

IS GOD MERCIFUL? ISLAM'S RESPONSE TO EVIL & SUFFERING (PART 2 OF 5)

Rating:

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 understanding 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)

Footnotes:

[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.

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