Teachings of Islam- Perseverance

Host: What is the English equivalent for the term *sabr* and its explanation?

Jamal Badawi:

Typically, people translate *sabr* as patience, which is an approximate meaning. Patience s is not a very good translation because it comes from the Latin origin which means suffering. Thus patience is understood in people's minds as a passive type of suffering. The term *sabr* comes from the verb *sabara* which means to tie or bind. In other words, it means to be tie down uncontrolled fears, weakness and human passion. There is no specific English word that expresses this meaning but some words that are close are perseverance, resolution, fortitude, self-discipline and control. This quality is not passive but more active determined and dynamic. The term *sabr* (perseverance) in Islam has so many applications that are not limited to perseverance in cases of calamity or disaster. It does include fighting for justice or freedom, demolition of human tyranny unlike the negative passive term, patience.

Host: What are some of the applications of perseverance in the life of a believer?

Jamal Badawi:

Perseverance relates to obedience in God, avoiding disobeying God and it relates to perseverance in the face of rejecters of truth. It may also refer to perseverance in terms of company, cases of calamity and even good fortune. The Quran describes *sabr* in relation to obedience of God and worship in (19:65) Lord of the heavens and of the earth, and of all that is between them; so worship Him, and be constant and patient in His worship.

Second, *sabr* is perseverance in terms of keeping away from things that displease God. For example in (113) it describes the believers as those who believe and do good deeds and exhort each other in truth and in perseverance. This is why Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) was quoted in Muslim to have said that Paradise is surrounded with things that are trying and difficult Hell Fire is surrounded with things that are more pleasing and glittery.

Third, in the Quran it addresses the Prophet and believers to persevere for God. In (76:24) Therefore be patient with constancy to the Command of thy Lord, and hearken not to the sinner or the ingrate among them.

Fourthly, perseverance refers to calamity and misfortune. This part is not to be ignored but is only part of the total meaning of *sabr.* For example in (31:17) in the Quran it says Bear with patient constancy whatever betide thee.

Fifthly, perseverance relates to keeping the company of those who are pious and staying away from the glitter of life. This is found in The Quran in (18:28) And keep thy soul content with those who call on their Lord morning and evening, seeking His Face; and let not thine eyes pass beyond them, seeking the pomp and glitter of this Life0

Finally, perseverance also applies in the case of happiness or good fortune. We find an example in Prophet Solomon as the Quran quotes in (27:40) ♦This is by the Grace of my Lord!- to test me whether I am grateful or ungrateful!0 In (11:10-11) ♦But if We give him a taste of (Our) favours after adversity hath touched him, he is sure to say, ♦AU evil has departed from me: Behold! he falls into exultation and pride.♦ Not so do those who show patience and constancy, and work righteousness; for them is forgiveness (of sins) and a great reward.♦♦ Perseverance has a much broader range than the passive, negative acceptance of fate.

Host:0 Why do people who are good face trials and have calamities and are not rewarded for being pious immediately?

Jamal Badawi:

This topic relates to the subject of measure. First of all, we as humans are not qualified to judge the ultimate wisdom of God. ♦Many things might sound paradoxical to us in this life as we forget that beyond our human judgment is a higher order and divine wisdom that we do not fully understand. On the other hand the Quran indicates to us that it is not only the wicked people who are touched with calamities and difficulties. An example is found in (29:2) ♦Do men think that they will be left alone on saying, ♦We believe, and that they will not be tested? In (3:142) ♦Did ye think that ye would enter Heaven without Allah testing those of you who fought hard (In His Cause) and remained steadfast? Trials verify our faith in God. The Prophet (PBUH) said that if God loves people he tests them. In another saying he said that a person might be tested in this life so that his punishment comes earlier (as punishment in this life is much easier to bear than that of the punishment in the hereafter). In another saying he said that people who are tested most in terms of their faith are the prophets and then those close to the prophets. We find that prophets are among those who suffer a great deal not because they are wicked.

It is, however, also possible that the calamities that befall the wicked are a sort of punishment. ♦ The Quran indicates that as humans we are tested in bounties as much as we are tested in trials.

Host: What is the view from a Muslim perspective of people who go to the extremes of patience by neglecting their human needs or even torturing themselves?

Jamal Badawi:

The fact that the believer regards calamities and difficulties as being tests from God it does not mean that one should seek them out. ❖ There is a difference between a person actively seeking out calamities and between persevering when and if a calamity takes place. In the Quran in (4:147) ♦What can Allah gain by your punishment, if ye are grateful and ye believe? Nay, it is Allah that recogniseth (all good), and knoweth all things. God does not enjoy punishing people as punishment is only for those who disobey. There is no intrinsic value in people punishing themselves.

On one occasion as narrated in Bukhari Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) was in the Pilgrimage and he saw a very old man who was very week and could barely walk with his two sons helping him. He asked ♦What is wrong with him? The replied ♦'This person made a promise that he would go to the Pilgrimage while walking (that going through the difficulty of walking he would get more reward).♦♦ Then Prophet (PBUH) then said that God has no need for this fellow to torture himself and ordered him to ride. On more than one occasion people would come to the Prophet and would say that a person is week and insists on walking for the Pilgrimage and he would command them to ride. In both Bukhari and Muslim Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) was reported as saying that even when you go for Jihad (struggle against those who want to destroy you) you should not be too eager to meet the enemy in the battle field and ask God for tranquility, peace and safety. If one has to face the enemy then practice perseverance. A person need not torture his body and actively seek calamities and difficulties to prove his faith.

Host: How is perseverance and resolution is related to other moral virtues that we talked about?

Jamal Badawi:

First of all, perseverance is described in the Quran as one of the characteristics of those who are pious and God conscious. For example in (12:90) He that is righteous and patient, never will Allah suffer the reward to be lost, of those who do right.

Second, it is related to forgiveness as found in (42:43) But indeed if any show patience and forgive, that would truly be an exercise of courageous will and resolution in the conduct of affairs.In a beautiful verse in the Quran (16:126) 0And if ye do catch them out, catch them out no worse than they catch you out: But if ye show patience, that is indeed the best (course) for those who are patient.It does not say an eye for an eye or a tooth for a tooth nor does it say to turn the other check in all situations it simply says that a person has the right to retaliate but if one controls themselves when they are able to take revenge then it is better for them.

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Third, the Quran describes perseverance as related to the attitude of being grateful to God as found in (14:5) Verily in this there are Signs for such as are firmly patient and constant,- grateful and appreciative.

Fourth, it is related to the attitude of trust, confidence and dependence on God.

Fifth, the Quran speaks of perseverance as related to *Jihad* which is a struggle in the path of God. The Quran praises the believers and describes them as those who strive in the path of God and show resolution and constancy. Also, in the Quran we find that perseverance is related to the quality of mercy and compassion. For example in (90:17) Then will he be of those who believe, and enjoin patience, (constancy, and selfrestraint), and enjoin deeds of kindness and compassion.

Host: What are the benefits and rewards of perseverance?

Jamal Badawi:

We find that perseverance or *sabr* is mentioned in the Quran as one of the main characteristics of Prophets. For example in (6:34) Rejected were the apostles before thee: with patience and constancy they bore their rejection and their wrongs.In addition to perseverance being used to describe the overall characteristic of believers it is a distinct characteristic of the greatest of all prophets, five prophets who showed more determination and constancy than any other.0 The five prophets are Noah, Abraham, Moses, Jesus and Muhammad (PBUT). In (46:35) it addresses the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) and says Therefore patiently persevere, as did (all) apostles of inflexible purpose; and be in no haste about the (Unbelievers). In (38:44) it talks about Prophet Job who was suffering a great deal God says Truly We found him full of patience and constancy. How excellent in Our service! ever did he turn (to Us)!

In addition to *sabr* being a characteristic of Prophets we find the Quran says that *sabr* is an over all characteristic found in believers. In the Quran in (33:35) it gives a number of descriptions of the believing men and women For Muslim men and women,- for believing men and women, for devout men and women, for true men and women, for *men and women who are patient and constant,* for men and women who humble themselves, for men and women who give in Charity, for men and women who fast (and deny themselves), for men and women who guard their chastity, and for men and women who engage much in Allahs praise,- for them has *Allah prepared forgiveness and great reward.*

In the Quran we also find that constancy is a prerequisite for spiritual leadership. Describing people before Islam who were given leadership in (32:24) it says And We appointed, from among them, leaders, giving guidance under Our command, so long as they persevered with patience and continued to have faith in Our Signs.

The Quran gives good tidings for those who persevere. People may occrue some reward in this life but in the here after the Quran says in (16:96) 0And We will certainly bestow, on those who patiently persevere, their reward according to the best of their actions. In (25:75) it says that Those are the ones who will be rewarded with the highest place in heaven, because of their patient constancy: therein shall they be met with salutations and peace. It also says they will be given double the reward.0 In (76:12) it says And because they were patient and constant, He will reward them with a Garden and (garments of) silk. In (13:23-24) it says Gardens of perpetual bliss: they shall enter there, as well as the righteous among their fathers, their spouses, and their offspring: and angels shall enter unto them from every gate (with the salutation): Peace unto you for that ye persevered in patience! Now how excellent is the final home!

The Prophetic Tradition is also in line with the verses quoted from the Quran. For example in Muslim the Prophet indicated that perseverance is light for the believer.0 In another saying in Abu Naim he says that patience and perseverance is half of the faith.

Host: How can one achieve this quality of *sabrl*

Jamal Badawi:

First of all, one should try to strengthen his faith and trust in God. We need to realize that God has wisdom and knowledge that we can not evaluate, that God is the owner and possessor of the entire universe and He gives us everything (children, spouses, property and our lives).Should God decide to take his property back we should have no objection.

Second, we should realize that anything that happens on this earth was decreed by God before the earth was created. So one should not fall into the argument of if I did such and such the result could have been such and such. There is one saying by Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) that tells us not to have this kind of attitude. In (57:22) No misfortune can happen on earth or in your souls but is recorded in a decree before We bring it into existence: That is truly easy for Allah.0 To remove our unnecessary anxieties and fears Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) said that if all mankind comes together to do something good for you they will not be able to do it unless God decreed it for you and if all mankind comes together to hurt you no one will be able to hurt you unless God has decreed it.

The third is that one should have perseverance and not to rush or demand quick solutions. An example is found in (94:6) Verily, with every difficulty there is relief.Fourth we need to realize that many of the difficulties we face in life can serve as atonement for our sins. The Prophet likened this to the tree that sheds its leaves. Finally, one should turn to God in times of difficulty, pray to Him and ask for His guidance and support.

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