



Core Curriculum

2 Foundations of Islam - Theology

2.11 The Problem of Evil, Suffering and Pain

INTRODUCTION

Bismillāhir Rahmānir Rahīm, As-salāmu ‘Alaykum wa rahmatullāhi wa barakātuh. Peace be upon you brothers and sisters.

Welcome back to the Muslim Converts Channel!

The greatest spiritual crisis that humans will ever face is the problem of evil and suffering. The question goes like this, if God is all good, why does He permit evil and suffering? Why doesn't He stop it? After all, if He loves His creation, He would protect them just like a mother protects her children.

In this lesson, we look at two aspects of the problem of evil in this world. The first is the intellectual problem of evil and suffering. The second is the emotional problem

of evil and suffering. On the latter, we will give some pointers on how to deal with suffering in the modern world.

BODY OF TEXT

Answering the Intellectual Problem of Evil

The intellectual problem of evil sees God and evil as mutually incompatible. If God is all-good and all-loving, then He would naturally want to alleviate suffering from us and get rid of evil. Since there is

great suffering and evil in the world, then God is either

1. powerless to do anything about suffering and evil
2. or careless and callous about His creation
3. or He does not exist

Obviously none of these options are good as they do not help the case for any monotheistic conception of God. Since God is the creator of the universe, it is impossible that He be powerless. Many people see God as All-Loving and All-Good which means that He would or should stop evil if He did indeed exist. Since evil still persists, many atheists will say that this is proof that God, or at least the Abrahamic understanding of God, does not exist.

This is a rather simplistic depiction of the intellectual problem of evil since there is another way of looking at the problem of God and evil that is logically sound.

Yes, God is All-Good and All-Loving, and as the creator of the universe, He is also All-Powerful. So why does He allow evil to exist?

A popular answer that theologians give is the following: God brought us unto this earth in order to test us. If God interferes in every single instance of evil in this world, then what is the point of free will and testing? It is by being tested on this earth that we grow spiritually. With constant divine intervention, we as individuals cannot grow spiritually.

The second answer is that God has morally sufficient reasons for allowing evil to exist. This means that our knowledge and awareness of things is very limited. God sees things from eternity and knows all possible outcomes. He allows evil to exist to the extent that it will have a positive effect in the world or the afterlife or both. We

may not be able to see the good of it as of now, but on the “macroscale” of things it does lead to an ultimate good no matter how bad it seems in the short-term.

This last part thus requires some honesty and humility. We can't predict with 100% accuracy what will happen five minutes from now, how can we ever make a judgment on the effects of evil acts throughout the span of human history in this world and the Hereafter?

The Emotional Problem of Evil

The emotional problem of evil is about people's dislike or even hatred of God who permits suffering in the world. People lose their loved ones, their health, their jobs or see society around them fall apart where much of it is due to evil acts such as murder or illnesses and disease brought about by war. They are angry that God doesn't do anything about it.

Remember that often enough, this kind of attitude stems from a subtle and hidden assumption that there is no afterlife. The person expressing such anger may outwardly believe in the Hereafter and God's Final Judgment, but deep down inside he or she isn't really certain about it.

From an Islamic perspective, and indeed from an Abrahamic perspective, God has the last word on the Day of Judgment. Our lives here are limited, and those of us who live in the 21st century will notice that time goes by super-fast. Know that you will soon die and on your death-bed, you will forget most of the evil and suffering that came your way.

This world, as we said earlier, is a world where God tests our free will. If we didn't have free will, we couldn't be truly good. In order to be truly good and reach union with God, one must be able to choose good over evil. For God to get rid of evil in the world, which is the result of human intentions, he would need to get rid of our free will. But if he did this, he would also take our ability to truly love and do good.

For Allah, this isn't worth the price. Why should Allah sacrifice our potential for infinite greatness and good for the sake of some evil people? And it's not like they're going to get away with it, they will be accountable for every single thing they do in their lives whether it is a

small lie or or a big thing like murder.

But what about those who suffered from evil? According to Islam, God will reward those who suffered from evil on the Day of Judgment. He will do this on multiple levels. First, their suffering will be a means for having their sins forgiven. Second, they will get extra rewards in heaven.

Third, there are some forms of evil that may cause long term psychological pain for its victims. On the Day of Judgment, God will make some people forget the horrible things they suffered in this world in order to fill them with inner peace. It will be as if none of it ever happened.

Finally, remember that suffering is our best teacher. We learn more from suffering than from our happy days. Our happy and comfortable days tend to make us heedless, whereas suffering wakes us up and makes us realize that nothing in this world is dependable. We can only depend on God.

Until Next Time, Thank you for watching. As-salāmu ‘Alaykum wa rahmatullāhi wa barakātuh