

Lesson 20: After Death

That which does not die is Allah. We, human beings, will one day eventually leave this world. The setting of the sun each day is a poetical metaphor for our passing away. The sunset is inevitable; similarly, death is a reality which, like it or not, must happen.

So we have no control over our death; but what we must think about is the following: What will happen to us after death? Will we become nothing? Will we merely “end” by death? Or will we “remain”, and if so, what will our “remaining” be like?

Those who do not believe in God consider death as the end of human beings, and life is just limited to one or two days. But those who believe in God say that human beings are immortal and that death is just a ladder which will take us through the world purgatory to Resurrection and the everlasting abode in the hereafter.

1. Purgatory (Barzakh)

According to the Qur^ʿān and many ahadith from the Prophet and the Imams, death is not our end. The human spirit, after death, remains and experiences blessings or torment up to the time of the turmoil of Resurrection.

This period from death to Resurrection is called barzakh. Allah says, ***“Count not those who were slain in the way of Allah as dead, but rather they are living with their Lord, being sustained and are rejoicing in the bounty which Allah has given them.” (3: 169–170)***

It is clear that if the life after death was not real, the phrase “living with their Lord, being sustained” would be meaningless.

2. The Questioning in the Grave

It can be seen from many ahadith that the spirit has a very special relation with the body in the grave,

although the nature of this relationship is not clear. The sixth Imam, Ja`far as-Sadiq (a.s.), said, “Those who deny the questioning of the grave are not from our party (Shi‘ah).”

When the dead person is laid in the grave, the angels of the questioning present themselves and ask him about his faith, beliefs and deeds. If the person has faith and has done good, he joins the believers; if not, he joins the unbelievers and evil-doers. And everyone will pass the period of Barzakh until the Resurrection with their respective group.

Shaykh Saduq writes in his Risalah al-I`tiqadat: “In our opinion, the questioning in the grave is a truth, and he who answers rightly will benefit in the grave from comfort and blessings, and the next world from the Garden. He who cannot answer rightly will see torment in the grave, and in the Resurrection he will go to the Fire.”

3. The Torment of the Grave

Man's placing in Barzakh is intimately connected with his deeds in this world. For those who are virtuous, Barzakh will be a sample of Heaven, and they will see the result of their good deeds. Imam Hasan al-`Askari (a.s.) said, “When a believer dies, six beautiful youths will hurry with him to his grave, one of them more fragrant and more beautiful than all the others. They will come and stand on his right, on his left, above him and below him and in front of him and behind him. Then the most beautiful of them will ask, ‘Who are you all.’ The one standing in the front will say: ‘I am prayer’; the one on the left: ‘I am zakat’. The one standing in front will say: ‘I am fasting’; the one behind: ‘I am hajj and `umrah.’ The one at his feet will say: ‘I am the goodness which he did to his brothers.’

“Then they all will ask the most beautiful one: ‘You, yourself, who are you and who is more perfect?’ He will answer, ‘I am the wilayat and love of the Ahlu ‘l-bayt of Muhammad (peace be upon him).’

“However, those who committed indecent acts and created chaos on the earth, when they enter the grave, they only face constraint and darkness; and the angels of torment will inflict chastisement on them.”

The questioning of the grave and its torments are not necessarily to be perceived by the physical eyes. That power by which the prophets, the Imams, the pure and righteous servants of God spoke is enough and must be accepted.

4. The Paradise & Hell in the Qur’ān

A few verses from the Qur’ān describing the Paradise:

Surely the God-fearing shall be in the gardens and fountains [of Paradise]. `Enter them in peace and security!’ We shall strip away all rancour that is in their hearts; they shall be upon couches sitting face to face as brothers; no fatigue there shall suite them, neither shall they be driven

forth from there. (15:47-48)

Those who rank first [among the good-doers], they will be brought near the Throne, in the gardens of delight...they will be reclining upon close-wrought couches, sitting face to face while immortal youths going round about them with goblets, ewers, and a cup from a spring..., such fruits as they choose, such flesh of fowl as they desire, and wide-eyed houris as the likeness of hidden pearls, a recompense for what they had done. (56: 11-24)

A few verses of the Qur'ān describing the Hell:

Surely those who disbelieved in Our signs — We shall certainly roast them at a Fire; as soon as their skins are wholly burned, We shall give them in exchange other skins, so that they may taste the chastisement [repeatedly]. Surely Allah is All-mighty, All-wise. (4:56)

As for the unbelievers, garments of fire shall be cut for them, and boiling water shall be poured over their heads whereby whatsoever is in their bellies and their skins shall be melted; hooked iron rods await them; as often as they desire in their anguish to come forth from it, they shall be restored into it, and `Taste the chastisement of the burning!' (22: 19-23)

Behold, the Jahannam has become an ambush, for the insolent a resort, there to tarry for ages, tasting therein neither coolness nor drink save boiling water and pus for a suitable recompense. (78:21-23)

Amiru 'l-Mu'minin, 'Ali bin Abi Tālib (a.s.) said:

“Know that the delicate skin of your body cannot tolerate or bear the fire of Hell. So pity yourselves. You who have experienced the discomforts of this world, and who know your own incapability, and who have seen how when a thorn enters your foot and makes it septic, the warm stones of the ground burn it, you take the pain. So how will it be when you are between two walls of fire, when you lie on stones and your companion is Satan.

“O those who are slaves of Allah; remember Allah, remember Allah, remember Allah while you are well before you become ill; while you have the opportunity before you become constrained; strive to be free of the fire of Hell before the way of salvation becomes impossible for you. Give yourself to the way of Allah with eyes clear of sleep, and your stomach empty (i.e., fasting). Walk in His path; give away your possessions in His path; use your body to the benefit of your spirit, being sparing.”

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This lesson is from Dar Rah-e Haqq, *The Roots of Religion*, Qum.

Question Paper on Lesson 20

Question 1: [30 points]

True or False:

- (a) Muslims believe that death is the end of our existence.
- (b) “Barzakh” refers to the period from time of death to the day of Resurrection.
- (c) Questioning in the grave is not an essential part of the faith.
- (d) Paradise and Hell are just metaphors and not a reality.
- (e) The angels will question you in the grave.
- (f) Those who are killed in the way of Allāh are alive only in the symbolic sense; not in the real sense.
- (g) Barzakh will be a sample of what one will get in the hereafter.
- (h) The hadith describing the “six beautiful youths” was narrated by Imam Hasan bin ‘Ali (a.s.).
- (i) Wilāyat and love of the Ahlu ‘l-Bayt of Muhammad (peace be upon him) will help the believers during the period of Barzakh.
- (j) Death is a doorway or a passage to the eternal life in the hereafter.

Question 2: [20 points]

Explain how the saying of Imam ‘Ali quoted at the end of the lesson affected you.

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