

The Good Times & The Bad Times

Standing here with all of you today, I wanted to talk about the concepts of windfall and loss, and how although we've traditionally associated windfall with blessing and loss with test, they are both, at the end of the day, simply two sides of the same coin. The "good times" and the "bad times" are really the same state of opportunity – in that moment, we are receiving love from God, even if we don't interpret the situation to be *to our advantage* in this life.

I want to share two poems in this vein. The first poem is pretty popular, and I doubt that anyone here hasn't heard it before, but it's one of my favorites, so I'm going to subject you all to it yet again. It's called:

"Footprints"

One night I dreamed I was walking
Along the beach with the Lord.

Many scenes from my life flashed across the sky.
In each scene I noticed footprints in the sand.

Sometimes there were two sets of footprints.
Other times there were one set of footprints.

This bothered me because I noticed that
During the low periods of my life when I was

Suffering from anguish, sorrow, or defeat,
I could see only one set of footprints,

So I said to the Lord, "You promised me,
Lord, that if I followed You,
You would walk with me always.

But I noticed that during the most trying periods
Of my life there have only been

One set of prints in the sand.

Why, When I have needed You most,
You have not been there for me?"

The Lord replied,
"The times when you have seen only one set of footprints
Is when I carried you."

We know from the Quran that we will be tested with adversity. However, though we are tested with hardship, God is in control of everything, and he would not overburden us:

[7:42] As for those who believe and lead a righteous life - we never burden any soul beyond its means - these will be the dwellers of Paradise . They abide in it forever.

[4:28] GOD wishes to lighten your burden, for the human being is created weak.

So, we're not tested beyond our means, but at the same time adversity is no walk in the park. Hardship and adversity can lead a believer to shed so many tears his eyes turn white (12:84). So what's the point?

Without hardship, we would never realize just how awesome He is, and how insignificant we are. Can you imagine if we were to have everything we wanted, as flawed as we are, without some overt sign that we weren't in control? As it is, our egos run wild, but if everything we wanted was at our beckon call without ever once having tasted failure or disappointment, we wouldn't be able to get through doors anymore, our heads would be so big! He **wants** us to ask Him for help. We could not survive on this earth without God sending the rain, driving the winds or granting the provisions. Loss and hardship allow us to understand that and give us the precious opportunity to humble ourselves before God.

We're weak. God knows that we are not capable of handling all of His tests alone but -that, ultimately- is the point. To fully understand our limitations, and be humbled by them, is to understand how adversity is a blessing, and how by turning to God and imploring Him for help, we can be carried in His arms, knowing that He is the one running everything.

[40:60] Your Lord says, "*implore Me*, and I will respond to you."

[14:34] And He gives you all kinds of things *that you implore Him for*. If you count GOD's blessings, you can never encompass them. Indeed, the human being is transgressing, unappreciative.

[6:42] The fact is: only Him you implore, and He answers your prayer, if He so wills, and you forget your idols.

With that understanding, and with God on our side, suddenly adversity becomes a blessing, and failure and disappointment teach us valuable lessons we spend the rest of our lives thanking God for.

For example, how many of you have been in situations where you started to think: "I can't survive this; I don't know how I'm going to move beyond this?" And of those situations, how many would you change if you had it to do again? My guess is none – because after it's all been said and done, the sum of our experiences – including the "negative" ones – is what makes us who we are. And to take that a step *further*, it is what makes us where we are right now, commemorating God, praising Him, making sacrifices for Him. For many of us, it's quite likely that without those hardships, we may not be sitting here today, thinking of Him.

Now, for the second poem:

I have in my hands two boxes
Which God gave me to hold
He said, "Put all your sorrows in the black,
And all your joys in the gold."

I heeded his words, and in the two boxes
Both my joys and sorrows I store
But though the gold became heavier each day
The black was as light as before.

With curiosity, I opened the black
I wanted to find out why

And I saw, in the base of the box, a hole
Which my sorrows had fallen out by.

I showed the hole to God, and mused aloud,
"I wonder where my sorrows could be."
He smiled a gentle smile at me.
"My child, they're all here with me."

I asked, "God, why give me the boxes,
"Why the gold, and the black with the hole?"
"My child, the gold is for you to count your blessings,
the black is for you to let go."

The Quran mentions in many places that we must be appreciative of the blessings bestowed upon us, but 27:40 offers a very important warning as well:

[27:40] The one who possessed knowledge from the book said, "I can bring it((Sheba 's mansion)) to you in the blink of your eye." When he saw it settled in front of him, he said, "This is a blessing from my Lord, whereby He tests me, to show whether I am appreciative or unappreciative. Whoever is appreciative is appreciative for his own good, and if one turns unappreciative, then my Lord is in no need for him, Most Honorable."

The point, here being that adversity is not the only test! Sometimes, He tests us with the good times:

[2:152] You shall remember Me, that I may remember you, and be thankful to Me; do not be unappreciative.

[16:121] Because he was appreciative of His Lord's blessings, He chose him and guided him in a straight path.

Sometimes, the "test" part of a windfall is obvious:

[3:152] GOD has fulfilled His promise to you, and you defeated them by His leave. But then you wavered, disputed among yourselves, and disobeyed after He had shown you (the victory) you had longed for. But then, some of you became distracted by the spoils of this world, while others were rightly concerned with the Hereafter. He then diverted you from them to test you. He has pardoned you. GOD showers the believers with His grace.

God had granted victory to this army, but upon receiving the blessing, they were distracted by the "spoils of this world" – the blessing in itself became the idol.

At other times, we are quick to turn away when times are good, especially after hardship, but even during the course of our daily lives, we tend to think that the good things we are given are simply deserved, and therein lies a test:

[6:165] *He is the One who made you inheritors of the earth, and He raised some of you above others in rank, in order to test you in accordance with what He has given you. Surely, your Lord is efficient in enforcing retribution, and He is Forgiver, Most Merciful.*

[8:28] You should know that your money and your children are a test, and that GOD possesses a great recompense.

Lastly, I want to briefly remind us all that none of this – the hardships, none of the windfalls, the cars, the houses, the jobs – is real. This world is an illusion, and illusions don't discriminate: Good time, bad time, none of it means anything. The meaning in life – the *only* meaning in life is to worship God alone:

[20:131] And do not covet what we bestowed upon any other people. Such are temporary ornaments of this life, whereby we put them to the test. What your Lord provides for you is far better, and everlasting.

[6:32] The life of this world is *no more than illusion and vanity*, while the abode of the Hereafter is far better for the righteous. Do you not understand?!

[51:56] I did not create the jinns and the humans *except to worship Me alone.*

The point of all of this is to offer a perspective on both “adversity” and “windfall” as simply two sides of the same coin. Both present opportunities to grow closer to God and both run the risk of inflaming the ego. How we respond to them (frustration, despair, joy, elation) is entirely up to us. Every new situation is essentially the same choice being presented to us over and over again: How do I want to use this moment? Do I want to step towards God, or away from him? It’s truly a simple question of perspective:

[10:64] For them, joy and happiness in this world, as well as in the Hereafter. This is **GOD's** unchangeable law. Such is the greatest triumph.

[92:7] We will direct him towards happiness.