179441 - Natural cause and effect, and cause and effect on the basis of shar‘i principles, and their connection to success, failure and provision

the question

I have three questions for which I hope for a direct response, because they are not like any other questions. So I hope you will read them carefully and attentively, and give me an answer from an experienced and knowledgeable scholar, so as to give me a feeling of reassurance and heal my sorely broken heart. My story is: I am a young Muslim man, and my childhood was not normal. I was born to very poor parents who did not get along, because of my mother, and we lived in a very small house. My mother is very ill mannered – I am sorry to say that – because she stirs up trouble with everyone in the house, her manner is very off-putting, and she causes a great deal of trouble, to the extent that she will not let her daughters, who are grown up, cook or touch anything without her permission. Since I was small, and until I grew up, my mother was always causing trouble by interfering in everything, major or minor, to the extent that she wants me to eat when she wants, and she feeds me what she herself likes, and she expects me to wear what she wants, and never to go out of the house on the excuse that the sun is very hot, or it is a rainy or windy day. Even when someone goes to the toilet – please excuse me – she tells them: Do such and such, et cetera. She even forbids her children to speak about whatever they want. When I was small I suffered a great deal because of the way in which she treated me, and I used to insult Allah – of course because I was so angry. But I used to believe that insulting Him was haraam and was a sin, but I did not know that it constitutes kufr. When I found out that it constitutes kufr, I repented and never did it again. As I said, I was suffering because of my mother’s treatment of me, and I used to have big arguments and fights with her, insulting her, breaking plates and tearing my garment, and all of that was involuntary, due to intense anger. Matters were so bad that I did not really care about my studies, so I failed, despite the fact that I was very smart and had good potential, and my behaviour outside the home was good, according to everyone. When I reached the age of 14 years, I used to pray on time, apart from Fajr prayer; I used to fall short in that regard until I reached the age of 24, because I used to believe, from what I had studied, that a

missed prayer could be made up and that religion is based on mercy. Of course I was ignorant of some shar‘i matters and I committed some ordinary sins, like any other Muslim.

My questions are:

-1-

Allah has natural laws of cause and effect and shar‘i laws of cause and effect. As for the natural laws: if the individual wants – for example – to become a doctor, he must study. I wanted to be educated from the time I was small, but the problems I went through with my mother and the environment I was in caused me not to succeed in my studies, despite the fact that I did what I could of taking appropriate means. Here I want to ask: is the reason why I did not succeed in my studies the fact that I fell short with regard to natural cause and effect or is it because I fell short with regard to shar‘i laws – i.e., because of my sins? If you say that it was because of my sins, I say to you: I was small and had not yet reached puberty, and I went through a great deal of stress and grief that distracted me from my studies. If you say that it was because of my disobedience towards my mother, I say: she did not give me any chance to be obedient and kind, as she is the one who stirred up trouble and caused problems, according to my siblings and everyone who was close to me. So I repeat my question: why did I not succeed in my studies? Was it because of falling short in taking appropriate natural measures or because I fell short in taking shar‘i measures?

-2-

Now I am a man and I have not succeeded in attaining a profession or any decent job, apart from a few jobs here and there. I have tried to get a good job dozens of times, but I have not succeeded. In addition to that, people who envy me keep after me. Is the reason for (my failure) falling short in taking natural measures or shar‘i measures? If you tell me that it has to do with natural measures, I will tell you: there are people who apply one tenth of what I do of measures, but they find good jobs and succeed in them. If you tell me that it has to do with shar‘i measures, then there are people who find good jobs even though they are the most evil and immoral of people, yet despite that they succeed in their work and earn a living. Yet here I am; I do not accuse Allah of unfairness – Allah forbid – I just want a shar‘i explanation for my situation from a devoted scholar, so that I may correct my mistakes and understand my situation.

-3-

If you say: Why don’t you try to study again? – when I am thirty-five years old, I will say to you: I got sick seven years ago when I had a major nervous breakdown that affected my memory and made it a little weak. Despite that, I tried to study five years ago and was relatively successful, but I do not have any income, so I am forced to work, but I cannot even find work. Is this miserable situation I am in, in which I am not able to achieve any success, even though I am taking appropriate measures, both natural and shar‘i, due to my sins, even though I am an ordinary Muslim? Or is it an indication that Allah is angry with me – Allah forbid? Please advise me, may Allah have mercy on you. I know that I have gone on at length, but I deliberately told my story in full, so that the one who will respond can understand my situation.

Detailed answer

Praise be to Allah.

Firstly:

The believer in this life is tried and tested so that it may be known how sincere he is in his faith, and thus may be given the appropriate reward. He may be afflicted with calamities and trials in order to raise him in status before his Lord, if he is patient and seeks reward for his patience at such times.

Allah, may He be exalted, says (interpretation of the meaning):

“And certainly, We shall test you with something of fear, hunger, loss of wealth, lives and fruits, but give glad tidings to As-Sabirin (the patient ones, etc.)

Who, when afflicted with calamity, say: ‘Truly! To Allah we belong and truly, to Him we shall return.’

They are those on whom are the Salawat (i.e. blessings, etc.) (i.e. who are blessed and will be forgiven) from their Lord, and (they are those who) receive His Mercy, and it is they who are the

guided-ones”

[al-Baqarah 2:155-157].

It was narrated from Mus‘ab ibn Sa‘d that his father said: I said: O Messenger of Allah, which of the people are most sorely tested? He said: “The Prophets, then the righteous, then the next best, then the next best of people. A man will be tested according to his level of religious commitment. If there is some solidness in his religious commitment, he will be more sorely tested, and if there is some weakness in his religious commitment the test will be lightened for him. A man will continue to be tested until he walks upon the face of the earth with no sin on him.”

Narrated by at-Tirmidhi (2398); he said: a hasan saheeh hadith. Classed as hasan by al-Albaani in Mishkaat al-Masaabeeh (1562).

So be patient, my brother, in bearing what befalls you; turn back to your Lord and ask Him to relieve you of calamity and tests. This world is not a dark place in which one does not know which direction to take, and it is not a blocked route as many people think who are tested with limited income or trials affecting themselves or their family members. Rather in this world there are many open doors that do not need anything but strong resolve on our part to strive. So strive hard and do not give in to these memories; replace them with hope followed by action, for in the Prophets you have a good example of constructive effort.

Secondly:

We have to explain the issue of natural causes or measures and shar‘i causes or measures – as they relate to your situation – so that the matter will be clear to you. Therefore we say: Allah, may He be exalted, has created causes and effects as an essential part of His creation. These are called “natural cause and effect” and they have a number of characteristics and signs:

1. Some of them are halaal and some of them are haraam according to Islamic teachings.

2. They are not only for the Muslims; rather they are for all people.

3. Although they are causes of the effects for which Allah has made them causes, it is only like that because Allah has made it part of His creation and the way He wants this universe to be. If He wills, He lets them take their course as He has designed it and lets them lead to the regular effects or results. But if He wills, He causes them not to take their usual course or produce their usual effect. And if He wills, He makes them have the opposite effect. There is none to put back His judgement, may He be glorified, and none can reverse His decree.

Ibn al-Qayyim (may Allah have mercy on him) said concerning the causes or means:

Some scholars affirmed the causes as part of Allah's creation, command, decree and laws, and gave the matter due consideration as He intended it to be, understanding the fact that these causes under His control and subject to His will. These causes are compliant with His will and subject to His ruling over them. Therefore He may strengthen some of these causes by means of one another, or He may cause some to nullify the effect of others, and He may take away from some of these causes their effects and prevent them from giving the usual result even though they are present, so as to teach His creation that He does whatever He wills, and nothing acts or has an effect independently, outside of His will. Focusing on the cause and not on Allah is like focusing on and feeling attached to a spider's web, even though that thing is a cause.

End quote from Madaarij as-Saalikeen (1/244)

Here we will give some examples so that you may have a clear picture. The example we will give with regard to your first question is as follows:

Allah, may He be exalted, has made studying and striving hard to learn, memorise and understand, the means of succeeding in one's studies. This is applicable to Muslims and disbelievers alike, as is seen and is well-known. But some students cheat in the exams in order to pass, in which case they have used a natural means that is haraam. Some use connections for the same purpose, and that is also haraam. Nevertheless can we say: is it true that everyone who studies, striving hard to learn, memorise and understand, will inevitably succeed? The answer is: of course not, for it is Allah, may He be exalted, Who is in control of all causes and their effects.

Allah, may He be exalted, may – for some good reason known to Him – cause a student's memory and understanding to weaken at the time of the exam, so that that student who studied hard, memorised and understood the curriculum does not attain dazzling success; Allah, may He be exalted, may even cause all of those elements to fail so that the student does not pass at all. One of the reasons why Allah, may He be exalted, may weaken the causes or render them ineffectual is grave sin committed by that student, such as insulting Allah, may He be exalted, or hitting his mother or disrespecting his father. There may also be wisdom behind that, which is to protect his religious commitment from being undermined if he were to attain dazzling success. And there may be many other significant reasons for that.

With regard to the shar'i causes, they include everything that Allah has made a means of bringing about certain effects, on the basis of the shar'i texts. For example, He has made ruqya, honey and the black seed remedies for sickness, and He has made piety or fear of Him, and upholding ties of kinship, sources of provision. These causes and means are only for the Muslims, and they are also subject to being weakened or nullified for significant reasons.

We should point out here that there are no shar'i means of attaining success. What we mean by that is that there are no causes such as acts of worship and obedience especially to achieve that purpose, which on their own could lead to the desired result without taking any natural measures or causes. If a person spends his night in praying qiyaam and spends his day fasting, and he prays during that for guidance and success, he has not taken the measures that will enable him to achieve success in his studies. The same applies to honouring one's parents for the sake of success. In fact it is not permissible for the Muslim to do any of these things, thinking that they are means to success in his studies, and to stop at that point (without doing anything more), because Allah, may He be exalted, has not made those things as causes or means of achieving that particular end. Yes, doing these acts of obedience may benefit him so that Allah reassures him and helps him in his exam, but he must also take the natural means and measures, namely studying. Even when studying shar'i knowledge, doing acts of worship will not cause a person to acquire knowledge. The Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) stated that definitively when he said: "Knowledge is only attained by learning." Narrated by at-Tabaraani and classed as hasan

by Ibn Hajar and al-Albaani. But the one who seeks to acquire knowledge still requires divine support and help in memorising and understanding, and that help may come about through following the path of piety, supplication and acts of obedience.

Another example is having children. Allah, may He be exalted, has created natural causes for that which are well-known. Therefore it is not permissible for the Muslim to persist in doing great acts of worship so that Allah, may He be exalted, will grant him a child, if he does not get married. In fact he will be following the wrong path and taking the wrong measures. But if he gets married and has intercourse with his wife, then he may also seek help by offering supplication as a shar'i means of attaining that goal, in addition to taking the natural measures.

Based on that:

The answer to your first question is that you did not succeed in your studies because the natural cause – which was studying – was not there. Even if you had taken that measure, Allah, may He be exalted, may have caused it not to succeed because of your falling into sin. He may have caused you to fail as a trial for you and a test of your faith and sincerity, or He may have caused you to fail so as to ward off some of the evil that could have been brought about if you had succeeded, or to store up some greater good for you, or for some other reason that we may or may not know. He, may He be glorified, is Most Wise, All-Knowing; He dictates matters according to His wisdom and controls the affairs of His creation by His decree, knowledge and kindness. There is none to put back His Judgement (cf 13:41) and none can change His Words (cf. 6:115).

So the issue is not that of hastening to fulfil these desires of people, because people are too weak to direct or manage their own affairs, let alone direct or manage the affairs of the universe by demanding or choosing what they want. Rather the choice is all in the hand of Allah, the Most Wise, All-Aware. Allah, may He be exalted, says (interpretation of the meaning):

"And your Lord creates whatsoever He wills and chooses, no choice have they (in any matter). Glorified be Allah, and exalted above all that they associate as partners (with Him).

And your Lord knows what their hearts conceal, and what they reveal.

And He is Allah; La ilaha illa Huwa (none has the right to be worshipped but He). His is all praise, in the first (i.e., in this world) and in the last (i.e.in the Hereafter). And for Him is the Decision, and to Him shall you (all) be returned”

[al-Qasas 28:68-70].

“Truly, your Lord enlarges the provision for whom He wills and straitens (for whom He wills). Verily, He is Ever All-Knower, All-Seer of His slaves”

[al-Isra’ 17:31].

So it is He, may He be glorified, Who allocates shares of provision and grants provision, on the basis of His wisdom.

The situation of the believer who accepts the will and decree of Allah is as the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) said: “How wonderful is the affair of the believer, for his affairs are all good, and this applies to no one but the believer. If something good happens to him, he is thankful 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).

In addition to the concept of being content with the decree of Allah, may He be exalted, we may also point out that a person should know that Allah has not decreed concerning him anything but what is good. If a person is independent of means and wealthy, that does not mean that he is favoured by Allah. Look at Qaroon – a group of men would not be able to carry the keys of his treasure, but the wrath of Allah befell him and he was swallowed up by the earth. Look at Pharaoh, and how he was established in the land of Egypt, but the wrath of Allah befell him and he was drowned in the sea. Did their wealth or status benefit them?! Did their situation indicate that Allah, may He be exalted, was pleased with them?! Do not be deceived by what you see of others enjoying wealth and status, for Allah gives this world to those whom He loves and those whom He does not love, but He only gives the hereafter to those whom He loves. Allah, may He be exalted, says, addressing His Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) – and it is more appropriate to say that we are also included in that – (interpretation of the meaning):

“And strain not your eyes in longing for the things We have given for enjoyment to various groups of them (polytheists and disbelievers in the Oneness of Allah), the splendour of the life of this world that We may test them thereby. But the provision (good reward in the Hereafter) of your Lord is better and more lasting”

[Ta-Ha 20:131].

Thirdly:

With regard to your final question, we have already answered it above. We also advise you to look at the answer to question no. 114019 and the answers given there, for you will find it beneficial, in sha Allah.

To sum up the above:

You should not neglect to take natural measures, and you should set things straight between you and your Lord, may He be exalted, and between you and other people. We would mention in particular your close family members, for neglecting to take natural measures will make things difficult for you and will make you miserable. This does not mean that taking these measures in the best manner will save you from being exposed to calamities and misery; rather that may happen to you because of your disobedience and sins. Allah, may He be exalted, says (interpretation of the meaning):

“When a single disaster smites you, although you smote (your enemies) with one twice as great, you say: ‘From where does this come to us?’ Say (to them), ‘It is from yourselves (because of your evil deeds).’”

[Aal ‘Imraan 3:165]

“And whatever of misfortune befalls you, it is because of what your hands have earned. And He pardons much”

[ash-Shoora 42:30].

Or it may be for other reasons, as we have explained above.

Finally, it should be understood that real misery is misery of the heart (spiritual misery) because of sins and acts of disobedience. If this misery is accompanied by all the wealth in the world, one can never feel happiness in one's heart, and the matter will not stop at this world; rather it will lead to misery and punishment in the hereafter. Allah, may He be exalted, says (interpretation of the meaning):

"...then whoever follows My Guidance shall neither go astray, nor fall into distress and misery.

But whosoever turns away from My Reminder (i.e. neither believes in this Quran nor acts on its orders, etc.) verily, for him is a life of hardship, and We shall raise him up blind on the Day of Resurrection"

[Ta-Ha 20:123, 124].

And it should be understood that true happiness is happiness in the heart (spiritual happiness) that results from faith and trusting in Allah, and that is not granted except to one who truly knows his Lord, carries out that which He has commanded and keeps away from that which He has prohibited. The Muslim will feel this happiness even if there is some restriction in his worldly livelihood caused by poverty or hardship. And this happiness will continue with him until the hereafter. Allah, may He be exalted, says (interpretation of the meaning):

"Whoever works righteousness, whether male or female, while he (or she) is a true believer (of Islamic Monotheism) verily, to him We will give a good life (in this world with respect, contentment and lawful provision), and We shall pay them certainly a reward in proportion to the best of what they used to do (i.e. Paradise in the Hereafter)"

[an-Nahl 16:97].

Please see also the answer to question no. 85362

And Allah knows best.