



“Why Is Everyone’s Life Better than Mine?” Protecting Yourself from the Dangers of Comparison

NAJWA AWAD, SARAH SULTAN

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INSTITUTE FOR ISLAMIC RESEARCH

Author Biography

Najwa Awad is a psychotherapist who is passionate about helping Muslims heal, grow, and thrive after adversity. She has over a decade of experience providing online and in-person counseling to children, adults, and families at her practice, Amanah Family Counseling. Najwa also enjoys giving workshops to destigmatize mental illness, address current mental health issues within the community, and promote psychological health from an Islamic perspective.

Sarah Sultan is a licensed professional counselor who strives to empower her clients through achieving healthier, more fulfilling lives and relationships while reconnecting with Allah during the healing process. Sarah obtained a Master's Degree in Mental Health Counseling and has practiced therapy for nearly 10 years. She is also an instructor with Mishkah University, where she teaches a course about the intersections between Islam, psychology, and counseling.

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Everyone has his own specific vocation or mission in life; everyone must carry out a concrete assignment that demands fulfillment. Therein he cannot be replaced, nor can his life be repeated. Thus, everyone's task is unique as is his specific opportunity to implement it.

- Viktor E. Frankl¹

*Whenever Yaser went on Facebook his heart would sink. His newsfeed was filled with friends' achievements, pictures of beautiful homes and details of exotic trips abroad. Yaser, on the other hand, was just let go from a place he had been working at for eight years and he lived at home with his mother who was very ill. As the breadwinner and only child left in his childhood home, this was a devastating situation to be in. For the first time in his life, he had to go to social services to apply for financial assistance as his mother's professional nursing care was very expensive. Everyone's life looked so easy on social media and he wondered if he was doing such an honorable thing, then why were his circumstances so difficult? It pained him seeing wedding and baby pictures on social media. Yaser wanted to start a family of his own, but it seemed that women were not interested in marrying him when they found out he had to take care of his mother. Yaser was not doing anything exciting like his peers and often wondered if others thought he was a loser—because that is exactly how he felt. Yaser would get so anxious and depressed looking at pictures and videos online, but it was so hard to stop. He found himself experiencing tremendous jealousy and wondered why his life turned out the way it did. Yaser wanted to know, **“Why is everyone’s life better than mine?”***

What is happening to me?

Jealousy is painful. It feels like a heavy object you carry inside your chest and no matter how much you dislike the feeling you can't find a way to get inside and

¹ Viktor Frankl, *Man's Search for Meaning* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2006).

remove the aching. Internally you may also feel sad, anxious, and overwhelmed. Nobody *wants* to feel jealous and be consumed by desiring what others have.

Jealousy can also feel ungrateful and petty, which compounds layers of guilt within. Outside you might wonder if others can see the burden you are carrying. Jealousy is invisible, but at the same time has a visible impact on the one experiencing it.

For many people jealousy stems from the cognitive distortion of **disqualifying positives**. This is when a person minimizes the good in their life by thinking less of themselves, their actions, and/or what has been given to them.² The comparison might be something very specific (e.g., we both got an A on the test, but I had to study much harder) or it could be a more general global comparison (e.g., everyone likes her more than they like me).

The dark path of comparing oneself to others that leads to jealousy has been present since the beginning of human existence. In Islamic (and Judeo-Christian) tradition, we know the story of Qabil (Cain) and Habil (Abel) in which both of Adam’s sons offered a sacrifice to Allah, but only one’s was accepted. As a result of envy, Qabil killed his brother Habil and became overwhelmed with regret. Qabil suffered in a few ways: 1) immediately from his jealousy; 2) long-term by incurring the sin of being the first to commit murder in humanity, and 3) inadvertently elevating the status of his brother by possibly making him the first martyr in Islam. Jealousy and envy are some of the most destructive forces in life, causing internal upheaval and irreparable damage to relationships. Sometimes jealousy doesn’t make much sense and may seem unwarranted, while other times it feels justified because of our difficult circumstances.

When we are in times of great hardship, jealousy can sometimes be associated with feelings of entitlement. Jealousy coupled with trauma adds another layer of pain and can be a barrier to healing.

² David D. Burns, *Feeling Good: The New Mood Therapy* (New York: Penguin Books, 1981).

Why was I molested and not her?

Why does my child have a disability and not others?

Why do I have a chronic illness and everyone else my age is healthy?

A person who has experienced trauma does not necessarily wish harm on others but might wonder why they have to go through excruciating hardships and others do not.

Understanding your thoughts and emotions

While the example of Qabil and Habil is extreme, comparing ourselves to others is now arguably worse than it has ever been, especially with the advent of social media. In the past, accomplishments and blessings were typically shared with immediate family, friends, and relatives, whereas now every life detail is openly shared with the public in real-time. Modesty is an elusive concept and oversharing with little boundaries has opened up everyone’s once private life to the world. Much is laid bare for others to comment including one’s deep thoughts, day-to-day activities, meals eaten, objects purchased, report cards, awards from work, engagements, and pregnancies. It’s almost like TV, but even better because it’s people you know. Social media can be very beneficial, but can also be extremely toxic if one is not careful.

You don’t have to be online to participate in the comparison game as people create public personas in real day-to-day life as well. Many individuals and families act differently in public than they do at home, and brand themselves to appear different from what they truly are. Mirages are created about homes, children's behavior, possessions, and marriages. At a *halaqah*, a father might brag about his son getting a scholarship to an Ivy League school, but would never disclose that his son has a drug problem. During a playdate, a woman might talk about all the jewelry her husband buys her, but would never talk about his infidelity. At an extravagant

party, the host might appear very generous and have the best of everything, but nobody would ever know that the family is swimming in debt. These innocent deceptions breed jealousy as friends and family compare themselves to false standards. If one also has low-self esteem by continuously disqualifying positives, then the feelings of self-loathing and pain are even greater.

In most societies and cultures around the world, the average person doesn’t discuss failures and tragedies except with a few people. When was the last time you heard a coworker or acquaintance say: “I’m lonely,” “I think my spouse doesn’t love me anymore,” or “I’m not as a good father as I should be”? The answer is likely “Never” because although it would be very authentic, it wouldn’t be socially appropriate. One might be labeled as negative, needy, or trying to attract unnecessary attention, although everyone experiences these types of emotions. If someone *appears* positive, attractive, witty, intelligent and well-rounded, however, he or she will get that acceptance and recognition that all human beings crave. As a result of invisible social rules, a lot of effort is expended to create public personas that just reflect the best parts of ourselves, creating illusions of how we truly live life. While the average person understands these concepts, there is still competition, jealousy, and deep resentment when other people’s lives appear better than our own.

Changing your mind, body, and heart

What is the cure for comparing yourself to others and disqualifying your positive attributes? There is no easy fix, but it starts with internalizing key concepts about how you view yourself and look at the world. You cannot change your feelings or behaviors until you hone in on the thoughts that are contributing to them.

To help break out of the cycle of thinking that everyone’s life is better than yours, remember that you are special and nobody can fulfill the calling and purpose Allah has planned for you. You have the same power as anyone else to create the life *you* want and envision. Your life may not look like the life of your friends or people

you see on social media, but then again why would you want it to? If you firmly believe that you are a person of irreplaceable value and can bring meaning to the world that nobody else can, you would not want to be anyone else.

When you feel like you are getting pulled into thinking that everyone’s life around you is better than yours, start by paying attention to the thoughts about your self-worth and reflect on the script or recurrent messages playing in your head. Many times those unhealthy thoughts are related to 1) low-self-esteem; 2) misunderstanding about Allah’s bounties; and/or 3) unrealistic or false expectations of how the world works.

Low self-esteem

I’m not as pretty as my friends.

I will never be as accomplished as my brother.

My friend’s children are so much smarter than mine.

Low-self esteem causes feelings of self-doubt and never feeling good enough. It leads to minimizing good qualities and focusing on negative qualities (which we all have). The person with low self-esteem is in no place to objectively judge if their life is better or worse than others because their assessment will be clouded by the negative feelings about themselves. When you think negatively of yourself everyone else will appear better by default. When you begin to have healthier self-esteem, however, your perspective will not be as skewed.

Where does low self-esteem come from? The biggest predictors of low self-esteem are early childhood emotional neglect, physical,³ and emotional abuse.⁴ Parenting

³ Seyede S. Sajjadi, Yadolla Zargar, Leila Zare, and Fakhri Tajikzadeh, “The Predictive Role of Early Trauma Dimensions on Self-Esteem in 11–13-Year-Old Students: Controlling the Role of Maladaptive Schema,” *Razavi Int J Med.* 4, no. 3 (2016): e38869.

style, perceptions of successes and failures (especially in the domain of academics), and genetics also play a big role in self-esteem.⁵ These childhood factors have profound emotional and physical effects on individuals into adulthood.⁶ Understanding the impact of emotional neglect is imperative, as it’s widely acknowledged that physical abuse is a type of trauma. Many people who grow up with low-esteem due to emotional neglect do not know that they may also be victims of trauma.

Another contributor to low self-esteem can be the occurrence of a negative experience, like failure or rejection.⁷ The negative experience can be any event that was emotionally painful and decreased the individual’s perception of self-worth and core values about themselves. Every individual has core values about who they are; a negative experience may be perceived as an anomaly or it may open up a new door on how they view themselves. For example, a person who is verbally attacked with racial slurs may look at the experience as a fluke whereas another person might internalize the experience to the point they change how they view themselves. Core values like “I belong,” “I’m worthy of being safe,” and “I’m a good person” can change to “I’m an outcast; I will never be accepted,” “I’m not safe,” and “There is something wrong with me.”

Self-esteem work in adulthood is not easy but can be accomplished by focusing on your positive traits and building mastery in those areas. To begin to counter low self-esteem, shift your focus needs to shift to your good qualities. Your good qualities are not going to be the same as those of your friends or the person who is the subject of your jealousy. It may be hard to find those positive qualities initially, but you can nurture them by learning how to strengthen and use them. For example, if you are not very academically inclined, but are good at making things with your hands, then focus your efforts on improving those skills. If you are not

⁴ Ilyse L. Spertus, Rachel Yehuda, Cheryl M. Wong, Sarah Halligan, and Stephanie V. Seremetis, “Childhood Emotional Abuse and Neglect as Predictor of Psychological and Physical Symptoms in Women Presenting to Primary Care Practice,” *Child Abuse & Neglect* 27, no. 11 (2003): 1247–58.

⁵ Joseph Rowntree Foundation, *The Costs and Causes of Low Self-Esteem*, 2001, <https://www.jrf.org.uk/sites/default/files/jrf/migrated/files/n71.pdf>.

⁶ Joseph Rowntree Foundation, *Causes of Low Self-Esteem*.

⁷ Nicholas Emler, “Self Esteem: The Costs and Causes of Low Self Worth,” *Youth Studies Australia*, no. 21 (2001).

great at making friends, but excel at writing, then work on your writing skills to uplift you and make the world a better place. Also keep in mind that just because someone doesn’t value your good quality doesn’t mean it’s not a good asset to have. If your father thinks that math is the most important skill in the world, but you are fantastic at English, that doesn’t mean your English skills are not of value.

To improve self-esteem, it’s also important that you change internal and external factors that contribute to how you feel about yourself. Internally, pay attention to how you talk to yourself or about yourself in your head. If you talk to yourself very negatively, you can expect that your mood and outlook will reflect that. Just for one minute, imagine being around someone who is chronically putting you down and saying negative things about you. How would you feel about this person? You probably wouldn’t feel very good about them or yourself. What if that person was actually you? Replacing negative self-talk with positive self-talk intentionally and consistently can have a profound effect on how you view yourself. Nobody deserves to be put down continuously, especially by one's own self.

To improve your self-esteem externally, reflect on whether some people around you may be the source of your negative feelings or may reinforce pre-existing negative feelings about yourself. If you know someone at home, work, or school who contributes to your negative self-esteem, consider distancing yourself from that person. If you can not do that because the person is family or someone you have to interact with, then put appropriate boundaries in place when interacting with them to protect yourself. People will treat you as you allow them, so do not let anyone think it’s ok to call you names, put you down, or take advantage of you.

Misunderstanding Allah’s bounties

Minimizing blessings is a very sneaky way Shaytan brings people down emotionally and spiritually without them realizing it. There is a regular kind of jealousy when you want what others have, and then a more sinister kind of jealousy that wants those people’s blessings to be taken away. This latter form is

very dangerous because it involves a questioning of Allah’s Wisdom and perhaps even a resentment towards Allah for giving things to other people and not you.

Why is my best friend better-looking than me?

Why is my brother so smart and such a good test-taker? I wish I was more intelligent than him.

Why do I have to work so hard at my job to make ends meet, but this lazy community member lives in a mansion and has a lot of family wealth? Aren’t I more deserving than him?

Bounties and blessings are all gifts from Allah. At certain points in life family and friends may appear to have more than us. Blessings can have nothing to do with how hard a person works or desires something. Some blessings you are born with, some are transient, and some last a long time. Sometimes beauty, wealth, and success are good for some people, and sometimes they can be trials that take people away from their closeness to Allah. Ultimately, Allah has allotted a share for each person and questioning what He gives to whom indicates a lack of understanding of His Wisdom.

There are ways to increase your blessings, but when certain bounties are outside of your control be cautious that you are not upset with Allah directly for the things you wish you had. Allah encourages, if not commands, us to be thankful, and tells us that if we are thankful He will give us more:

And He gave you from all you asked of Him. And if you should count the favor of Allah, you could not enumerate them. Indeed, mankind is [generally] most unjust and ungrateful. (Qur’an 14:34)

And if you should count the favors of Allah, you could not enumerate them. Indeed, Allah is Forgiving and Merciful. (Qur’an 16:18)

So remember Me; I will remember you. And be grateful to Me and do not deny Me. (Qur’an 2:152)

And [remember] when your Lord proclaimed, “If you are grateful, I will surely increase you [in favor]; but if you deny, indeed, My punishment is severe.” (Qur’an 14:7)

Then do you wonder that there has come to you a reminder from your Lord through a man from among you, that he may warn you? And remember when He made you successors after the people of Noah and increased you in stature extensively. So remember the favors of Allah that you might succeed. (Qur’an 7:69)

If you feel that you are starting to go down the path of being ungrateful to Allah, then seek refuge in Him from Shaytan, as this tactic is an aggressive assault on both your emotional and spiritual well-being. It’s one thing to lose faith in yourself, but never lose faith in Allah’s positive attributes and His ability to provide for you. Allah is *Ar-Razzaq* (The Ever-Providing, Sustainer), *Al-Fattah* (The Opener, the Victory Giver), *Al-Muqeet* (The Nourisher) and *Al-Karim* (The Generous, The Bountiful). When you ask and work hard, Allah will give you what you are looking for, even though it may come in a different form than you anticipated. Allah has no limitations in what He can give; if you see someone who has something you want, never fear that there isn’t enough bounty left for you or that you can not have the same.

Abu Hurairah narrated that the Messenger of Allah ﷺ said:

There is not a man who calls upon Allah with a supplication, except that he is answered. Either it shall be granted to him in the world, or reserved for him in the Hereafter, or his sins shall be expiated for it according to the extent that he supplicated—as long as he does not supplicate for some sin, or for the severing of the ties of kinship, and he does not become hasty. They said: “O Messenger of Allah, and how would he be hasty?” He ﷺ said: “He says: ‘I called upon my Lord, but He did not answer me.’”⁸

⁸ *Jāmi‘ al-Tirmidhī*: no. 3604d, bk. 48, hadith 238.

Unrealistic expectations about how life works

If only I were better looking I could climb up the corporate ladder more quickly.

If I was just a little wealthier I know I would be happy.

If my spouse wasn’t so lazy my marriage would be better for sure.

When we blame others (the world, *qadr*, society, parents, the president, etc.) for things we want but can’t have, we are creating unrealistic expectations for how the world works and giving those outside forces more power than they actually have. Blaming outside forces takes away from our own accountability and resourcefulness to find alternative means for our happiness. There are many circumstances in life we cannot control, but this does not mean we lack control to influence or change other circumstances. It’s not what happens to you that dictates your life, it’s how you choose to react and respond to those unexpected variables that affects your overall quality of life and happiness.

Your not advancing at work has nothing to do with how you look, and even if it did, a good work ethic would get you further.

Lack of wealth is not preventing you from being happy; your thirst for more is clouding your ability to find contentment.

Your marriage could be better if your spouse wasn’t lazy, but your marriage would also be better if you put more effort and positivity into it.

Instead of focusing on things in your life outside of your control, focus on what is in your control:

Your thoughts

Feelings

Attitude
Appreciation
Openness
Flexibility
Kindness
Creativity
Resourcefulness
Resilience

The power you have to control and exercise these qualities can offset any circumstance because you get to choose how to perceive the world around you.

You get to decide if something is of importance.

You get to decide if something bothers you.

You get to decide how you want to bounce back.

Cognitive shifts needed in addressing comparing yourself to others

Once you have started to shift incorrect beliefs about yourself, you can begin to replace those erroneous thoughts with more empowering concepts and cognitions. It’s not enough to just remove the old cognitions that were holding you back, you also need to utilize tools to improve how you relate to the world and those around you in a different way. Keeping perspective, self-improvement, making appropriate comparisons, and gratitude are great ways to do this.

1. Keeping Perspective: In life there is always more to obtain, and there will always be someone who has more than you in one capacity or another. Chasing after these things whether money, beauty, homes, cars, fame, etc. is never-ending and is very much like being a mouse running on a wheel. The mouse never gets anywhere running in place and achieves nothing but fatigue. This is because

oftentimes humans focus more on what they don’t have rather than what they do have. This is very eloquently narrated by Sahl bin Sa’d who said:

I heard Ibn Az-Zubair who was on the pulpit at Mecca, delivering a sermon, saying, “O men! The Prophet used to say, ‘If the son of Adam were given a valley full of gold, he would love to have a second one; and if he were given the second one, he would love to have a third, for nothing fills the belly of Adam’s son except dust. And Allah forgives he who repents to Him.’ Ubai said, “We considered this as a saying from the Qur’an till the Sura (beginning with) ‘The mutual rivalry for piling up of worldly things diverts you...’ (102.1) was revealed.”⁹

We are reminded in the Qur’an, as well as the Sunnah, that possessions come and go, while good deeds last; so, amassing good deeds is far better than amassing goods. Good deeds increase us in rank and give us better provisions in the *akhirah* which is not only better, but permanent.

Wealth and children are [but] adornment of the worldly life. But the enduring good deeds are better to your Lord for reward and better for [one’s] hope. (Qur’an 18:46)

Know that the life of this world is but amusement and diversion and adornment and boasting to one another and competition in increase of wealth and children—like the example of a rain whose [resulting] plant growth pleases the tillers; then it dries and you see it turned yellow; then it becomes [scattered] debris. And in the Hereafter is severe punishment and forgiveness from Allah and approval. And what is the worldly life except the enjoyment of delusion. (Qur’an 57:20)

Internalizing perspective on long-term goals, such as trying to go to *Jannah*, helps stabilize mood when things don’t go our way or when someone appears to have more than us. Factually, you don’t actually know if someone truly has more than you, but even if they did it wouldn’t matter when you think about The Day of Judgment, *Jannah*, and *Jahannam* in light of this hadith:

⁹ *Sahīh al-Bukhārī*: no. 6438, bk. 81, hadith 27.

Anas b. Malik reported that Allah's Messenger ﷺ said that one amongst the denizens of Hell who had led a life of ease and plenty amongst the people of the world would be made to dip in Fire only once on the Day of Resurrection and then it would be said to him: “O, son of Adam, did you find any comfort, did you happen to get any material blessing?” He would say: “By Allah, no, my Lord.” And then that person from amongst the persons of the world be brought who had led the most miserable life (in the world) from amongst the inmates of Paradise. and he would be made to dip once in Paradise and it would be said to him: “O, son of Adam, did you face any hardship? Or had any distress fallen to your lot?” And he would say: “By Allah, no, O my Lord, never did I face any hardship or experience any distress.”¹⁰

Furthermore, an increase in the blessings you seek results in an increase in accountability on the Day of Judgment. Ibn Mas'ud narrated that the Messenger of Allah ﷺ said: "The feet of the son of Adam shall not move from before his Lord on the Day of Judgement, until he is asked about five things: about his life and what he did with it, about his youth and what he wore it out in, about his wealth and how he earned it and spent it upon, and what he did with what he knew." (*Tirmidhi*) Therefore, anyone who *appears* to have more than you at the moment may be questioned more extensively about it later—and perhaps to their detriment.

2. Self-improvement for success: One of the most destructive aspects of getting caught up in comparisons is that it takes away from working on oneself. Two hours a day checking out people’s profiles on social media, and feeling terrible about oneself, is two hours one could have used to read a book, volunteer, learn something new, or work on an important goal. Multiply two hours a day by seven days a week and that is fourteen hours a week that is being given up. Fourteen hours a week is a part-time job or approximately how many hours a student needs to be enrolled full-time at college. Multiply two hours a day by thirty days in a month and you will get sixty hours that could be used for bettering oneself. Sixty hours a month can do wonders: One could work on writing a book, memorize lots

¹⁰ *Sahīh Muslim*: no. 2807, bk. 52, hadith 42.

of Qur’an, create community programs, or get oneself in top physical shape. The travesty in spending your life looking at what others are doing is that you are completely overlooking what you could be doing yourself. Wasting time comparing yourself to others is bad enough, but the resulting poverty of your soul due to neglecting it and not taking care of it is far worse.

Abu Huraira reported that the Messenger of Allah ﷺ said:

Richness does not lie in the abundance of (worldly) goods but richness is the richness of the soul (heart, self).¹¹

If you feel yourself caught up in thinking about how much more someone has than you, or how little you have, then put a cap on it. You may be thinking, “Well if I could stop thinking about it, I would.” However, this technique works counterintuitively. Set a designated time for you to sit with your negative feelings for 5 or 10 minutes. Set a timer if you need to. Then when the time is up, make a conscious effort to shift gears to doing something productive. This is a way to compartmentalize your feelings and prevent your feelings from taking over your day. Giving yourself permission to feel bad for 5 minutes and then do something productive for 2 hours is more useful than being distracted for 2 hours. Over time you will feel like sitting and being negative on purpose is a waste of time, and because it’s now out of your system, you will no longer have a need for it.

3. If you are going to compare, compare yourself to previous versions of who you are or to people who have less than you. Everyone is born into a unique set of circumstances that will set them on an exclusive trajectory that nobody else will be able to experience. Some people have similar interests, values, and family dynamics as you but nobody will ever have a life exactly like yours. Comparing one’s blessings to someone who you think has more than you will be of no benefit to you, whereas continually assessing your own growth to previous versions of yourself can increase your productivity and self-esteem. Comparing yourself to how you were 6 months ago, 2 years ago and 5 years ago can give you concrete

¹¹ *Sahīh Muslim*: no. 1051, bk. 12, hadith 157.

insight on how you may have improved or worsened in particular aspects of your life.

If you insist on comparing yourself to others, then look to those lower than you as demonstrated in this prophetic advice:

Abu Hurairah (RAA) narrated that the Messenger of Allah ﷺ said:

Look at those who are lower than you (financially) but do not look at those who are higher than you, lest you belittle the favors Allah conferred upon you.¹²

When you look at people who appear to have less than you, it can help you appreciate small blessings you may have not considered before. If you are worrying about having humiliated yourself in front of your community, but then reflect on a friend’s child who has a terminal illness, your problems may not seem as bleak anymore. Looking to those who have less than you is a useful way to develop a deeper appreciation for what you have.

4. Gratitude: One of the antidotes for dismissing positive things in your life is building appreciation and thankfulness for what you do have. It doesn’t matter exactly how you practice gratefulness as long as you do it consistently. Research supports that gratitude lists, grateful contemplation (reflecting globally on things you are grateful for), and gratitude visits (writing a letter to someone who has done something good for you and reading it to them) are effective in improving well-being.¹³ Consider the following exercises:

A. Every day when you wake up, identify 3 things you are looking forward to, and when you go to sleep, identify 3 things that you are grateful for. These items do not have to be big but the thankfulness should come from your heart. Examples of things you might look forward to: your morning coffee, your walk during

¹² *Bulugh al-maram*: bk. 16, hadith 1482.

¹³ Alex M. Wood, Jeffrey J. Froh, and Adam W. A. Geraghty, “Gratitude and Well-Being: A Review and Theoretical Integration,” *Clinical Psychology Review* 30, no. 7 (2010): 890–905, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cpr.2010.03.005>.

lunchtime, hugging a family member, tending to your garden or making a new recipe for dinner. Examples of things you might be grateful for: That you snuck into a work meeting without anyone seeing you were late, that you made it to the gas station before your tank was empty, that your child did not have a tantrum when leaving the toy store, a delicious meal, or the chance to read a chapter from your favorite book.

B. When you are facing something traumatic or difficult, find three good things that came out of that situation. This exercise does not take away from the pain or difficulties you are experiencing but can help you see that good can come from the worst of situations. The good thing might be a new relationship that was formed, an increase in patience, a new opportunity or strength you did not have before, or a chance to help others in a similar situation. Many times when reframing trauma one might find that in the long-term the good outweighs the bad.

C. Volunteer to help those who have less than you. Scientific studies show that by helping others you actually help and feel better about yourself.^{14, 15} Places you can volunteer: a soup kitchen for the homeless, nursing homes where the elderly are away from their family, hospitals, social services agencies, etc. You can also visit sick people in your local community and get tremendous amounts of *ajr* that way.

It was narrated that ‘Ali said:

I heard the Messenger of Allah ﷺ say: “Whoever comes to his Muslim brother and visits him (when he is sick), he is walking among the harvest of Paradise until he sits down, and when he sits down he is covered with mercy. If it is morning, seventy thousand angels will send blessing upon him until evening, and if it is evening, seventy thousand angels will send blessing upon him until morning.”¹⁶

¹⁴ Faiza Tabassum, John Mohan, and Peter Smith, “Association of Volunteering with Mental Well-Being: A Lifecourse Analysis of a National Population-Based Longitudinal Study in the UK,” *BMJ Open* 6, no. 8 (2016): e011327.

¹⁵ Jerf W. K. Yeung, Zhuoni Zhang, and Tae Yeun Kim, “Volunteering and Health Benefits in General Adults: Cumulative Effects and Forms,” *BMC Public Health* 18, no. 8 (2018).

¹⁶ *Sunan Ibn Majah*: vol. 1, bk. 6, hadith 1442.

Inspirational Hadith & Ayat for Reflection

Allah extends provision for whom He wills and restricts [it]. And they rejoice in the worldly life, while the worldly life is not, compared to the Hereafter, except [brief] enjoyment. (Qur'an 13:26)

'Umar bin Al-Khattab narrated that the Messenger of Allah (s.a.w) said:

“If you were to rely upon Allah with the required reliance, then He would provide for you just as a bird is provided for, it goes out in the morning empty, and returns full.” (Jami` at-Tirmidhi, 2344)

Ibn Mas'dd reported that Umm Habiba said:

O Allah, enable me to derive benefit from my husband, Allah's Messenger ﷺ, and from my father Abu Sufyan, and from my brother Mu'awiya. Allah's Messenger ﷺ said to her: Verily, you have asked Allah about the durations of life already set, and the steps which you would take, and the sustenances the share of which is fixed. Nothing would take place earlier than its due time, and nothing would be deferred beyond that when it is due... (Sahih Muslim 2663)

Practical Exercise

A. Cultivating Gratitude:

Every morning, identify 3 things you are looking forward to:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

Every night before you go to sleep, identify 3 things that you are grateful for:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

B. Building Your Self-Esteem and Goals:

Sometimes being distracted by what other people have is because one has low self-esteem. What are unique characteristics have you been blessed with?

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.

Pretend that you are older and reflecting back on your life. What are five long-term accomplishments you would like to have achieved? These goals should reflect values important to you, and not goals other people have for you or have for themselves. To increase well-roundedness, list goals in several different aspects of your life: familial, career, spiritual, philanthropic, etc.

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.

What are three short-term goals you can start to work on today to help meet your long-term goals?

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

To work to become your best self, you will need to commit some time every day to work on your goals. Half an hour at a consistent time can do wonders for turning your life around. Pick the same time every day, preferably after *fajr* (since this is a blessed time) to work on your goals. If you are really committed to working on yourself, your focus on others and what they have will naturally decrease. When

you are ready to pick a time, block off that time daily for 30 days and watch how both your outlook and life will change for the better *inshaAllah*.

Case Revisited

One day Yaser felt he couldn’t take how he felt anymore and knew that things had to change. Yaser understood that his mood was greatly affected by the amount of time he spent online so he started limiting social media use to one hour a day. He also realized that he was burned out taking care of his mother and that if he was going to continue doing this long-term he needed help. He asked extended family members for a loan to get his mother more in-home help. Having professionals assist him helped lift his spirits and allowed Yaser to be able to focus on himself, which was something he hadn’t been able to do in a long time.

Yaser felt that he needed to adjust his outlook on life. His circumstances were different than his friends, but that didn’t mean that his life was bad. Yaser owned a home, had good health, and was highly educated so it would be easy for him to get a new job. He also saw a great opportunity in taking care of his mother, as he was optimistic it would help him get to Jannah inshaAllah.

Yaser sat down and reflected on his life goals. He had wasted so much time on social media before that he realized he really didn’t have any long-term goals. Something that stood out right away was that he hadn’t exercised in a long time and that always made him feel good. He joined a brothers’ basketball team that met twice a month. The exercise and seeing old friends made him feel more like himself.

Regarding other long-term goals: Yaser knew he had no control over getting married or having children, but understood that he could contribute to the Ummah in other ways. With his IT skills from college he decided to create an online foundation for Muslims taking care of parents with chronic illness. His foundation would provide connections for other Muslims like himself to get support, learn about resources, and exchange helpful information.

Focusing on long-term goals helped Yaser stop minimizing the good in his life and comparing his life to others. Shifting attention to what Yaser could actually control empowered him and gave him a lot less time to sit around and compare his life to others. If Yaser ever felt like he was slipping into his old ways he would make sure to increase practicing his gratefulness exercises (identifying things to look forward to in the morning and counting his blessings at night), and this would help him get back on track.