

Fast 8: Humanity-wide approach of Surah Fatihah — “Beneficent” and “Merciful”

- *Surah Fatihah* continues as follows:

“The Beneficent, the Merciful.” (1:2)

الرَّحْمٰنِ الرَّحِیْمِ

- After describing Allah as *Rabb-ul-‘Ālamīn* or “Lord of the worlds”, this opening chapter of the Quran then tells us that He is *Raḥmān* (“Beneficent”) and *Raḥīm* (“Merciful”). Of course it is possible to translate *Raḥmān* and *Raḥīm* by other similar words in English.
- These two words *Raḥmān* (رَحْمٰن) and *Raḥīm* (رَحِیْم) are obviously similar. They both convey the ideas of love and mercy. There is a word *raḥim* (رَحِم) which means the “womb”, and it is used also to mean ties of physical relationship between human beings. The Holy Prophet Muhammad has said that the ties of relationship between people, or *raḥim*, are a consequence of God being *Raḥmān*.
- This shows that God, as presented in the second verse of the Quran (1:2), is One Whose overwhelming love and mercy for His creation is reflected in the close bond of affection which exists between relatives.
- There is a difference in meaning in God being *Raḥmān* and being *Raḥīm*. The name *Raḥmān* signifies that love is so predominant in God that He bestows His favours and shows His mercy freely, even though the recipient of His favours has done nothing to earn them. He acts as *Raḥmān* towards all human beings. It is His broader mercy.
- God being *Raḥīm* means that when man uses what God has given him to help the development of his physical and spiritual life, God rewards every effort made by man. This applies both in the spiritual and the material fields of life. So this is a mercy that is dependent on man’s own actions.
- It is not only the attribute of *Raḥmān* by which God’s mercy is open to all human beings, regardless of their nation or religion. In case of the attribute of *Raḥīm* also, God’s mercy helps all those who make an effort.
- Allah’s mercy towards all is mentioned several times in the Quran in different ways. According to the following verse, when *all* are gathered before Allah, He will deal with them mercifully.

“He (Allah) has ordained mercy on Himself. He will certainly gather you

كَتَبَ عَلٰی نَفْسِهِ الرَّحْمَةَ لِيَجْمَعَكُمْ

on the day of Resurrection — there is no doubt about it.” (6:12)

إِلَى يَوْمِ الْقِيَامَةِ لَا رَيْبَ فِيهِ

- Mercy was open to those who rejected the Holy Prophet:

“But if they reject you, then say: Your Lord is the Lord of all-encompassing mercy; and His punishment cannot be averted from the guilty people.” (6:147)

فَإِنْ كَذَّبُوكَ فَقُلْ رَبُّكُمْ ذُو رَحْمَةٍ وَاسِعَةٍ
وَلَا يُرَدُّ بَأْسُهُ عَنِ الْقَوْمِ الْمُجْرِمِينَ ﴿١٤٧﴾

They are told here that their Lord is the Lord of **extensive** mercy (*dhū raḥmah wāsi'ah*). This is why He is not quick to punish and keeps on giving people more and more chances for reform. If they persist in wrong-doing beyond all measure, then His punishment comes upon them, but that is also a mercy because it saves the innocent people from their mischief and offers the guilty ones a further opportunity for reform.

- Of all those who can show mercy, Allah is the most merciful of them. No one can outdo Him in showing mercy.
- For example, Moses prayed thus:

“My Lord, forgive me and my brother (Aaron), and admit us to Your mercy, and You are **the most Merciful of those who show mercy.**” (7:151)

قَالَ رَبِّ اغْفِرْ لِي وَ لِأَخِي وَ ادْخِلْنَا فِي رَحْمَتِكَ ۖ وَأَنْتَ أَرْحَمُ الرَّاحِمِينَ

- Prophets Jacob, Joseph and Job also described God as “the most Merciful of those who show mercy”: *arḥam-ur-rāḥimīn* (12:64, 12:92, 21:83). Joseph’s brothers had abandoned him in a well in the wilderness out of jealousy when he was a youth, so that he and his father would never see each other again. After years of separation, by chance they became reunited when Joseph had risen to become the King of Egypt’s right-hand man. The brothers asked him to forgive them. Joseph said to them:

“He said: There is no reproach against you this day. Allah may forgive you, and He is **the most Merciful of those who show mercy.**” (12:92)

قَالَ لَا تَثْرِبَ عَلَيْكُمُ الْيَوْمَ ۖ يَعْفِرُ اللَّهُ لَكُمْ ۖ وَهُوَ أَرْحَمُ الرَّاحِمِينَ

The Prophet Muhammad used the same words, “There is no reproach against you this day”, at the conquest of Makkah to forgive his enemies.