

Calamities and Misfortunes

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“In the Name of Allah, Most Gracious, Most Merciful”

Introduction

Life’s trials, whether the loss of a loved one, the burden of illness, financial hardship, war, job loss, divorce, or homelessness—can be profoundly difficult to endure. Such calamities often lead to emotional turmoil, including depression, anxiety, and even a crisis of faith. In moments of despair, we frequently hear anguished questions:

“Why did this happen to me? I’ve lived a good life.”

“Why does a corrupt ruler thrive while continuing his oppression?”

“How can a government commit ethnic cleansing, yet divine justice seems absent?”

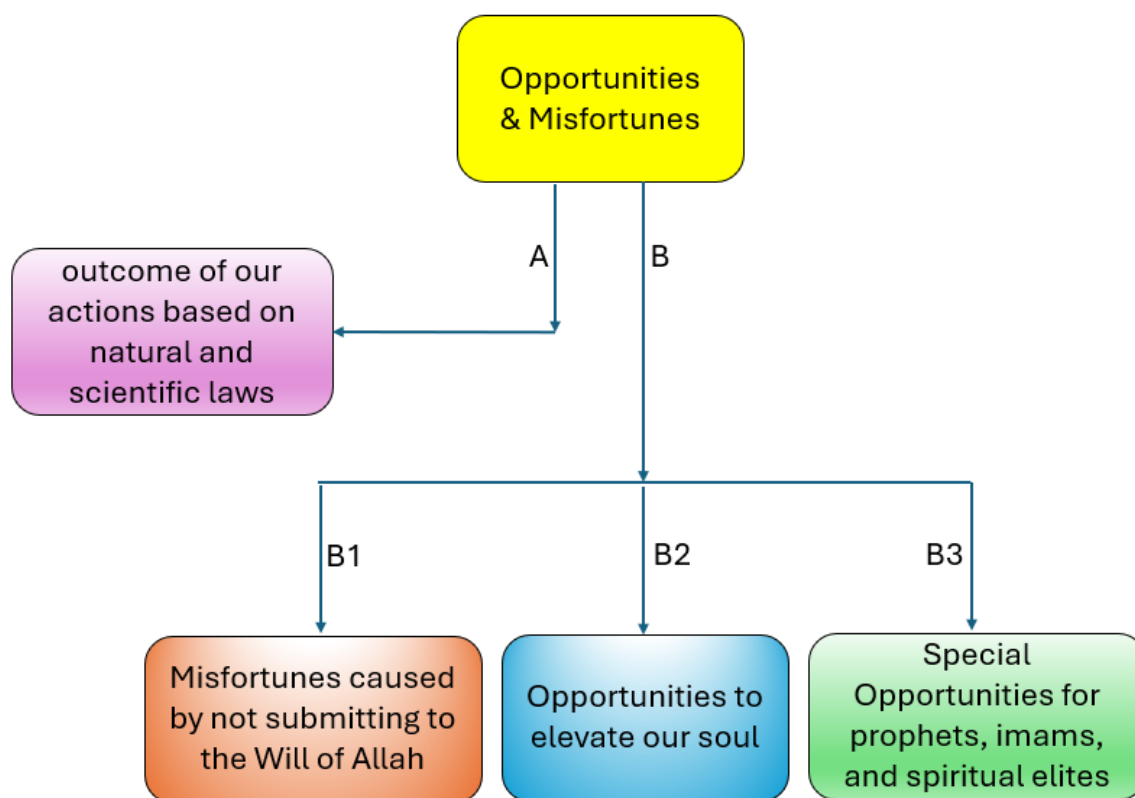
These questions strike at the heart of human suffering and divine justice. What is God’s role in all of this? How do these seemingly disjointed events fit into a larger, meaningful design? Is it destiny, free will, or a combination of them?

This article is based on a speech by Dr. Muhammad Ansari but it is not an exact translation.



The Holy Qur'an addresses these profound concerns across many chapters, offering insight into the nature of trials and divine wisdom. Yet one of the most illuminating explanations comes from Imam Ali ibn Abi Talib (AS) in Sermon 178, delivered over 1,400 years ago. Imam Ali—purified by Allah (SWT) as affirmed in verse 33:33, honored by the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) as the “Gate of Knowledge”, and the one who embodied the Qur'an in both understanding and action—offers a timeless perspective.

According to the Holy Qur'an, misfortunes fall into two primary categories. Imam Ali (AS) elaborates on these with clarity and spiritual depth, guiding us toward a more profound understanding of divine justice, human responsibility, and the path to inner resilience.



Category A

This category encompasses misfortunes that arise directly from our own actions and the natural consequences of our choices. According to the divine laws of nature and science established by God, if I place my hand into a blazing fire, it will burn. This outcome is not a punishment from God, and it is NOT my destiny, but a direct result of my decision. To claim that God *willed* this suffering would be a fundamental misunderstanding of divine justice and human agency.

God has endowed us with intellect and the ability to discern right from wrong. The question is, do we heed His Guidance? Some mistakenly believe that every event is predetermined by divine decree, and thus, even self-inflicted harm was “written” by God. This interpretation conflates Divine Knowledge with Divine Causation.

Let us consider a portion of Verse 57:22 below: *“It is in a Book before We bring it into being”*. This refers not to personal destiny, but to the universal laws and principles God has inscribed into creation. In the case of fire, God has endowed it with inherent properties—heat, light, and the capacity to burn. These characteristics are part of the manifest design of the universe, recorded in the divine registry of creation.

This verse speaks to the scientific and natural order established by Allah (SWT), not to the predestination of individual choices. The distinction between divine knowledge and human free will is addressed in other verses of the Holy Qur’an and deserves its own dedicated exploration in another article.

مَا أَصَابَ مِنْ مُصِيبَةٍ فِي الْأَرْضِ وَلَا فِي أَنْفُسِكُمْ إِلَّا فِي كِتَابٍ مِّن قَبْلُ أَن نَّبْرِأَهَا إِنَّ ذَلِكَ عَلَى اللَّهِ يَسِيرٌ

No disaster strikes upon the earth or among yourselves except that it is in a Book before We make it happen - indeed that is easy for Allah 57:22

Category B

This category consists of divinely directed misfortunes and opportunities. It is divided into the following 3 sub-categories (B1, B2, and B3).

Category B1

In Sermon 178, Imam Ali (AS) profoundly states:

“A nation that enjoys prosperity and blessings will not be deprived of them unless it brings about its own downfall through sin and wrongdoing.”

Notably, Imam Ali (AS) uses the term *“to injure”*—a powerful metaphor that underscores the self-inflicted nature of moral failure. He emphasizes that transgressing the commands of Allah (SWT) harms the individual and society, both materially and spiritually. These injuries are the natural consequences of abandoning Divine Guidance.

Imam Ali (AS) explains that Allah (SWT) is never an oppressor; He does not alter anyone’s condition arbitrarily or without just cause. Imam Ali (AS) also clarifies that when people humble themselves, shed their arrogance, and sincerely seek Allah’s forgiveness with purity of heart and piety, divine mercy responds. Their lost blessings can be restored, and their wounds—both seen and unseen—can be healed.

ذَلِكَ بِأَنَّ اللَّهَ لَمْ يَكُ مُغَيِّرًا نُّعْمَةً أَنْعَمَهَا عَلَى قَوْمٍ حَتَّى يُغَيِّرُوا مَا بِأَنْفُسِهِمْ وَأَنَّ اللَّهَ سَمِيعٌ عَلِيمٌ

That is because Allah would not change a favor which He had bestowed upon a people until they change what is within themselves. And indeed, Allah is Hearing and Knowing. 8:53

Let us now reflect on the following verse, which offers profound insight into the nature of human responsibility and divine mercy. The phrase *“it is what your hands have earned”* unmistakably refers to the full spectrum of human behavior—our speech, actions, thoughts, what we choose to see and hear, and the intentions that shape our conduct. It is a comprehensive expression of personal accountability.

The verse concludes with the reassuring words: *“He pardons much.”* This clearly indicates that the subject is human wrongdoing, and that Allah (SWT), in His infinite mercy, forgives many of

these transgressions. The verse does not imply predestination or negate human agency; rather, it affirms that while we are responsible for our choices, Divine Forgiveness remains accessible.

Thus, this verse harmonizes perfectly with verse 57:22, which speaks of divine knowledge and the unfolding of events within God's Will. There is no contradiction, only a deeper understanding of how human free will operates within the framework of Divine Wisdom and Mercy.

وَمَا أَصَابَكُمْ مِّنْ مُّصِيبَةٍ فَبِمَا كَسَبَتْ أَيْدِيكُمْ وَيَعْفُوا عَنْ كَثِيرٍ

*And whatever strikes you of disaster - it is for what your hands have earned;
and God overlooks many of your sins. 42:30*

One of the immutable Divine laws revealed in the Holy Qur'an is that every action, whether good or bad, carries a consequence. Nothing escapes the Divine record; even a deed or thought as minute as an atom is accounted for (99:7-8).

When Allah (SWT) bestows a blessing, whether grand or subtle, we are given the freedom to choose our response. We may honor it by using it wisely, in alignment with Divine Guidance and purpose. Alternatively, we may squander it, misuse it, or employ it in ways that contradict religious principles. There is also a subtler form of ingratitude: using a blessing appropriately in worldly terms yet failing to acknowledge its source due to arrogance or ignorance.

Gratitude for God's mercy is not a one-time act, it is a lifelong discipline, a spiritual training that cultivates piety and refines the soul. Many blessings are visible and known to us, but countless others remain hidden. How many misfortunes, accidents, and illnesses has Allah (SWT) shielded us from without our awareness? We may recall a few, but the vast majority are veiled from us.

True thankfulness encompasses both the seen and unseen blessings—past, present, and future—as beautifully articulated by Imam Ali ibn al-Hussain (AS) in Supplication #1 of *Sahifa Sajjadiyya*. To neglect gratitude for our fortunes, successes, and Divine favors is not merely a lapse in manners—it carries spiritual consequences and distances us from the mercy that sustains us.

Example 1 – When a family is blessed with abundant food yet habitually discards what they don't need, it reflects a deeper spiritual and ethical concern. The Holy Qur'an and teachings of the Ahlul Bayt (AS) emphasize that **blessings are not merely for consumption—they are entrusted to us as a test of gratitude, responsibility, and compassion**. Throwing away food is not just wasteful—it is a form of ingratitude (*kufr al-ni'mah*). Allah (SWT) says:

“Eat and drink, but do not waste. Indeed, He does not love the wasteful.” (7:31)

This verse highlights that even permissible acts like eating and drinking must be governed by moderation and mindfulness. Wastefulness severs the spiritual connection between the blessing and the Giver. Moreover, Imam Ali (AS) reminds us that every blessing carries a responsibility. When excess food is discarded while others go hungry, it reflects a failure to honor that trust.

Example 2 – God has blessed a person with financial prosperity, but his greed prevents him from helping the poor, even though God has commanded him to do so.

Example 3 – A family is blessed with healthy children, wealth, a nice home, and more, but they neglect to show gratitude to God, thinking it is all the result of their own efforts.

Example 4 – A person is blessed with wealth, excellent health, and a good job, but his life is not fully aligned with religion. He selectively follows religious responsibilities based on personal opinion rather than submitting to the Will of God.

Example 5 – A person mistreats his spouse and children. He cheats in business, lacks honesty, and shows no concern for the well-being of others. He is selfish, has not learned to love, and is driven by greed and arrogance.

Example 6 – A society may neglect its responsibilities toward the poor, promote injustice and racism, or advocate practices that contradict religious principles.

Example 7 – Some corrupt individuals or ruling parties may oppress others under the guise of religion.

Any worldly and spiritual blessing that God grants us, if we use it within the proper framework of religion, it will increase. The framework of religion consists of using the blessing properly and according to the religion guidelines (appropriate time/place/amount...), not wasting it, appreciating it, and most importantly, being aware that it comes from Allah (SWT) so we must be thankful to Him. Don't be arrogant claiming that it is all your own achievement or luck. It is true that you may have studied and worked hard to achieve this success, but you should also consider the following. It is impossible for you to count the known and unknown barriers along the way that He removed for you so you can get to this point. How much inspirations have you received from Him without realizing it? He is the ultimate source of your knowledge!

Respite or postponement

A person may persist in wrongdoing—whether against himself or others—yet divine misfortune does not immediately befall him. This, too, is governed by a Divine law: at times, Allah (SWT) grants *respite*. The delay in consequence is not a sign of approval, but a test in itself.

The first example of such respite was granted to Iblīs (Satan) after his defiance in the events surrounding Prophet Adam (AS). He was given time (7:15)—a deferment that serves as a precedent for understanding this Divine principle.

During this period of respite, several questions arise:

- Will the sinner awaken to his transgression and seek repentance?
- Or will he persist, deepening his injustice and compounding his sins?
- How will this delay affect those who suffer under this oppression? Will it shake their faith or strengthen their resolve?

Thus, the concept of *respite* is not merely a delay in justice, it is itself a multifaceted trial. It tests the oppressor's conscience, the patience and faith of the oppressed, and the moral clarity of those who witness the unfolding events. In this way, Divine wisdom encompasses all parties, and the unseen workings of justice continue even when they are not immediately visible.

Category B2

This type of misfortune may outwardly appear painful or undesirable, yet it is, in truth, a concealed gift—bestowed in the form of a Divine trial. Imam Ali (AS) described such tribulations as *gifts from Allah (SWT)*. But how can hardship be a gift?

Consider the process of purifying gold: to remove its impurities, it must be subjected to intense heat—up to 1064°C—through rigorous refining methods. From the perspective of the gold, this process may seem torturous. Yet it is only through this ordeal that its true brilliance and purity are revealed.

Similarly, these Divine trials—referred to in the Qur'an as *imtiḥān* (امتحان) and *iftinān* (افتتان)—are designed to refine the soul, to expose its hidden virtues, and to elevate its rank. They are not punishments, but opportunities for spiritual growth and inner illumination.

To pass such tests, one must respond with righteous action, unwavering faith in Allah (SWT) and His Justice, and steadfast patience. These trials call for constancy in religious obligations, sincerity in supplication, and a heart anchored in *tawḥīd*—the belief that help comes from Allah (SWT) alone, as affirmed in the verse: *“You alone we worship, and You alone we ask for help”* (1:5).

These trials, though veiled in hardship, are Divine invitations—to ascend, to purify, and to draw nearer to the Source of all mercy.

وَأَعْلَمُوا أَنَّمَا أَمْوَالُكُمْ وَأَوْلَادُكُمْ فِتْنَةٌ وَأَنَّ اللَّهَ عِنْدَهُ أَجْرٌ عَظِيمٌ

And know that your possessions and your children are but a trial and that Allah has with Him a great reward. 8:28

The above verse clearly affirms that we are tested through our possessions and our families. These trials are not limited to hardship alone; they may come in the form of fortune, happiness, success, good health, or conversely, through sadness, loss, illness, and adversity. Both extremes are tests, each revealing different dimensions of the soul.

- Will great success in business cultivate humility and generosity, or breed arrogance and greed?
- Will the birth of a healthy child deepen your sense of responsibility and gratitude, or will you dismiss it as mere luck?

Even in seemingly mundane moments, the test may unfold. Imagine walking peacefully down a sidewalk, only to fall and suffer broken bones. During the long months of recovery, how will your soul respond?

- Will your faith strengthen or falter?
- Will you become bitter, impatient, and unjust toward your family?
- Will you feel anger and resentment, questioning the fairness of your suffering?

These are not just physical trials—they are spiritual crucibles. *Misfortunes, when faced with faith, patience, and introspection, can become catalysts for profound transformation.* They offer the chance to ascend in piety, to polish the soul, and to draw nearer to Allah (SWT).

Rather than viewing such experiences as punishments or burdens, let us reframe them as Divine opportunities—gifts in disguise, designed to awaken, refine, and elevate us

Category B3

The final category of divinely directed misfortunes belongs to a select group of individuals—those who have attained the highest levels of piety (*taqwā*) and spiritual proximity

to Allah (SWT). This includes the holy prophets, the purified imams, and the most righteous among humanity. For these exalted souls, trials are not burdens, they are welcomed as sacred opportunities. They perceive misfortunes not as punishments, but as Divine gifts that allow them to ascend further in spiritual rank and deepen their knowledge of the Divine.

Consider the luminous examples from sacred history:

- When the tyrant ruler sought to cast Prophet Abraham (PBUH) into a blazing fire, he responded with unwavering faith, declaring *“Allah is sufficient for me”*—and the fire was rendered cool and safe by Divine command.
- When Allah (SWT) commanded the sacrifice of Prophet Ismail (PBUH), both father and son submitted without hesitation, embodying perfect surrender to the Divine will.

And when he reached with him [the age of] exertion, he said, "O my son, indeed I have seen in a dream that I [must] sacrifice you, so see what you think." He said, "O my father, do as you are commanded. You will find me, if Allah wills, of the steadfast. 37:102

- On the night of Hijrah, when Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) was instructed to leave his home and asked Imam Ali (AS) to sleep in his place—fully aware of the mortal danger—Imam Ali (AS) placed his forehead on the ground in gratitude, thanking Allah (SWT) for granting him the honor of such a trial.
- When Imam Hussain (AS) stood before the army of tyranny, facing certain death, he proclaimed: *“I am content and I submit to Your Will, O Allah.”* His martyrdom became a timeless beacon of truth, sacrifice, and Divine love.

These sacred lives reveal a profound truth: the closer one draws to Allah (SWT), the more refined and elevated the trials become. Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) himself affirmed that among all prophets, he endured the most continuous and difficult tribulations—yet his patience, kindness, and unwavering devotion remained unmatched.

Studying these lives teaches us that Divine trials, when embraced with faith and sincerity, are pathways to spiritual greatness. They are not obstacles—they are ascensions.