

Question 13: Non-muslims and Hell

Question: We know of many people around the world who are not Muslims or Shi`a but are nevertheless individuals of good conduct; for example, non-Muslims are responsible for many inventions. Is it right that they all deserve to be punished in Hell because they are not Muslims?

Brief Answer

Those who do not believe in Islam can be classified into two groups:

1. Those who are termed '*Jahil-e-Muqassir*' (lit. '*culpable ignorant*'). These are non-believers to whom the message of Islam has reached and who have understood its truthfulness. However, they are not prepared to accept the truth due to their obstinacy and stubbornness. This group deserves to be punished in Hell.
2. Those who are termed '*Jahil-e-Qasir*' (lit. '*inculpable ignorant*'). These are non-believers to whom the message of Islam has not reached, or it has been presented to them in a very incomplete and untruthful manner. Such people will attain salvation if they are truthful to their own religion.

Detailed Answer

Islam is a simple and accessible religion and it is easy to find out its truthfulness by means of the two guiding authorities that have been given to mankind: the '*outer*' guiding authority, that is, Allah's prophets and saints, and the '*inner*' one, that is, the intellect.¹

Islam is in complete opposition to the concept of religious pluralism because this concept is based on the principle that different beliefs are equal and that Muslims, Hindus, Christians, Jews etc. all have the same rank and status. According to religious pluralism, no proof exists for the invalidity of any belief because the truth is unattainable and religion is a relative and completely personal affair. Not only are its truths and real substance unattainable and every person takes from it whatever he or she personally understands, but furthermore, there are numerous truths and many correct paths to salvation and deliverance.

Such views are inconsistent with the religion of Islam, which is comprised of a set of fundamental beliefs and practical, legal and ethical laws and principles. Islam does however give concessions to those who are far from its reality. This can be better understood when we consider that there are two groups of people who do not believe in Islam:

1. Those who are termed '*Jahil-e-Muqassir*' (lit. '*culpable ignorant*') and who are obstinate non-believers. That is, Islam has reached them and they have understood its truthfulness; however, they are not prepared to accept the truth due to their obstinacy and stubbornness. This group of non-believers deserves to be punished in Hell because despite having known the truth, they have chosen with their own free will to reject Islam. These non-believers, even though they may be of good conduct, could have attained salvation but instead have closed the path to salvation themselves as they have covered the truth and are rebellious and obstinate in relation to it. As a result, they have chosen their own predicament.

2. Those who are termed '*Jahil-e-Qasir*' (lit. '*inculpable ignorant*'). These are non-believers to whom the message of Islam has not reached, or it has been presented to them in a very incomplete and untruthful manner; so for example, they think that Islam has the same status and rank as the religions of India and China and at the most, Judaism and Christianity. This group of non-believers, whether they live in the most remote parts of the world or in the most civilized, will not be subject to the punishments of Hell because they are not blameworthy for their lack of belief, and punishment is only for blameworthy sinners.

Unfortunately, there is so much propaganda against Islam that free thinking and seeking the truth has been taken away from many people in a way that they cannot distinguish truth from falsehood. The fact is that despite making significant material progress, contemporary man has regressed spiritually. The main cause of this is the '*World Arrogance*'—the superpower enemies of Islam—with its propagandist and deceptive media system that in full force tries to change and distort the truth. Therefore, many people, even in the most civilized of places, have remained unaware of the true message of Islam and of the enlivening Ahlul Bayt (ع) school of thought. Worse still, incorrect and unrealistic information about Islam is given to them in a way that a religion of mercy, love and justice is portrayed as a religion of violence, oppression and injustice.

In conclusion, from the point of view of Islam, those who have not heard about the true message of Islam and are not blameworthy with regard to this will attain salvation if they are truthful to their own religion. This religion must be based on the '*fitrah*'—man's primordial, innate nature—and so the followers of such a religion, for example, abstain from lying and committing crimes against humanity. This rule is also applicable to the Ahlus Sunnah to whom the truthfulness of Shi'aism has not been explained correctly.

1. al-Kafi, v.1, p.25, no. 22

2. Fitrah: Allah says in the Qur`an, "The divine nature by which Allah has created mankind" (30:30). Therefore, the fitrah in every person is the root of all spiritual matters and goodness. Imam Rida (ع) has said, "And it is by means of the fitrah that His proof is substantiated" (al-Saduq, al-Tawhid, pg. 35. That is, whatever Allah has as argumentation is of no use without the fitrah. By this explanation, it becomes evident why in the terminology of Islamic philosophers and theologians the fitrah is referred to as the origin of all spiritual matters and goodness, in contrast to tabi'ah (nature), which is referred to as the origin of all material and instinctive matters. Man is a being of free will that continuously chooses the path of the fitrah or the way of tabi'ah, and it is with this free will that he determines his life in the Hereafter, as indicated in the famous hadith: "The World is a plantation for the Hereafter."

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