



The Meaning of Allah's Name Al-Jabbar: The Compeller and Mender of Broken Hearts

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In the name of Allah, Most Compassionate, Most Merciful

She sat there for days, paralyzed by shock, having witnessed her dreams get shattered forever—or so she thought. A short time later, al-Jabbār had mended her broken heart and recreated for her an even better dream in its place.

Their tears streamed as they stared at the x-rays of his mangled bones. The physicians told them the accident would render him immobile for life. Not only did al-Jabbār fix the “unfixable,” but they were now preparing to watch him at the Paralympic finals.

Many gave up trying. Others even stopped waiting. Palestine had been forgotten, but now victory is visible on the horizon. After a hundred years of carnage, from above His throne, al-Jabbār decided that He would finally break the tyranny.

Allah’s name al-Jabbār [appears only once](#) in the Qur’an (59:23), though its meanings preexist within every person’s *fiṭra* (original pure nature), awaiting the spark of revelation to activate their potency. I pray that this paper effectively captures some of those sparks from the Qur’an and Sunnah, and thereby causes the flames of faith to surge within us like never before.

The meaning of al-Jabbār

Allah’s name al-Jabbār captures the incontestability of God’s great power and how it manifests in ways both grand and graceful. Embedded in this divine name are two eternal declarations: when Allah wishes to heal or restore, nothing poses a hindrance, and when He wishes to settle a score, nothing stifles His dominance.

Traditionally, Arabs used the term *jabbār* in reference to mighty individuals, tall trees, and bone healers.¹ Imagine a colossus towering over all like a massive tree, a giant possessed of the power to ameliorate or annihilate—just as the *jabīra* (bone splint) sits over fractured bones, forcing them into a stronger fusion. Of course, since imperfections are inconceivable of God, we find Imam al-Ṭabarī (d. 310/923) qualifying al-Jabbār, when it pertains to Allah, as, “He who rectifies the affairs of

¹ Jamāl al-Dīn Muḥammad b. Makram Ibn Manzūr, *Lisān al-‘Arab*, 15 vols. (Dār Ṣādir, 1414/1993), 4:113-117.

His creation, and drives them towards their own welfare.”² Similarly, Shaykh al-Sa’dī (d. 1957) writes,

Al-Jabbār can mean the Compeller (al-Qahhār), and the Most High (al-A‘lā) who is established upon the throne and possesses all sovereignty, and also the Most Affectionate (al-Ra’ūf). He mends (*jabr*) the broken and enriches the poor, and rehabilitates (*jabr*) the sick and those afflicted. He also reinvigorates (*jabr*) the hearts of those broken before His greatness, humbled by His perfection, hopeful of His bounty and favors—through what He pours on their hearts of love, experiences of intimacy [with Him], divine disclosures, guidance, direction, and grace.³

Neither accident nor sentiment drives our scholars to define Allah’s name al-Jabbār with an ethos of “compassion over compulsion.” Rather, it is their recognition that “when Allah finished the creation, He etched in His Book that is with Him above His throne: My mercy prevails over My anger.”⁴ When Allah introduces Himself as al-Raḥmān (Most Compassionate) al-Raḥīm (Most Merciful), before [Mālikī Yawm al-Dīn](#) (Owner of the Day of Recompense), in the greatest *sūrah* of the Qur’an (al-Fātiḥa), how could they falter in consistently differentiating between al-Jabbār and any other *jabbār* besides Him?

The word “algebra” is a latinization of *al-jabr*, and the etymological origins of this term have a wonderful relevance to Allah’s name al-Jabbār. Before algebra sparked the revolutionary birth of technological algorithms, and before it paved the way for groundbreaking advancements across physics and chemistry, it was first a set of mathematical formulas compiled by al-Khawārizmī (d. 236/850), a Persian Muslim polymath, in *al-Kitāb al-Mukhtaṣar fī Ḥisāb al-Jabr wa al-Muqābala* (The Compendium of Algebraic Calculations and Equations). Judges presiding over complex estate divisions, and astronomers of the Islamic renaissance probing the frontiers of the dark universe, now had an effective operating system in the *Book of Jabr* to “make whole” the partial numbers we call fractions, and “compensate” for the missing variables that riddled them. Likewise, no matter how deep the void, or how complex the equation, al-Jabbār is always ready to make us whole again.

² Abu Ja’far Muḥammad b. Jarīr al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi’ al-bayān ‘an ta’wīl āy al-Qur’ān*, 30 vols. (Dār al-Tarbiyah wa al-Turāth), 23:304.

³ ‘Abd al-Raḥmān b. Nāṣir al-Sa’dī, *Fath al-Raḥīm al-Malik al-‘Allām fī ‘ilm al-‘aqā’id wa al-tawḥīd wa al-akhlāq wa al-aḥkām al-mustanbaṭa min al-Qur’ān* (Dār al-Faḍīla, 2009), 35-36, adapted.

⁴ Muḥammad b. Ismā‘īl al-Bukhārī, *al-Jāmi’ al-musnad al-ṣaḥīḥ* (Dār al-Ta’ṣīl, 2012), nos. 7549, 7550.

Perhaps He restores what we lost, or replaces it with something superior. Perhaps He releases some dopamine into our bloodstream from a sip of coffee, or a child's smile, or a stranger's kindness. His "formulas" are numberless, and that is what makes al-Jabbār unique in His oneness.

It has also been reported from Ibn 'Abbās (rA) that angel Jibrīl's name means "the servant of the Lord,"⁵ whereby *jibr* (from *jabr*) refers to being subjected to another's power, and *īl* refers to *ilāh* (god). In other words, even the mightiest of angels, the archangel Gabriel himself, is but another powerless slave of al-Jabbār.

In summary, al-Jabbār is the Compeller whose wishes are behind every event and action in His creation, but also the Mender whose transcendence does not detract from His curative and restorative involvement with His creation.

Al-Jabbār and the nature of man

Al-Jabbār (the Compeller) did not allow His creations to choose their ancestry, nor their placement in history, nor their economic prosperity, nor their genetic pedigree. That is part of what makes Him al-Jabbār, that He alone decided these matters. Simultaneously, the sublime goodwill behind these determinations—which is, in part, indiscernible to us—echoes His name al-Jabbār (the Mender), albeit from a different angle. He did not leave us face down like the wild beasts, but instead "created the human in the best stature."⁶ He diversified the embryogenic process, without which no distinction or variety of beauty could be appreciated; "He is the One who shaped you [in the wombs], perfecting your [spectrum of] forms."⁷ Hence, by not endowing others with the power to create, al-Jabbār ensured that the decisions surrounding them remain supremely wise, supremely compassionate. Allah (the Most High) said, "Say [to them, O Prophet], 'Even if you were to possess the [infinite] treasures of my Lord's mercy, then you would certainly withhold [them] fearing they would run out—for humankind is ever stingy!'"⁸

⁵ Ibn Manzūr, *Lisān al-'Arab*, 4:114.

⁶ Qur'an 95:4, *Saheeh International* (with slight adaptation).

⁷ Qur'an 64:3, *The Clear Quran* (with slight adaptation).

⁸ Qur'an 17:100, *The Clear Quran*.

It is difficult to overstate the profundity of this verse at a time when the secular age has yielded—as Charles Taylor extensively argues—a “felt flatness” to modern life, spawned by our relentless obsession with control and choice.⁹ The symptoms of this mental malady may manifest in chasing physical beauty at all costs (cosmetics, wardrobes, medical procedures) or panting after riches unabated (unethical investments, deceptive marketing, neglect of family). These are no harmless fantasies; people suffer immensely when they attempt to play God, for it strips them of the very joy of being human.

Nowadays, many tragically aspire, consciously or not, to mastery of their own destiny. This god-complex—this conviction that they can fully shape their circumstances—is precisely what makes unfavorable outcomes so psychologically unbearable for them. But when believers submit to al-Jabbār, they become content with His decrees. They are able to perceive how what He “imposed” on them was actually a surer path to their eternal peace and salvation.

As for disbelievers, in the Qur’an Allah often casts them as suspicious of His judgments. For instance, when they rejected God’s election of Muhammad ﷺ, it was on the premise that his lack of wealth and status made him unsuitable for such prestige. In response, Allah said, “Is it they who distribute the mercy of your Lord? We [alone] have distributed their livelihood and raised some of them over others for their interdependence, and the mercy of your Lord far surpasses whatever [wealth] they amass.”¹⁰ While the wisdoms behind this subdivision of livelihoods are innumerable, people’s inability to force *their* way what al-Jabbār has sent *elsewhere* is worthiest of mention here. It was reported that ‘Alī b. Abī Ṭālib (rA) was once asked, “How can it be that intelligent people are [often] poor?” He said, “A man is allocated intelligence as part of his *rizq* (provisions).”¹¹ In other words, while one may logically expect a direct correlation between intelligence and financial prosperity, Allah has insisted that some receive more of the former and others more of the latter. Of course, our knowledge of this divinely-ordained distribution of resources should only serve to underline Allah’s title al-Jabbār, not

⁹ Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2007), 309, 364, 415, 681, 734.

¹⁰ Qur’an 43:32, *The Clear Quran* (with slight adaptation).

¹¹ Abū Ḥāmid Muḥammad b. Muḥammad al-Ṭūsī al-Ghazālī, *Iḥyā’ ‘ulūm al-dīn*, 4 vols. (Dār al-Ma’rifā, 1982), 3:373.

inspire complacency in the pursuit of beneficial knowledge and wholesome earnings.

Al-Jabbār and free will

Many people wonder to what extent their actions are really theirs if all might and power belong solely to God. Contrary to popular belief, this is an inquiry into the nature of causality, not into God's omnipotence. Even atheists may be deterministic, deeming every human act the inevitable outcome of a recursive chain of earlier causes. However, we should question how equipped we are to even assess the dynamics of "our world." Quantum physicists were astonished when they first stumbled upon wave-particle duality—the conundrum of energy and matter impersonating one another—and now, a century later, the mysteries of the quantum realm have become no less impenetrable. This suffices to highlight how uncertain we remain regarding the givens of our physical world, and hence *a fortiori* the irrationality of expecting to fully comprehend the metaphysics behind how al-Jabbār seamlessly reconciles His will and ours.

Nearly a century after the passing of the Prophet ﷺ, a theological school known as the Jabrites (or *Jabriyya*) emerged. They upheld an extreme doctrine of divine compulsion, maintaining that since only God has any real power, we must categorically deny any notion of human agency. Sunni theologians, past and present, have rejected this false dichotomy between destiny and "free will," and refuted the supposedly inherent conflict between God's absolute sovereignty and His flawless equity. The heterodoxical Jabrite position was not only unprecedented among the earliest scholars, but also implicitly impugned the perfect nature of God. After all, forcing upon someone a particular behavior is weakness, and holding them accountable for what was forced upon them is unfairness. As for al-Jabbār, of His might is that people do what He desires without His coercion, and of His fairness is that He grants them sufficient individual agency to qualify for accountability. Ibn al-Qayyim (d. 751/1350) writes,

The differences between this *jabr* [of Allah] and the *jabr* of created beings are many. Firstly, a created being is incapable of making another desire a certain action. As for the Lord (the Exalted), He is capable of making His servant that way. Secondly, a created being may compel others in a manner

that renders him unfair and transgressive, while the Lord is more just; He never wrongs any of His creation, rather His will for them always transpires fairly and graciously.¹²

There is timeless wisdom in the Prophet ﷺ cautioning us, “When destiny is discussed, restrain yourselves.”¹³ His injunction grounds the believers, guarding them from assuming the finite human mind can ever fully comprehend the infinite realm of God. As Ibn ‘Abbās (d. 68/687, rA) said, “Destiny is the secret of Allah, so do not [try to] uncover it.”¹⁴

Does God interfere with our agency? Certainly, only al-Jabbār—by definition—has absolute free will. The will of people is subordinate to the will of Allah, and so their will can only manifest when it aligns with His. However, the will of Allah would never undermine human agency in unwise or unfair ways, and the Qur’an often invokes the theme of reciprocation to illustrate this truth. For instance, Allah (the Mighty and Majestic) says, “So when they [persistently] deviated, Allah caused their hearts to deviate.”¹⁵ Elsewhere, “And We will turn their hearts and eyes away [from the truth] as they refused to believe in it the first time, leaving them to wander aimlessly in their defiance.”¹⁶ Only those who dismissed the demonstrable truth of Islam had their hearts “forced” shut, as a just penalty for ignoring His signs. Al-Jabbār may also intervene to facilitate positive ends for the sincere, such as kindling within them an eagerness for virtue, revulsion at immorality, or peace with a painful reality. The Sunnah even teaches us to invite this into our lives through the *istikhāra* prayer. Therein, we ask Allah,

وإِنْ كُنْتَ تَعْلَمُ أَنَّ هَذَا الْأَمْرَ شَرٌّ لِي فِي دِينِي وَمَعَاشِي وَعَاقِبَةِ أَمْرِي فَاصْرِفْهُ عَنِّي وَاصْرِفْنِي عَنْهُ،
وَأَقْدِرْ لِي الْخَيْرَ حَيْثُ كَانَ، ثُمَّ أَرْضِنِي

...and if [You] know this decision is not good for my religion, life, and afterlife, then turn it away from me, turn me away from it, decree for me whatever the good may be, and then make me content [with it].¹⁷

¹² Shams al-Dīn Muḥammad b. Abī Bakr Ibn al-Qayyim, *Shifā’ al-‘alīl fī masā’il al-qaḍā’ wa al-qadar wa al-ḥikma wa al-ta’līl* (Dār al-Ma’rifā, 1978), 129.

¹³ Abū al-Qāsim Sulaymān b. Aḥmad al-Ṭabarānī, *al-Mu’jam al-kābīr* (Maktabat Ibn Taymiyya, n.d.), no. 1427, 10448; authenticated by al-Albānī in *al-Silsila al-ṣaḥīḥa* (no. 34).

¹⁴ Ṣadr al-Dīn Muḥammad b. al-‘Alā’ b. Abī al-‘Izz, *Sharḥ al-‘aqīda al-Ṭaḥāwīyya*, 2 vols. (Mu’assasat al-Risāla, 1997), 1:321.

¹⁵ Qur’an 61:5, *The Clear Quran*.

¹⁶ Qur’an 6:110, *The Clear Quran* (with slight adaptation).

¹⁷ *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, no. 6390.

So many people have experienced a sudden unexplainable change of heart on matters they once abhorred or adored; the Muslim knows that the explanation is al-Jabbār. Sufyān al-Thawrī (d. 162/778, rA) was once asked, “How did you come to know your Lord?” He said, “By the breaking of [my] resolve and the unraveling of [my] drive.”¹⁸ He likely meant that, just as al-Jabbār has demotivated me from some acts of good (as a punishment for my sins), He has also dulled my attraction to what would have proven detrimental to my livelihood or religiosity.

Al-Jabbār and our broken hearts

Life’s emotional blows are vicious and incessant, and thus Allah does not describe Himself as al-Jābir (the Mender) but rather as al-Jabbār (the Perpetual Mender). This linguistic subtlety reminds us that the name “al-Jabbār” is more about Him *constantly healing* us than His *ability to heal* us, if He so chooses. This may explain why it was customary for the Prophet ﷺ to whisper between the two prostrations,

اللَّهُمَّ اغْفِرْ لِي وَارْحَمْنِي وَاجْبُرْنِي وَاهْدِنِي وَارْزُقْنِي

O Allah, forgive me, have mercy on me, mend (ijbur) me, guide me, and provide for me.¹⁹

As if we are always broken or nearly so, the Sunnah teaches us to recite this plea to al-Jabbār in every prayer, guiding our thoughts from the repair of our rarely broken bones to the repair of our frequently broken hearts. Al-Jabbār heals our emotional and psychological wounds time and again. He forces a smile back onto our faces even before the dilemma is resolved. He silences the negative self-talk with which we badger ourselves, releasing us from our insecurities about the past and anxieties about the future. How do addicts reform and shake off their sense of inadequacy? How do adults emerge from an abusive childhood with empathy? How do those tortured around the clock in prisons sleep restfully? It is al-Jabbār, the one who can “unlock” His compassion in the unlikely of places. Allah (Most High) said,

¹⁸ Abū Nu‘aym Aḥmad b. ‘Abd Allāh al-Aṣḥabānī, *Hilyat al-awliyā’ wa ṭabaqāt al-aṣfiyā’*, 10 vols. (Maṭba‘at al-Sa‘āda, 1974), 7:52.

¹⁹ Abū ‘Īsā Muḥammad b. ‘Īsā al-Tirmidhī, *Sunan al-Tirmidhī* (Maktabat wa Maṭba‘at Muṣṭafā al-Bābī al-Ḥalabī, 1975), no. 284, deemed as *ḥasan* (good) by some scholars such as al-Nawawī in his *al-Adhkār* and *ṣaḥīḥ* (authentic) by al-Albānī in *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Tirmidhī*; variant wordings also found in *Musnad Aḥmad*, *Sunan Abī Dāwūd*, and *Sunan Ibn Mājah*.

“Whatever mercy Allah opens up for people, none can withhold it. And whatever He withholds, none but Him can release it. For He is the Almighty, All-Wise.”²⁰

The resilience needed to withstand the tempest of life would seem impossible for anyone, and yet we find the firmest believers in al-Jabbār—despite the toughest tests—enjoying a tranquility and optimism that appears indomitable. Meanwhile, the less firmly faithful are emotionally shattered by far lighter circumstances.

When Abū Salama (rA) migrated to Medina with the Prophet ﷺ, his wife’s tribe forcefully prevented her from accompanying him. His tribe then came to Umm Salama (rA) and ripped “their grandson” away from her, dislocating the infant’s arm in the process. For an entire year, she stared with tear-filled eyes into the barren desert, in the direction of Medina, longing for a reunion that she knew only Allah could bring about. Sure enough, al-Jabbār then “compelled” the heart of her cousin—a pagan—to melt in sympathy for her, and he successfully negotiated the return of her child and her relocation to Medina. When Abū Salama (rA) was martyred shortly thereafter from an injury at the Battle of Uhūd, Umm Salama (rA) said, “I recalled him teaching me to say, ‘O Allah, reward me for my affliction and replace me with something better.’ I said to myself, ‘And who could possibly be better than Abū Salama? ...’ Ultimately, I still said it, and then Allah replaced him with the Messenger of Allah ﷺ himself.”²¹ Enshrined in this authentic account is the profound realization that the ways al-Jabbār compensates for loss are not confined to our limited imaginations.

Imam Ibn al-Qayyim (d. 751/1350, rA) writes,

From the perfect kindness of our Lord (the Exalted) is that He causes the servant to taste the bitterness of the break before the sweetness of the mend (*jabr*), and acquaints him with the magnitude of His favor upon him by afflicting him with its opposite. For instance, when He (the Glorified and Exalted) wanted to perfect the bliss of Paradise for Adam, He caused him to taste the bitterness of exiting it, and the toil of this worldly realm whose ease and hardship are entangled together. Hence, He does not break His believing servant except to mend him, nor deprive him except to provide for him, nor afflict him except to relieve him, nor put him to death except to grant him

²⁰ Qur’an 35:2, *The Clear Quran*.

²¹ Muslim b. Ḥajjāj al-Qushayrī, *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim* (Beirut: Dār Ihyā’ al-Turāth al-‘Arabī), no. 918.

life, nor frustrate him with this world except to stir his interest in the hereafter, nor try him with people's harshness except to bring him back to Him.²²

Elsewhere, he deepens our familiarity with al-Jabbār so we may further adore Him, saying,

Whoever deeply ponders His wisdom (the Glorified), gentleness, and kindness with His servants and devotees, particularly in how He breaks and then mends them (*jabr*) after the breakage—such as when He breaks the servant by [allowing him to] sin and thereby humiliates him, then mends him by accepting his repentance and forgiving him; or when He breaks him through various trials and tragedies, then mends him with relief and comfort—this opens for this person a massive door to becoming acquainted with Him, loving Him, realizing that He is more compassionate with His servants than a mother with her child, and that this breakage is itself a form of His mercy, kindness, and gentleness. He (Allah) knows better than His servant what benefits him [the servant], but due to the servant's weak insight and [shallow] knowledge of his Lord's names and attributes, he can hardly detect that, nor attain the pleasure of the Ultimate Beloved, nor the joy and exhilaration of drawing near to Him and climbing in rank before Him, except over this bridge of brokenness and desperation.²³

Al-Jabbār and the *ummah*

None other than an infant from among the slaves, found in a floating basket, would become the downfall of the dictator who kept his people in bondage, and none other than a child with a speech impediment would become the spokesperson of his great nation. These were but two of al-Jabbār's gifts for Prophet Moses (Mūsā) (as) and his *ummah*. Similarly, the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ came into a world of brutality and barbarity, but Allah decreed he deliver his community from darkness as the orphan who would adopt the world. Such accounts crystallize al-Jabbār's ability to revive an entire universe via the most unassuming people. Indeed, during the end times, the descendant of the Prophet ﷺ who will emerge to lead this

²² Shams al-Dīn Muḥammad b. Muḥammad b. al-Mūṣilī, *Mukhtaṣar al-ṣawā'iq al-mursala 'alā al-jahmiyya wa al-mu'aṭṭila* (Dār al-Hadīth, 2001), 306.

²³ Shams al-Dīn Muḥammad b. Abī Bakr Ibn al-Qayyim, *Miftāḥ dār al-sa'ādah wa manshūr wilāyat al-'ilm wal-irādah*, 2 vols. (Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyyah, 1998), 1:24.

ummah will initially deem himself unfit for such a task— and then “Allah will rectify him in a single night.”²⁴

While Muslims should never idle in wait for a savior, they must also never waver in believing that Allah can revitalize this *ummah* via the remotest means—including its enemies. As the Prophet ﷺ said, “Allah may certainly support this religion at the hands of a wicked man.”²⁵ Thus is the incredible power of al-Jabbār, who, at the most opportune time, converts the resources amassed against Him into a *jabr* (compelling force) leveled against the wicked. Allah (Most High) says,

Indeed, the disbelievers spend their wealth to hinder [others] from the path of Allah. They will continue to spend it, and then it will be for them a [source of] great regret, and then they will be defeated. And [then] into the Hellfire the disbelievers will be driven.²⁶

The periods of weakness faced by this *ummah* should never be misperceived as the low points in its history. While tragic, they are the periods that prove a believer’s conviction in al-Jabbār. Not only can He turn the efforts of His enemies against them, but He has promised to honor some of His truest servants with being vehicles of His *jabr* (restoration) for the *ummah*. As the Prophet ﷺ said, “Allah sends for this *ummah*, at the turn of every century, those who renew its religion for it.”²⁷

In fact, al-Jabbār affords every individual the potential for global impact. Consider the Israelite man who committed one hundred murders. He resolved to reform himself, and so he departed his hometown for a more pious place. Death befell him en route, so “Allah inspired [the wicked town] to move away and [the pious town] to move closer. Then He instructed [the angels] to measure between them. As a result, he [the man] was found closer to [the pious town] by a handspan, and so he was forgiven.”²⁸ Dumbfounded by the generosity of our Lord, I often find myself rechecking the wording of this highly authentic hadith, almost like a madman

²⁴ Abū ‘Abd Allāh Muḥammad b. Yazīd Ibn Mājah, *Sunan Ibn Mājah* (Dār Iḥyā’ al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyya), no. 4085. Graded as good (*hasan*) by al-Albānī.

²⁵ *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, nos. 3073, 6614.

²⁶ Qur’an 8:36, *The Clear Quran* (with slight adaptation).

²⁷ Abū Dāwūd Sulaymān b. al-Ash‘ath al-Sijistānī, *Sunan Abī Dāwūd* (Dār al-Risāla, 2009), no. 4291; authenticated by al-Sakhāwī in *al-Maqāṣid al-ḥasanah* (no. 149) and al-Albānī in *al-Silsila al-ṣaḥīḥa* (no. 599).

²⁸ *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, no. 3468; *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, no. 2766.

paranoid that his treasure will be stolen. This remorseful killer, dropped dead too close to the land of his dark past, needed a miracle—and so al-Jabbār “mended” the shortfall. If al-Jabbār could “force” the earth to shift for a single individual sincerely seeking redemption, one can only imagine the multiplied “force” of believers migrating in droves from the lifestyles that displease Him.

Al-Jabbār and the powerful on earth

The *Titanic* (1912), famously hailed as “a ship even God could not sink,” ended its maiden voyage on the ocean floor. The *Challenger* (1986), a NASA space shuttle, exploded just seventy-three seconds after launch.²⁹ After failing to swat away a fly, the powerful caliph Abū Ja‘far al-Manṣūr (d. 159/775) complained to Imam Ja‘far al-Ṣādiq (d. 148/765, rA), “Why did Allah create the fly?” Imam al-Ṣādiq replied, “To humble the *jabbārs* (tyrants) with it.”³⁰ Similarly, it is reported that Nimrod, the sadistic king confronted by Abraham (Ibrāhim) (as), was felled by a tiny mosquito that slipped up his nasal passage.³¹ Allah shatters our illusions of greatness about others, ensuring we never conflate them with *al-Jabbār*.

When the people of Córdoba suffered a severe drought, even the sultan himself (al-Nāṣir al-‘Abbāsī, d. 350/961) joined the masses for a joint prayer. Clad in coarse clothing, he wept profusely, pleaded with Allah for forgiveness, and exhibited his brokenness before the Almighty. He said, “My foreclock is in Your hands,”—meaning I am powerless before you—“...so do not punish the people because of me, for not an iota of me will escape you.” When news of this reached the saintly judge of Córdoba, Mundhir b. Sa‘īd al-Ballūṭī (d. 355/966, rA), his face lit up with joy, certain that relief was imminent. He said, “When the *jabbār* of the earth shows humility, the Jabbār of the heavens bestows mercy.” It was not long thereafter that rain poured from the sky.³²

²⁹ See: *Truth, Lies, and O-Rings: Inside the Space Shuttle Challenger Disaster* by Allan J. McDonald with James R. Hansen (University Press of Florida, 2018).

³⁰ Shams al-Dīn Muḥammad b. Aḥmad b. ‘Uthmān al-Dhahabī, *Siyar a‘lām al-nubalā’*, 23 vols. (Mu‘assasat al-Risāla, 1985), 7:202.

³¹ ‘Imād al-Dīn Abū al-Fidā’ Ismā‘īl b. ‘Umar Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr al-Qur’ān al-‘aẓīm*, 8 vols. (Dār al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyya, 1998), 1:526.

³² ‘Imād al-Dīn Abū al-Fidā’ Ismā‘īl b. ‘Umar Ibn Kathīr, *al-Bidāya wa al-nihāyah*, 15 vols. (Dār Iḥyā’ al-Turāth al-‘Arabī, 1988), 11:327.

Hārūn al-Rāshid (d. 194/809), arguably the most powerful ‘Abbāsīd ruler, once asked for a drink of water. Before he could lift it to his lips, Ibn al-Sammāk (d. 183/799, rA) interjected, “Not so fast, O commander of the believers. If this sip [of water] were withheld from you, how much would you purchase it for?” Hārūn al-Rāshid said, “Half my kingdom.” After he drank, the Imam asked, “If you were prevented from releasing (urinating) it, how much would you pay to release it from your body?” He replied, “My entire kingdom.” The great scholar and ascetic said, “A kingdom worth no more than a drink of water or a single urination certainly does not deserve being competed for.”³³ Upon hearing this Hārūn wept, fearing he may have been guilty of power grabs during his reign. However, throughout his largely righteous reign, he would weep at his grave (pre-dug to remind him of the inevitable) and say, “O You whose kingdom never vanishes, show mercy to the one whose kingdom has vanished.”³⁴

Indeed, the most powerful men can barely control their bowels, let alone stave off death, and the best of them are those cognizant that only Allah is al-Jabbār. As for the irredeemably arrogant and tyrannical, they march unwittingly toward the snares of a perfectly just, divinely orchestrated ambush. Ibn al-Jawzī (d. 598/1201, rA) writes,

I have reflected at length on a profound phenomenon: that He, the Mighty and Majestic, delays [punishment] as though He neglects them. Thus, you witness the hands of the defiant unleashed, as if nothing could prevent [them]. Then, as the violations escalate and the intellect offers no deterrent, He seizes them as [only] al-Jabbār can. This delay is but a test—for the patient to remain steadfast and for the tyrant to be led further astray, until the former is rewarded for endurance and the latter repaid for his wickedness. Even in this, there is immeasurable forbearance. But ultimately, when He does seize [them], He does so with such a punishment that every single crime is accounted for severely or in a single crushing blow.³⁵

The respite that Allah grants to the greatest transgressors—one that showcases the faith of the believers and honors some with martyrdom—is but the rope with which they will hang themselves. They are propelled down that ruthless path because

³³ Jalāl al-Dīn ‘Abd al-Raḥmān b. Abī Bakr al-Suyūṭī, *Tārīkh al-khulafā’* (Maktabat Nizār Muṣṭafā al-Bāz, 2004), 216.

³⁴ Al-Suyūṭī, *Tārīkh al-khulafā’*, 230.

³⁵ Jamāl al-Dīn Abū al-Faraj ‘Abd al-Raḥmān b. ‘Alī Ibn al-Jawzī, *Ṣayd al-khāṭir* (Dār al-Qalam, 2004), 159.

Allah has fated them to the severest punishment, all while keeping them from realizing their impending doom. With lesser oppressors, al-Jabbār may punish them in this world for spiritually therapeutic ends: to atone for their *jabbār*-ish conduct in this life before the hereafter. Muhammad Ali (d. 2016) was one of the most charismatic personas of the twentieth century, and he often celebrated himself as the “greatest” boxer of all time. Yet, in his final years, [he would say](#), with a trembling body and quivering tongue, “God gave me this illness (Parkinson’s Disease) to remind me that I’m not Number One—He is.”

Many are similarly brought to humility as their lives conclude, paying a worldly reparation for their sins in lieu of a lengthy sentence in the Hellfire. As Allah (the Mighty and Majestic) said, “Greatness and pride are exclusively Mine. Whoever challenges Me in either—I toss him into the Hellfire.”³⁶ In an alternate wording, “I break him.”³⁷

Al-Jabbār on the Last Day

Ibn ‘Umar (rA) narrated that the Messenger of Allah ﷺ said, “Al-Jabbār will take His heavens and earths in His hand,” proceeding to open and close his own hand, “and then He will say, ‘I am al-Jabbār (the Compeller)! I am al-Malik (the King)! Where are the *jabbār* (tyrants) and where are the arrogant?!’” Ibn ‘Umar (rA) continued, “The Messenger of Allah ﷺ began to sway left and right until I saw the pulpit beneath him shaking from its base and said to myself, ‘Will it actually collapse with the Messenger of Allah ﷺ?’”³⁸

He ﷺ was shaken to his core whenever recalling how al-Jabbār will manifest His immense power on the Last Day. On that day, every boastful bully and haughty hegemon will witness their delusions of grandeur crumble as they sense the Hellfire drawing near. As Allah says, “Once it [Hell] sees them from a distance, they will hear it fuming and roaring.”³⁹ It sees them before they see it, because as the Prophet ﷺ said, “A neck will emerge from the Hellfire on the Day of

³⁶ *Sunan Ibn Mājah*, nos. 4174, 4175. Graded as authentic (*ṣaḥīḥ*) by al-Albānī.

³⁷ Abū ‘Abd Allāh Muḥammad b. ‘Abd Allāh al-Ḥākim, *al-Mustadrak ‘alā al-ṣaḥīḥayn* (Dār al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyya, 1990), no. 203.

³⁸ *Sunan Ibn Mājah*, nos. 198, 4275. Graded as authentic (*ṣaḥīḥ*) by al-Albānī; variant wordings also exist in *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī* and *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*.

³⁹ Qur’an 25:12, *The Clear Quran* (with slight adaptation).

Resurrection, and [its head] will have two eyes with which it sees, two ears with which it hears, and a tongue with which it speaks. It will say, ‘I have been assigned three [targets]; every stubborn *jabbār* (tyrant), everyone that claims there is another god alongside Allah, and the image-makers.’⁴⁰

Only on this Day will these three classes of people discover where true power lies—the tyrants who abused their power, polytheists who claimed other than God had similar power, and artists who risked confusing humankind about Allah’s unique creative power.⁴¹

The Prophet ﷺ also warned that on the Day of Resurrection, the *jabbār* will be reduced to the size of ants and trampled by the people, then driven into Hell and forced to ingest the bodily secretions of those imprisoned therein.⁴² Thus will be their disgrace; stomped on from above for exalting themselves in life, heedless of the Qur’anic command, “And do not strut on the earth arrogantly. Surely, you will never puncture the earth [with your stride] nor will you ever reach the mountains in height.”⁴³ As for the boiling bodily fluids they will be forced to drink, other narrations classify it as “the mud of insanity.”⁴⁴ Their intense thirst will leave them no choice, and consuming it will drive them mad—a perfectly fitting end for those once intoxicated by their “power.” As Allah (Most High) described the Last Day,

...and every stubborn *jabbār* was doomed. Awaiting them is Hell, where they will be given oozing pus to drink. They will gulp it but hardly be able to swallow it. Death will come to them from every direction, but they will not die, and ahead of them is a massive torment.⁴⁵

Devotion to al-Jabbār

When this sublime name takes root in the hearts of the believers, it causes them to bloom in extraordinary ways. Below are some ways through which we can evaluate and strengthen our deep conviction in al-Jabbār.

⁴⁰ *Sunan al-Tirmidhī*, no. 2574. Graded as authentic (*ṣāḥiḥ*) by al-Albānī.

⁴¹ See fatwa on making images by jurist Dr. Hatem al-Haj: <https://www.drhatemalhaj.com/qa/?p=5501>.

⁴² Abū ‘Abd Allāh Aḥmad b. Muḥammad Ibn Ḥanbal, *al-Zuhd* (Dār al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyya, 1999), no. 121.

⁴³ Qur’an 17:37, author’s translation.

⁴⁴ For example, see *Sunan al-Tirmidhī*, no. 2492. Graded as good (*ḥasan*) by al-Albānī.

⁴⁵ Qur’an 14:15–17, *Saheeh International* (with slight adaptation).

1. Flee for cover under His name

When you race from one hospital to another, or await justice from one government or another, part your lips and pronounce from your heart, “O Jabbār! Only You can fix this!” It would be ingratitude to ignore whatever viable means Allah has provided us for pursuing our needs, but it would be far worse to be distracted by those means from their Maker. Would He have named Himself al-Jabbār if He did not want the desperate to scream it in the face of every harm? Were the challenges He embedded in our lives intended as anything but an invitation to knock on His door? Imagine you were honored with a palace invite personally extended by a righteous sultan, but upon your arrival you ignored him for chats with his butlers. The absurdity of such behavior is exceeded only by people who fixate on anything but al-Jabbār in their moments of greatest distress.

In search of wholeness, repair, and healing we must call out to al-Jabbār, the only one with the might to fix any situation. In his bestseller, *Because You Are Allah*, Dr. ‘Alī al-Fīfī writes that he had a university student who stuttered heavily whenever he spoke. He advised the student to chant the supplication of Moses (as) in every prostration, “My Lord, expand my chest, ease my task, and untie the knot from my tongue, so they can understand my words.”⁴⁶ A year later, he reencountered the young man and was elated to find that al-Jabbār had rendered his stutter a thing of the past.⁴⁷

Al-Mutanabbī (d. 354/965), widely considered the greatest Arabic poet of his time, wrote addressing his patron,

O you to whom I flee for everything I wish,
And with whom I seek refuge from every scare.
People can never mend (*jabr*) a bone you break,
Nor refracture any bone you repair (*jābir*).

Ibn Taymiyya (d. 728/1328, rA) criticized al-Mutanabbī for these couplets, arguing that such adulation befits only Allah, and should not be adulterated in the swamp of romance. Interestingly, some students of Ibn Taymiyya think they may or may

⁴⁶ Qur’an 20:25-28, author’s translation.

⁴⁷ ‘Alī Jābir al-Fīfī, *Li-Annak Allāh* (Dār al-Ḥadāra li-l-Nashr wa al-Tawzī‘, 2018), 126.

not have heard him admit to whispering these couplets to Allah in his prostrations.⁴⁸

No status or strength that we possess can save us without the permission and aid of al-Jabbār. So, when fleeing from the *jabbār* of this world, flee to al-Jabbār, the true Compeller and Mender. Prophet Abraham (as) resigned to prayer when Nimrod “the *jabbār*” abducted his wife, Sarah, until she strolled back into the house unharmed.⁴⁹ When al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī (d. 110/728, rA) learned that al-Ḥajjāj b. Yūsuf (d. 96/714) had brutally executed Sa‘īd b. Jubayr (d. 96/714, rA), al-Ḥasan said, “O Allah; O breaker of every *jabbār*, break al-Ḥajjāj.” Within days, worms infected the abdomen of al-Ḥajjāj and killed him.⁵⁰

The tumult of life can dull and distort anyone’s [god-image](#), and so our daily supplications repeatedly reattach us to al-Jabbār. In addition to the “mend (*ijbur*) me” supplication mentioned previously, the Prophet ﷺ would also repeat in his bowing and prostrations,

سُبْحَانَ ذِي الْجَبَرُوتِ وَالْمَلَكُوتِ وَالْكِبْرِيَاءِ وَالْعَظَمَةِ

Glorified is the Owner of all might (*jabarūt*), dominion, glory, and greatness.⁵¹

By consciously reacquainting ourselves with al-Jabbār in our daily supplications, we foster a relationship with Him that conditions us to take cover under this name *instinctually* in times of need.

2. Ascend as an instrument of Allah’s *jabr*

We established earlier that the Arabs would describe a towering tree as *jabbār*, and hence the name al-Jabbār points to Him being the Most High. Much as a tree reaches deep into the ground, His highness does not hinder His nearness—in His loftiness, He knows our fears and hears our wants. However, His highness also offers an opportunity for human transcendence. Life’s ultimate purpose is devotion to al-‘Alī (the Most High), to be awarded His company forever in *‘illīyīn* (the

⁴⁸ Ibn Kathīr, *al-Bidāya wal-nihāya*, 11:259.

⁴⁹ Ibn Kathīr, *al-Bidāya wal-nihāya*, 1:151–152.

⁵⁰ Jamāl al-Dīn Abū al-Faraj ‘Abd al-Raḥmān b. ‘Alī Ibn al-Jawzī, *al-Muntaẓam fī tārikh al-mulūk wa al-umam*, 19 vols. (Dār al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyya, 1992), 7:9.

⁵¹ *Sunan Abī Dāwūd*, no. 873. Graded as authentic (*ṣaḥīḥ*) by al-Albānī.

highest gardens of Paradise), for undertaking the arduous upward climb to “higher” ideals in this transient earthly existence. The Prophet ﷺ said, “Allah loves lofty pursuits and hates shallow ones.”⁵² In another authentic tradition, “When you ask Allah for Paradise, ask Him for al-Firdaws, for it is the pinnacle of Paradise, the central most region in Paradise, the place from which the rivers of Paradise emerge, and above it is the throne of the Most Merciful.”⁵³

Every moral virtue stems from the perfection of God, and human beings are given the unique opportunity to mirror Him as best as an imperfect created being can. Ibn al-Qayyim says, “Whoever aligns with Allah in one of His attributes, it leads him to Allah with its reins, admits him upon his Lord, brings him near to Him and His mercy, and makes him beloved [to Allah].”⁵⁴ Just as Allah is All-Knowing and loves the knowledgeable, Most Beautiful and loves beauty, and Most Strong and loves the [strong believer](#) more than the weak believer, He is also al-Jabbār. He loves those who embrace being an instrument of His restorative *jabr*, striving to ascend to higher ideals. Life is but a sprawl of routes up our proverbial mountainside, in the traversal of which we compete, in light of Allah’s names and qualities. The following two sections will take us on two *jabr*-specific tracks among those routes.

Bandage the wounded hearts He sent you

The Qur’an is filled with the motif of emotional *jabr*—emotional restoration. When some of the Prophet’s Companions could not afford steeds of war, they felt humiliated that they would not be joining their brethren in fighting on the path of Allah. At that moment, al-Jabbār revealed from above the seven heavens verses that soothed the pain of these brave souls and memorialized their sincerity. Allah (the Mighty and Majestic) said, “Nor [is there any blame] on those who, when they came to you for mounts, you said, ‘I cannot find anything to carry you on,’ and so they left with eyes overflowing with tears out of grief that they had nothing to spend.”⁵⁵ Elsewhere, Allah (the Most High) said, “O Prophet, tell the captives in your custody, ‘If Allah finds goodness in your hearts, He will give you better than what has been taken from you, and forgive you. For Allah is All-Forgiving, Most

⁵² Reported by al-Ṭabarānī in *al-Mu‘jam al-Awsaṭ*, no. 6906 and Ibn ‘Asākir in *Tārīkh Dimashq*, no. 4596. Graded as authentic (*ṣaḥīḥ*) by al-Albānī.

⁵³ *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, no. 7423.

⁵⁴ Shams al-Dīn Muḥammad b. Abī Bakr Ibn al-Qayyim, *al-Jawāb al-kāfi liman sa’ala ‘an al-dawā’ al-shāfi* (Dār al-Ma‘rifah, 1997), 67.

⁵⁵ Qur’an 9:92, *Saheeh International* (with slight adaptation).

Merciful.”⁵⁶ It is difficult to fathom the emotional relief this would have provided both the captives, now helpless in the hands of their foes, and the Muslims, their wounds still bleeding and the bodies of their kin slain by these very captives still warm.

The Prophet ﷺ understood better than anyone that such verses were meant to cultivate within believers a capacity for emotional *jabr* in even the most difficult circumstances, and even when seemingly against their self-interest, and hence he was the first to model this great virtue. To the resourceless warriors, he ﷺ said: “There is not a single mountain pass or valley we have crossed except that some of those who stayed back in Medina have in fact been with us [in reward]—those hindered by their circumstances.”⁵⁷ With captives, he ﷺ stressed that they not be tortured, nor receive inferior meals. Abū ‘Azīz (rA), captured at the Battle of Badr, said, “They would reserve the bread just for me, and only eat dates, due to the strict orders of Allah’s Messenger ﷺ.”⁵⁸ Such benevolence must have influenced his later decision to embrace Islam.

The early Muslims were keen to tread the path of their Prophet ﷺ in this regard. “The most beloved act to Allah is giving joy to a Muslim”⁵⁹—such enjoinders had them rushing to bring good news to people or helping them forget their grief. “Do not stare at someone suffering leprosy”⁶⁰—such instructions made them wary of alienating others or disregarding their feelings. When the Prophet’s wife, ‘Ā’isha (rA), got her menses en route to Mecca and could no longer perform *‘umrah*, the Prophet ﷺ took a moment away from the 100,000 pilgrims following him to reassure her, saying, “This is something Allah has destined for every daughter of Adam.”⁶¹ When she dropped a cherished necklace of hers during a battle expedition, he ﷺ attempted to recover it for her while the entire army waited.⁶² When, upon ascending his new pulpit, he and the people heard the weeping of the tree stump on which he ﷺ had once stood, he interrupted his sermon to hug it until it quieted.⁶³

⁵⁶ Qur’an 8:70, *The Clear Quran*.

⁵⁷ *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, no. 2856.

⁵⁸ Abu al-Fidā’ Ismā’īl Ibn Kathīr, *Kitāb al-sīrah min al-bidāya wa al-nihāya*, 4 vols. (Dār al-Ma’rifā, 1976), 2:475.

⁵⁹ *Al-Mu’jam al-Kabīr*, no. 13646; authenticated by al-Albānī in *al-Silsila al-ṣaḥīḥa* (no. 906).

⁶⁰ *Sunan Ibn Mājah*, no. 3543. Graded as authentic (*ṣaḥīḥ*) by al-Albānī.

⁶¹ *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, no. 298.

⁶² See *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, no. 334.

⁶³ See *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, nos. 3583, 3584, 3585.

Thus was the prophetic example of emotional *jabr*. The early Muslims knew they could never match this gold standard, but they also knew that even the attempt to do so would elevate them in God's eyes like few things ever could. Sufyān al-Thawrī (rA) is widely reported to have said,, “I have not seen an act of devotion greater or more important than *jabr al-khawāṭir* (emotional consolation).”

Lighten the burdens of others gracefully

Emotional *jabr* includes bringing solace to those hurting but may also take the form of gracefully preventing the onset of distress in the first place. For example, the Qur'an teaches us to include in our charity those whose [shame](#) keeps them from begging (2:273). Islam also distinguishes between the poor and needy, encouraging us to seek out eligible recipients of charity beyond the most visibly desperate sectors of society. The Prophet ﷺ said,

The needy person is not he who paces between people [for assistance] and can be sent away [satisfied with] a morsel or two, or a date or two. Rather, the needy is he who does not have enough to sustain him, nor receives any charity, due to going unnoticed and refusing to beg people [for help].⁶⁴

Another form of emotional *jabr* is the graceful delivery of charity. People are not just discomforted by asking for help, but also by receiving it publicly. This is solved by the Qur'an (as well as the Sunnah) encouraging discretion in charity (2:271). Early Muslims would purchase what they did not need, or overpay for an item, to spare the seller from the embarrassment of receiving charity. Righteous women would ask their poor neighbors for cooking ingredients of which they themselves had no shortage, solely to offset any hesitation their neighbors might feel in asking for their actual needs.

One of the most illustrious displays of this discreet *jabr* was the philanthropy of 'Alī b. al-Ḥusayn (d. 94/712, rA), the great grandson of the Prophet ﷺ. Only after his death did people realize the extent of his generosity. As they washed him for burial, some noticed the calluses on his body and inquired about them. It was then that the people of Medina learned that he would carry rough sacks of flour on his back and secretly deliver them to one hundred poor families in the city under the curtain of night. Abū Ḥamza al-Thumālī (d. 150/767) added that 'Alī b.

⁶⁴ *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, no. 1491; *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, no. 1039.

al-Ḥusayn (rA) would say of these nightly missions, “Secret charity extinguishes the anger of the Lord.”⁶⁵ It is no wonder why this blessed soul was dubbed Zayn al-‘Ābidīn (the Pride of the Devotees) during his lifetime. He toiled to prevent the hunger of his entire neighborhood while it slept, perfectly exemplifying the teaching that “no believer sleeps satiated while his nextdoor neighbors are hungry.”⁶⁶

3. Avoid tyranny in its subtler forms

Being an instrument of Allah’s *jabr* is a great virtue, but embodying other aspects of *jabr* can be a grave vice. Oppressive behavior sits at the heart of these condemnable forms of *jabr*. Such oppression is not limited to the tyranny perpetrated by a ruler, but rather extends to any usurpation of others’ rights. Hence, we find Prophet John (Yaḥyā) (as) grateful that Allah spared him from being a “defiant *jabbār*” with his parents—kindness being their right—and instead infused him with *ḥanān* (affection) for all people.⁶⁷ We find Jesus (‘Īsā) (as) divinely inspired to miraculously utter from the cradle, “And [Allah made me] dutiful to my mother, and He has not made me a wretched *jabbār* (tyrant).”⁶⁸ In other words, unlike the tyrants who demand the never-ending service of their subjects but only serve them in turn when begged and beseeched, Allah favored ‘Īsā (as) with unremitting service to his mother. Similarly immortalized in the Qur’an is the image of Prophet Joseph (Yūsuf) (as) in his royal garbs rising to seat “his parents upon [his] throne.”⁶⁹ In these are timeless warnings that only a *jabbār* brazenly dismisses their parents’ calls, or remains behind a corporate desk when they knock, or sits while elders stand. In fact, when the Prophet ﷺ saw people standing as he led them in prayer from a seated position due to his illness, he cautioned, “You nearly did like the Persians and Romans; they stand around their emperor while he sits.”⁷⁰

⁶⁵ Al-Aṣḥabānī, *Hilyat al-awliyā’*, 3:135–36.

⁶⁶ Abū Bakr Aḥmad b. al-Ḥusayn al-Bayhaqī, *al-Sunan al-kubrā* (Dār al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyya, 2003), no. 19668; authenticated by al-Albānī in *al-Silsila al-ṣaḥīḥa* (no. 149).

⁶⁷ See: Qur’an 19:13–14.

⁶⁸ Qur’an 19:32, *Saheeh International* (with slight adaptation).

⁶⁹ Qur’an 12:100, *Saheeh International* (with slight adaptation).

⁷⁰ *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, no. 413.

When al-Miswar b. Makhrama (rA) hesitated to call the Prophet ﷺ out from his home, his father reassured him, “My dear son, he is not some *jabbār*.” To his dismay, the Prophet ﷺ not only obliged, but even had a gift prepared for them.⁷¹ In stark contrast to the self-absorbed *jabbār*, the prophetic example is one of agreeability and availability. He ﷺ never engaged in vain argumentation like the egotists, nor was he ever preoccupied with frivolous living like the hedonists. It was enough of an honor for him ﷺ to be the servant of al-Jabbār, as it was frightening enough for him to know that Hellfire-bound are “every last prideful *ja‘zarī* (harsh and flamboyant person) and *jawwāz* (gluttonous ingrate).”⁷²

Hostility and belligerency are other symptoms of the *jabbār* virus. In one hadith, “Through forbearance, a man may certainly reach the rank of he who is dedicated to prayer and fasting, and a man may be written [with Allah] as a *jabbār* though he leads nothing but his household.”⁷³ Whether this manifests as physical assaults or verbal abuse, it is the excessive appetite for control which renders many people intolerant of nonconforming views and unleashes the “tiny tyrant” lurking within them. It gives us great pause to hear Allah (the Mighty and Majestic) say, “We know best what [falsehoods] they say, and you [O Prophet] are not there as a *jabbār* (a compeller to faith) over them. So [just] remind with the Qur’an those who fear My warning.”⁷⁴ If belief in the Qur’an cannot be forced, then neither can any other truth; if the Prophet ﷺ could not coerce others into faith, then neither can we.. This is not indifference to falsehood, but rather acceptance that an overbearing approach is counterproductive to persuading others of almost anything.

4. Stabilize your guidance only through al-Jabbār

No created being is capable of drawing closer to al-Jabbār (the Most High) except by the rope He extends down to them (Qur’an 3:103). Internalizing this reality

⁷¹ *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, no. 5864; *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, no. 1058.

⁷² Abū ‘Abdillāh Aḥmad Ibn Ḥanbal al-Shaybānī, *Musnad al-imām Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal*, 50 vols. (Mu’assasat al-Risāla, 2016), nos. 17585, 18728. Graded authentic (*ṣaḥīḥ*) by al-Albānī; variant wording also exists in *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*.

⁷³ Zakī al-Dīn Abū Muḥammad ‘Abdul-Azīm b. ‘Abdul-Qawī al-Mundhirī, *al-Targhīb wa al-tarhīb min al-ḥadīth al-sharīf*, 4 vols. (Dār al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyya, n.d.), 3:281; classified as weak by al-Albānī in *Da‘īf al-jāmi‘* (no. 1453). Note: While the traceability of this report is disputed, it can still help provide a wider conceptualization of where the qualities of a *jabbār* may manifest, namely even in the domestic space of the family home.

⁷⁴ Qur’an 50:45, *The Clear Quran* (with slight adaptation).

keeps the believer from ever loosening their grip, lest they suffer a fatal fall. As one poet famously said,

Every breakage—Allah can compensate (*jabr*) for it,
But no compensation (*jubrān*) is there for a broken religion.

While we can never repay the gift of guidance, we can demonstrate our gratitude by regarding no expression of appreciation as too great. As Allah (the Mighty and Majestic) said to the Prophet ﷺ, “And do not consider that you have ever conferred some great favor [upon God].”⁷⁵ Conversely, when some Arabs converted to Islam and immediately boasted of their righteousness, the Qur’anic corrective came sharp and fast: “They consider it a favor to you that they have accepted Islam. Say, ‘Do not consider your Islam a favor to me. Rather, it is Allah who will have done you a favor by guiding you to the faith—if you are indeed faithful.’”⁷⁶ Similarly, in the context of charitable giving, Allah (the Most High) says, “O you who have believed, do not invalidate your charities with reminders [of it] or annoyance [of the recipient]...”⁷⁷ The term *mann*, which occurs in each of the aforementioned verses, means to remind others of your favors in a brash way. The people of *mann* have forgotten that they are not the owners of their wealth or their guidance, and that their faith and their fortunes would have long faded if not for al-Jabbār.

Let that be our final reflection on this great name of Allah. It is not the Qur’an we memorize that “keeps” us religious, nor the “Islamic facts” in our head, nor the eloquence of our tongues and pens, nor the outward religiosity that people see—rather, it is al-Jabbār. Only al-Jabbār purges the selfish agenda of every pure soul, causing as several of the greatest early scholars said, “We learned this knowledge for other than Allah, but then Allah refused that it be for anyone but Him.” Only al-Jabbār expunges the doubts and desires from our chests, those which every day threaten to swarm our hearts and whose incursion is always imminent. Only al-Jabbār keeps us from unraveling, like the multitudes who went astray throughout history despite their oceans of knowledge and intensity of worship, “...this is how Allah seals the heart of every arrogant *jabbār* (tyrant).”⁷⁸

⁷⁵ Qur’an 74:6, author’s translation.

⁷⁶ Qur’an 49:17, *Saheeh International* (with slight adaptation).

⁷⁷ Qur’an 2:264, *Saheeh International* (with slight adaptation).

⁷⁸ Qur’an 40:35, *The Clear Quran* (with slight adaptation).

Just as only al-Jabbār preserves our eyesight, only He keeps our insight from blurring, our faith from flickering, and our steps from drifting off the Straight Path. As Allah (the Mighty and Majestic) said, “Ask [them, O Prophet], ‘Imagine if Allah were to take away your hearing or sight, or if He were to seal your hearts—who else other than Allah could restore it?’”⁷⁹ This hints at why, more frequently than any other supplication, the Prophet ﷺ would repeat,

يَا مُقَلِّبَ الْقُلُوبِ ثَبِّتْ قَلْبِي عَلَى دِينِكَ

O Turner of Hearts, anchor my heart upon Your religion.⁸⁰

A parting prayer

With Your aid, O Allah, we vow to recall that al-Jabbār only “breaks” the sincere to rebuild them stronger than before, so long as they flee to Him in times of difficulty. We vow to ignore Satan when he whispers that we are hypocrites for remembering al-Jabbār when we are troubled. We vow to keep faith that al-Jabbār will reverse every injustice, whether this reversal comes in this world or the next. We vow to defuse people’s conflicts before they rend the fabric of their family and society. We vow to revitalize the Muslim *ummah* with breezes of hope whenever around it the smoke of despair thickens. We vow not to laugh while others weep, nor sleep warm while forgetting those shivering under the frigid blanket of winter, nor strut around in life unmindful of those buried beneath our feet, whom we will join once al-Jabbār decides it is our time. May we reflect every glimmer of *jabr* that shone in our Prophet ﷺ, and avoid whatever distances us from his legendary piety and humility.

⁷⁹ Qur’an 6:46, *The Clear Quran* (with slight adaptation).

⁸⁰ *Sunan al-Tirmidhī*, no. 3522. Graded as authentic (*ṣaḥīḥ*) by al-Albānī.