

Understanding Trials and Tribulations

A few days ago, I was listening to a podcast about death, from an Islamic perspective. The woman giving the podcast had recently lost her mother due to the corona-virus. In this intense moment of grief, this sister managed to make it an act of obedience, by not only putting her full trust in Allah (swt) with everything she faced but also turning her sorrow into a beneficial lesson for others to learn from.

How we give meaning to the difficulties we face in life will automatically influence how we deal with the trials and tribulations.

Within the Ummah there are many thoughts regarding why we face trials and tribulations. A very common thought is that we face difficulties because we are being punished for our sins or because Allah (swt) is somehow not pleased with us.

It is true that our sins will lead to harmful consequences whether in this life or the next. This is something we cannot deny as Allah (swt) says: ﴿وَمَا أَصَابَكُمْ مِّنْ مُّصِيبَةٍ فَبِمَا كَسَبَتْ أَيْدِيكُمْ وَيَعْفُو عَنْ كَثِيرٍ﴾ **“And whatever strikes you of disaster - it is for what your hands have earned; but He pardons much.”** [Quran 42:30]

But it is important for us to understand that this is only part of a very complex process on why we actually face difficulties in life. For there are many calamities and hardships we face which may not be a punishment for our sins. For Allah (swt) also says: ﴿وَلَنَبْلُوَنَّكُمْ بِشَيْءٍ مِّنَ الْخَوْفِ وَالْجُوعِ وَنَقْصٍ مِّنَ الْأَمْوَالِ وَالْأَنْفُسِ وَالثَّمَرَاتِ وَبَشِّرِ الصَّابِرِينَ﴾ **“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”** [2:155]

﴿لَتَبْلُوَنَّ فِي أَمْوَالِكُمْ وَأَنْفُسِكُمْ وَلَتَسْمَعَنَّ مِنَ الَّذِينَ أُوتُوا الْكِتَابَ مِن قَبْلِكُمْ وَمِنَ الَّذِينَ أَشْرَكُوا أَدْوَى كَثِيرًا وَإِن تَصْبِرُوا﴾ **“You will surely be tested in your possessions and in yourselves. And you will surely hear from those who were given the Scripture before you and from those who associate others with Allah much abuse. But if you are patient and fear Allah - indeed, that is of the matters [worthy] of determination.”** [3:186]

﴿وَلَقَدْ أَخَذْنَاهُم بِالْعَذَابِ فَمَا اسْتَعَاثُوا لِربِّهِمْ وَمَا يَتَضَرَّعُونَ﴾ **“And We had gripped them with suffering [as a warning], but they did not yield to their Lord, nor did they humbly supplicate, [and will continue thus]”** [23:76]

Through these verses, we understand that we experience trials and tribulations for many different reasons. They can be a means to test us and see whether we remain steadfast on His path. Or to see who of us will show patience and perseverance when faced with difficulties, or to distinguish between the believers and the hypocrites, or to see whether our faith will remain strong.

So importantly we will face trials and tribulations **as part of this worldly life**, not necessarily because of our sins. It can be because we are steadfast on His path and because He (swt) loves us like it was with the Prophets (as) who experienced many difficulties.

Mahmud ibn Labeed reported: The Messenger of Allah, peace and blessings be upon him, said: «إِذَا أَحَبَّ اللَّهُ قَوْمًا ابْتَلَاهُمْ فَمَنْ صَبَرَ فَلَهُ الصَّبْرُ وَمَنْ جَزِعَ فَلَهُ الْجَزَعُ» “If Allah loves a people, then he afflicts them with trials. Whoever is patient has the reward of patience, and whoever is impatient has the fault of impatience.” [Source: Musnad Ahmad 23122, Grade: **Sahih**]

Abu Huraira (ra) reported: The Messenger of Allah, peace and blessings be upon him, said: «يَقُولُ اللَّهُ تَعَالَى مَا لِعِبْدِي الْمُؤْمِنِ عِنْدِي جَزَاءٌ إِذَا قَبَضْتُ صَفِيَّهُ مِنْ أَهْلِ الدُّنْيَا ثُمَّ اخْتَسَبَهُ إِلَّا الْجَنَّةَ» “Allah the Exalted says: I have nothing to give to my faithful servant, if I cause his dear friend to die and he remains patient, other than Paradise.”

On top of this, what we might perceive as difficult or negative might actually be something good in disguise or vice versa. «وَعَسَى أَنْ تَكْرَهُوا شَيْئًا وَهُوَ خَيْرٌ لَكُمْ وَعَسَى أَنْ تُحِبُّوا شَيْئًا وَهُوَ شَرٌّ لَكُمْ وَاللَّهُ يَعْلَمُ وَأَنْتُمْ لَا تَعْلَمُونَ» “But perhaps you hate a thing and it is good for you; and perhaps you love a thing and it is bad for you. And Allah Knows, while you know not.” [2: 216]

Understanding this issue correctly is vital for it helps us place “worldly difficulties” in the right perspective. It helps us to invest our energy in understanding what Allah (swt) wants from us without becoming overwhelmed by what is happening.

So if we are living a life which is not pleasing to Allah, we need to invest our energy in changing this reality. This might be to change our personal behaviour e.g. personal *ibadat* (worship) in order to get closer to Allah (swt) or it might be to change our reality e.g. surroundings, company we keep, or the system we are living under in order that they become more corresponding to that which Allah revealed. Or it might be that we need to invest in changing all these realities.

And when we are doing our best to live a life which is pleasing to Allah a right perspective will provide us with positive concepts which will allow us to continue to invest our energy in pleasing Allah (swt). It will help us to continue on His path no matter what this will bring us, as we will understand that pleasing Allah (swt) is all that matters just like the sister I mentioned at the beginning, who managed to continue her dawah despite losing her mother.

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