476721 - What is the wisdom behind enabling Iblis to mislead people?

the question

What is the wisdom behind Allah’s letting the Shaytan deceive people?

Why did Allah, may He be Glorified and Exalted, leave Iblis on earth to mislead humanity instead of punishing him for his sin immediately; why did He give him respite until the Day of Resurrection?

Summary of answer

One of the requirements of faith is knowing that Allah has created everything for a wise reason, even if it is not apparent to people, and that Allah is not to be questioned about what He does. He created Iblis and enabled him to mislead people for wise reasons, which include: as a trial to test people; to make manifest His forbearance and pardon; and other great and wise reasons that may be hidden from people.

Detailed answer

Praise be to Allah.

I.

One of the requirements of faith which the Muslim must believe with certainty is that Allah, may He be Exalted, does not do anything or create anything except for a good reason, whether that is clear to people or not.

Ibn al-Qayyim (may Allah have mercy on him) said:

Sound reasoning and common sense indicate the same as is indicated by the texts of the Quran and Sunnah, namely that Allah, may He be Glorified, is most wise and does not do anything in vain

or for no purpose, with no interest to be served or good reason which is the ultimate goal of His action. Rather His actions are based on great wisdom for which He does them.

End quote from *Shifa' al-`Alil*, 2/115.

Shaykh Ibn 'Uthaymin (may Allah have mercy on him) said:

The actions and rulings of Allah do not come about merely because He willed them; rather there is great wisdom behind them for which He willed them.

And he said:

You should understand that everything that Allah, may He be Glorified and Exalted, has connected to His will is done for a great and wise reason, and not merely because He willed it, but we may or may not be aware of that wisdom. Allah, may He be Exalted, says: {But you cannot will, unless Allah wills. Verily, Allah is Ever All-Knowing, All-Wise} [Al-Insan 76:30].

End quote from *Tafsir al-`Uthaymin: al-Fatihah wal-Baqarah*, 1/295 and 3/352.

Moreover, having strong faith and proper etiquette with Allah, may He be Glorified and Exalted, dictates that we should not question what He does: {He cannot be questioned about what He does, but they will be questioned} [Al-Anbiya' 21:23]. Therefore your saying "Why did Allah, may He be Glorified and Exalted, leave Iblis on earth to mislead humanity …" is not the right way for a man to present his question about the wisdom behind what Allah, may He be Glorified and Exalted, does.

At-Tabari (may Allah have mercy on him) said: No one should ask the Lord of the Throne about what He does with His creation of conducting their affairs in the way He wills with regard to life and death, honouring and humiliating, and other things that He decrees for them, because they are His creation and His slaves, and all of them are subject to His sovereignty and His authority; the ruling is His, the decree is His, and there is nothing superior to Him to question Him about what He does and say: Why did You do such and such; why did You not do such-and-such?

End quote from *Tafsir at-Tabari*, 18/425.

Ibn al-Qayyim (may Allah have mercy on him) said:

The foundation of servitude to Allah (`ubudiyyah) and belief in Allah, His Books and His Messengers is submission and not demanding a detailed explanation of the wisdom behind His commands, prohibitions and laws. Hence Allah, may He be Glorified, does not tell us [in the Quran] of any nation of a prophet who believed in their prophet and in what he brought, that they asked him for a detailed explanation of the wisdom behind what he enjoined them to do or forbade them to do and what he conveyed to them from their Lord. If they had done that, they would not have been believers in their prophet; rather what they did was to follow, submit and accept. Whatever they learned of the wisdom (behind their prophet's teachings), they acknowledged it and whatever was hidden from them, they did not make their submission, belief and following dependent on learning about it, and seeking to learn about that wisdom was not a matter of concern for them, for they held their Messenger in too high esteem to ask about that, as it says in the Gospel:

O Children of Israel, do not say: Why did our Lord command us to do such-and-such; rather say: What has our Lord commanded us to do?

Hence this ummah, which is the most perfect of nations in its reasoning and has greater knowledge, does not ask its Prophet why Allah enjoined such-and-such and forbade such-and-such, or why He decreed such-and-such, or why He did such-and-such, because they know that that is contrary to faith and submission, and that the Muslim cannot maintain his steadfastness unless he submits to Allah and recognises how great He is and how great His commands and prohibitions are, for faith cannot be sound except through realizing how great He is.

End quote from *As-Sawa`iq al-Mursalah* by Ibn al-Qayyim, 4/1560.

II.

There is nothing wrong with the believer seeking the wisdom behind rulings and decrees for the purpose of raising his level of faith and increasing in certainty. The people of knowledge have

always sought to learn the wisdom behind some shar`i rulings and divine decrees. Then if they find some indication of divine wisdom, they mention it for the purpose of increasing faith and certainty, and if they do not find any indication of that wisdom, they accept that there is wisdom in the shar`i rulings and universal decrees ordained by Allah, may He be Exalted.

As for asking about the wisdom behind these things for the purpose of arguing and objecting, this is one of the causes of misguidance and thinking negatively about Allah, may He be Exalted.

Ibn al-Qayyim (may Allah have mercy on him) said:

If the religious texts refer to the wisdom behind the command, or if one can find it out through reasoning, that may increase a Muslim's insight and increase his motivation to comply with the command. But if the Muslim does not find any indication of the wisdom behind a divine command, that does not weaken his resolve to commit to it or undermine his compliance with it, for the one who venerates the commands of Allah accepts the divine commands and prohibitions as they are, and he does not present an argument about them that could backfire and lead to undermining them or distorting their beauty, let alone oppose them by presenting arguments against them.

End quote from *As-Sawa`iq al-Mursalah*, 2/1131.

Shaykh Ibn `Uthaymin (may Allah have mercy on him) said:

As for asking about the wisdom behind things by way of seeking to increase one's knowledge, there is nothing wrong with that. Hence the Sahabah (may Allah be pleased with them) used to ask the Messenger (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) about the wisdom behind some matters, as we see in the verse: {They ask you, [O Muhammad], about the crescent moons. Say, "They are measurements of time for the people and for hajj [pilgrimage]"} [al-Baqarah 2:189]. Asking in this manner is by way of seeking knowledge, through which the believers will increase in faith and knowledge. As for asking about the wisdom behind things in the sense that a person will not accept a ruling or comply with it unless he knows the wisdom behind it, this is misguidance and arrogance towards the truth, and it is following whims and desires, making Islamic teachings something subordinate that is not followed.

End quote from *Tafsir al-`Uthaymin: al-Fatihah wal-Baqarah*, 1/133.

III.

With regard to the reason why Allah, may He be Glorified and Exalted, decreed that Iblis should strive to misguide people, from the above we learn that this decree is based on great wisdom, he details of which we may or may not know. Some of the scholars have suggested some reasons behind this divine decree that they deduced from the general religious texts. They include:

1.Allah, may He be Glorified and Exalted, made Iblis a means of testing His creation, to make the evil distinct from the good in this world, cleanse the Muslim community of hypocrites and requite people for their deeds, not on the basis of His prior knowledge of them. Were it not for the efforts of Iblis to mislead people, there would be no test and cleansing.

2.Allah, may He be Glorified and Exalted, wanted His Prophets and close friends (awliya') to attain a high level of servitude to Him (`ubudiyyah) by striving against the Shaytan and his party, and by going against him, opposing him and enraging him and his allies, and by seeking refuge with Allah, may He be Glorified, from the Shaytan, turning to Him to protect them from the evil of the Shaytan and his schemes. That could serve many interests for them in this world and the hereafter that could not be achieved without Allah having created him (Iblis).

3.So that the believer may attain the virtues of patience, steadfastness and striving. These are some aspects of servitude (`ubudiyyah) to Allah which are achieved through striving against Iblis and his whispers. If Allah did not create Iblis, a believer would not attain these levels of servitude through striving against the Shaytan.

4.Allah makes manifest some of His attributes – such as His forbearance, wisdom, pardon and forgiveness – to those whom the Shaytan causes to slip. In the hadith it is narrated that the Messenger of Allah (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) said: "By the One is Whose hand is my soul, if you did not commit sin, Allah would dispense with you and create people who would commit sins then ask Allah for forgiveness, then He would forgive them." Narrated by Muslim, 2749.

Imam Ibn al-Qayyim (may Allah have mercy on him) discussed this issue and elaborated on it, and made some useful points about some aspects of the divine wisdom behind the creation of Iblis, some of which we have mentioned above. Whoever wants to read what he said in full may refer to his book *Shifa' al-`Alil fi Masa'il al-Qada' wal-Qadar wal-Hikmah wat-Ta`lil*, 2/245 ff. See also: *Mukhtasar as-Sawa`iq al-Mursalah*, 245 ff.

And Allah knows best.