

Human Suffering in Muslim Divine Theological Sources

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Abstract: Muslim divine theological sources are two; namely, the Koran and the Prophetic tradition. Both sources explain about human suffering in this world and the coming suffering for some human beings in the hereafter. Some of the human sufferings are caused by their own thoughts, decisions and actions such as adulterers, polytheists and hypocrites while some other sufferings are inflicted by other human beings who decide to become evil doers such as thieves, rapists, robbers, cheaters and killers. The human evil doers make other humans their victims and inflict suffering on them. This study focuses on human suffering based on the Koran and the Prophetic traditions. Some of the sufferings take place in this world while some other sufferings are going to be in the hereafter for some human beings.

Key words: Human suffering, Koran, Prophetic tradition, polytheists, evil doers

INTRODUCTION

Both the Koran and the Prophetic traditions indeed frequently stress the justice of God and He is never unjust to human beings and other beings. The Koran (3: 117, 11: 101, 16: 33, 16: 118 and 43: 76) clearly states that Allah never does injustice to human beings but they do injustice to themselves. The Koran (4: 40) expresses that Allah is never unjust in the least degree:

If there is any good done by human beings, He doubles it and gives from His own presence a great reward

The Koran (10: 44) explains that:

Verily Allah will not deal unjustly with man in aught: It is man that wrongs his own soul

The existence of suffering in this world and in the hereafter is due to human beings who have chosen to become sufferers directly or indirectly and human beings who have chosen to inflict suffering on other human beings. Therefore, suffering has its own causes and purposes; such as, a punishment for human evil doers, a test or a trial for a human being, an opportunity for purification or expiation and finally a form of potentially transformative motive (Ali and Yusuf, 1996).

SUFFERING IS A PUNISHMENT FOR A PROHIBITED ACT OR BELIEF

Believing in polytheism is a prohibited act in Islamic theology. Therefore, suffering is the punishment for human beings who believe in polytheism. According to

Islamic theology, there are two groups of human beings who will be punished by Allah in this world and in the hell in the hereafter. They are polytheists and hypocrites. The Koran (33: 73) states that Allah has to punish the hypocrites, men and women and the polytheists men and women. The Koran (48: 6) explains that Allah will punish the hypocrites, men and women and the polytheists, men and women who imagine an evil opinion of Allah. On them is a round of evil and Allah has hated them and cursed them and gotten hell ready for them and evil is it for a destination. Based on the Koran (48: 6), the polytheists and the hypocrites are men and women who have evil thoughts of Allah. They are punished by Allah because of their evil thoughts.

The Koran (9: 67) explains what the hypocrites do in their lives; the hypocrites, men and women, enjoin evil and forbid what is just and are close with their hands. They have forgotten Allah and He has forgotten them. Verily, the hypocrites are rebellious and perverse. Based on the Koran (9: 67), it is plausible to see the reasons why Allah has to punish the hypocrites men and women. They are punished because they do the evil deeds and they prevent themselves and other peoples from doing the good deeds. They are rebellious peoples against Allah and human goodness.

The hypocrites and the polytheists are the unbelievers in Muslim theological categories of human beings. Since they are the unbelievers, they will be punished eternally in the hell in the hereafter. According to Muslim theology, the hell is for the unbelievers. The Koran (2: 39) states that the unbelievers and believers of Allah's signs are forever the inhabitants of fire. The Koran (3: 131) explains that the fire is prepared for those

who reject faith; they are the unbelievers. The Koran (9: 58) indicates that Allah has promised the hypocrites, men and women and the unbelievers the fire of hell and they dwell there forever for enduring punishment.

The Koran also elaborates of certain evil acts and their punishments such as adultery, stealing and murdering. Islam prohibits adultery and murdering and therefore, there are punishments for adulterers and adulteresses and murderers in Islamic criminal laws. The Koran (25: 68) prohibits killing and adultery. The Koran provides the punishment for adulterer and adulteress one hundred lashes. The punishment for committing adultery is stated in the Koran (23: 3). Muslim men and women are prohibited from committing adultery. If a Muslim man and a Muslim woman commit adultery, each of them is punished with one hundred lashes (Ali and Yusuf, 1996). The Koran (24: 3) states:

The woman and the man guilty of adultery or fornication flog each of them with a hundred stripes; let not compassion move you in their case, in a matter prescribed by Allah if you ye believe in Allah and the last day and let a party of the believers witness their punishment

The punishment provided for adultery and fornication in Islamic criminal laws has been considered inhumane by non-Muslims but Muslims believe in the divine wisdom in prohibiting adultery and fornication and the punishment prescribed in the Koran (24: 3) for the adulterers and adulteresses. Muslim men and women should not commit adultery and fornication if they believe in the divine wisdom in prohibiting them and the punishment prescribed for those who commit adultery and fornication. The non-Muslims see this Islamic criminal laws on adultery and fornication as inhumane because they do not believe in the divine wisdom in prohibiting adultery and fortification and punishing those who commit this evil act.

Stealing is an evil act in Islamic criminal laws. Its doer is punished by cutting of his or her hands. The Koran (5: 38) explains that the punishment for the male and female thief is cutting of his and her hands (Ali and Yusuf, 1996):

As to the thief male or female, cut of his or her hands: A punishment by way of example, from Allah for their crime and Allah is exalted in power, full of wisdom

Cutting of the hands of thief is considered inhumane by non-Muslims because they do not believe in Allah who prohibits stealing and prescribes the cutting of both hands for a thief, man or woman.

In Islamic criminal laws, murdering is prohibited and the murderer is punished by murdering the murderer or

killer (Ali and Yusuf, 1996). The punishment for murderer or killer in Islamic criminal laws is termed al-Qisas as mentioned in the Koran (2: 178-179):

Oh ye who believe! The law of equality is prescribed to you in cases of murder; the free for the free, the slave for the slave, the woman for the woman. But, if any remission is made by the brother of the, then grant any reasonable demand and compensate him with handsome gratitude. This is a concession and a mercy from your Lord. After this whoever exceeds the limits shall be in grave penalty. In the Law of Equality there is (saving of) life to you, O ye men of understanding that ye may restrain yourselves

SUFFERING IS A TRIAL OR TEST TO HUMAN BEINGS

Allah has planned to test human beings their obedience and perseverance by giving them some forms of suffering. The Koran evidently states Allah's plan to test human beings or to put them on trial. The Koran (2: 155-157) explains that Allah surely test human beings with something of fear, hunger, decreasing in the properties, souls and fruits. Allah gives glad tidings to those who patiently preserve when they are afflicted with calamity and they say that to Allah they belong and to Him they return. They are blessed by their Lord and they are the guided. Based on the Koran (2: 155-157), the divine purpose of trial or test of human beings with something of fear, hunger, decreasing in the properties, souls and fruits is to know their perseverance in facing and confronting such calamities. If they are able to become the patient human beings, Allah blesses them and gives them mercy and they become the guided human beings. If they fail in the divine test or trial upon them, they are not blessed and guided by Allah.

The Koran (2: 49) narrates that Allah put the children of Israel on a tremendous trial when their males were slaughtered by the people of pharaoh and Allah saved them from the hard tasks and punishments imposed by the people of pharaoh on the children of Israel. Based on the Koran (2: 49), Allah tested the children of Israel when their males were murdered by the people of pharaoh.

The Koran (47: 31) states that Allah wishes to know two things from human beings when he tests them. He wishes to know their efforts and their patience (Ali and Yusuf, 1996):

And We shall try you until We test those among you who strive their outmost and preserve in patience; and We shall try your reported (mettle)

The test or trial made by Allah upon some human beings is within their capability, not beyond their capability (Hermansen, 2007):

Islamic theology gives priority to omnipotence, the conviction that God is in control. However, believers are assured that God does not test any person beyond his or her capability (2: 286)

Humans are on this earth so that their faith in God be tested. A test necessarily requires calamities and misfortunes (Haq, 2002)

The sufferings experienced by some of the prophets and messengers of Allah themselves may be interpreted for the test or trial purposes from Allah to them. The Koran talks about Holy Prophet (Peace be upon him) who suffered in their earthly lives, sometimes at the hands of their enemies and sometimes tried by God himself. Other Prophets are murdered by their own communities because their messages become too burdensome on the conscience of people who want to silence their voices (Haq, 2002).

The Koran (21: 83) narrates the sufferings experienced by Prophet Ayyub. The Koran (21: 85) relates the sufferings experienced by Prophet Ismail, Idris and Dhu al-Kifli. Ayyub or Job suffers from a number of calamities; his cattle are destroyed, his servants are slain by the sword and his family crushed under his roof. But he holds fast to his faith in Allah. As a further calamity he is covered with loathsome sores from head to foot. The Prophets Ismail and Dhu al-Kifli had suffered in their lifetimes but they were very patient. Finally, Allah accepted their prayers and eliminated the sufferings from them (Ali and Yusuf, 1996).

SUFFERING IS AN OPPORTUNITY FOR PURIFICATION OR EXPIATION OF HUMAN SINS

Some of the sufferings inflicting upon some Muslims are with the purpose to burn off their sins. The hadith or sayings of the Prophet, in particular take this approach:

For every harm a Muslim meets in the form of illness, tiredness, sorrow, distress and pain, even the prick of a thorn, God rewards them (Hermansen, 2007)

According to Hashmi (2008), Ahmad Ibn Hanbal reported that the Prophet Muhammad declared:

By the One in Whose Hand is my soul (i.e., God), no believer is stricken with fatigue, exhaustion, worry or grief but God will forgive him for some of his sins thereby, even a thorn which pricks him

These sufferings are experienced by Muslims or believers in Allah during their lives in this world. Allah promises to pardon their sins provided that they do not forget Allah and do not blame Allah for any suffering happened to them. The patience and endurance are both demanded from Muslims who have experienced sufferings to be rewarded by Allah. Abu Muhammad Samir Faid narrated the Prophet tradition from Abu Yahya Suhaib bin Sinan that the Prophet Muhammad 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 attends him, he expresses gratitude to Allah and that is good for him and if adversity befalls him, he endures it patiently and that is good for him

The sufferings experienced by some Muslims after their deaths are known as the punishment of the grave or the punishment of the barzakh, the intermediate state between this life and the final judgment made by Allah in the hereafter. The punishment of the grave or the barzakh is a purgatorial understanding of suffering in Islamic eschatology. These sufferings are said to have purifying effect and to lower the time spent in the punishment of hellfire (Hermansen, 2007).

SUFFERING IS A FORM OF HUMAN TRANSFORMATION

Suffering is considered a form of human transformation by some Muslim Sufis. Some Sufis undergo suffering at least 40 days in strict austerity and self-discipline in the name of spiritual training and they like life more as its griefs (sic grieves) and hardships increase and they welcome afflictions in the delight of living conscious, deeply felt life. A Muslim Sufi named Fuduli is reported to have expressed:

Never reduce Your grace on people of affliction.
That is make me addicted to more and more misfortunes

Jalal al-Din al-Rumi is reported to have welcomed sufferings and afflictions and entertain them like welcoming the dear guests:

Every moment a grief comes upon your heart like a dear guest. When that emissary of grief visits you, welcome it as a friend; in fact, it is not a stranger to you, for You and it are acquainted

A Muslim Sufi named Ibrahim Haqqi is reported to have welcomed sufferings:

If grief and melancholy come upon your hearth,
Suffer it and know that it is acquainted with you.
If anything occurs to you from the Truth, Accept
it with warm welcome. Sorrow is a guest, entertain
it, so that God may find you welcoming every
misfortune

According to Hermansen (2007):

The Sufi perspective on how to meet suffering may be the most radical in the sense that the human ego and sense of owning any action performed or rejecting any pain encountered would interfere with surrendering to the realization that everywhere you turn, there is the face of Allah (2: 116)

In researcher's mind, the attitude of some Muslim Sufis to welcome sufferings and pains is not inline with the Prophetic tradition demanding Muslims to find prescriptions and medicines to cure for the illnesses and diseases inflicted upon them. However, after they have found no cures for their illnesses and diseases, they have to endure them patiently in their lifetimes.

Due to some attitudes of some Muslim Sufis towards some aspects of human problems and how to overcome them such as sufferings and calamities, some Muslim writers reject Sufism and Muslim Sufis. One of such writers is Hijazi (1998) who concludes that:

Sufism was doomed to destruction from when it first emerged because of its deviation from the teachings of the Quran and Sunah. The small excess, the little innovation, led to the snowball effect such that it emerged as a movement for well-meant increased Ibaadah and Zuhd to Kufr and Innovation

Prosperous, peaceful and wealthy human beings tend to forget Allah. Suffering causes them to remember Allah. When they remember Allah, they are able to transform themselves from the bad actions and beliefs prohibited by Allah to the good ones commanded by Him. The Koran (17: 66-67) tells that when man is in danger at sea he

remembers Allah and when the danger is over and he reaches the land safely, man relapses into his own fancies and he is the most ungrateful man.

Based on the case or example mentioned in the Koran (17: 66-67), Hashmi (2008) states that the example can be applied to human daily lives:

A person may forget God when his financial situation is good but if he were laid off from work then suddenly he had be invoking God for help. When Prophet Muhammad declared God's message, it was the poor and the slaves who made up the bulk of his followers. The rich and prosperous leaders of Mecca, on the other hand, continued to live a life removed from God. It is well-known that rich people such as actors, singers and other celebrities live the most ungodly of lives (Hashmi, 2008)

CONCLUSION

Based on the two Muslim divine theological sources; namely, the Koran and the Prophetic tradition, suffering has existed in this world and will exist in the hereafter for some human beings for certain goals or aims related to human beings themselves. The suffering goals are to punish human evil doers to test human being, to purify human sins and finally to transform human beings.

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