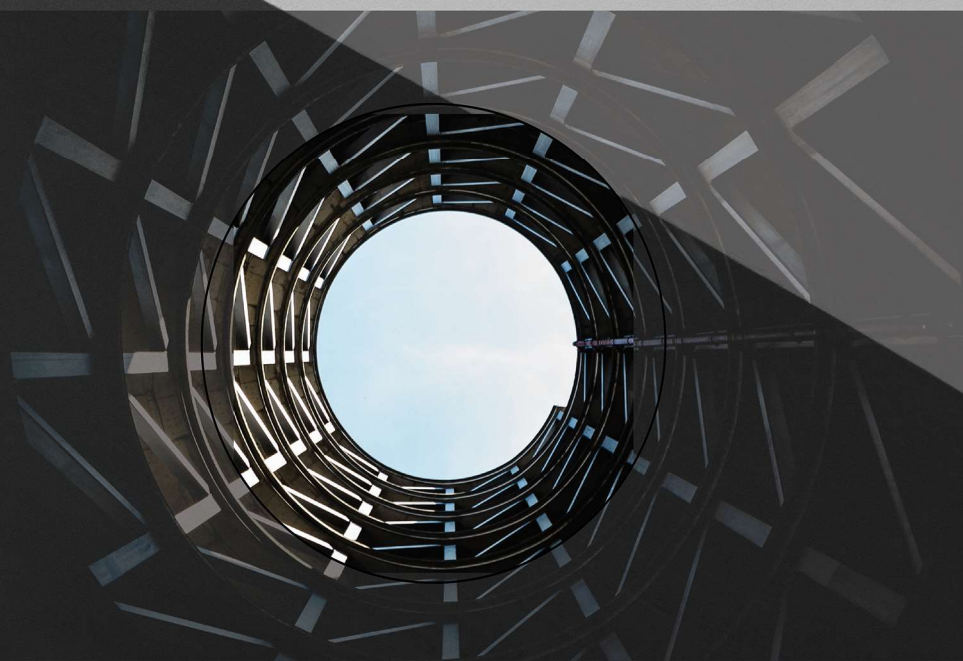


GRIEF &
DEPRESSION
MANAGEMENT
IN ISLAM



Tahir Ridha Jaffer

Grief &
Depression
Management
in Islam

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Grief & Depression Management in Islam

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TRANSLITERATION TABLE

ء	’	ط	ṭ
ا	a	ظ	ẓ
ب	b	ع	‘
ت	t	غ	gh
ث	th	ف	f
ج	j	ق	q
ح	ḥ	ك	k
خ	kh	ل	l
د	d	م	m
ذ	dh	ن	n
ر	r	و	w
ز	z	ي	y
س	s	ه	h
ش	sh	ة	h (or not transliterated)
ص	ṣ		
ض	ḍ		

Long Vowels

ا	ā
و	ū
ي	ī

Short Vowels

َ	a
ُ	u
ِ	i

(§) : ﷺ - Peace and blessings be upon him and his family

(a) : ﷺ - Peace be upon him (or her, or them)

(atf) : ﷺ May Allah hasten his reappearance

*We dedicate this work to all the oppressed believers around the world.
May their tears and grief turn into joy and happiness, and may Allah bless
them all.*

INTRODUCTION

Grief and depression are common experiences in the lives of many individuals in the world, with the former often being the primary cause of the latter. While grief is somewhat easy to spot, with tearing eyes, sulky frowns and sad faces being a sure give-away that someone is unhappy about something, depression is more obscure. People usually keep their depression a secret, perhaps because they think it may be regarded by others as a weakness of mind. However, the primary symptoms of depression, namely: low mood, reduced energy, and loss of interest or enjoyment, cannot go unnoticed for long by those who are close to a person suffering from depression.

Depression can be an overwhelming burden, especially when it is recurrent. Recurrent depression is very debilitating. It is also a cause of other common problems among the youth such as substance abuse, and studies have shown that there is a link between depression and cigarette smoking as well. Of course, the most adverse sequela of depression is suicide, which has been named the second leading cause of death among adolescents. While there are numerous books on the subject of depression and grief, most of them are written by psychologists or those who have suffered from the condition. Few, if any at all, have been written from the Islamic perspective by a Muslim seminarian with a qualification in psychology or a related field. There are some works of this kind in Farsi, but we have yet to come across one in English.

By the grace of the Almighty, we have been fortunate enough to have studied psychology for a while at university, and also completed a diploma course from the Institute of Counselling (Glasgow) a few decades ago. That, along with close to two decades in the *hawzah*, gave

us the required background to embark on writing the present monograph. This book aims to provide an insight into what Islam teaches about grief and overwhelming sadness. Since the primary audience of this work is Muslims or those interested in the study of Islam, and not psychologists or specialists in the field, we have refrained from delving too deeply into technical details, referring to complicated statistics or using medical jargon, and only mention the most basic terminology required to clarify fundamental ideas and concepts related to grief and depression. This book is, in part, a kind of 'self-help' manual for those suffering from depression and it can also be used by those who wish to assist or comfort others who are distressed.

Since the Covid pandemic, there has been a sharp rise in cases of depression due to the forced lockdowns and isolation. That made it even more urgent to fill the lacuna by addressing the subject from an Islamic perspective. While we are grateful to the Almighty that we have not personally had to grapple with the plague that is depression, nor has anyone in our immediate family as yet (*Alḥamdulillāh*), it is something we have witnessed in other members of the believing community on many occasions. For this reason, we sought to write this monograph which is hoped to be beneficial by clarifying the history, nature, causes, consequences, and remedies of overwhelming grief and depression.

There are five chapters and an appendix in this book. In the first chapter, we introduce the subject of depression and present the important ideas and concepts related to it. This initial chapter is based on what is generally accepted among scholars in the field and hence footnotes and references have been kept to a minimal. The second chapter is a brief discussion on what religion has to say about grief and depression, how religion itself is helpful to those suffering from either or both, and the position of specific religious traditions on the subject. The third chapter makes up the heart of the book, and discusses Islam and the management of grief or depression. The fourth chapter addresses the issue of suicide and in it we discuss the act of self-murder

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from different perspectives before looking at what Islam has to say on the subject. Finally, the fifth chapter consists of supplications that are reported to be helpful for those who are suffering from grief or melancholy.

There are a number of books and treatises on the subject of grief that have been written and compiled by Muslim scholars in the past. One such treatise, which we have been fortunate to translate recently, is the 10th century scholar al-Shahīd al-Thānī's *The Consoler of Hearts upon the Death of Loved Ones and Children (Musakkin al-Fu'ād 'inda Faqd al-Aḥibbah wal-Awlād)*. Since many of the traditions mentioned therein are relevant to our discussion, we have included an excerpt of the work as an appendix to this book. Wherever we refer to the appendix in the footnotes, it is to this work that we are referring. For those who are interested in reading the whole translation, it has been made available for download and can also be procured as a hard copy.¹

Since the scope of the subject is very wide, it was not possible for us to address all the issues pertaining to it. For instance, there is a lot of discussion about the matter of depression among women due to domestic abuse, rivalry with peers, being unable to bear children, and other such causes. Also, the different cultural reactions to depression and grief around the world and other such important and interesting matters related to the subject could not be addressed in the interest of brevity. We purposely tried to keep this volume as short as possible, without forgoing any of the necessary discussions, so that it would be accessible to a wider readership.

In the end, we hope that this work will act as a catalyst that leads to more research on the role of Islam in maintaining mental health in the community, as well as other related topics that are greatly needed today.

¹ A hard copy can be ordered from Ansariyan Publications in Qum, and the electronic copy can be downloaded from: www.jaffer.ir/books. Note that the bibliography of the excerpt can be found at the end of the complete translation and has not been included in the bibliography of this book.

We pray to the Almighty to grant wellbeing to all believers around the world and to safeguard them from the evils of the age and the schemes of the accursed enemy of mankind and his minions. This, we pray, by the right of the Blessed Messenger, Muḥammad (ṣ), and his pure progeny (a). Indeed, all might, majesty, and glory belong to Allah alone.

1

UNDERSTANDING GRIEF AND MELANCHOLY AS PART OF THE HUMAN CONDITION

Depression is a mood disorder which prevents individuals from leading a normal life, socially, at work, or within the family. Some psychologists refer to depression as the ‘common cold’ of psychiatry because of its frequency of diagnosis. Sadness and depression are not the same. Sorrow lessens in intensity and severity as time passes, whereas depression usually remains the same in extent or even increases over time if left unheeded. Furthermore, unlike sadness, depression usually involves a deep feeling of guilt compounded by a loss of self-esteem. It also diminishes one’s ability to work, enjoy, and show intimacy. A depressed individual hardly ever laughs and is unable to experience pleasure and joy like ordinary individuals. Depression comes in various forms and is of different types with varying symptoms. Sadness is one of the symptoms of depression, but not every sad person is depressed and not every depressed person is sad. Additionally, research seems to indicate that the symptoms of depression are manifested differently across cultures, perhaps due to different values, beliefs, and norms.

Depression feels like solitary confinement – it isolates the one who experiences it, making him or her feel alone, afraid, and powerless. It is like a cruel punishment meted on the body, mind, and soul of an individual. Yet even if it is considered a very personal ailment, it affects the society as a whole in many direct and indirect ways. For example,

in the list of diseases that put a financial burden on societies,¹ depression ranks in the top-five largest contributors. This is due to the fact that depressed people get less work done and even miss work more often. Depression generally reduces productivity in people and increases medical expenses. These social costs are aside from the personal costs that depressed individuals have to bear, such as anguish of family members, diminished quality of personal relationships with near and dear ones and damage to one's physical body, including the immune system, the heart,² and even the mind. There is evidence to suggest that depression can also lead to dementia-like symptoms such as lack of concentration and poor memory. Hence, aside from raw emotional pain, depression inflicts real injury to one's physical and mental wellbeing as well. It adversely effects all bodily functions and could very well lead to the development of chronic conditions that were previously non-existent.

Causes of Grief and Depression

There are many causes of grief but in a word, the cause of grief is loss. Loss of comfort in the form of physical or emotional pain, loss of property and wealth, loss of social standing or authority, and any other form of loss that has an impact on a person's life could result in grief. There are similarly a number of potential causes for depression including prolonged grief, mental disorders, hormonal imbalance, etc. While depression is more frequently found among the socially secluded and economically disadvantaged, it is not limited to these groups and can be found in all sections of society. Depressive episodes can sometimes be brought on by the change of seasons and this has been

¹ This is known as the Global Burden of Disease (GBD) by the World Health Organization.

² A study carried out in the journal *Circulation* showed that depressed people were more likely to develop heart disease.

dubbed ‘seasonal affective disorder’ (SAD) which is a mood disorder usually seen during winter. Depression faced by new mothers after childbirth is also relatively common and this postpartum depression is thought to be caused mainly by psychological changes associated with motherhood. Bereavement, radical surgery, failed marriage, amputation of a limb or learning of a terminal diagnosis all have the potential of leading one into depression.

Many factors can influence one’s susceptibility to depression, including genetics, stress, personality, religious beliefs or lack thereof, and possibly some metaphysical causes that are beyond what science can explain. Changes in the way human beings live in both developed and developing countries in the recent decades has led to an upsurge in the reported cases of severe depression. These changes have led to reduction in physical activity, unhealthy diets, reduced exposure to sunlight and inadequate quality sleep at night. Furthermore, with the advent of the internet, face-to-face social interaction has also decreased with people communicating more using the available technology. Parents even talk to their children, who reside under the same roof, through mobile phones sometimes! All these changes have been shown to have a negative influence on the brain and raise depression vulnerability among the people.

Out of the known causes of depression, some are said to be related to genetic factors or problems in the brain, such as neurotransmitter disturbances, while others are purely psychological in nature. The latter accounts for the most common causes of depression and is thought to be the result of a variety of factors such as: traumatic childhood experiences, undesirable events in one’s life, restricted social interaction, low self-esteem, etc. In most individuals, depressive episodes are brought about by a combination of different factors which gradually increase the melancholy and depression that they experience. Certain physical ailments and eating disorders as well as substance abuse also lead to depressive moods.

Of all the forms of depression, the most severe is caused by genetic factors. Those who have close relatives suffering from the disease are at a much greater risk, and this is without considering the effects of environment and upbringing. The less severe cases are usually more to do with environmental factors and are unrelated to genetics. As for the physical illnesses that are associated with depression, they include: hepatitis, glandular fever and other chronic infections, cancer, rheumatoid arthritis, thyroid disorders, and various forms of heart disease. There are some drugs that can also cause depression as a side-effect such as: anticonvulsants, oral contraceptives, calcium channel blockers, and corticosteroids.

Among the psychological factors that cause depression, low self-esteem, persistent pessimism, and obsession are all considered risk-factors. Other contributing factors include: unpleasant recent life experiences that usually involve some kind of loss (such as death of a loved one, divorce, being let go from one's place of work and so on), persistent major difficulties such as being a single parent, prolonged unemployment, financial strain and lack of intimacy or social support. Family dynamics are also important in influencing the course of one's depression once it is established. Some studies show that lack of an intimate, confiding relationship of a supportive spouse and having to care for children under the age of fifteen at home, make one vulnerable and predisposed to depression if coupled by life-threatening events or persistent social stress.

Most studies have shown that women suffer from depression more than men – up to twice as much or even four times as much, depending on what stage of life they are in (adolescence, middle age, etc.). Psychologists suggest that most depressive disorders begin during late adolescence, between ages 15 and 19, and when the symptoms go undiagnosed and untreated, they grow and gradually develop into a major depressive disorder. As such, early detection would help to avert many of the negative consequences of depression later in life. Biological

factors might also play a role in making women more susceptible to depression. Cultural and social factors like physical abuse, struggling to cope with responsibilities, and conflicts along with jealousy for others occur more frequently among women than men. Furthermore, it is a well-known fact that women are more emotional than their male counterparts, so that only adds to their vulnerability to depression. The fairer sex generally reacts to tragic events with overwhelming distress and anxiety, which can lead to depressive moods and even full-blown depression.

Depression during pregnancy and after delivery is also quite common, though this type of depression does not usually last long or recur once it has passed. The period of pregnancy and the postpartum phase are times when women are particularly vulnerable to depression. The presence of a genetic predisposition or stressful life events increase the chances of depression in pregnant or lactating women. Other factors such as a previous depressive episode in life, being a single parent, suffering from poor health, or taking intoxicants during pregnancy all contribute to furthering the risk of depression. Major depressive episodes during pregnancy can have adverse effects on both the mother and child, as some studies have shown. While the mother faces the risk of poor nutrition, inadequate self-care, insomnia and even suicidality, the child may also suffer from a low birthweight, increased risk of being born prematurely as well as preeclampsia in the mother during delivery, which could be fatal for the baby. Those who suffer from depression after giving birth are seen expressing less affection towards their newborns and are also less responsive to infant cues. This results in problems in their babies' development with some demonstrating mild behavioural difficulties as well.

Oftentimes, midlife crises are also caused or compounded by depression. This is especially true for women due to the hormonal changes they experience. The association between transition to menopause and depression has been suggested by some scholars, and it

is quite clear that middle-age women undergo some psychological changes that accompany their physiological ones. Depression during midlife is most common among those who have suffered a previous depressive episode in their lives. The primary cause of midlife depression is stress brought about by life changes such as children leaving home to start their own families, loss of elderly parents, occupational disruption, marital issues, and death of loved ones. The development of physical problems and disabilities at this time in life only serves to exacerbate the matter.

The pain and heartache that is experienced in the wake of loss of a loved one is a very deep and real sort of pain. Initially, in the early days and weeks, one feels completely broken-hearted and lost, with a clear sense of hopelessness and a feeling that many things remained unsaid or undone, and many dreams and aspirations are now unattainable. This deep emotional pain quickly translates into actual physical agony and even leads to the weakening of the immune system, which in turn renders one vulnerable to viruses and other diseases. Furthermore, the disruption of sleep patterns and inattention to dietary needs during this time interferes with the normal functioning of the body. This is why many people fall ill after having suffered emotional trauma. For these reasons, it is not uncommon to experience depression or depressive episodes soon after losing a loved one.

Crying is frequent in grief and depression, and it is known to provide some relief from the emotional pain one experiences. It has been speculated that crying somehow cleanses the body of 'emotional toxins' and brings it back to a calmer and more relaxed state. Crying and expressing sorrow is a normal reaction to loss. However, when it lingers on for a long time, grief can disrupt a person's life in many ways. Protracted grief can spiral into depression, even without awareness. Unresolved and suppressed grief can trigger depression even many years after the loss is experienced. It should be remembered, however, that while all people suffer some kind of loss in their lives, the way in which

they grieve differs from person to person. Hence, there is no hard and fast rule on how much sorrow is normal or how long a person has to mourn after suffering a loss.

The relationship a person had with the one whom he has lost also determines how much that loss affects him, and how long or intense his grief will be. Death of a spouse can be one of the most painful experiences for a human being, and this has even been alluded to in a tradition of the Holy Prophet (ﷺ) where he said, “Verily a wife has a connection to her husband which is unlike anything else.”³ Another extremely painful loss is the death of a child, which somehow feels unnatural since it seems to go against the laws of nature to have a child die before his parents. This kind of loss naturally leads to longer and more intense grief. It is important, however, to always remember that this life is transitory and there are many experiences which might be painful, but the pain will not last. Holding on to the pain unrelentingly can result in more negative outcomes which one should try his or her best to avoid.

Other than the death of a loved one, major life changes also have the potential to trigger depression. When children leave home to go and study or start their own families, it may be quite difficult to get adjusted to their absence at first. Marriage, while being a source of joy for the couple and families, can also bring about sadness as the girl leaves her parents’ home in order to move to her husband’s house. This separation is usually quite painful, especially for her mother. As noted earlier, having a baby is another occasion of joy that can lead to temporary depressed feelings in the new mother (and possibly even in the new father). Migrating to a new country, changing jobs, experiencing economic and political upheavals, and dealing with chronic illness can all bring about feelings of anxiety and gloom, which can then cause a person to become depressed.

It is noteworthy that certain things can trigger mass depression in

³ See: Appendix, no. 132.

people, as witnessed in the lockdown during the Covid pandemic. When freedom of travel, gathering for social and religious events, attending school or university, etc. were restricted, statistics show that nearly 40% of adults who were affected by these changes experienced some symptoms of depression. The adverse effects of the lockdown on children is still the subject of study in many institutions. Suffice it to say, it obviously negatively impacted the children psychologically as well. Financial stress brought about by the pandemic where many people lost their jobs, through downsizing or other reasons, also increased their vulnerability to depression.

Aside from the feeling of lack of security brought about by financial instability, many people wrongly believe their personal worth is directly related to how much money they possess. Not being able to meet financial obligations quickly reduces one's self-worth and heightens the sense of guilt for letting others down. Getting depressed due to money troubles is tantamount to digging oneself deeper since depression leads to lack of motivation and action. As such, a depressed individual is almost always incapable of struggling to strive harder in order to climb out of his economic predicament. In Islam, the belief that sustenance is guaranteed by the Creator brings a sense of relief and motivates one to strive harder, knowing that God will surely provide for him and his family as long as he plays his part.

Discrimination is something that takes many forms and most people have suffered one kind of discrimination or another in their lives, whether it is based on race, gender, class, ethnicity, social status, or anything else that sets them apart from others. Discrimination that is experienced on a regular basis can lead to depression in some individuals. Throughout history, discrimination has always existed. Examples of such discrimination that is prevalent today include the profiling that leads one to be stopped and frisked at airports, being ignored and excluded from activities and groups, and generally being targeted for blame. All this has caused many a person to feel anxious,

and repeated encounters of this kind can easily lead to depression.

In this day and age when health has become the primary concern for human beings the world over, we can clearly note the link between physical illness and depression. It is quite common for depression to emerge as a consequence of a health crisis. Studies have shown how heart attacks, strokes, and amputations often result in depression. In fact, after any major health problem one can easily slip into depression. Though depression is known as a psychological ailment, it is strongly tied to how we feel physically. Reminders of our mortality can trigger feelings of despair, especially in people who have a strong attachment to the material world. Sometimes, it is also due to the effect of hormones, or the side effects of certain pharmaceutical drugs that are prescribed to remedy the health problems one faces, that depression rears its ugly head. Many studies show that some medical procedures such as plastic surgery or sex-change surgery also cause depression.

Perfectionism is an attitude that only compounds any depressive feelings one may have. Perfectionists are also at a greater risk of developing full-blown depression. This is because it is a known fact that there can be no perfection [on the part of human beings] in this world. And since perfection is impossible to achieve, every perfectionist is sure to fail. The fear of making mistakes and having excessively high personal standards, the continuous doubt about the quality of their endeavors, and the harshness with which they judge themselves makes perfectionists the prime candidates for depression. Parents who foster perfectionism in their children are therefore only setting them up for failure. As such, it is important that parents do not act overly critical of their children's minor mistakes as this would likely lead to the development of perfectionist attitudes in the children, which is sure to harm them later in life.

People are always on the lookout for ways of increasing their happiness. They embark on anything that is assumed by them to result in joy and cheerfulness. Unfortunately, most of the time what one

assumes will lead to happiness ends up disappointing by either not bringing about the expected joy or giving rise to only short-lived delight. One may think, for instance, that if he or she finishes a big project, or buys a home, or completes a university degree, or retires, it will bring great joy and satisfaction. So the individual works tirelessly towards that goal but when it is finally achieved, the amount of happiness that results is far below what was expected. In the meantime, the enticement of a promised future happiness can ruin the present and make one miss out on so much in the “now”. Furthermore, not attaining the happiness one hoped for can be disappointing to the extent of leading one towards despondency and melancholy. Hence, it could be said that materialism is one of the causes of depression in modern society.

Some causes of depression can be controlled while others cannot. There are some factors beyond human control like natural disasters such as earthquakes and floods, and other events which are likewise generally beyond an individual’s control in that a person can do little to nothing about it, such as political strife, social unrest, and crime. In general, it has been shown that feelings of depression which are brought on by loss due to natural calamities do not last. In fact, studies show that most victims of such calamities do not suffer from depression at all. Rather, they are more likely to become anxious and suffer some kind of temporary traumatic stress. On the other hand, certain manmade factors do commonly give rise to depression. When it comes to causes of depression that are controllable, such as domestic violence or psychological abuse, removing oneself from the environment or relationship which is causing depression is a good way of remedying the situation and alleviating the depression.

Chronic depression is a long-term affliction that can last for the better part of one’s life. Studies have shown that some individuals suffer depression on and off for decades. Many of those who have undergone treatment for acute depression suffer a relapse or the recurrence of

depression. This reality highlights the many unanswered questions that still exist regarding the best way to manage chronic and acute depression, or any form of depression for that matter, among psychologists. Since the 1990s, a lot of research has been conducted on the subject and while plenty of new information about the affliction has come to light, there is still much that is unclear. Certain strategies for prevention of relapse into depression have been suggested for those who have previously suffered depressive episodes. Avoiding caffeine and smoking, while adhering to a routine of regular exercise, stress management and properly planned sleep cycles are all part of the strategies used to prevent relapse into depression.

One well-known theory is that depression results from a malfunction in the brain's capacity to produce the neurotransmitter serotonin. This belief has been the basis of most of the antidepressant medications that are prescribed today, including famous drugs such as Prozac and Zoloft. However, more recent research questions the validity of this theory. Nevertheless, the idea that depression is caused by a "chemical imbalance" in the brain is common among psychologists and lay people. This kind of thinking is not new by any means. In 1621, the English scholar Robert Burton presented one of the earliest theories about the causes of depression or melancholy in the Western world. Melancholy, he said, comes about due to an excess of black bile in susceptible individuals. Interestingly, he compared it to the experience a woman undergoes at childbirth: stunningly intense, yet unavoidable, because of the great "good" it brings.⁴

Identifying Depression in Individuals: The Signs

The key signs for identifying depression all relate to the general behaviour and outlook of an individual. Low mood, reduced energy

⁴ Robert Burton, *The Anatomy of Melancholy* (Kila, Mont.: Kessinger, 1991), 2:499-500.

and loss of interest or enjoyment in what one would otherwise derive pleasure from are telltale signs of depression. Other common symptoms include pessimism, lack of appetite, altered sleep patterns, poor concentration, guilt, reduced self-confidence, and thoughts of self-harm or suicide. As noted earlier, studies have shown that women are at least twice as likely to suffer from depression as men, and symptoms are heightened with age. In more recent times, however, there has been an upsurge of depression among the youth. Culture also plays a role in how likely it would be for an individual to suffer from depressive disorders. For instance, studies have shown that African American or Hispanic adolescents are more susceptible to depression than Chinese Americans. This shows that even when groups live in the same city, their cultural background and other sociocultural factors play a role in how vulnerable they are to depression.

Due to a number of reasons, it is often quite difficult to recognize and identify depressed individuals. Sometimes this is because patients themselves ignore their depression or fear the stigma of being classified as mentally ill. Others worry about the possible side effects of medication they would have to take and purposely avoid seeking treatment. In some cases, symptoms of depression are overlooked due to other illnesses from which a person suffers. However, once a person has been diagnosed as suffering from depression, that becomes something which is always considered in any future diagnosis since most patients experience multiple episodes of depression in their lifetime, with each episode varying in length and severity.

During the height of depression, a person is persistently in a low or indifferent mood, as if he or she is in a continuous miserable state of suffering. While in this mood, the individual does not even respond to good news and displays a complete lack of enthusiasm for activities and hobbies he or she would previously enjoy. Depressive episodes may be brief, lasting a few days only, or they may continue for a much longer period. Anhedonia, or a complete lack of pleasure or the capacity to

experience it, is a common indicator of a major depressive episode. In the most severe cases, suicidal ideation in depressed individuals reaches its height, with many attempting to take their own lives.

If a person has had five or more symptoms from the list below within a two-week period, and is not suffering from any medical condition or taking any medication that could induce these symptoms, then it would be highly likely that he or she is suffering from depression:

- (a) Depressed mood for most of the day, almost every day, with a sense of emptiness and futility, and sometimes irritability as well.
- (b) Diminished interest and pleasure in all activities, even those that were previously enjoyable.
- (c) Significant weight gain or weight loss without dieting.
- (d) Insomnia or hypersomnia (too much sleep) almost every day.
- (e) A feeling of fatigue or loss nearly every day.
- (f) Feelings of worthlessness or excessive guilt all the time.
- (g) Diminished ability to focus or concentrate, as well as chronic indecisiveness.
- (h) Recurring thoughts of death and suicide.

Since depression does not discriminate, it can affect any individual regardless of race, social class, or background. In fact, even age is not a limiting factor as studies demonstrate that young children also sometimes show signs of depression, though this is not common. Like children, the aged also seem to be less likely to get depressed. While there are cases of elderly depressed people, it is mostly only sadness caused by illness, disability, or loss of friends and family support. In fact, older people are more likely to focus their attention on their physical aches and pains than their emotional feelings of despair. They also reminisce about the past and replay in their minds the things that happened when they were young, which either brings them joy or

regret. Since many of the symptoms that are usually taken as signs of depression are also common in old age, it is more difficult to diagnose depression in seniors. Furthermore, the wisdom of old age saves many from falling into the deep dark pit of depression.

As we have noted, depression has a variety of symptoms, not all of which are obvious and recognizable. In some cases, depression slowly and stealthily overcomes the mind of an individual, impeding day-to-day life. At other times, depression openly and manifestly overwhelms a person, robbing him or her of all joy and happiness. As a disease of extremes, depression can reduce appetite just as it can lead to insatiable hunger. Some depressed individuals find it impossible to have a good night's sleep while others are always fatigued and sleep for hours on end. A depressed person may pace around frantically while another might find it hard to move even short distances. Some suffer from depression for years while for others depression lasts only for a few hours.

Those who are depressed look at things quite differently and are generally not self-absorbed. In fact, some would say that if one is not depressed, it is simply because he is unaware of what is going on in the world or too self-absorbed to care. Indeed, looking at the situation of the oppressed in many parts of the world would cause anyone with an ounce of compassion to feel sad and helpless. Of course, there are many things that one can do to make the plight of the oppressed known and assist them in other ways. However, it is undeniable that sadness frequently overwhelms the hearts of believers when they see their brothers and sisters being mistreated in different parts of the world. And this is part and parcel of what it means to be a true believer.

It is important, therefore, not to misdiagnose temporary feelings of sadness and hopelessness as depression. Feeling down from time to time is normal. Health problems, natural calamities, issues at work, disagreements with peers, etc. can all make one sad and upset for a while. Depression, on the other hand, is much more than this normal reaction to unpleasant events. When a person is depressed, his view of

the world changes. It is as if the sun is shining less brightly and people are cold and distant. A depressed individual sees the future as very bleak and hopelessness pervades his thoughts. This is compounded by feelings of worthlessness, low self-esteem and even self-loathing. The most common responses to depression are withdrawal and avoidance of human interaction.

When it comes to feelings, we know that feelings sprout from one's thoughts and in turn, they guide one's behavior. For example, if one thinks that there is something dangerous lurking about, or that he may be attacked by a predator, his thoughts lead to feelings of fear and anxiety, and that in turn makes him behave with caution and alertness. He is aware of his surroundings and realizes that he might have to flee if danger approaches. The feeling of anxiety causes one to pay attention to what lies ahead while fear prepares a person to avoid or escape a potentially perilous situation. In the same way, depression also changes one's behavior. A depressed individual tends to retreat, shut-down, and withdraw from society. Depression stops people from working towards their goals or makes it much harder to do so. While withdrawal can sometimes be good as a coping mechanism, especially when one is grieving, in the long run it can cause some severe damage to one's life and relationships. Since the root cause of depression is the negative nature of thoughts that one has, whenever greater attention is paid to such thoughts, depressive feelings become more intense. It even gets to a point where any positive comment made by a friend or acquaintance, which would normally give rise to positive feelings, is interpreted negatively and only compounds the sense of depression.

A depressed mind typically looks for the dismal and gloomy aspect of any event while screening and filtering out any positive information. As a result, the whole world begins to look bleak and dreary. For example, if one participates in a gathering with friends and many enjoyable discussions take place, and then someone makes a snide comment, the depressed individual will only focus on that one

comment and disregard all the other positive talks and interactions that took place. Or if a student who is depressed gets one low grade, he or she focusses only on that one grade instead of looking at all the other good grades that have been achieved.

Another feature of depressed individuals is that they are quick to judge and always look at things in black-and-white terms. They are quick to generalize and put people, things, and events into distinct categories of either good or bad. Nuance is all but lost on them. They cannot see shades of grey and stubbornly hold on to their incorrect, simplistic views. For instance, a depressed person might think that anyone who is a member of a certain political faction must be horrible, or that anyone who possesses a certain natural trait is automatically prone to violence. These kinds of judgments are not based on rational reasoning, but on emotions and feelings brought about by a single or a few past experiences. Any evidence provided to a person who thinks this way is quickly dismissed or deemed inadmissible or irrelevant.

Overgeneralization is another practice of the depressed mind. A single unpleasant incident or occurrence is enough to make a depressed person think that something is generally wrong or bad. Such an individual thinks that the negative event which happened one time represents a general, unrelenting trend or quality and will always continue or even get worse. For instance, if such a person drops something on the floor, he would immediately conclude that he is a clumsy klutz. If one person ignores him, he would quickly infer that nobody likes him. If one bad driver cuts him off in traffic, he would declare that every driver in that down is reckless, and so on. The key words that are indicative of this type of thinking are “never” and “always”.

Part of the misjudgements made by depressed people include unfair comparisons. Such critical and irrational comparisons with others only serve to deepen an individual’s depression. Thinking of oneself as a failure because he has a friend who is successful, or as poor because he

cannot afford the latest luxury items that his neighbour has are examples of this kind of misjudgement. The main problem with this type of comparison is that only one aspect is considered, and the whole picture is not seen. For instance, when one compares himself to a colleague who is more successful in his business, he does not consider how that person is having difficulties in his personal life, or suffering from health problems, or any other negative aspect of his life. Since nobody has a perfect life without any trials, it is wrong to look at only one part of a person's life and then compare ourselves to them, assuming that they are generally better off.

Types of Depression

There are a number of different types of depression, such as:

- 1) Major depressive disorder
- 2) Persistent depressive disorder
- 3) Postpartum depressive disorder
- 4) Depressive disorders caused by disease or drugs
- 5) Adjustment disorder with depressed moods

Since this is not a technical manual, we will only briefly look at each of these types:

(1) Major depressive disorder: This is the kind of depression that can prevent one from getting out of bed in the morning. It involves either a severely low mood or a marked loss of interest in things from which one would previously derive enjoyment and pleasure, and this state continues for two weeks or more. Some other symptoms of this kind of depression include: (i) the inability to concentrate, (ii) repeated thoughts of self-harm, (iii) changes in sleep patterns, (iv) extreme fatigue, (v) a general lack of interest, (vi) low sense of personal worth, (vii) overwhelming feelings of guilt or remorse, (viii) changes in appetite.

(2) Persistent depressive disorder: This kind of depression is less severe than major depressive disorder but tends to be more chronic. Its symptoms occur for at least two years, and can continue far longer. Those suffering from persistent depressive disorder have depressed moods almost on a daily basis. If any of the symptoms of major depressive disorder are constantly present in an individual, he or she might well be suffering from persistent depressive disorder. Left untreated, persistent depressive disorder can lead to the development of major depressive disorder.

(3) Postpartum depressive disorder: Certain types of depression are experienced only by women. Premenstrual dysphoric disorder and postpartum depressive disorder are two types of these. The former is linked to monthly cycles and has symptoms that recur every month, while the latter is experienced by some mothers after they give birth. Common symptoms include: anger, anxiety, fatigue, sensitivity to rejection, self-blame, guilt, sadness, withdrawal, and irritability. Scholars mostly attribute this kind of depression to hormonal fluctuations, though it is not known why it affects some women and not others.

(4) Depressive disorders caused by disease or drugs: Chronic illnesses often require some huge lifestyle adjustments which might mean stopping certain activities that one finds enjoyable. This can lead to a sense of depression. A clear example of this was witnessed during the beginning of the Covid-19 pandemic, when people had to isolate from others, which caused depression in many individuals. Furthermore, one of the side effects of certain kinds of medication is depression. It has therefore been advised that if one suffers inexplicable feelings of sadness or despondency shortly after starting a new medication, he should refer to his doctor.

(5) Adjustment disorder with depressed moods: Due to certain tragic events that transpire in a person's life, one may suffer from a

decreased ability to participate or interact effectively with others. That might further be compounded by a depressed mood, feelings of hopelessness and worthlessness, and crying spells. This is an informal type of depression that normally lasts for about one or two weeks.

Modern Science and Remedies for Depression

In order to cure depression, modern psychology has proposed a number of approaches. However, one of the main hurdles that psychologists face when trying to study the possible remedies for depression is the paucity of verifiable data on the subject. That is because the most usable data generally comes from placebo-controlled studies. Yet for psychological problems such as depression, it is both impractical and ethically questionable to involve people who have a long history of depression in a study where they are given placebo treatments in order to compare them with other treatments to gauge the effectiveness of the latter. Of course, with the invention of new tools for functional brain imaging, researchers can now look at the brain at different intervals and in different situations noninvasively. It should be noted, however, that the diagnosis and management of depression and other mental disorders has not been greatly improved by the advances made in brain imaging techniques. To date, there is no consensus among scholars about which region of the brain changes during depressive episodes.

Of all the available remedies, prescribing oral medication is said to be the least efficient since the medicine would have to be absorbed in the stomach and travel throughout the body before reaching the brain where only a very small portion of it would be transported across the blood-brain barrier. When this happens, the medication goes to every part of the brain and only an even smaller portion reaches the intended region where the effect that is sought is achieved. This means that there is a potential of unwanted side effects when other parts of the brain are

exposed to the medication, and other parts of the body are similarly put at risk of harmful side effects. It is for this reason that when antidepressants are taken as pills or intravenously, they are only marginally effective, but when they are injected directly into the central nervous system intrathecally, they are more potent and effective.

Among the variety of methods employed to treat depression, some seem more outlandish, intrusive, and even inhumane, than others. For instance, electroconvulsive therapy, which was first proposed as a treatment for depression in Italy in the early 20th century, involves brief electrical stimulation of the brain while the patient is under general anaesthesia. But this method, like all other putative remedies for depression, is based on trial and error. That is why for thirty years before the discovery that it was the prefrontal, nor parietal, area of the brain that needed stimulation to attenuate the effects of depression, electrodes were inserted in the wrong part of the brain for ECT stimulation. Only God knows how much damage was done in the quest to remedy depression in this manner. Of course, in the name of science, ECT is still being applied and even enhanced with newer and more powerful machinery despite the fact that it is nearly impossible to get any form of conclusive result on its efficacy as a treatment for depression.

Another outlandish form of treatment is known as Transcranial Magnetic Stimulation (TMS), which is dubbed as a non-invasive method for altering brain activity in specific regions of the brain. This treatment is carried out using powerful hand-held magnets placed on the scalp of the patient to create magnetic fields that in turn make electric currents flow in the superficial cortex of the brain. It is thus similar to ECT, but without using electrodes. The idea that powerful magnetic fields could cure depression was propounded at the beginning of the 20th century, but it was only in the 1980's when technology was adequately developed to create TMS devices that could generate magnetic fields powerful enough to affect the brain.

Though many published studies exist regarding the positive effects

of ECT and TMS, and these methods are in use even today, little is known about their adverse side effects and the long-term benefits or harms of these methods of treatment. Short term benefits have been documented but due to confirmation bias and other limitations such as the nature of unverifiable feedback from patients and lack of any standard means of measurement, these handful of studies cannot be relied upon. Hence, methods such as these and others like them, including vagus nerve stimulation, deep brain stimulation, artificial light exposure, etc. would not be deemed recommendable by any means.

Of the common treatments available, the one that is least invasive and arguably most effective, is a solution known as cognitive therapy. In general, cognitive therapy is based on the premise that how you feel is influenced by the way you think. As such, thinking of positive things brings about positive feelings while having a negative worldview leads to negative feelings. Cognitive therapy thus aims to train the mind to focus on positive aspects of events and do away with distorted, bleak thoughts. Another similar solution is known as behaviour therapy. This is where it is believed that changing one's behaviour can alter one's moods. So things like physical exercise, travelling to beautiful places, helping the needy, etc. can help to alleviate the negative feelings brought about by depression.

Though cognitive therapy can be quite helpful in mitigating the devastating effects of full-blown depression, it is not easy to change the way one thinks. For this reason, some psychologists have suggested using a 'thought tracker' to record and track one's disturbing and troubling thoughts, and in doing so one might be able to get a better understanding of the connections between his thoughts, feelings and the events that trigger them. The process is simple and involves keeping a small diary where thoughts and feelings are recorded alongside what happened to bring them about. At the end of every day or week, one can then review these thoughts and try to examine the patterns of

troubling thoughts so as to determine how best to avoid them. One can also find 'replacement thoughts' to substitute the negative thoughts whenever they occur and in so doing, prevent them from leading to the feelings that result in depression. Critically examining one's thoughts also acts as a barrier that keeps away the misjudgements and illogical assumptions which heighten one's depression.

Assessment of the risk of depression is usually carried out by studying the patient's medical history. In particular, the following variables are typically taken into consideration:

- (a) Number of previous depressive episodes
- (b) Number of days spent in depression in the past
- (c) Family history of depression
- (d) Key clinical variables such as early age onset, etc.
- (e) Treatments attempted in the past and their efficacy
- (f) Relapse into depression during or after treatment, and after how long
- (g) Severity of depression and other medical ailments

Due to the real possibility of relapse, it is of paramount importance that after the successful treatment of depression, the individual's positive state is sustained. Depression has the nasty habit of returning if one is not careful. As such, one must never feel completely secure from the recurrence of depressive episodes. It is paramount to hold on to the tools and means by which depression is defeated so that if it ever recurs, it may once again be thwarted. The beautiful teachings of Islam that can enable a person rid himself or herself of this terrible affliction should always be kept in mind in order to prevent it from rearing its ugly head and causing havoc in one's life. It is good to frequently remind oneself of these teachings by reading through the Qur'anic verses, supplications, and traditions that give one hope and a sense of tranquility.

Generally Accepted Methods for Alleviation of Depression

While it is true that depression is indeed burdensome and plagues millions of people around the world, diminishing personal productivity and ruining families and societies, and even taking lives; nonetheless, it is a treatable condition. Like every ailment, the first step in curing depression is identifying it. At times a person might suspect that they are experiencing some kind of depression. If that happens, the best way to determine whether or not one is depressed is by keeping track of mood changes from day to day. Doing so is helpful as one may discover patterns (like how he or she gets depressed on weekends) and specific things that trigger depressive moods. As noted earlier, it has been suggested that one should keep a diary in which moods and feelings are recorded on a daily basis. This can help to keep track of one's progress in the fight against depression.

Those who suffer from depression often make no effort to change their circumstances, at least for a while, and when they do try to make a change, they frequently slip back into inaction for prolonged periods. One of the reasons for this is thought to be fear of further loss. If a person is depressed after suffering a loss, it is natural that he or she would want to avoid any more losses. This fear then holds the person back from making positive changes that could help in overcoming depression. Another reason for not making the required changes is the natural fear of inconsistency. People generally prefer consistency and predictability. Even at a very primal biological level, our physical bodies always attempt to maintain a consistently stable state. This process is known as homeostasis, and it is where the body tries its best to keep the temperature, blood sugar, hormones, etc. of the body at a stable level. Whenever anything disrupts this, the body works extra hard to restore the stability.

The truth, however, is that depression cannot be countered without change. Change in the way one thinks and lives is absolutely necessary to remedy depression. There are many examples of such needed

changes. One pertains to dealing with the sense of inadequacy and inability. Depressed individuals often feel that whenever they try anything, they always fail, or that they cannot succeed at anything without help from someone else. This attitude needs to be overhauled completely in order to climb out of the dark hole that is depression. Another change that is required has to do with the feeling of being undeserving. Some people who suffer depressed moods believe that they are undeserving of good, or of anything that brings them joy. To gain relief from depression, it is necessary to reject playing the role of victim, or putting oneself down all the time.

As one embarks on the path of self-healing, it is important to realize that there are certain saboteurs that would sabotage any progress made in freeing oneself from the clutches of depression. Basically, anything that pulls one down should be avoided. This can take many forms, such as meetings with some negative-minded individuals, certain kinds of television or radio programs, or even activities that leave one feeling sad. Self-limiting thoughts should be replaced with self-affirming statements and it is always better to take things slow and suspend hasty judgment. Pacing oneself and taking a gradual, steady approach has the advantage of preventing the feeling of being overwhelmed. It is but natural for there to be bumps on the road, so reminding oneself that this process is like a marathon, not a sprint, can be helpful.

Recollecting the past and thinking about all the negative occurrences in one's life only compounds depression. Stories of doom and gloom seem like an unending web of tales about rejection, failures, losses, shortfalls, and humiliation. It is important to avoid thinking about the past and if a memory comes to mind, one should try to focus on the positive aspects rather than the negative ones. Bad memories fill one with sadness and regret, which only heightens the depressive feelings of despondency and hopelessness. With such feelings, it is almost impossible to believe that anything will ever change. Memory is a blessing, but when it is used in a positive manner. Instead of recalling

all the bad things that have happened, one should remind himself of all the blessings he has been granted.

The most difficult thing for depressed people is the slew of terrible feelings that overwhelm them. This is why the first thing that the depressed ask for when seeking help is a way to get relief from these horrible feelings. It could be said, in fact, that the primary goal of those seeking treatment for depression is to be freed from the grasp of such painful feelings. It should be understood, however, that focusing only on relief from disturbing feelings and emotions can sometimes hamper the overall treatment of depression. Rather, one needs to change their worldview entirely in order to get a lasting emancipation from depression. Feelings must be addressed and not avoided or ignored, as that would only give one temporary relief through distraction. Awareness of one's feelings is important, and denial or repression can harm both the body and mind of an individual.

Introspection is important if one wishes to evaluate the thoughts that are driving his negative feelings. A person needs to ask himself how he interprets any event or occurrence. Does he take it positively as it was intended, or as it would ordinarily be? Or does he take it as something negative even when it was not so. Sometimes depressed individuals imagine a sarcastic tone that was never there, or think that any positive comment is meant in jest or mockery, or is simply spoken out of envy. Even if no sinister motive is imagined, a depressed person might feel that the person who is making a positive comment is only being polite and does not really mean what he or she says. It is important to realize that feelings are not facts. Many people consider what they feel to be what really exists. They give too much credence to intuition or emotion. For depressed people who are inundated with countless negative thoughts and feelings, it can be detrimental to consider feelings as facts. This kind of emotional reasoning that is based on feelings rather than logic weighs a person down and prevents him from making the changes necessary to escape depression. So one should

always remember that just because one feels something, it does not make it true.

Of course, this is not to say that feelings are not important or that they should be ignored. Indeed, emotions and feelings are very important. Positive feelings inform you about what you like or dislike while negative feelings can save you by alerting you of danger or assisting you to recognize that something is not right for you. Feelings and emotions are what makes us human. In fact, it is by analyzing our feelings that we can not only diagnose depression but also remedy it. There is an entire area of study devoted to what is called 'emotional intelligence' with deals with this very subject.

The abilities of the mind are extraordinary. Not only is it a thinking machine, it also conjures up fabulous stories, eloquent poetry and creative ideas using its faculty of imagination. The mind also remembers the past, predicts the future, and decodes the present. A well-functioning mind gives one the ability to reason and make rational decisions. However, when it is clouded by depression, the mind can make one live in a past full of regrets and guilt, which then makes the present unbearable and foresees a future full of doom and gloom. While it is true that depression is not the only cause of distorted thinking, depression does make such negative distortions more frequent and intense. Depressed individuals often contort reality and twist it in ways that make all events appear bleak. The creativity of the imagination is misused by depressed people to distort information in creative ways and these distortions then get transformed into a tangled web of misinformation. Examples of such distortions include magnifying minor issues. This way of thinking is referred to as 'catastrophizing' and it makes small problems seem like huge catastrophes. At times a slight headache would be assumed to be the result of a brain tumor, or an innocent facial expression may be misinterpreted to mean something very negative. This kind of distorted thinking needs to be corrected if one wishes to stave off depression.

How one thinks of himself or herself plays an important part in depression. Generally, depressed individuals look at themselves in a very negative light. They apply terms of debasement to themselves such as *pathetic, idiot, clod, misfit, oaf, freak*, and so on. When such a person slips or trips, he would immediately call himself clumsy, and when he fails at something he would immediately consider himself to be a loser. Such negative terms obviously erode one's sense of self-worth. Whenever anything negative happens, a depressed person is more likely to personalize the problem and blame himself for his situation. Unwarranted guilt and blame are common among the depressed, and they lead to a drop in productivity and lethargy. Overcoming these emotions is a required step in the healing process on the path to overcoming depression.

Depression is, in its most basic sense, the lack of happiness. It is important therefore, that depressed individuals do not fall into the trap of falsely assuming that certain things would make them happy, since when those things fail to meet expectations, it will only worsen the sadness and depression. Instead, joy should be sought in mindful living – a type of lifestyle filled with acceptance and connecting with experience. Acceptance (or what is termed '*al-riḍā*' in Islam) is a willingness to cope with whatever comes one's way, even if it entails a certain level of sorrow. This is contrary to resistance and rejection. We have discussed more about the Islamic teaching of acceptance and satisfaction in the third chapter. Suffice it to say that acceptance can play a huge role in mitigating the effects of potentially depressive events and can safeguard one's happiness, or in the very least keep sadness and despondency at bay.

Psychologists and practitioners of traditional meditation and other mindfulness techniques have also offered some practical steps that can help to make a person more mindful of the present. These include: (a) focussing on each moment without associating it to anything that happened in the past or anything expected in the future, (b) paying

attention to the different sensations of the body such as touch, sounds, smells, and even the rhythm of one's breathing, (c) if any unwanted thoughts or feelings creep in, immediately turn your attention to something that is happening in the present, (d) try closing your eyes and notice what you see at the back of your eyelids. There are many such practices that can help one become mindful, albeit for a short while. Practicing Muslims have the added advantage of praying five times a day – which if they do correctly and with concentration, keeps them mindful for the duration of the prayers.

A depressed mind is bereft of even the small pleasures that are experienced in life, because it constantly focuses on negative thoughts that are linked to the past or future. One might sit down and consume an entire meal without ever actually tasting the food, for example. However, with mindful living where every moment is appreciated, the experience is quite different. For instance, mindful eating entails noticing the food on one's plate and taking into account the various shapes, colours, textures, and smells. It also includes the appreciation of the fact that one is greatly blessed to have access to such a meal while millions of people are starving all over the world. Starting the meal with the name of God and a feeling of gratitude for the blessing of good food before proceeding to eat slowly, chewing the food well and allowing yourself to taste each bite, further enhances the mindful eating experience which brings about a sense of joy and pleasure that cannot be compared to 'regular' eating.

Depression greatly reduces motivation. Even simple tasks like doing the dishes, taking out the garbage, or paying the bills, which are usually done without a second thought, become like heavy burdens that weigh a person down when one is suffering from depression. However, putting off necessary chores only increases problems in the long run and further saps motivation and deepens depression. That is why it is very important for one to take action, even if it be in small steps. For a depressed individual, it is futile to wait for motivation before acting.

Rather, actions almost always have to precede motivation when one is depressed. It is unhealthy to remain in bed thinking that rest will improve the situation and mitigate the lethargy and lack of motivation. This is because, as one person put it, humans are not like batteries – they need a healthy balance of activity and rest to stay charged.

One of the other abilities that is negatively impacted by depression is problem-solving. It is as though depression incapacitates the brain's problem-solving mechanism, resulting in a diminished capacity for finding solutions to any of life's complications that one may encounter. Not being able to solve problems in a timely and appropriate fashion leads to difficulties becoming bigger and more complicated, and this only compounds the problem further and increases the sense of helplessness and hopelessness. Common problem-solving strategies that have been generally suggested can be particularly useful for depressed individuals. In fact, it may even help in solving their biggest problem – how to get rid of depression. The steps that are suggested for easier and more effective problem solving are: (a) identifying and recognizing the problem, (b) searching for any possible options available for solving the problem, (c) thinking about the consequences of each option, (d) choosing the option you wish to try, (e) trying out the option to see if it successfully solves the problem or not.

Using this simple step-by-step approach, one can better deal with problems. Having a laid-out plan makes it easier for depressed individuals to tackle difficulties which would otherwise seem too daunting to face. It helps one to focus on the most important aspect of any problem first, especially since depression has a nasty way of misleading a person when it comes to trying to decipher the causes of any issue. Properly recognizing the extent of any problem and how much it effects one's life, as well as how beneficial it will be if that complication is fixed, is an inextricable part of effective problem-solving. The realization that other people also face similar problems can be somewhat comforting while also providing examples of how to solve

those problems by looking at the solutions that worked for others.

At the risk of sounding cliché, physical exercise is also highly recommended in the fight against depression and grief. When one feels down, the last thing he or she probably wants to do is exercise. However, believe it or not, exercise exorcises melancholy. Getting the blood pumping can do wonders for one's mood. It releases endorphins that uplift a person's spirits and numb the pain one is feeling. In fact, it is believed that these very same endorphins enable soldiers to carry on fighting, or athletes to continue competing, even when injured. Endorphins provide a buffer against stress and improve blood circulation. Aside from this, exercise has other obvious physical benefits as well. However, though it comes highly recommended, exercise is only one piece of the puzzle and if one just cannot get himself to exercise, there are other remedies that can be tried instead.

Some actions from which human beings derive a sense of pleasure can also help mitigate depression. Looking at beautiful scenery in nature, sitting by a lake or river, smelling fresh flowers, taking a warm bath, going for a walk in a quiet park, volunteering to assist the needy, or participating in sports can all give one a feeling of pleasure and make memories of sad and depressing events disappear for a while. Listening to a beautiful recitation of the Glorious Qur'ān or some wonderful supplications can give rise to a sense of tranquility that also has the effect of dispelling disturbing thoughts and calming the mind. It is important to find any such activity that takes the mind away from the dark hole of depression and shines some rays of light onto one's life, even if it is for a few minutes. Doing so regularly can help completely alleviate depression from one's life.

Just like the physical body suffers trauma when it is violently injured, the psyche of an individual who undergoes great pain also suffers trauma. And just as the physical body takes time to heal, so too does the heart and mind of an individual. While everyone is different and there can thus be no definite timeframe for healing and recovery,

there is no doubt that time heals the wounds of the body and the heart. Giving oneself enough time and following the important steps that have been outlined, as well as acting upon the wise teachings and advice of religious guides can ensure that one recovers from depression fully and then keeps it at bay so as not to regress into it again.

In the end, it must be remembered that though depression and grief may feel like a very personal experience, it is something that goes beyond the individual and affects others around him or her as well. In fact, it would not be wrong to say that depression is a communal problem that harms the whole society, not just the suffering individual. This is because, as we have seen, it has disruptive effects in the life of an otherwise important and contributing member of the society and workforce, and this translates into a disruption in the lives of others who depend on that person and his or her productivity. Hence, a concerted effort by the whole society is needed to keep the disease of depression in check.

2

GRIEF, DEPRESSION AND RELIGION

Most, if not all, of the world religions teach that human beings exist on two levels: the physical and the spiritual. Since the physical aspect of an individual ceases to function upon death, it is the spiritual aspect that is believed to live on. The Abrahamic traditions teach that the soul moves to another realm after death. The metaphysical realm, or the realm that goes beyond the physical and material, cannot be explained by science. Even though scholars have come up with a branch of science known as thanatology, which studies death and the phenomena related to it, they cannot explain what happens to an individual after he or she dies, purely in scientific terms. This is one of the limits of empirical science. As such, scientists who do not believe in religion simply claim that death is the end of human existence, whereas those who do espouse some religious belief cannot articulate, in scientific terms, what their religion teaches about life after death.

Many religions teach their adherents how to handle grief and sadness in their lives. Some simple ways in which religions assist in coping with bereavement, for example, is through funeral rites and mourning rituals conducted with other members of the community of believers. This gives one a sense that he is not alone during his time of sorrow. Simultaneously, religion helps by lending a larger meaning to a loved one's life and death. The belief that a dear one is enjoying the spiritual bounties of the afterlife can be comforting. Furthermore, knowing that you will be reunited in another place after your own death can help one continue to feel connected with the person he has lost. In general, humans fear what they do not know and since death is

perceived as an unknown reality, it is feared by human beings. However, by explaining what transpires after death, religion mitigates that fear and for strong believers, does away with it altogether.

Any loss, especially one involving the loss of love, independence, structure, or identity, causes a kind of temporary imbalance - physically, emotionally, and spiritually. Religion gives balance to the life of its adherents. Religiosity is an influential factor that shapes a person's cognitive processes. Many studies have demonstrated the positive effects of religious devotion for those suffering from depression. Out of the over 150 independent studies that have been conducted since the 1880s pertaining to the relationship between religious conviction and depression, there are a number of investigations that have been carried out over a long period of time (10 to 30 years). Perhaps the two most well-known longitudinal studies on the effect of religiosity on depression are the following:

(a) The longitudinal prospective study that analyzed the prevalence of depression in 114 offspring of depressed and non-depressed parents after 10 years and then 20 years as follow-up assessments. This was part of a three-generation study that started in 1982. In addition to measuring depression and mood disorders, they also measured how important religion or spirituality was to each individual and the level and frequency of their participation in religious services. The rate of depression among those who were considered the high-risk group, because they had at least one parent with depression, was twice as much as those with non-depressed parents. From all the participants in the study, those who reported that religion or spirituality was very important to them had about one-fourth of the risk of depression at the second assessment (10 years later) compared to those who did not. And from the high-risk group, those who reported that religion was of great importance had about one-tenth the risk of experiencing depression ten years later

compared to high-risk participants who did not believe in the importance of religiosity.¹

(b) Another similar longitudinal study aimed to investigate the relationship between depression, religion and poor-health. The general contention was that people who are irreligious or have little interest in religion may function well in their daily lives until they are faced with adversity. For the devout, however, religion acts as a buffer during adversity and it is this buffer that prevents or reduces the devastating effects of depression in such individuals. Those who were truly devout and practiced the teachings of their religions were shown to have a stronger buffer against depression as opposed to those who only professed religious attitudes and beliefs but were not devout. Similarly, participation in religious rituals and activities decreased the likelihood of depression and had a strong negative effect on depression when compared to involvement in more private religious or spiritual activities. When it came to physical illness, it was decisively shown by this study that those who were religious were less affected by depression following illness than those who were not.²

While such studies prove that religious individuals are generally at lower risk of falling into depression, they are limited in a number of ways. The greatest limitation is seen in the way that religiosity is measured as this is mostly done by simply interviewing the participants and asking about their views on religion and how often they participate in religious activities. Secondly, these studies are also limited by where they were carried out. The studies have been mostly conducted in Europe and America and involve, for the most part, Christian

¹ Taken from: <https://www.psychologytoday.com/ca/blog/neuroscience-in-everyday-life/201904/can-religion-help-depression>

² Paul Wink, Michelle Dillon, Britta Larsen, "Religion as Moderator of the Depression-Health Connection," *Research on Aging* (2005), vol. 27: 197-220.

participants. In fact, of all the major studies that have been recorded, there have been less than 1% of Muslim participants.³

Furthermore, both depression and religiousness are not static or constant, they change over time depending on a myriad of factors. In addition, there are different types of religiousness (some being more inclined towards spirituality while others towards ritual praxis, for example). Measuring religiosity is thus no easy feat, especially since none of the religious traditions other than Islam have a clearly defined measure. For Muslims, the gauge is clearly defined as the level of Godwariness (*taqwā* or mindfulness of God) as stated in the Qur'an and ḥadīth. Therefore, the limits of these studies prevent them from being sufficient, in and of themselves, as evidence for the direct negative correlation between religiousness and depression. However, they do help by providing supportive evidence for this well-founded claim.

It should be noted that religiousness also contributes to controlling or alleviating depression in other ways. For instance, drug abuse is much less prevalent among religious individuals. Furthermore, those who are part of religious communities have access to greater social support from their co-religionists. Religiousness also assists in self-evaluation, appraisal of life events, and coping with stressful situations. As such, it is but natural that there would be an inverse relationship between religiosity and depression. The attractiveness of religion for people undergoing traumatic experiences or adversities is apparent, and some studies have also found that a significant number of people, especially those who are religious to some extent, seek help from a member of the clergy or religious class when faced with such trying circumstances in their lives.⁴

³ Timothy Smith, Michael McCullough, and Justin Poll, "Religiousness and Depression: Evidence for a Main Effect and the Moderating Influence of Stressful Life Events," *Psychological Bulletin* (2003), vol. 129, p. 623.

⁴ Lisa Mille, Priya Wickramaratne, Mia Sage, et al. "Religiosity and Major Depression in Adults at High Risk: A Ten-Year Prospective Study," *American Journal of Psychiatry* (2012), vol. 169(1), p. 89.

Interestingly, some Christian and Jewish psychologists were evidently not inclined to make sweeping claims on the benefits of religion itself, as that would mean accepting the general benefits of belief systems that were different from their own. In order to highlight the benefits of their religious beliefs to the exclusion of others, they divided religions into 'neurotic' vs. 'non-neurotic' religions, or 'mature' vs. 'immature' religions.⁵ In this way, they could easily claim that only those who espoused their own religious tradition would benefit from the overall positiveness that religion had to offer. While it is true that the differences in religious traditions can have a tremendous effect on the potential immunization of adherents against maladies such as depression, one cannot deny the overarching general benefits of belief in a Creator and the need to live a purposeful, moral life, which is something that most religions of the world preach.

On the other hand, secularists have always downplayed the mitigating effect of religion on depression, and there are even some published works that claim that no such effect exists. In fact, some have spoken of an opposite effect, where depression actually reduces the religious belief of individuals.⁶ Of course, as we have noted in the previous chapter, depression generally causes loss of interest in group activities and this also translates to not wishing to participate in religious gatherings or communal worship. However, it should be kept in mind that religion is not limited to worshipping in groups and keeping to oneself for a period of time wherein one performs all the required acts of worship alone in no way impugns his or her religiosity.

It is precisely due to the negative attitude or indifference of secular psychologists and counsellors that we would generally not recommend any Muslim, or adherent of any faith for that matter, to seek assistance from such professionals. In fact, those psychologists who acknowledge

⁵ Eva Cadwallader, "Depression and Religion: Realities, Perspectives and Directions," *Counselling and Values* (1991), vol. 35, p. 89.

⁶ *Ibid*, p. 629.

the effect of religion on the psyche of its adherents themselves admit that religious individuals are some of the hardest clients to assist.⁷ This is because they lack the necessary knowledge and skillset to understand what a religious patient feels and is going through. Additionally, the methodology of their approach and the solutions they offer are based on secular ideals, which are often in conflict with the patients' religious beliefs.⁸ We have discussed this in more detail in the next chapter.

It is also noteworthy that some of the conclusions drawn by western sociologists and scholars who have studied the effects of religion on human life are outright ridiculous. For instance, Idler and Kasl published a paper titled 'Religion, Disability, Depression and the Timing of Death,' in which they claimed (based on some prior studies) that the impact of religion is intensified during religious holidays to such a degree that for some pious believers, it causes a postponement of their death!⁹ The ridiculousness of this claim is evident from the obvious fact that nobody can ever know for certain when a person's death is to occur, so there is no question of surmising any postponement or delay in death. Yet these findings were published in reputable western academic journals and are still available to researchers today.

After his seminal work on suicide (which we will discuss in chapter four), the French sociologist Emile Durkheim wrote another

⁷ Cadwallader, "Depression and Religion: Realities, Perspectives and Directions," p. 84.

⁸ This is not to say that there were no western psychologists who spoke favorably about religion or the religious. In fact, Carl Jung (d. 1961), who is one of the well-known figures in the field of psychology, is said to have presented the strongest psychological defense of religion in contemporary times. Jung believed that religious people enjoy a great advantage and in one of his works he wrote, "The individual who is not anchored in God can offer no resistance on his own resources to the physical and moral blandishments of the world." However, the number of those who were inimical to religion or indifferent towards it far outnumber those who gave it any importance. Some, like Albert Ellis (d. 2007), went as far as to equate religion to mental or emotional disturbance.

⁹ Ellen Idler and Stanislav Kasl, 'Religion, Disability, Depression and the Timing of Death,' *American Journal of Sociology* (1992), vol. 97(4): 1052-79.

monograph titled: *Elementary Forms of the Religious Life*. While his previous work, which was written about eighteen years prior, attributed the mitigating effects of religion on suicide to religious involvement within a social network, his new research suggested an extended influence by religion through dividing time and space into religious and profane, use of symbols as collective representations, and the implementation of congregational or collective worship in the form of religious rituals. All of this, Durkheim claimed, plays a role in how religion reduces the effects of negativity and affliction in a believer's life.¹⁰ According to Durkheim's arguments, some religious groups are more protected by their religious beliefs than others, due to their tightly integrated societies and the intensity with which they practice their religious beliefs.

Grief and Melancholy in the Abrahamic Traditions

Judaism

Most of the discussions related to grief in Judaism pertain to the death of loved ones. Generally, Jews prefer to concentrate on life in the here and now instead of focusing on the life in the Hereafter. In fact, most contemporary scholars are of the opinion that Jewish belief in the afterlife was something that entered Judaism much later.¹¹ It is noteworthy, however, that there are some clear references to life after death in the Tanakh. When it comes to what transpires after death,

¹⁰ Cf. Emile Durkheim, *Elementary Forms of the Religious Life*, English Translation Published in 2012, (<https://www.gutenberg.org/files/41360/41360-h/41360-h.htm>).

¹¹ The view that this belief entered Judaism after the Greek occupation by Alexander has been propounded by the likes of Bowker (see: John Bowker, *The Meanings of Death*, Cambridge, 1993). Others claim that Jewish belief in the resurrection of the body and in an afterlife was inherited from the Pharisees after the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem in 70 CE (see: Neil Gillman, *The Death of Death: Resurrection and Immortality in Jewish Thought*, Woodstock, 2000 and Arnold Toynbee, *Man's Concern with Death*, London, 1968).

Jews hold different beliefs. Some of the mystical Jewish sects like the Chasidic and Renewal schools actually espouse a doctrine of reincarnation after death.¹²

Judaism has a structured mourning program for all bereaved adherents that they are required to follow. The spouse and immediate blood relatives of the deceased are supposed to observe a three-part grieving ritual. The first part is known as *aninut* and lasts between the period of death and burial. The next two stages are known as *avelut*, or the actual mourning. The first of these lasts for seven days after burial and is known as *shivah*. This is then followed by a further 23 days of mourning known as *sheloshim*, which, together with the *shivah*, make a total of thirty days of bereavement. At the end of these thirty days, the mourning process is considered to have ended, unless one is mourning for his parents, in which case there is an additional mourning period of eleven months.

Since the first few days are considered the most difficult for mourners, during the *aninut*, mourners are required to abstain from a wide range of activities, including social interaction with anyone outside the circle of family and fellow grievers. During this time, one cannot attend social functions or conduct any business. He must not leave the house for anything other than making the funeral arrangements. The mirrors of the house must also be covered as this is 'not a time of vanity'. One is also to refrain from self-grooming through bathing, shaving, trimming nails, etc. Finally, one should wear worn-out clothing that he must not wash to clean. These are some of the known practices of the *shivah*, many of which are overlooked or ignored by modern-day Jews.

After the first three days, which are reserved for intense grief and lamentation, from the fourth day of the *shivah* a new phase of mourning begins. This is the time when the bereaved can now begin talking about

¹² Cf. David A. Cooper, *God is a Verb: Kabbalah and the Practice of Mystical Judaism*, New York, 1997.

his loss and accepting the verbal messages of condolence from members of the community. The mourner may also return to his social interactions. On their part, fellow believers are highly encouraged to express their condolences at this time and there are certain rules and etiquettes that must be followed by those who wish to console the grieving. For instance, it is important that they remain silent in the mourner's presence until he breaks the silence first. At times there is a long period of silence in the gathering before the speaking begins, and that is also considered part of the condolence "by presence."¹³

At the end of the *shivah*, the bereaved are encouraged to resume all their social activities and responsibilities. However, as a mark of continued mourning, they are not allowed to marry or groom themselves as they normally would until the end of the *sheloshim*. For those who adhere to these rules, it means that for an entire month, they are not to cut their hair, shave, bathe (their full bodies), trim their nails, or wear new clothes. However, as noted earlier, many modern Jews do not practice these teachings any more. The act of weeping for the dead is itself considered praiseworthy and even necessary in Judaism. The Talmud goes as far as to castigate those Jews who do not weep for the virtuous dead and conversely, those who do weep for the dead are said to have their own sins forgiven.¹⁴

The philosophy behind this kind of structured grieving process has been explained by some Rabbis as being natural since the grief that one ordinarily experiences after loss of a loved one gradually diminishes over a period of seven days, and then keeps getting weaker until it all but disappears after twelve months.¹⁵ It is thought that these stages help to guide a mourner back to his normal life and give him the closure he needs after losing a loved one. It also helps the community to recognize

¹³ Maurice Lamm, *the Jewish Way in Death and Mourning* (New York, Jonathan David, 1969), p. 138.

¹⁴ Shabbat 105b, Moed Katan 25a.

¹⁵ Midrash Esther Rabbah 8:1-2.

the termination of the mourning period. That is why offering condolences after a year has passed is highly frowned upon in Judaism and has been likened to breaking the leg of one whose leg was broken and has already healed.¹⁶

Since mourning is natural and spontaneous in times of sorrow, and the way each individual reacts to loss and expresses grief is different, one might question the utility of such a prescribed form of structured grief which is limiting and restrictive. For some, it can actually even prevent a full resolution and readjustment as they might need more time to mourn. This, in turn, can lead to a greater risk of depression. Of course, there are some allowances made by Jewish law in certain circumstances, such as illness, financial loss or being an orphaned child. In these cases, the extenuating conditions supersede the laws of mourning and allow believers to grieve in their own way, without having to follow the laid down structures.

Jews argue that while it may seem restrictive, the laws of grieving actually assist to maintain the dignity of both the bereaved as well as the departed.¹⁷ Aside from the legislated mourning practices, there is room in Judaism for certain local customs (*minhagim*) that are specific to different localities. For instance, in some places, mourners are served a meal of eggs and lentils, which is considered a symbol of resurrection.¹⁸ Other common practices include tearing one's clothing as a sign of sadness. The repetition of certain liturgies is also prescribed and thought to be a means of bringing relief to the bereaved.¹⁹

Aside from grieving, Jews believe that death is a lesson for the living. As such, they are averse to the modern practices in secular societies of beautifying the dead with makeup, smart attires, elaborately decorated coffins, etc. Instead, they use simple shrouds and clothing, plain

¹⁶ Moed Katan, 21b.

¹⁷ Sanhedrin 46b-47a.

¹⁸ Harry Rabinowicz, *A Guide to Life* (New York, Ktav, 1967), pp 58-9.

¹⁹ Jack Spiro, *Time to Mourn: Judaism and the Psychology of Bereavement* (New York, Bloch, 1967), p. 121.

wooden boards for the coffin when it is required, and a simple funeral that does nothing to hide the fact that the deceased has died and will not return. The bereaved are also encouraged to help or witness the internment of the deceased into the grave. All this heightens the sense of reality of the death of the loved one and helps ingrain this reality into those left behind.²⁰

Though excessive grieving is forbidden, actions such as rending one's clothing or weeping bitterly and wailing passionately are not frowned upon in Judaism and are considered legitimate expressions of grief during the first days after the death of a loved one, provided these expressions are done sincerely.²¹ To discourage believers from extreme and unbridled expression of grief, the Talmud states that "whoever laments his dead more than he should, he shall mourn still another."²² An example of this is also given in the story of a woman who had seven sons and when one died, she wept excessively for him. Due to this, she lost her other six sons as well.²³ On the anniversary of their loved one's death, Jews remember them with the *kaddish* which is a prayer-hymn recited for the dead. This is done every year, and though there is no mourning and sadness, it is considered a time to remember the deceased loved ones.

Interestingly, despite such a detailed and specific method of grief management after bereavement in Judaism, studies from the 1880s have shown that Jews are more likely to get depressed than non-Jews and that they are at a greater risk of mental disorders in general. Various studies with different groups showed that Jews are between 1.5 to 2

²⁰ It is said that in the past, Jews would have elaborate funerals where the expense of burial was higher and harder to bear than the death of a loved one itself. This was until one of the wealthiest religious leaders of his time, Rabban Gamaliel, insisted that he should be buried in a plain linen shroud. Since that time, it has been the practice of the Jews to keep their burials simple. (See: Milton Matz, "Judaism and Bereavement," *Journal of Religion and Health*, vol. 3 (1964), p. 347).

²¹ Moed Katan 24a.

²² Moed Katab 27b.

²³ Ibid.

times more likely to suffer from depressive disorders than non-Jews. The studies further showed that Jews of Eastern European descent were at a particularly higher risk of such ailments.²⁴ While it is possible that these studies were related to a period in which Jews faced persecution, it is also quite probable that certain other beliefs, such as the doctrine of chosenness, or lack of certitude about the afterlife, might be contributing to a greater likelihood of depression among Jews.

Christianity

Grief is dealt with quite differently in Christianity. While Judaism takes an external, pragmatic approach to the expression of grief in order to arrive at closure and move on, Christians receive consolation from their faith and are told that they need not grieve. The famous statement, “Those who believe need not grieve” is often heard being repeated in sermons and church orations. The New Testament assures believers that “The Lord is near the brokenhearted and saves the crushed in spirit” (Psalm 34:18). Furthermore, Christians are meant to be ‘informed’ about death so that they do not mourn like the rest of mankind, who have no hope (1 Thessalonians 4:13). This hope stems from the Christian belief in the resurrection and the New Testament speaks of this quite clearly.

The resurrection in Christianity is an earthly resurrection that will take place upon the Second Coming of Christ. The period between death and the Second Coming is considered by some as being a period of rest and waiting.²⁵ As in Islam, the firm belief in a resurrection and reckoning after death gives hope to the faithful as they know that after bearing the hardships of this world, they will arrive at eternal bliss and

²⁴ Michael McCullough and David Larson, ‘Religion and Depression: A Review of the Literature,’ *Twin Research* (1999), vol. 2, p. 127.

²⁵ Alan R. Kemp, *Death, Dying and Bereavement in a Changing World*, (Second Edition, New York, 2019) p. 80.

redemption. Hence, they await the joy that will follow the sorrow they currently suffer from. John 16:22 states: "...Now is your time of grief, but I will see you again and you will rejoice, and no one will take away your joy." Unlike this world in which none can escape from grief and sorrow at one time or another, the afterlife has no such burden, for "God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away" (Revelation 21:4).

A number of Christian scholars and priests have written about the bane of melancholy from a religious perspective. Two prominent examples are Evagrius Ponticus and John of the Cross. The ascetic monk, Evagrius Ponticus, also known as Evagrius the Solitary (345–399 AD), was one of the early Christian writers who addressed the question of depression in life. He was born in present-day Türkiye and spent his early life studying in Constantinople. As a youth, he fell in love with a married woman who happened to be the wife of a city official, and though the woman responded to his passion, either out of fear for his life or his soul, he left Constantinople for Jerusalem where he adopted an ascetic life as a monk. Initially, he fell ill and the doctors were not able to diagnose his ailment. It was only later when he confessed that the melancholy which was overwhelming him was due to the love affair in Constantinople that it became clear what had caused his sickness. Over time, his symptoms faded and upon regaining his health, he decided to migrate from Jerusalem to Egypt.

Having suffered depression himself, he came up with a doctrine that would, according to him, assure inner peace and tranquility for the restless soul. Furthermore, according to Evagrius, in order to attain the state of beatitude and see God, one must achieve a state of perfect tranquility. However, doing this is not easy and requires a monk to rid himself of any and all desires. To do that, the monk must remain celibate and live a life of poverty. Additionally, in order to avoid temptation, he must apply himself to continual manual work.

Furthermore, he must not allow any bad thoughts to creep into his mind thereby disturbing his tranquility. This may include memories of sad things that transpired in the past or imaginations of negative things that might happen in the future. Furthermore, sinful thoughts of fornication, avarice, arrogance, etc. must be completely avoided.²⁶

Hence, we see that Evagrius listed three very important points that play a pivotal role in maintaining positivity in life and keeping melancholy at bay. First, avoidance of worldly attachments and desires. Living a life of poverty and remaining celibate means that one neither has wealth to worry about nor a family to care for. Second, in order to keep away from any other form of temptation that exists around him, one must have a routine of manual work that not only keeps one busy but also tires his body such that there is no time or energy left to spend on seeking out that which might be enticing. Finally, thoughts that are allowed to remain in the mind are to be restricted to only positive ones, and all negative or sinful thoughts and musings must be dispelled completely. Adhering to these three rules keeps the mind and heart of an individual tranquil and protects one from melancholy and depression.

The Spanish Catholic priest John of the Cross (1542–1591 AD), was another renowned Christian figure who wrote about depression. He was a mystic, and one of the major figures of the Counter-Reformation in Spain, and he is also considered one of the thirty-seven ‘Doctors of the Church’. The writings of John of the Cross are highly valued and his studies on the development of the soul are considered exemplary and counted among the greatest works of all Spanish literature. In 1926 he was declared a Doctor of the Church by Pope Pius XI, and is commonly referred to as the ‘Mystical Doctor’. Two of his works that contain discussions about the soul are: *The Ascent of Mount Carmel* and its companion work, *The Dark Night of the Soul*.

²⁶ Ambresin, Sols, et. al. (Ed.s), *On the Dark Side of Chronic Depression* (Routledge, 2022), pp. 31-33.

The latter work is closely linked with the question of depression, which is depicted as a kind of darkness that engulfs the soul – especially the soul of a spiritual seeker who draws closer to God. It is noteworthy that the milieu in which this work was written marked the watershed of the violent counter-reform Catholic movement against Protestant reform.

So influential was his latter work that the phrase “the dark night” became a label employed to describe anything from a few bad days, to the death of a loved one, or even full-blown depression. Interestingly, John of the Cross himself attempted to distinguish the various ‘nights of the soul’ from mere melancholia and what was then seen as bad humors. However, there can be little doubt that what he describes is nothing but depression itself, with its different forms. Denys Turner notes this in his book titled *The Darkness of God* where he says that John of the Cross’s accounts of the sufferings of the ‘dark nights of the soul’ are uncannily similar to what a person experiences from depression.²⁷ Additionally, if we read the descriptions given by John of the Cross, we see how it completely resembles a state of utter depression.

For instance, he says in one of his descriptions, “The soul finds no solace or support in any doctrine or spiritual teacher. This dark night brings solitude and desolation with it... Rather than being consoled [by the efforts of spiritual guides], the soul’s suffering is intensified. She knows there is no hope, no cure, no release from affliction” (*The Dark Night*, II, 7:3). He then adds, “And in truth, there is no way out. Until God finishes purifying the soul in the way He desires to do it, no remedy can heal her nor is there relief from her pain.” This rather grim depiction is in line with the feeling of utter hopelessness which is the hallmark of depression. While in that state, even the consolation of spiritual guides cannot console the individual or offer direct relief. It is worth noting that according to John of the Cross, the only relief from the pain of the soul comes after God has completed its purification as

²⁷ Denys Turner, *The Darkness of God – Negativity in Christian Mysticism* (Cambridge University Press, 1995), p. 177.

He wills.

Like in Islam, Christianity emphasizes that it is God who heals the sick. Indeed, the Bible cannot be clearer about this when it states “I crush you and I heal you” (Deut. 32:39). Not only does He heal broken bodies, He is also the healer of broken hearts. As such, it is to Him that those suffering from deep sadness should turn. Indeed, the promise of consolation has been given to them in the Bible (Matt. 5:4) “Blessed are they that mourn: for they shall be comforted.” Despite these inspirational teachings and divine promises, studies show that Evangelical Pentecostal Christians are, like Jews, at a higher risk of mental disorders, especially depression. However, there is inconsistency when it comes to Catholics, with some studies showing them to be at a lower risk while others showing them to be at a higher risk of depression.²⁸

Other Religious Traditions

Hinduism, which is considered one of the ancient religions, believes in the human soul (which it terms *ātman*). Interestingly, Buddhism, which grew out of Hinduism, espouses an opposite notion of *anātman* or “non-soul”. Both these religions believe in reincarnation after death; however, their end goals are different. In Hinduism, one is reincarnated and continues within the cycle of birth, death, and rebirth, until he or she becomes divine by attaining basic unity with the Divine. In Buddhism on the other hand, it is believed that reincarnation keeps occurring until one reaches the state of *nirvāna*, or merging with the cosmos, which takes place only after one loses his sense of ‘self’ or his ego, completely. When these ultimate states are reached, both faiths say that one attains a form of release or liberation from suffering.²⁹

²⁸ McCullough and Larson, ‘Religion and Depression: A Review of the Literature,’ p. 128.

²⁹ Cf. John Bowker, *The Oxford Dictionary of World Religions*, New York, 1997.

While Hinduism has no concept of an intermediate realm to which souls go after death, Buddhism does. The belief in an intermediate realm which is present in Christianity and Islam is, interestingly, also found in some Buddhist teachings. According to Tibetan Buddhist doctrines, when one dies, he or she is transferred to a realm “in between” known as *bardo*. This is a place or a state between this life and the next one, where a dead person is believed to remain for a period of 49 days, before rebirth or reincarnation.³⁰ Memorial services are traditionally held on the third, seventh, forty-ninth, and hundredth day after the death and the family comes back to the temple during these days for more services. Just as belief in an afterlife brings with it a sense of hope in the Abrahamic traditions, in other religions that espouse similar beliefs there is likewise some hope for those who endure great suffering in this world. The concept of *karma* and the idea that every deed will be rewarded or punished helps one overcome the pain of suffering at the hands of others. At the same time, the idea that a lost loved one has not completely perished into non-existence and will return to earth in some reincarnated form also eases the pain of emotional suffering for adherents.

Moreover, the sense of purpose that is accorded to those who truly understand and believe in religious teachings acts as a mitigating factor against despondency and hopelessness. They know that life is temporary, short, and has a goal that must be achieved. As such, when grief besets them, they are able to gradually overcome it and carry on with their lives. The idea of purpose in life, its importance, and how it is to be understood has been depicted in one of Buddhism’s mythical anecdotes. This is an old Buddhist story of three seekers after enlightenment, each of whom is given a magic feather that, if dropped, will allow them to remain in whatever place they are. They set off across the Ganges for the Himalayas in search of *nirvāna* intending, like all

³⁰ Cf. Sogyal Rinpoche, *The Tibetan Book of Living and Dying: The Spiritual Classic from one of the Foremost Interpreters of Tibetan Buddhism to the West*, New York, 2012.

seekers, to drop their feathers there and abide in eternal bliss. After a certain amount of hard journeying, at the farthest edge of the flatlands they come upon a kingdom where the stones on the ground are made of silver, where every pleasure of life can be bought just by picking up a rock from the side of the road and all suffering has been banished. Seeing this, the first seeker promptly drops his feather and lives there happily ever after.

The other two, being made of sterner stuff, or perhaps simply greedier, continue up into the foothills of the Himalayas, and there, after some weeks of difficult travel, they come to a lovely green valley wherein they find a village where even the clods of earth are made of gold, and its inhabitants abide in constant ecstasy. The second seeker drops his feather there and is instantly and completely immersed in unending bliss. The third seeker, however, cannily noting the progression, realizes that he can do even better, and he forges on into the mountains. Clutching his feather, he passes through the high forests, braving all manner of ordeals and forgoing all manner of idyllic opportunities. He comes upon heaven after heaven of perpetual ecstasies, celestial transports, and eternal raptures, each more ambrosial and enchanting than the last. But he is determined to drop his feather only at the place of ultimate bliss.

Moving beyond the tree line, he plods upward, passing into the deep snow, through barren glacial passes and rocky slopes, until he finds himself, after months of the most intense journeying, among the icy, savage cliffs of the highest altitudes. And here, in the midst of a blinding blizzard, at the darkest hour of the coldest night he has ever known, he notices a dimly lighted cave ahead and proceeds towards it, seeking a moment's rest and a bit of respite from the bitter cold. When the seeker enters the cave, breathing a sigh of relief simply to be out of the biting wind, he finds a lone man sitting by a small and inadequate fire. The man is ancient, withered, and obviously spent, and on his head, like a crown of thorns, is the spinning weight of all the suffering in the world.

The seeker is so appalled by the sight that the feather he has clutched through every opportunity at earthly bliss and paradise slips from his benumbed and frozen hand. And at that instant the spinning wheel lifts from the man's head and settles on the seeker's own, and he cries out in astonishment at the agonizing weight of all the suffering in the world. The old man gets up and wipes the blood from his disburdened brow and bows to the seeker. "I am grateful to you beyond words," he says. "What is going on here?" the seeker exclaims. "A long time ago, like yourself, having passed through every temptation to settle for lesser truths, I came here with a feather of my own," the man tells him. "And like you, at the furthest reach of my own search for Realization, I found a man here bearing the unbearable weight of the world's suffering, and the burden passed from him to me. He then told me that I would have to remain here until another seeker came along." Through the blood now streaming down into his own eyes, the seeker sees that the floor of the cave is littered with feathers, some of them from birds long since extinct. "How long?" he finally manages to ask. "What millennium is it now?" the old man replies cheerfully, and off he goes, leaving the seeker, who has arrived at last at the pinnacle of his seeking, there in the cave with the weight of the suffering world spinning relentlessly upon his head!

This interesting story has many lessons, the most basic of which is that there is a goal and purpose for life which one must seek out and strive towards. Not knowing or understanding this purpose, and acting based on greed and avarice, can lead one to great suffering. While it is beyond the scope of this chapter to discuss all the religious traditions, it is quite evident that all the religions of the world offer their adherents some sort of lofty goal that they must work towards in their lives. With something greater than themselves to consider, believers more easily bring themselves out of the rut of melancholy when they get mired in it for any reason. In this way, religious beliefs are generally beneficial for those who espouse them.

The idea of a greater purpose in life that is offered by religion is lacking among atheists and those who do not believe in God. As such, they try to come up with some theories that, at times, border on the ridiculous. One such theory is based on the Greek legend of Sisyphus who is said to have defied the gods and put Death in chains so that no human would die. When Death was eventually liberated and the time came for Sisyphus himself to die, he cunningly planned an escape from the underworld. After finally capturing Sisyphus, the gods decided that his punishment would last for all eternity. He would have to push a rock up a mountain and upon reaching the top, the rock would roll back down again, leaving Sisyphus to start over. Sisyphus's continuous and pointless toil is seen as a metaphor for modern lives spent working at futile jobs in factories and offices, without any real goal or purpose. Yet some atheists believe that, just like in the legend of Sisyphus, life really has no greater purpose.

3

ISLAM AND MANAGEMENT OF GRIEF AND DEPRESSION

Grief is part and parcel of the innate makeup of man, and has thus been openly discussed and dealt with in Islamic teachings. Since it is seen as something natural, reactions to it are also deemed natural and the only thing that Islam frowns upon is excessive and inordinate expressions of grief. Recalling the loved one who has passed on and praying for his or her soul, or performing a righteous act in their name, is encouraged. This actually goes a long way in alleviating a believer's grief and sorrow as they know that the good they do directly benefits the soul of their loved one. So in a way, grief may actually motivate a Muslim to perform righteous actions and thereby strengthen the spiritual bond between himself and the deceased. Conversely, western psychology insists that the purpose of grief is to sever the bonds with the deceased in order to make new attachments with others and 'move on' with one's life.¹

We can make no claim that Muslims never get depressed, or that they are never in a position where they could be at a greater risk of depression. Rather, what we do state is that Islam provides Muslims with all the tools and means to avoid and prevent depression, and even helps those who are afflicted by it to alleviate the depression from which they suffer. Indeed, given the situation faced by Muslims in the world

¹ This is the most prominent view that is held among the recent and contemporary western psychologists. In fact, if one continues to remember the deceased, he is accused of holding on to the past and might be suffering from some psychological problem. 'Unresolved grief' is the term used for such attachment – as if grief is meant to be resolved, and that too, by severing all connections one had with the deceased. (See: D. Klass, P. Silverman & S. Nickman (Eds.), *Continuing Bonds - New Understandings of Grief*, (Routledge – Taylor & Francis, 1996), Introduction).

today, with all the wars in Muslim lands and the rampant racism and Islamophobia they experience in non-Muslim countries, it is surprising that there are not more cases of depression than what we witness today. The risk factor for depression abounds when any human being is traumatised in this fashion. Indeed, one study from the late 90s shows that Muslims living in Scotland were four times more likely to show depressive symptoms than non-Muslims given the level of racism they faced.²

The Typology of Tears

According to the Islamic sources, crying and shedding tears can be due to various reasons, and it is important to understand the differences between them as not all of them are related to sadness, depression, or melancholy. In general, at least seven different types of crying have been mentioned:

- 1) Crying out of yearning: This is experienced when one meets a close friend or relative after a long time, or when one yearns for something that is close to his heart, or when one hears or sees something that penetrates his soul. The Arabic term for this is *shawq*. It is said that when the Prophet (ﷺ) saw Ja'far ibn Abi Ṭālib after his return from Abyssinia where he had migrated to for a number of years, his eyes welled up with tears of joy as he had been yearning to see his cousin for a long time.
- 2) Crying out of recognition: Some pious believers have a deep attachment with the truth and it is as though the truth has been inscribed in the tablet of their hearts. When such individuals hear the revelation of Allah, it is immediately recognized by

² Michael McCullough and David Larson, 'Religion and Depression: A Review of the Literature,' *Twin Research* (1999), vol. 2, p. 129.

them as being true, and it thus moves them to tears. The Glorious Qur'an mentions an example of this kind of weeping in the verse that states:

وَإِذَا سَمِعُوا مَا أُنزِلَ إِلَى الرَّسُولِ تَرَىٰ أَعْيُنُهُمْ تَفِيضُ مِنَ الدَّمْعِ مِمَّا عَرَفُوا مِنَ
الْحَقِّ يَقُولُونَ رَبَّنَا ءَامَنَّا فَآكُتُبْنَا مَعَ الشَّاهِدِينَ

When they hear what has been revealed to the Messenger, you see their eyes fill with tears because of the truth that they recognize.

They say, 'Our Lord, we believe; so write our names among the witnesses.' (Q5:83)

- 3) Crying out of mercy and compassion: In one report, it has been narrated that the Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) went to see his infant son Ibrāhīm as he was on the verge of death. He placed the child in his lap and tears began to flow from his eyes. 'Abd al-Raḥmān asked the Prophet why he was weeping when he had previously prohibited weeping. He (ﷺ) replied clarifying that only excessive lamentation had been prohibited by him. This weeping, on the other hand, was just a sign of mercy, "...And one who does not show mercy [to others] is not shown mercy [by Allah, the Almighty]."³
- 4) Crying out of sadness and grief: There are many factors that can lead to sadness, and not all of them are negative. While it is more common for tragedies and loss to cause grief, and this then naturally leads to weeping and sorrow, in a few cases some people become sad due to their inability to participate in what is known to be good and beneficial. The Qur'an mentions an example of this when it recounts how some individuals who wanted to participate in *jihād* alongside the Prophet (ﷺ) could not accompany him because they did not have the material means (horses, weapons, etc.), so they were very saddened by

³ See: Appendix, h. 69.

this and began weeping:

وَلَا عَلَى الَّذِينَ إِذَا مَا أَتَوْكَ لِتَحْمِلَهُمْ قُلْتَ لَا أَجِدُ مَا أَحْمِلُكُمْ عَلَيْهِ تَوَلَّوْا
وَأَعْيُنُهُمْ تَفِيضُ مِنَ الدَّمْعِ حَزَنًا أَلَّا يَجِدُوا مَا يُنْفِقُونَ

Nor [is there any blame] on those to whom, when they came to you to provide them with a mount, you said, 'I do not find any mount for you,' and they turned back, their eyes flowing with tears, grieved because they did not find any means to spend [on the battle]. (Q9:92)

- 5) Crying out of joy: Shedding tears of joy is something that is commonly seen. When one receives some good news or glad tidings, or when a great achievement has been made, the human being is reduced to tears – not of grief, but of joy. Indeed, in one narration, it is reported that the Prophet (ﷺ) told Imam ‘Alī (a) that he and Allah are pleased with him...:

إِنَّ اللَّهَ تَعَالَى وَرَسُولَهُ عِنكَ رَاضِيَانِ، فَبَكَى أَمِيرَ الْمُؤْمِنِينَ عَلَيْهِ السَّلَامُ فَرِحًا.

...so Amīr al-Mu’minīn (a) cried tears of joy.⁴

- 6) Pretentious and insincere crying: There are also cases where people shed crocodile tears, only pretending to be sad. An example of this kind of ‘weeping’ has been mentioned in the story of the brothers of Prophet Yūsuf (a):

وَجَاءُوا أَبَاهُمْ عِشَاءً يَبْكُونَ

In the evening, they came weeping to their father. (Q12:16)

- 7) Crying out of regret and remorse: When a believer recalls his misdeeds and sins, he is overwhelmed by a sense of regret and weeps, seeking forgiveness from his Lord. This is one of the best and most praiseworthy types of weeping. In one narration,

⁴ Al-Majlisī, *Biḥār al-Anwār*, vol. 21, p. 81.

Imam ‘Alī (a) is reported to have said:

طوبى لمن كان نظره عبرةً وسكوته فكرةً وكلامه ذكراً وبكى على خطيئته
وأمن الناس من شره.

“Blessed is he whose gaze is [a means of learning] a lesson, whose silence is [accompanied by] contemplation, whose speech is recollection [of the greatness of Allah], who cries over his sins, and from whose evil people are safe.”⁵

A more general classification of crying is simply: weeping that leads to overwhelming sadness, depression, and melancholy versus weeping that results in revival, motivation, and strength. It is only the second type of weeping that has been recommended in Islam, not the first. It is reported in the tradition of Mufaḍḍal that Imam Ja‘far al-Ṣādiq (a) described the ability to cry and shed tears as a great blessing of Allah. It helps to cleanse the eyes, prevent ailments, and even protect one from blindness. Indeed, it is through the very act of crying that infants are able to communicate their needs to their parents. Therefore, crying is seen as one of the acts by which the soul is revitalized and refreshed, as the one who cries in humility and repentance before his Maker can attest.

Factors that Cause or Compound Grief and Sadness

According to the traditions, there are a number of factors that actually cause sadness or increase the sorrow a person feels. These factors include:

- (a) Sin and disobedience: Committing acts which are forbidden by Allah leads to all sorts of troubles and difficulties in life, since Allah has forbidden these things for our own good and to

⁵ Al-Ṣadūq, *al-Amālī*, p. 109.

protect us from the evil consequences that we would face by embarking on the proscribed actions. Aside from any physical consequences, sinning also has negative psychological effects which include overwhelming grief and regret, especially for believers. Giving in to vain desires can lead to lengthy sadness, as we are told by the Holy Prophet (ﷺ):

رب شهوة ساعة تورث حزناً طويلاً.

Many a brief carnal pleasure leads to prolonged sadness.⁶

- (b) Attachment to this world: Those who get too attached to this world and hanker after it all the time only end up being disappointed and sad. Indeed, Imam al-Ṣādiq (a) tells us this clearly:

الرغبة في الدنيا تورث الغم والحزن.

Yearning for this world brings grief and sadness.⁷

And the Prophet (ﷺ) is reported to have said:

الرغبة في الدنيا تكثر الهم والحزن، والزهد في الدنيا يريح القلب والبدن.

Desire for this world increases sadness and grief, while being [abstemious or] indifferent towards the world makes the heart and body tranquil [and comfortable].⁸

- (c) Restlessness and impatience: Difficulties are part of life. When faced with unpleasant happenings, one needs to remain patient and calm, knowing that in so doing he is earning the pleasure of Allah. Being restless and impatient only results in greater distress and sorrow. Indeed, Imam ‘Alī (a) is reported to have said:

⁶ Al-Ṭūsī, *al-Amālī*, p. 533.

⁷ Al-Ḥarrānī, *Tuḥaf al-Uqūl*, p. 358.

⁸ Al-Ṣadūq, *al-Khiṣāl*, vol. 1, p. 73.

فإيّاك والجزع فإنّه يقطع الأمل ويضعّف العمل ويورث الهمّ.

Beware of restless impatience, for it severs hope, weakens [one's] work,⁹ and brings about distress.¹⁰

- (d) Comparing ourselves with others: It is a bad habit to compare oneself with others who seem better off. Such a practice only leads to unhappiness and in reality, since we are mostly unaware of the difficulties and trials other people are facing, we can only compare ourselves to those who outwardly appear to be more fortunate than us. As such, it is a false comparison that is made, for if we came to know about all their problems, we would realize that they too are suffering from trials, as all people do in this world. A beautiful tradition from the Noble Prophet (s) states:

من نظر الى ما في أيدي الناس طال حزنه ودام أسفه.

Whoever looks at what other people possess, his sadness is prolonged and his regret lasts.¹¹

- (e) Getting angry on the weak: Sometimes, those who possess authority and power over others take out their frustrations on them and treat them harshly. In one tradition, Imam 'Alī (a) tells us that getting angry on those who have no power to harm us leads to sadness:

من غضب على من لا يقدر أن يضرّه طال حزنه وعذب نفسه.

Whoever gets angry on the one who has no ability to harm him, his sorrow is prolonged and his soul is tormented.¹²

⁹ Or: ...increases work... (since work is not done well and has to be redone).

¹⁰ Ibn Ash'ath, *al-Ja'fariyāt*, p. 234.

¹¹ Al-Daylamī, *Alām al-Dīn*, p. 294.

¹² Al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfi*, vol. 8, p. 24.

- (f) Negative thoughts: Surrounding oneself with negativity and always thinking about things that make one sad leads to sorrow and grief. Imam al-Kāzīm (a) is reported to have said:

من اغتمّ كان للغمّ اهلاً.

He who makes himself sad is deserving of sadness.¹³

Allowing negative thoughts to take root in one's heart leads to hatred and spite, and this in turn harms the individual himself and results in sadness. Amīr al-Mu'minīn (a) is reported to have said:

الحقود معذب النفس متضاعف الهمّ.

The spiteful one is [only] torturing himself and compounding his grief.¹⁴

- (g) Jealousy and envy: Those who have jealousy in their hearts are filled with rage and sorrow when they see the person whom they are envious of attaining something, and it is as if a bitter poison has been thrust down their throats when the achievements of that person are highlighted or praised by others. Indeed, Imam 'Alī (a) is reported to have said:

الحسد ينشئ الكمد.

Jealousy gives rise to [intense grief and] depression.¹⁵

And:

الحسود مغموم.

The jealous one is always sad.¹⁶

¹³ Al-Iskāfī, *al-Tamhīz*, p. 59.

¹⁴ Al-Laythī, *Uyūn al-Ḥikam wal-Mawā'iz*, p. 19.

¹⁵ Al-Āmidī, *Ghurar al-Ḥikam*, ḥ. 1786.

¹⁶ Al-Laythī, *Uyūn al-Ḥikam wal-Mawā'iz*, p. 19.

Imam ‘Alī (a) is also reported to have said:

لا يوجد الحسود مسروراً.

The jealous one is never found happy.¹⁷

- (h) Espousing a bad character: Those who have a bad character not only cause the people around them unhappiness, they also make their own souls restless and sorrowful. One of the things that Luqmān (a) told his son when advising him was:

من ساء خلقه كثر غمّه.

Whoever espouses a bad character, his grief increases.¹⁸

Furthermore, in another tradition we read:

سئل أمير المؤمنين عليه السلام: من أذوم الناس غمّاً؟ قال أسوأهم خلقاً.

Imam ‘Alī (a) was asked, “Who among the people remains sad the longest?” He replied, “The one who has the worst character.”¹⁹

- (i) Being hasty: Another trait that leads to regret and ultimately, sadness and grief, is hastiness. Those who do things hastily and without proper care and deliberation end up spoiling the work they are doing, and if the work is important, it can lead to grave loss from which one may at times not even recover. Hence, we find that Imam ‘Alī (a) is reported to have said:

العجل قبل الإمكان يوجب الغصة.

Making haste before [having] ability, causes distress.²⁰

- (j) Worrying about the future: It is common to worry about the

¹⁷ Ibid, p. 532.

¹⁸ Ibn Abī al-Ḥadīd, *Sharḥ Nahj al-Balāghah*, vol. 20, p. 326.

¹⁹ Al-Shu‘ayrī, *Jāmi‘ al-Akhhbār*, p. 107.

²⁰ Al-Āmidī, *Ghurur al-Hikam*, ḥ. 6083.

future. However, for those who have strong faith and trust in Allah, there is little room for the seeds of such worry to germinate and whenever any thought about an uncertain future enters their minds, believers quickly turn to their Creator and invoke Him with hope, asking that He protect them and what belongs to them. Indeed, most of these kinds of worry and apprehension are the result of the whisperings of Satan. For instance, in times of economic uncertainty, concern about their financial future is widespread among the people. The Qur'an tells us that Satan makes people worry about the security of their livelihood and scares them with the prospect of poverty and in that way, he misguides them. The verse about this states:

الشَّيْطَانُ يَعِدُكُمُ الْفَقْرَ وَيَأْمُرُكُم بِالْفَحْشَاءِ وَاللَّهُ يَعِدُكُم مَّغْفِرَةً مِّنْهُ وَفَضْلًا
وَاللَّهُ وَاسِعٌ عَلِيمٌ

Satan frightens you of poverty and prompts you to [commit] indecent acts. But Allah promises you His forgiveness and bounty, and Allah is Bounteous, Knowing. (Q2:268)

Reflection on Verses of the Qur'an

Reading the Qur'an and becoming intimate with it helps a person regain purpose and hope in his or her life, thereby alleviating the effects of depression and doing away with it altogether. Verses like:

وَقَالَ رَبُّكُمُ ادْعُونِي أَسْتَجِبْ لَكُمْ

Your Lord has said, 'Call Me, and I will hear you!' (Q40:60)

And:

وَلَقَدْ خَلَقْنَا الْإِنْسَانَ وَنَعْلَمُ مَا تُوَسْوِسُ بِهِ نَفْسُهُ وَنَحْنُ أَقْرَبُ إِلَيْهِ مِنْ حَبْلِ الْوَرِيدِ

Certainly We have created man and We know to what his soul tempts him, and We are nearer to him than his jugular vein. (Q50:16)

...give hope to people and assure them that whatever happens, God is there with them and everything will be fine. On the other hand, the Qur'an is very clear that those who turn away from the remembrance of Allah will lead very stressful lives in this world and end up suffering in the Hereafter as well:

وَمَنْ أَعْرَضَ عَن ذِكْرِي فَإِنَّ لَهُ مَعِيشَةً ضَنْكًا وَنَحْشُرُهُ يَوْمَ الْقِيَامَةِ أَعْمَى

But whoever disregards My remembrance, his shall be a wretched life, and We shall raise him blind on the Day of Resurrection. (Q20:124)

Furthermore, remembering Allah is described as a means of attaining tranquility of heart:

الَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا وَتَطْمَئِنُّ قُلُوبُهُمْ بِذِكْرِ اللَّهِ أَلَا بِذِكْرِ اللَّهِ تَطْمَئِنُّ الْقُلُوبُ

Those who have faith and whose hearts find rest in the remembrance of Allah. Behold! The hearts find rest in Allah's remembrance! (Q13:28)

There are also other verses that can help mitigate depression if reflected upon, such as those that tell us not to fret about what we lose in this world:

لِكَيْلَا تَأْسَوْا عَلَىٰ مَا فَاتَكُمْ وَلَا تَفْرَحُوا بِمَا ءَاتَكُمْ

So that you may not grieve for what escapes you, nor boast for what comes your way... (Q57:23)

Just as feeling overjoyed or exultant due to some worldly material gain is highly discouraged, suffering worldly loss is not something worth grieving about according to this verse. Hence, if one suffers a loss in his business for example, albeit huge, he should remember that it is only a material loss and it should not weigh too heavily upon him, causing sleepless nights and a lot of stress. Rather, he should remember that this

world is only temporary and its losses are not permanent or irreversible. He may yet recover or gain even more than he had before, and even if he does not do so, he will eventually have to leave everything behind anyway, so there is no point in being distraught.

A number of verses also encourage believers to rely solely on Allah, such as:

وَمَنْ يَتَوَكَّلْ عَلَى اللَّهِ فَهُوَ حَسْبُهُ وَإِنَّ اللَّهَ بَلِغُ أَمْرِهِ قَدْ جَعَلَ اللَّهُ لِكُلِّ شَيْءٍ قَدْرًا

And whoever puts his trust in Allah, He will suffice him. Indeed Allah carries through His commands. Certainly, Allah has ordained a measure [and extent] for everything. (Q65:3)

And:

الَّذِينَ قَالَ لَهُمُ النَّاسُ إِنَّ النَّاسَ قَدَّ جَمَعُوا لَكُمْ فَآخَشَوْهُمْ فَرَّادَهُمْ إِيْمَانًا وَقَالُوا حَسْبُنَا اللَّهُ وَنِعْمَ الْوَكِيلُ

Those to whom the people said, 'All the people have gathered against you, so fear them.' That only increased them in faith, and they said, 'Allah is sufficient for us, and He is an excellent trustee.' (Q3:173)

Indeed, relying on the Almighty makes difficult things easy to bear. This has been explained beautifully by Imam 'Alī (a) when he said:

من توكل على الله ذلت له الصعاب، وتسهلت عليه الأسباب، وتبوأ الخفض والكرامة

Whoever trusts in Allah, difficulties become tolerable for him, means become easy for him, and he enters into [a place of] comfort and honour.²¹

Certainly, Allah knows what is good for us even when we do not. Sometimes we might dislike something but it is good for us. The Qur'an says:

²¹ Al-Āmidī, *Ghurar al-Hikam*, h. 10781.

كُتِبَ عَلَيْكُمُ الْقِتَالُ وَهُوَ كُرْهُ لَكُمْ وَعَسَىٰ أَن تَكْرَهُوا شَيْئًا وَهُوَ خَيْرٌ لَّكُمْ
وَعَسَىٰ أَن تُحِبُّوا شَيْئًا وَهُوَ شَرٌّ لَّكُمْ وَاللَّهُ يَعْلَمُ وَأَنْتُمْ لَا تَعْلَمُونَ

Warfare has been prescribed for you, though it is repulsive to you. Yet it may be that you dislike something, which is good for you, and it may be that you love something, which is bad for you, and Allah knows and you do not know. (Q2:216)

Furthermore, the Qur'an also emphasizes on the value of patience and the reward that one can attain by being patient during times of distress and hardship. For instance, consider the following verses:

وَلَنَجْزِيَنَّهُنَّ الَّذِيْنَ صَبَرُوا أَجْرَهُمْ بِأَحْسَنِ مَا كَانُوا يَعْمَلُونَ

...And We will surely pay the patient their reward by the best of what they used to do. (Q16:96)

And:

أُولَٰئِكَ يُؤْتَوْنَ أَجْرَهُم مَّرَّتَيْنِ بِمَا صَبَرُوا

Those will be given their reward two times for their patience... (Q28:54)

And:

إِنَّمَا يُوفَّى الصَّابِرُونَ أَجْرَهُمْ بِغَيْرِ حِسَابٍ

...Indeed the patient will be paid their reward in full without any reckoning. (Q39:10)

There is nothing done for the sake of attaining nearness to Allah that has the value and importance which patience does. Allah has promised the patient ones that He is with them when He said:

وَاصْبِرُوا إِنَّ اللَّهَ مَعَ الصَّابِرِينَ

And be patient, verily Allah is with the patient ones (Q8:46).

The Qur'an further tells us that the greatest attainment for any human being is pleasing his or her Creator:

وَرِضْوَانٌ مِّنَ اللَّهِ أَكْبَرُ

Yet Allah's pleasure is greater [than everything else] ... (Q9:72)

Therefore, nothing can compare to this achievement. The obvious question then is: how can one go about pleasing Allah? The Qur'an gives us an idea when it states:

رَضِيَ اللَّهُ عَنْهُمْ وَرَضُوا عَنْهُ

Allah is pleased with them and they are pleased with Him... (Q5:119)

Thus, we are told that one has to be pleased with Allah in order for Allah to be pleased with him. This idea of reciprocity is beautifully portrayed in a tradition wherein it is narrated that Prophet Mūsā (a) was once told by his people, "Ask your Lord for us about the action which, were we to perform it, He would be pleased with us." In response, Allah, the Exalted, revealed to him saying, "Tell them to be pleased with Me so that I may be pleased with them."²²

A question that commonly arises in the minds of some believers is: why are those who disbelieve seemingly better off and look like they lead much more comfortable lives than us, despite their disbelief? This type of thinking is common during times of distress and hardship. Yet the Glorious Qur'an has answered this very question in a number of verses, such as:

وَلَا يَحْسَبَنَّ الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا أَنَّمَا نُؤْتِيهِمْ خَيْرٌ لَّا نَفْسِيهِمْ إِنَّمَا نُؤْتِيهِمْ لِيَزْدَادُوا إِيمَانًا
وَأَنَّهُمْ عَذَابٌ مُّهِينٌ

Let the unbelievers not suppose that the respite that We grant them is good for their souls: We give them respite only that they may increase in sin, and there is a humiliating punishment for them. (Q3:178)

And:

²² See: Appendix, h. 52.

وَإِذَا تُتْلَىٰ عَلَيْهِمْ آيَاتُنَا بَيِّنَاتٍ قَالَ الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا لِلَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا أَيُّ الْفَرِيقَيْنِ خَيْرٌ مَّقَامًا وَأَحْسَنُ نَدِيًّا ۖ وَكَمْ أَهْلَكْنَا قَبْلَهُم مِّن قَرْنٍ هُمْ أَحْسَنُ أَثْنًا وَرِعَاءَ ۖ قُلْ مَنْ كَانَ فِي الضَّلَالَةِ فَلْيَمْدُدْ لَهُ الرَّحْمَنُ مَدًّا حَتَّىٰ إِذَا رَأَوْا مَا يُوعَدُونَ إِمَّا الْعَذَابَ وَإِمَّا السَّاعَةَ فَسَيَعْلَمُونَ مَنْ هُوَ شَرٌّ مَّكَانًا وَأَضْعَفُ جُنْدًا

When Our manifest signs are recited to them, the unbelievers say to the believers, 'Which of the two groups is superior in station and better with respect to company?' How many a generation We have destroyed before them, who were superior in furnishings and appearance! Say, 'Whoever abides in error, the All-Beneficent shall prolong his respite until they sight what they have been promised: either punishment, or the Hour.' Then they will know whose position is worse, and whose host is weaker.

(Q19:73-75)

The unbelievers would often taunt the Muslims, who were poorer and lived more difficult lives, by claiming that if they were truly those who followed the right path, God would certainly have favoured them materially or made them live in comfort. The verses above rebuke the disbelievers and clarify that the respite they enjoy, along with the ease and comfort it comes with, is only temporary and by no means indicative of their special status in the eyes of the Creator. In fact, an interesting tradition from Imam Muḥammad al-Bāqir (a) states that Paradise is surrounded by tribulations, so whoever is patient in the face of tribulations in this world shall enter Paradise. On the other hand, Hell is surrounded by pleasures and desires, so whoever gives in to his pleasures and desires shall enter the Fire.²³

It is interesting to note that grief and sorrow is not restricted to this world. There will be those who are in a state of grief and distress in the Hereafter. For instance, those who are being punished in Hell will constantly be in such a state. The Qur'an tells us about them:

²³ See: Appendix, h. 34.

كَلَّمَآ أَرَادُوآ أَن يَخْرُجُوآ مِنْهَا مِن غَمٍّ أُعِيدُوآ فِيهَا وَذُوقُوآ عَذَابَ الْخَرْيِقِ

Whenever they desire to leave it out of [grief and] anguish, they will be cast back into it [and told], "Taste the punishment of the burning!"

(Q22:22)

Therefore, grief is recognized as an agonizing and burdensome state and is thus included among the punishments of the denizens of Hell. In contrast, the Qur'an also mentions some individuals who will neither fear nor grieve in the Hereafter, and in some cases, in this world as well. These groups of individuals are:

- 1) Those who submit to Allah and act virtuously:

بَلَىٰ مَن أَسْلَمَ وَجْهَهُ لِلَّهِ وَهُوَ مُحْسِنٌ فَلَهُ أَجْرُهُ عِنْدَ رَبِّهِ وَلَا خَوْفٌ عَلَيْهِمْ وَلَا هُمْ

يَحْزَنُونَ

Certainly, whoever submits his will to Allah and is virtuous, he shall have his reward from his Lord, and they will have no fear, nor shall they grieve.

(Q2:112)

- 2) Those who donate their wealth sincerely in the way of Allah:

الَّذِينَ يُنْفِقُونَ أَمْوَالَهُمْ فِي سَبِيلِ اللَّهِ ثُمَّ لَا يُتَّبَعُونَ مَا أَنْفَقُوا مَنًّا وَلَا أَذَىٰ لَهُمْ أَجْرُهُمْ

عِنْدَ رَبِّهِمْ وَلَا خَوْفٌ عَلَيْهِمْ وَلَا هُمْ يَحْزَنُونَ

Those who spend their wealth in the way of Allah and then do not follow up what they have spent with reproaches and affronts, they shall have their reward near their Lord, and they will have no fear, nor will they grieve.

(Q2:262)

- 3) Those who believe and follow the commandments of Allah:

إِنَّ الَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا وَعَمِلُوا الصَّالِحَاتِ وَأَقَامُوا الصَّلَاةَ وَعَاتَوْا الزَّكَاةَ لَهُمْ أَجْرُهُمْ عِنْدَ رَبِّهِمْ

وَلَا خَوْفٌ عَلَيْهِمْ وَلَا هُمْ يَحْزَنُونَ

Indeed those who have faith, do righteous deeds, maintain the prayer and give the zakat, they shall have their reward with their Lord, and they will have no fear, nor will they grieve. (Q2:277)

4) Those who remain steadfast in their belief:

إِنَّ الَّذِينَ قَالُوا رَبُّنَا اللَّهُ ثُمَّ اسْتَقَمُوا فَلَا خَوْفٌ عَلَيْهِمْ وَلَا هُمْ يَحْزَنُونَ

Those who say, 'Our Lord is Allah,' and then remain steadfast, they will have no fear, nor will they grieve. (Q46:13)

5) Those who espouse Godwariness and piety:

يَبْنَىءَ آدَمَ إِمَامًا يَأْتِيَنَّكُمْ رُسُلٌ مِّنْكُمْ يَقُصُونَ عَلَيْكُمْ آيَاتِي فَمَنِ اتَّقَى وَأَصْلَحَ فَلَا خَوْفٌ عَلَيْهِمْ وَلَا هُمْ يَحْزَنُونَ

O Children of Adam! If there come to you Messengers from among yourselves, recounting to you My signs, then those who are Godwary and righteous will have no fear, nor will they grieve. (Q7:35)

6) Those who follow the guidance sent by Allah:

قُلْنَا أَهْبِطُوا مِنْهَا جَمِيعًا فَإِمَّا يَأْتِيَنَّكُمْ مِنِّي هُدًى فَمَنِ تَبِعَ هُدَايَ فَلَا خَوْفٌ عَلَيْهِمْ وَلَا هُمْ يَحْزَنُونَ

We said, 'Get down from it, all together! Yet, should any guidance come to you from Me, those who follow My guidance shall have no fear, nor shall they grieve. (Q2:38)

7) The friends of Allah:

أَلَا إِنَّ أَوْلِيَاءَ اللَّهِ لَا خَوْفٌ عَلَيْهِمْ وَلَا هُمْ يَحْزَنُونَ

Look! The friends of Allah will indeed have no fear nor will they grieve. (Q10:62)

While it is generally praiseworthy to grieve for others out of

compassion and sympathy when one witnesses their sorry state, that is not always the case. There are some individuals who do not deserve sympathy and the Qur'an actually instructs the Prophet (ﷺ), and by extension, the believers, not to grieve or feel sad for those individuals who are completely immersed in the world and only have concern for the material life, constantly seeking ease therein. In this regard, the Qur'an states:

لَا تَمُدَّنَّ عَيْنَيْكَ إِلَىٰ مَا مَتَّعْنَا بِهِ أَزْوَاجًا مِنْهُمْ وَلَا تَحْزَنْ عَلَيْهِمْ وَأخْفِضْ جَنَاحَكَ
لِلْمُؤْمِنِينَ

Do not extend your glance toward what We have provided to certain groups of them, and do not grieve for them, and lower your wing to the faithful. (Q15:88)

Grief and its Causes in the Traditions of the Infallibles

The Noble Prophet (ﷺ) is reported to have said:

من رمى بنظره إلى ما في يد غيره كثر هممه ولم يشف غيظه.

Whoever gazes [yearningly] at what others possess, his distress increases and his anger will never dissipate.²⁴

And, in his advice to Abū Dharr, the Prophet (ﷺ) is reported to have said:

يا أبا ذرّ، الحقّ ثقيل مرّ، والباطل خفيف حلو، وربّ شهوة ساعة تورث حزناً طويلاً.

O Abā Dharr, the truth is heavy and bitter, and falsehood is light and sweet; and at times a brief carnal pleasure brings about long-lasting

²⁴ Ali ibn Ibrāhīm, *Tafsīr al-Qummī*, vol. 1, p. 381.

grief.²⁵

And:

إذا قصر العبد في العمل ابتلاه الله بالهم.

When the servant falls short in his deeds, Allah tries him with grief.²⁶

It is also reported that Imam al-Riḍā (a) told Zakariyyā ibn Ādam:

ما أحد من شيعة عليّ أصبح صبيحةً أتى بسئته أو ارتكب ذنباً إلا أمسى وقد ناله غمّ حطّ
عنه سيّئته.

None among the Shī'ahs of 'Alī commits a sin or a misdeed in the morning but that he spends the evening overcome by a grief that removes from him his sin.²⁷

And it is reported that the Prophet (ﷺ) said:

لا غمّ إلا غمّ الدين.

There is no grief comparable to [the grief caused by] indebtedness.²⁸

In the same vein, Imam al-Kāẓim (a) reportedly told his companion Hishām:

بحقّ أقول لكم إنّ من ليس عليه دين من الناس أروح وأقلّ همّاً ممّن عليه الدين وإن
أحسن القضاء وكذلك من لم يعمل الخطيئة أروح همّاً ممّن عمل الخطيئة وإن أخلص
التوبة.

Indeed, I tell you in truth: One who has no debt among the people is more comfortable and has less [stress and] grief than one who has a debt to pay, even if he is able to repay it. And the same is true for one who does not commit any sin – he is more at ease from distress than one

²⁵ Al-Ṭūsī, *al-Amālī*, p. 533.

²⁶ Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal, *Kitāb al-Zuhd*, p. 12.

²⁷ Al-Majlisī, *Biḥār al-Anwār*, vol. 65, p. 146.

²⁸ Al-Bayhaqī, *Shu'ab al-Īmān*, vol. 11, p. 417.

who commits sins, even if he then sincerely seeks repentance.²⁹

Imam 'Alī (a) is reported to have said:

القنية أحزان.

Acquisitions are [a cause of] sorrows.³⁰

It is narrated that the Prophet (ﷺ) once addressed the people and commenced his sermon saying:

أيها الناس، هذه دار ترح لا دار فرح.

O people, this [world] is an abode of unhappiness, not an abode of joy.³¹

It is also reported that Imam 'Alī (a) said in part of a sermon:

ولا تدخل عليك اليوم همّ غد يكفي اليوم همّه وغداً إذا حلّ لتشغله، إنك إن حملت على اليوم همّ غد زدت في حزنك وتعبك، وتكلفت أن تجمع في يومك ما يكفيك أياماً فعظم الحزن وزاد الشغل واشتدّ التعب وضعف العمل للأمل.

Do not allow tomorrow's concern to enter your present day, for the worry you currently have is sufficient, and when tomorrow comes, it will preoccupy you [with its own issues]. If you put the burden of tomorrow's concerns on today, you will only increase your sorrow and distress, and you will put the strain which would otherwise last many days on a single day, so your sorrow will become great, your preoccupation with it will increase, your distress will be compounded, and your work for what you aspire will become weak.³²

And it is reported that the Prophet (ﷺ) said [in a *ḥadīth qudsī*]:

²⁹ Al-Ḥarrānī, *Tuḥaf al-Uqūl*, p. 392.

³⁰ Al-Āmidī, *Ghurār al-Hikam*, ḥ. 8409.

³¹ Al-Daylamī, *Alām al-Dīn fī Ṣifāt al-Mu'minīn*, p. 343.

³² Ibn Fahd al-Ḥillī, *al-Taḥṣīn fī Ṣifāt al-Ārifīn*, p. 16.

قال الله تعالى: [يا] ابن آدم، يؤتى كل يوم برزقك وأنت تحزن، وينقص كل يوم من عمرك وأنت تفرح.

Allah, the Exalted, said, “O Son of Adam, every day your sustenance comes to you yet you are sad [and worried about it], and every day your life is shortened [by a day] yet you are joyful!”³³

It is reported that Allah revealed to Prophet ‘Īsā (a):

يا عيسى، هب لي من عينيك الدموع، ومن قلبك الخشوع، واكحل عينيك بميل الحزن إذا ضحك البطّالون.

O ‘Īsā, gift to me tears from your eyes and humility from your heart, and apply the kohl of sadness on your eyes when the proponents of falsehood laugh.³⁴

It is reported that Imam ‘Alī (a) advised:

أكثر سرورك على ما قدّمت من الخير وحزنك على ما فاتك منه.

Increase your gladness for that which you have sent forth of good deeds and your sadness for that which you have missed from it.³⁵

The Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) also gave us a general prescription about joy and sadness, and what causes these two states in a human being:

إنّ الله بحكمه وفضله جعل الرّوح والفرج في اليقين والرضا، وجعل الهمّ والحزن في الشكّ والسخط.

Verily Allah, by His wisdom and grace, placed comfort and joy in certainty and satisfaction, and He placed distress and sorrow in doubt and displeasure.³⁶

³³ Al-Daylamī, *A‘lām al-Dīn fī Ṣifāt al-Mu‘minīn*, p. 337.

³⁴ Al-Majlisī, *Biḥār al-Anwār*, vol. 14, p. 320.

³⁵ Al-Āmidī, *Ghurār al-Hikam*, ḥ. 2959.

³⁶ Al-Barqī, *al-Maḥāsīn*, vol. 1, p. 17.

Islam and the Permissibility of Weeping for the Dead

As a role model (*uswah*) for all Muslims, Prophet Muḥammad (ṣ) was observed and emulated by the believers. On numerous instances, he cried and wept due to the loss of someone close to him. One tradition recounts how the Messenger of Allah (ṣ) once visited his mother's grave and wept so much that he made all those around him weep.³⁷ It has also been reported that when the Prophet (ṣ) came to know about the martyrdom of Ja'far ibn Abī Ṭālib and Zayd ibn Ḥārithah, he mourned them both intensely, and he would say, "They used to converse with me [frequently] and were close to me, then death took them away."³⁸ Nevertheless, as it has been established by numerous traditions that excessive lamentation is discouraged, if not prohibited, the Prophet (ṣ) would cry in such a manner that when he wept, tears would flow from his eyes and he (ṣ) would wipe his face, but his voice would not be heard.³⁹ Hence, he would weep silently and this was his *sunnah*. Later traditions from the Imams encouraging loud weeping for Imam al-Ḥusayn (a) can be explained simply as being an exception which was meant to encourage open, joint weeping for the Master of Martyrs with the aim of keeping his message and mission alive.

The kind of weeping and lamentation that has been proscribed is clearly defined in the traditions. For instance, we are told that the Messenger of Allah (ṣ) said, "One who slaps his cheeks and tears his garments [out of grief] is not from us."⁴⁰ He (ṣ) is also reported to have prohibited people from walking behind a bier in a funeral procession while wailing loudly.⁴¹ Blameworthy actions that go against the spirit of patience have been described in the traditions as well. For instance, Imam al-Bāqir (a) is reported to have said that acts like screaming while

³⁷ See: Appendix, ḥ. 74.

³⁸ See: Appendix, ḥ. 77.

³⁹ See: Appendix, ḥ. 79.

⁴⁰ See: Appendix, ḥ. 81.

⁴¹ See: Appendix, ḥ. 82.

weeping and wailing, slapping the face and chest, and pulling one's hair are the worst forms of impatience, and whoever resorts to such lamentation has completely abandoned patience.⁴² The outcome of such excessive display of grief is forfeiture of the reward for being patient in times of trial. Imam al-Şādiq (a) narrated that the Prophet (ş) said, "A man's striking his hand on his thigh [out of grief] is the [cause of] nullification of his reward."⁴³

Perhaps one of the reasons for the prohibition of excessive grief is the lack of control by those who give in to such grief. If left unchecked and allowed to erupt, such grief can lead to self-harm and, in the worst cases, even suicide. Furthermore, a person who is in such a state might utter words of disbelief, blasphemy, or may say things about the deceased that are exaggerated and far from the truth. Hence, we see that the Prophet (ş) is said to have advised his daughter Fāţimah (a), telling her when Ja'far ibn Abī Ṭālib was killed, "Do not raise your voice by wailing, mourning [like one whose child has died], or lamenting [like one who has suffered great loss]; and whatever you say about him should be the truth."⁴⁴ Islam is generally against anything that causes a human being to lose self-control, be it anger, intoxication or anything similar. Therefore, the bereaved are advised to grieve in a manner that is appropriate. Unfortunately, some have wrongly assumed that this means that Islam is against grieving and lamentation, which is obviously not the case.

The misunderstanding that expression of grief is, in itself, prohibited in Islam was present even among some of the companions of the Prophet (ş). That is why when the Prophet wept as his son Ibrāhīm breathed his last, he was asked about it. And when he went to bury him, and he was placed in the grave, tears again began to flow from his (ş) eyes. Some of the companions objected saying, "O Messenger of

⁴² See: Appendix, h. 84.

⁴³ See: Appendix, h. 85.

⁴⁴ See: Appendix, h. 90.

Allah, do you weep while you prohibit us from weeping?” The Prophet (ﷺ) responded, “The eye sheds tears and the heart is in pain, yet we do not say anything that angers our Lord, the Almighty.”⁴⁵ It is narrated that a similar thing happened when the little girl Umāmah bint Zaynab was brought to the Prophet (ﷺ) while she was struggling to breathe. Upon seeing her state, the Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) said, “That which Allah takes belongs to Him, and that which Allah gives belongs to Him; and everyone has a specified term [in this world],” then he wept. Seeing this, Sa’d ibn ‘Ubādah said to him, ‘You weep while you have prohibited weeping!’ The Prophet responded, “It is only a mercy which Allah places in the hearts of His servants; and Allah is only merciful to those among His servants who show mercy.”⁴⁶

Mourning for the Ahl al-Bayt (a)

It is in the mourning gatherings (*majālis*) that the teachings of Islam are imparted to the audience, and this has become a means by which lay believers can increase their understanding of Islam, aside from remembering the tragedy of Karbalā’ and mourning for the grandson of the Noble Prophet (ﷺ). That is one benefit that the followers (*Shī’ah*) of the Ahl al-Bayt (a) enjoy over all the other Muslims, and the adherents of other religious traditions as well. Every year, there are a number of days in which gatherings are held, either to mourn the martyrdom of the Infallibles and other members of the family of the Prophet (ﷺ), or to celebrate their birth. This is done in the spirit of being joyful when they are happy and sorrowful when they are sad. As the tradition that describes the Shī’ah states:

يفرحون لفرحنا ويحزنون لحزننا.

⁴⁵ See: Appendix, h. 73.

⁴⁶ See: Appendix, h. 75.

They are happy when we [the Ahl al-Bayt] are happy, and sad when we are sad.⁴⁷

It is small wonder, then, that the revolutionary spirit found in Shī'ism, which makes fighting against oppression and resisting tyranny part and parcel of the Shī'ī psyche, is based on the love of al-Ḥusayn (a) and emulating the martyrs of Karbalā'. Indeed, in a famous statement, the leader of the Islamic revolution of Iran, al-Sayyid Rūḥullah al-Khumaynī, said, "Whatever we have, it is from the [mourning] months of Muḥarram and Ṣafar." This firm resolve to stand against evil and oppression is, sadly, less visible among the other Muslims, as is quite evident in the world today. Hence, we see that sadness and grief can have a strong motivating effect and can change entire world orders if channelled correctly.

Indeed, the Noble Prophet (ṣ) himself advised the believers that whenever a calamity befalls them and they are overwhelmed by grief, they should remember the intense grief they felt when they lost him, for in doing so they will have sought solace in the calamity of losing him from the calamity of losing any other person, "...for no member of my nation will ever be afflicted with a calamity after me that is harder on him [to bear] than the calamity of losing me."⁴⁸ Interestingly, one report tells us that even when Imam 'Alī (a) was fatally wounded, and the news of this was sent to Imam al-Ḥusayn (a) who was in al-Madā'in at that time, he reacted by saying, "What a calamity – how grave it is! Yet the Messenger of Allah (ṣ) said, 'If one of you is afflicted by a calamity, let him remember my calamity, for he shall never be afflicted with a calamity greater than it.'"⁴⁹ In yet another tradition, the Noble Prophet (ṣ) is reported to have said, "One who faces a grave calamity should recall his calamity in losing me, for that will make it easier for

⁴⁷ Al-Majlisī, *Biḥār al-Anwār*, vol. 44, p. 287.

⁴⁸ See: Appendix, ḥ. 98.

⁴⁹ See: Appendix, ḥ. 99.

him [to bear his calamity].”⁵⁰ So we see that the Prophet had himself advised us to seek solace from our sorrows by recalling the greater sorrow of losing him. This is the same thing that the lovers of the Ahl al-Bayt (a) do when they recall the tribulations that befell the family of the Prophet (ﷺ) during occasions of grief, thereby overshadowing the grief they have for their own loved ones with the grief they feel when they remember the tragedies that befell the Ahl al-Bayt (a).

Just as pain is alleviated when one focuses his attention on something else, similarly, psychological pain in the form of grief and sadness can be mitigated by turning one’s attention to something else, especially if it is a different and more intense grief. It is thus common for a brief *majlis* to be recited when a believer dies, so that when the tragedy of Karbalā’ is recounted therein, the family members of the deceased may weep for Abā ‘Abdillāh al-Ḥusayn (a) and the other martyrs from the Prophet’s family, and thereby attain a sense of solace from their own bereavement. Perhaps it is for this very reason that some reports state that the Infallibles had given instructions that they should be mourned after their deaths. For instance, it is narrated that Imām Muḥammad al-Bāqir (a) instructed his son Imām al-Ṣādiq (a), “Endow from my wealth such-and-such amount for mourners to mourn me for ten years at Minā during the days [when pilgrims stay] at Minā.”⁵¹ Furthermore, in an interesting tradition from Imam al-Ṣādiq (a), he states that Prophet Ibrāhīm, the Friend of Allah, prayed to his Lord to grant him a daughter who would mourn him after his death.⁵²

Condoling the Bereaved

The action of condoling the bereaved is highly encouraged in Islam. If

⁵⁰ See: Appendix, ḥ. 97.

⁵¹ See: Appendix, ḥ. 89.

⁵² See: Appendix, ḥ. 80.

one can visit the grieving believers to offer condolences in person, that is good. However, even if that is not possible for some reason, condolences can be offered in the form of written communication, such as a letter. It is reported that the Prophet's companion Mu'adh had a son whom he loved very much. When his son died, the Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) wrote him a letter of condolence in which he said, "In the Name of Allah, the Beneficent, the Merciful. From Muhammad, the Messenger of Allah, to Mu'adh. Peace be with you. I praise Allah, there is no god besides Him, then I say to you: may Allah magnify your reward, inspire you with patience, and grant us and yourself gratitude, for indeed our lives, our families, our dependents, and our children are all wonderful gifts of Allah, the Almighty, and His trusts that are given to us so that we may enjoy them for a term known [to Him], and they are taken away at a specific time..." The Prophet (ﷺ) then went on to advise Mu'adh to remain patient and informed him that he will gain three rewards for his patience, namely: blessings, mercy, and guidance from Allah. He (ﷺ) also warned him not to combine two calamities upon himself by nullifying his reward through impatience and restlessness. In this way, the Prophet (ﷺ) not only consoled him, but also gave Mu'adh good advice and admonition.⁵³

Among the etiquettes we learn from the *sunnah* of the Prophet (ﷺ) is that which pertains to how to correctly console a bereaved believer. For instance, the words of comfort that are spoken on such occasions should be modelled around what the Prophet (ﷺ) and his pure progeny themselves used to say while offering condolences, and these statements have been recorded in the narrations. For instance, one narration from Imam 'Alī (a) states that whenever the Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) gave condolences, he would say, "May Allah reward you and have mercy upon you."⁵⁴ Moreover, the way one conducts himself or herself while giving condolences is also important. As an example, the act of holding

⁵³ See: Appendix, h. 96.

⁵⁴ See: Appendix, h. 95.

the hand of the bereaved briefly has been encouraged and the Prophet is reported to have said about it, “It is calming for the believer; and whoever consoles the one who is afflicted by calamity will receive a reward similar to his.”⁵⁵ Indeed, the brief physical contact offered by a fellow believer results in a calming effect, and this is even attested to by modern psychology.

On the whole, the act of offering condolences to one who is grieving, be it in person or by correspondence, has been encouraged in Islam. Traditions mention the great reward one gets for offering solace to fellow believers in times of sorrow. For instance, it is reported that the Noble Prophet (ﷺ) said, “Whoever consoles a mother who has lost her child will be clothed with a [heavenly] mantle in Paradise.”⁵⁶ Moreover, this practice was not initiated by the Final Prophet (ﷺ); rather, it was part of the teachings of earlier Prophets as well. One narration tells us that Prophet Dāwūd (a) once asked Allah, “My Lord, what is the reward for one who consoles the grief-stricken and the distressed [believer] in order to please You?” He, the Almighty, said, “His reward is that I cover him with one of the robes of faith by which I shield him from the Fire and admit him into Paradise.”⁵⁷ And when Prophet Ibrāhīm (a) asked the same question, saying, “What is the reward for one who condole[s] [and reassures] a grieving person, seeking Your pleasure?” He said, “I clothe him with the attire of faith with which he shall enter Paradise and stay away from the Fire.”⁵⁸

Some interesting narrations describe how the Prophet (ﷺ) personally went to offer condolences to the families of some companions who had been martyred. It is reported, for example, that when the Prophet (ﷺ) received news about the death of Zayd ibn Ḥārithah, he went to Zayd’s house to offer condolences. Zayd’s little daughter came out to him and

⁵⁵ See: Appendix, ḥ. 91.

⁵⁶ See: Appendix, ḥ. 92.

⁵⁷ See: Appendix, ḥ. 93.

⁵⁸ See: Appendix, ḥ. 94.

when she saw the Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) and understood what had happened to her father, she expressed her grief and the Prophet, in turn, was overwhelmed and wept.⁵⁹ ‘Abdullāh, the son of Ja‘far ibn Abī Ṭālib, also narrated how the Prophet (ﷺ) visited his mother and siblings to offer condolences when his father was martyred in battle. He said, “I remember the time when the Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) visited my mother and gave her condolences on the death of my father. She looked at him as he kept [lovingly] stroking my head and that of my brother while tears rolled down his eyes until his beard started dripping... Then he (a) said, ‘O Asmā, shall I give you some glad tidings?’ She said, ‘Yes, may both my parents be sacrificed for your sake!’ He said, ‘Allah, the Almighty, has given Ja‘far two wings by which he flies in Paradise.’”⁶⁰

Islam itself has many teachings that offer consolation to grieving and sorrowful individuals. In fact, there is an entire genre of works, known as *ta‘āzī* (consolation) literature, that have been compiled by Muslim scholars dating back five to eight centuries ago. In his *Irtiyāḥ al-Akbād bi Arbāḥ Faqd al-Awlād* (lit. The Contentment of Hearts by the Gains [and Rewards] of the Loss of Children), the late 9th century scholar Muḥammad ibn ‘Abd al-Raḥmān al-Sakhāwī (d. 902 AH) lists eleven titles on the subject, and his brother later added a gloss to his work appending four more titles to the list. As such, it can be seen that by the 10th century, there were at least fifteen works of this genre among Sunnī circles. Shī‘ah scholars also had works of this type, the most famous among which is al-Shahīd al-Thānī’s *Musakkīn al-Fu‘ād ‘inda Faqd al-Aḥibbāh wal-Awlād*. Works of this kind generally contain a collection of Qur’ānic verses, *aḥādīth* from the Prophet (ﷺ) and his progeny, and anecdotes from the early generation of pious believers that offer lessons on patience and give solace in the form of promises of reward for those who undergo painful losses in this world.

⁵⁹ See: Appendix, ḥ. 78.

⁶⁰ See: Appendix, ḥ. 76.

Patience and its Rewards

The general encouragement to espouse patience during hardship is complemented by a promise of great reward for those who do so, to the extent that traditions tell us that if people knew how great the reward for being patient during trials was, they would wish “to be cut into pieces with scissors!”⁶¹ One of the rewards for exhibiting such steadfastness during trials is absolution from sin. A tradition reported from the Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) states that there is no tribulation that befalls a believer, and yet he or she remains patient through it, but that Allah wipes away that believer’s sins as a reward.⁶² Certain kinds of affliction, such as losing a child, carry specific rewards for those who remain patient. Indeed, loss of a child is one of the more difficult hardships that may befall an individual. Hence, it is not surprising that traditions tell us that those believers who bear this affliction patiently will be veiled from Hellfire and granted entry into Paradise, along with their children who died before them in the world.⁶³

At the same time, Islam discourages believers from allowing themselves to be overwhelmed by grief. Sometimes, when melancholy becomes pervasive due to a great loss, a person isolates himself from society and even stops carrying out his duties and responsibilities. When ‘Uthmān ibn Maz‘ūn’s child died, he was so overwhelmed by grief that he converted his house into a *masjid* wherein he would seclude himself in worship. When the Prophet (ﷺ) heard about this, he said to him, “O ‘Uthmān, verily Allah, the Almighty, has not prescribed monasticism for us. The monasticism of my ummah is struggling in the way of Allah. O ‘Uthmān ibn Maz‘ūn, verily Paradise has eight gates, and Hell has seven. Does it not please you to know that you will not come to any of

⁶¹ See: Appendix, ḥ. 1 & ḥ. 2.

⁶² See: Appendix, ḥ. 3.

⁶³ See: Appendix, ḥ. 17 - ḥ. 20.

these gates but that you will find your son next to it, ready to take hold of your waistband in order to intercede on your behalf before his Lord, the Almighty?”⁶⁴ In this way, the Prophet showed his disapproval of self-seclusion and keeping away from the society due to grief while at the same time affirming that those who are patient will be rewarded for bearing their sadness with steadfastness.

The importance of recognizing that every living soul will return to Allah is emphasized by the numerous narrations that encourage believers to pronounce the *istirjāʿ* - which is the statement “Indeed we belong to Allah, and to Him is our return,” (*innā lillāhi wa innā ilayhi rājiʿūn*) as mentioned in the Glorious Qurʾān (Q2:156). For instance, Imam al-Bāqir (a) is reported to have said that when faced with any calamity, whoever remains patient and says, “Indeed we belong to Allah, and to Him is our return,” such an individual has accepted the decree of Allah and his reward is with Allah, the Almighty.⁶⁵ In another tradition, the Imam actually mentions one of the rewards for uttering the *istirjāʿ* during calamities and says that Allah forgives a person’s past sins, except the major ones for which Allah has made the Fire mandatory. And whenever one recalls a calamity later on in his life and says, “Indeed we belong to Allah, and to Him do we return,” Allah will forgive him for every sin he committed between the first time and the last time he mentioned this statement (of *istirjāʿ*), except the major sins.⁶⁶

Another reward for remaining patient and pronouncing the *istirjāʿ* is related in an interesting narration from Umm Salamah, the wife of the Noble Prophet (ṣ). She narrates that the Messenger of Allah (ṣ) said, “There is no Muslim who is afflicted by a calamity and says what has been commanded by Allah: ‘Indeed we belong to Allah, and to Him do we return. O Allah, reward me in my calamity and compensate me with

⁶⁴ See: Appendix, ḥ. 19.

⁶⁵ See: Appendix, ḥ. 84.

⁶⁶ See: Appendix, ḥ. 86.

something better than it,' but that Allah will surely compensate him with something that is better." She then comments, "So when Abū Salamah died, I said [to myself], 'Who among the Muslims could be better than Abū Salamah; his was the first family to migrate to the Messenger of Allah.' Then I said what the Prophet had taught, so Allah replaced him for me with the Messenger of Allah (ﷺ)." Yet another report on the importance of this statement has come to us from Ibn 'Abbās wherein he said, "The Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) said, 'Verily death is terrifying, so when one receives the news of his brother's demise, he should say at that moment, 'Verily we belong to Allah and to Him do we return; and we shall [all] certainly go back to our Lord...'"⁶⁷

Emphasis on the inevitability of death and unavailability of facing what has been preordained and decreed by Allah is another way that Islam teaches believers to deal with grief. Believers are helped to cope with their sorrow by being reminded that it is only a temporary condition which they must face, but it will soon pass. One tradition recounts how the angel Jibra'īl once told the Noble Prophet (ﷺ), "O Muḥammad, live as you may, for [in the end] you shall surely die; love whomever you like, for [in the end] you shall surely separate from them; and do whatever you wish, for [in the end] you shall surely meet it (your deeds)."⁶⁸ And in another narration, it is reported that a man once came to Imam al-Ṣādiq (a) and complained about his misfortune, so he (a) said to him, "If you remain patient, you will surely be rewarded; otherwise, if you are not patient, the decree that Allah, the Almighty, has ordained for you will come to pass while you remain blameworthy [for your impatience]."⁶⁹ Hence we see that since some things are beyond our control and are part of Allah's plan for us, it is imperative that we remain patient and not get distraught.

A step further is to realise that actually, facing greater hardships and

⁶⁷ See: Appendix, ḥ. 37.

⁶⁸ See: Appendix, ḥ. 100.

⁶⁹ See: Appendix, ḥ. 16.

calamities is also an indication of the special attention and love of Allah. That is why traditions tell us that the Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) was once asked, “Who are the people that undergo the severest trials in this world?” He (ﷺ) said, “The Prophets, then those whose conduct most closely resembles theirs. The believer is tested [with tribulations] in accordance to the degree of his faith and good deeds. One whose faith is sound and actions are good faces more severe trials, whereas one whose faith is shallow and actions are weak, his trials [and tribulations] are few.”⁷⁰ Indeed, those who were closest in station to the Prophets were the infallible Imams of the Ahl al-Bayt (a). Hence, we find that they were also tested with difficult tribulations. Imam al-Ṣādiq (a) is reported to have told one of his companions, “When Allah, the Almighty, loves a servant, He afflicts him with trials, plunging him into them; and indeed we and you face the morning and the evening in this condition.”⁷¹

Hence, we find that these narrations drive home the notion that the more Allah loves a believer, the more He tries them in this world.⁷² In fact, sometimes the hardships that a believer faces in the world acts like a spiritual springboard that raises his rank and status. In one tradition, the Noble Prophet (ﷺ) is reported to have said, “Verily when a servant has a [reserved] status with Allah, the Exalted, that he cannot reach through [his] actions, Allah tests him in his body, his wealth, or his children, then He grants him the ability to patiently bear that until he attains the status that is reserved for him with Allah, the Almighty.”⁷³ This is why, as Imam al-Ṣādiq (a) explains, Allah, the Almighty, has some servants on earth who are the most sincere of His servants; no gift descends from the heavens to earth but that Allah diverts it from them to others, and no trial [descends] but that He sends it their way.⁷⁴ And,

⁷⁰ See: Appendix, ḥ. 5.

⁷¹ See: Appendix, ḥ. 8.

⁷² See: Appendix, ḥ. 6 & ḥ 9 - 11.

⁷³ See: Appendix, ḥ. 4.

⁷⁴ See: Appendix, ḥ. 7.

according to Imam al-Bāqir (a), when a servant calls out to Allah during such trials, He says, “Here I am, My servant! If I wish to hasten for you what you ask for, I can do it, but I have saved it for you, and what I have stored [for you] is better for you.”⁷⁵

On the question of what types of tribulation befall a believer, some individuals erroneously believed that certain afflictions would never come to those who have faith. For instance, we find that one of the companions of the sixth Imam is reported to have said to him, “Al-Mughīrah says that Allah does not try a believer with elephantitis, or leprosy, or such-and-such disease.” So the Imam responded, “It seems he is unaware of the believer from Āl Yāsīn whose fingers had atrophied, then they regained function – it is as if I can [clearly] see his shrivelled fingers. He came to them (his people) and warned them, then he returned to them [again] the following day, but they killed him.” Then he (a) said, “Verily a believer is tried with every calamity, and he dies in every way, but he never kills himself.”⁷⁶ In contrast, when one suffers no trials in this world, something is considered to be amiss. It is reported that the Prophet (ṣ) was once invited for a meal, and when he entered the host’s house, he saw that a hen had laid an egg on top of a wall. The egg fell on a wedge in the wall and rested on it without falling to the ground and breaking. The Prophet (ṣ) was surprised by that, so the host said to him, “Are you surprised about this egg? By the One who sent you with the truth, I have never been afflicted by the loss of anything.” Hearing this, the Messenger of Allah (ṣ) stood up to leave and did not eat any of his food. He (ṣ) said, “Allah has nothing to do with one who never suffers a loss.”⁷⁷

Calamities and tribulations that are borne patiently are not considered true calamities, since the believer who bears them is rewarded amply, both in this world and the next. This is what Imam al-Ṣādiq (a)

⁷⁵ See: Appendix, ḥ. 9.

⁷⁶ See: Appendix, ḥ. 12.

⁷⁷ See: Appendix, ḥ. 14.

told his companion Iṣḥāq ibn ‘Ammār, “A calamity is only that for which the one afflicted by it is deprived of recompense and reward because he did not remain patient when it descended [on him].”⁷⁸ And in a beautiful tradition from the Messenger of Allah (ṣ) is reportedly stated, “The affair of the believer is amazing. Indeed, his entire affair is good for him, and this does not hold true for anyone but the believer. If he faces good times, he is thankful and that is good for him, and if difficult times befall him, he is patient and that is good for him.”⁷⁹ Therefore we see that even the hardships and difficulties that befall a believer are actually considered a means of attaining reward and closeness to the Almighty through patience and forbearance. Hence, in reality, these brief, temporary worldly tribulations are not really calamities for the believer, even though it may seem that way outwardly.

Islamic Teachings for Managing and Alleviating Depression

In western societies, the two general treatments that are recommended for depression today are pharmacotherapy and psychotherapy, with the former being a regimen of antidepressant drugs and the latter mostly based on counselling with the aim of behaviour modification. There is, however, no fully tried and tested method of curing depression and most of the modern methods employed produce results that leave much to be desired. Since the kind of lifestyle one leads plays a pivotal role in how he or she is affected by changes that could lead to depression, altering one’s lifestyle would naturally be one of the surest means of countering this beast of a disease.

“Islam is a way of life.” This is a statement we have heard time and time again. It is an axiom that can aptly be applied to remedy the disease of depression. By modifying one’s lifestyle to incorporate the teachings

⁷⁸ See: Appendix, ḥ. 15.

⁷⁹ See: Appendix, ḥ. 31.

of Islam, one can significantly mitigate the effects of melancholy in one's life. Many of the changes proposed by secular psychology are also present in the Islamic system of recommended actions such as regular exercise, adequate sleep, maintaining positive social activity, sticking to a healthy diet, and participating in [lawful] constructive recreational entertainment. Of course, as noted in the previous chapter, religious beliefs and practices also generally enhance the speed and efficacy of any treatment involving lifestyle modification, and can result in earlier remission of depression.

A number of studies have shown that physical exercise can reduce the risk of depression and mitigate its effects. As such, exercise has been recommended both as a means of prevention and treatment of depression. The physiological benefits of regular exercise include improved blood circulation, enhanced metabolism, promotion of mood elevation and raising the threshold of pain. In addition to this, there are some psychological benefits associated to exercise such as increasing self-esteem and reduction of negative thoughts. There are some *ahādīth* that speak about this, such as the saying attributed to the Prophet (ﷺ), "A physically strong believer is better and more beloved to Allah than a weak believer."⁸⁰ Furthermore, Islam encourages believers to do certain exercises such as walking, running, swimming, wrestling, and horseback riding.⁸¹

Sleep is also linked to depression. Adequate high-quality sleep is very important for both physical and mental health. It is quite evident that there is a strong relationship between sleep disorders and mood disorders. Studies show that most of the people who suffer from depression also have erratic sleep patterns. The Qur'an describes sleep as one of the signs of Allah's omnipotence (Q30:23). It is important to get adequate sleep as this ensures that one's body gets the required rest

⁸⁰ Muslim, *al-Ṣaḥīḥ*, vol. 4, p. 2052.

⁸¹ See for example: al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 6, p. 47.

it needs in order to remain strong and healthy.⁸² It is thus recommended to go to bed early and wake up early, preferably about half an hour before the time of Fajr prayers. Taking a short midday nap (*qaylūlah*) is also recommended, especially if it helps one wake up for the nightly (*tahajjud*) prayer.⁸³ On the other hand, traditions state that one must not oversleep and lose out on the benefit of worship in the night.⁸⁴

Another factor that can mitigate the devastating effects of depression pertains to social relationships. Enhanced social support usually acts as a protection against depression. Social isolation makes depression last longer and human interaction is something that is recommended for depressed individuals. This can even be in the form of interaction with one's spouse or children. Strong family bonds help alleviate many symptoms of depression. Islam places great importance on maintaining strong family ties. For instance, it is reported that the Prophet (ﷺ) said, "A man sitting with his family (wife and children) is more beloved in the sight of Allah than his spending the night in worship in this mosque of mine."⁸⁵ Keeping ties with one's relatives is also one of the important Islamic practices, as is having good friends with whom one can comfortably interact, and this also helps in the path to recovery from depression.

Yet another factor in controlling depression is modification of one's diet. There is a growing body of research that shows that altering one's diet to include healthy foods goes a long way in preventing and curing mental disorders like depression. Among the recommendations that can be made in this regard is to include fresh fruits and vegetables in one's diet. Fish, and foods rich in folic acid, zinc, and magnesium are also helpful. Eating a hearty breakfast is also recommended and one must avoid the consumption of harmful foods (like fast-foods) and drinks

⁸² This is mentioned in a tradition from Imam al-Riḍā (a). See: al-Majlisī, *Bihār al-Anwār*, vol. 59, p. 316.

⁸³ Al-Ṣadūq, *Man Lā Yaḥḍuruhu al-Faqīh*, vol. 2, p. 136.

⁸⁴ Al-Laythī, *Uyūn al-Hikam wal-Mawā'iz*, p. 436.

⁸⁵ Warrām, *Tanbīh al-Khawātir*, vol. 2, p. 122.

(such as sugary fizzy drinks). The Qur'ān states:

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا كُلُوا مِن طَيِّبَاتِ مَا رَزَقْنَاكُمْ وَاشْكُرُوا لِلَّهِ إِن كُنتُمْ ءِيَّاهُ تَعْبُدُونَ
*O you who have faith! Eat of the good things We have provided you, and
 thank Allah, if it is Him that you worship. (Q2:172)*

Of course, Islam forbids anything that is harmful for a person's physical or mental health. In a famously recounted tradition, the Prophet (ﷺ) is reported to have said, "The stomach is the abode of ailments and [a healthy] dietary regimen is the medicine [for those ailments]."⁸⁶ Furthermore, Imam 'Alī (a) is reported to have advised his son, "O my son, shall I teach you four things that will make you needless of medicine?... Do not sit to eat unless you are hungry, stand up from the table while you still desire food, chew properly, and go to the lavatory before going to bed. If you put these into practice, you will not need medicine."⁸⁷

Recreational activities can also play a role in mitigating the negative effects of depression. Such activities shift the attention of depressed individuals from their problems, albeit for a brief while. Islam generally permits recreational activities as long as they are within the bounds of the *sharī'ah*. Imam 'Alī (a) is reported to have said that a believer must divide his day into three periods: part of his time must be spent worshipping Allah, another part should be devoted to earning a lawful livelihood, and the third part should be spent enjoying Allah's blessings and lawful pleasures. Indeed, it is this third part that helps rejuvenate one for the other activities he needs to carry out during the day.⁸⁸

Among the recreational activities that have been encouraged by Islam are those in which one interacts with the natural environment, like trekking, swimming, and so on. Imam Mūsā al-Kāẓim (a) is reported to have said, "Three things strengthen one's eyesight [and

⁸⁶ Al-Ṣadūq, *al-Khiṣāl*, vol. 2, p. 512.

⁸⁷ *Ibid*, vol. 1, p. 229.

⁸⁸ Al-Āmidī, *Ghurar al-Ḥikam*, ḥ. 890.

bring delight to one's eyes]: looking at greenery, looking at running water, and looking at a beautiful face."⁸⁹ Recreational activities that bring one closer to nature help a person to forget his difficulties and hardships. Of course, while it could be argued that even those activities that Islam forbids (such as gambling or playing games of chance, etc.) can keep one's attention away from his or her depression, the negative consequences of such forbidden actions would only make a person's life more difficult in other ways, and it would be akin to replacing one malady with another.

As noted in the previous chapter, religion and spirituality also help an individual cope with depression. A growing body of research shows that the more a person gets involved with religious practices, especially prayer and supplication, the quicker his depression wanes. Belief in a just and omnipotent God, who has the power to resolve all problems, gives one a heightened sense of hope and helps him tolerate many of the hardships of life. Similarly, the belief in a Day of Reckoning helps people bear what they witness of the intolerable cruelty of some human beings on others, or even on animals. Another tenet of faith that makes things bearable in this world is the belief in destiny. Knowing that everything that happens has a purpose and there are no random events or accidents brings a sense of tranquility to the otherwise perturbed soul.

Out of the religious duties prescribed for Muslims, prayer is the one carried out most frequently. As a means of communicating with the Divine, prayer can be a very relaxing and spiritually stimulating activity. Furthermore, it is recommended to supplicate after every prayer and present one's needs before his Creator. Fasting in the month of Ramaḍān is obligatory for Muslims and one of the benefits of this act of worship is that it helps believers understand, to some extent, the hunger that is experienced by the poor. Of course, there are also a number of other physical and mental benefits of fasting as well. In

⁸⁹ Al-Barqī, *al-Maḥāsīn*, vol. 2, p. 622.

general, Islam is against overconsumption and the Holy Prophet (ﷺ) is reported to have said, “A man whose consumption of food is little has a healthy stomach and a pure heart, while one who consumes plenty of food has a sick stomach and a hard heart.”⁹⁰

Worrying about one’s financial future is one of the common causes of depression, yet Islam teaches people that it is God who provides sustenance to all His creatures to the extent that He sees fit. The Qur’an states:

قُلْ إِنَّ رَبِّي يَبْسُطُ الرِّزْقَ لِمَن يَشَاءُ مِنْ عِبَادِهِ وَيَقْدِرُ لَهُ وَمَا أَنْفَقْتُمْ مِنْ شَيْءٍ فَهُوَ يُخْلِفُهُ وَهُوَ خَيْرُ الرَّازِقِينَ

Say, 'Indeed my Lord expands the provision for whomever of His servants that He wishes and tightens it, and He will repay whatever you may spend, and He is the best of providers.' (Q34:39).

A strong conviction about this not only removes any fear of one’s financial future, but also enables one to assist others financially. Though the alms-tax (*zakāt*) is mandatory on every able Muslim, knowing that it only brings rewards and benefits in both this world and the next, and in no way reduces one’s livelihood, makes it easier for believers to give generously to the needy from their wealth. Indeed, research has shown that those who give in charity suffer fewer depressive symptoms. Other religious actions like going for pilgrimage, visiting holy sites, and reciting and listening to the Qur’an, all play a positive role in effectively reducing the symptoms of depression and may actually help to remedy depression.

When comparing these beneficial Islamic teachings to what modern psychology preaches, we find that the fundamental problem in the current modern methods of depression management is that there are no standard treatments. The use of drugs is common but that only ends up suppressing some symptoms of depression and does not remedy the

⁹⁰ Warrām, *Tanbīh al-Khawātir*, vol. 1, p. 46.

problem itself. An ideal drug, if it were to exist, would be effective across a range of depressive disorders in different age groups, and would have no adverse side effects. Unfortunately, however, all the antidepressant drugs currently in use have serious side effects that range from constipation to seizures and glaucoma!⁹¹ In some cases, these drugs have the opposite effect on patients and actually worsen their suicidal thoughts.⁹²

The use of ‘mood-enhancers’ to counter depression and its associated symptoms is not a modern phenomenon *per se*. In Europe, the native herb called St John’s Wort has been employed for centuries as a remedy for different physical ailments as well as for alleviating melancholy. In more recent times, it has been used in tablet form containing the dried alcoholic extract of the herb. In the 1970’s another drug that was commonly used for the treatment of depression was lithium. However, like other drugs, lithium had adverse side effects and gradually its use was reduced or abandoned altogether. Aside from drugs, some physical treatments for depression were also common in the past, and some of these treatments are still in use today. We have mentioned some of these therapies in the first chapter.

General Islamic Guidelines to Counter Depression

Pain and hardship in life is not restricted to an unlucky few. Islam teaches us that the whole purpose of life in this world is to test us, and this test involves many unsavoury experiences as well as difficulties and trials that we must all undergo to assess our mettle and to strengthen and purify us. The Qur’an is quite explicit when it says that Allah created life and death to test us and see “*which of you is of better deeds*”

⁹¹ See the list of side effects of tricyclic antidepressants like Doxepin, Amozepine and the like.

⁹² This has been recorded particularly in the case of Selective Serotonin Reuptake Inhibitors.

(Q67:2). So if we look around us, we will notice many people also dealing with painful life challenges such as loss of loved ones, serious illnesses, broken relationships, as well as traumatic and unexpected changes in their lives. As we see others in the same boat in terms of suffering, we realize that we are not the only ones who are being tested with hardships in life. Of course, every individual faces different circumstances, and each responds differently to what they encounter, but there are some similarities too, such as how patience and forbearance in the face of hardship makes anyone a better and stronger person.

Remembering that this world is only temporary and that we have been created for the Hereafter can itself bring a sense of relief. Wise sages often reminded afflicted individuals that “this, too, shall pass.” We should avoid catastrophizing our situation and imagining the worst-case scenario playing out in our lives. Instead, we should try to focus on all the good that we have, all the blessings that remain with us which many do not even possess. Remaining positive and optimistic is difficult, but can do a lot to assuage the feeling of hopelessness. Islam teaches us to think positively in every situation. We are further taught to have a positive opinion (*husn al-zann*) of Allah, and know that He is aware of our situation at every moment, and does only what is best for us.

Though Islam is against cutting oneself off from society completely, it is perfectly fine to avoid social gatherings for a brief period while one is mourning a loss or feeling down and depressed. Sometimes one needs time to recover slowly on his own, without prying eyes and overzealous advisors. In such cases, it is better to pare things back to small gatherings or meeting a single friend or relative at a time. In that way, a person can give himself time to adjust to the new reality. Sometimes having a sympathetic ear is helpful so if there is someone you trust, you can call them or meet them and talk to them about what you are feeling. Though Islam discourages divulging personal secrets to others, there is

nothing wrong in having a conversation about one's feelings with a trustworthy person and seeking solace in their company.

Crying is a natural reaction, and since Islam is the religion of the *fiṭrah*, we are not only permitted to cry but even encouraged to do so. However, the encouragement is only with regards to crying in order to attain closeness of Allah, out of awe or regret for our sins. We cry for the martyrs of Karbalā' just as the Prophet (ﷺ) cried for the martyrs of Uḥud. In fact, there are also some renowned personalities in Islamic history who were given the title 'the weepers' (*al-bakkā'ūn*).⁹³ So crying is recognized as a beneficial practice which can lead to the cleansing of the heart and spirit. When it comes to losing a loved one, it is but natural to cry, and that is fine. The only thing that Islam frowns upon is the practice of excessive lamentation where the bereaved slap their faces, tear their clothes, or do other such actions out of grief, as was common among the pagan Arabs.

Ecotherapy is highly recommended in Islam. The Qur'ān has many verses that tell people to observe natural phenomena and the *ahādīth* also encourage walking on greenery, looking at running streams, etc. When feeling sad or depressed, it can be a great help to spend some time outside looking at lush green plants and trees, or even at the vast blue sky. Watching rainfall, listening to birds, and watching little insects in the wild all have a soothing effect on the mind and soul. If it is not possible for one to leave the home and find a place where they can watch the beauty of nature, one can, as an alternative, watch some nature and wildlife videos.

In many cultures and societies, people who are suffering emotional pain take recourse to intoxicants to numb their pain. This can be in the

⁹³ The term '*al-bakkā'ūn*' (the weepers) has been employed in the narrations to describe those who would often weep. For instance, Imam al-Ṣādiq (a) is reported to have said: عن أبي عبد الله عليه السلام قال البكاءون خمسة: آدم ويعقوب ويوسف وفاطمة بنت محمد وعلي بن الحسين عليه السلام. The weepers are five: Ādam (a), Ya'qūb (a), Yūsuf (a), Fāṭimah bint Muḥammad (a), and 'Alī ibn al-Ḥusayn (a). (*Tafsīr al-'Ayyāshī*, vol.2, p. 188)

form of drugs or alcohol. However, the effects of these substances do more harm than good and can even get one addicted thereby adding to their problems in life. In Islam, the opposite is recommended. Instead of trying to drown away the pain, we are encouraged to be more mindful and aware. Mindfulness simply means being aware about the present moment and paying attention to the reality of one's situation. When one is mindful, he or she realizes that what they are undergoing is temporary, that they will benefit from it in this world and the next, and that Allah is there for them. This is one of the reasons why there is so much emphasis on the constant remembrance of Allah.

One of the negative effects of emotional trauma is 'letting oneself go'. By this we mean that it is common for those who are bereaved or have suffered some great loss to no longer take care of their personal grooming and hygiene, and this, in the end, makes one feel even worse. It may be difficult, but maintaining a healthy diet and keeping to one's normal grooming routine, no matter how difficult it may be, can actually play a positive role in hastening emotional recovery. Looking after one's hair, teeth, skin, diet, and general health can help a person avoid further unexpected difficulties that would only compound one's problems. That is why Islam has emphasized a lot on cleanliness and grooming, and it is partly the reason why regular ablution and ritual baths have been prescribed for the believers.

Reaching out to someone in need and providing practical assistance, or simply being kind to others, goes a long way in making us feel good about ourselves and our lives. This in turn mitigates the feeling of sadness that sometimes overwhelms us. Islam recommends and encourages believers to assist those in need however they can. If financial assistance can be accorded, it should be provided in a manner that is not demeaning or humiliating. In cases where one cannot assist another person financially, there are numerous other ways assistance can be accorded and anything one can do to help another human being who is in dire need is appreciated by Islam and there is a promise of

reward for it.

An interesting tradition from Imam ‘Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib (a) states that when one is fearful of something, he should plunge into it.⁹⁴ The idea is that in so doing, his fear will vanish or at least become greatly reduced. The negative assumptions and fears about what might happen constantly plague a depressed mind, and one way of combatting these apprehensions, which even some modern-day psychologists suggest, is to ‘play them out’. This basically entails pushing oneself to experiment with those things that frighten them. For instance, if one feels that he would not enjoy attending a certain gathering because of the way others would react to his presence, he should still go and put this assumption to the test. If a person feels that he is incapable of giving a public speech, he should volunteer to give one. Doing this will, many times, give results that are completely contrary to what one had feared or negatively assumed.

Islam always encourages believers to be mindful and aware. In fact, one of the most commonly emphasized teachings that is found in many exhortations is the need to espouse ‘*taqwā*’ which is Godwariness or mindfulness of God. Mindfulness of one’s place in this universe in relation to the Creator and other beings is helpful in alleviating depression. In practical terms, mindfulness is about seeing the difference between oneself and one’s mind. Due to all the distractions of worldly life, as well as the ‘chatter’ of the mind, it is not easy for a person to maintain a state of constant mindfulness. This is the case even when people are not depressed, and depression only makes it more difficult to arrive at the state of mindfulness. That is why more practice is required in order to master the skill of clearing the mind and focusing on what is, rather than what ought to be, or what might be, or what has been.

⁹⁴ Al-Raḍī, *Nahj al-Balāghah*, saying 166.

The Importance of Smiling

Islam gives a lot of importance to remaining positive and surrounding oneself with an aura of positivity. To this end, it encourages certain practices such as smiling and avoiding sulky and frowning expressions, especially when encountering other believers. So much so that a smile is even considered to be a form of charity. In one tradition attributed to the Messenger of Allah (ﷺ), he said:

تَبَسُّمُكَ فِي وَجْهِ أَخِيكَ لَكَ صَدَقَةٌ.

Your smile towards the face of your brother [in faith] is [counted as] charity.⁹⁵

Hence, we see that even the simple act of giving a smile to your Muslim brother is considered an act of charity and will be rewarded as such.

A sincere smile can brighten up a person's day. Sometimes, it is all it takes to alleviate someone's ill temper and put joy in his heart. Of course, Islam has highly encouraged the act of making a fellow believer happy and joyful, and there are many narrations to this effect. In one particularly interesting narration, we are told that on the Day of Resurrection, when a believer is raised from his grave, a form is raised with him and it stays with him. Each time the believer is faced with something frightening, the form addresses him saying, "Do not become anxious or sad, for I give you glad tidings of joy and honour!" This continues happening until the believer stands before his Lord and is held to account for his deeds with a lenient and easy accounting. Then the angels are instructed to take him to Paradise, with the form still accompanying him. At that point, the man is very pleased and curiously asks the form what it is, to which it replies, "I am the joy that you brought about in the heart of your fellow believer."⁹⁶

In one narration, we are told that Allah once addressed Prophet

⁹⁵ Al-Tirmidhī, *al-Sunan*, vol. 4, p. 112.

⁹⁶ See: Al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfi*, vol. 3, pp. 485-6.

Dāwūd (a) saying, “Verily My servant comes to Me with one good act by which I grant him entrance into My Paradise.” Dāwūd (a) asked, “What good action is that, My Lord?” He replied, “He makes My believing servant happy, even if it is by [giving him] a single date.” Prophet Dāwūd said, “O Lord, indeed it behoves one who knows You never to lose hope in Your [great] mercy!”⁹⁷ Therefore, it is not surprising when the traditions tell us that one of the most beloved actions in the sight of Allah is bringing joy to a believer.⁹⁸ Aside from the otherworldly benefits of doing this, spreading joy among the believers and making them happy has a reciprocal effect of making one feel joyful, and all this leads to a positive atmosphere in the community. Out of the many ways this can be achieved, the simplest is by keeping a smile on one’s face – it costs nothing but gives much!

As the best exemplar, the Noble Prophet (ﷺ) is known to have had an ever-smiling countenance. There are numerous reports that attest to this. For instance, one of his companions said, “The Prophet never saw me except that he would smile at me.”⁹⁹ He would also encourage his followers to try and make each other happy and is reported to have said, “Whoever makes a believer happy has made me happy, and whoever makes me happy has made Allah happy.”¹⁰⁰ In fact, even if one has some sadness in his heart, it should not stop him from smiling at others. One of the qualities of a true believer that has been mentioned in the *ahādīth* is that “a believer’s cheerfulness is in his face, while his sadness is in his heart.”¹⁰¹ This clearly shows that the smile that is given to others is not necessarily the natural result of one’s own cheerfulness; rather, it is meant to bring joy to others and to uplift their moods, making them happy when they see you. So even if one is sad for some reason, it should not prevent him from sharing a smile when he looks at others.

⁹⁷ Ibid, vol. 3, p. 484.

⁹⁸ Ibid, vol. 3, p. 483.

⁹⁹ Al-Bukhārī, *al-Jāmi‘ al-Ṣaḥīḥ*, vol. 5, p. 162.

¹⁰⁰ Al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 3, p. 481.

¹⁰¹ Ibid, vol. 2, p. 226.

Just as smiling is encouraged and rewarded, frowning is discouraged in Islam. The Prophet (ﷺ) is reported to have said:

إن الله يبغض المعبس في وجه إخوانه.

Verily Allah hates the one who frowns at the face of his brothers [in faith].¹⁰²

Indeed, as we have often been told, frowning takes more effort (and uses more facial muscles) than smiling. Hence it is both physically taxing and psychologically draining. People naturally incline away from frowning faces. There is a kind of ugliness and negativity in the frowning, scowling face which repels all who see it. This is the exact opposite of the hidden magnetism in a smiling, welcoming face. For this reason, the Noble Prophet (ﷺ), who was the best example and the possessor of the most sublime etiquette as the Qur'an itself attests, is said to have always had a smile on his face. And according to a number of reports from his companions, whenever he spoke, he did so with a smiling face.¹⁰³

Sometimes, the Prophet (ﷺ) would smile in order to convey some important message. For instance, it is reported that at one time, the Messenger of Allah was seated with his companions when suddenly he went deep into thought, and subsequently began smiling. One of his companions asked, "O Messenger of Allah, why is it that you suddenly started smiling?" The Prophet replied, "I was wondering at the believer who is afflicted by an ailment and is restless because of it – if he knew how much reward he was receiving for his ailment, he would have loved to remain sick until he met his Lord!"¹⁰⁴ In this example, we see how the Noble Prophet attracted the attention of his companions towards what he wanted to say, and made them curious about his thoughts, by smiling.

¹⁰² Al-Nūrī, *Mustadrak al-Wasā'il*, vol. 8, p. 321.

¹⁰³ Al-Ṭabaraṣī, *Makārim al-Akhlāq*, p. 21.

¹⁰⁴ Al-Ṣadūq, *al-Amālī*, p. 501.

Psychologists have confirmed the positive effects of smiling. Not only does it uplift the mood of one who encounters it, a smile also enhances the joy of the one giving it. This means that it is not necessary for one to be happy before offering a smile, the smile itself can bring about happiness in the person giving it. So it is not be happy then smile, but rather smile first and then be happy!¹⁰⁵ Furthermore, those who smile often have been shown to be healthier psychologically and even physically.¹⁰⁶ The smile is part of a universal human language that is understood the world over. Those who smile a lot tend to have more friends and more people generally like to be in their company. It has been posited that this is because human beings are generally more responsive to non-verbal cues than to verbal statements.

Right from birth, before a child can understand the words spoken by his parents, he reacts to their facial expressions and body language. Facial expressions can convey a whole range of feelings such as joy, sadness, anger, fear, etc. This is part of the natural makeup of human beings and is very difficult to control, if at all possible. A smile indicates a person's willingness to communicate positively and sends a signal of optimism, compassion, and kindness. It plays a role in maintaining a cheerful atmosphere which is conducive to growth, progress, and development. Indeed, happiness has and continues to be the goal and aspiration of many in their lives. If a smile can assist towards this end, albeit a little, it is worth employing it and habituating oneself to smiling. As for depression and sadness, smiling does help to slowly alleviate these negative states of being.

¹⁰⁵ Mahdi Khuddāmiyān Arānī, *Lutfan Labkhand Bezanīd*, p. 65.

¹⁰⁶ Perhaps this is because the physical health of one who smiles is better than that of one who is always stressed and worried.

Positive Thinking (*Husn al-Zann*)

There are countless self-help books that discuss the power of positive thinking in some form or another. As such, there is seemingly a huge demand for literature that helps human beings cope with difficult situations by reminding them to look at all the positive things around them. Islam is perhaps the only religion that had highly emphasized the importance of thinking positively from more than a millennium ago, and its teachings are echoed by many of the secular works on the subject today. The Glorious Qur'an reminds us of the innumerable blessings of Allah which we so often tend to forget, when it states:

وَعَاتَيْنَاكُمْ مِّن كُلِّ مَا سَأَلْتُمُوهُ وَإِن تَعُدُّوا نِعْمَتَ اللَّهِ لَا تَحْصُوهَا إِنَّ الْإِنسَانَ لَظَلُومٌ
كَفَّارٌ

He gave you all that you asked Him. And if you enumerate Allah's blessings, you will not be able to count them. Indeed man is most unfair and ungrateful! (Q14:34)

Recalling all the good in one's life helps to alleviate the sadness and depression that is usually brought about by a single cause or only a couple of factors. In contrast, the blessings that we ought to be grateful for are so many that we would not even be able to list them.

When it comes to our relationship with others, and even with our Creator, Islam teaches us to think positively. Thinking positively about others is known as *husn al-zann*, and its opposite is *sū' al-zann* which means negative thinking or supposition. How we react when we see others behaving in a certain manner goes a long way in helping ourselves to remain positive. For instance, if we see someone donating towards a charity, we should assume that he is doing so in order to please Allah. Since we are not privy to the intentions of an individual, it would be just as easy to suppose that he has some nefarious and devious reason for giving money to the charity. However, since there is

no evidence either way, being suspicious and thinking negatively of a person in this way only helps foster an aura of negativity.

Those who think negatively of others without good reason or strong evidence, eventually get used to this kind of thinking. Such individuals are always cynical and are never ready to accept or acknowledge good in other people. This type of negativity is a breeding ground for depression and despondency, since even when well-intentioned individuals try to help a person who thinks this way, they are looked upon with suspicion and not accepted as the well-wishers they are. In contrast, those who think positively, without being naïve (since naivety is actually a sign of ignorance and that is not acceptable in Islam), are actually much calmer and healthier in their lives. And this, of course, leads to greater happiness and safety from deep-rooted sorrow and melancholy. To this end, Imam 'Alī (a) is reported to have said:

حسن الظنّ راحة القلب وسلامة البدن.

Positive thinking leads to a calm heart and healthy body.¹⁰⁷

And, in a clear statement on how one is expected to think of the actions of his brother in faith, the Imam said:

ضع أمر أخيك على أحسنه حتى يأتيك منه ما يغلبك ولا تظننّ بكلمة خرجت من أخيك
سوءاً وأنت تجد لها في الخير محملاً.

Consider your brother's affair in the most positive light, unless something reaches you from him that convinces you otherwise. And never think negatively of anything spoken by your brother while you can find a possible positive meaning in it.¹⁰⁸

Indeed, the Qur'an itself tells believers to eschew negative thoughts and suspicion, warning that some suppositions are actually sins:

¹⁰⁷ Al-Laythī, *Uyūn al-Ḥikam wal-Mawā'iz*, p. 229.

¹⁰⁸ Al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfi*, vol. 2, p. 326.

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا اجْتَنِبُوا كَثِيرًا مِّنَ الظَّنِّ إِنَّ بَعْضَ الظَّنِّ إِثْمٌ

O you who have faith! Avoid much suspicion; indeed some suspicions are sins... (Q49:12)

Taking this into consideration, we must be careful of our thoughts about others, especially if they are fellow believers. We should not be quick to judge their words or deeds negatively when we are uncertain about their true intentions. Imam ‘Alī (a) would advise his companions to avoid entertaining any negative thoughts about each other, saying that Allah has expressly forbidden it.¹⁰⁹ One of the ill consequences of harboring such negative thoughts has been beautifully explained by Amīr al-Mu’minīn (a) when he said:

من ساءت ظنونه اعتقد الخيانة بمن لا يخونه.

One whose thoughts are negative assumes the disloyalty of one who is not disloyal to him.¹¹⁰

Hence a person may even end up accusing righteous believers of some impropriety or misdeed simply because they hinge their beliefs on the negative assumptions they have of that person. This is no doubt a grave sin, and the scholars of ethics have even classified this act as forbidden (*ḥarām*).¹¹¹ It is therefore clear that everything should be done to avoid negative thoughts as much as possible, to the extent that one must refrain from attending the gatherings of evil people, lest it should lead to becoming negative towards the righteous believers, as Imam ‘Alī (a) has advised.¹¹²

Of course, as with everything else, there are some exceptions to consider here. In certain societies, immorality and evil becomes so pervasive that it is but natural to look at others with suspicion and lack

¹⁰⁹ Al-Ṣadūq, *al-Khiṣāl*, vol. 2, p. 624.

¹¹⁰ Al-Āmidī, *Ghurār al-Hikām* (English Translation), ḥ. 5866.

¹¹¹ See for instance: Al-Majlisī, *Mir’āt al-Uqūl*, vol. 11, p. 16.

¹¹² Al-Ṣadūq, *al-Amālī*, p. 446.

of trust. When a believer finds himself in such a community, then thinking positively of others can lead to great loss or harm. In such cases, it is better to be practical and consider the likelihood that since most of the people of that community are known to be evil, the person whom you encounter there might well be among those evil people so precaution should be exercised. This is explained clearly in a statement attributed to Amīr al-Mu'minīn (a) in which he said:

إذا استولى الصلاح على الزمان وأهله ثم أساء رجل الظنّ برجل لم تظهر منه حوبة فقد
ظلم وإذا استولى الفساد على الزمان وأهله فأحسن رجل الظنّ برجل فقد غرر.

When righteousness takes root in any era and its people, and a man thinks negatively of another while there is nothing manifested by him of sin [to justify his negativity and suspicion], then he has acted unjustly [for thinking in this negative way]. But when corruption [and immorality] becomes pervasive in any era and [among] its people, and a man thinks positively of another, then he is deluded.¹¹³

One of the reasons for despondency is a feeling of hopelessness because of one's sins. The weight of sin can bear heavily on the soul and can make a person feel that there is no way out for him, as he has been encumbered by his past misdeeds. However, Islam forbids believers from thinking this way and always urges them to remain hopeful in the mercy of Allah. To this end, the Qur'an states:

قُلْ يٰعِبَادِيَ الَّذِينَ أَسْرَفُوا عَلَىٰ أَنفُسِهِمْ لَا تَقْنَطُوا مِن رَّحْمَةِ اللَّهِ إِنَّ اللَّهَ يَغْفِرُ الذُّنُوبَ
جَمِيعًا إِنَّهُ هُوَ الْغَفُورُ الرَّحِيمُ

Say [that Allah declares,] "O My servants who have committed excesses against their own souls, do not despair of the mercy of Allah. Indeed Allah will forgive all sins. Indeed, He is the All-forgiving, the All-merciful."

(Q39:53)

¹¹³ Al-Raḍī, *Nahj al-Balāghah*, saying 110.

Thinking that Allah would not forgive one's sins because of their gravity, or because one is undeserving, is tantamount to thinking negatively of Allah. As believers, we have always been taught to have hope in the infinite mercy of Allah, and there should always be a balance between fear of punishment and hope for forgiveness. It is only such a balance between fear and hope that can keep one spiritually healthy and help maintain a strong relationship with the All-Merciful Lord. Having negative thoughts about Allah is a sign of weak faith. Allah is the All-Merciful and is beyond any need. As such, whatever He does to His servants is for their own benefit, even if they are unable to fathom it. The traditions from the Infallibles clearly encourage thinking positively of Allah, the Almighty, and state that the status of a believing servant in the eyes of Allah is based on how positively he thinks of his Creator.¹¹⁴

The Qur'an itself attributes the quality of thinking negatively of Allah to the hypocrites and polytheists when it states:

وَيُعَذِّبُ الْمُنَافِقِينَ وَالْمُنَافِقَاتِ وَالْمُشْرِكِينَ وَالْمُشْرِكَاتِ الظَّالِمِينَ بِاللَّهِ ظَنَّ السَّوْءَ
عَلَيْهِمْ ذَايِرَةٌ السَّوْءِ وَعَظِيبٌ عَلَيْهِمْ وَلَعَنَهُمْ وَأَعَدَّ لَهُمْ جَهَنَّمَ وَسَاءَتْ مَصِيرًا

That He may punish the hypocrites, men and women, and the polytheists, men and women, who entertain a bad opinion of Allah. For them shall be an adverse turn of fortune: Allah is wrathful with them and He has cursed them, and prepared Hell for them and it is an evil destination.

(Q48:6)

Hence, having negative thoughts about Allah is a quality of the disbelievers and hypocrites, while thinking positively of Him is a sign of true faith. Similarly, one tradition ascribed to the Noble Prophet (ﷺ) states that thinking positively about Allah is the price of Paradise (*thaman al-jannah*).¹¹⁵ Furthermore, according to Imam al-Ṣādiq (a),

¹¹⁴ See for instance: Al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfi*, vol. 2, p. 72.

¹¹⁵ Al-Ṭūsī, *al-Amālī*, p. 380.

nothing good is granted to a believer in this world and the next except due to his positive thoughts about Allah.¹¹⁶

From all the above, we see how explicitly and clearly Islam promotes positive thinking in general, and specifically about others, and about Allah, the Almighty. Thinking positively has many benefits, as we have seen, and it also goes a long way in helping to alleviate sadness and depression. As such, it is of paramount importance that we should try our best to cultivate the habit of positive thinking in line with Islamic teachings.

Trusting in Allah (*Tawakkul*)

When we understand that certain things are beyond our control, and we trust that whatever Allah does is ultimately good for us, then that results in an overall sense of calm that permeates the very fiber of our being. The Qur'an advises us to trust Allah at all times, and says:

وَعَلَى اللَّهِ فَلْيَتَوَكَّلِ الْمُؤْمِنُونَ

...*And in Allah let all the faithful put their trust.* (Q3:122)

And it promises that Allah will suffice anyone who trusts Him:

وَمَنْ يَتَوَكَّلْ عَلَى اللَّهِ فَهُوَ حَسْبُهُ

And whoever puts his trust in Allah, He will suffice him. (Q65:3)

When a human being is in need of anything, there are only three possibilities in front of him: either he can rely on his own ability and try to independently meet his need, or he can rely on another human being to assist him in fulfilling his need, or he can put his trust in Allah and rely solely upon Him. Since Allah is the Omnipotent Lord who has power over all things, a wise person would put his trust in Him rather

¹¹⁶ Al-Daylamī, *Irshād al-Qulūb*, vol. 1, p. 109.

than in his own abilities or in the abilities of a fellow human being. The concept of *tawakkul* in Islam is one wherein a believer works hard himself and performs all that has been made incumbent upon him, and then puts his complete trust in Allah, knowing that Allah is watching him and is aware of his needs and requirements.

It should never be assumed that trusting in Allah is a license to renege on one's own responsibilities and duties. For instance, it is incumbent upon us to work hard and to strive in our lives so that we may earn a lawful livelihood and be dignified and respectable members of society. One who falsely believes that since he trusts Allah, and Allah has promised to suffice those who trust Him, he does not need to make any effort towards the achievements of his worldly (and otherworldly) goals, is gravely mistaken. It is reported in the narrations that the Noble Prophet (ﷺ) once came across a group of people who were not farming like the rest. So he asked them, "Who are you?" They responded, "We are those who trust in Allah!"

قالوا: نحن المتوكلون. قال: بل أنتم المتكلمون.

So the Prophet said, "Rather you are a burden on others!"¹¹⁷

Hence, we see that trusting in Allah does not mean that one is free to be lazy and avoid exerting the effort needed to achieve the necessary objectives in life. It is after we have done our best that we must leave everything to Allah and trust in His decree. Whatever He decides is always good, even if it may not apparently seem that way. In this respect, there is a strong connection between patience (*ṣabr*), acceptance of divine decree (*riḍā*), and trusting in Allah (*tawakkul*). Just as the Qur'ān and *aḥādīth* tell us that Allah loves the patient ones and those who accept His judgments and decrees in every matter, so too does He love those who place their trust in Him. The Qur'ān says:

¹¹⁷ Al-Nūrī, *Mustadrak al-Wasā'il*, vol. 11, p. 217.

إِنَّ اللَّهَ يُحِبُّ الْمُتَوَكِّلِينَ

Indeed Allah loves those who trust in Him. (Q3:159)

There are many advantages and benefits to be gained from trusting in Allah. One of the benefits that has been mentioned in the narrations is the enhancement of strength. Of course, this is in reference to spiritual strength and determination. One who trusts in Allah gains a stronger will and greater steadfastness than one who does not put his trust in Him. The Noble Prophet (s) is reported to have said:

من سزه أن يكون أقوى الناس فليتوكل على الله.

Whoever would be pleased to be the strongest of all people, then let him place his trust in Allah.¹¹⁸

The strength accorded by trusting in Allah has been depicted beautifully in the Qur'an, in the stories of Prophet Nūḥ (a) and Prophet Hūd (a). When they both faced people who rejected them and threatened to harm or even kill them, they announced that through their trust in Allah, they were able to withstand any harm that the disbelievers wished to cause them:

وَأْتَلُ عَلَيْهِمْ نَبَأَ نُوحٍ إِذْ قَالَ لِقَوْمِهِ يَتَقَوْمِ إِن كَانَ كَبُرَ عَلَيْكُمْ مَقَامِي وَتَذْكِيرِي بِآيَاتِ اللَّهِ فَعَلَى اللَّهِ تَوَكَّلْتُ فَأَجْمِعُوا أَمْرَكُمْ وَشُرَكَاءَكُمْ ثُمَّ لَا يَكُنْ أَمْرُكُمْ عَلَيْكُمْ غُمَّةً ثُمَّ اقْضُوا إِلَيَّ وَلَا تُنظِرُونِ

Relate to them the account of Nūḥ when he said to his people, "O my people! If my stay [among you] is hard on you and [also] my reminding you of Allah's signs, [for my part] I have put my trust in Allah. So conspire together, along with your partners, leaving nothing vague in your plan, then carry it out against me without giving me any respite!" (Q10:71)

¹¹⁸ Al-Ṭabrisī, *Mishkāt al-Anwār*, p. 18.

إِنْ تَقُولُ إِلَّا أَعْتَرْنَاكَ بِبَعْضِ آيَاتِنَا بِسُوءٍ ۗ قَالَ إِنِّي أُشْهِدُ اللَّهَ وَاشْهَدُوا أَنِّي بَرِيءٌ مِمَّا
تُشْرِكُونَ ۗ مِنْ دُونِهِ ۗ فَكِيدُونِي جَمِيعًا ثُمَّ لَا تُنظِرُونِ

“All we say is that some of our gods have visited you with some evil.” He (Hūd) said, “I call Allah to witness—and you too be [my] witnesses—that I repudiate what you take as [His] partners besides Him. Now try out your stratagems against me, together, without granting me any respite.”

(Q11:54-55)

Another benefit of trusting in Allah is that it bestows dignity and makes one independent and needless of others. When a person relies solely on Allah, he does not consider any other human being to be indispensable to him and hence does not lower himself or humiliate himself in front of any other person. Indeed, he realizes that only Allah has power over all things and no one else. Imam Ja’far al-Ṣādiq (a) is reported to have said in this regard:

إِنَّ الْغِنَى وَالْعَزَّ يُجُولَانِ فَإِذَا ظَفَرَا بِمَوْضِعِ التَّوَكَّلِ أُوطِنَا.

Verily needlessness and honor keep wavering [and moving], but when they succeed in coming to a point of trust [in Allah], they settle there.¹¹⁹

Probably the most important effect and benefit of trusting in Allah is the attainment of peace of mind and tranquility. Knowing that Allah is always there and His will is always done gives believers and those who place their trust in him complete confidence and keeps them calm and composed even in the most stressful of situations. There are many examples of this to be found both in the Qur’ān and ḥadīth. For instance, when Prophet Mūsā (a) was leading his people out of Egypt and they came to the sea, and they saw that Pharaoh was coming with his army towards them, they began blaming Mūsā for leading them to their deaths. However, he remained calm and responded to them that

¹¹⁹ Al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfi*, vol. 2, p. 65.

he was unworried since he knew that Allah is with him:

فَلَمَّا تَرَا الْجُمُعَانَ قَالَ أَصْحَابُ مُوسَىٰ إِنَّا لَمُدْرِكُونَ ﴿٦١﴾ قَالَ كَلَّا إِنَّ مَعِيَ رَبِّي سَيَهْدِينِ

When the two hosts sighted each other, the companions of Mūsā said, 'Indeed we have been caught up.' He said, 'Certainly not! Indeed my Lord is with me. He will guide me.' (Q26:61-62)

So we see that even in such a terrifying and strenuous situation, Prophet Mūsā (a) was calm since he trusted in Allah and knew that Allah would give him a way out of the predicament. Similarly, when believers put their trust in Allah, no matter how difficult the calamity that befalls them is, they are still able to face it without trepidation. Therefore, trust in Allah is a means of fighting off the primary causes of overwhelming sadness and melancholy and not allowing it to take root in one's heart.

Being Satisfied with Allah's Decree (*Ridā*)

The believer who is firm in his belief, and knows his Lord, understands that Allah would never do anything to cause him harm. He has no need for anything, let alone the desire to see His believing servant suffer. Therefore, whatever is happening to him in the world must be good for him, even if its positive nature eludes him due to the pain it causes. It is here that the important concepts of trusting in Allah (*tawakkul*) and accepting His decree with contentment and satisfaction (*ridā*) come into play. Indeed, we are told that the way one thinks of Allah and feels towards Him is indicative of one's own status in the sight of Allah. As the Noble Prophet (ﷺ) is reported to have said, "Whoever would like to know what his status is with Allah, the Almighty, let him see what status Allah, the Almighty, has with him; for indeed Allah, the Exalted, holds the servant in the same esteem as the servant holds Him with

himself.”¹²⁰

When a group of his followers came to Prophet Mūsā (a) and requested him to find out from Allah which action they could perform that would bring them closer to Him and make Him pleased with them, Allah revealed to his Prophet, “Tell them to be pleased with Me so that I may be pleased with them.”¹²¹ And in a similar narration, Mūsā (a) himself asked Allah about the action that would please Him the most, to which He replied, “Verily My pleasure lies in what you dislike, and you cannot remain patient with what you dislike.” Mūsā said, “O Lord, show it to me!” He said, “Verily My pleasure is in your satisfaction with My decree [in every circumstance].”¹²² Indeed, Allah is said to have described His most beloved servant as being “The one who, when I take his beloved, he [accepts My decree submissively and] is at peace with Me.” Conversely, He described the one He is most angry with as “One who seeks from Me what is best for himself, but when I decree something for him, he is displeased with My decree.”¹²³

Accepting the decree of Allah in things that are beyond one’s control and being satisfied with His will in all that transpires leads to a sense of calm and tranquility in life. One who surrenders control and submits to the will of Allah can lead a pleasant and joyful life. On the other hand, one who tries to defy His will or fight His decree will always be sad and despondent. A tradition from the Holy Prophet (ﷺ) states, “Verily Allah, the Exalted, through His wisdom and majesty, placed joy and relief in acceptance [of His decree] and conviction, and He placed grief and sadness in doubt and disappointment [with His decree].”¹²⁴ Indeed, we have been promised that if we remain satisfied with whatever Allah has planned for us, there will always be goodness and

¹²⁰ See: Appendix, h. 53.

¹²¹ See: Appendix, h. 52.

¹²² See: Appendix, h. 55.

¹²³ See: Appendix, h. 56.

¹²⁴ See: Appendix, h. 59.

benefit in His plan for us, even if it is something we dislike.¹²⁵ In one tradition, Allah, the Exalted, is reported to have said to the Prophet (ﷺ), “I do not make My believing servant face anything except that I decree goodness in it for him; so let him accept My decree, let him be patient with My trial, and let him show gratitude for My blessings, [for then] I shall record him, O Muḥammad, among the truthful ones with Me.”¹²⁶

In a similar vein, it is narrated that Allah revealed to Mūsā (a), “I have not created anything dearer to Me than My believing servant. Indeed, I only test him for his own good, I grant him wellbeing for his own good, and I keep away some things from him for his own good. I know best what is beneficial for My servant, so let him be patient with My trials, show gratitude for My blessings, and accept My decree...”¹²⁷ In fact, the criteria of distinguishing a true believer from one who only feigns belief has been described by Imam al-Ṣādiq (a) as being “Through submission to Allah and satisfaction with whatever befalls him, be it pleasing or displeasing.”¹²⁸ This is perhaps why many a Prophet of Allah who asked to be shown the most devout worshipper or the one most loved by Allah on earth was taken to a helpless, disabled person who, despite all his physical disabilities and maladies, still expressed his complete satisfaction with the will of Allah.¹²⁹

The Seven Realizations that Rescue from Depression

Out of the numerous Islamic teachings that can potentially save an individual from any feelings of despondency, there are seven ‘realizations’ which, if meditated upon and accepted wholeheartedly, would surely pull people from the depths of despair and bring them out

¹²⁵ See: Appendix, ḥ. 60.

¹²⁶ See: Appendix, ḥ. 61.

¹²⁷ See: Appendix, ḥ. 62.

¹²⁸ See: Appendix, ḥ. 63.

¹²⁹ See: Appendix, ḥ. 65 & ḥ. 66 for example.

towards the light of joy and happiness in their lives. In the following pages, we will discuss these seven realizations and present them as practical steps towards recovery and even self-discovery, with the help of Allah. The seven realizations are:

(1) Realize that there is joy in giving

While some may consider giving as a cause of loss, and hence act niggardly towards others, Islam always encourages giving: giving wealth to the poor, giving time to the community, giving assistance to those in need of it, etc. In fact, the act of charitable giving in the way of Allah has been elevated by the Qur'an to the likeness of giving a 'loan' to Allah:

مَنْ ذَا الَّذِي يُقْرِضُ اللَّهَ قَرْضًا حَسَنًا فَيُضْعِفُهُ لَهُ وَأُضْعَافًا كَثِيرَةً وَاللَّهُ يَقْبِضُ
وَيَبْضُطُ وَإِلَيْهِ تُرْجَعُونَ

Who is it that will lend Allah a good loan that He may multiply it for him severalfold? Allah tightens and expands [the means of livelihood], and to Him you shall be brought back. (Q2:245)

Giving is a means of awakening our souls and it brings about a genuine concern for the wellbeing of others in society. There is a growing need for this, especially in the individualistic society we currently live in, where everyone is selfishly concerned only for himself and his immediate family, and does not care about the society as a whole. The culture of giving that is promoted by Islam, and the personal sacrifice of one's possessions, no matter how small, for the sake of helping those in need, is a blessing and a means of purifying our souls and wealth. The rewards mentioned in the Qur'an and ḥadīth for giving charity are too numerous to mention here. Suffice it to say that one is amply rewarded in both this world and the next.

Among the worldly rewards that we find, and that which pertains to our discussion here, is the joy brought about by the act of giving.

Research indicates that helping others lessens anxiety and increases positive feelings and satisfaction. When we are feeling low and unhappy, one of the best remedies is making someone else happy. And what better way to do this than to give something to someone in need, thereby alleviating their need while at the same time enhancing feelings of contentment and joy in both the giver and receiver! The joy felt when the person you help gratefully receives what you give is palpable and can clearly be sensed. However, giving also inculcates a more lasting means of happiness through reducing one's attachment to this world and readily parting with its wealth. When a person does not have a deep attachment to material wealth, he is less worried about creating, increasing, and protecting wealth. This itself removes a great burden of stress and leaves him feeling much happier and content.

From a wider social perspective as well, happiness results if everyone starts giving more freely since that leads to poverty reduction in the society. With reduced poverty comes reduction in crime, and that leads to greater security in the community, which in turn leads to less stress and more peace of mind. When giving in charity becomes a common practice, it also helps the economies of communities to grow and flourish since instead of keeping one's money in banks or other such institutions that promise some kind of return, which is often quite negligible, one invests the money in other people and they can then use it to start or expand their own businesses or income generating activities. This leads to the economic upliftment of the entire society and brings joy to many souls. Therefore, while in giving there is immediate joy, albeit for a short while, for the one who gives, there are many other long-term benefits of being charitable that can all enhance happiness and spread it around.

It is to this very important fact that the Qur'an refers when it states:

وَأَنْفِقُوا فِي سَبِيلِ اللَّهِ وَلَا تُلْقُوا بِأَيْدِيكُمْ إِلَى التَّهْلُكَةِ وَأَحْسِنُوا إِنَّ اللَّهَ يُحِبُّ
الْمُحْسِنِينَ

Spend in the way of Allah, and do not cast yourselves with your own hands into destruction; and be virtuous. Indeed Allah loves the virtuous.

(Q2:195)

This means that when one withholds his financial assistance from others in society, and this type of behavior becomes pervasive, it can lead to the downfall of that society. Therefore, we see that giving charity is a means of attaining joy and happiness in life, while at the same time playing a role in maintaining the welfare of the society.

(2) Realize that true peace of mind is in the remembrance of Allah

There are so many things happening all at once in this world that sometimes it can be quite stressful and overwhelming. The peace of mind that people crave, and for which they are even ready to travel to the ends of the earth, or climb towering mountain peaks, or seclude themselves in distant, isolated places, can only be attained through the remembrance of Allah. The Glorious Qur'an tells us:

الَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا وَتَطْمَئِنُّ قُلُوبُهُمْ بِذِكْرِ اللَّهِ أَلَا بِذِكْرِ اللَّهِ تَطْمَئِنُّ الْقُلُوبُ

...those who have faith and whose hearts find rest in the remembrance of Allah.' Behold! The hearts [only] find rest in Allah's remembrance!

(Q13:28)

Remembering Allah all the time keeps away evil thoughts and negativity, and brings a calming sensation to the heart and mind. A person who remembers Allah often keeps away from sin, and hence is saved from its repercussions and consequences, which itself is a cause of great grief and remorse. The kind of spiritual comfort and tranquility that *dhikr* of Allah brings cannot be attained through any other means. Thinking of material possessions that bring one joy soon leads to thoughts of ways to preserve them and prevent loss. That in itself leads to worry and anxiety rather than peace of mind.

On the other hand, remembering Allah leads one to remember that

he will eventually return to his Maker, and that everything he is experiencing in this world will soon come to an end. As such, it brings about a relief from the grief and sorrow that has cast a shadow over his heart, and causes the dark clouds of gloom to dissipate, allowing the rays of sunlit hope to shine through. Remembering Allah revives the soul and redirects it towards its purpose in this world. On the other hand, those who forget their Creator end up forgetting themselves and their real purpose of existence. The Qur'an describes these individuals thus:

وَلَا تَكُونُوا كَالَّذِينَ نَسُوا اللَّهَ فَأَنْسَاهُمْ أَنْفُسَهُمْ أُولَٰئِكَ هُمُ الْفَٰسِقُونَ

Do not be like those who forget Allah, so He makes them forget their own souls. It is they who are the transgressors. (Q59:19)

In addition to this, the Qur'an also tells us that such individuals who never think of Allah or remember Him will lead lives that are constricted spiritually. It is quite possible that this means they become easy prey for psychological problems such as depression and melancholy. It states:

وَمَنْ أَعْرَضَ عَن ذِكْرِي فَإِنَّ لَهُ مَعِيشَةً ضَنْكًا وَنَحْشُرُهُ يَوْمَ الْقِيَامَةِ أَعْمَىٰ

But whoever disregards My remembrance, his shall be [a wretched and] constricted life, and We shall raise him blind on the Day of Resurrection.'
(Q20:124)

The term *ma'ishatan danka* has been interpreted variously as 'wretched life', 'miserable life', 'life of hardship', 'life filled with narrowness', and 'straitened life'. Basically, it refers to a life of constriction that leaves a person feeling miserable. That is because he has disregarded the remembrance of Allah. And aside from having such a straitened life in the world, this kind of person will also be raised blind in the Hereafter. In all, therefore, it is important to realize the value of constantly remembering Allah as that will improve the quality of life for an individual in both worlds.

(3) Realize that Allah loves you when you are patient

When it comes to the subject of patience (*ṣabr*) itself, there are literally hundreds of narrations that highlight its importance in our ḥadīth works. The Messenger of Allah (ṣ) is quoted as having proclaimed, “Patience is half of faith.”¹³⁰ And in a tradition attributed both to the Prophet and Imam ‘Alī (a), it is stated that the position of patience with respect to faith is like that of the head with respect to the body. One who has no head has no functioning body, and one who has no patience has no faith.¹³¹ Furthermore, in a beautiful tradition, Imam Zayn al-‘Ābidīn (a) is reported to have said, “When Allah gathers the first and last [on the Day of Judgment], a caller will cry out: ‘Where are the patient ones? Let them enter Paradise without accounting.’ So a group of people will stand up and they will be met by some angels who ask them, ‘Where are you going, O children of Ādam?’ They will reply, ‘To Paradise.’ The angels will say, ‘Before accounting [for your deeds]?’ They will reply, ‘Yes.’ So the angels ask, ‘Who are you?’ They respond, ‘The patient ones.’ They ask, ‘And what was your patience?’ They say, ‘We were patient in obeying Allah and in avoiding disobedience to Him, until Allah, the Mighty and Majestic, took our souls.’ The angels will respond, ‘You are indeed as you say. Enter Paradise, for it is an excellent reward for the workers [of righteousness].’”¹³²

In a *ḥadīth qudsī*, Allah, to Whom belong might and majesty, is quoted by the Noble Prophet (ṣ) as having said, “When I cause some hardship to befall one of My servants in his body, his wealth, or his children, and then he encounters it with beautiful patience, I feel embarrassed to erect the scales [of accounting] for him or open up his book [of deeds] on the Day of Judgment.”¹³³ Small wonder it is, then,

¹³⁰ See: Appendix, ḥ. 24.

¹³¹ See: Appendix, ḥ. 26.

¹³² See: Appendix, ḥ. 29.

¹³³ See: Appendix, ḥ. 30.

that the Messenger of Allah described patience as “the best mount,” and then added, “Allah has not given His servant anything that is better or more expansive [and beneficial] for him than patience.”¹³⁴ While describing the positive outcome of patience, Imam al-Şādiq (a) gave his companion Abū Başīr the example of Prophet Yūsuf (a) and how being thrown by his brothers into the dark well, and then being imprisoned later in life due to the wiles of certain unchaste women, all resulted in a positive outcome for him due to his patience – he gained both prophethood and a lofty position of power and authority. Then the Imam said, “This is how goodness results from patience. So be patient and accustom yourself to patience, and you shall be rewarded.”¹³⁵ Indeed, as al-Bāqir (a) put it, Paradise is surrounded by tribulations and patience, so only those who are patient in the face of tribulations shall gain admission into Paradise.¹³⁶

True patience is quite different from outward, pretentious shows of patience. The Infallibles demonstrated to us true patience and showed us what it looks like and means. One of the many examples of this is the report that describes how a group of people were once with Imam ‘Alī ibn al-Ḥusayn (a) when one of his servants was rushing to get something roasted in the oven. He walked hastily with it, so the skewer fell from his hand on the infant son of the Imam (a), falling on his head and killing the child instantly. Imam ‘Alī ibn al-Ḥusayn (a) leapt up and when he saw that his son had died, he said to the servant, “I free you for the sake of Allah. Certainly you did not do this on purpose.” Then he began to prepare for the funeral rites of his son.¹³⁷ This is an example of true patience during a moment of overwhelming tribulation. Imam al-Şādiq (a) clarified the difference between true and pretentious patience when he said, “Every person claims to be patient,

¹³⁴ See: Appendix, ḥ. 32.

¹³⁵ See: Appendix, ḥ. 33.

¹³⁶ See: Appendix, ḥ. 34.

¹³⁷ See: Appendix, ḥ. 45.

yet it is only demonstrated by those who are humble. Every person denies impatience yet it is most evidently seen in the hypocrites, because the descent of tribulation and hardship divulges the true nature of the veracious and the liar.”¹³⁸

(4) Realize that this world is only temporary, and so are its tribulations

The true life is the life of the Hereafter, for which we have been created. The Glorious Qurʾān tells us:

وَمَا هَذِهِ الْحَيَاةُ الدُّنْيَا إِلَّا لَهْوٌ وَلَعِبٌ وَإِنَّ الدَّارَ الْآخِرَةَ لَهِىَ الْحَيَاةُ لَوْ كَانُوا يَعْلَمُونَ
The life of this world is nothing but diversion and play, but the abode of the Hereafter is indeed Life (itself), had they known! (Q29:64)

Addressing the people, Amīr al-Muʾminīn (a) once said:

عباد الله! إنكم وما تاملون من هذه الدنيا أثوياء مؤجلون.

O servants of Allah! You, and what you aspire of this world, are just temporary guests [here].¹³⁹

This important realization changes the way we think of this world and how we interact with it. It curtails lengthy aspirations and false hopes, many of which are responsible for our sorrow and despondency when we fail to achieve them. Furthermore, it strengthens us in the face of worldly hardships since we know that whatever we are facing is only momentary and will soon pass. This way of looking at the world has also been beautifully explained by the Noble Prophet (s) in his advice to one of his companions, when he said:

كن في الدنيا كأنك غريب وكأنك عابر سبيل، فاعدد نفسك في الموتى.

Behave in this world as if you are a stranger, and as if you are a mere

¹³⁸ See: Appendix, h. 44.

¹³⁹ Al-Raḍī, *Nahj al-Balāghah*, sermon 129.

traveler [who is passing through], and count yourself among those who have died [for you will soon join them].¹⁴⁰

If we understand that this world is only like a place of transit, and our permanent abode is in the Hereafter, then we would automatically begin preparing for that abode. While doing that, any hurdles which come about in the form of worldly loss will not make as deep an impact on us as it would if we thought that this world was the be all and end all of our existence. Therefore, this realization is extremely helpful in alleviating sorrow and depression.

(5) Realize that trials are part and parcel of worldly life

The entire purpose of creation is, according to the Qur'an, to test humankind so that those who perform the best deeds are distinguished from the rest of the people. As such, trials are part of life and there is nobody who has a life which is free of any form of hardship or tribulation. This fundamental truth is stated explicitly in the Glorious Qur'an when it says:

الَّذِي خَلَقَ الْمَوْتَ وَالْحَيَاةَ لِيَبْلُوَكُمْ أَيُّكُمْ أَحْسَنُ عَمَلًا وَهُوَ الْعَزِيزُ الْعَفُورُ

He [it is] who created death and life that He may test you [to see] which of you is best in conduct. And He is the All-mighty, the All-forgiving.

(Q67:2)

It is important never to lose hope when calamities befall, and to understand that most of the afflictions that one faces in this world are the result of human actions. Allah has no need to cause harm to any of His creation, and He is ever-Merciful to them. He reaffirms this Himself in the Qur'an when He says:

مَا يُبَدَّلُ الْقَوْلُ لَدَيَّ وَمَا أَنَا بِظَلَمٍ لِّلْعَبِيدِ

¹⁴⁰ Al-Tūsī, *al-Amālī*, p. 402.

The word [of judgement] is unalterable with Me, and I am not tyrannical to My servants.’ (Q50:29)

Therefore, one should never think that Allah enjoys seeing His servants suffer or that He acts unjustly towards them. Rather, it is the result of one’s own actions, even when it is not clearly apparent. The Qur’an tells us this when it proclaims:

وَمَا أَصَابَكُمْ مِّنْ مُّصِيبَةٍ فَبِمَا كَسَبَتْ أَيْدِيكُمْ وَيَعْفُوا عَنْ كَثِيرٍ

Whatever affliction that may visit you is because of what your hands have earned, and He excuses many [an offense]. (Q42:30)

Taking all these facts into consideration helps a person realize that hardships are part of life, and many times they are the result of one’s own deeds. This helps a person to maintain a positive impression of Allah and to eschew a feeling of hopelessness when afflictions befall. Knowing that all human beings face tests and trials in this world also helps a person avoid feelings of loneliness and seclusion. The trials may be different, but there is no human being in this world who does not encounter some kind of hardship or another.

(6) Realize that Allah is always watching and aware

Knowing that Allah is always watching and that He sees everything that happens to us is comforting for believers. This is because they know that nothing which transpires will be disregarded and it is all being recorded. If they are patient, Allah sees that and will reward them amply for their patience. If they are being oppressed, Allah knows what occurs and He will punish the oppressor. Therefore, when faced with any hardship in life which makes one sorrowful, keeping this fact in mind offers one some solace. Indeed, the Glorious Qur’an tells us:

وَأَصْبِرْ لِحُكْمِ رَبِّكَ فَإِنَّكَ بِأَعْيُنِنَا وَسَبِّحْ بِحَمْدِ رَبِّكَ حِينَ تَقُومُ

So submit patiently to the judgement of your Lord, for indeed you fare

before Our eyes. And celebrate the praise of your Lord when you rise [at dawn]. (Q52:48)

After suffering so much on the Day of ‘Āshūrā’, Imam al-Ḥusayn (a) is reported to have said:

هُوَ عَلَيَّ مَا نَزَلَ بِي أَنَّهُ بَعِينُ اللَّهِ.

What has befallen me is made easy to bear due to the fact that it is being watched by Allah.¹⁴¹

The fact that Allah was seeing all that befell Abā ‘Abdillāh (a) and his family and companions in the plains of Karbalā’ was a source of solace for him and made all the hardships easier for him to bear. He knew that none of it would go unrewarded, and that none of the evil oppressors would remain unpunished. In the same way, the realization that Allah is everywhere and nothing is hidden from Him, not even the innermost thoughts, ideas, opinions, etc. of the creatures, leads one to feel secure and gives a sense of hope that even in the darkest times, Allah is there and He sees what one is undergoing. Even when nobody can relate to what one is feeling inside, Allah knows and is aware of it. He knows His creatures better than they know themselves.

(7) Realize that you are never alone

Even when a person thinks he is completely alone, he always has company! First and foremost, Allah is ever-present. The Qur’ān describes His omnipresence beautifully when it states:

وَلِلَّهِ الْمَشْرِقُ وَالْمَغْرِبُ فَأَيْنَمَا تُوَلُّوا فَثَمَّ وَجْهُ اللَّهِ إِنَّ اللَّهَ وَاسِعٌ عَلِيمٌ

To Allah belong the east and the west: so whichever way you turn, there is the face of Allah! Allah is indeed all-bounteous, all-knowing. (Q2:115)

And:

¹⁴¹ Ibn Ṭāwūs, *al-Malḥūf*, p. 117.

وَهُوَ مَعَكُمْ أَيْنَ مَا كُنْتُمْ وَاللَّهُ بِمَا تَعْمَلُونَ بَصِيرٌ

... *And He is with you wherever you may be, and Allah watches what you do.* (Q57:4)

So we see that we are never alone because Allah is always with us. Furthermore, each individual has some angels with him, to record his deeds or to guard him as commanded by Allah. This has also been mentioned in the Qur'an. For instance, one verse states:

مَا يَلْفِظُ مِنْ قَوْلٍ إِلَّا لَدَيْهِ رَقِيبٌ عَتِيدٌ

Not a word does a person utter but that there is a ready observer beside him. (Q50:18)

This verse and others like it, as well as numerous traditions, tell us that there are angels who are always present with every individual and have been tasked with recording all the deeds that a person does. Finally, aside from the angels, even one's own body, including the limbs, organs, etc. are actually witnesses that are present with an individual and will testify about his actions on the Day of Judgment. The Qur'an portrays this vividly when it states:

حَتَّىٰ إِذَا مَا جَاءُوهَا شَهِدَ عَلَيْهِمْ سَمْعُهُمْ وَأَبْصَارُهُمْ وَجُلُودُهُمْ بِمَا كَانُوا يَعْمَلُونَ

When they come to it, their hearing, their eyes, and their skins will bear witness against them concerning what they used to do. (Q41:20)

Therefore, a person is never truly alone. When one is depressed and sad, preferring to keep away from the company of others, he should never think that he is all alone. In fact, loneliness is one of the factors that compounds grief and sorrow. Realizing that you are never alone and that there is always someone with you can go a long way to alleviate the feeling of loneliness, and may give relief and comfort in times of despondency.

These seven realizations can help any individual to come out of a

state of pervasive sorrow in his life, as long as they are accompanied by faith. Since it is but human to forget, one should always try to remind himself of these truths and reflect upon them as often as possible in order to bring back the positive feelings of hope, joy, and pleasure into his life. In addition to that, one should make it a habit to supplicate to Allah and ask for His assistance. To make things easier for the esteemed reader, we have included some of the recommended supplications that can help to alleviate sorrow in the last chapter of this book.

When the Shoe is on the Other Foot – How to Help the Depressed

Sometimes you may be the one to whom someone suffering from depression or intense grief turns to for support. It is paramount in such cases to offer support in a constructive way so as to enable the suffering individual to recover quicker. Here we will look at some methods that can help in this process:

- (1) Active listening: Listening actively means being fully present and focused on what the other person is saying. It is the opposite of distracted listening which gives the impression that you do not care about what the person talking to you is speaking about. Being distracted by your mobile phone or fidgeting, looking around, or any such activity can be unsettling for the suffering person who is trying to tell you his or her story.
- (2) Careful responses: It is important to respond thoughtfully to what the bereaved or depressed person is saying, realizing that they are in a painful state and need comfort and support. It is important not to turn the focus to yourself by making judgemental statements or even saying things like, “Something similar happened to me,” or “This is what I would do if I were you,” and so on. At the same time, do not try to look for the proverbial ‘silver lining’ in the situation since that would be

unhelpful. When you have listened to the sad person, do not simply walk away – offer a reassuring hand squeeze or a similar gesture and suggest to meet up again another day, reminding them that you are there for them. In this way, they will feel that you care about what they are going through.

- (3) Do not make assumptions: Let the person whom you are trying to help inform you of how he or she is feeling. Do not try to be a know-it-all, and realize that every situation is unique and that there are many things of which you are unaware. Connect with them on their terms, not yours, while understanding that they are in a state for flux: how they feel today may be different from how they feel tomorrow. Also, do not assume or expect them to feel better with every passing day. Coping with grief and depression is hard. Sometimes one may move two steps forward and then five steps back. Therefore, avoid giving them any unsolicited advice.
- (4) Be there for them: It is important that when you accept the role of supporter, you are always there for the person and never avoid them. Remain patient with them; sometimes it can be overwhelming to deal with someone who is undergoing great upheaval in his life. However, just being available and close by is helpful, even if you don't talk. Doing small and simple things like driving them to a medical appointment, helping to get groceries for them, etc. helps a lot. Try to stay in touch with a simple "Salāmun 'alaykum" and no matter how many times they avoid participating in your gatherings, do not stop inviting them. Days like anniversaries, birthdays, etc. are especially sensitive times for the bereaved so show them support on these days.
- (5) Never betray their confidence: Sometimes the bereaved will divulge some private information to you, and in Islam such

information is considered a trust (*amānah*). It is therefore very important to ensure that you do not share the information with anyone, even if it be your closest confidant.

Islam and Modern Psychotherapy & Counselling

There are many evident problems with the modern paradigm of psychological counselling or psychotherapy. While it is arguably better than the far worse option of medication and use of psychiatric drugs, which may only be justifiable in the most severe cases of neurosis (and that is outside the realm of our current discussion here), it is still very problematic as far as Islam is concerned. This is primarily because modern psychology does not believe in a soul, and hence attributes any problems of the mind exclusively to material causes. In the case of depression, it is claimed that a disruption in serotonin levels, or serotonin activity, is responsible for depression. This chemical imbalance, which they argue as being the cause of melancholia, is then addressed in various ways and if nothing works, antidepressants are prescribed in order to correct that imbalance in the brain.

However, like most of the precepts of modern psychology, the whole idea of chemical imbalance being the primary cause of depression is based on mere conjecture. In fact, recent findings of a decades-long study show that there is no evidence of any link between serotonin levels and depression.¹⁴² Hence the biochemical cause theory has essentially been rubbished, like many other earlier theories in the field. And the reality, as Muslims know, is that just as physical maladies affect the body, certain spiritual maladies affect the soul, and it is more than likely that depression has its root cause in one such immaterial malady. As such, the approach of Islam in dealing with depression is quite different from that of western psychology. The Freudian practice of laying on a

¹⁴² See: <https://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2022/07/220720080145.htm>

couch and divulging the most intimate details of one's life to a stranger, who just so happens to have a degree in psychology, is alien to Islam.

In fact, the Qur'an is quite clear in its instruction to believers not to become too intimate with the wrong people and thereby divulge sensitive information to them. Q3:118 states:

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا لَا تَتَّخِذُوا بِطَانَةَ مِّن دُونِكُمْ لَا يَأْلُونَكُمْ خَبَالًا وَدُّوا مَا عَنِتُّمْ

O you who have faith! Do not take your confidants from others than yourselves; they will spare nothing to ruin you. They are eager to see you in distress...

Hence, we see that a believer must espouse precaution when it comes to sharing intimate details or secrets about his life or about other believers. It is for the same reason that we find numerous traditions emphasizing the importance of keeping one's secrets hidden from others. For instance, we are told:

صدر العاقل صندوق سره.

The chest of a wise person is the strongbox of his secrets.¹⁴³

Imam 'Alī (a) is further reported as having said:

الكتمان طرف من السعادة.

Concealing [one's secrets] is part of felicity.¹⁴⁴

Furthermore, we have been told that one of the means of attaining success in any project is keeping information about it hidden until it is ready. Imam 'Alī is reported to have said in this regard:

أنجح الأمور ما أحاط به الكتمان.

The most successful matters are those that have been shrouded in

¹⁴³ Al-Raḍī, *Nahj al-Balāghah*, saying no. 6.

¹⁴⁴ Al-Ḥarrānī, *Tuḥaf al-Uqūl*, p. 223.

secretcy.¹⁴⁵

And in the same vein, it is reported that he (a) said:

جمع خير الدنيا والآخرة في كتمان السرِّ ومصادقة الأخيار، وجمع الشرِّ في الإذاعة
ومؤاخاة الأشرار.

That which brings together the good of this world and the next is [found] in concealing secrets and being friends with the virtuous, and that which brings together evil is in divulging secrets and being brotherly with the wicked.¹⁴⁶

There are many similar traditions that emphasize the importance of keeping secrets hidden from others and not divulging them. Indeed, over the ages certain groups have tried to access the secrets of others using various means. For instance, the Roman Catholic clergy hold confession sessions where they listen to the secret confessions of the people, and while many are sincere and keep these secrets to themselves, there have been some unscrupulous individuals among them who misused the information for their own benefit. That is why the Protestant movement had a problem with the whole idea of confessing sins to priests.¹⁴⁷ Similarly, some Sufis insist that in order to be initiated to the path, one must divulge all his secrets to the spiritual guide and submit in obeisance to him completely, with no room for questioning or disobedience.¹⁴⁸

¹⁴⁵ Al-Āmidī, *Ghurar al-Ḥikam wa Durar al-Kalim* (English Translation), ḥ. 563.

¹⁴⁶ Al-Mufid, *al-Ikhtiṣās*, p. 218.

¹⁴⁷ Interestingly, the whole concept of confessing sins to others is actually said to be promoted by the Bible. James 5:16 reads: *Confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The earnest prayer of a righteous person has great power and produces wonderful results.* So even while Protestants do not confess their sins to priests the way Catholics do, they still believe in confessing their sins to other believers. (See: <https://tedhaggardblog.com/2020/05/11/a-protestant-view-of-the-necessity-of-the-confessional/>)

¹⁴⁸ Nile Green, *Sufism – A Global History* (Wiley, 2012), p. 8.

One of the main issues in certain Muslim communities pertains to marital problems. Some communities have committees of individuals who are tasked with “marital dispute resolution”. However, having personally participated in this endeavour and interviewed a number of elders from my own community who have served in this capacity for decades, I can safely say that this approach to resolution of marital disputes is a non-starter. I was not able to find a single case where a marriage was ultimately saved after it had reached the committee that was meant to help resolve the disagreements between the spouses. Rather, the Qur’ān has already given guidelines on how to resolve such disputes. We are told that an elder or trusted individual from each of the two families of the spouses should play the role of trying to resolve their disputes. Note that only one individual from each side is to be involved, and that too, from within the family. Q4:35 states:

وَإِنْ خِفْتُمْ شِقَاقَ بَيْنِهِمَا فَابْعَثُوا حَكَمًا مِّنْ أَهْلِهِۦ وَحَكَمًا مِّنْ أَهْلِهَا إِنْ يُرِيدَا إِصْلَاحًا
يُوفِّقِ اللَّهُ بَيْنَهُمَا إِنَّ اللَّهَ كَانَ عَلِيمًا حَكِيمًا

If you fear a split between the two of them, then appoint an arbiter from his relatives and an arbiter from her relatives. If they desire reconciliation, Allah shall reconcile them. Indeed Allah is all-knowing, all-aware.

Indeed, it can be seen that as long as marital problems remain a secret between the spouses, there is a good chance that they can be resolved. After all, nobody has been disgraced or humiliated in public. If things become very bad, and divorce is sought, then according to the verse quoted above, arbiters are supposed to be appointed from the relatives of both sides. This is another example of how it is never a good idea to divulge personal matters and secrets to outsiders and unknown or unrelated individuals. In fact, perhaps a study can be carried out to show how detrimental it is to speak to a counsellor about certain shameful secrets. It would not be surprising if results of such a study showed that it would actually be more harmful to attend psychotherapy

sessions than not.

Another idea that is propounded by modern psychology which is incongruent with the teachings of Islam is that keeping feelings of rage or grief “locked up” is unhealthy as over time, such feelings accumulate and, like air that is continually pumped into a balloon, may burst out uncontrollably. As such, they claim that by speaking to a counsellor, one can release the pent-up rage or grief and attain relief thereby. In Islam, however, the idea of swallowing anger and suppressing grief, or displaying it in moderation only, has been encouraged. The Qur’an describes the virtuous as having, among other characteristics, the ability to swallow their rage. Q3:134 states:

الَّذِينَ يُنْفِقُونَ فِي السَّرَّاءِ وَالضَّرَّاءِ وَالْكُظُمِينَ الْغَيْظِ وَالْعَافِينَ عَنِ النَّاسِ وَاللَّهُ يُحِبُّ
الْمُحْسِنِينَ

...those who spend in ease and adversity, and suppress (lit. swallow) their anger, and excuse [the faults of] the people, and Allah loves the virtuous.

Similarly, when it comes to grief and complaining about heartache, the Qur’an describes how the chosen Prophets of Allah would act. The example of Prophet Ya‘qūb is quite apt, when he told his sons:

قَالَ إِنَّمَا أَشْكُوا بَنِي وَحُزْنِي إِلَى اللَّهِ وَأَعْلَمُ مِنَ اللَّهِ مَا لَا تَعْلَمُونَ

He said, ‘I complain of my anguish and grief only to Allah. I know from Allah what you do not know.’ (Q12:86)

So instead of complaining to any other human being, who would surely have his own burden of trials and hardships to face, it is recommended to complain to Allah directly, and to express one’s grief and anguish in His presence alone.

Thus we see that since the whole paradigm of modern psychology is based on a rejection of everything that falls under the category of the unseen (*ghayb*), it does not fit in well with the basic teachings of Islam. Of course, when it comes to depression, it must be reiterated that any

substantiated findings that link certain material causes to depression would be acceptable by Islam; perhaps not as primary causes, but as partial or secondary causes. So if it is established beyond any doubt that depression is hereditary, for example, then that would in no way be rejected on the basis of Islamic tenets. Similarly, for there to be an established and proven link between chemical imbalance in the brain and depression is perfectly acceptable. It does not, however, mean that the chemical imbalance is the primary cause of depression. Rather, it might well be a secondary cause, or even a consequence of depression. Indeed, as Andrew Solomon points out in his book on depression, *The Noonday Demon*, “Everything about a person is chemical if one wants to think in those terms. The sun shines brightly and that’s just chemical too, and it’s chemical that rocks are hard, and that the sea is salt [*sic*], and that certain springtime afternoons carry in their gentle breezes a quality of nostalgia that stirs the heart to longings...” Yet this kind of reductionist thinking in modern psychology could be, as David McDowell of Columbia University aptly calls it, a kind of “modern neuromythology.”

Modern psychotherapy is inherently elitist. It pairs an expensive, highly trained individual with another individual who feels sad, lonely, ineffective, nervous, or otherwise out of sorts. When much of the planet lives in poverty, it could be seen as First World selfishness to deploy mental health experts to work with privileged individuals, one at a time. These are the same mental health experts who supposedly have the knowledge and skills to help fix problems in the prevailing social system, thereby doing away with the root causes of many issues that adversely affect the mental health of members of the community as a whole. Nevertheless, this knowledge and talent is squandered on a handful of relatively wealthy individual clients for the sake of financial gain.

This is if we even accept the benefits of psychotherapy to begin with. In reality, however, there is no hard science to prove that

psychotherapy works to improve society or benefit humanity (in the ways that medicine or engineering does), beyond the subjective reports of recipients, or other unreliable gauges. Additionally, there is no consistently effective way of training therapists to a standard because unlike novices in almost any other skill, they cannot be observed and corrected while learning. There are no practical methods for judging a therapist's effectiveness, and studies that attempt to do so find huge variations in quality. Moreover, there is nearly zero quality control both during and after training. On the other hand, at least some evidence exists that alternative methods, such as guided spiritual practices, working as a volunteer helping others, mentoring, meditation and even self-hypnosis, among others, can be just as good as psychotherapy. Despite their efforts, researchers have not been able to identify any approach to psychotherapy as being more effective than another. Even the American Psychological Association, a trade group for practitioners which strongly advocates for psychotherapy, admits this.¹⁴⁹

Interestingly, psychologists insist on long-term treatments for depression. This is because it is claimed that over one-third of those who are treated for major depression experience a relapse in the first year after 'successful' treatment that leads to remission of their symptoms. Hence, they recommend long-term psychological care and according to current standard practices, the recommended treatment would last for at least five years, especially in individuals who have experienced three or more episodes of major depression within a period of five years.¹⁵⁰ The remedies offered by Islam, on the other hand, are lifestyle changes that require some determination and resolve, but once they have been adopted, there is little chance of recurrence of depression.

¹⁴⁹ See: <https://www.apa.org/about/policy/resolution-psychotherapy>

¹⁵⁰ Perhaps this recommendation by psychologists is meant to serve their own interests as they make a living by counselling the depressed individuals and charging per session.

Some Topics for Further Research

There are a number of potential studies that might greatly enhance our understanding of the way Islamic teachings can help to counter depression and its effects. Due to the nature and scope of the present work, we cannot dwell on these matters. However, those who are interested can do their own research on any of these topics to see their effects. The topics we suggest include, but are not limited to, the following:

(1) Whether one who is afflicted by severe, debilitating depression is still considered a *mukallaf* (i.e. one who is obliged to act in accordance with Islamic law and perform all the prescribed acts of worship). Just as one who goes insane, or loses consciousness, is considered to be exempt from *taklif* during the period of his loss of sanity or consciousness, would one who is so deeply affected by depression that he cannot even get out of bed also be exempted from the same? What do the jurists say about that and what is the reasoning behind it?

(2) How does listening to the beautiful recitation of the Qurʾān, or reciting it, affect depressed individuals? A practical study or collection of the experiences of various individuals might shed some light on this. Indeed, Imam Zayn al-ʿĀbidīn (a) is reported to have stated that if everyone on earth died and he was left all alone, he would not feel lonely as long as the Qurʾān was with him.¹⁵¹

(3) The role of marital disagreements in causing depression, and how the current trends in family life are contributing to it. A comparison can be made with the family structures, roles of the spouses and the different responsibilities of each in the past. This can then be further expanded to examine the effects of such family upbringing on

¹⁵¹ Al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfi*, vol. 2, p. 602.

the children as well.

(4) How social media has contributed to the increased cases of depression in present times and what can be done to curtail its negative effects.

4

THE QUESTION OF SUICIDE

Defining Suicide

Suicide is a phenomenon found in almost every human society and it is considered one of the common forms of violence, especially in the modern world. The etymology of the term suicide comes from the Latin *sui* meaning 'oneself' and *cidium* meaning 'killing'.¹ Unlike other acts of violence, because suicide is self-inflicted, both the assailant and the victim are one and the same. The term "suicide" was first used in English by the British scholar Sir Thomas Browne in his work *Religio Medici*,² and it did not pass to other languages such as French until the late eighteenth century. The commonly accepted definition of suicide is: the intentional act of killing oneself.

Some suicides are impulsive while others are premeditated. Some plan their own suicide for a long time before actually acting on their plan. Suicide is thus of different types and forms: there is individual suicide or collective suicide, with the latter involving a group of individuals who take their lives at the same time. There is volitional and coerced suicide, although the latter is not considered suicide by some. There is public or private suicide, depending on where and how a person kills himself. And there is also assisted or resisted suicide. In general, the act of self-murder is considered taboo and is frowned upon

¹ James Mitchell, *Significant Etymology - Roots Stems and Branches of the English Language* (Oxford: Blackwood and Sons, 1908), p. 147.

² Sir Thomas Browne, *Religio Medici*, ed. W. E. Greenhill (London: Macmillan, 1904), p. 69.

by human beings, except in certain exceptional cases, as we shall see.

In some instances, suicide is actually considered moralistic or altruistic. However, it is our contention that for such cases, the term 'suicide' is a misnomer and a more accurate way to refer to such actions would be 'self-sacrifice'. Indeed, giving up one's own life to save others or for a greater cause that would lead to the betterment of the lives of those who remain behind is the ultimate form of self-sacrifice. However, at times there is a thin line between suicide and self-sacrifice. For instance, if we consider the ritualistic self-disemboweling of some Japanese warriors as a demonstration of fealty to their overlords, would that be construed as self-sacrifice even when there was nothing to be gained by anyone, or would it simply be a case of suicide?

Furthermore, if suicide is defined as an act that is undertaken knowingly and intentionally, then what would we say if a young child were to hang himself to death – would that not count as suicide since the child had no understanding about death or the consequences of his actions? Another quandary relates to what has been termed as 'assisted suicide'. If a person inflicts violence on himself with the help of another, is that self-harm? And if he kills himself while being aided by another person is that still suicide? There are a number of reported cases where doctors have 'assisted' terminally ill patients to kill themselves by supplying them with lethal chemicals. Is that homicide or suicide?³

And what if one is ordered by his superior to kill him? For instance, the Bible tells us that after his defeat in battle, King Saul ordered his own shield bearer to slay him with a sword.⁴ Would the shield bearer

³ Interestingly, euthanasia or 'assisted suicide' is legal in places like Switzerland, Belgium, Luxembourg and the Netherlands, and people actually travel to some of these places from other countries to end their lives in what has been dubbed "suicide tourism". Some states in the US have also decriminalized euthanasia. Aside from terminal illness, Belgium and Netherlands also allow suicide for other reasons like autism, anorexia, chronic-fatigue, paralysis, blindness coupled with deafness and manic depression.

⁴ 1 Samuel 31:4

be punishable for following these instructions? And if he knew he would be punished by being put to death for killing the king, would it not be him who committed suicide by following his instructions? When the Greek philosopher Socrates was sentenced to death by poison, he carried out the sentence and drank the hemlock instead of using an opportunity to flee for dear life; so was that suicide? In present-day America, the phenomenon of “suicide by cop” is also witnessed, where some individuals goad police officers into shooting them by brandishing unloaded weapons and other such actions.⁵ Are individuals who do this guilty of suicide, thereby absolving the police who shoot them dead?

Hence, we see that while there is little disagreement about the general definition of suicide, when it comes to real-life scenarios, there are many cases where lines are blurred and it is unclear whether suicide would be the appropriate term to describe the death of an individual. The understanding of what constitutes suicide also changes depending on time, place, cultural and religious beliefs, etc. For instance, in ancient times, it was considered self-murder even when one was coerced into killing himself, as in the case of Socrates, while modern scholars would more likely consider it an execution. Hence, a contextual understanding of the term is of paramount importance.

After Emile Durkheim’s classical work on suicide in 1897 (which we will discuss later), scientific studies on suicide increased exponentially, and each year new books and journal articles are seen on the subject. As a research topic, it has even got its own name, ‘suicidology’. In various universities and medical colleges, there are thriving suicidology departments and units, such as at Johns Hopkins University in the US among others. The American government’s Department of Health sponsors the *Bulletin of Suicidology* magazine, and every year there are a number of international conferences that

⁵ Jason Manning, *Suicide - The Social Causes of Self-Destruction* (US: University of Virginia Press, 2020), p. 6.

discuss suicide and themes related to it.

Causes of Suicide

Traditionally, the reasons given for suicide have been deep sadness or depression, being faced with sudden dire circumstances, or the devil's influence. Those who were insane and ended up killing themselves were either forgiven or faced minimal censure. In eighteenth century Europe, the depressive episodes that lead to suicide were referred to as "melancholia" and whenever any discussion was held about suicide, melancholia was deemed to be its cause. For example, in England, in the mid-eighteenth century, the rate of suicide among the aristocracy became so high that the practice became known as "the English malady". In seeking an explanation for the behavior, some authors posited that the root of the problem was the melancholy disposition among the English that was caused by gloomy weather, as well as the development of anti-religious thought among the British.⁶

Sometimes, there is no apparently discernable cause for a suicide. One of the earliest records of suicide is actually about a 'suicide cluster' which was described by Plutarch (c. 119 CE), where something unknown came over the young women in Miletus and led to a kind of derangement of mind and yearning for death. This resulted in an insane impulse to kill themselves and many young maidens would steal away and hang themselves. No amount of persuasion, argument or entreaty made any difference, and these young ladies circumvented every effort by their watchers to escape and end their lives. Finally, it was proposed that a new law be passed where the women who hang themselves would have their denuded corpses carried through the marketplace. This proposal worked, since the women who were worried about their

⁶ George Minois, *History of Suicide: Voluntary Death in Western Culture* (US: John Hopkins University, 2001), pp. 181-190.

reputations could not bear the thought of being disgraced by having their bodies paraded through the streets, and thus the epidemic came to an end.⁷

The perception that those who wrote positively about suicide were somehow responsible for the suicides that took place after their works were published persisted among the people. When Wolfgang von Goethe published his famous novel, *The Sufferings of Young Werther* in 1774, it was followed by a spate of suicides and many people indicated that they were influenced by the book, keeping it besides them when they ended their lives or even dressing like the protagonist of the story, Werther. Across Europe, people were speaking of how Goethe's novel had inspired many people to commit suicide, especially spurned young men in love. One author wrote, "Goethe has caused more suicides than the most beautiful woman in the world." Goethe later came to regret his work and in future editions he included a note at the beginning of the book stating "Do not follow my example." Due to the apparent negative influence of this work, it was banned in many countries across Europe.⁸

In the twentieth century, one of the main western thinkers who discussed suicide at length was Emile Durkheim. In his classical study *Suicide: A Study in Sociology*, Durkheim strongly propounded the idea that suicide varies from one society to another and is thus affected by prevailing social conditions. Durkheim's work relied mostly on statistical analysis and is deemed one of the pioneering sociological studies. Among his conclusions were that suicide rates are generally higher in men than in women, though women who remain childless have a suicide rate closer to that of men later in life. He also concluded that suicide rates are higher for single people than for those who are

⁷ Plutarch, "The Bravery of Women", in *Moralia*, trans. Frank Cole Babbitt (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1931), [11], p. 249.

⁸ Jennifer Michael Hecht, *Stay – A History of Suicide and the Philosophies Against It* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2013), p. 113.

married, higher for those who do not have children than for parents, higher for soldiers than for civilians, higher in times of peace than in times of war, and higher among the educated than among the uneducated.

Suicide was further classified by Durkheim into four types: egoistic, altruistic, anomic, and fatalistic. According to him, egoistic suicide occurs in one who lacks a sense of communal belonging and is thus overcome by feelings of apathy and despair. Altruistic suicide is the opposite of this. A person gets so deeply involved with a community or group that upholding its ideals becomes more important to him than life itself. Anomic suicide results from a person's confusion and uncertainty regarding morality and is normally linked to drastic social and economic changes in his life such as great, unexpected wealth or sudden, extreme poverty. Fatalistic suicide on the other hand, is where one is constantly oppressed and has his wishes and desires endlessly thwarted. This classification was subsequently used for more than a century by sociologists and psychologists who studied suicide.

Durkheim's central thesis was based on the idea that the modern world had led to a breakdown in communal relationships which in turn deprived individuals of a sense of belonging. Feeling out of place and not knowing where they fit in, people suffered from a crisis of lack of close social interaction. This in turn led to an increase in cases of depression which led to more suicide. Loss of human connection and the collective force of community was, for Durkheim, the primary cause of suicide in the modern west.⁹ He insisted that people cannot become attached to lofty goals if they do not feel a sense of belonging, so by freeing people of all the pressure of social responsibilities, they are only left with sorrow and melancholy. Society is what unites people and gives them incentive to go on living for a higher purpose.¹⁰

⁹ Emile Durkheim, *Suicide*, ed. George Simpson, trans. John Spaulding (New York: Free Press, 1979), p. 209.

¹⁰ *Ibid*, p. 337.

THE QUESTION OF SUICIDE

While it is true that one of the primary causes of suicide is depression and hopelessness, not all suicides are due to depression. Some, like in the case of euthanasia, are just to seek relief from pain, while others are for more lofty ideals such as defeating a powerful enemy through self-sacrifice, as Japan's *kamikaze* pilots did in World War II by flying their explosive-laden airplanes into enemy targets at the cost of their own lives. Attacks by a desperate minority who are ready to sacrifice their lives to fight an oppressive majority that is stronger often leads to suicide attacks. This might be considered the greatest form of valor and self-sacrifice. In fact, some of the strongest armies are left substantially weakened when faced by such 'suicide-fighters'.¹¹

One of the common causes of suicide is bereavement following the death of a spouse or a close family member. Suicide by those who have been widowed has been studied and shown to be of a higher rate when compared to those who are married. The studies show that the risk of suicide is highest during the period immediately following the loss. Thus, in these cases, one ends his or her own life soon after the death of a loved one. From the notes left behind by such suicides, we learn that the motivation behind these bereavement suicides is overwhelming grief, and some even speak of their hope of joining their loved one in the afterlife. To avoid the grief of losing a spouse, sometimes when one is diagnosed with a terminal illness, both spouses may decide to end their lives together in a suicide pact.¹²

Imprisonment is another factor that often leads people to end their lives. Sometimes the prospect of prolonged imprisonment is too difficult to bear and leads some to take their lives, preferring death to long-term internment. Of the many examples of this cause of suicide, one which stands out is that of the American inventor Aaron Swartz, who hanged himself when he was faced with long term imprisonment

¹¹ See: Ami Pedahzur, *Suicide Terrorism* (Malden MA: Polity Press, 2005), pp. 89-91.

¹² Manning, *Suicide - The Social Causes of Self-Destruction*, pp. 74-5.

for illegally downloading academic papers from an online database.¹³

In recent times, financial trouble has become one of the leading causes of suicide. Sometimes even what may appear to be trivial ends up being an impetus for someone to take his own life. There are documented cases of people killing themselves when their insurance or pension claims are denied, for example.¹⁴ Speaking of economic factors that lead to suicide, we must not forget the growing problem of overwhelming debt. With the burgeoning of credit culture where people can buy now and pay later, many people put themselves in so much debt that it becomes nearly impossible to repay what they owe. This leads to desperation which in turn leads to suicide. One of the examples of this can be seen in the case of farmers in India, many of whom resort to suicide when their crops fail and they are unable to repay their loans.¹⁵ Another similar case was witnessed in Geneva when technological changes in the 18th century led to the unemployment of skilled watchmakers who, having lost their livelihoods, committed suicide in such large numbers that they had the highest rate of suicide of any occupational group at the time.¹⁶

Another common cause of suicide is debilitating, painful, chronic or terminal illness, especially when the illness adversely affects a person's independence and makes him reliant on others. Some research even shows that a cancer diagnosis doubles the risk of suicide. Perhaps this is why old people who experience irreversible physical decline have higher rates of suicide (even though the opposite is true for depression). Just as loss of health brings about a sense of hopelessness, and a feeling of uselessness, that may eventually lead one to take his or her own life, so too does loss of respect in society. This is particularly true for cultures

¹³ Ibid, p. 3.

¹⁴ Ibid, p. 58.

¹⁵ Bibhuti Mohanty, "We are like the Living Dead': Farmer Suicides in Maharashtra, Western India," *Journal of Peasant Studies* 32:2 (2005), pp. 256-7.

¹⁶ Jeffery Watt, *Choosing Death: Suicide and Calvinism in Early Modern Geneva* (Kirksville MO: Truman State University Press, 2001), pp. 180-2.

that hold honor and esteem as indispensable. The famous case of the former president of South Korea, Roh Moo-hyun, who killed himself in 2009 after being charged with corruption, shows how loss of respect can sometimes lead one to suicide.¹⁷

Hazing and bullying is another common cause of suicide today in some parts of the world. Anecdotal evidence shows that bullying can have detrimental psychological effects on the traumatized victims and in some instances, it has led to suicide.¹⁸ Other common causes include sexual abuse and post-traumatic stress disorder, especially among soldiers who return from combat. In fact, one writer noted in a Washington Post article that more personnel died of suicide in the US military than in combat in 2012.¹⁹ Indeed, this is not unfathomable given the grave atrocities committed by armies during war; atrocities that are bound to take a toll on one's mental and psychological health. After all, killing innocents and persecuting civilians would adversely affect anyone with a conscience.

Conquest and subjugation of one society by another also gives rise to feelings of hopelessness that leads to suicide. When human beings see their lands being taken, their children being slaughtered and their families being treated worse than animals, they naturally become desperate to get out of that situation and fight back with whatever means necessary, even if it leads to their own deaths. If no way is found, then suicide is the only recourse for them. The most evident example of this today is seen in occupied Palestine where having grown up under brutal Zionist occupation, Palestinians unsurprisingly feel a strong sense of desperation.²⁰ This kind of desperation can easily lead to suicide. Another example of this was seen when Spain conquered Cuba, and a large number of Cubans opted to hang and poison themselves to

¹⁷ Manning, *Suicide - The Social Causes of Self-Destruction*, p. 39.

¹⁸ Lester, Gunn, Quinnett (Ed.s), *Suicide in Men - How Men Differ from Women in Expressing their Distress* (Springfield: Charles Thomas Publishers, 2014), p. 87.

¹⁹ *Ibid*, p. 98.

²⁰ *Ibid*, p. 206.

avoid being subjugated by the 'ferocious tyrants'. Yet another reflection of this is also seen in the suicide of captured African slaves who were being taken to the Americas.²¹

Examples of 'suicide of the conquered' abound in history, even in the earlier periods. When Alexander of Macedonia invaded India, residents of a number of cities and towns committed mass suicide by self-immolation. During the anti-Jewish pogroms of the Middle Ages, European Jews are also said to have responded with mass suicide. The rate of suicide among the Jews in Nazi Europe also went up when the Nazis started humiliating Jews in public, forcing them to clean the pavements and undertake such demeaning work. Hundreds of Austrian and German Jews are reported to have committed suicide during this period.²² Ironically, many of the Nazi leaders, including Hitler himself, died by suicide.²³

There is some discussion among scholars regarding whether inclination to self-harm is hereditary. While it is not uncommon for children whose parents committed suicide to do the same later in life, this is more likely due to depression or any other neurological disorder that runs in the family than the passing of suicide ideation from parent to child. A famous example is that of renowned American novelist Ernest Hemingway who killed himself, as did two of his five siblings, and his father. One of his granddaughters also killed herself. These kinds of occurrences are rare and can generally be explained in terms of a genetic psychiatric disorder passed from generation to generation which renders members of the same family as suicidal.²⁴

While the idea that suicides tend to lead to more suicides, like a

²¹ Cf. Terri Snyder, *The Power to Die: Slavery and Suicide in British North America* (US: University of Chicago Press, 2015).

²² David Lester, *Suicide and the Holocaust* (New York: Nova Science Publishers, 2005), p. 89.

²³ Cf. Christian Goeschel, *Suicide in Nazi Germany* (UK: Oxford University Press, 2015).

²⁴ Lester, Gunn, Quinnett, *Suicide in Men*, p. 281.

contagion of sorts, was common in the past with some suggesting that even those philosophers and writers who promoted or justified self-murder caused a spate of suicides among those who read and were influenced by their works, for some people, reading about the depression of others that led them to end their lives actually provided a strange kind of solace. For instance, the 17th century scholar Robert Burton wrote, “I write of melancholy by being busy to avoid melancholy.”²⁵ This is probably because one achieves piece of mind when he learns that he is not really alone in his extreme sadness, but that many others also face something similar in their lives.

In his book *Why People Die by Suicide*, Thomas Joiner theorizes that there are three factors that lead to suicide: feeling out of place, thinking of oneself as a burden, and the acquired ability to harm oneself lethally. Being disconnected from others makes one feel lonely and out of place, and that in turn leads to a breakdown in personal relationships, giving rise to a sense of hopelessness and depression. After all, human beings are social creatures and need positive social interaction to maintain their psychological wellbeing. Perceiving oneself as a burden to those around him may lead a person to think that his suicide will actually benefit others as they would be better off without him. Finally, the capability to inflict lethal self-harm is not something everyone possesses. Self-preservation is hard-coded and intrinsically programmed in us, so only in rare cases, such as exposure to trauma, can a person acquire the actual ability to take his or her own life.²⁶

When asked about their motivation and what drove them to the desperate act of trying to end their own lives, those who survive serious suicide attempts describe mistreatment by others as well as their own feelings of inadequacy. In fact, some psychologists argue that suicide is a kind of escape from ‘aversive self-awareness’. It is as though a person

²⁵ Robert Burton, *The Anatomy of Melancholy*, ed. Thomas C. Faulkner, Nicholas K. Kiessling, and Rhonda L. Blair (Oxford: Clarendon, 1994), [1], p. 6.

²⁶ Lester, Gunn, Quinnett, *Suicide in Men*, pp. 34-5.

is trying to escape from himself due to various reasons such as having fallen short of his own standards, becoming aware of his own incompetence, unattractiveness, or guilt. While many look for escape from this self-awareness in intoxicants and excessive sleep, for example, sometimes the negative self-awareness is so strong that it pushes one over the edge and leads him or her to suicide. This is truer today than before since in the past, people would devote most of their attention to the community but today they devote most of their attention to themselves.²⁷

In the contemporary world, examples of suicide abound. Cases of young men in their late teens and early twenties killing themselves due to extreme poverty in different parts of the globe have been reported.²⁸ The explanations given by survivors of these suicide attempts are harrowing to say the least. A young man who suffered from recurrent, uncontrolled epilepsy following torture by the Israeli military described how his life had become unbearable as he was no longer able to cater for the needs of his family.²⁹ Aside from the physical effects of such torture, there are deep psychological scars that individuals have to bear. For instance, after the siege and destruction of the Jenin refugee camp by Israeli soldiers in 2002, young men were arrested, stripped, interrogated, and then left in their underwear to be found in villages outside the town.³⁰ This left them traumatized. The brutality of the IDF extends to the use of mock executions and demolishing houses while people are trapped inside as their loved ones watch helplessly from outside, as well as other inhumane atrocities. Many of these actions have even been chronicled by soldiers' testimonies and recollections of veterans of the Israeli military themselves.³¹

Causes of suicide can thus be summarized as:

²⁷ Donald Black, *Moral Time* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), p. 148.

²⁸ Lester, Gunn, Quinnett, *Suicide in Men*, p. 208.

²⁹ *Ibid*, p. 209.

³⁰ *Ibid*, p. 211.

³¹ *Ibid*, p. 212.

(a) Social and Economic causes, including: (i) Cultural poverty and lack of proper upbringing, (ii) hopelessness about the future, (iii) increased deviancy in the society and lack of security, (iv) increased injustice and social class schisms, (v) inability to fulfill or get one's own rights fulfilled or those of one's family, (vi) financial straits and penury, (vii) urban life and its stress.

(b) Psychological causes, such as: (i) Depression and other similar problems such as bipolar disorder, (ii) schizophrenia, (iii) unplanned emotional outburst, (iv) overwhelming stress, (v) feeling pressurized and hopeless, (vi) family history of suicide, (vii) terminal illness.

World Cultures and Suicide

Sociologists like Durkheim and others have long pointed out that the difference in suicide rates across nations shows that lifestyle and culture play a direct role in suicide ideation (i.e. the inclination or tendency to commit suicide). Different cultures have varying rates of suicide due to the obvious differences in traditions and cultural practices between them. For instance, studies have shown that African Americans have a much lower suicide rate than Caucasian Americans. This difference has been attributed to certain 'protective factors' among the African American community such as religiousness and spirituality.³²

Differences in world cultures also gives rise to varying suicide rates among the genders. So while it is established that men have a higher risk of suicide than women, the exception to this rule is found in China, where the male to female ratio of suicides differs from the rest of the world, and women actually have a higher rate of suicide than men. This has been explained in various ways including the strict cultural requirements on women, especially young brides who join large families and have to bear many difficulties before they rise to a position of

³² Ibid, p. 176.

respect in their new families.³³ In some cultures, like among the Lusi of Papua New Guinea, wives who have been subjected to domestic abuse sometimes commit suicide in order to mobilize their family against the abusive husband.³⁴ In cultures where a woman's honor is considered her most prized possession, anything that would impugn that honor would be unbearable. Hence, we see throughout history that there have been instances where women have preferred to end their own lives in order to avoid being violated.³⁵

In some cultures, it is believed that suicide results in a kind of metaphysical pollution and a curse is placed upon anything or anyone that is closely connected to the suicide. Hence, the home in which a person killed himself would be abandoned, the tree from which a person hanged himself would be uprooted, and so on. In Tanzania, it was not unheard of to receive a threat from an aggrieved individual that he would kill himself and then rise up as an evil spirit and torment his oppressor. The same practice was also common in India where suicide was sometimes used to avenge an injury and it was believed that the "ghost" of the deceased would haunt his oppressor.³⁶

In early Japan, the samurai warriors as well as officers of the imperial army would sometimes be ordered to commit suicide as punishment for failure, disobedience, or committing a crime. They would do this through the ritualized act of *seppuku* (also known as *hara-kiri*) where the offender disemboweled himself with a dagger. By the 18th century, *seppuku* had evolved from a painful form of suicide into a voluntary form of execution, with individuals only going through the motions of stabbing themselves before they were beheaded by an executioner. Though *seppuku* eventually died out, it had a brief resurgence during

³³ Ibid, p. 195.

³⁴ Bonnie Smith, *The Oxford Encyclopedia of Women in World History*, (UK: Oxford University Press, 2008), [1], p. 175.

³⁵ Manning, *Suicide - The Social Causes of Self-Destruction*, p. 76.

³⁶ Upendra Thakur, *The History of Suicide in India: An Introduction* (1963), p. 63.

World War II, particularly among military men.³⁷

Bereavement and neglect lead to suicide in some cultures. For instance, among the Jalé tribe of New Guinea, old people sometimes commit suicide when they are neglected by their children in an act that is believed to hurt the guilty children who later suffer feelings of regret and self-reproach.³⁸ To prevent suicide due to bereavement, it is reported that when a death occurs among the Peruvian tribe of Aguaruna Jívaro, members of the tribe keep close watch on the distraught relatives to ensure that no poisons are within their reach and they are not left on their own long enough for them to hurt or hang themselves.³⁹ In traditional India, it was not uncommon for widows to throw themselves on their husbands' funeral pyres in an act that was actually deemed loyal and praiseworthy.

In very strict cultures where youth are given no right to decide who their life partners will be, suicide is sometimes the only option young men and women see for themselves in their desperation to avoid marrying anyone whom their parents decide they should marry. The suicide of young lovers has been a common theme in many novels and plays for centuries. Warfare and military conquests in human history have often been accompanied by the enslavement of women, and in a number of recorded cases, women have undertaken mass suicides to avoid this fate. In India, a few well-known instances of this kind of suicide have been documented, where thousands of women and girls killed themselves by the sword or by leaping into a pit of fire, often led by a queen or princess.⁴⁰

Domestic quarrels get so heated in some cultures that they commonly lead to suicide. For instance, among the Luo of East Africa,

³⁷ *Kodansha Encyclopedia of Japan* (US: University of Michigan, 1983), [7], p. 261.

³⁸ Klaus-Friedrich Koch, *War and Peace in Jalémo: The Management of Conflict in Highland New Guinea* (Cambridge Mass: Harvard University Press, 1974), p. 75.

³⁹ Michael Brown, "Power, Gender, and the Social Meaning of Aguaruna Suicide," *Man* 21:2 (1986), p. 315.

⁴⁰ Thakur, *The History of Suicide in India: An Introduction*, pp. 166-68.

where polygamy is common, a man may assume that the bad behavior of his wife or daughter is the cause of his misfortune and castigate her for that, which in turn leads the woman to take her own life. In one recorded case, a Luo man thought his daughter's misbehavior was the reason that his cattle died of disease so he blamed his wife and said that he wished that the same disease that killed his cows would kill her as well. Outraged by this, the wife placed a curse on the village to prevent her husband from remarrying and then hanged herself.⁴¹

The ways by which suicide is committed also vary among cultures. Self-immolation is most common among cultures with deeply ingrained caste systems and hierarchies (as seen among Hindus and Buddhists for example). Among the Chuukese tribe, suicide often involves jumping from tall palm trees, so in certain circumstances, climbing a tall tree can actually signal an impending suicide.⁴² Interestingly, modern psychology tells us that those who jump to their deaths are actually seeking to attract witnesses who might try to talk them out of jumping. Sometimes such attempts to "talk them down" are successful, as in the famous case of the legendary boxing champion Muhammad Ali who was able to convince a suicidal man not to jump from the ninth floor of a Los Angeles high-rise in 1981.⁴³

In the context of funeral rites, one of the ways that certain cultures express grief, loyalty or reverence in the wake of someone's death is through suicide in what one historian calls "following into death."⁴⁴ One example of this is seen in ancient Rome where during the funeral of the Emperor Otho, a number of his Praetorian guards carried his

⁴¹ Gordon Wilson, "Homicide and Suicide among the Joluo of Kenya" in *African Homicide and Suicide* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1960), p. 208.

⁴² Thomas Gladwin and Seymour Sarason, *Truk: Man in Paradise* (New York: Wenner-Gren Foundation for Anthropological Research, 1953), p. 145.

⁴³ Leon Mann, "The Baiting Crowd in Episodes of Threatened Suicide," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 41:4 (1981), p. 703.

⁴⁴ Cf. Joerg Fisch, *Burning Women: A Global History of Widow Sacrifice from Ancient Times to the Present* (London: Seagull, 2016).

body to the pyre and then stabbed themselves to death next to it out of their love and reverence for the emperor, and in hope of following in his footsteps.⁴⁵ Similarly, many slaves and soldiers in Rome would kill themselves upon the death of their masters and generals, and in medieval Japan, samurai retainers would also follow their lords into death.⁴⁶

Suicide and Western Philosophy

In ancient Greece, there was no clear stance against suicide; in fact, it was sometimes even celebrated. For instance, Plato praised the suicide that is committed for a good reason, calling it 'a noble act' while at the same time castigating those weak individuals who only kill themselves to escape the distresses of life.⁴⁷ One of the oldest theories against suicide was propounded by the pre-Socratic philosopher Pythagoras (570-496 BC), who was the founder of the Pythagorean School that considered life as sacred and was against self-harm. Pythagoras taught that every human being holds a particular station and is responsible for remaining there until he is dismissed. This idea was later borrowed by Plato and remained a cogent metaphor for centuries.⁴⁸

One of the famous ancient suicides was that of the renowned philosopher Socrates (470-399 BC).⁴⁹ Since Socrates left no written works because he believed that philosophy is best done through conversation, all of his teachings were disseminated through his student

⁴⁵ Clifford Moore (Tr.), *Tacitus: The Histories* (Cambridge Mass: Harvard University Press, 1925), [1], p. 243.

⁴⁶ Jack Seward, *Hara-Kiri: Japanese Ritual Suicide* (Rutland: Charles E. Tuttle, 1968), pp. 32-7.

⁴⁷ Hecht, *Stay – A History of Suicide and the Philosophies Against It*, p. 18.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 25.

⁴⁹ Of course, some have argued that since Socrates was sentenced to die by the state, it was not really a suicide. However, since he had the option of fleeing but did not do so, it would not be improper to deem it a suicide.

Plato (428-348 BC). Indeed, it was Plato who described his death saying that he died in the most poised and dignified way. To save people the trouble of washing his body, Socrates bathed first, then he requested the poison hemlock before it could be forced upon him, as it was on most of those who were sentenced to die, and then he ingested it before calmly describing how it was affecting him to his friends and students who stood around him. Yet even as he died, he told his followers that suicide is wrong since “we were put here for a purpose.”⁵⁰

Socrates had also spoken against suicide earlier, comparing it to the act of a foolish slave who seeks to run away from his master and his duty. One owes it to his country to stay alive and die in battle if need be. Killing oneself, according to him, is like retreating or abandoning one’s post in battle. Furthermore, Socrates argued that just as it is clear that one must do no harm to his father and mother, he must also never harm his country. On his part, Plato expanded the discussion on suicide and listed the types of suicide that might be deemed excusable or permissible. It was not contemptible to end one’s life if compelled by the state, as in the case of Socrates, wrote Plato. Similarly, one who had experienced unbearable loss or great shame, such that there would be no means for redemption, could rightfully opt for suicide, as long as it did not compound his disgrace. Ultimately, the only form of suicide that was inexcusable in his view is that which results from weakness in the face of the vicissitudes of life, which we may interpret as something akin to depression in today’s parlance.⁵¹

As for Plato’s student Aristotle (384-322 BC), he considered suicide as outright abominable and something that must be rejected as an injustice to society, since a person who kills himself is actually stealing from the community as a whole. Consequently, according to him, only self-sacrifice for the betterment of the society is permissible, so if one

⁵⁰ Emily Wilson, *The Death of Socrates* (Cambridge Mass: Harvard University Press, 2007), p. 107.

⁵¹ Cf. Murray Miles, “Plato on Suicide,” *Phoenix* 55:3/4 (2001), 244-58.

gives up his own life for the benefit of others, that is to be lauded.⁵² Even the founder of western medicine, Hippocrates (460 to 377 BC), stated that one of the principles which physicians must adhere to is “do no harm”. Interestingly, part of the Hippocratic Oath reads, “I will neither give a deadly drug to anyone if asked for it, nor will I make any suggestion to this effect.” However, it seems that even Hippocrates was not averse to the idea of passive euthanasia as he suggested that doctors should not try to treat patients who were “overmastered by their disease.”⁵³

When we come to the era of the Stoics, which lasted about eight centuries (from the 3rd century BC to 529 CE), we note that Stoics considered duty to be of primary importance, and if one’s duty called for one to lay down his own life, then he ought to do so willingly. Furthermore, they counseled that one should stay alive as long as life was pleasing, and once it became unbearable, it should be left just as one would leave a room that gets filled with smoke! The Stoics actually considered this attitude towards death a sign of strength. Nevertheless, their emphasis was never on actually committing suicide, but rather on being unafraid of death. With the passage of time, however, Stoicism became known as being tolerant of suicide in general.⁵⁴ With the decline of Stoicism, the medieval period saw a renewed hostility toward suicide.

European philosophers also weighed in on the suicide debate, presenting rational arguments for and against suicide. Enlightenment thinkers like Hume, d’Holbach, and Voltaire actually defended suicide with the former two doing so with such fervor that it might even be

⁵² Ronald and Stephen Holmes, *Suicide - Theory, Practice, and Investigation* (California: Sage Publications: 2005), p. 18.

⁵³ *Hippocrates*, trans. William Henry Samuel Jones (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1967), [2], pp. 185-217.

⁵⁴ Miriam Griffin, “Philosophy, Cato, and Roman Suicide I,” *Greece & Rome* 33:1 (1986), p. 67.

said they were actually encouraging suicide.⁵⁵ On the other hand, those who were ‘anti-suicide’ claimed that we owe ourselves better than ending our lives to proceed to an unknown future. The Italian humanist philosopher Francesco Petrarca, commonly known as Petrarch (d. 1374 CE), considered suicide as plain, inexcusable evil. He wrote that suicides are caused by disdain, anger, impatience, and a kind of “furious forgetfulness” about oneself. He further stated that those who killed themselves would do anything to return to this world again and abide within it despite all the poverty and adversity.⁵⁶ Even some later atheist philosophers like Arthur Schopenhauer (d. 1860) believed that the pain we wish to avoid and because of which we seek an escape from this life is the very thing that leads us to the path of wisdom.⁵⁷

David Hume and Baron d’Holbach were the foremost among those who actually praised suicide. Hume was entirely anti-religion and claimed that belief in God was not necessary for humans to act morally. Rather, he said that being moral and good actually brings peace of mind and good repute among fellow human beings, and that suffices as an impetus to act morally. Hume wrote a provocative essay titled “On Suicide” where he defended the right of every individual to end his own life. In his essay, Hume said the idea that suicide is wrong because it goes against God’s plan for us is simply “modern European superstition.” He went on to argue that stepping aside from a falling stone is tantamount to disturbing the course of nature by seeking to lengthen one’s life beyond the period assigned to it by the general laws of matter.⁵⁸

Hume further stated that one who commits suicide may actually be doing the public some good and when a person becomes a burden, he

⁵⁵ Hecht, *Stay – A History of Suicide and the Philosophies Against It*, p. 9.

⁵⁶ Francesco Petrarca, *Petrarch’s View of Human Life*, trans. Mrs. Dobson (London 1791), pp. 307-8.

⁵⁷ Hecht, *Stay – A History of Suicide and the Philosophies Against It*, p. 11.

⁵⁸ David Hume, *Essays on Suicide and the Immortality of the Soul* (Basil: U.K.: Collection of English Classics, 1799), p. 10.

ought to kill himself since that is the only way he can be useful to society. Doing so, according to him, would also be beneficial in setting an example for others, which if imitated, would allow every individual to have a chance for a happy life and free him from the “danger of misery.”⁵⁹ While this pro-suicide stance seems cold and apathetic, scholars note that it is actually based on Hume’s anti-religious stance. His tirade is aimed more against the position of religion on suicide than anything else.

For his part, Baron d’Holbach gleefully praised suicide and in his best-known work, *The System of Nature*, he propounded the view that this world was a system based only on matter. He denied the existence of a deity and considered free will to be nonsense, given that human actions were so profoundly influenced by external forces like society, culture, and even biology. With this materialist worldview, he made light of death and insisted that the death of an individual does not affect the world in any significant way.⁶⁰ When talking about what would justify ending one’s life, he says that melancholy and sadness is definitely a good reason to kill oneself, for if a person feels like killing himself, that must be what nature wants him to do. Furthermore, he repudiates the argument made by Aristotle against suicide and says that if society cannot benefit a person and protect him from misery and hardship, it loses all rights over him.⁶¹

In responding to the accusation that his words might actually encourage people to take their own lives, thereby leaving him responsible for their deaths, d’Holbach states that the real cause of suicide is melancholy, a sickly constitution, a sour temperament and an overall defect or derangement in the individual, so it does not matter how much a philosopher or anyone else writes or speaks about the

⁵⁹ Ibid, pp. 11, 14.

⁶⁰ Baron d’Holbach, *The System of Nature*, trans. H. G. Robinson (Boston: Mendum, 1889), p. 136.

⁶¹ Ibid.

reasonableness and rationality of suicide, only those who are prone to it in the first place would attempt it and no other people would be pushed to self-murder simply by reading or hearing these discussions. Like his peers, d'Holbach appeals to the ancient Greek philosophers to support his own arguments. In one of his footnotes, he quotes from Seneca, "the moralist" who is said to have allowed suicide.

Voltaire also spoke approvingly of suicide, lauding those historical figures who had committed 'heroic' suicide. At the same time, he wrote against the punishments meted out by the church against those who killed themselves, saying that dragging and driving stakes through bodies of those who died 'a voluntary death' in order to defame their memory and dishonor their families was inhumane. It was, in reality, punishing a son for losing his father and a widow for losing her husband. Even the practice of confiscating the deceased's property was nothing short of robbing the living heirs of the livelihood which was rightfully theirs.⁶² For his part, Montesquieu also fulfilled the role of the 'enlightened' philosopher by writing that if one is miserable, he ought to have the freedom of ending his own life without facing any threat of posthumous punishments.⁶³

It is noteworthy, however, that not all rationalist philosophers were pro-suicide. There were many who spoke against self-murder in purely rational terms. John Henley was one such author who penned a well-known treatise against suicide during the enlightenment period. In 1730, he published a brief pamphlet wherein he stated that life is not without purpose and that it is by understanding and then working towards the fulfillment of that very purpose that life gets meaning. In this way, he presented a rational argument against suicide which went beyond the prevalent religious arguments of the day that suicide was

⁶² Voltaire, "Cato: On Suicide and the Abbe St. Cyran's Book Legitimizing Suicide," *The Works of Voltaire: A Contemporary Version*, trans. William F. Fleming (New York: E. R. DuMont, 1901), [4], p. 33.

⁶³ Montesquieu, *The Persian Letters*, trans. George R. Heasley (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1964), pp. 129-30.

wrong only because it was a sin against God.⁶⁴

As for Nietzsche, he felt that the reason people are so keen to end their lives at the slightest suffering is due to the growing “religion of comfortableness” among modern man. He considered the whole idea of displeasure and hardship as a defect of existence to be faulty, since he understood pain to be an inherent and necessary part of life in the human path towards wisdom. In fact, he opined that comfort is the opposite of real joy since happiness and unhappiness are like twin sisters who either grow up together or remain underdeveloped together.⁶⁵ Though Nietzsche considered human suffering to be necessary, he emphasized that the painful reaction of agitation and regret when faced with suffering is unnecessary. It is, in fact, a way of compounding our hardship. We are better off accepting the pain and seeing it as a universal, inescapable condition, as that will enable us to bear it more easily, he says.

In more recent times, the French existentialist philosopher Albert Camus (d. 1960) wrote at length about suicide. His approach stands out for its appeal to the average masses rather than just philosophers. He considered suicide to be a philosophical problem since it depends on judging whether life is worth living or not.⁶⁶ For Camus, taking one’s own life is tantamount to insulting existence itself, even if life is very difficult and painful.⁶⁷ Interestingly, though Camus considers life to be absurd and without purpose, he still feels that one can derive purpose from within its absurdity and hence should continue living for as long as possible. Thus, for Camus the length of life is more important

⁶⁴ John Henley, *The Case and History of Self Murder, Argued and displayed at Large, on the Principles of Reason, Justice, Law, Religion, Fortitude* (London: ECCO, n.d., 1730), p. 4.

⁶⁵ Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Vintage, 1974), pp. 269-70.

⁶⁶ Albert Camus, “An Absurd Reasoning,” in *The Myth of Sisyphus and Other Essays*, trans. Justin O’Brien (New York: Knopf, 1969), p. 3.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 8.

than its quality.⁶⁸

Camus is also known for comparing human life to the torture of the mythical Greek king Sisyphus, who was condemned to roll a boulder up a hill, just to have it roll down again when he reached the top, and to continue doing this over and over again until the end of time. This was his punishment for having escaped the underworld and spent some years enjoying life on earth, or so the myth goes.⁶⁹ Even though this action is absurd and without purpose, Camus thinks that the way he continues striving to face the absurd is itself heroic. So too is the individual who, when faced with distress and hardship in this absurd life, hangs on and faces it despite the pain. The ultimate heroism and revolt against life, therefore, is in continuing to face it and live on.⁷⁰

The harsh treatment of their bodies by some monks and nuns which resulted in early death was also seen as a form of suicide by the French philosopher Nicholas Malebranche (d. 1715), who argued that our body belongs to God and we are duty-bound to conserve our health and vigor.⁷¹ Another French philosopher Denis Diderot (d. 1784) was also adamantly opposed to suicide, saying that God gives life and only He should take it. Furthermore, Diderot declared that no one is useless to the society, even if he thinks he is. Like some of his predecessors, he also considered self-murder as being absolutely contrary to the laws of nature.⁷²

For his part, Rousseau offered a plea against suicide saying that every time a young person is tempted to end his life, he should ask himself to do one more good deed or act of kindness to another before he dies. That could be anything from helping a needy person, consoling

⁶⁸ Ibid, p. 62.

⁶⁹ Ibid, p. 120.

⁷⁰ Ibid, p. 54.

⁷¹ Cf. Nicholas Malebranche, *Traité de morale* (Rotterdam, 1684).

⁷² "Suicide", *The Encyclopedia of Diderot and d'Alembert*, Collaborative Translation Project, trans. Jeffery Merrick (1765, Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Library, 2003).

someone who is grieving, or defending one who is oppressed. In so doing, he knew that one would derive so much pleasure in helping another soul that the desire to take his own life would never overwhelm him. This strategy seemed to have worked for Rousseau himself as he is said to have been tormented by suicidal thoughts but he never acted upon them.⁷³

Despite being one of the most influential and renowned texts in favor of the right to kill oneself, when it was published, Hume's "On Suicide" was accompanied by an anonymous essay entitled "Anti Suicide" in which the author offers a religious rebuttal for each of Hume's arguments.⁷⁴ There were other Enlightenment authors who also argued against suicide. One writer, identified only as Denesle, commented that those who defend suicide are no different from assassins, and that self-murder is a crime. Even the German philosopher Immanuel Kant weighed in on the debate and argued that one should act only in a manner that he would want to be endorsed by a universal law; meaning to act in a way that would be fine if every other person acted the same.

In his *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, Kant said that all of us owe it to someone to remain alive, so suicide is in effect a violation of one's duty to others. Furthermore, he notes that the very courage that enables a person to end his life and confront death would be sufficient if used to face the hardships of life and go on living – for anyone strong enough to kill himself is more than strong enough to live.⁷⁵ Furthermore, for Kant, suicide is a selfish act that revolves around self-interest. He urges suicidal individuals to look beyond their self-love and ask whether what they intend to do could become a universal law

⁷³ Hecht, *Stay – A History of Suicide and the Philosophies Against It*, p. 136.

⁷⁴ See: David Hume, *Essays on Suicide and the Immortality of the Soul*, The Complete 1783 Edition.

⁷⁵ Immanuel Kant, *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, trans. M. Gregor (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), p. 547.

and whether it would writ large enhance or undermine the society.⁷⁶

As noted earlier, the German Philosopher Arthur Schopenhauer had emphasized the great benefit suffering has on the one who patiently endures it. Pain and hardship, according to him, is what one needs to gain the wisdom that would lead one out of pain and suffering. As such, he says that the analogy of a person who kills himself because of worldly distress is like a sick man who, after beginning a painful operation which would completely cure him of his ailment, stops it midway and does not allow it to be completed, preferring instead to remain in the pain.⁷⁷

Suicide versus Self-sacrifice in Battle

Since the term ‘suicide’ carries with it deeply negative connotations, it seems to be incompatible with the sacrifice made by soldiers in battle, where they end their lives by attacking their mortal enemies. The academic study of modern ‘suicide attacks’ began at the end of World War II with a focus on the Japanese *kamikaze* pilots. These were literally hundreds of young Japanese men who volunteered to sacrifice their lives by driving their bomb-laden planes or submarines into American Navy aircraft carriers and ships. The term *kamikaze* means “divine wind” and refers to the legendary typhoon which thwarted Kublai Khan’s invasion in 1281 by sinking his vast fleet and all its crew. The story of his defeat was given new life in Japanese nationalist discourse before the American invasion and that was when *kamikaze* units were created.⁷⁸ While in the west they were merely considered “suicide pilots” and depicted as brainwashed zombies, to the Japanese they were the greatest of heroes.

⁷⁶ Ibid, pp. 31-32.

⁷⁷ Arthur Schopenhauer, *The world as Will and Representation*, trans. E. Payne (New York: Dover, 1969) [2], pp. 399-400.

⁷⁸ James Lewis and Carole Cusack, *Sacred Suicide* (UK, Ashgate Publishing Ltd: 2014), p. 152.

Western misunderstanding and misappropriation of the term *kamikaze* was so widespread at one point that when a Christian evangelist went to Afghanistan on a mission of converting the Taliban to Christianity, he was called the “*kamikaze* missionary.”⁷⁹

Western hypocrisy is clearly seen when they avoid employing the term “suicide pilots” for the American pilots who carried out similar actions during World War II. In fact, their own pilots are not even mentioned among those who carried out suicide attacks. This is despite the fact that American pilots engaged in suicide dives even before the Japanese *kamikaze*, when they fought to defend their colony in the Philippines in 1941. For instance, one pilot named Colin Kelly intentionally flew his bomber right into a Japanese warship and was posthumously awarded with a medal for bravery. Yet Kelly was never considered a suicide pilot; rather, he was seen as a great American hero.⁸⁰ Indeed, one man’s hero is another’s suicide bomber, even today. This is typically how history is objectified by the west.

The act of sacrificing one’s own life in battle against a powerful enemy has been used by different races and peoples from the earliest times and continues to be employed even today. Yet like the case of the *kamikaze*, the narrative of those who laid down their lives for great causes like freedom and honor is twisted by their enemies who depict them as brainless fanatics and mindless zealots. A prime example of this kind of twisting of narratives is seen today in occupied Palestine where, as illegitimate occupiers, Israelis cannot “arrest” Palestinians who have a legal right to resist occupation. Yet in the western media, terms such as “arresting” and “kidnapping” are detached from their legal contexts. Israelis “arrest” while Palestinians “kidnap” and while the reverse seems unthinkable to the western mind, the reality is that Israelis are doing the unlawful kidnapping while Palestinians are lawfully arresting the

⁷⁹ Ibid, p. 153.

⁸⁰ James Joseph Martin, *The Saga of Hog Island and Other Essays in Inconvenient History* (Ralph Myles, University of Michigan Press: 1977), p. 142.

Israelis!⁸¹

Though a lot has been said about and against suicide bombers who detonate bombs in crowded places, thereby killing themselves and a number of innocent civilians as well, the fact is that the psychological profiles of such suicide bombers have not been studied by scholars to objectively assess what motivates them. There are no detailed biographies of these mass killers that have been made available for scholars to conduct a 'psychological autopsy'. Psychologists have only proffered theories on what drives suicide bombers, with some claiming that they have a single purpose, namely self-sacrifice, and others arguing that martyrdom is only an excuse for the desire to escape their own psychological pain. Nevertheless, as noted earlier, the possibility of their having been brainwashed and coerced to carry out such attacks against civilians is very real and has even been alluded to by some researchers.⁸² Hence, only vulnerable and traumatized individuals are susceptible to such mind control as opposed to narcissistic people who love themselves more than others.

Though mainstream news outlets have actively participated in anti-Islamic propaganda and rhetoric to such an extent that the impression is created that every suicide bomber is a Muslim, this is clearly not true. Even in recent times, there have been many suicide bombers of different faiths like the Black Tigers of Sri Lanka and others.⁸³ The question of why some people are ready to give up their lives through suicide bombing operations instead of simply planting bombs to achieve their objectives has not been sufficiently researched by psychologists.⁸⁴ However, it is quite evident that brainwashing by the enemy is the only logical explanation, for no army or group would be willing to sacrifice its own people if alternatives were available.

⁸¹ Lewis and Cusack, *Sacred Suicide*, p. 156.

⁸² Lester, Gunn, Quinnett, *Suicide in Men*, p. 127.

⁸³ Mary Sharpe, *Suicide Bombers - The Psychological, Religious and Other Imperatives* (Netherlands: IOS Press, 2008), p. 80.

⁸⁴ Lester, Gunn, Quinnett, *Suicide in Men*, p. 134.

Some authors have classified suicide bombers (or ‘suicide terrorists’) into four types. Conventional suicide terrorists are those who commit suicide for the same reasons other people in the society commit suicide, such as depression, etc. Coerced suicide bombers are forced to commit suicide on pain of torture or the threat of harm against their loved ones. Escapist suicide bombers resort to suicide as they fear capture by the enemy. Finally, the indirect suicide bomber is one who is unaware of his own suicidal desire.⁸⁵ However, this classification, which was first propounded by Lankford, is purely imaginary and does not answer the fundamental question of why those who carry out ‘suicide terrorism’ are willing to kill innocent civilians.

Consequences of Suicide

While suicide can seem like a solitary act, in reality it has grave repercussions for the society at large. When the harm of suicide is spoken of today, it is usually addressed in psychological terms. We see how survivors are affected psychologically and discuss the guilt they feel. Yet the true impact of suicide on society is far greater. The interconnectedness of humanity is such that even when one is overwhelmed by sadness and depression, he can find solace in the sadness of others as it gives him a sense of relief to know that he is not alone in sorrow.

Even if suicide may appear to be a private matter that affects only the individual who experiences an overwhelming desire to escape his despair or hardship through self-murder, history attests to the effect suicide has on other people. The consequences of suicide can be quite detrimental for the family and friends of the deceased. Suicide leads to destruction of relationships, brings disrepute, causes grief, blame, guilt, shame, and feelings of sympathy or even vengeance. Worse still, suicide

⁸⁵ Ibid, p. 140.

can actually lead to more suicide. It has been seen how when people hear about ways of responding to their deep pain, they actually act on them.⁸⁶ Since suicide is, in essence, a social problem more than an individual one, it can be solved by inculcating a heightened social conscience and greater social concern in members of the society.

For the individual, in many cases suicide is a last resort and a final escape. Historically, some battle commanders who were vanquished by their enemies opted to take their own lives. For instance, in 42 BCE the Roman commander Brutus, who played a pivotal role in the assassination of Julius Caesar, resorted to suicide when he was defeated by his rivals in the Battle of Phillipi. Similarly, many of those who were enslaved preferred suicide over the abuse and punishment of their masters. There was arguably little direct consequence to the societies that heard of or experienced these kinds of suicides, aside of course from the shock and sadness experienced by the close relatives and friends of those who ended their lives.

In many instances, suicide attempts are a “cry for help” and those who try to take their lives actually hope that those around them will feel sympathy for their plight and stop them from harming themselves. At other times, suicide may be used as a punitive measure in order to inflict psychological harm on those left behind through feelings of guilt, grief, and regret. Nevertheless, this is not the case for most suicides, as those who commit this act do not usually give much thought to the pain they are inflicting on the people left behind, and those who do often try to mitigate this by absolving others of blame in their suicide notes.

In some cases, individuals are pushed to suicide by their guilt for having done something wrong. It is reported, for instance, that a young woman in Victorian England killed herself after she was unfaithful to her husband. In the note she left behind, she confessed her infidelity to her husband and expressed how the disgrace was unbearable for her so

⁸⁶ Hecht, *Stay – A History of Suicide and the Philosophies Against It*, p. 87.

she drowned herself.⁸⁷ As a consequence, such suicides are actually taken as a means of absolution for crimes and wrongdoings, in order to redeem themselves in the eyes of those who respect them. At times suicide follows a specific offense against others; for example, those who kill others sometimes also kill themselves in turn, possibly out of guilt or remorse.

Prolonged suffering can sometimes lead to a transformation from feelings of empathy to those of antipathy, especially when it involves taking care of a bedridden spouse or close family member, where one gradually begins to feel that this care-giving is impeding his own freedom to carry out activities that he likes. In such cases, one may take drastic measures to obtain 'freedom'. In one recorded case, a man who was in this kind of situation bought a loaded gun, kept it near his bedridden wife and went into a bitter soliloquy about how her sickness had spoilt his life and then left to go to work. The wife killed herself with that gun shortly afterwards.⁸⁸

Suicide is not always meant as an escape from life and its travails. Sometimes, a more altruistic suicide is committed in protest as a means of inspiring other people to get involved and support a specific cause. Protestors may kill themselves in order to inspire people to join an activist movement and to shock them out of their apathetic slumber. For instance, the self-immolation of a fourteen-year-old Kurdish girl in London was done in order to protest the capture of a Kurdish leader and draw the attention of people to the same.⁸⁹

The case of Muhammad Bouazizi is particularly interesting. On December 17th 2010, this Tunisian fruit vendor proceeded towards the town center with a wheelbarrow full of produce that he had procured on credit the night before. As the sole breadwinner for a family of eight,

⁸⁷ Victor Bailey, *"This Rash Act" - Suicide across the Life Cycle in the Victorian City* (Stanford CA: Stanford University Press, 1998), p. 261.

⁸⁸ Perlin and Schmidt, *A Handbook for the Study of Suicide* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1975), p. 157.

⁸⁹ Michael Biggs, "Dying for a Cause - Alone?" *Contexts* 7:1 (2009), p. 25.

he was hopeful that the profit he would make selling the produce would be sufficient to provide for his family. However, on that day he was confronted by corrupt police officers who demanded a bribe on the pretext that he was conducting business without the required permit. This kind of harassment was not new, and the vendors knew about it and had experienced it many times. On this day, however, Bouazizi did not have enough money to bribe the officers, so they proceeded to beat him and confiscate his wheelbarrow as well as an electronic weighing scale he was using. With nowhere else to turn, he went to the governor's office to complain, but the governor refused to hear his case. That is when he threatened to immolate himself. When this threat fell on deaf ears, Bouazizi got some petrol and poured it over himself as he stood in the middle of the street in front of the governor's office shouting, "How do you expect me to make a living?" Then he struck a match and was engulfed in flames. Despite being rescued by bystanders, his burns were so severe that he succumbed to his injuries.

When the news of what had happened spread, many people blamed the corrupt government for driving Bouazizi to such a desperate act, and in no time the first protestors took to the streets. Thousands of people participated in his funeral procession calling for him to be avenged. The protests magnified to such an extent that Tunisia's president had to flee into exile. But it did not stop there. The protests spread to Algeria, Egypt and other Arab countries beginning the wave of the 'Arab Spring'. Therefore, a public show of grievance through self-immolation lit the spark for what was to be arguably the most momentous protest movement in the Arab world in recent times.

Suicide as a form of political protest, like in the example of Muhammad Bouazizi in Tunisia and a number of others before him, is not uncommon. Another example was witnessed when the Korean official Min Yonghwan cut his own throat to protest his country's annexation by Japan in 1905, and in 1965 Norman Morrison, an American Quaker, burned himself outside the office of the American

secretary of defense in protest against the Vietnam War. Similarly, numerous Tibetan monks committed suicide by self-immolation in protest against China's control of Tibet.⁹⁰ Sometimes the sacrificial suicide offered by one individual is assisted and even facilitated by others who espouse the same ideals, as in the case of the activist Vietnamese monks who helped plan the suicide of Thich Quang Duc and even tossed him matches when his lighter failed to ignite the gasoline he had doused himself with in order to carry out self-immolation in protest.⁹¹

“Suicide by law” is a phenomenon where a person who seeks to end his life commits a crime in order to be punished by death. This idea was attractive to some in the early periods when suicide was considered a crime worse than murder, so by committing a capital offence, not only would the individual get his wish of ending his life, but it would be done by another's hand so it was not technically suicide. Therefore, none of the negativity associated with suicide would apply. The person might actually be given time to repent, get an audience with a clergyman to confess his sins and seek penance, and would even get the chance of being forgiven by God and end up in heaven. Aside from that, he would be afforded a proper burial. Hence, we find a number of historical records that describe individuals actually murdering someone else because they wanted to end their own lives. In fact, this act became so common that in 1767 a law was enacted that denied capital punishment to those who murdered solely with the purpose of ending their own lives. Such individuals were given life imprisonment instead.⁹²

A more profound effect of suicide, however, is the contagious destructive effect it has on others. It has long been argued that suicides

⁹⁰ Manning, *Suicide - The Social Causes of Self-Destruction*, p. 10.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 151.

⁹² Vera Lind, “The Suicidal Mind and Body: Example for Northern Germany,” in *From Sin to Insanity: Suicide in Early Modern Europe*, ed. Jeffery R. Watt (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2004), pp. 64-80.

often come in clusters and that one suicide can lead to many others. In 1845, the editor of the *American Journal of Insanity* cited the statistician William Farr, who had found that imitation is often a source of suicide. It has indeed been the case that many people justified their own self-murders by citing earlier suicides.⁹³ For this reason, at times people were even warned not to publicize a suicide and even cautioned against reading newspaper reports about people who ended their own lives. The term “emotional contagion” was employed by some early writers to depict this phenomenon.⁹⁴ Loren Coleman has discussed this kind of contagious suicide in his book titled *Suicide Clusters*.⁹⁵

Modern sociological studies have also found evidence that when a person kills himself, it increases the likelihood that another person who witnesses or hears about the suicide will also end his life. This ‘suicide influence’ is strongest on those who were close to the victims or had an admiration or liking for them. Understanding such influence inevitably leads to the conclusion that in killing yourself, you are likely to kill another person too by the influence of your action. The strongest influence of this kind is seen in the effect of a parent’s suicide on a child. A 2010 study from John Hopkins University showed that young children of suicide victims are thrice as likely to commit suicide themselves in the future.⁹⁶

One occupation that has seen many mass suicides is farming. Indebted farmers who rest their hopes on a good harvest to repay their loans and provide for their families are so distraught when their crops fail that many times, they end up taking their own lives. Recorded cases

⁹³ J. P. Gray, “Suicide,” *American Journal of Insanity*, 35 (1878), 37-73.

⁹⁴ Olive Anderson, *Suicide in Victorian and Edwardian England* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1987), pp. 372-73.

⁹⁵ Loren Coleman, *Suicide Clusters* (Winchester, Mass.: Faber and Faber, 1987), pp. 30-37.

⁹⁶ Satoko Kuramoto et al., “Psychiatric Morbidity, Violent Crime, and Suicide among Children and Adolescents Exposed to Parental Death,” *Journal of the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry*, May 2010.

from the 1980s of American farmers killing themselves for this reason and the spate of farmer suicides in India even today attest to the fact that similar experiences and occupations can also play a role in this kind of suicide contagion. Of course, this theory of suicidal influence still has some skeptics, but the overwhelming evidence cannot be ignored.⁹⁷ Those who do recognize the danger of such an influence suggest a kind of “post-vention” where action is taken after a suicide to prevent the occurrence of a cluster.

Suffering in isolation pushes one to the brink of hopelessness in a way that collective suffering never does. Fewer suicides are seen in deeply enmeshed societies where the idea to preserve oneself for the sake of others is common. However, when one feels alone and isolated, the suffering of others does not act as a mitigating factor at all. For instance, during the American Depression of the 1930s, many individuals committed suicide after losing all their savings in the stock market or due to the unemployment that ensued. It may seem surprising how people would take their own lives when they knew that everyone else was suffering from the same situation. Yet they took this widespread hardship as a personal misfortune. This is an example of the result of modernity’s emphasis on the individual over the community.

Islam and Suicide

According to Islam, human beings are not the absolute owners of their bodies, as such absolute ownership belongs only to Allah. Rather, human beings have only been granted use of their physical bodies to enable them to carry out the work they need to do in this world. As such, suicide is forbidden in Islam and is considered a grave or major

⁹⁷ See for instance: James B. Hittner, “How Robust is the Werther Effect? A Re-Examination of the Suggestion-Imitation Model of Suicide,” *Mortality* 10 (2005), pp. 193-200.

sin (*kabīrah*). Some have even gone to the extent of stating that one who takes his own life has forfeited his place as a believer and dies as an infidel.⁹⁸ This is because true believers never lose hope in the face of worldly hardships and they have faith that they will be rewarded for patiently bearing the tribulations they encounter. Hence, a true believer would never take his own life due to depression or hopelessness.

Muslims form the majority in over 56 countries around the world. Studies have shown that there is a negative correlation between the percentage of Muslim populations in different countries and their suicide rates, such that where larger Muslim populations reside, lower suicide rates are found.⁹⁹ We also see that in general, suicide occurs much less frequently in Muslim countries than in non-Muslim ones.¹⁰⁰ However, this does not mean that there is no suicide in Muslim countries. Studies have shown that in Iran, for example, an average of over three thousand cases of suicide occur annually.¹⁰¹ Nevertheless, as we shall show here, Islam has within it certain preventative mechanisms and deterrents that keep adherents away from self-harm and suicide.

The Arabic term that is associated with suicide is *intihār*, although in many classical texts it is discussed under the rubric of *qatl al-nafs*. Sunnī scholars have discussed this subject at greater length and in more depth than their Shī‘ah counterparts, and in their works on jurisprudence, even the different types of suicide have been mentioned. In general, Sunnī scholars consider suicide as unlawful (*ḥarām*) and one of the gravest sins after ascribing partners to the Almighty (*shirk*).

There are a number of verses in the Qur’ān that have been evinced as forbidding suicide, either directly or indirectly. These include the

⁹⁸ Reza Askari et. al., “*Ḥurmat-i Khudkushī dar Qur’ān wa Sunnat wa Rāhkārhaye Qur’ānī barāye Pishgiriye ān*,” *Ulūm-i Qur’ān wa Ḥadīth* 5:1 (1393 AH Solar), p. 116.

⁹⁹ Cf. David Lester, “Suicide and Islam”, *Archives of Suicide Research*, 10:1 (2006), pp. 77-97.

¹⁰⁰ ‘Alī Islāmīnasab, *Bohrān-i Khudkushī*, (Firdaws Publications, Tehran, 1371 A.H. Solar), p. 155.

¹⁰¹ Reza Askari et. al., “*Ḥurmat-i Khudkushī dar Qur’ān wa Sunnat*,” p. 116.

verses that state:

(a) ‘Do not kill yourselves’

يَأْتِيهَا الَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا لَا تَأْكُلُوا أَمْوَالَكُمْ بَيْنَكُمْ بِالْبَاطِلِ إِلَّا أَنْ تَكُونَ تِجَارَةً عَن تَرَاضٍ مِّنْكُمْ وَلَا تَقْتُلُوا أَنْفُسَكُمْ إِنَّ اللَّهَ كَانَ بِكُمْ رَحِيمًا وَمَنْ يَفْعَلْ ذَلِكَ عُدْوَانًا
وُظْلَمًا فَسَوْفَ نُصَلِّيهِ نَارًا وَكَانَ ذَلِكَ عَلَى اللَّهِ يَسِيرًا

O you who have faith! Do not consume your wealth among yourselves unrightfully, but it should be trade by mutual consent. And do not kill yourselves. Indeed Allah is most merciful to you. And whoever does that in aggression and injustice, We will soon make him enter the Fire, and that is easy for Allah. (Q4:29-30)

In his *Tafsir-e Namūna*, Shaykh Makārim Shīrāzī states that this verse forbids people from taking their own lives especially given the statement ‘Indeed Allah is most merciful to you’. Hence it is an explicit prohibition of suicide, and whoever disobeys this command will not only burn in the fire of [misery in] this world, he will also burn in the fire of God’s wrath in the Hereafter. Sayyid Ṭabātabā’ī on his part says in his exegesis of this verse that the phrase ‘And do not kill yourselves’ is general and includes suicide as well as other forms of killing, and ‘yourselves’ refers to all members of the religious community who are considered to be part of a single body. Furthermore, he says that the punishment mentioned in the second verse is general and applies to ‘whoever does that in aggression and injustice’ whether he is a believer or not.

(b) ‘Do not kill the soul Allah has made inviolable’

وَلَا تَقْتُلُوا النَّفْسَ الَّتِي حَرَّمَ اللَّهُ إِلَّا بِالْحَقِّ وَمَنْ قُتِلَ مَظْلُومًا فَقَدْ جَعَلْنَا لَوْلِيهِ
سُلْطَانًا فَلَا يَسْرِفُ فِي الْقَتْلِ إِنَّهُ كَانَ مَنْصُورًا

Do not kill the soul [whose life] Allah has made inviolable, except with

due cause, and whoever is killed wrongfully, We have certainly given his heir an authority. But let him not commit any excess in killing [the murderer], for he has been assisted [by law]. (Q17:33)

And other verses that have a similar connotation such as:

وَالَّذِينَ لَا يَدْعُونَ مَعَ اللَّهِ إِلَهًا آخَرَ وَلَا يَقْتُلُونَ النَّفْسَ الَّتِي حَرَّمَ اللَّهُ إِلَّا بِالْحَقِّ وَلَا يَزْنُونَ وَمَنْ يَفْعَلْ ذَلِكَ يَلْقَ أَثَامًا يُضْعَفُ لَهُ الْعَذَابُ يَوْمَ الْقِيَامَةِ وَيَخْلُدُ فِيهِ مُهَانًا

Those who do not invoke another deity besides Allah, and do not kill a soul [whose life] Allah has made inviolable, except with due cause, and do not commit fornication. Whoever does that shall encounter its retribution, the punishment being doubled for him on the Day of Resurrection. In it he will abide in humiliation forever. (Q25:68-69)

(c) ‘Do not cast yourselves into destruction’

وَأَنْفِقُوا فِي سَبِيلِ اللَّهِ وَلَا تُلْقُوا بِأَيْدِيكُمْ إِلَى التَّهْلُكَةِ وَأَحْسِنُوا إِنَّ اللَّهَ يُحِبُّ الْمُحْسِنِينَ

Spend in the way of Allah, and do not cast yourselves with your own hands into destruction; and be virtuous. Indeed Allah loves the virtuous. (Q2:195)

In his exegesis on this verse, al-Ṭabrisī mentions a number of possible interpretations. One of the interpretations he relates from other commentators is that it means one should not embark on warfare against the enemy without the necessary accoutrements and weapons as that would be tantamount to casting oneself into destruction.

(d) ‘He gives life and causes death’

وَأَنَّهُ هُوَ أَمَاتٌ وَأَحْيَا

That it is He who causes death and gives life... (Q53:44)

(e) 'He created life and death to test you'

الَّذِي خَلَقَ الْمَوْتَ وَالْحَيَاةَ لِيَبْلُوَكُمْ أَيُّكُمْ أَحْسَنُ عَمَلًا وَهُوَ الْعَزِيزُ الرَّحِيمُ

He, who created death and life that He may test you [to see] which of you is best in conduct. And He is the All-mighty, the All-forgiving. (Q67:2)

Additionally, there are verses that distinguish martyrdom from suicide and encompass even those martyrs who knowingly sacrifice their lives.¹⁰² Q2:54 describes Prophet Mūsā rebuking the Banī Isrā'īl and instructing them, "kill yourselves," which is interpreted as an instruction to kill the culprits among them. It has nothing to do with suicide; rather, it is an instruction to kill those who engaged in calf-worship. Q3:145 states that no soul can die unless their appointed time has come, and only with Allah's leave. This could be understood as an imperative which shows that suicide is prohibited.

Similarly, there are a number of traditions from the Infallibles that clearly forbid suicide and self-harm. Some of these traditions include:

(a) Imam al-Bāqir (a) is reported to have said:

إِنَّ الْمُؤْمِنَ يَبْتَلَى بِكُلِّ بَلِيَّةٍ وَيَمُوتُ بِكُلِّ مَيْتَةٍ إِلَّا أَنَّهُ لَا يَقْتُلُ نَفْسَهُ.

Verily a believer may be afflicted by every kind of calamity, and may die any kind of death, except that he would not kill himself.¹⁰³

(b) It is reported that the Noble Prophet (ṣ) said:

الَّذِي يَخْنُقُ نَفْسَهُ يَخْنُقُهَا فِي النَّارِ، وَالَّذِي يَطْعَنُهَا يَطْعَنُهَا فِي النَّارِ.

Whoever suffocates [or strangles] himself will choke himself in the Fire [of Hell], and whoever stabs himself will skewer himself in the Fire.¹⁰⁴

¹⁰² See: Q2:154, Q3:169-70, Q4:74 and Q9:111.

¹⁰³ Al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfi*, vol. 2, p. 254.

¹⁰⁴ Al-Bukhārī, *al-Sahīh*, vol. 2, p. 416.

(c) It is narrated that Imam al-Ṣādiq (a) said:

من قتل نفسه متعمداً فهو في نار جهنم خالداً فيها. قيل له: أرأيت إن كان أوصى بوصية ثم قتل نفسه من ساعته تنفذ وصيته؟ فقال إن كان أوصى قبل أن يحدث حدثاً في نفسه من جراحة أو فعل لعله يموت أجزت وصيته في الثلث، وإن كان أوصى بوصية بعد ما أحدث في نفسه من جراحة أو فعل لعله يموت لم تجز وصيته.

Whoever kills himself intentionally will be in the Fire of Hell, abiding therein forever.

Someone asked him, “What if he had made a will and then killed himself moments later; should his will be acted upon?” He said, “If he made his will before doing anything to harm himself or undertaking an action from which he might die, then his will is valid as pertains to a third [of his wealth], but if he made his will after doing something to harm himself or undertaking an act that might end his life, his will is invalid.”¹⁰⁵

(d) The Noble Prophet (ṣ) is reported to have said:

من قتل نفسه بحديدة فحديدته في يده يتوجأ بها في بطنه في نار جهنم خالدًا فيها أبداً، ومن شرب سماً فقتل نفسه فهو يتحساه في نار جهنم خالدًا مخلدًا فيها أبداً، ومن تردى من جبل فقتل نفسه فهو يتردى في نار جهنم خالدًا مخلدًا فيها أبداً.

Whoever kills himself with a piece of iron, then his iron will be in his hand and he will be stabbing his stomach with it in the Fire of Hell wherein he will abide forever. Whoever drinks poison thereby killing himself, he will drink it in the Fire of Hell and abide therein forever. Whoever throws himself off a mountain thereby killing himself, he will [likewise] throw himself in the Fire of Hell wherein he will remain

¹⁰⁵ Al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfi*, vol. 7, p. 45.

forever.¹⁰⁶

(e) The Noble Prophet (ﷺ) is also reported to have said:

ومن قتل نفسه بشيء في الدنيا عذب به يوم القيامة.

Whoever kills himself with anything in this world, he will be punished with it on the Day of Resurrection.¹⁰⁷

(f) Also from the Prophet (ﷺ):

كان فيمن كان قبلكم رجل به جرح، فجزع، فأخذ سكيناً فحزَّ بها يده، فما رقا الدم حتى مات، قال الله تعالى: بادرني عبدي بنفسه، حرمت عليه الجنة.

Among those who lived before you was a man who had been wounded, so he was greatly distressed. Hence, he took a knife and cut his wrist so his blood flowed out until he died. Allah, the Exalted, said, “My servant has made haste to take his life [and come] before Me, so I hereby forbid him from Paradise.”¹⁰⁸

Thus, we see that Islam openly condemns suicide, which it considers a crime, and even thinking about killing oneself is prohibited since it is a reflection of one’s despair and lack of trust in the Almighty. Since three of the main causes of self-harm are mental distress or depression, financial hardship, and addictions such as alcoholism or drug abuse, when we look at how Islam helps believers to deal with these three things, it shows us the way by which Muslims safeguard themselves from suicide through following the teachings of Islam. As for mental distress, the Qur’an clearly tells believers that remembrance of Allah is one of the surest ways of alleviating any distress and attaining tranquility of the heart (Q13:28). Furthermore, the acts of worship performed regularly like the five daily prayers, regular supplications, etc.

¹⁰⁶ Muslim, *al-Ṣaḥīḥ*, vol. 1, p. 104.

¹⁰⁷ Al-Bukhārī, *al-Jāmi‘ al-Ṣaḥīḥ*, vol. 9, p. 233.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid*, vol. 5, p. 406.

all help believers to remember Allah at regular intervals throughout the day. As for mitigating financial hardship, Islam has made almsgiving mandatory on believers in the form of *zakāt*. Moreover, hoarding wealth has been clearly proscribed and “painful torment” is said to await those who hoard gold and silver (Q9:34). Alcohol and other intoxicants, as well as gambling, have also been forbidden in Islam (Q5:90).

It is important to note here that welcoming death and desiring it as a means of meeting one’s Lord is in no way the same as suicide. Imam ‘Alī was unafraid of death and would rush into battle wholeheartedly, with no fear. He even proclaimed, “I have succeeded, by the Lord of the Ka’bah” when he was dealt the fatal blow while praying.¹⁰⁹ And when his grandson Qāsīm ibn al-Ḥasan was asked by Imam al-Ḥusayn (a) how he saw death, he replied, “Sweeter than honey!”¹¹⁰ Indeed in the Qur’an the Jews, who consider themselves chosen people, are told to seek or desire death if they are truthful in their claim:

قُلْ يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ هَادُوا إِنْ زَعَمْتُمْ أَنَّكُمْ أَوْلِيَاءُ لِلَّهِ مِنْ دُونِ النَّاسِ فَتَمَنَّوْا الْمَوْتَ إِنْ كُنْتُمْ صَادِقِينَ

Say, ‘O Jews! If you claim that you are Allah’s favourites to the exclusion of other people, then long for death should you be truthful.’ (Q62:6)

Similarly, praying for death is not the same as suicide. The Glorious Qur’an quotes Maryam (a), the mother of Prophet ‘Īsā (a), as having said:

فَأَجَاءَهَا الْمَخَاضُ إِلَى جِذْعِ النَّخْلَةِ قَالَتْ يَلَيْتَنِي مِتُّ قَبْلَ هَذَا وَكُنْتُ نَسِيًّا مَنْسِيًّا
The birth pangs brought her to the trunk of a date palm. She said, ‘I wish I had died before this and become a forgotten thing.’ (Q19:23)

¹⁰⁹ Al-Raḍī, *Khaṣā’iṣ al-A’immah*, p. 63.

¹¹⁰ Al-Khuṣaybī, *al-Hidāyat al-Kubrā*, p. 204.

In one of his supplications, Imam Zayn al-‘Ābidīn (a) said:

فَإِذَا كَانَ عُمْرِي مَرْتَعًا لِلشَّيْطَانِ فَأَقْبِضْنِي إِلَيْكَ قَبْلَ أَنْ يَمْسُقَ مَقْتِكَ إِلَيَّ.

If my life should become a pasture for Satan, seize me to Thyself
before Thy hatred overtakes me.¹¹¹

Hence, we note that in certain circumstances one may pray for death, but that is not the same as taking one’s own life. It is also common for believers to pray for martyrdom, given the great station that can be attained through becoming a martyr. There is no comparison between this and taking one’s life intentionally by inflicting actual physical harm on oneself. Indeed, in the early days of Islam, many pious believers had a longing for martyrdom. Sometimes, these individuals came to the Holy Prophet (ﷺ) and expressed their desire to sacrifice their lives for the sake of Allah. This was not a desire to kill themselves; they only wanted to take part in the holy struggle of *jihād* and to be killed while performing their duty of protecting Islam and the Muslims. That is why they asked the Prophet to pray that they were granted martyrdom.

While there seems to be a general consensus among Muslim scholars about its proscription, the details about the definition of suicide, what exceptions to the rule are considered valid, and its punishment, are not unanimously agreed upon. For instance, among some Hanbalis, the body of one who has committed suicide is not washed and they do not offer funeral prayers over it as they consider such a person to be an infidel.¹¹² They base this ruling on a tradition attributed to the Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) where he is said to have refused to pray over a man who had taken his own life.¹¹³ Some scholars debated the subject of suicide and presented arguments for both sides before offering their conclusions. For instance, in his *al-Muqābasāt*, Abū Ḥayyān al-Tawḥīdī, has a lengthy discussion on suicide by Muslims

¹¹¹ ‘Alī ibn al-Ḥusayn (a), *al-Ṣaḥīfah al-Sajjādiyyah*, supplication no. 20.

¹¹² See: Ibn Qudāmāh, *al-Mughnī*, vol. 2, p. 415.

¹¹³ Al-Nasā’ī, *al-Sunan*, vol. 1, p. 638.

who are impoverished or ostracized by their society, and he articulates both arguments for and against it. Some western scholars have evinced from this that certain Muslim thinkers in 10th century thought of suicide as justified.¹¹⁴

As we will note in the following section on suicide in other religious traditions, there are a number of incidents mentioned in the Bible that depict certain important figures contemplating or seeking to undertake self-harm or even to take their own lives. The examples given in the Bible are not mentioned in the Qurʾān and in many cases, the stories are quite different from what is found in the Islamic tradition. For instance, Jonah (Yūnus (a)) never tried to kill himself and he was actually thrown overboard and did not voluntarily jump ship. Similarly, Job (Ayyūb (a)) never contemplated suicide, nor did his wife ever suggest it. Other stories like that of Samson and the Philistines are not found in Islamic sources. And when it comes to Jesus (ʿĪsā), Muslims believe that he did not even die on the cross, let alone commit suicide!

It has been argued by some that there are times when a person suffers from such overwhelming depression and despair, and for such a long time, that letting them end their own life may seem like an act of compassion, just like with some instances of euthanasia. However, Islam negates this notion quite clearly in the Qurʾān when it says that God never burdens a soul with more than it can bear (Q2:286). In fact, struggling with suicidal thoughts is itself a great burden which can torture a person from the inside. Suicide is not a “right” as some modern thinkers like Michel Foucault (d. 1984) and Thomas Szasz (d. 2012) say. Szasz even goes as far as to say that just as one has the right to use contraception, he has the fundamental right to die whenever he chooses.¹¹⁵

Islam emphasizes that it is incumbent to protect the life that God

¹¹⁴ See: Franz Rosenthal, “On Suicide in Islam,” *Journal of the American Orientalist Society*, 66:3 (1946),

¹¹⁵ Thomas Szasz, *The Theology of Medicine* (New York: Harper and Row, 1977), p. 73.

has blessed one with, and not only is one duty-bound to protect his own life, he must also do all that is possible to protect the life of every believer, and indeed every human being barring mortal enemies. Islam supports the use of general counselling and social education to counter suicidal thoughts and ideas. It is disheartening to note, however, that recent studies show that most people suffering from suicidal ideation receive no treatment whatsoever.¹¹⁶ This is something that needs to be addressed, especially in developing countries.

Islam itself, through its lofty teachings, helps believers avoid suicide. In a detailed methodological study carried out by two non-Muslim scholars of North Carolina Central University, Miles E. Simpson and George H. Conklin, it has been convincingly shown that aside from other factors that affect rates of suicide, belief in Islam in itself plays a positive role in reducing suicide rates. In their study, these two scholars based their research on Durkheim's famous claim that religion plays a role in suppressing suicide though its influence varies across religious beliefs. According to his observations, Catholics are less likely to commit suicide than Protestants. This, Durkheim said, was because traditional Catholicism brought order into the life of a believer through extensive rituals and subordination to the church hierarchy. Of course, critics of this view have tried to prove that the differences seen by Durkheim had nothing to do with religious persuasion and were based on socioeconomic factors instead.¹¹⁷

In their paper titled: "Socioeconomic Development, Suicide and Religion: A Test of Durkheim's Theory of Religion and Suicide" Simpson and Conklin use raw data and statistics to show that without

¹¹⁶ I. Hwang et. al., "Treatment of Suicidal People Around the World," *British Journal of Psychiatry*, January 2011, 1-7.

¹¹⁷ It is noteworthy that in general, countries that are religious have been shown to have lower suicide rates when compared with secular ones. Cf. Steven Stack, "The Effect of Religious Commitment on Suicide: A Crossnational Analysis", *Journal of Health and Social Behavior*, 24:4 (1983), pp. 362-374.

a doubt, Islam has an independent effect in reducing suicide rates.¹¹⁸ Their study is all the more convincing because they are not Muslims and can thus not be accused of religious bias, nor do they rely on hearsay testimony. Rather, they use statistical analysis to show that Islam helps keep believers away from self-murder. They even produce statistics from three non-Muslim countries that prove their theory, showing that in Israel, India and Sri Lanka, Muslims were less likely to commit suicide than the majority non-Muslim populations. They also evince statistics from Muslim countries to compare with other non-Muslim countries which invariably show that Muslim countries have lower suicide rates. After disqualifying any alternative explanations for this, they are left with the only conclusion that belief in Islam helps reduce suicide. Of course, being non-Muslims, they are unable to appreciate the underlying Islamic ethos and how being a religion of the *fitrah*, it is in complete harmony with human nature.

Indeed, Durkheim himself had claimed that nothing is more contrary to the spirit of “Mahometan civilization” than suicide, since Muslims deem the highest virtue to be complete submission to Divine Will which makes one endure all hardships patiently.¹¹⁹ The MPAC (Muslim Public Affairs Council) website states that suicide is “anti-Islam, anti-nature and anti-life”. Generally all Muslims believe that suicide is a grave sin and it is only in certain, very specific cases, that the permissibility of self-harm can even be debated.

Interestingly, as Emile Durkheim also observed long ago, married individuals have a lower risk of suicide than unmarried people. This is in line with the Qur’anic teaching that spouses are meant to be a source of tranquility for each other. Having someone to talk to and share one’s experiences with, one rarely feels lonely to the point of wanting release

¹¹⁸ Miles E. Simpson and George H. Conklin, “Socioeconomic Development, Suicide and Religion: A Test of Durkheim’s Theory of Religion and Suicide” in *Social Forces*, 67: 4 (June, 1989), pp. 945-964.

¹¹⁹ Emile Durkheim, *Suicide*, trans. John Spaulding and George Simpson (New York: Free Press, 1979), p. 327.

from life itself. The same is true for those with children as opposed to those without children. Also, people with fewer communal and family ties and less social involvement are at a greater risk of suicide.¹²⁰ For this reason, divorce is known to be one of the causes of suicide. Little wonder it is, then, that Islam frowns upon divorce and dubs it “the most detested of the permitted acts.” In fact, some studies show that divorced individuals are twice as likely to commit suicide as others, with the risk being highest right after the divorce and then slowly waning over time.¹²¹

Orientalist scholars who have studied what Islam has to say about suicide and why there is less prevalence of suicide in Muslim communities have expended great effort, albeit unsuccessfully, to show that suicide is not explicitly rejected in the Qurʾān or that during various phases in Muslim history, scholars actually considered suicide as acceptable.¹²² Interestingly, even some of the most well-known and ardent Orientalists admit that suicide is not as grave a problem among Muslims as it is among people of other faiths. To this effect, Theodor Nöldeke said, “A religion amongst the followers of which suicide is almost absolutely unknown...”¹²³ Nevertheless, as is their wont, some Orientalists offer far-fetched interpretations of Qurʾānic verses and appeal to fabricated traditions to prove their hypotheses about the lack of explicit proscription of suicide in Islam.¹²⁴

In his seminal work on divine justice, Shahid Murtaḍā Muṭahhari

¹²⁰ Emile Durkheim, *Suicide: A Study in Sociology* (New York: Free Press, 1951), pp. 171-216.

¹²¹ Manning, *Suicide - The Social Causes of Self-Destruction*, p. 67.

¹²² Cf. Rosenthal, “On Suicide in Islam,” pp. 239-259.

¹²³ Theodor Nöldeke, *Sketches from Eastern History* (London-Edinburgh, 1892), p. 72.

¹²⁴ For instance, in his article on suicide in Islam, Rosenthal repeats the fabricated report that is quoted by Nöldeke and others about the Prophet (ṣ) ascending the highest hill near Makkah with the intention of hurling himself from its peak in order to end his life. He then goes on to express his amazement why this intended suicide is not addressed in Muslim literature, without considering that Muslim scholars reject this report as fabricated.

writes, “The World Health Organization recently published some statistics on suicide and found that its incidence was on the rise among intellectuals. According to their report, the suicide rate has reached high proportions in eight European countries. One of these eight countries happens to be Switzerland – a nation that we think to be the example of prosperity. The report goes on to say that suicide has become the third most important factor of death – meaning that its casualties outnumber the victims of cancer – and that its incidence among the educated class is greater than in the uneducated. The same report states that the suicide rate is greater in developed nations, which are the very nations that are currently going through a crisis of faith. In West Germany, twelve thousand people lose their lives annually due to suicide, while sixty thousand are saved while attempting it. This is the state of affairs of those who have lost their faith in God, the All-knowing Lord of the worlds.”¹²⁵

What other Religious Traditions say about Suicide

In Judaism, the Genesis Rabbah is clear in its prohibition of suicide. While some early sources in the Jewish tradition appear to permit self-harm, the Talmud seems to give a more restrictive view on the subject. Even when a person commits suicide, the classification of that death as a suicide according to Jewish law requires that two reliable witnesses testify that the deceased had expressed his intention to kill himself and then acted immediately to end his life following that expression of intent. In this way, there are fewer deaths that are actually classified as suicides according to rabbinic law. Of course, like in most other legal subjects, there is quite a lot of debate and disagreement between Jewish scholars and no unanimity exists. While Judaism was not as extreme as

¹²⁵ Murtaḍā Muṭahharī, *ʿAdl e Ilāhī*, (Sadrā Publications, Tehran, 1389 A.H. Solar), p. 75.

Christianity in its punishment of suicide, synagogues would likewise regularly refuse to bury suicides in Jewish cemeteries during the Middle Ages.¹²⁶

There are a number of examples in the Hebrew Bible where known figures are shown to have committed suicide. Probably the most famous case is that of Samson who, upon being captured by the Philistines stated, "I will die with the Philistines" before pushing two columns with his strong arms bringing the ceiling down on all those present, including himself. There are also some cases where men of God resisted the idea of taking their own lives. Most notable is the example of Job who, despite being so miserable that he wished he was never born, resisted suicide even when his wife suggested that he "curse God and die" (Job 2:9). Even when Job said, "My soul chooses strangling and death rather than my life," (Job 7:15) which clearly sounds like suicidal words, he still does not attempt to end his life.

Interestingly, the Bible says nothing about the morality of this action. Similarly, no disdain was shown for the suicides of lesser figures. For instance, when Saul falls on his own sword after his defeat in battle, nothing negative is said about his deed. Likewise, when Ahithophel hanged himself after a failed attempt to overthrow King David, or Zimri burned the palace as well as himself after failing to successfully usurp the throne of Israel, there was no rebuke. Also, when Abimelech was wounded in battle and had been gravely injured, he asked his armor bearer to kill him. And in the case of Jonah who is said to have tried to kill himself several times but God kept saving him, especially when he jumped overboard on a sea voyage and God caused him to be swallowed by a whale which later disgorged him. In none of these cases has the Bible spoken negatively about the actual action of suicide.

One of the most famous accounts of mass suicide in Jewish history is the massacre at Masada. In 73 AD, a group of close to a thousand

¹²⁶ Hecht, *Stay – A History of Suicide and the Philosophies Against It*, p. 58.

Sicarii,¹²⁷ who were Jewish assassins and rebels, were trapped on top of the Masada fortress that was located next to the shore of the Dead Sea. Roman soldiers had besieged the fortress and when the Sicarii realized that there was no means of escape or victory, they all committed suicide. Only two old women and five children managed to hide themselves and survive the mass murder-suicide. The ancient Jewish chronicler Josephus Flavius (born Joseph Ben-Matityahu) reports that to avoid being conquered, the men decided to kill their own wives and children before drawing lots to see who would kill their comrades before the final executioner killed himself. This was therefore a murder-suicide, and not simply a mass suicide, since most of the people were killed by others. Later, this account was twisted by secular Zionists in order to portray the Sicarii as heroes. Their mythical tale then served as one of the founding myths of the state of Israel.¹²⁸

The famous Jewish scholar Moses Maimonides (d. 1204) has been credited with reinterpreting the complex injunctions of Judaism and shaping much of what later became synonymous with the Jewish faith and practice. He is said to have been a profoundly rational individual who even went as far as proclaiming that when science and scripture clashed, it was better to follow science since holy texts could be misread or misinterpreted. Regarding the act of suicide, Maimonides clearly stated that whoever destroys himself destroys the world.¹²⁹ This kind of thinking was also reflected in the “devout humanism” movement among the Christians which also spoke of the impact of suicide on the society. In 1623, John Donne, the famous Christian humanist scholar, wrote that the death of a single individual diminishes everyone since

¹²⁷ “Sicarii” derives from *sica*, referring to a small dagger which the Sicarii carried beneath their robes and used to attack and assassinate those whom they viewed as their opponents. Their tactics included intimidation and violence, and they were involved in indiscriminate terror activities. In fact, some have even called them the first terrorists in history. (See: *Sacred Suicide*, pp. 133-4).

¹²⁸ Lewis and Cusack, *Sacred Suicide*, p. 3.

¹²⁹ Hecht, *Stay – A History of Suicide and the Philosophies Against It*, p. 120.

everyone is linked to mankind [as a whole].¹³⁰

The earliest records, however, show that in the beginning, Christians never used to consider suicide a sin, and in some instances, it was even celebrated. For example, at the start of the 4th century, the scholar Eusebius wrote a book in which he compiled the stories of Christian martyrs in which he included the story of some women who had been arrested for their Christianity and fearing for their chastity, they chose to flee and plunge to their deaths in a nearby river. He considered their act as heroic and brave. Indeed, there were many such instances recorded in history where Christian martyrs walked to their deaths of their own free will.

When it comes to the Christian Bible, the only suicide mentioned in the New Testament is that of Judas, the one who betrayed Jesus and then hanged himself (Matthew 27). Interestingly, a number of Christian scholars, including Augustine of Hippo and Thomas Aquinas, claimed that the crucifixion of Jesus was also a suicide. They argued that since he accepted his own death and declined any of the several alternative courses of action that might have saved his life, the death of Jesus fits the criteria of suicide. Furthermore, he refused to plead his own case at trial, and is quoted by John as having said, “No man taketh [my life] from me, but I lay it down myself” (John 10:18). Some contemporary scholars have also echoed this idea. For instance, the Jewish psychologist historian Kalman J. Kaplan states that the death of Jesus can rightly be understood as a suicide due to its voluntary nature.¹³¹

Regardless of the attitudes towards suicide in early Christianity, it is noteworthy that suicidal martyrdom was not encouraged by the central figures of the religion. Even a person as fixated on the afterlife

¹³⁰ John Donne, *Devotions upon Emergent Occasions: Together with Death's Duel* (Middlesex, U.K.: The Ecco Library, 2008), p. 97.

¹³¹ Kalman Kaplan, “The Death of Jesus and Anti-Semitism,” in *Jewish Approaches to Suicide, Martyrdom and Euthanasia* (Northvale, N.J. 1998), p. 38.

as Paul did not advocate suicide. He said that though there may be an overwhelming desire to depart this world, “to abide in the flesh is more needful for you” (Philippians 1:23-24). It was in response to the growing popularity of martyrdom-suicide that the Church instituted its first ban on suicide. Furthermore, in 305 CE the Council of Guadix amended its list of Christian martyrs by removing the names of all those who had died by their own hand. Later, in 348 CE, the Council of Carthage pronounced a condemnation against all those who had committed suicide under the pretext of piety.¹³²

By 400 CE, renowned voices echoed the condemnation of suicide and in his *City of God*, Augustine called the act a “detestable crime and a damnable sin.” Furthermore, he explicitly stated that “Those who die by their own hand [to escape their worldly troubles] have no better life after death.”¹³³ His advice to any suicidal person who feels guilt and self-revulsion is to stay and redeem his past sins. Yet the primary reason to eschew suicide for Augustine is the explicit command by God “Thou shall not kill.” He notes that aside from the fact that there is no passage in the canonical books where permission has been granted to take one’s own life, the fact that the injunction which prohibits killing does not include the proviso “your neighbor” as seen in the other commandments like “Thou shall not bear false witness against your neighbor,” proves that it includes a prohibition for all kinds of killing, even self-killing. So strongly does Augustine believe this that he posits that even in the case of Samson, a special order must have come from God, otherwise he would not have killed himself.¹³⁴

In the wake of Augustine’s statements, in 452 CE legislation was passed against suicide at the Council of Arles. The logic behind it was similar to the ancient Roman law against slave suicide – that it was a kind of theft. In 533 CE, the second Council of Orleans denied funeral

¹³² Hecht, *Stay – A History of Suicide and the Philosophies Against It*, p. 49.

¹³³ Augustine, *City of God*, trans. Marcus Dods (Peabody, Mass. 2009), p. 29.

¹³⁴ *Ibid.* pp. 24-25.

rites to those who had committed suicide after being accused of a crime. This rule was then generalized to include all suicides, and by 590 CE, churches had been forbidden from taking offerings for the souls of those who had ended their own lives.¹³⁵ Later, postmortem punishments were instituted by the Church, such as maiming the corpse and carrying out rites of purification. By the seventh century, all self-murderers were denied normal funerals and excommunicated from the faith, with the exception of the insane.¹³⁶

In 1271, the famous Christian theologian Thomas Aquinas discussed the issue of suicide at length. He said that while he agreed that Jesus had essentially taken his own life, Christians were not permitted to follow his example. In his *Summa Theologica*, Aquinas poses a number of questions about the justification of suicide and then proceeds to answer them. For instance, he says that if a person in authority is allowed to kill criminals, then if he is himself a criminal, why should he not kill himself? Also, it is known that one is allowed to submit to a smaller danger voluntarily in order to avoid a bigger one, so if by killing himself one avoids a greater evil such as living a life of sin, it should be permissible for him to kill himself. In answering these questions, he says that one is not allowed to judge himself in criminal matters and must submit to the judgement of another, so he cannot kill himself. Furthermore, killing oneself is the ultimate evil, so it is wrong to assume it the lesser evil when compared to a sinful life.

In general, Aquinas argued that suicide had to be prohibited for three reasons: First, it harms the society to which the individual belongs. Second, it goes against the natural inclination of self-preservation; and third, it violates our duty to God, since He gave us

¹³⁵ Nils Rutterstol, *Suicide: A European Perspective* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), p. 17.

¹³⁶ Michael MacDonald and Terence Murphy, *Sleepless Souls: Suicide in Early Modern England* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1990), pp. 18-19.

life and only He should be allowed to take it.¹³⁷ Following Aquinas, Dante deemed suicide so grave that he placed it in one of the worst circles of hell. Dante's hell has a three-faced devil at the center, each with one famous suicide in his mouth namely: Cassius, Brutus, and Judas.¹³⁸

Since the crime of suicide could not technically be tried and punished as the perpetrator was already dead, Europeans devised ways of carrying out postmortem trials and punishments. In 1257, when a Parisian man committed suicide by plunging into the Seine, his body was fished out and then his case was tried in a court of law. Having been found guilty of self-murder, his body was sentenced to torture, which meant that it would be eviscerated and hanged by the neck in front of the public before being left to the birds and maggots.¹³⁹ From the fifteenth to seventeenth centuries, the idea of "rites of reversal" – which were intended as a hindrance to resurrection – was propounded. Now bodies of suicides were not just mutilated after death, but their corpses would be placed in a particular manner, lying north to south, contrary to the normal burial practices. In some cases, corpses were hanged by the feet or dragged head down, thereby satisfying both the rites of reversal and postmortem torture.¹⁴⁰ With the advent of the Protestant Reformation in the early 1500s, the religious hostility of Christians towards suicide was ramped up even further. Calvinist city leaders actually had bodies of suicides disemboweled and placed naked in the public square.¹⁴¹ Suicides were even used as propaganda between Christian sects for the next two centuries. The role played by suicide in some of these sectarian conflicts has been described in John Foxe's *Book*

¹³⁷ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, trans. Richard Murphy (New York: McGraw Hill, 1965), pp. 55-73.

¹³⁸ Hecht, *Stay – A History of Suicide and the Philosophies Against It*, p. 56.

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 57.

¹⁴⁰ Minois, *History of Suicide: Voluntary Death in Western Culture*, p. 75.

¹⁴¹ Hecht, *Stay – A History of Suicide and the Philosophies Against It*, p. 60.

of Martyrs (1563).¹⁴²

While some writers like Foxe believed that true faithful Protestants would never succumb to suicide out of despair, a later study by Emile Durkheim clearly showed that it was actually the Catholics who had lower suicide rates when compared to the Protestants.¹⁴³ A variety of reasons have been proposed for this, including the extensive rituals of Catholicism that gave believers a sense of purpose and belonging, the negative effects of Protestant and Calvinist beliefs in predestination, etc. Indeed, history attests that the cruel medieval punishments for suicide became even crueler after the rise of Protestantism. This in itself shows that self-murder was a real problem among Protestants.¹⁴⁴

Not all Christian theologians were in agreement about the evil of suicide. Around the early 1600s, the theologian John Donne wrote a treatise on the defense of suicide from a religious perspective. In his *Biathanatos* which was published posthumously, Donne stated that suicide was indeed a serious matter but it should nonetheless not be subject to harsh laws of retribution. Having himself contemplated suicide, he states that he was not held back from it save by the belief that it was a sin. In one of his interesting statements about the act of self-murder, he said that he had the keys to his prison in his own hands, meaning he could escape from this life if he so willed.¹⁴⁵

When we turn to non-Abrahamic traditions, we see that some of them also have quite a bit to say about suicide. For instance, the oldest scriptures of the Hindus, known as the Vedas, mention self-murder. In the Rigveda, one can find what is probably the earliest mention of *sati*,

¹⁴² John Foxe, *Book of Martyrs* (Philadelphia: Smith, 1856), p. 471.

¹⁴³ Miles E. Simpson and George H. Conklin, "Socioeconomic Development, Suicide and Religion: A Test of Durkheim's Theory of Religion and Suicide" in *Social Forces*, 67:4 (1989), pp. 945-964.

¹⁴⁴ Hecht, *Stay – A History of Suicide and the Philosophies Against It*, p. 64.

¹⁴⁵ John Donne, *Biathanatos: A Declaration of that Paradox or Thesis that Self-homicide is not so Naturally Sin that it may never be otherwise* (London: Humphrey Moseley, 1684), p. 18.

the practice where a widow ends her life by throwing herself on her husband's funeral pyre and burns to death as he is cremated. While the details, conditions and limits of this act are not clearly mentioned in the text, it is quite evident that *sati* is clearly depicted as a sign of a virtuous wife.¹⁴⁶ Ibn Battuta, in his travelogue (*al-Rihlah*), describes witnessing the Hindu ritual of *sati* in vivid detail. After recounting how one of the widows threw herself on a burning pyre and was subsequently held down by heavy wood placed on top of her as she screamed and burned to death, he says that he was close to fainting and falling off his horse at the sight, but was held by his companions and given water to splash on his face, so he composed himself and withdrew from the scene.¹⁴⁷

While taking one's life is generally looked at in a negative light, there are cases in Hinduism where committing suicide is not considered a sin. One example pertains to suicide of expiation, which is the only way to atone for the murder of a Brahmin or other serious crimes. Suicide is also accepted as a form of renunciation when one approaches enlightenment. However, the method of suicide makes all the difference. One does no actual violence to himself, but lets nature take its course either by entering a river and drowning, falling off a cliff or walking up a freezing mountain. This distinction is still ingrained in Hindu thought to this very day.¹⁴⁸

Out of the non-Abrahamic religions that permit and even glorify suicide, Buddhism and Jainism come to mind. While Buddhists only allow suicide in specific cases of self-sacrifice aimed at relieving the suffering of others, Jains not only permit suicide, but revere it. The process known as *sallekhana*, or *santhara*, which is practiced in the Svetambara branch of the Jain tradition, basically refers to attainment

¹⁴⁶ Margaret P. Battin (Ed.), *The Ethics of Suicide: Historical Sources* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015), p. 22.

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid*, p. 237.

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid*, p. 23.

of a spiritual death through fasting. The act entails a progressive withdrawal from the necessities of ordinary life where the believer voluntarily and gradually stops eating and drinking until they eventually die. Jains insist that *sallekhana* is not suicide since they believe it does not lead to self-destruction. Rather, they say that it provides a measured transition from this life to the next. It is carried out with the recitation of a sacred formula and only with the approval of an individuals' spiritual advisor.

Since, like the other Indian religions, Jains believe that the last moments of life are of paramount importance in determining how one will subsequently be reincarnated, they consider *sallekhana* to be like scratching the body to save the soul. According to Jain tradition, *sallekhana* can only be performed when the purpose of life has been served or one is in such a condition that his religious vows would be compromised. Usually it is undertaken by terminally ill patients or monks and nuns who face a catastrophe that could force them to leave their vow of total renunciation of worldly comforts. It is different from regular suicide in that it has to be done without any form of emotional arousal and must observe the Jain principles of non-violence and maintenance of spiritual purity. Suicide, on the other hand, usually results from despair, agony, anger and the like, and is undertaken with acts of violence such as hanging, using poison, or shooting oneself.¹⁴⁹ Other religious traditions of the East, such as Chinese Confucianism, generally insist that one must not harm himself in any way.¹⁵⁰

Suicide Prevention

Since suicide is one of the plights that has afflicted mankind throughout history, a number of devices were used to try and curtail or prevent it.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid, p. 47.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid, p. 54.

As noted earlier, Christians made it a punishable offence and as a requital for taking one's own life, a Christian who committed suicide was deprived of all the burial rites and rituals. In some places like France, before the French revolution, all the person's property was confiscated by the government and as a lesson to others, his body was placed in a large basket, tied to a horse, and then dragged in the streets before finally being hanged by the feet and left unburied.

By the twelfth century CE, most European laws mandated the forfeiture of at least part of the suicide's estate, and in some regions, desecrating the corpse of the self-murderer was sanctioned. The method of desecration varied based on the culture of different peoples but the underlying notion was the same: the soul of the self-killer was a threat to the living and had to be disposed of.¹⁵¹ In some places, the corpses of suicides were set adrift on a river, and in other places they were dragged on the streets, hung on chains, and left to rot.¹⁵²

This form of punishment did not continue, however, and in 17th century Europe, suicide had become more acceptable as people started questioning the severe religious intolerance towards self-murder. Shakespeare depicts suicides in many of his works, such as the famous *Romeo and Juliet*. Suicide was at times even portrayed as something heroic and not "an act of cowardice and weakness of a timorous soul" as some had suggested.¹⁵³ After the mid 1700s, almost all suicides were deemed to be of unsound mind and hence were subjected to no punishment. In reality, scholars say that this was due to the 'medicalization' of madness. That is why the sacrilege of suicide was transformed into something neutral like insanity. However, while this change assuaged the previous brutality and increased the tolerance of suicide, it also led to an increase in the act, as people could once again

¹⁵¹ Hecht, *Stay – A History of Suicide and the Philosophies Against It*, p. 54.

¹⁵² *Ibid.*, p. 55.

¹⁵³ Michel Montaigne, "A Custom of the Island of Cea," in *The Complete Essays of Montaigne*, trans. Donald M. Frame (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1957), pp. 253-255.

‘get away’ with self-murder, as it were.

In order to prevent suicide, it is essential to know how to identify potential suicides. There are certain warning signs that can assist one identify individuals who are possibly suicidal. Some psychologists have listed these signs by the mnemonic IS PATH WARM: Suicide Ideation, Substance Abuse, Purposelessness, Anger, Feeling Trapped, Hopelessness, Withdrawal, Anxiety, Recklessness and Mood Change. Once a person suspects an individual of being suicidal, there are a number of protective factors that are said to lower the risk of suicide which one could try to assist the person with, such as: social support, positive coping skills, life satisfaction, resiliency, hopefulness, increasing self-esteem, etc.¹⁵⁴ In general, it is said that there are three components of suicide: the wish to kill oneself, the wish to be killed, and the wish to die. If this tripartite dissection of suicide is to be accepted, it would mean that curtailing any one of these three components would prevent the suicide.

It should be noted that assessing suicide risk is never an exact science. Therefore, it is almost impossible to clearly identify a potential suicide. The characteristics that are known describe generally vulnerable groups rather than individuals, who are unique in their dispositions and the circumstances they face in their lives. Furthermore, these circumstances are in constant flux and the changes they undergo make them less or more vulnerable to suicide at any given moment in their lives. Unfortunately, the traits that are known to signify suicide risk have only been deduced from research that is mainly based on individuals and groups that committed suicide, irrespective of their detailed individual histories. For this reason, all the prediction models used to determine suicidality consistently demonstrate false positives.¹⁵⁵

¹⁵⁴ Lester, Gunn, Quinnett, *Suicide in Men*, pp. 51-2.

¹⁵⁵ J. Cooper and N. Kapur, “Assessing Suicide Risk” in *New Approaches to Preventing Suicide - A Manual for Practitioners* (London: Jessica Kingsley Publishers, 2004), p. 20.

Therefore, there is no way to tell for certain whether a particular individual is truly suicidal or not, short of their own confession, and even that may only be a ruse.

Since that most of the risk factors identified for suicide are based on studies carried out after the fact, or what is technically referred to as psychological autopsy research where instead of a physical autopsy, a psychological dissection is carried out on those who took their own lives in order to determine the reasons for their doing so, it precludes the possibility of finding out the details of the actual thoughts running through the minds of these individuals and what the proverbial 'final straw' was that pushed them over the edge and made them end their lives. Therefore, like most of modern psychology, these studies are based on mere speculation.

Nevertheless, there are certain factors that have been shown to increase the risk of suicide. These include:

- Loneliness due to social isolation
- Hopelessness about the future
- Life events that have a high negative impact such as loss of a loved one, financial or legal problems, abusive relationships, and exposure to suicidal behavior
- Physical problems and chronic or terminal conditions
- Abuse of drugs and use of intoxicants
- Psychological or neurological disorders, especially depression
- Having a history of previous self-harm
- A family history of suicide, self-harm, or depression

When we talk of risk of suicide, generally a binary classification of 'high risk' versus 'low risk' is employed, even though in reality risk varies between these two extremes. Factors that determine low risk of suicide include fleeting thoughts of suicide that are soon dismissed, no depression or drug abuse, and no major life problems that could possibly push one 'over the edge'. High risk is where an individual is

seen to have a definite plan for suicide, has access to means of suicide (such as a weapon, poison, etc.), an unstable psychological condition and a highly erratic behavior. Psychologists insist that for high-risk individuals, immediate support is required in the form of counselling, keeping constant watch over them, removing or restricting access to the means of suicide, and seeking the assistance of a mental health professional.¹⁵⁶

As for the factors that might lead one to suicide, psychologists have listed three distinct types: long-term factors, short-term factors, and precipitating factors. Long-term factors include things like genes and predisposition to suicide due to a family history of suicide or major depression, and personality traits that would make one more likely to end his or her life when pushed to do so by trying circumstances. These traits include impulsivity, low self-esteem, poor problem-solving skills, excessive perfectionism, and rigid thinking. Short-term factors relate more to circumstances encountered in life such as bereavement, divorce, substance abuse, etc. Precipitating factors are those that 'tip the balance' for the individuals who are at risk and lead them to actually take their lives. These include things like imprisonment or the threat of imprisonment, unwanted pregnancy, humiliating events, etc.¹⁵⁷

Psychologists also tell us that there are certain factors that make suicide more likely. These include: planning for death (by changing one's will or bidding family members farewell), escalation of maladaptive behavior such as drug or alcohol abuse, increase in deliberate self-harm, and the expressed intention to end one's life. Sometimes even when these factors are present, they are camouflaged by the individual in his or her outward behavior. This is sometimes referred to as 'smiling depression', and it makes identification of suicidal individuals difficult, if at all possible. In general, however, there

¹⁵⁶ Ibid, p. 24.

¹⁵⁷ Barry Lewis, "Primary Care" in *New Approaches to Preventing Suicide - A Manual for Practitioners*, pp. 43-44.

are certain 'high-risk groups' who are considered more likely to commit suicide than others. These include:

- Males (2-3 times more likely to commit suicide than females)
- Alcoholics and drug abusers (5-20 times more likely to commit suicide)
- Prisoners (9-10 times more likely to commit suicide)
- Doctors (twice as likely to commit suicide)
- Farmers (twice as likely to commit suicide)
- Unemployed individuals (2-3 times more likely to commit suicide)
- Divorced individuals (2-5 times more likely to commit suicide)

For other categories, such as those with serious physical illnesses or family history of suicide, it is not known how much greater at risk of suicide they are than others.¹⁵⁸

Interestingly, one of the factors that has been shown to protect people from suicide is marriage. Although this is truer for men than women, both spouses benefit positively from a successful and happy married life.¹⁵⁹ This is because loneliness is a catalyst for suicide since it heightens the sense of hopelessness that a person feels, and when loneliness is controlled, one feels less hopeless and would therefore be less inclined to attempt suicide. The converse of this is also true: divorce is one of the leading causes of suicide and in a number of studies, a direct correlation between the divorce rate and suicide rate has been demonstrated.¹⁶⁰

In recent years, a number of strategies for suicide prevention have been proposed, including medication, psychotherapy, public education programs, establishment of suicide prevention centers, and restriction of access to legal methods of suicide. Suicide prevention centers can be

¹⁵⁸ Ibid, p. 31.

¹⁵⁹ Lester, Gunn, Quinnett, *Suicide in Men*, p. 37.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid, p. 39.

found in several western countries and most have their own call centers where anyone who is feeling suicidal may call and receive immediate assistance in the form of a sympathetic ear and some counselling. Most suicide centers operate 24 hours a day, seven days a week, and are manned by trained volunteers. The effectiveness of suicide centers, or any of the other methods employed for preventing suicide is still open for debate. Some studies showed little impact on suicide rates while others demonstrate a significant impact.¹⁶¹

Generally, it is believed that women are easier to assist by suicide prevention methods as they are more willing to seek help and respond better to counselling and suicide education programs. For some reason, men seek help and use the available health services less often, or delay seeking assistance, leading to lower efficacy of the preventative measures among males. Some scholars have theorized that this is probably because males have always been responsible for protecting their families and tribes, and any display of weakness or vulnerability would work to their detriment. Asking unknown people for assistance is deemed dangerous to men and history shows that asking the wrong people even for the most basic assistance can even lead to one's death.¹⁶²

Some reports state that 90% of suicides are committed by people who have potentially treatable mental disorders, most commonly depression.¹⁶³ Interestingly, although women are more exposed to mental illness than men, suicide is less frequent among them. However, according to the available data, women actually have more suicidal thoughts even though they act on them less frequently and this is what leads to what is known as the "gender paradox of suicide" where there is an inverse relationship between suicidal mortality and morbidity in the two genders.¹⁶⁴ Other differences between the genders have also

¹⁶¹ Ibid, pp.303-4.

¹⁶² Ibid, pp. 308-315.

¹⁶³ Manning, *Suicide - The Social Causes of Self-Destruction*, p. 172.

¹⁶⁴ Lester, Gunn, Quinnett, *Suicide in Men*, p. 5.

been seen in the methods they use to commit suicide¹⁶⁵ as well as the willingness to report ideas of suicide (known among psychologists as ideation).¹⁶⁶

Notably, the statistics available on the subject of suicide cannot be deemed unquestionably accurate since firstly, many cases of suicide are not reported as such, and secondly, even if all the causes of death were to be recorded, it would still be virtually impossible to differentiate between certain apparently accidental deaths and suicide. A person may decide to take his life without leaving a note or any indication that he purposely crashed his vehicle, and it would then be recorded as an accident instead of suicide, for example. The converse is also true, for it is quite possible that a person who intended to take his life backed out at the last minute but died due to an accident. Such a case would be counted as a suicide when it was actually an accident. Therefore, official statistics on suicide rates cannot be considered completely accurate. Furthermore, it is clear that the number of attempted suicides in the world clearly outnumber actual suicides. This shows that many who try to take their lives are unsuccessful in doing so, and there are reported cases where people try to kill themselves numerous times using different methods but are unsuccessful each time.¹⁶⁷

Though suicidal individuals are generally ambivalent about killing themselves and actually express a desire to die, they also at times fear their own suicidal thoughts. For this reason, such individuals actively try to find people who would prevent them from taking their own lives. The fact that people refer to services like the suicide hotline in countries where it is available, or speak to religious leaders or close friends about their ideas of ending it all, shows that there is an attempt being made to save themselves by mobilizing someone else who could help to

¹⁶⁵ Women generally prefer methods they feel are less painful while men choose methods perceived as more masculine (See: *Ibid*, p. 74).

¹⁶⁶ *Ibid*, p. 14.

¹⁶⁷ Eve Moscicki, "Epidemiology of Completed and Attempted Suicide - Toward a Framework for Prevention," *Clinical Neuroscience Research* 1:5 (2001), p. 315

protect them from themselves. Hence we see, for example, that some individuals take slow-acting poisons shortly before someone is scheduled to arrive so that they will be found and assisted in time.¹⁶⁸ Furthermore, some go out of their way to ensure that others discover their bodies as they are concerned about being buried in a timely and proper manner.¹⁶⁹

Regret is quick for many who undertake suicide. Survivors of falls from tall buildings or bridges recount how as soon as they stepped off the edge, they immediately regretted it. Indeed, the overwhelming sadness or anger that leads one to take his or her life is short-lived, and there is a lot to look forward to in the unknown future that holds infinite possibilities. As Voltaire famously wrote, “The man who, in a fit of melancholy, kills himself today would have wished to live had he waited a week.”¹⁷⁰ Furthermore, the benefits that accrue from the suffering such as lessons learnt, experience acquired, etc. can only be gained if a person continues to live and face what comes in the future.

In trying to assist those who are contemplating suicide because of acute depression, we must realize that the primary characteristic of depression is despair of the possibility of something better in the future. However, even the depressed person has had periods of happiness, and it is the nature of existence that happiness always returns, if we only stay around long enough to enjoy it. Hence, it should be gently conveyed to suicidal individuals that suicide is nothing but a permanent solution to a temporary problem. So even though depression can last a long while, it is never permanent.

It is also noteworthy that the role played by other people in an individual’s suicide is not always positive, and people do not always try to help suicidal individuals. There are some who, probably because of

¹⁶⁸ Manning, *Suicide - The Social Causes of Self-Destruction*, p. 126.

¹⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 172.

¹⁷⁰ Voltaire, *The Works of Voltaire: A Contemporary Version*, trans. William F. Fleming, [4] p. 21.

their own problems in life, are indifferent towards those who are about to take their own lives. Worse still, there are even those who actively encourage others to end their lives. For instance, in 2008 when a British teenager climbed to the top of a city parking garage, some of the people in the crowd that had gathered to see what was happening started shouting abuse at him and urging him to jump. The young man eventually leapt to his death.¹⁷¹

Sometimes, such encouragement is more subtle as in the case of the American doctor Jack Kevorkian who infamously assisted in the suicide of over a hundred people between 1990 and 1998. To help facilitate the suicide of his patients, he developed devices that injected lethal chemicals into the bloodstream and emitted lethal gas. He would prepare the machines and then leave the patients to activate them. It was only after a video of him administering a lethal injection surfaced that he was finally arrested and convicted for murder.¹⁷²

One effective method of ridding society of a particular ill is using the sense of honor and ingraining the idea that the particular action is highly dishonorable. In his study on this subject, Kwame Appiah has shown how the cultural shifts regarding what is considered honorable and what is not plays an important part in the prevalence of certain acts and the hindrance of others. The notion of honor, he says, evolves over time but has an overwhelming influence on the society.¹⁷³ Appiah quotes philosophers like Kant who also opine that the sense of honor is a very powerful motivating factor in the performance or eschewal of an action. If we follow this line of thinking, it would mean that if suicide is made anathema in society to the point of considering it a highly dishonorable action, it should go a long way in preventing suicides. We only need to spread the word, make suicide resistance part of the wider

¹⁷¹ Manning, *Suicide - The Social Causes of Self-Destruction*, p. 105.

¹⁷² *Ibid*, p. 106.

¹⁷³ Kwame A. Appiah, *The Honor Code: How Moral Revolutions Happen* (New York: Norton, 2010), pp. 203-4.

culture, and attach a sense of honor to patience and perseverance in the face of life's travails.

Veterans who have helped people that wanted to jump to their deaths from tall buildings have mentioned a few tips on how to deal with such suicidal people. They say that one must avoid patronizing advice and judgmental language and instead urge the "jumper" to delay his leap for a while in order to take some time and think about the positive things in his life. Similarly, someone who is threatening to shoot himself might be convinced to put his or her gun down for a while in order to talk. Basically, getting suicidal people to delay the act can result in their calming down and realizing the folly of what they intended to do.¹⁷⁴

Distractions and ruses are also used to block those who are on the verge of suicide, such as offering a "last cigarette" to one who is about to jump from a tall building in order to get close enough to pull him to safety. Those who seek death by starvation, like people undertaking hunger strikes, are sometimes forced to ingest food in order to keep them alive. Hunger strikes were famously used during colonial times and are still commonly practiced today in many parts of the world, such as in occupied Palestine.¹⁷⁵ Among the [possibly least effective and worst] methods used in the modern world to prevent suicidal individuals from killing themselves is admitting them to special psychiatric institutions where they may be kept in padded cells for a period of time to prevent them from harming themselves or others.

As noted earlier, statistics on suicide are highly unreliable for a variety of reasons. Additionally, suicide prevention research is also difficult since it is almost impossible to identify when a suicide has been successfully prevented. We can only know when we have failed to prevent one. Focus, therefore, should be directed more on communal

¹⁷⁴ Rodney Fowler and James Maguire, "Dealing with Defenestrators - Immediate Interventions," *Journal of Police Crisis Negotiations* 1:2 (2001), pp. 45-6.

¹⁷⁵ Manning, *Suicide - The Social Causes of Self-Destruction*, p. 171.

programs aimed at prevention of self-harm and suicide rather than seeking raw data and statistics about cases of self-murder in our communities. There are many benefits of adopting a communal approach like arranging home visits to carry out informal assessments. Psychologists tell us that home assessments allow for a better understanding of the usual environment of individuals, as opposed to the false environment of the office or clinic.¹⁷⁶ When the imam or resident cleric visits the homes of those who are suffering from different life problems, they can counsel them and also assess any potential suicide risk in order to take the necessary steps to prevent the same.

Despite the fact that Muslim communities suffer far less from the problem of suicide, it would not be wrong to say that it is a growing problem, especially in migrant and minority Muslim communities. As such, the onus rests on the community leaders, and especially the imams and resident religious scholars, to cater for the mental health of the believers by providing counselling services. Resident *'ulamā'* should be trained in counselling skills and the ability to identify potential suicides so that they can help those individuals who would take their own lives if there is no one to assist them, even if only by lending a sympathetic ear. Acquiring these skills has become quite easy these days, and by attending short courses and seminars, one would gain the basic ability to offer rudimentary assistance to those who need it. This would be a positive first step to nip the problem of suicide in Muslim communities in the bud.

Communal counselling and suicide prevention methods are beneficial in countering the taboo of suicide by keeping things confidential and within communal circles. This approach is also more efficacious since one has easy access to other relevant information such as the identity of the significant people in one's life, how they can

¹⁷⁶ N. Crompton and P. Walmsley, "Community Mental Health Services" in *New Approaches to Preventing Suicide - A Manual for Practitioners* (London: Jessica Kingsley Publishers, 2004), p. 88.

positively or negatively impact the suicidal thoughts being experienced, and what they are prepared to do in order to show support, among other things. With a strong communal support structure in place, even in the unfortunate event of an actual suicide, relatives of the deceased can be assisted through the trauma and shock with the sensitivity, care and understanding that only community members can offer.

Suicide among adolescents is a growing problem. Research shows that the most common causes of teenage suicide are disciplinary action deemed to be too harsh or unfair, humiliation among peers, or rejection by love interests. A dysfunctional family only adds fuel to the fire with issues such as family conflicts, violence and lack of proper parenting skills, or apathy and lack of cohesion. Loss of a parent and a family history of suicide are also factors that may lead to young people ending their lives.¹⁷⁷ Community support in the form of morale boosting activities for youth can go a long way in mitigating some of the negative effects of these factors that push young people over the edge. The community can work as a ‘second family’ that would fill the lacunae of the actual families and give adolescents something to look forward to and live for.

It is important to remain sympathetic towards those who are grappling with suicidal thoughts and depression, and do all that is possible to assist them. Some of the suggestions given here may go a long way in assisting people to combat thoughts of ending their lives without making them feel judged and pressurized to justify their own existence. If suicide is considered a taboo subject and we avoid discussing it, we run the risk of having to confront it later while we are totally unprepared and vulnerable. It is better to understand that this is part of the human experience, and even though is not as prevalent in Muslim communities, it is nonetheless present and needs to be dealt

¹⁷⁷ Gemma Trainor, “Adolescents and Developmental Group Psychotherapy” in *New Approaches to Preventing Suicide - A Manual for Practitioners* (London: Jessica Kingsley Publishers, 2004), pp. 180-1.

with before it becomes pervasive.

5

SUPPLICATIONS IN TIMES OF GRIEF

The importance of supplication (*du'ā'*) in Islam is well known. Allah instructs all the believers to call upon Him and supplicate to Him when He says:

وَقَالَ رَبُّكُمْ ادْعُونِي أَسْتَجِبْ لَكُمْ إِنَّ الَّذِينَ يَسْتَكْبِرُونَ عَنْ عِبَادَتِي سَيَدْخُلُونَ
جَهَنَّمَ دَاخِرِينَ

Your Lord has said, 'Call Me, and I will hear you!' Indeed those who are disdainful of My worship will enter Hell in utter humiliation. (Q40:60)

In fact, even when one wishes to complain of his situation and the anguish he is experiencing, it is to Allah that this complaint should be addressed, for indeed He is the only one who can relieve one of his plight. The Qur'an quotes the words of Prophet Ya'qūb (a) when he said:

قَالَ إِنَّمَا أَشْكُوا بَنِي وَحُزْنِي إِلَى اللَّهِ وَأَعْلَمُ مِنَ اللَّهِ مَا لَا تَعْلَمُونَ

He said, 'I complain of my anguish and grief only to Allah. I know from Allah what you do not know.' (Q12:86)

For times when one is overcome by grief and sorrow, supplication can bring about much needed relief. Indeed, communicating with one's Maker and unburdening one's soul to Him quickens the healing process after any great loss. Remembering Allah is, after all, the means by which hearts find rest and tranquility:

الَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا وَتَطْمَئِنُّ قُلُوبُهُمْ بِذِكْرِ اللَّهِ أَلَا بِذِكْرِ اللَّهِ تَطْمَئِنُّ الْقُلُوبُ

Those who have faith and whose hearts find rest in the remembrance of Allah.’ Behold! The hearts find rest in Allah’s remembrance! (Q13:28)

Since by supplicating one is communicating with his Creator, he can speak in any language, and the *du‘ā* does not necessarily have to be in Arabic. The supplications that have been taught to us by the Infallibles serve as examples that teach us the etiquette (*ādāb*) of invoking and beseeching Allah and seeking what we need from Him. We can then employ this etiquette and supplicate to the Almighty in our own words and with our own invocations. Aside from this, there are certain verses and sūrahs of the Qur’ān that have also been recommended for the grief-stricken, such as Sūrah al-Inshirāḥ which should be recited after the *fajr* and *maghribayn* prayers to obtain relief from sorrow and anguish. Additionally, the verses that contain what is commonly referred to as *dhikr yūnusīyyah*:

وَذَا التُّونِ إِذْ ذَهَبَ مُغْلَبًا فَظَنَّ أَنْ لَنْ نَقْدِرَ عَلَيْهِ فَنَادَى فِي الظُّلُمَاتِ أَنْ لَا إِلَهَ إِلَّا أَنْتَ سُبْحَانَكَ إِنِّي كُنْتُ مِنَ الظَّالِمِينَ ﴿۱۰۱﴾ فَاسْتَجَبْنَا لَهُ، وَنَجَّيْنَاهُ مِنَ الْعَمِّ، وَكَذَلِكَ نُجِي الْمُؤْمِنِينَ

And [remember] the Man of the Fish, when he left in a rage, thinking that We would not put him to hardship. Then he cried out in the darkness, ‘There is no god except You! You are immaculate! I have indeed been among the wrongdoers!’ So We answered his prayer and delivered him from the agony; and thus do We deliver the faithful. (Q21:87-88)

...teach us what Prophet Yūnus recited to gain deliverance from agony and distress; and then Allah says: “*thus do We deliver the faithful*” which some scholars take to mean that if the faithful believers call upon Allah with the same invocation, they too will be relieved from their agony. Notably, the three important parts of this invocation are: attention to *tawhīd*, glorifying Allah and realizing His freedom from all shortcomings, and confessing one’s sins. Doing this will lead the

believer to attain deliverance.

So powerful is this invocation that the Noble Prophet (ﷺ) is reported to have said:

إِنِّي لَا أَعْلَمُ كَلِمَةً لَا يَقْرَأُهَا مَكْرُوبٌ إِلَّا خَرَجَ عَنْهُ، كَلِمَةً أَخِي يُونُسَ فَنَادَى فِي الظُّلُمَاتِ
أَنْ لَا إِلَهَ إِلَّا أَنْتَ سُبْحَانَكَ إِنِّي كُنْتُ مِنَ الظَّالِمِينَ.

Indeed, I know of an invocation that no a distressed person would recite but that he would come out of it (his anguish). It is the invocation of my brother Yūnus. He called out in the darkness, “*There is no god except You! You are immaculate! I have indeed been among the wrongdoers!*”¹

Some scholars have also noted that reciting the tradition of the cloak (*ḥadīth al-kisāʾ*) is also beneficial to relieve grief and sorrow, as is mentioned towards the end of the ḥadīth itself:

مَا ذُكِرَ حَبْرُنَا هَذَا فِي مَحْفَلٍ مِنْ مَحَافِلِ أَهْلِ الْأَرْضِ وَفِيهِ جَمْعٌ مِنْ شِيعَتِنَا وَمُحِبِّينَا، وَفِيهِمْ
مَهْمُومٌ إِلَّا وَفَرَّجَ اللَّهُ هَمَّهُ، وَلَا مَغْمُومٌ إِلَّا وَكَشَفَ اللَّهُ غَمَّهُ.

This report about us is not mentioned in any gathering of the people of the world in which our followers and lovers are present, and among them is the distressed one, but that Allah relieves his distress, nor a grieving one but that Allah removes his grief.

While there are numerous supplications that we have in our possession from the Infallibles, and many of them are recommended in times of grief and sadness, we have selected twelve supplications and presented them below with their translations. Reading these *duʿāʾs* with understanding and reflection will most certainly bring about a sense of relief and peace to the believing reader, God-willing. Those who are unable to read the Arabic may suffice with the translation. Before mentioning the supplications, it is beneficial to acquaint ourselves with

¹ Jalāl al-Dīn al-Suyūṭī, *Jāmiʿ al-Aḥādīth*, vol. 10, p. 194.

their contents. As such, we will first outline a brief synopsis of each *du‘ā*:

The first supplication was commonly recited among those who were grieving and it became known as one of the supplications for relief (*faraj*). It was the *du‘ā* that the Holy Prophet (ﷺ) himself taught us as he would recite it whenever he was sad. In it, he declares that his hope rests only with Allah and he recounts the fact that he is a recipient of many divine blessings. Finally, he asks Allah for protection, forgiveness, and deliverance from trials. The second supplication is also from Rasūlullāh (ﷺ), as narrated by Imam ‘Alī (a), and in it Allah is called upon with His beautiful names that reflect His omnipotence and the fact that it is only He who is able to rescue one from tribulations. The supplication consists of praise of Allah and in the end, one may ask for anything that he wishes. The third *du‘ā* also follows the same format with the difference being that in the end, Allah’s mercy is sought.

Supplications four through six are from *al-Ṣaḥīfah al-Sajjādiyyah*. In the fourth supplication, Imam Zayn al-‘Ābidīn (a) begins by praising Allah and acknowledging that no one can assist him besides Allah. He sends salutations to the Prophet and recounts the omnipotence and all-encompassing mercy of Allah. He testifies that he is but a weak slave of Allah, seeking sanctuary. He goes on to once again praise Allah and then prays for the ability to worship, obey, and please Him. He asks for the strengthening of his heart, and wishes to always remember Allah and be in reverential awe of Him. He seeks closeness to the friends of Allah and distance and independence from the wicked people.

In the fifth supplication, Imam al-Sajjād (a) starts by praising Allah as the “Reliever of worry” and “Remover of grief.” He then asks for the alleviation of his own worry and grief, before instructing that *āyat al-kursī*, and three sūrahs of the Qur’ān be recited.² He then emphasizes

² It is noteworthy that these supplications of Imam al-Sajjād were actually taught by him to his sons Zayd and Imam al-Bāqir (a), and hence he would sometimes instruct them to recite specific verses or sūrahs between the supplications.

his great need and intense weakness before Allah. He sends salutations upon the Noble Prophet and his pure household, and then asks Allah to fulfill his request and deliver him from trials. In the sixth supplication, the Imam asks for protection from his enemies and deliverance from his situation, before ending with salutations upon the Prophet and his progeny.

Though not from the *Ṣaḥīfah*, the seventh supplication is also from Imam Zayn al-‘Ābidīn (a) and he is reported to have recommended its recitation in times of distress, after performing ablution and offering two *rak‘ahs* of prayer. In it, he mentions how Allah helped His Prophets and then seeks a means out of his predicament. The eighth supplication comes highly recommended by some scholars and is based on the *du‘ā’* that was recited by the Infallibles in their *qunūt*. It likewise contains references to how Allah helped previous Prophets and ends with requesting one’s needs, whatever they may be.

The ninth supplication is from Imam al-Bāqir (a) and he starts and ends it with *ṣalawāt* upon the Prophet and his family. He humbles himself before Allah, asks for forgiveness, protection from calamities, and support in the face of hardship. The tenth supplication is from Imam al-Ṣādiq (a) and he is reported to have recommended that it be recited after performing *ghuṣl* and two *rak‘ahs* of prayer. The *du‘ā’* is short and contains a request to be granted relief from distress and sorrow. The eleventh supplication was recited by the Imams in times of grief and asks Allah for support, for indeed He is the greatest Supporter of the believers. The last supplication was what Jibra‘īl is said to have taught Prophet Yūsuf (a) when he was thrown into the well by his brothers and by which he was rescued and relieved from his plight.

①

When something made him sad, the Holy Prophet (ṣ) would recite the

following supplication and it was later called *du'ā' al-faraj*³:

اللَّهُمَّ احْرُسْنِي بِعَيْنِكَ الَّتِي لَا تَنَامُ، وَاكْنُفْنِي بِرُكْنِكَ الَّذِي لَا يُرَامُ، وَارْحَمْنِي بِقُدْرَتِكَ عَلَيَّ، وَلَا أَهْلِكَ وَأَنْتَ رَجَائِي، فَكَمْ مِنْ نِعْمَةٍ أَنْعَمْتَ بِهَا عَلَيَّ قَلَّ لَهَا شُكْرِي، وَكَمْ مِنْ بَلِيَّةٍ ابْتَلَيْتَنِي قَلَّ لَكَ بِهَا صَبْرِي، فَيَا مَنْ قَلَّ عِنْدَ نِعْمَتِهِ شُكْرِي فَلَمْ يَحْرَمْنِي، وَيَا مَنْ قَلَّ عِنْدَ بَلِيَّتِهِ صَبْرِي فَلَمْ يَحْدُلْنِي، وَيَا مَنْ رَأَى عَلَيَّ الْخَطَايَا فَلَمْ يَفْضَحْنِي، أَسْأَلُكَ أَنْ تُصَلِّيَ عَلَيَّ عَلَى مُحَمَّدٍ وَآلِ مُحَمَّدٍ. اللَّهُمَّ أَعْنِي عَلَى دِينِي بِالْدُّنْيَا، وَعَلَى الْآخِرَةِ بِالتَّقْوَى، وَاحْفَظْنِي فِيمَا غَبِثَ عَنْهُ، وَلَا تَكِلْنِي إِلَى نَفْسِي فِيمَا حَضَرْتُهُ، يَا مَنْ لَا تَضُرُّهُ الدُّنُوبُ، وَلَا تَنْقُضُهُ الْمَغْفِرَةُ، هَبْ لِي مَا لَا يَنْقُضُكَ، وَاغْفِرْ لِي مَا لَا يَضُرُّكَ، إِنَّكَ رَبُّ وَهَّابٌ. أَسْأَلُكَ فَرَجاً قَرِيباً، وَصَبْرًا جَمِيلاً، وَرِزْقاً وَاسِعاً، وَالْعَافِيَةَ مِنْ جَمِيعِ الْبَلَاءِ، وَشُكْرَ الْعَافِيَةِ.

O Allah! Protect me by Your watchfulness that does not become weary, guard me with Your support which cannot be defeated, have mercy on me by Your power over me, for I will not face destruction while my hope rests on You. How many blessings have You bestowed upon me for which my gratitude has come up short, and how many trials have you tested me with where my patience for Your sake was inadequate? O One for whose blessings my gratitude has fallen short but He has not deprived me! O One in whose trials my patience has been inadequate but He has not abandoned me! O One who has seen my mistakes but has not disgraced me! I ask You to send Your blessings on Muḥammad and the progeny of Muḥammad. O Allah! Make this world a means for my religion, and piety a means for my Hereafter. Protect me from that which is hidden from me and do not leave me on my own to face that which comes towards me. O One who is not harmed by sins and does not lose anything by granting forgiveness! Grant me that from which You lose nothing and forgive me that which does not harm You, indeed

³ There are a number of supplications with this same name.

You are a Generous Lord! I ask You for near deliverance, graceful patience, abundant sustenance, wellbeing in the face of all trials and gratitude for all Your blessings.⁴

(2)

Traditions tell us that the Prophet (ﷺ) taught the following supplication to Imam ‘Alī (a) to be recited in times of hardship, grief, and worry, saying that Jibra’īl had brought it to him as a gift from Allah:

يَا عِمَادَ مَنْ لَا عِمَادَ لَهُ، وَيَا ذُحْرَ مَنْ لَا ذُحْرَ لَهُ، وَيَا سَنَدَ مَنْ لَا سَنَدَ لَهُ، وَيَا حِزْرَ مَنْ لَا حِزْرَ لَهُ، وَيَا غِيَاثَ مَنْ لَا غِيَاثَ لَهُ، وَيَا كَرِيمَ الْعَفْوِ، وَيَا حَسَنَ الْبَلَاءِ، وَيَا عَظِيمَ الرَّجَاءِ، وَيَا عَوْنَ الضُّعْفَاءِ، وَيَا مُنْقِذَ الْغَرْقَى، وَيَا مُنْجِيَ الْهَلْكَى، يَا مُحْسِنُ يَا مُجْمِلُ يَا مُنْعِمُ يَا مُفْضِلُ، أَنْتَ الَّذِي سَجَدَ لَكَ سَوَادُ اللَّيْلِ وَنُورُ النَّهَارِ، وَضَوْءُ الْقَمَرِ وَشُعَاعُ الشَّمْسِ، وَدَوِيُّ الْمَاءِ وَحَفِيفُ الشَّجَرِ، يَا اللَّهُ يَا اللَّهُ يَا اللَّهُ، أَنْتَ وَحْدَكَ لَا شَرِيكَ لَكَ. اللَّهُمَّ افْعَلْ بِي...

O Supporter of the one with no supporter! O Protector of the one with no protector! O Provider of the one with no provisions! O Helper of the one with no helper! O Hearer of the unheard appeal! O Munificent in forgiving! O One whose trials are good! O Giver of great hope! O Helper of the weak! O Rescuer of the drowning! O Savior of the devastated! O Beneficent! O Creator of beauty! O Granter of blessings! O Bestower of good! You are the One to whom prostrate the darkness of night, the light of day, the illumination of the moon, the rays of the sun, the sound of [running] water and the rattling of trees. O Allah! O Allah! O Allah! You are One and have no partner. [Then you say:] O Allah! Grant me such and such...⁵

⁴ Al-Majlisī, *Biḥār al-Anwār*, vol. 95, p. 197.

⁵ Al-Ṣadūq, *al-Khiṣāl*, vol. 2, p. 510.

③

Another supplication that Amīr al-Mu'minīn (a) reported from the Noble Prophet (ṣ) for the alleviation of grief and stress was:

يَا حَيُّ يَا قَيُّوْمُ، يَا حَيًّا لَا يَمُوتُ، يَا حَيُّ لَا إِلَهَ إِلَّا أَنْتَ، كَاشِفُ الْغَمِّ، مُجِيبُ
دَعْوَةِ الْمُضْطَرِّينَ، أَشْأَلُكَ بِأَنَّ لَكَ الْحَمْدَ، لَا إِلَهَ إِلَّا أَنْتَ بَدِيعِ السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ
ذُو الْجَلَالِ وَالْإِكْرَامِ، وَرَحْمَانُ الدُّنْيَا وَالْآخِرَةِ وَرَحِيمُهُمَا، ارْحَمْنِي رَحْمَةً تُغْنِينِي
بِهَا عَنْ رَحْمَةِ مَنْ سِوَاكَ يَا أَرْحَمَ الرَّاحِمِينَ.

O Ever-living! O Ever-lasting! O Ever-living who never dies! O Ever-living, there is no god but You. Remover of the troubles! Answerer of the calls of the desperate! I ask You, as all praise is due to You – there is no god but You – O Bestower of favours! Originator of the heavens and the earth! Lord of Might and Glory! The Beneficent in this world and the next and the Merciful in them both! O Lord, bless me with the mercy that would make me free from needing mercy from other than You, O Most Merciful of those who show mercy.⁶

④

Imam Zayn al-‘Ābidīn’s supplication in times of sorrow:

اللَّهُمَّ يَا كَافِيَ الْفَزْدِ الضَّعِيفِ، وَوَاقِيَ الْأَمْرِ الْمُخْوفِ، أَفْرَدْتَنِي الْخَطَايَا فَلَا
صَاحِبَ مَعِيَ، وَضَعَفْتُ عَنْ عَضْبِكَ فَلَا مُؤَيِّدَ لِي، وَأَشْرَفْتُ عَلَى خَوْفِ لِقَائِكَ
فَلَا مُسَكِّنَ لِرُوعَتِي، وَمَنْ يُؤْمِنِي مِنْكَ وَأَنْتَ أَحْفَتْنِي، وَمَنْ يُسَاعِدْنِي وَأَنْتَ
أَفْرَدْتَنِي وَمَنْ يُقْوِينِي وَأَنْتَ أَضْعَفْتَنِي، لَا يَجِيزُ يَا إِلَهِي إِلَّا رَبُّ عَلَى مَرْبُوبٍ، وَلَا
يُؤْمِنُ إِلَّا غَالِبٌ عَلَى مَغْلُوبٍ، وَلَا يُعِينُ إِلَّا طَالِبٌ عَلَى مَطْلُوبٍ، وَيَبْدِكَ يَا إِلَهِي،

⁶ Al-Tūsī, *al-Amālī*, p. 511.

جَمِيعُ ذَلِكَ السَّبَبِ، وَإِلَيْكَ الْمَفْرُ وَالْمَهْرُبُ.

O Allah! O Sufferer of the isolated and weak, and Protector against terrifying affairs! Offenses have isolated me, so there is none to be my companion. I am too weak for Your wrath and there is none to strengthen me. I have approached the terror of meeting You and there is none to allay my fear. Who can make me secure from You when You have filled me with terror? Who can come to my aid when You have isolated me? Who can strengthen me when You have weakened me? None can grant sanctuary to a vassal, my Lord, but a master; none can give security to one dominated but a dominator; none can aid him from whom demands are made but a demander. In Your hand, my Lord, is the means of all that, and to You is the place of escape and flight.

فَصَلِّ عَلَيَّ مُحَمَّدٍ وَآلِهِ، وَأَجِرْ هَرَبِي، وَأَنْجِحْ مَطْلَبِي، أَللَّهُمَّ إِنَّكَ إِنْ صَرَفْتَ عَنِّي وَجْهَكَ الْكَرِيمَ، أَوْ مَنَعْتَنِي فَضْلَكَ الْجَسِيمَ، أَوْ حَظَرْتَ عَلَيَّ رِزْقَكَ، أَوْ قَطَعْتَ عَنِّي سَبِيلَكَ، لَمْ أَجِدِ السَّبِيلَ إِلَى شَيْءٍ مِنْ أَمَلِي غَيْرَكَ، وَلَمْ أَقْدِرْ عَلَى مَا عِنْدَكَ بِمَعُونَةِ سِوَاكَ، فَإِنِّي عَبْدُكَ وَفِي قَبْضَتِكَ، نَاصِيَتِي بِيَدِكَ، لَا أَمْرَ لِي مَعَ أَمْرِكَ، مَا ضِي فِي حُكْمِكَ، عَدْلٌ فِي قَضَاؤِكَ، وَلَا قُوَّةَ لِي عَلَى الْخُرُوجِ مِنْ سُلْطَانِكَ، وَلَا أَسْتَطِيعُ مُجَاوَزَةَ قُدْرَتِكَ وَلَا أَسْتَمِيلُ هَوَاكَ، وَلَا أَبْلُغُ رِضَاكَ، وَلَا أَنَالُ مَا عِنْدَكَ إِلَّا بِطَاعَتِكَ وَبِفَضْلِ رَحْمَتِكَ.

So bless Muhammad and his household, and give sanctuary to me in my flight, and grant my request! O Allah, if You turn Your generous face away from me, withhold from me Your immense bounty, forbid me Your provision, or cut off from me Your thread, I will find no way to anything of my hope other than You, nor be given power over what is with You through another's aid, for I am Your servant and in Your grasp; my forelock is in Your hand. I have no command along with Your command. Accomplished is Your judgement of me, just is Your decree for me! I have not the strength to emerge from Your authority

nor am I able to step outside Your power. I cannot win Your inclination, arrive at Your good pleasure, or attain what is with You except through obeying You and through the grace of Your mercy.

إِلَهِي أَضَبَحْتُ وَأَمْسَيْتُ عَبْدًا دَاخِرًا لَكَ، لَا أَفْلِكُ لِنَفْسِي نَفْعًا وَلَا ضَرًّا إِلَّا بِكَ،
أَشْهَدُ بِذَلِكَ عَلَى نَفْسِي، وَأَعْتَرِفُ بِضَعْفِ قُوَّتِي وَقَلَّةِ حِيلَتِي، فَأَنْجِزْ لِي مَا
وَعَدْتَنِي، وَتَمِّمْ لِي مَا آتَيْتَنِي، فَإِنِّي عَبْدُكَ الْمُسْكِينُ الْمُسْتَكِينُ الضَّعِيفُ الضَّرِيرُ
الذَّلِيلُ الْحَقِيرُ الْمُهِينُ الْفَقِيرُ الْحَائِفُ الْمُسْتَجِيرُ.

My Lord, I rise in the morning and enter into evening as Your lowly slave. I own no profit and loss for myself except through You. I bear witness to that over myself and I confess to the frailty of my strength and the paucity of my stratagems. So accomplish what You have promised me and complete for me what You have given me, for I am Your slave, miserable, abased, frail, distressed, vile, despised, poor, fearful, and seeking sanctuary!

اللَّهُمَّ صَلِّ عَلَى مُحَمَّدٍ وَآلِهِ وَلَا تَجْعَلْنِي نَاسِيًا لِذِكْرِكَ فِي مَا أَوْلَيْتَنِي، وَلَا غَافِلًا
لِإِحْسَانِكَ فِي مَا أَوْلَيْتَنِي، وَلَا آيسًا مِنْ إِجَابَتِكَ لِي وَإِنْ أَنْبَطَتْ عَنِّي، فِي سَرَاءٍ
كُنْتُ أَوْ ضَرَاءٍ، أَوْ شِدَّةٍ أَوْ رَخَاءٍ، أَوْ غَافِيَةٍ أَوْ بَلَاءٍ، أَوْ بُؤْسٍ أَوْ نَعْمَاءٍ، أَوْ جِدَةٍ أَوْ
لَأْوَاءٍ، أَوْ فَقْرٍ أَوْ غِنَى.

O Allah, bless Muhammad and his household, and let me not forget to remember You in what You have done for me, be heedless of Your beneficence in Your trying me, or despair of Your response to me, even if it keeps me waiting, whether I am in prosperity or adversity, hardship or ease, wellbeing or affliction, misery or comfort, wealth or distress, poverty or riches!

اللَّهُمَّ صَلِّ عَلَى مُحَمَّدٍ وَآلِهِ، وَاجْعَلْ ثَنَائِي عَلَيْكَ، وَمَدْحِي إِيَّاكَ وَحَمْدِي لَكَ فِي
كُلِّ حَالَتِي حَتَّى لَا أَفْرَحَ بِمَا آتَيْتَنِي مِنَ الدُّنْيَا، وَلَا أَحْزَنَ عَلَى مَا مَنَعْتَنِي فِيهَا،

وَأَشْعِرْ قَلْبِي تَقْوَاكَ، وَاسْتَعْمِلْ بَدَنِي فِي مَا تَقْبَلُهُ مِنِّي، وَاشْغَلْ بِطَاعَتِكَ نَفْسِي عَنْ كُلِّ مَا يَرُدُّ عَلَيَّ حَتَّى لَا أَحِبَّ شَيْئًا مِنْ سَخَطِكَ، وَلَا أَشْحَطُ شَيْئًا مِنْ رِضَاكَ.

O Allah, bless Muḥammad and his household, and make me laud You, extol You, and praise You in all my states so that I rejoice not over what You give me of this world, nor sorrow over that of it which You withhold from me! Impart reverential fear of You to my heart, employ my body in that which You accept from me, and divert my soul through obedience to You from all that comes upon me, so that I love nothing that displeases You and become displeased at nothing that pleases You!

اللَّهُمَّ صَلِّ عَلَى مُحَمَّدٍ وَآلِهِ، وَفَرِّغْ قَلْبِي لِمَحَبَّتِكَ، وَاشْغَلْ بِذِكْرِكَ، وَانْعَشْهُ بِخَوْفِكَ وَبِالْوَجَلِ مِنْكَ، وَقَوِّهِ بِالرَّغْبَةِ إِلَيْكَ، وَأَمَلْهُ إِلَى طَاعَتِكَ، وَأَجْرِ بِهِ فِي أَحَبِّ السُّبُلِ إِلَيْكَ، وَذَلِّلْهُ بِالرَّغْبَةِ فِي مَا عِنْدَكَ أَيَّامَ حَيَاتِي كُلِّهَا، وَاجْعَلْ تَقْوَاكَ مِنَ الدُّنْيَا زَادِي وَإِلَى رَحْمَتِكَ رِحْلَتِي، وَفِي مَرْضَاتِكَ مَدْخَلِي، وَاجْعَلْ فِي جَنَّتِكَ مَثْوَايَ، وَهَبْ لِي قُوَّةَ أَحْتَمِلُ بِهَا جَمِيعَ مَرْضَاتِكَ، وَاجْعَلْ فِرَارِي إِلَيْكَ وَرَغْبَتِي فِي مَا عِنْدَكَ.

O Allah, bless Muḥammad and his household, empty my heart for Your love, occupy it with remembering You, animate it with fear of You and quaking before You, strengthen it with beseeching You, incline it to Your obedience, set it running in the path most beloved to You, and subdue it through desire for what is with You all the days of my life! Let my provision in this world be reverential fear of You, my journey be toward Your mercy, and my entrance be into Your good pleasure! Appoint for me a lodging in Your Garden, give me strength to bear everything that pleases You, make me flee to You and desire what is with You.

وَأَلْبِسْ قَلْبِي الْوَحْشَةَ مِنْ شِرَارِ خَلْقِكَ، وَهَبْ لِي الْأَنْسَ بِكَ وَبِأَوْلِيَائِكَ وَأَهْلِ

طَاعَتِكَ، وَلَا تَجْعَلْ لِفَاجِرٍ وَلَا كَافِرٍ عَلَيَّ مِنَّةً، وَلَا لَهُ عِنْدِي يَدًا، وَلَا بِي إِلَيْهِمْ حَاجَةٌ، بَلْ اجْعَلْ سُكُونَ قَلْبِي وَأَنْسَ نَفْسِي وَاسْتِغْنَائِي وَكِفَايَتِي بِكَ وَبِحَيَارِ خَلْقِكَ.

Clothe my heart in estrangement from the evil amongst Your creatures, and grant me intimacy with You, Your friends, and those who obey You! Assign to no wicked person or unbeliever a kindness toward me or a hand that obliges me, nor to me a need for any of them! Rather make the stillness of my heart, the comfort of my soul, my independence and my sufficiency lie in You and the best of Your creatures!

اللَّهُمَّ صَلِّ عَلَى مُحَمَّدٍ وَآلِهِ، وَاجْعَلْنِي لَهُمْ قَرِينًا، وَاجْعَلْنِي لَهُمْ نَصِيرًا، وَامْتِنْ عَلَيَّ بِشَوْقِي إِلَيْكَ، وَبِالْعَمَلِ لَكَ بِمَا تُحِبُّ وَتَرْضَى، إِنَّكَ عَلَيَّ كُلِّ شَيْءٍ قَدِيرٌ، وَذَلِكَ عَلَيْكَ يَسِيرٌ.

O Allah, bless Muḥammad and his household, and make me their comrade, make me their helper, and oblige me with yearning for You and doing for You what You love and approve! You are powerful over everything and that is easy for You.⁷

5

Imam al-Sajjād's supplication for removal of anguish:

يَا فَارِجَ الْهَمِّ، وَكَاشِفَ الْغَمِّ، يَا رَحْمَنَ الدُّنْيَا وَالْآخِرَةِ وَرَحِيمَهُمَا، صَلِّ عَلَى مُحَمَّدٍ وَآلِ مُحَمَّدٍ، وَأَفْرِجْ هَمِّي، وَاكْشِفْ غَمِّي، يَا وَاحِدُ يَا أَحَدُ يَا صَمَدُ يَا مَنْ لَمْ يَلِدْ وَلَمْ يُولَدْ وَلَمْ يَكُنْ لَهُ كُفُوًا أَحَدٌ اغْصِنِي وَطَهِّرْ نِي، وَادْهَبْ بِنَيْبِي.

O Reliever of worry! O Remover of grief! O Merciful in this world and

⁷ 'Alī ibn al-Ḥusayn (a), *al-Ṣaḥīfah al-Sajjādiyyah*, supplication no. 21.

the next and Compassionate in both! Bless Muḥammad and his household, relieve my worry, and remove my grief! O One, O Unique, O Eternal Refuge! O He who has not begotten, nor has He been begotten, and none is equal to Him! Preserve me, purify me, and take away my affliction!

[وَاقْرَأْ آيَةَ الْكُرْسِيِّ وَالْمُعَوِّذَتَيْنِ وَقُلْ هُوَ اللَّهُ أَحَدٌ وَقُلْ:]

[Here you should recite *āyat al-kursī* (Q2:255), the two *Sūrahs* al-Nās and al-Falaq (Q113&114), and *Sūrah* al-Ikhlāṣ (112). Then say:]

اللَّهُمَّ إِنِّي أَسْأَلُكَ سُؤَالَ مَنْ اسْتَدَّتْ فَاقَتُهُ، وَصَعَفَتْ قُوَّتُهُ، وَكَثُرَتْ ذُنُوبُهُ، سُؤَالَ مَنْ لَا يَجِدُ لِفَاقَتِهِ مُعِينًا، وَلَا لِصَعْفِهِ مُقَوِّيًا، وَلَا لِذَنْبِهِ عَافِرًا غَيْرَكَ، يَا ذَا الْجَلَالِ وَالْإِكْرَامِ، أَسْأَلُكَ عَمَلًا تُحِبُّ بِهِ مَنْ عَمِلَ بِهِ، وَيَقِينًا تَنْفَعُ بِهِ مَنْ اسْتَيْقَنَ بِهِ حَقَّ الْيَقِينِ فِي نَفَاذِ أَمْرِكَ.

O Allah, I ask You with the asking of one whose neediness is intense, whose strength is frail, whose sins are many; the asking of one who finds no helper in his neediness, no strengthener in his frailty, no forgiver of his sin other than You. O Possessor of majesty and munificence! I ask of You for a deed through which You will love him who does it and a conviction by which You will profit him who is certain with true certainty concerning the execution of Your command!

اللَّهُمَّ صَلِّ عَلَى مُحَمَّدٍ وَآلِ مُحَمَّدٍ، وَأَقْبِضْ عَلَيَّ الصَّدَقِ نَفْسِي وَأَقْطَعْ مِنَ الدُّنْيَا حَاجَتِي، وَاجْعَلْ فِي مَا عِنْدَكَ رَغْبَتِي شَوْقًا إِلَيَّ لِقَائِكَ، وَهَبْ لِي صِدْقَ التَّوَكُّلِ عَلَيْكَ، أَسْأَلُكَ مِنْ خَيْرِ كِتَابٍ قَدْ خَلَا، وَأَعُوذُ بِكَ مِنْ شَرِّ كِتَابٍ قَدْ خَلَا، أَسْأَلُكَ خَوْفَ الْعَابِدِينَ لَكَ، وَعِبَادَةَ الْخَاشِعِينَ لَكَ، وَيَقِينَ الْمُتَوَكِّلِينَ عَلَيْكَ، وَتَوَكُّلَ الْمُؤْمِنِينَ عَلَيْكَ.

O Allah, bless Muḥammad and the household of Muḥammad, and take my soul while it is firm in sincerity, cut off my need for this world,

make my desire for what is with You become a [reason for] yearning to meet You, and give me true confidence in You! I ask of You the good of the writ that has been made and I seek refuge with You from the evil of the writ that has been made. I ask of You the fear of the worshipers, the worship of those humbly fearful of You, the certainty of those who have confidence in You, and the confidence of those who have faith in You.

اللَّهُمَّ اجْعَلْ رَغْبَتِي فِي مَسْأَلَتِي مِثْلَ رَغْبَةِ أَوْلِيَائِكَ فِي مَسْأَلِهِمْ، وَرَهْبَتِي مِثْلَ رَهْبَةِ أَوْلِيَائِكَ، وَاسْتَعْمَلْنِي فِي مَرْضَاتِكَ عَمَلًا لَا أَثْرُكَ مَعَهُ شَيْئًا مِنْ دِينِكَ مَخَافَةَ أَحَدٍ مِنْ خَلْقِكَ، اللَّهُمَّ هَذِهِ حَاجَتِي فَأَعْظِمْ فِيهَا رَغْبَتِي، وَأَظْهِرْ فِيهَا عُذْرِي، وَلَقِّنِي فِيهَا حُجَّتِي، وَعَافِ فِيهَا جَسَدِي.

O Allah, make my desire in my request like the desire of Your friends in their requests, and my fear like the fear of Your friends! Employ me in Your good pleasure through works in which I will not leave aside anything of Your religion fearing any of Your creatures! O Allah, this is my need, so make my desire for it great, within it make manifest my excuse, through it instill me with my argument, and by means of it make well my body.

اللَّهُمَّ مَنْ أَصْبَحَ لَهُ ثِقَةٌ أَوْ رَجَاءٌ غَيْرُكَ، فَقَدْ أَصْبَحْتُ وَأَنْتَ تَقْتِي وَرَجَائِي فِي الْأُمُورِ كُلِّهَا، فَاقْضِ لِي بِخَيْرِهَا عَاقِبَةً، وَنَجِّنِي مِنْ مُضِلَّاتِ الْفِتَنِ بِرَحْمَتِكَ يَا أَرْحَمَ الرَّاحِمِينَ، وَصَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيَّ سَيِّدِنَا مُحَمَّدٍ رَسُولِ اللَّهِ الْمُصْطَفَى وَعَلَى آلِهِ الطَّاهِرِينَ.

O Allah, some rise in the morning having trust or hope in other than You, yet I rise in the morning while You are my trust and my hope in all affairs, so decree for me those which are best in outcome and deliver me from misguiding trials, O Most Merciful of the merciful! And [O] Allah, bless our master Muḥammad, the chosen Messenger of God, and

his household, the pure!⁸

⑥

The following was Imam al-Sajjād's supplication in times of distress and for seeking relief:⁹

إِلَهِي لَا تُشْمِتْ بِي عَدُوِّي، وَلَا تَفْجَعْ بِي حَمِيمِي وَصَدِيقِي. إِلَهِي هَبْ لِي لَحْظَةً
مِنْ لَحْظَاتِكَ تَكْشِفُ عَنِّي مَا ابْتَلَيْتَنِي بِهِ، وَتُعِيدُنِي إِلَى أَحْسَنِ عَادَاتِكَ عِنْدِي،
وَاسْتَجِبْ دُعَائِي وَدُعَاءَ مَنْ أَهْلَصَ لَكَ دُعَاءَهُ، فَقَدْ ضَعُفَتْ قُوَّتِي، وَقَلَّتْ حِيلَتِي،
وَاسْتَدَّتْ حَالِي، وَأَيْسَتْ مِمَّا عِنْدَ خَلْقِكَ فَلَمْ يَبْقَ لِي إِلَّا رَجَاؤُكَ عَلَيَّ.

My Lord, let not my enemy gloat over me, and torment not my dear kinsman or friend through me! My Lord, give me one glance from Your glances, and thereby remove from me that by which You have afflicted me and return me to the best of Your customs with me! Respond to my supplication and the supplication of one who devotes his supplication sincerely to You, for my power has become frail, my stratagems few, my situation severe, and I despair of what is with Your creatures, so nothing remains for me but hope in You!

إِلَهِي إِنَّ قُدْرَتَكَ عَلَى كَشْفِ مَا أَنَا فِيهِ كُفِّرَتَكَ عَلَى مَا ابْتَلَيْتَنِي بِهِ، وَإِنَّ ذِكْرَ
عَوَائِدِكَ يُورِئُنِي، وَالرَّجَاءُ فِي إِنْعَامِكَ وَفَضْلِكَ يُقْوِينِي؛ لِأَنِّي لَمْ أَهْلُ مِنْ نِعْمَتِكَ
مُنْذُ خَلَقْتَنِي. وَأَنْتَ إِلَهِي مَفْرَعِي وَمَلْجَأِي، وَالْحَافِظُ لِي وَالذَّابُّ عَنِّي، الْمُتَحَنِّنُ
عَلَيَّ، الرَّحِيمُ بِي، الْمُتَكَفِّلُ بِرِزْقِي، فِي فَضَائِكَ كَانَ مَا حَلَّ بِي، وَبِعِلْمِكَ مَا
صَبَرْتُ إِلَيْهِ.

My Lord, surely Your power to remove that in which I dwell is like

⁸ Ali ibn al-Husayn (a), *al-Shahifah al-Sajjadiyyah*, supplication no. 54.

⁹ This is taken from the addendum to the *Shahifah* which contains seven extra supplications.

Your power over that with which You have afflicted me! And surely the remembrance of Your acts of kindness comforts me, and hope in Your showing favour and Your bounty strengthens me, for I have not been without Your favour ever since You created me. And You, my Lord, are my place of flight, my asylum, my protector, my defender, the loving towards me, the compassionate, and the guarantor of my provision. In Your decree lay what has settled upon me and in Your knowledge that to which I have come home.

فَأَجْعَلْ يَا وَليِّي وَسَيِّدِي فِيمَا قَدَّرْتَ وَقَضَيْتَ عَلَيَّ، وَحَتَمْتَ عَافِيَتِي، وَمَا فِيهِ صَلاحي وَخَلاصِي مِمَّا أَنَا فِيهِ؛ فَإِنِّي لَا أَرْجُو لِدَفْعِ ذَلِكَ غَيْرَكَ، وَلَا أَعْتَمِدُ فِيهِ إِلَّا عَلَيْكَ. فَكُنْ يَا ذَا الْجَلالِ وَالْإِكْرَامِ، عِنْدَ أَحْسَنِ ظَنِّي بِكَ، وَارْحَمْ صَغْفِي وَقَلَّةَ حِيلَتِي، وَاكشِفْ كُرْبَتِي، وَاسْتَجِبْ دَعْوَتِي، وَأَقْلِبْ عَثْرَتِي، وَآمِنُنْ عَلَيَّ بِذَلِكَ، وَعَلَى كُلِّ دَاعٍ لَكَ. أَمْرَتِي يَا سَيِّدِي بِالْدُعَاءِ، وَتَكْفُلْتَ بِالْإِجابَةِ، وَوَعَدُكَ الْحَقُّ الَّذِي لَا تُخْلَفُ فِيهِ وَلَا تُبَدِّلُ.

So, my Patron and Master, place within that which You have ordained, decreed, and made unavoidable for me, my wellbeing and that wherein lies my soundness and my deliverance from that in which I am! I hope for none to repel this other than You, and I rely in it only upon You. O Possessor of majesty and munificence, be as per my best opinion of You! Have mercy upon my frailty and the paucity of my stratagems, remove my distress, grant my supplication, forgive my mistake, and show kindness to me in that - and to everyone who supplicates You! My Master, You have commanded me to supplicate and undertaken to respond, and Your promise is the truth in which there is neither failing nor change.

فَصَلِّ عَلَيَّ مُحَمَّدَ نَبِيِّكَ وَعَبْدِكَ، وَعَلَى الطَّاهِرِينَ مِنْ أَهْلِ بَيْتِهِ، وَأَعِثْبِي؛ فَإِنَّكَ غِيَاثٌ مَنْ لَا غِيَاثَ لَهُ، وَحِزْرٌ مَنْ لَا حِزْرَ لَهُ، وَأَنَا الْمُضْطَرُّ الَّذِي أُوجِبَتْ إِجابَتُهُ،

وَكَشَفَ مَا بِهِ مِنَ السُّوءِ. فَأَجِنِّي، وَاكْشِفْ هَمِّي وَفَرِّجْ عَمِّي، وَأَعِدْ حَالِي إِلَى أَحْسَنِ مَا كَانَتْ عَلَيْهِ وَلَا تُجَازِنِي بِالْأَسْتِحْقَاقِ، وَلَكِنْ بِرَحْمَتِكَ الَّتِي وَسِعَتْ كُلَّ شَيْءٍ يَا ذَا الْجَلَالِ وَالْإِكْرَامِ، صَلِّ عَلَى مُحَمَّدٍ وَآلِ مُحَمَّدٍ، وَاسْمَعْ وَأَجِبْ يَا عَزِيزٌ.

So bless Muḥammad, Your Prophet and servant, and the pure ones from his household, and help me, surely You are the [granter of] help to one who has no help and the stronghold of one who has no stronghold, while I am the distressed the response to whom and the removal of evil from whom You have made obligatory! So respond to me, remove my concern, relieve my gloom, return my state to the best it has been, and repay me – not according to what I deserve, but according to Your mercy which embraces all things, O Possessor of majesty and munificence! Bless Muḥammad and the household of Muḥammad, hear, and respond, O All-mighty!¹⁰

⑦

Another supplication narrated from Imam Zayn al-‘Ābidīn (a) for alleviation of distress caused by calamity is:

يَا مَوْضِعَ كُلِّ شَكْوَى، وَيَا سَامِعَ كُلِّ نَجْوَى، وَشَاهِدَ كُلِّ مَلَأٍ، وَعَالِمَ كُلِّ خَفِيَةٍ، وَيَا دَافِعَ مَا يَشَاءُ مِنْ بَلِيَّةٍ، وَيَا خَلِيلَ إِبْرَاهِيمَ، وَيَا نَجِيَّ مُوسَى، وَيَا مُصْطَفِيَّ مُحَمَّدٍ ﷺ، أَدْعُوكَ دُعَاءَ مَنْ اسْتَدَّتْ فَاقَتُهُ، وَقَلَّتْ حِيلَتُهُ، وَضَعُفَتْ قُوَّتُهُ، دُعَاءَ الْعَرِيقِ الْعَرِيبِ، الْمُضْطَرِّ الَّذِي لَا يَجِدُ لِكَشْفِ مَا هُوَ فِيهِ إِلَّا أَنْتَ، يَا أَرْحَمَ الرَّاحِمِينَ.

O Receiver of all complaints, O Hearer of every whisper, Witness of every group and Knower of all that is hidden, O Averter of every tribulation that He wills, O Friend of Ibrāhīm, O He who communicated privately with Mūsā, O He who chose Muḥammad (s),

¹⁰ ‘Ali ibn al-Ḥusayn (a), *al-Ṣaḥīfah al-Sajjādiyyah*, supplication no. 59.

I invoke You with the supplication of one whose indigence has become intense, whose recourse is lacking, and whose strength has weakened – the supplication of a drowning, distressed stranger, who has none other than You to remove his current predicament, O Most Merciful of those who show mercy.

This supplication should be recited after performing ablution and offering two *rak'ahs* of prayer, as per the advice given by the Imam to his son.¹¹

⑧

Another supplication that some scholars say is beneficial for alleviation of grief and distress is that which has been reported from the Infallibles, who used to recite it as part of their lengthy supplications during *qunūt*:

يَا مُدَبِّرَ الْأُمُورِ، يَا مُجْرِي الْبُحُورِ، يَا بَاعِثَ مَنْ فِي الْقُبُورِ، يَا مُجْرِي الْفُلُكِ لِتُوحِ،
يَا مُلَيِّنَ الْحَدِيدِ لِدَاوُدَ، يَا مُؤْتِي سُلَيْمَانَ مُلْكًا عَظِيمًا، يَا كَاشِفَ الضُّرِّ عَنَّا أَيُّوبَ،
يَا جَاعِلَ النَّارِ بَرْدًا وَسَلَامًا عَلَىٰ إِبْرَاهِيمَ، يَا فَادِيَ ابْنِهِ بِالذَّبْحِ الْعَظِيمِ، يَا مُفَرِّجَ هَمِّ
يَعْقُوبَ، يَا مُنْقِصَ غَمِّ يُوسُفَ، يَا مُكَلِّمَ مُوسَىٰ تَكْلِيمًا، يَا مُؤَيِّدَ عِيسَىٰ بِالرُّوحِ
تَائِيْدًا، يَا فَاتِحَ لِمُحَمَّدٍ فَتْحًا مَبِينًا، وَيَا نَاصِرَهُ نَصْرًا عَزِيزًا...

O He who manages all affairs, O He who makes the seas flow, O He who resurrects those in the graves, O He who made the ship sail for Nūḥ, O He who made iron soft for Dāwūd, O He who gave a great kingdom to Sulaymān, O He who relieved the distress of Ayyūb, O He who made the fire cold and safe for Ibrāhīm, O He who ransomed his son with the great sacrifice, O He who alleviated the sadness of Ya‘qūb, O He who removed the grief of Yūsuf, O He who spoke to Mūsā directly, O He who assisted ‘Īsā with the Spirit, O He who gave clear victory to Muḥammad, and O He who assisted him with a mighty

¹¹ Al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 2, p. 560.

assistance... [then you can present your request and ask for relief from what is troubling you].¹²

⑨

In one ḥadīth, Imām al-Ṣādiq (a) reports that his father, Imām al-Bāqir (a), used to recite the following supplication in times of sadness and tribulation:

اللَّهُمَّ صَلِّ عَلَى مُحَمَّدٍ وَآلِ مُحَمَّدٍ، وَاعْفِرْ لِي وَارْحَمْنِي، وَرَكَعْ عَلَيَّ وَيَسِّرْ
مُنْقَلَبِي، وَاهْدِ قَلْبِي وَآمِنْ خَوْفِي، وَعَافِنِي فِي عُمْرِي كُلِّهِ، وَتَبِّتْ حُجَّتِي وَاعْفِرْ
حَطَايَايَ، وَبَيِّضْ وَجْهِي وَاعْصِمْنِي فِي دِينِي، وَسَهِّلْ مَطْلَبِي وَوَسِّعْ عَلَيَّ فِي
رِزْقِي، فَإِنِّي ضَعِيفٌ، وَتَجَاوَزُ عَنْ سَيِّئِ مَا عِنْدِي بِحُسْنِ مَا عِنْدَكَ، وَلَا تَفْجَعْنِي
بِنَفْسِي وَلَا تَفْجَعْ لِي حَمِيمًا، وَهَبْ لِي يَا إِلَهِي لِحِظَةً مِنْ لِحِظَاتِكَ، تَكْشِفُ بِهَا
عَنِّي جَمِيعَ مَا بِهِ ابْتَلَيْتَنِي، وَتُرَدِّدُ بِهَا عَلَيَّ مَا هُوَ أَحْسَنُ عَادَاتِكَ عِنْدِي، فَقَدْ ضَعُفْتُ
قُوَّتِي وَقَلَّتْ حِيلَتِي، وَانْقَطَعَ مِنْ خَلْقِكَ رَجَائِي، وَلَمْ يَبْقَ إِلَّا رَجَاؤُكَ، وَتَوَكَّلْتُ
عَلَيْكَ، وَقُدِّرْتَكَ عَلَيَّ، يَا رَبِّ، أَنْ تَرْحَمَنِي وَتُعَافِنِي كَقُدْرَتِكَ عَلَيَّ أَنْ تُعَذِّبَنِي
وَتَبْتَلِيَنِي. إِلَهِي ذِكْرُ عَوَائِدِكَ يُؤْنِسُنِي، وَالرَّجَاءُ لِإِنْعَامِكَ يُقَوِّبُنِي، وَلَمْ أَحُلْ مِنْ
نِعْمِكَ مُنْذُ خَلَقْتَنِي، وَأَنْتَ رَبِّي وَسَيِّدِي، وَمَفْرَعِي وَمَلْجَأِي، وَالْحَافِظُ لِي وَالذَّابُّ
عَنِّي، وَالرَّحِيمُ بِي وَالْمُتَكَفِّلُ بِرِزْقِي، وَفِي فَضَائِكَ وَقُدْرَتِكَ كُلُّ مَا أَنَا فِيهِ، فَلْيَكُنْ
يَا سَيِّدِي وَمَوْلَايَ، فِيمَا فَضَيْتَ وَقُدِّرْتَ وَحَتَمْتَ، تَعْجِيلُ خَلَاصِي مِمَّا أَنَا فِيهِ
جَمِيعِهِ وَالْعَافِيَةُ لِي، فَإِنِّي لَا أَحِجْدُ لِذَفْعِ ذَلِكَ أَحَدًا غَيْرَكَ، وَلَا أَعْتَمِدُ فِيهِ إِلَّا عَلَيْكَ،
فَكُنْ يَا ذَا الْجَلَالِ وَالْإِكْرَامِ عِنْدَ أَحْسَنِ ظَنِّي بِكَ وَرَجَائِي لَكَ، وَارْحَمْ تَضَرُّعِي
وَاسْتِكَانَتِي وَضَعْفَ رُكْنِي، وَامْسُنْ بِذَلِكَ عَلَيَّ وَعَلَى كُلِّ دَاعٍ دَعَاكَ، يَا أَرْحَمَ

¹² Ibn Ṭāwūs, *Muhaj al-Da'awāt*, p. 329.

الرَّاجِمِينَ، وَصَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَى مُحَمَّدٍ وَآلِهِ.

O Allah, bless Muḥammad and the family of Muḥammad, and forgive me, have mercy upon me, make my actions pure and my return easy. Calm my heart and alleviate my fear. Give me wellbeing throughout my life, establish my argument, forgive my mistakes, brighten my face, protect me in my religion, make my aspiration easily attainable, and increase my sustenance, for indeed I am weak. Overlook the faults that I have by the good that You possess. Do not afflict me or anyone close to me with calamity, and grant me, O Lord, a glance from Your merciful glances, by which You may remove from me all the hardships You have tried me with, and restore all the best of Your bounties upon me. Indeed, my strength has weakened, my means have been reduced, and my hope in Your creation has been cut off. Nothing remains for me except my hope in You and my trust in You and Your power over me, O Lord. I ask that You show me mercy and grant me wellbeing just as You have the power to punish me and try me. O Lord, the remembrance of Your promises gives me comfort and hope in Your blessings strengthens me. I have never been bereft of Your blessings from the time You created me. You are my Lord and my Master, the One in whom I take refuge and from whom I get support. You protect me and defend me. You are merciful to me and provide me with sustenance. All that I am in is the result of Your decree and Your power. So let there be in Your decree, my Lord and Master, a hastening of the end of this entire situation for me, and wellbeing for me. For indeed, I do not have anyone other than You to fend this off from me, and I do not rely upon anyone for that but You. So, O Possessor of majesty and honor, be to me as my best assumption of You and my hope in You. Have mercy on my entreaty and my submissiveness, and the weakness of my bones, and by this bless me and every supplicant who supplicates to You, O Most Merciful of the merciful ones – and may Allah bless

Muḥammad and his progeny.¹³

⑩

In one tradition from Imam al-Ṣādiq (a), we are told that to seek relief from distress and sorrow, we should perform a *ghusl* followed by a two *rak'ah* prayer, after which we should recite:

يَا فَارِجَ الْهَمِّ وَيَا كَاشِفَ الْعَمِّ، يَا رَحْمَانَ الدُّنْيَا وَالْآخِرَةِ وَرَحِيمَهُمَا، فَرِّجْ هَمِّي
وَكَشِفْ غَمِّي، يَا اللَّهَ الْوَاحِدَ الْأَحَدُ الصَّمَدَ الَّذِي لَمْ يَلِدْ وَلَمْ يُولَدْ وَلَمْ يَكُنْ لَهُ
كُفُوًا أَحَدٌ، اغْصِنِي وَطَهِّرْني وَادْهَبْ بِنَيْتِي.

O Reliever of distress and O Remover of sorrow, O Merciful in this world and the Hereafter and Beneficent in them both, relieve my distress and remove my sorrow. O Allah, the One, the Only, the Self-sustaining, Who neither begets nor is begotten and there is none like Him, protect me, purify me, and take away my difficult trial.

Then this should be followed by reciting *āyat al-kursī*, and the *mu'awwidhatān* (i.e. Sūrah al-Falaq and al-Nās).¹⁴

⑪

It is reported that the Infallibles used to recite the following supplication in times of distress and sadness:

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ وَبِاللَّهِ، وَمِنَ اللَّهِ وَإِلَى اللَّهِ، وَفِي سَبِيلِ اللَّهِ وَعَلَى مِلَّةِ رَسُولِ اللَّهِ ﷺ، اللَّهُمَّ
إِلَيْكَ أَسَلْتُ نَفْسِي وَإِلَيْكَ وَجَّهْتُ وَجْهِي، وَإِلَيْكَ أَلْجَأْتُ ظَهْرِي وَإِلَيْكَ فَوَّضْتُ
أَمْرِي، اللَّهُمَّ احْفَظْنِي بِحِفْظِ الْإِيمَانِ مِنْ بَيْنِ يَدَيَّ وَمِنْ خَلْفِي، وَعَنْ يَمِينِي وَعَنْ
شِمَالِي، وَمِنْ فَوْقِي وَمِنْ تَحْتِي، وَمِنْ قَبْلِي، وَادْفَعْ عَنِّي بِحَوْلِكَ وَقُوَّتِكَ، فَإِنَّهُ لَا

¹³ Al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfi*, vol. 2, p. 558.

¹⁴ Ibid.

حَوْلَ وَلَا قُوَّةَ إِلَّا بِكَ.

In the name of Allah, and by Allah, and from Allah, and towards Allah, and in the way of Allah, and upon the path of the Messenger of Allah (ﷺ). O Allah, I have submitted myself to You, and I have turned towards You. I have leaned upon You for support and I have left my affair in Your hands. O Allah, protect me by safeguarding my faith from before me, behind me, from my right and my left, from above and below me, and from in front of me. Defend me by Your might and power, for indeed there is no might or power except through You.¹⁵

(12)

It is reported from Imam al-Ṣādiq (a) that when Prophet Yūsuf (a) was thrown into the well by his brothers, Jibraʾīl came to him and taught him the following supplication, by which he was rescued from the dark well:

اللَّهُمَّ إِنِّي أَسْأَلُكَ بِأَنَّ لَكَ الْحَمْدَ، لَا إِلَهَ إِلَّا أَنْتَ، الْمَنَّانُ، بَدِيعَ السَّمَاوَاتِ
وَالْأَرْضِ، ذُو الْجَلَالِ وَالْإِكْرَامِ، أَنْ تُصَلِّيَ عَلَيَّ عَلَى مُحَمَّدٍ وَآلِ مُحَمَّدٍ، وَأَنْ تَجْعَلَ لِي
مِمَّا أَنَا فِيهِ فَرَجًا وَمَخْرَجًا.

O Allah, I ask You, for indeed all praise is due to You and there is no god other than You, the Benevolent, the Originator of the heavens and the earth, Lord of glory and honor. [I ask] that you bless Muḥammad and the progeny of Muḥammad and that You give me relief and a way out of that in which I find myself.¹⁶

¹⁵ Ibid, p. 559.

¹⁶ Ibid, p. 557.

APPENDIX: TRADITIONS

(Excerpted from al-Shahīd al-Thānī's *The Consoler of Hearts upon the Death of Loved Ones and Children*)

(١) [قال رسول الله ﷺ:] إِنَّ الْمُؤْمِنَ لَوْ يَعْلَمُ مَا أَعَدَّ اللَّهُ لَهُ عَلَى الْبَلَاءِ، لَتَمَنَّى أَنَّهُ فِي دَارِ الدُّنْيَا قَرَضَ بِالْمَقَارِيضِ.

(1) The Noble Prophet (ﷺ) [is reported to have] said: “If the believer knew what Allah had prepared for him of recompense for [bearing] the trials, he would wish to be cut into pieces with scissors in this world.”¹

(٢) وعن عبد الله بن أبي يعفور قال: شكوت إلى أبي عبد الله ﷺ ما ألقى من الأوجاع - وكان مسقماً - فقال لي: يا عبد الله، لو يعلم المؤمن ماله من الأجر في المصائب، لتمنى أن يقرض بالمقاريض.

(2) ‘Abdullāh ibn Abī Ya‘fūr said, “I complained to Abū ‘Abdillāh [al-Ṣādiq] (a) about the pain from which I was suffering – and he (‘Abdullāh ibn Ya‘fūr) was quite often sick – so he (a) said to me, ‘O ‘Abdullāh, if a believer knew the reward he gets during hardships, he would wish to be cut [into pieces] with shears.’”²

(٣) روى الترمذي بإسناده إلى النبي ﷺ أنه قال: ما نزل البلاء بالمؤمن والمؤمنة، في نفسه وولده وماله، حتى يلقي الله عز وجلّ وما عليه خطيئة.

(3) Al-Tirmidhī has narrated from the Prophet (ﷺ) who said, “No tribulation descends upon a believing man or woman, afflicting him, his child or his wealth, but that he shall meet Allah, to Whom belong might and majesty, while there is no sin upon him.”³

¹ Al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfi*, vol. 2, p. 255, with a slight variance in wording.

² Ibid, p. 255 with a slight variance in wording.

³ Al-Tirmidhī, *al-Sunan*, vol. 4, p. 327.

(٤) عن محمد بن خالد السلمي، عن أبيه، عن جدّه قال: سمعت رسول الله ﷺ يقول: إنّ العبد إذا سبقت له من الله تعالى منزلة ولم يبلغها بعمل، ابتلاه الله في جسده، أو في ماله، أو في ولده، ثمّ صبره على ذلك حتّى يبلغه المنزلة التي سبقت إليه من الله عزّ وجلّ.

(4) Muḥammad ibn Khālid al-Sulamī narrates from his father, from his grandfather who said, “I heard the Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) say, ‘Verily when a servant has a [reserved] status with Allah, the Exalted, that he cannot reach through [his] actions, Allah tests him in his body, his wealth, or his children, then He grants him the ability to patiently bear that until he attains the status that is reserved for him with Allah, the Almighty.’”⁴

(٥) وروى عبد الرحمن بن الحجاج قال: ذكر عند أبي عبد الله عليه السلام البلاء، وما يختصّ الله عزّ وجلّ به المؤمن، فقال: سئل رسول الله ﷺ: من أشدّ الناس بلاءً في الدنيا؟ فقال: النبيون، ثمّ الأمثل فالأمثل، وبيتلي المؤمن بعدّ على قدر إيمانه وحسن أعماله، فمن صحّ إيمانه وحسن عمله اشتدّ بلاؤه، ومن سخط إيمانه وضعف عمله قلّ بلاؤه.

(5) ‘Abd al-Raḥmān ibn al-Ḥajjāj narrated, “[The issue of] trials was mentioned in the presence of Abū ‘Abdillāh [al-Ṣādiq] (a), and what Allah, the Almighty, has kept specifically for the believer, so he said, ‘The Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) was once asked, ‘Who are the people that undergo the severest trials in this world?’ He (ﷺ) said, ‘The Prophets, then those whose conduct most closely resembles theirs. Then the believer is tested [with trials and tribulations] in accordance to the degree of his faith and good deeds. One whose faith is sound and action is good faces more severe trials, whereas one whose faith is shallow and action is weak, his trials [and tribulations] are few.’”⁵

⁴ Abū Dāwūd, *al-Sunan*, vol. 3, p. 1350.

⁵ Al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 2, p. 252.

(٦) وروى زيد الشحام عن أبي عبد الله عليه السلام قال: إنَّ عظيم الأجر مع عظيم البلاء، وما أحبَّ الله عزَّ وجلَّ قوماً إلاَّ ابتلاهم.

(6) Zayd al-Shahhām narrates that Abū ‘Abdillāh [al-Ṣādiq] (a) said, “Verily great reward comes with great trials. Whenever Allah, the Almighty, loves a people, He tries [and tests] them.”⁶

(٧) وعن أبي بصير، عن أبي عبد الله عليه السلام قال: إنَّ لله عزَّ وجلَّ عبداً في الأرض من خالص عباده، ما ينزل من السماء تحفة إلى الأرض إلاَّ صرفها عنهم إلى غيرهم، ولا بليّة إلاَّ صرفها إليهم.

(7) Abū Baṣīr narrated that Abū ‘Abdillāh [al-Ṣādiq] (a) said, “Verily Allah, the Almighty, has some servants on earth who are the most sincere of His servants; no gift descends from the heavens to earth but that Allah diverts it from them to others, and no trial [descends] but that He sends it their way.”⁷

(٨) وعن الحسين بن علوان، عنه عليه السلام، أنّه قال: إنَّ الله تعالى إذا أحبَّ عبداً غتّه بالبلاء غتاً، وإنا وإياكم لنصبح به ونمسي.

(8) Al-Ḥusayn ibn ‘Alwān narrated that he (Imam al-Ṣādiq) (a) said, “When Allah, the Almighty, loves a servant, He afflicts him with trials, plunging him into them; and indeed we and you face the morning and the evening in this condition.”⁸

(٩) وعن أبي جعفر الباقر عليه السلام قال: إنَّ الله تبارك وتعالى إذا أحبَّ عبداً غتّه بالبلاء غتاً وسجّه بالبلاء سجاً، فإذا دعاه قال: لبيك عبدي! لئن عجّلت لك ما سألت إني على ذلك لقادر، ولكن ادّخرت لك، فما ادّخرت خير لك.

(9) It is narrated that Abū Ja‘far al-Bāqir (a) said, “Whenever Allah, the

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid, p. 253.

⁸ Ibid.

Blessed and Exalted, loves a servant, He immerses him in trials and envelopes him with tribulation. When he calls out to Him, He says, 'Here I am, My servant! If I wish to hasten for you what you ask for, I can do it, but I have saved it for you, and what I have stored [for you] is better for you.'⁹

(١٠) وعن أبي عبد الله عليه السلام قال: قال رسول الله صلى الله عليه وسلم: إنَّ عظيم البلاء يكافأ به عظيم الجزاء، فإذا أحبَّ الله عبداً ابتلاه بعظيم البلاء، فمن رضي فله عند الله تعالى الرضا، ومن سخط البلاء فله عند الله السخط.

(10) It is reported that Abū 'Abdillāh [al-Ṣādiq] (a) said, "The Messenger of Allah (ṣ) said, 'Verily great tribulation is recompensed with great reward. When Allah loves a servant, He tests him with a great trial, so whoever accepts it attains the pleasure of Allah, and whoever is displeased by the trial earns Allah's displeasure.'¹⁰

(١١) وعن أبي جعفر عليه السلام أنه قال: إنَّما يبتلى المؤمن في الدنيا على قدر دينه - أو قال: على حسب دينه.

(11) It is narrated that Abū Ja'far [al-Bāqir] (a) said, "A believer is only tested in this world in accordance to the degree of his faith." Or he said, "...in accordance to the measure of his faith."¹¹

(١٢) وعن ناجية قال: قلت لأبي جعفر عليه السلام: إنَّ المغيرة يقول: إنَّ الله لا يبتلى المؤمن بالجذام، ولا بالبرص، ولا بكذا ولا بكذا. فقال: إن كان لغافلاً عن مؤمن آل ياسين، أنه كان مكتعاً ثم ردَّ أصابعه، فقال: كأني أنظر إلى تكنيعه، أتاهم فأنذرهم، ثم عاد إليهم من الغد فقتلوه. ثم قال: إنَّ المؤمن يبتلى بكلِّ بليّة، ويموت بكلِّ ميتة، إلا أنه لا يقتل نفسه.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Ibid.

(12) Nājiyah is reported to have said, “I said to Abū Ja‘far (a), ‘Al-Mughīrah says that Allah does not try a believer with elephantitis, or leprosy, or such-and-such [disease].’ He said, ‘It seems he is unaware of the believer from Āl Yāsīn whose fingers had atrophied, then they regained function – it is as if I can [clearly] see his shrivelled fingers. He came to them (his people) and warned them, then he returned to them [again] the following day, but they killed him.’ Then he (a) said, ‘Verily a believer is tried with every calamity, and he dies in every way, but he never kills himself.’”¹²

(١٣) وعن أبي عبد الله عليه السلام: إنَّ أهل الحقِّ لم يزالوا في شدَّة؛ أما إنَّ ذلك إلى مدَّة قليلة وعافية طويلة.

(13) Abū ‘Abdillāh [al-Ṣādiq] (a) is reported to have said, “Verily the people of truth [and righteousness] continually face hardships [in this world]; yet verily this is only for a short time and is followed by a long period of wellbeing [and felicity in the Hereafter].”¹³

(١٤) وعن أبي عبد الله قال: دعى النبي صلى الله عليه وآله إلى طعام، فلمَّا دخل إلى منزل الرجل نظر إلى دجاجة فوق حائط قد باضت، فتقع البيضة على وتد في حائط فتثبت عليه، ولم تسقط ولم تنكسر، فتعجب النبي صلى الله عليه وآله منها، فقال له الرجل: أعجبت من هذه البيضة؟ فوالذي بعثك بالحقِّ ما رزئت شيئاً قط، فنهض رسول الله صلى الله عليه وآله، ولم يأكل من طعامه شيئاً، وقال: من لم يرزأ فما لله فيه من حاجة.

(14) It is narrated that Abū ‘Abdillāh [al-Ṣādiq] (a) said, “The Prophet (ṣ) was once invited for a meal. When he entered the man’s house, he saw that a hen had laid an egg on top of a wall. The egg fell on a wedge in the wall and rested on it without falling [to the ground] and breaking. The Prophet (ṣ) was surprised by that, so the man said to him, ‘Are you surprised about this egg? By the One who sent you with the truth, I have never been afflicted by the loss of anything.’ [Hearing this,] the

¹² Ibid, p. 254.

¹³ Ibid.

Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) stood up to leave and did not eat any of his food. He (ﷺ) said, ‘Allah has nothing to do with one who never suffers a loss.’”¹⁴

(١٥) وروى إسحاق بن عمار، عن الصادق عليه السلام، أنه قال: يا إسحاق، لا تعدن مصيبةً أعطيت عليها الصبر، واستوجبت عليها من الله عز وجل الثواب؛ إنما المصيبة التي يحرم صاحبها أجرها وثوابها، إذا لم يصبر عند نزولها.

(15) Ishāq ibn ‘Ammār narrated that [Imam] al-Ṣādiq (a) said [to him], “O Ishāq, do not count as a calamity that for which you are granted patience and become deserving of reward from Allah, the Almighty. A calamity is only that for which the one afflicted by it is deprived of recompense and reward because he did not remain patient when it descended [on him].”¹⁵

(١٦) وعن أبي ميسرة قال: كنتا عند أبي عبد الله عليه السلام: فجاء رجل وشكا إليه مصيبته، فقال له: أما إنك إن تصبر تؤجر، وإلا تصبر يمضي عليك قدر الله عز وجل، الذي قدر عليك، وأنت مذموم.

(16) Abū Maysarah is reported to have said, “We were in the company of Abi ‘Abdillāh [al-Ṣādiq] (a) when a man came to him and complained about his misfortune. He (a) said to him, ‘If you remain patient, you will surely be rewarded; otherwise, if you are not patient, the decree that Allah, the Almighty, has ordained for you will come to pass while you remain blameworthy [for your impatience].”¹⁶

(١٧) ويأسناده إلى جابر، عن أبي جعفر محمد بن علي الباقر عليه السلام قال: من قدم أولاداً يحتسبهم عند الله تعالى، حجبوه من النار ياذن الله تعالى عز وجل.

(17) And [from al-Ṣadūq] from Jābir, from Abi Ja‘far Muḥammad ibn

¹⁴ Ibid, p. 256.

¹⁵ Ibid, vol. 3, p. 225.

¹⁶ Ibid, with a slight variance in wording.

‘Alī al-Bāqir (a) who said, “Whoever loses children yet remains patient for the sake of Allah, the Exalted, they will veil him from the Fire with the permission of Allah, to Whom belong might and majesty.”¹⁷

(١٨) وعن عبادة بن الصامت، أن رسول الله ﷺ قال: النفساء يجزّها ولدها يوم القيامة بسرره إلى الجنة.

(18) It has been narrated from ‘Ubādah ibn al-Ṣāmit that the Messenger of Allah (ṣ) said, “The woman who has just given birth [and loses her child] shall be led by her child on the Day of Judgment, by its umbilical cord, into Paradise.”¹⁸

(١٩) عن أنس قال: توفي لعثمان بن مظعونٍ رضي الله عنه ولد، فاشتدّ حزنه عليه حتّى اتّخذ في داره مسجداً يتعبّد فيه. فبلغ ذلك النبيّ ﷺ فقال: يا عثمان، إنّ الله عزّ وجلّ لم يكتب علينا الرهبانيّة، إنّما رهبانيّة أمتي الجهاد في سبيل الله. يا عثمان بن مظعونٍ، إنّ للجنة ثمانية أبوابٍ، وللنار سبعة أبوابٍ، أفلا يسرك ألا تأتي باباً منها إلّا وجدت ابنك بجانبه، آخذاً بحجزتك ليشفع لك إلى ربّه عزّ وجلّ؟ قال: فقيل يا رسول الله ولنا في أفراطنا ما لعثمان؟ قال: نعم، لمن صبر منكم واحتسب.

(19) It is reported from Anas who said, “‘Uthmān ibn Maz‘ūn, may Allah be pleased with him, had a child who died, so he was overwhelmed by grief until he made his house a *masjid*¹⁹ wherein he would [seclude himself in] worship. When the Prophet (ṣ) heard about this, he said [to him], ‘O ‘Uthmān, verily Allah, the Almighty, has not prescribed monasticism for us. The monasticism of my *ummah* is struggling in the way of Allah. O ‘Uthmān ibn Maz‘ūn, verily Paradise has eight gates, and Hell has seven. Does it not please you [to know] that you will not come to any of these gates but that you will find your son next to it, ready to take hold of your waistband in order to intercede

¹⁷ Al-Ṣadūq, *Man Lā Yaḥḍurubu al-Faqīh*, vol. 1, p. 188.

¹⁸ Al-Ṭayālīsī, *Musnad Abi Dāwūd*, vol. 1, p. 472.

¹⁹ Meaning he made it a place wherein he would spend all his time in prayer and worship. (Tr.)

on your behalf before his Lord, the Almighty?” He (the narrator) said, “Someone asked, ‘O Messenger of Allah, if we lose our offspring would we get the same reward as what ‘Uthmān shall have?’ He replied, ‘Yes, for those who are patient among you and seek divine reward [through their patience].’”²⁰

(٢٠) وعن زرارة بن أوفى أن رسول الله ﷺ عزى رجلاً على ابنه فقال: آجرك الله وأعظم لك الأجر. فقال الرجل: يا رسول الله، أنا شيخ كبير وكان ابني قد أجزأ عني. فقال له النبي ﷺ: أيسرك أن يشير لك - أو يتلقاك - من أبواب الجنة بالكأس؟ قال: من لي بذلك يا رسول الله؟ فقال: الله لك به، ولكل مسلم مات ولده في الإسلام.

(20) Zurārah ibn Awfā narrated that the Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) consoled a man for the loss of his son and said to him, “Your reward is with Allah; may He grant you a great reward!” So the man said, “O Messenger of Allah, I am an old man, and my son would suffice me [in my affairs].”²¹ The Prophet (ﷺ) said to him, “Does it please you [to know] that he will beckon you – or meet you – at one of the gates of Paradise with a [flowing] cup?” He said, “Who would grant me that, O Messenger of Allah?” He said, “Allah will grant it to you, and to every Muslim whose child dies in Islam.”²²

(٢١) وعن عبد الله بن قيس، عن رسول الله ﷺ: إذا مات ولد العبد، قال الله تعالى لملائكته: أقبضتم ولد عبدي؟ فيقولون: نعم. فيقول: قبضتم ثمرة فؤاده؟ فيقولون: نعم. فيقول: ماذا قال عبدي؟ فيقولون: حمدك واسترجع. فيقول الله تعالى: ابنوا لعبدي بيتاً في الجنة، وسمّوه بيت الحمد.

(21) ‘Abdullāh ibn Qays reported that the Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) said,

²⁰ Al-Ṣadūq, *al-Amālī*, p. 66.

²¹ Another possible translation for this could be, “...and my son has been separated [and taken away] from me.” (Tr.)

²² Al-Ḥanbalī, *Tasliyat Nufūs al-Nisā’ wal-Rijāl ‘inda Faqḍ al-Atfāl*, p. 14.

“When the child of a servant [of Allah] dies, Allah, the Exalted, asks His angels, ‘Have you taken the soul of My servant’s child?’ They reply, ‘Yes.’ He says, ‘You took away the fruit of his heart?’ They reply, ‘Yes.’ So He asks,²³ ‘What did My servant say?’ They respond, ‘He praised You and proclaimed: *Indeed we belong to Allah and indeed we shall return to Him.*’ So Allah, the Exalted, says, ‘Build for My servant a house in Paradise and call it the House of Praise.’”²⁴

(٢٢) وعن جابر بن سمرة قال: قال رسول الله ﷺ: من دفن ثلاثة أولاد، وصبر عليهم واحتسب، وجبت له الجنة. فقالت أم أيمن: واثنين؟ فقال: من دفن اثنين وصبر عليهما واحتسبهما، وجبت له الجنة. فقالت أم أيمن: وواحد؟ فسكت وأمسك، فقال: يا أم أيمن، من دفن واحداً وصبر عليه واحتسب، وجبت له الجنة.

(22) Jābir ibn Samurah narrated that the Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) said, “Whoever buries three [of his] children and patiently bears their loss, seeking the pleasure [and reward] of Allah thereby, Paradise becomes mandatory for him.” Umm Ayman asked, “And [what if they are] two?” He replied, “Whoever buries two children, and patiently bears their loss for the sake of Allah, Paradise becomes mandatory for him.” Umm Ayman asked, “And [what if it is] one?” So he remained silent and paused [for a while]. Then he said, “O Umm Ayman, whoever buries one [child] and patiently bears his loss for the sake of Allah, Paradise becomes mandatory for him.”²⁵

(٢٣) وعنه ﷺ من دفن ثلاثة من الولد حرّم الله عليه النار.

(23) It is also reported that he (ﷺ) said, “Whoever buries three of his children, the Fire [of Hell] becomes forbidden upon him by Allah.”²⁶

²³ Obviously, Allah already knows the answer as He has knowledge of all things – this ‘asking’ is not to learn anything new but to teach something to those who hear the response. (Tr.)

²⁴ Al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 3, p. 219 with a different chain of narrators.

²⁵ Al-Suyūṭī, *al-Jāmi’ al-Kabīr*, vol. 9, p. 185.

²⁶ Al-Ṭabarānī, *al-Mu’jam al-Kabīr*, vol. 22, p. 96.

(٢٤) قال النبي ﷺ: الصبر نصف الإيمان.

(24) The Prophet (ﷺ) has said, "Patience is half of faith."²⁷

(٢٥) وعن ابن عباس رضي الله عنه: لما دخل رسول الله ﷺ على الأنصار فقال: أمؤمنون أنتم؟ فسكتوا. فقال رجل: نعم، يا رسول الله. فقال: وما علامة إيمانكم؟ قالوا: نشكر على الرخاء، ونصبر على البلاء، ونرضى بالقضاء. فقال: مؤمنون، ورب الكعبة.

(25) Ibn 'Abbās, may Allah be pleased with him, said that when the Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) came to the Anṣār, he asked, "Are you believers?" So they remained silent. One man [among them] replied, "Yes, O Messenger of Allah." So he (ﷺ) asked, "What is the sign of your faith?" They said, "We are grateful in [times of] ease, patient in [times of] hardship, and we accept the divine decree." He (ﷺ) said, "[Then you are truly] believers, by the Lord of the Ka'bah."²⁸

(٢٦) وقال أيضاً: الصبر من الإيمان بمنزلة الرأس من الجسد، ولا جسد لمن لا رأس له، ولا إيمان لمن لا صبر له.

(26) He also said, "The position of patience with respect to faith is like that of the head with respect to the body. One who has no head has no [functioning] body, and one who has no patience has no faith."²⁹

(٢٧) وعن الحسن بن علي رضي الله عنه عن النبي ﷺ قال: إن في الجنة شجرة يقال لها شجرة البلوى، يؤتى بأهل البلاء يوم القيامة، فلا يرفع لهم ديوان، ولا ينصب لهم ميزان، يصب عليهم الأجر صباً؛ وقرأ رضي الله عنه: «إنما يوفى الصابرون أجرهم بغير حساب».

²⁷ Warrām ibn Abī Fāris, *Majmū'at Warrām*, vol. 1, p. 40.

²⁸ Al-Ghazzālī, *Ihyā' 'Ulūm al-Dīn*, vol. 4, p. 61.

²⁹ Al-Raḍī, *Nabj al-Balāghah*, saying 82 with a slight variance in wording.

(27) Al-Ḥasan ibn ‘Alī (a) narrated from the Prophet (s) who said, “Verily there is a tree in Paradise called the Tree of Tribulation, and on the Day of Judgment it shall be brought to those who faced trials [in the world, as a reward]. So neither shall their book of deeds (*dīwān*) be presented nor will the scales (*mīzān*) be set up for them. [Instead,] reward will be poured upon them [like rain].” Then he (a) recited the verse: *Only those who endure patiently will be given reward without measure* (Q39:10).³⁰

(٢٨) وعنه عليه السلام: المصائب مفاتيح الأجر.

(28) He (a) also said, “Hardships are keys to [divine] reward.”³¹

(٢٩) وعن زين العابدين عليه السلام: إذا جمع الله الأولين والآخرين، ينادي مناد: أين الصّابرون؟ ليدخلوا الجنّة بغير حساب! قال: فيقوم عنق من الناس فتلقّاهم الملائكة فيقولون: إلى أين يا بني آدم؟ فيقولون: إلى الجنّة. فيقولون: وقبل الحساب؟ فقالوا: نعم. قالوا: ومن أنتم؟ قالوا: الصابرون. قالوا: وما كان صبركم؟ قالوا: صبرنا على طاعة الله، وصبرنا عن معصية الله، حتّى توفّانا الله عزّ وجلّ. قالوا: أنتم كما قلتم، ادخلوا الجنّة، فنعم أجر العاملين.

(29) [Imam] Zayn al-‘Ābidīn (a) said, “When Allah gathers the first and last [of the people on the Day of Judgment], a caller will cry out: ‘Where are the patient ones? Let them enter Paradise without accounting.’ So a group of people will stand up and they shall be met by some angels who will ask them, ‘Where are you going, O children of Adam?’ They will reply, ‘To Paradise.’ The angels will say, ‘Before accounting [for your deeds]?’ They will reply, ‘Yes.’ So the angels ask, ‘Who are you?’ They respond, ‘The patient ones.’ They ask, ‘And what was your patience?’ They say, ‘We were patient in obeying Allah and in avoiding disobedience to Him, until Allah, to Whom belong might and majesty, took our souls.’ The angels respond, ‘You are indeed as you say. Enter

³⁰ Al-Ṭabarānī, *al-Muḥjam al-Kabīr*, vol. 3, p. 92.

³¹ Al-Baghdādī, *Tadhkirat al-Ḥamdūniyyah*, vol. 4, p. 195.

Paradise, for it is an excellent reward for the workers [of righteousness].”³²

(٣٠) وعن أنس قال: قال رسول الله ﷺ: قال الله عز وجل: إذا وجهت إلى عبدٍ من عبيدي مصيبة في بدنه، أو ماله، أو ولده، ثم استقبل ذلك بصبرٍ جميلٍ، استحيت منه يوم القيامة أن أنصب له ميزاناً، أو أنشر له ديواناً.

(30) Anas [ibn Mālik] reported that the Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) said, “Allah, to Whom belong might and majesty, said, ‘When I cause some hardship to befall one of My servants in his body, or his wealth, or his children, and then he encounters it with beautiful patience, I feel embarrassed to erect the scales [of accounting] for him or to open up his book [of deeds] on the Day of Judgment.’”³³

(٣١) وعنه ﷺ: عجباً لأمر المؤمن، إن أمره كله له خير، وليس ذلك لأحدٍ إلا للمؤمن، إن أصابته سراء شكر فكان خيراً له، وإن أصابته ضراء صبر فكان خيراً له.

(31) He (ﷺ) said, “The affair of the believer is amazing. Indeed, his entire affair is good for him, and this does not hold true for anyone but the believer. If he faces good times, he is thankful and that is good for him, and if difficult times befall him, he is patient and that is good for him.”³⁴

(٣٢) وعنه ﷺ: الصبر خير مركبٍ، ما رزق الله عبداً خيراً له ولا أوسع من الصبر.

(32) It is also reported that he (ﷺ) said, “Patience is the best mount. Allah has not given His servant anything that is better or more expansive [and beneficial] for him than patience.”³⁵

(٣٣) وعن أبي بصير قال: سمعت أبا عبد الله عليه السلام يقول: إن الحرَّ حرٌّ على جميع

³² Al-Tūsī, *al-Amālī*, p. 103 with a slight variance in wording.

³³ Al-Shuʿayrī, *Jāmiʿ al-Akbbār*, p. 116.

³⁴ Muslim, *al-Shāḥih*, vol. 4, p. 2295.

³⁵ Al-Suyūṭī, *al-Jāmiʿ al-Kabīr*, vol. 7, p. 615 (without the initial part).

أحواله، إن نابته نائبة صبر لها، وإن تراكمت عليه المصائب لم تكسره، وإن أُسر وقُهر واستبدل باليسر عسراً، كما كان يوسف الصديق الأمين عليه السلام، لم يضرر حرّيته أن استعبد وأسر وقُهر، ولم تضره ظلمة الجبّ ووحشته وما ناله أن منّ الله عليه، فجعل الجبار العاتي له عبداً بعد أن كان ملكاً، فأرسله ورحم به أمته، وكذلك الصبر يعقب خيراً، فاصبروا ووطنوا أنفسكم على الصبر تؤجروا.

(33) Abū Baṣīr said, “I heard Abā ‘Abdillāh [al-Ṣādiq] (a) say, ‘Verily the freeman is free in all situations; if a calamity befalls him, he remains patient, and if hardships pile up on him, they do not break him. If he is imprisoned or subjugated and his ease changes into hardship, the way it did for [Prophet] Yūsuf, the truthful and trustworthy (a), it does not impugn his freedom in anyway to be enslaved, imprisoned, and subjugated. The darkness of the well and its horror did not harm him, and what he attained was the special bounty of Allah by which He made the haughty transgressor his servant after having been a king. Then He (the Almighty) sent him as a Messenger and showed mercy to his community through him. This is how goodness results from patience. So be patient and accustom yourself to patience, and you shall be rewarded.’”³⁶

(٣٤) وعن الباقر عليه السلام: الجنّة محفوفة بالمكاره والصبر، فمن صبر على المكاره في الدنيا دخل الجنّة، وجهنّم محفوفة باللذات والشهوات، فمن أعطى نفسه لذاتها أو شهوتها دخل النار.

(34) It is reported that [Imam] al-Bāqir (a) said, “Paradise is surrounded by tribulations and patience, so whoever is patient in the face of tribulations in this world shall enter Paradise. And Hell is surrounded by pleasures and desires, so whoever gives in to his pleasures and desires shall enter the Fire.”³⁷

³⁶ Al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 2, p. 89.

³⁷ Ibid.

(٣٥) وعنه عليه السلام: الضرب على الفخذ عند المصيبة يحبط الأجر، والصبر عند الصدمة الأولى أعظم، وعظم الأجر على قدر المصيبة، ومن استرجع بعد المصيبة جدد الله له أجرها كيوم أصيب بها.

(35) He [Imam al-Ṣādiq] (a)³⁸ also said, “Striking the thigh during hardship nullifies the reward, and patience during the initial shock is greater, and the reward is enhanced in accordance with the [gravity of the] hardship. After having faced hardship, whoever says, ‘*We belong to Allah and to Him shall we return,*’ Allah renews his reward for [bearing] it just like on the day when he was afflicted by it.”³⁹

(٣٦) وسأل رجل النبي صلى الله عليه وسلم: ما يحبط الأجر في المصيبة؟ فقال: تصفيق الرجل يمينه على شماله، والصبر عند الصدمة الأولى، فمن رضي فله الرضا، ومن سخط فعليه السخط.

(36) A man asked the Prophet (ṣ), “What nullifies the reward in hardship?” He said, “When a man [impatiently] slaps his right hand on his left, for patience is [to be observed] during the initial shock. So whoever is satisfied [with Allah’s decree] gains the pleasure [of Allah], and whoever is displeased, then upon him shall be [Allah’s] wrath.”⁴⁰

(٣٧) وعن ابن عباس قال: قال رسول الله صلى الله عليه وسلم: إنَّ للموت فرعاً، فإذا أتى أحدكم وفاة أخيه فليقل عنده: «إنا لله وإنا إليه راجعون، وإنا إلى ربنا لمنقلبون. اللهم اكتبه عندك من المحسنين، واجعل كتابه في عليين، واخلف على عقبه في الآخرين. اللهم لا تحرمنّا أجره، ولا تفتنّا بعده».

(37) Ibn ‘Abbās said, “The Messenger of Allah (ṣ) said, ‘Verily death is terrifying, so when one receives the news of his brother’s demise, he should say at that moment, “*Verily we belong to Allah and to Him do we*

³⁸ In the original source, this tradition has been reported from the Prophet (ṣ). (Tr.)

³⁹ Ibn Nāṣir al-Dīn, *Bard al-Akbād ‘inda Faqd al-Awḷād*, p. 83.

⁴⁰ Al-Manbijī, *Tasliyat Ahl al-Maṣā’ib*, p. 168.

return; and we shall [all] certainly go back to our Lord. O Allah, write his name among the virtuous, and place his book among the loftiest (*‘illiyyīn*), and replace him for his heirs among others [who remain behind]. O Allah, do not deprive us of reward due to [losing] him, and do not test us after him.”⁴¹

(٣٨) وعن الحسين بن علي بن أبي طالب عليه السلام أن النبي صلى الله عليه وآله قال: من أصابته مصيبة فقال إذا ذكرها: «إنا لله وإنا إليه راجعون»، جدد الله عز وجل له أجرها مثل ما كان له يوم إصابته.

(38) Al-Ḥusayn ibn ‘Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib (a) narrated that the Prophet (ṣ) said, “Whoever is afflicted by a calamity and says whenever he recalls it, ‘*Verily we belong to Allah and to Him we will return,*’ Allah renews his reward for him just as it was on the day when he was [first] afflicted by it.”⁴²

(٣٩) وعن يوسف بن عبد الله بن سلام: أن النبي صلى الله عليه وآله كان إذا نزل بأهله شدة أمرهم بالصلاة، ثم قرأ: «وأمر أهلك بالصلاة واصطبر عليها».

(39) Yūsuf ibn ‘Abdullāh ibn Salām narrated that whenever the family of the Holy Prophet (ṣ) was afflicted by difficulty, he would instruct them to offer prayer and then he would recite: *And bid your family to prayer and be steadfast in its maintenance* (Q20:132).⁴³

(٤٠) وعن جابر، عن الباقر عليه السلام قال: أشد الجزع الصراخ بالويل والعيول، ولطم الوجه والصدر، وجرّ الشعر، ومن أقام النواح فقد ترك الصبر، ومن صبر واسترجع وحمد الله تعالى فقد رضي بما صنع الله، ووقع أجره على الله عز وجل، ومن لم يفعل ذلك جرى عليه القضاء وهو ذميم، وأحبط الله عز وجل أجره.

(40) Jābir narrated that [Imam] al-Bāqir (a) said, “The most extreme

⁴¹ Al-Suyūṭī, *al-Jāmi‘ al-Kabīr*, vol. 2, p. 631.

⁴² Al-Ṭabarānī, *al-Mu‘jam al-Kabīr*, vol. 3, p. 131.

⁴³ Al-Bayhaqī, *Shu‘ab al-Īmān*, vol. 7, p. 121.

[form of] impatience is screaming out while weeping and wailing, striking the face and chest, and pulling one's hair. Whoever laments openly has abandoned patience, but whoever remains patient and declares: 'We belong to Allah and to Him do we return,' and praises Allah, the Exalted, is satisfied with what Allah has done, and his reward is with Allah, the Almighty. But whoever does not do that, what has been decreed for him shall come to pass while he is blameworthy, and Allah will nullify his reward."⁴⁴

(٤١) وعنه عليه السلام قال: قال رسول الله صلى الله عليه وآله: ضرب المسلم يده على فخذه عند المصيبة إحباط لأجره.

(41) He (a) also said, "The Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) said, 'The strike of a Muslim on his thigh during a calamity causes his reward to be nullified.'"⁴⁵

(٤٢) وعن إسحاق بن عمار، عن الصادق عليه السلام: يا إسحاق، لا تعدن مصيبةً أعطيت عليها الصبر، واستوجبت عليها من الله عز وجل الثواب، إنما المصيبة التي يحرم صاحبها أجرها وثوابها، إذا لم يصبر عند نزولها.

(42) Ishāq ibn 'Ammār reported that [Imam] al-Ṣādiq (a) said [to him], "O Ishāq, never count as a calamity that for which you are granted patience and for which you get reward from Allah, to Whom belong might and majesty. It is only a calamity when the one who is afflicted by it is deprived of its reward and recompense because he did not remain patient when it befell [him]."⁴⁶

(٤٣) قال الصادق عليه السلام: البلاء زين المؤمن، وكرامة لمن عقل، لأنّ في مباشرته والصبر عليه، والثبات عنده، تصحيح نسبة الإيمان.

(43) [Imam] al-Ṣādiq (a) said, "Trial is an adornment for the believer

⁴⁴ Al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfi*, vol. 3, p. 222.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

and an honour for the one who understands, because by encountering it and remaining patient and steadfast, the attribution of faith [to him] is verified.⁴⁷

(٤٤) وقال الصادق عليه السلام: الصبر يظهر ما في بواطن العباد من النور والصفاء، والجزع يظهر ما في بواطنهم من الظلمة والوحشة؛ والصبر يدعيه كل أحد ولا يبين عنده إلا المختبون؛ والجزع ينكره كل أحد وهو أبين على المنافقين، لأن نزول المحنة والمصيبة يخبر عن الصادق والكاذب.

(44) Al-Ṣādiq (a) said, “Patience manifests the light and purity that is within the servants, while impatience manifests the darkness and desolation that is within them. Every person claims to be patient, yet it is only demonstrated by those who are humble. Every person denies impatience yet it is most evidently seen in the hypocrites, because the descent of tribulation and hardship divulges the true nature of the veracious and the liar.”⁴⁸

(٤٥) وروي أنّ قوماً كانوا عند عليّ بن الحسين عليهما السلام، فاستعجل خادماً بشواءٍ في التنور، فأقبل به مسرعاً، فسقط السفود من يده على ولد عليّ بن الحسين عليه السلام، فأصاب رأسه فقتله، فوثب عليّ بن الحسين عليهما السلام لما رأى ابنه ميتاً. قال: أنت حرّ لوجه الله تعالى، أما إنك لم تتعمّده. ثم أخذ في جهاز ابنه.

(45) It is narrated that a group of people were with ‘Alī ibn al-Ḥusayn (a) when one of the servants was rushing to get something roasted in the oven. He walked quickly with it, and the skewer fell from his hand on the son of ‘Alī ibn al-Ḥusayn (a), striking his head and killing the child [instantly]. [Imam] ‘Alī ibn al-Ḥusayn (a) leapt up and when he saw that his son had died, he said [to the servant], “I free you for the sake of Allah. Certainly you did not do this on purpose.” Then he began

⁴⁷ Attributed to Imam al-Ṣādiq (a), *Miṣbāḥ al-Sharī‘ah wa Miṣbāḥ al-Ḥaḡiqah*, p. 183. Or the last phrase could mean: “...the bond of faith becomes wholesome [and strong].” (Tr.)

⁴⁸ Ibid, p. 185.

to prepare for the funeral rites of his son.⁴⁹

(٤٦) وروي عن حَمَنَةَ بنت جحش رضي الله عنها أنها قيل لها: قتل أخوك، قالت: رحمه الله، وإنا لله وإنا إليه راجعون. قالوا: وقتل زوجك، قالت: واحزنناه! فقال رسول الله ﷺ: إن للزوج من المرأة لشعبة ما هي لشيء.

(46) It is narrated that Ḥamnah bint of Jaḥsh, may Allah be pleased with her, was informed that her brother had been killed. She said, “May Allah have mercy on him; *indeed, we belong to Allah and to Him is our return.*” Then they said, “And your husband has [also] been killed.” She said, “Oh, what sorrow!” So the Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) said, “Verily a wife has a connection to her husband which is unlike anything else.”⁵⁰

(٤٧) واستشهد شاب من الأنصار يقال له: خلاد يوم بني قريظة، فجاءت أمه متنقبة فقيل لها: تتقبين يا أم خلاد وقد رزئت بخلاد؟! فقالت: لئن كنت رزئت خلاداً، فلم أرأ حياي! فدعا له النبي ﷺ وقال: إن له أجرين، لأن أهل الكتاب قتلوه.

(47) A youth from among the Anṣār, named Khallād, was martyred in the Battle of Banū Qurayzah. His mother came out with a veil on her face. Someone said to her, “Do you wear a face veil, O Umm Khallād, while you are mourning [the death of] Khallād?!” She said, “I am mourning the loss of Khallād, not the loss of my modesty!” And the Prophet (ﷺ) supplicated for him, saying, “He will indeed receive twice the reward, because he was killed by the People of the Book.”⁵¹

(٤٨) وعن أنس بن مالك قال: لما كان يوم أحد حاص أهل المدينة حيصة، فقالوا: قتل محمد ﷺ، حتى كثرت الصوارخ في نواحي المدينة. فخرجت امرأة من الأنصار متحزنة، فاستقبلت بأبيها وابنها وزوجها وأخيها، لا أدري أيهم

⁴⁹ Al-Irbilī, *Kashf al-Ghummah*, vol. 2, p. 81.

⁵⁰ Ibn Mājah, *al-Sunan*, vol. 3, p. 109.

⁵¹ Ibn Mandah, *Maʿrifat al-Ṣaḥābah*, p. 504.

استقبلت أولاً. فلما مرّت على آخرهم قالت: من هذا؟ قالوا: أخوك، وأبوك، وزوجك، وابنك، قالت: ما فعل النبي ﷺ؟ قالوا: أمامك، فمشت حتى جاءت إليه، فأخذت بناحية ثوبه، وجعلت تقول: بأبي أنت وأمي يا رسول الله، لا أبالي إذا سلمت من عطب .

(48) Anas ibn Mālik said that during the Battle of Uḥud, the people of Madīnah were greatly troubled. They said, “Muḥammad (ṣ) has been killed,” until many loud cries were heard all around the city. A woman from the Anṣār came out grieving. She approached the corpses of her father, son, husband, and brother; I do not know which one of them she went to first. When she passed by the last body, she asked: “Who is this?” They said, “This is your brother, and [these are] your father, husband and son.” She asked, “How did the Prophet (ṣ) fare?” They said, “He is [there,] in front of you.” She walked until she came to him. Then she held the edge of his cloak and began saying, “May my father and mother be sacrificed for you, O Messenger of Allah! I do not care about anything as long as you are safe from harm.”⁵²

(٤٩) وروى البيهقي قال: مرّ رسول الله ﷺ بامرأة من بني دينار، وقد أصيب زوجها وأبوها وأخوها معه ﷺ بأحد؛ فلما نعوأ إليها، قالت: ما فعل رسول الله ﷺ؟ قالوا: خيراً يا أمّ فلان، وهو يحمد الله كما تحبّين، قالت: أرونيه حتى أنظر إليه، فأشير لها إليه، حتى إذا رآته قالت: كلّ مصيبة بعدك جليل.

(49) Al-Bayhaqī has narrated that the Messenger of Allah (ṣ) once met a woman from the Banī Dīnār whose husband, father and brother were with him in [the Battle of] Uḥud. When they informed her that they had been killed, she asked, “How did the Messenger of Allah (ṣ) fare?” They said, “He fared well, O mother of so-and-so, and he is praising Allah as you love.” She said, “Show him to me so that I may see him.” They pointed in his direction, and when she saw him, she said, “Any

⁵² Al-Baghḍādī, *Tadhkirat al-Ḥamdūniyyah*, vol. 4, p. 313.

calamity besides [harm coming to] you, is insignificant.”⁵³

(٥٠) وقال ﷺ: إذا أحبَّ الله عبداً ابتلاه، فإن صبر اجتبه، فإن رضي اصطفاه.

(50) He (ﷺ) also said, “If Allah loves one of His servants, He tests him [with affliction]. If he remains patient, He selects him [to be among the elite]; if he is satisfied [with His decree], He chooses him [for Himself].”⁵⁴

(٥١) وقال ﷺ: إذا كان يوم القيامة أنبت الله تعالى لطائفة من أمّتي أجنحة، فيطيرون من قبورهم إلى الجنان، يسرحون فيها، ويتنعمون كيف يشاؤون، فتقول لهم الملائكة: هل رأيتم الحساب؟ فيقولون: ما رأينا حساباً. فيقولون: هل جزتم الصراط؟ فيقولون: ما رأينا صراطاً. فيقولون: هل رأيتم جهنّم؟ فيقولون: ما رأينا شيئاً. فتقول الملائكة: من أمة من أنتم؟ فيقولون: من أمة محمّد ﷺ، فيقولون: نشدناكم الله، حدّثونا ما كانت أعمالكم في الدنيا؟ فيقولون: خصلتان كانتا فينا، فبلغنا الله تعالى هذا المنزلة بفضل رحمته. فيقولون: وما هما؟ فيقولون: كنّا إذا خلونا نستحي أن نعصيه، ونرضى باليسير ممّا قسم لنا، فتقول الملائكة: حقّ لكم هذا.

(51) He (ﷺ) also said, “When the Day of Judgment comes, Allah, the Exalted, will give wings to a group from my *ummah*, so they will fly from their graves to the gardens [of Paradise], where they will roam about and enjoy as they please. The angels will ask them, ‘Did you witness the Reckoning?’ They will reply, ‘We did not witness any Reckoning.’ They will ask them, ‘Did you pass on the *Şirāt*?’ They will reply, ‘We saw no *Şirāt*.’ They will ask them, ‘Did you see Hell?’ They will respond, ‘We saw no such thing.’ The angels will then ask, ‘To whose nation do you belong?’ They will answer, ‘We belong to the nation of Muḥammad, peace and blessings of Allah be upon him and

⁵³ Ibn Hishām, *al-Sīrah al-Nabawiyyah*, vol. 2, p. 99.

⁵⁴ Al-Ghazzālī, *Iḥyā’ ‘Ulūm al-Dīn*, vol. 4, p. 329.

his progeny.’

The angels will then ask them, ‘We adjure you in the Name of Allah, tell us: what were your deeds in the world?’ They will say, ‘We had in us two qualities, so Allah, the Exalted, elevated us to this status by the grace of His mercy.’ The angels will ask, ‘What were the two qualities?’ They will reply, ‘Whenever we were alone, we felt too shy to sin against Allah, and we were always pleased with whatever He allotted for us.’ So the angels will say, ‘Then, indeed, you deserve this [reward].’⁵⁵

(٥٢) وفي أخبار موسى ﷺ، أنهم قالوا: سل لنا ربك أمراً إذا نحن فعلناه يرضى به عنا. فأوحى الله تعالى إليه: قل لهم يرضون عني، حتى أرضى عنهم.

(52) In the reports about [Prophet] Mūsā (a), [it is narrated that] they once said to him, “Ask your Lord for us about the action which, if we perform it, He would be pleased with us.” So Allah, the Exalted, revealed to him saying, “Tell them to be pleased with Me so that I may be pleased with them.”⁵⁶

(٥٣) ونظيره ما روي عن نبينا ﷺ أنه قال: من أحب أن يعلم ما له عند الله عز وجل، فلينظر ما لله عز وجل عنده، فإن الله تعالى ينزل العبد منه حيث أنزله العبد من نفسه.

(53) A similar thing has been narrated from our Prophet (ﷺ), who said, “Whoever would like to know what his status is with Allah, the Almighty, let him see what status Allah, the Almighty, has with him; for indeed Allah, the Exalted, holds the servant in the same esteem as the servant holds Him with himself.”⁵⁷

(٥٤) وفي أخبار داود ﷺ: ما لأوليائي والهَمّ بالدنيا، إنَّ الهَمّ يذهب حلاوة مناجاتي من قلوبهم. يا داود، إنَّ محبتي من أوليائي أن يكونوا روحانيين لا

⁵⁵ Ibid, p. 344.

⁵⁶ Ibid, p. 345.

⁵⁷ Warrām ibn Abī Fāris, *Majmū‘at Warrām*, vol. 1, p. 230.

يغتمون.

(54) In the reports about [Prophet] Dāwūd (a), [we find that Allah said to him:] “Why should My friends be concerned about this [fleeting] world? Indeed, concern [for it] removes from their hearts the sweetness of whispering to Me. O Dāwūd, I love for My friends to be spiritual and unworried [about worldly matters].”⁵⁸

(٥٥) وروي أنّ موسى ﷺ قال: يا ربّ، دلّني على أمرٍ فيه رضاك عني أعمله. فأوحى الله تعالى إليه: إنّ رضاي في كرهك، وأنت ما تصبر على ما تكره. قال: يا ربّ، دلّني عليه. قال: فإنّ رضاي في رضاك بقضائي.

(55) It has been narrated that Mūsā (a) said, “O Lord, guide me to a matter in which You would be pleased with me, so that I may do it.” So Allah, the Exalted, revealed to him: “Verily My pleasure lies in what you dislike, and you cannot remain patient with what you dislike.” He said, “O Lord, show it to me!” He said, “Verily My pleasure is in your satisfaction with My decree [in every circumstance].”⁵⁹

(٥٦) وفي مناجاة موسى ﷺ: أي ربّ، أيّ خلقك أحبّ إليك؟ قال: من إذا أخذت حبيبه سالمني. قال: فأأيّ خلق أنت عليه ساخط؟ قال: من يستخيرني في الأمر، فإذا قضيت له سخط قضائي.

(56) Among the whispered communication of Mūsā (a) [with Allah, was one wherein he said]: “O Lord, who is the most beloved of Your servants to You?” He replied, “The one who, when I take his beloved, he [accepts My decree submissively and] is at peace with Me.” Mūsā (a) asked, “And who, among Your creation, are You angry with?” He replied, “One who seeks from Me what is best for himself, but when I decree something for him, he is displeased with My decree.”⁶⁰

⁵⁸ Al-Ghazzālī, *Ihyā’ Ulūm al-Dīn*, vol. 4, p. 345.

⁵⁹ Al-Rāwandī, *al-Da’awāt*, p. 164 with a variance in wording.

⁶⁰ Al-Ghazzālī, *Ihyā’ Ulūm al-Dīn*, vol. 4, p. 345.

(٥٧) وروي ما هو أشدّ منه، وذلك أن الله تعالى قال: أنا الله، لا إله إلا أنا. من لم يصبر على بلائي، ولم يرضَ بقضائي، فليتخذ رباً سوائى.

(57) Something even more severe than this has been narrated, and that is: Allah, the Exalted, said, “I am Allah, there is no god but Me. Whoever is not patient with My trial and is not pleased with My decree, then let him take a lord other than Me.”⁶¹

(٥٨) ويروى أن الله تعالى أوحى إلى داود عليه السلام: يا داود، تريد وأريد، وإنّما يكون ما أريد، فإن سلمت لما أريد كفيتك ما تريد، وإن لم تسلم لما أريد أتعبتك فيما تريد، ولا يكون إلا ما أريد.

(58) It is also narrated that Allah, the Exalted, revealed to [Prophet] Dāwūd (a): “O Dāwūd, you want and I want, and only what I want comes to pass. So if you surrender to what I want, I shall suffice you in what you want. But if you do not surrender to what I want, I will tire you in [your quest for] what you want, and [in the end] nothing but what I want shall come to pass.”⁶²

(٥٩) وقال عليه السلام: إنّ الله تعالى بحكمته وجلاله، جعل الروح والفرج في الرضا واليقين، وجعل الغمّ والحزن في الشكّ والسخط.

(59) The Prophet (s) said, “Verily Allah, the Exalted, through His wisdom and majesty, placed joy and relief in acceptance [of His decree] and [in] conviction, and He placed grief and sadness in doubt and disappointment [with His decree].”⁶³

(٦٠) وروي الكليني باسناده إلى أبي عبد الله عليه السلام، أنّه قال: رأس طاعة الله الصبر والرضى عن الله فيما أحبّ العبد أو كرهه، ولا يرضى عبد عن الله فيما أحبّ

⁶¹ Al-Rāwandī, *al-Da‘awāt*, p. 169 with a slight variance in wording.

⁶² Al-Ṣadūq, *al-Tawḥīd*, p. 337.

⁶³ Al-Barqī, *al-Maḥāsīn*, vol. 1, p. 17 with a slight variance in wording.

وكره إلا كان خيراً له فيما أحب أو كره.

(60) Al-Kulaynī narrated, through his chain of transmitters, from Abī ‘Abdillāh (a) who said, “The cornerstone of obedience to Allah is patience and acceptance of Allah’s decree in what the servant loves or hates, and if a servant is satisfied with Allah’s decree in what he loves or hates, then there will always be goodness for him in whatever he loves or hates.”⁶⁴

(٦١) وبإسناده عنه عليه السلام قال: قال الله تعالى: عبدي المؤمن لا أصرفه في شيء إلا جعلته خيراً له، فليرضَ بقضائي، وليصبر على بلائي، وليشكر نعمائي، أكتبه - يا محمد - من الصديقين عندي.

(61) Also through his chain [to the Imam, he reports that] he (a) said, “Allah, the Exalted, said: ‘I do not make My believing servant face anything except that I decree goodness in it for him; so let him accept My decree, let him be patient with My trial, and let him show gratitude for My blessings, [for then] I shall record him, O Muḥammad, among the truthful ones with Me.’”⁶⁵

(٦٢) وعنه عليه السلام قال: في ما أوحى الله عزّ وجلّ إلى موسى عليه السلام: يا موسى بن عمران، ما خلقت خلقاً أحبّ إليّ من عبدي المؤمن، فإني إنمّا أبتليه لما هو خير له، وأعافيه لما هو خير له، وأزوي عنه لما هو خير له، وأنا أعلم بما يصلح عليه عبدي، فليصبر على بلائي، وليشكر نعمائي، وليرضَ بقضائي، أكتبه في الصديقين عندي، إذا عمل برضائي، وأطاع أمري.

(62) He (a) also said, “Among what Allah, the Almighty, revealed to Mūsā (a) was: ‘O Mūsā son of ‘Imrān! I have not created anything dearer to Me than My believing servant. Indeed, I only test him for his own good, I grant him wellbeing for his own good, and I keep away

⁶⁴ Al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfi*, vol. 2, p. 60.

⁶⁵ Ibid, p. 61.

some things from him for his own good. I know best what is beneficial for My servant, so let him be patient with My trials, show gratitude for My blessings, and accept My decree, [for then] I shall record him among the truthful ones with Me, if he does what pleases Me and obeys My command.”⁶⁶

(٦٣) وقيل للصادق عليه السلام: بأي شيء يعلم المؤمن بأنه مؤمن؟ قال: بالتسليم لله، والرضا فيما ورد عليه من سرور أو سخط.

(63) It was said to [Imam] al-Ṣādiq (a), “Through what criteria can a believer know that he is a true believer?” He said, “Through submission to Allah and satisfaction with whatever befalls him, be it pleasing or displeasing.”⁶⁷

(٦٤) لما اشتدّ البلاء على أيوب عليه السلام قالت امرأته: ألا تدعو ربك فيكشف ما بك؟ فقال لها: يا امرأة، إني عشت في الملك والرخاء سبعين سنة، فأنا أريد أن أعيش مثلها في البلاء، لعلّي كنت أذيت شكر ما أنعم الله عليّ، وأولى بي الصبر على ما أبلى.

(64) When the affliction of [Prophet] Ayyūb (a) intensified, his wife said to him, “Will you not supplicate to your Lord so that He may remove what has afflicted you?” He said to her, “O wife, I lived in wealth and prosperity for seventy years, so I now want to live the same as that [length of time] in affliction. Perhaps in so doing, I will have fulfilled the right of gratitude to Allah for what He blessed me with, so patience is more befitting for me in what He has tested me.”⁶⁸

(٦٥) وروي أنّ يونس عليه السلام قال لجبرئيل عليه السلام: دلّني على أعبد أهل الأرض، فدله على رجل قد قطع الجذام يديه ورجليه، وذهب ببصره وسمعته، وهو يقول:

⁶⁶ Al-Ṭabrisī, *Mishkāt al-Anwar*, p. 299.

⁶⁷ Al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 2, p. 63.

⁶⁸ Al-Rāwandī, *al-Da‘awāt*, p. 165 with variance in wording.

إلهي! متّعني بهما ما شئت، وسلبتي ما شئت، وأبقيت لي فيك الأمل، يا برُّ يا
وصول!

(65) It is also reported that [Prophet] Yūnus (a) once said to Jibrā'il (a), "Show me the most devoted worshipper on the face of the earth." So he showed him a man whose hands and legs were severed due to leprosy, and both his vision and hearing had gone, yet he kept saying, "My Lord! You permitted me to enjoy them (my sight and hearing) as long as You willed, and You took away from me what You willed, yet You left me with hope in You, O most Kind, most Accessible [to His servants]!"⁶⁹

(٦٦) وروي أن عيسى ﷺ مرّ برجل أعمى أبرص مقعد مضروب الجنبين بالفالج، وقد تناثر لحمه من الجذام، وهو يقول: الحمد لله الذي عافاني ممّا ابتلي به كثيراً من خلقه. فقال له عيسى ﷺ: يا هذا، وأي شيء من البلاء أراه مصروفاً عنك؟ فقال: يا روح الله، أنا خيرٌ ممّن لم يجعل الله في قلبه ما جعل في قلبي من معرفته. فقال له: صدقت، هات يدك، فناوله يده، فإذا هو أحسن الناس وجهاً، وأفضلهم هيئةً، قد أذهب الله عنه ما كان به، فصحب عيسى ﷺ، وتعبّد معه.

(66) It is narrated that [Prophet] 'Īsā (a) once passed by a man who was blind, leprous, handicapped, and paralysed on both his sides, and his flesh [had fallen off and] was scattered around him because of the leprosy, yet the man kept saying, "Praise be to Allah Who has healed me from what many among His creation have been afflicted." 'Īsā (a) said to him, "O man, what affliction is it that has been kept away from you?" The man said, "O Ruḥullāh, my condition is better than those in whose hearts Allah did not place knowledge of Him as He has placed in mine." 'Īsā (a) said to him, "You have spoken the truth. Give me your hand." [The man stretched out his hand to 'Īsā (a)] and instantly he was turned into the most handsome of all people, possessing the best form, with Allah having removed all that he was suffering from. The man

⁶⁹ Ibn Abī al-Dunyā, *al-Riḍā 'an Allah bi Qaḍā'ihī*, p. 59.

then accompanied ʿĪsā (a) and worshipped [Allah] with him.⁷⁰

(٦٧) ومن مشاهير الأخبار ما روي عن الصادق عليه السلام، أنه قال: إنَّ زين العابدين عليه السلام بكى على أبيه أربعين سنَةً، صائماً نهاره، قائماً ليله، فإذا حضر الإفطار جاء غلامه بطعامه وشرابه، فيضعه بين يديه، ويقول: كل يا مولاي، فيقول: قتل ابن رسول الله جائعاً، قتل ابن رسول الله عطشاناً، فلا يزال يكرّر ذلك، ويبكي حتّى يبيل طعامه من دموعه، فلم يزل كذلك حتّى لحق بالله عزّ وجلّ.

(67) Among the famous narrations is one quoted from Imam al-Ṣādiq (a) where he said, “Verily [Imam] Zayn al-ʿĀbidīn (a) wept over his father for forty years, fasting during the day and standing for prayers at night. When it was time for him to open the fast, his servant would bring him food and drink, placing it in front of him and saying, ‘Eat, O my master.’ He (a) would respond, ‘The [grand]son of the Messenger of Allah (a) was killed while he was hungry; the [grand]son of the Messenger of Allah (a) was killed while he was thirsty.’ He would keep repeating this and weeping until his food became wet from his tears. He continued doing this until he joined Allah, the Almighty.”⁷¹

(٦٨) وروي عن بعض مواليه أنه قال: برز يوماً إلى الصحراء فتبعته، فوجدته قد سجد على حجارةٍ خشنةٍ، فوقفت وأنا أسمع شهيقة وبكائه، فأحصيت عليه ألف مرّة، وهو يقول: «لا إله إلا الله حقّاً حقّاً، لا إله إلا الله تعبداً ورُقّاً، لا إله إلا الله إيماناً وصدقاً»، ثمّ رفع رأسه من سجوده وإنّ لحيته ووجهه قد غمر بالماء من دموع عينيه، فقلت: يا سيدي، ما آن لحزنك أن ينقضي، ولبكائك أن يقل؟ فقال لي: ويحك، إنّ يعقوب بن إسحاق بن إبراهيم عليه السلام كان نبياً ابن نبيّ ابن نبيّ، له اثنا عشر ابناً، فغيّب الله واحداً منهم، فشاب رأسه من الحزن، واحدودب ظهره من الغمّ، وذهب بصره من البكاء، وابنه حيّ في دار الدنيا، وأنا رأيت أبي وأخي

⁷⁰ Al-Ghazzālī, *Ihyāʾ ʿUlūm al-Dīn*, vol. 4, p. 349.

⁷¹ Ibn Ṭāwūs, *al-Luhūf*, p. 209.

وسبعة عشر من أهل بيتي صرعى مقتولين، فكيف يتقضي حزني ويقلّ بكائي؟

(68) It is reported that one of his servants said, “He [Imam Zayn al-‘Ābidīn] went out to the desert one day, so I followed him. I found him prostrating on a rough stone, so I stood [nearby] as I heard him sobbing and weeping. I counted him repeating the following statement one thousand times: ‘There is no god but Allah, truly, truly. There is no god but Allah, I worship Him [alone] as a humble slave. There is no god but Allah, this I believe with conviction and know to be true.’ Then he raised his head from prostration, and his beard and face were awash with his tears.

I said, ‘O my master! Is it not time now for your grief to come to an end and for your weeping to reduce?’ He said to me, ‘Woe be to you! Ya‘qūb ibn Ishāq ibn Ibrāhīm (a) was a Prophet, the son of a Prophet, and the grandson of a Prophet. He had twelve sons. Allah kept [only] one of them away from him, so his hair turned grey on account of his grief, his back was bent due to his sadness, and he lost his eyesight because of his weeping, even though his son was alive in this world. And I saw my father, brother, and seventeen of my family members lying on the ground, slain; so how can my grief come to an end, and how can my weeping decrease?’⁷²

(٦٩) وعن جابر بن عبد الله الأنصاري رضي الله عنه قال: أخذ رسول الله صلى الله عليه وآله بيد عبد الرحمن بن عوف، فأتى إبراهيم وهو يوجد بنفسه، فوضعه في حجره، فقال له: يا بني، إني لا أملك لك من الله تعالى شيئاً. وذرفت عيناه، فقال له عبد الرحمن: يا رسول الله، تبكي؟ أو لم تنه عن البكاء؟ فقال صلى الله عليه وآله: إنما نهيت عن النوح، عن صوتين أحققين فاجرين: صوت عند نغمة لعب ولهو ومزامير شيطان، وصوت عند مصيبة؛ خمش وجوه، وشقّ جيوب، ورنّة شيطان. إنما هذه رحمة، ومن لا يرحم لا يرحم. ولولا أنه أمر حقّ، ووعد صدق، وسيل نأتيه، وأنّ آخرنا سيلحق أولنا، لحزننا عليك حزناً أشدّ من هذا، وإنا بك لمحزونون، تبكي العين ويحزن

⁷² Ibid, p. 210.

القلب ولا نقول ما يسخط الرب عز وجل.

(69) Jābir ibn ‘Abdillāh al-Anṣārī, may Allah be pleased with him, said, “The Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) took the hand of ‘Abd al-Raḥmān ibn ‘Awf and went to see [his son] Ibrāhīm as he was on the verge of death. He placed the child in his lap and said to him, ‘O my son! I cannot avail anything for you against [the will of] Allah,’ and tears began to flow from his eyes. ‘Abd al-Raḥmān said to him, ‘O Messenger of Allah, are you weeping? Did you not prohibit weeping?’ He (ﷺ) said, ‘I only prohibited lamenting; [I prohibited] the two foolish and corrupting sounds: the sound made in a playful tune, [while] merry-making and playing the pipes [and instruments] of Satan, and [secondly,] the sound made when a calamity befalls: the scratching of cheeks, the tearing of shirts, and the wailing of Satan.’⁷³

This [weeping], however, is only a [sign of] mercy, and one who does not show mercy [to others] is not shown mercy [by the Almighty].’ [Then he turned to his son and said,] ‘Were it not an inescapable matter, a true promise, and a path which we all must traverse, where the last of us shall meet up with the first, we would have grieved over you more intensely than this; and indeed we are sorrowful on your account. The eye is tearful and the heart is sad, yet we do not say anything that angers our Lord, the Almighty.’⁷⁴

(٧٠) وعن أبي أمامة قال: جاء رجل إلى النبي ﷺ حين توفي ابنه وعيناه تدمعان، فقال: يا نبي الله، تبكي على هذا السخل؟ والذي بعثك بالحق لقد دفنت اثني عشر ولداً في الجاهلية كلهم أشب منه، أدسه في التراب. فقال النبي ﷺ: فماذا، إن كانت الرحمة ذهب منك. يحزن القلب وتدمع العين، ولا نقول ما يسخط الرب، وإننا على إبراهيم لمحزونون.

(70) Abū Umāmah is reported to have said, “A man came to the

⁷³ Meaning a satanic form of wailing which is loud and without any self-control, and is indicative of one’s anger and dissatisfaction with the decree of Allah. (Tr.)

⁷⁴ Al-Suyūṭī, *al-Jāmi‘ al-Kabīr*, vol. 6, p. 788 with a slight variance in wording.

Prophet (ﷺ) when his son [Ibrahim] died and [saw that] his eyes were filled with tears, so he said, ‘O Prophet of Allah, do you cry for this child?’ I swear by the One who sent you with the truth, I buried twelve children during the age of ignorance (*jāhiliyyah*), all of them younger than him. I buried each in the ground [myself].’ The Prophet (ﷺ) said, ‘So what [does it mean] except that mercy has departed from you. The heart is grieved and the eye is tearful, yet we do not say anything that angers the Lord; and we are indeed sorrowful for [losing] Ibrāhīm.’⁷⁵

(٧١) وعن محمود بن لبيد قال: انكسفت الشمس يوم مات إبراهيم بن رسول الله ﷺ، فقال الناس: انكسفت الشمس لموت إبراهيم. فخرج رسول الله ﷺ حين سمع ذلك فحمد الله وأثنى عليه، ثم قال: أما بعد، أيها الناس، إن الشمس والقمر آيتان من آيات الله عز وجل، لا ينكسفان لموت أحد ولا لحياته، فإذا رأيتم ذلك فافزعوا إلى المساجد. ودمعت عيناه، فقالوا: يا رسول الله، تبكي وأنت رسول الله؟ فقال: إنما أنا بشر، تدمع العين ويفجع القلب، ولا نقول ما يسخط الرب؛ والله - يا إبراهيم - إننا بك لمحزونون.

(71) It is narrated that Maḥmūd ibn Labīd said, “The sun was eclipsed on the day that Ibrāhīm, the son of the Messenger of Allah (ﷺ), died, so people said, ‘The sun has eclipsed due to Ibrāhīm’s death.’ When he heard this, the Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) came out [to address the people]. He praised Allah and glorified Him, then he said, ‘O people! Verily the sun and the moon are two of the signs of Allah, the Almighty. They do not eclipse due to the death or the birth of anyone. If you see this (i.e. an eclipse), you must rush to the *masājid* to pray.’ His eyes were filled with tears, so they said, ‘O Messenger of Allah, do you weep while you are the Messenger of Allah?’ He (ﷺ) said, ‘I am only a human being; the eye sheds tears and the heart feels anguish, yet we do not say anything that angers the Lord. By Allah, O Ibrāhīm, we are sorrowful due to

⁷⁵ Al-Ṭabarānī, *al-Muḥjam al-Kabīr*, vol. 8, p. 230 with a slight variance in wording.

[losing] you.”⁷⁶

(٧٢) وقال ﷺ يوم مات إبراهيم: ما كان من حزن في القلب أو في العين فإِنَّمَا هو رحمة، وما كان من حزن باللسان وباليد فهو من الشيطان.

(72) On the day that Ibrāhīm died, he (ﷺ) said, “Whatever grief there is in the heart or in the eye is only a mercy; and whatever grief is [expressed] by the tongue or the hand⁷⁷ is from Satan.”⁷⁸

(٧٣) وروى الزبير بن بكار أن النبي ﷺ لَمَّا خَرَجَ بِإِبْرَاهِيمَ خَرَجَ يَمْشِي، ثُمَّ جَلَسَ عَلَى قَبْرِهِ، ثُمَّ دَلَّى، فَلَمَّا رَأَى رَسُولَ اللَّهِ ﷺ قَدْ وَضَعَ فِي الْقَبْرِ دَمَعَتْ عَيْنَاهُ، فَلَمَّا رَأَى الصَّحَابَةَ ذَلِكَ بَكَوْا حَتَّى ارْتَفَعَتْ أَصْوَاتُهُمْ، فَأَقْبَلَ عَلَيْهِ أَبُو بَكْرٍ فَقَالَ: يَا رَسُولَ اللَّهِ، تَبْكِي وَأَنْتِ تَهَيِّئِينَ عَنِ الْبُكَاءِ؟ فَقَالَ النَّبِيُّ ﷺ: تَدْمَعُ الْعَيْنُ وَيُوجِعُ الْقَلْبَ، وَلَا نَقُولُ مَا يَسْخَطُ الرَّبَّ عَزَّ وَجَلَّ.

(73) Al-Zubayr ibn Bakkār narrated that when the Prophet (ﷺ) went out with [the body of his son] Ibrāhīm, he did so on foot. Then he sat by his grave, and when he was lowered [into it] and the Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) saw him placed in the grave, tears began to flow from his eyes. When the Companions saw this, they began to weep so much that their voices were raised. Abu Bakr approached him and said, ‘O Messenger of Allah, do you weep while you prohibit us from weeping?’ The Prophet (ﷺ) said, ‘The eye sheds tears and the heart is in pain, yet we do not say anything that angers our Lord, the Almighty.’⁷⁹

(٧٤) وروى مسلم في صحيحه: أَنَّ النَّبِيَّ ﷺ زَارَ قَبْرَ أُمِّهِ، فَبَكَى وَأَبْكَى مِنْ حَوْلِهِ.

(74) Muslim narrates in his *Ṣaḥīḥ* that the Prophet (ﷺ) visited his

⁷⁶ Al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 3, p. 262 with a variance in wording.

⁷⁷ Meaning when grief turns into loud wailing or complaining, or when one slaps, hits or scratches himself with his hands out of grief, then these actions are from Satan. (Tr.)

⁷⁸ Al-Jūzjānī, *al-Taḥfīr min Sunan Sa‘īd ibn Mansūr*, Introduction, p. 188.

⁷⁹ Al-Tirmidhī, *Nawādir al-Uṣūl fī Aḥādīth al-Rasūl*, vol. 4, p. 163.

mother's grave and he wept and made all those around him weep.⁸⁰

(٧٥) وعن أسامة بن زيد قال: أتى النبي ﷺ بأمامة بنت زينب، ونفسها يتقعقع في صدرها، فقال رسول الله ﷺ: لله ما أخذ ولله ما أعطى، وكلُّ إلى أجل مسمى. وبكى، فقال له سعد بن عباد: تبكي، وقد نهيت عن البكاء! فقال رسول الله ﷺ: إنما هي رحمة يجعلها الله في قلوب عباده، وإنما يرحم الله من عباده الرحماء.

(75) It is narrated that Usāmah ibn Zayd said, “Umāmah bint Zaynab was brought to the Prophet (ﷺ) while she was struggling to breathe, so the Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) said, ‘That which Allah takes belongs to Him, and that which Allah gives belongs to Him; and everyone has a specified term [in this world],’ then he wept. Sa’d ibn ‘Ubādah said to him, ‘You weep while you have prohibited weeping!’ The Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) said, ‘It is only a mercy which Allah places in the hearts of His servants; and Allah is only merciful to those among His servants who show mercy.’”⁸¹

(٧٦) قال عبد الله بن جعفر: أحفظ حين دخل رسول الله على أمي، فنعى إليها أبي، ونظرت إليه وهو يمسح على رأسي ورأس أخي، وعيناه تهراقان الدموع حتى تقطر لحيته، ثم قال: اللهم إن جعفرًا قد قدم إلى أحسن الثواب، فأخلفه في ذريته بأحسن ما خلفت أحداً من عبادك في ذريته. ثم إنه ﷺ قال: يا أسماء، ألا أبشرك؟ قالت: بلى بأبي أنت وأمي، فقال: إن الله عز وجل جعل لجعفر جناحين، يطير بهما في الجنة.

(76) ‘Abdullāh ibn Ja’far said, “I remember the time when the Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) visited my mother and gave her condolences for the death of my father. She looked at him as he kept [lovingly] stroking my head and that of my brother while tears rolled down his eyes until his beard started dripping. Then he said, ‘O Allah, Ja’far has gone

⁸⁰ Muslim, *al-Shāḥih*, vol. 2, p. 671.

⁸¹ Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal, *al-Musnad*, vol. 36, p. 113.

towards the best of rewards, so bestow upon his progeny the very best of what You have bestowed upon the progeny of any of Your [martyred] servants.’ Then he (a) said, ‘O Asmā, shall I give you some glad tidings?’ She said, ‘Yes, may both my parents be sacrificed for your sake!’ He said, ‘Allah, the Almighty, has given Ja’far two wings by which he flies in Paradise.’⁸²

(٧٧) وعن أبي عبد الله عليه السلام، عن أبيه، عن النبي صلى الله عليه وآله، أنه لما جاءته وفاة جعفر بن أبي طالب رضي الله عنه وزيد بن حارثة، كان إذا دخل بيته بكى عليهما جداً، وقال: كانا يحدثاني ويؤنساني، فجاء الموت فذهب بهما.

(77) Abū ‘Abdillāh (a) narrated from his father regarding the Prophet (ﷺ), that when he learnt about the martyrdom of Ja’far ibn Abī Ṭālib, may Allah be pleased with him, and Zayd ibn Ḥārithah, he mourned them both intensely when he entered his house. And he would say, “They both used to talk to me and were close to me, then death took them away.”⁸³

(٧٨) وعن خالد بن سلمة قال: لما جاء نعي زيد بن حارثة إلى النبي صلى الله عليه وآله أتى النبي صلى الله عليه وآله منزل زيد، فخرجت إليه بنية لزيد، فلما رأت رسول الله صلى الله عليه وآله خمشت في وجهها، فبكى رسول الله صلى الله عليه وآله وقال: هاه هاه! فقيل: يا رسول الله، ما هذا؟ قال: شوق الحبيب إلى حبيبه.

(78) Khālid ibn Salamah said, “When the Prophet (ﷺ) received news about the death of Zayd ibn Ḥārithah, he went to Zayd’s house [to offer condolences], so Zayd’s little daughter came out to him. When she saw the Messenger of Allah (ﷺ), she scratched her face [in grief], whereupon the Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) wept and sighed, ‘Ah, ah!’ Someone asked, ‘What is this [that you are doing], O Messenger of Allah?’ He said, ‘It

⁸² Al-Suyūṭī, *al-Jāmi’ al-Kabīr*, vol. 12, p. 314.

⁸³ Al-Ṣadūq, *Man Lā Yaḥḍuruhu al-Faqīh*, vol. 1, p. 177 with a slight variance in wording.

is the yearning of a close friend for his cherished companion.”⁸⁴

(٧٩) قيل: وكان رسول الله ﷺ تذرّف عيناه، ويمسح وجهه، ولا يسمع صوته.

(79) It is said that [when he wept,] tears would flow from the eyes of the Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) and he would wipe his face, but his voice would not be heard.⁸⁵

(٨٠) وروى الشيخ في التهذيب بإسناده إلى الصادق عليه السلام: إنّ إبراهيم خليل الرحمن سأل ربّه أن يرزقه ابنة تبكيه بعد موته.

(80) Al-Shaykh [al-Ṭūsī] narrates in *al-Tahdhīb* through his chain of narrators from Imam al-Ṣādiq (a) who said, “Verily Ibrāhīm, the Friend of the Most Merciful, asked his Lord to grant him a daughter who would mourn him after his death.”⁸⁶

(٨١) عن ابن مسعود قال: قال رسول الله ﷺ: ليس منّا من ضرب الخدود، وشقّ الجيوب.

(81) It is reported that Ibn Mas‘ūd said, “The Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) said, ‘One who slaps his cheeks and tears his garments [out of grief] is not from us.’”⁸⁷

(٨٢) وعنه عليه السلام، أنّه نهى أن تتبّع جنازة معها رائة.

(82) He (ﷺ) is reported to have prohibited people from walking behind a bier while wailing [loudly].⁸⁸

(٨٣) وعن يحيى بن خالد: أنّ رجلاً أتى النبي ﷺ، فقال: ما يحبط الأجر عند المصيبة؟ قال: تصفيق الرجل بيمينه على شماله، والصبر عند الصدمة الأولى، من

⁸⁴ Al-Ṭabrisī, *Makārim al-Akhlāq*, p. 22. Lit. the yearning of a lover for his beloved. (Tr.)

⁸⁵ Al-Būṣīrī, *Ithāf al-Khiyarah al-Maharah bi Zawā'id al-Masānid al-Asharah*, vol. 2, p. 503.

⁸⁶ Al-Ṭūsī, *al-Tahdhīb*, vol. 1, p. 465.

⁸⁷ Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal, *al-Musnad*, vol. 7, p. 262.

⁸⁸ Ibn Mājah, *al-Sunan*, vol. 3, p. 103.

رضي فله الرضا، ومن سخط فله السخط.

(83) Yahyā ibn Khālid reported that a man came to the Prophet (ﷺ) and asked, “What nullifies reward during calamity?” He (ﷺ) replied, “When a man slaps his right hand on his left; and patience during the initial shock is better. Whoever accepts [what is decreed], he shall have the acceptance [of Allah], and whoever is displeased, then he shall have the displeasure [of Allah].”⁸⁹

(٨٤) وعن الباقر عليه السلام: أشدّ الجزع الصراخ بالويل والويل، ولطم الوجه والصدر، وجزّ الشعر، ومن أقام النواح فقد ترك الصبر، ومن صبر واسترجع وحمد الله - جلّ ذكره - فقد رضي بما صنع الله، ووقع أجره على الله عزّ وجلّ، ومن لم يفعل ذلك جرى عليه القضاء وهو ذميم، وأحبط الله عزّ وجلّ أجره.

(84) Imam al-Bāqir (a) is reported to have said, “The most intense form of restless impatience is screaming while weeping and wailing, slapping the face and chest, and pulling one’s hair. Whoever resorts to [such] lamentation has abandoned patience. He who remains patient and says, ‘Indeed we belong to Allah, and to Him is our return,’ and praises Allah – Great is His Mention, has accepted what Allah has done, and his reward is with Allah, the Almighty. But one who does not do that will be subjected to what has been decreed [for him] while he is blameworthy, and Allah, the Almighty, will nullify his reward.”⁹⁰

(٨٥) وعن الصادق عليه السلام قال: قال رسول الله صلى الله عليه وآله: ضرب الرجل يده على فخذه إحباط لأجره.

(85) Imam al-Ṣādiq (a) has stated that the Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) said, “A man’s striking his hand on his thigh [out of grief] is the [cause of] nullification of his reward.”⁹¹

⁸⁹ Al-Manbijī, *Tasliyat Ahl al-Maṣāʾib*, p. 168.

⁹⁰ Al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 3, pp. 222-3.

⁹¹ Ibid, p. 225.

(٨٦) وقال الباقر عليه السلام: ما من مؤمن يصاب بمصيبة في الدنيا فيسترجع عند المصيبة ويصبر حين تفجأه المصيبة، إلا غفر الله له ما مضى من ذنوبه، إلا الكبائر التي أوجب الله تعالى عليها النار؛ وكلما ذكر مصيبة فيما يستقبل من عمره فاسترجع عندها وحمد الله عزَّ وجلَّ، إلا غفر الله له كلَّ ذنب اكتسبه فيما بين الاسترجاع الأوَّل إلى الاسترجاع الأخير، إلا الكبائر من الذنوب.

(86) Imam al-Bāqir (a) said, “There is no believer who is afflicted with a calamity in this world and says ‘*Indeed we belong to Allah, and to Him do we return*’ during the calamity, and remains patient when the calamity befalls, but that Allah forgives his past sins, except the major ones for which Allah, the Exalted, has made the Fire mandatory. And whenever he recalls a calamity later on in his life and says, ‘*Indeed we belong to Allah, and to Him do we return,*’ and praises Allah, the Almighty, Allah forgives him for every sin he committed between the first time and the last time he mentioned this statement [of *istirjā*], except the major sins.”⁹²

(٨٧) وروى مسلم عن أم سلمة رضي الله عنها، قالت: قال رسول الله صلى الله عليه وآله: ما من مسلم تصيبه مصيبة فيقول ما أمره الله به: *إنا لله وإنا إليه راجعون*، اللهم آجرني في مصيبتى واخلف لي خيراً منها، إلا أخلف الله له خيراً منها. فلما مات أبو سلمة قلت: أي المسلمين خير من أبي سلمة، أول بيت هاجر إلى رسول الله صلى الله عليه وآله! ثم إنني قلتها فأخلف الله لي رسول الله صلى الله عليه وآله.

(87) Muslim has narrated from Umm Salamah, may Allah be pleased with her, that the Messenger of Allah (s) said, “There is no Muslim who is afflicted by a calamity and says what has been commanded by Allah: ‘*Indeed we belong to Allah, and to Him do we return. O Allah, reward me in my calamity and compensate me with something better than it,*’ but that Allah will surely compensate him with something that is better.” [Umm Salamah said,] “So when Abū Salamah died, I said [to myself],

⁹² Ibid.

‘Who among the Muslims could be better than Abū Salamah; his was the first family to migrate to the Messenger of Allah!’ Then I said what the Prophet had taught, so Allah replaced him for me with the Messenger of Allah (ﷺ).”⁹³

(٨٨) وروى ابن بابويه: أن الباقر عليه السلام أوصى أن يندب في الموسم عشر سنين.

(88) Ibn Bābawayh narrated that Imam al-Bāqir (a) instructed [in his will] that he should be mourned during the pilgrimage season for ten years.⁹⁴

(٨٩) وروى يونس بن يعقوب عن الصادق عليه السلام، قال: قال لي أبو جعفر عليه السلام:
قف من مالي كذا وكذا لنوادب يندبني عشر سنين بمنى أيام منى.

(89) Yūnus ibn Ya‘qūb narrated that [Imam] al-Ṣādiq (a) said, “Abū Ja‘far [al-Bāqir] (a) said to me, ‘Endow from my wealth such-and-such amount for mourners to mourn me for ten years at Minā during the days [when pilgrims stay] at Minā.’”⁹⁵

(٩٠) وقال عليه السلام لفاطمة عليها السلام حين قتل جعفر بن أبي طالب: لا تدعين بويل ولا
شكل ولا حرب، وما قلت فيه فقد صدقت.

(90) He (ﷺ) said to Fāṭimah (a) when Ja‘far ibn Abī Ṭālib was killed, “Do not raise your voice by wailing, mourning [like one whose child has died] or lamenting [like one who has suffered great loss]; and whatever you say about him should be the truth.”⁹⁶

(٩١) وسئل النبي عليه السلام عن التصافح في التعزية، فقال: هو سكن للمؤمن، ومن
عزى مصاباً فله مثل أجره.

(91) The Prophet (ﷺ) was asked about shaking hands while offering

⁹³ Muslim, *al-Ṣaḥīḥ*, vol. 2, p. 632.

⁹⁴ Al-Ṣadūq, *Man Lā Yaḥḍuruhu al-Faqīh*, vol. 1, p. 182.

⁹⁵ Al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 5, p. 117 with a slight variance in wording.

⁹⁶ Al-Ṣadūq, *Man Lā Yaḥḍuruhu al-Faqīh*, vol. 1, p. 176 with a variance in wording.

condolences. He said, “It is calming for the believer; and whoever consoles the one who is afflicted by calamity will receive a reward similar to his.”⁹⁷

(٩٢) وعن أبي برزة قال: قال رسول الله ﷺ: من عَزَى ثكلى كُسى برداً في الجنة.

(92) Abū Barzah narrated that the Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) said, “Whoever consoles a mother who has lost her child will be clothed with a [heavenly] mantle in Paradise.”⁹⁸

(٩٣) وروي أنّ داود عليه السلام قال: إلهي، ما جزاء من يعزّي الحزين والمصاب ابتغاء مرضاتك؟ قال: جزاؤه أن أكسوه رداءً من أردية الإيمان، أستره به من النار، وأدخله به الجنة. قال: يا إلهي، فما جزاء من شيع الجنائز ابتغاء مرضاتك؟ قال: جزاؤه أن تشيعه الملائكة يوم يموت إلى قبره، وأن أصلي على روحه في الأرواح.

(93) It is narrated that [Prophet] Dāwūd (a) said, “My Lord, what is the reward for one who consoles the grief-stricken and the distressed [believer] in order to please You?” He said, “His reward is that I cover him with one of the robes of faith by which I shield him from the Fire and make him enter Paradise.” He then asked, “My Lord, what is the reward for one who accompanies the funeral processions in order to please You?” He said, “His reward is that angels will escort him to his grave on the day he dies, and I shall bless his soul among the souls that I bless.”⁹⁹

(٩٤) وروي أنّ إبراهيم عليه السلام سأل ربّه، قال: يا ربّ ما جزاء من يبلى الدمع وجهه من خشيتك؟ قال: صلواتي ورضواني. قال: فما جزاء من يصبر الحزين ابتغاء وجهك؟ قال: أكسوه ثياباً من الإيمان يتبوا بها في الجنة ويتقي بها النار. قال: فما

⁹⁷ Ibn Shāhīn, *al-Tarḡīb fī Faḍā'il al-A'māl*, p. 341.

⁹⁸ Al-Tirmidhī, *al-Sunan*, vol. 3, p. 251.

⁹⁹ Al-Bayhaqī, *Shu'ab al-Imān*, vol. 7, p. 12.

جزاء من سدّد الأرملة ابتغاء وجهك؟ قال: أقيمه في ظلّي، وأدخله جنّتي. قال: فما جزء من يتبع الجنّاة ابتغاء وجهك؟ قال: تصلّي ملائكتي على جسده وتشيع روحه.

(94) It is reported that [Prophet] Ibrāhīm asked his Lord, “O my Lord! What is the reward for one whose tears out of fear [and awe] of You make his face wet?” He said, “My blessings and pleasure.” He then asked, “What is the reward for one who condoles [and reassures] a grieving person, seeking Your pleasure?” He said, “I clothe him with the attire of faith with which he shall enter Paradise and stay away from the Fire.” He asked, “What is the reward for one who supports a widow [thereby] seeking Your Pleasure?” He said, “I shall keep him in My shade and make him enter in My Paradise.” He asked, “And what is the reward for one who follows a bier seeking to please You?” He said, “My angels send blessings upon his body and escort his soul.”¹⁰⁰

(٩٥) وعن عليّ عليه السلام قال: كان رسول الله ﷺ إذا عزّى قال: آجركم الله ورحمكم، وإذا هنأ قال: بارك الله لكم، وبارك عليكم.

(95) Imam ‘Alī (a) said, “Whenever the Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) offered condolences to anyone, he would say, ‘May Allah reward you and have mercy upon you.’ And whenever he congratulated someone, he would say, ‘May Allah bless it for you and may He bestow upon you His blessings.’”¹⁰¹

(٩٦) وروي أنه توفّي لمعاذ ولد، فاشتدّ وجده عليه، فبلغ ذلك النبي ﷺ، فكتب إليه: بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم، من محمد رسول الله إلى معاذ، سلام عليك، فيأتي أحمد الله الذي لا إله إلا هو. أمّا بعد: أعظم الله لك الأجر، وألهمك الصبر، ورزقنا وإيّاك الشكر، فإنّ أنفسنا وأهلينا وموالينا وأولادنا من مواهب الله عزّ وجلّ

¹⁰⁰ Al-Ṭabarānī, *al-Du‘ā*, p. 370.

¹⁰¹ Al-Mubarrad, *al-Ta‘āzī*, p. 94.

الهنئية، وعواريه المستودعة، نمتع بها إلى أجل معلوم، وتقبض لوقت معدود، ثم افترض علينا الشكر إذا أعطانا، والصبر إذا ابتلانا، وكان ابنك من مواهب الله الهئية، وعواريه المستودعة، متعك الله به في غبطة وسرور، وقبضه منك بأجر كثير، الصلاة والرحمة والهدى إن صبرت واحتسبت، فلا تجمعن عليك مصيبتين، فيحبط لك أجرك، وتندم على ما فاتك، فلو قدمت على ثواب مصيبتك، علمت أن المصيبة قصرت في جنب الله عن الثواب؛ فتنجز من الله موعوده، وليذهب أسفك على ما هو نازل بك، فكأن قد، والسلام.

(96) It is narrated that the son of Mu'adh died, so his grief for him grew intense. The Prophet (ﷺ) heard about this, so he wrote to him [saying], "In the Name of Allah, the most Beneficent, the most Merciful. From Muhammad, the Messenger of Allah, to Mu'adh. Peace be with you. I praise Allah, there is no god besides Him, then I say [to you]: may Allah magnify your reward, inspire you with patience, and grant us and yourself gratitude, for indeed our lives, our families, our dependents, and our children are all wonderful gifts of Allah, the Almighty, and His trusts that are given to us so that we may enjoy them for a term known [to Him], and they are taken away at a specific time.

Then He enjoined upon us to thank Him when He grants [these gifts to] us and to be patient when He tries us. Your son was one of Allah's wonderful gifts and treasured trusts. Allah let you enjoy him in delight and happiness, and He took him away from you in lieu of a great reward: blessings, mercy, and guidance, if you remain patient and seek His pleasure. So do not combine two calamities upon yourself [by being restlessly impatient] lest your reward is nullified and you regret what you have missed. If you were to see the reward for your calamity, you would know that the calamity is dwarfed by the greatness of Allah's reward. Therefore, look forward to Allah fulfilling His promise [to you], and let go of your sorrow for what has afflicted you, as if there was no affliction [at all], and peace [be with you].¹⁰²

¹⁰² Ibn Nāṣir al-Dīn, *Bard al-Akbād 'inda Faqḍ al-Awlad*, p. 105.

(٩٧) وعنه عليه السلام: من عظمت مصيبته فليذكر مصيبته بي، فإنها ستهوّن عليه.

(97) It is also narrated that he (ﷺ) said, “One who faces a grave calamity should recall his calamity in losing me, for that will make it easier for him [to bear his calamity].”¹⁰³

(٩٨) وعنه عليه السلام، إنّه قال في مرض موته: أيّما عبد من أمّتي أُصيب بمصيبةٍ من بعدي فليتعزّز بمصيبته بي عن المصيبة التي تصيبه بغيري، فإنّ أحداً من أمّتي لن يصاب بمصيبةٍ بعدي أشدّ عليه من مصيبي.

(98) It is also reported that in his final illness before his demise, he (ﷺ) said, “O people! When any servant [of Allah] from my *ummah* is afflicted by the loss of someone after my death, let him seek solace in the calamity of losing me from the calamity of losing the other person, for no member of my nation will ever be afflicted with a calamity after me that is harder on him [to bear] than the calamity of losing me.”¹⁰⁴

(٩٩) وعن عبد الله بن الوليد ياسناده، لمّا أُصيب عليّ عليه السلام بعثني الحسن إلى الحسين عليه السلام، وهو بالمدائن، فلمّا قرأ الكتاب قال: يا لها من مصيبة، ما أعظمها! مع أنّ رسول الله صلى الله عليه وآله قال: من أُصيب منكم بمصيبة فليذكر مصابي، فإنّه لن يصاب بمصيبةٍ أعظم منها.

(99) ‘Abdullāh ibn al-Walīd narrated through his chain of narrators, “When ‘Alī (a) was fatally wounded, al-Ḥasan (a) sent me to [inform] al-Ḥusayn (a), who was in al-Madā’in [at that time]. When he (a) read the letter, he said, ‘What a calamity – how grave it is! Yet the Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) said, “If one of you is afflicted by a calamity, let him remember my calamity,¹⁰⁵ for he shall never be afflicted with a calamity

¹⁰³ Al-Suyūṭī, *Faḍl al-Jalad ‘inda Faḍl al-Walad*, p. 28.

¹⁰⁴ Al-Suyūṭī, *al-Jāmi‘ al-Kabīr*, vol. 12, p. 411. This means that thinking of the loss of the Noble Prophet (ﷺ) makes the believer grieve for that rather than for his own loss, and hence he finds some solace in it. (Tr.)

¹⁰⁵ Meaning, his calamity due to losing me. (Tr.)

greater than it.”¹⁰⁶

(١٠٠) وعن جابر رضي عنه: قال رسول الله ﷺ: قال لي جبرئيل عليه السلام: يا محمد، عش ما شئت فإنك ميت، وأحبب من شئت فإنك مفارقه، واعمل ما شئت فإنك ملاقيه.

(100) Jābir [ibn ‘Abdillāh al-Anṣārī], may Allah be pleased with him, said, “The Messenger of Allah (ṣ) said, ‘Jibrā’īl (a) said to me, “O Muḥammad, live as you may, for [in the end] you shall surely die; love whomever you like, for [in the end] you shall surely separate from them; and do whatever you wish, for [in the end] you shall surely meet it (your deed).”¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁶ Al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 3, pp. 220-1 with a slight variance in wording.

¹⁰⁷ Al-Ṣadūq, *Man Lā Yaḥduruhu al-Faqīh*, vol. 1, p. 472.

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