**Good and Evil in Islam**



3.104. There must be among you a community calling to good, and enjoining and actively promoting what is right, and forbidding and trying to prevent evil (in appropriate ways). They are those who are the prosperous.(1)



13.22. And those who endure patiently (all adversities they face in God's cause) in pursuit of where God's good, eternal pleasure lies, and they establish the Prayer in conformity with its conditions, and spend of whatever We provide for them secretly and openly, and repel the evil with good. Such are those for whom there is the ultimate (everlasting) abode:



99.7. And so, whoever does an atom's weight of good will see it;



4.40. Assuredly, God wrongs (no one) not even so much as an atom's weight; while if there is a good deed, He multiplies it (with respect to its outcomes and the reward it will bring), and grants (its doer) a tremendous reward purely from His Presence (beyond what it may have merited).

**HADITH**

106. Abu Said al-Khudri, may Allah be pleased with him, said, “I heard the Messenger of Allah, peace and blessings be upon him, say, ‘Whoever of you sees something wrong should change it with his hand; if he cannot, then with his tongue; if he cannot, then with his heart, and that is the weakest form of belief.’” (Sahih Muslim, Iman, 78).(5)

110. Abu Said al-Khudri, may Allah be pleased with him, reported that the Prophet, peace and blessings be upon him, said, “Beware of sitting in the roadways.” They said, “O Messenger of Allah. we must have places where we can sit and talk together.” The Messenger of Allah, peace and blessings be upon him, said, “If you must sit there, then give the roadway its rights.” They asked, “What are the rights of the roadway, O Messenger of Allah?” He said, “Lowering the eye, refraining from causing annoyance, returning the greeting, commanding the right and forbidding the wrong.” (Sahih al-Bukhari, Mazalim, 22; Sahih Muslim, Libas 114).(6)

**Good and Evil in Islam**

The relationship between good and evil has always intrigued people, and it is one of the central principles upon which religious doctrine and belief systems are built. Religion plays a central role in shedding light onto these abstract concepts, and Islam is no exception. In fact, Islam offers a complete picture in explaining good and evil. To understand the Islamic teachings on good and evil, however, one first needs to understand that Islam views life as a test of deciding between good and evil.

**The Meaning of Life According to Islam**

Said Nursi explains the aim of creation in the following words: “Belief in God is the highest aim of creation and the most sublime result, and humanity’s most exalted rank is knowledge of Him. The most radiant happiness and sweetest bounty for the jinn and humanity is love of God contained within knowledge of God.” In other words, we are created to believe in God. Once a person believes in God they will try to get to know Him and acquire knowledge about Him. This knowledge of God can only be built on a belief in God. This intimate knowledge of God must surely lead to the love of God, which is described as the highest degree of happiness a human being can achieve. A person with a heart that overflows with the love of God will strive to keep his commandments and ex-press this love through worship.

Achieving closeness to God gives life its real meaning. The closest proximity to God can be achieved only in Heaven. While God is closer to us than ourselves, we may put barriers between our conscious and subconscious, and our heart and our Lord. Islam teaches that, from our perspective, doing good and staying away from evil is a means of getting closer to God. Islam teaches that humans are equal in all respects (e.g. race, gender, status, occupation, appearance, etc) except for closeness to God. Every good deed brings a person closer to God, and every evil act takes them further away from God. We can understand this, as there are many ranks or stations in closeness to God. Thus, the test of choosing between good and evil has the purpose of giving people the opportunity to rise through these stations of spirituality.

Islam teaches that angels have fixed stations. They cannot commit sins or descend to lower stations, nor can they achieve a higher station through good deeds. Unlike angels, however, humans can get closer to God and rise through these stations by doing good deeds or descend and get further away from God by committing sins. So, God gives hu-man beings the opportunity to rise to a level beyond the angels or go below the level of Satan; it is all our choice. Without the creation of Satan or evil, there would not be any stations for humans to pass through to get closer to God, and therefore, we would be like angels with fixed stations.

**The Concepts of Good and Evil in Islam**

As humans, our definitions of good and evil are based on our perceptions and thinking. Human experience, however, is limited in many ways. Many things and events which at first appear to be good may prove in the final outcome to be evil, and vice versa. True knowledge, that is knowledge which is not subject to limitations, is only with God. The Qur’an clearly states that God is the only authority in defining good and evil. Therefore our perceptions of good and evil may be misleading:

. . . but it is possible that you dislike a thing which is good for you, and that you love a thing which is bad for you. But God knows, and you know not. (Baqara 2:216)

The Islamic definitions of good and evil are based on the purposes of creation and the meaning of human life. As mentioned above, the ultimate goal of human life is to become perfected spiritually through belief in God (iman), the knowledge of God (marifatullah), the love of God (muhabbatullah), and the worship of God (ibada). Accordingly, whatever brings a person closer to God and will benefit him in the Next World is good, and whatever takes a person away from God, and thus incurs His anger is evil.

Extrapolating from these definitions, one can see that those things and events that we perceive as evil may in reality be good, if they lead us closer to God. For instance, a disease may be perceived as evil. But a person who goes through the disease with patience grows spiritually and becomes closer to God.

No calamity strikes except by God’s permission. (Taghabun 64:11)

Wealth and health may be perceived as good. But if they lead a person to indulge in worldly desires and forget God, then they become evil for that person.

Have you seen the one who takes his desires as his god? (Furqan 25:43)

The tricks of the devil may be perceived as evil. But they are evil only for those who fall for those tricks and forget God:

Satan got the better of them and caused them to forget God. Those are the party of Satan. Truly the party of Satan are the real losers. (Mujadila 58:19)

On the other hand, through resistance to the devil and through patience in submission to God, one grows spiritually and becomes closer to God. So, for such a person, the existence of the devil and his tricks is a means of spiritual ascension.

…And those who persevere in seeking the pleasure of their Lord, and keep up prayer and spend (benevolently) out of what We have given them secretly and openly and repel evil with good; as for those, they shall have the (happy) issue of the abode. (Rad 13:22)

The following verse from the Qur’an exemplifies good and evil as they relate to the conduct of our lives:

It is not righteousness that you turn your faces toward the East and the West, but righteousness is this that one should believe in God and the last day and the angels and the Book and the prophets, and give away wealth out of love for Him to the near of kin and the orphans and the needy and the wayfarer and the beggars and for (the emancipation of) the captives, and keep up prayer and pay the poor-rate; and the performers of their promise when they make a promise, and the patient in distress and affliction and in time of conflicts-these are they who are true (to themselves) and these are they who guard (against evil). (Baqara 2:177)

An inclination toward good and a dislike for evil is inherent in every human being. Prophet Muhammad teaches that good is the beautiful personality and beautiful virtues of a person, while evil is what makes one’s heart uncomfortable, unhappy, and is that side of a person that they do not want anyone to know about. Islam teaches that good deeds in this world are like seeds that will be harvested in the Hereafter:

Then shall anyone who has done an atom’s-weight of good, see it! (Zilzal 99:7)

Also the Prophet said: “Save yourself from the Fire, even by giving half a date in charity, and if you do not find (half a date), then by saying a good word.” God is Just. Good will be rewarded sooner or later.

God is never unjust in the least degree: If there is any good (done), He doubles it, and gives from His own presence a great reward. (Nisa 4:40)

The Prophet explained these verses with the following words: “God rewards every single good deed that we do in this life and He is Just. He rewards people both here and in the Hereafter. For the unbelievers, on the other hand, they receive all their rewards here in this life and for them nothing is left for the Hereafter.” The Messenger of God states that all good deeds are important. “Do not underestimate any of them. Even smiling is not an unimportant action.”

Doing good deeds results from an intention and motivation that causes the action, and therein lies its value. A seemingly good action, if done for reasons other then pleasing God, may not be valued by God as a good deed and may not contribute to that person’s rising to the stations of spirituality. Good deeds done without the intention of pleasing God are most likely motivated by one’s ego. Therefore, it can be said that belief in God should be strongly located in the heart of a person when doing good deeds. Only a strong belief in God can guide people toward committing good deeds.

Human beings are not free to choose in many things. We cannot choose to live without eating, we cannot choose to live without drinking, and we cannot choose to live without sleeping. However, we are completely free in one thing: we can choose between good and evil. Life is about options, and decisions, and situations to choose between; good and evil are in front of us as options. We make our decisions, and God creates good and evil based on our decisions. It is inherent in Islam to believe that both good and evil comes from God.

Wherever you are, death will find you out, even if you are in towers built up strong and high! If some good befalls them, they say, ‘This is from God’; but if evil, they say, ‘This is from you’ (O Prophet). Say: ‘All things are from God.’ But what has come to these people that they fail to understand a single fact?” (Nisa 4:78)

God creates both good and evil based on our choices. Once we have made a choice, the action itself is independently created by God. For example, when a person decides to lift his arm, God creates all the necessary action in the muscles for that action to happen. The lifting of the arm might be to help somebody or to harm somebody; that decision is made by the person, and God merely converts the decision to action. We know, or are obliged to know, the consequences of our actions. People know that if they steal and are caught, they go to jail. We cannot blame the authorities for making that person suffer; it was their action that caused them to end up in jail. The authorities merely implement the law which states: if you steal, you go to jail. Similarly, God’s rule is that if you choose evil, it will be given to you; if you choose good, it will be given instead.

People are influenced by a number of forces in making choices. People are naturally inclined to do good. The reflections of God’s beautiful attributes, such as mercy and love, guide people toward good. However, two enemies work constantly against people to force them into evil. These enemies are Satan and one’s ego or carnal self.

Islam teaches that Satan in himself has no power to create. There is no war between Satan and God; this is a Hollywood fantasy. Satan was given a certain amount of time by God after he rebelled, because it is possible for people to make progress and attain higher spiritual stations through resisting his temptations. Satan’s only power is the ability to whisper into people’s souls and try to misguide them. He whispers to prevent people from doing good, or at least to delay it.

**The Test in Islam**

These are the reasons why this life is viewed as a test in Islam. The test is a struggle of choosing good over Satan and the carnal self. It is not a test to reveal anything to God; He already knows the past and the future. Rather, it is to reveal the outcome to ourselves and to help us grow in the process. Although the details may differ, the concept of the struggle is common in many religions. One important point in this struggle is to stay constantly active in good pursuits. It is easier for Satan and the carnal self to misguide people who are inactive and who are looking for ways to kill time. A believer should not waste time with fruitless actions; rather they should spend their time working for the afterlife and being useful to their fellow human beings. Another means to stop Satan and to nullify the carnal self is to surround oneself with people of belief and have strong relations with a believing community. A lone person is more prone to attacks from Satan and to follow the desires of their carnal self.

The main method in Islam for resisting Satan is prayer and refuge in God. Without God’s permission, Satan cannot cause any harm. A person who takes refuge in God and asks for help from Him with an open heart will be immune to Satan’s evil whispers. We need to maintain our motivation to get closer to God. We need to remember God in every single part of our life, and we need to establish our connection with God through prayer. An examination of Prophet Muhammad’s life shows that he spent a considerable amount of his time in worship and prayer. Published prophetic traditions include various prayers that are intended to guard us against the tricks of the devil.

**Conclusion**

Good and evil are intricate concepts that are difficult to define without reference to some sound sources. The revealed scriptures, messengers of God and the human inner conscience provide us with the knowledge of good and evil, as well as giving us information on how to attain good and prevent evil. In this article we have indicated various aspects of good and evil as they are described in the main Islamic sources of knowledge, the Qur’an and the prophetic traditions. A clear understanding of good and evil, a conduct of life that is directed toward the achievement of good for all humanity, and “enjoining good and forbidding evil” are the goals of a person of faith.(7)

**References**

**(1) 3:104/The Quran with Annotated Interpretation in Modern English by Ali Unal**

**(2)13:22/The Quran with Annotated Interpretation in Modern English by Ali Unal**

**(3) 99:7/The Quran with Annotated Interpretation in Modern English by Ali Unal**

**(4) 4:40/The Quran with Annotated Interpretation in Modern English by Ali Unal**

**(5)Nawawi, Imam. Riyad As-Salihin; The Gardens of the Righteous: A collection of authentic hadiths. Tughra Books Press, Inc. 2014**

**(6)Nawawi, Imam. Riyad As-Salihin; The Gardens of the Righteous: A collection of authentic hadiths. Tughra Books Press, Inc. 2014**

**(7)Dougan, Alphonse. Fountain Magazine. Issue 50 / April – June 2005**