

**THE BENEFITS OF TRIALS AND TRIBULATIONS FOR THE MUSLIM
BELIEVERS BY AL-‘IZZ ‘ABD AL-‘AZIZ IBN ‘ABD AL-SALĀM: A
TRANSLATION OF FAWĀ’ID AL-BALWĀ WA AL-MIḤAN**

Wan Mohd Fazrul Azdi bin Wan Razaliⁱ
Mohd Rumaizuddin Ghazaliⁱⁱ

ⁱ (Wan Mohd Fazrul Azdi bin Wan Razali). Senior Lecturer, Akidah and Religion Studies Programme, Faculty of Leadership and Management, Universiti Sains Islam Malaysia. wmfazrul@usim.edu.my

ⁱⁱ Associate Professor, Da’wah and Islamic Management Programme, Faculty of Leadership and Management, Universiti Sains Islam Malaysia. rumai@usim.edu.my

Abstract

Trials and tribulations come to everyone’s life in many shapes and forms. This issue is discussed systematically and at length in the field of Islamic faith (‘aqīdah), Islamic sufism (taṣawwuf), Islamic thought (al-Fikr al-Islāmiyy). Among treatises of classical Islam which touches this issue is Kitab Fawā’id al-Balwā wa al-Miḥan (The Benefits of Trials and Tribulations) by Sulṭān al-Ulamā’ Al-‘Izz ‘Abd al-‘Aziz Ibn ‘Abd Al-Salām al-Ash‘ariyy al-Shāfi‘iyy al-Dimashqiyy of the 6th/7th AH or 12th/13th CE. This article provides the introduction to the intellectual biography of Al-‘Izz ‘Abd al-‘Aziz Ibn ‘Abd Al-Salām, introduction to the treatise: Kitab Fawā’id al-Balwā wa al-Miḥan, English translation of this treatise, and discussion of its contents. This treatise of Al-‘Izz ‘Abd al-‘Aziz Ibn ‘Abd Al-Salām is a worth reading and exploring by all Muslims and non-Muslims. This treatise provides important points, proofs, and short explanations in understanding the benefits of trial and tribulation in human life from the Islamic perspective.

Keywords: trial, tribulation, benefit, Fawā’id al-Balwā wa al-Miḥan, and Al-‘Izz ‘Abd al-‘Aziz Ibn ‘Abd Al-Salām

INTRODUCTION

In the Islamic worldview, life in this world is not only for the purpose of learning, work and pleasure. This world is also a place for trial and tribulation from God to all creations. These trials and tribulations come to everyone in many shapes and forms. They can come in the forms of hardship, such as poverty, sadness, and ignorance. In the same time, the trials and tribulations can also come in the forms of pleasure, such as wealth, happiness, and knowledge (Al-Baqarah, 2: verse 155-157; Ali ‘Imran, 3: verse 14).

This issue of trial and tribulation in life is discussed systematically and at length in the field of Islamic faith (‘aqīdah), Islamic sufism (taṣawwuf), and Islamic thought (al-Fikr al-Islāmiyy). To some readers and thinkers, the discussions in this issue are also related to the discourse on theodicy or the justice of God. Among questions posed in this discourse on theodicy are as follows: if God is Most Gracious and Most Merciful, why are there trials and tribulations to His creations? If God is Most Omnipotent, why not God repel and predestine only happiness, calmness and

wellness to everyone? If God is All-Knowing and Almighty, why He still needs to test and try His creations? Why He repel not and predestine the safety and protection from the early moment? (Ormsby 1984; Muhsin Akbas 1999; Tubanur Yesilhark Ozkan 2015; Safaruk Chowdhury 2021)

Here comes the significant position of this treatise of classical Islam, *Kitab Fawā'id al-Balwā wa al-Miḥan*, in addressing the seventeen benefits of trials and tribulations for the Muslim believers. Though this treatise is small in size and page number, nevertheless it delivers effective and meaningful Islamic answers to the theodicy questions as previously mentioned. This treatise is an ingenious work by the King of all Muslim scholars (*Sultān al-Ulamā'*), Al-'Izz 'Abd al-'Aziz Ibn 'Abd Al-Salām al-Ash'ariyy al-Shāfi'iyy al-Dimashqiyy of the 6th/7th AH or 12th/13th CE (Izzuddin Bin Abd al-Salam 2018; Wan Mohd Fazrul Azdi bin Wan Razali 2021).

This article covers the intellectual biography of Al-'Izz 'Abd al-'Aziz Ibn 'Abd Al-Salām, introduction to the treatise: *Kitab Fawā'id al-Balwā wa al-Miḥan*, English translation of this treatise, discussion on its contents, and a conclusion. This translation is worked based on the modern English language and it is hoped to be of benefit to the readers of English language. This translation is also prepared to advance the studies and researches on the works of Al-'Izz 'Abd al-'Aziz Ibn 'Abd Al-Salām, in relation to the present developments of Islamic thought, humanities, and social sciences.

AL-'IZZ 'ABD AL-'AZIZ IBN 'ABD AL-SALĀM AND HIS FAWĀ'ID AL-BALWĀ WA AL-MIḤAN: AN INTRODUCTION

The author's full name is 'Abd al-'Azīz ibn 'Abd al-Salām ibn Abī al-Qāsim ibn Ḥasan. He received the honorary title *al-ʿIzz* or *ʿIzz al-Dīn*, which means the honor of religion, for his numerous contributions and services for the religion of Islam. The same also goes to the other honorary titles received such as *Sultān al-ʿUlamā'* (king of all Muslim scholars), *Shaykh al-Islām* (the Great Muslim scholar), and *Qāḍī al-Quḍāh* (the Great Muslim Jurist). He was born at Damascus in 577AH/1181AD and received his early Islamic knowledge in his hometown. He spent most of his lifetime in the fields of knowledge, teaching, writing, and giving religious verdicts (*fatāwā*). Later on, he moved to Cairo and continued his knowledge and religious routines. He died in the year 660AH/1262AD at the age of 83 (al-Subkiyy 1964; Ibn Kathīr 1993).

Al-'Izz 'Abd al-'Aziz Ibn 'Abd Al-Salām produced and left a lot of writings and treatises in the Islamic studies, such as in the fields of *fiqh* (Islamic law), *uṣūl al-fiqh* (principles of Islamic law), *tafsīr* (Quranic exegesis), and history. Among his writing are: *Tafsīr al-Qur'ān* in the field of Quranic exegesis, *al-Fawā'id Fī Mushkil al-Qur'ān* and *Majāz al-Qur'ān* in the field of *'ulūm al-Quran* (Quranic sciences); *Mukhtaṣar Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim* in the field of *ḥadīth* (prophetic tradition); *al-'Aqā'id*, *Sharḥ al-Asmā' al-Ḥusnā*, *Bidāyah al-Sūl Fī Tafḍīl al-Rasūl* and *al-Farq bayna al-Īmān wa al-Islām* in the field of *'aqidah* (Islamic faith); *Qawā'id al-Aḥkām Li Maṣāliḥ al-Anām* and *al-Qawā'id al-Sughrā* in the discipline of *uṣūl al-fiqh* (principles of Islamic law) (Al-Wahībiyy 1982; al-Zuhailiyy 1992).

In introducing *Kitab Fawā'id Al-Balwā Wa Al-Miḥan*, Iyād Khālīd al-Ṭabbā' (1994) alleges that the attribution of this authorship to Al-Izz ibn Abd al-Salām is correct based on scholarly statements made by many renowned Muslim scholars. Among these scholars are Tāj al-Dīn al-Subkiyy (727-770H) in his *Ṭabaqāt al-Shāfi'iyyah al-Kubrā*, al-Dā'ūdiyy (d. 945H) in *Ṭabaqāt al-Mufasssīrīn*, Jalāl al-Dīn al-Suyūṭiyy (849-911H) in the *Tashyīd al-Arkān Min Laysa Fī al-Imkān Abda'a Mimmā Kāna*, and Ismā'īl Bāshā al-Baghdādiyy (m. 1339H / 1920M) in the *Hadiyyah al-'Ārifīn*. This treatise also known with other name by other scholars, namely *al-Fitan wa al-Balāyā wa al-Miḥan wa al-Razāyā* (The Trials, Tribulations, Tests and Calamities).

There are seventeen benefits of trials and tribulations for the Muslim believers as arranged by Al-'Izz 'Abd al-'Aziz Ibn 'Abd Al-Salām in this treatise. These seventeen benefits are as follows:

1. recognizing the greatness of Allah SWT
2. recognizing the value of human servanthood to Allah SWT
3. achieving sincerity in accepting Allah SWT as the Holy Protector
4. returning to Allah SWT
5. humbling oneself and praying only to Allah SWT
6. forbearance with the cause of trial
7. forgiving the cause of trial
8. patience in facing the trial
9. feeling glad for the benefits received from the trial
10. being grateful for the benefits granted from the trial
11. purifying oneself from sins and wrongdoing
12. receiving mercy and help for the trial
13. recognizing the great value of living in pleasure
14. granted with the hereafter reward
15. recognizing the many hidden benefits from the trial
16. preventing oneself from self-evil, ungrateful, arrogance, boastfulness, and despotism
17. Feeling content for God's destiny, which also invites the pleasure of Allah SWT to his servant

Based on the explanations made by Al-'Izz 'Abd al-'Aziz Ibn 'Abd Al-Salām, this treatise is a suitable reference in understanding the discussion in the Islamic faith, sufism and Islamic thought, especially in grasping with the issues of God's destiny, theodicy, freewill and predestination. All these explanations are made in signifying the benefits and wisdoms of trials and tribulations in this world from the Islamic perspective. As said by Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālīyy in his *Iḥyā' 'Ulūm al-Dīn* (*The Revival of Islamic Sciences*) about the will, power and wisdom of Allah SWT: "there is in possibility nothing more wondrous than what is" (*laysa fī al-Imkān abda' mimmā kāna*) (Al-Ghazālīyy 1431H).

This English translation is made from the Arabic text *Kitab Fawā'id Al-Balwā Wa Al-Miḥan*, published by *Dār al-Fikr al-Mu'āṣir* of Beirut and *Dār al-Fikr* of Damascus year 1995. The editing and checking to the original manuscripts was made by Iyād Khālid al-Ṭabbā'. The published treatise is of 32 pages including an introduction by the *muḥaqqiq* (editor and checker), the text and six indices, namely: index of Quranic verses, index of prophetic traditions and scholarly sayings, index of names, index of poems, indeks of references and contents page.

All Quranic translations for this treatise are referred to *The Qur'an: A New Translation* by M.A.S. Abdel Haleem (2005), published by Oxford University Press. All honorary figures in the treatise are given proper abbreviated salutations accordingly such as *subhānahu wa ta'ālā* (SWT) to Allah, which means the Most Glorified and Most High; and *ṣallā Allahu 'alayhi wa sallam* (SAW) to Prophet Muhammad, which means peace and blessings be upon him. 'Alayhi / 'alayhā / 'alayhim al-Salām (AS) are used to the other prophets and their wives, which means peace be upon him / her / them; *raḍīya Allahu 'anhu* (RA) to all companions, which means may Allah satisfy with him; and *raḥimahu Allāhu ta'ālā* (RH) to all Muslim scholars, which means may Allah bless him.

THE TRANSLATION OF AL-'IZZ 'ABD AL-'AZIZ IBN 'ABD AL-SALĀM'S FAWĀ'ID AL-BALWĀ WA AL-MIḤAN

In the name of Allah, the most gracious, the most merciful

Prayer and blessings be upon Prophet Muhammad and his family members.

The teacher, leader, proof of Islam, knowledge reliance for the people, Abū Muḥammad 'Abd al-'Azīz ibn 'Abd al-Salām ibn 'Abd al-Qāsim al-Sulamī RH says: May Allah bless all muslims with his (the author's) knowledge, forgive all of us, the author and all Muslims.

In the face of trials, test, misfortunes, and tribulations, there are with them various benefits, depending on the ranks of people facing them.

1. First, recognising the greatness of Allah's Godship and His All-Power.

2. Second, recognizing the humility of servanthood and its subordination to the authority of Allah, where this matter is testified in His words:

الَّذِينَ إِذَا أَصَابَتْهُمْ مُصِيبَةٌ قَالُوا إِنَّا لِلَّهِ وَإِنَّا إِلَيْهِ رَاجِعُونَ

Which means: "those who say, when afflicted with a calamity, 'We belong to God and to Him we shall return.'" (Surah al-Baqarah 2: verse 156).

All servants acknowledge that they belong to Allah and must serve Him. They will return to His Laws, Rulings, predestination and will. There is no escape and exit for them (from His Power and Control) except with Allah SWT.

3. Third, achieving sincerity to Allah for there is no place for protection in repelling all troubles except with Allah SWT. And there is no place to depend for removing all hardships but Allah SWT.

وَإِنْ يَمَسُّكَ اللَّهُ بِضُرٍّ فَلَا كَاشِفَ لَهُ إِلَّا هُوَ...

Which means: "If God touches you [Prophet] with affliction, no one can remove it except Him,..." (Surah al-An'am 6: verse 17).

فَإِذَا رَكِبُوا فِي الْفَلَكِ دَعَوْا اللَّهَ مُخْلِصِينَ لَهُ الدِّينَ ...

Which means: "Whenever they go on board a ship they call on God, and dedicate their faith to Him alone,..." (Surah al-Ankabut 29: verse 65).

4. Fourth, returning to Allah SWT and accepting him wholeheartedly.

﴿وَإِذَا مَسَّ الْإِنْسَانَ ضُرٌّ دَعَا رَبَّهُ مُنِيبًا إِلَيْهِ ...﴾

Which means: "When man suffers some affliction, he prays to his Lord and turns to Him,..." (Surah al-Zumar 39: verse 8)

5. Fifth, humbling oneself and praying only to Allah SWT.

فَإِذَا مَسَّ الْإِنْسَانَ ضُرٌّ دَعَانَا ...

Which means: "When man suffers some affliction, he cries out to Us..." (Surah al-Zumar 39: verse 49)

وَإِذَا مَسَّكُمُ الضُّرُّ فِي الْبَحْرِ ضَلَّ مَنْ تَدْعُونَ إِلَّا إِلَٰهًا ...

Which means: "When you get into distress at sea, those you pray to besides Him desert you,..." (Surah al-Isra' 17: verse 67)

بَلْ إِيَّاهُ تَدْعُونَ فَيَكْشِفُ مَا تَدْعُونَ إِلَيْهِ إِنْ شَاءَ ...

Which means: "No indeed, it is on Him that you would call. If it were His will, He could remove whatever harm made you call on Him,..." (Surah al-An'am 6: verse 41).

فَلَمَنْ يَنْجِيكُمْ مِّنْ ظُلُمَاتِ الْبَرِّ وَالْبَحْرِ تَدْعُونَهُ تَضَرُّعًا وَخُفْيَةً

Which means: "Say [Prophet], 'Who is it that saves you from the dark depths of land and sea when you humbly and secretly call to Him...' (Surah al-An'am 6: verse 63).

6. Sixth, forbearance with the cause of trial.

... إِنَّ إِبْرَاهِيمَ لَأَوَّاهٌ حَلِيمٌ

Which means: "... Abraham was tender-hearted and forbearing." (Surah al-Taubah 9: verse 114).

فَبَشِّرْنَاهُ بِعُلْمٍ حَلِيمٍ

Which means: "so We gave him the good news that he would have a patient son." (Surah al-Saffat 37: verse 101).

In a Hadith narrated by Muslim, the Messenger of Allah SWT says:

إن فيك خصلتين يحبهما الله: الحلم والأناة

Which means: “(The Messenger of Allah SAW said to Ashajj ‘Abd al-Qays RA), verily you possess two qualities that Allah loves. These are forbearance and tolerance”. (Narrated by Muslim).

The rank of forbearance in facing trial is different according to the big or small quality of the trial. Forbearing the greatest trial is the highest quality among all types of forbearance.

7. Seventh, forgiving the person who causes the trial.

... وَالْعَافِينَ عَنِ النَّاسِ ...

Which means: “...and pardon people...” (Surah Ali ‘Imran 3: verse 134).

... فَمَنْ عَفَا وَأَصْلَحَ فَأَجْرُهُ عَلَى اللَّهِ ...

Which means: “...though anyone who forgives and puts things right will have his reward from God Himself...” (Surah al-Shura 42: verse 40).

Forgiveness upon the greatest trial is the highest quality among all types of forgiveness.

8. Eighth, patience in facing the trial.

Patience in facing the trial is the way to acquire the love of Allah SWT and great rewards from Him.

... وَاللَّهُ يُحِبُّ الصَّابِرِينَ

Which means: “...God loves those who are steadfast.” (Surah Ali ‘Imran 3: verse 146).

... إِنَّمَا يُؤَقِّى الصَّابِرُونَ أَجْرَهُمْ بِغَيْرِ حِسَابٍ

Which means: “...and those who persevere patiently will be given a full and unstinting reward.” (Surah al-Zumar 39: verse 10).

وما أعطي أحد عطاءً خيراً وأوسع من الصبر

Which means: “Nobody can be given a blessing better and greater than patience.” (narrated by al-Bukhariyy and Muslim).

9. Ninth, feeling glad for the trial due to its benefit from God. The Prophet SAW says:

والذي نفسي بيده إن كانوا ليفرحون بالبلاء كما تفرحون بالرخاء

Which means: “By Allah, which my soul is in His Power, the righteous people would rejoice at calamity as you all would rejoice at ease.” (Narrated by Ibn Mājah, no. 4024).

Ibn Mas‘ūd RA says:

حبذا المكروهان: الموت والفقير

Which means: “There are two things which are detested by people, but of amazing benefits: death and poverty.” (Al-Aṣbahāniyy n.d.).

The believers are glad with the trial for its hardship and bitterness, which are incomparable to its fruits and benefits to them. The same also goes to a patient who needs to take bitter medicine in curing his sickness.

10. Tenth, being grateful for the benefits granted from the trial. This is comparable to the situation of a patient who thanks the doctor for amputating his body parts, in avoiding from the sick desires, and curing from sickness.

11. Eleventh, purifying oneself from sins and wrongdoings.

وَمَا أَصَابَكُمْ مِّنْ مُّصِيبَةٍ فَبِمَا كَسَبَتْ أَيْدِيكُمْ وَيَعْفُوا عَنْ كَثِيرٍ

Which means: "Whatever misfortune befalls you [people], it is because of what your own hands have done- God forgives much." (Surah al-Shura 42: verse 30).

ولا يصيب المؤمن وصب ولا نصب حتى الهم يهيمه، والشوكة يشاكها، إلا كفر به عن سيئاته

Which means: "Nothing that befalls a believer, nor disease, nor fatigue, even the distressing sorrow feeling, and a piercing thorn, but that Allah expiates his or her sins for the trial." (Narrated by Al-Bukhāriyy and Muslim).

12. Twelfth, receiving mercy and help for the trial befalling them. As said by the Prophet Isa AS:

الناس معافى ومبتلى، فارحموا أهل البلاء، واشكروا الله على العافية

Which means: "Some people are protected from wrong action or trial, and some people are afflicted by it. Be merciful to the people of affliction and be grateful to Allah for His protection." (Narrated by Mālik ibn Anās)

A poet says:

وإنما يرحم العشاق ... من عشفا

Which means: "Verily, the one who has love can show mercy to the loved ones."

13. Thirteenth, recognizing the great value of living in pleasure (in the absence of trial). Verily, all pleasures and blessings are not known of their values, until one loses them.

14. Fourteenth, (hoping for the) different ranks of hereafter rewards from what Allah SWT has prepared for these benefits from the trials.

15. Fifteenth, there are hidden benefits behind all trials.

...فَعَسَىٰ أَنْ تَكْرَهُوا شَيْئًا وَيَجْعَلَ اللَّهُ فِيهِ خَيْرًا كَثِيرًا

Which means: "... if you dislike them, it may well be that you dislike something in which God has put much good." (Surah al-Nisa' 4: verse 19).

... وَعَسَىٰ أَنْ تَكْرَهُوا شَيْئًا وَهُوَ خَيْرٌ لَّكُمْ ...

Which means: "...You may dislike something although it is good for you..." (Surah al-Baqarah 2: verse 216).

إِنَّ الَّذِينَ جَاءُوا بِالْإِفْكِ عُصْبَةٌ مِّنْكُمْ لَا تَحْسَبُوهُ شَرًّا لَّكُم بَلْ هُوَ خَيْرٌ لَّكُمْ ...

Which means: “It was a group from among you that concocted the lie—do not consider it a bad thing for you [people]; it was a good thing...” (Surah al-Nur 24: verse 11).

When a tyrant ruler took away Sarah AS from Prophet Ibrahim AS, later after this trial and test, Prophet Ibrahim AS received a woman servant named Hajar AS, who gave birth Prophet Ismail AS. And it is from the family line of Prophet Ismail AS that the Leader and the Seal of all Prophets (Prophet Muhammad SAW) was born. This is a great goodness (the advent of Prophet Muhammad SAW), which came behind the trial of Prophet Ibrahim AS and Sarah AS.

It is said (by a poet):

كم نعمة مطوية ... لك بين أثناء المصائب

Which means: “how many blessings are hidden from you beneath all afflicted trials.” And other poet says:

رب مبعوض كربه ... فيه لله لطائف

Which means: “it could be that in a detested matter, lies the blessings and the love of Allah SWT.”

16. Sixteenth, verily in the trials and hardships; all evils, ungrateful feeling, arrogance, self-pride, boastfulness, and despotism could be prevented. If Nimrod (the cruel king during the days of Prophet Ibrahim AS) was a poor, sick, blind, and deaf; he would not debate with Prophet Ibrahim AS about Allah SWT. Nevertheless, Nimrod was influenced by his self-pride as a great king (which caused him to go against God and His prophet). Allah SWT justifies this condition of given power to rule (as reason for his wrongdoing), where He SWT says:

أَلَمْ تَرَ إِلَى الَّذِي حَاجَّ إِبْرَاهِيمَ فِي رَبِّهِ أَنْ آتَاهُ اللَّهُ الْمُلْكَ ...

Which means: “[Prophet], have you not thought about the man who disputed with Abraham about his Lord, because God had given him power to rule?...” (Surah al-Baqarah 2: verse 258).

And if the Pharaoh (the cruel king during the days of Prophet Musa AS) was tested with various tribulations, he dared not to proclaim:

أَنَا رَبُّكُمْ الْأَعْلَى

Which means: “I am your supreme lord,” (Surah al-Nazi’at 79: verse 24).

... وَمَا نَقَمُوا إِلَّا أَنْ أَغْنَاهُمُ اللَّهُ وَرَسُولُهُ مِنْ فَضْلِهِ ...

Which means: “...being spiteful was their only response to God and His Messenger enriching them out of His bounty...” (surah al-Taubah 9: verse 74).

... إِنَّ الْإِنْسَانَ لِرَبِّهِ لَكَنَّاظٍ ۖ ٦ أَنْ رَأَاهُ اسْتَكْبَرَ ۖ ٧

Which means: “...But man exceeds all bounds (6) when he thinks he is self-sufficient: (7) (surah al-Alaq 96: verse 6-7).

﴿وَلَوْ بَسَطَ اللَّهُ الرِّزْقَ لِعِبَادِهِ لَبَغَوْا فِي الْأَرْضِ ...﴾

Which means: “If God were to grant His plentiful provision to [all] His creatures, they would act insolently on earth...” (Surah al-Shura 42: verse 27).

... وَاتَّبَعَ الَّذِينَ ظَلَمُوا مَا أُتْرِفُوا فِيهِ ...

Which means: "...while the unjust pursued the enjoyment of plenty..." (Surah Hud 11: verse 116).

... لِأَسْقِيَهُمْ مَاءً غَدَقًا ۖ ١٦ لِنَقِّنَهُمْ فِيهِ ...

Which means: "...If they had taken to the right way, We would have given them abundant water to drink- (16) a test for them..." (Surah al-Jin 72: verse 16-17).

وَمَا أَرْسَلْنَا فِي قَرْيَةٍ مِّن نَّذِيرٍ إِلَّا قَالَ مُتْرَفُوهَا إِنَّا بِمَا أُرْسِلْتُمْ بِهِ كَافِرُونَ ٣٤

Which means: "Never have We sent a warner to a community without those among them who were corrupted by wealth saying, 'We do not believe in the message you have been sent with.'" (Surah Saba' 34: verse 34).

The pious and the weak people (living in hardships) are among the saints of Allah SWT and the followers of the Prophets AS. Due to these noble benefits,

أشد [الناس] بلاء الأنبياء، ثم الصالحون، [ثم] الأمثل فالأمثل

Which means: "the people who is tried most severely are the Prophets, then the righteous believers, then those nearest to them, and then those nearest to them." (Narrated by al-Tirmidhiyy). The Prophets AS and all their followers RH were accused with many evil charges, of being crazy, using sorcery, witchcraft, laughed and condemned by their people.

... فَصَبَرُوا عَلَىٰ مَا كُذِّبُوا وَأَوْدُوا ...

Which means: "...and they bore their rejection and persecution steadfastly until Our aid arrived..." (Surah al-An'am 6: verse 34).

We are told (by Allah the Most High):

أَمْ حَسِبْتُمْ أَنْ تُدْخَلُوا الْجَنَّةَ وَلَمَّا يَأْتِكُم مَّثَلُ الَّذِينَ خَلَوْا مِنْ قَبْلِكُمْ مَسَّتْهُمُ الْبَأْسَاءُ وَالضَّرَاءُ وَزُلْزَلُوا حَتَّىٰ يَقُولَ الرَّسُولُ وَالَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا مَعَهُ مَتَىٰ نَصْرُ اللَّهِ الْآلَا إِنَّ نَصْرَ اللَّهِ قَرِيبٌ ٢١٤

Which means: "Do you suppose that you will enter the Garden without first having suffered like those before you? They were afflicted by misfortune and hardship, and they were so shaken that even [their] messenger and the believers with him cried, 'When will God's help arrive?' Truly, God's help is near." (Surah al-Baqarah 2: verse 214).

وَلَنَبْلُوَنَّكُمْ بِشَيْءٍ مِّنَ الْخَوْفِ وَالْجُوعِ وَنَقْصٍ مِّنَ الْأَمْوَالِ وَالْأَنْفُسِ وَالثَّمَرَاتِ وَبَشِّرِ الصَّابِرِينَ ١٥٥

Which means: "We shall certainly test you with fear and hunger, and loss of property, lives, and crops. But [Prophet], give good news to those who are steadfast," (Surah al-Baqarah 2: verse 155).

﴿لَيَبْلُوَنَّ فِي أَمْوَالِكُمْ وَأَنْفُسِكُمْ وَلَنْسَمَعَنَّ مِنَ الَّذِينَ أُوتُوا الْكِتَابَ مِنْ قَبْلِكُمْ وَمِنَ الَّذِينَ أَشْرَكُوا أَدَىٰ كَثِيرًا...﴾

Which means: "you are sure to be tested through your possessions and persons; you are sure to hear much that is hurtful from those who were given the Scripture before you and from those who associate others with God..." (Surah Ali 'Imran 3: verse 186).

The Prophets AS and all their followers RH were expelled from their homes, their properties were confiscated, they became strangers in their own homeplaces, their difficulties were multiplied, their burdens were becoming harder, and their enemies

were also increased in number. They were defeated in some places (of war) and some were killed at *Uḥud*, *Ma'ūnah* Well, and other places.

The face of Prophet SAW was cut (in the war by his enemy), his molar teeth was broken, his war helmet was crushed on his head, his beloved companions RA were killed and their dead bodies were hurt, his enemies were rejoiced by this, and his companions RA were sad. They (the Prophet SAW and his companions RA) were tested during the war of *Khandaq* (ditch),

... وَزُلْزِلُوا زَلْزَالًا شَدِيدًا

Which means: "...there the believers were deeply shaken." (Surah al-Ahzab 33: verse 11).

... وَإِذْ زَاغَتِ الْأَبْصَارُ وَبَلَغَتِ الْقُلُوبُ الْحَنَاجِرَ ...

Which means: "...your eyes rolled [with fear], your hearts rose into your throats..." (Surah al-Ahzab 33: verse 10).

They were living in the constant state of fear, inescapable destitution, extreme poverty, until that they tied rocks on their bellies to resist their hunger. The leader of the first and the last mankind (the Prophet SAW) was never gratified from eating wheat bread twice in any one day. He was also hurt by various kinds of pains, till the hypocrites (*munāfiq*) slandered his beloved wife (*Ā'ishah* RA). Later, towards the end of his life, he was also tested with (the evil doings of) Musaylamah (a false prophet), Tulayḥah (an apostate), and al-'Ansiyy (an apostate). The Prophet SAW and his companions RA, from among the army of *Tabuk* (*jaysh al-'Usrah*), met great trial in the *Tabuk* war. And the Prophet SAW died while his armour was mortgaged to a Jew for some cups of barley (30 cups according to al-Bukhariyy's hadith).

All prophets AS and the righteous believers RH are promised with trial from time to time. A person is tested according to the level of his religious conviction. If one is firm and strong in his religious conviction, one will receive a more difficult test (than other people). Among the righteous people, there was a person who was sawn his body into half, but the event never ceased him from becoming firm in religion.

The Prophet SAW says:

مثل المؤمن كمثل الزرع، لا تزال الريح تميله ولا يزال المؤمن يصيبه البلاء

Which means: "The similitude of a believer is that of (a standing) crop which the air continues to toss from one side to another; in the same way a believer always (receives the strokes) of misfortune." (narrated by al-Bukhariyy and Muslim).

Then, the Prophet SAW says:

مثل المؤمن كمثل الحامة من الزرع [تفيؤها الريح]، تصرعها مرة وتعدلها أخرى حتى تهيج

Which means: "the similitude of a believer is that of a standing crop in a field which is shaken by wind and then it comes to its original position, but it stands at its roots, until it dries." (narrated by al-Bukhariyy and Muslim).

Therefore, the condition of living in hardship and in a test could guide a servant to return to Allah SWT. Whereas, the condition of living in wellness and pleasure could turn a servant away from Allah the Most High.

وَإِذَا مَسَّ الْإِنْسَانَ الضُّرُّ دَعَانَا لِجَنْبِهِ أَوْ قَاعِدًا أَوْ قَائِمًا فَلَمَّا كَشَفْنَا عَنْهُ ضُرَّهُ مَرَّ كَأَن لَّمْ يَدْعُنَا إِلَى ضُرِّ مَسَّهُ...^{١٠٠}

Which means: “When trouble befalls man he cries out to Us, whether lying on his side, sitting, or standing, but as soon as We relieve him of his trouble he goes on his way as if he had never cried out to Us to remove his trouble...” (Surah Yunus 10: verse 12).

Therefore, the Prophets AS and the righteous believers RH reduced their foods, drinks, clothings, marriages, speeches, homes, transportations, and the rest ways of living (or living in modest). This was done to compel themselves in returning to Allah SWT and to always focus in worshipping Him.

17. Seventeenth, feeling content with Allah’s SWT destiny, which also causes Allah SWT to be pleased with His servant. All trials are afflicted to the kind-hearted and the evil-doer. Whosoever angry with the trials will also receive Allah’s SWT anger, loss in this world, and the hereafter. Whereas, the one who feels content with the trials, Allah SWT will be pleased with him or her. And Allah’s SWT pleasure is greater than the value of the heaven and its contents, as in His SWT words:

... وَرِضْوَانٌ مِّنَ اللَّهِ أَكْبَرُ ...

Which means: “and- greatest of all- God’s good pleasure...” (Surah al-Taubah 9: verse 72).

These (seventeen benefits) are the brief points that we can list on the benefits of trial to the believers.

We ask from Allah the Most High His forgiveness and our well-being in this world and the hereafter, and may we are not made among those who are tested (to fail). May Allah SWT grant us His help in doing what He loves and pleases, and save us from any tests and calamities.

I have completed listing the benefits here, with all praises be to Allah SWT, with His help and favours. Peace and blessings be upon the Prophet, his family members, and companions. He is sufficient for us and He is the best disposer of all affairs.

The writing of this treatise ended on ninth of *Rabī‘ al-Awwal* year 655AH. May Allah bestow His forgiveness to the reader, listener, copier of this treatise, and to all Muslims. All praises are to Allah alone.

DISCUSSIONS ON THE CONTENTS OF THE TREATISE

In this treatise, Al-‘Izz ‘Abd al-‘Aziz Ibn ‘Abd Al-Salām listed seventeen benefits which are originally deduced and extracted from the Quranic verses, hadith (prophetic traditions), prophetic stories (*sīrah wa qiṣaṣ al-Anbiyā’*), Islamic traditions

(*athār al-Ṣaḥābah wa al-Anbiyā'*) and poems. There are thirty-three quotes from the Quranic verses used in this treatise, seven hadiths or prophetic traditions, two Islamic traditions from the sayings of Ibn Mas'ud RA and Prophet Isa AS; three poems, and a few prophetic stories from the lives of Ibrahim AS, Musa AS, and Prophet Muhammad SAW. Al-'Izz 'Abd al-'Aziz Ibn 'Abd Al-Salām systematically arranged and organized all these important quotes and proofs to explain these seventeen benefits in this treatise.

In reality, there are many other quotes, references and proofs for this discussion on the benefits of trial and tribulation for the Muslim believers. These references and proofs could be made from analyzing the Quran as the primary source of reference for Muslim life, with the guidance from the acknowledged Quranic exegeses such as *Tafsīr al-Tabariyy*, *Tafsīr Ibn Kathīr*, *Tafsīr Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāziyy*, or modern *Tafsīr* such as *Tafsīr al-Sha' rāwiyy* and *al-Tafsīr al-Munīr*.

The same also goes to the prophetic hadiths, their commentaries (*shurūḥ*), and wisdom sayings from the previous prophets and companions (*al-Hikam wa al-Āthār*). There could be thousands of hadiths and their acknowledged commentaries which are suitable to be referred for this purpose. And probably, there could be hundred thousands and more wisdom sayings from the previous prophets and companions, which are related with the topic of this discussion. As said by the Prophet Muhammad SAW: "Indeed the scholars are the heirs of the Prophets, and the Prophets do not leave behind Dinar or Dirham. The only legacy of the scholars is knowledge, so whoever takes from it, then he has indeed taken the most able share. (Narrated by al-Tirmidhiyy).

Nevertheless, *Kitab Fawā'id al-Balwā wa al-Miḥan* is prepared as a small treatise to meet the objective of the author, where he says: "These (seventeen benefits) are the brief points that we can list on the benefits of trial to the believers" (Al-Sulamiyy 1995; Al-'Izz bin 'Abd al-Salām 2004). Despite of its brevity, this treatise still provides sufficient explanations on the benefits of trials and tribulations to the Muslim believers. This treatise which is authored by the King of Muslim Scholars (*Sulṭān al-'Ulamā*) guides the readers in understanding the important aspects of living in this world, namely in unveiling the will, wisdom, and power of Allah SWT upon all creations. In the Islamic worldview, this world and its workings are not supposed to be alienated or divorced from the will, wisdom, and power of Allah SWT.

Due to that, all trials and tribulations in this world are also included among the works of Allah, which also bear benefits to the true and sincere Muslim believers. In an authentic hadith, narrated by Muslim, the Messenger SAW says:

عجبا لأمر المؤمن إن أمره كله له خير، وليس ذلك لأحد إلا للمؤمن، إن أصابته سراء شكر فكان خيراً له، وإن أصابته ضراء صبر فكان خيراً له.

Which means: "How wonderful is the case of a believer; there is good for him in everything and this applies only to a believer. If prosperity attends him, he expresses

gratitude to Allah and that is good for him; and if adversity befalls him, he endures it patiently and that is better for him.”

The life in this world is not supposed to be understood and worked as the final destination for all creations. Wrong understanding and incorrect application of this important concept of Islamic faith could lead to a huge confusion and great deviation from the true path of the Islamic life. In the Surah al-Ankabut 29: verse 2-3, Allah proclaims:

أَحْسِبَ النَّاسُ أَنْ يُتْرَكُوا أَنْ يَقُولُوا ءَامَنَّا وَهُمْ لَا يُفْتَنُونَ ۚ وَلَقَدْ فَتَنَّا الَّذِينَ مِنْ قَبْلِهِمْ فَلَيَعْلَمَنَّ اللَّهُ الَّذِينَ صَدَقُوا وَلَيَعْلَمَنَّ الْكٰذِبِينَ ۝۳

Which means: “Do people think they will be left alone after saying ‘We believe’ without being put to the test? (2) We tested those who went before them: God will certainly mark out which ones are truthful and which are lying. (3)”

Kitab Fawā'id al-Balwā wa al-Miḥān here is best read and pondered for its ability to discuss and rationalize the objectives of trials and tribulations of God upon all creations. Though some thinkers, including the religious and atheist, would think of trial and tribulation in this world as among signs of weaknesses and false claims of religious beliefs. Through the use of theodicy claim, the non-religious accuses that all trials and tribulations in life are proofs of no God in this world; however *Kitab Fawā'id al-Balwā wa al-Miḥān* proves otherwise.

In the Sunni faith doctrine, the actions and works of God are considered as possible (*jā'iz*), and not bound to the natural and scientific laws, which could be seen in this world (Al-Būṭiyy 1997; Al-Buti 2014; Al-Qudāh 1999; Al-Qudha 2014). This is evident in the Surah al-Anbiyā' 21: verse 23

لَا يُسْأَلُ عَمَّا يَفْعَلُ وَهُمْ يُسْتَأْنَوْنَ

Which means: “He cannot be called to account for anything He does, whereas they will be called to account.”

And in Surah al-Buruj 85: verse 16, He says:

فَعَالٌ لِّمَا يُرِيدُ

Which means: “He does whatever He will.”

Therefore, to force the actions and works of Allah to follow the natural and scientific laws, what else to follow one's whims and thinking, is considered unsound and illogical to the rational judgment (*ḥukm 'aqliyy*) of the Islamic faith (Al-Sanusiy 2009; al-Laqqāniyy 2009).

Nonetheless, this does not mean that humans are like living puppets, do not possess any roles and efforts (*al-Kasb wa al-Ikhtiyār*) in this temporal world. The Islamic worldview postulates that all creations are responsible to exert their efforts and work their endeavours in achieving goodness (*ḥasanah*) in this world and the hereafter (Al-Quran, Surah Al-Baqarah 2: verse 201; Maḥmūd Shaltūt 1988). For example, in Surah Āli 'Imran 3: verse 195, Allah the Most High explains:

فَأَسْتَجَابَ لَهُمْ رَبُّهُمْ أَنِّي لَا أُضِيعُ عَمَلَ عَمَلٍ مِّنْكُمْ مِّنْ ذَكَرٍ أَوْ أُنْثَىٰ بَعْضُكُم مِّنْ بَعْضٍ فَأَلَّذِينَ هَاجَرُوا
وَأَخْرَجُوا مِنْ دِيَارِهِمْ وَأُودُوا فِي سَبِيلِي وَقَتَلُوا وَقُتِلُوا لَأُكَفِّرَنَّ عَنْهُمْ سَيِّئَاتِهِمْ وَلَأُدْخِلَنَّهُمْ جَنَّاتٍ تَجْرِي مِنْ
تَحْتِهَا الْأَنْهَارُ ثَوَابًا مِّنْ عِنْدِ اللَّهِ وَاللَّهُ عِنْدَهُ حُسْنُ الثَّوَابِ ١٩٥

Which means: "Their Lord has answered them: 'I will not allow the deeds of any one of you to be lost, whether you are male or female, each is like the other [in rewards]. I will certainly wipe out the bad deeds of those who emigrated and were driven out of their homes, who suffered harm for My cause, who fought and were killed. I will certainly admit them to Gardens graced with flowing streams, as a reward from God: the best reward is with God.'

However, despite of all deeds and efforts from the creations, the Islamic faith teaches that only Allah SWT has the sole authority and absolute power to decide whether these deeds and efforts will come into effect or not. All creations are responsible to understand and recognize this reality, for this fact is also included in the meanings and concepts of worshipping (*ibādah*), relying (*tawakkal*), and contentment (*ridā*) to Allah SWT. The works and actions of Allah is not bound to the empirical or experiential judgment (*al-Hukm al-ʿAdiyy*) as presumed by the common people. In reality, Allah SWT who creates and ordains all these empirical and experiential judgment in this world (al-Bayjūriyy 2002; Al-Laqqāniyy 2009; Al-Sanusiyy 2009).

In a hadith narrated by al- Tirmidhiyy:

عَنْ ابْنِ عَبَّاسٍ، قَالَ: "كُنْتُ حَلَفَ رَسُولِ اللَّهِ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ يَوْمًا، فَقَالَ: يَا غُلَامُ إِنِّي أُعَلِّمُكَ كَلِمَاتٍ،
أَحْفَظُ اللَّهُ يَحْفَظُكَ، أَحْفَظِ اللَّهَ بَحْدَهُ بُجَاهَكَ، إِذَا سَأَلْتَ فَاسْأَلِ اللَّهَ، وَإِذَا اسْتَعْنَيْتَ فَاسْتَعِنْ بِاللَّهِ، وَاعْلَمْ أَنَّ الْأُمَّةَ لَوِ
اجْتَمَعَتْ عَلَىٰ أَنْ يَنْفَعُوكَ بِشَيْءٍ لَّمْ يَنْفَعُوكَ إِلَّا بِشَيْءٍ قَدْ كَتَبَهُ اللَّهُ لَكَ، وَلَوْ اجْتَمَعُوا عَلَىٰ أَنْ يَضُرُّوكَ بِشَيْءٍ لَّمْ
يَضُرُّوكَ إِلَّا بِشَيْءٍ قَدْ كَتَبَهُ اللَّهُ عَلَيْكَ، رُفِعَتِ الْأَقْلَامُ وَجَفَّتِ الصُّحُفُ."

Which means: "Ibn Abbas RH said: One day, I was riding behind the Prophet SAW when he said, "O boy! I will instruct you in some matters. Be watchful of Allah (Commandments of Allah), He will preserve you. Safeguard His Rights, He will be ever with you. If you beg, beg of Him alone; and if you need assistance, supplicate to Allah alone for help. And remember that if all the people gather to benefit you, they will not be able to benefit you except that which Allah had foreordained (for you); and if all of them gather to do harm to you, they will not be able to afflict you with anything other than that which Allah had predestined against you. The pens had been lifted and the ink (of destiny) had dried up".

Based on this discussion of Islamic faith, the trial and tribulation in life is considered good and beneficial for the Muslim believer, for they all come from Allah SWT. These goodness and benefits are veiled and unseen if one is using different or wrong perspectives to understand this matter. In this regard, it is best here to quote the saying of Ja'far al-Şādiq RH about the works and commands of Allah to His servants as below (Al-Shahrestānī 2001):

إن الله تعالى أراد بنا شيئاً و أراد منا شيئاً، فما أراد بنا طواه عنا وما أراد منا أظهره لنا، فما بالنا نشتغل بما أراد بنا عما أراد منا.

Which means: “Indeed, Allah the Most High wanted something for us (the *Qadar*) and wanted something from us (the *Sharī‘ah*). What He wanted for us (the destiny), He kept it hidden from us, and what He wanted from us (His commands), He made it apparent to us. So why do we occupy ourselves with what He wanted for us (the destiny), rather than what He wanted from us (His commands)?

CONCLUSION

Kitab Fawā'id al-Balwā wa al-Miḥan is a treatise and an ingenious work by the King of all Muslim scholars (*Sulṭān al-'Ulamā'*), Al-'Izz 'Abd al-'Aziz Ibn 'Abd Al-Salām al-Ash'ariyy al-Shafi'iyy al-Dimashqiyy of the 6th/7th AH or 12th/13th CE. He was born at Damascus in 577AH/1181AD and died at Cairo in the year 660AH/1262AD at the age of 83. Whereas, *Kitab Fawā'id al-Balwā wa al-Miḥan* is a small treatise which is also known as *al-Fitan wa al-Balāyā wa al-Miḥan wa al-Razāyā* (trials, tribulations, tests and calamities) by other scholars. This treatise listed seventeen benefits of trials and tribulations for the Muslim believers, which are supported with Islamic main sources, namely the Quranic verses, hadith (prophetic traditions), prophetic stories (*sīrah wa qīṣaṣ al-Anbiyā'*), Islamic traditions (*athār al-Ṣaḥābah wa al-Anbiyā'*) and poems.

Among these seventeen benefits from the trials and tribulations of God to the righteous believers, as listed by Al-'Izz 'Abd al-'Aziz Ibn 'Abd Al-Salām in this treatise, are as follows: recognizing the greatness of Allah SWT, recognizing the value of human servanthood to Allah SWT, and achieving sincerity in accepting Allah SWT as the Holy Protector, returning to Allah SWT,. He also lists the benefits: humbling oneself and praying only to Allah SWT, forbearance with the cause of trial, forgiving the cause of trial, patience in facing the trial, purifying oneself from sins and wrongdoing, and preventing oneself from self-evil, ungrateful, arrogance, boastfulness, and despotism.

To conclude, this treatise of Al-'Izz 'Abd al-'Aziz Ibn 'Abd Al-Salām is a worth reading and exploring work by all Muslims and non-Muslims. This treatise provides important points, proofs, and short explanations in understanding the benefits of trial and tribulation in human life from the Islamic perspective. For Muslim readers, this treatise will not only guide in understanding the great Will, Wisdom and Omnipotence of Allah SWT in determining all events and happenings of all creations. Yet, *Kitab Fawā'id al-Balwā wa al-Miḥan* is also capable to become a cure for the depressed hearts or chicken soup for the souls, in facing various tough challenges of our time.

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