114019 - Words concerning the reasons for calamities and bearing them with patience

the question

It is known that having patience when a calamity befalls a person is a part of a Muslim’s belief. Accepting and being content with what Allah decrees for us is an attribute of a believer. Is there a difference between this type of calamity and the other type that befalls one as a result of his own neglecting, or all calamities are equal?
If a person neglects his education and does not work hard for seeking it while he is able to, then when he becomes old, he keeps whining for his past and saying : “why have I neglected my education when I was able to gain it” some may think that this is dissatisfaction and rejection to what Allah decreed, and they justify this by saying that if Allah has decreed for this man to be educated he would have been, so he should not reject his fate and say why this happened to me. Please clarify this matter.

Detailed answer

Praise be to Allah.

1.

The believer who affirms the Oneness of Allah (Tawheed) knows that everything happens by the decree of Allah; what Allah wills happens and what He does not will does not happen; there is nothing that can block the will of Allah from being executed in His creation. Thus the heart of the believer who affirms the Oneness of Allah is at rest, and he knows that there is no room for regret or grief in his life, because the command of Allah preceded (the event) and His will is executed.

Allah says (interpretation of the meaning):

“No calamity befalls on the earth or in yourselves but it is inscribed in the Book of Decrees (Al-Lawh Al-Mahfooz) before We bring it into existence. Verily, that is easy for Allah.

23. In order that you may not grieve at the things over that you fail to get, nor rejoice over that which has been given to you. And Allah likes not prideful boasters”

[al-Hadeed 57:22-23]

“Say: ‘Nothing shall ever happen to us except what Allah has ordained for us. He is our Mawlaa (Lord, Helper and Protector).’ And in Allah let the believers put their trust”

[al-Tawbah 9:51]

2.

If this is the case for the believer who affirms the Oneness of Allah, then there is no room in his life for regret about the past and there is no room for the words “if only” in his speech. What Allah has decreed for His slave must be one of two things:

(i)Either it is because of a sin that the slave has committed, so Allah has decreed it for him because of his sins. Allah says (interpretation of the meaning): “And whatever of misfortune befalls you, it is because of what your hands have earned” [al-Shoora 42:30],

(ii)Or it is a test from Allah to raise him in status and expiate his bad deeds.

What should the believer who affirms the Oneness of Allah do, once he knows this and believes firmly in it?

If the calamity is because of a sin that he has committed, or because of neglecting something that he should have done, what he must do is hasten to repent and seek forgiveness, and turn back to his Lord, and regret what he has done, and set things straight between him and His Creator and Lord. Allah says (interpretation of the meaning):

“And verily, I am indeed forgiving to him who repents, believes (in My Oneness, and associates

none in worship with Me) and does righteous good deeds, and then remains constant in doing them (till his death)”

[Ta-Ha 20:82]

If the calamity is a test to raise him in status and expiate his bad deeds, then all that the believer who affirms the Oneness of Allah can do is accept the decree of Allah, and seek reward for what has befallen him with his Lord, hoping for reward and seeking to expiate his sins.

In both cases, the heart of the believer who affirms the Oneness of Allah will only become strong and at peace, and it will never become weak and feeble [?], rather he will hasten to obey and do good deeds. If he has sinned then he will give up his sins and become better than he was before, and if he was obedient to Allah then he will become even more obedient to His Creator and Lord.

3.

The shaytaan tries to weaken the heart of the believer and instil grief and sorrow in his heart, and he strives hard to make him helpless . He does all of that by means of the words “if only”, referring to the past and what he did or did not do. Along with all that evil and corruption he makes him live in a world of illusions and false notions, so he says, “If only such and such had happened, then such and such would have happened.” How does he know that that would have been the case?

Look at what the shaytaan causes of regret, sorrow and conjecture about the decree of Allah, and alongside that he weakens his resolve to strive and obey Allah, and he continues to bemoan his fate and regret until his life has passed. Allah tells us that this is the action of the hypocrites, and our Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) warned us against going down that path.

It was narrated that Abu Hurayrah said: The Messenger of Allah (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) said: “The strong believer is better and more beloved to Allah than the weak believer, although both are good. Strive to do that which will benefit you and seek the help of Allah, and do not feel helpless. If anything befalls you, do not say ‘If only I had done (such and such), the 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 shaytaan."

Narrated by Muslim (2664).

Look at this great hadeeth and ponder it, for it explains the difference between the strong believer and the weak believer, and it urges us to strive and not feel helpless. All of that is completely appropriate to the prohibition on regretting by saying "if only".

Shaykh Salih ibn Fawzan al-Fawzan (may Allah preserve him) said:

When a person experiences something unpleasant or a calamity befalls him, he should not say "If only I had done such and such, this would not have happened to me" or "If only I had not done such and such, this would not have happened to me," because that is a sign of not having patience in accepting what has been missed and cannot be regained, and because these words are indicative of not believing in the divine will and decree, and because it causes one pain and allows the shaytaan to gain power over a person though waswaas and worries.

What one must do when calamity strikes is submit to the decree of Allah, and bear with patience that which has befallen one, whilst striving to achieve the means of bringing good and protecting oneself against evil and disliked things, without apportioning blame.

Allah criticized those who said such things when calamity befell the Muslims at the battle of Uhud. He said (interpretation of the meaning): "[they said] 'If we had anything to do with the affair, none of us would have been killed here'" [Aal 'Imraan 3:154]. These words were spoken by some of the hypocrites on the day of Uhud, when calamity struck the Muslims. They said it in objection to the divine decree, and they criticized the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) and the Muslims for going out to fight the enemy. But Allah refuted what they said, in the same verse (interpretation of the meaning): "Say: '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'", i.e., what Allah decreed would happen was inevitable and could not have been prevented by their staying in their homes or worrying.

Saying “if only” after a calamity has struck does not achieve anything but causing regret, sorrow, pain and weakness, in addition to its effect on ‘aqeedah (belief), because it is generated by a lack of submission to the divine decree.

Then Allah mentioned something else that the hypocrites said, in the verse (interpretation of the meaning):

“(They are) the ones who said about their killed brethren while they themselves sat (at home): ‘If only they had listened to us, they would not have been killed’”

[Aal ‘Imraan 3:168]

This is another thing that the hypocrites said on the day of Uhud. It is narrated that ‘Abd-Allah ibn Ubayy objected to the divine decree and said: If they had listened to our advice to stay home and not go out to fight, they would not have been killed. Allah refuted what they said, in the same verse (interpretation of the meaning): “Say: ‘Avert death from your ownselves, if you speak the truth’”, i.e., if staying home and not going out to fight could save a person from being killed or dying, then you should not die, but death will inevitably come to you in any place, so ward it off from yourselves if you are telling the truth in your claim that those who obeyed you would be safe from death.

The Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) guided us to the actions that will benefit a person in this world and in the Hereafter, that Allah has prescribed to His slaves, whether they are obligatory, mustahabb or permissible. When a person does these actions, he should seek the help of Allah to perfect his efforts and benefit him, because Allah is the One Who created cause and effect. Combining appropriate action with putting one’s trust in Allah is Tawheed. Moreover, he forbade feeling helpless, which means not doing the things that are the means of benefit. This is the opposite of keenness to do that which will benefit one. If a person is keen to do that which will benefit him, and pursue the means, and then the opposite of what he wanted happens, or what he doesn’t want happens, he should not say “If only I had done such and such, such and such would have happened,” because these words do not do any good, rather they open the door to the

shaytaan, and cause regret and make one blame the divine decree. This is contrary to patience and acceptance of the divine decree. Patience is obligatory, and belief in the divine decree is obligatory. Then the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) taught him to say beneficial words which imply belief in the divine decree: “Qadara Allah wa ma sha’a fa’ala (Allah decrees and what He wills He does”), because what Allah decrees will inevitably come to pass, and what is required is to submit and accept what has been decreed. What Allah wills He does, because His actions stem only from wisdom.

May Allah have mercy on Ibn al-Qayyim (may Allah have mercy on him) who said: If a person misses out on something, one of two scenarios must apply. He may have felt helpless, which is the work of the shaytaan, who prompted him to say “If only”, but there is no benefit in that; rather it is the key to blame.

The second scenario is studying and pondering the divine decree; if something is decreed it could never miss him, and no one could get it before him. The Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) taught us that which will benefit a person whether he gets what he wanted or not. He forbade us to say “if only” and told us that this opens the door to the shaytaan, because it implies regret for what has passed, grief, sorrow, and blaming the divine decree, and one is sinning thereby. It is the work of the shaytaan. This does not apply only to the words “if only”, rather it applies to the feelings in the heart that accompany it, which are contrary to complete faith and open the door to the shaytaan.

This hadeeth which was narrated by Abu Hurayrah is something which no one can do without. It implies affirmation of the divine decree, affirmation of the role of human effort and true submission to Allah (al-‘uboodiyyah).

Shaykh al-Islam Ibn Taymiyyah (may Allah have mercy on him) said, concerning the meaning of this hadeeth: Do not be helpless in doing what is enjoined and do not panic with regard to what is decreed.

Al-Irshaad ila Saheeh al-I’tiqaad wa’l-Radd ‘ala Ahl al-Shirk wa’l-Ilhaad (p. 130-133).

4.

For one who missed out on being taught when he was young, let his regret for his negligence motivate him to invest what remains of his life in learning. He should not feel weak and helpless and give up on learning. The one who missed out on doing Hajj when he was young should hasten to do Hajj at the first opportunity; he should not delay it any longer. The same applies to all other acts of worship and good deeds that he may have missed out on. He has to believe that this is the decree of Allah; he should not feel helpless, rather he should be strong and strive to do that which will benefit him. If what he missed out on was due to his sinning, then he should do what we have mentioned above, in addition to repenting sincerely from sin, and asking his Lord to bless him with sound faith and to help him to do and say that which He loves and which pleases Him.

But we should point out to you that there is not only one door to goodness, righteousness, guidance and success in Paradise and the Hereafter. Rather there are many doors. The one who finds some branches of knowledge too difficult for him can find other branches of knowledge that he is able to learn, so he can make up for what he has missed out on with regard to knowledge. If you are wealthy, then spend for the sake of Allah and strive for His sake with your wealth. If you are physically strong then you can fast, for there is nothing like it. You can pray, for it is the best thing. You can do Hajj and ‘Umrah. You can enjoin what is good and forbid what is evil; you can recite dhikr and tasbeeh and read Quran. There are many ways of doing good, and everyone is guided to that for which he was created and the one who is doomed has no one to blame but himself.

We ask Allah to help you, guide you and make you steadfast in doing good.

For more information please see the answers to questions no. 49039, 49004, 43021, 34732, 11010 and 85362.

And Allah is the source of strength.