

Success in Islam (part 1 of 2): Success or Failure is recognised by the Ultimate Result



“Not alike are the dwellers of the Fire and the dwellers of the Paradise. It is the dwellers of Paradise that will be successful.” (Quran 59:20)

God tells us in the Quran that the inhabitants of the fire and the inhabitants of the garden are not alike. It is those who live in the garden that are the achievers, they are the successful ones. A good end that culminates in an eternal home of bliss is the reward for a successful life. How then do we define a successful life? Is it riches beyond compare, or perhaps good health, some might argue it is happiness or a stress free existence. Just how does Islam define success?

Google defines success as the accomplishment of an aim or a purpose. It says that its opposite is failure; failure to accomplish the aim or purpose. In these times we are inclined to think of success as a spacious house, an overseas holiday or fame. People work hard for these small successes and they are not to be trivialised however such success is transient. As the saying goes, you can't take it with you and Islam tells us, the only things you can take with you to the grave are your deeds. Prophet Muhammad said, “Three things follow the dead person to his grave, two of which return and one of which remains with him. His family, money and deeds accompany him [to the grave], then his family and wealth return, and his deeds stay with him. “[1]

“Everyone shall taste death. And only on the Day of resurrection shall you be paid your wages in full. And whoever is removed away from the fire and admitted to Paradise, he indeed is successful. The life of this world is only a deceiving thing.” (Quran 3:185)

In his traditions Prophet Muhammad tells us that, the one who has accepted Islam is successful, the one who has been provided with sufficient for his wants and is content with what God has given him is successful.^[2] Submitting to the will of God makes a person successful. This does not necessarily mean that one is rich or healthy or even constantly happy.

With the acceptance of Islam comes great responsibility, we are now responsible for our own happiness and for our own success. And success, as we are beginning to discover is the ultimate prize. If we are judged successful Paradise becomes our eternal abode; health, wealth and happiness now become eternal. Success in Islam is defined as achieving the ultimate result, or Paradise. Whatever success we achieve along the way whether it is financial, health related or a satisfying lifestyle is finite. It will come to an end.

The Arabic word for success is *falah*, it is a word that Muslims of all ethnicities are familiar with. They hear it every day in the call to prayer. "...hayya 'alal-falah!" Hurry to success. Come to prayer, come to success. This is what the words of the call are saying to the believers. You will find success in the prayer, in maintaining your connection to God. Interestingly the same root fa-la-ha gives us the Arabic word for farmer - *fallah*. How do we know if a farmer is successful? He has abundant crops and healthy livestock. But the farmer has very little control over his efforts and his labour; he plants the seeds, tills the soil, and tends to his livestock. Then however he must put his trust in God, for he has no control over the weather. His success as a farmer is determined by God's power over all things. Floods and drought, winds and rain, even his own health and the health of his plants and livestock could affect his success.

Could we then say that the definition of success includes putting one's trust in God? Make an effort, do what is required and leave the outcome to God. Prophet Muhammad explains to the believers that all their affairs are amazing. He said, "How wonderful is the affair of the believer, for his affairs are all good, and this applies to no one but the believer. If something good happens to him, he is thankful for it and that is good for him. If something bad happens to him, he bears it with patience and that is good for him."^[3] Thus when one devotes his life to pleasing God by submitting to His will, this saying takes on even more layers of meaning. Completely trusting God means that there is no failure. Thus minor setbacks and difficulties are just a small glitch on the road to ultimate success.

What about outcomes that this worldly life considers to be failures. What if you lose your livelihood, or your spouse? What if you are not recognised as the good person you are striving to be. None of this has the least bit of influence on whether or not you are ultimately successful. What is taken into account is how you react and how you face life's challenges. A person is successful and on the road to the ultimate success because of his attitude, his intention, and his ability to trust God's promise.

“He will indeed be successful who purifies his ownself, and he will indeed fail who corrupts his ownself.” (Quran 91:9-10)

“And my success cannot come from any source besides God. I have put my trust in Him.” (Quran 11:88)

God tells us throughout the Quran when we are successful and how to be successful. He also tells us when we are failing, when we are in fact loosing or in loss. In chapter 103 of the Quran, God Almighty swears by time that all of us are losers unless we do four things; believe, do good, teach each other the truth and encourage one another to be patient.

“By *Al-Asr* (the time). Verily, man is in loss. Except those who believe and do righteous good deeds, and recommend one another to the truth and recommend one another to patience.” (Quran 103)

In part 2 we will look at the various ways to achieve success. Remember that it is the ultimate success that we are striving for and God Himself, through the Quran and the noble life of Prophet Muhammad, has given us the real recipe for success.

Footnotes:

[1] *Saheeh Al-Bukhari, Saheeh Muslim*

[2] *Saheeh Muslim*

[3] *Saheeh Muslim*

(part 2 of 2): The Ultimate Success is yours for the Taking

In part 1, we learned that Islam is concerned with the ultimate success. Eternal Paradise is the ultimate success just as the fire of Hell is the ultimate failure. There are many ways to achieving a favourable outcome for God has promised Paradise to those who obey Him. To them He promises serenity, contentment, happiness and peace of mind. This however does not mean that these things cannot be achieved in this life as well as eternally. A good life is possible for those who look to God, the Quran and the authentic traditions of Prophet Muhammad for guidance. Success is easily attainable and today we will discuss a few ways that we can achieve success in this life and secure the ultimate success.

Righteousness

The Prophet Muhammad left us with a very good working definition of righteousness. He said, “...Righteousness is that with which the soul is

tranquil and the heart is tranquil, but sin is that which rouses suspicion in the soul and is perplexing in the breast, even if people give you a decision in its favour.”^[1] One of the things that we as human being define as success is the ability to sleep well at night, to live with a clear conscience and here we see that righteousness provides this. Righteousness includes following the commandments of God, striving to do all acts of worship including prayer, charity and fasting with a good intention and a sincere heart.

“Whoever works righteousness — whether male or female — while he (or she) is a true believer verily, to him We will give a good life (in this world with respect, contentment and lawful provision), and We shall pay them certainly a reward in proportion to the best of what they used to do (i.e. Paradise in the Hereafter).” (Quran 16:97)

Kindness

A true believer is known for his or her kind demeanour. They strive to see the good in everything and everyone. They are the first to give from that which they love to those less fortunate or in need. A believer is thus always ready to assist other people in need of his help with a true spirit of kindness.

“No good is there in much of their private conversation, except for those who enjoin charity or that which is right or conciliation between people. And he who does this, seeking the good Pleasure of God, We shall give him a great reward” (Quran 4:114)

God is kind; He multiplies the reward for good deeds and forgives bad deeds. Prophet Muhammad said that God has decreed both good deeds and bad deeds, however whoever intends to do a good deed then does not do it, God will write it down as one complete good deed; if he intends to do it then he does it, then God will write it down as between ten and seven hundred good deeds, or more. Whoever intends to do a bad deed, and then he does not do it, God will write it down as one complete good deed; if he intends to do it then he does it, God will write it down as one bad deed.^[2] One whose good deeds are multiplied is indeed successful.

Remembering God

One of the easiest ways of feeling content and relaxed is to remember God. It relieves stress and worry and leaves a person focussed on the true purpose of life, which of course we understand is to worship God in everything that we do. However the human condition is not always peaceful, anxiety can touch us at any moment, and we have no control over that. We do however have control over our reaction. If we react by turning to God, remembering that He has many attributes and names that we can call Him by we will successfully navigate life’s thoroughfare.

**“Verily, in the remembrance of God do hearts find rest”
(Quran13:28)**

Trusting God

“And whosoever puts his trust in God, then He will suffice him” (Quran 65:3)

The path to success can be found in putting our trust in God. When we accept that God has control over all things and that He wants us to gain the ultimate success we can begin to relax and perhaps find success in our worldly lives as well. God wants what is best for us; if we do what is right, yet things do not go according to our plan it doesn't mean that we have failed, it means that God's plan for us is not quite the same as the future we had envisaged. At this point, we must learn to trust God.

“If God helps you, none can overcome you; and if He forsakes you, who is there after Him that can help you? And in God (Alone) let believers put their trust.” (Quran 3:160)

A Final Word on Failure

If something bad happens, if things don't go according to plan it is not necessarily a sign of failure. Right attitude and action will help one cope with the situation in the best possible way and in the end remember it is the ultimate success (Paradise) that really matters. God has promised that the one who dies whilst following His path will be the successful. If something unpleasant happens or a calamity befalls a person, he should not say “If only I had done such and such, this would not have happened to me” or “If only I had not done such and such, this would not have happened to me,” as this is a sign of not having patience in accepting what has been missed and cannot be regained, and is indicative of not having the correct understanding of belief in the divine will and decree of God. These negative thoughts cause pain and allow Satan to gain power over a person through thoughts of failure and worries. Prophet Muhammad said: “The strong believer is better and more beloved to God than the weak believer, although both are good. Strive to do that which will benefit you and seek the help of God, and do not feel helpless. If anything befalls you, do not say ‘If only I had done (such and such), then such and such would have happened,’ rather say: ‘God has decreed and what He wills He does,’ for ‘if only’ opens the door to the work of the Satan.”^[3]

Islam guides to a straight path that can lead to success in this world and the hereafter. However it is clear that the religion of Islam encourages the believers to strive for success in the hereafter because that is what our creator God calls the supreme or the ultimate success.

“And whoever is removed away from the Fire and admitted to Paradise, he indeed is successful”. (Quran 3:185)

Footnotes:

[\[1\]](#) *At Tirmidhi*

[\[2\]](#) *Saheeh Bukhari, Saheeh Muslim*

[\[3\]](#) *Saheeh Muslim*