

Life and Death across-The Islamic Perspective

Prof. Shaheen S. Mukadam

Assistant Professor, St. Andrew's College

Introduction

Islam means complete submission to the will of Allah. Allah means *The Only One*(God), who is omnipotent , omnipresent and omniscient.

It is a misconception that Islam is a new religion that came into existence 1400 years ago. Prophet Adam who was the first human and first prophet on this earth and all other Prophets including Solomon, David, Moses, Joseph were followers and propagators of the message, that God is one and worship Him. Prophet Muhammad SAW, who is the last Prophet of Islam, has also given the same message as all the previous Prophets had given that God is one and worship him alone. *Islam forbids ascribing divinity to any other form or being besides God.*

The holy Quran which is believed to be the word of God provides the most graphic details of what comes after death and lies beyond. Islam views death to be a natural threshold to the *next stage of existence.*

“What you love to have with you in the Hereafter you should advance today, and what you hate to have with you, you should abandon today.” as quoted by Salman Ibn Dinar (RA).

Islamic doctrine holds that human existence continues after the death of the human body in the form of spiritual and physical resurrection. There is a direct relation between conduct on earth and the life beyond. The afterlife will be one of rewards and punishments which are commensurate with earthly conduct.

Allah says in the Holy Quran,

“Everyone shall taste death. And only on the day of Resurrection shall you be paid your wages in full. And whoever is removed away from the fire and admitted to Paradise he indeed is successful. The life of this world is only the enjoyment of deception (a deceiving thing).”

(Aal-‘Imraan 3: 175)

The afterlife will be one of rewards and punishments, which is commensurate with earthly conduct. A Day will come when God will resurrect and gather the first and the last of His creation and judge everyone justly. People will enter their final abode, Hell or Paradise. Faith in life after death urges us to do right and to stay away from sin. In this life we sometimes see the pious suffer and the impious enjoy. All shall be judged one day and justice will be served.

Faith in life after death is one of the fundamental beliefs required of a Muslim to complete his faith. Rejecting it renders all other beliefs meaningless. When it comes to doing school work, a child may feel lazy because he does not quite understand what a sound education will do for his future. Now, think of a man who does not believe in the Day of Judgment. Would he consider belief in God and a life driven by his belief in God to be of any consequence? To him, neither obedience to God is of use, nor is disobedience of any harm. What incentive would he have to suffer the trials of life with patience and avoid overindulgence in worldly pleasures? The acceptance or rejection of life after death is perhaps the greatest factor in determining the course of an individual's life.

Allah, praise and glory to Him, has given us in the Quran, an ordered specification of all the stages of life till the Day of Resurrection. First we were dead then Allah, all praise and glory is to Him, gave us life. Then He shall make us die then He shall resurrect us, alive, on the Day of Resurrection to face Judgment.

We notice here that life in this world started with death and not with life. According to our logic it should have started with life. The beginning of creation – as we understand it – is life. By relying on this conception we do not then understand the meaning of life.

People understand the meaning of life as the time during which man exists, and death as nonexistence or nothingness, whereas the truth is totally different.

Allah, all praise and glory is to Him, says what he means:

[[He] who created death and life to test you [as to] which of you is best in deed – and He is the Exalted in Might, the Forgiving.

[Al-Mulk , 67: 2]

Thus, death is not nonexistence, but one of the creations of Allah just as life. Allah, all praise and glory is to Him, created death just as He created life. Both are the creations of Allah. Each is governed by its own rules, its time of occurrence and its events. Only God, praise and glory to Him, is The One Able to transfer His creatures from the world of death to that of life, or from the world of life to that of death.

The Quran reveals that God (Allah), has created two lives: the first is worldly life, which is temporal. In it everything has an end. The share of each one of us in it is different. Some people live for hours, some for a day, some for months, some for years and some live till they reach the most decrepit [old] age.

Allah made the end of worldly life the transmission to the world of death. The life of the Hereafter is eternal; there is no death in it. The period of the existence of death ends by the beginning of the life of the Hereafter, where there shall be no more death.

Allah, all praise and glory is to Him, has pointed to us that true life for mankind is not in this world but in the hereafter. Life in the hereafter is eternal, where blessings are bestowed by the Power of Almighty God. You will neither leave the blessings nor will they forsake you.

The message is highlighted in Quranic verse mentioned below

[How can you disbelieve in Allah? Seeing that you were dead and He gave you life. Then He will give you death, then again will bring you to life (on the Day of Resurrection) and then unto Him you will return.] [Al-Baqarah, 2: 28]

When Allah, praise and glory to Him, created the Prophet Adam (may Allah bless him and grant him peace) He created in him all his offspring from the first till the last ones upon whom the Hour (of Resurrection) will come, based on His Saying, Blessed and Exalted is He, what means:

[And [mention] when your Lord took from the children of Adam – from their loins – their descendants and made them testify of themselves, [saying to them], “Am I not your Lord?” They said, “Yes, we have testified.” [This]

– lest you should say on the Day of Resurrection, “Indeed, we were of this unaware.”] [Al-A‘râf, 7: 172]

To understand this Saying we must state that life cannot continue if its rings are not linked together. My life is from an alive spermatozoon from my father. And my father’s life is from an alive spermatozoon from my grandfather. And my grandfather’s life is from his father...and so forth until we reach Adam (may Allah bless him and grant him peace). If the life chain was cut at any of its rings it would not have continued. If my father died before life was transmitted from him to me, I would not have existed and I would not have come to life.

We spend in the world of worldly life as much as God wills for us to spend, then comes the time of death and we move to the death world, then we move after that to the world of the life of the hereafter. According to Allah, The Most Exalted:

[[It will be said], “You were certainly in unmindfulness of this, and We have removed from you your cover, so your sight, this Day, is sharp.”] [Qâf, 50: 22]

Thus, from the hour of dying man starts to see what he has not seen in worldly life because Allah lifts the veil of this world off him and he sees a new world. This world exists but he cannot see it in his journey of worldly life. The Messenger of Allah (may Allah bless him and grant him peace) said: “People are asleep and when they die, they wake up.”

How is man in the life of this world asleep and becomes alert only at death? Though we see him (i.e. the dead person) still before us?!

Alertness here arises from seeing what he could not see before. He now knows that all the unseen matters that Allah has informed him about are an actual existing reality but he was screened from them.

This is the picture of the pious believer while dying; he is surrounded by the angels of mercy and they greet him with peace and give him the glad tidings of entering Paradise. Therefore, the believer is happy and relieved. He is going to a far better place. It is an hour of bright prospect, of comfort and happiness hoped by every believer: to see the angels of mercy and be given the glad tidings of entering Paradise

But the un-pious buried in the graves are desperate of receiving any mercy in the hereafter. And this can never be except if there is comprehension and awareness. Thus, as per Islam, death is not nonexistence but a world having its own laws where man understands and perceives.

There are many things that the dead experience and feel while between this world and the Hereafter. Since death is a creation and life is another one, both include a kind of sensibility different from the other. Both have their own laws and both are far removed from nonexistence.

We have to notice that Allah, all praise and glory is to Him, mention death before life in many Ayats in the Noble Qur'an. This is because death precedes life. Allah, all praise and glory is to Him, wants to always attract our attention to death, so that on remembering it we hurry to righteousness, faith and good deeds. It is needless to draw our attention to life for the motive power for life masters the human soul.

Who amongst us, when the first of the month comes, forgets to receive his salary? Or who among us does not try to get the biggest share from this world? Thus, the motives for living in the human soul are many in order for man to be able to fulfill his mission in this world, making land a prosperous place, and building civilizations. But by remembering life every second we forget death. And if someone reminds us of it we seek refuge with Allah(God) from it.

We need to always think of death as an inescapable reality. Therefore, Allah, The Exalted, states death first in His Saying: [[He] who created death and life to test you [as to] which of you is best in deed – and He is the Exalted in Might, the Forgiving] [Al-Mulk, 67: 2]

Death is the end of the human power of free choice. In the life of this world you have a will and a freedom of choice. But at the moment of death the mission of human will ends, it no longer has a role to perform.