

qul lay yuṣībānā illā mā katab al-lahu lanā huwa mawlānā. wa‘alā l-lahī falyatawakkalil mu`minūn.

Say: “Nothing will happen to us except what Allah has decreed for us: He is our protector: and on Allah let the Believers put their trust...” (9:51-Tawbah)

"The Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) said “If anything befalls you, do not say, ‘If only I had done such and such’; rather, say, ‘Allah has decreed and whatever he wills, He does.’ For saying ‘if’ opens the door to the deeds of Satan.” This profound hadith warns us against the delusions from Shaytan-i lain when we think we could have controlled the divine decree and achieved the desired outcome on our own.

Allah subhanahu wa ta'ala has bestowed upon humanity a unique gift: the power of choice, which we call "free will." This ability allows us to select from various options presented to us, guiding our daily decisions in every aspect of life. Our decisions inevitably lead to consequences, some of which bring us joy, while others cause misery. It is a common human tendency to attribute positive outcomes solely to our own efforts, yet to readily blame external factors—others or circumstances—when undesirable results occur. The reality is that the outcomes of our actions are far more complicated and far-reaching than we often realize. Every choice we make can set off a chain reaction, leading to results that are influenced by countless factors beyond our knowledge or control. Because life is filled with many unknown things, including other people's choices, and unexpected events, we can never fully predict how one simple decision will ultimately shape our lives, or the lives of others. This means it is impossible for us to foresee or completely manage all the consequences of what we do, no matter how carefully we plan. This should make us understand the importance of putting our trust in Allah, who alone knows how all things will unfold.

When faced with unfavorable outcomes, we often experience regret, believing our past actions were mistaken, or circumstances were not right to achieve the desired outcome. This frequently manifests in statements like, "If I had done that, then this would not have happened." Such expressions suggest a conviction that we could have achieved a more desirable outcome had conditions been different or had we made alternative choices. We may even believe that if we had acted differently, if circumstances had been altered, or if certain individuals had not been involved, then Allah's divine decree for us would have been different. This is precisely where the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) warns us: Fixating on past possibilities and imagining: “if only this had happened or that had happened” opens the door to the deeds of Shaytan (Satan). Shaytan sees an opening, whispering doubts like, "If only you had been smarter," or, “If only things were different.” This breeds self-blame, guilt, and feelings of inadequacy, leading individuals to question Allah's wisdom and weakening their faith.

Shaytan's goal is to keep believers fixated on the past, hindering their acceptance of Allah's decree and, more importantly, preventing them from learning from past experiences

and moving forward with resilience. Dwelling on "if" statements traps us in cycles of imagining alternate realities from past choices, causing significant distress.

Fixating on "what could have been" makes us forget Allah is the ultimate disposer of all affairs. Every outcome, good or bad, is part of His perfect plan, often with hidden blessings. Saying "if I had done this, that wouldn't have happened" implies our actions could alter Allah's decree. But as Imam Ibn al-Qayyim wisely stressed, what was decreed was always going to be; it won't change, as stated in "Nothing will happen to us except what Allah decrees for us." Believing we can change Allah's decree strips the heart of contentment (**rida**), breeding self-hatred, resentment, and even hatred towards one's destiny. This is why the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) taught that such "if only" statements "open the doors of Shaytan," filling our minds with endless hypotheticals, fueling doubt and despair.

Instead of surrendering to these destructive "ifs," submitting to the powerful verse, "**Allah is enough for us, and He is the best disposer of our affairs**" (3:173), serves as the ultimate lock on the door of doubt. This statement affirms complete reliance on Allah, acknowledging His absolute control and perfect wisdom. This is when we stop getting fixated with what if scenarios, but rather focus on what we have at the present, and build our lives around it. By embracing this principle, believers can navigate life's challenges with a profound sense of peace and acceptance. We learn to let go of the need to control outcomes and instead focus on our efforts, knowing that the ultimate decision rests with Allah, and His decision is always for our best, even if we don't immediately comprehend it. Focus on the present circumstances, becoming better and stronger Muslims, well educated, rich, who do not need anything from anyone, who are not weak and dependent.

We need to use "ifs" in a constructive way. The constructive use of "if" is central to **muhasabah**, or self-accountability. This involves thoughtfully evaluating our past actions and behaviors in a moral and ethical sense. When we engage in muhasabah, the "if" serves as a tool for **self-reflection** and **learning**. For example, asking, "If I had acted differently in that situation, what might have been a more virtuous or effective response?" allows us to draw lessons from our experiences. The focus here is firmly on **our actions** and how we can refine them moving forward, not on lamenting or challenging the ultimate outcome that Allah has decreed at the moment. This reflective process is indeed a foundational part of every spiritual journey, fostering continuous improvement and drawing us closer to Allah.

This profound sense of peace and contentment is unattainable when we spend our lives consumed by "what ifs." Such speculation about alternate realities not only breeds **regret or doubt** about Allah's divine plan, but also undermines our fundamental belief in His absolute control over our destiny. This line of thinking weakens our faith and trust in Allah's wisdom, leading to unnecessary stress and anxiety. Islam consistently encourages us to **focus on the present moment** and to be content with what Allah has decreed for us. By avoiding "if" in a regretful sense and instead seeing every event as an opportunity for gratitude, we strengthen our faith, reduce our anxieties, and develop a lasting sense of **thankfulness and patience**. Through this perspective, we come to understand that everything

happens for a reason, and ultimately for our own benefit, even if we cannot immediately see it. Life then becomes less about wondering “what if things had been different,” and more about embracing “what is” with a heart that submits to and appreciates Allah's perfect plan. This mindset allows us to live with greater peace, trust, and contentment in all circumstances.

Yurdaer Al Latif Al Jerrahi