

## Being positive in challenging times

Last week we looked at why challenging times happen, in the light of the Qur'an and Sunnah. Today let us look at the way forward. To begin we must always have hope. We must never lose hope because it is the hope of sunrise that keeps the traveler going, in the dark, cold, night on a lonely road, haunted with shadows in which evil lurks. He draws strength from his past and plans for the future and that is what we must do.

But even before we go there, I remind myself and you that we must never lose sight of the fact that this life is a journey. A journey towards our destination which is Jannah. We must remember what Allah ﷺ told us:

كُلُّ نَفْسٍ ذَائِقَةٌ لِّمَوْتٍ وَإِمَانًا تَوَفَّ  
 وَنَجَّ أَجْوَرَكُمْ يَوْمَ الْقِيَامَةِ  
 فَمَنْزَحَ عَنِ النَّمَارِيْخِ وَأَدْخَلَ  
 أَلْمَنَّمَةَ فَقَدْ فَازَ وَمَا أَلْيَ وَهُنَّ  
 دُنْ يَأْمُلُ مَتَعْ

الْغَرَوْرُ

*A'al Imraan 3: 185 Everyone shall taste death. And only on the Day of Resurrection shall you be paid your wages in full. And whoever is removed away*

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*from the Fire and admitted to Jannah, he indeed is successful. The life of this world is only the enjoyment of deception (a deceiving thing).*

Winners are decided only at the end of the race. And often the one who wins is not the one who was fastest at the start, but the one who stayed in the race until the end. Consistency and perseverance are critical. Talent is overrated. Sustained, thoughtful effort will beat talent every single time. Life is the greatest blessing of Allah. And in that life, the greatest blessing is Imaan, to recognize Allah and to worship Him because we love Him. I put life before Imaan because if we live, we can turn to Allah and have all our sins forgiven. It is important to keep this truth in perspective, that the door of Istighfaar and Tawba remains open until our end. It is also important to remember that this ending can come at any time. So, while being happy that the door of Tawba and repentance is open, we must not become complacent about it because it can shut at any time.

In a race, experienced racers focus on themselves to ensure that they are doing all the right things. They don't allow themselves to be distracted with what others are doing. They don't look at the equipment or style or resources of their opponents. They focus on their game, so to speak, on their own style. They are careful about doing the right thing, in the right sequence and they focus on the goal. Because they understand that winners are decided only at the end of the race.

The second thing is to think of the times when we faced difficulties and survived and emerged stronger. This can be as individuals in our own

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lives or in the stories of our families and of Muslims as the Ummah of Rasoolullah ﷺ. Let me illustrate for you some of the worst crisis that we Muslims faced, in our history. As I speak, please put yourself in the locations and situations, like a bird on a tree branch, witnessing what was happening. Listen to the voices, see the faces, colors, noise, dust, conflict, aggressors, victims. Look at the smiles and tears. Try to feel their pain and pleasure, fears, and apprehensions, hopes and aspirations. You are an interested observer.

It is a hill town. Home to one of the two powerful and respected tribes of the Hijaz, the Banu Thaqeef. The town had its own temple which ensured a steady stream of visitors which generated revenue for the chiefs and businessmen and employment for others. Two men are walking up the steeply inclined road leading to the town center where the three chiefs who ruled the tribe, live. Passersby and others in the town square look at the men and it appears that they recognize them. The men go into one of the houses of the chiefs. After some time, they emerge, and the chiefs come out after them and shout at them and call on the people to drive the men away from their town. You are astonished at this complete break with the Arab tradition of hospitality to the stranger. But you see urchins and loafers start shouting abuse at the men and throwing stones at them. The men are injured and bleeding by the time they go out of range. You recognize the men. One of them is the best of all creation, the beloved of Allah ﷺ, and his companion is his adopted son. Yet they are helpless, abused, beaten, injured physically and emotionally even more though those are wounds you can't see. Why? You ask, 'Why?' What is their

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crime? Why are they being punished? It looks like punishment, so why is it happening? How did you feel? As a Muslim, a Mu'min, seeing our Rasool<sup>ﷺ</sup> being treated in this way and no Divine help coming to his aid. Did you think the world would come to an end? That Allah<sup>ﷻ</sup> would destroy those who attacked His Messenger<sup>ﷺ</sup>? But did that happen?

Let us go to another day, Saturday, March 23, 625 AD (7, Shawaal, 3 AH). There is a battle raging at the foot of the mountain of Uhud, outside Madina. The battle is going in favor of the Muslims and you, the little bird on the tree, rejoice to see the enemies running. Then suddenly the tables are turned. The cavalry of Khalid bin Waleed routs the Muslims. Muslim soldiers are being killed everywhere. You see what is happening to some very famous Sahaba of Rasoolullah<sup>ﷺ</sup>; the first envoy of Rasoolullah<sup>ﷺ</sup> to Madina on whose invitation most of the powerful and influential chiefs of the Ansar became Muslim, Mus'ab bin Omair (R), fell. Abdullah bin Rawaha (R), the cousin of Rasoolullah<sup>ﷺ</sup>, was killed. Then as you watch, you see an Abyssinian warrior with a spear, taking cover of rocks, going towards the uncle of Rasoolullah<sup>ﷺ</sup>, Hamza bin Abdul Muttalib (R). As you watch, he throws his spear and the great 'Asadullah wa Asadur Rasool', is Shaheed in the path of Allah<sup>ﷻ</sup>. You see the enemy attacking Rasoolullah<sup>ﷺ</sup>'s position and then your worst nightmare comes true. You see Rasoolullah<sup>ﷺ</sup> struck on his blessed face, and he falls. There is a rumor that Rasoolullah<sup>ﷺ</sup> has been killed. For you, the world has ended. What is the point in even being alive? Islam is over. The Messenger<sup>ﷺ</sup> of Allah<sup>ﷻ</sup> is no more. But did that happen?

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However, just over 4 years later, in December 629 or January 630 AD (10–20 Ramadan, 8 AH) you see Rasoolullah ﷺ entering Makkah as a conqueror and a few weeks later you see him conquering At-Taif, the same town that drove him out those many years ago. The people who drove him out and their wealth came into the hands of the Muslims as spoils of war. The Battle of Hunayn was one of the most significant victories of the Muslims and secured the entire Hijaz region for Muslims.

Fast forward 500 years. You are in Baghdad, the capital of the Abbasids whose empire extended from the Iberian Peninsula in Spain to Sind in present day Pakistan. A center of learning the like of which the world had never seen before or since. A place with more libraries than in all of Europe put together. A city, the scholars of which translated the work of Greeks into Arabic which later became the basis of European Renaissance. The home of scientific discoveries, philosophical debates, books, and poetry, the coming together of the great Abrahamic faiths, in theological discussions and cultured debates. As you watch the vibrant markets, beautiful palaces, the court of Al-Mu'atasim the Khalifa, a direct descendent of Rasoolullah ﷺ, you learn that the Mongol horde, commanded by Hulegu Khan, the grandson of Genghis Khan is on the way to besiege Baghdad. You are not unduly perturbed because there is an army of 60,000 soldiers at the command of Al-Mu'atasim and after all he is a direct descendent of Rasoolullah ﷺ so the help of Allah ﷺ must come.

But to your utter horror, Baghdad falls in merely 13 days. The siege lasted from January 29 to February 10, 1258. The Mongols laid Baghdad waste.

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They say that books from the Bayt al-Hikmah (House of Wisdom), were thrown into the Tigris, supposedly, so many that a horse could have walked across the river on them. They say that the waters of the Tigris ran black with the ink from the books. Priceless manuscripts that contained the peak of knowledge of all mankind sank into the mud of the Tigris, lost forever. Death counts vary widely but it is estimated that over 1 million Muslims were put to the sword. The Mongols looted and then destroyed, mosques, palaces, libraries, hospitals — grand buildings that had been the work of generations — were burned to the ground. Al-Mu'atasim, the descendant of Rasoolullah ﷺ was executed along with his whole family. Hulegu took the women of his family as slaves and distributed them among his soldiers. He ordered that his children should be killed before his eyes and then he should be hanged. This was done. These were not merely Muslims but people with the highest lineage. The Golden Age of Islamic rule ended. For you, the world ended. But did it?

What did happen was that Berke, another grandson of Genghis Khan, the ruler of the Golden Horde from 1257 to 1266, became Muslim. And adopted Islam as the religion of the Il-Khanate Empire. Oz Beg – later changed to Uzbek – the Mongol Khan under whom the Golden Horde attained its greatest power, was not only Muslim but made Islam the state religion. As Allama Iqbal said so eloquently in his Jawab-e-Shikwa:

*Tu Na Mit Jaye Ga Iran Ke Mit Jane Se*

*Nasha e Mai Ko Ta'aluq Nahin Paimane Se*

*And you will suffer no ending should Iran's star decline,*

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*It is not the vessel which decides the potency of wine.*

***Hai Ayan Yorish e Tataar Ke Afsane Se***

***Pasban Mil Gaye Kaabe Ko Sanam Khane Se***

*It is proved to all the world, from tales of Tartar conquerors,*

*The Ka'ba found brave defenders among worshippers in the temple.*

I can give you many more examples from our history, the history of Islam and Muslims and of the world, of suffering and disasters which make whatever we are facing today look like a Sunday school picnic. That is why history is so important because it helps us to see things in perspective. Life and times have ups and downs and so we must never lose hope. Our hope is not a figment of our imagination nor is it selfdeception. It is rooted in our own history. History shows us that after every debacle, we survived and emerged victorious and stronger. So will it be in our case in these times In-sha-Allah. But there are rules:

1. Remember that the winner is always decided at the end of the race and our race ends when we meet Allahﷻ. So, stay true to Allahﷻ and Allahﷻ will help us.
2. Ensure that we obey Allahﷻ and His Messengerﷺ at all times. Nothing other than that will save us or relieve our suffering. Neither wealth, nor military strength, nor lineage, nor education. All these are important but secondary to obedience to Allahﷻ. Because it is Allahﷻ who is the source of all power and goodness.

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3. Ensure that we are always beneficial to all around us. Allahﷻ supports people if they are just and beneficial. Allahﷻ even supports a just and beneficial non-believer over a believer who is unjust and self-indulgent.
4. Remember that our return is to Allahﷻ and that He is always aware of all that is happening and has the power to change it.

Next week we will look at possible future strategy. Not easy but doable.