314875 - A response to one who claims that Allah loves to punish and torment people

the question

How can I respond to people who say that Allah – glorified and exalted be He far above what the wrongdoers say – is sadistic and loves to punish and torment people?

Detailed answer

Praise be to Allah.

Firstly:

This is an abhorrent statement that no one would say except one who is twisted and misguided, and denies the blessings of his Lord and His favours to him.

It is a lie and fabrication against Allah, ascribing to Him bad characteristics that are not appropriate for a human being of sound character, so how about the Creator, the Generous, the Beneficent, the Most Merciful, may He be exalted and sanctified?

Allah, may He be exalted, does not love to punish and torment His creation; rather He loves to show them mercy and guide them, and He is more merciful to them than their own selves and their mothers.

Allah, may He be exalted, says (interpretation of the meaning):

“Why would Allah punish you if you are grateful and believe? And ever is Allah Appreciative and Knowing”

[an-Nisa’ 4:147].

Shaykh as-Sa‘di (may Allah have mercy on him) said:

Then Allah, may He be exalted, tells us of the perfect nature of His self-sufficiency and the vastness of His forbearing, mercy and kindness: *“Why would Allah punish you …?”* Because Allah is Appreciative and Knowing, He will give those who carry the heavy burden of commitment for His sake and persist in doing righteous deeds an immense reward and abundant kindness. Whoever gives up something for the sake of Allah, Allah will give him something better than it.

Furthermore, He knows how you appear outwardly and what is in your hearts, and He knows what you do and what it is based on, be it sincerity or the opposite. He wants you to repent and turn back to Him, then if you turn to Him, why should He punish you? He does not find any joy in punishing you and He does not benefit from punishing you; rather the sinner only harms himself, just as the deed of one who is obedient is to his own benefit.

End quote from *Tafseer as-Sa‘di* (211).

The great scholar at-Taahir ibn ‘Ashoor (may Allah have mercy on him) said: This may be addressed to and intended for the entire ummah, or it may be addressed to the hypocrites, beginning by speaking of an absent party, then addressing them directly, by way of showing kindness to them.

The question in the phrase “Why would Allah punish you” is formed in such a way as to indicate that the expected response is negative, so it is denying such a thing. In other words: Allah would not punish you at all.

What is meant is that the warning that is addressed to the hypocrites is a warning against disbelief and hypocrisy, and no more. Therefore if they repent and mend their ways, and hold fast to Allah, He will forgive them and spare them punishment. So they should not think that Allah will punish them because He hates them personally, or because He finds joy in punishing them. Rather it is a requital for bad conduct, because the Most Wise does what is appropriate, so He rewards good with good and requites bad with bad. If the evildoer gives up his bad deeds, Allah will spare him from the punishment for those deeds, because He does not benefit either from punishment or

from reward; rather this is the divinely ordained process of cause and effect. If the believers persist in adhering to their faith and showing gratitude, and they avoid taking the hypocrites and disbelievers as allies and friends, then Allah will not punish them, because there is no reason to punish them.

End quote from *at-Tahreer wa't-Tanweer* (5/245).

It was narrated from 'Umar ibn al-Khattab that he said: Some prisoners were brought to the Messenger of Allah (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him), and there was a woman among the prisoners who was searching for someone. When she found a small boy among the prisoners, she clasped him to her and started to breastfeed him. The Messenger of Allah (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) said to us: "Do you think that this woman would throw her child into the fire?" We said: No, by Allah, she would never do that if she is able not to. The Messenger of Allah (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) said: "Allah is more merciful towards His slaves than this woman is towards her child."

Narrated by al-Bukhaari (5999) and Muslim (2754).

It was narrated from Abu Hurayrah (may Allah be pleased with him) that the Messenger of Allah (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) said: "When Allah created the universe, he wrote in His Book, which is with Him above the Throne: "My mercy precedes My wrath."

Narrated by al-Bukhaari (7453) and Muslim (2751).

It was narrated that Salmaan (may Allah be pleased with him) said: The Messenger of Allah (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) said: "On the day that Allah created the heavens and the earth, He created one hundred parts of mercy, each of which is as great as the distance between the heavens and the earth, and He put one part of that mercy on earth, because of which a mother shows compassion to her child and animals and birds show compassion to one another. When the Day of Resurrection comes, that mercy will complete the number (again)."

Narrated by Muslim (2753).

In addition to His perfect mercy, kindness, beneficence and compassion to His slaves, Allah, may He be glorified, is Most Wise, All-Knowing, the Creator, Almighty; He is not pleased if He is disobeyed or disbelieved in, and He does not accept for His Prophets to be rejected or for His slaves to be wronged. Hence He warned those who disbelieve in Him, rebel against Him, reject His Messengers and wrong His slaves of a severe and painful punishment.

This is part of His perfect justice and might, as He, may He be exalted, says (interpretation of the meaning):

"[O Muhammad], inform My servants that it is I who am the Forgiving, the Merciful

And that it is My punishment which is the painful punishment"

[al-Hijr 15:49, 50].

Rather if (hypothetically speaking) He loved to punish and torment people he would do the following:

1. He would love to punish and torture people, even if they were obedient and adhered to His commands. But Allah, may He be exalted, says (interpretation of the meaning):

"Indeed, Allah does not do injustice, [even] as much as an atom's weight; while if there is a good deed, He multiplies it and gives from Himself a great reward"

[an-Nisa' 4:40].

2. He would not give His slave any respite, excuse or chance to repent. But Allah, may He be glorified, is forbearing and generous, and He gives respite to His slaves, and leaves them with no excuse. He sends Messengers to them to remind them, and tests them in this world so as to instill in them fear of Him and bring them closer to Him.

3. He would mostly resort to torment and punishment, and rarely show mercy. But Allah, may He be exalted, is the most merciful of those who show mercy, and His mercy precedes His wrath.

Think and reflect. There are billions of people today who revile Allah and attribute a son to Him, or deny Him, or worship others instead of Him, yet despite that, he grants them provision and good physical health, and he bestows innumerable blessings upon them. He does not hasten the punishment for them, and He accepts the repentance of those among them who repent, even if the one who repents has led a life of disbelief and rebellion; He rejoices over that repentance, honours the one who repents, and turns his previous bad deeds into good deeds!

What mercy, forbearance and generosity can surpass this?

Al-Bukhaari (6099) and Muslim (2804) narrated that Abu Moosa said: The Messenger of Allah (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) said: “No one is more patient in bearing offensive things that he hears than Allah, may He be glorified and exalted; others are associated with Him, a son is attributed to Him, but He still grants them health and provision.”

To sum up, the one who expresses this view does not know Allah at all! And he does not know that He is the one who grants provision and bestows generously, and that everything that a person has of wealth, health, happiness, intellect, the ability to think, compassion towards others and being enabled to do good all comes from Allah. If he believed in that, he would realize that Allah is the most merciful of those who show mercy and is the most generous of those who show generosity.

The remedy for these people – if they truly seek good – is to learn about Allah and see for themselves the impact of His mercy. That is better for them than repeating the words of deniers of whom Allah says (interpretation of the meaning):

“They recognize the favor of Allah; then they deny it. And most of them are disbelievers”

[an-Nahl 16:83].

Secondly:

The one who sincerely cares about himself and about his faith, and is very cautious lest anything have a bad impact on it, should not listen to the specious arguments of the deniers and doubters, for that may undermine his faith and cause doubts to enter his heart.

No one should examine specious arguments except those who are well grounded in knowledge. Allah, may He be exalted, says (interpretation of the meaning):

“And when there comes to them information about [public] security or fear, they spread it around. But if they had referred it back to the Messenger or to those of authority among them, then the ones who [can] draw correct conclusions from it would have known about it. And if not for the favor of Allah upon you and His mercy, you would have followed Satan, except for a few”

[an-Nisa’ 4:83].

We ask Allah to help us and you to avoid fitnahs (temptations, confusion), both apparent and hidden.

And Allah knows best.