

Building Resilience

Defining Resilience

Resilience is an individual's ability to properly adapt to stress and adversity. It is the ability to regain original form and to thrive and fulfill potential in spite of difficult circumstances. To be resilient means to remain stable and function in the face of disruption and chaos.

Resilience means not just tolerating and enduring. It means to accept and come to terms with things. It also means to recharge yourself so you can be as much of your normal self as possible through an adversity.

Everybody has resilience. It's just a question of how much and how well you learn to use it. Resilience doesn't mean you don't feel the intensity of the event or problem. Instead, it just means that you've found a pretty good way of dealing with it more quickly than others.

Faith and Resilience

Adversity is a time of test for faith. It is a test that everyone has to go through. Allah says; *Do the people suppose that they will be let off because they say, 'We have faith,' and they will not be tested? Certainly We tested those who were before them. So Allah shall surely ascertain those who are truthful, and He shall surely ascertain the liars. (29:2-3)*

The tests to distinguish the true believers from the rest.

We will surely test you with a measure of fear and hunger and a loss of wealth, lives, and fruits; and give good news to the patient —those who, when an affliction visits them, say, 'Indeed we belong to Allah and to Him do we indeed return.' It is they who receive the blessings of their Lord and [His] mercy, and it is they who are the rightly guided. (2:155-157)

Those who have faith and trust in Allah are able to face the difficulty without collapsing. The following verse gives the example of the one who only has faith when life is smooth and comfortable;

And among the people are those who worship Allah on the edge: if good fortune befalls him, he is content with it; but if an ordeal visits him he makes a turnabout, he loses this world as well as the hereafter; that is a manifest loss. (22:11)

Reactions to Adversity

People react differently to difficulties in life. Common reactions are:

- 1) Anger and resentment.
- 2) Negative emotions including sadness, numbness, lack of interest in anything.
- 3) Being upset only about the change that has disrupted life presently.

The last approach is a response rather than a reaction. It fosters wellbeing faster than the other two responses which include the risk of sliding downhill.

Signs of Resilience

- 1) Not losing inner peace at the onset of adversity. There may be a setback but it is followed by a rebound.
- 2) Turning to Allah with increased dhikr and supplications.
- 3) Trust in Allah's plan for you.
- 4) Being grateful for the other things in life.
- 5) Continuing with normal activities of life as much as possible.
- 6) Being confident and hopeful.

All this does not mean that we will not suffer emotional ups and downs. We are not emotionless beings. We have the potential to accomplish great things but are also susceptible to pain, sadness, and anger. These are not forms of weaknesses, but challenges that can be overcome. See the story of Lady Maryam in the Quran (19:23-26)

The sadness and pain felt can be a drive to turn towards Allah and complain to Him of your grief, as Prophet Yaqub (a) did. It becomes a catalyst for a closer relationship with Allah, for seeking healing through the Quran, and for reflection and personal growth. Many people become transformed through adversity. Understanding that helps a person look at adversity from a different perspective.

Becoming Resilient

It is possible to increase the skill of resilience. The following tips are important to keep in mind to build resilience;

- 1) Look after yourself physically. A good diet, sleep, exercise . . . all play a role in how a person reacts to adversity.
- 2) Nourish social and community support. Turn to people who can help in different ways.
- 3) Meet challenges as they occur and avoid living in the past or future.
- 4) Get involved in activities that you enjoy and which bring you satisfaction.
- 5) Find new ways of connecting with God. Strengthening your relationship with Him will ease the inner turmoil created by adversity.

Building better resilience takes time and effort. It will not come overnight. A focused commitment will enable a person to meet adversity with resilience and pass the test that Allah has ordained for all.