

# Life, death, resurrection, judgment, heaven, and hell

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According to the Qur'an, humankind's existence started a long time before we were born to inhabit Earth. A stage that is called the World of Particles (*Alam Athar*) (Qur'an 7:172) is described in the Qur'an as the time when God spoke to every human spirit that He is our Lord, and that we replied with acceptance affirming this monotheistic fact. Our spirits are from God and thus do not perish. Therefore when God informed the angels that He is assigning a vicegerent on Earth who shall have dominion over it, He gave this vicegerent the choice to abide by His law in which case harmony would prevail and the outcome will be rewarded by Paradise, or disobey God's law and chaos in this world would reign and this choice would lead to torment in the Hellfire. This power to choose stage is limited to the time when our existence is composed of Spirit and body comprising one's self. This composition and the presence of the body allows one to experience emotions, lusts, desires, and other dimensions that are only associated with the body but are separate from the spirit. It is further understood then that because the body is subject to decay this composition is short lived compared to the existence of the spirit itself. When the body is no longer viable, one's spirit must depart the body leading to the experience of death.

Death marks the end of the power to choose stage. The spirit now enters a stage described in the Qur'an as *Barzakh* or purgatory (Qur'an 23:100). The definition of *Barzakh* in Islam significantly differs from that given by Catholic teachings. According to Islam, everyone will pass through this stage. What they experience during this stage, which starts at one's death and ends at the onset of the events of the Day of Resurrection, depends on their performance during their life time. Some may experience a felicitous life while others will face some forms of torment. The Qur'an describes how the Pharaoh and his family will experience hell prior to the Day of Judgment twice daily (Qur'an 40:46). According to Islamic teachings, some people may experience some torment for a period of time during this stage but later their state may change depending on the outcome of some of their worldly actions. For example, if someone left behind knowledge that is useful for humanity, or charity that saved a life after one's death, then that person shall reap the reward for his actions while in *Barzakh*. Many Muslims believe that it is possible for the highly adherent to communicate with those in *Barzakh* as

Prophet Muhammad, Imam Ali, and other righteous companions were recorded to have done so on many occasions.

Muslims believe that the Angel *Israfil*, who some believe is the Archangel Raphael, will blow the trumpet so that everyone will die, then he will blow it again to bring everyone back to life (Qur'an 39:68). This is the beginning of resurrection. All people from Adam until the last person, and all animals, Jinn, and once living thing will come back to life. A series of events known as The Stages of Judgment, or *Mawaqif Al Qiyamah* will take place culminating in the judgment of everyone by God based on their conduct during their lifetime.

The Qur'an makes clear on numerous occasions that humankind will be judged based on their belief systems followed by their deeds. Muslims do not believe in justification by faith alone, or work alone. They conform to the Qur'an which describes the righteous as those who "believe and do good" (Qur'an 23, and many other verses).

However, it is erroneous to think that Islam teaches that we receive salvation strictly based on our deeds by weighing our good deeds versus bad ones. Although we will be held accountable for our every action, the fundamental belief in Islam is that no one qualifies for salvation based on his beliefs and work alone, but that it is the qualification for the grace of God that is important. Part of that grace is qualifying for intercession by God's chosen people, angels, and other righteous creatures. God's messengers including Adam, Enoch, Abraham, Moses, Jacob, Joseph, Jesus and his mother, and Muhammad, along with the Imams and righteous companions; and angels, the Holy Spirit, and many believers will beseech God on the Day of Judgment to grant salvation and forgive people who are otherwise not worthy of salvation; and God will answer those prayers for the sake of many people out of His grace. Those who are worthy of God's grace shall be saved and enter paradise, while those who insisted on disobeying God and didn't qualify for this intercession will receive damnation.

The Qur'an states that God's right path is what we should seek (Qur'an 1:5). It is the common belief of Muslims that all people will be required to pass over this right path on the Day of Judgment, and that those who followed God's messages will pass over this path but those who insisted on defying God will fall into the hell fire.

Heaven is described in the Qur'an as surpassing any pleasant imagination that anyone can conjure (Qur'an 50:35). Although there are numerous descriptions of heaven as having flowing rivers of honey and gardens ripe with beautiful fruit and dwellings inhabited by beautiful spouses, these descriptions are believed to be an approximation for our minds to

envision the beauty that lies therein. Muslim scholars believe that heaven is a physical place that is far better than our minds can imagine, and that hell is also a physical place where torment is severe for those who insist on violating God's laws. The idea of seventy virgins that is circulated in the media has no foundation in Islamic teachings. In fact, the Qur'an makes it clear that although paradise is a beautiful reward for those who receive the grace of God, it is God's pleasure that these saved ones shall experience with the greatest pleasure (Qur'an 9:72).

Muslims share the importance of following God's commandments with Christians of all sects. The emphasis on being accountable for one's deeds while relying on God's grace is an important foundation for a healthy and harmonious society. Muslims and Christians can work together to build a morality based system with shared values that teach kindness, forgiveness, philanthropy, peace, love, and respect for all of God's creatures. It is difficult to find points of disagreement in this realm, and we owe it to ourselves to seek to know each other better, for "People are the enemies of what they do not know", as Imam Ali Ibn Abi Taleb said. ( Peaks of Eloquence, Short Sayings. By Imam Ali Ibn Abi Taleb )