**[Why suffering?](https://www.dawn.com/news/1810557/why-suffering)**

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A STILLBIRTH. A toddler diagnosed with Down syndrome. A teenage case of leukaemia. A rare blood disorder in the 30s. Cancer with a single-digit survival rate in the 40s. Death at wholesale rate in a territory — as if collective suffering somehow makes it easier to bear the burden than individual loss. We are surrounded and baffled by suffering. And what follows then is the biggest question of them all: why me? And why this hardship?

But the question that has confounded theologians and philosophers since the inception of humanity is even more fundamental: why does suffering even exist in a world designed by a kind and benevolent God?

Christianity sees suffering as a consequence of the ‘disobedience’ of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. Islam and Judaism proclaim suffering to be a test of faith from God. Buddhism declares dukkha, a result of material attachment, while Hinduism’s karma implies one’s current suffering as an aftermath of their actions in previous lives.

Some philosophers argue that suffering is a necessary part of human existence, fostering empathy, personal growth, or moral development. Others opine that suffering is a necessary consequence of free will or that it plays a role in the greater good.

Some say that suffering is a necessary part of human existence.

In Man’s Search for Meaning, psychiatrist Viktor Frankl provides a thoughtful analogy. He asks whether an ape being punctured repeatedly to develop a vaccine would ever be able to grasp the meaning of its suffering. The obvious answer is it would not; with its limited intelligence, it could not enter the world of man — which is the only world in which the meaning of its suffering would be understandable. He then follows up with a rhetorical question about humans. Can we really understand the reason and the meaning of our suffering while being part of this material world? “Is it not conceivable that there is still another dimension; a world in which the question of an ultimate meaning of human suffering would find an answer?”he asks.

Interesting, one thinks, but a grand argument does not ease the pain or dilute my misery. And then comes the backup argument — you are not alone! The list of beings afflicted by grief is led by our prophets. And then there are all and sundry, everyone with a story of their own. The variety and the ubiquity still do not relieve one’s agony, but maybe they make it more digestible on the accord of it being somewhat democratic. Here is how I try to wrap my head around it.

Everyone must get through it (Quran 2:155, 2:214, 29:2). This is just by design, the way this universe is programmed. If we think someone is spared and they have it all good in every sense, it is more our ignorance than the absence of suffering.

Nobody will have it more than one could bear (Quran 2:286). While everyone is unique and our sufferings appear unbearable, in the grand factory of this world, we are not much different than pieces of metal coming out of a foundry stamped with their unique tensile and yield strengths.

The Designer knows our limits, and those limits are respected when we are put under these harsh tests.

Every situation is a test. This world around us is a test. Sometimes, the test is of gratitude, and other times the test is of fortitude (Quran 27:40). We feel the burn of the hard situations, but we do not feel the blush of the good times.

If we think we do not deserve such a burdensome test, that is, perhaps, quite true. The Quran says that “if Allah were to impose blame on the people for what they have ear­n­­ed, He would not le­­ave upon earth any creature” (35:45). We are most likely getting much less than we truly deserve.

Our grace in how we deal with it will get us the accolades we need for the later parts of your story (Quran 2:156-157, 2:177). The sufferings of our prophets all had a good ending. But that exactly is the caveat. They graced their sufferings with perseverance, resilience, and patience, which in turn was rewarded by the Lord.

Now, does this answer all the questions for me? Maybe not. But perhaps these are not the questions we ought to answer. The question for us is to identify what our test is as we breathe the current breath. Is it the security of our four walls and the roof we shelter under, or the guaranteed next meal?

Or is our test the misfortune that is choking our airways, the one that we did not foresee, and that we feel we did not deserve? The short answer is: all of the above. And our attitude in dealing with them will determine if we are truly worthy of these tests.

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