



Question:

What are the boundaries concerning the abilities and powers of shaytan and jinn?

Furthermore, to what extent can they cause problems and difficulties for humans?

Answer:

The words shaytan and jinn have been mentioned numerous times in the Quran; to the degree that one of the chapters that have been revealed is named after jinn.

Shaytan is a general name given to any malignant being which misguides and deviates, be it human or otherwise. Iblis is the name of a particular shaytan who deceived Adam (as) and is currently among mankind along with his army of followers.

The word "jinn" literally means "concealed" and "hidden". The name is given to a being that has been created from fire and is comprised of a soul and a physical body. This being is a mukallaf, and is thus responsible for its actions. As a result, jinn can either be a mu'min, kafir, etc.

The view that some people hold regarding jinn is often overstated through imagination, exaggerated stories and false accounts. On the other hand, some people completely deny the existence of jinn. They consider any claims of their existence, even those mentioned in true historical accounts, as being nothing more than mythological superstition.

From Islamic narrations and verses, we understand jinn as being powerful creatures. An example of this can be seen in verse 39 of Surah Naml in the Holy Quran. In this verse, a jinn by the name of "Ifrit" makes a claim of power, which Prophet Sulaiman in turn does not deny. It should be noted, however, that the reality of such accounts does not legitimize the claims of people who believe that jinn are capable of performing any action they desire, and also doesn't legitimize some shirk-tainted movements and beliefs regarding jinns (that might believe in them being deities and the like). The reason behind all of this being that nothing can act independently without the permission of God. As a result, the influence of shaytan can only affect those who have left the bounds of tawhid and servitude of God. In the words of Iblis himself "I lack dominance over the sincere servants of God" {فَيَعِزُّنَكَ لَأَعُوذُ بِهِمْ أَجْمَعِينَ؛ [إِلَّا عِبَادَكَ مِنْهُمْ الْمُخْلِصِينَ}

[1]The power that shaytan has over mankind is limited to tempting and persuading, meaning that a human's free will and discretion is never affected.

As a result, shaytan's influence on human beings is limited to temptation, and in no way deprives one of free will. Succumbing to one's nafs (desires) opens a door for shaytan to deeply influence humans, which will over time trap one in a path of deviation and corruption. The only thing that provides shelter from such deviance and temptation is awareness and submission to God. In the words of the Almighty: "Indeed as for My servants you do not have any authority over them". [2]

Detailed Answer

To begin with, we will examine the concept of shaytan and jinn and then discuss their limits of influence.

The meanings of the words shaytan and jinn:

“Shaytan” literally means “one who has disobeyed” or “one who has distanced (himself)”.

This word has been used in the Holy Quran seventy-one times in the singular form and eighteen times in the plural form of shayatin.

Literal definition:

In the opinions of Tabarsi, Ragheb, Ibn Athir, and others, the letter nun (ن) in the word shaytan (شيطان) is a root letter. The word itself is derived from the base of shatana/yashtano (شطن / يشطن). Shatana (شطن) literally means “to distance”; therefore the word shaytan is defined as “one who has distanced himself from good”. [3] From verses of the Quran and narrations, we can determine that shaytan is a jinn. [4]

It should be noted that the word shaytan is a general noun, while the name “Iblis” is a proper noun. In other words, shaytan is a general name given to any malignant being which misguides and deviates, be it human or otherwise. Iblis is the name of a particular shaytan who deceived Adam (as) and is currently lurking among mankind along with his army of followers. [5] Sometimes, Iblis is referred to as “The Shaytan” or just plain “Shaytan”.

The word jinn:

This word has been mentioned in the Holy Quran twenty-two times. The word jinn literally means “concealed” and “hidden”; and the being it refers to is one created from fire [6] or smoke-less flame [7]. From what is mentioned in the Quran, jinn are described as rational beings capable of free will, whose natural makeup generally prevents them from being perceived through human senses. Like humans, they are mukallaf and thus responsible for their actions and conduct. They can choose whether or not to obey or sin, be mumins (believers) or mushriks (polytheists), etc. [8]

Mulla Sadra describes the nature of jinn in this manner: “Jinn are beings that exist in a certain form within this world, and in another form within the unseen world (ghaib). [Their existence in this world is not physical in the general sense]. Rather, their existence is can be described as insubstantial or almost immaterial, with a corresponding soul and nafs that has been granted to them by the Almighty. It is possible that the reason behind a jinn’s ability to appear and disappear is as a result of this delicate physical makeup. Their makeup is similar to that of air, and thus they are capable of expanding and compressing rapidly. For example, when air and the vapor within it are compressed, it takes on the form of clouds, and when it

expands it takes on the form of regular air.” [9] Like humans, jinn are composed of a body (although very delicate and intangible to us), soul, and rational intelligence capable of free will. Some of them are males, while others are females. They have the ability to reproduce and are responsible for their actions and deeds. Like humans, in their lives they face matters such as life and death, iman and kufr, etc.

The connection between jinn and shaytan:

The word shaytan is an adjective, which is commonly used to describe something “evil” or “malignant”. In the Holy Quran, the word shaytan has been used in this sense and refers to a being whom “evil” has taken root in. However, sometimes it is used specifically in reference to Iblis. In the Quran itself, it is affirmed that a shaytan could be either human or jinn. [10]

Amongst the shayatin and jinn, there is one especially malevolent being by the name of Iblis, to whom the Quran makes many references. For example, in one reference, it is confirmed that Iblis is a being from the species of jinn. [11]

The limits shaytan’s influence:

The dualistic religion of ancient Iran believed in a being by the name of Ahriman as being the exclusive creator of all bad and evil. They believed that any “bad” being such as snakes, scorpions, etc. was a product of this ultimate creator of evil. It is possible that some believe the shaytan that is presented in Islam and the Quran to be a parallel example of Ahriman. However, this concept is completely incorrect, as jinn and shaytan play no role in creation. The creator of all things is God; meaning that nobody else is capable of participating in the act of creation. In regards to these false beliefs and their falsehood and in rejection to them, the Quran has stated: “And they make the jinn associates with Allah, while He created them, and they falsely attribute to Him sons and daughters without knowledge; glory be to Him, and highly exalted is He above what they ascribe (to Him).” [12] The influence of shayatin is limited to tempting the heart, inviting one to transgression [13], and attempting to display what is bad in a good way and vice versa. Besides this, they are incapable of any other influence, and cannot force anyone to commit wrongdoings against their will. This is what the Holy Quran means when it speaks of the actions and influence of shaytan on mankind. [14]

This having been said, both angels and jinn have been created with a given amount of strength and have the ability to reveal themselves before humans. In the case of angels, however, their appearance before humans is not limited to those who are on the verge of death. For example, when a person utters the name of “Allah” with sincerity and belief, the angels descend upon that individual. [15] Similarly, jinn have also been given a certain level of power. For example, they are capable of performing extraordinary acts at very high

speeds. While jinns are relatively weak mentally, they are physically very powerful. They are capable of moving heavy objects in the least amount of time possible. Their level of mental understanding is not rational or strong, but rather imaginative and unrealistic. Like humans, their makeup has been described in the Holy Quran as being physical. In the story of Prophet Sulaiman (as), when a jinn by the name of Ifrit claimed that he could bring the throne of Bilqays (who was the Queen and ruler of the kingdom of Saba') to the Prophet before he could rise from his seat [16], the Prophet did not deny his claim (which shows such a claim was true). Even though it is not mentioned in the Quran that he (Ifrit) followed through on his claim, it does not disprove his ability to perform the task. [17] The jinn can also do other things like listen to the Quran when it is recited and other things that can be found in the Quran.

Shaytan's method of influence:

Shaytan has different methods of attacking mankind from different directions. "Then I will certainly come to them from before them and from behind them, and from their right-hand side and from their left-hand side". [18] (Of course this verse is metaphoric, and is trying to say that he will not stop at anything and will try everything possible for the deviance of mankind).

The most significant form of influence shaytan has after gaining proximity to a person is the effect that he has on the thought and imagination of that individual. [19] He conceals his attack in a myriad of different forms, of which a few will be mentioned here:

1) Sometimes Shaytan/Iblis influences a person through their obedience and religiosity. He tries to make a person perform their religious duties against that which God has prescribed, but rather in accordance to their own whims and desires. In reality, humans are the servants of God and all actions should be performed in concord with His divine revelation.

2) Other times, shaytan attempts to influence one's thought process and intellect by plaguing a person's judgment. This results in an individual accepting false views and ideologies as opposed to what has been divinely inspired.

3) Shaytan also attempts to deviate one through means of corrupting an individual's shuhud. Shuhud is a means in which an individual reaches levels of spirituality which allows him to understand worldly and divine matters without the use of an intermediary or medium (such as words, reasoning, arguments, etc., rather, he sees the truth instead of it being proven to him). Shaytan attempts to skew and distort the truth of matters in hopes of conveying a false image of the truth and reality for that individual. Thus, the chain of Shaytan's effect would be as follows: First, the perception of one's shuhud is corrupted. Second, that individual's

thought process is incorrectly altered. Third, the actions and deeds of that person are no longer in accordance to the wishes of God. [20]

From the verses and narrations of the Infallibles (as), it is understood that Shaytan and his followers can only affect those who have left the path of servitude to God. An egotistic person who is inconsiderate of anything but satisfying their own desires creates the perfect atmosphere for Shaytan's influence. On the other hand, a pious and sincere servant of God is protected from influence and deception of Shaytan. He himself has confessed to this in some verses: {قَالَ فَيَعِزُّكَ لِأَعْوَابِهِمْ أَجْمَعِينَ؛ إِلَّا عِبَادَكَ مِنْهُمُ الْمُخْلِصِينَ}

[21] The reason being that Shaytan's immateriality, is 'ideal immateriality' and he doesn't enjoy total 'intellectual immateriality', thus making it impossible for him to have any influence on those who have achieved the highest levels of humanity and have reached the rank of being mukhlas (purified by Allah (swt) himself) servants and has no way to their minds and intellects. He in no way deserves any of these two ranks and is at a lower level. Of course, he is always anticipating even their deviance as well.

Common people have created many irrational and illogical superstitions regarding jinn. For example, some believe that if you pour a bowl of hot water, they will set houses on fire. Some believe them to be mischievous, vengeful, uncivil, eager to harass and torment others, etc. In reality, if their existence was not tainted with these superstitions, the truth behind their existence would be quite clear and readily accepted. In fact, we do not have any reason to believe that the existence of beings is limited to the physical realm of what we are able to see. On the contrary, the number of metaphysical beings greatly outnumbers those that are physical. It has been narrated from the Prophet (pbuh) that:

خلق الله الجن خمسة اصناف كالريح فى الهواء و صنف حيات و صنف عقارب، و صنف حشرات الارض و صنف كينى آدم عليه السلام الحساب والعقاب 22

Judging from history, it appears that from the past to the present, people's minds have been filled with stories and superstitions regarding jinn; so much that two perspectives have been formed regarding the matter. The first completely disregards their existence and shrugs it off as a superstitious notion. The second perspective holds the existence of jinn to be true, but has heavily altered the truth as a result of imagination, exaggerated stories, etc. It can be said that both of these perspectives are incorrect because they have both left the bounds of reality. The religion of Islam recognizes the truth in the existence of jinn. However, it corrects the false notions regarding them and rids the people's hearts and minds of superstition. For this reason, a chapter has been revealed in the Holy Quran regarding jinn and their qualities.[23]

It is important to remember that in the world of existence, all beings - be it jinn, humans, physical beings, or metaphysical beings - are all under the rule of God. Any action they perform or affect which they have, is given specific limits and carried out only with divine permission.

God has continually mentioned in the Holy Quran that he is independent of that which is material and immaterial, life and death, profit and loss, etc. Since all power resides with God, one's trust and remembrance should always be with Him. No being is capable of harming and individual who seeks refuge in the Almighty: {وَلَيْسَ بِضَارِّهِمْ شَيْئًا إِلَّا بِإِذْنِ اللَّهِ}

[24] He has given a warning regarding the shayatin amongst jinn and mankind: "Let it not be that you find yourselves inclined towards them. For Shaytan is the enemy of God and the obvious enemy of you and has sworn to misguide mankind." However, the power that Shaytan has over mankind is limited to tempting and persuading, meaning that a human's free will and discretion is never affected. In reality, one's nafs (the animalistic self which has animalistic desires) is the primary element which sets the grounds for Shaytan's influence. "Certainly We have created man and We know to what his soul tempts him, and We are nearer to him than his jugular vein." [25] As God the Almighty states: "Indeed as for My servants, you do not have any authority over them, except the perverse who follow you."

[26]

Recommended reading:

- Badruddin bin Abdullah Al-Shabli, Ghara'eb wa Aja'ibul-Jinn, (translated and annotated and commented on by Ibrahim Mohammad Al-Jamal)

- Zar bin Shah Zaddin, Al-Jinn fil-Kitab wal-Sunnah

- Abdul-Amir, Ali Muanna, Al-Jinn fil-Quran wal-Sunnah

- Abdul-Rahman Muhammad Al-Rufa'i, Al-Jinn beynal-Isharatil-Quraniyyah wa Ilmil-

Fiziya'Refrence:

[1] Sad:82-83.

[2] Hijr:42.

[3] Seyyid Ali Akbar Qurashi, Qamuse Quran, the word "شطن"

[4] Kahf:51

فسجدوا الا ابليس كان من الجن

[5] Naser Makarem Shirazi, Tafsir Nemouneh, vol. 29, p. 192.

[6] Hijr:27

والجاء خلقناه من قبل من نارالسموم

[7] Rahman:15

وخلق الجن من مارح من نار

(and He created the jinn from a flame)

[8] Qamuse Quran, root word of "جن"

[9] Ibrahim Abbasi, Dastanhaye Shegeft Darbareye Jinn, p. 25.

[10] An'am:112.

[11] Kahf:50; See: Mohammad Taqi Misbah Yazdi, Ma'arefe Quran, p 98.

[12] An'am:100.

[13] Ibrahim:22

ما كان لي عليكم من سلطان الا ان دعوتك

Of course, Shaytan also has other methods of influence that other verses of the Quran have mentioned for us such as: embellishing bad acts for the interest of people, sharing others' wealth and children with them, vowing, causing forgetfulness, etc.

[14] Qamuse Quran "شيطان"

[15] Fussilat:30.

[16] Naml:30-40.

[17] Abdullah Javadi Amoli, Tafsire Mozu'i, vol. 1, p. 119.

[18] A'raf:17.

[19] Tasnim, vol. 3, p. 393.

[20] Tafsire Mozu'i, vol. 12, p. 400.

[21] Sad:82-83.

[22] Makarem Shirazi, Tafsir Nemouneh, vol. 29, p. 157; Biharul-Anwar, vol. 60, p. 268.

[23] Seyyid Qutb, Tafsir fi Dhilalil-Quran, vol. 6, pp. 27-28.

[24] Mujadalah:10.

[25] Qaf:16.

[26] Hjr:42.

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