

Tracing the Roots of Human Suffering Based on the Qur'anic Dichotomy of "*Ḍank*" and "*Kabad*"

Nematollah Firoozi  *

Assistant Professor, Department of Theology and Islamic Studies,
Imam Reza International University, Mashhad, Iran

Zahra Abbasi 

MA Student of Theology and Islamic Studies, Majoring in Qur'anic
and Hadith Sciences, Imam Reza International University, Mashhad,
Iran

Abstract

The Qur'an is a divine book of guidance that addresses the factors of human felicity, as well as the roots of challenges, suffering, and hardship. This article traces the origins of human suffering in this world and its continuation into the intermediary and hereafter realms, examining the dichotomy between "*Ḍank*" and "*Kabad*" from the perspective of Qur'anic commentaries. The primary research question is: 'Based on semantic analysis, what is the relationship between inherent and acquired human suffering, and how these concepts can be utilized to present a cognitive model of suffering in human life?' The research method is analytical, conducted by examining the context of the verses, lexicons, and the views of both early and late exegetes. The findings indicate that "*Kabad*" denotes inherent and creational suffering that encompasses all human beings from birth to death, regardless of faith or disbelief, and serves as part of the path of spiritual development and growth. In contrast, "*Ḍank*" represents an acquired suffering resulting from turning away from the remembrance of God and distancing oneself from divine guidance; it has consequences both in worldly life and in the hereafter. The results of this study suggest that understanding the distinction between these two concepts can lead to the proposal of Qur'anic strategies for managing life's sufferings. Ultimately, this differentiation has led to the presentation of a dual strategic outlook for an active and meaning-making confrontation with the phenomenon of suffering in human existence. The innovation of this research, compared to previous studies, lies in offering a semantic, systematic, and educational reading of this Qur'anic dichotomy and the approach to its management.

Keywords: *Ḍank*, *Kabad*, Suffering and Hardship, Semantic Analysis, Qur'anic Exegesis.

* Corresponding Author: Email: firoozi@imamreza.ac.ir

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Statement of the Problem

Suffering and hardship are among the inevitable subjects of human life. The Holy Qur'an, as a book of guidance, offers a comprehensive perspective on this issue and, by introducing concepts such as "*Kabad*" and "*Ḍank*," elucidates the various dimensions of human suffering. The verse, "We have certainly created man into "*Kabad*," (al-Balad :4) points to the inherent and universal suffering of man, which is an undeniable part of his material existence. In contrast, the verse "And whoever turns away from My remembrance- indeed, for him is a hard life" (Ṭāhā: 124) introduces an acquired suffering resulting from negligence of God's remembrance and distance from divine guidance.

The aim of the present research is to conduct a comparative study of the two Qur'anic concepts of "*Kabad*" and "*Ḍank*" and to analyze their similarities and differences, thereby providing a deeper understanding of the philosophy of suffering in human life. The significance of this research lies in its potential to specify Qur'anic strategies for constructively confronting suffering by systematically explaining the types of human hardship. The main hypothesis of this study is that "*Kabad*" expresses inherent and creational sufferings that all humans experience equally and which have an evolutionary function, whereas "*Ḍank*" represents acquired sufferings that originate from man's incorrect choices and have worldly and otherworldly consequences.

Furthermore, the primary research question is: "Based on a semantic analysis of the Qur'anic duality of *Kabad* and *Ḍank*, what is the relationship between inherent and acquired human sufferings, and how can these concepts provide a cognitive model for a rational confrontation with life's challenges?" This research, employing an analytical method and relying on exegetical sources, seeks to answer this fundamental question.

1. Research Method

The research method is qualitative content analysis with a semantic approach, conducted using library data and authoritative exegetical and lexical sources. The research process was designed and implemented in three main stages: content collection, data analysis, and inference.

-In the data collection stage, authoritative early and late sources were used.

-In the data analysis stage, descriptive semantic methods, particularly the approach of Toshihiko Izutsu, were employed. In this regard, the key semantic field of the two words "*Kabad*" and "*Ḍank*" was first delineated by examining their usage in the Qur'an and then in selected lexical sources.

-In the next step, syntagmatic and paradigmatic relationships within the context of the verses (al-Balad: 4, Ṭāhā: 124, and al-Inshiqāq: 19) were investigated.

-Additionally, semantic opposition, as a Qur'anic "Duality," was made the focus of examination to clarify the semantic network and its connection with concepts such as "Remembrance," "Turning Away," "Livelihood," "Pure Life," and "Punishment."

-In the inference stage, by synthesizing the findings from the lexical, exegetical, and semantic analyses, the distinctions and relationships between the two concepts of "*Kabad*" and "*Ḍank*" as two types of suffering, "Inherent" and "Acquired", were analyzed.

2. Preliminary Research

Previous studies can be categorized into several main areas:

A) Single-Lexeme Semantic Studies

This research category has primarily focused on the semantic analysis of a single term. For instance, Asadi et al. (2016 AD/1395 SH), in an article titled "An Analysis of the Semantics of the Word *Kabad* in the Holy Qur'an, Inspired by Toshihiko Izutsu's Method," utilized modern semantic methods to analyze its ontological and anthropological implications. Mousavi Moghaddam et al. (2016 AD/1395 SH) in "An Evaluation of Exegetes Views on the Semantics of a Life of *Ḍank* in Verse 124 of *Ṭāhā*," compiled and critically compared the opinions of exegetes from both Sunni and Shi'a traditions. A more recent study by Halimi Jelodar and Ettehad (2024 AD/1403 SH), titled "Semantics of the Word *Ḍank* Based on Syntagmatic and Paradigmatic Relations and Its Reflection in Persian and English Translations," adopted a linguistic approach to analyze the word's linguistic context and assessed the accuracy of existing translations. Furthermore, Norouzi et al. (2024 AD/1403 SH) in their article "A New Approach to the Semantics of the Word *Kabad* Concerning Verse 4 of Surah al-Balad," used structural semantics and contextual analysis methods to reinterpret the meaning of *Kabad*, interpreting it as "Striving accompanied by hardship on the path of evolution."

B) Studies on the Semantics of Cognate and Near-Synonymous Words

This approach, instead of focusing on a single word, examines the semantic network of related terms. The most prominent works in this area are "Semantics of Near-Synonymous Words with the Concept of Suffering and Hardship in the Holy Qur'an" and "The Semantics of Suffering and Hardship in the Holy Qur'an" (Ghavam, 2024 AD/1401 SH), which elucidate concepts such as *kabad*, 'Anā', *Ḥaraj*, *Ḍank*, *Shaqā'*, and 'Uṣr. Additionally, Zarsazan and Ghavam (2022 AD/1401 SH), in their article "Analysis of the Semantic Components of the Concept of Suffering in the Holy Qur'an Using Syntagmatic Relations," by analyzing the syntagmatic relations of the word "Suffering" and its synonyms, extracted semantic components and proposed a model for understanding the hierarchy of suffering in the Qur'an.

C) Thematic Studies with a Qur'anic-Hadith Approach

This research category, rather than focusing on specific words, has addressed the theme of "Suffering" through the lens of religious texts. The Master's thesis by Soltani (2018 AD/1397 SH), titled "The Roots of Human Suffering and its Consolatory Solutions in the Qur'an and Hadith," and the thesis by Alavi (2016 AD/1395 SH), titled "The Reflection of Qur'anic Teachings in Confronting Suffering," are among studies that have endeavored to explain the philosophy of suffering and present religious strategies for coping with it based on verses and narrations. The study by Rostami et al. (2017 AD/1396 SH), titled "Suffering Management and its Impact on Meaning in Life in the Beliefs and Conduct of Imam Ḥusayn (AS)," also moved beyond the exegetical domain to examine the practical model of confronting suffering in the conduct of the Imams (AS).

D) Comparative Studies

The research by Akhavan Aghdam and Sharifian (2020 AD/1399 SH), titled "The Concept of "Suffering" in Zoroastrianism and Christianity: A Comparative Approach Based on Pahlavi and New Testament Texts," by stepping outside the Islamic framework, has conducted a comparative examination of this concept in other religions, which can enrich the perspective of the present research.

Despite the richness of previous studies, the present research is distinct and innovative in several aspects:

1) Examination of a Qur'anic Dichotomy. This study focuses on the contrastive and systematic analysis of the two specific concepts "*Kabad*" and "*Dank*" as a Qur'anic duality, whereas most prior studies have either addressed a single concept or a collection of concepts without emphasizing the dialectical relationship between them.

2) Integration of Semantics with an Educational Framework. The ultimate goal of this research is to present an analytical perspective for the management and meaning-making of suffering based on its type (inherent vs. acquired).

3) Comprehensive and Comparative Exegetical Coverage. The selection and comparative analysis of the opinions of both early and contemporary exegetes from Sunni and Shi'a traditions, alongside authoritative lexical sources, has resulted in a more comprehensive picture.

4) Systematic View of the Existential Dimensions of Suffering. This research seeks to present a systematic framework that explains the different dimensions of suffering (creational, volitional, worldly, otherworldly, individual, social) in relation to each other.

Therefore, building on the valuable achievements of previous research, the present study seeks to go a step further by addressing the aforementioned gaps, offering a deeper and more practical understanding of the philosophy of human suffering based on Qur'anic teachings.

3. Conceptual Analysis

A profound understanding of Qur'anic concepts necessitates meticulous examination of their lexicon and analysis of their semantic dimensions. This section provides a conceptual analysis of the two key terms, "*Kabad*" and "*Dank*."

3.1. "Kabad"

Some lexicographers have cited several meanings for the word "*Kabad*," including: "A body organ (the liver), the center of a bow, life's hardship, a mine, and the middle of anything (al-Farāhīdī, 1988 AD/1409 AH: 5, 333; Ibn Manzūr, 1993 AD/1414 AH: 3, 376)." Based on the verses, "We have certainly created man into *Kabad*" (al-Balad: 4) and "You will surely travel from one state to another," (al-Inshiqāq: 19) some consider the endpoint of this suffering to be reaching the '*Aqaba* (the steep pass, symbolizing a righteous, Godly deed) (Rāghib, 1991 AD/1412 AH: 695). According to what has been mentioned, the intended meaning of "*Kabad*" in the verse in question is toil and hardship, meaning that man has been created into struggle and fatigue. This toil and suffering, in reality, is a factor that drives him towards perfection and advancement. If man were not placed in difficult circumstances, he would not strive to overcome them, and if he did not strive, the doors to the secrets and mysteries of the

universe would not be opened to him (Qarashī, 1991 AD/1412 AH: 6, 72). Therefore, these hardships pave the way for his progress and the discovery of his existential truths.

3.2. "Ḍank"

The root of this word is a verbal noun meaning "To constrict" or "To make narrow." However, over time, it has also been used as an adjective (Ibn Manzūr, 1993 AD/1414 AH: 10, 462). Some define its meaning as "Straitness" (*Ḍayq*) and identify it as the consequence of an illicit livelihood, even if that livelihood appears abundant (Farāhīdī, 1988 AD/1409 AH: 5, 302; Ibn Manzūr, 1993 AD/1414 AH: 10, 462, Ḥusaynī Zabīdī, n.d.: 13, 607; Rāghīb, 1991 AD/1412 AH: 512). Allamah Ṭabāṭabā'ī states that its primary meaning is narrowness and hardship, and he believes this word is used identically for both masculine and feminine (Ṭabāṭabā'ī, 1969 AD/1390 AH: 14, 225). An examination of lexical sources reveals that this constriction can be considered both material and spiritual. However, in the Qur'anic verses, it typically refers to a condition that leads man away from the path of divine guidance and mercy.

4. Exegetical Perspectives

A comparative examination of exegetical opinions reveals a diversity of views regarding this Qur'anic duality. The most significant interpretations are presented below.

4.1. Kabad

In elucidating the concept of "*Kabad*" in the verse "We have certainly created man into "*Kabad*," (al-Balad: 4) exegetes have emphasized the universal and inherent nature of suffering in worldly life, which can be categorized into several main themes.

4.1.1. The Intertwining of Human Life with Hardship and Toil (An Integral Part of Life's Nature)

Allamah Ṭabāṭabā'ī considers *Kabad* to be a hardship interwoven with human life, which must be traversed to obtain any blessing. He explains the phrase "Created man into "*Kabad*" as meaning that hardships encompass life from all directions. This is a truth acknowledged by every rational person: "That in the path of acquiring any benefit, man is inevitably compelled to pass through hardships. On one hand, man constantly seeks pure benefit, free from any trouble; however, in practice, no blessing is attained without being mixed with adversities. Even apparent blessings are accompanied by sips of sorrow and suffering, let alone the severe tribulations of life that test the human soul." (Ṭabāṭabā'ī, 1969 AD/1390 AH: 20, 291) Accepting this reality prepares man for a logical confrontation with life's challenges and deters him from expecting absolute tranquility in this world. This perspective aligns with Qur'anic teachings that depict the worldly life as a place of trial and effort and hold that true peace is possible only in the abode of the Hereafter.

Exegetes state that the onset of these hardships begins at the moment of the fertilized ovum formation and consider it an integral part of the nature of human existence. These sufferings commence from the first moments of human life, when the fertilized ovum settles in the womb, and continue until the end of one's lifespan. The various stages, including the

embryonic period, infancy, youth, and especially old age, each have their own specific challenges and difficulties. Even the lives of the divine saints, who are the perfect models for humanity, were full of adversities and hardships (Makarem Shirazi, 1992 AD/1371 SH: 27, 11; Qara'ati, 2009 AD/1388 SH: 10, 484). If, superficially, we see individuals or societies that appear free from suffering and toil, this is either due to our own superficial view or to a more precise examination that reveals the depth of their hidden problems. This condition is temporary and exceptional, not negating the general laws governing the world.

On the other hand, some exegetes align the discussion with the noble verse, "O! Mankind! You are laboring toward your Lord with [great] exertion and will meet Him." (al-Inshiqāq: 6) They thus categorize people into two groups: those who endure hardship, for whom death marks the end of worldly hardships and the beginning of their otherworldly felicity, and those for whom their death marks the beginning of their otherworldly punishment. This concept is grounded in a truth deeply rooted in human life: the first cell does not settle in the womb; rather, it strives, with hardship, by its Lord's permission-to, to create suitable conditions for life and nourishment. This suffering continues until the moment of birth, to the extent that the fetus endures intense pressure and pain during delivery, as if it is suffocating. Thereafter, the paths diverge, and the sufferings become varied. One person toils and strives for a morsel of bread and a piece of clothing. Another struggles for sovereignty or position, and yet another strives in the path of God through jihad. One is in pursuit of whim and desire, while another strives for belief and propagation. Suffering is the inherent nature of worldly life; its forms and causes differ, but ultimately, it is all suffering (Sayyid Quṭb, 2004 AD/1425 AH: 6, 3909). The most unfortunate person is the one who endures the suffering of this world only to reach a harder and bitterer suffering in the Hereafter. The most successful are those who strive on the path of their Lord so that they may meet Him under conditions that remove the suffering of life, and attain eternal peace in the shade of His grace.

4.1.2. The Disrespect Towards the Prophet (PBUH)

Some exegetes consider the phrase "And you are free of restriction in this city" (al-Bala: 2) to be an instance of *Kabad*. They argue that the noble verse "We have certainly created man into *Kabad*" is the response to the oath. The noble verse "And you are free of restriction in this city" is an interposed sentence that comes between the oath and its response, meaning that one of the hardships is that the violation of the sanctity of a highly revered person like you has been deemed permissible in this city (Ṭabrisī, 1955 AD/1375 AH: 6, 640). Just as hunting is considered permissible outside the sacred precinct, they deemed your expulsion and killing to be permissible.

4.1.3. Disease of the Heart and Inner Corruption (Specific to Sinners)

Some commentators hold that the meaning of the noble verse is that God Almighty created those whom He knew would not believe and perform righteous deeds with a disease in their hearts and inner corruption (Zamakhsharī, 1986 AD/1407 AH: 4, 755).

However, *Ālūsī* argues that the verse does not refer to this specific type of person; rather, its meaning is apparently more general and applies to the human race as a whole (*Ālūsī*, 1994

AD/1415 AH: 15, 352). He also cites three opinions regarding the primary meaning of the word *Kabad*:

1. That man expresses gratitude for blessings and exercises patience in hardships.
2. That *Kabad* means "We created man upright."
3. That *Kabad* means "We created him with his head [positioned] inside his mother's womb, and when permission for his exit is given; his head turns towards his mother's feet." (ibid: 351)

He considers these three opinions weak and finds only the first noteworthy. Ultimately, he includes the meaning of "Disease of the heart and inner corruption" among the plausible interpretations for this verse.

4.1.4. The Threefold Hardships of Worldly, Otherworldly, and Religious

Fakhr Rāzī explicates the verse "We have certainly created man into *Kabad*" through three aspects:

1. The Worldly Aspect: "We created man in stages, all of which are accompanied by hardship and toil: at times in the mother's womb, then during infancy, and after maturity, in the struggle for livelihood, and finally, in death."
2. The Religious Aspect: "This refers to the *kabad* in religion, meaning that man grapples within his religious life by giving thanks in times of ease and exercising patience in times of hardship. He also struggles to perform acts of worship."
3. The Otherworldly Aspect: "This pertains to the Hereafter and includes death, the questioning by the angels, the darkness of the grave, the Resurrection, and being presented before the presence of God Almighty until he reaches his final destination, be it Paradise or Hell." (Fakhr Rāzī, 1999 AD/1420 AH: 31, 166)

The opinion closest to being correct is that the term *Kabad* should be understood to encompass all of these meanings.

4.1.5. The Negation of Any True Pleasure in the World

Exegetes present another perspective, which posits that there is no true pleasure in this world. Rather, what is perceived as pleasure is, in reality, merely a temporary relief from suffering. For instance, what seems like pleasure when eating food is, in truth, a release from the pain of hunger. What is considered pleasure in wearing clothes is a relief from the suffering of heat and cold. Therefore, for humans, there exists nothing but suffering, or a temporary respite from one suffering before transitioning to another.

Consequently, it becomes evident that there must necessarily be a Resurrection and a Hereafter. This is because the Wise Creator, who has ordained man's creation, if His goal were merely for man to be in a state of perpetual suffering, would be inconsistent with Divine Mercy. If His will were for man to experience neither suffering nor pleasure, then leaving him in a state of non-existence would have sufficed to achieve this aim (Fakhr Rāzī, 1999 AD/1420 AH: 31, 166). If the intended purpose were for man to experience pleasure, there is no genuine pleasure in this life, for man was created for trial.

Thus, there must inevitably be another abode to serve as the place for bliss, genuine pleasures, and honor.

Table 1: Analysis of Concepts Related to "Kabad"

Row	Concept/Perspective	Explanations	Key Points
1	The Intertwining of Human Life with Suffering and Fatigue	Allamah <i>Ṭabāṭabā'ī</i> considers "Kabad" to be the inherent suffering of life, the traversal of which is necessary to attain blessings. Hardships accompany humans from birth until death and shape their growth.	Hardships accompany humans from birth to death and shape their development.
2	Violation of the Prophet's (PBUH) Sanctity	Some have considered the phrase (while you are lawful in this city) as an instance of "Kabad"; referring to the polytheists' deeming it permissible to harm the Prophet (PBUH).	A parenthetical phrase between the oath and its response.
3	Sickness of the Heart and Inner Corruption (Specific to Sinners)	Some have interpreted "Kabad" as the internal corruption of disbelievers; however, <i>Ālūsī</i> considers this view weak and regards the concept as more general.	Weak Interpretations: Connection to the sky or the state of the fetus.
4	Threefold Hardships: Worldly, Otherworldly, and Religious	<i>Fakhr Rāzī</i> proposes three types of "Kabad": 1. Life stages (birth to death) 2. Religious challenges (gratitude and patience) 3. Events of the Hereafter (Resurrection and Reckoning)	The most comprehensive interpretation: combining all dimensions of suffering.
5	Negation of Absolute Pleasure in the World	Worldly pleasures are, in reality, a temporary relief from sufferings (like satiety after hunger). This perspective proves the necessity of the Hereafter.	This world is the abode of trial, and the Hereafter is the abode of reward.

4.2. *Ḍank*

The concept of "*Ḍank*" within the Qur'an's epistemological framework represents a type of existential suffering rooted in man's voluntary choices and orientations. This section aims to investigate the fundamental causes and factors leading to this constricted life, examining the arguments and analyses of exegetes across several foundational themes.

4.2.1. The Consequence of Turning Away from God's Remembrance and Forgetting Him

Lexical examinations show that the word "*Aysh*" refers to the life specific to living creatures and thus has a narrower scope than the more general word "*Ḥayāt*," which encompasses living beings, angels, and the Divine Essence itself. The word "*Ma'īsha*," derived from the root "*Aysh*," refers to the affairs and means by which life is sustained, as stated in the Holy Qur'an: "It is We who have apportioned among them their livelihood in the life of this world..." and also: "...A life of *Ḍank*." (Rāghib, 1954 AD/1374 AH: 2, 466)

A subtle point to note in examining the Qur'anic verses is the semantic contrast between the phrase "And whoever turns away from My remembrance..." and the preceding phrase "So whoever follows My guidance..." Although one might expect the contrasting phrase to be "Whoever does not follow My guidance," the Qur'an, with particular subtlety, has substituted it with "Turning away from God's remembrance." This intelligent choice serves two main purposes: first, it points to the primary cause of the constricted livelihood in this world and blindness in the Hereafter, which is forgetting God and turning away from His remembrance;

and second, it sets the stage for expressing the crucial point that whoever forgets God in this world, God will forget him in the Hereafter.

The expression "God's remembrance" is used in the Qur'an with several meanings:

- First, in its verbal sense as "Remembrance";
- Second, as referring to the Qur'an or the totality of heavenly books;
- Third, as the call to truth.

The reason for naming the call to truth remembrance is that following it necessitates remembering and paying attention to God Almighty. The profound connection between "Turning away from remembrance" and "Hard Life" lies in the fact that by severing his connection with God, man confines all his attachments to this world. In this state, little or much wealth makes no difference, for whatever he acquires; he will never be content with it and will continuously seek to increase it. This endless cycle of greed and avarice keeps him in a state of perpetual poverty and constriction, dissatisfaction, and inner regret. In contrast, the mindful person who has recognized the station of his Lord and maintained his connection with Him is certain of an everlasting life, an enduring kingdom, and infinite honor with God (Ṭabāṭabā'ī, 1969 AD/1390 AH: 14, 225). This knowledge makes the world seem insignificant in his eyes, and he becomes content with what God has apportioned to him.

Some exegetes, in their semantic analysis of "Hard Life," have erroneously restricted it to the punishment of the grave and otherworldly chastisements. This view is inconsistent with reality, as many who turn away from God's remembrance enjoy substantial material comfort in their worldly lives. If "Hard Life" referred only to otherworldly punishment, how could one justify these individuals, despite their disbelief, benefiting from a prosperous life? The truth is that the Holy Qur'an is not seeking to compare the material standard of living of the two sides; rather, it addresses the qualitative difference between the lives of believers and disbelievers.

4.2.2. The Constriction of Life Due to Spiritual Deficiencies and Lack of Inner Richness

Some exegetes, including *Sayyid Quṭb*, identify the cause of a life of *Ḍank* as the lack of belief in God (Sayyid Quṭb, 2004 AD/1425 AH: 4, 2355). On the other hand, *Ālūsī* considers the intended meaning of "Remembrance" to be the Qur'an, the divine books, or guidance; thus, he regards this "Hard Life" as pertaining to the disbeliever and, consequently, to his inner characteristics (Ālūsī, 1994 AD/1415 AH: 8, 584).

Human life sometimes becomes so constricted that it seems all opportunities are closed off; every effort appears futile, and every move encounters a new obstacle. In contrast, at other times, conditions become so favorable that an unparalleled opening manifests in life. These two contrasting states are referred to in Qur'anic expressions as the "Constriction of livelihood" and the "Expansion of life." Therefore, the constriction of livelihood is not always due to material lack. Imam Ali (AS) alludes to this human paradox in a saying: "He lives in this world like the poor live, yet in the Hereafter he will be judged with the accounting of the rich." (Nahj al-Balāgha, Wisdom 126) This illuminating statement reveals the depth of the spiritual catastrophe for those who possess material wealth but whose spiritual poverty has turned their lives into a dark chamber. In truth, the constriction of life stems more from spiritual poverty and a lack of inner richness than from material limitations.

Furthermore, the phenomenon of "Hard Life" is not confined to individuals but also encompasses societies. When a society turns away from the remembrance of God, it faces a

crisis deeper than what occurs at the individual level. Evidence for this claim can be seen in modern societies, which, despite remarkable industrial achievements and apparent material prosperity, grapple deeply with anxiety and profound insecurity (Makarem Shirazi, 1992 AD/1371 SH: 13, 330). These societies are trapped in a vicious cycle: "Public distrust, relationships based on individual self-interest, exorbitant military expenditures that drain the economy, rising statistics of violent crime, the spread of addiction and moral corruption, and the disintegration of the family unit, emptied of the warmth of affection and emotional bonds. These are all tangible manifestations of that very constricted and difficult life which the Qur'an terms "Hard Life."

The Holy Qur'an, by stating the divine laws governing societies, shows how collective turning away from God's remembrance and negligence of spiritual values can lead to "Hard Life" at the societal level. For example, the verse "If only the people of the towns had believed and been mindful of God, We would have opened up for them blessings from the heavens and the earth. But they denied the truth, so We seized them for what they used to earn." (al-A'rāf: 96) clearly states that if the people had believed and been conscious of God, blessings from the heavens and the earth would have been opened for them, but their denial caused them to be seized for their deeds. This "Seizure" can be an instance of "Hard Life" at the societal level, where, despite material resources, life is constricted and anxiety-ridden due to the absence of divine blessing. Furthermore, verses such as "And whoever does not judge by what God has revealed - then it is those who are the disbelievers." (al-Mā'idah: 44) emphasize that the rule of non-divine laws and deviation from the Shari'ah lead to the moral and social decline of a society and result in worldly and otherworldly punishment.

Therefore, the Qur'an does not restrict "*Ḍank*" to the individual; rather, it presents it as a divine law applicable to societies that, by choosing the path of negligence and turning away from God's remembrance, become afflicted with a constricted and anxious life, even if they outwardly enjoy material prosperity.

4.2.3. The Extension of the Constricted Life into the Hereafter

Some exegetes, citing a narration from Imam *Sajjād* (AS), maintain that the scope of the constricted life extends to the Resurrection. After reciting the verse "Whoever turns away... a hard life...", the Imam (AS) said, "By God, the grave is either a garden from the gardens of Paradise or a pit from the pits of Hell." ('Arūsī Huwayzī, 1994 AD/1415 AH: 3, 553) Therefore, the scope of the constricted life continues into the intermediary realm (*Barzakh*) as well. The preceding verse gave glad tidings to the followers of the truth, while this verse is a warning and an admonition to those who turn away from the truth, so that fear and hope may be presented together for maximum effect (Qara'ati, 2009 AD/1388 SH: 5, 404).

4.2.4. Rooted in Abandoning the Path of the Wilayah of the Ahl al-Bayt (AS)

In Shi'a narrations, abandoning the path of the guardianship of the Ahl al-Bayt (AS) is identified as a manifestation of turning away from the remembrance of God. The intended meaning of a difficult and constricted life is not necessarily poverty, as many capitalists live under pressure and constriction due to greed, fear, and anxiety (Qara'ati, 2009 AD/1388 SH: 5, 404).

Based on a narration from Imam *Ṣādiq* (AS), the meaning of "Turning away from God's remembrance" is interpreted as turning away from the guardianship of Commander of the Faithful, Ali (AS) (Kulaynī, 2008 AD/1429 AH: 2, 422; 'Arūsī Ḥuwayzī, 1994 AD/1415 AH: 3, 405). This means that those who consign these divine guides to oblivion will find themselves trapped in the constriction of "Hard life" under any circumstances.

Connection with the divinely appointed saints is the continuity of the servants' link to the Worshipped One and to divine guidance. Consequently, its severance means distancing from the source of light and felicity and gradually falling into the darkness of deviation, ignorance, and nescience. Without a doubt, an individual or a movement that relies on anything other than them will experience a descent into the abyss of intellectual and ideological ruin, and the loss of peace for both body and soul.

4.2.5. The Result of Greed, Avarice, and Stinginess

Ṭabrisī considers spending in God's way to be the key to a blissful life, and greed, avarice, and stinginess to be the cause of a constricted and difficult life. By turning away from the Qur'an and the proofs of divine guidance, man places himself in a cycle of difficult life and constraints. The truth of the verse is that genuine faith necessitates contentment, reliance on God, and submission to divine decree. The true believer, with a tranquil heart and an open hand, gives generously from God's blessings, and this spirit of generosity fills his life with satisfaction and expansion.

In contrast, one who turns away from religion becomes a captive of greed and avarice. Stinginess overcomes his being, preventing him from spending and giving charitably (*Ṭabrisī*, 1955 AD/1375 AH: 4, 116). Although such an individual may outwardly possess material means, his life is inwardly filled with hardship and bitterness. This narrow-mindedness and materialistic worldliness deprive him of tranquility and turn his existence into a realm of perpetual dissatisfaction.

4.2.6. The Fourfold Punishments

In addition to the aforementioned opinions, *Fakhr Rāzī* posits four potential aspects of punishment for the "Hard Life": "Worldly punishment, the punishment of the grave, the punishments of the Hereafter, and the punishment of being barred from divine paths."

1) The First Aspect (The World). A group of exegetes has chosen this opinion because a believer, due to their reliance on God, has a good and pleasant life in this world, as God says: "Whoever does righteousness, whether male or female, while he is a believer - We will surely cause him to live a good life..." (al-Nahl: 97) However, the disbeliever, who has no faith in God, is always greedy and covetous, constantly seeking to increase worldly wealth and possessions; therefore, their life is constricted and dark. Furthermore, some disbelievers, because of their disbelief, are afflicted with humiliation and poverty, as God states: "And they were struck with humiliation and poverty and returned with wrath from God. That was because they would disbelieve in the verses of God..." (al-Baqarah: 61)

2) The Second Aspect (Punishment of the Grave). This opinion is attributed to *ʿAbdullāh ibn Masʿūd*, *Abū Saʿīd al-Khudrī*, and *ʿAbdullāh ibn ʿAbbās*. *Abū Ḥurayrah* also attributed it to the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH), stating that the punishment of the grave is for the disbeliever. "By the One in whose hand my soul is, ninety-nine serpents are unleashed upon

him in his grave."¹ (Thaqafī, 1989 AD/1410 AH: 1, 151; Ṭūsī, 1993 AD/1414 AH: 28; Mufīd, 1992 AD/1413 AH: 265; Baḥrānī, 1954 AD/1374 AH: 3, 786)

3) The Third Aspect (Constriction in the Hereafter and Hellfire). In Hellfire, their food will be "*Ḍarī*" (a bitter, thorny plant) and "*Zaqqūm*," and their drink will be "*Ḥamīm*" (scalding water) and "*Ghaslīn*" (filthy discharge). They will neither die nor live. This is the opinion of *Ḥasan Baṣrī*, *Qatādah*, and *Kalbī*.

4) The Fourth Aspect (Constriction in Religious Matters and Guidance). *Ibn 'Abbās* said: "The constricted life is that the doors of goodness and guidance are closed to him, and he finds no path to any of them." (Fakhr Rāzī, 1999 AD/1420 AH: 22, 111)

4.2.7. The Hard Life in Contrast with the Pure Life

Shi'a and Sunni exegetes have interpreted "Pure Life" as a pure, wholesome life characterized by spiritual tranquility, arising from faith and righteous deeds. Allamah *Ṭabāṭabā'ī* regards pure life as a life free from all spiritual pollution and worldly anxiety, rooted in reliance on God and contentment. He believes that this life, even in conditions of poverty or illness, is accompanied by peace of heart, because the believer is certain of divine pleasure and otherworldly reward (*Ṭabāṭabā'ī*, 1969 AD/1390 AH: 12, 327).

On the other hand, *Fakhr Rāzī* interprets pure life as the "Life of the Heart"—a life in which, through the light of faith, the heart is freed from the shackles of greed and fear and attains lasting serenity. This interpretation stands in clear opposition to the definition of "*Dank*" as a tight and anxious life arising from turning away from the remembrance of God (*Fakhr Rāzī*, 1999 AD/1420 AH: 21, 43).

Some commentators consider a person of faith to possess pure life, and a person without faith to possess "Hard life." Undoubtedly, religion entails submission to God, contentment, and trust in God and His provision. Thus, a person of faith spends from what they have been provided with generosity and ease, possessing an abundant and wholesome life; as God Almighty says: "Whoever does righteousness, whether male or female, while he is a believer - We will surely cause him to live a pure life..." (al-Nahl: 97) However, whoever turns away from religion is overcome by greed, which constantly drives them to seek more of this world, and miserliness takes hold of them, preventing them from giving in charity. Consequently, their life becomes constricted and dark (*Zamakhsharī*, 1986 AD/1407 AH: 3, 95).

Pure life is specific to those who view the world as a means to the Hereafter, whereas *hard life* is specific to those who make the world their ultimate goal.

In summary, pure life, in contrast to hard life, represents two opposing paths: "The first is a life filled with spirituality and satisfaction, expanded through the remembrance of God; the second is a constricted and tumultuous life, resulting from negligence of divine guidance."

1. "Given the presence of conflicting, contradictory, and diverse narrations on this matter, it should be noted that there is a divergence of opinion among hadith scholars and religious thinkers regarding the credibility of such narrations."

Table 2: A Comparative Analysis of the "Pure Life" and the "Hard Life" from the Viewpoint of Exegetes

Components	The Pure Life	The Hard Life
Definition	A pure life, accompanied by spiritual tranquility and contentment with God's provision.	A tight and tumultuous life, even with material comfort, due to distance from God.
Cause of Formation	Faith, reliance on God, contentment, and righteous deeds.	Turning away from the remembrance of God, greed, stinginess, and worldliness.
Key Characteristics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Internal Expansiveness •Charity and Giving •Heartfelt Assurance 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Greed and Dissatisfaction •Constant Anxiety •Dependence on Material Things
Otherworldly Outcomes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Divine Reward •Entry into Paradise 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Punishment of the Grave and Hellfire •Deprivation of God's Mercy
Qur'anic References	(al-Naḥl: 97)	(Ṭāhā: 124)

5. Examination of Semantic Substitution, Collocation, and Contrast

The word "*Kabad*" is used only once in the Holy Qur'an, in verse 4 of Surah *al-Balad*. Similarly, the word "*Ḍank*" is used only once, in verse 124 of Surah *Ṭāhā*.

5.1. Substitute Lexemes

Among the Qur'anic lexemes that can be considered semantic substitutes for "*Kabad*" are "*Imtīḥān*" (test) and "*Ibtīlā'*" (trial), which appear in the following verses:

"Indeed, we have tried them as we tried the companions of the garden..." (al-Qalam: 17)

"So when *Ṭālūt* set out with the soldiers, he said, "Indeed, Allah will test you with a river..." (al-Baqarah: 249)

"And We will surely test you until We make evident those who strive among you..." (Muḥammad: 31)

"As for man, when his Lord tests him..." (al-Fajr: 15-16)

The word "*Fitnah*" (trial) is another term that can function similarly to *Ibtīlā'*, as manifested in these verses:

"Do the people think that they will be left to say, 'We believe,' and they will not be tried? But We have certainly tried those before them..." (al-'Ankabūt: 2-3)

"And among them is he who says, 'Permit me [to remain at home] and do not put me to trial.' Unquestionably, into trial they have fallen..." (al-Tawbah: 49)

"*Kadh*" (strenuous effort), mentioned in (al-Inshiqāq: 6), is another word that signifies labor accompanied by hardship and fatigue. Furthermore, "*Tamḥīṣ*" (purification), meaning to be freed from distress, also alludes to this concept, as used in the verse: "...And they will think that they have no escape." (Fuṣṣilat: 48)

Among the Qur'anic lexemes that possess relative semantic proximity to "*Ḍank*" is "*Ḍayq*" (hardness), meaning tightness and difficulty, as used in the verse:

"And whoever He wills to leave astray-He makes his breast tight and constricted as though he were climbing into the sky." (al-An'ām: 125)

Also, the word "*Ḥaraj*" (constraint), which denotes a state of tightness and psychological pressure, can be referenced in verses such as:

"He has not placed upon you in the religion any difficulty." (al-Hajj: 78)

Furthermore, "‘Usr," (hardship) in contrast to "Yusr," (ease) can also fall within this semantic domain, as stated in the verse:

"For indeed, with hardship [will be] ease." (al-Sharḥ: 6)

"Ḥabṭ," (invalidation) (e.g., al-Mā'idah: 5, Hūd: 16, etc.), is another term that can be considered within this same semantic realm.

5.2. Collocation Relationships

The syntagmatic chain in Qur'anic vocabulary reveals the semantic relationships between aligned words within a single verse. In the noble verse:

"But whoever turns away from My remembrance - indeed, he will have a hard life, and We will gather him on the Day of Resurrection blind." (Ṭāhā: 124)

Three key collocates can be identified: "Life," "We will assemble him," and "Blind."

"Life" indicates the sphere and domain in which *Ḍank* exerts its influence.

"*Naḥshuruḥu*" signifies the otherworldly consequence of such a life.

"Blind" describes the final state of one who turns away from the remembrance of God, implying a blindness of the heart and a lack of spiritual insight.

These collocations demonstrate that "*Ḍank*" is not a material concept; rather, it possesses existential, social, and eschatological dimensions. It stands in contrast to concepts such as "Pure Life" and "Insight."

Similarly, the word "*Kabad*" in the verse:

"We have certainly created man into hardship (*Kabad*)" (al-Balad: 4) is in collocates with the concept of "*Khalq*" (creation). This collocation indicates that toil and hardship are inseparable from the very nature and process of human creation. Furthermore, within the context of the surah, it co-occurs with concepts such as "*Balad*" (city), "Parent and what he begot," and "*Uqbah*." (Steep pass)

This syntagmatic network implies that "*Kabad*" finds its meaning within the context of a specific place (the world), in relation to the human lineage, and along a path fraught with challenges.¹

5.3. Semantic Contrast

Alongside the examination of collocations, an analysis of the semantic contrast of the word "*Kabad*" reveals its profound dimensions. Among its antonyms are "*Riḍā*" (divine pleasure) and "*Sakīnah*," (peace of heart) which are manifested in the verses:

"And the first forerunners [in the faith] among the Muhajireen and the Ansar and those who followed them with good conduct - Allah is pleased with them, and they are pleased with Him..." (al-Tawbah: 100)

"It is He who sent down tranquility (*Sakīnah*) into the hearts of the believers that they would increase in faith..." (al-Fath: 4)

This contrast introduces "*Kabad*" as the path and process whose ultimate end, for the believers, is the attainment of divine pleasure and cardiac tranquility. In other words, if "*Kabad*" represents the hardship of the path of spiritual development in this world, "*Riḍā*" and "*Sakīnah*" signify the ultimate fruit and serenity achieved after traversing this arduous path.

1. Cf. Halimi et al., 2024 AD/1403 SH; Norouzi et al., 2024 AD/1403 SH; Asadi et al., 2015 AD/1395 SH.

Furthermore, an implicit contrast can be drawn with "*Yusr*" (ease), mentioned in verses such as:

"For indeed, with hardship [will be] ease" (al-Sharḥ: 6) which promises relief after every difficulty. Collectively, these contrasts point to the divine wisdom that the worldly system is founded upon a blend of hardship and ease. However, these inherent hardships are transient and serve as the groundwork for achieving lasting tranquility, satisfaction, and ease under the auspices of faith and righteous deeds.

The word "*Ḍank*" is in direct semantic opposition to Qur'anic concepts denoting relief, expansiveness, and peace. The most significant antonymous concept is "Pure life," stated in the verse:

"Whoever does righteousness, whether male or female, while he is a believer - We will surely cause him to live a pure life..." (al-Nahl: 97)

It can also be contrasted with "*Sa'ah*" (spaciousness), as found in verses such as:

"Let a man of wealth spend from his wealth..." (al-Ṭalāq: 7)

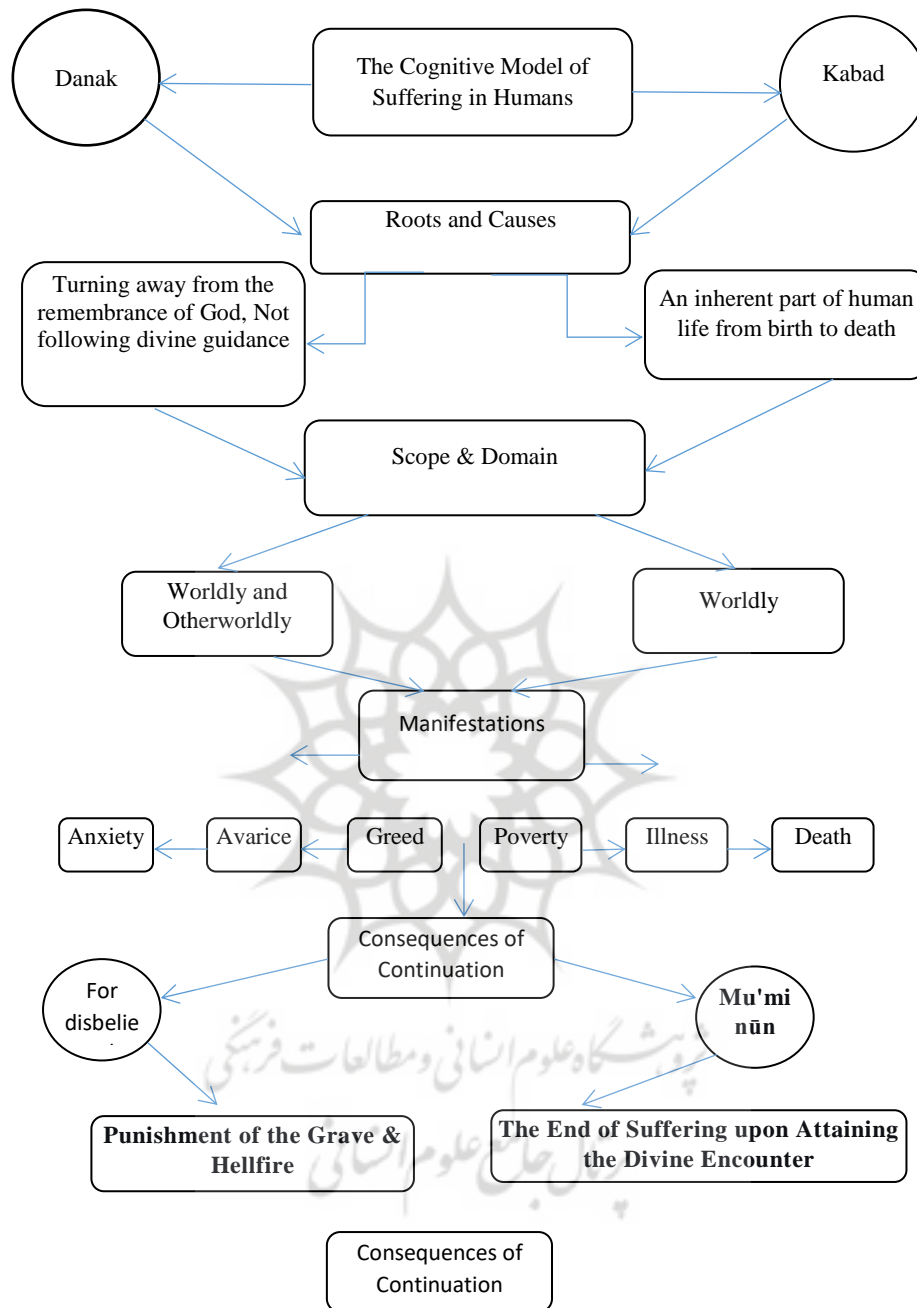
These contrasts underscore a divine principle: turning away from God leads to constriction (*Ḍank*), whereas piety and faith result in "Expansion (*Sa'ah*)" and a "Pure life." This opposition is not merely material; it is primarily an existential and spiritual contrast in the quality of life.

In summary, the concepts of *Kabad* and *Ḍank* can be presented in a comparative and contrastive overview as detailed in the following table and figure.

Table 3: Comparison of the Concepts of "*Kabad*" and "*Ḍank*" in the Holy Qur'an

Row	Component	Kabad (Verse 4, al-Balad)	Ḍank (Verse 124, Ṭāhā)
1	Lexical Meaning	Hardship, toil, inherent suffering of life.	Constriction, psychological pressure, a hard life resulting from sin.
2	Cause of Formation	An inherent part of human life from the moment of birth until death.	Turning away from God's remembrance, not following divine guidance.
3	Scope of Impact	Worldly. (All humans, regardless of faith or disbelief).	Worldly and Otherworldly. (Specific to sinners and disbelievers).
4	Educational Function	Accepting suffering as part of the path of perfection.	A warning to return to God's remembrance and avoid sin.
5	Tangible Manifestations	Illness, poverty, death, struggle for livelihood.	Greed, avarice, anxiety, materialistic life without tranquility.
6	Mitigation Strategies	Patience, gratitude, striving for spiritual growth.	Repentance, following divine guidance, charity, contentment.
7	Otherworldly Consequence	The end of suffering upon attaining the Divine Presence. (For believers).	Punishment of the grave and Hellfire. (For disbelievers and sinners).

Figure 1: Cognitive model of suffering in humans



6. Analysis

Based on the examination of various perspectives and an analytical review of the points of commonality and distinction between the terms, the following points can be made:

1. Cause of Formation

Kabad refers to the inherent and unavoidable hardships of human life that accompany an individual from birth until death. These hardships are considered part of the nature of worldly life and are essential for human growth and development.

In contrast, *Dank* is a form of suffering that arises from turning away from the remembrance of God and from distancing oneself from divine guidance. This type of suffering results from erroneous human choices and is linked to sin and negligence of spiritual matters.

2. Scope of Impact

Kabad is confined to worldly life and is experienced by all humans, regardless of their faith or disbelief. These hardships are universal and pervasive. However, *Dank* has consequences in both this world and the Hereafter and is specific to those who stray from the path of divine guidance. This concept illustrates the eschatological repercussions of wrongful human actions

3. Educational Function

Kabad invites humans to patience, gratitude, and striving for spiritual growth. Accepting these hardships as part of the path of development fortifies resilience and reliance on God. On the other hand, *Dank* serves as an educational warning, encouraging a return to God's remembrance and avoidance of sin. It demonstrates how incorrect choices can make life more arduous.

4. Tangible Manifestations

Manifestations of *Kabad* include illness, poverty, death, and the struggle for livelihood, all of which are part of the shared human experience.

Conversely, *Dank* manifests as greed, avarice, anxiety, and a materialistic life devoid of tranquility, highlighting the negative impact of spiritual distance on the quality of life.

5. Mitigation Strategies

To alleviate *Kabad's* suffering, strategies such as patience, gratitude, and striving for spiritual growth are recommended. These actions help individuals confront hardships constructively.

For *Dank*, the primary solutions include repentance, adhering to divine guidance, charity, and contentment. These practices help restore balance and tranquility to life.

6. Eschatological Consequence

The sufferings of *Kabad* culminate, for believers, in the attainment of the Divine Presence and are transformed into otherworldly reward.

However, *Dank* leads, for disbelievers and sinners, to the punishment of the grave and Hellfire. This contrast underscores the significance of human choices in determining their ultimate fate.

This analysis demonstrates that while *Kabad* is an inescapable part of the human condition, *Dank* is the result of erroneous human choices. Understanding these two concepts and their differences can lead to a deeper comprehension of the philosophy of suffering in life and the ways to confront it.

Conclusion

This research aimed to investigate the deep semantic structures of two key concepts in the Holy Qur'an—"Kabad" and "Dank"—and to elucidate their similarities and differences. The findings, obtained through analytical methods that rely on lexical, exegetical data, and verse

contexts, indicate that although these terms are conventionally considered instances of suffering and hardship, they occupy distinct positions and connotations within the Qur'an's epistemological system.

Intrinsic Distinction in Nature:

"*Kabad*" is defined as the inherent and creational hardship of worldly life, which is inescapable and encompasses all human beings, irrespective of their level of faith. This concept is part of the divine tradition and a universal test.

In contrast, "*Dank*" signifies a tormenting, constrictive otherworldly hardship. It represents an exceptional, punitive state and is the direct result of erroneous human choices in this world.

Distinction in Scope:

The scope of "*Kabad*" is universal: "We have certainly created man into hardship." (al-Balad: 4)

Whereas "*Dank*" is specific to disbelievers and wrongdoers: "But whoever turns away from My remembrance-indeed, he will have a hard life." (Tāhā: 124)

Functional Similarity:

Both concepts serve as instruments for the divine test and for this world's function as the "Abode of Responsibility." "*Kabad*" is a primary and universal test, while "*Dank*" is the consequence of failing this test and other divine trials.

Proposed Applied Model:

The findings can form the basis for a practical model in the following fields:

1. Islamic Counseling and Psychology: A correct understanding of "*Kabad*" as a creational law helps replace a "Victimhood mentality" with an approach centered on "Responsibility and resilience." Counselors can use this concept to help clients accept involuntary life hardships as a basis for growth and perfection.
2. Religious Education: This distinction can be central to educational curricula, helping the younger generation understand that natural life hardships are manageable and can be transformed into opportunities; in contrast, choosing the path of misguidance leads to real torment and existential constriction.
3. Systematic Theology: This research contributes to a more precise explanation of concepts like "Divine Decree and Predestination," "Free will," and "Divine Justice." It demonstrates that God does not place any human being in constriction without cause; rather, it is humans who, through their own actions, constrict their own existence.

Limitations and Future Research Directions:

This study primarily focused on classical exegetical and lexical sources. Future research could reveal further dimensions by exploring mystical, philosophical, and theological literature. Furthermore, subsequent studies should pay greater attention to investigating tangible, field-based manifestations. It is recommended to conduct qualitative studies, such as interviews

with religious scholars, and quantitative studies, such as designing questionnaires, to measure the external manifestations of a "Hardship life" versus a "Hard life" within society.

In summary, it can be emphatically stated that a decisive distinction between "*Kabad*" as a growth-fostering reality and "*Dank*" as a punitive condition is the key to a profound understanding of the philosophy of evils and hardships within the Qur'anic worldview. This distinction can serve not only in the theoretical realm but also in practical life as a roadmap for greater endurance of hardships and the conscious avoidance of factors that lead to otherworldly torment.

ORCID

Nematollah Firoozi



<https://orcid.org/0000-0001-6692-2479>

Zahra Abbasi



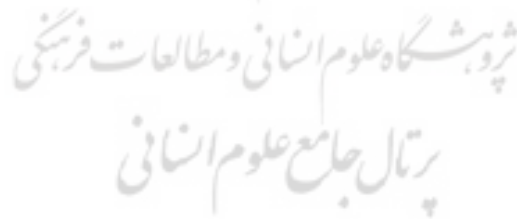
<https://orcid.org/0009-0004-6286-4223>



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