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# A Glance at Paradise and Hell

Although the Holy Qur'an tells us a good deal about Paradise and hell, more details are provided through *Qudsi ahadith* related by archangel Jibraeel (Gabriel), peace be upon him, to the Messenger of Allah (S) who, in turn, is quoted by his right hand, Imam Ali ibn Abu Talib (as), and by the other eleven infallible Imams (as). The Prophet of Islam (S), moreover, was able, during his ascension (*mi'raj*) to heaven not only to see but even to walk through Paradise, to eat of its fruit, and to observe its grounds. He (S) was also able to cast a look at hell and see the methods whereby its residents are being tortured.

Both al-Tirmithi and Abu Dawood quote the following Qudsi hadith as narrated by the Messenger of Allah (S):

When Allah created Paradise and hell, He sent Gabriel to Paradise saying, "Look at it and at what I have prepared therein for its inhabitants." He came to it and looked at it, observing what Allah had prepared therein for its inhabitants, then he returned to the Almighty and said, "By Your Glory do I swear that nobody hears of it without (desiring to) enter it."

So He ordered it to be surrounded with obstacles and hardships then ordered Gabriel to return to it and see what obstacles and hardships with which it was surrounded. Having returned to it and observed it, he addressed the Almighty saying, "By Your Glory do I swear that I fear lest not even one person should be able to enter it."

Allah said to him, "Go to take a look at hell and at what I have prepared therein for its inhabitants," and Gabriel found it to be layers above layers. He returned and said, "By your Glory do I swear that nobody who hears of it will ever (wish to) enter it." So He ordered it to be surrounded with incitements and attractions then ordered Gabriel to return to it. Having returned to it, he said, "By Your Glory do I swear that I am afraid lest nobody should be able to escape entering it."

Let us now glance at each of these places separately.

# 1) A Description of Paradise

Paradise (or heaven) is of different degrees of loftiness and happiness. Unlike hell, which is a very deep pit of fire, Paradise is level (or, say, many levels), so much so that even its rivers do not bore holes on its surface but flow miraculously in their paths without scathing the surface. And there is more than one heaven or garden. Verse 64 of Surat al–Rahman (Chapter 55) is comprised of one single word:

Mudhammatan, which describes two dark–green gardens, while verse 62 of the same sura tells us that there are "Besides these two gardens there are two other ones," bringing the total number of gardens comprising the eternal abode of bliss to four. The highest pinnacle of Paradise is the Garden of Eden, or jannat 'adan.

On p. 99, Vol. 13, of *Lisan al–Arabs*, we are told that *jannat* means: orchard, a garden with many fruit trees. *Jannat 'adan* is described in: verse 72 of Surat al–Tawbah (Ch. 9), verse 23 of Surat al–Ra'd (Ch. 13), verse 31 of Surat al–Nahl (Ch. 16), verse 31 of Surat al–Kahaf (Ch. 18), verse 61 of Surat Maryam (Ch. 19), verse 76 of Surat Ta–Ha (Ch. 20), verse 33 of Surat Fatir (Ch. 35), verse 50 of Surat Sad (Ch. 38), verse 8 of Surat Ghafir (Ch. 40), verse 12 of Surat al–Saff (Ch. 61), and verse 8 of Surat al–Bayyinah (Ch. 98).

On p. 279, Vol. 13, of *Lisan al–Arab*, we are told that *jannat 'adan* means "the place of eternity..., the very central (*al–awsat*) garden." Page 427, Vol. 7, of *Lisan al–Arabs* suggests that one of the meanings of *al–awsat* is: the best. No wonder, then, to see more reference to *jannat 'adan* than to, say, *al–firdaws*, Paradise, in the Holy Qur'an. This leaves us with the conclusion that the very best, the central, the focal, the highest pinnacle of *al–jannat*, the heavenly Garden, is *jannat 'adan*.

Paradise, or *al-firdaws*, as it is called in Arabic, is a loan word. The Arabs to whom Prophet Muhammad (S) was sent had no concept whatsoever of life after death, of heaven and hell. This is one of the main challenges faced by the Prophet (S) when he started preaching Islam to them.

The Holy Qur'an refers to this challenge in Surat Ya–Sin: "And he strikes out a likeness for Us and forgets his own creation. Says he: Who will give life to the bones when they are rotten? Say: The One Who brought them into existence the first time will give life (back) to them, and He is Cognizant of all creation" (36:79). Even the author of the best Arabic lexicon, *Lisan al–Arab*, is not sure whether *firdaws* is a word borrowed from Latin or Persian, nor is al–Majlisi, as the latter admits on p. 91, Vol. 8, of his one hundred and ten volume encylopedia not counting Vol. Zero known as *Bihar al–Anwar*.

A third view, which may be more accurate, is that it is neither; its origin may be Babylonian. The other word used in the Holy Qur'an for it is *Jannat*, garden. But Paradise is a lot more than just a garden or an orchard. The Arabs never had the habit of living inside their orchards. Their homes, built of sun dried or fire baked clay, were grouped together rather than scattered inside orchards as is the case with Paradise.

The presence of a good number of Jews in both Medina (where they were more nUmarous due to the city's tolerable climate) and Mecca permitted the Jews' contribution to such loan words. *Jahannam*, a derivation from Hebrew *Gehinnom* 1 (Latin *Gehenna*), hell, is another.

An overall "view" of this heavenly place can fill a book and may be out of the scope of this book; therefore, let us take a look at its gates as seen by an eye-witness: Prophet Muhammad (S) who is quoted on p. 144, Vol. 8, of *Bihar al-Anwar*, describing it as transmitted by Abdullah ibn Mas'ud thus:

When my Lord permitted me to ascend to heaven, Gabriel (as) said to me, "I have been ordered to show you both Paradise and hell." So I saw Paradise and the blessings it contains, and I saw hell and the types of torment it has. Paradise has eight gates, on each one of which are four statements, each one of which is better than the world and what is in it for those who comprehend and act upon them. And hell has seven gates, on each one of which are three statements, each one of which is better than this world and what is therein for those who comprehend and act upon them.

Gabriel (as) said to me, "O Muhammad! Read what is written on these gates!" So I read them. On the first gate of Paradise it is written: There is no god except Allah; Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah; Ali is a true servant (*wali*) of Allah; there are means to attain everything, and the means of livelihood are four: contentment, spending on the right cause, renunciation of grudge, and keeping company with the people of righteousness.

On the second gate it is written: There is no god except Allah; Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah; Ali is a true servant (*wali*) of Allah; there are means to attain everything, and the means to attain happiness in the life hereafter are four: rubbing the heads of (I.e., showing kindness to) the orphans, kindness to the widows, the effort to assist the faithful in attaining their objectives, and looking after the poor and the indigent.

On the third gate it is written: There is no god except Allah; Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah; Ali is a true servant (*wali*) of Allah; there are means to attain everything, and the means to attain good health in the short life are four: saying the least, sleeping the least, walking the least, and eating the least.

On the fourth gate it is written: There is no god except Allah; Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah; Ali is a true servant (*wali*) of Allah; whoever believes in Allah and the Last Day should be generous to his guest; whoever believes in Allah and the Last Day ought to be generous to his neighbor; whoever believes in Allah and the Last Day ought to be generous to his parents; whoever believes in Allah and the Last Day should either say what is good or remain silent.

On the fifth gate it is written: There is no god except Allah; Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah; Ali is a true servant (*wali*) of Allah; whoever wishes not to be oppressed should not oppress anyone; whoever wishes not to be taunted should not taunt anyone; whoever wishes not to be humiliated should not humiliate anyone; whoever wishes to cling to the firm and reliable nitche in the short life as well as in the life hereafter should testify that: There is no god except Allah; Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah; Ali

is a true servant (wali) of Allah.

On the sixth gate it is written: There is no god except Allah; Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah; Ali is a true servant (*wali*) of Allah; whoever wishes his grave to be wide and spacious, let him build mosques; whoever wishes the [earth] worms not to consume him in the ground, let him make the mosques his home 2; whoever wishes to remain fresh 3, let him sweep the mosques; and whoever wishes to see his place in Paradise, let him cover the mosques' floors with carpets.

On the seventh gate it is written: There is no god except Allah; Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah; Ali is a true servant (*wali*) of Allah; a pure heart is [attainable] in [the attainment of] four merits: visiting the sick, walking behind borne coffins, buying shrouds (for the dead); and paying the debts back. On the eighth gate it is written: There is no god except Allah; Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah; Ali is a true servant (*wali*) of Allah; whoever wishes to enter these gates should uphold four merits: generosity, good manners, charity, and staying away from harming the servants of Allah.

On the first gate of hell I found three statements written: Whoever places his hope in Allah will be happy; whoever fears Allah (alone) is granted security; a conceited person who is doomed to perdition is the one who does not place his hope on Allah nor does he fear Him. On the second gate is the following writing: If one does not wish to be naked on the Day of Judgment, he should clothe those who are naked in the short life of the world; whoever wishes not to suffer from thirst on the Day of Resurrection should give water to the thirsty to drink during his life in the world; whoever wishes not to come on the Day of Judgment hungry should feed the hungry in the life of the world.

On the third gate it is written: Allah curses the liars; Allah curses those who are miserly; Allah curses the oppressors. On the fourth gate, three statements are written: Allah humiliates whoever demeans the religion of Islam; Allah humiliates whoever insults Ahl al–Bayt (as); Allah humiliates whoever assists the oppressors in oppressing people. On the fifth gate three statements are written: Do not follow your inclination, for inclinations oppose conviction; do not talk much about that which does not concern you so you will fall from the mercy of Allah; and do not be a helper to the oppressors.

On the sixth gate it is written: I am prohibited from admitting the *mujtahids*4; I am prohibited from admitting those who give in charity; I am prohibited from admitting those who fast. On the seventh gate three statements are written: Take account of your deeds before you are accounted for them; rebuke your souls before you are rebuked; and invoke Allah, the most Exalted, the most Great, before you come back to Him and you will not then be able to do so.

Al-Majlisi, on p. 131, Vol. 8, of his *Bihar al-Anwar*, quotes p. 39, Vol. 2, of *Al-Khisal*, where Ubayy quotes Sa'd quoting al-Barqi quoting his father quoting Ahmed ibn al-Nasr quoting 'Amr ibn Shimr quoting Jabir ibn Abdullah al-Ansari quoting Imam Ja'far al-Sadiq (as) saying, "Think about Allah with the best of your thoughts, and be informed that Paradise has eight gates the width of each one of which is the distance of forty years."

In various sermons of *Nahjul Balagha*, Imam Ali (as) vividly describes both Paradise and hell; this is a paraphrasing of how he (as) portrays Paradise:

The degrees of its bliss and felicity vary a great deal from one person or place to another; its bliss never ends; those who reside in it are never evicted from its premises, nor do they ever get old, and nobody in it is afflicted with misery5. They do not brag with one another, nor do they multiply and have offspring6.

Nobody enters it except those who are familiar with (and who follow in the footsteps of) the Imams from the progeny of the Prophet (S) and whom they (as) identify (on the Day of Judgment) as such. 7 If you can ever conceive what may be described for you of it, your soul will turn away from the most alluring of what is in the life of this world of pleasures and temptations and things that please the eyes, and you will be perplexed at how its trees are lined up in rows, and their roots are buried in heaps of musk along its shores.

Its fruits are very easy to reach. Its inhabitants are treated periodically to drinks of pure honey and wines which do not cause intoxication, while such residents are enjoying life in the pavilions of their mansions. Its shade is Allah's 'Arsh; its light is His felicity, and its residents are often visited by His angels8.

The best enjoyment the residents of Paradise will appreciate will be nearness to the Almighty and the ability to communicate with Him. He will address them like a host surrounding his guests with his attention. On p. 114, Vol. 8, of his *Sahih*, al–Bukhari quotes Ma'ath ibn Asad quoting Abdullah quoting Malik ibn Anas quoting Zayd ibn Aslam quoting 'Ata ibn Yasar quoting Abu Sa'eed al–Khudri, may Allah be pleased with him, quoting the Messenger of Allah (S) saying that Allah will address the residents of Paradise and say, "O people of Paradise!" and they will answer Him by saying, "*Labbayk*, Lord! At your Pleasure!"

Then He will ask them, "Are you contented?" They will answer, "And how could we not be contented while You have given us what You have not given anyone else of Your creation?" Then He will say, "I will give you something even better than that," and they will say, "O Lord! And what is better than that?" He will say, "I shall cause My favor to descend upon you and I shall never be displeased with you."

The same author, in his chapter on Tawhid, quotes Muhammad ibn Sinan quoting Fulayh quoting Hilal quoting 'Ata ibn Yasar saying that one day the Messenger of Allah (S) happened to be delivering *hadith*, and a bedouin was present. He (S) said that a bedouin among the people of Paradise once sought permission of his Lord to cultivate the land, whereupon the Almighty asked him, "Haven't you acquired whatever you desire [of the trees and plants of Paradise]?"

He answered by saying, "Yes, but I still like to cultivate the land." The Almighty permitted him to do so; therefore, he sowed seeds and within seconds plants grew and ripened and yielded heaps of harvest as high as mountains. It was then that the Almighty said, "Take it, O son of Adam, for nothing satisfies you!" The bedouin said, "O Messenger of Allah! This man must have been either from Quraysh or from the Ansar, for they are farmers whereas we [bedouins] are not." The Messenger of Allah (S) smiled.

Since the love of acquisition and accumulation is instinctive among the descendants of Adam, al—Tirmithi, on pp. 89–90, Vol. 2, of his *Jami*', quotes traditions of the Messenger of Allah (S) wherein he informs his companions that the residents of Paradise will be treated periodically to a feast that will remind them of how they used to spend Fridays here on earth, and they will go to a bazaar where each one of them will select whatever clothes, jewelry, or anything else he likes and take it back to his residence.

The "Garden of Eden," that is, *jannat 'adan*, is referred to in the Holy Qur'an in more than one place. According to Ibn Mas'ud, it is the central part of Paradise. According to al–Dhahhak, it is a city within a city, one in which the messengers, prophets, martyrs, and the Imams of guidance reside surrounded by all others. It mansions are built of jewels, emeralds, sapphires, crysolites, pearls, gold and silver and plated in musk, and, according to Muqatil and al–Kalbi, a wind blows on it from underneath the 'Arsh, immersing it in white musk. Even Iblis, Satan, envied the humans on account of this Garden of Eden.

On p. 115 of *Al-Mahasin*, Muhammad ibn Qays quotes Imam Abu Ja'far al-Baqir (as) saying that Iblis the accursed saw prophet Noah (as) once saying his prayers, and he envied him for it. Then he said to him, "O Noah! Allah, the most Exalted One, the most Sublime, planted the trees of the Garden of Eden Himself and built its mansions and let its rivers flow. Then He looked at it and said, 'The believers are surely the winners! No, by My dignity! No immoral person shall ever reside here."

The types of food and drink in Paradise are detailed in the Holy Qur'an and Sunnah, and so are the *huris*, the women with large lovely eyes who will be the wives of the lucky ones, yet one is tempted to ask: What will the residents of Paradise enjoy most?

Will it be the drinks, the food, the music played by the branches and leaves of Paradise, or the singing of these *huris* whose songs, sung individually or in groups, will praise the Almighty and glorify Him? In his *Tafsir*, al-'Ayyashi, as quoted on p. 139, Vol. 8, of *Bihar al-Anwar*, quotes Abu Baseer quoting Abu Abdullah Imam Ja'far al-Sadiq (as) saying, "The residents of Paradise will enjoy neither food nor drink more than enjoying sexual intercourse."

On pp. 438–439 of Ali ibn Ibrahim's *Tafsir*, as quoted on pp. 120–121, Vol. 8, of al-Majlisi's *Bihar al-Anwar*, it is stated that Ibn Abu 'Umayr quotes Abu Busayr saying that he once asked Abu Abdullah Imam Ja'far al-Sadiq (as) to stir his anxiety about Paradise, whereupon the Imam (as) said, "O Abu Muhammad! Even from the distance of a thousand years can the sweet smell of Paradise be detected, and the most modest residence in Paradise is one where the jinns and humans go; there will they be well fed, and drinks will be served to them, without diminishing anything thereof.

The most modest of the residents of Paradise is one who, upon entering his garden, sees not one but three gardens full of wives, servants, rivers and fruits that fill his eyes and heart with joy. Once he thanks Allah and praises Him, he will be addressed to raise his head to see the second garden, for it contains what the first does not.

So he implores, 'Lord! I plead to You to grant me this one (instead)!' The Almighty will say to him, 'If I grant it to you, you may ask Me to give you some other one!' He will say, 'This one is the one I want, O Lord!' So when he enters it, his pleasure will increase, and he will thank and praise Allah, whereupon its gate is ordered open and he will be told to raise his head. Once the garden of eternity is opened for him, he will see many times as much as he saw before. When his happiness is multiplied, he will say, 'Praise to You, Lord, a Praise that can never be computed for having granted me gardens and saved me from the fire!"

At that point, Abu Busayr could not help weeping, yet he asked the Imam (as) to tell him more. Imam al-Baqir (as) said, "O Abu Muhammad! On the edges of the rivers of Paradise are wives waiting for their husbands like trees standing in a row. The moment he picks one of them, another is created for him in her place." Abu Busayr said, "May my life be sacrificed for you! Please do tell me more!" The Imam (as) then said, "A believer is married to eight hundred virgins, four thousand *thayyibs* 9 and two *huris*." "Eight hundred virgins?!"

Abu Busayr asked the Imam (as) in amazement. "Yes. Whenever he cohabits with one of them, he always finds her so." "May my life be sacrificed for your sake," said Abu Busayr, "What are the *huris* created of?" The Imam (as) told the inquirer that they were created of the same heavenly substance of which Paradise is created, then he added, "Her leg can be seen even from behind seventy outfits."

Abu Busayr asked the Imam (as), "May my life be sacrificed for you, do they say anything there?" The Imam (as) said, "Yes, they will say something no human has ever heard." "What is it?" asked Abu Busayr. "They will say: 'We are the eternal ones who never die! We are the blessed ones, so we never suffer! We are the ones who reside and never depart! We are the ones who are pleased, so we never complain! Congratulations to those who were created for us, and congratulations to those for whom we are created! We are the ones who, were we to hang in the skies, our light would overwhelm all visions..."

Both Ibn Qawlawayh, as well as al-Majlisi who on p. 143, Vol. 8, of his work *Bihar al-Anwar*, quote Sa'd quoting Ibn 'Eisa quoting Sa'eed ibn Janah quoting Abdullah ibn Muhammad quoting Jabir ibn Yazid quoting Imam Abu Ja'far al-Baqir (as) quoting his forefathers (as) saying that the Messenger of Allah (S) said once, "All prophets are prohibited from entering Paradise before I do, and all nations are prohibited from entering it before those who follow us, we Ahl al-Bayt (as), enter it." The Commander of the Faithful Imam Ali ibn Abu Talib (as) is quoted on p. 139, Vol. 8, of *Bihar al-Anwar*, as saying, "Paradise has seventy-one entrances: my Ahl al-Bayt (as) and followers enter through seventy of them, while all other people enter through the other."

Other types of enjoyment include pleasures such as no weariness will ever touch the residents of Paradise, nor will they ever suffer any pain whatsoever; they will not need to relieve themselves at all; instead, what they eat comes out of them in the form of sweet–smelling sweat. They will have no chores to perform, nor will they be denied anything.

Their wishes are granted, and their happiness never ends, nor will they ever be bored. May the Almighty admit us into His Garden by His mercy, for no matter how much good we do, the favor for doing it is His, and only His. He is the One Who creates within us the desire to do good; He is the One Who enables us to do good deeds, and He is the One Who, nevertheless, rewards us for doing them, though we would not have been able to do them on our own. He is the source of all good. He is all goodness.

Finally, one is tempted to ask how Paradise as a whole may be conceived. The discussion of *jannat* 'adan above suggests that it is quite likely it is circular with the Garden (or Gardens) of Eden being in the very center surrounded by the gardens of those who were close in lineage and deeds to the Prophet of Islam (S), namely Ahl al–Bayt (as), surrounded by those who were loyal to them in word and in deed, and so on.

The further one goes from the central point, the less his status will be, and the less his degree of bliss. The circle has always symbolized eternity. The Garden may very likely be circular, and surely Allah knows best.

# 2) A Description of Hell

Muslims observe the fast so that they may be spared the torment of hell. What kind of place is hell, and what sort of torment? Books have been written discussing only this subject. The Holy Qur'an contains vivid descriptions of the psychological and physical torture awaiting those who did not live up to what the Almighty had expected of them, who did not honor the trust whereby He entrusted them, and who did not carry out the goal for which He created them, that is, to worship Him, and Him alone.

Qur'anic references to such torment may be reviewed in Surahs such as these: al-Baqarah, Aali-'Imran, al-Maaida, al-An'am, al-A'raf, al-Anfal, Younus, Hud, al-Ra'd, al-Hijr, al-Nahl, Maryam, Taha, al-Hajj, al-Muminoon, al-Noor, al-Furqan, al-'Ankabut, Luqman, al-Sajdah, al-Ahzab, Saba, al-Zumar, Ghafir, al-Tur, al-Hashr, al-Ma'arij, al-Buruj, al-Fajr, al-Nisaa..., in most Surahs, as a matter of fact, for the Holy Qur'an was revealed to warn humans against the fire of hell and to attract them to the eternal bliss and happiness: to a kingdom that never diminishes.

What physical shape does hell take? Let us review these Qur'anic verses:

(As for) those who disbelieve in Our Signs, they are the people of the left hand. On them is fire closed over. (Holy Qur'an, 90:19–20)

"Closed over" means capped; hell may be compared to a pot, with a lid, on an oven, a pot which is burning both inside and out. The meaning becomes more clear when we recite these verses:

And what will make you realize what the crushing disaster is? It is the fire kindled by Allah, (a fire) which rises above the hearts. Surely it shall be closed over them, in extended columns. (Holy Qur'an, 104:5-9)

"Closed over them" conveys the same meaning as in 90:20 above. And its columns may be indicative of its depth, hence such columns are "extended," quite lengthy, and Allah knows best. How large are its sparks? The answer is provided by its Creator and ours:

### "Surely it sends up sparks like palaces" (Holy Qur'an, 77:32).

Since references to hell abound throughout the Holy Qur'an, we ought to stop here to review some traditions of the Messenger of Allah (S) and the Imams (as) describing the horrors of the place called hell, a place as intense in heat as it is in chillness, a place whose fire is fed by sulphur pieces each one of which is as large as the largest of the earth's mountains.

Equally large are the areas where those being tormented are taken to be chilled after being charred by its fire. In other words, they are taken from one extreme to another. There are on our planet ice mountains as well as volcanoes spewing rivers of molten or fluid rocks as lava; so is the case with hell: it contains both heat and chilliness.

On p. 309 of Ibrahim al–Selek's book *The Divine Traditions*, a compilation of *Qudsi ahadith*, the Messenger of Allah (S) is quoted saying that hell complained to its Lord saying, "O Lord! [Even] my parts are consuming one another!" whereupon the Almighty permitted it to take two breaths, one in the winter and one in the summer, hence the severe heat of the summer and the bitter cold of the winter. Had it been permitted to take more than two, no life would have become possible on earth.

While the lucky ones are enjoying the fruits of Paradise, the residents of hell will be eating thorn-like "food" that will reach their throats and halt there; it neither reaches their stomachs, nor does it enable them to vomit. This is one of the foods on hell's "menu." Another type is prepared for them from the pus of the wounds of those being tortured in hell, then boiled to a degree that will split their bowels.

The Prophet of Islam (S) is quoted on p. 145, Vol. 1, of al–Zamakhshari's *Rabee' al–Abrar* as having asked archangel Gabriel (as), "Why have I never seen [archangel] Michael smiling?" Gabriel (as) answered, "Michael never smiled since hell was created." Anas, may Allah be merciful to his soul, is quoted by al–Zamakhshari saying that the least degree of torture in hell are two pairs of shoes made for someone in it from the heat of which his brain boils. More details about this horrific place are excerpted from al–Zamakhshari thus:

The Messenger of Allah (S) has said, "During my night journey (*israa*), I heard a huge noise, so I asked Gabriel, 'What is this huge noise, O Gabriel?' He (Gabriel) said, 'It is a rock thrown from the tip of hell into it, and it has been falling for the past seventy Autumns, and it has now reached its bottom." Abu 'Asim 'Ubayd ibn 'Umayr ibn Qatadah al–Laythi, Mecca's judge (d. 68 A.H.), has said, "Hell exhales one exhalation because of which all angels and prophets tremble, so much so that even Ibrahim (Abraham) (as) kneels down and says, 'Lord! I plead to You to only spare me!"

Abu Sa'eed al-Khudri is quoted saying, "If a mountain is hit with one of the clubs used by the angels

charged with hell, it will be fragmented into bits and turned into dust." Tawoos ibn Keesan al-Khawlani is quoted saying, "When hell was created, the angels became extremely frightened, and when you (humans) were created, they became calm."

Al-Hasan ibn Yasar al-Basir has said, "By Allah! None among the servants of Allah can withstand its heat! It has been said to us that if a man stands in the east and hell in the west, and if it is partially uncovered for him, his skull will boil. Had a bucket of its pus been dropped on earth, not a single living being would have remained alive." Hisham ibn al-Hassan al-Dastoo 'I used not to put out his lamp at night. His family objected and said to him, "We cannot tell when it is daytime and when it is nighttime!" He said, "By Allah! If I put the lamp out, I will remember the darkness of the grave, and no sleep can then overcome me."

Punishment in hell will be according to the type or types of sins committed during the life of this world. For example, those who treasured their money and were negligent about taking out their *zakat* and other religious taxes will be burned with what they had treasured on their foreheads, on their sides, and on their backs. In other words, on most of their bodies. Abu Tharr al–Ghifari, may Allah be pleased with him, used to say, "Tell those who treasure their wealth that they will be burnt therewith on their foreheads, on their sides, and on their backs till they are filled with fire."

The Messenger of Allah (S) has said, as we are told on p. 243, Vol. 8, of *Bihar al–Anwar*, "No servant of Allah who has wealth and who does not pay its due *zakat* except that he will be burnt with metal pieces heated in the fire of hell whereby his forehead and sides and back are ironed till Allah finishes trying His servants on a Day the duration of which is a thousand years of your own calculation. Then he will see his way, either to Paradise, or to hell." Abu Umamah quotes the Messenger of Allah (S) explaining the type of drink given to the residents of hell. Says he, "It will be brought to him, and he will hate it; when it is brought close to him, it will burn his face and his skull will fall off. If he drinks of it, it will tear his intestines to pieces till it comes out of his anus."

The Messenger of Allah (S) is quoted saying, "The prayers of one who drinks wine will not be accepted for forty days; so, if he dies and his stomach has some of it, it will be incumbent on Allah to make him drink of *sadeed*, a liquid that comes out of the vaginas of adultresses which will be collected in cauldrons in hell to give to them, so it will incinerate their stomachs and skins."

This tradition has been narrated by Shu'ayb ibn Waqid who quotes al–Husayn ibn Zayd who quotes Imam Ja'far al–Sadiq (as) as indicated on p. 244, Vol. 8, of *Bihar al–Anwar*. Those guilty of sins other than adultery or fornication will be given a drink of lead and molten brass, as Ibn Mas'ud is quoted in *Bihar al–Anwar* as saying. Mujahid says it will be the pus and blood of those being tormented, while Ibn Jubayr says it is black water; since hell is black, its water is black, its trees are black, and the faces and bodies of its residents are charred black. This view is held by al–Dhahhak.

Additional torture methods in hell include snakes and scorpions whose fangs, as Ibn 'Abbas and others

narrate, are as huge and as tall as palm trees. The snakes will be as thick as elephants, and the scorpions will be as large as black mules. And the inmates of hell will often be beaten with huge clubs: if they are in the high levels of hell, the blows will cause them to fall into the other layers, each more intense in heat than the other, for seventy years.

Once they reach its bottom, its flame will push them back, and so on. There will be no moment of respite for them in it. Which is the very worst area of hell? Ibn Mas'ud and Ibn 'Abbas are quoted on pp. 241–242, Vol. 8, of al-Majlisi's *Bihar al-Anwar* saying that hypocrites will be lodged in the lowest level of hell where the torment is the most severe. Closed fire boxes, like ovens, are their torture chambers.

Let us now return to *Nahjul Balagha* to see how Imam Ali (as) paints for us the following graphic description of hell, may Allah never permit it to touch us:

The worst calamity is when someone falls into the pit of hell; he will feel as if he is being boiled alive therein, and he will find it a never-ending torment, a creature of some sort that snorts and exhales, giving its residents no respite at all, nor does it ever afford them a moment of rest, nor can they ever be shielded from its torment by any power or any sure death. There is no brief slumber in it, nor any interval between its successive waves of torture: an ever-recurring pain from which we seek Allah's help. 10

It surely is the very worst of all places, a place where the hands of its inhabitants are tied to their necks, and their foreheads are chained to their feet, and their clothing is made of sheets of tar. Their shirts are made of fire, while their torment is a never–ending fire in a place the door of which is capped over its people, in a raging fire the very noise of which is deafening, the sparks of which crackle and there is no freedom from it nor a period for its expiration, nor does it put an end to the people in it to finish them11

Its heat is intense, its bottom is distant, its "ornament" is iron, its drink is pus. 12 On the Day of Judgment, the unjust imam will be brought without having anyone to help him or find an excuse for him, so he will be hurled into the fire of hell where he will turn with it just as a grinding mill turns, till he collides with its deepest depth headlong. 13 If Malik (custodian of hell) becomes angry, he causes its parts to crush one another, and if he rebukes it, its gates fly up and down (and spit like volcanoes). 14

Reference to hell being brought from one place to another suggests beyond the shadow of doubt that distances, places, and spaces are a matter of reality in the life to come as they are in our worldly life. A testimony to hell being brought, that is, being moved or transferred from one location to another, exists in verse 23 of Surat al–Fajr (Chapter 89):

"And hell, that Day, is brought (to face all humans); on that Day will man remember, but how will that remembrance benefit him?" (Holy Qur'an, 89:23)

and in nUmarous other Qur'anic verses. Of course those who will move hell from one place to another will be none other than the angels whom we cannot see in this life but whom we will see the moment we die, but let us save the discussion of this most fascinating subject of angels to another book, *Insha*–

### Allah.

Remember that all these portraits of hell do not include the horrors resulting from being in the company of devils, demons, and condemned jinns who will all share hell with condemned humans. A look cast any of these creatures being tortured, their shrieks, their unsightly parts being pulled out of their places, and their skins being peeled off their flesh... may be as terrifying as hell itself. Remember how Allah described mankind as being created in the best form. Humans condemned to hell will realize this fact more than others, while the blessed will be spared such horrifying realization.

Those who read the story of Saint Joan of Arc (1412 – 1431), the French heroine who, despite her tender age, led French armies to victory over the English at Orleans, remember her saying that she saw once a demon, and that she would prefer to walk on burning timbers from one end of the earth to the other rather than seeing it again. Imagine being in the company of such demons for eternity...

Such is hell, and such is its torment. Had we had a glance at it, or even at some of its inhabitants, we would not have minded having to fast each and every day of our life, not only during the month of Ramadhan, the month of Allah, the month of forgiveness and mercy, but all our life.

- 1. According to the Oxford English Dictionary (OED), its full Hebrew name is ge hen Hinnom, the valley of the son of Hinnom, denoting a place near Jerusalem where, according to Jeremiah 19:5, children were burnt in sacrifice to Baal, the fertility god of polytheist Canaanites, or to Molech (Moloch). For more information, refer to II Kings 23:10 and Jeremiah 32:35 in the Bible.
- 2. That is, let him frequent them so often as though he lives in them.
- 3. That is, suffering no thirst in this life nor after resurrection when very few will not suffer thirst.
- 4. These are those who attain the degree of ijtihad, the ability to deduct injunctions. See Glossary for explanations of Islamic terms.
- 5. Sermon 85.
- 6. Sermon 161.
- 7. Sermon 152.
- 8. Sermon 183.
- 9. A thayyib is a deflowered but unmarried woman who may be either a pious widow or a divorcee.
- 10. Sermon 83.
- 11. Sermon 109.
- 12. Sermon 120.
- 13. Sermon 164.
- 14. Sermon 183.

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