

From the outset, I want to say Jonny's story is about hope, change and transformation. People start out in life in different places. What is important is not how we started life but how we end this short journey through life as we leave this world.

It was sometime in March, just a few months ago as I walked to the Masjid for prayer, I saw Jonny walking on the other side of the road he was also going to the Masjid. I called out to him and complimented on how good he looked as I knew he had been training in order to lose weight. As soon as he saw me he walked over addressing me like his older brother and tells me that he's been blessed. I assumed his getting married. Then he elaborates by saying three profound things with his usual joyful character and a smile without any sign of despair or compliant. He says...

## **1. 'I have been blessed with cancer' - Showing gratitude in times of difficulty**

It is easy for us to show gratefulness to Allah in times of ease, prosperity and when we have been blessed with good things in our lives. However, a true sense of gratitude is when we're able to even see the blessing in the difficulties we go through in life. There are a number of benefits that can be achieved by seeing a difficulty as a blessing. Al-Fadl ibn Sahl mentioned there is a blessing in a calamity that the wise man should not ignore, for it erases sins, gives one the opportunity to attain the reward for patience, dispels negligence, reminds one of the blessings at the time of health, calls one to repent and encourages one to give charity. We witnessed this description in the way Jonny responded to his situation.

We often don't realise the difficulties we go through in life can actually refine and deepen our sense gratefulness. When times are good, we take prosperity for granted and we may believe we're invincible and invulnerable. In times of uncertainty and tests, we realise how powerless we are to control our own destiny. If we begin to see that everything we have, everything we have counted on, may be taken away, it becomes much harder to take it for granted. Processing a life experience through a grateful lens does not mean denying the negative life experiences we go through. Instead, it means realising the power we have to transform difficulty into an opportunity. It means reframing loss and suffering into a potential gain, recasting negativity into positive channels for gratitude.

It is understandable for Jonny to see the pain and suffering caused by cancer as a calamity and a great difficulty upon him. Those of us that knew him naturally felt heartache and sympathy for him as his health rapidly deteriorated in front of our eyes. However, Jonny's response reminds us that he understood the purpose of life.

As Allah says: 'He who created death and life to test you as to which of you is best in deed - and He is the Exalted in Might, the Forgiving' (67:2). Through this belief and understanding that life is a test one is able to see through the prism of the hereafter and eternal life and any difficulty becomes insignificant in this temporary world. Being able to see difficulty and calamity as a test and ultimately a blessing, is a sign of Allah's love for a person, because such tests are like medicine, even though it is bitter, despite its bitterness you give it to the one whom you love.

When we're able to see the blessing in trials and tribulations our attitudes change and we become thankful for the smallest things in life and we begin to see the world in a different way. We realise it is not the difficulty in our lives that usually make us unhappy, it is rather the negative reaction to the difficulty that makes us unhappy. The state of being unhappy is created by ourselves. We learnt from Jonny complaining and dwelling upon difficulty won't do us any good. Being able to practice gratitude will make an improvement to our inner well-being and lead us to a sense of happiness in life. Through the lens of gratitude, Jonny was able to see the blessing in his own personal difficulty. Take a moment to reflect on your own life. Look back at all the difficult moments in your life and you will soon come to realise the many blessings that Allah has showered upon you.

## **2. 'I've accepted it' - Finding peace in the Qadr of Allah**

Allah says: 'and no person can ever die except by Allah's leave and at an appointed term..' (3:145). We all have a fixed time and place. One of the hardest things we struggle with when we are afflicted by difficulty or loss is accepting that it was meant to be, this is part of Allah's divine plan. We often may feel a sense of 'why me' or 'what did I do' without realising we are ultimately showing dissatisfaction in what Allah has decreed. However, if we are able to accept the Qadr of Allah then this has a profound effect in the way we behave in times of difficulty. The only thing that will settle our hearts and bring us inner peace in times of difficulty is accepting the Qadr of Allah.

Allah says: 'Allah does not burden any soul with more than it can bear..' (2:286). Jonny didn't fall into despair or complain but rather he had accepted his situation, he had accepted what Allah had written for him and it gave him immense peace which manifested in him being pleased with Allah's decree in his words, actions and the way he interacted with his family and friends.

Allah says: "...and it may be that you dislike a thing which is good for you and it may be that you like a thing which is bad for you. Allah knows but you do not know" (2:216). We often

forget that the One Who is testing us is the Most Wise and the Most Merciful, and that He did not send a calamity in order to destroy his servant but rather He is checking on him, testing his patience, acceptance and faith, it is so that He may hear us making supplication, see us stand before Him, seeking protection, filled with humility and complaining only to Him. The only way Jonny could respond and behave the way he did is through surrendering himself to Allah and putting his trust entirely and unconditionally in his Creator and Master.

When I remember the way Jonny responded to his situation it reminds me of how our Prophet (saw) described the state of the believer: "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" (Muslim).

### **3. 'I'm going to use this as an opportunity to get closer to Allah' - Developing a connection with Allah**

We often say 'to Allah we belong and to Him we return' when we hear the news of someone passing away. But truly this should be practised in times of any difficulty we face not just in times of loss. But what does it truly mean to us? Jonny knew what it really meant, he knew he had a short time in this world, he knew he was given the gift to prepare to meet his Creator and Master. Imagine you had a few months, days to live or informed you had until sunset tomorrow, what would you do? How would that change your priorities in life?

Jonny wanted to maximise his time in the worship of Allah, developing a stronger relationship with Allah. He would request friends and those that wanted to see him to meet him for salah at the Masjid as he found peace in salah from the difficulties of this world. The last time I visited him was a few days before he passed away. My nephew was with me and he had just returned from Umrah, Jonny hugged and held onto my nephew saying he could smell the house of Allah on him and it gave him peace. Jonny had made intention and booked his tickets to perform Umrah during Ramadan but was unable to go due to his treatment - he had a deep desire to be close to the house of Allah even if that meant travelling with great hardship. His tongue was constantly in the remembrance of Allah and every time his lips dried up he moistens it with water so he can continue making dhikr (remembrance of Allah) and dua (supplication).

Jonny realised he had a short time to put forward as many good deeds and seek as much forgiveness as possible before the day we all have to stand accountable before our Creator and Sustainer. He realised true happiness will never be satisfied with anything from this

world because our souls are not from this world and therefore it can only be satisfied with something out of this world. The only thing that will give our souls true happiness and contentment is through having a connection with Allah, living a life mindful of Allah, seeking His pleasure and avoiding His displeasure as we journey through this life. When you have a deep love for Allah then you become someone who Allah loves.

If Allah loves a person, He calls Jibreel, saying, 'I loves so and so, O Jibreel love him' So Jibreel would love him and they would make an announcement in the Heavens: 'Allah has loved so-and-so, therefore, you should love him also.' So all the dwellers of the Heavens would love him, and then acceptance is placed in the Earth for him." (Bukhari)

Jonny responded well to his calamity, he understood that it was a blessing and a gift, not a test. It was a means for him to draw closer to His Creator and Master. Ibn Taymiyah (rh) said: 'A calamity that makes you turn to Allah is better for you than a blessing which makes you forget the remembrance of Allah.'

## **4. Say it with smile - Bring Joy to the hearts of others**

Our brief exchange on the way to the Masjid was delivered with a smile. Jonny's character was jolly and cheerful, he would interact with children in a fun and playful way and would be respectful and pleasant to his elders. The one thing anyone who knew him remembers when they close their eyes is his smile. Jonny wasn't a student of knowledge but he practised the most common sunnah of the Prophet (saw) with zeal.

A distinguishable feature of our Prophet (saw) was his smile. He taught us to smile in the face of our brother was charity. Abu Dharr (RA) narrates the Prophet (saw) said: 'Do not regard any good deed insignificant, even meeting your brother with a cheerful face' (Muslim). Whenever Anas (RA) saw the Prophet (saw) he would find his blessed face as bright as the full moon, and whenever he (saw) gazed upon Anas (RA), he would smile. Every encounter was met with a smile which caused the heart of this great companion to be greatly affected so much so that he felt that he was the most beloved to the Prophet (saw).

I want you to reflect for a moment when you've been in a bad mood and then someone has come along with a huge smile or a cheerful face? How did this make you feel? When the person you are talking to or the people that surround you are smiling and are cheerful, you won't be able to help but smile and be in a good mood. A smile has special powers. You can calm fear, insecurity, hurt and anxiety not only in yourself but in those that are experiencing those feelings. Smiling when you meet someone indicates to the other person that you are genuinely happy to see them and that you are a positive person. Smiling offers

encouragement to the person that you are talking to. If someone is smiling at you while you are talking to them, you feel as though they genuinely value you.

So what is the value of a smile? We often give little significance to the power of a smile or to meet someone with a cheerful face. We don't realise a simple thing as a smile can bring joy to the heart of someone. A smile can transform someone's day and even their life. It can help someone escape for a moment the hardship they are going through. Think for a moment when you went through difficulty and hardship during that period you would have appreciated those that came around you that made you feel happy and normal. Ibn al Qayyim points out in his famous book *Al-Madarij As- Salikin*, when you smile at someone who feels like they are low in society or a burden to their community it shows them they are not a burden and you enjoy their company. They feel a sense of acceptance and belonging through your smile. Abdullah ibn Al-Harith said 'I have not seen anyone smile more often than the Messenger of Allah (saw)(Tirmidhi). You can imagine how the people around the Prophet (saw) felt when they were greeted with his smile. Our Prophet's (saw) smile and cheerfulness was just for the community around him but this characteristic played a key part in his family life. Umm Salamah (RA) described the Prophet (saw) as someone who would enter his home as if he was bringing in a celebration, he was cheerful and happy. Imagine, for the moment if we entered our homes with a big smile and in a cheerful state, it would create a positive mood within the household.

Ibn al Qayyim says the greatest thing that a person can hope from Allah (SWT), that is beyond Jannah, is to meet Allah (SWT) smiling at you in a way which demonstrates His pleasure. If we want to meet Allah (SWT) in a state He is pleased we us then we should give to others what we want Allah to give to us. What does it cost to smile at someone? Jonny knew that through the mere act of smiling he could bring joy to others even though he was going through immense difficulty. We can learn from his example and be among those Allah chooses to bring joy to the lives of others just by smiling and attain the pleasure of Allah.

*I want to conclude with the dua we made when closed his eyes. 'O Allah, forgive Junaid Noor and raise his rank among the rightly guided, and be a successor to whom he has left behind, and forgive us and him O Lord of the worlds. Make spacious his grave and illuminate it for him.'*

May Allah open a window of Jannah in his grave.

May Allah make his standing easy on the day of accounting

May Allah make him from those that drink from the lake of our beloved Prophet (saw)

May Allah make his crossing on the bridge swift

May Allah make his scales of good deeds heavy

May he be with those he loves and join the siddeeqeen, shuhadaa and saaliheen  
May he be from those that Allah is pleased with  
- Alluhamma Aameen.