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Chapter 1: Death or the beginning of the journey to eternity

The essence of death

From the Holy Qur'an's perspective, death is a truth with regard to the human life; it is in fact, a special form of transfer from this world to another world. This particular subject has been deeply examined and thoroughly studied, in various verses of the Holy Qur'an, some of which are mentioned below:

The transfer made by divine agents

Some of the verses in the Holy Qur'an have mentioned death as "Tawaffa" 1

The word "Tawaffa" comes from the word "Waffa", which means the complete reception of something. It does not mean "Fow't", which means to lose something or someone. Indeed, from these verses, one comes to understand that:

Death does not mean inexistence, nothingness, and destruction, but a transition from one world to another world.

Whatever creates the characteristic and the real "Me" is not one's actual physical body, because the physical body will decay and disintegrate gradually, and that which will be transferred to the other world will be the [human] spirit or the soul.

With the arrival of death, the extra-corporeal dimension of the human being will be taken away, and detached from the individual.2

God's creature

The Holy Qur'an considers death as an essential and absolute Truth for all of God's creatures.

The great sleep

The Holy Qur'an compares Death, Sleep, Awakening, and Resurrection on Judgment Day, as identical and announces,

"It is Allah, who takes away the souls at the time of their Death and those that die not during their sleep. He keeps those [souls] for which he has ordained Death and sends the rest for a term appointed. Verily, in this are signs for a people who think deeply." – 39: 42

The Importance of contemplating about death

Indeed, among the subjects that are noteworthy in all the religious instructions, there is the remembrance of death and the fact that one has to be prepared for it.

In regards to the essence of death and the fact that one shall have a re-birth in a far better world, which will be eternal as well, where happiness or unhappiness are the direct effects of the causes one has been responsible for in the earthly plane, one is thus forced to remember death at all times. At the same time, one is made to pay more attention to this matter and to try hard to build oneself a very nice "dwelling-place" in the Hereafter...

Once, a person asked the holy Prophet Muhammad (S)3, "Who is the cleverest among the believers?" 4

The Prophet Muhammad (S) answered him, "He, who remembers death more than anyone else does, and who is also readier; he it is, the cleverest of all..."

It is also reported in another hadith that, "Of the means for Man's happiness and beatitude is that his life be longer and that God may grant him the Blessing of the Repentance, so that he may be able to go to the Hereafter and Eternity..." 5

The agony of death and its cause

In the Holy Qur'an and numerous Ahadith from the holy family members of the venerable Prophet (S) [i.e. the Ahlil Beyt as6], there are all kinds of accounts and descriptions of the agony of death. Regarding this subject, the Holy Qur'an announces,

"And at last, the agony of Death [or the numbness which takes over the person, who is on the verge of Death] unveils the Truth before the eyes of Man [and he is told that]: this is the very thing from which, you were trying to escape..." – 50:19

The Arabic word "Sakrat" derives from "Sakrah", which comes from "Sakr", meaning a state of drunkenness; it refers to the mental state in which, the mind and the reason of man distance themselves from him. The verse mentioned above, explains that the level of intensity of death is such that it disables man's mind, his reason, and even his sanity.

The lord of the believers, Imam Ali [as] regarding this matter had once declared, "The harshness and the torments of death are far more difficult to be described or measured, by the intellect of the human beings..." 7

The difficulty of dying is mainly because mankind is attached to this world, physically, mentally, and emotionally. Indeed, it is for this reason, that it has been announced, "Die, before your Death." 8 or "Before your limbs separate from your bodies [and before you disintegrate], free yourselves [i.e. your hearts] from this earthly plane!" 9

A person once asked Imam Hassan [as], "Why have we not a pleasant death...?"

Imam Hassan [as] answered him, "You have ignored and ruined your Hereafter, and built and prospered your earthly world, instead. Therefore, you suffer and are tormented when you are transferred from your prosperous world to the Place of Sorrow and Ruin..." 10

This hadith shows that the earthly passions and all the things that one longs for on this earth, can easily shift man's behaviors towards satisfying the desires and interests of the world, at the cost of ignoring and destroying the Hereafter. Therefore, because of the wild passion towards the world, the desire for the Hereafter decreases more and more, as a sad, desolate consequence... To the extent that as long as this process continues, and the desire for the earthly world increases, in like manner, the bitter sentiment of the soul's transfer from this world to the Hereafter increases and eventually, it will bring on suffering, sorrow, and all kinds of inner torments for the soul's ultimate Journey to the afterlife...

It has been reported in many ahadith that when someone is on the verge of death, there is a particular moment, called "the examination moment", which is a brief instant, when the dying individual experiences and sees clearly the "other" world. It is similar to the condition of a person, who is standing next to a room, with a closed door in front of him. When the door opens, and just before the individual exits the room where he is standing, he would see the inside environment of the next room that he is to enter soon. In like manner, when the human beings are standing between the borders of the world and the hereafter, they too will have a similar, identical situation; and they can see the world beyond [i.e. the hereafter] with their physical eyes and with the help of their inner vision, they can have a view of the afterlife. It is from here, that everything illuminates before the very eyes of the human beings; and the disbelievers and the sinners would then suffer deeply. For it is only then, that they can see to where they will be heading. In response to those, who tormented incessantly Prophet Muhammad (S), and who used to ask him mockingly, "Tell us, when will the Day of Judgment come, as you are describing it to us?!" the Holy Qur'an gave two answers:

- 1. Its Knowledge is only beside God and no one else.
- 2. When those individuals understood that its time was much nearer than what they had thought, the faces of the disbelievers became horrified and turned pale and ugly; and they were told,

"When will this Promise [i.e. the Day of Resurrection] come to pass if you are telling the truth?" – 67:25

- 1. Al-An'am, 61; Az-Zumar, 42; An-Naml, 28, 32, 70; Al-A'raf, 37
- 2. Please refer to the Complete Works of Professor Mutahhari, volume 2, page 537
- 3. It is an abridged form of the sentence "Sallallah Alayhe wa Alehi wa Sallam"
- 4. Muhammad Baqir Majlisi, "Beharul-Anwar", volume 1 page 126
- 5. Idem, page 138
- 6. It is an abridged form of the sentence: "Alayaheh Salam"
- 7. "Nahjul-Balaghah", Sermon 22; From the Selection of Mizanul-Hekmah, volume 12, page 930, hadith 875
- 8. Kamaluddin Mey'sam Ibn Ali Meysam Al-Bahrani, The Words of the lord of the Believers, Imam Ali [as], page 6
- 9. Ibn Abel Hadid, "Sharheh Nahjul-Balaghah", volume 11, page 3
- 10. Muhammad Baqir Al-Majlisi, "Beharul-Anwar", volume 6, page 129

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