

HAPPINESS IN LIFE AND AFTER DEATH

An Islamic Sufi View

SHAYKH FADHLALLA HAERI



Publisher: Zahra Publications

ISBN (Printed Version): 978-1-84694-247-1

ISBN (E-Book Version): 978-1-919826-40-0

<http://www.zahrapublications.pub>

First Published in 2010

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BOOK DESCRIPTION

Shaykh Fadhlalla Haeri provides a lucid and inspiring account of life, death and the hereafter, according to an Islamic Sufi perspective.

The book opens with a wide-ranging sweep of death and dying as viewed in other cultures and religions – from ancient Mesopotamian, Egyptian and Zoroastrian sources through to Judaism and Christianity.

Based on the Qur'an and Prophetic message, this book offers a splendid collection of revelations and spiritual teachings that map a basic path towards a wholesome way of living without forgetting death. There is both physical and spiritual death, and death in both instances is seen as a natural bridge from the suffering and delusions of this life to a unifying and clear abode. As the reader is led from birth of the ephemeral self on earth through an unfolding progression towards higher consciousness and awakening to the eternal soul within, constant awareness of one's intimate dual nature takes away much of the fear of death and makes it seem like a familiar companion.

ABOUT SHAYKH FADHLALLA HAERI

Acknowledged as a master of self-knowledge and a spiritual philosopher, Shaykh Fadhlalla Haeri's role as a teacher grew naturally out of his own quest for self-fulfillment.

He travelled extensively on a spiritual quest which led to his eventual rediscovery of the pure and original Islamic heritage of his birth, and the discovery of the truth that reconciles the past with the present, the East with the West, the worldly with the spiritual – a link between the ancient wisdom teachings and our present time.

A descendant of five generations of well-known and revered spiritual leaders, Shaykh Fadhlalla Haeri has taught students throughout the world for over 30 years. A prolific author of more than thirty books relating to the universal principles of Islam, the Qur'an, and its core purpose of enlightenment, he is a gifted exponent of how the self relates to the soul, humankind's link with the Divine, and how consciousness can be groomed to reflect our higher nature.

The unifying scope of his perspective emphasizes practical, actionable knowledge that leads to self-transformation, and provides a natural bridge between seemingly different Eastern and Western approaches to spirituality, as well as offering a common ground of higher knowledge for various religions, sects and secular outlooks.

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This book is written for whoever is interested in the Islamic view of life, death and the hereafter. It is based entirely on the Qur'an and the prophetic teachings regarding the purpose and meaning of life on earth and its connection with the eternal Truth. It is written for the present day and relates to our modern knowledge of creation, human needs and the basic path towards a wholesome way of living without forgetting death. Although the emphasis in this book is on death and life after death, matters concerning life on earth and its dynamics and reality are brought to the forefront whenever relevant.

In Islam death is seen as a continuation of life but in an entirely different domain. This life is seen as a preparation for the hereafter, which is beyond the limitations of space and time. My childhood culture made the connection between life and death clearly inseparable. I was born and grew up in the city of Karbala, Iraq, whose fame is derived from the martyrdom of Imam Hussain, the grandson of the Prophet Muhammad. Ever since then it has been a favored place for burial. Every day thousands of coffins would arrive from far and nearby places to be ceremonially carried for burial in the vast desert necropolis, thereby connecting the life of the living and the dead in practical ways. Remembrance of the dead on weekly and annual basis was an integral part of our life. I grew up imbibing the desire for deeper understanding of the meaning and purpose of life and death. Reflecting about death and preparing for it in practice has made my life richer and deeper. As children we were made to understand that it is through proper understanding of death that we can obtain answers to the questions and challenges that life presents to us. Eternity was thus brought close.

The mystery and certainty of death have made it a perennial human concern, threading through religions, cultures, morality and most other human endeavors, aspirations and fears. Death and dying have preoccupied the human mind and consciousness ever since the dawn of self-awareness. Indeed, fears and concerns about death have distracted us from reflecting upon the key issue of the meaning and purpose of life.

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In order to have a positive attitude towards death, we need to look at the nature of birth and the historical background of the origin of life and creation. In our present day, we are endowed with considerable information and knowledge regarding the evolutionary background of all living creatures and human beings. Our lives have been much enriched due to the advancement of science and the popularization of basic knowledge regarding the nature of light, energy, matter and the magical world of sub atomic particles, as well as astrophysics.

When life becomes perceptibly sentient then the desire for survival and growth follows. In the case of human beings we willfully desire and seek numerous goals, such as food, procreation, power, rest, company of others, and so on. Death is the end of an individual's interaction with matter/energy, form/meaning and other subject-object dynamics. If there were a form or state of life after death then it could echo, resemble or relate to our life on earth. With death, we lose our worldly senses, mind and perception of space and time and other worldly parameters. 'After-life' implies a zone beyond our normal consciousness and understanding. Hence, it is unknown and this unfamiliarity and uncertainty generates the usual fear and apprehension.

The terms mind consciousness or awareness don't have the exact equivalent in Arabic or in the Qur'an. Islam ascertains that Absolute Truth or God is the only reality from which all other levels of realities, notions and illusions emanate. In Arabic, the term *khayal* refers to the faculty of the imaginal or the illusory, which brings about differentiation and discernment in the world of objects, forms and energies, none of which have an independent or sustainable reality. This most critical human faculty bridges the vast intangible with the discernable world. There is no total independence in our world, as everything in existence has a certain degree of interdependence. Absolute truth alone is independent. Personal identity and 'personality' is reinforced by identification with body, mind and other worldly relationships. The self is a companion shadow of the soul and will only realize relief and contentment after its unity at heart.

Return to your Lord, well-pleased (with him), well-pleasing
(Him), (89:28)

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The human soul has emanated from the eternal cosmic soul and is veiled by the illusion of separation as a prelude to returning back to its original source. The various levels of mental states such as intelligence, emotions, feelings, rationality and other elements are all descriptions of different levels of consciousness which have emanated from pure essence or truth, which is in itself free of any qualities or attributes. Illusions and delusions help to maintain a semblance of familiarity and continuity in time and space. Real happiness is the outcome of the realization of the eternal higher consciousness; constant, perfect and blissful. The Qur'an repeatedly describes the friends of God as those who are beyond fear or sorrow.

Thus whoever believes and acts correctly there will be no fear upon them nor will they grieve. (6:48)

Our so-called 'normal' world works within the realm of causality and the interactions between energy and physical entities. The subatomic world is based on uncertainty. It is no wonder that human beings struggle to realize a state that is always stable, eternal or timeless. It is the realm of higher consciousness that takes us beyond the earthly limitations and enables us to be secure in eternal perfection.

Thus whoever follows my guidance there will be no fear upon them nor will they experience sorrow. (2:38)

Death is the natural door to a higher consciousness where earthly dualities such as good and bad, heavens and earth, the seen and the unseen and objects and subjects are linked and unified. This crossover bridge is a one-way traffic into a new state where we see oneness behind all diverse realities. Our earthly experiences were the nursery of time and space leading to this new realm. For a smooth journey through death to the hereafter, we need to be prepared for a new consciousness without the body, mind, senses, earthly dualities, causality and rationality. Our life on earth is held by boundaries of conditioned consciousness and limitations. Space and time burst forth as a cradle to hold out all that is latent and in potential, before and now, in a discernable and repetitive way, until the cycle returns to where it originated from and by which it is constantly maintained.

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Every living entity or conscious creation is endowed with a soul or spirit which acts as the energizing source with its genetic imprints to enable it to grow and evolve towards its maximum potential in performance, intelligence and consciousness. Human beings experience changing and evolving personal consciousness with self awareness and flashes of higher or super consciousness, inspired by the soul within. Other names given to awareness beyond the self are pure consciousness, God awareness, supreme consciousness or higher or absolute consciousness. The more one's personal, specific or conditioned consciousness is aligned with pure consciousness, the deeper, wider and more efficient is the connection with life's essence and source. This act is often referred to as God awareness or remembrance; we often call such a person 'awake', spiritually realized or enlightened. These terms imply synchrony between self-ego and soul, head and heart or created and creator.

... and remember your Lord when you forget and say: "It may be that my Lord guides me unto a nearer way of truth than this."
(18:24)

O' you who believe, remember Allah with much remembrance (33:41)

Human beings have access to two spheres of consciousness. The first is primal, conditioned, limited and pervasive in all living entities; it motivates life, survival and other basic evolutionary dynamics. The other dominant sphere carries higher attributes and qualities uniquely accessible to human beings and to a lesser extent some primates, such as generosity, love, patience, justice, compassion, mercy and other subtler qualities desired by human beings. This level of consciousness enables humans to transcend the basic conditioned or egotistic primal consciousness. Spiritual growth entails a smooth connection between these levels of consciousness and reference between self and soul.

The human makeup is both earthly and heavenly, finite and eternal. We experience the physical realm for a short duration, until death ends the illusions of independence and opens the door to the hereafter. When 'coherence' and unity of consciousness is achieved, then life will be experienced as joyful and happy. Thus, the most important issue in human life is to grow from

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worldly (causal and rational) understanding to higher spiritual wisdom through reference to the light of the soul (or pure consciousness within). The more this higher state is practiced, the less death becomes fearful and it becomes a natural and welcome event in one's personal growth and journey towards timelessness. Limited consciousness returns to the pool of boundlessness from where it emanated. Containment, peace and inner harmony are steps towards seeing universal connectivity and unity; the divine golden thread of universal oneness.

Science and Metaphysics

Modern sciences such as physics, chemistry, mathematics and particularly quantum mechanics provide numerous metaphors and models of what life after death could be like. One example is the dual nature of electrons as a particle and as a wave at the same time. When an electron is intercepted by a screen with two slits, it assumes its wave characteristics and goes through both slits as a wave emerging on the other side with a phenomenon called interference. The patterns of interference are similar to those formed when two stones are thrown into water and the respective ripples subsequently interfere and overlap with each other. When this interference is harmonized, these ripples become 'coherent'. The laser beam's power, and numerous applications in technology, are due to the phenomenon of coherence.

When a person (composed of both body and soul) dies, the soul breaks through the barrier of death emerging as a wave. If during one's lifetime there was synchrony between body, mind, heart and soul, then the process of dying is likely to be easy and natural. Light returns to the realm of lights and matter to matters. Ease and harmony in the afterlife is like coherence and unification.

Until recently scientists kept a good distance from religion and metaphysics, which have lost much of past importance and relevance. Nowadays science is developing its own new form of metaphysics as part of the quest for the grand unifying theory or other attempts to discover the source of what holds the universe together, the physical with the subatomic. What the scientists need is a theory that includes all the forces of nature; the weak and strong forces within the nucleus of the atom, the electromagnetic forces as well as gravity. The string theory is a possible

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answer to this endeavor. It is perhaps the growing interest in consciousness studies and research that will ultimately shed the needed light onto what connects diverse or different entities and realities. This universal unifying field may also shed new light upon understanding death, dying and the connections between this world and the hereafter.

In the past, human obsession and fear regarding death was answered, for the most part, by religion or other systems of belief or faith. Fear of death and regret for lack of preparation have remained as keynotes throughout human history. In our present day, we have numerous studies of death consciousness through near death experiences (NDEs), as well as out of body experiences (OBEs), meditations and special practices designed to help the mind to transcend so-called normal consciousness.

Until recently, paranormal phenomena (like clairvoyance) were considered spooky and odd. Tests with consciousness-altering drugs and a clearer understanding of brain functions have opened up new channels for better understanding of different levels of consciousness. Our nuclear scientists have been coming up with ideas, theories and models of the quantum world, which are beyond normal human logic or understanding, thus breaking the exclusivity of ‘tangible reality’ and showing the possibilities of different realms of consciousness. “Schrödinger’s Cat” being both dead and alive, at the same time, sounds like the uttering of a mystical hermit who occasionally confuses his devotees with obscure mantras. A century ago such a contradictory idea would have been considered insane. Yet the ‘uncertainty principle’ is the foundation of our present day quantum physics.

And they say: “O you (Muhammad) to whom the Dhikr (the Qur’an) has been sent down! Verily, you are a mad man.” (15:6)

Views of Religions and Cultures

Historically, many thinkers and philosophers have written about the nature of death and the possibility of an afterlife. Socrates, Plato and Montaigne considered the study of philosophy as essentially the study of death. Michelangelo said, ‘No thought exists in me which death has not

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carved with his chisel.’ Awareness of death naturally increases and sharpens human awareness to live fully, with maximum awareness of the present moment and higher consciousness.

Every human being is bound to taste death, [and] in the end unto
Us shall all be brought back. (29:57)

As early as the Neanderthals, belief in life-after-death seems evident from drawings and other artifacts recovered from ancient graves and caves. The idea of a new or different kind of consciousness after death can be traced to prehistoric myths and sagas. The Sumerian myth of Gilgamesh, and the great flood of Noah depicted in the Bible and the Qur’an have their echoes in different cultures and religions of the world. Gilgamesh had acquired a rejuvenating plant whose name was ‘Old man grown young’, which was stolen from him towards the end of his epical journey. As a result, Gilgamesh had to accept that his memorial would be the great walls of the city he had built instead of personal immortality. This is an odyssey of love, labor, hope and a realistic acceptance of the way things are; an ancient example of reconciliation and peaceful surrender to Truth – whatever is born will also die. This perpetual conflict between human love for immortality and the inevitable death of body can only be resolved by realizing the soul’s ongoingness – light to light and dust to dust.

In Genesis, death is described as the outcome of disobedience to divine commands. In Jewish traditions, the idea of resurrection begins to develop a few centuries B.C. when death was considered to be an act of atonement. Christianity takes some of these Jewish ideas to another level of abstraction and reflects aspects of Zoroastrian notions of destiny beyond death and judgment.

.....” Say (O Muhammad): “Who then sent down the Book which
Moses brought, a light and a guidance to mankind which you (the
Jews), disclosing (some of it) and concealing (much). And you
were taught that which neither you nor your fathers knew.” Say:
“Allah (sent it down).” Then leave them to play in their vain
discussions. (6:91)

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Many Eastern religions and cultures consider this world an illusion and therefore promote renunciation and detachment. Life and death are regarded as a natural cycle of an ongoing existence. In these traditions, the history of death is more a history of change in consciousness than a tragedy or liberation. Furthermore, all human experiences are regarded as flawed or as illusions, which veil the truth that can only be revealed through enlightenment. Truth is considered as an absolute and immutable Reality and everything else is a shadow or mirage reflecting this constancy. Nothing is ever as we think it is. Truth gives rise to limited realities and thoughts and is beyond all that is discernible.

To 'see things as they really are' will require the ego and self-identity to transcend to pure consciousness which provides the clear lens through which life can be witnessed. The human self or ego as such is neither bad nor evil – it can be considered a helpful cover over the pure light within the heart until the right time when the self can evolve to realize its soul. The self is a temporary cover shielding the soul and connecting it to the world of change within space and time.

Religious belief in Ancient Egypt was based on the existence of the two different entities – one being the body and the other spirit – and that there would be another physical life after death. Thus, daily life revolved mostly around the concepts of life, death and gods. The Egyptians saw the heart as the source of life and being and that any damage to it would result in a 'second death'. They also had different words for heart. The physical heart was called *Haty*, whilst *Ib* referred to the metaphysical entity embodying thought, intelligence, memory and wisdom, bravery, sadness and love. They believed the deceased went to a territory ruled by *Osiris*, where each person had to give an account of all their good and bad deeds. The idea of death and resurrection stimulated the Egyptian's hope for immortality and produced a code of morality suitable to their culture and way of life.

And you shall see every nation kneeling down; every nation shall
be called to its book: today you shall be rewarded for what you
did. (45:28)

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In Mesopotamia the attitude towards death was very different to that of the Egyptians. The process of death was stark and quite bleak. Sickness was the outcome of sin and wrongdoing, a view that seeped through to the Abrahamic traditions. The death of a person was not connected to any reward in the afterlife; there was no salvation through human effort or divine compassion.

The Jewish literature refers to different kinds of death ranging from the hardest to the easiest. Many allegorical tales discuss the relationship between the living and the dead. It was thought that the dead could communicate with the living, as well as the other way round. The practice of praying for the intercession of the dead was mentioned in the Talmud as part of the custom of visiting the cemetery to request the dead to pray for the living. There are many similarities between Islam and the Old Testament, as well as other Abrahamic teachings.

Those who shall follow the [last] Apostle, the unlettered Prophet whom they shall find described in the Torah that is with them, and [later on] in the Gospel: Those, therefore, who shall believe in him, and honor him, and succor him, and follow the light which is sent down with him: they are the successful ones". (7:157)

Jewish views of the soul begin with the book of Genesis in which verse 2:7 states: 'The lord God formed man from the dust of the earth. He blew into his nostrils the breath of life, and man became a living being.' Although the Hebrew Bible offers no clear definition of the soul, various descriptions of the soul exist in classical Rabbinical literature, Maimonides, in *The Guide to the Perplexed*, explained classical Rabbinical teaching about the soul through the lens of neo-Aristotelian philosophy. He held that the soul is a person's developed intellect, which has no substance.

The *Zohar*, a classic work of Jewish mysticism (Kabbala), describes the soul as composed of the *Nefesh* (lower part of soul linked to instincts and desires which enter the body at birth), *Ru'ach* and *Neshamah*, developed with action and belief. The first is the lower or animal part of the soul, linked to instincts and bodily cravings. It is found in all humans and enters the body at birth and it is the source of one's physical and psychological nature. The other two parts of the soul are

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said to only fully exist in people of awakened spirituality. *Ru'ach* (the middle soul) contains the moral virtues and the ability to distinguish between good and evil. *Nashamah* (the higher soul) is what separates man from all other forms of life and is related to the intellect, which allows man to enjoy and benefit from the afterlife.

They said: O our people! We have listened to a Book revealed
after Moses verifying that which is before it, guiding to the
truth and to a right path: (46:30)

In the Kabbalistic teachings, many of the key terms used have similar counterparts in Arabic. The *Nefesh* (nafs: breath and/or soul) disintegrates after death and the *Ru'ach* (ruh: soul) is sent to a sort of intermediate zone where it is submitted to purification and enters 'temporary paradise'. Whilst *Neshamah* returns to the source and enjoys the 'kiss of the beloved' supposedly after resurrection, *Ru'ach* and *Neshamah* are united again in a permanently transmuted state of being.

Other Kabbalistic works state that there are two more parts of the human soul, which are considered to represent the most sublime levels of intuitive cognition and to be within the grasp of only a few chosen individuals. This aspect is considered as part of the soul that allows one to have an awareness of the Divine presence. The other part is the highest plane of the soul in which one can achieve as close a union with God as is possible.

And before this was the Book of Moses as a guide and a mercy. And
this is a confirming Book (the Qur'an) in the Arabic language, to
warn those who do wrong, and as glad tidings to the good-doers
(46:12)

Most Christians believe the soul (or spirit) to be the immortal essence of a human and that after death the soul is either rewarded or punished. Whether this reward is contingent upon good deeds or merely upon belief in God, the father, and Jesus, the son, is a constant debate among different Christian groups.

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In Christianity the eschatological concepts deal with the last ‘four things’: death, judgment, heaven and hell. Death is simply considered separation between body and soul and is the consequence and penalty of Adam’s original sin. It is the end event of man’s period of probation and decides his eternal destiny. ‘We will not all sleep, but we will all be changed’ (1: Cor 15:51); ‘Dust you are, and unto dust shall you return’ (Gen 3:19); ‘Earth to earth, ashes to ashes, dust to dust; in sure and certain hope of resurrection’ (The Common Book of Prayers).

And do not argue with the followers of the Book (other revealed religions) except by what is best, and say: We believe in what has been revealed to us and revealed to you, and our God and your God is One, and to Him do we submit. (29:46)

Within Christianity the idea of purgatory is based on the premise that the soul, if imperfect, spends a period purging or cleansing before being ready for the end of time. Purgatory is the intermediate state of unknown duration relevant to the extent of sins and missed repentance. They undergo a course of penal purification in order to be admitted into heaven. They share in the communion of the saints, and benefit by the prayer and good works of the living.

And indeed, We gave Moses the Book and followed him up with a succession of Messengers... (2:87)

In Christian theology, heaven is the abode of the blessed where they will be elevated by the light of glory so as to be capable of enjoying the company of Christ and the angels and the immediate vision of God, face to face. Only the perfectly pure and holy enter heaven. There are some who have attained that state at death, while others enter heaven after a course of purification and purgatory, without much delay. Hell designates the place or state of men and angels who are excluded from beatific vision due to their sins.

In the early centuries of Christianity, the Gnostic Valentinus proposed a version of spiritual psychology that was in accordance with numerous other perennial doctrines. He conceived of human beings as a triple entity, consisting of body (*hyle*), soul (*psyche*), and spirit (*pneuma*). This is identical to the division found in St Paul’s epistle to Thessalonians I.

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And when Allah said: O Jesus, I shall cause you death and cause you to ascend unto Me and purify you of those who disbelieve and make those who follow you above those who disbelieve to the day of resurrection; then to Me shall be your return, so I will judge between you in the matters in which you used to dispute. (3:55)

The idea of a spiritual essence for mankind is well described in Islam (especially Sufism) and echoed in several world religions such as Buddhism, Vedanta and others. In modern transpersonal psychologies it is known as the soul-spark or higher self.

According to Buddhist teachings, all things are impermanent and in a constant state of flux. All is transient and there is no abiding state. This is applied to humanity as much as anything else in the cosmos. Thus, there is no unchanging self. Our sense of 'I' or 'me' is simply a sense of belonging to the ever-changing entity composed of body and mind.

Buddhists hold that the delusion of a permanent self is one of the main roots of human conflict on the emotional, social and political levels. It is through understanding the 'not-self' that we gain insight into the human condition, which allows us to go beyond 'our' mundane desires. At death the body and mind disintegrate; any remaining traces of *karma* will cause the continuity of consciousness to bounce back as thought in the future mind of a fetus. Some Buddhist teachers, however, affirm that although permanent personal selfhood is denied, concepts such as Buddha-nature or original nature are valid. They take the view that if there is no abiding self and no soul then there is no cause to be reborn.

Say to (them): "If the home of the Hereafter with Allah is indeed for you specially and not for others, of mankind, then long for death if you are truthful," (2:94)

The Tibetan Buddhist *Book of the Dead* gives guidance for the stages during the process of dying and the 'Bardo' realm, or intermediate state, following death, prior to the next rebirth. Death for the Buddhist occurs on different levels and in different stages. Life and death are considered integral elements of one great cycle within the continuation and flowering of life. It is considered

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that the last thoughts before death are most important and we need to guard against inappropriate habitual thoughts throughout our life. Last thoughts are naturally related to the usual regular patterns of thinking and one's general inner state.

In Hinduism, the Sanskrit word most closely corresponding to the soul is *Atman*, which can mean soul or even God. It is seen as the portion of *Brahman* (God) within us. Hinduism contains many variant beliefs on the origin, purpose and fate of the soul. For example, *Advaita* or the non-dualistic conception of the soul, accords its union with Brahman, the absolute uncreated. *Dvaita*, or dualistic concepts, identify the soul as a different and incompatible substance.

Jainists believe in a *Jiva*, an immortal essence of a living being analogous to a soul, which is subject to the illusion of *maya* and evolves through many incarnations from mineral to vegetable to animal. Its accumulated *karma* determines the form of its next birth.

Islamic View of Death

According to Islam, death is not the end of life but a transformation from this world to the hereafter. Life after death is called *akhira* or that which comes later or lasting. It is a transition from earthly transitory experiences to a higher, clearer and subtler lasting life. It is a transition from a constrained and insecure state of life to a new horizon of pure consciousness. Human beings will simply shift from one place or state to another. Death is a bridge, taking the pious believers from worldly changes, hardships and afflictions to the widely spread gardens and permanent blessings of afterlife. After the limited life span in this world, death will lead to a new start of the boundless beyond space/time. The Qur'an and Prophetic traditions tell us that only the physical body, senses and ego will taste death and not the soul or essence within the heart.

And who believe in that which has been revealed to you and that which was revealed before you and they are sure of the hereafter.
(2:4)

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Death will cause the physical body to perish – sense and personal will suspended – but the soul with its attending shadow of a person's balance sheet of good and bad actions and intentions carry on to the hereafter. The Prophet taught that human beings have been created for the next permanent realm and not for this temporary and deceptive world. He emphasized that man was created for permanent happiness and not fleeting happiness. Our earthly life is but a preparation and passage towards the next world. The three phases of human growth start with the darkness of the womb and then comes the changing lights and shadows of this world, leading to the clearer lights of the hereafter. Experientially, we know that permanent happiness is not attainable in this world and yet we cannot stop pursuing it. The self is restless to attain its soul.

The Prophet Muhammad said: 'Death is a gift for the believer, like a pleasant fragrance; more deaths occur due to people's sins than to the stipulated time, and people live longer due to their good deeds than their determined life span.' The implication is that our intentions, thoughts and actions have a big part to play in our destiny. Every situation describes its ultimate destiny.

... Say: "Short is the enjoyment of this world. The Hereafter is (far) better for him who fears Allah, and you shall not be dealt with unjustly even minutely." (4:77)

Islam describes two types of death: physical and spiritual. Those who do not respond to the call and message of Allah are considered as 'dead' (in this world) in the eyes of Allah. The Qur'an states:

Surely you do not make the dead to hear, and you do not make the deaf to hear the call when they go back retreating. (27:80)

Is he, who was dead (ignorant) and We gave him life (knowledge) and set for him a light (of Belief) whereby he can walk amongst men, like him who is in the darkness from which he can never come out? Thus it is made fair seeming (pleasing) to the disbelievers that which they used to do. (6:122)

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The Prophet taught that worldly people think that ‘physical death’ of a person is a major event, but the righteous consider spiritual death as greater and more grievous. Islam condones death for the sake of Allah, Truth and Justice, and those who die as such are considered ever living. The Qur’an states:

And say not of those who are slain in God’s cause, “They are dead”: nay, they are alive, but you perceive it not. (2:154)

He who emigrates (from his home) in the Cause of Allah, will find on earth many dwelling places and plenty to live by. And whosoever leaves his home as an emigrant unto Allah and His Messenger, and death overtakes him, his reward is then surely incumbent upon Allah. And Allah is Ever Oft-Forgiving, Most Merciful. (4:100)

Dying for the cause of truth does not mean only on battlefields and in physical struggles, which are termed ‘lesser jihad’. To go against one’s ego and selfish desires, greed, love of power and dominance, is considered a greater battle or jihad and can therefore be considered as a sacrifice (death of ego) for the sake of truth and enlightenment. The key issue is to be willing to give up what is considered valuable or important, in a worldly sense, for the sake of purification of heart and light and God’s pleasure or command.

The Qur’an also mentions two different times of death: a definite time (fixed destiny) and an indefinite or changeable time as described in the verses:

It is He, Who takes your souls by night (in sleep), and has knowledge of all that you have done by day, then he raises (wakes) you up again that a term appointed (your life period) be fulfilled, then in the end unto Him will be your return. Then He will inform you what you used to do. (6:60)

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And (commanding you): "Seek the forgiveness of your Lord, and turn to Him in repentance, that He may grant you good enjoyment for a term appointed..." (11:3).

Whoever hopes for the Meeting with Allah, then Allah's Term is surely coming. And He is the All-Hearer, the All-Knower. (29:5).

Sleep is considered a type of temporary death. Natural or normal death is different to accidental and untimely death, which often comes suddenly and as a shock.

Islam does not uphold the soul's reincarnation or transmutation as such, although there are a few descriptions in the Qur'an which some commentators view as exceptional examples of a soul's return to the earthly realms.

The Qur'an also states that nations and civilizations also follow a course of maturity and then an inevitable decline and disintegration. As cited earlier:

And every nation has its appointed term; when their term is reached, neither can they delay it an hour nor can they advance it. (7:34)

According to the Qur'an, when a group of people or nation becomes 'oppressor' and 'tormentor', Allah will hasten their end:

And every nation has its appointed term; when their term is reached, neither can they delay it an hour nor can they advance it.) - (And how many of the generations did We destroy after Nuh! and your Lord is sufficient as Knowing and Seeing with regard to His servants' faults. (17:16-17)

The Qur'an emphasizes lack of foreknowledge of the place or time of death:

... and no one knows in what land he will die. Verily God [alone] is all-knowing, all-aware. (31:34)

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The implication is perpetual cautious awareness of thoughts and actions and accountability at all times in order to remain mentally prepared for death at any place or time. Whoever remembers death frequently is more likely to live at a higher level of awareness of intentions, actions and consciousness.

The Qur'an describes the angels who execute God's decrees as agents connecting the world of senses with the intangible domain.

Or do they think that we do not hear what they conceal and their secret discourses? Yes! And our messengers (angels) are with them recording. (43:80)

Angels carry out numerous duties and activities, affecting life on earth. Some angels are known as the generous scribes (*kiramin katibin*). One is deputed to record bad deeds and thoughts (on the left) whilst the other records good intentions and thoughts (on the right hand side). Then there are angels of death who have been assigned to take away the souls of people, of whom the archangel of death (Izra'il) is their chief.

Say: The angel of death who is given charge of you shall cause you to die, then to your Lord you shall be brought back. (32:11)

The Prophet Muhammad was present at the deathbed of a man when he saw the Angel of Death near him. He told the angel to be kind to the dying man and the archangel replied, 'Be sure that I am kind to the believers and that I pull out the soul of people (only as destined). By God, we don't wrong any person; we do not take the soul earlier or later than the appointed time. If a person accepts the will of God, he will depart with ease and if he objects with resentment and grief, he will be punished for it.'

After the world is destroyed and every living entity has gone through death, Izra'il, Jibra'il, Mika'il and the other angels bearing the throne of Allah will still be alive. Then Allah will order the death of Jibra'il and Mika'il. Then comes the death of the bearers of the throne. Finally, the

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archangel of death (Izra'il) will also die. The Prophet Muhammad said, 'On the Day of Judgment, Allah will make the angel of death taste death as all of his other servants.'

From the Qur'an and other Prophetic Traditions, it can be surmised that the balance of a person's deeds and intentions in this world will be carried forward to the hereafter. Power, wealth, offspring, prestige and other worldly desirables are of no consequence then. It is only what has been done for the good of others and in the way of charity, justice and truth, which will have a lasting effect in the after-world. Whatever helps to purify the heart and lighten the burden of the soul is considered good and helpful. Ultimately, it is witnessing creation through the light of unity that will liberate one from darkness. Shirk, or seeing other than the One, is at the root of all injustices, double standards, hypocrisy and confusion on earth.

Surely, God does not forgive shirk (associating others with Him) although He forgives what is beside that. (4:48)

Unto God belongs all that is in the heavens and all that is on earth. And whether you bring into the open what is in your minds or conceal it, God will call you to account for it; and then He will forgive whom He wills, and will chastise whom He wills: for God has the power to will anything. (2:284)

The sequences and order of events towards the end of time or doomsday do not follow a clear time line which corresponds to what our minds comprehend in this world of space and time. Understandably, these future events take place in a domain where time is no longer operative as on earth. In the Qur'an, hell and paradise are mentioned numerous times but these experiences are not slotted neatly in stages after death and resurrection but are diffused and interlinked throughout the hereafter as well as life on earth. In other words, difficulty or ease begins with birth and continue after death according to personal thoughts and actions. Hell or paradise does not begin only after receiving the account after doomsday. The Prophet had said that a person's grave is either part of paradise or hell, i.e. according to his deeds and inner state. The Qur'an states:

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O people! If you are in doubt about the Resurrection, then verily! We have created you from dust, then from a sperm then from a clot then from a little lump of flesh, some formed and some unformed, that We may make (it) clear to you. And We cause whom We will to remain in the wombs for an appointed term, then We bring you out as infants, then that you may reach your age of full strength. And among you there is he who dies (young), and among you there is he who is brought back to the feeblest old age, so that he knows nothing after having known. And you see the earth barren, but when We send down water (rain) on it, it is stirred (to life), it swells and puts forth every lovely kind (of growth) - (That is because Allah, He is the Truth, and it is He Who gives life to the dead, and it is He Who is Able to do all things.) (22:5-6)

Was he not once a [mere] drop of sperm that had been spilt, and thereafter became a germ-cell - whereupon He created and formed [it] in accordance with what [it] was meant to be, and fashioned out of it the two sexes, the male and the female? Is not He, then; able to bring the dead back to life? (75:37-40)

Life on earth is echoed in the hereafter. Everything in creation is part of a chain of events and is one of two pairs of entities which can be similar or different.

We create man out of the essence of clay, and then We cause him to remain as a drop of sperm in [the wombs] firm keeping, and then We create out of the drop of sperm a germ-cell, and then We create out of the germ-cell an embryonic lump, and then We create within the embryonic lump bones, and then We clothe the bones with flesh - and then We bring [all] this into being as a new creation: And then, behold! After all this, you are destined to die; and then, behold! You shall be raised from the dead on Resurrection Day. (23:12-16)

And that it is He who creates the two kinds - the male and the female - out of a [mere] drop of sperm as it is poured forth, and

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that [therefore] it is within His power to bring about a second life. (53:45-47)

The origin and metaphor of fire (and hell) is mentioned several times in the Qur'an with regards to resurrection,

Say: "He who brought them into being in the first instance will give them life [once again], seeing that He has full knowledge of every act of creation: He who produces for you fire out of the green tree, so that, lo! you kindle [your fires] therewith."
(36:79-80)

Have you ever considered the fire which you kindle? Is it you who have produced its tree (origin) - or are We the cause of its coming into being? We have made it a Reminder and an article of use for the journey. (56:71-73)

Signs and events of doomsday have been mentioned in numerous prophetic traditions. These include depression of the earth in the East and the earth bursting open in the West; smoke filling the skies; the earth splitting open in the Arabian Peninsula; *Dajjal* (the impostor) and other beasts will appear from under the earth; *Gog* and *Magog* (barbaric tribes) will appear and assault the people; the sun will rise from the West; Jesus will reappear and storms will blow and drown people in the sea. These and other catastrophic events herald the great assembly of creation. The last three chapters in this book present the Qur'anic description of doomsday and the human state of peace and ease or difficulty and affliction, which starts from the moment of death and continues further until resurrection and the end of time.

'Signs of the Hour' are often quoted by traditional Muslim preachers and scholars as well as 'end-of-timers', who emphasize the imminence of the end of time. For centuries, Muslims have often interpreted the moral ills and weaknesses of their societies as an indication of the nearness of the time of Judgment. 'Last day' literature often appears in parallel with the 'time of *Mahdi*', the awaited messiah, especially during difficult times, social upheavals and crises. The rising of

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the sun in the west, contrary as it is to its usual course in nature, is interpreted in recent times by some Muslim populists as a reference to the rising power of western nations. These obscurants regard this as a demonstration of God's anger (against the West) for He favors the Middle East from where most of the prophets emerged! The regularity of anticipating the 'last day' has become a historical fact which appeals to the general believing public and especially the poorer and less educated people. No century goes by without the rise and fall of numerous self-declared 'Mahdis' or 'messiahs' in the Muslim world.

The Prophet Muhammad often emphasized the importance of remembrance of death and being prepared for it at all times. 'Die before you die' is a frequently quoted tradition. The general meaning of this teaching is to be ready to leave this world in submission to the will of the generous and just God with ease and peace of mind. This state is attained by having the least amount of attachments to, and love of, worldly belongings and relationships. A deeper meaning is to let the lower consciousness die ('lower life' is often quoted in the Qur'an) and to live for and by the higher ('other', 'later' or 'lasting' life), which relates to God consciousness. These teachings and Qur'anic verses become transformative when one reflects and meditates upon the purpose and meaning of life and the human freedom and responsibility. Islam is the path of grooming the lower self and purifying the heart and unifying the self and soul. This spiritual evolvment will lift the individual consciousness out of the ever-changing worldly uncertainties to the domain of insights and inner delights. Whatever we love in this world we shall lose, except the sacred soul which lives on.

In this brief book, I have attempted to connect historical, religious and cultural ideas of Islam regarding the nature of death with contemporary interpretations and understanding. The Prophetic Teaching and the Qur'an emphasize the view that birth and death are natural cycles in the journey of the human soul back to its original divine source – Allah who is omnipresent. Life on earth is a metaphor for life after death and everything we experience here is a sample of what exists in the unseen as energy patterns or archetypes. Our life on earth is ever connected to our next life and is the preparation for it. The connection between life and death is natural and understandable by reason, faith, contemplation and insights. The human tendency to search for

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genealogical roots, or connection with dead ancestors, is an echo of the self's search for its soul (the life source) and our higher sacred origin. The restless and insecure self or ego is searching for its source of life, which is the soul within the human heart.

It is He Who gives life, and causes death, and to Him you (all)
shall return. (10:56)

At the end of each chapter, I have appended some additional relevant selections of Qur'anic Verses and Prophetic teachings which are well known (with some linguistic variation) amongst Muslims. I request the reader to reflect on the golden thread that binds these chapters together. When we connect any specific experience or awareness to a higher level of consciousness we are on the path of spiritual evolution from the specific and relative to the higher and absolute. Physical death is the natural prelude to the soul's liberation and flight to the domain of boundlessness, perfection and goodness of the eternal oneness – God.

Allah does not call you to account for what is vain in your
oaths, but He will call you to account for what your hearts have
earned, and Allah is Forgiving, Forbearing. (2:225)

CHAPTER 1: LIGHTS AND SHADOWS

It is normal that human life leads consciousness to widen, deepen and evolve towards higher consciousness and wisdom. This chapter examines several facets that are involved in the development of consciousness and the interplay of countless dualities, light and shadows, self and soul and the different spheres of consciousness. Conditioned consciousness relates to the sentiency and self-awareness of individuals and the urge for survival and growth. Higher level of consciousness relates to the soul (or spirit) and the realm of boundlessness. These two spheres meet within the human heart which creates the experience of oneness of the authentic self, even though changes are occurring all the time. This unified field becomes fully integrated when self and soul are in synchrony and the person's state of mind and behavior are in harmony.

Light

All praise is due to Allah, Who created the heavens and the earth and made the darkness and the light; yet those who disbelieve set up equals with their Lord. (6:1)

The essence, origin and structure of life is often explained by the notion of light. The Qur'an describes God's principal attribute as light by declaring Allah as the Light (essence) of heavens and earth. In Arabic, the words light and fire (*noor* and *nar*) are derived from the same root, implying that paradise and hell emanate from the same One source: the eternal cosmic Light. All creations draw their energy and life from this ever-present Light and, as such, they are flickering shadows with beginnings and ends or birth and death, proving the existence of the eternal divine Light. Hence, all life emanates from this sacred Light, sustained by it and returns to it. Fire consumes matter and 'purifies' it to produce light!

Allah is the guardian of those who believe. He brings them out of the darkness into the light; and (as to) those who disbelieve, their guardians are Shaytans who take them out of the light into

the darkness; they are the inmates of the fire, in it they shall abide. (2:257)

It is He who grants life and deals death; and when He wills a thing to be, He just says to it, 'Be!', and it is. (40:68)

Spheres of Consciousness

The experience of the numerous facets of human consciousness is perhaps one of life's greatest mysteries. Awareness of consciousness is a condition that distinguishes us from all other animals. Human self-awareness implies two spheres of consciousness: the first is local, limited, conditioned and evolving personal consciousness. The second sphere is of a higher level – the pure and supreme source and essence of the universe. The latter is like electric power giving rise to the former (as a fan, light bulb or a pump). Conditioned consciousness radiates from the soul to energize the body, the mind and the intellect, whilst higher consciousness is a subtle light force emanating from God – the cosmic soul. When conditioned consciousness leads to pure consciousness, intelligence, discernment and differentiation leads to insights, wisdom and illumination. This state is the purpose of all human endeavors, which can be experienced in this life or after death.

On that day Allah will pay back to them in full their just reward, and they shall know that Allah is the evident Truth. (24:25)

Human consciousness is the root and origin of our ability to discern different entities, qualities, quantities and dualities which interact, complement and connect with each other. All human action is motivated by the desire to attract something or repel something else. The human mind realizes that some aspects of this life are physical and material, whilst others are more subtle at the levels of feeling or intuition. We also differentiate between that which is inner or hidden and that which is outer or obvious. It is common to constantly review and change what is considered good or bad, what is valuable or worthless and what action is generous or mean, friendly or hostile and what is personal and what concerns society. Context and appropriateness in thought

and action are the foundation of wisdom and insights. Consciousness arises with self-awareness and concern for personal survival and welfare. It evolves towards higher levels.

That He may pay them back fully their rewards and give them more out of His grace: surely He is Forgiving, most ready to appreciate good deeds. (35:30)

It is natural that as we mature and evolve we increase our knowledge and skills in personal performance and in relationships. The drive for excellence is due to the pull of higher consciousness. God's perfection draws everything in creation towards it. The natural boundaries between one's self and others become blurred with increased understanding, sympathy, empathy, depth and breadth of perception and insight into human nature and its composition. Through wisdom we witness greater and deeper interconnectedness and relationships between creations and their source and between self and soul. We realize that, every living entity has a soul which is energized by the first primal source. Thus, there is a unity underlying all visible diversities.

Is someone who was dead (without Faith or knowledge) and whom we brought to life (by knowledge and faith) supplying him with a light (of guidance) by which to walk among people, the same as someone who is in utter darkness (ignorance), unable to emerge from it? Thus to those without faith their own deeds seem pleasing. (6:122)

Whatever we experience in creation relates to different fields of energy or patterns, which are woven in multidimensional ways within a unified field of universal Oneness. This is God's power, will and light. This unifying field is the supreme consciousness to which all of creation is connected and is the cause of the drive of self and soul to unite. If a person is not fully unified and attained inner integration or realizes eternal oneness, then unity and harmony remains an elusive idea. All of our experiences and insights oscillate between oneness and countless dualities. One essence, source or truth gives rise to the universal diversities and short-lived entities.

Say: Who is the Lord of the heavens and the earth? Say: Allah. Say: So why have you taken protectors apart from Him who possess no power to help or harm themselves? Are the blind and the seeing alike? Or can the darkness and the light be equal? Or have they assigned partners to Allah who create as He creates, so that all creating seems the same to them? Say: Allah is the Creator of all things, and He is the One, the Irresistible. (13:16)

Human beings are the middle kingdom or isthmus between the seen and unseen, heavens and earth, the absolute and relative and limited and cosmic-consciousness. The human soul is like a hologram replicating the cosmic soul. The Qur'an describes God as the Light of heavens and earth and the parable of that Light is the light within the breast of humankind. Everything else is like a shadow that is discernable due to this light. The Qur'an also refers to the colors of God, which are the divine attributes etched within the soul. It describes the soul as being from the breath of the Lord and that it carries on to the next world after the death of the body.

Our messenger has come to you making clear to you much of the Book that you have kept concealed and forgiving much; indeed, there has come to you light and a clear Book from Allah; (5:15)

By it (the Book) Allah guides those who follow what pleases Him to the ways of peace. He will bring them from the darkness to the light by His permission and guide them to a straight path. (5:16)

The Purpose of Life

The real challenge is to understand that the human microcosm – which contains everything that can be known, experienced or sensed – is a reflection and mirror of the macrocosm. The ultimate purpose of life is to experience and realize synchronicity between these two complementary states and thus attain unity. The source of all knowledge is already within the human heart and the spiritual path connects mind, heart, self and soul. The Prophet had commanded, “Cut down your worldly desires, it will remove your (inner) poverty; and cut down your sins, it will make the death (detachment) easy.” He had also said, “Know that you have been created for the next

lasting world, and not for this world of destruction and death. You are in a place that does not belong to you, and you are chased by death, which would surely overtake everyone.”

To be a friend of God and reliant on the sacred light is considered the ultimate in life’s purpose and attainment. This state of transcendence brings about joy and is beyond fear or sorrow. Rivalry, jealousy, competitiveness and desire to be “number one” are echoes of the self or ego desiring to be like the soul – perfect, eternal and in bliss.

Now surely the friends of Allah - will feel no fear and know no
sorrow (10:62).

Matter and Energy

Matter and energy interactions in creation produce all that appear and disappear, begin and end, with all other changing characteristics. The natural relationship and interchange between everything in creation (matter or form) and its energy state is fundamental to our world. The pool of energy in existence is constant and that matter is a form of energy appearing in physical form for a while. Eventually the energy available for work will be lost as heat resulting in the thermal death of the universe and its return to the realm of pre-creation. Modern school physics nowadays teaches that the atom is not a fixed or solid material entity. All the constituent parts of the atom are energy entities with vast spaces between them. Quantum physics has eroded the old cozy model of ‘material’ atoms being the building blocks of our physical world. Science had proved that subatomic entities are composed of energies that behave in ways not logical or predictable by our normal human measures or understanding. Like the nature of the hereafter, it doesn’t follow our everyday logic.

The relationship between what is considered tangible and real and that which is intangible and uncertain is subtle and follows dynamic exchanges at the quantum level. Energy is potential matter and every physical entity or form is on its way to being released as energy. The Qur’an repeatedly declares that whatever is in the heavens or earth is held and permeated by the One God, who is simultaneously evident as well as hidden.

He is the First and the Last, and the Outward and the Inward; and He has Knowledge of all things. (57:3)

No calamity can happen in the earth or in your selves unless it is recorded in a decree before existence. (57: 22)

Do they not see the birds, suspended in mid air in the sky? Nothing holds them there except for the power of Allah. There are certainly signs in that for people who believe. (16:79)

The photon is both a package of light as well as a wave affecting every aspect of this life that appears and disappears, discernible on some occasions and unseen at others. Consciousness may be subtler and faster than light and its subtler levels can only be subjectively experienced by human beings, who can transcend the conditioned personal state of consciousness to higher levels. The Qur'an gives several examples of how time is relative and space is deceptive, in that it can be traversed in an instant as happened with the Prophetic Journey or ascent to the heavens (*mi`raj*).

Do you not see that Allah has subjected to your (use) all things in the heavens and on earth, and has made His bounties flow to you in exceeding measure, (both) seen and unseen? Yet there are people who argue about Allah, without knowledge or guidance or without a Book to enlighten them. (31:20)

Also, the Qur'an describes a day with God is like a thousand years on earth. Or that the day, or periods, with angels is like fifty thousand years. Time is simply relative.

And a day with your hand is like a thousand years as you count. (22:47)

The angels and the spirit ascend to Him in a day whose length is fifty thousand years. (70:4)

Like many other realities, matter and energy appear with different characteristics whilst they are interrelated and inseparable. We human beings contain both. We are composed of matter, which can remain sentient by converting food into energy. We also have an unseen essence, which is the source of life in us and which we call soul or spirit. We encompass the subatomic entities as well as the astrophysical states of immense spaces and energy sources confirming the description of ‘middle people’. We are both heavenly and earthly at the same time but can discern one or the other state at any one instant.

In this way we have made you a middlemost (just) community so that you may act as witnesses against mankind, and that the Messenger (act) as a witness against you. We only appointed the direction you used to face (direction of *qiblah*) in order to distinguish those who follow the Messenger from those who turn round on their heels, though in truth it is a very hard thing except for those whom Allah has guided. Allah would never let your faith go to waste; Allah is All Gentle, Most Merciful to people. (2:143)

Origin of Creation

The Qur’an describes the original void or the state before creation as a seamless and non-differentiated or discernible realm. Dispersion then occurred from this original cosmic ‘dense’ oneness or gatheredness. This is the start of the so-called big bang. That same so-called void or cosmic soul exists throughout what we experience as worldly realities. All apparent creations are sustained by one universal unique reality – God. Only Allah was, is and will forever be. In truth, there is none in existence except the One and only God or cosmic soul. Creation is a result of divine effulgence and grace, which was before space and time and permeates everything within all of space and time.

Do those who are disbelievers not see that the heavens and the earth were joined together (inseparable), then We parted them? And We have made from water every living thing. Will they not then believe? (21:30)

Space/time is the nursery where consciousness provides the soil, air, water and sun for the seed of selfhood with its mind and intellect to grow, evolve and reach the higher consciousness of the soul. From the One, by the One, and unto the One. Truth has always been one and absolute and from it emanates infinite varieties of relative entities, realities and energies. Every creation seeks to realize its original root and oneness through the maze of multiplicities and complementary opposites. Grieving or rejoicing, winning or losing, are all natural outcomes of the self's quest for the ultimate joy of being one with the soul.

(Allah) The Most Beneficent: It is He Who taught the Qur'an. He created man: He taught him eloquent speech, (55:1-4)

Qur'an is the source book which contains all the signs and symbols of how countless varieties of creations emanate and return to the One essence, which permeates all perpetually.

One way of looking at this model is to think of a cosmic soul giving rise to countless mineral, vegetable, animal and human souls, each with limitations and potentials. Souls within each category resonate with each other and as such know and reflect each other, even though sensations and perceptions (at any period of time) are different. It is like pure light giving rise to countless colors and hues echoing their origin. This is the meaning of the saying that there are as many ways to God as there are human beings. The child sees everyone as different; the wise one sees everyone as the same. One looks at the outer, the other perceives the inner.

Often religions and philosophy are concerned with how to reconcile life, death and the hereafter with the idea of divine mercy, grace and compassion. How does eternal truth or the absolute relate to the ever-changing, relative manifestations; how does one see the sublime in ridiculous appearances, discern order within chaos, or good within bad, or see death as an aspect of life and complementary to birth.

Look then at the signs of Allah's mercy, how He gives life to the earth after its death, most surely He will raise the dead to life; and He has power over all things. (30:50)

God, or supreme consciousness, is what connects all levels of subtle and gross fields and states, which emanate from it and return to it. The Qur'an states that 'everything in creation is in adoration (worshipping) of God'. The act of worship implies love, knowledge and the passionate desire to be at one with this glorious all-encompassing Essence.

Allah is He to whom the kingdom of the heavens and the earth belongs. He gives life and causes to die. You have no protector or helper besides Allah. (9:116)

CHAPTER 2: REFLECTIVE CONSCIOUSNESS

Our worldly experiences are preludes to the next zone of consciousness after death. This idea or paradigm will help us to go through life with greater ease and grace. It is not enough to be limited to conditioned consciousness and self-interest. There is always a natural quest for the higher, subtler and more enduring state of consciousness. Biological evolution and personal consciousness are necessary starting points towards higher consciousness, spiritual evolution and greater inner stability, contentment and wisdom. An awakened person connects material, mental, emotional and spiritual issues and sees the world from a unified viewpoint. One's life experiences are conditioned by the inner state.

And that man will have nothing except what he does [good or bad].
(53:39)

Love of Divine Qualities

Biological evolution and natural selection are energized by conditioned consciousness. The drive for higher consciousness and spiritual awakening follows. Every human being grows and evolves towards its higher potential. By the mysterious force of creation, we have evolved from one cell over many millions of years; then there were plants which grew, drawing nourishment out of insentient minerals. All minerals replicate themselves (as in crystal growth) and form clusters according to natural laws. Plants and other living creatures, especially animals, follow a pattern of natural selection towards a more durable state and greater sense of awareness. Naturally, the outer world and its changing conditions have a significant influence on the specific as well as the general state of creations.

We created mankind out of dried clay (like pottery that makes sound), from black mud molded in shape. (15:26)

When I have formed him and breathed (some of) my Spirit into him,
fall down (you angels) in prostration in front of him! (15:29)

For every living person, the inner state and the outer environment are constantly reflecting each other, giving rise to either agreeable attraction or repulsion and disintegration. Every living entity aspires to higher consciousness and the qualities associated with it, such as knowledge, power and constancy. The Qur'an declares that whatever is contained in the Heavens and Earth glorifies God (His qualities). Human beings are created in love with God's attributes and perfections as depicted in our souls. The fall of Adam (personalized consciousness) was necessary for the struggle to ascend back to higher consciousness which symbolizes the awakened state as well as the stewardship of man on earth. We all desire wellbeingness, excellence and perfection in all endeavors.

Human souls are, in essence, heavenly and boundless. Thus, we all struggle to be relieved from limitations of physicality. We draw life and energy from supreme consciousness via our souls. We are souls with bodies and minds as appendages. Each human soul contains qualities and imprints which reflect aspects of the cosmic soul or God. Whilst souls of different creations have varying limitations and every soul reproduces some aspect of the higher attributes that it possesses. For example, 'the Ever-Living' quality of God is reflected by all sentient creatures as the essential drive to survive, live on and grow. Human beings aspire to the higher qualities of mercy, beauty, love and other such attributes due to higher consciousness and passion for God's qualities and beautiful names.

O man! Surely, you must strive (to attain) to your Lord, a hard striving until you meet Him. (84:6)

Potential Human Consciousness

Whatever that can exist is ever-present. God's light permeates heavens and earth and thus sustains the universe and all of creation therein – known and unknown. Every living entity is defined by its soul's consciousness and aspires to its highest possible level. Only the human being can transcend the limited personal conditioned consciousness to God consciousness. Paranormal phenomena, clairvoyance and other psychic states are due to transcending ego consciousness to the soul and higher states through prayers, meditation, trance and other means.

There, unusual phenomena occur due to accessing the energy bands and fields of subtle universal connections that are close by. This is how flashes of the past, future or present knowledge are revealed to prophetic beings, seers, sages and others. When the self is aligned to soul consciousness and the mind is still and free of thought, then one is engulfed by higher consciousness and the field of cosmic oneness.

And He taught Adam all the names (Divine attributes and knowledges)... (2:31)

Names relate to all aspects of knowledge and higher qualities and attributes, which are like energy fields within higher consciousness. The balanced and healthy human state draws energy from both spheres of consciousness (conditioned-personal and higher) simultaneously. For survival, we need the basic, personal or conditioned consciousness. Higher consciousness opens up doors to insights and sublime qualities that connect the seen and the unseen, within space/time and beyond, life on earth and the hereafter. The human being is designed to be on the “middle path” between seen and unseen, the lowest and highest states; between earth and heavens.

Our so-called ‘real world’ is discerned through a spectrum of consciousnesses. The outer world of physical entities and creations is subject to all the natural laws of biology, physics, chemistry and other regulations. The subtle, subatomic or quantum world is the foundation of the material world with its own logic and laws which are radical and unique. The logic of the inner workings of atoms or molecules and their dynamics seem most illogical to our minds, for the usual laws of the physical world do not apply at the small particle level.

When your Lord said to the angels: I am going to put a viceroy on the earth, they said: “Why put on it (the earth) one who will cause corruption and shed blood, when we glorify you and proclaim your purity?” He said: I know what you do not know. (2:30)

Everything in creation is one of two pairs. The Qur’an says God has created two of everything and this law applies to all levels of meanings, states and forms. Whatever is discernible and exists is subject to dualities and measures of qualities and quantities. No goodness is free of

potential badness and no beginning is without the seeds of its end. The outer world is balanced by an inner world and every form is accompanied by its subtle meaning and purpose.

And We have created you in pairs. (78:8)

It is He Who created you from a single self, and from it made its mate, so that he might dwell with her (in love). When they are united, she bears a light load and carries it around. Then when it becomes heavy, they call on Allah their Lord, (saying): "If you grant us a good, (righteous) child, we will be among the thankful". (7:189)

Our genes, minds and acts may be selfish but our hearts and souls transmit generosity and love. The restless self will only be content when it yields to its soul - ever at peace.

Levels of Consciousness

You shall certainly travel from stage to stage (84:19)

Every animated creature in our world has a soul and consciousness that determines its position in life. Survival, procreation and growth are amongst the most basic prevalent drives. Creatures have a limited and conditioned consciousness suitable for their role and integration within the universe. Every living entity is driven towards the highest level of consciousness possible to it. Domestic animals draw close to their owners to achieve a higher state of awareness and security. Self-awareness and reflection is a higher level of consciousness. It is evident to a modest degree in primates but in the main it is the preserve of human beings.

It is He Who has made you (His) agents, inheritors of the earth, and raised some of you above others in rank so He can test you regarding what He has given you. Your Lord is swift in retribution and He is Ever Forgiving, Most Merciful. (6:165)

Look how we favor some of them over others (in this world), and for the Hereafter there will be greater degrees and preference. (17:21)

Human beings are unique in being able to relate and connect personal and higher consciousness and thus, reconcile issues appearing contradictory or paradoxical. For example, we may desire immortality, whilst we know that death is inevitable any moment. We look for joy and harmony in a world of conflicts and constant uncertainty and change. Human desire for power and wealth beyond limitations can only be explained by the soul's exposure to boundless power and wealth (God's). Countless perplexing examples can be resolved through the self-soul interplay and the two spheres of consciousnesses – the basic conditioned and the higher consciousness. Why do we like to be depended upon? Why do we like to be independent? Why do we like to be needed? Why do we need others? The self is restless for the soul and desires its blissful peace and constancy. We are composed of lower and higher self and the purpose and challenge of human life is to experience and witness unity and oneness at all times.

Oh completed (evolved) self, return to your Lord, well-pleased (with him), well-pleasing [Him]. (89:28)

Death and Higher Consciousness

In ancient times, shamans, seers, rishis, prophets and others endowed with psychic abilities helped to show connections between different levels of consciousness and the subtler states. Dreams, out-of-body and near-death experiences, trance and other unusual states all show the existence of numerous levels of consciousness. Most religions and spiritual paths consider the world, and all that is experienced in it, as a prelude and preparation for another situation that is different and more constant or permanent. Our own world provides us with samples of what there is after death. The more we reflect upon meanings during our life, the smoother and easier our earthly journey will be. In Islam, reflection, prayer, presence of mind and heart and remembrance of God's countless mercies are fundamental to the religion. The Qur'an terms life after death as real or permanent life and the path is based on faith and good work.

The life of this world is nothing but a game and diversion. The abode of the Hereafter, that is truly the life, if only they knew. (29:64)

The Prophet Muhammad taught, 'Prepare for death as it approaches you.' He also said, 'Prepare yourself for the matter you do not know when it will happen,' and, 'Death will reach you, so do not be oblivious.' He also said, 'Send over your riches as charity and you will find it comforting you in the hereafter.' He also advised a man: 'turn away from worldly distractions and be ready for departure from this world'. He also said giving away whatever one loves and to prepare a will also reduces fear of death, and 'Be generous to your relatives and docile and obedient to parents, death will become easy for you and you will never face poverty.' Poverty and needs are both in the inner as well as the outer. An impoverished heart can be more painful than material poverty.

"We have been your friends in the life of this world and are (so) in the Hereafter. Therein you shall have (all) that your inner-selves desire, and therein you shall have (all) for which you ask for. (41:31)

It is Allah Who takes away the souls at the time of their death, and those that die not during their sleep. He keeps those (souls) for which He has ordained death and sends the rest for a term appointed. Verily in this are signs for a people who think deeply. (39:42)

The Prophet said: 'The best piety in this world is remembrance of death and the best worship is contemplation; the one whose heart overflows with remembering God will find his grave as a part of paradise.' Muslim scholars have consistently urged remembrance of death, as it brings about greater awareness of the present moment and helps with repentance, peace at heart and transformative worship. The Prophet described those who most frequently remember death, and prepare themselves for it, as most intelligent and worthy of honor in this world and the world to come. 'Presence' is the outcome of least self-concern, awareness of the sacredness of the moment and the Reality that is the source of all creation.

But to Allah belongs the last (Hereafter) and the first (this world) (53:25)

The world and its charms are like a mirage or mist veiling Reality. Love of the physical world and material prosperity is like a curtain drawn before our eyes, covering what is beyond it. At the time of death, a person is faced with higher reality and one's own fate, possibly wishing to be given another chance and a new opportunity to wake up to the truth.

Did we not raise high your remembrance? (94:4)

The Prophet taught that we have been created for eternal happiness. He also said that this world is the focus for a blind person who cannot see beyond it. Those who have inner vision are safe from the love of this world, whereas the short-sighted ones gaze continuously upon it. The visionary person takes from it his provision and the foolish person is absorbed in its distractions. After death, nothing will matter except past good deeds and the extent of purity of heart and inner awakening.

But as for anyone who desires the hereafter and strives for it with a striving that it deserves, and he is a believer, the striving of such people will surely be accepted. (17:19)

Death in the prophetic cosmology is the starting point of eternal life. In the next realm, higher consciousness and insights are the equivalent of worldly eyes and other senses. In that world, outer physicality seems a shadow for the inner states which is most clear. On earth, conditioned consciousness and instincts dominate our lives. After death, it is the soul and its higher consciousness and lights that lead us on to the original source – God. Death is a pleasure for true believers because it has moved them from a place of afflictions and uncertainties to a palace of eternal blessings.

Say: "Travel about the earth and see how He started creation. Then later Allah will bring about the next existence (resurrection). Allah is able to do all things." (29:20)

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