

# ARTICLE

## Coping with problems

Who does not have problems?

Problems are a part of life. If it were not for distance and separation, people would never know the joy of meeting and reunion. If it were not for poverty, people would not know wealth. And if it were not for sorrow, people would not know joy.

In this manner, Allah has permitted the world to be a place of passage, where pleasure is accompanied by pain and laughter by tears, a world where the degree and severity of suffering is commensurate to the degree of happiness a person feels when that suffering goes away.

Every home has its problems, as does every office, corporation, and country. Every soul is afflicted with its own inner problems. When a person knows that his own self does not comply with what he wants from it and does not fulfill his expectations, and that it often shames him and disappoints him unbearably, then what can he possibly expect from others?

What can he hope to expect from the difficulties that arise from social interactions, whether they occur within a family setting, or among neighbors, or between colleagues and business partners, or with those who he meets on the road?

In spite of all this, the goodness, companionship, and human welfare that social interactions bring about can never be attained by a person who lives in isolation. The evils brought about by seclusion are far greater than the discomfort that comes from dealing with others.

How many people have tried to solve their problems by cutting off their dealings with others and going into seclusion? They seek to treat their ailments with something that is a sickness itself. They wind up longing to return to the very circumstances that they had so much detested before.

A woman feels that she can not stand to live with her husband's behavior any more and sees divorce as the only solution. Then when she gets what she wants, she feels like she is going to die of loneliness and starts to think of a way to undo what she had done.

An employee feels he can not bear his job any longer so he quits his job. After a while, though, he starts looking for people to intercede on his behalf as he repeatedly tries to get his job back.

This is why it is not sensible to hastily resort to severing ties, thinking that this is going to get to the root of the problem and make it just go away. This course of action can possibly cause much more suffering than before.

Specialists in problem management have set down the following practical steps for dealing with one's problems. These steps can be summarized as follows:

1. Perceiving and recognizing the problem.
2. Defining the problem correctly.
3. Research, examination, and fact finding, with a focus on pinpointing causes.
4. Setting down alternatives and options, then evaluating them and weighing their pros and cons.
5. Determining the option that will provide the best solution to the problem.

These steps can only be put into practice by a person who can approach his problems with a calm, level head. Reactions that are spontaneous and overemotional only serve to cloud a person's judgment, making it seem that the only solution is to completely divorce oneself from the source of the problem and with everything that in any way relates to it.

The problem could actually come from the deep within a person's character or personal history and cannot be simply shrugged off. It could also come from unavoidable circumstances outside of that person's control.

Often we besiege ourselves with problems and difficulties. This is not to say that those problems are not real. They definitely are. But we often have many good ways of getting around them. We do not have to dwell on them. We need to seek the help of Allah and cling hard to the firm handhold that He provides, repeating the words: *"You alone we worship and You alone we beseech for help."* [surah al-Fatihah]

One of the supplications that the Prophets of old used to make goes as follows:

*"O Allah! Yours is the praise. You are the one whose help we seek. You are the one on whom we rely. Yours is the aid that we seek. There is no might and no strength except with Allah, the High and Mighty."*

We can look at our problems as they really are and strive to get rid of them or at least minimize them, without letting them suffocate us or hold us back. Our problems must not make us stop working and living productive lives. We can also defer some problems that we cannot solve at the present time and wait for Allah, in whose hands rest all affairs, to relieve us of them

It is related from Ibn Mas'ud that Allah's Messenger (salAllahu alayhi wasalam) said: *"The best form of worship is to wait for relief."* (1)

At the same time, there can be no doubt that expecting relief from Allah is a form of worship, since it is part of being patient. This brings to our attention an important yet often overlooked fact - that many problems can be solved, but not by jumping ahead of things. They must be approached one step at a time. Haste can lead to making our problems more deeply entrenched than they were before. Sometimes the best solution is to postpone action and be patient until the right opportunity comes along for a solution to be sought.

Patience, then, is necessary in all cases. Therefore, we have been encouraged - actually commanded - to be patient. The word patience, in all of its morphological forms, comes in the Qur'an about 103 times. Without patience to beautify our deeds, our efforts come to nothing. This is what Umar (radiAllahu anhu) meant when he said: "We found the best of our lives in patience." [Sahih al-Bukhari #6104]

We can solve some problems with Allah's help, and we can minimize others. As for those problems for which we cannot find a solution, we can do our best to accommodate them. If a person were to take a small square, no bigger than the palm of his hand, and place it right in front of his eye, that small square would completely block his vision. The same thing can be said of problems when we make them larger than they actually are and give over to them a good share of our lives, thoughts, and feelings so they become a serious impediment to our moving forward and living productively. The classical Arabian poet Mutanabbih writes:

*The eye of a small person makes small things look large  
And the eye of a great person makes great calamities look small.  
And  
When a man grows accustomed to dwelling in the fear of death  
Its arrival becomes the easiest possible event.*

Without the least doubt, a person is going to face difficulties from his family, sometimes because they are worried about him, and sometimes because they are angry with him for violating their norms and customs, and sometimes because they love him, as love can bring about its own stresses. He is going to face difficulties from society, from his school or university, from his job, and from the people he chooses to interact with.

Moreover, he is going to have to deal with difficulties emanating from within himself. Within him will be tendencies pulling him to do good and others pulling him to do evil. It will be as if his own inner condition is saying to him: "Why is it that I call you to salvation, yet you call me to the Fire?"

At the same time, this person, by way of supplication, devotion in prayer, and humility, will find Allah's help and support, and Allah will bless him the strength of will that he needs. He will also find help and support from his believing brethren who follow the same path.

Even when a problem springs from the inner depths of our being, we still must not let it bring us down. We must start afresh, take an assessment of our injuries, and bring our scattered wishes together. Then we must keep our eyes on the future instead of always looking back.

Is not Allah the one who is Oft Forgiving and accepts our repentance? Are not we human beings all prone to error? Our hearts can be cleansed with the knowledge that Allah is forgiving and by keeping hope before us. We must leave our vanities and base passions aside so they will not kill our souls. A believer takes refuge in his Lord and keeps the company of people who will help him overcome the obstacles along the way and help him to strengthen his resolve and his commitment. If he pulls himself up every time he stumbles, he will surely arrive.