

**A DETAILED STUDY OF ACTS OF DESPONDENCY AMONG THE MUSLIMS; NIGERIANS  
AS A CASE STUDY**

**BY**

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**Abstract**

The incessant occurrence of desperation, suicide, brutality, among other evils in Nigeria, calls for special attention. These social vices are said to be persistent as a result of many factors, among which are: the prevalent economic hardship, injustice, bad leadership, disappointment, among others. Even though life is not usually a bed of roses, no matter the caution, yet, one has to exercise patient and remain optimistic during adversity. This study aims at providing the Muslims with a spiritual solace that would serve as effective treatments to their psychological disorder and emotional disturbances; despondency in particular, through a principle of the Islamic monotheism; *at-Tawakkul*, in order to appease the depressed and frustrated ones, so that the effects of despondency can be effectively mitigated, if not totally eradicated. The study employs, historical and analytical research methods, leveraging the relevant library materials, the internet, journals, caches and more. Findings revealed that, many people resort to taking horrible decisions as a result of distress that lingers or affliction that dashes their hopes, which they allowed to overcome them, at the detriment of their worldly lives and hereafter. The study recommends that the Muslims should adhere to the better understanding of *at-Tawakkul*, among other teachings and remedies provided by Islam, in order to rectify despondency and its offshoots. It equally proffers some practical and spiritual ways to curb despondency among the Nigerian Muslims in particular, and the Muslims in other parts of the world generally, in order to achieve the desired outcomes; sound mental health and serenity.

**Keywords:** despondency, solace, *at-Tawakkul*, Muslims, monotheism.

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## Introduction

*Shari'ah*; The Islamic law is a comprehensive system which encompasses both private and public affairs. It governs the spiritual and worldly lives of man (Muslim). It regulates personal thoughts, mental health, beliefs and human attitudes to whatever happens to him. Allah says: "We have neglected nothing in the Book."<sup>1</sup> With respect to regulating one's attitude to what happens him, the *Shari'ah* is also explicit. Allah says: "And never give up hope of Allah's Mercy. Certainly no one despairs of Allah's Mercy, except the people who disbelieve."<sup>2</sup> He says elsewhere: "Say: 'O 'Ibadi (My slaves) who have transgressed against themselves (by committing evil deeds and sins)! Despair not of the Mercy of Allah, verily Allah forgives all sins. Truly, He is Oft-Forgiving, Most Merciful."<sup>3</sup>

However, *Shari'ah* sustains the fundamental human rights. Allah says: "Say (O Muhammad SAW): "Come, I will recite what your Lord has prohibited you from: Join not anything in worship with Him; be good and dutiful to your parents; kill not your children because of poverty - We provide sustenance for you and for them; come not near to *Al-Fawahish* (shameful sins, illegal sexual intercourse, etc.) whether committed openly or secretly, and kill not anyone whom Allah has forbidden, except for a just cause (according to Islamic law). This He has commanded you that you may understand. And come not near to the orphan's property, except to improve it, until he (or she) attains the age of full strength; and give full measure and full weight with justice. We burden not any person, but that which he can bear. And whenever you give your word (i.e. judge between men or give evidence, etc.), say the truth even if a near relative is concerned, and fulfill the Covenant of Allah, This He commands you, that you may remember."<sup>4</sup> Furthermore, the scholars of the Islamic law inferred the fact that, the basic necessities that *Shari'ah* safeguards for every individual include: right to freedom of religion, right to freedom of life (existence), right to freedom of intellect (brain), right to freedom of lineage (lawful procreation) and right to freedom of property (possessions). Moreover, *at-Tawakkul* being a principle of the Islamic monotheism (*at-Tawheed*), and an integral part of a Muslim's faith, can be seen as a tool for protecting virtually all the mentioned human rights, and majorly two, which are: 'right to freedom of life (existence) and right to freedom of intellect (brain)' respectively.

Despondency being the quality of unhappiness, with no hope or enthusiasm,<sup>5</sup> has devastating and devilish consequences. And the victim, if not given the much needed attention and appropriate succor,

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<sup>1</sup> Surah al-An'am:38.

<sup>2</sup> Surah Yūsuf: 87.

<sup>3</sup> Surah az-Zumar: 53.

<sup>4</sup> Surah al-An'am: 151-152.

<sup>5</sup> <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/despondency>

which would appease his mind and douse his tension, may resort to either taking his own life or perpetrating other sorts of evils, which are not only abominable but prohibited in Islam, this is the current state of many Nigerians, especially the middle and the working classes. Notably, according to the Minister of Health and Social Welfare of Federal Republic of Nigeria; Prof. Muhammad Ali Pate represented by Daju Kachallom, permanent secretary of the ministry, at the 2024 World Mental Health Day in Abuja, he acknowledged that the Federal Government is aware of the increase in depression and suicide attempts among the Nigerians, attributing the issues to the prevailing economic hardship. Thereafter he emphasized the point that over 20 percent of Nigerians suffer from mental health conditions such as anxiety, depression and substance use disorders.<sup>6</sup> In the same vein, the Courts of law have recorded numerous of cases of suicide and other self-inflicted harms that many frustrated and despairing Nigerians have caused themselves. Although, the cases were not peculiar to the Muslims alone, rather, it occurred widely across ages, genders, geographical locations, and cultural and religious backgrounds. For instance, a suicidal case was recorded on the 18<sup>th</sup> of October, 2023, where a 300 Level Microbiology female Muslim undergraduate student of the University of Ilorin, Kwara State, identified as Hameedah Sanni, aged 20, reportedly took her own life at her residence located at the main campus of the University. It was gathered that the deceased committed suicide by drinking sniper, a strong pesticide used for agricultural purposes over her indebtedness to loan App.<sup>7</sup> In a similar development, no fewer than eight suicide cases were recorded among the university students in Nigeria, within the span of six months; January to June, 2024.<sup>8</sup> According to the report, within the mentioned period, the undergraduates, comprising men and women, took their own lives. In another report by another media outlet, from June to September 2024, there have been at least 10 reported cases of suicide and about eight of the victims being young people and reasons linked to hardship in the land<sup>9</sup>. Most recently, on the 13<sup>th</sup> of August, 2025, a 200 level dental student of Obafemi Awolowo University (OAU), identified as Ajibola Ibitayo committed suicide at his parents home in Ejigbo, Osun state, after he got to know that he would have to repeat an academic year due to his failure in the semester results<sup>10</sup>. Undoubtedly, that can also be seen as one of the consequences of despondency, to mention but few.

However, experiencing and enduring melancholic and unfavorable situations are not new to the history of Islam, as many predecessors had gone through the worst, but with their sincere belief in Allah and unflinching trust and dependence on Him, they were able to overcome every adversity. Allah says: “Or think you that you will enter Paradise without such (trials) as came to those who passed away before you?

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<sup>6</sup><https://businessday.ng/health/article/more-nigerians-becoming-depressed-attempt-suicide-due-to-hardship-fg/>

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.thisdaylive.com/index.php/2023/10/19/300l-female-unilorin-student-commits-suicide/?amp>

<sup>8</sup> <https://dailytrust.com/how-7-students-died-by-suicide-in-6-months/>.

<sup>9</sup> <https://www.vanguardngr.com/2024/10/10-dramatic-suicides-linked-to-hardship-in-nigeria/>

<sup>10</sup> <https://gazettengr.com/oau-student-dies-by-suicide-after-failing-exam>

They were afflicted with severe poverty and ailments and were so shaken that even the Messenger and those who believed along with him said, "When (will come) the Help of Allah?" Yes! Certainly, the Help of Allah is near!"<sup>11</sup> Thus, these instances elicited the choice of the present work. As it attempts to prevent further occurrence of such horrible decisions, leveraging one of the principles of the Islamic monotheism; *at-Tawakkul*. It also indicates how Islam deals with the treatment of psychological and emotional disturbances of a man, providing spiritual solace and eternal tranquility, that serve as a lasting solution to such disorders. Nevertheless, Muslims are enjoined to accept the fact that no matter how they struggle to attain the best here or hereafter, they can only achieve that which Allah has preordained. Allah says: "And you will not, unless (it be) that Allah wills, the Lord of the 'Alamin (mankind, jinns and all that exists)."<sup>12</sup>, this implies the sixth article of faith; *Al-Qadar*.

### Concept of *at-Tawakkul*

***Tawakkul***: being an Arabic verbal noun, denotes: "showing helplessness in a matter and relying on someone other than oneself"<sup>13</sup>. Technically, it is a spiritual and emotional reaction that the doer directs to Almighty Allah, hoping for help and seeking refuge from disappointment and obstacles<sup>14</sup>. Summarily, it is obtainable from the definitions cited above, that there is a strong harmony between the literal and technical meanings of *at-Tawakkul*. As it literally refers to putting trust in, delegating to, or relying on others. Meanwhile, in order to make it technically suitable in the context of Islam, all the literal meanings of *at-Tawakkul* must be related to Almighty Allah alone,. Thus, *at-Tawakkul* can be defined as the act of depending on, relying on, putting trust in, and showing helplessness to Allah, while all the humanly possible efforts are exerted in order to attain one's goal.

### Concept of Despondency

The Arabic term for despondency is: "*al-Qunūt*". It signifies relinquishing relief or despairing of it, which is the opposite of feeling secure from Allah's plan<sup>15</sup>. However, a synonymous word to *al-Qunūt*, according to the usage of the Qur'an and the prophetic tradition is; *al-Ya'su*, which has identical meaning with it, and are being used interchangeably<sup>16</sup>.

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<sup>11</sup> Surah al-Baqorah:214.

<sup>12</sup> Surah at-Takweer:29.

<sup>13</sup> Ibn Fāris, Abul Husain Ahmad, *Mu'jam Maqāyīs Lughah* (Beirut: Dar Jayl, 1972), 136.

<sup>14</sup> Ibn 'Āshūr, Muhammad al-Ṭāhir, *Tafsīr Al-Tahrīr wa al-Tanwīr* (Tunisia: Dar at-Tanwīr, 1984), 151.

<sup>15</sup> Abdul Wahhab, 'Abdul Rahman bn Hasan bn Muhammad, Qurrat Uyūn al-Muwahhiddeen (Riyādh: Dār al-Tawheed for publishing and distribution, 2012), 460.

<sup>16</sup> Bastawy, Amal bint Abdul-'Aleem Abdul-'Adheem, *Al-Ya'su wa al-Qunūt wa 'Ilājuhuma fī al-Qur'an al-Kareem* (Saudi Arabia: Ummu Al-Qura University Press, 2015), 8-9.

### **Causes of Despondency**

Despondency as a psychological state of being unhappy, disheartened or dejected, does not occur spontaneously, but rather it happens as a result of numerous factors. These factors may be peculiar to a circumstance that the concerned individual finds him or herself. However, there are three major causes of despondency<sup>17</sup> these are:

- (a) The Disbelief in Almighty Allah (infidelity).
- (b) The Total Immersion In Sins and Transgression In The Fear of Allah.
- (c) Experiencing Calamities and Unfulfilled Goals.

However, the causes of despondency are not confined to these three factors only, others include:

- (d) Living In Privation.
- (e) Barrenness or having Female Children only.

### **The Disbelief In Almighty Allah (Infidelity)**

The disbelief in the divinity and oneness of Almighty Allah (infidelity) causes the heart of a man to suffer physical and psychological distress and afflictions, in fact, there is a tendency to live a miserable life by such an individual (unbeliever), because, he has interrupted the seamless connection between the Creator (Allah) and His creature. Allah says: “But whosoever turns away from My Reminder (i.e. neither believes in this Quran nor acts on its orders, etc.) verily, for him is a life of hardship, and We shall raise him up blind on the Day of Resurrection.”<sup>18</sup>

However, despondency as one of the consequences of the disbelief is not only limited to the worldly life, rather, it transcends to the hereafter. Allah says: “And on the Day when the Hour will be established, the *Mujrimun* (disbelievers, sinners, criminals, polytheists, etc.) will be plunged into destruction with deep regrets, sorrows, and despair.”<sup>19</sup> This unequivocally established that disbelief in the oneness and divinity of Allah, is one of the major causes of despondency.

### **The Total Immersion in sins and Transgression in the fear of Allah**

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<sup>17</sup>Bastawy, Amal bint Abdul-'Aleem Abdul-'Adheem, *Al-Ya'su wa al-Qunūt wa 'Ilājuhuma fī al-Qur'an al-Kareem* (Saudi Arabia: Ummu Al-Qura University Press, 2015), 11-12.

<sup>18</sup>Surah at-Tāhā: 124.

<sup>19</sup>Surah ar-Rūm: 12.

A Muslim incurs immeasurable woe through engaging in disobedience to Allah and committing sins. Allah says: “Evil (sins and disobedience of Allah, etc.) has appeared on land and sea because of what the hands of men have earned (by oppression and evil deeds, etc.), that Allah may make them taste a part of that which they have done, in order that they may return (by repenting to Allah, and begging His Pardon).”<sup>20</sup> Consequently, among the worldly taste of the consequences of whichever evil one has perpetrated, is to become depressed, and that which, its most effective cure is sincere repentance to Allah and seeking His forgiveness. Whereas, concerning the transgression in the fear of Allah, that used to happen whenever a sinner magnifies his sins and despairs of Allah’s mercy, as a result of whisper from the Satan, which makes the sin committed seem unforgivable. But fortunately, Allah, the Almighty had gladdened the hearts of the believers and relieved their fear, He says: “Say: “O *‘Ibadi* (My slaves) who have transgressed against themselves (by committing evil deeds and sins)! Despair not of the Mercy of Allah, verily Allah forgives all sins. Truly, He is Oft-Forgiving, Most Merciful. And turn in repentance and in obedience with true Faith (Islamic Monotheism) to your Lord and submit to Him, (in Islam), before the torment comes upon you, then you will not be helped.”<sup>21</sup>

### **Experiencing Calamities and Unfulfilled Goals**

Experiencing calamities is inevitable in the life of man, although, it differs according to the concerned individual, but the life itself, is a trial for the believers. Allah says: “And certainly, We shall test you with something of fear, hunger, loss of wealth, lives and fruits, but give glad tidings to *As-Sabirin* (the patient ones, etc.). Who, when afflicted with calamity, say: “Truly! To Allah we belong and truly, to Him we shall return. They are those on whom are the *Salawat* (i.e. blessings, etc.) (i.e. who are blessed and will be forgiven) from their Lord, and (they are those who) receive His Mercy, and it is they who are the guided-ones.”<sup>22</sup> However, every human being fears that whichever blessing or grace he is endowed with, should be taken away. And whenever an affliction befalls him, he becomes depressed and feeble. It takes a lot of

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<sup>20</sup>Surah ar-Rūm: 41.

<sup>21</sup>Surah az-Zumar: 53-54.

<sup>22</sup>Surah al-Baqorah: 155-157.

appeasement for such an individual to recuperate and sustain his resilience. This is due to the inherent human nature as described by Allah: “And when We cause mankind to taste of mercy, they rejoice therein, but when some evil afflicts them because of (evil deeds and sins) that their (own) hands have sent forth, lo! They are in despair!”<sup>23</sup>

### **Living In Privation**

Undoubtedly, Allah has guaranteed to sustain and nourish all His creatures. He says: “And no (moving) living creature is there on earth but its provision is due from Allah. And He knows its dwelling place and its deposit (in the uterus, grave, etc.). all is in a Clear Book (*Al-Lauh Al-Mahfuz* – the Book of Decrees with Allah).”<sup>24</sup> Yet, out of His wisdom, He apportioned provisions among His creatures separately but justly, in order to make the life meaningful and habitable for all and sundry. Else, it would have been uninhabitable for all, He says: “Is it they who would portion out the Mercy of your Lord? It is We Who portion out between them their livelihood in this world, and We raised some of them above others in ranks, so that some may employ others in their work. But the Mercy (Paradise) of your Lord (O Muhammad SAW) is better than the (wealth of this world) which they amass.”<sup>25</sup> This emphasizes the belief in predestination (*al-Qadar*) in the hearts of Muslims. In spite of this fact, human nature detests living in penury, and man spares no effort in order to conquer it. But whenever he feels losing out to privation against his will, he then resort to complaining about Allah. Allah says: “As for man, when his Lord tries him by giving him honour and gifts, then he says (puffed up): “My Lord has honoured me. But when He tries him, by straitening his means of life, he says: “My Lord has humiliated me!”<sup>26</sup>

### **Barrenness or having Female Children only**

Allah blesses every living creature, human beings inclusive, with procreation in order to avert quick extinction and to adorn them, He says: “Wealth and children are the adornment of the life of this world. But the good righteous deeds (five compulsory prayers, deeds of Allah’s obedience, good and nice talk, remembrance of Allah with glorification, praises and thanks, etc.), that last, are better with your Lord for rewards and better in respect of hope.”<sup>27</sup> Even though, Almighty Allah has not promised any children after marriage, but has been part of His blessings to whomever He wishes. However, everyone is scared of being barren, in fact, the prophets of Allah, may the peace and blessings be upon them, were not left out of

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<sup>23</sup>Surah ar-Rūm: 36.

<sup>24</sup>Surah Hud: 16.

<sup>25</sup>Surah az-Zukhruf: 32.

<sup>26</sup>Surah al-Fajr: 15-16.

<sup>27</sup>Surah al-Kahf:46.

this, as many of them were mostly unconcerned about the material benefits, but prayed for righteous children, which were explicitly prayers against barrenness. Because, it (barrenness) does not cause fruitlessness alone, but it also incites despondency at the same time, Allah says: “ (This is) a mention of the mercy of your Lord to His slave Zakariya (Zachariah). When he called out his Lord (Allah) a call in secret, Saying: “My Lord! Indeed my bones have grown feeble, and grey hair has spread on my head, And I have never been unblest in my invocation to You, O my Lord! And Verily! I fear my relatives after me, since my wife is barren. So give me from Yourself an heir, Who shall inherit me, and inherit (also) the posterity of Ya’qub (Jacob) (inheritance of the religious knowledge and Prophethood, not the wealth, etc.). And make him, my Lord, one with whom You are Well-pleased! (Allah said) “O Zakariya (Zachariah)! Verily, We give you the glad tidings of a son, His name will be Yahya (John). We have given that name to none before (him). He said: “My Lord! How can I have a son, when my wife is barren, and I have reached the extreme old age. He said: “So (it will be). Your Lord says; It is easy for Me. Certainly I have created you before, when you had been nothing!”<sup>28</sup> Likewise, not only the childlessness disheartens the man, rather, out of ungratefulness, man grumbles about being blessed with a female children only. In fact, his dissatisfaction with such a blessing is not only restricted to mere displeasure and complaints, rather, it incited some desperate and weak-minded ones to resort to female infanticide, Allah says: “And when the news of (the birth of) a female (child) is brought to any of them, his face becomes dark, and he is filled with inward grief! He hides himself from the people because of the evil of that whereof he has been informed. Shall he keep her with dishonour or bury her in the earth? Certainly, evil is their decision.”<sup>29</sup>

### **Signs of Despondency**

Every illness or abnormality has its specific sign and symptom. Therefore, despondency being a sad emotional state, has its typical signs and symptoms. However, some common signs of despondency<sup>30</sup> are:

- (a) Feeling lethargic all the time.
- (b) Not feeling like taking initiative.
- (c) Becoming reactive.
- (d) Feeling of ‘I am not good enough’.
- (e) Feeling insecure.

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<sup>28</sup>Surah Maryam: 2-9.

<sup>29</sup>Surah an-Nahl: 58-59.

<sup>30</sup><https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/beating-despondency-during-3rd-wave-janine-shamos>



### **Effects of Despondency**

Undoubtedly, nothing is done, said or conceived without a reason. And every deed has its effects, be it positive or negative. Hence, the effects of despondency can be said to be indefinite, considering its rampancy among the people. However, four major effects of despondency<sup>31</sup> are:

- (a) Having Ill-thought about Allah.
- (b) continuing to commit sins and abandoning acts of obedience.
- (c) Worry, grief and sadness.
- (d) Feeling helpless, lazy and weak.

However, the effects of despondency are not confined to the aforementioned alone, rather, it is best known, experienced and described by the affected individual.

### **Instances of offenses related to despondency under the *Shari'ah***

Undoubtedly, despondency is never the end, but the beginning of an end. Therefore, whenever any of its mentioned signs or another, is noticed in an individual, whether by himself or through someone else, then, a prompt rehabilitation and remedy must be initiated in order to curtail its devastating effects, else, it would certainly degenerate to an unexpected horrible situation. Unfortunately, the most rampant and terrible effects of despondency among the Nigerians nowadays is the act of committing suicide. This spreads continuously like a wildfire, which respects no boundary, religion, gender or age. Thus, it is necessary to identify the root cause of despondency in an individual or community, and ascertain its signs, only that would enable one to promptly tackle its effects and revive the ailing mental health and serenity.

Two major offenses related to despondency are discussed below:

- (a) Suicide
- (b) Murder and Infanticide.

### **Suicide**

The Almighty Allah, the Creator of every soul and the Giver of all lives, does not joke with it, at all. Neither its bearer (the person alive) nor someone else (a third party) is permitted to terminate it (the soul) unjustly, except if a person is guilty of any of the offenses that warrants execution by the Islamic law, and that which can be carried out only by the constituted authority, under an Islamic government. Else,

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<sup>31</sup>Bastawy, Amal bint Abdul-'Aleem Abdul-'Adheem, *Al-Ya'su wa al-Qunūt wa 'Ilājuhuma fī al-Qur'an al-Kareem* (Saudi Arabia: Ummu Al-Qura University Press, 2015), 13.

tampering with a life recklessly for any other flimsy reason is an heinous sin in the sight of Allah. And for that reason, Islam has given a stern warning and pronounced a severe punishment for whoever perpetrate any evil that leads to the loss of life, particularly a self-inflicted harm such as suicide. On a general basis, the Almighty Allah admonishes the believers thus: “And do not kill yourselves (nor kill one another). Surely, Allah is Most Merciful to you. And whoever commits that through aggression and injustice, We shall cast him into the Fire, and that is easy for Allah.”<sup>32</sup>

The severity of the offense merits the admittance into the Hellfire as clearly stated. However, with regard to committing suicide specifically, the prophet (pbuh) said: “Whoever throws himself down from a mountain and kills himself, will be in the Hellfire, falling into it, abiding therein forever. And whoever drinks poison and kills himself, will have his poison in his hand, sipping it in the Hellfire, abiding therein forever. And whoever kills himself with an iron weapon will have his iron weapon in his hand, stabbing himself in the stomach with it in the Hellfire, abiding therein forever.”<sup>33</sup>

He (pbuh) further warned his nation against such an abominable act, in another narration, he said: “There was a man among those who came before you who had a wound. He became despondent (impatient), so he took a knife and cut his hand with it. The blood did not stop until he died. Almighty Allah said: My servant rushed to Me with his life, so I have forbidden him Paradise.”<sup>34</sup>

Evidently, it has been established that, it is religiously forbidden to intentionally kill oneself no matter the situation. As such, Islam does not take it lightly with the suiciders, and has declared that the Hellfire is going to be their final abode. Justifiably, the only privilege that Islam gives the one whom has been overwhelmed by despondency and thought that death is the only way out of his problem, is to supplicate to Allah to keep him alive, if being alive would be better for him, and take his life, if that would be better for him, as recorded in an Hadith. The prophet (pbuh) said: “None of you should wish for death because of some affliction that has befallen him. If he must wish for it, let him say: Oh Allah, keep me alive as long as life is good for me, and take me, if death is good for me.”<sup>35</sup>

### **Murder and Infanticide**

Allah’s mercy is not limited to His individual servants, rather, it is wide and comprehensive, it encompasses all His creatures, particularly the mankind; dead or alive, believer or unbeliever. Hence, just like He has forbidden a man from killing himself intentionally, at the same time, He has prohibited him

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<sup>32</sup>Surah an-Nisā: 29-30.

<sup>33</sup> Al-Bukhari, Muhammad bn Ismail, *Sahih-al-Bukhari* (Riyadh: Darul Salam Publisher, 1997), 5778.

<sup>34</sup> Al-Bukhari, Muhammad bn Ismail, *Sahih-al-Bukhari* (Riyadh: Darul Salam Publisher, 1997), 3463.

<sup>35</sup>Al-Bukhari, Muhammad bn Ismail, *Sahih-al-Bukhari* (Riyadh: Darul Salam Publisher, 1997), 5671.

from murdering another person. Thus, on no account has Islam permitted any individual to tamper with the life of another, except on the basis of being a delegate of the constituted authority to execute whom is guilty of death penalty. Else, the severity of the act incurs its perpetrator the wrath of Allah and a perpetual stay in the Hellfire. Allah says: “And whoever kills a believer intentionally, his recompense is Hell to abide therein, and the Wrath and the Curse of Allah are upon him, and a great punishment is prepared for him.”<sup>36</sup>

He, the Almighty, further declared the consequences of murder in another verse thus: “Because of that We ordained for the Children of Israel that if anyone killed a person not in retaliation of murder, or (and) to spread mischief in the land – it would be as if he killed all mankind, and if anyone saved a life, it would be as if he saved the life of all mankind.”<sup>37</sup>

With respect to infanticide, it is an act which displeases Allah. He severally warned against it in various verses of the noble Qur’an, and the perpetrators of such atrocities are promised to be brought to book on the day of resurrection. However, beside the stern warning and the declared punishment for the act, He, the Almighty made an outright and general condemnation for it, He says: “Indeed lost are they who have killed their children, from folly, without knowledge, and have forbidden that which Allah has provided for them, inventing a lie against Allah. They have indeed gone astray and were not guided.”<sup>38</sup>

The prophet (pbuh) also warned his nation against the involvement in any of the seven catastrophic acts he mentioned, among which is killing the soul prohibited (protected) by Allah. He laid a further emphasis on the severity of the subject matter (murder), he says: “If the people of the heaven and the earth were to share in the blood of a believer (i.e. murder him), Allah would throw them all into the Hell.”<sup>39</sup>

In fact, he (pbuh) has remarked in one of his authentic sayings that, for this present world (life) to cease to exist, is lesser in the sight of Allah, than the killing of a Muslim man unjustly,<sup>40</sup> indicating how abominable the act is. Almighty Allah’s continuous aid is sought against killing of other people unjustly, or being killed.

### **Islamic Ruling on Despondency**

Islam has criminalised despondency. The unambiguous Islamic ruling on despondency is prohibition, based on the clear cut evidence from the noble Qur’an and the tradition of the prophet (pbuh). Majorly, all the verses that discussed despondency in the Qur’an, indicate either its implied prohibition (dissuasion) or its outright prohibition (unlawfulness). Concerning the implied prohibition, Allah says: “And when We

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<sup>36</sup>Surah an-Nisā: 93.

<sup>37</sup>SurahAl-Māidah:32.

<sup>38</sup> Al-An’ām: 140

<sup>39</sup>At-Tirmidhi, Muhammad bn Isa at-Tirmidhi, *Jami’ At-Tirmidhi* (Riyadh: Darul Salam Publisher, 2007), 1398.

<sup>40</sup> At-Tirmidhi, Muhammad bn Isa at-Tirmidhi, *Jami’ At-Tirmidhi* (Riyadh: Darul Salam Publisher, 2007), 1395.

cause mankind to taste of mercy, they rejoice therein, but when some evil afflicts them because of (evil deeds and sins) that their (own) hands have sent forth, lo! They are in despair!”<sup>41</sup> And for the outright prohibition, He says: “Say: “O *‘Ibadi* (My slaves) who have transgressed against themselves (by committing evil deeds and sins)! Despair not of the Mercy of Allah, verily Allah forgives all sins. Truly, He is Oft-Forgiving, Most Merciful.”<sup>42</sup> In essence, despondency is not only prohibited in Islam, but rather, it is considered to be one of the major sins, considering its devastating effects on the life of the depressed Muslim.

**The practical ways through which Islam rectifies despondency can be seen as follows:**

Despondency being a state of bad mental health is identified as a psychological disorder.<sup>43</sup> It is a characteristic of all forms of depression which feels deep and long lasting. Several literature have been written in contribution to what is now known as Islamic psychology, identified in Arabic as “*Ilm al-Nafs*”, which means “the science of the self or psyche”. This science provides an Islamic perspective of the philosophical, biological, psychological, and psychiatric aspects of human life. However, some Islamic solutions to despondency are discussed below:

**1. The Belief In Allah and In The Predestination**

A sincere belief in the divinity of the Almighty Allah forms the basis of *al-Tawakkul*. Similarly, it also necessitates the belief in the predestination. However, it forestalls despondency in the sense that, a cognizant Muslim believes in the existence of Allah, His divinity and His wisdom behind whatever He preordained. Having known that He possesses the kingdom of the heavens and earth, He controls all the mankind, jinns and all that exists, being the Most Beneficent, the Most Merciful and the Best Disposer of all the affairs. This conviction alone gives solace to the heart and body of its bearer and eliminate any form of desperation and despondency. Allah says: “Say: “Nothing shall ever happen to us except what Allah has ordained for us. He is our *Maula* (Lord, Helper and Protector).” And in Allah let the believers put their trust.”<sup>44</sup>

**2. Diligence and Occupation**

Engaging in profitable vocation, craft, business or educational pursuit ward off despondency and any of its agents. Since it was asserted long ago that “an idle hand is the devil’s workshop”. Basically, *at-Tawakkul* requires exerting one’s personal efforts in achieving one’s desired goal, and it dissuades

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<sup>41</sup>Surah ar-Rūm: 36.

<sup>42</sup>Surah az-Zumar:53.

<sup>43</sup><https://encyclopedia.arabpsychology.com/despondency/>

<sup>44</sup>Surah at-Tawbah: 51.

indolence and unemployment. As indolence and unemployment beget privation, starvation and other physical and emotional distress, including despondency. Thus, a proper understanding and practice of *at-Tawakkul* suggests diligence, occupation and hard work. Allah says: “But seek, with that (wealth) which Allah has bestowed on you, the home of the Hereafter, and forget not your portion of legal enjoyment in this world, and do good as Allah has been good to you, and seek not mischief in the land. Verily, Allah likes not the *Mufsidun* (those who commit great crimes and sins, oppressors, tyrants, mischief-makers, corrupts).”<sup>45</sup> He, the Almighty reiterated this instruction elsewhere, He says: “O you who believe (Muslims)! When the call is proclaimed for the *Salat* (prayer) on the day of Friday (*Jumu’ah* prayer), come to the remembrance of Allah [*Jumu’ah* religious talk (*Khutbah*) and *Salat* (prayer)] and leave off business (and every other thing), that is better for you if you did but know! Then when the (*Jumu’ah*) *Salat* (prayer) is finished, you may disperse through the land, and seek the Bounty of Allah (by working, etc.), and remember Allah much, that you may be successful.”<sup>46</sup> The prophet (pbuh) also discouraged joblessness and indolence. He said: “No one has ever eaten food better than that which he eats from the work of his own hands.”<sup>47</sup>

In essence, before one claims to have relied on, or put trust in Almighty Allah in any affair, one must have exerted his own humanly possible efforts, which are capable of yielding positive result, and which by implication, would forestall joblessness and its consequences.

### 3. Taking Possible Precautionary Measures

Averting despondency through *at-Tawakkul* demands that, the concerned individual takes the possible precautionary measure in order to avert unforeseen circumstance and bad consequence. Allah; the most Exalted instructed the Muslim fighters to take precautionary measure by bearing their arms and armor to the battlefield, in order to forestall defeat and its offshoot. He says: “When you (O Messenger Muhammad SAW) are among them, and lead them in *As-Salat* (the prayer), let one party of them stand up [in *Salat* (prayer)] with you taking their arms with them; when they finish their prostrations, let them take their positions in the rear and let the other party come up which has not yet prayed, and let them pray with you taking all the precautions and bearing arms. Those who disbelieve wish, if you were negligent of your arms and your baggage, to attack you in a single rush, but there is no sin on you if you put away your arms because of the inconvenience of rain or because you are ill, but take every precaution for yourselves. Verily,

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<sup>45</sup>Surah al-Qasas: 77.

<sup>46</sup>Surah al-Jum’ah: 9-10.

<sup>47</sup>Al-Bukhari, Muhammad bn Ismail, *Sahih-al-Bukhari* (Riyadh: Darul Salam Publisher, 1997), 2072.

Allah has prepared a humiliating torment for the disbelievers.”<sup>48</sup> Hence, few other points could be inferred from this very item, these include:

**i. Preventing Recklessness and whatever could incur Self-annihilation**

The effective exhibition of *at-Tawakkul* necessitates that a Muslim avoids whatever could lead to fatality, at the peak, and that which is capable of causing a physical or emotional harm, at the least. This is in order to live a tranquil and happy life as promoted by Islam. This is one of the ways through which *at-Tawakkul* rectifies despondency in the life of a practicing Muslim, Allah says: “and do not throw yourselves into destruction.”<sup>49</sup>

However, prophet Ya’qub in his wisdom to prevent the Egyptian authority from noticing the anticipated arrival of his children to Egypt (based on the directive given by Yusuf) and to forestall their possible apprehension, he advised them to not to enter the country from the same route, which was commended by Allah to be a wise decision, although, it could not hinder Allah’s will, just like he (Ya’qub) had early conceded: “And he said: “O my sons! Do not enter by one gate, but enter by different gates, and I cannot avail you against Allah at all. Verily! The decision rests only with Allah. In him, I put my trust and let all those that trust, put their trust in Him. And when they entered according to their father’s advice, it did not avail them in the least against (the Will of) Allah, it was but a need of Ya’qub’s (Jacob) inner-self which he discharged. And verily, he was endowed with knowledge because We had taught him, but most men know not.”<sup>50</sup> Unarguably, this also indicates that being cautious and preventing recklessness in whichever attempt one makes, does not contravene the principle of *at-Tawakkul*, rather, it counters despondency.

**ii. Adherence to Optimism**

Pessimism can be seen as one of the earliest manifestations of despondency. Thus, it is obligatory for every Muslim to expect the best and favorable outcome of whichever endeavor, and get rid of the negative thoughts. This is in compliance with the verses of the noble Qur’an and the traditions of the prophet (pbuh) to that effect. Allah rebukes the pessimists in many verses, which evidently conveys the prohibition of despondency, He says: “And that thought of yours which you thought about your Lord, has brought you to destruction, and you have become (this Day) of those utterly lost!”<sup>51</sup> Moreover, the optimism of prophet Musa (pbuh) during the turbulent time, healed

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<sup>48</sup>Surah an-Nisā:102.

<sup>49</sup>Surah al-Baqorah:195.

<sup>50</sup>Surah Yūsuf:67-68

<sup>51</sup>Surah Fussilat: 23.

the despondency of his people, and consequently they were all rescued. Allah says: “And when the two hosts saw each other, the companions of Musa (Moses) said: “We are sure to be overtaken. [Musa (Moses)] said: “Nay, verily! With me is my Lord, He will guide me.”<sup>52</sup>

### **iii. Exercising Patience In The Face of Adversities**

Generally, patience is a virtuous conduct, and specifically during the tribulation. It has no disadvantage whatsoever. Its reward is unquantifiable, while its adherents are praised and honoured by Allah. Allah says: “And certainly, We shall test you with something of fear, hunger, loss of wealth, lives and fruits, but give glad tidings to *As-Sabirin* (the patient ones, etc.). Who, when afflicted with calamity, say: “Truly! To Allah we belong and truly, to Him we shall return. They are those on whom are the *Salawat* (i.e. blessings, etc.) (i.e. who are blessed and will be forgiven) from their Lord, and (they are those who) receive His Mercy, and it is they who are the guided-ones.”<sup>53</sup> However, exercising patient in every situation is commendable, but it becomes more necessary during adversity, as it expresses the level of reliance, and the unwavering trust that such a Muslim puts in Allah. The Almighty reports the response of some of the true believers to their tormentors, He says: “And why should we not put our trust in Allah while He indeed has guided us our ways. And we shall certainly bear with patience all the hurt you may cause us, and in Allah (Alone) let those who trust, put their trust.”<sup>54</sup> The prophet (pbuh) also said: “The (real) patience is at the first shock.”<sup>55</sup> In essence, one of the most effective cure for despondency is exercising patience in tribulation. This would mitigate the hurt, calm the tension and prevent the further escalation of the problem, while awaiting the way out.

### **iv. Divine Intervention; Through Repentance and Seeking Forgiveness**

As early discussed, the repercussions of committing sins and engaging in disobedience to Allah by a Muslim, are quite scary and dreadful, that every pious Muslim tries not to be culpable. All sorts of evils and afflictions, including despondency, usually befall a sinner, in order for him to repent and amend his errors. Allah says: “Evil (sins and disobedience of Allah, etc.) has appeared on land and sea because of what the hands of men have earned (by oppression and evil deeds, etc.),

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<sup>52</sup>Surah ash-Shu'araa: 61-62.

<sup>53</sup>Surah al-Baqorah: 155-157.

<sup>54</sup>Surah Ibrahim: 12.

<sup>55</sup>Al-Bukhari, Muhammad bn Ismail, *Sahih-al-Bukhari* (Riyadh: Darul Salam Publisher, 1997), 1283.

that Allah may make them taste a part of that which they have done, in order that they may return (by repenting to Allah, and begging His Pardon).”<sup>56</sup>

However, one may be lucky to have sought for forgiveness before the occurrence of the punishment, this may hinder or alleviate its effects, Allah says: “And Allah would not punish them while you (Muhammad SAW) are amongst them, nor will He punish them while they seek (Allah’s) Forgiveness.”<sup>57</sup> But if unfortunately, the punishment has already descended, then it could be lifted through sincere repentance and seeking forgiveness. This has an intrinsic connection with *at-Tawakkul*, in such a way that, the sinner is convinced that Almighty Allah is capable of solving his problems, and he (the sinner) has the trust in Allah for his sins to be forgiven and to be rescued from the problem he is into. Else, he would not have resorted to supplications and seeking forgiveness. Allah instructed prophet Muhammad (pbuh) to be lenient with his companions, seek forgiveness for them and put his trust in Him (Allah), signifying that *at-Tawakkul* and seeking forgiveness goes hand in hand, in order to solve any form of problem, including despondency. Allah says: “And by the Mercy of Allah, you dealt with them gently. And had you been severe and harsh-hearted, they would have broken away from about you; so pass over (their faults), and ask (Allah’s) Forgiveness for them; and consult them in the affairs. Then when you have taken a decision, put your trust in Allah, certainly, Allah loves those who put their trust (in Him).”<sup>58</sup>

In a nutshell, the physical and spiritual benefits of seeking forgiveness (*al-Istighfār*) and repentance (*at-Tawbah*), is inexhaustible. Thus, it is religiously recommended for a Muslim to leverage it, in order to regain his happiness and tranquility, and to be free from sadness and despondency.

#### **v. Constant Supplication**

Supplicating Allah is inevitable in the life of a Muslim. It is an indispensable act of worship. Its effect precedes the life of its beneficiary, and succeeds the death of its supplicant. It is a commandment of Allah that must be obeyed by every Muslim, Allah says: “And your Lord said: “Invoke Me, [i.e. believe in My Oneness (Islamic Monotheism)] (and ask Me for anything) I will respond to your (invocation). Verily! Those who scorn My

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<sup>56</sup>Surah ar-Rūm: 41.

<sup>57</sup>Surah al-Anfāl: 33.

<sup>58</sup>Surah Āl-‘imrān: 159.



worship [i.e. do not invoke Me, and do not believe in My Oneness, (Islamic Monotheism)] they will surely enter Hell in humiliation!”<sup>59</sup>

However, He further gladdened the believers by informing them of His nearness and knowledge of all their situations, encouraging them to believe, put their trust, and supplicate to Him, and promised to answer them. This also emphasizes the essentiality of supplication, He says: “And when My slaves ask you (O Muhammad SAW) concerning Me, then (answer them), I am indeed near (to them by My Knowledge). I respond to the invocations of the supplicant when he calls on Me (without any mediator or intercessor). So let them obey Me and believe in Me, so that they may be led aright.”<sup>60</sup> Subsequently, there are records in the noble Qur’an narrating the series of ordeals encountered by some servants and prophets of Allah, peace be upon them, coupled with the supplications made thence, and how they were divinely rescued. This also indicates the necessity of supplication, particularly during adversity, despondency and the likes. Allah says: “Is not He (better than your gods) Who responds to the distressed one, when he calls Him, and Who removes the evil, and makes you inheritors of the earth, generations after generations. Is there any *ilah* (god) with Allah? Little is that you remember!”<sup>61</sup>

Moreover, it is a sufficient incentive for a Muslim to know that, whenever he supplicates Allah, he (the Muslim) automatically attracts His (Allah’s) attention and intervention. Allah says: “Say (O Muhammad SAW to the disbelievers): “My Lord pays attention to you only because of your invocation to Him.”<sup>62</sup> The prophet (pbuh) had also urged His nation to stick to supplicating at all the time, in numerous narrations. Likewise, he personally taught and recommended many supplications to his companions, more especially, supplications that have to do with dealing with anxiety, grief, desperation, among other disturbances. These are obtainable from various available books of Hadith.

### **Major findings**

Having justifiably established however the principle of *at-Tawakkul* serves as an Islamic antidote for despondency and ascertaining it to be a problem-solving mechanism, the findings revealed the following:

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<sup>59</sup>Surah al-Gāfir: 60.

<sup>60</sup>Surah al-Baqorah: 186.

<sup>61</sup>Surah an-Naml: 62.

<sup>62</sup>Surah al-Furqān: 77.

- That many Muslims differ on the conception and applicability of *at-Tawakkul*. Whereas, some Muslims are not well informed about its essence and reality, particularly as an effective remedy to despondency.
- That many people resort to taking horrible decisions as a result of distress that lingers or affliction that dashes their hopes. That which, they allowed to overcome them, at the detriment of their worldly lives and hereafter.
- That over 20 percent of Nigerians suffer from mental health conditions such as anxiety, depression and substance use disorders, all which undoubtedly prompts the incessant attempts of suicide and other self-inflicted harms by the frustrated and despairing individuals.
- That over 700,000 people die globally each year as a result of suicide. This is not far-fetched, considering the recorded number of suicide attempts among Nigerians on yearly basis.

These prompt the need to enlighten and sensitize the Nigerian Muslims particularly, and Muslims in other parts of the world generally, on the applicability of *at-Tawakkul* in solving the problem of despondency and the similar psychological disturbances.

### **Recommendation**

Having adequately discussed the perspective and remedy of despondency in Islam, the researcher hereby recommends the following:

- That the Muslims should adhere to the Islamic teachings pertaining to despondency as presented in the present work, and apply it to their daily lives, in order to rectify its effects on the affected ones, and forestall its occurrence to the healthy ones.
- That the Muslims should endeavor to maintain their belief in the predestination, knowing certainly that, whatever happens had been preordained by Allah, out of His wisdom, and that which is the best for the recipient (the afflicted one).
- That the afflicted Muslims should exercise patience and endure during the tribulation, as it would not last forever, let alone the huge reward promised by Allah for the patient ones.
- That the Muslims should endeavor to be righteous and stick to supplications at all times, as it is beneficial in forestalling an affliction before it occurs and in rectifying it after it has happened.
- That the Muslim scholars should prioritize teaching the Muslims the Islamic ways of maintaining good mental health conditions, among other religious remedies to psychological problems, and not only focusing on the explanation of the Islamic Jurisprudence (*al-Fiqh*), as mostly being practiced.

- That those in authority should try to address the issue of despondency by the use of law.
- That the Nigerian Government and the governments elsewhere, should exert her possible efforts to foster the well-being, growth, development, security, peace and emotional stability of her citizens, in order to keep them away from despondency and its offshoots, as the most recorded cases of suicide and other self-inflicted harms, were mostly prompted by hardships and afflictions.

### **Conclusion**

This paper has scrupulously examined the Islamic perspective of despondency, explaining its literal and technical meanings, its rulings in Islam, its causes, signs and effects. Thereafter, it proffered practical solutions to its devastating effects by unambiguously highlighting the ways through which it can be rectified in Islam, and established it (the proffered solutions) to be effective remedies for the menace of despondency.