

The Pleasures of Health, the Joys of Illness, and the delights of longing to meet my Maker

~ The Islamic Perspective on Life and
Death

by Rabia Mills

Introduction

Life: A cacophony of trial and tribulation

In the following verse from the Holy Qur'an, Allah s.w.t. tells us what His purpose was in creating us:

*"Blessed is He in Whose hand is the Sovereignty, and, He is Able to do all things. Who hath created life and death that **He may try you, which of you is best in conduct**, and He is the Mighty, the Forgiving [Qur'an 67:1,2 Marmaduke Pickthall translation]*

The purpose of life, then, is to pass the many many tests that we must undergo during our sojourn here on this earth. If we pass these examinations or trials, then there will be eternal rewards, but woe to us if we should fail them. Among the many possible tests, one of the examinations that we can be tested with is wealth or poverty. While it sure is nice to have material wealth because of the ease and comfort that it affords us, there is a hidden deception in it so that it is actually one of the more difficult tests for us to bear. Wealth, by it's very nature, has the potential to lead one astray far more easily than poverty ever could.

Allah s.w.t. says:

- *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, who say, when afflicted with calamity: "To Allah We belong, and to Him is our return": They are those on whom (descend) blessings from Allah, and Mercy, and they are the ones that receive guidance. [Qur'an 2:155-157 Yusuf Ali Translation]*
- *It is not righteousness that ye turn your faces towards the East or West; but it is righteousness to believe in Allah and the Last Day, and the Angels, and the Book, and the Messengers; to spend of your substance, out of love for Him, for your kin, for orphans, for the needy, for the wayfarer, for those who ask, and for the ransom of slaves; to be steadfast in prayer, and practice regular charity; to fulfil the contracts which ye have made; and to be firm and patient, in pain (or suffering) and adversity, and throughout all periods of panic. Such are the people of truth, the Allah-fearing. [Qur'an 2:177 Yusuf Ali Translation]*
- *The parable of those who spend their substance in the way of Allah is that of a grain of corn: it groweth seven ears, and each ear hath a hundred grains. Allah giveth manifold increase to whom He pleaseth. And Allah careth for all and He knoweth all things. Those who spend their substance in the cause of Allah, and follow not up their gifts with reminders of their generosity or with injury, for them their reward is with their Lord: on them shall be no fear, nor shall they grieve. [Qur'an 2:261,262 Yusuf Ali Translation]*
- *And render to the kindred their due rights, as (also) to those in want, and to the wayfarer. But squander not (your wealth) in the manner of a spendthrift. Verily spendthrifts are brothers of the Evil ones and the Evil one is to his Lord (himself) ungrateful. [Qur'an 17:26,27 Yusuf Ali Translation]*

The Prophet Muhammad s.a.w.s. said,

- "It is difficult for a man laden with riches to climb the steep path that leads to bliss."
- ". . . Be happy and be hopeful of that what gives you delight. By Allah, it is not poverty about which I fear in regard to you but I am afraid in your [in this particular instance he was talking to the Ansar] case that (worldly) riches may be given to you as were given to those who had gone before you and you begin to vie with one another for them as they vied for them, and these may destroy you as they destroyed them." [Sahih Muslim Book 042, Number 7065]

On Health and Wealth

Here is a quote from *The Discourses of Rumi (Fihi Ma Fihi)* by Jalalu'ddin Rumi (Discourse 68), translated by A.J. Arberry:

Between the human being and God are just two veils—health and wealth—all other veils come from these. Those who are healthy do not look for God and do not see Him, but as soon as pain afflicts them they cry out, "O God! O God!" calling out and surrendering to God.

Therefore, health is their veil and God is hidden in their pain. As long as people have wealth, they gratify their desires, and are preoccupied night and day with pleasures. The moment poverty appears, their spirits are weakened and they turn to God.

- Drunkenness and poverty brought You to me, I am the slave of Your drunkenness and need! God granted to Pharaoh four hundred years of life, kingship and enjoyment. All that was a veil, which kept him far from the presence of God. He did not even experience a single day of disagreeableness and pain, so he completely forgot God. God said, "Go on being preoccupied with your own desire, and do not even think of Me. Good night!"

- *King Solomon grew weary of his reign,
But Job was never sated of his pain.*

Health and illness -- a major test

Allah s.w.t. has given us so many gifts and blessings that we simply cannot count them all. One of His most awesome blessings to us is our health - both good and bad. Disease does not prove the non-existence of health altogether nor decay the non-existence of body. It is an extraordinary blessing when we are healthy **and** it is also an extraordinary blessing when we are ill. So how can these two opposite statements be true at the same time? After all, to be sick can be a very difficult trial, (although it may be a source of many blessings - blessings in disguise at that!) whereas to be healthy is comparatively easy to bear.

Jalalu'ddin Rumi says that Allah s.w.t. created suffering and heartache so that a joyful heart might appear through its opposite. Hence, he maintains that hidden things become manifest and known to us only by means of their opposites. He then says, that since Allah does not have an opposite, He remains hidden. "Hidden things, then, are manifested by means of their opposite; since God hath no opposite, He is hidden. . . The Light of God hath no opposite in (all) existence, that by means of that opposite it should be possible to make Him manifest. Necessarily (therefore) our eyes do not perceive Him, though He perceives (us) . . ." [*Mathnawi*, Book 1, Pg. 63, trans. by R.A. Nicholson]. Rumi's explanation, among other things, shows how it is that we come to know about good health through sickness and vice versa. Such explanations that are based on the personal experiences of people like Rumi "have made thinking humanity believe in the continuity of life after death. It is they who radiate a faith in everlasting life which in its turn takes away the sting from ill health and death and enables us to view life with a sense of ease."

For those who have had temporary illnesses mixed with good health, then, it is easy to see how good health is a blessing. After all good health is a most excellent state - a

miracle if you like. It is simply amazing that all the organs in the human body function with such astonishing unison and perfection. I once knew a heart surgeon who, through his pioneering work, developed the pacemaker, (among other major medical breakthroughs) yet he, with all his knowledge of the human body, was continually amazed by the exquisite perfection of the human body and its workings and so he was truly humbled by his knowledge of it. He was also amazed by the fact that the human body did not break down more often than it did. After all, how could such perfection continue to run like clockwork day in and day out year after year and not break down?

Islam has an elegant yet simple answer to this question. It is Allah s.w.t. who is our Creator and it is He in His Perfection and Wisdom (as well as with all His other attributes) who 'runs the show' shall we say. Absolutely nothing can occur without His permission. When He, in His perfect wisdom, decrees good health for us, then we will be healthy. When He in His perfect wisdom decrees ill health for us, then we will suffer from illness. Good health is truly a wonderful blessing and we should be grateful when Allah s.w.t. decrees that for us. It is an honour. But then ill health is also a marvellous blessing. If a sick person can still remain grateful to Allah s.w.t. through the course of his or her sufferings, trials and tests of illness, and still not oppose his or her destiny and endure patiently, then there will be many rewards and recompenses for them. Their sufferings will be rewarded with spiritual honours and gifts of forgiveness.

The Qur'an and the Sunna

The Holy Qur'an says:

- *"Naught of disaster befalleth in the earth or in yourselves but it is in a Book before We bring it into being, Lo! that is easy for Allah that ye grieve not for the sake of that which hath escaped you. [Qur'an 57:22 Marmaduke Pickthall Translation]*
- The Prophet Muhammad, s.a.w.s. said,

- The Apostle of Allah (peace be upon him) visited me while I was sick. He said: Be glad, Umm al-Ala' for Allah removes the sins of a Muslim for his illness as fire removes the dross off gold and silver. [Sunan Abu Dawood Book 20, Number 3086]
- "The more severe the trial and hardship, the greater its reward. When God cherishes love for a group of people, He puts them to trial to cleanse them more and to make them pure. Hence those who acquiesce in the Will of God win the pleasure of God. And those who harbour resentment against God in the hour of trial, God also is displeased with them. [Tirmidhi]
- " No fatigue, nor disease, nor sorrow, nor sadness, nor hurt, nor distress befalls a Muslim, even if it were the prick he receives from a thorn, but that Allah expiates some of his sins for that." [Sahih Bukhari Volume 7, Book 70, Number 545]
- "There is nothing (in the form of trouble) that comes to a believer even if it is the pricking of a thorn that there is decreed good for him by Allah or his sins are obliterated. [Sahih Muslim Book 32, Number 6241]
- "The example of a believer is that of a fresh tender plant; from whatever direction the wind comes, it bends it, but when the wind becomes quiet, it becomes straight again. Similarly, a believer is afflicted with calamities (but he remains patient till Allah removes his difficulties.) And an impious wicked person is like a pine tree which keeps hard and straight till Allah cuts (breaks) it down when He wishes." [Sahih Bukhari Volume 7, Book 70, Number 547]
- "If Allah wants to do good to somebody, He afflicts him with trials." [Sahih Bukhari Volume 7, Book 70, Number 548]
- I visited the Prophet during his ailments and he was suffering from a high fever. I said, "You have a high fever. Is it because you will have a double reward for it?" He said, "Yes, for no Muslim is afflicted

- with any harm but that Allah will remove his sins as the leaves of a tree fall down." [Sahih Bukhari Volume 7, Book 70, Number 550]
- Ibn 'Abbas said to me, "Shall I show you a woman of the people of Paradise?" I said, "Yes." He said, "This black lady came to the Prophet and said, 'I get attacks of epilepsy and my body becomes uncovered; please invoke Allah for me.' The Prophet said (to her), 'If you wish, be patient and you will (enter) Paradise; and if you wish, I will invoke Allah to cure you.' She said, 'I will remain patient,' and added, 'but I become uncovered, so please invoke Allah for me that I may not become uncovered.' So he invoked Allah for her." [Sahih Bukhari Volume 7, Book 70, Number 555]
 - Narrated 'A'isha: Whenever Allah's Apostle paid a visit to a patient, or a patient was brought to him, he used to invoke Allah, saying, "Take away the disease, O the Lord of the people! Cure him as You are the One Who cures. There is no cure but Yours, a cure that leaves no disease." [Sahih Bukhari Volume 7, Book 70, Number 579]

More Words of Wisdom

Dr. Mahmud Es'ad Cosan says, "Sickness wakes people up from heedlessness, guides them to give up their sins, makes them think about the Hereafter, leads them to pious foundations; makes them more thankful to Allah, and teaches them the necessity of taking better care of their health and making better use of their life - something they didn't realise before - teaches them to understand other sick and pained people better, to feel sorry for them and to help them; and raises their ranks and degrees higher in the Hereafter."

And just as wealth is a far more difficult trial because of its potential to lead one astray, so is health a more difficult trial than sickness, despite its outward appearance of ease.

[Abdul Qadir Gilani](#) r.a., tells us that Abu Dharr (may Allah be well pleased with him) used to say: "Poverty is dearer to me than affluence, sickness is dearer to me than health, and death is dearer to me than life."

It would be appropriate to quote here the following from the book *Futuh al Ghaib* (The Revelations of the Unseen) by Shaikh Abdul Qadir Gilani, r.a.:

- "Comforting it is to experience pain on account of the Friend who is also a physician daily visiting the home of the sick."
- "And know the help of God comes through patience and comfortable circumstances with distress and that difficulty is accompanied by ease."
- "Sincerity [of actions] resides in a grief-stricken heart."

[Appendix A](#) contains more quotes from this book.

A Voice of Experience

This essay has been written from personal experience, and I have shared with you some of the many valuable lessons that I've learned about both health and illness from my own firsthand trials. You see, for the past eight years now, I have personally suffered from a progressing and debilitating disease that has so far left me paralysed over 80% of my body. As if being paralysed were not harsh enough, I also suffer from a very long list of other incapacitating symptoms which affect every single part of my body. For example, among my many other symptoms, I also have extremely poor vision. But this illness has been very beneficial for me and so in spite of its severity, I am grateful to Allah s.w.t. for giving me this disease because through it I've learned many lessons that I could never have learned had I been healthy.

People who know me always seem to be amazed by the fact that I am constantly cheerful. How can this be? Well the answer is simple - as you know, cheerfulness or happiness is a state of mind and one's state

of mind depends on what one's point of view is. To wit: is the glass half full or half empty?

My basic belief is that **EVERYTHING** is a blessing from Allah s.w.t. and that He takes **the most excellent** care of me despite other people's shallow observations about my outward appearance. I can attest to the fact that His care has been **the best and most superb** ever imaginable! Therefore, I have completely resigned myself to, and totally believe that whatever is willed by Allah s.w.t. is not only **perfect**, but is the best that could conceivably happen in every situation and in all circumstances. I also have enormous trust in Allah s.w.t. and His wisdom because I know that He is behind **everything**. So for those who may wonder how or why I find it easy to cope with this illness, my reply is simple . . . it is Allah s.w.t. who is helping me to cope. Period.

Unquestionably, adopting the Islamic way of life has served as a protective barrier for me from even thinking about committing such senseless acts like suicide for example. In Islam, suicide is a major sin and Allah ta'ala has forbidden it **completely**. Because after all,

"Say: Lo! my worship and my sacrifice and my living and my dying are for Allah, Lord of the Worlds." [Qur'an 6:162 Marmaduke Pickthall Translation]

Despite the prohibition to commit suicide and the strict *Shar'iah* prohibitions forbidding us to even wish for death, some persons may nevertheless still long for a glimpse of Allah ta'ala's face. But this is not considered to be disobeying the *Shar'iah* law because the longing to meet our Creator is clearly not the same as wishing for death - - these are two separate desires that are actually opposites and both are distinguishable by intention. You see, to look forward to one's death hoping to catch a glimpse of our Creator is completely different from wishing for death because what one really wants to do is avoid suffering and thus reject and complain about Allah ta'ala's blessings.

So it is not difficult to see why a good Muslim looks forward to meeting his or her Maker with full anticipation and absolute

hope and trust in Allah ta'ala's Mercy and His Forgiveness. After all, in our primordial state, all of creation was offered this trust and only man accepted it because he fully believed in Allah ta'ala's Mercy (*Rahmat*).

We offered the trust to Heaven and Earth, and to the mountains too, yet they refused to carry it, and shrank back from it. However man accepted it: he has been unfair [to himself], ignorant! and accepted it. [Qur'an 33:72 T.B. Irving Translation]

This is why the Sufis celebrate the anniversaries of the deaths of saints. Those anniversaries are called "*Urs*" celebrations. Interestingly, the translation of the word '*urs*' means 'bridle celebration' which is obviously a joyful occasion where the bride gets to meet and join with her beloved bridegroom. Incidentally the word '*urus*' is a derivation from the same root and means 'bride.' It's the same with death, it's a joyful occasion where the lover is reunited with the Beloved -- the reunion of a loving friend after a long separation (i.e., meeting our Maker). What a lovely thought and what a beautiful anticipation!

Predestination

Before I proceed any further, I would like to take a detour and deal with the predestination/free-will dilemma and give you a quote from "*Introduction to Islam*" where Dr. M. Hamidullah, explains very nicely how the personal responsibility of man for his actions is tied in and reconciled with the concept of Allah ta'ala's predestination:

"We are rewarded only because we have also accepted to be punished for acts which are predestined. This seems to be the Divine Deposit [i.e. a place for safekeeping] with which we have been entrusted, when the Qur'an (33/72) reports: "*We did indeed offer the Trust to the heavens and the earth and the mountains; but they refused to undertake it, being afraid thereof: but man undertook it; -- he was indeed unjust and ignorant.*" God said: "*I shall predestine your acts, and want to reward or punish you according to whether they are good or evil.* Other created beings said: How? Thou wilt create, and we have to be responsible for

the same? They got afraid. Man believed in the limitless mercy of the Lord, and said: Yes Lord, I accept to take this responsibility and the Deposit of Thine. This pleased the Lord so much that He ordered even the angels to prostrate before man. To sum up, since Islam separates completely the two questions, it is not difficult for it to admit simultaneously the requirement of man (effort, sense of responsibility) and the rights of God with all His attributes, including the power to predetermine."

The Holy Qur'an makes it very clear that our origin is from Allah s.w.t. and ultimately that is where we will be returned:

"To Allah we belong, and to Him is our return" [Qur'an 2:156 Yusuf Ali Translation] So life is a gift -- a trust from Allah s.w.t. Our bodies and our lives belong to Him. Therefore, as trustees, we are required to take care of our bodies, protect our bodies from all adversities and guard our lives under all circumstances, until the appointed hour of our transfer to the other world comes from Allah ta'ala. Contrary to what some people seem to believe, it is **NOT** up to us to decide to take our own lives by suicide, believing incorrectly that our bodies and our lives somehow belong to us and that we can deal with our bodies in whatever way we want to.

Death

I would like to quote the following excerpt from the *Hundred Letters* by Sharafuddin Maneri:

The advanced Sufi is forever recalling death, for it is the time appointed for seeing the countenance of the Friend, and no lover can ever forget the time fixed for meeting his beloved. He would love to be swallowed up by death so that, being freed from this dwelling place of sinners, he might rise to the abode near his Friend, just as Huzaifa relates: "O God, You know that I prefer poverty to riches - sickness to health, and death to life. Make death easy for me, that I might arrive at my reward . . . You! [Click here](#) for the entire letter.]

I must admit that I do long for the vision of the beautiful face of my Creator after my natural death. I join with all the wise people in their prayers: "O Lord, do whatever You wish, but don't cut us off from this [vision of Your face]."

Since our goal and objective is to pass our tests and succeed or 'prosper' (a Quranic term), we have to follow the clear directions and guidance given to us by Allah ta'ala Himself:

- *But those will prosper who purify themselves, and glorify the name of their Guardian-Lord, and (lift their hearts) in prayer. [Qur'an 87:14,15 Yusuf Ali Translation]*

I began this essay with a quote from the Holy Qur'an (67:1,2) which declares that man's purpose of life while on this earth is to undergo tests, trials and tribulations. We must also remember (as I do) that the Holy Qur'an has also declared 'worship' of Allah to be the purpose of man's creation:

- *I created the jinn and humankind only that they might worship Me. [Qur'an 51:56 M. Pickthall translation]*
- *When ye have performed the act of worship, remember Allah, standing, sitting and reclining. And when ye are in safety, observe proper worship. [Qur'an 4:103 M. Pickthall translation]*

The Quranic term '*ibadat*' is usually translated as 'worship'. A better translation would be 'service' or 'service unto Allah' because the word '*ibadat*' is derived from '*abada*' and since '*abad*' means 'servant/slave', '*ibadat*' means 'service'. Therefore one should keep in mind that not only (a) mundane (lawful) acts (acts that are done with sincere intention, and done for the sake of Allah s.w.t. alone), (b) as well as all obligatory acts or other forms of worship (i.e. the five pillars of Islam) and (c) *Zikr* (remembrance of Allah) are **ALL** considered to be acts of worship. Also, don't forget that we also have the obligation to purify ourselves and acquire good moral characters as set out in the Quranic verse

above (87:14,15). That is, we are to purify ourselves (i.e. get rid of our evil traits) and thus enable ourselves to do good deeds (technically called *tazkiya*) in addition to fulfilling those two other duties (mentioned above), namely, **zīkr** (remembrance of Allah) or glorifying the name of our Lord and **prayer** (or worship as described above).

With regards to *tazkiya*, our great shaikh [Hazrat Nawab Mohammad Khadim Hasan Shah](#), r.a. said,

". . . [we] must acquire purity in body, speech, thought, heart, and soul. Washing off any unclean substance can purify the body, whereas purity of speech can be attained by always speaking the truth, keeping one's promises and not speaking evil of anyone. Also, one should not curse others, nor say anything that could hurt other people's feelings. To attain purity of thought, one should not think evil of anyone, nor should one bear any ill will toward them. One should not annoy nor harm others. Purity of heart can be attained by guarding one's heart against anger, malice, hypocrisy and pride. One should not harbour animosity, become spiteful, bear a grudge nor be jealous of anyone. Instead one should keep one's heart ready to impart love, sympathy and generosity for the service of humanity. Purity of soul is acquired when one becomes filled with love for Almighty God. One guards this by not allowing this love to be surpassed or overwhelmed by the love for anyone or anything else."

And regarding *zīkr* (remembrance of Allah), he said, "The result from chanting *Zīkr* is constant recollection and realization (gnostic knowledge, *marifat*) of God. Almighty God says: "Remember Me and I will remember you."

To round up

In closing, I would like to reiterate that Allah s.w.t. has created all of creation out of His Mercy (*Rahmat*) as a manifestation of His glorious name '*al-Rahman*' and so no matter what one's destiny is, whether it be health, sickness, wealth, poverty, etc., etc., there is

Mercy and Wisdom in it. And since I believe in the limitless Mercy of the Lord, (from our primordial state to now) I cannot help but conclude that Allah s.w.t. has predetermined precisely what my tests will be. I know that my particular tests are **THE BEST** that could ever happen to me. Allah s.w.t. has total control of how He chooses to 'run the show', shall we say, and He does this according to His Divine Wisdom. So it is obvious to me that His particular tests for me are the very best that could possibly ever happen. It is the same for everyone else too. Without this belief, *tawakkul* (trust in Allah) and *tawhid* (belief in the Oneness of God) would be meaningless. Obviously sickness was in my personal destiny, whereas other people will be given either health or sickness, wealth or poverty, etc. as part of their destinies. So the real challenge is to realize just how perfect and beautiful Allah ta'ala's blessings are in spite of either good fortune or tribulation. Believe me when I tell you that good fortune is an exceptionally difficult trial because of its subtlety. It is actually a far more difficult trial to pass because, in actual fact, the potential to stray is so very high. It's better to suffer tragedy!

Allah's Apostle said, "The (Hell) Fire is surrounded by all kinds of desires and passions, while Paradise is surrounded by all kinds of disliked [and] undesirable things." [Sahih Bukhari Volume 8, Book 76, Number 494]

And similarly Jalalu'ddin Rumi reiterates in the *Mathnawi*,

"Paradise is compassed about with the things we dislike (to do); the fires (of Hell) are compassed about with our lusts."
Now I will tell you what made me say what seems to be the most outrageous observation about my illness so far -- that my cheerfulness results from the joy of illness. No I'm not a masochist. Yes I am 80% paralysed and that means that I am physically unable to perform most tasks. But these things are still being done for me through the help of other people, by the grace of Allah ta'ala. He has also given me all kinds of help through many kinds of mechanical devices. Technology has been wonderful for me! *Al hamdu li Allah* this has

left me with a great deal of "free" time so as to pursue other more important tasks of the spiritual kind such as constant, uninterrupted and highly concentrated "worship/zikr" of Allah s.w.t every single moment of my life. How can that be a problem? To me it is an incredible gift from Allah *ta'ala*, because every single breath I take, whether inhaling or exhaling, is my attempt to keep Allah s.w.t. in the forefront of my every waking moment.

The Quranic verses that were quoted above (87:14,15) beautifully flow into the next two verses (16 and 17) as if the subject matter of both sets of these verses were meant to be a continuation of one theme. These verses joined together read as follows:

But those will prosper who purify themselves, and glorify the name of their Guardian-Lord, and (lift their hearts) in prayer. But ye prefer the life of the world although the Hereafter is better and more lasting. [Qur'an 87:14-17 M. Pickthall Translation]

So you see, Allah s.w.t. has given me, through my illness, the opportunity to occupy myself with far more important matters, namely the preparation for real life in the Hereafter and so, because of my progressing disabilities, I am actually very fortunate because I can spend less and less time on necessary worldly affairs. To quote William Wordsworth, "The world is too much with us."

Shaikh Abdul Qadir Gilani, r.a. discusses this in detail. [Please see [Appendix B](#)]

Conclusion

My point is this, if a person chooses to remain blind and therefore refuses to benefit from the many "blessings in disguise" that are given to us, then the seeds of his or her own discontent have been planted. What kind of a plant could possibly grow from those seeds? Think about it . . . selfpity and anger are both poisonous. All that could ever grow from those kinds of reactions to suffering is abject misery and sometimes even a desire to end it all. No thanks!

To be miserable and unhappy because of self-pity or angry over something that you have no control over is not only futile but a complete waste of time. I prefer to put my full trust (*tawakku*) in Allah s.w.t. rather than lead life in extreme misery and sorrow! Do I take my illness grudgingly, all the while complaining about what did I do to deserve it or do I accept it willingly and cheerfully? From day one I have been given the freedom and the opportunity to freely and voluntarily surrender my will to Allah ta'ala's will and I've never been forced. I've always had and still have the privilege/obligation to choose one of the two alternatives - one of the two divergent roads. In this regard, the lines from the poem, "[The Road Not Taken](#)" by Robert Frost comes to mind . . .

Two roads diverged in a wood, and I,
I took the one less travelled by,
And that has made all the difference.

And just like the poem, wherein the author has actually travelled on a well-trodden path, so it is that we Muslims (all 1.2 billion of us!) are travelling a well-trodden path with each other, for we all share this same perspective on suffering and life and death. Therefore our viewpoints may not be as unique and the path may not be as "less travelled" as we may think! Our goal then, is to follow faithfully in the footsteps of the Prophet s.a.w.s. and to not create innovation and to remain obedient (to Allah ta'ala and His Prophet) and to not transgress.

Abdul Qadir Gilani, r.a. says, "To remonstrate with the Lord of Truth (Almighty and Glorious is He) when the divine decrees descend from on high, is the death of religion [*din*], the death of the affirmation of Unity [*tawhid*], the death of absolute trust [*tawakku*] and of sincerity [*ikhlas*]. The heart of the believer knows not "why?" and "how?" it does not know; it simply says: "yes indeed!". [*Al-Fath ar-Rabbani*, The First Discourse.] In another excerpt he says, "Three things are indispensable for a believer in all conditions of life: He should keep the commandments of God; he should abstain from the forbidden things; and he should be pleased with the decree of Providence. Thus the least that is expected of a believer is that he should not be without

these three things. So it is meant that he should make up his mind for this and talk to himself about this and keep his organs engaged in this." [*Futuh al-Ghaib*, The First Discourse.]

Now, there is a great deal of fatalism in the teachings of Islam, but it is not the kind of fatalism that the West attributes to Muslims and it is the reverse of laziness. "It is also a fashion to ascribe its [Islam's] decline to a certain defect said to be **inherent** in Islam: its fatalism." (Marmaduke Pickthall) To see why this charge of fatalism is so inexcusable [click here](#) (for the entire lecture by Marmaduke Pickthall regarding this.)

Well everyone, this is Islam and I am a Muslim

I would like to thank my spiritual advisor, Syed Mumtaz Ali, for his endless patience, guidance and help and for giving me this opportunity to express my views on this subject.

Appendix A

An excerpt from *Futuh al-Ghaib* (*The Revelations of the Unseen*) by Hazrat Shaikh Muhyuddin Abdul Qadir Gilani, r.a., published by Sh. Muhammad Ashraf, Lahore Pakistan

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And as for the trial of man - sometimes it comes as a punishment for any violation of law and, any sin which has been committed; at others it comes with the object of removing the defects and refining the nature of man, and at still others it comes to raise a man in spiritual rank and to take him to higher stages where he may join the people of spiritual knowledge who have experience of different states and positions, for whom the grace of the Lord of the creation and humanity has been allotted beforehand, who have been made to travel in the fields of calamities riding on the conveyance of tenderness and kindness and whom He has soothed by the breeze of kind observation and loving watch in their movements and repose,

because such a trial was not meant for destruction and for hurling them in the depths of hell; on the contrary, by means of these trials God has tested them for selection and choice and has brought out from them the reality of faith and has refined it and made it distinct from polytheism and boastings of self and hypocrisy and has made a free gift, as a reward for them, of various kinds of knowledge and secret, and light.

So when these people have become clean outwardly and inwardly and when their hearts have become purified, He has made them among the specially selected and the favourites of His court and companions of His mercy in this world and in the hereafter - in this world through their hearts and in the hereafter through their bodies. Thus the calamities are purifiers of the dirt of polytheism and breakers of connections with people and with the means of the world and with desires and wishes and are instrumental in melting the boastfulness and greediness and the expectation of returns for obedience to commandments in the shape of high positions and stations in paradise and gardens of heaven.

Now, the indication of trial by way of punishment is want of patience on the arrival of these trials and bewailing and complaints before people. And the indication of trial by way of purification and removal of weaknesses is the presence of graceful patience without any complaint and expression of grief before friends and neighbours and without any disgust with the performance of commandments and acts of obedience. And the indication of trial for the exaltation of rank is the presence of pleasure and amity and composure of mind and peacefulness with regard to the act of God, the Lord of the earth and heavens, and to completely lose oneself in this trial till the time of its removal in course of time.

Appendix B

An excerpt from *Futuh al-Ghaib* (*The Revelations of the Unseen*) by Hazrat Shaikh Muhyuddin Abdul Qadir Gilani, r.a., published by Sh. Muhammad Ashraf, Lahore Pakistan

Pages 127-128

So whoever desires safety in this world's life and in the hereafter, he should cultivate patience and cheerful submission and avoid complaining against people and obtain all his necessities from his Lord, the Mighty, the Glorious, and make it an obligation to obey Him and should wait for ease and be exclusively devoted to Him, the Mighty, the Glorious. He in any case is better than those besides Him in the whole of His creation.

More often than not, the deprivation caused by Him is a gift. His punishment a blessing. His calamity a remedy, His promise a cash. His credit is existing state, His word is a deed.

Undoubtedly, His word and His commandment, when He intends to do anything, is only saying to it "Be," and it comes into being. So all His actions are good and based on wisdom and expedience, excepting that He keeps the knowledge of His expedience hidden from His servants and He is alone in this. So it is better and proper for the servants to be in a state of cheerful submission and resignation and to be engaged in service to Him by carrying out His orders and observing His prohibitions and being resigned to His allotment and by discarding such occupations as pertain to the nourishment of the creation - because this privilege is the source of all allotments and the point of their coming into force and their basis; and to be silent on why, how, and when (of happenings) and to refrain from ascribing fault to God in all His actions and inaction.

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And know that the help of God comes through patience and comfortable circumstances with distress and that difficulty is accompanied by ease.

Pages 131-132

Know that people are of two kinds. One kind of people are those that are blessed with the good things of the world, whereas the other kind are tried with what their Lord has decreed for them. As for those who receive the good things, they are not free from the blemishes of sin and darkness in the enjoyment of what they are given. Such a person indulges in luxury on account of these things, when all of a sudden the decree of God comes, which darkens his surrounding through various kinds of

misfortunes and calamities in the shape of diseases and sufferings and troubles on his own life and property and on the members of his family and on his offspring so that life becomes miserable through them, and it appears as if he had never enjoyed anything. He forgets the comforts and their sweetness. And if the affluence continues together with wealth and position and male slaves and female slaves and security from enemies, he is in a state of blessing as if calamity has no existence for him. And if he is in the midst of calamity it seems as if happiness has no existence. And all this is due to ignorance of his Master.

Thus if he had known that his Master is absolutely free to do whatever He likes and changes and transforms and sweetens and embitters and enriches and impoverishes and raises and lowers and gives honour and abases and gives life and causes death and gives a man precedence and pushes him to the background - if he had known all this he could not have felt secure in the midst of happy worldly circumstances and could not have felt proud on account of them, nor would behave despaired of happiness while in a state of calamity.

This wrong behaviour of his is due also to his ignorance of this world, which is in reality the place of trials and bitterness and ignorance and pain and darkness, and of which the rule is trial and happiness only an exception. Thus the worldly life is like a tree of aloes of which the first taste is bitter whereas the ultimate consequence is sweet like honey and no man can get at its sweetness unless he has first swallowed its bitter taste and no one can reach the honey unless he has first showed patience with its bitterness. So whoever has shown patience on the trials of the world is entitled to taste its blessings.

Appendix C

The Road not Taken

by Robert Frost

Two roads diverged in a yellow wood,
And sorry I could not travel both
And be one traveller, long I stood

And looked down one as far as I could
To where it bent in the undergrowth;

Then took the other, as just as fair,
And having perhaps the better claim,
Because it was grassy and wanted wear;
Though as for that the passing there
Had worn them really about the same,

And both that morning equally lay
In leaves no step had trodden black.
Oh, I kept the first for another day!
Yet knowing how way leads on to way,
I doubted if I should ever come back.

I shall be telling this with a sigh
Somewhere ages and ages hence:
Two roads diverged in a wood, and I,
I took the one less travelled by,
And that has made all the difference.

Notes

From the book "*Al-Ghunya li-Talibi Tariq al-Haqq*" [Sufficient Provision for Seekers of the Path of Truth] by Abdul Qadir Gilani, r.a.