

THE 'FACE OF GOD' AND THE INVOCATION OF DIVINE MERCY IN THE PSALMS

Abstract

This research examines the symbolism of the 'face of God' as a representation of divine presence and mercy, which is crucial in the dialogue between the believer and the divine. Using powerful biblical imagery, the Psalms highlight the importance of divine reconciliation, urging God to turn His face toward those who suffer, symbolizing not just acceptance and approval but also a deep, personal connection. In patristic writings, including those of St. John Chrysostom and St. Cyril of Alexandria, this theme reveals the complexity of the relationship between divine mercy and human prayer.

The study's comparative approach brings the Psalms and patristic texts into dialogue, exploring how mercy petitions serve as a foundation for rebuilding the lost spiritual relationship. The research shows that the symbol of the 'divine face' signifies an act of mercy and love necessary for experiencing divine protection and blessings. By studying selected Psalms, it becomes clear how this image is crucial in overcoming spiritual struggles and maintaining trust and hope, aiding in the revival of spiritual bonds. The findings underscore the significance of the return of the divine face in biblical spirituality, emphasizing its importance for inner peace and spiritual fulfilment. The study advocates for a sincere relationship with the divine, where prayer is not just a plea but a profound spiritual exchange and transformative dialogue with God.

Keywords

Face of God, Divine Mercy, Psalms, Spiritual Symbolism, Psalmic Prayer



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Introduction

The present study investigates the significant connection between mercy and the manifestation of divine presence, symbolized by the 'face of God.' The psalmists frequently use vivid imagery to express the need for divine intervention in human life, often requesting that God turn his face toward the supplicant. This theme has been widely debated in patristic literature, where the terms 'mercy' and 'countenance' acquire complex meanings, analysed in various ways by theologians and biblical scholars. Biblical literature highlights the significance of the divine face as a symbol of God's presence, closeness, and benevolence.

Essential resources in this study include theological works that offer detailed analyses of the Hebrew and Greek contexts of the terms used in the Psalms. Patristic commentaries and interpretations also play a crucial role, highlighting the profound symbolic depth of the relationship between divinity and humanity. Some aspects of patristic literature add a theological and spiritual dimension, utilizing linguistic symbolism and biblical imagery to illustrate the connection between divine mercy and the face of God. Church Fathers such as St. John Chrysostom, St. Cyril of Alexandria, and St. Augustine, among others, offer detailed insights into the theological significance of God's face, highlighting the connection between the plea for mercy and the desire to see His face. These interpretations are not only theoretical but also practical, guiding believers on how to approach prayer and spiritual interaction with the divine.

The study's approach is based on a comparative textual analysis of Psalms and patristic texts, incorporating both historical and contemporary interpretations of these texts. Beginning with a detailed exegesis of selected Psalms, the research examines mercy petitions and how they underscore the desire to reestablish divine fellowship. The invocation of God's face is not only a plea for favour but also a symbol of spiritual renewal and genuine connection with the divine.

The study's structure follows a systematic approach, beginning by defining and contextualizing the theme in the Psalms, and then proceeding to analyse the symbolism of God's face and the invocation of mercy. Next, it offers a detailed exploration of patristic interpretations and finally presents conclusions that highlight the connection between divine mercy and its symbolic expression. The study aims to give a comprehensive framework for understanding how psalmic prayer transcends time and space while remaining a means for drawing closer to God.

Psalms of divine mercy

The mercy Psalms are characterized by repeated expressions and formulas, reflecting the urgent need for help and the close bond between the petitioner and God. First, the imperative formula **הַנְּנִי** translated as 'have mercy on me,' appears only in the Old Testament Psalms, used 18 times across 13 Psalms (4:2; 6:3; 25:16; 26:11; 27:7; 30:11; 31:10; 41:5,11; 51:3; 56:2; 57:2; 86:3,16; 119:29,58,132 MT), indicating a pattern of direct prayer addressed to God (Botterweck & Ringgren 1986, 32). The verb form, built from an imperative in the first person, masculine, singular, emphasizes the urgency and sincerity of the plea, highlighting the personal dialogue and the intimate relationship between the petitioner and God. This formula conveys not just a passive request, but a direct conversation filled with emotional intensity and hope for divine mercy. Additionally, the use of **יְהוָה הַנְּנִי** – “Lord have mercy on me” – gives the prayer an intimate tone and expresses deep trust in divine mercy.

In the Septuagint, the verb **נָנַן** is translated as *οἰκτίρω* (*to pity or have compassion*) or *ἐλέεω* (*to show mercy or benevolence*), emphasizing the personal and active relationship of the divine in the process of mercy (Kittel 1976, v. 5, 159-61; v. 2, 477-87). In the Psalms, these formulas are often accompanied by the singular personal pronoun *με* – *on me, me* – or the plural *ἡμᾶς* – *on us* – highlighting both individual appeal and its universality. Notably, these formulas tend to be repetitive, placing the prayer within a context of hope and trust in divine mercy. They reflect an attitude of submission and reliance on divine mercy, while also acknowledging human vulnerability in the face of divinity. Their imperative form not only underscores the need for divine help but also incorporates sacred rhetoric that draws the believing soul closer to the God of mercy.

The basic meaning of the noun **חַן** is that of *grace, favour, mercy, or goodwill*. In the 69 occurrences in Scripture, most biblical authors use it in contexts where this 'mercy' or 'grace' is not only a favour offered in abundance, but also a disposition, a state of mind, a benevolent intention. Of these occurrences, 43 are part of the expression **חַן בְּעֵינֵי מִצָּא** translated as “to find grace and mercy in the eyes of God or man” (Harris 1999, 299). In this formulation, the emphasis falls not only on the act of being received, but also on the subjective perception of the one receiving: that experience of grace becomes visible, palpable, and often associated with the face or countenance of the giver. In this sense, we also note that between the verb **נָנַן** and the noun **חַן**, which outline

the universe of God's unconditional mercy, we observe a fundamental distinction in the way they highlight the subtle relationship between the giver and the receiver of mercy. If **יָרַח** focuses on the action of mercy, engaging the attention and initiative of the one who has the favour to offer it, then **יָחַן** is directed toward the receiver, the person or being who receives that mercy and what is given. In essence, if the verb emphasizes the act of giving, the noun emphasizes the reception and impact of this divine or human gesture.

In Antiquity, seeking human mercy or grace in someone's gaze often became a significant experience. A person's benevolent gaze, expression, and face symbolized mercy, compassion, and kindness (Botterweck 1986, 24). The sparkle of gentle eyes, frequently mentioned in sacred texts, can be easily seen as a sign of a positive disposition. Someone with clear, kind eyes communicated, without words, a willingness to grant grace or show mercy to those suffering. This powerful symbolism, reflected in social and cultural perceptions, suggests that the face and appearance reveal the actual state of mind and morality of both the giver and the receiver.

The association of God's face with the outpouring of his mercy

The psalmists often link the concept of mercy (**יָחַן**) with **פָּנָה** – 'face', suggesting that showing or turning the face toward someone symbolizes goodwill or rejection. The act of 'turning one's face away' is more than poetic; it's a metaphor for moral and emotional attitude. When God shows His face, it indicates His willingness to be kind, favourable, and merciful. Hiding His face symbolizes contempt or rejection. If God turns His face away, prayers may go unanswered, and blessings may be delayed or absent. This visual gesture signals mercy or its absence. Culturally and anthropologically, the idea of 'showing one's face' to express kindness or concealment is crucial for understanding social and religious bonds in Ancient Israel. A person's gaze reflects their moral and emotional state, and when it comes to the divine, this symbolism becomes even more significant. When God reveals Himself, it is believed that He is in a good mood, acknowledges prayer, and demonstrates love and mercy. Conversely, if He remains hidden or turns His face away, it signifies a lack of divine mercy, causing prayers to go unheard and unfulfilled. Showing one's face is not just a gesture but a tangible sign of divine concern, generosity, and mercy. Trust in God's mercy and His willingness to turn

toward the believer nurtures hope and optimism, even during the most difficult times of suffering.

The connection between mercy and face reflects a core idea in biblical spirituality: God's active and personal presence, symbolized by the look and manifestation of His face (Freedman 2000, 744). This symbol is not just poetic; it expresses the believer's deep longing to see God and witness divine goodness and mercy. The concept of the 'face of God' thus calls to mind a close relationship and communion, where God is not distant but reveals His mercy and goodness through visible gestures understood by the entire community of believers. In the Psalms and other biblical writings, this image remains a promise and a hope, directed to God and implicitly to believers seeking mercy, protection, and spiritual fulfilment.

The expression 'face of God' carries profound theological meaning in Jewish and biblical tradition, symbolizing the presence, manifestation, and closeness of the divine to humanity. In the religious culture of Ancient Israel, divine revelation was not seen merely as a distant display of a supreme power. Still, it was expressed through the visual image of God's 'face'. This image was not just a rhetorical device but a way to indicate Yahweh's active and immediate presence among the people, implying personal, direct, and intimate closeness. In Exodus 33, the most explicit biblical passage where Yahweh promises that his 'face' will go with Israel, it suggests that divinity is not confined to a distant absence but is manifested in a living, close, and personal manner. Moses' request to see God's 'glory' shows a desire for certainty and confirmation of Yahweh's ongoing presence among the Israelites – a need to perceive Him tangibly. God responds by saying that no man can see His face and live (Ex 33:20). This underscores the impossibility of fully seeing the divine face, as God remains unfathomable and unseen, and His complete revelation is beyond human reach (Durham 2002, 458; St. Gregory of Nyssa 1982, 88-99).

However, it is believed that God can reveal Himself in certain forms, as illustrated by the patriarch Jacob, who 'saw Him face to face' in Penuel, and by the experience of Moses, who also spoke with God 'face to face.' These examples demonstrate a special closeness, a communion of trust and intimacy. For these reasons, Edmond Jacob pointed out that:

Face has never ceased to be regarded as a divine revelation'; the pursuit of Yahweh's face, or his personal presence, encompasses both Temple worship and communion with

God through personal prayer (Ps 62:3-4; 99:3; 17:14). The faithful believed that seeking His face would be rewarded with Yahweh's blessing, which specifically involved Him turning His face toward them: Let Yahweh seek upon you with a cheerful countenance and have mercy on you! (Num 6:25; cf. Ps 79:4,8,20) (Jacob 1955, 62).

Thus, in essence, the 'face' of God embodies both man's desire to claim and understand Him and the impossibility of perceiving Him completely. This tension highlights the incompleteness and mystery of divinity, while also affirming the reality of visual perception in symbolic and spiritual forms. The 'face of God' remains a symbol of closeness, personal revelation, and divine love—a promise of encounter and intimate communication—even if this divine light often stays out of human reach.

The return/appearance of God's face in the Psalms of divine mercy

In the Psalms of Mercy, the concept of seeing God's face and using it as a symbol of divine mercy is central to the theology of God's presence and the relationship between the sacred and the human. This symbolism originates in the biblical language and culture of Israel, where the 'face' of God does not refer to a physical image but instead represents the goodness, mercy, and active presence of the divine in believers' lives. In this context, the divine 'face' symbolizes the cooperation between heaven and earth, as well as between God and humanity, and reflects God's attitude toward humans.

Psalm 4 highlights the divine presence, symbolized by the 'face of God,' as the source of blessing, mercy, and peace for believers (Craigie 2002, 82). The psalmist asks God to shine His face upon the people so that mercy, peace, and prosperity may flow continuously to all. This divine presence is not just a visible sign but a work that subtly and profoundly leaves an impression on everyone, spreading rays of light that bring joy and peace to the soul. Because of this presence, the psalmist finds immense pleasure and complete peace, even in the face of enemies, symbolized by peaceful sleep (Schaefer 2001, 13-4). St. John Chrysostom explains that the light of God's face is not shown by a visible radiance but by an imprint on the face—an inward and subtle impression made visible through divine blessing and protection (St. John Chrysostom 2011, 49). In this way, God's presence becomes a living proof of His mercy, spreading light and blessing over the faithful and providing security and peace amid trouble. Therefore, the 'face of God' symbolizes not only His divine display but also the manifestation of His love and mercy, imprinted on believers' hearts, spreading peace and joy.

Psalm 6 evocatively illustrates the relationship between man and God, emphasizing the importance of divine mercy in spiritual healing. The psalmist is in deep despair and suffering, feeling distant from God, which makes him believe he is nearing death. For him, this separation is the most painful part of his suffering and creates a strong urge to return and seek God's mercy. St. John Chrysostom interprets this as a spiritual struggle to reconnect with God and regain divine love and mercy (St. John Chrysostom 2011, 84). According to Didymus the Blind, the psalmist makes a twofold request: he asks God to turn His face toward him, symbolizing mercy, favour, and approval, and prays that he, too, will turn away from evil to restore lost fellowship ("Fragments on the Psalms," in PG 39, 1177 – Blaising 2004, 51). His separation from God, seen as the absence of His presence, becomes the source of all his suffering. This distance highlights his fear of death and despair, clearly showing the vital role of divine mercy in restoring inner harmony. Psalm 6 teaches us that closeness to God, expressed through sincere prayer and awareness of dependence on divine mercy, is the only way to overcome sorrow and find comfort during life's trials. In this inner struggle, divine mercy becomes the core motivation and driving force for restoring peace and hope.

Psalm 25 explicitly highlights the theme of divine mercy, using the words "turn your face towards me and be gracious to me" (v. 17), which suggests a dialogical and active relationship between God and the believer, where the request for mercy is not passive but involves active awareness and concern. In biblical language, "turning one's face away" symbolizes divine acceptance, favour, and goodwill, representing divine closeness and blessing. The psalmist, with his eyes continually fixed on God, subtly highlights the need to invite God to show His mercy and goodness, emphasizing the importance of a relationship founded on communion and mutual obedience. St. John Chrysostom interprets this request as a pedagogical act by God, who expects humans to seek Him with a sincere desire for mercy and acceptance. This act of returning is not just a prayer, but a display of a close relationship where both the divine and the human must actively participate. The Psalm emphasizes that divine mercy isn't automatically given but must be requested with faith and awareness, stemming from a living dialogue and a mindset of listening and recognizing human helplessness in the face of divine grace.

Psalm 27 reflects the psalmist's profound desire to be close to God, emphasizing essential aspects such as the 'face of God' and divine mercy. When faced with powerful enemies, the psalmist sees divine support as vital and regards closeness to God and seeing

His face (v. 7) as sources of reassurance. His heartfelt, sincere, and persistent prayer to be near God and to see His face reveals an intense longing for direct communion with the Creator. This longing not only relates to the physical realm but also symbolizes a spiritual need to be accepted in God's presence, thereby avoiding estrangement—something Rabbinic wisdom suggests leads to spiritual failures, including coldness, divine wrath, abandonment, and contempt (Rabinowitz 2005, 62). Bishop Gherasim Timuș identifies four stages of human decline caused by breaking the bond with God, which the psalmist desperately seeks to avoid:

God hides His face when He ceases to spread the rays of His light; He is angry when He no longer speaks to the human heart; He forsakes him when He leaves him prey to passions; He despises and rejects him when He sees him no longer returning... (Timuș 1896, 318).

The distance from God, symbolized by His face being hidden, is linked to the loss of divine protection and the ensuing chaos in the world, prompting the psalmist to pray not to be forsaken by divine mercy constantly. Central to this prayer is an invocation of mercy, seen as a heartfelt, sincere, and profound request. The psalmist understands that when God reveals His face, His mercy is quickly manifested, rewarding prayers with divine responses. Conversely, when His face remains unseen, wickedness and trouble increase, and prayers go unanswered. In this inner struggle, the psalmist—according to Arnobius the Younger—compares his desire to be close to God to the love of a lover pleading for mercy and love, asking God not to turn away but to be merciful:

In this place [the house of the Lord] [sub. ns.], the lover of God seeks no other happiness than the beauty of the Lord, using words similar to those lovers speak to their beloved: 'My heart says to your face, turn not your face from me, or cast away your servant in anger.' I have committed such sins that you have justly turned away your face from me, being angry at my passions; but be merciful, turn not away, and forsake me not, the God of my salvation. ("Commentary on the Psalms," in *CCL* 25, 34-35) (our translation).

Therefore, the 'face of God' symbolizes mutual closeness and nearness, with divine mercy forming the foundation of the psalmist's hope for salvation and communion. His heartfelt prayer, directed upward with sincere longing, reflects his conviction that only

divine mercy can provide safety and salvation, making this plea a core expression of his spiritual life (Kraus 1999, 514).

Psalm 30 illustrates the psalmist's state of confidence in his strength and steadfastness, which he sees as the result of divine health and radiance. However, this perspective is shattered with the turning away of God's face, an action that symbolizes the withdrawal of divine support due to his pride. The consequence is decline and approaching death, and the psalmist realizes that this separation from the divine face has removed him from goodness and protection. The deeper meaning of this experience is that, in the absence of divine mercy, the soul becomes weak, symbolizing an estrangement from God and spiritual beauty:

As long as the rays of Thy watchfulness shone upon me, says David through St. Basil the Great voice, I lived in a good and untroubled state; but when Thou turned Thy face from me, my sinful and troubled state of soul was revealed. It is said that God turns his face away from us in times of hardship, when he leaves us to our trials, that the strength of the struggler may be made known. [...] And because turning is contrary to the will of God, and trouble is contrary to beauty and strength, it follows that trouble is ugliness and weakness of soul, born of alienation from God (St. Basil the Great 1986, 240) (our translation).

The psalmist expresses his hope that without God's mercy, he cannot rise from a state of fallenness and darkness. In this prayer, humility and the realization of his weakness become the reasons why God showers His mercy upon him, restoring him to the blessed path. Thus, God's face and his mercy are seen as essential for spiritual revival, and the turning of the divine face towards man becomes the symbol of divine love and compassion, which can transform suffering into joy.

In **Psalm 31**, the psalmist asks the Lord to show mercy, turn His face toward him, and restore him to the fellowship lost through sin. He understands that God looks with mercy on the humble, who fear Him and continually trust in divine deliverance. The psalmist emphasizes – according to St. Cyril of Alexandria – that the presence of God's face, also called His light, is the only deliverance from trouble:

Shining shines the light of His deity, which Scripture calls the face of God, and all those who work that which is worthy of darkness flee. Therefore, the prophet also asks that he may receive it, not for his works, but for the mercy of God. For this [the revealing

of the face of the Lord] [emphasis added] is the only way of deliverance [according to David] [emphasis added] (St. Cyril of Alexandria 1990, 125-6) (our translation).

In verses 20-21, the way this divine mercy concretely works is highlighted: God becomes a shield, a refuge, guarding those attacked by their enemies, hiding them in the vicinity of His face, in a sacred space where attacks from darkness are defeated by divine light. The psalmist compares this divine protection to mysterious and preventative actions, such as those in Scripture, where God guards His believers' unseen, rendering attacks futile and enemies unaware of the cause of their resistance. In this view, the presence of God's face, as a touch of His mercy, becomes the source of safety and deliverance. Thus, the 'face of God' symbolizes divine protection and merciful favour, silently bestowing tranquillity and justice on the humble and trusting. Throughout the Psalm, it underscores the belief that divine mercy is the only practical solution against attack and suffering and is a manifestation of God's unwavering love and protection of those who trust in Him (Hengstenberg 2010, 504).

Psalm 51 profoundly reflects the psalmist's need for mercy and divine intervention to restore communion with God, symbolized by the concept of the 'face of God.' The psalmist recognizes that his sins have created a barrier between himself and God, which is why he asks God to turn His face away from him to forgive him and free him from guilt. This request does not express a desire to be removed, but a plea for God not to hold his sins against him, but to look upon him with mercy. St. Augustine acknowledges that, for God not to remember or see sins, they must always be present in the conscience of the sinner, who must mourn and understand them deeply (St. Augustine 1997, 195). In this prayer, the psalmist also expresses his fear of a final separation from God, aware that the privilege of dwelling in the divine presence depends solely on His mercy. He knows that this presence, along with protection and consolation from the Holy Spirit, is essential to avoid ending up like those who have lost this communion. St. Cyril of Alexandria interprets the fact that the duration of this divine presence depends on divine mercy. The Psalm also reflects the universal human desire to recover a relationship broken by sin, asking for the Holy Spirit to be rekindled within the soul:

For since the disobedience of Adam, as from the beginning of the human race, mankind has suffered God's withdrawal. They were taken out of paradise and became under the curse, the once blessed of God. When humanity grew into a multitude and sin reigned over all, the Spirit of God, which was given to us initially, departed from us, and

the beauty of the image was marred. For God said to them all, 'My Spirit will not remain in these men, for they are flesh' (Phil. 6:3) (St. Cyril of Alexandria 1991a, 59)

As a result, he requests two things at once: that the turning away from us may end and that the Holy Spirit may return to us. Therefore, the 'face' of God symbolizes divine mercy, compassion, and closeness; His throne remains open to the humble—those who acknowledge their sins and sincerely seek forgiveness, thereby enjoying communion with God, the only hope of salvation and spiritual renewal.

Psalm 67 expresses a collective prayer in which the psalmist asks for mercy and blessing for all people, emphasizing the importance of the 'face of God' and divine mercy. In this petition, the verb יָחַן is used differently from other Psalms, being expressed not in the imperative form but as an insistent desire to receive divine mercy (Tate 2002, 56). Most translations say, 'God have mercy on us,' suggesting an ongoing petition and the need to express divine love. An important point is the difference between οἰκτίρω (*to pity or have compassion*) and ἐλέω (*to show mercy or kindness*), where the former expresses a specific request for a particular cause, and the latter asks for it generally. The Church Fathers also interpret this prayer in a Christological sense, seeing in it a foreshadowing of the blessing that Jesus Christ's coming would bring. They assert that this 'appearing of the face of God' symbolizes for believers the direct perception of divine presence, i.e., the Kingdom of heaven becoming accessible through Christ (St. Cyril of Alexandria 1991b: 60; Theodoret of Cyrus 2003, 192). Thus, the coming of Christ brings salvation for all nations, marking the moment when divine mercy illuminates the path to obedience and salvation. In conclusion, Psalm 66 highlights the merciful act of God, who, through the coming of Jesus, reveals His face to those who seek and believe in him, offering them peace and blessing. The face of God symbolizes both direct contemplation of divinity and the manifestation of his love and mercy, received with faith and piety by all who trust in God.

Psalm 119 deeply emphasizes the meaning of the 'face of God' and divine mercy in a believer's life. The psalmist offers a heartfelt prayer, earnestly asking God to turn His face toward him, to comfort and show him mercy. This 'beautification' of the divine face is seen as a plea for God's goodness and love, bringing comfort, peace, and forgiveness from sin (Allen 2002, 192). The prayer is offered from the whole being, from the depths of the heart, highlighting that this request is not superficial but an essential need for closeness and communion with God, represented by His face—the divine presence

seen as a light of mercy. The Fathers of the Church teach that, although God appears judgmental, He also responds with mercy to those who repent, receiving prayers from pure and humble hearts (Theodoret of Cyrus 2003, 377; Euthymios Zigabenos 2006, 563). In this prayer, the psalmist seeks not only mercy but also light in his life, as a sign of divine closeness and ongoing dialogue with the Creator—a process leading to true communion. Ultimately, this request reflects the belief that only in the presence of God's face, in the light of His mercy, can true peace, joy, and healing be found. The 'face of God' symbolizes not just a visible sign but the divine act by which love and mercy are poured out upon humankind, strengthening the bond of faith and love between God and believers.

Theological perspectives on the 'face of God' in the Psalms

The significance of God's face in receiving divine mercy is a key theme in the theology of the Psalms, highlighting the profound and essential connection between humans and the sacred. In three distinct Psalms, the plea for mercy is reinforced by the psalmist's appeal for God to turn His face toward him (Ps 25, 86, and 119). This detail underscores that divine mercy is not only a sign of kindness but also a result of a direct and personal encounter with God, through which genuine communion is built. In the spiritual and cultural setting of the Old Testament, turning one's face indicated giving special attention and showing acceptance or approval. Therefore, God's face became a symbol of divine blessing and goodwill. If God chose not to turn His face away, the psalmist's prayers would remain unanswered, and deliverance would be delayed, as clearly shown in Psalms 31 and 56. Without God's face, cries for mercy were met with silence and anxiety, depicting feelings of abandonment and absence of divine aid. The desperate effort to gain God's mercy and attention is stressed in Psalm 25, where the psalmist persistently fixes his gaze on the Lord, hoping that his perseverance will eventually bring the blessing of God's merciful gaze. Prayer, therefore, becomes an act of profound hope and trust, proof of a personal covenant and a relationship that goes beyond merely asking for mercy.

To facilitate this divine encounter, the psalmist pleads with God not to focus on his sins but to turn His face toward him, as highlighted in Psalm 51. This plea is not an invitation for God to remove or overlook suffering but rather a plea for a gaze that looks beyond the sins that separate man and divinity, thus hindering access to mercy and forgiveness. The idea of God's face turning is vital for the psalmist, seen as a clear sign

that his request has been heard and that he is about to re-enter a state of communion with the divine. This communion is where he can feel and experience God's ongoing presence, where righteousness and divine grace make it possible to see God's face without obstacles or barriers.

The Psalms thus highlight another aspect of spiritual life: it is not enough to ask for divine help; it is necessary to create the right conditions for this intervention to be possible. This includes admitting sins, repenting, and sincerely wanting to restore the bond broken by thoughts or actions that have alienated man from God. In these situations, the Lord's face becomes not only a metaphor for divine presence but also a sign of the psalmist's spiritual state. The true goal of this spiritual dialogue is a genuine communion, where the psalmist not only asks for help but also actively receives and responds to divine presence and guidance.

The Psalms reveal that despite hardships and feelings of abandonment, hope persists when one turns to God and has a sincere desire for reconciliation. These writings encourage believers to pursue this communion not only in times of need but also as a continual practice in their spiritual life, for only in this way can they live in harmony with God's will and fully experience His mercy. The psalmist teaches that while sins can create obstacles between man and God, they are not insurmountable barriers but instead call to repentance, acknowledgment of one's faults, and a genuine desire to be shown mercy. The importance of seeking the Lord's face is not limited to outward appearances or benign manifestations of divinity but also signifies a profound change in the spiritual state of the one who seeks. The divine face turning toward the psalmist is not just a one-time act but a sign that the personal connection with God can be renewed through sincere prayer and genuine repentance at any moment. This divine renewal strengthens the believer, giving them courage to continue seeking, repenting, and transforming their life, assuring them that divine mercy is always accessible to those who turn to Him in faith.

Besides its theological and psychological importance, this need to see the face of the Lord in prayer also offered practical lessons for believers: that prayer should not just be a cry of desperation, but also a sign of faith in divine goodness and mercy. It reflects an attitude of humility and acknowledgment of sins, as well as hope that God, in his mercy, will look kindly and respond to requests for forgiveness and healing. In this way, prayer becomes a bridge between man and God—a means of communication where the believer expresses a desire to be in communion, to see the divine face, and to be

comforted by His presence. Only through this genuine and direct relationship can the believer recognize his sins, hope for forgiveness and acceptance, and ultimately receive divine mercy that restores and renews him spiritually.

Additionally, the need to seek God's favour and bring the heart closer to Him also teaches an important lesson about inner transformation. The psalmist recognizes that for God to turn His face toward him, he must correct his ways, sincerely repent, and cleanse his soul of sins. In this context, the request to be looked upon with mercy becomes an act of self-awareness, understanding that sins not only hinder the relationship with God but also corrupt the soul and damage the inner life of the believer.

In conclusion, the theme of God's face turning as a sign of mercy and restoring communion resonates deeply with the human quest for meaning, redemption, and divine love. The psalmist shows us that this close relationship must be nurtured through repentance, patience, and faith, and divine mercy will always be available to those who sincerely ask, let go of sins and hesitations, and approach God with an open heart. It is an ongoing process, a heartfelt dialogue where acknowledging sins and helplessness marks the start of mercy, and when divine gaze is returned, it brings not only answers to prayer but also a profound transformation—a change of the soul in the light of divine grace. In this way, faith becomes more than an outward act; it becomes an authentic and intense experience of a relationship with God, where humility and hope come together to draw man back into God's presence. Therefore, this prayer for the return of the Lord's face teaches spiritual delicacy and inner honesty: only by recognizing one's sins, remaining patient through trials, and trusting that divine mercy will be given can man regain the joy of communion and see God's face.

This remains a universal theme, relevant always and for every believer, because it reflects our deep desire to be in harmony with the divine, to experience His unconditional love, and to live in the light of His grace. Essentially, the turning of the Lord's face is not just a separate prayer but a symbol of our entire spiritual journey: to approach God with humility, to allow His light to illuminate our souls, and to live in genuine, deep communion with the One who created us and loves us endlessly.

Conclusions

In the Psalms, the theme of 'turning of the face' toward the believer primarily represents the presence and divine mercy that are essential for the soul's peace and spiritual fulfilment. The psalmist, whether in petition or penitential prayer, as well as in

praise, seeks this return of the divine to find peace and security amid dangers, showing that only this return from God's merciful side can guarantee deliverance and proper protection.

The idea of seeing him and having the Lord's face turned toward man is more about a spiritual state of divine communion, acceptance, and reconciliation than a literal visual perception. This state of communion, symbolized by the divine gaze, provides believers with security and hope—hope that God's mercy, revealed in His face, will become meaningful to those who are sincere, humble, and engaged in a relationship of mutual love and trust.

Thus, in the Psalms, God's face becomes not only a symbol of divine presence and love but also a testament that His mercy and blessings are not accessible to those who do not sincerely and humbly seek this closeness. When God turns His face toward the supplicant, it is a sign of mercy, an opportunity to be looked upon with love and to receive protection amid life's trials, an invitation to live in peace and divine joy. In this way, the Psalms teach us that the relationship with God, symbolized by the divine gaze and face, becomes a central aspect of religious experience, always representing the hope of ongoing divine mercy and love in the believer's life.

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