

Why We Suffer: Islamic Perspectives on Hardship

Lesson 4



tasneeminstitute
ENRICHING THE SOUL

The Promise of Suffering

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 glad tidings to the patient.”

Quran 2:155

The Promise of Suffering

الَّذِينَ إِذَا أَصَابَتْهُمْ مُصِيبَةٌ قَالُوا إِنَّا لِلَّهِ وَإِنَّا إِلَيْهِ رَاجِعُونَ

“Who say, when afflicted with calamity: "To God We belong, and to Him is our return"- Quran 2:156

- The patient person is the one who has understood these two important realities:
 - 1. We belong to God- reference to God’s absolute ownership
 - 2. We will return to God- reference to the impermanence of earthly life

Rumi's Definition of Patience

“Patience is not sitting and waiting, it is foreseeing. It is looking at the thorn and seeing the rose, looking at the night and seeing the day. Lovers are patient and know that the moon needs time to become full.” - Rumi (d. 1273)

The Patience of the Believer

الكافي عن الوشاء عن بعض أصحابه عن الإمام الصادق عليه السلام: إِنَّا صَبْرٌ وَشِيعَتُنَا
أَصْبَرُ مِنَّا ، قُلْتُ : جُعِلْتُ فِدَاكَ ، كَيْفَ صَارَ شِيعَتُكُمْ أَصْبَرَ مِنْكُمْ ؟ قَالَ : لِأَنَّ نَصِيرُ عَلِيٍّ مَا
نَعْلَمُ ، وَشِيعَتُنَا يَصْبِرُونَ عَلَى مَا لَا يَعْلَمُونَ

“Wassha narrates from one of the companions of Imam al-Sadiq (a) that he said:, ‘Verily we are very patient and our Shia are even more patient than us.’ His companion asked, ‘May I be your ransom, how can your Shia be more patient than yourselves?’ He replied, ‘Because we are patient alongside our knowledge [of everything], whereas our Shia are patient in spite of not knowing

A Sign of Divine Love

عن أبي جعفر عليه السلام قال: إن الله تبارك وتعالى إذا أحب عبدا غته بالبلاء غتا وثجه بالبلاء ثجا فإذا دعاه قال: لبيك عبادي لئن عجلت لك ما سألت إني على ذلك لقادر ولئن ادخرت لك فما ادخرت لك فهو خير لك

“When God loves one of His servants, He showers calamities upon him and covers him with them. Then when the servant calls God [to remove them], God replies, ‘Here I am, My servant. I can give you what you ask for quickly, but if I save it for you it would be better for you.’”- Imam al-Baqir (a)

A Sign of Divine Love

إن لله عز و جل عبادا في الارض من خالص عباده ما ينزل من السماء تحفة إلى الارض إلا صرفها عنهم إلى غيرهم ولا بلية إلا صرفها إليهم.

“Truly God has some servants on the earth who are very pure and dedicated to Him. Nothing good comes from heaven to the earth except that God sends it away from them and no calamity comes except that God sends it to them.”- Imam al-Sadiq (a)

A Sign of Divine Love

عن عبد الله بن أبي يعفور قال: شكوت إلى أبي عبد الله عليه السلام ما ألقى من الأوجاع وكان مسقاما فقال: لي يا عبد الله لو يعلم المؤمن ما له من المصائب لتمنى أنه يقرض بالمقاريض طول عمره.

“If a believer knew what he will gain because of all the calamities experienced and what God would give them as a result of this suffering, they would wish that their body was cut into pieces using scissors for as long as he or she was alive.”- Imam al-Sadiq (a)

A Sign of Divine Love

سئل رسول الله صلى الله عليه وآله من أشد الناس بلاء في الدنيا فقال: النبيون ثم الامثل فالامثل، ويبتلي المؤمن بعد على قدر إيمانه وحسن أعماله فمن صح إيمانه وحسن عمله اشتد بلاؤه ومن سخط

“The Prophet (s) was asked as to whom would receive the greatest calamities and to whom the greatest tragedies happen in this world. The Prophet replied that the prophets suffer the most in this world, and then those who most resemble the prophets suffer the most...”-
Imam al-Sadiq (a)

The Prophet's Suffering

ما أؤذي نبي مثل ما أؤذيت

“No prophet was harmed as I was harmed.”- The Prophet (s)

- Prophet Muhammad lost his father before his birth, and shortly after his birth he lost his mother. He was then brought up by his grandfather who then also passed away.
- When he was under great difficulties and pressures, when the Muslims were kept under sanctions in “mountain hideout of Abu Talib” he lost his greatest supporters, his wife, Lady Khadija, and his uncle, Abu Talib.

The Prophet's Suffering

- He was expelled from his home
- He even suffered within the four walls of his own house. In several verses of the Quran, God mentions some of the Prophet's difficult experiences e.g. suffering in his own family and being ill-treated by some of his own followers who did not appreciate having a Prophet like him.

The Prophet's Suffering

- The Prophet was tolerant among his own followers as well as the unbelievers and enemies who killed many of his companions, including his uncle Hamzah. And many times they have attempted to kill him. For example, sometimes when the followers wanted to meet the Prophet or ask him for something, they would shout using his first name (and not the nickname) from outside his house, asking him to come out. He was still tolerant and patient with this treatment to the extent that God came to support his Prophet:

إِنَّ الَّذِينَ يُنَادُونَكَ مِنْ وَرَاءِ الْحُجُرَاتِ أَكْثَرُهُمْ لَا يَعْقِلُونَ

“Indeed those who call you from behind the apartments, most of them do not apply reason.” Quran 49:4

Coping Strategies

لِكَيْلَا تَأْسَوْا عَلَىٰ مَا فَاتَكُمْ وَلَا تَفْرَحُوا بِمَا آتَاكُمْ وَاللَّهُ لَا يُحِبُّ كُلَّ مُخْتَالٍ فَخُورٍ

“In order that you may not despair over matters that pass you by, nor become too happy over favours bestowed upon you. And God does not love any arrogant boaster.” Quran 57:23

Coping Strategies

وَلَقَدْ نَعْلَمُ أَنَّكَ يَضِيقُ صَدْرُكَ بِمَا يَقُولُونَ فَسَبِّحْ بِحَمْدِ رَبِّكَ وَكُنْ مِنَ السَّاجِدِينَ

“And We certainly know that your heart is distressed by what they say. Therefore, celebrate the praise of your Lord and be among the prostraters.” Quran 15:97-98

Coping Strategies

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا اسْتَعِينُوا بِالصَّبْرِ وَالصَّلَاةِ إِنَّ اللَّهَ مَعَ الصَّابِرِينَ

“O you who have believed, seek help through patience and prayer. Indeed, God is with the patient.” Quran 2:153

- The relationship between prayer and health has been the subject of a lot of clinical studies over the past four decades.
- Dr. Herbert Benson, a cardiovascular specialist at *Harvard Medical School* and a pioneer in the field of mind/ body medicine discovered what he calls “the relaxation response,” which occurs during periods of prayer and meditation. At such times, the body’s metabolism decreases, the heart rate slows, blood pressure goes down, and our breath becomes calmer and more regular.

Coping Strategies

- This is significant because Benson estimates that over half of all doctor visits in the U.S. today are prompted by illnesses, like depression, high blood pressure, ulcers and migraine headaches, that are caused at least in part by elevated levels of stress and anxiety.
- In one *National Institutes of Health* funded study, individuals who prayed daily were shown to be 40 percent less likely to have high blood pressure than those without a regular prayer practice.

Coping Strategies

- A 2011 study of inner city youth with asthma by researchers at the *University of Cincinnati* indicates that those who practiced prayer and meditation experienced fewer and less severe symptoms than those who had not.
- A recent survey reported in the *Journal of Gerontology* of 4,000 senior citizens in Durham, NC, found that people who prayed or meditated coped better with illness and lived longer than those who did not.