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Lesson 10: God's Justice and the Issue of Eternity

We know that the Holy Quran directly speaks of the eternal punishment to be given to the kufar. That is, it speaks about eternity.

وَعَدَ اللَّهُ الْمُنَافِقِينَ وَالْمُنَافِقَاتِ وَالْكُفَّارَ نَارَ جَهَنَّمَ خَالِدِينَ فِيهَا ۚ هِيَ حَسْبُهُمْ ۚ وَلَعْنَهُمُ اللَّهُ ۚ وَلَهُمْ عَذَابٌ مُّقِيمٌ

"God has promised the hypocrites, men and women and the kafirs, the fire of hell; therein shall they dwell; sufficient is it for them; for them is the curse of God, and an enduring punishment."
(9:68)

Just as in the verse following that, the Quran promises the believing men and the believing women gardens in Paradise forever.

وَعَدَ اللَّهُ الْمُؤْمِنِينَ وَالْمُؤْمِنَاتِ جَنَّاتٍ تَجْرِي مِنْ تَحْتِهَا الْأَنْهَارُ خَالِدِينَ فِيهَا وَمَسَاكِنَ طَيِّبَةً فِي جَنَّاتٍ عَدْنٍ ۚ وَرِضْوَانٌ مِنَ اللَّهِ أَكْبَرُ ۚ ذَلِكَ هُوَ الْفَوْزُ الْعَظِيمُ

"God has promised to believers, men and women, gardens under which rivers flow, to dwell therein and beautiful mansions in gardens of everlasting bliss. But the greatest bliss is the good pleasure of God: that is the supreme felicity." (9:72)

This question then arises and that is how can one accept that in one's lifetime of eighty or one hundred years, one commits evil deeds and then for eternity – millions of years – is punished.

Of course, this is not important as to rewards because the ocean of God's Mercy is very great and however much greater is the reward, it shows greater virtue and mercy but as to evil deeds, they are

punished for eternity because of limited sins. How can this be reconciled with God's justice? Should a balance not exist between punishment and reward?

Answer:

In order to reach a final solution to this discussion, several points need to be noted:

A. Punishments on the Day of Resurrection do not resemble punishments in this world. For instance, a person is found guilty of aggression and plunder and he spends some time in prison whereas the punishment at the Judgment takes the form of efforts of one's deeds and the particularities of a person's acts.

In clearer terms, the difficulties which one bears in the other world is the direct result of their deeds. The Holy Quran explains this very clearly where it says,

فَالْيَوْمَ لَا تُظْلَمُ نَفْسٌ شَيْئًا وَلَا تُجْزَوْنَ إِلَّا مَا كُنتُمْ تَعْمَلُونَ

"Then on that Day, not a soul will be wronged in the least and you shall but be repaid the meeds of your past deeds." (36:54)

With one simple example, we can visualize this truth that a person who goes after narcotics and alcoholic drinks and no matter how much one explains that these things will ruin him, and sicken his heart and destroy his nerves, he does not listen.

He spends several weeks or months drowned in these killing pleasures and gradually develops ulcers, heart disease, nerve disease and then he spends tens of years until the end of his life suffering because of this and he groans night and day.

Can one object here why does a person who only sinned for several weeks or months have to suffer for tens of years?

It is readily stated in response that this is the result of his own actions. Even if he were to live longer than the Prophet Noah and were to live for tens of thousands of years and we were to continuously see him in pain and anguish, we would say that this is something he brought upon himself with his deeds.

Punishment on the Day of Judgment is like this. Thus, no one can object to the justice of the situation.

B. This is wrong that some people assume that the time limit of the punishment must be the same extent as the sin because the relation between a sin and punishment is not a temporal one. It depends upon the result and quality of the sin.

For instance, it is possible that a person in one second kill an innocent person and according to the laws

of some countries, he is given life imprisonment. Here we see that the time of the sin was one quickly passing second whereas the punishment is for tens of years. No one considers this to be oppressive. Why? Because the question here is not one of days or weeks or months or years. It depends upon the quality of the sin and its result.

C. Eternity in hell and eternal punishment only belongs to those people who have closed all doors to salvation for themselves and they have drowned themselves in corruption, licentiousness, kufr and hypocrisy so that the darkness of sin takes over their entire being and, as a result, that person takes on the color of sin and kufr.

The Holy Quran says,

بَلَىٰ مَنْ كَسَبَ سَيِّئَةً وَأَحَاطَتْ بِهِ خَطِيئَتُهُ فَأُولَٰئِكَ أَصْحَابُ النَّارِ ۖ هُمْ فِيهَا خَالِدُونَ

"Nay, those who seek gain in evil and are girt round by their sins they are companions of the fire: therein shall they abide (forever)." (2:81)

These kinds of individuals have completely cut off their connection with God and have closed all doors to their salvation and wellbeing.

These kinds of individuals are like birds who purposefully break their own wings, pullout their feathers, are obliged to walk forever upon the earth and are deprived of flying through the skies.

Noticing the three points given above clarifies the issue that eternal punishment which belongs to a particular group of hypocrites or kuffar does not oppose the principle of justice. This is the ominous result of their deeds themselves. The Divine Prophets had previously told them that their deeds would have these results.

It is clear that if individuals be ignorant and the invitation of the prophets not be known to them and if they commit evil deeds out of ignorance, they will not receive such a difficult punishment.

It is also necessary to point out that verses of the Holy Quran and Islamic Traditions are used because the ocean of Divine Mercy is so great and extensive that a large group of transgressors are included; some by means of intercession; some by means of forgiveness and some, because of small, good deeds which they performed. God, in His greatness, gives great reward for those small, good deeds.

And another group, after they have been punished for a time in hell: and have been purified, they will return because of Divine Mercy.

The only group remaining is the one which has enmity towards the truth and commit oppression, corruption and hypocrisy so that their whole being is covered in oppression, kufr and faithlessness.

Think and Answer

1. How is it that some people think that eternity does not conform to Divine Justice?
2. Are the punishments in the other world similar to the punishment in this world? If not, what are they like?
3. Does justice demand that there be a balance between the time of a sin and its punishment?
4. Who will receive eternal punishment?
5. Who will receive Divine Forgiveness?

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