

Analysis and Introspection into Allah's Names

Series 1

al-rahmān

Text

- Connection

Your dependency and need towards this name concerns connecting to a name (al-rahmān) whose acquisition has been hidden by the realm of creation, but not by the realm of immutability.

- *Explanation:* all blessings come from this name of al-rahmān; this name is indicating the first emanation of pure existence i.e. the granter of existence (from pure existence). So why have we become blind to this connection? Why have we become ignorant in relation to the fact that we are wholly dependent upon al-rahmān? After all, all that we have is from al-rahmān. Answer: because of the love of the dunya and one's excessive desires; these have made us preoccupied and thus oblivious to all blessings and therefore oblivious to al-rahmān.
- The dunya is the abode of obliviousness (ghaflah) and the abode of deception (dār al-ghurūr). 29:64 reads:
 - وَمَا هَذِهِ الْحَيَاةُ الدُّنْيَا إِلَّا لَهُوَ وَلَعِبٌ وَإِنَّ الدَّارَ الْآخِرَةَ لَهِيَ الْحَيَوَانُ لَوْ كَانُوا يَعْلَمُونَ
 -
- Real life where there is attentiveness to al-Rahmān – seeing all blessings from Him – necessitates one's elimination of the worldly life.

لَقَدْ كُنْتَ فِي غَفْلَةٍ مِّنْ هَذَا فَكَشَفْنَا عَنْكَ غِطَاءَكَ فَبَصَرُكَ الْيَوْمَ حَدِيدٌ

•[It will be said], "You were certainly in unmindfulness of this, and We have removed from you your cover, so your sight, this Day, is sharp." (50:22)

وَالَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا أَعْمَالُهُمْ كَسَرَابٍ بِقِيَعَةٍ يُحْسَبُهُ الظَّمَانُ مَاءً حَتَّىٰ إِذَا جَاءَهُ لَمْ يَجِدْهُ شَيْئًا وَوَجَدَ اللَّهَ عِنْدَهُ فُوقَاهُ حِسَابَهُ

•But those who disbelieved - their deeds are like a mirage in a lowland which a thirsty one thinks is water until, when he comes to it, he finds nothing there but finds Allah before Him, and He will pay him in full his due... 24:39

•Hence we are in need of Allah's Raḥmānīyyah because of being so hidden and we want to come out of this concealment. We are an application of:

يَعْلَمُونَ ظَاهِرًا مِّنَ الْحَيَاةِ الدُّنْيَا وَهُمْ عَنِ الْآخِرَةِ هُمْ غَافِلُونَ

Text

- Realization
- Al-Raḥmān, like all proper nouns, such as Allah, can't be used as an adjective but can be used as a subject to be described i.e. it's not a descriptor but is a described.

- *Explanation:* in the phrase “the big Peter”, big is the adjective and Peter is the described noun. But you cannot use Peter as an adjective and say “the Peter ball” where Peter is a proper noun. However using Peter as the noun, you can say “tall Peter”.
- Looking at al-rahmān as a proper noun for the holy essence, one cannot say “the Raḥmān man/lord” but one is sanctioned in saying “the kind Raḥmān”. Note with other names of Allah, this is not observed because they are looked upon as adjectives and attributes e.g. ṣabūr. One would be allowed here to say “the Sabūr Lord” or “the lordly Sabūr” because ṣabūr, here, is only seen as an attribute rather than a proper name for the holy essence. Now the issue is, whether or not the Arabs knew that this attribute of mercy has been used as a proper noun?

Text

Realization continued...

They replied: “what is al-raḥmān?”

• *Explanation:* this is referring to 25:60, where Allah states:

• وَإِذَا قِيلَ لَهُمْ اسْجُدُوا لِلرَّحْمَنِ قَالُوا وَمَا الرَّحْمَنُ أَنَسْجُدُ لِمَا تَأْمُرُنَا وَزَادَهُمْ نُفُورًا

• And when it is said to them, "Prostrate to the Most Merciful," [incorrect translation] they say, "And **what is the Most Merciful?** [Incorrect translation] Should we prostrate to that which you order us?" And it increases them in aversion.

Text

Realization continued:

Hence they did not recognize al-Raḥmān. If the word was referring to the adjective (all-merciful), they would not have denied the word. Moreover, if the word was in reference to a proper noun – like the word Allah – and they knew it as such, they would not have denied it.

Explanation: the problem therefore was they had not encountered the term al-rahmān as a proper noun. They were ignorant of this.

Text

Realization continued

•It was said to the Arab polytheists, “Worship Allāh” [اعبدوا الله] but they did not reply “What is Allah?” Rather, in defence of their associates (to Allāh), they said:

• مَا نَعْبُدُهُمْ إِلَّا لِيُقَرِّبُونَا إِلَى اللَّهِ زُلْفَىٰ

•We only worship them that they may bring us nearer to Allah 39:3

•Hence, it is for this reason, that we have treated the name as a proper noun, even though its adjectival meaning necessitates that it be derived from the root-word ‘raḥmah’ (mercy). The Arabs did not recognize the term raḥmān prefixed with ‘al-’ even though the term raḥmān had been annexed with definite nouns such as raḥmān al-yaḥmāmah

explanation

- Definite articles like ‘the’ where identity of succeeding noun is known;
- Indefinite articles like ‘a’ where identity is not known

- When it comes to definite-ness or specificity there are degrees i.e. identity is more known.
- Syntacticians have outlined a hierarchy
- At the top: pronouns, ‘I’, ‘me’, ‘him’ ...
- Next, proper nouns
- Next, nouns preceded by definite article ‘the’ al-
- Next, nouns annexed to definite noun e.g. ball of the teacher

- the prefix ‘al’ means ‘the’ or denotes a nature of definite-ness. Without it, a given word would be indefinite e.g. *al-bayt* versus *baytun* [the table versus a table] or by way of example ‘a patient man’ (as adjective) versus ‘the patient man’. The Arabs never observed the term *raḥmān* with a prefixed al- (as a proper noun) but had sanctioned the use of the expression “merciful of the Yamamah District” in reference to one who was the sole person from the Yamamah people to survive during the era of Islam. This phrase brings the word *raḥmān* out from its indefinite nature; nevertheless, they had never come across al-Raḥmān qua proper noun indicating the Essence. Conclusion: the specificity index was too high.

text

Realization continued

- I do not know whether the term al-raḥmān (as proper noun) was sanctioned after the revelation of the Holy Messenger or before revelation (for Muslims);
- in any case, that which was prohibited (grammatically) for the polytheists to deem the term raḥmān prefixed by al- (as proper noun) as indicating Allah was that an adjective be made proper noun with a prefixed al-.

text

Realization continued

- If it is said: what about concerning the letter of Solomon (peace be upon him) to Bilqays: “bismillāhir-raḥmānir-raḥīm”?
- We shall reply: the al- is prefixed to the adjective and we do not deny that; our concern is the use of al-raḥmān as proper noun and the fact that this was not recognised by the Arabs.

[i.e. they appreciate that al-rahmaan is a name meaning merciful but do not believe attributing mercy to Him because they have associates for that]

text

Realization continued

Hence, when the Holy Messenger would write (a treaty of reconciliation) between himself and the Arabs, he would write “bismillāhir-raḥmānir-raḥīm” to which the polytheists would say: “we do not know al-Raḥmān” for they always used to write: bismika allāhumma (by Your name Oh Allah!).

- *Note:* even the clause “letter from Muhammad Rasulullah” they had issues with and did not accept and asked for it to be deleted; Once the Prophet asked Ali to erase the title. Ali had hayaa. Prophet gave his finger to be placed over the title to delete it.
- Fiqhī relevance
- Modernity issues

text

Realization continued

• **Buttressing the point that al-Raḥmān is used a proper noun is 17:110:**

• **قُلْ ادْعُوا اللَّهَ أَوْ ادْعُوا الرَّحْمَنَ ۖ أَيًّا مَّا تَدْعُوا فَلَهُ الْأَسْمَاءُ الْحُسْنَىٰ**

• Say, "Call upon Allah or call upon the Most Merciful. Whichever [name] you call - to Him belong the best names."

• **One observes that the meaning indicated by the term Allāh is the same as that referred to by al-raḥmān, hence it is said “to Him” [for Him] not “to them two” [for both].**

text

Realization continued

In the servant's relation to and realization of this Name, Allah has assigned a way for the servant through which the servant realizes Allah. No-one (even the servant) is aware of the way save Allah to the extent that were that way disclosed, it would face denial, similar to how al-raḥmān was denied and not recognised by the Arabs.

Explanation: Imam Ali refers to this secret way between Allah and His servant in the supplication of Kumayl, where he says: “...**And the witnessing of what is hidden from them (the angels watching over them and recording their deeds); But through Your mercy You concealed it...**” i.e. the servant’s connection with Allah is maintained to such a degree that one’s misdeeds will not even be recorded and this ultimately leads to one’s salvation; a salvation which is actualized through Allah’s raḥmāniyyah! And were it to be disclosed, that such a servant has attained to salvation, most people will reject such a statement

- **وَ كُلِّ سَيِّئَةٍ أَمَرْتَبِائِبَاتِهَا الْكِرَامَ الْكَاتِبِينَ** □ and every evil act which you have commanded the noble writers to record
- **الَّذِينَ وَكَلْتَهُمْ بِحِفْظِ مَا يَكُونُ مِنِّي** □ those who you have appointed to watch over what appears before me
- **وَجَعَلْتَهُمْ شُهُودًا عَلَيَّ مَعَ جَوَارِحِي** □ and who you have made, along with my bodily members, witness against me
- **وَ كُنْتَ أَنْتَ الرَّقِيبَ عَلَيَّ مِنْ وَرَائِهِمْ** □ whilst you were yourself the watcher over me from behind them
- **وَ الشَّاهِدَ لِمَا خَفِيَ عَنْهُمْ** □ and the witness of what is hidden from them
- **وَ بِرَحْمَتِكَ أْخْفَيْتَهُ** □ but through your mercy, You concealed it

- traditions

- e.g. such as in 10:92:

- **فَالْيَوْمَ نُنَجِّيكَ بِبَدَنِكَ لِتَكُونَ لِمَنْ خَلَقَ آيَةً وَإِنَّ كَثِيرًا مِّنَ النَّاسِ عَنِ آيَاتِنَا لِعَاقِلُونَ**

text

Realization continued

- It was said to some of the mystics: “how many are the abdāl? (the substitutes)”
- They replied: “forty souls” (it shows that the mystic has a higher position than this station)
- It was then said to them: “why don’t you say forty men?”
- They replied: because some of them are women; and added “neither of them have recognition in relation to one another” The mystic is alluding to the fact that there is a special way that exists between each of them and their Lord. Also in line with this name (al-raḥmān), is that which Khidr disclosed for Moses, who then denied it.

- Explanation: that's why in some traditions it is stated that were one to disclose they are in contact with the twelfth Imam, reject them!
- 1 Pole, 4 awtād (needles), forty abdāl, seventy nujabā (pure), 360 righteous (ṣāliḥīn). Earth is never free from these people.

Text

Incorporation

- In unity with this Name is universal mercy and this corresponds with the mercy of granting existence, as it is said in the Quran, 7:156:

- **وَرَحْمَتِي وَسِعَتْ كُلَّ شَيْءٍ ۚ فَسَأَكْتُبُهَا لِلَّذِينَ يَتَّقُونَ**

- ...but My mercy encompasses all things. So I will decree it [especially] for those who fear Me

Explanation: note this mercy is universal and covers the bringing into existence of all things such as angels, mountains, animals, plants etc. and so incorporating this Name enables one to control all these existents and have them subjugated under one's command.

Text

Incorporation continued

- The love and compassion that manifests at all times between all forms of creatures emanate from this Name. Also emanating from this Name is the mercy between creatures and their fellow kind. The clause of 7:156 i.e. “so I will decree it [especially] for those who fear Me” will be discussed under the name al-rahīm (where people abiding by taqwā will be recipients of a special extra mercy in this world and the hereafter).
- Finally, to incorporate this Name, the mercy of the servant must be for all that is other than Allah, without distinction or bias (in attribute, otherwise the application may vary) – the more the better – as long as it does not go against the shariah and is not reproached by the shariah.
- It is for this reason that Abraham (peace be upon him) said: “I have learnt generosity from My Lord”
- Truly all success and salvation is His!