**ISLAM AS A RELIGION OF UNIVERSAL MERCY**



**8:33**. But God would not punish them so long as you were among them; and God is not to punish them (or other people) while they implore Him for forgiveness for their sins.8

8. This verse implies that so long as the religion – Islam – brought by God’s Messenger, upon him be peace and blessings, continues to be practiced and to order the life of the community in a way that is pleasing to God Almighty, and as long as people go on living in consciousness of God and imploring Him for forgiveness whenever they commit sins, God will not inflict any grievous suffering on them. (A)



**15:88**. Do not strain your eyes toward what We have given some groups among them (the unbelievers) to enjoy (in the life of this world), nor grieve over them (because of their attitude toward your mission); and lower your wings (of compassion and protection) for the believers.20

20. The life of God's Messenger, upon him be peace and blessings, was so simple that once ‘Umar, upon seeing him lying on a rough mat, could not help but weep and say: "O Messenger of God, kings sleep in soft, feather beds, while you lie on a rough mat. You are the Messenger of God and thereby deserve an easy life more than anyone else." God's Messenger answered: "Do you not agree that the luxuries of the world should be theirs, and those of the Hereafter ours?"(al-Bukhārī, "Tafsīr," 287; Muslim, "Talaq," 31)

God's Messenger, upon him be peace and blessings, like all Prophets, expected no reward for performing his mission. He suffered hunger, thirst, and every other hardship and persecutions. He was forced into exile, and he was made the target of many assaults and traps, both from within and without, when he emigrated. He bore all of these simply for the good pleasure of God and the good of humanity. Abū Hurayrah once saw him performing the Prayer in a seated position and asked if he was ill. The Messenger's reply caused Abū Huraryah to cry: "I am hungry, Abū Hurayrah. Hunger has left me no strength to stand up for the Prayer" (Abu Nu‘aym, 7: 107; al-Hindī, 1: 199).

Even though most of his Companions became wealthier in later years, the Messenger, upon him be peace and blessings, and his family never changed their very simple lifestyle.

In addition to receiving no worldly benefit, as mentioned above, God's Messenger underwent much torture. He was beaten many times and left on the ground covered with dust, and only Fātimah, his daughter, ran to his aid. Once he was being beaten at the Ka‘bah; Abū Bakr ran to help him, shouting to those beating him: "Will you kill a man because he says: ‘My Lord is God?' " (al-Bukhārī, "Fadā'il as-Sahābah," 5; Ibn Hanbal, 2: 205) (*The Messenger of God*, 89–90)

So, the meanings of such statements as *Do not strain your eyes toward what We have given some groups among them (the unbelievers) to enjoy (in the life of this world*)*,* signify for the Messenger, upon him be peace and blessings: We know that you never do so; rather, these verses address a warning to other believers. By "some groups" (*azwāj*), the verse actually refers to the social classes and class differences in non-Islamic societies. (B)

**ISLAM AS A RELIGION OF UNIVERSAL MERCY**

Life is the foremost and most manifest blessing of God Almighty, and the true and everlasting life is that of the Hereafter. Since we can deserve this life only by pleasing God, He sent Prophets and revealed Scriptures out of His Compassion for humanity. While mentioning His blessings upon humanity, He begins:

All-Merciful. He taught the Qur’an, created humanity, and taught it speech. (Al-Rahman 55:1-4)

All aspects of this life are a rehearsal for the afterlife, and every creature is engaged toward this end. Order is evident in every effort, and compassion resides in every achievement. Some “natural” events or social convulsions may seem disagreeable at first, but we should not regard them as being incompatible with compassion. They are like dark clouds or lightning and thunder that, although frightening, nevertheless bring us the good tidings of rain. Thus the whole universe praises the All-Compassionate.

Prophet Muhammad, peace and blessings be upon him, is like a spring of pure water in the heart of a desert, a source of light in an all-enveloping darkness. Those who appeal to this spring can take as much water as is needed to quench their thirst, to become purified of their sins, and to become illuminated with the light of faith. Mercy was like a magical key in the Prophet’s hands, for with it he opened hearts that were so hardened and rusty that no one thought they could be opened. But he did even more: he lit a torch of belief in them.

The compassion of God’s Messenger encompassed every creature. He desired that everyone be guided. In fact, this was his greatest concern:

Yet it may be, if they believe not in this Message, you will consume (exhaust) yourself, following after them, with grief. (Al-Kahf 18:6)

But how did he deal with those who persisted in oppression and persecutions; those who did not allow him and his followers to worship the One God; those who took up arms against him to destroy him? He had to fight such people, yet his universal compassion encompassed every creature. This is why when he was wounded severely at the Battle of Uhud, he raised his hands and prayed:

O God, forgive my people, for they do not know.[1]

The Makkans, his own people, inflicted so much suffering on him that he finally emigrated to Madina. Even after that, the next 5 years were far from peaceful. However, when he conquered Makka without bloodshed in the twenty-first year of his Prophethood, he asked the Makkan unbelievers: “How do you expect me to treat you?” They responded unanimously: “You are a noble one, the son of a noble one.” He then told them his decision: “You may leave, for no reproach this day shall be on you. May God forgive you. He is the Most Compassionate.”[2] 825 years later Sultan Mehmed II[3] said the same thing to the defeated Byzantines after conquering Constantinople. Such is the universal compassion of Islam.

The Messenger displayed the highest degree of compassion toward believers:

There has come to you a Messenger from among yourselves; grievous to him is your suffering; anxious is he over you, full of concern for you, for the believers full of pity, compassionate. (At-Tawbah 9:128)

He lowered unto believers his wing of tenderness through mercy … (Al-Hijr 15:88)

… was the guardian of believers and nearer to them than their selves. (Al-Ahzab 33:6)

When one of his Companions died, he asked those at the funeral if the deceased had left any debts. On learning that he had, the Prophet mentioned the above verse and announced that the creditors should come to him for repayment.

His compassion even encompassed the hypocrites and unbelievers. He knew who the hypocrites were, but never identified them, for this would have deprived them of the rights of full citizenship that they had gained by their outward declaration of faith and practice. Since they lived among the Muslims, their denial may have been reduced or changed to doubt, thus diminishing their fear of death and the pain caused by the assertion of eternal non-existence after death.

God no longer destroys unbelievers collectively, although He had eradicated many such people in the past:

But God would never chastise them while you were among them; God would never chastise them as they begged forgiveness. (Al-Anfal 8:33)

This verse refers to unbelievers regardless of time and place. God will not destroy whole peoples as long as there are some who follow the Messenger. Moreover, He has left the door of repentance open until the Last Day. Anyone can accept Islam or ask God’s forgiveness, regardless of how sinful they consider themselves to be.

For this reason, a Muslim’s enmity toward unbelievers is a form of pity. When ‘Umar saw an 80-year-old man, he sat down and wept. When asked why, he replied: “God assigned him so long a lifespan, but he has not been able to find the true path.” ‘Umar was a disciple of God’s Messenger, the prophet who said:

I was not sent to call down curses on people, but as a mercy.[4]

I am Muhammad, and Ahmad (the praised one), and Muqaffi (the Last Prophet); I am Hashir (the last Prophet in whose presence the people will gather); the Prophet of Repentance (the Prophet for whose sake the door of repentance will always remain open), and the Prophet of mercy.[5]

Archangel Gabriel also benefited from the mercy of the Qur’an. Once the Prophet asked Gabriel whether he had any share in the mercy contained in the Qur’an, Gabriel replied that he did, and explained: “I was not certain about my end. However, when the verse: (One) obeyed, and moreover, trustworthy and secured (At-Takwir 81:21) was revealed, I felt secure.”[6]

The Messenger of God was particularly compassionate toward children. Whenever he saw a child crying, he sat beside him or her and shared his or her feelings. He felt the pain of a mother for her child more than the mother herself. Once he said:

I stand in prayer and wish to prolong it. However, I hear a child cry and shorten the prayer to lessen the mother’s anxiety.”[7]

He took children in his arms and hugged them. Once when he hugged and kissed his grandson Hasan, Aqrah ibn Habis told him: “I have 10 children, none of whom I have ever kissed.” God’s Messenger responded: “One without pity for others is not pitied.”[8] According to another version, he added: “What can I do for you if God has removed compassion from you?”[9]

He said: “Pity those on the Earth so that those in the heavens will pity you.”[10] Once when Sa’d ibn ‘Ubadah became ill, God’s Messenger visited him at home. Seeing his faithful Companion in a pitiful state, he began to cry and said: “God does not punish because of tears or grief, but He punishes because of this,” and he pointed to his tongue.[11] When ‘Uthman ibn Mad’un died, he wept profusely. During the funeral, a woman remarked: “‘Uthman flew like a bird to Paradise.” Even in that mournful state, the Prophet did not lose his balance and corrected the woman: “How do you know this? Even I do not know this, and I am a Prophet.”[12]

A member of the Banu Muqarrin clan once beat his female slave. She informed the Messenger of God, who then sent a message to the master. He said: “You have beaten her without any justifiable right. Free her.”[13] Setting a slave free was far better for the master than being punished in the Hereafter because of a wrong act. The Messenger of God always protected and supported widows, orphans, the poor, and the disabled, even before his Prophethood. When he returned home in excitement from Mount Hira after the first Revelation, his wife Khadijah told him:

I hope you will be the Prophet of this community, for you always tell the truth, fulfill your trust, support your relatives, help the poor and weak, and feed guests.[14]

His compassion even encompassed animals. We hear from him:

A prostitute was guided to truth by God and ultimately went to Paradise because she gave water to a poor dog dying of thirst inside a well. Another woman was sent to Hell because she made a cat die of hunger.[15]

Once while returning from a military campaign, a few Companions removed some young birds from their nest to caress them. The mother bird came back and, not being able to find its babies, began to fly around, calling out for them. When told of this, God’s Messenger became angry and ordered the birds to be put back in the nest.[16]

While in Mina, some of his Companions attacked a snake in order to kill it. However, it managed to escape. Watching this from afar, he remarked: “It was saved from your evil, as you were from its evil.”[17] Ibn Abbas reported that God’s Messenger, upon observing a man sharpening his knife directly before the sheep to be slaughtered, asked him: “Do you want to kill it more than once?”[18]

His love and compassion for creatures differed from that of today’s self-proclaimed humanists. He was sincere and measured in his love and compassion. He was a Prophet raised by God, the Creator and Sustainer of all beings, for the guidance and happiness of conscious beings—humanity and jinn—and the harmony of existence. As such, he lived not for himself but for others. He is a mercy for all the worlds, a manifestation of Compassion.

He eradicated all differences of race and color. Once Abu Dharr got so angry with Bilal that he insulted him: “You son of a black woman!” Bilal came to the Messenger and reported the incident in tears. The Messenger reproached Abu Dharr: “Do you still have a sign of jahiliyah (ignorance)?” Full of repentance, Abu Dharr lay on the ground and said: “I will not raise my head (meaning that he would not get up) unless Bilal puts his foot on it.” Bilal forgave him, and they were reconciled.[19] Such was the bond of kinship and humanity that Islam created among a once-savage people.(20)

**References**

 **(A) 8:33/The Quran with Annotated Interpretation in Modern English by Ali Unal**

**(B) 15:88 /The Quran with Annotated Interpretation in Modern English by Ali Unal**

**[1] Qadi ‘Iyad, Shifa’, 1:78-9; Hindi, Kanz al-’Ummal, 4:93.**

**[2] Ibn Hisham, Sirat al-Nabawiyah, 4:55; Ibn Kathir, Al-Bidayah wa al-Nihayah, 4:344.
[3] Sultan Mehmed II (the Conqueror) (1431-1481). The 7th Ottoman Sultan who conquered Istanbul in 1453.
[4] Muslim, Birr, 87.
[5] Hanbal, Musnad, 4:395; Muslim, Fada’il, 126.
[6] Qadi ‘Iyad, as-Shifa’ al-Sharif, 1:17.
[7] Bukhari, Adhan, 65; Muslim, Salat, 192.
[8] Bukhari, Adab, 18.
[9] Ibid., Adab, 18; Muslim, Fada’il, 64.
[10] Tirmidhi, Birr, 16.
[11] Bukhari, Jana’iz, 45.
[12] Ibid, Jana’iz, 3.
[13] Muslim, Ayman, 31, 33; Ibn Hanbal, Musnad, 3:447.
[14] Ibn Sa’d, al-Tabaqat al-Kubra’, 1:195.
[15] Bukhari, Anbiya, 54; Muslim, Salam, 153.
[16] Abu Dawud, Adab, 164; Ibn Hanbal, Musnad, 1:404.
[17] Sunan al-Nasa’i, Hajj, 114; Ibn Hanbal, Musnad, 1:385.
[18] Hakim, Mustadrak, 4:231.
[19] Bukhari, Iman, 22.**

**(20)Fethullah, M.Gulen, Love and Tolerance. Tughra Books, 2012.**