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Facing Cancer with Faith

During my medical career that spans well over four decades, I have encountered cancer in hundreds, if not thousands, of cases. One case was different, because the patient was myself. Minor symptoms pursued by diagnostic tests lead to the diagnosis of stomach lymphoma. The diagnosis was neither expected nor welcome. Our medical books tell us that upon receiving the diagnosis, the patient goes through the standard phases of shock, disbelief, rejection, resentment, protest and depression, until he finally settles down, more by defeat than acceptance. In my case, however, it was none of the above! My prompt response was to turn to Allāh and address Him: I know that I am being tested and I hope to pass the test. I know that with time everyone will be the same, but the test is how to react to the first few moments. I accept the fate written in one's register since the beginning of time and revealing itself at this appointed time.

Despite cancer afflicting millions of people, most us remain silent until it is our turn, and then we say "Why me?" Books on medical, social, and pastoral care warn the caregiver never to say it is the will of God, or bring God into the matter in any way. Even pastoral care as I have witnessed it in this country has become completely secular. To me, it was genuinely God's will. He forewarns us in the Qur'ān, speaking in the plural majesty:

"Most certainly We will try you by means of danger, hunger and loss of possessions, of lives and of (labor's) fruits. But give glad tidings unto those who are patient in adversity – who, when calamity befalls them, say: Verily unto Allāh we belong and verily unto Him we shall return."¹

The issue is far from the myth oft repeated: "Why does the loving God allow bad things to happen to good people or innocent children?" That is the shallow, simplistic look. We tend to focus on small issues and ignore the big picture. Allāh has a purpose and He need not explain it to us every

time; our trust in Him has to be tested. Allāh gave us an illustration of this in "Surāh" (Chapter) 18, "al-Kahf" (the Cave) when prophet Moses followed al-Khiḍr and saw him doing very strange things, the underlying explanations of which were later explained to him.

The probability of dying, of course, crossed my mind; I asked myself: "and who will not die except the One that does not die? Is death not but the crowning of life, the crossing of the bridge, and arrival of the ship at long last to its port of destination? If Allāh grants His grace – and with certainty He is the absolutely generous and merciful One – who would not welcome the move to the real, everlasting, and blissful life of the hereafter? Indeed, the day I am mourned, might, hopefully, turn out to be my happiest day."

Since Islam emphasizes the rights of our bodies upon us and invokes us to seek treatment, I was put on a regimen of chemotherapy. This exhausted me and I felt very weak and drained. So I decided to fight back, by writing my book, *Reading the Muslim Mind* (published by American Trust Publications, Indianapolis). Some days I could only write a few lines, other days several pages. But the book was accomplished, with my hope that Allāh would accept it as a "Ṣadaqah Jāriyah" (perpetual charity) and knowledge that would be put to good use.

Alḥamdulillah, the response to the treatment was marvelous, and a later biopsy showed that the disease was completely gone. But, alas, the chemotherapy had affected my heart and I went through a phase of heart failure and severe arrhythmia, necessitating hospital admissions and lifelong medicinal treatment. My submission to the will of Allāh never wavered. All the while I did not give up my activities, having made my decision not to die before I die. Once I am at the microphone, however, all the symptoms disappear and I became very strong, albeit making up for it later. Once during a Friday "Khuṭbah" (sermon), I spontaneously asked Allāh: "Make our stay in this world easy, make our exit from it easy, and make the day we stand before you the happiest of our days." Unexpectedly and inexplicably I broke into tears and others also cried. I felt very embarrassed. Later, I recited the "Du'ā'" (supplication), "Allāhumma' (O God), I never despair of your mercy; I never despair of

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your mercy; I never doubt your 'Qudrah' (power), and I ask you for the health and strength to serve your cause more and do more 'Da'wah' (inviting others to your path)."

But the Prophet says: He who does not thank people cannot thank Allāh. I have therefore to acknowledge the gracious companionship and deep faith of my wife through this episode as well as throughout our 46 years of marriage. We pray that it continues into the hereafter with the promise of Allāh,

"Gardens of perpetual bliss they shall enter together with the righteous from among their parents, their spouses and their offspring; and the angels will come unto them from every gate saying, Peace be upon you because you have persevered in patience, how excellent therefore is this final abode."²

As we steadily approach the other side, our life has been

abridged into two questions and answers: What do we ask of Allāh? His pardon and restoration. And what do we accept from Allāh? Whatever He sees fit for us.

References

1. Glorious Qur'ān, Chapter 2, Verses 155-6.
2. Glorious Qur'ān, Chapter 13, Verses 23-4.

Editor's note: Dr. Hassan Hathout has been a professor and chief of obstetrics and gynecology at Kuwait University. He retired in 1988 and moved to the United States. He now is director of outreach at the Islamic Center of Southern California in Los Angeles. He is the author of several books on Islam and is involved in many Islamic activities and Da'wah work.

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