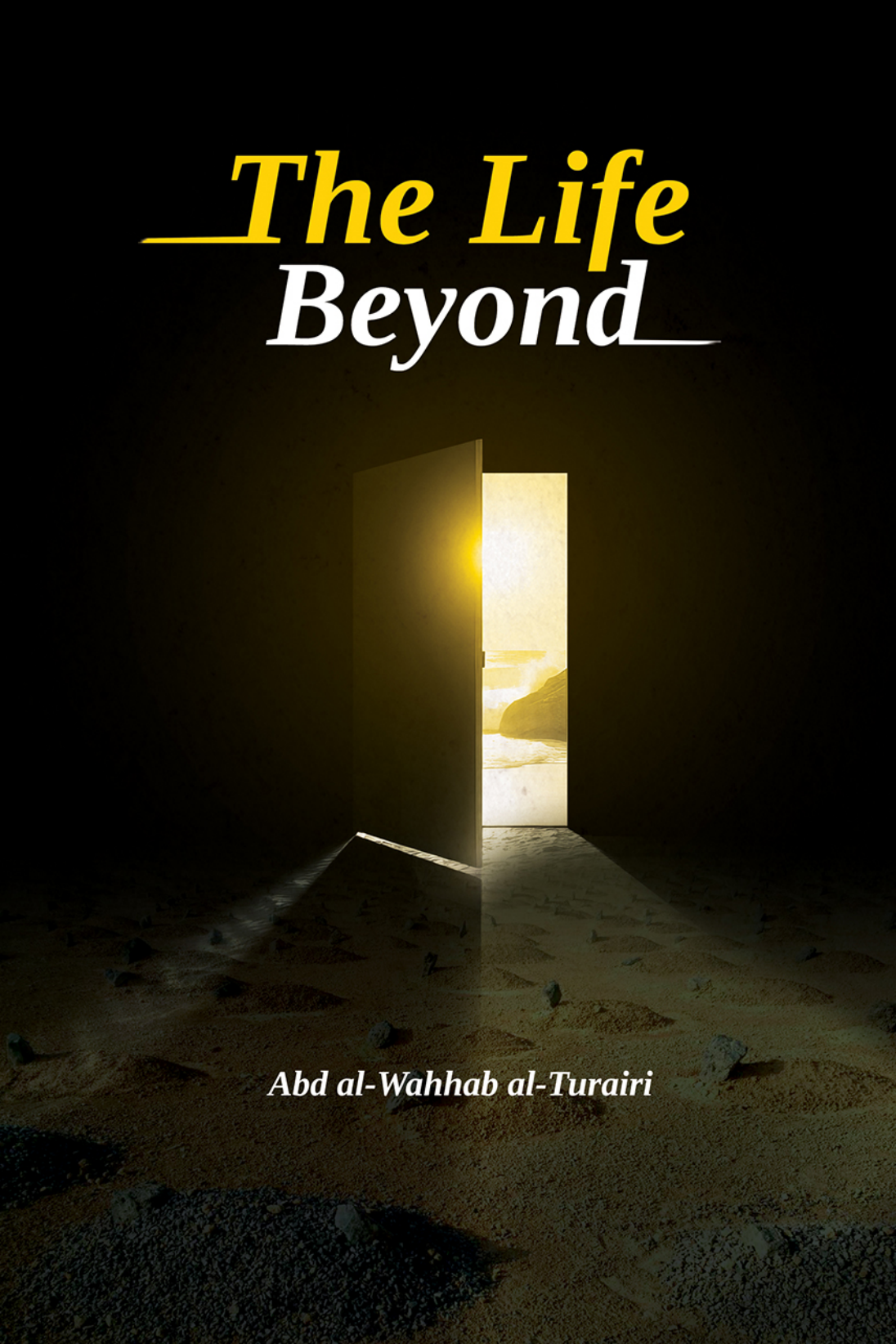


The Life Beyond

A dark, open doorway stands in a dark, textured floor. A bright, golden light emanates from the doorway, illuminating a beach scene with waves and a large rock. The light creates a strong contrast with the dark interior.

Abd al-Wahhab al-Turairi

The Life Beyond

Abd al-Wahhab al-Turaiiri

The Life Beyond

Translated and Edited by
Adil Salahi





Introduction



Dear brothers and sisters, I extend to every one of you the Islamic greeting of peace coupled with God's mercy and blessings.

In this book, I venture to present to you a subject which we have always turned away from thinking it of little concern, feeling that it is not close to us. Life's problems often overcrowd us, leaving us no time to think about death. All these collaborate and compound upon us to plan for this year rather than for the next life.

Yet death often stares us in the face and we do nothing but turn away, without looking at it. We are reminded of it, but we prefer not to contemplate it. Our attitude seems to suggest that we can escape death by not discussing it.

In this book, let us do the contrary; let us think of this inevitable outcome before we arrive at it. We should stand at the gate of death and the life beyond it, with alert minds so that we can review our situation.

Death itself and what comes after it have remained an unsolved puzzle in many cultures. Try as we may to find a satisfactory answer to the crucial question, 'What comes after this life ends?' our efforts remain unsuccessful. No direction gives us what may convince our minds or reassure our hearts.

Some people believe that death itself is the final end, and we simply turn into dust. Others believe in reincarnation, saying that when a soul departs from its body, it goes into another. There are other, even stranger ideas, advanced by people who have attempted to reach out to the 'world beyond' and give it some form based on their own unsophisticated cultural ideas.

The proponents of all schools of epistemology and all religious scholars of all sects aspire to find a satisfactory answer to the central question: 'What comes after this life?' No matter what the concept of the realm after death is, it is bound to end with us groping in thick darkness. Essentially, there is no clear and definite vision of death and what follows it except what is certainly given by the One who created life and death. The Qur'an tells us that it is God 'who has created death as well as life, so that He may put you to a test to show who of you is best in conduct'. (67: 2)

The One who has brought us into existence and who will reclaim us has not left us in total darkness, but has rather sent us revelations through His messengers. He tells us of the beginning of our existence and the purpose behind it: 'I have not created the jinn and mankind to any end other than that they may worship Me'. (51: 56) This means that after our journey through the present life we will return to God, our Creator: 'Surely to your Lord all must return'. (96: 8)

The journey to eternity is given in full details to enable us to visualize it before we experience it. It begins with the stupor of death, followed by departing the present life, then resurrection and the stages of reckoning and requital, leading to the final and eternal abode, either in Heaven or Hell. There is also a full description of both, including the happiness, enjoyments and bliss enjoyed by the dwellers of Heaven and the suffering of those who end up in Hell.

When we receive the facts of the journey to eternal life as described in many Qur'anic verses, we should remember two important points. The first is the certainty of this information. It is not based on anyone's ideas, conclusions or expectations. The information is given by the One who has the power to create life and who will end it by His will, then determine its final outcome: 'Surely all creation and all authority belong to Him'. (7: 54) Since the information is given by the One who initiated creation and to whom everyone will return then it must be a statement of undoubted truth and certainty: 'This is surely the indubitable truth'. (56: 95)

The other important point is that this outcome is very clear, shown to us as though we can see and experience it. When a believer recites the Qur'anic verses speaking of death and what follows it, he will have a feeling of one who has departed this life and seen the life to come. He reflects on the suffering of the person going through the throes of death, even though these are unknown to us. The Qur'anic verses then take us to the scene of resurrection, and we almost see the total surprise on everyone's face. We see the great shock and total disappointment of those who denied resurrection. The scene then shows the records of people's deeds and the reckoning and evaluation of these deeds. Finally, the people of Heaven arrive at their pleasant abode, with all its gardens and friendly society. It is a luxurious, happy and everlasting life.

The Qur'an also enables us to look at the guilty as they are being punished in Hell. We can almost witness their miserable condition, painful suffering, how they are chained. We note how they suffer the burning fire, eat the disgusting food they are given and we also note their painful sorrow for unlawfully indulging in their desires, and their regret as they face the consequences of their offences.

I have put together these scenes of the human journey to eternity, so that we can view with the certainty of belief how the life beyond our present life will look, and how we are transferred from the moment of death to the eternal life.

Even though the Qur'an was my companion throughout my life, right from the time when I became conscious of the world around me, when I recited these verses together, contemplating the scenes they paint and going through the stages they mention, I felt as though I was reading the Qur'an for the first time. The Qur'an describes the life to come as though it is happening now. It draws its scenes full of life and movement, right from the moment of resurrection to the point when mankind stand in great awe before God Almighty. 'On the Day when all mankind will stand before the Lord of all the worlds.' (83: 6) 'The earth will shine bright with the light of its Lord; the Record of Deeds will be laid open; all the prophets and the witnesses will be brought in. Judgement will be passed on them all in justice, and they will not be wronged.' (39: 69) An awesome scene overwhelms us when we contemplate the event as if it has taken place, with people rising and standing before God, the earth shining bright with His light, the record laid open, the prophets and witnesses all present and the judgement pronounced. We can even look at the outcome which is either eternal happiness or eternal suffering.

This is a reaction that words cannot properly describe, but we feel and react to it, as the Qur'anic verses paint these images and hold them before us.

Contemplation of the life to come through the Qur'anic verses give us the best motivation to prepare for it. This is something that we should repeatedly do and remember, so that we do not allow ourselves to become oblivious to it, or imagine that it is still far away. Our life is short, and it soon comes to an end that leaves no room for hope. Therefore repeated

contemplation of these scenes enables us to face death well prepared for the journey ahead.

We pray to God to give us a goodly conclusion to our present life, and a happy future life. Our Lord, grant us of Your bounty and fine reward. You are the true Lord of all the worlds.

May God grant peace and blessings to all my readers.

A.W. al-Turairi

Cali, Colomia

Friday, 22 December 2023





Preface

Some Thoughts on Life and Death

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One: Our Way to Death



The Prophet was sitting in the mosque, surrounded by his companions when he started to draw some lines on the floor, as though he wanted to explain something. He drew a square, then drew in its middle a line going a good length out of the square. Within the square, he also drew several short lines facing towards the middle long line. He then asked his companions whether they could guess what the drawing represented.

As the Prophet's companions could not think of what the drawn lines represented, they said: 'God and His Messenger know best'. The Prophet explained, saying: 'This figure in the middle of the square is man. The line going from the middle of the square going further out is man's hopes. The horizontal and vertical lines of the square represent the end of his life, as it surrounds him. As man looks further to what he hopes for, his death overtakes him, and he can no longer achieve what he hoped for. His life is too short for the fulfilment of his hopes.

The Prophet then pointed to the short lines around the middle long line and said: 'These are life's distractions: when he moves away from one, another attacks him'.⁽¹⁾ The Prophet refers here to the different things and situations that attract man's attention, making him oblivious of death, which is

(1) Related by al-Bukhari, 6,417.

certain to overtake him, keeping him looking further in life, hoping to fulfil more of his aspirations. Indeed, man's hopes and aspirations extend much farther than his life. The Prophet says: 'An old man's mind remains young in two matters: the love of life and his long hopes'.⁽¹⁾

This is a good representation of man's situation. He has high hopes which keep him oblivious to the fact that life comes to an end, and that the end might be very soon. Right from the moment of birth, a human being begins his journey towards this end. Every day that passes draws us closer to our deaths. We spend our lives like an hourglass: whatever is added to what has gone is taken out of what remains. A wise old saying addresses every one of us: 'Son of Adam, you are no more than a total number of days. When one day has gone, a portion of you goes with it'.⁽²⁾

It is an absolute certainty that life always moves ahead to a definite end, yet people always try to avert thinking of this and definitely avoid making it a central point in their thoughts. Al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī said: 'I have never seen any certainty treated as a doubt more than people's certainty of death'.⁽³⁾ We go about our lives as though death happens to other people, but not to us. We do not treat this end seriously. When we think about it, we are in real fear. When we take it into account, our lives seem unsettled. Therefore, we tend to think that we still have plenty of time in this life, and that it is preceded by some signs to prepare us for it. However, death does not need several causes. It is not attached to any particular age. If it does not come all of a sudden, then some illness comes suddenly.

It is part of human nature to dislike death and to love life. Yet, however we may dislike death, we cannot put it away,

(1) Related by al-Bukhari, 6,420.

(2) Abu Nu'aym, *al-Ḥilyah*, Vol. 2, p. 148.

(3) Ibn Abi al-Dunyā, *al-Yaqīn*, p. 42.

and life is not extended by the strength of our love of it. Death will always remain the final stop that halts our march. Try as we may to escape it, it will certainly overtake us, as God says: 'Say: "The death from which you are trying to run away will certainly face you"'. (62: 8) 'Wherever you may be, death will overtake you.' (4: 78) The truth remains that we will certainly die. Every one of us will die, leaving certain things we wanted to do undone, as also leaving some unfulfilled hopes. We depart this life leaving behind our work, wealth and hopes. We leave life alone, taking nothing with us, just like we came into it, alone, having nothing. God reminds us: 'Now, indeed, you have come to Us individually, just as We created you in the first instance; and you have left behind all that We conferred on you'. (6: 94)

This fact becomes clearer when we are closer to it. Our outlook on life starts to change as we begin to face this fact. This world and all it contains starts to take their true measures, and life begins to lose its shine. It starts to appear in its true condition. As he was close to death, one rich man is said to have looked at his wealth and said: 'I wish all this was nothing but animal droppings'.⁽¹⁾ All its appeal is gone. It is no longer of any real value.

When the Umayyad Caliph 'Abd al-Malik ibn Marwān was about to die, he addressed the life of this world, saying: 'Your length is short, and your abundance is little. Yet we have been allured by you'. During his last illness, he ordered that certain doors of his palace be left open. He overheard someone washing clothes. He asked what the noise was. They told him that it was a washer man. He said: 'I wish I was like him, earning my day's keep, day after day, and I wish I had not been in this position'. One scholar was told of what the dying

(1) Ibn Abi al-Dunyā, *al-Muḥtaḍirūn*, Dar Ibn Hazm, Beirut, 1997, p. 100.

caliph said. He commented: ‘They take some lessons through our lives, and we take some lessons through theirs. All praise be to God that when they approach death, they wish to have been like us, and that we do not wish to be like them’.⁽¹⁾

Some time ago I was in hospital, often unconscious. I felt death was stationed close to me, and that my end was approaching. When I was awake, I looked through the window to see the crowded city, its high buildings and bustling movement. I felt all this to be like ashes. I felt that all this running around was close to an end. This feeling was the result of another feeling that my end was close. I think that this is the feeling experienced by anyone in this situation.

As I said, hopes and aspirations come to an end as death is about to occur. Likewise, grudges and enmities disappear, as their causes are seen to be trivial.



(1) Ibid, p. 112; Ibn Kathīr, *al-Bidāyah wal-Nihāyah*, Vol. 12, p. 395.

Two: Is This What Death is Like? Is This What Life is Like?



I was reading the Qur'an, calm, alone, and I began Surah 23, The Believers. It opens with eleven short verses describing the characteristics of the believers. I then reached the following verses: 'Indeed, We create man out of the essence of clay, then We place him, a gamete, in a safe place of rest. Then We create out of the gamete a clinging cell mass, and out of the clinging cell mass We create an embryo. Then We create within the embryo bones, then We clothe the bones with flesh. We then bring this into being as another creation. Exalted be God, the best of creators'. (23: 12-14) I contemplated these stages and the details with which these early developments of the embryo are stated. I was ready to learn more details about other phases of life, stages of growth and development from childhood to adulthood, from weakness to strength and from the vigour of young age to the weakness of old age. Yet, as soon as the point of birth is stated, I faced a shock. It was like an alarm call made immediately after all these stages of the formation of the embryo. The surah follows all this with the statement: 'And then, after all this, you are destined to die; and then, you will be restored to life on the Day of Resurrection. (23: 15-16)

Attempting to deal with this great surprise, I stopped, reflected on these two verses but found myself unable to move on.

I continued to reflect on the meaning and the significance, thinking: O, my God! After all this preparation for life, stating all these stages and development of the embryo, we move to sudden death, followed by resurrection!

My Lord! Where is life and its stages? And where is the rolling of years and epochs? How about life and its struggle, the great efforts and what they yield? All these have been rolled together and disappeared in a flash. They seem too little to deserve even a mention. How can they be compared to the ages of death before this life and the other ages of death after it, followed by the eternal life that is certain to come. Essentially, I felt that we are unaware of this inevitable outcome, as though we are in a coma. Yet we walk towards it totally preoccupied with our life's affairs, letting it come upon us all of a sudden, stopping all our purposes, awakening us and taking us to our final destination. How is it that death is removed from our thoughts when it is certain to come upon us, without any doubt? It is indeed very close to us, and it comes suddenly, without warning.

I often remember that day and my position. I remember my feeling of surprise and shock, as though I was reading this surah and these two particular verses for the first time. I also remember my trembling and fear at the time. I continued to wonder why death is so close to us in our reality, yet so far removed from us in our thinking. How come it is present among us but we do not see it?

My Lord, awaken us from our oblivion, and enable us to prepare for the transition. Give us a good end to our lives and a good beginning to our future lives.



Three: Death and a Life without Faith

People look at death and deal with it according to how they look at what comes after death. I read the diaries of people who were close to death, written as they were fighting against cancer and other diseases. They recorded their views and feelings as they felt their lives approaching the end.

I noted how those who do not believe in a future life, looking at death as the final end, taking them to the stage of non-existence, bid farewell to this life. They consider that they end in the same way as an insect crushed under the foot of an oblivious person. They think that they will ultimately end in the form of some fertiliser. When the last generation that remembers them is gone, they also disappear from human memory.

This outlook imagines that life is mere idle play, beginning with a coincidence and ending in a void. Whatever we do in it becomes no more than a pleasant or negative memory, if anyone remembers. God denounces this trifling view of life, as He says: ‘Did you think that We created you in mere idle play, and that to Us you would not have to return?’ (23: 115) ‘Does man think that he will be left without purpose?’ (75: 36)

In her book *A Matter of Death and Life*, co-authored with her husband, Marilyn Yalom wrote: ‘I do not believe in a second life. I shall not exist after I die. Our state after death

is the same as our state before we were born'. Likewise, C. Taylor wrote: 'I do not believe in a second life after death. We come from nowhere and return to nowhere'.⁽¹⁾

It is not difficult to discover the emptiness of the type of life such people lead. Taylor shows no loving or compassionate emotion towards her parents or siblings. On the contrary, she describes them as enemies. Yalom is wiser as she speaks of her 'wonderful' mother. Yet she casually mentions that she placed her mother in an old people's home where she spent the rest of her life.⁽²⁾ She herself chose to end her own life by poison in the presence of her husband and children.

Such attitudes reflect the loneliness of the dark road in which the light of faith has been switched off. This misconception of the process of life and death is partly due to confining oneself to the standards of our narrow earthly world and the short duration of our lives. To apply such standards to the realm of the world beyond the reach of our faculties of perception and the life to come is totally wrong. There is a wide gulf between our world and the realm of the Hereafter. An insect may consider that its own hole represents the entire world, knowing nothing of the expanse of the earth with its plains, mountains and oceans. Such an insect knows even less about the fact that the entire earth represents no more than a tiny particle in the universe. Indeed, the difference between our world and the realm of the Hereafter is far greater than the difference between the world of the insect in its hole and the entire world around it.

(1) C. Taylor, *Fī Ma'nā an Namūt*, i.e. *On the Meaning of Death*, p. 72.

(2) In Islamic culture, placing one's parent in an old people's home, in preference to taking care of old parents at home, so that they continue to have their family life to their last day, is considered horribly undutiful, while Islam considers dutifulness to parents a primary duty, second only to the belief in God's oneness. – Editor's note.

Another reason is that the distorted form of religion such as atheism were aware of remains in conflict with reason. The god such form of religion describes does not have attributes of supremacy and perfection. He is described through some distorted tales of which C. Taylor says: 'I have been aware of some tales of the Holy Book, but these seemed to me of the same standard as ordinary superstitions, even though the latter are more interesting'.⁽¹⁾

The concept of God presented by such distorted religious texts does not reflect His majesty, holiness and absolute perfection. A god who wrestles one of his creatures is not mighty, and the one from whom Adam hides behind a tree is not an all-knowing lord. On the other hand, the lord who allows a sin to be inherited by those who neither did it nor witnessed it, nor were in existence at the time is not a fair and compassionate lord. Moreover, the one god who is a trinity at the same time is unacceptable according to simple logic.

Hence, these people are caught up between the natural instinct to believe in God and the misconception of Godhead which is unworthy of God's greatness and majesty. Hence, they resort to atheism, agnosticism, or idle deism that belongs to no religion.

There is a wide gulf between the paradoxical concept of Godhead advanced by erroneous and distorted religions and the feelings of God's supremacy, majesty and holiness which fill a believer's heart as he or she recites the Qur'anic verses speaking of God's oneness. Here are a few of these: 'Such is God, your Lord; there is no deity other than Him, the Creator of all things, so worship Him alone. He is the Guardian of everything. No power of vision can encompass Him, whereas He encompasses all vision; He is above all comprehension,

(1) C. Taylor, *op. cit.*, p. 63.

yet is all-aware'. (6: 102-103) He is God: there is no deity other than Him, the Sovereign, the Holy, the Source of Peace, the Giver of Faith, the Guardian over all, the Almighty, the Compeller, to whom all greatness belongs. Exalted is God in His limitless glory above anything they associate as partner with Him. He is God: the Creator, the Maker who gives shape and form to all. His are the most gracious names. Everything in the heavens and earth extols His limitless glory. He alone is the Almighty, the Wise'. (59: 23-24) Such verses fill our hearts with awe, love and recognition of God's supremacy and majesty.

Some others deny the future life out of no personal conviction; rather, it is a way of escape. They do not want to go through the problem of thinking about the ultimate end, or the guilt consciousness after committing every sin. Their way of escape is to deny resurrection and requital. Such a person wants neither to know nor to believe. Their ultimate sorrow is doubled and their punishment is very severe. They try to deceive God, but they are only deceiving themselves, though they may not realize it.

The natural instinct to believe may make its voice heard when the darkness of misconception thickens. It will call on people to resort to a deity who is all-powerful and has an imposing will. One person who has described this moment of awakening is the American scientist Francis Collins. He was brought up by atheistic parents, and then confirmed his own atheism citing scientific theories. Yet he was not a totally firm atheist; rather a doubtful agnostic. He later realized that such a position is merely a way of escape, attempting to ignore the arguments of both parties. In reality, this was a position of one who does not want to know.⁽¹⁾ He describes such condition

(1) F. Collins, *The Language of God*, p. 23 in the Arabic translation.

as 'voluntary blindness'. He then found himself facing this natural voice, as he was attending some patients who were close to death. He noted how their faith gave them a feeling of contentedness and serenity. His full awakening was the result of an elderly patient who was enduring severe pain, but asked him: 'What do you believe in? Do you believe in a God to whom you address your prayer?' This was sufficient to make him aware that all his ideas were hollow. He felt as though a frozen surface was breaking up under his feet.⁽¹⁾

Yet such deism cannot, on its own, lead to reassurance during life nor to serenity at the time of death. It gives no security after death. The mere belief in the existence of God is a natural instinct and a logical truth. God says: 'Were they created out of nothing? Were they the creators?' (52: 35)

We may detect in deism a sort of pressing a favour on God, as if the mere acknowledgement of the existence of God the Creator is all that is required of a sane adult human being who enjoys freedom of will and choice. Such people are similar to those whom God describes in the following verse: 'They think that they have bestowed a favour upon you by having embraced Islam. Say: "Do not count your embrace of Islam a favour to me. It is indeed God who bestows a favour upon you by showing you the way to faith, if you are men of truth"'. (49: 17)

Therefore, their belief in deism is flawed because it does not lead to glorifying God or to worshipping Him. Some of them adhere to the concept that having created the universe, God simply did not care for it. Some consider that God has no interest in His creation. We say that far it is from God to be as they claim.

(1) Ibid, p. 28; Also, Abdullah al-Ghudhami, *Al-Qalb al-Mu'min* i.e. *The Believing Heart*, p. 46.

Belief in God does not produce its great effect unless it is coupled with worshipping God alone, loving and glorifying Him, feeling that He is close to us, knowing that He knows all. It must also be coupled with the certainty that death does not mean falling into a bottomless abyss. It is the gateway leading to the true and eternal life when we all return to God: 'Surely to your Lord all must return'. (96: 8) It is in the life to come that good people will be given their multiple rewards by their merciful and benevolent Lord, while the evil people will be requited for their deeds by the most fair Lord who does not wrong anyone by as much as an atom's weight. He says: 'Indeed, God does not do the least wrong to mankind, but it is men who wrong themselves'. (10: 44)

This shows that when we import the problems of the Western mind, we do ourselves a great injustice. The recipient Muslim mind is not troubled by the same causes that produce these problems. As described in distorted scriptures and presented by clerics of various religions, the Lord is not the One God human nature identifies. He does not impart any reassurance to people's hearts. Therefore, it is not strange that Jean Meslier (1664 – 1729) who was a French Catholic priest (abbé) was discovered, upon his death, to have written a book-length philosophical essay promoting atheism and materialism. This shows that he spent forty years of his life urging people to believe in God, while he himself did not believe in Him.





Four: Faith as Death Approaches



I have attended some people as they bid farewell to this present life. I have seen some devout believers prepare to depart this life. I witnessed their certainty that they were about to go to God. Their certainty was of great comfort to them, giving them reassurance and serenity, as they saw their way ahead clearly. Hence, they were calm and reassured as the final moment approached.

My close friend Abd al-Aziz al-Majid had memorized the Qur'an in full. He led a well-balanced life and was very devout. I was with him when the doctor said to him that he was very sorry that no further treatment would be of any use. The inevitable was certain to come soon. He took the news very calmly and said: 'All praise be to God'. He repeatedly said: 'Why do we fear death when we are going to God? We think nothing but good of God'. He would also quote the Qur'anic verse: 'If you should die or be slain, it is to God that you shall be gathered'. (3: 158)

On the same evening, a Canadian doctor who was a member of the team treating him came to see him. He said that he was very sorry when he heard the news concerning him. Abd al-Aziz said: 'Thank you very much. However, I am not sorry. I have lived the time granted to me. I worshipped my Lord as well as I could. Now is the time for me to meet my Lord whom

I worshipped. May I say to you that you should think of this moment which you will certainly face, leading to the life to come. Are you prepared for it?' Abd al-Aziz was only 34 when he passed away.

In his memoirs, entitled *Ana Qādim Ayyuha al-Daw'*, i.e. 'Light, I am coming', Muhammad Abu al-Ghayt, wrote towards the end of his struggle with cancer: 'I never thought of life as idle play'. Indeed, whenever he felt that he was about to lose consciousness, he declared his belief in God's oneness and in Prophet Muhammad as God's last Messenger.

There are many amazing reports of how several devout people welcomed death with the certainty and reassurance imparted by faith. When Mu'ādh ibn Jabal, a learned companion of the Prophet, was on his death bed, he said: 'Welcome to death. A loved one has arrived when needed. My Lord, I used to be in fear of You, but today all my hopes turn to You'.⁽¹⁾ The fortitude, firmness and preparedness shown by many devout people as they were in the throes of death is amazing. They appear like a traveller who has arranged his luggage and arrived at the airport in good time. He knows his destination and is well prepared for the journey. He is neither perturbed nor in panic. On the contrary, he looks forward to the journey with reassurance.

Like me, many people witnessed Shaykh Ibn 'Uthaymīn as he delivered his lectures towards the end of his life. He was suffering from well advanced cancer. He was breathing with difficulty as he transmitted needed information and useful knowledge.

A believer goes about life knowing that God's knowledge encompasses everything, He is all-powerful, and His mercy is inexhaustible. He conducts his life as if he sees God, because

(1) Ahmad ibn Ḥanbal, *al-Zuhd*, p. 1,011.

he knows that God sees him. Therefore, his life becomes a straightforward interaction with God. He worships God, feels His pleasure, and prays to Him knowing that He is close. He feels that he is near to God as he says his supplication.

How broad and expansive life appears when one feels that as he deals with those around him, he is directly dealing with God Himself. He remembers the *qudsī*, or sacred hadith in which the Prophet quotes God: ‘On the Day of Resurrection, God, Mighty and Exalted, will say: “Son of Adam, I fell ill and you did not visit Me”. He will say: “My Lord, how should I visit You when You are the Lord of all the worlds?” He will say: “Did you not know that My servant, so-and-so, fell ill and you did not visit him? Did you not know that had you visited him you would have found Me with him? Son of Adam, I asked you for food and you did not feed Me”. He will say: “My Lord, how could I feed You when You are the Lord of all the worlds?” God will say: “Did you not know that My servant, so-and-so, asked you for food and you gave him none? Did you not know that had you fed him you would certainly have found that⁽¹⁾ with Me? Son of Adam, I asked you to give Me something to drink and you gave me none”. He will say: “My Lord, how can I give You something to drink when You are the Lord of all the worlds?” God will say: “My servant, so-and-so, asked you to give him something to drink but you gave him none. Had you given him something to drink you would have surely found that with Me”’.⁽²⁾

How broad life feels when you realize that whatever charity you put in the hand of one in need, you are actually putting in God’s own hand, and that whenever you extend an act of mercy to anyone of God’s creation, you will receive in return a mercy granted by the Creator! How expansive and exciting

(1) Meaning the reward for so doing.

(2) Related by Muslim, 2,569.

the future will be when you realize that you are going to your Lord with whom you have been dealing in your prayer and supplication, in love, hope and awe! You will certainly return to Him as He says: 'With your Lord is the ultimate end'. (53: 42) It is indeed a good life and a fine outcome, full of great hopes in God.

How wide is the gulf that separates such feelings from those of a person who looks at death as nothing but a totally dark abyss that leads to nothing whatsoever.





Five: Preparing for Death



To feel peaceful and calm as one is close to death is something that is experienced by a person who lives his life ready for this moment. One of the best incentives to be well prepared for death is to mention it frequently when one is in good health, hoping for a long life. Therefore, the Prophet advises us: ‘Mention frequently the one which destroys all pleasures’.⁽¹⁾ Mentioning it keeps one alert, taking the right preparations for it. Abu al-Dardā’ said: ‘When a person mentions death frequently, he feels no envy’.⁽²⁾ Remembering death restrains the eager pursuit of life’s pleasures and ambitions. Al-Daqqāq said: ‘Whoever frequently remembers death is favoured with three things: quick repentance of past misdeeds, readiness for voluntary worship and heart contentment’.⁽³⁾

One way of such frequent mention is to visit graveyards to draw a lesson. The Prophet (peace be upon him) encouraged this, saying: ‘Visit graveyards because they remind you of death’.⁽⁴⁾ The Prophet used to visit graveyards and to say on such a visit: ‘Peace be to you, the Muslim and believer dwellers

(1) Related by al-Tirmidhī, 2,307; al-Nasā’ī, 1,824.

(2) Ibn al-Mubarak, *al-Zuhd*, Vol. 2, p. 37.

(3) Al-Qurtubī, *al-Tadhkirah bi Aḥwāl al-Mawtā* i.e. Reminder of the conditions of the dead, p. 14.

(4) Related by Muslim, 976.

of this place. We shall be joining you, God willing. I pray to God to grant safety to you and us'. He taught his companions to say the same when they visited graveyards.

When one is at a graveyard, one notices that the graves are very similar. Their dwellers have left behind whatever distinguished them from other people. They are all equal in their graves, having shed their titles, positions and wealth. Mālik ibn Dīnār said: 'Bishr ibn Marwān, the ruler of Iraq, died and was buried. Then a black slave died and was buried next to him. Three days later, I passed by their graves and I could not distinguish the one from the other'.⁽¹⁾ The graveyard visitor remembers that those who are buried were one day on earth, conducting their business, having aspirations and dear wishes. What would they wish for if they could ever return to life?

Undoubtedly, their priorities and aspirations would be different. To them, life would have a different value, and what one can do during it would have a different objective. Therefore, every one of us should consider that we can do now, during our lives, what these people would be eager to do if they returned to life.

When one sees a grave, one is looking at someone giving an admonition and a reminder. The grave is silent no doubt, but its condition is expressive, telling us of our future status. Its dweller says to you: 'I was in life like you are now, but I died. You will also die. Happy is the one who takes heed from what happens to others. It is a moment that you are certain to arrive at, long as you may live'.⁽²⁾

Looking at graves increases our feeling of the value of life. A grave is like a mouth, calling on us: Make haste. Life is

(1) Ibn Abi al-Dunyā, *al-Muḥtaḍirūn*, p. 113.

(2) Al-Ishbīlī, *al-ʿĀqibah*, p. 204.

a time which is not sufficient even if every moment of it is devoted to good action. How could any part of it be wasted in something wrong or sinful? Were a person to be born, grow up and arrive at old age in one day, how much of that day would he be ready to waste? The person with the longest age in the world will look at his past life at the moment of his death and see it shorter than one day.

The living may forget the word 'death' through preoccupation or oversight, but the grave continues to remind them, putting the word to them in its clearest meaning. It tells them to learn its import, because all life will have the same end. The grave is the word of this land addressed to everyone who is deluded so as to see what has passed of one's life still remains, and to consider what remains of one's life as everlasting. Therefore, he persists in filling his life with sin and abomination. The grave calls out to people to mend their ways, as they still have time to mend them. If they persist in their wrongdoing until they reach the grave, it will remain with them forever.

Another good reminder of death and what comes after it is to follow funerals right up to the burial place. Looking at the deceased person as he is laid in his grave, and then filling the grave up with dust, then seeing people disperse to resume their life affairs are all scenes that inspire a person with an alert mind. He will see the end that is bound to come to him. Those who follow a funeral are the future dead. If we look at the case in this light we will see that death is very close to us. We can well imagine that we are walking and carrying our own coffins on our shoulders.⁽¹⁾

Waking up after having been asleep should remind us of death, because God describes sleep as similar to death. He says: 'God takes away people's souls upon their death, and the

(1) M. Mahmood, *Lughz al-Mawt*, i.e. The Death Enigma, p. 3.

souls of the living during their sleep. He keeps with Him the souls of those whose death He has ordained and sends back the others until their appointed time. In all this there are signs for people who reflect'. (39: 42) When he woke up, the Prophet used to say: 'All praise be to God for having giving us life after He had caused us to die. To Him all will return'.⁽¹⁾ As one wakes up, one feels one has been given a new lease of life. The moment of waking up is the start of the first day in what remains of one's life. The person has woken up to receive life, but a day is certain to come when he will be received by death.

Getting ready for death requires giving immediate attention to what should be done for a better outcome on the Day of Judgement. In this way, death does not come suddenly when we have not done what we wish to do. The worst grief at the time of death is what a person feels when he realizes that he is unable to do the good things that he kept postponing. This is what such people say, feeling great sorrow, as they face death: 'My Lord, if You would grant me a delay for a short while, I would give in charity and be one of the righteous'. (63: 10) 'When death approaches any of them, he says: "My Lord! Let me return [to life], so that I may act righteously in whatever I have failed to do". By no means!' (23: 99-100) The Prophet describes such bitter regret for postponed and unfulfilled good intentions. 'A man came to God's Messenger (peace be upon him) and asked: "Messenger of God, which *ṣadaqah* is greatest?" The Prophet said: "That you give away when you are healthy and parsimonious, fearing to be in poverty and hoping to be rich. Do not wait until [your soul] is at your throat and then say: I give so much to this person and so much to that person. Yet, it belongs to such a person"'.⁽²⁾

(1) Related by al-Bukhari, 6,312.

(2) Related by al-Bukhari, 1,419; Muslim, 1,032.

No one who is at the point of death will regret that he has failed to add a million dollars to the million he has in his bank account, or that he had not driven a more luxurious car than his own, or that he did not see a country he used to wish to visit. He will only regret failing to do some good deed that was available to him but which he postponed, or that he failed to give to charity a sum he intended to give, or an hour he wanted to spend doing something good but then failed to act on it.

No one will look at his past life, but he will look at his future life, realizing that this is the true life. Therefore, whoever neglected to prepare for it will say: ‘Oh, would that I had prepared for my life’. (89: 24) He realizes then that his life is the one he will soon enter, not the one he is leaving.

Those whose death arrives when they have fulfilled all their good intentions, putting forward their good deeds are the happy ones. Here are some insightful sayings from wise scholars which I would like to share with my readers:

- When you spend your life going the right way, you will be ready to face death and you will find it more acceptable.
- Try to make your life happy and full, working for your future life to which you will soon be transferred. When your time is due, make sure that you are not one of those whose hearts are full of the fear of death, crying and appealing for a grace period of life so that you can lead a different way of life.
- Do not leave anything for death to take apart from an empty box. Fulfil your good intentions and be resolute in doing good deeds. Make sure to complete these ahead of your death. Thus you will face the moment of death having completed your work, achieved your goals and you are ready to face what lies ahead.

Preparing for death does not mean abandoning pleasure and depriving oneself of its enjoyments. God commands

His messengers to enjoy the good things in life, as He says addressing them: ‘Messengers! Eat of that which is wholesome, and do good deeds’. (23: 51) God also mentions the advice given to a very rich man by some devout people. They said to him: ‘Seek instead, by means of what God has granted you, the good of the life to come, without forgetting your rightful share in this world’. (28: 77)

One aspect of God’s wisdom and mercy is that He has withheld people’s time of death, so that they will continue to be in hope, be happy in life and work for its progress. Muṭarrif ibn ‘Abdullāh said: ‘If I knew when my death would take place, I would be in fear of becoming mad. God has favoured His servants by keeping them unaware of the time of their deaths. Had it not been so, they would never have enjoyed life and they would not have established markets’.⁽¹⁾

However, remembering and preparing for death means establishing a balance in what we do for our present lives and what we store for the life to come. This will not deprive us of enjoying the good things of this life. On the contrary, such enjoyment will be doubled and increased further when we partake of them realizing that they are God’s gifts and blessings. The Prophet (peace be upon him) says: ‘God is pleased with His servant who would have a meal and praise Him for it, or have a drink and praise Him for it’.⁽²⁾ We will find good enjoyment in a bite of food, a drink of water, a feeling of love, good health, secure residence, friendship with good people, the beauty of the world around us, etc. and we then thank God for having granted us all these. We praise Him for

(1) Ibn Abi al-Dunyā, *Qīṣar al-Amal*, p. 39. Also, Ibn ‘Aqīl, *al-Funūn*, Vol. 2, p. 648.

(2) Related by Muslim, 2,734.

enabling us to experience such pleasures, enjoy them, and see their beauty. When he went to bed, the Prophet (peace be upon him) used to say: ‘All praise be to God who has fed us, given us our drink, given us enough and provided us with shelter. Many are those who have none to give them enough or provide them with shelter’.⁽¹⁾ We note that the Prophet felt that such normal blessings are so enjoyable that they deserve renewed expression of gratitude for them.

A person who believes in the life to come endures hardship with serenity and acceptance. Whenever he suffers a hardship, he remembers how often he enjoyed God’s numerous blessings in the past. He also thinks of the great reward God has in store for him for his patient endurance and acceptance of his hardship. This motivates him to again express his acceptance, and he praises God for all His favours.



(1) Related by Muslim, 2,715.

Six: I Have Experienced Death

I was in fine health, full of vigour. As I walked, I felt as though the earth was pushing me on. Death was far away from my thoughts. It is always the case that death is kept far from our minds, when in actuality it is the closest thing to us. We are oblivious to it even though we see it on our right and left. We follow other people's funerals unaware of what message they hold for us. We see processions of dead people, but we take no heed. We do not reflect upon the inevitability that we too will die as those people have died. Many were those who died when they were healthier, stronger than us, or were in power in their various lands enjoying the support of numerous followers and helpers. Yet when their time of death arrived, neither health, strength, political power nor followers were of any avail. We are well aware that death will be the end of everyone who is alive. But we ignore this fact. It is removed from our minds by our preoccupations and the trivialities of our present lives. Everyone says that death is true and that it will come to everyone, but our actions suggest that we think that we will escape it, and that death will come to everyone but ourselves. We think that we have plenty of time ahead of us, and that our time for death will not come.

But I experienced death and went through its early moments, suddenly and unexpectedly. I will relate now how and when this was.

It was a rough sea at Beirut, with the waves rising as high as sand dunes. I was close to the shore, a mediocre swimmer. When I felt tired, I took a rest enjoying the sunny weather and fresh air. I later went back into the sea and stayed a long while without perceiving that I was going further and further away from the shore. I reached a deep spot which I later learnt even skilful swimmers stayed away from.

Now that I was there, how could I get out of this dangerous spot? I tried to stand, but could not find any solid ground below. I tried to lift my head, but I was well under the surface. I could see nothing. I only felt the salty seawater going into my mouth and nose, and I had to inhale and swallow it. I soon started to feel pain which was severe beyond imagination or description. All my hopes centred on finding a single breath of air, but it was all in vain. I felt I was facing certain death. This is the end I always avoided speaking about. It was something that was still in the distant future. Hence, I kept postponing turning to God in repentance. I first thought that I would repent of my sins when I started my career, but then found I had left it until I was forty years of age. When I passed forty, I thought I would repent when I completed building my home. When it was built, I decided to repent when I retired from my work, as if I had obtained a promise that the angel of death would not knock on my door before I retired. Yet here he was, beating at my door unannounced.

At this critical juncture, the whole world became trivial in my mind's eye. How does a person who is on the point of death look at this world? By God, the image of this entire present world was effaced before me. How could I care about the world when I only had a few seconds left to live, and these in terrible and agonising pain? I had nothing to attract me to it, not even my family or children. I was too preoccupied with my own sad lot.

Numerous thoughts occurred to me as to what should I do. I tried to say the declaration of belief in God's oneness and declare my repentance of all sins, but I could not say a word because the sea water filled my mouth. My pain increased but it could not stop my thoughts. My brain was strangely and marvellously alert, in a way I had never before experienced.

Death came to me all of a sudden, like a lazy and negligent schoolboy suddenly facing his final examination. I was now facing the greatest test, one which would lead either to eternal happiness in Heaven or long suffering in Hell.

I reviewed my deeds and I could not find in my record a single action of the type truly devout people perform. I was not one of those who constantly feel that God is always watching what they do. Nor was I one of those who spend hours in worship, staying up long nights in voluntary worship. I was not one of those who supplicate and appeal to God before dawn, when most people are asleep. Nor was I one of the God-fearing who steer away from whatever is forbidden. Yet I was one among many oblivious sinners. Yes, indeed. So how, then, could I stand in front of God?

I then realized that all I had gained in my life was nothing more than some moments when I felt the sweetness of faith when I turned to God with true sincerity. Essentially, I had spent decades in the sea of oblivion. In my ignorance, I felt that I still had plenty of days ahead. I could not imagine that a person's life was nothing more than a few hours which represented all one's capital. If this capital was wasted, then nothing was left.

I remembered a hadith I had memorized in my youth. It quoted the Prophet saying: 'Make full use of five things before five others occur: your young age before you come to old age; your good health before you are ill; your good means before you become poor; your spare time before you are too busy;

and your life before you die'.⁽¹⁾ I regretted that I had not put this hadith in front of my eyes and that I had not made it the basis of my way of life. Unfortunately, I did not understand its full meaning until my life was about to end.

I thought of the hardship attending acts of obedience of God, and I realized that when the pain is over, the reward remains. I considered the pleasure attending some sinful actions and realized that the pleasure was gone and the reckoning was due. Basically, I regretted that I had not dedicated every minute of my time in life to obeying God.

I realized that all standards are altered at the time of death. Everything that I loved and was eager to take for myself had become nothing. I was not taking anything with me. I had built a house, but I was not taking with me even one of its stones. I had money, but nothing was left of it except what I thought in the past I had lost. What remained was whatever I had donated for God's sake. I had experienced all types of life's pleasures, but what remained of them when I now found myself drowning?

The pain of death overwhelmed me, and I could no longer think of anything. I turned to God and thought of His compassion and forgiveness. Hope and a love for life were still strong in my mind, and I hit hard with my arms and legs. I lifted my right hand to signal to whoever might see it. Then I fell again into despair and submitted myself to God.

I imagined that I was in this condition for hours, but I later realized that I had stayed in this condition for only two minutes. Yet in these two minutes, I experienced all this pain and traversed all these thoughts.

When I almost lost all my strength and was about to dive and sink further, I heard voices calling me. I felt my hand touching

(1) Related by al-Nasā'ī in *al-Sunan al-Kubrā*, 11,832.

a solid object, and I realized that it was the edge of a small boat. A unique feeling of delight which I never experienced before, overwhelmed me. I felt that I was being lifted to the boat. I was almost unconscious as some people held my legs, so that I could throw out some of the sea water I had swallowed.

I returned a new person. I had received a unique admonition which I hope will remain with me for the rest of my life. I now knew the value of life and death. We, indeed, know nothing of death except how it appears to us. We do not know its essence.

Death is nothing but a transition into a broader and more expansive life: either to permanent happiness or long-lasting misery. If death is an inevitable journey, then every wise person should be prepared for it. They should always remember it so that they will not be oblivious of it. Everyone should look at whatever they have: if it is something that they can carry along with them, they should be keen to have it; but if they must leave almost everything behind, they should look at it as trivial and care little for it.

In conclusion I say: by God, I fear lest I die when my mind and heart are not alert thinking of God, feeling repentance, thinking of the life to come, just as I was on this eventful occasion.⁽¹⁾



(1) This is a summary of an article by the late 'Alī al-Ṭanṭāwī, published in his book *Min Ḥadīth al-Nafs*, p. 238.



Seven: Man in Search of Meaning



I read Viktor Frankl's book *Man's Search for Meaning* in which he relates his exceedingly painful experience during the Nazi Holocaust. The only similar experience is that reported by the survivors of the Syrian prison in Palmyra.⁽¹⁾ Frankl speaks of what he suffered and points out what gave him the will or resistance while many others succumbed or wanted to die. He says that the search for a meaning to life and looking forward to achieve it gives people the necessary strength. He adds that what distinguishes man's ability to survive in the worst of conditions is that he can look forward to the future.

Frankl says that whoever despairs of the future spells his own doom, while the one who knows the cause and the aim of his existence remains able to endure any adverse circumstance, no matter how hard it may be. For Frankl, man's search for a meaning to life was his own prime mover. He says that man needs an objective which he lives to fulfil.

Frankl describes what he calls the emptiness of existence, which means losing the consciousness that life has a meaning. One such example he gives is the neurosis suffered during the weekend. It is a type of depression suffered by those who

(1) This was even surpassed by other Syrians prisons, such as the one in Sydnaya. Its horrors came to light only after the fall of the Asad regime on 8 December 2024. – Editor's note.

become aware of what they like in life when their busy working week is over while they have little to do at the weekend. They feel their own emptiness. He says that many try to compensate for having a meaning by trying to gain more money, or pursuing some pleasure, or resorting to some addiction, or even committing suicide.

I note that Frankl deliberately refers to the goal a person should have by a general and ambiguous term, 'meaning'. Indeed, everyone can define such a meaning according to their own interests. A person may find it in bringing up his children, or in writing a book, or in a house he hopes to possess, or a tree he plants, or even a pet, or some other concern. I was amazed at these little objectives. In contrast, I thought of the life of a believer in God who is certain to meet Him. Thus, the believer's life can accommodate this life and what comes after it. He looks at death as the beginning of real life. Throughout his life on earth, he looks forward to the life to come which is, to him, an absolute certainty, admitting no doubt whatsoever. His deeds and endeavours are constantly centred around it.

A believer does not experience the need or the anxiety of searching for a meaning, because he has the answer to all the questions people ask about life, existence and destiny. His faith gives him all the answers he needs, clear and simple. Therefore, his way ahead is clear before him, and his mission is well defined. The search for meaning is important to those who have neither listened to the revealed address nor responded to the urgings of human nature. He is thus left in confusion, with no clear meaning, defined goal or proper mission. On the other hand, to a believer, the meaning is set out clearly and he needs not search for it. He knows that he had no choice in coming into this life, and he has no say about departing it. In between birth and death, he spends his life preparing for the eternal life. His limited duration of life on earth is the time allowed for him to work, but the outcome will be in the next life,

which is eternal. During his life on earth, a believer deals with God, addressing his worship to Him, and when he dies, he returns to God for his reward: 'With your Lord is the ultimate end'. (53: 42)

We read this reassured certainty in the wills of many Muslims, which they write shortly before they die. We often read these wills starting with phrases like: 'This is what is stated by God's servant X, son of God's servant Z, declaring that he bears witness that there is no deity other than God, and that Muhammad is God's Messenger, and that Jesus was God's servant and messenger, and His word given to Mary, and a soul from Him. He testifies that Heaven is true, Hell is true and that God will resurrect all those in their graves...'

What a believer writes shortly before his death states his belief which was with him throughout his life. Therefore, he does not need to search for a higher meaning. Such a meaning is most clear to him. It is the ultimate goal to which all other goals are secondary.

It is with such certainty of faith that a believer faces death just as he uses it when facing all life's conditions. When a calamity befalls him, he says: 'To God we all belong, and to Him we will return'. When he finds himself in hardship, he says: 'God is enough for us; He is the best Guardian'. When he embarks on a serious task, he says: 'No power operates except by God's will'. When a blessing comes his way, he says: "All praise is due to God. This is by the Grace of my Lord". And when he is about to die, he says: 'There is no deity other than God. We believe in it throughout life and we believe it as we die'.

When we import the problem of 'searching for life's meaning' into the domain of believers, we are giving them an irrelevant question and an inapplicable problem. Essentially, we are imposing the questions of a confused and worried mindset on one which is reassured by its faith.

Eight: At a Square in Sarajevo

When I visited Sarajevo, I went through the Market Square. On one side, a large chessboard was drawn: players took turns and competed standing. A crowd of interested people stood close by, following the game. Most of these onlookers were bald, or with grey, uncombed hair. They were old people with wrinkled faces. They were retired people and seemed to have retired from life as well. They spent their time in this square which is open seven days a week, twenty-four hours a day. If you stop to watch you hear exchanges of abusive words, stories of old films, the names of old sporting people who died many years earlier, etc.

I stood by watching the crowd. My guide told me that they were retired people who spent their time there because they found life boring, and yet had plenty of time on their hands. Basically, they had nothing to do but wait for death.

I left them to their game and entered Khusru Pasha Mosque, a historical mosque close to the square. This was about an hour before the midday prayer was due. I saw in the mosque an elderly man, wearing clean clothes, with a serene face commanding respect. He had in front of him a large copy of the Qur'an and he was reciting its verses. He looked fully absorbed in his spiritual action, as though he was looking up to Heaven, unaware of what was close to him.



The two contrasted scenes remained in my mind. I compared those retirees who felt that they had a surplus of life and could only go through it by watching this idle game with the old man in the mosque who spent his life during Communist rule holding onto his faith like one who holds a firebrand. When he retired, he realized that he must do the best in the time that was left to him. I realized that he looked at the hours of his life as though they were empty boxes which he should fill with good deeds that would accompany him when he departed this life.

I also remembered one old and good believer who had his own copy of the Qur'an. When he died, his sons found in this copy a sheet of paper on which he wrote the dates when he began each of his readings of the Qur'an in full and the dates when he completed each reading. It seems that as he started each reading, he felt that he had begun a new project for which he dedicated his spare time. Dedicated his time and effort to reciting the Qur'an and understanding it.

What a blessing those two elderly people found in their lives. They knew what they were doing and were well aware of where they were going. By contrast, what meaning do those who burn away their surplus time in such a boring marketplace pursuit have?



Nine: The Death Phobia

A person who has an erroneous view of life will also have an erroneous view of death. Death does not entail going to nowhere, and it is not the final end. Rather, it is a transition from one world to another. A balanced remembrance of death is neither negative nor frustrating. On the contrary, it helps us to better invest into our lives, be tolerant with other people and ignore trivialities.

We can look at death as a teacher from whom we learn that life and death are the two sides of the same coin: youth is the death of childhood and old age is the death of youth. We learn that death is a bridge taking us to eternal life. As we go from one stage to the next, we are unaware as we climb one stage after another. Thus, we make our peace with death and are ready to receive it. It is no longer a frightful thing that chases us around.

Death reminds me of three things: first, what I have to present when I meet God. Secondly, what the heritage I leave behind will be. Thirdly, how do I spend the rest of my life happily and with a right plan? When I depart, I hope that I will have arranged my priorities well; I hope that I will have said my last word.⁽¹⁾

(1) Salman al-Oadah, *When I Depart*, an episode of his programme, *Wasm*.

Fear of death is neither desirable nor recommended. A Muslim remembers death so as to steer away from wronging others and from all types of sin; as also to catch up on what he has missed of good and benevolent deeds. He remembers it to take life truly and seriously. Every remembrance of death which does not lead to a good deed is Satan's work aiming at making people sad and weak. Essentially, then, a phobia of death is due to a misunderstanding of it.

Any person can face death comfortably when he has prepared well for it, having nothing rightfully due to someone else that remains unfulfilled. Nor does he have a good project which he intended to do, but delayed and left undone. Nor does he persist in something sinful, missing the chance to repent of it.

When someone has none of these burdens to carry, he will feel that death is merely a journey that has become due, and which he has prepared well for. He is taking on his journey all that he needs to take and leaving behind all the needless burdens.

A catastrophic death is that which arrives as a totally unexpected surprise. It catches up with one who is oblivious to it, having done nothing to prepare for it. He remained unwilling even to think about it. Therefore, he turns away whenever it is mentioned. Hence, when it comes, it is the inevitable moment: 'The stupor of death brings with it the full truth: This is what you tried to escape'. (50: 19) You have always tried to escape and turned a blind eye. Now you have reached the finishing line. The stupor of death comes to you when you are lost in the stupor of life.

The catastrophe that awakens the oblivious person is death itself. His feeling for not having corrected his life's errors and not increased his good deeds will be one of great sorrow. The critical moment has arrived and it cannot be shifted. 'When the end of their term approaches, they can neither delay nor hasten

it by a single moment.’ (7: 34) That time has passed, and the decision to mend one’s ways is too late.

The really painful death is one whereby we die before death comes to us. Basically, we die when we are alive. This is when we live without a well-defined goal, and with no achievement; or, when we distance ourselves away from God, experiencing no moments of sincere worship and appeal to Him which should draw us closer to Him.





Ten: Unveiling Death



Any discussion of death and what comes after it, with no reference to divine revelations, is no more than groping in thick darkness. It leads to nothing but blind confusion. What follows death is a different life in which there is nothing like the life we have in this world. Therefore, comparison between the two is useless. We go to a different world and life to which we cannot apply our measures and knowledge. Any attempt to understand it by applying human knowledge, experience and thought is no more than blind guesswork, with no valid foundation. In the Qur'an we read: 'Perish the ones given to blind guessing who are steeped in error, heedless of the truth. They ask: When will this Day of Judgement come?' (51: 10-12)

One type of such guessing is based on cases of what is termed as 'temporary clinical death'.⁽¹⁾ Some of those who experienced this condition report what happened to them, as if it were a case of life after death. However, what happened to them cannot be considered real death, because no one can return to life after death. Absolutely no one will return to this life after they die. God says: 'Our Lord, twice have You caused us to die, just as twice You have brought us to life'.

(1) Several such reports are related by Raymond Moody in his book '*Life after Life*'. He studies what was reported by people who went through such experiences.

(40: 11) There is no exception other than what is mentioned in the Qur'an, such as Jesus' miracle of bringing the dead back to life. As for what is reported by those who think that they have returned to life after being dead, this is nothing more than fleeting psychological imaginations. Such reports tell nothing of the conditions of the life to come.

However, people show much interest in such reports, studying them voraciously. This shows how eager people are to learn about the conditions of life after death. They hope that such visions in situations when people are unconscious may give them an idea of such future life. However, this is no more than losing one's way when walking in thick darkness. It relies on neither scientific facts nor revealed certainties.

The moment when one is in the throes of death and what follows it are totally screened from us. We neither see nor know what exactly takes place. It is a situation of total human powerlessness as God's decree is accomplished totally. Death takes place when the dying person is attended by his doctors, family members, friends and loved ones. All of them are absolutely helpless as what was entrusted to the dying person is claimed back: the soul returning to its Creator. God says: 'When the soul [of a dying person] comes up to the throat while you are helplessly looking on We are closer to him than you, although you do not see Us. Why, if you think you are not to be judged, can you not restore that [ebbing life], if what you claim is true?' (56: 83-87)

Death is the greatest event we will experience, and it occurs in an order of which we have no control. It is the gate to the future true life. Man faces that life as though he goes from what is abstract to reality. Hence the old saying: 'People are in slumber: when they die, they wake up'.

The Qur'an gives several clear accounts of the life to come, presenting images and scenes of this future life. Some

of these are short glimpses while others are well detailed. We can almost see these scenes shown before our eyes. We see how people are shocked and distracted, and we feel how hard and stressful the situation is, and we also see the final outcome. Thus, the future world is not merely described for people; it is presented to them in full view, clear and moving, as though the life to come is the one they see at present, while the present life is the one that has ended. Muslims live their lives as though they are already in the world to which they are destined: they look at its scenes and interact with them. Thus, their hearts are eager to be there at one time and trembling in fear at another. They oscillate between complete reassurance and panic, as though they feel a flash of the Fire at one moment and experience the freshness of Heaven at another. Thus, they know the future world very well. Such knowledge through the Qur'an is easy, clear with nothing complex or ambiguous. It is death and resurrection, followed by total happiness or great torment. Those who believe and do good deeds will go to Heaven and enjoy its blessings and comforts, while those who disbelieve and are guilty will endure great suffering. The scales of divine justice are absolutely accurate: 'Whoever does an atom's weight of good will see it then, and whoever does an atom's weight of evil will see it then'. (99: 7-8)

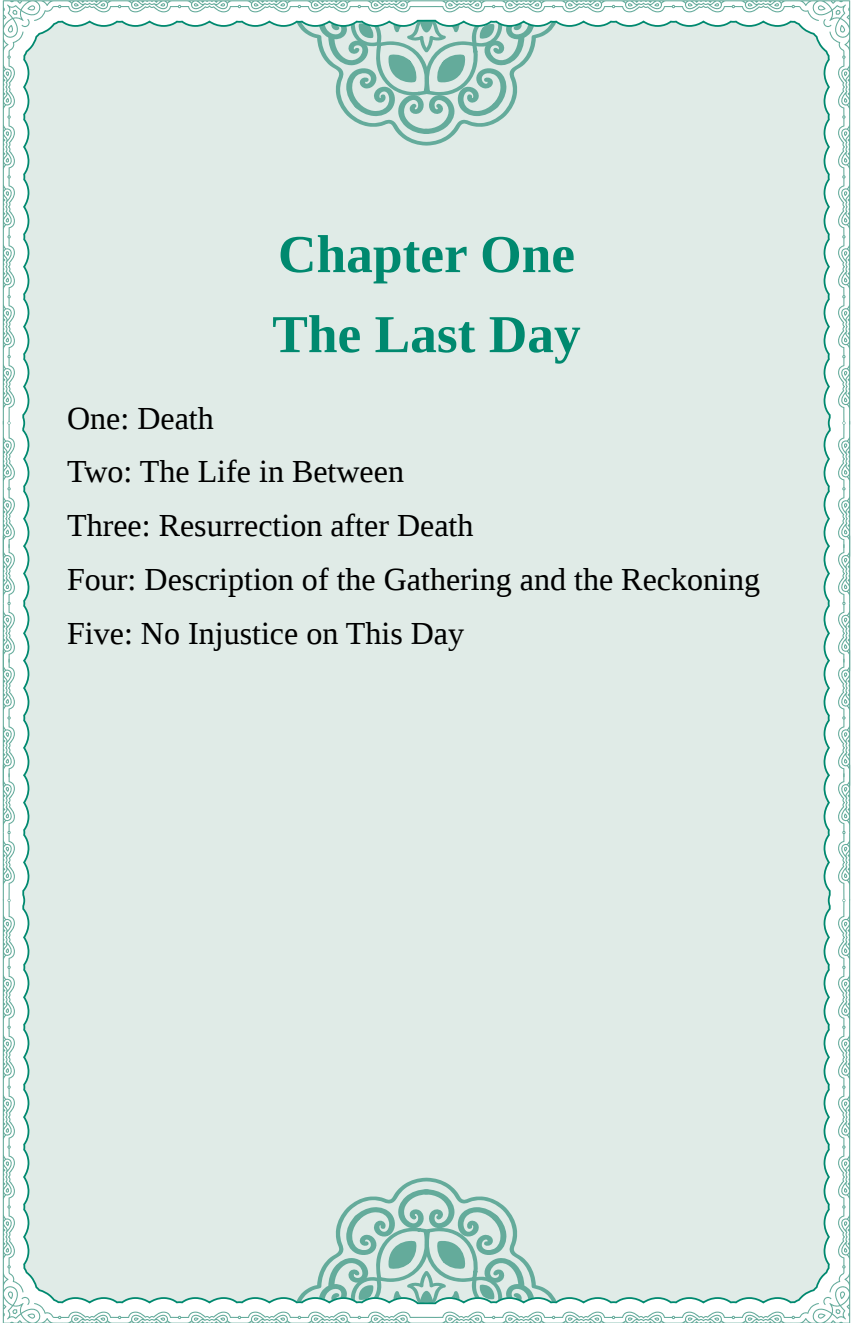
When we look at the Qur'anic verses describing this journey to the Hereafter, we will be able to clearly understand the facts of the world beyond, which we believe in and prepare for, as God says of good believers: 'Those who fear their Lord in their most secret thoughts, and are weary of the Last Hour'. (21: 49) 'Those who believe in what lies beyond the reach of human perception, attend regularly to prayer and give generously of what We bestow upon them.' (2: 3)

Readers will find in this book how the Qur'an describes the journey of life after the present life. It is told and described

by our supreme Lord ‘who has created death as well as life, so that He may put you to a test to show who of you is best in conduct’. (67: 2) We will thus see what we will be beholding, and experience what we will be living. The future will appear clear before our eyes. The Qur’anic description is absolutely detailed and accurate, painting the deep feeling of the human soul and its own thoughts; and it also describes the surrounding scene. Thus, the feelings and scenes are given to us so as to be a clear admonition and reminder. It awakens our hearts so that everyone will look at what they are sending ahead in preparation for their future lives.

May God include us among ‘those of His servants whom the angels gather in death while they are in a state of purity, saying: “Peace be upon you! Enter paradise by virtue of what you were doing [in life]”’. (16: 32)





Chapter One

The Last Day

One: Death

Two: The Life in Between

Three: Resurrection after Death

Four: Description of the Gathering and the Reckoning

Five: No Injustice on This Day



One: Death



The Qur'an mentions death in many verses. The most important thing the Qur'an reminds us of concerning death is that it is not a state of non-existence. On the contrary, it is the end of a short, temporary life, and the start of a long and eternal life. It is the end of a test and the beginning of reward. The Qur'an also tells us that death signifies the beginning of the second life which human beings will have according to how they perform in this present life. Hence, death is often mentioned in the Qur'an together with resurrection: 'And then, after all this, you are destined to die; and then, you shall be restored to life on the Day of Resurrection'. (23: 15-16)

It is at the moment of death that the life of this world appears in its true colour. All that it offers of enjoyment, wealth, position and status are seen with their true values. As he is departing this life, man looks at it all very differently from how he viewed it when he was fully involved in it. He feels that whatever he owned and was keen to keep has gone away. Everything is now very different. When the Umayyad caliph, 'Abd al-Malik ibn Marwān was on his death bed, he was asked how he felt. He said: 'I feel just as God says: "Now, indeed, you have come to Us individually, just as We created

you in the first instance; and you have left behind all that We conferred on you”⁽¹⁾ (6: 94)

‘As death was approaching him, the Abbasid Caliph Hārūn al-Rashīd ordered that his wrappings in which he was to be buried should be brought to him. He looked at them and said: “Nothing has my wealth availed me. I am now bereft of all my power”⁽²⁾ (69: 28-29) ‘When ‘Abd al-‘Azīz ibn Marwān, the Governor of Egypt, was about to die, he kept saying: “How trivial this life is: what is tall in it is really short; and what is plentiful is but little”⁽³⁾ During his last illness, Prince ‘Abdullāh ibn ‘Abd al-Malik was given the happy news that his wealth in gold, which was in Egypt, had been doubled. He said: “What use is it to me? It is just the same as sheep’s droppings”⁽⁴⁾

Thus, gold loses its shine and all hopes of life are lost. The dying person begins to think of the life he is approaching, not the one he is departing. Hence, a miser who was keen to accumulate wealth and loth to spend it will say: ‘My Lord, if You would grant me a delay for a short while, I would give in charity and be one of the righteous’. (63: 10) Even tyrannic rulers succumb before death. A tyrant realizes that he is losing his grip on power and authority. In his last few moments, he tries to look at what he used to disdain during life, but his repentance comes too late. God says: ‘Repentance will not be accepted from those who indulge in their evil deeds and, when death comes to any of them, he says: “I now repent”’. (4: 18) God tells us in the Qur’an that Pharaoh himself, wicked tyrant as he was, declared his repentance and belief in God when he was facing death by drowning, but it was too late: ‘As he

(1) Ibn Abi al-Dunyā, *al-Muḥtaḍirūn*, p. 78.

(2) Ibid, p. 96.

(3) Ibid, p. 111.

(4) Ibid, p. 114.

was about to drown, Pharaoh said: “I have come to believe that there is no deity other than Him in whom the Children of Israel believe, and to Him I surrender myself”. [But God said:] “Only now? But before this you were rebelling [against Us], and you spread corruption in the land”. (10: 90-91)

Many verses of the Qur'an describe the moment of death as very hard. They tell us how people feel, react and hope at that moment. They put before us what we cannot see. No one of those standing close to a dying person see any aspect of it, because it is a situation of the life to come shown only to those who get there.

The scene of approaching death is very moving. The final breaths of life go out with difficulty, and the dying person is on the point of departure. Those around stand powerless. The person is in God's hand. The soul of the dying person has nothing left in this life, as it turns its back to the earth and all those living on it. It goes to another world which is unknown to it. All that it takes from this life is the deeds and whatever they earn of good or evil. We have clear images of this situation and the feelings it inspires, as well as advance images of the Hereafter. These are painted in clear verses of the Qur'an. Here are some of these:

Death is the end of life's journey

Death is the thing man always tries to avoid and steer away from his mind. He knows that death is ahead of him, but he does not think that it will come to him. He follows funerals but does not think his own funeral will take place. How can he escape, when death pursues every one of us? It never fails to come at the moment appointed for it. ‘When the end of their term approaches, they can neither delay nor hasten it by a single moment’. (7: 34) Try as man may steer away from mentioning or remembering death, he will inevitably face it: ‘The stupor of death brings with it the full truth: This is what

you tried to escape'. (50: 19) 'Wherever you may be, death will overtake you.' (4: 78) 'Say: "The death from which you are trying to run away will certainly face you"'. (62: 8) What overtakes normally comes from behind, but what faces one comes from the front. In fact, all directions are equally ways death comes from. If one fortifies oneself against death, it will overtake one, and if one runs away from it, it will face one. It seems that the one running away is actually speeding towards death.

There is neither a specific age, nor a particular disease, nor a special place for death. God says: 'No one knows in what land they will die'. (31: 34) Everyone alive will inevitably die and depart this life. Death does not respond to an urgent appeal, a lover's sorrow or the fear of one in panic. When the soul of the dying person comes to his throat and he is in the final throes of death, suffering distress beyond description, those who are present realize that they can do nothing to help or save him. God says: 'Yet when the departing soul comes up to the throat, when it is said, "Can any charmer [do something now]?" When he knows it is the final parting, and one leg will be joined with another, to your Lord he will on that Day be driven'. (75: 26-30)

These verses describe a scene when death is yet to happen but in such a way as if it is happening now. The present life is shown as if it is a past memory, so that we can feel these last pangs of breath as if they were our own. It is the kind of very severe suffering and pain that causes the sufferer to join one leg to the other. His soul reaches his throat, and his family surround him wondering whether anyone, a devout supplicant or a doctor, can be of any help. However, all means are rendered useless. The sufferer realizes that the moment of departure from this life is on hand, and that he has to take the one way every living person will be driven to: 'To your Lord

he will on that Day be driven'. (75: 30) Painting the scene as it actually happens is intended to remove what blurs the view of those who are full of conceit and those who are totally allured and fascinated by worldly enjoyments, imagining that they have a very long time before them. This scene confronts them all with the fact that death is close by; nay, it is present now. What comes after it is the return to God, with whom man's journey ends. 'Surely to your Lord all must return'. (96: 8) It is the transition that happens now: 'With your Lord is the ultimate end', (53: 42) but the final abode is with God: 'On that Day, to your Lord all will return'. (75: 12)

Whether our present life is long or short, it is one of toil, followed by the ultimate end when God, who has given us this life, will take us back to meet Him. He says: 'O man! You have been toiling towards your Lord, and you will meet Him'. (84: 6) When man knows that the ultimate end is with God, he realizes as he begins his journey that he will reach its inevitable end. His heart and sight will be fixed on that end. This helps him to know his Lord and he will worship Him. He will then receive the good news of what awaits him of God's rich reward. By contrast, the one who leads a life of turning his back on God, treating His commandments with arrogance, will stand before Him humiliated and in fear. He is just like a chased criminal when he is arrested.

Man's regret at the moment of death

The moment a person faces death is the same moment he feels regret that he has missed out on what he could have done for his future life. He is in great sorrow for every sin he has committed and for every opportunity he wasted without doing a good deed. The Prophet (peace be upon him) said: 'Whoever dies will feel regret'. People asked: 'What will he regret, Messenger of God?' He said: 'If he has done well, he will

regret that he could not do more of good deeds, and if he has done badly, he will regret that he did not stop his wrongdoing'.⁽¹⁾

It is important to realize that it is not possible to ascertain the value of what is possible unless it becomes unavailable or unachievable. Good health and safety are only appreciated when one is either ill or going through some trial. Likewise, the value of life is only recognized at the time of death, when matters become apparent and man realizes the importance of good deeds, which are those that he will keep and take with him. When he realizes all this, he also recognizes the value of what he had wasted.

God mentions what the sinners and those negligent of their duties regret at the time of death and what they wish dearly to be given to them. He says: 'When death approaches any of them, he says: "My Lord! Let me return [to life], so that I may act righteously in whatever I have failed to do". By no means! It is but a word he says. Behind them there stands a barrier till the Day when all will be raised from the dead'. (23: 99-100) This wish the dying person expresses is merely a word which will not give him an extension of life or a new opportunity. It is a wish he says when it is too late, because a great gulf or barrier stands between him and life.

This is indeed the scene of the declaration of repentance at the time of death, requesting a return to life in order to do what was left undone. This too late appeal is given a firm response: 'By no means! It is but a word he says'. It is the word necessitated by the dreadful position such a person finds himself in. It is not a word of sincere repentance. It is said at the moment of distress, not an appropriately timed word. The situation is already settled: doors are closed as the time allowed for work is over and requital becomes due.

(1) Related by al-Tirmidhī, 2,403.

God also mentions the regret expressed by misers who concentrate on amassing wealth but withhold it. They will wish that they had spent all their money in good ways that would have benefitted them in their future lives. God says: ‘Give, then, out of what We have provided for you, before death comes to any of you, and then he says, “My Lord, if You would grant me a delay for a short while, I would give in charity and be one of the righteous”. God does not grant a delay to any soul when its term has come. God is fully aware of all that you do’. (63: 10-11)

The stupor of death

The actual time of death and the departure of the soul is described as ‘the stupor of death’. God says: ‘The stupor of death brings with it the full truth: This is what you tried to escape’. (50: 19) The very mention of it is enough to make one’s heart and body tremble in fear.

When the Prophet (peace be upon him) approached his death, he used to dip his hand in water and wipe his face with it. He continued to say: ‘There is no deity other than God. Death is accompanied by stupors. My Lord, help me through the stupor of death’.⁽¹⁾ He also said: ‘My Lord, forgive me and bestow mercy on me; and join me to the Supreme Companion’.⁽²⁾ His last supplication was to request the companionship of God, Mighty and Exalted, and that of earlier prophets.

The same was the case for the Prophet’s companions and other devout people after them. They welcomed death by being optimistic about meeting God. When Mu‘ādh ibn Jabal was close to death, he asked those who were attending him to look whether the dawn had broken. They told him that it had not. Later, they told him that dawn had broken. He said: ‘I seek

(1) Related by Ibn Mājah, 1,623.

(2) Related by al-Bukhari, 4,440; Muslim, 2,444; al-Tirmidhī, 3,496.

refuge with God from a night when the morning after will lead to the Fire. Welcome to death; it is welcome. It is a loved one coming when needed. My Lord, You know that I used to fear You; but today I turn to You in hope. I never loved the present life in order to attend to irrigation or to plant trees, but I loved it for fasting days, spending long time in worship and joining scholars when they sit together glorifying You'.⁽¹⁾

On his deathbed, Bilāl, the Prophet's companion, used to say: 'Tomorrow I meet my loved ones: Muhammad and his companions'.⁽²⁾ One bedouin fell ill and he was told that he was about to die. He asked: 'Where will they take me?' They said: 'To God'. He said: 'Why would I dislike going to God when all the good I have ever received came from Him?'⁽³⁾

At this time, man says the most important things he wants to say to his family and loved ones, and he reminds other people of the most important things that are of benefit to them. An example is stated in the Qur'an, reporting what Prophet Jacob said to his sons: 'Were you present when death approached Jacob? He asked his children, "Whom will you worship when I am gone?" They replied, "We will worship your God, the God of your forefathers Abraham, Ishmael and Isaac, the One God. To Him do we submit ourselves"'. (2: 133) When Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) was about to depart this life, his last words urged Muslims to always keep up their prayers, and to be kind and compassionate towards slaves and servants.

The admonitions of a number of highly devout believers have been reported because of the reminders they include in them. One such example is that of Yazīd al-Raqāshī who wept as death approached him. He was asked why he was crying. He

(1) Ibn Abi al-Dunyā, *al-Muḥtaḍirūn*, p. 127.

(2) Ibid, p. 294.

(3) Ibid, p. 24.

said: 'I am weeping for what I will be missing of night prayer and fasting days'. He continued to weep, then said: 'Who will pray for you, Yazīd, and who will fast? Who will draw you closer to God by offering good deeds on your behalf? Who will turn to God in repentance for your earlier sins? Woe to you, my brothers. Do not be deceived by your young age and vigour. The serious matter and the great distress that I have experienced could come to you as well. Save yourselves and be warned. Be quick to do your best. May God have mercy on you'.⁽¹⁾

When Abu Ḥāzim al-A'raj was about to die, his attendants asked him how he felt. He said: 'I feel well. I am full of hope with God, and I think well of Him'. He then added: 'By God, these two cannot be equal: the one who day after day works for his life to come, doing well ahead of his death, and when he dies, he finds it welcoming him; and one who day after day works for this life, building for others and when he arrives for his life to come, he finds that he has no share of it'.⁽²⁾

When Abu al-Dardā' was on his deathbed, he fainted. When he regained consciousness, he wondered: 'Who is working for the time when he is in my condition? Who is working for the same time as this hour of my life?'⁽³⁾

The moment of death is the moment when a person leaves the scene of this world and begins the scene of the Hereafter. A believer goes through it receiving the good news of a fine welcome and God's mercy, while a wrongdoer experiences it met with rebuke and warnings of forthcoming punishment. 'Ā'ishah said: 'God's Messenger (peace be upon him) said: "When a person loves to meet God, God will love to meet him,

(1) Ibid, p. 191.

(2) Ibid, p. 152.

(3) Ibid, p. 126.

and when a person dislikes meeting God, God dislikes meeting him". I said: "Prophet of God, do you mean hating death? Everyone hates death". He said: "Not so. When a believer is given the happy news of receiving God's mercy, pleasure and admittance into Heaven, he will love to meet God, and God will love to meet him. When an unbeliever is given the news of having to suffer God's punishment and displeasure, nothing will be more hateful to him than what is awaiting him. He will hate to meet God and God will dislike to meet him"⁽¹⁾.

Whether it is a fine reward or punishment, requital for one's deeds in this life starts at the moment when the soul departs from the body. It does not wait until the burial of the body or the end of offering condolences. Nothing follows a person's deeds in this life other than the reward of the Hereafter. The first signs of the nature of this reward starts when the angels arrive to gather the dying person's soul and transfer him from life to death, from the present world to the world beyond. At this time the early signs of happiness appear to the believers and those of punishment are shown to the guilty. It is then the surprise is shown, and events come in succession.

God describes how death approaches the happy believers, as He says: 'As for those who say: "Our Lord is God", and then steadfastly pursue the right way. For these, the angels will descend, saying: "Have no fear, and do not grieve, but rejoice in the good news of paradise which you have been promised. We are your guardians in the life of this world and in the life to come. There you shall have all that your souls desire, and all that you ask for, as a ready welcome from Him who is much-forgiving, ever-merciful"'. (41: 30-32) The angels encourage those happy people, welcoming and reassuring them. They tell them that now they will have neither fear nor sorrow. They are to enjoy the happy life of the Hereafter and its superior comforts.

(1) Related by al-Bukhari, 6,507; Muslim, 2,683.

The Prophet tells us how a believer's soul departs his body at the time of his death. He says that the Angel of Death says to it: 'You, good soul, may come out to receive God's forgiveness and pleasure. It comes out flowing like a drop of water comes out of a water container'.⁽¹⁾ This is due to the fact that it receives a fine welcome.

Those who are miserable and guilty go through great distress as their death approaches. They receive information about the rebuke and punishment in store for them. God describes the scene in the Qur'an: 'If you could but see the wrongdoers when they are in the throes of death and the angels stretch out their hands [and say]: "Give up your souls!" Today you will be rewarded with a humiliating punishment for having attributed to God something that is untrue and, in your arrogance, scorned His revelations'. (6: 93) It is a very distressful and frightful scene. These miserable ones are given such rebuke as their souls are taken away. The angels stretch their hands towards them and demand that their souls should come out. They remind them of their guilty deeds.

The Prophet (peace be upon him) mentions that a guilty person's soul is violently pulled out as he is rebuked. As he gathers his soul, the angel of death says: 'You wicked soul, come out and face God's wrath. It disperses in the person's body but the angel of death pulls it out like a hot iron rod is pulled out of wet wool'. Such rebuke and violent pulling of the soul are only the beginning of what comes later of that person's punishment.

Such is the beginning of the journey of torment the guilty have to traverse. It begins with the very first stage of the life to come, which they always denied and thought would never happen. They have brought themselves to this through their

(1) Related by Ahmad, 18,534.

denial of the truth and wicked behaviour. God does not do them any wrong; it is rather they that wronged themselves.

To sum up:

- Death is a universal certainty all people know, but they turn a blind eye to it, even though they cannot deny it.

- God reminds people that they are helpless against death. No matter how much support they can give one another, they can never prevent their own death or save a relative or friend from it.

- God mentions death in the Qur'an and confirms that it is neither the absolute end nor does it lead to non-existence. It is the end of a temporary life and the beginning of an eternal one. It concludes a trial and starts a reward.

- At the time of death, the life of this world appears in its real colours. Its desires and attractions appear in their real measures. Therefore, miserly people want to be generous, while the guilty repent and want to change their ways. Yet such decisions are too late to be of any use.

- The moment of death is the first stage of the life to come. Therefore, the dying then receive the first instalment of their later reward. The first news of their heavenly destination is given to believers at the time when their souls are gathered.

- The first signs of their future punishment are given to the miserable and guilty ones at the time when their souls are violently gathered. They are rebuked and warned by the angels who gather their souls.

- Throughout his life, a believer remains ready for this moment when he leaves this present life and faces the life to come. Death does not surprise him, but comes to him who has been waiting for it, eager to meet God, certain that he is going to Him, thinking well of God.

• By contrast, those who spend their lives indulging in their forbidden desires rarely think of death, as though they have been given a guarantee that it will not come to them. When they inevitably face it, they are in total panic. They feel that it is taking them to a different life for which they are totally unprepared. When the curtain is raised, the believers receive their initial good news and happiness, while the guilty receive the shock of their impending misery.

• The Prophet (peace be upon him) describes people's situation at that critical moment. He says: 'Whoever loves to meet God, God will love meeting him, and whoever dislikes meeting God, God dislikes meeting him'. Some of his wives said: 'We hate death'. He said: 'Not so. When a believer is about to die, he is given the happy news of receiving God's mercy, pleasure and admittance into Heaven, he loves nothing more than what is ahead of him. He will love to meet God, and God will love meeting him. When an unbeliever is given the news of having to suffer God's punishment and displeasure, nothing will be more hateful to him than what is awaiting him. He will hate to meet God and God will dislike meeting him'.⁽¹⁾

• What comes between death and the resurrection is the life in-between. It includes questioning before the reckoning, a feeling of happiness for believers ahead of the comforts of Heaven and a sort of suffering for the guilty ones ahead of their punishment in Hell. We have no details of this life, but it is the forerunner of what will be coming later of happiness or misery.



(1) Related by al-Bukhari, 6,507; Muslim, 2,683.

Two: The Life in Between

What follows death and precedes resurrection is the life in between this world and the life to come. These are the three stages of life: 1) the life of this present world, from birth to death; 2) the life in between, from death until resurrection on the Day of Judgement; and 3) the life to come starting with the dead coming out of their graves, followed by the reckoning and the requital of either everlasting happiness or painful suffering.⁽¹⁾

There will be questioning in the graves before the reckoning on the Day of Judgement, and there will be comforts for believers and torment for the guilty before what they receive in the life to come. Anas ibn Mālik narrated that the Prophet said: ‘When a man is laid in his grave, and his friends leave him, he hears the noise of their shoes. Two angels come to him and sit him up. They ask him: “What did you say about this man?” He says: “As for a believer, he will say: I bear witness that he is God’s servant and Messenger”. He is told: “Look at your place in Hell. God has replaced it for you with a seat in Heaven”. The Prophet said: “He will see both”’.⁽²⁾

The Prophet also said: ‘When any of you dies, his place is shown to him morning and evening: if he belongs to Heaven,

(1) Ibn al-Qayyim, *al-Rūḥ*, p. 185.

(2) Related by al-Bukhari, 1,374; Muslim, 2,870.

then so it be, and if he belongs to Hell, thus it shall be. He is told, this is your future position when God will resurrect you to take possession of it on the Day of Judgement'.⁽¹⁾

The Prophet (peace be upon him) used to pray for shelter with God against the torment in the grave. 'Ā'ishah said: 'I never saw God's Messenger offering a prayer without praying for refuge from the torment in the grave'.⁽²⁾ He also used to order his companions to pray for it. He said: 'Pray for refuge from the torment in the grave, because it is real'.⁽³⁾

We do not have any details of this life in between, but we know that it is the forerunner of the requital of the life to come. Believers will be happy with the good news that they will go to great comforts in the life to come, but the guilty will be tormented by the news that they will receive painful suffering in the Hereafter.

The questioning and happiness or torment in the life in between will be faced by every deceased person when their souls depart from their bodies, regardless of whether a person is buried in a grave, drowned in an ocean, or is burnt to dust. We believe in the realm beyond our perception even though we do not know how it is. We do not apply to it the measures of our own life.

These bodies of human beings will turn into dust in the earth, but the souls have their own world and they settle with their Lord. God says: 'They are then brought back to God, their true Lord Supreme. Indeed, His alone is all judgement; and He is most swift in reckoning'. (6: 62)

(1) Related by al-Bukhari, 1,379; Muslim, 2,866.

(2) Related by al-Bukhari, 1,372; Muslim, 586.

(3) Related by Ahmad, 24,520.

Three: Resurrection after Death

Belief in resurrection after death is one of the most important issues the Qur'an confirms, particularly because those who were the first to be addressed by the Qur'an denied it altogether. They used to say: 'We die, we live, nothing but time destroys us'. (45: 24) They also said: 'When we are bones and dust, shall we be raised to life again as a new creation?' (17: 49) Qur'anic verses confirm the requirement to believe in resurrection, give examples of similar situations, make it easier to understand and respond to those who deny it with proofs asserting that death is followed by resurrection, new life and requital for deeds done in this life, which comes in the form of reward or punishment. These verses also make it clear that resurrection takes people from their short lives in this world to life eternal.

Serious as this issue is, a large portion of the Qur'an is dedicated to it. God repeats and asserts what He says about it, giving vivid images of the life to come which we can almost see with our own eyes. He puts it so clearly that He sometimes refers to this future event in the past tense, as in: 'God's judgement has come'. (16: 1) 'The Trumpet was blown.' (18: 99) 'Your Lord came, with the angels rank on rank.' (89: 22) This is a particularly eloquent form of speech implying the absolute certainty of the event and its being close at hand, almost already done.

Belief in the Day of Judgement is one of the fundamentals of the Islamic faith. This belief is of immense value in that it makes people look forward to another world, beyond this earthly world. Therefore, they do not experience the sort of worry which affects those who pin all their hopes on what they achieve in their short lives on earth. A person who believes in the life to come dedicates his work to God and hopes for His reward, as He determines when He grants it, in this life or the next. Thus, a believer does his work reassured of what God will grant him, confident of a goodly outcome, firmly holding to the truth, with kindness and certainty.

Indeed, human life will not run according to God's superior way of life unless this truth of the Day of Judgement is firmly held by people, and they are happy with the certainty that whatever good they have in this life is not their final reward. Everyone should be certain that they will have a future life which deserves to be worked hard for and that this entails sacrifice for the truth and whatever is good, relying on God's reward which they are certain to have in that life which will inevitably come.

Believers in the life to come and those who deny it are not equal in their feelings, moral values, deeds or behaviour. A person who believes in the Hereafter and takes it into account cannot be at the same level with one who looks at nothing beyond this present life. They are two different types of people, having two different natures. They do not meet either in what they do in this life or in the reward they receive in the Hereafter. This is the fundamental difference between the two.

There is a wide gulf between a person who lives within the walls of the material world and the one who lives in the broad and open existence; and between one who thinks that life on earth is his entire existence and one who believes that it is only a trial which determines the reward. The latter believes that

the true life is the one yet to come. The first one looks at the present only while the other looks at the present and the future. He looks at the present world and believes in the promised world beyond.

The Qur'anic discourse of the life to come is plentiful, describing its meticulous reckoning, everlasting happiness and painful suffering. It emphatically states that people's life on earth is short, and that death is merely an interval between two stages of existence: the first is to plant and the second brings the harvest. It further asserts that when they complete their journey in this world all human beings, who have inherited the task of building human life, one generation after another, will go back to God who says: 'As We brought into being the first creation, so We shall bring it forth anew. That is a promise We willed upon Ourselves. We are indeed able to do all things'. (21: 104)

Qur'anic verses vary in the way they treat this great issue and deal with it from different angles, so that it leaves no opening for confirmed deniers. They demolish all the flawed arguments denying this major certainty. Here are some examples:

The command to remember and prepare for resurrection and the Day of Judgement

Since the duration of our life on earth is short and we go on to an immortal life, ignoring this future life represents a great loss; indeed it is the greatest loss that anyone can incur. Hence, there are frequent reminders of it in the Qur'an, stating that it is close to hand. God says: 'Fear the day when no soul will avail another in any way, nor will intercession be accepted from any of them, nor ransom taken from them, and none will receive help'. (2: 48) This verse shows the scene of bearing full responsibility for every deed we do. No intercession or ransom is of any use, and no help can be offered by anyone.

A believer in the Day of Judgement does his work, looking forward to the life to come, not limiting himself to this life. He does not take into account present times only, but looks to the day after and prepares for it, as God says: ‘Believers, have fear of God. Let every soul consider carefully what it sends ahead for tomorrow. Remain God-fearing, for God is fully aware of all that you do. Be not like those who forget God, so God causes them to forget their own souls. They are the transgressors’. (59: 18-19)

As they prepare for the life to come, believers fear what they may have there. They worship God in this life, but they look forward to the life to come, working for it and steering their way carefully. God says: ‘How about one who devoutly worships God during the hours of the night prostrating himself or standing in prayer, ever mindful of the life to come, and hoping for his Lord’s mercy? Say: “Can those who know and those who do not know be deemed equal?”’ (39: 9) This is an image of the heart which is alert. It goes through life on earth, mindful of the next life and full of hope for God’s mercy and benevolence.

God also says: ‘Fear the day when you will all return to God; when every soul will be repaid in full for what it had earned, and none will be wronged’. (2: 281) The day when we return to God is awesome and hard. It has its place in a believer’s mind and is ever-present in his consciousness. The mere remembrance of standing before God on this day is sufficient to make us tremble, keep us on the alert and refresh the God-fearing feeling in every living heart.

The disbelief of those who deny resurrection and their confused arguments

Many people immerse themselves in the pleasures of this world, feeling only their present material existence. They deny the life to come, saying: ‘I do not think that the Last Hour

will ever come'. (18: 36) 'We die, we live, nothing but time destroys us.' (45: 24) God mentions their false claims and their arrogant denial. He says: 'The unbelievers allege that they will not be raised from the dead. Say, "Yes indeed! By my Lord, you will certainly be raised from the dead, and then you will certainly be told of all that you have done. This is easy for God"'. (64: 7) They may even swear to confirm their claim, as God says: 'They most solemnly swear by God that God never raises the dead to life. Yes indeed! That is a promise to which He has bound Himself, even though most people do not know it'. (16: 38)

The evidence that life will be restored to the dead

Simple and clear as the question of resurrection is for everyone who thinks of the nature of life, death, resurrection and requital, it nonetheless led to long arguments between the Prophet (peace be upon him) and the idolaters. Hence, Qur'anic revelations continued to remind them of resurrection, giving evidence and examples of their present lives:

- Reminding them that the One who created you from nothing is able to return you as He created you. God says: 'It is He who creates [life] in the first instance, and then brings it forth anew; and most easy is this for Him. His is the most sublime attribute in the heavens and the earth. He is the Almighty, the Wise'. (30: 27) Returning the dead to life is not more difficult than the first creation. God, Mighty and Exalted, initiated creation in the first place, bringing people to life following no earlier pattern. Recreation is easier than the first creation. This is given to make it easier for people to understand, and it confirms resurrection. The fact is that there is nothing that is easier or more difficult for God. All matters are equally easy for Him. The means of creation in all matters is the same, because when He wills something to be, He only says to it, 'Be', and it exists. The Prophet (peace be upon him) said that God

said: ‘Adam’s son disbelieved Me and he had no right to do so. And he reviled Me and he had no right to do so. As for him disbelieving Me, it is by saying: He will not return me to life as He made me the first time. Initial creation is not easier to Me than bringing him back to life. As for his reviling Me, it is his saying: “God has taken to himself a son”, while I am the One, the Eternal, the Absolute. I beget none and I am not begotten. There is nothing that could be compared to Me’.⁽¹⁾

This idea is restated in many verses, drawing people’s attention to God’s limitless power in initiating creation and bringing the dead back to life. God says: Were We worn out by the first creation? Yet they are still in doubt about a renewed creation’. (50: 15) The One who brought them into existence out of nothing can give them life anew. God says: “What!” says man, “When I am once dead, shall I be raised up alive?” Does not man remember that We earlier created him, when he was nothing?’ (19: 66-67) This objection is due to man’s turning a blind eye to his initial creation: where and how he was. Resurrection is easier to understand than the first creation. It is amazing that people should understand the first creation and yet deny the second.

The Creator of the heavens and earth is able to recreate them

God explains to them that the One who created the heavens, the earth and all the celestial bodies throughout the entire universe is certainly able to create people like them and to return them to life after their deaths. He mentions that ‘they say: “When we are bones and dust, will we be raised to life again as a new creation?” Do they not see that God, who has created the heavens and the earth, has power to create their like? He has beyond any doubt set a term for their resurrection. But the

(1) Related by al-Bukhari, 4,974.

evildoers refuse to accept anything other than unbelief'. 17: 98-99)

It only needs for man to reflect on how great the creation of the heavens and earth is for him to be certain that the One who created all these is able to return the dead back to life. He says: 'Are they not aware that God, who has created the heavens and the earth and was not wearied by their creation, has the power to bring the dead back to life? Yes, indeed. He has power over all things'. (46: 33)

Just as rain revives barren land the dead can be resurrected

This scene is often repeated in life. People in fact await it and celebrate it. They see barren land which supports neither plants nor life of any sort. God sends it rain and it quickens and starts to look up. Life is back in it, and its hard dryness is replaced by delightful freshness. God links this scene with the creation of man, bringing humanity out of nothing into existence. He cites these facts of the creation of man and the revival of the barren land by rainwater as clear evidences confirming resurrection and the second life. He says: 'You can see the earth dry and barren; and [suddenly,] when We send down water upon it, it stirs and swells and puts forth every kind of radiant bloom. That is because God alone is the Ultimate Truth; and He alone brings the dead to life; and He has the power to will anything'. (22: 5-6)

This same scene is repeated in the Qur'an as evidence of bringing the dead back to life in the Hereafter. The scene of the barren land becoming full of life is close to everyone's heart. It touches people's hearts before it influences their minds. When life is freshly regained in a dead land, it reminds people of their future lives which follow their disappearance deep in the land. It is a scene to influence hearts and minds. God says: 'Another of His signs is this: you see the earth lying desolate, but when We send down rain water upon it, it stirs and swells

[with life]. He who brings it to life will surely give life to the dead. He has power over all things'. (41: 39)

Waking up after sleep brings life back

That the barren land is given life after it was lifeless is the same process as giving life back to the sleepy when they wake up. God says: 'God takes away people's souls upon their death, and the souls of the living during their sleep. He keeps with Him the souls of those whose death He has ordained and sends back the others until their appointed time. In all this there are signs for people who reflect'. (39: 42)

Sleep is a minimal case of death, and waking up is similar to resurrection after death. Those who deny resurrection will say when it happens: 'Woe betide us! Who has roused us from our resting place?' (36: 52) The Prophet (peace be upon him) used to say when he woke up: 'All praise be to God who has given us life after He has caused us to die. To Him shall be the return'.⁽¹⁾ Waking up after sleep is a new gift of life. How can anyone deny resurrection when he dies and comes back to life every day of his present life?

The miracle of raising the dead given to some prophets and witnessed by their peoples

One such example is that of Jesus (peace be upon him) as God says that He will make Jesus 'a messenger to the Israelites. "I have brought you a sign from your Lord. I will fashion for you out of clay the likeness of a bird. I will breathe into it and, by God's leave, it will become a living bird. I will heal the blind and the leper, and bring the dead back to life by God's leave. I will announce to you what you eat and what you store up in your houses. Surely, in all this there is a sign for you, if you are truly believers"'. (3: 49) As this is stated in the Qur'an,

(1) Related by al-Bukhari, 6,312.

it is also reported in the Gospels we still have today. Such miracles prove to the people that God is able to bring the dead back to life.

Resurrection is consistent with God's justice and wisdom

We see in our lives the battle between good and evil, and the one between vice and virtue. It often happens that evil is triumphant, and virtue is vanquished. In our limited lives, we may not see the reaction or the ultimate situation between good and evil. Many depart this life feeling sorry that they did not see evil repelled and punished, or good getting the upper hand. Believing in divine justice certainly requires fair recompense for good and evil. If this does not happen during human life on earth, then it must take place in another world.

Those who do good do not always receive the full reward for their goodness, and wrongdoers are not always taken to account in this life for their crimes and offences. They escape punishment in this world. God was certainly aware of their offences, and He could have punished them in this life. Hence, the punishment of the wrongdoers and oppressors will certainly take place in a different world. God says: 'Never think that God is unaware of what the wrongdoers are doing. He only grants them respite till the Day when eyes will stare fixedly in horror'. (14: 42) 'We will set up just scales on the Day of Resurrection, so that no soul will be wronged in the least. If there be but the weight of a mustard seed, We will bring it [to account]. Sufficient are We for reckoning.' (14: 47)

God mentions the wicked who killed believers and burnt them in a pit of fire, but He does not mention that any punishment befell them in the present life, as happened in the drowning of Noah's people, or Pharaoh, or other ways of punishment visited on other disbelieving communities. He only warns them that they will inevitably face a greater and more intense fire in the Hereafter. He says: 'By the heaven with its constel-

lations, by the promised Day, by the witness and that which is witnessed, slain be the people of the pit of the fire abounding in fuel, when they sat around it, watching what they did to the believers. They took vengeance on them for no reason other than that they believed in God, the Almighty, to whom all praise is due, To whom the dominion of the heavens and the earth belongs. But God is witness of all things. Those who persecute the believers, men and women, and do not repent will suffer the punishment of Hell, and suffer the punishment of burning. But those who believe and do righteous deeds will have gardens through which running waters flow; that is the supreme triumph'. (85: 1-11)

The field of reckoning and recompense is broader than the limited space of the earth and goes farther than the present life. What happens in this life is only a small portion of the total scene. The enjoyment of the present life is meagre, and its duration is short. The scene continues into the life to come where the reward is much greater and the punishment is severer, and life is everlasting. By contrast, life on earth, long as it may be, is no more than a flash or a moment, while life in the Hereafter is permanent, unending. God says: 'Brief is the enjoyment of this world, whereas the life to come is the best for all who are God-fearing. None of you will be wronged by as much as a hair's breadth'. (4: 77)

The purpose of creation

Man always asks about his destiny after living on earth his full life, doing whatever he decides to do. He is distinguished from other creatures around him by his mind and understanding, as well as his freedom of will and decision. Will he, then, end up in the same way as a crawling insect which lives for a short period of time during which nothing is brought to perfect completion? Is it possible that such is the final end? This would make life pointless. It would be a total disregard of man's sta-

tus, mind, understanding and freedom. Certainly God, the wise Creator who has perfected His creation and distinguished man from all creation around him does not do that. He made it clear that He never indulges in such idle play. He says: 'Did you think that We created you in mere idle play, and that to Us you would not have to return?' (23: 115) Most certainly, God has not created the universe for no purpose, as He says: 'We have not created the heavens and the earth and all that is between them in mere idle play. Had We willed to indulge in a pastime, We would indeed have found one near at hand; if ever We were to do so!' (21: 16-17) In His infinite wisdom and perfect knowledge, God does not indulge in pastimes or idle play. All that He creates and does is subject to his wisdom, which never fails.

It is God who has set the measures of human life in this way. Far be it from Him to let humans live in vain and perish without consequence. He does not let them live on earth, doing good or evil, only to be wasted in the dust, with all of them reaching the same end. On the contrary, there is a Day for passing judgement on all that occurs in human life, as we are told: 'Fixed is the Day of Distinction'. (78: 17)

As God gives different types of evidence confirming resurrection after death, He shows man His kindness and how He has always honoured him. He addresses man by his best quality, which is his humanity, saying: 'O man, what has lured you away from your gracious Lord, Who created and moulded you and gave you upright form? He can give you whatever shape He wills. Shun it! But you deny the Last Judgement. Yet there are guardians watching over you, noble recorders, who know all that you do'. (82: 6-12)

This is an address that touches hearts, makes man appreciate the care his Lord has always taken care of him, creating him in the best shape, giving him an upright and well-balanced form. What a gentle address by God to man, reminding him of

his destiny. Could God's generosity and blessings be denied and disregarded? Could His promise be disbelieved?

The sorrow shown on the Day of Judgement by those who disbelieve in resurrection

The Last Hour arrives all of a sudden, and resurrection occurs with equal suddenness: 'But with just one blast they will be alive on earth'. (56: 13-14) At that time, the voice that denies God is shut up, rendered ineffective: 'When that which is certain to happen will have come to pass no one will then deny its having come to pass'. (56: 1-2) Man is stubbornly argumentative, but what can he say when the great event has already taken place? At that moment, the throats of the deniers will be totally dry as they confusedly ask: 'Woe betide us! Who has roused us from our resting place? This is what the Lord of Grace had promised. The messengers told the truth'. (36: 52) It is the day when situations are set right and facts are ascertained. Hence, the scene is clearly described in the Qur'an: '[They will] say: "This is nothing but plain sorcery. What! After we have died and become mere dust and bones, shall we be raised back to life? And perhaps our forefathers?" Say: "Yes, indeed! And you shall be utterly humbled". There will be just one single cry, and they will all begin to see, and will say: "Woe betide us! This is the Day of Judgement!" This is indeed the Day of Decision which you used to call a lie!' (37: 15-21)

This describes their shock and surprise. They find themselves witnessing the Day which they were repeatedly told about but from which they turned away, disbelieving in it even when reminded of it. They even ridiculed those who warned them against it. Now they are in total shock, crying: 'Woe betide us! This is the Day of Judgement'. They will then be reminded of their refusal to believe in it: 'This is the Day of Decision you used to call a lie'. At this moment their shock turns into

grief and humble submission: ‘So turn you away from them. On the day the Summoner will summon them to something unknown, with eyes downcast, they will come out of their graves like swarming locusts rushing towards the Summoner. The unbelievers will say: “Hard indeed is this day”’. (54: 6-8)

It is at that great gathering and quick movement that the disbelievers will say with great sorrow that this day is indeed hard. They express their exhaustion and distress, as they face this overwhelming hardship. Hence, heads are lowered, and eyes are downcast. Humility replaces the arrogance of old: ‘They shall come in haste from their graves, as if rallying to a flag, with eyes downcast, with ignominy overwhelming them. Such is the Day they have been promised’. (70: 43-44)

How people in the life to come remember this present life

When people are resurrected, they will remember their lives on earth. It will appear to them devoid of its hopes, eager desires and enjoyments. It was nothing but a short span which ended quickly. Therefore, they will wonder how long its duration was and how long their sojourn therein was. God describes their amazement: ‘On the Day of Resurrection, the Day when the Trumpet is blown, We will assemble all the guilty ones, their eyes dimmed [by terror], whispering to one another, “You have spent but ten days on earth”. We know best what they will be saying when the most perceptive of them will say: “You have spent there but one day!”’ (20: 102-104)

This is how the life of this world will appear to its people after they depart from it. When they look back, they see its duration as very short. Its long years will appear to them as no more than ten days, or even a single day. But even this estimate shrinks further when God questions them: ‘And He will ask: “How many years have you spent on earth?” They will answer: “We have spent there a day, or part of a day; but

ask those who keep count". He will say: "Brief indeed was your sojourn, if you but knew it". (23: 112-114) It shrinks further so that it appears as a single day or even less, and it continues to shrink so that people think that it was merely one morning or one evening: 'On the Day when they see that hour, it will seem to them that their lives on earth had spanned only one evening, or one morning'. (79: 46) Yet the shrinking continues so that it appears even less than a portion of one day. It is appears to be a mere one hour: 'On the Day when He will gather them together, [it will seem to them] as though they had not sojourned in this world more than an hour of a day, getting to know one another. Lost indeed will be those who [in their lifetime] disbelieved in meeting God and did not follow the right guidance'. (10: 45) Thus, the one who died young and the one who attained old age are in the same position. The one who lived forty years and the one who lived ninety years consider that the life each of them spent on earth was no longer than an hour. Decades that followed decades, periods of ease and hardship, poverty and affluence, war and peace were merely a single hour in which they got to know one another. This is how their lives appear to them in their new consciousness: a very short duration compared to the life of eternity. No matter how big the number is, it is a mere zero when compared to infinity. Long as a period of time may be, it is negligible when compared to eternity. Hence, the wrongdoers who spent their long lives indulging in every pleasure, because it was their only life, will on the Day of Judgement swear most convincingly that they lived for no more than a single hour. God says: 'When the Last Hour strikes, the evildoers will swear that they had not tarried on earth longer than an hour. Thus they used to delude themselves'. (30: 55)

Should they, then, not have endured this hour refraining from wrongdoing and sinful action? Should they not have better spent their lives that seem as nothing when compared to

the eternal life to come? For now, their wrongful actions will become permanent suffering.

Let us now think of what remains of our own lives. It is no more than a few seconds that remain of that single hour. Let us then mend our ways, make good use of what remains for us in this life. We are lucky that we are still alive, having the chance to correct our errors and seek God's forgiveness for every sin we might have committed.

Disbelief in the Day of Judgement is a reason for the disbelievers' aggression and wicked actions

Some people believe that life will continue as it is and that death is the final end. Therefore, they do not make any preparations for a future life. They try to satisfy their desires as much as they can, caring little for anything else. They do not expect any final outcome or requital. God says: 'Yet man wants to deny what lies ahead of him. He asks: "When will this Day of Resurrection be?"' (75: 5-6)

The disbelievers organize their lives on the basis that there will be neither resurrection nor accounting and requital. This is the reason why they indulge in sinful acts, carelessly going deep into them, without feeling that they are abominable or ever regretting them. The Qur'an describes their condition as well as what motivates them to commit such offences. God says: 'In times gone by, they overindulged in luxury and persisted in heinous sin, saying, "What! When we have died and become mere dust and bones, are we to be raised up again? And our forefathers, too?" Say: "All people of the earliest and latest generations will indeed be gathered together at an appointed time on a specific day"'. (56: 45-50)

They indulged heavily in their luxurious lifestyles because they did not believe in a future life when they will have to answer for their deeds. Amazed and incredulous, they ask:

‘where are our forefathers now?’ The answer is readily given: the Day of Resurrection is appointed, and on that Day, they and all the generations that preceded them and those that will follow them will be gathered altogether: ‘That is a Day when all mankind will be gathered together, and that is a Day which will be witnessed by all’. (11: 103)

Certainty of the future life is the great motive to do good deeds and remain God-fearing

Believers realize that their true future consists of the little time they have left in this present life and the long-lasting future life. They feel that the latter is coming soon and that they will shortly encounter it. The Qur’an alerts us to this, referring to the future life as ‘tomorrow’. It says: ‘Believers, have fear of God. Let every soul consider carefully what it sends ahead for tomorrow’. (59: 18)

Qur’anic evidence of this includes: ‘This is the Book, there is no doubt about it: a guidance for the God-fearing. Those who believe in what lies beyond the reach of human perception, attend regularly to prayer and give generously of what We bestow upon them. Those who believe in what has been revealed to you and what was revealed before you, and are certain of the Hereafter’. (2: 2-4) Their certainty of the Hereafter motivates them to attend regularly to their prayers, pay their zakat and do good deeds.

God describes devout believers in the following terms: ‘Truly, those who stand in reverent awe of their Lord, and who believe in their Lord’s revelations, and who do not associate any partners with their Lord, and who give away whatever they have to give with their hearts filled with awe, knowing that to their Lord they shall certainly return: these vie with one another in doing good works, and they are the ones who are foremost in them’. (23: 57-61) The fact that they are in reverent awe of God and the feeling of dread they experience

when they think that they will return to Him motivate them to be generous to the poor, assured that they will have rich reward for this.

God describes the people of Heaven in the following terms: 'They give food – though they need it themselves – to the needy, the orphan and the captive, [saying within themselves,] "We feed you for the sake of God alone. We desire neither recompense from you, nor thanks. We fear the Day of our Lord: a bleak, distressful day"'. (76: 8-10) Their dread of the Day of Resurrection and the impending requital motivates them to be truthful and generous. They feed others, preferring to give food to others, although they need it themselves, knowing that their actions are part of their preparations to face the hardship of that Day. This means that their belief in the life to come works as a motivator to do good, pointing them to the direction their behaviour should take.

Because of the great distress attending resurrection, the Prophet (peace be upon him) often used to pray to God to spare him the suffering and hardship of that day. Ḥaḥṣah, the Prophet's wife, said: 'When the Prophet wanted to sleep, he put his right hand under his cheek and said: "My Lord, spare me Your punishment on the Day when You resurrect Your servants", repeating it three times'.⁽¹⁾ If Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) whose earlier and later sins had already been forgiven by God and who was assured by Him of security against whatever he feared, addresses his Lord in the stillness of the night with a prayer to be spared from the torment of the Day of Resurrection, what should other people say? How much should we fear that Day?

ʿUmar used to say: 'Had it not been for the Day of Judgement, things would have been different from what you see'.⁽²⁾ What

(1) Related by Abu Dāwūd, 5,045.

(2) Ibn ʿAsākir, *Tārīkh Dimashq* i.e. History of Damascus, Vol. 44, p. 309.

he meant is that much transgression and aggression is stopped because of people's fear of the Day of Judgement and their certainty that they will have to account for their deeds on that Day.

To sum up

- The disbelievers deny resurrection after death. They just dismiss the idea that God will bring them back to life after they had become nothing but bones and dust mixed with the soil. They used to say: 'What! After we have become dust, shall we be raised to life in a new act of creation?' (13: 5)

- God refutes their claims with clear and decisive arguments. He states that the One who creates mankind out of nothing is able to return them to life. He also says that the Creator of the heavens and earth is able to create the like of them. However, creating them is a greater act than the creation of mankind. Besides, people see with their own eyes that a barren, dead land is brought to life when it receives a rainfall. It soon stirs and swells with life.

- The duration of man's life on earth is not long enough to witness the requital of every oppressor and wrongdoer, or the end of the battle between good and evil. It often allows injustice to have the upper hand, and evil may spread in it. It is inevitable, therefore, that a day should come when every right should be returned, justice should be fulfilled. To doubt that this will certainly happen is to doubt divine justice.

- Man's life on earth cannot end in nothing. The Creator of the universe who created man with faculties of understanding and acquiring knowledge and gave him freedom of choice must, in His infinite wisdom, have a definite purpose in creating him thus. To doubt the eternal life to come is to doubt the wisdom of the Creator. He says: 'Did you think that We created you in mere idle play, and that to Us you would not have to return?' (23: 115)

• Turning a blind eye to resurrection and the Day of Judgement will bring about a great shock, sorrow and regret when the disbelievers are brought back to life on the Day of Resurrection and see the reality of what they used to deny. They will say then: ‘Woe betide us! This is the Day of Judgement!’ (37: 20)

• Their disbelief in resurrection and the future life is why they pin all their hopes on this present life. It also accounts for their arrogance and aggression.

• Belief in the Last Day provides great motivation for the believers to prepare for that day by doing good deeds and being kind to other people and other creation, hoping to receive God’s reward in the life to come.

• Many verses urge people to remember the Day of Resurrection and Requital, prepare for it and review what one is sending ahead of good deeds in preparation for it. God says: ‘Believers, have fear of God. Let every soul consider carefully what it sends ahead for tomorrow’. (59: 18)

• People greatly need to remember the Day of Judgement, because such remembrance checks their instincts and restrains their greed. A wise person who realizes that such a Day is coming without doubt will not choose the few in preference to the many or what perishes to what is everlasting. He will not disregard the reward in the future life in preference for the pleasures of this life.



Four: Description of the Gathering and the Reckoning



The Day of Resurrection after death, the judgement and other conditions in the life to come, as well as what will happen to people should be viewed then as a closed book in which believers believe. It is all foretold by God in His Book, the Qur'an. Thus, believers do their work in this life, with the unknown future in front of their eyes. They are certain that they will face it after they die. They further believe that this future life is the true life, and that the recompense for good and evil deeds will take place then. This belief in the life beyond is what checks people's behaviour and provides the incentive to do well. It is through such belief and certainty that our present life takes its true measure. Therefore, a believer endures what he suffers of hardship and pain with perseverance and tolerance, because his certainty extends to what comes after this life, which is the permanent and everlasting life.

Many verses in the Qur'an describe the conditions on the Day of Judgement, people's fear when they are resurrected and arise from their graves, as well as their confusion at what they see of the truth of the life to come. The Qur'anic description provides clear scenes and vivid images which are beyond human imagination. We almost see the movement and hear the sounds. We feel the great fear that overwhelms people. Thus,

the verses of the Qur'an transport believers to the world of the Hereafter. This confirms their belief in the world beyond this life, Heaven and Hell, total happiness and painful suffering, absolute justice and extensive mercy. Therefore, believers are always preparing for the Hereafter, ready to move there because they see it before their very eyes, close to them.

Qur'anic verses describe the events that take place on the Day of Judgement, starting with the turmoil in the universe, as its system crumbles and approaches the end of its life. They describe the blow of the Trumpet, the coming out of the graves, the gathering of mankind for the reckoning of their deeds, the placement of the scales, the opening of the records of people's deeds and handing everyone their records, the happiness of some people and the misery of others, as well as the everlasting enjoyment in Heaven and the long lasting suffering in Hell. Let us look at some examples of such description.

The turmoil in the universe as it comes to the end of its life

At the Last Hour, the system that applies to the entire universe, with a fine, accurate pattern, suffers catastrophic turmoil. The universe has come to the end of its life, giving way to a new life that is about to begin. The event is total, changing whatever has been familiar. The entire universe is set to witness great events, heralding its collapse, as celestial bodies are greatly affected. The sun will lose its light and become dark, the stars will fall and disperse, the mountains will be made to move away, and the seas will be set alight. The sky which used to be like a ceiling covering the earth will be stripped bare. Hell will burn fiercely, while Heaven is brought near in readiness to welcome its dwellers. Humans will be resurrected, but their bodies will be changed. Likewise, the universe is given a new look to suit the life to come. God says: 'On that Day, the earth shall be changed into another earth,

as shall be the heavens'. (14: 48) At that time, the contents of the graves are scattered about, and what has been in people's breasts is brought out. This indicates that whatever was hidden is laid open, with nothing remaining a secret. On that Day, every soul will find itself looking at whatever good it has done. As for the evil it did, every soul will wish that some very long time still separated it from that Day.

Such turmoil is so great that we cannot really imagine it with our present feelings and concepts that are limited to our familiar world. The total scene sends a great shockwave to awaken sleeping hearts. It is like a huge earthquake that sends a tremor into every person's heart. It is a wake up call to everyone, telling us to reflect and take action before it is too late. God says: 'Believers, have fear of God. Let every soul consider carefully what it sends ahead for tomorrow'. (59: 18)

God mentions these great events, in accurate detail, saying: 'When the sun is darkened, when the stars fall and disperse, when the mountains are made to move away, when the camels, ten months pregnant, are left untended, when the wild beasts are brought together, when the seas are set alight, when people's souls are paired [like with like], when the infant girl, buried alive, is asked for what crime she was slain, when the records are laid open, when the sky is stripped bare, when Hell is made to burn fiercely, when paradise is brought near, every soul shall know what it has put forward'. (81: 1-14) God also says: 'When the sky is cleft asunder, when the planets are scattered, when the oceans are made to explode, when the graves are hurled about, every soul will know its earlier actions and its later ones'. (82: 1-5)

All are resurrected as the Trumpet is blown

Blowing the Trumpet is the fearsome cry that brings people out of their graves. They come out to face their Lord. As they are resurrected, they are totally surprised and confused. The

shock is too big for them. They look as though they are drunk, but they are not. God says: 'Mankind! Have fear of your Lord. The violent convulsion at the Last Hour will be awesome indeed. On the Day when it comes, every suckling mother will utterly forget her nursling, and every woman heavy with child will cast her burden. It will seem to you that all mankind are drunk, although they are not drunk. But severe indeed will be God's punishment'. (22: 1-2)

They appear drunk, with hazy eyes, feeling great fear. They move around in a vast crowd. The fear is such that the suckling mother forgets her baby, and every pregnant woman casts her burden. Yet no woman is really suckling or pregnant, but the image is given so as to bring the scene closer to our eyes: 'The violent convulsion at the Last Hour will be awesome indeed'. (22: 1) The event is too fearsome to describe. It is beyond our imagination. No human mind can paint a picture of it. Hearts jump out of place, to be close to people's throats, as God describes: 'Warn them of the Day that is ever drawing near, when people's hearts will chokingly come up to the throats. The wrongdoers will have neither intimate friend nor intercessor to be heeded'. (40: 18)

People are in great distress, feeling that their hearts have been out of place, compressed into their throats. This adds to their fear, and they feel as though they cannot breathe. The wrongdoers will be in even greater distress. If they say something, what they say remains unheard, discarded. No one intercedes on their behalf. The earth has thrown out all the bodies that were buried in it, across countless generations and centuries. Thus, all mankind, throughout human life and across all human generations, are gathered together, but they are all speechless: 'All sounds will be hushed before the Lord of Grace, and you will hear nothing but a faint sigh in the air'. (20: 108) The angels stand in front of God, silent,

showing humility, as the Qur'an mentions: 'On the Day when the Spirit and the angels stand in ranks, they will not speak, except those to whom the Lord of Grace has given leave, and who will say what is right'. (78: 38) The fact that even favoured angels stand up with all humility, saying no word, adds to the awesomeness of the scene on that Day. God describes some further scenes of that Day: 'The Trumpet will be sounded, and all creatures that are in the heavens and the earth will fall down senseless, except those God wills to be spared. It will then be sounded a second time, and they will rise and look around them. The earth will shine bright with the light of its Lord; the Record of Deeds will be laid open; all the prophets and the witnesses will be brought in. Judgement will be passed on them all in justice, and they will not be wronged'. (39: 68-69)

God also describes the Day of Resurrection stating that it is 'the Day when the Trumpet is blown. For on that Day We shall assemble all the guilty ones, their eyes dimmed [by terror], whispering to one another, "You have spent but ten days on earth". We know best what they will be saying when the most perceptive of them shall say: "You have spent there but one day!" They ask you about the mountains. Say: "My Lord will scatter them far and wide, and leave the earth level and bare, with no curves or ruggedness to be seen". On that Day, all will follow the summoning voice from which there will be no escape. All sounds will be hushed before the Lord of Grace, and you will hear nothing but a faint sough in the air. On that Day, intercession will be of no avail to any except a person in whose case the Lord of Grace will have granted permission, and whose word He will have accepted'. (20: 102-109)

The tremor that occurs on that Day, with people coming out of their graves to face the reckoning and the requital, leaves people stunned, in great fear, regret and pain. Everyone is scared, not knowing where to turn, totally confused. He asks:

‘What is the matter with the earth?’ The earth was shaken with its final earthquake, throwing out its burdens. It is the unbelievers, who denied there would ever be a resurrection, who now experience the greatest fear. During their lives, they ridiculed the idea of resurrection and those who believed in it. They look around and they realize that what they used to ridicule is a fact staring them in the face. They lament their earlier attitude and say: ‘Woe betide us! Who has roused us from our resting place? This is what the Lord of Grace had promised. The messengers told the truth’. (36: 52) ‘Woe betide us! This is the Day of Judgement!’ (37: 20) ‘Oh, woe to us! Of this we were indeed heedless. We have assuredly done wrong.’ (21: 97) As they start to realize what awaits them of suffering, they become humble, submissive, as the Qur’an mentions: ‘So turn you away from them. On the Day the Summoner will summon them to something unknown, with eyes downcast, they will come out of their graves like swarming locusts rushing towards the Summoner. The unbelievers will say: “Hard indeed is this Day”’. (54: 6-8)

The Prophet describes this oblivious condition, as he says: ‘People are gathered on the Day of Resurrection, bare-footed, naked, uncircumcised’. ‘Ā’ishah said: ‘Messenger of God, women and men together, looking at one another?’ He said: ‘‘Ā’ishah, the situation is too hard to let them look at one another’.⁽¹⁾

In the midst of this very hard situation, worried and panicking people wonder whether there is a place of refuge. They soon realize that there is none. All will return to God. He says: ‘When the sight is dazzled and the moon eclipsed, when the sun and the moon are brought together, on that Day man will say: “Where to flee?” But no! There is no refuge. On that

(1) Related by al-Bukhari, 6,527; Muslim, 2,859.

Day, to your Lord all will return'. (75: 7-12) 'Then, when the Trumpet is sounded, there will be no ties of kinship between them on that Day, nor will they ask about one another.' (23: 101) Thus, the entire situation is one of awe, humility and silence. Speech and questions are merely whispers. Faces are pale. God's majesty fills people with awe and absolute reverence. Everything is in God's hand and all decision belongs to Him alone.

The Day of Resurrection comes as a stunning shock to those who focused all their attentions on this present life, trying to get the best out of it, enjoying all the comforts they could have in it. They denied any possibility of meeting God, the Lord of all the worlds and sought to satisfy every desire they had, in every way they could. They could not imagine that man's life on earth is an exceedingly short period of time, and they prepared nothing for their permanent stay in the life to come. When they look back at life on earth, they will feel that it took no more than an hour in one day, during which time they came to know some people, then they departed having done nothing other than being introduced to those few people. Hence, their fear and confusion are total as they are faced with the truth they denied. God says: 'On the Day when He will gather them together, [it will seem to them] as though they had not sojourned in this world more than an hour of a day, getting to know one another. Lost indeed will be those who [in their lifetime] disbelieved in meeting God and did not follow the right guidance'. (10: 45) However, such fear and confusion are the feelings of those who during their present life doubted and ignored the life to come. They do not believe in resurrection, and hence they do not prepare for it. When it comes, it is like a huge earthquake that leaves them absolutely stunned and shaken: 'On the Day when it comes, every suckling mother will utterly forget her nursling, and every woman heavy with child will cast her burden. It will seem to you that all mankind

are drunk, although they are not drunk. But severe indeed will be God's punishment'. (22: 2)

Those entitled to security on the fearsome Day

Those who believed in the life to come and prepared for it will be resurrected in a good shape, reassured. They are the ones God describes in the following terms: 'The Supreme Terror will cause them no grief, since the angels will receive them with the greeting, "This is your day which you were promised"'. (21: 103) They are in total security, safe from this great fear, because they have already received God's promise of having the 'ultimate good'. They are the successful ones who are untouched by the supreme terror which leaves the guilty in total perplexity. They are received by the angels who give them complete reassurance: 'Who is in a better state: he who is cast into the Fire, or he who will come safe on Resurrection Day? Do what you will; He sees all that you do'. (41: 40)

Those good people receive different grades of honour on that Day. The Prophet (peace be upon him) mentions something special given to certain groups, as he says: 'Seven types of people will be under God's shade on the Day when there is no shade other than His: a just ruler; a young person brought up attending to the worship of God; a person whose heart is inclined towards mosques; two people who love each other for God's sake: they uphold it when they meet and when they part; a man who is tempted by a woman who combines power with beauty, but he says: "I fear God"; a person who gives a *ṣadaqah* in secret, concealing it to the extent that his right hand does not know what his left hand has given; and a person who remembers God when alone and his eyes are tearful [in fear of Him]'.⁽¹⁾ While people are under great stress on the Day of Judgement, profusely sweating as they suffer its extreme

(1) Related by al-Bukhari, 660; Muslim, 1,031.

heat, these seven types are spared as they are given a place of shade under God's throne. They enjoy their position of honour and safety.

The ones who are in security on this fearsome day are the people who believed in it during their lives on earth. They were in awe of what might happen to them on this Day. Therefore, they prepared for it. During the night, when others were fast asleep, they used to appeal to God, saying: 'Our Lord, You will indeed gather mankind together to witness the Day of which there is no doubt. Surely, God never fails to keep His promise'. (3: 9) Therefore, God grants them security so that they will feel no fear then. They will not suffer the fear twice: in this present life and in the life to come. Hence God reassures His faithful servants: 'Those who believe and do not taint their faith with wrongdoing are the ones who will feel secure, as they follow right guidance'. (6: 82)

All people gather for the reckoning

Can we imagine such a Day when all people who lived on earth, from the very first day of human existence, until the end of human life when the Last Hour occurs will be gathered together. All successive human generations are brought together on one day, and all those who lived in their far apart regions are assembled in one place. This is what God says: 'All people of the earliest and latest generations will indeed be gathered together at an appointed time on a specific Day'. (56: 49-50) Several Qur'anic verses describe this gathering, such as: 'How, then, will it be with them when We will gather them all together to witness the Day about which there is no doubt, when every soul will be paid in full what it has earned, and they will not be wronged?' (3: 25) 'God, save whom there is no deity, will surely gather you all together on the Day of Resurrection, which is sure to come, no doubt. Whose word could be truer than God's?' (4: 87) '[Think of] the time when

He will gather you all together for the Day of the Gathering, the Day of mutual loss and gain.’ (64: 9)

Such is, then, the Day of Gathering when all mankind, all the jinn and all the angels will be gathered on a different earth and under a different sky. The earth we live on will suffer in the universal turmoil, with its mountains made to disappear, its oceans exploding, and the entire scene changed, in preparation for standing before God, Exalted and Mighty.

Great as this assembly will be, with all generations and nations present, not a single individual is left out, as God confirms: ‘We will gather them all together, leaving out not a single one of them’. (18: 47) They all come together, but everyone feels as if he is the only one to come: ‘And now, indeed, you have come to Us individually, just as We created you in the first instance; and you have left behind all that We conferred on you’. (6: 94)

They come individually, scattered by the fearsome event, separated as they are preoccupied with their worries. They cannot think of anything other than the hardship engulfing them all. Hence, every single one can only think of themselves and their responsibility for what they did during their lives on earth. They are gathered ‘in order to be shown their deeds’. (99: 6)

Everyone will be shown their destiny, and they have no thought for anything other than what will be happening to them and whether they can save themselves. Hence, they forget even their immediate relatives and their families and clans: ‘On that Day everyone will forsake his brother, his mother and his father, his wife and his children: for each one of them will on that Day have enough preoccupations of his own’. (80: 34-37) Everyone is preoccupied with their own lot. It takes all his thoughts and he cannot spare a thought for anyone else. ‘When no friend will ask about his friend’. (70: 10) No one

asks his relative or his friend how they are doing, because his thoughts are focused only on his own situation. No one asks another for help or support, because they know that none can be of any help. All ties, bonds and relationships are severed: 'Then, when the Trumpet is sounded, there will be no ties of kinship between them on that Day, nor will they ask about one another'. (23: 101) Even the closest relations will be of no use, as the Qur'an confirms: 'Mankind! Fear your Lord and fear a day when no parent will be of any avail to his child, nor any child will in the least avail his parents! God's promise is most certainly true'. (31: 33)

On this Day, all types of sovereignty are at an end. Whatever is owned in this life is temporary. A person comes into it, after it had not been his, and it will be passed over to someone else. Real ownership and absolute dominion belong to God alone: 'On that Day, true sovereignty belongs to the Lord of Grace'. (25: 26) No sovereignty belongs to anyone other than God. All else will stand before God, subjects, not sovereigns: 'With whom does sovereignty rest today? With God, the One who holds sway over all that exists'. (40: 16) Abu Hurayrah narrated that God's Messenger (peace be upon him) said: 'God, Mighty and Exalted, will roll up the heavens on the Day of Resurrection, then hold them in His right hand. He will then say: "I am the Sovereign. Where are the despots? Where are the arrogant?"'⁽¹⁾ This hadith echoes what God says in the Qur'an: 'No true understanding of God have they: on the Day of Resurrection, the whole earth will be a mere handful to Him, and the heavens will be rolled up in His right hand. Limitless is He in His glory, and sublimely exalted above anything which they associate as partner with Him'. (39: 67) Hearts will feel the absolute awesomeness of the situation. Could there be anything more awesome than God's majesty when everyone in that gathering feels that they are standing before Him?

(1) Related by al-Bukhari, 7,382; Muslim, 2,788.

What tremor will people's hearts experience when the earth will shine bright with the light of its Lord, and the Record of Deeds will be laid open? How awesome is the situation when God will come, with the angels rank on rank? The whole thing is so frightening as God will pass judgement on all His servants: 'Are they waiting for God to reveal Himself to them in the shadows of clouds, together with the angels? The case will have been settled then. To God shall all things return'. (2: 210) God comes to them, but He was never away. They were always in front of Him, under His control. Today they stand in front of Him to be given their accounts and face their requital. 'To God all shall return'. (3: 28) 'With your Lord is the ultimate end.' (53: 42)

God has come and they are present before Him. His angels surround them, and they all are witnesses to the surprise He repeatedly warned them about: 'The case will have been settled then'. (2: 210) Time is no longer there. The opportunity was made available to them, but it is now gone. There is no escape now, as they are facing the reckoning. 'To God shall all things return'.

This is the inimitable way of expression in the Qur'an, bringing the future scene right before our eyes, as if it is happening here and now. The fearsome Day will be coming; no, it is now upon them: 'On the Day when the skies will be rent asunder with clouds, and the angels will be sent down [in ranks]. (25: 25) 'On the Day when the Spirit and the angels stand in ranks, they will not speak, except those to whom the Lord of Grace has given leave, and who will say what is right'. (78: 38) This is when everything will have been settled. No, it has already been settled.

The gravity of people's situation on the Day of Judgement

The Day of Judgement is a day of hardship and distress. How can we imagine a day when mankind will stand before

their Lord on a day, which is equal in length to fifty thousand years of our time on earth? We will all stand there, each of us awaiting the decision that pertains to ourselves.

This is the Day when mankind will rise and stand before God, Mighty and Exalted. '[It is] the Day when all mankind will stand before the Lord of all the worlds.' (83: 6) The first and the last of them, as well as all in between, will be gathered in one place. They will all hear the summoner and they are all within sight. The sun will be brought close to them. This is the sun of the Hereafter, not the sun we see in our world, for our sun will have darkened and died. As this sun of the Hereafter comes close to people, they will perspire profusely as the day will be very hot. Everyone's sweat will be according to their deeds in this life. For some, it will cover their feet up to their heels; others will have their sweat reaching their knees; With some, the sweat will be up to their waist, while the worst condition is that of those immersed in their sweat up to their mouths, preventing them from uttering a word. Yet all are in distress, uncertain of the outcome. Anxiety adds to hardship and all start questioning each other.

They will say: 'Perhaps we should seek intercession with our Lord so that He will relieve us of this position of ours'. They will go to Adam (peace be upon him) and say: 'Adam, you are the father of all mankind. God created you with His own hand and blew of His spirit in you. He ordered the angels and they prostrated themselves before you. Intercede with your Lord on our behalf so that He will relieve us of this position of ours. Do you not see our condition and how distressed we are?' He will say: 'I am not fit for that. My Lord is so angry today as He has never been before. He will never be as angry as He is today. I can hardly look after myself. Seek someone else. Go to Noah'. They go to Noah (peace be upon him) and they say: 'Noah, you are the first of God's messengers

to mankind. He describes you as His truly grateful servant. Intercede with your Lord on our behalf. Do you not see how distressed we are?' He will say: 'My Lord is so angry today as He has never been before. He will never be as angry as He is today. I can hardly look after myself. Seek someone else. Go to Abraham'. They go to Abraham (peace be upon him) and they say: 'Abraham, you are God's prophet and His chosen human friend. Intercede with your Lord on our behalf. Do you not see how distressed we are?' He will say: 'My Lord is so angry today as He has never been before. He will never be as angry as He is today. I can hardly look after myself. Seek someone else. Go to Moses'. They go to Moses and say to him: 'Moses, you are God's messenger whom He honoured with His message and He spoke to you directly. Intercede with your Lord on our behalf. Do you not see how distressed we are?' He says to them: 'My Lord is so angry today as He has never been before. He will never be as angry as He is today. I can hardly look after myself. Seek someone else. Go to Jesus, son of Mary'. They will go to Jesus and say: 'Jesus, you are God's messenger and His word which He gave Mary, and you are a soul from Him. You spoke to people when you were in the cradle. Intercede with your Lord on our behalf. Do you not see how distressed we are?' He will say to them: 'My Lord is so angry today as He has never been before. He will never be as angry as He is today. I can hardly look after myself. Seek someone else. Go to Muhammad'.

They go to Muhammad and say: 'Muhammad, you are God's Messenger and the final Prophet. God has forgiven you your earlier and later sins. Intercede with your Lord on our behalf. Do you not see how distressed we are?' Muhammad says: 'I will do it. I will go to the Throne and will drop down under the Throne, prostrating myself before my Lord. God will inspire me with new praises of Him and expressions of gratitude as He has never inspired anyone with before me.

Then I am told: “Muhammad, lift your head. Say and you will be heard; request and your request will be granted; intercede and your intercession will be accepted”⁽¹⁾.

This intercession is a privilege granted to Prophet Muhammad only. All other prophets and messengers of God feel unable to undertake this task because of the awesomeness of the situation. It is then that God reveals Himself to mankind in the shadows of clouds, accompanied by the angels who stand rank on rank. The earth is made to shine with the light of her Lord. All people are afraid of God’s wrath because He is very angry, as He never was before and will never be again, probably because of people’s enormous evil deeds which will be presented to Him, even though He is aware of them. Hence, God’s messengers are reluctant to intercede with Him. Only Prophet Muhammad comes forward because he is the one who has saved his answerable prayer for use on this particular occasion. It is the honourable station to which God promised to raise him, as He says: ‘Your Lord may thus raise you to an honourable station’. (17: 79)

Placing the scales and presenting the deeds

This present life is a field of trial and a test. It is not the time when results are declared or justice restored. Hence, there is a need for a day when erroneous standards and unfair situations are set right, injustice removed and the right, fair standard is applied to all.

There shall be no wrong value to register, and no dispute about the correctness of the verdict. When a person’s deeds appear to be heavy on the scales, it is noted that these are God’s scales, and God alone has absolutely accurate scales. When good deeds are heavy, success follows as God says: ‘On that Day, the weighing will be true and accurate: and those whose

(1) Related by al-Bukhari, 4,712; Muslim, 194.

weight [of good deeds] is heavy in the balance are the ones who are successful'. (7: 8) Could there be any greater success than being safe from torment in Hell and gaining admittance into Heaven? This is the end that crowns a person's success in his life's journey. By contrast, what is left for man when he loses himself? What does he own when has forfeited his own self? God says: 'Whereas those whose weight is light in the balance are the ones who have lost their own souls because of their wilful rejection of Our revelations'. (7: 9)

As Muslims, we believe in what God has told us about the scales that will be used and the deeds to be weighed. We also believe that those having weighty deeds will be successful and those whose deeds are light will be losers.

We believe with total certainty in all this, but we do not try to imagine the scales and how they will be set up. Nor do we try to paint a picture of how deeds such as prayers and fasting, or even the acceptance or rejection of the faith are weighed. We have no idea of how people's lies or offenders' crimes are placed on the scales to be weighed. All such matters belong to the realm beyond our perception, which we believe to exist but cannot imagine its details. The world of the life to come is different from our world and its system is unlike ours. Therefore, we believe in what God tells us about it, as He mentions the recording and weighing of deeds to ensure that justice is done on the Day of Judgement. Nothing is lost or missed, not even a mustard seed which is the smallest thing to see and the lightest to weigh. God tells us: 'We shall set up just scales on the Day of Resurrection, so that no soul shall be wronged in the least. If there be but the weight of a mustard seed, We shall bring it [to account]. Sufficient are We for reckoning'. (21: 47)

When people become aware of the situation they are in on that Day, they realize that this is the start of the 'life beyond

life on earth'. They will understand that they are facing the promised Day of Judgement. Believers will know that this is the Day they believed in and prepared for, while disbelievers will be certain that it is the Day they used to deny would ever come. The faces of both groups will reflect their prospects: the believers' faces will be beaming, smiling and joyful, while those of the other group will be veiled with darkness as if they are covered with dust. These remain downcast, worn out, while the believers' faces are jocund, looking forward to their reward. God says: 'For those who do good there is a good reward, and more besides. Neither darkness nor any disgrace will overcast their faces. These are destined for paradise, where they will abide. As for those who have done evil, an evil deed is rewarded with its like. Ignominy will overshadow them – for they will have none to protect them from God – as if their faces have been covered with patches of the night's own darkness. Such are destined for the Fire, where they will abide'. (10: 26-27)

'On the Day when some faces will shine with happiness and some faces will be blackened. Those whose faces are blackened [will be told]: Did you disbelieve after having embraced the faith? Taste, then, this suffering for having sunk into disbelief. Those with shining faces will be in God's grace; they abide there forever.' (3: 106-107) These verses mean that the prospect of happiness or misery appears to people from the moment of their resurrection. The darkness that shows on some faces heralds the forthcoming punishment of those people, while those with shining faces realize that this is the mark of the forthcoming grace they are bound to receive. Then comes the other functions of opening the records of deeds and weighing them, leading to the determination of everyone's destiny.



All are handed their records

God's perfect justice is reflected in the fact that He does not make His servant accountable according to His own knowledge. God knows not only their deeds, but also knows their inner thoughts and intentions. However, He makes their accountability according to what the angels enter in each person's record of deeds. Everyone will read what is recorded and they will discover that whatever they did, major or minor, is actually recorded. These records are laid open and everything is there to be seen. It is a very hard Day, as nothing remains hidden. Such publicity is hard for everyone. A person might have done many abominable things and he must have done his best to keep these under thick cover, unknown even to his closest friends and associates. Yet he will find all these made public, for all to see. This is one of the most difficult things of the Day. What was kept harboured in people's chests becomes like the most publicized scandal. How burdensome and how hard that Day will be!

The happy ones will be given their records in their right hands, while the miserable will receive theirs in their left hands. At that moment, two opposite cries are heard. One is made by a happy believer whose face is shining brightly, holding his record in his right hand, and the other is a cry of sorrow made by a pale-faced, grieved criminal given his record in his left hand. God says: 'He who is given his record in his right hand will say, "Come you all! Read this my record. I certainly knew that one day I would have to face my account". He will be in a happy state of life, in a lofty garden, with its fruits within easy reach'. (69: 19-23) We can almost see this happening as we hear the cry of joy and success. It reflects great delight felt among a huge crowd feeling the hardship of the Day. The believer says to all people: 'Come and read my record'. It reminds us of school children given the results of their final

exam, leaving their schools and transmitting their joy to all on their way home. Yet how great the difference is between a fleeting feeling of happiness experienced in childhood and the delight at a great success at the beginning of an everlasting life.

‘But he who is given his record in his left hand will say, “Would that I had never been shown my record and knew nothing of my account! Would that death had been the end of me! Nothing has my wealth availed me. I am now bereft of all my power”.’ (69: 25-29) This is a cry of pain, distress and regret on a Day of calamity when a person wishes that he never existed and never had to face such accountability or be given such a record of deeds.

These records list people’s deeds, and each person will find all their deeds during their lives on earth fully recorded. The guilty ones will be stunned as they realize that whatever they did is entered in their records. ‘The record [of everyone’s deeds] will be laid open; and you will see the guilty filled with dread at what it contains. They will say: “Woe to us! What a record is this! It leaves out nothing, small or great, but takes everything into account”. They will find all that they ever wrought now facing them. Your Lord does not wrong anyone.’ (18: 49) Therefore, the records provide the proof of each person’s deeds, as the Qur’an says: ‘It is We who will bring the dead back to life. We record whatever [deeds] they send ahead, as well as the traces they leave behind. We keep an account of all things in a clear record’. (36: 12) Thus, the evidence is irrefutable, and God’s justice will be enforced as their deeds were written down immediately after they took place: ‘Yet there are guardians watching over you, noble recorders, who know all that you do’. (82: 10-12). Needless to say, God’s knowledge encompasses everything, but He does not hold people accountable on the basis of His knowledge. He only

looks at the evidence provided by people's records, showing everyone their own.

The Qur'an describes showing the records: 'On the Day when every soul will find itself confronted with whatever good it has done and whatever evil it has done, they will wish that there were a long span of time between them and that Day. God warns you to beware of Him; and God is most compassionate towards His servants'. (3: 30) 'Every human being's action have We tied around his own neck. On the Day of Resurrection We shall produce for him a record which he will find wide open. [And We will say:] "Read this your record! Sufficient it is for you today that your own soul should make out your account."' (17: 13-14)

At this point, those who deny resurrection will suffer their distress at its most painful and as they look at their past deeds, they will wish that they had never existed. The Qur'an states this: 'We have forewarned you of an imminent scourge, on the Day when man will look on what his hands have forwarded and the unbeliever will cry: "Would that I were dust!"' (78: 40) They will dearly wish that they could be spared the reckoning of their deeds, even if this means their non-existence: 'Those who disbelieved and disobeyed God's Messenger will on that Day wish that the earth may swallow them. They will be able to conceal nothing from God'. (4: 42) They will remember their past disbelief and wrongdoing. They will bite their own fingers, remembering and regretting their offences. They will remember how they turned away from the truth when it was presented to them and they will regret having followed those who led them astray. Yet, what use is their regret when there is no longer any time for action. It is now the time of accountability: 'On that Day the wrongdoer will bite his two hands and say: "Would that I had followed the path shown to me by the Messenger. Oh, woe is me! Would that I had never

taken so-and-so for a friend! He surely led me astray from the Reminder after it had come to me!” Satan is ever treacherous to man’. (25: 27-29)

God will question them about their deeds to complete the process of accountability: ‘By your Lord, We will call them all to account for whatever they have done’. (15: 92-93) Those who denied the truth will be asked about their denial, as the Qur’an states: ‘On that Day We will gather from each community a host of those who denied Our revelations; and they will be lined in ranks. And when they come forth [God] will say: “Did you deny My revelations even though you did not comprehend them fully; or what was it that you were doing?”’ (27: 83-84) This questioning is to establish the facts and show that they deserved the blame and the suitable punishment that follows.

Although all deeds are also entered into a master record, some people imagine that they can escape punishment by denying their offences. Therefore, they lie despite being aware that they stand before God who knows all. They will swear and lie in the same way as they used to do during their lives on earth. God says: ‘On the Day when God will raise them all from the dead, they will swear before Him as they swear now before you, thinking that they have something to stand upon. It is they who are indeed liars’. (58: 18) When they so stubbornly refuse to admit their errors, God will make the organs of their own bodies testify against them. God says: ‘On the Day when God’s enemies will be gathered together before the Fire, they will be driven onwards until, when they reach it, their ears, their eyes and their very skins will bear witness against them, speaking of what they used to do [on earth]. They will ask their skins: “Why did you bear witness against us?” To which they will reply: “God, who gave speech to all things, has made us speak. It is He who created you in the first instance, and to Him you now return”. You did not try to hide yourselves

so that your ears, eyes and skins could not be made to testify against you. Yet you thought that God did not know much of what you were doing. And it is this thought of yours which you entertained about your Lord that brought you to perdition, so that you are now among the lost'. (41: 19-23)

The Day of Judgement is the day when justice is done. One aspect of God's fairness is that He asks a person's own organs to testify in his case. God has given man's tongue the ability to speak in this life. Likewise, He is able to make man's organs and skins speak in the life to come, testifying to what disbelievers did and what they persist in denying. This will stop their denial and they will be in disgrace. They will be totally stunned as they will see their own organs submit to God's will and obey His commands. They will say: 'God, who gave speech to all things, has made us speak'. Those people never entertained a thought that their own organs would testify against them. They could not hide from their organs which are part and parcel of their bodies. They never imagined that these would be the witnesses against them. They were deceived by their own thoughts which led them to suffer the torment of Hell.

The Prophet (peace be upon him) describes this scene. Anas ibn Mālik narrated: 'We were with God's Messenger (peace be upon him) when he smiled. He said: "Do you know why I am laughing?" We said: "God and His Messenger know best". He said: "At the way a person speaks to his Lord. He says: 'My Lord, have You not safeguarded me from injustice?' God will say: 'I have'. He says: 'Then I shall only accept a witness from within myself to testify against me'. God will say: 'Sufficient it is today that your own soul will be the witness against you. And sufficient it is that the noble recorders will be witnesses'. He [i.e. the Prophet] said: 'His mouth will be sealed, and his organs are told to speak. They will recount his deeds. Then he

will be allowed to speak. He will say: “Away with you all into perdition. I have been striving to protect you”⁽¹⁾

Lenient accountability

God will spare some believers the hard accountability, giving them an easy version. He will show them their errors in order to make clear to them the extent of His favour as He will forgive them these. This is certainly a light type of accountability as it is confined to a mere showing of errors, not a hard questioning. This is stated in the following hadith: ‘Ā’ishah narrated that God’s Messenger (peace be upon him) said: ‘Whoever faces the reckoning on the Day of Judgement will be punished’. I said: ‘Does not God, Mighty and Exalted, say: “He will, in time, have a lenient reckoning?”’ (84: 8) He said: ‘That is not the reckoning; it is mere presentation. Whoever is questioned on the Day of Resurrection will be punished’.⁽²⁾

The Prophet (peace be upon him) mentions some scenes of this type of lenient reckoning which reflect God’s favours. He said: ‘A believer is brought close to his Lord, Mighty and Exalted, until he is under His mercy, keeping him screened from all viewers. He is then made to acknowledge his sins [as he is asked]: “Do you recognize this?” He will say: “I do. My Lord”. When God has taken his acknowledgement of his sins and the man thinks that he is doomed, God will say to him: “I kept them secret in the first life and today I forgive you them”. His record of good deeds is then given to him. As for the unbelievers and the hypocrites, it will be stated aloud, in front of all: “These are the ones who lied against God. God’s curse is on the wrongdoers”’. (11: 18) We note that the Prophet makes clear that God will keep such a person screened from all

(1) Related by Muslim, 2,969.

(2) Related by Muslim, 2,876.

viewers. This means that none will see those misdeeds except the one who did them. He is not embarrassed by showing his faults to other people. This is an aspect of making his reckoning easy and lenient.

Abu Dharr narrated: ‘God’s Messenger (peace be upon him) said: “I know the person who is the last of the people of Heaven to be admitted into it and the last of the people of Hell to leave it. That is a man who is brought forward on the Day of Judgement. It is said: ‘Show him his minor sins and keep from him the major ones’. His minor sins are shown to him and it is said to him: on such-and-such a date you did this-and-that; and on this other day, you did this other thing. He will say: “Yes”, and cannot deny it. He is in dread that his major sins will be shown to him. He is told: “You will have a good deed in place of every bad one”. He will say: “My Lord, I have done other things but I do not see them here”. I saw God’s Messenger laughing such that his molars were visible. He used to say: “This is the one who has the lowest rank in Heaven”’.⁽¹⁾

The quarrel between leaders and followers

A most amazing scene of the Day of Judgement is the bitter conflict between the idolaters and the idols they worshipped, as also between leaders and followers. The truth becomes apparent to all, and false images are shattered. Therefore, those who were worshipped disown their worshippers. God describes the raging conflict between those worshipped people and the polytheists who worshipped them, conferring on them attributes of divinity, supremacy and unlimited power. They are now in conflict, and those who were worshipped disclaim such worship. However, those of them who claimed Godhead appear in their real status and the falsehood of their claims becomes known to all. These include the king who said to Abraham:

(1) Related by al-Bukhari, 6,571; Muslim, 190.

‘I give life and cause death’. (2: 258) Pharaoh is another example. He said to his people: ‘I am your supreme Lord’. (79: 24) He also said to them: ‘I know of no deity that you could have other than myself’. (28: 38) On the Day of Judgement, they realize that their kingdoms no longer belong to them, and their power is gone. They feel their humiliation. All sovereignty now belongs to the true Lord: ‘With whom does sovereignty rest today? With God, the One who holds sway over all that exists’. (40: 16) God describes this scene of conflict in the Qur’an:

One Day we shall gather them all together, and then We shall say to those who associated partners with God: ‘Keep to your places, you and those you associated with God as partners’. We will then separate them from one another. Then those whom they associated as partners with God will say: ‘It was not us that you worshipped’. ‘God is sufficient as a witness between us and you. We were, for certain, unaware of your worshipping us.’ There and then every soul will realize what it had done in the past; and all will be brought back to God, their true Lord Supreme. All their invented falsehood will have forsaken them. (10: 28-30)

Those who did not claim Godhead, but it was attributed to them, will disown this claim and disown those who attributed it to them. God says: ‘And when those who associate partners with God will see their [alleged] partners, they will say: “Our Lord, these are our partners whom we used to invoke instead of You”. But they will throw their word back at them, saying: “You are indeed liars”. On that Day, they shall proffer submission to God; and all their inventions will have forsaken them’. (16: 86-87)

All angels will disown those who in this life used to confer divinity on them and worship them. God says: ‘On the Day He gathers them all together, He will say to the angels: “Was

it you that these people worshipped?" They will answer: "Limitless are You in Your glory! You alone are Our patron, not they. In fact they worshipped the jinn and most of them believed in them". Today none of you has any power to benefit or harm another. We will say to the wrongdoers: "Taste now the suffering through fire which you persistently denied". (34: 40-42)

Prophet Jesus will disown those who attributed divinity to him and to his mother. He will glorify God when God questions him, as mentioned in the Qur'an:

'And God will say: 'Jesus, son of Mary! Did you say to people, "Worship me and my mother as deities beside God?"' [Jesus] answered: 'Limitless are You in Your glory! I could never have claimed what I have no right to [say]! Had I said this, You would certainly have known it. You know all that is within myself, whereas I do not know what is in Yourself. Most certainly, it is You alone who fully knows all that lies beyond the reach of human perception. Nothing did I tell them beyond what You bade me [to say]: "Worship God, who is my Lord and your Lord". I was witness to what they did as long as I lived in their midst. Then when You took me to Yourself, You have been watching over them. You are indeed a witness to all things.' (5: 116-117)

Just as false deities disown their worshippers, leaders will disown their followers. Indeed the two groups will be in bitter dispute and will hurl accusations on each other on this fearsome Day. God describes their dispute in the Qur'an:

The unbelievers say: 'We will never believe in this Qur'an, nor in any earlier revelations'. If only you could see how the wrongdoers shall be made to stand before their Lord, hurling reproaches at one another. Those of them who were weak on earth will say to those who had deemed themselves mighty: 'Had it not been for you, we would certainly have been

believers'. The ones who deemed themselves mighty will say to those who were weak: 'Was it we who prevented you from following right guidance after it had been given you? Certainly not! It was you who were guilty'. Those who were weak will reply to those who deemed themselves mighty: 'Not so! It was your scheming, night and day, ordering us to disbelieve in God and to set up equals to Him'. When they see the punishment awaiting them, they will all harbour utter and unmitigated remorse. We will put chains round the necks of the unbelievers. Are they to be requited for anything other than what they did? (34: 31-33)

'If the wrongdoers could but see, as see they will when they are made to suffer, that all might belongs to God alone, and that He is stern in retribution. [On that Day] those who were followed will disown their followers and they all will see their punishment, while all their ties are severed. The followers will say, "Would that we had another chance so that we can disown them as they have disowned us!" Thus will God show them their works [in a way which causes them] bitter regrets. They will never come out of the Fire'. (2: 165-167)

His companion will say: 'Our Lord! I did not make him transgress. He had already gone far astray'. God will say: 'Do not argue in My presence, for I had forewarned you. (50: 27- 28)

The happy and the miserable on the Day of Judgement

God clearly states in His glorious book, the Qur'an, that He will administer justice, rewarding those who have done well and punishing the wrongdoers. He will reward every single person according to their deeds. He says: 'High above all orders [of being] is He, the Lord of the Throne. By His own will does He bestow revelation on whomever He wills of His servants, so as to warn of the Day when all will meet; the Day when they will come forth, with nothing about them concealed from God. With whom does sovereignty rest today? With God,

the One who holds absolute sway over all that exists. This Day each soul will be requited for what it has earned: no injustice will be done today. God is swift in reckoning'. (40: 15-17)

This burdensome and long Day, stretching as far as fifty thousand years will be one of hardship, fear and anxiety. However, it will be short and easy for the believers, with the sun moving down as it does before sunset, until it actually sets. The Prophet says: 'By Him who holds my soul in His hand, it will be made very easy for the believers, so as to make it lighter than one obligatory prayer'.⁽¹⁾

Those who are successful will be full of hope, and their faces will beam with delight, as they are given good news by the angels. When other people are in great panic, they feel safe and reassured, as God says: 'The Supreme Terror will cause them no grief, since the angels will receive them with the greeting, "This is your day which you were promised"'. (21: 103) Great lights shine before them, and they are told that they are going to Heaven: 'On the Day when you see all believers, men and women, with their light spreading rapidly before them and to their right, [they will be told], "The good news for you today is that you will for ever abide in gardens through which running waters flow"'. This is indeed the supreme triumph'. (57: 12) Their happiness is made even greater as they join the procession of successful believers, headed by Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him), with light accompanying them on all sides: 'On a Day when God will not disgrace the Prophet or those who believed with him. Their light will spread out before them, and on their right. They will say: "Our Lord! Perfect our light for us and forgive us. You certainly have power over all things"'. (66: 8) They will march in a procession to meet God, the Lord of Grace, assured of good reception: 'The Day [will surely

(1) Related by Ahmad, 11,717.

come] when We will gather the God-fearing before [God] the Lord of Grace, as honoured guests'. (19: 85)

The losers are those who were bent on wrongdoing during their lives on earth. As they realize the miserable situation that lies ahead of them, they feel great lasting regret, and they bemoan what they did in the past. God tells us: 'On that Day the wrongdoer will bite his two hands and say: "Would that I had followed the path shown to me by the Messenger. Oh, woe is me! Would that I had never taken so-and-so for a friend! He surely led me astray from the Reminder after it had come to me!" Satan is ever treacherous to man'. (25: 27-29) 'All hearts will be filled with terror, and all eyes will be downcast'. (79: 8-9)

How could a heart feel anything but terror, and how could eyes be other than downcast when all is laid bare, facts are ascertained and everyone sees what they have done: 'We have forewarned you of an imminent scourge, on the Day when man will look on what his hands have forwarded and the unbeliever will cry: "Would that I were dust!"' (78: 40) All disbelievers will wish that they had been non-existent rather than face their forthcoming destinies.

Whoever wants to be safe in the life to come should be keen to do what leads to safety, fulfilling all their responsibilities. God says: 'But those who care only for the life to come, strive for it as it should be striven for, and are true believers, are indeed the ones who will have their endeavours well rewarded'. (17: 19) In the life to come, every person will see whatever he has done in this present life. He will meet his Lord, bringing with him whatever he used to do and whatever he believed at the time of his death. The Prophet said: 'Everyone is resurrected as he thought at the point of his death'.⁽¹⁾

(1) Related by Muslim, 2,878.

Five: No Injustice on This Day

Requital in the life to come is fair, and no one will be unfairly treated. God does not punish anyone for a sin he did not commit, nor does His punishment exceed what the sinner deserves. God is the fairest of arbiters: His mercy is always ahead of His wrath. Whoever is punished in the life to come must have acknowledged their wrongdoings. Therefore, God has informed all His servants that requital on the Day of Judgement is based on what everyone did during their lives on earth. It is the Day of absolute justice, when no one suffers any wrong. God says: ‘Today, no one shall be wronged in the least: you will be requited for nothing other than that which you did in life’. (36: 54)

No punishment is administered on the Day of Judgement until every wrongdoer has read their records, and their evil deeds have been weighed. God says: ‘We will set up just scales on the Day of Resurrection, so that no soul will be wronged in the least. If there be but the weight of a mustard seed, We will bring it [to account]. Sufficient are We for reckoning’. (21: 47) ‘This Our record speaks of you in all truth; for We have been recording everything you do.’ (45: 29) They will also admit their bad deeds: ‘They will say: “Our Lord! Twice have You caused us to die, just as twice You have brought us to life! Now that we have recognized our sins, is there any way out?”’ (40:11)

One of the clearest aspects of divine justice is that God will judge people according to what is recorded of their deeds. Their accompanying angels will testify against them, and their records include every single thing they did during their lives. Whoever denies what is thus proven will have their own body organs testifying against them. This means that their own bodies stand witness against them. Then the scales are set and the deeds are weighed: ‘Whoever does an atom’s weight of good will see it then, and whoever does an atom’s weight of evil will see it then’. (99: 7-8) It would have been enough that God judges them according to His knowledge, since He knows everything. He beholds their misdeeds when they commit them. Indeed, He knows all their deeds before they do them. When He passes judgement, no one can question Him. However, He caused deeds to be recorded and subsequently weighed, and He will call witnesses to establish fairness, stop any argument, ensure fair dealing and show that justice is done.

No one is cast into Hell until the angels have questioned him about having received God’s message and that he was well aware of it. In reference to Hell, God says: ‘Every time a group is thrown in it, its keepers will ask them, “Did no one come to warn you?” “Yes”, they will reply, “a warner did indeed come to us, but we did not believe him. We said, ‘God has revealed nothing. You are in total error’”. They will further say, “Had we but listened, or reasoned, we would not now be among the inhabitants of the blazing Fire”. Thus they shall confess their sins. Far [from God’s mercy] are the inhabitants of the blazing Fire’. (67: 8-11)

They thus acknowledge that God’s message was given to them in full, but they neither listened to it, nor did they use their minds to think and reflect about it. It is as if they went through life devoid of hearing and thinking.

Those who did not receive God's message

God tells us that He does not punish anyone who does not receive His message and become well aware of it: 'We would never inflict punishment on anyone until We have sent a messenger'. (17: 15) 'These were messengers sent to bring good news and give warning so that people may have no argument against God once these messengers have come.' (4: 165)

God will have His argument against them on the Day of Judgement and question them so that they will testify against themselves. He will address both humans and jinns, saying: 'O you company of jinn and humans! Have there not come to you messengers from among yourselves who related to you My revelations and warned you of the coming of this your day?' They will reply: 'We bear witness against ourselves'. The life of this world has beguiled them. So they will bear witness against themselves that they were unbelievers'. (6: 130) On that Day, there will be no avoidance of admitting one's wrongdoing and incurring God's punishment.

This clearly shows that whoever remained unaware of the message presented by God's messengers does not incur His punishment. The same is true for anyone who received a distorted version of God's message, making it unacceptable.

This means that good, simple people living everywhere on earth, who are uneducated and oblivious of God's message will not be punished. Most probably, they would have followed God's message had it been delivered to them, unless they were determined to deny it out of arrogance or blind stubbornness. God will never punish a person who has not learnt the truth or has not been well informed of the divine faith as preached by His messengers. Only a person who learnt the truth and was clearly given God's warning, and yet who turned away from

all this and arrogantly decided to go his own way, deserves punishment.

No one will appeal for a retrial, protesting that his trial was unfair. They will only appeal for another chance and a return to life on earth so that they will do differently from what they did in their first lives. The Qur'an says: 'If you could but see them when they will be made to stand before the Fire! They will say: "Would that we could return! Then we would not deny our Lord's revelations, but would be among the believers". Indeed, that which in the past they used to conceal will manifest itself to them; and if they were to return to life they would go back to that which they have been forbidden. They are indeed liars'. (6: 27-28)

Now that they realize the magnitude of their wrongdoing and how far astray they had gone, with no reasonable excuse to justify their errors, they will not claim that they do not deserve their punishment. Nor will they deny having committed those sins. Instead, they acknowledge all this, but they appeal for another chance to rectify their errors and follow the truth. They want to learn from their mistakes. But all this comes too late. Everyone will have only one chance in this life, and during his time he has ample chance to correct mistakes and turn to God in repentance. This is open to everyone until their last moment in life. Whoever squanders this opportunity only wrongs himself and chooses to go the way leading to Hell.

Our Lord, Mighty and Exalted, has forbidden all mankind to commit injustice. Prior to this, He has forbidden Himself injustice. He says in a *qudsī* hadith: 'My servants, I have forbidden Myself injustice and have made it forbidden to you. Do not act unjustly towards one another'.⁽¹⁾ He says in His Book: 'Indeed God does not wrong anyone by as much as an

(1) Related by Muslim, 2,577.

atom's weight. And if there be a good deed, He will multiply it, and will bestow a great reward out of His grace'. (4: 40)

Mercy to be extended on the hard Day

What God describes of the distress, hardship and hard accountability of the Day of Judgement, as well as the grief, regret and sorrow of the losers –are all suffered by those who rebel, act wrongfully. Such a person spends his life turning away from God, paying little attention to His commands and giving no thought to meeting Him. He suddenly discovers that the Day he dismissed as too far away is closing in on him. He faces the Reckoning that he casually dismissed and realizes that it is very hard. He ridiculed whoever warned him against it, but now he faces it. He is much grieved as he admits; 'This is what the Lord of Grace had promised. The messengers told the truth'. (36: 52)

God, Compassionate and Ever-Merciful, gives us many chances to ensure success and makes them easy to use. He also narrows down the ways leading to loss and ruin so that people can easily steer away from them. Therefore, those who deliberately choose the wrong way, turning their backs on the truth will be ruined. The Prophet (peace be upon him) says: 'All my community will be in Heaven, except those who refuse'. People asked: 'Who will refuse, Messenger of God?' He said: 'Whoever obeys me will be in Heaven, and whoever disobeys me refuses'.⁽¹⁾

One aspect of making success easier to achieve is that God does not charge anyone with more than they are able to do. He does not burden anyone with more than what He has given them. He has laid no hardship on anyone in anything that pertains to religion. He wants to make things easy, not difficult, for us. Moreover, His mercy is such that when His servants

(1) Related by al-Bukhari, 7,280.

pray for His forgiveness, He forgives them, and when they turn to Him in repentance, He accepts it from them. Whenever a person commits a sin or errs and then prays for forgiveness, he is forgiven. He says: ‘Who but God can forgive sins?’ (3: 135) He tempts the errant with His forgiveness and forbids them to despair of being granted His mercy. He says: ‘Say: “[Thus speaks God]: You servants of Mine who have transgressed against their own souls! Do not despair of God’s mercy: God forgives all sins; He alone is much-forgiving, ever-merciful”’. (39: 53) He keeps the way of forgiveness and safety open all the time, as He says: ‘When those who believe in God’s revelations come to you, say: “Peace be upon you. Your Lord has committed Himself to bestow grace and mercy: if any of you does a bad deed out of ignorance, and then repents and mends his ways, He will be much-forgiving, ever-merciful”’. (6: 54)

The forgiveness of sins is a direct relationship between God and His servants. It requires no intercession or action by an intermediary. It involves no confession before anyone. Whoever commits an error or a sin simply turns to his Lord, seeking His forgiveness and the acceptance of his repentance. God will be pleased with him and He will accept his repentance and forgive him. The Prophet (peace be upon him) said: ‘A servant of God committed a sin. He then said: “My Lord, forgive me my sin”. God, Blessed and Exalted, said: “My servant has committed a sin and has known that he has a Lord who forgives sins and punishes for sins. I have forgiven My servant”. Then he spent sometime as he wished, then he sinned again and said: “My Lord, I have committed another sin. Please forgive me my sin”. God, Blessed and Exalted, said: “My servant has committed a sin and has known that he has a Lord who forgives sins and punishes sins. I have forgiven My servant”. Sometime later, he sinned again and said: “My Lord, I have committed another sin. Forgive me”. God, Blessed and Exalted, said: “My servant

has committed a sin and has known that he has a Lord who forgives sins and punishes sins. I have forgiven My servant three times. He may do as he wishes”’.⁽¹⁾ This means that every time a person commits a sin then regrets it, turns to God in repentance and prays for His forgiveness, God will forgive him. Indeed, God wants to accept His servants’ repentance, not punish them. He says: ‘God wants to turn to you in His mercy, while those who follow their lusts want you to go very far astray’. (4: 27)

God needs nothing from His servants, while they need everything from Him. Nevertheless, he is very pleased with His servants when they turn to Him repenting of their sins. God is also pleased that His servant stops his sin. The Prophet said: ‘God is more delighted with His believer servant turning to Him in repentance than one travelling through a barren, dangerous land, having his camel which carries his food and drink and his other needs. However, he loses his camel. He looks for it everywhere, but he cannot find her. When he feels that he will die, he thinks: I better go back to the place where I lost her and stay until death overtakes me. He is overtaken by sleep. He then wakes up to find his camel standing close and carrying his belongings, food and drink. He holds its rein, then feeling overjoyed, he says: “My Lord, You are my servant and I am Your Lord”. He unwittingly said this out of extreme delight’. God is more delighted with the repentance of His believing servant than such a person is delighted to have his mount and supplies back’.⁽²⁾

God, who is so much delighted with His servant’s repentance, will not punish His servant unless the servant runs away from Him, exposing himself to His punishment. Very often God states that the opportunity to forgive sins and extend

(1) Related by al-Bukhari, 7,507; Muslim, 2,758.

(2) Related by Muslim, 2,744.

mercy is readily available, at the same time He mentions punishment. He says: ‘Tell My servants that I alone am much-forgiving, ever-merciful; and also, My punishment is indeed the most grievous suffering’. (15: 49-50) It is certainly God ‘who forgives sins, accepts repentance, is severe in retribution and limitless in bounty. There is no deity other than Him. To Him is the ultimate return’. (40: 3) His punishment applies only to those who turn away from His mercy and forgiveness. As for those who seek His pardon and pray for His unfailing forgiveness, they are sure to receive it: ‘Your Lord is abounding in forgiveness’. (53: 32) Whoever seeks God’s abundant and overflowing mercy, it will be granted to him in great measure, because His mercy encompasses everything.

Prophet Abraham said to his father: ‘My father! I dread lest a scourge will fall upon you from the Lord of Grace, and then you will become one of Satan’s friends’. (19: 45) Although Abraham was warning his father against incurring God’s wrath, he reminds him that one of God’s names is *al-Raḥmān*, which means ‘the Lord of Grace’. God is certainly Almighty, yet He is *al-Raḥmān*, and He always extends mercy. How could his father, then, turn away from God’s mercy, exposing himself to His punishment.

An important aspect of God’s mercy is the fact that good deeds are rewarded generously, in multiples, while bad deeds are punished at their exact level. God says: ‘Whoever does a good deed shall be credited with ten times as much; and whoever does an evil deed will be requited with no more than its like. None shall be wronged’. (6: 160) This means that the reward of a good deed is ten times its value, while a bad deed is requited only at its single value. The Prophet (peace be upon him) gives a full description of the recording of good and bad deeds. He says: ‘God has written down the good deeds and the bad ones. Then He explained this saying: whoever intends a

good deed but does not do it, God writes it down as a full good deed, but if he intends it and does it, God writes it down as ten good deeds, up to seven hundred times, up to many times more. If he intends a bad deed and does not do it, God writes it down as one full good deed, but if he intends it and does it, God writes it down as one bad deed'.⁽¹⁾

Thus, good deeds are accepted and multiplied, while bad deeds are punished at their simple value or forgiven. Therefore, only those whose bad deeds are greater than ten times their good deeds find themselves in the most dire situation. The ruined only send themselves to ruin.



(1) Related by al-Bukhari, 6,491; Muslim, 131.



The Resurrection and Reckoning in Brief



- Qur’anic verses describe the terror of the Day of Judgement, which encompasses the entire universe: a great earthquake on earth, the skies rent asunder, the seas exploding, the planets falling and dispersing, the graves scattered, and people in fear and confusion. The scene engulfs all this, as we see all that happens as if it is occurring before our eyes.

- Blowing the Trumpet is the beginning of the Hereafter, as mankind are resurrected from their graves and taken to their gathering place. God says: ‘The Trumpet will be sounded, and out of their graves they will rise and hasten to their Lord’. (36: 51)

- On the Day of Judgement, God will gather all His creation throughout the long history of mankind, across all their generations. They will all gather in the plane where the Reckoning will take place. Hence, the Day of Judgement is also called the Day of the Gathering. All mankind are brought in, with none left out, as God says: ‘We will gather them all together, leaving out not a single soul of them’. (18: 47)

- When people will see the facts of resurrection and the beginnings of reckoning and requital, the faces of the happy ones

will be beaming, while the faces of the miserable will be dark, covered with gloom.

- Their deeds will be shown to people, and they will see their every good and bad thing clearly recorded. Their deeds are accounted, the scales are set up and the deeds are weighed, so that the truth will be clearly declared, and no one will be unjustly treated. God says: ‘This day each soul will be requited for what it has earned: no injustice will be done today. God is swift in reckoning’. (40: 15-17)

- When facts are laid clear and falsehood is shown for what it is, there will be fierce arguments between the idolaters and the idols they worshipped, and between leaders and followers. God says: ‘On that Day those who were followed will disown their followers and they all shall see their punishment, while all their ties are severed’. (2: 166)

- All people are given the records of their deeds. The believers will be delighted as they take their happy records in their right hands, while the guilty ones will be full of regret as they take their records in their left hands.

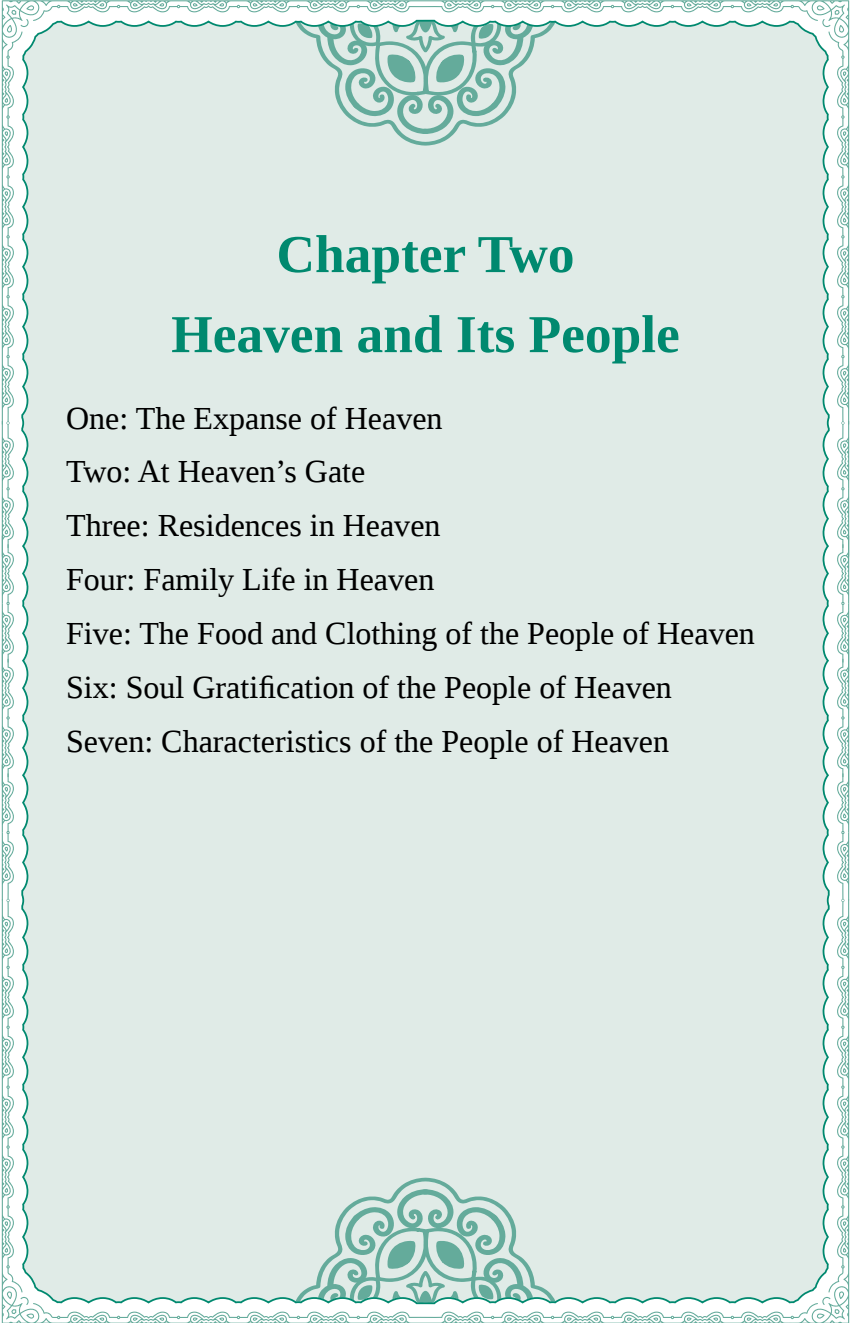
No one will be wronged as none will be punished for an offence he did not commit. None will deny something he did. A person’s body organs will testify against him, and he will admit his sins. This is the day of absolute justice: ‘No injustice will be done today’. (40: 17) No one shall claim to have been wronged, but they will wish to return to life on earth so that they will do well, unlike what they did in their lives. But it is too late for such an opportunity. “Have We not given you lives long enough for anyone who would be warned to take warning? And a warner had come to you’. (35: 37)

- When fair judgement is administered to all, and everyone is given what they deserve, people are driven to their ultimate destiny. Some are happy while others are miserable: ‘Those

who will have brought wretchedness upon themselves, they will be in the Fire where, moaning and sobbing, they will abide as long as the heavens and the earth endure, unless your Lord wills it otherwise. Your Lord always does whatever He wills. And those who are blessed with happiness will be in Paradise, abiding there as long as the heavens and the earth endure, unless your Lord wills it otherwise: an unceasing gift'. (11: 106-108)

- The Day of Judgement is the Day of absolute justice. No one will be wronged or punished for anything other than his own sins which he admits. 'We will set up just scales on the Day of Resurrection, so that no soul will be wronged in the least.' (21: 47) This is the Day of Truth and Justice. 'No injustice will be done today.' (40: 17) None will be punished except those whose evil deeds are overwhelming, and who choose to take the way to Hell.





Chapter Two

Heaven and Its People

One: The Expanse of Heaven

Two: At Heaven's Gate

Three: Residences in Heaven

Four: Family Life in Heaven

Five: The Food and Clothing of the People of Heaven

Six: Soul Gratification of the People of Heaven

Seven: Characteristics of the People of Heaven



Heaven and Its People



Heaven is described in the Qur'an in a way that gives us scenes describing different types of comforts and happy feelings its people experience. Its material comforts include beautiful scenery, palaces, rivers and delicious provisions. Other aspects focus on feelings, such as pure hearts that experience neither grudge nor hatred. They appreciate God's favour as He guided them along the way leading to Heaven. It also describes how they meet and exchange visits with those whom they love, as in 'They shall rest as brothers, facing one another, on couches'. (15: 47) This psychological happiness is brought to perfection by the fact that God is pleased with them, speaks to them and they look at His majesty and greatness. They enjoy a great variety of pleasant things coupled with an ever-renewing friendly environment that never gets boring through familiarity. However, all these scenes describing what the dwellers of Heaven will enjoy are merely images drawn on what we have in this present life. What people will have and enjoy in Heaven is much greater and beyond human imagination, which can only draw on what is familiar to it. Therefore, God refers to it in the following terms: 'No one can imagine what blissful delights have been kept in store for them as a reward for what they used to do'. (32: 17) 'There will be found all that the souls may desire and the eyes may delight in.' (43: 71) Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him)

quotes God, Mighty and Exalted, as saying: 'I have prepared for My good servants what no eyes has ever seen, no ear has ever heard of and no mind has ever imagined'.⁽¹⁾

We need not ask about the overwhelming feelings of surprise as the people see delights that no eye has ever seen and no mind can ever have imagined. These are stored delights no one has ever experienced. Such is the honourable meeting in God's presence, when He shows believers what has been kept for them to enjoy. It is all much greater and happier than they could ever have hoped for.

The honour God bestows on Heaven is that He calls it His own. He says: 'Oh soul at peace! Return to your Lord, well pleased and well pleasing. Enter, then, together with My servants! Enter My paradise!' (89: 27-30) This is a description implying honourable position. When Pharaoh's wife supplicated, she said: 'My Lord, build me a mansion in Heaven near You'. (66: 11) A home in Heaven is near to God, which makes it honourable. Heaven is in God's neighbourhood, and its dweller is with and near God, as He says: 'The God-fearing will be in gardens and running waters, in a seat of truth, in the presence of an all-powerful Sovereign'. (54: 54-55)

Another aspect of honouring the dwellers of Heaven is that Heaven is brought nearer to them as they enter it. God says: 'And Paradise will be brought close to the righteous, and will no longer be distant'. (50: 31) Its gates will be opened to them, as the Qur'an mentions: 'Gardens of perpetual bliss, with gates wide open to them'. (38: 50) The angels welcome them with glad tidings as they enter: 'Peace be to you! Well have you done. Come in: you are here to stay'. (39: 73) They enter it looking similar to each other in shape and age. They do not display any great differences with some being tall and others short, or some young and others elderly.

(1) Related by al-Bukhari, 3,244.

There will be a great change in the bodies and forms of men and women, which makes them closer to perfection and more suited to enjoy life in Heaven and its comforts. All of them will be similar in physique to their first father, Adam, having the finest of forms. The Prophet said: ‘Everyone who will enter Paradise will have Adam’s form, sixty cubits in height’.⁽¹⁾ They will all be in their prime, as old as Jesus, son of Mary, as the Prophet says: ‘The people of Heaven will enter it having hairless skins, beardless, white, with curly hair, with kohl naturally applied around their eyes, aged thirty-three’.⁽²⁾

Another aspect of the warm welcome is that they will enter Heaven in large groups, as God says: ‘The Day [will surely come] when We shall gather the God-fearing before [God] the Lord of Grace, as honoured guests’. (19: 85) ‘And the God-fearing believers will be led to paradise in throngs.’ (39: 73) Blessings and comforts are better enjoyed when they are received by people together. The believers will enter Heaven accompanied by their families and relatives, as the Qur’an mentions: ‘Gardens of perpetual bliss, which they will enter together with the righteous from among their parents, their spouses and their offspring. The angels will come in to them from every gate, [saying]: “Peace be upon you, because you have persevered”. Blessed indeed is the attainment of the [ultimate] abode’. (13: 23-24) Needless to say, a person feels happier as he sees his parents and forefathers happy, and he is accompanied by his wife, and sees his offspring delighted. It is a celebrated group entry into Heaven, which increases people’s delight. God mentions their companions in Heaven, as He says: ‘All who obey God and the Messenger shall be among those upon whom God has bestowed His blessings: the prophets, and those who never deviate from the truth, and the martyrs

(1) Related by al-Bukhari, 3,326; Muslim, 2,841.

(2) Related by Ahmad, 8,505; al-Tirmidhī, 2,545.

and the righteous ones. How goodly a company are these!’ (4: 69) It is a great honour for anyone to be in company with those noble people honoured by God. It is a fitting honour given to people with good hearts. Accompanied entry into Heaven and noble company inside it increase the blessing granted to these people. A blessing is increased when it is shared with others.

In contrast, the guilty are driven to Hell as a thirsty herd, with none feeling who is being driven alongside him. His pain is not reduced by its being shared by others, because the hardship is much greater than that. God says: ‘Because of your wrongdoing, it will not be of any benefit to you that you are now to share your suffering’. (43: 39)

Descriptions of Heaven and its dwellers is often given in general, as in ‘Those who believe and do good deeds’, or detailing their characteristics and deeds. The Qur’anic discourse about Heaven, its comforts and happiness, as well as the characteristics of its dwellers is greatly varied, as will be presently explained.





One: The Expanse of Heaven



‘Hasten, all of you, to the achievement of your Lord’s forgiveness, and a paradise as vast as the heavens and the earth, prepared for the God-fearing.’ (3: 133) ‘Vie with one another in seeking to attain your Lord’s forgiveness, and a paradise as vast as the heavens and the earth, prepared for those who believe in God and His messengers. Such is God’s bounty which He grants to whomever He pleases. God’s bounty is great indeed.’ (57: 21)

All mankind, from the start to the end of human life, spend their lives on earth, this planet which is no more than a particle in the universe, with its countless stars and huge galaxies. Paradise, where the believers are bound in the life to come, is so vast that its width is as vast as the entire universe. We need to reflect: all this universal expanse that includes all stars and galaxies, measured in billions of light years is smaller than Paradise.

How will the people of Heaven move and separate in such a vast area? The short answer is that when we speak of Heaven, we are speaking about the measures of the life to come. We do not apply our measures which we use in this world to the realm of the Hereafter. The Hereafter has its own worlds and conditions which are not to be compared to this short duration of our lives on earth.

Besides, this great expanse is suited to everlasting life. Those people in Heaven will live forever and ever, in a great world with limitless space. Thus, its infinite expanse can easily support their everlasting lives, and can provide the limitless variety of bliss that its dwellers will enjoy. God describes this, saying: 'If you were to look around, you would see only bliss and a vast kingdom'. (76: 20) When God, Mighty and Exalted, describes a kingdom as 'vast', He actually refers to something beyond the reach of our imagination and dreams, as these are confined to our own small world and short life spans. That God says that the heavenly kingdom is 'vast' means that it extends beyond our imagination. We cannot visualize its extent. It is a description that fits God's power and generosity, not our understanding and imagination.

The Prophet (peace be upon him) indicates in a hadith how vast Heaven is, and that no one can possibly imagine it, because we live in our own limited world. He describes what is given to the person who offers the least amount of good deeds and gets the lowest position in Heaven. The Prophet says: 'I know the last person of the people of Hell to leave it and the last person of the people of Heaven to enter it. He is a man who leaves Hell crawling. God says to him: 'Go and enter Heaven'. He goes there and it seems to him that Heaven is full. He goes back and says: 'My Lord, I found it full'. God says to him: 'Go and enter Heaven'. He goes there and it seems to him that Heaven is full. He goes back and says: 'My Lord, I found it full'. God says to him: 'Go and enter Heaven. You have [there] the like of the world and ten times like it'. He says: 'Are You making fun of me when You are the King?'. The narrator said: 'I saw God's Messenger (peace be upon him) laughing such that his molars were visible'. He used to say: 'This is the one who has the lowest rank in Heaven'.⁽¹⁾

(1) Related by al-Bukhari, 6,571; Muslim, 190.

How splendid. This is the case of the last person to enter Heaven. He is the one with the least bounty, yet he will have ten times our world. Yes, ten times the earth with all its treasures, forests, islands, seas, etc. in addition to all that he wishes to have. He will be in such luxury that he will declare: ‘No one has ever been given as much as I have’.

The question is: if such are the riches this person will have, what will be given to those who were ahead of him and given much more? Those are the ones God will place closer to Himself, elevating their status. What God will grant them is beyond imagination and description. No eye has ever seen its like, nor has any ear heard of it. It will only be appreciated when its recipients will see it. God says: ‘That which is with God is best for those who are truly virtuous’. (3: 198)





Two: At Heaven's Gate



The people destined to Heaven shall enter it, one large group followed by another, as God says: 'And the believers will be led to paradise in throngs'. (39: 73) When they reach it, its gates are opened wide for them, and the angels will welcome them with a greeting and very happy news, saying: 'Peace be to you! Well have you done. Come in: you are here to stay'. (39: 73) Its many and very wide gates will see great crowding as people arrive. The Prophet mentions that Heaven has eight gates, each one stretches as long as the distance from Makkah to Busra, in southern Syria, or from Makkah to Hajar, by the eastern coast of Arabia. The distance between Makkah and each of these two cities is more than one thousand kilometres. Yet the Prophet says that 'there will come a day when it is overcrowded'.⁽¹⁾

This description is merely to indicate size, not to give an accurate distance. The world of the Hereafter is totally different from our world. Hence, an even greater description is given. 'Utbah ibn Ghazwān narrates: 'We have also been told that the distance between the two sides of any gate of Heaven is equal to forty years of travel. There will come a day when it is overcrowded'.⁽²⁾ We should remember that this promised

(1) Related by Muslim, 2,967.

(2) Ibid.

day of overcrowding is a day of the Hereafter, not one of our days. Its length is as God mentions: 'In your Lord's sight a day is like a thousand years of your reckoning'. (22: 47) Can we imagine the number of people who will enter through this gate, or those who will enter through the other seven gates? This in itself is happy news for all believers, indicating that God accepts them and forgives their errors and sins. This should add to their hopes of being among the people of Heaven and should make them eager to do more good deeds.

Another good news is that the majority of this great multitude heading towards Heaven belong to Prophet Muhammad's community. One day he said to his companions: 'Will you be happy to form one-quarter of the people of Heaven?' They said, 'Yes', and glorified God expressing their delight. The Prophet said: 'Will you not be happy to form one-third of the people of Heaven?' They glorified God. He then said: 'I certainly hope that you will form one-half of the people of Heaven'.⁽¹⁾ The Prophet's companions glorified God, expressing their delight at this happy news.

This is not surprising because Prophet Muhammad's community is the longest surviving community, with a far greater number of generations, and it spreads over a larger area of the earth than any other community. The Prophet's hadith foretells of the spread of Islam all over the world. Today, one-quarter of the people on earth are Muslims, and Islam continues to be the fastest spreading religion.

Angels standing at everyone of the gates of Heaven will call out to them, so they enter through the right gates. The Prophet says: The one who prays frequently will be called from the gate of prayers; the one who goes on jihad will be called from the gate of jihad; the one who fasts often will be called from

(1) Related by al-Bukhari, 6,528; Muslim, 221.

a gate called al-Rayyān, and the one who is charitable will be called from the gate of *ṣadaqah*'.⁽¹⁾ Some believers will be called to enter from all these gates, with the angels standing at each gate calling him to enter through their gate. Abu Bakr asked the Prophet: 'Is anyone called from all these gates?' God's Messenger said: "Yes, and I hope you will be one".⁽²⁾ Those who are called to enter from all these gates are those who do most good deeds. They are ready to do every type of good deed whenever they have the opportunity to do so. They, thus, have a share of every type of goodness and they find themselves invited to enter Heaven through several gates.

The difference is great between the people of Heaven who are invited in and the people destined for Hell who are flung into it.

When all the people of Heaven have entered, its gates remain open. Normally, gates and doors are locked to prevent the people inside from going out, or to prevent those outside entry. Needless to say, the people who have arrived in Heaven will not want to leave it. They do not entertain any thought of leaving. Why would they leave Heaven which stretches in width as long as the universe? No one they dislike will enter. The gates of Heaven remain open so that angels will come through them, giving fresh welcome to the people inside. The Qur'an states: 'The angels will come in to them from every gate, [saying]: "Peace be upon you, because you have persevered". Blessed indeed is the attainment of the [ultimate] abode'. (13: 23-24) This is different from Hell where its gates are locked from all sides, keeping its dwellers in, with none able to leave.



(1) Related by al-Bukhari, 1,897; Muslim, 1,027.

(2) Ibid.



Three: Residences in Heaven



The Arabic word for Heaven is *Jannah*, which means ‘a garden with trees having overlapping branches’. It is not given a name indicating palaces or great tents. It is given this name because it bears connotations of freshness, delight, openness and a variety of enjoyable things. The sight of large gardens increases delight as we look at flowing springs, running waters, high trees, ripe fruits, etc. All these are attractive and delightful. They provide beauty with variety. God gave the believers’ dwelling place this name, even though it additionally contains lofty mansions, great palaces, flowing rivers, great trees, sumptuous food, splendid garments and beautiful brides and bridegrooms.

When the people of Heaven enter it, they go straight to their own dwellings. They do not need to ask for them, because they know them, as if they have resided there since they were born. God says: ‘He will admit them to the Garden He has made already known to them’. (47: 6) The Prophet says: ‘By Him who holds my soul in His hand, each of them knows his dwelling place in Heaven better than he knows his home in this world’.⁽¹⁾

(1) Related by al-Bukhari, 2,440.

Heaven has different grades and levels above levels, according to the different ranks of the believers' piety and good works. The Prophet said: 'There are one hundred grades in Heaven, and the distance between each two grades is like the distance between the sky and earth. Paradise is the highest grade. It is from Paradise that Heaven's four rivers spring, and God's Throne is above it. When you pray to God, request Him to grant you Paradise'.⁽¹⁾ He also said: 'The people of Paradise will look up to the people of high station above them, just like you cite a bright planet, as it departs from the eastern or western horizon, because of the superiority between them'. People asked: 'Messenger of God, are these the ranks of prophets which are attained by none other than them?' He said: 'Nay. By Him who holds my soul in His hand, these are people who believed in God and fully trusted His messengers'.⁽²⁾

In the Battle of Badr, one of the Muslim martyrs was a young man called Ḥārithah. His mother came to the Prophet and said: 'Messenger of God, will you tell me about Ḥārithah: if he is in Heaven, I will remain patient. If it is otherwise, I will weep long for him'. The Prophet said: 'Umm Ḥārithah, there are several heavens, and your son has attained the highest Paradise'.⁽³⁾

The Prophet advises believers to pray to God to grant them the highest level in Heaven, because God is generous and He gives in abundance. The bounty He bestows on His servants is limitless. The Prophet said: 'When you pray to God, request Him to grant you Paradise, which is the best and the highest in Heaven. Above it is the Throne of God, the Lord of Grace. It is from Paradise that the rivers of Heaven spring'.⁽⁴⁾

(1) Related by al-Tirmidhī, 2,531.

(2) Related by al-Bukhari, 3,256; Muslim, 2,831.

(3) Related by al-Bukhari, 2,809.

(4) Related by al-Bukhari, 2,790.



The dwellings in Heaven are described in the Qur'an: 'God has promised the believers, men and women, gardens through which running waters flow, where they will abide, and goodly dwellings in the Garden of Eden. Yet God's acceptance is the greatest blessing of all. This is indeed the supreme triumph'. (9: 72) They are fine residences, bright and fresh, full of greenery, with rivers running below their gardens and mansions. These rivers are not distant. They are very close, giving a scene of ever-renewing beauty. God says: 'As against this, those who are God-fearing will have lofty mansions raised upon mansions high, beneath which running waters flow. This is God's promise. Never does God fail to fulfil His promise'. (39: 20)

These lofty mansions raised upon high mansions give us an image of raised beauty giving boundless bliss and eternal comfort.



Four: Family Life in Heaven

There is another type of bliss in Heaven, which is that of a happy married life, with all that this implies of mutual compassion, love and companionship. Yet it is a family life in an environment of comfort, reassurance and plentifulness. God says: ‘Those who are destined for Heaven are today happily occupied. Together with their spouses, they will be in shady groves seated on soft couches. There they have fruit and whatever they ask for: peace and fulfilment through the word of the Lord who is ever-merciful’. (36: 55-58) They are occupied, but it is not a tiring occupation that requires much effort. They are occupied with the bliss surrounding them, partaking of the great variety of delicious things available to them, comfortable as they recline on rich and soft couches. How blissful such a life is, and how delightful it is to enjoy with one’s loving and beloved spouse. Yet all this is granted with no worry that anything may disturb it, such as boredom, illness or death. It is described by God as a life of ‘peace and fulfilment through the word of the Lord who is ever-merciful’.

In Heaven a family of believers will be together, leading a life of love and contentment. God says: ‘Gardens of perpetual bliss, which they will enter together with the righteous from among their parents, their spouses and their offspring. The angels will come in to them from every gate, [saying]: “Peace

be upon you, because you have persevered”. Blessed indeed is the attainment of the [ultimate] abode’. (13: 23-24)

Another aspect of God’s favour bestowed on the people of Heaven is that He elevates their children to the same rank as their parents, even though the children may not be of the same level as their parents. This is another act of bounty which He grants them so that they will be happier together. Ibn ‘Abbās said: ‘God elevates a believer’s offspring to his rank, even though they are of a lesser grade, so as to please the parent. He then recited the verse that says: “As for the believers whose offspring follow them in faith, We shall unite them with their offspring; and We shall not deny them anything of the reward for their deeds”. (52: 21) He added that God does not decrease His reward to the parents to compensate for what He gives their children’.⁽¹⁾

This is one of the blessed results of good deeds: their effect is extended and its blessing goes from parents to children. One example of this is mentioned in the Qur’an in the story of Moses with al-Khaḍir. There were two orphan children whose deceased father was a devout believer. He had hidden a treasure for his children under a wall, but the wall was about to collapse. God sent these two prophets to rebuild the wall so that the treasure would remain safe until the children grew up and would be able to retrieve it. This is mentioned in Surah 18. This is an aspect of God’s generosity, as He allows the effect of good deeds to be extended, while bad deeds affect only the person who commits them. No other person is punished for them.

God not only elevates children to their parents’ ranks, but He also elevates the parents to the level of their children. The same applies to husbands and wives. He elevates the lower

(1) Ibn ‘Āshūr, *al-Taḥrīr wal-Tanwīr*, Vol. 27; p. 49.

relative to the level of the higher one, so that they will enjoy a life of greater bliss, because it is part of human nature to enjoy the company of family members and other relatives.

The aforementioned Qur'anic verse gives great news to every believer who has a devout ancestor, offspring or spouse. When such a person arrives into Heaven, he will be joined to the devout ones of his relatives, whether these are his parents, children or spouse.

Another type of people who are given higher ranks than they deserve through their own deeds is that of believers who love one another for God's sake. God elevates the loving person to the rank of his beloved one as a gesture of His grace. A man asked the Prophet (peace be upon him): 'What do you say about a person who loves some people but could not achieve their level?' The Prophet answered: 'A person stays with those whom he loved'.⁽¹⁾ Thus, God makes this noble bond of loving Him and loving others for His sake at the same level as the bond of familial relations. He brings such close friends together so that they may enjoy greater bliss in Heaven.



(1) Related by al-Bukhari, 6,169.

Five: The Food and Clothing of the People of Heaven

Many Qur'anic verses mention the food and drink given to the people of Heaven. One such verse says: 'To those who believe and do good deeds give the good tidings that they shall reside in gardens through which running waters flow. Whenever they are offered fruits therefrom, they say, 'We have been given the same before', for they will be provided with what looks similar. They will also have pure spouses and they will reside there for ever'. (2: 25) The reference here is to fruits that are similar in colour and shape, but diverse in taste. This apparent similarity, but genuine variety, delivers a pleasant surprise every time. It adds to the enjoyment of what they eat.

The believers will be in gardens and in bliss, (17) rejoicing in all that their Lord will have granted them; for their Lord will have warded off from them the suffering of the blazing Fire. (18) 'Eat and drink with healthy enjoyment as a reward for what you have done.' (19) They will recline on couches arranged in rows, and We shall pair them with companions having most beautiful eyes. As for the believers whose offspring follow them in faith, We will unite them with their offspring; and We will not deny them anything of the reward for their deeds. Yet every individual will be held in pledge for his own deeds.

(21) We provide them with fruit and meat as they desire. (22) They pass around a cup which will not lead to idle talk or to sin. (23) They will be waited upon by youths of their own, [as pure] as pearls hidden in their shells. (24) They will turn to one another, asking each other. (25) They will say: ‘When we were still living with our kinsfolk, we were full of fear, (26) and so God has been gracious to us, and warded off from us suffering through the scorching wind. (27) We used to pray to Him: He is the Beneficent, the Ever-Merciful’. (52: 17-28)

This is a scene of group pleasure, which is multiplied upon by the sheer fact that it is shared with others. These people enjoying it have others sharing it, and these are their spouses, children and friends. They eat and drink together. They pass around cups of drink with pleasure, because sharing such fine drinks gives added pleasure as everyone feels full enjoyment with what they are having. Hence, their conversation is also pleasant, as they exchange some memories of their lives in this world. They say: ‘When we were still living with our kinsfolk, we were full of fear, and so God has been gracious to us, and warded off from us suffering through the scorching wind. We used to pray to Him: He is the Beneficent, the Ever-Merciful’. (52: 26-28)

Not only are types of food mentioned, but details are also given of drinks and the vessels in which these are served: ‘They will be served with silver plates and goblets that seem to be crystal. [These goblets are] crystal-clear, but made of silver, the measure of which they are the ones to determine’. (76: 15-16) How beautiful these plates and goblets are: they are made of shiny silver, but they are as clear and transparent as crystal.

They also have a variety of pure and mixed drinks. God says: The righteous shall drink from a cup mixed with *kafur*'.⁽¹⁾

(1) A sweet-smelling substance extracted from beautiful flowers.

(76: 5) 'They will be given to drink of a cup flavoured with ginger, from a spring there called Salsabīl'. (76: 17-18) All this speaks of a sort of luxury unknown during life on earth. The plates and cups are of sizes that combine enjoyment with beauty. The drinks are mixed with ginger at one time and with *kāfūr* at another time, while the cups are filled at a spring called Salsabīl, which is a name suggesting sweetness, fine taste and easy flowing. As they enjoy their sumptuous meal and fine drink, they receive a warm welcome, as they are told: 'Eat and drink to your hearts' content as a reward for what you have done in days gone by'. (69: 24) God mentions another drink served to the people of Heaven: 'A cup will be passed round among them with a drink from a flowing spring: clear, delicious to those who drink it, causing no headiness or intoxication'. (37: 45-47) Wine in the Hereafter imparts the pleasant nuances of wine but causes neither headiness nor intoxication.

Qur'anic verses also describe the fine garments worn by the people of Heaven and how luxurious these garments are. God says: 'Theirs shall be gardens of perpetual bliss, with rivers rolling at their feet. There they will be adorned with bracelets of gold and will wear green garments of silk and brocade, and they will recline on couches. Excellent is the recompense, and comfortable is the place to rest'. (18: 31) 'God will certainly admit those who believe and do righteous deeds into gardens through which running waters flow, wherein they will be adorned with bracelets of gold and pearls, and where silk will be their raiment.' (22: 23)

All types of enjoyment and things imparting pleasant and happy feelings are given to them in plenty. They never cease for any reason. They are provided with the best of food and drink which people used to wish for, but of which they could afford only a little. Now they have them at their disposal all the time, without fail, and yet they are of better taste and

finer quality. They are always fresh, never losing their appeal or their taste. And added to all such fine food and drink they also receive God's forgiveness of their past faults. They suffer neither remonstrance nor reminder of these. On the contrary, they only receive God's forgiveness, so as to give them a feeling of total and perfect bliss. God says: 'Such is the Paradise which the God-fearing are promised: In it are rivers of water for ever pure, rivers of milk the taste of which never alters, rivers of wine, a delight for those who drink, and rivers of honey pure and clarified. In it they shall have all kinds of fruit. And they receive there forgiveness by their Lord. Are they to be compared to those who are to abide in the Fire and be given a drink of scalding water that tears their bowels?' (47: 15) Thus, the enjoyment of these fine provisions is coupled with a rejoicing at having been saved from the torment of Hell and its drink of scalding water.

God also says: 'There they can call for every kind of fruit, enjoying peace and security'. (44: 55) All types of fruit, whether known or unknown to us, are made available to them if they ask for them or wish to taste them. That this life of bliss is so perfect means that it satisfies all their desires, however varied. Hence, the trees of Heaven are so varied that they suit urban luxury and desert aspiration. God says: 'As for those on the right, what people are they? They will dwell amid thornless lote trees and flower-clad acacias with extended shade, constantly flowing water, abundant fruits, unfailing, never out of reach'. (56: 27-33) Lote trees and acacias grow in deserts, and desert people express their fondness of them. In addition to its palaces and gardens, Heaven also has tents for whoever prefer tents. God says: 'They will have dark-eyed and modest companions, sheltered in tents'. (55: 72)

The Prophet mentions that the people of Heaven may have different desires. He says: 'When the people of Heaven

have gone inside it, one man stands up and says: “My Lord, permit me to do some planting”. God asks him whether he has whatever he wants. The man says: “Yes, my Lord, I do, but I love to do some planting”. The man starts quickly, sowing the seeds and planting young shoots. In no time, he sees it all springing forth, standing firm and harvested, in quantities as huge as mountains. His Lord, Mighty and Exalted says: Take all this, son of Adam. Nothing will satisfy you’.⁽¹⁾

An aspect of the perfection of this bliss is that it is available all the time, as God says of Heaven: ‘Its fruits will be everlasting; and so will be its shade’. (13: 35) Its fruits are not seasonal; they are always there to have. Its shade does not shrink. It remains full and perfect. Nothing that the people of Heaven enjoy shall be missed at any time, and they are reassured of its availability.

Moreover, Heaven is always in the best state. There will be no variety of temperatures, high at times and low at others. Its temperature is set at the most perfect mild level. Its people do not experience the burning heat of the sun or the freezing cold of winter. God says: ‘They will recline there on soft couches, feeling neither burning sun nor severe cold’. (13: 13) They will continue to enjoy the far-stretching shade and fine fruits in perfect tranquillity: ‘Its shades will come low over them, and its clusters of fruit will hang low, within easy reach’. (13: 14)

They are served by the most handsome and well dressed servants, because they are treated as highly honoured people. Therefore, they are not required to make any effort in their abode of comfort and bliss. God says: ‘They will be waited upon by immortal youths. If you see them, you would think they were scattered pearls’. (76: 19) ‘They will be waited upon by youths of their own, [as pure] as pearls hidden in their

(1) Related by Ahmad, 10,642; al-Bukhari, 2,348.

shells’. (52: 24) If such the servants are, what do those being served look like?

A further aspect of all this perfect bliss is that the furniture and couches are highly luxurious. God says: ‘[There they have] raised couches, and goblets placed ready, and cushions laid in order, and carpets spread out’. (88: 13-16) ‘They will recline on couches lined with rich brocade.’ (55: 54) If the lining is made of brocade, how fine the front part will be?





Six: Soul Gratification of the People of Heaven



We have been speaking mostly about a luxurious life with sumptuous food, fine clothing, palaces and gardens. All these make life highly enjoyable, but the people of Heaven enjoy what is even better, that is psychological bliss. This includes:

God's pleasure granted to the believers

Detailing His rich reward to the righteous believers, God says: '[Enjoying] goodly dwellings in the Garden of Eden. Yet God's acceptance is the greatest blessing of all'. (9: 72) This acceptance, which means that God is pleased with them, is greater than all types of bliss. It is more gratifying than the greatest enjoyment. Abu Sa'īd al-Khudrī narrated that God's Messenger (peace be upon him) said: 'God will say to the inhabitants of Paradise: "You, dwellers of Paradise!" They will say: "We present ourselves to You, our Lord, and we are at Your pleasure. Goodness rests in Your hand". He will ask them: "Are you contented?" They will answer: "How can we not be contented when You, our Lord, have given us what You have not given to anyone else of Your creation?" Then He will say: "Shall I give you what is better than that?" They will say: "Our Lord, what is better than that?" He will say: "I will

bestow upon you My acceptance and therefore I will never be displeased with you”’.⁽¹⁾

God’s acceptance becomes even greater when He bestows on them His love, as He is the All-Loving. He says: ‘As for those who believe and do righteous deeds, God will certainly bestow love on them’. (19: 96) That the people of Heaven should feel that God loves them is the greatest favour. No other favour or blessing is equal to it. It simply means that God is pleased with them, accepts and loves them. He says: ‘God has promised the believers, men and women, gardens through which running waters flow, where they will abide, and goodly dwellings in the Garden of Eden. Yet God’s acceptance is the greatest blessing of all. This is indeed the supreme triumph’. (8: 72) They have all types of enjoyable things and every kind of pleasure, but they also have what is better and greater than all these. God’s acceptance and pleasure is superior to all that they are given in Heaven. Indeed, Paradise and all that it contains of comforts and the bliss it gives shrink and dwindle in comparison to God’s acceptance. They enjoy their bliss only through God’s acceptance, which is the ultimate goal of all worshippers and believers. That the Lord of heavens and earth should be pleased with them is far greater than all the luxuries enjoyed in Paradise.

Just as they are very pleased with God’s acceptance and love, they are pleased with their Lord and the honour He bestows on them.

During their lives on earth they believed in *ghayb*, which is the realm beyond the reach of their faculties of perception. Now, they see it all and they witness it. God’s fine attributes which they believed in days gone by are now within their eyesight. Therefore, they praise God and thank Him for having

(1) Related by al-Bukhari, 6,549.

guided them to the truth and granted them such reward for their faith. 'We will remove any rancour that may be lingering in their hearts. Running waters will flow at their feet; and they will say: "All praise is due to God who has guided us to this. Had He not given us guidance, we would certainly have not found the right path. Our Lord's messengers have certainly brought us the truth". [A voice] will call out to them: "This is the paradise you have inherited by virtue of what you used to do"'. (7: 43)

Seeing their Lord: Mighty and Exalted

An important aspect of God's acceptance of the people of Heaven is that He brings them closer to Him, removes the screen separating them, so that they can behold Him. They worshipped Him during their lives on earth without seeing Him. They loved Him and yearned to meet Him. Now they are in the presence of His Holiness, enjoying His address to them and their speaking to Him. They are most pleased by being close to Him. God mentions this in His Book: 'Some faces will on that Day be radiant with happiness, looking towards their Lord'. (75: 22-23) This is a situation which cannot be described in words. Our minds cannot even imagine it. These faces are radiant because they are able to look at their Lord with no separating screen. This is the ultimate bliss of the life to come, and the highest grade of all God's favours.

In our present lives, we feel very happy and delighted when we see attractive beauty in some aspects of God's creation around us: in the full moon and its light, in green trees, in the blossoms of spring, in the splendid peaceful sea, in the stretch of the desert, in the sky adorned with stars, etc. What sort of pleasure, delight and happiness will we feel when we look at the beauty of the One who has created all these types of beauty? It is a situation in which man needs God's support to be able to control himself and enjoy. It is a sort of happiness

that is beyond description and imagination. Hence, some scholars have said that when the people of Heaven see their Lord, they will forget the bliss of Heaven. God says: ‘For those who do good there is a good reward, and more besides. Neither darkness nor any disgrace will overcast their faces. These are destined for Paradise, where they will abide’. (10: 26)

The phrase used in this verse, ‘and more besides’, refers to giving their reward and blissful life in multiples. The utmost of these is to look at God’s face in Heaven. Şuhayb narrated that God’s Messenger recited this verse, then said: ‘When the people of Heaven enter it, God, the Glorious, the Exalted, will say: “Do you wish that I give you anything more?” They will say: “Have You not made our faces shine? Have You not admitted us into Heaven and saved us from the Fire?” He will remove the screen. They have not been given anything which they like more than they are looking at their Lord, the Mighty, the Exalted’. He then read out the verse starting with: ‘For those who do good there is a good reward, and more besides’.⁽¹⁾

This meeting which gathers all the people of Heaven is such that every one of them feels that he is especially favoured by seeing his Lord. It is as if every single one of them is alone with their Lord, speaking to Him, and their Lord is bestowing His favour on him. It is not a mere glance by a great multitude. It is a view with a special flavour. Hence, the Prophet likens it to how people look at the full moon. Everyone of them looks at it as if the full moon belongs to him or her alone. Jarīr ibn ‘Abdullāh narrated: ‘We were sitting with God’s Messenger’s (peace be upon him) when he looked at the moon on a night when it was a full moon and said: “You shall indeed see your Lord as you see this moon, and you shall not be barred from seeing Him”’.⁽²⁾ Therefore, the effect of seeing Him will be

(1) Related by Muslim, 181.

(2) Related by al-Bukhari, 554; Muslim, 633.

reflected in the faces of the beholders as they will be beaming with delight: ‘Some faces will on that Day be radiant with happiness’. (75: 22) What can we think of faces that have looked at God and listened to His speech? Their beauty will be more than doubled. They are beaming, radiant, full of happiness. What a scene, and what a gathering. Let everyone of us be eager to meet our Lord and look at His face. The Prophet (peace be upon him) used to say in his supplication: ‘My Lord, I appeal to You to grant me the pleasure of looking at Your face and eagerness to meet You’.⁽¹⁾

This supreme and holy meeting is described in several hadiths, one of which mentions that the people of Heaven are addressed: ‘People of Paradise, you have an appointment with your Lord and He wants to fulfil it for you’. They will say: “Has He not made our faces shine? Has He not given us a heavier weight in our scales? Has He not admitted us into Heaven and saved us from the Fire?” While they are in such a position a great light shines above them. They look up and they see that their Lord is looking at them from above. He will say to them: “Peace be to you, the inhabitants of Heaven”. There is no better response to this greeting by God than that they say: “Our Lord, You are Peace, and peace comes from You. Blessed are You, full of majesty, granting grace”. God reveals Himself to them and His light spreads over them. Had He not willed that they should never burn, they would have been burnt by His light. Not a single one in that assembly will be left out, without God speaking to each one personally. He will even say to them: “Do you, so-and-so, remember the day when you did such-and-such?” In this way, He reminds the person of some of his misdeeds during his earthly life. He will answer: “Yes, my Lord. Have You not forgiven me?” He will

(1) Related by Ahmad, 18,325; al-Nasā’ī, 1,305.

say: “Yes, I did. It is through My forgiveness that you have attained this status you now have””.⁽¹⁾

My God! Will we be seeing our Lord whom we now worship, pray to, fear and pin our hopes on? Shall we meet and see Him? This happy news is indeed what He tells us: ‘Whoever looks forward with hope to meeting God [let him be ready for it]; for the end set by God is bound to come. He alone hears all and knows all’. (29: 5)

The welcome they receive

As they are in the throes of death, good believers receive very happy news. They depart this life with the angels telling and reassuring them that they have nothing to fear. They should not grieve, because they are destined for Heaven which they worked hard to achieve and which they were promised. God says: ‘As for those who say: “Our Lord is God”, and then steadfastly pursue the right way. For these, the angels will descend, saying: “Have no fear, and do not grieve, but rejoice in the good news of Paradise which you have been promised”’. (41: 30) On the Day of Judgement, when people come out of their graves in fear, because of the hardship of that Day, they are received by the angels who give them the happy news that they are safe from the terrors of that Day: ‘The Supreme Terror will cause them no grief, since the angels will receive them with the greeting, “This is your day which you were promised”’. (21: 103) However, the greatest news they receive is that given to them by God Himself. What happiness is bestowed on them when they receive such delightful news from God, Mighty and Exalted: ‘Their Lord gives them the happy news of bestowing on them His grace, and acceptance, and of the gardens of

(1) Related by Ibn Mājah, 187; al-Tirmidhī, 3,105; al-Nasā’ī in *al-Sunan al-Kubrā*, 11,170.

eternal bliss where they shall reside forever. God's reward is great indeed'. (9: 21-22)

When Heaven is brought near to them, they head towards it in throngs. When they arrive, its gates are thrown open for them, and its guards welcome them. God says: 'And Paradise will be brought close to the righteous and will no longer be distant: "This is what you have been promised; this is for everyone who used to turn to God and to keep Him in mind, who used to stand in awe of the Lord of Grace although He is beyond the reach of human perception, and who comes before Him with a heart full of devotion. Enter Paradise in peace; this is the Day when everlasting life begins". (50: 33-34) When they have entered Heaven and settled there, they are repeatedly welcomed and greetings are offered to them. God says: 'Gardens of perpetual bliss, which they will enter together with the righteous from among their parents, their spouses and their offspring. The angels will come in to them from every gate, [saying]: "Peace be upon you, because you have persevered". Blessed indeed is the attainment of the [ultimate] abode'. (13: 23-24)

They are safe from every fear and hardship, and they are spared all hard tasks. They are given a greeting by God Himself, communicated to them by the angels who come to them through every gate, to deliver this supreme greeting. They also tell them of what has been prepared for them as honoured guests. They hear no foul words and no idle talk. They only receive happy news and expressions of welcome. 'These will enter the Garden and will not be wronged in any way: the Gardens of Eden which [God] the Lord of Grace has promised to His servants, in the realm that lies beyond the reach of human perception. Indeed, His promise is certain of fulfilment. There they will hear no idle talk, but only the

voice of peace. And their sustenance will be given them there morning and evening'. (19: 60-62)

One of the greatest aspects of their happiness is that when they are in Heaven, God reminds them of the good deeds they did during their earthly lives. These were in fact a blessing God bestowed on them, yet He thanks them for these deeds, because He is ever-thankful. He reminds them of these deeds to show them that He has accepted such. He says: '[A voice] will call out to them: "This is the Paradise you have inherited by virtue of what you used to do"'. (7: 43) They are also told: 'Eat and drink to your hearts' content as a reward for what you have done in days gone by'. (69: 24) How happy they feel to be reminded of their good deeds and the way they conducted themselves in life.

As the people of Heaven receive such welcome and happy news, they also express their happiness and their gratitude to God, and they praise God for His favours. 'There they will call out: "Limitless are You in Your glory, God", and their greeting will be, "Peace!" Their call will conclude with the words: "All praise is due to God, the Lord of all the worlds!"' (10: 10)

Pure hearts

When the believers are in Heaven, their hearts are purged of every type of rancour. They no longer have any ill-feelings towards one another. Thus, they meet in Heaven, harbouring nothing but good thoughts towards one another. They sit on their couches facing each other. God says of them: 'We shall remove any rancour that may be lingering in their hearts. Running waters will flow at their feet'. (7: 43) 'We will have removed from their hearts any lurking feelings of malice, [and they will rest] as brothers, facing one another, on couches.' (15: 47)



Their conversation and remembrance of life matters

Another type of pleasure the people of Heaven have is their gatherings in a fraternal atmosphere, when their conversation is characterized by mutual affection. They sit on their couches facing each other, served with pure drinks that give rise to no idle or sinful talk. They remember how they were in their earthly lives, when they believed in what they could not perceive and how they were God-fearing, praying to Him, assured of His mercy. They went through life wary about this day, dreading the Reckoning. Yet at the time, they were with their families, where they had deceptive security, but were not deceived. They had many distractions, but they were not distracted. As a result, God answered their prayers, protected them from punishment and gave them Heaven. What a great outcome: ‘They will turn to one another, asking each other. They will say: “When we were still living with our kinsfolk, we were full of fear, and so God has been gracious to us, and warded off from us suffering through the scorching wind. We used to pray to Him: He is the Beneficent, the Ever-Merciful”’. (52: 25-28)

They will remember their lives on earth and their worries, grief, hard tasks and problems. They will thank God for having removed all these, giving them pure delight that will not be followed by sorrow. They enjoy comforts that do not alternate with problems and difficulties. ‘They will say: “All praise is due to God, who has removed all sorrow from us. Our Lord is certainly much-forgiving, most-appreciative. It is He who, out of His bounty, has settled us in this abode of permanent life, where we shall endure neither toil nor fatigue”’. (35: 34-35)

A pleasant conversation free of idle talk

Heavenly conversations are free of nonsense, shouting and futile argument. They reflect the overall sense of contentment, through the voice of peace. God says: ‘[They are in] the

Gardens of Eden which [God] the Lord of Grace has promised to His servants, in the realm that lies beyond the reach of human perception. Indeed, His promise is certain of fulfilment. There they will hear no idle talk, but only the voice of peace. And their sustenance will be given them there morning and evening'. (19: 61-62) The atmosphere is one of tranquillity, reassurance and contentment. The people there have a feeling of love towards one another. They disdain uttering a rude or vulgar word. They are 'in a sublime garden'. (88: 10) It is sublime in itself, but it also has lofty grades and sublime positions. Hence the atmosphere there is one of happiness, where people dislike hearing a single word of nonsense. This, in itself, is a source of happiness, and such happiness is particularly appreciated when one remembers how this life is full of argument, controversy, unfair competition, quarrels, slanging matches, overcrowding and pushing around. When one remembers all this, one should try to imagine the peaceful, friendly and compassionate atmosphere imparted by the description: 'in a sublime garden, where you hear no babble'. (88: 10-11) There is a hint here suggesting that when believers steer away from futile argument and idle talk in their earthly lives, they actually receive a touch of heavenly life. Perhaps this prepares them for their future lives of bliss when they indulge in no idle talk or futile argument. 'There they will hear no idle talk, no sinful speech, only the saying, "Peace! Peace"'. (56: 25-26)

Such is the life of Heaven where there is no idle talk and no argument leading to disbelief. It is a condition of good manners and enjoyment that fits the eternal life: 'There they shall hear no idle talk, nor any falsehood. Such is the recompense of your Lord: a truly sufficient gift'. (78: 35-36)



Talking to the people of Hell who used to ridicule them

The people of Heaven are far away from Hell and its people. God mentions that they ‘do not hear its hissing sound’. (21: 102) However, God opens the screens for them so that they can speak to the people of Hell who used to ridicule them during their lives on earth and try to lead them astray. They even persecuted them for their beliefs. God opens this opportunity for the people of Heaven so that they can satisfy themselves and increase their delight with the blessing God has conferred on them. God describes the different situation when the unbelievers ridiculed the believers during their lives on earth and the believers’ derision of the unbelievers in the life to come: ‘Those who are given to sinful practices scoff at the faithful (29) and wink at one another as they pass by them. (30) When they go back to their folk they speak of them with jests, (31) and when they see them they say: “These have indeed gone astray!” (32) Yet they have not been assigned the mission of being their guardians. (33) So on this Day [of Judgement] the faithful will laugh at the unbelievers, (34) As they recline upon their couches and look around them. (35) Shall the unbelievers be requited for what they were wont to do?’ (83: 29-36)

‘The dwellers of Paradise will call out to the inmates of the Fire: “We have found what our Lord promised to be true. Have you, too, found the promise of your Lord to be true?” They will answer: “Yes”, whereupon someone from their midst will proclaim: “Cursed indeed are the wrongdoers who turn others away from God’s path and try to make it appear crooked, and who reject the truth of the life to come.”’ (7: 44-45)

God also mentions how the people of Heaven recall their argument with those who tried to turn them away from faith, pressurizing them to disbelieve in God’s oneness. Speaking of the people of Heaven, God says: ‘And they will turn to one

another with questions. (50) One of them will say: I had a close companion on earth (51) who used to ask me: “Do you really believe (52) that after we have died and become mere dust and bones we shall be brought for judgement?” (53) He adds: “Would you like to look down?” (54) Then he looks and sees him in the midst of the Fire. (55) He will then say: “By God! You almost brought me to ruin! (56) But for the grace of God I should have also been brought there”. (57) But then is it truly so, that we are not to die (58) except for our first death, and that we are not to suffer? (59) This is indeed the supreme triumph. (60) Everyone should strive to attain this goal’. (37: 50-61)

This is a scene of the conversation of the people of Heaven. Someone will remember how during his life on earth a friend used to blame him for his belief. He even ridiculed his certainty of resurrection after death. It occurs to him to see him now. He does not need to go anywhere. He merely looks down at Hell, where he does not need to search deep into its pits, or look at the crowds of suffering people. He immediately sees the one he wanted to see. He speaks to him as though the two are close together. He remonstrates with him in the same way as the unbeliever used to do. He tells him of God’s grace when He protected him from listening to his friend. Now that both are in the Hereafter, the one who used to deny it altogether is suffering its torment while the one who worked for his future life is enjoying its bliss: ‘This is indeed the supreme triumph. Everyone should strive to attain this goal’. (37: 60-61)

Although life in Heaven is long and eternal, it is free from boredom. It is not a routine life that becomes too familiar. It is a life of an ever-renewing bliss. Its occupants’ condition there is as described by Him: ‘Therein they will abide, and never will they desire any change to befall them’. (18: 108) Their happiness there is unlike happiness in this life. In our current lives, when some comforts and desirable things stay long with

us, they become boring. By contrast, the bliss of Heaven is never boring. The people of Heaven live in such great luxury and comfort, but they have with it contentment, security, reassurance and contemplation of the great blessings they have. God mentions their reassurance as they express their gratitude to Him, praising Him for His great favours: ‘They will say: “All praise is due to God, who has removed all sorrow from us. Our Lord is certainly much-forgiving, most-appreciative. It is He who, out of His bounty, has settled us in this abode of permanent life, where we will endure neither toil nor fatigue”’. (35: 34-35) Life on earth is associated with anxiety concerning what it will bring, and how things will develop. As such, it is a source of sorrow when compared with the permanent bliss in Heaven. Moreover, God has removed their fear of what may happen to them on the Day of Resurrection. Hence they say: ‘Our Lord is certainly much-forgiving, most-appreciative’. He has forgiven us our shortcomings and our sins, and appreciated our good deeds, accepting them and rewarding us for them settling us in this permanent abode with everlasting happiness: ‘It is He who, out of His bounty, has settled us in this abode of permanent life’. We do not have a right to claim all this. He gives it out of His bounty to whomever He chooses of His servants. It is a life of bliss where we experience neither toil nor fatigue.



Seven: Characteristics of the People of Heaven

God mentions the characteristics, conditions and deeds of the people of Heaven, for which they achieve the great success of entry into Heaven. These characteristics qualify them to achieve this success. Hence they are told: ‘Enter Paradise by virtue of what you were doing in life’. (16: 32) The question that arises here is: What were they doing? God mentions this in many verses of the Qur’an, such as that they ‘spend [in His way] in time of plenty and in time of hardship, and restrain their anger, and forgive their fellow men. God loves the benevolent. Those who, when they commit a gross indecency or wrong themselves, remember God and pray for the forgiveness of their sins - for who but God can forgive sins? - and do not knowingly persist in doing wrong. These shall have the reward of forgiveness by their Lord, and gardens underneath which rivers flow, where they shall abide. Excellent is the reward for those who labour [well]’. (3: 134-136)

They are ‘those who remember God when they stand, sit and lie down, and reflect on the creation of the heavens and the earth: “Our Lord, You have not created all this in vain. Limitless are You in Your glory. Guard us, then, against the torment of the Fire. (191) Our Lord, him whom You shall commit to the Fire, You will have condemned to disgrace. The wrongdoers

shall have none to help them. (192) Our Lord, we have heard the voice of one who calls to faith, [saying], “Believe in your Lord”, and we have believed. Our Lord, forgive us, then, our sins and efface our bad deeds and let us die with the truly virtuous. (193) “Our Lord, grant us what You have promised us through Your messengers, and do not disgrace us on the Day of Resurrection. Surely, You never fail to fulfil Your promise’. (194) Their Lord answers them: ‘I will not suffer the work of any worker among you, male or female, to be lost. Each of you is an issue of the other. Therefore, those who migrate and are driven out of their homes and suffer persecution in My cause, and fight and are slain [for it] - I shall indeed efface their bad deeds and admit them to gardens through which running waters flow, as a reward from God. With God is the best of rewards’. (3: 191-195)

‘Truly, successful will be the believers, who humble themselves in their prayer, who turn away from all that is frivolous, who are active in deeds of charity, who refrain from sex except with those joined to them in marriage, or those whom they rightfully possess – for then, they are free of all blame, whereas those who seek to go beyond that [limit] are indeed transgressors, who are faithful to their trusts and to their pledges, and who are diligent in their prayers. These will be the heirs who will inherit Paradise; therein shall they abide’. (23: 1-11)

It should be noted that whenever the characteristics of the people of Heaven are mentioned, prayer is immediately identified. Prayer is the situation when believers meet God in this present life, and it is the way to ensure meeting Him in Heaven. When the Prophet (peace be upon him) mentioned seeing God in Heaven, he said: ‘We were sitting with God’s Messenger’s (peace be upon him) when he looked at the moon on a night when it was a full moon and said: “You will indeed see

your Lord as you see this moon, and you will not be barred from seeing Him. If you can manage it: never be barred from a prayer before sunrise and one before sunset”. He meant the ‘Aṣr and Fajr Prayers’. Jarīr [the narrator of this hadith] then recited: ‘Extol your Lord’s limitless glory and praise Him before the rising of the sun and before its setting’.⁽¹⁾ (20: 130)

Rabī‘ah ibn Ka‘b al-Aslamī narrated: ‘I used to stay the night at God’s Messenger’s home. I brought him his water for ablution and other needs. He said to me: “Put your request”. I said: “I request to be in your company in Heaven”. He said: “Or perhaps you have some other request”. I said: “No, that is it”. He said: “Then help me against yourself with plenty of prostrations [meaning in prayer]”’.⁽²⁾

Prayer is the bond that brings a person close to God in this life. The nearest to his Lord a person gets is during his prostration in prayer. This closeness in the present life is the forerunner of his closeness to Him in Heaven. When we relate the present life’s situation of the people of Heaven to their reward in the life to come, we will see what they do in this life and what reward they get for it.

In this life, they fear the hardship of the Day of Resurrection. They think of it as a certainty and they are in fear as they try to prepare for it. Hence, they say: ‘We fear the Day of our Lord: a bleak, distressful day’. (76: 10) This fear of the Day of Judgement is the result of their belief in God, and trust in His true promise. They are men and women of belief and certainty. Therefore, they are rewarded for their fear in this life by security and reassurance on the Day of Resurrection. The angels welcome them with expressions of reassurance: ‘Have no fear, and do not grieve, but rejoice in the good news of Paradise

(1) Related by al-Bukhari, 554; Muslim, 633.

(2) Related by Muslim, 489.

which you have been promised'. (41: 30) 'God will save them from the woes of that Day, and will grant them radiance and joy.' (76: 11) They were in fear, and now they are in security; they used to give, and now they take; and they used to strive, and now they rest: 'Such is the recompense of your Lord: a truly sufficient gift'. (78: 36)



Heaven and Its People in Brief

• God, Mighty and Exalted, mentions only the aspects of the happy and blissful life of Heaven that people can comprehend and imagine, and what have some similar versions in the present life. This is to enable man to visualize it, because man can only imagine what he sees or senses.

• There are other types of enjoyments in Heaven, but these are not given in detail because they have no counterparts in our world. As such, we cannot imagine these. Therefore, God mentions them in general terms, such as: ‘No one can imagine what blissful delights have been kept in store for them as a reward for what they used to do’. (32: 17) ‘There will be found all that the souls may desire and the eyes may delight in.’ (43: 71) Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) quotes God, Mighty and Exalted, as saying: ‘I have prepared for My good servants what no eyes has ever seen, no ear has ever heard of and no mind has ever imagined’.⁽¹⁾

• The types of luxurious things given in Heaven such as fruits, dates, pomegranates, wine and milk are merely expressed in these terms by way of similarity. Ibn ‘Abbās says: ‘Nothing in Heaven is similar to what is in this world except by name’.⁽²⁾

(1) Related by al-Bukhari, 3,244.

(2) Ibn Abi Ḥātim, *Tafsīr*, Vol. 1, p. 66.

What he means is that the difference between the two types is unknown to mankind. What is in Heaven is far superior. The substance is different as is the enjoyment it imparts.

- Most of the things people enjoy in this life are subject to shrinking or decay. In this life, wine leads to drunkenness and headache; the taste of milk may change; and water may become polluted. In Heaven, its dwellers get the best of everything, and these are not subject to any change. God says: ‘Such is the Paradise which the God-fearing are promised: In it are rivers of water for ever pure, rivers of milk the taste of which never alters, rivers of wine, a delight for those who drink, and rivers of honey pure and clarified. In it they shall have all kinds of fruit. And they receive there forgiveness by their Lord. Are they to be compared to those who are to abide in the Fire and be given a drink of scalding water that tears their bowels?’ (47: 15)

- The servants in Heaven are described as ‘pearls’. God says: ‘They will be waited upon by immortal youths. If you see them, you would think they were scattered pearls’. (76: 19) If such are servants, what do those being served look like? Also, the furniture in Heaven is lined with brocade: ‘They will recline on couches lined with rich brocade’. (55: 54) If the lining is made of brocade, how fine will the front part be? This is stated so as to aspire to the better comfort by stating the lesser one.

- While there are types of tangible enjoyments and pleasures in Heaven, such as food, drinks and marital relationships, there are also pleasant and happy feelings and renewed pleasures. The topmost of these is to look at God’s majestic face. We believe in Him, pray to Him and long to see Him. How will we feel when the screens of light are removed and God appears to His servants in His full majesty, beauty and greatness?

- Another aspect of Heavenly bliss is the gatherings of believers and their pleasant and happy conversations as they are ‘in gardens of bliss, seated on soft couches, facing one another’. (37: 43-44) They pleasantly recall their situations during their lives on earth.

- A different aspect of the happiness of the people of Heaven is that they will be allowed to speak to their enemies who used to ridicule and harm them in this world because of their faith. They will see them in their situation of great sorrow and suffering. They will feel greatly pleased for having believed and thus secured their own safety.

- God mentions the characteristics of the people of Heaven and their good deeds through which they earned His mercy and admittance into Heaven by His grace. He says: ‘This is the Paradise you have inherited by virtue of what you used to do’. (7: 43)

Their best deed is their belief in God and what He mentioned. Hence, they are often described in the Qur’an as ‘those who believe and do good deeds’. Such deeds do not earn a person entry into Heaven except through God’s favour and blessing. A person’s deeds do not do more than testify that the doer has exerted his effort, seeking what God has in store. This is what qualifies people to receive God’s favours. The Prophet (peace be upon him) said: ‘No one’s deeds will ensure entry into Heaven’. People said: ‘Not even you, Messenger of God?’ He said: ‘Not even me, unless God bestows on me favours and mercy. Therefore, maintain moderation and do what you can. Let none of you wish for death. If he is one who does well, he may live and increase in goodness. If he is doing badly, he may have a chance to desist and seek forgiveness’.⁽¹⁾

(1) Related by al-Bukhari, 5,673; Muslim, 2,816.



- God mentions some of the righteous deeds the people of Heaven do, giving some details, to highlight their goodness and the fact that they maintain such deeds. These include their regular attendance to prayer, glorification of God, seeking His forgiveness, supplication, obligatory and voluntary charity, seeking perfection of good deeds, jihad, maintaining chastity, faithfulness, honesty, and other good qualities. All these are included under being righteous and God-fearing.





Chapter Three

Hell and Its People

One: Those who Leave Hell and those who Stay

Two: The Wrongdoers' Entry into Hell

Three: The Food and Clothing of the People of Hell

Four: The Great Suffering of the People of Hell

Five: The Desires of the People of Heaven and the
Strong Wishes of the People of Hell

Six: The Quarrels among the People of Hell

Seven: The Characteristics of the People of Hell

Eight: The Bliss of Heaven and the Torment of Hell

Nine: Fair Punishment by a Merciful Lord





Hell and Its People



As we have seen, God mentions the blissful life in Heaven and describes its people and what they receive there in order to encourage people to follow the same way. Likewise, He mentions the Fire and its horrors to warn people against following the same pattern of life so that they do not end up in the same position. Many Qur'anic verses warn against incurring what will lead to punishment in Hell, so that oblivious people wake up and mend their ways lest they condemn themselves. God says: 'I warn you of the raging Fire, which none shall endure but the most hapless wretch'. (92: 14-15) It is a fiercely burning fire, and to suffer it is the worst outcome a person may have.

God also says: 'We have forewarned you of an imminent scourge'. (87: 40) It is certainly not far away. Life on earth is merely a short journey. The Prophet addressed his companions and said in his speech: 'I am warning you of the Fire'. He repeated the warning three times, raising his voice. His upper garment which was on his shoulders dropped and fell down. This reflected the Prophet's very strong feeling about the reality of the suffering in Hell.

God describes the suffering of the Fire as a warning, so that people seek the way that leads to Heaven. Al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī said: 'One of the greatest favours God has bestowed on His

servants is that He created the Fire to drive them to Heaven'.⁽¹⁾ In fact, the very mention of the Fire is a warning given to people against injustice, sinful deeds and capital crimes which are punished by torment in Hell. This serves to protect people from committing such offences.

Believers go through life in this world as though they can see the torment in Hell and feel its heat and severity. Therefore, they continue to appeal to God in their supplication to keep them away from it and protect them from it. Some such supplication is mentioned in the Qur'an, for example: 'Our Lord, avert from us the suffering of Hell, for the suffering it causes is indeed a dire torment; it is indeed an evil abode and a terrible station'. (3: 65-66) He also said that the believers 'remember God when they stand, sit and lie down, and reflect on the creation of the heavens and the earth: "Our Lord, You have not created all this in vain. Limitless are You in Your glory. Guard us, then, against the torment of the Fire. Our Lord, him whom You shall commit to the Fire, You will have condemned to disgrace. The wrongdoers shall have none to help them"'. (3: 191-192)

Qur'anic verses describe the severity of the punishment in Hell and the distress suffered by those who are guilty of such misdeeds. These verses state that such will be their condition in the life to come, because they led a life on earth marked by injustice, arrogance, ingratitude for God's favours and disbelieving God's messengers. Very often the verses mentioning the torment in Hell state the characteristics of those wicked people which earned them God's punishment. The worst of these characteristics is their disbelief in God and accusing His messengers of false fabrications.

(1) Abu Ḥayyān al-Tawhīdī, *al-Baṣā'ir wal-Dhakhā'ir*, Vol. 1, p. 197.

The Qur'an also give us images of the sorrow and lamentations felt by those wicked people, particularly when they are let down by their leaders who led them along the path of disbelief and sinful action. Their leaders disown them and take a hostile attitude to them, while in the present life they used to take pride in the fact that they follow their lead.

When we read the description of such terrible suffering, it is most important that we should remember that God only inflicts such punishment on people who certainly deserve such punishment. We should also remember that God has forbidden Himself injustice and made it forbidden for people to commit injustice. He says: 'Indeed, God does not do the least wrong to mankind, but it is men who wrong themselves'. (10: 44) We must bear in mind that it is simply impossible for God to punish anyone who does not deserve to be punished. He never inflicts on any person a greater punishment than what that person has incurred. We must also remember that God's mercy runs ahead of His wrath, and that His forgiveness is available to everyone who appeals for it, no matter how grave his sins are, provided that such a person requests God's forgiveness when he is still alive in this world. For others who go to God bearing their crimes, stubborn disbelief and sinful actions, these are they who choose to go all the way to Hell. Yet He is mighty, the avenger of evil.



One: Those who Leave Hell and those who Stay

Some people will go to Hell because of the numerous misdeeds they committed and did not repent of. Nevertheless, God's mercy will apply to them and God will save them from Hell, even after they have deserved and entered it. They are released from it through God's permission to intercede on their behalf. God's angels and messengers will use their opportunity of intercession, as will the believers. God will accept the intercession of all these and permit them to bring out of Hell all those covered by their intercession. This permit of intercession is an act of honour God grants to the intercessors and an act of mercy bestowed on the recipients of this intercession.

The greatest and most comprehensive act of intercession is that of Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him). He describes the scene on the Day of Judgement and how he will appeal to God, as well as what God will grant him in response. He said:

I seek permission to see my Lord and I am granted permission. He inspires me with praises to praise Him by, but I do not remember these now. When I see Him, I praise Him using these praises and I prostrate myself. He then says: "Muhammad, lift your head. Say and you will be heard; request and your request will be granted; intercede and your intercession will be accepted". I lift my head and I say: "My

Lord, my community; my community”. He will say: “Go and bring out of it whoever has a shred of faith his heart”.

I go and do that, then I go back and prostrate myself before my Lord. He leaves me [in this position] as He wills. Then I am told: “Muhammad, lift your head. Speak and you will be heard; request and your request will be granted; intercede and your intercession will be accepted”. I lift my head and I say: “My Lord, my community; my community”. He will say: “Go and bring out of it whoever has an atom weight of faith his heart”.

I go and do that, then I go back and praise Him using those praises, then I prostrate myself before my Lord. He leaves me [in this position] as He wills. Then I am told: ‘Muhammad, lift your head. Speak and you will be heard; request and your request will be granted; intercede and your intercession will be accepted’. I lift my head and I say: “My Lord, my community; my community”. He will say: “Go and bring out of it whoever has the least and most minute seed of faith in his heart”.

I go and do that, then I go back for the fourth time and praise Him using those praises, then I prostrate myself before my Lord. He leaves me [in this position] as He wills. Then I am told: “Muhammad, lift your head. Speak and you will be heard; request and your request will be granted; intercede and your intercession will be accepted”. I lift my head and I say: “My Lord, permit me [to save] whoever said ‘There is not deity other than God’. He will say: “This is not for you to ask. However, by My power, majesty, might and greatness, I shall bring out of it whoever has said that there is no deity other than God”.⁽¹⁾

Just like Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) will intercede on behalf of his community, other messengers of

(1) Related by al-Bukhari, 7,510; Muslim, 193.

God will also intercede for their communities. Others who will intercede for the people of Hell are their brethren who have been saved by God and did not enter it. These will intercede on behalf of those of the people of Hell they know. The Prophet tells us of this intercession:

When the believers have been saved from the Fire, then, by Him who holds my soul in His hand, none of you will be more eagerly appealing to God for their rights than the believers appealing on the Day of Judgement for their brethren who are in Hell. They will say: Our Lord, they used to fast and pray with us and they used to perform the pilgrimage. They will be told: Bring out whomever you know. The Fire will be forbidden to burn them. They will bring out a large number of people, some of them will have been burnt up to the middle of their legs, and others to their knees. They will then say: Our Lord, none whom You have ordered remains there. He will say: Go back, and bring out whoever you find there with the weight of one dīnār of goodness in their hearts. They will bring out a large number of people. They will say: Our Lord, we have left there none of whom You have ordered. He will say: Go back, and bring out whoever you find there with the weight of half a dīnār of goodness in their hearts. They will bring out a large number of people. They will say: Our Lord, we have left there none of whom You have ordered. He will say: Go back, and bring out whoever you find there with an atom's weight of goodness in their hearts. They will bring out a large number of people. They will then say: Our Lord, we have left nothing of goodness there.

God, the Mighty, the Exalted, will say: The angels, the prophets and the believers have all done their intercession. Only the Most Merciful of all those who have mercy remains. He will take a handful out of the Fire, bringing out of it people

who never did any good whatsoever. They are burnt out. He will put them in a river at the mouth of Heaven called the river of life.

They will come out like pearls, and they will have rings around their necks. The people of Heaven will recognize them. These are the ones freed by God. God will admit them into Heaven even though they had done nothing good. He will say to them: Go into Heaven; whatever you see is yours. They will say: Our Lord, You have given us what You have given to none other. He says: I have something better in store for you. They say: Our Lord, what is better than this? He says: My pleasure with you. I shall never be displeased with you.⁽¹⁾

Such intercessions bring out of the Fire large numbers of people who deserved God's punishment for sins they committed and did not repent for. When all these intercessions have been done, God takes out of the Fire great numbers of people to whom all the intercessions do not apply. No one recognizes them or intercedes for them. God brings them out of the Fire by an act of His grace. There is simply no reason to save them except His limitless mercy. It is my certain belief that those people which God will bring out of the Fire by His grace are far greater in number than those who came out through the other intercessions. God's mercy encompasses everything, and these people will come out of Hell when God, the Lord of Grace, takes out a handful of its people. How many men and women will His hand encircle? He says of Himself: 'No true understanding of God have they: on the Day of Resurrection, the whole earth will be a mere handful to Him, and the heavens will be rolled up in His right hand'. (39: 67). How many errant people who incur God's punishment will God bring out by His hand, taking them out of the place of suffering and admitting

(1) Related by al-Bukhari, 7,439; Muslim, 183.

them into Heaven? Their entry into Heaven will not be through any good deed they might have done. How splendid and extensive God's mercy is!

This shows that whoever remains in Hell after all these acts of mercy are the most wicked of people, who never had a shred of goodness in their hearts to save them. They are the worst of mankind who deserve every type of punishment.

The people of Hell are those arrogant people who turn their back on faith and never try to know God. They are the wrongdoers who stand in opposition to God's messengers, remain hostile to the divine faith and those who believe in it. They are well content with the life of this world and feel at ease about it, referring with derision to whatever is suggested to be beyond it. They focus only on satisfying their desires and ambitions. They are the wicked people who commit crimes, oppress those who are powerless and make them subservient to their own wishes. Therefore, God will punish them, so that they will taste the outcome of their wrongdoing.

They deserve God's punishment in the life to come because they never try to protect themselves against His punishment by doing any good deed. Indeed, they do not believe in Him. Hence, they are prepared to commit any crime in order to satisfy their own desires.

These are the ones who turn deaf ears to the divine message, declaring that they hate it. Yet, God's messengers never forced them to accept anything. Every one of God's messengers stated this concept to his people: 'Think, my people! If I take my stand on clear evidence from my Lord, and He has favoured me with grace from Himself, to which you have remained blind, can we force it upon you when you are averse to it?' (11: 28) No compulsion is acceptable in matters of faith. This is the age old principle of the divine faith. Everyone is given free choice, and they are rewarded or punished on the basis of their



choices. ‘The truth [has now come] from your Lord. Let him who wills, believe in it, and let him who wills, reject it.’ (18: 29) The people of Hell are those who condemn themselves through their stubborn arrogance and evil deeds.



Two: The Wrongdoers' Entry into Hell

Like resurrection, the Fire strikes those who are heading towards it with fear and terror. They are stunned as they see it: 'Indeed, it will come upon them of a sudden, and will stupefy them. They will be unable to avert it, nor will they be allowed any respite'. (21: 40) The guilty will be forcibly driven towards it: 'We shall drive those who are lost in sin to Hell as a thirsty herd'. (19: 86)

God mentions the condition of the Fire as they are approaching it: 'Nay! It is the Last Hour that they deny. For those who deny the Last Hour We have prepared a blazing fire. When it sees them from a far-off place, they will hear its fury and its raging sigh'. (19: 11-12) It is a fearsome scene, shaking hard hearts and stalled feelings. Hell, the raging Fire, appears to have come alive, looking with disgust at those who denied its existence and made little of its torment. It is furious with them, eager to inflict itself on them. When they see it, they are in utter distress, realizing their depressing end. God says: 'And when those who were lost in sin see the Fire, they will realize that they are bound to fall in it, and will find no way to escape from it'. (18: 53) They are violently pushed towards their inevitable end: 'On that Day they will be irresistibly thrust into the Fire of Hell, [and told:] 'This is the Fire you used to deny!' (52: 13-14) At this point, their grief is at its highest and their regret is overwhelming: 'They will harbour feelings of

remorse when they see the suffering'. (10: 54) They harbour their regret within themselves, rather than declaring it. This because they face their awaiting punishment suddenly, driven to it by force. Hence they realize that they have no one to help them. Their evil deeds have brought them to this result, and they can do nothing other than surrender to their disgrace. God says: 'You will see them brought before the Fire, disgraced and humiliated, looking with a furtive glance'. (42: 45) They are shown their destiny and they feel their total disgrace. Hence, they are unable to lift their eyes and look: they only glance furtively. Their pride is in tatters, and their power has disappeared. They see the stern and mighty angels guarding Hell, whose sight seems to be a part of their suffering. Those angels violently grab their heads and feet: 'The guilty ones will be known by their mark and will be seized by their forelocks and their feet'. (54: 41)

They are thrust into Hell, chained and fettered, as the Qur'an describes: 'And when, chained together, they are flung into a tight space within, they will pray for extinction there and then. [But they will be told]: Do not pray today for one single extinction, but pray for many extinctions!' (25: 13-14) In this condition, with both their hands and legs tied up, they are thrown into a tight space, which will add to their distress. All this harsh treatment is accompanied by humiliating questioning and blame: 'Every time a group is thrown in it, its keepers will ask them, "Did no one come to warn you?"' (67: 8) Nothing is more painful to a person in distress than putting the blame on him for his own misery. Hence, they give their answer feeling their shame and disgrace as they acknowledge their fault: 'Yes', they will reply, 'a warner did indeed come to us, but we did not believe him. We said [to God's messengers]: 'God has revealed nothing. You are in total error'. (67: 9) Then they start to blame themselves and bemoan their error: 'They will further say: "Had we but listened, or reasoned, we would

not now be among the inhabitants of the blazing Fire”’. (67: 10) They acknowledge that they lost their hearing as they did not listen to divine guidance, and they lost their minds which should have led them to the truth: ‘Thus they shall confess their sins. Far [from God’s mercy] are the inhabitants of the blazing Fire’. (67: 11) The Fire is their abode. What a wretched end.

When they are flung into Hell, it receives them with fury, as though it is aware of their sins and feels angry with them. ‘When they are thrown in it, they will hear it drawing in its breath as it boils up, almost bursting with fury.’ (67: 7-8) God describes the scene when the guilty are about to enter the Fire. He says: ‘The unbelievers will be led to Hell in throngs. When they reach it, its gates will be opened, and its keepers will ask them: “Did there not come to you messengers from among yourselves, who recited to you your Lord’s revelations and forewarned you of this day?” They will answer: “Yes, indeed”. But the sentence of suffering will have already been passed against the unbelievers. They will be told: “Enter the gates of hell; there you will abide”. How vile an abode for the arrogant!’ (39: 71-72)

Thus the arrogant disbelievers are driven to Hell, and such is the reception given to them by its guards: they confirm that they have deserved it and remind them of the reasons which brought them there. They admit it all, because their position is not one of argument, but rather one of admission, regret and sorrow.





Three: The Food and Clothing of the People of Hell



Hard and depressing as the conditions of the people of Hell are, the raging Fire is not their only punishment. Their food, drink, clothing and what they sit upon also constitute types of punishment. God describes their condition, saying: ‘On that Day you will see the guilty chained together in fetters, wearing garments of black pitch, and their faces covered with flames’. (14: 49-50) ‘For the wrongdoers We have prepared a fire whose billowing folds will encompass them from all sides. If they beg for water, they will be given water [hot] like molten lead, which will scald their faces. Dreadful is the drink, and evil is the place to seek rest.’ (18: 29)

Their voices will be raised, crying for help. They wish for some drink that will quench their burning thirst, but they are given nothing other than a hateful thick fluid that scalds their faces when they lift it to their mouths and tears their bowels if they drink it.

Their food is also described and it comes from Zaqqūm, which is a tree that grows at the centre of Hell. God says: ‘Is this the better welcome, or the Zaqqūm tree? We have made it a test for the wrongdoers. It is a tree that grows in the very heart of the blazing Fire of Hell. Its fruit is like devils’ heads. They will indeed eat of it, filling their bellies. Then on top of

it, they will be given polluted, scalding water to drink. Then again, their ultimate goal is Hell'. (37: 62-68) The description mentions that the fruit of this tree is 'like devils' heads'. We do not know what the heads of devils look like, but any imagined picture of their heads is sufficient to cause fear. So how will they feel if their food looks like that? Yet they will eat it and fill their bellies with it. If it is so ugly to look at, how will it taste?

God also says: 'You who have gone astray and denied the truth will eat from the fruit of the Zaqqum tree, filling your bellies with it, and will drink scalding water; yet you will drink it like insatiably thirsty camels drink. Such will be their dwelling place on the Day of Judgement'. (56: 51-56) Disgusting and terrifying as this food is, it is the only food available to them, and they will eat their fill of it. If they want a drink with it, they have nothing but that boiling water which is like molten lead. Yet they will drink of it in plenty, like thirsty camels.



Four: The Great Suffering of the People of Hell

The punishment of the people of Hell is described generally and in detail in many verses in the Qur'an. God describes it in different verses as 'severe, humiliating, grievous and hard'. He says: 'Woe to the unbelievers; for theirs will be a severe suffering'. (14: 2) 'Let not those who disbelieve imagine that our giving them rein bodes well for their own souls. We only give them rein so that they may grow in sinfulness. A humiliating suffering awaits them.' (3: 178) 'Tell My servants that I alone am much-forgiving, ever-merciful; and also, My punishment is indeed the most grievous suffering.' (15: 49-50) 'We will let them enjoy themselves for a short while, but We will ultimately drive them into hard suffering.' (31: 24)

Abu Hurayrah narrated that the Prophet (peace be upon him) said: 'This fire of yours which a person lights up has the heat of one out of seventy portions of Hell's heat'. People said: 'By God, it would have been sufficient [as it is], Messenger of God'. He said: 'It is made greater by sixty-nine portions, each is similar to it in heat'.⁽¹⁾ We cannot, in our present life, imagine the nature of this suffering in the life to come. These descriptions are only meant to give us an idea of the hardest

(1) Related by al-Bukhari, 3,265; Muslim, 2,843.

and severest suffering we can imagine. Still, the suffering in the Hereafter is greater, severer and longer-lasting.

God mentions some aspects of its severity and pain. One such aspect is that it is refreshed time after time. Thus, it is renewed, and those who suffer it cannot get used to it. God says: ‘Those who disbelieve in Our revelations We will, in time, cause them to endure fire: every time their skins are burnt off, We will replace them with new skins, so that they may taste suffering [in full]. God is indeed almighty, wise’. (4: 56) This is a fearsome scene of the burning of fire, and how skins are burnt off, then replaced by new skins. The replacement skins are not meant to heal the effect of the burning of the old skins, but to start the burning anew. Thus, their suffering restarts.

God also says: ‘The evildoers will abide in the suffering of hell. It will not be lightened for them; they will remain in utter despair’. (43: 74-75) It is a permanent suffering in a very hard situation. It is not lightened for even a moment, to give them respite. They cannot entertain any hope that it will come to an end. Therefore, they are in utter despair.

One aspect of the severity of this suffering is that it is at its severest when it touches faces. Needless to say, the face is a person’s most important feature, as it combines all his senses. God says: ‘On the Day when they are dragged into the Fire, their faces down, [they will be told], “Taste now the touch of Hell-fire”’. (54: 48) ‘The Fire will scorch their faces, and therein they will look gloomy.’ (23: 104) ‘On the Day when their faces will be tossed about in the Fire, they will say: “Would that we had obeyed God and obeyed His Messenger”.’ (33: 66) ‘How about one who will have nothing but his bare face to protect him from the awful suffering on Resurrection Day? It will be said to the wrongdoers: “Taste now what you have earned”.’ (39: 24) It is only normal for a person to protect his face from any danger or harm. However,

the people of Hell cannot use their hands to protect their faces, and the punishment strikes them in a terrible scene that reveals their impotence and confusion.

The punishment in Hell is both painful and long-lasting. It does not lead to death, nor does it retain life. God says: 'He who will appear before his Lord [on Judgement Day] laden with sin will be consigned to Hell, where he will neither die nor live'. (20: 74) 'As for the unbelievers, the Fire of Hell awaits them. No term will be determined for them so that they could die, nor will its suffering be reduced for them.' (35: 36) 'For those who deny Our revelations and scorn them the gates of heaven will not be opened; nor will they enter Paradise any more than a thick, twisted rope can pass through a needle's eye. Thus do We reward the evil-doers. Hell will be their resting place, and sheets of fire will cover them. Thus do We reward the wrongdoers.' (7: 40-41)

God also says: 'He whom God guides is indeed rightly guided; whereas for those whom He leaves to go astray you cannot find anyone to protect them from Him. On the Day of Resurrection We will gather them together, prone upon their faces, blind, dumb and deaf. Hell will be their abode. Every time it abates We will increase for them its blazing flame'. (17: 97) A man asked the Prophet (peace be upon him): 'Prophet, how will an unbeliever be resurrected standing on his face?' The Prophet told him: 'Is not He who enabled him to walk on his two legs in this life able to make him walk on his face on the Day of Judgement?'⁽¹⁾

God says further: 'These two adversaries have become engrossed in contention about their Lord. For the unbelievers garments of fire will be cut out; and scalding water will be poured over their heads, melting all that is in their bellies and

(1) Related by al-Bukhari, 6,523; Muslim, 2,803.

their skin. In addition, there will be grips of iron for them. Whenever, in their anguish, they try to get out, they are returned there, and will be told: “Taste the torment of fire”’. (22: 19-22) This is a fearsome scene, with active movement and horrible imagery. It describes how fire garments are cut and tailored for them, while scalding waters are poured over their heads, melting their skins and penetrating into their bellies. They are hit violently with iron grips. They feel that they cannot stand this suffering any longer, and they try to get out, but are only returned right into it by force, rebuked and told: ‘Taste the torment of fire’.

Severe and intense as this physical suffering the unbelievers endure in Hell, it is compounded by psychological torture as they are blamed for bringing it upon themselves. They are reminded of their offences and sinful actions which exposed them to such punishment. Such blame and reminders start as they arrive at the gates of Hell. It is then that the guards of Hell remind them of their misdeeds and blame them for wilfully exposing themselves to God’s punishment. They further remind them that they used to take the warnings of the Day’s great suffering very lightly. God says: ‘On the Day when the unbelievers will be brought before the Fire, [they will be asked]: “Is this not the truth?” They will answer: “Yes, by our Lord”. He will say: “Taste, then, this suffering, for you were unbelievers”’. (46: 34) They used to deny the very existence of Hell and disbelieve in it. Now they admit it, swearing by God that it is true. However, their admission is too late. What use is their belief in Hell after they are thrown into it, deserving its punishment?

They are further reminded of their earlier denials of the punishment now befalling them. They try to escape it in any way they can, but are only brought back right into it. The Qur’an describes their condition: ‘The wicked ones will have

the Fire as their abode: whenever they try to come out of it, they will be thrown back in it, and they will be told, “Taste this suffering through fire which you always thought to be a lie”.

(32: 20)

‘They did not expect to be faced with a reckoning, and roundly denied Our revelations. But We have placed on record every single thing, [and We will say]: “Taste this, then, the only increase you will have is increase of torment.”’ (78: 27-30) Their disbelief in resurrection, accountability and reckoning was one of their worst misdeeds in their first life. Because they disbelieved in people’s accountability and in the punishment in Hell, they indulged in different types of sin and evil. Hence, they are repeatedly reminded of their denials and sinful actions. God says: ‘On that Day they will be shut out from their Lord. They will enter the blazing Fire, and will be told: “This is [the reality] which you denied!”’ (83: 15-17) They are reminded of their offences during their earthly lives, as they endure their overwhelming suffering: ‘[That will be] on the Day when suffering will overwhelm them from above and from beneath their feet. He will then say: “Taste now [the result of] your own doings”’. (29: 55)

A different aspect of the severity of the torment in Hell is that God enables Hell to understand, be angry and vengeful against those thrown into it. It calls on them to come over and get inside it, as God says: ‘It is the raging Fire that tears the skin away. It will claim all who turn their backs, and turn away from the truth’. (70: 15-17) Besides, ‘when it sees them from a far-off place, they will hear its fury and its raging sigh’. (25: 12) They hear its fury and exhalation before they arrive in it. When they are flung into it, they hear its inhalation and boiling. God says: ‘Suffering in Hell awaits those who deny their Lord: an evil destination. When they are thrown in it, they will hear it drawing in its breath as it boils up, almost bursting with fury’. (67: 6-8)

The Fire will continue to rage on, demanding more because it is furious. It engulfs those who are thrown into it and it is eager for more fuel. This is described in the Qur'an: 'On that Day We will ask Hell, "Are you full?" and it will reply, "Are there no more?"' (50: 30) Those who are punished in Hell not only suffer its painful torment and burning fire but are also troubled by its fury with those who are thrown into it.





Five: The Desires of the People of Heaven and the Wishes of the People of Hell



There is a great difference between what the people of Heaven desire and what the people of Hell wish for. The people of Heaven receive all that they desire, and the angels give them a warm and friendly welcome. The angels say to them, as the Qur'an mentions: 'We are your guardians in the life of this world and in the life to come. There you will have all that your souls desire, and all that you ask for'. (41: 31) 'They will be waited upon with trays and goblets of gold; and there will be found all that the souls may desire and the eyes may delight in. There you shall abide.' (43: 71) 'We provide them with fruit and meat as they desire.' (52: 22)

What this means is that the people of Heaven do not entertain wishes that are unattainable, such as an old man's wish to regain his youth. Nor do the people of Heaven hope for anything, because all their desires are fulfilled once such a desire occurs to any of them. They do not wait for the fulfilment of their hopes, because whatever they hope for is immediately present before them, as stated in Verse 41:31, quoted above.

The people in Hell experience the sorrow of realizing that it is too late for their wishes to materialize. The wishes they

express are of the type mentioned in the Qur'an: 'Would that we could return! Then we would not deny our Lord's revelations, but would be among the believers'. (6: 27) 'Is there any way of return.' (42: 44) What they now, when they are in Hell, wish for was often offered to them during their lives on earth, but they refused. Now, the ultimate of their wishes is that they be made to die, or that their punishment be stopped for a day. When they express such wishes, the decisive answer is immediately given: 'Away with you into this ignominy! Do not plead with Me'. (23: 108)

God mentions in the Qur'an some of their wishes. He mentions that they will cry aloud: 'Our Lord! Let us out and we will do good, not like what we did before'. The answer is promptly given to them: 'Have We not given you lives long enough for anyone who would be warned to take warning? And a warner had come to you. Taste it, then. Wrongdoers will have none to support them.' (35: 37) This is what they appeal for: another chance so that they may do differently. This is a confession coupled with regret, but it comes too late, when the chance has gone. Hence, the answer is decisive: they had their opportunities, and they could have heeded the warnings. They lived long enough to reflect and make up their minds, but they failed to make use of the chances given to them. Hence, the result is clearly put to them: 'Taste it, then. Wrongdoers will have none to support them'.

God mentions their same wish in a different context: 'Hence, warn mankind of the Day when suffering may befall them; when those who do wrong will say: "Our Lord, grant us respite for a short while, so that we may respond to Your call and follow Your messengers". "Why? Did you not in time past swear that you would suffer no decline? And you dwelt in the dwellings of those who wronged their own souls before you.

Yet you knew for certain how We had dealt with them, and We placed many examples before you”’. (14: 44-45)

Their wishes are expressed within the context of their admissions that they erred and did wrong, as well as pledging not to do so again, should a new chance be given to them. God says:

The Fire will scorch their faces, and therein they will look gloomy. (104) ‘Were not My revelations read out to you, and did you not consider them as lies?’ (105) They will reply: ‘Our Lord! Our misfortune has overwhelmed us, and so we went astray. (106) Our Lord! Bring us out of this [suffering]. If ever We relapse, then we shall be wrongdoers indeed’. (107) He will say: ‘Away with you into this ignominy! And do not plead with Me. (108) Among My servants there were those who said: “Our Lord! We believe in You. Forgive us and have mercy on us; for You are the best of those who show mercy”. (109) But you made them the target of your derision to the point where it made you forget all remembrance of Me; and you went on laughing at them. (110) Today I have rewarded them for their patience in adversity. Indeed it is they who have achieved triumph’. (23: 104-111)

They are given a strong and decisive response, as God makes it clear that they remain in ignominy and cannot speak to Him. They are thus held in disgrace because they were arrogant in their first lives. They used to ridicule good believers who believed in God, glorified Him and sought His forgiveness. This attitude is requited by their suffering and looking gloomy in Hell. As for the believers, God rewards them for their patience despite the unbelievers’ ridicule, and has given them the ultimate triumph.

The bitterness of regret, unattainable wishes and the painful suffering lingers with them. God says: ‘On the Day when their faces will be tossed about in the Fire, they will say: “Would

that we had obeyed God and obeyed His Messenger”. And they will say: “Our Lord! We have paid heed to our masters and our leaders, but they have led us astray from the right path. Our Lord! Give them double suffering, and banish them utterly from Your grace”. (33: 66-68) Their tone is humble, pleading with a sorrowful and regretful expression, as though they realize that their wish is unattainable. Hence, they direct their pain and grudge against those masters and leaders whom they followed, appealing to God to give them double punishment. Yet, they will benefit nothing by such doubling of punishment for their leaders. Each group will have enough punishment to make them utterly miserable.

Another of their wishes is that the dwellers of Paradise should grant them some of what they have been granted of God’s favours. The Qur’an mentions this: ‘And the inmates of the Fire will cry out to the dwellers of Paradise: “Pour some water on us, or give us some of the sustenance God has provided for you”. They will reply: “God has forbidden both to the unbelievers, who have taken their religion for a pastime and an idle sport, and who have been beguiled by the life of this world”. Today We will be oblivious of them as they were oblivious of the meeting on this Day of theirs, and as they used to deny Our revelations’. (7: 50-51)

They realize that their wishes will produce nothing, and therefore, the ultimate that they wish for is to die. Death is their utmost wish, and they clearly express it: ‘The evildoers will abide in the suffering of Hell. It will not be lightened for them; they will remain in utter despair. We never wronged them; it was they who have wronged themselves. They will cry, “Mālik, if only your Lord would put an end to us!” He will answer: “You are here to stay”. We have brought the truth to you, but most of you abhor the truth’. (43: 74-78)



Their appeal is that of a depressed prisoner, coloured by his pain and suffering. When he expresses his urgent desire, he says that he wishes to die. Needless to say, what is worse than death is that which makes a person wish for death.



Six: The Quarrels among the People of Hell

It should be remembered that on the Day of Judgement, dispute erupts between the leaders of the unbelievers and their followers. The leaders disown their followers on this occasion. The dispute is renewed when they enter the Fire, and their quarrel is even fiercer. When a group of these leaders is ushered into Hell, they are followed by a group of their followers. The former will say: 'Here is another crowd of people rushing headlong to join you. No welcome to them! They too shall burn in the Fire'. (38: 59) The leaders do not want to see their followers and they say: 'No welcome to them'. Yet during their lives on earth, they used to tempt them enjoying their support. Their followers will not take this quietly: 'These others will say: "No, but it is you! No welcome to you either! It is you who brought this on us! How vile a place to be in!"' (38: 60) They assert that they have ended in this vile place because they trusted their leaders and followed them. They will now appeal to God with bitter grief and regret, saying: 'They will say: "Our Lord! Give double punishment in the Fire to whomever has brought this on us"'. (38: 61) It is an appeal that reflects their desire to avenge themselves against those who led them into this tragic end. However, even if their prayer is answered, it would benefit them nothing.

Their bitter sorrow is further increased when they search in the Fire for some people whom they used to deride when they were on earth. They used to manipulate their leaders' power to humiliate these people. Now they do not find them in Hell and they wonder: 'They will say: "How is it that we do not see here men whom we considered to be wicked, and whom we made the target of our derision? Or is it that our eyes have missed them?"' (38: 62-63) No, their eyes will not deceive them, rather they are prevented from seeing them. Had their sights stretched to reach Heaven, they would be able to see those people enjoying God's favours and blessings.

God mentions this scene of dispute in the depths of Hell, portraying it in a different light, as He says: '[God] will say: "Enter into the Fire to join the hosts of the jinn and humans who have gone before you". Every time a host enters [the Fire], it will curse its fellow host. When all are gathered there, the last of them will say of the first: "Our Lord, these are the ones who have led us astray, so give them double suffering in the Fire". He will answer: "Every one of you will have double suffering, although you may not know it"'. (7: 38)

During life on earth, the later of these communities used to follow in the footsteps of those before them. Those in the lead used to dictate the pattern of behaviour for their followers. When they gather in Hell, suffering utter loss and an ignominious end, their mutual hatred, conflict and grudges will surface. What a wretched outcome, when the followers will curse their leaders, pray for their ruin, as they consider them responsible for their own ultimate loss. Thus, those who were intimate friends during life on earth are now in bitter hostility towards each other. They exchange accusations and pray against each other. Ultimately, the leaders disown their followers altogether: 'The first of them will say to the last:

“In no wise were you superior to us. Taste, then, this suffering on account of what you have been doing”’. (7: 39)

Those leaders will declare that they disown their followers. Relations between the two parties will be severed. The followers lamentably wish that they can have another chance so that they may disown their leaders. All this adds to their grief and sorrow. God says: ‘If the wrongdoers could but see, as see they will when they are made to suffer, that all might belongs to God alone, and that He is stern in retribution. [On that Day] those who were followed will disown their followers and they all will see their punishment, while all their ties are severed. The followers will say, “Would that we had another chance so that we can disown them as they have disowned us!” Thus will God show them their works [in a way which causes them] bitter regrets. They will never come out of the Fire’. (2: 165-167)

Those followers looked up to their leaders, deriving power and feeling secure and strong by their association with them. Now they find those leaders powerless, unable to protect themselves, let alone protect their followers. The followers are angry, putting the blame on the leaders who led them astray. They wish they could have a return to times past, so that they can disown the very leaders who deceived them, and then let them suffer their punishment. It is an emotional scene of bitter dispute and animosity between leaders and followers. The Qur’anic comment is very powerful: ‘Thus will God show them their works [in a way which causes them] bitter regrets. They will never come out of the Fire’. (2: 167)

The Qur’an describes: ‘They will contend with one another in the Fire: the weak will say to those who were arrogant, “We have been your followers, so can you relieve us of some share of the Fire?” The arrogant will reply: “We are all in it together. For God has judged between His creatures”’. (40: 47-48)

One of the worst causes for their distress is that they see their false deities which they worshipped becoming like firewood, sharing their suffering of burning. God says: ‘You and all that you were wont to worship instead of God are but the fuel of Hell: that is what you are destined for. If those [objects of your worship] had truly been divine, they would not have been destined for it. But there all will abide’. (21: 98-99)

They feel strongly reproached and blamed, as they are asked to look for their false deities and find out whether they can give them any help or support: ‘The blazing Fire will be placed in full view of the ones lost in error. It will be said to them: “Where is now all that you used to worship instead of God? Can they help you or even help themselves?” They will be hurled into Hell, as also those who are lost in error, and Iblīs’s hosts, all together. And there, quarrelling with one another, they will say: “By God, we were obviously in error, when we deemed you equal to the Lord of all the worlds. It was only the truly guilty ones who led us astray. And now we have none to intercede for us nor any loving friend. Would that we had a second chance [in life], so that we could be believers”’. (26: 91-102)

They put the blame for their error on others among them: ‘It was only the truly guilty ones who led us astray’. (26: 99) However, they know that it is too late and there is no use in apportioning blame. ‘And now we have none to intercede for us nor any loving friend.’ (26: 100-101) Neither the false deity can intercede on their behalf, nor will friends be of any use. ‘Would that we had a second chance [in life], so that we could be believers.’ (26: 102) Nothing is left for them other than to entertain some wishes, but even these are unattainable, as it is too late for them. There is simply no return to earthly life.

One of the worst types of reproach they receive is that Satan who did his best to lead them astray, giving them all sorts of

false temptations, now lets them down, putting the blame on them for their going astray. God tells us: ‘And when everything will have been decided, Satan will say: “God has made you a true promise. I, too, made promises to you, but I did not keep them. Yet I had no power at all over you, except that I called you and you responded to me. Hence, do not now blame me, but blame yourselves. It is not for me to respond to your cries, nor for you to respond to mine. I have already disclaimed your associating me with God”. Indeed, for all wrongdoers there is painful suffering in store’. (14: 22)

The truth appears clearly at this very grave scene. Satan himself admits to those who followed him, believing his promises, that the true promise was that given by God, while he himself did not fulfil any of his promises. He adds to their pain by making them responsible for their own actions: ‘Yet I had no power at all over you, except that I called you and you responded to me. Hence, do not now blame me, but blame yourselves’. He goes further in dissociating himself, saying that he never shared their polytheist beliefs. He warns them of imminent and painful suffering: ‘I have already disclaimed your associating me with God. Indeed, for all wrongdoers there is painful suffering in store’. It appears that Satan enjoys watching their suffering.



Seven: The Characteristics of the People of Hell



God mentions the characteristics of the people of Hell and their deeds which made them deserve God's punishment. He speaks of these characteristics in many verses. The worst of all these is to associate partners with God, placing some beings as equal to Him and worshipping other beings alongside Him.

Other characteristics of these people include their denial of resurrection, reckoning of deeds, Heaven and Hell, as well as their dislike of worshipping God. They even dislike prayer. At the same time, they are hard-hearted giving little or no help to those who are poor or weak. Here are some Qur'anic descriptions of them: 'It is to God that all that is in the heavens and all that is on earth belongs. Woe to the unbelievers; for theirs will be a severe suffering. These are the ones who love the life of this world preferring it to the life to come, and who turn others away from God's path and try to make it appear crooked. They have gone far astray'. (14: 2-3)

'Every soul is held in pledge for what it has wrought, (38) except for those on the right hand. (39) They will be in gardens, and will ask (40) about the guilty ones: (41) "What brought you into the scorching Fire?" (42) They will answer: "We were not among those who prayed, (43) neither did we feed the needy; (44) but we indulged with others in vain talk,

(45) and we denied the Day of Judgement (46) until there came upon us that which is certain". (47) So, of no benefit to them could be the pleas of any intercessors'. (74: 38-48)





Eight: The Bliss of Heaven and the Torment of Hell



It is often the case that the bliss of Heaven and the torment of Hell are mentioned side by side, so that the elements of desirability and dread work together. Moreover, when the torment of Hell becomes known, the value of the bliss of Heaven becomes greater in the sight of those who seek it. It is not that the people in Heaven have achieved the great prize, but they also achieved safety from the torment of Hell. To be safe from the Fire is a great success and to be admitted into Heaven is a double prize. ‘He who will be drawn away from the Fire and brought into Paradise will indeed have gained a triumph.’ (3: 185) After life on earth, there will only be either Heaven or the Fire.

Moreover, being aware of the promised bliss in Heaven increases the grief, pain and sorrow of those who incur punishment in Hell. They realize that they have to endure this suffering and that they have lost all that the people of Heaven enjoy. God mentions the appeal the people in Hell make to the people of Heaven: And the inmates of the Fire will cry out to the dwellers of Paradise: “Pour some water on us, or give us some of the sustenance God has provided for you”. They will reply: “God has forbidden both to the unbelievers”. (7: 50) As they suffer their punishment, those who are in Hell are well

aware of the bliss enjoyed by the people in Heaven. They wish to have a share of it, even if only a drink of water. How grieved they must feel to be so deprived and still have to endure all their suffering!

The comparison between the state of bliss of Heaven and the state of torment in the Fire complements the scene, providing a greater incentive to take the way leading to Heaven and a sterner warning against taking the one leading to Hell. God says: ‘Who is in a better state: he who is cast into the Fire, or he who will come safe on Resurrection Day?’. (41: 40) Mentioning the situation of the people in Hell, God says: ‘And when, chained together, they are flung into a tight space within, they will pray for extinction there and then. [But they will be told]: Do not pray today for one single extinction, but pray for many extinctions!’ (25: 13-14) God then adds, comparing their status to that of the people of Heaven: ‘Which is better: that, or the Paradise of eternity which the God-fearing have been promised as their reward and their ultimate abode?’ (25: 15) God further mentions the situation of those disbelievers when they see the angels, but the angels have no good news for them: ‘On the Day when they will see the angels, the sinners will receive no happy news then, and they will say: “a forbidding ban!”’ (25: 22) The decisive comparison concludes: ‘On that Day, those destined for Paradise will be graced with the best of abodes and the fairest place of repose’. (25: 24) Needless to say, there is a great difference between the two situations. When God mentions the bliss of Heaven, its food and shade, He mentions the opposite situation of the disbelievers: ‘Such is the Paradise which the God-fearing have been promised: through it running waters flow. Its fruits will be everlasting, and so will be its shade. Such will be the destiny of those who fear God, while the destiny of the unbelievers is the Fire’. (13: 35) It’s a compassion between bliss and suffering, happiness and misery, fine outcome and evil abode. God mentions some

aspects of the bliss of Heaven and their opposites of suffering. This brings the two into sharp relief. Let us now quote some of what God says describing the bliss of Heaven and what describes the suffering in Hell, so that we can draw the contrast.

1. The vast expanse of Heaven, whereby God mentions its width as equal to the heavens and earth. On the other hand, Hell is tight on its occupants, and they are thrown into its narrow space, in fetters. Thus, the narrowness of the place is compounded by their fetters. God says: ‘And when, chained together, they are flung into a tight space within, they will pray for extinction there and then’. (25: 13)

2. The people of Heaven arrive there in throngs and enter as large groups, while the people of Hell are violently pushed into the Fire, caught by their forelocks and feet and flung into it.

3. Heaven is brought nearer to the righteous, to give them a good welcome, while the Fire appears to the wrongdoers in fury.

4. The people of Heaven are warmly greeted by the angels as they enter: ‘Peace be to you! Well have you done. Come in: you are here to stay’. (39: 73) By contrast, the people of Hell are reproached, blamed and humiliated as they enter. They are warned that they will abide forever in such miserable conditions: ‘This is the Fire you used to deny!’ (52: 14)

5. The people of Heaven are in perfect friendliness, and whatever rancour they might have had is removed from their hearts. By contrast, in Hell, even those who were close friends in this present life will be hostile to each other. They will disown one another and they will exchange blame and curses.

6. The people of Heaven are kept far away from the Fire. They do not hear either its hissing sound, nor its noises. They are not disturbed by the torment given to its people.

The people of the Fire hear its exhalations before they arrive there. What they hear when they get there is much worse.

7. The people of Heaven are repeatedly welcomed by the angels who say to them: ‘The angels will come in to them from every gate, [saying]: “Peace be upon you, because you have persevered”. Blessed indeed is the attainment of the [ultimate] abode’. (13: 23-24) By contrast, while the people of Hell are suffering their punishment, they are repeatedly reproached and blamed, so that their mental pain is added to their physical torture. In the midst of their suffering, they are told: ‘This is the very thing you surely doubted’. (44: 50)

8. The people of Heaven are reminded of their good deeds, as a gesture of honour, and they are told: ‘Eat and drink with healthy enjoyment as a reward for what you have done.’ (52: 19) The people of Hell are reminded of their disbelief and their bad deeds, to add to their reproach and blame. They are told: ‘Taste this your trial! This is what you were keen to hasten’. (51: 14)

9. Running waters flow beneath the people of Heaven while the people of the Fire have ‘scalding water being poured over their heads, melting all that is in their bellies and their skins’. (22: 19-20)

10. The people of Heaven are well delighted, living in a serene atmosphere: ‘There they will hear no idle talk, but only the voice of peace’. (19: 62) The people of Hell shout and curse one another. This shows a great difference between those who are in perfect amity and those who exchange blame and foulness.

11. The people of Heaven are delighted when they remember their good deeds which they did in this present life. They praise God for having guided them to do so. They remember that they believed when others did not. The people of Hell remember

their disbelief and rejection of the truth. They say: ‘A warner did indeed come to us, but we did not believe him. We said [to God’s messengers]: “God has revealed nothing. You are in total error”’. (67: 9)

12. God mentions the sumptuous food the people of Heaven eat in a way that makes it closer to our understanding, saying for example: ‘Fruits as they may desire’. (77: 42) ‘And with fruit of any kind they may choose, and with the meat of any fowl they may desire.’ (56: 20-21) These verses speak of plentiful and varied fruits. They take their choices. They also have as many kinds of meat as they fancy. Because they have so much, these different types appear to them similar to what they had earlier. Hence, the Qur’an mentions this: ‘Whenever they are offered fruits therefrom, they say, “We have been given the same before”, for they shall be provided with what looks similar’. (2: 25)

Wretched is the food of the people of Hell. It is torturous to look at, taste or eat. It comes from the Zaqqūm tree which is planted in the centre of Hell. When they eat its food, it boils inside their bellies. God says: ‘The fruit of the Zaqqūm tree will be the food of the sinful; like molten lead will it boil in the belly, like the boiling of scalding water’. (44: 43-46)

13. God mentions what the people of Heaven drink, and it is very tasty and refreshing, served with pleasure and in fine goblets. He mentions its different types, saying: ‘In it are rivers of water for ever pure, rivers of milk the taste of which never alters, rivers of wine, a delight for those who drink, and rivers of honey pure and clarified’. (47: 15) We learn from the Qur’an that their drink is mixed with *kāfūr* and also with ginger. He also mentions the pleasure they have as they sit together to have a drink: ‘They pass around a cup which will not lead to idle talk or to sin’. (52: 23)

By contrast, the drink of the people of Hell adds further suffering. When it is presented to them, it is boiling like flames that burn their faces. When they drink it, it tears their bowels. In addition, it has very bad smell and taste. It is unwillingly swallowed with pain. God says of it: 'Let them, then, taste this: a scalding fluid and a disgusting dark drink'. (38: 57) How wretched the one whose only drink is such!

14. The people of Heaven have desires, and those in Hell have things to wish for, but there is a great difference between the two. The desires of the people of Heaven are fulfilled at the moment they entertain the desire. They do not have to wait for fulfilment. The wishes of the people of Hell are unattainable. They are merely regrets they feel and hopes that will never materialize, because the chance has passed and it is too late. In their first lives, these were easy and available. They were offered to them but they declined to take them. The thing that gives them the greatest sorrow is that they wish they could have believed, instead of spending their lives on earth as unbelievers. They say: 'Would that we could return! Then we would not deny our Lord's revelations, but would be among the believers'. (6: 27)

They were frequently addressed with the message of faith, but they turned away in arrogance. Now that what was hidden is there for all to see, they wish that they had believed. They forget that they have lost the chance. They are now at the time of requital, not action. God says: 'A barrier will be set between them and all that they desire, just as was done with their kind before. They were lost in perplexing doubt'. (34: 54) Their wishes are expressed in the form of a passionate appeal, to which they are given a decisive response: There they will cry aloud: 'Our Lord! Let us out and we will do good, not like what we did before'. To which they are told: 'Have We not given you lives long enough for anyone who would be warned

to take warning? And a warner had come to you. Taste it, then. Wrongdoers will have none to support them.’ (35: 37)

15. God mentions the bedding of both parties. He speaks of the luxurious bedrooms of the people of Heaven which include raised couches, cushions laid in order and spread out carpets. The people of Hell lie down on fire and cover themselves with fire blankets. God says: ‘Hell will be their resting place, and sheets of fire will cover them’. (7: 41)

16. The people of Heaven have precious jewellery and fine clothing: ‘There they will be adorned with bracelets of gold and will wear green garments of silk and brocade’. (18: 31) ‘They will be arrayed in garments of fine green silk and brocade; and adorned with bracelets of silver.’ (76: 21) The clothing of the people of Hell gives them added suffering: ‘For the unbelievers garments of fire will be cut out; and scalding water will be poured over their heads’. (22: 19) ‘On that Day you will see the guilty chained together in fetters, wearing garments of black pitch, and their faces covered with flames.’ (14: 49-50)

17. What each of the two parties say:

When we put the verses that quote what the people of Heaven say in Heaven and what the others say in Hell, we have a full image. We almost hear the friendly speech of the people of Heaven reflecting serenity and peace, describing their happiness. We also almost hear the lamentations and wailing of the people of Hell as they cry out. Their very tone reflects their sorrow, regret and despair.

Here are some of the pleasant words of the people of Heaven: ‘All praise is due to God who has guided us to this. Had He not given us guidance, we would certainly have not found the right path. Our Lord’s messengers have certainly brought us the truth’. (7: 43) ‘All praise is due to God who

has made His promise to us come true and given us this land as our own. Now we may dwell in Paradise as we please.’ (39: 74) ‘When we were still living with our kinsfolk, we were full of fear, and so God has been gracious to us, and warded off from us suffering through the scorching wind. We used to pray to Him: He is the Beneficent, the Ever-Merciful.’ (52: 26-28)

When we hear the speech of the people of Hell, we realize that their words are all tears, grief and regret. These start from the moment each of them receives the records of their deeds in their left hands, realizing what their fate will be. They will then cry in pain and sorrow: ‘Would that I had never been shown my record and knew nothing of my account! Would that death had been the end of me! Nothing has my wealth availed me. I am now bereft of all my power’. (69: 25-29)

When they are in the thick of Hell, they will be shouting, but they are merely angry with the fate they have brought upon themselves. They are quarrelling with one another and praying desperately, but their prayers are rejected. They say: ‘Would that we could return! Then we would not deny our Lord’s revelations, but would be among the believers’. (6: 27) When they are asked: ‘Did there not come to you messengers from among yourselves, who recited to you your Lord’s revelations and forewarned you of this day?’ Their lamentable answer is: ‘Yes, indeed. But the sentence of suffering will have already been passed against the unbelievers’. (39: 71)

They are asked: ‘Did no one come to warn you?’ (67: 8) They will reply: “Yes. A warner did indeed come to us, but we did not believe him. We said [to God’s messengers]: ‘God has revealed nothing. You are in total error’”.’ (67: 9)

When they meet their leaders who led them astray, they show that they are very angry with them. They complain to God and pray against them. They say: ‘Our Lord, these are the ones who have led us astray, so give them double suffering in

the Fire'. The answer they receive only increases their anger and despair: 'Every one of you will have double suffering, although you may not know it'. (7: 38) Their leaders who are also in the Fire respond to them, saying: 'In no wise were you superior to us. Taste, then, this suffering on account of what you have been doing'. (7: 39)

When they are alone, suffering their punishment, they appeal to God whom they had always denied and never prayed to: 'Our Lord! Our misfortune has overwhelmed us, and so we went astray. Our Lord! Bring us out of this [suffering]. If ever We relapse, then we will be wrongdoers indeed'. (23: 106-107) 'Our Lord! Let us out and we will do good, not like what we did before.' (35: 37)

They try and request Mālik, the chief guard of Hell, to put their dearest wish to God, saying: 'Mālik, if only your Lord would put an end to us!' (43: 77) They appeal for death. What can be said other than when death is seen as the saviour from a difficult situation, that situation must be much harder than death itself. Yet this despairing wish is rejected and Mālik tells them: 'You are here to stay'. (43: 77) They will have nothing other than permanent and endless suffering.

18. What is said to both parties:

The people of Heaven will receive kind words, because they are those who, during their lives on earth, were guided to the best of what may be said. They listen to fine greetings and warm welcome. This means that what is said to them is further kindness and warmer welcome. Their first reception as they arrive at the gates of Heaven, which have been thrown open for them, is that the angels guarding Heaven will say to them: 'Peace be to you! Well have you done. Come in: you are here to stay'. (39: 73) Angels frequently greet them: 'The angels will come in to them from every gate, [saying]: "Peace

be upon you, because you have persevered”. Blessed indeed is the attainment of the [ultimate] abode’. (13: 23-24)

Renewed greetings are further said to them, expressing continued welcome. They are served with food and drink, and offered congratulations, with reminders of their past good deeds: ‘Eat and drink with healthy enjoyment as a reward for what you have done.’ (52: 19)

The people of Hell receive only hard speech, including reproach and blame, which increases their humiliation, sorrow and regret. They are told: ‘Enter the gates of Hell; there you will abide’. How vile an abode for the arrogant!’ (39: 72) Their reproach gives them even greater humiliation as they are asked an embarrassing question: ‘Have there not come to you messengers from among yourselves who related to you My revelations and warned you of the coming of this your day?’ (6: 130)

In addition to their severe punishment, they are often reminded that this is the very punishment they were warned against during their lives on earth, but they met these warnings with derision. They are told to suffer it, then: ‘Taste this suffering through fire which you always thought to be a lie’. (32: 20)

How bitter and grieved these people must feel as they receive an address from God, Mighty and Exalted, speaking of His wrath and their deprivation: ‘The unbelievers will be addressed: “Indeed, greater than your present loathing of yourselves is God’s loathing of you when you were called to the faith and you rejected it”’. (40: 10) Many a time they were called upon to believe in God and pray to Him, but they persisted in their arrogance and turned away. The result of their attitude is that they suffer reproach and deprivation.

19. The people of Heaven are granted God's pleasure with them. This is one of the greatest gifts God grants them, telling them directly that He is pleased with them. He says: "God has promised the believers, men and women, gardens through which running waters flow, where they will abide, and goodly dwellings in the Garden of Eden. Yet God's acceptance is the greatest blessing of all. This is indeed the supreme triumph'. (9: 72) This means that the fact that God accepts them and is pleased with them is greater than all that the Qur'anic verse mentions of bliss and comforts. Indeed, all these are not fully enjoyed except by God's acceptance and His revealing Himself to them. Is there anything greater than that they have a relationship with God of mutual love and acceptance? Their ultimate aim in this life is that they win God's acceptance and pleasure. This is what they always prayed for. When He makes them witnesses to the fact that He is pleased with them, they enjoy their happy lives to the utmost.

The people of Hell incur God's wrath. He says: 'Can he who strives after God's pleasure be compared to one who has incurred God's wrath and whose abode is Hell? How evil such a goal is'. (3: 162) They incur God's wrath 'because they follow what incurs God's anger, and hate what pleases Him. Therefore, He will surely make all their deeds come to nothing. (47: 28) Would God be pleased with one who hates what pleases Him? Does the one who follows what incurs God's wrath get anything but God's displeasure? Our Lord, we seek refuge with Your pleasure against Your wrath.

The people of Heaven receive the highest and best bliss, which is talking to God then seeing His blessed face. When they enter Heaven and settle in it, enjoying their success and security, they believe that there is nothing better than this bliss. However, the Prophet (peace be upon him) mentions that God will speak to them. Explaining God's statement in the

Qur'an: 'For those who do good there is a good reward, and more besides', (10: 26) the Prophet says: 'When the people of Heaven enter it, God, the Glorious, the Exalted, will say: "Do you wish that I give you anything more?" They will say: "Have You not made our faces shine? Have You not admitted us into Heaven and saved us from the Fire?" He will remove the screen. They have not been given anything which they like more than that they are now looking at their Lord, the Mighty, the Exalted'.⁽¹⁾ This is what God mentions, as He says: 'Some faces will on that Day be radiant with happiness, looking towards their Lord'. (75: 22-23)

By contrast, the people of Hell are isolated from seeing their Lord, Mighty and Exalted. This is a special favour granted to those with whom God is pleased. No shred of it is allowed to those who incur His displeasure. God says: 'On that Day they will be shut out from their Lord'. (83: 15) This deprives them of one of the greatest favours. They cannot see their Lord and He will not look at them to grant a favour, nor speak to them indicating their acceptance by Him. He says that 'they will have no share in the life to come. God will neither speak to them, nor cast a look on them on the Day of Resurrection, nor will He cleanse them of their sins. Theirs will be a painful suffering'. (3: 77)

20. The people of Heaven will remember the unbelievers who used to try to turn them away from their faith. The screen between the two parties is lifted and they see them suffering inside Hell. This brings their already enjoyed favour of being safe from sharing their depressing status in Hell to complete perfection. They can now throw back at the disbelievers their earlier ridicule. Referring to the people of Heaven, God says: 'One of them will say: I had a close companion on earth (51)

(1) Related by Muslim, 181; al-Tirmidhī, 3,105.

who used to ask me: “Do you really believe (52) that after we have died and become mere dust and bones we will be brought for judgement?” (53) He adds: “Would you like to look down?” (54) Then he looks and sees him in the midst of the Fire. (55) He will then say: ‘By God! You almost brought me to ruin! (56) But for the grace of God I should have also been brought there’. (57) But then is it truly so, that we are not to die (58) except for our first death, and that we are not to suffer? (59) This is indeed the supreme triumph. (60) Everyone should strive to attain this goal’. (37: 51-61)

The people of Hell will also remember the believers whom they used to deride and ridicule. They will look for them in Hell, but they will not find them. They will ask with much sadness: why do we not see them? God describes their condition then, saying: ‘They will say: “How is it that we do not see here men whom we considered to be wicked, and whom we made the target of our derision? Or is it that our eyes have missed them?” This is in truth how it will be: the people of the Fire will quarrel among themselves’. (38: 62-64)

In this world, they used to look at the believers with contempt. They considered them wicked and miserable. When they cannot find them in Hell, sharing their own suffering, they will wonder with much grief: How come they are not with us? Well, they certainly will not see them because those believers are in a position of great bliss and permanent delight, as God says of them: ‘On that Day, those destined for Paradise will be graced with the best of abodes and the fairest place of repose’. (25: 24)

21. The people of Heaven will enjoy their bliss together with their spouses and offspring, as well as their friends. Enjoyment becomes more pleasant when shared. This is particularly so when those sharing it are one’s own family and relatives. God refers to this family feeling of enjoyment as He says:

‘Gardens of perpetual bliss, which they will enter together with the righteous from among their parents, their spouses and their offspring. The angels will come in to them from every gate’. (13: 23)

The people of Hell are enduring their suffering, each on their own, thinking only of themselves, and they are too preoccupied with their own fate to enquire about their immediate family members. God describes the condition of the guilty person when he is given the record of his deeds, handing it over to him in his left hand, from behind. He says: ‘But he who is given his record behind his back will in time call down destruction upon himself and will enter the Fire of Hell. He lived joyfully among his people. He surely thought he would never return. Yes, indeed; his Lord was watching over him’. (84: 10-15) There is a great difference between such a guilty loser and the successful person who is given his record in his right hand: ‘He who is given his record in his right hand will in time have a lenient reckoning and return rejoicing to his people’. (84: 7-9) He will take his record with delight and will immediately go to his own family to share this great happiness with them.

22. The people of Heaven will enjoy a perfectly pleasant life: ‘therein they will abide, and never will they desire any change to befall them’. (18: 108) No matter how long their lives extend, they enjoy an ever-renewing bliss that never becomes boring. They remain pleased with their blissful lives and they are never bored with it. They never wish to leave, nor are they ever driven out of it. God says: ‘No weariness will ever touch them there, nor will they ever be made to depart’. (15: 48)

The inmates of Hell are in much distress: ‘They will wish to come out of the Fire, but they will not come out of it. Theirs will be a long-lasting suffering’. (5: 37) If they try to leave it, they will be prevented and humiliated. God says: ‘Whenever,

in their anguish, they try to get out, they are returned there, and will be told: “Taste the torment of fire”’. (22: 22) Their hope to get out is no more than that of a person in absolute despair. Chains are around their necks and legs, and the flames of Hell stop them, as do the iron rods held by the angels. The contrast is clear between those who are happy with their blissful lives, hoping for nothing better, and those who eagerly wish to leave their place of misery but are pushed back into it.

23. The people of Heaven are with God, feeling His nearness, as He mentions: ‘The God-fearing will be in gardens and running waters, in a seat of truth, in the presence of an all-powerful Sovereign’. (54: 54-55) They are enjoying their blissful lives close to God in Heaven, where they are in the company of prophets and people who never deviate from the truth, martyrs and righteous people. Theirs is certainly the best company.

The inmates of Hell are with Satan who disowns them, feels pleasure at their misery, puts the blame on them for their disbelief and going astray. He addresses them stating that he is well satisfied to see them suffering. He speaks harshly to them, disowning their disbelief. He says to them: ‘God has made you a true promise. I, too, made promises to you, but I did not keep them. Yet I had no power at all over you, except that I called you and you responded to me. Hence, do not now blame me, but blame yourselves. It is not for me to respond to your cries, nor for you to respond to mine. I have already disclaimed your associating me with God. Indeed, for all wrongdoers there is painful suffering in store’. (14: 22)

In Hell they have the company of the worst of all people, such as Pharaoh and his hosts, tyrants and opponents of prophets and advocates of the divine faith. They all share the same suffering and have the same wretched destiny.



Needless to say, the gulf is great between being close to God and in company with His prophets and the best of His servants on the one hand and being in company with Satan and the worst offenders against God and His messengers.





Nine: Fair Punishment by a Merciful Lord



The very stern punishment, great suffering and wretched end the people of Hell endure, which God paints in horrific terms, is His punishment of only those who deserve it. These are the people who rejected the possibility of ever standing before God, indulged in their sinful deeds, persisted in their guilt and never repented of or stopped their offences. When they are resurrected, they will stand before Him burdened with their sins, disbelief and wicked behaviour. They will inevitably face the punishment they were warned against.

God does not seek any revenge against any of His creation. However, He punishes those who do not heed His warnings, those who do not take the chance to repent of their sins, which remains available until the last moments of their lives. Such people never seek God's forgiveness for their misdeeds. Hence, they are questioned in the Hereafter: 'Have We not given you lives long enough for anyone who would be warned to take warning? And a warner had come to you'. (35: 37) Whatever they may suffer in Hell has been foretold to them. They were warned against incurring it. Therefore, when a person behaves arrogantly and commits offences and sins, he acts in defiance of all this, despite the clarity of the warnings and the fact that God's will is always done. God has created man with sound

nature that leans towards following the truth and steering away from sin. However, God further adds sending His messengers and giving them His revelations to show the way to the truth. He further gave repeated warnings and threats against going astray. He has laid down the ultimate punishment and great suffering incurred by whoever persists in going astray. Therefore, whoever chooses to follow the wrong way, despite knowing all this is an absolutely careless person who goes deep into error and chooses falsehood in preference to truth. He gravely wrongs himself, but God does not wrong him. He says: 'It is not God who does them wrong; they wrong themselves'. (3: 117)

The Prophet (peace be upon him) told us that God will take out of the Fire everyone who has an atom's weight of faith in his heart. He will go further and take out of it everyone whose heart has the tiniest shred of faith. This means that those who stay in the Fire are those who go to the farthest end in error, guilt and disbelief. They have nothing whatsoever of faith or goodness in their hearts. Needless to say, anyone who sinks that low deserves a very severe punishment.

Therefore, we should not entertain any doubt that leads us to question whether those who are punished deserve their punishment. God has the ultimate argument and the perfect knowledge of everything. He is absolutely fair to everyone. His mercy encompasses everything, and it runs ahead of His wrath. He is most merciful to His creation and the fairest of judges. His punishment will engulf only those whose sins have greatly accumulated. He says: 'Indeed, those who earn evil and become engulfed by their sin are destined for the Fire where they will abide'. (2: 81)

We should know that when we show mercy to someone, we are using our portion of the one percent share of God's mercy which God has placed as available to all His creation

to use, retaining for Himself the rest of His mercy, which He will use on the Day of Judgement. So, how small is our mercy compared with God's mercy? The Prophet (peace be upon him) says: 'God divided mercy into one hundred parts. He retained ninety-nine parts and placed one single part on earth. It is through this single part that creatures are merciful to one another, to the extent that a mare may lift her hoof so that she does not kick her foal'.⁽¹⁾

The Prophet (peace be upon him) was with some of his companions when they saw a woman searching for her suckling baby. She looked around, totally absorbed, then she found the baby, picked it up and gave it her breast. She held on to the baby as though it was about to be wrenched away. It was a very emotional scene. The Prophet asked his companions: 'Can you imagine this woman casting her baby into the fire?' They were amazed at his question and said: 'By God, no, if she can ever avoid that'. The Prophet said: 'God is more compassionate to His servants than this woman is to her child'.⁽²⁾ How could her compassion compare to God's limitless mercy?

We must not judge God by our own reasoning. He has given us our minds to judge ourselves and our decisions, not to judge Him. He says: 'Is not God the most just of judges?' (95: 8) We understand and know justice because God has made it known to us and commanded us to be fair and just. We feel mercy because God has gifted it to us and rewards us for using it. He says: 'God enjoins justice and kindness to all'. (16: 90) His rule is based on perfect justice, total mercy and perfect wisdom, for He is the One who is most wise and who knows all.

(1) Related by al-Bukhari, 6,000; Muslim, 2,752.

(2) Related by al-Bukhari, 5,999; Muslim, 2,754.



To sum up:

- Just as we do not have a choice about being in this life, we have no choice as to our accountability on the Day of Judgement, or about the type of punishment we incur for every sin. We will only be punished for doing what God has warned us of, and His punishment will only be in the way He has told us.

- God has informed us of the nature of His punishment so that we will be clear as to what we will be facing. Therefore, no one can claim not to know that God's punishment is very severe. No one will be able to say that had they known the punishment they would be facing, they would not have disbelieved or disobeyed.

- The correct question to ask is: why do we permit ourselves to break the law God has given us and which we know very well and know the punishment we incur for so doing. God has given us ample opportunity in this life, and given us complete freedom of choice, with no compulsion whatsoever. He has also given us the opportunity to mend our ways and choose the right course at every moment during our lives on earth.

- Why do we insist on saying that the punishment is too harsh, but we do not blame ourselves for wilfully choosing the wrong course, making ourselves liable to God's punishment, despite the fact that He has given us proper warnings of it?





Hell Punishment in Brief



- God mentions the types of punishment meted out to offenders. One of the worst types is His reproach and reminders of their disbelief and sinful actions. He, thus, reminds them and then gives them the response they deserve: ‘Were not My revelations read out to you, and did you not consider them as lies?’ (23: 105) ‘Away with you into this ignominy! Do not plead with Me.’ (23: 108)

- God mentions the food and drink given to the inhabitants of Hell, which is in itself a punishment added to their suffering. Their food is from the Zaqqūm tree: ‘The fruit of the Zaqqūm tree will be the food of the sinful; like molten lead will it boil in the belly, like the boiling of scalding water’. (44: 43-46) Their drink is boiling fluid: ‘They will be given a drink of scalding water that tears their bowels?’ (47: 15) They will be made to wear clothes made of fire: ‘For the unbelievers garments of fire will be cut out’. (22: 19)

- One of the worst sorrows of the inhabitants of the Fire is that when they are together with their leaders who tempted them to follow the way leading astray, they are involved in bitter dispute with them. ‘They will contend with one another in the Fire: the weak will say to those who were arrogant, “We have been your followers, so can you relieve us of some share of the Fire?” The arrogant will reply: “We are all in it together.

For God has judged between His creatures.” (40: 47-48) That both groups are together will not reduce their sorrow or suffering: ‘It will not be of any benefit to you that you are now to share your suffering’. (43: 39)

- One of the clearest and most effective admonitions is to compare the desires of the inhabitants of Heaven with the wishes of the inhabitants of Hell. The desires of the former are given to them with pleasures and immediately when they feel the desire. By contrast, the inhabitants of Hell wish for what they used to arrogantly reject during their lives on earth. They wish to return to life on earth so that they now can believe. If they make a request, their utmost appeal is that they will be made to die. They say to the angel in charge of Hell: ‘Mālik, if only your Lord would put an end to us!’ (43: 77) Yet when they make such a wish, it is rejected and they are reproached.

- God mentions the horrific suffering in Hell and describes what happens to its dwellers to warn people against following their ways and methods, so that they do not bring themselves into the same conditions. He says: ‘Above them there will be layers of fire, and layers of fire will be beneath them. In this way God puts fear into His servants’ hearts: “My servants! Fear Me!”’ (39: 16) The Qur’an also clearly puts the argument against the people of the Fire. When they are suffering their punishment, God will say to them: ‘Were not My revelations read out to you, and did you not consider them as lies?’ (23: 105) They will find no answer other than humiliating confession: ‘Our Lord! Our misfortune has overwhelmed us, and so we went astray’. (23: 106)

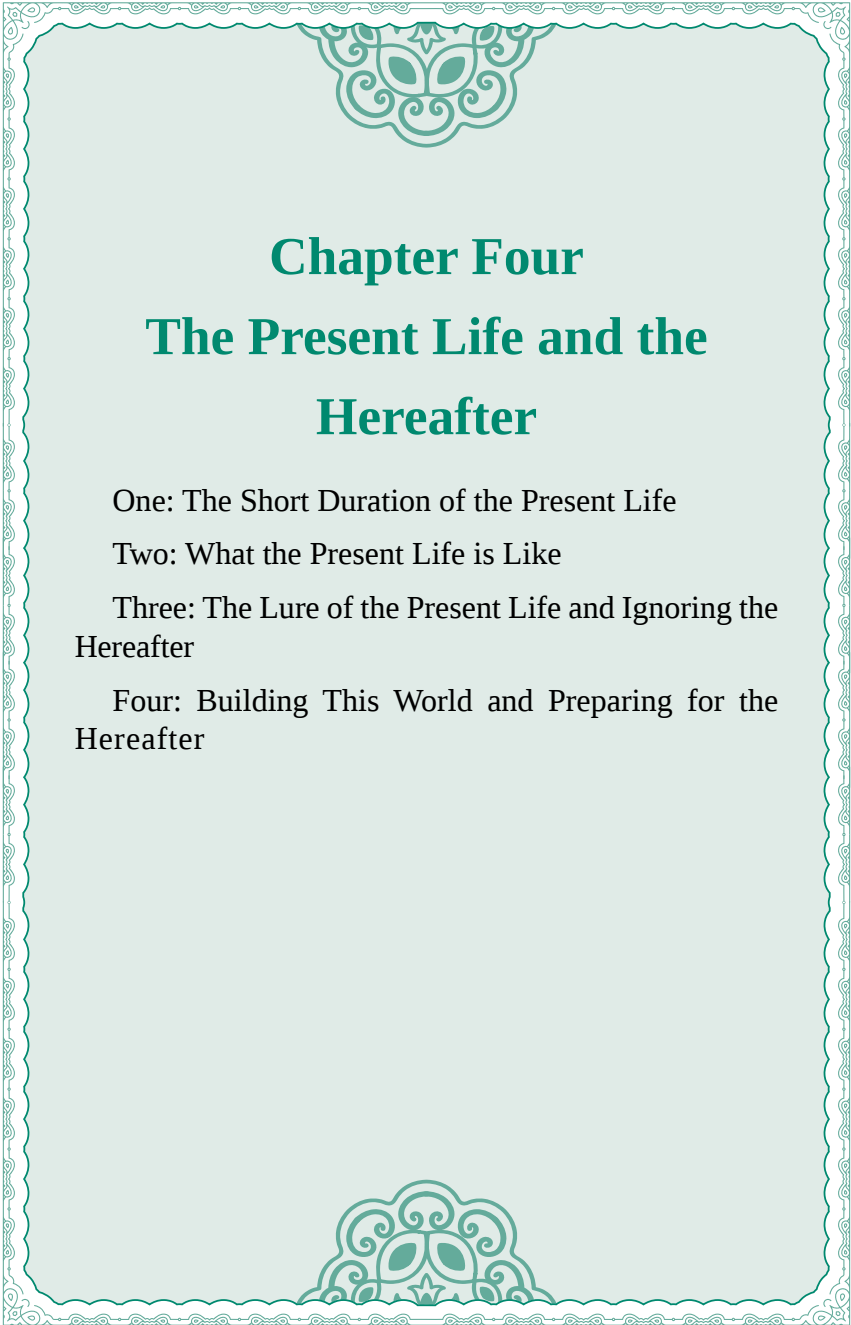
- Qur’anic verses not only describe the severe suffering of the inhabitants of Hell, but they also explain in detail the causes of their ruin. They enumerate their deeds which earned them their depressing final place. All this, the Qur’an mentions as a general warning against following their example

and emulating their deeds. It makes absolutely clear that they are punished because of their offences and misdeeds. It is a fitting requital, considering the nature of their offences and the warnings given to them. God does not wrong anyone in any way. It is people who wrong themselves.

- The gravest sinful actions that send people into the Fire include associating partners with God by worshipping other deities alongside Him, disbelieving God's messengers, and disbelieving in resurrection after death. Therefore, as they are flung into the Fire, the angels reproach them: 'Every time a group is thrown in it, its keepers will ask them, "Did no one come to warn you?" They will reply: "Yes. A warner did indeed come to us, but we did not believe him". We said, "God has revealed nothing. You are in total error"'. (67: 8-9)

- This extremely painful suffering of the inhabitants of Hell, which God describes, only applies to those who incur and deserve such punishment by their own deeds and capital offences. It must be emphasized that God, Mighty and Exalted, does not wrong anyone in any way. He will never punish anyone who does not deserve punishment, and He does not punish anyone more than they deserve. He says: 'Indeed, God does not do the least wrong to mankind, but it is men who wrong themselves'. (10: 44)





Chapter Four

The Present Life and the Hereafter

One: The Short Duration of the Present Life

Two: What the Present Life is Like

Three: The Lure of the Present Life and Ignoring the Hereafter

Four: Building This World and Preparing for the Hereafter



The Present Life and the Hereafter



The Qur'an describes our life in this present world, as well as the stages we go through. It shows that the present life changes quickly and comes to an end. It is merely a limited span. Whatever exists in this world will eventually end up in nothing. In order to make the picture very clear, God gives us examples drawn from what we see as we go through life. He thus presents a scene that moves very quickly. He says: 'Set forth to them a simile about the life of this world: [it is] like the water which We send down from the skies, and which is absorbed by the plants of the earth. In time they turn into dry stubble which the winds blow freely about. It is God alone who has power over all things'. (18: 45)

To make the true nature of the present life clear, God compares it to the permanent and settled life to come, as He says: 'My people! This worldly life is but a brief enjoyment, whereas the life to come is the lasting home'. (40: 39)

The earth is a small planet, and the present life is of short duration, and what it provides of pleasure and enjoyment is meagre. But this does not mean that man should give little attention to it, hate it or try to escape from it. What it means is that man should look at the present life as closely linked to the life to come. He should never ignore the Hereafter, which is a permanent and everlasting life. Therefore, man should

always strive to improve human life in its totality, fulfil his responsibilities throughout life, keeping a keen eye on its final outcome. God mentions both the present life and the life to come in several places in His Book, the Qur'an, and He highlights the following:





One: The Short Duration of the Present Life



Compared to the everlasting life to come, this life, long as it may last, is no more than a short moment, a twinkling. Think of a person who lives one hundred years: how does it compare to what has passed before him of the present life and what will remain of it after him? How does his life compare to the length of time from the moment of his death to the Last Hour? And then, how does all this, put together, compare to the everlasting life to come? When humans find themselves in the life to come, they will look at this present life and recognize its reality. They will see it as a short span lasting one day or a part of a day, or even an hour.

On the Day of Judgement, God will ask the wrongdoers how long they lived on earth, and they will answer Him with certainty, as the Qur'an says: 'And He will ask: "How many years have you spent on earth?" They will answer: "We have spent there a day, or part of a day; but ask those who keep count". He will say: "Brief indeed was your sojourn, if you but knew it"'. (23: 112-114) 'When the Last Hour strikes, the evildoers will swear that they had not tarried on earth longer than an hour. Thus they used to delude themselves.' (30: 55)

This is how their lives on earth, long as they may be, will appear to them then. Their long years and all the pleasures and

enjoyments they had will look to them as no more than a single hour. They will swear to this because this is how they will remember it. Indeed, all the great and most important issues and problems that occur in the present life will be mere trifling play when compared to the future destiny. What is really serious and very important is the everlasting outcome, and whether it will be permanent bliss or continuous suffering: ‘The life of this world is nothing but a sport and a passing delight. Surely the life in the Hereafter is by far the better for those who are God-fearing. Will you not, then, use your reason?’ (6: 32)

Because the present life is a mere trifle in God’s sight, and its duration is very short, He left it available to all mankind, believers and unbelievers. He allows the wicked among them to exploit its resources and obtain thorough knowledge of it, despite their disbelief and wickedness, because all this is a transitory trifling. Real reward is reserved for the life to come, which is everlasting. He preserves it for His devout and righteous servants. He says: ‘Were it not that all people would become one community [of unbelievers], We would have provided those who now disbelieve in the Lord of Grace with roofs of silver for houses, stairways on which to ascend, gates, couches on which to recline, and gold ornaments. Yet all this would have been nothing but the fleeting enjoyment of life in this world. It is the life to come that your Lord reserves for the God-fearing’. (43: 33-35)

All the luxuries enjoyed in this present life will be forgotten with the first blow of punishment in the life to come. All misery and suffering endured in this life will be forgotten with the first breath of the bliss of the Hereafter. The Prophet (peace be upon him) said: ‘The one from among the people of Hell who enjoyed the most luxuriant life in this world is brought forward on the Day of Judgement and then dipped into Hell for a moment. He is then asked: “You, son of Adam, have you ever

seen anything good? Have you ever enjoyed anything?" He will say: "No, by God; none, my Lord". Then one of the people of Heaven who led the most miserable life in this world will be brought forward and entered into Heaven for a moment. He will then be asked: "Have you ever been wretched? Have you ever experienced any hardship?" He will say: "No, by God. My Lord, I never experienced wretchedness, nor did I ever go through any hardship".⁽¹⁾ What a petty thing this life appears when compared with the life to come. How can the transient and minimal luxury of this life be compared to the everlasting luxury and comforts of Heaven? How can the temporary miseries of this life be compared to the severe and successive suffering of the life Hereafter? God says: 'Indeed the suffering in the life to come will be most severe and most enduring'. (20: 127)



(1) Related by Muslim, 2,807.

Two: What the Present Life is Like



God defines the life of this world by drawing a simile that shows how plant life flourishes after rainfall in spring. The earth produces its shoots and acquires its green appearance and splendour. The plants then attain their maximum growth, then they become like dry stubble blown freely about by the winds. The field that was a short while ago full of life becomes dead and barren. Such is the present life: all its adornments, pleasures and desires are trifling enjoyments for a short period of time. It will all come to an end, or we may depart and leave it. We will soon discover that it is no more than some cheap allurements. Our true life is the one that we start after the end of this present life. God says:

This present life may be compared to rain which We send down from the sky, and which is then absorbed by the plants of the earth from which men and animals eat. Then, when the earth has been clad with its fine adornments and well embellished, and its people believe that they have full mastery over it, Our command comes down upon it, by night or by day, and We make it like a field that has been mowed down, as if it did not blossom but yesterday. Thus do We spell out Our revelations to people who think. God calls to the abode of peace, and guides him that wills to a straight path. (10: 24-25)



Three: The Lure of the Present Life and Ignoring the Hereafter



Many people go through this present life as if it is their permanent abode where they spend their entire lives. They are so absorbed by life's affairs to a degree that leaves no room for anything else. Their concerns and discussions do not go beyond what is available in this life. They all seem to be firmly attached to the concerns of this life and nothing beyond it. They do not direct their minds to the One who conducts its affairs and manages it. They never speak about meeting God, which is inevitable, nor about His reward and punishment, which are sure to come. Such people are covered with what the following two verses say: 'So, ignore those who turn away from Our message and care only for the life of this world. Such is the sum of their knowledge. Your Lord knows best who strays from His path, and He knows best who follows right guidance'. (53: 29-30)

It is right to give this life due importance, provided that it is recognized that it leads to what comes afterwards. To give full attention to it and to be oblivious to what comes next is to go far astray.

God describes the condition of those who are only concerned with the life of this world. He says: 'God grants abundant sustenance, or gives it in scant measure, to whomever He wills.



They [the unbelievers] rejoice in the life of this world, even though, compared to the life to come, the life of this world is nought but a fleeting pleasure'. (13: 26)





Four: Building This World and Preparing for the Hereafter



It is certainly God who created the earth, placed its resources in it, measured out its varied provisions and made it suitable to sustain human life. Therefore, building life and making use of all the resources God has placed for His servants fulfils what He wants and has enabled them to do. He, therefore, points out to them the blessings He has given them, requiring them to make good use of them. He says: ‘It is He who created for you all that is on earth’. (2: 29) ‘Are you not aware that God has made subservient to you all that is in the heavens and the earth, and has lavished upon you His blessings, outward and inward?’ (31: 20) ‘Say, “Who is there to forbid the beauty which God has produced for His servants, and the wholesome means of sustenance?” Say, “They are [lawful] in the life of this world, to all who believe – to be theirs alone on the Day of Resurrection”. Thus do We make Our revelations clear to people of knowledge’. (7: 32)

It is incumbent upon us to believe that this present life is merely a passage, not a permanent abode; and that returning to God is inevitable. Therefore, it must be prepared for. All this does not mean that we should turn our backs on this life, take none of its enjoyments, or make no effort to build it. To do these is to go against the guidance provided in the Qur’an

and ignore the practice of God's Messenger (peace be upon him). Islam teaches us that the upper hand is better than the lower hand, and that a strong believer is better than a weak one. The standard set in the Qur'an for us is: 'Seek instead, by means of what God has granted you, the good of the life to come, without forgetting your rightful share in this world; and do good just as God has done good to you'. (28: 77)





The Present and the Future Lives in Brief



- Qur’anic verses remind us that the present life is short and that it is soon to end. All it offers is little enjoyments that are sure to pass. Whatever a person owns in this life is temporary: either it is transferred to someone else, or its owner leaves it behind. God says: ‘Say, “Brief is the enjoyment of this world, whereas the life to come is the best for all who are God-fearing. None of you will be wronged by as much as a hair’s breadth”’. (4: 77)

- God gives an example of this present life which we all see and know, so that we may appreciate the reality of this life and what it offers of good things and adornments. He shows it like a plain which receives rainfall and its plants shoot forth, then blossom and grow. Its plants subsequently dry out and become like stubble. Likewise, this present life ends in death. This scene is often repeated in human life and people are well aware of it. It is the same with this life and its adornments.

- Some individuals and communities concern themselves only with this life, caring nothing for what comes after it. They devote all their powers and talents to possess and enjoy its resources, giving no thanks to God, its Creator. They do not offer Him His due respect. God makes clear that He grants them of the goods of this world according to their efforts,

denying them nothing. However, they have no share in the life to come, because they do not work for it or pay attention to it. He says: 'As for those who desire only the life of this world and its bounties, We will fully repay them in this life for all they do, and they will suffer no diminution of their just dues. It is they who, in the life to come, will have nothing but the Fire. In vain will be all that they have done in this world, and worthless will be all their actions'. (11: 15-16)

Whatever is mentioned in the Qur'an about the shortness of the present life and the small measures and transitory nature of its enjoyments serves to warn us against being allured by it, ignoring the life to come. It is not meant to disdain the good things it offers, or to deny ourselves the benefit of its resources. God created all these for our benefit. He says: 'It is He who created for you all that is on earth'. (2: 29) Islam does not encourage denying ourselves the good things of this life, or making things hard for oneself. God says: 'Believers, do not forbid yourselves the good things God has made lawful to you. Do not exceed the bounds; God does not love those who exceed the bounds'. (5: 87)

- Our modern world does not care about the life to come, making no preparations for its hard reckoning. It is busy with this earth, keen to benefit by its treasures, oblivious or turning its back on the life to come. Yet, all God's messengers confirmed that this present life is only like a brief introduction to a long book. They showed that while time dictates life on earth, all will proceed to a different life in which time is non-existent. It is a permanent, unending life. People should prepare themselves for it by purifying themselves and doing good deeds. This is the only way to prepare for such eternal life: 'Brief is the enjoyment of this world, whereas the life to come is the best for all who are God-fearing. None of you will be wronged by as much as a hair's breadth'. (4: 77)

• That people turn their minds away from the life to come and do not speak about it is due to the fact that they do not have much faith in it. Their hearts and minds are not really bothered about it. For this reason, the Qur'an repeatedly reminds us of it. Most surahs of the Qur'an include reminders of it, describe it and enjoin people to prepare for it. Whenever this life is mentioned, the life to come is also mentioned, but the Hereafter is frequently mentioned alone, without reference to the present life

The Qur'an also links a Muslim's behaviour and worship to faith which stresses the link between the two lives, making the life to come the continuity of this present life. God says: 'Seek, then, all sustenance from God, and worship Him alone and be grateful to Him. Indeed, to Him you will return'. (29: 17)





Conclusion



We have gone on a long journey, going to the eternal life that follows this transitory life. We have gone from this world to the next, from death to resurrection. We have surveyed the stages of the Day of Judgement to speak of Heaven which is ‘a goodly abode and a high station’, and Hell which is ‘an evil abode and a terrible station’. In conclusion, we can now make the following observations:

1. The life to come will be present in our minds when we know that these are two lives: the present life and the life to come, while death is like a door standing between them. The way to secure all the comforts and bliss of the life to come starts in this life, as God states: ‘For those who do good in this world, good reward [is assured]; but far better is their abode in the Hereafter. Blessed is the dwelling place of the God-fearing’. (16: 30)

When people believe in the life to come, they will be ready to work and compete for it. They hasten to achieve that bliss through righteousness and good deeds. Belief in the life to come is not a substitute for this life; it is the light and perfection of the present life. Qur’anic reminders of the life to come are often given in the context of spending, sacrifice and good deeds.

Belief in the Last Day gives feelings of certainty, comfort, happiness and reassurance. A believer is not crushed by any calamity, nor does he become arrogant when he enjoys God's favours. Believers go through this life looking forward to a great expanse of the life to come. They know that God will compensate them for whatever they miss out on in this world, if they believe and remain Godfearing. A person who looks at his life in this world from the viewpoint of the broadness of the Hereafter is not the same as one who looks at this life placing before his eyes a thick curtain, seeing nothing of the life to come. The latter live like prisoners confined to dark cellars.

The entire system of the present life is based on the fact that it is a temporary field of trial, to be followed by the Day of Judgement when accountability and reckoning of deeds done in this life are conducted. The result of such accountability determines one's destiny of either eternal bliss or permanent misery.

The best incentive to patiently persevere through whatever this life brings of injustice, evil, calamity and oppression is to focus one's sight on the life to come. The best way to resist the temptations of this life is to remember that they are temporary, while the bliss of the life to come is permanent. Remembrance of the severe suffering in the life to come is the best help to overcome tempting desires and refrain from what is forbidden. Longing to meet God and remembering heavenly bliss is the best incentive to do what is good.

2. The life to come and its details are often mentioned in the Qur'an, with much emphasis and variation. Hardly any surah is without a reference to it. Had it not been for the Qur'an we might well have forgotten the life to come. To forget it is to lose ourselves and lose both our lives. Mu'adh ibn Jabal said: 'You should know that you cannot live without having your share of this life, but you are in a greater need of your share of the life to

come. Start with your share of the life to come, because it will ensure your share in this life for you'.⁽¹⁾ This shows the great importance of often remembering the life to come and keeping it always present before us. It is amazing how present it was in the lives of the Prophet and his companions. It was repeatedly mentioned, in all situations. Once the Prophet was eating with some of his companions when he was handed a lamb's shoulder, which he normally liked. 'He took a bite and said: "I shall be the master of mankind on the Day of Judgement". He then took another bite and said: "I shall be the master of mankind on the Day of Judgement". When he saw that his companions did not ask him about this, he said: "Should you not ask me how?" They said: "How will it be, Messenger of God?" He said that God will gather mankind, past and future generations, in one plain. They will all hear a caller, and eyesight will get through them...'⁽²⁾ The Prophet proceeds to relate how people request several prophets to intercede with God for them. This hadith with all the details it gives about the Day of Judgement was mentioned during a dinner.

Before silk was forbidden for men, the Prophet was sent a suit made of silk as a gift. He put it on, and his companions touched it admiring its softness. The Prophet said: 'By Him who holds my soul in His hand, the handkerchiefs Sa'd ibn Mu'adh has in Heaven are much better than this'.⁽³⁾ Thus, the Prophet kept helping his companions to look up to the life to come, so that the comforts and luxuries of this world did not cause them to forget it.

(1) Related by al-Bayhaqī in *Shu'ab al-Īmān*, 10,147. Also, al-Dhahabī, *Siyar A'ālam al-Nubalā'*, Vol. 1, p. 455.

(2) Related by al-Bukhari, 3,340; Muslim, 194. This is a long hadith speaking of the Prophet's intercession on the Day of Judgement. A long portion of it is quoted in Chapter One above.

(3) Related by al-Bukhari, 2,615; Muslim, 2,469.

3. The Qur'an repeatedly mentions the disbelievers' denial of the life to come. It provides a variety of evidence confirming resurrection and the Hereafter. The evidence always addresses our minds, awakens our consciousness and stops the thoughts of denial of the true promise of a second life. Nevertheless, there are people who deny the life to come, arrogantly suppressing the incentive to believe in it. This is perhaps to avoid having to abide by the requirements of faith and to shirk responsibility for one's deeds. They want to indulge in the pleasures offered in this life, feeling that there will be no accountability.

Some wise people used to say to those who denied the life to come: if what you say is true, both you and we are safe; but if what we say is true, we are safe but you are ruined. This argument is merely given to let those people think of their outcome. Belief in the Hereafter is an act of profound faith, based on acknowledging God's greatness and majesty, fearing Him and hoping for His favour. Belief in God cannot be treated as the safe option in an adventure undertaken for profit. God describes the believers as 'those who are certain of the life to come'. (2: 4)

4. The Qur'an describes people's very hard situation on the Day of Judgement and the severe suffering in the Fire, as well as the details of the hardship of resurrection and the horrors of the Fire. However, all these descriptions are accompanied by the very happy news given to every believer in God who is certain of meeting Him, feeling the very awesome situation of being present before God. All the hardships and suffering are mentioned as a punishment meted out to those who live their lives on earth denying God and the meeting with Him. Hence, when they are bewildered as they are resurrected, they will be told: 'This is, then, the Day of Resurrection, but you did not know it'. (30: 56) When they are turned around in the Fire, they will be told: 'Taste this suffering through fire which

you always thought to be a lie'. (32: 20) The hardships of the Day of Judgement and the suffering in the Fire are always mentioned in conjunction with disbelief in God, denial of the forthcoming meeting with Him, and turning a blind eye to His signs and revelations. Whoever believes in God, certain of meeting Him and prepares for this by doing good deeds is safe from such horrors.

A believer should be happy with his faith, feeling God's great favour as He guided him or her to faith. Believers should be happy with the blessing of their certainty, as this gives them safety on the fearsome Day of Judgement. 'Abdullāh ibn Mas'ūd narrated: 'When this verse was revealed: "Those who believe and do not taint their faith with wrongdoing are the ones who will feel secure, as they follow the right path", (6:82) the Prophet's companions felt that it was tough. They thought: "Who of us does not wrong himself?" The Prophet said: "It is not as you think. It is like Luqmān said to his son: 'Do not associate any partners with God; for, to associate partners with Him is indeed a great wrong'.'"⁽¹⁾ (31:13)

5. Dear reader, this book is in your hand to serve as a reminder and an admonition. It is not an academic thesis following a rigid pattern nor does it try to present something new. It repeats ideas and concepts as they fit new points. It is full of Qur'anic verses that describe the Day of Judgement and the scenes of the life to come. No one is able to describe the life to come as the One who has prepared and promised it.

I have benefited by other authors' writings and books, but the most important of these are Sayyid Qutb's *Mashāhid al-Qiyāmah fī al-Qur'an* [i.e. Scenes of the Day of Judgement in the Qur'an], and *In the Shade of the Qur'an*, and Shaykh Muhammad al-Ghazālī's *al-Maḥāwir al-Khamsah fī al-Qur'an*

(1) Related by Muslim, 124.

[i.e. the Five Main Themes in the Qur'an]. May God bless their souls. They speak of the life to come as though they were living there and then came to our world to describe it for us. I have not referred to what I quoted from them because it is plenty, and I have often rephrased it to suit my discussion.

I pray to God to enlighten our insight, keep our hearts alert and guide us along the way to peace and safety.

Peace be to you all, along with God's mercy and blessings.

Abd al-Wahhab al-Turairi





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The belief in the Day of Judgement and life after death is one of the most essential beliefs in Islamic faith. In our present world, death is a certainty accepted by everyone. This book explains that death is not the final end of human life, as we all will be resurrected for a second life.

The author highlights the importance of always remembering the certainty of death and preparing for what comes after it. No matter how and where we depart our present life, we will be resurrected and gathered together on the Day of Judgement. Everyone will be given a record of whatever they did in this first life. Nothing is left out. Judgement will be most fair, based on our deeds. No one will suffer any injustice, because we are all judged by God, the Ever Merciful. When judgement has been given, mankind will be divided into those who go to Heaven and those who go to Hell. The book describes the conditions enjoyed by the people of Heaven and the suffering in Hell.

The book explains that belief in the future life influences our conduct in our present life. It is what ensures that this life is set on the right footing, upholding the right faith and implementing the most important principles and values. It gives a great meaning and a different colour to human life on earth.