

ISLAM AND THE PROBLEM OF EVIL

THE WISDOM BEHIND SUFFERING

In a world where atrocities and suffering are all too commonplace, with the events in Gaza being a heart-wrenching example, a profound question echoes in the minds of many: *"If Allah is all-Merciful, why is there evil in the world?"*

This question is often used by atheists to challenge the faith of believers in moments of despair and injustice. Islam as an eternal faith that is firmly rooted in both revelation and reason is able to provide satisfactory answers to this question just as it is able to resolve other problems that may from time to time confound the human intellect.



Understanding The Problem of Evil

Firstly, let us remember that the question of human suffering is not a new one. Thinkers and philosophers have struggled with this problem from time immemorial. Some have been more successful than others in proffering a useful explanation. Islam however, provides the best solution to this seemingly difficult conundrum. Islam never leaves its adherents confounded and its solution to this problem is another clear proof of the veracity of this Divine religion.

For the arguments posited by atheists to hold, they must demonstrate a logical incompatibility between Divine wisdom and knowledge, and the existence of evil and suffering in the world. This task, however, is an exercise in futility and is impossible by virtue of who Allah is. His wisdom and knowledge are infinite while we are beings who are very limited in our knowledge and capabilities as illustrated by Ustadh Hamza Tzorzits in a single sentence, "Allah has the picture and we have the pixel."

The Atheistic Argument

The atheist argument essentially suggests that the existence of a Merciful and All-Powerful being is highly unlikely, given the prevalence of evil and suffering in the world. They argue that if Allah is good, He should be willing to stop evil and suffering.

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These problematic, flawed, and presumptive assumptions are as follows: 1) **Allah is only Good, Loving, Merciful, and All-Powerful**, and 2) **Allah has not provided a satisfactory reason for suffering and evil in this world**. We will address and refute both of these assumptions, demonstrating that they represent a straw man argument.



Debunking These Untrue Assumptions

"Allah is only Good, Loving, Merciful, and Powerful"

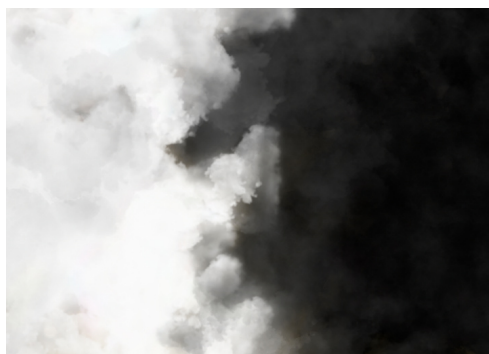
This assumption is incomplete. One cannot isolate the attributes of Allah. A true and comprehensive understanding of Allah must encompass all His names and attributes. So, this is a misconception of the Divine. Understand Allah as He is, not as you assume Him to be. Allah has many names and attributes – such as Al-'Alīm (The All-Knowing), and Al-'Adl (The Just) – which must be considered to grasp His essence fully.

Significantly, Allah is also Al-Hakīm - The Wise. This attribute alone refutes the assumption that God's nature is limited to only being good, loving, merciful, and powerful. It's essential to acknowledge that Allah's wisdom and knowledge are far beyond human comprehension. What may appear inexplicable or unjust from our limited perspective may have a deeper purpose in the divine plan.

There are a number of instances in the Qur'an when Allah Ta'ala makes this point. Consider for example, "And [mention, O Muhammad], when your Lord said to the angels, "Indeed, I will make upon the earth a successive authority." They said, "Will You place upon it one who causes corruption therein and sheds blood, while we exalt You with praise and declare Your perfection?" He [Allah] said, "Indeed, I know that which you do not know." (2:30)

Ibn Kathir explained that Allah Ta'ala said: "I know that which you do not know", means, "I am aware that the benefit of creating this type of creature outweighs the harm that you mentioned, that which you have no knowledge of. I will create among them prophets and send messengers. I will also create among them the truthful, martyrs, righteous believers, worshippers, the modest, the pious, the scholars who implement their knowledge, humble people, and those who love Allah and follow His Messengers."

In the story of Musa AS and Khidr AS, Allah teaches us that there is a higher, perfect wisdom behind events. Two key qualities that Musa AS demonstrated in this story are humility and patience. To understand and accept Divine wisdom, one must also develop these qualities. These are qualities that one can find in the people of Gaza, exemplified by their resilience, forbearance, and acceptance of the divine decree of Allah. They embody humility and patience in the face of adversity.



Allah does not create pure evil. Rather, everything He creates serves a wise purpose, even though it may contain some elements of evil for some people. This is a partial, relative evil. As for total or absolute evil, Allah is exonerated from that. A sickness may avert a person from greater harm, a financial loss may prevent arrogance and tyranny, and even the death of a loved one can reveal hidden wisdom. As Muslims, we believe that every event has a purpose, often beyond human understanding.

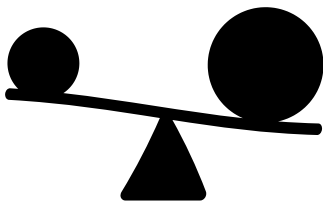
Thus, the first assumption is false and a misrepresentation of Allah, falling into the trap of a straw man fallacy. If one were to understand the Allah through Islam, they would recognize that Allah is not only Good, Loving, Merciful, and Powerful but also Wise. And it is logically impossible to show an incompatibility between Divine wisdom and knowledge, and the existence of evil and suffering in the world.

Debunking These Untrue Assumptions

"Allah has not provided a reason for evil and suffering"

This assumption is incorrect. The Qur'an and Hadith provide a multitude of explanations and reasons for life's trials and tribulations. We will explore a few of these here.

Life is a test, not a perpetual celebration. This worldly life is a temporary abode, a place of test and trial. We will be tested with both ease and hardship, success and failure, joy and sorrow. Life is not inherently about suffering but in the same breath, enduring these tests are a part of life.



The Qur'an reminds humans that Allah "created death and life to test you [as to] which of you is best in deed - and He is the Exalted in Might, the Forgiving." (67:2)

Furthermore, our purpose is not solely to seek happiness or enjoyment, but to worship Allah. As stated in the Qur'an, "And I did not create the jinn and mankind except to worship Me." (51:56). Through worship, we encounter difficulties, suffering, and pain, but we address these challenges in a specific manner. In every situation, we should ask, "What does Allah want from me in this particular situation?"

The Prophet (saw) has said, "How wonderful is the case of a believer; there is good for him in everything and this applies only to a believer. If prosperity comes to him, he expresses gratitude to Allah and that is good for him; and if adversity befalls him, he endures it patiently and that is better for him". Thus, the believer, in all situations, reacts positively in line with Divine commands

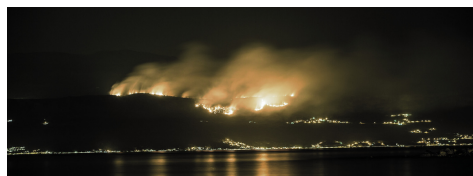
Having debunked these two false assumptions, the entire argument collapses. The truth is that one of the most common atheist arguments can be easily dismantled by the ordinary believer.

Personal Evil

Free will explains the existence of personal evil. One of the key tenets of Islamic belief is the concept of human free will. Allah Ta'ala has given human beings the choice between good and evil, making them accountable for their actions. The evils we witness, such as murder, oppression, and tyranny, are often the result of human actions. Without free will, moral choices would have no meaning. We explain personal evil through this lens of accountability, which extends into the afterlife, where the oppressed receive justice, and the oppressors face the consequences of their actions.

Natural Disasters

An objection could be made that not all calamities and catastrophes are direct results of human action. Natural disasters, like volcanoes or tsunamis are not caused by human interference. Our answer to this would be that these calamities serve as reminders of Allah's grandeur and the limitations of human power. They can also be seen as forms of divine punishment or as balances in the environmental and cosmic laws.



An Alternative Angle

We must be aware that many who bring these arguments are often influenced by personal experiences and emotions. In these situations, they will not heed logic, but in reality they seek empathy and spirituality. We need to listen with an intent to understand and answer their doubts based on their individual circumstances. Our interactions should not begin with judgment of the individual but rather with a sincere desire for their guidance.



The Resilience of Muslims in The Face of Adversity

The Palestinian struggle, with its stories of resilience and faith amidst suffering, stands as a testament to the enduring faith that Muslims have in Allah's wisdom and justice. When disbelievers witness the attitude of Muslims in Palestine, many are astonished. This resilience and faith can often lead people to embrace Islam. Philosophical naturalists reduce suffering to meaningless, physical processes, which they boil down to non-conscious, random, non-rational, cold, blind, indifferent electrons whizzing around. That is the only meaning they attribute to it. To them, there is no higher purpose, there is no good recompense to look forward to.

Islam, however, gives a different meaning. Allah tests those He loves and His love is the greatest achievement. On other occasions, the pain that we endure results in the exoneration of our sins or could be a means of the elevation of our status in the hereafter.

The meaning we ascribe to suffering is not our own, but that given by Allah. When we adopt this divine perspective, suffering becomes a means to cultivate patience and humility before Allah. As Allah Ta'ala says, "So, surely with hardship comes ease. Surely with [that] hardship comes [more] ease." (94:5-6).

The reward of the patience of a believer is Paradise which is a place of such eternal and unadulterated happiness that it will cause a person to forget all prior misery and difficulties. The Prophet (saw) said, "And then that person from amongst the inmates of Paradise who had led the most miserable life [in the world] would be brought 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 reply: 'By Allah, no, O my Lord, never did I face any hardship or experience any distress.'"

This Hadith, and many like it, illustrate the temporary and insignificant nature of this world and its suffering compared to the ultimate and pure reality of the hereafter and its joys. As Muslims, all of our pain and hardship becomes bearable due to the promise of the love of Allah and eternal happiness in Jannah.



In conclusion, the problem of evil and suffering in Islam is not a sign of a merciless God, but a test of faith, a call to patience, and a reminder of the transient nature of this world. The real abode of ultimate justice and fulfilment of rights is in the hereafter. In the face of the injustices we witness, like those in Gaza, our faith offers not only solace but also a promise of divine justice that transcends the limitations of our worldly existence.

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