

BENEFICIAL MEANS TO A HAPPY LIFE

Abridged from a treatise by Shaykh 'Abdurrahmān bin Nāṣir as-Sa'di

A happy life is undoubtedly the primary object of every human being, although people differ over what constitutes happiness. Some assume it is found in accumulating wealth, others in having good health, security and stability, others in the enjoyment of a spacious dwelling, good food and a pleasing spouse, others in obtaining lawful provision and beneficial knowledge and others in true faith and the performance of good deeds. In reality, all of the aforementioned contribute to happiness, which is of two types: the temporary worldly happiness that is limited to a person's lifespan and the eternal everlasting happiness of the Hereafter. It is no secret that happiness in this life is gained when one exerts himself toward the Hereafter, and that the complete happiness of this world and the next is reserved for believers who work for the acceptance of Allah, as He confirmed in the Qur'an. In this treatise I shall mention some of the ways to happiness, and the assistance of Allah is sought for all that is good and for the avoidance of all that is evil.

Peace of mind, contentment and the elimination of anxiety and distress is something sought by everyone, for this is what comprises a good life and produces pleasure and happiness. Toward such an end people apply various means of both a physical and mental nature. The best use of those means is made by believers, while others, although they might realize some of their desires, inevitably miss out on the better and more lasting aspects. What follows is a summary of what contributes to a happy life.

1. The most basic and fundamental causes of happiness are faith and righteous deeds. Allah, the Exalted, declared in the Qur'an: **"Whoever does righteousness, whether male or female, while he is a believer – We will surely cause him to live a good life and We will surely give them their reward according to the best of what they used to do."** (16:97) This is a promise to those who combine faith and good works of a good life upon the earth and a good reward in this life as well as the eternal one to come. The reason is obvious, for believers with true faith who perform righteous deeds, who amend hearts and correct morals, who make good the life of this world and the Hereafter have principles with which they meet all occasions of anxiety, distress and grief as well as those of pleasure and joy.

They accept what is liked and pleasing with gratitude, using it in a beneficial way, and it brings them joy, blessing and reward – fruits that far surpass the initial pleasure of possession or attainment. And they encounter what is dreaded and disliked by opposing it and reducing its harm as far as possible, and with patience in the face of whatever is inevitable. Thus, they gain strength and valuable experience, while the expectation of reward obliterates much of the affliction and replaces it with hope and optimism.

All this was summarized by the Prophet (ﷺ), who said, *"Amazing is the affair of the believer, for all of it is good. If he is touched by something pleasing, he is grateful and that is good for him, and if he is touched by adversity, he is patient and that is good for him. And that is for none but the believer."* (Muslim) So the Prophet (ﷺ) informed his ummah that the believer reaps the fruit of his deeds in every situation and the consequence is always good.

Sometimes one finds two people exposed to benefits or harm whose reactions are very different. But this is due to the difference in their faith and righteousness. One meets his experiences with gratitude or patience and thus obtains contentment and the removal of worry, anxiety and depression. The other receives his blessings from Allah with greed, tyranny and arrogance, so his morals are corrupted. He seizes those favors ravenously like an animal, yet his heart is not at rest. He fears that what he has will be lost or taken from him. He craves more and is never satisfied. He meets afflictions with distress, panic or anger, causing his life to become miserable and infected with tension and nervousness, perhaps to the extreme of illness, because he expects no compensation and so has no patience to sustain him.

All of this is confirmed by experience. A single comparison in actual life is sufficient to show the great difference between a believer acting in conformity with his belief and someone else. This is because religion places great emphasis on acceptance of whatever Allah has provided and of what He has given to others of various favors and abilities.

So the believer, when tried through illness or poverty or any other affliction will be serene due to his faith and conviction that this is what Allah decreed for him. His heart will not covet what others have and what he cannot obtain lawfully. He will look only at those with less than himself and not at those with more. He may even be happier than someone who has everything in this world but yet is not content. In contrast, one who does not act according to faith will be extremely unhappy and miserable when tried with adversity.

In addition, the true believer will be found in times of fear and hardship with a staunch heart, self-assured, effective in planning and in dealing with whatever has come upon him, whether by thought, speech or action. He stands firm in the face of the problem, while the one without faith behaves in the opposite manner and his inner reserve is shaken.

It is true that both the righteous and the wicked, the believer and non-believer can attain a level of confidence and bravery through training. However, the believer, distinguished by strong faith and trust in Allah, is superior in this respect. As Allah said in the Qur'an: **"If you should be suffering so are they suffering as you are suffering but you expect from Allah that which they do not expect."** (4:104) They obtain aid and support from Allah which dissipates fear, as He said, **"And show patience; indeed Allah is with the patient."** (8:46)

2. Among the means of removing worry and anxiety is kindness to people and concern for them. This is true for both the religious and non-religious person, although the believer reaps greater benefits. For his efforts spring from sincerity and seeking approval from Allah; therefore Allah makes it easier for him. And He informs him that he will gain far more than what he spent of time, effort or wealth: **"No good is there in much of their private conversation except for those who enjoin charity or that which is right or conciliation between people. And whoever does that seeking the approval of Allah - then We are going to give him a great reward."** (4:114) So goodness brings good and repels evil, and among the rewards obtained by the believer is the removal of annoyance and worry.

3. And among the means of averting tension, anxiety and preoccupation with trivialities is to busy oneself with work or obtaining knowledge. Not only will it serve to divert the mind from one's troubles but will bring him pleasure and increase his energy and enthusiasm. This, too, is true for all people, but the believer, again, has an advantage. For he, the believer, intends to make his effort acceptable to Allah, so it becomes worship and is rewarded. One should seek a type of work or study that is pleasing to him, for this is more likely to induce the desired result.

4. Another method is to concentrate one's thoughts on the important things of the present day and not worry about the future or grieve over the past. The Prophet (ﷺ) used to seek refuge in Allah from worry and grief, as related in hadiths by al-Bukhari and Muslim. A person should do his best in fulfilling the obligations of each day as it comes, and this will enable him to complete his tasks and not postpone them until they become a burden. When the Prophet (ﷺ) supplicated or directed his ummah to do so, seeking the aid and blessing of Allah, he also encouraged the exertion of serious effort toward obtaining that requested from Him. Supplication and hard work go hand in hand. The servant of Allah must exert the utmost effort for all that benefits him in this world and the next while asking his Lord to grant him success in accomplishing what he desires. Allah's Messenger (ﷺ) said, *"Strive for what benefits you, seek the support of Allah and do not give up. If something afflicts you, do not say, 'If only I did such and such', but say, 'Whatever Allah decreed and willed He has done', for 'if' begins the work of Satan."* (Muslim) Here, the Prophet (ﷺ) mentioned two separate issues: That which a person may affect completely or partially through effort and supplication and that which is out of his hands and beyond his control. Undoubtedly, acceptance of the latter as Allah's will calms and reassures the soul.

5. Among the greatest causes of contentment and reassurance is the continual remembrance of Allah, who said, **"Surely, by remembrance of Allah are hearts assured."** (13:28) The effect is powerful for those particular servants who know there is reward in remembering and invoking their Lord.

Additionally, mentioning Allah's countless favors, both the obvious and the obscure, reduces anxiety and depression and encourages gratitude even though a person might be undergoing trials and difficulties.

For when he compares the innumerable blessings he has with his affliction, he will realize that it is of small proportion. In fact, when a servant of Allah is afflicted and practices patience, acceptance and submission, the burden is lightened and the bitterness of endurance is replaced by the sweetness of anticipating his reward.

The Prophet (ﷺ) instructed, *"Look to those below you and do not look to those above you, for this makes you less likely to underestimate Allah's favors upon you."* (Al-Bukhari and Muslim) When one puts this into practice he will find that he is much better off than many – financially, health wise and in numerous other ways – and he will find satisfaction and become thankful. The more one contemplates the apparent and unapparent blessings Allah has bestowed upon him, the more he realizes what might have befallen him of pain and suffering if not for Allah's mercy, and the more he appreciates his own condition.

6. It is also important to work at eliminating causes of distress and to apply causes of happiness. This is done by a conscious effort to forget past misfortunes and injustices that cannot be remedied, for dwelling upon such things is not only useless but harmful. Instead, one should oppose this tendency in himself as well as the impulse to worry about the future. His dependence upon Allah, rather than on His servants, and trust in Him will bring him peace of mind and heart.

An aid to this are supplications of Allah's Messenger (ﷺ) such as: *"O Allah, amend for me my religion which is the guardian of my affairs and amend for me my worldly life wherein is my sustenance; make good my Hereafter to which is my return, and make life for me an increase in all that is good and death a relief from all that is evil..."* (Muslim) He (ﷺ) would also say, *"O Allah, I hope for Your mercy so do not leave me to myself as long as the glance of an eye, and amend for me all my affairs. There is no god but You."* (Abu Dawud - saheeh) When a servant supplicates to Allah for the good of his future with a conscious heart and pure intention, doing his best to accomplish it as well, Allah will help him to realize what he sought, hoped and worked for and will give him contentment.

And for the removal of anxiety and sadness the Prophet (ﷺ) taught his companions to say: *"O Allah, I am Your servant, the son of Your servant and of Your maidservant. My forelock is in Your hand. Your decision is carried out in me; Your decree is just concerning me. I ask You, O Allah, by every name of Yours that You have named Yourself or revealed in Your Book or taught to any of Your creation or kept to Yourself in Your knowledge of the unseen to make the Qur'an the restoration of my heart, the enlightenment of my breast, the removal of my sadness and the elimination of my anxiety."* (Ahmad - saheeh)

7. When confronting misfortunes and catastrophes one can lighten their effect by preparing himself for the worst possible outcome while doing everything in his ability to counteract whatever he can of the calamity. His efforts and supplication will surely produce benefit of some kind and lessen his anxiety, and at the same time he will not be surprised or shocked if the result is less than he had hoped. Thus, he will meet afflictions not as a victim but with resolve, self-assurance and the strength to make the best of any situation, trusting in the support of Allah throughout the ordeal and in His reward in the life to come. The success of this method has been observed repeatedly in real life occurrences.

8. One of the best treatments for nervous disorders and even physical disorders is to strengthen the heart against falling prey to imagination and assumption, for this generates bad thoughts, anger, fear or obsession. A person who succumbs to such emotions often develops mental or physical illness and can easily be led by Satan into sinful behavior.

Reliance upon Allah and remembrance of Him averts much of what might enter the mind of suspicions and doubts. The healthy person is one who is always in a state of jihad against his own weaknesses, and so Allah gives him strength and health. The Qur'an states: **"And whoever relies upon Allah, then He is sufficient for him."** (65:3) This means that Allah will take care of all his concerns in both religious and worldly matters. Therefore, one who trusts in Allah and believes His promise cannot succumb to fear or dwell upon uncertainties. Rather, his heart becomes strong and steadfast.

9. There is a hadith from which two benefits may be drawn. Allah's Messenger (ﷺ) said, *"A believer should not hate a female believer. If he dislikes something in her he will be pleased with something else."* (Muslim)

The first benefit is guidance for dealing with one's wife, relative, employee and in fact, anyone with whom he has a relationship. It teaches that one should expect to see in another some imperfection or trait he may not like. So when he discovers this he must remember the good qualities as well, and all the general and specific benefits of the relationship. When he compares the fault to the many benefits and recalls that it is his duty to preserve this relationship through patience and forgiveness he will find peace and acceptance.

The second benefit is in the refinement of one's character, the observance of right, fulfillment of obligations and the maintenance of good feelings between the two parties. Anyone who fails to implement the instruction of the Prophet (ﷺ) in this matter will surely notice negative results: tension, loss of affection and perhaps even animosity leading to heedlessness concerning the other's rights. Many energetic people are mentally well prepared for disasters and difficulties on a major scale and can encounter them with calm and forbearance. But smaller problems upset them and cause distress. Some allow their generally successful lives to be overshadowed by stress over unimportant matters. Therefore, one must be ready to accept even minor annoyances with patience and composure and request Allah's help in this as well.

10. When someone is troubled by apprehension of harm that could befall him or those he loves he can balance it by remembering the great possibility that it might not happen at all or be less than he anticipated and leave the decision to Allah. Living a crisis before it happens only doubles its pain, and Allah may choose to avert it in any case.

Further, one should know that when others talk or gossip about him it cannot hurt him unless he allows it to occupy his thoughts and emotions. In reality it harms them instead, lessening people's confidence in them and lessening the good deeds in their balance on the Day of Judgement. The state of one's mind and heart affects his life positively or negatively. When his thoughts produce benefit in his religion and his worldly affairs he will experience pleasure and well being. Otherwise, he will experience the opposite. Knowing that Allah is near and aware lightens every burden.

11. Bad feelings are avoided by the believer when he expects appreciation only from Allah. He will not be disappointed, sad or angry when people are ungrateful or unappreciative of his kindness or sacrifice for their benefit because he deals directly with Allah and awaits reward from Him alone. Hence, it matters not that the recipient of his good deed praises or thanks him. He becomes like those servants generous to the poor whose thoughts are expressed in the Qur'an: **"We feed you only for approval of Allah. We want from you neither reward nor gratitude."** (76:9) And this attitude is greatly helpful in regard to life with family members and close associates. For he who continually serves others and strives for their benefit can never get adequate compensation in this world, and to expect it only produces bitterness.

12. Keep your mind on beneficial matters and work to accomplish them. Do not be distracted by that which causes sorrow and anxiety but instead concentrate on the important issues of the present day. Once these have been dealt with you can face what follows with strength and optimism.

There are often several options, so choose what is most needed at the moment or most productive. And when undertaking voluntary good works select those for which you have an affinity so as not to become bored or frustrated. Seek help in sound thinking and the counsel of wise believers. Make a careful study of what you wish to accomplish. And when you have become certain of its benefit and decided on action, then rely upon Allah, for He loves those who rely upon Him.

And praise be to Allah, Lord of the worlds.