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Beautiful Patience

Daniel C. Peterson

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BEAUTIFUL PATIENCE

Daniel C. Peterson

Abstract: *Believers in the God of Abraham — who include not only Jews and Christians but also Muslims — are exhorted to call upon him every day, as well as in times of need. We are promised that he will respond to petitionary prayers. Moreover, we are assured that, in the end, believers will prosper, that their faith or trust in him will prove justified. But we are not promised that rewards, compensation, or justice will come to us on our mortal timetable — and this raises sometimes burningly acute questions about Providence and even, for more than a few, about either God’s benevolence, his care, or his sheer existence. So we are also exhorted to be patient. And that sets us up for many of mortality’s greatest tests. In the meantime, while faithfully waiting for God’s promises to be fulfilled, we ourselves are to work toward their fulfillment “with all [our] heart, as working for the Lord, not for human masters” (Colossians 3:23, NIV).*

The remarks below are a lightly edited version of what I delivered at the “U.S. Hazāra Conference 2022,” held in Provo, Utah, at the Conference Center of Brigham Young University on 17 December 2022. The program for the meeting described it as “the first ever Hazāra conference.” “The conference aims to gather the Hazāras across the U.S., harmonize with the interfaith groups of Utah, provide them with an interactive platform, strategize about the future of the Hazāras in the U.S., and organize the Hazāra genocide case.”¹

The Hazāras are a persecuted ethnic group that is native to a region in central Afghanistan known as Hazārīstān or Hazārajāt but who also live throughout Afghanistan as well as, to some extent, in Pakistan and in Iran. Predominantly if not entirely Shī‘ī Muslims, they speak a dialect known as Hazāragī that is very similar to the dialect of Persian or Fārsī that is called Dari.

1. Printed program in my possession.

The topic that I was asked to address was “The Power of Prayer,” and specifically (curiously enough) to do it from a Latter-day Saint perspective. I tried to take an ecumenical approach to the topic, citing not only uniquely Latter-day Saint material but, even more, the Bible as well as the Qur’ān. There were excellent but challenging questions afterward, but (so far as I’m aware) they weren’t recorded. This is a people who have really suffered. It was humbling to be asked to speak to them.



First of all, welcome to the United States, to Utah, and to the campus of Brigham Young University. You are not only safe here, you are among friends.

As I understand it, my assignment in my remarks today is to set forth some Latter-day Saint thoughts on prayer, and specifically on petitionary prayer, prayer that asks help from God. Roughly, on what Muslims call *du‘ā*; I hope, though, that what I say will express the faith of *all* of those who belong to what I sometimes call the “Abrahamic religions,” to what Muslim writers have traditionally called the *adyān samawiyya* or “heavenly religions” — and, indeed, to all believers in God.

“God,” the Qur’ān says, “is the light of the heavens and the earth” (Qur’ān 24:35).²

Allāhu nūr al-samawāt wa al-arḍ

In the Qur’ān, he declares, “I answer the call [*da‘wa*] of the suppliant [*dā‘i*] when he calls upon me [*da‘āni*]” (Qur’ān 2:186). “Call upon me [*ud‘ūnī*], and I will answer” (Qur’ān 40:60).

The context for my remarks, of course, is this conference. More specifically, it is the travails, suffering, and persecution of the Hazāra people, not only under the oppressive rule of the Taliban in Afghanistan but in their exile from their native land.

For all our technological progress and even in the most advanced and powerful states, we humans live in a universe far larger than we are, in a universe and a world that we cannot control — it is beyond our power. And, many times, history and politics overwhelm us. We feel powerless. But believers in God know that a Power exists that is greater than the material cosmos, greater than the most oppressive tyrant, greater than the most unjust regime.

And we resort to petitionary prayer when we realize that we are confronted by forces that are beyond our ability to command. We pray

2. All quotations from the Qur’ān are my translation.

when our loved ones are gravely ill, for example. This does not mean that we abandon efforts to help the situation ourselves. Praying that God will bless someone who is seriously ill certainly doesn't mean that we stop seeking medical help. But it does show our recognition that the final outcome isn't entirely up to us.

Prayer signals that we believe in Someone who *does* control the final outcome, and it *reminds* us that we believe in Someone who will guarantee that the end for the faithful, for those who have loved and sought to do righteousness, will be a good one. I love the Arabic Islamic term *dhikr* or *zikr*, "remembrance," as the word for certain important Muslim worship practices.

We are to trust in God.

In the Old Testament portion of the Christian Bible, the psalmist says:

Whoever dwells in the shelter of the Most High will rest in the shadow of the Almighty.

I will say of the Lord, "He is my refuge and my fortress, my God, in whom I trust." ...

If you say, "The Lord is my refuge," and you make the Most High your dwelling,
no harm will overtake you, no disaster will come near your tent.

For he will command his angels concerning you to guard you in all your ways;
they will lift you up in their hands, so that you will not strike your foot against a stone.

You will tread on the lion and the cobra; you will trample the great lion and the serpent.

"Because he loves me," says the Lord, "I will rescue him;
I will protect him, for he acknowledges my name.
He will call on me, and I will answer him; I will be with him in trouble,

I will deliver him and honor him." (Psalm 91:1-2, 9-15)³

In a different psalm we learn that

God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble.

3. All biblical quotations are from the New International Version.

Therefore we will not fear, though the earth give way and the mountains fall into the heart of the sea,
though its waters roar and foam and the mountains quake with their surging ...

Nations are in uproar, kingdoms fall; he lifts his voice, the earth melts.

The LORD Almighty is with us; the God of Jacob is our fortress. ...

He makes wars cease to the ends of the earth.

He breaks the bow and shatters the spear; he burns the shields with fire.

He says, "Be still, and know that I am God; I will be exalted among the nations,

I will be exalted in the earth."

The LORD Almighty is with us; the God of Jacob is our fortress. (Psalm 46:1–3, 6–7, 9–11)

The greatest example of this in the Old Testament occurs in the book of Exodus. The children of Israel have escaped from slavery in Egypt, but now the pharaoh, Egypt's king, is chasing them with his army, and they are trapped at the Red Sea. The people are terrified.

Moses answered the people, "Do not be afraid. Stand firm and you will see the deliverance the Lord will bring you today. The Egyptians you see today you will never see again. The Lord will fight for you; you need only to be still." (Exodus 14:13–14)

But, many times, deliverance isn't so dramatic or so immediate. Or it doesn't seem to come at *all*.

In the New Testament, Jesus says to his disciples

I am sending you out like sheep among wolves. ... Be on your guard; you will be handed over to the local councils and be flogged in the synagogues. On my account you will be brought before governors and kings as witnesses to them and to the Gentiles. ... You will be hated by everyone because of me, but the one who stands firm to the end will be saved. When you are persecuted in one place, flee to another. ... So do not be afraid of them. ... Do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather, be afraid of the One who can destroy both soul and body in hell. Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? Yet not one of them will fall to the ground

outside your Father's care. And even the very hairs of your head are all numbered. So don't be afraid; you are worth more than many sparrows. (Matthew 10:16–18, 22–23, 26, 28–31)

Yes, God is in charge. Sometimes, though, a good outcome doesn't arrive when we want it to arrive, certainly not on our timetable. Our ways are not necessarily God's ways. It may not even come in this life or in this world. It may not come at *all* in the exact way that we picture it or want it. And, sometimes, evil men seem to succeed and to prosper.

In the Bible, the ancient patriarch Job (*Ayūb*, in Arabic), asks a question that all of us have asked at one time or another:

Why do the wicked live on, growing old and increasing in power?

They see their children established around them, their offspring before their eyes.

Their homes are safe and free from fear; the rod of God is not on them.

Their bulls never fail to breed; their cows calve and do not miscarry.

They send forth their children as a flock; their little ones dance about.

They sing to the music of timbrel and lyre; they make merry to the sound of the pipe.

They spend their years in prosperity and go down to the grave in peace. (Job 21:7–13)

The Old Testament prophet Malachi raises the same issue:

“You have spoken arrogantly against me,” says the LORD.

“Yet you ask, ‘What have we said against you?’

“You have said, ‘It is futile [useless] to serve God. What do we gain by carrying out his requirements and going about like mourners before the LORD Almighty? But now we call the arrogant blessed. Certainly evildoers prosper, and even when they put God to the test, they get away with it.’”
(Malachi 3:13–14)

But that is not the whole story. Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., reminded us that “the arc of the moral universe is long but it bends

toward justice.”⁴ Moreover, the story isn’t finished when this life comes to a close, when this world ends.

The Qur’ān frequently distinguishes *al-dunyā* (literally, “the near [life]”) from *al-ākhirā* (literally, “the further [life]” or “the latter [life]”). *Al-dunyā* refers to the world of everyday reality around us. And the Qur’ān plainly assigns it less value than *al-ākhirā*.

The life of this world is nothing but a game and a distraction;
the Home in the Hereafter is best for those who are aware of
God. (Qur’ān 6:32)

There is good in this present world for those who do good,
but their home in the Hereafter is far better: the home of the
righteous is excellent. (Qur’ān 16:30)

Malachi continues:

Then those who feared the LORD talked with each other, and
the LORD listened and heard. A scroll of remembrance was
written in his presence concerning those who feared the LORD
and honored his name.

“On the day when I act,” says the LORD Almighty, “they will
be my treasured possession. I will spare them, just as a father
has compassion and spares his son who serves him. And you
will again see the distinction between the righteous and the
wicked, between those who serve God and those who do not.”
(Malachi 3:16–18)

In the Qur’ān’s beautiful telling of the story of Joseph in Egypt, Joseph’s father, Jacob, has been deprived of his favorite son and is being betrayed and lied to by his other sons. But he does not lose faith, either in God or in an eventual good outcome. “Beautiful patience,” he counsels himself (Qur’ān 12:18):

fa ṣabrun jamīlun

It is important to understand, and to help Western non-Muslims understand, the significance of the terms *Islam* and *Muslim*. *Islam* means “submission” and *Muslim* refers to someone who “submits.” The idea of humble submission — not to tyrants or injustice, but to God’s will — is fundamental to the religion taught by the Prophet Muhammad (upon whom be peace). It is, in fact, embodied and illustrated and taught

4. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., “Remaining Awake Through a Great Revolution,” (speech, Washington National Cathedral, Washington, DC, March 31, 1968).

even in the physical motions of the *salat* prayer, performed five times each day.

In the Bible, when Job has lost everything — his home, his flocks, his wealth, and his family — in a matter of minutes, his initial reaction is sorrowful. Understandably so. But it isn't anger. Consider his response, as it is recorded in the Old Testament:

At this, Job got up and tore his robe and shaved his head. Then he fell to the ground in worship and said: "Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked I will depart. The Lord gave and the Lord has taken away; may the name of the Lord be praised." In all this, Job did not sin by charging God with wrongdoing. (Job 1:20–22)

Shortly afterward, having already lost everything and been reduced to poverty, Job is stricken with a serious and humiliating illness. Even his wife advises him to "curse God and die." But he doesn't.

"Shall we accept good from God," he replies, "and not trouble?" And, comments the biblical writer, "In all this, Job did not sin in what he said" (Job 2:9–10).

The mid-nineteenth-century Latter-day Saint pioneers, who settled this valley and the Salt Lake Valley to our north, were driven here by religious persecution. They had previously been driven from New York to Ohio, from Ohio to Missouri, and from Missouri to Illinois. Now, they were being pushed beyond the borders of the United States. Their graves line the so-called "Mormon Trail." "We came here voluntarily," one Church leader is said to have joked many years later, "because we *had to*."

On 15 April 1846 — more than a hundred miles from the city of Nauvoo, Illinois, that they had been forced to abandon, but still 1,200 miles from the Valley of the Great Salt Lake beyond the great Rocky Mountains — a Mormon refugee caravan rested at Locust Creek, Iowa. One of those refugees, an English convert to the Church named William Clayton, wrote the words to a hymn that has been called the "anthem" of the Mormon pioneers. Its final two verses, which remind me of the situation not merely of my people then but of the Hazāra people today, read as follows:

We'll find the place which God for us prepared, Far away in
the West,
Where none shall come to hurt or make afraid; There the
Saints will be blessed.

We'll make the air with music ring, Shout praises to our God
and King;
Above the rest these words we'll tell — All is well! All is well!
And should we die before our journey's through, Happy day!
All is well!
We then are free from toil and sorrow, too; With the just we
shall dwell!
But if our lives are spared again To see the Saints their rest
obtain,
Oh, how we'll make this chorus swell — All is well! All is
well!⁵

Those who are faithful know that the final end will be good — for
those who are faithful.

As the Qur'ān says, in *Sūrat al-Baqarah*:

*wa lā taqūlū li-man yuqṭalu fī sabīl Allāh amwātun bal
aḥyā'un wa-lākin lā tash'urūn*

And do not say of those killed in the path of God, 'They are
dead.' Rather, they are living, but you do not perceive them.
(Qur'ān 2:154)

In the New Testament Revelation of John, the apostle writes

I saw under the altar the souls of those who had been slain
because of the word of God and the testimony they had
maintained. They called out in a loud voice, "How long,
Sovereign Lord, holy and true, until you judge the inhabitants
of the earth and avenge our blood?" Then each of them was
given a white robe, and they were told to wait a little longer,
until the full number of their fellow servants, their brothers and
sisters, were killed just as they had been. (Revelation 6:9–11)

Full justice may not come — usually, it doesn't come — until after
this life. Here, again, is the biblical Job:

I know that my redeemer lives, and that in the end he will
stand on the earth. And after my skin has been destroyed, yet

5. "Come, Come, Ye Saints," *Hymns*, no. 360. For the background, see
Alexa Reimschuessel, "Nine Facts about 'Come, Come, Ye Saints' and Its
Composer That Might Surprise You," *Church News*, 25 July 2019, <https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/church/news/nine-facts-about-come-come-ye-saints-and-its-composer-that-might-surprise-you>.

in my flesh I will see God; I myself will see him with my own eyes — I, and not another. How my heart yearns within me!
(Job 19:25–27)

We are to pray, to ask for God's help. In the meantime, we submit. We show patience. And we can receive divine comfort.

Let me briefly tell you a story about a famous American poet by the name of Henry Wadsworth Longfellow. He lived in New England in the nineteenth century. His story is particularly relevant at this Christmas season.

Longfellow's first wife, Mary, died after a miscarriage. His second wife, Fanny, died in a household fire. While trying to save her, he himself was burned so badly that he couldn't attend her funeral. And, for the remaining decades of his life, he couldn't shave. Still today, the familiar photographs of him feature a long white patriarchal beard.

"How inexpressibly sad are all holidays,"⁶ he wrote on the first Christmas after Fanny's death. One year after her passing, he commented, "I can make no record of these days. Better leave them wrapped in silence. Perhaps someday God will give me peace."⁷ His journal entry for 25 December 1862 reads: "'A merry Christmas' say the children, but that is no more for me."⁸ Late in 1863, his eldest son, Charles, was severely wounded fighting for the Union in the American Civil War. Longfellow made no journal entry at all for Christmas that year.

On 25 December 1864, he wrote one of the most beloved of all American Christmas carols. Here are the words of the song:

I heard the bells on Christmas day
Their old familiar carols play,
And wild and sweet the words repeat
Of peace on earth, good will to men.

I thought how, as the day had come,
The belfries of all Christendom
Had rolled along the unbroken song
Of peace on earth, good will to men.

6. Chris Fenner, "I heard the bells on Christmas day," Hymnology Archive (website), 17 December 2019, <https://www.hymnologyarchive.com/i-heard-the-bells-on-christmas-day>. A recent biography is Nicholas A. Basbanes, *Cross of Snow: A Life of Henry Wadsworth Longfellow* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2020).

7. Ibid.

8. Ibid.

And in despair I bowed my head:
 “There is no peace on earth,” I said,
 “For hate is strong and mocks the song
 Of peace on earth, good will to men.”
 Then pealed the bells more loud and deep:
 “God is not dead, nor doth he sleep;
 The wrong shall fail, the right prevail,
 With peace on earth, good will to men.”
 Till, ringing, singing, on its way,
 The world revolved from night to day,
 A voice, a chime, a chant sublime,
 Of peace on earth, good will to men!⁹

Julian of Norwich, a fifteenth-century English mystic, summed up her Christian hope in these simple words: “All shall be well, and all shall be well, and all manner of thing shall be well.”¹⁰

One of the final verses of the Bible promises that

God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away.
 (Revelation 21:4 KJV)

So, until the final judgment comes and final justice is done, we, as believers, are to pray. And we are to be patient, submissive to the will of God. But prayerful and patient believers shouldn’t stop working to make things right. There is a wonderful phrase in Hebrew, *tikkun olam* (תִּיקּוּן עוֹלָם), which means “repair of the world.” And that is our responsibility, too. As the biblical prophet Amos put it, “Let justice roll on like a river, righteousness like a never-failing stream!” (Amos 5:24).

Oleksandra Matviichuk represented the Center for Civil Liberties, in Kyiv, Ukraine, on 10 December 2022, just a few days ago, when that organization was presented the 2022 Nobel Peace Prize. She is a human-rights lawyer and the Center’s executive director. I quote a passage from her Nobel lecture:

War turns people into numbers. We have to reclaim the names of all victims of war crimes. Regardless of who they are, their social status, the type of crime they have suffered,

9. “I Heard the Bells on Christmas Day,” *Hymns*, no. 214.

10. Julian of Norwich, *Revelations of Divine Love*, chapter 27 (various editions).

and whether the media and society are interested in their cases. Because anyone's life is priceless.¹¹

At a minimum, it's essential to remember. It's essential to remember our stories. It's essential, in your case, to remember and to record the names and the stories of the Hazāra people who have suffered and died.

Yelena Bonner, widow of the great Russian physicist, dissident, and Nobel Peace laureate Andrei Sakharov, told the journalist Jay Nordlinger that Sakharov disliked talking about human rights in general. That was too abstract for people. He liked to talk about specific cases, especially about political prisoners that he knew personally. In a similar way, this is how Matviichuk ended her lecture:

You don't have to be Ukrainians to support Ukraine. It is enough just to be humans.

Félix Maradiaga is a heroic Nicaraguan political prisoner. His wife, Berta Valle, has a similar slogan: "Be human."¹²

Our shared humanity and our religious commitments oblige us to work for justice and against oppression. In this cause, our religious differences, important as they are, are secondary. The Qur'ān quotes God himself as saying

To each of you we have prescribed a law and a way of life. Had God willed it, he could have made you all one people, but that he might test you by means of what he has given you. So compete with one another in good works. All of you will return to God, so he will inform you regarding the matters about which you used to disagree. (Qur'ān 5:48)

We must join together, as believers and as humans.

I close with a saying that's been attributed to the great fourth/fifth century Latin bishop St. Augustine. He advised us to

Pray as though everything depended on God;
work as though everything depended on you.



11. Oleksandra Matviichuk, speech given at the 2022 Nobel Peace Prize Award Ceremony, Oslo City Hall, Oslo Norway, December 10, 2022, <https://www.nobelprize.org/prizes/peace/2022/center-for-civil-liberties/lecture/>.

12. For the foregoing, see Jay Nordlinger, "A Plea for Humanity," *National Review* (14 December 2022); <https://www.nationalreview.com/corner/a-plea-for-humanity/>.

St. Augustine's admonition captures, I think, some of the spirit of The Interpreter Foundation. I express my gratitude here to the authors, reviewers, designers, source checkers, copy editors, donors, and other volunteers who make the work of the Foundation possible. A short while ago, we celebrated our tenth anniversary, and these have been remarkably productive years — especially considering the fact that we started in August 2012 with no journal, no organization, no money, and no bank account. In connection with this particular volume, I thank the authors who have contributed their work, along with its managing or production editors, Allen Wyatt and Jeff Lindsay, both of whom also serve as members of the foundation's Board of Trustees. Like all of the other officers of The Interpreter Foundation, they are volunteers. I'm deeply grateful.

Daniel C. Peterson (*PhD, University of California at Los Angeles*) is a professor emeritus of Islamic studies and Arabic at Brigham Young University, where he founded the University's Middle Eastern Texts Initiative. He has published and spoken extensively on both Islamic and Latter-day Saint subjects. Formerly chairman of the board of the Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies (FARMS) and an officer, editor, and author for its successor organization, the Neal A. Maxwell Institute for Religious Scholarship, his professional work as an Arabist focuses on the Qur'ān and on Islamic philosophical theology. He is the author, among other things, of a biography entitled *Muhammad: Prophet of God* (Eerdmans, 2007).