

**STRATEGIES FOR MAINTAINING
STEADFASTNESS IN FAITH DURING
PERIODS OF TRIBULATION:
AN ISLAMIC THEOLOGICAL AND
PRACTICAL PERSPECTIVE**

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STRATEGIES FOR MAINTAINING STEADFASTNESS IN FAITH DURING PERIODS OF TRIBULATION: AN ISLAMIC THEOLOGICAL AND PRACTICAL PERSPECTIVE

Abstract

This study explores the theological and practical foundations of steadfastness (*thabat*) in Islam, especially in light of contemporary ideological, social, and moral challenges. Drawing from core Islamic sources namely the Qur'an, Prophetic traditions (*Sunnah*), and classical scholarly works the research develops a structured framework for spiritual resilience. As Muslims face rising levels of doubt, identity crises, and moral relativism, understanding the causes of religious deviation becomes critical. Through qualitative content analysis, this paper examines causes such as weak religious knowledge, immoral environments, and a lack of righteous companionship, and it outlines strategies rooted in Islamic tradition: supplication, Qur'anic engagement, righteous

deeds, companionship of the pious, and eschatological awareness. The paper offers a bridge between classical scholarship and modern-day needs, providing practical guidance for educators, parents, scholars, and individuals seeking steadfastness in faith during tribulations.

Keywords: Thabat, Islamic faith, spiritual resilience, religious deviation, Qur'an, Sunnah, fitnah, Tawbah

Introduction

In Islamic theology, *Iman* (faith) is dynamic and susceptible to change depending on internal and external influences. The Prophet Muhammad ﷺ described the human heart as inherently unstable, stating,

الْقَدْرُ إِذَا اسْتَجْمَعَتْ غَلِيَانًا لِقَلْبٍ ابْنِ آدَمَ أَشَدُّ انْقِلَابًا مِنْ

“The heart is more inconsistent than a pot of boiling water.”¹

He would regularly pray:

يَا مُقَلِّبَ الْقُلُوبِ ثَبِّتْ قَلْبِي عَلَى دِينِكَ

¹ Musnad Ahmed, 23816

“O Turner of the hearts, keep my heart firm upon your religion.”²

These traditions illustrate the Prophet’s profound awareness of the volatility of belief and the human condition.

This anthropological view necessitates intentional spiritual effort (*mujahadah*) to maintain one’s faith. In today’s world, the challenges of secular ideologies, digital saturation, and normalized immorality intensify the struggle to uphold religious conviction. As Islamic scholars have long observed, spiritual crises manifest through intellectual doubts (*shubuhah*) and unrestrained desires (*shahawat*), both of which threaten steadfastness.

In this environment, the concept of *thabat* steadfastness in belief and practice becomes crucial. The Qur’an declares:

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا إِن تَنْصُرُوا اللَّهَ يَنْصُرْكُمْ وَيُكَفِّتْ أَقْدَامَكُمْ

“O you who believe, if you support Allah, He will support you and plant your feet firmly.”³

Similarly, the Prophet ﷺ said:

² Jami‘ al-Tirmidhi, 3522

³ Surah Muḥammad (47:7)

وَأَنَّمَا الْأَعْمَالُ بِالْخَوَاتِيمِ

“Verily, deeds are judged by the last of them.”⁴

These principles emphasize that enduring belief requires consistent struggle and divine support.

Types of Trials (Fitan) in Islamic Thought

In classical Islamic theology, fitan (plural of fitnah) refers to tests and tribulations that affect an individual’s faith, morality, and stability. The Qur'an confirms that these trials are part of the human condition:

أَحْسَبَ النَّاسُ أَن يُتْرَكُوا أَن يَقُولُوا آمَنَّا وَهُمْ لَا يُفْتَنُونَ

“Do the people think that they will be left to say, ‘We believe’ and they will not be tested?”⁵

Scholars broadly divide fitan into two key categories:

1. Trials of Doubts (Fitan al-Shubuhah)

These are **intellectual and ideological trials**, which arise from ambiguity, misguidance, or weak religious understanding.

⁴ Sahih al-Bukhari, 6607

⁵ Surah Al-Ankabut (29:2)

Ibn Taymiyyah (d. 728 AH) insightfully identified two major roots of tribulation (fitnah) in the Muslim Ummah: weakness in knowledge and weakness in patience. He said:

"عامّة الفتن التي وقعت من أعظم أسبابها قلة الصبر، إذ الفتنة لها سببان: إما ضعف العلم، وإما ضعف الصبر"⁶.

This profound statement reveals that most societal and ideological upheavals stem from ignorance, which blinds people from distinguishing truth from falsehood, this leads them to uncertainty and doubts.

Finally, these doubts take the form of:

- Misinterpretation of Islamic texts
- Secular or modernist ideologies
- Questioning core doctrines (e.g., Qadar, prophethood, afterlife)

Such trials weaken conviction (yaqeen) and blur the lines between truth (ḥaqq) and falsehood (batil).

فَإِنَّهَا لَا تَعْبَى الْأَبْصَارُ وَلَكِنْ تَعْبَى الْقُلُوبُ الَّتِي فِي الصُّدُورِ

⁶ Al-Mustadrak ‘ala al-Majmū‘ (5/127)

"Indeed, it is not the eyes that are blind, but the hearts within the chests that are blind."⁷

2. Trials of Desires (Fitan al-Shahawat)

These are **trials of lust, greed, and worldly attachments**. The desires of the self (nafs) often lead to moral corruption and spiritual decay.

Al-Ghazali (d. 505 AH) observed:

فإذا استولت عليه النفس، صار أسيراً في حبِّ شهواتها؛ محصوراً في سجنٍ هواها، مقهوراً، مغلولاً، زمامه في يدها، تجرّه حيث شاءت، فتمنع قلبه من الفوائد.

“When desire takes hold through the dominance of the lower self, a person becomes a captive in love with it confined in the prison of passion, overpowered and bound, his reins held in its grip, dragged wherever desire wills, and thus his heart is barred from receiving any true benefit.”⁸

These trials include:

- Unlawful sexual relations
- Greed for wealth and status
- Addiction to fame and pleasure

⁷ Surah Al-Hajj (22:46)

⁸ Al-Ghazali, *Iḥyā' 'Ulūm al-Dīn*, vol. 3, Kitāb Riḡāḡat al-Nafs

- Moral desensitization

The Prophet ﷺ warned:

تُعْرَضُ الْفِتَنُ عَلَى الْقُلُوبِ كَالْحَصِيرِ عُوْدًا عُوْدًا، فَأَيُّ قَلْبٍ أُشْرِبَهَا نُكِتَ فِيهِ نُكْتَةٌ سَوْدَاءُ

“Trials will be presented to the hearts like a woven mat, stick by stick. Any heart that absorbs them will have a black dot placed in it...”⁹

This metaphor shows how **fitan gradually darken the heart**, until right and wrong become indistinguishable.

3. The Interplay between Doubts and Desires

According to **Ibn al-Qayyim (d. 751 AH)**:

القلب يعترضه مرضان يتوارد عليه، إذا استحكما فيه كان هلاكه وموته، وهما: مرض الشهوات، ومرض الشبهات

“The diseases of the heart are two: doubts and desires. The first corrupts understanding, the second corrupts will. When both combine, ruin is complete.”¹⁰

For example:

A person pursuing immoral desires may adopt deviant ideologies to justify them.

⁹ Sahih Muslim, Hadith 144

¹⁰ (Ibn al-Qayyim, Ighāthat al-Lahfān, vol. 1, p. 28)

Or, a person with doubts may find it easier to give in to temptations.

This interplay reinforces deviation unless one turns to sincere repentance and correct knowledge.

4. Contemporary Relevance

In the digital age, fitan are more **widespread and normalized**:

- Shubuhāt (doubts) are spread via influencers, pseudo-scholars, or manipulated content.
- Shahawāt (desires) are promoted through media, entertainment, and consumerism.

What was once considered morally corrupt is now repackaged as freedom or identity. Hence, steadfastness (thabāt) requires:

- Sound Islamic knowledge (Ilm)
- Good companionship (ṣuḥbah ṣaliḥah)
- Constant remembrance (dhikr) and supplication (du'a)

The Prophet ﷺ said:

يَأْتِي عَلَى النَّاسِ زَمَانٌ الصَّابِرُ فِيهِمْ عَلَى دِينِهِ كَالْقَابِضِ عَلَى الْجَمْرِ

“A time will come when holding on to your religion will be like holding onto hot coal.”¹¹

Causes of Religious Deviation

Several core causes for deviation from steadfast faith are identified in classical texts and Qur’anic exegesis:

- Weak religious foundations and ignorance of essential doctrines.¹²
- Neglect of regular engagement with the Qur’an.¹³
- Lack of righteous companionship.¹⁴
- Continuous exposure to corrupt environments and media.
- Failure in spiritual purification (*tazkiyah*).¹⁵

These causes contribute to a decline in one’s spiritual consciousness and moral resolve.

Steadfastness in Faith during Times of Trial (Fitan):

1. Always Ask Allah for Help (الدُّعَاءُ)

The Prophet Muhammad ﷺ regularly made this heartfelt supplication:

¹¹ Sunan al-Tirmidhi, Hadith 2260

¹² Surah al-Isra’ (17:82)

¹³ Surah al-Ra’ad (13:28)

¹⁴ Surah al-‘Ankabut (29:69)

¹⁵ Sunan Abi Dawud, 4833

"يَا مُقَلِّبَ الْقُلُوبِ ثَبِّتْ قَلْبِي عَلَى دِينِكَ"

"O Turner of the hearts, make my heart firm upon Your religion." ¹⁶

This shows that even the Prophet ﷺ, whose heart was the purest, relied on Allah to remain firm. Du'a is a constant spiritual need, not just during hardship. It reflects humility and trust in Allah's control over guidance.

Another beautiful du'a is:

"اللَّهُمَّ اهْدِنِي، وَسِدِّدْنِي، وَارْزُقْنِي، وَثَبِّتْنِي"

"O Allah, guide me, correct me, provide for me, and make me steadfast." ¹⁷

2. Read and Reflect on the Qur'an (Tilawah & Tadabbur –
(التَّلَاوَةُ وَالتَّدَبُّرُ)

Allah says in the Qur'an:

وَقَالَ الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا لَوْلَا نُزِّلَ عَلَيْهِ الْقُرْآنُ جُمْلَةً وَاحِدَةً كَذَلِكَ لِنُثَبِّتَ بِهِ فُؤَادَكَ وَرَتَّلْنَاهُ
تَرْتِيلًا

¹⁶ Tirmidhi, Hadith no. 2140; Ahmad ibn Hanbal, Musnad, no. 26694 graded sahih by al-Albani

Abu Dawud, Sunan, Hadith no. 5074¹⁷

"Thus We have revealed it gradually, to strengthen your heart."¹⁸

The Qur'an strengthens the heart not only through recitation (*tilāwah*), but by deep thinking (*tadabbur*) and action. Ibn al-Qayyim (رحمه الله) said:

"القرآن هو الشفاء التام من جميع الأدواء القلبية"

"The Qur'an is a complete cure for all diseases of the heart."¹⁹

Reciting it regularly, memorizing portions, and applying it makes the soul resistant to doubts and worldly distractions.

3. Do Good Deeds Consistently (العَمَلُ الصَّالِحُ)

Allah promises:

"وَالَّذِينَ جَاهَدُوا فِينَا لَنَهْدِيَنَّهُمْ سُبُلَنَا وَإِنَّ اللَّهَ لَكَنَ الْمُحْسِنِينَ"

"As for those who strive in Our cause, We will surely guide them to Our paths. And Allah is with the doers of good."²⁰

Good deeds strengthen your soul and bring you closer to divine support. Acts like prayer, helping others, and controlling anger

¹⁸ Surah Al-Furqan (25:32)

¹⁹ Source: Zad al-Ma'ad, vol. 4, Ibn al-Qayyim

²⁰ Surah Al-'Ankabut (29:69)

are means to earn Allah's closeness and become spiritually firm.

Al-Ghazali (رحمه الله) said:

"الإصرار على المعصية يُبَيِّت القلب، والمداومة على الطاعة تُحييه"

"Insisting on sin kills the heart, but persistence in obedience revives it." ²¹

4. Surround Yourself with Good Friends (Ṣuḥbah Ṣaliḥah – الصُّحْبَةُ الصَّالِحَةُ)

The Prophet ﷺ said:

"الرَّجُلُ عَلَى دِينِ خَلِيلِهِ، فَلْيَنْظُرْ أَحَدُكُمْ مَنْ يُخَالِلُ"

"A person is on the religion of his close friend, so be careful whom you befriend." ²²

Good company uplifts your faith, reminds you of Allah, and protects you from temptation. Evil friends, on the other hand, are a cause of regret:

"يَا وَيْلَتَى لَيْتَنِي لَمْ أَتَّخِذْ فُلَانًا خَلِيلًا"

"Woe to me! I wish I had not taken so-and-so as a friend." ²³

²¹ Source: Ihya-ul-Ulum al-Din, vol. 3

²² Source: Abū Dāwūd, Sunan, Hadith no. 4833; Tirmidhi, Hadith no. 2378 — graded ḥasan

²³ Surah Al-Furqān (25:28)

As Imam al-Shafi said:

"من أراد معرفة حاله، فليَظر إلى صديقه"

"Whoever wants to know his state, let him look at his friends."

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5. Beware of Shayṭān's Tricks (مَكْرُ الشَّيْطَانِ)

Allah clearly warns:

"إِنَّ الشَّيْطَانَ لَكُمْ عَدُوٌّ فَاتَّخِذُوهُ عَدُوًّا"

"Indeed, Shayṭān is your enemy, so treat him as an enemy." ²⁵

Shayṭān uses doubt, delay, laziness, and false hopes to mislead believers. Ibn al-Jawzi (رحمه الله) wrote an entire book on his deceptions:

"أشدُّ مكائد إبليس أن يُزَيِّن المعصية حتى لا تُرى معصية"

"One of Shayṭān's greatest tricks is beautifying sin until it no longer looks like a sin." ²⁶

To stay protected, regularly recite **أَعُوذُ بِاللَّهِ مِنَ الشَّيْطَانِ الرَّجِيمِ** and stay in remembrance (*dhikr*). ²⁷

²⁴ Al-Bayhaqi, *Manaqib al-Imam al-Shafi*, vol. 2, p. 188

²⁵ Surah Faṭir (35:6)

²⁶ Source: *Talbis Iblis*, Ibn al-Jawzi, pp. 17–24

²⁷ Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhari (3282) and Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim (2610)

6. Think about the Afterlife Often (تَذَكُّرُ الْآخِرَةِ)

Ali ibn Abi Ṭalib (رضي الله عنه) said:

"الدنيا مدبرة والآخرة مقبلة، ولكل واحدة بنون، فكونوا من أبناء الآخرة"

"This world is retreating and the Hereafter is coming. Each has its people—be of the people of the Hereafter." ²⁸

The Prophet ﷺ advised:

"أَكْثَرُوا ذِكْرَ هَازِمِ اللَّذَاتِ"

"Remember often the destroyer of pleasures: death." ²⁹

Thinking of death reduces greed, pride, and attachment to this world, and prepares one for eternity.

7. Hold Yourself Accountable (المُحَاسَبَةُ)

Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb (رضي الله عنه) said:

"حَاسِبُوا أَنْفُسَكُمْ قَبْلَ أَنْ تُحَاسَبُوا، وَزِنُوا أَعْمَالَكُمْ قَبْلَ أَنْ تُوزَنَ لَكُمْ"

"Take account of yourselves before you are taken to account.

Weigh your deeds before they are weighed for you." ³⁰

This practice of daily reflection helps believers correct their intentions and repair mistakes early. Al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī said:

²⁸ Source: Shu‘ab al-Imān, al-Bayhaqi, no. 10113

²⁹ Source: Tirmidhi, Hadith no. 2307 — graded ḥasan by al-Albānī

³⁰ Source: Al-Muwaṭṭa‘, Imam Mālik, Kitāb al-Jamī‘, Hadith no. 1843

"الْمُؤْمِنُ قَوَّامٌ عَلَى نَفْسِهِ، يَحَاسِبُهَا اللَّهُ"

"The believer keeps watch over himself and holds himself accountable for the sake of Allah." ³¹

8. Learn about Prophets and Righteous People (قِصَصُ الْأَنْبِيَاءِ (وَالصَّالِحِينَ

Allah says in the Qur'an:

"وَكُلًّا نَقُصُّ عَلَيْكَ مِنْ أَنْبَاءِ الرُّسُلِ مَا نُثَبِّتُ بِهِ فُؤَادَكَ"

"And all that We relate to you of the stories of the messengers is to make your heart firm." ³²

Their patience, sacrifice, and commitment are timeless models of resilience. Ibn Taymiyyah said:

"هذه القصص من أعظم ما يثبت القلب على الإيمان"

"These stories are among the greatest ways to strengthen the heart upon faith." ³³

Reading the biographies of scholars like Imam Aḥmad, Sufyan al-Thawri, or Ibn Taymiyyah provides real-life examples of remaining firm during trials and pressures.

³¹ Source: Siyar A'lam al-Nubala', vol. 4, al-Dhahabi

³² Surah Hūd (11:120)

³³ Source: Majmu' al-Fatawa, vol. 17, p. 187

Conclusion

In an era marked by ideological confusion, moral temptation, and the widespread trials of *shubuhāt* (doubts) and *shahawat* (desires), the need for steadfastness (*thabāt*) in faith has never been more urgent. These *fitan* test the very roots of our belief, often subtly eroding conviction through daily distractions, compromised values, and social pressures. Yet, Allah, out of His mercy, has not left us without guidance.

The Qur'an, Sunnah, and the legacy of the righteous predecessors offer us a timeless roadmap to navigate these storms. Through sincere supplication, regular Qur'anic reflection, righteous actions, surrounding ourselves with virtuous companionship, and maintaining awareness of both Shayṭān and the Hereafter, we fortify our hearts against spiritual collapse. Self-accountability and the study of the Prophets' lives further deepen our roots in faith, providing practical and emotional anchors.

Remaining steadfast in times of *fītnah* is not a passive state; it is an active, conscious struggle (*jihad al-naḥs*), requiring knowledge, action, and divine reliance (*tawakkul*). True success

lies not in the absence of trials, but in remaining loyal to Allah through them. As the Prophet ﷺ said:

بَدَأَ الْإِسْلَامُ غَرِيبًا، وَسَيَعُودُ كَمَا بَدَأَ غَرِيبًا، فَطُوبَى لِلْغُرَبَاءِ

“Islam initiated as something strange, and it would revert to its (old position) of being strange. so good tidings for the stranger.”³⁴

May Allah make us among those strangers, those who remain firm, faithful, and unshaken until we meet Him.



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³⁴ Sahih Muslim, Hadith 145