

DEATH,
RESURRECTION,
HELL

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DEATH

Say: Death, from which you are fleeing, will certainly catch up with you.
Then you will be returned to the Knower of the Unseen and the
Visible and He will inform you about what you did.
(Surat al-Jumu ah: 8)

INTRODUCTION

Death may catch up with you at any time. Who knows, perhaps this is the moment. Or, it may be much closer than you have ever expected.

These lines may be the last opportunity, the last reminder, the last warning before death comes upon you. As you proceed with these lines, you can never know that you will still be alive in the next hour. Even if it proves to be so, nothing can guarantee you another hour. Let alone an hour, not even after a single moment, is it certain that you will be still living. There is no guarantee that you will ever finish reading this book. Death will, most likely, come upon you at a time when, only a moment before, you never thought about dying.

You will most certainly die, as will all your loved ones. Before you or after you, they will certainly die. A hundred years from now, there will not be a single soul you are familiar with in this world.

Endless aims pertaining to life occupy man's minds; to finish high school, to enter university, to graduate, to have a respectable occupation, to marry, to bring up children, to lead a peaceful life these are among the broadest and most ordinary plans of man. These aside, there are thousands of others devised to address one's personal circumstances.

Death is one of the few things in life certain to occur. This is a one hundred per cent certainty.

After years of hard work, a student succeeds in entering the university, yet dies on the way to class. Someone who has recently been hired for a job loses his life on his first morning commute to his work. A traffic accident ends the lives of a newly married couple on their wedding day. A successful businessman prefers to fly to save time, not knowing that that very flight will put a horrible end to his life.

At such a stage, plans no longer avail. Leaving behind plans doomed to remain unfinished for all eternity, they head for a point of no return and yet it is a destination they never planned for. Ironically, for years, they spent too much time detailing plans which would never be put into operation, yet never gave a thought to the one certain thing that would happen.

How then should a man of wisdom and conscience establish his priorities? Does he have to make his plans for the one thing certain to happen or for something unlikely to happen? The majority, it is evident, give priority to goals which they can never be certain of accomplishing. No matter which phase of life they are passing through, they resolutely plan for a better and more fulfilling future.

This tendency would be quite rational, if man was immortal. Yet the fact remains that all plans are doomed to that absolute end, called death. Thus it is irrational to disregard death, which is certain to occur, and devote all one's attention to all those things which may or may not materialize.

Yet, owing to an incomprehensible spell enslaving their minds, human beings fail to notice this obvious fact.

This being the case, they can never become acquainted with their real life which is due to start with death. They simply do not prepare themselves for it. Once they are resurrected, they head nowhere but hell, a place specially designed for them. The intention in writing this book is to make man ponder over an issue which he avoids thinking about and warn him against an imminent and ineluctable event. Avoiding thinking about it cannot, by any means, provide a solution.

SUPERSTITIONS AND FACTS

Throughout history, man has successfully coped with many seemingly intractable problems. But death has remained inescapable. Everyone who appears on this earth no matter when, is destined to die. Man only lives until a certain day and then dies. Some die very young, while still babies. Others go through all phases of life and face death in their latter years. Nothing a man possesses, neither property, fortune, status, fame, grandeur, confidence nor good looks can repel death. Without exception, all men are helpless against death and will remain so.

The majority of people avoid thinking about death. It never occurs to them that this absolute end will befall them one day. They harbour the superstitious belief that if they avoid the thought of it, that will make them immune from death. In daily conversations, those who intend to talk about death are interrupted out of hand. Someone who does begin to speak about death, intentionally or not, recalls a sign of God and, even if only to a very slight degree, removes the thick cloud of heedlessness covering people's eyes. Nevertheless, a majority of people who make insouciance a way of life, feel uneasy when such disturbing facts are presented to them. Yet, the more they try to escape from the thought of death, the more the moment of death will obsess them. Their devil-may-care attitude will determine the intensity of the terror and bewilderment they will experience at the moment of death, on the Day of Judgement and during the eternal torment.

Time works against man. Have you ever heard of a man who has resisted ageing and death? Or, do you know anybody who will not die? This is quite unlikely! Unlikely because man has no influence whatsoever on his body or on his own life. That he himself did not decide his birth makes this fact obvious. Another piece of evidence is man's desperateness in the face of death. The owner of life is the One who grants it to man. And whenever He wills, He takes it back. God, the Owner of life, informs man about this in the verse He revealed to His Prophet:

We did not give any human being before you immortality. And if you die, will they then be immortal? (Surat al-Anbiya : 34)

At this moment, there are millions of people living around the world. From this we conclude that countless people appeared and passed away since the creation of the first man on earth. They all died without exception. Death is a certain end: for people in the past as well for those currently alive. No one can avoid this inevitable end. As the Qur'an puts it:

Every self will taste death. You will be paid your wages in full on the Day of Resurrection. Anyone who is distanced from the Fire and admitted to the Garden has triumphed. The life of the world is just the enjoyment of delusion. (Surah Al Imran: 185)

Assuming Death to be Coincidence or Bad Fortune

Death does not occur by chance. As is the case with all other incidents, it happens by God's decree. Just as the birth date of a man is predestined, so also is the date of his death right down to the very last second. Man rushes towards that last moment, rapidly leaving behind every hour, every minute granted to him. The death of everyone, its location and time, as well as the way one dies are all predetermined.

Despite this, however, the majority of people assume death to be the last point of a logical sequence of events, whereas its actual reasons are known only to God. Everyday death stories appear in newspapers. After reading these stories, you probably hear ignorant comments like: He could have been saved, if necessary precautions had been taken or He would not have died, if so and so had happened. Not a minute longer or less can a person live, other than the time determined for him. However, people, who are remote from the consciousness granted by faith, view death as a component of a sequence of coincidences. In the Qur'an, God warns believers against this distorted rationale which is peculiar to disbelievers:

You who have faith! Do not be like those who disbelieve and say of their brothers, when they went on journeys or military expeditions, If they had only been with us, they would not have died or been killed. God will cause them to regret their words. It is God Who ordains life and death. God sees what you do. (Surah Al Imran: 156)

Assuming death to be a coincidence is sheer ignorance and imprudence. As the verse above suggests, this gives great spiritual anguish and irresistible trouble to man. For disbelievers or those failing to have faith in the Qur'anic sense, losing a relative or a loved one is a cause of anguish and remorse. Attributing death to bad luck or negligence, they think there could be some leeway to avoid death. This is the rationale which indeed adds to their grief and regret. This grief and regret, however, is nothing but the torment of disbelief.

Nevertheless, contrary to the received wisdom, the cause of death is neither an accident, nor a disease nor anything else. It is surely God Who creates all these causes. Once the time granted to us terminates, our life ends for these apparent reasons. Meanwhile, none of the material resources devoted to saving one from death will bring another breath of life. God underscores this divine law in the following verse:

No self can die except with God's permission, at a pre-determined time... (Surah Al Imran: 145)

A believer is aware of the temporary nature of the life of this world. He knows that our Lord, Who gave him all the blessings he has enjoyed in this world, will take his soul whenever He wills and call him to account for his deeds. However, since he has spent his entire life to earn God's good pleasure, he does not worry about his death. Our Prophet Mohammad (pbuh) also referred to this good character in one of his prayers:

Jabir ibn Abdullah narrated, When God's Apostle (peace be upon him) commenced the prayer he recited: God is the Greatest; then said: Verily my prayer, my sacrifices, my life and my death are for God, the Lord of the worlds. (Al-Tirmidhi, 262)

The Distorted Understanding of Destiny

People entertain many misconceptions about destiny, especially when death is the issue. Nonsensical ideas, e.g. that one may defeat one's destiny or change one's destiny are prevalent. Deeming their expectations and assumptions to be destiny, some unintelligent and ignorant people believe it is destiny that changes when events do not proceed as they anticipate or predict. They assume an unwise attitude and act as if they have read destiny beforehand and events have not proceeded in line with what they have read. Such a distorted and inconsistent rationale is surely the product of a narrow mind bereft of an adequate understanding of destiny.

Destiny is God's perfect creation of all events past and future in timelessness. God is the One who creates the concepts of time and space from nothing, Who keeps time and space under His control and Who is not bound by them. The sequence of events which was experienced in the past or which will be experienced in the future is, moment by moment, planned and created in the sight of God.

God creates time, thus He is not bound by it. Accordingly, that He follows the events He Himself created together with the ones He created is implausible. In this context, there is no need to say that God does not wait to see how events come to an end. In His sight, both the beginning and end of an event are plain. Similarly, there is no doubt about where this event is situated on the plane of eternity. Everything has already taken place and finished. This is similar to the images on a film-strip; just as the images on a film cannot exercise any influence on the film and change it, human beings who play their individual roles in life cannot influence the flow of events recorded on the destiny-strip. Human beings have no influence whatsoever on destiny. Just the contrary, it is destiny which is the determining factor in people's lives. Man, an absolute component of destiny, is not separate and independent from it. Let alone changing destiny, man is unable to go beyond the boundaries of destiny. For a better understanding, we can draw a parallel between a man and an actor in a film. The actor cannot slip out of the film, acquire a physical existence and start making changes in the film by deleting unfavourable scenes or adding some new ones. This would surely be an irrational suggestion.

Consequently, notions of defeating destiny or diverting the flow of events are sheer fallacy. One who says: I defeated my destiny. is only deceiving himself and the fact that he does so is a matter of his destiny.

A person may remain in coma for days. It may seem unlikely that he will revive. Yet, if he does recover, this does not mean that he defeated his fate or doctors changed his fate. This is simply an indication that his time is not yet over. His recovery is nothing but a component of his own ineluctable fate. His fate is like that of all other human beings determined in the Sight of God.

And no living thing lives long or has its life cut short without that being in a Book. That is easy for God. (Surat al-Fatir: 11)

Our Prophet (pbuh) said the following to a believer who was praying to God to enable her to derive benefit from her loved ones:

You have asked from God about durations of life already set, and the length of days already allotted and the sustenances the share of which has been fixed. God would not do anything earlier before its due time, or He would not delay anything beyond its due time. (Book 33, Number 6438, Sahih Muslim)

Such incidents are the means by which God displays to man the endless intelligence, wisdom, variety and blessing inherent in His creation and the way He puts man to the test. Such variety adds to the appreciation, amazement and, ultimately, to people's faith. In disbelievers, however, they produce sensations somewhere between uncertainty, astonishment and perversion which, owing to their ignorant mentality, makes them assume a more rebellious attitude towards God. Meanwhile, awareness of such a heedless outlook on the part of disbelievers, makes believers feel more grateful to God for allowing them to have faith and wisdom, which makes them superior to disbelievers.

According to another piece of received wisdom, the death of a person dying in his 80s is destiny whereas the death of a baby, a young or a middle-aged man is a dire event. To be able to accept death as a natural phenomenon, they try to make death fit their established criteria. Thus after a long and severe illness, death seems acceptable while, death by a sudden sickness or accident is an untimely disaster! That is why they often meet death in a rebellious spirit. Such a stance is a clear sign of being bereft of an ultimate faith in destiny, and consequently in God. Those nurturing such a frame of mind will be doomed to live in constant grief and trouble in this life. This is actually the beginning of the eternal torment which results from being faithless.

The Belief in Reincarnation

One of the common irrational beliefs people hold about death is that reincarnation is a possibility. Reincarnation means that on the physical death of the body, the soul transmigrates to or is born again in another body with a separate identity in a different time and location. Recently, it has become a perverted movement attracting many adherents among disbelievers and followers of superstitious beliefs.

In technical terms, the reasons why such superstitious beliefs receive support on the basis of no concrete evidence whatsoever are the concerns disbelieving people subconsciously harbour. Having no faith in the Hereafter, people are afraid of being reduced to insignificance after death. Those of poor faith, on the other hand, feel uneasy about the thought of being sent to hell since they are aware, or at least, consider it a probability, that God's justice entails their punishment. For both, however, the idea of the rebirth of the soul in other bodies at various times sounds extremely alluring. Thus, particular circles who exploit this distorted belief succeed in making people believe in this fallacy with the help of a little window-dressing. That their followers do not demand any further evidence encourages the efforts of these opportunists.

Unfortunately, such a perverted belief also finds adherents in Muslim circles. These are mostly the type of Muslims who are anxious to project an intellectual and liberal self-image. There is another serious dimension to this issue that deserves mention; such people strive to confirm their views with the help of Qur'anic verses. To this end, they distort the explicit meanings of the verses and fabricate their own Qur'anic interpretations. Our intention here is to emphasise that this perverted belief is totally at variance with the Qur'an and Islam and wholly contradictory to the verses of the Qur'an which are absolutely precise.

These circles claim that there are a few verses in the Qur'an which corroborate their perverted views. One of these verses is the following:

They will say, Our Lord, twice You caused us to die and twice You gave us life. We admit our wrong actions. Is there no way out? (Surat al-Mu min: 11)

On the basis of this verse, people who believe in reincarnation claim the following: man is given a new life after he has lived in this life for some time and then dies. This is the second time he comes into being and also the period during which his soul completes its development. After the second death following this second life, they claim, man is resurrected in the Hereafter.

Now divorcing ourselves from any prejudices, let's analyse this verse: from the verse, it is evident that man experiences two states of living and dying. In this context, a third state of being dead or alive is out of question. This being the case, one question comes to mind: What was man's initial state? Being dead or alive? We find the answer to this question in the following verse:

How can you reject God? Did He not give you life when you were dead and will He not cause you to die and then give you life again? Will you not return to Him at last? (Surat al-Baqarah: 28)

The verse is self-explanatory; initially, man is dead. In other words, owing to the very nature of his creation, he is originally made up of inanimate matter such as water, earth, etc., as the verses inform. Then, God made this heap of inanimate matter alive, created and shaped it. This is the first death and thus the first rising from the dead. Some time after this first rising from death, life ends and man dies. He returns to earth again, just as in the first phase, and is reduced to insignificance. This is the second transition to the state of death. The second and last event of rising from the dead is the one taking place in the Hereafter. Since this is the case, there is not a second resurrection in the life of this world. Otherwise, this would necessitate a third resurrection. However, there is no reference to a third resurrection in any of the verses. Both in Surat al-Mu min: 11, and Surat al-Baqarah: 128, there is no reference suggesting the possibility of a second resurrection in the life of this world. On the contrary, these verses explicitly reveal the existence of one resurrection in this world and another one in the Hereafter.

Yet followers of reincarnation invest all their hopes in these two verses.

As is evident, even these verses put forth as evidence by the followers of reincarnation alone refute this distorted rationale. In addition, several other verses in the Qur'an make it clear that there is only one

life where man is put to the test and that it is in the life of this world. That there is no return to this life after death is stated in the following verse:

When death comes to a wrongdoer, he says, My Lord, send me back again, so that perhaps I may act rightly regarding the things I failed to do! No indeed! It is just words he utters. Before them shall stand a barrier until the Day they are raised up. (Surat al-Mu minun: 99-100)

The dialogues in the verse make it clear that after death, there is no return to this life. Meanwhile, in this verse, God draws our attention to the fact that disbelievers entertain desperate hopes about a second raising from the dead, a second return to this life. However, the verse clarifies that these are just words suggested by disbelievers which have no validity.

That the people of Paradise will not experience another death other than the first death is described in the following verse:

They will not taste any death there - except for the first one. He will safeguard them from the punishment of the Blazing Fire. A favour from your Lord. That is the Great Victory. (Surat ad-Dukhan: 56-57)

The great bliss of the people of Paradise is described in another verse. This bliss is due to the fact that they will not experience another death except for the first one:

Are we not going to die, except for our first death? Are we not going to be punished? Truly this is the Great Victory! (Surat as-Saffat: 58-59)

The above verses leave no room for further questions. The conclusion is, there is only one death which man experiences. At this stage, the following question may arise: Despite the reference to two deaths in the previous verses, why is only one death mentioned in Surat as-Saffat: 58? The answer to this question is given in the 56th verse of Surat ad-Dukhan, which says: They will not taste any death there - except for the first one. Indeed, there is one and only one death that man meets consciously. He encounters it, and with all his senses, perceives it. This is the death one meets at the moment his life ends. He surely cannot perceive the very first state of death since at that time he is deprived of senses and consciousness.

In the face of such definite and clear explanations as the Qur'an brings, maintaining that there are more deaths and states of rising from the dead and holding that there is transmigration of the soul would be an overt denial of the Qur'an verses.

On the other hand, if God had created a system in this life based on reincarnation, then He would definitely have informed man about it in the Qur'an, which is the only guide to the true path for humanity. If this had been the case, God would surely have provided a detailed account of all phases of reincarnation. However, in the Qur'an, which provides every sort of information related to the life and the next life of believers, there is not a single hint about reincarnation, let alone a direct reference to it.

THE VEIL OF HEEDLESSNESS

Man is intrinsically selfish; he is extremely sensitive about issues linked to his own interests. Ironically, he displays indifference towards death, which ought to be a matter of paramount concern. In the Qur'an, this state of mind peculiar to those who do not hold firmly to Faith is defined by God in one word: heedlessness .

The meaning of heedlessness is a deficiency in full comprehension of facts owing to a blurring of awareness or even total unawareness and the resultant failure to arrive at sound judgements and give pertinent responses. An example of this is given in the following verse:

Mankind's Reckoning has drawn very close to them, yet they heedlessly turn away.
(Surat al-Anbiya : 1)

People feel certain that one who is afflicted by a fatal or incurable disease will die. Yet, no less than this patient, these people who harbour such feelings of certainty, too, will die. That this will happen some time in the future or very soon does not change this fact. Often, heedlessness obscures this truth. For instance, it is highly probable that someone afflicted with HIV will die in the near future. Yet, the fact remains that it is also highly probable if the truth be told, it is certain that a vigorous person next to him will one day die. Maybe death will come upon him long before it comes upon that HIV-stricken patient. This will most likely be at some quite unexpected moment

Family members grieve over patients on their deathbeds. Yet, hardly ever do they grieve over themselves, who will definitely die one day. However, given the certainty of the event, the response should not vary depending on whether it occurs shortly or at some far-off time.

If, in the face of death, grief is the correct response to give, then everyone should immediately start grieving for himself or for another. Or, he should overcome his grief and strive to have a deeper understanding of death.

To this end, being acquainted with the reasons for heedlessness will be useful.

Causes for Heedlessness

A Lack of Sagacity: The majority of the individuals making up society are not accustomed to thinking over serious issues. Making heedlessness a way of living, they do not concern themselves with death. Any mundane problems they fail to solve keep their minds constantly occupied. Trivial issues, already congesting their narrow minds, do not allow them to give serious thought to grave issues. Thus, they spend their lives drifting in the daily flow of events. Meanwhile, at the death of somebody, or when the conversation turns to the subject of death, they derive comfort from blurted phrases and simply avoid the subject. They are people with narrow minds harbouring trifling narrow thoughts.

The Complexity and Vividness of Life: Life flows very fast and it is alluringly vivid. In the absence of exceptional mental effort, man is likely to take no notice of death, which is bound to overcome him sooner or later. Not having faith in God, he is too distant from concepts like destiny, putting trust in God and submission to Him. From the moment he becomes conscious of material needs, he strives to ensure a good living. Such a person does not even endeavour to avoid death because he is already engrossed in worldly concerns. He constantly chases after new plans, interests and objectives and, one day, unpredictably and therefore with no preparation, faces the reality of death. Then he has regrets and wants to return to life, but to no avail.

The Deception of Population Increase: One of the reasons for heedlessness is the recurrence of births. The population of the world keeps increasing; it never shrinks. Once dragged into the spiral of life, however, man may, because of misconceptions, believe in alluring yet utterly illusory notions like births replace deaths, thereby maintaining an equilibrium of population. Such a rationale makes conditions ripe for the formation of a heedless outlook upon death. However, if from now on, no more births ever occurred around the world, we would still witness deaths one after another and, as a result, a shrinking world population. Then the horror of death would start to be felt. Man would see the disappearance of the people surrounding him one by one and would realise that the inevitable end would likewise afflict him. This is similar to what those sentenced to the death penalty feel on death row. Each day, they witness one or two people taken out for execution. The number of people in the cells steadily decreases. Years pass by, but still every day, those still alive go to sleep in a state of anxiety over whether the next day it would be their turn. Never do they fail to remember death, not for one second.

Ironically, the actual situation is no different from the aforementioned example. New-borns have no effect whatsoever on the ones destined to die. This is only a psychological misconception. The inhabitants of the world who lived 150 years ago are not around today. The following generations did not save them from death. Likewise, 100 years from now, those currently living, with a few exceptions, will not be alive. That is because the world is not a permanent place for man.

Methods Of Self-Deception

About from the reasons which make us disregard death and plunge into heedlessness, there are also certain defence mechanisms which people employ to deceive themselves. These mechanisms a few of which are mentioned below, reduce man to the level of the ostrich which buries its head in the sand to avoid a disagreeable situation.

Postponing thinking about death to the latter years of life: People generally take it for granted that they will live until their mid-sixties or seventies. This explains why generally young and middle-aged people employ this defence mechanism. With such calculations in mind, they postpone thinking about such gloomy issues to the latter years of their lives. In their youth or their prime they do not want to blur their minds with depressing issues. The latter years of life are inescapably the time when one cannot get the best out of life and this period is thought by many people to be the most appropriate phase in which to think sedulously about death and become prepared for the next life. This also brings spiritual relief, since it provides a sense of doing something for the Hereafter.

Nevertheless, it is evident that making such long-term and inconclusive plans makes no sense for one whose next breath is not even guaranteed. Every day he sees many people of his age or even younger

ones dying. Obituaries constitute a considerable part of daily newspapers. Every hour, television channels report news of deaths. Often man witnesses the death of people surrounding him. Yet, little does he think that people around him will also witness his own death or read about it in the newspaper. On the other hand, even if he lives for a very long time, nothing will change in his life, since his mentality will remain the same. Until he is actually facing death, he just postpones thinking about death.

Making the assumption that one will serve one's sentence in hell only for a certain period: This view, which is prevalent in society, is nothing but a superstition. After all, it is not a belief having its roots in the Qur'an. In no part of the Qur'an do we find any reference to serving one's sentence in hell for some time and then being forgiven. Quite the contrary, in all relevant verses, there is specific mention of the separation of believers and disbelievers on the Day of Judgement. Again we know from the Qur'an that believers will remain in Paradise for all eternity, while disbelievers will be cast into hell, where they will suffer everlasting torment:

They say, The Fire will only touch us for a number of days. Say, Have you made a contract with God then God will not break His contract or are you rather saying about God what you do not know? No indeed! Those who accumulate bad actions and are surrounded by their mistakes, are the Companions of the Fire, remaining in it timelessly, for ever. Whereas those who believe and do right actions, such people are the Companions of the Garden, remaining in it timelessly, for ever. (Surat al-Baqarah: 80-82)

Another verse stresses the same point:

That is because they say, The Fire will only touch us for a number of days. Their inventions have deluded them in their religion. (Surah Al Imran: 24)

Hell is a place of unimaginable torment. Consequently, even if remaining in hell only for a certain time were possible, a man of conscience would never consent to go through that suffering. Hell is the place where the attributes of God, al-Jabbar (The Compeller) and al-Qahhar (The Subduer) are manifested to the utmost degree. The torment in hell is incomparable to any pain in the world. A person who cannot endure even a burn on his finger saying he can readily undergo such torture is merely demonstrating weak-mindedness. Furthermore, a person who does not feel terrified by the Wrath of God fails to give God due esteem. Such a person, entirely deprived of faith, is a poor man who does not even deserve a mention.

Thinking I already deserve Paradise : There is also a group who assume themselves to be the people of Paradise. Engaging in some minor deeds they assume to be good deeds and avoiding some wicked deeds, they think they are ripe for entry into heaven. Steeped in superstition and mouthing heresies which they associate with religion, these people actually adhere to a faith completely divorced from that of the Qur'an. They present themselves as true believers. However, the Qur'an classifies them among those who ascribe partners to God:

Give them this parable. Once there were two men. To one of them We gave two vineyards surrounded by date-palms, with some cultivated land in between. Both gardens yielded their crops and did not suffer any loss, and We made a river flow right through the

middle of them. He was a man of wealth and property and he said to his companion, while conversing with him, I have more wealth than you and more people under me. He entered his garden and wronged himself by saying, I do not think that this will ever end. I do not think the Hour of Doom will ever come. But if I should be sent back to my Lord, I will definitely get something better in return. His companion, with whom he was conversing, said to him, Do you then disbelieve in Him who created you from dust, then from a drop of sperm, and then formed you as a man? He is, however, God, my Lord, and I will not associate anyone with my Lord. (Surat al-Kahf: 32-38)

With the words, But if I should be sent back to my Lord , the garden owner expresses his lack of sound faith in God and the Hereafter and consequently reveals that he is an idolater who harbours doubts. Meanwhile, he claims that he is a superior believer. Moreover, he feels no doubts that God will reward him with Paradise. This insolent and inferior character of the idolater is very common among people.

These people, deep inside, know that they are entirely fraudulent, yet once they are questioned about it, they try to prove their innocence. They claim that observing the commandments of religion is not so important. Furthermore, they try to clear themselves, claiming that the seemingly religious people they see around them are immoral and dishonest. They try to prove that they are good people by stating that they do not mean any harm to anyone. They state that they do not hesitate to give money to beggars, that they have been serving honestly in public service for years and these are the things that make a sincere Muslim. They either do not know or simply pretend not to know that what makes a man a Muslim is not getting along well with people, but being a servant of God and obeying His commandments.

In an endeavour to base their distorted religion on some kind of rationale, they subscribe to certain fallacies. This is actually typical of their insincerity. To legitimise their own life, they seek refuge in slogans like: The best form of worship is to work or what matters is sincerity of heart. In the words of the Qur'an, this is just inventing lies against God and it merits the punishment of eternal Hell. In the Qur'an, God describes the situation of such people as follows:

They think they deceive God and those who have faith. They deceive no one but themselves, but they are not aware of it. (Surat al-Baqarah: 8)

Double-Standard Rationales: Sometimes when people think about death, they assume they will disappear for all eternity. Such a startling idea makes them develop another defence mechanism; they only give half credence to the fact that there is an eternal life promised by God. Such a conclusion raises some hope in them. When they consider the responsibilities of a believer towards his Creator, they prefer to completely ignore the fact of an eternal life. They comfort themselves thinking: After all, we shall be reduced to insignificance, decomposing completely in the soil. There is no life after death. Such an assumption represses all fears and concerns, such as giving an account of one's deeds on the Day of Judgement or suffering in hellfire. In both sets of circumstances, they lead their lives in heedlessness until the end of their days.

The Consequence of Heedlessness

In the previous sections, as we have said, as long as one lives, death inevitably calls itself to one's attention. These reminders sometimes prove to be beneficial, prompting man to re-examine his priorities in life and to re-evaluate his outlook in general. But there are other times when the above-mentioned defence mechanisms take over, and with each passing day, the veil of heedlessness before one's eyes becomes thicker.

If disbelievers await death in a tranquil mood and have an irrational feeling of comfort, even when they are intensely aware of its approach in the latter years of their lives, it is because they are completely swathed in this veil. That is because death for them connotes restful and sound sleep, tranquility and calmness, and an eternal relief.

Contrary to what they think, however, God, the One who creates every being from nothing and the One who makes them die and who will give life to all creatures on Judgement Day, promises them eternal regret and grief. They will, too, witness this fact at the moment of death, a time when they assume they will go to an eternal sleep. They realise that death is not total disappearance, but the initial moment of a new world full of anguish. The terrifying appearance of the angels of death is the first sign of this great torment:

How will it be when the angels take them in death, beating their faces and their backs?
(Surah Muhammad: 27)

At this moment, the pre-death arrogance and insolence of the disbelievers turn into terror, regret, desperation and eternal pain. In the Qur'an, this is referred to as follows:

They say, When we have been absorbed into the earth, are we then to be created afresh? In fact, they deny they will ever meet their Lord. Say: The Angel of Death, who has been given charge of you, will carry off your souls, and then you will be sent back to your Lord. If only you could see the evil-doers hanging their heads in shame before their Lord: Our Lord, we have seen and we have heard, so send us back again and we will act rightly. Truly we are now firm believers. (Surat as-Sajdah: 10-12)

There is No Escape From Death

Death, especially at an early age, seldom comes to mind. Considering this as the end, man even escapes from the thought of it. However, just as physical avoidance provides no cure for death, neither does avoidance of thinking about it. Besides, it is impossible to ignore death. Every day, newspapers run headlines about the deaths of so many people. You frequently come across hearses or pass by cemeteries. Relatives and associates die. Their funerals or visits to offer condolences inevitably bring death to mind.

As one witnesses the death of others, and especially the death of beloved ones, he inevitably thinks about his own end. This thought hurts him deep inside, making him restless.

No matter how strongly the individual resists, wherever he seeks refuge or how he tries to escape, he may actually encounter his own death at any moment. He has no other choice. Ahead of him, there is no other exit. The countdown never stops, not for a moment. Wherever he returns, death meets him there. The circle encloses constantly and finally catches up with him:

Say: Death, from which you are fleeing, will certainly catch up with you. Then you will be returned to the Knower of the Unseen and the Visible and He will inform you about what you did. (Surat al-Jumu ah: 8)

Wherever you are, death will catch up with you, even if you are in impregnable fortresses. (Surat an-Nisa : 78)

That is why we need to stop deceiving ourselves or disregarding facts and strive to earn the good pleasure of God during this period predetermined by Him. Only God knows when this time will be over.

Our Prophet Mohammad (pbuh) also said that one of the best ways to prevent one's conscience from hardening, and attain a good character is by frequently remembering death:

Abdullah ibn Umar narrated, Gods Messenger (peace be upon him) said, These hearts become rusty just as iron does when water affects it. On being asked what could clear them he replied, A great amount of remembrance of death and recitation of the Qur an. (Al-Tirmidhi, 673)

THE ACTUAL DEATH AND WHAT IS OBSERVED ABOUT DEATH

The Death of the Soul (The Actual Death)

Have you ever thought about how you will die, what death looks like and what will happen at the moment of death?

So far, nobody has appeared who died and was raised again and who could share his actual experiences and feelings about death. This being the case, it is, technically, impossible to gather information regarding what death is like and what one feels at the moment of death.

God, the One Who bestows life upon man and takes it back in due course, informs us in the Qur'an about how death actually occurs. Thus, the Qur'an is the only source from which we can learn about how death really occurs and what someone who dies actually experiences and feels.

Death, as referred in the Qur'an, is quite unlike the medical death people observe from outside.

Primarily, certain verses acquaint us with events as seen by the dying person himself, which can never be perceived by others. This is related in the Surat al-Waqi'ah:

Why then, when death reaches his throat and you are at that moment looking on—
We are nearer him than you, but you cannot see. (Surat al-Waqi'ah: 83-85)

Unlike the disbelievers' death, that of the believers is blissful:

...the angels reclaim the souls of the just, saying: (to believers) Peace be upon you! Enter the Garden as a reward for your labours. (Surat an-Nahl: 32)

These verses disclose a very important and unchanging fact about death: at the moment of death, what the dying person goes through and what those nearby observe are dissimilar experiences. For instance, a person who spent his entire life as an unyielding disbeliever may be perceived to experience a peaceful death from outside. However, the soul, in a totally different dimension now, tastes death in a very painful way. Alternatively, the soul of a believer, despite seemingly suffering great pain, leaves his body in a virtuous state.

In brief, the medical death of the body and the death of the soul, which is referred to in the Qur'an, are totally different events.

Being unaware of this truth with which the Qur'an acquaints us, disbelievers, who assume death to be an eternal and peaceful sleep, also seek ways to make the moment of death painless and comfortable. The consequences of such a misconception are clearly to be seen in the examples of those who commit suicide by taking pills, inhaling natural gas or resorting to a painless form of death to escape a painful disease.

As mentioned earlier, the death tasted by disbelievers is a great source of torment for them, while it turns out to be bliss for believers. The Qur'an gives a detailed account of the difficulty the disbelievers undergo while their souls are taken away, because of the way angels deal with the soul of a disbeliever at the moment of death:

How will it be when the angels take them in death, beating their faces and their backs? That is because they followed what angers God and hated what is pleasing to Him. So He made their actions come to nothing. (Surah Muhammad: 27-28)

In the Qur'an there is also reference to the throes of death, which are actually the result of the angels giving the news of eternal torment at the moment of death:

...If you could only see the wrongdoers in the throes of death when the angels are stretching out their hands, saying, Yield up your souls. Today you will be repaid with the punishment of humiliation for saying something other than the truth about God, and being arrogant about His Signs. (Surat al-An'am: 93)

If only you could see when the angels take back those who were disbelievers when they died, beating their faces and their backs: Taste the punishment of the Burning! That is for what you did. God does not wrong His slaves. (Surat al-Anfal: 50-51)

As the verses make it clear, just the death of a disbeliever is an entire period of agony in itself. While people surrounding him see a seemingly untroubled death in his bed, a great spiritual and physical torment begins for him. The angels of death take his soul, inflicting pain and humiliation on him. In the Qur'an, the angels who take the souls of disbelievers are described as: those who pluck out harshly. (Surat an-Nazi'at: 1)

The last phase of how the soul is taken away is explained as follows:

No indeed! When it (the soul) reaches the gullet and he hears the words, Who can heal him now? he knows it is indeed the final parting. (Surat al-Qiyamah: 26-28)

At this moment, the disbeliever faces the truth he denied all throughout his life. With death, he will start to suffer the consequences of his great guilt, his denial. Angels beating their backs and plucking (the soul) out harshly are only the beginning and a minor indication of the grief awaiting him.

On the contrary, death for the believer is the beginning of eternal happiness and bliss. Unlike that of the disbeliever who suffers bitterly, the soul of the believer is drawn out gently (Surat an-Nazi'at: 2) with the angels saying: Peace be upon you! Enter the Garden as a reward for your labours. (Surat an-Nahl: 32) This is similar to the state of sleep. In sleep, the soul gently slips into another dimension, as the following verse indicates:

God takes back people's selves when their death arrives and those who have not yet died, while they are asleep. He keeps hold of those whose death has been decreed and sends the others back for a specified term... (Surat az-Zumar: 42)

This is the ultimate truth about death. Externally, people witness only the medical death: a body gradually losing its corporeal functions. Those watching from the outside a person on the brink of death see neither his face and back being beaten, nor his soul reaching the gullet. Only the soul of the person concerned experiences these feelings and sees these images. However, the actual death is tasted in all of its aspects by the person dying in a dimension unfamiliar to those witnessing death from the outside. In other words, what is experienced during the course of death is a change in dimension.

We can outline the facts revealed in the verses we have analysed so far as follows: be it a believer or a disbeliever, the death of a person is neither delayed nor hastened for even an hour. Wherever human beings may be, death overtakes them, if their time has come. In the process of experiencing death, they individually receive quite different treatments, although this is externally undiscernible.

The Death of the Believer

Being aware that death is inevitable, the believer prepares himself for death all throughout his life and ultimately passes on.

Angels of death greet him and give him the glad tidings of paradise.

Angels take the soul of a believer gently.

The believer feels the need to give the glad tidings to other believers in the world that God's promise is assured and that there is neither fear nor sorrow for believers. Yet, this is not allowed.

The Death of Disbeliever

He meets the death he has always avoided all throughout his life.

He suffers from intense fits of shaking during the course of death.

Angels extend their hands to him and give him the tidings of the degrading punishment of the Burning.

Angels take him in death, beating his face and back.

The soul is taken with a great inner pain.

The soul is taken as it reaches the gullet and at that moment there remains no one to heal him.

The soul is taken with difficulty while he is indulging in denial.

At the moment of death, no expression of his faith or repentance is allowed.

There are also lessons to be drawn from the medical death people witness from outside. The way medical death reduces the human body to insignificance makes one see certain very important facts. Therefore, the medical death and the grave, awaiting each one of us, also deserve mention and contemplation.

The Death of the Body (As Witnessed from Outside)

At the moment of death, as the soul leaves the dimension the human being lives in, it leaves behind the lifeless body. As in the case of living beings changing their skins, it leaves behind the outer casing and proceeds towards its real life.

However, the story of the casing which remains here in this world is important, especially for those who attach more importance to the body in this life than it actually deserves...

Have you ever thought in detail about what would befall this casing when one dies?

One day you will die. Maybe in a way you have never expected. While going to the grocery to buy bread, a car will hit you. Or, a fatal disease will bring your life to an end. Or, simply, your heart will stop beating for no reason at all.

So, you will begin tasting death.

From then on, you will have no relation with your body whatsoever. That body, you assumed to be yourself all your life, will turn into an ordinary heap of flesh. With your death, your body will be carried by other people. There will be people around weeping and mourning. Then that body will be carried to the morgue, where it will remain for a night. The next day, the burial operations will start. The lifeless body, now very rigid, will be washed all over with cold water. Meanwhile, the traces of death will start to appear and some parts of the body will turn purple.

Then, the body will be wrapped in a shroud and put in a wooden coffin. The hearse will be ready to take the coffin. Proceeding towards the graveyard, life will be as always on the streets. Seeing that a hearse is passing by, some people will show respect, but the majority will go on with their daily tasks. At the graveyard, the coffin will be carried by those who love you or by those who seem to love you. Most probably, there will again be people around weeping and mourning. Then, people will arrive at the inescapable destination: the grave. On the marble stone, your name will be inscribed...Your corpse will be taken out of the coffin and placed in the pit. Prayers will be said for you. Finally, people with shovels will start to cover your body with soil. Soil will also be thrown into the shroud. It will fill your mouth, throat, eyes and nose. Then the soil will gradually cover your shroud. Soon, the funeral will be over and people will leave the grave. Then, the graveyard will return to its deep silence. Those attending the funeral will go on with their everyday lives and for your buried body, life will no longer be meaningful. A beautiful house, a pretty person, a breathtaking landscape will mean nothing. Your body will never meet a friend again. From then on, the only certainty for the body will be the soil and the worms and bacteria inhabiting it.

Have you Ever Thought About What Your Body will Look Like After Death?

With burial, your body will undergo a rapid process of decay, caused by internal and external factors.

Soon after you are placed in the grave, the bacteria and insects proliferating in the corpse due to the absence of oxygen will start to function. The gases released from these organisms will inflate the body, starting from the abdomen, altering its shape and appearance. Bloody froth will issue from the mouth and nose due to the pressure of gases on the diaphragm. As corruption proceeds, body hair, nails, soles, and palms will fall off. Accompanying this outer alteration in the body, internal organs such as lungs, heart and liver will also decay. In the meantime, the most horrible scene takes place in the abdomen, where the skin can no longer bear the pressure of gases and suddenly bursts, spreading an unendurable disgusting smell. Starting from the skull, muscles will become detached from their particular places. Skin and soft tissues will completely disintegrate. The brain will decay and start looking like clay. This process will go on until the whole body is reduced to a skeleton.

Your body, you think to be yourself, will thus disappear in a terrible and disgusting manner. While those you leave behind carry out the customary rituals, worms, insects and bacteria in the soil will eat the body away.

If you die by an accident and are not buried, then the consequences will be even more tragic. Your body will be worm-eaten, just like a piece of meat left at room temperature for a long time. By the time the worms have eaten the last bit of flesh, your body will have become a skeleton.

This is the way, a human being's life, created in the best of forms, comes to the most horrible end possible.

Why?

It is surely by the Will of God that the body ceases to exist in such a drastic way. That it does so actually carries a very important inner message in itself. The terrible end awaiting man should make him acknowledge that he is not a body himself, but a soul encased within a body. In other words, man has to acknowledge that he has an existence beyond his body. Such a striking end, with its many lessons, is made ready for man so that he may understand that he is not mere flesh and bones.

Man should look at this body to which he attaches importance, as if he would stay in this temporary world forever, and should contemplate the end of it its death. For it will decay under the soil, become worm-eaten and finally turn into a skeleton.

THE TEMPORARY LIFE OF THIS WORLD

Have you ever thought why does man need to devote so much time and effort to keeping his body clean? Why does an unclean body, a foul-smelling mouth, greasy skin or hair seem so unbecoming? Why does man sweat and why is the odour accompanying sweat so disturbing?

Unlike man, plants have extremely pleasant odours. A rose or a carnation never stinks, despite the fact that it grows in soil and remains in an environment of dust and dirt. However, man can hardly achieve such a permanent fragrance, no matter how much he cares for his body.

Have you ever thought why man is created with so many weaknesses? Why God created flowers with beautiful fragrances but made the human body prone to produce an unpleasant scent?

The weaknesses of man are not limited to body odours: he gets tired and hungry, feels weak, gets injured, becomes nauseated, sick...

All these may seem to be ordinary to man, yet it has a deceiving aspect. It could well be that a bad odour never came from the body. Likewise, one might never suffer from a headache or fall sick. All these weaknesses of man happen not by coincidence but are created by God on purpose. God assigned man a particular goal and intentionally made him weak.

Such a strategy serves two purposes: first, to make man realise that he is a weak being, a servant of God. Being perfect is an attribute of God. His servants, on the other hand, are infinitely frail and thus inherently in need of their Creator. This is explained in the Qur'an as follows:

Mankind! you are the poor in need of God, whereas God is the Rich Beyond Need, the Praiseworthy. If He wills He can dispense with you and bring about a new creation. That is not difficult for God. (Surat al-Fatir: 15-17)

Weaknesses of the human body continuously remind man of his weaknesses. Man may consider himself to be a superior and perfect being. Yet, the fact that he needs to go to the restroom everyday and what he experiences there make him recognise his true self.

The second purpose these weaknesses serve is to remind man of the temporary nature of this life. That is because these weaknesses are peculiar to the body in this world. In the Hereafter, the Companions of the Garden will be endowed with a perfect body. The poor, imperfect and weak body in this world is not the actual body of the believer but a temporary mould he remains in for a certain period.

That is why, in this world perfect beauty is never attainable. The most physically attractive, perfect and beautiful person also goes to restroom, sweats, has bad breath in the mornings and now and then suffers from acne. One needs to involve oneself in endless routines to keep clean and fresh. Some people have pretty faces but lack shapely bodies. There are also cases in which just the contrary is true. Some have beautiful eyes but a big nose. There are countless such examples. A person with outwardly perfect looks might be suffering from a serious disease.

Over and above this, even the most perfect-looking person ultimately grows old and dies. In an unexpected traffic accident, his body might be irremediably injured. It is not only the human body which

is imperfect, flawed and temporary in this world. All flowers fade, the most delicious food decays and goes bad. All these are peculiar to this world. The short life in this world granted to us as well as this body are temporary favours bestowed by God. An eternal life and a perfect creation are possible only in the Hereafter. As the Qur'an puts it:

Whatever you have been given is only the enjoyment of the life of the world. What is with God is better and longer lasting for those who have faith and trust in their Lord. (Surat ash-Shura: 36)

In another verse the real essence of the world is explained as follows:

Know that the life of the world is merely a game and a diversion, ostentation and a cause of boasting among yourselves, and a quest to outdo one another in wealth and children. It is like the plants which flourish after rain: this delights the cultivators, but then they wither and you see them turning yellow, and then they become broken stubble. In the Hereafter a terrible punishment awaits you but also forgiveness from God and His good pleasure. The life of the world is nothing but the enjoyment of delusion. (Surat al-Hadid: 20)

In brief, in this world, God, as a sign of His infinite might and knowledge, creates many beautiful and wonderful things as well as many flawed things. Permanence and excellence are against the laws of this world. Nothing the human mind can imagine, including advanced technology, will ever change this law of God. This is so that people may strive to attain the Hereafter and show due respect and gratefulness to God. It is also so that people may realise that the actual place of these favours is not this temporary world, but the eternal abode prepared for believers. In the Qur'an, this is alluded to as follows:

Yet still you prefer the life of the world when the Hereafter is better and longer lasting. (Surat al-A la: 16-17)

Another verse says: The abode of the Hereafter that is truly Life if they only knew. (Surat al-Ankabut: 64) There is a very thin border between this world, which is a temporary abode, and our actual life, the Hereafter. Death is the instrument which raises this curtain. By death, man will break off all his relations with his body and this world; he will start his eternal life with his newly created body.

Since the real life is the one beginning with death, the real laws of nature are those pertaining to the Hereafter. Flaws, imperfections and impermanence are the laws of this world, yet they are not real and unchanging laws. The real laws are formulated on the principles of infiniteness, excellence and immortality. In other words, what is normal is a non-fading flower, a never-ageing man, a never-decaying fruit. The actual laws entail the instant realisation of every wish of man or the removal of pain and diseases, or even sweating or feeling cold. However, temporary laws are in effect in this temporary life,

while the actual laws are binding upon the next life. All the imperfections and flaws we come across in this world exist through the deliberate distortion of the actual laws.

The abode of the actual laws, namely the Hereafter, is not far away, as is assumed. God can end the life of man at any moment He wills it and makes him pass to the Hereafter. This transition will occur in a very short period; in the blink of an eye. This is similar to waking up from a dream. A Qur'anic verse describes the brevity of this world as follows:

He will say, How many years did you tarry on the earth? They will say, We tarried there for a day or part of a day. Ask those able to count! He will say, You only tarried there for a little while if you did but know! Did you suppose that We created you for amusement and that you would not return to Us? (Surat al-Mu minun: 112-115)

When death comes, dreams come to an end and man starts his actual life. Man, who remained on earth for a period as short as the blink of an eye comes into the presence of God to give an account of his deeds in this world. If he has kept death in his mind all throughout his life and lived to attain God's approval, he will be saved. In the Qur'an, the words of those who are given their Books in their right hands are quoted as follows:

As for him who is given his Book in his right hand, he will say, Here, come and read my Book! I counted on meeting my Reckoning. (Surat al-Haqqah: 19-20)

THE SITUATION OF THOSE IN THIS WORLD AND THE HEREAFTER WHO DO NOT TAKE LESSONS FROM DEATH

The majority of people have an inadequate conception of death. Death is the moment life ends is one of these. Take one step further, however and one will comprehend that death is the moment the next life starts. This ill-informed outlook makes disbelievers compress everything they want into the very short time of this life. That is why, those who do not come to realise the truth of the Hereafter want to make the most of this life without giving it a second thought. Not making a distinction between right and wrong, they seek to satisfy all their tastes in this world. This stance is essentially based upon the notion that death will put an end to all the joys and pleasures of this world. Believing that they still have long years ahead of them, they chase after long-term plans. They consider themselves to be very intelligent while they think believers, who have an unshakeable faith in God and the Hereafter and thus prepare themselves for it, are unwise. This is one of the most classical methods employed by Satan to deceive man. God draws our attention to this deceptive method in the following verse:

Those who have turned back to unbelief after God's guidance has been revealed to them, are seduced by Satan who has filled them with false hopes. (Surah Muhammad: 25)

He makes promises to them and fills them with false hopes. But what Satan promises them is nothing but delusion. (Surat an-Nisa : 120)

Amassing fortune in this world as if life would last forever, disbelievers perceive life as a competition. All throughout their lives, they take pride in possessions and children. This pride gives them a sense of artificial superiority, which causes them to drift completely away from the thought of the Hereafter. However, the following verses disclose where they are destined for because of this great delusion:

Do they imagine that, in the wealth and children We give to them, We are hastening to them with good things? No indeed, but they have no awareness! (Surat al-Mu minun: 55-56)

Do not let their wealth and children impress you. Through them God merely wants to punish them during their life in the world and for them to expire while they are unbelievers. (Surat at-Tawbah: 55)

God gives man many warnings and messages to make him ponder upon death and the Hereafter. In one verse, God draws attention to the trials given as a warning to man:

Do they not see that they are tried once or twice in every year? But still they do not turn back. They do not pay heed. (Surat at-Tawbah: 126)

Indeed, the majority of people encounter various trials, so that they may frequently ask for forgiveness and take heed. These may take place very rarely, once or twice in a year, as mentioned in the verse. Alternatively, they may be small, daily troubles. Man witnesses accidents, deaths or injuries. Newspapers abound in stories of death and obituaries. In the face of such events, man should remember that calamities can at any time befall him and at any moment his testing period may end. Such an awareness makes one sincerely turn to God, seek refuge in Him and ask for forgiveness from Him.

The lessons believers draw from the adversity they encounter are abiding. Yet, the same events have a totally different impact on disbelievers. Being terrified by the thought of death, disbelievers turn their backs on the reality of death or simply try to forget it. In doing this, they seek relief. However, this deceptive method only does them harm. That is because God reprieves them till a predetermined time and this period, contrary to what they think, works against them. (Surat an-Nahl: 61) In another Qur'anic verse, it says:

Those who are disbelievers should not imagine that the extra time We grant to them is for their good. We only allow them more time so they will increase their evil-doing. They will have a humiliating punishment. (Surah Al Imran: 178)

A heedless person, who does not take a lesson even when death befalls someone very close to him, becomes very sincere towards his Creator, when he himself encounters death. This psychology is related in the Qur'an as follows:

It is He Who guides them on both land and sea so that, when some of them are in a boat, running before a fair wind, rejoicing at it, and then a violent squall comes upon them and the waves come at them from every side and they realise there is no way of escape, they call on God, making their religion sincerely His: If You rescue us from this, we will truly be among the thankful. (Surah Yunus: 22)

However upon deliverance, these people return to their initial heedless state. Forgetting their promise, they display a low and false attitude and, while doing this, never feel the slightest pangs of conscience. Yet, this falsity will be evidence against them on the Day of Judgement:

But then, when He does rescue them, they become rebellious in the land without any right to do so. Mankind, your rebelliousness is only against yourselves. Take your enjoyment in the life of the world and then you will return to Us and We will inform you about what you did. (Surah Yunus: 23)

Desperately, man re-attempts to do the same at the moment of death. Yet, the time predetermined for him is already over:

If only you could see the evil-doers hanging their heads in shame before their Lord: Our Lord, we have seen and we have heard, so send us back again and we will act rightly. Truly, we are now firm believers. ...(It will be said to them): So taste this. Because you forgot the meeting of this Day, We have forgotten you too. Taste the eternal punishment for your misdeeds. (Surat as-Sajdah: 12-14)

The same unyielding efforts will continue also in hell:

There they will cry out: Our Lord! take us out! We will act rightly, differently from the way we used to act! Did We not let you live long enough for anyone who was going to pay heed to pay heed? And did not the warner come to you? Taste this then! There is no helper for the wrongdoers. (Surat al-Fatir: 37)

These hopeless strivings in the Hereafter and the painful end are surely the results of man's scant acknowledgement of the actual purpose of his existence on earth and of his value. One who has no faith does not take lessons from the happenings around him, does not listen to the warnings sent by God, feigns ignorance of the voice of his conscience or flouts it, and sees death as an unlikely event for himself. He complies with the wishes of the wicked side of his soul rather than seeking God's pleasure. All these eventually pave the way for death to seize him suddenly and make him fall into the desperate situation depicted in the above verses. Thus, before death comes upon one, one should wake up from the deep sleep of heedlessness, since the moment of death is too late for such a recovery:

Give from what We have provided for you before death comes to one of you and he says, My Lord, if only you would give me a little more time so that I can give alms and be one of the righteous! But God will not give anyone more time, once their time has come. God is aware of what you do. (Surat al-Munafiqun: 10-11)

A person of intelligence should constantly dwell upon death rather than keep avoiding the thought of it. Only thus can he act in compliance with God's will and prevent the wicked side of his soul and Satan from deceiving him with this fleeting life. Indeed, making the life of this world one's only goal is the greatest danger for people. Our Prophet (pbuh) also reminded the believers of this with his supplication let not worldly affairs be our greatest care of all that we know about. (Narrated by Abdullah ibn Umar, Al-Tirmidhi, 783)

Getting Prepared for Death

This world is a place where man is being trained. God charged man with many responsibilities in this world and informed him about the limits He has set for him. Provided that man observes these limits, complies with His orders and avoids prohibited acts, he will attain personal maturity and a better state of

wisdom and awareness. With such attributes, a believer shows inexhaustible patience no matter what befalls him; he turns only to God and seeks help only from Him. These are the ways to revere God and to feel an inner submission to and an unbounded faith in Him. Realising the actual worth of favours bestowed by God, he expresses a deeper gratefulness to God and feels closer to Him. Consequently, he becomes an ideal believer endowed with the superior attributes of wisdom and morality. Furthermore, he becomes the type of person deserving to attain paradise, a place of perfection. But if man receives no education in the realities of the world, he fails to evince excellence of behaviour and, even when best situated from the material point of view, remains prone to all forms of failures.

Indeed, the Prophet Adam was sent to the earth to receive due training and was put to the test purposefully devised by God to prepare him for his eternal life. In the end, he became a distinguished person of superior morality and character highly praised in the Qur'an.

Man continues to be tested by countless events befalling him; his success in dealing with them earns him rewards in his eternal life, while his failure earns him punishment. Nobody knows when his period of testing will be over. In the words of the Qur'an, the term of every life is fixed. (Surah Al Imran: 145) This term can sometimes be long, but can also sometimes be short. The truth is, however, that even the period we regard as being long rarely extends beyond 7 or 8 decades.

That is why, rather than engage in making long-term plans, man has to be guided by the Qur'an and live by its principles, knowing that he will give an account of all his deeds in the Hereafter. Otherwise, failure to prepare oneself for the eternal life, missing the one and only opportunity granted for this purpose, and deserving hell for all eternity will be a painful situation indeed. It should never be forgotten that, the only destination of someone who is deprived of paradise forever is nowhere else but hell. That is why, every moment spent in vain in this world is a great loss and a giant step taken towards an atrocious end.

Since this is so, this fact should take precedence over everything else in this world. Just as we prepare ourselves for the possible situations which we will confront in the course of our lives, we need to devote similar and even greater efforts, to becoming prepared for the next life. That is because the one who will die will be us. We will experience everything which will happen after death all alone. Therefore, this subject directly concerns us, in other words, ourselves. To those seeking eternal salvation, God commands the following:

You who have faith! Have fear of God and let each self look to what it has sent forward for tomorrow. Have fear of God. God is aware of what you do. Do not be like those who have forgotten God, so that He has made them forget themselves. Such people are evil-doers. (Surat al-Hashr: 18-19)

RESURRECTION

...Yet man still wants to deny what is ahead of him, asking, So when is the Day of Resurrection? But when the eyesight is dazzled, and the moon is eclipsed, and the sun and moon are fused together, on that Day man will say, Where can I run? No indeed! There will be no safe place. That Day the only resting place will be your Lord. (Surat al-Qiyamah: 5-12)

INTRODUCTION

Faith in the Hereafter

Faith in the hereafter is one of the most important pillars of faith. In the first surah of the Qur'an, after His attributes, the All-Merciful and the Most Merciful, God states that He is the King of the Day of Judgement (Surat al-Fatiha: 3). In the third verse of the next surah, it is stated that believers are ...those who have faith in the Unseen... (Surat al-Baqarah: 3)

This concept of the Unseen also includes rising from the dead after death, the Day of Resurrection, paradise and hell, in brief, everything related to the Hereafter. Indeed, in the next verse, the 4th verse of Surat al-Baqarah, with the words ...they are certain about the Hereafter, a special emphasis is given to faith in the Hereafter.

Belief in the Hereafter is a sign of true faith, and as such is very important. The sort of faith in the Hereafter as defined by the Qur'an provides strong evidence for the sincerity and truthfulness of a believer. One having faith in the Hereafter has already reposed unconditional faith in God, in His Book and in His messenger. Such an individual knows that God has power over all things and that His words and promises are true. Consequently, he never harbours doubts about the Hereafter. Before seeing and witnessing these facts, he puts his faith in them as if he has already seen them. This is the natural consequence of the faith and trust he puts in God and the wisdom granted to him. Furthermore, an unshakeable faith in the Hereafter, purified of all forms of doubts, embraces faith in the existence of God as well as in His attributes, as explained in the Qur'an, and complete trust in and submission to Him. This faith also makes one know God and appreciate Him as is proper. This is the type of faith God considers to be precious.

From the foregoing, it is clear that having true and complete conviction rests upon a committed faith in the Hereafter. In many parts of the Qur'an, there are references to disbelievers' denial of the Hereafter and their indecision about its realisation. In fact, the majority of these are people who believe in the existence of God. However, what misleads them most is not the issues pertaining to the existence of God but to His attributes. Some believe God initially created everything and then left human beings to their own devices. Some, on the other hand, hold that God created man, but that it is the individual himself who determines his own fate. Another group maintains that God does not know the inner thoughts and secrets of man. Some others believe in the existence of God, but reject the idea of religion. The holders of this last conviction are defined in the Qur'an as follows:

They do not measure God with His true measure when they say, God would not send down anything to a mere human being. (Surat al-An'am:91)

Consequently, rather than a total denial of the existence of God, not measuring God with His true measure and accordingly, the denial of the Hereafter, underlie faithlessness. Indeed, the proportion of people refusing to accept the existence of the Creator is rather low and many of them often entertain doubts about their convictions. That is why in the Qur'an, there is not much mention of people who deny

God. Conversely, one finds extensive reference to people who ascribe partners to God and deny rising from the dead, the Judgement Day, Paradise, Hell and to all the details and rationales pertaining to faith in the Hereafter.

Although the Hereafter is a fact which cannot be perceived through the five senses, God created it along with countless pieces of evidence so that our minds might easily have a grasp of it. As a matter of fact, as a requisite for passing the test of this world, one should perceive this fact, not through the five senses, but with wisdom and as a matter of conscience. Any average person, after some contemplation, easily recognises that everything in his environment, including himself, could not have come into existence as a result of pure coincidence but rather by the exercise of the superior might, knowledge, will and control of a Creator. Then, he consequently comprehends that the creation of the Hereafter is simple for God and that it is the most natural and rational consequence of this world. Furthermore, he realises that God's wisdom and justice entail the existence of the Hereafter.

Although this is so apparent, one who is rebellious against the commandments of God, would dislike the idea of rising from the dead. As one who spends his life on satisfying his vain desires, he would not be willing to stand before God to give an account of the deeds he engaged in throughout his life. That is why, despite having a thorough grasp of the existence of God, he would choose to suppress the voice of his conscience and deceive himself. Being confined in such a dimension, a disbeliever starts to make unwise, inconsistent and irrational comparisons without any long-term considerations, just to deny the resurrection and the Hereafter:

He makes likenesses of Us and forgets his own creation, saying, Who will give life to bones when they are decayed? (Surah Ya sin: 78)

However, this question, designed merely to escape reality and bolster self-deceit, has an explicit answer:

Say He who made them in the first place will bring them back to life. He has total knowledge of each created thing. (Surah Ya sin: 79)

In the Qur'an, God makes it clear that the making of such inconsistent comparisons is an attribute peculiar to disbelievers:

Evil are the ways of those who do not have faith in the Hereafter. But most sublime are the ways of God. He is the Almighty, the All-Wise. (Surat an-Nahl: 60)

Some, on the other hand, attempt to justify their stance by providing some so-called explanations:

They will say, Are we to be restored to our former state? When we have become decayed, worm-eaten bones? They say, That will clearly be a fruitless restoration! (Surat an-Nazi at: 12)

In fact, despite being convinced about it, they do not hesitate to confess that the existence of the Hereafter does not fit in with their goals in life.

The disbeliever curtails his own wisdom by his own will. Seeing the irrationality of his own claims, he still treats this issue with sentimental obstinacy and goes to great lengths to find psychological satisfaction in it:

They swear by God with their most earnest oaths that God will not raise up those who die, when, on the contrary, it is a binding promise on Him; but most people do not know it. (Surat an-Nahl: 38)

Taking their whims and desires as their gods, these people utter vain words to ease their consciences and then take refuge in them. God describes the nature of these people who deny the existence of the Hereafter:

We created many of the jinn and mankind for Hell. They have hearts they do not understand with. They have eyes they do not see with. They have ears they do not hear with. Such people are like cattle. No, they are even further astray! They are the unaware. (Surat al-A raf: 179)

In another part of the Qur'an, the situation of these people is described as follows:

Have you seen him who takes his whims and desires to be his god whom God has misguided knowingly, sealing up his hearing and his heart and placing a blindfold over his eyes? Who then will guide him after God? So will you not pay heed?

They say, There is nothing but our existence in the world. We die and we live and nothing destroys us except for time. They have no knowledge of that. They are only conjecturing. (Surat Al-Jathiyah: 23-24)

The Reality of the Worldly Life

Disbelievers claim that it is impossible to understand certain issues through wisdom. Death, rising from the dead and the Hereafter, they claim, are amongst them.

We can draw parallels between these concepts and the phenomena of sleep and dreams. One who insistently denies that he will rise from the dead after death and constantly escapes from the thought of death, is in fact not aware that he experiences death every night in his sleep and likewise rises from the dead in the morning when he wakes up. The account provided by the Qur'an of sleep is of great help in understanding the subject. God describes sleep in the Qur'an as follows:

God takes back people's selves when their death arrives and those who have not yet died, while they are asleep. He keeps hold of those whose death has been decreed and sends the others back for a specified term. There are certainly Signs in that for people who reflect. (Surat az-Zumar: 42)

It is He who causes you to be (like) dead at night, while knowing the things you perpetrate by day, and then brings you back to life (wakes you up) again, so that a specified term may be fulfilled. Then you will return to Him. Then He will inform you about what you did. (Surat al-An'am: 60)

In the verses above, the state of sleeping is referred to as death. No significant distinction is made between death and sleep. What, then, happens during sleep that has astonishing similarities with death?

Sleep is the departure of the human soul from the body that it occupies while it is awake. In dreaming, on the other hand, the soul acquires a totally different body and starts to perceive a totally different setting. We can never discern that this is a dream. We feel fear, regret, and pain, we become excited, or experience pleasure. In our dreams, we feel very assured that what befalls us is real and we often give the same responses as we give when we are awake.

If it were technically possible to intervene from outside and tell the dreamer that what he saw were mere feelings and illusions, he would simply ignore this warning and even think that he was being mocked. However, in reality, these perceptions have no material correlates in the external world and what we experience in our dreams is the sum of the images and perceptions which God projects to our souls.

The most important point we need to keep in mind is the fact that the same divine law still applies when we wake up. God, in the Qur'an, affirms that dreams are under His will and control as stated in the verse: Remember when God showed them (the unbelievers) to you in your dream as only a small band. If He had shown them to you as a great army, you would have lost heart and quarrelled about the matter; but God saved you. He knows what your hearts contain. (Surat al-Anfal: 43). The verse, Remember when God made you see them as a few when you met them, and also made you seem few in their eyes. This was so that God could settle a matter whose result was preordained. All matters return to God. (Surat al-Anfal: 44) provides clear evidence that the same law applies to daily life. The fact that the perceptions and images we have of matter are entirely subject to the will and creation of God and that apart from them, there is no existence in the external world is stated in the following verse:

There was a sign for you in the two parties which met face to face, one party fighting in the Way of God and the other disbelievers. You saw them as twice their number with your own eyes. God reinforces with His help whoever He wills. There is instruction in that for people of insight. (Surah Al-Imran:13)

Just as is in the case of dreams, what we experience in the course of daily life and matters we assume to exist externally are images projected to our souls by God, along with the feelings He makes us

perceive simultaneously. Images and actions pertaining to our bodies as well as those of other beings exist because God creates the related images and perceptions frame by frame. This fact is explained in the Qur'an:

You did not kill them; it was God Who killed them; and you did not throw, when you threw; it was God Who threw: so He might test the believers with this excellent trial from Him. God is All-Hearing, All-Knowing. (Surat al-Anfal: 17)

The same divine law applies to the creation of the Hereafter and the images and perceptions related to it. When death comes, all relations with this world and the body are broken. The soul, however, is eternal because God breathed His Spirit into it. Everything relating to life, death, resurrection and the life of the Hereafter consists merely of numerous perceptions felt by the eternal soul. That is why, in terms of basic reasoning, there is no significant distinction between the creation of this world and that of paradise or hell. Similarly, transition from this world to the Hereafter is no different from waking up from sleep and proceeding with daily life.

With resurrection, a new life begins in the Hereafter with a new body. Once the perceptions pertaining to paradise or hell are projected to the soul, the individual starts to experience them. God, the Creator of infinite images, voices, odours, tastes and feelings pertaining to this life, will, in like manner, create infinite images and feelings of paradise and hell. The creation of all these is easy for God:

...When he decides on something, He just says to it, Be! and it is. (Surat al-Baqarah: 117)

°Another fact to be noted is that just as life in this world appears in sharper relief than dreams, so does the Hereafter as compared to life in this world. Likewise, just as dreams are short compared to this life, so also is this life as compared to the Hereafter. As known, time is not static, as earlier supposed, but it is a relative concept. This is a fact which is verified by science today. In dreaming, an event assumed to go on for hours, lasts only for a few seconds. Even the longest dream is of only a few minutes duration. Yet, the one who has the dream assumes he has most probably spent days experiencing it. Reference is made in the Qur'an to the relativity of time:

The angels and the Spirit ascend to Him in a day whose length is fifty thousand years. (Surat al-Ma arij: 4)

He directs the whole affair from heaven to earth. Then it will again ascend to Him on a Day whose length is a thousand years by the way you measure. (Surat as-Sajdah: 5)

Similarly, a person spending long years in this world actually lives a short life based on the time concept in the Hereafter. The following conversation during the judgement in the Hereafter is a good example of this:

He (God) will say, How many years did you tarry on the earth? They will say, We tarried there for a day or part of a day. Ask those able to count! He will say, You only tarried there for a little while, if you did but know! Did you suppose that We created you for amusement and that you would not return to Us? (Surat al-Mu minun: 112-115)

Since this is the case, it is evident that risking one's eternal life in return for this temporary one is an unwise choice. This becomes more clear when one considers the shortness of the worldly life in comparison to the Hereafter.

To sum up, the thing we call matter and assume to have an external existence is nothing but sensations projected to man's soul by God. A person believes that his body belongs to himself. However, the body is also nothing but an image which God projects to man's soul. God changes the images whenever he wishes. When the image of the body suddenly disappears and the soul starts to see new illusions, in other words, when one dies, the veil over the eyes is removed and then one realises that death is not disappearance as one had believed. This is stated in the Qur'an as follows:

The throes of death come revealing the truth. That is what you were trying to evade! The Trumpet will be blown. That is the Day of the Threat. Every soul shall come attended by one who will drive it on, and another to testify against it. One will say: You were heedless of this, so now We have stripped you of your covering and today your sight is sharp. (Surah Qaf: 19-22)

Disbelievers thereby attain a better comprehension of the truth:

They will say, Alas for us! Who has raised us from our resting-place? This is what the All-Merciful promised us. The Messengers were telling the truth. (Surah Ya sin: 52)

From then on, the disbeliever starts to experience great regret the greatest of all regrets.

THE DEATH OF THE UNIVERSE

In the Qur'an, it is stated that apart from all the created beings, the universe will also confront death. It is not only man who is mortal. All animals and plants die. Even the planets and stars die. Death is the destiny common to all that has been created. In God's presence, on a predestined day, all people, all living beings, the world, the sun, the moon, the stars, in brief, all the material world will disappear. In the Qur'an, this day is called the Day of Resurrection. This is ...the Day mankind will stand before the Lord of all the worlds (Surat al-Mutaffifin: 6)

Just as the death of man is terrifying, so is the death of the universe. On the Day of Resurrection, those who did not have faith previously, will, for the first time, have an intense feeling of God's greatness and might. That is why the Day of Resurrection is a day of grief, torment, regret, pain and great confusion for disbelievers. A person witnessing the Day of Resurrection will be seized by some grave fear. This undefinable fear is hundreds of times more intense than all the fears one is likely to experience in this world. The Qur'an provides a detailed account of each phase of the Day of Resurrection. How this great event will happen and what will happen to people on that day are all described in a striking way.

The First Blast of the Trumpet

The Day of Resurrection begins when the Trumpet is blown. This is the sign of the total destruction of the world and of all the universe and the beginning of the end. This is the point of no return. This is the sound declaring that the life of the world has come to an end for all and that the real life has begun. This is the initial sound arousing an uninterrupted fear, terror and confusion in the hearts of disbelievers. This sound heralds the beginning of the difficult days for disbelievers which will extend to eternity. In Surat al-Muddaththir, the Day of Resurrection is thus referred to from the point of view of disbelievers:

For when the Trumpet is blown, that Day will be a difficult day, not easy for the disbelievers. (Surat al-Muddaththir: 8-10)

The sound of the Trumpet will surely create a great dread and unrest among disbelievers. An imperceptible, non-definable vibration with no apparent source will permeate the entire world and hence all people will acknowledge that something is beginning. The unrest felt by disbelievers soon turns into panic and horror. The consecutive events following the sound of the Trumpet will raise this horror to an unimaginable level.

The Destruction of the Universe

A great tremor and a deafening blast follows the sound of the Trumpet. At this moment, people recognise that they are face to face with a horrible disaster. It is obvious that the world and life is about to

cease to exist. That is why, everything on earth loses its value in just a few moments. Even the sound of the Day of Resurrection will suffice to break all worldly relations among people. No thoughts can occupy the minds of people other than escaping and rescuing themselves. Fear is rife and, on that day, everyone is concerned only about himself:

When the Deafening Blast comes, the Day a man will flee from his brother and his mother and his father, and his wife and his children: on that Day every man among them will have concerns enough of his own. (Surah Abasa: 33-37)

After an intense shake, the earth throws up all its treasures and discloses all its secrets, none of which will have any value at all from then on:

When the earth is convulsed with its quaking and the earth then shakes off its burdens and man asks, What does this mean? on that Day it will impart all its tidings because your Lord will have inspired it. (Surat az-Zalzalah: 1-5)

A terrifying noise followed by an intense tremor and sudden underground explosions ravage everything to which people formerly attached a great deal of importance. For instance, people treasured their houses, offices, cars and fields. Some people held a house to be the main target of their lives. Yet, the vanity of such goals surfaces at the very moment of the Day of Resurrection. Material wealth, to which people devoted all their lives, will disappear in a second. The goals of one who makes getting promoted in the company his main ambition become worthless. Another who devoted all his life to seizing power in his country experiences the same terrifying situation. He bitterly witnesses the disappearance of that country...Everything loses its significance...except everything done to earn God's approval. As God states in the Qur'an: When the Great Calamity comes: that Day man will remember what he has striven for and the Blazing Fire will be displayed for all who can see. (Surat an-Nazi at: 34-36)

The Crushing of Mountains

The calamities which will occur on that day are beyond one's imagination. Mountains, the most awe-inspiring, unshakeable structures of the earth, are set in motion; they are lifted from their roots and crushed. Even a minor earthquake spreads terror into the hearts of people and inspires in them feelings of insecurity. It makes them leave their homes and spend the whole night out on the streets. This being so, the type of disaster so dreadful as to cause the mountains to shift proves to be unbearable. In the Qur'an, the mountains on that day are depicted as follows:

So when the Trumpet is blown with a single blast, and the earth and the mountains are lifted and crushed with a single blow, on that Day, the Dread Event will come to pass. (Surat al-Haqqah: 13-15)

The Day of Decision is a fixed appointment: the Day the Trumpet is blown and you come in droves. The gates of heaven shall swing open and the mountains shall be shifted and become a mirage. (Surat an-Naba : 17-20)

(Each soul shall know what it has done) when the mountains are set in motion, when the camels in foal are neglected, when the wild beasts are all herded together. (Surat at-Takwir: 3-5)

On that day men shall become like scattered moths and the mountains like tufts of carded wool... (Surat al -Qari ah: 4-5)

That day, there is an awesome and unbounded might, so powerful as to throw black mountains of stone, earth and rocks into the air like tufts of carded wool . Now, people are well aware of the fact that this is not something which is within the power of nature to accomplish. They witness that mother nature , which they once upon a time worshipped as an idol and to which they attributed their existence, cannot prevent its own destruction. Now is the time to become acquainted with the real owner of this power. Yet, this acquaintance is no longer of any benefit to them. Now, they are being surrounded by this power, about which they have never bothered to think before. They will apprehensively understand facts, which they have failed all their lives to grasp as a matter of wisdom and conscience.

The terror created by an unbounded might is never conceivable and definable until one experiences it oneself. It encloses all beings, living and non-living. This horror keeps everything under its control. Human beings, animals and nature alike are all crushed under this common fear. Mountains are no longer majestic, oceans are not boundless and heaven is not as unattainable as in the past. The sun, stars and all the universe are surrounded by the fear of the Day of Resurrection. They all submit to their Creator. As mountains crumble like sand castles, man, inexpressibly feeble next to the mountains, stars and oceans, goes through a phase of great destruction.

The Surge of Oceans

With its present faculties, it is unlikely that the human mind can conceive of the horror of the Day of Resurrection when the oceans surge into each other, when the souls are divided into classes (Surat at-Takwir: 6-7) and when the seas flood and overflow. (Surat al-Infitar: 3) However, that the destruction will be in due proportion with God s might gives an idea of its dimensions.

The Destruction of Heaven:

On the Day of Resurrection, not only the earth but also space and the entire universe will be destroyed. The predetermined time of extinction will also come for the sky, the moon, the sun and the

planets as well as the earth, whatever lies underground, the mountains and oceans. The Qur'an states that on that day, what you are promised will certainly happen. When the stars are extinguished, when heaven is split open, when the mountains are pulverised... (Surat al-Mursalat: 7-10)

On the Day of Resurrection, all beings to whom, and established orders to which people attribute eternity will collapse and will ultimately be reduced to nothing. This also holds true for the sky. From the moment one comes into existence, the atmosphere proves to be a protective roof. Yet, on the Day of Resurrection, this roof will collapse and burst into pieces. The air and atmosphere, which surround man and give him life with his every breath will become like molten brass. (Surat al-Ma'arij: 8) and will burn with great intensity. Air will fill the lungs of a man not to revive life but to burn it up.

A comparison drawn between the fear created by disasters in this world and the horror of the events of the Day of Resurrection may provide some understanding about that day. Earthquakes and volcanic eruptions are the catastrophes that frighten man most. The earth crust cracked by an earthquake or a volcanic eruption dispels the tediousness of everyday life in a moment. This makes man appreciate the solid ground he steps on with confidence.

Nevertheless, despite all the pain they give, earthquakes and volcanic eruptions are lived through only once. An earthquake or an eruption lasts for a certain period of time. Wounds heal, pains are forgotten and in time they become faint memories. But the Day of Resurrection is neither like an earthquake nor any other disaster. Incredible acts of destruction occurring one after another signify that everything has come to a point of no return. For instance, an event beyond one's imagination will happen: heaven will crack and split apart. This is the collapse of all the known laws of physics and the concepts one has trusted so far. The heaven and the earth which have remained in existence for thousands of years are crushed by the One, Who constructed them. The Day of Resurrection, as is explained in the Qur'an (Surat al-Infitar: 1-3), will be marked by the sky splitting apart, the stars being strewn about, and the seas flooding and overflowing. When the sky bursts open, it will be hearkening to its Lord as it is bound to do! (Surat al-Inshiqaq: 1-2)

Everything people attach importance to in this world will cease to exist. The heavenly bodies will die one after another: When the sun is compacted in blackness, when the stars fall in rapid succession. (Surat at-Takwir: 1-2)

When the sun, the source of light for the earth for millions of years, is folded up, people will come to realise that it has a real owner and that it has moved until then under His control. Up till that point, people will have gone on thinking of stars as unattainable, glorious and mysterious entities. However, on that day, they will be extinguished almost like gilded toys. Giant, unshakeable mountains will be moved, boundless oceans will begin to boil. With such scenes, who the real Owner is of all beings, the one and only Possessor of might Who is above and over everything, will become most apparent. The predestined time will be over and thus human beings will be bitterly awoken from the heedlessness they have indulged in. The reason for this heedlessness is man's failure to appreciate the might of his Creator while he was still in the world. On that day, however, the identity of the real owner of the universe and life will be made explicit:

They do not measure God with His true measure. The whole earth will be a mere handful for Him on the Day of Resurrection, the heavens folded up in His right hand. Glory be to Him! He is exalted above the partners they ascribe! (Surat az-Zumar: 67)

The Situation of the People

All this fear, dread and confusion of the Day of Resurrection will be caused by the disbeliever's heedlessness. The more heedless a person is, the more his dread will be on that day. The feeling of fear and horror which begins with death never ends for all eternity. Each event becomes a source of fear for him. Every hideous event he confronts will also nurture his future fears. This fear will be so intense that it will even turn children's hair grey.

How will you safeguard yourselves, if you are disbeliever, against a Day which will turn children grey, by which heaven will be split apart? His promise will be fulfilled. (Surat al-Muzzammil: 17-18)

Those who assumed God to be unaware of their deeds realise at that moment that God postponed their judgement until the Day of Resurrection. This is explained as follows:

Do not consider God to be unaware of what the wrongdoers perpetrate. He is merely giving them respite till a Day on which their gaze will be transfixed. (Surah Ibrahim: 42)

In another verse, the fear felt by disbelievers is described as follows:

The Crashing Blow! What is the Crashing Blow? What will convey to you what the Crashing Blow is? It is the Day when mankind will be like scattered moths and the mountains like tufts of carded wool. (Surat al-Qari'ah: 1-5)

The strongest bond in this world is the love and feeling of protection a mother feels for her child. The intensity of the Day of Resurrection will break even this strong bond, however. Dread keeps everything under its control. That great shock will make people lose their consciousness. Confused and panicked, they will run about like drunks. What makes them lose their consciousness is the intensity of God's wrath:

Mankind, have fear of your Lord! The quaking of the Hour is a terrible thing. On the day they see it, every nursing woman will be oblivious of the baby at her breast, and every pregnant woman will abort the contents of her womb, and you will think people drunk when they are not drunk; it is just that the punishment of God is so severe. (Surat al-Hajj: 1-2)

Apart from fear and dread, another grievous feeling people will experience on that day is desperateness. Mankind takes necessary precautions against all possible disasters; against the most lethal calamity, the most powerful earthquakes, floods, hurricanes or the most horrible nuclear war. Man finds ways to protect himself and builds shelters. However, on that day, there will not remain a single secure place where one can take refuge. He will receive no help from God. There will also be no other person or authority who could provide help. In the past, man sought assistance and guidance from science and technology. But now, all the laws of science will have collapsed. Even if advanced technology could enable one to flee to the remotest point of space, God's wrath would find him there. That is because the Day of Resurrection pervades the entire universe. Not only the earth he lived on securely but also the remote stars will submit to the will of God, with the sun, compacted in blackness, and the stars falling in rapid succession. (Surat at-Takwir: 1-2)

The despair into which human beings will fall on that day is described as follows:

...and the moon is eclipsed, and the sun and moon are fused together. On that Day man will say, Where can I run? No indeed! There will be no safe place. That Day the only resting place will be your Lord. (Surat al-Qiyamah: 8-12)

THE SECOND BLAST OF THE TRUMPET AND RAISING OF THE DEAD

When the trumpet is blown for the first time, heaven and earth will be crushed and the whole material world will come to an end. Not a living soul will be left. In the words of the Qur'an: On the Day the earth is changed into a different earth, and the heavens likewise, mankind shall stand before God, the One who conquers all. (Surah Ibrahim: 48) This new environment prepared for the Last Judgement is described as follows:

They will ask you about the mountains. Say: My Lord will scatter them as dust. He will leave them as a barren, level plain on which you will see no dip or gradient. (Surah Ta ha: 105-107)

This is the point at which people will rise from dead, gather and wait to give an account of their deeds. This is also the place where they will learn where they are heading for. The time has come for people to be raised from the dead and presented to God, the al-Qahhar (The Subduer). And then the trumpet will be blown for a second time. Those who denied the hereafter and resurrection in the world will be raised from their graves. This will be something they never expected. The Qur'an gives an account of these happenings as follows:

The Trumpet will be blown and those in the heavens and those on the earth will all lose consciousness, except those God wills. Then it will be blown a second time and at once they will be standing upright, looking on. And the earth will shine with the Pure Light of its Lord...(Surat az-Zumar: 68-69)

The Emergence of the Dead From their Graves

God gives a detailed account of the situations which will take place as the dead rise again by His will. As related in the Qur'an, this great event will occur thus:

By the time the trumpet is blown for the second time, the dead will be called from the earth. Upon this call, they will rapidly emerge from their graves with downcast eyes, like swarming locusts. (Surat al-Qamar: 7)

(...Then, when) He calls you forth from the earth, you will emerge at once. (Surat ar-Rum: 25)

The Day the earth splits open all around them as they come rushing forth, that is a gathering, easy for Us to accomplish. (Surah Qaf:44)

As if hastening on to a goal, they will follow the inviter who will call them with their necks extended towards him. This call will be dissimilar to any other call hitherto heard:

... On the Day the Summoner summons them to something unspeakably terrible. (Surat al-Qamar: 6)

On that day they will follow the Summoner who has no crookedness in him at all. (Surah Ta ha: 108)

...That Day they will emerge swiftly from their graves as if rushing to rally to the flag. (Surat al-Ma arij: 43)

Those who committed transgressions beyond the limits set by God, who did not obey God, insisted on their own ways, denied God, and remained arrogant, will suddenly become obedient and submit to Him as soon as they are raised from the dead. Without questioning, they will respond to this call. Because the test in this world will be over, they will have no other choice but to conform. Even if they so desired, they could not do otherwise. They could not even harbour such a wish. They will have no power to resist this call. That is why, they will feel deep inside that this is a pitiless day :

With necks outstretched, eyes transfixed, rushing headlong to the Summoner, the disbelievers will say: This is a pitiless day! (Surat al-Qamar: 8)

Thus the disbelievers will run forward. Everyone will display an absolute obedience. That day, the one and only important thing people possess is faith. However, disbelievers are bereft of it. That is why, their hearts are hollow as they rush headlong heads back, eyes vacant. (Surah Ibrahim: 43)

They will head towards a certain point in the crowds:

..the Day the Trumpet is blown and you come in droves (Surat an-Naba : 18)

The Trumpet will be blown and at once they will be sliding from their graves towards their Lord. They will say, Alas for us! Who has raised us from our resting-place? This is what the All-Merciful promised us. The Messengers were telling the truth. (Surah Ya sin: 51-52)

The exclamation Alas for us! is the expression of great panic and disappointment. The disbeliever who witnesses his own resurrection realises that God's apostles who conveyed this message throughout his life had told the truth. He then grasps that he will be subjected to the eternal torment with

which the disbelievers were threatened. At that moment, he sheds all doubts on the subject and comes to terms with the fact that there is just not anything like eternal sleep . His disappointment is intensified by his diminishing hopes of salvation from the forthcoming torment.

Disbelievers feel fear, horror and they are desperate. Their general appearance is frightening; their faces are black, dust-covered. What is more, they will be humiliated:

Some faces on that Day will be downcast (Surat al-Ghashiyah: 2)

That Day some faces will be dust-covered, overcast with gloom. Those are the dissolute disbelievers. (Surah Abasa: 40-42)

On the Day of Resurrection you will see those who lied against God with their faces blackened. Do not the arrogant have a dwelling place in Hell? (Surat az-Zumar: 60)

God will raise disbelievers on the Day of Resurrection, blind.

But if anyone turns away from My reminder, his life will be a dark and narrow one and on the Day of Resurrection he will come before Us blind. He will say, My Lord, why have you brought me blind before you when before I was able to see? He will say, Just as Our Signs came to you and you forgot them, in the same way you too are forgotten today. (Surah Ta Ha:124-126)

Whoever God guides is truly guided. But as for those He leads astray, you will not find any protectors for them apart from Him. We will bring them before Us on the Day of Resurrection, flat on their faces, blind, dumb and deaf. Their shelter will be Hell. Whenever the Blaze dies down, We will increase it for them. (Surah al-Isra : 97)

The white part of the eye will turn to a bluish colour. This colour of the eye will intensify the frightening and disgusting appearance of disbelievers.

On the Day the Trumpet is blown, We will gather the evil-doers on that Day, their eyes dimmed (as if they were covered with a bluish film). (Surah Ta Ha: 102)

With this terrible and degraded appearance the disbelievers will be distinguished from the believers at first sight. This is the beginning of the end of this group of people who waged war against the verses of God and remained arrogant.

There Exists no Friendship, Kinship and Cooperation

On that day, a person will be too occupied to worry about others. He will even abandon his own mother, father, spouse and children. The intensity and inconceivable terror of the Day of Resurrection will make everyone concern himself over his own affairs. God describes the Day of Resurrection as follows:

What will convey to you what the Day of Judgement is? Again! What will convey to you what the Day of Judgement is? It is the Day when a soul will have no power to help any other soul in any way. The command that Day will be God's alone. (Surat al-Infitar: 17-19)

When the Deafening Blast comes, that Day a man will flee from his brother and his mother and his father, and his wife and his children: on that Day every man among them will have concerns enough of his own. (Surah Abasa: 33-37)

And thus the most precious social bonds in this life will come to a bitter end. The terror of that day will render all close relations and kinship meaningless. The only precious thing remaining will be faith:

Then when the Trumpet is blown, that Day there will be no family ties between them; they will not be able to question one another. Those whose scales are heavy are the successful ones. Those whose scales are light are the losers of their souls, remaining in Hell timelessly, for ever. (Surat al-Mu minun: 101-103)

Bonds and family ties break down in such a way that people would give their so-called beloved sons, spouses, brothers and even all their relatives in ransom for their own salvation:

No good friend will ask about his friend, even though they can see each other. An evil-doer will wish he could ransom himself from the punishment of that Day, by means of his sons, or his wife or his brother or his family who sheltered him or everyone else on earth, if only that meant that he could save himself. But no! It is a Raging Blaze. (Surat al-Ma arij:10-15)

This offer is actually an indication of the pitiless and ungrateful nature of disbelievers which surface when their benefits are in question. This offer also warns of the vanity of this life. Often a person chases after trivial goals; for an admirable job, a beautiful house, or a woman, and for money he will work for a lifetime. However, as the Qur'an informs us, in his desperate efforts to be saved, a person will be willing to pay, not just a single woman, but all the women in the world or all possible possessions in ransom for his own personal salvation. However, these are all futile efforts. God is essentially the owner of all the possessions in the world. Salvation, on the other hand, remained behind, in the worldly life. It is too late now and, as promised, hellfire has already started burning.

The Gathering of People To Give an Account of Their Deeds

The Qur'an states the real meaning of life:

O Man! You are toiling laboriously towards your Lord but meet Him you will. (Surat al-Inshiqaq: 6)

No matter what we do in the course of our lives, we will eventually stand before God. The ultimate aim of this life is to be His servant. The most important time, on the other hand, is the Day of Resurrection, when we shall be giving an account of our lives.

Each passing day brings us even closer to that point in time. Each passing hour, minute or even second is a step taken towards death, resurrection and the moment of reckoning. Life, like an hourglass, flows continuously in this direction. There is no way to stop time or to reverse it. All people will be following this path.

Certainly it is to Us they will return. Then their Reckoning is Our concern. (Surat al-Ghashiyah: 25-26)

There are around 6 billion people on the earth today. Adding this figure to the total number of people who ever lived in the past will give some idea of the crowd that will gather on the Day of Resurrection. All people, from the Prophet Adam, the first man on earth, to the last disbeliever who will ever live in the world will be there. This horde of human beings will present an amazing picture. Nevertheless, at the same time, it is certain that it will be a fearsome one. The situation of all people in the presence of God is depicted in the Qur'an as follows:

On that day they will follow the Summoner who has no falsity in him at all. Voices will be hushed before the All-Merciful and You shall hear only the sound of marching feet.

On that Day intercession will not be of any use except for him whom the All-Merciful has authorised and with whose word He is well-pleased.

He knows what is in front of them and behind them. But their knowledge does not encompass Him.

Faces will be humbled before the Living, the All-Sustaining One. And anyone weighed down with wrongdoing will have failed. (Surah Ta Ha: 108-111)

The moment of giving accounts, which disbelievers neglected for a lifetime, while believers zealously prepared for it, has come. A glorious location is created for this great court. According to the Qur'an, on that day:

Heaven will be split apart, for that Day it will be very frail. The angels will be gathered round its edge. On that Day, eight will bear the Throne of their Lord above their heads. (Surat al-Haqqah: 16-17)

On the Day when the Spirit and the angels stand in ranks, they shall not speak; except him who shall receive the sanction of the Merciful and says what is right. (Surat an-Naba : 38)

The Lord of the heavens and earth will demand an account of their deeds from His servants. A source of torture, suiting His might and glory, will be present. A roaring fire burns in hell. God, who creates everything in its unique fashion, has prepared a perfect torment for disbelievers. No one can inflict the type of anguish God will give on that day. In the Qur'an God states:

No indeed! When the earth is crushed and ground to dust and your Lord arrives with the angels rank upon rank and that Day Hell is produced, that Day man will remember; but how will the remembrance help him? He will say, Oh! If only I had prepared in advance for this life of mine! That Day no one will punish as He punishes and no one will shackle as He shackles. (Surat al-Fajr: 21-26)

If man fails to serve His Creator in the world and to prepare for this great day, then he shall suffer a keen regret. He will then ardently wish to be reduced to earth rather than raised from dead. Yet, this regret will be of no avail. On the contrary, it will become a new source of anguish and add to the torment he will be subjected to in hell.

the GIVING OUT OF the Books and Just Balances

Before having the chance to overcome the bewilderment caused by resurrection, the human being becomes struck with fear and grief. This is because he will give an account of his deeds in the presence of God. All his deeds he engaged in throughout his life and all his thoughts will be disclosed. No minor detail is forgotten. The following verse explains this clearly:

... even if something weighs as little as a mustard-seed and is inside a rock or anywhere else in the heavens or earth, God will bring it out. God is All-Pervading, All-Aware. (Surah Luqman: 16)

This is the moment closest to paradise and hell. People will see what they had presented for their eternal life. This is related in the Qur'an as follows:

That Day people will emerge segregated to see the results of their actions. Whoever does an atom's weight of good will see it. Whoever does an atom's weight of evil will see it. (Surat az-Zalzalah: 6-8)

As mentioned in the Qur'an, disbelievers will receive their books from their left, while believers will receive theirs from their right. The experience of the people of the right is described as follows:

On that Day you will be exposed no concealed act you did will stay concealed. As for him who is given his Book in his right hand, he will say, Here, come and read my Book! I counted on meeting my Reckoning. He will have a very pleasant life in an elevated Garden, its ripe fruit hanging close to hand. Eat and drink with relish for what you did before in days gone by! (Surat al- Haqqah: 18-24)

Contrary to the happiness and joy of believers, disbelievers will have an acute feeling of malaise. They would like to die, even to disappear. Their desperate mood is indicated as follows:

But as for him who is given his Book in his left hand, he will say, If only I had not been given my Book and had not known about my Reckoning! If only death had really been the end! My wealth has been of no use to me. My power has vanished. (Surat al-Haqqah: 25-29)

But as for him who is given his Book behind his back, he will cry out for destruction, but will be roasted in a Searing Blaze. He used to be joyful in his people. He thought that he was never going to return. But in fact his Lord was always watching him! (Surat al-Inshiqaq: 10-15)

The deeds recorded in the Books are measured by just balances. Today, in the presence of God's justice, no one is unjustly treated:

We will set up the Just Balance on the Day of Resurrection and no soul will be wronged in any way. Even if it is no more than the weight of a grain of mustard-seed, We will produce it. We are sufficient as a Reckoner. (Surat an-Anbiya : 47)

Every deed engaged in in this life, even of a minor nature, is placed in this balance. The indicator of this balance determines whether one will be sent to eternal torment or to eternal bliss and salvation. If the balance is well weighed down with good deeds, the person being judged is sent to paradise. If not, he will be destined for hell. No one, no power can help him:

As for him whose balance is heavy, he will have a most pleasant life. But as for him whose balance is light, his motherland will be the Abyss. And what will convey to you what that is? A raging Fire! (Surat al-Qari ah: 6-11)

Then, all men created since the creation of the earth give their accounts one by one. Here, positions and ranks in the world lose their meanings. A president of a country or an ordinary person are both the same; they receive the same treatment in the presence of God. Here, they are subjected to arduous questioning as to whether or not they served their Creator and obeyed His commands. All sins, wicked deeds, and inner thoughts of a disbeliever are disclosed:

...on the Day when the secrets are sought out and man will have no strength or helper. (Surat at-Tariq: 9-10)

This process is grueling for those who did not live by the laws of God but by their own desires or by the distorted values, beliefs and principles of their society. In the following verse, God gives an account of this great day:

When the baby girl buried alive is asked for what crime she was killed, when the Pages are opened up, when Heaven is peeled away, when the Fire is set ablaze, when the Garden is brought up close: then each soul will know what it has done. (Surat at-Takwir: 8-14)

The servant has no chances to deny what he engaged in in the presence of God. All his deeds, good and wicked, are disclosed. Even if he denies anything, there are witnesses to tell the truth. People who witnessed him during the course of his life are also brought to the fore to testify:

And the earth will shine with the Pure Light of its Lord; the Book will be put in place; the Prophets and witnesses will be brought; and all will be judged with fairness; none shall be wronged. (Surat az-Zumar: 69)

In the course of giving accounts, there are other unexpected witnesses awaiting the disbelievers. The senses of hearing and sight as well as human skins are endowed with the faculty of speech by the Will of God and testify against them. The betrayal of even one's own organs, which one assumed to belong to oneself for a lifetime, adds to the depression one will suffer on that day. God describes this fact as follows:

On the Day, We crowd the enemies of God into the Fire and they are driven in close-packed ranks; when they reach it, their hearing, sight and skin will testify against them concerning what they did. They will ask their skins, Why did you testify against us? and they will reply, God gave us speech as He has given speech to everything. He created you in the first place and you will be returned to Him. You did not think to shield yourselves from your hearing, sight and skin testifying against you and you thought that God would never know much of what you did. It is that thought you had about your Lord that has destroyed you, so now you find yourselves among the lost. If they are steadfast, the Fire will still be their residence! If they ask for pardon, they will not receive it. (Surah Fussilat: 19-24)

Disbelievers bear the great guilt of rebelling against the Creator, Who created them and made living possible for them. That is why, on the Day of Resurrection, they are even not allowed to defend themselves. No opportunity is given to them to voice their defence, despite the fact that even the most infamous criminal is granted this right in the world. Humiliated and desperate, they must expect the verdict to be given thus:

On that Day, woe to the deniers! This is the Day they will not say a single word, nor will they be allowed to offer any excuses. On that Day, woe to the deniers! This is the Day of Decision. We have gathered you and the earlier peoples. So if you have any cunning, use it against Me now! On that Day, woe to the deniers! (Surat al-Mursalat: 34-40)

That day, the disbeliever feels an inner loathing for his own deeds and his own self. However, God's feeling of aversion is more intense.

Those who were disbelievers will be thus addressed: God's abhorrence of you, when you were called to the faith but then chose to disbelieve, is even greater than your hatred of yourselves. (Surat al-Mu min: 10)

Encountering God's wrath, the disbeliever falls into a state of profound hopelessness and sorrow. He is ashamed and wishes he would never rise from the dead. He wishes that death had put an end to his life for all eternity. He then realises that death is not an end, but only a beginning. And there is no death other than this. Their state of mind is thus expressed as follows:

It may be that those who are disbelievers will wish that they had been Muslims. (Surat al-Hijr: 2)

In contrast to this, the way believers will give their accounts will be quite easy. After giving his account, the believer will remain in eternal bliss. After all, he lived by the principles laid down by his Creator and his sins are forgiven by God, the Merciful. He thus attains paradise, a place filled with God's boundless favours and is kept remote from hellfire.

O Man! You are toiling laboriously towards your Lord but meet Him you will! As for him who is given his Book in his right hand, he will be given an easy reckoning and return to his family joyfully. (Surat al-Inshiqaq: 6-9)

The Desperateness of Disbelievers

On that day, the disbeliever intends to comply with all orders, yet, he fails to do so. That is because, he no longer has any energy to accomplish anything. When he is called upon to prostrate himself, he wants to do so. However, he cannot even succeed in doing this. Just like a person having a bad dream, he wants to scream but cannot. Neither can he move his legs or hands. Fear, terror and despair leave him almost paralysed:

On the Day when legs are bared and they are called on to prostrate themselves, they will not be able to do so. Their eyes will be downcast, darkened by debasement; for they were called on to prostrate themselves when they were in full possession of their faculties. (Surat al-Qalam: 42-43)

Calling upon the disbeliever to prostrate himself serves a purpose: to intensify the regret and sorrow he feels at not having complied with the call made when he was in the world, and to remind him that this disobedience, unlikely to be compensated for, will be a source of eternal sorrow and hopelessness. It is already known to God that the disbeliever is unable to prostrate himself. It is only if God wills, that is impossible to prostrate oneself, worship and be a servant to Him. Likewise, believers are honoured with faith only by God's will and favour.

The Qur'an also informs us about how believers and disbelievers will look on that day. The inner joy of believers is seen on their faces; their eyes shine brightly. Disbelievers, on the other hand, realise how they ungratefully and unwisely conducted themselves and start to wait for the torment they will be subjected to. Contrary to the joyful expressions on the faces of believers, disbelievers' faces are dull and gloomy:

You love this fleeting world and you disregard the hereafter. There will be faces that Day which will be radiant, gazing at their Lord. And there will be faces that Day which will be glowering, realising that a back-breaking blow has fallen. (Surat al-Qiyamah: 20-25)

Seeing Hell

It is popularly believed that only disbelievers can see hell. This is, however, only partially true. God informs us in Surah Maryam that all people, both believers and disbelievers, will be assembled around hell on their knees:

Man says, When I am dead, will I then be brought back to life again? Does not man recall that We created him out of the void? By your Lord, We will collect them and the devils together. Then We will assemble them around Hell on their knees. Then We will drag out from every sect the one among them most insolent towards the All-Merciful. Then it is We who will know best those most deserving to roast in it. There is not one of you who will not come to it. That is the final decision of your Lord. Then We will rescue those who feared Us and We will leave the wrongdoers in it on their knees. (Surah Maryam: 66-72)

As we see from the above verses, on the Day of Resurrection, people will be gathered around hell on their knees. Disbelievers and believers alike will all hear the horrible noise and roar of the fire together and witness stunning images. However, believers are saved after some time and disbelievers are left on their knees. Then, they are cast into the hellfire.

Having a better grasp of God's wrath and being grateful to Him can be considered as one of the purposes of the presence of believers among the crowd gathered around hell. A believer witnessing what hell looks like comprehends how a great favour the faith granted to him is. Because hell is a terrible place, even being saved from torment means bliss for the human being.

Witnessing hell, the believer can make comparisons and thus better appreciate paradise, a place of blessings where he will reside for all eternity. Even in the world, the greatest boon is to be saved from pain. For instance, someone facing the danger of being frozen on a mountain rejoices at finding an old hut with a fireplace. He perceives this hut almost as if it were a luxury hotel room. For someone who has not

eaten anything for days a loaf of bread is a feast. The end of pain is an unsurpassable reason for joy, happiness, peace and gratefulness.

A believer who sees hell at close quarters and is saved from it attains this kind of bliss. Moreover, being rewarded with paradise makes believers attain the success mentioned in the Qur'an. Having seen the greatest torment in hell, the believer very well understands the value of paradise overflowing with blessings. For the rest of his eternal life, he never forgets what hell looks like and hence takes greater pleasure in paradise.

On the Day of Judgement, people hear the following words of those who recognise believers and disbelievers from their faces:

There will be a dividing wall between them and on the ramparts there will be men who recognise everyone by his look. They will call out to the people of the Garden: Peace be upon you! But they will not enter it yet for all their ardent desire to do so. When they turn their eyes towards the inmates of the Fire, they will say, Our Lord, do not cast us among these wrongdoers!

The Companions of the Ramparts will call out to men they recognise by their mark, saying, What you amassed was of no use to you. Likewise your arrogance. Are these the people you swore would never earn God's mercy? (Again turning to the blessed, they will say): Enter the Garden. You will feel no fear and know no sorrow. (Surat al-Araf: 46-49)

This is the time when believers, the best of creatures, (Surat al-Bayyinah:7) and disbelievers, the worst of creatures, (Surat al-Bayyinah: 6) are separated from one another. This day is described in the Qur'an as follows:

When the Messengers' time is appointed until what day is that deferred? Until the Day of Decision. And what will teach you what the Day of Decision is? On that Day, woe to the deniers! Did We not destroy the earlier peoples, then cause others to follow them? That is how We deal with evil-doers. On that Day, woe to the deniers! (Surat al-Mursalat: 11-19)

This Day of Decision begins with death and continues with resurrection and the giving of accounts and ends when people are sent to their eternal abodes. In the Surah Qaf, the journey believers and disbelievers take to their real abodes is related as follows:

The throes of death come revealing the truth. That is what you were trying to evade! The Trumpet will be blown. That is the Day of the Threat. Every soul will come along with one who drives it on and one who testifies against it. One will say: You were heedless of this so We have stripped you of your covering and today your sight is sharp. His inseparable comrade will say, My testimony is ready to hand. (And it is said): Cast into Hell every obdurate disbeliever, impediment of good, doubt-causing aggressor, who has set up another deity besides God. Hurl him into the terrible punishment. His inseparable comrade

will say, Our Lord, I did not make him overstep the limits. He was, in any case, far astray. He will say, Do not argue in My presence when I gave you advance warning of the Threat. My Word, once given, is not subject to change and I do not wrong My slaves. On the Day He says to Hell, Are you full? it will ask, Are there no more to come? And the Garden will be brought up close to the righteous. (And it is said): This is what you were promised. It is for every careful penitent: those who fear the All-Merciful in the Unseen and come with a contrite heart. Enter it in peace. This is the Day of Timeless Eternity. (Surah Qaf: 19-34)

HELL

...He (the denier) reflected and he schemed. Curse him, how he schemed! Again curse him, how he schemed! Then he looked. Then he frowned and glowered. Then he drew back and was proud. He said, This is nothing but magic from the past. This is nothing but the words of a mere mortal! I will roast him in the Fire. What will convey to you what the Fire is? It does not spare anyone and it does not ease up, ceaselessly scorching the flesh. (Surat al-Muddaththir: 18-29)

INTRODUCTION

Deceptions and Facts

The place, where disbelievers will remain for all eternity, is specially created to give pain to the human body and soul.

That is solely because the disbelievers are guilty of great wrong and God's justice entails their punishment. Being ungrateful and rebellious to the Creator, the One who gives man a soul, is the greatest wrong that can be committed in the whole universe. Therefore, in the hereafter there is grievous punishment for such a deadly sin. That is the purpose that hell serves. Man is created to be a servant of God. If he denies the main purpose of his creation, then he surely receives what he deserves. God states the following in one of the verses:

...those who are too arrogant to serve Me will surely find themselves in Hell - in humiliation! (Surat al-Mu min: 60)

Since the majority of people will be sent to hell at the end, and punishment in it is timeless and eternal, the main aim, the basic goal of people, should be to avoid hell. The biggest threat to man is hell and nothing can be more important than saving one's soul from it.

Despite this, almost all people on earth live in a state of unawareness. They occupy themselves with other troubles in their daily lives. They work for months, years, even decades for insignificant issues, yet never think of the biggest threat, the gravest danger to their eternal existence. Hell is right next to them; yet, they are too blind to see it:

Closer and closer to mankind comes their Reckoning: yet they pay no heed and turn away. To each renewed Message from their Lord they listen as in jest: their hearts are set on pleasure. (Surat al-Anbiya : 1-3)

Such people engage in vain effort. They spend all their lives chasing after chimerical goals. Most of the time, their goals are being promoted in the company, marrying, having a "happy family life", earning a lot of money or being an advocate of a useless ideology. While doing these things, these people are unaware of the big threat ahead of them. One catches the insensitive attitude they have towards hell even from their manner of referring to the subject. The ignorant society composed of such people frequently utter the word "hell" without having a thorough grasp of its meaning. Now and then, this word becomes the subject of jokes. However, nobody gives as much thought to the subject as it deserves. For these people, hell is an imaginary fiction.

In fact, hell is more real than this world. The world will cease to exist after some time, but hell will remain for all eternity. God, the Creator of the universe and the world and all the delicate balances in

nature, has likewise created the hereafter, paradise and hell. A grievous punishment is promised to all disbelievers and hypocrites.

Hell, the worst place that can ever be imagined, is a source of the sheerest torture. This torture and pain is not similar to any kind of pain in this world. It is much more intense than any pain or misery one can ever face in this world. It is surely the work of God, the Exalted in Wisdom.

A second reality about hell is that, for everyone, this torture is timeless and eternal. The majority of people in this ignorant society have a common misconception about hell: they assume that they will serve their sentence in hell for a certain period and then they will be forgiven. This is only wishful thinking. This belief is also particularly widespread among those who assume themselves believers yet neglect to perform their duties towards God. They assume that there is no limit to the extent that they may indulge in worldly pleasures. According to the same belief, they will attain paradise after receiving temporary punishment in hell. However, the end awaiting them is more painful than they expect. Hell is definitely a place of everlasting torment. In the Qur'an, it is often stressed that punishment for disbelievers is constant and everlasting. The following verse makes this fact explicit: They will dwell therein for ages. (Surat an-Naba : 23)

The rationale stating: I will serve my sentence for a while and then I will be forgiven is bigoted thinking indulged in by some to comfort themselves. Indeed, God draws attention to this in the Qur'an, the same rationale having also been given utterance to by the Jews:

They say, The Fire will only touch us for a number of days. Say, Have you made a contract with God - then God will not break His contract - or are you rather saying about God what you do not know? No indeed! Those who accumulate bad actions and are surrounded by their mistakes, are the Companions of the Fire, remaining in it timelessly, for ever. (Surat al-Baqarah: 80-81)

Being ungrateful and rebellious to the Creator who gave hearing and sight and intelligence and affections (Surat an-Nahl: 78) certainly deserves unceasing suffering. The excuses one puts forward will not save one from hell. The verdict given for those who display indifference - or worse, animosity - towards the religion of his Creator is certain and invariable:

When Our Signs are recited to them - Clear Signs - you can detect denial in the faces of those who are disbelievers. They all but assault those who recite Our Signs to them! Say: Shall I inform you of something worse than that? The Fire which God has promised those who are disbelievers. What an evil destination! (Surat al-Hajj: 72)

Those who remained arrogant to God and harboured enmity towards believers will hear the following words on the Day of Judgement:

So enter the gates of Hell, to dwell therein. Thus evil indeed is the abode of the arrogant. (Surat an-Nahl: 29)

The most fearsome characteristic of hell is its eternal nature. Once in hell, there will be no return. The only reality is hell together with many other kinds of torture. Encountering such an eternal torture, a person falls into total despair. He has no further expectations. This state is described in the Qur'an as follows:

As for those who are rebellious and wicked, their abode will be the Fire. Every time they wish to get away from it, they will be forced into it, and they will be told: Taste the Penalty of the Fire, which you were wont to reject as false. (Surat as-Sajdah: 20)

They will want to get out of the Fire but they will not be able to. They will have an everlasting punishment. (Surat al-Ma'idah: 37)

THE TORMENTS OF HELL BEING TAKEN TO HELL

Hell...This place, where the attributes of God, the al-Jabbar (the Compeller), the al-Qahhar (the Subduer) and al-Muntaqim (the Avenger) are manifested for all eternity is specially created to inflict suffering on man. In the Qur'an, hell is depicted as if it were a living being. This creature is full of rage and hatred for disbelievers. Since the day it was created, it waits impatiently to take its revenge upon disbelievers. Hell's desire for disbelievers can never be quenched. Its hatred for disbelievers makes it mad. When it encounters those who deny, its rage intensifies. The creation of this fire serves a single purpose; to inflict an unbearable torment. Indeed, it will carry out its duty and give the gravest of all pain.

After the judgement of disbelievers takes place in the presence of God, they will take their Books from the left side. This is the moment they will be sent to hell for all eternity. For the disbelievers, there is no opportunity to escape. There will be billions of people, yet this huge crowd will not offer the disbelievers an opportunity to escape or to be ignored. No one can hide himself in this crowd. Those sent to hell come with a witness and one who drives the soul on:

The Trumpet will be blown. That is the Day of the Threat. Every soul will come along with one who drives it on, and one who testifies against it. One will say You were heedless of this, so We have stripped you of your covering and today your sight is sharp. His inseparable comrade will say, My testimony is ready to hand. (And it is said): Cast into Hell every obdurate disbeliever, impeders of good, doubt-causing aggressor, who has set up another deity besides God. Hurl him into the terrible punishment. (Surah Qaf: 20-26)

Disbelievers are driven towards this terrible place. In the words of the Qur'an, they are driven in divisions. However, on the way to hell, fear is inspired in the hearts of disbelievers. The horrible noise and roar of the fire is heard from a distance:

When they are flung into it, they will hear it gasping harshly as it seethes. It all but bursts with rage. Each time a group is flung into it, its custodians will question them: Did no warner come to you? (Surat al-Mulk: 7-8)

From the verses, it is obvious that when they are recreated, all disbelievers will understand what will befall them. They will remain all alone; no friends, relatives, or supporters will be there to help. Disbelievers will not have the strength to be arrogant and they will look with averted eyes. One of the verses describes this moment as follows:

You will see them as they are exposed to it, abject in their abasement, glancing around them furtively. Those who have faith will say, Truly the losers are those who lose

themselves and their followers on the Day of Resurrection. The wrongdoers suffer an everlasting punishment. (Surat ash-Shura: 45)

Entrance to Hell and the Gates of Hell

Ultimately disbelievers arrive at the gates of hell. The Qur'an describes the events there as follows:

Those who are disbelievers will be driven to Hell in companies and when they arrive there and its gates are opened its custodians will say to them, Did Messengers from yourselves not come to you, reciting your Lord's Signs to you and warning you of the meeting on this Day of yours? They will say, Indeed they did, but the decree of punishment is justly carried out against the disbelievers. They will be told, Enter the gates of Hell and stay there timelessly, for ever. How evil is the abode of the arrogant! (Surat az-Zumar: 71-72)

For each one of the groups a special gate of hell is created. Depending upon the extent of their rebellion against God, people are subjected to a classification. Disbelievers are placed in their individual locations in hell according to the sins they have committed. It is stated thus in the Qur'an:

He will say, Enter the Fire together with the nations of jinn and men who have passed away before you. Each time a nation enters, it will curse its sister nation, until, when they are all gathered together in it, the last of them will say to the first, Our Lord, those are the ones who misguided us, so give them a double punishment in the Fire. He will say, Each will receive double. But you do not know it. (Surat al-Araf: 38)

Another verse provides detailed information about hell:

... Hell is the promised meeting-place for all of them. It has seven gates and each gate has its allotted share. (Surat al-Hijr: 43-44)

Those subjected to the severest torment will be the hypocrites. These are the people who behaved as if they were believers, although they had no faith in their hearts:

The hypocrites are in the lowest level of the Fire. You will not find any one to help them. (Surat an-Nisa : 145)

Hell is full of hatred; its hunger for disbelievers can never be quenched. Despite the many disbelievers thrown into it, it asks for more:

On the Day He says to Hell, Are you full? it will ask, Are there no more to come? (Surah Qaf: 30)

Once it catches, it keeps for all eternity. God describes hell in the Qur'an as follows:

I will roast him in hellfire. What will convey to you what hellfire is? It does not spare anyone and it does not ease up, ceaselessly scorching the flesh. (Surat al-Muddaththir: 26-29)

Surely, entrance to hell is also painful. People are thrown into it. In the words of another verse, they are bundled (Surat ash-Shu ara: 94) into it.

An Endless Life Behind Locked Doors

As soon as disbelievers arrive in hell, the doors are locked behind them. Here, they see the most fearsome sights. They immediately understand that they will be presented to hell, the place where they will remain for all eternity. The closed doors indicate that there will be no salvation. God describes the state of disbelievers as follows:

And (as for) those who disbelieve in Our signs, they are the people of the left hand. On them is fire closed over. (Surat al-Balad: 19-20)

The torment in the Qur'an is described as a severe punishment (Surah Al 'Imran: 176), a heavy doom (Surah Al Imran: 4), and a painful chastisement (Surah Al 'Imran: 21). The descriptions of it are inadequate to give a full understanding of the punishment in hell. Being unable to suffer even minor burns in the world, man cannot grasp being exposed to fire for all eternity. What is more, the pain that a fire gives in the world does not stand comparison with the severe torture of hell. No pain can be similar to that of hell:

None punishes as He will punish on that day! None binds as He then will bind. (Surat al-Fajr: 25-26)

There is life in hell. Yet it is a life in which every moment is full of torture and anguish. In that life, every type of physical, mental and psychological torment, along with various types of torture and disgrace rage unchecked. To compare it to any distress in the world is impossible.

People in hell perceive pain through all five senses. Their eyes see disgusting and terrible images; their ears hear frightening screams, roars and cries; their noses fill with terrible and acrid smells; their tongues taste the most unbearable, vile tastes. They feel hell deep in their cells; this is a maddeningly severe pain that is difficult to imagine in this world. Their skin, their internal organs and their whole body are wracked and they writhe in pain.

The people of hell are very resistant to pain and they never die. Hence, they can never save themselves from torture. Their skins are mended as they burn; the same torture continues for all eternity; the intensity of torture never decreases. God says in the Qur'an: Burn in the flames of hell. It makes no difference whether you bear it with patience, or not. (Surat at-Tur: 16)

No less than physical pain, mental pain is also severe in hell. People in hell have profound regrets, fall into hopelessness, feel desperate and spend ages in despair. Every corner, every place in hell is designed to give mental suffering. The suffering is eternal; if it were to end after millions or billions years, even such a long-term possibility could arouse fervent hopes and remain a strong reason for happiness and joy. Yet, the eternity of torture will inspire a kind of hopelessness that cannot be compared to any similar feeling in this world.

According to the Qur'an, hell is a place where extreme pain is experienced. It is narrow, noisy, smoky and gloomy, injecting feelings of insecurity into the human soul. It is a place characterised by disgusting smells, fires burning deep in the heart, nasty food and drink, garments of fire and liquid pitch. These are the basic characteristics of hell. There is a life going on in this terrible environment, however. The people of hell have sharp senses. They hear, talk and argue, and they try to escape from suffering. They burn in the fire, become thirsty and hungry, and feel regret. They are tormented by feelings of guilt. What is more important, they want the pain to be relieved.

The people of hell live a life infinitely more debased than that of the animals in this dirty and disgusting environment. The only nourishment they have is the fruits of the bitter thorn and the tree of zaqqum. Their drink, on the other hand, is blood and pus. Meanwhile, fire engulfs them everywhere. The anguish in hell is depicted as follows:

Those who reject our Signs, We shall soon cast into hell. As often as their skins are roasted through, We shall change them for fresh skins, so that they may taste the penalty. For God is Exalted in Power and Wise. (Surat an-Nisa : 56)

With skin rent, flesh burned, and blood splattering all over, they are chained and whipped. Hands tied to their necks, they are cast into the core of hell. Angels of punishment, in the meantime, place those who are guilty in beds of fire, with their covers also of fire. The coffins they are placed in are likewise covered with fire. Disbelievers constantly scream to be saved from such anguish. And in return, they often receive more humiliation and torture . They are left all alone.

These scenes will all come true. They are real. They are more real than our daily lives.

Those who among men serve God, as it were, on the verge (Surat al-Hajj: 11) ; those who say the Fire shall not touch us but for a few numbered days (Surah Al Imran: 24); those who make money, status, careers and other such material things the main goals of their lives and accordingly neglect the good pleasure of God; those who alter the commands of God in accordance with their own wishes and desires; those who interpret the Qur'an according to their own interests; those who go astray from the right path - in brief - all disbelievers and hypocrites will abide in hell, except for those upon whom God bestows His mercy and forgiveness. This is the conclusive word of God and will certainly be borne out:

If We had so willed, We could certainly have brought every soul its true guidance: but the word from Me will come true, I will fill Hell with jinn and men all together. (Surat as-Sajdah: 13)

These people are already destined for hell:

Many are the jinn and men we have made for Hell: They have hearts with which they do not understand, eyes with which they do not see and ears with which they do not hear. They are like cattle - nay more misguided: for they are heedless (of warning). (Surat al-A'raf: 179)

The Torment of Fire

In this life of hell, the greatest and most basic torment is no doubt being exposed to fire. Unlike other forms of torture, fire, as a distinctive feature of hell, leaves irreparable traces on the human body. It is a torment permeating the human body down to its cells. The people of hell are thrown into this Raging Blaze (Surat al-Ma'arij: 15). They burn in a Searing Blaze (Surat al-Furqan: 11) which is a Fire which rages (Surat al-Layl: 14). In a verse of the Qur'an, it is said:

But as for him whose balance is light, his motherland is hellfire. And what will convey to you what that is? A raging Fire! (Surat al-Qari'ah: 8-11)

From the verses, we understand that fire rages all over hell. In this pit, there is not a single place which remains protected against fire. Fire reaches every corner of hell. While being subjected to other forms of physical and spiritual tortures, the disbeliever is constantly in touch with fire. The hellfire is enormously big. In the Qur'an, analogies are drawn between the sparks of fire and great sparks the size of castles and a herd of yellow camels to describe the intensity and magnitude of the fire.

On that Day, woe to the deniers! Proceed to that which you denied!

Proceed to a shadow which forks into three but gives no shade or protection from the flames, shooting up great sparks the size of castles, like a herd of yellow camels. (Surat al-Mursalat: 28-33)

Disbelievers devote all their energy to escaping the flames, but it is not allowed. It is a fire which calls for all who drew back and turned away. (Surat al-Ma'arij: 17) Another verse tells of the fate of the deniers:

But as for those who are deviators, their refuge is the Fire. Every time that they want to get out, they are put straight back into it again and they are told, Taste the punishment of the Fire, which you denied. (Surat as-Sajdah: 20)

The screams and sighs of those who are subjected to such torment can be heard all over. Just these terrifying screams and sighs are a special source of torment for disbelievers:

There will be sighing for them. (Surat an-Anbiya : 100)

As for those who are wretched, they will be in the Fire, where they will sigh and gasp. (Surah Hud: 106)

Fire causes unbearable pain. Human beings are unable to endure even such pain as the flame of a match gives. However, any pain we experience in this world is insignificant as compared to that of hellfire. No one can be exposed to fire in the world over a long period of time. He either dies in 5-10 seconds or feels the pain for a limited period of time. However, hellfire is horrible; it does not kill but only inflicts pain. People in hell will be subjected to a fire which will abide for all eternity. Knowing that this torment will never end makes hell's inmates fall into a state of utter hopelessness. They feel desperate and experience a sense of total destruction.

A burned face is the most undesirable aspect of torment. That is because the face is important in being the part of the body which gives one a feeling of pride. It gives a person an identity and it is the most significant expression of what we call I. Often, the features of being ugly or beautiful are attributed to the face. Upon seeing photographs of a person with a severe burn on his face, people shrink and immediately turn to God asking for protection for themselves against such a disaster. Nobody wants to be struck down by such misery. However, disbelievers are heedless of one important fact; they are gradually approaching a similar end, and an incredibly severe one. The pain of hellfire penetrates the entire human body. However, when the face is exposed to fire, it becomes an unbearable torture. Eyes, ears, nose, tongue and skin, in brief, all sensory organs are located in this important part of the body. Any threat to the face, albeit minor, elicits a strong reflex response. In hell however, the face is scalded. In this way, the most vulnerable part of the body is injured the most severely. This torment is depicted in the following verses:

They will say on the Day their faces are rolled over in the Fire, If only we had obeyed God and obeyed the Messenger! (Surat al-Ahzab:66)

...wearing shirts of tar, their faces enveloped in the Fire. (Surah Ibrahim: 50)

The Fire will sear their faces, making them grimace horribly in it, their lips drawn back from their teeth. (Surat al-Mu minun: 104)

The Firewood for Hellfire and Boiling Water

In the Qur'anic descriptions regarding the way disbelievers burn in hellfire, we come across an arresting expression: disbelievers are referred to as firewood for Hellfire. Their burning is dissimilar to the burning of any other thing in fire. Disbelievers themselves make up the fuel of the fire:

The deviators will be firewood for Hellfire. (Surat al-Jinn:15)

Wood the kindling for fire, burns longer than any other material and with a greater intensity. Likewise, disbelievers become the wood for this fire which they once upon a time denied. This fact is made manifest in the following verses:

You who have faith! Safeguard yourselves and those who are close to you from a Fire whose fuel is people and stones.... (Surat at-Tahrim: 6)

As for those who are disbelievers, their wealth and children will not help them against God in any way. They are fuel for the Fire. (Surah Al Imran: 10)

You and what you worship besides God are fuel for Hell. You will go down into it. (Surat al-Anbiya : 98)

As well as the people serving as wood, there is also real wood to kindle the fire. Yet, this is another source of torment. Disbelievers, who used to be very close in the world, husband and wife, for instance carry wood for each other's fire. Abu Lahab and his wife are an example:

Ruin to the hands of Abu Lahab and ruin to him! His wealth has not helped him nor anything he has earned. He will burn in a Flaming Fire. And so will his wife, the firewood-carrier, with a rope of twisted fibre round her neck. (Surat al-Masad: 1-5)

This is the break-up of all bonds in this world. Disbelievers, who used to say that they were very much in love and rebelled against God together, build the fires of one another in hell. One's spouse, close relatives and all one's intimate friends will become enemies. Treachery will know no bounds.

The fire fed by living and non-living wood also boils the water that scalds disbelievers. Skin, one of the vital organs stretched all over the human body, and hardly a few millimetres in thickness, makes one perceive the outer world by the sense of touch. Including the genital organs, all vital parts of body like the face, hands, arms, legs the organs to which one attaches the utmost importance are covered by skin. As well as being the organ by which one takes pleasure, owing to its sensitivity, the human skin can become a major source of pain. It is especially vulnerable to fire and boiling liquids. Fire scorches the skin, boiling water scalds it. Scalding water wracks the skin completely; hardly a piece of skin remains unhurt. The thin skin first swells and then becomes inflamed, inflicting a severe pain. Neither physical charm, material wealth, strength, nor fame, in brief, nothing renders a person resistant to the

injury done by scalding water. In the words of the Qur'an, ...they will have scalding water to drink and a painful punishment because they were disbelievers. (Surat al-An'am:70) In another verse, it is said:

And if he is one of the misguided deniers, there is the hospitality of scalding water and roasting in the Blazing Fire. This is indeed the Truth of Certainty. (Surat al-Waqi'ah: 92-95)

One of the verses describes this form of torment as follows:

Seize him and drag him bodily into the middle of the Blazing Fire. Then pour the punishment of boiling water on his head. Taste that! You are the mighty one, the noble one! This is the very thing you used to doubt. (Surat ad-Dukhan: 47-50)

These aside, there are other forms of anguish inflicted by fire. Branding is one of them; people of hell are branded with red-hot metals. However, these metals are actually the possessions disbelievers ascribed as partners to God in the world:

...As for those who hoard up gold and silver and do not spend it in the Way of God, give them the news of a painful punishment. The Day will surely come when they are heated up in the fire of Hell and their foreheads, sides and backs are branded with it: This is what you hoarded for yourselves, so taste what you were hoarding! (Surat at-Tawbah: 34-35)

Other Forms of Torment

Contrary to the received wisdom, hell is not merely a giant oven. The people of hell will be exposed to fire. This is true. However, the torment in hell is not limited only to burning. The people of hell are also engulfed by other physical and psychological torments.

Various methods and equipment are employed to subject someone to torture in this world. Often torture cripples its victims. Sometimes they die of the pain. Those who survive become mentally distorted. Yet, the fact remains that the techniques employed for torture in this world are incomparably simpler than those of hell. The people of hell will undergo very different and severe tortures. In the case of a person who is electrocuted, the electricity given as well as the vulnerability of man to electricity are both created by God. Many other unknown sources of pain and the weaknesses of man all form part of God's perfect knowledge. Accordingly, God will inflict the most severe of all tortures. This is the law of God, the al-Qahhar (the Subduer).

In the words of the Qur'an, in hell, there is misery everywhere. There is no avoidance of torment; it engulfs the people of hell from all sides. They can neither fend off the torment nor avoid it:

They ask you to hasten the punishment, but Hell already encircles the disbelievers. (Surat al-Ankabut: 54-55)

Besides, there are other sources of suffering in hell. These are enumerated in the Qur'an as follows:

Hell, where they will roast. What an evil resting-place! This! So let them taste it - boiling water and scalding pus, and other such torments. (Surah Sad: 56-58)

From this and other verses, we understand that there may be various kinds of torments in hell. The most apparent ones, such as fire and humiliation, are alluded to in the Qur'an. However, the people of hell are by no means immune to other forms of suffering. For instance, besides fire and boiling water, being attacked by wild animals, being thrown into a pit of insects, scorpions and snakes, being bitten by mice, suffering from wormy wounds and many others beyond one's imagination are likely to afflict the wrongdoers simultaneously.

Hotness, Darkness, Smoke and Narrowness

Narrow, hot and dirty places are the most troublesome to be in for any individual in this world. Humidity and heat cause a feeling of suffocation; breathing, an essential function of body, is rendered difficult by high levels of humidity. Not being able to breathe causes intense weariness; the breast constricts. Even shade does not provide any relief in very hot weather and humidity. An unseen yet thick encompassing layer of air becomes suffocating. Even the levels of temperature and humidity in a sauna are difficult to tolerate. Unable to withstand intense steam for only ten minutes, a person locked in a sauna faints in a short while. A longer stay means death.

This stifling atmosphere dominates hell. Man, who takes elaborate precautions against becoming over-heated in this world, feels desperate in hell. Hell is hotter than any desert and dirtier and more oppressive than any place imaginable. Heat penetrates the human body; it is felt deep within the cells. For disbelievers, there is no possibility of relief or of cooling down there. In the Qur'an, the situation of the people of hell is depicted as follows:

And the Companions of the Left: what of the Companions of the Left? They shall dwell amid searing blasts and scalding water and the murk of thick black smoke, providing no coolness and no pleasure. (Surat al-Waqi ah: 41-44)

On that Day, woe to the deniers! Proceed to that which you denied! Proceed to a shadow which forks into three but gives no shade or protection from the flames. (Surat al-Mursalat: 28-31)

In such a dense atmosphere, being confined to a narrow place proves to be another form of torment. This punishment is described as follows:

When they are flung into a narrow place in it, shackled together in chains, they will cry out there for destruction. Do not cry out today for just one destruction, cry out for many destructions! (Surat al-Furqan: 13-14)

Being locked in a narrow place causes maddening anguish in this world. Solitary confinement is one of the severest punishments for prisoners. Being stuck in a car for hours after an accident or remaining locked in the wreckage of an earthquake-ravaged city is considered to be among the gravest disasters. However, such examples are insignificant beside their counterparts in hell. After all, someone trapped among the rubble either loses consciousness and dies, or is rescued alive after some time. In both cases, the pain lasts for a certain period of time.

This does not hold true for hell, however. There is no end to the pain in hell and thus no hope. In a dirty, stuffy, gloomy atmosphere with smoke filling the air, the disbeliever, hands tied to his neck and cast into a small room, is afflicted with anguish. He struggles, strives for salvation, but to no avail. He cannot even move. Ultimately, he begs to be allowed to disappear, as stated in the verse, and wishes only that he were dead. This request is simply returned. In that narrow hole he is confined in, he remains for months, years and may be for hundreds of years. A growing trouble fills his heart, while he begs thousands of times for his own disappearance. Once saved, he will not taste salvation, but will encounter another face of hell.

Food, Drinks and Garments

The world abounds in countless varieties of delicious and nutritious food. Each one is a blessing from God. Various kinds of meat, fruits and vegetables with innumerable colours, tastes and odours, dairy products, honey and many other nutrients produced by animals and spices, had all been created specially by God and generously given for the service of man by the time this world was created. Moreover, the human senses have been created in such a way as to perceive all these delicious tastes. By the inspiration of God, man has an appetite for dainty food, while he is disgusted at rotten and nasty food, pus and so on. This is another inspiration by God.

Favours, far greater than the ones in this world, are kept prepared in paradise, and from them believers will derive the benefit for all eternity. This is the gift of God, the One who gives blessings and prosperity. The people of hell, on the other hand, in retribution for the wicked deeds they engaged in in this world, are kept distant from the favours of God, the ar-Razzaq, (Surat ash-Shuara: 19) so that all they encounter is torment:

On the Day when those who were disbelievers are exposed to the Fire, (it will be said): You dissipated the good things you had in your worldly life and enjoyed yourself in so doing. So today you are being repaid with the punishment of humiliation for being arrogant on the earth without any right and for being deviators. (Surat al-Ahqaf: 20)

There shall be no further favours for them. Even meeting the most essential needs turns out to be a torment. Food is specially created by God as a source of suffering. The only edible things are the fruits of the bitter thorn and the tree of zaqqum, which neither nourish nor satiate. They only give pain, tearing apart mouth, throat and stomach and giving off a disgusting taste and odour. In the Qur'an, we find descriptions of both the glorious beauties and the delicious food peculiar to paradise as well as the unendurable food of the people of hell:

Is that better by way of hospitality or the tree of Zaqqum which We have made to be an ordeal for the wrongdoers? It is a tree that emerges in the depths of the Blazing Fire. Its fruits are just like the heads of devils. They will eat from it and fill their bellies with it. (Surat as-Saffat: 62-66)

They have no food but a bitter thorny bush which neither nourishes nor satisfies. (Surat al-Ghashiyah: 6-7)

The people of hell, being rebellious and ungrateful to God, deserve such a requital. As a punishment, they encounter due hospitality. In Surat al-Waqi ah, this is related as follows:

Before that they were living in luxury, persisting in immense wrongdoing and saying, When we are dead and turned to dust and bones, shall we then be raised again or our forefathers, the earlier peoples? Say: The earlier and the later peoples will certainly all be gathered on an appointed day. Then you, you misguided people, you deniers, will eat from the tree of Zaqqum, filling your stomachs with it and drink scalding water on top of it, slurping like thirst-crazed camels. This will be their fare on the Day of Judgment! (Surat al-Waqi ah: 45-56)

In the world, one occasionally suffers from a severe soar throat or a stomach ache. However, in hell, hardly a minute goes by without suffering from the severest of all these pains. The food disbelievers are entitled to eat chokes them. If they can ever manage to swallow, it seethes in the belly like molten brass (Surat ad-Dukhan: 44). It never satiates. This being the case, the people of hell suffer an everlasting, horrible hunger.

This torment is not limited to a single case; it repeats itself over and over again for all eternity. The people of hell feel hunger so intensely that, despite trying countless times, they can not help but eat the fruits of the bitter thorn, which make them writhe in pain. Then they rush to the boiling water. Yet, this water can never be digested. As stated in the verse above, they slurp like thirst-crazed camels. To make this suffering even more severe, disbelievers are driven to hell thirsty. (Surah Maryam: 86)

Aside from boiling water, another disgusting drink of the people of hell is pus. This fluid, the product of inflammation, one of the secretions in the human body with the most offensive odour, is the second choice of disbelievers. Pus is served to disbelievers together with blood. In another verse, there is

mention of pus served with boiling water, so as to make the believer taste the obscene taste of pus and perceive the torment of boiling water with all his senses.

Despite their being disgusting and unbearable, that disbelievers still drink them to meet their needs shows their craving for drink. Once they taste this torment, they run to another. This also lasts for all eternity. Due to a never-ending thirst, the people of hell writhe in affliction:

Not tasting any coolness there or any drink, except for boiling water and scalding pus a fitting recompense. (Surat an-Naba : 24-26)

Therefore here today he has no friend nor any food except exuding pus which no one will eat except those who were in error. (Surat al-Haqqah: 35-37)

Disbelievers struggle to swallow this mixture, but to no avail. Blood and pus choke them yet they never manage to die:

And beyond him is Hell where he will be given pus to drink. He gulps at it but can hardly swallow it down. Death comes at him from every side, but he does not die. And beyond him is relentless punishment. (Surah Ibrahim: 16-17)

In this desperate situation, by means of a special dialogue, dwellers of hell see the people of paradise. They witness the wonderful favours the people of paradise enjoy. This enormously adds to their torment. Meanwhile, the people of hell plead for some of their provisions. But this is a futile supplication.

The Companions of the Fire will call out to the Companions of the Garden, Throw down some water to us or some of what God has given you as provision. They will say, God has forbidden them to the disbelievers. (Surat al-A raf: 50)

Aside from the provisions, the garments of the people of hell are also specially designed for them. Human skin is a sensitive tissue; even touching a hot stove or an iron for a second gives an unbearable pain. In such a case, the afflicted person suffers for days, his wound becomes inflamed and swells. Hell, however, abounds in garments hotter than molten iron which turn into a flame which blankets the skin and viciously burns:

...Those who are disbelievers will have garments of fire cut out for them... (Surat al-Hajj: 19)

...wearing shirts of tar, their faces enveloped in the Fire. (Surah Ibrahim: 50)

They will have Hell as a resting-place and covering layers on top of them. That is how We repay wrongdoers. (Surat al-A raf: 41)

Angels of Punishment

Despite all the suffering they go through, there will not be a single soul to provide aid to the people of hell. No soul will be able to save them from it. Being abandoned will give them a bitter feeling of loneliness. Of the wrongdoer God says in the Qur'an: Therefore, here today, he has no friend (Surat al-Haqqah: 35). Among them, there will be only angels of punishment, who will inflict perpetual torture and suffering. These are extremely stern, merciless, terrifying guards, bearing the sole responsibility for inflicting severe torture on the people of hell. The sole purpose of their existence is to take revenge upon those who rebel against God, and they discharge their responsibility with due care and attention:

You who have faith! Safeguard yourselves and those who are close to you from a Fire whose fuel is people and stones. Harsh, terrible angels are in charge of it who do not disobey God in respect of any order He gives them and carry out what they are ordered to do. (Surat at-Tahrim: 6)

No indeed! If he does not desist, We will grab him by the forelock, his lying, sinful forelock. Let him call his attendants; We will call the Guards of Hell! No indeed! Do not obey him, but prostrate yourself and draw near. (Surat al-Alaq: 15-18)

These angels of punishment make disbelievers feel the wrath and rage of God upon them. They subject the people of hell to the severest, and most terrifying and degrading tortures.

One point deserves special mention here: angels of punishment, in fact, avoid the slightest injustice or cruelty. They merely administer the punishment in the way disbelievers deserve. These angels, the main manifestation of God's justice, are the holy beings who perform this duty with great pleasure and in a manner submissive to God.

THE SPIRITUAL TORMENT IN HELL

So far, we have mentioned the physical torment in hell. However, no less than this physical torment, there exists the spiritual torment of hell. Regret, hopelessness, humiliation, a feeling of being ill-treated, embarrassment, and disappointment are the feelings aroused by these various torments.

The Fire Reaching Right into the Heart

In one way or another, everyone tastes spiritual torment in this world. For instance, losing one's closest friend, spouse, or children or being deceived by someone in whom one has placed unquestioning trust fills the heart with an inexplicable grief. This grief is, in fact, a special form of torment which God implants in a person's heart as a penalty for idolising someone lost or someone who betrayed him. The individual needs essentially to demonstrate to God his feelings of love, appreciation, awe, devotion, trust and friendship. Failing to do this and simply extending these feelings to someone else, who is also created by God and thus in need of Him, in other words, associating partners with God, causes this torment. Idolaters taste this grief, so that they may take lessons from it, ask for pardon and turn to God before they are caught by death. The being which is idolised is not, necessarily, a human being. People have different things they cannot resist. Possessions, money, fortune, fame, in brief, anything or any concept being worshipped besides God may well be idolised.

The pain the loss of these idols inflicts on one's heart in this world is but a glimpse of the great torment one would undergo in hell. In essence, it is a warning. In hell, the real and non-ending form of this pain awaits an idolater. Sometimes, this spiritual torment becomes so intense that, one would prefer physical torture. Even, suicide is considered a salvation. This spiritual aspect of torment in hell is stressed in the Qur'an and described as a fire reaching right into the heart :

Woe to every faultfinding backbiter who has amassed wealth and hoarded it! He thinks his wealth will make him live for ever. No indeed! He will be flung into the Shatterer. And what will convey to you what the Shatterer is? The kindled Fire of God reaching right into the heart. It is sealed in above them in towering columns. (Surat al-Humazah: 1-9)

Even the severest pain in this world disappears in time. Its traces may remain for a while, but time eventually erases its most hurtful traces. In hell, however, an even more bitter pain penetrates the hearts of disbelievers like a fury and remains there eternally.

Apart from this, the spiritual torment produces a sensation somewhat between hopelessness and humiliation, rage and hatred. No less than physical pain, disbelievers are also subjected to an insufferable spiritual pain.

Humiliation

Many verses regarding hell inform us that a degrading, humiliating torment awaits disbelievers there. They incur this punishment due to their arrogance and pride.

In this world, one of the main goals of disbelievers is to make others envy them and appreciate their personality and social status. A distinguished career, children, beautiful mansions, cars, and similar other worldly passions mean more to the individual when they become a part of a vain display of himself. Indeed, in the Qur'an, boasting of one's wealth and properties are mentioned as being among the lures of this world.

This passion, namely boasting, turns in the hereafter to anguish which includes degradation as well as physical pain. That is because, the disbeliever forgot about God, who is Praiseworthy (Surat al-Baqarah: 267) and has taken his whims and desires to be his god (Surat al-Furqan: 43). For this reason, he has mainly busied himself in earning appreciation for himself rather than glorifying and praising God. He has built his life upon earning the pleasure of other people rather than earning God's approval. That is why he is blighted most when he is humiliated in front of other people.

The most horrible nightmare of a disbeliever is being disgraced and degraded in front of other people. There are even some people who would consider dying only to be appreciated rather than be disgraced. Adversities peculiar to hell have this feature at their core. The dismal state of the dwellers of hell is mainly due to their haughtiness. Never before have they been so utterly degraded. Numerous verses draw attention to this fact:

On the Day when those who were disbelievers are exposed to the Fire, (it will be said): You dissipated the good things you had in your worldly life and enjoyed yourself in so doing. So today you are being repaid with the punishment of humiliation for being arrogant on the earth without any right and for being deviators. (Surat al-Ahqaf: 20)

Those who are disbelievers should not imagine that the extra time We grant to them is good for them. We only allow them more time so that they will increase their evil-doing. They will have a humiliating punishment. (Surah Al Imran: 178)

Disbelievers are subjected to thousands of kinds of degrading treatment... even lower than that which animals receive in this world. Iron whips, shackles and collars are available only to humiliate. The faithless are tied to pillars, collared and chained.

In reality, humiliation is the essence of all the torments in hell. For instance, while being cast into the fire, they are degraded. This dreadful treatment starts from the moment the disbeliever is resurrected and chosen to be sent to hell. Furthermore, this punishment never abates.

Among billions of people, the disbeliever is taken by the angels and grabbed by his forelock and feet. In the words of the Qur'an, That Day no man or jinn will be asked about his sin...The evil-doers will be recognised by their mark and seized by their forelocks and their feet. (Surat ar-Rahman: 39-41)

In hell, the disbeliever has to come to terms with a type of treatment even worse than that which animals receive. Seized by his hair, he will be dragged along the ground and then cast into hell. Unable to resist, he will ask for help, but to no avail. A feeling of desperation only increases the torment:

No indeed! If he does not desist, We will grab him by the forelock, his lying, sinful forelock. Let him call his attendants; We will call the Guards of Hell! No indeed! Do not obey him, but prostrate yourself and draw near. (Surat al- Alaq: 15-18)

As the verses state, disbelievers will be shoved roughly into the Fire of Hell (Surat at-Tur: 13-14) and they will be herded headlong into Hell. (Surat al-Furqan: 34)

Similarly,

...those who perform bad actions will be flung head first into the Fire: Are you being repaid for anything other than what you did? (Surat an-Naml: 90)

...On the Day that they are dragged face-first into the Fire. (It will be said): Taste the scorching touch of Hell! (Surat al-Qamar: 48)

Degradation becomes even more intense once in hell. Apart from the physical pain, an intense feeling of degradation overwhelms the dwellers of hell:

Seize him and drag him bodily into the middle of the Blazing Fire. Then pour the punishment of boiling water on his head. Taste that! You are the mighty one, the noble one! This is the very thing you used to doubt. (Surat ad-Dukhan: 47-50)

To humiliate disbelievers, specially designed whips, collars and chains are used:

Seize him and truss him up. Then roast him in the Blazing Fire. Then bind him in a chain which is seventy cubits long. He used not to have faith in God the Magnificent, nor did he urge the feeding of the poor. (Surat al-Haqqah: 30-34)

In this world, except for those which are savage, even animals are not chained. And as for human beings, only the untreatable and dangerously mentally retarded are chained. This being the case, those sent to hell are the most inferior of all creatures. That is why, they are bound in a chain which is seventy cubits long , as stated in the above verse. Other verses also give details of this degrading torment:

...they have shackles and chains around their necks and are dragged along the ground into the boiling water and then are thrown into the Fire! Then they will be asked, Where are those besides God you associated with Him? (Surat al-Mu min: 71-73)

... If you are surprised at their blindness, what could be more surprising than their words: What, when we are turned to dust, shall we then be created all anew? These are the people who reject their Lord. Such people have iron collars round their necks. Such people are the Companions of the Fire, remaining in it timelessly, for ever. (Surat ar-Ra d: 5)

...that Day you will see the evil-doers yoked together in chains, wearing shirts of tar, their faces enveloped in the Fire. So that God may repay every self for what it earned. God is swift at reckoning. (Surah Ibrahim: 49-51)

Those who are disbelievers will have garments of fire cut out for them, and boiling water poured over their heads, which will melt the contents of their bellies as well as their skin, and they will be beaten with cudgels made of iron. (Surat al-Hajj: 19-21)

The dark spirit the degradation accounts for becomes apparent on the faces of the people of hell. In the world too, you can see the serious trouble of people who are disgraced, dishonoured and mistreated. The degradation in hell will also affect the appearance of dwellers of hell as stated in the following verse:

Some faces, that Day, will be humiliated. (Surat al-Ghashiyah: 2)

Apart from all the methods of humiliation we have mentioned so far, we have to keep in mind that various other forms of it will be exercised in hell. In the Qur'an, the term humiliation is used and a few examples are provided to illustrate it. However, we need to keep in mind that this is a broad term which can by no means be limited to a few examples. All feelings, treatment or events stirring up humiliation in man's soul in this world are included in this concept and they are all available in hell.

An Irrecoverable Regret

By the time he is resurrected, the disbeliever bitterly realises what he has done wrong. The regret caused by his irreparable wrong gives him a bad shaking up. His desperate situation is exacerbated by this profound regret.

When the disbeliever is confronted with the deeds he engaged in in this world, he understands that he has no longer any chance to restore any honour to his life. Yet he still asks for another opportunity. In this spirit, he wants to return to his old life to atone for his wrongdoing. Meanwhile, he never again wants to see his friends and beloved ones with whom he heedlessly enjoyed life. All friendships, all bonds are torn apart. The lifestyle and traditions people adhered to in life, their houses, cars, spouses, children,

companies, the ideologies they advocate lose their value and vanish. Quite simply, they are replaced by torment. The spirit caused by the terror of that day is related as follows:

If only you could see them when they are standing before the Fire and saying, Oh! If only we could be sent back again, we would not deny the Signs of our Lord and we would be among the believers. Indeed that which they were concealing before has been shown to them; and if they were sent back they would merely return to what they were forbidden to do. Truly, they are liars. They say, There is nothing but this life and we will not be raised again. If only you could see them when they are standing before their Lord. He will say, Is this not the Truth? They will say, Yes indeed, by our Lord! He will say, Then taste the punishment for your disbelief. (Surat al-An am: 27-30)

The Contention Among the People of Hell

Social status and hierarchical relations , which were assumed to be momentous in this world, lose all their meaning in hell. The state that both the people and their leaders are reduced to is such that they curse one another:

When those who were followed disown those who followed them, and they see the punishment, and the connection between them is cut, those who followed will say, If only we could have another chance, we would disown them just as they have disowned us. In that way God will show them their actions as a cause of anguish and remorse for them. They will never emerge from the Fire. (Surat al-Baqarah: 166-167)

They will say on the Day their heads roll about in the Fire, If only we had obeyed God and obeyed the Messenger! And they will say, Our Lord, we obeyed our masters and great men and they led us away from the right path. Our Lord, give them double the punishment and curse them many times over! (Surat al-Ahzab: 66-68)

Arguing in it with one another, they will say, By God, we were plainly misguided when We equated you with the Lord of all the worlds. It was only the evil-doers who misguided us and now we have no one to intercede for us; we do not have a single loyal friend. If only we could have another chance, then we would be among the believers!

There is certainly a Sign in that, yet most of them are not believers. (Surat ash-Shu ara: 96-103)

Among the people of hell encountering an eternal torment, contentiousness arises. Everyone accuses everyone else. Intimate friends hate one another. The main source of this hate is the friendship they

cherished in the world. They tempted one another into committing sins and offered encouragement in denial. All concepts regarding friendship have disappeared in the face of hellfire and all bonds strengthened in this life are broken. In the midst of all this crowd, everyone is alone, cursing all the others:

He will say, Enter the Fire together with the nations of jinn and men who have passed away before you. Each time a nation enters, it will curse its sister nation, until, when they are all gathered together in it, the last of them will say to the first, Our Lord, those are the ones who misguided us, so give them a double punishment in the Fire. He will say, Each will receive double. But you do not know it. (Surat al-A raf: 38)

Those who are disbelievers say, Our Lord, show us those jinn and men who misguided us and we will place them beneath our feet, so that they will be among the lowest of the low. (Surah Fussilat: 29)

When they are squabbling with one another in the Fire, the weak will say to those deemed great, We were your followers, so why do you not ward off from us some of the flames? But those who deemed themselves great will say, All of us are in it. God has clearly judged between His slaves. (Surat al-Mu min: 47-48)

Here is a troop rushing headlong with you! There is no welcome for them. They will certainly roast in the Fire. (And the damned will say to their leaders), No, it is you who have no welcome. It is you who brought this upon us. What an evil place to settle! They will say, Our Lord, give him who brought this on us double the punishment in the Fire! But how is it that we do not see some men whom we used to count among the worst of people and whom we turned into figures of fun? Did our eyes miss them? All this is certainly true - the bickering of the people of the Fire. (Surah Sad: 59-64)

Pleas of Desperation and Hopelessness

The people of hell are in a hopeless state. The torture they undergo is extremely cruel and never-ending. Their only hope is to cry and beg for salvation. They see the people of paradise and beg for water and food. They try to repent and ask forgiveness of God. Yet, all these moves are in vain.

They beseech the keepers of hell. They even want them to act as intermediaries between them and God and ask for mercy. Their pain is so unbearable that they want to be saved from it even if it is only for a single day:

Those in the Fire will say to the custodians of Hell, Call on your Lord to make the punishment less for us for just one day. They will ask, Did your Messengers not bring you

the Clear Signs? They will answer, Yes. Then they (their keepers) will say, Offer your prayers! But the prayers of the disbelievers shall be in vain. (Surat al-Mu min: 49-50)

Disbelievers further try to seek forgiveness, but they are strictly turned down:

They will say, Our Lord, our miserable destiny overpowered us. We were misguided people. Our Lord, deliver us from Hell! Then if we revert to sin, we will definitely be wrongdoers. He will say, Stay here in shame and do not plead with Me. There was a group of My slaves who said, Our Lord, we have faith, so forgive us and have mercy on us. You are the Best of the Merciful. But you made a mockery of them so that they made you forget to remember Me while you were laughing at them. Today I have rewarded them for being steadfast. They are the ones who are victorious. (Surat al-Mu minun: 106-111)

This is actually the last address of God to the people of hell. His words Stay here in shame and do not plead with Me! are conclusive. From then on, God never considers the people of hell. One would not even like to think about this situation.

While the sinners burn in hell, those who attain happiness and salvation remain in paradise enjoying the benefit of endless favours. The suffering of the people in hell becomes more intense when they observe the life of believers in paradise. Indeed, while being subjected to unbearable torture, they can watch the magnificent blessings of paradise.

Believers, whom disbelievers derided in this world, now lead a full and happy life, living in glorious locations, magnificent houses with beautiful women, and savouring delicious food and drinks. The sight of the believers in a state of peace and abundance further aggravates the humiliation of being in hell. These scenes add greater pain and suffering to their grief.

The regret becomes deeper and deeper. Not having followed the commands of God in the world makes them feel profound remorse. They turn to the believers in paradise and try to speak to them. They beg for help and sympathy from them. Yet, these are vain efforts. The people of paradise also see them. The exchange between the peoples of hell and paradise is as follows:

In Gardens they will ask the evil-doers: What caused you to enter Hell? They will reply, We were not among those who prayed and we did not feed the poor. We engaged in vain disputes and denied the Day of Judgment until the inevitable end overtook us. The pleas of the intercessors will not help them. (Surat al-Muddaththir: 40-48)

Meanwhile, believers and hypocrites will argue with one another. Hypocrites are the people who remained with the believers for a certain period of time. Despite having no faith in their hearts, and purely for personal gain, they performed their religious duties as if they were believers. Thus, they earned the appellation of hypocrites . In hellfire, they implore the believers to give them help. The dialogue between these two groups is conveyed in the Qur'an as follows:

That Day the hypocrites, both men and women, will say to those who have faith, Wait for us, so that we may borrow some of your light. But they will be told, Go back and look for some other light! And a wall with a gate will be erected between them. Inside there will be mercy, but on the exterior lies punishment. They will call out to them, Were we not with you? They will reply, Indeed you were. But you made trouble for yourselves and hung back and doubted, and false hopes deluded you until God's command arrived. The Dissembler tricked you about God. So today no ransom will be accepted from you or from those who were disbelievers. Your refuge is the Fire. It is your master. What an evil destination! (Surat al-Hadid: 13-15)

An Eternal Torment With No Salvation

Apart from all the features of hell we have mentioned so far, there is another aspect of it which augments the intensity of torment inflicted: it is eternal. In this world, the fact that even the sharpest pain lessens with time gives comfort to man. The end of every pain is bliss and even awaiting this bliss gives hope.

However, there is no such hope in hell and this is what overwhelms the people of hell most. When they are cast into the fire, chained, scalded, whipped, and crammed into narrow places, their hands tied to their necks, they know that it will last for all eternity. Their attempts to escape can never meet with success. This indicates that their torment will continue forever. The anguish they feel is explained as follows:

Every time they want to come out of it, because of their suffering, they will be driven back into it: Taste the punishment of the Burning! (Surat al-Hajj: 22)

Hell is an entirely isolated place. Disbelievers enter it and never re-emerge. There is no way out of hell. The feeling of confinement engulfs disbelievers. They are surrounded with walls and locked doors. This bitter feeling of confinement is described in the Qur'an as follows:

Those who reject Our signs, they are the Companions of the Left. Above them is a sealed vault of Fire. (Surat al-Balad: 19-20)

Say: It is the truth from your Lord; so let whoever wishes have faith and whoever wishes be a disbeliever. We have prepared for the wrongdoers a Fire whose billowing walls of smoke will hem them in. If they call for help, they will be showered with water like seething molten brass, which will scald their faces. What a noxious drink! What an evil repose! (Surat al-Kahf: 29)

The shelter of such people will be Hell. They will find no way to escape from it. (Surat an-Nisa : 121)

By the time disbelievers see the fire, they fully recognise where they belong. They truly understand that there is no chance whatsoever of getting away from the fire. At this stage, the time concept loses its meaning and an eternal torment begins. The incessant nature of pain is its worst aspect. Even if a hundred years, a thousand years or millions of years pass by, one never draws close to the end. Millions of years is nothing as compared to eternity. The disbeliever dwelling in hell awaits an end, yet to no avail. That is why the eternal nature of hell is stressed:

God has promised the hypocrites, both men and women, and the disbelievers the Fire of Hell. They shall remain in it timelessly, for ever. It will suffice them. God has cursed them. They will have everlasting punishment. (Surat at-Tawbah: 68)

If those (the idols) had really been gods, they would not have gone down into it. Each one will be in it timelessly, for ever. (Surat al-Anbiya : 99)

As for those who are disbelievers, the Fire of Hell awaits them. Death shall not deliver them, nor shall its punishment be lightened for them. That is how We repay every thankless man. (Surah Fatir: 36)

All the pain in this world comes to an end. There is always salvation. One who suffers from pain either dies, or his pain is alleviated. However, in hell, pain is continual and incessant, offering no relief for even a moment.

An Important Reminder to Avoid Torment

Throughout this book, it has been stressed that those who reject the commands of God in this world and deny the existence of their Creator will have no salvation in the hereafter and that they will face a terrifying torment in hell.

Therefore, without losing any time, each one has to realise his situation in the presence of God and surrender to Him. Otherwise, he will regret it and face a fearsome end:

It may be that those who are disbelievers will wish that they had been Muslims. Leave them to eat and enjoy themselves. Let false hope divert them. They will soon know. (Surat al-Hijr: 2-3)

The way to avoid eternal punishment, win eternal bliss and attain the approval of God is apparent:

Before it is too late, have true faith in God. Spend your life in doing good deeds to earn His pleasure