

**LIFE, DEATH  
AND THE  
HEREAFTER**

**ACCORDING TO THE TEACHINGS OF ISLAM**

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**LIFE, DEATH AND THE HEREAFTER:** Every human being wonders about death, and the hereafter. To appreciate the Islamic position we need to examine what it teaches about the various stages of existence, namely:

1. In the womb
2. Life on earth
3. Death
4. What happens in the grave
5. Destruction of the world
6. Resurrection
7. Accountability and the hereafter

The teachings of Islam come from two sources, the **Quran** and the **Hadith**. Find out what Islam has to say about these and other issues by reading this booklet.

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## INTRODUCTION

Every human being wonders about death, and what happens after. To appreciate the Islamic position we need to examine what it teaches about the various stages of existence. Namely:

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2. Life on earth
3. Death
4. What happens in the grave
5. Destruction of the world
6. Resurrection
7. Accountability and the hereafter

The teachings of Islam come from two sources, the **Quran** and the **Hadith**. Muslims believe the same angel (Gabriel) that came to prophets Abraham, Moses and Jesus also came to prophet Muhammad (peace be upon them all). Muslims also believe that God, through the angel Gabriel, revealed the **Quran** to Muhammad (peace be upon him). This was done over a period of twenty-three years. Muslims consider the Quran to be God's last revelation to mankind. Since one in every five persons on earth is a Muslim, the Quran enlightens and guides over one billion people around the world.

The **Hadith** are sayings and practices of prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him). Muhammad (peace be upon him) lived during the sixth and seventh centuries. Muslims accept him as God's last prophet and messenger to mankind. He invited people to the same God that Abraham, Moses and Jesus (peace be upon them) invited people to. The sayings of prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) number in the thousands, and cover a variety of topics.

It is these two sources that we will use to educate ourselves and clarify the various stages of existence.

## IN THE WOMB

The Quran is filled with vivid descriptions as to what happens in the womb. For example:

“O mankind! If you have a doubt about the Resurrection, (consider) that We created you out of dust, then out of sperm, then out of a leech-like clot, then out of a morsel of flesh, partly formed and partly unformed, in order that We may manifest (Our power) to you; and We cause whom We will to rest in the wombs for an appointed term, then do We bring you out as babes...” (Quran 22:5)

It is useful to note that the above verse is an accurate description of the development of the embryo revealed over 1400 years ago. To the people at that time it did not make much sense. However the details outlined in the verse is now scientifically confirmed.

Dr. Keith Moore of the University of Toronto (Canada) anatomy department, on examining the above and other verses in the Quran said “I am amazed at the scientific accuracy of these statements which were made in the seventh century.”

We also know from the sayings of Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) that after 120 days after conception, the soul and the flesh is brought together. He (peace be upon him) says:

“Verily the creation of each one of you is brought together in his mother’s belly for forty days in the form of seed, then he is a clot of blood for a like period, then a morsel of flesh for a like period, then there is sent to him the angel who blows the breath of life into him...” (Bukhari and Muslim)

## **LIFE ON EARTH**

Once birth takes place one may live a short time or make it all the way to old age. God says:

“...then (foster you) that you may reach your age of full strength; and some of you are called to die, and some are sent back to the feeblest old age, so that they know nothing after having known (much).” (Quran 22:5)

Despite how long we live we are to remember that life is a test. God tells us:

“Blessed be He in Whose hands is Dominion, and He over all things has Power. He Who created Death and Life, that He may try which of you is best in deed and He is Exalted in Might, Oft-Forgiving.” (Quran 67:1-2)

Our souls have the ingredients to be good or be evil, and it is up to each of us to direct it accordingly. Our challenge is to keep it from becoming corrupted and sinful. God reminds us:

“By the Earth and its (wide) expanse: By the Soul, and the proportion and order given to it; And its inspiration as to its wrong and its right: Truly he succeeds that purifies it, And he fails that corrupts it!” (Quran 91:7-10)

According to Islam we are God’s vicegerent on earth. A vicegerent is one who is delegated by God to be his representative on earth. This requires us to live in a responsible fashion. As vicegerents we are to enjoin what is right and forbid what is wrong, and protect the environment. We are also to ensure that all people that share the

planet with us are treated fairly. We need to be mindful of the complaints of the angels. When God told them He was going to create a vicegerent on earth they asked:

“Behold, your Lord said to the angels: ‘I will create a vicegerent on earth.’ They said: ‘Will you place therein one who will make mischief therein and shed blood, while we do celebrate Your praises and glorify Your holy (Name)?’ He said: ‘I know what you know not.’ ” (Quran 2:30)

As we live our life we should remember our time on earth is short. Our priorities should be kept straight, with our primary focus on that which will benefit us in the hereafter. God reminds us in the Quran not to be distracted by rivalry for worldly increase:

The mutual rivalry for piling up (the good things of this world) diverts you (from the more serious things, Until you visit the graves. But nay, you soon shall know (the reality). Again, you soon shall know! Nay were you to know with certainty of mind, (you would beware!) You shall certainly see Hell-fire! Again, you shall see it with certainty of sight! Then, shall you be questioned that Day about the joy (you indulged in!) (Quran 102:1-8)

## DEATH

Muslims do not view death as an end, but rather a continuation to another stage of our existence. Whether a person is a king, a president, a doctor, or has a large bank account, one thing is certain; every soul will taste death. The Qur’an teaches:

“Every soul shall have a taste of death: in the end to Us shall you be brought back.” (Quran 29:57)

“ ‘Did you then think that We had created you in jest, and that you would not be brought back to Us (for account)?’ Therefore exalted be God, the King, the Reality: there is no god but He, the Lord of the Throne of Honour!” (Quran 23:115-116)

I said earlier that after 120 days after conception the soul was fused with the flesh. Death is the opposite. The soul and the flesh are separated from each other. God sends his angels to take a person’s soul back to Him. The Qur’an teaches:

“Say: ‘The angel of Death, put in charge of you, will (duly) take your souls: then shall you be brought back to your Lord.’ ” (Quran 32:11)

“He is irresistibly Supreme over His servants and He sets guardians over you. At length, when death approaches one of you, Our angels take his soul, and they never fail in their duty.” (Quran 6:61)

The separation of the soul from the body is different for those who believe versus those who disbelieve in the existence of God. For those who believe in God we are told:

“In the case of those who say: ‘Our Lord is Allah,’ and further stand straight and steadfast, the angels descend on them (from time to time): ‘Fear not!’ (they suggest), ‘nor grieve, but receive the Glad Tidings of the Garden (of Bliss), that which you were promised! We are your protectors in this life and in the Hereafter: therein shall you have all that you shall desire; therein shall you have all that you ask for! ‘A hospitable gift from one Oft-Forgiving, Most Merciful!’” (Quran 41: 30-32)

For those who disbelieve in God we are told:

“If you could see, when the angels take the souls of the Unbelievers (at death), (how) they smite their faces and their backs, (saying): ‘Taste the Chastisement of the Blazing Fire. This is because of (the deeds) which your (own) hands sent forth. For Allah is never Unjust to His servants.’” (Quran 8: 50-51)

In a narration of prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) he said: “When the believer is dying, he will receive the glad tidings of God’s pleasure and satisfaction; and when the unbeliever is dying, he will receive the evil tidings of God’s torment...” (Ubadah ibn Samit in Bukhari and Muslim)

Among people there are three opinions as to what happens after death:

1. Nothing
2. Reincarnation
3. Resurrection, judgement and a hereafter

Muslims believe in resurrection, judgement and a hereafter. The Quran teaches:

“Until, when death comes to one of them, he says: ‘O my Lord! Send me back (to life), In order that I may work righteousness in the things I neglected.’ ‘By no means! It is but a word he says.’ Before them is a Partition till the Day they are raised up. Then when the Trumpet is blown, there will be no more relationships between them that day, nor will one ask after another! Then those whose balance (of good deeds) is heavy, they will be successful. But those whose balance is light, will be those who have lost their souls; in Hell will they abide. The Fire will burn their faces, and they will therein grin, with their lips displaced.” (Quran 23:99-104)

Belief in resurrection and judgement motivates us to live in peace with our fellow human beings, and to strive for success in the hereafter. Likewise, a denial of life after death could encourage evil, corruption and exploitation of other people.

## WHAT HAPPENS IN THE GRAVE?

From the teachings of Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) we know a person is questioned in the grave as to:

- a) Who their lord was.
- b) Who their prophet was.
- c) What their way of life was.

The Qur'an teaches that a believer will have the "strength" to handle such questions as a result of God's mercy.

"God will establish in strength those who believe, with the Word that stands firm, in this world and in the Hereafter; but God will leave to stray those who do wrong; God does what He wills." (Quran 14:27)

Depending on how one answers the above questions, reward or punishment starts in the grave.

You may ask where is the evidence, because when we open the graves of people that have died, there is no indication of reward or punishment. This is because our senses and perceptions as human beings are limited. Think of when you have a nightmare or a dream. A person watching over you cannot tell one way or another what was in that dream or nightmare. The same is true for a person watching over you in the grave.

Prophets have insight and understanding of things we cannot easily perceive. The fact that we are punished or rewarded in our grave was confirmed by the prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) in various Hadith (sayings). For example:

"A Jewess came to me and mentioned the punishment in the grave, and said, "May God protect you from the punishment in the grave." Aisha then asked God's Messenger if it was about the punishment in the grave? He said, "Yes, (there is) punishment in the grave." Aisha added, "After that I never saw God's messenger but seeking refuge with God from the punishment in the grave in every prayer he prayed." (Aisha in Bukhari, Volume 2, Hadith # 454)

In another saying:

"When anyone of you dies, he will be shown his destination both in the morning and in the evening. If he belongs to the people of Paradise, he will be shown his place in paradise. If he is from the people of Hell, he will be shown his place in Hell." (Abdullah ibn Umar in Bukhari, Volume 4, Hadith # 463).

## **DESTRUCTION OF THE WORLD AS WE KNOW IT**

In December 2004 we saw the destruction a tsunami brought to Sri Lanka, Indonesia, Thailand and the surrounding areas. The Quran tell us of something similar happening on a much larger scale.

In several chapters in the Quran we are taught that a time will come when the world as we know it will be destroyed. People will be scattered like moths, the earth will convulse, and the mountains will be like carded wool. For example:

“The (Day) of Clamour: What is the (Day) of Clamour? And what will explain to you what the (Day) of Clamour is? (It is) a Day whereon men will be like moths scattered about, And the mountains will be like carded wool. Then, he whose balance (of good deeds) will be (found) heavy, Will be in a Life of good pleasure and satisfaction. But he whose balance (of good deeds) will be (found) light, Will have his home in a (bottomless) Pit. And what will explain to you what this is? (It is) a Fire blazing fiercely!” (Quran 101:1-11)

“When the Sky is cleft asunder; When the stars are scattered; When the oceans are caused to burst forth; and when the graves are turned upside down, (then) shall each soul know what it has sent forward and (what it has) kept back. (Quran 82:1-5)

This is only natural. Just as how people and nations die, it is a part of God’s plan that the earth will also die. The time as to when this will happen is known only to God. The Quran teaches us:

“They ask you about the (final) Hour, when will be its appointed time? Say: ‘The knowledge thereof is with my Lord (alone): none but He can reveal as to when it will occur. Heavy were its burden through the heavens and the earth. Only, all of a sudden will it come to you.’ They ask you as if you were eager in search thereof: say: ‘the knowledge thereof is with Allah (alone), but mostly men know not.’” (Quran 7:187)

## **RESURRECTION**

Muslims believe resurrection will be both physical and spiritual, but not necessarily with the same body. The Quran teaches:

“We have Decreed death to be your common lot, and We are not to be frustrated from changing your Forms and creating you (again) in (Forms) that you know not. And you certainly know already the first form of creation: why they do you not take heed?” (Quran 56:60-62)

“The Day that We roll up the heavens like a scroll rolled up for books (completed); -even as We produced the first Creation, so shall We produce a new one: a promise We have undertaken: truly shall We fulfil it.” (Quran 21:104)

You may ask how can our bodies can come back to life after having decayed. This occurs the same way we see God’s power in the changing of the seasons. We see trees appearing dead during the winter months, yet they return to full bloom during spring and summer. God is able to give life to men as He gives life to the barren earth. God explains this in many verses in the Quran. For example:

“And among His Signs is this: you see the earth humble; but when We send down rain to it, it is stirred to life and yields increase. Truly, He Who gives life to the (dead) earth can surely give life to (men) who are dead. For He has power over all things.” (Quran 41:39)

“And he makes comparisons for Us, and forgets his own (Origin and ) Creation; he says: ‘Who can give life to (dry) bones and decomposed ones (at that)?’ Say, ‘He will give them life Who created them for the first time! For He fully knows all creation. The same who produces for your fire out of the green tree, when behold, you kindle therewith (your own fires)! Is not He Who created the heavens and the earth able to create the like thereof?’ Yes, indeed! For He is the Creator Supreme, of skill and knowledge (infinite)!’ ” (Quran 36:78-81)

“O mankind! If you have a doubt about the Resurrection, (consider) that We created you out of dust, then out of sperm, then out of a leech-like clot, then out of a morsel of flesh, partly formed and partly unformed, in order that We may manifest (our power) to you; and We cause whom We will to rest in the wombs for an appointed term, then do We bring you out as babes, then (foster you) that you may reach your age of full strength; and some of you are called to die, and some are sent back to the feeblest old age, so that they know nothing after having known (much). And (further), you see the earth barren and lifeless, but when We pour down rain on it, it is stirred (to life), it swells, and it puts forth every kind of beautiful growth (in pairs). (Quran 22:5)

## JUDGEMENT

After the resurrection, judgement will start, and we will be made to account for how we spent our life on earth. There is much description in the Quran on how this judgement will be done. Here are some excerpts:

### **Judgement done with full justice:**

Muslims see God as fair and just. He tell us that He will be conducting our judgement with full justice. He says:

“That Day will every soul be requited for what it earned; no injustice will there be that Day, for God is Swift in taking account.” (Quran 40:17)

“Verily God will not deal unjustly with man in anything: it is man that wrongs his own soul.” (Quran 10:44)

**Judgment done with thoroughness:**

Not only will God be just, but He will be thorough. He says:

“We shall set up scales of justice for the Day of Judgement, so that not a soul will be dealt with unjustly in the least. And if there be (no more than) the weight of a mustard seed, We will bring it (to account): and enough are We to take account.” (Quran 21:47)

**Uses the record of our deeds kept by the angels:**

To enhance that thoroughness our records by the angels will be used. Muslims believe each person has two angels assigned to them. One records the good we do, the other angel records the bad we do:

“But verily over you (are appointed angels) to protect you, -Kind and honourable, - writing down (your deeds): They know all that you do.” (Quran 82:10-12)

“Not a word does he (man) utter but there is a vigilant Guardian.” (Quran 50:18)

**Those of us who are presented our book of deeds in our right hand will have an easy reckoning:**

“Then he who is given his Record in his Right hand, Soon will his account be taken by an easy reckoning.” (Quran 84:7-8)

**Our own organs will witness against us:**

God will even empower our limbs and organs to testify for or against us. He says:

“On the Day when their tongues, their hands, and their feet will bear witness against them as to their actions.” (Quran 24:24)

“That Day shall We set a seal on their mouths. But their hands will speak to Us, and their feet bear witness, to all that they did.” (Quran 36:65)

“You did not seek to hide yourselves, lest your hearing, your sight, and you skins should bear witness against you! But you did think that God knew not many of the things that you used to do!” (Quran 41:22)

## WHAT HAPPENS AFTER JUDGEMENT?

After judgment people will take their place in hell or heaven. These are places where there is no more death. Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) said:

“The people of Paradise will enter Paradise, and the people of the (Hell) Fire will enter the (Hell) Fire: then a callmaker will get up (and make an announcement among them, ‘O the people of the (Hell) Fire! No death anymore! And O people of Paradise! No death (anymore) but Eternity.’ (Ibn Umar in Bukhari, Volume 8, Number 552)

People of hell that believe in God, even if their faith is equal to that of a grain, will eventually be moved to paradise. Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) said:

“Whoever said “None has the right to be worshipped but God and has in his heart good (faith) equal to the weight of a barley grain will be taken out of Hell.” And whoever said: “None has the right to be worshipped but God and has in his heart good (faith) equal to the weight of a wheat grain will be taken out of Hell.” And whoever said, “None has the right to be worshipped but God and has in his heart good (faith) equal to the weight of an atom will be taken out of Hell.” (Anas in Bukhari, Volume 1, Number 42)

Again, there are a lot of details as to what hell and heaven is like, with many similarities to the Old and New Testament. This we should not find surprising, because the same God that sent revelation to Moses and Jesus (peace be upon them) sent revelation to Muhammad (peace be upon him). In fact, the same angel of God (Gabriel) was used to deliver that revelation.

## HELL A PLACE OF PUNISHMENT

### **Given boiling water to quench thirst:**

“Say: ‘The Truth is from your Lord;’ let him who will, believe, and let him who will, reject (it): for the wrong-doers We have prepared a Fire whose (smoke and flames), like the walls and roof of a tent, will hem them in: if they implore relief they will be granted water like melted brass, that will scald their faces, how dreadful the drink! How uncomfortable a couch to recline on!” (Quran 18:29)

“(Here is) the description of the Garden which the righteous are promised: in it are rivers of water unstalling; rivers of milk of which the taste never changes; rivers of wine, a joy to those who drink; and rivers of honey pure and clear. In it there are for them all kinds of fruits: and forgiveness from their Lord, (can those in such Bliss) be compared to such as shall dwell for ever in the Fire, and be given, to drink, boiling water, so that it cuts up their bowels (to pieces)?” (Quran 47:15)

**A chastisement of burning:**

“Every time they wish to get away therefrom, from anguish, they will be forced back therein, and (it will be said). ‘Taste the chastisement of Burning!’ ” (Quran 22:22)

**A punishment where the person does not die:**

“Verily he who comes to his Lord as a sinner (at Judgement), for him is Hell: therein shall he neither die nor live.” (Quran 20:74)

**Skin that burns will be replaced:**

“Those who reject Our Signs, We shall soon cast into the Fire: as often as their skins are roasted though. We shall change them for fresh skins, that they may taste the chastisement: for God is Exalted in Power, Wise.” (Quran 4:56)

## PARADISE A PLACE OF FELICITY

**Pleasurable drinks served:**

However the drinks is such that, “No after-ache will they receive therefrom, nor will they suffer intoxication.” (Quran 56:19)

**Fruits that are similar to that of the earth present:**

“But give glad tidings to those who believe and work righteousness, that their portion is Gardens, beneath which rivers flow. Every time they are fed with fruits therefrom, they say: ‘Why, this is what we were fed with before,’ for they are given things in similitude; and they have therein spouses purified; and they abide therein (forever).” (Quran 2:25)

**In the company of angels:**

“Gardens of perpetual bliss; they shall enter there, as well as the righteous among their fathers, their spouses and their offspring and angels shall enter unto them from every gate (with the salutation)”. (Quran 13:23)

**Nearness to God:**

“Say: shall I give you glad tidings of things far better than those? For the righteous are Gardens in nearness to their Lord with rivers flowing beneath; therein is their eternal home; with spouses purified and the good pleasure of God. For in God’s sight are (all) His servants,-” (Quran 3:15)

“God has promised to Believers, men and women, Gardens under which rivers flow, to dwell therein, and beautiful mansions in Gardens of everlasting stay . But the greatest bliss is acceptance from God: that is supreme triumph.” (Quran 9:72)

“Some faces, that day, will beam (in brightness and beauty); Looking towards their Lord;” (Quran 75:22-23)

## CONCLUSION

By now you should have realised that this world is temporary and that the everlasting life is the life of the hereafter. This we should make our primary focus, and at the same time live our life in such a way that when death comes to us, we will not have to ask God for a second chance to live a life of righteousness. God reminds us:

“Until , when death comes to one of them, he says; “O my Lord! Send me back (to life), “In order that I may work righteousness in the things I neglected.” “By no means! It is but a word he says.” Before them is a Partition till the Day they are raised up. (Quran 23: 99-100)

As we live our life and strive for the hereafter we are likely to wrong other people. Where possible we should seek the forgiveness of those that we wrong. This is because on the day of judgement people will repay each other by their good or bad deeds. Depending which way the scale tips we will go to hell or heaven. Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) said:

“Whoever has wronged his brother, should ask his pardon (before his death), as (in the Hereafter there will be neither a Dinar nor a Dirham (a kind of currency). (He should secure pardon in this life) before some of his good deeds are taken and paid to his brother, or, if he has done no good deeds, some of the bad deeds of his brother are taken to be loaded on him (in the Hereafter).” (Abu Hurairah in Bukhari, Volume 8, Hadith # 541)

I conclude by leaving you a final saying of prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) and a short verse from the Quran to ponder.

Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) said:

“God said, I have prepared for My righteous servants (such excellent things) as no eye has ever seen, nor an ear has ever heard, nor a human heart can ever think of.” (Abu Hurairah in Bukhari, Volume 9, Hadith # 589)

God says:

“From the earth did We create you, and unto it shall We return you, and from it shall We bring you out once again.” (Quran 20:55)

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