



Daily Recipients of Opportunity: Allah's Name al-Halim

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لا إِلَهَ إِلَّا اللَّهُ الْعَظِيمُ الْحَلِيمُ ، لَا إِلَهَ إِلَّا اللَّهُ رَبُّ الْعَرْشِ الْعَظِيمِ ، لَا إِلَهَ إِلَّا اللَّهُ رَبُّ السَّمَاوَاتِ وَرَبُّ الْأَرْضِ ، لَا إِلَهَ إِلَّا اللَّهُ رَبُّ الْعَرْشِ الْكَرِيمِ

Lā ilāha illā Allāh al-‘aẓīm al-ḥalīm. Lā ilāha illā Allāh rabb al-‘arsh al-‘aẓīm. Lā ilāha illā Allāh rabb al-samāwāt wa rabb al-arḍ. Lā ilāha illā Allāh rabb al-‘arsh al-karīm.

None has the right to be worshipped but Allah, the Majestic, the Most Forbearing, none has the right to be worshipped but Allah, the Lord of the Tremendous Throne. None has the right to be worshipped but Allah, the Lord of the Heavens and the Lord of the Honorable Throne.¹

Introduction

No one likes to be with a harsh, unforgiving person who is quick to judge and punish. When we make a mistake—particularly when it is out of heedlessness or weakness rather than bad intentions—all we desire is forbearance. We want to be treated with a gentle patience that will give us the chance to realize our mistakes and take the steps to mend our actions before we are held accountable for it. We appreciate the person who sees our mistake and does not shame us for it. More so, we appreciate the person who gives us a second chance even when—or especially when—we know we do not deserve it. It is particularly humbling to be treated gently when we do something knowing it is wrong; in this case, we appreciate the forbearance even more. The best of us are those who recognize this forbearance and take the opportunity to mend our actions and our hearts. Understanding how forbearance makes us feel and its effect on us should encourage us to extend it to others when they make mistakes.

¹ The Prophet's ﷺ supplication during difficulty; al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī* (Beirut: Dār Ṭawq al-Najjāh, 2002), 8:75, no. 6346.

We appreciate this characteristic in its human form, even though human forbearance is, by its very nature, flawed. A person can be forbearing because they have to be in a given situation, or because they want to avoid confrontation, or perhaps they only appear to be forbearing because they are weak or unable to react to the situation. The seemingly forbearing actions can lack wisdom or may be unfairly applied.

So, what would perfect forbearance, or *ḥilm*, look like? *Ḥilm* is forbearance that is coupled with wisdom, purpose, and knowledge of who we are and what we need. Only God has this perfect *ḥilm*; when He is forbearing with us, He knows that that is what is best for us in that given moment. This is why He is *al-Ḥalīm*—The Forbearing. Only He Who truly understands us and Who is the ultimate guide to all that is truly good in this life and the hereafter employs this forbearance in a way that, if we heed the signs, is designed for us to remember and to return to Him. Understanding this name and attribute should remind us of the beauty of being forbearing with others, as Allah loves for His servants to embody His attributes of beauty.

So, what does this name truly mean and what are its dimensions?

The meaning of *al-Ḥalīm*

The root of the word *ḥalīm* is *ḥ-l-m* which has many meanings—to attain puberty, a dream, clemency, discernment—including patience and reason.² Allah says in the Qur'an, "Or do their minds [*aḥlāmuhum*] command them to this, or are they a transgressing people?"³ From this (reason—the mind) comes the meaning that *ḥilm* is related to not being overcome by anger; i.e., being able to still use one's reason when a situation gives rise to anger. The scholar and linguist al-Rāghib al-Iṣfahānī stated that "*ḥilm* is self-control and tempering the rampage of anger."⁴ Thus, most regard this characteristic as meaning to be measured in one's reactions and not hasty. Indeed, the Prophet ﷺ reminds us that, "Deliberation is from Allah, and

² Hans Wehr, *A Dictionary of Modern Written Arabic* (New York: Spoken Language Services, 1976), 202.

³ Qur'an 52:32.

⁴ In Sa'īd ibn 'Alī al-Qaḥṭānī, *Muqawwimāt al-dā'iya al-nājiḥ* (n.p.: Ktab Inc, 1996), 107.

recklessness is from Satan.”⁵ As a characteristic, one who has *ḥilm* is forbearing and gentle.

Al-Ghazālī defines Allah's name *al-Ḥalīm* as the One Who does not react out of anger to disobedience, nor is He hasty in punishing, even though He is capable of punishing then and there.⁶ Ibn al-Qayyim similarly states that *al-Ḥalīm* is the One Who grants a grace period to the wrongdoer and does not punish him or her immediately, even though He is capable of that.⁷ These scholars emphasize two points: God's lack of haste, which reminds us that anything that comes from Allah is measured and from a place of wisdom; and His capability, which should humble us. At the essence, Allah is calm, unperturbed, and gentle with His servants when they commit wrongful acts.

This is a moment to pause. We are often oblivious to the fact that we do things that are against what Allah has commanded us to do. It may be in the things we do not notice, such as using vulgar language or not turning away from an inappropriate scene, or things that are more severe, such as mistreating family or employees, or acting upon racist assumptions, or engaging in illicit sexual relations. The reason why we have not faced the consequences of these actions is quite simply because of Allah's forbearance: He is not hasty to punish us. On the contrary, He sees all, and is not overcome by anger; He is *al-Ḥalīm*.

To truly understand this beautiful attribute, we should take a step back and think: why would someone who has the power to execute a punishment that is deserved show forbearance? As we have seen, forbearance is related to employing reason, particularly in a situation that would normally give rise to anger or condemnation. This means that forbearance is not simply for forbearance's sake, but rather is purposeful, made within the context of Allah's infinite wisdom, mercy, and

⁵ al-Bayhaqī, *al-Sunan al-kubrā* (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyah, 2003), 10:178, no. 20270; declared fair (*ḥasan*) by al-Albānī in *Ṣaḥīḥ al-targhīb wa-al-tarhīb* (Riyadh: Maktabat al-Ma‘ārif, 2000), 2:242, no. 1572.

⁶ Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī, *The Ninety-Nine Beautiful Names of God: al-Maqṣad al-Asnā Fī Sharḥ Asmā’ Allāh al-Ḥusnā*, trans. David Burrell and Nazih Daher, The Ghazali Series (Cambridge: The Islamic Texts Society, 1992), 99.

⁷ In Omar Suleiman al-Ashqar, *Sharḥ Ibn al-Qayyim li-Asmā’ Allāh al-Ḥusnā* (Amman: Dar al-Nafa’is, 2008), 89. Another name of Allah that is similar is *al-Ṣabūr*, the Most Patient. Ibn al-Qayyim differentiates between the two names by stating that forbearance is wider in meaning and encompasses patience. Moreover, patience is the fruit of forbearance. Al-Ashqar, 91.

knowledge. Not punishing may be the best path in a particular circumstance. But what is it best for? Allah gives us the opportunity to return, as well as to learn from our mistakes, to learn about others, and the world around us. He does not punish us for any given wrongdoing in order to give us the chance to reflect and come back to Him. In a beautiful hadith, the Prophet ﷺ tells us that, “Allah stretches out his hand by night to accept the repentance of those who sin by day, and he stretches out his hand by day to accept the repentance of those who sin by night, until the sun rises from the west.”⁸ Indeed, the Prophet ﷺ also tells us that, “The Scribe on the left delays registering the sin of a Muslim for six hours. If he repents (within these six hours), and seeks God’s forgiveness, they do not register the sin. If he does not, they write it down as a single sin.”⁹ Allah does not simply delay a potential punishment or consequence, He even delays writing down the deed if one returns to Him.

And not only does Allah *accept* those who return to Him, He “*loves* those who constantly return.”¹⁰ This is a point worth emphasizing: Allah loves—loves!—the sinner *if* he returns. He is opening the door for us to be of those whom He loves and are special to Him, not because we are perfect but precisely because we are not and still maintain hope in Him.

Moreover, it would be more than many of us could bear if we were constantly and immediately punished for any and all sins. We would be tired, and would likely give up because all we would anticipate is punishment. What would that do to our relationship with the Most Merciful? Allah does not want that for us. He is forbearing with us because we *need* His forbearance and gentleness. And Allah bestows upon us this forbearance so that we never despair of His mercy and grace. It is important to recognize here that we should be forbearing with others. Just as we love when Allah treats us with forbearance, we should exhibit this beautiful characteristic in our treatment of others.

⁸ Muslim, *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim* ([Beirut?]: Dār Iḥyā’ al-Kutub al-‘Arabīyah, 1955), 4:2113, no. 2759.

⁹ al-Ṭabarānī, *al-Mu’jam al-kabīr* (Cairo, Riyadh: Maktabat Ibn Taymīyah, Dār al-Ṣumay’ī, 1983), 8:185, no. 7765; declared fair (*ḥasan*) by al-Albānī in *Ṣaḥīḥ al-jāmi’ al-ṣaḥīḥ wa ziyādātihi* ([Damascus?]: al-Maktab al-Islāmī, 1969), 1:422, no. 2097.

¹⁰ Qur’an 2:222.

The following section explores the various ways this name is mentioned in the Qur'an.

Al-Halīm in the Qur'an

This name is mentioned in various places in the Qur'an.¹¹ For example, we are told:

Allah does not impose blame upon you for what is unintentional in your oaths, but He imposes blame upon you for what your hearts have earned. And Allah is Forgiving and Forbearing.¹²

The meaning is also alluded to in different verses, such as the following verse:

And if Allah were to impose blame on the people for what they have earned, He would not leave upon the earth any creature. But He defers them for a specified term. And when their time comes, then indeed Allah has ever been, of His servants, Seeing.¹³

Some of us may isolate His names from one another, giving an incomplete idea about Allah. This is one reason why Allah often pairs His names in the Qur'an, giving us a more nuanced understanding of the various dimensions of each name. This name—*al-Halīm*—is most often paired with His name *al-Ghafūr*, the Forgiving. Allah says in the Qur'an:

Indeed, those of you who turned back on the day the two armies met, it was Satan who caused them to slip because of some [blame] they had earned. But Allah has already forgiven them. Indeed, Allah is Forgiving and Forbearing.¹⁴

Anyone who is a recipient of Allah's *ḥilm* (we all are) may wonder, "If I messed up, and Allah is delaying His punishment, will He accept me in the meanwhile? Is the delay just a temporary delay, or will seeking forgiveness remove the blame and

¹¹ According to Abū Shādī and Āl 'Abd al-Jabbār, Allah's name *al-Halīm* has been mentioned eleven times in the Qur'an. See: Khalid Abū Shādī, *Hanī'an li-man 'arafa rabbah (Asmā' al-jamāl)* (Cairo: Tayba Publishing, 2015), 264; Majid bin Abdullah Āl 'Abd al-Jabbār, *al-Asmā al-ḥusnā: Taṣnīf wa ma'nan*, 2nd ed. (self-pub., 2018), 486.

¹² Qur'an 2:225.

¹³ Qur'an 35:45.

¹⁴ Qur'an 3:155.

potential punishment?” And the answer Allah gives to the last question is “Yes”; the purpose of the delay is so that you can return to God sincerely and, God willing, you will be accepted and forgiven because He forgives those who return to Him.

The Prophet Yūnus (Jonah) became frustrated with his people when they rejected his message. So he left them, and from this point in the story we tend to focus on when he is swallowed by the whale and the lessons we learn from that. However, another important event occurs. In Prophet Yūnus's (as) absence, Allah continues to send his people signs, rather than punish them—and they actually take heed. The Qur'an tells us, “And We sent him to [his people of] a hundred thousand or more. And they believed, so We gave them enjoyment [of life] for a time.”¹⁵ Allah did not punish them for their initial rejection and the bad deeds they had committed. He was forbearing, delayed the potential punishment, and continued to send them signs. This allowed them time to think, reflect, and change their beliefs and behaviors. And they returned to Him. There was no punishment because they understood the lessons and the signs. And that is the point of the delay.

What happens, though, if we do not immediately return? What if we forget or do not realize our mistakes, and then Allah teaches us the lesson with something that may, in the moment, hurt us? Even then, He is the Forgiving. Both the delay in punishment, and the punishment itself, are for the purpose of waking us up so that we can return. In either case, when we return to Allah, He forgives us, and He reminds us of this by pairing His name *al-Halīm* with His name *al-Ghaḥfūr*. A human being may exhibit *ḥilm*, but after a period of time of showing forbearance, they may not forgive because of their frustration and anger;¹⁶ their eventual punishment is coupled with the rejection of forgiveness. With Allah, as long as we still have life in us, a delay in punishment is an opportunity to reflect, return, and be accepted by Him.

¹⁵ Qur'an 37:147–48.

¹⁶ al-Biqā'ī, *Naẓm al-durar* (Cairo: Dār al-Nashr al-Islāmī, 1984), 16:72.

This name is also paired with His names *al-‘Alīm*,¹⁷ *al-Ghanī*,¹⁸ and *al-Shakūr*.¹⁹ These are all reminders of how His attributes are interconnected. When Allah pairs His name *al-Halīm* with His name *al-‘Alīm* (The All-Knowing), He is reminding us that His forbearance is not because He is ignorant of our bad deeds. Rather He knows and is still forbearing. Similarly, He reminds us that He is *al-Ghanī*—free of need—so His forbearance is not because He needs anything from us. A human being might delay certain consequences because they need a personal favor or even the right circumstances to be able to punish; Allah is far above that, as He is free of need. Rather His forbearance only benefits us; so, when we return to Him, and try to do good to make up for the bad, He does not gain anything by it. Only we do.

Finally, one might think, “If I am deserving of punishment, does that mean that my good deeds don’t matter?” and the answer to that is a resounding “No!” This is why Allah reminds us that He is *al-Shakūr*, which means He appreciates even the tiniest good deed and the smallest step taken towards Him, and He rewards multiple times for any small or large action. It does not mean that our good deeds are ‘canceled out’ because we are struggling with other obligations or we are making mistakes in other areas. We need to remember the Prophet’s ﷺ words when he said, “All the children of Adam err and the best of those who err are those who constantly return.”²⁰ *al-tawwābūn*—those who constantly return—are those who recognize their mistakes, regret committing the sin, and seek forgiveness from Allah verbally and in action, by trying never to repeat it. It is a process of self-improvement.

The appreciation, forgiveness, and forbearance of Allah are all so that we can return to the path to Him. It is not so that we engage in self-loathing or self-flagellation; rather, it is so that we seek strength and hope from Allah, knowing that even one step taken towards Him is met by Him rushing to us.²¹

¹⁷ Qur’an 22:59.

¹⁸ Qur’an 2:263.

¹⁹ Qur’an 64:17.

²⁰ al-Tirmidhī, *Sunan al-Tirmidhī* (Beirut: Dār al-Ġarb al-Islāmī, 1998), 4:240, no. 2499; declared fair (*ḥasan*) by al-Albānī in *Ṣaḥīḥ al-targhīb*, 3:216, no. 3139.

²¹ Part of a longer hadith, where the Prophet ﷺ tells us that Allah says, “Whoever comes to me walking, I will come to him running.” *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, 4:2061, no. 2675.

Some of us, however, may feel that we are mostly good. We may even resent being told that we are recipients of God's *hilm* because we feel that we do not do anything that warrants a wake-up call. Indeed, the *nafs*—the lower self—is comfortable when it considers itself beyond reproach. The next section will address this.

Why do we need *hilm*?

The answer to this question—indeed, the question itself—may appear unnecessary and obvious to some. But it is only obvious if we conceptualize our relationship to God in a certain way—that Allah is the Lord, the Creator, and the Nurturer, and we have a beautiful and intimate relationship with Him that includes responsibilities; indeed, our main purpose is worshipping Him. However, we live in an era of elevating the self or the *nafs* or the lower self. Oft-repeated mantras include “Do you,” “Be your ‘authentic self’” (without a definition of what that is, whether it is subject to change, whether that “self” contains harmful aspects that need rectifying rather than obeying, and even if being this undefined authentic self means going against what Allah has told us), and the idea that “the universe” does what you want or will it to do. The underlying message may be a positive one on the surface or may have positive aspects that aim to combat self-loathing, particularly in the face of social media messaging, childhood trauma, or societal pressures that make people feel as though they are not enough, particularly in the material realm. **However, we end up elevating the *nafs* and its whims to fight against feelings of unworthiness, instead of attaching our self-worth to being created and honored by God, and through cultivating a beautiful relationship with Him.** And thus, anything that causes us to question the self and its desires is met with resistance.

And if we believe in these aforementioned mantras, the idea of *hilm* may be difficult to grasp, and can only include Allah having forbearance because we deserve it or because He is gently guiding us to the earthly fulfillment of some worldly goals, and not because we were heedless or did something wrong that needs to be pointed out and rectified. It becomes about us and this world solely,

rather than about Allah and the hereafter. And we must shift this focus from a “me-centered” life to a “God-centered” life. Indeed, recognizing and appreciating Allah’s characteristic of *hilm* can only help us to grow spiritually because we are always seeking to improve and work on our shortcomings. It is actually empowering because we have been given the opportunity to change for the better.

If we take a moment to truly reflect, we remember that we will be meeting with Allah. In His wisdom, He has ordained a certain way of living and being, recognizing that we will all fall short. And falling short is fine (‘fine’ in the context of it being a human trait, and what elevates us is the recognition of the mistake and then seeking forgiveness from God) because Allah’s gentleness and *hilm* are so that we can return to Him. We mess up in life and God gives us signs to return. He is not hasty in punishment because the purpose of punishment is not the punishment in and of itself. Rather, He is gentle with us because in His all-encompassing wisdom, He knows that what we need is *hilm*. Punishment has its purpose, its time, and its place but so does *hilm*. And His *hilm* is tailored to our situation because He knows us deeply; indeed, He is closer to ourselves than even our own selves.

Do ‘bad people’ deserve *hilm*?

It may sometimes appear that certain people who are ‘bad’ or do evil things are left to their ways without any visible consequences, while those who appear to be good cannot catch a break. We may wonder: are ‘bad’ people recipients of Allah’s forbearance, while those who are good suffer through hardship that some may interpret as punishment?

Allah’s names must be understood holistically. We do not partition His attributes. His forbearance, for example, is not separate from His mercy, and it is also not separate from His justice. Additionally, it is intertwined with His wisdom and His knowledge. The Qur’an clarifies for us what we see on the surface, and what is happening in the unseen.

In Surat al-Kahf,²² the Prophet Mūsá (as) and al-Khiḍr—whom Mūsá (as) went to learn from—visit a village where the inhabitants are inhospitable to them. al-Khiḍr then proceeds to mend a wall that is breaking down—keep in mind that this comes after he damages the boat of some poor persons who had helped them, and after a young boy was killed. On the surface, this is completely illogical and seems at odds with Allah's attributes of justice and mercy. This is unfortunately how we view things when superficially they appear not to make sense. It seems that the inhospitable villagers are recipients of God's forbearance even as they mistreat their guests, but the good poor people with the boat were victims of damage to their boat, which they relied on for their sustenance. Were they being punished for something?

But we then learn that al-Khiḍr fixed the wall because “it belonged to two orphan boys in the city, and there was beneath it a treasure for them, and their father had been righteous.”²³ The people of the village also benefited from the fixing of the wall in this world, despite their unbecoming actions, because of Allah's reward to a righteous father—they were not punished at that time and were shown forbearance. We also learn that damaging the boat ended up being a good thing because there “was after them a king who seized every [good] ship by force”²⁴ and the poor people were spared that fate. So, we do not interpret every seemingly good thing as a reflection of God's pleasure with someone, nor every bad thing as a punishment, and should have certainty that Allah appreciates all good deeds, and that we still have the opportunity to return to Him whatever the case is. Hardships are not necessarily punishments but are also for the purpose of raising our rank, teaching us, and even avoiding a greater calamity that could have befallen us. We never know which is the case because that is from the unseen; the important thing is how we behave during and after the hardship and whether we use the circumstances to reflect on our states and turn to Allah.

We must understand nuance. There are the Pharaohs of the world, certainly. In the story of Mūsá (as), we know Pharaoh was a cruel tyrant. After all, it was Pharaoh

²² See verses 65–82 of Sūrat al-Kahf (Chapter 18).

²³ Qur'an 18:82.

²⁴ Qur'an 18:79.

who commanded the murder of newborn boys from Bani Israel. It was Pharaoh who proclaimed, “I am your lord, the most high.”²⁵ But God gives him many chances to return. He does so by commanding Mūsa (as) to speak to him gently. He does so by using logic when Mūsá (as) is able to defeat the magicians he is supposed to compete with. Allah finally does so by sending down punishments and hardships.²⁶ After Pharaoh turns away from all of those signs and persists in his tyranny, Allah finally causes him to drown. That was the final worldly punishment. The punishment in the Hereafter is so much worse, so Allah gives multiple opportunities—even to the worst of us—to rectify our wrongs and return to Him.

On the other hand, in another story in the Qur'an, we are told of a situation where Allah sends his worldly punishment almost immediately. In Sūrat al-Qalam,²⁷ the garden of the three brothers is destroyed before they have the opportunity to harvest it. They were intending to leave nothing for the poor, who were allowed to pick the fruits when their father was alive. Even before they could execute their plans, a blazing fire engulfed the garden. Where was God's forbearance? Why were they punished the first time (that we know of) they intended to do something wrong?

We understand that the father raised his children correctly since he allowed the poor to pick from the fruits of the garden, and his children were witness to this as they grew up. The three brothers knew that they should not have attempted to deny the poor the chance to take some of the harvest but we can assume that greed overshadowed what they knew in their hearts to be the most moral and God-conscious way. If Allah had allowed them to harvest the garden and deny the poor people that chance, it perhaps could have meant that they would continue on that path. They may have been so thrilled with the wealth of the harvest that they would have committed even more wrongful acts to increase their share, causing further injustice on the way. Spiritually, this would have been so much worse for them, and the consequences in the Hereafter would be much more severe.

²⁵ Qur'an 79:24.

²⁶ Floods, locusts, frogs, and so on—see Surat al-A'rāf, 7:133.

²⁷ See *ayaat* 17–33 of Sūrat al-Qalam (Chapter 68).

And here we return to the purpose of forbearance. If a person is forbearing to the degree that their forbearance causes the wrongdoer to forget or become heedless, then that forbearance actually harms its recipient. In Surat al-Qalam, the fire engulfing the garden was a cause for the brothers to return to God. They changed their ways as a result. Allah tells us,

They said, “O woe to us; indeed, we were transgressors. Perhaps our Lord will substitute for us [one] better than it. Indeed, we are toward our Lord desirous.”²⁸

This also means that the punishment itself was measured. It was a signal that forced them to think about their actions. As human beings, we may take for granted that we do not see the consequences of our actions immediately. When we do not see an obvious negative reaction to our actions, we may assume that what we are doing is good or correct or not a major bad deed, even if there is a clear commandment telling us the opposite. In these cases, we need to be woken up and alerted. A punishment should not cause us to lose heart; rather we should take it as an act of mercy in order that we return. Just like a student failing a midterm or an applicant being denied a job because of a poor or rushed application, the initial rejection hurts. Yet, we can either be the person who wallows in it or the person who wakes up and realizes that they must do something different.

This is a crucial point. The word “punishment” often conjures up images of harshness and lack of mercy and is perceived as being wholly negative—almost as though it is the final judgment from which there is no return. However, we have to stop and remember that this “punishment” is from Allah: the Most Forbearing, the Most Merciful, and the Most Wise. Therefore, this punishment is measured and teaches us discipline. It is purposeful, and Allah wants to guide us to what is best for us in this world and the next. Wallowing is a trick of Satan so that we completely miss the point, and either turn away from Allah because we have misunderstood the purpose of the hardship, or continue doing what we always do without paying heed to the lessons we are supposed to take.

²⁸ Qur'an 68:31–32.

So, if we feel that something bad has happened as a result of our actions, it should be a moment for us to reflect and even appreciate the wake-up call. We should seek forgiveness from God, increase our good deeds, and learn from our mistakes. We should seek to be like the brothers with the garden, rather than the inhospitable people of the village, or even—God forbid—Pharaoh himself.

Devotion to *al-Ḥalīm*

Reflect

An important step towards connecting to Allah through His name *al-Ḥalīm* is to recognize the manifestation of His *ḥilm* in our lives. It is one of those heart-softening exercises when we realize that Allah sees and is aware of everything, and still we receive His forbearance and His kindness. For example, for myself, I know that I am lacking in devotion during my prayers. I should be much more present, and we know that prayer is the pillar of our faith. The fact that I have the opportunity to make up for this at every prayer is truly a blessing from the forbearance of God. Similarly, when we reflect on both the seemingly small and bigger things, we realize how much God has blessed us with His Grace.

Another aspect of this reflection is to be aware of God's signals. The brothers in the story in *Sūrat al-Qalam* immediately recognized the error of their ways and returned to God. Similarly, when something outwardly bad happens, we should reflect on our actions and try to mend our deeds because that tribulation might be a sign from Allah for us to return to Him.

Appreciate

Recognizing the many manifestations of forbearance in our lives should compel us to express gratitude. Gratitude increases us in good and what is in our best interest, as Allah tells us, “And if you are grateful, I will surely increase you in favor.”²⁹

²⁹ Qur'an 14:7.

We are already subjects of Allah's forbearance; now imagine when we recognize and thank Him for His forbearance. Not only will this soften and expand our hearts, increase our love for and closeness to Him, and encourage us to rectify our actions and become better overall, it may also mean that we will be in constant reception of His gentle forbearance, God Willing, if that is good for us.

This does not mean that nothing that is outwardly bad will ever happen. Tests—in both their manifestations as ease and difficulty—are a part of life. But tests also have a purpose, as they elevate our rank and bring us closer to our Lord. They are, as mentioned previously, also a signal and sign to bring us back to Him when we have strayed too far.

Return to Allah

As mentioned, one of the purposes of forbearance is for us to return. If we consider the previous example of lacking devotion in prayer, recognizing God's forbearance should not simply cause us to be grateful, though that is, of course, important. It should also alert us to the fact that we need to change. And if it is something we are struggling with, any small step taken to fix the mistake is a step taken towards Allah. Difficulty should not cause us to despair. Rather, it just means we need to break up the issue into smaller parts, seeking help from God, expressing our struggles, and still working our way through them.

Be forbearing with people

The Prophet ﷺ made a beautiful statement to one of the Companions. He said to him, “You have two characteristics that Allah loves: Forbearance and patience.”³⁰ Indeed, Allah describes the Prophet Ibrahim ﷺ, His “*khalīl*”—i.e., His intimate friend—as “compassionate and *ḥalīm*.”³¹ Ibrahim was described as being *ḥalīm* because he exhibited forbearance in response to harm and ill-treatment. For example, when his father threatened that he would stone him if he did not desist in

³⁰ Muslim, *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, 1:48, no. 17.

³¹ Qur'an 9:114.

calling to Allah, Ibrāhīm responded with, “Peace will be upon you. I will ask forgiveness for you from my Lord. Indeed, He is ever gracious to me.”³²

There are certain attributes of God that cannot have a human ‘face’ to them and are exclusive to Him, such as Him being the Creator (i.e., creating something from nothing) or being completely free of need. But other attributes are used to describe and praise human beings when they embody them. Allah is the Most Merciful, and He wants us to practice mercifulness towards one another, as the Prophet ﷺ teaches us: “The merciful will be shown mercy by the Most Merciful. Be merciful to those on the earth and the One in the heavens will have mercy upon you”³³ (reflect upon this equation: imperfect and flawed mercy is met with absolute and complete mercy). *al-Ḥalīm* is also one of these names. Not only is Allah the ultimate manifestation of *ḥilm*, but He also loves for His servants to beautify themselves with this attribute. Imagine being told—by the Prophet ﷺ, no less—that God *loves* something in you. Would you not work to cultivate this characteristic? Would you not try to perfect it as far as is humanly possible?

Thus, *ḥilm* in our context involves avoiding being reactionary and reacting to people in a state of anger. This is the sign of true strength, as the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ reminds us, “The strong man is not one who is good at wrestling, but the strong man is one who controls himself in a fit of rage.”³⁴ It was reported that when the Caliph ‘Umar ibn ‘Abd al-‘Azīz had to punish someone for a crime, he would detain him three times before executing the punishment, fearing to execute a punishment out of anger (rather than because it was deserved or necessary).³⁵ While Allah’s Mercy is the most perfect and human mercy cannot even compare, we are still encouraged to embody and practice mercy at the human level. Indeed, it is precisely because we are imperfect that we should be forbearing; it allows us to take a step back and reflect, lest we make a mistake.

Forbearance also means letting go when others make mistakes, as well as helping them to rectify their wrongs. It particularly means avoiding negative reactions to

³² Qur’an 19:47.

³³ al-Tirmidhī, *Sunan al-Tirmidhī*, 3:388, no. 1924; declared authentic (*ṣaḥīḥ*) by al-Tirmidhī in the comments.

³⁴ al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, 8:28, no. 6114.

³⁵ From “Siyar A‘lām al-Nubalā’,” in Abū Shādī, *Hanī’an Li-man ‘Arafa Rabbah*, 272.

slights to our ego. This requires work. The Companion Abū al-Dardā' (ra) said, "Verily, knowledge only comes by learning and forbearance only comes by cultivating forbearance. Whoever aims for goodwill receive goodness and whoever seeks to evade evil will be protected from it."³⁶ Thus, cultivating this characteristic takes practice. But we do so, hoping ultimately for God's forbearance with us.

Of course, in order to embody this characteristic, we have to try to understand what it means for us in different situations. It does not necessarily have to mean that we do not react to multiple acts of, for example, abuse or mistreatment. This is not only unhealthy, it may encourage the other party to continue in the wrongful actions. We need to remember that the root of *ḥilm* is the employment of reason, so forbearance must come from a place of wisdom and must be tailored to the situation. Most of us deserve to be given a chance the first time, perhaps even a second or a third. But would it be wise in a particular context to avoid attaching consequences to certain actions? Allah might delay punishment for a character like Pharaoh, but that is because Allah can eventually punish him—and does. Thus, while we should embody characteristics of mercy and forbearance, especially in our personal capacities, it should be done so with measured wisdom within the context, without perpetuating injustice.

Forbearance and difficulties

When the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ went through difficulty, he would make the following supplication:

لَا إِلَهَ إِلَّا اللَّهُ الْعَظِيمُ الْحَلِيمُ ، لَا إِلَهَ إِلَّا اللَّهُ رَبُّ الْعَرْشِ الْعَظِيمِ ، لَا إِلَهَ إِلَّا اللَّهُ رَبُّ السَّمَاوَاتِ وَرَبُّ الْأَرْضِ ، لَا إِلَهَ إِلَّا اللَّهُ رَبُّ الْعَرْشِ الْكَرِيمِ

Lā ilāha illā Allāh al-‘aẓīm al-ḥalīm. Lā ilāha illā Allāh rabb al-‘arsh al-‘aẓīm. Lā ilāha illā Allāh rabb al-samāwāt wa rabb al-arḍ. Lā ilāha illā Allāh rabb al-‘arsh al-karīm.

³⁶ Ibn Ḥibbān, *Rawḍat al-‘uqalā’ wa nuzhat al-fuḍalā’* (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-‘Ilmīyah, 1975), 1:210.

None has the right to be worshipped but Allah, the Majestic, the Most Forbearing, none has the right to be worshipped but Allah, the Lord of the Tremendous Throne. None has the right to be worshipped but Allah, the Lord of the Heavens and the Lord of the Honorable Throne.³⁷

This is a beautiful and special *du‘ā’*. The entire supplication is a reminder of Allah's names and attributes; that there is no god but Him, so who can we turn to besides Him? We remind ourselves that He is the Majestic, the Lord of the heavens and of the Throne, and therefore He is far greater than any problem we are facing. We emphasize that He is the Most Forbearing because we recognize our shortcomings and His mercy with us in delaying the consequences of our actions. Perhaps this difficulty is as a result of our wrongful actions, so we beseech Him by His name *al-Ḥalīm* to ask for His forbearance.

This supplication should also remind us to be forbearing when we are in difficulty because those situations are the ones that may cause us to react in negative ways. We can recite the Prophet's ﷺ supplication to remind us who is in control, to ask Allah for help, and to appreciate His forbearance with us. Nothing that befalls us is wholly negative, as we are rewarded for exhibiting this lofty attribute.

Conclusion

Forbearance essentially involves delaying the consequences of our wrongful actions and not reacting with haste, and *al-Ḥalīm* manifests His forbearance with us in a multitude of ways. All of us are daily recipients of His *ḥilm*, and this becomes apparent when we reflect upon our heedlessness that seldom results in major worldly consequences. Reflecting upon this name should remind us of God's kindness in His treatment of us, as He is never hasty in punishing, giving us the opportunity to return. Indeed, one of the purposes of this forbearance is so that we reflect and immediately, or at least eventually, return to Him. Knowing that Allah is *al-Ḥalīm* should also shift the way we view hardships and punishments. These come from Allah, the Most Forbearing and the Most Wise. He sends signs—sometimes in the form of punishments and difficulties—our way so that we

³⁷ The Prophet's ﷺ supplication during difficulty; al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, 8:75, no. 6346.

may learn from them and rectify our deeds, all so that we can become close to Him. Finally, forbearance is one of those attributes with which we should beautify our characters. Since the essence of forbearance involves patience and reason, we must be reasonable and measured in reacting to perceived or actual slights and wrongs by others, challenging our ego and whims by forgiving others, knowing that Allah loves when His servants manifest this attribute.