

# Patience

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## Abstract

From a realistic perspective, one can see that life is unbelievably crammed with difficulties and troubles. One may be confronted with these difficulties in two ways: patiently and impatiently. A person can succeed in leading a good life only if he is able to be patient in unfavorable conditions. Those who satisfy this requirement make attempts to go through the inevitable difficulties without stress by virtue of their patience and forbearance. For they know that intolerance not only does not solve their problems but it also makes their simple problems more complex. One will manage to develop his spiritual, moral, and even material aspects of his life only if he is patient.

**Keywords:** *patience, forbearance, faith, attempts, impatience, difficulties.*

## Introduction

People always suffer from hardships, problems, and shortcomings in their lives. Impatience with problems in life prevents people from achieving the goals and actualizing the potentials which are innate in them. On the other hand, patience and perseverance facilitate achieving those goals. Human beings might go on either of the two directions: ascent or descent, to which the Qur'an refers as virtues and vices.<sup>1</sup> Intellect calls human beings to virtues, and carnal desires call them to vices. The fruit of applying the knowledge of virtues is the actualization of human potentials, whereas vices and carnal desires call human beings to temporary and momentary pleasures and prevent them from actualizing their potentials.

In the Islamic view, patience seems to be effective especially in three important fields: in obeying and serving God, in dealing with hardships and troubles, and in resisting against sins. In the Qur'an, patience is so important that it is enjoined together with prayer.<sup>2</sup> The Qur'an also states that God is with the patient,<sup>3</sup> gives them good news,<sup>4</sup> and loves them.<sup>5</sup> Patience has also been regarded as one of the most difficult stages in Islamic ethics and mysticism.

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<sup>1</sup> "And inspired it with [discernment between] its virtues and vices" (Qur'an 91:8).

<sup>2</sup> "And take recourse in patience and prayer, and it is indeed hard except for the humble" (Qur'an 2:45).

<sup>3</sup> "O you who have faith! Take recourse in patience and prayer; indeed, Allah is with the patient" (Qur'an 2:153).

<sup>4</sup> "And give good news to the patient" (Qur'an 2:155).

<sup>5</sup> "Allah loves the steadfast" (Qur'an 3:146).

### The Literal and Metaphorical Meanings of Patience

To have a better understanding of patience, it would be better if we learned about its opposite, i.e., *jaza'* (impatience), defined as the feeling of depression which comes together with the loss of courage, preventing one from doing what he was doing and forcing him to do something else (Ibn Athir n.d., 1:269); as explained by the noble Prophet (s): "*Jaza'* in hardships is that one does something he would not do before or abandon doing something he always did" (Raghib Isfahani 1991, 1:194). In his *Mi'raj al-sa'adah*, Naraqı states: "It is giving in to the course of hardships through crying, moaning, tearing one's clothes and hitting oneself. Also, it includes despondency, anxiety, and being upset" (A. Naraqı 2012, 693).

Thus, according to the meaning of *jaza'*, patience can be defined as self-control and self-restraint against distress and anxiety (Fayyumi n.d., 2:331; see also Ibn Manzur 1993, 4:438). Idiomatically, however, patience means perseverance and calmness in the face of hardships, without losing one's temper, happiness, and placidity and without complaining or doing anything wrong (A. Naraqı 2012, 724).

Patience (*sabr*) includes most moral qualities, and it is not a surprise why it accompanies faith (*iman*) such that being religious would not mean anything without it. Thus, patience can be defined as perseverance in the face of hardships without complaining; more accurately, *sabr* is resistance of the self against its desires and persisting in abiding by the truth!<sup>6</sup> This meaning of *sabr* can be applied to the

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<sup>6</sup> This is because enjoining the Truth and patience are regarded among the qualities of the righteous; see Qur'an 103:3.

times of happiness as well, since one must not lose his *sabr* and become distracted from the path of truth when he is granted divine blessings and must not display prodigality.

It might be useful to add that, in most cases, we are advised to practice *sabr* because we usually do not know the philosophy behind what happens in our lives; otherwise, *sabr* would not be bitter to us. This can be clearly seen in the impatient reactions of Moses (a) when he accompanied Khidr (a).

## Patience in the Qur'an

### I. Patience as a Condition of Preaching

The onerous duty of guiding and leading people is not a responsibility one can fulfill with impatience and bad temper. Thus, prophets (a) were great models for patience and perseverance. The Qur'an praises Ayyub (a) for his patience: "Indeed We found him to be patient. What an excellent servant! Indeed, he was a penitent [soul]" (38:44), and commands the Prophet (s) to "be patient just as the resolute among the apostles were patient, and do not seek to hasten [the punishment] for them" (46:35). Elsewhere, the Prophet (s) is instructed: "Be patient, and you cannot be patient except with Allah[’s help]. And do not grieve for them, nor be upset by their guile." (16:125)

Patience with hardships during religious missions is only for prophets (a); rather, anyone who wants to support and preach religion has to have this quality. According to the Qur'an, only those who are patient can defend religion: "Repel [evil] with what is best. [If you do so,] behold, he between whom and you was enmity, will be as though he were a sympathetic friend. But none is granted it except those who are patient, and none is granted it except the greatly endowed" (Qur'an 41:34-35). Moreover, it can be understood from this verse that a very

efficient strategy to attract people to religion is patience. Imam Ali (a) also counted patience as one of the moral attributes of prophets (a): “Patience, having good manner, doing good, and forbearance are among the attributes of prophets (a)” (Majlisi n.d., 68:92).

## **2. Patience as the Key to Happiness**

Patient people not only achieve their goals in this world but also receive divine rewards in the hereafter: “And be patient; indeed, Allah does not waste the reward of the virtuous” (Qur’an 11:115). They are promised to receive their rewards immeasurably: “Indeed, the patient will be paid in full their reward without any reckoning” (39:10). The following hadith from Imam Ali (a) confirms this: “[On the Judgment Day,] for every obedient one, there will be a scale to measure his actions except for the patient, who will be rewarded immeasurably” (Maybudi 1371 Sh, 8:393).

## **3. Patience and Receiving the Blessings of God**

The patient will be blessed with closeness to God: “O you who have faith! Take recourse in patience and prayer; indeed, Allah is with the patient” (Qur’an 2:153). Such friendship of God with the patient is beyond common friendship: “He is with you wherever you may be” (57:4). “The fruit of this special friendship is the promotion of faith, illumination of the way ahead, and perseverance in that way. From such good news for the patient, it can be understood that the focus of this verse is on patience, and prayer is mentioned to create the spirit of power and persistence in them” (Taleqani 1984, 2:22).

## **4. Patience as a Divine Attribute**

According to a hadith, God told David (a): “Adopt My attributes, and an attribute of Mine is that I am the Patient.<sup>7</sup> If a patient person dies with patience, he has died as a martyr; and if he lives, he lives with honor. Behold, standing against one’s desires is the sign of victory, and being patient with hardships results in redemption” (Daylami 1991, 1:127).

### **5. Patience as the Attribute of the Faithful**

Enjoining one another to patience is among the attributes of the faithful: “[T]hose who ... enjoin one another to [follow] the truth, and enjoin one another to patience” (103:3).

#### **Patience in Hadiths**

##### **1. Faith and Patience as Concomitants**

In some hadiths, faith and patience have been introduced as concomitants: if one of them is lost, the other one will be lost as well. Theoretical faith leads to patience, and practical faith depends on patience. Imam Ali (a) said: “[The relation of] patience to faith is like the relation of the head to the body, and one who is not patient does not have faith” (Daylami 1991, 1:126). Likening patience to head here is important; it indicates that just as the brain is responsible for the cooperation of all the body limbs, patience also harmonizes all the

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<sup>7</sup> Al-Sabur (the Patient). The truth of patience is perseverance against unpleasant issues and hardships, which requires calmness and absence of distress and anxiety. For God, this attribute means that He does not become upset with the disobedience and disbelief of His servants (Hamadani Durudabadi 1426 AH, 122).

virtues. If there is no patience, virtues will not find the opportunity to develop or endure.

In another hadith, patience is introduced as the main element of faithfulness: “O people, practice patience! Indeed, one who does not have patience, does not have faith” (Majlisi n.d., 68:92). In another hadith, patience is described as a key element of faith: “Faith relies on four elements: patience, certitude, justice, and generosity” (Shu’ayri 1405 AH, 36).

## **2. Patience as an Efficient Conveyance**

In their way towards their goal, human beings always need efficient conveyance. Patience is the conveyance that can help people achieve their material and spiritual goals. The noble Prophet (s) said: “Patience is a good conveyance God has blessed His servant with ... There is no [conveyance] better and more convenient than it” (Shahid al-Thani n.d., 45). Also, Imam Ali (a) said: “Patience is a vehicle which does not throw its rider to the ground” (Daylami 1412 AH, 1:127). Elsewhere, he (a) said: “Anyone who gets on the conveyance of patience will be guided to the field of victory” (Majlisi n.d., 68:96).

## **3. Patience as the Cause of Nobility**

Nobility finds its meaning only with patience. A noble person, even in the most difficult situations, guards his nobility patiently against hardships. Imam Sadiq (a) mentioned Yusuf (a) as a free spirit, who kept his soul free through most difficult situations with patience and perseverance: “The free person is always free ... If he is stricken by successive troubles, they will not break him; if he is captured or coerced, he will change the hardships into joy; just like Yusuf (a), the truthful and trustworthy, whose freedom was not damaged by imprisonment

and slavery and whom the darkness and distress of jail did not harm. Afterwards, God blessed him and made [his master who was] a tyrant ruler his slave and sent him [as a prophet], and through him God had mercy upon people. Thus, patience always results in good. So, practice patience and reconcile yourself to patience, so that you may be rewarded” (Kulayni 1984, 2:89).

#### 4. Victory as the Result of Patience

Real victory is only possible through patience. Imam Ali (a) said: “There is no victory for one who does not have patience” (Tamimi Amidi 1366 Sh, 283). An impatient person may choose ways which do not please God to achieve his goal. Then, although he may apparently achieve his goal, he will never be really successful as he will lose the eternal happiness as a result of disobeying God. Imam Ali (a) said: “He who wins through sins is not a winner, and those who win through evil fail” (Tabarsi 1965, 325). Elsewhere, the Imam (a) says: “The patient do not lose, even if it takes a long time” (Nahj al-balagha, wisdom 153).

Contrary to patience, impatience with hardships bears no fruits other than sorrow, distress, and pain. The impatient person complains about things before everyone, and this discredits him in the eyes of people as someone with weak and unstable personality. It is reported that Mufaddal b. Qays, one of the companions of Imam al-Sadiq (a), went to the Imam Sadiq and complained about different things. The Imam (a) called his servant and asked him to bring Mufaddal a certain bag. Then, he gave it to him and said: “There are four hundred dinars of gold in this bag, which Abu Ja‘far, the Abbasid caliph, has given me. Recover your life with this money!” Mufaddal said: “I did not talk of my situation to gain your help! I just wanted you to pray for me!” Imam



Sadiq (a) said: "I will pray for you, but never inform people of your hardships or you will be discredited in their eyes!" If Mufaddal had seen hardships as temporary, embedded features of this world, he would not have shown impatience and distress. Thus, distress over hardships has no fruits other than doubling our problems. Imam Ali (a) says: "There is an end to hardships, which they inevitably reach. Thus, if one of you is subject to any of them, you must submit yourself to it and be patient until it passes, because insisting on doing away with it when it comes adds up to its bitterness" (Harrani 1404 AH, 201).

Believing in the divine will and knowing that what has been written will take place, the faithful are patient with the troubles; they know that impatience will only increase their pains and deprive them of the rewards they can earn: "If you remain patient, God's decrees for you will be fulfilled and you will be rewarded; if you show impatience, God's decrees will be fulfilled and you will be considered a wrongdoer!" (Majlisi n.d., 68:92). If human beings understand that nothing in this world lasts long, they will choose patience over impatience. Imam Sadiq (a) said: "Surely, one who remains patient will [need to] be patient for a short time, and one who shows impatience will be impatient for a short time" (Kulayni 1984, 2:88). Once 'Aqil, Imam Ali's (a) brother, came to him while he was too upset about his poverty. He asked the Imam (a) to help him by giving him some money from the public treasure. The Imam (a) told him: "O 'Aqil! Be patient with the world whose hardships pass like the nightmare of one night" (Shaykh al-Saduq 1400 AH, 622).

### 5. Patience as Revealing the Inner Light

Patience reveals people's inner light, and impatience shows their hidden darkness and fear. Thus, patience with hardships is a sign of the light within, and impatience is a sign of the darkness within. Imam

Sadiq (a) says: “Patience reveals the light and purity within people, and impatience shows the darkness and desolation in their hearts. Patience is everyone’s claim, but no one stands up to it except the humble. And everyone denies impatience, but it is most apparent on the hypocrite, since the befalling of calamities and afflictions differentiates between the liar and the truthful” (Majlisi 1403 AH, 68:90-91).

The necessary point to mention at the end of this section is that a servant of God is always in need of patience, because whatever he is faced with is either pleasant for him or unpleasant, and he needs to have patience in both cases. Patience at the time of ease and affluence is even more difficult than patience during difficulties. Naraqı writes: “Believers [usually] remain patient upon calamities, but no one remains patient at the time of ease except the truthful. When life became easier for the companions of the Prophet (s), they said, ‘God tried us with hardships and pain and we remained patient, and now He is going to try us with the affluence of blessings and ease of life, and we may fail’” (A. Naraqı 2012, 697). Since this kind of patience is practiced while having other choices, it is more difficult than patience during hardships when there is no choice but being patient.

### **Patience in the Views of Islamic Thinkers**

In addition to the patience that was discussed so far, Naraqı mentions other types of patience:

There are other types of patience that are considered examples of other virtues: patience at the battlefield, which is an example of bravery, and its opposite is timidity; patience at the time of anger, which is called *hilm* (forbearance), and its opposite is wrath; patience with hardships, as in fulfilling one’s obligations, the opposite of which is impiety; patience with desires,

which is abstinence and about which God says: ‘But as for him who is awed to stand before his Lord and forbids the soul from [following] desire, his abode will indeed be paradise’ [Qur’an 79:40-41], and its opposite is intemperance; patience with the desire for having unnecessary things, which is self-restraint and asceticism, and its opposite is avarice; and patience with keeping secrets. (M. Naraqı 1388 Sh, 442)

### **A Story about Patience**

Prophet Ayyub (Job) (a) was tested with severe calamities. He had a lot of properties, a big farm and many sheep, and some grown-up children, and he lost all of them. He himself was inflicted by a severe illness. However, none of these difficulties decreased his gratitude towards God.

Many of his enemies criticized and blamed him, and possibly this was the greatest affliction for him. But he never lost his patience and never showed any kind of ingratitude towards God. When he passed all the stages of this great trial and disappointed Satan, the gates of God’s mercy were opened to him: not only he was granted new properties and children but also he gained such a great place in the eyes of God that the Almighty praised him in the following way: “What an excellent servant! Indeed, he was a penitent [soul]” (38:44).

### **The Way of Practicing Patience**

Below, we will discuss things that help a person remain patient in different situations, each of them having a special effect on this virtue.

#### **1. Strengthening Pillars of Faith**

Having a firm belief in the fact that God is the Most Merciful, especially with His servants and that He provides the best for them increases one's patience. In this regard, Imam Ali (a) says: "The essence of patience is having good trust in God" (Tamimi Amidi 1366 Sh, 281).

It is obvious that the more one's faith in God's wisdom and mercy increases, the easier his patience becomes. Imam Sadiq (a) is reported to have said to one of his companions: "We are patient, but our followers are more patient than us." The companion asked the Imam (a): "May I be your ransom! How could your followers be more patient than you?" The Imam (a) replied: "We are patient with what we know, but our followers remain patient with what they are not informed of" (Kulayni 1984, 2:93).

## 2. **Practice**

Like any other virtues, achieving patience is possible only through practice. This is why Imam Ali (a) said: "One who frequently encounters unpleasant situations will achieve the virtue of patience" (Tamimi Amidi 1366 Sh, 281).

## 3. **Accepting the Realities of Life**

This world is the place of problems, and no blessings can be achieved without passing different obstacles. Accepting this reality strengthens people in practicing patience against difficulties.

## 4. **Increasing One's Spiritual Capacity**

Patience has a close relation with one's spiritual capacity. One's patience increases as much as his capacity grows; therefore, children and childish adults show impatience with all

afflictions, while a person with great spiritual capacity solves the problems and shows no impatience.

## 5. Following Godly Leaders

Studying the conduct of godly leaders—especially prophets, who reached great spiritual positions by practicing patience—can inspire patience.

## 6. Paying Attention to the Physical Benefits of Patience

Patience is also very beneficial for physical health. Impatient people usually suffer from heart-related diseases and nervous disorders, while patient people often enjoy a long, healthy life. Imam Ali (a) said: “One who loves survival, must prepare a patient heart for afflictions” (Majlisi n.d., 75:81).

## Attributes of the Patient

### 1. Avoiding Impatience

Patience is resistance against difficulties and not losing one’s temper. Patient people think well when they face a problem and act appropriately, and refrain from harmful reactions. Although they may become upset or suffer, they do not give in. Imam Sadiq (a) said: “A free spirit is free in all circumstances: he would not lose his patience if an affliction struck him. He would not break if afflictions pound on him—even though he may become entangled or conquered—or if he faces hardships and difficulties after ease and comfort” (Kulayni 1984, 2:89).

### 2. Wise Response to Problems

The patient neither engage in vain fights with difficulties, nor do they yield to them; they accept the realities with patience and pursue a rational solution (Pasandideh 2009, 111 – 12).

### 3. Striving

The patient do not become tired of fighting with problems in their way towards their spiritual or worldly goals and do not become frustrated. Regarding the importance of striving for daily sustenance, Imam Sadiq (a) said: “If you have a [financial] problem, travel in the land, seek God’s grace and do not become sad” (Muhaddith Nuri 1987, 13:7).

### 4. Not Complaining

The patient do not let others know about their problems and hardships. They regard the difficulties of life as gifts from God. Imam Sadiq (a) said: “When God loves a servant, He would cover him with afflictions” (Kulayni 1984, 2:253). Elsewhere, Imam Sadiq (a) was asked about what “*sabr Jamil*” (beautiful patience) means in the Qur’an; the Imam (a) replied: “It is a kind of patience in which there is no complaining [about one’s problems] to people” (Kulayni 1984, 2:93).

This point is also mentioned in a hadith by the Prophet (s): “Attributes of the patient are three: first, they are not languid; second, they are not plaintive; and third, they do not complain about God” (Shaykh al-Saduq n.d., 2:498).

### Personal and Social Fruits of Patience

Patience has many personal and social fruits, some of which were mentioned above and some others will be mentioned below:

**I. Personal Fruits****a. Developing the Spirit of Invincibility**

Impatient people, who frequently express grief upon ordinary incidents in life, usually fail and escape away. On the contrary, those who have patience are more invincible and competent in coping with life problems. Imam Sadiq (a) said: "One who has not prepared patience for afflictions will become miserable" (Harrani 1404 AH, 304).

**b. Finding Hidden Powers Within**

Those who have tasted pressures and hardships in their lives and have suffered on their way to their goals well understand the role of patience in discovering hidden powers within. Such people have definitely experienced amazing powers in themselves as a result of their patience with hardships. Thus, patience helps a person know himself better and find out more about his virtues and discover his hidden powers.

**c. Remembering God and Relying More on Him**

The third valuable benefit of patience is that it helps a person get closer to God and rely more on Him. Some think that reliance on God contradicts self-reliance, and one who relies on God cannot rely on himself. However, there is a correlation between reliance on God and reliance on the self; self-reliance can even be regarded as a dimension of patience. In fact, it is a means of relying on God, since impatience with bitter happenings in life and being horrified of difficulties, which is a sign of the lack of self-reliance, leads to forgetting God. When people encounter difficulties and hardships but do not show impatience and despondence, windows for connecting with God will open to them and their souls will be enlightened by the presence of God. By contrast, showing impatience and

weakness separates one from God, as it separates one from oneself (Khamenei 1976, 39-42).

d. Finding Opportunity

Those who become hopeless after encountering problems lose many opportunities, but patient people use all their strengths to achieve better opportunities. Imam Ali (a) said, "Patience with hardships leads you towards opportunities" (Khamenei 1976, 39-42). He (a) also said, "Patience with miseries and pains draws the patient towards opportunities" (Tamimi Amidi 1366 Sh, 284).

e. Training and Perfecting the Soul

If a person practices patience with hardships just for the sake of God, his soul gradually becomes accustomed to it, and bearing hardships will become increasingly easy for him. This way, the self will grow a firm and vivid disposition, by which it ascends from the station of patience to higher spiritual stations. Having patience and abstaining from transgressions generate the power of self-control, draw one closer to God, and lead to contentment with what God wills, which are among great virtues of believers and of the Friends of God.

f. Victory

Imam Ali (a) said, "The patient do not lose, even if it takes a long time" (Nahj al-balaghah, wisdom 153). Impatience does not allow a person to have perseverance in a beneficial work that matches his talents; it makes him leave different tasks unaccomplished.



g. Reaching the Spiritual Station of Contentment (*Rida*)<sup>8</sup>

Some scholars of ethics have regarded patience as the gate to the station of *rida* and the station of *rida* as the gate to God's mercy. Therefore, two of the most important fruits of patience in this world are reaching the positions of "contentment" and "mercy."

**2. Communal Fruits**

a. Social Promotion

Patience takes the servant to high positions and puts him on the throne of honor and happiness: "Patience is the high position" (Tamimi Amidi 1366 Sh, 284), "Tolerate! [and] your esteem will increase" (Ibid.), and "One who wears the dress of patience and contentment becomes honorable and esteemed" (Ibid.).

b. Divine Assistance

One of the divine precedents is that God assists patient individuals and societies and helps them defeat their enemies: "Yes, if you are steadfast and God-wary, and should they come at you suddenly, your Lord will aid you with five thousand marked angels" (Qur'an 3:125).

c. Truth-Seeking

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<sup>8</sup> Rida (contentment) "is withdrawing objection against divine decrees in the heart and appearance, in the speech and action. And the possessor of the position of rida is in the state of happiness, bliss, and comfort, because it does not make any difference for him whether he is in the state of poverty or wealth, comfort or discomfort, respect or disrespect, illness or health, and death or life" (A. Naraqi 2012, 651).

People can defend the truth and avoid the trap of falsehood only by being patient. In a society where reality and truth are concealed by wealth, power and tricks, announcing the truth will have consequences, but free spirits are always prepared for bearing such hardships. Accordingly, Imam Sajjad (a) tells his son, Imam Baqir (a), “O son! Have patience even though it is bitter” (Kulayni 1984, 2:91).

## Conclusion

Patience is a great cause for progress in different aspects of life, whether material or spiritual. Since “actions are time-bound” (Hakimi 1380 Sh, 1:562), impatience does not assist one’s progress and achievement towards his goal but complicates the situation and distracts him. Many moral virtues, such as contentment, love, sacrifice, generosity, good manners, trust in God, can only be achieved through patience. Societies also develop only through facing challenges and problems patiently. The Muslim society at the time of the Prophet (s) is the best evidence for this claim. Although patience always entails hardships and pains, according to the Glorious Qur’an, comfort and victory are the worthy fruits.

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