



“How Can I Ever Trust Again?” Navigating Betrayal

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Vulnerability sounds like truth and feels like courage. Truth and courage aren't always comfortable, but they're never weakness.¹

-Brene Brown

Case study

Kathleen had never loved anyone the way she loved Mustafa. They met when they were in college and quickly realized there was something worth pursuing. They dated for a while and soon started to get into serious relationship territory. When they started to discuss marriage, Mustafa told Kathleen he wanted the future mother of his children to be a Muslim.

Kathleen began to study Islam and found that a lot of the tenets and values resonated with her. She never would have explored the religion if she hadn't met Mustafa but she felt comfortable converting. They had a small marriage ceremony in a local masjid and were happily married for 10 years. During these 10 years, they had 3 children and both gradually learned more about Islam.

Mustafa started to become more involved in the community, particularly through teaching classes. His schedule started to get busier and Kathleen found herself spending more time alone with the children. When she broached this subject one day, Mustafa reluctantly admitted that he had been having an affair for some time but didn't tell her due to fears of upsetting her.

*Kathleen was stunned. It never crossed her mind that infidelity was a possibility, especially from someone who portrayed himself as a spiritual and practicing person. Suddenly, she was plagued with doubts, including unsettling questions surrounding her faith in her religion. Mustafa was the one who had introduced her to Islam all those years ago yet he had betrayed her. If this was what Islam was about, she didn't want to have anything to do with it! She found herself thinking, “If someone I loved, looked up to, and invested so much time in could betray me, **how can I ever trust again?**”*

¹ Brown, C. B. (2012). *Daring greatly: How the courage to be vulnerable transforms the way we live, love, parent, and lead*. New York, NY: Gotham.

What is happening to me?

When someone you trust betrays you, it hurts tremendously. The pain can be so intense that it can be felt physically. People often describe it as a “punch in the gut,” where it feels as though all of the breath has been completely knocked out of you. Whether you are double-crossed in a business deal, or a person in a position of authority abuses their power, or you have suddenly discovered that you’ve been lied to, betrayal is intensely painful. Even more difficult to endure is when the betrayal comes from one of the people you trust most in life.

When a betrayal occurs, the blow you experience is two-fold. First, you experience a breach of the trust that you so tenderly gave to another person—so much so that the relationship is often changed in a permanent way. Secondly, you suddenly realize that you’ve been lied to for an extended period of time but didn’t know until this moment. You may start to doubt yourself and wonder how you hadn’t seen it before. You may wonder if you’re gullible because you trusted someone who has been lying to you for so long. You may feel inadequate—as though something or someone else has been prioritized over you in the relationship. You may even wonder if you’ve done something to bring this upon yourself and whether you deserve this type of treatment.

Betrayal and the accompanying breach of trust is a unique type of trauma. No one has died but in many ways the emotions you experience can be even more painful than other types of loss. A large part of your life has died after a betrayal and can never be revived fully. You may even feel as though a part of yourself has passed away in the process. It’s important to grieve the loss of the relationship you thought you had. This also applies to one-sided relationships, such as feeling betrayed upon finding out unsavory news about an imam, public speaker, or shaykh who you admire.

We each picture our lives moving forward in a particular direction—we dream of vacations, children, and having the comforting presence of someone who loves us.

As children, we trust in parents and relatives who care for our needs, show us affection, and read us stories. We believe that the scholars we listen to online live their lives in accordance with what they preach. Once we realize that our expectations of the people we care about aren’t always accurate, the entire mental picture we’ve created suddenly bursts and a vast emptiness takes its place. That void can be terrifying.

Understanding your thoughts and emotions

After experiencing the trauma associated with a betrayal, it may feel as though your world has come crashing down on you and like your legs simply can’t hold up the tremendous burden you now have to walk around with. Suddenly, you find yourself scanning the world for threats. If your husband could have kept his porn addiction a secret for so long, what would stop something just as shocking from happening in another relationship in your life? If your uncle, who is supposed to care for you, touches you inappropriately, what would possibly stop someone else from doing the same on your commute to school? And, even scarier, your fears might start to extend to Allah (swt). You might be thinking, *“If the person I trusted more than anyone in my life was capable of hurting me so badly, how can I trust anyone at all? If nobody can be trusted, what if I feel like I can’t trust Allah?”*

What you’re feeling—and even what you’re thinking—is normal after experiencing betrayal. These passing thoughts are so common that there is even a *hadith* about them: The Prophet ﷺ said, ***“Allah has forgiven my followers the thoughts that occur to their minds, as long as such thoughts are not put into action or uttered.”***² This *hadith* can alleviate a lot of the shame many of us may feel when doubts surface related to our faith and our relationship with Allah (swt). However, these thoughts can still increase our anxiety and may result in distancing ourselves from Allah (swt) if they begin to impact our actions and the way we view ourselves. Therefore, proactively addressing them is needed to alleviate them.

² *Sahih al-Bukhari* 5269.

With a little bit of information and effort, you don't have to spend your life struggling with these thoughts. Remember, just because one person (or even more than one person) has hurt you, doesn't mean that everyone is unworthy of your trust.

Why does betrayal hurt so much?

Recovery from a betrayal can be a long journey. There are several steps in the process and everyone walks the road to healing at a different pace. Betrayal traumas involve the perpetrator being in a close relationship with the victim. Due to this, the violation of trust feels deeply personal, rather than random. If someone pushed you as you were walking down the street, you would experience a sense of shock and fear but it wouldn't cause you to doubt any of your closest relationships. Betrayal trauma is different because it jeopardizes the safety of the very relationship you would normally turn to for comfort when distressed, which causes an increased sense of vulnerability at a time when support is most needed.

Betrayal by someone close to you, like a parent or a spouse, is a unique form of trauma and one that hurts tremendously. When a person who is supposed to love, respect, and support you betrays you, your world can feel like it's shattering.

Why does experiencing betrayal impact my ability to trust Allah?

Along with the overwhelming instability you may be experiencing, another type of instability may take root: instability in your relationship with Allah (swt). Just as you now scan the world for ways you might get hurt, you may start scanning the skies for ways you feel disappointed by God.

Why does this happen? Logically, we know that Allah isn't comparable to human beings but emotionally we may fear risking closeness to *anyone*, including Allah.

There is something called “attachment theory,” which began with John Bowlby who devoted extensive research to the concept of attachment, describing it as a “lasting psychological connectedness between human beings.”³ This is first created through our childhood experiences with our parents/caregivers and can influence our relationship patterns and behaviors later in life.

Attachment is a human need. Allah (swt) created us as social creatures that are in need of belonging, closeness, and caring. Allah (swt) says, “*O mankind! We have created you male and female, and have made you nations and tribes, that you may know one another...*”⁴ Even our brains are wired for sociality. Research suggests that we are born with innate abilities for facial recognition⁵ and language acquisition.⁶ However, the ability to move forward in these developmental stages is dependent on a child being stimulated by interactions with other people. Brain structures activate and mature during interactions with attachment figures.⁷

The brain area associated with trusting people is the same brain area needed to trust Allah. This brain area is called the amygdala.⁸ It is the core of emotion processing and assesses our experiences for safety or danger. When an emotionally charged experience transpires, such as a spouse cheating or a family member being abusive, our brain registers this experience to be remembered long term. Our brains cannot differentiate the feeling of trusting a human being and the emotion associated with trusting God. After a betrayal trauma, the amygdala signals “danger” whenever you begin to trust someone. However, don’t lose hope: The amazing thing about

³ Bowlby J. (1969). *Attachment. Attachment and loss: Vol. 1. Loss*. New York: Basic Books.

⁴ Qur’an 49:13.

⁵ Otsuka, Y. (2014) Face recognition in infants: A review of behavioral and near-infrared spectroscopic studies. *Japanese Psychological Research*, 56(1), 76–90.

⁶ John-Steiner, V., Panofsky, C., & Smith, L. (Eds.). (1994). *Sociocultural approaches to language and literacy: An interactionist perspective*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. doi:10.1017/CBO9780511897047

⁷ Avants, B. B., Hackman, D. A., Betancourt, L. M., Lawson, G. M., Hurt, H., & Farah, M. J. (2015). Relation of childhood home environment to cortical thickness in late adolescence: Specificity of experience and timing. *PLoS ONE*, 10(10): e0138217. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0138217>

⁸ Kosciuk, T. R., & Tranel, D. (2011). The human amygdala is necessary for developing and expressing normal interpersonal trust. *Neuropsychologia*, 49(4), 602–611. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.neuropsychologia.2010.09.023>.

the brain is that it’s flexible. We may struggle to trust Allah now but that doesn’t doom us to struggle forever.

Changing your thoughts

Now that you understand why you might struggle with trusting Allah after you’ve had your trust betrayed by someone close to you, we can work toward changing this thought process. The thought, “How can I ever trust again?” is a form of the cognitive distortion called overgeneralization.

Overgeneralization means coming to a general conclusion based on a single event or one piece of evidence. Therefore, when something bad happens, you expect it to happen over and over again. Thinking that you will *never* be able to trust again creates a permanent umbrella over your entire life based on one rainy day.

A thought trajectory based on overgeneralization may progress like this:

I thought we were close friends but now she’s ignoring me.



I shared so much with her and now she’s gone. I didn’t matter to her.



I don’t really matter to anyone.



There’s no point in investing in relationships since they always end this way.

As we can see here, overgeneralization causes us to see a single event as a never-ending pattern of negativity, defeat, and pain. This causes us to search for evidence that goes along with this worldview. We see people in our lives as a part of this overgeneralized pattern of tragedy, disappointment, and negativity. We focus on the times when we notice negativity and it further validates our overgeneralized perception of reality. We find what we look for: If you believe that people will hurt you, you will search for any indication that this is true rather than

being able to view situations objectively.

Overgeneralization can impact our ability to fully trust Allah (swt) just as it can impact our ability to be vulnerable in our relationships with people. When we overgeneralize, we may lose sight of who Allah truly is. Consider the impact overgeneralization can have on our faith:

If I can't trust my spouse who can I trust?



I should only depend on myself.



I trust Allah, pray, and make du'aa but nothing changes.



I guess this just solidifies the fact that I can't trust anyone at all.

It is important to realize that we often model our relationship with Allah after our relationship with attachment figures. Therefore, our relationship with Allah often mirrors our relationship with others in our lives. So when we've been hurt by people close to us, we also assume that we will be hurt by Allah. When we ask a friend for help and she doesn't follow through, we feel disappointed and we hold Allah to that same standard. When we ask Allah for something we want or for help in a situation and we don't get the response in the way we anticipate, we feel disappointed and concerned that we are being ignored and are beyond help. It can be a very lonely and painful feeling.

Transforming your overgeneralizations

Consider these questions to identify and combat the overgeneralizations that are dictating the way you live and perceive your life:

What overgeneralization are you struggling with? What overarching perception of the world/people/Allah do you have?

Example: There is no point in investing in relationships since they all end in me feeling hurt and disappointed.

How has this overgeneralization impacted your emotions and the way you live your daily life?

Example: No expectations means no disappointment. But, realistically, I am always disappointed and sad. I tend to avoid calling people and then I get upset that they don't reach out to me. It just proves that I shouldn't bother investing in relationships. It's safer to just depend on myself.

How has this overgeneralization impacted your relationships with others and relationship with Allah?

Example: I tend to distance myself from people in my life even when they want to get close to me. I don't always support people since I imagine that they won't support me in the future. I don't open up to or seek help from anyone since I feel like I'm alone and I can't trust anyone. I also feel distant from Allah since I stopped praying and asking for help; I feel sure that I'll be disappointed so I don't bother trying.

What was the starting point of this overgeneralization?

Example: I told my best friend everything. We used to talk on the phone for hours everyday. She knew everything about me and I trusted her with the deepest parts of myself. She gradually started distancing herself from me once she found a new friend group and eventually stopped answering my calls and texts. I was so hurt and I promised myself I wouldn't allow myself to ever feel pain like that again.

What evidence do you have that shows the inaccuracy of this overgeneralization?

Example: I guess I rationally know that not everyone will hurt me in the same way that my best friend did. There are other people in my life who I've known for a long time and they have never betrayed my trust. My childhood friends have been there for me and my parents have always had my best interests at heart. There are a lot of relationships that have been valuable to me that would never have existed if I had chosen not to invest in them.

What is a more realistic assumption?

Example: There is always a risk of getting hurt when we trust others; however, there is a greater risk in choosing not to invest in relationships. I may have been hurt but this does not guarantee that I will be hurt over and over again if I allow myself to get close to someone.

The cost of avoiding pain

The more distressed we are at any point in our lives, the more we want relief from pain and despair and the more we fear removing the armor we imagine is protecting us from experiencing more hurt. This fear presents itself in different ways including: anger toward the one who betrayed you and anyone else who crosses your path, including God; numbness in every relationship to prevent yourself from investing in something that may potentially cause pain; and creating distance from anyone who may disappoint you.

This is called *avoidance coping*. This is a maladaptive form of coping that involves avoiding thinking, feeling, or doing things that are uncomfortable. We avoid stressors rather than dealing with them. Although it may seem logical to avoid things that feel stressful and it may feel as though avoiding problems is working well for you, in reality avoidance of discomfort usually yields more stress.⁹

What we resist tends to persist. When we avoid things that yield uncomfortable emotions, the same emotions and situations we fear have an interesting way of reappearing in our lives at inopportune times. When we overgeneralize, we think we are protecting ourselves from getting hurt again but, in fact, we usually end up creating situations where we do end up getting hurt. For example, you may avoid getting close to others due to fears that they may hurt you; however, in the process of avoiding connection with people in your life, relationships deteriorate, which eventually causes you pain. The cycle of avoiding discomfort often yields even more discomfort in the end.

⁹ Holahan, C. J., Moos, R. H., Holahan, C. K., Brennan, P. L., & Schutte, K. K. (2005). Stress generation, avoidance coping, and depressive symptoms: A 10-year model. *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology*, 73(4), 658-66.

Conquering avoidance

Avoiding problems feels like it works for us, which is why we do it. However, what we really need is to build up the ability to tolerate discomfort and stress. Difficult emotions encourage us to figure out the source of the issue and take action to solve the problem. Avoiding anything that can be a threat feels safer because it prevents uncomfortable feelings from ever surfacing.

False refuges

We all seek to feel “protected and safe... loved and at peace... to feel at home in my life.”¹⁰ We pray for a sense of refuge yet, in reality, we often turn toward *false refuges*. They provide temporary relief from discomfort and provide us with a false, temporary sense of comfort and security.

Maybe your spouse texts you, “We need to finish the discussion we were having last night. It’s still bothering me.” And you respond with, “Sure.” But you end up finding extra work to do and stay at the office late that night. Avoiding the discussion feels safer and more comfortable but it’s a false refuge and the longer we live in a false refuge, the more suffering and damage we’ll find once we leave it.

Maybe you’re scared of being rejected and you worry that any assertion of your needs will result in others disliking you so you avoid taking that risk and always strive to please others, allowing resentment to build up within. Maybe you’re worried that you are unworthy of being cared for so it feels safer to avoid asking for anything, even asking anything of Allah (swt).

Identifying your *false refuges* is a great step in breaking down the walls that prevent you from gaining a true sense of peace and safety. When we avoid situations, people, and thoughts that may lead to discomfort, we are falling into the trap of overgeneralization: We are operating under the assumption that we have to

¹⁰ Brach, T. (2013). *True refuge: Finding peace and freedom in your own awakened heart*. New York: Bantam Books, p. 7.

hide from *everything* in order to prevent the risk of getting hurt by *anything*. In the process of protecting ourselves, the shields of avoidance end up preventing us from accessing the good things in life as well.

Think about what you’ve been avoiding and ask yourself: What is one small thing I can do today that I haven’t felt willing to do in a long time? It can be as small as looking at a picture from a happier time, picking up the Qur’an and reading one *ayah*, or gently telling yourself, “I am worthy of being loved.” Try one small change and see if you can slowly step away from your false refuge and into the true refuge of living life more fully.

How to experience safety and security through Allah

After the end of a meaningful relationship, opening yourself up to trust again can feel incredibly overwhelming. When overgeneralization takes over, you are naturally going to assume that since one person has hurt you, every person in your life is capable of being inconsiderate, untrustworthy, and unfaithful. As mentioned earlier, this mindset can extend to an inability to trust Allah. However, in reality, in your journey toward healing, there is no better place to gain a sense of security than in your relationship with Allah.

It is important to keep in mind that Allah (swt) is above and beyond what our minds are capable of imagining. We imagine that we can no longer make *du’aa* because the prayers we have fervently been making have not yet come to fruition or because we blame Allah for allowing someone to betray us. However, realistically, we trust in Allah every single moment of every single day. We trust in Allah with every breath we take—we trust that He will allow that inhalation to reach our lungs. We trust Allah with every bite we eat—we trust that He will allow the nourishment to access the parts of our body that need it most. Every blessing we encounter is by the will of Allah and they are innumerable. So, when we say that we can never trust again—that we can’t even trust Allah—realize that the way we live every second of our lives contradicts this thought.

The guarantees of human beings are not always guarantees. However, the promise

of Allah is always a guarantee. Allah (swt) says, “[*It is*] *the promise of Allah. Allah does not fail in His promise, but most of the people do not know.*”¹¹ We assume that when our prayers are not responded to exactly in the way we envision them that Allah has chosen to overlook us. However, realize that we often ask for what we want, not what we need. We assume that our wants are best for us but Allah knows us better than we know ourselves. He says, “*But perhaps you hate a thing and it is good for you; and perhaps you love a thing and it is bad for you. And Allah knows, while you know not.*”¹² There is a difference between wanting something and needing something. If what we are asking for is not given to us, then we don’t truly need it.

Also realize that every prayer is heard but the answer to each prayer may come in a different form than what we anticipate. We assume that our *du’aa* can only be answered in one particular way—the way we envision the response. However, the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ said, “*There is no Muslim who supplicates to Allah without sin or cutting family ties in it but that Allah will give him one of three answers:*

1. *He will hasten fulfillment of his supplication*
2. *He will store it for him in the Hereafter*
3. *He will divert an evil from him similar to it.*”

*They said, “In that case we will ask for more.” The Prophet said, “Allah has even more.”*¹³

Try to take an objective look at your life. The prayers you have been asking for that you feel have not yet been responded to—could the answers possibly have come in a different form? Could the hurt you’ve experienced actually be a form of protection from something else that may have come your way?

You may have prayed for a marriage filled with love and mercy and just found out that your husband has been with someone else. The pain you are enduring feels

¹¹ Qur’an 30:6.

¹² Qur’an 2:216.

¹³ *Musnad Ahmad* 10749 (Graded *Sahih* by al-Albani).

unbearable but, as you process it, consider the fact that the children you have were meant to be yours through your marriage with him. Despite his betrayal, there are certain aspects of your marriage that can never be taken away—your children, your experiences, and the lessons you learned during your time in this relationship. After processing your hurt, when you’re ready to shift your focus away from the pain of the betrayal, consider the fact that you are no longer in an unhealthy relationship and realize that your *du’aa* may have been responded to by Allah granting you the love of your children and also diverting a different evil away from your life through your marriage to your husband.

Instead of thinking, “I’ve been hurt so deeply. I can never trust anyone again,” reframe this thought to encompass an understanding that there is One Being who will never betray you: “I’ve been hurt so deeply. I know I’m afraid to trust because that makes me vulnerable to being disappointed. However, Allah will never disappoint me. I trust that even when things happen that seem negative on the surface, there is something good in it because Allah always takes care of my needs.”

Getting to know Allah as a means of regaining trust

While overgeneralization and the weight of betrayal trauma can impact our relationship with Allah (swt), one of the best ways to reconnect with Him is through getting to know Him, His Names, and His Attributes. We cannot realistically trust someone we don’t know so, naturally, learning more about who Allah truly is will be an important step in reconnecting with Him (swt).

Consider a story that illustrates some of the beautiful Names and Attributes of Allah (swt) that remind us of the fact that even though we may struggle to emotionally open ourselves up to trusting Him, He is still our Protector every step of the way.

The Prophet Yusuf عليه السلام was described as, “*The honorable is the son of the honorable, the son of the honorable, i.e., Joseph, the son of Jacob, the son of*

Isaac, the son of Abraham.¹⁴ The story of Yusuf عليه السلام is one filled with danger and betrayal yet is also inspirational as the culmination of it shows us the one stable force in his life (and in our own lives): the presence and care of Allah (swt). One thing to remember is this: even one so beloved to Allah experienced tremendous betrayal so it is not an indication of Allah’s love and care that those around us choose to hurt us.

Yusuf عليه السلام experienced the betrayal of his own brothers who intended to kill him, of an employer who attempted to seduce him toward sin and then wrongfully accused him of sexual violation, and of high ranking officials who jailed him despite his having not committed a crime.

Throughout all of this, Allah (swt) was, “***closer to him than [his] jugular vein***”¹⁵ and protected him by giving him ways to dodge physical and spiritual danger. While plotting to kill him, one of Yusuf’s brothers suggested placing him in a well instead. When he was accused of rape, physical evidence to the contrary was presented. When constant temptation to engage with women sexually was offered to him, Allah (swt) positioned Yusuf in prison to save him from spiritual danger. Through experiencing constant betrayals, Prophet Yusuf عليه السلام realized that he only had Allah. We learn from his example: Even when those closest to you betray you, Allah (swt) can raise your status and open doors for you in the most difficult and darkest of times.

From the outside looking in, it appears as though Yusuf was moving backward and his life was falling apart but he was actually being positioned to become who Allah has destined him to be. If even one small step had been missing in his journey, it would not have culminated in the finale in which Yusuf was given a high ranking position in the government and was reunited with his family in a position of nobility and honor. This is the hidden hand of God. At the end of his story, Yusuf عليه السلام reflects on his deep understanding of the Lord who brought him through such arduous challenges, protected him, and shaped him into the person he had

¹⁴ *Sahih al-Bukhari* 3382.

¹⁵ Qur’an 50:16.

become.

And he raised his parents upon the throne, and they bowed to him in prostration. And he said, “O my father, this is the explanation of my vision of before. My Lord has made it reality. And He was certainly good to me when He took me out of prison and brought you [here] from bedouin life after Satan had induced [estrangement] between me and my brothers. Indeed, my Lord is Subtle in what He wills (al-Lateef). Indeed, it is He who is the Knowing, the Wise.

My Lord, You have given me [something] of sovereignty and taught me of the interpretation of dreams. Creator of the heavens and earth, You are my protector (Wali) in this world and in the Hereafter. Cause me to die a Muslim and join me with the righteous.”¹⁶

Here we see that Yusuf عليه السلام calls Allah (swt) by two of His Names, *al-Lateef*, the Subtle and Gracious, and *al-Wali*, the Protector:

***Al-Lateef*:** The One who is Kind, Gracious, and Understanding, with regard for the subtle details of individual circumstances.¹⁷ He knows what is in your heart and mind. He knows exactly what you’re going through. He knows where hidden goodness lies and His approach to addressing this can be so subtle that it’s imperceptible to us and beyond our comprehension.

You can see this Name in action during moments when you’re feeling down and a friend randomly sends you a meme that makes you laugh. Or when you open the Qur’an and suddenly come across an *ayah* that resonates with you in a way it never had before. Or when you’re stuck in traffic and the bumper sticker of the car in front of you has a message that strikes you as inspirational. It’s not simply your friend who is comforting you, it is Allah who sent that friend, that statement on that bumper sticker, or that verse to uplift you. That is *al-Lateef*.

¹⁶ Qur’an 12:100-101.

¹⁷ Shelquist, R. (N.D.) The Beautiful Names of Allah: Al-Latif. Retrieved from: https://wahiduddin.net/words/99_pages/latif_30.htm

Al-Wali: The One who is the loving Defender, the nearby Guardian, and a constant Supporter.¹⁸ He is the One who lovingly supports us in paving the way toward that which we most need in every moment of our existence. He is the One who defends us from potential harms of which we are completely unaware. He is the One who guides us and turns us toward that which is most needed, despite it sometimes not being what we want for ourselves.

You can see this Name in action when you are running late to work and caught in traffic when suddenly you see a horrible car accident in the lane you normally drive in every day, realizing that could have been you. Or when you find out a new friend you’ve quickly grown to love has been saying horrible things about you to others, causing you to witness her true colors and end the friendship before you’ve shared too much of yourself with her. Allah’s protection often comes in forms we may not notice but we can be confident that *al-Wali* is constantly defending us.

Opening ourselves up to trusting again, even trusting Allah (swt), can be a terrifying step. However, in choosing to take action rather than avoiding anything that reminds us of the betrayal we have faced, we reclaim the power we have given to those who have hurt us and choose to thrive despite them. This power you reclaim, this ability to trust again and expand your world to include new experiences, is a gift from Allah (swt) and another demonstration of His Mercy, His Protection, and the amazing plan He has for your life.

Inspirational *hadith* for reflection

A *hadith* of the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ states, “*There is no person who says, in the morning and evening: ‘I am content with Allah as my Lord, Islam as my religion and Muhammad as my Prophet,’ but he will have a promise from Allah to make him pleased on the Day of Resurrection.*”¹⁹

¹⁸ Shelquist, R. (N.D.) The Beautiful Names of Allah: Al-Wali. Retrieved from: https://wahiduddin.net/words/99_pages/walee_55.htm

¹⁹ *Sunan Ibn Majah* 3870.

This *du’aa* is an excellent reminder to implement into our daily morning and evening routines. By saying this each day, while truly giving thought to the meaning of the words, the brain area involved in interpersonal trust can be gradually soothed. By saying this each day, you are actively reminding yourself that, although someone may have hurt you deeply, Allah is always worthy of your trust. And through this, the healing process can begin.

Practical exercises

A. Mindfulness exercise for inspiring trust

We discussed the fact that we inherently trust in Allah when we expect our bodies to function as they normally do. Try this guided mindfulness activity as a reminder of this fact and notice how you feel afterward:²⁰

Close your eyes. Take a deep, encompassing breath and allow it to flow out of your mouth slowly. Allow yourself to switch from the usual mode of doing to a mode of non-doing. Of simply being. As you allow your body to become still, bring your attention to the fact that you are breathing. And become aware of the movement of your breath as it comes into your body and as it leaves your body. Not manipulating the breath in any way or trying to change it. Simply being aware of it and of the feelings associated with breathing. Observe the breath deep down in your belly. Feeling the abdomen as it expands gently on the inbreath, and as it falls back towards your spine on the outbreath.

Imagine each breath filling your lungs with the air that it needs. Allow yourself to experience the feeling of knowing that Allah is ensuring that each breath reaches your lungs. Allow yourself to trust that each breath will be allowed in and each

²⁰ <http://mindfulnesshamilton.ca/meditation-scripts>

breath will be allowed out. Remind yourself that every breath is an exercise in trusting Allah to take care of you and your body.

*As you feel your limbs relax, tell yourself, “Right at this moment, I am safe. Others might disappoint me; I might even disappoint myself—but Allah will always be there for me.” Remind yourself of the verse in Surah al-Baqarah where Allah (swt) says, “So whoever... believes in Allah has grasped **the most trustworthy handhold with no break in it.** And Allah is Hearing and Knowing.”²¹*

Slowly open your eyes and take note of how you feel physically and emotionally.

B. Transforming your overgeneralizations

Ask yourself these questions to reconsider the overgeneralizations that are dictating the way you live and perceive your life:

What overgeneralization are you struggling with? What overarching perception of the world/people/Allah do you have?

How has this overgeneralization impacted your emotions and the way you live your daily life?

²¹ Qur'an 2:256.

How has this overgeneralization impacted your relationships with others and your relationship with Allah?

What was the starting point of this overgeneralization?

What evidence do you have that shows the inaccuracy of this overgeneralization?

What is a more realistic assumption?

C. False refuges

In order to feel safe, we often turn toward *false refuges*. They provide temporary relief from discomfort and provide us with a false, temporary sense of comfort and security.²² This can come in the form of distractions, avoiding difficult conversations through increasing our workload, focusing solely on others instead of working on ourselves, etc. Unfortunately, false refuges can prevent us from gaining a true sense of peace and safety.

What types of *false refuges* have you noticed in your life? What have you been avoiding due to your personal fears?

Think about what you’ve been avoiding and ask yourself: What is one small thing I can do today that I haven’t felt willing to do in a long time?

D. Getting to know Allah as a means of regaining trust

While overgeneralization and the weight of betrayal trauma can impact our relationship with Allah (swt), one of the best ways to reconnect with Him is through getting to know Him through His Names and Attributes. We cannot realistically trust someone we don’t know so, naturally, learning more about Who Allah truly is will be an important step in reconnecting with Him (swt).

²² Brach, T. (2013). *True refuge: Finding peace and freedom in your own awakened heart*. New York: Bantam Books.

Pick any Name of Allah (swt) and read a little more about it. What resonates with you about this Name? How have you seen this Name of Allah manifested in your life?

Case revisited

Kathleen endured something incredibly traumatic upon the discovery of her husband’s infidelity. His actions resulted in a spiral of negative thoughts that eventually affected her faith. Kathleen could not wrap her head around the fact that the man she had loved, trusted, and devoted herself to for over 10 years would hurt her so cruelly. Furthermore, her husband had been her initial introduction to Islam so, as her relationship with Mustafa ended, she thought it was the end of her relationship with Allah. After all, if Mustafa could do this, despite being a Muslim, Kathleen began to doubt everything about Islam.

Kathleen began to experience symptoms of trauma, such as flashbacks to her discovery of Mustafa’s affair, hopelessness, negative thoughts about herself, withdrawal from family and friends, difficulty sleeping, and angry outbursts. She realized she needed to do something to address what she was dealing with and sought out a therapist. Through therapy, Kathleen began to differentiate her husband’s choice to betray her trust from her ability to trust other people in her life. She also explored the connection between her faith in Allah and her faith in

her husband, realizing that Allah (swt) is beyond comparison to any human being and that her relationship with Him could be a source of soothing, rather than pain. Kathleen began to feel empowered by being able to dissociate her husband from her faith—she began to feel a sense of ownership of her life and her ability to have a strong relationship with Allah without her husband’s presence in her life.

Kathleen realized that her overgeneralization, “I will never be able to trust anyone again” led her to distance herself from people in her life who were her supporters and from Allah (swt), which only amplified her pain. As she explored her negative assumptions, she realized that she was painting everyone with the same brush and basically saying that no one is capable of being a good person, which was unfair to the people who cared about her. As she learned to accept that her husband’s hurtful choices did not impact the fact that others have consistently been there for her, Kathleen was able to reconstruct healthy relationships with others.