

There are very elaborate descriptions in traditional sources of the three different types of states that the human soul experiences after death: the paradisaal, the purgatorial and the infernal. We experience one of these states depending who we are, what we are and how we have lived our lives in this world. In a sense we weave our "body of resurrection" through our actions and on the basis of what we have woven by our own actions we enter into one of the posthumous states to which our being corresponds. Some of these states are described majestically in the Qur'an and others in the *Hadith*. There is altogether a very elaborate Islamic teaching concerning the various states beyond the grave to be found in both the sources of the Islamic revelation and later commentaries upon them.

There is moreover, the question of Allah's judgment of us, the question of the bridge (*sirat*) over which soul must pass after the Day of Resurrection, the balance (*mizan*) which weighs our good and evil acts and the other elements which, according to the Qur'an and *Hadith*, constitute the eschatological realities as far as the individual human being is concerned. All of these teachings are based on the very thorough and clear insistence of the Qur'an upon the immortality of the human soul and the resurrection of the human being, resurrection not only of the soul but also of the body (*al-ma'ad al-jismani*). Bodily resurrection is in fact clear teaching of orthodox Islam in all of its schools. It is not only the question of the soul surviving and living after death. On the Day of the resurrection the body as well as the soul are resurrected before Allah.

As for the Day of Resurrection (*yawm al-qiyamah*), one must distinguish here between the individual experience of eschatological realities and the eschatological events concerning the whole of humanity. Usually the Day of Resurrection or *Yawm al-qiyamah* refers in fact not to the death of the individual but to the final end of present humanity not the eschatological experience which every individual must understand at the moment of his or her death, but that of the world of the present humanity itself. The Islamic teachings reserve the term *al-qiyamah* for cosmic eschatological event crowned by the resurrection of creation at well as the resurrection of the individual. More specifically these sources distinguish between the greater resurrection, *al-qiyamat al kubra* which is that of the cosmos followed by the resurrection of the whole of humanity and the individual death and resurrection *al-qiyamat al-sughra* which the soul undergoes following upon the event of death. What takes place between the death of the individual and the resurrection of the whole of humanity has been debated by various schools of Islamic thought and cannot be discussed in this work because it involves very complicated theological and philosophical issues.

The Qur'an also refers to eschatological events which concern the whole of humanity. As already mentioned Islam believes that this world in which we live is not eternal. It has a beginning and an end after which Allah will create other worlds. For He is always the Creator, *al-khaliq*. But this present world was created with a definite beginning and will have a definite end marked by eschatological events. According to traditional sources, these events involve, first of all, the appearance of a figure whose name is Muhammad al-Mahdi. This appearance is anticipated on the basis of the *hadith* of the Prophet who said that where oppression and iniquity cover the earth "a member of my tribe shall appear whose name will be the same as mine." Therefore, throughout the

centuries, Muslims, both Sunni and Shi'ite, have believed that a figure will appear one day who will be the Mahdi, the Guided One, who will destroy iniquity, reestablish the rule of Islam and bring back justice and peace to the world. His rule, however, will be fairly short and it will be followed by the return of Christ.

Islam and Christianity share the same vision concerning the second coming of Christ because Christians also believe in his return. Moreover, the Muslims also accept, as do the Christians, that Christ's return will occur in Jerusalem and that this city will be the place where final eschatological events will take place. Islam in contrast to Christianity, however, sees the function of the Mahdi and Christ as being associated with each other and their coming as part of the same major eschatological events. While the Mahdi will rule for some years on earth, the coming of Christ will coincide with the termination of the present history of mankind and of time as we ordinarily experience it. Historical time comes to an end and is followed by the Day Resurrection, the final judgment of all human beings, the weighing of the good and evil acts, the determination of the inhabitants of heaven, purgatory and hell and the coming to end of the history of the cosmos. These very complicated events have been described in Islam in such a way that no man, no matter what claims he makes, can predict exactly when the Hour will arrive. In fact, there is a *hadith* of the Prophet which says that all those who predict the time of the coming of the Hour are liars. Nevertheless, all Muslims believe that the Hour will come, that is, there is an end to human history, that Allah intervenes finally like lightning upon the stage of ordinary time/space consciousness, that there is the final death and resurrection of humanity and that there is an accounting for all that men have done in this world.

Most of the details of these teachings are usually put aside in every day life by ordinary Muslims who are not given to meditating and thinking about them. It is for theologians, philosophers and other authorities in the religious sciences to deal with their ultimate significance. But as their consequences are concerned, they are meant for all Muslims to think about them. First of all, we all die whether we are illiterate or great religious scholars, kings or beggars; therefore, the reality of death and what happens to the human soul after death are the concern of every human being. Not only every Muslim, but every human being whether Muslim, Christian, Jew or other thinks naturally of his or her end. The consequences of the eschatological teachings of Islam are there for the benefit of all Muslims and they have been thought about by all types of people and in very different forms ranging all the way from popular stories and old wives' tales to the most scholarly and intellectual expositions in which these realities have been presented in metaphysical and theological terms.

The important lesson, as far as the general teachings of Islam are concerned, is to keep in mind at all times the reality of death and the afterlife, the ultimate consequence of our human actions and our responsibility to Allah for what we do. The precious gift of human life, while has allowed us by the grace of Allah to possess the freedom to act and to accept Allah's teachings on the basis of our freedom and not by coercion, must always be kept in mind. Without the eschatological realities the other teachings of religion would lose much of their compelling influence and the spiritual tension of human life in this world which is part and parcel of the reality of being human would disappear, leaving human life without any ultimate meaning. This would happen since no matter what man achieves in this world, there is always the certitude that these achievements will ultimately flounder and disappear. The greatest material achievements, not only of the individual but also of whole civilizations, can and in fact do wither away. It is only the eschatological

realities which bring into focus the permanent, abiding and eternal consequences of human actions precisely because human beings are being created for immortality and the eternal world.

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