

Lesson 30: After Death

Death

That which does not die and will never die is Allah. We, slaves, will one day eventually leave this world.

The setting of the sun each day is a poetical metaphor for our passing away. How good it is, if we meet with another day, just like the sun, beaming and bright on the horizon of the Resurrection. This is important for the sunset is inevitable, death is a reality which, like it or not, must happen.

What we must think about is what after death will happen to us? Will we become nothing? Will everyone's life merely "end in death"? Or will we "remain", and if so, what will our "remaining" be like?

Those who do not believe in God consider death to be the becoming nothing of man, and life just limited to one or two days. They say that everyone's turn is short-lived. But those who are blessed in revelation are completely opposed to this view, and they say that man is immortal and that death is just a ladder leading to the world of purgatory and Resurrection, which is the everlasting resting-place.

Purgatory (Barzakh)

According to clear ayahs of the Qur'an and many hadiths from the leaders of Islam, death is not the becoming nothing of man. 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. The life of Barzakh is a real existence, not imaginary or illusory. Allah says:

"Count not those who were slain in the way of Allah as dead, but rather living with their Lord, being sustained rejoicing in the bounty which Allah has given them". (3: 169-170)

It is clear that if the life were not real, the phrase "living with their Lord, being sustained" would be meaningless.

Similarly in the case of the man of Ya-Sin, the believer, who advised his people to follow the Messenger

of 'Isa, but they did not and killed him, the Qur'an says:

"It was said: 'Enter Paradise!' He said: 'Ah, would that my people had knowledge that my Lord has forgiven me, and that he has placed me among the honored." (36:26-27)

It is evident that the meaning of Paradise in this ayah is the purgatory of Barzakh which people of faith benefit from in between death and the Resurrection.

The Qur'an said of the unbelievers and those who, till the moment of death, continue in unacceptable ways:

"Till, when death comes to one of them, he says 'My Lord return me; haply I shall do righteousness in that which I forsook.'" (23: 99)

But their wish is unfulfilled, and they are told.

"Nay, it is but a word he speaks, are there, behind them, barrier until the day that they shall be raised up." (23: 100)

Here is a true story about this. The tumult of the battle of Badr had just died down and the enemy fled away. The dead remained. Some of the dead who were unbelievers were dumped in a well. The Prophet (S) came to the head of the well and said to the dead: "O ye unbelievers! You were the accomplices of evil. You drove the Prophet of Allah from his home, and joined together in war against him. Now I have seen the promise of my God fulfilled. Have you also seen the promise of your god proved true?"

On hearing these words, 'Umar said: "O Prophet, how can you speak with these who are no more than bodies without spirits?"

"Enough!" said the Prophet, "I swear by Allah that you can hear no better than they can. Just as I got up and turned away from them, the angels of torment came to beat them with iron clubs."

Amir al-mu'minin 'Ali (a.s.), too, was searching among the dead after the battle of Jamal for the body of Ka'b ibn Surah. Ka'b had been appointed in his life-time to be judge of Basrah, and had been judge there till the end of the Caliphate of 'Uthman. In the battle of Jamal he hung a Qur'an round his neck and together with the family and offspring of the Prophet went to the Imam's battle and was killed. After he had found the body, the Imam (a.s.) gave the command to sit him up, and addressed him: "O Ka'b, I have seen the promise of Allah fulfilled. Have you, too seen it fulfilled?"

Then he ordered the body to be laid down; then he did the same with the body of Talhah. So someone asked him: "What is the use of doing that? They cannot hear your words."

"I swear by Allah," We said, "that they heard both my remarks, just as did the deadbeat Badr with the

Prophet.”

Also Habbah al-'Arni said “I went with Amir al-mu'minin 'Ali (a.s.) to Wadi as-Salam. The latter stood and it seemed that he spoke with some people. I stood too but became tired, so I sat down, but I was still tired. I got up and sat down again. Still I was tired so I stood up to get my cloak and asked 'Ali if he would allow me to put my cloak down so that he could sit down for a while. I told him I was afraid he might be tired from standing too much.

“O Habbah.” he said, “this standing up gives no discomfort, because I am busy with speaking familiarly with the dead.” “Are they like this,” I asked.

“Yes, if the veil was taken away from your eyes you would see that groups of the dead are sitting speaking to one another.”

“Are they bodies or spirits?” I asked.

“Spirits. The faithful, in all corners of the world, do not die unless an order reaches them. In Wadi as-Salam, here and there are chambers of the Garden of Eden, and the highest heavens where the spirits of the believers gathered from far and near.”

The Questioning in the Grave

It can be seen from many hadiths that the spirit has a very special relation with the body in the grave, although the nature of this relation is not clear.

The sixth Imam, Ja'far as-Sadiq (a.s.) said: “Those who deny the questioning in the grave are not from our party (Shi'a).”

When the dead person is laid in the grave, the angels of the questioning present themselves and ask him about his din, his beliefs and his deeds. If the individual 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 in Barzakh until the Resurrection with their respective group.

Shaykh Saduq – may the mercy of Allah be with him – 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 in 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.”

The fourth Imam (a.s.) used to exhort people every Friday in the Mosque of the Prophet (S), saying: “O People, prefer abstinence and virtuousness. Your return will be to Allah. Each person who has done good here, will be advanced there, and each person who has done impure deeds and wishes that a great distance be put between him and his deeds, Allah will put the fear of your torment into you.

“Alas, O sons of Adam! What neglectfulness! But they are not neglectful. Death is quicker than anything that tries to overtake it, and it will swallow you. And when it finds you out, it will be as it is said when it overtakes you, and the angel of death will recover your spirit from you and you will rise alone in the chamber (the grave), and the angel of questioning will come in to you for questions and a hard examination.

“The first question will be about your God whom you worshipped, and about your Prophet who was sent to you, and about your din which you followed, and about your Book which you believed in and read, and about your Imams whose wilayat you accepted and whose orders you carried out. Then they will ask about the reckoning of your life, what way you went, and about your property and wealth, where you disposed of it and how you spent it. So be careful, and after the questions be ready with your answer!

“If you are with faith, virtuous, know yourself well and follow the truthful leaders; and a friend of the friends of Allah, Allah will make your tongue speak the truth, and He will give you the good news of the Garden and your happiness. The angels will come before you with gifts and sustenance. Otherwise your tongue will fall to stammering and you will not reply after the questions, and He will make you the promise of the Fire, and the angels will bring torment before you with the entertainment of boiling water and fire.”

The Torment of the Grave

Man's placing in Barzakh is intimately connected with his deeds in this world. For those who are virtuous of soul, Barzakh will be a sample of Heaven, and they will see their good deeds reflected in beauty and soft to the eye. Hazrat Imam Hasan '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. On his right, on his left, above him and below him and in front of him and behind him they will stand. Then the most beautiful of them will ask: “Who are you all.” The one standing on the right 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 all will ask of the most beautiful: 'You, yourself, who are you, who is more perfect?’”

“I am walayat”, he will say, “and love of the Household of Muhammad (S).”

However on those who had polluted the surface of the earth with unbelief, impurity and indecent acts, constraint and darkness will fall when they enter the grave, and their angel of torment will inflict suffering on them.

The Prophet of Islam (S) was following the funeral procession of one of the Ansars; and when he had been buried, he sat down on his grave and lowered his head, saying: “O Allah, I seek refuge from the torments of the grave!”

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

Mulla Muhsin Fayz says: “These (physical) eyes are not competent to see what happens in the world of Malakut, and what happens in the next world and in Barzakh is the business of Malakut. Did not the companions of the Prophet (S) believe in the descent of Jibra'il, although they could not see him? So also, the torment of the grave is an affair of Malakut, and if this is to be perceived, another sense is necessary of which all are deprived save the prophets and the walls of Allah.”

The Remembrance of Death

Some people run away from the remembrance of death, and do not give way to thoughts about it. It is as if they have drunk the water of eternity, and think to remain in this world forever. These people are drunk from the wine of neglectfulness. For they know but do not accept that the only thing that is eternal and will not die is Allah. From the results of their neglectfulness of death, they will pass their lives aimlessly. They do not think to reform themselves; their time is spent like the hands of a clock, turning round and round, and how often will they be polluted with dreadful sins. There is not so much difference between their lives and the lives of animals.

The manner of their behavior is completely the contrary of the way of acting of the chosen ones of Allah. The Prophet of Islam (S) said: “Remember death very often, so that it may purify you from sins and decrease attachment to a world which is not an introduction to the betterment of the spirit.”

On the other hand, there are others who remember death much, following the command of the leaders of the din – may Allah bless them – and profit from every occasion that comes their way for the Day of Resurrection. Their world is a world of introduction to the ultimate world. Their search is not for personal benefit and their own desires. From their view the world does not have so much value that they will dirty their hands and clothes with urine and treachery to get it. Rather they are busy with work and pursuits and service in society, so that they will completely take the benefit from this life to the life of the Resurrection.

They do not fear death. The greatest example is Amir al-Mu'minin, 'Ali (a.s.), whose first words when the sword of the enemy fell to martyr him were: “I swear by Allah, I have been delivered!”

Truly, the leaving of the constraints of this world and going to eternity of the everlasting world is an ease and a salvation, but only for those who follow the way of Hazrat 'Ali (a.s.) to polity in the straightened circumstances of this life, and who are occupied with piety in their spirits and souls and thoughts, and with worship and slavery to Allah, and with service to mankind.

Abu Dharr al-Ghifari was asked: “Why are we disgusted with death?”

“You have taken up residence in this world,” he replied, “but ruined your next world. So you do not desire to migrate from your home to the place of ruin.”

The Prophet of Islam (S) said: “Do you all wish to go to the Garden?”

“Yes,” they all said.

“So cut short your cravings, and always keep death in sight, since you must always be shameful before Allah.”

To remember those near to you when they met death, and occasional visits to graveyards and the tombs of believers will result in remembrance of death and guidance.

The Garden

“But the godlearning shall be amongst gardens and fountains: ‘Enter you them, in peace and security!’ We shall strip away all rancour that is in their breasts; as brothers they shall be upon couches set face to face; no fatigue there shall suite them, neither shall they be driven forth from there.” (15: 45–48)

“The Outstripped (al-Sabiqun), those are they brought nigh the Throne, in the Gardens of Delight (a throng of the ancients but how few of the laterfolk) upon clcrse-wrought couches reclining upon them, set face to face, immortal youths going round about them with goblets, and ewers, and a cup from a spring (no brows throbbing, no intoxication) and such fruits as they choose, and such flesh offewl as they desire, and wide-eyed hours as the likeness of hidden pearls, a recompense for that they laboured.” (56: 10–24)

“Except for Allah’s sincere slaves; for them awaits a known provision, fruits – and they high-honoured in the Gardens of Bliss upon couches, set face to face, a cup from a spring being passed round to them, white, a delight to the drinkers, wherein no sickness is, neither intoxication; and with them wide-eyed maidens restraining their glances as if they were hidden pearls.” (37: 39–47)

The dwellers in the Garden are talking to one another “One of them says, ‘I had a comrade who wouldsay, “Are you a confrmer? What, when we are dead and become dust and Barnes, shall we indeed be requitted?” He says, ‘Are you looking down?’ Then he looks. and sees him in the midst of Hell. He says, ‘By Allah, wellnigh thou didst destroy me; But for my Lord’s blessing, I was one of the arraigned. What, do we then not die except for our first death, and are we not chastised? This is indeed the mighty triumph and for the like of this let the workers work.” (37: 50–61)

Hell

Hell is the place of the unbelievers and the sinners. Their torment and torture cannot be compared to the torments of this world. Allah gives us a picture of the horror of it in the Qur'an:

“Surely those who disbelieved in Our signs – We shall certainly roast them at a Fire; as often as their skins are wholly burned, We shall give them in exchange other skins, that they may taste the chastisement. Surely Allah is All-might, All-wise.” (4: 56)

“As for the unbelievers, for them garments of fire shall be cut, and there shall be poured over their heads boiling water whereby whatsoever is in their bellies and their skins shall be melted; for them await hooked iron rods; 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)

And those who are in the Fire will say to the keeper of Gehema, ‘Call on your Lord, to lighten for us one day of the chastisement!’ They shall say, ‘Did not your Messengers bring you the clear signs?’ They shall say, ‘Yes, indeed’ They shall say, ‘Then do you call?’ But the calling of the believer is only in error.” (40: 49–50)

“Behold, Gehema has become an ambush, for the insolent a resort, therein to tarry for ages, tasking therein neither coolness nor drink save boiling water and pus for a suitable recompense.” (78: 21–23)

“Woe unto every backbiter, slanderer, who has gathered riches and counted them over thinking his riches have made him immortal! No indeed; he shall be thrust into the Crusher; and what shall teach thee what is the Crusher? The Fire of Allah kindled roaring over the hearts covered down upon them, in columns outstretched.” (104: 1–9)

Amir al-mu'minin,¹Ali (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 incapacities, 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 stone” and your companion is Satan.

“O those who are slaves of 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 stomachs empty (i.e. fasting). Walk in His path; give away your possessions in His path; use your bodies to the benefit of your spirit; being sparing.” [1](#)

Intercession (ash-Shafa'ah)

One of the dear matters in the Qur'an, and also in many hadiths, is the matter of intercession. Intercession as intervention for the pardoning of someone's sins.

This intermediation, which takes place by the permission of Allah in some sins and in the case of some sinners, is based on the expensive mercy and deep kindness of Allah, and is a consequence of the hope of believers.

If one believes and obtains worthiness to be forgiven and pardoned, and does not fall back again from these high positions, although one was not able to repent in this world, Allah will grant one His great Forgiveness by the means of intercession. In the Resurrection, the Prophets, the Prophet of Islam and the Pure Imams – may Allah bless them all and grant them peace –will, with the permission of Allah, intercede with Him for some sins. Of course, the sins of some persons will be so grave that they cannot merit intercession until they have met with the torment But some sins are such that they will be completely removed by intercession. Thus a hadith says:

“Our intercession, the intercession of the Household of the Prophet is not the lot of those who take prayer to be a frivolity.”

Questions

What is it that will certainly, like it or not, happen?

If so then what must we think and be concerned about?

What is purgatory?

What do verses of the Holy Qur'an say about it?

What does verse 100 ch. 23 say?

To who did the Prophet speak?

Who said it is no use to speak to the dead?

What was the Holy Prophets answer?

To whose dead body did Imam speak?

In what position was the dead body kept and what did Imam Ali say?

What did Habbah al-Ami experience?

What were the answers of Imam Ali to Habbah's questions?

Who lived in Wadi as-Salem according to Imam Ali?

What did the sixth say about those who deny questions in the grave?

What has Shaykh Sadiq said in his book about the questions in the grave?

What has the fourth Imam Said people to do every Friday?

What will happen If you are with faith and if you are without faith?

What will happen to people in barzakh, if they are of good faith and deeds and if they are not so?

Who do the six youths do to a person of good faith and deeds?

What do they say to each other?

What did the Holy Prophet do and say on the grave of the man who just died??

What kind of life do people who neglect death live?

What kind of life does people who are mindful of death live?

Who is the most prominent of the people who are mindful of death?

What were the first words of Imam Ali when death approached him?

What did the Holy Prophet say about the Gardens?

What does verses 45–48 ch. 15 say about the Gardens?

What do verses 10–24 say about the Garden?

What does verse 40–48 say?

What does verse 50–61 ch. 37 say?

What does verse 56 ch. 4 say?

What do verse 19–22 ch. 22 say?

What do verse 21–25 ch. 28 say?

What do verses 1–9 ch. 104 say?

What has Imam Ali said about fire and suffering?

What is intercession?

Who will be able to intercede for others before God?

Who will not be able to benefit from the intercession of Ahlul Bayt?

1. Nahjul Balaghah

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