

The Types of Trials a Believer Experiences | The Necessity of Tests for Believers

What Are the Trials a Believer Experiences? How Do Divine Tests Strengthen Our Faith?

Have you ever found yourself in the midst of hardships and wondered, "Why me?" or "Why now?" Sometimes, we assume that we are on the right path, but suddenly, we are hit by a storm of trials. Just when we think everything is okay, the situation changes. It is like the ground shakes beneath us.

It may seem surprising, but these sufferings are part of our journey toward nearness to Allah. In divine laws, trials are not signs of God's anger; rather, they are manifestations of His mentor-like training. They serve as tools for refining faith and elevating individuals to a higher status. No one is exempt from this principle—not prophets, saints, or believers.

As we learned in previous lessons, trials are divine laws. All humans, including prophets and saints, are tested by God. Basically, achieving perfection and becoming similar to Allah is difficult. It becomes even more difficult when it comes to prophets and the infallible Imams (Peace be upon them). A brief look at the lives of the prophets and the Imams, who were the best of God's creations, clearly shows that their lives were filled with various hardships and challenges. The reason is that trials are always proportional to the amount of individuals' faith. So, since prophets are at the pinnacle of faith, their trials are so many and more severe [1].

In fact, each person must endure greater hardships and fight stronger enemies according to the level of their faith and spiritual state. As noble scholars say, a believer is like a plate of balance scales; as their faith grows, they face more trials in life and suffers more [2]. This means that faith is a criterion for measuring trials. Since, the faith of a believer is measured with trials and also elevated through them. The important point here is that, while believers experience trials and hardships, too, their real personality is never hurt. This is because they are equipped by faith. As a result, only their material nature is under pressure.

In this writing, we aim to take a closer look at the philosophy of trials for believers. We also examine the types of trials they face, and see how these hardships pave the way for spiritual growth, elevation, and closeness to God.

Examining Different Types of Trials a Believer Experiences

Just as a martial arts instructor creates types of training environments and urges his students to fight strong opponents to help them grow stronger, God, as the Lord and Mentor of the human being, constantly exposes believers to five types of hardships [3]. Each of these challenges is like a furnace in which the believer is refined and his faith and sincerity increases day by day. In fact, God cultivates the believer's heart through types of trials, so that the seeds of faith, love, and affection grow in it. These five challenges are inevitable in a believer's life and as essential as oxygen for breathing.

Types of Trials a Believer Experiences: Envious Believers

One of the most significant hardships for a believer is dealing with the envious believer who cannot stand seeing other people are growing and successful. It is important to note that a believer is not always admired by others. Sometimes, they are subject to others' jealousy and narrow-mindedness; especially if they receive a material or spiritual blessing. For example, a husband may feel jealous of his wife's educational pursuits and obstruct progress for her.

The crucial point is that among the trials a believer experiences, the envy of other believers is more painful than other trials. The reason is that in this case, these are their friends that show hostility to and bear malice towards them. For instance, if a believer recognizes that they are being tempted by Satan, they can overcome the temptation effectively. However, enduring the envy of a fellow believer is much harder and more painful; in this case, the hell of envy manifests in a sacred form. In this case, the believer feels like someone with terminal cancer who cannot easily cure their illness.

Types of Trials a Believer Experiences: Hypocrites

In a believer's life, there are always hypocrites who harbor grudge and conspire against them. The hypocrite is always on the lookout for the believer's sins and missteps to catch them in the act and undermine their credibility among Muslims. Under the guise of religion, the hypocrite challenges the believer to reveal his true nature and it becomes clear if he has insight or not. In confronting a hypocrite, the believer practices to acquire God's attributes of *Ghafur* (The All-Forgiving) and *Rahim* (The Merciful). Therefore, a believer should not seek comfort, because God has reserved ease and comfort for heaven.

It is worth noting that, in addition to individuals, society too, is constantly exposed to the plots of hypocrites. Although hypocrites pretend to be religious and loyal to *wilayah* (guardianship), they have no real belief in the *wilayah*, the principles the Imam of the society appoints, or the social expediency. However, they claim more than anyone else that they care for the people and profess to follow the Imam's way.

Types of Trials a Believer Experiences: Disbelievers

The second type of trials that a believer faces a disbeliever who constantly tries to make him leave the realm of faith and be a disbeliever. Just as the body needs microbe to become stronger, the harassment and torment of disbelievers develop and strengthen a believer's soul. Someone who is easily offended and overreact to a slight annoyance will never grow and cannot reach Allah. In fact, the disbeliever lay the groundwork for *jihad* (struggle in the cause of God), providing a believer with an opportunity to solidify his faith and love for Allah. Imam Hussain (Peace be upon him) reached the highest ranks in confrontations with disbelievers like Shimr, Yazid, and Umar ibn Sa'ad. Although, in this case, wars and conflicts look bad on the surface, they lead to elevation and growth.

Types of Trials a Believer Experiences: Satan

One of the trials a believer experiences in life is Satan, who always seeks to mislead and tempt him. Satan's hatred for humanity is so profound that he has sworn to

mislead all human beings. Satan seduces individuals on the straight path to mislead those who walk in righteousness, including believers [4]. This is why when someone repents and steps onto the straight path, they become even more susceptible to the four types of Satan's attacks and negative thoughts.

Without Satan, a believer's faith is not stabilized, and they cannot attain the ranks of *wilayah*, affection, struggling in the way of Allah, and sincerity. If there were no Satan, a person would not reach any level of heaven's levels. It is because of *al-nafs al-ammāra* (evil-commanding soul) and Satan, if anyone has reached any level of heaven.

Types of Trials a Believer experiences: The Low desires

The fifth factor that put a believer in a severe predicament is their low desires. Naturally, every individual constantly struggles with his own self and material nature and is in conflict with them throughout their life. Overcoming these low desires leads the person into the realm of love and affection. In fact, without desires, we find no opportunity to prioritize God over our own self. *Al-nafs al-ammāra* constantly interfere with the believer's spiritual journey, tempting a him by whims, desires, and moral vices like arrogance, hypocrisy, and pride, diverting him from the right path. However, a wise and intelligent believer understands that anything that hinders his nearness to Allah is, in fact, a blessing of his Lord that not only does not make him weak but also is a training ground for testing his faith. The larger and broader this training ground is, the greater the believer's chances of success and higher he soars; just as when the wind blows strongly, a kite soars higher into sky, or when the waves get bigger, a surfer enjoys surfing more.

At first glance, it may seem bitter and unjust for believers to face trials. However, the truth is that it is through these very hardships that God allows a believer to taste the sweetness of faith. If a believer were not in a situation to test his faith through envy, hypocrisy, satanic whispers, disbelief, or internal temptations, how could he grow and get close to God?

The trials a believer experiences are not his enemies but rather his teachers. Each has come to put something in the believer's heart: Attributes like patience, wisdom, honesty, sincerity, and insight. Going through these tough situations, a believer sheds his shell and steps onto the path of becoming similar to Allah. If you find yourself caught in pressures, temptations, or taunts, remember: the trials a believer experiences are signs that show he is God's beloved, and the one who is God's beloved is never alone.

In this lesson, we discussed the trials a believer experience. We said that a believer is always grappling with five hardships: envious believers, Satan, disbelievers, hypocrites, and low desires. These challenges are essential needs for a believer; without facing them, no perfection can be achieved.

References

[1]. al-Kulayni. *Kāfi*, vol. 2, book 1, chapter 106, hadith #1: "Imam Sadiq (Peace be upon him) said, "The trial (suffering hardships in life) of the prophets is the most difficult then is that for those next to the prophets in a (spiritual) position and thereafter those similar to the previous group and so forth."

[2]. al-Kulayni. *Kāfi*, vol. 2, p. 259, hadith 29: “Imam Sadiq (Peace be upon him) said, ‘Indeed, the believer undergoes trial in proportion to his good deeds. So, one whose faith is sound and whose deeds are good, his trials are also more severe...’”

[3]. Warram, *Tanbihul-Khawater*, vol. 1, p. 96: “Prophet Muhammad (Peace be upon him) said, ‘The believer is between five hardships: a believer who envies him, a hypocrite who envies him (*hasad*), a *kafir* (non-Muslim) who fights him, a soul which contends with him and a devil who leads him astray.’”

[4]. Quran, 7:16