

A Perspective on the Problem of Evil in the Context of Hadiths Attributed to the Prophet Muhammad

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ABSTRACT:

In this study, the problem of evil is addressed within the framework of hadiths narrated from the Prophet Muhammad, and the ways in which evil is interpreted in these hadiths are examined. Following an assessment of the nature and source of evil, the study focuses on fundamental elements such as faith, intention, free will, and predestination, which play a role in determining evil in the hadiths. Quranic verses are also partially utilized in the examination of these issues. The study reveals that, in the hadiths of the Prophet Muhammad, evil is not evaluated solely in terms of physical harm, pain, or negative consequences; rather, a person's faith, intention, will, circumstances, and the ultimate consequences of an act are also taken into account. Within this framework, it is concluded that an act that appears to be good may lose its value in the sight of Allah due to bad intentions, whereas illnesses, misfortunes, and obstacles that a person encounters beyond their control cannot be characterized as absolute evil. In the context of predestination, it is demonstrated through Quranic verses and hadiths that it is not appropriate to directly attribute evils arising from a person's own voluntary actions to predestination; that a person is responsible for the actions they perform through their free will; and that factors such as the self and Satan are not the absolute causes of evil, but rather factors that lead a person toward evil. Furthermore, it is demonstrated through Quranic verses and hadiths that, due to the limitations of human knowledge, certain events perceived as evil in this world may carry a different meaning from the perspective of divine wisdom and the Hereafter. In conclusion, this article presents a comprehensive approach demonstrating that, in the hadiths of the Prophet Muhammad, the problem of evil is addressed in conjunction with divine justice, human responsibility, life as a test, patience, trust in God, and belief in the Hereafter, and that it is incorrect to attribute evil, as an absolute and independent entity, to Allah.

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1. Introduction

The problem of evil (theodicy) is one of the most fundamental and widespread issues in individual

and social life. People often encounter suffering, misfortunes, and various adversities that they believe they do not deserve. This situation may

naturally lead people to question God, who is believed to be absolutely good, as well as religions. However, the problem of evil is a multidimensional and complex issue that has been addressed from diverse perspectives by different religions, belief systems, and schools of thought. Approaches that take divine revelation and the teachings of the prophets as their primary points of reference offer explanations for this problem in accordance with religious principles, whereas systems of thought that do not rely on religious references arrive at different conclusions based on different premises.

In addition, differences in individuals' material circumstances, cultural backgrounds, and life experiences shape the ways in which they perceive the concept of evil and, consequently, the conclusions they reach. This further complicates the assessment of the problem of evil. For while wealth, health, power, and similar blessings may be regarded by some as sources of goodness and happiness, they may become causes of various hardships and forms of evil for others. Accordingly, the answer to the question of what constitutes absolute good and absolute evil may vary depending on individuals' perspectives and the circumstances in which they find themselves. Some Qur'anic verses that illustrate Islam's approach to this issue are as follows:

"Those who, just yesterday, had longed to be in his place began to say, 'So it turns out that Allah bestows abundant provision upon whom He wills among His servants and restricts it for whom He wills. If Allah had not bestowed His grace upon us, He would have caused us to perish as well. So it turns out that the disbelievers will never attain salvation'" (Qur'an, al-Qasas 28:82).

At first glance, this verse reveals that wealth, status, and similar worldly advantages—which are desired and envied by others—do not always constitute true goodness. Indeed, when such gains distance a person from Allah and lead them to arrogance and transgression, they may ultimately pave the way for their ruin and downfall. Accordingly, according to the Qur'an, whether something is regarded as good or evil is

determined not solely by its outward appearance but also by the consequences it produces.

The same truth is also expressed in the hadiths of the Prophet Muhammad through various examples. In this context, one hadith uses the example of an ant to illustrate the relative nature of good and evil, stating: "If Allah had intended good for the ant, He would not have given it wings" (Kelâbâzî, 2008, 1:297).

When a female ant reaches a certain stage of maturity, it develops wings and leaves its nest in order to establish a new colony. This process yields a positive outcome for the small number of ants that succeed in establishing a new colony. However, the vast majority of winged ants fall prey to birds and lose their lives. Therefore, while having wings and acquiring the ability to fly may be regarded as a good for the limited number of ants that succeed in establishing a new colony, for the vast majority of ants, it constitutes the beginning of a process that ends in death. This example is noteworthy in that it demonstrates how a blessing that appears to be a good at first glance may, in terms of its consequences, turn into a significant evil.

Although access to information has become easier and faster than ever before, increasingly difficult living conditions and rising economic burdens are causing individuals to face more problems and hardships. This situation brings the relationship between the evils experienced and God and predestination back to the fore, making questions concerning the role of predestination in the emergence of evil and the nature of divine justice particularly prominent. Indeed, questioning the workings of predestination and God's justice in the face of suffering, calamities, and adversities emerges as a natural consequence of the human existential quest. This study examines how the problem of evil is addressed within the framework of the Qur'an and the hadiths of the Prophet Muhammad and seeks to analyze the approach to this issue presented by these two fundamental religious sources.

2. The Definition of Evil and Its Synonyms

Evil (شر / *sharr*) is used as the antonym of the concept of good (خير / *khayr*) (al-Lughawī, 1986, Vol. 1, p. 501). *Khayr* encompasses all material and spiritual values that human beings desire and pursue. In this context, reason, justice, virtue, and anything that provides benefit are considered to fall within the scope of *khayr* (al-Iṣḥānī, 2009, p. 300). By contrast, the word *sharr* (شر), which literally means “to spread something under the sun,” refers to every form of negativity that human nature seeks to avoid and shun (al-Iṣḥānī, 2009, p. 300). Within this framework, any situation that produces negative consequences for an individual’s material or spiritual well-being may generally be characterized as evil.

Rāghib al-Iṣḥānī states that the concepts of *khayr* and *sharr* do not possess an absolute nature; rather, they are relative concepts that may vary according to the individual, time, and circumstances. Therefore, a situation regarded as *khayr* by one person may constitute *sharr* from another person’s perspective. To illustrate this relative nature, the author cites the example of wealth, drawing attention to the fact that the same blessing may produce different outcomes for different individuals (al-Iṣḥānī, 2009, p. 300).

In the verse from Sūrat al-Baqarah that states, “When death approaches any of you, and if he leaves behind wealth, it is incumbent upon him to make a bequest to his mother, father, and relatives as a right for those who fear Allah” (Qur’an, al-Baqarah 2:180), wealth is described as *khayr* in an absolute sense. By contrast, in Sūrat al-Mu’minūn, it is stated: “Do they think that We have given them wealth and children for their own good? No! But they are unaware of this” (Qur’an, al-Mu’minūn 23:55–56). Here, the focus is placed not on wealth in itself but on the consequences it produces, and it is emphasized that the wealth granted to the polytheists does not, in reality, constitute a good for them, since it leads them toward disbelief and transgression. Thus, the Qur’an indicates that the value of a blessing should be assessed not merely according

to its nature, but according to the outcome to which it leads a person.

On the other hand, some scholars have stated that the word *khayr* in the verse in question does not refer to wealth in an absolute sense, but rather to abundant wealth. Furthermore, in the Arabic language, the words *khayr* and *sharr* may be used as both nouns and adjectives, depending on the context in which they occur.

There are various examples in the Qur’an of *khayr* being used as both a noun and an adjective. Indeed, in the verse, وَلْتَكُنْ مِنْكُمْ أُمَّةٌ يَدْعُونَ إِلَى الْخَيْرِ (وَلْتَكُنْ مِنْكُمْ أُمَّةٌ يَدْعُونَ إِلَى الْخَيْرِ وَيَأْمُرُونَ بِالْمَعْرُوفِ وَيَنْهَوْنَ عَنِ الْمُنْكَرِ وَأُولَئِكَ هُمُ الْمُفْلِحُونَ) “Let there be among you a community that calls to good, enjoins what is right, and forbids what is wrong. It is they who are the successful ones” (Qur’an, Āl ‘Imrān 3:104), the word *khayr* is used as a noun. By contrast, in the verse, (مَا نَنْسَخْ مِنْ آيَةٍ أَوْ نُنسِهَا نَأْتِ بِخَيْرٍ مِنْهَا أَوْ مِثْلَهَا) “If We abrogate a verse or cause it to be forgotten, We will surely bring one better than it or similar to it” (Qur’an, al-Baqarah 2:106), the word *khayr* is used as an adjective in the sense of “better.” These examples demonstrate that the concept of *khayr* can assume different grammatical functions in the Qur’an depending on the context, and that its semantic scope is shaped by its context of usage.

The word *khayr*, when used to compare two things, takes on the meaning of the elative (*ism al-taḍlīl*), signifying “better” or “superior.” Indeed, the Qur’an contains various examples of this usage. In addition, different terms are used in different contexts to express the opposite of *khayr*. In one instance, the word *sharr* (شر) is used (Qur’an, al-Zilzāl 99:7–8), while in another, the word *ḍurr* (ضر) is used in this sense (Qur’an, al-An‘ām 6:17). This demonstrates that, in the Qur’an, the opposite of *khayr* is expressed through different terms depending on the context, and that its semantic range varies according to the context in which it is used (al-Iṣḥānī, 2009, pp. 300–301).

3. The Source of Evil

At the heart of discussions surrounding the problem of evil lies, without doubt, the question

of divinity. For questions such as whether God exists or not and, if His existence is accepted, what attributes He possesses and how He should be conceived in terms of His nature constitute the fundamental starting point of the problem of evil. In addition, the question of how the existence of the universe and human beings is to be explained is an integral part of the same debate. For this reason, the question of divinity encompasses many fundamental problems revolving around God's existence, attributes, and relationship with the universe. According to Muhammad Iqbal, however, one of these problems stands out in particular and constitutes the central issue of discussions on divinity. This is the problem of evil (*sharr*) (Cebeci, 1985, p. 2). The classical formulation of the problem of evil was first put forward by Epicurus (341–270 BCE) and later restated by Lactantius (260–340 CE). Despite the passage of time, this paradox remains one of the fundamental issues that continues to be debated in philosophy and religious thought. The problem in question is formulated as follows:

“Either God wishes to eliminate evil (*sharr*) but lacks the power to do so, or He has the power to do so but does not wish to eliminate it. Or He neither wishes to eliminate it nor has the power to do so. Finally, He both wishes to eliminate it and has the power to do so. If He wishes to eliminate evil but lacks the power to do so, then He is powerless, which is incompatible with the concept of divinity. If He has the power to eliminate evil but does not wish to do so, then this is a situation incompatible with the attributes of goodness and justice. Conversely, if He both wishes to eliminate evil and has the power to do so—which is consistent with the concept of divinity—then how is the existence of evil to be explained? In other words, why does God not eliminate evil?” (Cebeci, 1985, pp. 4–5).

As Saint Thomas Aquinas (1225–1274) puts it, from the perspective of the problem of evil, it appears to human beings as though God does not exist. For when one of two opposing phenomena exists in an absolute sense, the existence of the other cannot be posited. Based on this line of thought, it is argued that if God possesses

absolute goodness, there should be no evil in the world; conversely, if evil actually exists, then God's existence can be called into question. This approach is expressed as follows: “If God existed, there should be no evil. But there is evil in the world. Therefore, does God not exist?” Some philosophers and thinkers who have adopted this line of reasoning have regarded the existence of evil in the world as evidence for the non-existence of God; they have argued that God possesses absolute goodness and should therefore be the sole source of good (Cebeci, 1985, p. 5).

In order to address the problem of evil adequately, it must first be determined whether evil possesses an absolute and independent realm of existence. To argue, on the basis of certain phenomena characterized by evil, that an absolute evil exists in the universe is to elevate evil to the status of an ontological reality, thereby rendering the problem insoluble from the very outset. In reality, however, evil does not exist in and of itself as an independent and absolute entity; rather, in most cases, it manifests as a diminution of goodness, a disruption of order, or the absence of what ought to be. In this regard, evil should be understood not as an independent and eternal principle opposed to being, but as a relative deficiency in relation to being and goodness.

Given the close relationship between being and goodness in Islamic thought, it is not appropriate to regard the evils in the universe as absolute. This is because a significant portion of the phenomena characterized as evil are dependent upon particular conditions of existence, causes, and consequences. Although illness, death, poverty, suffering, and loss cause genuine distress to human beings, none of these can be regarded as evil in an absolute sense. Indeed, the Qur'an states that some things that human beings dislike may be good for them: “It may be that you dislike a thing which is good for you, and it may be that you love a thing which is bad for you. Allah knows, but you do not know” (Qur'an, al-Baqarah 2:216). Thus, the distinction between the limitations of human perception and the

comprehensiveness of divine knowledge is highlighted, drawing attention to the possibility that an event perceived as evil at first glance may turn out to be good within a broader context.

As for the sources of evil, the Qur'an particularly emphasizes the actions that human beings undertake of their own free will. The verse, "Whatever misfortune befalls you is because of what your own hands have wrought. Yet Allah forgives many sins" (Qur'an, al-Shūrā 42:30), clearly establishes human responsibility for the evils caused by human beings. The emphasis here is not on reducing all forms of evil to human actions, but rather on underscoring that responsibility for the evils brought about by one's own choices rests with the individual. Indeed, a significant portion of moral evils—such as oppression, injustice, war, murder, lying, theft, and the like—result from the misuse of human free will.

One of the factors influencing a person's inclination toward evil is the *nafs*. The Qur'an draws attention to the aspect of the human *nafs* that is prone to evil, stating, "Indeed, the self commands to evil—except for those upon whom my Lord has mercy" (Qur'an, Yūsuf 12:53). However, the *nafs* is not an independent force that compels a person toward evil. Although it is the source of desires and inclinations, it can be guided by human will. Therefore, responsibility for evil cannot be attributed directly to the *nafs*; rather, the human being is the one who makes choices in the face of the inclinations of the *nafs* and assumes responsibility for those choices.

Another source of evil is the devil's whispers and misleading suggestions. The Qur'an describes the devil as the human being's manifest enemy (Qur'an, Fāṭir 35:6) and states that he commands people to commit evil and seeks to make evil appear attractive. Nevertheless, the devil does not possess absolute dominion over human beings. Indeed, on the Day of Judgment, the devil will say to those who followed him, "I had no power over you. I merely called you, and you responded to my call" (Qur'an, Ibrāhīm 14:22). This statement demonstrates that the devil is not the creator of evil, but rather an agent who calls people to evil

and induces them to choose it. Therefore, the existence of the devil does not absolve human beings of their responsibility.

Another significant source of evil is the negative influence that human beings exert on one another. Individual acts of evil may, over time, develop into social structures, while oppression, wrongdoing, war, exploitation, and injustice can become widespread through human agency. The Qur'an clearly establishes the relationship between social corruption and human actions, stating, "Corruption has appeared on land and sea because of what people's own hands have wrought" (Qur'an, al-Rūm 30:41). Thus, evil is not merely an individual moral problem but also a social issue arising from human relations with others.

However, it is not correct to regard every pain and hardship that a person encounters as a moral evil. Illness, earthquakes, death, poverty, and similar natural events may cause pain and loss for human beings; however, their occurrence does not necessarily mean that they result from someone committing a moral evil. The Qur'an states that such circumstances constitute a test for human beings: "We will surely test you with a little fear and hunger, and loss of wealth, lives, and crops. Give glad tidings to those who are patient" (Qur'an, al-Baqarah 2:155). The Prophet Muhammad also stated that the hardships encountered by a believer may turn into good for him if they are met with patience. Therefore, not every event that appears to be evil can ultimately be regarded as an absolute evil.

From the perspective of divine testing, another function of pain and hardship becomes apparent. A person demonstrates their awareness of servitude to God not only when enjoying blessings but also in the face of deprivation and hardship. A significant number of moral values—such as patience, trust in God, perseverance, mutual assistance, and compassion—become manifest amid life's difficulties. For this reason, the fact that an event is painful for a person does not mean that it is evil in an absolute sense. A situation perceived as evil may, within a broader

context of consequences, become a means of moral and spiritual good.

On the other hand, death should also be considered within this framework. Although death signifies separation and loss in terms of worldly life, it is not the end of existence according to Islamic belief. The Hereafter demonstrates that death is not absolute annihilation. Therefore, the temporary suffering and losses experienced in this world should not be considered independently of the Hereafter. The Hereafter, where divine justice will be fully realized, constitutes the ultimate context in which the apparent inequalities and sufferings of this world are assessed.

At this point, belief in the Hereafter occupies a fundamental place in understanding the problem of evil. Since worldly life is limited and human knowledge is incomplete, it is not possible to evaluate any event absolutely solely on the basis of its immediate consequences. As the Qur'an states, "Whoever does an atom's weight of good will see it, and whoever does an atom's weight of evil will see it" (Qur'an, al-Zilzāl 99:7-8). Thus, it is stated that good deeds whose recompense is not seen in this world will not remain without recompense, and that evil deeds will receive their due in accordance with justice. The Hereafter is the realm in which divine justice is brought to completion and the transient appearances of this world attain their ultimate meaning.

In this context, rather than speaking of a single and absolute source of evil, it is necessary to note that evil manifests itself on different levels. While the misuse of human will lies at the root of moral evils, the *nafs*, as the internal inclination that directs this choice, Satan, through external whispers and suggestions, and evil people, through social interaction, may all play a role in the emergence of evil. Illness, death, and natural disasters, however, should not be considered directly within the scope of moral evil, but rather as events through which human beings are tested and whose outcomes are assessed within the framework of divine wisdom.

Consequently, in Islamic thought, evil cannot be regarded as an independent and absolute entity positioned in opposition to Allah. Since Allah possesses absolute goodness and perfection, evil is not an independent principle that can be attributed to Him. Evil either arises from human volitional choices, is perceived as evil due to the limitations of human perception, or appears as a temporary condition that serves as a means of testing and contributes to the emergence of a greater good. For this reason, rather than seeking the source of evil solely in an external entity, it should be considered within the context of human will, the *nafs*, Satan, social influences, natural events, and divine testing. Ultimately, it becomes evident that evil is temporary, whereas goodness possesses an eternal horizon in conjunction with divine justice and the Hereafter.

4. Evil According to the Hadiths of the Prophet Muhammad

Evaluating the problem of evil in the hadiths solely through narrations that mention "evil" and its synonyms is not sufficient to fully elucidate the Prophet Muhammad's approach to the subject in all its aspects. Accurately determining the Prophet Muhammad's perspective on the subject requires, at times, a multifaceted approach that takes into consideration the fundamental principles and tenets of Islam; at other times, the *majbūm al-mukhālafah* (مفهوم المخالفة; the opposite meaning) of matters characterized as good; and, in other instances, cultural, historical, and individual circumstances. The fundamental reason for this is that rulings concerning good and evil in the hadiths acquire meaning not merely at the conceptual level, but also within the context in which they occur, the circumstances of their addressees, and the consequences they may produce. Indeed, in some cases, whether an act is regarded as good or evil, as well as the reward or punishment associated with it, may vary depending on the individual and the circumstances.

Furthermore, the concept of evil cannot be defined and considered independently of the concept of good, nor can solutions be sought for the problems associated with it in isolation.

Likewise, in order to accurately elucidate how evil is addressed in the hadiths, it is first necessary to take into consideration the Qur'an's approach to the problem of evil. For this reason, although this study examines the semantic scope of the concept of evil in the hadiths, this examination should be considered in conjunction with the fundamental principles concerning evil set forth by the Qur'an. The Sunnah, as a source responsible for explaining the Qur'an, translating its teachings into practice, and implementing them in life, is therefore in harmony with it. Consequently, it is inconceivable that the Sunnah would present a conception of evil that contradicts the fundamental principles of the Qur'an.

In the hadiths of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him), the problem of evil emerges as an important subject addressed in the context of human faith, moral development, free will, and social responsibilities. In the hadiths, the existence of evil is not presented merely as a negative reality; rather, it is regarded as a phenomenon that carries significance in terms of testing human beings, fostering an awareness of patience and trust in God, enabling them to attain moral maturity, and helping them comprehend divine wisdom. The Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him), while explaining the attitude that human beings should adopt in the face of evil, emphasized virtues such as patience, faith, prayer, trust in God, and doing good. In this context, the hadiths situate the place of evil in human life within the framework of divine wisdom while also emphasizing human responsibility in the face of evil. Below, some hadiths that illustrate this approach will be examined in order to explore the fundamental evaluations and solutions offered by Islam concerning the problem of evil.

5. Parameters Defining Evil

5.1. Faith

Faith is one of the fundamental criteria that determine the nature and value of good and evil. Whether an action acquires value in the sight of Allah and is rewarded accordingly depends not only on the outward appearance of the action but

also on the faith and intention of the person performing it. There are numerous examples in the Qur'an and Sunnah that demonstrate this point. However, the examples cited here will suffice to outline the basic framework of the subject:

While the Qur'an and the Sunnah emphasize that faith is a fundamental factor, they also warn Muslims in very strong terms about their faith and intentions: "O you who believe! Do not render your charity worthless by flaunting it or causing harm, like one who spends his wealth to show off to people even though he does not believe in Allah or the Last Day. The example of such a person is that of a smooth, steep rock covered with soil; a torrential rain has fallen upon it, leaving it bare. Such people will gain no benefit from anything they have earned, and Allah does not guide the disbelieving people (Qur'an, al-Baqara 2:264)."

The following example is also noteworthy in this regard: After the qibla was changed from Bayt al-Maqdis to the Kaaba, the Companions asked the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) about the status of believers who had previously prayed facing Bayt al-Maqdis and had passed away while still doing so. In response, Allah declared, "Allah will not let your faith go to waste" (Qur'an, al-Baqara 2:143), thereby assuring them that their acts of worship would not be in vain (Abu Dawud, Sunnah, 16). The fact that the word "faith" in the verse refers to prayer highlights the inseparable relationship between the value of worship and faith. Indeed, the prayers performed before the change of the qibla retained their validity in the sight of Allah because of the believers' faith and did not suffer any loss of value. This demonstrates that the value of deeds in the sight of Allah is directly related to faith.

Another verse that we may cite in this regard presents the matter in even clearer terms: "...Whoever denies faith, his deeds will certainly be in vain. He will be among those who suffer loss in the Hereafter (Qur'an, al-Ma'idah 5:5)." This verse clearly states that the acquisition of value by deeds in the sight of Allah is contingent upon faith.

The phrase “Allah will not let your faith go to waste” (Qur’an, al-Baqara 2:143) in the verse above emphasizes that acts of worship and righteous deeds performed together with faith will not be in vain in the sight of Allah. In contrast, the second verse states, “...Whoever denies faith, his deeds will certainly be in vain” (Qur’an, al-Ma’idah 5:5), clearly indicating that deeds devoid of faith will not be subject to reward in the Hereafter. When these two verses are considered together, it becomes clear that faith is not a universal criterion for determining whether an action is inherently good or evil; rather, it is a fundamental factor determining the value of that action in the sight of Allah, whether it will be accepted, and whether it will be subject to reward in the Hereafter. In other words, faith is not a parameter that determines the moral nature of a behavior, but rather a parameter that determines its religious value in the sight of Allah and its consequence in the Hereafter. For this reason, while a behavior that appears good and beneficial in outward terms becomes a means of reward and merit in the sight of Allah for a believer, it will not produce the same reward in the Hereafter for a non-believer. Similarly, from the believer’s perspective, the actions commanded by Allah are considered good, whereas those He has forbidden are considered evil. The terms “good” and “evil” here are used primarily with regard to the acceptance of deeds in the sight of Allah and the reward or punishment associated with them. This point can be examined in greater detail in the context of the following hadith narrated by al-Bukhari. This hadith narrated by al-Bukhari is one of the most striking examples illustrating the distinction between the outward appearance of an action and its actual value in the sight of Allah: “The Prophet (peace be upon him) encountered the polytheists during a military campaign (the Battle of Khaybar) and fought them. Both groups returned to their respective camps. Among the Prophet’s (peace be upon him) Companions was a man who would attack anyone he encountered and kill them with his sword without relying on anyone’s assistance. When it was said to the Prophet (peace be upon him), ‘None of us has been able to do what this man has done,’ the

Prophet (peace be upon him) said, ‘This man is one of the people of Hell (Whoever wishes to see a man of Hell should look at this man).’ Upon hearing this, a man said, ‘I will follow this man,’ and during the battle, he stayed close to him, stopping when he stopped and walking when he walked (that is, he began to observe him closely). Eventually, the man was wounded and, wishing to die quickly, placed the tip of his sword between his two breasts, leaned his weight onto it, and killed himself (the tip of the sword emerged from his back). The man who had been following him came to the Prophet (peace be upon him) and said, ‘I bear witness that you are the Messenger of Allah.’ The Prophet (peace be upon him) asked, ‘What prompted you to say this?’ The man explained, ‘People were greatly concerned about the man whom you said was one of the people of Hell (some people were almost led to doubt) (Bukhari, Maghazi, 38), so I said, “I will follow him for you,” and followed him. When the man was seriously wounded, he placed his sword against his chest, leaned his weight onto it, and killed himself.’ Upon this, the Prophet (peace be upon him) said, ‘A man (a servant of God) may perform the deeds of the people of Paradise as far as people can see (he performs a deed that others perceive as the deed of the people of Paradise), but in reality, that person is one of the people of Hell. Likewise, another person may perform, as far as people can see, a deed that they regard as the deed of the people of Hell, yet that person is in reality one of the people of Paradise. (Bukhari, Maghazi, 38) Deeds acquire their value according to their outcomes (Bukhari, Jihad, 182; Rikak, 33; Qadar, 5).’ According to a narration from Abu Hurayrah in the chapter on ‘The Battle of Khaybar’ in al-Bukhari’s book *Maghazi*, when the Prophet (peace be upon him) was informed that the man had killed himself during the Battle of Khaybar, he said: ‘O So-and-so, stand up and proclaim to the people that only a believer may enter Paradise. Allah (if He wills) may support His religion even through a wicked (unbelieving) man (Bukhari, Maghazi, 38).’

According to this hadith, even if a person appears to have performed the deeds of the people of Paradise, if those deeds were performed not for

the sake of Allah but for the sake of fame or worldly gain, that person cannot attain the reward received by those who perform the same deeds for the sake of Allah. Al-Bukhari titled Chapter 77 of his book *Jihad* “It Is Not Said That So-and-So Was a Martyr” and also narrated this hadith in this chapter (Bukhari, Jihad, 77). In the chapter heading, Bukhari also cites the following statement of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) in a hadith narrated from Abu Hurayrah: “Allah knows best those who strive in His cause, and Allah knows best those who fight and are wounded in His cause” (Bukhari, Jihad, 77).

As can be understood from the verses of the Qur’an and the hadiths, in Islamic thought, faith is not the criterion that determines the benefit or harm of an action in the external world; rather, it is the most fundamental criterion determining its religious value and its reward in the Hereafter in the sight of Allah. This approach demonstrates that good and evil cannot be evaluated solely according to the outward aspect of an action; rather, the faith and intention of the agent, as well as the ultimate outcome of the deed, must also be taken into consideration. Accordingly, while the hadiths caution people against reaching definitive judgments based solely on outward actions, they demonstrate that divine evaluation is based on more comprehensive criteria that are beyond human access and are not fully reflected outwardly. Thus, the Sunnah complements the understanding of values set forth in the Qur’an by addressing the problem of good and evil not merely from a behavior-centered perspective, but through the framework of faith, intention, and divine acceptance, thereby providing a deeper perspective on faith-based moral evaluation.

5.2. Intention

According to Islam, a religion shaped by the Qur’an and the Sunnah, the determination of whether an action is good or evil depends not only on its outward appearance and the consequences it produces, but also on the intention and purpose of the person performing it. From an Islamic perspective, the value of an act in the sight of Allah is closely related to the

purpose for which it is performed and the orientation with which it is undertaken. Indeed, just as an act devoid of faith and sincerity has no value in terms of reward in the sight of Allah, an act that appears good but is performed with an evil intention likewise loses its value in the sight of Allah. In this respect, actions that appear good outwardly but are actually performed for an evil purpose possess the quality of evil in terms of their intention, even if they are good in form. Therefore, when evaluating an action in the context of the problem of evil, it is necessary to consider not only the action itself or its outcome, but also the intention and purpose that give rise to it.

The Holy Qur’an makes it particularly clear, through the ritual of sacrifice, that the value of an act in the sight of Allah does not depend solely on its outward form: “Neither the meat nor the blood of the sacrifices reaches Allah. What reaches Allah is only your piety” (Qur’an, al-Hajj 22:37). The verse indicates that what is essential in the ritual of sacrifice is not its material and outward aspects, but rather the devotion to Allah and sincerity with which it is performed. Thus, it indicates that the same action may acquire different value depending on the intention of the person performing it and the sincerity they maintain toward Allah. This demonstrates that the outward appearance of an action is not, by itself, sufficient to determine its true moral and religious value.

Similarly, the verse, “Say: ‘Everyone acts according to their own disposition and character (shākila).’ Your Lord knows very well who is on the right path” (Qur’an, al-Isra’ 17:84), also draws attention to the connection between human actions and a person’s inner world, character, and orientation. The word “shākila” carries meanings including a person’s nature, innate disposition, character (temperament, character), temperament (nature, disposition), intention, and other related meanings (Biçer, 2011, p. 412). The fact that al-Bukhari mentions this verse in the heading of the chapter in which he includes the hadith concerning intention indicates that he understands the word “shākila” in the verse to

mean a person's intention. Accordingly, in the sight of Allah, a person's actions will not be considered independently of the orientation they possess. Performing the same action with different intentions may lead to differences in its religious and moral value.

This point is expressed more clearly in the hadith narrated from 'Umar (may Allah be pleased with him), which demonstrates the central position of intention in Islamic ethical thought: "Actions are according to intentions" (Bukhari, *Bad' al-Wahy*, 1). The hadith continues: "Whoever migrates for the sake of Allah and His Messenger (out of obedience to them), his migration is for the sake of Allah and His Messenger. And whoever migrates for the sake of worldly gain or to marry a woman, his migration is for the sake of whatever he migrated for." Although, in terms of its chain of transmission, the narration is transmitted through a single Companion route traced back to 'Umar, it has been regarded as *mutawatir* by some hadith scholars because of the Companions' acceptance of the hadith and the importance attached to it by hadith scholars (Kettâni, 1983, p. 24). The hadith demonstrates that the value of an action in the sight of Allah, even when the action itself appears identical, may change when the purpose of the person performing it changes.

The role of intention in determining the value of an action—that is, whether it is good or evil—is explained in greater detail in a hadith narrated by Abu Hurayrah: "If a person intends to do a good deed but is unable to do it, Allah records it as a complete good deed. If he performs the good deed he intended, Allah records for him ten good deeds, seven hundred good deeds, or even (depending on the sincerity of his intention) many times more good deeds (rewards). Whoever intends to commit an evil deed but does not carry it out, Allah records for him the reward of a complete good deed. If he carries out the evil deed he intended, Allah records for him (only) one evil deed (sin)." (Bukhari, *Riqaq*, 31; Muslim, *Iman*, 204).

The hadith demonstrates that intention is taken into consideration in the evaluation of good and

evil deeds. At the same time, it establishes an important distinction between a bad intention not being recorded as a sin as long as it does not materialize in an action and its being regarded as an evil deed once it is carried out. Thus, intention emerges as an element that precedes the deed and determines its moral dimension.

According to another hadith narrated by Imam Muslim, among the first people to be questioned on the Day of Judgment will be a martyr, a scholar, and a wealthy person. Allah will ask each of them what they did in response to the blessings He bestowed upon them. The martyr will say that he fought in the way of Allah; the scholar will say that he learned and taught knowledge and recited the Qur'an; and the wealthy person will say that he spent his wealth in the way of Allah. However, Allah will declare that He knows the true purpose behind their deeds and that they performed these deeds not for the sake of Allah's pleasure, but so that people would regard them as brave, knowledgeable, and generous. They were described as such in this world and achieved their intended goals. Therefore, these deeds—which appeared to have been performed for the sake of Allah—are not accepted, and those who performed them are punished (Muslim, *Imara*, 152). In this example, the sacrifices made by the martyr, the scholar, and the wealthy benefactor are not questioned; rather, the message conveyed is that deeds are evaluated according to the intention of the person who performs them. Such metaphors are frequently employed in the Qur'an and the hadiths. The following narration, which states that sincerity and genuine devotion are prerequisites for the acceptance of a deed, further completes this framework. According to the narration, the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) said: "Allah accepts only those deeds that are performed sincerely and with the intention of seeking His pleasure" (Nasa'i, *Jihad*, 24). This hadith demonstrates that the value of a deed in the sight of Allah does not depend solely on whether it appears formally correct or beneficial; rather, it also requires that Allah's pleasure be sought and that the deed be performed with sincerity. Consequently, a behavior that appears beneficial to people or is

characterized outwardly as a good deed cannot have the same value in terms of divine acceptance when it is performed for a purpose other than seeking Allah's pleasure.

At this point, intention emerges as a fundamental element that precedes the act and determines its value. When a person performs an act that appears good for an evil purpose—such as seeking praise, fame, personal gain, superiority, or harming another—a distinction arises between the outward appearance of the act and its true nature. In such a situation, even if the act appears good on the surface, it may lose its value in the sight of Allah because of the purpose behind it, and a good deed may consequently be regarded as evil. Therefore, it is not always possible to regard every act that appears good as absolutely good, nor to regard every act that appears evil as evil solely on the basis of its outward appearance.

This approach, rooted in the Qur'an and the Sunnah, adds a new dimension to the problem of evil and offers a different perspective. According to this view, evil is not limited to actions that cause physical harm, pain, or negative consequences. The evil of an act may sometimes depend on the intention of the person performing it, even before its visible outcome emerges. Accordingly, an act that appears to be good may not constitute genuine goodness if it is motivated by an evil intention. Similarly, even when an act intended to be performed with a good intention has not yet taken place, the intention itself may possess moral value. This demonstrates that the Islamic understanding of evil places importance not only on the outcome of an act in the external world, but also on human will, intention, and orientation.

According to the Qur'an and the Sunnah, intention emerges as one of the fundamental criteria that precedes an action and determines its value in the sight of Allah. While faith, sincerity, and seeking Allah's pleasure are considered among the fundamental conditions for the acceptance of an action, an act performed with an evil purpose or intention does not possess genuine value as a good deed in the sight of Allah, even if it appears good on the surface. From this

perspective, evil can be found not only in the visible form of an act or in the outcome it produces, but also in the purpose and orientation that a person brings to that act. Indeed, while the verse "Everyone acts according to their own disposition and character (shākila)" (Qur'an, al-Isra' 17:84) highlights the connection between human actions and a person's inner world and orientation, the hadith "Actions are according to intentions" (Bukhari, *Bad' al-Wahy*, 1) clearly sets forth the fundamental principle underlying this relationship. Thus, intention becomes one of the essential elements that cannot be overlooked in determining good and evil.

5.3. Predestination

One of the most intensely debated issues in religious literature surrounding the problem of evil is the question of predestination. The fundamental starting points for philosophers and thinkers who address this problem are questions such as, "If God exists, why does evil exist?" or, "If God is all-wise and inclined toward good, how can the existence of evil in the universe be explained?" From the perspective of believers, the explanation derived from the Qur'an and the hadiths—that evil is sometimes a means of testing and at other times a consequence or punishment for human actions, and that those who remain patient will ultimately prevail—may be considered sufficient. However, grounding the issue in a manner that would also convince those who do not accept religious beliefs is not so straightforward. For they generally approach the problem within the framework of God's justice and the principles of equality among human beings and, on this basis, arrive at different conclusions.

When the subject is examined in the context of the hadiths, it becomes apparent that the wording of some narrations is open to misunderstanding and therefore requires careful analysis. This is the case not only for non-believers but also for believers. The historical course of debates concerning predestination clearly demonstrates this difficulty as well. Indeed, the Jabriyya and the Mu'tazila represent two distinct approaches that emerged within the Muslim intellectual tradition:

the Jabriyya understanding, which reduces predestination to a scenario predetermined by Allah and human beings to actors who play out that scenario on the stage of this world; and the Mu'tazila school, which maintains that human beings are the creators of their own actions. The interpretation that "human beings are the creators of their own actions," which was particularly debated by proponents of the Mu'tazila from the early centuries of Islam onward, is in fact an answer to the question, "Does Allah create evil?" This issue is one of the fundamental points on which the Mu'tazila differs from the other Sunni schools. In this regard, the position of Ahl al-Sunnah is that "Allah is the absolute Creator of all beings and of both good and evil deeds. However, it is the human being who, through free will, chooses evil and is responsible for that choice."

Even if all the evils encountered by human beings are written in their predestination, since they are chosen through their own free will, the true source of evil is not predestination itself but the human being's own free will—that is, their choice. When the Qur'an and the hadiths are considered as a whole, it becomes clear that evil cannot be reduced to a single source. While the Qur'an mentions the factors that lead human beings toward evil, it does not remove ultimate responsibility from them. Indeed, Allah states, "O Children of Adam! Do not worship Satan. For he is a clear enemy to you" (Qur'an, Yasin 36:60); and in another verse, He warns, "Do not follow in the footsteps of Satan. For he is a clear enemy to you" (Qur'an, al-Baqarah 2:168). The fact that Satan calls people to evil and attempts to lead them astray does not mean that he possesses coercive and absolute dominion over human beings. Indeed, the Qur'an also holds human beings responsible for embracing and committing evil: "Those who commit evil and are encompassed by their sins—they are the inhabitants of Hell" (Qur'an, al-Baqarah 2:81). Likewise, the verse, "Satan frightens you with poverty and incites you to commit all manner of indecency and immorality" (Qur'an, al-Baqarah 2:268), draws attention to Satan's role in instigating and encouraging such actions.

The Qur'an's statement, "Whatever misfortune befalls you is because of what your own hands have wrought. Yet Allah forgives many" (Qur'an, al-Shura 42:30), is supported by other verses that state that human beings are held responsible for the consequences of their own actions. Indeed, the verse, "Whoever commits an evil deed will face its punishment" (Qur'an, al-Nisa 4:123), clearly establishes the relationship between evil and responsibility. However, one should not assume that every human error will inevitably be punished. For in many passages of the Qur'an, the breadth of divine forgiveness is emphasized, and it is stated that human errors may be forgiven through Allah's mercy.

The hadiths also emphasize that the true source of evil is not predestination itself, but rather the actions that a person performs through their free will. The prayer of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him), "I seek refuge in Allah and His power from the evil of what I think and what I guard against" (Muslim, Salam, 67), demonstrates that one should seek refuge in Allah even from inclinations arising within one's inner world that may lead one toward evil. Similarly, the prayer of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him), "O Allah! I seek refuge in You from the evils of my ears, my eyes, my tongue, my heart, and my private parts" (Tirmidhi, Da'awat, 74), indicates that evil may emerge through a person's senses, speech, heart, and actions. Thus, in the hadiths, evil is addressed not as the inevitable result of an independent force outside the human being, such as predestination or Satan, but as a phenomenon closely related to the human inner world and voluntary actions. In the balanced understanding presented by the Qur'an and the Sunnah, a distinction is made between the causes that lead to evil and the agent who chooses evil. Satan whispers, the self desires, and an evil environment exerts influence. However, since it is ultimately the human being who, through free will, chooses between good and evil, responsibility for punishment also belongs to the human being.

Evil that befalls a person beyond their will, however, should generally be regarded either as an indirect consequence of human actions or as part of a divine test. Events such as being born with a disability or becoming disabled later in life, losing one's property, famines, epidemics, wars, and suffering harm because of the mistakes or negligence of others fall within this category. In such situations, the individual is often not directly at fault; however, they may be affected by adversities arising from the natural and social conditions of the world in which they live. The Holy Qur'an draws attention to the dimension of divine testing in such hardships, stating: "We will surely test you with a little fear and hunger, and a loss of wealth, lives, and crops. Give good news to those who are patient" (Qur'an, al-Baqarah 2:155).

The Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) also stated that the hardships a believer encounters are not entirely evil for him. "Everything that befalls a Muslim—fatigue, illness, sorrow, distress, suffering, and even a thorn that pricks his foot—serves as a means for Allah to forgive his sins" (Bukhari, Marda, 1; Muslim, Birr, 52). This hadith demonstrates that hardships encountered beyond a person's control, when met with patience, can serve as a means for the forgiveness of sins and the elevation of one's spiritual rank.

Therefore, evils that occur beyond a person's control should not always be regarded as absolute and ultimate evil. Although a significant portion of these evils may result from a person's own mistakes, some are entirely attributable to external factors. However, learning from one's mistakes, recognizing them, and exercising patience when necessary can contribute to the transformation of evil into good. Indeed, the verse, "But the case of those who repent, believe, and do righteous deeds is different. Allah will transform their evil deeds into good. Allah is Most Forgiving, Most Merciful" (Qur'an, al-Furqan 25:70), explains this situation very clearly. For the believer, the decisive factor is not merely the affliction itself, but also the attitude displayed toward it. A hardship met with patience, reliance

upon Allah, and an awareness of servitude to Him becomes a means of attaining a great reward in the Hereafter. From this perspective, at the heart of the problem of evil lies not only the question, "Where does evil come from?" but also the question, "What kind of will does a person exercise in the face of evil?" Thus, an event perceived as evil in this worldly life may, from the perspective of divine justice and the Hereafter, turn into a greater good for the person. In this respect, within Islamic thought, afflictions acquire meaning not merely as experiences of pain and loss, but also as trials that bring a person's faith, patience, and moral maturity to the fore.

6. Divine Justice and the Problem of Evil

The problem of evil lies at the heart of humanity's effort to make sense of the suffering, deprivation, illness, disability, death, and other adversities encountered in this world. People often evaluate the events that occur in their own lives on the basis of their limited knowledge and the circumstances of the moment, characterizing what benefits them as good and what causes them harm as evil. However, it is impossible for human beings to fully comprehend all the consequences of an event, its potential future effects, and its place within divine wisdom. Therefore, there may not always be a necessary correspondence between a person's assessment of something as good or evil and whether it is actually good or evil. One of the fundamental issues concerning the problem of predestination and evil arises precisely here: Is everything that appears evil to human beings truly evil, and is everything that appears good truly good?

In Islamic thought, the answer to this question is addressed primarily on the basis of Allah's absolute justice and wisdom. Whatever Allah's justice requires will ultimately come to pass. Since human beings can perceive only a limited part of events, they may misinterpret them from their own perspective. The fact that an event is painful or disadvantageous from a human perspective does not necessarily mean that it is evil in an absolute sense. This is because human beings often see only the beginning of an event or its

visible consequences in this world and are unable to take into account all of its consequences, particularly its dimension in the Hereafter. In contrast, divine knowledge encompasses the past, the present, and the future, all of which are beyond human knowledge. Consequently, there is a significant difference between human beings' limited assessment and Allah's all-encompassing knowledge.

This distinction shows that certain circumstances that arise within the framework of predestination and are initially perceived as evil may in fact carry a different meaning. For example, having a disability may be regarded as a deprivation and hardship in terms of a person's opportunities in this worldly life. A person may naturally regard the limitation of their mobility, ability to see or hear, or any other capacity as a form of deprivation. However, divine justice is not evaluated solely on the basis of equality of opportunities in this world. An opportunity that is lacking or diminished in this world may be compensated for in the Hereafter in a different manner. In this respect, a disadvantage experienced by a person in this worldly life does not mean that their ultimate existential condition is entirely evil. If divine justice does not leave a person's deprivation in this world without recompense in the Hereafter, then a situation that initially appears to be evil cannot be characterized in the same way in the final assessment.

The point to note here is not to directly characterize every suffering in the world as "good." The real issue is that, because human beings do not know all the consequences of the events they experience, they are limited in determining their value in an absolute sense. It is true that an event may cause suffering or deprivation in this world. However, human beings cannot fully know what opportunities it may provide in this world or what its consequences will be in the Hereafter. Therefore, when approaching the problem of evil from the perspective of predestination, it is necessary to take into consideration the distinction between the immediate appearance of an event and its ultimate outcome.

The scope of divine justice is not limited merely to compensating for the hardships experienced by human beings. The hadith stating that even the injustices suffered by animals will not be left without redress demonstrates that the scope of justice extends beyond human beings. Indeed, the hadith of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him), which states, "The hornless sheep will take its right from the horned sheep" (Muslim, Birr, 60), indicates that even injustices among animals will be rectified on the Day of Judgment. Thus, it becomes clear that certain injustices occurring in this world—which human beings often fail to notice—will not remain without redress in the face of divine justice. This understanding makes it insufficient to evaluate the problem of evil solely on the basis of its consequences in this world and necessitates considering the Hereafter as the ultimate realm in which justice is completed. The philosophers' perspective, however, does not take this dimension of the issue into account.

The same may be considered with regard to deaths that occur during childhood. The early termination of a child's life is regarded, from the natural human perspective, as a great evil and a profound loss. Indeed, death, particularly when it concerns a child, is a source of great suffering for those left behind. However, here too, it is not possible to say that the human assumption that "If he had lived, it would certainly have been better for him" is based on certain knowledge. People, whose knowledge is limited to what they observe, cannot know what kind of life the child would have lived had he lived longer, what trials he would have encountered, what kind of person he would have become, or what outcome he would have faced at the end of his life. Therefore, although a child's early death is a painful event, it cannot be said with certainty that, from the child's perspective, it constitutes an absolute evil. In this respect, just as a longer life does not necessarily mean a greater good, a shorter life cannot necessarily be interpreted as evil (sharr).

At this point, the relationship between predestination and human will also becomes significant. People do not merely misjudge

external events; sometimes, of their own free will, they may desire things that will lead to negative consequences for them in the future, mistakenly regarding them as good (see Qur'an, al-Isra' 17:11). By nature, human beings tend to gravitate toward immediate and apparent benefits. However, the fact that something provides an immediate benefit does not guarantee that it will be beneficial in the long term. Similarly, a situation that causes distress at first may later turn into a source of great benefit. For this reason, the judgments of "good" and "evil" that a person makes about their own circumstances through reason and free will may not always be absolutely correct. The Qur'an's approach to this matter is particularly noteworthy: A person may not know that something they love may be bad for them, while something they dislike may be good for them (see Qur'an, al-Baqarah 2:216). This reality points to the limitations of human knowledge concerning their own future. For example, a person may regard attaining a position, wealth, status, or relationship they greatly desire as the greatest good in their life. However, this opportunity may lead them to become arrogant, commit injustice, turn away from Allah, or harm others. Conversely, an unwanted failure, loss, or deprivation may lead them toward a more balanced life, encourage them to pursue areas in which they may achieve greater success, and lead them toward patience and moral maturity. Here, the emotion initially evoked by an event may differ from its ultimate outcome. Consequently, a person may sometimes desire what is evil for them while believing it to be good, and at other times desire what is good for them while believing it to be evil. This demonstrates that human assessments of evil are often based on immediate and transient perceptions. A person's evaluation of things they cannot obtain as "evil" and things they have obtained as "good" may make sense only when their immediate desires are taken as the sole criterion. From the divine perspective, however, the value of something is assessed within a framework far broader than a person's immediate desire. Indeed, people often come to regret many things they have obtained

with love, desire, and great effort and wish that things had turned out differently.

From this perspective, predestination requires that the events a person encounters be evaluated in terms of their consequences and ultimate outcomes, rather than being superficially classified as "good" or "evil." A person cannot always know why an event has occurred in their life or what it will eventually lead to. Allah, however, acts on the basis of His knowledge that encompasses all outcomes. Therefore, a person's position with regard to predestination is not to fully unravel the wisdom behind every event, but rather to exercise their free will correctly within the sphere of their responsibility and to place their trust in Allah's justice.

In conclusion, within Islamic thought, predestination should not be understood as a form of determinism that requires people to passively accept every adversity they encounter. Rather, it should be understood as a framework that takes into account the difference between the limited knowledge of human beings and the comprehensive knowledge of Allah. Human beings are responsible for the actions they perform through their own free will and for the moral consequences arising from those actions. Therefore, oppression, injustice, and deliberate wrongdoing cannot be legitimized by invoking predestination. At the same time, illnesses, disabilities, losses, premature deaths, and similar afflictions that occur beyond human control cannot necessarily be regarded as absolute and ultimate evil, given the limitations of human knowledge. An event's visible consequences in this world may not correspond to its ultimate value. Human beings can often perceive only the event itself and its immediate consequences, whereas Allah encompasses all of its consequences, the person's future, and its consequences in the Hereafter. Therefore, from an Islamic perspective, addressing the problem of evil does not require denying the painful nature of every adverse event; rather, it requires distinguishing between the temporary and visible consequences of an event and its ultimate value. In this way, the concept of predestination

preserves human free will and responsibility while also addressing the problem of evil within the framework of divine justice and wisdom, particularly through the belief that justice that appears incomplete in this world will ultimately be fulfilled in the Hereafter.

6.1. Divine Will and Human Responsibility Regarding the Problem of Evil

When the problem of evil is examined from the perspective of predestination and divine will, certain statements in the Qur'an may, at first glance, appear to imply that human will is limited and that human beings are rendered passive in the face of predestination. Indeed, the Qur'an states: "Whatever Allah has decreed for us will surely befall us" (Qur'an, at-Tawbah 9:51); "Say to them: 'Unless Allah wills, I can neither harm myself nor benefit myself. Every nation has a fixed term. When its term comes, they cannot delay it for a single moment, nor can they advance it'" (Qur'an, Yunus 10:49); "Indeed, those against whom their Lord's decree has been finalized will not believe—even if every kind of evidence were to come to them—until they witness the painful punishment" (Qur'an, Yunus 10:96–97); "This is a reminder for everyone—especially for those among you who wish to follow the right path. But you cannot will anything unless Allah, the Lord of the worlds, wills it!" (Qur'an, At-Takwir 81:27–29); and "The disbelievers say, 'Why isn't a miracle sent down to him from his Lord?' Say: 'Allah leads astray whom He wills, and guides to the truth those who turn to Him'" (Qur'an, Ra'd 13:27).

In particular, the expressions "Allah leads astray whom He wills," "those against whom their Lord's decree has been finalized," and "you cannot will anything unless Allah, the Lord of the worlds, wills it"—when considered independently of their context and of the conception of God and human beings presented by the Qur'an as a whole—may be understood as implying that human beings possess no will or that they cannot be held responsible for their own choices. However, when considered together with the other Qur'anic verses concerning human actions, such a conclusion does not follow. On

the one hand, the Qur'an emphasizes Allah's absolute will and power; on the other, it holds human beings responsible for their own choices and actions. Thus, these two dimensions are not alternatives to one another but rather constitute different aspects of the same reality.

A person first turns toward an action through their own free will and chooses it. This choice is the primary basis for attributing the action to the person and for holding them responsible for it. For this to occur, however, Allah must create the action and enable the realization of the act chosen by the servant. In other words, human will is the starting point of an inclination toward and choice of an action, whereas Allah's creation is the divine act that enables this choice to become an actual deed. Although a person is capable of desiring, choosing, and directing themselves toward something, they do not possess the absolute power to realize everything they desire under all circumstances. Health, time, opportunities, external conditions, and many other factors may limit the realization of human will in action. For this reason, there is a distinction between human willing and Allah's willing: human beings desire and choose, whereas Allah enables the choice of the servant who wills and creates the action.

From this perspective, the statement "You cannot will anything unless Allah wills it" does not entirely negate human will; rather, it indicates that human will is neither independent nor absolute. Human will is real, but limited. Allah's will, on the other hand, is all-encompassing and absolute. A servant's desire for something does not necessarily mean that it will be realized, just as Allah's creation of an action does not mean that the servant is compelled to perform it. Thus, predestination is not a compulsion that nullifies human will, but rather the sphere of divine power within which human will is realized.

The same applies to the issue of guidance and misguidance. The statement, "Allah misleads whom He wills; and He guides to the truth those who turn to Him," should not be understood to mean that Allah misleads people arbitrarily. A person turns toward guidance or misguidance through their own free will. Allah, for His part,

enables the servant's choice to be realized. Therefore, Allah's creation of an action is not the same as His approval of that action. Allah may create the evil that the servant chooses. However, this does not mean that He loves that evil or is pleased with it. The creation of evil pertains to divine power and decree, whereas the choice of evil pertains to the servant's will and responsibility.

Therefore, when evaluating the problem of evil from the perspective of predestination, it is no more accurate to disregard human will entirely in the face of Allah's will than to regard human will as wholly independent of Allah's power. The primary basis for the moral responsibility arising from an action is the servant's will. Allah's act of creation, however, enables the action to come into existence in accordance with the servant's choice. Thus, while the human being is held responsible for the evil they choose, Allah's power and sovereignty remain absolute.

These verses are not intended to suggest that human beings are passive objects of predestination, but rather to remind them of the limitations of human will and the absolute power of Allah. Human beings are capable of willing, choosing, and directing themselves; however, their willing is not independent of Allah's will. This balance preserves human moral responsibility on the one hand while maintaining Allah's absolute will and power on the other. From the perspective of the problem of evil, this means that it is the servant who chooses evil, whereas it is Allah who grants the servant the power to carry out the act. The servant's choice constitutes the realm of responsibility, while Allah's creation constitutes the realm of power and divine decree.

6.2. Predestination, Divine Will, and Human Responsibility in the Hadiths

Some hadith texts contain statements that emphasize the determinative role of predestination and, at first glance, appear to place human will in a secondary position. However, when such narrations are considered independently of the overall course of life and

struggle exemplified by the Prophet Muhammad, they may be prone to misinterpretation. Rather, these narrations should be understood within the framework of the relationship between Allah's eternal knowledge and the servant's voluntary choice, rather than through a deterministic understanding that negates human will. Allah's foreknowledge and predestination of something do not mean that the servant is compelled to perform that action. On the contrary, Allah knows through His eternal knowledge what the servant will choose of his own free will and decrees accordingly. Therefore, the fact that something has been written in predestination does not negate human choice; rather, it expresses the all-encompassing nature of divine knowledge.

In the hadiths of the Prophet Muhammad, it is evident that a person's predestination is linked to their deeds:

I swear by Allah that a man may perform the deeds of the people of Hell—to the point where only one *zira'* (arṣīn) remains between him and Hell—yet the Book (of Predestination) takes precedence, and that person performs the deeds of the people of Paradise and enters Paradise. There is also a man who performs the deeds of the people of Paradise, to the point that only one (or two) *zira'* (cubits) remain between him and Paradise, but then the Book (of Predestination) takes precedence, and that person performs the deeds of the people of Hell and enters Hell (Bukhari, Qadar, 1; Bad' al-Khalq, 6; Anbiyā', 1; Muslim, Qadar, 1; Abu Dawud, Sunnah. 17).” According to another hadith narrated by Tirmidhi, Allah first created the pen and commanded it to write down predestination—the decrees of what would occur for all eternity—and indeed, Allah had already decreed (and determined) what would happen fifty thousand years before He created the heavens and the earth (Tirmidhi, Qadar, 16). In the narration by Muslim, the phrase “Then the pages are rolled up, and nothing is added or subtracted” appears (Muslim, Qadar, 2). In another hadith, it is stated as follows: “The completion of a person's creation in the mother's womb takes forty days.

Then, in the same manner, it becomes an ‘alaka’ (a clinging entity), and then, in the same manner, it becomes a ‘mudghah’ (a lump of flesh). Then Allah sends an angel and commands him to record four things in the child’s predestination: ‘his deeds, his provision, his term of life, and whether he will be happy (sa’id) or miserable (shaki).’ Then the soul is breathed into it (Bukhari, Qadar, 1; Bad’ al-Khalq, 6; Anbiyā’, 1; Muslim, Qadar, 1, 2; Abu Dawud, Sunnah, 17; Tirmidhi, Qadar, 4).

The life of the Prophet Muhammad demonstrates not a passive understanding of predestination that renders human will ineffective in the face of predestination, but rather the necessity of combining belief in predestination with deliberate effort. Throughout his life, the Prophet Muhammad was never one who merely waited to see where events would lead him or abandoned the means available to him by surrendering his will to predestination. On the contrary, he demonstrated great determination and resolve in fulfilling the mission he had been entrusted with; he left his homeland by migrating from Mecca to Medina, continued his efforts to convey the message, and fought his enemies when necessary. In this respect, his Sunnah demonstrates that, rather than abandoning human agency and taking necessary precautions by using predestination as a pretext, a person must fulfill the responsibilities incumbent upon them. This understanding shows that predestination does not render human actions meaningless; rather, it demonstrates that human choices and deeds have real consequences for one’s life and one’s outcome in the Hereafter. Therefore, predestination is not an unchangeable script that eliminates human free will, but rather a divine order of decree within which human voluntary choices also take place.

The life of the Prophet Muhammad as a servant of God also clearly supports this understanding. Although he occupied the highest position—that of a prophet—he did not become lax in worship and devotion; on the contrary, he conducted his life with a constant awareness of devotion and responsibility. Indeed, he was commanded: “Rise

during part of the night to perform the tahajjud prayer as an additional act of worship specific to you” (Qur’an, al-Isrā’ 17:79) and “Worship your Lord until death comes to you” (Qur’an, al-Hijr 15:99).

This demonstrates that the concept of predestination is not a form of resignation that leads people away from effort, precaution, and worship. The example set by the Prophet Muhammad can be summarized as follows: a person should turn toward goodness of their own free will, pursue the necessary means to attain it, fulfill their responsibilities, and then leave the resulting outcome to Allah’s decree. In this respect, belief in predestination is not an alternative to free will, but rather an expression of the divine power that encompasses human will.

This approach is also significant from the perspective of the problem of evil. A person cannot relinquish their responsibility in the face of evil by saying, “It was destined to happen anyway.” The Sunnah of the Prophet Muhammad teaches not that predestination should be used as an excuse, but that human will, precaution, and effort should be mobilized to prevent evil. Actions begin with a person’s will and choice, while Allah’s creation allows that choice to come into existence. Therefore, predestination is not a form of compulsion that absolves human beings of responsibility for evil; rather, it is a divine order of decree within which human volitional actions also take place.

The saying of the Prophet Muhammad, “Do good deeds; for everyone, it is easy to perform deeds in accordance with the purpose for which they were created” (Bukhari, Qadar, 2; Abu Dawud, Sunnah, 17), also highlights an important dimension of this relationship. The hadith demonstrates that belief in predestination does not lead a person to passivity; rather, it encourages them to exercise their free will and fulfill their responsibilities. Human beings are agents who make choices among the alternatives available to them. Predestination, however, is not a compulsion that makes such choices inevitable or replaces human free will.

This point is articulated more clearly in the following hadith of the Prophet Muhammad, in which he advises turning toward what is beneficial and seeking help from Allah:

“A strong believer is better and more beloved to Allah than a weak believer. However, there is good in every believer. Be eager in matters that will benefit you (strive to achieve them), seek help from Allah, and do not show weakness. If some misfortune befalls you, do not say, ‘If only I had done such-and-such, then such-and-such would have happened,’ but rather say: ‘It was Allah’s decree; He did as He willed.’ Saying ‘If only’ opens the door to what Satan wants.” (Muslim, Qadar, 34).

The instructions in the first part of the hadith—“Be eager in matters that will benefit you,” “Seek help from Allah,” and “Do not show weakness”—clearly affirm human will and responsibility. The servant is not required to abandon the means by leaving the outcome to predestination; rather, they are required to exercise their will and pursue what is beneficial. Therefore, predestination is not a justification for inaction, but rather the divine framework within which human effort acquires meaning.

The continuation of the hadith advises submission to Allah’s decree rather than regret—such as saying, “If only I had done such-and-such”—after an evil has occurred. This demonstrates that human will takes precedence before an action, whereas the understanding of predestination takes precedence after it has occurred. A person acts through their own will at the stages of decision-making and taking precautions, and once the outcome has emerged, they acknowledge that the event that has occurred is not outside Allah’s knowledge and decree. Thus, predestination is not an excuse that removes responsibility for an event that has already occurred, but rather a principle of faith that enables one to understand the place of the realized outcome within divine decree.

Within this framework, the servant’s will should be regarded as the primary cause of an action that gives rise to moral responsibility. A person

chooses and turns toward good or evil through their own choice. Allah’s act of creation, on the other hand, is the divine act by which, in accordance with the servant’s choice, the action is brought into existence. Therefore, Allah’s creation of an action does not negate the fact that the servant has chosen that action. Likewise, Allah’s creation of evil does not mean that He is pleased with it. Divine creation pertains to divine power, whereas the servant’s choice pertains to moral responsibility.

This distinction is particularly significant in the context of guidance and misguidance. While the hadiths emphasize the divine dimension of predestination, they do not entirely negate human free will. Human beings turn toward guidance or misguidance, while Allah enables the realization of the action in the direction chosen by the servant and creates it. Accordingly, Allah’s decree of misguidance should not be understood as forcing a person into misguidance without any cause; rather, it should be understood as the realization of the servant’s own choice within the divine order of creation. Indeed, the following hadith likewise emphasizes that human beings choose guidance or misguidance, while Allah creates the action and its outcome in accordance with that choice: When the Prophet Muhammad was asked, “O Messenger of Allah, are the inhabitants of Paradise and Hell known (in advance by Allah)?” he replied, “Yes.” When he was then asked, “Why, then, do those who act perform deeds?” he replied, “Perform (righteous) deeds, for whatever a person was created for, performing deeds in accordance with that is made easy for him” (Bukhari, Qadar, 2; Muslim, Qadar, 3; Abu Dawud, Sunnah, 17).

From the perspective of the problem of evil, this approach establishes an important balance. Human beings are responsible because they choose evil, while Allah possesses absolute power in creating the action chosen by the servant. Thus, a distinction is made between Allah’s creation of evil and the moral attribution of evil to Allah. Allah’s act of creation does not negate the will of the servant who chooses evil, nor does divine creation imply approval of that evil.

Indeed, the fact that the concept of predestination does not eliminate human responsibility becomes clearer when considered alongside the Qur'anic teachings that hold human beings accountable for their choices. Human beings turn toward good or evil through their own choices and experience the consequences thereof. For this reason, predestination is not a coercive necessity that absolves human beings of responsibility for evil; rather, it is a framework within which divine knowledge and decree and human free choice coexist within the same order of existence.

In summary, the balance established by the hadiths on this subject may be expressed as follows: the servant chooses, Allah creates; the servant turns toward a course of action, Allah enables it; the servant assumes responsibility, and Allah judges with justice. Accordingly, predestination does not eliminate human responsibility in the face of evil. On the contrary, it requires human beings to exercise their free will, make use of the available means, and assume the consequences of their choices. Once an evil has occurred, however, rather than attempting to alter the past by saying, "I wish I had done this or that," the servant should learn from the mistake and submit to Allah's decree. In this respect, belief in predestination does not legitimize evil; rather, it provides a framework that maintains the balance between human responsibility, divine power, and divine justice.

Conclusion

The problem of evil is one of the most fundamental issues arising in relation to God's existence, power, justice, and wisdom in the face of the suffering, deprivation, injustice, and various adversities that human beings encounter in this world. When the hadiths transmitted from the Prophet Muhammad are considered holistically, it becomes evident that Islam does not confine the problem of evil to the question, "Why does evil exist?" Rather, it addresses together the questions of what evil is, how it arises, how it is perceived by human beings, who

is responsible for it, and what its ultimate consequences are. The approach presented in the hadiths does not treat evil as an independent and absolute reality opposed to God; rather, it evaluates evil within the framework of human will, intention, limited knowledge, the life of trial, divine wisdom, and the perspective of the Hereafter.

One of the most fundamental conclusions reached by this study is that not everything perceived by human beings as evil is necessarily evil in an absolute sense. Human beings often assess an event solely in terms of its apparent aspects and immediate consequences. Yet the subsequent consequences of an event, its effects on others, and, in particular, its consequences in the Hereafter may remain beyond human knowledge. Therefore, not every circumstance in this world that causes suffering, results in deprivation, or conflicts with human expectations can be regarded as evil in an absolute sense. Likewise, not everything that appears good will necessarily prove beneficial in the final outcome. The approach of the hadiths in the context of predestination and trial highlights the distinction between human beings' limited assessment and Allah's all-encompassing knowledge. Accordingly, "perceived evil" must be distinguished from the "ultimate outcome." The fact that an event initially appears evil does not mean that it is evil in all of its consequences.

This also demonstrates that the concepts of good and evil should not be evaluated solely according to their manifestations in this worldly life. In the understanding conveyed by the hadiths, good and evil possess a dimension that extends into the Hereafter. This worldly life is not the place in which final judgment is rendered, but rather a process in which human beings are tested in every respect. Therefore, it cannot be conceived that evils, injustices, and deprivations for which full retribution is not realized in this world will remain without recompense in the Hereafter. The hadith in which the Prophet Muhammad states that "the hornless sheep will take its right from the horned sheep" indicates that the scope of divine justice is extensive and that justice not realized in this

world will be completed in the Hereafter. Accordingly, no evil will ultimately remain without an account. However, this reckoning does not transform the evil that occurs in this world into good; rather, it demonstrates that divine justice will ultimately render judgment upon evil. Likewise, an evil whose ultimate outcome is good should not be regarded as an absolute and enduring evil.

At this point, a significant difference emerges between the approaches of believers and non-believers to the problem of evil. From the perspective of a non-believer, or of one who considers only this worldly life, evil often appears as an ultimate problem that demands an explanation. Events such as death, illness, natural disasters, injustice, deprivation, and the suffering of innocent people may be regarded as difficult to reconcile with the existence of a God who possesses absolute goodness and power. This is because such a perspective generally evaluates these events primarily in terms of their observable consequences in this world. From the perspective of faith, however, the problem of evil must be considered in relation to Allah's absolute knowledge, His creation of whatever He wills, His being the One who holds others accountable rather than being held accountable Himself, and His justice and wisdom, together with the limitations of human knowledge, the transience of worldly life, and human subjection to certain necessary laws. From this perspective, the fact that an event cannot be explained at present does not necessarily mean, for the believer, that it is meaningless or absolutely evil. At the same time, this approach does not entail denying the suffering experienced by human beings or accepting every form of evil unquestioningly as "good."

One of the important conclusions drawn from the hadiths is that human beings cannot always accurately determine what is good and what is evil. This is because they evaluate events on the basis of their limited knowledge, existing circumstances, and immediate consequences. Thus, something initially regarded as good may subsequently lead to adverse consequences, while

an event perceived as evil may later become a means of attaining beneficial outcomes. This point is particularly significant in the context of predestination and the adversities encountered by human beings. Not every event that occurs within the framework of predestination and is perceived by a person as evil should therefore be regarded as an absolute evil that is inherently detrimental to that person. Illness, misfortune, deprivation, and similar hardships encountered beyond one's control may carry different meanings, such as constituting a test, revealing one's patience and trust in Allah, contributing to moral maturity, or leading to more beneficial outcomes in the future. Accordingly, the occurrence of a misfortune within the framework of predestination does not mean that Allah wills evil for a person or condemns that person to evil. The Qur'an emphasizes that human beings evaluate events primarily through their visible aspects and immediate consequences, whereas Allah possesses absolute knowledge and wisdom that encompass everything, from beginning to end and the visible and the unseen. For this reason, the true nature and value of an event that human beings characterize as good or evil can be understood not merely through the impression it initially creates, but through its ultimate consequences within the framework of divine wisdom. While human beings can know only the visible aspects of events that are accessible to them, Allah encompasses them in all their dimensions, causes, and consequences. Consequently, the ultimate judgment concerning good and evil rests not on human beings' limited knowledge and assessment, but on divine knowledge, wisdom, and justice, which encompass all things.

However, the concept of predestination presented in the Qur'anic verses and hadiths is not a fatalistic understanding that eliminates human free will and responsibility. On the contrary, human free will is a fundamental determining factor in the emergence of moral evil. Human beings are responsible for the actions they perform through their own choices. Oppression, injustice, murder, lying, theft, and similar moral evils cannot be justified on the

grounds of “predestination.” Acceptance of predestination does not negate human free will or the responsibility arising from one’s actions. At the same time, the concept of divine justice requires that human beings be held accountable for the actions they perform by their own choice. The fact that a person faces the consequences of actions performed through free choice, and receives the corresponding recompense for the attitude they adopt toward evils experienced beyond their control, defines the boundaries of their sphere of free will and responsibility.

Within this framework, the Qur’an states that a significant portion of evil results from human actions themselves. When a person misuses their free will, they may cause harm both to themselves and to others. Therefore, it is not correct to always seek the source of evil somewhere outside oneself. Indeed, human beings themselves are often active agents in the emergence of evil. Nevertheless, within the framework presented by the hadiths, a person’s turn toward evil is influenced not only by their own will but also by various factors. Foremost among these are Satan and the self. While Satan appears as a factor that directs a person toward evil through whispers and suggestions, the self may provide the ground for the formation of evil desires and erroneous choices within a person’s inner world. However, neither Satan nor the self completely eliminates a person’s reason or free will. Human beings retain the ability to choose in the face of the suggestions and desires directed toward them. Therefore, the role of Satan and the self in evil should not be understood as coercive causes that absolve human beings of responsibility, but rather as factors that incline them toward evil and facilitate their choice of it. In protecting themselves against these factors, virtues such as disciplining the self, sound knowledge, correctly interpreting events, patience, having a favorable opinion of others, purification of the heart, and contentment with divine decree play an important role. Indeed, the Qur’an and the hadiths of the Prophet Muhammad encourage human beings to discipline the self, correctly assess the events they encounter, exercise patience, choose goodness in the face of evil, and accept Allah’s decree with

contentment. Accordingly, combating evil requires not only eliminating its external causes but also reforming one’s inner world and one’s attitude toward events.

Similarly, bad companions, an adverse social environment, and social interaction also play a significant role in a person’s moral choices. Since human beings are social beings, they are influenced by their surroundings and may acquire behavioral patterns and values from the social environment in which they live. Therefore, evil should be evaluated not only as an individual choice but also in relation to the environment in which a person exists. Nevertheless, the influence of the environment does not entirely eliminate individual responsibility. As beings capable of choosing among the influences to which they are exposed, human beings retain their responsibility.

Biological and genetic factors must also be taken into consideration when examining human beings’ inclination toward evil. It is evident that people do not possess identical characteristics with regard to character, inclinations, impulses, and patterns of behavior. Genetic characteristics and certain innate differences may influence a person’s behavior. However, the influence of such factors does not mean that a person is inevitably condemned to evil. Rather, human responsibility must be assessed within the limits of one’s capacities, circumstances, and capacity for free will. Therefore, rather than adopting a reductionist approach that attributes evil solely to genetic or biological causes, it is more appropriate to consider together the roles of free will, the self, Satan, the environment, social conditions, and individual characteristics.

In conclusion, the concept of evil presented in the hadiths does not regard evil as an independent and absolute reality standing in opposition to Allah. Allah possesses absolute justice and wisdom. While a significant portion of evil arises from human volitional choices, circumstances beyond human control—such as illness, death, natural disasters, deprivation, and similar conditions—should be evaluated in light of the test of faith, the limitations of human perception, and their ultimate recompense in the

Hereafter. This approach neither denies evil nor legitimizes it in the name of predestination. On the contrary, it emphasizes human responsibility in the face of evil, the importance of patience and trust in Allah, and the obligation to prevent evil and promote good.

Taken together, these considerations indicate that the solution offered by the hadiths to the problem of evil is shaped around three fundamental principles. First, not everything that humans perceive as evil due to their limited

knowledge is necessarily evil in an absolute sense. Second, in the case of moral evil arising from human free will, the primary responsibility lies with the individual. Third, the ultimate evaluation of neither good nor evil in this world is confined to worldly life; its true and complete recompense will emerge in the Hereafter. Thus, the hadiths transform the problem of evil from a merely theoretical problem of theodicy into a holistic issue that concerns human faith, free will, moral responsibility, and one's attitude toward life.

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