



In the name of God, Most Gracious, Most Merciful

Submitters Perspective

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When the Going Gets Tough: Our Response to Tests

Imagine you are the prophet Job (38:41). You are trying your hardest to be a good submitter. You have examined yourself, repented and tried to figure out what you are doing or have done wrong. But the horrendous test continues. What does it mean—what did it mean for Job, and what can we learn from this example?

Do you expect to enter Paradise without being tested like those before you? They were tested with hardship and adversity, and were shaken up, until the messenger and those who believed with him said, "Where is GOD's victory?" GOD's victory is near. (2:214)

Even the messengers are tested until they are "shaken up." God tells us that we will be tested with "fear, hunger, and loss of money, lives, and crops." And

then He says: "Give good news to the steadfast." (2:155)

Tests in themselves are not bad things. If a test draws us closer to God, and proves our steadfastness it is a great blessing. Even if we do not initially pass a test, we may learn from it and benefit our souls.

Lessons from the story of Job

The story of Job shows us that the test may be exceptionally severe. In Job's case his family was killed and he was afflicted with terrible physical suffering. Yet neither the Quran nor the Bible even mentions the mistake made by Job. The focus of the story in the Quran (21:83-84, 38:41-44) seems to be his response to the test. Not the cause. It is almost certain that he did indeed have some slip that took him out of God's kingdom long enough for

Satan to get to him (38:41), but the details of the mistake were not the significant lesson that God wanted us to know.

Indeed, it may not be very useful for us to know what the mistake was, since each of our weaknesses is personal. What God does tell us is how he responded, imploring God, being steadfast, and upholding his pledge to God. This was the right response, and God uses **the phrase "What a good servant!"** when describing him. This is our lesson.

When we are facing a major difficulty, the question always exists as to whether something is a test or a punishment. When we are faced with a disaster, what is really going on?

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Each situation is different, and every person has to interpret their **own test (with God's assistance, of course)**. Perhaps reviewing the purpose of our creation may help put things in perspective. When the great feud arose in the heavenly society (38:69), you and I did not side whole-heartedly with God. God in His Mercy gave us this life as a chance to redeem ourselves and rejoin His kingdom (67:1-2). **This world is Satan's temporary dominion (2:30)**, and we humans chose to come here as his constituents to make up our minds about **God's absolute authority**.

If we step out of God's kingdom temporarily (or, God forbid, are permanently living outside it), God may allow Satan to afflict us with some hardship or pain. The important thing to remember is that disasters and pain come from Satan, not God. Nothing bad or evil comes from God (4:78-79), but rather is due to our own weaknesses and inflicted by Satan. These are important principles and often misunderstood, even by good submitters (4:78).

Types of disasters humans face

Admission tests: Once we make the decision to submit whole-heartedly to God and forsake **Satan's kingdom in favor of God's**, we must undergo an admission test to prove our true convictions (3:154). We are told in 29:2 that the test is mandatory.

We may be tested through wealth, health, or lack of them, to see if we worship God alone under all circumstances (38:34 & 41). Why are some people tested with adversity, and some with prosperity? God knows best. For all that we know, if God were to test us differently, we may either turn despondent (41:49) or drift away (41:51). We

pray that God may protect us from falling into either of those traps.

Educational disaster: The second kind is an educational disaster (reminder to return to the straight path). The story of Jonah (21:87-88) is a good example of this type of disaster. Had he not been swallowed, he might never have turned back to God.

Blessings in disguise: These appear to be disasters, but when they pass, we look back and see they were good for us. We are told that the human prays for things that may hurt him, thinking he is praying for good (17:11). What we think is bad for us, may really be good for us in the long run.

Retribution: Finally, the last kind of disaster mentioned in the Quran is that of retribution for people who have reached a point of no reform (e.g., Sodom & Gomorrah, 11:77-83). This one comes from God, not Satan. Thus, if examined carefully, retribution is a mercy for a community in a perpetual state of transgression. Those in the community who die under the age of 40 go straight to heaven (46:15), and the rest are spared by God from committing more sins against their soul.

Some misconceptions about the tests

All disasters are punishments. If we repent, reform, hold fast to God, and devote our religion absolutely to God alone, we know He will not punish us (4:146-147). Also God may use hardship to toughen the submitters (3:141). It is a punishment only if we turn away (5:49).

The size and/or duration of the disaster reflects the size of the transgression. The examples of Job and Joseph show this is not true. Though they were righteous messengers, their test continued for a long time.

Our job is to remind those undergoing tests until they repent. Not so. A **submitter's repentance is to God Alone**, and God tells us not to be suspicious of one another. Quranic references to inviting people to the message say to do it kindly (16:125). We cannot guide anyone, only God guides (28:56). Submitters are allies of one another (5:55, 8:72) and are kind, humble, and compassionate amongst themselves (52:26).

If you're not perfectly healthy, you're not a submitter. The Quran makes it clear that this is not so. Not only is Job a good example, but **also we're told in 4:102, 9:91-2 and 24:61** that there are believers who wish to mobilize in the cause of God but are injured, weak, sick or handicapped. And 80:1-11 tells us of the blind man whom Muhammad ignored, though he was reverent to God. Therefore, illness, even one that continues until death, or a permanent disability does not indicate a state of disbelief. It is not the condition of our bodies, but our state of happiness which reflects the circumstances of our souls. Happiness is Submission to God.

Conclusion

To conclude, ultimately we need to look at the end result of any test/disaster. The important thing is not whether it is a punishment or not, but what it does for us in the long run. Remember that our bodies are just shirts; this life is temporary and very short. So no matter what it looks like, if something draws us closer to God, it is a great blessing.

If a difficulty causes us to turn to God—it is a gift, no matter how others see it. We will all die at a predetermined moment. It is the status of our soul, not our shirt, which matters when that time comes.

Faiz, Lisa, Lydia

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