

# **Satan in the Holy Quran**

**In the Name of Allah, the Companionate, the Merciful**

**The Holy Quran has talked about Iblis(Satan) as a physical being made of fire. He is portrayed as a rebellious creature, basking in glory of the matter he was made of and showing arrogance to man, who was made of clay. To Satan's mind, fire is far superior to clay because it can destroy clay with its power.**

**The cause of his rebellion against God was the high regard in which God had held Adam when He created him and for his forthcoming role on earth, especially when God ordered the angels to prostrate themselves to Adam. As the Quran implies, Satan was part of the angelic group.**

**The Quran keeps showing pictures that depict the dialogue with Satan to make clear the grudge this creature holds against man. He asked God to grant him immortal status in this life, so that he could concentrate on his vendetta against man.**

**In so doing, he wants to topple man from the lofty station God had put him in and rouse in him the struggle between good and evil. He spares no effort in tempting man to incline towards doing what would in the end spell disaster for his being, by dampening down man's spirit and his position vis-à-vis God.**

**Through the dialogue, the Holy Quran informs us that God had granted Satan his wish for the reasons He knows best. Nevertheless, He has made it abundantly clear to him and us that his power does not go beyond luring us towards committing what is vile and showing disobedience. There is, by no means, any direct authority that could entail force, coercion, and repression that Satan can exercise on man.**

**Indeed, it is the type of man who chooses to embark on unbelief, waywardness, trampling his faith and not experiencing a sense of enmity to Satan, who gives Satan the sway over himself. In contrast, the person who chooses the path of belief does not usually give Satan any chance to manipulate him because of the strength of his belief. Thus, Satan's plans to mislead such a person are doomed to failure. The Quranic dialogue has sought to capture all that, highlighting the general characteristics of Satan.**

## **Satan's role in the story of Adam's creation**

**God created Satan and honoured and favoured him over many of his creatures. This regard with which Satan was held started when He ordered**

the angels, Satan included, to bow down to Adam in a big celebration that was held as a sign of glorification for the new creature on account of his intrinsic characteristics, the great role that awaited him on earth, and putting all creation at his service in order to play his part in the most efficient manner.

In many verses, the Holy Quran mentions the characteristics of Satan. By and large, he is portrayed as an insignificant creature who is at odds with God, especially in the great issues. He is painted as an egoistic self-centered and arrogant person, not least for his high opinion of his physical makeup being superior to others.

Satan does not seem to give genuine thought to the other characteristics that, if found in others, could make them far superior, namely the spiritual, intellectual, and behavioural. These are the qualities that make man strive to reach the highest stations while competing for a better future, through sound ideology and better work.

The Quranic verses assume different approaches to present the whole picture in scenes that seem pulsating with life, movement, and liveliness, with the aim of making the gulf between man and Satan far greater on the one hand. On the other hand, importance is given to the sense of the terribleness of arrogance and indulgence in self-worth and the extent to which it can influence the lives of living beings, as happened to Satan.

**Here are some of the Quranic verses that make the boundaries of the portrait more defined:**

Allah Exalted He says in the Glorious Quran:

“And ‘remember’ when We said to the angels, “Prostrate before Adam,”<sup>1</sup> so they all did—but not Iblīs,<sup>2</sup> who refused and acted arrogantly,<sup>3</sup> becoming unfaithful.” Quran (2: 34)

And

“Surely We created you,<sup>1</sup> then shaped you, then said to the angels, “Prostrate before Adam,” so they all did—but not Iblīs,<sup>2</sup> who refused to prostrate with the others. Allah asked, “What prevented you from prostrating when I commanded you?” He replied, “I am better than he is: You created me from fire and him from clay.” Allah said, “Then get down from Paradise! It is not for you to be arrogant here. So get out! You are truly one of the disgraced.” Quran (7: 11–13)

And

**“And ‘remember’ when We said to the angels, ‘Prostrate before Adam,’ so they all did—but not Iblīs,<sup>1</sup> who protested, ‘Should I prostrate to the one You have created from mud?’ Adding, ‘Do you see this one you honoured above me? If you delay my end until the Day of Judgment, I will certainly take hold of his descendants, except for a few.’” Quran (17: 61–62)**

**Going through these verses would suffice to draw a clear picture of Satan’s character. It is that of an arrogant creature that thinks highly of his physical fiber, so much so that he rebels against the will of God when he perceives that it clashes with the intrinsic conceited tendency of his character. Not only this, but he also seems bent on facing the consequences of his rebellion and not bothering about his fate, only to keep his “pride”.**

### **The tragedy of Satan, a delusion**

**Some philosophers have tried to describe Satan’s position vis-à-vis his belief as tragic. They seem to portray him as a true monotheist and believer, who refused to bow down to Adam out of a desire to worship God alone, i.e. no one should prostrate to anyone else but God. He has been depicted as willing to rebel against God’s command and tolerate His punishment, for the sheer love for, and truthfulness of belief in, Him.**

**However, this argument does not seem to have any basis, neither in religion nor in logic, for two reasons:**

**1. The idea of Satan as a living being is not one that can be subjected to the empirical approach, so that we can have access to its details through our personal experiences. It is a matter of the unseen, which we have come to know about from God through what He revealed to His prophets. In this context, we have to countenance its features and details from the body of religious traditions, especially God’s divine revelations.**

**As is evident from the above-mentioned verses, Satan’s refusal to prostrate himself to Adam was not induced by monotheism and love for God; rather, it was due to arrogance. We shall see in the ensuing discussion how he has a begrudging character, whose resentment knows no bounds, so much so that he spares no effort to inflict damage on the new creature and his offspring, as a means for venting his hate. And in order to achieve that evil end, he pleaded with God to let him live until the Day of Judgement.**

**If this is the picture of Satan depicted in the Holy Quran, from where did those philosophers bring us the portrait of the true believer and lover of God Satan had been, to the extent that he is prepared to be consumed by fire simply to keep pure his love for God and belief in Him?**

**Can we not but consider this a figment of the imagination of a poet?**

**A poet who is daydreaming and trying to confer the semblance of tragedy on criminals, by virtue of identifying with their feelings, without giving measured thought to the real motives of the crime and its consequences on the land and people. A similar case is he who condemns the death penalty meted out to a murderer, [as a punishment in the Islamic penal code], on the basis of naive emotional feelings, losing sight of the conscious planning of legislation for man's life. We may find some other details pertaining to this subject in the traditions of the Progeny of the Prophet (peace be upon him).**

**In Biharul Anwar, [a compendium of traditions (hadith)], and in the context of the stories of the prophets, Imam Ja'far as-Sadiq (a.s.) was quoted as saying, "Satan was ordered to bow down to Adam. He replied: O Lord! If You forgive me for not prostrating to him, I would worship You the kind of worship that no one else could match. God Almighty said: I wish to be obeyed whence I have decreed."1**

**Some traditions from the Progeny of the Prophet (a.s.) spoke about this in a similar vein. In Tuhaful Uqool, Imam Ja'far as-Sadiq (a.s.) has been quoted as saying, "The angels' prostrating to Adam was a sign of submission to God and out of love for Adam."2**

**Abu Basira asked Imam as-Sadiq (a.s.), "Did the angels perform the prostrating act by putting their foreheads on the earth? He said: Yes, as a mark of glory to God Almighty." 3**

**In the tradition (hadith) of the protestation (ihtijaj), in the context of a dialogue with a Jew, Imam Ali (a.s.) has been quoted as saying, "Their [the angels] prostration was not out of submission and worship for Adam himself. They prostrated to Adam as a sign of respect for the new creature and not worshipping Adam or associating him in worship with Allah Exalted He.**

**Such prostrate to Adam can not be polytheism or committing shirk or associating Adam in worship with Allah, simply because Allah Exalted He himself ordered the angels, Satan included to prostrate to Adam. So, Allah will not order anyone to associate anyone with him in worship. However, it was out of recognition for Adam's loftier station and by way of asking mercy for him." 4**

**Satan's Role Vis-à-Vis Man**

**What is Satan's role vis-à-vis man? Does Satan have overwhelming power over man, so much so that the latter cannot walk the path of submission to and harmony with the will of God?**

**If this is the case, how can one understand this "God-given" domineering power? And how can one reconcile this with God's Justice? The God who threatens man with punishment, if he rebelled against His commands, while making it possible for Satan to lure him away from the right path?**

**This could be the impression that is predominant among the generality of people, as a way of blaming Satan for many of the ills they are afflicted with and for being noncommittal. Thus, they find in Satan a whipping boy, i.e., to their mind, their going astray is a natural result of falling to Satan's devices.**

**However, the Holy Quran paints a different picture.**

**Satan has no power to exert on man, apart from trying to mislead him by way of devilish insinuations and creating tempting conditions for man to commit what is vile.**

**Man, on the other hand, has been endowed with conscious intellect that can draw the line between good and evil and be clear on the Divine messages, which open up all the roads to acquire the necessary knowledge to lead to God's way. Man has also been graced with a strong will that helps in the process of sound decision-making and walking with firm steps on the right path.**

**This is what makes the struggle between man and Satan an equal one. In this fight, man has the free will to make choices amidst evil inclinations, tempting climates, and devilish suggestions. Yet, he has the means, of willpower, intellect, and conviction, to emerge victorious from this standoff, without giving in to factors of weakness or failure.**

**In portraying the character of Satan and his part in misleading man, the Holy Quran has provoked in the mind of the believers the strength of conviction that is capable of defeating all the forces of evil, especially with the weapons of mental power and strong belief, should he use them in the struggle. As for those who fall victim to his temptations, their failure is not due to intrinsic weakness but rather, because they contributed to paralysing, and eventually neutralizing, the powers at their disposal.**

**In this light, we should now know that lengthening Satan's life till the Day of Judgement, and giving him the freedom to seduce man, who is armed with all the weapons necessary to put up a determined fight, into leaving**

**the right way is a sign of confidence in man. This is so that man should be able to choose his destiny on account of his will and capability, not because of coercion and repression that could weaken his resolve and make him buckle under pressure.**

**This is the difference between one who gets influenced by events and falls under their sway, and one who is the master of his own destiny and who makes the events subservient to his willpower and choice.**

**Now, let us dwell for a short while on these Quranic verses, which tell of the roles of both man and Satan:**

**Allah Exalted He says in the Glorious Quran:**

**“Instead of Allah, they (The Pagans) only invoke female gods<sup>1</sup> and they ‘actually’ invoke none but a rebellious Satan—cursed by Allah—who said, “I will surely take hold of a certain number of Your servants. I will certainly mislead them and delude them with empty hopes. Also, I will order them and they will slit the ears of cattle<sup>1</sup> and alter Allah’s creation.” And whoever takes Satan as a guardian instead of Allah has certainly suffered a tremendous loss. Satan only makes them ‘false’ promises and deludes them with ‘empty’ hopes. Truly Satan promises them nothing but delusion. It is they who will have Hell as their home, and they will find no escape from it! Quran (4:117-121)**

**And**

**” And ‘remember’ when We said to the angels, “Prostrate before Adam,” so they all did—but not Iblīs,<sup>1</sup> who protested, “Should I prostrate to the one You have created from mud?” Adding, “Do you see this one you honoured above me? If you delay my end until the Day of Judgment, I will certainly take hold of his descendants, except for a few. Allah responded, “Be gone! Whoever of them follows you, Hell will surely be the reward for all of you—an ample reward. And incite whoever you can of them with your voice, mobilize against them all your cavalry and infantry, manipulate them in their wealth and children, and make them promises.” But Satan promises them nothing but delusion. ‘Allah added,’ “You will truly have no authority over My ‘faithful’ servants.” And sufficient is your Lord as a Guardian. Quran (17:61-65)**

**And**

**“Satan appealed, “My Lord! Then delay my end until the Day of their resurrection. Allah said, “You will be delayed until the appointed Day.”Satan responded, “My Lord! For allowing me to stray I will surely**

tempt them on earth and mislead them all together, except Your chosen servants among them.” Allah said, “This is the Way, binding on Me: you will certainly have no authority over My servants, except the deviant who follow you” Quran (15:36-42)

And

“Whenever We intend to destroy a society, We command its elite to obey Allah but they act rebelliously in it. So the decree of punishment is justified, and We destroy it utterly. Imagine how many peoples We have destroyed after Noah! And sufficient is your Lord as All-Aware and All-Seeing of the sins of His servants. Whoever desires this fleeting world alone, We hasten in it whatever We please to whoever We will; then We destine them for Hell, where they will burn, condemned and rejected.” Quran (17:16-18)

And

“And Satan will say to his followers after the judgment has been passed, “Indeed, Allah has made you a true promise. I too made you a promise, but I failed you. I did not have any authority over you. I only called you, and you responded to me. So do not blame me; blame yourselves. I cannot save you, nor can you save me. Indeed, I denounce your previous association of me with Allah in loyalty. Surely the wrongdoers will suffer a painful punishment. Those who believe and do good will be admitted into Gardens, under which rivers flow—to stay there forever by the Will of their Lord—where they will be greeted with “Peace!” Quran (14:22-23)

### **The boundaries of Satan’s “authority”**

It can be gathered from the verses above that, in his argument with God, Satan seems determined to entice Adam’s offspring away from the right path, by lying in wait for them at every corner and tempting them with false promises of impending good, if they turn their backs to God. However, God granted Satan his wish, but warned him against indulging in his dreams and posturing, in that he did not have any direct power to mislead people.

That is, he cannot mislead those who strive in the way of guidance. It is not in his power to tempt those who aim for forthrightness and good works and get to them. All that Satan can do is arouse doubts in people’s minds. Thus, those who are overwhelmed by wishful thinking may fall prey to his lure and follow him without any resistance.

**Satan makes no bones about leading people astray. On the Day of Judgement, he openly confesses before those who were ensnared by his guile. He abdicates his responsibility in misleading the people who followed him by proclaiming that his role was confined to tempting them with wicked suggestions, i.e. he did not have access to their mental faculties so that he could adversely affect their willpower and freedom of choice.**

**It is evident that the issue is not one of deviating from the path of justice in creating man and directing his steps, in that it is within its natural environment, i.e. as God has willed. That is, it is a means of rousing struggle within man's psyche, so that he is in a position to choose his way by exercising his free will, not by means of compulsion and suppression.**

**This is what the following verses are trying to illustrate:**

**“Indeed, Iblīs' assumption about them has come true,<sup>1</sup> so they 'all' follow him, except a group of 'true' believers. He does not have any authority over them, but 'Our Will is' only to distinguish those who believe in the Hereafter from those who are in doubt about it. And your Lord is a 'vigilant' Keeper over all things.” Quran (34:20-21)**

**However, the picture becomes sharper when one consults other Quranic verses, which seek to rouse man and call on him to be unequivocally hostile to Satan.**



**The verses also seek to show man the way to be the master of his own destiny, ignoring Satan's temptations, such as:**

**Allah Exalted He says in the Glorious Quran:**

**“When you recite the Quran, seek refuge with Allah from Satan, the accursed. He certainly has no authority over those who believe and put their trust in their Lord. Quran (16: 98–100)**

**And**

**“O humanity! Indeed, Allah's promise is true. So do not let the life of this world deceive you, nor let the Chief Deceiver<sup>1</sup> deceive you about Allah. Surely Satan is an enemy to you, so take him as an enemy. He only invites his followers to become inmates of the Blaze.” Quran (35:5-6)**

**And**

**“If you are tempted by Satan, then seek refuge with Allah. Surely He is All-Hearing, All-Knowing. Indeed, when Satan whispers to those mindful of Allah, they remember their Lord then they start to see things clearly. But the devils persistently plunge their human associates<sup>1</sup> deeper into wickedness, sparing no effort.” Quran (7:200-202)**

**Experiencing the atmosphere of the Quranic dialogue between God and Satan exposes Satan's acrimonious position towards man. It is thus evident that he is bent on destroying man and undermining the lofty station God has lifted him to. Satan does this in reaction to God ousting him from the domain of His Mercy for having failed to obey His orders.**

**Thus, there is no shadow of a doubt that the idea that Satan has not been done justice, in that he is a true believer deep down, is a ludicrous one.**

**On the contrary, a picture of a psychopath comes across very clearly. The manifestations of this picture are his disobeying God's orders and the positions he takes that are induced by selfish reactions, without giving a considered thought to the consequences of his actions to his destiny in this world and the hereafter.**