

# PROBLEM OF PAIN





“...when pain is to be borne, a little **courage** helps more than much knowledge, a little **human sympathy** more than much courage, and the least tincture of the **love of God** more than all”

—*CS Lewis*



# Atheists View of Pain

- Atheists see pain and suffering as a natural phenomenon:

*“Nature red in tooth and claw, war, famines, etc. are inevitable, random, purposeless, and to be expected in a universe run by chance and impersonal laws of nature.”*

- The real question is: How could **Pain and Suffering** co-exist with a **good**, **loving** and **omnipotent GOD**?!



# Common Religious Beliefs

1. Existence of **Holy Divinity**, who evokes awe
2. **Universal moral law**: one ought to do certain things and avoid others coupled with the sense of guilt when we do not measure up.
3. The Divine Power of which they feel awe is the **Giver** and **Guardian** of the morality to which they feel obligation.
4. **Christianity** adds a fourth strand to the above: Son of the Divine suffered and died on behalf of the guilty.



# Steps in Answering Back

1. Omnipotence of God (what does it mean?)

2. Divine Love & Goodness

3. Human Wickedness

4. Human Pain

5. Passion of Christ (Abuna Matta)



“If God were **good**, He would wish to make His creatures perfectly happy; and if God were **almighty**, He would be able to do what He wished. But the creatures are suffering. Therefore God lacks either goodness, or power, or both!”



# 1. DIVINE OMNIPOTENCE

- Bible says: “*with God all things are possible*”. However, there are certain things that God cannot do! (**not out of inability** but because they are either **intrinsically impossible** or **against His nature**):
  - ◆ round squares / white blacks / give a creature free will and at same time withhold free will from it
  - ◆ God cannot lie (He is Truth) or commit sins (He is Holy) or break a promise (He is Faithful)

***This is no limit to His power***

- It remains true that all things are possible with God. The intrinsic impossibilities are not things but nonentities or nonsense

**We may attribute miracles to God, but not nonsense!**



# 1. DIVINE OMNIPOTENCE (Cont.)

- Why not create a universe without pain or suffering? It is an **intrinsic impossibility**
  - ◆ For **distinct free** beings to co-exist, matter must have *fixed nature obeying constant laws*. Else, freedom of one to conform nature to his own will, deprives others free will.
  - ◆ This gives opportunities for humans to:
    - ▶ exercise selflessness, courtesy and respect by which love and modesty prevail
    - ▶ exercise evil, selfishness and hostility, where matter is used to hurt others
- Why not conceive of a world where iron became soft when used as a weapon?

*If wrong actions were impossible, freedom of the will would be void.*
- God can and does, on occasions, modify the behaviour of matter and produce **miracles**.  
(**Example**: Game of Chess)



## 2. Divine Love & Goodness

- When we equate God's goodness with His love and kindness towards us, we are tempted to believe **God should indulge us**.
  - ◆ We want a kind **grandfather** who gives us what we want not a stern **Father** who seeks to make us mature, healthy, strong and caring human beings.
- God is wiser than us; His judgment of what is good and evil is superior to ours.

*God is more concerned with us becoming good and perfect than being worldly happy!*

- God's love for us demands that we become perfect. Sometimes love will cause pain where pain is necessary to **help the beloved become fully loveable**.
- Because of our wicked condition, He's got to hone us with suffering to purify and sanctify us (**Ex:** as surgeon amputates a tumour).



# 3. Human Wickedness

- In Bible times men knew they were sinners, deserving Divine wrath ([Jonah](#))
- Our culture has reduced goodness to kindness and evil to cruelty. We **lost a sense of sin**. As long as a person is “kind” he is good. Humility, diligence, chastity, faithfulness, self-control, purity are simply ignored. (**video**)
- Even though we are prideful, intemperate, unchaste, we ignore God, commit mean and ugly acts, and do hateful things, **yet we seek to justify, deny, and minimize our sins**.
- **Until we recover a sense of sin, we’ll resent God’s chastening and anger.** When we acknowledge our sin, God’s wrath is then a corollary of His goodness, holiness and justice.
- Without a conviction of sin, what God has done in Jesus Christ seems irrelevant (**video**)



# 4. Human Pain

- **Review:** “If there are people with free will, then they can use it for evil. Men and not God have produced weapons of mass destruction and torture”.
- **What about natural evils?** Pain is God’s tool to nudge us toward our ultimate aim in life: self-surrender, putting God’s will above our own, death to self.
- We’re prone to resist submission to God. *Suffering aids this in three ways:*
  1. **Pain gets our attention** when all else doesn’t. “God whispers to us in our pleasures, speaks in our conscience, and shouts in our pain. It is His megaphone to rouse a deaf world”.
  2. **Suffering shatters our pride and self-sufficiency** (**Ex:** French lady and her baby). “He troubles them and makes life less sweet, so they’ll turn to him now before it’s too late”
  3. Suffering purifies our motives, **stimulates repentance** and submission to God, and **compassion and acts of mercy towards others in pain.**



# 5. Passion of Christ (Abuna Matta)

- If I have to suffer because I am a sinner and deserve affliction, then how come Christ should suffer while **He is spotless, without sin and undeserving of pain?**
- When Christ suffered and died, He:
  1. **exalted the value of pain** from being a punishment for sin to a means of showing love, submission, gratitude, patience, hope and faith by which we may receive the kingdom of God. (Job 2:9-10)
  2. turned suffering from being the cruelty of nature to being a transformation and purification for a **better holy life**.
  3. taught us **to forgive** those who afflict us unto death instead of seeking revenge.
  4. rose from the dead, so that we may **face death without fear**, trusting in our sure resurrection in His likeness. It became an awaited opportunity to change this corrupt and sinful body for an incorrupt, spiritual and luminous one that is glorified in heaven forever.