

Question And Answer

Misfortunes and catastrophes

Q.

We always hear and read that God is kind and has mercy on everything. He is fair and just. If it is true, how can we witness all around the world ,when a natural catastrophe break out like flood , earthquake,.. most of the people living there, including children, women or innocent people are involved? They will suffer the same torture that others, like sinful people ,suffer?

A.

To answer this question, there is a need to go over a couple of some essential points first. In the doctrine and ideology of our infallibles (Alul Bayt) the end of our life does not equal death. As a matter of fact, our life on this world is just a first step of a very long way to an eternal life. If I want to use simile I could compare life on the earth like a resting place in a shade of tree to find energy to go on and cross through a desert. Or like a bridge which should be crossed to get to the destination.

The life, the true life, the one which God created us for, eternality, is just to begin when we leave this life. The adversity, difficulties and relief of this world all are limited to this world, they are transitory and ephemeral, like a dream.

If you reflect more, you will get to believe that the problems of this world we are facing to is trivial and passing.

On the other hand, we believe that God is Omniscience, Omnipotent, knowing everything said or unsaid, done or undone. Now, let's imagine someone's right is violated. Even it is possible someone's right is violated because of the cruel relations of other people with each other which its side effect is violating other's right and this person fails in gaining their right; in this case, we believe that God, in the other world, will compensate this violation of right for him in a way that these suppressed ones would wish they suffered more in this world.

I am going to make some examples to make this point more tangible.

Someone lining up in a long line awaiting to receive something essential to him in the hot summer day, he knows why he is waiting for, but maybe a passerby laughs at his patience standing in line.

Or a patient in a theater room accept to go under the surgery, a sharp knife of a surgeon and lots of pains after it, to find his health back and go on a healthy life then after.

A student ignoring all possible fun things around though attracting his attention and naturally he prefers to spend his day with those funny things and plays, but against his desire he accept the difficulty of spending his time for studying which sometimes even means to sacrifice his natural wishes.

Or like a farmer who accepts to tolerate the difficulty of cultivating his farm in a hot day.

These examples bring forth the same idea, that life in this world is like a farm, and its result would be gathered in the next life.

One of the basics of obviating cruelty and injustice from god is to believe in hereafter, the other world, not only to reward the ones who undergone suffering but also to punish those cruel which his cruelties is more than the scope of this world to be punished fully here, a punishment which deserves their broad domain of cruelties.

To one who believes he is going to go to a just court is assured:

First: no right of him has been violated.

Second: some of his rights has been violated, which he is sure those rights will be refunded in the court.

Now, in this part I would like to address some reasons behind catastrophes or misfortunes mankind is faced with. it should be mentioned that I don't claim I am aware of all the reasons just I put my finger in several reasons which are mentioned in traditions and sayings of our infallibles.

The reasons can be classified into different groups:

Test of God

It is mentioned in the holy Quran, test of God is His Way treating with every nations and community from the first of creation till the end. Sometimes, misfortunes and problems happen to put him in the test. The holy Quran states:

﴿ *and surely we shall try you with something of fear and hunger, and loss of wealth and lives and crops; but give glad tidings to the steadfast, who, in adversity say: 'we belong to Allah and to him we shall return. on those will be prayers and mercy from their lord, those are guided.'* ﴾ (Holy Quran, al-baqarah:155-157) ﴿

Reminding and warning

In some cases, the misfortunes are to be a reminder or warn. In this way God awaken them of their false way and at the same time forgives their sins. Here, the misfortunes should be regarded as a blessing helping them to be purified.

Training and perfection

Not all misfortunes should be treated as something negative .In some cases they are necessary to discipline someone ,to help him to reach a higher place, getting closer to God. Like a file brushing and shining a metal stuff. Like a hammer carving a stone making a nice figure out of it. In this way, the misfortunes are gifts of God, a catalyst for the soul to gain purity and perfection. With this meaning we have quite a few number of traditions. It is mentioned in these traditions, there is a direct link between being good and facing more problems. The proof to this meaning is the life story of our infallibles and other holy people.

Reflection of our deeds

Sometimes misfortunes and catastrophes are the outcome of our own deeds. As holy Quran states:

﴿ *“and whatever affliction befalls you, it is on account of what your hands have wrought, and (yet) he pardons most (of your faults)”* (The Holy Quran ash-shuraa :30) ﴾

The outcome of one's deed could bring him misfortunes in two ways:

A reflection of someone's bad deed

When man willingly do something, the result of it bounces back to him ,and his community. Like one who is poisoned by his action -eating food - or the one who dies out of his careless driving. In the same way, a tyrant can bring misfortunes to his people out of his cruelties and negative deeds. Generally speaking, lots of sufferings of mankind are afflicted as the result of his own actions.

A punishment for wrongdoings

The holy Quran has frequently referred to this meaning saying the misfortunes are the punishments of their wrong doing, such as befalling stones, or a loud shout from the sky, or entering into earth, or drowning in the sea.

❦ *“ each of them we seized for his sin. on some we loosed a squall of pebbles, and others were seized by the cry. some we caused to be swallowed up by the earth, and some we drowned. Allah would never wrong them but they wronged themselves.” (The Holy Quran al-ankaboot :40)* ❦

If we accept this concept that our misfortunes are the result of our own deeds, the only point questioning the justice of God is about massive catastrophes afflicted to a large group of people, including children and innocents. To answer this question we narrate 3 traditions:

When Yunes asked God to punish his tribe, God said him: oh! Yunes! In this tribe there are innocent people like children, old men and women, and oppressed ones . I am a just Ruler and my mercy out speed my Anger. I never punish children for the wrongdoings of their adults. ¹

Someone asked Imam Riza:

Why God drowned all the world in the time of Noah?

He said:

*“ there was no child among them. Because God had cut their child bearing fertility since 40 years ago , and God do not punish a group unless they are sinful. In that community, there was a group who did not accept Noah , and the rest were satisfied with the their disapproval.”*²

3. In response to Ozair, about punishing a community while having babies among them ,the Almighty God said: o’ Ozair! When it comes the time to punish a community out of their sins, I put the dead time of kids of that society simultaneously with the breaking out of that punishment. So the kids are living their natural, predetermined life and their death is a natural death and to others it is my punishment.” ³

¹ Bihar Al-Anvar 4:393

² Bihar Al-Anvar 5:283/ elal al-Sharaye:43

³ Bihar al-anvar, 5:286, no.8