

## REAL-LIFE TESTS OF HUMAN BEINGS FROM AN ISLAMIC PERSPECTIVE

Ivon Sagita

International Open University

### ABSTRACT

*The paper discusses real-life tests undergone by human beings from the Islamic perspective. The purpose of this research paper is to explore natural tests for humans as part of sunnatullah (Allāh's way) and Allāh's decree. The life tests that Allāh decides for humans have a purpose with various types of tests that occur. For accommodating the data, library research method has been used to structure this paper with relevant sources including verses of Qur'ān, ḥadīths, books and journal articles. It is obtained that the tests of life are in the form of physical trials, social and community trials, psychological and spiritual trials with fitnah of doubts, lusts and desire, also trials from Satan. Every tribulation in life has purposes and benefits, such as to distinguish true believers from disbelievers and hypocrites, for reawakening of the fitrah, to make humans turn to Allāh and exercise humility, for strengthening belief in Allāh's qadar, to expiate sins, to grow spiritually and for purification of the soul, for increasing good deeds, rewards, rank in Paradise and as the punishment for sins and disobedience.*

**Keywords:** *Life testing, Trials, Tribulations, Islamic perspective.*

**Corresponding author:** Ivon Sagita can be contacted at [ivonsagita89@gmail.com](mailto:ivonsagita89@gmail.com)

## **1. INTRODUCTION**

“Blessed is the One in Whose Hands rests all authority. And He is Most Capable of everything. 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” (QS. al-Mulk 1-2, *Qur’ān.com*). These verses of Qur’ān indicate the reason why Allāh The Almighty created this life with the purpose of testing. Utz (2014) stated that Allāh informs human beings that their existence on this earth is destined to be a constant series of trials, tribulations, hardships and challenges. Further she argued this world is a place of struggle and striving, whereas the Hereafter is the dwelling of reward or punishment. No human being who has ever existed, who exists today, or who will exist in the future can avoid the inevitable; not even the prophets and the most righteous are able to do so. In fact, they are tested to an even greater extent.

Testing means something that is used to test the quality of something, for example testing of intelligence, learning outcomes, abilities, and others. In life, there are many types of tests carried out by humans, both formal and informal tests, on a small scale. On a large scale, according to the Islamic view, life itself is a test for humans in order to test a person's quality for the aspects of faith, devotion, sincerity, ability, patience, intelligence, and so on. Testing of this life will be used as a parameter for the success of a human life to be rewarded in the Hereafter. The purpose of this paper is to explore the nature of life's tests for human beings from an Islamic perspective.

---

## 2. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

### 2.1 Life as a Test

An Arabic term often used for tests is *fitnah* (plural: *fitan*), the linguistic meaning of which is temptation, trial, and affliction. It can also carry the meaning of discord and dissension. The root word is *fatana*, which means to subject to temptations or trials (Wehr, 1947). Said Yai (2014) stated that a test is a decree from Allāh which will definitely happen to every servant of Allāh anytime and anywhere, in fact the higher the rank of a servant, the greater the test he will receive. In fact, in this life, it has become *sunnatullāh* that Allāh will test each of His servants with various kinds of trials and tests, such as fear, losing loved ones and being separated from them, lack of possessions, both clothing and food (Al-Ghazali, 2006).

A believer is someone whose heart always depends on Allāh. If a disaster befalls him, he will definitely remember Allāh and know that the disaster that befell him comes from Allāh The Almighty. And he discovered that Allāh had wisdom in this matter which was not visible to his weak human mind. As for those who do not believe, when a disaster befalls them, their hearts will look only to the causes, and forget that the matter belongs to Allāh. Before or after it happens, and in essence the disaster that befalls it comes from Allāh's side, even though it happens through the hands of creatures, for example, then actually the One who makes the test happen through their hands is Allāh (Al-Halili, 2008).

Utz (2014) explained from the Islamic perspective, tribulation is not intended to bring evil to individuals. Instead, their goal is to provide opportunities for humans to realize the truth about their existence in the world and develop spiritual potential. Even though the surface may seem bad, mistakes actually involve goodness and helpfulness. Because of His mercy, Allāh only determines goodness for humans.

## **2.2 Relevant Publications**

There are several publications related to the topic of real-life tests of human beings from the Islamic perspective. In 2021, Ilzam Naufal published a paper entitled '*The Testing according to Imam Nawawi Al-Bantani in the Interpretation of Al-Munir*' with the aim to review and find out the meaning of the test, the form and type of test, the purpose of test that Allāh gives and how should humankind respond to the test based on perspective of Iman Nawawi Al-Bantani in his book '*Al-Munir*'.

Other research was conducted by Amirrudin in 2020. In his paper '*Trials Concept in Al Qur'ān*' he concluded that in the Qur'ān there are several aspects related to the meaning of *balā*, namely *al-imiṭihān*, *muṣībah*, slander, '*adhāb* and '*la'nat*.. The Qur'ān's perspective on the blessings given by Allāh, in various forms, there are health and illness, misery and happiness, poor and rich, commands and prohibitions, life and death and so on. These types of reinforcements are classified into two forms, namely reinforcements in the form of goodness and those in the form of evil.

### **3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

This study used research library methodology. According to Sarwono (2006), in library research, to obtain a theoretical basis or explanation related to the topic to be studied, researchers need to study various types of book sources as references or results from previous relevant research (Mirzaqot & Purwono, 2017). For library research, the technique of collecting the data is done by having the review of sources such as books, notes, literature and reports related to the discussion topic (Nazir, 2003).

### **4. DISCUSSION**

The life tests that Allāh decrees for humans have a purpose with various types of tests that occur. Utz (2014) explained the test types of human beings include physical, social and community, psychological and spiritual trial, *fitnah* of doubts, *fitnah* of desire, and satanic trials.

#### **4.1 Physical testing**

In this category Utz (2014) mentioned the examples of trials including natural disasters, wars, deaths of loved ones, loss of employment and wealth, loss of fruits and crops, physical illness, and hunger. Allāh said about these categories in QS. 2:155, "And We will surely test you with something of fear and hunger and a loss of wealth and lives and fruits...". These tests will not be strictly limited to the physical realm; they will encompass other aspects as well. Poverty, for example, affects an individual physically, but it also restricts social interaction, limits opportunities, and may lead to feelings of frustration, worry, and humiliation. Also, a needy person may be tempted

to engage in immoral behaviors or to beg in order to obtain provisions.

#### **4.2 Social and community trials**

In their social life, people will experience difficulties from their nearest and dearest ones: family, community, educational or employment networks. Allāh stated on QS. 25:20, "...And We have made some of you [people] as trials for others will you have patience? And ever is your Lord, Seeing". Utz (2014) said this test is including the disbelievers, the hypocrites, the misguided and the ignorant among the Muslims will attempt to divert them from the straight path upon which they are travelling. The tests will come in a variety of forms. This test may also occur through misguided and ignorant members of the Ummah who divide into sects and thereby cause confusion and conflict. Allāh mentions on QS. 6:65, "Say: He is the [One] Able to send upon you affliction from above you or from beneath your feet or to confuse you [so you become] sects and make you taste the violence of one another. Look how We diversify the signs that they might understand". Family members can be a test also for someone as Allāh stated on QS.6:9, "O you who have believed, let not your wealth and your children divert you from the remembrance of Allāh. Whoever does that-then those are the losers".

#### **4.3 Psychological and spiritual testing**

Allāh mentions the testing of humans within their own selves in QS.3: 186 that "You will surely be tested in your possessions and in yourselves...". According to this verse Utz (2014) clarified while this verse refers to the way individuals are tested through

wealth, family and children, it also includes the way they are tested within the self, in the form of psychological and spiritual trials. Trials and tests in this category involve the beliefs, values, and goals of the individuals. They also include various psychological trials that affect not only their thinking but also their emotions and their behavior, and ultimately their souls. As such, this category strongly involves the spiritual realm.

#### 4.4 Fitnah of doubts

The first of these is the *fitnah* of doubts, misconceptions, and unclear matters. Individuals may entertain uncertainties, leading to the distortion or destruction of their knowledge and beliefs. These afflictions of doubt are in opposition to the correct *aqidah* (creed or belief system) of *Ahl as-Sunnah wal-Jamā'ah* (the people of the Sunnah and the community). They corrupt one's thinking, understanding and perception. Thus, the afflicted individuals deviate from the true path, either totally or partially, by misunderstanding the divine wisdom behind particular matters. Such people may also introduce innovations in the religion (As-Saleh, n.d).

#### 4.5 Tests of lusts and desire

Allāh The Almighty mentioned on Qs. 7:176, "And if we had willed, We could have elevated him thereby, but he adhered [instead] to the earth [to worldly desires] and followed his own desire..". As-Saleh (n.d) argued This type of *fitnah* opposes the will of the individual and leads to corruption in behavior and choices. It refers to the appetites or desires of the self or soul (involving the stomach, tongue, and private parts), as well as various negative attributes (can be greed, envy, arrogance,

laziness, or to commit sins) and desires (such as those for excess wealth, power, prestige, or authority). While desires involving the stomach and private parts may be considered physical in nature, they also include significant psychological elements. These desires exist within human beings as a test - a test to distinguish between those who will strive to control these desires according to the guidance of Allāh and those who will allow them to flourish without being checked.

#### **4.6 Satanic test**

Satan is aware of the weakness of human beings, so he attempts to play on their whims and desires in order to distance them from Allāh and their worship of Him. The Messenger of Allāh (ﷺ) said: When Allāh created Adam in Paradise, He left him for as long as Allāh willed He should leave him. Iblīs started walking around him, looking at him, to see what he was. When he saw that he was hollow, he knew that he had been created in such a way that he would not be able to keep control. (Muslim Ḥadīth). This means that humans would not be able to control their desires and ward off the whispering of Satan, because something that is hollow does not prevent anything from entering it. Of course, this does not mean that it is impossible to overcome Satan and one's desires, but in reality, it is a significant trial for human beings and one that they face on a daily basis (Utz, 2014).

According to Islam, tribulations may serve a purpose in this life, whether or not humans are able to ascertain what it is. The various purposes may include testing the individual, expiating sins, increasing the reward or punishment, serving as a reminder, and purifying the soul, among others. In general, Allāh



has a purpose or plan for each and every tribulation, and it is mainly to benefit the individual in the hereafter (Utz, 2014). Utz (2014), explained these points:

#### ***4.6.1 To distinguish true believers from disbelievers and hypocrites***

From the Islamic perspective, one of the fundamental purposes of trials and tribulations in this life is to distinguish between those who submit and those who refuse, to separate the believers from the disbelievers, and to separate the truthful from the lying hypocrites. Allāh explains that in QS. 29:11, “And Allāh will surely make evident those who believe, and He will surely make evident the hypocrites”.

#### ***4.6.2 The reawakening of the fitrah***

During times of crisis, the spiritual side of humans is likely to be awakened as the *fitrah* attempts to break through after having been obscured under layers of false beliefs, principles, ideals, and behaviours. The *fitrah* is the innate tendency to believe in the existence of Allāh and to believe that He alone is worthy of worship. During the worst of times, humans call out to Allāh, recognizing that He is the only One Who can rescue them in time of need. Allāh points out this fact on QS. 10:12.

#### ***4.6.3 Turning to Allāh and exercising humility***

According to QS. 30:33-34, when people undergo trials, they repent to Allāh and beseech Him to forgive their past sins. In this verse, the Arabic phrase for repenting to Allāh is *munībīn ilayhi*. This involves turning to Allāh's Lordship, and it

particularly occurs during times of affliction and suffering, as noted in this verse.

#### ***4.6.4 Strengthening belief in Allāh's qadar***

One component of true faith in Allāh is believing in His divine will and decree: that nothing, no matter how grand or insignificant, how obvious or subtle, happens in this universe except by the will and decree of Allāh the Almighty. Trials and tribulations serve to strengthen this belief and move it from the realm of doubt to the realm of certainty.

#### ***4.6.5 Determining who does the best deeds***

Another purpose of trials and tribulations is to determine whose actions are the best. It is during these times that the patience and conduct are tested to the ultimate degree. Either we will maintain our composure and follow the practice of Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ) in this regard or we will express ourselves like those in the days of ignorance.

#### ***4.6.6 Expiation of sins***

The pain and suffering that an individual faces in this life may result in the expiation of sins and evil deeds. The following are some of the many sayings of the Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ) confirms this fact: "For every fatigue, disease, sorrow, sadness, hurt, or distress that befalls a Muslim, including a prick that he receives from a thorn, Allāh expiates some of his sins" (Ḥadīth Bukhārī).

#### ***4.6.7 Spiritual growth and purification of the soul***

One of the main purposes of trials and tribulations is to assist the individual in purifying the soul, a process that is related to expiation of sins. Through the process of purification, augmented by the challenges of life, we may overcome weaknesses and enhance our obedience to Allāh, leading to a closer relationship with Him. It is through this very relationship with Allāh that true peace and happiness are found.

#### ***4.6.8 Increase in good deeds, rewards and rank in Paradise***

Trials and tribulations may also increase the good deeds and raise the rank of the believer; the more difficult and intense the hardship, trial or tribulation, the greater the reward. This increase in good deeds and reward is particularly true for those who do not carry the burden of sin (as a result of their sins having been cleansed through the trial itself or through other means).

#### ***4.6.9 Punishment for sins and disobedience***

For those who have committed transgressions, tribulations may be a punishment for their bad deeds. Sins lead to the removal of blessings and the sending of calamities and hardship. In many verses of the Qur'an, in the form of direct warnings, reminders, stories, and analogies, Allāh mentions the reality of punishment for disbelief and evil deeds.

## **5. CONCLUSION**

From all data gained, in the exploration of the test of life according to an Islamic perspective, it was found that human beings have a variety of trials that have huge benefits for them. Many verses in the Qur'ān explain the kinds of tests faced by humans and the purposes for which they happen by the will of Allāh.

By living in this life, every believer and unbeliever will have tests in their lives. The test can be in the form of physical trials, social and community trials, psychological and spiritual trials with *fitnah* of doubts, lusts and desire, also trials from Satan. Every tribulation in life has purposes and benefits to distinguish true believers from disbelievers and hypocrites, for reawakening of the *fitrah*, to make humans turn to Allāh and exercising humility, strengthening belief in Allāh's *qadar*, to expiate sins, to grow spiritually and for purification of the soul, in increasing good deeds, reward, rank in Paradise and as the punishment for sins and disobedience. As a recommendation, by having this discussion about the tests of life, it is hoped that the reader is able to realize that this world is the place for tests to be faced as part of daily life. A strong connection to Allāh the Almighty is needed to pass every test and gain all benefits. For further research on this topic, it can be explored in other aspects of tests apart from the types, purposes and benefits.

## **REFERENCES**

- Al-Ghazali, M. (2006). *Minhajul Abidin*. Amelia.
- Al-Halili, A.M.A. (2018). *Facing Life's Trials and Trials Under the Guidance of the Al-Qur'ān and As-Sunnah*. Darul Haq.

- Amiruddin. (2020). Trials Concept in Qur'ān. *Al-Kauniyah, journal of Qur'ān and Tafsir Science*, Vol. 1, No. 1, December 2020.
- As-Saleh, S. (n.d). The Contemporary Fitan: Afflictions, Trials, Tests, Tribulations, from Abdurrahman.org, <http://abdurrahman.org/character/TheContemporaryFitan.pdf>
- Bukhari, M.I. (1997). *The Translations of the Meaning of Sahih Bukhari (Arabic-English)*. M.M.Khan (trans). Darusaalam Publishers and Distributors.
- Mirzaqon, T, A and Purwoko, B. (2017). Literature Study on the Theoretical Basis and Practice of Expressive Writing Counseling. *BK Jurnal Unesa* 8(1).
- Naufal, I. (2021). The Testing according to Imam Nawawi Al-Batani in the Interpretation of Al-Munir. *Undergraduate thesis, Raden Intan Lampung Islamic State University*.
- Nazir, M. (2003). *Research Methodology*. Ghalia Indonesia.
- Qur'ān.com. Retrieved from <https://Qur'ān.com/surah-al-mulk> on 15 April 2024.
- Sahih International. (1997). *The Qur'ān: Arabic Text with Corresponding English meanings*. Abul-Qasim Publishing House.
- Said Yai, A.A. (2015). Tests From Allāh and How to Overcome Them. *Islam House, Albab*, Vol.16, No. 2.
- Utz, A. (2014). *The Prick of Thorn – coping with the trials and tribulations of life*. International Islamic Publishing House.
- Wehr, H. (1974). *A Dictionary of Modern Written Arabic*. Libraire du Liban.