

Trials & Tribulations – An Islamic Perspective

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In the Name of Allah, the Most Compassionate the Most Merciful

Trust & Reliance should only be in Allah

Everything that happens is from Almighty Allah and only from Him. Human beings, whilst having the will power to do things, have no power to change the outcome or the end result. It is mentioned in the Holy Qur'an: "*Nothing shall ever happen to us except what Allah has ordained for us.*" [9:11] The Prophet ﷺ expressed this very same sentiment in the following manner: "*Whatever has befallen you was not meant to escape you, and whatever has escaped you was not meant to befall you.*" [Tirmidhi]

You will never completely feel at ease until you firmly believe that Allah has already pre-ordained all matters. Therefore, do not feel remorse over that which is not in your hands. Do not think that you could have prevented the death or sickness of someone, the accident that happened, the imprisonment of a loved one or the fight or argument that resulted in devastation. You could not have prevented these things, whether you wanted to or not.

In times of ease and comfort one tends to build expectations on individuals and institutions upon whom one can turn to in times of need hoping that they can be one's saviour. However, experience has shown that those very same means upon whom one has attached so much reliance fail to materialise in the hour of need. Not only that, but many a times those very same 'friends', apart from walking away in the midst of one's sufferings, prove to be injurious and detrimental to ones interest. This demonstrates the reality of all those expectations and hopes apart from Allah, testing times define the real from the false and the good from the bad.

If you are afflicted with trials and tribulations remember Allah, call out His name, and ask Him for help. Place your forehead on the ground and mention His praise, so that you can obtain true freedom. Raise your hands in supplication, and ask of Him constantly and abundantly. Cling to His door, have good thoughts about Him, and wait for His help – you will then find true happiness and success.

If you remain persistent and sincere in your calling Him, you will achieve freedom from worry and anxiety. All ropes are cut loose save His, and all doors are shut save His. He is near; He hears all and answers those who supplicate to Him.

Almighty Allah says: "*...invoke Me, I will respond to you*" [Qur'an – 40:60]

Remember well, if you have found Allah, then you have found everything. And if you lose your faith in Him, then you have lost everything!

Dealing with Trials & Tribulations

Trials and tribulations are in no way a criterion on defining success and failure. The Prophet ﷺ said: "*No one was subjected to the amount of difficulties I was subjected to.*" [Tirmidhi] The underlining criterion is by evaluating ones relationship with His Lord, Allah in all situations. If during ones suffering, a person terminates his relationship with his religious

obligations and loses hope in Allah – he is at a loss. On the other hand, if one in the midst of distress holds firmly to his Deen, repents from sins and strengthens his bond with His Creator he is the successful one.

Now consider these sayings of the pious servants of Allah regarding trials and tribulations:

Junaid Baghdadi (Allah have mercy on him) said: *“Hardships are a lamp for the divinely enlightened ones; a warning for the doubters and a disaster for careless people.”*

Ali bin Bindar (Allah have mercy on him) said: *“The foundations of this worldly abode are hardships and difficulties. Therefore, life on earth without effort is not possible.”*

Ibn Ata (Allah have mercy on him) said: *The truth and falsehood of a servant becomes manifest at the time of hardship. During good times he remains stagnant. He refrains from thankfulness and does not progress in worship. When he bewails his lot in hardship, he displays his falsehood.”*

Compare the following insults and difficulties which the great Prophets (peace be upon them): were subjected to:

- Prophet Nuh (peace be upon him): He is astray! He should be pelted to death!
- Prophet Hud (peace be upon him): A fool and a liar indeed he is!
- Prophet Lut (peace be upon him): Expel him from the community!
- Prophet Salih (peace be upon him): He and his companions are bad luck!
- Prophet Ibrahim (peace be upon him): A criminal! Burn him alive!
- Prophet Musa (peace be upon him): A mad man he is!
- Prophet Isa (peace be upon him): It is compulsory to kill him!
- Maryam (peace be upon her): She is unchaste!

The scholars and saints of Islam, being the inheritors of the Prophets (peace be upon them) were also subjected to similar trials.

- Imam Jafar Saadiq (peace be upon him) was branded a madman.
- Imam Zainul-Abidin (peace be upon him): He speaks like an idol worshipper!
- Imam Abu Hanifa (peace be upon him): was imprisoned by the ruler of the time and his food was rationed. People abused him and called him an enemy and shaytan of the Ummah. Open calls were made that ‘assassinate him and you will earn more virtues than performing seventy Jihads!’
- Imam Malik (Allah have mercy on him): was whipped and dragged in the street. He was unable to perform Salaah with Jama'ah and even prevented by his enemies and oppressors from leaving his house for performing Jum'ah.

- Imam Shafi'i (Allah have mercy on him): was given the title "More harmful than Iblis". He was cursed and sworn at!
- Imam Ahmed bin Hanbal (Allah have mercy on him): was imprisoned and whipped daily until he would fall down unconscious. In addition to this, he was repeatedly smacked and spat upon.
- Imam Bukhari (Allah have mercy on him): was hounded, called a non-Muslim and to even sit in his company was considered sinful. He was banished from his home city on four occasions following theological disputes and died whilst in exile.
- Imam Nasa'i (Allah have mercy on him) was beaten so severely for giving a Khutbah in praise of Ali (Allah have mercy on him) that resulted in his death.
- Imam Ghazzali (Allah have mercy on him): his books were burnt in public, and this was considered obligatory just as it was considered an act of reward to curse him!
- Imam Ibn Taymiyyah (Allah have mercy on him) was imprisoned for 36 months and his assets were confiscated by the state.
- Shah Waliyullah (Allah have mercy on him): was imprisoned and his hand was amputated to stop him from writing. He was forced to migrate and he passed away in Delhi.

As history has demonstrated in the case of those mentioned and many others alike that, despite the apparent suffering inflicted upon them, they were ultimately successful and their lives are admired and their legacy lives on till this very day.

It is reported about the great saint Junaid Baghdadi (Allah have mercy on him) that when people insulted him and criticised his work, he would mostly remain silent, but occasionally he would say, *"The accounts are always made up at the end of the day. Lets us see, when a sufficient space of time has passed, whether it is our work which is remembered or the names of our critics."*

Transforming Challenges into Opportunities

Circumstances of pure evil do not exist, and in all situations one can find goodness, benefit and reward from Allah. A believer should always ponder and look at the other side of any tragedy or hardship.

Almighty Allah says in the Holy Qur'an: *"And it may be that you dislike a thing which is good for you and it may be that you like a thing which is bad for you. Allah knows but you do not know."* [42:27]

It was this very reason that the Prophet ﷺ was compelled to leave Makkah, but rather than quit his mission, he continued it in Madina – the city that took its place in history with lightning speed.

An intelligent and skilful person endeavours to transform challenges into opportunities and losses into profits; whereas, the unskilled person aggravates his own predicament, often making two disasters out of one.

Two brilliant poets were imprisoned - one was an optimist, the other was a pessimist. They both squeezed their heads through the bars of their cell windows. The optimist then stared at the stars and laughed, while the pessimist looked at the dirt of a neighbouring road and wept.

Now consider the response of these eminent personalities of Islam in the face of hostilities and aggression.

- Imam Abu Hanifah (Allah have mercy on him) was whipped by the ruler of the time in the open bazaar. The whipping was so severe that the lashes left impressions on his body - blood would flow down his feet. On being whipped he would weep and make Dua abundantly to Allah. Whilst in captivity in a foreign land, when death drew near, the Imam fell in prostration and passed away therein. Despite this persecution and torture he emerged as Imam Azam – the Great Imam. His Madhhab (school of Jurisprudence) spread across the globe and his followers outnumbered everyone else.
- Imam Ahmed Ibn Hanbal (Allah have mercy on him) was severely tortured and flogged and yet he emerged triumphant from that ordeal, becoming the Imam of the Sunnah.
- Imam Ibn Taymiyyah (Allah have mercy on him) was imprisoned for 36 months during which he completed reciting the Qur'an 80 times. He would put his head on the floor in prostration from Isha until Fajr (all night long), repeating the supplication, *"O Allah! Help me to remember You, be grateful to You and to worship You with excellence."* During imprisonment, his books, pen and paper were confiscated; despite this, he continued his writings with pieces of coal - he emerged an even more accomplished scholar than he was before.
- Imam Sarakhsi (Allah have mercy on him) was held as a prisoner, kept at the bottom of an unused well; he managed therein to produce twenty volumes on Islamic Jurisprudence.
- Ibn Athir (Allah have mercy on him) became crippled, after which he wrote Jam'i al-Usool and Al-Nihayah, two of the most famous books in the Science of Hadith.
- Imam Ibn al-Jawzi (Allah have mercy on him) was banished from Baghdad. Then through his travels, he became proficient in the seven recitations of the Holy Qur'an.
- Mujaddid Alfi Thani (Allah have mercy on him) was imprisoned; he continued his propagation work in prison and successfully converted all the non-Muslim inmates to Islam.

Therefore if you are afflicted with a misfortune, look on the bright side. If someone was to hand you a glass full of squeezed lemons, add to it a handful of sugar. And if someone gives you a snake as a gift, keep its precious skin and leave the rest.

Remember, eating follows hunger, drinking follows thirst, tears are followed by a smile, fear is replaced by comfort, anxiety is overthrown by serenity, sleep comes after restlessness, and health takes the place of sickness. The lost will find their way, the day will follow the night and one in difficulty will find relief.

Almighty Allah says: *“Verily, with hardship, there is relief.”* [Qur’an 94:6]

Remain patient, steadfast and sincere in your relation with your Lord and await Allah’s promised relief and assistance. The following quote very nicely articulates these sentiments:

“Life is a book with many chapters. Some tell of tragedy, others of triumph. Some are dull and ordinary, others intense and exciting. The key to success in life is to never stop on a difficult page, to never quit on a tough chapter. Champions have the courage to keep turning the pages because they know that a better chapter always lies ahead, because with Allah all things are possible. And the last chapter of a book is always the best.”

And our last call is that all praise is for the Lord of the worlds and peace and blessings be upon the Master of the Messengers, his family and his companions.

***“A friend who does not benefit at the time of hardships,
Is close to an enemy on the scales,
The friend does not remain, during all times,
Nor does the brother, except for consolation.
I searched the days, with all my strengths
for a brother to trust, but my search was fruitless,
The lands and those who live them were barren,
As though its people were not people I wanted them to be.”***

From the Poems of Imam Shafi'i (Allah have mercy on him)

