

ESSAYS ON FAITH: GOD USES DISASTERS TO TEST OUR CONDUCT

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Recent disasters in New Orleans as a result of Hurricane Katrina sparked a debate among the religious extremists. They blamed Katrina on our foreign policy or on our immorality.

If Katrina is to be blamed for our foreign policy, then who is to be blamed for the tsunami in the Indian Ocean and the earthquake in Pakistan?

On the other hand, if it is to be blamed for our immorality, then why, we must ask, were San Francisco and Las Vegas spared from this disaster?

Yes, the natural disasters, be it Katrina in New Orleans, the tsunami in the Indian Ocean, or the earthquake in Pakistan, have a spiritual dimension, but not what the religious extremists interpret it to be.

From the Islamic perspective, all the events happening in this universe do not only have a physical reason but also have God's ordained purpose. In fact, the creation of the universe itself has an ordained intent. It has been created with the ultimate purpose of testing our conduct in this life.

When this objective is accomplished, when all the humans starting from Adam to the last person to come in this world have been tested, this universe will come to an end. A new universe will then be created, and we will all be given a new life. This will mark the beginning of the Hereafter.

For us, this life is only a springboard for the long-lasting life to come in the Hereafter. However, our fate in the Hereafter will depend upon how well we do in this life. If our overall conduct in this life is good, we will live a life of bliss in the Hereafter. On the other hand, if we fail to behave well in this life, we will have to live a life of eternal misery.

Our life on this planet is a mixed bag of good and bad. Sometimes we are exposed to good and sometimes bad. Some of us are exposed to more good and less bad and some vice versa. It is a part of the ordained plan.

Our performance in this life is measured by how well we respond to the events around us. When exposed to adversity, do we become ill-tempered and start grieving? Do we recognize that whatever we owned belonged to God anyway? Do we complain for the loss of things, we did not own to begin with?

God promises in the Holy Quran that those who maintain their composure while patiently navigating through hardship will receive blessing, mercy and guidance and will be successful in the Hereafter.

Just as hardship and adversity are ways to test our conduct, our wealth and power are also ways to test our behavior in this life. We are tested by how we manage these commodities in this life. If we abuse our power, become extravagant, mismanage our wealth, or withhold the gift of God from the destitute, then we are heading toward disaster and should expect to spend the eternal life in misery.

According to the Holy Quran, we cannot attain righteousness until we freely and voluntarily spend in charity what we love the most out of love of God. This does not mean we should give away everything we own. We are expected to do our share without becoming destitute ourselves. When we responsibly spend our wealth on those afflicted with misery and hardship, it not only lightens their burden, it enriches us and guarantees us a life of bliss in the Hereafter.

The universe, since its creation, is heading toward its ultimate destination. In doing so, it will continue to go through geological changes. Sometimes these changes will bring natural disasters. While none of us should look forward to these disasters and should do our best to avoid them, some of us might get caught in these disasters. It is God's way of testing us how do we perform in these situations. When this happens, do we behave responsibly? Do we use these events to improve our lot in the Hereafter or waste it away?

These disasters are tests for both the victims as well as the nonvictims. The victims can improve their fortune in the Hereafter by riding out these events with patience and the nonvictims by opening up their purse for the victims.

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