



# Suffering

## A Qur'anic perspective

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# THE QUESTION OF SUFFERING

We all suffer, and often, it is what unites us. We find a sense of shared humanity in our own suffering and those of others. Often, suffering inspires change, both personal and communal, it has always done this. Yet, there seems to be great reluctance in accepting that suffering is 'good' for us.

We find it difficult to marry the concept of suffering to that of 'love', 'happiness' and 'mercy', despite seeing manifestations of this marriage on a daily basis. For instance, Israeli aggression against Palestinians often inspires a wave of protest, and an outpouring of feelings of compassion and mercy towards them and their ordeal. Similarly, when we go through hardships, it is often these moments that propel us into urgent feelings of self-betterment, of wanting to do better, to be better.

The question of why humans suffer in life and continue to suffer despite our greatest efforts to make life easier through medical, scientific and electronic advancement is an important ask. The answers to which, are numerous and diverse in intensities, ranging from lukewarm responses such as 'that's just the way life is', to complex eschoterch notions.

Despite the reluctance shown by the contemporary discourse on wellbeing to place the question of suffering (rather than its symptoms) at its centre, it remains an integral question. As, the reasons for why suffering exists is vital in understanding what kind of techniques bring relief to humans in times of suffering.

Within the Islamic tradition there exists the understanding that suffering or feelings of distress are opportunities that lead to spiritual wellbeing and subsequently general positive wellbeing. Such understandings diverge from contemporary notions of 'good' feelings mean 'positive wellbeing' and 'bad' feelings equate to 'negative wellbeing'.

From an Islamic perspective, at a single moment one may be subjected to pain, yet experience feelings of ecstasy due to spiritual illumination in the presence of God or His miracles. For example, in the Quran there is reference to Prophet Joseph, whose beauty was such, that upon seeing him, the ladies of the village 'cut their hands off' and proclaimed 'surely this is no man but an angel!'. So overcome by utter awe these women had not felt pain nor realised they were cutting their own hands off!



# THE QUESTION OF SUFFERING

As part of my PhD on wellbeing- from a Qur'anic perspective, i spent years analysing the Qur'an for verses that answered the question of wellbeing.

Included in the wellbeing question is the question of suffering, and so i asked myself 'in what context does the Qur'an place suffering?' I wanted to know, from an Islamic perspective, why we suffered and if this suffering could be mitigated in any way?

In this guide i present to you the results of my findings and some of the Qur'anic verses that led me to the conclusions presented in this guide.

To the best of my knowledge, the Qur'an places suffering in 3 contexts:

1. A Test
2. A result of sinning
3. A reminder of God

# WHY DO WE SUFFER?

There are three contexts within which the Qur'an places human worldly suffering in:

A test

A result of  
sinning

A reminder  
of God.

## 1. A TEST

The Qur'an makes numerous references to suffering being 'a test' to distinguish those who truly believe from those who do not, and to also establish the extent of conviction a believer possesses. The following verses are examples that support this claim:

كُلُّ نَفْسٍ ذَائِقَةُ الْمَوْتِ وَبَلَّوْكُمْ بِالْشَّرِّ وَالْخَيْرِ فِتْنَةً وَإِلَيْنَا تُرْجَعُونَ

Every soul shall taste death. We try you with evil and with good, as a test, and unto Us shall you be returned.

(Qur'an 21:35)

وَلَتَبْلُوكُمْ بِشَيْءٍ مِّنَ الْخَوْفِ وَالْجُوعِ وَنَقْصٍ مِّنَ الْأَمْوَالِ وَالْأَنْفُسِ وَالثَّمَرَاتِ وَبَشِّرِ الصَّابِرِينَ الَّذِينَ إِذَا أَصَابَتْهُمُ مُصِيبَةٌ قَالُوا إِنَّا لِلَّهِ وَإِنَّا إِلَيْهِ رَاجِعُونَ

And We will indeed test you with something of fear and hunger, and loss of wealth, souls, and fruits; and give glad tidings to the patient—those who, when affliction befalls them, say, 'Truly we are God's, and unto Him we return.'

(Qur'an 2:155-156)

Within this Islamic context there exists the notion that people should expect to be tested, that it is not a matter of 'if' but rather 'when'. The Qur'an positions suffering as a natural part of life and scoffs at the expectation of *not* being tested, framing this expectation as unreasonable. The following verses illustrate this observation:

أَمْ حَسِبْتُمْ أَنْ تَدْخُلُوا الْجَنَّةَ وَلَمَّا يَأْتِكُمْ مَثَلُ الَّذِينَ خَلَوْا مِنْ قَبْلِكُمْ مَسَّنَّهُمْ الْبَاسَاءُ وَالضَّرَّاءُ وَزَلُّوا حَتَّى يَقُولَ الرَّسُولُ وَالَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا مَعَهُ مَتَى نَصْرُ اللَّهِ أَلَا إِنَّ نَصْرَ اللَّهِ قَرِيبٌ

Or did you suppose that you would enter the Garden without there having come to you the like of that which came to those who passed away before you? Misfortune and hardship befell them, and they were so shaken that the Messenger and those who believed with him said, 'When will God's Help come?' yes, surely God's Help is near.

(Qur'an 2:214)

أَمْ حَسِبْتُمْ أَنْ تَدْخُلُوا الْجَنَّةَ وَلَمَّا يَعْلَمِ اللَّهُ الَّذِينَ جَاهَدُوا مِنْكُمْ وَيَعْلَمَ الصَّابِرِينَ

Or did you suppose that you would enter the Garden without God knowing those among you who strived, and without knowing those who were patient?

(Qur'an 3:142)

أَحْسِبَ النَّاسُ أَنْ يُتْرَكُوا أَنْ يَقُولُوا ءَامَنَّا وَهُمْ لَا يُفْتَنُونَ

Does mankind suppose that they will be left to say, 'We believe', and that they will not be tried,

(Qur'an 29:2)

إِنَّا جَعَلْنَا مَا عَلَى الْأَرْضِ زِينَةً لِّهَا لِنَبْلُوهُمْ أَيُّهُمْ أَحْسَنُ عَمَلًا

Surely, We made whatsoever is on the earth an adornment for it, that We may try them as to which of them is most virtuous in deed.

(Qur'an 18:7)

We can see that within the Islamic ethos, there is an expectation to suffer and be tested on the extent of conviction one has in the One God.

One can see that suffering is presented as a normal and natural part of life, in fact within the Islamic context, hardship is THE context life is placed in. This is very different to how secularism positions suffering in life, in which it is portrayed as an indication that there is some sort of a 'glitch' in life and in order for one to experience 'wellbeing' one must pursue maximum pleasure and minimum pain. However, God's message on the pursuit of pleasure is quite the contrary, He states:

"As for him who feared to stand before His Lord & restrained his soul from desires, Paradise will be his home"

(Quran 79:40-41)

The islamic teachings have an opposite understating of life, in which life is seen as a temporary place, a test, that will determine your eternal place in the hereafter.

These different understandings of life purpose will/should lead to differing notions on what constitutes things like 'wellbeing', 'happiness', 'self-worth' and 'success' and the Muslim should be aware of this when dealing with philosophies and understandings that discuss such notions. One should ask oneself 'does this person who is giving me advice on how i should behave during my lifetime believe in God and that this life is ultimately nothing but a test?'

In acknowledging life as being a test the Muslim rids himself of limiting and destructive notions like 'why is my life so difficult?', 'does God not love me?', 'this is not fair!' As, in accepting that life is a test one understands that it is not personal, it is just how things are meant to be, for us all.

Upon accepting that life is a test, the mindful Muslim becomes consumed in ensuring that they are prepared for these tests. The Muslim looks to equip themselves with character traits and philosophies that ensure they are able to withstand the tests, rather than be distracted with trying to attain the versions of 'happiness' peddled by secular western narratives.



## 2. A result of sinning

The second context in which suffering is explained in is as a result of sinning. The Qur'an indicates that the believers experience suffering to be cleansed of the sins they have committed.

The idea that pain can 'erase' the sins committed by a person is also supported in the Prophetic tradition that states:

'No illness or fatigue, nor sickness or sadness, not even a worry afflicts a believer without expiating some of the wrongs he has committed.'

There are many verses in the Qur'an that God administers suffering due to sin. The understanding is that bad actions have a negative impact on wellbeing, whereas good actions result in blessings, which includes having a positive disposition. This understanding is based on the Islamic teaching that stipulate that the human innately need to fulfil the role of Khalifa and thus worship God in order to feel at peace.

Examples of verses that this research basis the claim that sufferings and hardships can be due to sinning are:

وَمَا أَصَابَكُمْ مِّنْ مُّصِيبَةٍ فَبِمَا كَسَبَتْ أَيْدِيكُمْ وَيَعْفُوا عَنْ كَثِيرٍ

Whatsoever misfortune befalls you is because of that which your hands have earned; and He pardons much.

(Qur'an 42:30)

مَا أَصَابَكَ مِنْ حَسَنَةٍ فَمِنَ اللَّهِ وَمَا أَصَابَكَ مِنْ سَيِّئَةٍ فَمِنْ نَفْسِكَ وَأَرْسَلْنَاكَ لِلنَّاسِ رَسُولًا وَكَفَى بِاللَّهِ شَهِيدًا

Whatever good befalls thee, it is from God, and whatever evil befalls thee, it is from thyself. We sent thee as a messenger unto mankind, and God suffices as a Witness.

(Qur'an 4:79)

فَإِنْ تَوَلَّوْا فَاعْلَمُوا أَنَّمَا يُرِيدُ اللَّهُ أَن يُصِيبَهُمْ بِبَعْضِ ذُنُوبِهِمْ وَإِنَّ كَثِيرًا مِّنَ النَّاسِ لَفَاسِقُونَ

And if they turn away, know that God desires to smite them for some sin of theirs, and surely many among mankind are iniquitous.

(Qur'an 5:49)

وَإِذْ تَأَذَّنَ رَبُّكُمْ لَئِنْ شَكَرْتُمْ لَأَزِيدَنَّكُمْ وَلَئِنْ كَفَرْتُمْ إِنَّ عَذَابِي لَشَدِيدٌ

and when your Lord proclaimed, 'If you give thanks, I shall surely grant you increase, but if you are ungrateful, truly My Punishment is severe!'

(Qur'an 14:7)

فَأَصَابَهُمْ سَيِّئَاتُ مَا عَمِلُوا وَخَاقَ بِهِم مَّا كَانُوا بِهِ يَسْتَهْزِءُونَ  
Thus, they were stricken by the evil deeds they had done, and were beset by that which they used to mock.

(Qur'an 16:34)

قَالَ أَمَّا مَن ظَلَمَ فَسَوْفَ نُعَذِّبُهُ ثُمَّ يُرَدُّ إِلَىٰ رَبِّهِ فَيُعَذِّبُهُ عَذَابًا نُكْرًا

He said, 'As for the one who has done wrong, we shall punish him. Then he shall be brought back to his Lord, whereupon He will punish him with a terrible punishment.

(Qur'an 18:87)

كَذَّابٍ عَالٍ فِرْعَوْنُ وَالَّذِينَ مِنْ قَبْلِهِمْ كَذَّبُوا بِآيَاتِنَا فَآخَذَهُمُ اللَّهُ بِذُنُوبِهِمْ وَاللَّهُ شَدِيدُ الْعِقَابِ

(It is) like the affair of the House of Pharaoh and those who were before them; they denied Our signs. So God seized them for their sins, and God is severe in retribution.

(Qur'an 3:11)

أَلَمْ يَرَوْا كَمْ أَهْلَكْنَا مِنْ قَبْلِهِمْ مِّنْ قَرْنٍ مَّكَّثُوهُمْ فِي الْأَرْضِ مَا  
لَمْ نُمْكِنْ لَّكُمْ وَأَرْسَلْنَا السَّمَاءَ عَلَيْهِمْ مِّدْرَارًا وَجَعَلْنَا الْأَنْهَارَ  
تَجْرِي مِنْ تَحْتِهِمْ فَأَهْلَكْنَاهُمْ بِذُنُوبِهِمْ وَأَنْشَأْنَا مِنْ بَعْدِهِمْ قَرْنًا  
آخَرِينَ

Have they not considered how many a generation We destroyed before them? We had established them on the earth more firmly than We have established you, and We sent the sky upon them with abundant rains, and made rivers flow beneath them. Then We destroyed them for their sins, and brought into being after them another generation.

(Qur'an 6:6)

ثُمَّ نُنَجِّي الَّذِينَ اتَّقَوْا وَنَذَرُ الظَّالِمِينَ فِيهَا جِثًّا

Then We shall save those who are reverent and leave the wrongdoers therein, on their knees.

(Qur'an 19:72)

فَأَصَابَهُمْ سَيِّئَاتُ مَا كَسَبُوا وَالَّذِينَ ظَلَمُوا مِنْ هَؤُلَاءِ  
سَيُصِيبُهُمْ سَيِّئَاتُ مَا كَسَبُوا وَمَا هُمْ بِمُعْجِزِينَ

So, the evils of that which they earned befell them. And as for those who do wrong among these, the evils of that which they have earned will befall them, and they cannot thwart (it).

(Qur'an 39:51)

Al-Ghazali believes that sinning causes a person to experience negative emotions comparing the resultant feeling as a 'persistent ache' the only remedy for which is repentance and the determination to keep away from sinning once forgiveness has been sought. Al-Ghazali supports this view by quoting a Prophetic tradition that states:

"When a man's sins multiply and he has no works by which to atone for them, God brings upon him anxieties, that which becomes atonement for his sins."

And

"There are sins for which only anxieties atone."



Al-Ghazali further expands that sinning places a veil between the person and God and this causes negative feelings to manifest, as peace is found only through close proximity to God. Al-Ghazali sees the relationship between sinning and negative feelings as a very logical dynamic, he states:

“For unless the states of happiness and sadness were dependent upon an action or its omission, there would be little significance in rendering an action obligatory.”

Although the concept of being punished for one's sins, highlighted in this section, can be quite distressing, it can also be seen in a positive light within the Islamic context, in that rather than seeing the distress as punishment, one can be mindful of being 'cleansed' of sins, which consequently draws a person closer to God, which in turn should result in feelings of peace and general wellbeing.

Furthermore, associated with the concept of sinning, is that of forgiveness. 'The Forgiver' is one of God's ninety-nine names and attributes. The Qur'an makes reference to forgiveness 277 times and broadly speaking places forgiveness in two contexts, the first being seeking forgiveness from God and the second; forgiving others.

In relations to God, forgiveness has been explained as; a realisation that one has done wrong either towards themselves or others and asking forgiveness from God with sincerity. From a theistic religious perspective forgiveness is an opportunity to draw closer to God.

Forgiveness gains its relevance to wellbeing because it follows the logic; that if sinning can lead to hardship and strife, as observed, then seeking forgiveness for sins should lessen opportunities for hardship and strife. The following are examples of Qur'anic verses supporting this notion:

وَمَا كَانَ اللَّهُ لِيُعَذِّبَهُمْ وَأَنْتَ فِيهِمْ وَمَا كَانَ اللَّهُ مُعَذِّبَهُمْ وَهُمْ يَسْتَغْفِرُونَ

But God will not punish them while thou art among them. And God will not punish them while they seek forgiveness.  
(Qur'an 8:33)

فَقُلْتُ اسْتَغْفِرُوا رَبَّكُمْ إِنَّهُ كَانَ غَفَّارًا يُرْسِلِ السَّمَاءَ عَلَيْكُمْ مِدْرَارًا وَيُمْدِدْكُمْ بِالْمَوَلِ وَبَيْنَ يَدَيْكُمْ جَنَّاتٌ وَجُجُلٌ لَكُمْ أَنْهَارٌ

I said, 'Seek forgiveness of your Lord! Truly He is Forgiving. He will send the sky upon you with abundant rains, support you with wealth and sons, and make for you gardens and rivers.  
(Qur'an 71:10-12)

وَلِلَّهِ مَا فِي السَّمُوتِ وَمَا فِي الْأَرْضِ لِيَجْزِيَ الَّذِينَ أَسَاءُوا بِمَا عَمِلُوا وَيَجْزِيَ الَّذِينَ أَحْسَنُوا بِالْحُسْنَى

Unto God belongs whatsoever is in the heavens and whatsoever is on the earth, that He may requite those who commit evil for that which they have done, and that He may requite those who are virtuous with that which is most beautiful,  
(Qur'an 53:31)

فَأَمَّا مَنْ تَابَ وَآمَنَ وَعَمِلَ صَالِحًا فَغَسَىٰ أَنْ يَكُونَ مِنَ الْمُفْلِحِينَ

But for he who repented, believed, and worked righteousness, perchance he will be among those who prosper.  
(Qur'an 28:67)

قَالَ يَقَوْمِ لِمَ تَسْتَعْجِلُونَ بِالسَّيِّئَةِ قَبْلَ الْحَسَنَةِ لَوْلَا تَسْتَغْفِرُونَ اللَّهَ لَعَلَّكُمْ تُرْحَمُونَ

He said, "O my people! Why do you seek to hasten evil before good? Why do you not seek Forgiveness of God, that haply you may be shown mercy?"  
(Qur'an 27:46)



‘Turn away from worldly possession and reputation and be patient with their passing. You will become a king in this world by abandoning it and can expect to be a king in the Hereafter.’

Al-Ghazali

وَيَقُومُوا أَسْتَغْفِرُوا رَبَّكُمْ ثُمَّ تُوبُوا إِلَيْهِ يُرْسِلِ السَّمَاءَ عَلَيْكُمْ مَدْرَارًا  
وَيَزِدَّكُمْ قُوَّةً إِلَى قُوَّتِكُمْ وَلَا تَتَوَلَّوْا مُجْرِمِينَ

O my people! Seek forgiveness from your Lord; then turn unto Him in repentance. He will send the sky upon you with abundant rain, and add strength to your strength. And turn not away, guilty."

(Qur'an 11:52)

وَأَن أَسْتَغْفِرُوا رَبَّكُمْ ثُمَّ تُوبُوا إِلَيْهِ يُمَتِّعْكُمْ مَتَاعًا حَسَنًا إِلَىٰ أَجَلٍ  
مُّسَمًّى وَيُؤْتِ كُلَّ ذِي فَضْلٍ فَضْلَهُ وَإِن تَوَلَّوْا فَإِنِّي أَخَافُ عَلَيْكُمْ  
عَذَابَ يَوْمٍ كَبِيرٍ

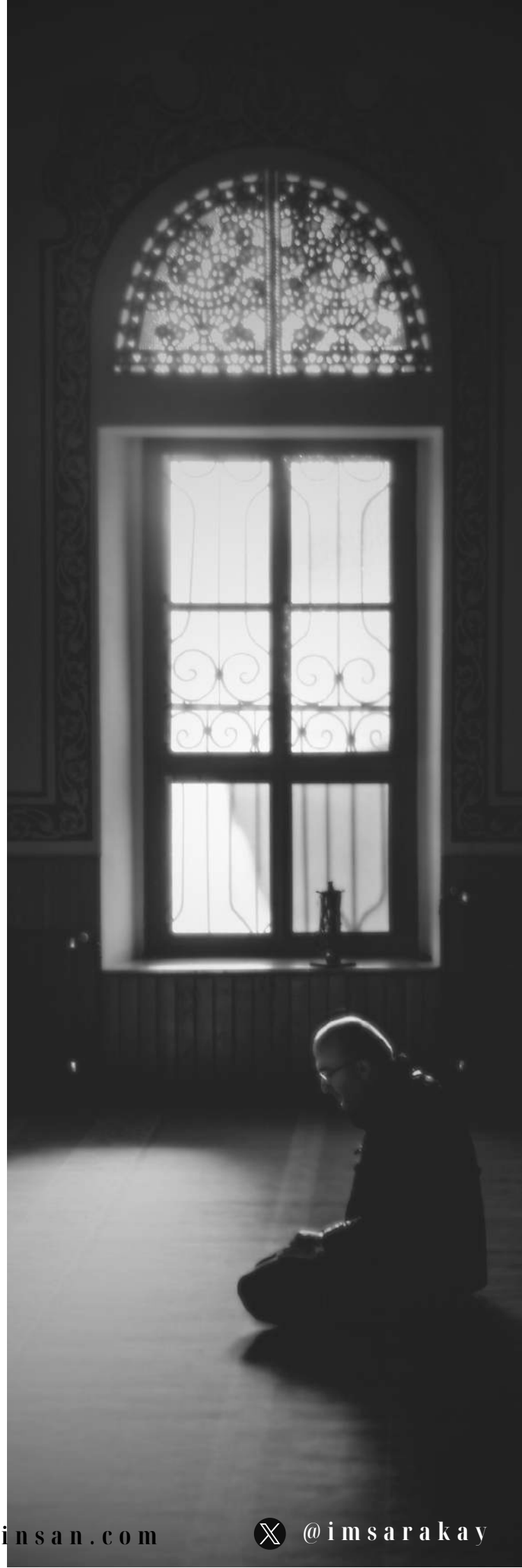
And seek forgiveness from your Lord; then turn unto Him in repentance. He will grant you goodly enjoyment for a term appointed and give His Bounty unto everyone possessed of merit. But if you turn away, then truly I fear for you the punishment of a great Day.

(Qur'an 11:3)

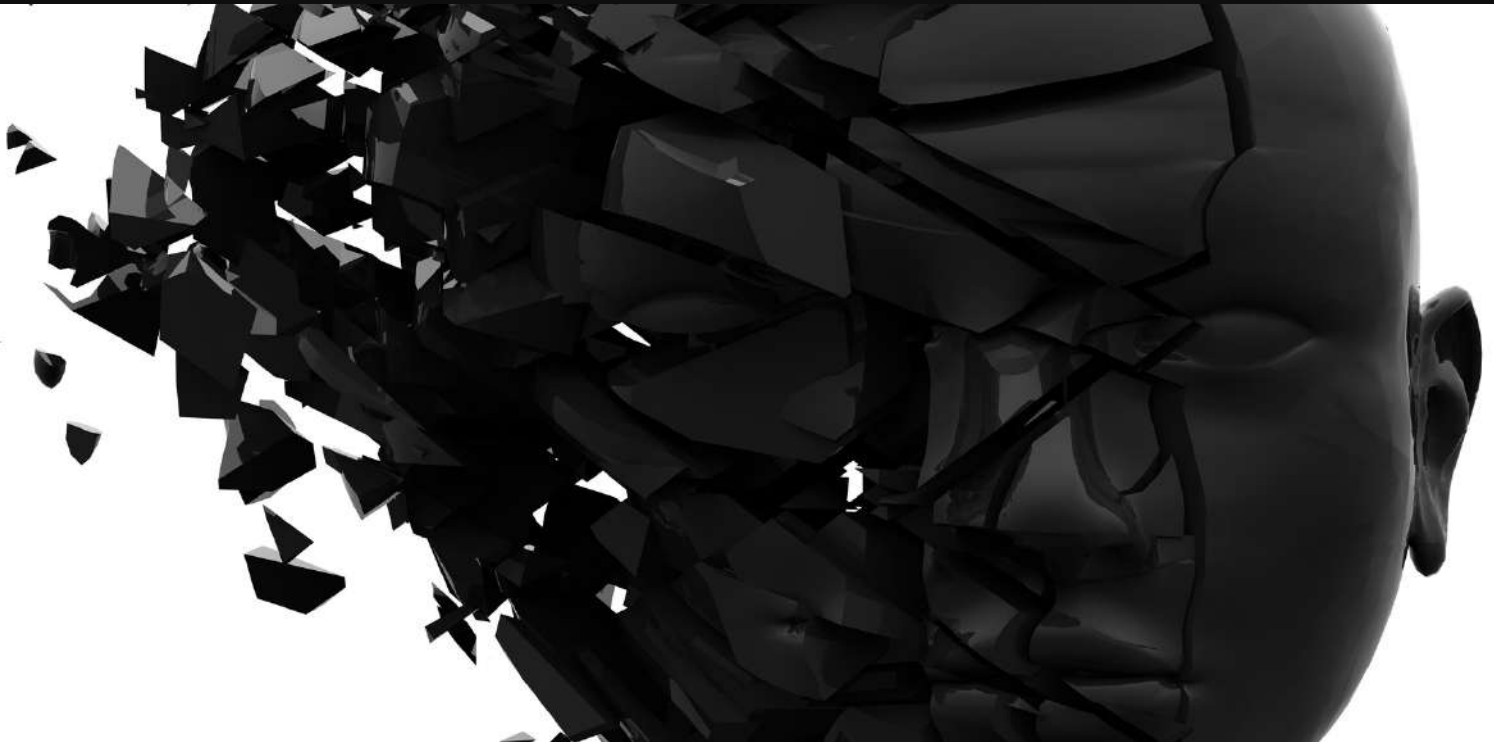
Commentary on chapter 11 verse 3 of the Qur'an (noted above) argues that the 'good' mentioned includes feelings of peace, in which seeking forgiveness cleanses the soul and acts as a mental health retreat for inner peace.

Al-Ghazali points out in order for one to ask for forgiveness one must first be mindful or aware of all of one's actions at every moment, introducing the notion of self-accountability. Al-Ghazali states; 'one should look at all his days and hours and make apparent to oneself all of one's transgressions'.

Al-Ghazali expands, once a person is aware of their sins they must ask for forgiveness with 'presence of heart', an indication of which is feelings of regret, and must then be determined not to transgress in the same act again. Al-Ghazali encourages a person to ask for forgiveness 70 to 100 times a day, as stipulated in a well-known Prophetic tradition, adding that if a person asks for forgiveness with presence of heart, then the asking in itself atones for the sin committed.



### 3. A reminder of God.



The third and final context human suffering is presented in within the Qur'an is the context of remembrance. Within the Qur'an, the notion that God places hardship on people so that they may become mindful of Him and turn back to Him in humility was observed.

The following verses are examples that support the relationship between strife and remembrance of God noted in this research:

وَلَقَدْ أَرْسَلْنَا إِلَىٰ أُمَمٍ مِّن قَبْلِكَ فَأَخَذْنَاهُم بِالْبَأْسَاءِ وَالضَّرَّاءِ  
لَعَلَّهُمْ يَتَضَرَّعُونَ

We have indeed sent messengers unto communities before thee, and We seized them with misfortune and hardship, that they might humble themselves.

(Qur'an 6:42)

وَلَقَدْ أَخَذْنَا آلَ فِرْعَوْنَ بِالسِّنِينَ وَنَقْصٍ مِّنَ الثَّمَرَاتِ  
لَعَلَّهُمْ يَذَّكَّرُونَ

And We indeed afflicted the House of Pharaoh with drought and a shortage of crops, that haply they would be reminded.

(Qur'an 7:130)

وَقَطَّعْنَاهُمْ فِي الْأَرْضِ أُمَمًا مِّنْهُمْ الصَّالِحُونَ وَمِنْهُمْ دُونَ  
ذَلِكَ وَبَلَّوْنَهُم بِالْحَسَنَاتِ وَالسَّيِّئَاتِ لَعَلَّهُمْ يَرْجِعُونَ

And We divided them into communities on the earth: some of them are righteous and some are otherwise. And We tried them with good things and with evil things, that haply they would return.

(Qur'an 7:168)

وَلَقَدْ أَهْلَكْنَا مَا حَوْلَكُمْ مِّنَ الْقُرَىٰ وَصَرَّفْنَا الْآيَاتِ لَعَلَّهُمْ  
يَرْجِعُونَ

And indeed, We destroyed the towns around you, and We vary the signs that haply they might return.

(Qur'an 46:27)

لَنُفْتِنَهُمْ فِيهِ وَمَن يُعْرِضْ عَن ذِكْرِ رَبِّيَّ سَلَكَهُ عَذَابًا صَعَدًا  
That We may try them therewith, and whosoever turns away from the remembrance of his Lord, He leads him to a grievous punishment,

(Qur'an 72:17)

The understanding here is, suffering can be a way of reminding a person of God.

As humans when things are 'going well' we tend to become heedless of God, distracted by the glitter and glitz of life and it is often strife that makes us aware of the futility of life.

The above verses indicate that heedlessness of God can result in Suffering and God may induce a trial or suffering in order to remind a person of God and ensure they remain faithful to their covenant to God and so, on track to attaining paradise. If One is mindful of this, then One will begin to see God's mercy even in the most challenging of times.

A suffering that leads to the remembrance of God will eventually lead to feelings of peace and positive wellbeing. The Qur'an stipulates, an example of such a verse includes:

الَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا وَتَطْمَئِنُّ قُلُوبُهُمْ بِذِكْرِ اللَّهِ أَلَا بِذِكْرِ اللَّهِ تَطْمَئِنُّ الْقُلُوبُ

those who believe and whose hearts are at peace in the remembrance of God. Are not hearts at peace in the remembrance of God?

(Qur'an 13: 28)

And conversely, those who turn away from the remembrance of God will have a miserable life, an example includes:

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

But whosoever turns away from the remembrance of Me, truly his shall be a miserable life, and We shall raise him blind on the Day of Resurrection.'

(Qur'an: 20:124)

Therefore, where there is suffering there is always an opportunity for peace and tranquility, providing that a person remains mindful of God and does not turn away from Him.

Furthermore, in a general sense, suffering ensures that one does not get attached to anything in this world apart from God, as in adverse moments one is forced to turn inwards and in doing so, comes to know the truth of God, which brings feelings of peace and tranquillity.

The sentiment that 'non-attachment' results in relief from suffering is commonly discussed within the mindfulness discourse. In the Islamic context it is present in a Godly context, in that attachment to anything other than God will inevitably result in pain and suffering.

Al-Ghazali argues, worldly attachment is the source of all desires and prevents the heart from experiencing the truth or 'the light' of God and thus feelings of peace. Al-Ghazali pens:

'Turn away from worldly possession and reputation and be patient with their passing. You will become a king in this world by abandoning it and can expect to be a king in the Hereafter.'







It is also important to point out, the teachings of Islam do stipulate that the burdens one is afflicted with are never greater than one's capacity to bear, the Qur'an states:

وَالَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا وَعَمِلُوا الصَّالِحَاتِ لَا نُكَلِّفُ نَفْسًا إِلَّا وُسْعَهَا أُولَٰئِكَ أَصْحَابُ الْجَنَّةِ هُمْ فِيهَا خَالِدُونَ

As for those who believe and perform righteous deeds—We task no soul beyond its capacity—it is they who are the inhabitants of the Garden; they shall abide therein.

(Qur'an 7:42)

With Al-Ghazali adding that God even when He inflicts all types of suffering and trials upon his creation that result in much pain and suffering, would be just and not malicious in doing so. The Qur'an states:

مَنْ عَمِلَ صَالِحًا فَلِنَفْسِهِ وَمَنْ أَسَاءَ فَعَلَيْهَا وَمَا رَبُّكَ بِظَلَّامٍ لِلْعَبِيدِ

Whosoever works righteousness, it is for his own soul. And whosoever commits evil, it is to the detriment thereof. It is not for thy Lord to wrong His servants.

(Qur'an 41:46)

Moreover, individuals should also bear in mind that challenging times have also been presented as opportunities for building characteristics and traits that are beneficial in navigating through life, Al-Ghazali writes:

'When anguish in the heart becomes overwhelming, this suffering from the heart induces another state; called the will and determination to behave differently, affecting the present, past and future' .

The notion that hardship can enhance characteristics like patience, reliance and fortitude is found across many world views, including the secular philosophies of contemporary mindfulness.

‘When anguish in the heart becomes overwhelming, this suffering from the heart induces another state; called the will and determination to behave differently, affecting the present, past and future’ .

Al-Ghazali

# Suffering Cycle

Mitigated through  
Remembrance of God

Sins

Suffering

Heedlessness

Test

you can not stop this, you can only  
strengthen yourself through faith  
and resilience ensuring you pass  
these tests and get to paradise.

Mitigated by carrying out  
good deeds and asking for  
forgiveness

To summarise, suffering is presented in the Qur'an as a natural part of life, not something one should or can avoid. The Islamic perspective is that our tough times provide opportunities to be cleansed of sin, to be reminded of God and to demonstrate the extent of one's belief and conviction in God. It is, in short, an opportunity to face your true self and use this insight to further grow and develop. Being mindful of this process is understood to bring peace. This view is shared in contemporary understandings, where life challenges are presented as opportunities to reassess one's outlook on life and change those elements that stunt personal development and growth.

Salaam! I'm Sara and I have a PhD in "Mindfulness and psychological wellbeing from a Qur'anic perspective". Much of my research relied upon the works of Imam Al-Ghazali in his book "The Revival".

I launched 'INsane' after noticing people were genuinely interested in my research. The INsane logo has a double meaning, it can also be read as the Arabic word for human 'insan'. You can find more about the project and me on my podcast, the link for which is on the website.

I am passionate about informing Muslims on wellbeing from an Islamic perspective. I see this as a duty and a privilege.

This guide will be the first of many (insha'Allah). You can download it free from the INsane website.

I pray that the knowledge i share brings you clarity and courage. Because finding peace takes courage.

*Sara K*



ISLAMIC WELLBEING

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