

THE PROBLEM OF SUFFERING IN ISLAM

Introduction

Mankind, from time immemorial, has been wrestling with the problem of suffering. Men and women through the ages have sought answers to this problem through myth and ritual, art and philosophy, religious piety and mysticism. It may be safely said that religious traditions have been, in part, attempts to answer the question of human suffering and to find meaning and purpose in life in spite of it.

The present essay will presuppose that suffering—physical, psychological and spiritual—is our most common existential reality. Thus, in attempting to examine the ways in which Islam has dealt with this reality, and the answers it has provided to the meaning of human existence, we recognize the problems to be universally relevant. Furthermore, it is hoped that the answers we shall propose, while remaining Islamic in context and intent, will have relevance for readers outside the Muslim community as well as for those within it. Our concern will not be with right or wrong answers, but with apprehending the truth of our existence.

We shall deal with the problem of suffering and evil in Islam under the following four headings: Islam and the human condition; the problem of suffering in the Qur'ān; the problem of suffering in the Hadīth; and the Shīci ethos, suffering and redemption. We shall examine the way in which Islam envisages the human condition both in terms of its ephemerality and limitations, and its infinite possibilities as the instrument of the Divine activity and Will in creation. In this context we shall contrast the Qur'ānic view of the world and man with the *Weltanschauung* of the pre-Islamic Arabs to whom the Qur'ān remains crucial to the Islamic understanding of human suffering, even though later developments have often distorted the Qur'ānic view through theological exaggeration or understatement. Later theological and philosophical formulations of the problem of suffering and evil within the context of Divine justice and predestination on the

one hand, and human freedom and responsibility on the other, are beyond the scope and purpose of this study. Such developments, however, are clearly indicated in the Hadīth literature, much of which was compiled to provide the basis for the various positions taken on this issue. We shall limit our discussion to the two most important ways in which Hadīth tradition has dealt with the problem of suffering and evil. These are Divine predestination, and human patience in the face of adversity and affliction. Our interest throughout will be more in Islamic piety rather than in speculation on questions of theodicy or theology (*kalām*).

Islam is not, any more than any other religious tradition, a monolithic system of religious thought and piety. Many and varied were the answers which Islam gave to the problems with which we are concerned. Shīʿī Muslims, for various social, political and religious reasons, have wrestled with the problems of evil and suffering more intensely than any other group in the Muslim community. They have seen suffering as a cosmic drama beginning in primordial time before creation, and unfolding throughout human history. In some ways, Shīʿī Islam has come closest to Christianity in its understanding of suffering and insistence on its redemptive value, but without ceasing to be fully Islamic with regard both to the context of the problem and to the form and content of its presentation and solution. Indeed, this Shīʿī ethos has deeply influenced general Islamic piety. Nonetheless, it remains a unique phenomenon in Islam which deserves special attention.

1 *Islam and the human condition.*

Man, according to the Qurʾān, is the vicegerent (*khalīfah*) of God on earth.¹ It may be further argued that on the scale of being, man is higher than the angels. He is the crown of creation, and potentially at least, he is the closest being to the Divine. This potentiality has been actualized throughout human history in the prophets, who are the Elect of God, and His Friends. In Islam Adam is not the first sinner but the first prophet. He is the pure one

1. Qurʾān, II:30. All references to the Qurʾān will follow the standard numbering of the Egyptian Royal edition. I have used Arberry's translation of the Qurʾān for quotations because it is more readable than other available translations and because I do not agree with the use of 'Allāh' when writing in English to denote the name of God.

(*ṣafwāh*) of God and the first recipient of His revelation.² Islam further insists that every human being is created like Adam before he sinned, sound and pure. This state of purity is called in the Qurʾān *fiṭrat-Allāh* (which cannot be changed).³

In Islam, as in other monotheistic traditions, man is regarded as co-worker with God. The drama of creation and history is, therefore, a Divine-human drama. While humanity was yet in the world of essences,⁴ that is to say, when men existed only as ideas in the mind of God, He sealed His covenant with them by addressing to them the question, "Am I not your Lord?" The human answer, likewise, signified the acceptance of this covenant in the words, "Yes, we testify."⁵ History is, then, the echo of this Divine address and our answer to it.

God, the Qurʾān tells us, fashioned man with His own two hands.⁶ Then he commanded the angels to prostrate themselves before Adam.⁷ This, however, is only one side, the positive side of the human condition. There is the other dimension of man, the dimension of rebellion, corruption and violence. When God declared to the angels His intention to make a vicegerent on the earth, they protested, " 'What, wilt Thou set therein one who will do corruption there and shed blood, while we proclaim Thy praise and call Thee Holy?' " ⁸ God's retort was not to demonstrate any innate goodness of man, but rather His own direct intervention by teaching Adam "all the names,"⁹ that is, to initiate human history, which in Islam is the history of revelation and man's response to it.

Sin in Islam is disobedience, which is tantamount to revoking the covenant with God. Yet here again, when Adam did disobey his Lord, God turned towards him through a new act of revelation: "Thereafter Adam received certain words from his Lord, and He turned towards him..."¹⁰ Sin, therefore, is not an

2. Qurʾān, II:31-37.

3. Qurʾān, XXX:30.

4. *ʿĀlīm al-hayr* could mean 'world of essences, or atoms', the implication in either case being 'before man obtained concrete existence'.

5. Qurʾān, VII:172; Arthur J. Arberry, *The Koran Interpreted*. New York: MacMillan, 1963, Vol. I, P. 192.

6. Qurʾān, XXXVIII:75.

7. Qurʾān, VII:11.

8. Qurʾān, II:30; Arberry, Vol. I, P. 33.

9. Qurʾān, II:30.

10. Qurʾān, II:37; Arberry, Vol. I, P. 34.

irremediable state; rather, man is subject to error as well as capable of repentance. God is both just and forgiving. One may say that there is no cosmic evil in Islam. Human evil is disobedience, or a hardening of the heart, the denial (*kufr*) of what man knows to be the truth.¹¹

God's absolute sovereignty cannot admit of evil in the cosmic sense. Satan (*Iblis*), by refusing to prostrate himself before Adam, committed the sin of pride, not against God, but against man. He protested, " 'I am better than he; Thou createdst me of fire, and him Thou createdst of clay.' " ¹² Yet even the sin of *Iblis* is shown to be part of the Divine scheme of things. God gave him a respite until a fixed day.¹³ We must therefore agree with Dr. John Bowker that, "... (t) here is duality but no dualism..." ¹⁴ in Islam.

Islam rests on two basic principles; God's oneness or uniqueness (*tawhid*), and man's ascent to this truth and his commitment (*islām*) to its implications. Because God is One in the absolute sense, He is absolutely omnipotent, having absolute sovereignty over all things. Thus all things in creation are subject to this Divine sovereignty; they are within the universal *islām* (submission) to God. Man alone has the choice to freely accept or reject the grave charge (*amānah*), which is active Islam.¹⁵ The Qur'an does not tell us what that great charge is which neither the earth nor the heavens could bear, but which man foolishly accepted. If, however, this verse is read in the same context as that of the covenant (*mithāq*) already cited, the meaning is clear: The *amānah* is accepting the implications of the ascent (*tasdiq*) to the Oneness of God. In the *shabāda* (profession of faith), this becomes *islām* in its highest expression.

We can go a step further and assert that in the ultimate sense, man also is part of the *islām* of creation, being himself a creature of God. Man's freedom and responsibility, therefore, must be limited by God's sovereignty and omniscience. This is not to deny human freedom, but to see it within the context of Divine

11. For the use of this term in the Qur'an, see: Toshihiko Izutsu, *Ethico-Religious Concepts in the Qur'an*. Montreal: McGill University, Institute of Islamic Studies, 1966. PP. 119-177.

12. Qur'an, VII:12; Arberry, Vol. I, P. 173.

13. Qur'an, XXXVIII:78-81.

14. John Bowker, *The Problem of Suffering in the Religions of the World*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970. P.119.

15. Qur'an, XXXIII:72

mercy and justice. This idea will become clearer as we briefly contrast the Qur'anic *Weltanschauung* with that of pre-Islamic Arab society.

God was, for the pre-Islamic Arabs, the creator, the bestower of life. However, once man had come into existence, he fell under the tyrannical sway of time (*dabr*). Time was regarded as a blind force, merciless and unsparing in its indiscriminate attacks on the rich and poor and old and young alike. One could never know what time had in store for man. Arab poets often sounded the familiar note of desperate fear of the vicissitudes (*surūf*) of *dabr*. The Qur'an cites the Arabs of Muhammad's time as saying, "There is nothing but our present life; we die, and we live, and nothing but Time destroys us."¹⁶

The phenomenal individuality and sense of freedom which characterize the *Jāhūliyyah* Arabs extended to the refusal of any conscious authority over the individual's life, including the authority of God. Time was regarded as blind fate determining beforehand man's fortune or misfortune, and even his span of life. The idea of the Divine sovereign Will must have been known, if not accepted, by the Arab of the Prophet's time. The Qur'an, therefore, rebukes the Arabs not so much for their lack of belief but for their *kufr*, that is, denying what they know to be true. The Qur'an further contrasts what it regards as the proper attitude of man before God—an attitude of creatureliness or humility—with the haughty attitude of the unbelievers. Theirs was an attitude of arrogance and self-sufficiency.

For the Qur'anic *Weltanschauung*, Divine sovereignty made all the difference in the life of the individual as well as society. This is because the Divine sovereign Will was not a capricious Will. God is just and merciful; He hears and answers prayers and has determined everything according to His eternal wisdom.¹⁷

For the pre-Islamic Arabs, however, any religious beliefs or rituals were formalities, traditions handed down from fathers to sons. While the traditions had to be observed, they did not have

16. Qur'an, XLV:24; Arberry, Vol. II, P. 212. See also Izutsu, *God and Man in the Qur'an: Semantics of the Qur'anic Weltanschauung*. Tokyo: Institute of Cultural and Linguistic Studies, Keio University, 1964, P. 123ff.

17. Qur'an, III:191 and LXVII:1-4. See also Izutsu, *God and Man in the Qur'an*, P. 125.

to be taken seriously.¹⁸ The result was sure to be a pessimistic outlook on life and disregard of any moral imperatives beyond those imposed by social custom and tradition. Islam, in contrast, underlined the importance of trust (*tawakkul*) in God and the regulation of human conduct by the moral imperatives which are imposed by God Himself in the Qur'ān, His immutable Word.

The Qur'ān may be regarded as a long hymn of praise to God, the creator of all things, sovereign Lord over all His creation, the God of mercy and compassion but also of stern judgement. The urgency of the Divine presence in human affairs is finally, what distinguishes the *Jāhiliyyah* world-view from that of the Qur'ān. The ancient Arabs accepted suffering with bitter resignation, if only because there was no conscious personality behind events and things. Likewise, they accepted pleasure with avarice at the hands of the same blind, impersonal fate to which no gratitude could be shown and no complaint made.

The Qur'ān insists on God's majesty and creative power, His providence and mercy. This is expressed in a series of magnificent verses, each beginning with a question concerning God's majesty and ending with a challenge to human unbelief, ignorance and lack of reflection.

What, is God better, or that they associate?

He who created the heavens and earth,
and sent down for you out of heaven water;
and We caused to grow therewith
gardens full of loveliness

whose trees you could never grow.

Is there a god with God?

Nay, but they are a people who assign to
Him equals!

He who made the earth a fixed place
and set it amidst rivers

and appointed for it firm mountains
and placed a partition between the two seas

Is there a god with God?

Nay, but the most of them have no knowledge.¹⁹

18. Of course, an exception of this was the small circle of the Hanīfs, religious men about whom little is known, and even less about their influence on their society. See: *Ibid.*, PP. 112-119.

19. Qur'ān, XXVII:59-61,62; Arberry, Vol. II, PP. 81-82.

God's mercy is one with His power to answer "...the constrained when he calls unto Him, and removes the evil..."²⁰ Likewise, it is God who made men His vicegerents in the earth. Yet, little do men reflect.²¹

Here the challenge to Job and his friends is repeated, but in a significantly different way. God does not, as with Job, challenge man to do the great things He is capable of doing,²² but challenges man to contest His power: "'Produce your proof, if you speak truly.'"²³ Thus, in the Qur'ānic view, nothing in creation is fortuitous. How then does the Qur'ān account for human evil and suffering?

2 The Problem of suffering in the Qur'ān

The Qur'ān begins with the fact of suffering and tries not to explain it away, but to explain it in the context of Divine sovereignty, justice and mercy on the one hand, and human responsibility and relative freedom on the other. The absolute sovereignty of God is essential to the Qur'ānic world-view. Without it, human life and existence is altogether meaningless. The alternatives then, would be, first, to attribute all good and evil in the world to a blind force, and that, as we saw in the case of the pre-Islamic Arabs, would lead to deep pessimism and irresponsibility. The second alternative would be to limit God's sovereignty by human freedom and the power of evil in man and the world, as is the case in some respects with Christianity.²⁴ This also the Qur'ān rejects and with a vehemence that often verges on Divine caprice: "And they devised, and God devised, and God is the best of devisers."²⁵

We noted above that man is God's representative on earth. We noted further that man is not innately sinful, but is capable of good and evil acts. To provide a constant reminder to man of

20. Qur'ān, XXVII:62; Arberry, Vol. II, P. 81.

21. Qur'ān, XXVII:62.

22. See Job, XXXVIII-XLII.

23. Qur'ān, XXVII:64; Arberry, Vol. II, P. 82.

24. Of course, the matter is far more complicated than here suggested. Yet, theories of redemption are, in our view, attempts at explaining how God was finally able to overcome the devil. See: Gustav Aulen, trans., A.G. Herbert, *Christus Victor; and historical Study of the three main types of the idea of atonement*. New: MacMillan Co., 1931.

25. Qur'ān, III:54; Arberry, Vol. I, P. 81.

his primordial covenant with God, God "sent His guidance"²⁶ so that man would not say in the end he did not know. We must at this point somewhat qualify our position with reference to God's sovereignty. With regard to creation, God's sovereignty is absolute, totally independent of all external factors. With regard to man, however, God's sovereignty is related to, but not limited by, human acts. God has the power to punish, yes, but he punishes the evil-doers. Here, God's justice is one with His power. God grants mercy, but to those who do good and are themselves merciful. An outstanding example of this is the words addressed to the Prophet: "Thy Lord has neither forsaken thee nor hates thee...thy Lord shall give thee, and thou shalt be satisfied."²⁷ After recounting the various acts of mercy towards the Prophet, God concludes, "As for the orphan, do not oppress him, and as for the beggar, scold him not; and as for thy Lord's blessing, declare it."²⁸

In what appear at first sight to be glaring contradictions, the Qur'an in many verses asserts that God decrees all good and evil for men, and also that men earn all that befalls them by their own actions. Thus we read, "No affliction befalls in the earth or in yourselves, but it is in a Book, before We create it; that is easy for God..."²⁹ Again we read, "Whatever affliction may visit you is for what your own hands have earned..."³⁰ The contradiction is resolved if we take both statements in their wider context. Hence, where we are told that God has already prescribed all that befalls us in a Book, this is so in order that we may not despair in the face of adversity or boast with ease and prosperity, since "...God loves not any man proud and boastful..."³¹ Similarly, the verse stating that we suffer the evil we earn concludes, "...and He pardons much."³² We act within the limit of God's sovereign will, yet the evil we earn is our own doing. God's mercy, moreover, is not limited by

26. Qur'an XX: 120-122. The concept of guidance (*huda*) in Islam is in some way analogous to the Holy Spirit of Christianity. See W.C. Smith, "Some Similarities and Differences Between Christianity and Islam: An Essay in Comparative Religion." in Kritzeck and Winder, eds., *The World of Islam*. New York: MacMillan Co., 1960.

27. Qur'an, XCIII: 3 and 5; Arberry, Vol. II, P. 342.

28. Qur'an, XCIII: 9-11 Arberry, Vol. II, P. 342.

29. Qur'an, LVII: 22; Arberry, Vol. II, P. 261.

30. Qur'an, XLII: 30; Arberry, Vol. II, P. 196.

31. Qur'an, LVII: 23; Arberry, Vol. II, P. 261.

32. Qur'an, XLII: 30; Arberry, Vol. II, P. 196.

our evil will, as His sovereignty is limited neither by the good nor by the evil we do.

From God comes guidance, and to Him belong both this world and the next.³³ Yet at the risk of overstating the point, we must add that God voluntarily, so to speak, limits His sovereignty by our actions. To be sure, He guides whom He pleases and leads astray whom He pleases,³⁴ but also He wills no injustice to His servants.³⁵ This point is succinctly stated in the Qur'an in the words "...and whoso has done an atom's weight of good shall see it, and whoso has done an atom's weight of evil shall see it."³⁶

In general, the Qur'an asserts that God works with our capacities or tendencies for good or evil. He it is who inspires the soul with both its lewdness and piety, or fear of God, and He it is who has guided man on "the two highways."³⁷

Like other monotheistic religious traditions, Islam is intensely historical. History is the state of Divine activity where God's omnipotence, omniscience and justice operate.³⁸ The Qur'an is replete with examples of God's just punishment of peoples of old for their unbelief, hard-heartedness and contumacy. We read of towns that were destroyed because their people were heedless of God's messengers. Such tales conclude with the words "And We wronged them not, but they wronged themselves."³⁹ History is God's court of justice and the instrument of His discipline.

It may be argued that even in the strict justice of God, His mercy is manifested. The examples of the severe punishments of bygone generations must serve as lessons for those who follow, so that they may be spared the fate of their predecessors. God's justice, however, does not operate in frustration or capricious wrath. It is corrective, not retributive. He forgives those who repent, if men persist in their heedlessness and obstinacy until death comes upon them, for these God has prepared a painful doom.⁴⁰

33. Qur'an, XCII: 12 and 13.

34. Qur'an, XIV: 4.

35. Qur'an, III: 182.

36. Qur'an, XCIX: 7 and 8; Arberry, Vol. II, P. 347.

37. Qur'an, XCI: 7 Xc: 10; Arberry, Vol. II, P. 340; Vol. II, p. 339.

38. See, for a thorough analysis of the concept of divine justice in the Qur'an, Daoud Rahbar, *God of Justice: A Study in the Ethical Doctrine of the Qur'an*. Leiden: Brill, 1960.

39. Qur'an, XI: 100 and 101. See also XXIX: 28-40, for further examples.

40. Qur'an, IV: 17 and 18.

For the man of faith, the old question of undeserved suffering is the real test. If God is all-knowing and all-powerful, just and merciful, why does He allow innocent people to suffer and the wicked to prosper? Several answers to this question are suggested in the Qur'an. The Qur'an is not interested in theodicy, but in human attitudes or responses to God's acts in nature and history. The Qur'an is not interested in logic and justification, but in the dynamic relationship between man and God. It is for this reason that no single answer can be given to the problem of evil and suffering in human society.

The most obvious answer is that suffering is sometimes a test of faith. As this answer relates directly to man's trust in God's omnipotence and omniscience, His justice, mercy and love, the Qur'an returns to it again and again in various contexts and themes. The Qur'an insists that in the face of affliction and sorrow man must remember that, "...Surely we belong to God, and to Him we return..."⁴¹ These words are constantly on the lips of pious Muslims in the presence of calamity or death. Such an affirmation of faith provides a hard test to man's resilience and trust. "Surely We will try you with something of fear and hunger, and diminution of goods and lives and fruits; yet give thou good tidings unto the patient..."⁴²

In the view of the Qur'an, one of the essential distinctions between God the creator and His creatures is the fact that "All things shall perish, save His face."⁴³ Death is the final test, but a test that every living creature must undergo. Thus God's eternity and omnipotence are set in sharp contrast with our ephemerality. "Wherever you may be, death will overtake you, though you should be in raised-up towers."⁴⁴ Yet even this unquestionable fact is invoked against man's tendency to self-righteousness in blaming the calamity of an individual on others or in regarding it as just punishment of the individual's sin. In the verse just cited, it was Muhammad who was blamed for the death of martyrs in battle. In answer, he is commanded to say, "...everything is from God."⁴⁵ Men should not seek reasons for the misfortunes of others, or deride them for their disabilities.⁴⁶

41. Qur'an, II:156; Arberry, Vol. I, P. 48.

42. Qur'an, II:155; Arberry, Vol. I, P. 48.

43. Qur'an, XXVIII:88 and LV:26-27

44. Qur'an, IV:78; Arberry, Vol. I, P. 111.

45. Qur'an, IV:78; Arberry, Vol. I, P. 111.

46. Qur'an, XXIV:61.

Another justification which the Qur'an offers for the trial of faith through suffering is that suffering creates true humility. The other side of humility is not only pride, but despair. Men wax proud in times of ease and prosperity for which they claim credit, and despair when misfortune befalls them, blaming it on God.⁴⁷

Still another justification for Divine trial is that it proves to others the steadfastness of the afflicted, and thus it teaches men patience and gratitude: "...and We appointed some of you to be a trial for others: 'Will you endure?'"

In all the cases just cited, human response is of crucial importance. What should then be man's proper response to the trials of suffering, misfortune and sorrow? The answer to this question has already been partially suggested. In the face of adversity man must be patient and humble. The fact that God's sovereignty is over all things should inspire not a fatalistic attitude towards life or a resigned acceptance of the ills of society. That would mean man's shirking of his responsibility as the vicegerent of God on earth. It would also mean despair, which is the denial of God's mercy, and that is a great blasphemy.

Patience at all times and gratitude for everything should not mean inactivity and detachment from this world, but a humble acceptance of God's will and the dynamic hope and trust in God's mercy. "Thy will be done" must be the response of faith in humility and confidence in God's mercy, His "dominion, power, and glory." Both human responsibility and trust, and God's mercy and sovereign control are asserted in the words, "God charges no soul save to its capacity; standing to its account is what it has earned, and against its account what it has merited."⁴⁹ Yet even so, man is not left to struggle alone. God Himself prays on our behalf. Both in the Lord's prayer and the prayers of the first *sūrah* of the Qur'an and the end of the second, we pray not only to God, but with God for His mercy: "Our Lord, do not burden us beyond what we have the strength to bear. And pardon us, and forgive us, and have mercy on us; Thou art our protector."⁵⁰ Indeed, in every invocation of the name of God, the merciful and compassionate, a prayer of affirmation of faith and trust is uttered. God is nearer to men than

47. Qur'an, XI:9 and 10 See also: XXXIX:49.

48. Qur'an, XXV:20; Arberry, Vol. II, P. 88.

49. Qur'an, II:286; Arberry, Vol. I, P. 71.

50. Qur'an, II:286; Arberry, Vol. I, P. 71.

their life pulse,⁵¹ ready to hear and succour those who call upon Him and respond to His call.⁵² The answer to the despair of sin and evil is repentance and trust in God's mercy and forgiveness:

And when those who believe in Our signs come to thee, say, "Peace be upon you. Your Lord has prescribed for Himself mercy. Whosoever of you does evil in ignorance, and thereafter repents and makes amends, He is All-forgiving, All-compassionate."⁵³

Suffering, patiently endured in the way of God, will have its reward, if not in this life, certainly in the hereafter. It is man's way of expiating his sins and evil deeds. It is an affirmation of man's faith in God, of preferring Him to everything else. It is an affirmation of God's Oneness (*tawhid*) in man's life. *Jihad* (holy struggle), while it includes the so-called holy war, goes far beyond it. It is all that man endures of hardship, suffering and evil, for the sake of God and the good.⁵⁴ Through hardship, suffering and martyrdom in the way of God, man's wealth and life are offered to God as the price of the bliss of paradise.⁵⁵ Indeed, martyrdom is declared to be the bridge connecting this ephemeral life to the eternal life with God. Thus we read, "Count not those who were slain in God's way as dead, but rather living with their Lord, by Him provided..."⁵⁶ It is not that a person should seek death that he may be a martyr, but to struggle in the way of God; and whether he is slain or victorious, the reward is the same. "So let them fight in the way of God, who sell the present life for the world to come; and whosoever fights in the way of God and is slain, or conquers, We shall bring him a mighty wage."⁵⁷

The Qur'an, as has already been observed, is not a treatise on theodicy, but a book of guidance for men to a life of piety and righteousness.⁵⁸ The life it enjoins is a life of personal commitment (*islām*) to God's Will, and a living of this commitment in social responsibility; it is a dynamic life of faith and works. The

51. Qur'an, I:16.

52. Qur'an, II:186.

53. Qur'an, LVI:54. Arberry, Vol. I, P. 155. See also: XXXIX:53 and 54.

54. For example, *hijrah*, 'leaving one's home for the sake of God', is a form of *jihad*. See: Qur'an, XXII:58-60.

55. Qur'an, II:207.

56. Qur'an, III:169; Arberry, Vol. I, P. 94.

57. Qur'an, IV:74; Arberry, Vol. I, P. 111. See also II:154.

58. Qur'an, II:2-5.

Qur'an is a Divine call to the good to those "Who have faith and do good deeds."⁵⁹ An integral part of this life of faith is the individual's responsibility towards the unfortunate in society: the destitute, orphans, wayfarers and those oppressed in slavery.

It is not piety, that you turn your faces to the East and to the West. True piety is this: to believe in God, and the Last Day, the angels, the Book, and the Prophets, to give of one's substance, however cherished, to kinsmen, and orphans, the needy, the traveller, beggars, and to ransom the slave, to perform the prayer, to pay the alms. And they who fulfil their covenant when they have engaged in a covenant, and endure with fortitude misfortune, hardship and peril, these are they who are true in their faith, these are the truly godfearing.⁶⁰

Man's primary responsibility, as God's representative on earth, is to co-operate with God in building the Good Society, to establish the kingdom of God on earth. That Muslims, like the rest of humanity, have fallen short of this ideal, cannot be denied. Nonetheless, the ideal remains as a challenge and a responsibility for the man of faith. It is his highest goal, and though he may never fully attain it, still he must strive for its attainment. In its transcendent aspect, it is the true *islām*, the immutable Divine Will for creation. In its human aspect, this goal embodies the hope of humanity for a better existence and the religious obligations of the man of faith to do good. That this may not be left only to man's discretion, the Qur'an makes it one of the pillars of faith in the religious duty (*ḥard*) or *zakāt*, almsgiving. *Zakāt* means purity, that is, to purify oneself through giving. It is a form of worship (*ʿibādah*) of God both as a religious duty and as a good deed. "Prosperous is he who has cleansed himself, and mentions the Name of his Lord, and prays."⁶¹

With such a positive and fully involved attitude towards life, the Qur'an can hardly be accused of fatalism. Those kinds of suffering over which man has no control must be endured and accepted as coming from God. They must serve as a source of humility

59. The phrase: "O ye who believe and do good deeds." is too frequent in the Qur'an to need any documentation.

60. Qur'an, II:177; Arberry, Vol. I, PP. 50-51. See also Qur'an, LXXVI:8-10.

61. Qur'an, LXXXVII:14 and 15; Arberry, Vol. II, P. 335. (See also the previous footnote.)

and discipline. In the end, God will reward the sufferer with the eternal bliss of paradise. The Qur'an regards this world as a passing vanity.⁶² Both its pains and its pleasures are ephemeral. Thus the Qur'an chides people, "Nay, but you prefer the present life; and the world to come is better, and more enduring."⁶³

With regard to human suffering and responsibility, the Qur'an is one with the Old and New Testaments. The prophets stressed God's demand for justice and compassion; they saw suffering as the instrument of Divine discipline and instruction.⁶⁴ The Gospels, likewise, insist on man's involvement with the problems of society. This involvement, moreover, is regarded as essential for salvation. The poor and afflicted Lazarus will reap the rewards of his sufferings in heaven, "in the bosom of Abraham," while the rich man who did not share his wealth will meet his just punishment in the fiery pit.⁶⁵ The same idea is presented even more dramatically and with greater urgency in the apocalypse of Saint Matthew's Gospel.⁶⁶ There, the good people, (the sheep) who shall inherit the kingdom, are those who fed the hungry, clothed the naked and visited the sick. By doing this to others, it was as though they did it to Christ, the redeemer and judge of humanity. Similarly those, who do good deeds are, according to the Qur'an, giving God a goodly loan.⁶⁷

Evil happens in the world, not in spite of the Divine Will, but because God allows it to happen. Satan, as we have seen, was given a respite for a time, "...to a fixed day."⁶⁸ Similarly, the wicked have a respite; it may be until the day of the final reckoning, when every soul "...shall know its works, the former and the latter."⁶⁹

God is the creator of all things including, in the final analysis, man's weal and woe. Yet, even in this, man is to some extent the Divine instrument of creation. This paradox of God's absolute

62. Qur'an, III: 185.

63. Qur'an, LXXXVII: 16 and 17; Arberry, Vol. II, P. 335.

64. For a comprehensive discussion of the problem of suffering in the Old Testament and post-Biblical literature. see: Jim Alvin Sanders, *Suffering as Divine Discipline in the Old Testament and Post-Biblical Judaism*. Rochester: Colgate Rochester Divinity School, 1955.

65. Matt. 25: 31ff.

66. Luke, 16: 19ff.

67. Qur'an, II: 245, V: 12, LVII: 11.

68. Qur'an, XV: 37-38. See also: VII: 16.

69. Qur'an, LXXXII: 5; Arberry, Vol. II, P. 328.

sovereignty and final responsibility for all things, and man's freedom, is essential to the faith in One God. Christ the redeemer and judge will admit the good to the kingdom which was prepared for them before the foundations of the world, and the wicked to the fire which was preordained.⁷⁰ Thus Calvin's predestinarian theology has its biblical basis, as much as the one-sided insistence of Muslim theologians on Divine predestination has its basis in the Qur'an. Again, Dr. Bowker is right in asserting that, "...a fatalistic and indifferent attitude to the occurrence of suffering is ruled out by the Qur'an itself."⁷¹ That this attitude has long dominated popular piety as well as theological thinking is due, we believe, to the socio-political and economic vicissitudes of the history of Muslim society, and not to the message of the Qur'an. It is "...a perversion of Islam, not its true expression, and the Qur'an militates against such an attitude."⁷²

The attitude which the Qur'an enjoins is one of submission to God, the God whose mercy "...has encompassed all things,"⁷³ whose face is before us "...wherever we turn our faces."⁷⁴ The prayer of faith which the Qur'an teaches is "Say: 'My prayer, my ritual sacrifice, my living, my dying—all belongs to God, the Lord of all Being.'"⁷⁵

3 The Problem of suffering in the Hadith.

The Qur'an, as we have seen, moves between Divine determinism and human freedom, and Divine pre-ordination and human effort and responsibility. While it asserts them both in different contexts, it does not take an extreme position on either approach. In general, absolute Divine sovereignty and foreordination of all things were, from the beginning of Islamic speculation on the subject, favoured above all other alternatives. Much support for this position was found in the Hadith (sayings of the Prophet).⁷⁶

70. Matt. 25: 41 and 46.

71. Bowker, P. 116.

72. *Ibid.*, P. 116.

73. Qur'an, VII: 156.

74. Qur'an, II: 115.

75. Qur'an, VI: 163; Arberry, Vol. I, P. 169.

76. For discussions of the growth and development of this important genre of Islamic religious literature and its place in Islamic piety, the reader is referred to standard works on the subject.

All Islamic literature subsequent to the Qur'ān may be regarded in some sense as an attempt to understand the sacred text and fulfil its injunctions in the daily life of the community. The Hadīth, as the words of the Prophet, must be taken as the best and primary commentary on the Qur'ān. It seeks not to contradict the Divine word, but to amplify its meaning. Thus, while the Hadīth on the whole asserts Divine determinism over human freedom and effort, it tempers that position by asserting the expiatory role of suffering and its purgative effect on the life of the man of faith. Here again, it is patience in affliction that is regarded as the highest virtue in the believer and test of his faith.⁷⁷

Hadīth's dealing with Divine predestination are not involved specifically with the problem of human suffering. They are rather concerned with man's character and destiny, his lot in this world, and blessedness or damnation in the next. We shall analyse only those which are based directly on the word of the Qur'ān.

We saw in our discussion of the covenant verse,⁷⁸ that God sealed His primordial covenant with humanity through the revelation of His Lordship and man's acceptance of this challenge. In the Hadīth, the import of this verse is reversed. Thus it is reported on the authority of 'Umar, the second Caliph, that the Apostle of God was asked concerning the meaning of this verse and he said:

God, blessed and exalted be He, created Adam, then passing His right hand over Adam's back, He took out some of his progeny, 'These I have created for paradise, and they will perform the deeds of the people of paradise.' Again God passed His right hand over Adam's back and took out another portion of his progeny and said, 'These I have created for the fire, and they shall perform the deeds of the people of the fire.' A man asked the Prophet, 'What then is the purpose of human action?' The Prophet answered, 'When God creates a servant for paradise, He causes him to do the works of the people of paradise, so that the servant would die performing their deeds; and God would therefore

77. Hadīths dealing with this topic are grouped under the heading: *al-ṣabr al-balā'* ('patience in affliction'). See below.

78. See above: P. 4.

cause him to enter paradise.' Similarly, the one destined for the fire will likewise be caused to do the works of the people of the fire, and thus enter the fire.⁷⁹

According to this, human action loses all meaning, since God has predetermined all things including man's good and evil acts. Hence, God's self-revelation is not a challenge for men to be vigilant in fulfilling the Divine covenant, but a revelation of the Lord's absolute power over the destiny of His servants.

In a similar tradition, the Prophet is said to have declared to a group of people at a funeral, "...there is no soul endowed with breath except that God has determined its place in paradise or in the fire, and that it was prescribed either as miserable (damned) or happy (blessed)." A man protested, "O Apostle of God, should we not then abide by our book (that is, Divine decree) and abandon action?" The Prophet replied, "Act, for everything is facilitated (by God)." The Hadīth goes on to assert that those destined for happiness will be aided in performing right actions, and those destined for misery will be aided to act accordingly. The Prophet then quoted,

As for him who gives and is godfearing and confirms the reward most fair, We shall surely ease him to the Easing. But as for him who is a miser and self-sufficient, and cries lies to the reward most fair, We shall surely ease him to the Hardship...⁸⁰

The verses quoted in support of the argument of this Hadīth do not argue for Divine predestination. On the contrary, they provide a good example of the dynamic relationship between God and man as envisaged by the Qur'ān. God's assistance to man for good or evil depends on man's involvement in the actual life of society, involvement with its poor and needy.

Not only is the faith of humanity collectively determined, but the fate of every individual is also fixed in the womb. The traditions describing the manner in which the fate of the unborn child is sealed go into graphic details. One example should suffice.

79. Mālik ibn Anas, *al-Muwatta'*, Muḥammad Fu'ād 'Abd al-Bāqī, ed., Cairo: Dar al-Iḥyā al-Kutub al-'Arabīyah, 1370/1951, Vol. II, P. 898.

80. *Ṣaḥīḥi Muslim*, Beirut: al-Maktab al-tijārī, li-tibā' ahwa nashr, N.D., Vol. VIII, 46 and 47.

Forty or forty-five nights after conception, an angel comes to the womb to blow the spirit into the yet unformed foetus. The angel asks God, "O Lord, is it to be a happy or a miserable one?" and that is recorded. The angel asks again, "O Lord, is it to be a male or a female?" and that is recorded." The angel then records the actions, character, the term of life (*ajal*) and allotted sustenance of the unborn child. The Prophet concluded, "After that the scrolls are sealed, and nothing will be added or deleted therefrom."⁸¹ In another version of the same Hadīth the Prophet adds, "By God... a person may perform the deeds of the people of paradise until there is no more than a cubit's length between him and paradise, but that the book (decree) overtakes him and he performs the works of the people of the fire; thus he would enter it."⁸² Likewise a man who lives all his life doing evil until the decree overtakes him would repent and thus enter paradise.

Although the traditions just discussed do not deal directly with the problem of suffering, it is to be understood that all is from God, the evil and the good. God decrees not only man's capacity to act, but also the acts themselves. The God of such traditions, however is not the God of mercy and love, the God whom man can love and worship. Furthermore according to such traditions, neither good nor evil has meaning or purpose which man can fathom. They provide no grounds for hope to balance the fear man must feel in the face of the Divine inscrutability. These traditions belong to theological speculation, not to the popular piety of religious men and women.

The hard line which these traditions represent was from the beginning challenged by other traditions. These traditions concerned themselves not only with the meaning and purpose of suffering in human life, but with the actual suffering of God's servants and His love and compassion for them. The traditions we are about to consider breathe the warm pietistic air of the Qur'ān, and generally echo its dynamic view of the Divine-human relationship. Suffering is a test of the faith of the believer. If it is endured patiently and with trust and gratitude, it evokes God's love and compassion. It serves as (an) expiation for the sins of the sufferer who will be well rewarded for the strength of his faith.

81. Muslim, Vol. VIII, p. 45. See also pp. 46 and 47 for a Hadīth more clearly reflecting theological developments.

82. Muslim, Vol. VIII, p. 45. See also *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, Cairo: Kitāb al-sh'ab, N.D., Vol. VIII, p. 132ff.

Thus it is reported that Abū Waqqāṣ, a well-known Companion, asked the Prophet:

O Apostle of God, who among men are visited with the greatest affliction? The Prophet said, "The Prophets, then the pious, then those like them among men. A man is visited with affliction in accordance with his faith (*din*). If his faith is durable, his affliction is increased, but if his faith is weak, then his affliction is lightened accordingly." (The Prophet continued), "Calamity continues to afflict the servant until he walks on the face of the earth without any sin cleaving to him."⁸³

Suffering can be a sign of the love of God for His patient servant. For if God loves a people, we are told, "...he visits them with affliction..."⁸⁴ This view of suffering has profoundly affected Islamic piety through the life and teachings of the Sufis, the mystics of Islam.⁸⁵ To them God spoke directly, not only in the Qur'ān, but in Hadīth traditions known as *ḥadīth qudsī*, sacred or divine utterance.⁸⁶ The view presented in these traditions is that God allows His faithful servant to suffer in order that he may be rewarded for his patience and trust. Yet God himself shares sympathetically, so to speak, the pain of His suffering servant. If a man bears patiently and with fortitude the loss of a loved one, God would reward him with paradise.⁸⁷ In the *ḥadīth qudsī*, God's love and mercy overshadow His justice and wrath, He shares the sorrow of His servant in spite of His unalterable decree. Thus the Prophet said, "When the child of a servant dies, God, blessed and majestic is He says to His angels, 'Have you taken the soul of my servant's child?' 'Yes,' they would ans-

83. Ahmad b. Muḥammad Ibn Hanbal, *Musnad*. Beirut: 1st ed., al-Maktab al-Islāmī, 1389/1966, pp. 173-174.

84. *Ibid.*, p. 174.

85. Because of consideration of space, it will not be possible to discuss Ṣūfī views in any detail. The reader is referred to the standard treatises already available in English translation.

86. On the nature and growth of the *Ḥadīth qudsī*, see: Dr. Wm. A. Graham, *Divine Utterance and Prophetic Utterance*, first presented as a Ph.D. thesis to Harvard University, Center for the Study of World Religions, 1974. It appear shortly in book form.

87. 'Abd Allāh ibn al-Mubārak al-Marwazī, *Kitāb al-zuhd wa-l-raqā'iq* ed., Shaikh Ḥabīb al-Rahman al-A'zamī, Hyderabad, India: pub. Shaikh 'Aḥī al-Zu'bi, N.D., Vol. 11, p. 27.

wer." God repeats the question three times to indicate His compassion for the pious sufferer. Then He asks, "What did my servant say?" They answer, 'He praised you and repeated, Surely we belong to God and to Him we return.' Then God commands, 'Build a mansion for My servant in paradise and call it the house of praise.'⁸⁸

No doubt under Sūfī influence, some of the pious began to despise prosperity and health and wish for poverty and affliction. One such man was the pious Companion al-Rabīʿ who was afflicted with paralysis. When asked why he did not seek medical help, he replied, "I almost did. But I remembered the people of Ad and Thamūd...and many other peoples. There were among them afflicted people and physicians. Yet neither those needing cure nor those offering it remained; they all perished."⁸⁹ Such extreme attitudes, however, were again tempered as men were taught to repeat a prayer attributed to the ancient Prophet David, "O my Lord! Not a disease that would destroy me, nor health that would make me forget, but state between the two."⁹⁰

4 *The Shīʿī ethos: suffering and redemption.*

Shīʿism has been regarded by Western scholars as a deviation from true Islam. This view is based on a one-sided approach to the history and religious thought of Shīʿism. It presupposes that Shīʿī Islam is simply the result of political circumstances, the reaction of a frustrated party of malcontented Muslims who tried to hide their failure behind religious fantasy and revolt. That such a view is totally unfounded is just beginning to be realized by Western scholarship.

Our view is that Shīʿism is an authentic interpretation of Islam, based on the Qurʾān and prophetic Tradition. In our view, both Shīʿī and Sunnī expressions of Islam are equally true and equally authentic interpretations of the Qurʾānic message as realized in the life of the Prophet and his immediate community.⁹¹

88. *Ibid.*, P. 27, see also, nos. 109-113, and especially 112. P. 28; Qurʾān, II: 150; Arberry, Vol. I, P. 48.

89. *Ibid.*, P. 25.

90. *Ibid.*, P. 26.

91. In this we share the view for long defended by Dr. S.H. Nasr. See his translation: *Tabāḡabāʿī, Shīʿite Islam (Shīʿī dar īslām)*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1975. See also, Ch. VI of *Ideas and Realities of Islam*. London: Allen and Unwin, 1966.

We insisted earlier in this discussion that what determines the world-view of a religious tradition is not only the concept of the divine, but the view of man which such a tradition holds as well. We wish to add here that this is true also with regard to the different expressions or emphases within any one given religious tradition. Shīʿī and Sunnī Islam, therefore differ principally not on any basic Islamic beliefs or obligations, but rather on the question of authority, both temporal and spiritual, in the community, and the community's response to God's involvement in human history.

Islam views human history essentially as the history of Divine guidance through revelation and the human response to this Divine initiative. Shīʿī Islam carries this view to its ultimate conclusion. The human potential, it asserts, must always be fully actualized and exemplified in special human beings who stand midway between humanity and the Divine. These are the Imāms, the first of God's creation and His proof against humanity.⁹² Before all things, the Prophet Muḥammad, his daughter Fāṭimah and ʿAlī the Prophet's cousin and son-in-law, and their two sons Hasan and Husayn were essences of Divine light. The process of their creation is described by the sixth Imām as follows:

God created us (the Imāms) from the light of His majesty. Then He formed us from a lump of clay, preserved and well guarded under His throne. He then made the light to dwell in the clay, thus we became luminous humans...⁹³

As human archetypes, the Imāms are the concrete embodiment of the Divine Word. They are, so to speak, the speaking Qurʾān, as they alone among men comprehend its hidden meaning. The Imāms are the repositories of Divine Knowledge (ʿilm); the interpreters of God's revelation (*wahī*). They are the incontrovertible proofs of God over all creation. Through them alone is

92. The Imāms are regarded as the 'proofs' (*ḥujaj*) of God. The word *ḥujjah* (the singular of *ḥujaj*) means 'proof', 'argument', 'contention' or 'judgement'. This view is consistently argued in the *Ḥadīth* collection of al-Kulaynī, and especially in the part dealing with the Imāms: *Kitāb al-Ḥujjah* ('The Book of Proof'), in *al-Uṣūl min al-Kāfī*. Tehran: Dār al-Kutub al-Islāmīyah, 1374/1954. Vol. I, P. 268ff.

93. Kulaynī, Vol. I, P. 332.

God truly worshipped, "Had it not been for us", the eighth Imām al-Rida declared, "God would not have been worshipped."⁹⁴

The Imāms are the Friends (*awliyā'*) of God, and their authority (*walāyah*) was the charge (*amānah*) which God offered to all creation.⁹⁵ The sin of Adam and Eve was not that they disobeyed God by eating of the forbidden tree; it was rather their envy of the exalted status of the Prophet, his family and their descendants, the Imāms. The sin of envy laid them open to the evil temptations of Satan. This sin, moreover, has been the cause of human evil, sin and suffering from the time of Adam, and will continue to the end of time.

The Imāms are not only the Divine proof or judgement against human folly, they are also the source of Divine grace⁹⁶ and forgiveness. Their names were the words which Adam received from his Lord, and He forgave him.⁹⁷ They are the pillars (*arkān*) of the earth, and on them depends cosmic order, the regularity of nature and mankind's subsistence.⁹⁸

Shī'ī imamology is, in some way, analogous to Christology. The Prophet and his descendants, the Imāms, collectively play a role similar to that of Christ in Christianity. Like Christ the Logos, they are eternally present with God. Through them all things were created, and on their existence depends the existence of the entire creation. Like Christ, moreover, the Imāms were destined to suffer persecution and martyrdom. Their sufferings are a source of redemption for those who accept their absolute authority, and a source of judgement for their opponents. Like Christ, finally, the Imāms will be vindicated on the Day of Judgement. The twelfth Imām, the Mahdī (expected messiah) will come to judge mankind and usher in an era of peace, comfort and prosperity in the earth. He shall purify the earth from iniquity and wrong-doing. In

94. Kulaynī, Vol. I, P. 275. See also P. 274.

95. Abū Ja'far Muhammad b. 'Alī b. al-Husayn b. Mūsā al-Qummī Ibn Bābawayh, known as al-Shaykh al-Sadūq, *Kitāb ma anī al-akhbār*. Tehran: al-Maktabah al-Islāmīyah, 1379/1959. P. 108ff.

96. In standard theological works, the Imām is declared to be an act of divine grace (*lutf*): hence his appointment is incumbent upon God. See, for instance, Nasīr al-Dīn al-Tūsī, *Tajrid al-I tiqād. Mashhad*: Ja'farī, N.D., PP. 225ff.

97. Qur'ān, II:37. See Ibn Bābawayh, *Ma'ānī*, PP. 125-127.

98. Kulaynī, Vol. I, PP. 278-280.

this mission, the Mahdī will be aided by Christ himself who awaits in heaven his return, as do men here on earth.⁹⁹

The basis of the Shī'ī ethos of suffering and martyrdom is the tragic death of Husayn, the grandson of the Prophet, and third Imām of the Shī'ī community. Husayn's death has been regarded by the general community of Muslims as the tragedy of Islam. It has therefore served as a source of sorrow and a lesson of true sacrifice in the way of God and the Truth. It has also served as an example for the pious to imitate in their struggle against wrong-doing and tyranny. For Shī'ī Muslims, the death of Husayn is a cosmic event, the focal point of human history.¹⁰⁰

Shī'ī piety has viewed human history prior to the martyrdom of Husayn as a series of events foreshadowing and, in some instances, foretelling this tragic event. Prophets from Adam to Muḥammad were told of it, and in some way shared in the grief of the martyred Imām and his family.¹⁰¹ The Prophet Muḥammad was told of the impending death of his grandson by multitudes of angels who came to express their joy at the birth of the Imām, and offer their condolences for his impending painful martyrdom.¹⁰²

Shī'ī hagiography has painted pathetic scenes of the sorrow of the Prophet and his family as they recalled the fate that was to befall their beloved child. They lived in a house of sorrows, and the mistress of that house was Fātimāh al-Zahrā', the radiant one.¹⁰³ Her short life was a tragedy. As an infant she was orphaned by the death of her mother. As a married woman, she and her husband and two sons lived in poverty and privation. Then the death

99. For the Shī'ī concept of the Mahdī, see Mulla Muhammad Bāqir Majlisī, *Biḥār al-Anwār*. Tehran: al-Maktabah al-Islāmīyah, 1384, Vols. LI-LIII. See also my forthcoming book, *Redemptive Suffering in Islam: A Study of the Devotional Aspects of 'Ashūrā' in Twelver Shi'ism in the Middle Ages*, presented also as a Ph.D. thesis to Harvard University, Center for the Study of World Religions, 1975, Ch. VI, section 5. Many references are made to the work in this discussion, as there is no other comprehensive treatment of the subject that I am aware of in any European language.

100. For the historical circumstances of the death of ḥusayn, see my thesis, Ch. VI, section 1. See also L. Vecchia Vagliari, ḥusayn ibn 'Alī ibn Abī Tālib' in Bernard Lewis, et. al., *New Encyclopaedia of Islam*, Leyden, Brill, 1971, Vol. III.

101. For such hagiographic legends and their effect on Shī'ī piety, see my thesis, Ch. I, section 2 and Appendix A.

102. *Ibid.*, Ch. III, section 1.

103. *Ibid.*, Ch. I, section 4; Ch. VI, section 4.

of her father left her totally distraught with grief. After him, she suffered persecution and humiliation. She mourned her father until she died less than six months after his death. In paradise, she continues to mourn the death of her son Husayn, and all the denizens of heaven and hell share in her grief. Her grief will continue till the Day of Judgement, the day of her final vindication. Both her grief and vindication are graphically described in a popular tradition attributed to the sixth Imām al-Sādiq.

On the day of resurrection, Fāṭimah will sit in judgement beneath a dome of light. Her martyred son Husayn will stand before her carrying his head in his hand, ready to contend with his murderers. Seeing him, she will raise a piercing lament, and all prophets, angels and men will weep because of her weeping. God will then transform Husayn into the best of forms before her eyes. His murderers and all those who shared in his blood will be brought together for the final retribution. They will be killed and brought back to life until each of the Imāms will have killed them all. The sixth Imām concluded, "...then will all anger be appeased and all sorrow forgotten."¹⁰⁴

Redemption must always imply judgement as well as salvation. It is the struggle between good and evil where the good prevails and healing and harmony are restored to mankind. It is a return to the primordial goodness of the world as it emerged from the Creator's hand. Thus both redemption and judgement are an integral part of the monotheistic religious traditions, where God will finally justify all His ways in the eschatological consummation of history. Fāṭimah and the Imāms play the same role in Shī'ī piety that Christ of the apocalypse plays in the early Church. Christ will return to save and judge, to condemn the wicked and vindicate the righteous. In both Shī'ī and Christian eschatology the bitterness of a persecuted community is all too apparent.

The Shī'ī community has identified itself with the Imāms and their sufferings in many ways. One of these is the memorial services (*majālis al-ta'ziyah*) which are held during the first ten days of Muḥarram, the first month of the Islamic calendar.¹⁰⁵ In these memorial services, the participants mourn the martyred Imām through ritual, verse and drama and shedding copious tears. Very

104. Ibn Bābawayh, *Kitāb thawāb al-a'māl wa 'iqāb al-a'māl*. Baghdad: Asad Press, 1385/1962, P. 195. See also my thesis, Ch. VI, section 4.

105. For a comprehensive discussion of the Ta'ziyah tradition, see my thesis, Ch. V, section 2.

early, perhaps shortly after the death of Husayn, his treacherous supporters felt deep remorse which in time came to be expressed in a rich *cultus* which has survived until the present day. Hagiographical tales and legends of the lives of the Imāms and their eschatological role continue to grow and provide a rich source of ideas, myth and ritual for this devotional cult.

The first ten days of Muḥarram, the days of '*āshūrā*', may be regarded as the Shī'ī holy week. During these days, pious Shī'ī Muslims share in the sufferings of the Imāms as they seek to interiorize these sufferings through the recollection of the tragic events of Muḥarram, which they act out in popular passion plays.¹⁰⁶ The purpose of all this is to induce sorrow in the hearts of the faithful and to bring out their tears.

Weeping for the suffering and death of Husayn, and the harm and persecutions which all the Imāms had suffered,¹⁰⁷ will earn the weeper divine forgiveness and assure him of a place in paradise. In numerous traditions attributed to most of the Imāms, it is asserted that whoever weeps for Husayn and causes others to weep will have rich rewards in paradise. His sins will be forgiven, even if they were as numerous as the sands of the sea.¹⁰⁸

No doubt this emphasis on sorrow as the means of salvation for the faithful was meant to keep the spirit of revolt alive. It had other political implications as well, which took on different expressions according to different circumstances. Nonetheless, the emphasis expressed the profound religious view that the community's sharing of the sufferings of its religious heroes here on earth will be the means of its sharing in their bliss in the world to come. The faithful must bear the cross of suffering in this world in order for them to share the fulfilment of the final hope of salvation in the world to come. Traditions expressing this view are usually couched in powerful language and are intended to produce an equally powerful psychological impact on their hearers. The following is a typical example attributed to the eighth Imām:

106. For good examples of the Muharram passion play, see Sir Lewis Pelly, *The Miracle Play of Hasan and Husayn*, 2 Vols., London: Wm. H. Allen and Co., 1879.

107. According to Shī'ī tradition, from at least the beginning of the third century Hijrah, all the Imāms except the twelfth were martyred, either by the sword or by poison.

108. See *Majlisī Bihār*, Vol. XLIV, Ch. XXXIV, PP. 278ff. for many examples of such traditions. See also my thesis, Ch. V, section 1.

He who recalls our afflictions and weeps for all we have suffered will be with us in our high station on the day of resurrection. He who is reminded of our sufferings and weeps, and causes others to weep, his eyes shall not weep on the day when many eyes shall weep. He who sits in an assembly wherein our memory is kept alive, his heart will not die on the day when many hearts shall die.¹⁰⁹

Redemption may be a divine gift, but it is a gift that must be earned by both the redeemer and the redeemed. It must be earned by the redeemer through the agony of suffering and death. It must be earned by the community of the redeemed through their endurance of suffering, and even death if necessary. Redemption in Shī'ī Islam is not expressed in the idea of ransom or the ancient ritualistic sacrifice, but through intercession. The martyred Imām earned this prerogative of intercession through frustration, failure and, finally, the cup of martyrdom. In very early hagiographical interpretations of the death of Husayn, it was insisted that he could not attain his high status with God except through martyrdom. Thus the Imām, and even those who died with him, were predestined for martyrdom as the price of their divine favour.¹¹⁰

Not only Shī'ī Muslims, but the Muslim community in general continues to find in the tragedy of Muḥarram a source of comfort and courage in the face of wrongdoing and adversity. On Calvary and on the hot sands of the Mesopotamian desert, in every self-sacrifice for the truth, humanity will find strength and challenge, healing and judgement. Only in this way could suffering have a purpose, as it carries humanity a step closer to God.

Conclusion

Genesis tells us that God made man in his own image. Although the Qur'ān does not say the same thing directly, it clearly implies it in its view of man as God's representative on earth, man to whom even the angels had to make obeisance. Islamic piety, both in the Hadīth and Sūfī discipline, went even further than

Genesis in its high claims for man. The human religious quest may be regarded as an attempt at discovering our own image of God. As our view of ourselves matures, our vision of this divine image grows clearer. This goal must be achieved through our total involvement in life, its joys and sorrows, its pleasures and pains.

"Why", it may be asked, "is there not in Islam, '...anything like the profound analysis of tragedy and defeat as there is in Judaism and even more in Christianity.'"¹¹¹ The answer is that in Islam, man is not the pathetic fallen creature whom God alone, and through a supreme act of sacrifice, could save. The emphasis on man's power and responsibility as the vicegerent of God must be matched with equal emphasis on divine sovereignty. This the Qur'ān does without sacrificing either man's responsibility or God's omnipotence. In our view, both the Judaeo-Christian and Islamic interpretations of suffering, different though they may be, are equally valid and necessary for a true and universal understanding of man. The truth is far too great and too profound to be contained in any one religious tradition, philosophy or ideology. Nor is the truth static; it is rather a dynamic force forever challenging and enriching our lives, whatever our understanding of God and man may be.

In Islam, for instance, the "...virile and wideranging sense of the victory and omnipotence of God..."¹¹² with all the implications this phrase must have for the life of the Muslim community, was not left unchallenged by Shī'ī piety. Shī'ism can be viewed as a movement of protest. In this lies its great contribution to Muslim piety, in spite of its many excesses. Moreover, once the political climate calling for such excesses had changed, Shī'ī and Sunnī understanding of the value of suffering as a means of discipline and instruction converged. It is now common for Shī'ī 'ulamā' to preach during the celebrations of 'Ashūrā' that Husayn died in order that wrongdoing, poverty, hunger and oppression may be exposed. He died in order that the Islamic ideal may be saved from any attempts to confuse it with mere power or vain-glory. On all this, Sunnī Muslims are also agreed. The new understanding of his martyrdom was eloquently expressed through the words put in the mouth of 'Husayn the Martyr' by a modern Sunnī Muslim Egyptian writer. We shall conclude this essay with

109. Majlisī, *Bihār*, Vol. XLIV, P. 278.

110. See my thesis, Ch. IV, section 3, for a comprehensive discussion of such hagiographical interpretations.

111. Bowker, P. 120.

112. *Ibid.*, P. 120.

the voice of Husayn from the depths of tragedy across the centuries.

Remember me not through the shedding of the blood of others, but remember me when you seek to save the truth from the claws of falsehood. Remember me in your tears; when the meek and lowly are oppressed. Remember me when religion is belied by the cries of hungry stomachs and when the corrupt among you are set up in government over men of faith. Remember me when the singing of nightingales in your lives would be overcome by howls of pain and when the sound of clinging glasses drowns the cries of weepers... But if you hold your peace against deception and accept humiliation, then I would be slain anew. I would be killed every day a thousand times. I would be killed every time a zealous man is silent and a man of endurance slackens. I would be killed whenever men are subjugated and humiliated... Then would the wound of the martyr forever curse you because you did not avenge the blood of the martyr. Avenge the blood of the martyr.¹¹³

113. 'Abd al-Rahmān al-Sharqāwī, *Tha'r Allāh: A Play in Two Volumes*, II, al-Husayn Shāhidan. Cairo: Dār al-Kitāb al-'Arabī li-l-tibā'h w-al-nashr, 1388/1969. PP. 283-286.