

# This World and the Hereafter

## A. The Relationship

In the Islamic worldview, God has created human beings with a specific purpose: to attain the highest level of perfection in order to have a blissful life in the hereafter. The process of attaining perfection is to be done in this world by willingly submitting ourselves to God.

The relationship between this world and human beings can be clearly and simply put as the following:

- The world has been created for humans; it is only here that a person can attain the levels of perfection.
- Humans have been created for God: it is here that they have to submit by their own choice to the commandments of God.

In a *hadith qudsi*, God says: “I have created all things for you, but you I have created for Myself.”<sup>1</sup> In the Quran, God says:

***“And the earth- We have spread it forth and made in it firm mountains and cause it to grow in it of every suitable thing. And We made in it means of subsistence for you and persons for whom you are not the sustainers.”*** (The Qur'an, 15: 19–20)

Muslims have to maintain a balance between their outlook towards this world and the hereafter. They cannot exclusively bind themselves to one without the other; neither is the world to be forsaken for the hereafter nor the hereafter for this world. A Muslim uses this world for the hereafter; or, to put it in a stronger form, one cannot prepare for the hereafter without this world.

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When Imam 'Ali deputed Muhammad bin Abi Bakr as the governor to Egypt. He wrote the following document as an advice to him and the Egyptians:

"Know, O people, that the righteous ones have acquired [the joys of] this transient world as well as the forth-coming hereafter. They shared with the worldly people in their mundane matters while the worldly people did not share with them in [the blessings of] their hereafter.

"They lived in this world in the best manner of living and ate the choicest food and so they enjoyed herein all that the worldly people enjoyed and achieved from it what the haughty and arrogant had achieved.

"Then they departed from it with the sufficient provision and profitable bargain [for the hereafter]. Thus they tasted the pleasure of renouncing the world in their world and were assured of being neighbors of Allah in their hereafter where neither their prayer shall be rejected nor their share of pleasure shall be diminished."[2](#)

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Upon hearing a man abusing the world, Imam Ali (a.s) said, "O you who abuse the world, O you who have been deceived by its deceit and cheated by its wrongs. Do you covet the world and then abuse it? Do you accuse it or should it accuse you?

"Certainly, this world is a house of truth for him who appreciates it; a place of safety for him who understands it: a house of riches for him who collects provision from it (for the next world) ... [it is] the market-place for those devoted to Allah. Herein they earned mercy and therein they acquired Paradise by way of profit.

"Therefore, who can abuse it when it has announced its transitory nature and called out that it would leave! It has given news of its own destruction and the death of its people. By its hardship, it set an example of their hard ship. By its pleasures it created eagerness for the pleasures (of the next world) ...The world recalled to them the next life and they bore it in mind. It related to them (things of the next life) and they acknowledged them. It preached to them and they took lesson there from it."[3](#)

## **B. The Attachment**

The wealth of this world is a blessing of God: and, therefore, Islam does not condemn the world and its wealth. However, Islam has always emphasized to its followers that the attachment of humans to this world should be of a nature where you are in control of your life, and not the slave of this world and its pleasures.

***"Say: If your fathers, your sons, your brothers, your wives, your clan, possessions that you have acquired, business that you fear may slacken and dwellings which you love- if these are dearer to you than Allah, His Messenger and to struggle in His way, then wait till Allah brings about His decision". (9:24)***

The .key word in this verse is "dearer;" a person can love the family and the worldly possessions but not more than the love that he or she has for God and His Messenger.

The Prophet Muhammad (s.a.w) said, "The best help in piety is being free from need."[4](#) Imam Ja'far as-Sadiq (a.s) said, "The best help for the hereafter is this world."[5](#) Imam Muhammad al-Baqir (a.s) said, "One who forsakes his world for his hereafter or his hereafter for his world is not from us."[6](#)

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Imam Musa al-Kazim (a.s) has very elegantly described the relationship of the believer to this world and the hereafter. He said,

**Work for your world as if you are to live forever and work for your hereafter as if you are to die tomorrow.**[7](#)

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## Wealth versus Poverty and Asceticism

However, a question comes to mind: Does not Islam, like other religions, prefer poverty to wealth and affluence? The reality is that Islam does not consider poverty or affluence as the goal; the ultimate goal is to submission to the will of God and whatever helps that submission is preferred.

Therefore, Imam as-Sadiq (a.s) said, "Wealth which prevents you from injustice is better than poverty which pushes you towards sin."[8](#)

So what does Islam say about asceticism (zuhd)?

Imam Ja'far as-Sadiq explains the real meaning of asceticism as follows: "Asceticism (zuhd) in this world is neither neglecting your wealth nor making the permissible (halal things) into forbidden (haram); instead, zuhd in this world means that your wealth should not be stronger to you [in attachment] than what is with Allah."[9](#)

## Affluence and Charity

Once people have amassed enough wealth to ensure a comfortable standard of living for themselves and their dependents, then they must realize that it is better to share the extra wealth with the less fortunate members of the society.

They must engage in public service. After all, the affluent people are to consider themselves as the trustees of God's wealth and the poor as the dependents of God should not the trustees of God take care of His dependents?

Referring to the lack of concern for the society's wellbeing by corporate America in the nineties, Harvey

Pitt, the chair of the Securities and Exchange Commission said, "We are coming off a period of enormous and probably excessive exuberance in the markets ...I don't want to condemn corporate America. I do condemn the fact that in the excesses of the 90s, the people really lost sight of fundamental values."[10](#)

Even Alan Greenspan, the chairman of US Federal Reserve, talked about the "infectious greed" that has gripped "much of our business community."

Sama'ah once asked Imam as –Sadiq (a.s) about a people who had excessive wealth while their brethren in faith were in such dire need that even the zakat was not sufficient for their needs: "Is it permissible for them to eat their fill while their brethren are hungry, since they are in financially depressing time?" The Imam replied,

"A Muslim is a brother of a Muslim, neither does he oppress him nor does he abandon him or deprive him. It is a duty upon the Muslims to work diligently on this matter, to connect and cooperate in it, to be charitable towards the needy, to show sympathy as Allah has commanded about them, and to be beneficent to one another."[11](#)

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'Abdullah bin Abi Ya 'fur narrates that at a person came to Imam as–Sadiq (a.s) and said, "By Allah, I like to seek the world (i.e., wealth) and love to be given of it."

Imam: "What would you like to do with it?"

The answer was "[I would like] to maintain myself and my family; to help my relatives and to give in charity; to do hajj and 'umra."

Imam said, "Then what you are doing is not seeking of the world; instead, it is seeking the hereafter."[12](#)

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Once al-'Ala ' bin Ziyad al–Harithi, a companion of Imam 'Ali (a.s) became sick. The Imam went to visit him. After greeting him and inquiring about his health, when the Imam noticed the vastness of al-'Ala's house, he said:

"What will you do with this vast house in this world, while you need this house more in the next world? Of course, if you want to take it to the next world, then you should entertain guests in it, be charitable to the relatives, and discharge through it the dues as they should be discharged. In this way you will be able to take it to the next world."[13](#)

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Let me conclude this section with an advice of a saint that I learnt from my late father:

"Son, if you want to be a fly, be a fly which sits on sugar; but, for God's sake, don't be a fly which sits on honey. Because a fly sitting on sugar leaves it the moment it wants; but a fly which sits on honey becomes imprisoned in it, unable to leave it and dies miserably."[14](#)

## C. Seeking Livelihood

Islam is not an exclusively otherworldly religion. It strongly emphasizes that you work hard to fulfill the needs of yourself, your family, and to help others. A Muslim is expected to be financially independent.

Working hard to earn your livelihood is not in any way reprehensible in Islam. The lives of our Prophet and the Imams of Ahlul Bayt clearly encourage us to hard work for our financial independence.

### **Examples:**

The Prophet himself engaged in trade and business when he lived with his uncle Abu Talib. He was in charge of the trade caravan of Lady Khadija who later became his wife. It is well known that Imam 'Ali emancipated a thousand slaves from the earnings of the toil of his own hands.[15](#)

'Ali bin Abu Hamzah saw Imam Abu'1 Hassan al-Kazim (a.s) working in his farm while his feet had become dirty with mud. He went forward and said,

"My life be ransom for you! Where are your men?"

The Imam said. "O 'Ali, those who were superior to me and my father have worked with their own hands in their farms."

'Ali asked, "Who can that be?"

The Imam said, "The Messenger of Allah. Amiru '1- mu'minin, and all my forefathers; they have toiled with their hands and this is the tradition of the prophets, the messengers, their successors and the good people."[16](#)

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Muhammad bin al-Munkadir used to think that Imam Zaynu '1-'Abidin (a.s.) could not have left a successor as good as himself until he met Imam Muhammad al-Baqir (a.s). While strolling once on a hot summer afternoon outside Medina, al-Munkadir saw Imam al-Baqir soaked in sweat and tired from working on his farm. Al-Munkadir said to himself, "Praise be to Allah! An elder from the elders of Quraysh at this hour of the day in this state of seeking livelihood for this world- I should surely admonish him." He went to the Imam and after greeting him , said:

"May Allah reform you-an elder from the elders of Quraysh at this hour of the day in this state of seeking worldly sustenance? What do you think of yourself if death comes to you in this state?"

Imam al-Baqir said, 'If death comes to me in this state, then let it come because I am in the state of obedience to the Almighty Allah by which I intend to make myself and my family independent of you and the people. I would indeed fear if death came to me while I was in the state of committing a sin.'

Al-Munkadir said, "You have spoken the truth; may Allah shower His mercy on you! I intended to admonish you but am the one who stands to be admonished." [17](#)

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'Abdu 'l-A'la once saw Imam Ja'far as-Sadiq (a.s) in Medina on a very hot afternoon and said to him. "May I be your ransom! With your status in the eyes of Almighty Allah and your relationship with the Messenger of Allah, you are exerting yourself [for your worldly needs] on such a day?"

Imam said, "O 'Abdu 'l-A'la, I have come out seeking the sustenance so that I may be independent from people like you." [18](#)

## Sayings

Imam Ja'far as-Sadiq (a.s): "The person who works hard for his family is like one who fights in the way of Allah." [19](#)

Imam ar-Rida (a.s): "The person who seeks the blessings of Allah to maintain his family has more rewards than one who fights in the way of Allah." [20](#)

Imam as-Sadiq: "Verily Allah, the exalted and high, dislikes long sleeps and long idle times." [21](#)

Imam al-Baqir: "I strongly dislike the person who is lazy in his worldly affairs because one who is lazy in the affairs of his world is lazier in the affairs of his hereafter." [22](#)

The Prophet: "Accursed is the person who puts his burden on the people." [23](#)

When the verse

***"And whoever fears Allah, He will find a way out [for him] and provide for him from sources he never thought of,"***

Was revealed, some people went to their homes and got busy in worship and said, "Allah will take care of us." When the Prophet Muhammad (s.a.w) came to know about it, he sent for them and said, "What has caused you to behave in this manner?"

They said, "Allah [in the verse recently revealed to you] has guaranteed our sustenance, therefore we have devoted ourselves to worship."

The Prophet said, "Whosoever does like this, his prayers will not be answered. I urge you to go out and seek [your livelihood]..." [24](#)

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"Learn three characteristics from the crow," said Imam as-Sadiq (a.s):

"1. It conceals its act of cohabitation;

"2. It rises early for seeking sustenance;

"3. It is [always] alert."[25](#)

[1.](#) Hadi as-Sabzwari, Sharhu 'l – Asmai 'l-Husna, vol.1 (Qum: Basirati, n.d.)p.139

[2.](#) Sayyid Radi, Nahju'l-Balagha, instruction no.27

[3.](#) Nahju 'l-Balagha, saying 131

[4.](#) Al Kulayni, al-Furu'mina'l-Kafi, vol.5, p,71; al-Hurr al-Amili, Wasa'ilu sh-Shi'ah, vol. 12, p. 16

[5.](#) Al-Fu'ru, vol 5, p.72; Wasa'ilu sh-Shi'ah, vol. 12, p.17

[6.](#) As-Suduq, Man la Yahduruhu 'l-Faqih, vol 3 ( Tehran: Daru 'l-Kutub al-Islamiyya, 1367 A.H) p.94

[7.](#) Ibid.

[8.](#) Al-Furu, vol. 5. p. 72

[9.](#) Tahdhib, vol. 6. p. 327.

[10.](#) In an interview in USA Today, 2 July 2002.

[11.](#) Wasa'ilu' sh- Shi'ah, vol. 11 , p. 597.

[12.](#) At-Tusi, Tahdhibu 'l-Ahkam,vol.6 ( Tehran: Daru 'l-Kutub al-Islamiyya, 1365 AH [solar]) p.327-8

[13.](#) Nahju 'l-Balagha. Sermon no. 209.

[14.](#) S.S. Akhtar Rizvi, Inner Voice (Dar-es-salaam: BMM , 1989) p. 58

[15.](#) This has also been narrated by Imam Ja'far as-Sadiq (a.s). See Al -Furu ', vol. 5, p. 74.

[16.](#) Man la Yahduruhu 'l-Faqih. vol. 3, p. 162

[17.](#) Al -Furu ', vol. 5,p. 73.

[18.](#) Ibid, vol. 5,p.74.

[19.](#) Ibid, vol. 5,p. 88

[20.](#) Ibid.

[21.](#) Ibid, vol. 5,p. 84.

[22.](#) Ibid. vol. 5, p. 85.

[23.](#) Ibid, vol 5, p.72; vol.4, p. 12.

[24.](#) Ibid, vol.5.p. 84

[25.](#) Man la Yahduruhu 'l-Faqih, vol. 1. p.482

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