

DEALING WITH GRIEF IN ISLAM (PART 3 OF 5)

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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)

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