

WITH THE SHAYKH



On Adversity and Ordeals

Shaykh al-'Uthaymin¹

The question is a frequently asked one, and concerns the ruling of someone who is discontent when afflicted by a calamity. Below is the response of the Shaykh, may Allah have mercy upon him.

The Reply

People, in situations of adversity, are of four levels:

The First Level Being discontent, and this is of various types. Firstly, the heart being displeased with its Lord and feeling bitter at what Allah has decreed. This is forbidden, and could even lead to disbelief. Says Allah, Exalted is He: *Among people there are those who worship Allah as if on the borderline. If good comes to him, he feels content therein; but if an ordeal befalls him he turns away, losing both the world and the Afterlife.*² Secondly, the tongue's discontent, such as its invoking destruction, ruin, and the like. This is forbidden. Thirdly, discontent through bodily acts, like beating one's chest, tearing one's clothes or pulling out one's hair, and other acts [of grief] similar to them. All this is prohibited, for it flies in the face of the required patience.

The Second Level Patient perseverance, or *sabr*,³ which is, as the poet has described:

*Patience is just like its name, bitter to taste;
but its outcome is sweeter than honey.*

Here, the ordeal weighs heavy on a person, but he bears it patiently even though he finds it disdainful. His faith, however, saves him from being discontent. Facing an ordeal or not having to is not, though, equal in his eyes. Patience is obligatory, for Allah, Exalted is He, ordains it: *Be patient, for Allah is with those who show patience!*⁴

The Third Level Contentment (*rida*), in that a person accepts misfortunes so that their occurrence or absence are one and the same to him. They are not difficult for him and nor do they weigh heavy on him. This [state] is praiseworthy (*mustababb*); it is not obligatory - as per the soundest view. The distinction between this and the previous level is evident in that the presence or absence of adversity is one and the same to someone who is content. In the previous level, though, ordeals are tough, though he bears them with patience.

The Fourth Level Gratitude (*shukr*), which is the loftiest level. It is being grateful to Allah for the ordeal because he realises that this adversity is a cause for his sins to be expiated; it may even be a

reason for him to do more good deeds. The Prophet, peace be upon him, stated: “There is no affliction that befalls a Muslim except that Allah expiates a sin from him because of it; even if it be the pricking of a thorn.”⁵



FOOTNOTES

1. *Fatawa Arkan al-Islam* (Riyadh: Dar al-Thurayyah, 2001), 126-7; no.64.
2. Qur'an 22:11.
3. Other words that describe the notion of *sabr* include: fortitude, steadfastness and tenacity.
4. Qur'an 8:46.
5. Al-Bukhari, no.5640; Muslim, no.2572.