

LONGING FOR CONSOLATION: A DILEMMA FOR DAWKINS

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فَإِذَا مَسَّ الْإِنْسَانَ ضُرٌّ دَعَانَا ثُمَّ إِذَا خَوَّلْنَاهُ نِعْمَةً مِّنَّا قَالَ إِنَّمَا أُوتِيْتُهَا عَلَىٰ عِلْمٍ بَلْ هِيَ
فِتْنَةٌ وَلَكِنَّ أَكْثَرَهُمْ لَا يَعْلَمُونَ

When a person is afflicted, he cries unto Us; but when We confer upon him a favor from Ourselves, he says: This has been given to me on account of my own knowledge. He does not realize that it is a trial: but most of them know not. [Zumar (Chapter 39), Verse 50]

Professor Richard Dawkins in the last chapter of his book, *the God Delusion*, summarizes the four roles of religion, namely, explanation, exhortation, consolation and inspiration. In this chapter he is trying to refute the consolation and inspiration purpose of religion. This short essay is meant to be a practical rebuttal of Dawkins' views pertaining to the consolation needs and longing of humanity. The reality of human psyche is such that it cannot find any real consolation or comfort in blind science or the so called 'survival of the fittest.' As Carl Sagan noted, "It does not make any sense to pray to the law of gravity; "Nor," as Kenneth Miller adds, "does it make any sense to pray to the second law of thermodynamics, which has never given me a break, and probably never will."

Dawkins makes several tall claims in his book, including, "If this book works, as I intend, religious readers who open it will be atheist when they put it down." He seems to think that humans' realization of their inevitable death and scientific knowledge in general should be enough consolation, but facts on the ground and the daily experiences defy Dawkins' assertions and hopes as we shall presently see.



Crews went door-to-door Wednesday, February 6, 2008, a day after the super Tuesday, named after the Presidential election primaries, searching debris for more victims of deadly tornadoes that ripped the roofs off shopping malls and churches, pummeled homes and blew apart warehouses as they tore across five states. At least 55 people were killed throughout the South. Relatives of a baby boy, Kyson Stowell, found him alive after being flung 300 feet by the tornado. Eleven-month-old Kyson was found face down in a muddy field after being picked up by the tornado that killed his mother and wrecked his home. "He's just a miracle, luck, God watching over him - it's all it can be," said his grandfather Doug Stowell. It was the deadliest tornado barrage in two decades, the US news agency Associated Press reported. It tore apart communities in Tennessee, Kentucky, Mississippi, Alabama and Arkansas. As the rescue workers combed through the devastated town of Castalian Springs, Tennessee, firefighter David Harmon came across what looked "like a baby doll". "He was laying face down with his arms above his head, he was just laying there motionless, wasn't moving," said David. The baby was lying 300 feet or more from the ruins of his house. His mother, 23-year-old Kerri Stowell, was found dead in the same field. He was taken to the children's hospital at Vanderbilt University, but had only light cuts and bruises. Dr Tom Morgan said, 'Maybe he landed on something that lessened his blow, maybe he, you know, came down against a bush or something.' He stuttered, 'I think it was probably mostly luck, God's grace.'¹ It is

not possible for man to not invoke God in circumstances like this. The combination of tragedy and the silver lining in the situation is too much to bear. There is a common proverb, "There are no atheists in foxholes."

Others in the community also saw it as divine intervention, a ray of hope amid the destruction visited on them in a few violent hours. The bland facts of science as to what brings about tornadoes may give us some future prevention but offer no consolation for the tragedy at hand.

A 1997 survey of American scientists found that 39 percent believed in a God to whom one may pray in expectation of receiving an answer as compared to 42 percent in a 1916 survey that used the same questions and an identical sampling procedure. The results challenged the widely held assumption that religious beliefs have fallen off drastically among scientists in the twentieth century.²

These statistics are about an imagined trial or tragedy. Once the tragedy or trial hits home, these numbers quickly swell to a hundred percent. It has been well documented that 96% of patients undergoing cardiac surgery used prayer as a coping mechanism to deal with their stress.³ Dawkins himself tells us that 95% of US population believes in afterlife. It seems it is very hard for humanity to face his or her mortality. Once again, it cannot be repeated enough, 'There are no atheists in foxholes.' The Holy Quran says:

"Your Lord is He Who propels the vessels in the sea for your benefit that you may seek of His bounty. Surely, He is Ever Merciful towards you. When danger threatens you in the sea you call upon Him, and forget all others upon whom you call. But when He brings you safe to land, you turn aside. Man is ever ungrateful. Do you then feel secure against His causing you to be swallowed up by the earth or His sending a sandstorm to cover you up, when you would find no one to rescue you? Or, do you feel secure against His sending you back therein once more and raising a fierce gale against you and drowning you because of your ingratitude, when you would find no one to help you against Us? We have indeed honored the children of Adam, and provided for them means of transportation in land and sea, and given them wholesome food and exalted them high above the

greater part of Our creation.” [Bani Israel (Chapter 17), Verses 67-71]

The Holy Quran very profoundly describes human psychology at time of trial and its tendency of ‘out of sight out of mind’ once the trial is over. But, in the final analysis, there is no escaping from All Knowing God. Allah says:

“If you are ungrateful, surely Allah is Self-Sufficient, and He is not pleased with ingratitude in His servants; but if you are grateful, He likes it for you. No one can bear the burden of another. To your Lord is your return; and He will inform you of that which *you* used to do. Surely, He is Well-Aware of your secret thoughts. When a person is afflicted, he calls upon his Lord, turning penitently to Him. Then, when He confers a favor upon him from Himself, he forgets that which he used to pray for before, and starts assigning rivals to Allah, that he may lead people astray from His way. Say to such a one: Profit from thy disbelief a short while; thou art surely of the inmates of the Fire. Then observe one who is devout in prayer, standing and in prostration, during the hours of the night, and who fears the Hereafter, and hopes for the mercy of his Lord. Ask them: Can those who know be like those who know not! It is only those endowed with understanding that take heed.” [Zumar (Chapter 39), Verses 8-10]

Michael Shermer and Frank J. Sulloway conducted a poll to outline as to why people believe in God. Let us describe the results in Shermer’s words:

“The five most common answers given to the question *Why do you believe in God?*:

1. The good design / natural beauty / perfection / complexity of the world or universe (28.6%)
2. The experience of God in everyday life (20.6%)
3. Belief in God is comforting, relieving, consoling, and gives meaning and purpose to life (10.3%)
4. The Bible says so (9.8%)
5. Just because / faith / the need to believe in something (8.2%)

And the six most common answers given to the question *Why do you think other people believe in God?*:

1. Belief in God is comforting, relieving, consoling, and gives meaning and purpose to life (26.3%)
2. Religious people have been raised to believe in God (22.4%)
3. The experience of God in everyday life (16.2%)
4. Just because / faith / the need to believe in something (13.0%)
5. Fear death and the unknown (9.1 %)
6. The good design / natural beauty / perfection / complexity of the world or universe (6.0%).”⁴

Notice that the intellectually based reasons offered for belief in God ‘the good design of the universe’ and ‘the experience of God in everyday life’; which occupied first and second place when people were describing their own beliefs dropped to sixth and third place, respectively, when they were describing the beliefs of others. Indeed, when reflecting on others' beliefs, the two most common reasons cited were emotion-based (and fear-averse!) personal comfort (‘comforting, relieving, and consoling’) and social comfort (‘raised to believe’). Human rationalization never stops justifying oneself and looking for short comings in others!

The fact of the matter is that none of us can stand alone against the forces of nature or our mortality. As stated before, Dawkins provided the useful poll information that 95% of the population of US believe that they will survive their own death.

Carl Jung, a famous psychologist and a cotemporary of Freud, says, “Freud has unfortunately overlooked the fact that man has never yet been able single handed to hold his own against the powers of darkness — that is, of the unconscious. Man has always stood in need of the spiritual help which each individual’s own religion held out to him.”

The Messiah (may peace be upon him) of this era, the lead follower of the

Prophet Muhammad (may peace be upon him), His Holiness Mirza Ghulam Ahmad has said:

"If mankind had to live without God, no doubt, it would have been a life of great trial and misery. Look! Now every particle is in His protection. So what is there to worry about or be afraid of? Allah's powers are marvelous and His influences are unparalleled. Having believed in All Powerful *Personal* God a believer is never again anxious or worried! As the believer knows that Allah does what He wills *and at the same time the believer is also resigned to the fact that whatever Allah will provide for him would indeed be the best for him.* A believer finds blessing in what he receives from Allah. The basic difference in a believer and non-believer is indeed the belief itself. The life of an atheist or an agnostic is fine and without fear until he has not been afflicted by a trial and tribulation. But when even a small difficulty raises its head, it stuns his mind. He is unable to cope with even small set backs. His hope does not lie in Allah; *he is focused on worldly means.* These means disappoint him. Under these circumstances even small set backs make these people commit suicide. In Europe where there are a large number of atheists, there are so many suicides that are not seen in any other country. What is the reason for that? Indeed it is the fact that they cannot patiently face setbacks and trials. Their *patience and hearts* are weak. On the other hand the believer has a brave heart, because his trust is on God All Mighty. If he goes through difficulties he does not lose heart. On the contrary he marches forward despite the difficulties. He begins to increase in his faith. The fact of the matter is that it is in *times of distress* that one really has the *greatest* pleasure of faith and belief. The faith is indeed for these very days. In the time of prosperity when there is no financial or health strain and there are all sorts of comforts and luxuries, then the believer and a non-believer are alike. It is in trouble, illness and other difficulties that one is tested out. These trials show as to who has a firm relationship with Allah and believes in His Powers *and Influences* and who complains and is displeased with Him."⁵

The super Tuesday tornadoes were the nation's deadliest barrage of twisters in almost 23 years. "I was there before daylight and it looked like a war zone," said county emergency management director Johnny Burnette.



In Mississippi, Desoto County Sheriff's Department Cmdr. Steve Atkinson said a twister shredded warehouses in an industrial park in the city of Southaven, just south of Memphis. "It ripped the warehouses apart. The best way to describe it is it looks like a bomb went off," Atkinson said.

Union University staff and students search through dormitories destroyed by a tornado in Tennessee. Classes have been canceled for two weeks to allow for cleanup. The Union University campus was perhaps hardest hit. Candra Pennington, a senior, told CNN there were 15 students in her dorm when the warning sirens went off; "we went to look at the weather and we realized we couldn't get the door open," she said. "We had to get all 15 girls in the bathroom. As we were closing the bathroom door, the debris, the windows were shattering in with us, the ceiling began to fall on us. We were able to get the door shut just in time to keep ourselves safe from all of the debris that fell out into the room." "It looks like a war zone," said David Dockery, university president. "Cars and trucks thrown from one side of the campus to the other," Dockery exclaimed, and added, "the women's dorms were destroyed, along with two academic buildings." Many other school buildings received lesser damage.

"I'm surprised that I'm alive," said Telia Sorrells, 24, who survived one twister that left only parts of two walls standing in her home. A gash on her head required eight staples at a hospital to close. Sorrells was sitting on her couch watching storm coverage on television and talking with her mother by cell phone when the

power abruptly went out. "Something is hitting the house," she told her mother. Then, "It's here!" The next thing she knew, she said, "I was looking up at sky."

Winter tornadoes are not uncommon. The peak tornado season is late winter through midsummer, but the storms can happen at any time of the year with the right conditions. But this batch was the nation's worst in a 24-hour period since May 3, 1999, when some 50 people died in Oklahoma and Kansas. One can safely assume that there would be tornadoes, earthquakes and hurricanes in future also. Man seems to be in constant need of consolation for one reason or another.

Professor Dawkins offers us a good metaphor for false hope but unfortunately draws the wrong conclusions from it. As a compliment to his excellent writing skills, we quote his example of false hope in his own words:

"Another child, a girl, had a 'little purple man', who seemed to her a real and visible presence, and who would manifest himself, sparkling out of the air, with a gentle tinkling sound. He visited her regularly, especially when she felt lonely, but with decreasing frequency as she grew older. On a particular day just before she went to kindergarten, the little purple man came to her, heralded by his usual tinkling fanfare, and announced that he would not be visiting her any more. This saddened her, but the little purple man told her that she was getting bigger now and wouldn't need him in the future. He must leave her now, so that he could look after other children. He promised her that he would come back to her if ever she *really* needed him. He did return to her, many years later in a dream, when she had a personal crisis and was trying to decide what to do with her life. The door of her bedroom opened and a cartload of books appeared, pushed into the room by the little purple man. She interpreted this as advice that she should go to university - advice that she took and later judged to be good. The story makes me almost tearful, and it brings me as close as I shall probably come to understanding the consoling and counseling role of imaginary gods in people's lives. A being may exist only in the imagination, yet still seem completely real to the child, and still give real comfort and good advice. Perhaps even better: imaginary friends – and imaginary gods – have the time and patience to devote

all their attention to the sufferer. And they are much cheaper than psychiatrists or professional counselors.” (The God Delusion, last chapter)

Dawkins deals with all the religions at the same time. That does disservice to the reader and does not provide for the necessary separation between the main contenders for the 21st and the 22nd century, namely Islam and Christianity. Perhaps his agenda is negative propaganda, against all religions so he does not need to promote understanding. To understand the issue better, let us apply this metaphor to Christianity and Islam separately. What would be a more reasonable application of the phenomenon of false hopes? To understand this further we need to make a distinction between Deism, Christianity and Islam.

DEISM, CHRISTIANITY AND ISLAM

Perhaps Dawkins acknowledges that there are no atheists in foxholes when he writes, “People caught up in a terrible disaster, such as an earthquake, frequently report that they derive consolation from the reflection that it is all part of God’s inscrutable plan: no doubt goodness shall come out of it in the fullness of time.” Of course in such dire circumstances they cannot sing the hymns of ‘science god’, as it offers no help or escape under the circumstances. It is clear to most non-atheists that atheism is a dead alley and does not offer any hope. **Dawkins has himself written, “The universe that we observe has precisely the properties we should expect if there is, at bottom, no design, no purpose, no evil, no good, nothing but pitiless indifference.”** Even Deism has its limitations in offering any consolation to the bereaved.

President Thomas Jefferson believed in the One God of Nature. His views were well founded in as far as God’s relationship is concerned with the universe. However, he believed in a Deist god that does not answer prayers. In other words he did not believe in a Personal God, but believed in a God who is the Creator of the Universe. Jefferson, after his presidency years, expressed general agreement with his friend Joseph Priestley’s Unitarianism that is the rejection of the doctrine of Trinity. In a letter to a Ohio pioneer he wrote, “I rejoice that in this blessed country of free inquiry and belief, which has surrendered its conscience to neither kings or priests, the genuine doctrine of only one God is

reviving, and I trust that there is not a young man now living in the United States who will not die a Unitarian.”⁶ His dream, however, of large scale conversion to the belief in One God was not to come true in the time of his contemporaries. His prophecy did not come true even after two hundred years. What he did not realize was the human need for consolation! Majority of the US population continues to believe in a non-existing Trinitarian god.

Despite Jefferson’s urging, the citizens found that the false hope from an unreal Trinitarian god was far more needed and necessary than belief in any real truth. The ‘science’ of Dawkins does not answer prayers, it does not offer any hope. Even the Unitarian God of a Deist does not take us any further. The Trinitarian god does not exist so cannot respond to any appeals, however, moving they may be.⁷ The Trinitarian god is not supported by the study of nature or even religious history as is examined in the suggested links below or March, 2008 volume of Muslim Sunrise. To learn more about the phantom of Trinity, review the links:

<http://www.alislam.org/library/christ.html>

<http://www.alislam.org/library/articles/FourLeafletShamrockXX-20080226MN.pdf>

Trinity can offer only false hope as it is not real.⁸ The real hope lies in seeking the true God of the universe, the one God, Allah or God the father as some Christians will understand. Seeking help from the Trinitarian God, comes at a high price, it comes at the price of ghost of Dawkins constantly chasing and ridiculing you, 'little purple man', 'little purple man', 'little purple man'!

The one God of nature, the God of Muhammad, Moses and Abraham, God the Father in Christian terminology is the only solution to the problems of humanity. He exists, He is a Living God, Who speaks and answers prayers. The Ahmadi Muslims experience Him. One who has had his prayers answered, one who has been rescued from the iron grip of disaster by an Invisible Hand and has experienced true friendship with God cannot be told by Dawkins that religion’s power to console does not make it true. The fact is, it does serve as a proof for the religion when the consolation is real, truly experienced and not childhood make-believe 'little purple man'!

Bible is true in inviting believers to prayer:

The Lord is near to all who call on Him, to all who call on Him in truth. He fulfills the desires of those who fear Him; He hears their cries and saves them. (Psalms 145:18-20)

And:

Call to me and I will answer you and tell you great things and unreachable things you do not know. (Jeremiah 33:3)

The only catch is that Trinitarian god is a later day creation that the Old Testament knew not. The word Trinity does not even exist in the New Testament. The final hope for mankind is the Quranic expression:

And when My servants ask thee about Me, say 'I am near. I answer the prayer of the supplicant when he prays to Me. So they should hearken to Me and believe in Me, that they may follow the right way.' [Baqarah (Chapter 2), Verse 187]

And:

Who answers the cry of the distressed person when he calls upon Him, and removes the affliction, and makes you successors in the earth? Is there a god besides Allah? [Naml (Chapter 27), Verse 63]

CONCLUSION

The founding fathers of USA, in a pragmatic sense did not truly have the choice of Islam. They did their best under the circumstances; the closest they could come to rationality was Deism. Today the Westerners have a choice, to combine realism of Deism, with the Personal God of Islam and leave the false doctrine of Trinity and hopelessness of atheism behind.

Atheism is a world view without hope and devoid of meaning. It does not offer

any consolation when going gets tough. A false hope is only so much better than no hope. A Trinitarian God does not exist. The true and real hope can only come from real sources. The real hope comes from God the father, Eternal God, who is Gracious and Merciful.

وَالَّذِينَ جَاهَدُوا فِينَا لَنَهْدِيَنَّهُمْ سُبُلَنَا وَإِنَّ اللَّهَ لَمَعَ الْمُحْسِنِينَ

“We will surely guide in Our ways those who strive after Us. Indeed, Allah is with those who do good.” [Ankabut (Chapter 29), Verse 70]

Consolation and help from the Divine comes with some responsibility. It is a two way street:

“If Allah had imposed upon people the evil consequences of their conduct as quickly as they desire the acquisition of worldly goods, the end of their term of life would already have been reached. But We leave those who believe not in meeting Us to wander distractedly their transgression. When trouble befalls a person he calls on Us all the time, lying on his side, sitting and standing; but when We relieve him or remove his trouble, he goes his way unconcernedly as if he had never called on Us for the removal of his trouble. Thus it is that the doings of the transgressors are made to look fair to them. We destroyed generation after generation before you when they did wrong. Their Messengers came to them with clear Signs, but they would not believe. Thus do We requite the guilty people. Then, after them We made you their successors in the earth, that We might see how you would behave.” [Yunus (Chapter 10), Verses 12-15]

¹ <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/americas/7234842.stm>

² Nature 386 (April 3, 1997): 435-436.

³ Saudia TL, Usaf NC, Kinney MR, Brown KC, Young-Ward L; Health locus of control and helpfulness of prayer. Heart and lung, 20:60-65, 1991.

⁴ Michael Shermer. Why Darwin Matters. Times Books, 2006. Page 36-37.

⁵ Promised Messiah^{as}. Malfoozat, September 24, 1905. Page 391, Volume IV/V.

⁶ Letter to Dr. Benjamin Waterhouse June 26, 1822

⁷ The Holy Quran, 16:18-22.

⁸ The Holy Quran, 46:5-6.