

The Quran and its Message

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Salamun Alaikum (Peace be upon you)

UNDERSTANDING OUR TRIALS - WHY ME?

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The Quran presents a number of reasons as to the nature of our trials. Some are discussed below:

- (1) To test one's resolve / mettle.
- (2) As a means of test for others.
- (3) To strengthen one's resolve / to fortify hearts and minds.
- (4) To keep one out of harm's way or as part of wider wisdom.
- (5) To enable humility / humbleness / modesty / opportunities for one to mend their ways.
- (6) As a worldly recompense for what one's own hands have earned.
- (7) To separate good from the bad and a means for spiritual purification.
- (8) Learning / reflection / reminder of God's authority over you and the universe.

(1) TO TEST ONE'S RESOLVE / METTLE

This world remains a trial for each soul. From the Quran's perspective, this is a well-founded concept which is repeatedly given mention.

Trials and tribulations remain inevitable and serve as a means to test one's mettle and their resolve. In God's plan for His servants, it has been used as a mechanism to discriminate between those that strive and bear with patience, and others that fall astray. Just because for one there is a semblance of well-being in terms of health and ample means, this does not mean that they are not being tested or shall not be subjected to adversity. Even our wealth and good health remain trials and we will be questioned as to how we utilised our resources.

029.002

"Do men think that they will be left alone by saying, "We believe", and that they will not be tested?"

029.003

"We did test those before them, and God will surely make evident those who are true from those who are false / liars"

We will be tested with our wealth, children and health.

008.028

"And know that your wealth and your children are but a trial; and that it is God with Whom lies your highest reward"

003.186 (part)

"Ye shall certainly be tried and tested in your wealth and in yourselves... ..But if you persevere patiently, and guard against evil, then that will be a determining factor in all affairs"

002.155

"And surely We will test you with something of fear and hunger, and loss of wealth and lives and the fruits (of your toil), but give glad tidings to those who patiently persevere"

Believers must rest assured that they will not be subjected to any **trial, no matter how dire**, which is **greater** than their ability to bear it. Thus the nature of each trial is **intrinsically linked** to one's capacity to bear them. Our Creator is fully cognizant of individual extent. If one's hardship is seemingly greater than another, it follows that so is their innate capacity to bear it. In the end, we will all be returning back to our Lord.

002.286

"On no soul does God place a burden greater than it can bear. It gets every good that it earns, and it suffers every ill that it earns. (Pray:) "Our Lord! condemn us not if we forget or fall into error; our Lord! Lay not on us a burden like that which Thou did lay on those before us; Our Lord! Lay not on us a burden greater than we have strength to bear. Blot out our sins, and grant us forgiveness. Have mercy on us. You are our protector; help us against those who stand against faith."

(2) AS A MEANS OF TEST FOR OTHERS

In order to create a canvas of human life where human souls can be trialled, oppression, wretchedness, illness, and calamities will become the fabric of human existence. If believers are expected to help the poor, the needy, the wretched, how can there ever be those avenues to assist, if such difficulties were not created in the first place within God's plan?

Thus, each being or thing, no matter how small or large on God's earth, serves an integral part of God's wider plans. One's riches and health remain a trial for them. The meek, the ill and destitute will have their trials and they will become a means of test for the healthy and those of means as well as themselves. The rich may become stripped of their possessions and assets (denuded) and others will be given plenty as a trial. They will be questioned of what they were granted and how they utilised their resources and worshipped their Lord.

In this manner, each soul will play a part. Those with difficult, dire circumstances will undoubtedly become a test and a source of reflection and contemplation for others. For example, innocent children may be afflicted with adversity, so as to present opportunities to their parents to take stock of their actions in the widest sense, return to God consciousness, or an opportunity for them and others to reflect and assist. Oppression and wretchedness may afflict others to provide

opportunities for those with means to assist and reflect. The forbearance of the innocent will arguably find favour with their Lord after all, it is to Him that we shall all return.

008.028

"And know that your wealth and your children are but a trial; and that it is God with Whom lies your highest reward"

002:155-156

"And We will surely test you with something of fear and hunger and loss of wealth and lives and fruits (of your toil); and give good news to the patient. Those who say when a misfortune (Arabic: **Musibatun**) strikes them: Indeed! to God we belong and indeed to Him is our return (Arabic: **inna-lillahi-wa'inna-ilayhi rajiun**)"

Alas, many still do not take heed to God's signs and pursue haughtily in their blind contumacy.

025:020

"...And We have appointed some of you a test for others: **Will you have patience?** And thy Lord is ever Seer."

Note the rhetorical question posed by God. '**Will you have patience?**' (*atasbiruna?*)

The Quran unequivocally states that some of us will become a means of a trial for others (25:20). He will indeed test some of us by means of others (47:4). There is no doubt about this.

SOME ARE AFFLICTED WITH DISABILITIES AND DISEASES:

Any genetic ailment or goodly form will have been carefully selected by God to trial His servants. There is a purpose of Him making His servants the way He has willed, including the innate **vulnerabilities** or **proWess** He has given them. This is **not** a random process. (3:6)

003.006

"He is the One Who shapes you / fashions you (Arabic: *yusuwwirukum*) in the wombs however He wills (Arabic: *Kayfa yashau*). There is no God save Him, the Almighty, the Wise."

PROPHET JOB'S ^(qanun) EXAMPLE:

Prophet Job was afflicted with suffering (disease) and adversity (21:83; 30:41-42). He lost his family. But he endured with patience and was given respite (38:42-43).

PROPHET JACOB'S ^(qanun) EXAMPLE:

Prophet Jacob ^(qanun) lost his son Joseph to the guiles of a ploy of his other sons (12:17-18). For many years he longed for him and refused to believe the story that a wolf had devoured him (12:18). His response was only that he would endure patiently (*fasabrun jamilun* - so patience is beautiful) (12:18). His tears had made dim his eyesight (12:84) and his health remained at risk as it diminished (12:85). Yet, he bore patiently and in the end, was given respite (12:99).

PROPHET JOSEPH'S ^(ghab) EXAMPLE:

Prophet Joseph ^(ghab) was imprisoned for numerous years for a crime he didn't even commit. His gift (his immense beauty 12:31) became a source of his trial (12:32-33). He persisted to remember God and praise Him in the confines of prison (12:38). He neither abandoned God nor lost hope, but endured patiently. Even when he saw an opportunity to be freed from prison, God in His wisdom allowed Satan to create a situation where Prophet Joseph's ^(ghab) release would become further delayed (12:42). In the end, his patience was rewarded with power and authority over aspects of the kingdom (12:55-56), and he was subsequently reunited with his parents and family (12:99-100).

094:005-6

"So indeed, with hardship, comes ease. Indeed, with hardship, comes ease"

THE EXAMPLE OF THE BELIEVERS WHO WERE BURNT ALIVE:

Calamities even befell the innocent where they were killed in the most distressing manner. Some were simply burnt alive only because they said they believed.

085.004

"(Self-)destroyed were the owners of the ditch / pit"

085.005

"Of the fire full of fuel"

085.006

"When they sat by it"

085.007

"And were themselves witnesses of what they did to the believers"

085.008

"And they did not take vengeance on them for nothing except that they believed in God, the Mighty, the Praised."

Those that innocently perished would undoubtedly receive respite in the Hereafter for enduring and remaining a source of trial for others. This also finds support in the next example.

THE EXAMPLE OF ADAM'S SON:

Adam's son, who was wholly innocent, was slaughtered by the hands of his own brother (5:27-30). He committed no crime and was simply murdered out of jealousy because his sacrifice was accepted (5:27).

Thus, one brother **had to transgress against another** so that his sin could be **manifested**. This is made clear in the innocent brother's own words captured for posterity and remains the bedrock of much of the Quran's teaching regarding our trials here on earth.

005.029

"Indeed, I wish that you be laden with my sin and your sin so you will be the companions of the fire, and that is the recompense for wrong-doers."

The innocent brother was presented as a trial. In the end, both were destined to die at one point or another. No one is to remain on this planet ad infinitum.

Sometimes within God's mighty plan, conflicts are allowed to fester, so that some can become trials for others and an opportunity granted for their transgressions to be manifested and others to do good (e.g. as peacemakers).

047.004 (part)

"...And if God had willed, surely He could have punished them (without you) but (thus it is ordained) that He may test some of you by means of others..."

049:009

"And if two parties among the believers should fight, then make settlement between the two. But if one of them oppresses the other, then fight against the one that oppresses until it returns to the ordinance of God. Then if it returns, then make peace / settlement between them in justice and act justly. Indeed, God loves those who act justly."

THERE IS NO EXCLUSIVITY - EVEN THE INNOCENT WILL BE SUBJECTED TO CALAMITIES:

There is no exclusivity that calamity will only afflict the wrong-doers. Indeed, calamities **will also afflict the innocent, the righteous. They must bear with patience and understand that they are part of a collective trial and their reward for forbearance is with God.**

008.025

"And guard yourselves against a chastisement which cannot fall exclusively (*khassah*) on those of you who are wrong-doers, and know that God is severe in punishment."

LUQMAN'S ADVICE TO HIS SON:

031:017

'O my son! Establish prayer, and enjoin what is right and forbid what is wrong **and be patient / persevere over whatever may befall you.** Indeed, that is of the matters that require determination / acts that require courage"

(3) TO STRENGTHEN ONE'S RESOLVE / TO FORTIFY HEARTS AND MINDS

Prophet Moses ^(عليه السلام) was trialled after he had killed a man, after which the Quran says he was tested. ("*And you killed a man, but We saved you from the distress and we tried you with a trial*" 20:40). He was further trialled by his own people. "*O my people! why do you vex and insult me / hurt / punish (adha)...*" (61:5). His patience was put to the test where he, even Moses!, was not able to uphold patience in this instance (*...of what you were not able to hold patience* 18:78). Adam was trialled and was found not to have determination / resolve / steadfastness ("*And verily We made a covenant with Adam before, but he forgot and We found in him no determination / resolve (azama)*" 20:115).

As mentioned, Prophet Joseph ^(pbuh) was incarcerated for no apparent crime. Yet, he continued to show patience, resilience and determination making the best of his situation.

Prophet Job ^(pbuh) was tried with affliction and great distress as noted in the previous section.

At times, the trials were so intense that even momentarily, prophets succumbed to the pressure. For example, Prophet Jonah ^(pbuh) lost his patience with his people, sought to flee and was found guilty and blameworthy by God and condemned (*adhada* - 37:141; *alama* - 37:142). **Not even the prophets of God were exempt from being tested and trialed.**

(4) TO KEEP ONE OUT OF HARM'S WAY OR AS PART OF WIDER WISDOM

At times, what may appear to us as a calamity may be part of a greater wisdom to protect and nurture us. Nothing illustrates this better than the marring / damaging of a boat by a servant of God (18:71) as part of a trial where Prophet Moses ^(pbuh) was being taught patience.

Prophet Moses ^(pbuh) questioned this action in utter disbelief (18:71), perceiving it as a transgression. After he was not able to keep his patience, he was informed that the boat belonged to certain poor men who worked on the river and it was marred / damaged as a king was seizing (undamaged) boats by force (18:79). Thus a damaged boat was better in this instance than a full working one to protect the means of income of poor people who otherwise, would have ended up with little or no ability to source a living.

(5) TO ENABLE HUMILITY, HUMBLENESS / MODESTY / OPPORTUNITIES FOR ONE TO MEND THEIR WAYS

The following verses make it clear that people are often subjected to trials so that they can become humble, God conscious and mend their errant ways.

007.094

"And We did not send a prophet in a town except We seized its people with distress / adversity and affliction / hardship in order that they might humble (*tadarra'a*) themselves."

006.042

"And certainly We sent (messengers) to nations before you then We seized its people with distress / adversity and affliction / hardship in order that they might humble (*tadarra'a*) themselves."

These calamities also afflict us personally, so that we and those closest to us can also alter our ways, grow humble and heed God consciousness.

038.034

"And certainly We tried Solomon, and set upon his throne a body. Then did he return (repent)."

(6) AS A WORLDLY RECOMPENSE FOR WHAT ONE'S OWN HANDS HAVE EARNED

Causation (Cause and effect)

At times, when souls transgress they are subject to its consequences. If the punishment is not exacted in this world, then it is meted out in the Hereafter. There is no escape from one's punishment as God wills.

This Quranic maxim appears well founded in the following verses which illustrate this concept.

005.049

"And that you should judge between them by what God has revealed, and do not follow their vain desires, and beware of them, lest they tempt you away from part of what God has revealed to you; **but if they turn away, then know that God intends to afflict them on account of some of their faults (*dhanb*);** and most surely many of the people are transgressors."

059.003

"**And had it not been that God had decreed exile for them, He would certainly have punished them in this world,** and for them in the hereafter they shall have chastisement of the fire."

Corruption and suffering appears in the land not because God has forgotten, or because He remains aloof from His creation, but rather, as a direct consequence of what the hands of mankind have often earned. As mentioned in the previous section, this is to teach them humility so that they may return to the righteousness.

030:041

"Corruption has appeared in the land and the sea on account of what the hands of humankind have earned, that He may let them taste a part of that which they have done, so that they may return."

At times God allows mankind to taste of what they have earned and transgressors will be allowed to err, wreaking havoc and corruption in the land. Thus their sin will become manifested and in return, they will indeed be held accountable.

004:078-79 (part)

"...Say (to them): All is from God. **So what is wrong with these people** that they cannot come to understand this fact / happening / what is told them / any statement? **Whatever** of good befalls you (O mankind) it is from God, and whatever of ill befalls you it is from yourself (*min nafsika*)..."

(7) TO SEPARATE GOOD FROM THE BAD AND A MEANS FOR SPIRITUAL PURIFICATION

An inherent purpose of being trialled is not only to separate those who commit evil from those who remain righteous, but also as a source of purification within our own spiritual consciousness.

In the following verse, Prophet Moses ^(pbwt) implores God for the wrong-doers to be separated from those who do right, for which God created a test of 40 years where his people wandered with no fixed abode. It can be posited, that over such an extensive time period, a situation was created

where the collective and individual determination of Prophet Moses's ^(rah) people would be tested and the sins of those that were inclined to transgress manifested.

005.025-26

"He (Moses) said: My Lord! Indeed, I do not have control (over anyone) except myself and my brother, so distinguish between us (make a separation between us - *fa-uf'ruq*) and the wrong-doing folk. (Their Lord) said: Then Indeed (for this), the land will surely be forbidden them for forty years that they will wander in the earth (bewildered). So do not grieve over the wrongdoing folk."

In the following verse, it is noted that God's plan was to institute a mechanism where separation of good and evil was a key attribute in God's wider plan.

048.025

"These it was who disbelieved and hindered you from the Masjid Al-Haram, and prevented the offering from reaching its place. And if it had not been for believing men and believing women, whom you knew not - less you should tread them under foot (trample them) and incur any harm from them without knowledge; that God may admit to His mercy whom He wills - **If (the believers and the disbelievers) had been clearly separated, We verily would have punished those of them who disbelieved with painful punishment.**"

'FITNAH' - A DEEPER MEANING BEHIND OUR TRIALS

"...We test you with evil and good as a trial (*fitnatan*)..." (21:35)

"...Nay it is a trial (*fitnatan*), but most of them do not know it" (39:49)

"We shall send the She-camel as a trial (*fitnatan*) for them..." (54:27)

"...your wealth and your children are only a trial (*fitnatan*)..." (64:15)

The Arabic word '*fitnah*' is a nuanced expression and carries different meanings depending on context.

However, in light of the above verses, it is interesting to note that the word is actually derived from its primary signification meaning to **burn something in the fire**. This is attested by various Quranic verses and noted by grammarians.

However, the purpose of melting or smelting with fire as generally understood (*usually with gold and silver*) is done with a view to **separate the good from the bad or to ascertain the degree of goodness**.

In this way, trials can be seen as a means of purification, to separate good from the bad.

As noted by grammarians and lexicographers:

"Fitnatan = a burning with fire. (T.). And The melting of gold and of silver (K, TA) in order to separate, or distinguish, the bad from the good. (TA.) - And [hence, or] from فَنَّ signifying " he melted, " (T,) or from that verb as signifying " he put into the fire (Msb,) gold, and silver for that purpose, (T, Msb,) it signifies A trial, or probation; (IAar, T, S, M, K, TA;) and affliction, distress, or hardship; (TA;) and [particularly] an affliction whereby one is tried, proved, or tested: (IAar, T, S, K, TA:) this is the sum of its meaning in the language of the Arabs: (T, TA: *)" [1]

"...or, as some say, and we purified thee with a [thorough or an effectual] purifying [like that of gold, or silver, by means of fire]: (TA:) [in many instances] فَنَّنَهُ, aor. فَنَّ , [inf. n. فَنَّنٌ] signifies He tried, or

tested, him; whence, in the Kur 9:127, **يُقْتَنُونَ** means They are tried, or tested, by being summoned to war, against unbelievers or the like; or, as some say, by the infliction of punishment or of some evil thing. (M.) **قَتْنَم**

" [2]

Our trials are indeed designed to test our resolve but not without purpose. They also have the ability to separate the impurities within us and purify us in a manner no different from the *smelting of gold and silver* which is carried out with a view to distinguish good from the bad.

(8) LEARNING / REFLECTION / REMINDER OF GOD'S AUTHORITY OVER YOU AND THE UNIVERSE

Humans are the ones in need. They are the ones that continually require God's help. God remains wholly self-sufficient (5:17). But despite what many may utter, their beseeching of their Lord often does not peter into practice. Their remembrance often lacks vigour, consistency and their general approach to God consciousness, can only be best described as ambivalent.

035:015

"O mankind! you are those who are in need of God, and God is He Who is the Self-sufficient / Free of Need, the Praiseworthy"

Some ask God for help and as soon as God removes the ill from them, they return back to associating others with Him and revert to their previous ways.

030:033

"And when harm afflicts mankind, they call upon their Lord, turning to Him, then when He makes them taste of mercy from Him, lo! some of them begin to associate (others) with their Lord"

At times, a trial is given to a people and when they are given respite from it, they do not thank their Lord but attribute the overcoming of the adversity to their own efforts.

039:049

"So when harm afflicts the man, he calls upon Us; then, when We give him a favour from Us, he says: "I have only been given it by means of knowledge" Nay, it is a trial, but most of them do not know."

During affliction, people implore God in many different ways. Once the trial is removed, they continue again in their blind ways, seemingly oblivious to reality. They forget to remember God as they had done before when they were afflicted with hardship.

010:012

"And when affliction touches the man, he calls on Us, whether lying on his side or sitting or standing; but when We remove his affliction from him, he passes on as though he had never called on Us on account of an affliction that touched him; thus that which they do is made fair-seeming to the extravagant."

039:008

"And when distress afflicts the man he calls upon his Lord turning to Him; then when He bestows on him a favour, he forgets that for which he called upon Him before, and sets up rivals to God that he may cause (men) to stray off from His path. Say: Enjoy yourself in your disbelief a little. Indeed you are of the companions of the fire."

FINAL THOUGHTS

Trials will remain a mechanism through which mankind will be trialled. The Quran presents a number of reasons as to the nature of our trials and some were discussed as below:

- (1) To test one's resolve / mettle.
- (2) As a means of test for others.
- (3) To strengthen one's resolve / to fortify hearts and minds.
- (4) To keep one out of harm's way or as part of wider wisdom.
- (5) To enable humility / humbleness / modesty / opportunities for one to mend their ways.
- (6) As a worldly recompense for what one's own hands have earned.
- (7) To separate good from the bad and a means for spiritual purification.
- (8) Learning / reflection / reminder of God's authority over you and the universe.

God makes it clear in the Quran that with sustained God consciousness, He will give His servants an ability to discriminate in matters.

008:029

"O you who believe! If you are careful of (your duty to) God (fear God), **He will grant you a criterion (an ability to discriminate) and will remove from you your evil deeds and forgive you; and God is the Lord of great bounty / grace.**"

At times, we must take heed from our adversity and consider whether we have strayed in our ways, whether our spiritual consciousness lacks vigour or whether we have become arrogant in the land and our affairs. It is an opportunity to take stock and redress the balance. In other circumstances, we must accept that our resolve is being tested, we are being kept out of harm's way, or that we have been selected as a source of trial for others so that they may take heed, mend their ways or assist. Trials are also used a means to separate good from evil and as an enabler of spiritual purification.

In the end, there is much comfort in the following verse which makes it clear that no matter how difficult the trial, God will never burden a soul beyond its capacity to bear it.

002.286

"On no soul does God place a burden greater than it can bear.

And finally, it will always serve us well to remain cognizant of Luqman's advice which has been preserved for posterity.

031:017

'O my son! Establish prayer, and enjoin what is right and forbid what is wrong **and be patient / persevere over whatever may befall you.** Indeed, that is of the matters that require determination / acts that require courage"

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- (2) [Suffering and Adversity](#)
- (3) [Indeed to God We Belong and Indeed to Him is Our Return - 'inna-lillahi-wa'inna-ilayhi rajiun'](#)

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[1] LANE. E.W, Edward Lanes Lexicon, Williams and Norgate 1863; Librairie du Liban Beirut-Lebanon 1968, Volume 6, page 2335.

[2] Ibid.

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