

How to Behave When Struck by Illness

(part 1 of 2): Bearing Afflictions with Patience



Before talking about how a believer behaves when ill or injured it is important to understand just what Islam teaches us about the life of this world. Our existence here on earth is but a transient stop, on the way to our real life in the Hereafter. Paradise or Hell will be our permanent abode. This world is a place of trial and testing. God created it for us, for our enjoyment, but it is a place of more than just worldly pleasures. It is here that we fulfil our true purpose; we live our lives based on the worship of God. We laugh, we play, we cry and we feel heartache and sorrow, but every condition and every emotion is from God. We react with patience and thankfulness and hope for eternal reward. We fear eternal punishment and know with certainty that God is the source of all mercy and all forgiveness.

“And this life of the world is only amusement and play! Verily, the home of the Hereafter, that is the life indeed (i.e. the eternal life that will never end), if they but knew.” (Quran 29:64)

God did not create us and then abandon us to the pleasures and trials of life; rather He sent Messengers and Prophets to teach us and Books of revelation to guide us. He also provided us with countless blessings. Each blessing makes life wonderful and at times bearable. If we stop for a moment and contemplate our existence, the blessings of God become evident. Observe the rain falling outside,

feel the tingle of the sunshine on your bare skin, touch your breast and feel the strong rhythmic beating of your heart. These are blessings from God and we should be thankful for them, along with our homes, our children, and our health. God however tells us, that we will be tested, He says,

“And certainly, We shall test you with something of fear, hunger, loss of wealth, lives and fruits, but give glad tidings to the patient ones.” (Quran 2:155)

God has advised us to bear our trials and tribulations patiently. However, this is difficult without understanding that everything that happens in this world happens by the permission of God. No leaf falls from a tree without God’s permission. No business crumbles, no car crashes, and no marriage ends without God’s permission. No illness or injury touches a human being without God’s permission. He has power over all things. God does what He does for reasons that are at times beyond our comprehension and for reasons that may or may not be apparent. However, God, in His infinite wisdom and mercy wants only what is best for us. Ultimately, what is best for us is eternal life in a place of eternal bliss, Paradise.

“Their Lord gives them glad tidings of a Mercy from Him, and that He is pleased (with them), and of Gardens (Paradise) for them wherein are everlasting delight.” (Quran 9:21)

In the face of every trial, a believer must be certain that God does not decree for him anything but good. The good may be among the pleasures of this world or it may be in the hereafter. Prophet Muhammad, may the mercy and blessings of God be upon him, said, **“How wonderful is the affair of the believer, for his affairs are all good. If something good happens to him, he is thankful for it and that is good for him. If something bad happens to him, he bears it with patience and that is also good for him.”**^[1] God tests us with the trials and tribulations of life, and if we bear patiently we will attain great reward. Through changing circumstances and trying times God tests our level of faith, ascertains our ability to be patient and wipes away some of our sins. God is all loving and all wise and knows us better than we know ourselves. We will not attain Paradise without His mercy and His mercy is manifest in the tests and trials of this life.

The life of this world is mere deception. The most beneficial thing to us are the good deeds that we were able to perform. Families are a trial, for God says that they can lead us astray, but equally they can lead us to Paradise. Wealth is a trial; coveting it can make us greedy and miserly, but distributing it and using it to benefit those in need can bring us closer to God. Health is also a trial. Good health can make us feel invincible and not in need of God, but bad health has a way of humbling us and forcing us to depend on God. How a believer reacts to the circumstances of life is very important.

What happens if the pleasures of this life suddenly become torments? How should one behave when struck by illness or injury? Of course, we accept our fate and try to bear the pain, sadness, or suffering patiently because we know with certainty that from this God will bring about much good. Prophet Muhammad said, **“No misfortune or disease befalls a Muslim, no worry or grief or harm or distress – not even a thorn that pricks him – but God will expiate for some of his sins because of that.”**^[2] However, we are imperfect human beings. We can read these words, we can even understand the sentiment, but behaving with acceptance is sometimes very difficult. It is much easier to bemoan and cry about our situation, but our Most Merciful God has given us clear guidelines and promised us two things, if we worship Him and follow His guidance we will be rewarded with Paradise and that after hardship comes ease.

“So verily, with the hardship, there is relief.” (Quran 94:5)

A believer is obligated to look after his body and mind, therefore trying to maintain good health is essential. However, when struck by illness or injury, it is vital to follow God’s guidance. A believer must seek medical aid and do everything he can to bring about a cure or recovery, but at the same time he must seek help through prayer, remembrance of God and acts of worship. Islam is a holistic way of life, both physical and spiritual health go hand in hand. In part two we will examine in more detail the steps to take when struck by illness or injury.

Footnotes:

^[1] *Saheeh Muslim*

^[2] *Saheeh Al-Bukhari, Saheeh Muslim*

(part 2 of 2): God’s Mercy has no Limits



In part one we discussed bearing trials and tests with patience and understanding that nothing happens without the permission of God.

“And with Him are the keys of the unseen; no one knows them except Him. And He knows what is on the land and in the sea. Not a leaf falls but that He knows it. And no grain is there within the darkness of the earth and no moist or dry [thing] but that is [written] in a clear record.” (Quran 6:59)

When illness or injury strikes the reasons may not be apparent, or perhaps even be beyond our understanding. However God wants only good for humankind. We can therefore be sure that there is great wisdom behind the affliction and that it presents us with the opportunity to develop a closer relationship with God. As humans, of course we have free will and are free to choose our own course of action in any given situation, but the best reaction is patience and acceptance.

Prophet Muhammad, may the mercy and blessings of God be upon him, informed us that we will be tested, according to our level of faith and that the very least good that will come from these tests will be purification from sins. He said, a man will be tested according to the level of his religious commitment, and the trials will keep affecting a slave of God until he is left walking on the face of the earth with no burden of sin whatsoever.^[1]

When illness or injury over come us it is natural to be fearful. At times we can even feel resentful, wondering why God has allowed this to happen. We question and complain, but really this serves no purpose except to accentuate our sorrow or suffering. God, in His infinite wisdom and mercy has given us clear guidelines about how to behave when struck by illness or injury. If we follow these guidelines it is possible to bear afflictions with ease and even to be grateful. When struck by illness or injury, a believer puts his or her trust in God, expresses thankfulness for whatever condition God has decreed for him, and seeks medical aid.

Medical treatment is allowed in Islam and seeking medical aid does not negate or cancel out the idea of putting ones trust in God. Prophet Muhammad made this clear when he said, **“No disease has been ordained except that it has a cure.”**^[2] A believer may go to a doctor for the treatment of diseases and injuries. He may go to seek a diagnosis and a cure for diseases of the mind or emotional conditions. However there are some small stipulations, including that a cure cannot be sought in something that is forbidden, such as alcohol. Ultimately God does not put healing in something He has prohibited.

It is not permissible to seek a cure from soothsayers, fortunetellers and other charlatans of any sort. These people claim to have knowledge of the unseen, which is not possible and they are only trying to extort people and lead them

astray from the One True God. God has also forbidden the use of amulets and lucky charms to ward off illness and injury. All power and all strength come from God alone. To call on someone or something besides God to heal us or keep us safe is a very serious sin.

While seeking treatment or cure in this physical world it is important to also seek a cure through spiritual remedies. The first thing to do is to think positively about God, confirm your belief in Him, and contemplate His names and attributes. He is the Most Merciful, the Most Loving, and the Most Wise. We are advised to call on Him by the names that are most appropriate to our needs.

“And (all) the Most Beautiful Names belong to God so call on Him by them.” (Quran 7:80)

God has not abandoned us to the trials, tests and tribulations of this world, He has provided us with guidance and the most powerful weapons against torment and distress – Quran, words of remembrance and supplication, and prayer.^[3] As we move further into the 21st century we have begun to rely on medical aid instead of authentic spiritual remedies, however using the two, hand in hand can often be very effective very quickly. Sometimes illnesses persist, sometimes injuries become chronic, but sometimes ill health can bring about great spiritual insight.

How often have we heard people with debilitating diseases or terrible disabilities thank God for their conditions, or speak of the way pain and suffering brought blessings and goodness into their lives? When we are feeling alone and distressed, God is our only handhold. When pain and suffering become unbearable, when there is nothing left but fear and misery, that is when we reach for the one thing that can bring about redemption – God. Complete and utter trust and total submission to the will of God brings about the joy and freedom that is known as the sweetness of faith. It is peace and tranquility and it enables one to accept all the conditions this world brings, the good, the bad, the ugly, the painful, the distressing and the joyous.

Finally it is important to understand that illnesses and injuries can be God’s way of purifying us. As human beings we are not perfect, we make mistakes, do bad deeds, and even deliberately disobey God’s commandments.

“Whatever misfortune befalls you, is because of the things your hands have wrought, and for many (of them) He grants forgiveness.” (Quran 42:30)

God’s mercy should never be underestimated. He asks us to seek forgiveness from Him. Prophet Mohammad reminded us that God is waiting for us to turn to Him. In the last part of the night, when darkness lies heavily across the land, God descends to the lowest heaven and asks His slaves. **“Who is saying a prayer to**

Me that I may answer it? Who is asking something of Me that I may give it to him? Who is asking forgiveness of Me that I may forgive him?”^[4]

Often misfortune, pain, and suffering come about because of our own actions. We choose to commit sin, but God purifies us through loss of wealth, health or the things we love. Sometimes suffering now, in this world means that we will not suffer for all of eternity, sometimes all that pain and distress means that we will attain a higher station in Paradise.

God knows the wisdom behind why good things happen to bad people, or why bad things happen to good people. In general, whatever causes us to turn to God is good. In times of crisis people are drawn closer to God, whereas in times of comfort we often forget from where the comfort originated. God is the Provider and He is the Most Generous. God wants to reward us with life everlasting and if pain and suffering can guarantee Paradise, then ill health and injuries are a blessing. Prophet Muhammad said, **“If God wants to do good to somebody, He afflicts him with trials.”^[5]**

When illness strikes, the best course of action is to thank God, try to be closer to Him and to seek medical aid and count the blessings that He has bestowed upon us.

Footnotes:

^[1] *Ibn Majah.*

^[2] Bukhari

^[3] For a full explanation of the healing power of Quran please see the article Health in Islam Part 2.

^[4] *Saheeh Al-Bukhari, Saheeh Muslim, Malik, At Tirmidhi, Abu Dawud*

^[5] *Saheeh Al-Bukhari.*