

Shock: a blessing in disguise

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Introduction

It is disheartening to realise how the blessing that accompanies the shocks or problems in life passes unrecognised by man. An article in today's newspaper was entitled, "*Great heroes make great mistakes.*" It tells how in spite of being utterly shocked at the mistake committed by his hero, an admirer attempts to justify the act saying that great heroes make great mistakes. In this case, the admirer loosely indulged in wordplay to overlook the mistake committed by his hero. This, to my mind is a grave issue of modern times. The advancement of our age has inculcated within us a sense of pride or narcissism, which arouses the notion of being infallible. Such a feeling is no more than a glorified myth.

Getting a shock

People face great difficulties, which jolt them from within. We find various centres of 'de-stressing' that claim to eliminate tensions from the lives of individuals. In attempting to do so, they take away the perspective of viewing the stress (or tension) as a blessing in-disguise. Let me explain this through a Hadith (sayings of Prophet Muhammad),

"Prophets were afflicted with greater hardships."(Bukhari)

God was not against his messengers. If problem were an evil, He would never have inflicted it upon His messengers. Problem therefore, must have a positive role to play. To my understanding, hardships are in effect, God's way of bringing about intellectual development. In other words, **stress plays the role of an intellectual booster because intellectual development cannot be sustained in a luxurious environment.** Just as fish cannot thrive in a palace but requires sea-water, in the same manner a human being cannot develop his intellect in comfort. Stress therefore is a positive phenomenon, one that has been given a negative nomenclature - 'tension.'

The Iceberg Phenomenon

Water turns into ice at its freezing point. When water freezes, it expands by 9%. Due to this property of water, pipes in places like Kashmir burst in winters as water in them freezes and expands beyond the capacity of the pipe. On the other hand are icebergs, the huge masses of frozen ice, but nothing happens when water freezes to form an iceberg. Why? This is because formation of an iceberg takes place in open areas where water has all the available volume to expand; therefore it does not damage or break anything.

This made me understand an important facet of life. While **intellectual thinking had no limit, material thinking had a limited domain.** In most cases, man restricts his thinking to the realm of his family, assets or other objects

of desire. It is the **inability of man to think beyond this realm that arouses tension as there is restricted space for growth**. On the other hand, living in a world of ideas offers unlimited avenues and does not let tension grip an individual. Therefore, if our thinking is limited to the pipe – the material world - it will not find space beyond its volume and any further distension would burst it. Whereas if one lives in the world of ideas - like an iceberg – one can expand as much as one wishes and nothing will hinder one's growth.

Tension is negative

Universe has no trace of any kind of negativity. A scientist did a lot of probe to detect a single defect in the universe. He surmised that it is the very size of earth which is defective. This he said was so because being big, earth's gravitational pull was so large that big weights appeared heavy. If instead gravity of the earth was lesser compared to what it is, lifting heavy weights would have been easy. But this is an absurd argument. Had the gravitational pull of Earth been less than present, erection of no infrastructure would have been possible. It would have jeopardised the entire mechanics of motion. Quran states this fact in the following words:

“You will not find any flaw in the creation of the Gracious One.” (67:3)

When the entire universe is defect-free, it implies that tension or stress must also be positive - a blessing in disguise. I for instance, was always fond of reading and writing. My first article was a literary piece of work. Soon after, my father passed away. It was the first great shock in my life. Thereafter shocks and stress became a part of my life and jolted my being and my beliefs from time to time. I then began writing articles that were more objective – related to science and dawah work. I therefore can conclusively say that unpleasant situations in life must be welcomed. In words of Caliph Umar,

“May God bless him who tells me about my inefficiencies.”

Wisdom and knowledge

Modesty is the door of knowledge whereas narcissism leads to self-destruction. Unless one reduces oneself to level zero, no learning can be made possible. For example, if a glass is full, anything else poured into it is bound to spill over. One therefore, must become an empty glass. Similarly a mind full of preoccupied notions, allows no development to take place. I for instance, always consider myself to be an 'empty mind' because only an empty container can hold what comes its way.

According to the Quran, God always sends inspiration (*faizan*) to man. It is important to clarify here that revelation and inspiration are different phenomena. Revelation was sent to Prophets and ended with Prophet Muhammad. Inspiration however, is all around man and can be received any time, only if he is receptive to it. Receptivity is determined by the emptiness of the container (mind). If your container is full, the inspiration will

come but you will not be able to get it. An anecdote from the life of Buddha succinctly captures the essence of this concept. A milkman was a disciple of Gautam Buddha. He invited Buddha to his house and asked him to carry a container along so that he can give him fresh milk in exchange of Buddha's wisdom. Gautam Buddha purposely poured some mud in the container. Noticing the dirt, the milkman first cleansed it and then filled it with milk. Buddha picked it up and started walking away. Startled, the milkman asked why was he leaving without imparting any wisdom. Buddha replied, "I have given you wisdom." He then explained that just as he cleansed the container, the milkman must first clean his mind of negative thoughts, only then will he become receptive to wisdom.

Managing the hardships

Life must always be viewed from a positive angle. So should the stress. Nowadays, it is claimed that all illnesses originate from tension or stress. This is not the right approach. We must understand that tension is a self-inflicted phenomenon. God had given stress to man as a blessing in disguise but he instead took it in a negative sense and used it to ruin his being.

However, it is not elimination of the hardship but management of it, which is crucial. I am always on the lookout for positive aspect in every situation. For example, I once met an accident and my hand got caught in a high-voltage junction box. The shock affected my hand so severely that I could no longer lift a pen. Spending my days at the hospital, I began reading a lot about skin grafting. I learnt that skin grafting was a process where a portion of a person's skin is surgically removed and placed on the damaged portion. This skin however must be taken from the body of the person affected; if someone else's skin is placed then it will be rejected by the body. This was a perfect example of how **self will not accept non-self**. I extended it to understand that **God will accept only those individuals who possess God-like attributes**. He will not accept men who would not match His tastes and likes. This was a great lesson.

Price of learning

Like for everything, a price must also be paid for learning lessons and receiving inspiration from God. **This price is modesty**. It entails completely freeing oneself of bias and not harbouring hatred for anybody. Along with this, it is also important to view stress as a positive development in life, one that would leave us enriched.

Here I would like to raise a concern. Man stands at the threshold of a very dangerous situation. He will face this situation after death when his development will be put to a halt. In other words, **there will be no development after death**. Everything will come to a standstill. However much a person could develop himself while in this world, will be it. **That is, when resurrected, man will be raised at the level of intellect which he died with.**

Contrary to this impending fact, man's nature seeks development all the time. It is this hope which keeps him alive and gives him the strength to carry out his work. **The grave risk is that while each passing day is bringing us closer to our death, we are still not doing anything to develop ourselves.**

Final Word

Imaan is an ever-growing dimension. There is no limit to one's development because the world of thought is unlimited. Bounties in paradise will be received according to the level of intellect of man. The greater the intellectual level, the greater would be the proximity to God. This world therefore, is not for achievement but to develop one's taste so that the luxuries of paradise can be relished.

Death is a sudden phenomenon. Despite providing all other details of man's existence, the knowledge of how death strikes still eludes his understanding. And stark as the fact is, man cannot change a thing after his death.

Lastly, I would say that there is nothing mysterious about hell and paradise. One, who lived in the present world, such that he never felt the company of angels, was never thrilled with the works of God and whose aspirations and desires were not framed as per the will of God, will be raised blind in the hereafter. This is hell. **In other words, one who will forget to prepare himself will find himself in hell and one is prepared will find himself in paradise.**

May God guide us!