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Why is the world fraught with evil and suffering?

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By Bachar Bakour

God is Merciful and Just

While the Qur'ān underlines the transcendence, majesty, and absolute power of God, many verses describe Him as a merciful and compassionate Creator. God has committed Himself to bestow grace and mercy [The Qur'an. 6:12]. The Qur'ān, God's final revelation, is accounted as a brand of mercy: **"We have indeed brought them a Book** which We have clearly and wisely spelled out, a guidance and a grace for people who have faith." [The Qur'an. 7:52] The sending of the Prophet Muhammad (Peace be upon him) is a sign of God's mercy: "We have not sent you but as a mercy towards all beings." [The Qur'an. 21:107]

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such as the reliable hadith in which Prophet Muhammad says: “When God decreed the creation, He pledged Himself in His book: My mercy prevails over My wrath.” So, too, in “The merciful are granted mercy by God. Show mercy to those on earth so that you are shown mercy by God in Heaven.”

Additionally, the Qur’an clearly states that God is never unjust to His servants [the Qur’an. 3:182; 8:51; 22:10; 41:46]; God does not like wrongdoers [the Qur’an. 3:57], and He does not wrong anyone by so much as an atom’s weight [the Qur’an. 4:40]. Elsewhere, Muslims are instructed to live by the principle of justice: “O believers, be steadfast in your devotion to God, bearing witness to the truth in all equity. And never allow your hatred of any people to lead you away from justice.

Be equitable, that is nearer to godfearing.” [the Qur’an. 5:8] Whoever does an atom’s weight of good shall see it and whoever does an atom’s weight of evil shall see it, too.[the Qur’an. 99:7-8] As denoted by the phrase ‘an atom’s weight, any act of goodness, however trivial or minute, will be, on the Day of Judgment, brought forth and presented before its doer who will be rewarded for it. And of course, the converse applies as well.

It can be deduced that anyone with a strong belief in God’s unaltered word and unbroken promise must be absolutely sure that those who have created evil, violence, mischief, injustice, etc., who have caused suffering to the innocent, will never get away with what they have done. One day, be it in the near or distant future, they will be brought to divine justice which has committed itself to support the crushed and oppressed people, *either* in this life, or in the life to come.

Life is a test

Life is by nature imbued with numerous forms and ways of test and affliction. On various occasions, the Qur’an reminds man of this undeniably living reality. First, affliction is inevitable: “Do the people reckon that they will be left to say ‘We believe’ and will not be tried? We certainly tried those that were before them, and

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certain measure of fear and hunger, and with diminution of goods, lives and crops; and give good tidings to those who remain patient in adversity who, when a calamity befalls them, say, 'Surely we belong to God, and to Him we return.' On such people, blessings and mercy are bestowed by their Lord, such people will be truly guided." [Qur'an. 2:155-157] "Every soul shall taste of death, and We try you with evil and good by way of trial, then unto Us, you shall be returned." [Qur'an. 21:35] Reflecting on the last quoted verse, stressing the creation of good and evil for the purpose of testing humans, Sayyid Qutb, writes: "To be tested with good things is more difficult than hardship, even though it may appear easier.

The fact is that many people can endure being tested by evil, but few can endure a test with good. When the test takes the form of sickness and weakness, many are able to endure and withstand the hardship, but when its form is that of good health, strength, and ability, then few are those who pass through successfully. People may be able to withstand poverty and deprivation, maintaining their dignity in such situations, but few are those who succeed in a test with comfort and affluence. For the latter tempts us to satisfy all our desires. Equally, there are many who cannot be deterred by torture or physical harm. They are not overawed by such threats and actualities. By contrast, however, only a few can resist the temptations posited by wealth, position, comfort, and desire." (In the Shade of the Quran., 12:30-31.)

So, the whole range of aspects of life, such as knowledge, power, wealth, children, poverty, fame, and beauty, as well as good and evil, clearly reflect the pervasive shaping force of the test. The existence of evil, therefore, is made essential so as to serve the very purpose of creation.

In addition, as things are easily recognisable vis-à-vis their opposites, 'good' as a concept cannot be apprehended unless measured against 'evil'. If 'evil' does not exist at all, how can 'good' be identified?

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