

MUSLIM BELIEFS

by

Dr. Jamal A. Badawi

Edited by

Anthony Green



MCAS
Darul Arqam

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PREFACE

This content for this small book is taken from a series of talks delivered by Dr Jamal A. Badawi at Muslim Converts' Association of Singapore (MCAS) some years ago. Originally published as direct transcripts of the 'Question and Answer' format of the talks the books have been edited by permission of Dr Jamal Badawi to provide what we hope is a more readable flow of text.

This is the third book in a series of three. The first book in the series is on Monotheism and the second is on Prophethood.

One small point to note: in the title 'Monotheism' it was made clear that 'Allah' is the proper name of the One God. There can be no plural form of 'Allah.' In that sense the English word 'God' is not the same. Nevertheless, we recognise that readers may pick up these books in any order and that people coming to Islam will likely be more familiar with the word 'God.' For that reason alone the word 'God' is used extensively in this book.

ANGELS

As part of the belief system of Islam Muslims must believe in the existence of angels. This may prompt questions or surprise so to begin with we have to realize that God's creation is not limited by the physical world that we can perceive. We are aware of our own existence as human beings, but there are other beings that have been created by God, i.e. there is the world of the unseen.

Our knowledge and perceptual ability are quite limited. They do not allow us to fully explore the world of the unseen, so the natural human curiosity to understand the mysteries of the universe cannot be totally satisfied by known scientific methods or mystical experiences.

We have to depend on a higher source of information and that can only be the direct revelation of God as revealed to his Prophets.

For Muslims, it boils down to belief in angels and similar beings through the authority of the Qur'an, which Muslims accept as the final and unchanged word of God, and also through the sayings of the last Prophet, Muhammad. Anything else is sheer speculation.

The nature of angels

As to what angels are created from this is summarized in one saying of Prophet Muhammad. He says that angels were created from light, and the jinn (another unseen spirit) were created from fire.

Humans, however, were created from earth. This saying is consistent with what appears in the Qur'an. In the Qur'an we read in Chapter 32, verse 7 that humans were created from clay. "From clay" has two meanings here. It could be interpreted literally to mean from clay, or it could mean created from the same elements that are as the earth. In this regard it has been proven that humans have the same elements as earth – elements such as carbon, sodium, and potassium.

In the same chapter it talks about jinn being created from fire without flame. The nature of the jinn is mentioned in Chapter 55: verse 15. We don't know the exact nature of that fire.

All we can infer from this is that angels, if they are created from light, are not physical beings. They do not have the same carnal desires as human beings. They are neither male nor female. They are pure and sinless creatures of God. Also, when we talk about light it implies that they have certain capabilities which are not imaginable by us. We cannot imagine light travelling at the speed of 186,000 miles per second (approximately 1,080 million kilometres per hour). From that we can infer that angels might have certain capacities that are not restricted by our physical understanding.

Indeed, to prove this point of the absolute sinlessness of angels, the Qur'an says, in Chapter 66: verse 6:

"They flinch not from executing the commands they receive from God but do precisely what they are commanded."

Also in Chapter 16, verses 49-50, it says that these angels,

"... revere their Lord high above them and do what they are commanded to do."

We find similar statements in other parts of the Qur'an, for example, in Chapter 21, verses 26-29.

The Arabs used to believe that the angels were the daughters of God. We find a categorical rejection of this in this passage. It says:

"They say the God Most Gracious has begotten offspring. Glory to Him. They are but servants raised to honour. They speak not before Him. He speaks and they act in all things by His command. He knows what is before them and what is behind them and they offer no intercession except for those who are acceptable. And they stand in awe and reverence of His glory."

From this it is obvious that the Qur'an not only rejects the attribution of human offspring to God but also spiritual offspring.

In Chapter 7: verse 206, the Qur'an states that the angels never hesitate in worshipping and carrying out His commands in humility and submission.

The creation of the angels

There is an indication that they were created before humans. In Chapter 2: verse 30, the Qur'an says,

“Behold. Your Lord said to the angels: ‘I will create a vicegerent.’ They said: ‘Will you place therein one who will make mischief therein and shed blood while we celebrate Thy praise and glorify Thy holy name?’ He said: ‘I know what you know not.’ From this verse it is quite clear that God’s announcement of his plan to create human beings on the earth was made to the angels before human beings were created.”

Are angels superior to mankind?

When we think about angels, most people think about perfection. That might lead some to assume that angels are a superior creation to mankind. But this is not necessarily the case. It depends on human behaviour.

First of all, angels are created good. They don’t have carnal desires or face the temptations that humans face. So, it is not difficult for them to be good. Human beings, however, are created by God with the inclination towards both good and evil.

Man is in the unique position of being able to make the goodness within himself subdue the evil in himself. This requires a great deal of struggle which angels are not required to do. In that sense, then, a human being who is righteous could actually be superior to angels.

And this is not just some personal interpretation. In the same chapter (Chapter 2: verses 31-34) it says that after God announced this He told Adam the names – meaning effectively the nature – of all things.

“Then He placed them before the angels and He said: ‘Tell Me the nature of these if you are right.’ The angels said: ‘Glory to You. Of knowledge we have none save what You have taught us. It is You who are perfect in knowledge and wisdom.’ He said to Adam: ‘Tell them their natures.’ When he had told them, God said: ‘Did I not tell you that I know the secrets of the heavens and the earth and I know what you reveal and what you conceal.’ And, behold, We said to the angels: ‘Bow down to Adam.’ And they bowed down. Not so Iblis, He refused and he was haughty. He was of those who rejected faith.”

This verse has two implications. Firstly, that human beings have been given certain types of knowledge which exceed the knowledge given to the angels. But the most conclusive evidence is the last verse in which God commanded the angels to bow down to Adam.

This definitely shows that human beings, as a species, were so honoured in the sight of God that He even ordered the angels, which are purer creatures than humans, to bow down to the first man to be created, Adam.

Was Satan one of the angels?

The verse that we have just cited tells us that when God commanded the angels to bow down to Adam, Satan disobeyed God and refused to do so. Some may ask whether Satan was one of the angels and if so how could he disobey God if, by definition, angels are totally obedient to God?

The Muslim belief is that Satan belongs to the jinn, which are another type of spirit. The implication in this verse is that he was not one of the angels, but merely with the angels when God gave the command to bow down to Adam.

More evidence that Satan is not an angel appears in Chapter 18: verse 80:

“When We commanded the angels to bow down to Adam, they bowed down except Iblis. He was of the jinn and he disobeyed his Lord.”

Why were angels created? What function do they perform?

In addition to constantly worshipping God, they have other functions which are closer to our own lives. In particular they have a historical role in bringing revelation to the different prophets throughout history. This function ended with the coming of the last prophet, Muhammad. The Qur'an says in Chapter 26, verses 193-194, that the Qur'an was sent by the “Honest Spirit” (roohulamin). It says:

“Verily, this [the Qur'an] is a revelation from the Lord of the Worlds. With it came down the spirit of faith and truth [this refers to the Archangel Gabriel].”

We also find in Chapter 16, verse 102 a description of the Qur'an as being revealed through the “Holy Spirit”:

“Say, O Muhammad, the Holy Spirit has brought the revelation from thy Lord in truth in order to strengthen those who believe and as a glad tiding to those who surrender to God.”

We need to stress that the term “Holy Spirit” here has nothing to do with the Christian notion of the Holy Spirit being part of divinity. To the Muslim, the Holy Spirit is the Archangel Gabriel. He is simply an angel created by God.

In what form do angels appear?

There is a human tendency to want to put things into some

kind of physical form so that they can be understood. We might therefore wonder if angels can appear in human form and we do indeed find evidence of angels appearing in such form from time to time for a special purpose. But this is very rare. For example, Chapter 11: verses 69-73, talks about the angels coming to Prophet Abraham, before they went to destroy the people of Lut.

They not only told him about their plans, but also brought him the glad tidings of a birth of a son from his first wife Sarah, who was barren, i.e. the birth of Prophet Isaac.

In Chapter 19: verses 16-17 of the Qur'an there is another mention of the Holy Spirit. These verses refer to Gabriel coming to Mariam (Mary, the mother of Jesus) to give her the glad tiding of the birth of Prophet Jesus.

There is also a lot of evidence that Archangel Gabriel came in human form to Prophet Muhammad several times, the first of these occasions being when Prophet Muhammad received the first revelation in the cave of Hira.

So, in these rare cases, angels did indeed appear in human form. However, there were no more appearances after Prophet Muhammad.

How do angels relate to humans?

So far we have spoken of angels solely in relation to prophets, yet we cannot think of angels only in this way, and we can consider at least five areas indicated in the Qur'an and in the sayings of Prophet Muhammad in which angels are involved.

Angels take care of recording our deeds. They keep a very accurate record of what we do.

In one saying of the Prophet he states that you have angels who are constantly with you. They do not leave you except during the most private functions.

He also said that you should be generous to them. Generous here means in the sense of doing good things, because those angels will feel very happy when you are doing the right thing. In another Hadith, the Prophet indicated that another function of those angels was to prompt us to do good.

You will not hear any sound, but sometimes you will feel as if someone is whispering to you, telling you do what is good. Satan will also prompt you, in the same manner, to do something that is wrong, so the prompting of the angels balances out this evil prompting.

Secondly, in the Qur'an, there is an indication that angels take care of recording our deeds. They keep a very accurate record of what we do. We don't know how they do this. Only Allah knows and we find reference to that in the Qur'an in Chapter 82: verses 10-12; Chapter 43: verses 79-80; Chapter 50: verse 16; Chapter 17: verses 13-14. All of these show that our deeds and words are kept track of.

In addition to that we find that there is reference to angels having a special relationship with people who are pious. Prophet Muhammad indicated that whenever a group of people meet to recite the Qur'an or make supplication or praise, the angels will surround them and feel very happy. In relation to this, in Chapter 17: verse 87, we read about the special value of reciting the Qur'an in the late hours of the night. At this time, angels usually come in great numbers to listen.

And lastly, the Qur'an refers to angels as providing support and aid to the believers in the times of stress and adversity in Chapter 58: verse 22 and in Chapter 8: verses 10-12. Angels pray to God for forgiveness to those who are believers. We find that in Chapter 40: verse 97:

“And those angels sing glory and praise to their Lord. Believe in Him and implore forgiveness for those who

believe. Saying: 'Our Lord, Your reach is over all things in mercy and knowledge. Forgive them, those who turn to you in repentance and follow your path. Preserve them from the penalty of the blazing fire.'"

In an impressive citation, in Chapter 33: verse 43, it talks about the angels praying for the forgiveness and the welfare of human beings in general and pious people, in particular.

Does the Muslim belief in angels have any practical implication?

We have to stress here that the belief in angels is not just some kind of dogma. It has practical applications, just as the belief in the oneness of God has implications. If we realize that angels are with us, and watching us, we should always keep in mind that God is also with us and watching us. That means we should always be pious, or "God-conscious." Added to this the proximity of those angels provides us with some inducement to do what is good to please those honoured guests and avoid evil in order not to feel ashamed before them, as well as before God. That is why the Qur'an regards belief in the angels as part of righteousness, and in this regard we can refer to Chapter 2: verse 177 of the Qur'an and Chapter 2: verse 285.

This proximity of the angels, this closeness, is a method to help awaken our moral consciousness.

THE JINN

The Muslim belief in other unseen creatures

When we talk about God's creatures, we can classify them into two main groups: the seen and the unseen, and the creatures that are seen can be further classified into two major groups: humans and others (ie, animals, animate and inanimate objects). Humans themselves can be divided into two basic groups: believers and unbelievers.

The Qur'an speaks about two basic groups of unseen creatures. One of these is the angels; the other is the jinn. It is difficult to translate the word jinn into English for there is no single word that gives the complete meaning of jinn as it is understood by Muslims. So, to make it easier to understand, we can divide the jinn into two main groups: believers and unbelievers.

Jinn who are believers are just as good as angels or human believers. The unbelievers among the jinn, however, are the ones we refer to as 'satans.' The first of those unbelievers was

Iblis. When you use the name ‘Satan,’ you are talking about Iblis – the first of the unbelievers – and the legion of Satan (his helpers), are sometimes referred to as satans or devils.

In Arabic, the term ‘satan’ means anyone who rebels against God. As we know, there are human beings who rebel against God and, as such, they are, in Arabic, referred to as shaitans (devils).

According to the Qur’an – in Chapter 15: verses 26-27 – the jinn are created from smokeless fire, although no one knows what is the exact nature of that fire.

However, it signifies that they are non-material; that they have capabilities such as speed of movement, etc, that far exceed those given to humans. But the Qur’an says that the jinn, like humans, have free will. They can choose whether or not to obey God.

Jinn are not evil by definition

Because they have freedom of choice, not all jinn are evil spirits so jinn are not evil by definition. It’s what they make of themselves. In fact, in one verse in the Qur’an – Chapter 6, verse 130 – it even talks about the jinn receiving messengers, just as human beings received Prophets to guide them. And in Chapter 46: verses 29-32, it says:

“Behold, We turned towards thee [Muhammad] a company of jinns (quietly listening to the Qur’an. When they stood in the presence thereof, they said: ‘Listen in silence!’ When the (reading was finished, they returned to their people, to warn (them of their sins). They said, ‘O our people! We have head a Book revealed after Moses, confirming what came before it. It guides (men) to the truth and to a straight path. O our people, harken to

the one who invites (you) to Allah, and believe in him. He will forgive you your faults and deliver you from a grievous penalty. If any does not harken to the one who invites (us) to Allah, he cannot frustrate (Allah's plan) on earth, and no protectors can he have besides Allah. Such men (wander) in manifest error.”

***Jinn are like humans . . .
having been warned and
urged to use their free will
in the right direction***

Therefore, we can say that jinn are like humans in the sense of having been warned and urged to use their free will in the right direction.

The relationship of Satan to our daily life

Angels are the pure, sinless spirits who encourage us to do what is good and to avoid what is evil. Satan tries to do the opposite of what the angels are trying to do and is constantly urging us to commit evil.

The unbelieving jinn are not only relevant to our life as individuals, but are relevant to the history of the entire human race. If you look at human history, you will find that the basic struggle in any civilization has been this struggle between the forces of good and evil.

The Qur'an makes it clear in Chapter 7: verses 20-21 that from the very beginning, Satan tried to tempt Adam and Eve into disobeying God. But even when mankind appeared on earth, Satan did not stop. He and his legions continue to push humans to destroy themselves and to commit all kinds of evil acts.

We find examples of that in Chapter 2: verse 268; in Chapter 8: verse 18; and in Chapter 16: verse 63. The first quotation says:

“The evil one threatens you with poverty and bids you

to conduct unseemly acts. Allah promises you His forgiveness and bounties, and Allah cares for all and He knows all things.”

There is a clear warning for us here that the role played by Satan is really dangerous. We must beware and take all kinds of precautions against his evil prompting.

The Qur'an on cautions against the evil of Satan

The first thing we have to realize is that he and his associates are our enemy. The Qur'an puts it very clearly in Chapter 35: verse 6:

“Verily Satan is an enemy to you: so treat him as an enemy.”

The kind of enmity is also expressed in Chapter 7: verse 16 and Chapter 4: verse 117. After Satan was cast out of Paradise, he said that he would stand in the way of humans trying to perfect themselves, try to dissuade them, and order them to do what is evil.

That is why the Qur'an warns us that we should not obey him. In Chapter 7: verse 27, it says:

“O children of Adam! Let not Satan seduce you in the same manner as he got your parents out of the Garden, stripping them of their raiment to expose their shame, for he and his tribe watch you from a position where you cannot see them. We made the evil ones friends (only) to those without faith.”

Secondly, we should not only take this precaution, but we should be aware of all the tricks and deceptions of the satans. Satan seldom comes to someone and says: “This is an evil thing – do it.” Rather, he tries to present it in a way that looks attractive. This is why in Chapter 6, verse 142 and in Chapter

24, verse 21 the Qur'an reminds us not to follow the steps of Satan. This means that he tries to draw us step by step, gradually, towards evil.

In addition to these two precautions we should be aware that obedience to Satan, at the expense of obedience to God, is tantamount to actually worshipping Satan. This doesn't mean worship in a ritual sense. In Islam, the term worship has a broad meaning. It means not only ritual worship but also obedience.

There is an interesting quotation from the Qur'an with regard to this type of worship. It comes in Chapter 36, verses 60-64:

“Did I not enjoin on you, children of Adam, that you should not worship Satan, for he was to you an avowed enemy? And that you should worship Me, for this was the straight way? But he did lead astray a great multitude of you. Did you not, then, understand? This is the Hell of which you were (repeatedly) warned! Embrace you the (fire) this day, for you (persistently) rejected (truth).”

So from this it is clear that obedience to Satan is tantamount to rejection of the truth.

What authority do Satan and his legions have over us?

Having described something of the seductive nature of Satan it seems useful to consider what power is possessed by Satan and his legions. We can ask whether it is accurate to say that they have no authority over us, that they cannot force us to do anything against our will?

In Chapter 91: verses 7-8 of the Qur'an we read about the nature of the human soul:

“By the soul and proportion and order given to it, and its enlightenment as to its wrong and its right.”

Without being guided by Prophets or Scriptures, each human being has the potential for belief and unbelief; good and evil. In that sense, Satan only has power over those who obey him and give him the opportunity to dominate them. If we are capable as humans of disobeying God and obeying Satan, we are just as capable of disobeying Satan and following the path of God.

Satan only has power over those who obey him and give him the opportunity to dominate them.

The Qur'an makes it clear that we should not have superstitious beliefs so that we cannot offer an excuse such as: "The devil made me do it." In such a case Satan did not 'make you do it.' You let him cause you to do it. In the Qur'an, Chapter 16: verses 98-100, it says:

"When you read the Qur'an, seek Allah's protection from Satan the rejected one. He has no authority over those who believe and put their trust in their Lord. His authority is over those only who take him as patron and who join partners with Allah."

It is up to us as to whether we should give him this authority or not.

In conclusion, if we sin, we should not give up hope. The Qur'an urges us to remember God and to try to correct ourselves. In the Qur'anic telling of the story of Adam and Eve, even the first mistake made by them was forgiven.

In Chapter 3: verse 37 and Chapter 20: verses 120-121 we read that Adam and Eve repented and their repentance was accepted. The lesson is that we must never give up hope of ridding ourselves of the control of Satan.

What conditions allow Satan to exercise control over us?

The first condition that would allow Satan an opportunity to exercise control over us is disbelief in God: the rejection of His existence, the rejection of His divine attributes, and a lack of gratitude for His bounty and blessings.

You find reference to this in Chapter 19: verse 83. And in Chapter 59: verse 16 there is a similar statement, in that disbelief in God is a way of making friends with Satan.

The second thing that we should keep in mind is that having a close friendship with those upon whom is God's wrath is one way of allowing Satan to have more influence on us.

This appears in Chapter 5, beginning in verse 19. These verses tell about the bad influence that we get from being close to people who are ungodly.

The third condition that the Qur'an warns us of is forgetting God. Nowadays, it seems that people have time for every conceivable type of activity except remembrance of God. In Chapter 43: verses 36-37, we read:

“If anyone withdraws himself from remembrance of (Allah) Most Gracious, We appoint for him an evil one, to be an intimate companion to him. Such (evil ones) really hinder them from the path, but they think that they are being guided correctly.”

Finally, the Qur'an tells us how to respond to Satan's prompting in Chapter 7: verse 201 and in Chapter 23: verse 98. These verses implore us to seek refuge in God from any evil prompting.

Why were jinn created?

Having said all of this there may be those who will ask why jinn were created. For their part angels prompt us to do good but

without the evil jinn, we would not be tested and it is ultimately our decision to use our God-given freedom of choice and spirituality to overcome Satan's prompting.

DIVINATION, ASTROLOGY, MAGIC

Do Muslims believe in magic?

This is another question that arises from time to time but if the question is asked in this way, then the phrase 'believe in'

In Arabic the word that is usually used for magic is sihr, which has three basic meanings

is significant and it is important to make a distinction here.

When anyone says that a Muslim believes in God, or believes in the Prophets and angels, it carries a lot more weight than saying, for example, that a Muslim believes in the existence of magic. It would be better to call it a belief in the existence of something called magic.

The word 'magic' has different meanings and when we define

this term it becomes easier to explore the Islamic point of view on magic.

In Arabic the word that is usually used for magic is *sihr*, which has three basic meanings.

The first meaning does not necessarily refer to sorcery. It simply means enchantment, attraction or charm. We use the word in the sense that something is so beautiful that it has a magical influence in the sense of attraction or enchantment. In that sense, it is not a problem. Prophet Muhammad was quoted as saying that some truths which are presented properly have the effect of magic, as in the sense of attraction. There is nothing wrong with this.

When these kind of tricks are used . . . to give the illusion that someone has some kind of supernatural power, then it is wrong and condemned.

Sometimes, we also talk about magic in the sense of a kind of trick or illusion. If it is used for the purpose of entertaining children or adults, it is fine. Pulling a rabbit out of a hat, if it's done for the purpose of entertainment, is fine.

But when these kind of tricks are used to exploit people or to give the illusion to people that someone has some kind of supernatural power, then it is wrong and condemned.

In fact, we read about this kind of magic in the Qur'an where it talks about the magicians in the time of Prophet Moses. This appears in Chapter 7: verse 116. It says that the magicians challenged Prophet Moses. They started to perform all sorts of magical feats to see whether Moses could match them. Then Moses said:

“‘Throw ye first.’ When they threw, they bewitched the eyes of the people, and struck terror into them; for they showed a great (feat of) magic.”

The idea was to impress people with this supernatural power. This is something that is condemned. In fact, the Qur’an explained that this kind of magic is simply a skill in illusion. The same situation is mentioned elsewhere in the Qur’an. In Chapter 20: verse 66, it says:

“He (Moses) said, ‘Nay, throw ye first!’ Then behold their ropes and their rods – so it seemed to him on account of their magic – began to be in lively motion!”

We also find references in the Qur’an to a third type of magic which is perhaps equivalent to the word “sorcery.” This is magic which is used for sinister purposes, possibly by invoking evil spirits from among the unseen creatures like the jinn. It also means giving illusions to people or trying to exploit them.

There is a reference in the Qur’an to this in Chapter 113 where it says that believers should always seek refuge in God and God’s power and it talks about “those who blow on knots” which is a type of witchcraft. It doesn’t say that they can harm you. It simply says to invoke the name of God and ask His protection against these evil deeds.

The Qur’an, in Chapter 2: verse 102, tells how people who are learning sorcery, sometimes learn how to sow discord between husband and wife by means of magical formulae. Now, this verse has been interpreted in a variety of ways. Some say that it does not necessarily mean magic, but possibly some evil deeds or creating an illusion among people. But there are those who also believe that it may be possible, with the use of evil spirits, to harm other people.

The Islamic view on other forms of magic, especially sorcery
 The position of Islam on this is very clear. In fact, in the same verse that was quoted earlier (Chapter 2: verse 102) it says that buyers of magic have no share in the happiness of the Hereafter. It is very strongly condemned. Not only this, we find that Prophet Muhammad has indicated in one Hadith that the seven greatest sins include magic. In fact, magic comes immediately after associating others with God, which is the greatest sin. That makes sorcery the second greatest sin. Islam is quite clear on this – sorcery is absolutely condemned.

In addition to ‘buyers of magic,’ that same verse in the Qur’an also speaks about people who learned magic in the past, and it says that they learned what harmed them, not what profited them.

Obviously, when the Qur’an says that learning something is harmful, you should keep away. Indeed, you cannot separate learning magic from using magic, because a person learning magic or sorcery is very tempted to use it. And he may also be tempted to use it for evil. We are human – we might get angry at someone.

So, to cut the evil tree at the roots, Islam also prohibited even the learning of magic. In fact, there are reports that some who tried to practise sorcery ended up going crazy because they were dominated by evil spirits even by their imagination. This is a very dangerous area to get into.

Asking a magician for help to solve a problem

In a Hadith, Prophet Muhammad said that there are thirteen categories of people who will never enter Paradise and one of these categories includes people who believe in magic because when you go to a sorcerer, it means that you believe he has some power that can profit or harm you. This is totally against Islam because Muslims believe that only God has absolute power

and that nobody, human or unseen, can inflict any harm on you against the will of God.

In Islamic jurisprudence, when something is forbidden and evil, then learning it is evil, and believing in it or even resorting to someone who uses it is also evil. In that sense, an ideal society, in the view of Islam, is a society free of sorcery, witchcraft or wizardry.

What should a person do when faced with very serious problems?

Having dismissed the role of magic and sorcery there are four basic points that you should keep in mind whenever you are faced with a difficult problem. Islam teaches that, first of all, you must have a very firm, unshaken belief that there is nobody who shares the divine attributes of God and His power. As we have said before, nothing can happen or take place in this universe against His will. There is no competing power with God. He is the Sovereign of the universe. This includes human beings, jinn, diviners, magicians, sorcerers or any other creature because there is only one Creator. Everything else is also a creature of God.

The second point that we should keep in mind is that to believe that magic will help you to resolve a particular problem has an implicit hidden assumption that somebody else can benefit you or harm you, and this is shirk (associating other powers with God) which is regarded as blasphemy.

Thirdly, Islam provides a more constructive and positive way of dealing with difficult problems: A person should try to depend on God. This dependence, however, does not mean being fatalistic. It simply means that you do what you can on your own but ultimately believe in the authority of God. You invoke His name and pray to Him to guide you and help you.

The fourth point is that this dependence is not necessarily contradictory with doing your best. Whenever you have a

problem, use your God-given rationality to try to solve it. If this is not enough, seek the help of other sincere human beings. And in conclusion, when problems really get complex, invoke the name of God and ask for His guidance. Intelligence alone may not resolve all problems. You might need extra help, but you first have to try your best and then, having done this, leave the rest to God.

What of fortune tellers, those who claim to be able to tell the future?

In the Qur'an, the term used for the unseen is ghaib, meaning something that is absent, beyond our knowledge, and things that relate to the unseen can be divided into three categories.

There is one category of information which people who are alive today do not have access to. For example, if you talk about something that happened during the days of previous Prophets, we don't know exactly what took place then because we were not there. But there were other people who were there and who knew of such events.

A second type of information is not accessible to anyone, living or dead. For example, no one knows what happened on earth before human beings lived on it. No human being has ever been there. People invent theories on the basis of whatever facts are available, but no one knows for sure.

Thirdly, there is information which is impossible for any human being to know without revelation. This includes knowledge about God and life in the Hereafter. This is information that you can't simply discover by reading or studying. It has to be communicated through revelation. This also includes the knowledge of the future.

The basic rule, according to the Qur'an, is that the knowledge of all categories of the unseen lies exclusively with God. In

Chapter 27: verse 65, it says:

“Say: None in the heavens or on the earth except Allah knows what is hidden.”

This is the basic rule about the unseen. Even the Prophets were instructed not to claim that they had any knowledge by themselves. For example, in Chapter 6: verse 50, it says:

“Say: I tell you not that with me are treasures of God nor do I know what is hidden nor do I tell you I am an angel.”

The same reminder was also directed to Prophet Muhammad in Chapter 7: verse 188, which says:

“Say! (O Muhammad): I have no power over any good or harm to myself except as Allah wills. If I had knowledge of the unseen, I should have multiplied all good and no evil should have touched me. I am but a warner and a bringer of glad tidings to those who have faith.” In fact, there is a story about some people who came to Prophet Muhammad

The knowledge of the future is the exclusive domain of God, except as He wills

with something hidden in their hands, and they asked him to tell them what they were holding. He answered that he was not a diviner and that divination and diviners will dwell in the hellfire. In the Qur'an, Chapter 34: verse 14, it mentions that even the jinn did not know about the death of Prophet Solomon. So, there is plenty of evidence in the Qur'an that shows the basic rule that the knowledge of the future is the exclusive domain of God, except as He wills.

But what of Prophets being able to tell the future?

In the second book in this series – on Prophethood – we mentioned that one attribute of a Prophet is being able to foretell the future. Based the discussion above it might be asked whether this example of Prophethood is an exception to the general rule. However, if we are talking about divination it is not an exception, so a distinction needs to be made to clarify this point.

When we talk about divination, we are talking about people who claim that they have certain supernatural powers in order to exploit other people. They tell them what is going to happen to them and they charge money for this. Sometimes divination is also based on false claims or on contact with supernatural beings or devils. This is definitely wrong.

In that sense, there is no exception. Divination is wrong for anybody, including Prophets.

Prophecy is not divination

However, when you are talking about Prophets, the chosen messengers of God, whatever they have foretold about the future is not divination. It is prophecy, and prophecy means that the Prophet was not claiming to know the future just by himself. He is simply claiming that God has revealed certain information. This is why we have already emphasised that the basic rule is that the knowledge of the unseen is the exclusive domain of God unless, by His will, He gives such information to a particular Prophet.

In this regard there is one interesting verse in the Qur'an. It is Chapter 72: verse 26, which says about God:

“He alone knows the unseen nor does He make anyone acquainted with His mysteries except a messenger whom He has chosen.”

In fact, this could be regarded as the most explicit verse in the Qur'an about specific information being conveyed to Prophets. But, of course, if the Prophet is a true Prophet, he will not boast about it. He will humbly admit that this is something that God has blessed him with.

Some comments on astrology

In this discussion of people who claim to have information about the future there is one more area that should be mentioned and that is astrology – the use of the stars as a 'source of information.'

From the Muslim point of view, this sort of thing is nothing but superstition and, once again, exploitation. Sometimes something might happen by way of coincidence, but that should force us to think about this: an individual opens any newspaper on any day, reads the horoscope and then think that it tells you what will happen to you because you have been born in that particular month. We forget that current estimates of global population put that figure at something like 7.5 billion people in the world.

You are one individual and probably, a few million are born in the same month as you. How can all these people have that same type of personality and the same kind of events happening in their lives? It is incomprehensible.

The Qur'an does mention something about the stars but not in relation to astrology or the making of horoscopes. In Chapter 15: verse 16, it says that God has created the stars as a beautification of the sky. One function of beauty is to observe and remember the bounty and the power of God. In addition, in Chapter 6: verse 97, the Qur'an speaks of the stars in terms of guidance to people in the darkness and those travelling on the sea or on the land. In this case the stars have a positive benefit as a source of both beauty and guidance. This is completely different from the superstition that is astrology.

DREAMS, OMENS, ENVY & CHARMS

Areas of the unseen which particularly belong to Allah

One verse in the Qur'an summarizes five areas of the unseen which especially belong to Allah, and these also repeated in one of the sayings of Prophet Muhammad. This verse is Chapter 31: verse 34, where we read:

“Verily, the knowledge of the Hour is with God alone. It is He who sends down rain and He is the one who knows what is in the wombs. Nor does anyone know what is it that he will earn tomorrow nor does anyone know in what land he is to die. Verily, with God is full knowledge and He is acquainted with all things.”

Just to clarify the five basic areas that are emphasized here: They are: 1) the knowledge of the last hour (the Day Of

Judgement); 2) knowledge of the rainfall; 3) what is in the wombs of mothers; 4) what a person will earn the following day, and 5) where and how the person will die.

Now, of course, some might argue that things like rainfall can be predicted by forecasts and other things can be predicted by scientific means but to argue in this way is to mix two different issues. In this case it means mixing the absolute knowledge of God with the human effort to predict something on the basis of the partial evidence that is available to us. We might look at each of these five areas briefly.

Taking the first point, it is very unlikely about when the Day of Judgement is going to happen. There may be signs of the approach of the Day, but no one can know for sure.

The second issue is rainfall. When the weather person makes any forecast about rainfall, it is based on information about the pattern of the wind, its speed and direction, and the clouds. In recent years, this has been facilitated with information obtained by satellite. You are really not getting knowledge of hidden things. These phenomena are things that God has already created, that have already started. The wind moves according to certain laws which God created in nature. In that sense, it is not really encroachment on the domain of God to make this kind of forecast because God, according to the Qur'an, encourages us to try and learn what is in the universe and harness this for human benefit.

Take the third issue about the knowledge of what is in the womb of mothers. Some people would say that we can use medical means, like taking some of the fluid from the uterus, to predict the sex of the fetus. But what is forgotten here is that the verse recited in the Qur'an did not say that only God knows the sex of the fetus. It simply says that only God knows what is in the womb.

“What is in the womb” does not mean whether the person is going to be male or female. It means the kind of character the person will have, how long the person is going to live and that person’s destiny, even after death. This is knowledge that only God would know for sure.

Concerning the fourth area, when you say no person knows for sure what he is going to earn tomorrow, it doesn’t mean earning a salary. For example, I am working on a fixed salary and I know how much I am going to make tomorrow. The word ‘earn’ here means deeds, i.e. what kind of bad deeds or good deeds you’re going to earn tomorrow. Again, nobody can tell for sure because nobody knows if he will be alive tomorrow.

Finally, we don’t know in which land we are going to die, and I think all of us have to accept this fact. Doctors can sometimes predict that the person may probably die within so many days or months, but the exact day or moment is exclusively the knowledge of God. In other words, the main issue here is the distinction between the full and certain knowledge of God and between God-permitted forecast of certain natural phenomena. The Qur’an takes a very open attitude towards understanding the laws of the universe because those laws are created by God and we have to understand them and harness them for our benefit.

Dreams that turn out to be true

Sometimes, people have dreams which turn out to be true, so it may be asked whether this contradicts the Islamic understanding about the unseen.

The answer to that is ‘not necessarily.’ Earlier, we quoted one verse from the Qur’an – Chapter 72, Verse 26 – which says that the knowledge of the unseen is reserved for God, except as He permits. So, there is the possibility of God giving some of this information to Prophets of God or even other people through

dreams. In fact, in one of the sayings of Prophet Muhammad, which is narrated in the hadith collection of Sahih Muslim, he classified dreams into three types: 1) good dreams that come from God; 2) bad dreams that come from Satan; and 3) dreams which are basically our own fault, i.e. that emanate from our thoughts and worries.

The first category, dreams that come from God, are sometimes a kind of warning about something wrong that you might be tempted to do. They give you some advance warning. They could also tell you about something that will happen to you very soon. These dreams come from God. They are a gift – one aspect of prophecy. In fact, in one of the sayings of Prophet Muhammad, he says that if a person is gifted with dreams that come true, then this constitutes 1/45 portion of prophecy. In other words, you are not a Prophet but just have a bit of prophetic ability.

The second type of dream, which is from Satan, is an evil suggestion or nightmare. Prophet Muhammad, in the collection of Muslim, says that when these dreams occur, you should not tell other people about them.

At these times you should simply invoke the name of God, i.e. by saying, “I seek refuge in the name of God, Most Gracious, Most Merciful.” He also recommended that you change the side you are sleeping on. If you are sleeping on your right side then turn on your left side and vice versa. It is still better to rise up and make ablution and perform prayers and then go back to bed. This will drive away the evil suggestion and you will sleep securely.

The third type of dream is something many psychiatrists would be interested in that is the reflection of some of your thoughts or your prior experiences.

In the case of a Prophet, whatever the Prophet sees in his dream is regarded as a direct command from God to him just as He

sends the Angel of Revelation to instruct the Prophet to do certain things.

We find evidence about this in the Qur'an – in Chapter 37: verses 100-113 – in the story of when Prophet Abraham was commanded by God in his dream to sacrifice his only son, Ismail. Again, that applies only to Prophets of God and the era of Prophethood ended with the last Prophet, Prophet Muhammad.

The Qur'anic view of bad omens or bad luck

There is a term which is used in the Qur'an which approximates to the meaning of bad omen. The term is *tahtayul*, which means believing that somebody brings bad luck.

We find that this is quite common in a variety of cultures. For example, some people have a hang-up with the number 13, so

Islam came to change the whole notion of bad omens

in some high-rise buildings there is no 13th floor. The 12th floor is followed by the 14th floor. Others feel

it is bad luck if a black cat passes in front of you. They believe that black cats bring bad luck regardless of what is happening to you at that time.

The Qur'an indicates that, in the past, many people have fallen prey to this kind of superstition. It is not accepted by Muslims. Indeed, the Qur'an ridicules some of the unbelievers who used to accuse the Prophets of bringing bad luck to them. This appears in Chapter 36; verse 18, and the Qur'an denies that Prophets bring bad luck or bad omens. In the case of Prophet Salleh in Chapter 27: verse 47, the Qur'an also talks about the accusation made against him. Even in the case of one of the five great Prophets, Prophet Moses, the Egyptians felt that he and

his followers brought bad luck to them. In Chapter 7: verse 131, it says:

“But when good times comes, they said, ‘This is due to us’; but when gripped by calamity, they ascribed it to evil omens connected with Moses and those with him. Behold! In truth the omens of evil are theirs in Allah’s sight, but most of them do not understand!”

In other words, Islam came to change the whole notion of bad omens. Bad omens are not necessarily just a superstitious belief that a person or event brings bad luck. What truly brings bad luck are the evil deeds of the person. This is very essential because there are some sayings of Prophet Muhammad in which he uses the term “bad omen,” but he changes it from a superstition into a rational evil. For example, a bad omen connected with the home could just be a bad neighbourhood or bad neighbours. Omens involving some animal like a horse could be because the animal is troublesome. So, the whole meaning is changed from superstitious belief to the actual reason behind it.

It is not unusual, because of some people’s belief in bad omens, that these omens become self-fulfilling prophecies. Somebody leaves home and a black cat passes in front of him while he is getting into his car. That person keeps thinking about it and this leads to an accident. Yet he blames it on the cat he saw that morning. Prophet Muhammad, in one of his sayings said that: “He is not one of us (a Muslim), who believes in bad omens or goes to someone else who tells him about this omen.”

Good luck charms

Surprisingly, even in cultures where there is a high degree of education, many superstitions still persist that ‘good luck charms’ like a rabbit’s foot will bring good fortune. Once again the Islamic position is as we discussed earlier: that this kind of belief reflects a belief in some other power besides God. As

such, it is rejected by Islam, just as bad omens are also rejected.

There are two sayings of Prophet Muhammad about this.

One of them is narrated in the hadith collection of Ahmad in which he said: "A person who has a necklace [an amulet] and believes this will protect him is really associating other powers with God."

In another saying, in the collection of Tirmizi, he said: "If a person hangs up something and believes in its protection, God will leave him to that thing's protection." This means that the thing has no power to protect the individual. A true Muslim will not believe it. Unfortunately, there are some Muslims who still hang up things in imitation of others.

Even in the case of illness, for example, Prophet Muhammad taught, in his saying narrated by Ahmad, that you should, "Seek remedy for your disease because He who created the disease also created the cure."

One should not have superstitious thoughts about either good or evil. One has to be rational. One should not pray to God believing that God can cure even without the agency of medicine.

You must first put in effort. Your role is to do your best and then leave the rest to God. You should always feel that it is ultimately His authority. One of the interesting practices of Prophet Muhammad was that when he visited somebody who was sick, he used to make something call *rohkiah*. It means to pray for his cure. Then he would put his hand on the person's forehead and say: "Relieve the suffering, O Lord of mankind! Cure. You are the Curer. There is no cure but your cure which leaves no trace of illness."

It does not say that you shouldn't take medicine. The attitude

of Islam is to combine the rational way of looking for a good solution to your problem and, in the meantime, always believing that everything is contingent on the power and will of God.

Can envy cause harm to another person?

The question of envy has been mentioned in the Qur'an in more than one place but perhaps more specifically in Chapter 113: verse 5, in which a believer is taught to seek God's protection from the evil of an envious person.

When the subject of evil is brought up, along with that comes talk of the "evil eye"; the idea that whenever a person 'with the evil eye' looked at someone or something, then something bad happened to it. There are those who believe in a power like this but what exactly is the "evil eye" or spell?

One possibility is the fact that an envious person, who by definition is a person who does not wish any blessings or good thing to remain with you, may be driven by this kind of extreme jealousy to try and carry out certain actions that may eventually cause some harm to you. This is one possible meaning for that.

But on the other hand, we should not try to just rationalise it and forget the fact that in human history there have been many cases where this "evil eye" did actually result in some harm to people.

How to explain it? We don't know. There is nothing in the Qur'an or the sayings of Prophet Muhammad to give a clear explanation as to how this kind of unseen thing emanates from the person. We don't know and we should not make any guesses on that issue. However, the Qur'an says that we should not be over-anxious about the "evil eye." Prophet Muhammad has told us to recite three times the last three chapters of the Qur'an. Two of them, Chapters 113 and 114 contain all kinds of invocation of the name of God that should be recited when we

go to bed. But, above all, the person should keep their trust in God and should not have any undue anxiety about any evil that might happen.

THE SOUL

Belief in life after death

Belief in the life in the Hereafter is part and parcel of the whole pattern of Muslim belief. Indeed, a Muslim cannot be regarded as a Muslim if he or she rejects belief in life in the Hereafter. There is specific documentation of just how much importance Islam places on this particular belief.

Consider first the material part of the human being. A human is

When we talk about the human being, we are talking about a special class of God's creation

composed of a few gallons of water, some carbon, magnesium, sodium and other elements. What does that mean? In itself,

it means nothing. All of those elements are only worth a few dollars.

But when we talk about the human being, we are talking about a special class of God's creation, which is worth a lot

more than a few dollars. You can't put any price tag on this miraculous creation.

To a Muslim, the human being is the crown of creation. What, then, is the thing that makes the difference between this combination of natural elements and a human being who has the intellect, the free will and, above all, the spirituality to know God and to strive to serve Him? If the value of the human being does not reside in these elements, then where does it reside? From here comes the belief that the soul is the thing that makes the human being a different kind of creature.

How to define the soul and the spirit?

We will try here to give, as clearly as possible, the equivalent Qur'anic terminology used for this. The term spirit approximates to the Qur'anic term *rooh*, whereas the term soul approximates to the Arabic term *nafs*. To put it in a nutshell, the spirit (*rooh*) is, to the Muslim, a term which is more general and more inclusive than the term soul. When you talk about spirit, as used in the Qur'an, we find that this term has three or four different meanings.

First of all, it is used to refer to divine revelation given to Prophets. Chapter 42: verse 52 refers to the Qur'an as "a spirit from the command of God."

A second meaning that is used for the term spirit is in the

The soul . . . makes the human being a different kind of creature

sense of that spirit that God provides for the believers to give them the comfort and trust in Him, and to support

them in their difficulties. This is documented in Chapter 58: verse 22. But we should point out here that this spirit which God provides is not part of divinity.

A third meaning of spirit is in reference to Archangel Gabriel. In the Qur'an, he is called "Holy Spirit" and "Trustworthy

Spirit.” But, once again, the term spirit does not have any connotation of divinity. Archangel Gabriel is a creation of God, not part of God.

There is another meaning that can be derived from the term spirit; that it is a spirit from God that He breathed into us to make us human. We find reference to this in the Qur’an, in Chapter 4: verse 71, regarding the creation of Prophet Jesus, that he is a spirit from God.

The same term, roohulamin, also appears in Chapter 32: verse 9 and in Chapter 15: verses 18-19. Both of these quotations talk about God creating the human being in the best possible fashion and then “breathing into him of His spirit.” This spirit that is breathed into us is the spirit of knowledge of God, an intuitive feeling of a need for the Creator.

The term soul, however, has a more limited meaning. It is what makes the distinction between biological life and a human being who has the power of reason and, above all, the spirituality that connects him with his creator.

How much can we know about the soul?

By definition, when we talk about the soul, we are not talking about something that is tangible. As such, the sources of knowledge cannot be material sources.

In other words, no amount of human intellect, experimentation or experiential ability (mystical experience) can provide a sufficient and authentic source of knowledge. This leads us to the conclusion that the only authentic source about the unseen is direct revelation, communicated by God, through His Prophets.

Even then, the Qur’an makes it clear that the information given in revelation is limited. In Chapter 17: verse 85, it says:

“They ask you (Muhammad) concerning the spirit

(of inspiration). Say: ‘The spirit (comes) by command of my Lord. Of knowledge it is only a little that is communicated to you, (O men)!’”

Where is the soul located?

There is no evidence in the Qur’an or the sayings of Prophet Muhammad, implying that the soul resides in any special part of the body. Some non-Muslims believe that the soul resides in the blood or the heart or the brain but all these notions seem to confuse the soul with biological life.

A famous Muslim scholar, Ibnul Qayyim, felt that the soul is a body of light within our own body; that the soul is totally infused in the body in the same way that water is infused in a flower. But this is not based on the Qur’an or the sayings of the Prophet.

Is the soul eternal?

Earlier, we indicated that the soul has its origins from God and we know that God is eternal. Taking these two points together may lead some to ask if that means that our souls are eternal, or to question whether our souls existed before we were born.

Ideas such as this confuse two different issues. On the one hand, God has prior knowledge of everything that will happen. He knows what happened even before the earth was created. On the other hand, that is quite different from the actual creation of the soul and its uniting with the physical body. God’s knowledge is always complete and perfect, but the creation of the soul is something that took place later. It is not eternal. One way of explaining it is that the soul uses the body as a garment. The soul may take different forms and may transform from one stage to another using that body, yet the body is like a garment that is shed at the time of death.

There is one saying of Prophet Muhammad, which confirms

that the soul is created, not eternal. He says that at the beginning of the fifth month, God ordains the soul to be breathed into the foetus.

The soul is indestructible once it is created. It has four stages. In the first stage, the soul is united with the body of the foetus. Secondly, the soul is united with the body during the period between birth and death. The third stage is after the soul departs from the physical body and before the Day of Resurrection. The fourth, and more eternal stage, is when the soul reunites with the body on the Day of Resurrection and dwells with the body in Paradise or hell.

The Muslim attitude towards death

Any further exploration of the soul requires that we briefly touch on the subject of death and that we discuss the Muslim attitude towards death.

We have to realize that for many people death is an unpleasant subject; something they try to ignore. Yet, for the Muslim, there is no avoidance of the subject of death. There are several reasons for this. Across the world, at every moment of every day, there are people dying. Death is the most universal experience. Therefore, it is wrong to avoid this subject. We find that the Qur'an in Chapter 21: verse 35 says:

“Every soul will have a taste of death.”

That phrase also appears in Chapter 29: verse 57.

Secondly, the Qur'an makes it clear that, no matter what the person does to evade death, once it is determined for him to die, nothing can prevent it. In one moving verse in the Qur'an, in Chapter 4: verse 78, it says:

“Wherever you are, death will find you out. Even if you are in towers built up strong and high.”

In addition, for the Muslim, there isn't much worry as to

when he is going to die. A Muslim should not use terms like ‘prolonging’ or ‘shortening’ the life of an individual because, before we are created, God has determined the exact moment of our death.

For example, in Chapter 16: verse 61, it says:

“When their (mankind’s) term expires, they would not be able to delay (the punishment) for a single hour, just as they would not be able to anticipate it (for a single hour).”

As the Muslim believes in the perpetual existence of the soul after the death of the physical body, he looks at death as a shift from

People are sleeping when they are physically alive and are too busy to realize many of the things that God has created in this universe.

one state of existence to another, i.e. in the same way that we move from sleep to consciousness. Indeed, for the Muslim, when people die, they awake. People are sleeping when they are physically alive and are too busy to realize many of the things that God has created in this universe. But when the person dies and the physical body is no longer there to distract him, then that person awakens (sometimes too late) to the higher reality of spiritual existence.

A Muslim should always be prepared for this shift. A true Muslim should not be worried that he will face death. What worries the Muslim more is whether or not he is doing enough in this earthy life to get ready for security and felicity in the life Hereafter.

Perhaps we should conclude this question with one interesting verse in the Qur’an which gives the ideal attitude of the Muslim towards death, that it is a test for us. That appears in Chapter 67: verses 1-2:

“Blessed be He in Whose hands is dominion; and He has power over all things – He who created death and life, that He may try which of you is best in deeds.”

In that sense, death is merely a test to a Muslim, a stage in his eternal existence. He has to face it and harness it to prepare for eternal life.

Does the Qur'an explain what a person experiences when he dies?

At the time of death, the person usually hopes to get back to life in order to catch up on doing good deeds. In Chapter 63: verse 10, it says:

“And spend something (in charity) out of the substance which We have bestowed on you, before death should come to any of you and he should say, ‘O my Lord! Why did you not give me respite for a little while? I should then have given (largely) in charity, and I should have been one of the doers of good.’”

DEATH

Since we have come to the very important subject of death it is important to elaborate on the Islamic teachings on death and the experience of death.

The first thing we emphasize is that, at the time of death, a person will feel a desire to come back to life in order to catch up on doing good deeds. We have already cited one verse on this in the Qur'an, and we should now cite another: Chapter 23: verses 99-100. It describes what happens to people who did not comply with the commands of God at the time of death. It says:

“In falsehood will they be, 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.”

It's interesting to note that even a good person desires to come back to catch up on good works at the time of death. But the most significant thing is that it mentions that there is a partition. There is a barrier that is impossible to break so that one can come back to this life.

In addition to this, a person's soul is taken by angels. The Qur'an indicates that there are certain angels who are in charge of taking the souls of humans. In Chapter 6: verse 61, it says:

“He is irresistible, watching from above over His worshippers, 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.”

Another verse which we cited earlier, Chapter 32: verse 11, says:

“The Angel of Death, put in charge of you, will duly take your souls. Then shall you be brought back to your Lord.”

Finally, the overall experience of death is described in the Qur'an as *sakrah*, a stupor or unconscious state at the time of the exit of the soul. That appears in Chapter 50: verse 19.

At the time of death . . .

Now, it may be wondered whether, at the time of a person's death, there is any way that person can find out if his afterlife will be a happy one or a sad one.

There are indications. In the Qur'an, there are profiles of both states – of people who will be happy in the Hereafter versus those who will be miserable.

Let us look at the more hopeful state first. First of all, a

A believer who has done good deeds will be greeted by the angels of death and will be assured of his destiny

believer who has done good deeds will be greeted by the angels of death and will be assured of his destiny. He will know for sure, in his very last moments, where his destiny is. In Chapter 16: verse 32, it says:

“(Namely) those whose lives the angels take in a state of purity, saying (to them), ‘Peace be upon you; enter the Garden, because of (the good) which you did (in the world).’”

Another moving passage in the Qur’an, Chapter 41: verse 30-32, gives a description of the exit of the soul of the believer. It says:

“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 you 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 your souls shall desire; therein shall you have all that you ask for – a hospitable gift from One Oft-Forgiving, Most Merciful!’”

The Qur’an also gives a profile of those dying in a state of disbelief and wickedness. The picture is quite different. Obviously, when the person is an unbeliever, at the time of death, the soul will not be anxious to get out. It knows what its destiny is going to be. In Chapter 8: verse 50, it says:

‘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 penalty of the blazing Fire.’

It doesn't mean physical smiting but the pain of being rebuked at the time of death. In another description, Chapter 6: verse 93, it says:

“If you could but see how the wicked fare in the flood of confusion at death! The angels stretch forth their hands, (saying), ‘Yield up your souls. This day shall you receive your reward – a penalty of shame, for you used to tell lies against Allah, and scornfully to reject His signs!’”

The Qur'an gives a clear indication that any human being, before departing this world, will know his or her destiny.

The experiences of an individual at the time of death

There is a very lengthy saying of Prophet Muhammad which appears in the hadith collection of Imam Muslim. But we have to be careful not to take it literally because it describes something that is too inaccessible for us to fully understand. In that saying, he gives two profiles: that of the pious person and that of the wicked person.

When the pious person is on the verge of departing this life, angels will come to him with shining (joyous) faces and he will see them. Then, the Angel of Death will sit at his head, and when his soul is leaving the body, the Angel will say: “Come out, you good soul! Come to forgiveness and pleasure.”

The soul will leave the body in the same way that a drop of water would fall, i.e. easily and smoothly. Next, this soul is taken by these angels and they begin to ascend into Heaven. Whenever angels notice that pious people are passing they ask: “What is that nice smell – like the smell of musk?”

The angels will give the name of the person. They also continue praying, on his behalf, for forgiveness. Whenever the angels move from one level to another, other angels keep coming and

participating in the prayers for the soul. Eventually, the soul reaches a certain level in Heaven where God commands the angels to take the Book of Deeds and put in the highest level. And then, he commands them to return the soul to earth in preparation for the accountability immediately after burial.

The wicked person also sees the angels coming to take his soul but the angels have darkened, grim faces which reflect God's anger. They will stand in front of him.

The Angel of Death will also come, but he will say, "Come out, you wicked soul, to displeasure from God." He describes the exit of the soul as being pulled, rather than flowing smoothly. Then the angels take this soul. The smell of it would stink. When the soul ascends to Heaven, the angels on the first level will wonder what the bad smell is. But the wicked soul is not allowed to ascend any further into Heaven. Concerning this, the Prophet quoted one verse from the Qur'an, Chapter 7: verse 40, which says:

"To those who reject Our signs and treat them with arrogance, no opening will there be of the gates of Heaven, nor will they enter the Garden, until the camel can pass through the eye of the needle: Such is our reward for those in sin."

Then, God will command the angels to return the soul to earth and put that individual's book of deeds in the lowest place. Finally, the Prophet said: "If anyone assigns partners to God, he is as if he had fallen from Heaven and been snatched up by birds, or the wind had swooped like a bird on its prey and threw him into a far-distant place."

On "near-death" experiences

There have been several books written on the subject of what are called 'near-death' experiences. Basically, these are reports by a

number of people who have been near death. Perhaps they had gone through a serious operation, or were about to drown, or were about to fall, but they did not actually die.

It is reported that the things those people experienced were quite similar. For example, they heard an uncomfortable buzzing sound and they felt as if they were moving quickly through a long, dark tunnel.

They reported that they felt as if they were outside their physical body and were watching that body. Some reported that they saw the souls of their dead relatives and friends. Some reported that they saw their lives pass very quickly in front of them, like a movie. There were requested to evaluate their lives. They had a different sense of time and knowledge.

Some saw souls in bodies similar to human bodies. Others said they heard music. There was a lot of light, like a city of light. There were rivers and mountains and vegetation, but these were very different from what we see in this life.

Some reported seeing souls that were sad and bewildered. Others talked about those who committed suicide continuing to face the same kinds of problems that caused them to commit suicide in the first place.

... and the accuracy of those reports

Firstly, there are some methodological problems in considering these reports.

All the studies are based on the reports of people who were described as “near-death.” We cannot check the accuracy of these reports. We can only take these people’s words about these experiences.

In addition, there is another issue that should disturb any

believer in any divinely revealed faith, and not just Muslims. Almost all of these people reported that they were in an enjoyable place. Some even wished to go back to that place.

This raises a very serious question, because it suggests that everyone can have this enjoyable experience after death, regardless of his or her own belief or deeds. This is contrary to what all the Prophets and messengers have taught. In consequence, the promotion of these kinds of accounts could result in an indifference towards doing good deeds.

It is possible that some of these visions could be deceiving visions to dupe people into believing that what we do in this life doesn't make much difference. It is not logical to equate good with evil and for the Muslim in particular, the only authentic source of information about the unseen is divine revelation.

One final point – “near-death” is not death. The experience of almost dying is different from the real, irrevocable experience of death itself.

Could “near-death” experiences be explained by scientific analysis?

There are certain areas that could be explained by science, but not all. For example, scientists tell us that a lot of our experiences throughout life are stored in the brain. In one famous study, the pioneering neurosurgeon Dr. Wilder Penfield stimulated certain areas of the brain during brain surgery. As a result of this stimulation, he found that people started to remember events in their lives which had been totally forgotten. This could be one explanation of why some people have said that their whole life flashed before their eyes. But this is only a glimpse into the unseen. The total picture is hidden from us. We have to depend on divine revelation to give us a more vivid and accurate description.

The Islamic view of suicide

In Islam, suicide is regarded as one of the major sins for which a person is severely punished in the afterlife. The reason behind this is that, according to Islam, no person owns anything in the absolute sense. This includes our lives, because everything is owned by God.

The fact that we are blessed with property, health or life does not mean that we can do what we wish with these things. Islam regards the human being as the trustee of God on earth. Our life is a trust to be used for our benefit, for the benefit of our families and for humanity. As such, if we destroy it without any justification, we are betraying our trust and not fulfilling our mission. In fact, in Chapter 4: verse 29 the Qur'an says:

“Do not kill (or destroy) yourself; for verily Allah has been most merciful to you.”

We find that the same basic principle was re-emphasised by Prophet Muhammad. In one of his sayings, he says that if a person commits suicide, he will come back on the Day of Judgement and continue in a vicious circle, repeating the same act of suicide constantly.

He specifically says that if a person throws himself off a mountain, he will repeat the same thing for eternity. Even in cases of severe psychological or physical stress, the Muslim is taught that one should persevere, should ask God to relieve him of this pain and never to despair. The Qur'an quotes Prophet Jacob as saying, when he asked his children to look for Joseph:

Even in cases of severe psychological or physical stress, the Muslim is taught that one should persevere

“No one despairs of Allah's soothing mercy.”

The maximum that the Muslim would be permitted to do, in case the suffering is intolerable, is to pray to God, as Prophet Muhammad has explained in Bukhari and Muslim: "O God! Give me life if You feel life is better for me and take me away if You decide death is better."

Euthanasia – referred to as ‘mercy-killing’

First of all, there is no mercy in killing. The wrong which is done by others is the same as the wrong which is done by you. In other words, if it is morally wrong to commit suicide, it is also wrong to have somebody else take your life, even if you request it. As an analogy, if you ask someone else to pay a bribe on your behalf, it is still wrong.

It is true that we should be sympathetic to the suffering of those who are terminally ill. But the Muslim looks at it from a different perspective. It is quite possible that the person's suffering may somehow atone for his sins. Perhaps it is a way for God to relieve him of a greater and more everlasting suffering after death.

The best thing you can do for a person who is terminally ill is to provide them with whatever assistance that might be needed. We should also not forget the spiritual needs of the person. We should remind them to repent, to seek the acceptance of God, to make peace with God.

In the case of irrevocable brain damage

There are other issues which are sometimes caught up in any discussion of euthanasia. Some physicians raise the issue of people who have irrevocable brain damage. They say that it is possible to hook up someone to a heart-lung machine which maintains the body even though the brain is destroyed. The question that usually arises is what do you do in a case like that? Even then, it is not appropriate to give an injection or

overdose to let the person die. But, if the physicians agree that there is no chance of survival, if the EEG shows that there is no brain activity whatsoever, it means that the person is dead, even though you can still artificially pump the blood throughout the body. This is a sensitive matter that has to be studied by Muslim jurists as well as by competent physicians in order to establish guidelines as to which cases should not be hooked to this equipment. But this is different from deliberately taking the life of the person.

Islamic guidance on caring for the terminally ill

As we have already mentioned, a sick person should be treated with compassion. He should be reminded of his destiny. Prophet Muhammad taught that, when a person begins to die, we should recite the testimony (“There is no God but Allah, and Muhammad is His Prophet”) in front of him. We should not push the person to recite it. Hopefully, when he hears other people reciting it, he will also recite it. It is very important that the person, no matter how sinful he may have been, departs this world having uttered this expression of belief and hope.

There are also some sayings of Prophet Muhammad, in which he says that Surah Yasin (Chapter 36) should be read when the person is dying. That chapter deals with creation, birth, life, death and resurrection. It is a very appropriate chapter for such an occasion.

... and on death itself

Once the person has actually died, his eyes should be closed. According to one of the sayings of the Prophet, once the soul is taken away, the sight follows, although we don't fully understand what this means. After the eyes are closed, the person could be kissed by their loved ones if they wish.

Of course, when a loved one dies, we feel sorrow. But the Prophet recommended that we do not cry loudly because this

could hurt the soul or this individual. We should especially not say words that show despair of the mercy of God or lack of faith. However, normal expressions of sorrow are not prohibited.

Then, according to Islam, it is desirable to bury the person as soon as possible. The first thing that should be done is to give the body a bath and put some camphor oil on it. Then the body should be dried and wrapped in simple white cloth. For the man it should be at least three layers; for the woman it is desirable to have five layers.

After this, the funeral prayer should be conducted on behalf of the person. The funeral prayer is different from regular prayers. The people stand in lines in front of the body and say the takbir (Allahu Akbar) and recite the first chapter of the Qur'an. Then they say Allahu Akbar again and recite the second part of the shahadu (part of the regular prayers). After that they say the takbir again and recite prayers on behalf of the dead person, asking God to accept him into Paradise and save him from the hellfire.

When this is finished, as many people as possible should follow the funeral procession to the grave. During this procession, there should be no music, no singing or loud sounds – only silent, sincere prayers.

Once the people reach the graveyard (the grave should already be dug), the body is lowered into the grave (preferably without a casket, although there's nothing wrong with using a casket if it is required). The people standing around the grave should put three handfuls of earth towards the head of the deceased. The first time they say: "From earth We created you"; the second time they say: "From earth we are going to return you"; and the third time: "From it you will be resurrected again." This is actually a verse from the Qur'an.

A person should be buried on his right side, facing the Ka'aba. The body should be covered and people should continue to pray.

What happens to the soul after burial?

There are several sayings of Prophet Muhammad in which he indicates that after death a person is questioned, even in the grave.

He would be asked who his Lord is, who his Prophet is, and certain things about his faith. For believers, the answers to these questions would be easy.

The Prophet is actually referring to Chapter 14: verse 27, which says:

“Allah will establish strength in those who believe, with the word that stands firm, in this world and in the Hereafter.”

An unbeliever, even though he understands the questions intellectually, would be confused.

After this questioning, every person will see his position in Paradise or the hellfire. There are also a number of sayings to affirm that a person is also punished or rewarded.

This is similar to something that we have all gone through. Suppose that you have a nightmare in which you feel that someone is choking you or you are drowning. Anyone who observes your physical body would say that nothing is happening. But to you, during that nightmare, it is real. Similarly, after death, there is punishment or reward, but the physical body is not affected.

There is also evidence of this in the Qur'an, in Chapter 40, verse 46. Here it speaks about the people of Pharaoh, the one who

persecuted Prophet Moses:

“In front of the fire will they be brought, morning and evening, and (the sentence will be) on the day that judgement will be established: ‘Cast ye the People of Pharaoh into the severest penalty!’”

Notice that this verse talks about the people of the Pharaoh, even though they have already died. Still, they are brought “morning and evening” (all the time) in front of the fire, which means they are punished.

And, it says that, on the Day of Judgement their suffering will continue and they will be thrown into the “severest penalty.” This is conclusive proof, from the Qur’an, that punishment and reward do not have to wait until the Day of Judgement.

This period between burial and the Day of Judgement is like an interim period. The Qur’an calls it *barzah*, a partition. It is a partition between two levels: the level of our early life and that of our life after the Day of Judgement.

That is why Prophet Muhammad used to teach people to pray:

“O God, I seek refuge in you from the punishment in the grave. I seek refuge in you from the punishment in the Hereafter.” Both are areas in which one can suffer, depending on one’s deeds.

Is the soul capable of comprehending what happens after death?

There is some evidence to the idea that the soul can comprehend what happens after death. First of all, in a saying of Prophet Muhammad, he says that after a person is buried, at the time he is questioned, he hears the sound of the footsteps of the mourners leaving the gravesite, leaving him alone. That is why it

was the custom of the Prophet that, when someone was buried, he asked those around him to pray for the deceased person because he was being questioned.

Some people would recite verses from the Qur'an, hoping that would be of some benefit to the deceased.

There are other sayings that show that the dead person knows what is going on. During the Battle of Badr, when the pagans came to destroy the Muslims, many of the pagans were killed. After they had been buried, the Prophet stood there and talked to them. He asked them if they now found that the promise of God is true, the promise of punishment for those who disobey God. He kept repeating that and one of the Prophet's companions, Umar, asked him why he was talking to people who were already dead. The Prophet answered him: "Umar, you do not listen better than them, they just cannot respond."

The Prophet also says that if a person passes a graveyard where a person he knew in this life is buried, he should greet him with Assalaamu alaikum (Peace be upon you). God will cause that person to reply, though of course, we cannot hear it. In fact, it is required that, when a Muslim passes by a Muslim graveyard, even if he does not know the people buried there, he should greet them.

The Prophet also indicated that at certain times, especially on Thursday and Friday nights, he (the Prophet) would be aware of the deeds of his people. He would feel happy if the Muslims behaved in accordance with the Qur'an and sad when they deviated. He also taught that if people pray to God to have His peace and blessings on him (the Prophet) that God will cause the Prophet to respond to this greeting.

AFTER DEATH

Is it possible for the souls of the dead to contact the souls of the living?

The possibility exists of the living being contacted by the souls of the dead but this cannot be done through séances. A séance suggests that someone has the souls under his control, and that he can summon any soul he wishes and this is someone that calls for a degree of scepticism. In fact, many people who have been involved in séances have reported that the séances usually involved fraud.

However, the possibility exists. The Qur'an says that God takes the souls of persons who have died and He takes the souls of those who did not die in their sleep.

The phrase "In their sleep" has two meanings: 1) people who did not die while sleeping; and 2) during our sleep our soul is

taken, i.e. our soul is connected with our body during sleep in a different way than when we are awake.

In the Qur'an, chapter 39: verse 42, we read:

“It is Allah that takes the souls (of men) at death; and those that die not (he takes) during their sleep. Those on whom He has passed a decree of death, He keeps back (from returning to life), but the rest He sends (to their bodies) for an appointed term. Verily in this are signs for those who reflect.”

This clearly indicates that sleep – for example, when you have a dream and see somebody who has died – is actually a process of meeting between the souls of the living and the dead for the period of the dream.

Before you wake up, the souls of those who died before are kept away from returning to life. Your soul comes back fully to you in the morning.

There is one aspect of sleep that many people do not pay much attention to. Every day, we seem to have a rehearsal of coming to life, dying and resurrecting. When you wake up in the morning, it's almost like a rehearsal of resurrection on the Day of Judgement.

Every day [in sleep] we seem to have a rehearsal of coming to life, dying and resurrecting.

When you go to bed at night, it is almost like a minor death. Every day we repeat this process that will eventually happen to us.

Can the souls of the dead contact each other?

In the Qur'an, Chapter 3: verse 170, it talks about the souls of

the martyrs carrying to each other the good news of other pious people who have been left behind. This means that these souls communicate among themselves about what is going on in the physical world.

We find a more indirect piece of evidence in Chapter 4: verse 69, which describes the reward of those who are obedient to God and His messenger. It says:

“All who obey Allah and the messenger are in the company of those on whom is the grace of Allah – of the Prophets (who teach), the sincere (lovers of truth), the witnesses (who testify), and the righteous (who do good). Ah! What a beautiful fellowship!”

This verse could apply both to company in the interim period between death and resurrection and company after the Day of Judgement. But once we talk about this interim between death and resurrection the question may arise as to where the soul resides in this period.

Between death and resurrection

Earlier we have said that the soul does not reside in any part of our body and that it is dangerous to imagine the soul in a very limited physical sense, i.e. residing in the blood. However, in some sayings of Prophet Muhammad (in the collection of Ahmad), it is indicated that the soul is returned immediately after death to face the accountability in the grave. In that sense then, we say that the soul unites, in some way, with the body after burial.

On the other hand we find other sayings (in the collection of Muslim) that say that the souls of the believers will be in Paradise. Some sayings declare that the souls of the unbelievers will be in the hellfire, while others say that they would be imprisoned in the lowest part of the earth. We can't understand

this physically, but it shows the notion of suffering.

We have also mentioned that when a person passes by a graveyard and greets the people who are buried there, God causes the believers among them to respond.

If we take all these sayings in a literal sense, it can cause some confusion. Where are the souls? Are the souls of the believers on the earth so that they can reply to you? Are the souls of wicked people in the hellfire, and are the souls of the martyrs in Paradise? Yet these descriptions are not contradictory, if we approach the soul as something different from the material world.

One of the great scholars of Islam, Ibnu Qayyim, said that there is no contradiction in all this. It is just like the sun and all its rays. Physically, the sun is located in Heaven but its rays, which are here on earth, are also part of the sun. In the same way, the soul could be in Paradise but still be in contact (like the rays of the sun) with its grave and still meet people in dreams.

Do Muslims believe in the reincarnation of the soul?

On this question we can be quite clear: reincarnation is part of the Hindu faith. The Hindus believe that the soul is reincarnated in cycles. When you die, your soul reappears in another body. It could be the body of a human or an animal. If you lived a good life, your soul would be reincarnated into the body of a good human being, but if you were wicked, you would be reincarnated into body of a human being who suffers, or even in the body of an animal.

This has nothing to do with Muslim belief. If you think about it, if souls keep being reincarnated, this would mean that the number of souls has been constant throughout history. However, the population has been increasing. Where have these new souls come from? The Muslim belief is that the number of souls

increases, rather than coming in cycles.

As we mentioned before, the Prophet says that the soul starts coming into being in the fifth month of pregnancy. After that, the soul is indestructible. It leaves the body after death, but reunites with the body on the Day of Judgement.

Three states of the soul

Some writers may refer to three states of the soul. In this case they are referring to three terms used in the Qur'an to describe the soul: 1) an-nafsu ammarah: the soul that prompts us to do evil; 2) an-nafsu lawamah: the soul that is aware of its sin; and 3) an-nafsu mutma'inah: the soul which is at peace. Each of these terms has been used in the Qur'an.

In the Qur'an, Chapter 12: verse 53, it says:

“The (human) soul is prone to evil, unless my Lord bestows His mercy.”

That shows that one state of the soul pushes us to do evil. This is the bad or animal part of us that pulls us away from the path of God.

The second term is used in Chapter 75: verse 2. This term has two meanings. It could mean the soul of a believer or an unbeliever because lawama means a soul that does not stay in one state. But some interpreters understand this term as a soul that is more aware of its mistakes.

The third, and ultimate, state of the soul is mentioned in the Qur'an in Chapter 89: verses 27-30. It says:

“(To the righteous soul will be said): ‘O (you) soul in (complete) rest and satisfaction, come back to your Lord – well pleased (yourself), and well-pleasing unto

Him! Enter, then, among My devotees! Yea, enter My Heaven!”

This is the ultimate and most perfect of the three states of the soul.

The Day of Judgement and its place in Muslim belief

According to Muslim belief, the physical world, as we know it, will come to an end. One day there will be upheaval, and the world will be destroyed. All those who are living at that time will eventually die and, after that, all those who died from the beginning of creation will be resurrected. They will face the accountability before God, and then they will be rewarded with Paradise or put in the hellfire, depending on their deeds.

It is very important for a Muslim to believe in this. Any person who claims to be a Muslim, who rejects the notion of life after death, cannot be regarded as a Muslim. It is one of the five pillars of faith. One reason for this is related to the role of the human on earth. We are created as responsible beings. In Chapter 23: verses 115-116, it says:

“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 Allah, the King, the Reality. There is no God but He, the Lord of the Throne of Honour!”

A number of alternative terms to the term “Day of Judgement” appear in the Qur’an. It is also called the Day of Resurrection (Chapter 30: verse 56), the Hour (Chapter 22: verse 1), the Hereafter (Chapter 87), the Day of Reckoning (Chapter 1: verse 3), the Day of Accountability (Chapter 40: verse 27), the Day of Meeting (Chapter 40: verse 15), the Day of Gathering (Chapter 64: verse 9), the Day of Coming Out (Chapter 50: verse 42), the Overwhelming (Chapter 79: verses 34-35), the Deafening Noise (Chapter 80), the Revealer and the Day of Eternity (Chapter 50: verse 34).

RESURRECTION

The nature of the Resurrection

According to the Qur'an the resurrection will be of both the soul and the body. This has been emphasized a great deal, and the main confusion that arises in the minds of many people is that when the Qur'an talks about resurrection in soul and body, they assume that it must be the same body that we had here on earth. In fact, we find evidence in the Qur'an that this might not be correct. We are resurrected to a physical existence but it is a different type of physical existence. In Chapter 56: verses 60-61, it says:

“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.”

One question that is not new is the question of how the dead, decomposed body will be resurrected in the Hereafter. It is a question that has been raised by many people, including those living during the time of the Prophet. In Chapter 45: verses 34-36, the Qur'an refers to the argument of the unbelievers that we have only this life and there is nothing after death, i.e. we are only destroyed by time. These verses rebut this by declaring such statements to be a product of guesswork, because those who make these statements do not possess any capability to prove that there can be no life after death.

The Qur'an also provides other beautiful examples to silence such disbelief. In Chapter 36: verses 77-79, it says:

“Does not man see that it is We who created him from sperm and yet behold! He (stands forth) as an open enemy 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 has created them for the first time, for He is well-versed in every kind of creation.’”

In other words, what these people tend to ignore is their own unimaginable miracle of creation. It is easier to recreate something when it is broken down.

What should be truly difficult is to create it in the first place considering that we are formed from a microscopic sperm and a clot of ovum. If we, in our limited understanding cannot figure out how our original creation is possible, why should we worry about the end.

In Chapter 50: verse 15, God says:

“Were We then weary with the first Creation that they should be of confused doubt about a new Creation [the Resurrection]?”

God uses the analogy of giving life to the barren earth and giving life to the decomposed bones

As we know, God needs no rest. In Chapter 30: verses 27-28, God describes how

He has brought about creation and it is most easy for Him to return it to the Last Day. In Chapter 41, verse 39, God uses the analogy of giving life to the barren earth and giving life to the decomposed bones. We see the significance when we study the condition of the earth when it is gripped by winter and we cannot expect any vegetation to grow on it. Yet, when rain falls and the conditions are right, you'll find all the plants springing to life. It says:

“And among His signs is this: You see the earth barren and desolate but when We send down rain to it, it is stirred to and yields increase. Truly, He who gives life to the (dead) earth can surely give life to (men) after death.”

This is also repeated in Chapter 22: verse 5 with the same analogy about the earth.

Will only the righteous will be resurrected?

If anyone were to assume that only the righteous will be resurrected and the unrighteous will not this would be contrary to the Qur'an and also to the concept of justice. According to the Qur'an, everybody, irrespective of faith, will be resurrected as all deeds will be recompensed. It is also unjust if the unrighteous are punished by being exempted. If this were true, then they would choose to enjoy this life and its pleasures as they need not care about being resurrected. There would be no motive to be good.

This is contrary to the principle of justice for those who do evil deeds to be simply allowed to die and not be resurrected again. It is not enough. Therefore, it is the wisdom of God that

everybody be brought to account for their positive or negative deeds. In Chapter 36: verse 12, it says:

“Verily We shall give life to the dead and We record all that they have done before and that they leave behind, and of all things We have taken account in a clear Book (of evidence).”

Also in Chapter 39: verse 70, it says:

“And to every soul will be paid in full (the fruits) of its deeds and God knows best all that they do.”

The basic principle of justice requires everyone to go through and know

the results of this test of life. Everybody should know the consequences of their life.

According to the Qur'an, everybody, irrespective of faith, will be resurrected as all deeds will be recompensed

When will the Day of Judgement come?

The Qur'an is very clear about this knowledge being in the hands of God and not with any particular person. With regard to this we have already cited two verses from the Qur'an. Chapter 31: verse 34 says that, “With God alone lies the knowledge of the Hour”; and Chapter 41: verse 47, where we read that, “unto God is the knowledge of the Hour.”

The Qur'an also indicates that the Hour will come suddenly when nobody expects it. We can find this in several places in the Qur'an, including Chapter 7: verse 187. Prophet Muhammad described the suddenness of the hour in this way: People will be conducting their usual affairs but they will not be able to complete them when the hour really comes. Somebody will be transacting business and not able to complete the deal. Another will be milking his goat and not be able to finish. Some person

will be about to eat a piece of bread and it will not reach his mouth.

The main issue concerning the exact hour is that one should not worry about the exact time of its occurrence, but be prepared for it when it finally comes. Chapter 79: verses 42-46, says:

“They ask you about the Hour – ‘When will be its appointed time?’ Wherein are you (concerned) with the declaration thereof? With your Lord is the limit fixed therefore. You are but a warner, for such as fear it. The day they see it, it will be as if they had tarried but a single evening or (at most till) the following morning.”

The verses mean that it will come sooner or later, and that when it comes, most of us will feel that our entire life is like an

When it comes, most of us will feel that our entire life is like an evening . . . one’s whole life will feel like one hour

evening. In one place in the Qur’an it says that one’s whole life will feel like one hour, as if we just took a nap.

However, knowing that the Last Hour will come, there has

been much discussion as to what signs might be there to tell us that the Hour is approaching. In the next section we will look at some of possible signs of the Hour – those that are referred to as ‘minor’ signs and those that are ‘major.’

SIGNS OF THE HOUR

Signs of the approach of the Last Hour

There are signs that Muslim jurists call the minor signs, that may extend over hundreds of years, and there are major signs that will appear a few years before the Day of Judgement. There are also actual accounts of what will happen when that Day starts. When we talk about these signs, we have to bear in mind that they are relative. For example, the Prophet said: "I was sent as a Prophet and the difference between my coming and the Hour is like this," and the Prophet held up his two fingers. Now we know that was fourteen hundred years ago so we are talking about relative closeness. A span of many years is actually very short compared to the age of the earth or mankind itself.

Concerning the minor signs, there are many of them. There are signs relating to many areas such as the advance of technology, the spread of diseases and the change in moral standards and so on.

Signs concerning technology

When we talk about signs of the Last Hour that relate to technology, we must bear in mind that technology by itself is not bad. The Qur'an has clearly urged Muslims to master science and technology and use this mastery for the benefit of humanity at large.

There are many prophecies that were made by the Prophet that are quite interesting, considering that they were made fourteen hundred years ago and the more so since they resemble what is happening today. The Qur'an itself describes the earth becoming so advanced and the people on it becoming so arrogant that they think that they can do anything they desire.

A hadith narrated by At-Tabarani tells of fantastic, unheard-of inventions and advances that make earthly distances shorter.

Another hadith, on the authority of Muslim, Ahmad Al-Hakim and At-Tabarani describes different forms of transportation, particularly the Prophet's reference to riding on something that looks like a saddle that is not a saddle. Perhaps this could be a car seat. He also talked about the false Messiah coming in a form of speed like the clouds. This could be like a jet plane or missile.

There are also references to the possibility of man being able to communicate with animals. We don't know if this means talking literally or if it refers to animals being able to communicate with human beings like police dogs or circus animals.

In another place, there was an account of inanimate objects being able to communicate. The Prophet talked about the person's whip or shoes being able to speak. Today we have telephones, radios, TV, electronic devices and satellites that can communicate with us. But it doesn't mean that they are bad. They are signs, not causes of the end.

Signs that concern the economic sphere

There are narrations from At-Tabarani concerning the discovery of a lot of metals by people who are unscrupulous. We are not sure if this has really come to pass. Also, in another hadith by Nasai and Ahmad, the Prophet talked about the expansion of trade and the participation of women. In another saying related by Abu Dawud, he said that usury (interest) will become so widespread that everyone will be affected by it. This can be seen today in the usage of many form of banking facilities such as credit cards where interest is charged.

The Prophet also said that desolate places would have lots of buildings and areas that had lots of buildings before would be deserted. And there is also mention of something very fascinating – about sheep-herders making very tall buildings, and this can make one wonder about its resemblance to what is going on in the Gulf region.

Of course it is not only in Arabia but all over the world. There is also mention of the spread of luxury in houses, and the use of fine material such as silk. Finally, in one saying of the Prophet, we are told there will be a lot of progress in terms of the material world but a great deal of destruction when it comes to the heart.

Signs related to health

The sayings of the Prophet clearly indicate that there will be an increase in drinking. He also made a prophecy about the use of things that have the same effect on the mind as drinking does, such as drugs. He said that some people would be intoxicated in the later days and they would call this intoxicant by different names.

There is also reference to the spread of serious new diseases and this could be a reference to the spread of diseases such as AIDS and cancer. And he describes one of the diseases as a disease that will cause sudden death. Perhaps this is about heart attacks.

Signs that refer to aspects of morality

The sayings of the Prophet on this issue are both numerous and very clear. With respect to individual morality, there will be a culture of provocative clothing where women wear dresses that will make them look naked. This could pertain to modern clothing design that is tight and clinging and shows the shape of the body.

A second prophecy then describes women as imitating men and men imitating women. This could mean in appearance and in behaviour.

The third sign concerns the rise of homosexuality among both sexes. There is also the sign of open adultery and fornication to the extent that it becomes normal behaviour. Sexual behaviour will no longer be private but even carried out in the streets. Perhaps this is an allegory of pornography, which is widely available. In one saying, he said that people's sexual behaviour would be almost like that of animals.

In terms of social morality, there are descriptions of those who are kind and generous to their wife or friends but indifferent to their own parents or relatives. In this regard we see people today who would rather send their elderly to an old folks home than to care for them.

There is a specific hadith saying that people would rather raise animals in preference to raising children. Another sign is about the spread of hypocrisy where the tongue speaks good words but the actions differ. We can wonder about this point in terms of politicians who are known to make promises concerning many issues but have then failed to carry them out.

There are also quite a number of traditions on the subject of killing. One hadith describes a time in which there is so much killing to the extent that a person doesn't know why he killed his own brother. In our own century our daily news makes us

witness to enormous levels of killing and destruction.

Another teaching says that people would also not be charitable and the Prophet also made the point that there will be too many rulers, and very few who are honest. Finally, one sign describes a time when a person or entity will be feared out of his sheer brutal power rather than any particular good reason.

Other signs – of falsehoods and changing social values

A great many signs have been told to us of the coming of the Last Hour.

False teachers and false prophets

One sign notes that there will be too many false teachers and false prophets misleading people, and one hadith speaks of there being around thirty of these false Prophets. Some may even claim to possess holy scriptures and there will even be those who are willing to trade their faith for some material benefit.

The Prophet also indicated that social values will change and people will be critical of those who have faith. The Prophet describes a time when a person who prays will be belittled like a prostitute. A total reversal will occur, such as we see nowadays when one can be teased for remaining chaste.

There is also an indication that people would not take steps to stop evil. In this regard it is not unusual to read stories about people watching someone being killed in the street without even bothering to call the police. This kind of attitude of apathy would give more room for the spread of evil.

Literacy and ignorance side by side

There is also a prophecy on the spreading of literacy and ignorance side by side. There is indeed an increase in knowledge relating to technology, but not so in the important realm of faith and the relationship between God and man.

There is a dearth of knowledge in those areas of conduct. In fact in one saying, there will even be religious leaders who are unscrupulous and despite their knowledge, they are crooked. Many will use their religious authority for self- benefit or coerce the masses to support a corrupt leadership.

There is also a prophecy that some Muslims will imitate those who were before them so that, instead of following the Qur'an, they will imitate this and that. But the Prophet also indicated that there will still be a group of believers that continues to be steadfast irrespective of the condemnations against them.

On the whole what we can expect is a great deal of commotion and temptations to encourage people to deviate from the right path.

Crucially, materialism will be rampant.

On the major signs concerning the Day of Judgement

Major signs are mentioned in both in the Qur'an and the hadiths. In total there are ten signs. It is quite difficult to fully understand them as we are not sure whether they are meant to be literal or allegorical. But we will present them here, starting with the first three, which concern the eclipses. One will be in Saudi Arabia; one to the east of it and one to the west of it.

Another sign is about a lot of smoke in the sky. Perhaps this refers to smog. It is mentioned in the Chapter called Ad-Dukhan, which means smoke.

In verse 10 it warns:

“Watch for the Day that the sky will bring forth a kind of smoke, plainly visible, enveloping the people.”

This could be a special sign of the Day of Judgement or it could

be pollution. Only God knows the exact meaning.

A fifth sign is that fire will come out from the bottom of the earth in the area of Aden, which is in the Arabian Peninsula. Aden is actually located on top of a volcano, but this is not the main point. We don't know for sure if this sign is a reference to that.

The sixth sign will be the sun rising from the west instead of the east. Perhaps something will disturb the earth's axis.

The seventh sign will be an animal coming out from the earth and speaking to people.

Again, perhaps it is allegorical in the sense that people will be so ignorant (having technological knowledge but lacking true wisdom) that even an animal can show them the truth. This creature is mentioned in Chapter 27: verse 82 but is not clearly described.

Another important sign from Chapter 21, verses 96 and 97, concerns Gog and Magog. These are groups of people who will destroy everything they can lay their hands on. There would be great commotion and warfare.

The Mahdi and the false messiah

The ninth sign concerns the Mahdi, who would be a Muslim and whose name is either Muhammad or Ahmad. He will come to establish justice and peace.

The final sign is that, during the Mahdi's time, the false messiah will come down to earth. He is described as one-eyed. He will impress the masses (perhaps through miracles or technological power) and invite them to worship him. Many people will be misled and they will follow him.

The Prophet Jesus

The most important part of this sign is that Prophet Jesus will also come down to join the Mahdi in fighting and killing the false messiah. The Mahdi will then die, and there will be a number of years of perfect peace on earth.

Thereafter, Jesus will also die after a normal life. Then a cool wind will blow killing everyone who has the slightest bit of faith in his soul. Only evil people will remain on earth until the Judgement day begins.

In regard to the false Messiah, one hadith says that the war between the Mahdi and the false messiah will take place when the Muslims are on the east bank of the Jordan River and the false messiah is on the west side.

When this was narrated 1,400 years ago, the narrator said: “I don’t even know where the Jordan River is.” So, we only have a rough location.

Concerning these signs, Jesus is mentioned in more than one place in the Qur’an. In Chapter 43: verse 61, Jesus is mentioned as the “sign of the Hour.” This may refer to his virgin birth, implying that the sign of the Hour is true. A second interpretation may be that his second coming is a sign that the Hour is imminent.

Another, much-discussed verse has been interpreted in a variety of ways. This is Chapter 4: verse 158, that says that none of the People of the Book will die until they believe in Jesus.

This may mean that every Christian will realize, at the time of his death, the truth about Jesus being a great messenger but not the “son of God.” A second interpretation is that the Christians who are living at the time of his second coming will then believe the true story.

These are all references of the second coming of Jesus. I want to emphasize this because our Christian brothers and sisters also believe in the second coming of Jesus, but in a different way. They believe that Jesus comes as God to judge people. Whereas Muslims believe that Jesus will come as a follower of Islam. (All Prophets were really followers of Islam).

What actually happens on the Day of Judgement?

The Qur'an gives a sketch of what will happen on that Day. As we have already said, only evil people will be living. First of all a trumpet will be blown and all the people remaining on earth will die. Then will be a great cosmic change. It will be something that is both unimaginable and totally frightening. Many chapters give vivid descriptions of these cosmic changes. Just to give a brief description, the Qur'an speaks of the sky being cleft asunder and the stars dispersing and perhaps even crashing into each other.

This indicates a tremendous change in the order of the universe. The oceans would burst forth and even ignite and one can wonder if this can be explained by the components hydrogen and oxygen in the water splitting and thus becoming combustible. Mountains will become like pieces of wool flying. The balance of the earth will change when the mountains vanish and the earth will shake with deep convulsions. The sun and moon will combine or come together, and the earth will open and all who lived before will come out to face judgement. On that Day, all mankind will be running away, even from their closest relatives. This is the Day when everyone stands in pledge for their own deeds.

ACCOUNTABILITY, PARADISE & HELLFIRE

What marks the beginning of the Day of Judgement?

In one of the sayings of Prophet Muhammad, he describes the effect of that Day: that people will be distressed and worried to the point that the situation becomes almost intolerable for them. They will go to some of the Prophets and ask them to plead with God. They will go to Prophet Moses and the other Prophets, and, although they are great and respected Prophets, the situation will be so ominous that those Prophets will say that they do not feel fit enough to make this request.

So, the people will end up going to Prophet Muhammad and ask him to plead with God. Prophet Muhammad would then pray to God to carry out His work and start the accountability.

This saying of the Prophet is consistent with one verse in the Qur'an. In Chapter 17: verse 79, it tells Prophet Muhammad to

wake up and make night prayers and, as a result of this, perhaps (although it is not certain) God will raise him up on the Day of Judgement in an honoured state.

How will the Judgement actually happen?

We may ask whether there is anything in the Qur'an that gives a description of the nature of the Judgement and what will actually happen and there are plenty of references in the Qur'an to this, because belief in the Day of Judgement is integral to Muslim belief.

The first thing that should be emphasised is that the Judgement is carried out with a full sense of justice. We find numerous references in the Qur'an so it is sufficient here just to summarise the verse numbers and the contents.

In Chapter 40: verse 17, it says there will be no injustice this day. In another verse in Chapter 18: verse 50 it says: "Your Lord will not be unjust to anyone." The Qur'an also mentions that God would not do even the least injustice. That appears in Chapter 4: verse 39 where we are assured that even the weight of an atom would not be wronged from the deeds of anyone. We find the same thing in Chapter 10: verse 44. All of these verses consistently emphasise that there will be no injustice done to anyone.

In addition, issues would be so clear on the Day of Judgement that it is even possible that a human being would be

All of these verses consistently emphasise that there will be no injustice done to anyone

appointed as his own reckoner to hold himself accountable. That is an interesting concept that we find in the Qur'an where it speaks about the Book of Deeds.

“Read your own book. Suffice yourself as a reckoner.”

In Chapter 17: verses 13-14, we read that God has given responsibility to every human being. It says that on the Day of Judgement everyone will be given a book that he will receive wide-open and he will be told to “read your own book. Suffice yourself as a reckoner.” That is, you are your own best judge about your deeds.

For any judgement you need evidence. The evidence here is the Book of Deeds and, during our discussion on angels, we mentioned that the angels also keep track of our deeds. We don't know where they keep it but we know that a record is kept of all our deeds.

God has appointed guardian angels [to each of us]. They know everything that we do.

For example, we find in Chapter 82: verses 10-12 that God has appointed guardian angels. They know

everything that we do. In Chapter 50: verse 18, it also talks about angels who are aware of even a single word that you may utter. In that sense then, the best evidence is the Book of Deeds. In Chapter 18: verse 50, it says that the Book is put forward and the wicked are very apprehensive of what it contains, and they say, “Woe to us! What a book is this. It does not leave the slightest thing but keeps track of it.”

The main witnesses will be one's own organs.

Another interesting thing that we find in the Qur'an are the witnesses in addition to the Book of Deeds. There are witnesses, but there are no outside witnesses. The main witnesses will be one's own organs. Interestingly enough, Chapter 24: verse 24, talks about “the Day when their tongues and their hands will give witness against them.” We find confirmation of this in Chapter 36: verse 65 and also in Chapter 41: verse 22. Of course, we don't know how they will speak, but God, who created them, is able to make them give that witness.

Another thing related to the process of the Day of Judgement is the concept of mizan, which means scales. Our deeds will be weighed on a pair of scales. But we should not always think in terms of physical weighing. The description given in the Qur'an gives the impression that it is basically a process of evaluation of deeds.

In Chapter 21: verse 47, the Qur'an tells us that God will place the balance on the Day of Judgement. It need not be physical, but simply a just evaluation of good deeds and bad deeds. We also find in Chapters 101 and 23 that it is mentioned that those whose good deeds outweigh their bad deeds will go to Paradise and the others will be placed in the hellfire.

The Islamic position on Grace

Here we can see a great many references to deeds but many people may argue that it is not by your actions that a person gains salvation, but by grace. What, then, is the Islamic point of view on this? Is there any room for Grace in Islam?

The answer is there is ample room for Grace, but only for those who deserve it. There is Grace for people who maintain a firm belief in God and try their best, despite their human weaknesses, to live up to the requirements and challenges of that belief. If one is doing that, then he or she will deserve that Grace.

Grace exists but it is not freely given. This would be like a teacher saying that no matter what you do, whether you attend class or not, do your assignments or not, you will pass. That's not grace. That's what might be referred to as mediocracy. One has to try to earn and deserve that Grace by translating belief into actions.

It is important to realize that no matter how many good deeds we may do while we are living here on earth, it by no means

guarantees us salvation. When God holds us accountable, it is not a mechanical type of judgement, i.e. one for one. For example, the Qur'an says that if someone does an evil deed it is only counted once. Whereas, in numerous places, the Qur'an talks about the multiplication of good deeds. In other words, if you do one good deed it is given to you ten times or even seventy times as much. In one of the sayings of Prophet Muhammad, he says that some deeds can be multiplied 700 times.

Besides this, we also find that if a person intends to do something wrong, but does not commit it, it is not counted against him. So it is a very generous type of accountability. But there must be at least some credit to be multiplied so the good deeds will outweigh the bad ones.

In that sense, we find that Prophet Muhammad has given us very good guidance. He says that if any person were really held accountable in great detail, he would perish. That is to say, out of the generosity and grace of God, if you are basically good in terms of belief, and you tried your best in your life, then God will not hold you accountable for each and every small thing; He will forgive your sins. In one verse in the Qur'an it says that good deeds remove the effect of evil deeds.

The Qur'an also describes people in different groups. One group will be given their book in their right hand. Another group will be given their book behind their back. If a person receives the Book of Deeds behind his back that is a symbol that he is in trouble, and that he was a wicked person while he was on earth. If a person is given the Book of Deeds in his right hand, that is an indication that many of his mistakes will be forgiven. For example in Chapter 84: verse 8, it says that whoever is given his Book of Deeds in his right hand, his account will be easy. But of course, he will have earned this ease.

Finally, Prophet Muhammad said that when a person comes

before the Judgement, if he's basically good, God will ask him, "Did you do so and so?" and he will say, "Yes" and ask for forgiveness and God will agree to conceal it for him. But this is not for everyone. A person would have to exert some effort in order to receive that grace.

After the Judgement has taken place . . .

We need to consider how things will proceed after the Judgement has taken place; how will people proceed to Paradise or hell?

One of the concepts that is quite crucial in Islam is as-sirat – a path. We should remember that the first chapter of the Qur'an, which a Muslim repeats several times every day, says "O Allah, guide us onto the straight path." Islam is also called the straight path. In a sense, you could regard the whole of Islamic teaching as a straight path or a path that helps us reach God.

"the narrow path" – a bridge over hellfire

The same concept of a path is repeated on the Day of Judgement. All the human beings, after the accountability is finished, start moving onto a path.

In some of the sayings of Prophet Muhammad, he describes that path as being "the narrow path" and "the very delicate path" and that path is a bridge that passes over hellfire. Whoever is wicked, or was an unbeliever, will not be able to pass that bridge to Paradise. He would fall down into the hellfire. And whoever makes it would be saved.

We can take this literally or symbolically. This path is very narrow, just as in our lives here, if we are really trying to follow the path of God, we must walk a narrow path. Hellfire is not only underneath us, it is around us. There are many temptations to deviate from the truth. To follow the path of God you constantly have to sacrifice. You have to have

determination and faith to keep doing what is right, regardless of what other people say.

God has appointed guardian angels [to each of us]. They know everything that we do.

By the same token, we can say that on the Day of Judgement the situation is serious to

the point that every person is walking a very narrow path. But it is not his skill that helps him. It is his own deeds that were done on earth that will help him pass the Hellfire safely.

One beautiful explanation of how a believer would pass over this path says: "In the Day, when you see the believers with light guiding them from all sides." In other words, their deeds would be like lights guiding them safely through this very critical path.

The Islamic concept of Hell

The picture given in the Qur'an is so horrifying that everyone would try by all means to keep away. The description is that, first of all, the intensity of the fire is very great and that the food there is something like thorns that would cut a person.

If a person is thirsty, he would be given boiling water. We find that mentioned in Chapter 4: verse 15 and Chapter 18: verse 29. In Chapter 22: verse 22, it says that the unbelievers would have clothing of fire. Beds (Chapter 7: verse 4) would be totally engulfed in fire. But what is even worse is that people will not die from all these torments, as they would during their earthy life. In Chapter 20: verse 74, and in Chapter 87: verse 13, it talks about people not dying.

What is even more painful, which is an interesting thing in view of our contemporary knowledge of the human body is that in Chapter 4: verse 55, it says that whenever their skins are burned, God will replace their skins so that they really taste the torment. It is known that if you have a third-degree burn, you don't feel

the pain as much because the nerves are close to the surface and third-degree burns destroy them. So the surface skin, the most sensitive part, is replaced so they really keep getting the punishment for their rejection of God. It is certainly not something that one would be anxious to experience.

It may be asked why Hell is always described as fire. Why, for instance, couldn't people be tormented with frostbite? Wouldn't that be worse? But accounts given by people who have experienced frostbite suggest that in cases of severe frostbite the feeling is as if one's skin is burning, and it is the burning sensation that causes the pain. But, after all, the Qur'an indicates that this is just reward for those who rejected God, who ignored the guidance that He provided through His messengers from Prophet Adam to Prophet Muhammad.

And the description of Paradise?

As the description of hellfire is beyond imagination, the same applies to the description of Paradise. It is a description that communicates to us felicity, enjoyment, and pleasure, but nothing that we can totally comprehend. We can understand the language, but that does not reflect the real picture.

The Qur'an describes things that exist in Paradise: fresh milk; fresh sparkling; sweet water; sweet honey; all kinds of delicious foods; beautiful silk clothing; comfortable places to sleep on and sit; palaces underneath which rivers flow; jewellery of gold and precious stones; pure spouses, which include spouses from this life. A good male believer would have his believing spouse coming with him.

There is also a description of drinks that are pleasing. Concerning this, some people ask why Islam prohibits wine-drinking while the Qur'an mentions people drinking wine in Paradise? Is it forbidden on earth but allowed up there? This is a misunderstanding. If you take literally the word used for wine

– ie, khamar – it means something fermented and intoxicating, but we have evidence from the Qur'an itself that what it really means is the pleasure of drink but not something that clouds the mind. Chapter 56: verse 19 of the Qur'an talks about pleasurable drinks that do not cloud the mind.

Some people think this description of Paradise is too material. What they forget is that although this description is of a material nature, it is different from what we understand here on earth. We find in Chapter 2: verse 25 that we will see fruits like we had on earth but they will be quite different.

Above all, we find that the Qur'an describes different kinds of pleasures for people who have more spiritual inclinations, and who can understand this kind of communication better. It talks about the company of pure angels in Chapter 13: verse 24. It talks about the feeling of pleasure of God, which is even greater, in verse 72. But the greatest pleasure of all would be that the perceptual barriers would be removed in such a way that we would be able to look at God. The Qur'an says, "there will be faces on that day shining with light looking at their Lord."

***And as the Prophet said,
God has prepared, for his
servants in Paradise, things
that no eye has ever seen, no
ears have ever heard***

Finally, the Qur'an says, no soul knows what has been hidden, by way of pleasures and surprises for them on this Day of

Judgement. And as the Prophet said, God has prepared, for his servants in Paradise, things that no eye has ever seen, no ears have ever heard, and no thought that could have occurred to any human being.

INTERCESSION

Will souls who go to Hell stay there forever?

This question is often asked – the question as to whether souls who go to Hell stay there forever or whether there is a chance that they will be taken out of Hell after some time. The answer is that some will, but not all. The Qur'an says that those who rejected God and who were very wicked will stay in Hell forever. It says in Chapter 20: verse 74: "Therein shall he neither die nor live."

However, it is possible that a person will die with a lot of evil deeds and sins, but will still have some remnant of faith and goodness in his heart. There is a reference to that in one of the sayings of Prophet Muhammad.

It says that on the Day of Judgement, after these people get their purification (pay for their sins) by going through the hellfire, God will tell the angels to take out of the hellfire any

human who believes that there is no deity but Him, even if he has only an atom's weight of faith and goodness in his heart.

So, no matter how sinful the person may be, faith and belief in the oneness of God, in itself, would lead eventually to the person eventually being taken from the Hellfire.

But some people use this saying in an erroneous sense. They feel that if they are only going to be in the Hellfire for a few days they might as well enjoy their life here on earth. What they forget, first of all, is that nobody knows how many days or years this state of punishment will continue. A more important question is: What is a day? We know that under severe punishment, every second becomes like a year. Thirdly, according to the Qur'an in Chapter 22: verse 47, it says:

“Verily a day in the sight of thy Lord is like a thousand years of your reckoning.”

In another verse in the Qur'an it says a day is equivalent to 100,000 years. This relative counting of days is also mentioned in Chapter 32: verses 4-5 and Chapter 70: verse 4.

Intercession and the wide door for repentance

In this consideration of Hell and Judgement yet another question is often asked; whether Muslims believe that someone can intercede with God on their behalf?

There is a concept of intercession in Islam, but not of an intermediary. An intermediary is someone who stands between two other people, trying to reconcile them. This is alien to Muslim thinking because Muslims believe that there is no intermediary between Man and God.

Even the great Messengers and Prophets were not intermediaries between man and God. The relationship between

man and his Creator is direct. These great Prophets came to guide us. They can plead with God on our behalf as intercessors.

An intercessor is someone who has no authority on his own, but pleads with God on the behalf of others who are sinful or who need help. This limited help is admissible.

One important principle that has been emphasized in the Qur'an, that each person is responsible for himself

This should be put in perspective. It cannot contradict one important principle that has been

emphasized in the Qur'an, that each person is responsible for himself. One cannot put the blame on others. He has to stand on his own merits. But even if that merit is imperfect, we find that the Qur'an opens the door wide for repentance, allowing the situation to be corrected directly between the person and God without any intermediary or confession.

One thing that cannot be forgiven

The Qur'an makes it clear that everything can be forgiven, except for one thing. That is to associate others with God.

One verse, Chapter 4: verse 48, says:

“Allah will not forgive that partners should be associated with Him; but He forgives anything else to whom He pleases.”

Another qualification for intercession is that even the intercession here must be given after permission has been given by God.

Finally, this intercession has to be on behalf of someone who is accepted by God.

We find this in Chapter 21: verse 28:

“And they (the Messengers) offer no intercession except for those who are acceptable.”

Even Prophet Muhammad must depend on the Grace of God

In Islam we cannot know for sure whether we are going to Paradise while we are still living here on earth. This is clear from one important saying of Prophet Muhammad. Once, he told his companions: “None of you will enter into Paradise because of your good deeds.”

They looked at him and said: “Even you, O Messenger of God?” He said, “Even me, unless God shrouds with his Mercy.”

Prophet Muhammad was a great Prophet and the final Prophet. Here he is teaching mankind spiritual humility by telling them that even he must depend on the Grace of God.

This is an important lesson to learn. If a person were to know for sure that he will enter into Paradise, this could lead to spiritual arrogance. It could also weaken the tendency to sacrifice and discipline oneself to do good deeds. This is a dangerous type of thinking.

On the other hand, this does not mean that a person should feel constant anxiety that no matter what he does he might not be allowed to enter Paradise. The Qur'an makes it clear that the promise of God is true. He is not urging us to lead a good life just for the sake of doing good. He gave the criteria in the Qur'an: belief, good deeds, and praying for the grace and mercy of God. Also, a person will feel in his heart that he is following that right path, because there is an inner peace.

There is also one interesting question: suppose a person now, in this day and moment, is a pious person. Can anyone know for

sure whether this person, towards the end of his life, may not renounce his belief, and die as an unbeliever? Likewise, a wicked person might eventually repent, be accepted, and then go to Paradise. It is very dangerous to start classifying.

The Qur'an says that belief has to be confirmed and translated into action. One has to always be on guard.

Thinking that Paradise is confirmed just because of your belief

Some people claim that they alone are going to Paradise because of their particular beliefs, whereas others who do not share those beliefs will be going to hell.

If a Muslim were to be asked if they were certain to go to Paradise simply because they were a Muslim and that non-Muslims were going to Hell, how should they respond? A person, by claiming to be a Muslim, cannot claim they have 'carte blanche' to enter Paradise. The hadith that we have just quoted is proof of that. And, as we have suggested above, any Muslim who tells you that he is sure that he is going to Paradise is spiritually arrogant.

If the implication is that people who don't share a particular belief will not go to Paradise a second response would be to ask what the situation would be about those who died in the past, before they heard about this particular belief? Are they to be condemned, or is it a matter that should be left to the judgement of God?

And thirdly, when anyone talks about classifying people, aren't they being arrogant? Aren't we talking for ourselves a power that belongs to God? Aren't we really associating others with God by claiming this divine attribute of final judgement? How can I as a human being, who cannot even guarantee that I will go to Paradise, say that someone else will or won't?

The criteria have been given as to who will enter Paradise or Hellfire. In fact, we find evidence in the Qur'an that only God will decide. We are not supposed to judge people. We are supposed to proclaim the truth.

Are animals accountable and resurrected in the same day as mankind?

There is one verse in the Qur'an that says that on the Day of Judgement, animals will come to life. It talks about "when the beasts are collected," describing the scene on the Day of Judgement.

However, in principle, animals cannot be held accountable, because they are not responsible beings. Animals are created without the power of reason. Only human beings and jinn are held responsible.

Angels are not held responsible because they are created good and they have no choice but to be good.

Another thing that we can say by inference is that the description of Paradise is of a place where a person would get everything that he or she wants. A person who loves cats would definitely not be deprived of them in Paradise, because that would contradict the nature of felicity and joy that one would get in Paradise.

The relevance of belief of the life in the Hereafter to our day to day to existence

We might ask: Is this a question of belief or dogma?

Well, it is not a dogma. First of all, belief in the Day of Judgement is related to understanding and to belief in ultimate justice. By this, we mean that while we are living on earth it may not be possible to achieve ultimate justice. Some people are evil

and they torture and kill people, but they may still die rich and powerful. Is that justice?

Take the opposite. We find people who are good and pious. They discipline themselves; they offer all kinds of sacrifice in the service of humanity.

But they may be under all kinds of oppression from unjust rulers, and they suffer all kinds of pain and they die in pain. In that sense then there must be some stage where things have to come to a final conclusion.

In the Qur'an, Chapter 45: verse 21, it says:

“Do those who seek after evil ways think that We shall hold them equal with those who believe and do righteous deeds – that equal will be their life and their death?”

Also, in Chapter 38: verse 28, it says:

“Shall we treat those who believe and work deeds of righteousness, the same as those who do mischief on earth? Shall We treat those who guard against evil the same as those who turn aside from the right?”

Secondly, the belief in the life Hereafter puts life in its proper perspective. A person realises that this life is not aimless, that whatever he enjoys or suffers, there is something more important, and that he has a particular mission on earth.

Finally, once we as human beings have this firm belief in the ultimate judgement before God, we try our best to cement our personal relationship with God, and try to be more spiritually oriented in our approach.

To conclude, we are reminded of a saying by one Muslim saint – the lady Rabi'a al-Adawiyah, who was born in Basra, in what is

now Iraq, about the year 95 A.H. (about 717 C.E.):

“O my Lord, I am not worshipping you because I am afraid of your Hellfire, or because I am aspiring to your Paradise. I am doing that only out of love of Thee, in the hope of being close to you on the Day of Judgement.”

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## NOTES

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Muslim Beliefs

# MUSLIM BELIEFS



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