

# Making Sense of the Uyghur Genocide Through Religious Theodicy: Voices of Uyghurs in Canada and Türkiye

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**Abstract:** This study aims to explore how some Uyghurs in Canada and Türkiye<sup>1</sup> interpret the ongoing Uyghur Genocide through a religious lens, as a form of *theodicy*, an explanation for evil and suffering.<sup>2</sup> The article is based on data collected from three different sources. The first source is a diary which recorded discussions of individual Uyghurs participating in an online class on the Qur'an taking place in 2021. The second source comes from interviews with two prominent Uyghur Imams who reside in Canada and Türkiye, and the third is an interview with a young Uyghur political activist residing in Canada. From their narratives, we have identified four distinct yet interrelated perspectives, which we have categorized into four categories: *gnostic*, *mythic*, *apocalyptic*, and *mystery*. Most of the Uyghur voices in our study understand and present the ongoing genocide in East Turkestan<sup>3</sup> as a divine test. Despite understanding the ongoing genocide as a test by Allah, the aspect of divine punishment appears to be downplayed, and instead what is emphasized is the goodness of Allah who seeks to teach His servants lessons so that they may achieve greater virtues in both this life and the afterlife. Our analysis has led us to the conclusion that Uyghur Islam seems to offer its adherents a sense of optimism and, for Uyghurs living in the diaspora, a means to move forward. This is in stark contrast to other forms of Islamic theodicy which focus more on the aspect of suffering.

**Keywords:** Uyghurs, genocide, theodicy, test, punishment

Since 2017, with the widespread establishment of “re-education” camps, the international media, human rights organizations, as well as various governments, have turned their attention toward Uyghur suffering, classifying it as either a severe human rights violation or genocide. Prominent media organizations like *The New York Times*, *The Guardian*, and *The BBC*, have reported on the deplorable

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1. This spelling follows the Turkish government’s 2022 request for Turkey to be referred to as Türkiye – its spelling and pronunciation in Turkish. See “UN Agrees to Change Turkey’s Official Name to ‘Türkiye,’” *Al Jazeera*, June 2, 2022, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2022/6/2/un-registers-turkiye-as-new-country-name-for-turkey>.

2. John Hick, *Evil and the God of Love* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007) and Mark S. Scott, “Theodicy at the Margins: New Trajectories for the Problem of Evil.” *Theology Today* 68, no.2 (2011): 113–204, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0040573611405878>.

3. In this article we will use “East Turkestan” or “the Uyghur Homeland” to refer to the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region of China. The Chinese term “Xinjiang” means “New Frontier,” “New Borderland,” or “New Territory,” a designation which was given to the region by the Qing dynasty in 1884, so it is politically fraught for Uyghurs because it justifies the displacement of its occupants by Chinese settlers. As the present study focuses on the Uyghur perspective, the preferred Uyghur terms for the region, given above, will be used.

conditions within the “re-education” camps and other similar detention facilities, utilizing firsthand data from aerial photography and the accounts of survivors.<sup>4</sup> Approximately one to three million Uyghurs and other Turkic Muslims are believed to have been arbitrarily detained in those facilities from 2018 to the present day.<sup>5</sup> Survivors have extensively described instances of torture, sterilization, rape, and indoctrination programs taking place within the camps. Additionally, there have been reports indicating that tens of thousands of individuals in the region have been coerced into forced labour.<sup>6</sup>

The nature of this crisis has been recognized as “genocide” by many Western governments, such as the U.S., Canada,<sup>7</sup> The Netherlands,<sup>8</sup> Lithuania,<sup>9</sup> the United Kingdom,<sup>10</sup> and France,<sup>11</sup> a recognition that Uyghur rights advocacy groups and members of the Uyghur diaspora have long been lobbying for, citing the 1948 UN General Assembly’s adoption of the Genocide Convention as support.<sup>12</sup> Moreover, in 2021, British barrister Sir Geoffrey Nice presided over the 2021 *Uyghur Tribunal*, which launched an independent investigation and concluded that “beyond reasonable doubt that the PRC, by the imposition of measures to prevent births intended to *destroy* a significant part of the Uyghurs in Xinjiang as such, has committed genocide.”<sup>13</sup>

While there have been heated debates on the suppression of Uyghurs in East Turkestan from various perspectives since 2014, to our knowledge, there has been no study regarding the *religious* ramifications of this suppression. These ramifications present a genuine and pressing political concern, especially for human rights groups. As Islam is an important component of the Uyghur identity – and one that has long been under attack and deliberately suppressed by the

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4. Austin Ramzy, “‘Show Me That My Father Is Alive’ China Faces Torrent of Online Pleas,” *The New York Times*, February 17, 2019, <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/02/17/world/asia/uyghurs-china-internment-camps.html>.

5. For more information, see Sheena C. Greitens, Myunghee Lee, and Emir Yazici, “Counterterrorism and Preventive Repression: China’s Changing Strategy in Xinjiang,” *International Security*, 44, no. 3 (2020): 9–47.

6. For more information, see Adrien Zenz, “Sterilizations, IUDs, and Mandatory Birth Control: The CCP’s Campaign to Suppress Uyghur Birthrates in Xinjiang,” *Jamestown*, updated March 17, 2021, <https://jamestown.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/Zenz-Internment-Sterilizations-and-IUDs-REVISED-March-17-2021.pdf?x66651>.

7. “Canada’s Parliament Declares China’s Treatment of Uighurs Genocide,” *BBC News Online*, February 23, 2021, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-56163220>.

8. “Dutch Parliament: China’s Treatment of Uighurs is Genocide,” *Reuters*, February 25, 2021, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-netherlands-china-uyghurs-idUSKBN2AP2CI>.

9. “Lithuanian Parliament Attest to call China’s Treatment of Uyghurs Genocide,” *Reuters*, May 20, 2021, <https://www.reuters.com/world/china/lithuanian-parliament-latest-call-chinas-treatment-uyghurs-genocide-2021-05-20/>.

10. Patrick Wintour, “UK MPs Declare China is Committing Genocide Against Uyghurs in Xinjiang,” *The Guardian*, April 22, 2021, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/apr/22/uk-mps-declare-china-is-committing-genocide-against-uyghurs-in-xinjiang>.

11. “French Lawmakers Officially Recognise China’s Treatment of Uyghurs as ‘Genocide,’” *France 24*, January 20, 2022, <https://www.france24.com/en/europe/20220120-french-lawmakers-officially-recognise-china-s-treatment-of-uyghurs-as-genocide>.

12. The Newlines Institute for Strategy and Policy, in cooperation with the Raoul Wallenberg Centre for Human Rights, has recently published a report that outlines how the current treatment of the Uyghur people meets the definition of genocide as outlined in the 1948 convention. See: *The Uyghur Genocide: An Examination of China’s Breaches of the 1948 Genocide Convention* (Washington, DC: Newlines Institute for Strategy and Policy, March 2021), <https://newlinesinstitute.org/rules-based-international-order/genocide/the-uyghur-genocide-an-examination-of-chinas-breaches-of-the-1948-genocide-convention/>.

13. To watch the tribunal proceedings, see: Uyghur Tribunal, YouTube, accessed August 2021, <https://www.youtube.com/@uyghurtribunal6959/videos>. See also “Uyghur Tribunal Judgement,” Uyghur Tribunal, December 9, 2021, <https://uyghurtribunal.com/wp-content/uploads/2022/01/Uyghur-Tribunal-Judgment-9th-Dec-21.pdf>.

Chinese government – we argue that the lack of attention paid to this particular dimension of the Uyghur Genocide represents a serious gap. As a response to this gap in scholarship we have chosen to focus on this particular aspect and explore some philosophical and religious responses to the Chinese government’s policies and practices targeting Uyghur identity and culture.

### The Research Data

The data collected for this paper is part of a SSHRC-funded study entitled *Children in Sectarian Religions and State Control, 1950–2020*, directed by Susan J. Palmer and undertaken at the McGill School of Religious Studies. Our team collected three sources of material on this topic. The first source was provided by Dilmurat Mahmut, a member of our research team, who received a copy of a diary from an unnamed Uyghur woman participating in an online course on the Qur’an and residing in Canada. The course was offered to Uyghur adults in early 2021 during the COVID-19 pandemic. Since 1949, Uyghurs have faced continuous challenges in learning about and adhering to their religious and cultural traditions. Since 2016, the Chinese Communist Party (CPP) has made it officially illegal to study or practice Islam or even to own a Qur’an, a level of religious intolerance not seen since the end of the Cultural Revolution (1966–1976).<sup>14</sup> As a result, a large number of Uyghurs who escaped China are appreciating their newfound freedom to explore and re-assess their previously suppressed Muslim identity.<sup>15</sup>

One of the ways Uyghurs have tried to become reacquainted with Islam is by participating in religious courses about the Qur’an. As noted, one such course was offered to adult Uyghurs living in Canada in 2021. The online course was only accessible to registered Uyghur participants, and the diary that was provided to one of our researchers, Dilmurat Mahmut, thus offers insight into the discussions had by the Uyghur participants. While this woman’s diary primarily consisted of class notes, what intrigued Dr. Dilmurat most were her entries documenting online discussions among her fellow students regarding whether the suffering of their people should be viewed as a divine test or a divine punishment. This diary contains the narratives of sixteen adult Uyghur students, and the contents of these discussions can be found in Appendix A.

Another source for understanding the perceptions and convictions of Uyghur Muslims is through trained religious teachers, and thus another one of our researchers, Abdulmuqtedir Udun,<sup>16</sup> invited two Imams to share their views on how they understood the Uyghur Genocide. Udun interviewed Dr. Abdulaziz Rahmetullah, who is a prominent Uyghur Imam and Islamic scholar based in Türkiye,<sup>17</sup> and Imam Abdujilil Bugra, an Islamic scholar and teacher based in Montreal. Imam Abdujilil Bugra responded to Abdulmuqtedir’s questions by email. In addition to these two sources, the online interviews of a young Uyghur activist, Kabir Qurban, will also be examined.

We will begin by examining the diary entries, in particular those related to the following question that was posed to the participants: Is the genocide faced by the Uyghurs a test or punishment by Allah? The author of the diary wrote down the responses of her classmates under four categories: those who regarded the Uyghur Genocide as a test by Allah; those who believed the Uyghur Genocide was a punishment by

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14. For more information, see Sean R. Roberts, *The War on the Uyghurs* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press), 2020.

15. See Dilmurat Mahmut, Marie-Ève Melanson, Susan J. Palmer, and Abdulmuqtedir Udun, “Becoming ‘true’ Muslims in Canada: Experiences of Uyghur Immigrants,” *Identities* (2023), <https://doi.org/10.1080/1070289X.2023.2264643>.

16. Abdulmuqtedir Udun is an independent Uyghur researcher based in Ottawa, Canada.

Allah; those who viewed the Uyghur Genocide as both a test and punishment of Allah; and those who were uncertain about this question. The following table lists the research participants and their responses to this question. For anonymity purposes, names have been removed and each of the participants has been assigned a letter.

**Table 1:**  
Responses of Uyghurs who attended an online Quran course in Canada.

Participant codes	<i>The Uyghur Genocide is Allah's test</i>	<i>The Uyghur Genocide is Allah's punishment</i>	<i>The Uyghur Genocide is Allah's test and punishment at the same time</i>	<i>Uncertain</i>
Uyghur A	yes			
Uyghur B	yes			
Uyghur C		yes		
Uyghur D	yes			
Uyghur F	yes			
Uyghur G	yes			
Uyghur J			Yes	
Uyghur H				Yes
Uyghur K	yes			
Uyghur L			Yes	
Uyghur M			Yes	
Uyghur O			Yes	
Uyghur Q	yes			
Uyghur R	yes			
Uyghur W	yes			
Uyghur Z				yes

### The Uyghurs and Islam

The Uyghurs are a Turkic people who reside in the north-western border region of China, which is the hub of the Eurasian Crossroads. The Manchu Empire annexed the Uyghur Homeland to China proper in the late eighteenth century, and they ruled the local inhabitants through indirect means until 1884 when Xinjiang province was established.<sup>18</sup> After the demise of the Manchu Dynasty, the Uyghurs were able to gain their short-lived independence twice.<sup>19</sup>

18. James A. Millward, *Eurasian Crossroads: A History of Xinjiang* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007).

19. These two independent states – East Turkestan Islamic Republic (1933–1934) and East Turkestan Republic (1944–1949) – were established by the local Turkic elites. The advent of communist China ended the short second Independence of the Uyghurs. For more information, see Gardner Bovingdon, *The Uyghurs: Strangers in Their Own Land* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010).

Today, the Uyghurs are one of the fifty-five officially recognized minority ethnic groups in China. According to the 2017 regional census, the Uyghur population is slightly more than 12 million, while many Uyghurs believe that this number could be about 20–35 million. The Uyghur Homeland occupies one-sixth of the total Chinese landmass while harbouring more than 20% of China’s total natural gas, coal, and other fossil resources, and its wind power and solar energy production are ranked second in China.<sup>20</sup> In 2019, China’s Ministry of Natural Resources estimated that the Tarim Basin holds 9.7 t/m<sup>3</sup> of ultra-deep natural gas resources or 60% of the country’s potential gas reserves.<sup>21</sup> Meanwhile, according to the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS), China produces around 22% of global cotton supplies, and 84% of Chinese cotton came from the Uyghur region in 2018.<sup>22</sup> Therefore, with China’s drive to meet strategic energy-related plans such as the Belt and Road Initiative and 5G technology, one can clearly see the importance of the region.

The Uyghurs established numerous kingdoms in Central Asia before and after their conversion to Islam and played a key role in the Islamization of Central Asia.<sup>23</sup> Since the tenth century, the Uyghurs have been adherents of the Hanafi school of Sunni Islam, which organically mingled with their local/pre-Islamic traditions of Shamanism, Manicheism, and Buddhism.<sup>24</sup> In the present context, most Uyghurs regard their Muslim faith as one of the most crucial aspects of their collective identity.<sup>25</sup>

Until the early twentieth century, education among Uyghurs was primarily regulated through *maktaps* and *madrasas* (both meaning Islamic schools). The advent of Russian imperialism in Central Asia triggered modern educational reformism among the local intellectuals, who attempted to establish *Jadid* (Arabic: new) schools that would offer secular education in addition to traditional Islamic education.<sup>26</sup> Before the founding of the People’s Republic of China in 1949, these schools flourished all over the Uyghur Homeland. The formation of modern Uyghur Islamic culture and identity is indebted to *Jadidism*, which allowed Islamic and secular education to be blended in a syncretistic manner.<sup>27</sup>

After 1949, religious education in the Uyghur homeland has continuously faced deep challenges and strict restrictions, apart from the period of “controlled tolerance” in the 1980s and 1990s, during which

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20. Thomas W. Overton, “The Energy Industry in Xinjiang, China: Potential, Problems, and Solutions,” *Power*, January 1, 2016, <https://www.powermag.com/energy-industry-xinjiang-china-potential-problems-solutions-web/>.

21. Craig Guthrie, “China Looks West to Solve Energy Crisis,” *Petroleum Economist*, August 22, 2019, <https://www.petroleum-economist.com/articles/politics-economics/asia-pacific/2019/china-looks-west-to-solve-energy-riddle>.

22. Amy K. Lehr and Efthimia Maria Bechrakis, “Connecting the Dots in Xinjiang: Forced Labor, Forced Assimilation, and Western Supply Chains,” *Center for Strategic and International Studies*, October 16, 2019, <https://www.csis.org/analysis/connecting-dots-xinjiang-forced-labor-forced-assimilation-and-western-supply-chains>.

23. Millward, *Eurasian Crossroads*.

24. See: Rahile Dawut, “Shrine Pilgrimage Among the Uighurs,” *The Silk Road* 6, no. 2 (2009): 56–67; Rahile Dawut “Ordam Mazar: A Meeting Place for Different Practices and Belief Systems in Culturally Diverse Xinjiang,” in *Kashgar Revisited: Commemorating the 10th Anniversary of the Death of Ambassador Gunnar Jarring*, ed. Ildikó Bellér-Hann, Brigit Nn. Schlyter, and Jun Sugawara (Leiden: Brill, 2017); Rachel Harris and Rahile Dawut, “Mazar Festivals of the Uyghurs: Music, Islam, and the Chinese State,” *British Journal of Ethnomusicology* 11, no. 1 (2002): 101–118; Rian Thum, *The Sacred Routes of Uyghur History* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2014).

25. See: David Brophy, *Uyghur Nation: Reform and Revolution on the Russia-China Frontier* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2016); Işık Kuşçu, “The Uyghur Diaspora in Cyberspace: Identity and Homeland Cause,” *Bilig* 69 (2014): 143–160; Dilmurat Mahmut, “Belonging to Quebec and English Canada as Muslims: Perspectives of the Highly Educated Muslim Uyghur Immigrants,” *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs* 41, no. 2 (2021): <https://doi.org/10.1080/13602004.2021.1947586>.

26. Adeeb Khalid, *The Politics of Muslim Cultural Reform-Jadidism in Central Asia* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998).

27. See: Brophy, *Uyghur Nation*; Thum, *The Sacred Routes*, 2016; Waite, 2007.

Uyghurs were given a certain degree of autonomy.<sup>28</sup> Despite this reality, until recent years, Uyghurs were able, to a certain extent, to maintain and transmit religious knowledge to younger generations through oral traditions in private spaces.<sup>29</sup> However, after 2017, the Chinese government demonstrated clearcut rhetoric to eradicate Uyghur Islam, replacing it with Sinicized or secular practices.<sup>30</sup>

For example, in March 2017, the “Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region Regulation on De-extremification” was adopted. Based on this regulation, those whom the state perceived as being overly devout or exhibited any form of religious practice were categorized as radicals and would be sent to “centralized transformation through education training centres” to remove their “extreme” religious ideologies.<sup>31</sup>

Showing even a tiny bit of religiosity can be considered a sign of religious extremism. For example, a government document released in 2017 identified seventy-five factors that could be deemed as indicative of religious extremism by the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region Committee of the Communist Party of China and could thus lead to incarceration. These include some common Islamic practices such as congregating to pray outside a mosque, “participating in religious activities... without justifiable reasons,” and women wearing hijabs. The list also includes some very vague and innocuous practices, such as having “long beards” or suddenly abstaining from drinking and smoking.<sup>32</sup>

Later, more activities began to be seen as indications of extremism. Smith Finley notes that the Chinese government lists the following as indicators of religious extremism: travelling or planning to study abroad, especially in a Muslim country, having a relative who travelled abroad, particularly to a Muslim country, wearing any religious symbols, praying regularly, fasting during Ramadan, making the pilgrimage to Mecca, teaching children about Islam, giving children names of Islamic origin, attending Friday prayers, possessing and/or spreading sensitive digital content such as messages containing religious language, e.g. Qur’anic verses or graphics, explanations of the Qur’an (*tabligh*) or pictures of women wearing religious symbols and praying, and so on.<sup>33</sup>

At the same time, hundreds of historical mosques and graveyards were demolished, and many Islamic shrines (*mazar*) were desecrated or destroyed by the Chinese government.<sup>34</sup> The current climate in

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28. Edmund Waite, “The Emergence of Muslim Reformism in Contemporary Xinjiang: Implications for the Uyghurs’ Positioning between a Central Asian and Chinese Context,” in *Situating the Uyghurs between China and Centra Asia*, ed. Christina M. Cesàro, Joanne Smith Finley, and Ildikó Bellér-Hann (Abingdon: Routledge, 2007), 167.

29. Edmund Waite, “The Impact of the State on Islam amongst the Uyghurs: Religious Knowledge and Authority in the Kashgar Oasis,” *Central Asian Survey* 25, no. 3 (2006): 251–265.

30. See: Joanne Smith Finley, “Securitization, Insecurity, and Conflict in Contemporary Xinjiang: Has PRC Counter-Terrorism Evolved into State Terror?” *Central Asian Survey* 38, no. 1 (2019): 1–26; Smith Finley, “The Wang Lixiong Prophecy: Palestinization in Xinjiang and the Consequences of the Chinese State Securitization of Religion,” *Central Asian Survey* 38, no. 1 (2019): 81–101; David Tobin, “Genocidal Processes: Social Death in Xinjiang,” *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 45, no. 16 (2022): 93–121.

31. See: Darren Byler, *Terror Capitalism: Uyghur Dispossession and Masculinity in a Chinese City* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2021); Joanne Smith Finley, “Why Scholars and Activists Increasingly Fear a Uyghur Genocide in Xinjiang,” *Journal of Genocide Research* 23, no. 3 (2021): 348–370; Zenz, “Thoroughly Reforming Them Towards a Healthy Heart Attitude: China’s Political Reeducation Campaign in Xinjiang,” *Central Asian Survey* 38, no. 1 (2019): 102–128.

32. For more information, see Darren Byler trans. “Identifying Religious Extremism,” *Xinjiang Documentation Project*, 2017, <https://xinjiang.sppga.ubc.ca/chinese-sources/online-sources/identifying-religious-extremism/>.

33. Smith Finley, “Securitization, Insecurity and Conflict.”

34. Rachel Harris, “Bulldozing mosques: The latest tactic in China’s war against Uighur culture.” *The Guardian*. April 7, 2019, <https://bit.ly/3w8cvyy>; Rian Thum, “The Spatial Cleansing of Xinjiang: Mazar Desecration in Context,” *Made in China Journal* August 24, 2020, <https://madeinchinajournal.com/2020/08/24/the-spatial-cleansing-of-xinjiang-mazar-desecration-in-context/>.

the Uyghur homeland has rendered Uyghur Islam a crime in East Turkestan to the point where no one dares to utter the simple Islamic greeting - *salaam alaikum* (peace be upon you), let alone attempt to follow more explicit Islamic practices.<sup>35</sup> Despite the ongoing religious oppression experienced by Uyghurs in their homeland, Islam remains an important and crucial aspect of the Uyghur identity and it continues to shape and influence their understanding of the world.

### Theodicy in Islam

Originally coined by Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz (1646–1716) in his *Essais de Theodicee* (1710), the term “theodicy” is composed of two Greek words – “God” (θεός) and “justice” (δίκη). The concept behind this term has two connotations: first, and in an original and proper sense, it “denotes the attempt to demonstrate that the divine justice remains uncompromised by the manifold evils of existence.”<sup>36</sup> Second, it is the attempt, in Milton’s words, “to justify the ways of God to men.” It is a technical term that signifies the defence of divine justice in the face of evil.<sup>37</sup> More broadly speaking, theodicy denotes the attempt to explain or make sense of suffering.<sup>38</sup>

Theodicy in Islam first emerged as an affirmation of God’s “unqualified omnipotence” that is directly linked to “a rationalistic notion of divine justice.”<sup>39</sup> According to Ormsby, historically speaking, Muslim thinkers, like their Christian counterparts, highlighted God’s justice and goodness, but “the allied problem of evil does not appear to assume the dominant position in Islamic theology which it often occupies in the Western tradition.”<sup>40</sup> For many Muslim scholars, “evil” seems to be “merely a name for the privation of good.”<sup>41</sup>

Pre-modern Islamic scholars, especially Mu’tazila theologians,<sup>42</sup> have argued that the existence of suffering or evil is not a bad thing as it allows humans to achieve a greater reward in the afterlife. However, evil comes from the free will of individuals, not God, who is only responsible for punishing wrongdoers. Such perspectives were largely adopted by Shia Islam.<sup>43</sup> In Sunni Islam, human free will appears to be less absolute. Al-Shahrastani (1086–1153) states:

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35. Hamut T. Izgil, *Waiting to Be Arrested at Night: A Uyghur Poet’s Memoir of China’s Genocide* (New York: Penguin, 2023); Christopher White, “The Uyghurs are Being Ethnically Cleansed in Northern China: Why Aren’t we Doing More?” *Broadview*, May 5, 2021, <https://broadview.org/uyghurs-genocide/>.

36. Eric Linn Ormsby, *Theodicy in Islamic Thought: The Dispute Over Al-Ghazali’s Best of All Possible Worlds* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1984), 3.

37. John Milton, *Paradise Lost* (Book I, line 26), in Northrop Frye, ed., *Paradise Lost and Selected Poetry and Prose* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1962), 6.

38. Scott, *Pathways in Theodicy*, *passim*.

39. Ormsby, *Theodicy in Islamic Thought*, 16.

40. Ormsby, *Theodicy in Islamic Thought*, 4.

41. Augustine, *City of God (Books 11–22)*, trans. William Babcock, ed. Boniface Ramsey (Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, 2013), 45.

42. According to the Encyclopedia Britannica, *Mu’tazilah* – which in Arabic means “Those Who Withdraw, or Stand Apart” – are political or religious neutralists. For more information see, Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica, “Mu’tazilah,” *Encyclopedia Britannica*, June 26, 2020, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Mutazilah>.

43. Ayman Shihadeh, “Suffering,” in *Medieval Islamic Civilization: An Encyclopedia, Vol. 2* (London: Routledge, 2006).

God creates, in man, the power, ability, choice, and will to perform an act, and man, endowed with this derived power, chooses freely one of the alternatives and intends or wills to do the action, and, corresponding to this intention, God creates and completes the action.<sup>44</sup>

On the nature of evil, Ibn Sina (Avicenna), an influential Muslim philosopher, argued that “evil is a non-existent thing that has no essence but is lack of essence or imperfection for essence.”<sup>45</sup> Thus, from this perspective, evil is something that does not exist, and its absence is equivalent to the imperfection that exists in everything. Ultimately, Ibn Sina is willing to assert that there is a quantitative amount of evil in the world but that this amount is minimal in comparison to the great amount of good that is in the universe.<sup>46</sup> Other prominent Islamic scholars have offered greater details on the question of evil and its existence in the world. Al-Ghazali, another influential philosopher and theologian, for instance, noted that evil was a necessity because things cannot be known except through their opposite. Thus, one cannot know health without knowing illness or know Paradise without knowing Hell and so on.<sup>47</sup> However, this idea that things can only be known through opposition was not shared by all in the Islamic tradition. For the Hanbali scholar Ibn Taymiyya, an eminent Muslim jurist, evil has an educational quality to it in that it has a “logical” necessity in the natural order of the world; a world from the jurist’s point of view is a world created by God and thus good by nature.<sup>48</sup> As a result, evil can never be attributed to God directly.

According to John Hoover, in Ibn Taymiyya’s typology, evil can be broken down into three distinct types:

First, from God’s perspective, the generality of what God creates is wholly good; evil is relative and exists only from the perspective of creatures. Second, evil is a necessary concomitant of the perfection of the created order. Third, from the human perspective, the generality of good is far greater in quantity than evil.<sup>49</sup>

Furthermore, not all Islamic scholars viewed evil as quantitatively less or minimal. Influential and innovative Muslim philosopher Fahr al-Dīn al-Rāzī rejected Ibn Sina’s optimistic position on theodicy by pointing out that “real pleasures, are seldom experienced, and then only fleetingly. So in quantitative terms, it is not good, but evil that is overwhelmingly prevalent.”<sup>50</sup> In fact, al-Rāzī takes a very anti-theodical position and argues that Islamic theodicy “must be strictly subject-centred and is ultimately a futile exercise.”<sup>51</sup>

Scholars have noted a strong influence of Sufism in the evolution of Uyghur Islam,<sup>52</sup> Historian Rian Thum specifically highlights the significance of the spread of Sufi ideas in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, a period viewed as the “last major period of Islamization” of “Altishahr” (southern part of East

44. Al-Shahrastani cited in Roy Jackson, *What is Islamic Philosophy* (New York: Routledge, 2014), 33.

45. Avicenna Ibn Sina, *Al-Shifāh*, First Edition (Tehran, Nasser Khosrow Publications, 1985), 381.

46. Jon Hoover, “The Wise Purpose and Origin of Evil,” in *Ibn Taymiyya’s Theodicy of Perpetual Optimism* (Lieden: Brill, 2007), 177, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.1163/j.ctt1w76tv7.9>.

47. Hoover, “The Wise Purpose and Origin of Evil,” 178.

48. Hoover, “The Wise Purpose and Origin of Evil,” 178.

49. Hoover, “The Wise Purpose and Origin of Evil,” 181.

50. Ayman Shihadeh, “Avicenna’s Theodicy and al-Rāzī’s Anti-Theodicy,” *Intellectual History of the Islamicate World* 7 (2019): 75, <https://doi.org/10.1163/2212943X-00701004>.

51. Shihadeh, “Avicenna’s Theodicy and al-Rāzī’s Anti-Theodicy,” 61.

52. Rémi Castets, “Uyghur Islam: Caught between Foreign Influences and Domestic,” in *China and India in Central Asia*. The Sciences Po Series in International Relations and Political Economy, ed. M. Laruelle, J.F. Huchet, S. Peyrouse, and B. Balci (Palgrave Macmillan, New York, 2010), 215–233, [https://doi.org/10.1057/9780230114357\\_14](https://doi.org/10.1057/9780230114357_14); Dawut, “Shrine Pilgrimage,” 56–67; Rachel Harris, *Soundscapes of*



Turkestan) in Uyghur history.<sup>53</sup> Sufi theologians largely followed Ibn Sina’s ontological perspective in linking evil with Divine will. Therefore, because God created all things and this creation is ultimately good, humankind must accept the divine will and rely on God’s mercy and wisdom. The mystic poet Rumi, for instance, goes one step further and ascribes evil to God: “God wills both good and evil, but He only approves of good.”<sup>54</sup> But it is important to note that this understanding of evil does not affect God’s moral perfection because ultimately evil “is willed for the ‘greater good.’”<sup>55</sup> Optimism is an important element of the Sufi tradition. According to Hoover, “Sufis do not always speculate whether this world is the best possible, but they do typically affirm that God creates evil as an instrument of discipline on the spiritual path.”<sup>56</sup> As Annemarie Schimmel rightly points out, “The mystic can understand that God’s wrath is mercy in disguise and that the pain and punishment that He inflicts upon those who love Him are necessary for their spiritual growth—just as bitter medicine is necessary for the sick.”<sup>57</sup>

Said Nursi, an influential Muslim modernist theologian, directly connects the existence of evil with the afterlife, contending that it would be impossible to effectively comprehend the meaning of the former without the latter.<sup>58</sup> For Nursi, death is the only doorway to the afterlife and is part of the “all-encompassing mercy and the all-embracing goodness of God, Who is the most just and the most compassionate.”<sup>59</sup> These views are in line with Safaruk Chowdhury, who strictly refrains from giving an all-encompassing and definitive “Islamic solution to the problem of evil” and instead highlights the overall consensus among Muslim scholars and adherents that the Quran and the existence of evil are “logically compatible.”<sup>60</sup>

### The Voices of Uyghurs in Canada and Türkiye

Despite the ongoing attempts to eradicate Islam from the everyday lives of Uyghurs in China, Islam has remained an indelible aspect of the Uyghur identity, even when it has had to remain silent and hidden. Given this fact, it should not be a surprise that many Uyghurs may have contemplated or engaged in discussions with others regarding the ongoing Uyghur Genocide from the perspective of Islamic faith or theodicy, albeit with differing levels of depth and understanding. The statements that will be examined here display such contemplation and come from sixteen Uyghur adults living in Canada who identify as Muslim and who were participating in an online Qur’an class in early 2021. Participants in the class were asked the question, “Is the plight of Uyghurs a punishment or a test of Allah?”, and their responses to this question were noted in the diary of one of the participants, a Uyghur woman. The notes were written in the Uyghur language and were translated by Dr. Dilmurat Mahmut. The responses of the sixteen (16) Uyghur Qur’an

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*Uyghur Islam* (Indiana University Press, 2020); Harris and Dawut, “Mazar Festivals of the Uyghurs,” 101–118; Thum, *The Sacred Routes*.

53. Thum, *The Sacred Routes*, 42.

54. Ozgur Koca, “Ibn ‘Arabī (1165–1240) and Rūmī (1207–1273) on the Question of Evil: Discontinuities in Sufi Metaphysics,” *Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations* 28, no. 3 (2017): 303, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09596410.2016.1267969>.

55. Koca, “Ibn ‘Arabī (1165–1240) and Rūmī (1207–1273),” 303.

56. Hoover, “The Wise Purpose and Origin of Evil,” 3.

57. Annemarie Schimmel, *Mystical Dimensions of Islam* (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 1975), 198.

58. Ian Markham, “Living Life in the Light of Death: A Conversation with Bediuzzaman Said Nursi,” in *Theodicy and Justice in Modern Islamic Thought: The Case of Said Nursi*, ed. Ibrahim M. Abu-Rabi (London: Routledge, 2016).

59. Bilal Kuşpınar, “Death in Nursi’s Thought,” 2016.

60. Safaruk Chowdhury, *Islamic Theology and the Problem of Evil* (Cairo: American University of Cairo, 2021), 2.

students were categorized by the research team into four categories: Nine (9) regarded the genocide as a test, one (1) said it was a punishment, four (4) said it was both, and two (2) were uncertain.

The responses noted in the diary can be qualified as spontaneous religious contemplations on suffering and evil but should also be understood as reflections on what it means to be Muslim. It is important to note that the participants' familiarity with the Qur'an is somewhat limited due to the oppressive policies imposed by the Chinese Communist regime, which they all experienced before relocating to Canada. As Uyghur participant M notes:

Under the Chinese rule, we face many restrictions and violations in terms of identity, religious beliefs, culture, and education. We are brainwashed by the erroneous ideas of Communist China, and we are left ignorant in terms of [Islamic] education.

These responses thus will be different from those statements made by the young Uyghur activist, who grew up in Canada, and the two Imams, who received formal religious education, and whose responses demonstrate a more in-depth knowledge of Islam. Thus, their statements demonstrate more nuanced reflections on the Uyghur Genocide from a traditional Islamic point of view.

The combination of all three perspectives, the Uyghur participants reacquainting themselves with their Islamic tradition, the Canadian Uyghur activist and the trained Uyghur Imams offer a unique glimpse of how it is that the Uyghur community living in Canada is thinking about the Uyghur Genocide through an Islamic lens. After having examined and analyzed their responses to the question of whether the Uyghur plight is a punishment or a test of God (Allah) we would like to argue that these Uyghur responses present a distinctively "Uyghur" theodicy. The statements noted in the diary can be characterized as an initial effort by the participants to develop a theodicy, even though they might not be familiar with the term or the concept of "theodicy."

We will first focus on the responses offered by the participants in the online Quranic class and the Canadian Uyghur activist. These silenced Uyghurs pose the fundamental question often encountered in classic theodicies: "Why does God allow evil?" They grapple with the perplexing paradox of a God who is both all-powerful and benevolent yet permits evil and suffering to afflict his followers. Based on the responses offered by each of the participants the research team has regrouped the answers as fitting into one of the four types of arguments: the Gnostic argument, the Mythic argument, the Apocalyptic argument, and the Mystery Argument. Each of these arguments will be defined and explained in the following section.

### **The Gnostic Argument**

The term gnostic is a difficult one within modern scholarship and consensus on what the term means is not unanimous. However, for the purpose of this paper and the research conducted therein, the term will be defined as follows: a transcendent strategy that devalues the human body and the material world, reducing their importance while emphasizing the reality of an eternal spiritual realm or an afterlife. From this gnostic viewpoint, human suffering is regarded as temporary and something that will be rectified or compensated for in Paradise. The Uyghur responses we have classified under this category share this sense of "temporality" and understand behaviour and action in this world as compensated for in the afterlife.

Uyghur A notes:

When we come into this world, we must face all kinds of tests. We must take this seriously. If we successfully go through these trials, we can achieve the rewards that Allah has promised us. This world is temporary, only the hereafter is eternal.

Uyghur M argues it is a purification from sin leading to rewards in paradise:

If Allah gives trials to His beloved servants, that is to test their endurance; He intends to purify them from sins by giving these trials to His sinful servants. If these servants pass these trials of Allah, if they can persevere no matter what calamities come to them, their past sins will be washed away. The reward of such servants will certainly be Paradise.

Uyghur G echoes this notion and adds that the wrongdoers will be punished:

Good people who are oppressed and unable to protect themselves in this world will go to Paradise anyway in the sight of Allah. The hardships they endure in this world only wash away their sins and increase their rank in Paradise. If bad people are punished in this world, they will be losers both in this world and in the Hereafter. In this world, if bad people do not face punishment, they will face the wrath of Allah, wrongdoers will be cursed in this world and will never escape the punishment of Allah in the Hereafter.

This line of reasoning shares similarities with Hick's "soul-making theodicy," which suggests that suffering plays a crucial role in our moral and spiritual growth, enabling us to recognize our capacity to better resemble the divine.<sup>61</sup>

Kabir Qurban is a young Uyghur activist based in Canada, who views both the Uyghur crisis and his personal challenges within the framework of jihad, a concept directly tied to Allah's divine trial.<sup>62</sup> He declares:

Yeah, this is my *jihad*, the word *jihad* actually means "struggle". I go to my imam, and I always ask him "How can I deal with this?" He is like "I have no answers for you. I wish I did" because nobody has the answer. But they said this is your Jihad, this is your struggle, you have to go through it. And I have accepted it, this is my *jihad*, not the media version of *jihad*, but the actual religious struggle to do good.

Being a devout Muslim, Qurban forges a connection between his political activism and his faith, which bolsters his agency and optimism. He says that he frequently prays to God, asking for help. He notes that "If I didn't have faith, I would genuinely be in turmoil." He also shares that his mother consistently urges him to pray for his incarcerated cousin, helping him sustain his faith while confined within camps.

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61. Hick, *Evil and the God of Love*.

62. *Jihād* is the Arabic term for "struggle" or "effort." In Islam, the meaning is understood as a meritorious struggle or effort. "The exact meaning of the term *jihād* depends on context; it has often been erroneously translated in the West as 'holy war.' Jihad, particularly in the religious and ethical realm, primarily refers to the human struggle to promote what is right and to prevent what is wrong." For further details see Asma Afsaruddin, "jihad," *Encyclopedia Britannica*, November 12, 2023, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/jihad>. In the Qur'an, the term is mentioned as follows: "Do you think you will enter Paradise without Allah proving which of you [truly] struggled [for His cause] and patiently endured?" (Surah Al Imran, verse 142); "We will certainly test you [believers] until We prove those of you who [truly] struggle [in Allah's cause] and remain steadfast, and reveal how you conduct yourselves" (Surah Muhammad, verse 31).

Ultimately, Qurban explains that all sufferings and struggles will not go in vain; they will bring great rewards. He states:

Any hardship in this world we see it as an opportunity for us to elevate ourselves to do good, it is a mercy for us to be able to actually do good work and elevate ourselves.

### **The Mythic Argument**

The second characteristic we identified in the diary responses is one that is connected to some form of otherworldly concept of evil (where God in scripture is shown as intervening) and we have categorized this argument as Mythic. This argument posits that the prevailing evil (in this case, the suffering inflicted upon the Uyghur people) is rooted in the primal act where chaos (evil) is ordered to create the world. Thus, evil is understood to have existed from the onset and the notion of injustice is found in the sacred narratives of the Abrahamic faiths, as detailed in the Qur'an, the Torah, and the Christian Bible. However, the notion of injustice raises several points of tension within the Islamic tradition. One dilemma faced by these Muslim Uyghur students is that they were forced to stray from the strict adherence to the five pillars<sup>63</sup> of Islam, but how can they be held accountable? If the Uyghur Genocide is truly an act of divine justice where lies the justice in being forced into horrific situations and not offered any reprieve?

Uyghur D confronts this quandary and references heroic figures from the Qur'anic scriptures of a mythical past to find meaning in present-day events. They draw a parallel between the enslaved ancient Israelites under the Egyptian Pharaoh and the contemporary Uyghurs who are detained or subjugated by the Chinese government under Xi Jinping. This approach bestows a sense of dignity, and the suffering is given a deeper significance, hinting at the promise of an eventual end to suffering and the retribution of the oppressors. Uyghur M echoes this sentiment, stating, "Allah will help us as long as we do not betray Him. No tyrant has ever lasted very long in history. The punishment of Allah is severe."

The Mythic Argument is used slightly differently by Uyghur G, who argues that Allah in past stories of the ancients only punished humans through various natural disasters. Therefore, in the eyes of Uyghur G, the Uyghur Genocide is not a divine punishment but a divine test. He states:

Allah never wrongs innocent people. In the stories of Noah and Lot in the Qur'an, Allah punished those who disobeyed him and committed immorality in the world and blessed those who obeyed His commandments and did good deeds. However, we have not seen any statement in the Qur'an that the punishment of Allah was carried out through the means of man. Yet, we see Allah punishing humans through various natural disasters. For example, the people of Noah were punished by the flood, the people of Shuaib by the fire from the cloud, the people of Lot by the stones from the sky, or by the natural disasters that were uncontrollable, such as insects, a strong sound, etc.

### **The Apocalyptic Argument**

A third characteristic identified from the diary responses presents the Uyghur participants as understanding evil and suffering, especially as it relates to the Uyghur Genocide, as an "awakening." This argument, which we have categorized as Apocalyptic, perceives the genocide as an Ordeal of Initiation, an

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63. The Five Pillars of Islam are fundamental practices in Islam and are considered obligatory acts of worship. They are 1) the declaration of faith, 2) praying five times each day, 3) giving alms, 4) fasting during the month of Ramadan, and 5) going on a pilgrimage to Mecca.

Awakening from Slumber, and a Call to Battle. Certain statements by the Uyghur participants suggest that the genocide in the Uyghur homeland is part of an apocalyptic struggle between the forces of Good and Evil. Uyghur F notes:

This test actually woke us up from our slumber. If this test of Allah had not come to us, when would we have known the Chinese, who are our true enemy? We would still have considered them as a friend. If these ordeals of today did not happen to us, how could we realize the evilness of Communist China? These trials that befell us have made us recognize the fact that we can never live along with China. There will be no good in a land where justice is gone. If we fight relentlessly against the Chinese, we will surely win, Allah willing.

Uyghur M suggests that the genocide might be a kind of cosmic winnowing, a separation of the “wheat from the chaff” or the “sheep from goats” (in terms borrowed from the gospel of Matthew, Matt 13:29-30). As they state, “*By giving us those trials, Allah has made the wicked among us exposed and separated the pious and good from the hypocrites.*” Uyghur R echoes this point:

Allah has helped us to recognize the bad people among us through giving us some tests. [Otherwise] we would not have been able to notice the traitors and hypocrites within us. He wants to purge us of bad people and make us cleaner.

This argument presents a certain problem. It is well known that many of the earliest arrests in the PRC’s “Crackdown” and “Strike Hard” campaigns since 2016 targeted Uyghur religious leaders (imams and scholars) and authors, professors or historians of Uyghur history and literature.<sup>64</sup> Yet, this response from Uyghur M and R qualified the genocide as something that needed to happen to test and punish those Uyghurs who were “traitors and hypocrites.” This line of thinking is furthered by Uyghur O, who seeks to resolve this tension by separating the “good” people who are being tested from the “bad” people who will be punished, a distinction that is not clearly made in the responses offered by Uyghur M and R. Uyghur O argues:

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64. The first “Strike Hard” or “Stern Blow” campaign in 1983 was framed as a massive anti-crime campaign. It was initiated by Deng Xiaoping and lasted for almost four years. The “Strike Hard Campaign against Violent Terrorism” (*Yanda* in Chinese) was the Chinese government’s intensified security campaign to crack down on Uyghurs. During the Strike Hard Campaigns, the Chinese authorities would detain people they deemed suspicious or potential rebels, including religious scholars, leaders, and people who had been previously detained or served prison terms. Usually, the Strike Hard Campaigns would be implemented prior to major events or after a major incident and would last for several months. For instance, the Chinese police in the Uyghur Homeland arrested many Uyghurs several months prior to the 2008 Beijing Olympics. After the July 5, 2009, demonstration in Ürümqi, there was a massive “crackdown” when the authorities cut off access to the Internet in the Uyghur region for almost a year, placed travel restrictions within the region, and imposed several other restrictions. After Xi Jinping became the Communist Party Chairman, there were several Strike Hard Campaigns before 2017. As the name suggests, during Strike Hard Campaigns, people would be easily arrested for minor crimes/mistakes, police could be seen roaming around in the city, police would raid and conduct searches at Uyghur homes. After Chen Quanguo became the Communist Party Secretary of the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region in 2016, he started a Strike Hard Campaign that is still ongoing. For further discussion see Marie Trédaniel and Pak K. Lee, “Explaining the Chinese Framing of the ‘terrorist’ violence in Xinjiang: Insights from Securitization Theory,” *Nationalities* 46, no. 1 (2018): 177–195, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00905992.2017.1351427>; “China Steps Up ‘Strike Hard’ Campaign in Xinjiang,” *Radio Free Asia*, December 3, 2018, <https://www.rfa.org/english/news/uyghur/strike-hard-01092014172927.html>; Sean R. Roberts, “The Biopolitics of China’s ‘War on Terror’ and the Exclusion of the Uyghurs,” *Critical Asian Studies* 50, no. 2 (2018): 232–258, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14672715.2018.1454111>.

But if we look at modern Uyghur society, there exists corruption, fraud, such as stealing from others, and killing. Such unethical practices have proliferated. When I encounter such things and people, personally I regard this as Allah's punishment.... But when I see my innocent, suffering brothers and sisters, I think this is a test."

Uyghur Z echoes this point:

There are both good and bad people among us, just like in other communities. We can consider this as a punishment for those human beings who do not believe in Allah, do evil deeds which are forbidden in our religion. However, for those who are pious, virtuous, well-behaved people, this calamity is not a punishment, but a trial.

In the same vein, Uyghur G emphasizes the justice and mercy of Allah while criticizing the argument that Uyghur sufferings can only be understood as a sign of Allah's punishment:

There could be some wisdom we don't know behind such a big genocide. It is an insult to Allah to see that the powerful oppressing the weak is a punishment of Allah. How can one compare the oppression of human beings to the punishment of Allah? Moreover, Allah does not need to use a group of powerful people to punish weak or sinful ones. Just like there is nothing in the world that is absolute, a whole nation cannot be considered absolutely good or absolutely bad.

### **The Mystery Argument**

A last characteristic was identified from the responses found in the diary and this argument we have categorized as Mystery. This category emphasizes more of the unknown component of God's actions and that practitioners should not try to rationalize divine will because we simply will never be able to know, it will always remain a mystery. Those who are practicing and faithful to God should simply have faith in divine goodness and that God's master plan for humanity will never be known.

Uyghur G makes a convincing case against using genocide as a form of punishment and firmly dismisses the idea that an entire group should be held responsible for the transgressions of a few individuals. They support this argument by relying on examples from the Qur'an:

Allah does not punish a whole nation just because of some of its members who err and go beyond the limit. Allah never wrongs innocent people. In the stories of Noah and Lot in the Qur'an, Allah punished those who disobeyed him and committed immorality in the world and blessed those who obeyed His commandments and did good deeds. However, we have not seen any statement in the Qur'an that the punishment of Allah was carried out through the means of man.

Additionally, Uyghur G argues that the genocide cannot be a divine punishment, because that would make it just and we would be siding with the Chinese government: "*If we regard what happened to the Uyghurs to be a punishment, we should consider the oppression of the perpetrators of violence in this world to be reasonable.*"

Similar to Uyghur G, Uyghur O contends that the Uyghurs were led astray and lost their religious identity, but argues that the genocide should not be regarded as God acting through the Chinese regime, but rather as God testing those who are faithful and punishing those who have committed wrongs.

In the past, we insisted that we follow the same path as our ancestors followed. Because we did not analyze which way was right and which way was wrong, unknowingly, we deviated from the right path of Allah. This is a very dangerous situation. This is also the current situation of the Uyghurs. As a Muslim nation, we should have followed the path of Allah. But as human beings who are easily deceived, we couldn't do so. Under the influence of the Communist Chinese, who are anti-religious, some of us were forcibly de-religionized or alienated from our religion.

### Learned Responses – the Imam Perspective

As noted, the responses discussed above were those of Uyghur Muslim practitioners with varying degrees of knowledge about Islam. We will now move on to discuss how two Uyghur imams, both educated and trained in the Sunni Islamic tradition, understand the Uyghur Genocide.

The question discussed by the Uyghur Muslims attending the online Qur'anic course was also posited to a Montreal Uyghur Imam, Abdujilil Bugra. The following is his response on the subject matter of God's (Allah's) role in the Uyghur Genocide, which refutes the notion that the Uyghur Genocide is "divine punishment." He makes the following argument to support his claim:

There is no verse of the Qur'an (Ayat), nor Hadith of Prophet Muhammed, nor scholastic jurisprudence (Kiyas), nor a consensus of the entire Muslim community (Ijmah), which are the four basics of interpretation in Islam, that relates or regards such an extremely cruel genocide as a test or punishment of Allah. To the contrary, Allah describes Himself as "the Most gracious and the Most merciful" at the beginning of the Holy Qur'an and at the beginning of its every Chapter and repeats [this statement] inside Chapters.<sup>65</sup>

What we have derived from this statement is that the genocide has no metaphysical origin; instead, the evident cause of this tragedy lies in the malevolent intentions and deeds of the perpetrators, with varying levels of support from the international community.

Offering an alternative explanation, he argues that the genocide should be viewed as a *musibet* (a tragic calamity), brought about by state authorities:

The genocide of the Uyghur Muslims is a tragic calamity (*musibet*) caused directly or indirectly by individual, public, corporate, state and international irresponsibility, miscalculated wrongdoings, gross ignorance and misapprehension of the evil power of the CCP.

Imam Bugra maintains that "*the genocide is a big lesson for all collectively and individually.*" Alluding to the tumultuous history of the Chinese Communist Party and the economic investments that facilitated its growth in the post-Cold War era. In this context, Bugra is emphasizing the profound historical lesson and views free will and political action as the central factors behind the genocide. From his perspective what is needed is a greater activist response.

Based on the four categories developed in this paper, some of Bugra's statements fall within the category of the "Mystery argument." For instance, he contends that:

Allah is there for the Uyghur people and Allah surely will take revenge sooner or later and punish the culprits who committed the genocide. Allah may punish late, but does not forget. Our thousand years is like one day in front of Allah and revenge will come sure even though it is late in our point of view.

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65. Abdulmuqtedir sent Imam Bugra questions by WhatsApp, and he replied with a .pdf file on October 19, 2021.

Here Imam Bugra, although not explicitly noting the unknown of God's plans, argues for an eventual time of punishment one that is unknown to us. This is very similar to the statements made by the two other Uyghurs (G and O), who assert that theodicy lies beyond human understanding. This perspective shares potential similarities with the Lubavitch,<sup>66</sup> which often chooses to bypass the unsettling questions of theodicy in favour of commemorating and intensifying their commitment to religious practices. They recognize a theological enigma in progress, understanding that the conventional explanations, be it in terms of paradigmatic thinking, a covenant, or retribution and trials, ultimately fall short in addressing the extensive, multifaceted nature of the crisis and its outcomes.

### The Theodicy of Collective Punishment

A contrasting theodicy was provided by a distinguished Uyghur imam living in Türkiye, Dr. Abdulaziz Rahmetullah,<sup>67</sup> interviewed on June 30, 2021, by Abdulmuqtedir Udun in the Uyghur language. We want to highlight his position in a separate section as it is unique, and he is a prominent authority figure. Among the Qur'an class participants, only one student, Uyghur C, shared a similar perspective.

Imam Rahmetullah stated that the genocide was a *collective* punishment laid upon the Uyghur people for transgressions of the past. When asked, "How do you view the genocide of the Uyghur people from a religious point of view?" Imam Rahmetullah responded: "*I believe the vital reason that led to the oppression [was] we didn't unite since our forefathers.*" He moves on to offer several historical examples to support his claim:

- 1) "those who were steadfast in their political stance and view have always been sabotaged by some traitors and hypocrites";
- 2) "the later generation abandoned Jihad against the invaders, didn't punish the traitors who worked for the enemy. and lost historic opportunities." 3) "It is also the result of wronging ourselves, [as] "whatever affliction befalls you is because of what your own hands have committed. And He pardons much." (in this last example he quotes Qur'an 42:30)

He expands on this notion of collective punishment as follows:

Allah has explained his instructions in many verses in the Qur'an in this regard, including to not neglect physical resources, preparation of force, staying steadfast, staying alert, obeying the leaders, and not falling into disunity. A nation that neglects those prerequisites of victory is destined to suffer even if there are people who live with piety among them. Allah SWT says: "Why is it when you suffered casualties you protested, 'How could this be?' Say, 'O Prophet,' 'It is because of your disobedience.' Surely God is Most Capable of everything." (Qur'an 3:165)

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66. For more information see Nissan Dovid Dubo, "Belief after the Holocaust," Chabad.Org, Accessed 13 June 2021, [https://www.chabad.org/library/article\\_cdo/aid/108398/jewish/](https://www.chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/108398/jewish/); Tommy Schnurmacher, *Makeup Tips from Auschwitz: How Vanity Saved my Mother's Life* (Victoria, BC: Tellwell Talent, 2019), 195–198; Yanki Tauber, "The Rebbe on the Holocaust: What the Rebbe Said (And Didn't Say) About the Holocaust," Chabad.Org, Accessed 13 June 2021, [https://www.chabad.org/library/article\\_cdo/aid/64888/jewish/](https://www.chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/64888/jewish/).

67. Dr. Imam Abdulaziz Rahmetullah is a prominent Uyghur scholar of Islam. He was born in Hotan, East Turkistan, in 1971. In 2008, Imam Rahmetullah received his PhD in Islamic comparative jurisprudence from the Faculty of Arabic and Islamic Studies at Al-Azhar University in Cairo, Egypt. He has published several books in Uyghur including a two-volume collection of *fatwas*, or rulings about Islamic law given by a recognized person of authority. Dr. Rahmetullah is currently the director of the Sajjiye Center for Research and Islamic Studies in Istanbul, Türkiye and a member of the International Union of Muslim Scholars.



Imam Rahmetullah also suggests that the genocide is a test, not only for the Uyghurs but for all nations: “*In the same way, the oppression and the ongoing genocide is a test for the people of East Turkestan as well as for the entire humanity.*” He addresses the age-old question, “Why must the innocent suffer?” as follows:

The inclusion of good people when nations are punished as a whole is a divine law. This does not mean that we disregard the crimes of the invaders who are afflicting the genocide upon our nation. The crimes of the invaders are external factors. Allah SWT says: ‘This is how We make the wrongdoers ‘destructive’ allies of one another because of their misdeeds.’ (Qur’an 6:129)

When asked, “Does the Qur’an contain passages that could be used to support the concept of mass suffering as a test or punishment?” Imam Rahmetullah responded, “*The mass suffering of nations contains meanings [that are] broader than just punishment. Every punishment is a suffering, but not every suffering is a punishment.*” He then quoted five verses from the Qur’an that relate to the concept of mass suffering as a test or punishment:

- 1) “This is because God would never discontinue His favour to a people until they discontinue their faith. Surely God is All-Hearing, All-Knowing.” (Qur’an 8:53)
- 2) “Indeed, God would never change a people’s state ‘of favour’ until they change their own state ‘of faith’. And if it is God’s Will to torment a people, it can never be averted, nor can they find a protector other than Him.” (Qur’an 13:11)
- 3) “So We seized each ‘people’ for their sin: against some of them We sent a storm of stones, some were overtaken by ‘mighty’ blast, some We caused the earth to swallow, and some We drowned. God would not have wronged them, but it was they who wronged themselves.” (Qur’an 29:40)
- 4) “Corruption has spread on land and sea as a result of what people’s hands have done, so that God may cause them to taste ‘the consequences of’ some of their deeds and perhaps they might return ‘to the Right Path’.” (Qur’an 30:41)
- 5) “Whatever affliction befalls you is because of what your own hands have committed. And He pardons much.” (Qur’an 42:30)

Finally, when asked, “To what extent, in your opinion, should the Uyghurs of East Turkestan be blamed for failing to observe the five pillars of Islam while under the rule of the CCP which banned such practices?” Imam Rahmetullah replied, “*Everyone should try to follow the pillars of Islam within their capacities. Those who are not able to, should not be blamed.*”

Therefore, it seems that, even though he considers the genocide to be a collective consequence of the Uyghur people's past transgressions and shortcomings, this Imam does not accept the idea of individual Uyghurs being subjected to divine punishments.

### **A Glimpse of “Pastoral Theodicy”**

In discussions among the participants in the online Qur'an course, there are sporadic mentions of an emerging concept referred to as a “pastoral theodicy.” This concept acknowledges the importance of relating theodicy to actual instances of suffering and oppression. Mark Scott has identified instances of this

theology at the “margins” in various theological contexts, including feminist, liberation, and black theologies.<sup>68</sup> The statements made by Uyghurs F and M, as shown below, reflect similar theological ideas as they advocate for resistance and lobby for human rights but always under the guidance of Allah. Uyghur F:

These trials that befell us have made us recognize the fact that we can never live along with China. There will be no good in a land where justice is gone. If we fight relentlessly against the Chinese, we will surely win, Allah willing.

Uyghur M:

We must continue to speak out for our brothers and sisters who are being persecuted in our country. Although the Chinese state is now very strong, Allah will help us as long as we do not betray Him. No tyrant has ever lasted very long in history. The punishment of Allah is severe.

Imam Bugra endeavours to instill hope in his congregants by pointing to an era of Uyghur prosperity in the future, by using metaphors such as Yusuf (Joseph) prospering under Pharaoh and a buried flower seed surviving the winter.

The motivations and principles of pastoral theodicy find reflection in present-day Holocaust and genocide education, evident in the reverence for survivors’ accounts and within the mainstream Jewish commemoration of the Holocaust. Regrettably, stories about the Uyghur Genocide might soon become a part of this undertaking, given the increasing number of Uyghur camp survivors who are now coming forward to share their experiences.

### Conclusion

Our objective was to share some of the insider perspectives and discussions that are taking place within the Canadian Uyghur community on the current genocide. We sought to examine and analyze these discussions by focusing on the *religious* response and understanding of the Uyghur Genocide. Based on our analysis, most participants who emphasize the notion of the divine test of Allah will downplay the punishment aspect of the Uyghur plight, which they see as part of Allah’s divine decree (*qadar*). We have understood the Uyghur responses as fitting within four distinct categories of arguments. Although these arguments are distinct, they also have some overlap and interrelatedness. All these perspectives seem to correspond with Islam’s de-emphasis on evil as opposed to its focus on the goodness of Allah, which is best understood through “the privative theory of evil, or the notion of evil as a necessary concomitant of a greater good.”<sup>69</sup> From this same frame of de-emphasizing evil, Imam Rahmetullah’s perspective can also be seen as an emphasis on the goodness ordained by Allah, who wants all His servants to learn from their own errors so that they can achieve more goodness in the future. While Imam Bugra does not attempt to de-emphasize evil, on the contrary, he points out that those who transgress, who commit evil cannot and do not go unpunished it is simply not always in the immediate, but it will eventually come. Because Allah is “the Most Gracious and the Most Merciful,” his views offer the potential for retribution, a message that contends that Allah’s punishment is inevitable, sooner or later. For Kabir, the Uyghur activist, the struggle

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68. Scott, “Theodicy at the Margins,” 149–52.

69. Ormsby, *Theodicy in Islamic Thought*, 27.

he and his fellow Uyghurs endure is part of Allah's test. His activist work is fueled by his faith, which helps him to focus on overcoming the obstacles. What is reflected in their responses is that, despite the atrocities and sometimes the hopelessness, their Islamic faith provides answers to help them overcome the trauma of the genocide and to find ways, not only to move forward but to gain the courage to fight their oppressors, thus reinforcing the importance of being able to rediscover and maintain their religious identity.

## Appendix: Data Responses and Statements Collected from a Uyghur Diary

### Data Collection Method

The data collected is from a diary given to us by a Uyghur woman who noted the conversations between Uyghurs participating in an Online Qur'an course taking place in Canada. The discussions center around the meaning of the Uyghur Genocide in relation to their Muslim faith. The participants of this online course were asked the question, "Is the plight of Uyghurs a punishment or a test of Allah?" The conversation took place in early 2021 on an online platform. The woman shared her diary with us with the condition that she and all the participants remain anonymous.

Note:

The word "test" in Uyghur is *sinaq* or *imtahan*. The latter is an Arabic term whereas *sinaq* is a Uyghur word.

The word "punishment" in Uyghur is *jaza* and comes from the Arabic.

The term "servant" is actually a mistranslation of the word *banda*, which is originally Persian and means "henchman, (loyal) servant, vassal."<sup>70</sup>

### Responses of Uyghurs Who Attended the Online Quran Course

The author of the diary noted and organized the responses of her classmates under four categories: those who regarded the Uyghur Genocide as Allah's test; those who believed the Uyghur Genocide as Allah's punishment; those who viewed the Uyghur Genocide as both a test and punishment of Allah; and those who were uncertain about this question. The only statistical information we know about the participants is that 3 of the participants were male and 13 were female.

Participant codes	<i>The Uyghur Genocide is Allah's test</i>	<i>The Uyghur Genocide is Allah's punishment</i>	<i>The Uyghur Genocide is Allah's test and punishment at the same time</i>	<i>Uncertain</i>
A	yes			
B	yes			
C		yes		
D	yes			
F	yes			
G	yes			
J			yes	
H				yes
K	yes			

70. For more information, see the "banda," *Encyclopedia Iranica*, December 15, 1988, <https://iranicaonline.org/articles/banda-servant>.

<b>L</b>			<b>yes</b>	
<b>M</b>			<b>yes</b>	
<b>O</b>			<b>yes</b>	
<b>Q</b>	<b>yes</b>			
<b>R</b>	<b>yes</b>			
<b>W</b>	<b>yes</b>			
<b>Z</b>				<b>yes</b>

The following are the responses and statements of each of the participants as they have been categorized by the author of the diary.

### **The Uyghur Genocide is Allah’s Test**

**Participant A:**

I consider it as a test of Allah. Because Allah is very kind and merciful to His servants. We will not be punished in a hurry. This is just a test that has come to us. When we come into this world, we must face all kinds of tests. We must take this seriously. If we successfully go through these trials, we can achieve the rewards that Allah has promised us. This world is temporary, only the hereafter is eternal.

**Participant B:**

I consider it as a test of Allah. As long as we are humans, we cannot avoid committing mistakes. Most of us do not fully understand the divine law of Allah, which commands good and forbids evil. Going after our ego and possessions, doing what Allah has forbidden, and being oppressed by the temptations of the devil, we do things that are harmful to humanity. However, Allah will never hasten to punish those servants who commit mistakes. Only these trials can give us the opportunity to recognize our mistakes and return to the right path of Allah who uses all sorts of difficulties to test our faith. Allah is very kind and merciful to His servants.

**Participant Q:**

I don’t think it’s fair to say it is a punishment. This is a test of Allah. If we say it is a punishment, many people in prisons and camps in our homeland - East Turkestan- are innocent and should not be punished. This is a test. Allah tests His beloved servants through all kinds of hardships. Allah never punishes innocent servants, and He does not rush to punish sinful servants, only allowing them to reform themselves through various trials. He is very kind and merciful to His servants.

**Participant D:**

I consider it a test of Allah. Allah loves those who have good hearts and are devoted to Him, and He tests them with all sorts of trials to bring those beloved servants closer to Himself. For example, so many people currently are in prisons and camps in East Turkestan. Many of them are our scholars, intellectuals, and entrepreneurs who are sincere and pure-hearted. They have done many good deeds and contributed to the development of society. Allah has tested these people through the modern pharaoh – the Chinese. Before us, many other people were tested in the same way, too.

**Participant F:**

I consider it a test of Allah. Some Uyghurs think because we have not stood firm in our religion, that Allah is punishing us. But I disagree with that idea. After I visited some Arabic countries that consider themselves Islamic and stayed there for some time and interacted with the local people, I realized that the faith of the Uyghurs is very strong, especially with respect to personal practice and committing to Islamic creeds. Some people in the Arab world speak about Allah all the time and highlight good morals related to Islam, but in reality, they don't practice them in their daily lives. On the contrary, although we Uyghurs are in the hands of an irreligious, oppressive state, our faith is still strong. And even though we are encountering much oppression, we have kept our Islamic faith quite well. Alhamdulillah (praise be to God). Allah loves us.

He tests the servant he loves with such trials. This test actually woke us up from our slumber. If this test of Allah had not come to us, when would we have realized that the Chinese are our true enemy? We would still have considered them as a friend. If these ordeals of today did not happen to us, how could we realize the evilness of Communist China? These trials that befell us have made us recognize the fact that we can never live along with China. There will be no good in a land where justice is gone. If we fight relentlessly against the Chinese, we will surely win, Allah willing.

**Participant W:**

I recognize this as a test of Allah. This world is just a temporary residence, not eternal. Allah tries his beloved servants through various tests in order to make them closer to Himself.

**Participant R:**

I think it's a test. We are not a nation which is so bad that we deserve a punishment. Anyway, there will inevitably be good and bad people in a nation. We are actually a very kind, hospitable, generous, funny, and enlightened nation. Allah tests His servants. Probably, the calamities we are facing are good for us. Allah has helped us to recognize the bad people among us by giving us some tests. If these did not happen to us, we would not have been able to notice the traitors and hypocrites amongst us. I guess he wants to purge out the bad people and make us cleaner.

**Participant G:**

I don't think it's a punishment; it's probably a test. There could be some wisdom we don't know behind such a big genocide. It is an insult to Allah to see that the powerful oppressing the weak is a punishment of Allah. How can one compare the oppression of human beings to the punishment of Allah? Moreover, Allah does not need to use a group of powerful people to punish weak or sinful individuals. Just like there is nothing in the world that is absolute, a whole nation cannot be considered absolutely good or absolutely bad.

We come across a variety of people in our lives. Allah does not punish a whole nation just because of some of its members commit wrongs and go beyond the limit. Allah never wrongs innocent people. In the stories of Noah and Lot in the Qur'an, Allah punished those who disobeyed him and committed immorality in the world and blessed those who obeyed His commandments and did good deeds. However, we have not seen any statement in the Qur'an that the punishment of Allah was carried out through the means of man. Yet, we see Allah punishing humans through various natural disasters. For example, the people of Noah were punished by the flood, the people of Shuaib by the fire from the cloud, the people of Lot by the stones from the sky, or by uncontrollable natural disasters, such as insects, a strong sound, etc.

If we regard what happened to the Uyghurs to be a punishment, we should consider the oppression of the perpetrators of violence in this world to be reasonable. Likewise, the suffering of all Muslims in this world is not a punishment, but a test. When a person suffers, they can become closer to the Lord, while recognizing their sins and repenting in this world. They won't leave this world without knowing the Lord. Life in this world is only temporary, and life in the Hereafter is eternal. The more people do wrong to others, the more they make Allah angry.

The real punishment and reward are only from Allah. Good people who are oppressed and unable to protect themselves in this world will go to Paradise anyway in the sight of Allah. The hardships they endure in this world only wash away their sins and increase their rank in Paradise. If bad people are punished in this world, they will be losers both in this world and in the Hereafter. In this world, if bad people do not face punishment, they will face the wrath of Allah in the Hereafter anyway. There is nothing more inevitable in this world than death. And the wrongdoers will be cursed in this world and will never escape the punishment of Allah in the Hereafter. Only the punishment and reward of Allah are the most true and greatest.

The hardships and rewards that come from man in this world are not absolute. While the oppression of the Uyghurs is a test for the Uyghurs to see how they face the oppression; for other groups of people, it is a test to see how they react to the oppression of the Uyghurs. Behind such oppression, there must be the wisdom of Allah. We have seen people all over the world realize the tragedies that befell the Uyghurs and recognize the true nature of an evil force like the Chinese Communist regime. Only Allah knows best.

**Participant K:**

I think it's a test. Allah is not in a hurry to punish man for his error and disobedience to the divine laws established by Himself. Allah always gives us the opportunity to correct our mistakes, because he is very kind and benevolent. May Allah guide us to the truth by recognizing and examining ourselves through these trials. I believe that if we seize this opportunity given to us and recognize it correctly, this will give each of us time to think deeply about ourselves and return to the right path of Allah, Insha'Allah (God willing) everything will be fine, Insha'Allah (God willing).

**The Uyghur Genocide is Allah's Punishment**

**Participant C:**

I consider it a punishment from Allah, because, in Uyghur society, although we are Muslim, increasingly more people among us do not pray, do not fast, do not perform obligatory practices such as giving zakat (alms). They do not condemn but freely do evil deeds such as drinking alcohol, lying, adultery, etc. They do anything for money...They have been estranged from our beautiful religion that commands doing good and forbids doing evil. So, Allah has punished us.

**The Uyghur Genocide is Allah's Test and Punishment at the Same Time**

**Participant O:**

I consider it both a punishment and a trial. In the Qur'an, which Allah revealed to us, are given clear information about what is right and what is wrong to do. Although many of us consider ourselves Muslim, we do not really understand the religion of Islam, which is our religion, and the Qur'an, which is our book,

and we do not try to understand it. Therefore, some of us do not and cannot do many things as Allah has commanded.

In the past, we insisted that we follow the same path as our ancestors followed. Because we did not analyze which way was right and which way was wrong, unknowingly, we deviated from the right path of Allah. This is a very dangerous situation. This is also the current situation of the Uyghurs. As a Muslim nation, we should have followed the path of Allah. But as human beings who are easily deceived, we couldn't do so. Under the influence of the Communist Chinese, who are anti-religious, some of us were forcibly de-religionized or alienated from our religion. Religion and science were separated. As a result, a situation has arisen in which those who believe in science do not believe in religion, and those who believe in religion do not believe in science. Only a handful of us did not separate the two, and defended our religion with all our might, seeing this as a test of Allah, Alhamdulillah (praise be to God).

Our religion is a beautiful religion that prevents people from doing evil and commands doing good and having good morals. But if we look at modern Uyghur society, there exists corruption, fraud (such as stealing from others), and killing. Such unethical practices have proliferated. When I encounter such things and people (personally) I regard this as Allah's punishment. I think it's true. But when I see my innocent, suffering brothers and sisters, I think this is a test. Allah knows best.

**Participant J:**

I consider it both a trial and a punishment. In Islam, life itself is a test. As long as we live in this world, we will inevitably face all kinds of trials. Allah punishes His beloved servants for the sins they have committed only in this world and takes them clean from sins to the next world.

**Participant L:**

I see this as both a test from Allah and a punishment for some of our bad deeds. Although we consider ourselves Muslims, in many ways, we have deviated from what Allah has commanded us to do. We have not submitted to Him in a way worthy of the greatness of Allah. May Allah, the All-Knowing, guide us. We pray for Allah to reform us according to his way. Inshallah (God willing), we will try our best.

**Participant M:**

I don't think this question has been asked properly. We cannot call this an absolute punishment or an absolute test. In our religion, such controversial issues are considered very serious, and we are not encouraged to dwell on them much. Because arguing over such issues is a waste of time. No definite answer can be found.

We servants are too weak to answer this question. It is Allah Who knows best. If we must give an answer to this question, then I consider this both a punishment and a trial. This is because the two are closely interrelated. The Qur'an says humans will be rewarded or punished according to their deeds. If Allah gives trials to His beloved servants, that is to test their endurance; He intends to purify them from sins by giving these trials to His sinful servants. If these servants pass these trials of Allah, if they can persevere no matter what calamities come to them, their past sins will be washed away. The reward of such servants will certainly be Paradise.



As human beings, inevitably, we will unknowingly commit all kinds of sins, and even our previous prophets could not avoid them. Because they were also humans. We, the Uyghurs, also have our sins and bad habits done knowingly. Another reason is that under Chinese rule, we face many restrictions and violations in terms of identity, religious beliefs, culture, and education. We are brainwashed by the erroneous ideas of Communist China, and we are left ignorant in terms of education.

By giving us those trials, Allah has exposed the wicked among us and separated the pious and good from the hypocrites. Those who pass this test will be closer to Allah, while those who do not pass this test will be further alienated from Allah. Some of us think of these episodes as punishment for the sins we have committed. But think about it. We also punish our children if they do not listen to us and do sinful things. What is the purpose of punishing them? Our goal is simply to make them understand what they did wrong, correctly recognize their errors, and not make the same mistake again and to be a good person. In fact, if we think deeper, the punishment of Allah is the same. May the punishment of Allah, correct our mistakes and repent our sins. He gave us a chance to get closer to Him. The Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) said: “Even though something as little as a thorn pricks one’s hand, that much suffering will wash away one’s sins.”

We Uyghurs have done so many unhealthy deeds; we have been deeply involved in arrogance, vanity, and greed; we have regarded wealth as higher than anything else. In short, we have committed acts that are contrary to the beliefs of our religion. Allah said He would test His servants through the things they cherish most. Perhaps He has tested us through our most cherished things. Maybe he has tested us to make us united as we were not able to unite. Thus, in order to pass this test, we need to stick to our religion, which is the rope of Allah. We need to do more of the good deeds that our religion commands. By doing so, we can renounce evil and harm and reform ourselves. We must continue to speak out for our brothers and sisters who are being persecuted in our country. Although the Chinese state is now very strong, Allah will help us as long as we do not betray Him. No tyrant has ever lasted very long in history. The punishment of Allah is severe.

### **Response Was Uncertain**

**Participant H:** I can't answer that question. My knowledge level is not enough to answer that. We cannot state it is definitely a punishment or a test. Allah knows the most correct answer. I think we should not get involved in such controversial issues, as Allah ordered us not to.

### **Participant Z:**

This cannot be seen definitely a punishment or a trial. In our religion, we do not go into such controversial issues. And we cannot judge that this should be such and such. Because only Allah knows the best and most correct answer. There are both good and bad people among us, just like other communities. We can consider this as a punishment for those human beings who do not believe in Allah and do evil deeds which are forbidden in our religion. However, for those who are pious, virtuous, well-behaved people, this calamity is not a punishment, but a trial.

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