

STRESS Demystified

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When we seek to demystify something, we need to look at it from different angles and new perspectives. We need to evaluate its definition, get a clear picture, bust the myths around it and then endeavour to chart out a program for its management. Here, we will be doing that for *STRESS*.



Then we can optimise living and be productive in the right direction with no undue negative stressors or energies pulling us down. It is an uphill task, but from then on, in anticipation of the fruits of our labour, the weariness is manageable. The journey becomes enjoyable - a blessing of life to be thankful for and the Life of Eternity to work for.

The Purpose of Life Defined

[It is He] who created death and life to test you [as to] which of you is best in deed - and He is the Exalted in Might, the Forgiving. 67:2

We feel focused, energized – working with determination, practicing patience and striving whole heartedly when we have clear cut goals. When the goal is already entrenched in our hearts and minds, we are involved mentally, engaged in self dialogue. To be ‘best in deed’ challenges us constantly.

Working for this goal busts stress, as each new day is a new opportunity to work for it – a goal that replaces all goals, a purpose given by our Creator. Rewards and punishments will be meted out based on this basis. Height, weight, ethnicity, beauty, intelligence, fame, wealth and prestige all fade away as unworthy of the roll of honour.

And this goal has inbuilt relief. In the words of the Messenger (blessings and peace be upon him):

“Amazing is the affair of the believer, for all of his affairs are good, and this is not except for the believer. If something good happens to him, he is thankful to Allah, and that is good for him. And if something bad happens to him, he shows patience and that is good for him.” (Muslim)

Shaykh al-Islam, Ibn Taymiyyah said: "A calamity that makes you turn to Allah is better for you than a blessing which makes you forget the remembrance of Allah."

So do not weaken and do not grieve, and you will be superior if you are [true] believers. (3:139)

If the purpose not defined, life will be wasted.

Say, "Shall we inform you of the greatest losers as to [their] deeds? [They are] those whose effort is lost in worldly life, while they think that they are doing well in work. Those are the ones who disbelieve in the verses of their Lord and in [their] meeting Him, so their deeds have become worthless; and We will not assign to them on the Day of Resurrection any importance. (18:103-105)

This is general in meaning and applies to anyone who worships Allah in a way that is not pleasing to Him, thinking that he has got it right and that his deeds are acceptable, when in fact he has got it wrong and his deeds are rejected.

Ibn Katheer said: "**Those whose effort is lost in worldly life** means that they did invalid deeds that were not in accordance with the Shari’ah, and were neither prescribed by Allah nor acceptable to Him, while they thought they were acquiring good by their deeds."

The stress response begins in the brain with perception of danger, real or imagined. The latest findings say that when people feel emotional pain, the same areas of the brain get activated as when

people feel physical pain. Pain, of course, is always both a physical and an emotional experience. If someone stubs his toe, in addition to the physical pain, he is likely to be also angry or disappointed with himself or with someone else who is convenient to blame. Emotional pain doesn't just hurt psychologically; it hurts in the body. It's not "just in his head," although the brain happens to be located in the head.

So, let us give an appropriate answer to counter it. The deen has a basic principle: '*laa dharara walaa dhiraar*' meaning, let there be no harm and no harming in reciprocation. We should be vigilant not to give emotional pain to anyone. But if we are at the receiving end we must try to communicate and solve problems. If we cannot, then we have to bear it in acceptance as a trial from Allah.

The most effective way to deal with stress Islamically is:

1. To challenge and bust it in our thinking. How do we challenge? It is possible in our minds to change the perception and our thinking on it so that situations are not seen to be as stressful in the first place. Ruminating on the past and reliving it is toxic. Negative thinking patterns are never good. Our Creator has given guidelines that will break them.

2. To accept it when required. How do we accept? Not expecting ease in this life and knowing that trials and difficulties are part of it wins half the battle. Suffering and pain, distress, tension and anxiety all are going to happen. Accepting that they are from our Rabb is de-stressing. Worry is appropriate only as long as it works to solve an issue. Positive stress motivates us, so now let us make the negative work for us too by accepting it as part of life.

The following ayahs will help us do the above:

- *We have certainly created man into hardship.* 90:4.
- *Indeed, mankind was created anxious. When evil touches him, impatient, and when good touches him, withholding [of it], except the observers of prayer - those who are constant in their prayer.* 70:19
- *Originator of the heavens and the earth. When He decrees a matter, He only says to it, "Be," and it is.* 2:117
- *O you who have believed, seek help through patience and prayer. Indeed, Allah is with the patient.* 2:153
- *Indeed, Allah is with those who fear Him and those who are doers of good.* 16:128
- *Those who have believed and whose hearts are assured by the remembrance of Allah. Unquestionably, by the remembrance of Allah are hearts assured."* 13:28.
- *And We will surely test you with something of fear and hunger and a loss of wealth and lives and fruits, but give good tidings to the patient, who, when disaster strikes them, say, "Indeed we belong to Allah, and indeed to Him we will return." Those are the ones upon whom are blessings from their Lord and mercy.* 2:155-157.
- *And He gave you from all you asked of Him. And if you should count the favours of Allah, you could not enumerate them. Indeed, mankind is [generally] most unjust and ungrateful.* 14:34

When his wife, Khadijah and his uncle, Abu Talib passed away in the same year, the Prophet was greatly distressed. Distress, grief and sadness is natural. What is not right from a believer's position, however, is despair. That speaks of lacking knowledge of Allah and of His exalted nature.

Some of the Prophet's du'aas further clarify the subject and give us direction to bust our stress: The fact that these du'aas were taught is evidence that they are needed by us.

O Allah, I seek refuge in you from grief and from sadness, from weakness and from laziness, from miserliness and from cowardice, from being overcome by debt and being overpowered by men. (Al Bukhari)

O Allah, I hope for Your mercy, so leave me not to myself for even the wink of an eye. And amend for me all of my affairs. There is no god but You. (Abu Dawud)

Challenging our negative thoughts

Abu Hurayrah reported that the Prophet (ﷺ) said, *"Keep asking Allah and do not cease. If anything befalls you, do not say, 'If only I had done such and such.' Rather say, 'The decree of Allah and what He willed has happened.' For saying 'if only' opens the door for Satan."* (Muslim)

This hadith provides great relief from dwelling in the past and undue worry about the future.

And there is relief when we know that other people's bad behaviour toward us only gives us reward. We are not harmed in any way, and it is not our job to judge. It is Allah who judges people's affairs.

Sufficient for us is Allah and He is the best Disposer of affairs. 3:173

And the Qur'an cites the example of a believing man who advised his people and then said:

I entrust my affair to Allah. Indeed, Allah is Seeing of [His] servants. 40:44

Allah's care is always with us. We are often reminded in the Qur'an to work on our connection with Him. Ibn 'Abbas reported: "One day I was [mounted] behind the Prophet (ﷺ), and he said to me, *'Young man, I will teach you words [of advice]: Keep Allah in mind – He will keep you from harm. Keep Allah in mind – you will find Him before you. When you ask, ask Allah; and when you seek help, seek it from Allah. Know that even if the [whole] nation assembled in order to benefit you with something, it could not benefit you except by something Allah had already decreed for you; and if they assembled in order to harm you with something, they could not harm you except with something Allah had already decreed upon you. The pens have been lifted, and the pages have dried.'*" (At-Tirmidhi)

Whatever befalls us is Decree. Acceptance of it is according to proper knowledge and implementation of it. What we are sometimes unable to comprehend is the wisdom of Allah's ways. The only stress believers need to feel is yearning for a good end and to be covered by His mercy at the time of Reckoning.

What is stress? It is mental or emotional strain resulting from difficult circumstances. It brings about predictable biochemical, physiological and behavioural changes affecting metabolism, memory or the muscular system, to name a few.

After the initial verses of the Qur'an were sent down, the revelation paused and was thought to have ceased. The Prophet (ﷺ) was distressed and saddened by this and the disbelievers were taunting him. Surah adh-Dhuḥā was then revealed to remind and reassure him of the many favours Allah ta'ālā had bestowed upon him, and that he was cared for and not forgotten.

Did He not find you an orphan and give [you] refuge? And He found you lost and guided [you]. And He found you poor and made [you] self-sufficient. 93:6-8

Many lessons can be learnt from this surah. It helps in dealing with low feelings and does not let them develop into a full-blown depression. So we should try not to let this happen, but sometimes, though, it might happen. Then medical help should be sought. Depression is an illness like any physical illness needing treatment. Sometimes it is a side-effect of medications. Sudden onset should make you think of this probability.

There are measures that can help us along the path to recovery as advised by various experts in the field of wellbeing. They include: walking or light exercise, supplements such as B vitamins, which are

essential for cell metabolism and central nervous system maintenance, vitamin D if deficient, omega 3 supplements and the support of friends and family. Just as important are focused thinking, control of anger, having a positive attitude towards life, taking a break from the stressor, avoiding triggers and time-management. Accepting events beyond our control is a measure of faith, as well as reading a situation as important but not alarming.

The life of every individual has full potential for success, with sufficient opportunities. Each day and every step taken in that day, has to be based upon knowledge and its implementation. Then we are surely moving towards the acceptance and pleasure of Allah.

As the Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) disclosed, *"Whoever relieves a believer of a distress from the distresses of this world – Allah will relieve him of a distress from the distresses of the Day of Resurrection. And whoever facilitates [a matter] for one in financial difficulty – Allah will facilitate for him [matters] in this world and the Hereafter. And whoever covers [the fault of] a Muslim – Allah will cover his [faults] in this world and the Hereafter. Allah is in aid of [His] servant as long as the servant is in aid of his brother. And whoever follows a path seeking knowledge therein – Allah will facilitate for him a path to Paradise. No people assemble in one of the houses of Allah reciting the Book of Allah and studying it among themselves but that tranquility descends upon them, mercy envelops them, the angels surround them, and Allah mentions them among those with Him. And he whose deeds slow him down will not be accelerated by his lineage."* (Muslim)