

2 Patience and Perseverance

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The virtues of the good Muslim emerge from two different backgrounds: the divine qualities, otherwise the 'Beautiful Names', which, or most of which, the believer will try to imitate to the best of his limited human ability; and the love of God, explicitly referred to in the Qur'ān in relation to certain categories of believers and their qualities.

Two different frameworks, which nevertheless echo one another, since the Qur'ān, the Sunna of the Prophet and to an even greater degree the work subsequently carried out by theologians and jurists in explaining and supporting the textual tradition arrive, from various directions, at the same affirmation that God loves those who resemble Him. So much is certainly true of Patience, *ṣabr* in Arabic, the virtue which above all others defines the good believer. On the one hand, in fact, the Tradition recognises *al-ṣabūr* الصبور or 'the Most Patient One' as a Name of God, appearing in ninety-ninth place in the most authoritative lists of the Beautiful Names,¹ – and it should be emphasised that this rear-guard position does not in any way imply a diminished status in so far as it immediately precedes and gives way to the supreme Name, the hundredth, that God alone knows. On the other hand, the Qur'ān is firm in emphasising God's love for those who are patient (*al-ṣābirūn* الصابرون). This from the sura 'The Family of 'Imrān':

Many a prophet there has been, with whom thousands have fought, and they fainted not for what befell them in God's way, neither weakened, nor did they humble themselves; and God loves the patient. (Qur'ān III,146)

¹ As in the above mentioned list provided by al-Tirmidhī in *al-Jāmi'*, relying on the authority of the Companion Abū Hurayra.

Patience fits perfectly, therefore, into the two frameworks outlined above: the imitability *mutatis mutandis* of the divine qualities, and the lovability of man in the eyes of the Creator. Furthermore, and in fact like the more generic ‘piety’ (or *taqwā* ‘reverence for God’), patience enjoys a particular status, which raises it above the other qualities required of the Muslim and adds to its nobility: the ‘companionship of God’ (*ma‘iyya* معية, from *ma’a* ‘together with’).

2.1 Be Patient with a Gracious Patience (Qur’ān LXX,5)

The sura *al-Baqara* ‘The Cow’ has this to say to the faithful: “O all you who believe, seek you help in patience and prayer; surely God is with the patient” (*Allāh ma’a al-ṣābirīn*; Qur’ān II,153). And a little further on in the same sura, which rehearses the story of the pious David and the ungodly Goliath (cf. 1 *Samuel* 17,1-53), the Book reiterates:

How often has a little company overcome a numerous company, by God’s leave! And God is with the patient. And when they advanced to meet Goliath and his forces, they prayed: – Our Lord! Pour forth on us patience and make us victorious over the unbelievers. (Qur’ān II,249-50)

When applied to patience, the idea of the companionship of God – whether meaning only His support, His help in the victory over the infidels and His satisfaction with the deeds of the good, as the majority of commentators maintain, or the highest and most enduring degree of proximity to Him, as spiritual authors suggest – reappears in the sura *al-Anfāl* ‘The Spoils’:

And obey God and His Messenger; and fall into no disputes, lest you lose heart and your power depart; and be patient and persevering: for God is with those who patiently persevere [*Allāh ma’a al-ṣābirīn*] [...]. Now God has lightened your task for you, knowing that there is weakness in you. If there be a hundred of you, patient men, they will overcome two hundred; if there be of you a thousand, they will overcome two thousand by God’s leave; God is with the patient. (*Allāh ma’a al-ṣābirīn*, VIII,46 and 66)

The persistent presence of patience in the Qur’ān, along with the commendations it receives from divine *dicta*, is clear proof of its importance in Islamic moral thought. It inevitably looms large in the case of Job/Ayyūb (XXXVIII,44), with even greater scope here than in the biblical antecedent. Patience is a regular trait of the prophets and messengers (VI,34; XLVI,35), and of Moses/Mūsā in particular (XIV,5; XVIII,69; XXI,85; XXXVIII,12), of Ishmael/Ismā‘īl, Idrīs, Dhū al-Qifl (XXI,85), Jacob/Ya‘qūb (XII,18), Joseph/Yūsuf and his brother (XII,90), Noah/Nūḥ (VIII,12), Lot/Lūṭ (XXXVIII,13), the messengers to the tribes of ‘Ād, of Thamūd and to al-Ayka (XXXVIII,12-13), and the son whom Abraham/Ibrāhīm was ready to sacrifice to God (XXXVII,102). Patience defines those who followed the Prophet in the Hijra, the move from Mecca to Medina (XVI,42 and 110); and all those who fear God and are sincere (II,177), all the devout, the generous (III,17), the grateful (XXXI,31), those who commend to one another compassion (XC,17) and truth (CIII,3). Men and women equally, as the sura *al-Aḥzāb* ‘The Combined Forces’ has it:

the men who submit and the women who submit, and the believing men and the believing women, and the obeying men and the obeying women, and the truthful men and the truthful women, and the patient men and the patient women and the humble men and the humble women, and the almsgiving men and the almsgiving women, and the fasting men and the fasting women, and the chaste men and the chaste women, and the men and the women who constantly remember God – surely He has prepared for them forgiveness and a mighty reward. (XXXIII,35)

Patience brings help from harm (VI,34) and victory against odds (VIII,65-6), good outcomes (VII,128; XI,49), recompense (III,80) and reward (XI,11 and 115; XVI,96; XXIX,59; XXXIX,10), even double reward (XXVIII,54), satisfaction (X,130) and the gardens of paradise (XIII,22-4; XXV,75; LXXVI,12); it stimulates the Lord's forgiveness (XI,11) and transforms enemies into good friends. As the sura *Fuṣṣilat* 'Explained in Detail' says:

Virtue and evil are not equal. If you replace evil habits by virtuous ones, you will certainly find that your enemies will become your intimate friends. Only those who exercise patience and who have been granted a great share of God's favour can find such an opportunity. (XLI,34-5)

There is a similar message in the sura *al-Qaṣaṣ* 'The Stories': "These will be given their reward twice over, because they are patient, and repel evil with good" (XXVIII,54). Patience often figures as a metonym for the very condition of the believer, as if to say that its presence alone is enough to define the Muslim.

God repeatedly recommends patience to Muḥammad: "Be patient with a gracious patience [*aṣbir ṣabr^{an} jamīl^{an}*]" as the sura *al-Ma'ārij* 'The Ways of Ascent' puts it (LXX,5). The Qur'ān calls on the Prophet to be patient so that he does not despair and trusts in God who is the Supreme Judge (X,109; cf. LII,48), so that he will trust in His true promises (XXX,60; XL,55 and 77), in the announcement that the good will be rewarded and the transgressing people will be destroyed (XLVI,35); so that he look after his Companions (XVIII,28), that he not allow himself to be distressed by the plots (XVI,127) or the words (XX,130; XXXVIII,17; L,39; LXXIII,10) of the unbelievers, and that he not give way to sadness (XVI,127 again).

Also in the Qur'ān, patience features in the advice that the wise Luqmān gives to his son to help him lead a good and responsible life as well as a pious one: "My son, be steadfast in prayer. Make others do good. Prevent them from doing evil. Bear patiently that which befalls you; surely these acts require determination" (XXXI,17). This is an interesting reappearance, because Luqmān, although described in the Book as possessing the traits of the good Muslim, is a wise man (cf. *ḥikma* حكمة; XXXI,12) and not a prophet: in this case, then, patience goes beyond the sphere of religion and takes on a secular, humanistic value.

2.2 Resistance, Care, Serenity

Patience is the greatest virtue of the true Muslim. And yet ‘patience’ in Islam is more than merely a disposition that allows us to accept the reversals of fortune with moderation and equanimity. It is the resigned acceptance of adversity, just as gratitude to God (*shukr* شكر) is its mirror image in times of prosperity (Qur’ān XXXI,31); it is a calm submission to divine justice, which is in any case a prerequisite of victory or success (VIII,66; XVIII,69; XXIII,111; LXXVI,24); it is absolute trust in God’s plan, which is essentially the same as faith (*īmān*). But it is also the serene behaviour of those who are content, it is tolerance and moderation towards others (III,200); as well as commitment and steadfastness in the act of worship (II,45; XVIII,28; XX,132). To this extent, the English word ‘patience’ is perhaps insufficient to render the full semantic range of the corresponding Arabic term.

Translating *ṣabr* as ‘patience’ seems all the more inadequate when we think of the different etymological backgrounds of the two terms, on the one hand endurance and suffering (as in, for example, *passio* and παθήσις), and on the other (*ṣabr*) holding back, resistance and abstention: of the tongue from complaining, of the limbs from violence, abstention too from food and from sexual relations during ‘the month of patience’, another name for Ramadan.² *Ṣabr* is also the name of the aloe, a plant capable of retaining water and of withstanding heat and drought without apparent alteration or distress. And it is in fact because it is not necessarily connected with suffering but can on the contrary coincide with impassibility, immutability and serenity that *al-ṣabūr* ‘the most Patient One’ can be conceived as a divine Name.

Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī, in his book on the Beautiful Names, when commenting on *al-ṣabūr*, emphasises the appropriateness of timing and modality that characterise divine actions, but also stresses the absolute absence of suffering or aversion in God’s patience. He writes as follows:

Al-ṣabūr is not One to be seized by haste so as to act precipitately, before the due time; on the contrary, He causes things to happen in accordance with a given plan, and brings them about in a precise manner, without delaying through indolence their preordained end, and without impetuously anticipating their fulfilment. Instead, He makes all things happen when they should happen and how they should happen. And all this He does without sufferance [or *muqāsāh* مقاساة ‘endurance’], and without contravening His own will.³

2.3 Continuity of a Tradition

The continuing importance of al-Ghazālī’s work should not be underestimated. An essay on patience in the Qur’ān, *Al-ṣabr fī l-Qur’ān* (Patience in the Qur’ān), by the contemporary Egyptian theologian and preacher Yūsuf al-Qarāḍāwī (d. 2022)⁴ draws heavily on al-Ghazālī’s *Kitāb al-ṣabr wa-l-shukr* ‘The Book of Patience and Gratitude’, a section of his major work

² As noted by Lane 1968, root ṣ-b-r.

³ Al-Ghazālī 1971, 149.

⁴ Al-Qarāḍāwī 1410/1989.

on the revival of religious sciences.⁵ Al-Qaraḍāwī emphasises in his own work the excellence but also the mandatoriness of patience in the Qur'ān, reminds us of the figures who best embody it in the Holy Book, and provides examples of patience in different contexts, often following in this the great medieval master step by step. He does so, for example, when drawing a fundamental distinction between physical and spiritual patience, while illuminating the preeminence of the second, and enumerating its particular aspects, defining them scrupulously, sometimes by means of contrasting their opposites. Here is a passage that al-Qaraḍāwī borrows wholesale from al-Ghazālī:

When it is dealing with the desires of the stomach and the sexual organs, it is called abstinence.

When it has to do with calamity it is simply called patience [*ṣabr*], and its opposite is called bitterness and despondency [...].

When it concerns the management of one's wealth it is called self-control, and its opposite is called insolence.

When it is in war or combat it is called courage and its opposite is cowardice.

When it is a matter of suppressing anger it is called wisdom [*ḥilm* حِلْم], and its opposite is rabid and excited speech.

When it is reacting to the unpleasant calamities of life it is called greatness of mind and its opposite is cowardice, despondency and meanness.

When it has to do with keeping something said hidden, it is called 'keeping a secret' and whoever does so is said to be a discreet person.

When it regards the pleasures of life it is called renunciation, and its opposite is greed.

And when it is patience towards a destiny of bad luck, then it is called acceptance and its opposite is presumption.

Many of the characters of faith [*akhlāq al-īmān*] are found in patience. And that is why, when they asked Muḥammad about faith, he replied: – It is patience. For that contains the greatest and best part of our deeds.

God has put these elements together and called the whole 'patience'; and He has called 'patient' [*ṣābirūn*] all those who are in sorrow, that is, in calamity; or in adversity, that is, in poverty; or in times of trouble, that is, in war [...]. These then are the components of patience in relation to their pertinence.⁶

Al-Qaraḍāwī also carries over from al-Ghazālī the idea that patience is a characteristic of human beings which distinguishes them from the animals because they lack it, and from the angels on account of their perfection; as well as the idea that patience is a characteristic of adults, since children have no patience at all and in this they are like the animals. He also reiterates the notion that patience is a characteristic of the man from whose heart the angelic host has driven out the battalions of demons responsible for stoking the passions.⁷ Al-Qaraḍāwī's erudition has him drawing often on the work of the early mystics, and on patience in particular he quotes

⁵ Al-Ghazālī 2010.

⁶ Al-Qaraḍāwī 1410/1989, 7-9; Al-Ghazālī s.d., *Kitāb al-ṣabr wa-l-shukr*, 4: 60-80.

⁷ Al-Qaraḍāwī 1410/1989, 10-11; Al-Ghazālī s.d., *Kitāb al-ṣabr wa-l-shukr*, 4: 62.

the *Qūt al-qulūb* or ‘The Nourishment of Hearts’, a systematic compendium of Sufi piety and practice by the renowned ascetic and preacher Abū Ṭālib al-Makkī (d. 386/996). From the latter he quotes:

Know that the greater part of men’s faults come from two things: lack of patience with what they love and lack of patience with what they hate.⁸

2.4 Patience According to the Mystics

Al-Makkī, like other spiritual writers, devotes particular attention to the virtue of patience: in *The Nourishment of Hearts* he selects the most eloquent Qur’ānic verses, and quotes Prophetic sayings and stories about the “pious predecessors” (*al-salaf al-ṣāliḥ* السلف الصالح) in support, sometimes also adding the thoughts and expressions of previous ascetics. He teaches that “patience occupies the highest rank of obedience to God”, that the best kind of patience is patience in the face of disobedience, and next comes patience in devotional works; and that “the righteous [*ṣāliḥūn* صالحون] among believers are few, the sincere [*ṣādiqūn* صادقون] among the pious are few, and the patient [*ṣābirūn*] among the sincere are few”, thus indicating that patience is higher up the scale than any other form of adherence to Islam, and finally that it is a virtue that fully belongs only to a fortunate few. Among the Prophetic sayings that al-Makkī rehearses in his huge hotch-potch of quotations are “patience is half of faith” and “patience lies in three things: purifying one’s soul, turning away from the torment of misfortune and being content with what God has decreed for us, be it good or ill”. He further explains that patience is a pillar of the faith, and that “in faith, it is like the head on the body, there is no body without its head, and there is no faith without patience”; and finally, that faith, sincere assent to the truth, wisdom and patience are all one.⁹

As a mystic, he does not overlook the significance of patience as the sublimation of suffering and renunciation. Exploring, for example the relationship between patience and gratitude, he writes that “patience belongs to the state of adversity and gratitude to the state of prosperity, therefore adversity is better because it is more painful for the soul”, and “God has said that He will reward those who are patient ‘without measure’” (cf. Qur’ān XXXIX,10). It is better, he goes on to say, “to patiently abstain from what requires thanksgiving, and it is better to be grateful for what requires patience”; “the patient wise man is better than the grateful wise man, because patience is given in a condition of poverty while gratitude is given in a condition of wealth”. Al-Makkī teaches finally that when the Qur’ān declares that some prophets are preferred to others (XVII,55) the reference is to the patient prophets; and that God alone can provide serenity of mind (*sakīna* سَكِينَة) since He has said: “Your patience is only by the help of God” (XVI,127).

⁸ Al-Qaraḍāwī 1410/1989, 14; Al-Makkī 1426/2005, 1: 306.

⁹ Al-Makkī 1426/2005, 1: 298-313.

2.5 Patience in Islamic Law

The theologian and jurist Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya (d. 751/1350), who belonged to the Ḥanbalī theological and juridical school – named after the expert in Prophetic Tradition Ibn Ḥanbal – devoted one of his maturest works, the *‘Uddat al-ṣābirīn wa-dhakīrat al-shākirīn* ‘The Resources of the Patient, the Reserves of the Grateful’, to patience, together with gratitude.¹⁰ In this work we find a systematic exposition of all the many issues concerning patience according to Islam, including a detailed evaluation of its significance in juridical terms, which is perhaps the most remarkable aspect of the book. He examines patience here according to the five qualifications (*aḥkām* أحكام) of Islamic Law: obligatory, recommended, forbidden, reprehensible and permitted.¹¹ In illuminating particularly the pragmatic side, focusing not so much on patience as a quality of the soul as the patient actions that this virtue can generate, Ibn Qayyim highlights the double face of *ṣabr*, which can spur both action and inaction, because on the one hand it describes the believer who acts with perseverance and tenacity (cf. *ṣabr ‘alā*), and on the other the one who refrains from action, who renounces and disciplines himself to avoid a given behaviour (cf. *ṣabr ‘an*). He writes:

Obligatory patience is subdivided into three kinds: the first is the patient abstention from what is forbidden, the second the determined execution of what is commanded, and the third is to bring patience to calamities over which man has no control, such as illness, poverty and the like.

Recommended patience is abstention from reprehensible things and commitment to commendable things, as well as refraining from doing to an evildoer what he has done to us:

As for proscribed patience, it breaks down into various types, and the first of these is to cease eating and drinking to the extent of dying of starvation; similarly, it is prohibited to abstain from eating dead meat, blood and pork in times of scarcity, when without eating these things one will die [...]. If someone asks about the patience of those who abstain from begging, whether it is allowed or not allowed,¹² he must be told that there is a difference of opinion among the Hanbalites in this regard.

Forbidden too is the patience of those who give up and are too patient in the face of beasts, snakes, a fire, or faced with an unbeliever who tries to kill them. On the other hand, abstaining from taking part in a revolt in which Muslims may be killed is not only lawful but commendable, because when this question was put to the Prophet he answered: “be like the best of Adam’s children” [...].

There are various examples of reprehensible patience, and the first is that of those who refrain from eating or drinking or dressing themselves or from having sexual relations with their wives, to the extent of damaging their own bodies; a second is that of those who abstain from sexual relations with their wives when they ask for them, unless they themselves would be damaged thereby; a third is steadfastness in pursuing

¹⁰ Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya 1409/1989.

¹¹ Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya 1409/1989, 31-53.

¹² On the basis of numerous Prophetic sayings, asking for charity is strongly discouraged. On the permissibility or otherwise of begging, cf. Zilio-Grandi 2018b.

what is reprehensible; a fourth, conversely, steadfastness in abstaining from what is praiseworthy.

As for permissible patience, it is that of those who abstain from performing actions that have two sides to them, that is, when it is good both to do and not do a thing.

Generally speaking, to be patient in what is obligatory is obligatory, while tenacious abstinence from what is obligatory is forbidden; likewise, abstaining from doing what is forbidden is obligatory, while abstaining from doing what is obligatory is forbidden; and being patient in performing what is recommended is recommended, while abstaining from performing what is recommended is reprehensible; finally, abstaining from what is allowed is, instead, allowed. But God knows better than any other.¹³

Another admirable aspect of *The Resources of the Patient, The Reserves of the Grateful* is its insistence on the divide between praiseworthy and blameworthy *ṣabr*. As is not uncommon among Muslim jurists, Ibn Qayyim shows a lively interest in the spiritual aspect of Islam. As he explains:

Culpable patience is that of those who resolutely turn away from God, His love, His will, and the drawing of their hearts nearer to Him, because this prevents them from attaining perfection and accomplishing that for which they were created. This patience, which is the most terrible, is also the greatest and most extreme, because there is no greater patience than that of one who tenaciously stays away from his Beloved, from Him without whom he would not even have had life, just as there is no greater renunciation than that of the ascetic who refrains from performing the wonders which God has prepared for His saints, such as no eye has ever seen and no ear has heard, wonders which never before made hearts beat faster.¹⁴

And here, once again in *The Resources of the Patient, The Reserves of the Grateful*, is a story about the mystic al-Shiblī (d. 334/945) – a ubiquitous presence in Sufi manuals for his famous ecstasies, penances and spiritual torments – and on the horror that patience aroused in him in its sense of tenaciously keeping away from the Lord:

A man who had become his friend asked him: – What kind of patience is the hardest for those who practise it?

Al-Shiblī answered: – Patience in God [*fī Allāh*].

– No – said the man.

– Then patience *for* God [*li-llāh*].

– No – the man said again.

– Then patience *with* God [*ma’a Allāh*].

– No – said the man once more.

Al-Shiblī exclaimed: – Well, what is it then?

The man answered: – It is persistence in turning one’s back on God [*‘an Allāh*].

At which al-Shiblī let out a howl as if he were dying.¹⁵

¹³ Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya 1409/1989, 31-3.

¹⁴ Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya 1409/1989, 44.

¹⁵ Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya 1409/1989, 44.

Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya dwells at length on, among other things, a conundrum, namely whether patience directed ‘to God’ (*li-llāh*) or ‘through God’ (*bi-llāh*) is better, and mentions a third type of patience, that ‘with God’ (*ma’a Allāh*; cf. Qur’ān II,153; VIII,46 and 66), which in his opinion is the highest form of all. In this passage he does not forget the famous ‘holy speech’ or ‘holy tradition’ (*ḥadīth qudsī* حديث قدسي or *ilāhī* إلهي or *rabbānī* رباني) – a saying of the Prophet so called because God speaks in the first person on God’s love for the good believer:

If I love him, I am the ear with which he hears, the sight with which he sees, the hand with which he attacks, the foot with which he walks, and if he asks Me, I will certainly satisfy him.¹⁶

A last distinction finely drawn by Ibn Qayyim in his book on patience and gratitude is that between the patience of the noble soul and that of the craven one. The author observes that the former acts patiently, or patiently refrains from action, out of choice, while the patience of the coward is not by choice but by necessity, and if the noble man turns away from bad deeds voluntarily, because he knows well what he is doing and seeks his reward in the world to come, the coward conversely is patient because compelled to be so, as if chained and beaten; the noble is patient in obedience to God, the coward in obedience to Satan so that, of all men, he is the most tenacious in his obedience to the desires and passions of men, and equally, of all men, the least steadfast in obedience to the Lord.¹⁷

2.6 The Best and Greatest of Gifts

The great relevance of *ṣabr* to virtuous conduct stands out in the Prophetic Tradition. According to a well-known saying, it happened that one day a group of *Anṣār* ‘Helpers’ – those men of Medina who supported Muḥammad after the Hijra – bombarded the Prophet with questions. Muḥammad answered them many times, until he said finally:

What good I have to give you I will not deny you; however, he who holds himself back, God sustains him; whoever is content, God will satisfy him; and he who is patient, God will comfort him. No greater and better thing has been given to anyone than patience.¹⁸

The reach and longevity of this Prophetic saying, which is enough on its own to illustrate the multiple contents and also the excellence of *ṣabr*, is not limited to long-distant times but is still frequently taken up by contemporaries, in sermons, teachings or systematic treatises, in more or less pastoral contexts. One such is the above-cited Muḥammad Rātīb al-Nābulusī in the *Encyclopaedia of the Beautiful Names of God*, where

¹⁶ Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya 1409/1989, 45-6. The saying is quoted, with others, in the compilation by al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ, kitāb al-rifāq*, no. 6137.

¹⁷ Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya 1409/1989, 52-3.

¹⁸ Al-Bukhārī actually quotes this twice: *Ṣaḥīḥ, kitāb al-zakāt, bāb al-isti’fāf ‘an al-mas’ala*, no. 1400, and *kitāb al-rifāq, bāb al-ṣabr ‘an al-maḥārim*, no. 2150. Cf. Muslim, *Ṣaḥīḥ, kitāb al-zakāt, bāb faḍl al-ta’affuḥ wa-l-ṣabr*, no. 1745; cf. also Ibn Abī l-Dunyā 1998a, 17.

the author takes his brother through stories from the Tradition and true-life instances.¹⁹

Another example is provided by the Saudi ‘Abd al-Raḥmān Ibn Nāṣir al-Sa’dī (d. 1956) in his *Bahjat qulūb al-abrār* or ‘Splendours from the Hearts of the Faithful’, a collection of 99 Prophetic sayings.²⁰ When it is the turn of the saying on patience as the best and greatest of gifts, al-Sa’dī refers to the Qur’ān in the sura ‘The Cow’, in which the believer is called upon to seek help from patience and prayer (Qur’ān II,45) and explains that patience, like prayer, is needed in every situation. Taking his cue from his early colleagues, he illustrates the difference between an active, positive and productive patience (*ṣabr ‘alā*) and an abstaining and renunciatory patience (*ṣabr ‘an*), and teaches that the former is for obtaining Favours and what one loves, and serenely accepting ‘painful Decrees’ (*aqdār Allāh al-mu’līmā* أقدار الله المؤلمة), i.e. suffering, whether physical or spiritual; while the latter is the ability to renounce disobedience and transgression. Unlike others, however, al-Sa’dī emphasizes the possibility of refining patience, which is not given ready-made to the believer but must be honed by a process of application and exercise.

Another example by a Saudi scholar, Muḥammad Ṣāliḥ al-Munajjid (b. 1961), is from his popular *fatwa* website IslamQA (*Al-Islām su’āl wa-jawāb*), where he answers questions on religion and faith. In reply to a question on the meaning of the Prophetic saying “no greater and better thing has been given to anyone than patience”, al-Munajjid refers to previous ancient and contemporary sources, more or less without adding personal glosses, as is his practice on this forum.²¹ With the aid of these many quotes, the author points out the difference between active patience and abstaining patience and reminds his readers that the best of the patient are those who abstain (*ṣabara ‘an*) from what God has forbidden, and persevere (*ṣabara ‘alā*) in obeying Him. He frames patience as going it alone, without depending on others, as with those who refrain from harassing questions, but especially those who defer to God and wait with confidence. The Prophetic saying about the excellence of patience, he explains, “calls on the faithful to exercise restraint, and to be soberly content with what comes their way, even if it is little, because patience is also moderation, self-mastery and frugality”.

2.7 The Paradise of the Believer

Appeals to the Islamic value of patience are frequent enough in contemporary literature of Islamic inspiration, even in fields other than theology and pastoral instruction, including among female voices.

A certain Hayā Bint Nāṣir Ibn ‘Abd Allāh al-Rāshid published in Riyadh, in 2014, a miscellany of memoirs and other non-fiction material entitled

¹⁹ Al-Nābulusī 2002b, *Ism Allāh al-ṣabūr*, lesson no. 21, 2005. <https://nabulsi.com/web/article/1461>.

²⁰ Al-Sa’dī 1423/2002, 88-90.

²¹ Al-Munajjid 1997-2019, no. 201175, 19 August 2013.

Al-ṣabr jannat al-mu'min or 'Patience is the Paradise of the Believer'.²² The author describes how from her youth she had observed people who found themselves in conditions of great adversity, and who had aroused the greatest respect in her because of their patience under the blows that fate inflicted on them, their steadfastness and tenacity, their perseverance in performing devotional works and keeping themselves free of sin: "Here a poor man content with his lot, there a sick one full of patience, there again a destitute grateful to God". She goes on to say that she then compared these with many similar situations in current everyday life, made up of rushing around, complaining, grumbling and resentment, "as if Satan had covered our hearts and eyes with a veil, concealing the grace that God has reserved for us and for which we should be grateful to Him". "We are too much in a hurry", she writes, "and we lack the patience to give ourselves patience".²³

Nothing – Hayā Bint Nāṣir goes on to say in this book – is "key and salvation" as patience is, nothing is as free as patience is from regret, and though it shares its name with the bitter aloe, its fruits are sweeter than honey. As for its meaning, it does not imply surrendering to events or dodging the burdens of existence, but keeping the heart from anguish and resentment, and the tongue from complaining.²⁴

Numerous first-person stories about her life, family, and friendships new and old alternate with quotes from early poets, proverbs, and popular sayings, such as "health is a crown on the head of the healthy person, which only the sick one can see", or "when a misfortune occurs, the clever do immediately what the fool does after a month". Many of the Prophet's sayings are shrewdly analysed, for example the following, where patience is displayed by the husband who gives up the best food:

I am amazed by what God has ordained for the believer: when something good happens, he praises the Lord and is grateful to Him, if something bad happens, he praises the Lord and is patient; the believer is compensated for everything, even for the tasty morsel of food he offers to his wife's lips.²⁵

Hayā Bint Nāṣir does not ignore the many Qur'ānic verses on patience, nor the teachings of the theologians and the jurists, nor the classical meditations on the divine Name *al-ṣabūr*;²⁶ but she adds a good number of novelties, such as the idea that patience is a medicine made simultaneously of knowledge and action, a medicine for the heart and also for the body, since for every evil God has allowed He has equally decreed an antidote.²⁷ Here the author no doubt has in mind, although she does not say so, the following well-known episode:

²² Bint Nāṣir 1435/2014. As far as I have been able to establish, this is her only publication. I have not been able to find a birth date for the author.

²³ Bint Nāṣir 1435/2014, 10.

²⁴ Bint Nāṣir 1435/2014, 12.

²⁵ From Ibn Ḥanbal, *Musnad*, *musnad bāqī al-'ashara al-mubashsharīn bi-l-janna*, no. 1425.

²⁶ Apropos of this Name the author reminds us of a Prophetic saying about the Christian creed: "No one is more patient than God. They associate him with others, they give him a son, and despite all this He has care for them and fills them with grace"; Muslim, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, *kitāb ṣifat al-qiyyāma wa-l-janna wa-l-nār*, no. 5022.

²⁷ Bint Nāṣir 1435/2014, 84.

They asked him: – Messenger of God, is it counted a crime not to seek a cure?

He answered: – Servants of God, seek for a cure, because Almighty God has not created any disease without also creating its cure, with the exception of old age.

They asked him: – And what is the best thing that a servant of God can receive [from Him]?

He replied: – Good character.²⁸

Patience is the Paradise of the Believer is a valuable book, a contemporary compendium on patience according to Islam. In the non-autobiographical section, it is a breviary for the believer seeking at once sound doctrine and good advice, but the most interesting parts are the narrative ones, in which, for all that they are couched in a high style and a very refined lexicon, the daily experience of a lifetime shines through. And, in this light, all the work of the many who have reflected on patience, who have examined it and subdivided it, classified it and evaluated it, who have assigned it many names, all the rest, including the Word of God, is made actual, revived and renewed once more.

²⁸ Cf., among others al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ, kitāb al-ṭibb, bāb mā anzala Allāh dā' illā anzala la-hu shifā'*, no. 3436.