



Why Do Bad Things Always Happen to Me? Breaking the Cycles of Negativity

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Why Do Bad Things Only Happen to Me?

Cognitive Distortion: Filtering

We cannot solve our problems with the same level of thinking that created them.

-Albert Einstein

*Muadh is a 52-year-old man who is very well respected in his local Muslim community. On the outside looking in he has many good things going for him: a prestigious job working for a Fortune 500 company, a nice home, and a beautiful sports car. The walls of his home tell a different story however. Muadh is currently separated from his third wife and his children are struggling to behave at home and school. When Muadh got married this time around he thought it would be different but the same relationship patterns persisted as before: constant bickering, big fights about insignificant things and feeling totally alone. “How could this happen again?” and “**Why do bad things only happen to me?**” were questions Muadh would ask himself often. He couldn’t help but take this most recent divorce personally as he was the common denominator in all his failed relationships. Muadh could feel that his self-esteem was low and he had difficulty seeing positives in his life outside of his relationships. Muadh felt like he was a good person overall, but was convinced there must be something wrong with him because he kept getting involved in bad relationships over and over again.*

What is Happening to Me?

Feeling trapped within the confines of the same problem over and over again is both soul-crushing and overwhelming. Whether the issue is never-ending conflict with a family member, recurring feelings of defeat, or something holding you back from living the life you envisioned for yourself, it's emotionally exhausting to face the same issue day in and out, sometimes year after year. A difficulty that keeps resurfacing, sometimes under different guises, can feel like pushing a huge boulder up a hill; you expend so much energy trying to make progress only to be met with more resistance.

Over time you might wonder:

“There has to be something wrong with me.”

“How could so many bad things happen to one person?”

“Why do bad things keep happening to me?”

Or you might take a different approach and think:

“How could the world be such a bad place?”

“There are so many evil people out there.”

“Why is everyone out to get me?”

No matter how you interpret your experience, it becomes increasingly difficult to see good in anything or anybody through the pain. The more negative things you experience, the more negative the world looks. The worse people treat you, the worse you feel about yourself. And the more difficult your trials are, the more impossible it feels to change.

Understanding Your Thoughts & Emotions

The Filtering Phenomenon

When unfavorable things happen back-to-back or repeatedly it's easy to get discouraged and begin to look at the world through a pessimistic lens or filter.

Filtering is a cognitive distortion, or unhealthy way of thinking, that skews how a person views the world and causes everything to be perceived from a negative bias.

¹ Life experiences go through a sieve that withholds the good and only what is negative comes out and is brought to one's attention. Common everyday examples include:

Getting angry with your child when he or she generally gets good grades, but slips up and gets a poor grade.

Becoming upset with a friend, who is generally reliable and kind, when they make a mistake.

¹ Burns, D. D. (1981). *Feeling good: The new mood therapy*. New York, N.Y: Penguin Books.

When a person has a history of trauma, an internalized filter can be even more painful than it is for the average person. Traumatic events leave bigger impressions on the mind and body and cut into the soul in a deeper way. Some of these examples include:

A person might generally have good relationships, but after a rape begins to fear that most people are out to hurt him/her because danger seems to present everywhere.

Someone who was physically attacked because of their religion may begin to think all negative interactions with others have to do with their faith, although most experiences in their day-to-day life are neutral or positive.

Cognitive Biases

Over time, the filtered thoughts develop into more intricate frameworks, which impact how the overall environment is experienced. A filter blocks positive stimuli and allows only the negative to come through. This filter, along with each person's individual temperament, experiences and circumstances lead to the development of *biases*. Biases are patterns of thinking that form over a period of time and impact how the world is seen.

Some of these biases include:

Failure is inevitable regardless of hard work or effort—therefore, there is no point in trying.

Humans are selfish, and you should never let your guard down because people will hurt you.

Humans are unreliable and you can't depend on family and friends for anything.

Patience is the best recourse no matter what, even if others hurt or abuse you.

When more than one person hurts you it's because there is something wrong with you and not them.

It's better to be with others who hurt you than to be by yourself.

Once a filter and biases are in place it can be difficult to break free from those thought patterns. These cognitive and emotional biases are like colored glasses and can affect how we see everything unfolding in our lives, ultimately influencing our decision-making. Before we delve into how biases affect our decision-making let's discuss why or how people form filters and biases in the first place.

Contributors to the Development of Filters & Biases

Learned Pessimism

Disappointment is uncomfortable, and sometimes very painful. When a person is let down often, whether through events or people in their life, the healthy thing to do is to adjust expectations, try something new, or view the situation differently. Another option is to stop expecting good things to happen altogether—this prevents future disappointment since one is not hopeful that good things will happen in the first place. The logic is: *If I don't expect good things to happen to me, then I won't be disappointed when I don't succeed or good things don't come my way.* This unhealthy and maladaptive way of looking at the world is initially developed to protect oneself; however, long-term it does much more harm than good. Over time, this way of thinking builds deep-rooted pessimism and a very reactive (instead of proactive) way of addressing concerns.

Childhood Invalidation

Parents, teachers, and caregivers play major roles in how we view and interact with the world. When we have role models who are pessimistic or have unhealthy ways of looking at things, we are susceptible to internalizing the same ways of thinking. Let's take a very common example of striving for good grades. Imagine a child who worked hard all quarter to get good grades. This child did their homework, tried their best in class, and looked forward to their report card coming home to show their parents. This child turned out to be successful in making the honor roll with all As and one B. They are excited and happy with the results of their hard work, but when they show the report card to their parent, the first thing the parent says is, "Why do you have that B?" This unexpected reaction instantly deflates the child's pride in their hard work over the course of weeks in just seconds. This reaction not only teaches a child to focus on negatives and shortcomings, but that

their efforts, feelings, and thoughts are not valid or valuable. When a child thinks or feels something only to have an adult say their experience is wrong (not just about school but any life experience) it creates self-doubt, anxiety and a lack of security.

Genetics

A study conducted by Todd et al. in 2013 suggests the inclination for pessimism may be partially genetically based.² Researchers are exploring whether a person's genetic makeup may make them more susceptible to perceiving the glass as half empty. If this is the case, then individuals with this gene may have to try a little harder than others to practice looking on the brighter side of things.

Implications of Having a Negative Filter

According to cognitive behavioral theory, thoughts impact our feelings, which in turn influence how we behave, ultimately having big implications for our filters and potential biases. If a person has a skewed way of thinking about the world, whether through a particular filter or bias, it's inevitable that feelings and behavior in that subject area will be affected as well. If someone thinks they will not succeed, they will feel as though they have already failed, and will not take the appropriate steps to become successful. As a consequence, they will not be successful. This is called a *self-fulfilling prophecy*.

There are two kinds of self fulfilling prophecies: self-imposed and ones imposed by others (also known as the Pygmalion effect). Self-imposed prophecies are internal, coming from within ourselves and can be about ourselves or about other people. If a man thinks all women are irrational, he will behave in ways that will substantiate this through his interactions with women; he will speak to women in a condescending and offensive manner and will interpret their responses as irrational when they get upset, ultimately validating his initial perception. Similarly, if a woman thinks poorly about herself, she will interact with others in a way that will eventually cause them to view her in the same light, thereby substantiating her

² Todd, R. M., Muller, D. J., Lee, D.H., Robertson, A., Eaton, T., Freeman, N., Palombo, D. J., Levine, B., & Anderson, A. K. (2013). Genes for emotion-enhanced remembering are linked to enhanced perceiving. *Psychological Science*, 24 (11), 2244-2253.

low-self esteem (e.g., she will be overly critical of herself when speaking with others).

The Pygmalion Effect occurs when a person behaves in ways that meet others' expectations of them. In the famous Rosenthal and Jacobson (1966) study, researchers described certain students as “ready to bloom” and realize their potential.³ Unbeknownst to their teachers, the students were labeled in this way at random, rather than based on their intellectual abilities. Students believed to be on the verge of academic success by their teachers performed in accordance with these expectations as seen by substantial gains in their IQ at the end of the study. Students not labeled as “ready to bloom” did not have similar IQ gains. Further research has supported the conclusion that teachers' expectations can have a substantial effect on students' academic performance due to children fulfilling the expectations of those around them—in essence, a self-fulfilling prophecy.⁴

Beginning to Change a Filter or Bias

Once you have identified a negative filter and unhealthy biases, it's important to look at what learned responses you have developed as a result of your cognitions. If you are seeing a pattern in life problems or interpersonal conflict, meaning the same problem keeps coming up in different ways, it's important to not just reflect on the biases contributing to your thoughts, but your learned behavior as well.

Why do certain people end up being in the same situation over and over again? Why do some women keep finding themselves in abusive relationships? Why do some men keep losing their jobs over and over? Why are some families in one financial hardship after another? Most of the time these situations do not happen coincidentally, but due to a negative filter and learned maladaptive patterns of behavior. Let's look at some theories as to why we subconsciously (not fully aware) or unconsciously (completely unaware) find ourselves in the same predicaments over and over again.

³ Rosenthal, R., & Jacobson, L. (1966). Teachers' expectancies: Determinants of pupils' IQ gains. *Psychological Reports, 19*, 115-118.

⁴ Boser, U., Wilhelm, M., & Hanna, R. (2014). The power of the Pygmalion Effect: Teachers' expectations strongly predict college completion. Center for American Progress, <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED564606.pdf>. (accessed January 30, 2019)

The Cognitive Perspective

Cognitive theory suggests that individuals make the same mistakes over and over because those mistakes are learned responses. Theorists believe that we have neural pathways in our brains that are reinforced by habit. A good way to visualize this is a dirt road. The more you travel on the dirt road, the more well-established it becomes, and the less likely you will travel on the grassy or wooded part. It is much easier to tread a well-worn path than one covered in rocks and branches.

There is also a physiological explanation of the Islamic principle that the more you practice anything, the easier it becomes. The more you do good deeds or bad deeds, the easier they become. The more often you get up for *tahajjud*, the easier it becomes, just as the more you look at pornography, the easier it becomes. This is because the relevant neural pathways get strengthened any time a behavior is repeated.

Cognitive theory also suggests that bad things keep happening to you because you are trapped in a cycle of making the same mistakes over and over. This does not mean that you are not smart or a good person, but that you don't know how to break the cycle yet. If you are trapped in a room and the only way you know how to get out is through the door you will spend all your time trying to break the lock free, when perhaps the only way to get out is through the vent in the ceiling. It is possible that the solution is outside what you may be comfortable with or know exists.

An example:

A lonely teenager feels hopeless and begins to engage in pleasurable self-destructive behavior through the party scene (drinking, clubbing and casual sex). His negative filter makes him feel that there is no good in his life and his bias makes him think he may as well do whatever he wants, good or bad, because it doesn't matter. As he engages in risky behavior, he temporarily feels better and learns that his actions provide relief, although he feels exponentially worse from the consequences of his actions later. He internalizes the idea that it's better to feel

good for short periods of time followed by feeling bad, rather than feeling bad all the time. Over time, he gets stuck in a cycle and doesn't know how to feel better without engaging in self-destructive behavior.

Cognitive behavioral theory suggests that individuals can learn maladaptive ways of coping with their problems, and over time these coping behaviors become habitual. The more someone gets into the pattern of making the same mistake over and over, the more difficult it will be to change the behavior.

The Psychodynamic Perspective

Psychodynamic theory offers a different perspective on why we fall into the same patterns, especially in relationships. According to one theory, individuals keep making the same mistakes over and over because they are trying to heal unmet needs from early childhood development. A person will keep putting themselves into the same predicament because, subconsciously or unconsciously, they want to use the current situation as an opportunity to resolve what has happened in the past. Unfortunately, since the person has not learned better ways of dealing with the situation, they keep making the same decisions over and over, leading to even more unresolved struggles.

This perspective is useful for those who tend to get in the same types of toxic relationships over and over but do not understand why.

An example:

A girl grows up in a household where her father abuses her mother, which makes her feel insecure and vulnerable. She develops biases that the world is unsafe and that she needs to be protected by others in order to get by. When she gets older, she finds herself attracted to very strong men who carry themselves with a lot of bravado because this makes her feel safe. This initially makes her feel good but over time she realizes these over-the-top men are also sometimes controlling and violent towards her. She finds that these men are actually very much like her father, although this was exactly what she was trying to escape in the first place.

In cases like this, there are oftentimes two major forces contributing to the individual's decision-making.

1. Humans are attracted to what they are used to because it feels most familiar and comfortable. A person who grows up in an abusive household may hate it, but may find themselves being part of one as an adult because that is the dynamic and treatment they are accustomed to.
2. Humans have an innate need to resolve conflicts and when they are unable to do so, will create similar future conflicts to resolve previous issues. These conflicts are not created on purpose but subconsciously to help heal past wounds.

Changing Your Mind, Body, and Heart

If you feel that you are a magnet for bad things happening to you, it's likely that you are struggling with a combination of a negative filter and unhealthy learned ways of adapting to stress in your environment. Don't worry: filters and biases are not permanent, unless you want them to be. The nice thing about learning different psychological theories is that you can gain the tools needed to change thoughts, feelings, and behaviors with reflection and practice.

The most logical thing to do if you have biases is change them; however, if you are like most people, you probably aren't sure what biases you have in the first place. The tricky thing about biases is that when unexamined they appear logical, healthy, and like other thoughts you might have. A filter or bias may have been present for so long that you don't remember what it's like to see the world without it. In order to help reveal some of your biases you have to work backwards from repetitive cycles of conflict in your life. Take a moment to reflect:

1. What causes me the most distress in my life on a regular basis? Don't think of specific stressors or individuals, but themes in your life. Is what bothers me conflict with others? Not feeling good enough? Fear of what others might think? Abandonment? Feeling attacked?

2. Do you have themes in your emotions? Are you chronically angry, sad, or anxious? What environmental stressors are usually present when you experience these emotions?

Once you have the answers to these questions you can begin to work backwards and reflect on whether there are fallacies in your thinking contributing to your distress. Let's look at a few examples:

If you notice a theme in your life that other people have ill will towards you then it's possible that you have a bias in your view towards other people. Let's say you are finding yourself having the following thoughts:

"I was called on in the meeting because my boss knew I didn't know the answer and he wanted to embarrass me."

"My husband came home late on purpose today because he intentionally didn't want to spend time with me."

"My friend takes time to text me back because deep down she actually doesn't like me."

Can you spot the filter and bias? A negative filter is preventing you from seeing good things in other people and focusing on the negative, while your bias is impacting your ability to objectively see and interact with others. This bias can be something you learned from your environment over time or it could be the result of a trauma (for example, someone betrayed your trust).

Let's take another example. Upon reflection, you might have come to the realization that most of your distress comes from yourself. You are your worst critic. You have perfectionist ways and can't stand when you do things incorrectly. It may be that you have thoughts like:

“I can never do anything right.”

“How did I mess this up again?”

“God, I’m so dumb!”

Can you see the filter and bias here? You might be filtering out all the good things about yourself and just looking at the negative. Your bias is that you are flawed and that there is something wrong with you. This could be something you came to think on your own or that others have said to you. It can also be a result of trauma, such as emotional abuse in childhood.

Once you have identified the negative filters you have, you can begin to work on them by using counter thoughts. If you have a filter that others are out to get you, practice the Sunnah of having *husn ad-dhan* (having a good opinion of others) and giving others many excuses. If you have a filter that you are worthless and not good at anything, counter those thoughts with positive qualities about yourself. Try to have 1-3 counter thoughts for every thought derived from your negative filter. It might take work and not feel genuine at first, but the more you practice replacing those thoughts, the more those new thoughts will become a part of your belief system. Keep practicing everyday until you get the results you want. If it takes weeks don’t be discouraged—it took years and years to develop and maintain those unhealthy biases so undoing that work will not happen overnight.

Also notice how it feels in your body when you experience negative thoughts. During this exercise close your eyes, breathe deeply and notice where the tension lies (your forehead, your chest, your stomach, your shoulders, etc.). When you are ready to counter your negative thought imagine the thought leaving that place in your body and letting it float away in a balloon drifting toward the sky. Don’t forget to breathe deeply throughout. Imagine the balloon being released, drifting out your door, lingering near the ground, and then propelling itself with the wind into the horizon. Don’t rush the balloon leaving and let it take as long as you need until you feel that the negative thought has left you.

When you are formulating your counter thought, imagine gently placing it on the part of your body where the negativity has left. Continue to breathe deeply. Imagine placing something therapeutic and reparative like a bandage or compress to heal that area. Cover that area gently until you start to feel yourself heal underneath. This visualization exercise might sound silly but it taps into the mind-body connection, reinforcing a healthy cognitive shift and releasing trauma stored in the body. Using visualization can have powerful effects on your healing process and has been substantiated through a systematic review of numerous studies.⁵

Below are some additional exercises to try if you are feeling that only bad things happen to you.

1) Through the Prophet's Eyes ﷺ:

This exercise taps into your negative filter. Prophet Muhammad ﷺ had some incredibly difficult times in his life when he had no food, people were trying to kill him, and he had no sense of physical security. People abused him, attempted to sully his reputation, and tried hard to reject the words of Allah. He ﷺ also did not have any of the modern luxuries we have today like running water in the home, internet, electricity, etc. If the Prophet ﷺ had a negative filter it would have been very easy for him to be overcome by trauma, fall into depression, and stop sharing the message of Islam.

Reflecting on your life now, as difficult as it may feel, what are positive things that you have that he ﷺ didn't? What are good things about you? What are positives you have in your life or things you have the potential to look forward to? Imagine sitting down with the Prophet ﷺ and conversing with him. Write those blessings down on sticky notes and post them on your mirror so you see them often.

⁵ Wahbeh, H., Senders, A., Neuendorf, R., & Cayton, J., (2014). Complementary and alternative medicine for post-traumatic stress disorder symptoms: A systematic review. *Journal of Evidence-Based Integrative Medicine*, 19(3): 161–175.

2) Follow the Pattern:

This exercise is for helping explore behaviors resulting from your filter and biases. In the field of psychology there is a term called *transference*, which occurs when a person subconsciously or unconsciously interacts with another person in a certain way because that person reminds them of someone else. You have likely experienced this at some point; e.g., when a waitress at a restaurant has a similar voice to a friend you had in elementary school, or a person's tone reminds you of the boss you struggled with at your first job. Transference can be a part of a person's bias(es).

If you notice that you are getting in the same types of unhealthy relationships repeatedly, try to find a common thread between all those people and reflect on if they remind you of a trauma you experienced, perhaps from childhood. Ask yourself: *Do these individuals remind me of a caregiver or someone I struggled having a relationship with in the past? Who had the biggest impact on my negative emotions growing up? Who has made me feel anxious, stressed, or depressed in my early development?* Reflect on whether the people from your recent toxic relationships have similar characteristics and remind you of a person who might have hurt you in the past.

If a pattern becomes clear, and you find the original source of pain, then know that working on that relationship where the pain first started is imperative to healing. You do not, and sometimes should not, work on the relationship directly with the person; rather, this can be done within yourself. One effective way of trying to repair damage from previous relationships is writing candid letters to that person venting all your feelings and frustrations about what happened. This is very cathartic and brings a feeling of resolution for many people, which can be useful for future relationships. Once you are finished releasing all of your feelings into the letter, burn it, shred it, or throw it away.

Inspirational Hadith and *Ayat* for Reflection

*The Messenger of Allah ﷺ said: “Whoever among you wakes up in the morning secure in his dwelling, healthy in his body, and having his food for the day, then it is as if the world has been gathered for him.”*⁶

No disaster strikes except by permission of Allah. And whoever believes in Allah, He will guide his heart. And Allah is Knowing of all things. (Qur’an, 64:11)

Ibn Kathir said about this verse:

*Whoever suffered an affliction and he knew that it occurred by Allah’s Judgment and Decree, and he patiently abides, awaiting Allah’s reward, then Allah guides his heart, and will compensate him for his loss in this life by granting guidance to his heart and certainty in faith. Allah will replace whatever he lost for Him with the same or what is better. Ali ibn Abi Talhah reported from Ibn Abbas: ‘... and whosoever believes in Allah, He guides his heart.’ Allah will guide his heart to certainty. Therefore, he will know that what reached him would not have missed him and what missed him would not have reached him.*⁷

And We will surely test you with something of fear and hunger and a loss of wealth and lives and fruits, but give good tidings to the patient who, when disaster strikes them, say, "Indeed we belong to Allah, and indeed to Him we will return." Those are the ones upon whom are blessings from their Lord and mercy. And it is those who are the [rightly] guided. (Qur’an, 2:155-157)

Practical Exercises

⁶ *Jami` at-Tirmidhi*, Vol. 4, Book 10, Hadith 2346.

⁷ Al Mubarakpuri, Sheikh Saifur-Rahman, *Tafsir ibn Kathir* (Abridged) vol. 10 (Riyadh, Darussalam, 2000), pp 24-25.

A. Through the Prophet's Eyes صلى الله عليه وسلم:

Step 1:

Imagine sitting with Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم. What are positive things (amenities, luxuries, blessings, etc.) he might say you have that he didn't?

Step 2: Write those blessings down on sticky notes and post them on your mirror so you see them often. Write one good thing per note. Say your blessings out loud once a day with intention and mindfulness (paying attention to what you are saying, not being hasty). Saying the blessings out loud has a stronger effect than just saying it in your head.

B. Following the Pattern

Step 1: Examine the relationships in your life and see if you notice any patterns in the people you are in conflict with (certain characteristics, behavior patterns, fight patterns). Write down patterns you see below.

Example: I keep getting fired. All my bosses are rude, aggressive, and inconsiderate. When I'm with them I feel combative and insubordinate. This pattern has happened with my last 3 places of employment.

Step 2: Once you have identified the current patterns, go back to earlier in your life and see if there are any difficult situations or people that remind you of the current conflict you are going through. If you see a connection to someone or something traumatic in your past write it below.

Example: My boss reminds me a lot of my father. My father was very aggressive, authoritarian, and sometimes violent. I never felt understood by him and felt that he always came first.

Step 3: Identify how you may be contributing to the problem through transference (treating someone a certain way because they remind you of someone in your past). Write down your specific behaviors before, during, and after the problem at hand and describe how others are affected by your actions.

Example: Because my bosses remind me of my father perhaps I'm disrespectful and have a poor attitude. This outlook might put off my employers and make them not want to keep me long-term.

Step 4: Visually break down the problem so you can see your pattern more clearly. Using a 3-5 step chart break down the pattern of your problem.

My boss asks me to do something I don't want to do and this reminds me of my father.

↓

I develop a poor attitude.

↓

My boss develops a poor attitude and acts harshly towards me.

↓

I resent my boss for how he treats me and I start to become stubborn and rebellious.

↓

I get fired.

↓

↓

↓

↓

Step 5: Go back to the original source. On a separate piece of paper write a letter with all your thoughts and feelings towards the person who you have unresolved feelings with from the past. Do not hold back. Tell them how their actions have upset and impacted you. This activity can be done in more than one sitting. Keep writing until your anger and sadness is released.

Step 6: Now that you have a better handle on the past, alter your incorrect beliefs about your current situation. Identify maladaptive thoughts and biases you currently have because you were holding on to your past and change them. Write down all your unhealthy beliefs and replace them with more appropriate thoughts. Then begin to apply those thoughts in day-to-day life, especially when you feel triggered. Over time your unhealthy thoughts will be replaced by your new healthier ones.

Unhealthy Thought	Healthy Thought
<i>When my boss asks me to do something it's because he wants to put me down and make me feel like I have no control (transference from my father).</i>	<i>My boss is not the same as my father. It's my boss's job to make sure the company runs smoothly. He asks me to do tasks because we are all a team and everyone has a certain role to play.</i>
<i>My boss thinks he is better than me.</i>	<i>As my employer, my boss has the right to give me directions on how he wants tasks completed. This does not mean he thinks he is better than me.</i>

Case Revisited

Muadh didn't understand why he kept getting in the same toxic relationships over and over. He tried the Follow the Pattern exercise and noticed that all the women he had married were aggressive and reminded him a lot of his mother. As a child Muadh never felt that she loved him although he did everything in his power to try to be close to her. When Muadh thought more and more about the connection between his ex-wives and his mother, he realized that perhaps he was trying to heal the relationship with his mother by marrying people similar to her. Furthermore, Muadh realized that he had pretty negative biases about women and that this was also contributing to some of the conflict with his wives. Since Muadh expected women to be hurtful, disloyal, and irrational, he acted in ways to unconsciously facilitate this, thereby causing a self-fulfilling prophecy.

Muadh realized that he needed to better understand and overcome what happened with his mother in order to have healthier relationships in the future. He wrote a letter to his mother about all the feelings he had during childhood. The letter was unfiltered and didn't leave any negative feelings or thoughts unaddressed. Sometimes a few days would pass and Muadh would have more to say so he would add a P. S. at the end of the letter. When he felt like he had nothing more to write, he burned the letter and decided to forgive his mother for everything. He didn't feel what she did was right, but didn't want to hold on to the negative feelings anymore.

After putting the difficult parts of his childhood to rest, Muadh felt like he had more clarity in his life. He realized that bad things didn't happen to him more than the average person—he was filtering out the good things in his life. Muadh decided he was going to take a break for a year from thinking about marriage and shift his focus to other aspects of this life. Muadh decided he needed to work on his and his children's well-being. He bought several self-help books for himself, and invested heavily on spending more quality time with family. As a result, his children began to respect him more and started doing better at home and at school. Muadh understood that if/when he met the next person he wanted to marry, premarital

counseling would be a very important step to prevent him from repeating the same mistakes of the past.