

## Suffering – Our Response and How to Help

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How Should We Respond To Suffering

We're told to rejoice – a mental discipline that can be very difficult to achieve.

When calamity striketh, be ye patient and composed. However afflictive your sufferings may be, stay ye undisturbed, and with perfect confidence in the abounding grace of God, brave ye the tempest of tribulations and fiery ordeals. (Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, p. 74)

Grieve not at the divine trials. Be not troubled because of hardships and ordeals; turn unto God, bowing in humbleness and praying to Him, while bearing every ordeal, contented under all conditions and thankful in every difficulty. Verily thy Lord loveth His maidservants who are patient, believing and firm. He draws them nigh unto Him through these ordeals and trials. (Tablets of 'Abdu'l-Bahá v1, p. 51)

We need to cling to this thought in tough times:

If, however, for a few days, in compliance with God's all-encompassing wisdom, outward affairs should run their course contrary to one's cherished desire, this is of no consequence and should not matter. Our intent is that all the friends should fix their gaze on the Supreme Horizon, and cling to that which hath been revealed in the Tablets. (Bahá'u'lláh, The Compilation of Compilations, vol.1, p. 171)

We're told to:

Remember My days during thy days, and My distress and banishment in this remote prison. (Bahá'u'lláh, Tablet of Ahmad, Bahá'í Prayers, p. 210)

Bahá'u'lláh was:

Wrongly accused, imprisoned, beaten, chained, banished from country to country, betrayed, poisoned, stripped of material possessions, and "at every moment tormented with a fresh torment" ... For two score years, until the end of His earthly days, He remained a prisoner and exile ... [experiencing such grief] no ordinary mortal could endure. But lest we give way to feelings of gloom and distress, we take recourse in the tranquil calm He induces with such meaningful words as these: "We have borne it all with the utmost willingness and resignation, so that the souls

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of men may be edified, and the Word of God be exalted. (The Universal House of Justice, A Wider Horizon, Selected Letters 1983-1992, pp. 239-240)

And while we're remembering His days, we can join with Him in His suffering, and trust these words:

Now ye, as well, must certainly become my partners to some slight degree, and accept your share of tests and sorrows. But these episodes shall pass away, while that abiding glory and eternal life shall remain unchanged forever. Moreover, these afflictions shall be the cause of great advancement. (Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, pp. 238-239)

He's given us a prayer to use (The Tablet of Ahmad), in which He promises:

Should one who is in affliction or grief read this Tablet with absolute sincerity, God will dispel his sadness, solve his difficulties and remove his afflictions. (Bahá'u'lláh, Tablet of Ahmad, Bahá'í Prayers, p. 211)

And in the meantime, we can finish with a prayer:

I ask God to grant thee by His favor and grace that which is thy utmost desire; that the closed doors become opened, the uneven roads become even, thy face shine by the love of God, thy sight become brighter by witnessing the signs of God; that thou mayest attain spiritual joy, eternal happiness and heavenly life. (Tablets of 'Abdu'l-Bahá v1, pp. 129-130)

How Can We Help Someone Who is Suffering

The Oneness of Humanity teaches us that when one part suffers, the whole part suffers.

It establishes such a unity in the bodily organism that if any part is subjected to injury or becomes diseased, all the other parts and functions sympathetically respond and suffer, owing to the perfect oneness existing.

('Abdu'l-Bahá, The Promulgation of Universal Peace #104.3, p. 321)

We can turn to each other in times of suffering:

... the human body, all the members of which are connected and linked with one another with the greatest strength. How much the organs, the members and the parts of the body of man are intermingled and connected for mutual aid and help, and how much they influence one another! ('Abdu'l-Bahá, Some Answered Questions, p. 245)

It doesn't mean that we (as Bahá'ís) have to stand by and watch helplessly. We can take some comfort in knowing that there are things we can do:

Our duty as Bahá'ís is to build up such a love and unity within our own ranks that the people will be attracted by this example to the Cause. We also must teach all we can and strengthen the Bahá'í Community in the administration. But more we cannot do to avert the great sufferings which seemingly still lie ahead of the world in its present evil state. (Shoghi Effendi, Lights of Guidance, p. 116, #396)

There is a power in drawing on each other's love when we are suffering:

Indeed the believers have not yet fully learned to draw on each other's love for strength and consolation in time of need. The Cause of God is endowed with tremendous powers, and the reason the believers do not gain more from it is because they have not learned to fully draw on these mighty forces of love and strength and harmony generated by the Faith. (Shoghi Effendi, Lights of Guidance, p. 93, #321)

One of the purposes of a study circle is to build a depth of relationships where we can carry each other's burdens.

A distinguishing feature of study circles is that ... they have created a new dynamic within the community and have become nuclei of community life and ... bind the group together in fellowship. (International Teaching Centre, Turning Point: Selected Messages of the Universal House of Justice 1996-2006, p. 354, #51.49)

So we have an obligation to help one another, and one way we can do it is through home visits and visiting the sick:

We should all visit the sick. When they are in sorrow and suffering, it is a real help and benefit to have a friend come. Happiness is a great healer to those who are ill. In the East it is the custom to call upon the patient often and meet him individually. The people in the East show the utmost kindness and compassion to the sick and suffering. This has greater effect than the remedy itself. You must always have this thought of love and affection when you visit the ailing and afflicted. ('Abdu'l-Bahá, Promulgation of Universal Peace, p. 204, #72.1)

In the midst of our suffering, when people don't know how to help, they might say things we think are trite, to help us through:

That seeker must at all times put his trust in God ... (Bahá'u'lláh, The Kitáb-i-Íqán, p. 193)

All men are in God's hands ... (Shoghi Effendi, Lights of Guidance, p. 237, #791)

...prayers and supplications should be offered ... ('Abdul-Bahá, Divine Art of Living, p. 87)

Be not troubled because of hardships and ordeals ... (Tablets of 'Abdu'l-Bahá v1, p. 50)

Even when we think these don't bring comfort in our darkest moments, the words of God have a power to heal:

Now, if thou wishest to know the divine remedy which will heal man from all sickness and will give him the health of the divine kingdom, know that it is the precepts and teachings of God. ('Abdu'l-Bahá, Bahá'í World Faith, p. 376)

... the people of religions find, in the teachings of Bahá'u'lláh, ... the immediate cure of the incurable disease, which relieves every pain, and bestows the infallible antidote for every deadly poison. (Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, p. 305)

By understanding someone's pain, we don't need to say trite things; we can just "be" with them.