Coping with Adversity, Part 2

Synopsis of the Friday Sermon delivered by Ameer Mustapha Elturk on April 22, 2011

Today's sermon is a continuation of the earlier sermon on the topic, “Coping with Adversity” delivered on April 1, 2011, wherein the philosophical aspects of the subject touching upon three fundamental issues—the nature of man, the nature of universe, and the nature of God had been discussed. Today’s discussion will focus more on the practical aspects of the problem.

Man should always have a positive attitude. He must believe that nothing happens without the divine decree of Allah (SWT). Allah (SWT) never intends anything bad for His ‘ibad (servants). Just because we go through difficult times does not necessarily mean that Allah (SWT) does not like us. Actually, adverse conditions are a test of faith in Him. The muttaqeen or those who have an implicit faith in Allah (SWT) and are always mindful of Him are rewarded by Him in many ways as stated in Surat al-Talaq: “…Allah will find a way out for those who are mindful of Him… And He provides for him from (sources) he never could imagine…Allah makes things easy for those who are mindful of Him…Whoever has taqwa of Allah – He will erase his bad actions from him and greatly increase his reward” (al-Talaq, 65:2-5).

We have to ask ourselves if we really believe in these divine ayaat, as we should, because if we do so, and think positively about the adversities and calamities that befall us, we will eventually emerge successful. We have also to be mindful of the ayah, “…You may dislike something although it is good for you, or like something although it is bad for you: God knows and you do not” (al-Baqarah, 2:216). Since Allah (SWT) alone knows what is actually good or bad for us, it is advisable that whenever we are inflicted with any calamity, the first thing that should come to our mind is that it is from Allah (SWT). This should be accompanied with a spontaneous consciousness of the truth that “…We belong to God and to Him we shall return, (Inna lillahi Wa Inna Ilaihi Raji’oon) (al-Baqarah, 2:156). Allah (SWT) has asserted that He will test us in various ways. "We shall certainly test you with fear and hunger, and loss of property, lives and crops. Give good news to those who are patient."(al-Baqarah, 2:155)

Practical steps to be taken when inflicted with adversity:
There are several practical steps that can be taken to cope with adversities in life. Some of these are: patience (sabr), prayer (salah), supplication (du’a), acts of charity (‘ibadah, sadaqah etc), remembrance of Allah SWT (zikr), and trust in Allah-SWT (tawakkul).

Patience:
What is patience? We generally know what it means. It is the capacity for calmly enduring pain, trying situations, etc., but to actually exercise patience is easier said than done. It is the true believer (mu’min) alone who understands the virtue of patience and practices it. Alhamdulillah, Allah (SWT) Himself prescribes us this remedy against any predicament that we may face. It is up to us to take heed. “O you who believe; seek help through patience and prayer; verily Allah is with the patient” (al-Baqarah, 2:153). This means that Allah (SWT) is with the believer who seeks His help through patience and prayer against all kinds of hardships and tribulations. Our noble Prophet (SAW) himself is a shining example of patience. He displayed utmost patience and perseverance in the face of countless adversities that he encountered during his arduous prophetic mission of 23 years, and with Allah (SWT)’s grace, eventually emerged supremely successful on all fronts. The Prophet (SAW) while being a model of patience also inculcated this noble quality in his companions. Their noble characters are portrayed in the ayah, “Those who are patient in seeking the face of their Lord, and establish prayer and give from the provision We have given them, secretly and openly, and repel evil with good, it is they who will have the ultimate abode” (al-Ra’d, 13:22). Scholars have divided patience into three categories: patience in the face of adversity (sabr ‘ala al-Musibah), patience in obeying Allah (SWT) (sabr ‘ala al-Ta’a), and patience in abstaining from the forbidden (sabr ‘an al-Ma’siyyah). Islam provides a powerful psychological leverage in the form of patience to deal with adversities. Patience, therefore, has to be adopted by the believers as a way of life.
Prayer:
Prayer (salah) is another effective remedy for coping with calamities, catastrophes, adversities, and all types of trials and tribulations. Ayah 153 of Surat al-Baqarah speaks of seeking (SWT)’s help with patience and prayer. Prayer is an effective medium of connecting with Allah (SWT). The true believers understand this. It was the Sunnah of our beloved Prophet (SAW) to offer prayers whenever he was distressed in the face of a grave situation or adversity. Prayer brings about peace and tranquility of the mind and heart. No wonder, the injunction to establish prayers has been repeatedly stressed in the Qur’an. “Establish salah and pay zakah and bow with those who bow.” (al-Baqarah, 2:43).

Du’a
The power of du’a or supplication can never be underestimated. A believer knows and understands that if faced with a problem or difficulty, he should call upon Allah (SWT) for He is close to him, listens to him, and answers him. “And if My servants ask you about Me, I am near answering the calls of those who call to Me. So let them respond to Me and believe in Me that they may be guided” (al-Baqarah, 2:186). The Prophet (SAW) used to invoke Allah (SWT) on all occasions. We learn from hadith about the numerous supplications he made to Allah (SWT) to help him in situations of distress and difficulties. The meaning of one such du’a is: “O Allah, I take refuge in You from anxiety and sorrow, weakness and laziness, miserliness and cowardice, the burden of debts and from being overpowered by men.” Ibn Mas’ud reported that the Prophet (SAW) said, “If any servant of Allah afflicted with distress or grief makes this supplication, his supplication will be accepted: ‘O Allah, I am Your servant, son of Your servant, son of your maidservant. My forehead is in Your hand. Your command concerning me prevails, and Your decision concerning me is just. I call upon You by every one of the beautiful names by which You have described Yourself, or which You have revealed in Your book, or have taught anyone of Your creatures, or which You have chosen to keep in the knowledge of the unseen with You, to make the Qur'an the delight of my heart, the light of my breast, and remover of my grief, sorrows, and afflictions.’ Allah will remove one’s affliction and replace it with joy and happiness.” We have been encouraged by the Prophet (SAW) to memorize such dua’s. They are handy tools in times of distress.

Good Deeds:
Doing good deeds in times of crisis is also an effective way to ward off adversities. The scope of good deeds is very comprehensive and includes among others, all forms of worship (‘ibadah), charitable work, and spending in the way of Allah (SWT). The importance of doing good deeds can be appreciated from the emphasis the Qur’an lays to it. While this makes one qualify for Allah’s mercy and blessings, it also distracts one from being overwhelmed with distress. “But if We let him taste blessings after hardship has afflicted him, he says, ‘My troubles have gone away,’ and he is overjoyed, boastful; except for those who are patient and do good deeds. They will receive forgiveness and a great reward (Hud, 11:10-11). Spending in the way of Allah (SWT) is another way to coping with adversity. Surat al-Ra’d explains, “and those who are patient in adversity seeking the good pleasure of their Lord, and are constant in prayer, and spend on others, secretly and openly, out of what We provide for them, and [who] repel evil with good, it is they who will have the Ultimate Abode” (al-Ra’d, 13:22).

Zikr
Zikr means constant remembrance of Allah (SWT). According to Imam Shafi’ (may Allah have mercy on him), the best zikr is to recite the Qur’an. In fact, one of the names of the noble Qur’an is al-Zikr. The Qur’an connects one to Allah (SWT). Its recitation soothes and calms the soul. “Those who believe and whose hearts find peace in the remembrance of Allah. Look! it is in the remembrance of Allah alone that the hearts really find peace” (al-Ra’d, 13:28).

Tawakkul
Tawakkul means to have resolute trust and reliance on Allah. The Qur’an says, “And put your trust and reliance on Allah, and sufficient is Allah as a Trustee” (al-Ahzab, 33: 3). How beautiful and comforting it is to know while coping with adversity that we have Allah on our side! A believer knows that nothing happens without the decree of Allah (SWT). “No misfortune occurs except by Allah’s permission. Whoever has iman in Allah – He will guide his heart. Allah has knowledge of all things…There is no god but He, therefore, let the believers put their trust in Him” (al-Taghabun, 64:11,13). True believers should put their trust solely in Allah (SWT) for He will take care of them,” “…Whoever puts his trust in God, He is sufficient for him…”(al-Talaq, 65:3).

It is only in following the teachings of the Qur’an and the Sunnah that we get guidance in all areas of life including the guidance to cope with adversities. We pray to Allah (SWT) to make things easy for us.

End

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