

Muslim Beliefs- Death Continued

Summary of 4.6 “Death”

There were two basic areas that we covered last time.’ One was to continue on the experience of death as described in the Quran.’ We concluded that basically an individual at the time of death usually hopes to come back to life in order to continue [good deeds](#) or to make them if he hasn’t done enough and that there are certain angels in charge of taking the soul.’ That person at the time of death can tell what his destiny is going to be like based on the state of the angels that come to take his soul and the way his soul is taken.’ Also as we indicated last time that for the pious person the angels would be greeting him with ‘peace be with you.” A person who was wicked is usually not greeted in this way and also feels what his destiny is going to be like.

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The second basic area that we touched on is the issue that comes in literature especially in recent years about the so called near death experience reported by people who were about to die but did not.’ We summarized what kind of things they saw, experienced or felt.’ Then we tried to evaluate that from a Muslim’s perspective by indicating that after all near death is not death.’ The real experience at the time of death is something that nobody has gone through and came back.’ It is something that is irrevocable and final.’ A Muslim can look into those reports and study them but after all the ultimate source of authentic information would have to be revelation because this is something which is from the unseen and is not subject to normal tools of research.

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4.7’ Death (Cont.)

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Host:’ Is it possible that these near death experiences could be explained by scientific analysis?

Jamal Badawi:

I think that there are certain areas that could be explained by science but again it is a limited area because this is the area of the unseen.’ For example many scientists tell us that lots of our experiences throughout life are stored in our brain cells.’ In one famous study that by Dr. Penfield he says that when he was doing brain surgery he stimulated certain areas or points in the brain.’ As a result of this stimulation he found that people involved started to remember events in their lives that they had totally forgotten.’ So one of the possible explanations for that could be that neurological explanations.’ Just like people keep information on tapes one could have a fast rewind.’ So many of the experiences of people saying that their entire life passed before their eyes is just like we said very quickly rewinding the tape or in this case the information that is stored in the brain.’ This might be one way of looking in some of the areas.’ Like I said this is only a glimpse into the unseen but the total picture is hidden from us and we have to depend on divine revelation to get the more vivid and accurate description.

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Host:’ How does Islam view suicide?

Jamal Badawi:

In Islam suicide is regarded as one of the major sins.’ It is a sin for which a person is severely punished in the after life.’ The main idea behind it is that according to Islam no person owns anything in the absolute sense.’ We don’t own any property in the absolute sense or our own life in the absolute sense because everything is owned by Allah who is the creator of the universe.’ The fact that we are blessed with certain natural resources, property, health or life doesn’t mean that we can dispose of them whichever way we wish.’ Islam regards the human being on earth as the trustees of God on earth.’ Our life is a trust in our hands to be used for our benefit, for the benefit of our families and humanity at large.’ As such if we destroy without any justification this life that we have in our hands we are betraying our trust and not fulfilling the mission for which we were created.’ In fact when we refer to the [Quran](#) for example in (4:29) ‘Nor kill (or destroy) yourselves: for verily Allah hath been to you Most Merciful!’ We find that the same basic principle was reiterated by Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) in one of his sayings he said that if a person commits suicide he will come back in the Day of Judgment and constantly repeat the same act that he did in a vicious circle.’ For example he specifically says that if a person throws himself of the side of a mountain he will keep repeating the same thing on the Day of Judgment.’ If a person poisons himself or uses any other means of destroying himself he will keep repeating the same act.

Even in the case of severe psychological or physical stress the Muslims are taught that one should persevere and ask God to relieve them from this difficulty and never to despair.’ In fact the Quran quotes Prophet Jacob the father of Prophet Joseph (PBUH) when he sent his other children to look for Joseph and he said (12:87) ‘and never give up hope of Allah’s Soothing Mercy: truly no one despairs of Allah’s Soothing Mercy.” In the worst circumstances one should always look for this type of soothing mercy by way of belief and conviction.’ The maximum that a Muslim is permitted to do in case when the suffering is really beyond toleration is to pray as described in [Bukhari](#) and Muslim and it goes ‘Oh God give me life if You feel life is better for me and take me away or give me death if You decide that death is better for me.” But we are never allowed to take things in our own hands.

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Host:’ Is mercy killing or [euthanasia](#) permissible in Islam?

Jamal Badawi:

First of all there is no mercy in killing.’ The wrong which is done by others is the same as the wrong that is done by ones self.’ In other words if it is wrong morally to commit suicide it is also wrong to have someone else take your life even if you request him to do so.’ It is a wrong on both sides just like if one says I am not paying a bribe but someone else is paying it for me.’ It is quite true that we should feel sympathetic and sensitive towards the suffering of people who are sick especially those who are terminally ill.’ The Muslim also looks at it from a different perspective.’ It is quite possible for the person who is suffering to pay for some of the sins with his suffering.’ Maybe it is a way that God would relieve him from greater and more everlasting suffering that he would have in the life after death.’ This could be just one way to atone for his sins.

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The other thing is that the best thing that one could do for a person who is terminally ill is to provide him with whatever assistance that might be needed to ease his pain.’ One of the things that should not be forgotten aside from a person’s physical needs in terms of therapeutic treatments is a person’s spiritual.’ This can be done by reminding him to repent for his mistakes and seek the acceptance of God and to try and make peace with God.’ The concept of repentance is emphasized very much in Islam.’ There is no original sin but there is an open door for repentance at any time if a person sincerely directs his feeling towards God.

There are issues that sometimes seem to be mixed with euthanasia or so called mercy killing as some physicians raised the issue of people who have had irrevocable damage in the brain where they have no chance of living.’ They say that with the development of medical technology it may be possible to hook someone onto the heart lung machine where one has life that is like a vegetable.’ The brain cells are destroyed they don’t regenerate themselves like other cells in the body.’ The question arises as to what to do with a case like this.’ Even then it is not appropriate to give an injection or overdose to let the person die.’ However, if the physicians are agreed that there is absolutely no change of survival and the EEG (the equipment that detects brain activity) shows that there is no activity and this continues for a long time it means that the person is practically dead even though the blood can be artificially pumped.’ This is a sensitive matter that has to be clearly studied both by both Muslim jurists as well as competent physicians in order to establish some kind of guide lines as to in which cases the person can be unhooked.’ Again this is different from deliberately taking the life of the individual.

Host:’ Does Islam give any guidance as to how to care for the terminally ill?

Jamal Badawi:

Yeah there are certain things that can be done.’ A sick person should be treated with compassion and kindness.’ One can give them pain killers but don’t turn them into self killers.’ A person should be reminded of his destiny so as to make peace with God.’ To carry on from there is what happens when the person really starts to die.’ One of the things that should be done at that time as taught by Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) is to recite the testimony in front of him.’ The testimony which means that there is ‘I bear witness that there is no deity but Allah and I bear witness that Muhammad is his messenger.” This will reaffirm his belief in Allah and his acceptance of all prophets as symbolized by the last Prophet Muhammad (PBUH).’ One need not push the person to say it but simply repeat it in front of him or her and the person would pick it up because it is very important that the person departs this word, no matter how sinful he might have been, with this expression of belief and hope in God.

There are also some sayings of the Prophet in which he says that one chapter of the Quran is desirable to be read at the time when a person is dying.’ That chapter is called Ya-Sin and is chapter 36 in the Quran.’ No wonder one should read this chapter because it deals with creation, birth, life, death and resurrection.’ Once the person actually dies, then his eyes should be closed.’ One of the sayings of the Prophet which would perhaps be of interest to people who study dreams and what happens to the eyeballs during deep sleep is that once the soul is taken away the sight follows it.’ We don’t fully understand what that means but this is an area of research that could be explored.’ A person could be kissed by his loved ones if need be as there is no prohibition.’ People definitely can’t resist the feeling of sorrow or tears.’ However the Prophet recommended that one should not cry in a very loud voice because this could hurt the soul of that individual especially when saying words that show despair towards the mercy of God or express lack of faith.’ But normal expressions of sorrow are not prohibited.’ Then according to Islam it is desirable to bury the person as soon as possible.

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The first thing that should be done is to give the body a full bath and put camphor oil to give them a nice.’ Then the body is dried and wrapped in simple white cloth (male should have at least three layers, female at least five layers) and there is nothing wrong with tying it around the neck waist or feet.

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After this a funeral prayer must be conducted on behalf of the person that is a little different from the regular prayers.’ People stand in lines in front of the casket or the body and they make takbeer ‘AllahuAkbar’ means God is Great and they recite the first chapter of the Quran and then again they make takbeer then they recite the second half of tashahood which is part of the regular prayers and then they make another takbeer and then they make prayers (dua’a) on behalf of the dead person.’ After this is finished, takes a few minutes, it is desirable for as many people as possible to follow the funeral but there is no music, singing, fire, loud sounds but solemn sincere silent prayers on the behalf of the deceased.

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Once the people reach the grave yard where the grave should be prepared, the body is lowered preferably without a casket but there is nothing wrong if the casket is required and then the people around would carry three handfuls of dust towards his head and the first time they say ‘from it we created you’ the second time ‘into it we are going to return you’ and the third time ‘from it we you will be resurrected.” This is actually a verse in the Quran in (20:55) God says ‘From the (earth) did We create you, and into it shall We return you, and from it shall We bring you out once again.” A person should be buried on his right side facing the Kaaba (Qibla) in Mecca which is now in Saudi Arabia.’ This should be it, the grave should be covered and people keep praying for the deceased.

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Host:’ What happens to the soul after the burial and what does it experience?

Jamal Badawi:

There are several sayings of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) which indicates very clearly that after death a person is not just finished and that is it.’ A person is questioned even in his grave.’ Of course we don’t exactly know how.’ A person could have been burned or cut into pieces but still God who created him initially is able to bring him forth to answer these questions.’ We don’t know the nature of the questioning but it says that a person would be questioned as to who their Lord is who their prophet is and he may be asked certain things about his faith.’ According to the sayings of Prophet Muhammad to the believer the answers to these questions would be easy.’ Actually the Prophet is referring to one verse in the Quran in (14:27) ‘Allah will establish in strength those who believe, with the word that stands firm, in this world and in the Hereafter.” So it says that Allah will give strength to the believer in this life and the hereafter and of course the hereafter starts immediately after burial.’ A believer will know how to answer these questions but an unbeliever no matter how much he may know intellectually would be confused.

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According to the Prophet every person after death and the questioning will see his position in paradise or hell fire.’ Not only will the person know his position in the hereafter but the person is either punished or rewarded.’ Again the ‘how’ is a matter that is beyond our imagination and understanding because we are talking about a world that is beyond this physical world.’ There are clear indications there being punishment or reward.’ It is similar to one aspect that all of us have gone through.’ Suppose one has a nightmare, one would feel like someone is choking them or that they are drowning or that something is hurting.’ Anyone who observes the physical body of the person having the nightmare would say that nothing is happening or physically hurting.’ But to the person experiencing it during sleep during the night mare it is very real and once one wakes up they are thankful they only had a bad nightmare.’ So here we have punishment or reward even though the physical body is not being affected.’ So we make this analogy in order to understand that the punishment and reward starts immediately after burial and it is something that is real even though we may not physically be able to prove it or test it.

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The is clear evidence, not only in the sayings of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH), in the Quran in (40:46) where it talks about the Pharaoh and the people who persecuted Moses and his people ‘In front of the Fire will they be brought, morning and evening: And (the sentence will be) on the Day that Judgment will be established: ‘Cast ye the People of Pharaoh into the severest Penalty!’” We notice here that there is a very interesting thing in this verse that it talks first about the Pharaohs even though they had already died a long time ago they became dust.’ Still the verse says that during day and night they are brought in front of the fire and punished.’ Later also on The Day of Judgment it would not be the end of their suffering but the people of the Pharaoh will be thrown into the severest penalty which is in the hell fire.’ This is conclusive proof from the Quran that punishment and reward do not really have to wait but start immediately after the person departs from this world.’ It is like an interim period which the Quran calls barsakh and means a partition in Arabic.’ It is just like a partition between our earthly life and The Day of Judgment.’ Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) used to always teach people to pray and one of them is ‘oh God I seek refuge in You from the punishment of the grave, I seek refuge in You from the punishment in the hereafter.” Both are areas that one can either enjoy or suffer.

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Host:’ Is the soul also capable of comprehending what is going on in this physical world after death?

Jamal Badawi:

There is some evidence to the effect that the soul after death can follow what is going on around it.’ First of all in one of the sayings of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) is that after the person is buried at the time when he is questioned it says that he hears the sound of their shoes when they are turning away and leaving him there alone.’ Of course we are not talking about the physical hearing that we know of in this world.’ That is why it was the custom of the Prophet to say to the people pray for your brother or sister because he is being questioned now.’ Some people recite verses from the Quran hoping that it might be of some benefit to the deceased person.

There are also other sayings of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) that again shows that even dead people are aware of what goes on.’ After the famous battle of Badr when the pagans came to destroy the Muslims and they were defeated and many of their leaders were killed and buried the Prophet stood there and addressed them and asked if they found now that the promise of God was true.’ He kept repeating this questioning and so one of the companions, Omar was standing there and he said ‘oh Prophet are you talking to people who have already been decayed?’ The answer of the Prophet was ‘Omar you can’t listen better than they do but they can’t respond.’ We find evidence that the Prophet (PBUH) says that if the person passes by a grave yard by a brother or friend that he knew in this life and he says to him ‘Asalamu Alikum’ or ‘peace be upon you’ that Allah will cause that person to reply but of course we can’t hear it.’ In fact it is required that if a person passes by a grave yard of believers even though he may not know them he would say AsalmuAlikum or Aslamu Ala Ahli Dar Almu’minean that is peace be upon the believers who are residence of this particular area.

The Prophet indicated that at times especially on Thursday and Friday night that he would be aware of the deeds of his people and he would definitely be glad if the Muslims behave in accordance with the teachings of the Quran and [Sunnah](#) and he feels sad when they deviate from it.' Not only this but also the Prophet taught people that if they pray to God for His peace and blessings upon him (the Prophet) that God will cause him to reply even though he died a long time ago.