

In the Grave

Questioning in the Grave

Muslims believe that after the dead is buried in the grave, divinely appointed interrogating angels arrive and ask the deceased about his faith and beliefs; if he had been a righteous believer, a door to Paradise is opened before him and he would enjoy the bounties of Paradise till Judgment Day; and if he had been a disbeliever or an oppressor, a door to Hell will opened before him and he will continue to suffer the chastisement of Hell till Judgment Day. In fact there is no doubt in this, because a large number of traditions are recorded about it and we present some of them by way of examples.

Imam Ja'far Sadiq (as) said:

“One who denies three things is not amongst our Shia (i.e. followers and devotees): Ascension of the Prophet, questioning of the grave, and intercession.”¹

Imam Musa Kazim (as) has narrated from his father, Imam Ja'far Sadiq (as), that he said:

“When a believer dies, seventy thousand angels participate in his funeral; when he enters the grave, Munkir and Nakeer come to him and pose questions to him; they ask him: ‘Who is your god? What is your religion? And who is your prophet?’ The believer replies: ‘My Lord is Allah, my prophet is Muhammad, and my religion is Islam.’ At that moment the grave is expanded as far as the eye can see and the foods of Paradise will be brought there for him and the breeze of Paradise will welcome him. It is this, which is mentioned in the Holy Quran:

فَأَمَّا إِنْ كَانَ مِنَ الْمُقَرَّبِينَ * فَرَوْحٌ وَرَيْحَانٌ وَجَنَّتُ نَعِيمٍ

If he is one of those drawn nigh (to Allah), then happiness and bounty and a garden of bliss (shall be his). (56:88-89)

...that is in the grave and Paradise of bliss, that is in the hereafter.”

Then the Imam said:

“When a disbeliever dies, seventy thousand angels of Hell accompany him to the grave. In this condition the dead person will plead to them in a voice, which would be audible to all except humans and jinns: ‘If only I had been able to return to the world and had become of the faithful.’ And he says: ‘Send me back to the world, perhaps I may do good in that, which I have left.’ Angels of Hell would say: ‘By no means! It is a (mere) word that you speak,’ and one of the angels would say: ‘If you are sent back to the world, you will again do the same.’

When his dead body is interred and people go away from there, Nakeer and Munkar come to him in the most terrible form and they raise him up for questioning. They ask him: ‘Who is your god? What is your religion? And who is your prophet?’ Since the disbeliever had no sincere faith in them, he would stammer and fail to reply. Thus those two angels would lash him in a punishment that everything will be terrified of it. They would ask him: ‘Who is your god? What is your religion? And who is your prophet?’ He would reply: ‘I don’t know.’ So they would tell him: ‘Neither you know, nor you were guided to the right path.’ Thus a door would be opened to Hell before him and the scalding fluids of Hell would come down to him. It is about this that is mentioned in the Holy Quran:

وَأَمَّا إِنْ كَانَ مِنَ الْمُكَذِّبِينَ الضَّالِّينَ * فَنُزِّلُ مِنْ حَمِيمٍ

And if he is one of the rejecters, the erring ones. He shall have an entertainment of boiling water... (56:92-93)

That is, in the grave he would be greeted by boiling water,

وَتَصْلِيَةٌ جَاحِمٍ

And burning in hell. (56:94)

That is, in the hereafter, he would be consigned to Hell.”[2](#)

Imam Ali (as) said:

“When the corpse is interred, two angels, named Munkir and Nakeer arrive. Their first questions to the dead are about God, prophet and caliphs. If it replies correctly, it is given salvation and if it is unable to reply correctly, they punish it.”[3](#)

Tens of other traditions also mention the same points, but quoting all of them here would prolong the discussion.

Squeeze of the Grave

Squeeze of the Grave is a painful event, which is mentioned in some traditions and the Infallibles (as) have also informed about it. For example:

Amirul Momineen (as) wrote to Muhammad bin Abu Bakr:

“O people, events occurring after death are more severe than death itself. Beware of the squeeze of the grave and the darkness and loneliness in it. The grave calls out every day: I am the house of strangeness, a house of dust, abode of loneliness and the house of stinging creatures. Grave is either a garden from the gardens of Paradise or a pit from the pits of Hell. When a believer is buried, the grave says: Welcome, previously I was desirous that you would walk to me, now that you are entrusted to me, you will see how I behave with you. At that moment the grave will be expanded as far as the eye can see.

But when a disbeliever is buried, the earth says: You are not welcome. Before this I detested your coming to me. Now that you are in my custody, you will see how I deal with you. At that moment he would be squeezed in such a way that his bones will merge into each other. A life of hardships that the Almighty Allah has promised to the disbelievers in the grave includes ninety-nine large serpents who will chew his flesh and crush his bones.

This will continue till Judgment Day. If one of those large serpents were to blow on the earth, nothing would ever grow on it again. O people, protect your weak selves and bodies that have lived in a tender way. Protect your bodies from the hardships, which they are unable to bear. Do that which the Almighty Allah likes and keep away from acts, which He has prohibited.”[4](#)

The Holy Prophet (S) remarked about cause of the squeeze of grave that Saad had to suffer:

“He was harsh and bad-tempered with his wife.”[5](#)

The Messenger of Allah (S) said:

“Squeeze of grave is due to wasting of the bounties.”[6](#)

It is because of such traditions that most scholars have concluded that faith in questioning of grave is a fundamental principle of Islamic faith. Mulla Mohsin Faiz Kashani writes:

Questioning, and punishment and reward of the grave is one of the necessary fundamentals of Islamic faith since there are a large number of traditions in this regard in Shia and Sunni sources, which remove every kind of doubt about it.[7](#)

Shaykh Tusi writes in Tajreedul Itiqad:

Chastisement of the grave is definite and imminent and also an inordinate number of traditions have come down about it from Ahle Bayt (as).[8](#)

The chastisement of Purgatory (Barzakh) and its rewards are matters on which Muslims have consensus.[9](#)

Therefore questioning and chastisement of the grave should not be doubted about; however its actual process requires discussion and research.

Whether man would hear the questions posed by the angels through these same worldly ears and would he reply through this same tongue or it is through some other types?

How is it possible for a body, which has lost the functioning of the heart, brain, organs, ears, eyes, tongue and other limbs and which has cooled down to hear the questions of the angels with the ears and how is it possible to answer them with the tongue?

Moreover, angels who are from the non-material spiritual world would they ask with the same worldly tongue so that the dead person may hear them with the same worldly ears and reply with the same tongue? Speaking of the angels is of another kind, which cannot be heard by worldly ears. Jibraeel used speak to the Prophet, but those around him were unable to hear it.

The Holy Prophet (S) used to hear Jibraeel through his inward ears and spoke to him with his inward tongue. Questioning of the angels must also be of this type. Angels speak to the abstract soul of man. He also hears the questions of the angels through his spiritual ears and replies with his inward tongue. That is why, if voice control is overlooked in the grave, he will not have to control it.

Rewards and punishments of grave should also be of such kind. This dusty grave, which is not expanded and a door is not opened from Paradise in his direction, so that bounties of Paradise may arrive there. Since the useless body of the dead also does not need nutrition. Therefore the grave should be related to the soul and its abode. Chastisements of the grave should also be of the same type. In this pit, where the corpse was buried, there is neither scorpion nor huge vipers or stinging creatures; even if they were present and were also to sting the dead body, what can a lifeless body feel? Therefore harmful creatures of the grave should be such that they can hurt the soul of the dead and only this much is sufficient in the chastisement of the grave. Spiritual and sensual punishment is definitely more severe than physical chastisements.

In physical chastisements also, that which suffers is actually the soul. In this earthly grave, no squeeze and fire of Hell is experienced, therefore the grave mentioned in the traditions must be some other place.

That grave is the abode of the soul and not the body; therefore it can be said that the first grave implies the abode of the soul after death; that is the beginning of entry into the Purgatory (Barzakh). But since this transfer is contemporary with the entry of the body into the earthly grave, it is interpreted as grave.

Therefore one who drowns or one whose body is cut up into pieces, or one who is burnt or becomes dust, he also has to face questioning of the grave and would feel the pleasures of Paradise and the punishments of Hell.

In some traditions also grave is interpreted in this way. For example:

The Messenger of Allah (S) said:

“Grave is the first stage of the hereafter. If man is able to get salvation in that stage, the later stages would be easier for him, but if he is unable to get salvation in that stage, he would be more unlikely to get salvation after that.”[10](#)

Imam Sajjad (as) said after reciting the verse of:

وَمِنْ وَرَائِهِمْ بَرْزَخٌ إِلَى يَوْمِ يُبْعَثُونَ

...and before them is a barrier until the day they are raised. (23: 100)

“Barzakh is the grave. Indeed for them there is a hard life there. By Allah, the grave is either a garden from the gardens of Paradise or a pit from the pits of Hell.”[11](#)

Allamah Majlisi writes:

“Grave in most traditions implies the world of Barzakh, where the soul of man is transferred.”[12](#)

Allamah Tabatabai has written in the marginal notes of Biharul Anwar as follows:

Perhaps it implies that after death, man would not be destroyed completely. On the contrary, it implies another life other than the life he has lost. As the Messenger of Allah (S) has said: ‘And indeed they would be transferred from one abode to another’. But the traditional report which apparently states that in the grave, the soul would re-enter the body of the dead upto his knees, is figurative. For questioning in the grave since the statements in these same traditions are from the sayings of the angels that they would tell the believer: ‘Go to sleep like a bride,’ is figurative for the stay of the believer in the grave waiting for Qiyamat.[13](#)

Imam Khomeini writes with regard to this:

“But this does not mean that all the graves would be abodes of questioning and comfort for the believer. The grave, which has questions and answers or pain and sorrow or happiness and joy; does not have the natural form; on the contrary it has the form of Barzakh and the facsimile world. Attachment and attention to the abode of nature exists as long as the self is in the Barzakh and the world of grave.

Expansion and squeeze in this world is under the control of the expansion and squeeze of the chest and

self of man. But a grave, which is one and a half metre in length and half a metre in width is not the same grave about which it is said that it is: between the east and the west or for example no matter how much we search in these graves, we would never find pythons in them. [14](#)

- [1.](#) Biharul Anwar, Vol. 6, Pg. 223.
- [2.](#) Biharul Anwar, Vol. 6, Pg. 222.
- [3.](#) Biharul Anwar, Vol. 6, Pg. 233.
- [4.](#) Biharul Anwar, Vol. 6, Pg. 218.
- [5.](#) Biharul Anwar, Vol. 6, Pg. 217.
- [6.](#) Biharul Anwar, Vol. 6, Pg. 221.
- [7.](#) Mulla Mohsin Kashani, Ilmul Yaqeen, Vol. 2, Pg. 873.
- [8.](#) Allamah Hilli, Kashful Murad Fee Sharhe Tajreedul Itiqaad, Pg. 424.
- [9.](#) Haqqul Yaqeen, Vol. 2, Pg. 68.
- [10.](#) Biharul Anwar, Vol. 6, Pg. 242.
- [11.](#) Biharul Anwar, Vol. 6, Pg. 214.
- [12.](#) Biharul Anwar, Vol. 6, Pg. 271.
- [13.](#) Biharul Anwar, Vol. 6, Pg. 280.
- [14.](#) Maad az Deedgah Imam Khomeini, Pg. 171.

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