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# Rocket Science

January 2022

Jamad ul-Awal / Jamad ul-Thani 1443



In the name of Allah,  
most Gracious, most Merciful

## Gratitude: the Israelites' perspective

From passages in various surahs of the Quran, we know the struggle of the Israelites (Bani Israel) under the Pharaoh (Firaun) and how Moses (Musa, as) helped them escape the tyranny of the evil ruler. This article analyses the story from the angle of gratitude.

### The story in a nutshell

The Israelites had been oppressed for a very long time. They were the slaves of the Pharaoh and were forced to work. Their living conditions were terrible. Quite often the children would see their old parents being whipped into working, or see their sister or mother being harassed.

While the Pharaoh was a dictator, he was also a political mastermind. He realised that these male children would soon grow into teenagers and young adults, and that they would be hot-headed and could cause an uprising.

So, he devised a plan. The Pharaoh decreed that every male child born would be killed to control the population. And this would be done every other year, so that he would

have enough manpower to get his work done while not causing a revolution.

The Israelites did not have a place to run to. They were landlocked. On one side was the river, which flowed to the Pharaoh's palace. On the other side was the army and slavery.

Allah (swt) made a way for the Israelites to escape by parting the water so that they could cross. But when the Pharaoh and his army started to cross, the water came back together and they were drowned.

When they reach the other side of the river, the Israelites were relieved from the tyranny of the Pharaoh. They were no longer subject to torture or slave labour. However, this new land brought about its own problems.

They were in a desert under the hot sun, with no place to sleep. There was barely any food, and they could not go back to their land as it was on the other side of the river.



### Musa's speech

This is when Musa (as) addressed his people. This is narrated in the Quran (14:6):

"And when Musa said to his people, 'Remember Allah's blessing upon you when He delivered you from Pharaoh's people who had been inflicting a grievous torment on you, slaughtering your sons and leaving your women alive. In that there was a great trial from your Lord.'"

The people were taken aback when Musa (as) encouraged them to "remember Allah's blessing on you". He reminded them:

- The Pharaoh used to humiliate you, and take honour away from your family.
- They would massacre your sons.
- They would allow your women to live because they would produce more later. And for unthinkable reasons also.

These were all things they used to suffer. However, Musa (as) started

with "Remember Allah's blessings (or favour)". These tortures do not look like favours: that he killed children and tortured the people.

It is important to remember that Allah (swt) rescued them from all these difficulties. That is the favour that Musa (as) is referring to. This is the terrible predicament you were in, but Allah (swt) rescued you from it.

When you are in the middle of a trial or test (fitnah), you often cannot see beyond the bad situation you are faced with right at that moment. In the case of the Israelites, they could not see beyond the lack of food, shelter, etc on the other side of the river.

The Israelites needed to recognise how much of the suffering was no longer there. They were now free from the tyranny of the Pharaoh, the slavery, the humiliation. This is the gratitude that Musa (as) urges them to concentrate on in the Quran.

Allah (swt) says the current situation was nothing compared to what they had been through. In the same verse, Musa (as) says "In that there was a great trial from your Lord."

### Conclusion

Being grateful is not just about looking for the good, positive things that Allah (swt) has given you, but also being thankful for the absence of bad, negative things in life. If Allah (swt) has given you the blessing of escaping the most powerful ruler of the world – and Pharaoh's army was the strongest – it is a huge blessing. There was no way that a civilian population could overcome such a huge power. However, Allah (swt) liberated them from such a ruler.

وَإِذْ قَالَ مُوسَىٰ لِقَوْمِهِ اذْكُرُوا نِعْمَةَ اللَّهِ عَلَيْكُمْ إِذْ  
 أَنْجَاكُمْ مِنْ آلِ فِرْعَوْنَ يَسُومُونَكُمْ سُوءَ الْعَذَابِ  
 وَيَدْبِحُونَ أَبْنَاءَكُمْ وَيَسْتَحْيُونَ نِسَاءَكُمْ وَفِي  
 ذَلِكُمْ بَلَاءٌ مِّنْ رَبِّكُمْ عَظِيمٌ ﴿٦﴾

At this point, you might expect Musa (as) to give a lecture about patience (sabr): "You are in a difficult situation. Be patient and Allah will give you more."

But rather, Musa (as) says, "And remember when your Lord proclaimed, 'If you are grateful, I will certainly give you more. But if you are ungrateful, surely My punishment is severe.'"

The lecture he gave the Israelites is not about being patient. The lecture is about being grateful. He didn't say that if you are patient, Allah will solve your problem. Instead, He said that if you are grateful, He will give you more.

But he didn't say exactly what Allah will give you "more" of. In other places, Allah (swt) does define what this "more" is; for example, Allah will make you escape. But not in this ayah. Not even an escape.

When you are in a desperate situation, you may feel overwhelmed, and people tell you to have patience.

Instead, in those moments of hardship, you should focus on things that you are grateful for. Even if your present situation seems bad, your previous situation may have been even worse. Perhaps, you are now grateful for having a family, having enough food, being in a secure financial situation, having freedom, security and peace where you live, good health, good company, a stable job, etc, etc.

The bounties of Allah (swt) are endless. Count them one by one, and be grateful to Him. And as Allah promises, he will increase you in what you desire.

One way that you may be grateful to Allah is by doing remembrance of Allah (thikr). A simple dua is *Subhan Allahil Atheem, Subhan Allahi Wabihamdihi*, which means "Glory be to Allah the Great. Glory be to Allah and thanks be to Him." This is all it takes in those moments of hardship. And Allah (swt) will increase you, and never makes false promises.

موسى  
عليه السلام

## Why do bad things happen?

The Pew Research Center<sup>1</sup> "is a nonpartisan fact tank that informs the public about the issues, attitudes and trends shaping the world." It conducts public opinion polling, demographic research, content analysis and other data-driven social science research. Often the topic of research is a religious one.

In November, they published the results of a survey<sup>2,3</sup> that asked, "In your own words, why do you think terrible things happen to people through no apparent fault of their own?" This was set in the context of the COVID pandemic,

and climate change resulting in hurricanes, wildfires, floods, etc.

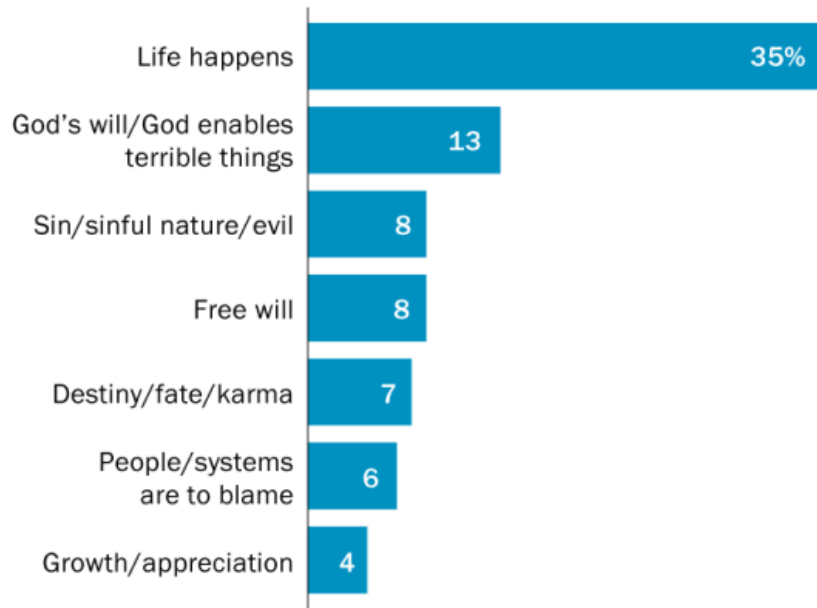
A total of 5,280 people responded. The composition of those people is not given, although clearly a large proportion are Christians of one kind or another.

The response with the largest proportion (35%) is that "Life happens"; in other words, it is random and nearly inescapable. In everyday American parlance, "Sh\*\* happens."

The next largest (13%) response was that it is God's will.

### Many Americans say terrible experiences are just an inevitable part of life

*% of U.S. adults who say terrible things happen to people through no apparent fault of their own because ...*

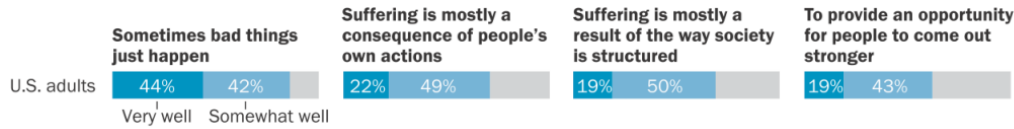


However, the evil is considered to be caused by people, systems and society – or even Satan – rather than by God. Instead, God chooses not to stop the evil because He has a bigger plan.

The existence of evil does not make Americans believe less that God is all-powerful, loving and kind.

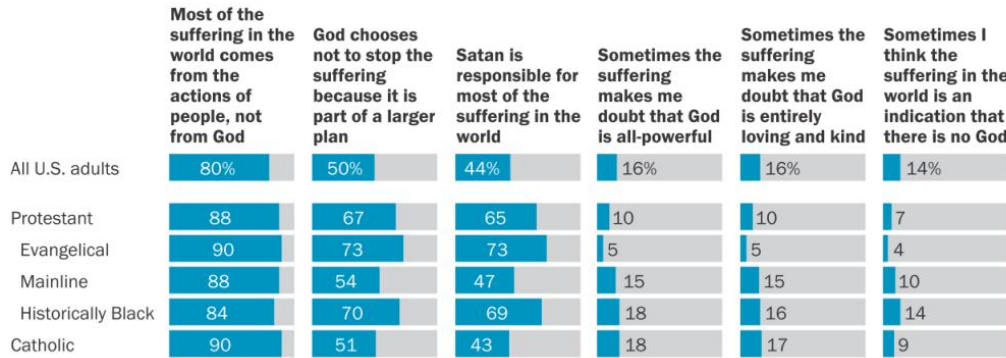
**When asked to explain suffering, majority of U.S. adults say that sometimes bad things just happen**

*% of U.S. adults who say \_\_\_\_\_ explains why suffering exists very/somewhat well*



**Most Americans say the suffering in the world comes from people – not God**

*% of U.S. adults who say each of the following reflects their views very/somewhat well*



1

[www.pewresearch.org/about](http://www.pewresearch.org/about)

2 In their own words, how Americans explain why bad things happen.

[www.pewresearch.org/interactives/in-their-own-words-how-americans-explain-why-bad-things-happen](http://www.pewresearch.org/interactives/in-their-own-words-how-americans-explain-why-bad-things-happen)

3 Few Americans blame God or say faith has been shaken amid pandemic, other tragedies.

[www.pewforum.org/2021/11/23/few-americans-blame-god-or-say-faith-has-been-shaken-amid-pandemic-other-tragedies](http://www.pewforum.org/2021/11/23/few-americans-blame-god-or-say-faith-has-been-shaken-amid-pandemic-other-tragedies)

**Qadha and qadar**

Muslims have a simple answer to the question of evil happening to people: it is the will of Allah (swt). This is embodied in the concept of *qadha* and *qadar*, one of the articles of faith. Allah’s knowledge of everything that will happen is called *qadar* (fate), while His causing these events to happen is called *qadha* (decree). In short, everything that happens, whether good or bad, or seemingly good or bad, comes from Allah (swt). “All things are from Allah” (Quran 4: 78).

As humans, we cannot know the future, and it may be that something that seems bad may turn out to be good after all, and vice versa.

Allah (swt) explains this in the Quran (57:22-23): “No misfortune can happen on earth or in your souls but is recorded in a decree before We bring it into existence: That is truly easy for Allah, in order that you may not despair over matters that pass you by, nor exult over favours bestowed upon you. For Allah loves not any vainglorious boaster.”

It is said that Muslims should always be in one of two states. If things are good, we should be in a state of thankfulness, gratitude to Allah (swt) (*shukr*). If things seem to be bad, we should be in a state of patience and forbearance (*sabr*). Both states are in fact a test. If things are going well, this tests whether we remember to be grateful to Allah (swt). If things do not seem to be going well, this is a test of our patience.

The only Muslim quoted in the responses to the Pew Forum questionnaire answered, “I don't know why these things happen through no fault, though I believe everything we are faced with is a test for how we do/don't handle the test itself. That goes for the individual and human society.”

Let us finish with a quotation from John Lennon – not a religious person, but someone who sometimes produced religious-sounding quotes: “Everything will be OK in the end. If it’s not OK, it’s not the end.”

Trusting in Allah (swt) is important, As Allah says in the Quran (9: 51), "Say: 'Nothing will befall us except what Allah has ordained. He is our Guardian. In Him let the believers put their trust.'"





## The richest person in history was a Muslim

The topic of this article is Mansa Musa<sup>1,2</sup>. Most readers will react to that name by saying, "Who? Never heard of him." However, as we will see, he is one of the most important people in the history of the world.

*Mansa* in the Mande language of Mali means "ruler" or "king".

Some details of his life – especially precise dates – are sketchy. He was born around 1280 and ascended to power in the early 1300s under unclear circumstances. At its peak, Mali was the largest empire in West

Africa. The Mali Empire at that time comprised modern-day Mali and parts of Guinea, Senegal, Mauritania, and the Gambia. The empire was the source for very pure gold and, as a result, the empire and its ruler were very wealthy. People estimate that, in modern currency, Mansa Musa was worth at least US\$ 400 billion.

Rodulf Ware<sup>1</sup> of the University of California suggests that, in the medieval period, the only other empire that had similar military, economic and political strength to the Mali Empire, was China.



Mansa Musa is reported to have been a devout Muslim, and performed hajj in 1324-5, a journey of 4,300 km. This involved overland travel via Cairo, and he took with him an enormous entourage. Wikipedia<sup>2</sup> reports that he took:

- 60,000 men, all wearing brocade and Persian silk, including ...
- 12,000 slaves, who each carried 1.8 kg of gold bars
- heralds dressed in silks, who bore gold staffs, organized horses, and handled bags
- 80 camels which each carried 23–136 kg of gold dust
- maybe 18 tons of gold in total

He gave some of the gold to the poor along the route. It was reported that he built a mosque every Friday. Because of his nature of giving in Cairo, Makkah, Madinah and other places, Musa's massive spending and generous donations created a massive ten-year gold recession. Some critics say this was an ulterior motive for his journey – to increase the reputation of the Mali Empire. Perhaps it worked: the Mali Empire was visited by the famous Muslim

explorer Ibn Battuta, during the reign of Musa's younger brother Sulaiman.

Returning from hajj, Musa embarked on a programme of cultural and scholarly development. He constructed the University of Sankoré in Timbuktu, and brought jurists, astronomers, and mathematicians from around Africa and the Middle East. The university had 25,000 students (more than any university in New Zealand, with the exception of the University of Auckland) and one of the largest libraries in the world with roughly a million manuscripts. In the 1400s, there were 80 universities in the city of Timbuktu alone.



The Djinguereber Mosque, commissioned by Mansa Musa in 1327



He built many other mosques and places of learning. He brought architects from Andalusia and Cairo to build his grand palace in Timbuktu and the great Djinguereber Mosque. Civilisation flourished; Sergio Domian, a modern-day Italian scholar of art and architecture, wrote, "Thus was laid the foundation of an urban civilization. At the height of its power, Mali had at least 400 cities, and the interior of the Niger Delta was very densely populated."

Musa died in about 1337 and was succeeded by his sons. The empire continued to flourish, but declined in the 15<sup>th</sup> century.

So, that is Mansa Musa, probably the wealthiest person in the history of the world. The fact that you have probably never heard of him says a lot about the western historical tradition.

1 The richest person who ever lived. BBC News, 12 April 2021. [https://www.bbc.com/reel/video/p09dcbl0/the-richest-person-who-ever-lived?utm\\_source=taboola&utm\\_medium=exchange&tblci=GiBgLh61omfgT7sy-9Z7ZgL1ljGdboKLygX8ljLrLk-Q9iCMjFQolMW3nN2QsqOtAQ#tblciGiBgLh61omfgT7sy-9Z7ZgL1ljGdboKLygX8ljLrLk-Q9iCMjFQolMW3nN2QsqOtAQ](https://www.bbc.com/reel/video/p09dcbl0/the-richest-person-who-ever-lived?utm_source=taboola&utm_medium=exchange&tblci=GiBgLh61omfgT7sy-9Z7ZgL1ljGdboKLygX8ljLrLk-Q9iCMjFQolMW3nN2QsqOtAQ#tblciGiBgLh61omfgT7sy-9Z7ZgL1ljGdboKLygX8ljLrLk-Q9iCMjFQolMW3nN2QsqOtAQ)

2 [en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mansa\\_Musa](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mansa_Musa)



Musa depicted holding an Imperial Golden Globe in the 1375 Catalan Atlas

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## Why attend Rocket Park jumuah?

Prayers are held at the **Senior Citizens' Association building, Rocket Park, New North Road, Mount Albert.**

- ✓ Central location
- ✓ Plenty of free parking
- ✓ Facilities for ladies
- ✓ Heating and air-conditioning
- ✓ Bayan (religious talk) before jumuah prayers
- ✓ All bayans and khutbahs in English

NB We are only open for Friday prayers – not for the five daily prayers.

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## ***SwT, saw, as, ra***

**SwT:** subhanahu wa ta'ala "Glory to Him, the Exalted" (when mentioning Allah)

**saw:** salallahu alaihi wassalam "May the blessings and peace of Allah be upon him" (when mentioning Muhammad)

**as:** alaihis salam "Peace be on him" (when mentioning other prophets)

**ra:** radi allahu anhu/ha/hum "May Allah be pleased with him/her/them" (when mentioning members of Muhammad's family, companions, etc)