

Tests and Afflictions: A Blessing in Disguise

The Messenger (saw) said, «مَنْ يُرِدِ اللَّهُ بِهِ خَيْرًا يُصِبْ مِنْهُ» **“If Allah intends good for someone then He afflicts him with trials.”** (Bukhari)

It can often be difficult to see loss, misfortune and affliction, including the current pandemic, in anything but a negative light. The pain we feel from the death of a loved one, the suffering we go through upon ill-health, the anxiety we experience during financial hardship, and the disappointment we feel when we are unable to achieve an important goal in our life can sometimes consume our attention and fill us with nothing but dark thoughts and emotions.

However, our Deen tells us that not only are such tests and tribulations inevitable in our life but are a source of blessing for us as Believers. Indeed, they are one of the Favours of Allah upon the Muslim. Allah (swt) says, وَلَنَبْلُوَنَّكُمْ بِشَيْءٍ مِنَ الْخَوْفِ وَالْجُوعِ وَنَقْصٍ مِنَ الْأَمْوَالِ وَالْأَنْفُسِ **«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. And it is those who are the [rightly] guided.»** [Al-Baqarah: 155-157]. Anas (ra) narrated that the Messenger of Allah (saw) said: «إِنَّ عِظَمَ الْجَزَاءِ مَعَ عِظَمِ الْبَلَاءِ وَإِنَّ اللَّهَ إِذَا أَحَبَّ قَوْمًا ابْتَلَاهُمْ فَمَنْ رَضِيَ فَلَهُ الرِّضَا وَمَنْ سَخَطَ فَلَهُ السَّخَطُ» **“Indeed greater reward comes with greater trial. And indeed, when Allah loves a people He subjects them to trials, so whoever is content, then for him is pleasure, and whoever is discontent, then for him is wrath.”** (Al-Tirmidhi). Abu Sa’id and Abu Hurayrah (ra) reported that the Prophet (saw) said: «مَا يُصِيبُ الْمُسْلِمَ مِنْ نَصَبٍ وَلَا وَصَبٍ وَلَا هَمٍّ وَلَا حُزْنٍ وَلَا أَذًى وَلَا غَمٍّ حَتَّى الشَّوْكَةِ يُشَاكُهَا إِلَّا كَفَّرَ اللَّهُ بِهَا مِنْ خَطَايَاهُ» **“Never is a believer stricken with a discomfort, an illness, an anxiety, a grief or mental worry or even the pricking of a thorn but Allah will expiate his sins on account of his patience.”** (Al-Bukhari and Muslim)

Hence, tests and tribulations are an opportunity to prove to our Rabb (swt) that we are true to our belief as Muslims by being patient and steadfast to our Deen in the face of whatever He (swt) has decreed upon us. In return, Allah (swt) promises us His Blessings, Mercy, Forgiveness and Rewards, and indeed, this is the true success in life, for He (swt) says: «فَمَنْ زُحِرَ عَنِ النَّارِ وَأُدْخِلَ الْجَنَّةَ فَقَدْ فَازَ وَمَا الْحَيَاةُ الدُّنْيَا إِلَّا مَتَاعُ الْغُرُورِ» **“Then whoever is drawn away from the Fire and admitted to Paradise then surely he is successful; for the life of this world is nothing but an illusory enjoyment.”** [Al-i Imran: 185]

Loss, misfortunes and afflictions therefore provide an opportunity for us to gain closeness to our Rabb (swt) and elevate our ranking in the Hereafter – achieving success in this life and the next. This is because they are a means of purification of our character, our thinking, our actions and our aspirations, away from any weaknesses and impurities that which may be at odds with our Deen, and towards that which is in obedience to the Commands of Allah (swt). In fact, the word for ‘tested’ in Surah Al-Ankabut, verse 3, is derived from the word ‘Fatana’ which has the same root as the process that gold goes through when it is being purified in a hot fire. The Iman is more precious than gold, and hence it also needs to go through heat and tests to remove impurities to make it pure, strong and worthy of Jannah. The great scholar Ibn al-Qayyim Al-Jawziyya (RH) stated: *“Were it not that Allaah treats His slaves with the remedy of trials and calamities, they would transgress and overstep the mark. When Allaah wills good for His slaves, He gives him the medicine of calamities and trials according to his situation, so as to cure him from all fatal illnesses and*

diseases, until He purifies and cleanses him, and then makes him qualified for the most honourable position in this world, which is that of being a true slave of Allaah ('uboodiyyah), and for the greatest reward in the Hereafter." Tests from Allah (swt) therefore offer a graduation process to rise to a higher level in this life and the Akhirah, if we respond to them in the correct manner.

To reap the true benefits of this purification process and achieve success in this world and the next, it requires for us as believers to use tests, including the current pandemic, as a means of sincere self-accounting, and re-evaluation and re-calibration of our lives. When we are afflicted by loss and misfortune, Allah (swt) tells us that we should say – *"Innah lillahi wa innah ilayhi rajeun"* – *"To Allah we belong and to Allah is our return"*. This statement should not simply be mere words we utter but it should make us **stop, think, reflect and change**. It should be a reminder of how weak and powerless we are as human beings compared to the greatness of our Rabb, and how needy we are of His support and guidance in every area of our life. It should be a reminder of how temporary the things of this world are – such as our wealth, jobs, family, children, our homes – and how they can be lost in a blink of an eye. We see with this pandemic, that even basic things we took for granted - such as leaving our homes, or meeting with friends and family – can be taken away overnight. And it should be a reminder that we do not belong in this world and that it is not our true home but rather ultimately our return is to Allah (swt) and our true home is Jannah.

All this should drive us to question our priorities in life – are they according to that which our Rabb has defined – such as striving for His Cause and establishing His System, the Khilafah (Caliphate) based upon the method of the Prophethood, upon this earth, or are our priorities pursuing the temporary dazzles of this world and allowing this to consume our time and attention? It should drive us to question whether we have given this world more weight than it deserves compared to the Hereafter, such that we fail in fulfilling our Islamic obligations due to the temptations of life or fear of losing our personal interests and ambitions. And it should drive us to question our relationship with Allah (swt) and whether we have prepared ourselves sufficiently to face Him (swt) and His Judgment upon us, as to whether we have fulfilled all His Commands and lived life according to His dictates – for without doubt, facing this judgement from our Rabb is our destiny? This re-evaluation of our life should lead to change in our thinking, priorities, character and actions, Insha Allah, so that they are in line with what our Deen expects from us, and to work to overcome any weaknesses in our qualities or adherence to the Orders of Allah which may hold us back from gaining the highest station in Jannah. Otherwise we have failed to grasp one of the true blessings and gifts that Allah (swt) provides us through His tests and tribulations: to gain true success in this life and the Hereafter.

The afflictions that befall us as individuals, or as an Ummah, including this coronavirus pandemic, should also motivate us to reflect on the political realities of the world that we live in, and to examine if these realities caused or exacerbated the crises and problems that we face which fuel our loss, hardships and misfortunes. For example, we witness today severe cracks in the health care systems of countries even in the world's largest economies; governments that have placed protecting economic interests over the health of their own people, even failing to ensure sufficient personal protective equipment for their medical and care workers; the fragility of the man-made financial models of nations; and the failure of regimes in the Muslim world to deal with the infection in a way which protects the wellbeing of the Ummah and the Deen – such as preserving the obligatory Jummah prayer. All this is the result of flawed capitalist, socialist and other man-made systems of governance which have failed to look after the needs of their people. Seeing all this, should surely inspire us with the need for change, and strengthen our resolve to create a better world for this Ummah and humankind, and consolidate our conviction in the urgent need for the Khilafah that will provide a leadership that genuinely cares for humanity, embraces sound principles and laws

to solve all problems we face, and that will protect the interests of Islam and the Ummah always.

For example, in the Qur'an, Allah (swt) tells the Muslims that the defeat and calamity that befell the Believers at the Battle of Uhud was because the archers on the hilltop disobeyed the orders of our Rasul (saw), and by default disobeyed the Command of Allah (swt) by abandoning their position due to their desire to gain the booty of the war, though they were told to stay firm to their post. Allah (swt) says regarding this battle: **وَلَقَدْ صَدَقَكُمُ اللَّهُ وَعْدَهُ إِذْ تَحُسُّونَهُمْ بِإِذْنِهِ حَتَّى إِذَا فَشِلْتُمْ وَتَنَازَعْتُمْ فِي الْأَمْرِ وَعَصَيْتُمْ مِمَّا بَعْدَ مَا أَرَاكُمْ مَا تُحِبُّونَ مِنْكُمْ مَنْ يُرِيدُ الدُّنْيَا وَمِنْكُمْ مَنْ يُرِيدُ الْآخِرَةَ ثُمَّ صَرَفَكُمْ عَنْهُمْ لِيَبْتَلِيَكُمْ** ***“And Allah had certainly fulfilled His promise to you when you were killing the enemy by His permission until [the time] when you lost courage and fell to disputing about the order [given by the Prophet] and disobeyed after He had shown you that which you love. Among you are some who desire this world, and among you are some who desire the Hereafter. Then he turned you back from them [defeated] that He might test you.”*** [Al-i Imran: 152] It was a heavy lesson they learnt that disobedience to the Order of Allah (swt) leads to failure and calamities in life.

Likewise, the disastrous manner by which states in the Muslim lands and beyond have managed this current crisis, failing to protect the health of their people adequately while also causing huge economic hardships upon them, and depriving them of the ability to fulfil important Islamic obligations – such as the Jummah prayer due to simply ‘copying and pasting’ the approach of Western states to this pandemic, should surely be an important lesson for us to learn about the consequences of disobedience to our Rabb, by abandoning the implementation of His System of Islam, the Khilafah, upon our lands.

Tests and afflictions are therefore an opportunity to learn lessons in life, to put things in our life in perspective, to re-evaluate if we are living according to what our Creator demands of us, and a chance to create real positive change within ourselves, our lands, and our world. Indeed, success in our personal lives as Muslims, success as an Ummah in this world, and success in the Akhirah can ONLY transpire through the full obedience to all the Laws of Allah (swt). The scholar Ibn Taymiyyah stated: *“A calamity that makes you turn to Allah is better than a blessing that makes you forget the remembrance of Allah.”*

In normal times, we are often absorbed in the routines of our daily lives – whether it's work, taking the children to and from school, social activities, attending college or university and other actions which consume our attention and time. However, this period of lockdown, where many of us have been confined to our homes, offers us the time to truly reflect upon our lives, our relationship with our spouses or family, our responsibilities to our children, and the state of our world. If we fail to optimize on this opportunity to make a real change within ourselves and strengthen our resolve to make a positive change to our lands and this world, then it is this which is the true loss and misfortune that will have befallen us. The scholar Ibn al-Qayyim (RH) said in Miftaah Dar al-Sa'adah: *“If you ponder Allaah's wisdom in that with which He tests His slaves and chosen ones, by means of which He directs them to achieve the highest goals and reach the highest positions, which they could not have achieved without these tests and trials... all these tests and trials are in fact a kind of honour, for while they appear to be trials and tests, in fact they are mercy and blessings. How many great blessings from Allaah are the direct consequences of tests and trials?”*

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