

The Book of Deeds: Comprehensive Understanding of Accountability in Islam

Surah Az-Zumar highlights that belief in the Last Day is intrinsically connected to belief in the Book of Deeds. This sacred book meticulously records every action performed by a servant in their worldly life, encompassing both good and evil deeds.

Key Concepts:

- **Book of Deeds:** A divine record of all actions.
- **Belief in the Last Day:** Fundamental to Islamic faith.
- **Accountability:** Central theme in Islamic teachings.

Quranic Insights on the Book of Deeds

Allah the Exalted states:

“And the earth will shine with the light of its Lord, and the Book will be placed, and the prophets and the witnesses will be brought, and it will be judged between them in truth, and they will not be wronged.”

(Quran 39:69)

This verse signifies the **establishment of the Book of Deeds**, indicating that every individual's actions are recorded meticulously. Some will receive their books in their right hand, others in their left, or even behind their backs, symbolizing their eternal fate.

Scholarly Interpretations and Explanations

Ibn Jarir (may Allah have mercy on him) interprets *“And the Book will be placed”* as the **Book of Deeds** meant for accountability and punishment.

Qatada, through an authentic chain, narrated that he said: *“And the Book will be placed”* means *“the Book of their deeds.”*

Al-Baghawi (may Allah have mercy on him) affirmed that *“And the Book will be placed”* refers to the Book of Deeds. This underscores that belief in the Last Day includes belief in the Book of Deeds, where every action of Adam’s son, whether good or evil, is accounted for, and that no small or large deed escapes its record.

Divine Accountability on the Day of Judgment

It has been established in numerous **Quranic verses**, the **purified Sunnah**, and the **consensus of Islamic scholars** that the Creator, exalted be He, will present every servant on the Day of Resurrection with a book that they will receive unfolded. They will be told:

“Read your book; today you are accountable for yourself.”

They will read in their book whatever good or evil they did in the world, finding that the **angels** have recorded everything they did, leaving nothing small or large unrecorded. The person will be accountable for themselves on the Day of Resurrection, as Allah the Almighty informed us in His Noble Book:

“Sufficient for you is your own self this Day; you will be brought forward as your Reckoner.”

(Quran 79:38)

The Role of Angels in Recording Deeds

Allah appoints two angels for every individual to monitor and record their deeds:

- Angel on the Right Shoulder:

Tasked with recording **good deeds**.

- Angel on the Left Shoulder:

Responsible for documenting **bad deeds**.

This divine system ensures that **nothing is overlooked**, reinforcing the concept of **divine accountability** on the Day of Judgment.

Quranic Verses Highlighting the Recording of Deeds

1. Assigning the Recording to Allah Himself:

Allah the Exalted says:

**"Indeed, Allah has heard the statement of those who disbelieve, [saying], 'Indeed, Allah is impoverished and we are rich.' We will record what they have said and drive them to a punishment of the Burning Fire."*

(Quran 39:7)

This verse contains a threat and warning that is beyond their capacity.

Meaning of *"We will record what they have said"*:

It signifies that Allah will write it in the angels' scrolls or preserve it, serving as a threat prepared for them on the Day of Judgment.

2. Bringing the Dead to Life and Recording Their Deeds:

Allah the Exalted says:

"Indeed, We bring the dead to life and record what they have put forth and what they left behind, and all things We have enumerated in a clear register."

(Quran 39:69)

3. Monitoring Uttered Words:

Allah the Exalted states:

“When the companions of the left are in rows, they will not speak except a word which Allah has permitted. They will not hear its sound except the sound of a broken whisper – and they will not be recompensed except for what they used to do.”

(Quran 56:8-10)

4. Recording by Noble Angels:

Allah the Exalted says:

“Indeed, over you are keepers, noble and recording; they know whatever you do.”

(Quran 82:10-12)

5. Recording by Messengers:

Allah the Exalted states:

“Or do they think that We do not hear their secret conversation and their private talk? Yes, [we do]. Indeed, Our messengers are with them, recording.”

(Quran 50:18)

6. Recording by Unknown Recorders (Angels):

Allah the Exalted says:

**“And they have made the angels, those who are [in] the service of the Most Merciful, females. And they have certainly witnessed their creation, so let them not dispute with you. And indeed, the record of the righteous is in ‘Illyyun. And what can make you know what is ‘Illyyun? It is [their destination recorded in] a register inscribed.”*

(Quran 56:79-82)

7. Additional Verses Emphasizing Recording and Accountability:

Allah the Exalted says:

“And the Book will be placed, and you will see the criminals fearful of that within it, and they will say, ‘Oh, woe to us! What is this Book that leaves nothing small or great except that it has enumerated it?’ And they will find what they did present [before them]. And your Lord does injustice to no one.”

(Quran 39:69)

The Importance of Belief in the Book of Deeds

Belief in the Book of Deeds is a fundamental aspect of Islamic faith, reinforced by numerous [Quranic verses](#) and authentic hadiths. Denying its existence is considered disbelief in Islam, as it contradicts the established teachings of the Quran and Sunnah.

Mohammed ibn Ahmad al-Safarini states:

“In summary, the publication of the scrolls and their taking in the right and left hands is something that must be believed in and affirmed in the heart as a truth, established by the Book, Sunnah, and consensus.”

The Purified Sunnah and Hadiths on Recording Deeds

[The Sunnah](#) has indicated in multiple hadiths that angels record the deeds of the children of Adam. Some notable hadiths include:

1. Recording of First Deeds on Friday:

Narrated by [al-Bukhari](#) and Muslim in their authentic collections:

[Abu Huraira](#) (may Allah be pleased with him) reported that the Messenger of Allah (peace be upon him) said:

“When it is Friday, the angels stand at every door of the mosque and record the people in the order of their arrival, and when the Imam sits (on the pulpit for delivering the sermon) they fold up their sheets and listen to the mention (of Allah). And he who comes early is like one who offers a she-camel as a sacrifice, the next like one who offers a cow, the next a ram, the next a hen, the next an egg..”

(Bukhari and Muslim)

2. Recording Intentions and Actions:

Al-Bukhari narrated through Rifa‘a ibn Rafi‘ al-Zarqi:

“One day we were praying behind the Prophet (peace be upon him). When he raised his head from the bowing, he said, ‘Allah hears the one who praises Him.’ A man behind him said, ‘Our Lord, and to You is all praise, a much greater praise, good and blessed.’ When he left, he said, ‘Who was the speaker?’ The man said, ‘I was.’ He said, ‘I saw thirty or thirty-three angels starting first.’”

(Bukhari)

3. Recording Good and Evil Deeds:

Al-Bukhari and Muslim also narrated through Abdullah [ibn Abbas](#) (may Allah be pleased with them both) from the Prophet (peace be upon him):

“Allah has written down the good and the evil deeds, and then He explained them. So whoever intends to do a good deed but does not do it, Allah writes it down for him as a complete good deed. If he intends to do it and does, Allah writes it down for him as ten good deeds to seven hundred times, to many times more. And whoever intends to do an evil deed but does not do it, Allah writes it down for him as a complete good deed. If he intends to do it and does, Allah writes it down for him as one evil deed.”

(Bukhari and Muslim)

4. Rewards for Recitation and Supplication:

The Prophet (peace be upon him) said:

“Whoever says, ‘There is no deity except Allah alone, without any partners. His is the kingdom and His is the praise, and He is over all things competent,’ a hundred times on the day, will have a hundred equivalent scales of justice added to him, and a hundred good deeds will be recorded for him, and a hundred bad deeds will be erased from him. He will have a protection from Satan that day until evening, and no one will come with something better than what he brought, except someone who did more than that. And whoever says, ‘Glory is to Allah and praise is to Him,’ a hundred times on the day, his sins, even if they are like the foam of the sea, will be removed.”

(Sahih Muslim)

From Mus’ab ibn Sa’d:

His father said:

“We were with the Messenger of Allah (peace be upon him), and he said, ‘Does anyone of you find it difficult to earn a thousand good deeds each day?’ A questioner from his companions asked how one could earn a thousand good deeds. He replied, ‘By saying a hundred tasbeehat, a hundred tahmid, and a hundred takbir, it will be recorded for you as a thousand good deeds, or a thousand sins will be erased from you.’”

(Sahih Muslim)

These hadiths emphasize that both **intentions** and **actions** are recorded, highlighting the comprehensive nature of the Book of Deeds.

Methods of Receiving the Book of Deeds on the Day of Resurrection

1- Receiving the Book in the Right Hand: Quranic Description: “As for the one who is given his record in his right hand, he will say, ‘Here, read my record! Indeed, I was certain that I would meet my account.’ So he will be in a pleasant life – In an elevated garden, its [fruit] to be picked hanging near. They will not taste therein [any] illness. And as for the one who is given his record behind his back, he will cry out for destruction and [enter to] burn in a Blaze. Indeed, he had been in pleasure among his people, having followed his pleasure; indeed, wrath has covered him, and he will be asked.”

(Quran 69:19-37)

Significance:

- Symbolizes a pleasant life and entry into Paradise.
- Indicates righteousness and faithfulness.

2- Receiving the Book in the Left Hand:

Quranic Description: “And as for the one who is given his record in his left hand, he will say, ‘Oh, I wish I had not been given my record.’ *And he will wish that he had not been involved in it. *So he will plunge his face into the blazing fire.*”

(Quran 69:25-30)

Significance:

- Indicates **punishment** and entry into the **Blazing Fire**.
- Symbolizes **shirk** and **disobedience**.

3- Receiving the Book Behind the Back:

Quranic Description: *“As for the one who is given his record behind his back, he will cry out for destruction and [enter to] burn in a Blaze. Indeed, he had been in pleasure among his people, having followed his pleasure; indeed, wrath has covered him, and he will be asked.” (Quran 69:37)*

Significance:

- A debated method among scholars.
- Often interpreted as another form of receiving the book in the left hand, symbolizing severe consequences.

Scholarly Opinions on Receiving the Book Behind the Back

Due to differing interpretations of the third method, scholars have provided various explanations:

- Sa'id ibn al-Musayyib:

The individual takes his book in his left hand, turning it behind his back, or it is taken from his chest to behind his back.

- Mujaahid:

Refers to placing the left hand behind the back to receive the book.

- Al-Qurtubi:

Suggests removing the left shoulder, allowing the hand to take the book behind the back.

- Mujaahid (Alternative Interpretation):

The person turns his face to the position of his back and reads his book.

- Qatada:

Implies that it will be read by someone who was not a reader in the world.

- **Al-Hasan:**

States that a person reads his book whether he is literate or illiterate.

These interpretations emphasize the severity and finality associated with the Book of Deeds.

How the Book of Deeds is Presented to Individuals

The Quran has limited the manner of taking the books to only three cases based on the apparent meaning of the verses. However, in reality, it boils down to two cases:

- **Receiving the Book in the Right Hand:**

- For the **fortunate** among the people of monotheism and faith.

- **Receiving the Book in the Left Hand:**

- For the **unfortunate** and those destined for loss.

Disagreement among Scholars:

- The third case (receiving the book behind the back) is debated.

- It is generally concluded that the disbeliever receives his book in his left hand.

Importance of Belief in the Book of Deeds

Belief in the Book of Deeds is a cornerstone of Islamic eschatology, encapsulating the essence of divine justice and accountability. Every action, intention, and word is meticulously recorded by appointed angels, ensuring that each individual faces the consequences of their deeds on the Day of Judgment.

Key Points:

- **Divine Justice:** Ensures fair recompense for all actions.

- **Comprehensive Recording:** Includes both deeds and intentions.

- **Accountability:** Central to maintaining moral and ethical standards in Islam.

Mohammed ibn Ahmad al-Safarini emphasizes:

“In summary, the publication of the scrolls and their taking in the right and left hands is something that must be believed in and affirmed in the heart as a truth, established by the Book, Sunnah, and consensus.”

Conclusion

The Book of Deeds serves as a fundamental aspect of Islamic belief, embodying the principles of divine justice and accountability. Every individual is required to believe in the meticulous recording of their actions and intentions by appointed angels, ensuring that each person is held accountable on the Day of Judgment. Embracing this belief fosters a life of righteousness, mindfulness, and adherence to the guidelines set forth in the Quran and Sunnah.