

# “Resistance to Evil: Perspectives of Faith”

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## Introduction

We are in a place of resistance. That is, “The path of resistance” is our Soul Matters theme for the month of April. Resistance strikes me as a worthwhile lens to apply to the concept of evil, which I’ve been exploring lately from various angles. Today I want to look at evil--and resistance to evil--from a variety of faith perspectives. So, I’ve brought you some views based on six major world religions.

They say the devil is in the details. Sorry. Today I bring simple descriptions of complex theologies. My research comes from our Spirit Play religious education curriculum and from a BBC bitesize website on evil. If you feel resistant to that, let’s just see what we’ve got to work with.

## Judaism

Let’s begin this exploration with the major monotheistic religions, starting with the oldest, Judaism.<sup>1</sup>

From Spirit Play:

Jews believe that there is a single God who not only created the universe, but with whom every Jew can have an individual and personal relationship.<sup>2</sup>

Where does evil come from? BBC bitesize tells us:

Many Jews believe that evil originates from the first sin of Adam and Eve. The serpent tempted Eve to eat from the Tree of Knowledge against God’s wishes. Evil then became a part of them and they no longer needed an external temptation to sin. Humans suffered because they were disobedient and so became separated from God.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Judaism. -- From Spirit Play--Source Stories/World Religions/Religious Card Material.

<https://docs.google.com/document/d/10M0jV4zYzBO-xr3lR6nOXOSYgXgJaNIikjo1vbTh85E/edit>

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Good, evil and suffering -- BBC bitesize <https://www.bbc.co.uk/bitesize/guides/zqjqrwx/revision/1>

Then there's Satan. All three of the Abrahamic religions--Judaism, Christianity, and Islam--have a concept of Satan, but with nuanced understandings. According to BBC:

Some Jews believe that Satan is not a separate being. For them, Satan is a tendency existing in every human being which tempts them to do wrong.<sup>4</sup>

From Wikipedia: Although people are born sinless, each is born with both an evil inclination and a good one. In Jewish thought, the inclination toward evil is considered normal.<sup>5</sup>

Quoting BBC:

Most Jews believe that everything God does is for good. From a human perspective, some actions might seem evil, but they trust that whatever happens on Earth is ultimately according to God's plan, which is good.<sup>6</sup> Jews believe that they should accept both good and bad in their lives, as both are God-given and therefore have a purpose.<sup>7</sup> [end quote]

If evil is accepted as a part of life, this might seem to suggest that in this view, there is no big resistance to evil. In Deuteronomy 30:15-19, God says:

See! Today I have set before you [a free choice] between life and good [on one side] and death and evil [on the other]...

Yes, there is free will, but there are also consequences. Jews believe that they will be punished for committing evil. Conversely, when they resist temptation, they will be rewarded with protection and prosperity.<sup>8</sup>

The High Holy Days offer ways of resisting evil in ourselves. Rosh Hashanah, the Jewish New Year, begins with ten days of self examination and repentance.<sup>9</sup> On the final day, Yom Kippur, Jews pray for forgiveness and resolve to behave better in the future.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Wikipedia -- from a series on Jews and Judaism. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jewish\\_views\\_on\\_sin](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jewish_views_on_sin)

<sup>6</sup> Good, evil and suffering -- BBC bitesize <https://www.bbc.co.uk/bitesize/guides/zqjqrwx/revision/1>

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Judaism. -- From Spirit Play--Source Stories/World Religions/Religious Card Material.

<https://docs.google.com/document/d/10M0jV4zYzBO-xr3lR6nOXOSYgXgJaNIkjo1vbTh85E/edit>

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

So, Judaism encourages us to accept evil--including the evil inclination in ourselves--as a natural part of life. At the same time, we are encouraged to work on our moral improvement--to resist temptation and resist committing evil.

## Christianity

Next in the lineage of the monotheistic tradition is Christianity. From Spirit Play: Christians believe that Jesus Christ was the Son of God and that God sent his Son to earth to save humanity from the consequences of its sins.<sup>11</sup>

As in Judaism, the origins of evil in Christianity are in the Garden of Eden, known as 'the fall'.<sup>12</sup> Some Christian theologies teach original sin--the view that all humans are born with a tendency towards evil.

Christianity teaches free will. As BBC bitesize says,

Although God made a world **and it was good**, it is up to humans whether they choose to do good or bad deeds.<sup>13</sup>

Many Christians believe that God is the power for good, and Satan (or the Devil) is the power for evil.<sup>14</sup> BBC explains that

Satan is traditionally thought to have been an **archangel** who disobeyed God and so was thrown out of heaven.<sup>15</sup>

So, what are Christians expected to do in the face of evil?

Following Jesus' example, Christians should take action to **help** those who are suffering.<sup>16</sup> Jesus calls his followers to provide for those in need.

**Praying** is another Christian response to evil. Praying for God to remove the causes of evil. Praying for God to help us bear suffering caused by evil.<sup>17</sup> Either way, it's not resisting evil but seeking help from God.

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<sup>11</sup> Christianity -- From Spirit Play--Source Stories/World Religions/Religious Card Material. <https://docs.google.com/document/d/1rzU1D0tv0eF8ZxN70wsB9H8l8FEQQBNCdGSFbmUS3ho/edit>

<sup>12</sup> Good, evil and suffering -- BBC bitesize <https://www.bbc.co.uk/bitesize/guides/zct68mn/revision/2>

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> Good, evil and suffering -- BBC bitesize <https://www.bbc.co.uk/bitesize/guides/zct68mn/revision/5>

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

If Christians view themselves as sinners by nature, perhaps they believe that “resistance is futile.” Nonetheless, they are expected to strive to be good. When it comes to evil within oneself, the Lord’s Prayer asks God to “Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.” Christians are also encouraged to rely on the grace of God. “Forgive us our sins, as we forgive those who sin against us.” The ultimate grace? It’s the ultimate non-resistance: Jesus sacrificing his own life as payment for the sins of all humanity.

## Islam

Next in the lineage of the Abrahamic religions is Islam. The Arabic term *islam* means “surrender.”<sup>18</sup> A Muslim, a follower of Islam, is one who surrenders to the will of God.<sup>19</sup>

Where does evil come from? BBC bitesize says:

The Qur'an teaches that evil originates from the refusal of Shaytan (Satan/the Devil) to bow down to Adam when ordered to by Allah. Shaytan is also called Iblis. For his disobedience, Iblis was cast out of Heaven by Allah. He vowed that in revenge he would spend eternity trying to tempt humans to do evil.<sup>20</sup>

In *The Farewell Speech of the Prophet*, Muhammad said:

Beware of Shaytan, he is desperate to divert you from the worship of Allah, so beware of him in matters of religion.<sup>21</sup>

But people have skills for resisting Shaytan. Quoting BBC bitesize:

Islam teaches that a knowledge of right and wrong is intrinsic to human nature. Muslim teachings say that individuals should know, without having to be informed, which actions are evil and will contribute to the suffering of

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<sup>18</sup> Islam - Britannica <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Islam>

<sup>19</sup> Islam - <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Islam>

<sup>20</sup> The problem of evil and suffering -- BBC bitesize <https://www.bbc.co.uk/bitesize/guides/zhsjsw/revision/6>

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

others, and which actions are good. This inner sense of right and wrong is called *fitrah*.<sup>22</sup>

In the Islamic view, it is up to us humans to be on the lookout--to resist temptation and resist evil based on what one knows is right.

## Hinduism

As we continue our exploration, let's venture further eastward--to the world's oldest existing religion, Hinduism.

According to Spirit Play:

Hindus believe that the soul passes through a cycle of successive lives, and its next incarnation is always dependent on how the previous life was lived.<sup>23</sup>

BBC bitesize writes that the sacred Hindu text, the Bhagavad Gita, [quote] encourages readers to 'detach from the world' and appreciate that everything is just part of an eternal cycle. The role of humans is to do as little harm and as much good as possible so that they may escape this cycle.<sup>24</sup> [end of that quote]

In Hinduism, what is evil? BBC says,

“It is the state when good is not present or [is] ignored.”

It also refers to the necessary 'bad' things required for cosmic balance.<sup>25</sup>

Evil is considered a natural part of life because of Karma, which BBC explains simply:

Each time a person does something, it has an effect.

Good actions have good effects, bad actions have bad effects.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> Hinduism (Sanātana Dharma). -- From Spirit Play--Source Stories/World Religions/Religious Card Material.

<sup>24</sup> Good, evil and suffering -- BBC bitesize <https://www.bbc.co.uk/bitesize/guides/zxt7cj6/revision/1>

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

Do you picture Karma as payback? Well, in Hinduism, God does not impose evil on people.<sup>27</sup> It's not about 'deserving' suffering. Suffering is an opportunity to learn from our mistakes.<sup>28</sup>

Quoting Spirit Play again:

Through pure acts, knowledge and devotion, you can reincarnate to a higher level. The opposite achieves the contrary result.<sup>29</sup>

So, to create good Karma, it's important to resist doing evil--resisting evil in ourselves.

What about resisting evil "out there"?

Are we off the hook because karma will take care of it? Not necessarily!

To quote BBC again:

Those who deliberately hurt others or harm the Earth will face **karmic** consequences, but it is the duty of everyone else to both challenge such people and help them to 'see the light'.<sup>30</sup>

Furthermore, Mahatma Gandhi said, "...non-cooperation with evil is as much a duty as is cooperation with good."<sup>31</sup>

Hmm... challenging people who do evil... non-cooperation with evil. Sounds like "resistance."

## **Buddhism**

Let's turn now to Buddhism, which has many parallels to Hinduism--such as belief in reincarnation--as well as key differences. One big distinction is that "Buddhists do not believe in a personal creator God."<sup>32</sup>

Also, in Buddhism there is no soul. Instead, what carries on to the next life is a person's life force, called **Karma**. In Buddhism, good or bad actions determine where one will be reborn in the next life--in human form, as an animal, or into a

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<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

<sup>29</sup> Hinduism (Sanātana Dharma). -- From Spirit Play--Source Stories/World Religions/Religious Card Material.

<sup>30</sup> Good, evil and suffering -- BBC bitesize <https://www.bbc.co.uk/bitesize/guides/zxt7cj6/revision/4>

<sup>31</sup> Good, evil and suffering -- BBC bitesize <https://www.bbc.co.uk/bitesize/guides/zg7297h/revision/2>

<sup>32</sup> Buddhism -- From Spirit Play--Source Stories/World Religions/Religious Card Material.

<https://docs.google.com/document/d/1UKI4g1M5aQgGMHLcws7sCIhFbhxFmDtJ2fqoaxsku4A/edit>

hell realm.<sup>33</sup> In Buddhism, the way to break out of the cycle of reincarnation is by reaching Enlightenment, or Nirvana--a state of pure peace, achieved through meditation and following the teachings of the Buddha.<sup>34</sup>

To understand how evil operates according to Buddhism, let's turn to BBC bitesize:

Buddhists do not believe that human beings are evil.<sup>35</sup>

[They do] believe that the negative actions and beliefs of human beings give rise to evil.<sup>36</sup> The basic causes of suffering [or evil] are known as the Three Poisons: greed, ignorance and hatred. These three things stop Buddhists from reaching enlightenment.<sup>37</sup>

A key feature of Buddhist practice is avoiding extremes. One should not have or do too much, nor too little. This is called the 'Middle Way'.<sup>38</sup>

Rather than resistance to evil, Buddhism focuses us on good as an antidote to evil. From The Dhammapada, a collection of sayings by the Buddha:

Let us overcome violence by gentleness; let us overcome evil by good;  
Let us overcome the miserly by liberality; let us overcome the liar by truth.

## Sikhism

For our final stop on this evil journey, let's visit one of the youngest religions, Sikhism, based on the teachings of the Ten Sikh Gurus. BBC bitesize describes the faith as follows:

“Sikhs believe in one God who guides and protects them.

They believe everyone is equal before God.

Sikhs believe that your actions are important and you should lead a good life.”

--including honesty and hard work, generosity, and service.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> Good, evil and suffering -- BBC bitesize <https://www.bbc.co.uk/bitesize/guides/zg7297h/revision/3>

<sup>34</sup> Buddhism -- Spirit Play

<sup>35</sup> The Buddha and his teachings -- BBC bitesize <https://www.bbc.co.uk/bitesize/guides/zj4g4qt/revision/4>

<sup>36</sup> Good, evil and suffering -- BBC bitesize <https://www.bbc.co.uk/bitesize/guides/zg7297h/revision/2>

<sup>37</sup> The Buddha and his teachings -- BBC bitesize <https://www.bbc.co.uk/bitesize/guides/zj4g4qt/revision/4>

<sup>38</sup> Buddhism -- Spirit Play

<sup>39</sup> What is Sikhism? -- BBC bitesize <https://www.bbc.co.uk/bitesize/topics/zsjpyrd/articles/zkjpkmn>

As we've heard in other faiths, Sikhism teaches both free will and consequences.

“evil cannot be removed from the world by God as otherwise God would not be allowing humans true free will.”<sup>40</sup>

In the Sikh faith, according to BBC, “God does not inflict suffering on human beings directly.”<sup>41</sup> However, God allows suffering as a test of courage and faith.<sup>42</sup>

Sikhism teaches that the main cause of evil is self-centredness, or Haumai.<sup>43</sup>

Haumai has five basic elements:

pride  
lust  
greed  
ego  
anger

So, what about resistance to evil? Well, some degree of these five emotions is considered important in living a fulfilling life. However, succumbing to them creates a separation from God and causes suffering.<sup>44</sup> Self-restraint and pure thoughts are key values.<sup>45</sup> The final Sikh Guru, Granth Sahib, tells us that

“Those who have virtue as their treasure destroy *haumai*”.<sup>46</sup>

So, yes. Virtue. Restraint. Resistance.

## Conclusion

So, looking across the board, here: Where do you most align on resistance to evil?

Do you...

- accept evil as normal, yet hold yourself accountable, like a Jew?
- pray, help, and seek God's grace, like a Christian?
- stay vigilant and follow your inner sense of right and wrong, like a Muslim?

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<sup>40</sup> Good, evil and suffering -- BBC bitesize <https://www.bbc.co.uk/bitesize/guides/z24ky4j/revision/1>

<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

<sup>45</sup> Sikhism-- From Spirit Play--Source Stories/World Religions/Religious Card Material.

[https://docs.google.com/document/d/19Kiu08fgrkRHesLWs0k-6mSdyLxGz4\\_HjeOJhMdtgv0/edit#heading=h.gjdgxs](https://docs.google.com/document/d/19Kiu08fgrkRHesLWs0k-6mSdyLxGz4_HjeOJhMdtgv0/edit#heading=h.gjdgxs)

<sup>46</sup> <https://psyche.co/ideas/sikh-ethics-sees-self-centredness-as-the-source-of-human-evil>



- challenge evil and refuse to cooperate with it, like a Hindu?
- avoid extremes and overcome evil with good, like a Buddhist?
- practice self-restraint and serve others, like a Sikh?

Or do you think of evil (and resistance to evil) entirely differently--like a Unitarian Universalist?

How could I resist?

May it be so. And Amen.