



The Sublimely Subtle: Allah's Name al-Latîf

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In the name of Allah, the Most Merciful, the Grantor of Mercy.

Prelude

At every turn, subtle dangers lurk that people may never notice, let alone protect themselves against. Little did he know, that particular doubt might have ravaged his faith had he heard it, and that particular temptation might have hijacked his religion. Little did she realize as she stepped outside, that there was an accident looming that would end her life, a gust of cold air that would make her sick, a lewd person that would ruin her day, a dishonest trader about to cheat her, or an envious eye ready to hack away at her happiness.¹ Other dangers are the very opposite; they are so intrusive and entangled that only a surgically subtle fix could carve them out of our lives. These may be the complexity of family problems, the innumerable relapses into sin that evoke shame, the intensity of heartbreak, or otherwise. Both these categories (potential threats stealthily en route to ambush us, and the dead-ends currently confronting us) offer us one opportunity after another to learn how internalizing Allah's name *al-Laṭīf* brings incalculable benefit into our lives.

The meaning of *al-Laṭīf*

Does He who created not know, while He is *al-Laṭīf* (the Subtle), *al-Khabīr* (the Acquainted)? (Qur'an 67:14)

Al-Laṭīf is from Allah's names of beauty and grace, which feeds the souls who contemplate it with a heightened recognition of His omniscience and sublime compassion. Stemming from the triliteral verb *la-ṭa-fa* which means to be subtle or undetectable, *al-Laṭīf* is one of the Divine's names that reflects His subtle nature in two respects:

a) His extensive knowledge, namely Him being fully aware of the most hidden secrets, and the most elusive intricacies.

¹ 'Alī b. Jābir al-Fīfī, *Li-Annak Allāh: Riḥlah ilā al-samā' al-sābi'ah* (Beirut: Dār al-Ḥadārah, 2016), 101 (with adaptation).

b) His delicate finesse in dispensing mercy to His creation, delivering to them His kindness in the most gentle ways.²

al-Ghazālī (d. 505 AH, Allah grant him mercy) writes, “None deserves this name but the One who can identify the ultra-fine, indistinct, unapparent interests [of a creature]. And then can deliver them in a gentle, unaggressive way to those who would benefit from them. Hence, it is only when gentleness in action and nuance in knowledge come together that the concept of *al-Latīf* is realized. It is unimaginable for such perfection in knowledge and actions to exist except with Allah, the Glorified and Exalted.”³

In most places where the Qur'an mentions Allah's name *al-Latīf*, it does so in conjunction with His name *al-Khabīr* (the Acquainted). This pairing is a profound catalyst for generating awe of God in a believer's heart. It stimulates a lifetime of reflections on how the closest people to us do not know what Allah knows about our struggles and pain. It also armors us against forgetting the many who thought they knew the help we needed, yet harmed us inadvertently by offering or imposing that help. It reminds us that people are all very much like that friendly grizzly bear in the children's fable; the one who killed its dear owner as he slept, by swatting the mosquito on his nose with its lethal claws. Only Allah is both *Latīf* (Most Subtle) and *Khabīr* (Best Acquainted); only He knows our dark past and how to guarantee it will not impact our future; only He is privy to both the diagnosis and how to provide relief upon those 'unreachable' sectors within us; only He transcends our hasty tendency to dismiss significant details as irrelevant minutiae, and only He does not fall into oversimplifying solutions in the many reckless ways that we do.

Even those inconspicuous anxieties murmuring deep within the chambers of your heart, which you do not understand, nor are you able to properly express them—your Lord, *al-Latīf*, is fully aware of them. In fact, it is He who tucked them in there, for wonderful wisdoms you may soon discover. al-Sa'dī (d. 1376 AH,

² See: Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyyah, *Matn al-qaṣīdah al-nūnīyah* (Cairo: Maktabat Ibn Taymiyyah, 1417 AH), 1:207.

³ Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī, *al-Maqṣad al-asnā fī sharḥ mā 'ānī asmā' Allāh al-ḥusnā* (Cyprus: al-Jaffān wal-Jābi, 1987), 1:101.

Allah grant him mercy) writes, “*Al-Laṭīf* is the One whose knowledge is so subtle that it perceives the indiscernible and the hidden, and every [secret] the heart contains, and all that hides underground of grains. He [also] acts with *lutf* towards His allies and distinguished [servants], easing them towards ease and distancing them from difficulty; He eased for them every path leading to His pleasure and honorable reward and guarded them against every path leading to His wrath—in ways they realize, and in ways they do not realize. He decreed on them what they dislike, in order to grant them what they love. He exhibited *lutf* towards them in their personal lives, by regularizing for them His beautiful favors and gracious offerings, and exhibited *lutf* towards them through external factors that facilitate for them every form of good, welfare, and prosperity. Hence, *al-Laṭīf* is adjacent in meaning to the implications of *al-Khabīr* (the Acquainted), *al-Raʿūf* (the Affectionate), and *al-Karīm* (the Generous).”⁴

Al-Laṭīf and our existence

Sights cannot encompass Him, though He encompasses [all] sights; and He is *al-Laṭīf* (the Subtle), *al-Khabīr* (the Acquainted). (Qur'an 6:103)

In this verse, Allah teaches us that due to His supreme *lutf* in knowledge, His transcendence does not hinder Him from being fully acquainted (*khabīr*) with all that exists. Down to the quickest glances of His creatures, and the silent debates within every last child's heart, *al-Laṭīf* witnesses the faintest details with His pervasive vision, and accounts for every dimension with His omnipresent knowledge. As Allah says, “And We have indeed created man, and know what his soul whispers to him, and We are closer to him than [his] jugular vein” (Qur'an 50:16). Pondering over these sacred truths rehabilitates a believer's worldview, and neutralizes heart-wrenching worries about the Creator disowning His creation. When asked, “If a tree falls in the forest and no one is around to hear it, does it make a sound?,” the Qur'anically enlightened respond, “No *leaf* falls except that He knows it. And no *grain* is there within the darknesses of the earth, nor a single moist or dry [thing], except that it is [written] in a clear record” (Qur'an 6:59).

⁴ ‘Abd al-Raḥmān al-Sa’dī, *Tawḍīḥ al-kāfiyah al-shāfiyah* (Riyadh: Maktabat Aḍwā’ as-Salaf, 2000), 191 (with slight adaptation).

Similarly, *al-Latīf* sees and acknowledges every tear that falls and every silent supplication you make.

Major exegetes of the Qur'an⁵ suggest another possibility for why *al-Latīf* appears at the conclusion of this verse: to denote the supreme *lutf* of Allah in His very existence. In other words, He cannot be seen due to Him being *Latīf*, just as He can see everything due to being *Khabīr*. But does it not intrigue you how *al-ʿAzīm* (the Greatest) could also be *al-Latīf*—the most discreet being? It is seldom appreciated that Allah veiling Himself from creation in this life is an act of kindness and endearment towards them. By doing so, He protects our fragile nature from being overwhelmed by His magnificence. The Qur'an tells us that when the Lord of Might spoke to Moses (peace be upon him), he said, "My Lord, allow me to look at You." Allah said, "You will not see Me, but look at the mountain; if it should remain in its place, then you will see Me." But when his Lord appeared to the mountain, it was instantly reduced to rubble, and Moses fell unconscious (Qur'an 7:143). Similarly, the Prophet ﷺ said, "His veil is light. Were He to remove it, the glory of His Face would incinerate everything that His sight reaches."⁶ And since something not being visible, and overlooked acts of kindness, are both meanings of the term *latīf* in Arabic, one marvels at the succinct eloquence of Allah identifying Himself as *al-Latīf* in this particular context, calling our attention to both His discreteness and kindness simultaneously.

The *latīf* nature of Allah does not only shield us from seeing Him, which would annihilate us were we to experience it in our earthly forms. It also insulates us from the coexistent phenomena that surround us, which would render life unbearable for us to experience. It is *al-Latīf* who causes them to seem *subtle* in relation to us, when in reality their existence could be inseparable from ours, or could totally eclipse ours. Consider the vast spectrum of sounds, for instance. What if *al-Latīf* had not made our breathing and heartbeats largely unheard by us? What if *al-Latīf* had not made the sounds of roaring plane engines above us, or the deafening sound of planets orbiting above them, beyond the range of our hearing? What if *al-Latīf* had not spared us from being able to hear the insects chewing, or the enemies

⁵ Muḥammad Ibn Aḥmad al-Qurtubī, *al-Jāmi' li-aḥkām al-Qur'ān* (Cairo: Dār al-Kutub al-Maṣriyyah, 1964), 7:54.

⁶ Muslim Ibn al-Ḥajjāj al-Qushayrī, *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim* (Beirut: Dār Iḥyā' al-Turāth al-ʿArabi, 1955), 1:161, no. 179.

plotting, or the wicked among the dead screaming? As the Prophet ﷺ said, “Were it not for [fear] that you would no longer bury one another, I would have asked Allah to enable you to hear from the torment of the grave what I hear.”⁷ Consider the vast unseen world or just those sentinel angels who document our deeds around the clock. What if *al-Latīf* had not limited your awareness of their presence to a conviction at heart? We often hear that celebrities are suffocated by the necessity of personal bodyguards that dictate strict protocols on them at every turn. In all of these examples, it is the *lutf* of Allah in action that relegates them as less evident phenomena in our perception, as if our existences are primary and most entitled to not being crowded or infringed upon.

Al-Latīf and our achievements

The grandest events often start with imperceptible beginnings, just as *al-Latīf* hid for Yūsuf (as) the glory of kingdom in the garbs of captivity. With every new scene in the story, his childhood dream appears to become increasingly distant but then suddenly and without warning, all these scattered pieces reveal their role and incredibly assume their place in seamless fashion. From the moment this story begins, a multitude of factors compound the unlikelihood of Yūsuf (as) being prostrated to by his parents and brothers; they are his parents, one of them is a prophet, his brothers are older than him, they despise him, they threw him down a well, and they had him abducted to remote lands as a slave. From there, the plot only thickened; he is framed by lustful women as a treacherous miscreant, which demoted him from a palace servant to a dungeon prisoner, making the dream even more of an impossibility. Eventually, the decades of difficulty begin to subside, Yūsuf (as) finds himself in the audience of the king, is entrusted with the most sensitive state office during the drought, and this sends his family to his feet in utter desperation. “This is the outcome of my dream from before; my Lord has certainly made it a reality” he proclaimed to his father, then signed his testimony by saying, “Indeed, my Lord is *Latīf* towards whomever He wishes. Indeed, He truly is the All-Knowing, the Most Wise” (Qur’an 7:100). Imagine the flood of memories that must have raced to Yūsuf (as), sending him into deep reflection over

⁷ *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, 4:2199, no. 2867.

how any small step missing from this journey would have prevented it from culminating as it did and from Yūsuf (as) being shaped into the hero he became. He must have replayed all those scenes in his head, but now with the hidden hand of *al-Latīf* in mind, who was actually using every single rock Yūsuf stumbled on as a building block towards his unpredictable finale:

- What if *al-Latīf* had not inspired my brother to suggest casting me into the well, to dissuade them from murdering me or deserting me in the killer sun?
- What if *al-Latīf* had not relocated me to Egypt, to protect me from what my parents could not, and to protect the world from the ensuing famine?
- What if *al-Latīf* had not allowed for a scandal that sent me to prison, to meet the king's butler, exhibit my forte in dream-interpretation, and win his favor?
- What if *al-Latīf* had not caused the butler to forget me once he left prison, to ensure that the king only heard of me at his moment of greatest need for me, so I could demand that my innocence surface from the highest authority?

Dr 'Ali al-Fīfī writes, "When Allah wished to extract Yūsuf from prison, He did not make the prison walls collapse, nor did He send an angel to pluck the souls of the tyrants, nor a lightning bolt from the sky to explode the iron locks off the cage. He simply caused the king to see a dream as he slept, and deemed that *latīf* event sufficient to rescue Yūsuf al-Ṣiddīq from the shackles of oppression."⁸

Every achievement we enjoy is choreographed by His *lutf*. There were thousands of invisible strands that converged to produce that picturesque conclusion. *Al-Latīf* only disclosed a few of these strands to us, thereby allowing us to feel accomplished as weavers of our own success story when it was purely His tapestry throughout. And for a privileged group, *al-Latīf* discloses some additional details, thereby allowing them to notice that nothing short of a miracle has just fallen into their laps, one that their power and might are for certain unable to bring to fruition. So their hearts melt, their gazes rise to the sky, and they find themselves whispering, "Allah is *latīf* with His servants; He extends provisions to whomever He wills. And He is the Powerful, the Exalted in Might" (Qur'an 42:19). Or they

⁸ Al-Fīfī, *Li-Annak Allāh*, 55–56.

may just smile, lower their eyes in humility as they well up with tears, and think, “He is so amazing; He works in such mysterious ways.”

Al-Latīf and our guidance

Within every human being, Allah instilled an instinctive propensity for faith which Islam calls the *fiṭrah*. To facilitate people's guidance, without compromising the test of faith in the unseen, *al-Latīf* hardwired in us all a vague but irresistible conviction in a higher power, and a burning passion to discover Him and somehow connect with Him. Even people whose *fiṭrah* has been corrupted by socialization or otherwise, remain incapable of fully denying the unseen world, since a part of their very nature is unseen—the *rūḥ* (spirit/soul). Every honest person accepts that there is an enigmatic difference between a living person and a corpse which the physical sciences cannot explain. It was none other than *al-Latīf* who curated that mystery, to serve as a stealthy wedge preventing the door of metaphysical possibilities from being shut in our minds, and a nexus between us and the major existential truths that *al-Ḥaqq* (the Ultimate Reality) wants us to perceive. This represents the subtle beginning of our guidance, and life represents the chance to enhance that perception through reflection on the natural world and refinement of the spiritual inner-self until the insight of our hearts becomes sharper than the sight of our eyes.

The aid of *al-Latīf* towards our guidance does not end there, leaving the rest entirely up to our efforts. He will sometimes kindle lamps in the distance to help us see through the fog; a line our eyes fall on, a verse we needed to hear, a dream we needed to see, or a simple realization that swooped in for the rescue. Other times, He erects invisible rails along our path to keep us from swerving: a fearless scholar who reminds us of unpopular truths, a friend who refuses to let us succumb to our demons, a critic that unearths our unrecognized flaws, or a hiccup in our piety that deflates our swelling sense of conceit. Other times, He causes the greatest gifts to await us in the smallest packages; fortunes that we would never imagine can carry us the length of the journey. As the Prophet ﷺ said, “While a man was walking along a path, he found upon it a thorny branch so he set it aside. Allah appreciated this of him, so He forgave him [of his sins].”⁹ Think of the hadith of the prostitute

⁹ Muḥammad Ibn Ismā‘īl al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī* (Beirut: Dār Ṭawq an-Najāh, 1422 AH), 1:132, no. 652.

at the well; a woman whose harm on people's hearts and homes was beyond measure—forgiven for simply descending into the well once more, filling her shoe with water, then climbing out with it between her teeth to quench that parched dog's thirst.¹⁰ While appreciating her kindness is a given, we must consider: Who sent that dog there at that moment? Just like the examples before it, and everything the spiritually blindfolded may consider a mere coincidence, this is but *al-Latīf* reminding us when we forget, rinsing us when we slip back into the mud, and writing the story of our guidance when our pens falter.

Another way that *al-Latīf* guides us aright is by surrounding us with supports that are disguised as struggles. At face value, we may see our inability to improve, while in reality memories are being forged to help us cherish the straight path once it is gifted to us. At face value, they are our loved ones dying or our friends disappointing us, but behind the scenes, the [problem of evil](#) is stoking the flames of longing for Allah and Paradise like nothing else can. Just like with the plants that shoot up from the ground each spring, endless intricacies need to first occur “underground” for the trees of faith to bloom within us. In both cases, we are oblivious to what is happening beneath the surface, while *al-Latīf* knows and engineers it all. Allah invites us to better appreciate this, saying, “Do you not see that Allah has sent down rain from the sky and the earth becomes green? Indeed, Allah is *Latīf* and *Khabīr* (Acquainted)” (Qur'an 22:63).

A third way that *al-Latīf* guides us aright is by infusing us with increased faith at times of adversity, to mitigate its painful brunt and shift our focus to the reward of this suffering. Ibn al-Qayyim (d. 751H, Allah grant him mercy) writes, “...for his perception and anticipation [of the relief] lightens the weight of the burden. Especially when the hope [in Allah] intensifies, and he is positive of the relief, he detects the comfort and breeze of the [impending] relief while still in the midst of the distress. This is from the hidden forms of *lutf* (kindness), and a [dose of] solace that is bestowed in advance, and through it and otherwise can the meaning of His name *al-Latīf* be understood.”¹¹

¹⁰ *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, 4:1761, no. 2245.

¹¹ Ibn Qayyim al-Jawzīyah, *Madārij al-sālikīn fī manāzil iyyāka na 'budu wa-ıyyāka nasta 'ın* (Beirut: Dār Iḥyā' al-Kutub al-‘Arabī, 1996), 2:166.

Al-Latīf and our safety

In a desperate attempt to save her baby from slaughter, the mother of Mūsā (peace be upon him) cast him into the river. Her heart was then unable to bear the anguish of separation, and this nearly drove her to disclose to people his true identity, which would have meant a death sentence for the infant. Had *al-Latīf* not seen her heart about to crack, none else would have been able to preempt that disaster. Allah says, “And the heart of Mūsā’s mother became empty [of all else]. She was about to disclose [his identity] had We not fastened her heart that she would be of the believers” (Qur’an 28:10). And when Allah wished to return Mūsā to his mother, to ease her distress and fortify his faith at her hands, He did not cause a national uprising against the tyranny of Pharaoh to free the oppressed. He simply caused the tongue of baby Mūsā to find the milk of every wet nurse distasteful, until his own mother was hired and paid a royal salary, to breastfeed the child she passionately longed for—all compliments of *al-Latīf*, glory be to Him. Allah says, “And We had prevented from him [all] wet nurses before, so [his sister] said, ‘Shall I direct you to a household that will be responsible for him for you while they are to him [for his upbringing] sincere?’ So We restored him to his mother that she might be content and not grieve, and that she would know that the promise of Allah is true. But most of the people do not know” (Qur’an 28:12-13).

Dangers constantly scale the walls of our lives, and *al-Latīf* constantly averts their raid while we are entirely oblivious. Nobody else knew—not even you—that an eruption was brewing inside you, and that your jokative friend calling you at this random hour was just the destresser you needed. Nobody else knew that you were about to quit on yourself or others, and that a traffic jam was necessary for you to linger on that car’s inspiring bumper sticker. Nobody else knew that your speeding vehicle was about to skid off the mountain, pulverizing you inside it, and that stopping to photograph the baby deer is what thwarted the deadly momentum from building. We usually do not recognize the perils facing us, let alone how to escape them, but *al-Latīf* certainly does recognize them and reroutes us to safety each time.

As individuals, modern medical research has enhanced our ability to reflect on our anatomical vulnerabilities; an exclusive opportunity to realize the extent to which *al-Latīf* actively protects us physically each and every millisecond. Humans have approximately 10 billion capillaries in their bodies, and each of these microvessels must be guarded against clogging. There are nearly 120 million rods in the human retina, and each rod must be maintained to be a functional photoreceptor. There are an estimated 100 trillion bacterial cells in the human microbiome, and keeping the fine balance that allows for robust immunity and not cancer is unending work. Thus is the meticulous grace of *al-Latīf* in action.

The servants of *al-Latīf*

The deeper one's internalization of Allah's name *al-Latīf* becomes, the greater its impact on one's interaction with Allah and with His creation. The following are but a few qualities that will necessarily manifest in a believer once this blessed divine name has crystallized in his or her heart.

1) Receptiveness to Divine Messages

Due to the certainty that the knowledge and gentleness of *al-Latīf* permeate every atom, and accompany every moment, believers live with a heightened sensitivity to Allah and His messages. They see that scientists are correct in that the scenes of nature uplift our spirits, but see through that as well; it was Allah who beautified the universe with stars and breezes and sunsets—a subtlety and kindness we often take for granted.¹² They see that rain does indeed follow the patterns of the water cycle, but see through that as well; it was Allah Who first started it, and Who redirects the clouds each time, and Who recreates every raindrop for His servants whose well-being He cherishes. Anas b. Mālik (Allah be pleased with him) narrates that during a rainfall, the Messenger of Allah ﷺ uncovered some of his body for the rain to reach it, and said, “It has just recently come from its Lord.”¹³ They see that it was a strong urge to drink at an unusual hour that awakened them from sleep, but they also see through that; it was Allah who wished for them to rise

¹² Jinan Yousef, “With the Divine: Al-Lateef,” Virtual Mosque, September 11, 2012, <http://www.virtualmosque.com/relationships/withthedivine/al-lateef/>.

¹³ *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, 2:615, no. 898.

and stand before Him, so they spend moments of intimate conversation on the prayer mat, before returning to bed feeling privileged that He chose to wake them.

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This perceptiveness of the believer does not just allow for understanding *al-Latīf* in some austere conceptual way, but delivers us beyond that to instinctually loving Him. After all, human beings irresistibly love those who treat them kindly, so it's only natural to love *al-Latīf* most upon realizing that nobody has actually ever been kind to us but Him. Everyone else, in reality, was but a conduit of His affection and grace. The believer never conflates the source with the medium, and hence Allah says, “And among humanity are those who take others as equals to Allah, loving them as they should love Allah. But those who believe have more intense love for Allah [than anything]” (Qur'an 2:165).

2) Unbreakable Optimism

The servants of *al-Latīf* find that as their knowledge of Him increases, the vault on their negative thoughts is gradually welded shut. This knowledge then unleashes many dormant memories, opening their eyes to the shade of *lutf* that has and will continue to canopy their life story. They realize it was Him who sent them into that room moments before the child was hurt, so it will be Him who protects this child when they cannot. They realize it was Him who alerted them to the outlet sparking before the smoke got thick, so it will be Him who exposes the smokescreens that could divert them from His path. They realize that in all these instances in their past, a few seconds later would have been too late, so they welcome their future certain that *al-Latīf* will never be late—no matter what tomorrow may bring.

With the meaning of *al-Latīf* carved into their souls, His servants carry hopes that others consider naive, but they understand that no dreams are impossible for Him to retrieve. As Luqmān the Wise said, “O my dear son, if something were [even] the weight of a mustard seed and within a rock or [anywhere] in the heavens or in the earth, Allah will bring it forth. Indeed, Allah is *Latīf* (subtle) and *Khabīr* (Acquainted)” (Qur'an 31:16). Picture a speck of dust in the next room, the next house, the next street, the next neighborhood, the next city, the next country, the

¹⁴ Al-Fīfī, *Li-Annak Allāh*, 57 (with adaptation).

next continent, the next planet, the next galaxy—and be certain if Allah wishes, He will extract it at once. Thus is the confidence of the servants of *al-Latīf*; it is not grounded in material means, or morning words of self-affirmation, but in the fact that He Who can capture a tiny seed from the lost corners of a massive universe can direct every treasure their way, even if the factors on hand do not appear to allow for it, if they but knock on His door.¹⁵

When Umm Salamah's (Allah be pleased with her) husband passed away, she felt happiness was irretrievable after her loss. The Prophet ﷺ counseled her by saying, "Nobody is struck by a calamity, then says as Allah instructed him—'We belong to Allah, and we are certainly returning to Him. O Allah, reward me for my calamity, and grant me better than that [which I lost]'—except that Allah will surely do so." She admits that although she said these words, she could not overcome a question that lingered inside her: "Who could possibly be better than Abū Salamah?" But the days would soon unfold and reveal to Umm Salamah that *al-Latīf* had secured for her the finest husband the sun has ever risen upon: the Prophet ﷺ himself.¹⁶

3) A Gentle Demeanor

In contrast to human relationships, which are often high maintenance, unfulfilling, and erosive of a person's softheartedness, a believer's acquaintance with Allah moistens their spirit and affords them a magnanimous demeanor with His creation. For instance, a believer feels obliged to be a source of gentleness for others, not in light of their treatment of them, but in proportion to their recognition of *al-Latīf's* gentleness towards them. It was the Prophet ﷺ who called our attention to this correlation, saying, "Allah is Gentle and loves [seeing] gentleness."¹⁷ Nobody was ever more observant of Allah's kind treatment than the Prophet ﷺ, and hence his kindness with Allah's creation was unparalleled. Never once did he avenge himself, nor chastise the ignorant for their blunders, nor had two choices without choosing the option less burdensome on others. He ﷺ would hear an infant

¹⁵ Al-Fīfī, *Li-Annak Allāh*, 61 (with adaptation).

¹⁶ *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, 2:631–33, nos. 918–19.

¹⁷ *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, 4:2003, no. 2593.

crying during the prayer and shorten it,¹⁸ empathizing with its mother's distress, and on another occasion question his army for startling a bird by seizing its hatchlings.¹⁹ He ﷺ positioned being gentle as an overarching virtue that belongs everywhere, saying, "Gentleness is not found in anything except that it beautifies it, and is not plucked from anything except that it defiles it."²⁰

Believers being *latīf* in their charity is a fundamental concept in Quranic ethics, as Allah says, "O you who have believed, do not invalidate your charities with reminders or injury" (Qur'an 2:264). This means that being modest about one's charity is required even after distributing it (no reminder), to not shame the recipient, as is not leveraging that charity to offend or exploit the recipient (no injury). The earliest Muslims exhibited incredible *lutf* in their philanthropy, being as discreet as they could, even concealing it from their families when possible. Only upon the death of Zayn al-ʿĀbidīn (Allah be pleased with him), the great-grandson of the Prophet ﷺ, did many homes in Madinah realize that it was him who secretly delivered sacks of flour to their doors by night. And when his family disrobed him for the pre-burial washing, they discovered dark calluses on his back from the heavy loads.²¹ Others would overpay particular sellers in the marketplace so that for the onlooker it would appear purely transactional, while in reality it was creatively hidden financial assistance. In our times, a brother mentioned that his thoughtful mother would ask her poor neighbor for salt, while she had plenty, simply to keep the latter feeling comfortable to ask the former for her frequent needs. Such 'givers' are in reality the greatest recipients, because their *lutf* places them at the receiving end of Allah's love, as the Prophet ﷺ said, "Allah certainly loves the servant who is *taqī* (pious), *ghanī* (independent), and *khafī* (discreet)."²²

When seeking to better people's profile before Allah, having a gentle demeanor is necessary to help maneuver around their defensiveness, and avoid falling into behavior that would be counterproductive towards our objective. Allah says, "So

¹⁸ *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, 1:342, no. 470.

¹⁹ Abū Dāwūd al-Sijistānī, *Sunan Abū Dāwūd* (Beirut: al-Maktabah al-ʿAṣrīyah, n.d.), 3:55, no. 2675.

²⁰ *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, 4:2004, no. 2594.

²¹ Shams al-Dīn al-Dhahabī, *Siyar a'lām al-nubalā'* (Beirut: Mu'assasat al-Risālah, 1985), 4:393.

²² *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, 4:2277, no. 2965.

by mercy from Allah, you [O Muhammad] were lenient with them. And if you had been rude [in speech] and harsh in heart, they would have disbanded from around you” (Qur'an 3:159). Similarly, the Prophet ﷺ taught us that “Allah is Gentle, loves gentleness, and grants in light of gentleness what He does not in light of roughness, or anything else.”²³ This may entail amplifying good more than one combats evil, not being forceful with criticism, or aggressive in tone, or impatient with people's pace to guidance, or otherwise. But in general, exhibiting *lutf* in the form of due consideration, and surgical care to not kill the patient, is the common denominator here. Thus is the believer, as the Prophet ﷺ said, “The example of the believer is that of the honey bee; it only consumes that which is good and pure, only produces that which is good and pure, and lands without breaking or ruining [anything].”²⁴ May we be people who land gently on the subjects of God, extract the best in them, instill the best in them, and never break a single one of them by failing to be *latif* in how we approach them.

4) Undeterred by Fears

Nothing can be as empowering as knowing that your guardian is *al-Laṭīf*, who knows your every fear, and how to render it as harmless as a summer breeze. It suffices to rely on Him for impeding these fears from reaching us, or commanding “their flames” which engulfed us to be cool and safe, just as they were on Ibrahīm (peace be upon him).

While some criminals are so crafty that hardly anyone can discover their schemes, the servant of *al-Laṭīf* sleeps well knowing that his Lord already has. While some tyrants are so powerful that it's difficult to imagine something stealthy enough to breach their defenses, the servants of *al-Laṭīf* contain their fears and do not cower before them. They remember that Allah said, “And if you are patient and fear Allah, their plot will not harm you at all. Indeed, Allah is encompassing of what they do” (Qur'an 3:120). They remember that when Allah wanted to remove the Prophet ﷺ and his supporters from the ravines of Abū Ṭālib, where they had been driven by persecutors and boycotted for three agonizing years, He did not

²³ See footnote 17.

²⁴ Ahmad Ibn Ḥanbal, *Musnad Ahmad* (Beirut: Mu'assasat al-Risālah, 2001), 11:458.

smite the Qurashites with a punishment from the sky. Instead, *al-Laṭīf* simply sent termites to gnaw away at the pact that was in their possession,²⁵ a nearly invisible insect disintegrating every oppressive clause in that agreement.

During the infamous Mutazilite inquisition under the Abbasids, Imam Ahmad b. Hanbal (d. 855 CE, Allah grant him mercy) was sent to the dungeons for refusing to accept their claim that the eternal Quran is God's *created* word. His brittle age of seventy years old was irrelevant to those who lashed him mercilessly. One of the floggers said, "An elephant would have crumbled from the intensity of the blows I dealt to Ibn Hanbal. With each strike, I would say the whip would emerge from his mouth this time, due to how severely the flesh on his back was falling apart." Ibn Hanbal's situation was absolutely deadlocked; it was a matter of time before he caved to their demands or through martyrdom escaped their hands. But *al-Laṭīf* injected His relief into the ordeal with two splendid, subtle gifts. Beyond the prison walls, the Mutazilite judges overlooked a man named 'Abd Allāh al-Adhrumī (unbeknownst to them, a fearless erudite scholar) and debated him in front of the caliph, not realizing that this would herald the beginning of their end. Within the dungeon, the prison guards overlooked a man named Abū al-Haytham (a thief) who would replenish the Imam's heroic spirit whenever it was flagging. Thereafter, Imam Ahmad's son asked his father why he would constantly pray for the forgiveness of this thief. He said, "He bolstered me. He would say, 'O Imam, the state records document that I endured being flogged eighteen thousand times—separately—while being upon falsehood, so stand firm upon the truth. O Imam, persevere, for if you live—you will live glorified and if you die, you will die martyred.'"²⁶ Neither al-Adhrumī nor Abū al-Haytham were expected factors in this grand ordeal, but *al-Laṭīf* employed them as the special forces necessary to 'infiltrate sensitive areas' and help Imam Ahmad complete his valiant mission.

Conclusion

Upon learning these meanings of the Divine Name *al-Laṭīf*, a believer should periodically avail themselves long hours with this blessed name, identifying its

²⁵ 'Abd al-Mālik Ibn Hishām, *Sīrat Ibn Hishām* (Egypt: Maktabat Mustafā al-Bābi, 1955), 1:376.

²⁶ Jamāl al-Dīn Ibn al-Jawzī, *Manāqib al-Imām Aḥmad* (Riyadh: Dār Hajr, 1409 AH), 450.

manifestations in the past, anticipating its involvement in the future, invoking Allah using it, and allowing their tears to wash away the heart's rust in light of it. O Allah, we testify that you are indeed *al-Laṭīf*, we implore You by Your mastery of every subtlety, and by Your sublime gentleness—to direct our steps every time the road splits, to guide us through every darkness that blankets us, and to soothe us through our nightmares and our pain.