

Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyyah

Patience and Gratitude

*An abridged translation of
'Uddat as-sabirin wa dhakhirat ash-shakirin*

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Translator's Introduction

We live in an era of overwhelming Western influence where two major ideas are upheld and promoted. One of these is the expectation of instant gratification, whereby few people are prepared to wait, or work hard, or suffer temporary hardship, to get results. People see a world of wealth and power, depicted on TV and in the movies, and they want it, now. Immediate satisfaction is expected in this world, so how much harder must it be for such people to think in terms of preparing themselves for the Hereafter!

The other major idea promoted by Western influences is the cult of the superman. Here, too, TV and movies must take much of the blame for filling people's minds with the notion that the stronger and wealthier you are, the freer you are to do what you like, regardless of the consequences. The idea of the "survival of the fittest" is used to justify destroying the weak. In their quest for independence and superiority, the godless are turning this world into a living hell where competition and conflict prevail. Crime is on the increase, as religion and morality are no longer deterrent forces, and a sense of fear and insecurity is spreading in its wake. Mental illness and psychological disorders are a further symptom of the malaise caused by negative Western influences.

The Islamic way is in sharp contrast to the current trends of the West. Our Creator knows best the make-up of the human psyche, and the guidance of the Qur'an and Sunnah is in perfect harmony with human nature. Not for nothing is Islam known as *din al-fitrāh* (the life-transaction of the natural state of man). Muslim scholars and scientists developed an extensive and deep knowledge of human behaviour and psychology, which was firmly rooted in the guidance of the Qur'an and Sunnah. Centuries ago, scholars developed Islamic concepts by which any person

who is seeking strength of willpower, and perfection may be guided. Instead of struggling alone, for no other reason than self-gratification, Islam channels us into seeking perfection for the sake of Allah, and teaches us to seek His help in doing so. Thus we have important Islamic ideals such as: *'ubudiyyah* (being a true slave of Allah), which puts a person in touch with the highest Power in this universe, the Power of Allah; *tawakkul* (putting one's trust in Allah), concerning which the Prophet ﷺ advised, "Whoever wishes to be the strongest among men, let him put his complete trust in Allah"; and *sabr* (patience, forbearance, fortitude), which enables a man to face hardship with dignity and to accept times of ease without becoming arrogant.

Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyyah (1292-1350 CE) was one of these scholars. His full name was Muhammad ibn Abi Bakr ibn Ayyub ibn Sa'd az-Zar'i and his *kunya* was Abu Abdullah Shams al-Din, but he is better known as Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyyah. Born in Damascus, Syria, he was the son of the attendant (*qayyim*) of the school of al-Jawziyyah. He lived during a period of great turmoil in the Muslim world, which was still reeling from the Mongol onslaughts. At the same time, his was an era of remarkable scholarship. He studied under the great scholar, Ibn Taymiyyah, and was also a contemporary of Ibn Kathir and others.

The present text is an abridged translation of Ibn al-Qayyim's famous work, *'Uddat as-Sabirin wa Dhakhirat ash-Shakirin* (literally, *The Equipment of the Patient and the Investment of the Grateful*). This work deals with the closely-related topics of patience and gratitude. Although often translated as "patience", the Arabic word *sabr* has a broader and deeper meaning than the English. Depending on the context, it may mean fortitude, patience, equanimity, forbearance, patient endurance, etc. *Shukr* may be translated as "gratitude" or "thankfulness". As is shown in the book, patience and gratitude are two sides of the same coin, closely-related attitudes which the Muslim should seek to foster in every aspect of his or her life.

This kind of practical spiritual advice is something that today's Muslims so desperately need. Far from being a set of empty rituals and nit-picking legal technicalities, or a set of words to be repeated or chanted *ad nauseam*, Islam is a holistic way of life; if it is applied only partially, imbalance will result. A most important aspect of Islam, which must always accompany the formal "rituals" and the recitation of *du'as* and *dhikr*, is constant remembrance of Allah and constant contact with the Divine. Developing a truly Islamic attitude of patience will enable us to achieve this.

Although his works were written over six centuries ago, Ibn al-Qayyim has much to offer the modern reader. Caught as we are between the tempting influences of the West and the hidebound superstitions of some of our own Muslim communities, Ibn al-Qayyim's level-headed and above all practical advice will point us back towards a purer Islamic way, insha'Allah.

It is my firm belief that Islam has the answer to many of the psychological problems that trouble mankind today, such as anxiety, depression, lack of confidence, addictions, etc. In direct contrast to the Western focus on the "self", Islam tells us to look beyond ourselves and focus on Allah. By doing so, we will move towards fulfilling the purpose for which we were created, and thus attain peace with our Creator and within ourselves. This book will, insha'Allah, bring the spiritual and psychological benefits of our Islamic heritage to Muslims who do not have access to the works of scholars in the original Arabic.

Nasiruddin al-Khattab
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The Definition of Patience

Sabr is an Arabic word which comes from a root meaning to detain, refrain and stop. There is an expression in Arabic, “so-and-so was killed *sabran*”, which means that he was captured and detained until he died. In the spiritual sense, patience means to stop ourselves from despairing and panicking, to stop our tongues from complaining, and to stop our hands from striking our faces and tearing our clothes at times of grief and stress.

What scholars have said about patience

Some scholars have defined patience as a good human characteristic or a positive psychological attitude, by virtue of which we refrain from doing that which is not good. Human beings cannot live a proper, healthy life without patience.

Abu ‘Uthman said, “The one who has patience is the one who has trained himself to handle difficulties.” Amr ibn ‘Uthman al-Makki said, “Patience means to keep close to Allah and to accept calmly the trials He sends, without complaining or feeling sad.” Al-Khawwas said, “Patience means to adhere to the rules of the Qur’an and Sunnah.” Another scholar said, “Patience means to refrain from complaining.” ‘Ali ibn Abi Talib عليه السلام said, “Patience means to seek Allah’s help.”

Is it better to have patience at a time of difficulty, or to be in a situation which does not require patience?

Abu Muhammad al-Hariri said, “Patience means not seeing any difference between times of ease and times of hardship, and being content at all times.” I (Ibn Qayyim) say this is too difficult, and we are not instructed to be like this. Allah has created us in such a way that we feel the difference between times of ease and times of hardship, and

all that we can do is refrain from panicking at times of stress. Patience does not mean feeling the same at both easy and difficult times. That is beyond us, and is not part of our nature. Having an easy time is better for us than having a difficult time. As the Prophet ﷺ said in his well-known *du'a*, “If You are not angry with me, then I do not care what happens to me, but still I would rather have Your blessings and favour.” This does not contradict the hadith which says, “No-one has ever been given a better gift than patience”, because that refers to a time after a test or trial has befallen a person. But ease is still better.

Patience and Shakwah (complaint)

Shakwah (complaint) falls into two categories: The first type means to complain to Allah, and this does not contradict patience. It is demonstrated by several of the Prophets, for example, when Ya'qub ﷺ said:

“I only complain of my distraction and anguish to Allah.”
(Yusuf 12:86)

Earlier, Ya'qub ﷺ had said “*sabrun Jamil*”, which means “patience is most fitting for me”. The Qur'an also tells us about Ayyub ﷺ:

“And (remember) Ayyub (Job), when he cried to his Lord, ‘Truly distress has seized me...’” (al-Anbiya 21:83)

The epitome of patience, the Prophet ﷺ, prayed to his Lord, “O Allah, I complain to You of my weakness and helplessness.” Musa ﷺ prayed to Allah, saying, “O Allah, all praise is due to You, and complaint is made only to You, and You are the only One from Whom we seek help and in Whom we put our trust, and there is no power except by Your help.” The second type of complaint involves complaining to people, either directly, through our words, or indirectly, through the way we look and behave. This is contradictory to patience.