

# Frequently Asked Questions

regarding

## The Hereafter

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# Frequently Asked Questions Regarding the Hereafter

## The Concept

### What Happens After Death

After an individual dies and is laid to rest in his grave, what happens? Is the soul taken? Is the person in limbo till the Day of Judgment?

### Reply

The Qur'an, in *Surah Ghaafir* 40: 46, has mentioned the fate that Pharaoh and his followers are faced with after their death, as a consequence of rejecting the message of Moses (pbuh). The Qur'an says that they are all continually shown their ultimate destiny in hellfire and on the Day of Judgment they shall all be thrown in it. A number of narratives ascribed to the Prophet (pbuh) mention a similar fate for those who rejected him and, thereby, failed to cleanse and purify themselves in the life of this world.

It is quite obvious from the referred verse of the Qur'an that this torturous situation for the dead is spiritual, not physical in nature. Moreover, it is not even necessary that the dead be faced with this situation only inside their graves. On the contrary, it seems more likely that their souls are put to rest somewhere in God's vast creation and these souls experience this situation. Unfortunately, we do not have any information regarding the whereabouts of the place where the souls are put to rest after death.

Looking at the narratives ascribed to the Prophet (pbuh), in the light of the referred verse of the Qur'an, it seems that *'Azaab e Qabar* (i.e. punishment of the grave) actually refers to the same kind of torturous situation that the rejecters' souls are faced with

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after their death.

On the basis of the referred verse of the Qur'an and the narratives ascribed to the Prophet (pbuh), one may derive that every person has to go through this situation. Each rejecting soul experiences a torturous situation, while each pious soul is shown the great blessings that it shall be bestowed with on the Day of Judgment. But this derivation entails a slight problem. A person may ask that if God is to pass His judgment regarding the blessed and the doomed on the Day of Judgment then how can the two experience their respective destinies before such judgment is passed. In other words it may be said that if blessings and tortures shall start immediately after the death of an individual then it implies that the decision regarding the ultimate destiny of the individual preceded the Day of Judgment.

This question prompts us to take a second closer look at the referred verse of the Qur'an and the narratives ascribed to the Prophet (pbuh). In both these instances (i.e. in the verse of the Qur'an as well as the narratives ascribed to the Prophet) we find that it is primarily the direct addressees of either Moses (pbuh) or Mohammed (pbuh) whose fate is being mentioned.

According to the Qur'an, both Mohammad (pbuh) and Moses (pbuh) were not only Prophets (*Nabis*) but also Messengers (*Rasu'l*) of God<sup>1</sup>. The Qur'an tells us that when God sends His messenger in a people, the polytheists among these people are not allowed to live on God's earth if they reject the messenger. It tells us that these people are given time in which to make up their minds and to present all their objections against the messenger (*Rasu'l*). It tells us that all their objections are answered and all the doubts in their minds are removed by the Almighty Himself. It tells us that a time comes when - the All-knowing and the All-wise - God decides that these people have been given adequate time and that they are now absolutely clear regarding the truthfulness of the messenger. It tells us that because of this clarity, these people are not left with any excuse for rejecting the messenger. It tells us that because these people are now left with no excuse for rejecting the messenger, thus if they persist in their rejection, then the Almighty directs His messenger to migrate from the area and the polytheists among the rejecters are, subsequently, annihilated.

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<sup>1</sup> For more information on the difference between Prophets and Messengers please visit <http://www.understanding-islam.com>

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According to the Qur'an, the decision regarding the fate of the direct addressees of a messenger (*Rasu'l*) of Allah is not postponed till the Day of Judgment. Their fate is decided during the life of this world and thus, their punishment begins with their death.

In the light of this explanation and also in the light of the words of the narratives ascribed to the Prophet (pbuh), it seems that the narratives regarding *`Azaab e Qabar* (punishment of the grave) are specific to the direct addressees of Mohammad (pbuh), the messenger of Allah. These narratives are specific for those people whose fate was decided during the life of this world and whose final decision was not left pending till the Day of Judgment. This would, in fact, mean that the punishment and the reward of the clear rejecters and the clear believers respectively, shall not be left pending till the Day of Judgment, but would be initiated immediately after their deaths. This immediate initiation of their reward and punishment is what has been termed as the punishment or reward of the grave. As far as those who were neither clearly among the firm and true believers nor among the rejecters, they shall get their respective decisions on the Day of Judgment, following which, their punishment or reward shall be initiated.

If my understanding is correct, then it follows that people who were neither clearly among the firm and true believers nor among the rejecters shall probably be in a state of limbo till the Day of Judgment. On the Day of Judgment their fate shall be decided and then shall they be sent to their respective destinies.

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### **From Death till the Judgment Day...**

I was conversing with a Christian minister about religion. He then asked me what happens to people when they die, from an Islamic perspective. I answered that we go to God to be judged. He said, "yeah, but are you guys floating around somewhere till Judgement Day and then you'll know your outcome?" I said, "no, we go to God and await our judgement." To be honest he kind of stumped me I wasn't fully knowledgeable as to exactly what happens after death. His point really wasn't in trying to understand Islamic concepts or to stump me. He was trying to show how much better it was to be a Christian (what he implied) since once you die in Christianity you go to Jesus and the Father. Basically, you are saved and have no worries. What surprised me is when I asked him about Judgement Day. His answer was that

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"that's for everyone else, not us, we are saved."

My question is: can you elaborate on what happens from the moment of death? I know we get asked the three questions (please cite them, if possible) and await our destiny. But what else happens? We die, then what? Where do we "wait" until earth passes and Judgement Day comes? Give as much detail as possible. How would you have answered the minister?

### **Reply**

Before reading my following answer, please refer to one of my previous responses to a related question, titled: "What Happens after Death?"<sup>2</sup>

It is clear that during the test during the life of this world, people will be clearly divided in three groups: 1) those, who excel in piety, truthfulness, justice and submission to God; 2) those, who excel in transgression, rejection and are clearly averse to accepting God's truths; and 3) those, who are neither clearly among the first nor clearly among the second group.

As for the first two groups, these are people, who are themselves witnesses upon their own behavior. These are people, whose ultimate destiny - whether it be heaven or hell - is decided during the life of this world and they start enjoying or suffering the fruits of their deeds, immediately after death. If falling in the first category, they shall be in a state of blissful slumber till the Day of Rising, while if falling in the second category, they shall be in a state of torturous slumber till the Day of ultimate Rising.

The fate of the third category of people, which apparently would be the largest in number in the Hereafter, would be decided on the Day of Judgment. Such people, till the Day of Rising will be in a state of dreamless sleep.

It should, nevertheless, be kept in mind that whichever category a person may be in, the waiting period from his death till the Day of Reckoning would be insignificant for him, as he would not have any sense of the passing time.

This seems to be the case, as derived from the Qur'an and the various narratives ascribed to the Prophet (pbuh). There is no reason, why the situation may have been any different in the previous revelations of God.

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<sup>2</sup> Included in this booklet on page no.

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A person may conveniently ascribe to any idea regarding the life, which is yet to come. Everyone will know the reality, as it unfolds itself. The minister has presented the point of view, which is generally considered to be proposed by the Christian Theology. The important question to ask is: whether this idea is based on the teachings of the Christ or not.

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### **Proof of the Day of Judgement**

How do you prove to a Muslim or a non-Muslim that the Day of Judgment actually exists or is coming?

#### **Reply**

Before explaining the bases on which the Qur'an has evidenced the Day of Judgment, we must first consciously realize whether the present setup of the world and our lives require a Judgment Day or not. Without first consciously realizing the need for the Judgment Day within ourselves, we can never fully appreciate the great blessing and relief entailed in the belief that a universal Judgment Day will, in fact, be established one day. To fully understand this point, take the example of clean and clear water - one of the great blessings of God that we enjoy in our daily lives. We can fully appreciate this great blessing of God, because we have, at one time or another practically experienced or observed thirst and have quenched it with water. Had we never experienced thirst, we would never have realized the great blessing entailed in water and its quality of quenching our thirst.

On the other hand, if we had experienced thirst, in the same way as we now do, and yet had not found water (or anything similar to it), with which we could quench our thirsts, this would indeed have created a vacuum in our lives. We would then have searched the earth, the mountains, the skies and everything that existed around us to find something which would quench our thirsts. We would have carried on this search till the time that we either found something which would satisfy our need (thirst) or discovered a plausible explanation for the strong need that exists within us and yet remains non-existent in our environment.

We so strongly trust the providence and mercy of our Creator that we know that there is no real need in us, which our Creator has not provided for. If we required a delicate balance of various gases in the atmosphere to survive, we were provided with that delicate balance in our environment; if we required particles of

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food to maintain our health, we were provided with a variety of tasty and healthy foods; all our physical requirements were provided for to the ultimate. There is not a single requirement that exists within us, which is necessary to maintain our lives, which is not provided for in our environment.

But then, there is a set of needs that exist within us, yet which remains unanswered:

My desires know no limits, yet the opportunities available to me are extremely limited; Given good health and the desirable environment, I would like to live on forever, yet there is nothing more certain in my life than death; From the day I become conscious, I strive for a blissful future, yet my life is always blemished by the thoughts of 'what could have been' and 'what might be'; My conscience condemns me for every wrong that I do, yet I have to bear the heavy costs of every step that I take in the right direction; I am told that justice would ultimately prevail, yet justice, in its absolute sense, is impossible to secure in this world, no courts of law, no legislations, no governments can provide me with absolute justice. Yet I crave for it.

These are only some of the glaring vacuums in my life. These are some of the pressing needs that I find implanted in my heart and soul, yet since time immemorial my search continues for ways of satisfying these needs. Even though some of these may be more pressing than others at various stages of my life, yet each of them exists in its own right and forces me to find ways to fulfill them. But to no avail.

According to the Abrahamic religions - Judaism, Christianity and Islam - all these strong requirements and needs, imbedded inside of me are, actually, a continual internal reminder of the Day of Judgment and the eternal life that would follow. It would, in fact, be quite accurate to say that one of the basic - if not the basic - message of all divine religions has been to provide an explanation for the existence of the referred human needs by pointing out to them the bases for the belief in the Hereafter.

However, before we take a look at these bases, let us first take an overview of the concept of the Hereafter, as propounded by the Qur'an.

According to the Qur'an, the life of this world is a testing ground for man. As a requirement of the test, this life is only a temporary phase in man's existence. The scope of this test is primarily

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moral. During this test, man has been bestowed with the knowledge of 'good' and 'evil', which subsequently has been further strengthened by God, through His prophets and messengers. During this test, man is required to do 'right', even if it entails material and emotional costs, and to refrain from doing 'wrong', even if this restraint deprives him of immediate gains. This test shall soon be terminated. At the end of this test, man will have to face its results. The 'good' and the 'bad' that remain mixed and generally indistinguishable during the life of this world shall, on that day, be separated from each other. Both shall meet separate ends. Those, who, during the life of this world, ignored the call of their conscience and that of the prophets and messengers of God, shall have to face the dire consequences of their deeds; while those, who stood by the truth with patience and perseverance, shall have all their needs and requirements completely fulfilled and shall remain in the eternal bliss of God's Paradise, forever.

Keeping this basic concept of the Day of Judgment in mind, let us now take a look at the bases for the belief in the Hereafter, as given in the Qur'an:

### **A Requirement of God's Basic Attributes**

The Day of Judgment is evidenced on the basis of God's obvious attributes from two separate perspectives. Firstly, the Qur'an emphatically states that the Day of Judgment is a necessary requirement of God's mercy, providence, wisdom and justice. Secondly, God's omnipotence and omniscience are referred to evidence the fact that God can, as required by His basic attributes, organize a Day of Judgment.

### **A Requirement of God's Mercy**

According to the Qur'an, the Hereafter is an obvious requirement of God's abounding and continuing mercy.

If life were to end at death, it would be as if God has discontinued his mercy for man. This, according to the Qur'an is clearly contrary to the requirements of the continuing nature of God's mercy and is, therefore, obviously, incorrect.

Another aspect, which can easily be derived from the referred idea, is that it is primarily to reward the pious and the faithful that the Day of Judgment shall be established. The punishment of the transgressors is not the primary purpose of the establishment of the Day of Judgment, but is, in fact, its corollary. The Qur'an says:

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كَتَبَ عَلَى نَفْسِهِ الرَّحْمَةَ لِيَجْمَعَنَّكُمْ إِلَى يَوْمِ الْقِيَامَةِ لَا رَيْبَ فِيهِ الَّذِينَ خَسِرُوا أَنْفُسَهُمْ فَهُمْ لَا يُؤْمِنُونَ  
(الأنعام 6 :12)

He has made mercy binding upon Himself; He would, therefore, definitely gather you till the Day of Resurrection in which there is absolutely no doubt. But those, who have completely lost their souls shall not believe in it.

### ***A Requirement of God's Providence***

According to the Qur'an, the merciful provider, who has arranged for the adequate fulfillment of each and every one of man's needs and requirements, will soon provide for the fulfillment of each of man's existing vacuums, as well.

As has been stated earlier, because of the temporary and testing nature of the life of this world, it was essential that 'good' and 'bad' deeds should not immediately follow their respective consequences. If the reward and punishment of 'good' and 'bad' respectively were to follow immediately, it would then, for all practical purposes, have refuted the test. It is, thus, the temporary and testing nature of this life, which requires that the referred vacuums be left unfilled during this life. This, however, does not mean that these vacuums would remain agape forever. The Provident Creator, who has arranged for the fulfillment of all the necessary requirements of man, has made an unblemished arrangement for the fulfillment of these requirements, as well.

How can man bring himself to even imagine that the all-encompassing providence, which has catered for all the physical needs and requirements of all that enjoys existence, would be unmindful of man's moral and spiritual needs and requirements? Thus, a lack of belief in the Day of Judgment is, in fact, a refusal to trust God's Providence.

### ***A Requirement of God's Wisdom***

According to the Qur'an, all of God's decisions and actions are based on His unblemished wisdom. God does not do anything, which lacks wisdom. The Qur'an emphatically states that if everything was to end at death, it would imply that all the magnificent structure of this vast universe and all the brilliance entailed in man was devoid of all wisdom. It forcefully states that it is the Day of Judgment that gives meaning and wisdom to the present existence. Rejecting the Day of Judgment is like saying that God takes pleasure in man's miseries and his unfulfilled needs, requirements and desires. The Qur'an strongly refutes this idea and declares that God has not created this vast universe for

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His entertainment. He has created this universe for a wise and meaningful end. He would definitely bring about the Day of Judgment to fulfill this wise and meaningful end.

### ***A Requirement of God's Justice***

According to the Qur'an, the Day of Judgment is also an obvious requirement of God's justice. As has been stated earlier, for the purpose of making the test in the life of this world possible, 'good' and 'bad' deeds are not, generally, followed by their respective consequences. This, however, does not mean that God would allow this lack of distinction between 'good' and 'evil' to exist forever. Even though man has sometimes been prone to rejecting the attribute of justice for God, in view of His apparent indifference toward 'good' and 'evil' during the life of this world, yet the Qur'an strongly refutes this idea. How can the Creator, Who has implanted within us a sense of justice and Who has directed us to always decide with justice, be Himself void of all sense of justice? The Qur'an refutes this idea as mere stupidity.

The Qur'an says:

أَفَجْعَلُ الْمُسْلِمِينَ كَالْمُجْرِمِينَ مَا لَكُمْ كَيْفَ تَحْكُمُونَ (الْقلم 68 : 35 - 36)

Will We then make the obedient and the criminals alike? What is wrong with you? How do you judge?

### ***God's Omnipotence & Omniscience***

Even though the attributes of mercy, providence, wisdom and justice require God to set-up a Day of Judgment, yet man has traditionally found the possibility of the setting-up of such a universal Day of Judgment, as propounded by Divine religions, hard to accept. Once a person has died and has disintegrated into dust and bones, how can he be brought back to life? What kind of a record-keeper can maintain the record of billions of deeds of trillions and trillions of people that have inhabited the earth since the beginning of time? These two questions have generally been the stumbling block for those, who, even in the face of the strong requirement for the Day of Judgment, could not accept its possibility.

The answer to these questions lies in the attributes of 'Omnipotence' and 'Omniscience':

According to the Qur'an, if God could bring man to life once, then why would it become impossible or even difficult for Him to do so once again? The Qur'an says:

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وَلَقَدْ عَلِمْتُمُ النَّشْأَةَ الْأُولَىٰ فَلَوْلَا تَتَذَكَّرُونَ (الواقعة 56 : 62)

You are already aware of the first creation, then why are you not reminded [of God's powers]?

At another instance, the Qur'an says:

أَفَعَيَّبْنَا بِالْخَلْقِ الْأَوَّلِ (ق 15 : 50)

Has the first creation [completely] drained Us of Our powers?

As for the records of the deeds of men, the Qur'an says that God's knowledge not only encompasses man's deeds but also the ideas that arise in his mind. The Qur'an says:

وَلَقَدْ خَلَقْنَا الْإِنْسَانَ وَتَعَلَّمَ مَا نُوسِوسُ بِهِ نَفْسَهُ وَنَحْنُ أَقْرَبُ إِلَيْهِ مِنْ حَبْلِ الْوَرِيدِ (ق 16 : 50)

We created man and We are aware even of the promptings of his heart; and We are closer to Him than even his life-vein.

Furthermore, the deeds of man are not only safely stored in God's knowledge, but are also being carefully recorded by two of his angels put in-charge of each person. The Qur'an says:

مَا يَلْفُظُ مِنْ قَوْلٍ إِلَّا لَدَيْهِ رَقِيبٌ عَتِيدٌ (ق 18 : 50)

He [i.e. man] does not even utter a word, but it is recorded by a sentinel near him, who is prompt in recording.

On the Day of Judgment, this comprehensive record of each individual shall be placed in front of him. The Qur'an says:

وَوُضِعَ الْكِتَابُ فَتَرَى الْمُجْرِمِينَ مُشْفِقِينَ مِمَّا فِيهِ وَيَقُولُونَ يَا وَيْلَتَنَا مَالِ هَذَا الْكِتَابِ لَا يُغَادِرُ صَغِيرَةً وَلَا كَبِيرَةً إِلَّا أَحْصَاهَا وَوَجَدُوا مَا عَمِلُوا حَاضِرًا وَلَا يَنْظِمُ رَبُّكَ أَحَدًا (الكهف : 49)

And the Book [of the record of deeds] shall be placed. Then you shall see these criminals in extreme terror of what shall be recorded in it. And they shall say: Woe to us! What kind of a book is this? It misses out on nothing - big or small - but encompasses it all. And they shall find each of their deeds present in it. And your Lord shall not be unjust to anyone.

### **Signs & Indications of the Day of Judgment**

Besides the foregoing bases of belief in the Hereafter, mentioned in the Qur'an, the Qur'an has also pointed out toward a few phenomena, which not only substantiate, but also serve as signs and indications of the approaching Day of Judgment. Some of these signs are mentioned below:

#### ***Man's Nature***

The Qur'an has strongly pointed toward man's inherent knowledge

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of 'good' and 'evil' as an indication of the fact that man shall soon be faced with accountability and reward and/or punishment for his intentional actions.

The Qur'an says:

وَالْأَرْضِ وَمَا طَحَاها وَنَفْسٍ وَمَا سَوَّاهَا فَأَلْهَمَهَا فُجُورَهَا  
وَتَقْوَاهَا قَدْ أَفْلَحَ مَنْ زَكَّاهَا (الشَّمْسُ 91: 6 – 9)

The human soul and the way it has been adorned - with the inspiration of what is right for it and what is wrong - bears witness that whoever purifies it, shall succeed and whoever corrupts it, shall fail.

The Qur'an further points out that it is not merely the knowledge of 'good' and 'evil', which is entailed in man, but man is also endowed with a strong conscience, which encourages and acknowledges his 'good' deeds and discourages and condemns him for doing 'evil'.

This knowledge and conscience of man, in combination, are not only an indication of the fact that man's Creator is not indifferent toward 'good' and 'evil', but is also an inherent evidence of the fact that 'good' and 'evil' should meet separate ends.

### ***The Messengers of God - as a Sign of the Day of Judgment***

Another point, which the Qur'an presents as evidence for the universal Day of Judgment is the history of God's judgment for those nations in which he sent His messengers.

According to the Qur'an, a messenger of God is not merely a deliverer of God's revelations to his people. In addition to delivering of God's messages, a messenger of God is also a sign of the approaching universal Day of Judgment. Explaining this point, I have written in one of my earlier responses<sup>3</sup>:

The advent of a *Rasu'* (Messenger - as distinct from *Nabi* or Prophet) of God is an exception to the above general principle  
<sup>4</sup>. A *Rasu'* of God is not just a deliverer of God's message. In

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<sup>3</sup> For more details visit <http://www.understanding-islam.org>

<sup>4</sup> reference is to the principle stated in the following words:

Man is generally given the freedom to choose between good and

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addition to that, a *Rasu'l* is also a symbol and an evidence of God's final justice on the Day of Judgment. When a *Rasu'l* of God is sent to a people, their reward and punishment is not governed by the general principles mentioned above. The reward/punishment of these people is no longer deferred till the Day of Judgment. God directly guides the *Rasu'l* in his deliverance of the message and furnishes him with all the necessary qualities and requirements to affect this deliverance at a level after which no excuse of rejection is left with the addressees of the *Rasu'l*. At this juncture, the collectivity of the people towards whom the *Rasu'l* is sent is neither left ignorant of God's truth nor in a state of misunderstanding or confusion. No questions are left unanswered. No doubts about the truthfulness of the *Rasu'l* are left to exist in the minds of his addressees. Truth and falsehood become as clear of each other as is the light of the day from the darkness of the night. The path of God's liking becomes an apparent reality. Thus, no one is left with any excuse of rejecting the truth revealed by God. This is the stage of *Itmaam al-Hujjah*<sup>5</sup>. If the addressees of the *Rasu'l* persist in their rejection of the truth even at this stage, then the punishment of God, which, on the Day of Judgment, shall be the fate of all those who knowingly do evil in the life of this world, is initiated for these people. Consequently, the pious and the impious - who would generally be separated on the Day of Judgment - are separated and grouped in the life of this world.

Thus, with the advent of a messenger of God in a people, God's Judgment is carried-out for that people, whereby the pious and the transgressors are separated. This Judgment - at a micro level - is a clear indication of the point that God is not indifferent toward the overall judgment of the whole of the humankind.

### ***Creation in Complementary Parts***

The Qur'an has pointed-out toward the nature of God's creation during the life of this world as another indication of the fact that a Day of Judgment is required for the moral completion of the life of this world. The Qur'an says that nothing in the life of this world is self-sufficient and independent. All phenomena in the life of this world is designed in such a way that a unit taken independent of the other seems to be incomplete, seeking completion through

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evil and right and wrong during the life of this world. However, the reward of opting for pious deeds or the punishment of evil deeds, for the purposes of this test is generally not delivered immediately.

<sup>5</sup> Removal of excuse for rejection

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the combination of its complementary part. For instance, 'human being' is divided into the 'male' and the 'female' gender. Taken independent of each other, both have gaping vacuums in them. These vacuums are filled only when the two complement each other. Similarly, the phenomenon of '24-hour day' is divided into the complementing parts of 'day' and 'night'. The Qur'an says:

وَمِنْ كُلِّ شَيْءٍ خَلَقْنَا زَوْجَيْنِ لَعَلَّكُمْ تَذَكَّرُونَ (الذاريات 51  
(49 :

And each of the things We have created is divided in complementing parts. [We point this out to you,] so that you be reminded [of the complementing part of the life of this world].

The Qur'an points out the fact that just as any other part of a phenomena, if taken independent of its complementing part, is incomplete, the life of this world has gaping moral vacuums in it and is in search of its complementing part, for its completion. This complementing part for the life of this world, according to the teachings of the prophets and messengers of God, is the Hereafter.

These are some of the major bases and indications of the life hereafter and the Day of Judgment, which the Divine religions want us to believe.

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### **The Start of the Judgment Day**

When the Qur'an says that two trumpets will be sounded, does it mean that they will herald the Day of Judgment itself or only the events leading up to Judgment Day, such as "children being rendered white-haired," the Sun and moon fusing together, the mountains being tossed like carded wool, etc.? If you have time, could you make a chronological list of events leading up to Judgment Day?

### **Reply**

It is quite difficult to give a chronological account of the events of the Day of Judgment. However, as for your specific question, my answer follows:

According to *Al-Zumar* 39: 68, the first trumpet shall actually start the destruction of the existing physical world, which would

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include the death of all living beings and the sun and the moon fusing together and the tossing around of the mountains and stones etc. In other words, the first trumpet would actually be the beginning of the end for the existing physical world. According to the same verse, at the blowing of the second trumpet, humans shall be resurrected. Thus, the second trumpet shall mark the beginning of the new and eternal life of man. Between the blowing of the two trumpets, it seems that a new physical world shall be brought into existence – the world which will have different physical laws, the world which will entail heaven and hell as real physical entities, rather than mere abstract concepts.

The blowing of the second trumpet would mark the beginning of our judgment and subsequent reward and punishment. May the Almighty forgive us our sins and enter us in the folds of His mercy, on the day, when solace and pleasure shall be restricted to those, who deserve the mercy of the Almighty.

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### **Sequence of Events in the Hereafter**

What are the stages that people will pass through at the Day of Resurrection?

#### **Reply**

The Qur'an does not give a complete chronological sequence of events that shall take place on the Day of Judgment. The Qur'an has only referred to some of the major events that shall take place on that day. Even though this reference of the Qur'an is actually in the context of reminding people of the severity of that day as an admonition for those who were averse to surrendering to the truth, yet an overall sequence may be derived from these references. The general sequence of events seems to be as follows:

- End of the present physical world and all that exists in it;
- Changing the present physical environment with a new one;
- Raising of the dead;
- Scrutiny of the records of the deeds of the humankind;
- Judgment regarding the eternal destiny of each individual;
- Placement of individuals according to their deeds.

There are also some scattered details of each step given in the Qur'an and some narratives ascribed to the Prophet (pbuh). Nevertheless, the overall sequence of events seems to be as given above.

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### **Is the End Near?**

The Qur'an clearly states that knowledge of the Final Hour rests with the Almighty alone. While the idea that Judgment Day is coming soon is neither essential to nor a part of Muslim belief, does the termination of the institution of prophethood indicate that God's Judgment is near? What I mean is that it has been a long time -- 1400 years -- since the last prophet of God preached.

Does the cessation of such a vital method of communication to mankind convey something about the nearness of God's Judgment?

### **Reply**

It would not be prudent to draw any ideas regarding the nearness or distance in time by our limited standards of measuring time. God, according to the Qur'an, makes His decisions with His abounding mercy, encompassing knowledge, absolute wisdom and pure justice, on the basis of His own standards of time.

It is indeed true that the cessation of the institute of prophethood implies the nearness of the Final Day, yet what exactly is implied by "nearness" is not something which we can plot on a measurable scale of time.

My dear brother, we do not know, from our limited point of reference, how near the Day of Judgment may have drawn to us. Nevertheless, we do know that each passing moment is taking us closer to our respective deaths. This may be last night that I will get to sleep on my bed; this may be the last question I will be allowed to answer; this may be the last breath of fresh air that I will be allowed to inhale. We are all going toward a destiny that we can neither avoid nor even postpone. Our death, as no one can doubt is always close by. Thus, from an individual's perspective, the Day of Judgment is only as far away from him as his death. For as soon as he dies, his sense of the passing time ends and, thus, he is only moments away from the Day of Resurrection and Judgment.

In my opinion, therefore, the Day of Judgment may actually be tens of thousands of years away. Yet, however, for me it is only as far away as my death - which is always close by.

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## **Reward & Punishment**

### **Nature of Reward and Punishment in the Hereafter**

Is Paradise/Heaven physical? Is it Spiritual? Doesn't Jesus (Matthew 22:23-33; Mark 12:18-27; Luke 20:27-38 KJV) imply that the experience of Heaven will not be like that of this world. How does this compare to the Islamic concept of Paradise? Or, do the verses I've quoted actually agree with the Qur'anic concept of being resurrected in our whole bodies but that the laws of (nature) this world would not apply?

#### **Reply**

Although most of the verses of the Qur'an as well as the narratives ascribed to the Prophet (pbuh), which deal with the concept of reward and punishment in the hereafter are allegorical in nature and, therefore, the fine details of the life after resurrection cannot be known during this world, yet it seems quite apparent that the reward and punishment during the hereafter would be physical in nature. Furthermore, it would only be justice that if man is tested in a physical world, then his reward/punishment should also be of a physical nature.

The nature of the life hereafter, besides being physical, would clearly be different in many respects. The mere fact that the life after death would be eternal makes it clearly distinct from the present life. Most of the other laws of nature would also not apply to the life after death.

Jesus' (pbuh) response to the referred question has the same implication: In this world man's continued and peaceful social existence requires marriage and marital laws and respect for these laws. The most significant factors, which call for marriage and marital laws are infancy, ageing and death. For his continued survival on this earth, under the prevalent laws of nature, man needs a family - which, in turn, is based upon the bond of marriage. If, contrary to the existing laws, man were born at a mature age, rather than infancy, and were not subjected to the laws of ageing and of death, then there would have been no need for marriage and, consequently, of marital laws.

I really do not see much of a difference in the concept of the life hereafter as given in the Qur'an and that given in the sayings ascribed to Jesus (pbuh).

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### **Concept of Eternal Punishment**

One of the hardest issues I have had to struggle with is the concept of hell in Islam. I cannot imagine people burning forever and ever for whatever crime or disbelief they committed. If Allah is so merciful, how does he do this to his own creation. There are billions and billions of human beings and most of them are not Muslims. I just can't understand how most of them will just burn in hell.

### **Reply**

First of all, I would like to clarify that it is not the 'non-Muslims' who shall be given eternal punishment. It is actually the '*Kaafirs*' or the rejecters. There is obviously a difference between the two terms. The first one (i.e. 'non-Muslim') merely refers to the fact that the individual in question does not ascribe to Islam, as his religion. While the second one implies that a person, even after adequate knowledge of the truth and even after recognizing the truth from falsehood, has opted to reject the truth. A non-Muslim, shall only be subjected to eternal punishment, if he is a *Kaafir* as well.

Keeping this brief clarification in perspective, let us now turn to your specific question. You state that the implementation and the justification of eternal punishment is, somewhat, incomprehensible for you. You believe that no crime, however grave it may be, deserves eternal punishment.

I would suggest that rather than trying to ascertain the justified level of severity for the punishment of each crime, as we are not even in a position to do so, we should concentrate on trying to understand the overall scheme of things in the life of this world and the principles of the subsequent results in the life hereafter, as given in the Qur'an.

The following points may be of some help in understanding the scheme of things in the life of this world and that of the hereafter, as given in the Qur'an:

- The life of this world is a test (*Al-Mulk* 67: 2)
- Before putting man in the test of the life of this world, God gave us the option to accept or avoid the responsibility of taking this test, fully clarifying the consequences of our success and/or failure. Attracted by the unimaginable rewards, man accepted the responsibility and consented to

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take the test and face the consequent results (*Al-Ahzaab* 33: 72). However, the memory of this acceptance, for the purpose of effective testing of man, has been erased from man's mind. Nevertheless, man shall, once again, clearly remember this acceptance in the hereafter.

- To help man succeed in the test, God made a number of arrangements. These arrangements can broadly be divided into two categories:
  1. *Internal Arrangement*: This arrangement is common to all humans. Under this category fall all the abilities that humans possess with reference to gathering information and drawing conclusions. Besides the five senses, this category includes the human faculty of reasoning and drawing inferences (*Al-Sajadah* 32: 9). Moreover, this category also includes not only the information about the basic good and evil behavior (*Al-Shams* 91: 8), but also the human conscience, which checks and discourages man from doing wrong and encourages him to do good (*Al-Qiyamah* 75: 2)
  2. *External Arrangement*: Besides the internal arrangement, God also made an external arrangement for reminding and clarifying man of the right path and of the consequences of his divergence from the right path. Under this category, God chose the best of men from a given community and revealed His message upon them. The selected person, in turn was to deliver the revealed message to his community. These selected people were called '*Nabi*' (i.e. prophet). God sent his prophets in the world in such great numbers that, according to the Qur'an, mankind is left with no excuse of rejecting the basics (i.e. *Tawheed* - oneness of God, *Risa'lah* - the institution of prophethood, and *Aakhirah* -the Day of Judgment) of God's path (*Al-Nisaa* 4: 165).
- Even after all these arrangements, God promised forgiveness for all such people who, after having committed a crime - however grave it may have been - repented and resolved to correct their behavior (*Al-Nisaa* 4: 17).

Under this basic scheme, God has warned man of eternal punishment in case of the following crimes:

- A general attitude of arrogance and haughtiness in the face of any and every truth that comes one's way (*Al-Zumar* 39: 72);
- Intentional indulgence in:
  1. Ascribing partners, associates or equals to the one God (*Al-Furqaan* 25: 68);
  2. Killing an innocent soul (*Al-Furqaan* 25: 68);

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3. Committing adultery (*Al-Furqaan* 25: 68);
4. Living a life completely engulfed in sin and disobedience to God (*Al-Baqarah* 2: 81);

However, it may be mentioned here that whatever crime a person may have committed, during his life, if he truly and sincerely repents for these crimes, corrects his behavior and honestly seeks God's forgiveness, the Qur'an has promised forgiveness for such a person. Moreover, the Qur'an also tells us that besides the crime of ascribing partners, associates and equals to God, God may, for whomsoever He pleases (without being unjust), forgive any crime (including the one's mentioned above). Nevertheless, God shall never forgive a person who associated partners to Him and did not repent or correct his behavior (*Al-Nisaa* 4: 48).

Thus, as a corollary of the details given above, we may say that only those people shall be subjected to the eternal punishment of Hellfire, who not only refuse to be saved from it but are, in fact, persistent on proving themselves deserving of it, even in the face of all of God's arrangements for saving them from it. It is only those who prefer to taste of God's wrath, over His mercy.

The Qur'an tells us that God's abounding mercy is available to all during the life of this world. However, in the hereafter, it shall only be limited to those, who prove themselves to be truly deserving of this mercy during the test of this life.

Thus, in view of:

- the extra-ordinary arrangement to guide man to the path of success;
- the limited number, the gravity and the severity of crimes that deserve eternal punishment; and
- the arrangement of informing man regarding the punishment of these crimes, prior to judging him,

the concept of eternal punishment no longer seems to be unjustified or against the concept of mercy.

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### **Will People be Reunited in Heaven?**

Does the Qur'an/*Hadith* mention anything about the people in Heaven being reunited with their loved ones (family, friends) who go to Hell? Can they take them out of Hell since all requests in Heaven are met, assuming they know about the fate of their

loved ones?

### **Reply**

The Qur'an clearly tells us:

And those who [truly] believe and whose progeny followed their footsteps with faith, We shall join them with their progeny. And [this joining shall be in a way that] We shall not, in the least, reduce the reward of their deeds; but every soul shall be under the pledge of its own deeds [thus, only deeds shall relieve it from the everlasting torments of Hellfire]. (*Al-Toor* 52: 21)

A close look at the above verse shows that it is primarily a glad tiding for the believers that if their progeny follows their footsteps with faith, they shall all be joined in the heaven in a way that those qualifying for a lower cadre of heaven shall be brought up to the higher cadre for which their parent or child has qualified<sup>6</sup>. However, immediately after this good news, the Qur'an has admonished its addressees that even though God shall unite the relatives in such a manner, yet to qualify for this mercy, a person should prove himself deserving of entry to at least the lowest cadre of paradise, which would be based purely on one's deeds<sup>7</sup>.

Keeping this glad tiding of the Qur'an in perspective, let us now turn to your specific question.

It is quite clear from the above verse that no person shall qualify for entry into the eternal bliss of paradise on the basis of anything besides his own deeds and faith. Thus, whether it be a relation, a friend or an acquaintance no one can be saved from facing the consequences of his/her deeds in the hereafter. Good deeds, and

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<sup>6</sup>1 This, in my opinion, is what the words "We shall not, in the least, reduce the reward of their deeds" imply. It is obvious that when the Qur'an announced that the pious parents and their pious children shall be united; there arose a question of the method of this reunion in the minds of the believers. If a parent has qualified for a higher cadre of heaven, would the child be brought up to the parent's level or would the parent be brought down to the child's level? The Qur'an, in the referred words, has given an eloquent answer to this question by saying that the reunion would be in such a way that no one shall be deprived of his/her rewards. Which, obviously, implies that those qualifying for a lower cadre shall be brought up to the higher level and shall get the rewards of the higher cadre, purely by God's mercy, rather than vice versa.

<sup>7</sup> This, in my opinion, is the obvious implication of the words: "but every soul shall be under the pledge of its own deeds".

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only good deeds, shall be a person's savior. No intercession, no request and no arbitration shall be able to save a person, whose balance tilts in favor of sins, rather than good deeds. Every person shall be under the pledge of his own deeds. Only deeds shall save him; and only deeds shall seal his eternal fate.

Those who qualify for the everlasting bliss of paradise have been promised that all their desires and demands shall, by God's grace, be met. However, the Qur'an is also quite clear to the effect that no person shall be able to enter into heaven on any other basis except on that of his own deeds. Keeping these two aspects of the information provided in the Qur'an, it seems that on that day, God shall remove the love of the impious from the hearts of the pious and shall, thereby, make their stay in paradise clear of all regret and discontentment.

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### **Women and Rewards in Paradise**

Can you tell me what Muslim women will have in heaven? I know that Muslim men will have 70 female "hories". So will women have male "hories"?

#### **Reply**

The Qur'an, while referring to the rewards of the pious in the Hereafter, has categorically stated that:

1. All persons - men as well as women - shall be fully rewarded for their deeds and shall not be wronged in the least (*Aal Imraan* 3: 195, *Al-Nisaa* 4: 124, *Al-Nahl* 16: 97, *Ghaafir* 40: 40);
2. They shall get all that they may desire and all that they can ask for, as a first gift from God. His further blessings would follow subsequently (*Fussilat* 41: 31); and
3. They - men as well as women - shall have perfected and cleansed counterparts/spouses as a reward of their deeds (*Al-Baqarah* 2: 25, *Aal Imraan* 3: 15, *Al-Nisaa* 4: 57<sup>8</sup>).

As should be obvious from the above points, there is absolutely no difference in the reward of men and women, as it is mentioned in the Qur'an. Furthermore, it may be noted that the Qur'an has not mentioned anything about '70 hories'. The Qur'an has only

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<sup>8</sup> Although the Qur'an has mentioned this reward while addressing men, yet, as is clear from the style of the Qur'an, there is no reason to believe that the same reward shall not apply to women as well.

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mentioned 'perfected and cleansed spouses/counterparts'.

An interesting point to note here is that some people have criticized the Qur'an for appealing to the very basic needs and desires of man, which include his desire for taste in edibles and beauty and chastity in his partner.

I really do not understand how can a person with even a cursory knowledge and exposure of human nature criticize this aspect of reward, mentioned in the Qur'an. The Qur'an has simply stated that in the life hereafter, man shall be granted all these things that he very strongly desires to possess in the life of this world and due to which, many a times, he is driven away from the path of his Lord's liking.

A study of human history as well as that of contemporary societies shall clearly evidence the fact that one of the strongest attractions that has led man away from God and His directives is that of the opposite sex. Many a times, man has sinned because of this impulse. The Qur'an has simply assured man that there is no harm in this attraction if one's behavior is controlled within the boundaries prescribed by the *Shari`ah* (i.e. the limits prescribed by God). It has assured man that if, in the life of this world, man would control himself within the boundaries prescribed by the *Shari`ah*, his Lord, in His infinite mercy, shall grant him all that he desired to get but from which he refrained himself, only to deserve the mercy and good will of His Lord.

For a normal human being the concept of an everlasting reward without the satisfaction of his most pressing desires is obviously incomplete. The Qur'an has recognized this fact, as all realistic views should. Only an ascetic, incomplete and unnatural view of life with arbitrary concepts of reward and punishment can refute this fact.

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### **Will Some People be Transferred from Hell to Heaven?**

What are your views about the following *Hadith of Sahih Bukhari* Volume 1, Book 2, Number 42:

Narrated *Anas*:

The Prophet said, "Whoever said "None has the right to be worshipped but Allah and has in his heart good (faith) equal to the weight of a barley grain will be taken out of Hell. And

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whoever said: "None has the right to be worshipped but Allah and has in his heart good (faith) equal to the weight of a wheat grain will be taken out of Hell. And whoever said, "None has the right to be worshipped but Allah and has in his heart good (faith) equal to the weight of an atom will be taken out of Hell."

Whereas, in Qur'an it is written that there will be three groups "*Sabiqoon al-Awaloon*", "*As'haab al Yameen*", and "*As'haab al-Shimaal*"<sup>9</sup>.

### **Reply**

As you have stated in your question, the Qur'an seems to be quite clear on the issue that on the Day of Judgment, people shall be divided into three groups. The *Sabiqoon*<sup>10</sup>, the *As'haab al Yameen*<sup>11</sup>, and the *As'haab al-Shimaal*<sup>12</sup>. The first two among these groups shall be those who will be given the good tidings of the everlasting life of bliss, while the third shall be the one sentenced to the tortures of hellfire. It is also quite obvious from the Qur'an that the *As'haab al Yameen* will be given this name, because on the Day of Judgment they shall be handed their records in their right hands. Thus, it seems from the Qur'an that no one from among these three groups shall be transferred from the torture of hellfire to the gardens of Paradise. In this perspective, the subject matter of the narrative ascribed to the Prophet (pbuh), which you have referred to in your question, apparently seems to be in contradiction with the Qur'an.

If all narratives relating to the subject are gathered and the issue is seen in the light of the information thus received, we get a slightly different picture. According to one of the narratives, also reported by *Anas (ra)* in *Sahih Bukhari (Kitaab al-Tawheed)* the Prophet (pbuh) is reported to have said that on the Day of Judgment, the records of some of the believers shall be held back. And subsequently, the Prophet (pbuh) shall intercede for these

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<sup>9</sup> That is, on the Day of Judgment, all mankind shall be divided into three groups. The former two groups shall qualify for the everlasting bliss of Paradise, while the third shall face the everlasting punishment of hellfire.

<sup>10</sup> Those who preceded others not only in believing in the Prophet's message but also in their submission to God, their steadfastness in the face of difficulties and hardships and their willingness to sacrifice all that they possessed in the way of the Almighty.

<sup>11</sup> People of the right hand, i.e. those who shall be given their records in their right hands.

<sup>12</sup> People of the left hand, i.e. those who shall be given their records in their left hands.

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people and God, in His infinite mercy shall forgive these people [and give their records in their right hands]. According to this narrative, the Prophet (pbuh) is reported to have said that he would keep going back to intercede for such believers till the time that only those are left who, according to the clear verses of the Qur'an deserve to be thrown in the hellfire, to abide there forever.

Now, if we look at the subject matter of this narrative ascribed to the Prophet (pbuh), we shall see that it does not contradict with the referred grouping of people as given in the Qur'an. The intercession mentioned in the stated version of the narrative does not, in any way, affect the grouping mentioned in the Qur'an and, moreover, no one, according to this narrative, is believed to be transferred from hellfire to Paradise.

Keeping the above explanation in perspective, we may hold the referred narrative of *Anas (ra)*, as reported in the *Kitaab al-Tawheed of Bukhari*, as more accurate in its subject matter and hold the other narratives as erroneous versions of the same narrative. Such errors, as we know, are not improbable when a chain of individuals is involved in the transmission of a particular subject matter. Such errors become even more probable when we take into account the fact that the accuracy of this transmission is highly dependent upon the correct understanding as well as narration of each and every individual narrator in the reporting chain. It is quite possible that some of the narrators may have misunderstood the subject matter and later on, may have very honestly and diligently transmitted what they understood to be correct, which, in reality, was not.

On the other hand, we may hold the two kinds of narratives to be independent of each other. In such a case, the narrative that you have referred to in your letter can only be accepted when an acceptable explanation, in the light of the Qur'an, is provided to resolve the apparent contradiction that you have mentioned in your question. In my opinion, an explanation worth considering may be that the Qur'an has told us that God will never forgive associating partners with Him. Besides this, God may forgive any sin for anyone (see *Al-Nisaa* 4: 48, *Al-Nisaa* 4: 116, *Al-Maaidah* 5: 72). Moreover, there are a few sins mentioned in the Qur'an, which deserve the everlasting punishment of hellfire. Thus, it may be that on the Day of Judgment, all those whose bad deeds are heavier than their good deeds, are sent to Hellfire. In other words, they are among the *As'haab al-Shimaal* on the Day of Judgment. From among those who are sentenced to Hell, for sins other than ascribing associates with Allah or for sins other than

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those for which the Qur'an has sentenced an everlasting punishment, the Prophet (pbuh) would request Allah for His forgiveness, and the people for whom Allah shall please, shall be forgiven. I think this interpretation also removes any contradiction between the referred narratives and the referred verses of the Qur'an.

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### **The Qur'anic Point of View regarding Eternal Salvation**

What does the Qur'an say about salvation? Do Muslims have assurance that they will go to heaven?

#### **Reply**

Your first question, as I understand it, relates to the principles or the law of eternal salvation mentioned in the Qur'an. The Qur'an has promised salvation for those who possess the following qualities:

1. True belief in one God only;
2. True belief in the Day of Judgment and the life hereafter; and
3. The balance of good deeds, done purely for winning the goodwill of God, outweighs that of bad deeds.

Besides the above positive qualities that an individual must possess to deserve eternal salvation, one should also be clear of the following negative qualities, which, in effect, are a negation of the above mentioned three positive qualities:

- A general attitude of arrogance and haughtiness in the face of any and every truth that comes one's way;
- Intentional indulgence in any of the crimes that has been declared by God to deserve eternal punishment in hellfire. Some of these crimes are:
  1. Ascribing partners, associates or equals to the one God;
  2. Rejecting a prophet or a messenger of God, after it has become absolutely clear that the person, in question, is indeed a true prophet or a messenger of God;
  3. Killing an innocent soul or committing adultery etc.

However, it may be mentioned here that whatever crime a person may have committed, during his life, if he truly and sincerely repents for these crimes, corrects his behavior and honestly seeks God's forgiveness, the Qur'an has promised forgiveness for such a person. Moreover, the Qur'an also tells us that besides the crime

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of ascribing partners, associates and equals to God, God may, for whomsoever He pleases (without being unjust), forgive any crime (including the one's mentioned above). Nevertheless, God shall never forgive a person who associated partners to Him and did not repent or correct his behavior.

The above, in my opinion, is a brief explanation of the principles or the law of eternal salvation, according to the Qur'an.

Your second questions is:

Do Muslims have assurance that they will go to heaven?

Yes. The Qur'an has given us assurance that if we live or sincerely try to live a life, which is in accordance with the above mentioned principles, God shall forgive us our mistakes and grant us eternal salvation. All those who are believers, muslims (i.e. a person who truly submits to the will and directives of God), obedient, truthful, steadfast in God's way, charitable, pious, chaste those whose hearts are filled with God's remembrance are indeed assured of eternal salvation by the Qur'an.

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### **Why does the Qur'an Arouse Man's Attraction to the Opposite Sex?**

Many non-Muslims and some Muslims have criticized the Qur'an in terms of its explanation of paradise. In some *Surahs* (55: 56) it mentions "in them will be maidens, chaste, restraining their glances". Critics like to say that this is 'giving the wrong impression'. So could you please explain to me how to argue this point in defense of the Qur'an when in discussion with non-Muslims?

#### **Reply**

I do not fully understand what exactly do you imply by the words 'giving the wrong impression'. Some people have criticized the Qur'an for appealing to the very basic needs and desires of man, which also include his desire for beauty and chastity in his/her partner. I really do not know how a person who has even a very cursory knowledge and exposure of human nature criticize this appeal of the Qur'an. The Qur'an has simply stated that in the life hereafter, man shall be granted all these things that he very strongly desires to possess in the life of this world and due to which, many a times, he is driven away from the path of his Lord's liking.

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I am sure you would agree with me that one of the strongest attractions that, generally, led man away from God and His directives is that of the opposite sex. Many a times, man has sinned because of this impulse. The Qur'an has simply assured man that there is no harm in this attraction if one's behavior is controlled within the boundaries prescribed by the *Shari`ah*. It has assured man that if, in the life of this world, man controls himself within the boundaries prescribed by the *Shari`ah*, his Lord, in His infinite mercy, shall grant him all that he desired to get but from which he refrained himself, only to deserve the mercy and the good will of His Lord.

If you look at these verses in this perspective, I am sure you will also agree with me that a more just and equitable reward, in the hereafter, cannot even be imagined than the one which promises man to get exactly what he sacrificed in the life of this world.

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### **The Test of Children**

What shall happen to children on the Judgment Day?

#### **Reply**

The reward or the punishment that a man shall face on the Day of Judgment will be the result of his intentional and conscious good and/or bad deeds. Children who die before reaching the age of mental maturity shall obviously not deserve to be punished for their mistakes - whether in adhering to any beliefs or in adopting any practices. The Qur'an is very clear in this respect that only those who reject the truth (*Kafir*), after the truth has become completely apparent to them, shall be put to punishment in the hereafter. It, therefore, seems far from the concept of mercy and justice that a child be put to punishment.

Thus, in my opinion, a child shall not be put to punishment. However, the question remains that if a child shall not be put to punishment, would he then be rewarded with the eternal bliss of paradise, like other honest seekers of the truth. This question cannot be answered, as no guidance has been given in this respect in the Qur'an or any reliable narrative ascribed to the Prophet (pbuh). Nevertheless, we can rest assured that whatever the eternal fate of such children it shall be decided by the just and the ever-merciful Lord of the worlds. Therefore, even if we do not possess any knowledge of that fate, we can be hopeful that such children shall be dealt with in a manner most suited for the

ever-merciful Judge.

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***Hadith Regarding the Fate of Children on the Day of Judgment***

With reference to your previous response on the topic: 'What shall be the fate of children on the Day of Judgment', I need to know your understanding about the following Hadith:

Narrated Ibn `Abbas:

Allah's Messenger (saw) was asked about the children of *Al-Mushrikun*<sup>13</sup>. The Prophet (saw) replied, "Since Allah created them, He knows what sort of deeds they would have done." (*Bukhari*, 2:465-O.B)

**Reply**

Before reading on with my response to your specific question, I would suggest that you should take another look at my earlier response regarding the fate of children on the Day of Judgment.

The Qur'an has unequivocally declared that on the Day of Judgment, every person shall face the consequences only of his actual deeds.

The referred narrative cannot be termed as one, which is accurately ascribed to the Prophet (pbuh) because of the fact that it does not corroborate with the clearly stated principle of 'Punishment' in the Qur'an<sup>14</sup>. Furthermore, there are a few other narratives ascribed to the Prophet (pbuh) according to which he said that all children (including those of the polytheists) die according to the nature upon which God has created them<sup>15</sup>. According to a narrative reported in the compilation of *Bukhari*, the Prophet (pbuh) is reported to have said:

فكل مولود مات على الفطرة قال فقال بعض المسلمين يا رسول الله وأولاد المشركين؟ فقال رسول الله صلى الله عليه وسلم وأولاد المشركين. (بخاري، كتاب التعبير، باب تعبير الرؤيا بعد صلاة الصبح، رقم الحديث 6525)

Each child dies according to the nature upon which God has

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<sup>13</sup> i.e. the polytheists.

<sup>14</sup> It should be kept in mind that a person may be forgiven for his sins but he shall in no case be subjected to a punishment for something, which he has not actually done.

<sup>15</sup> i.e. he is on the right path.

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created him. The narrator says that some of the Muslims asked: 'Prophet of God, is this the case with the children of the polytheists as well?' The Prophet (pbuh) replied: '[Yes.] The children of the polytheists as well.'

It is, in fact, because of such mutually contradictory narratives ascribed to the Prophet (pbuh) that there is a significant difference of opinion regarding the stated issue among Muslim scholars<sup>16</sup>.

The strangest among the narratives on this subject is the one cited by Ibn Abd al-Burr, in his commentary on the "Mu'atta" of Imam Maalik<sup>17</sup>. According to this narrative, Ayesha (ra) says that once Khadijah (ra) asked the Prophet (pbuh) regarding the fate of the children of the polytheists. At that time, the Prophet (pbuh) replied that they shall be in the company of their parents<sup>18</sup>. Some time later, I [i.e. Ayesha] asked the Prophet (pbuh) the same question, at which the Prophet (pbuh) replied that God shall decide about their fate, according to His knowledge of what they would have done in their mature days. After some time, when I once again asked the Prophet (pbuh) regarding the fate of such children on the Day of Judgment. At that time the verse 'No one shall bear the burden of another'<sup>19</sup> was revealed, after which the Prophet said that each child is born according to the nature upon which God has created him.

In view of the apparently contradictory information entailed in narratives ascribed to the Prophet (pbuh), it would obviously seem more prudent to base our opinion regarding the issue under consideration, on the clear principles stipulated in the Qur'an.

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### **The Severity of the Punishment in the Hereafter**

In a dialogue I had with an atheist over the summer, we discussed the story of the Trust mentioned in Chapter 33. I explained that the Trust represents the test of this life, in which, if we succeed, we are rewarded and if we fail, punished. He

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<sup>16</sup> '*Fath al-Bari*', the commentary on *Sahih Bukhari*, has mentioned at least ten different opinions on the subject, which various Muslim scholars hold to be correct.

<sup>17</sup> Al-Tamheed, Volume 18, Pg. 117.

<sup>18</sup> Obviously implying that they too shall be punished in hellfire.

<sup>19</sup> This verse can be found in *Al-An`aam* 6: 164, *Al-Israa* 17: 15, *Faatir* 35: 18, *Al-Zumar* 39: 7 and *Al-Najm* 53: 38.

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mentioned that this was an aspect of Islamic thought he had been unaware of. But it only raised more questions for him.

He likened God's presentation of the Trust to man to a teacher administering a test, with which the penalty for failure is being shot, murdered, or, far worse, tortured in hell for an eternity. He said that if he were that teacher, he would encourage – even force – his students to cheat, and if, like God, he had the power to get rid of such a testing system altogether, he would do so. While it makes sense that a teacher should give students appropriate slack in terms of failing, this analogy does not adequately capture the great stakes involved in God's test. The penalty for failure in God's test is being roasted in fire forever, whereas the worst that could happen to a student is dismissal from a particular educational institution and/or unemployment. I was, with my limited intelligence, unable to answer his questions. And the analogy he presented made me consider God's Trust in a new light.

I was wondering how you would respond to his arguments.

### **Reply**

The 'Trust' referred in *Al-Ahzaab* 33: 72, as I understand it, is not the test, but the 'free will', which man has been bestowed with, during this test. Explaining my point of view, I have written in one of my earlier responses:

In my opinion, the word "*al-Amanah*" refers to the free will in matters relating to the choice between right and wrong and good and evil, which, according to the Qur'an, humans are bestowed with. The verse actually tells us that before the creation of man in the present physical and material form and before putting him in the test of the life of this world, man, with other creations – like the heavens, the earth and the mountains – was given the option of accepting to take this test, bestowed with the quality of free will in opting for good and evil. At that time, all the creations, including man, were shown the great pleasures (during the life hereafter) that they shall receive in case of success in this test and were also shown the severe punishment (during the life hereafter) which shall befall them as a consequence of failing in this test. All the creations refused to take up the trust of being bestowed with this free will and, thus, to take the test of the life of this world, for they were scared of the consequences of failure. The only exception was man. He accepted this trust. He accepted the trust to gain the pleasures of the life

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hereafter and was so attracted to these pleasures that he completely ignored the consequences and the severity of the punishment in case of his failure. But man's past and present (on the basis of which his future seems to be no different) shows that he has normally misused his free will and has generally opted for evil. Thus, man has generally failed in the trust that he himself accepted to fulfill. This is a clear evidence that his decision of taking this test and accepting the trust of free will was an emotional one (*jahalah*) and in doing so he crossed his limits and over-estimated himself (*zulm*).

As for the questions raised by your friend, they do not directly relate to the 'trust', but actually relate to the severity of the consequences, in case of failure.

Your friend has highlighted the severity of the punishment that man shall have to face in the Life hereafter, in case of 'failure' in the test of this life, without actually fully realizing what is it that shall actually constitute 'failure' in this test. Failure in the test of this life is not comparable to failure in a high-school test: the respective scope of the two is incomparable, their respective significance is beyond comparison and most of all the standards of success and failure in the two are poles apart.

In the test of the life of this world, 'failure' is not merely giving a wrong 'answer'. On the contrary, 'failure' in this test is actually refusing to give the right 'answer', even after having full knowledge of that 'answer'. 'Failure' in the hereafter is not the consequence of ignorance, mistake, inability or even being overcome by circumstances. On the contrary, 'failure' in this test is due to a refusal to see, even though we were bestowed with eyes; it is a refusal to hear, even after being granted ears; it is refusal to understand, even after being given the knowledge and the ability to distinguish right from wrong.

My dear brother, the severe and eternal punishment in the life hereafter would be the fate of those human beings, who preferred to act like grazing animals. Only those people would 'roast' in the Hellfire, who 'refuse' upon themselves the abounding Mercy of the Just and render themselves a target of the absolute justice of the Merciful.

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### **Will the Bliss of Paradise be Absolute?**

I was recently thinking about the idea of eternal bliss, as my

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philosophy teacher posed the following (completely arbitrary) question on an exam: "Do you find the idea of eternal bliss appealing or repellant? Why?" My immediate answer to this was that it is appealing, especially considering the immense suffering that flesh is heir to in the life of this world as well as the fact that it is fairly easy to qualify for Paradise. You just have to believe in God, in accountability before Him, do more good deeds than bad deeds, and avoid the big sins. However, it was only hours after the exam that I began to wonder whether the idea of eternal bliss was repellant...

Why might it be repellant? It seems to imply a kind of stagnation. That is, it would seem boring if the bliss of Paradise is maximal. One could enter heaven and ask God for a beach. If one was maximally happy using this beach, there would be no incentive to change action and one would be sitting on a beach forever! (This is not a bad thing necessarily, but there is the element of stagnation and it is almost as though you have been "programmed" to be completely happy). However, Islam holds that there are varying levels of Paradise, which implies that happiness is relative, not absolute. I have tried rationalizing the concept in my mind, and this is what I have come up with: Each level of heaven will contain unimaginable bliss, which God will provide without any difficulty. But this bliss will not be 100% absolute and there will instead be a certain margin of longing/dissatisfaction in each level of heaven. This margin is what prompts the citizens of Paradise to ask God for more and more, for an eternity. In the highest echelon, there would be a smaller margin of longing as compared to lower levels. Whatever garden one enters, the situation will obviously be much much better than roasting in fire and drinking boiling water for eternity.

I understand, though, that heaven and hell are abstract, mystical concepts that are allegorically described, and so rationalizing them in the manner above is, in a sense, futile. The Qur'an says that no soul knows what delights are hidden for the eye in Paradise. We can't even begin to imagine what Jannah will be like. Still, I wanted to solicit your thoughts on this issue. Have you ever tried rationalizing the concept in your mind? If so, how did you rationalize it? If not, how would you explain the apparent element of stagnation in absolute (not relative) happiness?

### **Reply**

I do not have much to add to the explanation that you have yourself given in your last paragraph. The fact is that the concept of 'absolute' bliss is so alien to our minds that we cannot even

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imagine enjoying a life that provides us with it.

You write:

I have tried rationalizing the concept in my mind, and this is what I have come up with: Each level of heaven will contain unimaginable bliss, which God will provide without any difficulty. But this bliss will not be 100% absolute and there will instead be a certain margin of longing/dissatisfaction in each level of heaven. This margin is what prompts the citizens of Paradise to ask God for more and more, for an eternity.

I would not disagree with your explanation completely, yet I would phrase it in a slightly different way: As I understand it, there would indeed be a continual evolution of the great blessings of Paradise, yet none of these evolutionary stages would entail any sense of deprivation, at any level. Every person, at each level, would get even more than his wildest imagination. As you would have it, every person would get 100 percent satisfaction, at each level. No level would entail any unfulfilled desires, aspirations or needs. However, there can indeed be yet 'unknown' desires, aspirations and needs at each evolutionary level, which become 'known' and 'fully satisfied' at each subsequent level.

To understand my foregoing explanation, take the example of the general evolution and development of the humankind, over time, as well as that of an individual life in its various stages.

Consider the desires, aspirations and needs of man during the bronze-age. We know that a person may have lived a life of 'complete satisfaction' during that age, without even being 'aware' of the desires, aspirations and needs that time would create within man. Thus, the cool shade of a tree may have provided man with ultimate satisfaction in his desire to save himself from the scorching heat of the sun, for he was never even aware of the comfort provided by central air-conditioning facility. The historical man lived a life of 'complete satisfaction', without ever experiencing the pleasant environment of the central air-conditioning facility, for this experience was never desired, aspired or needed by the historical man.

The same phenomenon can be observed in the evolving stages of an individual's life. The concept of 'complete satisfaction' for an infant would be substantially different from that of a teenager, an adult or a middle-aged person. Our desires, aspirations and needs evolve considerably over time. Something, which becomes a

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desire in our adult life may not even attract us during our childhood.

The blessings of Paradise would continually evolve with our evolving needs and aspirations. No stage of that life would entail any degree of dissatisfaction, yet every subsequent level would entail more pleasure and satisfaction, when compared to the preceding level.

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### **Will Disability be given a Relief on the Day of Judgment?**

I was wondering if people who are disabled did something wrong to deserve their disability does their condition help them in any way on the Day of Judgment? Or are they judge like everyone else.

#### **Reply**

In the hereafter, every person shall be held accountable on the basis of what he was capable of doing – whether from a physical perspective or from an intellectual perspective. This point is clearly confirmed by the following verse of the Qur'an:

God does not put upon anyone a responsibility that is beyond his capacity. (Al-Baqarah 2: 286)

Thus, if a person suffers from a disability which hinders the performance of any of his religious or moral obligations, the person would then be given a relief, due to that disability, in his accountability – with reference to that particular obligation – in the hereafter.

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### **Good & Bad Deeds**

#### **Are All Sins of Equal Weight?**

In Christianity all sin is equal. What are the weights of sin in Islam? I know that *shirk* stands above everything else... Could you elaborate?

#### **Reply**

Not only according to the Qur'an, but also according to the Bible, it is quite obvious that all sins are not of equal weight. Some sins

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are much more significant than others and therefore should be followed by graver consequences. We have heard of the "seven deadly sins" mentioned in the Bible, while we also know that there are only a few sins for which the Qur'an has warned of everlasting punishment, which obviously implies that these sins are more significant and grave than others.

The following saying ascribed to Jesus (pbuh) according to Matthews also points out the same fact:

Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You give a tenth of your spices - mint, dill and cummin. But you have neglected the more important matters of the law - justice, mercy and faithfulness. You should have practiced the latter, without neglecting the former. You blind guides! You strain out a gnat but swallow a camel. (Matthew 23: 23 - 24)

The words: "the more important matters of the law", clearly indicate that all of the directives – though need to be followed with the same vigor – are not of equal significance. "You strain out a gnat but swallow a camel" also has the same implication. "Gnat" here implies small sins, while "camel" is used figuratively for big sins.

Jesus (pbuh) is also ascribed to have said:

Truly, I say to you, The sons of men will have forgiveness for all their sins and for all the evil words they say. But whoever says evil things against the Holy Spirit will never have forgiveness, but the evil he has done will be with him forever. (Mark 3: 28 - 29)

It is, obvious, that the unforgivable sin mentioned in the referred verses is not equal to the other sins.

The Qur'an has used the word "*Kabaa'ir*" to imply big sins. According to the Qur'an a person should be very mindful of the "*Kabaa'ir*". If a person saves himself from "*Kabaa'ir*", God, with His all encompassing mercy shall forgive his smaller sins (see *Al-Nisaa* 4: 31, *Al-Shooraa* 42: 37, *Al-Najam* 53: 32).

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## **Sins That Can Follow Eternal Punishment**

I have heard that besides *Shirk*<sup>20</sup>, cold-blooded murder and not dividing inheritance properly are two other sins that can send one to hell forever. Is this true?

### **Reply**

There are, indeed, a few other crimes - besides *Shirk* - mentioned in the Qur'an, as entailing the fearsome potential of subjecting a person to the eternal punishment of Hellfire. Some of these crimes are fornication, murder (*Al-Furqaan* 25: 68 - 69) and living a life, which is completely drowned in sin (*Al-Baqarah* 2: 81). As far as hindering the prescribed distribution of the shares of inheritance and of depriving a person from his rightful share in inheritance - whether the share is prescribed by the *Shari`ah* or through a will of the deceased, the Qur'an has referred to such an action as filling one's belly with fire (*Al-Nisaa* 4: 10).

All the referred sins have the potential of subjecting man to extremely severe punishments in the hereafter. The only exception is where a person has truly repented for and, wherever possible, has corrected the effects of his wrongdoing. Furthermore, in all such cases where the sin is committed against another human being - as for instance, in the case of murder or in the case of depriving someone of his rightful wealth etc. - because the real authority for forgiveness rests with the individual, who has been wronged, therefore, forgiveness should be sought from the individual or, in the case of murder, from his immediate relatives. Moreover, in all such cases, where the rights of the wronged individual can be returned, the sinner, for the purpose of securing his forgiveness, must also completely return the rights which he had deprived the individual from.

In case of all the referred sins - including *Shirk* - the sinner shall be completely relieved of the punishment of his sin, if he has truly repented and sought forgiveness for his wrongdoing, during the life of this world.

The particular aspect of difference between *Shirk* and all other crimes, from the perspective of their punishment in the hereafter, lies in the fact that according to the Qur'an, if anyone dies without repenting for his wrongdoings, then he may - even though he deserves the severe punishment of hellfire - be pardoned by the Merciful and the Just Lord. However, contrary to all other crimes, if someone dies without repenting for ascribing partners to God -

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<sup>20</sup> Ascribing partners to the One God.

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i.e. Shirk - then even the Merciful and the Just Lord will never forgive him (*Al-Nisaa* 4: 48, *Al-Nisaa* 4: 116).

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### **Sins Committed in Ignorance**

I want to know about what does Islam say about punishment to someone who was not fully or was not made fully aware of the extent of his limits but has done something wrong (which is not considered wrong by the accused due to his unawareness of the matter).

#### **Reply**

A sin becomes punishable when it is committed with the intent of the heart as well as the knowledge of it being a sin. However, this is only true for sins that are purely religious in nature. In cases of basic morality, we may have the excuse of getting carried away in an uncontrolled stroke of emotional outburst, but the excuse of ignorance shall not be acceptable. For instance, in the case of all those basic ethical or moral values the knowledge of which is *a priori*<sup>21</sup> to man, the excuse of ignorance shall not be acceptable. For instance, if I have deprived anyone of his/her right or have killed an innocent soul or have stolen something or have intentionally decided a matter, which was presented before me for a decision, unjustly or have intentionally given a false witness etc., my excuse of ignorance in such matters shall not be acceptable, as the knowledge of the wrongfulness of all such matters is *a priori* to man. No man is ignorant of their being a grave sin.

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### **Relationship between Beliefs and Actions for Success in the Hereafter**

While reading the Qur'an a question has arisen several times in my mind regarding conflicting criteria (to my novice mind) for success in the hereafter.

At several places it is mentioned in the Qur'an that those who indulge in '*shirk*' will not be forgiven and all other sins may be forgiven. But at other places it is mentioned that our success or failure in the hereafter depends on our deeds.

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<sup>21</sup> This includes all such actions about the wrongness of which man is inherently and naturally aware.

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Hence in one place the emphasis is on having correct concepts about God. In other words importance is placed on right knowledge of God or stress is on theory. While at other places actions or practice are deemed important.

The traditional explanation is that '*shirk*' or not having the correct '*Imaan*' (concept of God) makes us liable to be sent to hell. On the basis of this our traditional '*Ulema*' infer that good deeds done by non-Muslims will be rewarded in worldly life only. And that Muslims will undergo punishment for their misdeeds in the hereafter but will eventually land in heaven because of their having the correct '*Imaan*'.

When I look at the people around me I see several people with wrong concepts about God/hereafter/Prophethood but who in their actions/dealings are irreproachable. This observation comes true (several times) the other way round also when people with clear concepts indulge in misdeeds.

One explanation of the above behavior to me is that the link between man's concepts and actions is not very strong and actions are governed by a person's nature and predisposition. If this is true then religion should not put so much emphasis on having correct concepts.

But maybe I haven't understood the correct meaning of the word '*Imaan*' as used in the Qur'an. Maybe what God means by it is not just having theoretical knowledge (*Ilm-ul-Yaqeen*) but having '*Ain-ul-Yaqeen*' and '*Haq-ul-Yaqeen*'. i.e *Imaan* is not just mere concepts but a strong conviction which then propels action.

But conviction in good and bad can be had by a follower of any religion or faith. And if we accept this then a person can be successful in the hereafter irrespective of the religion that he grew up into and was given to him by his parents.

Would you elaborate on it?

### **Reply**

Let us first of organize the information that we get from the Qur'an regarding success in the life hereafter. The Qur'an tells us that:

1. *Shirk* (i.e. associating partners to God) has no logical or natural grounds. It is an absolute lie, which infringes upon the rights of the one God. Due to this reason, the Qur'an

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emphatically declares that God will, in no case, forgive *shirk*. This really implies that associating partners to the one God (and dying in that state, without repentance and correction) is an eternal disqualification from the life in Paradise (please note that this does not mean that a life clear of *Shirk* is guaranteed Paradise).

2. Besides *Shirk*, a person, unless forgiven by God, may be eternally doomed into hellfire for killing an innocent soul, for committing fornication and for other such crimes the punishment of which has been mentioned in the Qur'an to be eternal doom (for example rejecting a prophet of God, after being fully convinced of his prophethood or to be completely drowned in and encompassed by sins - *Al-Baqarah* 2: 81).

The above two, according to the Qur'an are eternal disqualifications from the everlasting bliss of Paradise. However, it should be kept in mind that the Qur'an clearly tells us that the absence of these two disqualifications is not by itself, a qualification for paradise. On the contrary, the Qur'an has positively mentioned the qualifications required for success in the hereafter. These qualifications are:

- The absence of the disqualifications mentioned in point 1 and 2 above.
- *Imaan* on the necessary articles of faith. *Imaan* implies true and real belief. According to the Qur'an, the articles of faith necessary for qualification to paradise are (according to *Al-Baqarah* 2: 62):
  1. Belief in one God. This belief entails holding that God possesses all such qualities that we know to be good and deserving of him and also all such qualities that we have been told through His prophets and messengers that He possesses. Moreover, this belief also entails holding that God is absolutely clear of all such qualities that we know to be bad and not deserving of Him to possess and also all such qualities that we have been told through His prophets and messengers that He is clear of.
  2. Belief in the Day of Judgment. This belief means to hold that there will be a day when we shall be made to face God and made to answer for all the bad (whether in beliefs or actions) that we did and in case we do not have a plausible and acceptable excuse of doing such bad, shall be punished for doing so; when we shall be rewarded for all the good that we did or intended to do. Belief in the Day of Judgment is a corollary of the correct belief in God;

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as such a day of judgment is an obvious result of the divine attributes of mercy, providence, wisdom, omnipotence, omniscience and justice.

- *Amal e Saalih* (i.e. good deeds). True belief in the two concepts explained above, requires us to behave accordingly. If these beliefs do not affect the behavior of a person, then they are either hypocrisy or ignorance<sup>22</sup>. Thus, we see that the Qur'an, at most of the places, has combined the two things - i.e. *imaan* (belief) and *amal e saalih* (good deeds) - as if they are inseparable. It seems that according to the Qur'an, there is no such thing as 'true belief', without 'good deeds'.

You should be able to find answers to most of the points that you have raised in your letter. However, some of the points need some further clarification. For instance, you state:

... On the basis of this our traditional `Ulema infer that good deeds done by non-Muslims will be rewarded in worldly life only. And that Muslims will undergo punishment for their misdeeds in the hereafter but will eventually land in heaven because of their having the correct 'Imaan'.

In my opinion, the concept more coherent with the information given in the Qur'an would be:

1. All those who do not ascribe partners/associates to God (*mushrik/polytheist*) and do good deeds as a requirement of their belief in one God are promised a position in the everlasting bliss of paradise.
2. All those who ascribe partners/associates to God (*mushrik/polytheist*) shall have no chance of forgiveness irrespective of their deeds (they may or may not be rewarded in this life).
3. All those who, although, do not ascribe partners to God (*mushrik/polytheist*) - whether Muslims or ascribing to any other non-polytheistic faith - yet have lived a sinful life, shall face the punishment of their sins, except if forgiven by the Merciful.

This explanation should answer all the points that you have raised. However, in case any question remains in your mind, please feel free in writing back to me.

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<sup>22</sup> That is either the person is lying about his beliefs or is not aware of what true belief is.

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### **Renouncing Faith at the Time of Death**

What if a person at the time of death utters words like "God does not exist, no resurrection will take place, I have wasted my time in all the prayers those I offered etc.", out of fear and desperation.

Does this person consider to be died at kufr (disbelieve) and go to hell; no matter how pious he has been throughout his life?

### **Reply**

When a person accepts faith, he nullifies all the bad deeds that he had previously done in his life and shall not therefore be punished for these bad deeds. Similarly, when a person renounces faith, he nullifies all the good deeds that he had done previously in his life and shall not therefore be rewarded for these pious deeds.

During the test of the life of this world, God puts us through various kinds of situations to test the truthfulness of our claim of having faith and belief in Him and His promises. Our response in these various situations of life, bring to light the reality or otherwise of our claim of faith and belief.

When a person accepts or renounces faith at any stage in his life, he absolves himself of the responsibility, liability or reward of the deeds that he had previously done in his life. As a result, a person's renouncement of faith at any stage in his life is, in effect, his declaration of considering himself at fault throughout his past life. Thus, when a person absolves himself from the reward of his deeds, then, obviously, God is no longer responsible to reward his deeds.

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### ***Clarification regarding Renouncing Faith at the Time of Death***

I would like you to clarify my point of view regarding the faith at the time of death.

It is said in *Al-Nisaa* 18:

And repentance is not for those who go on doing evil deeds, until when death comes to one of them, he says: 'Surely, now

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I repent'; nor (for) those who die while they are unbelievers. These are they for whom We have prepared a painful chastisement.

It is also said in *Yunus* 90-91:

And We made the children of Israel to pass through the sea, then Firon and his hosts followed them for oppression and tyranny; until when drowning overtook him, he said: I believe that there is no god but He in Whom the children of Israel believe and I am of those who submit. What! now! and indeed you disobeyed before and you were of the mischief-makers.

By reading the above verses one infers that God is not accepting the repentance of an unbeliever no matter how sincere he/she is at the time of death i.e. he is still alive. Firon was also not spared although he said that he believed in God. It seems that at the time of death a person's faith is not judged.

Let me rephrase the situation:

What if a person at the time of death has thoughts like "God may not exist, resurrection might not take place, I might have wasted my time in all the prayers those I offered etc.", out of fear and desperation.

It is also said that if a person is asked to recite Kalima at the time of death, he will not become a Muslim on the basis that he is not in his senses.

The time of death is certainly a very distressing situation in ones' life. God accepts the repentance of humans, even when they have committed sin intentionally, if they repent sincerely. How can a God expect an individual, i.e. His own creation, to be in right state of mind at such a distressing time of his life? After all He knows what a human is capable of. Like God Himself says in Surah Qaaf 50:16:

And certainly We created man, and We know what his mind suggests to him, and We are nearer to him than his life-vein.

How many individuals can pass this moment successfully? It is not a situation like others where many individuals are going through the same distressing situation and can hold on to themselves. Here no one can help; he is alone and desperate.

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So, does this person consider to be died at *kufr* (disbelieve), because of just having these thoughts, and go to hell; no matter how pious he has been throughout his life? Will God nullify his deeds just because he could not bear the psychological pain associated with his death?

### **Reply**

Firstly, we must remember that what man goes through at the time of his death, how conscious he is while going through this ultimate phase of his life and which of his thoughts, at that time, should be excused as having been generated unconsciously, over which he has no control, are known more to God than even man himself. On the basis of this obvious reality as well as on the assurance provided by the Qur'an that man shall only be held responsible and accountable for the sins that he has intentionally committed and for which he has no repentance, we can rest assured that any incorrect thought or idea coming in a less than fully conscious mind shall not subject man to eternal doom. A truly pious man shall always find God's mercy to be far more abounding than the gravest of his mistakes.

Nevertheless, we must also keep in mind that for a person, who has lived his life with full commitment to God's guidance, God, with His special mercy for him, bestows upon him with satisfaction, contentment and serenity of heart and mind and continues to strengthen his faith in Him at every stage of his life.

The Qur'an says:

God is the guardian of those who believe; guiding them out of the dark [alleys of falsehood] into the light [of Truth].  
(*Al-Baqarah* 2: 257)

At another instance, the Qur'an says:

Those who declare: 'Our Lord is God alone' and then remain steadfast on it, angels shall descend upon them [saying] that: 'You shall neither fear [your future] nor regret [your past]. Receive tidings of [the eternal bliss of] Paradise, which you were promised. We were your companions in the worldly life and are also your companions in the later life. [Here] you shall have all that your hearts desire. [Here] you shall have all that you ask for: As a first greeting from the Forgiving, the Merciful. (*Fussilat* 41: 30 - 32)

If a person has truly tried his best to live a steadfast life of piety

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and submission to his Merciful Creator, God will Himself save him from going astray during the most distressing moments of his life.

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### **Is Man Accountable for his Thoughts?**

Are we going to be judged on what we think and if we cant stop thinking about bad thoughts, what can we do? Is it haraam to think about doing something wrong and you know that you are not going to do it, you are just thinking about it because it makes you feel good. Do you think thinking about making love to a girl is haraam? Even though you know that you are not going to do. People say that its going to lead you to do the haraam thing but if it doesn't lead to anything, is it haraam?

### **Reply**

It is indeed a great mercy of the Almighty that He does not hold us accountable or punish us for our evil thoughts or desires, till the time that such thoughts or desires are translated into action. However, in my personal capacity, I would not recommend intentionally indulging in evil thoughts, as it has a definite effect on the personality of the individual. We must remember that God's mercy does not end at not punishing us for our evil thoughts, but extends to rewarding our good thoughts even if we are unable to translate them into action. Thus, even though we are not punished for our evil thoughts or ideas, we lose the credit, which we could so easily have earned by just positive, noble and pious thinking.

My dear brother, a truly godly person is concerned not just with avoiding sin but also with earning more credits for the hereafter. This is exactly what the Prophet (pbuh) is reported to have said in one of the narratives ascribed to him. Nomaan ibn Basheer says that the Prophet said:

The prohibitions and allowances have been clearly specified. However, between these two limits, lie things, which are neither clearly prohibited nor allowed, which can create doubts in your minds. Whoever desists from the things which are not clearly prohibited, and about which he has doubts, is more likely to stay away from the clear prohibitions of the Shari`ah. While a person who does not save himself from things about which he has doubts, is more likely to cross the limits set by God. (*Bukhari, Kitaab al-Buyoo*)

The aforecited narrative as well as the general moral teachings of

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the prophets of God have been to the effect that if something is prohibited in the *Shari`ah*, then even the path which has a chance of leading us into that sin should be avoided. This is exactly what the Prophet (pbuh) has implied in one of the narratives ascribed to him. The Prophet (pbuh) is reported to have said that a lustful look at a woman is the fornication of the eye and vulgar speech is the fornication of the tongue etc. and this is what Jesus (pbuh) implied in the following words ascribed to him:

You have heard that it was said, 'Do not commit adultery.'  
But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart. (Matthew, 5: 27 - 28)

My dear brother, a person who not only believes but practically keeps the thought of God's omniscience and omnipresence alive in his mind would not like to indulge in anything, however trivial it might seem, that God does not like. The life of a godly person is like a prayer that is offered in God's presence. Our minds can only be occupied with either the good or the evil thoughts. We should always try to keep our mind filled with the former.

I would, therefore, suggest that an evil thought may come to mind but a person who holds God's love dear to him, should not intentionally try to keep his mind occupied with evil thoughts.

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### **Does Abstinence from Sin Count as Good Deeds?**

If we abstain from committing a particular sin, for fear of God, does God reward us for this and count the abstention as good deeds?

#### **Reply**

With all the attraction and the immediate physical and material pleasures generally involved in most of the 'sins', it is indeed a good deed to refrain from all immoral actions. Refraining from immorality is, indeed, a part of morality.

On the basis of the abounding mercy and grace of the Almighty, we should remain hopeful of being rewarded not only for our good deeds, but also for the good deeds that we desired to perform as well as for all those evil deeds, which we refrained from for our love for winning the pleasures of and for our fear of the wrath of the Almighty.

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### **Doing Good Deeds for Rewards**

The idea that good should be rewarded with good and that evil should be rewarded with evil makes sense to me.

However, I often wonder about whether seeking reward for virtuous behavior and ethically sound action renders such behavior and action less virtuous. If someone, for example, decides to donate charity to please and earn the pleasure of God, who is the Supreme Good, as well as to satisfy the natural desire to assist the deprived/weak, the action retains its moral and ethical value. When we say, in Muslim parlance, that we shall receive 'sawaab' or reward for good deeds, it seems to be the logical consequence of performing deeds of piety. But when a person thinks solely about reward when doing good deeds, it seems to me that a kind of 'reductive disintegration' of morality takes place. There seems to be something embarrassingly puerile about needing the thought of pretty women and sparkling fountains to serve as the motor for moral and ethical action. If someone has only these images in his mind when doing good deeds, there seems to be something less virtuous about it all. I do not condemn these desires, but I think that such motivation should remain an adjunct to the primary motive of serving and pleasing God.

Please explain where and how the concept of reward fits into the Islamic picture of moral and ethical action and please comment on the claim that the concept of reward contributes to a "reductive disintegration" of morality.

### **Reply**

The essence of the Qur'anic message is only that people shall be rewarded for their good deeds. However, to put this message across more effectively, the Qur'an has referred in some detail to some of the forms of these rewards, which under the present human perspective are likely to be more generally comprehensible by all human beings. Nevertheless, even while referring to these forms of rewards in the hereafter, the Qur'an has clearly mentioned the point that the greatest of these rewards, even though it may not be as easily comprehensible for many human beings, is to have earned the pleasure of the Lord (*Al-Taubah* 9: 72). Furthermore, the Qur'an has also mentioned that the referred forms of rewards, in fact, present only a vague glimpse of what is to come in the afterlife, besides the referred

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forms of rewards, the Qur'an has emphatically stated that man cannot even imagine the great rewards that await him during the hereafter (*Al-Sajadah* 32: 17).

The idea that 'doing good deeds with the intention of earning rewards in the hereafter is a kind of reductive disintegration of morality' may seem to be extremely attractive from a philosophical perspective. However, a thorough deliberation over it would show that it can only be propounded by those who not only have their basic needs fully met, but who also take the fulfillment of these needs for granted. It is extremely unfortunate how man can take his fulfilled needs for granted to the extent that sometimes he can even forget how pressing and demoralizing these needs can become, if they remain unfulfilled for some time. Only those who have tasted hunger can realize the blessing of sleeping with a full belly.

The Qur'an, while mentioning the rewards of good deeds addresses humans, who realize that they are indigent and needy of God's special blessings to even sustain their existence. It is such humans, who have been informed by the Qur'an that if they live a life of piety, they shall not only earn the pleasures of their Merciful Creator – which is indeed the biggest reward for man – but shall also provide them with all that their hearts desire and shall grant them unimaginable bounties as a special gift from Him.

It is man's nature to work for rewards, whether internal or external, physical or emotional, social or economic and intellectual or carnal. No one knows this aspect of human nature better than the Creator of this nature. The Qur'an, recognizing this nature of man, has portrayed a life of complete contentment and satisfaction as a reward for piety during the life of this world. Furthermore, the Qur'an wants us – indigent humans – to live a life of piety in the desire to earn the rewards as well as with the fear of the punishment of the hereafter. The Qur'an says:

... they call upon their Lord with fear [of punishment] and desire [of reward]. (*Al-Sajadah* 32: 16)

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## **Can Others Get the Benefit of our Deeds?**

### **Can We Benefit the Dead with Any Good Deeds?**

Can the living reward the dead by doing *hajj* for them and reading the Qur'an? In the case of the latter is there any significance in doing Qur'anic recital 3 days and 40 days after someone's passing? Is there any basis for these practices?

#### **Reply**

A person shall only benefit in the life hereafter from his own deeds and, on the other hand, he shall be punished only for his own deeds. The reward of the deeds of one person – whether good or bad – cannot be transferred to another person. The Qur'an clearly says:

... that no one shall bear the burden of another, that man shall have only that which he strived for, and that his striving shall soon be examined [and] then he shall be rewarded with a complete reward." (*Al-Najm* 53: 38 - 41)

If you consider these verses closely, you shall see that they completely negate: a) the possibility of transferring the burden of bad deeds on another person ("no one shall bear the burden of another"); and b) the possibility of transferring the reward of good deeds to another person ("man shall have only that which he strived for").

The Prophet (pbuh) has been reported to have said:

When a person dies, the reward of his deeds ceases except in the case of three things: in the case of something the benefit of which is reaped [even after his death] for a long time (*Sadaqah Ja'riyah*); in the case of some knowledge that he leaves behind, which benefits the world [even after his death] for a long time; and in the case of a righteous child who prays for his forgiveness." (*Muslim, Kita'b al-Wasiyyah*)

Thus, it is clear from the Qur'an and the sayings ascribed to the Prophet (pbuh) that a person can only benefit from his own deeds. Deeds of another person shall not be credited to his account.

Now as for the specific question, i.e. "Can the living reward the dead by doing *hajj* for them and reading the Qur'an", the answer is "No". The reward of a person's deeds - whether of the performance of *hajj* or that of the recitation of the Qur'an - is not

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transferred to another person. There are only a few obvious exceptions to this rule. For instance, if a person honestly desires and intends to perform *hajj* but due to some reason, is unable to carry out his desire and intention, he may ask or send another person to the *haram*<sup>23</sup> to perform *hajj* on his behalf. In this case, the first person shall not only be rewarded for his desire and intention to visit the *haram* but shall also be rewarded for requesting or sending the other person on his behalf. Or for example, if a person has vowed to carry out a certain religious activity, which is not against the tenets of Islam, but that person does not get a chance to fulfill his vow, any one of his children or inheritors may fulfill his vow. A vow, it must be remembered, is like a debt on a person and if possible should be fulfilled just as a debt be repaid.

These are the two kinds of instances that have been reported in some of the narratives ascribed to the Prophet (pbuh). For instance:

عن ابن عباس رضي الله عنهما أن امرأة من جهينة جاءت إلى النبي صلى الله عليه وسلم فقالت: إن أمي نذرت أن تحج فلم تحج حتى ماتت. أفأحج عنها؟ قال نعم، حجي عنها. أرايت لو كان على أمك دين أكنت قاضية؟ أقضوا دين الله. فإنه أحق بالوفاء (بخاري، كتاب الحج)

"*Ibn `abbas (ra)* says that once a woman from *Juhainah* came to the Prophet (pbuh) and asked: My mother had vowed to perform *hajj* but could not carry out her vow and died. Can I perform *hajj* on her behalf? The Prophet (pbuh) said: Yes, perform *hajj* on her behalf. If your mother owed a debt to someone, wouldn't you have paid it on her behalf? Pay her debt towards Allah, on her behalf. Allah deserves most that the debts owed to Him be repaid." (*Bukhari, Kita'b al-Hajj*)

Thus, all the narratives reporting this incident (or anything like it) should be considered in the light of the above explanation, otherwise, they shall be contradicting the verses of the Qur'an and would, therefore, not be acceptable.

Recitation of the Qur'an for the dead is also something, which the Prophet (pbuh) never did or taught. It has no basis in the Qur'an, the *Sunnah* of the Prophet (pbuh) or any reliable saying ascribed to the Prophet (pbuh).

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<sup>23</sup> i.e. the *Ka`bah*.

### **Performing *Umrah* on behalf of Others**

I was wondering if I can perform *Umrah* on behalf of my grandparents. If so, does *Hajj* become *fardh* on them? They are not alive and did not get a chance to perform *Umrah* or *Hajj*.

Please enlighten me on this.

#### **Reply**

Performing acts of worship on behalf of a deceased relative, in my opinion, should be restricted to a situation where the deceased relative had pledged to undertake that particular act of worship, but could not get a chance to carryout his pledge during his/her life.

For instance, had your grandparents pledged to go for *Umrah*, but did not live long enough to carryout their pledge, then I would definitely have recommended your going to *Umrah* on their behalf and, thereby, relieving them of the responsibility that their pledge had put upon them. Carrying out the responsibilities entailed in such pledges is comparable to paying a loan on behalf of a deceased relative.

However, under ordinary circumstances, every person is responsible and shall be rewarded for his own deeds and intentions. The deeds of one person cannot be transferred to the account of another.

As for the second part of your question, that is whether undertaking *Umrah* makes it obligatory upon the person to go for *Hajj*, I do not agree with this opinion. *Hajj*, as we know, is independently obligatory upon all those Muslims, who can undertake to complete it. *Umrah* is an act of worship, which is independent of *Hajj*. The two referred acts of worship should be seen independent of each other. Successfully undertaking each one of these acts of worship should be seen as a blessing of the Almighty. Performing *Umrah* before performing *Hajj* does not alter the original status of *Hajj* in Islam.

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### **Regarding Intercession on the Day of Judgment**

Please can you explain the relevance intercession has in Islam? Is there any proof of it in the Qur'an and Sunnah? Muslims believe that the Prophet (p) may intercede for them, or Ali (ra) or a Saint (r). Can any of this be backed with any proof?

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### **Reply**

Before discussing the possibility of intercession on the Day of Judgment, a few aspects relating to the very nature of the Day of Judgment as well as those relating to the attributes of the Almighty should be kept in perspective.

As far as the nature of the Day of Judgment is concerned, it should be kept in mind that according to the Qur'an, the basic purpose for which the Day of Judgment shall be brought into existence is to reward each soul for what it has actually earned in an absolutely just and equitable manner. The Qur'an says:

To Him will be your return, of all of you. The promise of Allah is true and sure [to happen]. It is He Who begins the process of Creation, and then shall repeat it, so that He may reward with justice those who believe and do righteous deeds... (*Yunus* 10: 4)

At another instance, the Qur'an says:

[This will happen] So that God may reward each soul according to its deeds; and verily God is Swift in calling to account. (*Ibraheem* 14: 51)

Then again in *Al-Aa`raaf*, the Qur'an says:

The balance that day will be according to justice: those whose scale [of good deeds] will be heavier shall prosper; while those whose scale [of good deeds] will be lighter, these are the ones who shall lose themselves... (*Al-Aa`raaf* 7: 8 - 9)

In *Ghaafir*, the Qur'an says:

Today shall each soul be compensated for its deeds; no injustice will there be today, for God is Swift in taking account. (*Ghaafir* 40: 17)

Because the basic purpose of the very existence of the Day of Judgment is to decide among people according to absolute justice, therefore, the Qur'an has unequivocally refuted all such concepts, which may - directly or indirectly - go against the concept of absolute justice, on the Day of Judgment. The Qur'an says:

Guard yourselves against a day, when no soul shall avail another nor shall intercession be accepted for it, nor shall compensation be taken from it, nor shall anyone be helped. (*Al-Baqarah* 2: 48)

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Some of the Hypocrite Muslims and the *Ahl e Kitaab* ascribed to the belief that irrespective of their deeds, they shall be forgiven for whatever they do, whether on the basis of intercession of their prophets and elders or merely on the basis of their being the selected ones. Such a concept was clearly contradictory to the concept of justice. Thus, the Qur'an has termed this belief as their 'vain desires' and has forcefully refuted it. The Qur'an says:

Neither your vain desires, nor those of the People of the Book shall come to pass. [On the contrary,] whoever does evil, shall be rewarded accordingly. He will not find, besides God, any protector or helper. (*Al-Nisaa* 4: 123)

Thus, the first point that should be kept in mind, while considering even the possibility of any intercession - on the Day of Judgment - is that it should not contradict the principle of justice, which according to the Qur'an, is the very purpose for which the souls shall be resurrected after their death.

The second point that should be kept in mind, in this respect, relates to the attributes of the Almighty. It should be remembered that:

- God is Most Merciful - No one is more merciful than the Almighty Himself, no one loves us more than the Almighty does. Thus, any concept of intercession, based on the belief that any person is more merciful or more loving than the Almighty is against Islam;
- God is Omniscient - He knows everything, nothing is hidden from Him. Thus, any concept of intercession based on the belief that any other person shall inform God about the 'goodness' of a person, is absolute alien to Islam;
- God is Omnipotent as well as the Highest Authority - No one is more powerful than God and neither has the ability or the authority to overrule His decisions. Thus, any concept of intercession based on the belief that any person shall be in a position to overrule the decision of God is clearly against the Qur'an;
- God is 'Justice' - All His decisions are just. No one is more just than God. Thus, any concept of intercession based on the belief that any person shall give a more just decision than God, is clearly against the teachings of Islam.
- In short, no concept of intercession, which is against or contradictory to any of the attributes of God can be ascribed to by a Muslim.

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Keeping the above clarifications in perspective, it may now be considered whether or not any form of intercession can be held as applicable on the Day of Judgment. It seems that a concept of intercession, which is neither contradictory to the principle of justice nor challenges any of the attributes of God maybe accepted as true. However, one may ask, what sort of intercession can that be.

With some deliberation, one may find a possible answer from the Qur'an itself. *Al-Taubah* 9: 100 - 103 informs us about the fate of three groups from among the believers:

1. Those who excelled in their belief and in doing good deeds (*Al-Taubah* 9: 100). These are the people, who are promised the eternal bliss of the hereafter. Their success shall not be dependent on or subject to any intercession. They shall stand successful on the basis of their own deeds and the strength and truthfulness of their own faith. In other words, these are those whose scale of good deeds shall clearly outweigh their mistakes and who shall, therefore, deserve the eternal rewards of the hereafter;
2. Those who, even though they had apparently accepted faith, were not true in their faith (*Al-Taubah* 9: 101). These were the hypocrites among Muslims. These are those for whom no intercession or request shall be heard - not even that of the Prophet (pbuh)<sup>24</sup>. In other words, these are those, whose scale of bad deeds shall clearly outweigh their good deeds and, therefore, nothing shall be able to save them from the eternal punishment of hellfire.
3. Those who although are sincere in their faith and truly seek the pleasures of the Almighty by doing good deeds, yet keep falling prey to the attractions of their worldly desires (*Al-Taubah* 9: 102 - 103). In other words, these are those, whose scales of good and bad deeds are almost equal. On the basis only of their own deeds, they neither deserve reward nor punishment. For such people, the Qur'an directs the Prophet (pbuh) in the following words:

Take charity from their wealth, you shall purify and cleanse them through it, and pray for them. Indeed your prayer shall be a source of comfort for them. (*Al-Taubah* 9: 103)

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<sup>24</sup> See *Al-Taubah* 9: 80 and *Al-Munaafiqoon* 63: 6.

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It seems that just as, according to the above-cited verse, the Prophet (pbuh) is directed to pray for such people in the life of this world, in the same manner, the Prophet (pbuh) may be asked to pray for their forgiveness in the hereafter as well. As should be clear, the Prophet's prayer (or intercession) for such people and their subsequent forgiveness shall neither be against the principle of justice nor would it amount to a refutation of any of the attributes of God.

Furthermore, according to the Qur'an, any intercession (or prayer or request) for any person shall be subject to the following conditions:

- Such prayer (or intercession or request) shall only be made by a person, to whom God grants permission<sup>25</sup>;
- Such prayer (or intercession or request) shall only be made in favor of such a person for whom God grants permission<sup>26</sup>;
- Such prayer (or intercession or request) shall not be unjust or based on a lie<sup>27</sup>.

In the above explanation, I have tried to cover the various aspects that relate to the topic under consideration, as given in the Qur'an. All the narratives ascribed to the Prophet (pbuh), relating to the said issue, should be seen, understood and explained in the light of the principles outlined in the Qur'an. Any concept of intercession, which is against the principles outlined in the Qur'an, is obviously, false. Any narrative, ascribed to the Prophet (pbuh), which is contrary to any of the principles outlined in the Qur'an, has to be rejected as one, which is incorrectly ascribed to the Prophet (pbuh) or incorrectly perceived and reported by any one or more of its narrators.

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### **Making *Sadaqah-e-Jaariyah* (Continuing Charity) for a Dead**

A 21 years old brother has died about five or six months ago. His mother is asking now, can she make "*Sadaqah Jariyah*" (ceaseless charity) for him after his death?. And which money should she use for that purpose? The money of her dead son (which she gained as her share of inheritance of her son), or her own money, or his father's money, or brothers' money?

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<sup>25</sup> See *Al-Baqarah* 2: 255; *Ta Ha* 20: 109; and *Al-Naba'* 78: 38

<sup>26</sup> See *Ta Ha* 20: 109; *Al-Najam* 53: 26; and *Al-Anbiyaa* 21: 28.

<sup>27</sup> See *Al-Naba'* 78: 38.

Finally, What is the best "*Sadaqah Jariyah*" she can make?

### **Reply**

Before answering your specific question, I would request you to kindly take a look at one of my previous responses to a related question titled: "Can we Benefit the Dead with any Good Deeds?"

<sup>28</sup>.

It is clear from the Qur'an as well as sayings ascribed to the Prophet (pbuh) that the accumulation of 'good' as well as 'bad' deeds of a person in his 'deed record' ceases at his death. A person shall be rewarded (as well as punished), in the hereafter, only for the deeds that he himself performed or intended to perform. Just as a person cannot be held responsible for the 'wrong' that was committed by someone else, he cannot be rewarded for the 'good' that was performed by someone else. Thus, after the death of a person, only such of his own deeds continue to bring him reward, the benefit of which continues for a longer time. For instance, if a person had constructed or installed a water stall for the thirsty, his reward shall be accumulated for as long as his action benefits the thirsty. Nevertheless, the important thing to note here is that the person rewarded is actually the person who installed the water stall.

All that can be done for the benefit of a person after his death is to pray for the forgiveness of his mistakes. Prayer for the forgiveness of a brother is our request to the Almighty to deal mercifully with the mistakes of our brother. Such prayer and supplication is not only a desirable action on our own part but is also one of the rights that our dead brother has upon us.

In view of the above explanation, it is clear that after the death of the brother (referred to in your question), whatever his mother spends – whether out of her share of inheritance from the brother's wealth or out of her independently earned wealth – shall be recorded as a 'good' deed of the mother, the reward of which cannot be transferred to the dead brother.

However, there is nothing wrong in requesting as many people as possible for praying for the forgiveness and salvation of a person. I would therefore suggest that the mother use a part of her money in something that can, in some way, benefit the needy (for instance, install a water stall in a hot dry place). She can then put

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<sup>28</sup> Also included in this booklet on page

## Questions Regarding God

something like the following inscription at the place: 'If this water stall has helped you in quenching your thirst, thank God for it and pray for my and my son's forgiveness'. I am sure that God will not turn down the prayer of a thankful heart.

The decision regarding the best *Sadaqah-e-jaariyah* is related to one's social environment. In a place like Pakistan, for instance, where most of the people lack the availability of basic amenities, one may be tempted to spend all his charity in providing clean drinking water to the people. The case of developed countries would, obviously, be quite different.

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### **Will the Parents be Rewarded for Each of the Good Deeds of their Children?**

It is said that every wrong or right that we do, the reward basically goes to our parents for it since they are responsible for our training and upbringing? The question here arises that no parent would ever teach his children to murder, to cheat, to steal, adultery etc. etc., then in such a case will the sins be added to parents' accounts as well, and if yes, then why, since they never neither taught them any thing like that nor did they ever provide any such environment to let such acts flourish?

#### **Reply**

The concept that one's parents get a share of reward/punishment for one's good or bad deeds is not absolute. Interpreting it to be absolute would clearly be against the Qur'an, where it has clearly declared that: "[On the Day of Judgment,] every person shall only get what he actually strived for" (*Al-Najam* 53: 39).

Parents shall get their share of reward/punishment only in case of those deeds of a person, which that person had learnt from his parents and which they had encouraged and promoted him to do. Thus, if my mother taught, encouraged and directed me to say my prayers, she would get her share of reward each time I would say my prayers. Nevertheless, if a mother never encouraged or promoted prayers in the household, she would not get any reward for the prayers that her children offer. The same holds true for the bad deeds as well.

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## Non-Muslims & the Hereafter

### Will only Muslims Enter Paradise?

A person is molded according to his surroundings and he adopts those values and religion, which are inculcated in him. Then don't you think that those who although are not Muslims because they are not born in Muslim families but are very pious in their lives should be forgiven? If they are not, wouldn't it be injustice with them?

#### Reply

Success in the hereafter does not depend on whether the world knew me as a Muslim or a non-Muslim. It is whether I really was a "Muslim" or a "non-Muslim". A "Muslim" is a person who truly submits to the will of God.

What one believes in largely depends on what he thinks and knows to be true. And that in turn, would depend on his knowledge and exposure. An honest person, who with all his honesty searched for and submitted to God's will, is a true Muslim. And only that "Muslim" qualifies for *Jannah*<sup>29</sup>.

Yes, I do agree that we Muslims have a certain advantage if we approach the issue from the perspective you have mentioned. However, this advantage, places a very big responsibility on our shoulders too. Now, a Muslim is also responsible for showing the right path to those who have gone astray<sup>30</sup>. If Muslims do not fulfill this responsibility, it is highly probable that they are collectively held responsible for those who went astray, because of their ignorance about the truth.

Who knows, when the curtain is ultimately raised on the Day of Judgment, many whom we thought and knew as Muslims, are amongst the *Kaafirs*... just because of their attitude of infidelity.... and many of those whom we knew as non-Muslims are found among the Muslims, just because of their true submission to (whatever they honestly thought to be) the will of God.

The Day of Judgment would be a day of absolute justice. No one

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<sup>29</sup> Paradise.

<sup>30</sup> This, however, should not be construed to mean that he should start preaching and teaching the non-Muslims. The Qur'an tells us that this is not the responsibility of Muslim individuals, it is rather the responsibility of the Muslim community, in general.

## Questions Regarding God

will be able to object regarding the ultimate justice done by God. No one will be punished, because he lacked knowledge.

There are two basic qualities that will be judged:

1. Whether one really searched for the truth; and
2. Whether one submitted to what he believed was true.

On the other hand, two qualities are bound to doom a person:

1. His carelessness and arrogance in his search for the truth; and
2. His arrogance in submitting to the truth.

Now, you can surely see that from this perspective, Muslims and non-Muslims stand on the same grounds. We, as Muslims do not have any advantage, besides the one, which puts a heavy responsibility on our shoulders. While the non-Muslims do not have any disadvantage, besides the one, for which they may be given a lot of allowance

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### **What are the Bases of the Stated Criteria of Success in the Hereafter?**

From where in the Qur'an you derived your understanding that one will be rewarded on the basis of investigating the truth with sincere heart?

#### **Reply**

First of all, I would like to clarify that my point of view is not merely that a person shall be rewarded for 'investigating the truth with a sincere heart'. On the contrary, as I had implied in one of my previous responses to you, man is required to surrender and submit to whatever he has understood and recognized to be the truth of God.

My point of view is clearly supported by the mere fact that the Qur'an has presented itself as the 'Truth' and has prompted the addressees of the Prophet (pbuh) to accept it because they have recognized it to be the truth<sup>31</sup>.

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<sup>31</sup> It should be noted that the advent of a messenger (Rasu'l) of God removes all doubts that may exist in the minds of the people in which the messenger is sent, regarding the 'Truth'. For details please refer to my answers relating to the difference between "*Nabi*" and "*Rasu'l*" (at

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Moreover, the Qur'an has promised severe punishment for the rejecters of the Prophet (pbuh), because, according to the Qur'an, they have rejected the truth even after having fully recognized it (*Al-Taubah* 9: 17).

Finally, God's mercy and justice, obviously, require that severe punishment be administered only upon those who are guilty of rejecting the truth even after they have recognized it to be the truth. A mistake in the recognition of the truth does not deserve punishment. The Qur'an has clearly declared that God does not put upon any soul a burden that is beyond its capacity (*Al-Baqarah* 2: 286). Obviously to hold a person responsible and to punish him even for his misunderstandings, errors of judgments and mistakes is like putting upon him a burden that is far beyond his capacity. This fact is clearly stated in *Al-Ahzaab* 33: 5, where the Qur'an says: "There is no blame upon you for what you have mistakenly done, but [you shall bear the burden] of that which you do with your will".

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### ***Further Clarification regarding the Criteria of Success***

After reading some questions and answers in your web-site regarding the Success in the Hereafter, I found that the answers are very convincing.

My question is:

How should we understand the following verses in Qur'an, which talk about people who think that they are rightly guided, but actually they are not, as given in:

- *Al-Aa`raaf* 7: 30
- *Al-Kahaf* 18: 103 - 104
- *Al-Zukhruf* 43: 37

### **Reply**

Before answering your specific question, I would like to remind you once again that the summary of my opinion regarding success in the hereafter is that people shall be rewarded for their honest and sincere search for the truth and for surrendering and submitting to what they truly understood to be the truth.

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<http://www.understanding-islam.org>).

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Keeping this fact in mind, if you consider the referred verses of the Qur'an, you shall see that they actually refer to those people who have knowingly rejected the guidance of the Lord of the world. They did not even have to search for the truth, God delivered His guidance to them at their doorsteps through His prophets and messengers, and yet, in their arrogance and prejudice, they rejected it.

*Al-Aa`raaf* 7: 30 reads as:

Some He has guided and some He has [justly] left in error; for they chose the devils for their masters, instead of God. And [now] they deem themselves to be on the right path.

*Al-Kahaf* 18: 103 - 105 reads as:

Say: 'Shall we inform you of him, who shall lose all his deeds? It is those whose endeavors in this world are misguided and yet they think that what they do is right; [These people are those,] who reject the revelations of their Lord and deny that they will ever meet Him.'

*Al-Zukhruf* 43: 35 - 37 reads as:

Indeed all this is nothing but utilities for the life of this world. The [pleasures of the] hereafter, are reserved for the pious by your Lord. He that shuns the remembrance of the Most Gracious (God), We appoint for him a devil, who then becomes his companion. And these devils hinder such people from the right path, while they think that they are rightly guided.

If you look closely at the translations of all the referred verses, you shall see that they actually refer to such people, who knowingly opt for the wrong path (i.e. the path of the devil) rather than the right one (i.e. the path of God); knowingly reject God's guidance, or shun the right attitude (of keeping God's remembrance alive in their hearts). It is such people who are allowed to wander blindly in the darkness, without any clue of light to guide them to the right path. Then, as a further punishment for their rejection and avoidance of submitting to God's truth, God allows them to confidently think that they are rightly guided. If seen in the right perspective, this punishment is similar to the one, which has been referred in the beginning of *Surah Al-Baqarah* in the words: 'God has set a seal upon their

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hearts and upon their hearing and there is a curtain upon their sight'.

Thus, these verses do not refer to people who commit mistakes in their honest and sincere search for the truth. On the contrary, these verses relate to people, who knowingly reject the truth and as a consequence, are punished by God, Who deprives them of their basic ability to recognize the truth from falsehood and, thus, they wander in the darkness of falsehood with the false confidence that they are on the right path, free from all want of guidance.

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### **What will Happen to Christians and Jews**

There has been recent discussion about the fact whether Christians and Jews will be going to heaven along with Muslims (*insha'Allah*).

The argument is such: Christians and Jews who are isolated from Islam have the possibility to go to heaven but those who have been exposed to Islam do not. Also certain verses in the Qur'an concerning Christians and Jews going to heaven have been nullified by later verses.

Could you please comment on this because it does not make sense considering what I have read in the Qur'an?

### **Reply**

The Qur'an has very strongly negated the idea that the *Jannah* or the bliss in the life hereafter - the Paradise - is the right of any particular religious group or creed. Whether one ascribes to the Muslim or to any other belief, the criteria for success in the hereafter is going to be his true faith in the Almighty and in the Day of reckoning.

According to the Qur'anic view about life, each individual, who lives on the face of this earth, is being tested by the Almighty. Whether born to Muslim, Jewish, or Christian parents, each individual is being tested for his honest and unbiased search for and surrender to the Truth, as he sees and understands it. To go through this test, God has bestowed upon us the sense and the intellect to judge right from wrong.

A close look at our general attitude towards religion and religious beliefs shows that we normally go through life with the beliefs that we inherit from our parents. If we are born in a Muslim

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family, there is a greater chance that we shall remain Muslims throughout our lives. The same holds true in other cases as well. But unfortunately, this passive belief shall have absolutely no importance on the Day of Judgment. Whether we attended the Sunday Church or the Friday Congregation shall only have a secondary importance. The first thing that would be judged is whether the individual truly searched for the Truth or not and then, whether he lived his life in accordance with that Truth or not.

In the light of the above explanation, in my opinion, success in the hereafter is not dependent on ascribing to any one or the other group. It is basically dependent on my attitude towards searching for and submitting to the Truth. Thus, those Christians and Jews, who, without any prejudice, had searched for the Truth and had submitted to it, shall be among those who are successful in the hereafter. While those who called themselves Muslims might fail in the hereafter on the account that they did not seriously, with an unbiased mind, seek the Truth or that even after knowing the Truth, did not submit to it or did not live their lives in accordance with it.

This is the general principle of success and/or failure in the test of the life of this world. Thus, the criterion of success or failure is one that depends purely on the internal mechanism of the human soul and intellect. Because we cannot say that a particular person has rejected Islam (or whatever we hold to be the Truth) after being thoroughly convinced that Islam is the divine truth, we therefore, cannot pass a judgment regarding his success or failure in the hereafter. It is only the Omniscient<sup>32</sup> God who really knows whether a person rejected a concept after being truly convinced of it being the Truth or whether his rejection was because of some misunderstanding or some unanswered questions in his mind, regarding that Truth. On the day of reckoning, God shall give His decision on the basis of His absolute knowledge about the reasons of the rejection of the individuals.

According to the Qur'an, when a messenger of God (*Rasu'l* as distinct from *Nab'i*)<sup>33</sup> is sent towards a people, he removes all doubts that lie in people's minds regarding the Truth. He answers all their questions. Truth becomes evidently distinct from falsehood. Those who accept his message, accept it with full

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<sup>32</sup> that is 'All Knowing'.

<sup>33</sup> For more information on this distinction visit [www.understanding-islam.org](http://www.understanding-islam.org)

## Questions Regarding God

knowledge of what is right and what is wrong; and those who reject his message, reject it after gaining full knowledge that it is the Truth that they are rejecting. It is because of this particular position of the messengers (*Rasu'l*) of God that it becomes evident that those who are rejecting his call are rejecting the Truth, and those who are accepting his call are submitting to the Truth. The former are thus bound to be thrown in the hellfire and the latter are promised the everlasting bliss of paradise. Therefore the Jews and Christians who lived during the life of the Prophet (pbuh) and yet did not accept his message are doomed to the severe punishment of hellfire. Even with our limited knowledge, we know about this fact, because if, as the Muslims hold, Mohammad (pbuh) was a true messenger of God, then those Jews and Christians of Arabia who lived during the life of the Prophet (pbuh) knowingly rejected the Truth. They shall, therefore, have no excuse for their rejection. It is these Jews and Christians that are sure to be doomed.

As far as the Jews and Christians of other times and places are concerned, they are subjected to the same test in the life of this world, as everyone else, including the Muslims. If they submit to whatever they truly believe to be the Truth and live their lives in accordance with that Truth, they shall be successful. The case of the Muslims is not any different.

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### **Success in the Hereafter for People of Other Faiths**

In *Surah* 5:48 there is a statement that is often interpreted as allowing other people to have their faiths because they can lead to God as well. However, if this is so then many non-Muslims state that why should they follow the Qur'an and Islam if they can simply follow their own faiths?

Could you comment?

### **Reply**

The referred interpretation of the cited verse is not very accurate. The related portion of the verse reads as:

Had God pleased, He could have made you one community, but [He did not do so] to test you in what he has bestowed upon you. Therefore, [do not fret over those who reject your message and] strive hard to take lead in virtue. [Be mindful of the fact that ultimately,] your return shall be to your Lord and then shall He inform you [and pronounce His judgment]

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about the things in which you differed. (*Al-Maaidah* 5: 48)

If you look closely at the referred verse, you shall see that it does not say that all paths lead to God. On the contrary, it says that if God had wanted, He could have guided all humanity to one path and resolved all differences among them. However, this would effectively have meant that man be forced into submission. This would have meant that the freedom of choice - in accepting or rejecting the truth or in doing good or bad deeds - be taken away from man. However, because God wanted to test man by bestowing upon him the freedom to do good or bad and to choose between right and wrong, He, therefore, did not force him into submission. It is the result of this freedom that God has bestowed upon man that some people accept the truth while others are allowed to become adversaries to it. Thus, in this context, the believers are directed to ignore those who are still persistent in their rejection even after the truth has become apparent to them. They are directed to concentrate on taking lead in good deeds rather than fretting over the rejecters. Finally, they are reminded of the fact that if God has bestowed man with freedom in a particular sphere of his life, which results in the existence of differences among them, it does not mean that God is indifferent towards the good and the bad. Soon shall He gather all humanity and then pass His judgment about the differences that existed among them. On that day, those who submitted to the truth shall be rewarded for their good behavior, while those who knowingly rejected the truth shall be doomed to eternal punishment.

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### **Success in the Hereafter for Non-Muslims – *Al-Baqarah* 2: 62**

Please explain the message/directive of *Al-Baqarah* 2: 62.

#### **Reply**

The referred verse reads as:

Indeed those who have believed [now] and those who [previously] became Jews and the Christians and the Sabeans, whoever [truly] believed in God and the Final Day and was pious in his actions, shall get his reward with God. He shall neither have any fears [of the future] nor any regrets [of the past].

The particular portion of *Surah Al-Baqarah* in which the verse is placed addresses the *Banu Israel*. It deals with the negation of

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one of the beliefs of the *Banu Israel* who lived in the Arabian Peninsula at the time of the revelation of the Qur'an. The Banu Israel held the belief that because they have been the chosen people of God in this life; it automatically implies that they shall be successful in the hereafter as well. In this connection, the Qur'an has referred to their belief that even if they deserve any punishment, their punishment shall not last for more than a few - numbered - days. Moreover, they believed that success in the hereafter is the right only of the *Banu Israel*. *Surah Al-Baqarah* has negated both these beliefs of the *Banu Israel*.

Keeping the above explanation in mind, the implication of the referred verse should be quite clear. This verse is a part of the negation of the belief of the *Banu Israel* according to which they held that success in the hereafter is their exclusive right. In this particular context, the verse says that success in the hereafter is not the sole right of any particular creed or nation. According to this verse, all those peoples shall be successful in the hereafter who truly believe in God and the Day of Judgment and have the necessary good deeds that qualify them for success in the hereafter. If that is not the case, then their affiliation with any particular creed shall not save them from God's punishment.

Furthermore, it should also be kept in mind that one of the obvious inherent qualifications of success in the hereafter is that with belief in God, the Day of Judgment and the doing of good deeds the person has not been guilty of any such sin which deserves everlasting punishment of Hellfire. For instance, murder, fornication and *Shirk* (associating partners with God), according to the Qur'an, are sins, which shall doom a person to everlasting hell. Another one of such disqualifications for success in the hereafter is to knowingly reject a messenger or a prophet of God.

Thus, the complete implication of the referred verse is that all those people, who ascribe to one or the other of God's messengers, who truly believe in God and the Day of Judgment and who are pious in their deeds, if they are not guilty of any such sins that disqualify them from success in the hereafter (including knowingly rejecting any of the messengers of God), shall stand successful.

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### **Who Shall Enter Paradise – A Contradiction between *Al-Maaidah* 5: 69 and *Aal Imraan* 3: 85**

Dear brother in Islam, my question is if there is any contradiction

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between these 2 *ayahs*:

Surely, those who believe, those who are the Jews and the Sabians and the Christians - whosoever believed in Allaah and the Last Day, and worked righteousness, on them shall be no fear, nor shall they grieve. (*Al-Maaidah* 5:69)

and

And whoever seeks a religion other than Islam, it will never be accepted of him, and in the Hereafter he will be one of the losers. (*Aal 'Imraan* 3:85)

as you can see in the first *ayah*, it uses the present tense (those who are the Jews and the Sabians and the Christians) I have searched through out the internet for answer and I found the following:

The great Imaam Ismaa'eel ibn Katheer, may Allaah have mercy on him, said in his tafseer of the aayah from Soorat al-Baqarah:

Allaah, may He be exalted, points out that whoever of the previous nations did well and was obedient, will have a good reward, and this will be the case for everyone who follows the Unlettered Prophet [Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) until the Hour comes - he will have eternal happiness, and they will not fear what they are going to face, nor will they grieve for what they have left behind.

If this *ayah* was for the nations that lived before the Prophet (SAW) why is it then using the present tense. This (to me) also seems to imply that the Christians were only saved before the time of Muhammad. Since Muhammad wasn't born until 600 years after Jesus the two verses (2:62 and 5:69) would not have been valid at the time they were written. Plus, 18 verses before 5:69 is verse 5.51 that reads "O you who believe! do not take the Jews and the Christians for friends; they are friends of each other; and whoever amongst you takes them for a friend, then surely he is one of them; surely Allah does not guide the unjust people."

Clearly, 5:69 ("Surely those who believe and those who are Jews and the Sabians and the Christians whoever believes in Allah and the last day and does good - they shall have no fear nor shall they grieve.") was written after 5.51, Muhammad (pbuh) was already alive 5.69 doesn't appear to be talking about people in

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the past or it would read "those who were Jews" rather than "those who are Jews".

I hope you give me any explanation about it.

### **Reply**

For my understanding of *Al-Baqarah* 2: 62<sup>34</sup> and of the directives/information derived from these verses, please refer to one of my earlier responses to a related question titled: "Success in the Hereafter for non-Muslims"<sup>35</sup>.

As for *Aal Imraan* 3: 85, the verse has used the word 'Islam' in its literal<sup>36</sup> rather than its legal or juristic connotation<sup>37</sup>. This point is easily determined through a close study of the two verses preceding verse 85. A simple translation of these three verses follows:

Do they seek [to adopt] a religion, other than the one given by God, while [the fact is that] everything in the heavens and the earth submits to Him - whether willingly or unwillingly - and [finally] to Him everything shall be returned. Tell them that we believe in God and in whatever has been revealed to us and in whatever was revealed upon Abraham, Ishmael, Isaac, Jacob and his progeny and in whatever was given to Moses, Jesus and the Prophets from their Lord. We do not differentiate between any one of these [prophets]. And indeed to Him do we submit. And [remember that] whoever seeks [to adopt] any other religion, except that of submission [to God], it shall not be accepted from him. And in the hereafter, such people shall be among the losers. (*Aal Imraan* 3: 83 - 85)

*Aal Imraan* 3: 83, which is a kind of a preamble for the following verses, has clearly used the word 'Islam' in its literal meaning. It is quite clear that in this context, the word 'Islam' is used in the same meaning in the following two verses as well.

If seen in the foregoing explanation, you shall see that the two referred verses not only are not contradictory, but are in fact referring to the same phenomenon in different words. *Al-Baqarah*

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<sup>34</sup> According to my understanding, the same explanation applies to *Al-Maaidah* 5: 69 as well.

<sup>35</sup> Included in this booklet on page

<sup>36</sup> The literal meaning of the word 'Islam' is submission and obedience, implying submission and obedience to God.

<sup>37</sup> In its legal or juristic connotation, the word 'Islam' implies the religion based on the revelation delivered to Muhammad (pbuh).

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2: 62 (and *Al-Maaidah* 5: 69) says that success in the hereafter shall not be based on one's ascription to any one or the other creed, but shall depend on one's true belief in the One God and in the hereafter and on his doing pious deeds. On the other hand, *Aal Imraan* 3: 85 declares that the only religion acceptable in the eyes of God is the religion of submission and obedience to God. It is this religion of submission and obedience to God, which was taught by each and every one of the prophets sent by God.

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### **Will All Non-Musims be Tormented in the Hereafter – the Meaning of *Al-Nisaa* 4: 56**

One of the objections raised by Ibn Warraq (<http://www.secularhumanism.org/wtc.htm>) is that in *Al-Nisaa* 4: 56, the Qur'an says that the non-Muslims are to be greatly tormented.

Please explain the referred verse of the Qur'an.

#### **Reply**

The referred verse reads as:

إِنَّ الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا بِآيَاتِنَا سَوْفَ نُصَلِّيهِمْ نَارًا كَلَّمًا  
نَضِجَتْ جُلُودُهُمْ بِدَلْنَاهُمْ جُلُودًا غَيْرَهَا لِيَذُوقُوا  
الْعَذَابَ (النساء 4 : 56)

Those who reject Our signs, We shall soon burn them in a [huge] fire. As their skins are completely scorched, We shall give them fresh skins, so that they keep tasting the punishment.

Firstly, it is important to note that the referred verse relates to the punishment in the Hereafter. The verse does not relate to any punishment in the life of this world.

Secondly, the verse does not relate to the torment of non-Muslims, but that of the 'rejecters'. It is quite clear that a person can be a non-Muslim and yet not be a rejecter. A 'rejecter' is a person, who refuses to accept the truth, even after it has become completely apparent to him. A non-Muslim, in contrast to a rejecter, can be a true believer in God and the Day of Judgment, who may have honest unanswered questions regarding

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the prophethood of Muhammad (pbuh), which may have held him back from accepting Islam. This punishment is for those people, who refuse to accept God's signs, after being fully convinced of the validity of these signs. These are the people, who shall be faced with the stated punishment in the Hereafter.

Finally, if this is a point of criticism on Islam, then this is a common point shared by all the Abrahamic religions - Judaism, Christianity and Islam. Each of these religions ascribes to the belief that the rejecters of God's guidance shall be thrown in the Hellfire on the Day of Judgment.

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### **God's Attributes & the Hereafter**

#### **Why does God's Mercy Overpower His Wrath?**

If Allah is qualitatively and quantitatively infinite in all of his attributes then why is his Mercy overpowering His Wrath?

#### **Reply**

According to the Islamic introduction of God, God is completely clear of all shortcomings, imperfections and faults. Mercy and grace are permanent attributes of God, while being wrathful is not. This implies that God is Merciful of His own accord, whether His subjects deserve His mercy or not. This, however, is not the case with God's wrath. God's wrath is the fate only of those, who, because of their own deeds and behavior, have closed all doors of God's mercy and forgiveness upon themselves.

Thus, contrary to mercy, wrathfulness is God's response to man's misbehavior and arrogance, rather than His permanent and inseparable attribute. This is precisely what is meant by the point that 'God's Mercy overpowers His wrath'.

The point that God's mercy overpowers His wrath is an everyday experience for fallible humans like our selves. We know, through our personal experiences, that hardly a day dawned on us in which we had not committed mistakes and – intentionally or unintentionally – done something contrary to our knowledge of God's commandments. Yet, God did not punish us and subject us to His wrath immediately after we committed a mistake, but mercifully allowed us respite and gave us innumerable chances to seek His forgiveness and express repentance for our misdeeds. Indicative of God's abounding mercy, He continues to grant man

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respite from His 'wrath' and punishment till the time that man renders himself completely undeserving of His mercy.

Thus, the Qur'an says:

The Lord said: 'My punishment afflicts whom I decide [according to My knowledge and justice], but My mercy encompasses all things. (*Al-Aa`raaf* 7: 56)

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### **Will People Enter Paradise only on the Basis of God's Mercy?**

This particular *hadith* was sent to me recently but I feel as though there are parts of it missing. could you please let me know what the complete *hadith* is or whether this is the complete *hadith*.

Narrated by *Abu Hurairah (Radhiallahohunho)*: Allah's Apostle (*sallallahu 'alaihi wasallam*) said, "The deeds of anyone of you will not save you (from the Hellfire)." They said, "Even you (will not be saved by your deeds), O Allah's Apostle?" He said, "No, even I (will not be saved) unless and until Allah bestows His Mercy on me. Therefore, do good deeds properly, sincerely and moderately, and worship Allah in the forenoon and in the afternoon and during a part of the night, and always adopt a middle, moderate, regular course whereby you will reach your target (Paradise)." (*Bukhari* Vol. 8 : No. 470)

### **Reply**

No significant part of the referred narrative seems to be missing.

As reported in the narrative, the Prophet (pbuh) has taught his followers that no one among them should become conceited and unmindful of satan's attacks because of his good deeds. Man, has the tendency of over estimating his good deeds and being carried away because of whatever good he does. A person who spends more in God's way can easily become prone to looking down upon those who spend less. The same is the case with other good deeds as well. Such an attitude can easily develop a sense of arrogance and conceit in a person, which may ultimately result in making him unmindful of his duties toward God and his brethren. The Prophet (pbuh) in this narrative has, in my opinion, pointed out this danger. The message in this narrative is that a person should never become conceited and boastful of his good deeds, he must always remember that it is for his own benefit and good that good deeds be done. God does not need our deeds; it is purely

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His mercy that He accepts our deeds and rewards us for them. He is above all. We can neither contribute nor take away even a minutest part of His kingdom. Thus, even if we do a world of good, it is only with God's mercy that we will qualify for His everlasting bliss.

If we can keep this spirit alive, it will help us do more and more good in this life, but if, on the contrary, a person becomes conceited and boastful of the good that he has already done, it would have a negative effect on his motivation and initiative to do good.

If seen in the correct perspective, this narrative ascribed to the Prophet (pbuh) conveys the same message as given in *Surah Al-Muminoon* 23: 60. In the referred verse one of the qualities of those that shall qualify for God's eternal bliss is described as:

Those who give, whatever they give [in God's way], and [yet] their hearts are filled with awe.

Thus, true believers do all the good that they can but never become conceited. They spend all that they can in God's way but are still awed by the thought of the Day when they shall face the Master of the worlds.

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### **Is Forgiveness & Mercy Against Justice?**

I am involved in a discussion with a Christian and the topic is 'salvation'. I explained that there is no 'forgiveness' if sin is 'paid for' and any kind of 'payment' refutes any kind of 'forgiveness'. I mean, if I owe some money to someone, he can demand a payment or he can forgive that debt. He cannot do both. However, this Christian said that by Eisa's [as] alleged death on cross, God's JUSTICE was atoned. His words:

"The Bible (Leviticus 11:45) and the Qur'an (*Surah* 59, *Al Hashr*, verse 23) tell us that God is holy. The Christian view of God's Holiness means that He is separated from anything that is unclean, bad, and hypocritical, in other words from anything that is sin. God is purity and righteousness. Sin separates us from God, it brings as its wages death, spiritual and physical. Once a person is dead he cannot do anything, he is completely helpless. That becomes clear by the fact that God will not judge according to our good or bad works alone (Romans 3:23-24, *Surah* 35, *Fatir* verse 45). Another reason why sin has such terrible consequences

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is that God is just (Deuteronomy 32:4, *Surah 95 Al Tin* verse 8). He loves us so much as who we are but he hates the sin we do (John 3:16) Therefore, in His mercy he chooses to forgive our sins. But if He would forgive our sins without punishment, then in His mercy He would become unjust!"

I was wondering if there is a logical refutation to this.

### **Reply**

Man has never considered grace and benevolence to be against justice. Injustice, in its absolute connotation implies to give someone less than what he deserves or to put on someone a burden, which is bigger than what he deserves. While in its relative connotation, injustice implies to deal with people in a manner, which is based on undue disparity among those people.

Thus, to give charity is not injustice but to wrongfully deprive a person of his possessions is, indeed, an injustice. On the other hand, to restrict charity to a particular creed may also, in certain cases, be termed as injustice. In the same way, if a person forgives another for the wrongs that the latter had inflicted upon him, the act of the former can by no means be termed as injustice, but would rather be seen as an act of benevolence. On the other hand, if a person inflicts a greater pain on another in retribution of the pain that the latter had inflicted upon him, it would indeed be an act of injustice.

Similarly, God's forgiveness of man's sins can in no way be termed as injustice, unless such forgiveness is administered with undue disparity among the subjects. While, putting a person into a severer punishment than what he deserves may, indeed, be termed as injustice.

The above should suffice as an explanation for the basic objection raised by the cited author. However, I would like to mention a couple of other observations regarding the whole issue here:

- The belief that the Christ (pbuh) suffered during his life and was ultimately crucified as an atonement for the sins of mankind does indeed raise a few questions not only regarding God's justice but also regarding God's mercy. Who would term the infliction of pain and suffering on an individual for the sins of another "Justice"? How can this infliction of pain and suffering on an innocent person be ascribed to a Merciful God? It would indeed be injustice and unmerciful if I was to punish one person for the wrongs of another [person or persons].

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This injustice would not be any less injustice if the person I punished for the sins of another was my own son and in so doing, I was myself greatly grieved and pained! Thus, in my opinion, if someone believes that God shall deal mercifully with all mankind and shall forgive their sins in the hereafter and subsequently no person shall be punished, yet the good and the bad shall in some way be dealt with differently, this belief can be absolutely unfounded and baseless, yet it does not, in any way, involve God in an act of injustice. However, if someone holds that God, in this life or in the hereafter, shall [or has] put an individual [or a group of individuals] to a severer punishment than what that individual or group deserves [or deserved] as an atonement for the sins of the rest of mankind, I cannot understand how any person can hold such an act to be one in consonance with the principles of Justice and Mercy.

- Although forgiveness can purely be an act of benevolence and mercy, and in such a case, the question whether the person deserved to be forgiven or not does not always arise, yet both the Qur'an as well as the Bible, have mentioned that a sinner who accepts and confesses his sins (in front of God) and, wherever possible, tries for reparation of his misdeeds, sincerely repents and mends his ways in future, shall not only be forgiven but shall deserve to be forgiven. Actually, this is the only way a person can wash away his *Kaba'ir* (i.e. sins that according to the Qur'an shall be punished by everlasting burning). In the Qur'an, this is mentioned in *Al-Baqarah* 2: 160. While a close look at the Bible shows that one of the common messages of all the prophets was to call their people to salvation through repentance and correction of deeds. For reference, see Jeremiah 3: 12 - 13, Jeremiah 18: 5 - 12, Proverbs 28: 13 - 14, Job 36: 9 - 12, Ezekiel 18: 30 - 32, Isaiah 30: 15, Luke 5: 32, Matthew 4: 17, Luke 13: 2 - 3 and Matthew 3: 8. All these verses of the Qur'an as well as the Bible clearly show that man shall be judged purely on the basis of his deeds alone.

I hope this helps.

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### **God's Justice & Mercy**

The Qur'an says that Allah is a merciful being. It also says Allah is full of justice. I do not understand the meaning of being Merciful and Just, when we know that if a person does something wrong, the justice demands punishment, and if you do not punish

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him/her and instead show mercy, then that can be categorised as injustice.

On the contrary, it could also mean that Allah would do justice to some and be merciful to others.

However, the dividing line between justice and mercy is beyond my comprehension. If I would have to reward someone, I would do so according to my moods, likeness towards the other being, my general demeanor, my attitude towards fellow human would over rule my capability of doing justice and instead force me to show mercy. Obviously this decision has shown a greater element of mercy and a smaller element of justice. I can not understand the equality between the two.

Secondly, the justice has to be a standard in Islam. Certain acts must be followed by certain rewards and or punishments. It must not mean relaxation for one person who drinks alcohol and strict penalties for another. Here, the 'hakooq Allah' (duties towards Allah) makes it difficult for me to understand, when I have heard that Allah may forgive 'hakooq Allah' but He would not forgive 'hakooq Al Ibaad' (duties towards fellow humans). How could this standard suddenly change and Allah would revert from being just to being merciful where 'hakooq Allah' are an issue?

### **Reply**

Firstly, in most of the cases, justice, in itself, is a requirement of mercy. One can so easily realize this point if he/she has ever been wrongfully deprived of his/her rights and, consequently, had to knock at the doors of the authorities. In such circumstances, no one is more 'merciful', from the perspective of the deprived, than a just officer.

When a person, who has been wrongfully deprived of his rights, knocks at the doors of a court of law, the judge is required to take a just action (according to the best of his knowledge and understanding), undue mercy for the criminal by the person passing the judgment, may be considered as 'mercy' by the criminal, who himself is devoid of all mercy, yet it would, from the perspective of the deprived, be considered as partiality and injustice and would take away all hope for the weak and the law abiding citizens.

Secondly, forgiveness or mercy is not always unjust. On the contrary, forgiveness (mercy) can be administered with complete justice. When a person is forgiven for crime X, in view of his

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specific circumstances, while another person is severely punished for the same crime committed under the same circumstances then the punishment of the second may be considered 'unjust'. Nevertheless, if forgiveness is administered with justice then no objections of injustice can be raised against it.

Besides the stated principles, some of the other important factors in the balance between 'mercy' and 'justice' may be:

1. People should generally be informed about the consequences of their crimes (administration of justice with mercy);
2. A person, who has unintentionally done a wrong, deserves forgiveness (a show of mercy, without being unjust);
3. A person, who has committed a crime, but, before being apprehended, has repented for his uncalled for behavior and has sincerely tried his best to correct his behavior may also be dealt with a softer hand (a show of mercy, without being unjust);
4. No one should be administered a severer punishment than what his crime actually deserves (administration of justice with mercy);
5. Forgiveness of one individual should not result in depriving another individual of his rights; (administration of mercy with justice); and
6. Forgiveness should be impartial (administration of mercy with justice);

I am sure you would agree that in the foregoing cases, forgiveness and mercy are not against justice nor is the administration of justice against mercy.

The Qur'an has promised that on the Day of Judgment, God shall be extremely Merciful to all those, who prove themselves to be deserving of His mercy, during the life of this world, without being unjust. Punishment shall only be the fate of those, who - by their own misdeeds, disobedience and arrogance - close upon themselves the wide-open doors of God's abounding mercy. However, even in this case, their punishment shall not be administered unjustly.

In view of our lack of absolute knowledge, we cannot draw analogies between our own implementation of justice and mercy with that of God's. However, we have been assured by the Qur'an that in the Hereafter, God's decisions shall not only be based on the principles of justice and mercy, but also that this justice and mercy shall be manifest in all the decisions to the extent that

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even those who are subject to severe punishments shall admit this fact.

As for your second question, both the *Huqooq Allah* (rights of the Almighty) and the *Huqooq al-Ibaad* (rights of fellow humans) shall be decided on the same principles. The only difference between the two kinds of rights is that in the case of the latter, we shall not only have to seek God's forgiveness and mercy, but also that of the particular person, whom we have wronged.

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### **Regarding some Signs of God's Forgiveness & Mercy**

Please provide the scriptural basis (brief citations would suffice) for the following signs of God's mercy:

1. He does not put man in a situation, in which he is forced to lose his faith in Him;
2. He rewards man for the intention of doing good, even if man is not able to carry out this intention;
3. He does not punish man for his unintentional misunderstandings, unanswered questions, or lack of being convinced (after an open-minded investigation); and
4. He does not hold man responsible for something that is against His commands, if such evil is done in ignorance.

*Jazak'Allah* for all your help

### **Reply**

As for the first point, it is clearly a requirement of God's mercy that He should not put upon man a burden, which he cannot bear. Thus, the Qur'an has not only promised us that the Almighty does not put upon man a responsibility of the *Shari'ah*, which he cannot fulfill:

لَا يُكَلِّفُ اللَّهُ نَفْسًا إِلَّا وُسْعَهَا (البقرة 2 : 286)

God does not put upon anyone a responsibility, except that which is within the capacity of that person.

but has also informed us that God does not desire to put man in a situation in which he is likely to lose faith in Him:

وَمَا كَانَ اللَّهُ لِيُضِيعَ إِيمَانَكُمْ إِنَّ اللَّهَ بِالنَّاسِ لَرَءُوفٌ رَحِيمٌ

(البقرة 2 : 143)

And God is not such that He would [put you in a test, which would] render you faithless. [On the contrary,] God is extremely Kind and Merciful upon His people.

As for the second point, the Qur'an has mentioned it with reference to the directive relating to the migration of the Muslims, from the lands in which they were being persecuted by the rejecters, to *Medinah*, after the establishment of the Muslim state in *Medinah*. In this context, the Qur'an has informed the Muslims that if they leave their homes with the intention of migrating to *Medinah* but are unable to reach their intended destiny, they would still be fully rewarded for their decision. The Qur'an says:

وَمَنْ يَخْرُجْ مِنْ بَيْتِهِ مُهَاجِرًا إِلَى اللَّهِ وَرَسُولِهِ ثُمَّ يُدْرِكُهُ  
الْمَوْتُ فَقَدْ وَقَعَ أَجْرُهُ عَلَى اللَّهِ وَكَانَ اللَّهُ غَفُورًا رَحِيمًا  
(النساء 4 : 100)

Whoever leaves his home, intending to migrate towards God and His messenger, and is overtaken by death, his reward becomes binding upon God, for indeed God is extremely forgiving, eternal in mercy.

The glad tidings entailed in this information provided by the Qur'an has been further elaborated in the following saying ascribed to the Prophet (pbuh):

... فمن هم بحسنة فلم يعملها كتبها الله له عنده حسنة  
كاملة فإن هو هم بها فعلها كتبها الله له عنده عشر  
حسانات إلى سبع مائة ضعف إلى أضعاف كثيرة ومن  
هم بسيئة فلم يعملها كتبها الله له عنده حسنة كاملة فإن  
هو هم بها فعلها كتبها الله له سيئة واحدة (بخاري،  
كتاب الرقاق، رقم الحديث 6010)

Whoever decides to do a good deed but is not able to carry it out, God credits him with the complete reward of a good deed, but when someone decides to do a good deed and then carries it out as well, God credits his account with a reward of ten to seven hundred or even more good deeds. And [on the contrary,] when someone plans to do a bad deed and then

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decides against carrying it out, he is credited with the reward of one good deed [for not carrying out the bad deed]. But when a person plans a bad deed and then carries it out as well, only then is a bad deed recorded in his account.

As for the third and the fourth points, the Qur'an says:

وَلَيْسَ عَلَيْكُمْ جُنَاحٌ فِيمَا أَخْطَأْتُمْ بِهِ وَلَكِنْ مَا تَعَمَّدَتْ  
قُلُوبُكُمْ وَكَانَ اللَّهُ غَفُورًا رَحِيمًا (الأحزاب 33 : 5)

And there is no blame upon you in what you do by mistake, but [you shall be held responsible] for the actions committed with the intention of your hearts. Indeed God is extremely forgiving, eternal in mercy.

In the same manner, the Qur'an promises man forgiveness for those sins, which are committed under coercion and compulsion:

مَنْ كَفَرَ بِاللَّهِ مِنْ بَعْدِ إِيمَانِهِ إِلَّا مَنْ أُكْرِهَ وَقَلْبُهُ مُطْمَئِنٌّ  
بِالْإِيمَانِ وَلَكِنْ مَنْ شَرَحَ بِالْكُفْرِ صَدْرًا فَعَلَيْهِمْ غَضَبٌ  
مِنَ اللَّهِ وَلَهُمْ عَذَابٌ عَظِيمٌ (النحل 16 : 106)

Whoever rejects belief in the One God after having believed in Him, except him, who is forced into declaring disbelief, while in his heart he remained contented with faith [in God], but one who rejected with the contention of his heart, upon such people shall be the wrath of God and for them shall be a great punishment.

This aspect of God's eternal mercy and kindness has also been elaborated in the following saying ascribed to the Prophet (pbuh):

رفع القلم عن ثلاث عن النائم حتى يستيقظ وعن  
الصغير حتى يكبر وعن المجنون حتى يعقل أو يفيق  
(النسائي، كتاب الطلاق، رقم الحديث 3378)

Three people are not responsible for any wrong committed by them: A person, who is in a state of slumber, till he becomes fully conscious, a child till he fully matures and a person with an unsound mind, till he is cured.

At another instance, the Prophet (pbuh) is reported to have said:

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إن الله تجاوز عن أمتي الخطأ والنسيان وما استكروها  
عليه (ابن ماجه، كتاب الطلاق، رقم الحديث 2033)

For my people, God has forgiven [sins committed due to] mistakes, forgetfulness and what they are coerced into doing.

I hope this helps.

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### **The 'Wrath' of God**

The following questions may come off as slightly misplaced, especially considering that I am a believer in the mercy of God. I like to remind myself of the Qur'an's directive to count the favors of God, which we would never be able to number. And I feel that He has poured His grace and benevolence on me, even though I do not deserve any of it. Truly, all praise and thanks belong to Allah (SWT).

However, there remains in my mind a question mark – not necessarily one that has deflated my faith – but one that puzzles me nonetheless. Why does God have to be wrathful? I mean I understand that human wickedness and transgression anger Him, but must they anger Him so much that He has to roast sinners for an eternity in fire? I sometimes wonder what I would do if I were angry with, say, someone who murdered one of my family members (God forbid). I would certainly like to see the perpetrator brought to justice, and I might even want him to experience pain and torture, but for all the punishment I could put him through, I wouldn't make it eternal. I think my anger at some point -- certainly after hearing the person scream and seeing him bleed -- would diminish and I would forgive the person. Why does wrath not diminish with God, who is omnimerciful and omnibenevolent?

I know the Qur'an accords a certain amount of praise for those who "when they are angry, even then forgive." Why would He prescribe such temperance for us and not for Himself in the Hereafter? I know my questions are daring, but I wanted to hear your thoughts on this.

### **Reply**

My dear brother, for a person who has been wronged, no one can be more merciful than him who can grant him justice. Consider the emotion of a rightful person, who knocks at a court of justice

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only to be awarded a decree of 'Mercy' for the criminal. 'Justice', in such a situation, is, in fact, the requirement of 'Mercy' for the wrongfully deprived. However, if seen from the perspective of the criminal, this 'Justice' can be seen as being 'wrathful'.

In the life of this world, God's mercy is available to all. In the hereafter too, God shall be merciful for all, except those, who refuse to enter into the folds of His mercy.

As for God's directive to humans to forgive others, even when they are angry, it relates to the fact that humans can lose their balance in anger. God, on the other hand, never loses His balance. Even when wrathful, God would not subject anyone to a punishment, which is more than what he actually deserved.

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### ***Further Clarification on "The Wrath of God"***

In response to the question "The 'Wrath' of God" you wrote:

As for God's directive to humans to forgive others, even when they are angry, it relates to the fact that humans can lose their balance in anger. God, on the other hand, never loses His balance. Even when wrathful, God would not subject anyone to a punishment, which is more than what he actually deserved.

It seems, after reading the above quotation, that God is an "emotional being". How can a human grasp or comprehend or visualize the nature of God when it is said: "And none is like Him" in *Surah Al-Ikhlaas* 112:4 i.e. His nature (physical and psychological) can not be imagined in any way.

Also in one of your article titled "Is the Qur'an Clear or Incomprehensible?"<sup>38</sup> you wrote:

"Thus, the Qur'an has referred to Fire and Boiling Water and the Tree of *Zaqqoom* to communicate the severity of the punishment in the hereafter and has referred to Fruits and rivers of honey and perfected partners to give an idea of the

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<sup>38</sup> Reference is to an article posted on the website 'Understanding Islam', and may be accessed at: <http://www.understanding-islam.com/related/text.asp?type=article&aid=56>.

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rewards of the hereafter. All these references are actually to communicate the concept of the reward and punishment that man shall be subjected to in the hereafter and because the human languages do not have words to communicate the reality of these concepts, the Qur'an has, therefore, introduced them by drawing analogy with things, which man is aware of. The concepts communicated through analogous verses, even though they are in pure and clear Arabic, are understandably slightly vague, only conveying the general idea of the concepts thus communicated. The reality and the details of these concepts are known only to God, till the time that man comes face to face with these concepts, on the Day of Judgment."

In the same sense, is not the phrase "Wrath of God" used as analogous to human emotion, to scare the humans of His punishment, instead of depicting the real emotions of God?

### **Reply**

I agree with you that in the relevant verses the phrase 'wrath' of God is, in fact, used in an allegorical manner and it actually implies the complete implementation of the requirements of God's justice, and a lack of His mercy.

It is almost exactly in the foregoing sense that I have written in one of my earlier responses titled "Why does God's Mercy Overpower His Wrath?"<sup>39</sup>:

According to the Islamic introduction of God, God is completely clear of all shortcomings, imperfections and faults. Mercy and grace are permanent attributes of God, while being wrathful is not. This implies that God is Merciful of His own accord, whether His subjects deserve His mercy or not. This, however, is not the case with God's wrath; God's wrath is the fate only of those, who, because of their own deeds and behavior, have closed all doors of God's mercy and forgiveness upon themselves.

I hope this clarification, combined with the earlier explanation given in my basic response, shall clarify the issue.

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## **If God is Omnipotent & Omnipresent, then How**

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<sup>39</sup> Also included in this booklet on page

### **can Man be Responsible for his Deeds?**

If God is omniscient and omnipotent then how can we be held responsible for making "choices" we could not possibly have made, without his knowledge and permission? If we do have freewill, does it mean that God is limited in knowledge and power? And if he is limited, then what else can he not do?

#### **Reply**

Man's freedom to choose between right and wrong is granted by God Himself. This freedom does not, in any way, limit God's knowledge or His powers.

God created man and granted Him the freedom to choose between 'good' and 'evil' for a limited time and in a very limited area of activities. Man is responsible for the 'good' and the 'evil' that he does only when such 'good' or 'evil' is done by man's freewill. I can easily tell the difference between when, in practical life, I am forced to do 'evil' or when 'evil' is, unintentionally, wrought through my hands and when I opt to do 'evil'. While in a state of extreme hunger, I did not have any other option but to steal some bread to keep myself alive. Nevertheless, when I lied on the witness stand and falsely implicated an innocent person, in my greed to earn a few pennies, I knew deep inside that I was free to save myself from the detestable act, had I wanted to. The detestability of my act is not affected, in the least, by whether the Omniscient God, knew about it before I committed it, or not. Thus, my freewill is not affected, in any way, by God's pre-knowledge of any of my actions.

It should further be kept in mind that all my actions, which emanate from my freewill are not dependent upon God's pre-knowledge of these actions. I know, through introspection, that I am never forced to do 'good' or 'evil', when I want to do otherwise. In other words, God's pre-knowledge of any of our deeds does not affect our deeds in any way. Thus, God's omniscience does not, in any way, affect man's freewill.

The Question: 'Can man do otherwise than what God knew beforehand?' is only a philosophical question. It has no practical significance at all. It would only have had a practical significance had man known about what God *knew beforehand* and then would have tried to alter it. As things stand, for all practical purposes, man is responsible for the actions that he commits with his freewill and this responsibility of man is not affected by whether God knew about man's actions beforehand or not. Thus, it would not be very accurate to say that 'God knows that Tom would

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commit a grave sin two days later', on the contrary, it would be more accurate to say that 'God knows that Tom, with his freewill, would commit a grave sin two days later'.

Now let us consider the relationship between God's omnipotence and man's freewill: In the course of the test, during the life of this world, God has granted man the opportunity to do what he wants to do. During this time, God does not, generally, hinder man from carrying out his evil desires nor forces him into doing good. This permission is granted by the Omnipotent and the Omniscient, Himself. Thus, because this freedom is bestowed upon man, by God Himself; because man enjoys this freedom only for the time for which God, Himself, has decided to grant man the privilege; because man enjoys this freedom only in the particular circles of activities, in which God, Himself has allowed him this privilege; because, God shall hold man responsible for the decisions that he takes by utilizing this great privilege; and because even with this great privilege, God has complete control over man, we cannot, therefore, say that man's freewill, during the life of this world and within a limited circle of activities, refutes God's omnipotence.

The Question: 'If God is omnipotent, then why does He not stop man from doing evil?' is actually based on a lack of appreciation of the concept of test, during the life of this world. God, for the purpose of this test, has decided that He would generally not interfere in man's decisions. A close analysis would show that had that not been the case, the 'test', during the life of this world, would have been impossible. It is, in fact, this lack of direct interference from God, in most of the cases, which makes this 'test' possible. This is precisely what the Qur'an has referred to in the following verse (*Al-Maaidah* 5: 48):

وَلَوْ شَاءَ اللَّهُ لَجَعَلَكُمْ أُمَّةً وَاحِدَةً وَلَكِنْ لِنَبِّئُكُمْ فِي مَا آتَاكُمْ

And had God so desired, He would have made you a single people [and not given you the freedom to deviate], but for the purpose of testing you in what He has bestowed upon you [He granted you freedom].

I hope this helps.

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## **Signs of the Day of Judgment Regarding One of the Signs of the Day of**

## **Judgment**

There is a famous Hadith called the Hadith of Gabriel. In it the prophet Mohammad (Peace be upon him) when asked by Gabreil (PBUH) about the signs of the Day of Judgment, told him some of the signs of the coming of the Day of Judgment. One of the signs which he told was that near Day of Judgment slave woman will give birth to her master.

What is meant by this?

### **Reply**

In my opinion, the sign given in the words: "A slave woman shall give birth to the free woman" is actually a reference to the discontinuation of the then established institution of slavery. It is, in other words, a reference to the fact that there shall be a time when the next generation of slaves shall be free men and women.

This, however, is my understanding of the statement. There can obviously be a difference of opinion regarding this interpretation.

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### ***An Alternative Explanation of the Sign of the Day of Judgment***

I've read this Hadith in 'Al-Risala' and according to Maulana Wahiduddin this Hadith tells us about rich women rent poor women to deliver children for them. I think it is the best explanation of Hadith. We can see easily this incident.

### **Reply**

Thank you for your contribution.

However, in my opinion, just as the words "العراة", "الحفاة" etc. in the previously mentioned sign in the narrative refer specifically to the Arabs, as implied by the prefixed "ال" (definite article) in the case of these words, in the same manner, the definite article with the word "الأمّة" should be interpreted to imply reference to the existing "slave girl".

Nevertheless, I do submit that there can be a difference of opinion in the interpretation of such signs.

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## **A Sign of the Day of Judgment**

There are many signs for the coming of The Day of Judgment, viz. time will pass very quickly, big buildings will be built. The Sun will rise from the west etc. Are these signs for those peoples who do not believe in The Day of Judgment, or these signs have any reality that when these signs will happen, after this there will be The Day of Judgment. Also tell me what is the significance of big buildings, which is mentioned as a sign for the coming of The Day of Judgment?

### **Reply**

The referred signs of the Day of Judgment have generally been mentioned in narratives ascribed to the Prophet (pbuh). In view of the nature of the transmission of *Hadith* and its heavy reliance upon the correct understanding and subsequently the accurate transmission and communication of the reported saying of the Prophet (pbuh), it is almost impossible to ascertain whether the narrators have reported the exact and unaltered saying of the Prophet (pbuh) or not. In view of this apparent susceptibility of narratives ascribed to the Prophet (pbuh), those narratives, which do not have a clear basis in the Qur'an and the *Sunnah* – as is clearly the case with the narratives which mention the signs of the Day of Judgment – can neither be confirmed nor rejected as accurately reported, till such time that the sign mentioned in such narratives becomes manifest.

Nevertheless, as reported in these narratives ascribed to the Prophet (pbuh), most of the referred signs have been mentioned as events that shall take place before or close to the time of the establishment of the Judgment Day.

As for the 'tall buildings', this is not a general but a sign specific to the Arabs. Mentioning this sign, the Prophet (pbuh) is reported to have said that "these bare footed, naked and poor shepherds shall compete with each other in making tall buildings". Seen from a wider perspective, the sign mentioned in this saying ascribed to the Prophet (pbuh) seems to relate to the fact that near the Day of Judgment, the poor Arabs will become affluent and rich.

The twentieth century saw this prediction fulfilled.

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## Related Issues

### **Deciding about Somebody's Position in the Hereafter**

Just recently a situation occurred on campus concerning the *Ismaili* faction of Islam. There are quite a few *Ismailis* (*Agha Khanis*) on campus and they have become active members in our Muslim Students Association where I think that a lot of them have learned a lot and also corrected some of the wrong things within their particular sect. Now I realize that there are definite things wrong with them, but in order to educate them we cannot shun them away when they reach out their hand, or should we?

A brother at an *Iftari* gathering got into a discussion about the issue of *Ismailis* and basically told one of the female *Ismailis* that he could not help think that she was going to hell every time he looked at her. Islamically, can he make a statement like that?

Are we, by any authority through the Qur'an, allowed to decide who goes to heaven and who goes to hell? I am just a little confused because although I may not feel *Ismailis* are on the straightest of paths, I felt as though this brother committed *shirk*.

Please help me with my confusion.

### **Reply**

It is very unfortunate that we, Muslims have generally become more interested in deciding about the dark future in the hereafter of our brethren rather than be thoughtful of our own bleak future there. I assure you my brother, if I am thrown into hellfire, it shall be no consolation for me to find that one of my neighbors is there too. I should therefore, concentrate on cleansing my own soul of the wrongs that I have already committed and earned, rather than decide about the position of others.

Even if I find someone doing or believing what is absolutely wrong, I should call him or her to the way of God, with great wisdom. I should never hurt a person's ego. Hurting a person's ego can become a great hindrance in his willingness in submitting to the Truth. I remind you, my brother, of God's command:

Call to the way of your Lord with (great) wisdom and solicitude and argue with them in ways that are most gracious. (And remember that) your Lord knows best those who have strayed from His path and (also) those that have

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received guidance. (*Al-Nahl* 16: 125)

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### **Imagining Rewards in the Hereafter**

To help me lower my gaze when coming across attractive women, especially when they dress provocatively, I find it helpful to visualize myself being rewarded with beautiful women in the *akhirah* for lowering my gaze. Is this permissible?

### **Reply**

I consider it a great virtue in trying to live a life of piety according to the directives and prescriptions of the Almighty in the hope that in return, God shall fulfill our deepest and most personal desires in the most satisfying manner on the Day of Judgment. Imagining this fulfillment of desires on the Day of Judgment, as a means of controlling ourselves from crossing the prescribed limits of the Almighty during the life of this world, should also be seen as an effort to tempt ourselves into living a pious life which is within the prescribed limits of the Almighty.

I, therefore, do not consider such thoughts to be impious.

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### **Related to the Moral Nature of Paradise**

The Qur'an describes Paradise allegorically, using lush and potent imagery that appeals to the five senses and to man's generic aesthetic sense. You write that while these descriptions are fundamentally allegorical, yet it would only be just of God to reward us in a physical realm because we were tested in a physical world.

If this is the case, I would like some more insight on the nature of the eternal bliss and peace of Paradise. Will certain moral values lose their importance, and perhaps their existence, in heaven? For example, patience is a virtue that is praised by the Qur'an, yet would there be no need for demonstrating patience in heaven because we will have all that we could ever wish for? Similarly, assisting the weak and needy is a basic moral/ethical value, yet would there be no need to assist the weak and needy in heaven because God will provide bountifully for everyone there? I suppose what I am really asking is if there will be a continual moral/ethical evolution in Paradise. It seems logical that if we are to grow morally and ethically during the life of this world to earn entry into Paradise, that Paradise itself, which will endure forever,

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should generate the same kind of growth. Yet how can it do this, if after growing morally and ethically in this life, we are rewarded with sunny gardens, fountains, fruits, drinks, meats, couches, golden cups, beautiful spouses etc.? How can a moral and ethical evolution proceed if all of a sudden all of our natural appetitive desires are fulfilled eternally? It might be said in response that there is nothing immoral about the amenities and favors offered in Paradise, but even so, this implies a primarily appetitive evolution that does not violate morality rather than a primarily moral/ethical evolution that regulates the appetitive (the latter of which was the case in this life). It almost seems as though the appetitive aspect of the human overtakes the moral/spiritual aspect.

Moreover, can it be the case that we are to cleanse our hearts, minds, and souls (which obviously implies moral and spiritual growth) to render ourselves deserving of selection into Paradise, only to arrive there and have our physical, appetitive needs taken care of, even if at the expense of moral and spiritual evolution/growth? I know I have posed several queries here, but they are meant to be disparate permutations of the same basic question.

Please offer your thoughts.

### **Reply**

Some clarifications seem necessary to answer your question:

Firstly, all kinds of virtuous behavior should not be construed as 'moral values'. For instance, take the case of patience. Patience is not a moral value, but is, in fact, a virtuous behavior, which must emanate from our strong trust and reliance on God's knowledge, wisdom, mercy and omnipotence. Patience, in fact, is a required virtuous behavior in human beings because of the nature of the test that man is put into during the life of this world, where the attribute of God's justice is generally not immediately applied on all moral situations. With the advent of the Day of Judgment, as God's absolute justice and mercy would reign supreme, there would no longer be a requirement for patience in man. Thus, patience is required of a true believer in God's knowledge, wisdom, mercy and omnipotence due to the nature of the test during the life of this world. Had the nature of this test been different from what it now is and at the termination of this test, the very nature of man's life would no longer require the virtue of patience.

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Secondly, the application of all moral values is always contingent upon the circumstance in which a person lives. For instance, it is a great moral virtue to be kind to one's parents during their old age, **IF** one's parents live to an old age, during one's life. Obviously, however great and significant this behavior may be, it is not required of an orphan, merely on the grounds that his parents are no longer alive. Similarly, irrespective of the significance of helping the needy and the poor, it is contingent upon the existence of the needy and the poor. Had there been no needy or poor around us, there would not have been any requirement of helping them.

You write:

I suppose what I am really asking is if there will be a continual moral/ethical evolution in Paradise.

The fact that Paradise is in fact the permanent abode of cleansed souls seems to point out that moral and ethical values do indeed play a significant role in the life of Paradise. Nevertheless, the practical application of these moral and ethical values in the life of Paradise may not be easily imaginable during our present frame of reference.

Another extremely important factor that should be kept in mind is the one that I have pointed out at the beginning of my response that it is the nature of the life of this world, which sometimes makes it difficult for us to adhere to the natural call of our moral and ethical being. Thus, we see that it is because of the circumstances that a person lies, even though he is fully aware of what the truth is. This, as is clear from the revealed literature, would not be the case in the life hereafter.

The foregoing clarification should suffice as answers to your questions. Nevertheless, if you feel that any of your questions needs to be addressed separately, please do let me know

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### **Language in Paradise**

I want to know the language that will be spoken in Heaven.

It would not be very difficult for God to make non-Arab learn the Arabic language in a blink of an eye. Or there will be no language; people will comprehend the thoughts of each other without speaking.

I really prefer the last option of "comprehending thoughts".

I would like to hear your comment on this.

### **Reply**

It is clear from the Qur'an that people shall freely communicate in paradise, but the Qur'an has not specified the language or the method in which people shall communicate with each other. However, there is a narrative ascribed to the Prophet (pbuh) in Tabraniy's *Mu`jam al-Awsat*, according to which the Prophet (pbuh) is reported to have said that the language of the people of Paradise shall be Arabic. If this narrative is considered to be reliable and accurately reporting the actual saying of the Prophet (pbuh), then a Muslim would obviously be inclined towards believing that the language spoken by the inmates of Paradise shall indeed be Arabic.

Whatever the case may be, it should be appreciated that because of our limited perspective during the life of this world, we are not in a position to fully comprehend either the exact nature of the life in the hereafter or that of the rewards and punishment of the hereafter. After fully appreciating this point, we would naturally be more concerned and involved in rendering ourselves deserving of God's mercy in the hereafter and not be too concerned about the details and the exact nature of the life or the rewards and punishments in the hereafter.

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### **Islam's View on Suicide**

What does Islam say about suicide?

### **Reply**

Islam's philosophy of life and the values that it wants to promote are all based on a particular point of view regarding the life of this world. Islam holds the life of this world as a temporary testing time for humans. For as long as one lives he/she is being tested. The end of this temporary life is not the extinction of man. He shall then open his eyes in another world. That world shall be the place of reward and/or punishment for the deeds done in this life. This afterlife shall not be temporary in nature. The pleasures and pains of the second life shall last forever. In the life of this world, man is being tested with different kinds of situations - good times as well as bad times. The good times that come our way are not necessarily a reward and the hard times that we have to face are

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not necessarily a punishment. These are all primarily a part of the test. The Qur'an says:

We test you with good and bad, to judge you. Finally, you shall all be returned to Us. (*Al-Anbiaa* 21: 35)

For all the blessings that one enjoys in the life of this world, he is expected to be grateful to his Creator and to rejoice and proclaim His beneficence and providence. While during all the hard times that come his way, he is expected to remain steadfast in His obedience, never losing faith in His wisdom and mercy.

The beginning (i.e. the birth) and the end (i.e. the death) of this test for an individual is controlled by the Almighty Himself. He gives life and death to an individual according to His own absolute knowledge and wisdom.

Keeping the above explanation in mind, it should be easy to understand that Islam holds suicide to be *haraam* (i.e. prohibited). Suicide implies lack of trust in God and a lack of faith in His benevolence, mercy, love, wisdom and knowledge. In effect, suicide implies an overall lack of faith in God.

When a person commits suicide, he practically declares that he does not believe that God knows about his sufferings, and even if God has knowledge of his sufferings, He does not care enough to relieve him of these sufferings. He practically declares that God has unjustly inflicted pain upon him, which he is not willing to bear. He practically declares that he does not have faith, confidence and trust in the mercy and wisdom of God, as he does not have confidence that God will end his pain in time, and therefore he has to end his sufferings himself (by taking his own life). Thus, in effect, suicide - in most of the cases - is a clear sign of negation of the faith of a person in his Merciful, Omniscient and Wise Creator and is therefore prohibited in Islam.

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### **Regarding Reincarnation**

I know that you have a busy schedule, and it would not be right to bother you with my trivial questions. But if you could find some spare time, do go through this mail that one of my acquaintances sent me on a debate on 'reincarnation'.

I would be grateful if you could provide me with some comments on this, and Islam's philosophy about life after death

### **Reincarnation**

Reincarnation is the belief that when one dies, one's body decomposes, but one is reborn in another body. It is the belief that one has lived before and will live again in another body after death. The bodies one passes in and out of need not be human. One may have been a Doberman in a past life, and one may be a mite or a carrot in a future life. Some tribes avoid eating certain animals because they believe that the souls of their ancestors dwell in those animals. A man could even become his own daughter by dying before she is born and then entering her body at birth.

The belief in past lives used to be mainly a belief in Eastern religions such as Hinduism and Buddhism, but now is a central tenet of such theories as dianetics and channeling. In those ancient Eastern religions, reincarnation was not considered a good thing, but a bad thing. To achieve the state of ultimate bliss (nirvana) is to escape from the wheel of rebirth. In most, if not all, ancient religions with a belief in reincarnation, the soul entering a body is seen as a metaphysical demotion, a sully and impure rite of passage. In New Age religions, however, being born again seems to be a kind of perverse goal. Prepare yourself in this life for who or what you want to come back as in the next life. Belief in past lives also opens the door for New Age therapies such as past life regression therapy which seeks the causes of today's problems in the experiences of previous lives.

L. Ron Hubbard, author of Dianetics and the founder of Scientology, introduced his own version of reincarnation into his new religion. According to Hubbard, past lives need auditing to get at the root of one's "troubles." He also claims that "Dianetics gave impetus to Bridey Murphy" and that some scientologists have been dogs and other animals in previous lives. According to Hubbard, "It has only been in Scientology that the mechanics of death have been thoroughly understood." What happens in death is this: the Thetan (spirit) finds itself without a body (which has died) and then it goes looking for a new body. Thetans "will hang around people. They will see a woman who is pregnant and follow her down the street." Then, the Thetan will slip into the newborn "usually...two or three minutes after the delivery of a child from the mother. A Thetan usually picks it up about the time the baby takes its first gasp." How Hubbard knows this is never revealed.

J.Z. Knight claims that in 1977 the spirit of a Cro-magnon warrior who once lived in Atlantis took over her body in order to pass on

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bits of wisdom he'd picked up over the centuries. Ms. Knight seems to be carrying on the work of Jane Roberts and Robert Butts, who in 1972 hit the market with Seth Speaks. Knight, Roberts and Butts are all indebted to Edgar Cayce who claimed to be in touch with many of his past lives. One would think that channeling might muck things up a bit. After all, if various spirits from the past can enter any body at any time without destroying the present person, it is possible that when one remembers a past life it is actually someone else's life one is remembering.

From a philosophical point of view, reincarnation poses some interesting problems. What is it that is reincarnated? Presumably, it is the soul that is reincarnated, but what is the soul? A disembodied consciousness?

Reincarnation does seem to offer an explanation for some strange phenomena such as the ability of some people to regress to a past life under hypnosis. Also, we might explain child prodigies by claiming that unlike most cases of reincarnation where the soul has to more or less start from scratch, the child prodigy somehow gets a soul with great carryover from a previous life, giving it a decided advantage over the rest of us.

Reincarnation could explain why bad things happen to good people and why good things happen to bad people: they are being rewarded or punished for actions in past lives (karma). One could explain déjà vu experiences by claiming that they are memories of past lives. Dreams could be interpreted as a kind of soul travel and soul memory. However, past life regression and déjà vu experiences are best explained as the recalling of events from this life, not some past life. Dreams and child prodigies are best explained in terms of brain structures and processes. And since bad things also happen to bad people and good things also happen to good people, one might well suppose that there is no rhyme or reason why anything happens to anybody.

Finally, since there is no way to tell the difference between a baby with a soul which will go to heaven or hell, and one with a soul which has been around before in other bodies, and one with no soul at all, it follows that the idea of a soul adds nothing to our concept of a human being. Applying Occam's razor, both the idea of reincarnation and the idea of an immortal soul which will go to heaven or hell are equally unnecessary.

### **Reply**

The concept of reincarnation seems to have emanated primarily

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from man's effort of finding an explanation of "Déjà vu" and related experiences. However, being based purely on logical explanations and not relying upon revelations, the concept lacks all empirical evidence.

Reason, obviously demands that we should either base our beliefs on information that we are convinced is based upon divine revelation – i.e., information given by the Creator Himself – and is understandable by the human mind or on information that is proven beyond all doubt, on the basis of empirical evidence, to be true. The concept of reincarnation, as we know, does not entail either of these bases.

Furthermore, it is clear from the cited passages that the concept of reincarnation inherently entails the concept of reward and punishment. Nevertheless, no one living on earth can say with any degree of confidence whether his present life is a punishment or a reward for any of the 'unknown' deeds of any of his 'past lives'.

You cite:

Reincarnation could explain why bad things happen to good people and why good things happen to bad people: they are being rewarded or punished for actions in past lives (karma).

It is quite clear that the whole concept of reward and punishment is completely nullified if the person being subjected to this reward and/or punishment is not even aware of what and why is he being rewarded or punished for.

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