

Why We Suffer:

Islamic Perspectives on Hardship

Lesson 3



tasneeminstitute
ENRICHING THE SOUL

Awakening the Soul Through Suffering

وَمَا أَرْسَلْنَا فِي قَرْيَةٍ مِّن نَّبِيٍّ إِلَّا أَخَذْنَا أَهْلَهَا بِالْبَأْسَاءِ وَالضَّرَّاءِ لَعَلَّهُمْ يَضُرَّعُونَ

“And We did not send a prophet in a town but We overtook its people with misfortune and hardship in order that they might humble themselves.” Quran 7:94

- Sometimes hardship and misfortune are aimed at engendering within us a sense of humility.
- People will only accept the messages of prophets if their egos are deflated.

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ظَهَرَ الْفَسَادُ فِي الْبَرِّ وَالْبَحْرِ بِمَا كَسَبَتْ أَيْدِي النَّاسِ لِيُذِيقَهُمْ بَعْضَ الَّذِي عَمِلُوا لَعَلَّهُمْ يَرْجِعُونَ

“Corruption has appeared in the land and the sea on account of what the hands of men have earned, that He may make them taste a part of that which they have done, so that they may return.” Quran 30:41

- Again the verse ends with “so that they may return” to God.
- Human beings need to constantly be reminded of their vulnerabilities and weaknesses, otherwise they would be extreme in their rebelliousness

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وَلَنُذِيقَنَّهُمْ مِنَ الْعَذَابِ الْأَدْنَىٰ دُونَ الْعَذَابِ الْأَكْبَرِ لَعَلَّهُمْ يَرْجِعُونَ

“And most certainly We will make them taste of the lesser punishment before the greater punishment so that they may return.” Quran 32:21

- “The lesser punishment” is punishment in this world, which can come through illness, natural disaster, poverty etc.
- “The greater punishment” is punishment in the Hereafter.
- Being afflicted with the lesser punishment is a mercy of God as it might make people reflect and turn back to belief.

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وَلَقَدْ أَخَذْنَا آلَ فِرْعَوْنَ بِالسِّنِينَ وَنَقْصٍ مِّنَ الثَّمَرَاتِ لَعَلَّهُمْ يَذَّكَّرُونَ

“And We indeed afflicted the House of Pharaoh with drought and a shortage of crops, that they might be reminded.” Quran 7:130

- In verse 133 of the same surah, other plagues sent against Pharaoh and his people are mentioned.
- That “drought and a shortage of crops” were visited upon the people of Pharaoh during the time of Moses’ mission to them is consistent with other verses indicating that the adversity suffered by a people in connection with the coming of a prophet is meant to make them humble and to cause them to hearken to God’s message.

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- The famine and the drought were meant to be an admonition to Pharaoh and his people and to frighten them, so that they would repent and believe in God.
- Adversity in general may also have the effect of “softening the heart”.
- These verses highlight that God arranges matters so as to encourage belief, but then allows people to choose how they will react.

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- It is reported in Nahjulbalagha sermon 143 that Imam Ali (a) said:

إِنَّ اللَّهَ يَبْتَلِي عِبَادَهُ عِنْدَ الْأَعْمَالِ السَّيِّئَةِ بِنَقْصِ الثَّمَرَاتِ، وَحَبْسِ الْبَرَكَاتِ، وَإِغْلَاقِ خَزَائِنِ
الْخَيْرَاتِ، لِيَتُوبَ تَائِبٌ، وَيُقْلَعَ مُقْلَعٌ، وَيَتَذَكَّرَ مُتَذَكِّرٌ، وَيَزْدَجِرَ مُزْدَجِرٌ

“God certainly afflicts His servants [with hardship] when they sin by decreasing fruits, holding back blessings and closing the treasures of good, so that he who wishes to repent may repent, and he who wishes to turn away (from sin) may turn away, and he who wishes to remember may recall, and he who wishes to abstain (from evil) may abstain.”

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لا يمضي على المؤمن أربعون ليلة إلا عرض له أمر يحزنه يذكره ربه.

“Forty nights do not pass upon a believer unless he is presented with a matter that causes him to grieve and remember His Lord.”- Imam al-Sadiq (a)

Source: Bihar al-Anwar, v. 64, p. 242

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إن الله إذا أراد بعبد خيرا فأذنب ذنبا أتبعه بنقمة ويذكره الاستغفار، وإذا أراد بعبد شرا فأذنب
ذنبا أتبعه بنعمة لينسيه الاستغفار،

“Verily when God wishes good for a servant, he sins and is pursued by a calamity which reminds him to repent. And when God wishes evil for a servant, he sins and is pursued by a blessing so that he forgets to repent...” – Imam al-Sadiq (a)

Source: Al-Kafi, v.2, p. 452

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إذا رأيت الله سبحانه يتابع عليك البلاء فقد أيقظك، إذا رأيت الله سبحانه يتابع عليك النعم مع المعاصي فهو استدراج لك

“If you see God continuously afflicting you with calamities, He has awakened you. And if you see God continuously sending upon you blessings while you sin, He is leading you on [towards destruction] little by little.”- Imam Ali (a)

Source: Ghurar al-Hikam, tradition 4046

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لولا ثلاث في ابن آدم ما طأطأ رأسه شئ : المرض والفقر والموت، كلهم فيه وإنه معهن لو
ثاب.

“Were it not for three things that afflict a person, nothing would humble him: sickness, poverty and death...”- The Prophet (s)

Source: al-Khisal, p. 113

Spiritual Growth Through Suffering

- When the believers enter paradise, they are greeted by the angels:

سَلَامٌ عَلَيْكُمْ بِمَا صَبَرْتُمْ فَنِعْمَ عُقْبَى الدَّارِ

“Peace be upon you because of the patience you showed...” Quran

13:24

Spiritual Growth Through Suffering

- To enter paradise, you need to develop heavenly qualities.
- After all, paradise is the projection of the human soul.
- These noble traits are built through suffering
- Every incident that we experience in life, good or bad, is an opportunity for us to build certain traits in our souls; traits such as patience, courage, humility, courtesy etc

Spiritual Growth Through Suffering

- Suffering happens in two ways:
 - 1. Through the Sacred Law الشريعة
 - 2. Through interacting with souls that are less mature. These interactions present opportunities for us to choose humility or arrogance, patience or impatience, kindness or cruelty etc
- Islam wants us to live in the world because that is where the soul can develop. Spirituality cannot be achieved in absolute isolation.

Spiritual Growth Through Suffering

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا لَا تَدْخُلُوا بُيُوتَ النَّبِيِّ إِلَّا أَنْ يُؤْذَنَ لَكُمْ إِلَى طَعَامٍ غَيْرَ نَاطِرِينَ إِنَّا هُنَا وَلَكِنْ إِذَا دُعِيتُمْ فَادْخُلُوا فَإِذَا طَعِمْتُمْ فَانْتَشِرُوا وَلَا مُسْتَأْنِسِينَ لِحَدِيثٍ إِنَّ ذَلِكُمْ كَانَ يُؤْذِي النَّبِيَّ فَيَسْتَحْيِي مِنْكُمْ

“O you who have faith! Do not enter the Prophet’s houses unless permission is granted you for a meal, without waiting for it to be readied. But enter when you are invited, and disperse when you have taken your meal, without settling down to chat. Indeed such conduct torments the Prophet, and he is ashamed of (asking) you (to leave).”

Quran 33:53