

And He says that through perseverance and fear of Allah, the schemes of the enemy will not cause His faithful servants any harm, even if they are of the worst kind:

◀ And if you persevere and have *taqwa*, their cunning will not harm you at all – surely Allah surrounds whatever they do. (3:120) ▶

Allah has made success conditional on perseverance and righteousness:

◀ O you who believe, persevere, and be patient, and hold together firmly, and fear Allah, so that you may be successful. (3:200) ▶

He also speaks of His love for those who persevere, which is the greatest incentive possible for anyone who seeks His love:

◀ And Allah loves those who persevere. (3:146) ▶

Allah gives good news to those who persevere and promises them three things, each of which is far better than anything the people of this world envy one another for:

◀ And give good news to those who persevere, those who say, when a misfortune strikes them, "Surely we come from Allah, and surely to Him we return"; these are the ones on whom blessings from their Lord descend, and mercy, and these are the ones who are rightly guided. (2:155-157) ▶

Allah has made the attainment of a place in the Garden and the avoidance of a place in the Fire the exclusive reward of those who patiently persevere:

◀ Surely I have rewarded them this Day for their patience and surely they are the ones who are successful (23:111) ▶

By making them the particular beneficiaries of His *ayat*, Allah has distinguished those who endure and persevere and are grateful for such great good fortune. He says, in four different places in the Qur'an:

◀ Surely in this there are signs for every one who perseveres and gives thanks. (14:5, 31:31, 34:19 and 42:33) ▶

Perseverance is a true attribute of the believer. He circles round it and then returns to it. It is the pillar that supports his faith, without which he could not remain upright. Whoever has no perseverance can have no faith, or if he does have some faith, then it is scant and weak. Such a person worships Allah half-heartedly: if he encounters good in this life, he is reassured in his belief, but if he is afflicted by misfortune, then he turns away from Allah and loses everything both in this life and in the next life, settling for a losing deal.

The good news proclaimed by the Prophet Jesus, peace be on him, was only appreciated by the fortunate ones because of their perseverance, and they ascended to the highest ranks because of their gratitude. They flew with the wings of perseverance and gratitude to the Gardens of Bliss:

◀ Race with each other towards forgiveness from your Lord and a Garden whose extent is like the extent of the heavens and the earth which is in store for those who believe in Allah and His messengers. That is Allah's grace which He grants to whomever He wishes – and Allah's grace is vast. (57:21) ▶

Since perseverance and gratitude are two elements of faith, whoever is concerned about the well being of his soul – desiring its salvation and hoping for its good fortune – must not neglect these two essentials.

He must approach Allah with them, so that He may put him among those who are successful on the Day that he meets Him.

The Meaning and Essence of Perseverance

The word *sabr* in Arabic, meaning 'perseverance' or 'patience', indicates holding back and self-restraint. In the context of the *shari'ah*, it means keeping the self from being agitated, the tongue from complaining, and the hands from beating cheeks and tearing clothes (as an expression of grief).

It has been said that it is one of the excellent possessions of the self, without which it is not possible to do anything well. It is a strength of the self that makes it possible to put it right and benefit it.

When *Imam* Junaid was asked what it is, he said, "Swallowing something bitter without displaying any distaste on your face."

Dhu'n-Nun al-Misri said of it, "Perseverance is distancing yourself from all wrongs and transgressions, and remaining calm when you are engulfed by impossible afflictions, and appearing to have enough when poverty is in permanent residence in your home."

It has also been said that perseverance is, "Standing firm and remaining courteous when affliction strikes, and remaining content when afflicted with misfortune, without showing any signs of complaint."

One day, a righteous man saw someone complaining to his brother, so he said to him, "By Allah – what you are really doing is complaining about the One Who is merciful to you, as you complain to one who has no mercy of his own to give to you."

It has also been said:

When you complain to the son of Adam,
you are in fact complaining about the Merciful
to one who has no mercy of his own.

There are two types of complaint:

The first type of complaint is a complaining to Allah, Mighty and Glorious is He, which is not inconsistent with perseverance, as in the saying of the Prophet Ya'qub, peace be on him, when he said:

◀ "I only reveal my distress and sorrow to Allah."
(12:86) ▶

And also:

◀ "So patience is beautiful." (12:83) ▶

The Prophet ﷺ said, "O Allah! I complain to You about the weakness of my strength and the lack of my ability." ¹

The second type of complaint is a complaining about affliction, by objecting to its nature and character. This kind is incompatible with perseverance and it contradicts it and cancels it out.

The arena of power is more significant for the servant than the arena of perseverance; as the Prophet ﷺ said to Allah, "If You are not angry with me, I will not be concerned, but Your Might is more significant for me." ²

This does not contradict his ﷺ saying, "No one has been given a better or greater gift than perseverance." ³

This applies to someone who has been afflicted by a misfortune. The arena of perseverance in his case is the greatest one, but, before affliction strikes, the arena of strength and health is more significant.

The self is the riding beast that carries the servant either to the Garden or to the Fire. Perseverance is to the self

what the reins and blinkers are to the riding beast – if it had neither, it would wander off in all directions.

Al-Hajjaj once said, “Keep your selves in check, for they can get up to all sorts of mischief. May Allah grant mercy to whom-ever puts reins and blinkers on his self, directing it with the blinkers towards obedience to Allah, and steering it away from disobedience with the reins. Patiently avoiding what Allah has forbidden is easier than enduring the punishment that He inflicts.”

There are two types of impetus that drive the self: one is the active impulse of courage, and the other is the inhibiting force of restraint.

The true essence of perseverance is to channel the first type of energy towards what is beneficial, and to use the second type of energy to avoid doing what is harmful.

There are people who persevere in doing the night prayer regularly and in enduring the burden of fasting, and yet they do not have the power to refrain from a forbidden glance. There are others who can do this, and yet they do not have the energy to persevere in enjoining good and forbidding evil, or in fighting a *jihad*.

It has been said, “Endurance, patience, and perseverance are what constitute the bravery of the self.” Similar to this saying is the proverb, “Courage is being able to persevere for a while.”

Enduring patiently is the opposite of being agitated. As Allah, Mighty and Glorious is He, says of the people of the Fire and what they say:

◀ Whether we rage, or patiently endure, is the same for us (now) – for us there is no way of escape. (14:21) ▶

Types of Perseverance

There are three kinds of perseverance, depending on the intention behind it: perseverance in completing acts of worship and being obedient; perseverance in refraining from forbidden actions and being disobedient; and perseverance in the face of destiny so that the servant does not become angry in times of adversity.

It has been said about these different types, "A servant must have a command to obey, prohibitions to avoid, and adversity to endure."

There is another way of categorising endurance and perseverance, namely, perseverance where there is a choice and perseverance where there is no choice. The former is better and has greater significance than the latter, for perseverance where there is no choice is the kind which is common to all people; it is exercised by all those who do not display perseverance by choice.

For this reason the perseverance of the Prophet Yusuf, peace be on him, in refusing the advances of the wife of al-Aziz is more significant than his enduring what his brothers inflicted on him when they threw him in the well.

Man can never do without perseverance. He fluctuates between a command that he must obey and fulfil, prohibitions he must avoid and do without, destiny which must run its course, and blessings for which he must thank the Provider. As the human situation never changes, man has to persevere until the day he dies.

Everything that the servant meets in this life is one of two kinds: one kind matches his desires and accords with his wishes, while the other does not.

He needs to have patience for both kinds, but the first kind – such as having health, wealth and power – requires more patience from him in several respects:

First, he should not place his confidence in them; nor should he be arrogant and bad mannered because of them; nor should they be the cause of his being ungrateful; nor should he celebrate with them in ways of which Allah does not approve.

Second, he should not become preoccupied with acquiring them.

Third, he must persevere in fulfilling what is due to Allah in them.

Fourth, he must persist in his efforts not to expend them in making *haram* profits.

It has been said, “Both the *mumin* and the *kafir* are able to persevere in times of hardship, but only the truly faithful are capable of persevering in times of ease.”

Abdur-Rahman ibn Awf said, “We were afflicted with hardship, and we persevered and endured, but when we enjoyed times of ease, we were unable to persevere.” That is why Allah warns His servants against becoming engrossed or preoccupied with money, spouses and children. He says, Mighty and Exalted is He:

﴿ O you who believe, do not let your wealth or your children distract you from the remembrance of Allah. (63:9) ﴾

The other kind, which does not accord with his desires and wishes, is either related to matters where the servant has a choice – such as acts of obedience or disobedience – or with matters in which the servant has no choice – such as afflictions. Perhaps he has a choice in the very beginning, but not in ending them once they are under way.

Thus of this second kind there are three categories:

First, there are matters in which the servant has a choice, which include all the actions involving either obedience or disobedience.

In the case of actions involving obedience, the servant needs to persevere in doing them because the self, by its very nature, dislikes much of what is involved in worship and service. In doing the prayer, for example, the self is lazy and prefers taking it easy, especially if it is accompanied by a hardened heart that has been overwhelmed by wrong action, and is inclined to follow its own desires and mix with people who neglect Allah's commands. In paying *zakat*, perseverance and endurance are needed because of the mean and miserly characteristics of the self. In doing the *hajj* and fighting *jihad*, perseverance is required, because of both of the above mentioned characteristics combined: laziness and meanness.

A servant needs to persevere in three circumstances:

First, before fulfilling an act of obedience, by paying attention to his sincerity in doing this act of obedience.

Second, during the act of obedience, by persisting in completing it without any omissions and without being negligent, in accordance with his sincere intentions, and without allowing the physical performance of the action to distract his heart from being at rest in full submission before Allah, the Exalted.

Third, after completing the act of obedience by patiently avoiding anything that might wipe out its reward. This kind of patience means that he must not be pleased with his having been obedient and boast about it, bringing it out from the realm of the veiled secret in to that of public scrutiny.

The act of the servant is a secret between himself and Allah, the Exalted, and it is recorded as such in the realm of secrets. If he talks about it, it is removed from there to the realm of public knowledge. So he must not think that there is no more need for perseverance once the physical action has been completed.

In the case of acts of disobedience, the matter is clear and simple. The greatest help for the servant in patiently avoiding such acts is to give up his bad habits and to avoid contact with those who encourage such habits through companionship and conversation.

Second, there are matters in which the servant has no choice, and which he has no means of avoiding, such as misfortunes, which either are not of man's own making – like death and illness – or are caused by man – like physical violence and verbal abuse.

In relation to the first kind of misfortune, there are four known stations: the station of inability to cope, which includes being agitated and complaining; the station of patient endurance and perseverance; the station of acceptance and contentment; and the station of gratitude, in which the misfortune is viewed as a blessing – and so the one who is afflicted is thankful to the One Who Afflicts him for it.

In relation to the second kind of misfortune, which is caused by man, there are these four stations, plus four more: the station of forgiveness; the station of clarity of the heart regarding any wish to satisfy any desire for revenge; the station of being in a position to do so; and the station of treating the wrongdoer with kindness.

Third, there are matters which are brought about by the servant's own choice, but once they have happened and taken hold of his situation, he is left with no choice in

being able to change them or to free himself from their effects on him.

The Merits of Perseverance

Umm Salama, may Allah be pleased with her, reported that she heard the Messenger of Allah ﷺ say, "There is no Muslim who, when afflicted with a misfortune, says as Allah has ordered him to say, ﴿ Surely to Allah we belong, and surely to Him we are returning, (2:156) ﴾ O Allah, reward me in my misfortune and give me better than it afterwards', except that Allah grants him better than it."

She continued, "When Abu Salama died, I said, 'Which one of the Muslims is better than Abu Salama, whose family was the first to follow the Messenger of Allah ﷺ in making *hijra*?' Then I said what Allah has ordered us to say, and He gave me marriage to His Messenger ﷺ." ⁴

Abu Huraira has related that the Messenger of Allah ﷺ said, "The Mighty and Glorious says, 'I have nothing but the Garden as a reward for My faithful servant who, when I take back one of the most excellent people of this world (i.e. through death), remains patient and hopes for Allah's reward.'" ⁵

In the two books of *as-Sahih*, it is reported that Aisha, may Allah be pleased with her, related that the Messenger of Allah ﷺ said, "Any believer who is afflicted by a misfortune, even if it is as little as the prick of a thorn, will have it removed from his record of wrong actions, in return for it." ⁶

Abu Huraira reported that the Prophet ﷺ said, "The believer continues to be afflicted with hardships in his or her body, wealth and children, until he or she meets Allah completely free of all wrong actions." ⁷

Khabbab ibn al-Arath reported, "We complained to the