

mother of all inventions. Remove suffering as a causative factor in developing a person's potential & the wheel of progress would turn back a hundred thousand times. Humans may try their hand at altering the plan of things, but frustration would be their lot. Thus, the question of apportioning blame for the existence of suffering upon the Creator should not arise. Suffering, to play its subtle creative role in the grand scheme of things, is a blessing in disguise.

Allah says: "If a problem has touched you, be sure a similar problem has touched the others. Such days of **varying fortunes** We give to people by turns: that Allah may know those that believe. And that He may take to Himself from your ranks witnesses to Truth. Allah loves **not** those that do wrong." (3:140)

Everyone's suffering, has been experienced by others before us...and most certainly will be experienced by some after us. Allah, not us, chooses in what way He will try his servants. Why? "Allah's object is to purge those that are true in Faith & to deprive of blessing those that resist Faith." (3:141) **So that we may be purified.** And then what? We hope for Allah to give us eternity in Jannah. "Did you think that you would enter Heaven without Allah testing those of you who fought hard in His Cause & remained steadfast?" (3:142) "Or do you think that you shall enter the Garden of Bliss without such trials as came to those who passed away before you? They encountered **suffering & adversity**, and were so shaken in spirit that even the Messenger & those of faith who were with him cried: 'When will come the help of Allah.' Ah! Verily, the help of Allah is always near!" (2:214)

These struggles must be endured for a reward so majestic & beyond comprehension. How can we expect to be rewarded when we do not want to be even tried? But even though we are tested: Allah says: "Ah! Verily, the help of Allah is always near!" A Lord Most Merciful will never give His servant more than he can bear. "On no soul does Allah place a burden greater than it can bear. It gets every good that it earns, and it suffers every ill that it earns." (2:286)

Allah did not send down this Quran for us to read & think it's awesome. He knew that people would fall into despair & He needed to reassure them. We were all created weak...our weakness is inherent... Allah has also shown us how to rise above our weaknesses & to attain His pleasure. Most Merciful is He, that He will never give us a trial we cannot bear! Your trial is not beyond your ability to bear.

And do not call for death in your time of

suffering. Fear not, your time will come...Allah says: "Every soul shall have a taste of death. We test you by evil & good by way of trial. To Us must you return." (21:35) **In our happiest times we do not want to die.** The wish for death rises only when our suffering seems unbearable. What we really want in those times is not death, but relief. We would love for the good times to come again...for the pain to retreat.

We will return to Allah, return to Allah we all must. But wait, are we prepared for our return? Ah, but are we not fortunate to have every second more we can to seek forgiveness & do more good deeds? When that hour draws upon us certainly the time for forgiveness is over & then what? Our chance of doing that one more good is over...it's gone. The Prophet (p) said that the Believer does not wish for death! Why wish for that which Allah has already decreed?

What did Prophet Ayyub (p) understand & accept? "Do men think that they will be left alone on saying, 'We believe,' and that they will not be tested?" (29:2) Allah will test the believers. So you believe... Words...words...words...we understand what words are. But Allah requires our actions too...our **patient perseverance.** Sickness was the trial of Ayyub (p). But it was also something more than this to him. It was his road to everlasting & eternal honour. "Whereupon We responded unto him and removed all the affliction from which he suffered; and We gave him new offspring, doubling their number as an act of grace from Us, and as a **reminder unto all who worship Us.**" **REMINDER.** His suffering could have felt like purifying silver or gold in a crucible to eliminate the dross.

Trying to shove the Quran in your face and say you are wrong to despair? Here's what Allah says: "Lo! **this Quran is a conclusive word, it is no pleasantry.**" (86:13-14) Those verses aren't to remind us of what we already know. They're for us to take heed of. The best of us despaired & Allah reminded him that help was near. Despair has limits. Let it fuel our desire to effect change in our lives. It isn't easy, but it has to be done.

We sometimes pray that God should take away our pain. It simply doesn't happen that way. We give God an ultimatum: "You either take away this damn pain, or I'm turning my back on you." We demand "a" solution, an answer. One isn't forthcoming. Stop trying to dictate to God. Instead, just surrender yourself. God is bigger than our suffering. It doesn't mean that we wouldn't suffer now or in the future. But a light appears in the cracks in suffering's armour. There's a sense of joyous relief that comes when we stop warring with

suffering. We lay our burden down.

Suffering is the means to heal ourselves, "the bitter potion by which the physician within you heals your sick self." The next time you feel sorrow, consider that it may have been self-chosen at some level of your being, to bring about an enlargement of your self. **Without struggles we would learn nothing about life.**

We may never fully understand suffering or its purpose but we can always try to alleviate it. Suffering is not for us to question, dissect & comprehend. It is something beyond us. Its mystery is beyond the grasp of the human mind. We are not privy to the facts. All we can do is trust and do what we can during those times of despair. The storm never lasts forever, it passes...and we pick up the pieces & move on. To have life means there is hope...had Allah willed He would have taken our life...He hasn't. He knows Best. Allah is testing us...do not choose the route of despair & accompany Satan.

"So, verily, with every difficulty, there is relief: Verily, with every difficulty there is relief." (94:5-6) Do not despair, for Allah's mercy encompasses all things. Avoid doubts & inner conflicts. When suffering whittles you down your true essence becomes exposed.

Sympathize with those who suffer. This was the way of the Prophet (p). Sympathy is a deep, inexpressible tenderness which is shown in a consistently self-forgetful, gentle character. It belongs to the highest moral sphere. Our sympathetic Prophet (p) occupies the zenith of this sphere: "Muhammad, have an exalted standard of character." 68:4

"Out of suffering have emerged the strongest souls; the most beautiful characters are seared with scars." Gibran's description perfectly fits our Prophet (p) who suffered inhuman torture for years. Only those who have endured the greatest suffering can become the greatest people. Muhammad (p) was strong & had the most beautiful of character. Say Amen!

Finally let's look at the evil of causing strife to others. To inflict suffering upon others is to become deeply involved in ignorance; but to suffer ourselves is to come nearer to enlightenment. When a person does a cruel deed, they think, in their ignorance, that that's the end of it, but it is only the beginning. Attached to the deed is a train of consequences which will plunge them in a tormenting hell of pain. For every wrong thought we think, or unkind deed we do, we must suffer some form of mental or bodily pain; and the kind of pain will be in accordance with the initial thought or act. Justice turns the scale, bringing to some learning through suffering. **Suffer patiently but avoid causing needless suffering.**

To experience God's Grace...
...we must be broken

Suffering

Suffering is a Gift.
In it is Hidden Mercy...

God Reveals this Secret

After every **Difficulty**

Quran 94:5-6

there is **Relief**

Re-emphasized

After every **Difficulty**

there is **Relief**

There are times when life seems little more than a matter of struggle & endurance. When difficulty & sorrow form a crust around the heart. In such dark times we approach very near to Ultimate Truth. To the Grand Mercy of God. When the tears flow, and the heart aches, remember then the sorrow of the world. When sorrow has overtaken you, remember then that **it overtakes all**; that none escape it; that it is the great fact in human life that **makes religion a necessity.** Think not that your pain is isolated & unjustly inflicted. It is but a fragment of the great pain of the world. It is the common experience of all. Perceiving this, let sorrow gently lead you into a **deeper** religion, a **wider** compassion, a more **tender** regard for all people & all creatures. Let it bring you into **greater** love & **deeper** peace. Nothing can overtake you that does not belong to you & that is not for your eternal good. Suffering carries you to a loftier height of realization, shattering the myth that life is merely mundane. **All suffering has redemptive value as the Prophet (p) taught: "Never are believers stricken with discomfort, hardship or illness, grief or even with mental worry that their sins are not expiated for them."** It is beyond the reach of human compassion to efface suffering **without** effacing life itself. Life's tribulations are a source of spiritual richness. **After the suffering...it is like stumbling on cool water in the desert.**

Were suffering abolished the spirit of the human being would be like an empty tablet, with nothing inscribed save the signs of selfishness & greed.

Suffering is a purifying & perfecting process. As fire refines gold, so suffering refines virtue. We become obedient by the things through which we suffer. Pain teaches us to be compassionate. It makes us tender-hearted & thoughtful for the sorrows of others. Suffering predisposes the mind to devoutness.

As the falling rain prepares the earth for the future crops of grain & fruit, so the rains of many sorrows showering upon the heart prepare & mellow it for the coming of that wisdom that perfects the mind & gladdens the heart. As the clouds darken the earth but to cool & fructify it, so the clouds of grief cast a shadow over the heart to prepare it for nobler things. **The hour of sorrow is the hour of reverence.** It puts an end to the shallow sneer, the ribald jest, the cruel calumny; it softens the heart with sympathy, and enriches the mind with thoughtfulness. Wisdom is mainly recollection of all that was learned by sorrow. Your sorrow will not remain; it will pass away like a cloud. Nature teaches the best of lessons.

Are you faced with one of those “episodes” that drains you & sends you into despair... “It is not fitting for a Believer, man or woman, when a matter has been decided by Allah & His Messenger to have any option about their decision: if any one disobeys they are indeed on a clearly wrong Path.” (33:36)

Allah extends His munificence to those who humbly ask: “O you who believe! Seek help with patient perseverance & prayer. Allah is with those who **patiently persevere.**” (2:153) The deeper wisdom which flows from acquaintance with sorrow brings with it a holier & more abiding joy than that shallow excitement that preceded sorrow. As light displaces darkness & quiet follows storm, so gladness displaces sorrow & peace comes after pain.

There’s not a person who hasn’t been lonely, discouraged, depressed, or guilt-ridden at one time or another, if not sick, burned-out, at sea in a relationship. Suffering comes in all colours. Some talk about their problems; sometimes you can tell just by looking in their eyes.

It is possible to reach even the most burdened person provided he or she wants help but there are never easy answers. How could there be, when suffering is an unavoidable part of existence, regardless of age, social standing, or income bracket? “Be sure We shall test you with something of fear & hunger, some loss in goods or lives or the fruits of your toil, but give glad tidings to those who **persevere.**” (2:155) The sorrowless state is reached through sorrow. The bridge is perseverance states Allah.

Are you too busy coping with the duress of life? Reconnect to God. The commandments are **not** dusty relics of another age, but speak in important ways to the human predicament. The Quran presses home the point: “You shall certainly be tried & tested in your possessions & in your personal selves. If you **persevere patiently** & guard against evil, then that will be a **determining factor** in all affairs.” (3:186) Between the lesser joys of the senses & the greater joy of the spirit lies the dark vale of sorrow through which we pass. Having passed through it, the Heavenly Joy is henceforth our companion.

Trials, tribulations, suffering & heartbreak we must face. Allah has told us that without a doubt! But what did He say in all the ayahs? Two words: **Persevere Patiently.** But what does this mean? To sit in a chair & look pensive; lie in bed curled up in a foetal position bemoaning our “luck.” It is to flee to God – a flight from ignorance to knowledge. Dependence upon God...that He is the Nourisher & He is the One that gives Repose.

When our lives are shattered by tragedy & emotional pain we confront the mystery of good & evil. Voices across time have struggled to transmit & pay homage to this mystery, what it means for our lives & our place in the cosmos. All cultures struggle to give words to the experience of the transcendent. This is the most powerful testament to the reality of God. It is a reminder that we find God **not** in what we know, but in what we cannot comprehend & cannot see. Insight in life comes through suffering; suffering alone does **not** bring insight.

In the intricate paths of life when difficulties & hardships confront a person & the darkness of difficulty & suffering becomes long, **it is patience only that acts like a light** for a Muslim. This keeps a person safe from wandering here & there & saves them from the muddy marsh of disappointment, desperation & frustration. The

“storms of suffering” with its bracing downpours are meant to rouse us from our spiritual slumber. Rather than steeling ourselves against life’s hardships, we must open ourselves to them & let them transform us.

Twenty-five centuries ago Aeschylus wrote, “The one who learns must suffer. Even in our sleep, pain falls drop by drop upon the heart. In our own despair, against our will, wisdom comes to us by the awful grace of God. Could it be that we’ll find freedom by looking suffering squarely in the eye? There are those whose high standard of living shields them from the harsher realities of life, and this will not come naturally. Most of us have been insulated for so long that we are numb to the suffering of others & even to our own.

What’s more, our numbness anesthetizes us to our own pain as well: we push away reflections on our problems with relationships & disappointment. Many of us flee from an unblinking view of human reality into entertainment or consumption. Paying to be distracted, we let our hearts become callous & are unable to see the world from another’s perspective.

Beware of religious opium: Materialism is not the only false escape from suffering; selfish & sentimental religion is a culprit that’s just as guilty. **When religion becomes a fantasy buffering us from life’s harshness by telling us to ignore the present & worry only about the afterlife, it has become an opiate.** It’s nothing more than a dangerously addictive sedative that calms our feelings of anxiety or guilt. Knowingly or not, priests/imams whose motto is “don’t worry, it’s gonna be ok, God is with you” are perpetrating fraud. They hawk an easy gospel promising cheap grace & seem to forget that once we really escape the prison of self-absorption, we will immediately find ourselves among others in a wider human community for which we have **responsibility.** A responsibility to ease the pain of suffering mankind. To sympathize!

Lack of sympathy arises in egotism; sympathy arises in love. Sympathy leads us to the hearts of all people, so that we become spiritually united to them, and when they suffer we feel the pain; when they are glad, we rejoice with them; when they are despised & persecuted, we spiritually descend with them into the depths, and take into our hearts their humiliation & distress; and the one who has this binding, uniting spirit of sympathy can

never be cynical & condemnatory, can never pass thoughtless & cruel judgments upon their fellows, because in the tenderness of heart they are ever with them in their pain.

To have reached this ripened sympathy, it must need be that they have loved much, suffered much & sounded the dark depths of sorrow. It springs from acquaintance with the profoundest experiences, so that a person has had conceit, thoughtlessness & selfishness burnt out of their heart. **Sympathy, in its real & profound sense, is oneness with others in their strivings & sufferings.**

The religious institutions seem designed to destroy the spiritual will to live of those who are suffering. It’s a paradox. It is death by denial of the intellect. Of the soul. **The sermons all work to destroy the spirit.** They make the sufferer feel as if they are one of the damned, the doomed, the caught, the trapped. Your self becomes one with misery, and from this destructive union comes a feeling of utter worthlessness.

Analyze the life of Prophet Ayyub (p) – he suffered for many years. His life offers hope amid the pain & hardship that make up so much of daily life. Even the weariest soul will see that **the agonies of suffering are not without meaning.** Loss of children alone? Wealth, health, reputation...all. He beseeched Allah, but did **not** complain. Did he ever ask Allah for death during that time? Prophet Ayyub (p) knew that Allah was testing him, and he knew that success lies in patient perseverance. We’re not Prophet Ayyub, but was Allah referring only to the Prophets in those ayahs? Allah spoke to the Believers. Is it not true that we are tested by the level of our faith? Certainly we are each given tests based on our faith and the best of us – the Prophets – endured the greatest tests. No one suffered like Muhammad (p). He didn’t give up & we shouldn’t. Giving up isn’t an option for the Believer.

Suffering has been a great teacher, cultivating & culturing our conduct. It teaches humility, it develops & refines sensibilities. In more than one way, prepares humans to be able to turn to God. It awakens the need for search & exploration; creates that necessity which is the