

بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم

Tests from Allah

This world is a place of striving and struggle, stress and exhaustion, while the Hereafter is the place for compensation. Allah informed us the Qur'an that we will be tested in this life. And because life on earth is a test for every human being, we must expect to have problems, difficulties and hard times. He has said:

"Do the people think that they will be left to say, 'We believe' and they will not be tried?"

(Sūrah al-'Ankabūt : 2)

"We will surely test you with something of fear and hunger, loss of wealth, lives and fruits [of labor], but give glad tidings to the patient who, when disaster strikes them, say: 'We belong to Allah and to Him we will return.' Those are the ones upon whom are blessings from their Lord and mercy, and those are the rightly guided." (Sūrah al-Baqarah : 155-7)

And the Prophet (ﷺ) said: *"When Allah intends good for someone, He tries him with hardships."* (Al-Bukhāri)

Every one of us is being tested by Allah. He tests us all in many different ways. A Muslim may be tested by sickness, financial difficulty or disobedience from his children – the afflictions that can torment a person are innumerable. This is what the Prophet (ﷺ) meant when he said: *"No fatigue, illness, anxiety, sorrow, harm or sadness afflicts any Muslim, even to the extent of a thorn pricking him, without Allah wiping out his sins by it."* (Al-Bukhāri and Muslim)

All of these afflictions, when endured patiently by the believer, are a means of attaining Allah's forgiveness and His reward. They are like bitter medicine; you offer the medicine, despite its bitterness, to the one you love in order to benefit him. The Prophet (ﷺ) said: *"The greatest reward comes from the greatest trial. When Allah loves people He tests them, and whoever accepts it gains approval [from Allah], and whoever becomes angry earns His anger."* (At-Tirmidhi and Ibn Mājah – saheeh)

People are tested by the good things they have just as they are by the misfortunes that befall them.

We are tried with wealth as well as poverty. Will we hoard it or be generous? Will we use it for lawful purposes or waste it in sin? We are tested with health as well as sickness. How will we use our minds and bodies? We are tested with the guidance Allah has given us. Will we follow it or ignore it and follow the Shayṭān instead?

We can also be tested through others who experience suffering.

Their plight can be a test for those whom their lives affect, even for those who know about them. How will they be treated? Will they be helped, cared for, respected and given their rights? Allah has said:

"Every soul shall taste of death. And We will test you with evil and with good by way of trial.

And to Us is your return." (Sūrah al-Anbiyā' : 35).

How to view tests and trials

1. Accepting Allah's decree

Trials are decrees of Allah that have already come to pass. Nothing takes place except that Allah knew it and decreed it beforehand. Allah tells us:

“No disaster strikes upon the earth or among yourselves but that it is in a register before We bring it into being. Indeed, that is easy for Allah.” (Sūrah al-Ḥadīd: 22)

So we must recognize that whatever befalls us is not something random; it was predetermined for us before the creation of the heavens and the earth. The Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) said, *"For everything there is a reality, and a servant does not attain the reality of faith until he knows that whatever struck him could not have missed him and whatever missed him could not have struck him."* (Ahmad - saheeh)

When we believe in Allah's justice and wisdom we know that He does not decree except what is good. Difficulties and disasters become easier to bear with the knowledge that they are decreed for us as opportunities to earn great rewards. The Qur'an instructs:

“Say: ‘Nothing will happen to us except what Allah has decreed for us.’” (Sūrah at-Tawbah: 51)

It does not say "decreed upon us" or "against us." Allah's decree is for us – for our benefit.

So we should not assume that the difficulties that we face in life are punishments or signs that Allah is angry with us. And we should not necessarily interpret the success and pleasure that some people enjoy on earth as a sign Allah is pleased with them. Possibly, the opposite could be true. For the believer, distress in this life is better than a punishment stored for the Hereafter, which is far more severe, and many of his sins are erased thereby. The Prophet (ﷺ) said: *"When Allah intends good for a servant, He hastens punishment for him in this world, but when He wills ill for a servant, he lets his sins accumulate and will punish him fully on the Day of Resurrection."* (At-Tirmidhi - saheeh)

If suffering had no benefit, Allah would have spared those He loved most, and the prophets and messengers were the most beloved of creation to Allah. Yet they were the most severely tested of mankind and suffered the most hardships. Why? It was because Allah loved them and had stored for them an unlimited reward which they will enjoy in Paradise. He decreed that calamities should befall them in order for them to earn that high status.

When asked which of the people are most severely tried, Allah's Messenger (ﷺ) answered, *"The prophets, then the righteous, then those following them in degree. A man is tried according to his religion. So if there is firmness in his religion, his trial is increased; but if there is weakness in his religion, it is lightened. Indeed, tribulations remain with the servant until he walks upon the earth having no sin left upon him."* (At-Tirmidhi - saheeh)

2. Acknowledging Allah's right of ownership

“Know that your properties and your children are but a trial, and Allah has with Him a great reward.”

(Sūrah al-Anfāl : 28)

When one admits the unconditional right of Allah to do as He pleases with His creation, trusting in the ultimate good of His decrees, he will continually be prepared for the possibility of examination through painful experiences. After all, it is He who has given everything we possess, and He is the true owner of it all. So all that we have – our wealth and property, our homes, our children and family, our bodies and minds, our abilities, our time, our own souls – all belong to Allah.

And since He is the true owner of everything, and everything is His property, He makes it available to whom He wills for a specific period according to His wisdom. So He may give you something to test you and then take it back to test you. Money, position, health, a child, a dear friend, security and peace of mind are all blessings on loan from Allah. He has the right to take them back; in fact He has the right to take any of us at any time, for we belong to Him. In the words of the Qur'an:

“He cannot be questioned for what He does but they will be questioned.” (Sūrah al-Anbiyā': 23)

We should try not to object to the trials that Allah has decreed for us. Allah tests believers to make clear to them whether their professed faith is strong and sincere or weak and corruptible. Protesting against divine decree, anger against Allah, turning away from Him through neglect of prayer and other duties, or outright denial of Him are signs of failure in one's test. Al-Hasan al-Basri advised, "Do not dislike the trials that afflict you or the calamities that strike you, for there may be something you hate but it leads to your salvation, and there may be something you like, but it leads to your destruction." And Allah said:

And perhaps you hate something while it is good for you, and perhaps you love something while it is bad for you. And Allah knows, and you know not. (Sūrah al-Baqarah : 216)

3. Acknowledging Allah's absolute wisdom, justice and mercy

When one believes that Allah is more wise than himself, more just, and more merciful towards His creation, he submits to Him and accepts His will, knowing that the Creator, Lord and Sovereign of the universe is perfect in every way. We may not understand the wisdom behind Allah's decrees but we must know that Allah does everything in accordance with His absolute knowledge and wisdom. Ibn Taymiyyah said: "The fact that we may not understand the wisdom behind certain decrees and issues should not undermine the basic principle of what we know about His wisdom. And we should not deny what we know of His wisdom because we do not know all the details of His wisdom."

Man has been created with limitations and imperfections. One aspect of his shortsightedness is that he focuses on adversities without considering the benefits they may bring or remembering the countless blessings he enjoys and observes around him. Indeed, one appreciates his own condition more when comparing it with others whose afflictions are greater than his and realizing that the blessings retained after a loss are still far greater than those of which one was deprived. For Allah has blessed man in immeasurable ways that cannot compare to the limited misfortunes that befall him. When a person is known for much good work but fails occasionally, forgetting the good he has done would be regarded as ingratitude. So what should be thought of Allah, whose dealings with His creation are always good and beneficial?

What to do

1. Think about how to cope in the situation that Allah has placed you

First of all, we should not despair. We have the ability to endure because the Qur'ān has told us:

"Allah charges no soul except [with that] within its capacity." (Sūrah al-Baqarah : 286)

There are generally two kinds of trials:

a) Those where the misfortune is not seen to be anyone's fault, but merely something decreed by Allah, such as natural disasters, illnesses and accidents. These may cause prolonged sorrow and grief but are readily accepted by a believer as the will of Allah. The Prophet (ﷺ) taught us to say in such situations, *"Mā qaddar Allahu wa mā shā fa'al"* (What Allah decreed and willed He has done). And when circumstances are not as one would like, he should say, *"Al-ḥamdu lillaahi 'alā kulli ḥāl"* (Praise is due to Allah in all conditions). (Ibn Mājah - hasan)

b) Those also decreed by Allah, but where human beings are seen to be the immediate cause. While ordinary people tend to hold others responsible for their misfortunes, sensitive believers sometimes go to extremes in blaming themselves. But the Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) said, *"When something befalls you, do not say, 'If only I had done so and so, then such and such would have happened,' but say, 'What Allah decreed and willed He has done.' For 'if only' (لو) opens the door for Shayṭān."* (Muslim)

2. Consider possible action

Accepting a misfortune doesn't mean that nothing can be done. Islam expects action and effort to change every undesirable situation whenever possible, and this is a requirement of the faith. However, when faced with harm we often have a natural impulse to repel it any way we can, which might lead to transgression against others. Shayṭān is always prepared to take advantage of a person's weakness during times of anger or despair to push him into committing sin and losing his reward. That is why stressful circumstances require self control, balanced thinking and recognition that it is not possible to rid the world of all its evil and injustice. Trials decreed by Allah have to be confronted only in ways that are sanctioned by the Shari'ah. Allah has said:

"And let not the hatred of a people prevent you from being just." (Sūrah al-Mā'idah : 8)

All lawful efforts to improve a situation will be rewarded by Allah whether they succeed or not. We are judged by the effort and not the result. A prophet will not be held accountable for those of his people who rejected his message. Someone who did his best to save a life will not be blamed by Allah if he failed; rather he will be rewarded for trying. So if you could not prevent the disaster, perhaps you can lessen its bad effects, help someone, comfort someone, control your own reaction – and earn reward. Nothing is overlooked by Allah.

Unfortunately, it is no longer so easy to find wise family members or experienced friends to consult during personal problems or family crises, so ultimately we must turn to Allah. And He has instructed the believers that when some matter worries them or a calamity befalls them to seek help from Him through patience and prayer. (استعينوا بالصبر والصلاة) At a time determined by Him, He will relieve distress, provide a solution and give unlimited rewards in the Hereafter for whatever was endured.

3. Repent and return to Allah

The calamities and disasters of this world offer a reminder to repent before the greater punishment comes on the Last Day. Allah motivates people to turn back to Him, saying:

“And We will surely let them taste the nearer punishment less than the greater punishment that perhaps they will return.” (Sūrah as-Sajdah : 21)

Many people have been slaves to their own desires rather than to Allah. They thought they were servants of Allah, but when they were tested they failed the test. The Qur'an describes them, saying:

“And of the people is one who worships Allah on an edge [of uncertainty]. If he is touched by good, he is reassured by it; but if he is struck by trial, he turns on his face [to the other direction].”
(Sūrah al-Ḥajj : 11)

Anger at Allah and turning away from Him by neglect of prayer and other duties are signs of failure. But if you have failed before, you can still repent, turn back to your Lord sincerely and pass this test with Allah's help. In a practical sense, adversities and calamities will show you your true nature. You will realize that you are weak and have no power and no ability except through your Lord. Then you will know you are in need of Him, give up your pride, turn back to Him and seek His help.

4. Be constant in du‘aa’

Combined with other efforts, du‘aa’ is one of the most beneficial means by which relief can be attained. It can lessen calamities, ward them off or prevent greater ones. The Prophet (ﷺ) said: *“Nothing can avert divine decree except du‘aa’.”* (Ahmad and at-Tirmidhi - hasan) He meant that when a person avails himself of the prescribed means and calls upon Allah in du‘aa’, this is also part of the divine decree, so one decree is repelled by another when Allah wills it. The same applies to everything that is decreed to happen through some means or cause. Allah has made this particular tool or method the cause for a thing to happen, and it was decreed from eternity, before it happened. The du‘aa’ you make by your own will was decreed by Allah and the result granted by Him was decreed by means of that du‘aa’.

Allah is merciful and generous, so we should never assume that we are not righteous enough to earn a response from Him. If we are not so righteous, it is sufficient that we are helpless, distressed and fearful, knowing that no one can help us at this time except Allah. Then we will be close to Him, because at such moments we are most sincere and humble.

“Is [it not He] who responds to the desperate one when he calls upon Him and removes evil and makes you inheritors of the earth?” (Sūrah an-Naml : 62)

For du‘aa’ to be most effective, it should be done with presence of heart and concentration, along with admission of sins and repentance. One should beg Allah repeatedly, particularly when alone in the last portion of the night, during sujūd in prayer and at times of anxiety, grief or deep distress. The Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) said, *“One of you will be answered as long as he is not impatient, saying, ‘I supplicated but was not answered.’”* Ibn al-Qayyim commented: *“So a person should not give up du‘aa’ prematurely, thinking the response is slow in coming; for then he is like one who plants a seed or a twig and begins to care for it and water it, but when he finds it to be slow in growing, discontinues and abandons it.”* So continue persistently and patiently in du‘aa’ and don't give up.

Ibn al-Jawzi said, "Part of the trial is when a believer supplicates and repeats his du'aa' for a long time and sees no sign of response. He should realize that this, too, is a test which requires patience. I experienced this myself. My soul (nafs) said to me, 'How can you explain Allah withholding His response to your prayers for relief from this calamity?'"

I said [answering himself as if addressing a student], 'It is evident that Allah (ﷻ) is the Sovereign, and the Sovereign may withhold or grant as He wills, so there is no point in objecting. I may think that something is good, but wisdom does not prescribe it, and the reason for that may be hidden; just as a doctor may do things that appear to be harmful, intending something good thereby. Or there might be some advantage in the delay, and haste could be harmful. Or the response could be withheld because of some fault in you. So look for some of these reasons.'

And perhaps losing what you wanted will cause you to turn to Allah while getting it would distract you from Him. This is obvious, because if not for this calamity you would not have turned to Him. The real calamity is what distracts you from Allah, but what makes you turn to Him is good for you and in your best interest. And if you considered these things you would focus on what is more beneficial for you, such as correcting a mistake or seeking forgiveness or turning to Allah and invoking Him, instead of on what you have suffered."

When you can't change the situation or do anything more

1. *Get out of the driver's seat and leave the matter to Allah. Trust Him.*

Trust that you are close to Allah during this period, that your du'aa' is being heard, and that He is supporting you. Trust that there is benefit in the matter according to the perfect knowledge of Allah. Perhaps the trial is an expiation for sins, and it could have been worse. And there may be some worldly benefits, such as the strengthening of character or a lesson learned. Remember Allah's words:

No disaster strikes except by permission of Allāh. And whoever believes in Allāh – He will guide his heart. And Allāh is Knowing of all things." (Sūrah at-Taghābun : 11)

Afflictions are easier to bear with the knowledge that no matter how difficult, they are decreed for believers to develop reliance on Allah and to earn His approval as well as a reward infinitely greater than the adversity. Think of yourself in the Hereafter receiving so great a compensation as to make you forget everything you have suffered and endured.

The Prophet (ﷺ) mentioned in a hadith narrated by Muslim that one who had suffered most in the world among the people destined for Paradise will be brought and dipped just once into Paradise. He will then be asked, "O son of Adam, did you ever experience any misery or any hardship?" He will say, "No, by Allah, my Lord, I never experienced any misery or hardship at all."

Remember how Allah's Messenger (ﷺ) endured hardship throughout his life. He was born an orphan and lost his mother and grandfather in childhood. The initial experience of revelation was terrifying for him and the burden of prophethood was exhausting. His people were hostile towards him, and some of his closest relatives rejected him. Some slandered him, others persecuted him. He was subjected to a harsh boycott, the tribes gathered to kill him and was compelled to leave his home. His wife, Khadijah, and Abu Tālib, the uncle who had protected him, died at the most difficult time. He would go for a month or two eating only dates and water. In Madinah he was burdened with the welfare and problems of his followers,

the affairs of an emerging state, the plots of the hypocrites and the defense and security of the Muslim Ummah, never enjoying a day of rest. And he was the chosen Messenger of Allah.

It is makrūh (disliked) to wish for death because of harm that one has suffered or the hardships of this life. The Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) said, *"None of you should wish for death because of some harm that has befallen him, but if he must, then let him say, 'O Allah, keep me alive so long as life is best for me and cause me to die when death is best for me.'"* (Al-Bukhari and Muslim) Despite suffering in this world, a believer must continue to fulfill his duties to Allah and do as much good as possible in obedience to His words:

"And worship your Lord until there comes to you the certainty [i.e. death]" (Sūrah al-Hijr : 99)

2. Practice patience

Patience is undoubtedly one of the most difficult forms of worship, but that is why it earns unlimited reward in the eternal life to come. Allah has said:

"Indeed, the patient will be given their reward without account." (Sūrah az-Zumar : 10)

Dealing with wrongdoers is a challenge to be met with strength of character and good morals. Expect that there will always be people who will disappoint you, hurt you and sin against you – even those you love. Try to be tolerant and forgive their mistakes. When you cannot prevent their major sins, continue to pray for their guidance and leave them to Allah. In the Qur'an, Allah told us:

**"And We have made some of you as trial for others – will you be patient?
And your Lord is ever Seeing."** (Sūrah al-Furqān : 20)

The Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) said, *"No servant is struck by affliction and then says, 'We belong to Allah and to Him we will return. O Allah, reward me in my affliction and follow it up with something better for me,' (Innā lillāhi wa innā ilayhi rāji'ūn. Allāhumma'jurnī fī musībatī wakhluḥ lī khayran minhā) without Allah rewarding him in his affliction and following it with something better for him."* (Ahmad and Muslim)

3. Remember

- The life of this world fluctuates between periods of relative ease and difficulty. We must constantly deal with trials and misfortunes throughout life by practicing patience, determination, courage, exertion, proper behavior and reliance upon Allah.
- Try to remember and value the many blessings you still have in spite of your affliction. There are always countless reasons to be grateful to Allah, and there are many people whose hardships are greater. The Prophet (ﷺ) said, *"Look at those with less than you and do not look at those with more than you, for this makes you less likely to underestimate Allah's blessings upon you."* (Muslim)
- You have been chosen by Allah for this particular test because He knows you have the ability to pass it.
- How can you long for Paradise unless you taste the bitterness of this life and the hardships of this world? It is only there that believers will find relief from harm, pain, hostility and discomfort and have an eternal life of ease and pleasure.

"And therein is whatever the souls desire and [what] delights the eyes." (Sūrah az-Zukhruf : 71)