

**6.26 Compassion**

**Host:** How does the Quran describe compassion or mercy as a divine attribute?

**Jamal Badawi:** According to the Quran mercy or compassion as a divine attribute is one of the most notable and highly emphasized of the divine attributes. It suffices to say that when one opens the Quran the first line before any of the chapters even begin says *In the name of Allah, Most Gracious, Most Merciful.* This same phrase is found in the beginning of all *Surhas* save one. Also this same phrase is repeated by Muslims before any act (work, study or any other activity).

In Arabic the phrase is *Bismi Allah Arahman Araheem* which is translated to In the name of Allah, Most Gracious, Most Merciful. Both words *Arahman* and *Araheem* come from the same Arabic root which is *rahman* which means compassion. *Araheem* means the kind, merciful and the compassionate. This trait can apply to any human being. *Arahman*, however, doesn't really have a word equivalent in English, as it means the absolute source of mercy. Thus, it is erroneous to describe a person as being *rahman*. We can however say that a person is *raheem* which means he is kind, merciful and compassionate but not the source of these attributes. In the Quran in (7:156) is says *My mercy extendeth to all things. That (mercy) I shall ordain for those who do right, and practice regular charity, and those who believe in Our signs.* The Quran also mentions compassion as a divine attribute when it talks about the angels prayers on behalf of the believers in (40:7) when they say *Our Lord! Thy Reach is over all things, in Mercy and Knowledge. Forgive, then, those who turn in Repentance, and follow Thy Path; and preserve them from the Penalty of the Blazing Fire!*

Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) described this divine attribute in moving way. According to Bukhari the Prophet said that he saw a woman in captivity who was looking among the people till she found a little infant whom she took in and started compassionately nursing him. He turned to his companions and asked *Would that mother deliberately throw her infant in the fire?* The companions replied *No!* He then replied *You should know that God is more compassionate towards you than that mother is towards her infant.* This is a divine attribute that has been emphasized in the Quran unlike what some may believe.

**Host:** Can you tell us about justice? Some say that it is a contradiction between compassion and punishment is this correct?

**Jamal Badawi:** The mercy and compassion of God are there for the taking. There are two basic conditions in order to deserve and receive mercy. One, is the correct belief in God and to accept to be a servant of God. Second, is to do good deeds in ones way of life. Doing good deeds can be implemented in one's way of life in aspects of family, social, political and economic life. When a human being becomes so puffed up with pride becoming arrogant and haughty to the point that they refuse to believe in God then the person is just being unfair to himself. In many places in the Quran it describes many acts which deviate from the truth and it says that the person who does them is being unfair to himself. In other places in the Quran it says *Do not be unfair to yourself.* For example if one lays down on rail road tracks and a train comes and hits him, the train can not be blamed for his actions. Islam believes strongly in individual responsibility.

Of course non of us are perfect and we all make mistakes. But if a person sincerely believes and tries their best to implement the will of God in their life when they do make a mistake the door of repentance will always be open. The Quran says in (23:118) *So say: O my Lord! grant Thou forgiveness and mercy for Thou art the Best of those who show mercy!* In Prophetic sayings we also find a reference to this. One

saying is reported in Muslim and is a Hadith Qudsi (word of God through the Prophet) ♦My mercy overcomes my anger.♦♦ Thus, there can be mercy and justice at the same time and if the person is trying their best then the mercy of God will outweigh the punishment or strict justice.

The same point was emphasized by Prophet Muhammad (PBUH).♦ In Bukhari he was quoted to have said ♦All of my followers will enter Paradise except for those who refuse.♦♦ People wondered if anyone would refuse to go to Paradise and he replied ♦Whoever obeys me (in following the teachings revealed by God) will enter Paradise and whoever disobeys me refuses to go to Paradise.♦♦ The question is not reconciling justice with mercy but rather that we are being unfair to ourselves when we reject God and the right path.

**Host:** ♦ As a human quality, what should the nature of mercy be like?

**Jamal Badawi:** ♦ As a human trait mercy is basically sensitivity towards others.♦ This sensitivity is not only for their pain and suffering but also sensitivity for a person's own spiritual wellbeing.♦ It is not just the physical suffering but also the psychological suffering of those who have been misguided from the path of God that we should have sensitivity towards.♦ The Quran indicates that compassion in its broader sense is the very essence of the message of all prophets throughout history.♦ The Quran describes Prophet Muhammad's message in (21:107) ♦We sent thee not, but as a Mercy for all creatures.♦♦ This mercy partly operates by guiding people to the right path and taking them away from false manmade doctrines.♦ It is also a mercy because it relieves the suffering of the oppressed and those who are neglected in society.♦ It is a mercy because it stops human tyranny and exploitation of the rich and powerful.

**Host:** ♦What has the Prophet (PBUH) said about mercy as a moral virtue?

**Jamal Badawi:** ♦ Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) made a clear connection between belief in God and compassion.♦ In a saying of the Prophet narrated in Al Tabarani he said ♦You won't be true believers unless you have compassion.♦♦ When people heard him say this people said ♦Oh Prophet, we are all merciful.♦♦ He replied ♦I am not referring to the mercy that one of you would have towards his companion or close friend but I am referring to mercy or compassion to all.♦♦♦ In one of his sayings the Prophet indicated that it is important for one to be compassionate towards other fellow beings in order to receive the compassion and mercy of God.♦ Again in Al Tabrani the Prophet says ♦Whoever does not show mercy to those on earth will not receive the mercy of He who is in the Heavens.♦

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In another saying narrated in Al Turmithi the Prophet said that ♦The farthest people from God are the people who are cruel in their hearts.♦♦ Cruelty takes a person farther away from God.♦ The Prophet even said that we should be merciful even with our enemies.♦ An example of this is found in the collection of Muslim which narrates that some people came to the Prophet (PBUH) who were complaining about persecution of the unbelievers and were asking the Prophet to invoke God's curse against the unbelievers.♦ The Prophet answered ♦I was sent as mercy and not as a curser.♦

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Another example is when the Prophet (PBUH) and the early followers were being persecuted the Prophet went to Al Taif where people received him very badly by sending their children and others to throw stones at him.♦ His feet were bleeding and while he was being stoned he did not invoke any type of curse on the people.♦ All he said was ♦Oh my Lord, guide my people to the right path for they know not what they are doing.♦♦ This is the kind of attitude which does not limit mercy to a certain category but rather extends it to all mankind.

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**Host :** ♦ Is there a special category of people to whom more compassion should be shown?

**Jamal**

Badawi:

Since people should show compassion to all there is no contradiction in showing extra compassion to certain categories of people. There are eight categories that are emphasized in the Quran. The first category includes compassion towards parents. For example (17:23-24) Thy Lord hath decreed that ye worship none but Him, and that ye be kind to parents. Whether one or both of them attain old age in thy life, say not to them a word of contempt, nor repel them, but address them in terms of honour. And, out of kindness, lower to them the wing of humility, and say: My Lord! bestow on them thy Mercy even as they cherished me in childhood. We notice in this verse that kindness to parents was mentioned after the decree to worship God alone which shows its significance and importance.

The second category is compassion towards children. One time the Prophet (PBUH) was sitting with some people and he kissed one of his grandchildren (Hassan or Hussein). One of the people sitting with him said Do you kiss your children? I have ten of them and I never kissed anyone of them. The Prophet (PBUH) responded He who doesn't show mercy shall not receive mercy. And in another version of this saying he told him What can I do if God has taken mercy out of your heart. This shows that we should be kind and merciful towards children.

The third category is compassion towards one's spouse. In Al Tirmithi the Prophet (PBUH) was reported to have said The most perfect believers are those who are best in their character and the best of you are the best to their families. He particularly referred to being kind to one's wife. This doesn't mean that the wife is exempt from showing kindness and compassion to her husband.

The fourth category would be compassion towards relatives. There is a saying of the Prophet (PBUH) as narrated in Al Tirmithi where he says that blood relation is a network of connections which are granted and a blessing from the most Compassionate. Whoever tries to keep this network intact, God will keep his connection with him and whoever tries to break it, God will disassociate Himself from them. One has to perform his duty towards relatives even if they are not believers.

Another category would be compassion towards the orphans. In the Quran in (93:9) Therefore, treat not the orphan with harshness. On several occasions the Prophet (PBUH) indicated that the best actions is to put one's hand kindly on the head of an orphan child. In the collection of Bukhari the Prophet (PBUH) said Whoever looks after an orphan will be like this (he was referring to two of his fingers held out side by side) with me in Paradise.

The sixth category would be compassion to those who are sick and suffering. There are several Hadiths that God regards a person's visit to a sick person like visiting God himself. On one occasion the Prophet (PBUH) showed that this mercy should be shown towards people who are serving or helping one. Once the Prophet (PBUH) passed by a person who was beating his servant he said No Abu Masud, No Abu Masud till the man turned his face know that God is able to punish you more than your ability to punish that little boy (who was a slave at the time). Abu Masud said I bear witness that he is free for the sake of God. The Prophet responded If you had not freed this slave by way of atonement the hellfire would have devoured you! In another situation the Prophet was asked How many times should I forgive my servant? He replied Seventy times a day.

The Quran also indicates that kindness is required to those who are not close to a person. In (4:36) Serve Allah, and join not any partners with Him; and do good- to parents, kinsfolk, orphans, those in need, neighbours who are near, neighbours who are strangers, the companion by your side, the wayfarer (ye meet), and what your right hands possess: For Allah loveth not the arrogant, the vainglorious.

**Host:** What does Islam say

regarding mercy towards other creators or pets?

Jamal Badawi:

Lets refer back to the Quran when it refers to Prophet Muhammad's message in (21:107) We sent thee not, but as a Mercy for all creatures. In the original Arabic text it says mercy for the *alameen*. *Alameen* is a plural of *alam* which means world. So *alameen* means worlds or universe. If it was meant that the prophets mission brought mercy and compassion only to mankind then it would not have said universe. The universe has lots of other creators and the Prophet is mercy to mankind, Jinn, animals and whatever is part of universe.

In the collection of Hadith in Bukhari Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) said that a woman was destined to go to hellfire because of a cat. The reason is that she imprisoned the cat without feeding it or allowing it to go out and search for food. So the reason she was going to hellfire was her cruelty towards the cat. The Prophet (PBUH) indicated that kindness to animals or pets is one of the ways that one can gain forgiveness for his sins. In the collection by Muslim he said that one time a man was walking who was very thirsty. The man found a well and went down into the well to get a drink. After he quenched his thirst he saw a dog chewing mud out of thirst. He told himself that the dog must be in the same pain he was in before he drank some water. So he went down the well again, put water in his shoes and gave the dog a drink. The Prophet said that because of this God forgave his sins.

In Islam when people kill an animal for food they should make sure that it is done with as little pain as possible. For example an animal should not be killed in front of another, knife must be very sharp and it must be done quickly. Also, people should be careful when using animals unnecessarily and cruelly for experimentation.