

Chapter Seven

COPING WITH DIFFICULTY

Important concepts discussed

- 1- We are going to be tested and tried in various ways
- 2- Allah knows what we are going through
- 3- Allah places no burden on a soul greater than it can bear
- 4- Allah gives us the ability to cope and survive
- 5- We should never lose hope of Allah's mercy

Experiencing difficult times is part of our tests and trials

The Qur'an tells us that we are going to be tested and tried until our true nature becomes apparent: are we sincere and true in faith, or are we lacking in faith or hypocrites:

﴿ أَحْسِبَ النَّاسُ أَنْ يُتْرَكُوا أَنْ يَقُولُوا ءَامَنَّا وَهُمْ لَا يُفْتَنُونَ ﴾ [العنكبوت: ٢]

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

Al-Ankabut 29 : 2

﴿ وَلَقَدْ فَتَنَّا الَّذِينَ مِنْ قَبْلِهِمْ فَلَيَعْلَمَنَّ اللَّهُ الَّذِينَ صَدَقُوا وَلَيَعْلَمَنَّ الْكٰذِبِينَ ﴾ [العنكبوت: ٣]

[العنكبوت: ٣]

We did test those before them, and Allah will certainly know those who are true from those who are false.

Al-Ankabut 29 : 3

We are going to be tested and tried in various ways. Among these tests and trials the following can be enumerated:

- Adversity and difficult times
- Sickness and loss of health
- Loss of wealth, poverty and a feeling of want
- Power and money can also be a test and trial
- Fame is another test
- Lack of support or friends

The Qur'an cites some of these tests and trials:

Fear, hunger and loss of wealth and loss of life

﴿ وَلَنَبْلُوَنَّكُمْ بِشَيْءٍ مِّنَ الْخَوْفِ وَالْجُوعِ وَنَقْصٍ مِّنَ الْأَمْوَالِ وَالْأَنْفُسِ وَالثَّمَرَاتِ ۗ وَكَشَرِ الصَّابِرِينَ ﴾ [البقرة: ١٥٥]

Be sure We shall test you with something of fear and hunger, some loss in goods or lives or the fruits (of your toil), but give glad tidings to those who patiently persevere.

Al-Baqara 2 : 155

Excess of good things

﴿ كُلُّ نَفْسٍ ذَائِقَةُ الْمَوْتِ ۗ وَنَبْلُوكُم بِالشَّرِّ وَالْخَيْرِ فِتْنَةً ۗ وَإِلَيْنَا تُرْجَعُونَ ﴾ [الأنبياء: ٣٥]

[الأنبياء: ٣٥]

Every soul shall have a taste of death: and We test you by evil and by good by way of trial. To Us must ye return.

Al-Anbia'a 21 : 35

﴿ وَلَا تَحْسَبَنَّ الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا أَنَّمَا نُمَلِّهِمْ خَيْرًا لَّأَنفُسِهِمْ ۗ إِنَّمَا نُمَلِّهِمْ لِيَزِدَادُوا إِثْمًا ۗ وَهُمْ عَذَابٌ مُّهِينٌ ﴾ [آل عمران: ١٧٨]

Let not the Unbelievers think that our respite to them is good for themselves: We grant them respite that they may grow in their iniquity: but they will have a shameful punishment.

Al-Imran 3 : 178

Our whole life is a test and trial

﴿ تَبْرَكَ الَّذِي بِيَدِهِ الْمُلْكُ وَهُوَ عَلَىٰ كُلِّ شَيْءٍ قَدِيرٌ ﴾ [الملك: ١]

Blessed be He in Whose hands is Dominion; and He over all things hath Power:

Al-Mulk 67 : 1

﴿ الَّذِي خَلَقَ الْمَوْتَ وَالْحَيَاةَ لِيَبْلُوَكُمْ أَيُّكُمْ أَحْسَنُ عَمَلًا ۗ وَهُوَ الْعَزِيزُ الرَّحِيمُ ﴾

[الملك: ٢]

He Who created Death and Life, that He may try which of you is best in deed; and He is the Exalted in Might, Oft-Forgiving;

Al-Mulk 67 : 2

Allah is well aware of the difficulties that we are experiencing

Nothing happens without God's knowledge and His permission. He is well aware of our difficult situation and of the tests and trials we are experiencing. Once we have the knowledge and realization that our difficulty was allowed and willed by God and that He knows our suffering and that we are not alone, then we can cope with our adversity

﴿ مَا أَصَابَ مِنْ مُصِيبَةٍ إِلَّا بِإِذْنِ اللَّهِ ۗ وَمَنْ يُؤْمِنْ بِاللَّهِ يَهْدِ اللَّهُ قَلْبَهُ ۗ وَاللَّهُ بِكُلِّ شَيْءٍ

عَلِيمٌ ﴾ [التغابن: ١١]

No kind of calamity can occur, except by the leave of Allah; and if anyone believes in Allah, (Allah) guides his heart (aright): for Allah knows all things.

At-Taghabun 64 : 11

And:

﴿ مَا أَصَابَ مِنْ مُصِيبَةٍ فِي الْأَرْضِ وَلَا فِي أَنْفُسِكُمْ إِلَّا فِي كِتَابٍ مِّن قَبْلِ أَنْ نَبْرَأَهَا

إِنَّ ذَٰلِكَ عَلَى اللَّهِ يَسِيرٌ ﴾ [الحديد: ٢٢]

No misfortune can happen on earth or in your souls but is recorded in a decree before We bring it into existence: that is truly easy for Allah:

Al-Hadeed 57 : 22

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

﴿ [الحديد: ٢٣] ﴾

In order that ye may not despair over matters that pass you by, nor exult over favours bestowed upon you. For Allah loveth not any vainglorious boaster,

Al-Hadeed 57 : 23

We learn from these Qur'anic verses:

- Our fate was willed by God
- He knows what we are going through
- We should not feel sorry about opportunities that passed us by, nor gloat about our success

We should also understand that some of our difficulties may be our own doings and due to our own mistakes.

Allah forgives many of our mistakes. Some may come to haunt us:

﴿ وَمَا أَصَابَكُمْ مِّنْ مُّصِيبَةٍ فَبِمَا كَسَبَتْ أَيْدِيكُمْ وَيَعْفُوا عَنْ كَثِيرٍ ۙ﴾ [الشورى: ٣٠]

Whatever misfortune happens to you, is because of the things your hands have wrought, and for many (of them) He grants forgiveness.

Ash-Shura 42 : 30

The good and the bad both come from Allah

The good that we enjoy surely come from God. Many of our difficulties is our own faults. But sometimes, we are tested with difficulty or adversity to find our true faith:

﴿ أَيِنَّمَا تَكُونُوا يَدْرِكَكُمُ الْمَوْتُ وَلَوْ كُنْتُمْ فِي بُرُوجٍ مُّشِيدَةٍ ۗ وَإِن تُصِيبَهُمْ حَسَنَةٌ ۙ يَقُولُوا هَذِهِ مِّنْ عِندِ اللَّهِ ۗ وَإِن تُصِيبَهُمْ سَيِّئَةٌ يَقُولُوا هَذِهِ مِّنْ عِندِكَ ۗ قُلْ كُلٌّ مِّنْ عِندِ اللَّهِ ۗ فَمَالِ هَتُولَاءِ الْقَوْمِ لَا يَكَادُونَ يَفْقَهُونَ حَدِيثًا ۙ﴾ [النساء: ٧٨]

"Wherever ye are, death will find you out, even if ye are in towers built up strong and high!" if some good befalls them. they say, "This is from Allah"; but if evil, they say, "This is from thee" (O Prophet). Say: "All things are from Allah." But what hath come to these people, that they fail to understand a single fact?

An-Nesa'a 4 : 78

﴿ مَا أَصَابَكَ مِنْ حَسَنَةٍ فَمِنَ اللَّهِ وَمَا أَصَابَكَ مِنْ سَيِّئَةٍ فَمِنْ نَفْسِكَ وَأَرْسَلْنَاكَ لِلنَّاسِ رَسُولًا وَكَفَى بِاللَّهِ شَهِيدًا ﴾ [النساء: ٧٩]

Whatever good, (O man!) happens to thee, is from Allah; but whatever evil happens to thee, is from thy (own) soul. And We have sent thee as a Messenger to (instruct) mankind. And enough is Allah for a witness.

An-Nesa'a 4 : 79

Allah does not place a burden on a soul greater than it can bear

Only Allah knows what we are capable of doing and what we are able to bear and cope with. As human beings we may have an inflated opinion of our own abilities, and sometimes we under-estimate what we can tolerate or cope with. Allah is just and He knows what we are made of. He promised that He will not place a burden on a soul more than it can bear:

﴿ لَا يُكَلِّفُ اللَّهُ نَفْسًا إِلَّا وُسْعَهَا لَهَا مَا كَسَبَتْ وَعَلَيْهَا مَا اكْتَسَبَتْ ﴾ [البقرة: ٢٨٦]

On no soul doth Allah place a burden greater than it can bear. It gets every good that it earns, and it suffers every ill that it earns.

Al-Baqara 2 : 286

And :

﴿ وَلَا نُكَلِّفُ نَفْسًا إِلَّا وُسْعَهَا وَلَدَيْنَا كِتَابٌ يَنْطِقُ بِالْحَقِّ وَهُمْ لَا يُظْلَمُونَ ﴾

[المؤمنون: ٦٢]

On no soul do We place a burden greater than it can bear: before Us is a record which clearly shows the Truth: They will never be wronged.

Al-Mumenoun 23 : 62

We learn from these two verses:

- No soul is tested beyond its limits, and each person is tested according to his capabilities
- We are judged according to our response and how we cope with difficulty
- How we cope with difficulty is well recorded
- Allah is just, everything is taken into consideration

Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) explained that each person is tested according to his degree of faith: if his faith is strong then his test is more severe, and if his faith is weak then his test is less severe:

(People are tested according to their faith: Prophets are most severely tested, followed by the most righteous, then the less righteous. A person may be tested so often that he walks on earth with no sin)

Narrated by Ahmad, Termedhi & Ibn Hibban

Allah's prophets are examples to us in patience and coping with difficulty

Prophet Nuh (Noah) preached God's message for 950 years, yet few people believed in him. Even his own wife and son rejected him, but he patiently persevered:

﴿وَلَقَدْ أَرْسَلْنَا نُوحًا إِلَىٰ قَوْمِهِ فَلَبِثَ فِيهِمْ أَلْفَ سَنَةٍ إِلَّا خَمْسِينَ عَامًا فَأَخَذَهُمُ

الطُّوفَانَ وَهُمْ ظَالِمُونَ ﴿١٤﴾ [العنكبوت: ١٤]

We (once) sent Noah to his people, and he tarried among them a thousand years less fifty: but the Deluge overwhelmed them while they (persisted in) sin.

Al-Ankabut 29 : 14

﴿وَأَوْحَىٰ إِلَىٰ نُوحٍ أَنَّهُ لَنْ يُؤْمِنَ مِنْ قَوْمِكَ إِلَّا مَن قَدْ ءَامَنَ فَلَا تَبْتَئِسْ بِمَا

كَانُوا يَفْعَلُونَ ﴿٣٦﴾ [هود: ٣٦]

It was revealed to Noah! "None of thy People will believe except those who have believed already! so grieve no longer over their (evil) deeds.

Hud 11 : 36

﴿ حَتَّىٰ إِذَا جَاءَ أَمْرُنَا وَفَارَ التَّنُورُ قُلْنَا احْمِلْ فِيهَا مِن كُلِّ زَوْجَيْنِ اثْنَيْنِ وَأَهْلَكَ إِلَّا
 مَن سَبَقَ عَلَيْهِ الْقَوْلُ وَمَنْ ءَامَنَ وَمَا ءَامَنَ مَعَهُ إِلَّا قَلِيلٌ ﴾ [هود: ٤٠]

At length, behold! There came Our Command, and the fountains of the earth gushed forth! We said: "Embark therein, of each kind two, male and female, and your family - except those against whom the Word has already gone forth - and the Believers." But only a few believed with him.

Hud 11 : 40

Prophet Ibrahim (Abraham)

Was rejected by his people, even by his father who threatened him with punishment, but he patiently persevered and immigrated to a new land where he can invite others to God. Abraham was thrown into the fire, but refused to give up his faith in God:

﴿ قَالُوا حَرِّقُوهُ وَانصُرُوا ءَالَهُتِّكُمْ إِن كُنتُمْ فَعَلِينَ ﴾ [الأنبياء: ٦٨]

They said, "Burn him and protect your gods, if ye do (anything at all)!"

Al-Anbia'a 21 : 68

﴿ قُلْنَا يَنَارُ كُونِي بَرْدًا وَسَلَامًا عَلَىٰ إِبْرَاهِيمَ ﴾ [الأنبياء: ٦٩]

We said, "O Fire! be thou cool. and (a means of) safety for Abraham!"

Al-Anbia'a 21 : 69

﴿ وَأَزَادُوا بِهِ كَيْدًا فَجَعَلْنَاهُمُ الْأَخْسَرِينَ ﴾ [الأنبياء: ٧٠]

Then they sought a stratagem against him: but We made them the ones that lost most!

Al-Anbia'a 21 : 70

﴿ وَحِجْنَئِهِ وُلُوطًا إِلَى الْأَرْضِ الَّتِي بَارَكْنَا فِيهَا لِلْعَالَمِينَ ﴾ [الأنبياء: ٧١]

But We delivered him and (his nephew) Lut (and directed them) to the land which We have blessed for the nations.

Al-Anbia'a 21 : 71

Prophet Ibrahim was ordered to sacrifice his son and he complied. Both Ibrahim and his son were willing to comply and obeyed God's order:

﴿ فَبَشِّرْنَاهُ بِبُحْتِهِ حَلِيمٍ ﴾ [الصافات: ١٠١]

So We gave him the good news of a boy ready to suffer and forbear.

As-Saffat 37 : 101

﴿ فَلَمَّا بَلَغَ مَعَهُ السَّعْيَ قَالَ يَبْنَئِي إِنِّي أَرَىٰ فِي الْمَنَامِ أَنِّي أَذْحُكَ فَانظُرْ مَاذَا تَرَىٰ ۚ ۝١٠٢﴾

﴿ قَالَ يَتَابَتِ أَفْعَلٌ مَا تُؤْمَرُ سَتَجِدُنِي إِن شَاءَ اللَّهُ مِنَ الصَّابِرِينَ ﴾ [الصافات: ١٠٢]

Then, when (the son) reached (the age of) (serious) work with him, he said: "O my son! I see in vision that I offer thee in sacrifice: now see what is thy view!" (the son) said: "O my father! do as thou art commanded: thou will find me, if Allah so wills, one practising Patience and Constancy!"

As-Saffat 37 : 102

﴿ فَلَمَّا أَسْلَمَا وَتَلَّهُ لِلْجَبِينِ ﴾ [الصافات: ١٠٣]

So when they had both submitted their wills (to Allah), and he had laid him prostrate on his forehead (for sacrifice),

As-Saffat 37 : 103

﴿ وَنَادَيْنَاهُ أَن يَا إِبْرَاهِيمُ ﴾ [الصافات: ١٠٤]

We called out to him, "O Abraham!

As-Saffat 37 : 104

﴿ قَدْ صَدَّقْتَ الرُّءْيَا إِنَّا كَذَلِكْ نَجْزِي الْمُحْسِنِينَ ﴾ [الصافات: ١٠٦]

"Thou hast already fulfilled the vision!" thus indeed do We reward those who do right.

As-Saffat 37 : 106

﴿ إِنَّ هَذَا هُوَ الْبَلَاءُ الْمُبِينُ ﴾ [الصافات: ١٠٥]

For this was obviously a trial,

As-Saffat 37 : 105

Prophet Jacob (Israel) lost his son Joseph and wept till he became blind, but never lost hope of God's mercy:

﴿ وَتَوَلَّىٰ عَنْهُمْ وَقَالَ يَا سَفَىٰ عَلَىٰ يَوْسُفَ وَأَبْيَضَّتْ عَيْنَاهُ مِنَ الْحُزَنِ فَهُوَ كَظِيمٌ ﴾

[يوسف: ٨٤]

And he turned away from them, and said: "How great is my grief for Joseph!" and his eyes became white with sorrow, and he fell into silent melancholy.

Jusuf 12 : 84

And:

﴿ يَبْنِي أَذْهَبُوا فَتَحَسَّسُوا مِنْ يُوسُفَ وَأَخِيهِ وَلَا تَأْيِسُوا مِنْ رَوْحِ اللَّهِ إِنَّهُ لَا يَأْيِسُ
مِنْ رَوْحِ اللَّهِ إِلَّا الْقَوْمُ الْكَافِرُونَ ﴾ [يوسف: ٨٧]

"O my sons! go ye and enquire about Joseph and his brother, and never give up hope of Allah's soothing Mercy: truly no one despairs of Allah's soothing Mercy, except those who have no faith."

Yusuf 12 : 87

Prophet Yusuf (Joseph) was thrown in the well by his brothers to die, was then rescued and sold as a slave. He was seduced by the wife of his master, but resisted the temptation and preferred jail to committing adultery. He invited his jail inmates to God. When he assumed power, he was humble and wise and turned to God acknowledging God's blessings and seeking His forgiveness:

﴿ رَبِّ قَدْ آتَيْتَنِي مِنَ الْمَلِكِ وَعَلَّمْتَنِي مِنْ تَأْوِيلِ الْأَحَادِيثِ فَاطِرَ السَّمَوَاتِ
وَالْأَرْضِ أَنْتَ وَلِيٌّ فِي الدُّنْيَا وَالْآخِرَةِ تَوَفَّنِي مُسْلِمًا وَأَلْحِقْنِي بِالصَّالِحِينَ ﴾

[يوسف: ١٠١]

"O my Lord! Thou hast indeed bestowed on me some power, and taught me something of the interpretation of dreams and events, O Thou creator of the heavens and the earth! Thou art my Protector in this world and in the Hereafter. Take Thou my soul (at death) as one submitting to Thy Will (as a Muslim), and unite me with the righteous."

Yusuf 12 : 101

Prophet Ayyoub (Job) was afflicted with chronic skin ailment and suffered for many years. He was deserted by his wife and his people but he never lost hope and kept praying to God. The Qur'an praises him as the epitome of patience and coping with difficulty:

﴿ وَأَيُّوبَ إِذْ نَادَىٰ رَبَّهُ أَنِّي مَسَّنِيَ الضُّرُّ وَأَنْتَ أَرْحَمُ الرَّحِيمِينَ ﴿٨٣﴾ ﴾

[الأنبياء: ٨٣]

And (remember) Job, when he cried to his Lord, "Truly distress has seized me, But Thou art the Most Merciful of those that are Merciful."

Al-Anbia'a 21 : 83

﴿ وَخُذْ بِيَدِكَ ضِغْثًا فَاصْرِبْ بِهِ ۖ وَلَا تَحْنُتْ ۗ إِنَّا وَجَدْنَاهُ صَابِرًا ۖ نِعْمَ الْعَبْدُ ۗ إِنَّهُ ۗ

أَوَّابٌ ﴿٤٤﴾ ﴾ [ص: ٤٤]

"And take in thy hand a little grass, and strike therewith: and break not (thy oath)." Truly We found him full of patience and constancy, how excellent in Our service! ever did he turn (to Us)!

Sa D 38 : 44

Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) is our example of patience and coping with difficulty:

- He was rejected by his own people but kept inviting to God through 13 hard years in Macca, then 10 more years in Madina
- He lost his sons during infancy
- He faced many difficulties in Madina and worked a plan to solve them and establish the Muslim community and Muslim state
- Despite many set backs and difficulties he never wavered in his faith or lost hope in God's mercy, and was an inspiration to his companions and to all believers

Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) explained the proper behavior of someone who believes and has faith. He said:

(All the affairs of the believer are good for him, and this only happens to those who believe. If he enjoys a blessing he is grateful to God, and this is good for him. And if he is experiencing difficulty and hardship he patiently persevere, and this is good for him)

Narrated by Ahmad & Muslim

Those who believe are patient and never lose hope of God's mercy. In contrast, those who lack faith are impatient and give up quickly for they lack

the necessary strength and support to cope with difficulty and adversity. The Qur'an explains:

﴿لَا يَتَسُمُّ الْإِنْسَانُ مِنْ دُعَاءِ الْخَيْرِ وَإِنْ مَسَّهُ الشَّرُّ فَيُؤْسُ قُنُوطًا﴾ [فصلت: ٤٩]

Man does not weary of asking for good (things), but if ill touches him, he gives up all hope (and) is lost in despair.

Fusselat 41 : 49

And:

﴿وَإِذَا أَنْعَمْنَا عَلَى الْإِنْسَانِ أَعْرَضَ وَنَأَىٰ بِجَانِبِهِ وَإِذَا مَسَّهُ الشَّرُّ فَذُو دُعَاءٍ عَرِيضٍ﴾

[فصلت: ٥١]

When We bestow favours on man, he turns away, and gets himself remote on his side (instead of coming to Us); and when evil seizes him, (he comes) full of prolonged prayer!

Fusselat 41 : 51

Allah gives us the ability to cope with difficulty

Allah provides relief after each difficulty. Such relief does not happen right away. We must learn to be patient and cope with our difficulty, but feel certain that Allah will reward us for our faith and will relieve our distress:

﴿فَإِنَّ مَعَ الْعُسْرِ يُسْرًا﴾ [الشرح: ٥]

So, verily, with every difficulty, there is relief:

Ash-Sharh 94 : 5

﴿إِنَّ مَعَ الْعُسْرِ يُسْرًا﴾ [الشرح: ٦]

Verily, with every difficulty there is relief.

Ash-Sharh 94 : 6

Our job is to turn to God seeking His help and He promised to give us the ability to cope with our difficulty and to give us patience and strength. Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) said:

(.. and whoever seeks patience Allah will strengthen him and gives him patience. No one is given anything better or more lasting than patient perseverance)

Narrated by Bokhari

The Qur'an stresses that Allah is indeed with those who patiently persevere:

﴿ يَتَأَيَّهَا الَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا اسْتَعِينُوا بِالصَّبْرِ وَالصَّلَاةِ ۚ إِنَّ اللَّهَ مَعَ الصَّابِرِينَ ﴾

[البقرة: ١٥٣]

O ye who believe! Seek help with patient Perseverance and Prayer: for Allah is with those who patiently persevere.

Al-Baqara 2 : 153

We should keep company with those who are patient. Their faith and character help us in coping with difficulty. If we associate with others whose preoccupation is with material things they will only weaken our faith and deprive us of the ability to cope with difficult situations. The Qur'an explains:

﴿ وَأَصْبِرْ نَفْسَكَ مَعَ الَّذِينَ يَدْعُونَ رَبَّهُمْ بِالْغَدَاةِ وَالْعَشِيِّ يُرِيدُونَ وَجْهَهُ ۗ وَلَا تَعْدُ

عَيْنَاكَ عَنْهُمْ تُرِيدُ زِينَةَ الْحَيَاةِ الدُّنْيَا ۗ وَلَا تُطِعْ مَنْ أَغْفَلْنَا قَلْبَهُ عَن ذِكْرِنَا وَاتَّبَعَ

هَوَاهُ وَكَانَ أَمْرُهُ فُرُطًا ﴾ [الكهف: ٢٨]

And keep thy soul content with those who call on their Lord morning and evening, seeking His Face; and let not thine eyes pass beyond them, seeking the pomp and glitter of this Life; nor obey any whose heart We have permitted to neglect the remembrance of Us, one who follows his own desires, whose case has gone beyond all bounds.

Al-Kahf 18 : 28

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