

DEPRESSION

By Shaikh Sa'ood Ash-Shuraym

Fear of Allah ﷻ and piety are the sources of might, honor and security in this life, and the way to salvation on the Day of Resurrection. Allah ﷻ says in the Qur'an,

وَإِنْ مِنْكُمْ إِلَّا وَارِدُهَا كَانَ عَلَى رَبِّكَ حَتْمًا

مَقْضِيًّا ﴿٦٧﴾ ثُمَّ نُنَجِّي الَّذِينَ اتَّقَوْا وَنَذَرُ

الظَّالِمِينَ فِيهَا جِثًّا ﴿٦٨﴾

There is none among you who does not have to arrive at it. This is undertaken by your Lord as an absolute decree, bound to be enforced. Then We will save those who feared Allah, and will leave the wrongdoers in it, fallen on their knees. (Maryam: 71-72)

This is the era where technology is in its advanced stages and civilization is most developed economically, medically, militarily, specially in the field of information analysis.

However, if we, the slaves of Allah ﷻ, take a just and unbiased look at the current general condition of mankind and in particular the Muslims, we will find that all this worldly knowledge, information and development is inherently deficient and inept because it cannot produce a single human being who realizes the reason for his creation.

There is no doubt that this is a fact; otherwise, how can one explain the spread of ignorance and lack of knowledge in the era of information and technology? Why is there so much poverty at a time of abundant resources? Why is unemployment overwhelming in an era of mass production and manufacturing? Why do some international researchers who specialize in community affairs call this era an era of grief and depression after they called the previous one an era of anxiety?

We do not need much evidence to prove that we are suffering from the spread of this phenomenon - the phenomenon of grief and depression.

This is the destructive problem of our time and it is the most widespread amongst all the psychological diseases in the world. It is continually on the increase. An international survey affirms that ten percent of the world's population suffers from depression, including the Muslim countries. This simply means that hundreds of millions of people are living through this bitter reality.

Moreover, there is proof that this phenomenon is starting at a younger age as time goes by, and that it affects twice as many females as males. This has resulted from the fact that women are not practicing their natural role in the community. They are shouldering responsibilities of employment, which is forcing them to leave the role of raising their children to nannies and day-care centers.

The number of suicides resulting from grief and depression has exceeded eight hundred-thousand annually. Meanwhile, eighty percent of those who suffer from depression do not see doctors in order to report or solve the problem. Therefore, these unreported cases are not even counted in the depression and suicide statistics.

Depression is not a new phenomenon and its causes are not mysterious. Rather it is the natural and expected result when people become obsessed by gathering and collecting worldly belongings and when people's concern becomes purely materialistic. This problem differs from one country or community to another, and is dependent on the weakness of people's belief in Allah ﷻ, His angels, His Books, His Messengers, the Last Day and the divine decree. Additionally, it is dependent upon people's social behaviors, the degree of security, justice and love between people.

This trend has interested scholars of various disciplines, including medical doctors, writers and journalists, who have studied and addressed this problem. In many cases, the articles written have been of little benefit. And as much as people have addressed this problem, no one seems to have approached it correctly. The only correct and acceptable way of curing and solving this problem is to diagnosis it based on scientific as well as spiritual findings. Any diagnosis or treatment based purely on materialistic bias, which fails to attach any value to the spiritual side of the problem, will not produce long-lasting results.

Grief is something natural that humans feel due to their common problems. It is only when grief increases and overwhelms a person that it becomes what is known as depression. This is a condition that is considered to be at the highest level of grief and results in a person becoming controlled and dominated by his/her inner misery, the result of which is despair and loss of happiness. It is usually accompanied with headaches, bone problems, ulcers and other symptoms. It also makes a person lose his/her taste of joy and happiness. The manifestations of depression include laziness, loss of energy and hatred of life, which makes some people feel that suicide is the only solution.

Imam ibn Al-Qayyim *rahmatullahi alayhi* said, "Four things destroy the body: anxiety, grief, hunger and sleeping late."

Applying medical treatment with a religious foundation, extracted from the Qur'an and Sunnah of the Prophet ﷺ, is vital because it is the most perfect and safest form of treatment, especially when one compares this to the hundreds of medications and tranquilizers which have flooded the market and which the human body becomes addicted to, thereby descending into a worse and more serious condition than depression.

Some medical reports state that swimming and frequently doing house work is a solution for depression, but it is ludicrous to imagine that depressed people will always remain in swimming pools or be constantly doing housework. On the other hand, it is accepted that a person can easily be remembering Allah ﷻ, glorifying Him and seeking His forgiveness

at all times, whether he is standing, sitting or lying down.

This is how Allah ﷻ describes the people of understanding when He says,

الَّذِينَ يَذْكُرُونَ اللَّهَ قِيَمًا وَقُعُودًا وَعَلَىٰ جُنُوبِهِمْ
وَيَتَفَكَّرُونَ فِي خَلْقِ السَّمَوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ رَبَّنَا مَا
خَلَقْتَ هَذَا بَطْلًا سُبْحَانَكَ فَقِنَا عَذَابَ النَّارِ

Those who remember Allah standing and sitting, and (lying) on their sides, and ponder on the creation of the heavens and the earth (and say) "Our Lord, You have not created all this in vain. We proclaim Your purity. So, save us from the punishment of the Fire." (3:191)

Therefore, we can see the importance of spiritual treatment to these problems, although, there is no doubt that medication is also necessary. But the point here is that we must not focus on medical treatment and ignore the spiritual treatments that exist for these ailments.

One may well ask, "We realize that these problems exist, but what are the reasons behind them and what is the solution?"

The answer is that in some cases, there are purely medical reasons behind depression which cannot be ignored. The most common being the frequent consumption of medication, drugs, and alcohol. This leads to a person becoming addicted to them and subsequently feeling that his/her life is pointless without them. This results in a chemical imbalance within the brain which causes depression.

Depression also afflicts some people due to heredity, where one inherits a predisposition to it through his family genes.

We shall concentrate on some of the reasons why depression exists as it has been specifically addressed by Islam. It has been disapproved and warned against in many verses of the Qur'an and Ahadith.

In many Qur'anic verses and Ahadith, it is mentioned that the heart which is heedless of the remembrance of Allah ﷻ, which is reflected by the heedlessness of the tongue, is afflicted by grief and misery. Allah ﷻ says:

وَمَنْ أَعْرَضَ عَن ذِكْرِي فَإِنَّ لَهُ مَعِيشَةً ضَنْكًا

وَنَحْشُرُهُ يَوْمَ الْقِيَمَةِ أَعْمَى ﴿١٢٤﴾

As for the one who turns away from My message, he shall have a straitened life, and We shall raise him blind on the Day of Judgment. (TaHa: 124)

It is also mentioned in the Sunnah that sins lead to depression. Imam Ahmad *rahmatullahi alayh* states in his book that the Prophet ﷺ said, "If a slave's sins increase and he does not have enough good deeds which would wipe them out, then Allah will afflict him with grief and sorrow in order to wipe them out".

Being anxious and concerned about the future and the lack of belief in divine decree and pre-destination is another cause for depression. Some people worry about what the future holds for them and fear being incapable of dealing with problems, disasters and calamities, if and when they arrive. One finds that such people are in such a frenzy at times of tribulation that if they could find refuge in a cave or other remote and concealed place, they would rush like mad to get to it.

Bad dreams caused by Shaitan, who instills sorrow in a person, also play an important role in the causes of depression. The Prophet ﷺ informed us that Shaitan comes to people as they sleep and makes them see things which results in them feeling grief and sorrow. This is why we see many people who suffer from depression not being able to sleep properly.

Other reasons that lead to depression are debts which a person cannot repay, cowardliness at the time of fear, and stinginess while aggressively collecting wealth.

The proof that debts cause grief and anxiety lies in the Hadith where the Prophet ﷺ went into the Masjid one day and found Abu Umaamah رضي الله عنه and said, "O Abu Umaamah! Why do I see you sitting in the Masjid when it is not Salah time?"

Abu Umaamah رضي الله عنه replied, "It is due to anxiety and grief which resulted from debts that I owe."

So the Prophet ﷺ said, "Shall I teach you words which, if you were to say them, would take away your grief and by which Allah will help you repay your debts?"

Abu Umaamah رضي الله عنه replied, "Yes! O Allah ﷻ's Messenger ﷺ."

Thereupon, the Prophet ﷺ said, "Every morning and every evening say, O Allah! I seek refuge in you from anxiety and grief, weakness and laziness, miserliness and cowardliness, the burden of debts and from being overpowered by men."

After this, Abu Umaamah رضي الله عنه commented that, "I did this and Allah relieved my sorrow and anxiety and helped me repay my debts."

These are some reasons behind depression. One can clearly see the connection between depression and straying away from the guidance and the path of Allah ﷻ, committing that which Islam has prohibited, and being attached to worldly matters. Allah ﷻ says:

فَمَنْ يُرِدِ اللَّهُ أَنْ يَهْدِيَهُ يَشْرَحْ صَدْرَهُ لِلْإِسْلَامِ

وَمَنْ يُرِدْ أَنْ يُضِلَّهُ يَجْعَلْ صَدْرَهُ ضَيِّقًا حَرَجًا

كَأَنَّمَا يَصْعَدُ فِي السَّمَاءِ كَذَلِكَ يَجْعَلُ

اللَّهُ الرِّجْسَ عَلَى الَّذِينَ لَا يُؤْمِنُونَ ﴿١٢٥﴾

So, whomsoever Allah wills to guide, He makes his heart wide open for Islam, and whomsoever He wills to let go astray, He makes his heart strait and constricted, (and he feels embracing Islam as difficult) as if he were climbing towards the sky. In this way, Allah lays abomination on those who do not believe. (Al-An'am: 125)

In order to address this topic in a comprehensive manner, we must briefly point out some of the best ways of curing this problem based on Islamic texts in addition to the testimony of eminent and specialized medical doctors.

1. The correct understanding and belief in divine decree and pre-destiny is one way to treat this problem. When a person believes that there

was no way that he could have escaped whatever befell him and that all matters are in the Hands of Allah ﷻ, including ones provisions and death, and that no one will die until he consumes all his decreed provision and until he lives for the whole amount of time that was given to him, then he will definitely rely on Allah ﷻ completely without any worry or grief and will face all his problems with strength and resolution.

Also, if people acknowledge that whatever Allah ﷻ has decreed resulted from His perfect wisdom, then they will be content with whatever He decrees. One who is discontented will become an easy victim for grief, disease, and following base desires. Hasan Basri *rahmatullahi alay*, when asked how he attained his good manners replied, "From being content with the decree of Allah ﷻ."

Abu Haatim رضي الله عنه reported that some of the Salaf said, "There is no rank higher or mightier than being content. It is the peak of loving Allah ﷻ."

Contentment can only be established when the slave has firmly in his mind the conviction that whatever Allah ﷻ decrees results from His wisdom. Allah ﷻ provides and deprives for a wise reason, and this is the only thing that will make a person feel at ease during times of hardship. This also applies during times of prosperity, as Allah ﷻ informs us in the Qur'an about Prophet Sulayman عليه السلام:

قَالَ هَذَا مِنْ فَضْلِ رَبِّي لِيَتْلُوَنِي ۗ أَشْكُرُ أَمْ أَكْفُرُ
وَمَنْ شَكَرَ فَإِنَّمَا يَشْكُرُ لِنَفْسِهِ ۗ وَمَنْ كَفَرَ فَإِنَّ رَبِّي
غَنِيٌّ كَرِيمٌ

"This is by the grace of my Lord, so that He may test me whether I am grateful or ungrateful, then my Lord is Need-Free, Bountiful." (An-Naml: 40)

This is also evident in the saying of the Prophet ﷺ when his son Ibrahim died, and he said, "The eyes cry tears, and the heart becomes sad, but we will not say that which will bring the wrath of our Lord. If it was not a true promise, and that we will meet in an appointed time, and that the last will eventually follow (die) after the first, then we would have cried hard for your death (O Ibrahim). Indeed we are saddened by your departure." (*Al-Bayhaqi & Ibne Maajah*)

By saying this, the Prophet ﷺ meant that had he not known that there was wisdom from Allah ﷻ behind taking his son, he would have been grief stricken.

2. Extra prostration and glorification of Allah ﷻ and worship in general takes away grief. Allah ﷻ says,

وَلَقَدْ نَعْلَمُ أَنَّكَ يَضِيقُ صَدْرُكَ بِمَا يَقُولُونَ

فَسَبِّحْ بِحَمْدِ رَبِّكَ وَكُنْ مِنَ السَّاجِدِينَ

وَأَعْبُدْ رَبَّكَ حَتَّىٰ يَأْتِيَكَ الْيَقِينُ

We know that your heart feels distressed for what they say. So, proclaim the purity and glory of your Lord, and be among those who prostrate themselves (before Allah); and worship your Lord until comes to you that which is certain. (Al-Hijr: 97-99)

Whenever the Prophet ﷺ felt grief or worry, he would rush to offer salah. The Prophet ﷺ said, "Whoever continuously asks forgiveness from Allah, then Allah will make a way out for him from all his worries, and will provide him from means he never would have expected." [*Courtesy of Al-Farooq International*]