

Dealing with Grief in Islam

التعامل مع الحزن في الإسلام

[English - إنجليزي]

www.islamreligion.com website

موقع دين الإسلام

2013 - 1434

IslamHouse.com

War. Famine. Suffering. Not a day goes by that the evening news does not report horrific stories of humanity in despair, and of worldwide misery. On a more personal level, many of us have been stricken with grief and depression in our day to day lives. A loved one passes away. A financial downturn. A cheating spouse. Why then does God allow bad things to happen to good people? This is a question that people of many religious faiths have struggled with for hundreds of years. It is one of the greatest stumbling blocks to faith and has led countless people to disbelieve in God altogether.

Theists have tried to reconcile God and evil in a number of ways. Some pagans claimed that God hates evil, but He is powerless to prevent it. This idea, however, is rejected in the Quran, because it questions God's status as The Almighty (*Al-Azeez*), The All-Powerful (*Al-Jabbaar*), The All-Strong (*Al-Qawiyy*), and The All Capable (*Al-Qadeeir*). Others have claimed that perhaps God is capable of removing evil, but He does not know when or where evil will happen. This idea relegates God to a fireman who only comes to the scene of a fire after half the building has burned down. Yet, this too is an unacceptable claim, for God's Names in the Quran include The All-Knowing (*Al-Aalim*), The All-Seeing (*Al-Baseer*), The All-Hearing (*Al-Samee'*), and The Constant Owner and Controller of Everything (*Al-Maleek*). In fact, it would be considered blasphemous to question God's Power: if God wanted to remove all evil on this earth, then nothing could prevent Him from that.

Polytheistic religions further another hypothesis: God is good, but there are other evil gods who frustrate His goodness and spread corruption on this earth. God is therefore locked in a struggle with these other deities. Perhaps Satan is a counter-god with whom God must constantly battle with. Yet this idea—of multiple gods—is categorically rejected in the Quran, which calls God as The One (*Al-Wahid*), The One and Only (*Al-Ahad*), The First (*Al-*

Awwal), and The Last (*Al-Akhir*). The Quran stresses that there are no gods besides God; for example, the Quran says:

“Your God is but one God; there is no god other than Him!”
(Quran 2:163)

With over a thousand verses to this effect, it would be impossible to believe in multiple deities; rather, there is one and only one supreme God.

The ancient Gnostics had such a troubling time reconciling the evil of this world with God that they concluded that God Himself must be evil. People who further this claim argue that God cannot possibly be All-Powerful and All-Loving at the same time. If God is capable of removing evil and does not do it, He must therefore be evil. Yet, this idea is unconditionally rejected in the Quran, which declares that God is The Most Loving (*Al-Wadood*), The Most Kind (*Al-Barr*), and The Most Generous (*Al-Kareem*). The Quran also refers to God as The Most Merciful (*Al-Raheem*), The Most Beneficent (*Al-Rahmaan*), The Most Forgiving (*Al-Ghaffaar*), The Lord of Infinite Grace (*Dhul Fadl al-Adtheem*), and the Ultimate Source of Peace and Safety (*Al-Salaam*).

Therefore, the Quran affirms that God is both All-Powerful and Most Loving; so how can these two qualities be reconciled, given the fact that the world is full of evil? The Islamic perspective is that God causes “bad” things to happen in order to achieve a greater good. God afflicts His servants with suffering in order to mold them into the type of people He wants them to be. Through suffering, humans can develop qualities that last forever: steadfastness and patience in the face of great adversity, as well as great humility and meekness. Most importantly, suffering causes people to turn towards God for help; it establishes and differentiates the true believers from the false ones.

Suffering Causes People to Remember God

Human beings tend to forget God when they are prosperous and only remember Him when afflicted with suffering. The Quran gives the example of a ship: when the ship is smooth sailing, then the occupants do not remember God, but when the wind threatens to capsize the ship, suddenly the occupants of the ship begin praying sincerely to God. The Quran says:

“Your Lord is He that makes the ship go smoothly through the sea for you that you may seek of His Grace, for He is Most Merciful to you. When distress seizes you at sea, you cry to nobody save Him (God), but when He brings you back safely to the land, you turn away (from Him). Most ungrateful is man!” (Quran 17:66-67)

This example can be applied to our day-to-day lives. A person may forget God when his financial situation is good, but if he were laid off from work, then suddenly he’d be invoking God for help. When Prophet Muhammad declared God’s Message, it was the poor and the slaves who made up the bulk of his followers. The rich and prosperous leaders of Mecca, on the other hand, continued to live a life removed from God. It is well-known that rich people—such as actors, singers, and other celebrities—live the most ungodly of lives. Meanwhile, the meek and needy cling to God more. This means that suffering is not necessarily a bad thing, and prosperity is not necessarily a good thing. God says in the Quran:

“But it may happen that you dislike a thing which is good for you, and it may happen that you love a thing which is bad for you. And God knows and you do not know!” (Quran 2:216)

This is all a part of human psychology: we forget God in good times, and we remember Him during times of distress. So God afflicts us with trials and tribulations so that we may turn to Him and seek His Grace. How many countless people have turned to

God and were guided to Islam after having been afflicted with suffering upon suffering? An example that comes to mind is of a well-meaning politician who intends to do good, but once he comes to power, the system corrupts him. Soon, he starts giving and taking bribes; he begins to live the ungodly life of a rich politician, wasteful and extravagant. Then suddenly, God causes him to be arrested; the man loses all of his wealth, his wife leaves him, and he rots away in jail. Finally, after having pondered over his gains and losses, the man turns to God. So bad things happened to this man in order that a greater good could occur. When he was prosperous, he was heading towards Hell, but when God afflicted him with distress, the man changed his course; the temporary suffering of jail is indeed a small price to pay for the Eternal Bliss in Paradise. In conclusion, we see that God causes bad things to happen to good people, in order that a greater good come to them in the long run.

Another good that comes out of suffering is that the soul is purified through it. Prophet Muhammad declared:

“By the One in Whose Hand is my soul (i.e. God), no believer is stricken with fatigue, exhaustion, worry, or grief, but God will forgive him for some of his sins thereby—even a thorn which pricks him.” (*Musnad Ahmad*)

Some people describe a feeling of heartburn when they grieve. On a physical level, that may just be gastro-esophageal reflux disease brought on by stress and anxiety, but on a symbolic level, it represents the spiritual heart burning away sins like a powerful furnace. When a believer is struck with suffering, then God expiates some of that person’s sins as a mercy. As a consequence, that person will not be punished for those sins in the Hereafter and thereby will be pushed towards Paradise.

Perhaps a skeptic may wonder why God does not merely forgive His servants without afflicting them with suffering on this earth or in the Hereafter. The response to this is that God does in

fact forgive any and all sins, so long as His servant comes to Him penitent and seeking His Grace and Forgiveness. Such a man that comes to God seeking forgiveness, God will forgive him without any penalty punishment, nor any retribution whatsoever. God will wipe away his sins as if they never occurred. According to Prophet Muhammad, whoever turns to God asking for penitence will be forgiven “even if they (his sins) are (numerous) like the flecks of foam upon the ocean, as numerous as all the grains of sand, as heavy as the mountains, and as many as the drops of rain and the leaves on all the trees.”

God forgives those who seek His Forgiveness, and this is because He loves those believers who humble themselves before Him, those who seek penitence from Him, and those whose hearts cry because they disobeyed Him. The Quran says:

“Truly, God loves those who repent.” (Quran 2:222)

But what of the one who sins and never seeks God’s Forgiveness? What about the one who continues to sin without any plans to stop? God does not let all sins go unpunished because this would lead people to become negligent and wicked. The enforcement of punishment on these sinners is for their own benefit, just as a father’s enforcement of punishment on his son is for the child’s own benefit. For example, a six year old boy sticks his fingers in an electric socket. His father, fearful that the boy may electrocute himself, punishes him for that. A parent threatens to punish his child only as a benefit for the child, even though the recalcitrant child might be too immature to realize that the punishment stems from his father’s love and concern. If the child puts his fingers into the electric socket, it will be he himself—not his father—who will be electrocuted. Likewise, if we sin, we do this to our own detriment, and the Glory of God is unaffected. The worldly punishment therefore is a means, not the ends; the goal of the punishment is not to punish, but rather to serve as a strong deterrent.

If a father is too lenient with his son and does not say anything when the child puts his fingers in the socket, then the boy will not realize the gravity of what he is doing. He will then keep sticking his finger in the socket until one day he will get electrocuted and die. Likewise, if God does not send affliction down upon His servants, they might not ever realize the error in their ungodly ways until they reach spiritual death. For example, the philandering husband may never realize that his indiscretions will one day lead to the breakdown of his family unit, the compulsive gambler might not realize that his addiction will lead to bankruptcy, and the alcoholic might not realize that his drinking will lead to a life of misery and emptiness. So God sends down upon these people punishments, in order not only to expiate them of their sins, but also to alert and awaken them to their detrimental ways.

Imagine the child who knows that his parents won't do anything if he is caught doing drugs. This would be parental negligence, and it would lead to the child harming himself without any fear of repercussions. Therefore, a responsible parent will establish certain guidelines so that the child knows that if he takes drugs, then he will be grounded. This causes the child to stay away from drugs for fear of being punished. Similarly, the creation of Hellfire—though it is a punishment—is also a mercy to mankind; through the threat of it, God creates much good. Hell-Fire is a punishment that God threatens upon His servants, so that they may fear God and thereby obey Him; such people will then become spiritual, righteous, and rightly guided. This will not benefit God, but rather it will only benefit themselves. God has no need for them, but they have a need for God in their lives.

But God gives His servants many chances and warnings before He condemns them to Hellfire. An analogy of this is of a police officer, who catches a speeding motorist. The first time she (the motorist) is caught speeding, the police officer gives her a warning. The second time, the police officer fines her \$50. The

third time, he gives her a hefty fine of \$300. The fourth time, she receives community service hours, and the next time her license will be suspended, etc. Again, the police officer does not stop the woman for his own good; rather, it is for the motorist's own good, so that she does not get into a traffic accident and harm herself. This is like God's methodology: He afflicts people with minor punishments in this *worldly* life, so that they might realize the error in their ways. In other words, God allows bad things to happen to good people so as to punish them for their sins; this punishment serves as a warning in order that they may correct themselves in this lifetime and thereby avoid punishment in the Hereafter. Surely a motorist would rather be fined \$50 as opposed to being locked up in jail. Likewise, a believer would rather be punished in this lifetime as opposed to being thrown into Hell-Fire in the next life.

What this means is that when a believer is struck with some sort of calamity, he should take comfort in the fact that his sins are being forgiven by God. He should know that God will compensate him for every woe and grievance, and God is Most Just! Prophet Muhammad told us that God will compensate His servants for even the minor hurt that comes from a thorn which pricks the skin. A believer who is going through a difficult time should never be ungrateful to God, nor should he question God's justice, because God will compensate everyone in the next life. This is God's Promise to humanity. A believer who is aggrieved by trials and tribulations should take heart in the fact that he is one of God's chosen ones, whom God loves enough not to punish in Hell but rather whom He wishes to purify in this life.

Another reason why God sends down trials and afflictions to people is so that they may be tested. The Quran declares:

“Do men think that they will be left alone on saying, ‘We believe’, and that they will not be put to the test?” (Quran 29:2)

This concept can be clearly understood if we take the analogy of marriage. A man might love and be loyal to his wife during good times, but when things become difficult, he might abandon her. For example, if she is young and beautiful, he will adore her; but if she gets cancer and thereby loses her physical beauty, the same man might abandon her. This shows that in reality he did not really love her. Similarly, a man should love God and obey Him in not only good times, but also trying times. Hypocrites might call to God's Way when the weather is good, but as soon as the storm brews, they abandon their faith in God.

For example, during the time of Prophet Muhammad, may the mercy and blessings of God be upon him, there were many hypocrites who converted to Islam when it was beneficial for them to do so. In doing so, they were able to secure powerful positions in the Islamic government. But as soon as the going got rough, they began showing disbelief, even after they had claimed to believe; when a powerful enemy threatened to destroy the fledgling Islamic city-state, the hypocrites abandoned their faith. The enemies of Islam persecuted the early Muslims, torturing them, boycotting them, and even killing them. This really differentiated the true believers from the false ones; the true believers would stay true to God, even in the time of great adversity. Therefore, God tests the people, to differentiate the true believers from the hypocrites. God says:

“Do men think that they will be left alone on saying, ‘We believe’, and that they will not be put to the test? And certainly We tested those before them, so that God will differentiate those who are true from those who are false.” (Quran 29:2-3)

This idea is repeated in numerous verses in the Quran, such as:

“God will not leave the believers in the state in which you are now, until He shall separate the wicked from the good.” (Quran 3:179)

God's Messenger promised his followers that by becoming Muslim, they would attain success. When the powerful enemy almost overwhelmed the Muslim defenders, the hypocrites began to question the promise of the Messenger of God; they even began to question the All-Powerful nature of God. The Quran says:

“Behold! They (the enemy soldiers) came on you from above you and from below you, and behold, the eyes (of the hypocrites) grew terrified and the hearts rose up to the throats, and you began to think unbecoming thoughts concerning God...And behold! The hypocrites and those in whose hearts is a disease began to say: ‘God and His Messenger promised us (victory) only to deceive.’” (Quran 33:10-12)

The calamity made the hypocrites expose their disbelief, whereas it only made the true believers even more absolute in their faith. The Quran says of them:

“When the believers saw the Confederate forces...it only added to their faith and their zeal in obedience.” (Quran 33:22)

Therefore, God puts people to the test, to differentiate between the true from the false. Indeed, how can the worth of an object be ascertained unless it is put to the test? An automobile maker will test its cars to see how fast they can go and to see what type of crash they can withstand. Likewise, God puts His creations to the test, to see how faithful they will be, and to see if they will remain so when He causes them to crash. Will they fold up like a beat up lemon? Or will they be like the high-end car that can withstand much? God says:

“And We shall certainly test you, until We know those of you who strive their utmost (for God) and who are the steadfast; and We shall test your reported mettle.” (Quran 47:31)

Adversity and afflictions are actually a heavenly mercy, because they give the believers a chance to earn good deeds, by being patient and loyal to God. By passing the test that God puts

them through, these believers open up the way for entrance into Paradise (i.e. Heaven). God says:

“Or do you expect to enter Paradise without facing such trials as did those before you?” (Quran 2:214)

And so people are tested with various trials and afflictions; poverty, hunger, fear, etc. are all various forms of God’s test. Even the loss of loved ones is one such trial. When the ungrateful one loses a loved one, he becomes bitter against God, challenging God as to why He caused his loved one to die. But the grateful believer will remain patient and submit his will totally to God, and in this way, God differentiates the true from the false. God says:

“We will surely test you with something of fear and hunger, and the loss of wealth and lives and the fruits (of your toil), but give glad tidings to those who patiently persevere, who say—when afflicted with calamity—“To God We belong, and to Him we shall return!” They are on those whom descend blessings from their Lord, and Mercy. Such are the rightly guided.” (Quran 2:155-157)

It is not necessary that calamity is the only way God tests us. God’s testing may also be in the form of blessings, wealth, health, children, family, and the like. What the people do with such blessings is indeed a great test. Many celebrities and rich people are given great wealth, fame, and material goods, but they are not grateful to God for that, and instead live their lives in sin and wickedness. God says:

“And know that your (worldly) possessions and your children are but a test, and that it is with God with Whom lies your highest reward.” (Quran 8:28)

Therefore, we see that God tests the people through both adversity as well as blessing; but regardless of the type of test, the believers are those who remain grateful to God. The Quran declares:

“You shall certainly be tried and tested in your possessions and in your lives; and you shall certainly hear much that will grieve you...But if you patiently persevere and be pious, then surely this will be of great resolution.” (Quran 3:186)

In conclusion, when calamity befalls a believer, he should know that in it is much good, even if it is not apparent at first. Through affliction are sins expiated and souls purified; through trials are the steadfast tried by God, and only the resolute will be successful. It is upon these that God will bestow goodness in due time, either in this life or the life after death. God says:

“And none shall be granted such goodness, except those who are steadfast.” (Quran 41:35)

When calamity strikes us, we should take pride in the fact that we are similar to the righteous servants of God, of whom were the Prophets; all of them were put through trials and tests. Prophet Abraham and his son, may God praise them both, were both tested in a most severe way. God commanded Prophet Abraham to sacrifice his son, Ismail. This command no doubt would have been very difficult for Prophet Abraham, and he no doubt would have been very saddened by the thought of losing his loved one. But Prophet Abraham patiently persevered and obeyed God. Not only this, but even Ismail, remained steadfast and obedient and offered himself to be sacrificed.

This test that God put Prophet Abraham through was to test his determination. If Prophet Abraham or his son had been weak in faith, they would have both failed this severe test God rewarded them with a great reward on account of their strong faith and obedience to Him; right before Prophet Abraham struck his son, a ram appeared and God told him to sacrifice it instead. As a reward, God promised to establish them as leaders on earth. God says of Prophet Abraham and his son:

“So when they had both submitted their wills (to God), and he (Abraham) had laid him (his son) down on his forehead (for sacrifice), We called out unto him, saying: “O Abraham! You have indeed fulfilled the vision.” Thus, indeed do we reward the doers of good. Most surely, this was a clear test.” (Quran 37:103-106)

The Quran says:

“And remember that Abraham was tested by his Lord with certain commands, which he fulfilled. He (God) said: ‘I will make you a leader to the nations.’” (Quran 2:124)

No doubt when Prophet Abraham was instructed to sacrifice his son, he might have been reluctant in that regard, but he did it out of obedience to God Almighty. This goes to say that even if one may dislike something there may be good in it. God says:

“And it may be that you dislike a thing which is good for you and that you like a thing which is bad for you. God knows and you do not know.” (Quran 2:216)

Another example that comes to mind is that of Prophet Joseph, may the mercy and blessings of God be upon him. The Quran mentions many details of the trials and tribulations he faced in his life. His father loved him a great deal, which made his brothers very jealous of him. They conspired against him, and finally dumped him in a deep well. A company of travelers passed by the well, and one of them let down his bucket. He said, "Good news! Here is a boy." And they took him as merchandise. With this, Prophet Joseph was sent to the far off land of Egypt as a slave. An Egyptian governor bought him, and Prophet Joseph dutifully toiled away. As he was in the service of the governor, the test intensified, the governor's wife, who was very beautiful, tried to seduce Joseph. This was a great trial for Prophet Joseph, and he resisted her advances with steadfast perseverance. One day, the governor's wife ran after Prophet Joseph, so to seduce him by

force, and she tore his shirt, whereupon her husband entered the room. She accused Prophet Joseph of rape but Joseph denied it, and when the governor saw his shirt torn from the back, he asked his wife to repent to God Almighty. She schemed and came up with a plot to have Prophet Joseph; she gave him one of two choices, to either approach her or to be thrown in prison. He chose the second and was put in prison for a period of time.

When we are struck with calamities, we should think of all the trials Prophet Joseph went through: years of slavery and imprisonment. Yet, through it all, Prophet Joseph remained steadfast to God. He never resented the calamities that had befallen him, but instead used the time to invoke his Lord. It was then—finally, after many years—that God rewarded Prophet Joseph for his steadfastness. It was in that same jail cell that he met a man who had a dream; God gave Prophet Joseph the gift of being able to interpret dreams. And so Prophet Joseph interpreted his cellmate’s dream, telling him that he (the cellmate) would go free and work for the king. Indeed, the prophecy came true and the man did go free to work for the king.

One day, the king had a dream. The story is narrated in the Quran:

“And the king of Egypt said: ‘Verily, I saw in a dream seven fat cows, whom seven lean cows were devouring, and seven green ears of corn and seven others dry. O notables! Explain to me my dream if it be that you can interpret dreams.’” (Quran 12:43)

Prophet Joseph’s ex-cellmate, who was now in the service of the Egyptian king, immediately remembered Joseph. He informed the king about Prophet Joseph, and so Joseph was asked to interpret the dream, which he did. Prophet Joseph told the king that there would be seven years of good harvest, after which would follow seven years of drought and famine. He advised the king to store up food during the seven years of prosperity, which could be used during the times of drought and famine.

The king was so pleased by Prophet Joseph that he not only set him free but appointed him to a very high position in the government. And so God established a great deal of good through adversity; had Prophet Joseph never been abandoned in the well by his brothers, nor sold into slavery, nor imprisoned wrongfully, he would never have been found by the king and appointed to a position of such great authority. Indeed, Prophet Joseph had to go through all that tribulation in order to attain that rank. Therefore, when we go through difficult times in life, we should be positive. It may be that God is propelling us to a greater good which may be unknown to us at that moment.

Prophet Solomon was also tested, although in a different way. He was given immense wealth and power; history attests to the fact that wealth and power corrupts. Yet, Prophet Solomon was one of the few kings who remained pious and God-fearing. The Quran says:

“And certainly we tested Solomon...and he (Solomon) turned (to God).” (Quran 38:34)

Indeed, *all* of God’s prophets were tested; this shows that God bestows trials upon His righteous servants, and we should feel proud to be in their company. We should also emulate their behavior, which was to remain steadfast in times of tribulation.

All of what has been stated in this article is extremely interesting, but it all boils down to the following question: how should we deal with grief when a calamity strikes? Every person on earth will face some grief in his life, and some more than others. People deal with grief in different ways, but how should a believer deal with it?

The first thing that a believer should realize is that the calamity is from God. The Quran declares:

“All things (good and bad) are from God.” (Quran 4:78)

Once we realize that it is from God, we should realize that God is the Most Loving (*Al-Wadud*) and the Most Kind (*Al-Barr*). Therefore, there is some good in whatever God has decreed for us, even if we do not immediately see what it is. God Almighty says:

“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.” (Quran 2:216)

Imam Hasan al-Basri, a great scholar of Islam, said:

“Do not resent the calamities that come and the disasters that occur; perhaps in something that you dislike will be your salvation, and perhaps in something that you prefer will be your doom.”

For example, if a man is laid off, perhaps it will be a means to securing an even better job, which he might not have opted for had he not been fired in the first place. One of the benefits of calamity that we know about for sure is the fact that a person’s sins are forgiven by the will of God. Mus'ab b. Sa'd b. Malik narrated that his father said:

"O Messenger of Allah, who are the most tested and tried people in this world? He answered: 'The Prophets, and then who are similar to them (i.e. the god-fearing and pious). A man would be tested and tried according to his piety and faith. If the individual has strong faith, he would be tested and tried in a severer manner; similarly, if the man's faith is weak, he would be tested accordingly. A person would be struck by calamities until he is sin-free." (Ibn Hibban #2901)

Fadl ibn Sahl said:

“There is a blessing in calamity that the wise man should not ignore, for it [calamity] erases sins, gives one the opportunity to attain the reward for patience, dispels negligence, reminds one of

blessings at the time of health, calls one to repent, and encourages one to give charity.”

The believer should turn to God when a calamity strikes. In this way, the calamity reminds the believer that his only purpose in life—the reason for his creation—is to worship God alone. This is in fact the meaning of our existence and the purpose of our life. God says in the Quran:

“I created the jinn and humankind only to worship Me.”
(Quran 51:56)

Oftentimes, when life is good and man is living in prosperity, he forgets to worship his Lord. It is only when calamity strikes that he remembers to invoke God. So, in this way, a calamity serves as a reminder to fulfill the purpose for which we were created. *Shaykh al-Islam* Ibn Taymiyyah said:

“A calamity that makes you turn to God is better for you than a blessing which makes you forget the remembrance of God.”

Imam as-Sufyan said:

“What a person dislikes may be better for him than what he likes, because what he dislikes causes him to call upon God, whereas what he likes may make him heedless (of worship).”

Therefore, whenever calamity strikes, we should show our gratitude to God by saying “All praise is due to God” (*Al-Hamdu Lillah*). Prophet Muhammad, may the mercy and blessings of God be upon him, commented:

“How wonderful is the affair of the believer, for his affairs are all good, and this applies to no one but the believer. If something good happens to him, he is thankful for it and that is good for him. If something bad happens to him, he bears it with patience and that is good for him.” (*Sahih Muslim*)

When *Shaykh al-Islam* Ibn Taymiyyah was wrongfully imprisoned, he regarded it as a blessing that his enemies had enabled for him. *Shaykh al-Islam* used that time to increase his worship of God. He said:

“What can my enemies do to me? ...My imprisonment is a religious retreat (an opportunity to worship God), my being killed is martyrdom, and my being expelled from my city is a journey.”

Prophet Muhammad said:

“There is no Muslim who is stricken with a calamity and (then) says what God has enjoined (to say): ‘Verily, to God we belong and unto Him is our return; O God, reward me for my affliction and compensate me with something better’ but God will compensate him with something better.” (*Sahih Muslim*)

We should remember that God tests those whom He loves most. The Prophet said:

“The greatest reward comes with the greatest trial. When God loves a people, He tests them. Whoever accepts this, wins His Pleasure.” (*Al-Tirmidhi*)

And the Prophet said further:

“The path to Paradise is surrounded with difficulties.”

Calamity and grief is a way of having our sins forgiven in this life, so that we won’t have to face the punishment for these sins in the next life. Prophet Muhammad said:

“Trials will continue to befall the believing man and woman—with regard to themselves, their children, and their wealth—until they meet God with no sin on them.” (*Al-Tirmidhi*)

God does not send calamity down upon us in order to destroy us, nor to shatter our will, nor to finish us off, but rather as a means of checking on us, to test our patience and faith. If it were not for trials and tribulations, a person would develop arrogance,

heedlessness, and hardheartedness, which would lead him to the pits of Hell. So it is indeed a Mercy of God that He sends down upon us this remedy to cure us of these diseases of the heart, and to eliminate all evil elements in our personality that might lead to our doom.

When some calamity strikes us in this life, we should remember that God will recompense us, but we must show patience; the *ultimate* recompense will not even be in this life, but in the next one, and in this, we should take comfort. Abu Sufyan lost his eye in battle whilst defending the Muslims; he asked the Prophet to pray to God that he (Abu Sufyan) get his eyesight back. The Prophet asked him if he would rather have his eye in this life or the next, and Abu Sufyan responded that he would rather have the recompense in the next life. Abu Sufyan would in fact go on to lose his other eye as well.

God says:

“We shower Our Mercy upon whomever We will, and We never fail to recompense the righteous. Additionally, the reward in the Hereafter is even better for those who believe and lead a righteous life.” (Quran 12:56-57)

A believer must never despair in God’s Mercy; he should not think that God will not get him out of this rut. In fact, the name of Satan in Arabic (*Iblis*) comes from the root word *ablasa*, which means “to despair”. A certain calamity hit Satan (he was “demoted” when Prophet Adam was created); instead of thinking that this was something good from God, Satan despaired of God’s Mercy, and thereupon began his hedonistic lifestyle. Likewise, when calamity strikes some people, they resort to booze and other sinful devices to ebb their pain. But the believers do not fall into despair, but rather they turn to God in worship. God reassures His creation:

“By the Glorious Morning Light, and by the Night when it is still! The Guardian-Lord has not forsaken you nor does He hate you. And verily the Hereafter will be better for you than the present. And soon will your Guardian-Lord give you that wherewith you shall be well-pleased.” (Quran 93:1-5)