

***A TIME FOR REFLECTION***

Br. Asif Saifuddin



## Abstract

An article written during my post-operative recovery following removal of a malignant brain tumour (grade 4 glioma/glioblastoma multiforme) in April 2022. I hope it will be of benefit to any Muslim who is tested in a similar way. To those of other faiths or who claim to have no faith at all, I hope it will provide some insight into how Islam allows Muslims to deal with the challenges of life.

## By Way of Introduction

I am by profession a Consultant Musculoskeletal Radiologist, since 1994.

## Acknowledgements:

Sh. Muhammad Abid Khan

Zehra Saifuddin

**Nb:** There is absolutely no copyright related to this article. If you have found it to be beneficial, then please share with family, friends and colleagues through whichever social media platforms that you wish, with the knowledge that you will also be rewarded, *inshā'Allāh*.

**Abū Mas'ūd (RA) reported: The Prophet ﷺ said, 'Whoever guides someone to goodness will have a reward like the one who did it.' (Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim:1893)**



*In The Name of Allah, The Most Gracious, The Most Merciful*

## Introduction to the Northwood Community

Many of you in the local community will know me and my family well, but for those who don't, a brief introduction. We arrived in Northwood in the summer of 2007, the reason being that my youngest 3 children (then aged 5-15-years old) had obtained places in local schools. I do not recall knowing any of the families in the area, but in the intervening ~15-years, by The Grace of Allah, we have been blessed with a multitude of wonderful friends. The first and foremost is Muhammad Abid Khan, then a fresh-faced (and still so) ~21-year-old. I started to attend the weekly Monday evening circles at his home, taking with me my eldest son and inviting some other friends. We learnt much of our Islam from those sessions, but the highlight of each evening was undoubtedly the delicious chicken biryani that his dear mother would prepare for us (sorry Abid, but have to be honest!). May Allah bless her and her offspring in this world and the next, *Āmīn*. Since then, he has become my first source of advice regarding matters of The *Dīn* (religion), he has become a true friend and 'big brother' to my sons, and he has become my regular walking companion. I pray that Allah accepts his *du`ā'* as mentioned in *The Qur'ān*:

**'They are those who pray, 'Our Lord! Bless us with pious spouses and offspring who will be the joy of our hearts, and make us models for the righteous.' (25:74)**

Would that every mother had a son like him; then what a wonderfully different world we would be living in! He has become a valuable guide to all of my children, including my eldest daughter who has also taken the path of *`ilm* (Islamic Knowledge). Following a Bachelor's Degree in Psychology, she undertook the 1-year Arabic Intensive Course at Ebrahim College in East London, topping the class. She fell in love with the Institution and completed the 4-year *`Ālimiyyah* course, passing with Distinction. She then undertook a Masters in Islamic Education run by Warwick University, again passing with Distinction. Despite studying full-time at Ebrahim College, she wrote a 6-volume course entitled 'The Arabic Language', which details the grammar of *Qur'ānic* Arabic. This is being taught to sisters every Saturday morning at a local *madrāsah*, and in the last ~3-4 months she has started to teach the course on a Sunday evening to our family. For the first time I appreciated the weightiness of the Prophetic words:

**Narrated `Uthmān b. `Affān (RA): The Prophet ﷺ said, 'The most superior among you (Muslims) are those who learn The *Qur'ān* and teach it.' (*Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī: 346, 546*)**

Our scholars point out that the Prophet's ﷺ words highlight the value of both studying and internalising *The Qur'ānic* message and its language, which enables us to access The Divine Revelation. By definition, this *ḥādīth* (statement of The Prophet ﷺ) makes her stand out most amongst her local peers.

Next to mention is the Iron Aid Foundation, a group of local brothers who had the vision to establish a Community Centre in Northwood. This started with the first congregational *'ishā'* and *tarāwīḥ ṣalāh* (prayer), in 2006 I believe. Since then, regular *'ishā'*, *fajr* and *jumu'ah* prayers have been held in a local Church outbuilding. I was honoured with delivering the first *jumu'ah khuṭbah* (Friday Sermon) in this small town of Northwood, and was so proud when my eldest son followed on from me. The fulfilment of my own *du'ā'* (25:74). The community has managed to purchase the local derelict Police Station, and we eagerly await the outcome of a meticulously prepared planning application for change of use. I pray that the dedication they have shown and the sacrifice and *ṣabr* (patient perseverance) from their families is purely for Allah's Sake. If so, then what a remarkable reward awaits them. Allah says:

**'And be constant in prayer and pay the *zakaḥ* (purifying dues), for whatever good deed you send ahead for your own-selves, you shall find it with Allah: behold, Allah sees all that you do.' (2:210)**

It is the *shahādah* (proclamation of faith in the Absolute Unity of God, and that The Prophet Muḥammad ﷺ is His Final Messenger) that unites our hearts and minds, but it is the *jamā'ah* (congregational prayer) that unites us physically: 'Strength in Unity', the motto of the Iron Aid Foundation.

Then finally, a small group of extra-special brothers who must be mentioned; I will refer to them as the '*fajr brothers*'. They are regularly present at the *fajr jamā'ah*. If you want to see the faces of *īmān* (faith) and *taqwā* (God Consciousness) from the local community, then come along one morning and look at them. They are the ones, who when the *mu'azzin* calls '*ḥayya `Alā al-ṣalāh ḥayya-`Alā al-falāḥ-aṣ-ṣalātu-khayrum-min-an-nawm* (come to the prayer, come to success, prayer is better than sleep), respond with '*sami`nā-wa-aṭā`nā* (we hear and we obey). I will be forever indebted to them for their practical understanding that Allah is worthy of being worshipped in the *jamā'ah* at the *fajr* time in our small town. I have absolutely no doubt that my ability to pray *fajr* and *'ishā'* with the *jamā'ah* since their introduction has had a hugely significant impact on my ability to deal with my diagnosis and treatment so far. All of you brothers face your own personal challenges, but rest assured that continued attendance of these *jamā'ahs* will also have a significant impact on your abilities to cope, *inshā'Allāh* (God willing). As for the rest of the local brothers, I leave you with this reminder:

**The Messenger of Allah ﷺ said: 'If people knew what (reward) there is in the *'ishā'* prayer and *Fajr* prayer, they would come to it even if they had to crawl.' (*Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī:688*)**

My dear brothers, we each need to strive to an 'inner place' such that it becomes more difficult for us to not be at the *fajr anjamā'ah* than to be there, *inshā'Allāh*.

## The Life-Changing Event

We had entered Ramadan, 2022. I had been working at full-capacity, fulfilling my contractual obligations, helping my trainees and junior consultant colleagues with their own research papers, lecturing around the world via Zoom in association with a variety of teaching organisations. My walking routine had resulted in ~12kg weight-loss (a cause of great jealousy for my eldest son), and a resting pulse rate of ~60bpm, *Alḥamdulillāh* (All praise is due to Allah). I was planning in my mind what I would like to achieve in the next 5-7 years prior to retirement, assuming/praying that Allah would continue to provide me with the required mental and physical capabilities. What legacy could I leave for my junior radiology colleagues and for the musculoskeletal radiology world at large? The plan was a series of scientific and review articles, continued lecturing, and on-line Fellowship programs based on >30-years' experience of musculoskeletal radiology at a world leading orthopaedic centre. In short, I felt 'on top of the world', by His Grace. But we foolishly think that we are in control; Allah was soon to teach me a big lesson!

There was a lingering doubt in my mind. My own sub-specialist interest is the imaging of bone and musculoskeletal soft tissue tumours/cancers. In our weekly new patient meetings I would regularly see the scans of patients ranging from children to the elderly who were presenting with terrible cancers, many of which would require horrendous surgical procedures for attempted cure. When I looked at their ages, it became clear to me that the vast majority were younger than me. I became concerned. We are constantly told that Allah tests those He loves most with the severest tests<sup>1</sup>, yet I was living a life of ease. Why them and not me? What could I assume then about my relationship with Him?

I had been experiencing very mild right-sided headaches over the previous 4-5 months, not to an extent that they precluded me from my daily routine. But due to their unexplained persistence I decided to organise an MRI scan of my head just to be on the safe side. On the morning of the scan I had had to deal with an elderly gentleman presenting for biopsy of a likely cancer in his left hip. He was reluctant to undergo the procedure at that time due to a skin infection in the same leg, but I explained to him the absolute need to proceed. His main concern had been the lack of personal control of this particular circumstance, and that he had never been in hospital for a major operation before. I also told him, that thanks to God, I had never had a major operation, but then commented 'who knows what's around the corner?'

My scan was undertaken in the mid-afternoon of Wednesday 20<sup>th</sup> April. As I was being taken into the scanning room I joked with the radiographer that 'I think I've got a brain tumour', not a joke that he particularly appreciated. Imagine then the horror of what he saw in the posterior aspect of the right side of my brain as the images came up on the screen, a likely malignant brain tumour! (Figure 1).

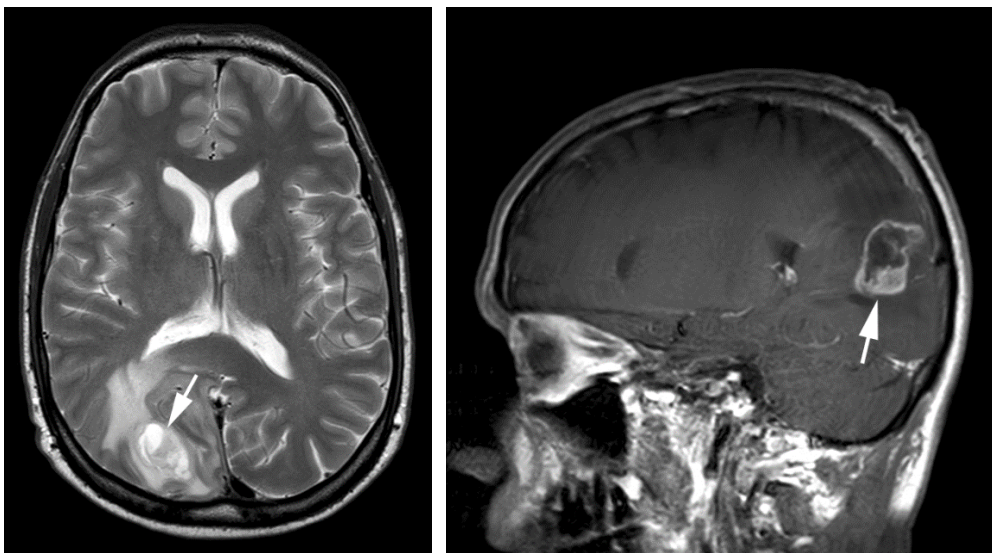


Figure 1.

I looked at the pictures with one of my consultant radiology colleagues, she also not knowing what to say to me. I called one of my neurosurgical colleagues and briefly explained what had happened. Before looking at the pictures, he undertook a simple visual field examination which confirmed loss of vision in the left lower quadrant. He looked in shock at the images, again not knowing how to deal with the situation. Throughout this short period of time my only concern was not for myself, but rather how I would break the news to my wife, children, and sisters and brother. Allah has blessed me with a very pragmatic approach to life; I never worried about things that might happen to me in the future, but dealt with them as they occurred to the best of my capabilities. I fully intended to deal with this in the same way. A new battle line had been drawn; me vs. my brain cancer, and the Muslim does not flee the battle-field!

To cut a long story short, due to inter-professional relationships my surgery was successfully undertaken 9-days after diagnosis in a world-leading Neurosurgical Unit in London. How blessed I was to be looked after by such expertise! But also, how crazy is the world that we live in? On the one hand, outstanding organisations such as the NHS dedicate themselves to the service of humanity, while tyrants and dictators murder the weak and innocent mercilessly. Anyone who believes in justice, know that it cannot be found in this world, so what is the alternative? The Day of Judgement, no doubt!

During Ramadan I had signed-up for an online course run by Imam Ajmal Masroor, another old friend. The final class was held at 12-2pm on Sunday 1<sup>st</sup> May. I participated in it fully from my hospital bed via my iPhone Zoom link, less than 48-hours after major brain surgery! (Figure 2). *SubhānAllāh* (Glorified is Allah).

The location of the tumour has meant that I will have a permanent visual loss on the left lower side which will not result in any significant reduction in my long-term capacity to work, *inshā'Allāh*. But you have to look at the positives; I joked with one of my cousins that now I can walk into a pretty young woman in the street, and my wife won't be able to complain! (*Astaghfirullāha-wa-a-tūbu-ilayh!*)



Figure 2.

On arrival home some 5-days later, I commented to my wife that in my opinion, the identification and treatment of this tumour was ‘the best thing that could have happened to me at this particular moment in my life’, a statement she could understandably not understand. However, it is backed up by the following. **Abū Hurayrah (RA) reported: The Messenger of Allah ﷺ said, ‘If Allah wills good for someone, He afflicts him with trials.’ (Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī 5321)** The remainder of this article, I hope, will help you all to understand where I am coming from. An easy life too often leads to mediocrity, laziness and negligence. I have always thrived on challenges. O Allah; keep us on our toes!

Upon receiving the histological diagnosis of grade 4 glioma (glioblastoma multiforme), the most aggressive form of the disease, some of my friends became concerned and contacted me to ask how I was coping with the news. I replied to one of them, ‘I find it unusual that you should think I would be overly concerned. After all, Allah takes our souls when we sleep at night, and returns them in the morning if He wills, so there is nothing to be worried about’. And Allah says:

**‘Do you not know that to Allah belongs the dominion of the heavens and the earth, and that besides Allah you do not have any protector or any helper?’ (2:107)**

So again my dear brothers and sisters in Islam, when you have Allah as your protector and friend, then why worry?

### **The *Khayr* (Goodness)**

On the morning of the local community *Eid-ul-Fiṭr* function expertly organised by the Iron Aid brothers, I received a call from my dear friend Sh. Ahmad Barouni, the Principle of the School of Arabic and Islamic Studies, and another hugely valuable source of Islamic guidance. He had not known of the situation, but called me as soon as he found out. He expressed his great sadness, but immediately I said that there was no need for sadness since every situation in life can be a source of immense *khayr*, if only we have the correct outlook.

**Ṣuhayb (RA) reported: The Messenger of Allah ﷺ said: 'Wondrous is the affair of the believer for there is good for him in every matter and this is not the case with anyone except the believer. If he is happy, then he thanks Allah and thus there is good for him, and if he is harmed, then he shows patience and thus there is good for him.' (Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim:2999)**

I want to now talk now about this *khayr* to the extent that I am aware of it, dividing it into 6 categories: *du`ā'* (supplication to Allah, *shukr* (thankfulness), *ṣadaqah* (charity), *da`wah* (invitation to Islam), visiting the sick which has led to re-establishment of old friendships and finally expiation of sins.

**Du`ā'**: Since the news of my diagnosis spread, I have been inundated with messages of support and *du`ā'* for my complete *shifā'* (recovery). These have come from family, close friends, radiology colleagues, both current and those who have previously trained with me and moved-on. The requests for *du`ā'* on my behalf have been passed on through various social media networks, such that I received many messages from brothers completely unknown to me. So I have to ask the question, 'Why?' Why am I so deserving of such consideration, love and respect? I sincerely hope that it is due to the fulfilment of Allah's statement:

**'Is the reward for good [anything] but good?' (55:60)**

One of my favourite messages was from the daughter of old friends; I have known her since the day she was born:

**'Asalamualaikum. Baba told me about your tumour. I am heartbroken to hear but inshallah you will get better. I hope the surgery goes well. I know our families don't meet as much, but you were always like another dad to me growing up. I will keep you in my prayers'**

Another thoughtful *du`ā'* forwarded to me was from a friend of my eldest son, who asked that Allah should 'guide the hand of the surgeon'. This was undoubtedly answered, and I was left with no unexpected complications, *Alḥamdulillāh*.

We need to remember that *du`ā'* is an absolutely essential aspect of Islamic worship<sup>2</sup>. It is a cause for us to remember Allah's name: i.e. to make *dhikr*, and when we mention it something truly remarkable happens. Allah says:

**'And remember Me; I will surely remember you' (2:152)**

Can you even imagine that? God Almighty is remembering you!

**Narrated Abū Hurayrah (RA): The Prophet ﷺ said, 'Allah says: 'I am just as My slave thinks I am, (i.e. I am able to do for him what he thinks I can do for him), and I am with him if He remembers Me. If he remembers Me in himself, I too remember him in Myself; and if he remembers Me in a gathering, I remember him in a gathering that is better; and if he comes one span nearer to Me, I go one cubit nearer to him; and if he comes one cubit nearer to Me, I go a distance of two outstretched arms nearer to him; and if he comes to Me walking, I go to him running.' (Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī:7405)**



My understanding is that the gathering ‘that is better’ is of His Closest Angels, but Allah knows best. Also, the fact that we ask of Him and Him alone establishes the basic principle of *Tawhīd*, Islamic Monotheism.

My understanding is that the primary beneficiary of any *du`ā`* is the one who makes it. They have been given a reason/excuse (if one is needed) to raise their hands to Allah and ask for anything they wish, and Allah loves that they should do so<sup>2</sup>. They further benefit from the fact that whenever they supplicate for their Muslim brother/sister, the same outcome will also be for them<sup>3</sup>. So I hope and pray that Allah rewards you all abundantly for every sincere *du`ā`* that you made on my behalf, each of which will be of benefit to you. I would only require that one was accepted for me.

Another point to contemplate is the following; I have had many kind messages from work colleagues who consider themselves to be atheists ‘wishing me well’. I would like to ask them, ‘who did you wish to? A scientist?’

**Ṣadaqah:** Below I have cut and pasted part of an email response from one of our non-Muslim trainees upon hearing of my brain tumour:

Yes, I received [REDACTED]'s email and have been contemplating what to write to you since I read it earlier today since it is so difficult to know what to say. Of course, you know that I am here to offer support and help in any way I can (big or small), practical help, moral support, anything at all. My thoughts and prayers have been with you all day and will continue to be. You are a huge part of RNOH and there are many shoulders for you to lean on. I look forward to having you back.

I hope you don't mind but I have made a charitable donation in your name with the wish that you are blessed with a speedy recovery. I donated via Ummah welfare trust (recommended to me by a friend). The donation in your name is for food aid, a cause I thought fitting in Ramadan. The receipt is attached to

I was amazed. May Allah guide her to Islam, *Āmīn!*

On the following page, I have cut and pasted a message sent to my younger daughter from one of her university friends; I know her name but have never met her:



The olive farmers of the Jenin, Nablus and Salfeet districts of Palestine participating in the "Trees for Life" programme

sincerely thank

**Asif Saifuddin**

Your sponsorship through Zaytoon will fund the planting of 5 olive trees in Palestine.



My own sister donated to the UAE Red Crescent Syria Appeal as *ṣadaqah* on my behalf. The knowledge that the poor/needy/orphans/widows, people who I will never meet in this life have been fed and protected due to this tumour is of immense value to me. I imagine myself standing in front of Allah, the command *iqra' kitābak* (read from your book) is pronounced. I see a huge amount of *ḥasanāt* (good actions) which I cannot account for. I am informed that these are the result of the tumour that I was tested with. *Alḥamdulillāh* for this brain tumour!

***Shukr***: Thankfulness/gratitude to Allah is an essential aspect of the life of Muslims. Allah says: **'Then remember Me; I will remember you. Be grateful to Me, and do not reject Me.'** (2:152)

And further:

**'and be grateful to Allah, if it is Him that you worship.'** (2:172)

And further:

**'What can Allah gain by your punishment, if you are grateful and you believe?'** (4:147)

The debt of gratitude I also owe to all of those who prayed and gave charity on my behalf is immeasurable.

**Da`wah:** Undoubtedly the highlight of my short post-operative hospital stay was two conversations I had with non-Muslim fellow in-patients on the same ward. The first was a 64-year old Welsh gentleman being treated for Parkinson's disease with deep brain stimulation. On my first day back on the normal ward I would see him walking up and down so decided to join him for some light exercise. The second was a 38-year old English gentleman who had also been admitted for investigation of a malignant brain tumour and was likely to undergo a similar procedure to mine. Neither of them were of a particularly religious background, but we were united by our individual personal health challenges. The Welsh gentleman commented that I was the first Muslim he had ever spoken to! These conversations allowed me to present to them an Islamic perspective to dealing with stress/difficulty. I briefly explained to them the concepts of *Qadr* (destiny) and *Fiṭrah* (the innate nature of every human that they had already testified to the existence of Allah). Several simple statements from them stay with me, the Welsh gentleman saying that I was 'a good man' and the English gentlemen thanking me sincerely for the kindness I had shown for taking time out to talk to him and to try to put him at ease. So a question now to you young, self-proclaimed 'inviters to the *Dīn*' who promote yourselves on YouTube and in your Twitter/Facebook accounts, boasting the hundreds of thousands of your followers, sitting arrogantly on your leather sofas or prancing around on stages with your designer beards wearing your above-ankle *thawbs*, aggressively denouncing 'the *kuffār*' (unbelievers), claiming without knowledge that they are all destined for The Fire. How often after one of your performances has a non-Muslim approached you and told you that you are a 'good man' or a 'kind person'? How often has a non-Muslim recommended that another non-Muslim should come to talk to you? Well, let me tell you that if it has never happened, you have serious problems. Maybe it is because you have forgotten or never actually knew the true character of the Muslim, and how we should deal with our non-Muslim brothers and sisters in humanity<sup>5</sup>. So let me inform/remind you of some of what Allah says:

**'The true servants of the Most Compassionate are those who walk on the earth humbly, and when the foolish address them improperly, they only respond with 'peace'.'** (25:63)

And further:

**'And do not turn your nose up to people, nor walk with pride upon the earth. Surely Allah does not like whoever is arrogant, boastful. Be moderate in your pace. And lower your voice, for the ugliest of all voices is certainly the braying of donkeys.'** (31:18-19)

And further:

**'Invite (mankind, O Muḥammad) to the way of your Lord (Islam) with wisdom and fair preaching, and argue with them in a way that is better. Truly, your Lord knows best who has gone astray from His path, and He is the Best Aware of those who are guided.'** (16:125)

Below is an email I sent to my surgeon soon following my discharge home:

Dear XXXX

I'm sorry that I missed you on the afternoon of my discharge from Queen's Square. I had been chatting to another patient in the next bay who had also been admitted for possible craniotomy. I hope I had put him at some ease and assured him that he was in the best place possible for his treatment.

I mentioned that I wanted to send a brief message regarding my experience since diagnosis of the tumour on 20/4 to surgical resection on 29/4, and subsequent discharge on 3/5/22.

As Muslims, we believe that anything that befalls us, either good or bad is a test from **Allah** (The One True God worthy of worship). Whether we perceive it as good or bad, we are encouraged to say the Arabic term **Alhamdulillah**, meaning that all of praise is due to Him and Him alone. But the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) also instructed us with words which can be roughly translated as follows:

**'Whoever does not thank people has not thanked Allah.'**

So it becomes an Islamic obligation for me to thank you all for the care I received during that short period of time. This ranges to every individual I came across, from your secretary who organised my admission, the nurses in the Pre-Assessment Clinic, the porters who took me for my MRI scans and to theatre, the amazing nursing staff in post-op recovery and on the main ward, to the consultants who looked after me. You told me the QS is ranked No. 3 in world neurosurgery; I cannot imagine what Nos 1 and 2 are like!

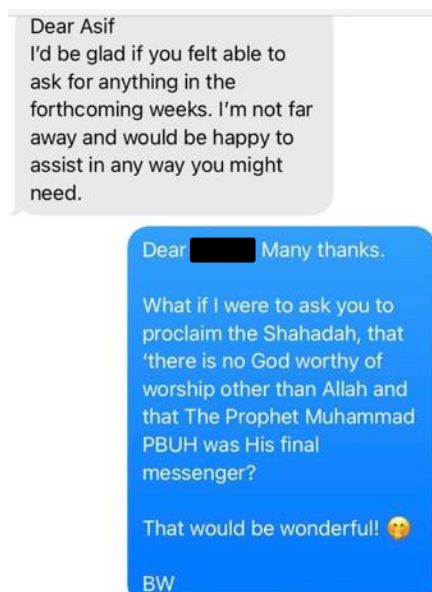
I have worked in the NHS now for >37-years. If I have ever treated a patient who has appreciated what I have managed to do for them in the way I have appreciated what you all did for me, then I believe it has been a valuable use of my working life.

With all of the thanks possible

Asif

I have gifted him an English translation of *The Qur'ān*, a beautiful production for *da`wah* purposes from QuranProject.org. I believe that the ability to give *da`wah* in such a way is something that needs to be pro-actively considered by our well-educated youth who reach positions of authority in their working lives, something that I consider to be an Islamic 'obligation'. Think about this my Muslim brothers and sisters: If you saw a blind person walking into a fire, what would you do? This was an amazing opportunity to inform others of Islam, an action which is of great virtue<sup>6</sup>. We call ourselves Muslims; why are we so shy to talk about Islam? We claim to believe that *The Qur'ān* is Divine Revelation, so why do we hide it from our brothers and sisters in humanity?

I recently received a text message from an old surgical colleague and good friend. Below was my response:



**Visiting the sick/Re-establishing old friendships:** There's nothing like illness to bring family and friends together, especially if you tell them you've got a malignant brain tumour! 🤖. Visiting the sick is a very well-established Islamic etiquette<sup>8,9</sup>; in fact, it constitutes one of the rights of brotherhood<sup>10</sup>. Once the news of my diagnosis had reached brothers in the local community, they would come to me as I was leaving the *tarāwīḥ ṣalāh* and say, 'Brother Asif, absolutely anything we can do for you, just please let us know. We're here for you always, just ask'. So I thought I'd test this out. I joked to the next brother who said this, 'give me your car!' There was silence. Be careful of your words my brothers!

Following diagnosis, but particularly after returning home, I received family and friends from all over the country. One particularly pleasing experience was as follows; many years ago I used to run a study circle of four close families including our own. We would rotate between houses on a monthly basis, the sisters each bringing 'one-dish' food. The adults and children would all sit together, and we would learn about the basics of Islam. It was a beautiful gathering *māshā'Allāh*, but unfortunately issues arose and after some years the circle discontinued. On the Saturday following my return home from hospital, we all sat together again in my home for the first time in over ~6-years! I pray that Allah keeps us united and increases the respect and love between us, *Āmīn*.

**Expiation of sins:** Several of my well-wishers pointed out that this test would result in the washing away of sins, this based on the following: **Abū Hurayrah (RA) reported: The Prophet ﷺ said, 'Nothing afflicts a Muslim of hardship, nor illness, nor anxiety, nor sorrow, nor harm, nor distress, nor even the pricking of a thorn, but that Allah will expiate his sins by it.'** (*Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim: 2573*)

So I'm thinking to myself, it will take more than brain cancer to deal with my sins! But Allah is *ar-Raḥmān* (The Beneficent), *ar-Raḥīm* (The Merciful), *al-Ghfūr* (The All-Forgiving) and *al-Karīm* (The Generous One), and I place my trust in Him, because He says:

**‘O My servants who have transgressed against themselves [by sinning], do not despair of the mercy of Allah. Indeed, Allah forgives all sins. Indeed, it is He who is the Forgiving, the Merciful.’ (39:53)**

And further:

**and provide for them from sources they could never imagine. And whoever puts their trust in Allah, then He alone is sufficient for them. Certainly Allah achieves His Will. Allah has already set a destiny for everything. (65:3)**

### ***The Fitnah***

Allah says:

**‘He is the One Who created death and life in order to test which of you is best in deeds. And He is the Almighty, All-Forgiving’ (67:2)**

When I think about this verse, it suggests to me that Allah has created our existence in order to note whom amongst us turns out to be *aḥṣanu-‘amalā* (those best in actions), and we should be conscious of this at every moment of our lives, since we would certainly want to be amongst them ‘when the second trumpet is blown’. To me it implies the people of *taqwā*, the *muttaqīn*, who will have achieved this by worshipping Allah in the way He desires, not in the way that suits them. The practical manifestation of this is the *sunnah* of *Rasūlullāh* ﷺ. It also implies to me that He is noting those who are opposite, those whose actions are tainted by evil.

So unfortunately, all is not rosy in the garden, otherwise we would already be in *Jannah* (paradise). The *ḥayāt’d-dunyā* (life of this world) is filled with *fitnah* (trials). The Beloved Prophet ﷺ was sent as *bashīran wa nadhīran* (a giver of good news and a warner). The *khayr* arising from the current situation has been dealt with to some extent, so within the Prophetic example the warning must also be addressed, and I am grateful to have that opportunity now.

I will be talking about two specific situations totally unrelated to my ‘illness’, that ravaged our small community within the last ~5-years. There is no need to name any names or name any Institutions, since those who choose to read this will clearly identify their direct and/or indirect roles. It is not meant as a criticism or insult, or to open up old wounds, but rather as a sincere, humble *naṣīḥah* (advice) with the intention that such situations should **never** be allowed to arise again, either within the current or future generations. Although specific to our community, these problems can arise in any community at any level, Muslim or non-Muslim, affecting family relationships such as those between spouses<sup>11</sup>, between parents and children, between siblings, and between unrelated families. They arise due to a variety of the basest of human traits, such as *ẓulm* (injustice/oppression) which Allah has forbidden for Himself<sup>12,13</sup>, so how do we even dare to approach it? *Kibr*<sup>14</sup> (arrogance—a characteristic of the *shayṭān*), and *ḥasad*<sup>15</sup> (jealousy/envy), to name but a few. The tools are *ghībah* (backbiting), *namīmah*<sup>16</sup> (slander) and *kadhīb*<sup>17</sup> (lies), also to name but a few. The effects are simple but devastating, and include hatred<sup>18</sup> and dis-unity<sup>19</sup>. So, let me put this into context. Allah says:

**‘Those who persecute the believing men and women and then do not repent will certainly suffer the punishment of Hell and the torment of burning.’ (85:10)**

It may be assumed that the persecutors themselves are not believers, but this is never stated. So, when a believer knows or is made aware that he/she has created *fitnah* (any kind of trial/difficulty) for their believing brothers and/or sisters, and they do not make *tawbah* (Repentance to Allah), in such circumstances with the need for forgiveness from the injured party, then they will find themselves in a very difficult situation in the *ākhirah* (next life).

The first situation arose due to a problem between two families, one local and one nearby. It was a personal matter and should have remained so for a civilised and amicable resolution one-way-or-the-other, possibly with the additional intervention of family elders or respected Islamically knowledgeable members of the community, as is my understanding of the way our wonderful religion deals with such matters. Allah says:

**‘O believers! Obey Allah and obey the Messenger and those in authority among you. Should you disagree on anything, then refer it to Allah and His Messenger, if you truly believe in Allah and the Last Day. This is the best and fairest resolution.’ (4:59)**

Unfortunately, in such circumstances, emotion and irrationality usually prevail and Islam is left by the wayside. This amounts to submission to the *nafs* (lower self) rather than submission to The Law of Allah. There was a systematic/concerted effort to denigrate and dishonour the family of the accused based on one-sided information spread throughout the community with the aim of exclusion, while the accused family to my knowledge maintained a strong *ṣabr* (patient perseverance) and a remarkable level of dignity, may Allah continue them on that path, *Āmīn*. The situation was eventually resolved, the outcome being that families instigating the discord withdrew themselves from the community, while the family of the accused maintains a high status and central community role, at least in my eyes for what it’s worth. The practical effect was that brothers and their sons who had previously been regular attendees of the *fajr*, *‘ishā’*, *jumu`ah* and *tarāwīḥ* prayers were no longer to be seen. The Prophet ﷺ would order the *ṣahābah-kirām* (his companions) to stand shoulder-to-shoulder in the prayer lines, and to not let the *shayṭān* come between them. But these brothers chose to distance themselves by miles from the *jamā`ah*. So, I ask you my dear brothers who left; who is pleased with this situation, Allah or *Iblīs* (The Devil)? You know the answer, but if you’re still unsure then know that Allah says:

**‘Tell My believing servants to say only what is best. Satan certainly seeks to sow discord among them. Satan is indeed a sworn enemy to humankind.’ (17:53)**

And further:

**‘Did I not command you, O Children of Adam, not to follow Satan, for he is truly your sworn enemy, but to worship Me (alone)? This is the Straight Path.’ (36:60-61)**

My dear brothers, I long to see you and your sons at the *jamā`ah* again soon, *inshā’Allāh*.

The second situation arose within the setting of a local *madrasah*, a wonderful organisation established tirelessly predominantly by a group of local sisters over a period of >20-years. My dear sisters, I entrusted the earliest Islamic education of my 3 youngest children to you. I still

remember dropping them every Saturday morning into your trusted hands. You were the role models for my daughters, dressed in your *ḥijābs* and *`abāyas*, the radiant smiles of intelligent, confident, young *muslimahs* on your faces. How I longed that my daughters would follow in your footsteps, but how badly some of you let me down. Again, a situation arose between some of you, with the same result as in the first case, hatred and dis-unity.

Again, the correct course of action as I understand it, is that Islamically knowledgeable members of the community should have been consulted, and once done so **their opinion adhered to**. Again, I remind you that Allah says:

**‘O believers! Obey Allah and obey the Messenger and those in authority among you. Should you disagree on anything, then refer it to Allah and His Messenger, if you truly believe in Allah and the Last Day. This is the best and fairest resolution.’ (4:59)**

But despite your best efforts the *madrasah* continues to function strongly, providing a hugely important Islamic Organisation for our immediate and more distant communities. My beloved grandsons are now also the recipients of its excellent Islamic *tarbiyyah*! Were the outcomes of this tragic situation the result of anything other than *ẓulm*, an unwillingness to cede control, and chiefly a lack of *taqwā*? Surely this could not manifest in blessings?!

Allah says:

**‘Had the people of those towns believed and been mindful of Allah, We would have overwhelmed them with blessings from heaven and earth. But they rejected, so We punished them for their misdeeds.’ (7:96)**

It becomes important that we remind ourselves of some basic Islamic principles as outlined in *The Qur’ān*, since Allah says:

**‘So always remind with *The Qur’ān*, even if the reminder is beneficial only to some. Those in awe of Allah will be mindful of it.’ (87:9-10)**

Firstly, the absolutely essential requirement for unity amongst the Muslims. Allah says:

**‘Hold fast together to the rope of Allah, and do not be divided. Remember the blessing that Allah bestowed upon you: you were once enemies then He brought your hearts together, so that through His blessing you became brothers. You stood on the brink of a pit of fire and He delivered you from it.’ (3:103)**

And further:

**‘And do not be like those who split into sects and differed after clear proofs had come to them. It is they who will suffer a tremendous punishment.’ (3:105)**

And further:



**‘Surely the believers are none but brothers unto one another, so set things right between your brothers, and have fear of Allah that you may be shown mercy.’ (49:10)**

And further:

**‘The believing men and believing women are allies of one another. They enjoin what is right and forbid what is wrong and establish prayer and give *zakāh*, and obey Allah and His Messenger. Those; Allah will have mercy upon them. Indeed, Allah is Exalted in Might and Wise.’ (9:71)**

Secondly, to not make baseless accusations. Allah says:

**‘O Believers! When an ungodly person brings to you a piece of news, carefully ascertain its truth, lest you should hurt a people unwittingly, and become regretful over what you have done.’ (49:6)**

In reference to this *āyah*, the scholars teach us that while it says ‘a *fāsiq* (an ungodly person) brings you a piece of news’, the necessity to verify is fundamentally applicable to any situation for which the outcome is consequential, and the ramifications of which could leave one regretful of the hurt inflicted on others.

And further:

**‘O Believers! Avoid many suspicions, for indeed some suspicions are sinful. And do not spy, nor backbite one another. Would any of you like to eat the flesh of their dead brother? You would despise that! And fear Allah. Surely Allah is the Acceptor of Repentance, Most Merciful.’ (49:12)**

## The Future

From the time of diagnosis to what has been so far a most remarkable post-operative recovery *Alḥamdulillāh*, I could not have asked for anything more. It is as if the pieces of a jigsaw puzzle have been thrown from the sky and landed perfectly into place. However, there were still 2 pieces of that jigsaw puzzle missing, but I was not left disappointed. My younger daughter who is soon to qualify with a BSc in Nutrition and Dietetics (*inshā’Allāh*) was offered her first job as a Band 5 Dietician to commence in August. You cannot imagine my pride and happiness! Then, on the very day of my diagnosis I received the news that my younger son had received a Medical school offer. His paternal grandmother (may Allah have Mercy on her soul) would have been so delighted, the tradition of Medicine continuing through her family. A hugely deserved reward for a determined and single-minded, yet humble young man. I look forward to the day of his graduation, *inshā’Allāh*.

Only Allah knows what the future holds for me and anyone who has read this article, but I hope that you can now understand my earlier statement ‘that it is the best thing that could have happened to me at this stage in my life’. We should certainly not wish for calamity; in fact, we are recommended to seek Allah’s protection from it at the end of our *ṣalāh* with the following *du`ā`*:



**‘O Allah! I seek refuge in You from the affliction of the torment of the Hellfire, from the affliction of the torment of the grave, from the trial of life and death and from the evil of the affliction of *Al-Masīh Al-Dajjāl*.’ (Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī:1377)**

However, Allah also says:

**‘We will certainly test you with a touch of fear and famine and loss of property, life, and crops. Give good news to those who patiently endure. Who, when faced with a disaster, say, ‘Surely to Allah we belong and to Him we will return.’ They are the ones who will receive Allah’s blessings and mercy, and it is they who are rightly guided.’ (2:155-157)**

So, some form of trial is inevitable for each and every one of us; the question is can we deal with it? As I mentioned to a recent radiology trainee, ‘you never know what life is going to throw at you, but you’ve got to be prepared to make the catch!’

Allah says:

**‘We said, ‘Descend all of you! Then when guidance comes to you from Me, whoever follows it, there will be no fear for them, nor will they grieve.’ (2:38)**

The alternative is unthinkable. Allah says:

**‘But those who disbelieve and deny Our signs will be the companions of the Fire. They will be there forever.’ (2:39)**

So, the general starting point is to follow Islam, which was revealed to make our lives easy. But more specifically, the preparation for dealing with life starts with the establishment of *ṣalāh*, the 5 daily prayers, even one of which should **never** be left without a valid reason, and ideally with the *jamā`ah* whenever possible, even if this is with your families at home. Allah says:

**‘And seek help through patient perseverance and prayer. Indeed, it is a burden except for the humble, those who are certain that they will meet their Lord and to Him they will return.’ (2:45-56)**

And further:

**Maintain with care the [obligatory] prayers and [in particular] the middle prayer and stand before Allah, devoutly obedient. (2:238)**

I sincerely hope that this article will be of some value to you in dealing with whatever the future holds, both for you and your families.

### Closing Statement

My dear brothers and sisters in Islam of this local community, and of any community in the world to which this article reaches: I swear by Allah that I love you all for His Sake Only. I sincerely request that you forgive me for any wrongdoings in the past, present or future, either intentional or unintentional. I hope for your continued support and *du`ā'* during the remainder of my treatment and long into the future, that by His Mercy I will be cured of this illness. But if there is one request I have of you, one promise which you could all keep, it would be that you remove the hatred from your hearts, forgive each other unconditionally just as you all hope that Allah will forgive you on *yawm'l-qiyaamah*, that you reconcile and reunite as families and communities, and that you return to the *jamā`ah*. If you could fulfil these humble requests, then I would be prepared to go through what I have gone through a thousand times or more.

Your brother in Islam

Asif Saifuddin



## Appendix

A list of valuable *aḥādīth/statements* related to topics covered in this article.

1. *Abū Hurayrah* (RA) reported: The Messenger of Allah ﷺ said, 'If Allah wills good for someone, He afflicts him with trials.' (*Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*: 5321)
2. *Salmān al-Fārisī* (RA) reported: The Prophet ﷺ said, 'Verily, Allah is shy and generous. He would be shy, when a man raises his hands to Him, to turn them away empty and disappointed.' (*Sunan al-Tirmidhī*: 3556; *Ṣaḥīḥ*)
3. *Abū'l- Dardā'* (RA) reported: The Messenger of Allah ﷺ said, 'No Muslim servant supplicates for his brother [or sister] behind his back but that the angel says: And for you the same.' (*Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*: 2732)
4. *Abū Hurayrah* (RA) reported: The Prophet ﷺ said, 'No child is born but that he is upon natural instinct [of wanting to worship One God]. His parents, however, make him a Jew, or a Christian, or a Magian. As an animal delivers a child with limbs intact, do you detect any flaw?' Then, *Abū Hurayrah* recited the verse, 'The nature of Allah upon which he has set people,' (30:30). (*Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*: 1292, *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*: 2658)
5. 'People are of two types, they are either your brothers in faith or your equals in humanity.' (*Alī b. Abī Ṭālib* (RA))
6. *Sahl b. Sa`d* (RA) reported: The Prophet ﷺ said, 'By Allah, that Allah guides a man through you is better for you than a herd of expensive red camels.' (*Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*: 2847, *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*: 2406)
7. And our Beloved Messenger ﷺ is reported to have said, 'Supplication is the very essence of worship' (*Sunan Tirmidhī*: 669; *Ṭabarānī, Awsaṭ*)
8. *Thawbān* (RA) reported: The Prophet ﷺ said, 'He who visits his sick brother in Faith, will remain engaged in picking the fresh fruits from the garden of Jannah till he returns.' (*Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*: 2568)
9. *Abū Hurayrah* (RA) reported: The Messenger of Allah ﷺ said, 'Verily, Allah, the Exalted, and Glorious will say on the Day of Resurrection: 'O son of Adam, I was ill but you did not visit Me.' He would say: 'O my *Rubb*, how could I visit you and You are the *Rubb* of the worlds?' Thereupon He would say: 'Did you not know that such and such a slave of Mine was ill but you did not visit him? Did you not realize that if you had visited him (you would have known that I was aware of your visit to him, for which I would reward you) you would have found Me with him? O son of Adam, I asked food from you but you did not feed Me.' He would submit: 'My *Rubb*, how could I feed You and You are the *Rubb* of the worlds?' He would say: 'Did you not know that such and such a slave of Mine asked you for food but you did not feed him? Did you not realize that if you had fed him, you would certainly have found (its reward) with Me? O son of Adam, I asked water from you but you did not give it to Me.' He would say: 'My *Rubb*, how could I give You (water) and You are the Rubb of the worlds?' Thereupon He would say: 'Such and such a slave of Mine asked you for water to drink but you did not give it to him. Did you not realize that if you had given him to drink you would have found (its reward) with Me?' (*Al-Adab al-Mufrad*: 517)
10. *Abū Hurayrah* (RA) reported: The Messenger of Allah ﷺ said: 'The rights of one Muslim over another are six. It was said: What are they, O Messenger of Allah? He said: 'If you meet him, greet him with *salām*; if he invites you, accept the invitation; if he asks for advice, give him sincere advice; if he sneezes and praises Allah, say *Yarḥamuk-Allāh* (may

Allah have mercy on you); if he falls sick, visit him; and if he dies, attend his funeral.' (*Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī: 1240 and Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim: 2162*)

11. *Jābir* (RA) reported that the Messenger of Allah ﷺ said: 'Satan places his throne upon water; he then sends his troops; the nearer to him in rank are those who are most skillful in creating mischief. One of them comes and says: 'I did such-and-such', to which Satan replies: 'You did nothing.' Then one among them comes and says: 'I did not leave so-and-so until I separated him from his wife.' Satan brings him near him and says: 'You did well'. *Al-A'mash* said: 'I think he said: 'He then embraces him'. (*Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim: 6755*)
12. *Abū Dharr* (RA) reported: The Messenger of Allah ﷺ said, 'Allah Almighty said: O My servants, I have forbidden injustice for Myself and I have forbidden it among you, so do not oppress one another. O My servants, all of you are astray except for those I have guided, so seek guidance from Me and I shall guide you. O My servants, all of you are hungry except for those I have fed, so seek food from Me and I shall feed you. O My servants, all of you are naked except for those I have clothed, so seek clothing from Me and I shall clothe you. O My servants, you sin by night and day and I forgive all sins, so seek forgiveness from Me and I shall forgive you. O My servants, you are unable to harm Me and you are unable to bring benefit to Me. O My servants, were the first of you and the last of you, the human of you and the jinn of you, to be as pious as the most pious heart of anyone of you, that would not increase My dominion at all. O My servants, were the first of you and the last of you, the human of you and the jinn of you, to be as wicked as the most wicked heart of anyone of you, that would not decrease My dominion at all. O My servants, were the first of you and the last of you, the human of you and the jinn of you, to rise up in one place and make a request of Me, and were I to give everyone what he requested, that would not diminish what I have any more than a needle would diminish the sea if put into it. O My servants, it is only your deeds that I record and then recompense for you. Let him who finds good praise Allah, and let him who finds something else blame no one but himself.' (*Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim: 2577*)
13. *Abū Hurayrah* (RA) reported: The Prophet ﷺ said, 'Beware of committing injustice, for injustice will be darkness on the Day of Resurrection. Beware of obscenity, for Allah does not love obscenity and immorality. Beware of greed, for it tempted those before you and caused them to make lawful what is unlawful, to shed blood and sever their family ties.' (*Musnad Aḥmad: 9361*)
14. *ʿAbdullāh b. Masʿūd* (RA) reported: The Prophet ﷺ said, 'No one who has the weight of a seed of arrogance in his heart will enter Paradise.' A man said, 'But a man likes to have nice clothes and nice shoes.' The Prophet ﷺ said, 'Verily, Allah is beautiful and He loves beauty. Arrogance is to disregard the truth and to look down upon people.' (*Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim: 91*)
15. *Abū Hurayrah* (RA) reported: The Prophet ﷺ said, 'Beware of envy, for it devours good deeds just as fire devours wood or grass.' (*Sunan Abī Dāwūd: 4903*)
16. *Abū Hurayrah* (RA) reported: The Messenger of Allah ﷺ said, 'Do you know what backbiting is?' They said, 'Allah and his messenger know best.' The Prophet said, 'To mention your brother in a way he dislikes.' It was said, 'What do you think if what I said about him is true?' The Prophet said, 'If what you say about him is true, it is backbiting. If it is not true, it is slander.' (*Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim: 2589*)

17. *Samurah b. Jundub* (RA) reported: The Prophet ﷺ said, 'I saw a dream at night in which two men came to me. They said: The one whose face you saw being torn away was a great liar, who would tell a lie and it would be carried until it reaches the horizons. This will be done to him until the Day of Resurrection.' (*Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī: 5745*)
18. *Abū Hurayrah* (RA) reported: The Messenger of Allah ﷺ said, 'Be servants of Allah as brothers. Do not be hostile to each other and do not hate each other. Follow the right course, seek nearness to Allah in worship, and give glad tidings' (*Musnad Aḥmad: 9763*)
19. *Al-Nu`mān b. Bashīr* (RA) reported: The Messenger of Allah ﷺ said upon the pulpit, 'Whoever is not grateful for small things will not be grateful for large things. Whoever is not thankful to people is not thankful to Allah. Mentioning the blessings of Allah is gratitude and ignoring them is ingratitude. Unity is a mercy and division is a punishment.' (*Musnad Aḥmad: 17982*)