



THE NATURE OF MERCY/RAḤMA AND ITS MANIFESTATIONS IN THE QUR'AN

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Abstract

The term *rahma/mercy* is one of the key terms of the Holy Qur'an and it has many connotations. Two names of God, *rahmān* and *rahīm* and their manifestations are contained in these connotations. So the two names explicitly tackled in our paper. While *rahmān* is the proper name indicating the absolute being and the source of all existence, *rahīm* is much narrower. The exegetical tradition emphasizes that God is *rahmān*, i.e. provides existence and sustenance to all creatures in this world while *rahīm* gives guidance and salvation to those who just deserve it here.

Rahmān and *rahīm* are used in the Qur'an asyndetically, i.e. without the copula *wāw* (و): in the form of *ar-rahmān ar-rahīm* not *ar-rahmān wa'r-rahīm*, indicating that these two names signify One (God) and that they appear in His actions simultaneously and instantaneously, not consecutively.

Keywords: *Rahma/mercy*, rule of mercy, principle of hope, divine assistance, heaven and hell.

RAHMETİN MAHİYETİ VE KUR'AN'DA KENDİNİ GÖSTERİM ALANLARI

Öz

Rahmet/merhamet Kur'an'ın anahtar kelimelerinden biridir ve birçok çağrışımı içinde barındırmaktadır. Allah'ın *rahmān-rahīm* isimleri ve bunların tezahür biçimleri kendilerini bu çağrışımlarda göstermektedir. *Rahmān* Allah'ın mutlak varlığına ve varlıkların yegâne kaynağı oluşuna işaret ederken, *rahīm* çok daha dar bir anlamda kullanılmaktadır. Tefsir geleneği bunu şöyle formüle etmiştir: *Rahmān* ismiyle Allah, bu dünyada bütün varlıklara varlık verir, varlığın devamı için gerekli olan her şeyi sağlarken, *rahīm* ismiyle sadece onu hak edenlere rehberlik etmekte ve kurtuluş sağlamaktadır.

Rahman ve *rahīm* Kur'an'da aralarında *vāw* atıf harfi olmadan kullanılmaktadır: *rahmān* ve *rahīm* şeklinde değil, *rahmān-rahīm* formunda. Bu da iki ismin tek bir Varlık'a işaret ettiğini ve bu iki ismin O'nun fiillerinde ardı ardına değil aksine aynı anda tezahür ettiklerini göstermeye yöneliktir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Rahmet/merhamet, merhamet ilkesi, ümit ilkesi, ilahî inâyet, cennet ve cehennem.

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1. RAḤMA (MERCY): LINGUISTIC ANALYSIS

To determine the place of *rahma*/mercy in any revealed religion is an inquiry about the general character of that religion. Following from this premise it seems inevitable to scrutinise the realms of mercy from its linguistic structure to the modalities it manifests itself.

Rahma (mercy) in Arabic is the infinitive form of the verb *r-ḥ-m* which means to have mercy, compassion and affection upon someone. *Rahma* is also any action motivated by compassion and providence; and in religious literature it means God's total mercy, providence, benevolence, love and compassion toward his creatures.¹ So Muslim scholars considered it as an active attribute of God. Mercy of God, to them, is His bounty to people and His forgiveness of them, which are palpable in factual life.²

Rahmān (the source of mercy) is an absolute state of the divine while *rahīm* (the giver of mercy) is a volitional state. To put in different terms, *rahmān* is an intensive proper name exclusive to God while *rahīm* is shared with others.³ *Rahmān* is the proper name that indicates the absolute being and the source of all existence, and as such acts upon all creatures. So Islamic tradition acknowledges that this name can't be ascribed but God.

Ghazālī defines *rahma* as a quality visible in actions. To him, in order that one can be called merciful (*rahīm*) (s)he should act mercifully with his free will and care for others, provide their needs and stands for them.⁴

The best definition of mercy (*rahma*) and its two derivatives (*rahmān* and *rahīm*) are most likely made by Sadr al-dīn Qunawī, the son in law of Ibn Arabī of Murcia. To him, God's mercy (*rahma*) is undifferentiated considered in itself, but when deployed to its objects, it is differentiated into the functions of *rahmān* (universality) and *rahīm* (particularity),⁵ which are counted among ninety-nine beautiful names of God (*asmā' Allāh al-husnā*).

One of the early exegetes Muqātil ibn Sulaimān (d. 150/767) states, *rahmān* entails a greater and more wide-ranging compassion, while *rahīm* is the One who consents to act compassionately.⁶

Dāwūd al-Qaysarī (d. 751/1350) makes it more explicit and says:

¹ Rāḡib al-Isfahānī, *Mufradātu alfāz al-Qur'ān*, Ed. Safvān Adnān Dāvud (Beirut: 1412/1992), Article "rhm", 606.

² Isfahānī, op. cit.; Tahānavī, *Kashshāf istilāhātu'l-funūn va'l-'ulūm*, ed. A. Sprenger and others (Kalkuta: 1278/1862), 2: 588; Ghazālī, *Maqṣad al-asnā* (Cairo: 1322), 38-40.

³ Jārullāh al-Zamakhsharī, *al-Kashshāf 'an haqāiq al-tanzil wa-'uyūn al-aqāwīl* (5 volumes) (Beirut: al-Dār al-'Ālamiyya, nd.), 1: 41.

⁴ Ghazālī, *Maqṣad al-asnā*, 38.

⁵ Sadr al-dīn Qunawī, *I'jāz al-bayān fī ta'wīli umm al-Qur'ān* (Hyderabad: Osmania Oriental Publications 1949), 202.

⁶ *Tafsīr Muqātil Ibn Sulaimān*, ed. A. Farīd (3 vol.) (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Īlmiyya, 2002), 1: 24.

“The name *rahmān* (Source of Mercy) has a comprehensive rank over all things including the other divine names. The mercy of being-the-source-of-mercy is a mercy common to the people of this world and the afterlife and encompasses the believers and the non-believers, the obedient and the disobedient with existence, sustenance and so forth. The name *rahīm* (Giver of Mercy) has a comprehensive scope. [However], the mercy of being-the-giver-of-mercy is specific to those existents to whom the command of God extends. It is perfection that is appropriate to the ontological preparation of each one of them.”⁷

To put it in a summary fashion, the two names are functioning within the cosmology of the manifestation (*tajallī*) of God in the universe. This is the theological bipolarity which was dealt with by Muslim scholars within the issue of *tanzīh* and *tashbīh*. To formulate the issue theologically: How does the Supreme God, the abstract one manifest Himself in the World, the concrete one. The bipolarity between *tanzīh* and *tashbīh* is solved by Ibn ‘Arabī with the metaphor of a man seeing with his two eyes. Man sees with his two eyes but sees everything one, not two or many. This is the melting point of two distinct horizons, the abstract and the concrete one.

2. MODALITIES THROUGH WHICH DIVINE MERCY IS MANIFEST

The pivotal question here is how *rahma* manifests itself in the universe, in human experience and in the Qur’an, in three books in summary fashion.

“Mercy is an ontological fact of bestowing existence. Emotions as human properties are attributes of imperfection and cannot be applied to God. Being merciful as a divine attribute is equivalent to the process of giving existence. This bestowal arises because God overflows with munificence (*al-jūd*), a theme common in Neoplatonic writings whether pre-Islamic or Islamic. Existence is thus the overflowing of mercy to all things.”⁸

Ethos (*khulq/akhlāq*) entails creation with its all-embracing manifestations in human experience, impersonating God as it was expressed by the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh):

“Adorn yourselves with the code of conduct laid down by God / Create in yourselves the attributes of God.”⁹

⁷ Dāvūd al-Qaysari, *Sharhu ta’wīl al-basmala in Rasāil*, ed. Mehmet Bayraktar (Kayseri: Büyükşehir Belediyesi Kültür Yayınları, 1997), 199.

⁸ See Sajjad Rizwi, “The Existential Breath of al-rahmān and the Munificent Grace of al-rahīm: The Tafsīr Surat al-Fatiha of Jamī and the School of Ibn ‘Arabī,” *Journal of Qur’anic Studies* 8, no. 1 (2006): 70.

⁹ *Takhallaqū bi akhlāq Allāh*.

The aim of this high ethical statement is to assimilate the names of God to humans' lived existence, to make sense of these names in the light of their own experience. To make them viable in human transactions, extending from the inner circle to the outer one, from the minimal to the maximal. Perfection is the aim of this process, like the universe: from micro to macro, from one spot to the planets. The perfection is the destiny of every single part of the whole. Necessarily mercy evolves from being an emotion into a value then into a norm, successively organizing the whole life.

Actually this is the reason why man was made vicegerent/trustee (*khalifa*) on earth. This means man can only do full thoughtfulness, kindness, protection, justice, mercy to the duty of guardianship if he treats God's subjects in the same way as God is expected to. This means that the human representative should look after God's creatures with the same grace and benevolence as the Lord does. This representation can only be fulfilled with two basics according to the Qur'an: faith and good deed. If these two foundations are lost then the chaos arises as declared in the Holy Qur'an when referring to the communal life at the time of prophet-king David:

وَإِنَّ كَثِيرًا مِّنَ الْخُلَطَاءِ لَيَبْغِي بَعْضُهُمْ عَلَىٰ بَعْضٍ إِلَّا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا وَعَمِلُوا الصَّالِحَاتِ وَقَلِيلٌ مَّا هُمْ

"And surely many partners in the community wrong one another save those who believe and do good, and very few are they! ..." (Sād 38/ 24).

3. MANIFESTATIONS OF MERCY

Muslim theologians as much as Philosophers agree on the characterization of God as all merciful and compassionate *per se*. But as to the manifestation of this mercy, it remains somewhat vague and depends on the context. Theologically speaking the crucial manifestations of mercy can be reckoned as follows:

a. Mercy is Revelation and Prophets

That man can sustain his physical and spiritual life without revelation is attributed to God's mercy. Actually the reason embedded into human disposition (*fitra*) is seen as the innermost prophet in man, while the prophet is called as the outermost reason and consciousness. Self-sufficiency here is used to mean that humans can go without revelations and prophets.

"... And if not for the mercy and favour of Allah upon you, you would have follow the devil, except for a few" (an-Nisā 4/83).

Māturidī expresses 'mercy' and 'favour' as revelation and prophets and concludes that man can guide himself through his inner faculty of reasoning, one of cognitive faculties of mind. This is natural guidance and man is expected to find his way through this faculty. But if he is not able to exercise this ability and find the true path then mercy is provided. Hence God's sending prophets is considered as a

providence and benevolence (*lutf*) not a necessity in Kalām tradition.¹⁰ In this context, one of the most intellectually stimulating scholars of early Islam, Māturīdī (d. 333/944) in his *Ta'wīlāt al-Qur'ān* divides humans into three:

1. Those who can attain the truth through reasoning without the support of revelation (*hum yudrikūna al-ashyā' bi'l badīhiyyāti*). They are philosophers (*hukamā*) and scholars (*'ulamā*).
2. Those who can only through the guidance of revelation and prophets comprehend the metaphysical realities. They are like kids who need to be warned. So the revelation is mercy for this kind.
3. Those who neither understand these realities through their reasoning nor give ear to revelation. They are like animals (*bahāim*). They can be stimulated only through reward or penalty.¹¹

Considering the mental abilities of the people, God's sending prophets is seen as mercy and benevolence:

لَقَدْ مَنَّ اللَّهُ عَلَى الْمُؤْمِنِينَ إِذْ بَعَثَ فِيهِمْ رَسُولًا مِّنْ أَنفُسِهِمْ يَتْلُو عَلَيْهِمْ آيَاتِهِ وَيُزَكِّيهِمْ وَيُعَلِّمُهُمُ الْكِتَابَ وَالْحِكْمَةَ وَإِن كَانُوا مِن قَبْلُ لَفِي ضَلَالٍ مُّبِينٍ

“Certainly did God confer favour upon the believers when He sent among them a messenger from themselves reciting them his verses and purifying them and teaching them the book and wisdom although they had been before in manifest error” (Āl-i 'Imrān 3/164).

The Qur'an calls itself *al-Dhikr* or a source of eminence or remembrance to mankind.¹² Muslim scholars unanimously acknowledge that from the outset all prophets conveyed to humanity the same religion (*al-dīn*), and every single prophet reminded humanity the core of this message. The basics of this religion are the same and never changing. The nomos of Noah, Abraham, Moses, Jesus and Muhammad who are called in the Qur'an as the prophets with utmost determination (*ulu'l-'azm*) preached the same core message. Although the Holy Qur'an also calls itself as *Shifā* or healing¹³ to heal all the spiritual diseases of humanity; *al-Nūr* or the Light¹⁴ which will ultimately dispel all darkness from the surface of the earth; *al-Haqq* or the Truth¹⁵ which will ultimately take hold of the minds of men and before which false will vanish; *al-Hudā* or the Guidance¹⁶ which will make men ultimately attain the goal of life to the perfection; *al-Rûḥ* or the Spirit¹⁷ which gives life to humanity. With all these qualifications the Holy Qur'an

¹⁰ Māturīdī, *Ta'wīlāt*, 3: 356.

¹¹ Māturīdī, *Ta'wīlāt*, 5: 431.

¹² al-Hicr 15/9.

¹³ Yûnus 10/ 57.

¹⁴ A'rāf 7/157.

¹⁵ al-Īsrā 17/ 81.

¹⁶ al-Jinn 72/13.

¹⁷ as-Shūrā 42/52.

and the Holy Books that were sent before it are expected to heal the sufferings humankind has undergone and is still undergoing.

b. Mercy is All-Inclusive Here and in the Hereafter

One controversial issue comes forth under this heading is the character of salvific will of God. In a definitive verse in the Qur'an we read:

وَإِكْتُبْنَا لَنَا فِي هَذِهِ الدُّنْيَا حَسَنَةً وَفِي الْآخِرَةِ إِنَّا هُنَا إِلَيْكَ قَالِ عَذَابِي أُصِيبُ بِهِ مَنْ أَشَاءُ وَرَحْمَتِي وَسِعَتْ كُلَّ شَيْءٍ فَسَأَكْتُبُهَا لِلَّذِينَ يَتَّقُونَ وَيُؤْتُونَ الزَّكَاةَ وَالَّذِينَ هُمْ بِآيَاتِنَا يُؤْمِنُونَ

“And ordain for us good in this world’s life and in the Hereafter, for surely we turn to You. He said: I afflict with my chastisement whom I please, and **My mercy encompasses all things**. So I ordain it for those who keep their Duty and pay the poor-rate, and those who believe in Our messages.” (A’rāf 7/156).

The issue is whether the statement that ‘the mercy encompasses all things’ is conditional or unconditional. It seems from this and many other verses that it is conditional. On condition that man undertakes his humane responsibilities that mercy is bestowed upon him. To show this conditionality some other verses could be cited:

إِنَّ الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا وَالَّذِينَ هَاجَرُوا وَجَاهَدُوا فِي سَبِيلِ اللَّهِ أُولَئِكَ يَرْجُونَ رَحْمَتَ اللَّهِ وَاللَّهُ غَفُورٌ رَحِيمٌ

“Those who believed and those who migrated and strove hard in Allah’s way – these surely hope for the mercy of God. And Allah is Forgiving, Merciful” (al-Bakara 2/218).

إِنَّ اللَّهَ لَا يَغْفِرُ أَنْ يُشْرَكَ بِهِ وَيَغْفِرُ مَا دُونَ ذَلِكَ لِمَنْ يَشَاءُ وَمَنْ يُشْرِكْ بِاللَّهِ فَقَدْ ضَلَّ ضَلَالًا بَعِيدًا

“Surely God forgives not setting up partners with Him, and He forgives all besides this to whom He pleases. And whoever sets up a partner with God, he indeed foes far astray.” (an-Nisā 4/116).

وَإِكْتُبْنَا لَنَا فِي هَذِهِ الدُّنْيَا حَسَنَةً وَفِي الْآخِرَةِ إِنَّا هُنَا إِلَيْكَ قَالِ عَذَابِي أُصِيبُ بِهِ مَنْ أَشَاءُ وَرَحْمَتِي وَسِعَتْ كُلَّ شَيْءٍ فَسَأَكْتُبُهَا لِلَّذِينَ يَتَّقُونَ وَيُؤْتُونَ الزَّكَاةَ وَالَّذِينَ هُمْ بِآيَاتِنَا يُؤْمِنُونَ

“And ordain for us good in this world and in the Hereafter; four surely we turn to You. He said: I afflict with My chastisement whom I please, and My mercy encompasses all things. So a ordain it for those who keep their duty and pay the poor-rate, and those who believe in Our messages.” (A’rāf 7/156).

However, to some scholars the fact that “God has ordained mercy on Himself”¹⁸ and “His mercy encompasses everything”¹⁹ requires Him (*ijāb*) to behave his creatures in the Hereafter with his mercy not with his justice. Musā Jār Allah

¹⁸ Ql lmn mā fī ssmāwat wal arḍ qll llm kntb ʿlī nḥsīh rḥmḥ. An’ām 6/12.

¹⁹ Rḥmḥī w sīʿt kll šyʿ. A’rāf 7/156.

Bigiyef is among the leading scholars who claimed that irrespective of their belief and religious identities, God will bestow His mercy over every believer in the Hereafter. His work *The Signs of Divine Mercy (Raḥmeti İlāhiye Bürhanları)* is exclusively allocated to this issue.

The key doctrine behind this debate is that God never gives up his promise of reward (*va'd*) but can give up his promise of punishment (*va'id*). In this theological issue almost every scholar agrees on God's mercy encompassing all sinful believers except for those who associate God with idols.

c. Mercy: Rule of Mercy/The Golden Rule of Avoiding Conflicts

In the Qur'an the interactions among believers in particular are asked to be established by mercy before suing to court or legal processes. This is rule of mercy. Hence believers are asked not to recompense to their adversaries but to forgive them. 'Eye for eye' is not recommended. This was just a temporary arrangement and perfection requires it to be transferred to a higher hierarchy of values, and mercy is above justice in hierarchy. If possible, mercy is firmly advised, but left to the voluntary action of the subject. The following verse from Surah Shûrā, verse 40 illustrates it clearly:

وَجَزَاء سَيِّئَةٍ سَيِّئَةٌ مِّثْلُهَا فَمَنْ عَفَا وَأَصْلَحَ فَأَجْرُهُ عَلَى اللَّهِ إِنَّهُ لَا يُحِبُّ الظَّالِمِينَ

The standard translation of the verse is "And the retribution for an evil act is an evil one like it, but whoever pardons and makes reconciliation –his reward is (due) from Allah. Indeed, He does not like wrongdoers" (as-Shûrā 42/40). My translation is "And the recompense of any evil with the same recompense is also evil. ... " A golden rule relating to forgiveness of evil is provided in the verse.

This preference determines the guiding principle when commenting the Holy Scripture or deriving any verdict from it. The first translation makes the **justice** as the guiding principle, while the latter determines **mercy** as the essential one. We should pay attention to two distinct cases here. If any criminal case is taken to the court necessarily justice is required, but among the believers any conflict is asked to be solved through mercy and forgiveness before any legal action is taken. An Arabic expression puts it tersely: "Justice is substitution of mercy. If mercy leaves, justice takes over."

In spite of this emotional commonality among believers, the Holy Qur'an on the other hand strictly emphasizes not to be merciful about punishing the guilty. It warns that the two basic sentiments might lead one to avoid justice: love and hatred. Muslim community is severely cautioned not to bypass justice for their beloved ones and not to be very eager to apply extreme penalty for those they hate. The negative quality of sentiments are highlighted here.

And in legal issues the punishment must be proportionate. It should be noted that this crucial maxim is given first to a people who were in the habit of slaughtering

whole tribes for the most trivial fault of one member. In this rule of mercy and rule of law two objectives are aimed. Mercy amends and justice deters. But deterrent punishment must be proportionate. The omega point of justice is mercy which means the notion of mercy rests on the idea of consciously placing on hold or banishing into exile our desires and passions for anger and revenge. This is the 'pleasure principle' or 'the stimuli in a cognizant self' as Freud called it.

d. Mercy is a Guiding Principle in Creation

Mercy is the guiding principle for divine consciousness as it was manifest in the beginning of creation and relationship:

الرَّحْمَنُ عَلَّمَ الْقُرْآنَ خَلَقَ الْإِنْسَانَ عَلَّمَهُ الْبَيَانَ

"The Most **Merciful** laid down the principles and accordingly created man and taught him the power to uncover them. ..." (ar-Rahmān 55/1-4).

قُلْ لَمَن مَّا فِي السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ قُلْ بِاللَّهِ كُنَّ عَلَى نَفْسِهِ الرَّحْمَةَ

"Say, "To whom belongs whatever is in the heavens and earth?" Say, "To Allah." He has ordained upon Himself **mercy**. ..." (An'ām 6/12).

According to these verses, all the creation is crafted under the principle of mercy and all relationships are tarred with the same brush.

e. Mercy is the Principle of Hope

Mercy is the principle of hope for the grave-sin committers like homicide, defamation, fornication etc. Even in these case believers are asked not to be despair of the mercy of Allāh:

قُلْ يَا عِبَادِيَ الَّذِينَ أَسْرَفُوا عَلَىٰ أَنفُسِهِمْ لَا تَقْنَطُوا مِن رَّحْمَةِ اللَّهِ إِنَّ اللَّهَ يَغْفِرُ الذُّنُوبَ جَمِيعًا إِنَّهُ هُوَ الْعَفُورُ الرَّحِيمُ

"Say: O My servants who have been prodigal regarding their souls, do not despair of the mercy of Allah; surely Allāh forgives sins altogether. He is indeed the Forgiving, the Merciful" (az-Zumar 39/ 53).

One important theological conclusion derived from this principle is that the grave sinner is entitled to be forgiven by God. Although a believer commits any grave sin, he is still considered as believer. Actions are not considered as part of the faith.

f. Mercy is Love

Mercy is love. However, love contains mutuality, while mercy is one sided. God has mercy on creation, but not the other way around. As it is shown in the Qur'an:

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا مَنْ يَرْتَدَّ مِنكُمْ عَن دِينِهِ فَسَوْفَ يَأْتِي اللَّهَ بِقَوْمٍ يُحِبُّهُمْ وَيُحِبُّونَهُ

“O you who believe! Should any one of you turn back from his religion, then Allah will bring a people, **whom He loves and who loves Him. ...**” (al-Māida 5/54).

The reciprocity in love is not seen in terms of mercy. Mercy has one direction, from God to his creatures, not the other way.

g. Mercy is Compassion and Benevolence

Another pivotal verse gives clues about the conception of the Qur'anic God toward creatures which reads:

قُلْ لَمَنْ مَا فِي السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ قُلْ لِلَّهِ كَتَبَ عَلَى نَفْسِهِ الرَّحْمَةَ...

“Say: To whom belongs whatever is in the heavens and the earth? Say: To Allah. **He has ordained mercy on Himself.** He will certainly gather you on the Resurrection day - there is no doubt about it. Those who have lost their souls will not believe” (An'ām 6/12).

The statement *He has ordained mercy on Himself* implies that mercy is His very nature. The fact that everything is arranged to the benefit of humankind is the evidence of Divine mercy in the physical World.

h. Mercy is Intimacy to God

The universe is seen as the divine womb/uterus (*rahm*) as it was taken after by Lord the Creator after its creation.

هُوَ الَّذِي خَلَقَ السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضَ فِي سِتَّةِ أَيَّامٍ ثُمَّ اسْتَوَىٰ عَلَى الْعَرْشِ يُعَلِّمُ مَا يَلِجُ فِي الْأَرْضِ وَمَا يَخْرُجُ مِنْهَا وَمَا يَنْزِلُ مِنَ السَّمَاءِ وَمَا يَعْرُجُ فِيهَا وَهُوَ مَعَكُمْ أَيْنَ مَا كُنْتُمْ وَاللَّهُ بِمَا تَعْمَلُونَ بَصِيرٌ

“He it is who created the heavens and the earth in six periods, and He is established on the Throne of Power. He knows that which goes down into the earth and which comes forth out of it, and that which comes down from heaven and that which goes up o it. **And He is with you wherever you are.** And Allah is Seer of what you do” (al-Hadīd 57/4).

i. Mercy is Believers and Bounties

In addition to revelation,²⁰ mercy as a valuing quality is attributed to prophets,²¹ believers,²² and bounties.²³ And these are reflected to a believers' experiences as emotions, mind/thoughts and acts.

²⁰ وَمَا أَنْزَلْنَا عَلَيْكَ الْكِتَابَ إِلَّا لِلتَّبَيِّنِ لَهُمْ الَّذِي اخْتَلَفُوا فِيهِ وَهُدًى وَرَحْمَةً لِّقَوْمٍ يُؤْمِنُونَ an-Nahl 16/64

²¹ وَمَا أَرْسَلْنَاكَ إِلَّا رَحْمَةً لِّلْعَالَمِينَ al-Anbiyā 21/ 107

²² مُحَمَّدٌ رَسُولُ اللَّهِ وَالَّذِينَ مَعَهُ أَتْبَادُ عَلَى الْكُفَّارِ رُحَمَاءُ بَيْنَهُمْ al-Fath 48/29

²³ يُبَشِّرُهُمْ رَبُّهُمْ بِرَحْمَةٍ مِنْهُ وَرِضْوَانٍ وَجَنَّاتٍ لَهُمْ فِيهَا نَجِيمٌ مُّقِيمٌ at-Tavba 9/21

j. Mercy is Divine Assistance

The leading Mu'tazilite theologian Qādi 'Abd al-Jabbār (d. 425/1025) acknowledges an important element as the manifestation of God's mercy and benevolence/*lutf*. To him, without God's assistance humans can be lost on the way and will never achieve knowledge which is guaranteed to be correct. Thus, 'Abd al-Jabbār not only devotes himself to studying divine assistance, *lutf*, but we also meet this concept in many other volumes, notably Volume 12, where he explores rational knowledge and considers that God assists humans in all the steps of their journey to knowledge. This assistance guarantees their arrival, as will be explained in the section titled "The rational approach to God." The image of God which 'Abd al-Jabbār has in mind unveils two of His important characteristics: the first is God's mercy in choosing to create the world and to supply it with a divine system and laws which guarantee its best function. The second is seen in being bound to supply every assistance to mankind in order that humans may have the desire and ability to follow the divine law, which leads to reward. Both characteristics unveil God not only as a just judge, *'ādil*, but also as compassionate and merciful, *laṭīf*.²⁴ Qādi devotes his magnum opus *al-Muğnī*'s 13th volume exclusively to *lutf*.

k. Mercy is Finitude of Torments in Hellfire

God's mercy requires that bliss of God will be eternal in heaven, while torments will end up in hellfire. Although the traditional view of the torments of Hell attributes a defect not to God's benevolence but to human free will, there were other contentions highlighting God's mercy that requires ending up torments in hell for its people or hellfire itself.

Theological defence of the claim is that heaven is from the consequences of His mercy and forgiveness and fire is his punishment. Rewarding and blessing (i.e. heaven) is a necessary consequence of His names and of himself, so it must remain alongside His eternal names and attributes. The punishment is His creation and the creation can end such as the world and others.

Considering God's mercy, scholars defended this idea. While Jahm b. Safvān defended finitude of heaven and hellfire, Abu'l-Huzayl al-'Allāf, Ibn Taymiyya, Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya claimed torments therein will end up and its inhabitants will eventually be evacuated to heaven. They refer to the following verses:

"God will say: Fire is your home. Abide therein forever, save him whom Allah will deliver" (An'ām, 6/128).

"They will abide therein for ages (*ahqāb*)".²⁵

²⁴ Maha Elkaisy Friemuth, *God and Humans in Islamic Thought: 'Abd al-Jabbār, Ibn Sinā and al-Ghazālī* (London: Routledge, 2006), 41.

²⁵ Qatādah and Hasan al-Basrī mentioned that *ahqāb* in the verse (sing. *huqb*) means limited time; each *huqb* is eighty years.

Theologically the idea that the bliss of Paradise and the punishment of the Hellfire are permanent (eternal) alongside the recurrence (renewal) of events therein was first rejected by Jahm bin Safwān who claimed that Paradise and Hellfire will [cease and] perish, and Abu al-Hudhayl al-Allāf who claimed that the movements of the inhabitants of Paradise and Hellfire will be cut off (and expire), and they will remain in eternal rest (*sukūn*, absence of motion). This is because they believed that an endless chain of events is both impossible in the past and in the future. (en-Nebe' 78/23).²⁶

Rational defence of the claim that punishment is not in vain but for a purpose and when this wise purpose is fulfilled there is no reason to continue it was put forward by Ibn Qayyim as follows:

*"Allah punishes His slaves not because He needs to do so, nor because of a benefit which returns to Him, nor because He wants to prevent some harm or avoid pain for Himself with His punishment. He is exalted above all defects and shortcomings. His punishment is not mere play, devoid of wisdom and wise, praiseworthy purposes. He is exalted above all this as well. So the punishment can either be for the purpose of (a) completing the blessings on His friends and loved ones or (b) for some purpose which relates to the unfortunate ones being punished, for curing them or (c) it could be for both reasons. In all three cases, the punishment is something which is required for another reason, not for its own sake. It is a means and not an end. What this means is that once the purpose behind punishment is achieved, there is no need for it to continue. Now the blessing and happiness of Allah's friends is not dependant or completed by being subject to the punishment of the unfortunate ones, nor is it dependant on their punishment being eternal and continuous, even if there is a blessing for them in the basic act of punishment."*²⁷

Conclusion

In a world where many rivalries and divergences are set against each other necessarily suffering arises. Entities find themselves as foreigners in a rival environment. Any entity (human or animal) spends his whole life trying to protect himself against this rival world. But actually (s)he can't protect himself against all these rival powers; (s)he is one but the enemies are many. In this case the clashes among rival powers might have so far been expected to extinct them. But this is not the case. Despite the rivalries and clashes, one principle leads them to cooperate, to support each other and to sustain the life: it is mercy. Considering the aim, object and form of mercy, it seems that the very nature of things are constructed from

²⁶ Ibn Taymiyya, *Minhāj as-Sunnah al-nabawiyya fī naqzi kalām ash-shīa wa al-qadariyya*, ed. Muhammad Rashad Salim (Riyad: Dār al-fadīlah), 1:146.

²⁷ See: Ibn al-Qayyim al-Jawziyyah, *Hādi al-arwāḥ ila bilād al-afrāḥ* (Cairo: Maktabat an-Nahḍa al-Misriyya, 1971).

mercy so that the life could last forever. And in order to make it viable believers are requested to exhort each other patience and mercy.²⁸

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²⁸ al-Balad, 90/17.