

Psychological Analysis of Qur'anic Philosophy of Punishments

Dr. Saqib Muhammad Khan
Research Scholar, Sheikh Zayed Islamic Centre, Karachi

Abstract

Punishment is considered as a means toward the moral reform of a person that can result in the internalization of moral values and a potentially happier life. Punishment deters future wrongdoings by the offender. Ultimately, the effect of punishment comes principally from a decrease in wrongdoings and the criminal acts.

The Holy Qur'an, in connection with motivating people towards the true faith, presents warning of severe punishments as the extrinsic motivator towards the true faith and righteousness. A thorough study of the Holy Qur'an reveals that all psychological precepts regarding use of punishment as an effective extrinsic tool of motivation are duly addressed in the verses of the Holy Qur'an.

The article mainly describes that the positive impacts and the desired objectives from punishments can only be achieved if the guidance of the Holy Qur'an for execution of punishments are followed.

In the course of the behavioral improvement, the element of motivation plays a vital role. The word *motivation* comes from the Latin term meaning 'to move'¹ and it is defined in Psychology as, "The influences that account for the initiation, direction, intensity, and persistence of behavior."² It is also defined as an internal condition initiated to produce goal-directed behavior.³

Most psychologists accept that motivation causes people to behave in certain ways. Behavior is therefore often thought of as the product to motivate. Without motivation, it is probable that there would be no behavior. There are always some motives that instill the change in behavior of an individual.

The motivation is that which activates a person's behavior and gives it direction. Therefore, in order to reform the humanity, motivation is the primary requisite.

Intrinsic Vs. Extrinsic Motivation

Different types of motivation are often identified as being either extrinsic or intrinsic. Extrinsic motivations are those that originate from outside of the individual and often involve rewards such as money, social recognition, praise or warnings of punishment. Intrinsic motivations are those that arise from inside the individual purely for the personal gratification.⁴

The Holy Qur'an very wisely and comprehensively applied both intrinsic and extrinsic motivations. The Holy Qur'an, determining the best ways of developing intrinsic motivation in individuals, addresses the inner nature of man that appeals the humanity towards a goal and ultimate success. Along with intrinsic motivation, the Holy Qur'an appeals with broad and all-inclusive extrinsic motivation as well.

Extrinsic (external) motivation refers to the direction from outside the person, including the promise of rewards and the threat of punishment. Many facets of our society revolve around extrinsic motivation. School students, for instance, are graded on the caliber of their work, facing threats or punishments when they neglect to study well and rewards when they get through. Similarly, employees of a company may seek to earn a bonus for completing their work.

It should be remembered that many professionals consider that people are extrinsically motivated. They do not engage in positive behavior without external incentives. People mostly engage in activities because they are trained to do so, because they are required to do so, or because they are furnished with promises of rewards or threats of punishment. This phenomenon is termed as extrinsic motivation. Extrinsically motivated people act in certain ways because they believe that they will receive rewards, avoid punishments, or please someone by doing so.⁵

Punishment and the Science of Psychology

Psychologists consider fear of punishment and coercion as extrinsic motivators. Punishment is defined in psychology as a stimulus that represses a behavior. Psychologists claim that punishment is a means toward the moral reform of a person, which can result in the internalization of moral values and a potentially happier life.⁶ In other words, punishment is a means of deterring future wrongdoings by the

offender and other members of the society who contemplate committing the same offense. Ultimately, the effect of punishment comes principally from a decrease in wrongdoings and the criminal acts.

Punishments in the Holy Qur'an

The Holy Qur'an, in connection with motivating people towards the true faith, presents warning of severe punishments as the extrinsic motivator towards the true faith and righteousness. A thorough study of the Holy Qur'an reveals that all psychological precepts regarding use of punishment as an effective extrinsic tool of motivation are duly addressed in the verses of the Holy Qur'an.

The Three Psychological requisites of Punishment and the Holy Qur'an

The Science of psychology outlines the following three basic requisites for punishment:

Identification of the Crime

The first requisite is the identification of the behavior that is being punished so the recipient of punishment should not be left with a "What did I do now?" feeling.

Balance between Crime and Punishment

The Holy Qur'an maintains a complete balance between the severity of the punishment and severity of the misbehavior because if the punishment is too light, the reinforcers inherent in the undesired behavior are likely to outweigh the punishment and the behavior will persist. If the punishment is too severe, the recipient is likely to engage in avoidance, suppression, self-devaluation, or retaliatory behaviors. Thus, the Holy Qur'an perfectly complies the second psychological requisite of punishment of keeping a balance between severity of the crime and the level of punishment.

Intensity

All punishments in the Holy Qur'an are introduced at its full intensity because well-intentioned attempts to start with a mild punishment and build gradually to more difficult forms of punishment are often mistaken, because the recipient is likely to become habituated to the punishment. However, punishments are more effective if an accurate judgment is made regarding the intensity of punishment that is needed and deliver the punishment at that level of intensity when it is called for.⁷

Allah states in the Holy Qur'an,

إِنَّ الْمُجْرِمِينَ فِي عَذَابٍ مُّهِينٍ . لَّا يُغْنِي عَنْهُمْ وَبِمَآ ذُنُوبِهِمْ مَا كَانُوا يَكْفُرُونَ . وَ مَا ظَلَمْنَاهُمْ وَلَٰكِن كَانُوا يَمْ كُفِّرُونَ .⁹

Translation: "Indeed the criminals will stay in the punishment of hell forever. And it will never be lightened upon them, and they will remain in it devastated. And We did not oppress them at all, but they themselves were unjust."⁹

The above verses very clearly explain that the culprits who opposed the Prophets will be condemned to Hell to abide therein, never to find an exit. Its intensity will not be decreased in the least. The level of Hell to which admitted will become their abode. It is not Allah who has by any means wronged them, but they had wronged themselves by opting for denial.¹⁰

So, quite psychologically, the Holy Qur'an here does not merely describe the criminal offense for which punishment will be given but also the intensity of the punishment. Moreover, these verses also explain the atrocity of the crime by the description of the severity of the punishment.

It is also stated in Surah Al-Jaathiyah,

مِن ذُرِّيَّتِهِمْ عَذَابٌ مُّهِينٌ . وَالَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا بِرَبِّهِمْ لَهُمْ عَذَابٌ مِنْ رَبِّهِمْ أَشَدُّ .¹¹

Translation: "Hell is after them, and what they have earned will not benefit them at all, nor those whom they have chosen as supporters besides Allah; and for them is a terrible punishment. This is the (true) guidance; and for those who disbelieve in the verses of their Lord is the severest of painful punishments."¹²

This means that the liar and the malefactor who turns around in arrogance will receive the punishment of Hell. These infidels will not benefit from their wealth nor from those idols which they had been worshipping, or the leaders of the gentiles. This means there is the most severe of punishment set aside for the gentiles, which is beyond your imagination.

So, once again, the Holy Qur'an while warning people has indicated the crime for which punishment is to be given that those who refute the guidance and resort to denial will be awarded a terribly painful punishment.

Beside these two verses, there are a number of verses in the Holy Qur'an which indicate its usage of warnings as extrinsic motivators for abandoning the idol worshipping.

Punishment Collaborative with Reward – the most effective technique

Psychologists state that punishment is the most effective when it works collaboratively with reward.¹³ It is said that punishment which is intense, immediate, and applied to responses learned through positive reinforcement is very effective, particularly if alternative responses are available to the individual being punished.¹⁴ In a famous experiment making this point John Whiting and O. Hobart Mowrer (1943) first trained rats to learn a particular route to a goal. And so they punished them for taking this route, but provided them with a new route, which they rewarded. The animals never took the original route again.¹⁵

Three eminent psychologists Gregory A. Rimple, Norman Garnezy and Edward Zigler compiled a book 'principles of psychology'. In this book they state the significance of collaborating punishment with rewards,

"A rat will quickly learn to take an alternative route in a maze if he is not only shocked for taking the wrong route but is rewarded with food for taking the right one. A 3-year-old will learn not to poke his finger in his baby sister's eye if he is not only scolded for eye-poking behavior but is also shown how to tickle her gently and is then commended for being 'such a big boy who knows how to treat a baby.'¹⁶

The famous psychologist Skinner (1953) also emphasizes the importance of defining the kind of behavior that will avoid punishment – whether it is a different routine or simply doing nothing. Very often punishment doesn't work because the person being punished realizes that he should not be doing, but keeps on doing it because he doesn't know what he should be doing. This is only one of the problems with punishment.¹⁷

Hence, psychologically it has been proven that punishment should almost never be used alone. The proper technique is to teach what not to do by punishing one behavior and simultaneously to teach what to do by reinforcing another behavior. This is an extremely effective technique; both the reward and the punishment are intensified by a contrast effect.

Therefore, Holy Qur'an frequently employs this most effective technique of describing punishment in conjunction with the

reinforcement of an alternative behavior. This way it teaches what to do, as well as what not to do.

Following are some examples in this context:

بَلْنَ خَصْمُنْ لَطْفُوا فِي رَبِّهِمْ فَالَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا وَطَعَتْ لَهُمْ ذِيَابٌ مِّن نَّارٍ يُصَنَّبُ مِنْ فَوْقِ
رُءُوسِهِمُ الْحَمِيمُ رُبِّهِمْ مَا فِي بَطُونِهِمْ وَأَجْلا وَذُ. وَأَبْهَمُ مَعَامِجٍ مِّنْ خَبِيثٍ. كَأَمْثَارٍ لَّوَا
أَنْ تَخْرُجُوا مِنْهَا مِنْ غَمٍّ أَعْبَثُوا فِيهَا * وَتَوَفَّوْا عَذَابَ الْعَذَابِ إِنَّ اللَّهَ يَلْعَلُ الَّذِينَ
أَعْبَثُوا وَعَمَّا وَأَمْلَأَتْكُمْ جَنَّتْ نَجْرِي مِّنْ نَّحْبِهَا الْأَشْبُرُ يُخَالُونَ فِيهَا مِنْ أَسَاوِرَ مِنْ نَّبَبٍ
وَأَلْوَا وَيُنَاسِبُهُمْ فِيهَا خَرِيرٌ.¹⁸

Translation: "These are the two groups who fought concerning their Lord; so those who disbelieved – garments of fire have been fashioned for them; and boiling water will be poured onto their heads. With which will melt what is in their bellies, and their skins. And for them are rods of iron. Whenever they wish to come out of it due to suffocation, they will be returned to it again and it will be commanded, 'Taste the punishment of fire!' Indeed Allah will admit those who believed and did good deeds into Gardens beneath which rivers flow – in it they will be made to wear armlets of gold, and pearls, and in it their garment is silk."¹⁹

The above passage describes the moment of the Day of Judgement when the respect and dignity will be rewarded by Allah to the believers and unbelievers will suffer humiliation. Sayyid Qutb, commenting on the above passage writes,

"It is a violent scene with loud noises and bustling movements. We see garments being cut out and tailored, and fiercely boiling water being poured over people's heads. Its temperature is so high that the moment it touches the heads of those at the receiving end, whatever is in their bellies smelted, as does their skin. We also see whips made of red-hot iron to flog those condemned to such punishment. The suffering is intensified and becomes unbearable. The unbelievers make a sudden move to try to escape this torment, but they are fiercely returned into it. They are strongly rebuked and told: 'Taste the torment of fire.' The only way to turn away from this self-repeating scene is to look at the other destiny portrayed in the sūrah. The starting point is that there are two adversaries contending about their Lord. We have just seen the sad end of those who refuse to believe in Him. The believers, on the other hand, are in gardens through which running waters flow. Their clothes are unlike those of the first group: they are made of silk. On top Of these they have adornments and jewelry made of gold and pearls. God

also guides them to the best of words and to the way leading to the One worthy of all praise. Thus, they encounter no difficulty either in word or in a direction. Such guidance is a great blessing, because it gives them a sense of ease, comfort and reassurance.²⁰

Similarly, at another place, the Holy Qur'an states,

إِنَّ شَجَرَةَ الزَّقُّومِ طِغَامٌ لِّالَّذِينَ كَانُوا لَا يَتَلَوَّنَا فِي الْطُّورِ . كَلْبًا لِّالْحَمِيمِ .
 كَلْبًا قَاغْرًاؤُهُ إِلَىٰ سَوَاءٍ الْحَمِيمِ . دَّمَ صَدْرًا قَلْبًا رَّسْمًا . مِنْ غَلَابِ الْإِحْمِيمِ . نُوُؤُ
 إِلَيْكَ أَمَّ الْفَرِيضِ الْكَرِيمِ . إِنَّ بِلَا مَا عَلَّمَ بِهِ نَمْتَرُونَ . إِنَّ الْمُدْتَمِرِينَ فِي مَقَامِ الْإِيمَانِ . فِي
 جَنَّةٍ وَ غَنَوْنَ لِيَسُونَ مِنْ سَعْسَعَةٍ وَ اسْتَمْرَقُوا مُذْهَبَاتِنِ كَلْبًا . وَ رَوْحِنِهِمْ بِرَحْوَرِ عَيْنِ .
 الْمَوْتِ إِلَّا الْمَوْتَةَ الْأُولَىٰ وَ وَفِيهِمْ 74 بَدَاعُونَ فَبِئْسَ مَا كَانُوا يَكْفُرُونَ .
 غَلَابِ الْإِحْمِيمِ . فَضْلًا مِنْ رَبِّكَ لِيَكُنُوا الْفَوْزَ الْإِعْطِيمِ . 11

Translation: "Indeed the tree of Zaqqum, is the food of the sinners. Like molten copper, it churns in their bellies. Like the churning of boiling water. 'Seize him, and forcibly drag him right to the blazing fire.' 'Then pour on his head the punishment of boiling water.' 'Saying, 'Taste it! Indeed you only are the most honourable, the dignified!' 'Indeed this is what you used to doubt about.' Indeed the pious are in a place of peace. In the Gardens and water-springs. They will be dressed in fine silk and embroidery, facing one another (on thrones). So it is; and We have wedded them to maidens with gorgeous eyes. In it they will ask for all kinds of fruit, with safety. They will not taste death again in it, except their former death; and Allah has saved them from the punishment of fire. By the munificence of your Lord; this is the great success."²²

Anwar Muhammad Akram Awan, in his Commentary 'Asrar At-Tanzil' describes the above passage as,

"The infidels will be offered cactus as food on that Day, the food most suitable for the malefactors. This cactus grows in Hell, whereas the cactus we know about here is also extremely bitter, full of ugly thorns. Once ingested it shall seethe in their bellies like the melting of copper or like the boiling water. They will then be dragged into the center of Hell and showered with boiling water in punishment to taste the outcome of their misdeeds. This indeed was the Hell they never believe in, and the promised doom they had long forgotten about.

In contrast, those who had opted for Taqwa and His obedience will be living in abodes of peace, seated majestically amidst gardens and springs, clad in fine silk robes, facing one another. Allah shall wed

them with Hur. There will be no death save the one which ushered them into the Hereafter, and spared them the horrors of Hell.”²³
 In Surah An-Naba, Almighty Allah portrays the frightening and all-terrifying state of Hellfire for the wrongdoers. However, just connected to this, a beautiful scene of Gardens of Heaven is presented as the reward for those who are righteous.

إِنَّ جَهَنَّمَ كَانَتْ مِرْصَادًا ۚ لَاطِمًا عِتْنَ مَلَأَ دَرَجَاتِهَا قَبِيحًا ۚ لَافْتَابًا لَا يُؤْوُونَ فِيهَا بَرْدًا وَ
 لَا سَرَابًا ۚ إِلَّا خَيْمًا مِّنْ عَسَافٍ ۚ جَزَاءً ۚ وَفَاءً ۚ لِّبِمَا كَانُوا لَا يَرْجُونَ حِسَابًا ۚ وَكَذَّبُوا
 بِآيَاتِنَا كِبَارًا ۚ وَكُلُّ شَيْءٍ أَحْصَيْنَاهُ كِتَابًا ۚ فَذُوقُوا ۚ فَإِنَّ ذُرِّيَّتَكُمْ إِلَّا غَلِيًّا ۚ إِنَّ لِّلْمُتَّقِينَ
 مَغَارًا حَفَاطًا ۚ وَأَعْنَابًا ۚ وَكَوَاعِبَ ۚ الْأَنْبَا ۚ وَكُنَّا بِبَنَاتِكُمْ لَدُنَّكُمْ قَبِيحًا ۚ لَعُونًا ۚ وَلَا
 كُنَّا ۚ جَزَاءً ۚ مِّن رَّبِّكَ عَطَاءً حِسَابًا ۚ

Translation: “Indeed hell is lying in ambush. The destination of the rebellious. They will remain in it for ages. They will neither taste anything cool in it, nor anything to drink. Except hot boiling water and hot pus discharged from the people of hell. The reward to each is according to what he is. Indeed they had no fear of the account. And they denied Our signs to the extreme. And We have kept recorded everything in a Book, accounted for. Therefore taste it now – We shall not increase anything for you except the punishment. Indeed the place of success is for the pious. Gardens and grapes. And maidens of a single age. And an overflowing cup. In which they shall neither hear lewd talk, nor any lie. A reward from your Lord – a grossly sufficient bestowal.”²⁵

These verses describe the fate of the tyrant unbelievers combined with that of the righteous. It is said that Hell has been created so that it may watch the tyrants and transgressors and await their arrival. It is a home in which they stay endlessly. But they taste “neither coolness nor any drink.” The next verse provides an exception to this, but the exception is even worse: “except boiling fluid and decaying filth.” Their throats and stomachs burn as they drink the boiling fluid, which is the only ‘coolness’ they have, while their other drink is the filthiest of the burning bodies, decaying in the enormous heat. The Qur’an comments that this is ‘a fitting recompense’. It is in keeping with what they have done in their lives. Then follows a reproach coupled with the tidings that they can hope for no change in their condition and no abatement of its intensity: “Taste this, then; the only increase you shall have is an increase of torment.”

We then have the corresponding scene of the righteous in complete bliss. If hell is a vigilant watch guard, which the tyrants cannot escape, the righteous, the God-fearing will end in a place of security. What a place it is: "gardens and vineyards." The vine tree is specifically mentioned because it is well known to the addressees. The God-fearing will also have companions who are described here as high-bosomed and of equal age. They also drink from a cup overflowing with a refreshing beverage. These luxuries give a physical description so that we may better appreciate them. It is a pure life there, free of the idle chatting and falsehood which give rise to controversy. It is a sublime state of affairs suitable for eternal life. Then follows the Qur'anic comment: "Such is the recompense of your Lord, a truly sufficient gift."²⁶

The aspect which is common in all above mentioned passages is the description of the severe torment and unbearable punishment for those who deny the truth, combined with the profound reward and sublime luxuries for those who accepted the righteous faith and obeyed Almighty Allah. This is one of the most effective psychological impulses applied by the Holy Qur'an to affect the behavior of mankind. In order to divert people from false beliefs and wrongdoings, grievous and intensive punishment is declared for those to deny the truth which mentally compels to shun all atrocious beliefs and practices readily otherwise severe torments awaits them. However, punishments are never mentioned in the Holy Qur'an alone, people are simultaneously motivated towards the righteous faith. And for this, a perfect contrast is presented for the guaranteed psychological effect. People are given a number of glad tidings encompassing comfort of worldly life and eternal pleasure in Paradise.

The Qur'anic effectuation of punishments encompassing all psychological principles in the most practical and applicable manner is termed as 'Manipulation' in the science of ---psychology, which is defined as, 'the ability to modify and change behavior by systematic use of appropriate reinforcements and punishments.'²⁷

In order to attract the people towards righteousness, the Holy Qur'an applied one of the most significant factors of psychology i.e. punishment. Through this, the Holy Qur'an deviated people from the false belief and wrongdoings and inclined them towards righteousness. In this regard, the Holy Qur'an applied most practical psychological technique which is termed as 'Manipulation' which includes a description of the severe torment and unbearable punishment for those who deny the truth and disobeyed Allah, combined with the profound

reward and sublime luxuries for those who accepted the righteous faith and obeyed Almighty Allah. Hence, the Holy Qur'an, using the element of Manipulation in a repeated manner, brought positive change in behaviors of Arabs to the extent that they permanently forsook the false beliefs and they were motivated so much for noble deeds that they became the leaders of the entire world in piety.

As the factor of punishment is an indispensable issue. Its positive impacts and the desired objectives from punishments can only be achieved if and only if Qur'anic way and guidelines are observed. The law enforcement agencies, state rulers, principals and Teachers of educational institutions and most importantly, parents must pay heed towards guidance of the Holy Qur'an for execution of punishments. It is assured and guaranteed that negative behaviors, habits, routine and performances in the society will change into the positive meanings and we will see once again revival of Muslim Ummah unprecedented in the history of humankind.

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