

As-Sabr (Patient perseverance)

BS Foad, M.D 2011

The meaning of Sabr

Sabr is mentioned in the Qur'an in numerous places. It is joined with prayer, Taqwa and is an important basic aspect of faith. We learn to be patient and persevere in the face of tests and trials; and to patiently persevere in obeying God and living our life as He has commanded us to do; and to avoid following our vain desires or falling into sin or doing wrong.

We will discuss the following concepts

- 1-Patience in the face of tests and trials
- 2-Patient perseverance in obeying God's orders
- 3-Avoiding sin and wrong deeds or falling slaves to our vain desires
- 4-How can we achieve patience?
- 5-What are our examples of patience?
- 6-What is our reward if we patiently persevere?

Patience in the face of difficulty, tests and trials

The Qur'an tells us that every person will be tested and tried in his life. We are supposed to learn from these tests and trials and evolve and become better human beings. We are likely to make mistakes, but what is important is to learn from our mistakes and shortcomings and do better. Such tests and trials are not punishment from God, rather it is a way of improving our character and behavior. Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) was asked: Who are the ones tested most severely among mankind? He said: (The Prophets are tested the most; then the most righteous. Each person is tested according to his faith. If his faith is strong, his test is more severe. A person may be tested so often that he walks on earth carrying no sin. A person with a weak faith is tested according to his faith) Ahmad, Muslim, Nesa'ee & Termedhi

We learn from this Hadeeth (saying of Prophet Muhammad PBUH) the following lessons:

- Tests and trials are to be expected. We should not be surprised or wonder why this is happening to us? Is it a punishment from God?
- Being tested is an opportunity to learn and improve, and show how strong our faith in God is.
- Tests and trials remit our sins. God forgives our mistakes and our shortcomings because of our patience and perseverance and our faith in Him
- God is just and does not place a burden on any person more than he can bear. Thus he tests us according to our faith and belief.

The Qur'an confirms these concepts:

Do men think that they will be left alone on saying, "We believe," and that they will not be tested?

Al-Ankabut 29: 2

We did test those before them, and Allah will certainly know those who are true from those who are false.

Al-Ankabut 29: 3

Sometimes the bad things that happen to us and the difficulty that we face is our own fault. But sometimes, it is a test and trial from God:

Whatever misfortune happens to you, is because of the things your hands have wrought, and for many (of them) He grants forgiveness.

Ash-Shura 42: 30

Tests and trials are a way of learning patience and working hard and striving in the cause of God. Our faith is tested and we learn through patient endurance and through hard work and trying to change our fate, to become better human beings. It is this process of coping with difficulty, learning what it means to suffer and to strive that we evolve and that we appreciate God's blessing and that we turn to Him seeking His forgiveness, mercy and guidance. We learn to be humble and to work hard and to try again after failing and we learn to pick ourselves and never give up

Therefore the benefits of tests and trials are the following:

- Learning to be patient and to be persevering
- Learning to be humble
- Learning the value of hard work
- Learning never to give up but to try again and again
- Learning to seek God's help and guidance and to turn to Him for He is our source of strength
- Learning from our mistakes so we do not repeat that mistake again

Did ye think that ye would enter Heaven without Allah testing those of you who fought hard (in His Cause) and remained steadfast?

Al-Imran 3: 142

And We shall try you until We test those among you who strive their utmost and persevere in patience; and We shall try your reported (mettle).

Muhammad 47: 31

These tests and trials will take different forms:

- Loss of money
- Facing hunger
- Facing fear
- Loss of life
- Failure to achieve things
- Excess money
- Fame and recognition
- Facing misinformation about Islam and the Muslims

The Qur'an tells us something about these different tests and trials and how God rewards those who patiently persevere and have faith in God:

Be sure We shall test you with something of fear and hunger, some loss in goods or lives or the fruits (of your toil), but give glad tidings to those who patiently persevere.

Al-Baqara 2: 155

Who say, when afflicted with calamity: "To Allah we belong, and to Him is our return"

Al-Baqara 2: 156

They are those on who (descend) blessings from their Lord, and Mercy, and they are the ones that receive guidance.

Al-Baqara 2: 157

The Qur'an describes three rewards:

- 1-God's prayers and blessing will be with them
- 2-God's mercy will surround them
- 3-Their hearts will be guided

Once we understand that God knows what we are going through and that He is a witness to our suffering and that He appreciates our effort, and our patience and perseverance, then it becomes easier for us to cope with our difficult situation and to have the faith and strength not to give up. God's blessings, and his mercy will comfort us and put peace in our hearts. He will guide us as the Qur'an explains:

No kind of calamity can occur, except by the leave of Allah: and if anyone believes in Allah, (Allah) guides his heart (aright): for Allah knows all things.

At-Taghabun 64: 11

Muslims in America are tested and tried by the negative publicity about Islam in the news media. Islam is projected as a backward religion not suitable for our times, and Muslims are depicted as primitive people living in far away places and who hate America and want to cause harm to Americans. The views of radical Muslims are displayed in the news media every day to project Islam as a violent religion. The views of moderate Muslims who are the majority of Muslims may be mentioned in passing. Most Americans, therefore, are either ignorant about Islam or have a distorted unfavorable view. The Qur'an did stress that Muslims will be subjected to this kind of test and trial and will hear a lot that will grieve them. But the Qur'an also charts the way and explains how we should deal with misinformation about Islam and the Muslims:

Ye shall certainly be tried and tested in your possessions and in your personal selves; and ye shall certainly hear much that will grieve you, from those who received the Book before you and from those who worship many gods. But if ye persevere patiently, and guard against evil, then that will be a determining factor in all affairs.

Al-Imran 3: 186

The three steps mentioned in the Qur'an are:

- 1-Patient perseverance: coping with this difficulty and never giving up, Rather having trust in God after we do our work
- 2-Not returning wrong doing with doing wrong ourselves. In other words Not reacting emotionally but in a rational way explaining the truth and Contrasting the false claims and accusations to the truth. We have ample Information in the Qur'an and the Sunnah to show the truth about the position of Islam regarding freedom of expression and safeguarding human life and liberties, and respecting the rights of minorities. It means working close with our Christian and Jewish friends and establishing lines of communications and building bridges and having access to the news media to explain the Muslim point of view.
- 3-Understanding that this struggle is a long and difficult process, and not to expect immediate results. Rather to expect set backs and failures. Putting things in prospective allows us to work hard and regroup and learn from our mistakes.

Patient perseverance in obeying God's orders

To pray five times every day at the proper time and to be devoted in our prayers requires strong faith, and placing our priorities properly. To understand that prayer is essential and crucial and takes precedence over other activities and to stand up for prayer even though we are preoccupied or tired requires resolve, patience and commitment

Therefore be patient with what they say, and celebrate (constantly) the praises of thy Lord, before the rising of the sun, and before its setting; yea, celebrate them for part of the hours of the night, and at the sides of the day: that thou mayest have (spiritual) joy.

Ta Ha 20: 130

Nor strain thine eyes in longing for the things We have given for enjoyment to parties of them, the splendour of the life of this world, through which We test them: but the provision of thy Lord is better and more enduring.

Ta Ha 20: 131

Enjoin prayer on thy people, and be constant therein. We ask thee not to provide sustenance: We provide it for thee. But the (fruit of) the Hereafter is for righteousness.

Ta Ha 20: 132

And:

And establish regular prayers at the two ends of the day and at the approaches of the night: for those things that are good remove those that are evil: be that the word of remembrance to those who remember (their Lord):

Hud 11: 114

And be steadfast in patience; for verily Allah will not suffer the reward of the righteous to perish.

Hud 11: 115

To fast Ramadan and to do optional fasting also requires patience, resolve and commitment. It is easy to find excuses not to fast, or to delay the

optional fast. To be disciplined and carry out God's orders requires sacrifice and strong faith.

Similarly, to give charity requires strong faith and a proper understanding that what we have is a gift from God, and that we are accountable regarding how we earn our money and how we spend it. It is not just money that we give in charity or share with others that need our help. It is also our effort to help them and to reach out and it is the guidance, example and encouragement that we provide.

Avoiding what God has made forbidden and not becoming slaves to our desires also requires patience and a strong will

It is easy to follow our vain desires and more pleasant to get immediate gratification, but much more difficult to discipline ourselves and control our vain desires. Unless we become masters of our souls we will become slaves to our desires and lusts. What pleases us and tempt us varies from one person to another. Some want money to spend, and do not care how they get it. They are willing to lie and cheat. Then they spend the money on themselves and never think of sharing their fortune with those who are poor or needy. Others enjoy power, position and fame and will do anything to be in such position, like politicians. Others fall victim to drugs, alcohol or illicit sex. Unless we control our vain desires they become our masters or God as the Qur'an explains:

Seest thou such a one as taketh for his god his own passion (or impulse)?
Couldst thou be a disposer of affairs for him?

Al-Furqan 25: 43

Or thinkest thou that most of them listen or understand? They are only like cattle; nay, they are worse astray in Path.

Al-Furqan 25: 44

And:

Relate to them the story of the man to whom We sent Our Signs, but he passed them by: so Satan followed him up, and he went astray.

Al-Araf 7: 175

If it had been Our Will, We should have elevated him with Our Signs; but he inclined to the earth, and followed his own vain desires. His similitude is

that of a dog: if you attack him, he lolls out his tongue, or if you leave him alone, he (still) lolls out his tongue. That is the similitude of those who reject Our Signs; so relate the story; perchance they may reflect.

Al-Araf 7: 176

Once we become slaves to our desires we cannot see our way and refuse God's guidance and follow our own way. All we care about is satisfying our desires regardless of what it takes to do that. We can steal, cheat, lie or even kill to achieve our purpose. Committing sins does not mean anything as long as we satisfy our urges and lusts. The only way to avoid such a disastrous fate is to have faith, patience, and perseverance and to seek help and guidance from God.

How can we achieve patience?

- 1-Having strong faith and being committed
- 2-Seeking help and guidance from Allah
- 3-Seeking help in prayer and fasting
- 4-Keeping company with those who are righteous
- 5-Learning to control our vain desires

Having strong faith and commitment

When we understand that tests and trials are to be expected and that it is not a punishment from God, we will deal better with our difficulty and not give up or reject faith in God. The Qur'an stresses that patient perseverance and being conscious of Allah and being aware of our accountability to Him are essential for us to succeed:

O ye who believe! persevere in patience and constancy; vie in such perseverance; strengthen each other; and fear Allah; that ye may prosper.

Al-Imran 3: 200

Strong faith can withstand difficulty and adversity.

Seeking help and guidance from God

If we turn to God seeking His help, He promised to help us. Our prayers are always answered, not necessarily as we want. Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) said:

(Whatever I have of good I will not keep it away from you. Whoever does not ask others for help or beg, Allah will enable him to be independent; Whoever seeks to be self-sufficient and not ask for help, God will make him able to be self-sufficient; and whoever seeks patience, Allah will make him patient. No one was given a gift better or more encompassing than patience)

Bokhari & Muslim.

Seeking help in prayer and fasting

Prayer five times a day at its proper times, and fasting teaches us patience, discipline and commitment. The Qur'an states that we can get help in prayer and in being patient:

O ye who believe! Seek help with patient Perseverance and Prayer: for Allah is with those who patiently persevere.

Al-Baqara 2: 153

Keeping company with those who are righteous

Because they remind us of our responsibility and accountability to Allah, and because they serve as examples for us in proper behavior in adversity:

And keep thy soul content with those who call on their Lord morning and evening, seeking His Face; and let not thine eyes pass beyond them, seeking the pomp and glitter of this Life; nor obey any whose heart We have permitted to neglect the remembrance of Us, one who follows his own desires, whose case has gone beyond all bounds.

Al-Kahf 18: 28

Learning to control our vain desires

Unless we learn to control our vain desires we want to see immediate results and demand instant gratification. This will rarely happen in real life since it takes time for our work to bear fruit. If we become impatient we

will give up too quickly. In contrast, we need to be patient and persevere and understand that what is important is the good work that we do, not seeing successful results.

Our examples of patience

The Prophets serve as our best examples of patience and perseverance. They were committed, had strong resolve and never gave up hope or lost their faith in Allah, despite numerous tests and trials and set backs. The Qur'an relates to us the example of some of these prophets:

"No reason has we why we should not put our trust on Allah. Indeed He has guided us to the Ways we (follow). We shall certainly bear with patience all the hurt you may cause us. For those who put their trust should put their trust on Allah."

Ibrahim 14: 12

Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) was patient and persevering during 23 years of calling his people to Allah, despite their rejection and abuse. He was sad because he feared that Allah's punishment will befall them. The Qur'an came to console him and to order him to be patient like other messengers before him:

We know indeed the grief which their words do cause thee: it is not thee they reject: it is the Signs of Allah, which the wicked contemn.

Al-Ana'm 6: 33

Rejected were the Messengers before thee: with patience and constancy they bore their rejection and their wrongs, until Our aid did reach them: there is none that can alter the Words (and Decrees) of Allah. Already hast thou received some account of those Messengers.

Al-Ana'm 6: 34

And:

And do thou be patient, for thy patience is but from Allah; nor grieve over them: and distress not thyself because of their plots.

An-Nahl 16: 127

For Allah is with those who restrain themselves, and those who do good.

An-Nahl 16: 128

Prophet Ayyoub (Job) was patient and tolerated his affliction and sought God's help. The Qur'an praises him as a true patient servant of Allah:

Commemorate Our Servant Job. Behold he cried to his Lord: "The Evil One has afflicted me with distress and suffering!"

Sa D 38: 41

"And take in thy hand a little grass, and strike therewith: and break not (thy oath)." Truly We found him full of patience and constancy, how excellent in Our service! ever did he turn (to Us)!

Sa D 38: 44

Other Prophets were patient and persevered like Isma'il, Idrees

And (remember) Isma'il, Idris, and Zul-kifl, all (men) of constancy and patience;

Al-Anbia'a 21: 85

Our reward for patiently persevering

1-Forgiveness of sin

2-Greater reward than our good deeds

3-Entering God's paradise

4-Allah is with those who patiently persevere with His guidance, help and Blessing

5-Allah will make those who persevere in patience leaders and examples for others

The Qur'an confirms these concepts:

Forgiveness of sin

(Namely), those who say; "Our Lord! We have indeed believed: forgive us, then, our sins, and save us from the agony of the Fire;" –

Al-Imran 3: 16

Those who show patience, firmness and self-control; who are true (in word and deed); who worship devoutly; who spend (in the way of Allah); and who pray for forgiveness in the early hours of the morning.

Al-Imran 3: 17

Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) said:

(Whatever afflicts the Muslim of tiredness, or pain, or worries, or sadness, or harm, or anguish, even a thorn that pierces his skin, till Allah remits his sins by these afflictions)

Bokhari & Muslim

Greater Reward than our deeds

We are given our reward according to the best of our deeds, then some more. Allah is kind and generous and rewards His righteous servants more than they can imagine, especially those who patiently persevered and proved their true faith despite difficulty and tests and trials

Behold, he that is righteous and patient, never will Allah suffer the reward to be lost, of those who do right."

Yusuf 12: 90

And:

. And We will certainly bestow, on those who patiently persevere, their reward according to the best of their actions.

An-Nahl 16: 96

And:

those who patiently persevere will truly receive a reward without measure!"

Az-Zumar 39: 10

Entering God's paradise

But those who believe and work deeds of righteousness, to them shall We give a Home in Heaven, lofty mansions beneath which flow rivers, to dwell therein for aye; an excellent reward for those who do (good)!

Al-Ankabut 29: 58

Those who persevere in patience, and put their trust in their Lord and Cherisher,

Al-Ankabut 29: 59

And:

Those are the ones who will be rewarded with the highest place in heaven, because of their patient constancy: therein shall they be met with salutations and peace,

Al-Furqan 25: 75

Allah is with those who patiently persevere

O ye who believe! Seek help with patient Perseverance and Prayer: for Allah is with those who patiently persevere.

Al-Baqara 2: 153

And:

But those who were convinced that they must meet Allah, said: "How oft, by Allah's will, hath a small force vanquished a big one? Allah is with those who steadfastly persevere."

Al-Baqara 2: 249

Allah will make those who patiently persevere leaders and examples for others

And We appointed, from among them, Leaders, giving guidance under Our Command, so long as they persevered with patience and continued to have faith in Our Signs.

As-Sajda 32: 24