Facing the Problems of Life – By Sheikh Munawar Haque

Today’s khutbah is on the topic: ‘facing the problems of life’. Life, as we all know, is a series of problems. Our ability to lead a harmonious life depends on our ability and skill in solving the problems and challenges of life. If we are currently living in happiness with nothing to worry about, then it is almost guaranteed that sometimes in the future, sooner than we may realize, we will be faced with problems. We have to be prepared for such problems and we have to be able to deal with them as and when they arise. Several verses in the Qur’an make reference to the trials and tribulations of this world, indicating that the occurrence of problems is part of life. However, there are other verses that give solutions on how to cope with these problems that life presents to us.

The most important tools that we use to solve life’s problems are patience, perseverance, and prayers. There are several verses in the Qur’an, which make reference to the value of applying these tools in order to attain success in this world and in the hereafter.

ويَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ أَمَنُّوا إِنَّ الَّذِينَ أَسْتَعِينُوا بِالصَّبْرِ وَالصَّلَاةِ أُنَبِيَوْا إِلَى اللَّهِ مَعَ الصَّلَابِيرِينَ

O you, who believe, seek help through patience and prayer. Surely, Allah is with those who are patient (al-Baqarah 2:153).

وَأَسْتَعِينُوا بِالصَّبْرِ وَالصَّلَاةِ وَإِنَّهَا لَكَبِيرَةٌ إِلَّا عَلَىِ الْخَاشِعِينَ

And seek help through patience and prayer; and it is indeed hard except for the humble (al-Baqarah 2:45).

يا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ أَمَنُّوا إِنَّكُمْ أُصْبِرْتُمْ وَصَبَّارُوا وَرَابِطُوا وَاتَّقُوا الله لَعَلَّكُمْ تَفْلِحُونَ

O you who believe, be patient, compete with each other in patience, and be on the alert, and be mindful of Allah, in order that you may succeed (Aal Imran 3:200).

These and many other verses of the Qur’an are filled with hope and assurance from Allah (SWT), who in His infinite mercy and kindness assures us that He is with those who act with patience and perseverance. Any difficulty, hardship, problem or calamity becomes bearable and tolerable by using patience and perseverance and placing one’s trust and hope in Allah. We need to understand that part of being in this world is that we will be tested.

لَتَنْبَلُوا فِي أَمَوَّالِكُمْ وَأَنْفُسِكُمْ

You will surely be tried and tested in your possessions and in your personal selves (Aal Imran 3:186).
We do not know when we will be tested, how we will be tested, and how severe the test will be or how long the test will last. Allah knows us better than we know ourselves. Allah knows what we can bear and what we cannot.

لا يُكِفَفُ اللهُ نَفْسًا إِلاً وَسَعَهَا

Allah does not burden any soul with more than it can bear (al-Baqarah 2:286)

Furthermore, Allah gives us courage and hope when He says:

إنّ مَعَ الْعُسْرِ يُسَرًا

Surely, with hardship comes ease (al-Inshirah 94:6).

No matter how severe or long the problem is, it has to end. That is definite. This is what gives us courage. This is what inspires us to put all our trust in Allah (SWT) and to patiently persevere, for relief may be just around the corner.

When we are faced with problems in life, such as financial problems, marital problems, health problems, family problems, and other problems, we have two choices: either we seek Allah’s help through patience and prayer, placing our implicit faith in Him while trying our best to resolve the problem within the divine guidelines, or we take the shortcut, and fall prey to the whispering of the Shaytan, and land ourselves in further trouble, because it is during our times of difficulty and weakness, that Shaytan is most active and tries very hard to influence us to his evil ways. He made a vow saying,

ثمَّ لَاتَبْتَهُمْ مِنْ بَيْنَ أَيْدِيهِمْ وَمِنْ خَلْفِهِمْ وَعَنْ أَيْمَانِهِمْ وَعَنْ شَمَائِلِهِمْ وَلَا تَجِدُ أَكْثَرَهُمْ شَاكِرِينَ

Then I will come at them-from their front and their back, from their right and their left—and You will find that most of them are ungrateful (al-A’raf 7:17).

Controlling our Emotions

Further, we have to understand that dealing effectively with our difficulties and problems also requires appropriate emotional control. We have to accept realities; we have to chart out a course of action, and finally take preventive measures to keep future problems at bay. Thus, arming ourselves with the right intellectual, mental, and spiritual strategies to pass through these phases can help us to tackle the problems. Let’s briefly go over those steps, starting with the emotional response to a problem.

An emotional response to a difficulty or calamity is quite normal and also human. However, emotions have to be managed and channeled appropriately; else they can manifest negatively within our personalities and affect our lives in general. Research confirms that emotionally-reactive individuals confronting even relatively minor challenges in their lives are prone to increased physical problems and diseases.
One potential way people channel their emotions is to act them out uncontrollably and irresponsibly. In such situations, the prophet (SAW) instructed us to exercise patience and to conduct ourselves with calm and composure. In other cases, people give vent to their emotions by making their lives to appear as a pathetic tearful story, which then leads to the development of a victimized mindset. We may not realize it, but believing that our life is worthless may be the anchor weighing us down and preventing us from moving forward.

So we have to be conscious and careful of how we control our emotions. They should be tempered with positive thinking and a strong faith. This will put us on the right path to get out of our difficulties faster.

**Divine Decree**

Also, when facing difficulties, our weak faith can sometimes drive us to question the justification of all that is happening to us; of all that is going against us. In this context, we should remind ourselves that believing in *al-Qadr* (the divine decree) is one of the pillars of Islamic faith. Allah (SWT) says in the Qur’an,

\[
\text{مَّا أُصِبَّ مِن مَّسَيِّبَةٍ فِي الأَرْضِ وَلَا فِي أَنْفُسِكُمْ إِلَّا فِي كِتَابٍ مِّن قَبْلَ أَنْ نُبْرَأَهَا}
\]

No misfortune happens, either in the earth or in yourselves, that is not set down in writing before We bring it into existence— (al-Hadeed 57:22).

As part of this belief, we should recognize that Allah does what He wills for reasons that are only known to Him. Any attempt to comprehend with our limited minds His wisdom, or to understand how our current situation fits in His overall plan can only lead us to erroneous conclusions.

**The “If-Only” Trap:**

Another trap that many of us fall into has to do with using the “if-only” logic. Very often, our minds tell us that “if I could have done such and such, then this wouldn’t have happened.”

We see an example of this during the battle of Uhud when many Muslims died. This gave the hypocrites an excuse to question the divine decree. They began to argue that had those who died in the battle only listened to them and not gone out to fight, they would not have died. But Allah (SWT) refuted their claims by saying,

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\text{لَوْ كُنْتُمْ فِي بُيُوتٍ كَنْ تَكُمُّ لَبَرَزَ الَّذِينَ كَتَبَ عَلَيْهِمْ الْقُتُولُ إِلَى مَضَاجِعِهِمْ}
\]

“Even if you had remained in your homes, those for whom death was decreed would certainly have gone forth to the place of their death” (Aal ‘Imran 3:154).
This further goes to show that what Allah decrees is inevitable. Any attempt to imagine a
different outcome based on different actions that we could have taken in the past will only
increase our frustrations.

The Prophet (SAW) warned us against falling into such satanic traps. In a hadith narrated by Abu
Hurairah (RA), the Prophet said, “If anything befalls you, do not say ‘If only I had done (such
and such), then such and such would have happened,’ rather say: ‘Allah has decreed and what He
wills He does,’ for ‘if only’ opens the door to the work of the shaytan.”

**Getting yourself out of trouble**

Having accepted Allah’s decree, and after getting over any emotional challenges, the next step
involves taking the right actions to get us out of our problems and difficulties. Although Allah’s
decree is ordained, there are things we can do beforehand to influence the outcome of our efforts,
and thus prevent problems from piling up. First, we should never forget that Allah has provided
us with a free will and associated faculties to think and act. As the prophet had stated, while we
should fully trust Allah, we should tie our horse first – meaning we should use all our God-gifted
faculties and exercise due diligence.

This requires that we take time to define the problems and difficulties that we face with
increased clarity. This is bound to yield better results because we will get clearer about the
outcomes that we desire. These tasks should be followed through to the end with patience and
perseverance.

**Preventive measures**

For cases in which we fumble to choose between options, we should exercise the use of
the *Istikhara* prayers. The text of the du’a recited in those prayers clearly reflects our plea to
Allah to make the desired decision work for us if it’s good for us, or to ward it off if it’s not. By
doing so, we consciously put our faith in Allah (SWT) to guide us.

**Conclusion**

To summarize, we have to keep in mind that our life in this world is but a short journey. We are
here on probation. Each and every one of us has to undergo various trials and tribulations,
various successes and failures.

When faced with afflictions and troubles, we should seek advice from the Qur’an and the Sunnah
for divine guidance. We should pray to Allah and place our trust in Him. We should learn to
have *sabr* (patience). When *sabr* enters the heart, then the mind and heart are in balance, and the
body takes on a new focus, a new determination, a new will to strive and persevere on seeking
solutions to the problems that face us on an individual level, community level and global level.

We have to effectively channel our emotions, maximize the use of our God-gifted faculties, and
above all have strong faith to help us attain the wisdom that life demands from us to get through
even the most difficult challenges. It is important to bear in mind that we should remember Allah
(SWT) during good times and difficult times.
We pray to Allah (SWT) to give us the strength and courage to bear the trials of this world with patience and perseverance; to forgive us our shortcomings; not to place on us a burden greater than we can bear, and to be merciful on us on the Day of Judgment when every soul shall be summoned in front of him individually to give an account of its earthly existence.