DEALING WITH GRIEF IN ISLAM (PART 2 OF 5)

Rating: **4.4**

Description: Suffering is a means of purifying oneself.

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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.

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