

Towards Eternal Life

Death

Death means separation of soul from the body; Islam tells us that man is not annihilated as the result of death. He is only transferred from one world to another, where he begins a new life. The Holy Prophet has said: "You have not been created for annihilation. You have been created for everlasting life. The only thing is that you are moved from one world to another."

According to Islam, separation of soul from the body does not take place in a uniform manner in the case of all individuals. The souls of the sinners and of those who are too much attached to this world are separated with violence and force, but the souls of the virtuous and those who love Allah and are in communion with the next world are separated with ease and gentleness.

The Hereafter

All prophets and sacred books unanimously agree that with death human life does not come to an end, and after this world, there exists another world where human beings will be rewarded or punished according to their deeds.

The virtuous will lead a happy and pleasant life, and the evil-doers will be punished and tormented. Belief in resurrection and the next world is one of the fundamentals of all religions and a believer in prophets has to believe in resurrection, too.

The idea that with death everything comes to an end and man is completely annihilated is not only appalling but appears to be odd and illogical also. Especially after the acceptance of the doctrine of divine unity and acknowledgement of the existence of Allah, it is totally incomprehensible.

It is unbelievable that the aim of all the complex laws of evolution is simply to first transform a simple and invaluable being into a highly developed intellectual being like Avicenna (Ibn-Sina) or Einstein and then to annihilate him altogether.

It does not stand to reason that annihilation should be the fate of the entire human race and its culture. Such a theory is incredible, unreasonable and incompatible with the knowledge, wisdom and skill of the Creator. This looks as if a vainglorious person builds a carefully designed and well-executed magnificent workshop or factory and then blows it into pieces.

Will it not be more logical if we admit that life continues in another form after death and the process of evolution does not come to an end? Here we can give a beautiful example. Our life in this world is like that of a fetus which after passing through several evolutionary stages, is transferred to a wider and more perfect environment of which it could not even have imagined (if it had any power of imagination).

Had human life been limited to a fetus period and every fetus died immediately after birth. Would such a life not have been illogical and unreasonable? It would be more logical if human life in this world after passing through intricate and difficult routes of physical, intellectual and moral evolution is a prelude to the beginning of a higher and wider life in the next world. The life of that world should bear the same relation to the life of this world as the life of this world to the fetal life.

That is why all those who believe in Allah also believe that with death man is not annihilated, but is transferred to another world whose full details and characteristics are beyond our comprehension, for we are confined to the four walls of this world. Anyhow; we know this much that leaving this world does not mean the end of life and that another world does exist.

Study of the laws of the Universe, of the forces which push man forward along the path of evolution and of the systematic grandeur of this world convincingly testify to this truth.

The Holy Qur'an says; "Did you think that we had made you in vain and that you were not going to return to us?" It also says: "And surely you have known the first evolution then why do you not mind?" In other words it says you have seen the life of this world, then why do you not conclude that there is another world also, for the study of this world and the laws concerning the evolution of human life here show that there is another world where the process of evolution will continue.

Scientific Laws and Resurrection

It is remarkable that Science with its modern discoveries has taken a long step forward towards proving the possibility of resurrection and life hereafter, and with the enunciation of the doctrine of the imperishability of matter and energy, the resurrection which previously appeared to be impossible, has now become logical and comprehensible.

The doctrine of the imperishability of matter which was first discovered by Lavoisier has rendered the question of complete annihilation totally unscientific. According to it, the particles of man, howsoever, decomposed and scattered they may become, still exist in this very world, and it is possible that one day they are recollected.

This is the first step forward towards the possibility of the resurrection of man and his return to life after death.

This doctrine was further reinforced by the discovery of radio-active bodies by Marie Curie. Her discovery confirmed that not only matter but energy is also everlasting and that there is no duality between matter and energy, for they are convertible with each other.

On this basis, we should admit that our ideas, our deeds and all our movements which are all produced by the transformation of our various bodily energies, continue to exist in this world.

Our vocal waves are not obliterated and their traces always exist in the air and the objects which surround us. Only their form is changed. The same is the case with all our works and deeds.

This is another step forward towards the possibility of resurrection and even physically seeing the deeds themselves.

Anyhow, with the progress of science the question of resurrection is no longer as complicated as once it was. Now it is comprehensible and from a scientific stand-point fully admissible.

Faith in Resurrection and Human Development

Faith in resurrection besides logically interpreting and revolving the puzzle of life and death and besides being a truth which must be accepted, produces diverse effects on human life, the most important of them being the following two:

The picture of death which had always been appalling and the thought of which had always disturbed the peace of mind has undergone a complete change. With the acknowledgement of resurrection and "life after death" in a world where all the gifts of life will exist eternally and on a higher and bigger scale the picture of death is no longer as dreadful and appalling as it was, and the scenes of death and old age no longer disturb the peace of mind.

The unrest and anxiety caused by the thought of death is not as painful to us as to the materialists, and thus we can lead a more comfortable and satisfied life.

The believers in life hereafter welcome sacrifice and martyrdom for a sacred cause, for they regard them as a prelude to a new life in a higher and wider world.

2. The realization that human thought and deeds continue to exist, that they after going through a process of development and growth come back in a magnified form in the next world, that all good and bad deeds are to be minutely accounted for and that one has to receive reward or punishment, as the case may be, certainly exerts a healthy effect on human conduct and behavior. Thus the belief in the next world creates a favorable atmosphere for the promotion of good deeds and keeping the out-burst

of passions under a check.

Independent Existence and Imperishability of Soul

Though the materialists try to describe thought, understanding and other psychological phenomena as the physical and chemical properties of brain and nervous system and hence proclaim them to be material, yet the inadequacy of their interpretation clearly indicates the independent existence and non-material nature of soul, because in spiritual phenomena like thinking, imagination and memory, we find characteristics which are not the general properties of matter.

We can embody in our minds huge planets, galaxies and solar systems or mountains, deserts and large rivers, though in their external existence they are so enormous. Obviously, in such cases, a huge picture, even as large as the heaven and earth is drawn in our minds and we feel the existence of the mental picture within ourselves.

Now the question is where is the location of this picture? Certainly, it cannot be located in our brain cells, because our mental pictures may be millions of times larger than our brain. Can you ever, on paper, draw a map of Japan to the actual and physical scale of that country? Certainly not.

Hence, we must believe in the existence of meta-physical forces to be able to interpret this phenomenon without being confronted with the dilemma of correspondence of a big object to a small object.

One of the general properties of matter is constant change, transformation and disintegration with the passage of time, whereas, our mental picture, remain firm and stable and do not undergo a change.

For example, I saw a young friend of mine some years ago at a meeting. If I recollect that meeting even after fifty years, the same mental picture, which is still firm in my memory, will reappear without, the slightest change. This shows that mental pictures remain stable and are not affected by general properties of matter, and hence they cannot be material.

Non-correspondence of a large object with a small object and unchangeability of mental pictures are two out of many arguments advanced by the philosophers to prove the independent existence of human soul or spirit. There are other arguments also, for which a reference may be made to the books of philosophy.

From the above, it may be concluded that soul and spiritual phenomena do not have general properties of matter, they do not come to an end with physical death, and continue to exist even after having separated from the body. This clearly indicates the possibility of resurrection after death.

Barzakh (Purgatory)

Life hereafter and resurrection after death are proved by reason, but reason cannot guide us as to the nature and character of the next life. For that we have to refer to the sayings of the prophets and

religious leaders (Imams). The Holy Qur'an and the traditions of the Holy Prophet tell us that there exists a world named Barzakh where the dead will be kept till the Day of Judgment and general resurrection. It is an intermediate stage between this world and the next.

When a man dies, he comes first to this world, where he passes a special kind of spiritual life. At the start of this life which begins from the grave, a brief interrogation is carried out, and the beliefs and acts of the individual are checked. If his beliefs are found in order of his acts and deeds good, a door of paradise is opened to him and he stays on the way leading to paradise, where he enjoys heavenly blessings.

There he waits for the Day of Judgment and final attainment of eternal favors. On the other hand, if he is found wicked and his beliefs false, he is placed on the way leading to hell and the door of hell is opened in his face. There he leads a bitter and unpleasant life. He is tormented and remains in constant fear of the Day of Judgment and severe punishment.

Allah says in the Holy Qur'an:

"And do not say of those who are slain in the way of Allah that they are dead. In fact, they are alive, but you do not perceive that life." (Sura al-Baqarah, 2: 155)

"Do not regard as dead those who have been slain in the way of Allah; nay they are really alive and are well-provided by their Lord." (Sura 'Ali-Imran, 3: 169)

The Holy Prophet said: "The grave is the first stage of the next life. If one is saved from its rigors, the next stages are easy. If one is not saved, then what follows is not easier."

Imam 'Ali Ibn Husayn (A) said: "The grave is either a garden out of the gardens of paradise or a pit out of the pits of hell."

General Resurrection

The Holy Qur'an and the traditions of the Holy Prophet and the Imams describe resurrection as under:

The sun and the moon will become dark and lightless. The mountains will be cleaved and torn as under. The planets will collide with each other. The rivers will become dry and will be ablaze. The heaven and earth will be deformed. At that time all the dead will be raised. They will be assembled for giving account of their deeds.

Allah has the record of all acts and deeds of the people. Nothing has been left out or missed. On the Day of Judgment the veil will be lifted from the eyes of the people and they will be able to see their deeds with their eyes physically. Then the process of accountability will begin.

Everything will be checked most carefully and minutely. The infidels and the unpardonable sinners will

be sent to hell. The sinners who will be eligible for pardon, having already undergone a part of punishment during their stay in the Purgatory, will be pardoned as a result of an intercession by the prophets and the Imams. They will eventually be sent to paradise.

The accountability process in respect of the good and virtuous will be completed speedily and with ease. But the infidels and many sinners will have a rough time. Even the minutest details of their conduct will be checked and they will be asked to explain all their acts. This will take a long time, and they will pass through various stages of accountability in great discomfort and anguish.

Paradise

Paradise is the place where the good and the virtuous will be sent. There exist all means of comfort, ease and happiness and all that one may enjoy. Everything which one wishes will be available there. The Holy Qur'an says:

"There shall be what the soul desires and what delights the eye." (43:71)

The blessings of Paradise are higher and better than those of this world. None has heard of nor seen anything like them. There will be no discomfort there. He who enters paradise will have eternal life and will stay there forever.

Paradise has various divisions, and everyone will be accommodated in them according to the degree of his good deeds and virtues.

Hell

Hell is the place where infidels and the wicked will be kept, and there they will be punished, tormented and subjected to most severe pain. The punishment meted out in hell will be indescribably harsh and severe. The fire in the hell not only burns the body, but it also burns the heart and soul. It erupts from within and inflames the very existence of the individual. "The fire of Allah that has been lighted, rises over the hearts," says the Holy Qur'an.

Those who will be consigned to hell will be divided into two groups:

The first group will consist of unbelievers who do not acknowledge Allah. They will forever be tormented in hell and will have no escape.

The second group will consist of those who acknowledge Allah, but their faith being weak, they commit sins and thus become liable to punishment. They will be kept in hell temporarily. After they have been purged of the darkness of the sins, they, through the direct mercy of Allah or intercession of the prophet, will be forgiven and sent to paradise.

Hell also has various divisions where various types of chastisements have been provided for. Everybody will be placed in the class which he deserves according to the varying degree of his sins and will be suitably punished.

Intercession

The principle of intercession has been mentioned in the Holy Qur'an and the traditions of the Holy Prophet and the Imams. Hence, in principle, intercession is undeniable. On the whole the traditions show that the Holy Prophet and the Imams will intercede on behalf of some sinner.

They will say: "O Allah : Though this person is a sinner and deserves punishment, yet for the sake of the certain quality which he possesses because you are All-forgiving and for the sake of that consideration you have for us. We beseech you to ignore his misdeeds and show mercy to him." Their request will be acceded to and Allah will forgive the sinner and will bestow his favor on him.

Though in view of the Qur'anic passages and traditions, the principle of intercession is undeniable, a few points must be borne in mind:

No interceder will intercede without prior permission of Allah.

Intercession will take place only on the Day of Judgment and after the process of accountability is completed and all deed sheets have been checked. Interceders will ask for mercy only. There will be no intercession so long as a person is in 'barzakh' where sinners must undergo punishment according to their sins. Though it is possible that there also on the recommendation of the Prophet or an Imam, punishment is reduced or commuted, but that is not what is meant by intercession,

The interceders (Imams) themselves have said: "Be careful to come on the Day of Judgment in the form of a man so that we may intercede on your behalf." This shows that if sins and beastly acts of a person are so heinous that he comes on the Day of Judgment in the shape of a beast, he is not eligible to intercession. In any case, eligibility is the essential condition.

The interceders have said that their intercession will not include certain sins like not offering prescribed prayers.

In view of the above, one must not commit sins in the hope of intercession. That will only amount to taking poison and relying on the aid of physicians and medicines. Such a person is certainly liable to perish.

Penitence

The passages of the Holy Qur'an and the traditions of the infallible Imams tell us that if a sinner before his death repents and feels penitence about his misdeeds; his sins are forgiven without further

questioning. Hence the door of penitence is open to all sinners and one need not despair, for true penitence wipes all sins. But it is not enough to repeat any formula of penitence or just to shed a tear. True penitence has certain conditions to which 'Ali ibn Abi Talib (Peace be on him) has referred. He has said: "Penitence has six conditions. One must:

Really and sincerely repent his past misdeeds.

Be determined not to commit any sin in future.

Discharge all the rights which belong to others.

Fulfill all neglected obligatory acts.

Melt through self-mortification all the flesh that has grown on his body through the use of unlawful foods.

Bear the bitterness of acts of worship in the same way as he had tasted the pleasure of sin. Only then, he should utter the formula of penitence."

Source URL:

<https://www.al-islam.org/rationality-islam-sayyid-abu-al-qasim-al-khoei/towards-eternal-life#comment>

-0