

## 8. To Prepare for the Permanent Abode (Afterlife)

- Life of This World, the Hereafter, and Death
- About Paradise

### [Life of This World, the Hereafter, and Death](#)

#### [Introduction](#)

The Islamic concept of life (of this world) refers to a temporary state of being, a period of test and trial. It is not meant for indulging in luxuries and excesses. Rather, it is for preparing for an eternal life in the Hereafter. Death is the beginning of the next phase of life, the everlasting life, “the real life.” There are detailed accounts of the life in the Hereafter recorded in the Qur’an and in the sermons of Prophet Muhammad (s). In the following pages, Imam Ali (p) eloquently expounds upon these concepts as a warning and guidance to humanity. His deep knowledge and understanding of the Qur’an and the teachings of the Prophet are evident here. His understanding of God’s workings is an indicator of his high level of spiritual insight.

#### [Transient Nature of This World](#)

Surely this world will depart, and the next world will take its place. “Today” is the day of preparation, while “tomorrow” will be the day of the race (to the destination). Paradise is the place of bliss, whereas Hell is the place of doom. Is there anyone to repent for his sins before his death? Is there anyone to perform virtuous acts (atonement) before the Day of trial?

You entertain many hopes, but beware; death is not far behind you. Whoever acts righteously will reap the benefits, and the approaching death will not bring harm to him/her. However, whoever fails to act righteously before the approach of death, he will be in a loss, and his/her death will bring harm. Beware;

act (prudently) during a period of ease, just as you would act during a period of difficulty. Beware; surely I have not seen one who desires Paradise, or one who dreads Hell to be in sleep (of heedlessness). Beware; he whom right (goodness) does not benefit must suffer the harm of the wrong (evil), and he whom guidance does not keep steady (on the right path) will be the victim of misguidance and destruction.

Beware; you have been destined to journey relentlessly (to meet your Lord), and you have been advised to collect provision for that. Surely the most frightening thing is to pursue (vain) desires and to have inflated hopes. Gather Provision from the world that you will need tomorrow (on the Day of Judgment).

**(Sermon 28)**

Beware! An action that is performed only for earning benefit in this world will not earn benefit in the Hereafter. People are tested in this world through (loss and) calamities. The worldly pleasures here will be terminated (by death), and people will be asked about the pleasures. Whatever (good deeds) they have performed, they will find them in the next world.

**(Sermon 62)**

O creatures of God! In this world, you are like guests with a limited duration of stay. Many people are wasting (their time and efforts) and are putting themselves in harm's way. You belong to a period where virtue is on the wane, evil is on the rise, and Satan is doubling his effort to ruin the people.

Cast your glance over people wherever you like; you will see either a poor individual suffering from poverty, or a rich person heedless of God (His presence) while enjoying His bounties. You will see a miser increasing his wealth by trampling on his obligations to God, or an unruly person closing his ears to good counsel. Where are your good people?

### **Admonishing a Certain Group of People**

“Where are your virtuous people? Where are your high-spirited and generous men? Where are those of you who avoid deceit in their business and remain pure in their behavior? Have they not all departed from this ignoble, transitory, and troublesome world? God says this in the Scripture:

***“Verily we are God’s (belong to God) and verily unto Him shall we return” (Qur’an 2: 156)***

**(Sermon 12)**

I advise you, O creatures of God, that you be God-conscious, and I warn you about this world, which is a house from which departure is inevitable.

O creatures of God, you should know now that you have to perform (good) acts, because (at present) you have freedom of speech, and your bodies are healthy (and strong). Consider this: death is inevitable.

**(Sermon 195)**

## Lowliness of this World

The destruction of this world is preordained, and its inhabitants are destined to depart from it. It is sweet and attractive. It hastens towards its seeker and tends to be attractive to their hearts. So, do not seek here more than what is reasonable; depart from this world with the best provision (for the Hereafter).

**(Sermon 45)**

## About the Fall and Destruction of this World

O creatures of God, be prepared to leave this world, for your abode is your grave. Beware lest your heart's desires overpower you. Do not consider your stay in this world to be an extended one. Turn to God, seek His nearness, and strive for an honorable position with Him. Pray for the forgiveness of your sins, as recorded by the Angels.

O creatures of God, purchase the everlasting joy (of the Hereafter) by foregoing transitory pleasures of this world. You are being driven towards death, which is hovering over you. Certainly God has not created you without purpose. Every moment that is passing by is shortening your life. Gather provision from this world today which you will need tomorrow (in the afterlife).

Therefore, we ask God, the Glorified, that He does not allow us to be seduced by bounties of this world, that nothing will prevent us from His obedience (and submission), and that shame and grief do not befall us after death.

**(Sermon 63)**

## About the World and Worldly People

In what way shall I describe the (life of the) world? Its beginning is grief and its end is destruction. The lawful actions performed here have to be accounted for, while for the forbidden actions, there is punishment (in the Hereafter, if not forgiven). Whoever is rich here encounters mischief and whoever is poor suffers from grief. He who hankers after it (the World) does not get it, and the one who stays away from it, it advances towards him. If one sees through it, it would bestow him insight, but if one has his eye set on it, then it blinds him.

**(Sermon 81)**

I warn you of this world, for it has decorated itself with deceptions. God regards it lowly. In it, lawful with unlawful are mixed, good with evil, life with death, and its sweetness with its bitterness. Its habitations would ultimately face desolation. What good is a house that is destined for destruction?

Ask God for the fulfillment of what He has made obligatory on you. The remembrance of death has disappeared from your hearts, while false hopes have beguiled you. Therefore, this world has mastered you more than the next world. Although you are brethren in the religion of God, you do not share the burdens of each other, nor do you advise each other, nor do you spend your wealth to help, nor do you

love each other.

What is your condition? You feel satisfied with what you have secured from this world, while you are oblivious of your loss in the next world. If you lose a little from this world, it grieves you much and you show lack of patience over what is taken away, as though this is your permanent abode. You have fallen in love with this world and have become heedless of the next world.

**(Sermon 112)**

### Various Types of People in the World and about the World's Lowliness

O people! We live in such a time, wherein the virtuous are regarded as base and the oppressor is allowed to commit excesses. We do not make use of what we know and do not discover what we do not know. We do not fear calamity until it befalls us.

There is a person who is prevented from making mischief because of his low position in society and lack of resources. He calls it contentment and renunciation, although he has never had any connection with these (noble) qualities.

Then there is the one who has drawn his sword, openly commits mischief, and has devoted himself to securing wealth, power, and position. He has allowed his faith to perish. How bad is the transaction that you choose (the enjoyment of) this world in exchange for what God has for you (in the Hereafter)!

There are some people to whom the thought of their return (to God) makes them humble and the fear of the Day of resurrection moves them to tears. Some of them are frightened and subdued, some are quiet and restrained in their speech, and some are praying sincerely. They (strive to) preach (goodness), but they are harassed (by those in power). Some are unjustly killed, and a few (manage to) survive.

The (value of the) world in your eyes should be “less than the bark of the acacia plant”<sup>1</sup> (i.e., worthless). Take a lesson from those who went ahead of you (departed from this world).

**(Sermon 32)**

### Reason for Our Creation

O creatures of God, be God-conscious; be aware of the reason that He has created you. Make yourself deserving of (bounties) that God has promised you by putting Trust in God, and by fearing the Day of Judgment.

**(Sermon 82)**

In answer to a question, Imam Ali said this: “The Universe without plan, purpose, and program is the idea of infidels and the pagans; sorry will be their plight in the leaping fires of Hell.” Hearing this, the man asked Imam Ali, “Then what kind of destiny was it that we had?” Imam Ali replied: “It was an order of God to do it like the order He has given in His Holy Book: You are destined by God to worship none but

Him,<sup>2</sup> and here ‘destined’ means ‘ordered.’ It does not mean physical compulsion”

**(A Saying)**

### **Advice on Abstinence (from Indulging in Luxuries) and about the Changing Times**

We praise God for what has already passed and seek His succor in our affairs for what is yet to come, and we beseech Him to safeguard our faith, just as we beseech Him to safeguard our bodies.

O creatures of God! I advise you to keep away from (luxuries of) this world, which you will (shortly) have to leave, even though you may not be ready for it.

Do not hanker after worldly honor and pride, and do not feel elated over its adornments and bounties, nor wail over its losses and misfortunes, because its honor and pride will end, while its beauty and bounty will perish. Everything in it will come to an end, and every living being in it is (destined) to die. Is there not for you a warning in the relics of your predecessors? Do you not see that your predecessors do not come back?

**(Sermon 98)**

O people! Look at those who abstain and turn away from the worldly desires. By God, it would shortly cause grief to the happy and the (ones who consider themselves) safe. The one who goes away from it never returns. That which is to happen, (the time of death) is not known, nor can it be anticipated. The joys (of this world) are mixed with grief.

May God shower His Mercy on him who ponders (over the affairs), takes lesson from it, and thereby achieves enlightenment. Whatever exists in this world will (eventually) become nonexistent, while whatever is to be in the next world already exists.

**(Sermon 102)**

### **Cautioning Against the World's Deceptions**

I caution you about this world, for it is sweet and attractive, surrounded by lusts and sought for its immediate enjoyments. It excites wonder, is ornamented with (false) hopes, and is decorated with deceptions. Its rejoicing does not last for long, and its afflictions cannot be avoided. It is deceitful, changing, perishable, exhaustible, and destructive. About the one who achieves the (worldly) desires and feels happy with it, God, the Glorified, says (in the Qur'an):

***“Like the water which We send down from heaven, and the herbage of the earth mingleth with it, then it becometh dry stubble which the winds scatter; for God, over all things, hath power.”***

**(Qur'an Chapter 18:45)**

No person derives pleasure from this world without experiencing sadness afterwards, and no one enjoys its comforts without encountering hardships later on. In the morning, it supports an individual, but in the

evening, it does not recognize him. If one side of it is sweet and pleasant, then the other side is bitter and distressing.

No one secures enjoyment from its freshness, but (subsequently) has to face hardship from its calamities. No one would pass the evening in safety, but that the morning would bring fear. It is filled with deception, and everything on it will perish. The best provision therein is God-consciousness. How many people relied on this world, but it caused them distress; and (how many) felt peaceful in it, but it let them down; how many achieved prestige in it, but it brought them low, and how many felt proud of it, but they fell in disgrace?

Its authority is ever changing and its sweetness turns bitter. The healthy in it are liable to disease, the strong in it are (liable to be) defeated, and the rich are (liable to be) afflicted with misfortune. Are you not (residing) in the houses of those who went before you? How they devoted themselves to the world and were attracted by it! Then they left (empty-handed) without any provision for the next world.

You should know that (eventually) you have to depart from this world. Therefore, while in it, take lessons from those who had proclaimed:

***“Who is more powerful than we (the boastful)?” (Qur’an 41: 15).***

However, they were carried to their abodes in their graves.

**(Sermon 119)**

### **Beware of the Trap**

Certainly, this world’s appearance is attractive and its inside is destructive. It is full of deceptions and mirages. When one begins to like it and feels comfortable, it puts down its foot and catches (its victim) in its trap.

**(Sermon 82)**

### **About How This World Treats Those Who are Attached to It**

Know that this world which you have started to covet, in which you are interested, which sometimes enrages you and sometimes pleases you, it is not your (permanent) abode. Turn your hearts away from this world and do not grieve over what you have been deprived in it.

Know that the loss of anything of this world will not harm you if you have safeguarded the principles of your religion. Know also that after the loss of your religion, nothing of this world will benefit you. May God guide our hearts to what is right, and may He grant us endurance.

**(Sermon 172)**

## About Collecting Provision for the Next World

O people, certainly this world is (like) a passage, whereas the next world is a place of permanent abode. So, from the passage, take (all you can for the permanent abode), because you have been created for the next world. When a man dies, people ask, “What (property) has he?” while the angels ask, “What (good actions) has he sent forward?” May God bless you, send in advance something (for the next world); it will be credited to you, and the (material possessions) you leave behind will be a liability for you (on the Day of Judgment).

**(Sermon 202)**

## Death and Resurrection

The people are marching towards their death. God would then bring them out (on the resurrection day) from their graves. They will respond to His command and hasten towards the assigned places, in groups. They will be speechless, standing in rows, and within God’s sight.

They will be in a state of helplessness, submission, and humility. Their cleverness will disappear, their hearts will sink, their throats will choke, they will be overcome with fear, and their ears will resound with the thundering voice of the announcer, calling them towards the (seat of) judgment to receive recompense for good deeds, or to receive punishment.

**(Sermon 82)**

## Spiritual Aspects of Death and Preparation for the Day of Judgment

Are the people who are in youth now waiting for (inevitable) old age to arrive? Are those currently enjoying good health waiting for (unexpected) ailments to afflict? Are those who are alive anticipating the encounter with death? When the hour of death would be close, it will be the time to look to relatives and friends for help (and support). Could then the near ones stop (or reverse) death, or would the mourning be of any good? All the dead will end up in the grave. Then, neither can good acts be added to nor can sins be atoned by repentance. Are you not sons, fathers, brothers, and relations of the dead? Are you not to follow them in the same manner? However, hearts are still not moved (to take lessons), being heedless of guidance and moving in the wrong direction, as though the right thing to do is to amass worldly gains.

Know that (on the Day of Judgment) you have to pass over the pathway (Bridge of siraat)<sup>3</sup> where steps waver, feet slip away, and there are fears and dangers at every step. O creatures of God, be God-conscious, like the fearing of a wise man whom the thought (of the next world) has turned away from other (lesser) matters, fear (of reckoning) has afflicted his body with anxiety and pain, abstention has curbed his worldly desires, and remembrance of God is ever on his tongue. He avoids crooked ways in favor of clear ones. He follows the shortest route to secure his purpose, wishfulness does not distort his thinking, and ambiguities do not blind his eyes.

He enjoys restful sleep and passes his day content because of the (anticipation of) the good tidings and the pleasures (in the Hereafter). He passes the pathway of this world in a praiseworthy manner. He reaches the next world with virtues. He hastens (towards virtue) out of fear (of falling in vices). He devotes himself in seeking (eternal) benefit and shuns evil. He keeps the future in his view. Certainly Paradise is a reward and an achievement, while Hell is (a place of) punishment and suffering. God is the Reckoner, and the Helper, and the Qur'an is the best argument and a confronter (of those who disobey).  
(Sermon 82)

### [The Lesson to Learn from Those Who Have Passed Away](#)

O creatures of God! Where are those who were allowed (long) ages and enjoyed the bounties? They were given time and they wasted it in vain (pursuits); they were bestowed with health, but they forgot (their duty). They were allowed a long period (of life), they were warned of punishment and were promised great rewards. Therefore, you should avoid sins that lead to destruction and vices that prompt the wrath (of God).

O people, O possessors of eyes, ears, health, and wealth; is there any place of refuge, any shelter in which to find safety, any safe haven, or any opportunity to escape (death), or to return back (to this world)? God asks the deniers in the Qur'an this:

***“He brings out the living from the dead, and the dead from the living. That is God! How are you then turned away deluded?” (Qur'an 6:95).***

(O people) what has deceived you? Certainly, your share from this earth is just a piece of land, the size of your grave; you will lie there covered with dust. The present (time) is an opportune moment to act (righteously).

O creatures of God, since you are enjoying leisure and freedom, now is the time to seek guidance. You are free to assemble and have freedom of action, so use the opportunity to seek forgiveness before you are overtaken by hard times, distresses, fear, infirmity, or death.

O creatures of God! Derive benefit from the preaching and admonitions. Your march is towards the place where everyone has to go, namely, your grave. The Qur'an says:

***“With every person there is a driver and a witness”<sup>4</sup> (Qur'an 50:21).***

The driver drives him towards the day of resurrection, while the witness furnishes evidence about his deeds.

(Sermon 82)

They were ignoring it (death), but it struck, causing their separation from this world. They reached their destination (in the next world) as they were promised, and their fate is unknown to their kinsfolk.

Death stands between him/her and the people; He (the soul) is able to see and able to hear. He (the soul) then ponders over how he wasted his life and in what (activities) he passed his time. He recalls the wealth he collected, (if he) was blinded with greed in seeking it, and whether he acquired it by fair or unfair means. Now the consequences of amassing wealth have overtaken him. He has to leave his wealth behind for the next of kin. They would enjoy his wealth (oblivious of his suffering).

(What he bequeaths) would be a bonanza for the recipients, but it will be a burden (of accountability) on his back, and he will not be able to escape the accountability. He will thereupon bite his fingertips out of shame (and remorse) when his deeds will be shown to him. He will regret what he coveted during his life and will wish that someone other than him/her had owned that wealth.

**(Sermon 108)**

We praise God for whatever He takes away from us (or denies) and whatever He grants us; whatever He inflicts upon us, or with whatever He tries us. He is (fully) aware of all that is hidden, and He sees all that is concealed. He knows all that the hearts and the eyes hide.

We testify that there is no god except He, that Muhammad (s) is His chosen (messenger), and he was sent by Him (as guidance to humanity).

By God, certainly, death is a reality. You have seen those who lived before you; they amassed wealth, and then death overtook them; it took them out of the safety of their homes.

Did you not witness those who were busy in achieving their desires? They built big and strong buildings, amassed much wealth, but their death led them to their graves, and their collections turned into ruin. Their Estate was inherited by those left behind. Therefore, whoever makes his/her heart to be God-conscious achieves a forward position, and his/her efforts are successful. Thus, prepare yourself for the Hereafter and do all that you can to achieve Paradise. Certainly this world has not been designated as a place of permanent stay for you. It is made as a passage in order that you may take from it the provisions (your good deeds) for your permanent abode (in the Hereafter). Prepare yourself for departure from this world.

**(Sermon 131)**

**[Learn from Those Who Have Already Passed Away](#)**

I also advise you to remember death and to lessen your heedlessness towards it. Those who died before you should suffice as examples. They were carried to their graves by others. They vacated the places where they lived, and they now lie in a lonely place (the grave). Now, they cannot escape from the consequences of their sinful deeds, nor can they add to their good deeds. They attached themselves to the world, but it deceived them. They trusted it, but it abandoned them.

**(Sermon 187)**

## About the Angel of Death

Do you see him, when the Angel of death enters a house, and when he draws the life out of an individual? Do you know how he takes the life out of an embryo in the womb of its mother? Does he reach the embryo in the mother's interior? Thus, how would he, who is unable to describe (or understand) a creature like this, be able to describe God?

**(Sermon 111)**

## About the Dead and Their Condition in the Graves

Those who have died have reached their goal and have arrived at their destination ahead of you. They had held positions of honor and pride (in this world). Some of them were rulers and others held high positions. Now they lie lifeless in their graves. The approach of (earthly) dangers does not frighten them anymore, earthquakes do not bother them, nor do they pay heed to thunderstorms.

Their situation is unknown to those who are left behind; they were made to drink the cup (of death), which has changed their speech into silence, their hearing turned into deafness, and their movements into stillness. It seems as though they are fallen in slumber. Every one of them is in a lonely place (the grave), unaware of the time of the day or night. Their faces and bodies are covered with dust. Those who are still alive should draw lessons from them.

**(Sermon 219)**

## About Paradise

### Introduction

The concept of the afterlife and the reward of Paradise is part of the belief system of many religions. The Qur'an gives many details about the heavenly bounties. It also describes the blessed ones who will enter Paradise. Imam Ali (p), in these few paragraphs, gives a summary of the pleasures of Paradise and the way to achieve them. Some details are amazing and cause one to wonder if he actually visited Paradise, or perhaps learned it from the Prophet (s), who ascended to the highest levels of Heaven on the night of *Me'raj* (ascension).<sup>5</sup>

### Paradise, an Everlasting Abode

In Paradise, there are different places (levels) of residence. Its boundaries have no limits. He or she who stays in it will never have to move out of it. He who is blessed will never be in need of anything else.

**(Sermon 84)**

## [A Description of Paradise](#)

If you cast your mind's eye at what is described to you about Paradise, your heart would begin to dislike the pleasures and adornments of this world. You would be lost in the rustling of the trees of Paradise, whose roots lie hidden in the mounds of musk on the banks of the rivers, and in the sight of different fruits from under the cover of their leaves. These fruits can be picked without difficulty, as they come down at the desire of the inhabitants. Pure honey will be handed around to its palaces.

They are honorable people who are made to settle in the house of eternal abode, and they have rested there from their journey. O you listeners, if you busy yourself in advancing towards those wonderful scenes which will rush towards you, then your heart's desire will be to die in eagerness for them. O God, by Your Mercy, include us also among those who strive with their hearts for the abodes of the virtuous. **(Sermon 164)**

## [An Invitation to Paradise](#)

Glorified are You, O the Creator, the one worshipped. You created a house (Paradise) and provided (facilities) in it for feasting, refreshing drinks, mates, servants, streams, plantations, and fruits. Then You sent a messenger to invite people towards it, but many people did not respond to the caller and did not show eagerness towards what You offered them. They jumped on the wagon (of the transient pleasures), they loved this world, and they earned shame (in the Hereafter).

**(Sermon 108)**

- [1.](#) Meaning the material possessions of the world has no value in the Eternal life in the Hereafter. They might even be a liability unless spent in charity and human welfare.
- [2.](#) 1 "You (God) alone do we worship, and from You (only) do we seek help" (Qur'an 1:5).
- [3.](#) A narrow bridge on which humankind will be made to journey on the Day of Judgment. The sinners will falter, whereas the righteous will have an easy passage.
- [4.](#) The angels will be the drivers and Witnesses over each person on the Day of Judgment.
- [5.](#) Please refer to the Glossary section.

---

### **Source URL:**

<https://www.al-islam.org/what-true-success-excerpts-peak-eloquence-nahjul-balagha/8-prepare-permanent-abode-afterlife#comment-0>