219462 - The difference between patience and contentment

the question

I am facing mistreatment from my husband’s family, meaning that they talk about me a great deal and sometimes tell others about my private matters, may Allah guide them and forgive them. By the grace of Allah, I am bearing their mistreatment with patience and seeking reward for that with Allah. But sometimes I feel very anxious and I feel that I can no longer put up with it, and I wish that I had never got to know these people. Even though my husband – praise be to Allah – fears Allah with regard to me, he lives abroad and I am living with his family, so it is inevitable that I will face problems. My question is: is my anxiety and my feeling that I can no longer put up with it contrary to patience? How can I reach the level of contentment, so that I can see the situation I am in as a blessing from Allah, because whatever He decrees is all good?

Detailed answer

Praise be to Allah.

Firstly:

You have done well in bearing with patience the harm caused by your husband’s family and seeking reward for that with Allah, may He be exalted. That is a high level of faith, and we ask Allah, may He be exalted, to reward you for it and to compensate you with something better. The Messenger (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) said: “If a Muslim mixes with people and bears their harm with patience, that is better than the Muslim who does not mix with people and does not bear their harm with patience.” Narrated by Imam Ahmad (5002) and at-Tirmidhi (5307); classed as saheeh by al-Albaani in *Silsilah al-Ahaadeeth as-Saheehah* (39).

Secondly:

There is a difference between patience and contentment, both in terms of the definition and in

terms of the ruling thereon.

With regard to the ruling: patience is obligatory, meaning that a person is sinning if he does not bear with patience whatever he faces of troubles and problems, and he is exposing himself thereby to the punishment of Allah, may He be exalted.

As for contentment, it is a higher level than patience; it is the level of those who are foremost in good deeds. Hence it is encouraged (mustahabb), but it is not obligatory, so the Muslim is not sinning if he does not attain it, but he is required to strive against his own self (nafs) and the Shaytaan until he attains that lofty status.

Shaykh al-Islam Ibn Taymiyah (may Allah have mercy on him) said in *Majmoo' al-Fataawa* (10/682):

Being content with calamities such as poverty, sickness and humiliation is recommended according to one of the two scholarly views, but it is not obligatory. It was also said that it is obligatory, but the correct view is that what is obligatory is patience. End quote.

Shaykh Ibn 'Uthaymeen (may Allah have mercy on him) said:

With regard to what may occur of calamities, it is recommended (mustahabb) to be content with them, according to most of the scholars, and it is not obligatory, but it is obligatory to bear them with patience. End quote from *Majmoo' Fataawa Ibn 'Uthaymeen* (2/92).

With regard to the difference between patience and contentment in terms of the definition: patience is what makes a person restrain himself from doing or saying something that is indicative of displeasure or resentment towards what Allah has decreed and what has befallen him of calamity. So the one who is patient restrains his tongue from objecting to the decree of Allah or complaining to anyone other than Allah, and he restrains himself from doing any action that is indicative of panic or lack of patience, such as slapping one's cheeks, rending one's garment, breaking things, striking one's head against the wall, and so on.

Ibn al-Qayyim (may Allah have mercy on him) said in *'Iddat as-Saabireen* (p. 231):

Patience is restraining one’s tongue from complaining to anyone other than Allah, restraining one’s heart from feeling resentment, and restraining oneself from slapping one’s cheeks, rending one’s garment, and so on. End quote.

As for contentment, it is patience and more. The one who is content is patient, and in addition to this patience he is content with the decree of Allah, and is not distressed or pained by it.

Shaykh Ibn ‘Uthaymeen (may Allah have mercy on him) said:

Patience: even if a person feels a great deal of pain and is grieved by a calamity, he bears it with patience and controls his tongue, his actions and his emotions. His attitude is to say: “O Allah, reward me in my calamity and compensate me with something better than it” and “Inna Lillahi wa inna ilayhi raaji‘oon (Indeed to Allah we belong and to Him we will return).”

Contentment is when a calamity befalls a person and he is content with the decree of Allah.

The difference between contentment and patience is that the one who is content does not feel pained by calamity at all, and he goes along with the divine decree. “If harm befalls him, he is patient, and that is good for him, and if something good happens to him, he is grateful, and that is good for him.” Thus he does not see any difference between one and the other, with regard to his acceptance of what Allah, may He be glorified and exalted, decrees. In other words, for the one who is content, the presence or absence of calamity is all the same to him. End quote from *Majmoo‘ Fataawa Ibn ‘Uthaymeen* (3/206).

Thirdly:

For a person to merely feel anxious and that he can no longer put up with something, and wishing that the hardship that has befallen him had never happened – all of that is not contrary to patience, so long as he controls his emotions, his tongue and his actions, and refrains from doing anything that is indicative of panic, and so long as he does not object to the decree of Allah, may He be exalted; rather he is usually patient and does not feel anything except that anxiety, hardship and exhaustion.

As for the one who is content, he does not feel that anxiety and pain, because he knows that Allah, may He be exalted, will never choose for him anything except that which is good. So he goes along with whatever Allah chooses for him, with contentment and reassurance.

Shaykh Ibn ‘Uthaymeen (may Allah have mercy on him) said:

Patience, like its name, tastes bitter, but its consequences are sweeter than honey.

A person may feel that this thing is burdensome for him and dislike it, but he puts up with it and shows patience, but whether it happens or does not happen is not the same for him; rather he dislikes it, but his faith protects him from complaining and feeling discontent.

Contentment is of a higher level than that, for it is all the same to him (whether calamity occurs or not), as they are both the decree of Allah, although he may be saddened by the calamity. That is because he is a man who goes with the flow of the divine will and decree. Wherever the divine will and decree takes him, he will accept it, whether it takes him to a plain or a mountain, whether he goes through a time of ease or the opposite. It is all the same to him, not because his heart is deadened [and he feels no pain], but because he has attained the highest level of contentment with his Lord, may He be glorified and exalted. He accepts whatever Allah decrees for him, for whatever happens to him, it is all the same to him, because in his view it is what his Lord has decreed.

End quote from *Majmoo‘ Fataawa Ibn ‘Uthaymeen* (10/692).

Fourthly:

There is a higher level of contentment, which is the level of gratitude, meaning that a person thanks Allah, may He be exalted, for whatever befalls him of calamity and hardship. Thus he thinks that what has befallen him was a blessing from Allah, therefore he gives thanks for it.

A person may attain the level of patience, then contentment, then gratitude by the following means:

1.. Looking at what Allah, may He be exalted, has chosen for him, and realizing that Allah will never choose anything for him except what is good. The Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) said: “How wonderful is the situation of the believer, for all his affairs are good. If something good happens to him, he gives thanks for it, and that is good for him; if something bad happens to him, he bears it with patience, and that is good for him.” Narrated by Muslim (2999).

2.. Reflecting on what has befallen him, for it is a means of expiating his sins, until he meets Allah, may He be exalted, pure and free of sins. The Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) said: “Calamity may continue to befall a believing man or believing woman in his own self, his children and his wealth, until he meets Allah with no sin on him.” Narrated by at-Tirmidhi; classed as saheeh by al-Albaani in *Sunan Saheeh at-Tirmidhi*.

3.. Looking at what has befallen him and realizing that Allah, may He be exalted, was very gentle with him when that befell him, for how many people have been afflicted with that which is worse than it and greater? Ibn al-Qayyim said in *al-Fawaa’id* (1/112-113), after mentioning patience and contentment: A person’s servitude to his Lord when calamities befall him dictates that he should bear them with patience, then be content with them, which is higher than patience. Then he should give thanks for them, which is higher than contentment. But he will only be able to achieve all of that if love of Allah is deeply rooted in his heart, and he realises that whatever Allah chooses for him is best for him, and that He was kind to him and gentle with him when He decreed this calamity for him, even if he dislikes the calamity. End quote.

4.. Looking at the consequences of trials and hardship, and realizing that Allah decrees such hardships which will make him remember Allah, may He be exalted, a great deal, call upon Him and humble himself before Him.

5.. Looking at the reward for patience and contentment: *“Indeed, the patient will be given their reward without account” [az-Zumar 39:10]*, and the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) said: “Great reward comes with great calamity. Indeed, when Allah loves a people He tests them, then whoever is content will attain Allah’s good pleasure, and whoever is discontent will earn His wrath.” Narrated by at-Tirmidhi; classed as saheeh by al-Albaani in *Sunan Saheeh at-*

Tirmidhi. Allah's being pleased with the person is greater than admittance to Paradise. Allah, may He be exalted, says (interpretation of the meaning): *"Allah has promised the believing men and believing women gardens beneath which rivers flow, wherein they abide eternally, and pleasant dwellings in gardens of perpetual residence; but approval from Allah is greater. It is that which is the great attainment" [at-Tawbah 9:72]*. And the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) said: "Allah will say to the people of Paradise: O people of Paradise! They will say: Here we are at Your service, our Lord; all goodness is in Your hands. He will say: Are you pleased? They will say: How could we not be pleased, O Lord, when You have given us that which You have not given to anyone else among Your creation? He will say: Shall I not give you something even better than that? They will say: O Lord, what can be better than that? He will say: I bestow My pleasure upon you and I will never be angry with you after that." Narrated by al-Bukhaari (6549) and Muslim (2829).

Ibn al-Qayyim said in *Tareeq al-Hijratayn* (1/417), after mentioning something similar to these means that will help a person to attain contentment with the decree of Allah, may He be exalted: These and similar means are the causes that will enable a person to develop patience in the face of calamity, and if they become strongly rooted in him, they will develop further and lead to contentment and gratitude. End quote.

We ask Allah, may He be exalted, to make us among the patient, the content and the grateful.

And Allah knows best.