

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

In the name of God, Most Gracious, Most Merciful

Submitters Perspective

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Tests

[2:155] We will surely test you through some fear, hunger, and loss of money, lives, and crops. Give good news to the steadfast.* [2:156] When an affliction befalls them, they say, "We belong to GOD, and to Him we are returning."
*2:155 The test is designed to prove that we worship God alone under all circumstances (29:2).

The Test is Mandatory

[29:2] Do the people think that they will be left to say, "We believe," without being put to the test? [29:3] We have tested those before them, for GOD must distinguish those who are truthful, and He must expose the liars.

[67:2] The One who created death and life for the purpose of distinguishing those among you who would do better ...

[2:210] Are they waiting until GOD Himself comes to them in dense clouds, together with the angels? When this happens, the whole matter will be terminated, and to GOD everything will be returned.*

*2:210 This world is a test; it is our last chance to restore ourselves back into God's kingdom by denouncing idol worship (see the INTRODUCTION). ...

Two things I take away from these

verses: This world is a test and those who claim to believe will be tested. There is no escape from proving oneself worthy to make it back to God. The only thing that we can do is try to score more and more.

[23:102] As for those whose weights are heavy, they will be the winners.
[23:103] Those whose weights are light are the ones who lost their souls; they abide in Hell forever.

The Most Gracious Lord is so Merciful that He gives us plus 10 for right answers and minus 1 for wrong ones.
[6:160] Whoever does a righteous work receives the reward for ten, and the one who commits a sin is requited for only one. ...

God wants us to score Paradise and that's why He has given us this final chance to get ourselves redeemed. We need to score as high as we can to get promoted to Paradise. So, I feel we should keep reminding ourselves that this is a test and we need to score every moment we get.

After entering Submission, I came to know that there is an admission test which is mandatory for all those who claim to believe (29:2-3). The footnote to 3:186 says: *After passing the admis-*

sion tests, the proven worshipers of God ALONE enjoy a perfect life, now and forever. See 10:62, 24:55, and 29:2-3.

According to me, once we pass our admission tests we'll be happy but it doesn't mean we won't have other kinds of tests or opportunities to grow and improve. I feel it means that with God's help we become better at handling all kinds of moments. We learn to be appreciative (27:40), we learn to be fearless (3:173), we learn to be steadfast (2:249), we learn to implore (2:186, 3:38), and we learn to rejoice in remembering God irrespective of the situation. Absolutely by remembering God, our hearts rejoice (13:28).

I don't know when the admission test begins or ends for any one person. Maybe for someone it lasted a month, or maybe it lasted a year or longer for someone else. Satan does not like anyone rejecting his false viewpoint and choosing to worship God alone. In my life, some really tough tests started immediately after I acknowledged the right *shahadah* and corrected my Salat to be devoted to God alone. I think those were admission tests. God knows best. I remember there were times

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when I used to literally beg God to remove me from the situation that I was in. One thing that helped me was reading the Quranic stories of messengers and believers being tested. It gave me faith that God will protect us if we're devoted to Him alone.

The tests are an important part of the learning process. To pass a class, they give us tests. The tests for our souls are far bigger and teach us what no tutor or school can. The best part is that God decreases the magnitude of the tests as soon as we learn and implement the lessons He's teaching us.

[2:214] Do you expect to enter Paradise without being tested like those before you? They were tested with hardship and adversity, and were shaken up, until the messenger and those who believed with him said, "Where is GOD's victory?" GOD's victory is near.

The later part of 20:40 says about Moses: "... indeed we tested you thoroughly. ..."

[33:9-11] O you who believe, remember GOD's blessing upon you; when soldiers attacked you, we sent upon them violent wind and invisible soldiers. GOD is Seer of everything you do. When they came from above you, and from beneath you, your eyes were terrified, your hearts ran out of patience, and you harbored unbefitting thoughts about GOD. That is when the believers were truly tested; they were severely shaken up.

They "harbored unbefitting thoughts about God." Yes, there were times when I thought if God is running everything, then why is He running it like "this" for me. I knew He is watching me but why is He doing "this to me". He knows what I am going through; still I'm going through the situation. May God Almighty forgive me. I couldn't understand the wisdom behind it. I couldn't understand that it is God's way of teaching me things. God's way is perfect.

Another thing that helped me during those days were sermons by Dr. Rashad and the Friday sermons in the

mosque. By God's grace, some of those sermons helped me a lot; otherwise, I had almost given up.

But after reading this verse, I really felt that my tests are like a tiny car compared to a jumbo jet:

[2:49] Recall that we saved you from Pharaoh's people who inflicted upon you the worst persecution, slaying your sons and sparing your daughters. That was an exacting test from your Lord.

This kind of a test is something which God Himself calls an exacting test.

I can't say that my tests have come to an end, but God has taught me how to perceive things that happen in my life. This change took time and happened gradually. Sometimes we want our situation to change overnight. But we have to work at it.

Even today, Satan tries to instill fear in me, but I try to smile and ask myself, "How does it matter?" What I mean to say is that God teaches us to tackle our fear factors through our tests and later, by His grace, those fear factors don't worry us anymore.

When talking about tests, it's important to realize that God also calls prosperity a test: *[64:15] Your money and children are a test, and GOD possesses a great recompense.*

Sometimes, people associate tests only with hardship, but God calls money and blessings tests too. Consider the example of prophet Solomon: *[27:40] ... "This is a blessing from my Lord, whereby He tests me, to show whether I am appreciative or unappreciative. Whoever is appreciative is appreciative for his own good, and if one turns unappreciative, then my Lord is in no need for him, Most Honorable."*

I feel if we learn to perceive prosperity as a test, then hopefully we will not get preoccupied with material gains, and our priorities will be set right. God wants us to enjoy the nice things in this world, but not at the cost of the Hereafter.

[7:32] Say, "Who prohibited the nice things GOD has created for His crea-

tures, and the good provisions?" Say, "Such provisions are to be enjoyed in this life by those who believe. Moreover, the good provisions will be exclusively theirs on the Day of Resurrection." We thus explain the revelations for people who know.

Why the Tests

[3:154] ... GOD thus puts you to the test to bring out your true convictions, and to test what is in your hearts. GOD is fully aware of the innermost thoughts.

[6:42] We have sent (messengers) to communities before you, and we put them to the test through adversity and hardship, that they may implore.

[18:7] We have adorned everything on earth, in order to test them, and thus distinguish those among them who work righteousness.

[47:31] We will certainly put you to the test, in order to distinguish those among you who strive, and steadfastly persevere. We must expose your true qualities.

Through these verses we see some of the reasons for tests. For example, tests expose people's true convictions (3:154). Tests also make the righteous implore and turn towards God (6:42-43). But obviously God's tests are never unreasonable. Nor are they for God's amusement. Instead, it is we who incur hardships on ourselves by not upholding God's words. We were the confused lot, up in God's kingdom. We didn't uphold God's authority and landed ourselves in this test.

God never burdens a soul beyond its means, and God doesn't send any soul astray unless it chooses to go astray. So, I feel we choose to take that burden on ourselves.

[89:15] When the human being is tested by his Lord, through blessings and joy, he says, "My Lord is generous towards me." [89:16] But if He tests him through reduction in provisions, he says, "My Lord is humiliating me!" [89:17] Wrong! It is you who brought it on yourselves by not regarding the orphan. [89:18] And not advo-

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cating charity towards the poor.

[89:19] And consuming the inheritance of helpless orphans. [89:20] And loving the money too much.

What should we do during Tests?

First and foremost, implore God. Implore God in everything. The more we implore God, the more we uphold His authority. We admit to God that we cannot get out of a situation without His help. We admit that we need God.

[6:42] We have sent (messengers) to communities before you, and we put them to the test through adversity and hardship, that they may implore.

From the prophet David's example, we learn to implore God for forgiveness when God is testing us (38:24). The test can be a gentle and loving reminder from God to help us return.

From the prophet Solomon we learn to appreciate God when we are tested with blessings (27:40). We have so much to appreciate and thank God for each moment. There is something called the power of the present moment. The past moment is gone; the future moment is yet to come. What's really in our hand is the present moment. If we learn to thank God and appreciate the present moment, life will be much simpler. When we should be enjoying the crunchiness of an apple or loving its colour or appreciating God for the taste, we usually waste the moment of opportunity by thinking about the past or the future.

One more important thing that we can do during tests is meditation on God. It's extremely effective. Consider Jonah.

[37:142] Consequently, the fish swallowed him, and he was the one to blame. [37:143] If it were not that he resorted to meditation (on God), [37:144] he would have stayed in its belly until the Day of Resurrection.

When sincere meditation on God can save Jonah from the belly of the fish, it can certainly help us in our test.

Praise be to God!

Zahid

The Opening Act

As a young, naïve actor, I dreamt about making it, about landing that breakout role, and for several years, that was where my focus lay. The acting industry heavily emphasizes doing anything one needs to in order to get their foot in the door, which means taking any kind of roles you're offered, and schmoozing the people you need to. Once you make it, then you have some autonomy and say in what kind of roles you take and who you associate with. But until then, it's essentially cutthroat and you do what's required of you.

Four years ago, and already a couple of years into my acting career, I was introduced to Submission. I initially thought that Submitters were these perfect people who had all the answers to life. I quickly realized that everyone is also going through their own challenges and are also trying to figure it out. I looked for answers that I did not necessarily receive. It was easy for me to veer away from the community in search of a place where such perfect people existed. I looked to other scriptures, I visited temples, I wanted to find these "perfect" people because if they could give me the answers, then I wouldn't need to do any of the work for myself. Essentially, I wanted the seemingly easy way out.

Ironically, this way wasn't easy at all. And I'll fill you in on a little secret that I discovered: people aren't perfect, no matter where in the world you go. So, on this bizarre quest, I hit numerous rock bottoms. However, two years ago, God inspired me to relook into Submission and to really understand it. But this time, not for anyone else, not in search of the perfect people, but to do my own work, to figure out what this message was really all about. And purely by God's Grace, He opened my heart to learning and understanding. As some time went by, and now with a deeper understanding of what Submission meant, my values began to change, my perspective on my lifestyle began to change and now I didn't know if being a part of an industry that was so cutthroat in so many ways was what was right for me while I was growing in this new way.

This was scary, terrifying actually. The

thought of giving up what I had known for so long, what I had worked so hard for, my dreams, my aspirations, was difficult to do. But while I had really enjoyed the craft of acting, I didn't know if I could feel comfortable in an industry that seemed so disconnected to my new understanding of life. At the time, I was still shaky as many are, in new territory, like a newborn deer trying to stand for the first time. I didn't know if it was okay for me to portray roles and ideologies that didn't coincide with what I believed in; but being an actor, I had to carry out someone else's vision; I couldn't just say, "Actually, I don't like what my character has to do on this page, could you just rip it right out of the script?" I was at an internal war, between what I had known for so long and what I was just learning and in the ways I wanted to change.

So, at the time, I made the decision to leave acting behind. I had to trust God that He had a plan for me. I'd like to point out though, that in hindsight, it wasn't really about acting. It was about me needing to make a decision. And my recognition now that whether I chose to stay with acting, or try a different career, God would have guided me to what was truly best for me. And that leads me to my first big lesson that I wanted to share: We can't be scared of not knowing what to do in a given situation, especially when faced with an important decision because when God says to be steadfast, it means you just have to keep going, even if it's unclear, even if the road ahead seems murky, even if you have no idea what you're doing, which I absolutely didn't, He will show you the way. A phenomenal example of this in the Quran is in 28:7 when God inspires Moses' mother to throw her child into the river to keep him safe. The anxiety and turmoil that she likely felt may have made her wary about her decision to do so, but she had to trust in God and He strengthened her heart. We, too, must trust that in time, God will strengthen our hearts.

[8:10] GOD gave you this good news to strengthen your hearts. Victory comes only from GOD. GOD is Almighty, Most Wise.

[3:159] ... Once you make a decision, carry out your plan, and trust in GOD. GOD loves those who trust in Him.

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By God's leave, I ended up choosing to go into Early Childhood Education. I love children so I jumped in head first. I now work with children of all ages and I absolutely, by God's Grace, love what I do. It's tiring and exhausting but it's beautiful and rewarding and I have discovered that there are few things in this world that are as incredible as a meaningful interaction with a child.

Nowadays, when I see a young actor on screen who is being celebrated for their work, I miss the feeling of other people watching my work and commending me on a job well done. That's the thing in acting, everybody's watching, everybody knows what you're doing. There is no glamour in childcare. But I hold onto the realization that acting is for this life, but childcare is for the Hereafter.

[6:32] The life of this world is no more than illusion and vanity, while the abode of the Hereafter is far better for the righteous. Do you not understand?!

And this is my next big lesson that I have learned along the way: It shouldn't matter that few people really care what I did today at work or are actually interested in the interactions and incredibly funny and soulful conversations I have with my group of kids; it matters that God knows. It matters that God knows when a parent thanks me for being a positive part of their child's life. It matters that God knows when I can console a child and relate to him or her and tell them that they are not alone. It matters that God knows that sometimes I have to be the

caring adult in a child's life when that child doesn't have another adult to go to.

In a day and age when our entire lives are available to others online through the use of social media, we often feel a pressure to let everyone know the awesome things we get up to, but it's important to remind ourselves that it's really actually only important that God knows.

[16:19] And GOD knows whatever you conceal and whatever you declare.

Another big thing that I have learned is that I am a completely different person now, by God's Grace, than I was two years ago. At the time, I didn't know if acting was right for me, but I just had to trust God and He led me to find something that truly fulfills me. But having grown and become a little more knowledgeable, I can also very much recognize that it's not acting that is right or wrong, it's the choices that you as a person make. Again, let me re-emphasize that it is not my intention to say that it is wrong being an actor. The movie industry has its good and bad just like every other industry in the world. I personally love movies. They're a huge source of entertainment and can be a blessing from God. We just need to be able to find out where we fit in to these industries. Because wherever we are, or whatever job we're in, we have to submit and pray that God will guide us through it.

I would love to act again, and if God wills that to be something in my future, then, God willing, I will be able to approach it in a completely different mindset. This time not with the intention of needing to make

it, or needing to do whatever I'm asked of, or needing the attention and the glamour of it all, but knowing that I love acting for what it is, knowing that I don't need to compromise who I am and what I believe in for my work, knowing that I can be comfortable and figure it out. We're always changing, and particularly as Submitters, by God's Grace, we're always striving to grow, to progress, to persevere. I trust that as long as I hold fast to God and keep the faith, with sincerity, love and hope, God will guide me to the right answer.

[33:70-1] O you who believe, reverence GOD and utter only the correct utterances. He will then fix your works, and forgive your sins. Those who obey GOD and His messenger have triumphed a great triumph.

My final point, and my explanation into why I entitled this "The Opening Act" is because this is merely the beginning of my wonderful life as a Submitter. I have so much more to learn, so much more to grow. "All the world's a stage" as Shakespeare said and God is my director. He sets the stage and He casts the parts of the actors, each one of them there to play a unique role in this performance of life. I must steadfastly act out my role, even if the demands are high, even if it's a difficult part to play. But I know I have to seek the dignity and opinion of God and not be distracted by the critics of the world.

[35:5] O people, GOD's promise is the truth; therefore, do not be distracted by this lowly life. Do not be diverted from GOD by mere illusions.

Jehan