

**THE ESSENCE OF LOVE, GRACE AND MERCY THROUGH SUFFERING AS
REFLECTED IN *THE HOLY BIBLE* AND *THE QURAN*: AN APPRAISAL**

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ABSTRACT

*This paper is an attempt to project the essence of love, grace and mercy through suffering as reflected in **The Holy Bible** and **The Quran** has been accepted as written in an elegant style with purity of language. Both are found to have certain common features, beliefs, practices and ideas. Both the holy books reveal their belongings to different religions and sermons eternal deity.*

Key words: spiritualism, religious belief, supernatural, self-existent.

INTRODUCTION

It is universally accepted and professed that both **The Holy Bible** and **The Quran** are the rich sources of inspiration, comfort, hope and salvation to millions and millions of people. Both are found to have certain common features, beliefs, practices and ideas, though they belong to different ages and religions. **The Quran** has much more in common with the Old Testament than with the New Testament. **The Quran** has one hundred and fourteen chapters of unequal length called **Suras** divided into verses. Each chapter except the ninth one commences with the word **Bismillah**. **The Quran** like **The Holy Bible** has been accepted as written in an elegant style with purity and lucidity of language. Both the sacred books are considered to be admirable in their concept of divine nature and grace and their fervent trust is the power of one god.

The common thought found in both books is that whenever people neglect or forget God, they are admonished or corrected through prophets. Muhammad declared himself to be the

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last of the prophets while Jesus was the last of the prophets and his message culminated on the cross and He declared rather boldly, "My kingdom is not of this world". A Knowledge of God is very essential for meaningful living as is the act of breathing. This knowledge can be earned only through religion. For most people, religion has come to mean a fixed relationship between the human self and some non-human entity – the sacred, the supernatural, the self-existent, the absolute or just 'God'. Early Christianity in the Book of Acts of the Apostles is called 'The way'. Buddhism is described as 'The noble eight-fold path' and The Japanese nationalist religion is called *Shinto*, 'the way of Gods'. East or West, human beings have to believe in a God for their ways of living. In this respect, both the Holy Books have withstood the test of time.

The Holy Bible is the sacred book of the Christian church whereas *The Quran*, is the book of Muhammad who claimed that the divine revelations enshrined therein were themselves miraculous 'signs' of his apostleship. More than this, *The Quran* is a transcript of a tablet preserved in heaven, in which are written all that has happened and all that will happen. In a word, *The Quran* is nothing but a record of what Muhammad said while in a state of ecstatic seizure. To Muslims, "*The Quran* is a faithful and unalterable reproduction of the original scriptures which are preserved in heaven. The Muslim world has not yet come to grips with the problem which the Christian Europe faced after the Renaissance" (Guillaume 59). Two collections of books are within the Bible – "those of the Old Testament, which were formed into the canon of scripture within the Jewish church and subsequently came to be received within the Christian Church also and those of the New Testament which were written within the Christian church and accepted as sacred scripture" (Black 1).

The Holy Bible has been cherished in every part and in every phase of Christendom as possessing an authority which is divine, conveying the truth through such various modes as literal symbolic and allegorical. Similarly, Muslims believed that *The Quran* is God's uncreated word, something inherent in His essence. The very words of God Himself are inscribed in them in Arabic. The old and New Testaments were revelations delivered to men in the form of ideas, which 'inspired' prophets' gave to the world in human language. "*The Quran*'s actual text was pronounced by Gabriel in the ear of Muhammad" (Dawood 75). Gabriel in the Bible is the angel who gave the prophecy to Virgin Mary about the birth of Jesus Christ. Both the holy books reveal, in spite of their belongings to different religions, the thought that God is the sole creator of the universe. The followers of *The Holy Bible* and *The Quran* believe that God, Yahweh of the Old Testament or Allah of *The Quran*, is 'Compassionate and merciful' to all believers in one God. God's power is as infinite as His knowledge. God hates injustice and oppression and cherishes kindness to orphans and widows and charity to the poor and grace and sympathy to all.

Both worship one all-powerful and eternal deity. Islam occupies a position relative to Christianity that is not shared by the other world-religions in as much as it is subsequent to

Christianity. All the Muslims believe that Allah has no physical attributes. He has no age, shape, mother or appetite; nor is He an abstraction. He is an immediate and constant presence, cognizant of every person's deeds and thoughts. Submission to the will of God is expected of all Muslims. Islam is an Arabic word, that means 'submission to the will of God'. Hence, a Moslem (or Muslim) is one who submits to the will of God. "If I ascend up into heaven, thou art there, if I make my bed in hell, behold thou art there" (*Psalm* 139: 8). This reveals the faith of a Christian in the continuous presence of God wherever he goes. Submission to the will of God is expected of all Christians. "Islam is not an organised religion in the sense that Catholicism is because it is theoretically a faith without clergy, saints, hierarchy or sacraments. No man stands between the believer and God" (Lippman 2). In Christianity, there are men who study theology, men who lead congregational prayers and give sermons and interpret *The Bible* and men who advise temporal authorities on questions of religious law. But in orthodox Islam, there are no central doctrinal authorities, no equivalent of Bishops or the college of Cardinals, no Pope or Papal authorities and no intermediary between man and God. Since there are no sacraments as in Christianity, no one needs special standing or orders to perform them. But grace, sympathy, mercy, sufferings and miseries are visualized in both the holy books.

*"In the world ye shall have tribulation:
but be of good cheer; I have overcome
the world!"*

These words of Jesus spoken to his disciples give them the warning that an hour comes when they shall be scattered and leave Him alone. But still God the Father will be with Him. The grace of God will continue to be with the disciples when they go into the world for He has already overcome the world.

*"Have you heard of the Event which will
overwhelm mankind?"*

On that day, there shall be downcast faces, of men broken and worn out, burnt by a scorching fire, drinking from a seething fountain. Their only food shall be bitter thorns, which will neither sustain them, nor satisfy their hunger" (St. John 16:33). *The Quran* reveals these words in the chapter *The Overwhelming Event* when the sufferings of the men of God overtake them. on the other hand, the men who overcome the trials of the world shall be with radiant faces; they shall be well-pleased with their labours, in a lofty garden; they shall hear no idle talk. A gushing fountain shall be there, and raised soft couches with goblets placed before them; silken cushions ranged in order and carpets richly spread. There are different kinds of rewards promised for the believers in *The Holy Bible* and *The Quran*, after the sufferings in the world. But the fundamental idea of reward is the same.

The early Hebrews explained their happiness or misfortunes as due to the favour or disfavor of God or the Gods. Under primitive conditions, men were at the mercy of wind and storm, heat and cold, drought and rain, mysterious diseases and unpredictable disasters; but still they found themselves at the mercy of superhuman forces:

*“We have decked the lower heaven
with constellations. They guard it against
rebellious devils, so that they may not
hear the words of those on high. Meteors
are hurled at them from every side; then
driven away; they are
consigned to an eternal scourge.
Eavesdroppers are pursued by fiery
Comets” (The Koran – The Ranks 165)*

Such punishments are given to the unbelievers in **The Quran** when they take no warning and mock at signs. The ten plagues of Egypt can be cited as an example when the pharaoh of Egypt did not pay heed to the sufferings of the Israelites and the last plague was the smiting of the first born;

*“And it came to pass, that at midnight the
Lord smote all the firstborn in the land of
Egypt, from the first born of pharaoh that
sat on his throne unto the firstborn of
the captive that was in the dungeon and
all the firstborn of cattle” (Exodus 12:29)*

In spite of the previous sufferings pharaoh of Egypt remained adamant and would not leave the Israelites from bondage. This last plague raised a great cry in Egypt, for there was not a house where there was not one dead. And then, he called for Moses and Aaron by night and granted them leave to take their people to the city of Canaan. This example from **The Holy Bible** proves that sufferings are followed by the grace of God. A similar reference can be cited of the sufferings of the followers of Allah as given in the chapter ‘The Spoils’ which refers to The Battle of Badr, A.D.624. Muhammad’s plan was to attack an unarmed Caravan belonging to The Quraysh of Mecca on its assistance. Some of the Muslims wished to attack the Caravan, others the Meccan army. Muhammad’s forces, only 319 strong, routed the Meccans who were nearly 1000 in number. Victory comes from Allah for when one prays to him for help. He will send thousand angels to help him” (The Koran – The Spoils 305). Thus, the variations of human fortune are due to the caprice of deities and in their favour or disfavor lay the origin of all man’s happiness and misery. It is also said that when a family is fortunate, the Gods are pleased with it; if disaster befalls a household, divine displeasure is



said to be the reason. This is the simple formula in the explanation of suffering. Thus, man's happiness and misery come from God as the evidence of his favour or disfavour.

Whenever men are fortunate, they must have been virtuous and whenever they are wretched, they must have transgressed; all human suffering is thus the punishment for sin – “shall not judge of all the earth do right” (Genesis 18:25). A similar thought is expressed in *The Quran* too relating to the destruction of the city of Sodom. But still there is a belief expressed in both *The Holy Bible* and *The Quran* that justice to the individual is not done here. Socrates drinking the hemlock, Christ on his cross, Hugh Latimer burned at the stake, Lincoln martyred when he was profoundly needed, make it impossible for people to say all suffering is penalty for corresponding sin” (Fosdick 159). On the one hand, the entire history of Israel had proved that all sufferings are punishments, deserved. The argument and appeal of Zephaniah when the Scythians came of Joel when the locusts came, of Jeremiah when the Chaldeans came and of Isaiah when Judah lay desolate had proved that “the anger of Yahwah was kindled against his people” (Amos 3:6).

In the New Testament, Jesus in one place had firmly declared that suffering is not due to sin. When Jesus and His disciples were passing by, they saw a man who was blind from his birth. His disciples asked him, “Master, who did sin, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?” (St. John 9:2). Jesus answered that neither the man or his parents had sinned. The works of God should be made manifest in him. He took pity on the man, spat on the ground, made clay of the spittle and he anointed the eyes of the blind man with the clay. Then he asked him to go and wash his eyes in the pool of Siloam. He went and washed and got his sight. The Pharisees, instead of praising God for the grace shown to the blind man found fault with Jesus for healing him on a Sabbath day.

The chapter *Houd in The Quran* reveals a similar incident when Allah wanted to show His mercy to Noah and his children. When Noah came to warn the people to serve Allah, the unbelieving elders did not want to believe in the mercy of God but rather continue in their sufferings. Like the blind man, Noah received the blessings of God. Both the Holy Books reveal that people are given warnings before their sufferings. If they repent and turn to God, they receive the grace of God and escape the ensuring punishment. “The Lord is merciful and gracious, slow to anger and plenteous in mercy” (St. John 42:12) verses like this are very commonly found in *The Holy Bible*. Every chapter in *The Quran* starts with the following words: “In the name of Allah, the compassionate, the merciful”. When the God of the Old Testament is described as a jealous and zealous God. He is also known for his mercy and love. Christianity, originating in the teachings of Jesus, His Sermon on the Mount Lord's prayer and parables, contains the essence of Love and Mercy.

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