

Is God Merciful? Islam's Response to Evil & Suffering (Part 1 of 5)

Description: The problem of evil has troubled humankind since time immemorial. This article gives the Islamic perspective on it in a simple and logical way. Part 1: God is more than just The-Merciful and All-Powerful.

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When I was a child, my parents would always chide me for trying to drink my grandfather's whisky. You can imagine, an active and inquisitive



young child observing his grandfather sip this thick, gold, smooth liquid. I wanted some! However, every time I attempted to secretly drink the enticing beverage, I would get into big trouble. I never understood why, thus negative thoughts about my parents would race through my mind. Fast-forward many years: I now realise why they didn't allow me to drink my grandfather's whisky, it could have poisoned me. A 40 percent volume alcoholic drink would not have been pleasant on my young stomach or liver. However, when I was younger, I did not have access to the wisdom that formed the basis of my parents' decision, yet I thought I was justified in my negativity towards them.

This sums up the atheist attitude towards God when trying to understand evil and suffering in the world (*note: this doesn't apply to all atheists*). The above story is not intended to belittle the suffering and pain that people experience. As human beings we must feel empathy and find ways of alleviating people's hardships. However, the example

is meant to raise a conceptual point. Due to a valid and genuine concern for human and other sentient beings, many atheists argue that the existence of a powerful and merciful[1] God is incompatible with the existence of evil and suffering in the world. If He is The-Merciful, He should want the evil and suffering to stop, and if He is All-Powerful, He should be able to stop it. However, since there is evil and suffering, it means that either He is not powerful, or He lacks mercy, or both.

The evil and suffering argument is a very weak one because it is based on two major false assumptions. The first concerns the nature of God. It implies that God is only The-Merciful and All-Powerful, thereby isolating two attributes and ignoring others that the Qur'an has revealed about God. The second assumption is that God has provided us with no reasons for why He has allowed evil and suffering to exist.[2] This is not true. Islamic revelation provides us with many reasons for why God has allowed evil and suffering to exist. Both assumptions will be addressed below.

Is God only The-Merciful and All-Powerful?

According to the Qur'an, God is *Al-Qadeer*, meaning the All-Powerful, and *Ar-Rahmaan*, meaning The-Merciful, which also implies compassion. Islam requires that mankind know and believe in a God of power, mercy and goodness. However, the atheist grossly misrepresents the comprehensive Islamic conception of God. God is not only The-Merciful and All-Powerful; rather, He has many names and attributes. These are understood holistically via God's oneness. For instance, one of His names is *Al-Hakeem*, meaning the The-Wise. Since the very nature of God is wisdom, it follows that whatever He wills is in line with Divine wisdom. When something is explained by an underlying wisdom, it implies a reason for its occurrence. In this light, the atheist reduces God to two attributes and by doing so builds a straw man, thereby engaging in an irrelevant monologue.

The writer Alom Shaha, who wrote *The Young Atheist's Handbook*, responds to the assertion that Divine wisdom is an explanation for evil and suffering by describing it as an intellectual cop-out:

"The problem of evil genuinely stumps most ordinary believers. In my experience, they usually respond with an answer along the lines of, 'God moves in mysterious ways.' Sometimes they'll say, 'Suffering is God's way of testing us,' to which the obvious response is, 'Why does he have to test us in such evil ways' To which the response is, 'God moves in mysterious ways.' You get the idea." [3]

Alom, like many other atheists, commits the fallacy of *argumentum ad ignorantiam*, arguing from ignorance. Just because he cannot access Divine wisdom does not mean it does not exist. This reasoning is typical of toddlers. Many children are scolded by their parents for something they want to do, such as eating too many sweets. The toddlers usually cry or have a tantrum because they think how bad mummy and daddy are, but the child does not realise the wisdom underlying their objection (in this case, too many sweets are bad for their teeth). Furthermore, this contention misunderstands the definition and nature of God. Since God is transcendent, knowing and wise, then it

logically follows that limited human beings cannot fully comprehend the Divine will. To even suggest that we can appreciate the totality of God's wisdom would mean that we are like God, which denies the fact of His transcendence, or implies that God is limited like a human. This argument has no traction with any believer, because no Muslim believes in a created, limited God. It is not an intellectual cop-out to refer to Divine wisdom, because it is not referring to some mysterious unknown. Rather, it truly understands the nature of God and makes the necessary logical conclusions. As I have pointed out before, God has the picture, and we have just a pixel.

Although I empathise with their concern and anguish at the suffering inflicted on fellow sentient beings, some atheists suffer from a veiled type of egocentrism. This means they make special effort not to see the world from any perspective other than through their own eyes. However, in doing so, they commit a type of emotional"or spiritual"fallacy. They anthropomorphise God and turn Him into a limited man. They assume that God must see things the way we see things, and therefore He should stop the evil. If He allows it to continue, He must be questioned and rejected.

The problem of evil and suffering argument exposes a cognitive bias known as egocentrism. Such a person cannot see any perspective on a particular issue apart from their own. Some atheists suffer from this cognitive bias. They assume that since they cannot possibly fathom any good reasons to justify the evil and suffering in the world, everyone else"including God"must also have the same problem. Thus they deny God, because they assume that God cannot be justified for permitting the evil and suffering in the world. If God has no justification, then the mercy and power of God are illusions. Thus, the traditional concept of God is nullified. However, all atheists have done is superimposed their perspective on God. This is like arguing that God must think how a human thinks. This is impossible because human beings and God cannot be compared, as God is transcendent and has the totality of wisdom and knowledge.

Endnotes:

[1] The problem of evil and suffering argument has been expressed in a number of different ways. Some of the arguments use the words good, merciful, loving or kind interchangeably. Despite the varying use of words, the argument remains the same. Instead of using the word good, terms like merciful, loving, kind, etc., can also be used. The problem of evil assumes that the traditional concept of God must include an attribute that would imply God does not want evil and suffering to exist. Hence, using alternative words like merciful, loving and kind do not affect the argument.

[2] This assumption has been adapted from Professor William Lane Craig's treatment on the problem of evil. Moreland, J. P. and Craig, W. L. (2003). *Philosophical Foundations for a Christian Worldview*. Downers Grove, Ill, InterVarsity Press. See chapter 27.

Is God Merciful? Islam's Response to Evil & Suffering (Part 2 of 5)

Description: The problem of evil has troubled humankind since time immemorial. This article gives the Islamic perspective on it in a simple and logical way. Part 2: God has the picture; we just have a pixel.

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Comparing man with God exposes their inability to understand things holistically. The atheist would probably at this point exclaim that this means man has more compassion than God. This further highlights their inability to see things from beyond their perspective, and exposes their failure to fathom that God's actions and will are in line



with a Divine reason that we cannot access. God does not want evil and suffering to happen. God does not stop these things from happening because He sees something we do not, not that He wants evil and suffering to continue. God has the picture and we just have a pixel. Understanding this facilitates spiritual and intellectual tranquillity because the believer understands that ultimately all that occurs in the world is in line with a superior Divine wisdom that is based on superior Divine goodness. Refusing to accept this is actually where the atheist falls into the quagmire of arrogance, egocentrism and ultimately despair. He has failed the test, and his misunderstanding of God makes him forget who God is, and dismisses the fact of Divine wisdom, mercy and goodness.

At this point the atheist might respond by describing the above as an intelligent way of evading the problem. If the theist can refer to God's wisdom "and that His wisdom is so great that it cannot be understood" then we can explain anything 'mysterious' in reference to a Divine wisdom. I somewhat empathise with this reply, however, in the context of the

problem of evil and suffering, it is a false argument. It is the atheist that refers to God's attributes to begin with; His power and mercy. All that is being said is that they should refer to God as who He is, not as an agent with only two attributes. If they were to include other attributes such as wisdom, their argument would not be valid. If they were to include the attribute of wisdom they would have to show how Divine wisdom is incompatible with a world full of suffering or evil. This would be impossible to prove because there are so many examples in our intellectual and practical lives where we admit our intellectual inferiority" in other words, there are cases where we submit to a wisdom we cannot understand. We rationally submit to realities that we cannot understand on a regular basis. For example, when we visit the doctor we assume that the doctor is an authority. We trust the doctor's diagnosis on this basis. We even take the medicine the doctor prescribes without any second thought. This and many other similar examples clearly show that referring to God's wisdom is not evading the problem. Rather, it is accurately presenting who God is and not making out that God has only two attributes. Since He is The-Wise, and His names and attributes are maximally perfect, it follows that there is wisdom behind everything that He does" even if we do not know or understand that wisdom. Many of us do not understand how diseases work, but just because we do not understand something does not negate its existence.

The Qur'an uses profound stories and narratives to instil this understanding. Take, for instance, the story of Moses and a man he meets on his travels, known as Khidr. Moses observes him do things that seem unjust and evil, but at the end of their journey, the wisdom that Moses did not have access to is brought to light:

"So the two turned back, retraced their footsteps, and found one of Our servants" a man to whom We had granted Our mercy and whom We had given knowledge of Our own. Moses said to him, 'May I follow you so that you can teach me some of the right guidance you have been taught?' The man said, 'You will not be able to bear with me patiently. How could you be patient in matters beyond your knowledge?' Moses said, 'God willing, you will find me patient. I will not disobey you in any way.' The man said, 'If you follow me then, do not query anything I do before I mention it to you myself.' They travelled on. Later, when they got into a boat, and the man made a hole in it, Moses said, 'How could you make a hole in it? Do you want to drown its passengers? What a strange thing to do!' He replied, 'Did I not tell you that you would never be able to bear with me patiently?' Moses said, 'Forgive me for forgetting. Do not make it too hard for me to follow you.' And so they travelled on. Then, when they met a young boy and the man killed him, Moses said, 'How could you kill an innocent person? He has not killed anyone! What a terrible thing to do!' He replied, 'Did I not tell you that you would never be able to bear with me patiently?' Moses said, 'From now on, if I query anything you do, banish me from your company" you have put up with enough from me.' And so they travelled on.

Then, when they came to a town and asked the inhabitants for food but were refused hospitality, they saw a wall there that was on the point of falling down and the man repaired it. Moses said, 'But if you had wished you could have taken payment for doing that.' He said, 'This is where you and I part company. I will tell you the meaning of the things you could not bear with patiently: the boat belonged to some needy people who made their living from the sea and I damaged it because I knew that coming after them was a king who was seizing every [serviceable] boat by force. The young boy had parents who were people of faith, and so, fearing he would trouble them through wickedness and disbelief, we wished that their Lord should give them another child "purer and more compassionate" in his place.[1] The wall belonged to two young orphans in the town and there was buried treasure beneath it belonging to them. Their father had been a righteous man, so your Lord intended them to reach maturity and then dig up their treasure as a mercy from your Lord. I did not do [these things] of my own accord: these are the explanations for those things you could not bear with patience.'"
(Qur'an 18: 65-82)

Endnotes:

[1] This part of the story shows God's mercy. All children enter paradise "which is eternal bliss" regardless of their beliefs and actions. Therefore, God inspiring the man to kill the boy is to be understood through the lens of mercy and compassion.

Is God Merciful? Islam's Response to Evil & Suffering (Part 3 of 5)

Description: The problem of evil has troubled humankind since time immemorial. This article gives the Islamic perspective on it in a simple and logical way. Part 3: Some lessons from the story of Moses and Khidr.

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In addition to contrasting our limited wisdom with God's, this story also provides key lessons and spiritual insights. The first lesson is that in order to understand God's will, one has to be humble. Moses approached Khidr, and knew that he had some Divinely inspired knowledge that God had not given to Moses.



Moses humbly asked to learn from him, yet Khidr responded by questioning his ability to be patient; nevertheless, Moses insisted and wanted to learn. (The spiritual status of Moses is very high according to the Islamic tradition. He was a prophet and messenger, yet he approached the man with humility.) The second lesson is that patience is required to emotionally and psychologically deal with the suffering and evil in the world. Khidr knew that Moses would not be able to be patient with him, as he was going to do things that Moses thought were evil. Moses tried to be patient but always questioned the man's actions and expressed his anger at the perceived evil. However, at the end of the story, Khidr explained the Divine wisdom behind his actions after exclaiming that Moses was not able to be patient. What we learn from this story is that to be able to deal with evil and suffering in the world, including our inability to understand it, we must be humble and patient.

Commenting on the above verses, the classical scholar Ibn Kathir explained that Khidr was the one to whom God had given knowledge of the reality behind the perceived evil and suffering, and He had not given it to Moses. With reference to the statement "You will not be able to bear with me patiently", Ibn Kathir writes that this means: "You will not be able to accompany with me when you see me doing things that go against your law, because I have knowledge from God that He has not taught you, and you have knowledge from God that He has not taught me."[\[1\]](#)

In essence, God's wisdom is unbounded and complete, whereas we have limited wisdom and knowledge. Another way of putting it is that God has the totality of wisdom and knowledge; we just have its particulars. We see things from the perspective of our fragmentary viewpoint. To fall for the trap of egocentrism is like believing you know the entire puzzle after seeing only one piece. Hence Ibn Kathir explains that the verse "How could you be patient in matters beyond your knowledge?" means that there is a Divine wisdom that we cannot access: "For I know that you will denounce me justifiably, but I have knowledge of God's wisdom and the hidden interests which I can see but you cannot."[\[2\]](#)

The view that everything that happens is in line with a Divine wisdom is empowering

and positive. This is because God's wisdom does not contradict other aspects of His nature, such as His perfection and goodness. Therefore, evil and suffering are ultimately part of a Divine purpose. Among many other classical scholars, the 14th century scholar Ibn Taymiyya summarises this point well: "God does not create pure evil. Rather, in everything that He creates is a wise purpose by virtue of what is good. However, there may be some evil in it for some people, and this is partial, relative evil. As for total evil or absolute evil, the Lord is exonerated of that."[\[3\]](#)

This does not negate the concept of objective moral truths. Even if everything is in line with ultimate goodness, and evil is 'partial', it does not undermine the concept of objective evil. Objective evil is not the same as absolute evil, rather it is evil based on a particular context or set of variables. So something can be objectively evil due to certain variables or context, and at the same time it can be included with an ultimate Divine purpose that is good and wise.

This evokes positive psychological responses from believers because all the evil and all the suffering that occur are for a Divine purpose. Ibn Taymiyya summarises this point as well: "If God"exalted is He"is Creator of everything, He creates good and evil on account of the wise purpose that He has in that by virtue of which His action is good and perfect."[\[4\]](#)

Henri Laoust in his *Essay sur les doctrines sociales et politiques de Taki-d-Din Ahmad b. Taimiya*, also explains this position: "God is essentially providence. Evil is without real existence in the world. All that God has willed can only conform to a sovereign justice and an infinite goodness, provided, however, that it is envisaged from the point of view of the totality and not from that of the fragmentary and imperfect knowledge that His creatures have of reality...."[\[5\]](#)

Endnotes:

[\[1\]](#) Ibn Kathir, I. (1999) Tafsir al-Qur'an al-'Atheem. Vol 5, p. 181.

[\[2\]](#) Ibid.

[\[3\]](#) Ibn Taymiyyah, A. (2004) Majmu' al-Fatawa Shaykhul Islam Ahmad bin Taymiyyah. Vol 14, p. 266.

[\[4\]](#) Ibn Taymiyyah, A. (1986) Minhaj al-Sunnah. Edited by Muhammad Rashad Salim. Riyadh: Jami'ah al-Imam Muhammad bin Saud al-Islamiyah. Vol 3, p142.

[\[5\]](#) Cited in Hoover, J. (2007) Ibn Taymiyya's Theodicy of Perpetual Optimism. Leiden: Brill, p.4.

Is God Merciful? Islam's Response to Evil & Suffering (Part 4 of 5)

Description: The problem of evil has troubled humankind since time immemorial. This article gives the Islamic perspective on it in a simple and logical way. Part 4: Some of the reasons God has given for the existence of evil.

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Does God give us reasons for why He has allowed evil and suffering to exist?

A sufficient response to the second assumption is to provide a strong argument that God has communicated some reasons to us about why He has allowed evil and suffering in the world. The intellectual richness of Islamic thought provides us with many reasons.



Our purpose is worship

The primary purpose of the human being is not to enjoy a transitory sense of happiness; rather, it is to achieve a deep internal peace through knowing and worshipping God. This fulfilment of the Divine purpose will result in everlasting bliss and true happiness. So, if this is our primary purpose, other aspects of human experience are secondary. The Qur'an states, "**I did not create either *jinn* [spirit world] or man except to worship Me.**" (Qur'an 51:56)

Consider someone who has never experienced any suffering or pain, but experiences pleasure all the time. This person, by virtue of his state of ease, has forgotten God and therefore failed to do what he was created to do. Compare this person with someone whose experiences of hardship and pain have led him to God, and fulfilled his purpose in

life. From the perspective of the Islamic spiritual tradition, the one whose suffering has led him to God is better than the one who has never suffered and whose pleasures have led him away from God.

Life is a test

God also created us for a test, and part of this test is to experience trials with suffering and evil. Passing the test facilitates our permanent abode of eternal bliss in paradise. The Qur'an explains that God created death and life, **"so that He may put you to test, to find out which of you is best in deeds: He is the The-Almighty, The-Forgiving."** (Qur'an 67:2)

On a basic level, the atheist misunderstands the purpose of our existence on Earth. The world is supposed to be an arena of trials and tribulations in order to test our conduct and for us to cultivate virtue. For example, how can we cultivate patience if we do not experience things that test our patience? How can we become courageous if there are no dangers to be confronted? How can we be compassionate if no one is in need of it? Life being a test answers these questions. We need them to ensure our moral and spiritual growth. We are not here to party; that is the purpose of paradise.

So why is life a test? Since God is perfectly good, He wants every single one of us to believe and as a result to experience eternal bliss with Him in paradise. God makes it clear that He prefers belief for us all: **"And He does not approve for His servants disbelief."** (Qur'an 39:7)

This clearly shows that God does not want anyone to go to hell. However, if He were to enforce that and send everyone to paradise, then a gross violation of justice would take place; God would be treating Moses and the Pharaoh and Hitler and Jesus as the same. A mechanism is needed to ensure that people who enter paradise do so based on merit. This explains why life is a test. Life is just a mechanism to see who among us are truly deserving of eternal happiness. As such, life is filled with obstacles, which act as tests of our conduct.

In this regard, Islam is extremely empowering because it sees suffering, evil, harm, pain and problems as a test. We can have fun, but we have been created with a purpose and that purpose is to worship God. The empowering Islamic view is that tests are seen as sign of God's love. The Prophet Muhammad, may God's peace and blessings be upon him, said, "When God loves a servant, He tests him."[\[1\]](#)

The reason God tests those whom He loves is because it is an avenue to achieve the eternal bliss of paradise"and entering paradise is a result of Divine love and mercy. God points this out clearly in the Qur'an: **"Do you suppose that you will enter the Garden without first having suffered like those before you? They were afflicted by misfortune and hardship, and they were so shaken that even [their] messenger and the believers with him cried, 'When will God's help arrive?' Truly, God's help is near."** (Qur'an 2:214)

The beauty of the Islamic tradition is that God, who knows us better than we know

ourselves, has already empowered us and tells us that we have what it takes to overcome these trials. **"God does not burden any soul with more than it can bear."** (Qur'an 2:286)

However, if we cannot overcome these trials after having tried our best, God's mercy and justice will ensure that we are recompensed in some way, either in this life or the eternal life that awaits us.

Knowing God

Having hardship and suffering enables us to realise and know God's attributes, such as The-Protector and The-Healer. For example, without the pain of illness we would not appreciate the attribute of God being The-Healer, or the one who gives us health. Knowing God in the Islamic spiritual tradition is a greater good, and worth the experience of suffering or pain, as it will ensure the fulfilment of our primary purpose, which ultimately leads to paradise.

Greater good

Suffering and evil allow a greater good, also known as second-order good. First-order good is physical pleasure and happiness, and first-order evil is physical pain and sadness. Some examples of second-order goodness include courage, humility and patience. However, in order to have a second-order good (like courage) there must be a first-order evil (like cowardice). According to the Qur'an, elevated good such as courage and humility do not have the same value as evil: **"Say Prophet, bad cannot be likened to good, though you may be dazzled by how abundant the bad is. Be mindful of God, people of understanding, so that you may prosper."** (Qur'an 5:100)

Free will

God has given us free will, and free will includes choosing evil acts. This explains personal evil, which is evil or suffering committed by a human being. One can ask: *why has God given us free will at all?* In order for the tests in life to be meaningful, there must be free will. An exam is pointless if the student is obligated or forced to answer correctly on each question. Similarly, in the exam of life, human beings must be given adequate freedom to do as they please.

Good and evil lose their meaning if God were to always ensure we chose good. Take the following example into consideration: someone points a loaded gun to your head and asks you to give charity. You give the money, but does it have any moral value? It does not, for it only has value if a free agent chooses to do so.

Endnotes:

[1] Tirmidhi

Is God Merciful? Islam's Response to Evil & Suffering (Part 5 of 5)

Description: The problem of evil has troubled humankind since time immemorial. This article gives the Islamic perspective on it in a simple and logical way. Part 5: Some of the reasons God has given for the existence of evil"continued.

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Detachment from the world

According to the Islamic tradition, God has created us so that we may worship and draw near to Him. A fundamental principle concerning this is that we must detach ourselves from the ephemeral



nature of the world. Known as *dunya*, meaning low or lowly, the ephemeral world is the place of limitations, suffering, loss, desires, ego, excessiveness and evil. Suffering shows us how truly low the *dunya* is, thereby facilitating our detachment from it. Thus we are able to draw closer to God.

The Prophet Muhammad, may God's peace and blessings be upon him, was reported to have said, "Love of the *dunya* is the root of all evil."^[1] The greatest evil according to Islam is denying and associating partners with God; therefore detachment from the *dunya*

is necessary to reach the ultimate spiritual goal of nearness to God, and subsequently paradise.

The Quran makes it very clear that the *dunya* is ephemeral and a deceiving enjoyment: **"Know that the life of this *dunya* is but amusement and diversion and adornment and boasting to one another and competition in increase of wealth and children"like the example of a rain whose [resulting] plant growth pleases the tillers; then it dries and you see it turned yellow; then it becomes [scattered] debris."** (Qur'an 57:20)

The concept of the *dunya* should not be confused with the positive aspects of creation, known in Arabic as *'alam* and *khlaq*. These concepts relate to the beauty and wonder of what God has created. They are intended to encourage people to reflect and understand which serve as a means to conclude that there is a Divine power, mercy and wisdom behind them.

Suffering of innocent people is temporary

Even if there is a lot of greater good to be actualised, one may observe that some people still suffer without experiencing any relief. This is why in Islam, God not only provides justifications for evil and suffering in this world but also recompenses them. At the end, all believers who suffered and were innocent will be granted eternal bliss, and all the suffering they had"even if they suffered all of their life"will be forgotten forever. The Prophet Muhammad, may God's peace and blessings be upon him, said:

"... the person who had suffered the most affliction in the world of those destined for Paradise will be brought forth and merely dipped into Paradise for a moment. Then he will be asked 'O son of Adam, have you ever seen suffering? Have you ever experienced hardship in your life?' He will reply 'No my Lord, by God. I have never undergone suffering. I have never seen hardship.'"[2]

Spiritual perspectives

Under atheism, evil has no purpose. It is one of the blind forces in the world that indiscriminately chooses its prey. Those who are victims of suffering and evil have no emotional and rational perspectives to help alleviate their suffering or put their experiences into context. Someone could have suffered all their lives and just ended up in the grave. All of their suffering, sacrifice and pain would have absolutely no meaning whatsoever. Evil is viewed to occur due to prior physical processes, and those who experience evil have no recourse. They cannot attribute any type of will to it, whether human or Divine, because everything is just reduced to blind, random and non-rational physical occurrences. Thus, the logical implications of atheism are quite depressing.

The Islamic tradition has a fountain of concepts, principles and ideas that facilitate the believer's journey in life. The Prophet Muhammad, may God's peace and blessings be upon him, empowered the believers with hope and patience. All of the suffering that we face is a means of spiritual purification, thereby facilitating paradise in which we will forget every suffering that we ever experienced:

"No calamity befalls a Muslim but that God expiates some of his sins because of it, even though it were the prick he receives from a thorn."[\[3\]](#)

"Amazing is the affair of the believer, verily all of his affair is good, and this is for no one except the believer. If something of good/happiness befalls him he is grateful and that is good for him. If something of harm befalls him he is patient and that is good for him."[\[4\]](#)

Even natural disasters and fatal illnesses are seen through the eyes of hope, mercy and forgiveness. The Islamic perspective on illness is that it is a form of purification, which facilitates eternal bliss in paradise for the sick. The Prophet Muhammad, may God's peace and blessings be upon him, encouraged visiting the sick: "Feed the hungry, visit the sick, and free the captives."[\[5\]](#) Those who take care of the sick are rewarded with mercy and forgiveness, and ultimately paradise. There are many Prophetic traditions that elaborate on these points. For example, the Prophet Muhammad, may God's peace and blessings be upon him, said that if a believer dies of the plague or a stomach illness, they are considered as a martyr, and all martyrs[\[6\]](#) go to paradise.[\[7\]](#) There are inspiring traditions of mercy, reward and blessings for those who visit and care for the sick; the Prophet Muhammad, may God's peace and blessings be upon him, said that whoever visits a sick person "is plunging into mercy until he sits down, and when he sits down he is submerged in it."[\[8\]](#) A moving and powerful narration from the Prophet Muhammad, may God's peace and blessings be upon him, teaches us that those who visit the sick will find God with them:

"Verily, God, the Exalted and Glorious, will say on the Day of Judgement: 'O Son of Adam! I fell ill, but you did not visit Me.' The human will ask, 'O my Sustainer! How could I visit You when You are the Sustainer of the Worlds? And how can You fall sick?' He, the Almighty, will say, 'Did you not know that such and such a servant of Mine was sick. But you did not visit him. Did you not know that, had you visited him, you would have found Me by his side?'"[\[9\]](#)

Even in the case of natural disasters like tsunamis, the believing victims would be considered people of paradise because death by drowning is considered martyrdom in the Islamic tradition. The Prophet Muhammad, may God's peace and blessings be upon him, said in this regard, "Anyone who drowns is a martyr."[\[10\]](#) Islamic scholars conclude that if a believer died as a result of being crushed by a building during an earthquake (some even extend this to a plane or a car crash), then they are considered people of paradise. The Prophet Muhammad, may God's peace and blessings be upon him, said that one of the martyrs includes "the one who died in a collapsed (building)".[\[11\]](#)

But God could create a world without suffering

Notwithstanding the discussion so far, a key objection that usually follows is "but God could create a world without suffering". This contention is just a repackaging of the original argument; in other words, *why has God allowed evil and suffering to exist?* Therefore, the same answer applies; Divine wisdom. The one who makes this objection does so because they cannot understand why there is evil and suffering in the first place,

and they believe that a merciful and powerful God should prevent every evil and suffering. Nevertheless, this has already been addressed in this essay.

The 'problem' of evil and suffering is not a problem for the believer, as evil and suffering are understood as functions of God's profound wisdom, perfection and goodness. The spiritual teachings of Islam create a sense of hope, patience and tranquillity. The logical implications of atheism is that one is plunged into a hopeless state and does not have any answers to why evil and suffering exist. This ignorance is mostly due to an egocentrism that makes them fail in their ability to see things from another perspective, just as I was when I thought my parents were malicious when they prevented me from drinking my grandfather's whisky.

Last updated 4 May 2017. Taken and adapted from my book "The Divine Reality: God, Islam & The Mirage of Atheism". You can purchase the book [here](#).

Endnotes:

[1] Al-Bayhaqi's *Shu'ab al-Iman*, traced back to Al-Hasan Al-Basri, who ascribes it to the Prophet Muhammad, may God's peace and blessings be upon him. The scholars have graded this Prophetic tradition as *hasan*; its level of authenticity is good.

[2] Narrated by *Muslim*.

[3] Narrated by *Saheeh Al-Bukhari*.

[4] Narrated by *Muslim*.

[5] Narrated by *Saheeh Al-Bukhari*.

[6] Anyone that attempts suicide bombing or engages in terrorism and dies as a result is not considered a martyr. These evil acts are forbidden in Islam.

[7] Narrated by *Muslim*.

[8] Narrated by *Ahmad*.

[9] Narrated by *Muslim*.

[10] *Ibid*.

[11] *Ibid.*

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