

TAWAKKUL OR TRUSTING IN ALLAH

إِنْ يَنْصُرْكُمُ اللَّهُ فَلَا غَالِبَ لَكُمْ ۖ وَإِنْ يَخَذِلْكُمْ فَمَنْ ذَا الَّذِي يَنْصُرْكُمْ مِنْ بَعْدِهِ ۗ وَعَلَى اللَّهِ فَلْيَتَوَكَّلِ الْمُؤْمِنُونَ ﴿١٦٠﴾

If Allah helps you, none can overcome you: if He forsakes you, who is there after that that can help you? In Allah, then, let believers put their trust. (Qur'an, 3:160)

O Allah, You are my lord. There is no god but You. I put my trust in You. You are the Lord of the Mighty Throne. Whatever Allah wills will happen and what He does not will cannot happen. There is no power or strength except with Allah, the Exalted, the Mighty. I know that Allah has power over all things, and that Allah comprehends all things in knowledge. O Allah, I seek refuge with You from the evil of myself and from the evil of all creatures under your control. Surely, the straight way is my Sustainer's way.

(Du'a of Prophet Muhammad')

When Abraham had differences with his wife (Sarah), (because of her jealousy of Hajar, Ishmael's mother), he took Ishmael and

Muslim decision-makers should not place unwarranted confidence in their plans and their ability to execute them; whatever they plan and do, they must put their trust in Allah. Prophet Muhammad said in a *du`a*, "Whatever Allah wills will happen, and what He does not will cannot happen."

his mother and went away. They had a water-skin with them containing some water. Ishmael's mother used to drink water from the water-skin so that her milk would increase for her child. When Abraham reached Mecca, he made her sit under a tree and afterwards returned home. Ishmael's mother followed him, and when they reached Kada', she called him from behind: "O Abraham! To whom are you leaving us?" He replied: "(I am leaving you) to Allah's (care)." She said: "I am satisfied to be with Allah" [...].

Narrated by Ibn Abbas²

As the Prophet clearly stated and demonstrated, Islam encourages strategic planning and thinking. People, however, may place unwarranted confidence in their plans and their ability to execute them. For Muslims, such one-sided confidence borders on arrogance and is dangerous because it challenges a major dimension of Islam: that of *tawakkul* (trust/reliance in Allah). Anas ibn Malik reported in the following hadith that:

A man once rode into town on a fine she-camel of his, and he said: "O Messenger of Allah, shall I just leave her unattended, and put my trust in the Lord [ada'u-ha wa atawakkalu]?" So the Prophet told him: "Hobble her feet with a rope and put your trust in the Lord [a'qil-ha wa tawakkal]." ³

No matter how good our plans are, they cannot succeed unless Allah wills them to. Allah tells us to rely on Him and to strive for our objectives (*Surat al-Jamu`ah*¹⁰) for He is the master planner and trusting in Him (*tawakkul*) is a sign of belief. *Tawakkul* is clearly related to *iman*, as indicated in the following verse:

اللَّهُ لَا إِلَهَ إِلَّا هُوَ وَعَلَى اللَّهِ فَلْيَتَوَكَّلِ الْمُؤْمِنُونَ ﴿٣١﴾

Allah! There is no god but He: and on Allah therefore let the Believers put their trust. (Qur'an, 64:13)

The Qur'an uses *iman* and *tawakkul* in many of its verses (e.g., Qur'an, 2:283, 4:36, 8:27, 11:56, 14:11, and 58:10). In a *hadith sahih* reported in Ahmad, al-Nasa'i, Ibn Majah, al-Hakim, and al-Tirmidhi, Umar ibn al-Khattab narrates that the Prophet said:

If only you relied on Allah a true reliance, He would provide sustenance for you just as He does the birds: They fly out in the morning empty and return in the afternoon with full stomachs.⁴

Although trust and reliance on Allah are one of the most important causes of success in this life, they do not negate strategic planning, working, and striving for sustenance in this life.

Although trust and reliance on Allah are one of the most important causes of success in this life, they do not negate strategic planning, working, and striving for sustenance in this life. As hadith commentators (such as al-Bayhaqi) have noted, the bird is, in fact, working to support itself. It does not sit idly in its nest or on a branch waiting for food; rather, during the day it actively searches for insects and other food and trusts its Creator to feed it. Allah feeds billions of birds and other creatures every day.

In other words, *tawakkul* does not mean abandoning work or becoming a fatalist. You must plan, live your life, and work to support yourself and your family to the best of your ability. Yet having done all of these, you must never rely solely on yourself and your actions, for success is not up to you. Ultimately, you must submit to His will with complete sincerity. Your organization's plan cannot be implemented and cannot succeed unless Allah wills it.

In the same manner, your competitor's plans or those who work against Islam or Islamic organizations are futile without Allah's will. This fact is amply illustrated in the Prophet's *sirah*. During his migration from Makkah to Madinah, the Prophet and Abu Bakr could hear their pursuers' voices from inside the cave, where they were hiding. Relying completely on Allah, he told Abu Bakr: *Do not grieve, for Allah is assuredly with us* (Qur'an, 9:40). Similarly, when Abraham was thrown into the fire, he uttered the same words that Muhammad did when he was being threatened:

For us Allah is Sufficient and He is the best Disposer of affairs (Hasbun Allahu wa ni`mah al-wakil)

الَّذِينَ قَالَ لَهُمُ النَّاسُ إِنَّ النَّاسَ قَدْ جَمَعُوا لَكُمْ فَاخْشَوْهُمْ
فَزَادَهُمْ إِيمَانًا وَقَالُوا حَسْبُنَا اللَّهُ وَنِعْمَ الْوَكِيلُ

Men said to them: "The people are gathering against you, so fear them." But it only increased their faith; they said: "For us Allah is Sufficient and He is the best Disposer of affairs" (Hasbun Allahu wa ni`mah al-wakil). (Qur'an, 3:173)

Allah cooled the fire so that Abraham would not be incinerated, and turned the Prophet's pursuers away with a spider's web and a rock dove's nest.

Illustration capsule 11 describes the example of Hakeem Olajuwon, one of the great basketball players in the world, and his personal discovery of *tawakkul*.

Illustration Capsule 11

***Tawakkul* and the Success of One of the USA's Greatest Basketball Stars⁵**

Brother Hakeem Olajuwon taught me the importance of *Tawakkul*, or trusting Allah.

Br. Hakeem was an MVP on the Houston Rockets basketball team a couple of years ago when I first got to know him.

I remember reading before he became the star of the team, that he was a very good player but had a very bad temper. He would regularly fight with other players and swear, for instance.

Although he was a good player, his team went nowhere. But suddenly, in the mid-1990s, that changed, and the Rockets became a winning team instead of one with a couple of good players but no coordination. This culminated in their success in the 1994 and 1995 NBA championships.

Br. Hakeem used to be a non-practicing Muslim. I and a group of friends once asked him how the transformation to Islam affected his character.

"Before I started practicing my faith, I used to completely rely on myself. When I had done my best, I would be extremely frustrated if I didn't win. It would irritate and anger me. And that was causing me to be bad to others by fighting and swearing," he explained.

"But when I started practicing my faith, I learned that results are not my property. I started doing my best but then I left success and failure to my Creator. Now I was not irritated by failure and was not overinflated by success. That caused me to calm down and improve my behavior towards others on my team and we became a team."

The difference between Br. Hakeem before and after was his understanding of the concept of *Tawakkul*, which is a major concept in the relationship of a believer with his or her Creator. When a believer fully practices *Tawakkul* by putting his or her full trust in Allah, this person realizes that they are not all-powerful, Allah is. Although we all control some variables that Allah has given us in our control, Allah ultimately controls all the other variables known or unknown to us.

Our capacities are limited. Allah's are unlimited. We are responsible for following His command by doing our duty and making a right choice in the world of choices and following them up with action. In this way, good intentions and directions combined with good steps are what we are responsible for. And as Muslims, we want to do our best in that area. But results, positive or negative, are not always in our control. They are dependent upon the laws and prophecies which Allah has put in place and on His Will.

Sometimes we think that something is good for us and actually it is bad for us. And sometimes we feel that something is bad for us while actually it is the other way around. So the limit of human knowledge explains the limits of not only our control, but our responsibility as well. That is why we do our part and leave things in terms of results to God.

Adopting the belief and practice of *Tawakkul* has two benefits for us. First, knowing that our responsibility for what happens is limited is very comforting. Those who do not realize the limits of human responsibility normally transgress on others' rights by forcing their will on them through verbal or physical violence or they may get depressed and lose their mind or hurt themselves. So it is the Mercy of Allah that He has told us that our responsibility is limited. And that is the meaning of "On no soul does Allah place a burden greater than it can bear" (Qur'an, 2:286) as well as the understanding of individual responsibility.

The second consequence of *Tawakkul* is that it invites us to connect to a powerful Ally Who is no one but the Lord Himself.

The more we rely on Him, the greater the chances that we will try to please Him by following the guidance He has given us, which in turn will lead to goodness in this world and success in the Hereafter.

The third consequence of *Tawakkul* is what Br. Hakeem learned by observing himself. By fully trusting in Allah and relying on Him, we are not depressed by what we have lost or intoxicated by our success (Qur'an, 57:22-23). We know that all things are in Allah's hands. And that makes us not only humbler but more submissive to Allah, thus better believers.

"And put your trust and reliance in Allah, and sufficient is Allah as a Trustee." (Qur'an, 33:3)

"And trust and rely on the Living One (Allah), Who will never die, and celebrate His praises and thanks. And Sufficient is He to be acquainted with the sins of His slaves." (Qur'an, 25:58)

"And whoever places his trust in Allah, Sufficient is He for him, for Allah will surely accomplish His Purpose: For verily, Allah has appointed for all things a due proportion" (Qur'an, 65:3) [...]

Salat al-Istikhara

Salat al-istikhara is a special prayer performed to ask Allah for guidance, especially when you have to choose between two permissible alternatives.

Istikhara (seeking guidance from Allah) is one of the avenues that our Creator has made available to guide those who put their trust in Him. *Salat al-istikhara* is a special prayer that you can perform to ask Allah to guide you in any affair in your life, especially when you have to choose between two permissible alternatives. As pointed out in *Fiqh-us-Sunnah* (4.41), Qatadah said: "Every people who seek the pleasure of Allah and consult with one another are guided to the best course in their affairs."⁶ In the course of developing and implementing your organization's strategic plan, you will confront multiple alternatives. Prayer, especially *salat al-istikhara*, is one way that you can seek guidance from the Omniscient One.

Several hadiths point to the importance of this special prayer: Sa'd ibn Waqas reported that the Prophet said:

Istikhara (seeking guidance from Allah) is one of the distinct favors (of Allah) upon man, and a good fortune for the son

of Adam is to be pleased with the judgment of Allah.⁷ And a misfortune of the son of Adam is his failure to make istikhara (seeking Allah's guidance), and a misfortune for the son of Adam is his displeasure with the judgment of Allah.

For more information on how to perform *Salat al-Istikhara*, please see *Sahih al Bukhari*, Volume 2, hadith 263).

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Final Words

*Create a world of your own
If you are amongst the living!
The secret of the creation of Adam, and the object
Of Divine Order: "Be!"
And then "It was!" – is Life!
[...]*

*O foolish Glow-Worm!
Get rid of revolving
Around the Lamp,
And live in the illumination
Of thy own Nature!
[...]*

*Never forget that you are a Muslim!
Keep your breast brimmed
With healthy longings; and
Always remember this holy Verse:
"Allah does not break
His Promise (with true Believers)!"*

[Selections from Mohammad Iqbal's *Khizr-e-Raah*¹]