21631 - Benefits of Calamities

the question

I have seen on TV many of the calamities that have befallen the Muslim ummah (global community); in Palestine our wounds are bleeding; in Chechnya our bodies are cut; in Afghanistan our houses are destroyed; in the Philippines and in Kashmir… and now in Iraq.
Tomorrow only Allah knows who will meet this fate…
Are these calamities and these disasters that we see good or bad?

Detailed answer

Praise be to Allah.

Disasters and calamities have been created for a reason, which none can fully comprehend but Allah. Some of the things that Allah has shown to us indicate this.

1 – Disasters and calamities are a test of the believer’s patience. Allah says (interpretation of the meaning):

“Or think you that you will enter Paradise without such (trials) as came to those who passed away before you? They were afflicted with severe poverty and ailments and were so shaken that even the Messenger and those who believed along with him said, ‘When (will come) the Help of Allah?’ Yes! Certainly, the Help of Allah is near!”

[al-Baqarah 2:214]

2 – This is a sign of man's weakness and his need for his Lord, and shows that he cannot succeed unless he realizes his need for his Lord and starts beseeching Him.

3 – Calamities are a means of expiation of sin and raising one's status. The Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) said: “There is nothing that befalls a believer, not even a thorn that pricks him, but Allah will record one good deed for him and will remove one bad deed from

him.”

Narrated by Muslim.

It was narrated that Abu Hurayrah (may Allah be pleased with him) said: The Messenger of Allah (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) said: “Trials will continue to befall the believing man and woman, with regard to themselves, their children and their wealth, until they meet Allah with no sin on them.” Narrated by al-Tirmidhi, 2399; classed as saheeh (authentic) by al-Albani in al-Silsilah al-Saheehah, 2280.

And it was narrated that Jabir (may Allah be pleased with him) said: The Messenger of Allah (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) said: “On the Day of Resurrection, when people who had suffered affliction are given their reward, those who were healthy will wish their skins had been cut to pieces with scissors when they were in the world.” Narrated by al-Tirmidhi, 2402. See al-Silsilah al-Saheehah, no. 2206.

4 – One of the reasons for calamities is so that people will not feel content only with this world. If the world were free of calamities, man would love it more and feel content with it, and would forget about the Hereafter. But calamities wake him up from his negligence and make him strive for the place in which there are no calamities or trials.

5 – One of the greatest reasons behind calamities and trials is to warn against falling short in some matters, so that man can make up for the areas in which he has fallen short. This is like the warning that is issued to an employee or student who is falling short. The purpose behind it is to make him make up for his shortcomings. If he does that, then all well and good, otherwise he deserves to be punished. The evidence for that includes the verse (interpretation of the meaning):

“Verily, We sent (Messengers) to many nations before you (O Muhammad). And We seized them with extreme poverty (or loss in wealth) and loss in health (with calamities) so that they might humble themselves (believe with humility).

When Our Torment reached them, why then did they not humble themselves (believe with

humility)? But their hearts became hardened, and Shaytan (Satan) made fair-seeming to them that which they used to do."

[al-An'am 6:42]

Another reason for calamities is as a punishment for those who were previously warned, but did not benefit from the warning and mend their ways, and persisted in their sin. Allah says (interpretation of the meaning):

"…so We destroyed them for their sins …"

[al-Anfal 8:54]

And Allah says (interpretation of the meaning):

"And indeed, We destroyed generations before you when they did wrong, while their Messengers came to them with clear proofs, but they were not such as to believe! Thus do We requite the people who are Mujrimoon (criminals)."

[Yoonus 10:13]

"And when We decide to destroy a town (population), We (first) send a definite order (to obey Allah and be righteous) to those among them [or We (first) increase in number those of its population] who lead a life of luxury. Then, they transgress therein, and thus the word (of torment) is justified against it (them). Then We destroy it with complete destruction."

[al-Isra 17:16]

Ibn Taymiyah (may Allah have mercy on him) said: "Grief may be accompanied by that for which a person will be rewarded and praised, so it may be good in that sense, not that grief is good in and of itself, such as one who feels sad for falling short in religious matters or for calamities that befall the Muslims. In this case a person will be rewarded for what is in his heart of loving good and hating evil, and so on, but grief in itself, if it leads to failure to do that which is enjoined, namely patience, jihad (fighting for Allah's cause), seeking benefits and warding off harm, is forbidden, but

if the person does not give it up, and it is not recorded as a sin for him then he is fine."

So the one who wishes that Allah would change his situation without any effort on his part and that of others like him needs to understand this.

6 – Allah says (interpretation of the meaning):

"Verily, We sent (Messengers) to many nations before you (O Muhammad). And We seized them with extreme poverty (or loss in wealth) and loss in health (with calamities) so that they might humble themselves (believe with humility)."

[al-An'am 6:42]

Al-Sa'di (may Allah have mercy on him) said: (This means) We sent (Messengers) to the nations who came before you, and they disbelieved in Our Messengers and rejected Our signs. So We seized them with poverty, sickness, calamities and disasters as a mercy from Us to them, so that they might humble themselves before us and turn to Us at times of hardship.

And Allah says (interpretation of the meaning):

"Evil (sins and disobedience to Allah) has appeared on land and sea because of what the hands of men have earned (by oppression and evil deeds), that He (Allah) may make them taste a part of that which they have done, in order that they may return (by repenting to Allah, and begging His Pardon)."

[al-Room 30:41]

Al-Sa'di interprets the word fasad (translated here as "evil") as referring to the disasters that develop on land and sea, which are making people's lives difficult and causing a lot of problems with regard to their livelihood and well-being.

And the disasters that befall them themselves, such as diseases, plagues and the like, which happen because of the things their own hands have wrought of evil deeds that can only lead to bad consequences.

The phrase, “that He (Allah) may make them taste a part of that which they have done,” means, so that they might know that Allah is requiting them for their deeds, so He gives them a foretaste of the recompense of their deeds in this world, “in order that they may return (by repenting to Allah, and begging His Pardon)” i.e., repent from their deeds that have had this bad effect on them, and set their affairs straight.

Glory be to the One Who blesses by means of His punishment, for if He were to make them taste all that they have done, no living creature would be left alive on earth.

7 – Worship at times of hardship and tribulation has a special flavour and a special reward.

It was narrated from Ma’qil ibn Yasar that the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) said: “Worshipping at times of tribulation and confusion is like migrating to join me.” Narrated by Muslim, 2948.

Al-Nawawi said: “The Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) said, ‘Worshipping at times of tribulation and confusion is like migrating to join me.’ The reason why worship at such times is of such great virtue is that people become negligent about worship and are distracted from it, and no one focuses on worship except a few.”

Al-Qurtubi said: “Tribulation and great hardship will happen until the matter of religion is taken lightly and people will care about nothing but their worldly affairs and how to earn a living. So worship becomes very important at times of tribulation, as Muslim narrated from Ma’qil ibn Yasar in the marfoo’ report (one attributed to the Prophet): ‘Worshipping at times of tribulation and confusion is like migrating to join me.’”

8 – Blessings that come after pain, hardship and calamity are more precious to people.

So then they appreciate the blessings of good health and safety as they should be appreciated.

Another of the benefits of calamity is a reminder of how Allah has blessed man, because the man who is created with sight – for example – forgets the blessing of sight and does not really appreciate it, but if Allah tests him with temporary blindness, then restores to him his sight, he will

fully understand the value of this blessing. If things are always easy a person may forget this blessing and not be grateful for it, so Allah takes it away and then restores it, as a reminder to him to be grateful for it.

Calamity may remind the person to whom it happens and others of the blessings of Allah. So when a person sees one who is insane, he appreciates the blessing of sanity; when he sees one who is sick, he appreciates the blessing of sound health. When he sees a kafir who is living like cattle, he appreciates the blessing of faith. When he sees an ignorant man he appreciates the blessing of knowledge. Only the one whose heart is open will feel this. Those who have no heart do not give thanks for the blessings of Allah, rather they are arrogant towards the creation of Allah.

9 – The benefit of calamity is that it rescues man from negligence and alerts him to his shortcomings in keeping his duty to Allah, so that he does not think that he is perfect, which would lead to the hardening of his heart and negligence.

Allah says (interpretation of the meaning):

“When Our torment reached them, why then did they not humble themselves (believe with humility)? But their hearts became hardened, and Shaytan (Satan) made fair-seeming to them that which they used to do.”

[al-An’am 6:43]

10 – One of the benefits of tribulations and hardships is purification.

Hardships reveal how people really are, and distinguish the good from the bad, the true from the false, the believer from the hypocrite. Allah says of the Battle of Uhud and what happened to the Muslims on that day, explaining part of the wisdom behind this trial (interpretation of the meaning):

“Allah will not leave the believers in the state in which you are now, until He distinguishes the wicked from the good.”

[Aal ‘Imran 3:179]

So the true nature of all things is shown clearly.

11 – When Muslims help those Muslims who have been afflicted by calamity, they will be rewarded for that. The Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) said: “The likeness of the believers in their mutual love, mercy and compassion is that of the body; when one part of it suffers, the rest of the body joins it in staying awake and suffering fever.” Narrated by al-Bukhari, 6011; Muslim, 2586.

And he (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) said: “None of you truly believes until he loves for his brother what he loves for himself.” Narrated by al-Bukhari, 13; Muslim, 45.

12 – At times of hardship and war we see the true meaning of the words of Allah (interpretation of the meaning):

“Help you one another in Al-Birr and At-Taqwa (virtue, righteousness and piety).”

[al-Maidah 5:2]

Ways of cooperating in da’wah (propagation) and supporting Islam include: waging jihad against the kuffar (disbelievers) and hypocrites for the sake of Allah, joining with the people of Islamic da’wah in fighting the followers of kufr (disbelief) and misguidance, and preparing all means and tools for jihad for the sake of Allah.

One of the ways of cooperating in supporting Islam that was invented at the time of the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) is cooperating in killing those who claimed to be Prophets, killing the leaders of the mushrikeen (pagans) and the apostates, including those who insulted the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him).

And Allah knows best.