

# The Spiritual Insights of Divine Wisdom in Adversity: A Translation with Introduction and Commentary of al-‘Izz al-Dīn ibn ‘Abd al-Salām’s *al-Fitan wa al-Balāyā wa al-Miḥan wa al-Razāyā*

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## Abstract

This article examines *Kitāb al-Fitan wa al-Balāyā wa al-Miḥan wa al-Razāyā* by the eminent Shāfi‘ī jurist and theologian al-‘Izz al-Dīn ibn ‘Abd al-Salām al-Sulamī al-Dimashqī (577–660 AH / 1181–1262 CE), widely known as *Ṣulṭān al-‘Ulamā’* (the King of Scholars). While best known for his legal maxims and principled leadership during the Crusader and Mongol periods, this lesser-studied treatise articulates a systematic and spiritually rich framework for understanding tribulation. Drawing on Qur’ānic verses and Prophetic traditions, Ibn ‘Abd al-Salām presents seventeen spiritual insights (*fawā’id*) that reframe suffering not as punishment, but as divine refinement—cultivating sincerity (*ikhhlās*), servitude (*‘ubūdiyyah*), patience (*ṣabr*), gratitude (*shukr*), and contentment (*riḍā*). The article combines close textual analysis with semantic investigation of five central Arabic terms—*fitan*, *balāyā*, *miḥan*, *razāyā*, and *muṣībah*—using classical lexicons by al-Rāghib al-Iṣfahānī and Ibn Manẓūr, supported by comparative references to his other works and select Ṣūfī commentaries. The findings reveal a coherent theological vision wherein adversity becomes a vehicle for moral elevation and existential clarity. In contemporary contexts marked by war, displacement, and psychological distress, Ibn ‘Abd al-Salām’s insights offer enduring relevance and spiritual guidance for navigating hardship with purpose and trust in divine wisdom.

## Keywords:

Al-‘Izz al-Dīn ibn ‘Abd al-Salām, *Ṣulṭān al-‘Ulamā’*, trials and tribulations, *balā’*, *ibtīlā’*, *muṣībah*, and *fitan*.

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**Introduction**

While his magnum opus in legal theory, *Qawā'id al-Ahkām fī Maṣāliḥ al-Anām* (also known as *al-Qawā'id al-Kubrā*), has received considerable scholarly attention, the lesser-known *al-Fitan wa al-Balāyā wa al-Miḥan wa al-Razāyā* reveals the profound engagement of al-'Izz ibn 'Abd al-Salām al-Sulamī al-Dimashqī (577–660 AH/1181–1262 CE) with the spiritual and ethical dimensions of suffering. In this treatise, he identifies at least seventeen spiritual insights (*fawā'id*) drawn from Qur'ānic and Prophetic accounts of tribulation. Through these reflections, Ibn 'Abd al-Salām shows how such ordeals function not merely as tests of faith, but also as catalysts for spiritual growth, nurturing qualities such as patience, resilience, and deeper reliance upon the Divine. The need to engage with this work is both urgent and timely, as trials and tribulations continue to weigh heavily upon the Muslim *ummah*. The ongoing assault and genocide in Gaza—as of March 2025, exceeding 605 days—has resulted in more than 50,000 deaths and over 124,000 injuries, bearing grim witness to the scale of contemporary suffering. Meanwhile, protracted crises in Yemen, Syria, Sudan, Afghanistan, and other Muslim-majority countries have brought years of hardship and instability. In this context, Ibn 'Abd al-Salām's reflections on adversity offer not only theological insight but also moral clarity and existential guidance for a community enduring sustained affliction.

To the best of our knowledge, prior studies on this treatise include *The Benefits of Trials and Tribulations for the Muslim Believer* by al-'Izz 'Abd al-'Azīz ibn 'Abd al-Salām: A Translation of *Fawā'id al-Balwā wa al-Miḥan*, by Wan Mohd Fazrul Azdi bin Wan Razali and Mohd Rumaizuddin Ghazali.<sup>1</sup> Wan Mohd Fazrul Azdi has also authored *Panduan Peranan Para Ibu Bapa dalam Pendidikan Teodisi Islam: Beberapa Pedoman daripada Fawā'id al-Balwā wa al-Miḥan oleh al-'Izz ibn 'Abd al-Salām* (577–660H), which explores parental roles in Islamic theodicy education.<sup>2</sup> These works underscore the treatise's pedagogical relevance, though further in-depth analysis remains necessary. Another contribution is Marwan Bukhari A. Hamid's *Faedah di Sebalik Ujian dan Musibah*, which also reflects on the wisdom embedded in adversity.<sup>3</sup> The present study uses the printed edition edited by Iyād Khālīd al-Ṭabbā', published jointly by Dār al-Fikr al-Mu'āṣir

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1. E-Proceeding, International Seminar on Islam and Science 2023, jointly organised by Persatuan Kakitangan Akademik Universiti Sains Islam Malaysia (PKAUSIM), Faculty of Syariah and Law, Universiti Sains Islam Malaysia (USIM), and the Institute of Fatwa and Halal (IFFAH) (Nilai: Penerbit USIM, 2023), 262–278.
  2. Wan Mohd Fazrul Azdi, "Panduan Peranan Para Ibu Bapa dalam Pendidikan Teodisi Islam: Beberapa Pedoman daripada Fawā'id al-Balwā wa al-Miḥan oleh al-'Izz ibn 'Abd al-Salām (577–660H)," *Journal of Ifla and Islamic Heritage* 2, no. 2 (2023): 85–107.
  3. Marwan Bukhari A. Hamid, *Faedah di Sebalik Ujian dan Musibah* (Kuala Lumpur: ABIM Press, 2018).

(Beirut) and Dār al-Fikr (Damascus) in 1992, hereafter cited as *al-Fitan*.<sup>4</sup> This text is widely recognised as the authentic work of *Ṣultān al-ʿUlamāʾ*, Ibn ʿAbd al-Salām, as affirmed by several classical authorities: al-Tāj ibn al-Subkī cites it in *Ṭabaqāt al-Shāfiʿiyyah al-Kubrā*;<sup>5</sup> al-Dāwūdī mentions it in *Ṭabaqāt al-Mufasssīrīn*;<sup>6</sup> and Ismāʿīl Pasha al-Baghdādī lists it in *Hadiyyāt al-ʿArifīn fī Asmāʾ al-Muʿallifīn wa ʾĀthār al-Muṣannifīn* (entry 580/1),<sup>7</sup> among others.<sup>8</sup>

In this treatise, the *Ṣultān al-ʿUlamāʾ* identifies seventeen distinct benefits arising from the trials and tribulations that befall individuals. For the purposes of this study, these benefits are grouped thematically as follows: *al-rubūbiyyah* (lordship), which affirms God’s supreme authority over all affairs; *al-ʿubūdiyyah* (servitude), the posture of submission and worship; *al-ikhhlās* (sincerity), denoting purity of intention in devotion; *al-tawbah* (repentance), the act of returning to God; and *al-tadarruʿ* (humility), a state of lowliness before the Divine. Further themes include *al-hilm* (forbearance), or restraint amid provocation; *al-ʿafw* (forgiveness), the pardoning of others; *al-sabr* (patience), understood as endurance in adversity; and *al-farḥ* (joy), or rejoicing in divine favour. Also identified are *al-shukr* (gratitude), the expression of thankfulness to God; *al-kaffārah* (expiation), the erasure of sin; *al-musāʿadah* (assistance), the duty to help others; and *al-niʿmah* (blessing), the recognition of divine grace. Additional insights include *al-fawāʾid al-khafīyyah* (hidden benefits), the unseen wisdom in suffering; *al-ajr* (reward), the spiritual recompense for enduring hardship; *al-tawāduʿ* (humility), or modesty and the avoidance of arrogance; and finally, *al-ridā* (contentment), the acceptance of God’s decree.

Although Ibn ʿAbd al-Salām’s treatise is relatively brief, it offers a deeply meaningful framework for confronting tribulation—especially in an age marked by rising levels of psychological distress, including depression and suicide. The

4. Al-ʿIzz ibn ʿAbd al-Salām, *al-Fitan wa al-Balāyā wa al-Miḥan wa al-Razāyā aw Fawāʾid al-Balwā wa al-Miḥan*, ed. Iyād Khālīd al-Ṭabbāʿ (Beirut: Dār al-Fikr al-Muʿāṣir, 1992).
5. Tāj al-Dīn ʿAbd al-Wahhāb ibn ʿAlī al-Subkī, *Ṭabaqāt al-Shāfiʿiyyah al-Kubrā*, ed. ʿAbd al-Fattāḥ Muḥammad al-Hulwa and Maḥmūd Muḥammad al-Tanāḥī, 6 vols. (Cairo: Dār al-Naṣr Fayṣal ʿIsā al-Bābī al-Ḥalabī, 1964), 4: 209–255. Within this section, al-Subkī records various scholarly contributions of Ibn ʿAbd al-Salām, including his treatise on *al-Fitan* (trials and tribulations), which addresses the nature of trials along with their wisdoms and blessings, and underscores their significance in Islamic jurisprudence and theology.
6. Muḥammad ibn ʿAlī al-Dāwūdī, *Ṭabaqāt al-Mufasssīrīn*, 2 vols. (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyyah, 1983), 1:208. Here, al-Dāwūdī highlights Ibn ʿAbd al-Salām’s perspectives on societal challenges and his approach to addressing them through his writings, including his work *al-Fitan*.
7. Ismāʿīl Pasha al-Baghdādī, *Hadiyyāt al-ʿArifīn fī Asmāʾ al-Muʿallifīn wa ʾĀthār al-Muṣannifīn*, 2 vols. (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyyah, 1951), 1:100. Al-Baghdādī mentions Ibn ʿAbd al-Salām’s work titled *al-Fitan wa al-Balāyā*, which focuses on trials, tribulations, and calamities.
8. The editor, Iyād Khālīd al-Ṭabbāʿ, also asserts the existence of a manuscript (no. 16660) preserved in the Syrian National Library in Damascus, which confirms: “Shaykh al-ʿIzz ibn ʿAbd al-Salām authored a book containing seventeen profound insights on the benefits of tribulations...” See Ibn ʿAbd al-Salām, *al-Fitan wa al-Balāyā*, 4.

work emphasises the theological and jurisprudential significance of suffering within the Islamic tradition. It also helps to correct widespread misconceptions about divine will (*irādah*) and justice (*ʿadl*) in the face of adversity, offering insight into the wisdom that may lie behind both visible and hidden afflictions. This article presents not only a translation of the seventeen spiritual insights identified by Ibn ʿAbd al-Salām but also a selective commentary informed by his other writings and by reflections from Ṣūfī authorities who have treated related themes. The commentary is intentionally limited in scope, as a full exposition of each benefit lies beyond the boundaries of this study.

### **A Brief Introduction to al-ʿIzz al-Dīn ibn ʿAbd al-Salām<sup>9</sup>**

His full name was Abū Muḥammad ʿIzz al-Dīn ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz bin ʿAbd al-Salām bin Abī al-Qāsim bin Ḥasan al-Salamī al-Shāfiʿī. He was born in Damascus, Syria, in 577 AH/1181 CE, where he grew up and studied, eventually teaching at the Umayyad Mosque in the “corner of al-Ghazālī.” He studied under notable scholars such as Ibn ʿAsākir (d. 1176 CE) and Sayf al-Dīn al-ʿAmidī (d. 1233 CE), and, in the field of Sufism, he was instructed by Shihāb al-Dīn Abū Ḥafṣ ʿUmar Suhrawardī (d. 1234 AH/1818 CE) and Abū al-Ḥasan al-Shādhilī (d. 656 AH/1258 CE). He later moved to Cairo, where he was appointed Chief Qaḍī and Imām. He was not only a scholar but also a *mujāhid*, actively involved in the struggle against the Mongol invasion and the Crusaders. Mastering various disciplines, including *kalām*, *fiqh*, and *uṣūl al-fiqh*, he attained the status of *mujtahid*, as noted by Imām al-Dhahabī.<sup>10</sup> Ibn ʿAbd al-Salām was a renowned Shāfiʿī scholar, recognised not only for his depth of learning and published works but also for his active participation in religious life. His expertise in the Islamic sciences, including *tafsīr*, enabled him to formulate and articulate comprehensive legal principles that became foundational in Islamic jurisprudence. His work *Qawāʿid al-Aḥkām fī Maṣāliḥ al-Anām* (Rules of Governance in the Interests of Mankind), commonly known as *al-Qawāʿid al-Kubrā*, is considered a seminal text outlining core legal maxims.

In 1227, the 37th ʿAbbāsīd Caliph, al-Mustansir Billāh (r. 1226–1242 CE), established the Madrasah al-Mustansiriyyah in Baghdad—a prestigious institution devoted to the advancement of jurisprudence, theology, and the Islamic sciences. Although Ibn ʿAbd al-Salām was not directly affiliated with this institution, it exemplifies the broader intellectual climate in which he flourished.

9. This brief biodata on Ibn ʿAbd al-Salām is extracted from various sources, such as al-Subkī, *Tabaqāt al-Shāfiʿiyyah al-Kubrā*, 8:209–255; Muḥammad ibn Aḥmad al-Dhahabī, *Siyar Aʿlām al-Nubalāʾ*, ed. Shuʿayb al-Arnaʿūt, 30 vols. (Beirut: Dār al-Risālah al-ʿAlamiyyah, 2019), 23:48; and Ibn ʿAbd al-Salām, “The Belief of the People of Truth (*al-Mulha fī Itiqād Ahl al-Ḥaqq*),” trans. Gibril Fouad Haddad, in *Islamic Doctrines & Beliefs*, 4 vols. (Damascus: n.p., 1998), 3: 3–14.

10. Al-Dhahabī, *Siyar Aʿlām al-Nubalāʾ*, 23:48.

The Shāfiʿī madrasah in Cairo, where Ibn ʿAbd al-Salām later taught, was established and supported by Sultan al-Ṣāliḥ Najm al-Dīn Ayyūb, the Ayyubid ruler of Egypt (r. 1240–1249 CE). Recognising Ibn ʿAbd al-Salām’s scholarly merit and reformist zeal, the Sultan extended him an invitation to relocate to Cairo, following opposition in Damascus stemming from Ibn ʿAbd al-Salām’s uncompromising stance on social justice and Islamic law. In Cairo, he was appointed to senior posts in the judiciary and educational institutions, thereby allowing him to influence the development of the Shāfiʿī legal tradition. The Sultan’s patronage afforded Ibn ʿAbd al-Salām the institutional authority and resources necessary to advance his principles of justice and reform, helping to cement his enduring legacy in Islamic jurisprudence and ethics.

In addition to his scholarly accomplishments, Ibn ʿAbd al-Salām was renowned for his moral courage in confronting erroneous practices in society. He openly admonished public officials and rulers when necessary, and did so with intellectual clarity and religious conviction. He was also known for his asceticism and steadfast commitment to enjoining right and forbidding wrong. In *al-Furūq* by Shihāb al-Dīn al-Qarāfi (d. 1285), Ibn ʿAbd al-Salām is cited as a major legal authority, particularly in matters of justice and equity. Al-Qarāfi highlights his bold legal opinions and fearless opposition to injustice, especially when perpetrated by figures of political authority.<sup>11</sup> Ibn ʿAbd al-Salām died in Egypt in 1262 CE. There is a saying in Egypt that reflects his reputation: “You are nothing but one of the common folk, even if you were the son of Ibn ʿAbd al-Salām” (*mā anta illā min al-ʿawwām walaw kunta ibn ʿAbd al-Salām*).<sup>12</sup> The phrase implies that a person’s worth is determined not by lineage but by individual character and action. Referencing “Ibn ʿAbd al-Salām”—that is, Ibn ʿAbd al-Salām himself—invokes the memory of a scholar distinguished by his knowledge, virtue, and moral stature. Yet the saying emphasises humility, affirming that honour and distinction must be earned through personal integrity rather than inherited from family reputation.

## Terminologies

This treatise is titled *al-Fitan wa al-Balāyā wa al-Miḥan wa al-Razāyā* (or *Fawāʾid al-Balwā wa al-Miḥan*), which may be translated as “Trials, Afflictions, Hardships, and Calamities: Insights into the Merits of Suffering and Adversity.” The title comprises several terms which carry meanings that are nearly synonymous: “trials” (*al-fitan*), “afflictions” (*al-balāyā*), “hardships” (*al-miḥan*), and “calamities” (*al-razāyā*). Arabic is a language of artistry, nuance, and depth, wherein each word bears both similarities and subtle distinctions in meaning. However, since

11. Shihāb al-Dīn al-Qarāfi, *al-Furūq* (Beirut: Dār al-Kutūb al-ʿIlmiyyah, 1994), 120.

12. Khayr al-Dīn al-Ziriklī, *al-Iʿlām: Qamūs Tarājīm*, 8 vols. (Beirut: Dār al-ʿIlm li al-Malāyīn, 2002), 4:21.

in this title these words are grouped together, it is safe to concede that the *Ṣultān al-ʿUlamāʾ* does not—at least not in this treatise—elaborate extensively on the semantic differences between the terms he employs. The title appears to reflect Ibn ʿAbd al-Salām’s intention to utilise these terms in a general and straightforward manner, without probing deeply into their nuanced connotations, despite the inherent linguistic richness and precision characteristic of the Arabic language. Nevertheless, in this section, we briefly explore the etymological and semantic meanings of each Arabic term. Our analysis draws upon at least three principal lexicons, each offering a distinct perspective. *Lisān al-ʿArab* provides historical depth and intricate linguistic detail, tracing the evolution of terminology over time.<sup>13</sup> The *Hans Wehr Dictionary* offers a pragmatic and contemporary interpretation suited to modern usage.<sup>14</sup> Meanwhile, *Mufradāt Alfāz al-Qurʾān* emphasises the moral and spiritual dimensions of the terms within the Qurʾānic context.<sup>15</sup> Together, these sources illustrate how each term encompasses both everyday meanings and profound spiritual connotations. Additional references are incorporated where necessary to ensure a comprehensive and nuanced understanding.

### *Al-Fitan*

The term *fitan* derives from the Arabic root *fitnah*, composed of the letters *fāʾ-tāʾ-nūn*. According to al-Rāghib al-Iṣfahānī (d. 502 AH/1108 CE), it denotes trials (*ibtīlāʾ*) and tests (*ikhtibār*). Al-Iṣfahānī records the original and linguistic meaning of *fitnah* as follows: “I tested the gold with fire to examine it/I have inserted gold into the fire to reveal its quality from its inferiority” (*fātantu al-dhahaba bi al-nār idhā imtahantuhu/idkhāl al-dhahab al-nār li-tazhara jawdatuhu min radāʾatih*).<sup>16</sup> The phrase *fātantu al-dhahaba bi al-nār idhā imtahantuhu* (I tested the gold with fire to examine it), as interpreted by al-Iṣfahānī in the context of the root *f-t-n*, highlights its core meaning of “testing” or “trial.” This concept is exemplified through the refinement of gold, wherein fire serves as a purifying agent that separates its pure essence from its impurities. Although the original definition of *fitnah* revolves around the act of burning, its metaphorical usage extends to depict trials and tests as processes of refinement and purification—analogueous to the smelting of gold. The term *fitnah* also encompasses the senses

13. Muḥammad ibn Mukarram Ibn Manẓūr, *Lisān al-ʿArab*, 18 vols. (Beirut: Dār al-Ṣādir, 2000), vol. 14, s.v. “balāyā.”

14. Hans Wehr, *A Dictionary of Modern Written Arabic*, ed. J. Milton Cowan, 3rd printing (Beirut: Librairie du Liban, 1980), s.v. “b-l-w.”

15. Al-Rāghib al-Iṣfahānī, *Mufradāt Alfāz al-Qurʾān*, ed. Ṣafwān ʿAdnān Dāwūdī (Damascus: Dār al-Qalam, 2009), 623–625.

16. Ibid., 623–625.



of trials (*ibtīlāʾ*) and tests (*ikhtibār*), implying that al-Isfahānī does not draw a definitive distinction between these terms, treating them as largely synonymous in meaning.

Symbolically, *fitnah*—encompassing “trials,” “tests,” and “calamities”—may be understood within the framework of divine decree from God (Allah), intended to “refine” or “forge” individuals into exemplary human beings. Just as gold must be heated and purified in fire to eliminate its impurities before it can be fashioned into exquisite ornaments such as rings or bracelets, so too are human beings exposed to various trials intended to cultivate noble virtues—chief among them, steadfast faith—provided that they respond with patience, perseverance, and spiritual resilience.<sup>17</sup>

### *Al-Balāyā*

According to *Lisān al-ʿArab*, the term *balāyā* is the plural of *baliyyah*, derived from the root *b-l-w*. It denotes trials, challenges, or misfortunes that test an individual’s patience and resilience.<sup>18</sup> The *Hans Wehr Dictionary* defines *balāyā* as “affliction,” “calamity,” or “misfortune,” with its root associated with being tested or tried, often in difficult or adverse circumstances.<sup>19</sup> Similarly, *al-Muṣam al-Wasīṭ* describes *baliyyah* as a severe trial or affliction, and *balāyā* in its plural form as multiple such trials.<sup>20</sup> These sources collectively illustrate how *balāyā* conveys the idea of repeated trials or hardships—a usage found in both classical and modern Arabic to describe periods of collective or individual suffering. The term *baliyyah* (plural: *balāyā*), along with *balāʾ*, *balwā*, and *ibtīlāʾ*, generally denotes trials, tests, calamities, misfortunes, and suffering—terms which are nearly synonymous with *miḥnah* (plural: *miḥan*). Hence, tests in the Islamic tradition may manifest in both positive and negative forms, encompassing the blessings of ease as well as the hardships of suffering, as articulated in the Qurʾān: “Every soul shall taste death, and We will test (*nablūkum*) you with evil and good as a trial (*fitnatān*); and to Us (God) you will all be returned.”<sup>21</sup>

17. It is worth noting, by way of brief digression, that the commonly held understanding of the term *fitnah* within the Malay-speaking community does not accurately reflect its nuanced meaning in the original Qurʾānic Arabic.

18. Ibn Manẓūr, *Lisān al-ʿArab*, vol. 14, s.v. “balāyā.”

19. Wehr, *A Dictionary*, s.v. “b-l-w”

20. Majmaʿ al-Lughah al-ʿArabīyah, *al-Muṣam al-Wasīṭ*, s.v. “al-baliyyah,” <https://www.almougem.com/search.php?query=البليّة>, accessed 22 August 2025.

21. *Sūrat al-Anbiyāʾ* (21):35.

*Al-Miḥan*

The term *miḥan* is the plural of *miḥnah*, meaning “trial,” “hardship,” or “test.” According to Ibn Manẓūr, *miḥan* is indeed the plural form of *miḥnah*, derived from the root *m-h-n*, which conveys meanings related to testing, trying, and examining—particularly through hardship. In Arabic morphology, the pluralisation of nouns such as *miḥnah* often follows the *fiʿal* template (*wazan*), yielding *miḥan*. Ibn Manẓūr further explains that *miḥnah* denotes the difficulties or tests a person might endure, aligning closely with the sense of hardship. The *Hans Wehr Dictionary* similarly defines *miḥnah* as a “trial, ordeal, hardship, [or] affliction,” referring to situations of testing or difficulty, and confirms that its plural is *miḥan*, in accordance with common Arabic morphological patterns for abstract nouns related to trials and adversities.<sup>22</sup> Al-Isfahānī, in his *Mufradāt Alfāz al-Qurʾān*, examines the root meanings of *miḥnah* within the Qurʾānic context. He explains that *miḥnah* denotes a state of being tested, often through difficulties or trials intended to reveal a person’s character or faith. Although the term *miḥnah* does not occur explicitly in the Qurʾān, related concepts derived from the root *m-h-n* are present, indicating that *miḥnah* embodies the notion of divine or worldly tests. The plural *miḥan* thus refers to multiple such tests or hardships, reflecting an extended or compounded experience of trials. In all three sources consulted, *miḥan* is recognised as the plural of *miḥnah*: the singular conveys the concept of a single test or trial, whereas the plural extends this to a series of challenges, thereby capturing both the intensity and the frequency of adversities one may encounter. In the *Mufradāt*, al-Isfahānī further defines *miḥnah* and related concepts in ways that underscore their spiritual significance. He describes *miḥnah* as “a form of trial or examination” intended to test a person’s endurance and faith, aligning it with divine wisdom and the process of purification. This perspective, characteristic of classical Islamic scholarship, affirms that trials and adversities are integral to the believer’s journey, providing occasions to manifest patience and steadfastness in faith.

*Al-Razāyā*

In Arabic lexicons, the plural term *razāyā* has its roots in classical sources. Notably, Ibn Manẓūr traces it to the root *ruzʿ*, denoting a calamity or misfortune. He cites an example from Abū Dhuʾayb, who says: “a calamity like the loss of Ibn Mālik” (*al-ruzʿ mithl ibn Mālik*). The terms *marziʾah* and *raziʾah* both signify “calamity” or “misfortune,” with the plurals *arzāʾ* or *razāyā*. The expression *razathu raziʾah* means “a calamity struck him.” A further example appears in the *hadīth* of a woman mourning her son: “If I lose my son, I have not lost my dignity” (*in*

22. Wehr, *A Dictionary*, s.v. “m-h-n.”



*urza'ibnī falam urza'hayā*). The term *razāyā* is thus the plural of *razīyah* or *razī'ah*, denoting a significant loss, calamity, or disaster. It refers to multiple misfortunes or afflictions and is often used to describe grave tragedies or severe hardships.<sup>23</sup> In the *Hans Wehr Dictionary*, the word is associated with “heavy loss,” “serious damage,” “disaster,” or “calamity.”<sup>24</sup> It appears frequently in Islamic texts and literature, particularly in contexts emphasising trials or adversities faced by religious figures or communities. In the context of Qur'ānic interpretation, al-Isfahānī's *Mufradāt* explores the nuances of terms such as *razīyah*, interpreting them as referring to calamities or severe trials that a person may experience. In the Qur'ān, the concept of *razāyā* is often employed to describe trials occurring as part of God's wisdom and divine decree. Several verses underscore that hardships or calamities occur only by God's permission and are often linked to tests of faith and the purification of believers.<sup>25</sup> This interpretation aligns with the term's usage in both Qur'ānic and classical Arabic, where it denotes situations involving loss, grief, or severe affliction. Upon closer examination, it becomes evident that these terms—*fitan*, *balāyā*, *mīhan*, and *razāyā*—share overlapping meanings, each relating to concepts such as tests, trials, calamities, temptations, and tribulations. This nuanced convergence may explain why the *Ṣulṭān al-'Ulamā'* unifies them under a single, comprehensive designation that captures the full scope of challenges and adversities individuals may encounter. Such an approach encapsulates a broad spectrum of trials, underscoring their interconnected nature as elements of spiritual and personal testing. There is, however, another term—though not included in the title by Ibn 'Abd al-Salām—which is often used in relation to trials and tribulations: *muṣībah*. An examination of this term will complete our understanding of the Qur'ānic and Islamic conceptualisation of trials and tribulations.

### *Al-Muṣībah*

The term *muṣībah* in classical Arabic lexicons, such as Ibn Manẓūr's, carries nuanced meanings that have evolved over time. Derived from the root ṣ-w-b, which connotes “to hit the mark” or “to be correct,” it originally referred to something that befalls a person as though it had been “aimed” or destined for them. Over time, it acquired the meaning of a calamity or misfortune—an event, often challenging or painful, that occurs as if it were meant to happen. In the *Hans Wehr Dictionary*, *muṣībah* is generally translated as “misfortune,” “calamity,” or “disaster.”<sup>26</sup> In contemporary usage, it is frequently applied to

23. Ibn Manẓūr, *Lisān al-'Arab*, vol. 6, s.v. “r-z-’.”

24. Wehr, *A Dictionary*, s.v. “m-h-n.”

25. Ibid., s.v. “r-z-’.”

26. Ibid., s.v. “ṣ-w-b.”

unfortunate events, disasters, or accidents—situations perceived as negative, sudden, or difficult. In the *Mufradāt*, al-Isfahānī analyses the term within the Qur’ānic framework, interpreting it as a test, trial, or affliction faced by an individual. He emphasises that such events are often understood as part of divine will, intended as tests of faith. From this perspective, *muṣībah* is not merely a misfortune but also an opportunity for personal or spiritual growth, as hardships and trials are designed to bring a believer closer to God.

Etymologically, *muṣībah* signified something that “hits the mark” or befalls one as if destined; in modern and colloquial Arabic, however, it has come to denote “calamity,” “disaster,” or “misfortune.” Spiritually, as explained by al-Isfahānī, it represents a “test” or “trial,” closely tied to divine will and a believer’s journey towards greater resilience and faith. In *al-Ta’rīfāt*, al-Jurjānī defines *muṣībah* as “something that is unusual, such as death and the like.”<sup>27</sup> In the Qur’ān, God employs the term *muṣībah* to describe events that may befall believers, with the critical implication that such trials serve as reminders for them to return to Him, as indicated in the verse: “Those who, when afflicted by a calamity, say: ‘Indeed, we belong to Allah, and indeed, to Him we shall return.’”<sup>28</sup>

In a *ḥadīth* narrated by Umm Salamah, the term *muṣībah* is also employed. Umm Salamah, the wife of the Prophet Muḥammad, relates:

I heard the Messenger of Allah (peace and blessings be upon him) say: “No servant is afflicted by a calamity and then says: ‘we come from God, and to Him we shall return, O Allah, reward me in my calamity and grant me something better in return,’ except that Allah grants him reward for his calamity and replaces it with something better (*lā yuṣībū ‘abdan muṣībah fa-yaqūlu: innā lillāhi wa innā ilayhi rāji‘ūn, Allahumma ajirni fī muṣibatī wa akhlif li khayran minhā*).”

She continued:

When Abū Salamah passed away, I uttered these words as the Messenger of Allah had instructed me, and Allah granted me someone better than Abū Salamah—by allowing me to become the wife of the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him).<sup>29</sup>

In conclusion, according to Ibn Manẓūr, terms such as *fitan* (trials), *balāyā* (calamities), *razāyā* (disasters), *miḥan* (tests), and *muṣībah* (calamity) are discussed

27. Al-Sharīf al-Jurjānī, *Al-Ta’rīfāt* (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyyah, 1983), s.v. “*al-muṣībah*.”

28. *Sūrat al-Baqarah* (2):156.

29. When Abū Salamah died in 4 AH/625 CE from wounds sustained during the Battle of Uhud, Umm al-Mu’minīn Umm Salamah (Hind bint Abī Umayyah) observed her waiting period (*‘iddah*) and was subsequently married to the Prophet Muḥammad (peace be upon him). See Ibn ‘Abd al-Barr, *al-Istī‘āb fī Ma’rifat al-Ashāb*, vol. 8 (Egypt: Markaz Hajr li al-Buḥūth wa al-Dirāsāt al-‘Arabiyyah wa al-Islāmiyyah, 2019), 274.

within a framework that encompasses both their linguistic roots and their thematic associations with the challenges faced by individuals or communities. Collectively, these terms convey the multifaceted nature of human adversity in Islamic thought, ranging from moral and spiritual trials to severe misfortunes and societal upheavals. In brief, we can summarise the above terms as follows. *Al-fitan* often refers to tribulations or trials that test a person's faith or resolve. Derived from the root *f-t-n*, meaning to purify gold by fire, it symbolises the way in which trials refine and purify a believer's character and faith. *Al-balāyā* denotes severe difficulties or afflictions, commonly associated with hardships that serve as tests from Allah. *Al-raẓāyā* conveys the sense of calamities or losses, with particular emphasis on profound personal or collective tragedies. *Al-miḥan* refers to tests or ordeals, underscoring the divine purpose of assessing patience and perseverance. Finally, *al-muṣṭabah* encapsulates the idea of an adverse event that befalls an individual, with layered meanings that include fate, misfortune, and the potential for spiritual and personal development.

### **Tests, Calamities, and Punishments**

Another prevalent question arises: under what circumstances is a calamity regarded as a “test” (*ibtilāʾ*), and when is it interpreted as a “punishment” (*uqūbah*) from God? In addressing this, it becomes evident that God tests humanity through both moments of ease and experiences of hardship. At times, these trials arise as a consequence of sins committed by individuals, as stated in the Qurʾān: “And whatever strikes you of calamity is from what your own hands have earned, and He forgives much.”<sup>30</sup> Occasionally, a calamity serves the purpose of expiating sins (*kaffārah*), as indicated in the *ḥadīth* of the Prophet: “Abū Saʿīd and Abū Hurayrah (may Allah be pleased with them) narrated that the Prophet said: ‘No hardship, illness, worry, sadness, hurt, or even the prick of a thorn befalls a Muslim, except that Allah expiates his sins (*kaffara Allāh bihā*) because of it.’”<sup>31</sup> Alternatively, it may be intended to bring about some greater good, as reflected in the statement: “Whomever Allah intends good for, He afflicts them with calamity.”<sup>32</sup> Thus, whether a calamity is perceived as a test or as a punishment depends less on the calamity itself and more on the individual's response to it. If the person meets it with patience (*ṣabr*), reflection, and recognition of it as a trial from God, it may serve to elevate their rank,

30. *Sūrat al-Shūrā* (42):30.

31. Muḥammad ibn Ismāʿīl al-Bukhārī, “Kitāb al-Marḍā,” *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, ed. Muḥammad Zuhayr ibn Nāṣir al-Nāṣir, 9 vols. (Beirut: Dār Tawq al-Najāh, 1422 AH [2001 CE]), vol. 7, p. 216, *ḥadīth* no. 5641; Muslim ibn al-Hajjāj, “Kitāb al-Birr wa-al-Silah wa-al-Adāb,” *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, ed. Muḥammad Fuʿād ʿAbd al-Bāqī, 5 vols. (Cairo: Dār Iḥyāʾ al-Kutub al-ʿArabiyyah, 1374 AH [1955 CE]), vol. 4, p. 1992, *ḥadīth* no. 2573.

32. Al-Bukhārī, “Kitāb al-Marḍā,” vol. 7, p. 218, *ḥadīth* no. 5645.

expiate their sins, and prompt sincere repentance. There is a prophetic tradition reported by Anas ibn Mālik (may Allah be pleased with him), in which the Prophet states: “When Allah intends good for His servant, He hastens their punishment in this world; but when He intends evil for a servant, He withholds them with their sins until they meet Him on the Day of Resurrection.”<sup>33</sup>

‘Abd al-Qādir al-Jīlānī (d. 1166) explains that one indication of a calamity being a punishment from God is the loss of patience in the face of adversity, accompanied by anxiety and complaints regarding the situation. Conversely, a sign that a calamity constitutes a purifying test is the presence of patience without complaint or anger, as well as the absence of any sense of burden in fulfilling acts of obedience. A distinguishing feature of a test that elevates one’s spiritual rank is the presence of contentment, tranquillity, and calmness when confronting divine decree. Al-Jīlānī states:

The indication of a test administered in a punitive manner is the absence of patience during adversity, accompanied by anxiety and complaints to others. By contrast, the mark of a test that expiates and purifies sins is the presence of graceful patience, free from complaint, distress, or any sense of burden in performing divine commands and acts of obedience. The sign of a test that elevates one’s spiritual rank is the presence of contentment, acceptance, tranquillity of the soul, and calmness in the face of destiny until its outcome is made manifest.<sup>34</sup>

In conclusion, scholars have drawn clear distinctions between *al-ibtīlā’* and *al-‘uqūbah*, which may be summarised as follows. *Al-ibtīlā’* occurs when an individual remains steadfast in their faith and commitment to Islam; in such circumstances, the tests they encounter serve as proof of the strength of their belief, similar to the trials endured by the Prophets—who are the most rigorously tested—followed by those closest to them in faith. By contrast, punishment or affliction arises as a direct result of sins, transgressions, or deviations from Islam. The greater the prevalence of sins and misdeeds, the more widespread the corruption, and consequently, the more severe the affliction that befalls individuals. “Tests” are a sign of Allah’s love and approval for His servants, whereas affliction from Allah is a manifestation of His wrath and a withdrawal of His favour. “Tests” serve as a means to establish and strengthen leadership and authority, while afflictions are fundamentally distinct in nature and purpose. The Prophet Ibrāhīm, for example, was appointed as a leader owing to his success in enduring trials, as emphasised in the Qur’ān:

33. Muḥammad ibn ‘Isā al-Tirmidhī, “Kitāb al-Zuhd,” *Jāmi‘ al-Tirmidhī*, ed. Aḥmad Muḥammad Shākir et al., 5 vols. (Cairo: Maṭba‘at Muṣṭafā al-Bābī al-Ḥalabī, 1937–65), vol. 4, p. 601, *ḥadīth* no. 2396.

34. ‘Abd al-Wahhāb al-Sha‘rānī, *al-Ṭabaqāt al-Kubrā* (Cairo: n.p., n.d.), as quoted in Islamweb, <https://bit.ly/4fsYmke> (accessed 21 December 2024).

And (remember) when Ibrāhīm was tested by his Lord with certain commandments, which he fulfilled completely. Allah said, “Indeed, I have appointed you as a leader for all mankind.” Ibrāhīm asked, “And what of my descendants?” Allah replied, “My covenant does not extend to the wrongdoers.”<sup>35</sup>

The purpose of tests is to unite the community and strengthen its bonds, whereas affliction becomes a cause for division—setting hearts against one another and fostering increased animosity and hatred. As the Qur’ān states: “But they forgot a portion of what they had been reminded of, so We instilled enmity and hatred between them until the Day of Resurrection. And Allah will inform them of what they used to do.”<sup>36</sup>

### **Annotated Translation**

Below is a translation from Ibn ‘Abd al-Salām’s original work, *al-Fitan wa al-Balāyā wa al-Miḥan wa al-Razāyā*.<sup>37</sup>

In the name of Allah, the Most Merciful, the Most Compassionate.

May Allah send blessings and peace upon our master Muḥammad, his family, and his companions in full measure. The esteemed Shaykh, the Imām, the Proof of Islam, the Support of Mankind, Abū Muḥammad ‘Abd al-‘Azīz ibn ‘Abd al-Salām ibn Abī al-Qāsim al-Sulamī al-Shāfi‘ī—may Allah grant benefit through him to all Muslims, and forgive him, us, and all believers—said:

Among the trials, tribulations, calamities, and misfortunes, there are benefits that vary according to the spiritual rank of individuals. The first of these is the experience of the majesty (ʿizz) of Divine Lordship (*al-Rubūbiyyah*) and the overwhelming power (*al-Qaḥḥār*) of Allah.<sup>38</sup>

35. *Sūrat al-Baqarah* (2):124.

36. *Sūrat al-Māʾidah* (5):14.

37. The translation begins from page 13 until page 23 of Ibn ‘Abd al-Salām, *al-Fitan wa al-Balāyā* edited by Iyād Khālīd al-Ṭabbāʾ. It covers only the original Arabic text of Ibn ‘Abd al-Salām, while the editorial notes and commentaries by al-Ṭabbāʾ are translated selectively—only where necessary for clarity. Each benefit (*faʾidah*) is numbered to enhance readability. Additional commentary is provided in the footnotes by the translator, particularly where Ibn ‘Abd al-Salām does not elaborate within the main text.

38. Ibn ‘Abd al-Salām does not elaborate extensively on this particular benefit; however, it may be inferred that recognising Allah’s attributes—especially His absolute sovereignty and overwhelming power—serves to deepen one’s spiritual connection and submission. Acknowledging Allah’s supreme authority compels believers to reflect upon their own servitude and complete dependence upon Him. The might and will of Allah are absolute, for He acts as He wills, without restriction. Such recognition cultivates humility, inspires sincere worship, and fosters a steadfast commitment to righteous conduct.

The second is the realisation of one's own state of humiliation (*dhillah*) and the brokenness (*kasr*) inherent in servitude. This reflects the words of God: "Those who, when calamity befalls them, say: 'Indeed, we belong to Allah, and indeed, to Him we shall return.'" These believers acknowledge that they are the absolute property of God and are subject to His will. They attribute the wisdom behind every trial to God, who ordains it. They cannot escape the affliction, nor can they resist it.

Third is sincerity (*al-ikhhlās*) to God: when there is no escape from formidable trials except by turning to God, it is at that moment that one's reliance rests solely upon Him. This is expressed in the words of God: "And if Allah should afflict you with harm, there is none to remove it except Him"<sup>39</sup>; and: "So when they embark on a ship, they call upon Allah, making their religion sincere for Him."<sup>40</sup>

Fourth is returning to and approaching Allah (*al-inābah ilā Allāh ta'ālā wa al-iqbāl 'alayhi*): "And when adversity touches man, he calls upon his Lord, turning to Him."<sup>41</sup>

Fifth is humbling oneself and praying. The Qur'ān says: "And when man is touched by harm, he calls upon Us";<sup>42</sup> "When you are engulfed by danger at sea, those you call upon vanish except for Him. But when He delivers you to the land, you turn away—and man is ever ungrateful";<sup>43</sup> "But only Him do you call upon, and He removes the distress for which you pray to Him, if He wills";<sup>44</sup> and: "Say, 'Who can save you from the darkness of the land and the sea—whom you invoke with humility and in secret?'"<sup>45</sup>

Sixth is forbearance (*al-ḥilm*) in times of adversity. The Qur'ān says: "Indeed, Ibrāhīm was most clement, compassionate, and inclined to turn to Allah."<sup>46</sup> This verse underscores that Ibrāhīm possessed a gentle heart and a calm demeanour. Allah also says: "And We gave him good tidings of a forbearing boy."<sup>47</sup> In a *ḥadīth*, the Prophet (peace be upon him) said: "Indeed, within you

39. *Sūrat al-An'ām* (6):17.

40. *Sūrat al-Ankabūt* (29):65.

41. *Sūrat al-Ẓumar* (39):8. The verse continues: "...but when He bestows a favour upon him, he forgets what he had been invoking before and sets up rivals to Allah to mislead from His path. Say, 'Enjoy your disbelief for a little while; indeed, you are among the companions of the Fire.'" When a person is afflicted by hardship, the trial itself often compels them—by its very nature—to return to Allah in earnest *du'ā*. Even if the individual had been a sinner or accustomed to indulgence in wrongdoing, it is common in such moments of tribulation for them to instinctively seek divine assistance, raising their hands in *du'ā* and drawing closer to their Lord without any external prompting.

42. *Sūrat Yūnus* (10):12.

43. *Sūrat al-Isrā'* (17):67.

44. *Sūrat al-An'ām* (6):41.

45. *Sūrat al-An'ām* (6):63.

46. *Sūrat Hūd* (11):75.

47. *Sūrat al-Ṣaffāt* (37):101. Here, Allah granted Ibrāhīm the glad tidings of a son distinguished by patience and composure.



are two qualities beloved by Allah, the Almighty: forbearance (*al-ḥilm*) and deliberation (*al-anāḥ*).<sup>48</sup> The rank of *al-ḥilm* varies according to the magnitude and nature of the afflictions encountered, whether minor or severe. The greatest afflictions call for, and reveal, the most elevated level of forbearance.

Seventh is forgiving those who wronged one.<sup>49</sup> Allah says: “Those who restrain their anger and pardon people—and Allah loves the doers of good.”<sup>50</sup> He also says: “Whoever pardons and makes reconciliation—his reward is with Allah.”<sup>51</sup> Extending forgiveness to others is among the noblest acts of mercy, reflecting a purified heart and a magnanimous spirit.

Eighth is patience in the face of adversity.<sup>52</sup> The quality of patience when confronting hardship leads to the attainment of Allah’s love and abundant reward.<sup>53</sup> Allah, the Almighty, states: “And Allah loves the patient”,<sup>54</sup> and: “Indeed, the patient will be rewarded without measure.”<sup>55</sup> The Prophet Muḥammad (peace be upon him) also said: “Whoever is granted goodness is also granted the capacity for patience.”<sup>56</sup>

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48. Muslim, “Kitāb al-Īmān,” *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, vol. 1, p. 37, *ḥadīth* no. 17. A similar narration is found in al-Bukhārī, *al-Adab al-Mufrad*, *ḥadīth* no. 584–585, where the Prophet mentions forbearance (*al-ḥilm*) and modesty (*al-ḥayāʾ*) as two qualities beloved by Allah. See al-Bukhārī, *al-Adab al-Mufrad* (Kuala Lumpur: Dakwah Corner Publications, 2014), 391–392.
  49. A test not only requires a high degree of personal patience but also calls for forgiveness towards those who may have been the cause—or part of the cause—of the affliction, whether directly or indirectly. Adversities remind us that all events unfold by the will of God. Thus, the most virtuous course is to “forgive and forget,” enabling us to move forward in life. Extending forgiveness presents a golden opportunity to purify the heart, earn the pleasure of Allah, and cultivate love and compassion within society.
  50. *Sūrat Āli Imrān* (3):134, which highlights the virtue of restraining anger and granting forgiveness.
  51. *Sūrat al-Shūrā* (42):40, which affirms that the one who forgives and acts righteously will have their reward entrusted to God.
  52. Patience (*ṣabr*) is mentioned more than seventy times in the Qurʾān, and its reward is likened to the boundless recompense for fasting. Imām Ibn Juzayy al-Mālikī, in his *al-Tashīl fī Ulūm al-Tanzīl*, outlines seven rewards Allah grants to those who are patient, derived from his commentary on *Sūrat al-Baqarah* (2):153: “Indeed, Allah is with the patient.” These rewards are: (i) Allah loves them; (ii) they are granted His rewards; (iii) they receive His help and support; (iv) an eternal home in Paradise; (v) His mercy; (vi) His guidance; and (vii) His blessings. This reflection underscores the elevated station of patience in Islam and its transformative spiritual and social power. Ibn Juzayy al-Kalbī, *al-Tashīl fī Ulūm al-Tanzīl*, 2 vols. (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyyah, 1995), 1:89–90.
  53. The command to be patient falls under the category of inward obligations (*al-māʾmūrāt al-bāṭinah*). Imām al-Qushayrī delineates different types of patience, such as patience for the sake of Allah (*al-ṣabr li-Allāh*), which means remaining steadfast in fulfilling obligations and refraining from what is prohibited purely to seek His pleasure. See Abū al-Qāsim ʿAbd al-Karīm ibn Hawāzin al-Qushayrī, *al-Risālah al-Qushayriyyah* (Jeddah: Dār al-Minhāj, 2017), 438–451; al-Nawāwī, *Riyāḍ al-Ṣāliḥin*, trans. Muhammad Amin and Abū Usamah, 2 vols. (Riyadh: Darussalam Publishers & Distributors, 1999), 1:50–51.
  54. *Sūrat Āli Imrān* (3):146.
  55. *Sūrat al-Zumar* (39):10.
  56. I am unable to find the exact Prophetic ḥadīth in the canonical hadith collections in that form. However, there is an authentic *ḥadīth* with very close meaning: “Whoever strives

Ninth is rejoicing in the benefits of adversity.<sup>57</sup> The Prophet Muḥammad (peace be upon him) stated: “By the One in Whose hand is my soul, they rejoice when faced with adversity just as they rejoice when bestowed with blessings.”<sup>58</sup> Ibn Mas‘ūd (may Allah be pleased with him) remarked: “Indeed, there are two things that are greatly despised: death and poverty.” They find joy in hardship and bitterness, and in the benefits derived from experiences such as death and poverty—just as one accepts the bitter and painful medications prescribed by a physician for the sake of healing.<sup>59</sup>

Tenth is gratitude in the face of adversity.<sup>60</sup> The challenges inherent in tribulation carry their own benefits, akin to a patient who expresses gratitude to a physician for amputating a part of his body. Though the action may conflict with the patient’s immediate desires, he recognises that the physician’s decision is ultimately for his well-being and healing.

Eleventh is the removal of sins and errors. Allah says: “And whatever strikes you of disaster is due to what your own hands have earned, and He overlooks much.”<sup>61</sup> The Prophet Muḥammad (peace be upon him) said: “A believer does not suffer from fatigue, illness, or even a thorn that pricks him, except that it serves as expiation for his sins.”<sup>62</sup>

The twelfth benefit is mercy for those tested and encouragement to assist. Mercy is bestowed upon those afflicted by calamity, as such trials cultivate a spirit of compassion and a willingness to help others. God says: “When humans are tested by adversity, help them, and be grateful to Allah for your own condition.”<sup>63</sup>

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to be patient, Allah will grant him patience; and no one has been given a gift better and more abundant than patience.” See al-Bukhārī, “Kitāb al-Zakāh,” *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, vol. 3, p. 113, *ḥadīth* no. 1469; Muslim, “Kitāb al-Zakāh,” *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, vol. 2, p. 726, *ḥadīth* no. 1053.

57. Adversities are like medicine: though bitter, they offer benefits that help heal our ailments. For this reason, we should welcome adversity with joy, as it serves as a remedy for our lives in ways we may not immediately recognise.
58. I am unable to identify any Prophetic *ḥadīth* that corresponds exactly to the phrasing mentioned by *Sulṭān al-‘Ulamā’*. It appears more likely to be a thematic paraphrase or a spiritual exhortation rather than a verbatim scriptural citation.
59. This perspective invites us to recognise the intrinsic value and growth that can emerge from life’s challenges.
60. This principle reflects a profound truth: in critical circumstances, preserving life takes precedence over retaining a body part. For instance, in cases of advanced diabetes, a limb or finger may require amputation due to severe tissue damage (gangrene), in order to save the patient’s life. Despite the loss, the patient often expresses gratitude to the physician—saying, “Thank you, doctor!”—in recognition of the greater benefit of survival. Similarly, when we come to appreciate the immense wisdom and hidden benefits within the adversities decreed by Allah, we are moved to express gratitude to Him, just as we would thank the doctor. Trials, though painful, often yield greater good that may not be immediately apparent.
61. *Sūrat al-Shūrā* (42):30. This verse reminds us that the calamities we face are often a consequence of our own actions, yet Allah forgives many of our transgressions.
62. Al-Bukhārī, “Kitāb al-Mardā,” vol. 7, p. 216, *ḥadīth* no. 5641; Muslim, “Kitāb al-Birr wa-al-Ṣilah wa al-Adāb,” *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, vol. 4, p. 1992, *ḥadīth* no. 2573.
63. This is mentioned by Imām Mālik in his *al-Muwatta’a* and is attributed to Prophet ‘Isā (peace

The thirteenth benefit is appreciating the blessing of safety and being grateful for it. The true value of blessings is often realised only after they are lost. This awareness fosters gratitude for the state of safety and well-being that is frequently taken for granted.<sup>64</sup>

The fourteenth benefit is the varied rewards prepared by Allah for adversity. What Allah, the Almighty, has prepared in terms of benefits and rewards for trials varies according to the individual's rank and the nature of the affliction.<sup>65</sup>

The fifteenth benefit is the hidden gifts behind adversity. Allah, the Almighty, says: "Perhaps you dislike a thing, and Allah has placed therein much good";<sup>66</sup> "And perhaps you dislike a thing while it is good for you";<sup>67</sup> and: "Indeed, those who came with falsehood are a group among you. Do not think it is bad for you; rather, it is good for you."<sup>68</sup> When the tyrant took Sārah from Ibrāhīm, it was within that calamity that Hājar was given to serve her, leading to the birth of Ismā'īl. From the lineage of Ismā'īl emerged the Seal

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be upon him). Mālik related to me that 'Īsā ibn Maryam used to say, "Do not speak much without mentioning Allah because you will harden your hearts... Be merciful to the people of affliction and praise Allah for His protection." See *al-Muwatta' of Imām Mālik ibn Anas: The First Formulation of Islamic Law*, trans. Aisha Abdurrahman Bewley, 3rd ed. (Norwich: Diwan Press, 2014), 727. This encourages us not only to support those in need but also to cultivate a sense of gratitude for the blessings we possess, even in difficult times.

64. There are also sayings by Ibn 'Atā' Allāh al-Iskandarī (d. 709 H/1310 CE) that emphasise the importance of recognising and valuing blessings, urging one not to take them for granted, such as: "Whoever does not show gratitude for blessings while they exist will be made to recognise their worth after their loss" (*man lam yashkur al-ni'am fi wujūdihā shakarahā ba'da faqdihā*) and "Blessings are only recognised for their value after they are lost" (*al-ni'amu lā tu'rafu qadruhā illā ba'da faqdihā*). See Ahmad Zarrūq al-Fāsī, *Al-Sharh al-Hādī 'Ashar 'alā al-Hikām al-Atā'yyah* (Beirut: Dār Ibn Hāzm, 2019), p. 128, Aphorism no. 64.
65. Ibn 'Abd al-Salām (may Allah have mercy on him) mentioned in his book *Mukhtaṣar al-Fawā'id fī Ahkām al-Maqāsid*, or *al-Qawā'id al-Sughrā*, regarding patience over calamities, that such calamities do not inherently carry a reward or burden unless one is commanded to endure them. The reward is for the patience in facing or being content with them. When calamities are inevitable, such as from fighting in the cause of Allah or suffering injuries therein, the individual is rewarded for the calamity because they were commanded to face it. Similarly, calamities caused by commanding good or forbidding evil—such as killing oneself or others—are considered a dual calamity: one affecting faith and the other impacting worldly life. Moreover, hardships and worldly calamities serve as expiation for sins and as consequences for certain misdeeds. The Prophet said: "No affliction, fatigue, illness, sorrow, or grief befalls a believer—even a thorn that pricks him—except that it expiates some of his sins." Al-Bukhārī, "Kitāb al-Marḍā," vol. 9, p. 107, *ḥadīth* no. 5642. This is further validated by Allah's statement: "And whatever strikes you of disaster—it is for what your hands have earned; but He pardons much" (*Sūrat al-Shūrā* (42):30). See Ibn 'Abd al-Salām, *al-Fitan wa al-Balāyā*, notes 2 and 18.
66. *Sūrat al-Nisā'* (4):19. This verse serves as a reminder that what we may perceive as unfavourable may actually contain abundant blessings.
67. *Sūrat al-Baqarah* (2): 216.
68. *Sūrat al-Nūr* (24): 11. This invites reflection on the idea that our understanding of good and bad is often limited, and what we resist may indeed be beneficial in the grand scheme. It emphasises that even negative situations can lead to positive outcomes, often beyond our immediate comprehension.

of the Prophets—a profound blessing arising from that trial. As a poet once said: “How many blessings are hidden for you amidst the trials.” Another poet remarked: “Perhaps there is something detestable that carries subtle blessings from Allah.”<sup>69</sup>

The sixteenth benefit is that calamities serve as a preventative against evil, arrogance, and hubris. If Namrūd had been poor, sick, deaf, or blind, he would not have treated Ibrāhīm *‘alayhi al-salām* as he did. His arrogance and power blinded him. Thus, Allah, the Almighty, addressed his pride through His words: “Have you not seen the one who argued with Ibrāhīm about his Lord because Allah had given him kingship?”<sup>70</sup> This verse highlights how authority can corrupt and lead individuals to deny the truth. When Fir‘awn was tested with power, he arrogantly proclaimed: “I am your most exalted lord.”<sup>71</sup> Allah also says: “They do not criticise Allah and His Messenger except because Allah and His Messenger have bestowed His bounty upon them”;<sup>72</sup> “Indeed, man transgresses when he feels self-sufficient”;<sup>73</sup> “And if Allah were to extend abundance to His servants, they would surely transgress throughout the earth”;<sup>74</sup> “And the oppressors followed that in which they had been indulged”;<sup>75</sup> “We would have certainly given them abundant water to test them therein”;<sup>76</sup> and: “There has not been a village to which We sent a warner except that its affluent ones said, ‘Indeed, we are disbelievers in that with which you have been sent.’”<sup>77</sup> The poor (*al-fuqarā*) and the weak (*al-du‘afā*) are the guardians (*al-awliyā*) and the followers of the prophets (*atbā‘ al-anbiyā*). Because of these great benefits, “the people who were most afflicted were the prophets, then the righteous, and then the best and the best.”<sup>78</sup> They were accused of madness, sorcery,

69. These reflections encourage us to remain open to the hidden virtues within our challenges and to trust in the divine wisdom that governs our lives.

70. *Sūrat al-Baqarah* (2):258.

71. *Sūrat al-Nāzi‘āt* (79):24. This illustrates how those who are favoured with power often succumb to hubris.

72. *Sūrat al-Tawbah* (9):74.

73. *Sūrat al-‘Alaq* (96):6–7. This verse reminds us that human beings tend to exceed limits when they perceive themselves as self-sufficient.

74. *Sūrat al-Shūrā* (42):27. This verse emphasises that if Allah were to grant unrestricted provisions, people would fall into excess and misconduct.

75. *Sūrat Hūd* (11):112. Those who are unjust prioritise their luxurious pleasures, often losing sight of morality and justice.

76. *Sūrat al-Jinn* (72): 16. This reflects Allah’s wisdom in providing for people while testing their faith and integrity.

77. *Sūrat Saba’* (34):34. This statement illustrates a recurring pattern where the wealthy and powerful reject divine guidance, clinging instead to their worldly comforts. Adversity serves as a crucial reminder, grounding individuals and preventing them from falling into the traps of pride and self-importance.

78. Al-Tirmidhī, “Kitāb al-Zuhd,” *Jāmi‘ al-Tirmidhī*, vol. 4, p. 601, *ḥadīth* no. 2398.

and false prophecy, and were subjected to humiliation and mockery. Allah, the Almighty, states in *Sūrat al-An‘ām* (6):34: "...But they remained patient against the falsehood and humiliation they faced."<sup>79</sup>

And it is said to us: "Or do you think that you will enter Paradise while you have not yet experienced the like of what befell those who passed on before you? They were touched by misfortune and hardship, and were shaken until the Messenger and those who believed in him said, 'When will the help of Allah come?' Unquestionably, the help of Allah is near."<sup>80</sup> "And We will surely test you with something of fear and hunger and a loss of wealth, lives, and fruits, but give good tidings to the patient."<sup>81</sup> "Certainly, you will be tested in your possessions and your souls, and you will surely hear from those who were given the Scripture before you and from those who associate others with Allah much abuse."<sup>82</sup> These are the ones who were expelled from their homes and deprived of their possessions, exiled from their lands, and subjected to overwhelming hardship. Their trials were severe, and their enemies united against them. Some were defeated in various battles, and many were killed at Uhud, in the Battle of Bi'r Ma'unah (Well of Ma'unah), and in other encounters. The face of the Messenger of Allah (peace be upon him) was wounded, his front teeth were broken, and the helmet on his head was shattered. His companions were killed, their bodies desecrated, and they faced ridicule from their enemies, while the companions of the Messenger (peace be upon him) mourned their losses. They were also tested during the Battle of the Trench: "And they were shaken with a severe shaking";<sup>83</sup> and: "When the gazes faltered and the hearts reached the throats."<sup>84</sup> They were perpetually engulfed in fear, enduring profound poverty to the extent that they had to bind stones to their stomachs to stave off hunger. The Master of both the First and the Last (peace be upon him) never experienced satisfaction from good bread even twice a day.<sup>85</sup> He was subjected to various forms of persecution, including slander against his beloved family. Ultimately, he was tested in his later years by Musaylamah, Tulayḥah, and al-

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79. *Sūrat al-An‘ām* (6):34.

80. *Sūrat al-Baqarah* (2):214.

81. *Ibid.*, 155.

82. *Sūrat Āli Imrān* (3):186.

83. *Sūrat al-Aḥzāb* (33):11. It was there that the believers were tested, and their hearts trembled with a great shaking. This highlights the trials and tribulations faced by the righteous, reminding us that enduring hardship is part of the journey towards faith and spiritual growth.

84. *Sūrat al-Aḥzāb* (33): 10.

85. Al-Bukhārī, "Kitāb al-Maghāzī," *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, vol. 7, p. 387, *ḥadīth* no. 4101; Muslim, "Kitāb al-Zuhd wa-l-Raḡā'iq," *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, vol. 4, p. 2288, *ḥadīth* no. 2970.

‘Anṣī.<sup>86</sup> He and his companions faced great trials during the Army of Hardship (*jaysh al-‘usrah*), and he passed away while his armour was still pawned to a Jew for a measure of barley.<sup>87</sup>

Throughout time, the prophets and the righteous have continuously faced tribulations. Each individual is tested in accordance with the strength of their faith; the more resolute their faith, the greater their trial. It is said that one of them had a saw placed upon his head, yet this did not deter him from his faith.<sup>88</sup> The Messenger (peace be upon him) said: “The example of the believer is like that of a plant; the wind continually bends it, yet the believer remains subjected to trials.”<sup>89</sup> He also said: “The believer is like a crop, swayed by the wind; at times it is toppled and at other times it is restored, until it becomes agitated.”<sup>90</sup> Thus, the state of trials and tribulations draws a servant closer to Allah, while comfort and prosperity often distance them from Him. Allah says: “And when adversity touches a person, he calls upon Us—reclining or sitting or standing; but when We remove his adversity from him, he passes on as though he had never called upon Us for a hardship that afflicted him.”<sup>91</sup> To face such trials, one should minimise indulgence in food, drink, clothing, marriage, celebrations, housing, transportation, and other worldly matters. This restraint facilitates a return to Allah and prepares one to meet Him when the appointed time arrives.

The seventeenth benefit is that being content with trials invites the attainment of Allah’s pleasure. Adversity befalls both the righteous and the wicked alike. Those who harbour disdain for calamities suffer loss in both this world and the Hereafter, whereas those who find contentment in their

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86. Musaylamah al-Kadhdhāb, known as “the Liar,” was a self-proclaimed prophet from the Banū Ḥanīfah tribe. Tulayḥah (also spelled Talīḥah ibn Khuwaylid al-Asadī, d. 21 H/642 CE) of the Banū Asad tribe likewise claimed prophethood during the Prophet Muḥammad’s lifetime. Al-Aswad al-‘Anṣī, referred to as “the Veiled Prophet,” hailed from the Banū ‘Anṣ tribe in Yemen and declared his prophethood in the final days of the Prophet’s life. These figures posed grave challenges to the early Muslim community. A comprehensive account of the challenges posed by Musaylamah, Tulayḥah, and al-Aswad al-‘Anṣī—and the ultimate triumph of Islam during this turbulent period—can be found in classical sources such as al-Balādhurī’s *Futūḥ al-Buldān*, Ibn Hishām’s *Sīrah*, al-Ṭabarī’s *Tārīkh*, Ibn Kathīr’s *Tafsīr*, and various *ḥadīth* collections.
  87. The *ḥadīth* regarding the Prophet Muḥammad’s pawned armour is narrated in several *ḥadīth* collections: “The Messenger of Allah (SAW) passed away while his armour was pledged to a Jew for thirty *sā‘* of barley.” See Al-Bukhārī, “Kitāb al-Rahn,” *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, vol. 3, p. 115, *ḥadīth* no. 2916.
  88. This statement may refer to Prophet Zakariyyā. The account of his martyrdom can be found in classical *tafsīr* works such as Ibn Kathīr, al-Qurtūbī, and al-Ṭabarī, though it is rooted in *Isrā’īliyyāt*. These narratives are employed to highlight moral lessons concerning the perseverance and sacrifices of prophets in the face of persecution.
  89. Al-Bukhārī, “Kitāb al-Mardā,” *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, vol. 7, p. 217, *ḥadīth* no. 5644; Muslim, “Kitāb Ṣifat al-Qiyāmah wa al-Jannah wa al-Nār,” *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, vol. 4, p. 2276, *ḥadīth* no. 2809.
  90. Al-Bukhārī, “Kitāb al-Mardā,” *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, vol. 7, p. 217, *ḥadīth* no. 5643.
  91. *Sūrat Yūnus* (10):12.



trials will discover that such acceptance is far better than Paradise and all its delights. The pleasure of Allah is greater still, for in its grandeur it surpasses even the bounties of the Garden of Paradise and all that it contains<sup>92</sup>—that is, the Paradise of Eden and its good dwellings. This is a concise compilation of the benefits derived from adversity. We earnestly implore Allah, the Exalted, for His forgiveness and well-being in both this world and the Hereafter, while acknowledging that we do not claim to be “masters of adversity.”

## Conclusion

We have demonstrated in this brief article the spiritual wisdom articulated by Ibn ‘Abd al-Salām in his treatise *al-Fitan wa al-Balāyā wa al-Miḥan wa al-Razāyā*. The treatise identifies seventeen benefits derived from trials and tribulations, emphasising their role as both tests of faith and opportunities for spiritual growth. These benefits include fostering qualities such as servitude (*‘ubūdiyyah*), sincerity (*ikhlās*), patience (*ṣabr*), gratitude (*shukr*), and contentment (*riḍā*), while highlighting the hidden blessings and rewards inherent in adversity. We have provided a concise version of these themes, accompanied by selective commentary, drawing insights from Ibn ‘Abd al-Salām’s other works and contributions by Ṣūfī masters. This timeless treatise addresses misconceptions about adversity, offering a deeper understanding of Allah’s wisdom in decreeing challenges and underscoring their significance in Islamic spirituality and jurisprudence.

Ibn ‘Abd al-Salām’s treatise presents penetrating reflections on how trials and tribulations serve as instruments of spiritual refinement. By nurturing essential virtues such as patience, gratitude, and reliance upon Allah, adversity becomes a path to heightened spiritual awareness and deeper closeness to the Divine. In an age ripe for theodicean issues and marked by mental health challenges, this work offers a transformative perspective—inviting believers to view hardship not merely as a burden, but as a divinely ordained opportunity for growth, reflection, and inner strength. Engagement with this treatise is both timely and necessary, given the ongoing afflictions confronting Muslim communities worldwide. In this context, Ibn ‘Abd al-Salām’s treatment of tribulation transcends abstract theology, offering instead a coherent spiritual framework for facing hardship with meaning, dignity, and resolve. His insights resonate not only as theological guidance, but as moral and existential support for a community striving to persevere and find divine purpose amid profound adversity.

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92. *Sūrat al-Tawbah* (9):72.

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