

## HEALTHY PAIN, HEALTHY EVIL, AND HEALTHY SHAYTAN

By Thea Elijah

**Q: I wonder if you might offer further insight into the deeper dimensions of the question about the existence of pathology and darkness within the creation?**

I can only give you what I've got so far-- I guess that's all any of us can do.

One of the most profound teaching moments for me was with a young child in the tx room, who was coming to me for nightmares. She was asking many soul-searching questions about evil and demons, and wanted to know how a loving God could have created horrible demons. Something happened, one of those moments when it feels like the holy spirit was coming through to answer her through me, and I said, "God decided to create the universe by pushing the button marked EVERYTHING, because of the incomparable glory that is only possible in a universe that contains everything.

Everything means everything, including those demons. Without them, it wouldn't be everything-- for the sake of the glory that is only possible in a universe that contains EVERYTHING."

The child I was speaking to was completely satisfied by this, and I must say that it satisfied something in me too. Maybe you had to be there-- it's a simple little story, silly in a way, but something about it came out with a ring of truth that stopped our heart's asking, and satisfied.

So, here in Creation we have everything, and need to deal with that. Lovingly.

Another important moment for me in my considering of these questions came during a time when-- wow this stuff is so hard to talk about, mainly because I have no idea if the intensity of it can come across in an email. I was struggling with the question of pain, and why there was so much-- especially excruciating physical pain. Why did a loving God create us capable of such agony? It doesn't seem sensible-- why?

Around this time I got some kind of weird infected rash on my right thigh, which got worse and worse until my whole right thigh was swelled up huge and red, and the whole septic-looking thing was approaching my groin, at which point I figured I would either have to go to the ER and take lots of drugs, or maybe go septic and die. I let it get to this point because I'd spent many thousands of dollars and years of my life flying out to the Jaffe Institute to learn Sufi healing, and I was not going to let up on this until I'd found the pictures and the voices and cleared it myself. I'd done some really cool healings in the past-- ah the joys of arrogance-- and I was not going take some drugs and suppress the symptoms etc etc when I was sure that if I just spent enough time in prayer I would be able to clear this 'myself.'

I put a lot of time into it. I put a lot of prayer into it. I did all the things I usually did to do those super-cool healings, oooh-wah oooh-wah. NOTHING. I was getting nowhere, hearing nothing, seeing nothing, zero voice of Allah, zero pictures, and figuring all I needed was faith and I'd keep at it-- until it got to the point where I really had to confront that the situation was getting dangerous. So I went to a dermatologist who said, either end up in the ER in really big trouble by the end of the day or take these antibiotics and this cortisone NOW.

I took 'em. The antibiotics as far as I could tell did nothing, for better or worse, but the cortisone! Wow!!! I wallowed that first pill and within 15 minutes I felt like I had a direct line to Al-Alim. It was fantastic-- I've never had another experience like that-- and it lasted for the first three days of steroids. I felt like I could leap tall shaytans in a single bound-- I was SUPER SUFI. I really don't think it was delusional-- it felt like Allah was saying, why the heck didn't you come to me sooner? And I was saying, but I had no idea you'd be behind this door-- I had no idea that steroids could open the way to You! --and Allah was saying, Why not? I have many doors.

That was very humbling, and an incredible teaching in itself-- but during those three days of SUPER SUFI direct access, I was able to ask many questions and felt like the answers would just come pouring into me, beyond words, as direct knowing.

Oh man, I don't know if I can do this. It's going to come across so totally lame, and yet it was one of the most powerful spiritual experiences in my life.

I had just first taken the drugs, and I felt the surging power of my connection to Allah open up again and move me to go do noon prayer. As I did noon prayer, images and experiences of dying people with terrible wounds in great pain came into me, but I was experiencing it from Allah's point of view as well as the people's, and it was like coming into the experience from a different angle-- like the back of the woven cloth or the back of a bas-relief. Allah was pulling the souls out of this world, bringing them back home, and --- I have no idea how to get this across because I've never heard anyone speak about this before in words-- the aim was to get the whole soul out in one piece, fully intact, much as we used to try to get the whole walnut out of the shell in one piece when we were cracking nuts as kids. The closest I can come to explaining what was going on, in living and dying, was this need to 1) crack the nafs walnut shell around the soul, as though incarnation were kind of nafs encasement or padding, so that the soul could live, really live-- rather than just have an ongoing life-long nafs experience-- and then 2) at the end of life to get out the whole soul, the whole walnut, and leave all the nafs attachments behind-- leave everything behind-- and go back naked soul to Allah. I saw many people die, and actually experienced it from inside, and it was clear that the agony was a mercy because it made it so much easier to let go of this body and this world.

Viewed from the other end, the pain was not a big deal to the soul; it was a big deal to the body, but the soul was able to use the pain as a pushing-off point, a way of

establishing direction: pain in incarnation vs. clear easy shot back home.

What I experienced was a strange duality of love and pain dancing like yin and yang.

Love brings us into incarnation, and into bonding with creation-- bonding deeply with our own bodies, our family's bodies, our planet's bodies--- all of this "attachment" is love-based, and as such not an illness and not a pathology in its essence. It is how we suckle at life, how we are nourished and how we flourish in our incarnation. It is not a bad thing, and the solution is not to refuse to bond! Love as bonding and incarnating and tasting and being nourished is part of the health of living-- and then comes the kiss good-bye, also with love-- but a different kind of love. Both of these loves are about separating and bonding. We leave the Whole in order to incarnate, and must kiss the Wholeness good-bye and come into separation, and in the midst of this separation learn bonding and loving-into-union here in Creation, and then it happens again-- we need to separate from all that we have bonded into union with here in Creation, and return home to the Whole. In both birth and death, we are kissing good-bye and hello, bonding and separating from what we have experienced ourselves as "one" with.

Pain is an urging from bonding-love to kiss-goodbye love. It's the moment of the soul's eye changing its focus, changing its trajectory.

I remember when my son was born, like a good Sufi I wanted to teach him how to pray, how to close the door to the dunya (world) and look towards Allah, and he wasn't having any of it! He was in a state of having come from Allah, and he knew all about that-- but look at *this* world! Woweee! Check it out! His face was pressed right into the bowl of Life Food, and he wanted more, and he wanted to explore. I realized, OK, he's facing into the world that I'm in the process of leaving, and we cross paths. It's a natural thing. I'm watching him as he slowly begins to develop an ability to put down the world and go inward towards Allah, and it is almost entirely as a result of pain and disappointment-- NOT AS A RETREAT from this world! Not as a resignation or a shutting down! More, it is the discovery of a whole new dimension he would not have found without bumping his nose pretty hard on something.

There seems to be a life-long journey of balance between facing the dunya and facing Allah, beginning with being more world-facing and ending, hopefully, with a good clean shot home with a whole-heartedly kiss-goodbye, the soul like a walnut coming uncrushed-but-whole out of its life-shell to return intact. Pain seems to be instrumental, all through our lives, in helping us turn towards Allah by any name. Ow. This hurts: OK, let go! Love in the other way, the way of blessing and returning to greater blessing!

Pain can get very extreme when we are having a hard time, time after time, with transitioning between the bonding-love and the kiss-goodbye love. The pain sometimes has to get extreme, to get our attention. Once it gets our attention, we can work to make it stop, or we can work to fulfill its purpose. What am I being shown here? Where does

my soul need to shift its grip-- to let go of a bond for the sake of a greater unity, or turn a trajectory so that I am not only facing the dunya but also heading home?

I think that my Perennial Medicine audio lecture, in the section on the 4 levels or kinds of healing, talks about this.... Some healing is to help us more fully and truly incarnate. Some is just the opposite-- helping us die before we die, and head home now.

That's the rudiments of my understand, so far, about the purpose of pain as a mercy from a loving God. Evil is a whole other story-- much pain has nothing to do with evil. We just don't like it-- we'd prefer for it to stop and let us continue with the agenda of our trajectory or our attachment. We get mad and call the pain, or the source of pain, evil--- but it's just not what we want, and it hurts a lot. Because most of us do not have much skill at healthy suffering, all sorts of illness can come up in its wake. To be able to feel really awful and hurt a lot and truly suffer without "going bad" and turning to the dark side is a HUGE aspect of spiritual life and spiritual practice. How much can you hurt or suffer before you become rather a nasty character? We tend to use pain as a justification of evil in ourselves. The thing or person causing the pain must be evil-- let's fight it! Kill it! Stop it! By any means necessary! I am justified in taking any measures because I am fighting evil! How do I know it is evil? Because it hurts ME! Hurts me = bad bad bad!

Big problem here. See my cancer lectures for a fuller sense of this dynamic.

Any exploration of the healthy and loving role of evil, in my opinion, MUST begin with the clarification of the difference between evil vs. painful. Pain is a signal to love differently-- to keep loving, but to shift. Most of what we call "evil" is our own pathological response to pain's message. No discussion of healthy evil makes any sense if we are confusing pain with evil. This is so culturally rampant that it really cannot be overstated.

The oil spill is a good example-- it causes us pain, and many people's first response to this pain is to vilify BP, and focus a great deal of time and energy on how bad they are and what they did wrong. Instead we can take the pain as a signal to shift our attention from loving and living as we were, or as we want things to be, and instead let it go and focus on how things are now-- and make our loving response. This response might include some shift in our relationship with BP, which might include some very purposeful communication, but this would be more in the nature of rectification than vilification. In general, the two do not effectively go together. Once we vilify someone, they are much more resistant to any form of communication from us. A clear steady love in action is better for our health and the health of the planet, and that may include some hard work and some new awareness and some big changes.

Going forward from here:

I remember so many things that I was told by teachers at various points along the way, and how I considered them easy bullshit that might help the teacher sleep better at night, but to me it was just a load of crap and I didn't believe a word of it. Now, a decade later, I sheepishly must admit that due to actual personal experiences I've come to believe a lot of things that I used to consider a load of crap. I don't think there's anything I can do except admit that, and let anyone who disagrees with me know that I don't blame you. It does sound rather far fetched. I agree. I've just also shifted to a place where experientially it makes sense to me. The journey continues. Who knows what you or I will be experiencing in another ten years. As I said at the beginning, I'm just giving you what I've got so far.

I've come to believe that the shaytan is a mercy and a tool of tremendous spiritual benefit WHEN WE ARE IN HEALTHY RELATIONSHIP with the shaytan. When we are not in healthy relationship with the shaytan, it's like anything else with which we are not in healthy relationship--- sweet desserts or making money or sex or sports or anything else which can hold our attention, and then distort our attention so that we lose our connection with Allah. Sweet desserts and making money and sex and sports are all wonderful blessings in the life and consciousness of a person who is in alignment, and potentially havoc-wreaking in the life of someone who is not in alignment, and thus inevitably not in healthy relationship with these other focuses of attention. It is our attention to the Unity, by the name of Allah or any other name we want to give it-- the Heart, the Emperor's clear reception of Heaven, the radiant void, Source---- that allows us to focus on the particularities of our lives without losing the sense of proportion given by a primary attention to "the greater scheme of things," again by any name. I say Allah, but that is a mere technicality.

Heck, we could come into a perverted relationship with soap. Or old toothpaste boxes. They could become a "source of illness" for us. But is the problem with these things, or with our lack of alignment leading to our being in unhealthy relationship with them?

Let me talk about what the shaytan is good for. Evil makes "towards Allah" a.k.a "good" very clear. Most of the time, honestly, we float along in nafs-land, a sort of ego playground in which there really is no good or evil, but simply a wandering around in a state of personal preference. We want what we want, generally quite strongly. It's hard to let go of what we want, and instead turn to Allah and feel what is good-- which may be different, at first, than what we want. What we want feels "good," but it is not The Good. The contrast is not stark enough to be clear and help us to let go.

The most exciting thing about learning to hear clearly the voice of the nafs (self), the voice of Allah, and the voice of the shaytan is that the shaytan hold such a clear polarity

of not-towards-the-unity. The nafs can keep you wandering around in the desert for 40 years-- the shaytan will lead you directly away from the Promised Land. That's so clear, so helpful, IF we know what we are hearing! At the worst times of my life, when I was so downtrodden inside that I could not hear the voice of Allah in my heart at all and I was living in a hell of really mean and nasty shaytan voices, I employed a practice which I called "Walking Backward to Allah." Anything the shaytan told me to do, I would do the exact opposite. If the shaytan said, "Don't go to that group; everyone there will think you are a stupid dork and you'll feel lonelier than ever," I'd go. If the shaytan said, "Go out tonight, don't stay home alone-- you'll feel lonely and awful," I'd stay home and pray or be with myself. It ended up being great opposite-advice.

The role of the shaytan is to make the path to hell very clear. The role of the shaytan is to tell us exactly what to do, what to think, and what attitudes to adopt in order to take the quickest road into separation from our own hearts. THAT IS VERY GOOD TO KNOW, wouldn't you say?

Following the voice of the shaytan is not healthy, is not a good idea. Noticing the voice of the shaytan is tremendously clarifying, especially in the early days of spiritual practice when the voice of Allah is not yet very clear. The shaytan can help us get very clear on what is NOT true and NOT a good idea in our lives and in ourselves very very fast. How long did it take me to hear the voice of Allah clearly? Years, and even so it tends to be intermittent due to my own lack of constancy in listening. How long did it take to learn to hear the voice of the shaytan clearly? One 15 minute lesson at Sufi school, and suddenly I realized I'd been hearing it all my life and thought it was "the truth about me" complete with bad movie music.

Following the shaytan's voice is not helpful. Having the shaytan in your life as a clear voice is a fabulous cut-to-the-chase about what isn't Allah.

The shaytan does great detective work, too. What the shaytan chooses to whisper to us, what the shaytan chooses to use as a torture device, usually tells us exactly where in our nafs we are not listening to Allah, and need healing. In myself and in the tx room, I follow the shaytan straight to where the wound is. That's where we go to pray/work.

While I do not in any way espouse or bless the destruction that comes about from *following* the shaytan, I do understand the benevolence of the existence of the shaytan. I'm not saying it is healthy when it is totally blindly out of hand and run amok in people's minds and hearts. That is not healthy shaytan.

I'd like to emphasize, too, the important of making the distinction between a nafs voice and a shaytan voice.

Your question came from the mind-- and the mind is part of the nafs-- and so sometimes mental healing is needed-- an answer that illumines and opens the connection between heart-knowing and mind-knowing, rather than "proving" anything intellectually. This is different than a shaytan question, which is not worth answering. Yours felt to me to be a sincere calling from the nafs mind, saying hey I am truly seeking Allah and I could use more light in here....

The mind is seeking. It needs to be taught HOW to seek-- not alone, but in partnership with the heart, perceiving one light.

I'll throw in here a copy of an excerpt from my journal of my experience as a Sufi student--- my first time learning about the shaytan:

In the afternoon we learned how to tell the difference between the voice of God, the voice of the Nafs (personality/Ego) and the voice of the Shaytan (the Devil). It was incredible. I don't think I will ever be the same. I feel like I want to do that exercise over and over; I think I want to go home and teach all my friends how to tell who is speaking, the voice of God, the voice of the Nafs, or the voice of the Shaytan. We have no idea; there are all these voices in us all the time, and we don't even realize that often they are not really OUR voices. The Shaytan tells me I am afraid. When I ask God, God says, "You are not afraid." NOT: Don't be afraid. It's a simple statement; I'm not afraid. The Shaytan tries to make me think I am afraid by whispering into my heart. A million voices a day, some from my ego, some from my soul, some from my emotions, some from my mind, some from Allah, and some from the Shaytan. Now that I know the difference I don't think I can ever be the same. I must teach this to my clients if I possibly can. Better teach my friends first.

Ginny, who is like a Brillo Pad of God, very brittle and mental and hard, said "I feel like I'm in some fundamentalist church; what is this crap about the Devil? Give me a break!" So Ibrahim had her come up to do yet another demo so she could feel it for herself. He had her stream of consciousness until he said, "OK that's an important voice; let's work with that one." It's funny, he didn't stop her when she was telling him to go to hell or to fuck himself; during that part he just sat and loved her like a father loves a 5 year old child who says "I won't take a bath! I hate you!" He stopped her when she said, "It's not safe to trust anyone who says that they hear the voice of God." He had her trace where that voice was coming from. Ginny is actually a fairly accomplished energy worker already; she's ahead of us all in many ways. She said, "It's entering my heart but it's coming from behind me."

He asked, "Follow the voice back to the face that is speaking. Look at the face; what does the face look like?"

She said, "I don't want to tell you this, but OK, it's a dark black face."

Ibrahim asked, "What expression is on the face?"

“Smiling,” she said.

“What does it want?”

She said, “I don’t want to give this to you, either. It wants my soul.”

The whole room is frozen by now. Ibrahim is easy and loving as ever, and says, “OK, so it wants your soul. What makes that attractive to you? Ask it, why should you give it your soul?”

She said, “It will take away all my pain.”

“That’s a pretty good sounding deal,” said Ibrahim; “no pain- except, also, no soul. It’s not a good deal; this voice is not your friend.”

Ginny said, “It’s my protector.”

Ibrahim said, “It wants your soul. What kind of protection is that?”

She said, “It’s protection from pain.”

Ibrahim said, “When the Shaytan takes a soul, it’s true that at first there is no pain, but it’s not replaced by joy; it’s replaced by numbness. Then, later on, your soul is taken into torment. The Shaytan doesn’t mention that kind of pain; it’s not on the human level. It will take away your human pain and replace it with first numbness, and then soul torment. This voice is not your friend. Do not listen to this voice.”

She sat there for a while with a look on her face that I am beginning to recognize; I’ve seen it on a lot of faces over the past week and a half, and I’ve felt it on my own face.

It’s the stubborn face of someone who won’t give in, not because they disagree, but because their ego can’t bear to give in. Ibrahim just nodded and sent her back to her seat.

We did an exercise to help us go through our inner voices and pick out which ones were from our ego, our mind, our Inner Primitive, or the Shaytan, and we learned the rudiments of invoking Allah and being able to tell if we were getting a clear message or if we were getting interference, and if so from where. For the most part, it was SO EASY that it was shocking. I’m told that this is because of our relatively low level of spiritual development. The Shaytan doesn’t have to work too hard; we hear inner voices and we let ourselves be influenced by them blindly without a single thought as to who or what is speaking. I found myself loaded with voices that I now know are voices of the Shaytan. Mostly they tell me what a stupid slut I am, and how I’m never going to amount to anything but a more and more grandiose charlatan. NOW I KNOW THAT IS THE DEVIL SPEAKING, why the hell should I listen? If it’s the voice of the Shaytan, it’s automatically not a good idea to believe it.

I want to teach this to my clients. WHO IS SPEAKING? If it’s the voice of the Shaytan, we shouldn’t listen. PERIOD. No stopping even to argue; it’s the voice of the Shaytan, it is not your friend. If it’s part of the ego, it may be worth “working through the issues.” If it’s the Shaytan, it’s not amenable to psychotechniques. Just bring in God; help the person to recognize the voice of God instead. Again, at this level, it’s SO

OBVIOUS it's ridiculous.

Also, at this level, the voice of the Shaytan is a lot more clear and straightforward than the voice of Allah. I'm told that as time goes on, it gets less and less tricky to hear the voice of God clearly, but more and more tricky to catch the voice of the Shaytan. It whispers more and more softly.

It was amazing to realize how much of my time I spend listening to the voice of the Shaytan, and usually through my spine. That's where it comes in mostly. Hah! Things are going to be different now. The Shaytan's favorite trick for me is to make me think I'm afraid when I'm not afraid. Allah Allah Allah. What an amazing day it's been. And in an hour and a half we have an evening class. Whew.

love

Maryam Thea Elijah