

Title? ... You decide!

Life Is Seasonal:

Our life is like the four seasons, one succeeding another; cold, hot, colorful and dark. Everything is in constant motion; day and night, health and sickness, youth and old age, tranquility and tension, wealth and poverty, life and death. Nothing is to last forever and at different levels we all experience these successive stages of life. All of these are part of destiny- what has already been ordained. The challenge is how we behave once faced with our destiny! The key of success in this case is faith; if we have faith it will lead us to always be content, thankful, and show gratitude to the Creator, the owner of destiny. The happy time will never be forever, the sad time will never be forever. We will always be fluctuating between give and take; the state of receiving a blessing and the state of losing it. Regardless of what state you are in, the life will continue. And just the like that, the journey of *Iman* must continue. We will have obstacles in our journey of *Iman* just like in any other journey, but if the eyes are on the prize, there is nothing you cannot overcome.

What about family, spouse, job demands, social and educational obligations becoming a hindrance? This life will continue with the things we desire or do not desire; with the things we like and dislike. A believer knows that Allah SWT does not take from him, except to give him. This giving might be in the form of a blessing in this life, or in the form of good deeds in the next. The real point of concern is how to leave this life with a legacy and a sign that will benefit you and benefit others. The focus should be on how to please your Lord so that your Lord will please you and allow you to attain your purpose in life and leave a mark in this world. These thoughts can take a lifetime to internalize!

Regardless of us all experiencing these seasonal changes in our lives, we behave with an attitude of permanency towards this world. We have all heard this numerous times that so and so is dead; irrespective of the educational level, the distinguished titles of doctor or engineer, and the amount of wealth one has successfully accumulated, death is an inevitable reality. It will be you and me tomorrow, it is a just a matter of time. And at this point, what will matter most is how we spent our lives and what we did with the blessings that Allah SWT had given us. How many of us, when making decisions about our lives question ourselves as to whether this decision will lead me to heaven or hell? How many of us plan our actions according to the kind of legacy we want to leave behind in this world? How many of us are vigilant about our

behavior, well aware of the fact that everything in this world will either bear witness to us or against us? How many of us are ‘men’ (or women) as Allah describes in the following ayah:

مِّنَ الْمُؤْمِنِينَ رِجَالٌ صَدَقُوا مَا عَاهَدُوا اللَّهَ عَلَيْهِ فَمِنْهُمْ مَّنْ قَضَىٰ نَحْبَهُ
وَمِنْهُمْ مَّنْ يَنْتَظِرُ وَمَا بَدَّلُوا تَبْدِيلًا ﴿٢٣﴾

Among the Believers are men who have been true to their covenant with Allah. Of them some have completed their vow (to the extreme), and some (still) wait: but they have never changed (their determination) in the least. (33:23)

All of these attainments are dependent on *Niyyah*—intention, purpose and will. *Niyyah* is located in the heart and a scholar has divided it into two components: knowledge and action. Knowledge is the knowledge of things you want to do or do not want to do; the purpose and goal of what you want to do; and why you want to do or not do it. According to your knowledge, what your action means to you, how much you believe in it and its purpose, and what you are going to achieve from it for yourself and others will generate the *niyyah*—whether it is to carry out an action or avoid it. By this way, the *niyyah* itself stands on three pillars:

- * knowledge,
- * will/desire to do, and
- * the ability to do it.

The more you know about something the more convinced you become about your view of it; and the more you believe in it, the more it will generate a will within. This is what pushes you and gives you the strength to carry out the actions!

And all this is the PILLAR or pre-requisite of *niyyah*, meaning *niyyah* is after all this! What is the purpose of knowing all of the above? A *mo'min* (believer) weighs all his actions according to the teachings and pleasure of Allah and His prophet SAW; he will always question his intentions asking before each action—why yes, and why no; what am I going to gain from this act in this life and the hereafter; and how does it help me leave the kind of legacy I want to leave behind in this world. This is called sincerity. The purity of intention where you do

everything just to please Allah SWT without waiting for any acknowledgment from others, but waiting for the reward and pleasure of Allah and the benefit of Muslims and all mankind.



Grind It Out!

Olives are pressed, squeezed and grinded between rocks in order to get pure olive oil, the best of the olive. The same is done to the fruits in order to extract their best, the juice. Flowers are grinded in order to extort the essence and perfume, the very best of flowers. Misk, one of the most expensive perfumes, is skillfully derived from the blood of gazelles. Nature seems to have a system where the very best of anything is after putting it through the worst torture. Then what about you and me? Allah SWT sometimes puts us through very tough situations, situations that we don't like and that cause a lot of pressure and squeeze. Why? The same law of nature: Allah SWT wants the best of us.

What makes one person different from another is how they rise above these difficulties and make the best out of them. It is the *iman* (faith) of the person and ability to show gratitude under hardships that raises him in the sight of Allah. And it is his total and utter desperation to Allah SWT, his complete reliance and trust only in Him SWT that earns him the victory and ease out of these difficulties. This is what distinguishes the believer from a non-believer, a victorious person from a defeated one. It is not easy but when a person knows that Allah SWT is the only one in control of everything, that He is the owner of destiny and holds the keys to all closed doors; then one surrenders and submits to Allah, is patient, and hopes for the reward in this life and the hereafter.

Reward and blessings from Allah can be in various forms; Allah can reward a person in this life by decorating him with the quality beloved to Him SWT such as patience, gratitude, and contentment. And He SWT rewards a person in the hereafter by forgiving his sins and granting him paradise, the eternal land of pleasure. Once this knowledge is firmly inculcated in the heart, you will fall in love with Allah SWT and with everything that happens in your life. Both the sweetest and the toughest time will be beloved to your heart because you know they are ordained by Allah SWT. You will be content because you know that Allah SWT loves you and is purifying you to bring the best out of you; and when you discover that, you will be melted in the love of Allah.



Ignorance is Misery:

The ignorant person is an enemy of his own self. A wise man once said that there are two whom neither knowledge nor wisdom can benefit, an ignorant person and a dead person.

Luqman Al-Hakeem said: the ignorant sees himself as always being on the straight path and being right, and that is why he cannot change himself. The signs of an ignorant person are six:

1. He gets angry easily without any reasoning.
2. He talks without any purpose or benefit.
3. He gives to those who do not deserve it.
4. He is blind to the point he is unable to differentiate his enemy from his friend.
5. He betrays the trust and secrets of others.
6. He trusts everyone, even the fools.

The example of us is like that of an artist. The artist gets a canvas and fills it with colors according to his own feelings and beliefs. When he is done, it is his own work! You and I, we are born with an empty canvas and when we die, we will leave behind our canvases which we have painted during our life with our actions, manners and character—either good or bad. Ask yourself as to what kind of painting you are planning to leave behind? What colors do you plan to use? Are we painting a colorful painting full of faith, generosity, kindness, goodness, compassion, mercy? Or we are leaving an ugly painting with unattractive colors full of injustice, stinginess, bad manner, oppression, and ignorance?



Ramadan—The Month of Allah:

Ramadan is the month of Allah, the month of Quran, the month of fasting, of Rahma, of forgiveness, of 'Afw (pardon), the month of *laylatul qadr*, the month of purification from hellfire. This is the month that can change your destiny in this life and the hereafter. In this month the

provision increases. This is the month of self reflection when the *shayateen* are chained; this is the time to train yourself to be an ‘*abd* and to elevate yourself from the animalistic behavior to human and angelic behavior. Allah SWT has set this month aside for His slaves to reflect over their bad habits and innate weaknesses and convert them to good habits beloved to Allah SWT. Ramadan is the month of developing awareness and vigilance of the heart and actions; this is the month to learn about the status of your piety. This is the month of showing gratitude to Allah, the month to gain *rushd* (status to gain guidance mixed with wisdom, vision). This is the time to behave with the qualities beloved to Allah such as generosity, humbleness and humility, exercising forgiveness and pardon towards others, taking care about people’s needs and to be nice and compassionate to them, to love goodness for others. All in all, it is the time to show the best of you to Allah SWT. For the believers, this month is like the intensive care unit, the rehab center, the tune up month, their bank-*Ilahi* account, their business investment—both for *dunya* and *akhirah*.

May Allah SWT accept us to be among those who will be accepted as the fasting Muslims and not those who will not gain anything from their fasting except hunger and thirst. This is the month we can elevate ourselves and decorate ourselves with the qualities, attitude, character and manners beloved to Allah and His Prophet SAW. This is the month when we should make *du’a* for the whole ummah, for mankind, for ourselves to be the cause of spreading the message and mercy of Islam to mankind. May Allah accept us among those who will be the keys of goodness, the lock of evil, and give us the blessing in everything we say and we do. May Allah SWT bless us with a good ending with His pleasure. *Ameen, Ameen Ya Rabbal ‘Alameen*.

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