

The Journey into the Hereafter

رحلة إلى الدار الآخرة

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The Journey into the Hereafter (part 1 of 8): An Introduction



Muhammad, the Prophet of Islam who passed away in 632, related:

“Gabriel came to me and said, ‘O Muhammad, live as you wish, for you shall eventually die. Love whom you desire, for you shall eventually depart. Do what you please, for you shall pay.

Know that the night-prayer¹ is the honor of a believer, and his pride is being independent on others.” (Silsilah al-Saheehah)

If there is only one thing certain about life, it is that it ends. This truism instinctively raises a question which preoccupies most people at least once in their life: What lies beyond death?

At the physiological level, the journey that the deceased takes is plain for all to witness. If left alone to natural causes,² the heart will stop beating, the lungs will stop breathing, and the body's cells will be starved of blood and oxygen. The termination of blood flow to the outer extremities will soon turn them pale. With the oxygen cut off, cells will respire anaerobically for a time, producing the lactic acid which causes rigor mortis – the stiffening of the corpse's muscles. Then, as the cells begin to decompose, the stiffness wanes, the tongue protrudes, the temperature drops, the skin discolors, the flesh rots, and the parasites have their feast - until all that is left is dried-out tooth and bone.

As for the journey of the soul after death, then this is not something that can be witnessed, nor can it be gauged through scientific enquiry. Even in a living body, the conscious, or soul, of a person cannot be subjected to empirical experimentation. It is simply beyond human control. In this regard, the concept of a Hereafter - a life beyond death, resurrection, and a Day of Reckoning; not to mention the existence of a Divine, Omnipotent Creator, His angels, destiny, and so on - comes under the subject of belief in the unseen. The only way in which man can come to know anything of the unseen world is through divine revelation.

“And with God are the keys of the unseen, none knows them but He. And He knows whatever there is in (or on) the earth and

1 Formal prayers (salat) prayed voluntarily at night after the last (isha) and before the first (fajr) of the five daily prayers. The best time to pray them is in the final third of the night.

2 Although a heart can be kept artificially beating, and blood artificially pumping, if the brain is dead, so too is the being as a whole.

in the sea; not a leaf falls, but He knows it. There is not a grain in the darkness of the earth, nor anything fresh or dry, but is written in a Clear Record.” (Quran 6:59)

While what has come down to us of the Torah, the Psalms, the Gospel - the scriptures revealed to early prophets - all speak of a Hereafter, it is only through God’s Final Revelation to humanity, the Holy Quran, as revealed to His Final Prophet, Muhammad, that we learn most about the afterlife. And as the Quran is, and will forever remain, preserved and uncorrupted by human hands, the insight it gives us into the world of the unseen is, for the believer, as factual, real and true as anything that can be learnt through any scientific endeavor (and with a zero margin of error!).

“...We have neglected nothing in the Book; then unto their Lord they shall all be gathered.” (Quran 6:38)

Coupled with the question of what happens after we die, is the question: Why are we here? For if there is indeed no greater purpose to life (that is, greater than simply living life itself), the question of what happens after death becomes academic, if not pointless. It is only if one first accepts that our intelligent design, our creation, necessitates an intelligence and designer behind it, a Creator who will judge us for what we do, that life on earth carries any significant meaning.

“Then did you think that We created you in vain and that to Us you would not be returned? Therefore exalted be God, the Sovereign, the Truth; no deity is there save Him, Lord of the Supreme Throne.” (Quran 23:115-116)

If aught else, a discerning person would be forced to conclude that life on earth is full of injustice, cruelty and oppression; that the law of the jungle, survival of the fittest, is what is paramount; that if one cannot find happiness in this life, whether due to an absence of material comforts, physical love, or other joyous experiences, then life is simply not worth living. In fact, it is precisely because

a person despairs of this worldly life while having little, no, or imperfect faith in an afterlife, that they may commit suicide. After all, what else do the unhappy, unloved and unwanted; the dejected, (desperately) depressed and despairing have to lose?!³

“And who despairs of the Mercy of his Lord except those who are astray?” (Quran 15:56)

So can we accept that our death is limited to mere physiological termination, or that life is merely a product of blind, selfish evolution? Surely, there is more to death, and so to life, than this.

3 According to a United Nations report marking ‘World Suicide Prevention Day’, “More people kill themselves each year than die from wars and murders combined ... Some 20 million to 60 million try to kill themselves each year, but only about a million of them succeed.” (Reuters, September 8, 2006)

The Journey into the Hereafter (part 2 of 8): The Believer in the Grave

A Grave World

We will now take a brief look at the journey of the soul after death. This is truly an amazing story, all the more so because it is true and one which we all must take. The sheer depth of knowledge we have concerning this journey, its precision and detail, is a manifest sign that Muhammad was truly God's Last Messenger to humanity. The revelation he received and then communicated to us from His Lord is as unambiguous in its description of the afterlife as it comprehensive. Our glimpse into this knowledge will begin with a brief exploration of the journey of the believing soul from the moment of death to its final resting place in Paradise.

When a believer is about to depart this world, angels with white faces come down from the heavens and say:

“O peaceful soul, come out to forgiveness from God and His pleasure.” (*Hakim and others*)

The believer will look forward to meeting his Creator, as the Prophet, may the mercy and blessings of God be upon him, explained:

“...when the time of the death of a believer approaches, he receives the good news of God's pleasure with him and His blessings upon him, and so at that time nothing is dearer to him

than what lies ahead of him. He therefore loves meeting God, and God loves meeting him.” (*Saheeh Al-Bukhari*)

The soul peacefully passes out of the body like a drop of water which emerges from a water-skin, and the angels take hold of it:

The angels gently extract it, saying:

“...Do not fear and do not grieve, but receive good tidings of the Paradise which you were promised. We were your allies in this worldly life and [are so] in the Hereafter, and you will have therein whatever your souls desire, and you will have therein whatever you request [or wish], as a hospitality from the Forgiving and Merciful.” (Quran 41:30-32)

Once extracted from the body, the angels wrap the soul in a shroud smelling of musk and ascend up to the heavens. As the Gates of Heaven open for the soul, the angels greet it:

“A good soul has come from the earth, may God bless you and the body you used to dwell in.”

...introducing it with the best names it was called with in this life. God commands his “book” to be recorded, and the soul is returned back to earth.

The soul then remains in a place of limbo in its grave, called the Barzakh, awaiting the Day of Judgment. Two fearsome, dread-inspiring angels called Munkar and Nakeer visit the soul to ask it about its religion, God, and prophet. The believing soul sits upright in its grave as God grants it the strength to answer the angels with full faith and certainty.⁴

Munkar and Nakeer: “What is your religion?”

Believing soul: “Islam.”

Munkar and Nakeer: “Who is your Lord?”

4 Musnah Ahmad

Believing soul: “Allah.”

Munkar and Nakeer: “Who is your Prophet?” (or “What do you say about this man?”)

Believing soul: “Muhammad.”

Munkar and Nakeer: “How did you come to know these things?”

Believing soul: “I read the Book of Allah (i.e. the Quran) and I believed.”

Then, when the soul passes the test, a voice from the heavens will call out:

“My slave has spoken the truth, supply him with furnishings from Paradise, clothe him from Paradise, and open a gate for him to Paradise.”

The believer’s grave is made roomy and spacious and filled with light. He is shown what would have been his abode in Hell - had he been a wicked sinner - before a portal is opened for him every morning and evening showing him his actual home in Paradise. Excited and full of joyful anticipation, the believer will keep asking: ‘When will the Hour (of Resurrection) come?! When will the Hour come?!’ until he is told to calm down.⁵

The Journey into the Hereafter (part 3 of 8): The Believer on Judgment Day

The Day of Judgment

“That Day, a man shall flee from his brother; from his mother and his father; from his wife and his children. For on that Day, every man will have enough to make him indifferent to others.” (Quran 80:34-37)

The Hour of Resurrection will be a terrifying, overwhelming event. Yet, despite its trauma, the believer will be ecstatic, just as Prophet Muhammad, may the mercy and blessings of God be upon him, related from his Lord:

God says, “By My Glory and Majesty, I will not give My slave two securities and two terrors. If he feels secure from Me in the world⁶, I will instill fear in him on the Day when I gather My

⁶ In the sense that he does not fear God’s punishment and thus commits sins.

slaves together; and if he fears Me in the world, I will make him feel safe on the Day when I gather My slaves together.”⁷

“Unquestionably, for the allies of God there will be no fear concerning them, nor will they grieve: those who believed and used to fear God (in this life); for them are good tidings in the worldly life and in the Hereafter. No change is there in the words of God. Indeed in that is the great success.” (Quran 10:62-64)

When all humans ever created are gathered to stand naked and uncircumcised on a great plain under the ferocious scorching heat of the Sun, an elite group of pious men and women will be shaded under the Throne of God. The Prophet Muhammad foretold just who these fortunate souls will be, on that Day when no other shade will avail:⁸

- a just ruler who did not abuse his power, but established divinely revealed justice among people
- a young man who grew up worshipping his Lord and controlled his desires in order to remain chaste
- those whose hearts were attached to the Mosques, longing to return every time they left them
- those who loved one another for God’s sake
- those who were tempted by seductively beautiful women, but their fear of God stopped them from sinning
- the one who spent in charity sincerely for God’s sake, keeping their charity secret
- the one who wept out of God’s fear in solitude

Specific acts of worship will also keep people safe on that day, namely:

7 Silsila Al-Saheehah.

8 Saheeh Al-Bukhari.

- efforts in this world to relieve the woes of the distressed, to help the needy, and to overlook the mistakes of others will relieve people's own distress on Judgment Day⁹
- leniency shown to the indebted¹⁰
- the just who are fair to their families and matters entrusted to them¹¹
- controlling anger¹²
- whoever calls to prayer¹³
- growing old while in a state of Islam¹⁴
- performing ritual ablution (*wudu*) regularly and properly¹⁵
- those who fight alongside Jesus son of Mary against the Anti-Christ and his army¹⁶
- martyrdom

God will bring the believer close to Him, shelter him, cover him, and ask him about his sins. After acknowledging his sins he will believe he is doomed, but God will say:

“I concealed it for you in the world, and I forgive it for you this Day.”

He will be rebuked for his shortcomings,¹⁷ but will then be handed his record of good deeds in his right hand.¹⁸

9 Saheeh Al-Bukhari.

10 Mishkat.

11 Saheeh Muslim..

12 Musnad.

13 Saheeh Muslim.

14 Jami al-Sagheer.

15 Saheeh Al-Bukhari.

16 Ibn Majah.

“Then as for he who is given his record in his right hand, he will be judged with an easy account and return to his people in happiness.” (Quran 84:7-8)

Happy to look at his record, he will announce his joy:

“So as for he who is given his record in his right hand, he will say, ‘Here, read my record! Indeed, I was certain that I would be meeting my account.’ So he will be in a pleasant life – in an elevated Garden, its [fruit] to be picked hanging near. [He will be told], ‘Eat and drink in satisfaction for what you put forth in the days past.’” (Quran 69:19-24)

The record of good deeds will then be weighed, literally, to determine whether it outweighs the person’s record of bad deeds, and so that reward or punishment be meted out accordingly.

“And We place the scales of justice for the Day of Resurrection, so no soul will be treated unjustly at all. And if there is [any deed even] the weight of a mustard seed, We will bring it forth. And sufficient are We to take account.” (Quran 21:47)

“So whoever worked even an atom’s weight of good will see (the good fruits of his labor).” (Quran 99:7)

“The heaviest thing that will be placed in a person’s Balance on the Day of Resurrection [after the testimony of Faith] is good manners, and God hates the obscene, immoral person.” (*Al-Tirmidhi*)

The believers will quench their thirst from a special reservoir dedicated to the Prophet Muhammad. Whoever drinks from it shall never experience thirst again. Its beauty, immenseness, and sweet, fine taste have been described in detail by the Prophet.

17. Mishkat.

18 Saheeh Al-Bukhari. A sign that they are from the inhabitants of Paradise, as opposed to those who will be given their record of deeds in their left hands or behind their backs.

The believers in Islam – both the sinful amongst them and the pious – as well as the hypocrites will be left in the great plain after the unbelievers are driven to Hell. A long bridge traversing the Hellfire and engulfed in darkness will separate them from Paradise.¹⁹ The faithful will take strength and comfort in their swift crossing over the roaring fires of Hell and in the ‘light’ that God will place in front of them, guiding them to their eternal home:

“On the Day you see the believing men and believing women, their light proceeding before them and on their right, [it will be said], ‘Your good tidings today are of gardens beneath which rivers flow, wherein you will abide eternally.’ Indeed in that is the great success.” (Quran 57:12)

Finally, after crossing the bridge, the faithful will be purified before they are entered into Paradise. All scores between believers will be settled so that no one man nurses a grudge against another.²⁰

19 Saheeh Muslim.

20.Saheeh Al-Bukhari

The Journey into the Hereafter (part 4 of 8): The Believer and Paradise

Paradise

The believers will be ushered on towards the grand eight gates of Paradise. There, they will receive a joyous angelic reception and be congratulated on account of their safe arrival and salvation from Hell.

“But those who feared their Lord will be driven to Paradise in groups until, when they reach it while its gates have been opened and its keepers say, ‘Peace be upon you; you have become pure; so enter it to abide eternally therein.’” (Quran 39:73)

(It will be said to the pious): “O (you) the one in (complete) rest and satisfaction! Come back to your Lord, Well-pleased and well-pleasing unto Him! Enter you then among My honored slaves. Enter you My Paradise!” (Quran 89:27-30)

The best of the Muslims will enter Paradise first. The most righteous of them will ascend to the highest levels.²¹

“But whoever comes to God as a believer (in His Oneness, etc.) and has done righteous good deeds; for such are the high ranks (in the Hereafter).” (Quran 20:75)

“And the foremost (in faith) will be foremost (in the Hereafter); those are the ones brought near to God in the Gardens of Pleasure; they will enter in one rank with bright faces.” (Quran 56:10-2)

The Quranic description of Paradise gives us a vision of just what a fantastic place it is. An eternal home that will fulfill all our wholesome desires, seduce all our senses, grant us everything we could possibly want and much more besides. God describes His Paradise as having earth made of is fine musk powder,²² soil of saffron,²³ bricks of gold and silver, and pebbles of pearls and rubies. Beneath the gardens of Paradise are flowing rivers of sparkling water, sweet milk, clear honey, and non-intoxicating wine. The tents on their banks are domes of hollow pearls.²⁴ The whole space is filled with sparkling light, sweet-smelling plants and fragrances that can be savored from afar.²⁵ There are lofty palaces, huge mansions, grapevines, date palms, pomegranate trees,²⁶ lotus and acacia trees whose trunks of made of gold.²⁷ Ripe, abundant fruit of all kinds: berries, citrus, drupes, grapes, melons, pomes; all kinds of fruit, tropical and exotic; anything the faithful could possibly desire!

“...And therein is whatever each soul desires and delights the eyes...” (Quran 43:71)

21 Sahih al-Jami..

22 Saheeh Muslim

23 Mishkat

24 Saheeh Al-Bukhari

25 Sahih al-Jami

26 Quran 56:27-32

27 Sahih al-Jami

Each believer will have a most beautiful, pious and pure spouse, wearing exquisite clothing; And there will be so much more in a new world of eternal, radiant joy.

“And no soul knows what has been hidden for them of comfort for eyes [i.e. satisfaction] as reward for what they used to do.” (Quran 32:17)

As well as physical delights, Paradise will also give its residents a state of emotional and psychological bliss, as the Prophet said:

“Whoever enters Paradise is blessed with a life of joy; he will never feel miserable, his clothes will never wear out, and his youth shall never fade away. The people will hear a divine call: ‘I grant you that you will be healthy and never fall sick, you will live and never die, you will be young and never age, you will be joyful and never feel miserable.’” (*Saheeh Muslim*)

Ultimately, the thing that will most delight the eyes will be the Countenance of God Himself. For the true believer, to see this blessed vision of God is to have won the ultimate prize.

“[Some] faces, that Day, will be radiant, looking at their Lord.” (Quran 75:22-23)

This is the Paradise, the eternal home and final destination of the righteous believer. May God, Most High, make us worthy of it.

The Journey into the Hereafter (part 5 of 8): The Unbeliever in the Grave

As death approaches the wicked disbeliever, he is made to feel something of the heat of the Hellfire. This taste of what is to come causes him to plead for a second chance on earth to do the good he knew he should have done. Alas! His pleading will be in vain.

“Until, when death comes to one of them, he says: ‘O my Lord. Send me back to life (on earth) in order that I may do good deeds in the things that I neglected.’ By no means! It is only an utterance that he says. And before them is a barrier (preventing them from returning: the life of the grave) until the Day (of Resurrection) they are resurrected.” (Quran 23:99-100)

Divine wrath and punishment is conveyed to the wicked soul by hideously ugly, dark angels who sit far away from it:

“Receive glad tidings of boiling water, wound discharge, and multiple, similar torments.” (*Ibn Majah, Ibn Katheer*)

The disbelieving soul will not look forward to meeting its Lord God, as the Prophet explained:

“When the time of the death of a disbeliever approaches, he receives the evil news of God’s torment and His Requital, whereupon nothing is more hateful to him than what is before

him. Therefore, he hates the meeting with God, and God too, hates the meeting with him.” (*Saheeh Al-Bukhari*)

The Prophet also said:

“Whoever loves to meet God, God loves to meet him, and whoever hates to meet God, God hates to meet him.” (*Saheeh Al-Bukhari*)

The Angel of Death sits at the head of the disbeliever in his grave and says: “**Wicked soul, come out to the displeasure of Allah**” as he snatches the soul out of the body.

“And if you could but see when the wrongdoers are in the overwhelming pangs of death while the angels extend their hands, saying, ‘Save yourselves! Today you will be awarded the punishment of extreme humiliation for what you used to say against God other than the truth, and that you were, toward His verses, being arrogant.’” (Quran 6:93)

“And if you could not see when the angels take the souls of those who disbelieved... striking their faces and their backs and saying, ‘Taste the punishment of the Blazing Fire.’” (Quran 8:50)

The evil soul leaves the body with great difficulty, drawn out by the angels as a thronged skewer is dragged through wet wool.

²⁸ The Angel of Death then seizes the soul and puts it in a sack woven from hair which gives off a putrid stench, as foul and offensive as the most foul-smelling rotting corpse found on earth. The angels then take the soul up past another company of angels who inquire: “**Who is this wicked soul?**” to which they reply: “**So and so, the son of so and so?**” - using the very worst of names that he was ever called during his time on earth. Then, when he is brought to the lowest heaven, a request is made that its gate be opened for him, but the request is denied. Whilst the

28 Al-Hakim, Abu Dawood, and others.

Prophet was describing these events, when he reached this point, he recited:

“The gates of heaven will not be opened for them and they will not enter paradise until a camel can pass through the eye of a needle.” (Quran 7:40)

God will say: **“Record his book in Sijjeen in the lowest earth.”**

...and his soul is cast down. At this juncture, the Prophet, may the mercy and blessings of God be upon him, recited:

“He who assigns partners to Allah is as if he had fallen down from heaven and been snatched up by the birds, or made to fall by the wind in a place far distant.” (Quran 22:31)

The wicked soul is then restored to its body and the two fearsome, dread-inspiring angels, Munkar and Nakeer, come to it for its interrogation. After making him sit up, they ask:

Munkar and Nakeer: **“Who is your Lord?”**

Disbelieving soul: **“Alas, alas, I do not know.”**

Munkar and Nakeer: **“What is your religion?”**

Disbelieving soul: **“Alas, alas, I do not know.”**

Munkar and Nakeer: **“What do you say about this man (Muhammad) sent to you?”**

Disbelieving soul: **“Alas, alas I do not know.”**

Having failed his test, the disbeliever’s head will be struck with an iron hammer with a force so violent that it would crumble a mountain. The cry will be heard from heaven: **“He has lied, so spread out carpets of Hell for him, and open for him a portal into Hell.”**²⁹ The floor of his grave is thus set alight with some

29 Musnad Ahmad.

of Hell's fierce fire, and his grave is made narrow and constricted to the extent that his ribs become intertwined as his body is crushed.³⁰ Then, an incredibly ugly being, wearing ugly garments and giving off a foul and offensive odor comes to the disbelieving soul and says: **"Be grieved with what displeases you, for this is your day which you have been promised."** The disbeliever will ask: **"Who are you, with your face so ugly and bringing evil?"** The ugly one will reply: **"I am your wicked deeds!"** The disbeliever is then made to taste bitter remorse as he is shown what would have been his abode in Paradise - had he lived a righteous life - before a portal is opened for him every morning and evening showing him his actual home in Hell.³¹ Allah mentions in His Book how the wicked people of Pharaoh are, at this very moment, suffering from such an exposure to Hell from within their graves:

"The Fire: they are exposed to it, morning and afternoon, and on the Day when the Hour will be established (it will be said to the angels): '(Now) cause Pharaoh's people to enter the severest torment!'" (Quran 40:46)

Overcome with fear and loathing, anxiety and despair, the disbeliever in his grave will keep asking: **"My Lord, do not bring the last hour. Do not bring the last hour."**

The Companion, Zaid b. Thabit, narrated how, when the Prophet Muhammad and his Companions were once passing some graves of polytheists, the Prophet's horse bolted and almost unseated him. The Prophet, may the mercy and blessings of God be upon him, then said:

"These people are being tortured in their graves, and were it not that you would stop burying your dead, I would ask God to let

30 Musnad Ahmad.

31 Ibn Hibban.

you hear the punishment in the grave which I (and this horse) can hear.” (*Saheeh Muslim*)

The Journey into the Hereafter (part 6 of 8): The Unbeliever on Judgment Day

A great terror will befall the resurrected on the mighty Day of Resurrection:

“...He only delays them until a Day when eyes will stare (in horror).” (Quran 14:42)

The unbeliever is resurrected from his ‘grave’ as described by God:

“The Day they will emerge from the graves rapidly as if they were, toward an erected idol, hastening. Their eyes humbled, humiliation will cover them. That is the Day which they had been promised.” (Quran 70:43)

The heart will be trembling, confused about what evil retribution lies in store for it:

“And (other) faces, that Day, will have upon them dust. Blackness will cover them. Those are the unbelievers, the wicked ones.” (Quran 80:40-42)

“And never think that God is unaware of what the wrongdoers do. He only delays them (i.e., their account) until a Day when eyes will stare (in horror). Racing ahead, their heads raised up, their glance does not come back to them, and their hearts are void.” (Quran 14:42)

The disbelievers will be gathered as they were born - naked and uncircumcised – upon a great plain, driven on his faces, blind, deaf, and mute:

“We will gather them on the Day of Resurrection (fallen) on their faces – blind, dumb, and deaf. Their refuge is Hell; every time it subsides We increase them in blazing fire.” (Quran 17:97)

“And whoever turns away from My remembrance – indeed, he will have a depressing life, and We will gather him on the Day of Resurrection blind.” (Quran 20:124)

Three times they will “meet” God. The first time they will attempt to defend themselves in futile argument against God Almighty, saying things such as: “**The prophets did not come to us!**” Even though Allah revealed in His Book:

“...And never would We punish until We sent a messenger.” (Quran 17:15)

“...Lest you say: ‘There came unto us no bringer of glad tidings and no warner....’” (Quran 5:19)

The second time, they will present their excuses while acknowledging their guilt. Even the devils will try to excuse themselves from their crimes of leading men astray:

“His (man’s) personal demon will say: ‘Our Lord! I did not push him to transgress. Rather, he was himself in error, far astray.’” (Quran 50:27)

But God, Most High and Just, will not be fooled. He will say:

“Dispute not in front of me. I have already advanced before you the threat. The sentence that comes from Me cannot be changed. And I am not unjust (in the least) to the slaves.” (Quran 50:28-29)

The third time the wicked soul will meet its Maker to receive its Book of Deeds³², a record omitting nothing.

“And the record [of deeds] will be placed [open], and you will see the criminals fearful of that within it, and they will say: ‘Oh, woe to us! What is this book that leaves nothing small or great except that it has enumerated it?’ And they will find what they did present [before them]. And your Lord does not do injustice to anyone.” (Quran 18:49)

Upon receiving their records, the wicked ones will be rebuked in front of the whole of mankind.

“And they will be presented before your Lord in rows, (and He will say), ‘You have certainly come to Us, just as We created you the first time.’ But you claimed that We would never have an appointment!” (Quran 18:48)

The Prophet Muhammad said: “**These are the ones who did not believe in God!**”³³ And it is these whom God will question regarding the blessings they took for granted. Each one will be asked: **‘Did you think We would meet?’** And as each one will answer: **‘No!’** God will tell him: **‘I will forget about you as you forgot Me!’**³⁴ Then, as the disbeliever will attempt to lie his way out, God will seal his mouth, and his body parts instead will testify against him.

“That Day, We will seal over their mouths, and their hands will speak to Us, and their feet will testify about what they used to earn.” (Quran 36:65)

Besides his own sins, the disbeliever will also bear the sins of those he misled.

32 Ibn Majah, Musnad, and Al-Tirmidhi.

33 Saheeh Muslim.

34 Saheeh Muslim.

“And when it is said to them: ‘What has your Lord sent down?’ They say: ‘Legends of the former peoples,’ that they may bear their own burdens (i.e., sins) in full on the Day of Resurrection and some of the burdens of those whom they misguide without knowledge. Unquestionably, evil is that which they bear.” (Quran 16:24-25)

The psychological pain of deprivation, loneliness and abandonment will all to the physical torture.

“...and God will not speak to them or look at them on the Day of Resurrection, nor will He purify them; and they will have a painful punishment.” (Quran 3:77)

While the Prophet Muhammad will intercede on behalf of all believers, no intercessor will the disbeliever find; he who worshipped false deities besides the One, True God.³⁵

“...And the wrongdoers will not have any protector or helper.” (Quran 42:8)

Their saints and spiritual advisors will dissociate themselves, and the disbeliever would wish he could come back to this life and do the same to those who now disown them:

“(And they should consider that) when those who have been followed disassociate themselves from those who followed (them), and they [all] see the punishment, and cut off from them are the ties [of relationship]. Those who followed will say, ‘If only we had another turn [at worldly life] so we could disassociate ourselves from them as they have disassociated themselves from us.’ Thus will God show them their deeds as regrets upon them. And they are never to emerge from the Fire.” (Quran 2:167)

The sorrow of the sin-ridden soul will be so intense that he will actually pray: **‘O God, have mercy on me and put me in the**

35 Saheeh Al-Bukhari.

Fire.’³⁶ He will be asked: **‘Do you wish you had a whole earth-full of gold so you could pay it to set yourself free?’** To which he will answer: **‘Yes.’** Whereupon he will be told: **‘You were asked for something much easier than that - worship God alone.’**³⁷

“And they were not commanded except that they should worship Allah (alone), being sincere to the upright religion (of Islam)....” (Quran 98:5)

“But the disbelievers – their deeds are like a mirage in a lowland which a thirsty one thinks is water until, when he comes to it, he finds it is nothing, but he finds God before Him, Who will pay him in full his due; and God is swift in account.” (Quran 24:39)

“And We shall turn to what deeds they have done, and We shall make them as dust dispersed.” (Quran 25:23)

The disbelieving soul will then be handed in his left hand and from behind his back, his written record which was kept by angels who noted his every deed in his earthly life.

“But as for he who is given his record in his left hand, he will say: ‘Oh, I wish I had not been given my record, and had not known what is my account.’” (Quran 69:25-26)

“But as for he who is given his record behind his back, he will cry out for his destruction.” (Quran 84:10-11)

Finally, he will be made to enter Hell:

“And those who disbelieved will be driven to Hell in groups until, when they reach it, its gates are opened and its keepers will say: ‘Did there not come to you messengers from yourselves, reciting to you the verses of your Lord and warning you of the meeting of this Day of yours?’ They will say: ‘Yes, but the word

36 Tabarani.

37 Saheeh Al-Bukhari.

(i.e., decree) of punishment has come into effect upon the disbelievers.” (Quran 39:71)

The first to enter Hell will be the pagans, followed by those Jews and Christians who corrupted the true religion of their prophets.³⁸ Some will be driven to Hell, others will fall in it, snatched by hooks.³⁹ At that point, the disbeliever will wish that he had could have been turned into dust, rather than reap the bitter fruits of his evil works.

“Indeed, We have warned you of a near punishment on the Day when a man will observe what his hands have put forth and the disbeliever will say: ‘Oh, I wish that I were dust!’” (Quran 78:40)

38 Saheeh Al-Bukhari.

39 Al-Tirmidhi.

The Journey into the Hereafter (part 7 of 8): The Unbeliever and Hell

Hell will receive the faithless with its fury and roar:

“...and We have prepared for those who deny the Hour, a Blaze. When it [Hellfire] sees them from a distant place, they will hear its fury and roaring.” (Quran 25:11-12)

When they near it, they will anticipate their shackles and their destiny as fuel:

“Indeed, We have prepared for the disbelievers chains and shackles and a blaze.” (Quran 76:4)

“Indeed, with Us are shackles and burning fire.” (Quran 73:12)

Angels will rush at God’s command to seize and shackle him:

“Seize him and shackle him.” (Quran 69:30)

“...and We will put shackles on the necks of those who disbelieved.” (Quran 34:33)

Bound in chains...

“...a chain whereof the length is seventy cubits.” (Quran 69:32)

...he will be dragged along:

“When iron collars will be rounded over their necks, and the chains, they shall be dragged along.” (Quran 40:71)

While they are being tied down, chained, and dragged to be thrown into Hell, they will hear its rage:

“And for those who disbelieved in their Lord is the punishment of Hell, and wretched is the destination. When they are thrown into it, they hear from it a [dreadful] inhaling while it boils up. It almost bursts with rage....” (Quran 67:6-8)

Since they will be driven from the great plain of gathering, naked and hungry, they will beg the inhabitants of Paradise for water:

“And the companions of the Fire will call to the companions of Paradise: ‘Pour upon us some water, or from whatever God has provided you.’ They will say: ‘Indeed God has forbidden them both to the disbelievers.’” (Quran 7:50)

At the same time the faithful in Paradise will be received with honor, made comfortable, and served with delicious banquets, the disbeliever will dine in Hell:

“Then indeed, you, the stray, the deniers, will be eating from trees of *zaqqoom* and filling your bellies with it.” (Quran 56:51-53)

Zaqqoom: a tree whose roots are in the bottom of Hell and which branches into its other levels; its fruit resembles the heads of the devils:

“Is that (Paradise) better as hospitality or the tree of *zaqqoom*? Indeed, We have made it a torment for the wrongdoers. Indeed, it is a tree issuing from the bottom of the Hellfire, its emerging fruits as if it was heads of the devils. And indeed, they will eat from it and fill with it their bellies.” (Quran 37:62-66)

The wicked will have other food to eat as well, some that chokes,⁴⁰ and some like dry, thorny bushes.⁴¹

“Nor any food except from the (foul) discharge of wounds; none will eat it except the sinners.” (Quran 69:36-37)

And to wash down their melancholy meals, an extremely cold mix of their own pus, blood, sweat and wound discharge⁴² as well as boiling, scolding water which dissolves their intestines:

“...and are given to drink scalding water that will sever their intestines.” (Quran 47:15)

The clothing of the denizens of Hell will be made of fire and pitch:

“...but those who disbelieved will have cut out for them garments of fire.” (Quran 22:19)

“Their garments of liquid pitch and their faces covered by the Fire.” (Quran 14:50)

Their sandals,⁴³ bed, and canopies will likewise be made of fire;⁴⁴ a punishment encapsulating the entire body, from heedless head to transgressing toe:

“Then pour over his head from the torment of scalding water.” (Quran 44:48)

“On the Day the punishment will cover them from above them and from below their feet and it is said: ‘Taste what you used to do.’” (Quran 29:55)

Their punishment in Hell will vary according to their disbelief and other sins.

40 Quran 72:13.

41 Quran 88:6-7.

42 Quran 78:24-25.

43 Saheeh Muslim.

44 Quran 7:41.

“By no means! He will surely be thrown into the Crusher. And what can make you know what is the Crusher? It is the fire of God, [eternally] fueled, which mounts directed at the hearts. Indeed, it [Hellfire] will be closed down upon them. In extended columns.” (Quran 104:5-9)

Every time the skin will burn through, it will be replenished with new skin:

“Indeed, those who disbelieve in Our verses – We will drive them into a Fire. Every time their skins are roasted through, We will replace them with other skins so they may taste the punishment. Indeed, God is ever Exalted in Might and Wise.” (Quran 4:56)

Worst of all, the punishment will keep increasing:

“So taste [the penalty], and never will We increase you except in torment.” (Quran 78:30)

The psychological effect of this punishing chastisement will be tremendous. A chastisement so severe that its sufferers will cry out for it to be multiplied on those who led them astray:

“They will say: ‘Our Lord, whoever brought this upon us – increase for him double punishment in the Fire.’” (Quran 38:61)

The daring will make their first attempt to break out, but:

“And for them are maces of iron. Every time they want to get out of it from anguish, they will be returned to it, and [it will be said]: ‘Taste the punishment of the Burning Fire!’” (Quran 22:21-22)

After failing several times, they will seek assistance from Iblees, the Great Satan himself.

“And Satan will say when the matter has been concluded: ‘Indeed, God had promised you the promise of truth. And I promised you, but I betrayed you. But I had no authority over you

except that I invited you, and you responded to me. So do not blame me; but blame yourselves. I cannot be called to your aid, nor can you be called to my aid. Indeed, I deny your association of me [with God] before. Indeed, for the wrongdoers is a painful punishment.” (Quran 14:22)

Giving up on Satan, they will turn to the angels guarding Hell to get their torment reduced, even if just for a day:

“And those in the Fire will say to the keepers of Hell: ‘Supplicate your Lord to lighten for us [even] one day from the punishment.’” (Quran 40:49)

Awaiting the response for as long as God wills, the guards will come back and ask:

“‘Did there not come to you your messengers with clear proofs?’ They will say, ‘Yes.’ They (Hell’s keepers) will reply: ‘Then supplicate yourselves, but the supplication of the disbelievers is nothing but (an exercise in) futility.’” (Quran 40:50)

Losing hope in the reduction of punishment, they will seek death. This time they will turn to the Hell’s Chief Keeper, the angel, Malik, pleading to him for forty years:

“And they will call: ‘O Malik, let your Lord put an end to us!...’” (Quran 43:77)

His curt rebuttal after a thousand years will be:

“...Indeed, you will remain.” (Quran 43:77)

Eventually, they will return to He Whom they refused to turn to in this world, asking for one last chance:

“They will say, ‘Our Lord, our wretchedness overcame us, and we were a people astray. Our Lord, remove us from it, and if we were to return [to evil], we would indeed be wrongdoers.’” (Quran 23:106-107)

God's respond will be thus:

“Remain despised therein and do not speak to Me.” (Quran 23:108)

The pain from this response will be worse than their fiery torment. For the disbeliever will know his stay in Hell will be for an eternity, his omission from Paradise absolute and final:

“Indeed, those who disbelieve and commit wrong – never will God forgive them, nor will He guide them to a path except the path of Hell; they will abide therein forever. And that, for God, is easy.” (Quran 4:168-169)

The greatest deprivation and sorrow for an unbeliever will be spiritual: he will be veiled from God and will be deprived of seeing Him:

“No! Indeed, from their Lord, that Day, they will be partitioned.” (Quran 83:15)

Just like they refused to “see” Him in this life, they will be separated from God in the next life. The faithful will jeer at them.

“So Today, those who believed are laughing at the disbelievers, on adorned couches, observing. Have the disbelievers [not] been rewarded [this Day] for what they used to do?” (Quran 83:34-36)

Their total despair and grief will culminate when death is brought in the form of a ram and slaughtered in front of them, so they know no refuge will ever be found in a final dissolution.

“And warn them, (O Muhammad), of the Day of Regret, when the matter will be concluded; and yet they are heedless, and they do not believe!” (Quran 19:39)

The Journey into the Hereafter (part 8 of 8): Conclusion

Muhammad, the Prophet of Islam, who passed away in 632, related:

“This world is a prison for the believer, but for the disbeliever it is a Paradise. While for the disbeliever, the Hereafter will be a prison, but for the believer, it will be his Paradise.”

Once, in the early period of Islam, a poor Christian happened upon one of the great scholars of Islam, who was at the time mounted upon a fine horse and clad in fine garments. The Christian recited to the well-to-do Muslim the *hadeeth* quoted above, before remarking: **“Yet I stand before you a non-Muslim, poor and destitute in this world, while you are a Muslim, rich and prosperous.”** The scholar of Islam replied: **“Indeed so. But if you knew the reality of what might await you (of eternal punishment) in the Hereafter, you would consider yourself now to be in Paradise by comparison. And if you knew the reality of what might await me (of eternal bliss) in the Hereafter, you would consider me now to be in prison by comparison.”**

Thus, it is from the great mercy and justice of God that he created Heaven and Hell. Knowledge of the Hellfire serves to dissuade man from wrong-doing while a glimpse into the treasures

of Paradise incites him towards good deeds and righteousness. Those who deny their Lord, work evil and are unrepentant will enter Hell: a place of real pain and suffering. While the reward for righteousness is the place of unimaginable physical beauty and perfection that is His Paradise.

Often, people testify to the goodness of their own souls by claiming that any good they do is purely and solely out of a genuine love of God or to live by a universal moral and virtuous code, and for that, they do not need any sticks or carrots. But when God speaks to man in the Quran, He does so knowing the fickleness of his soul. The delights of Paradise are real, physical, tangible delights. Man can begin to appreciate just how desirable the perfect, abundant and unending food, clothing and homes of Paradise can be precisely because he is aware of how satisfying and sweet those things can be in this present reality.

“Beautified for men is the love of things they covet: women, children, hoards of gold and silver, branded beautiful horses, cattle and well-tilled land. Such is the pleasure of the present life; but with Allah is the excellent return (to Paradise).” (Quran 3:14)

Likewise, man can begin to appreciate just how tortuous and terrifying Hellfire and its furnishings could be precisely because he is aware of how awful a burning by fire can be in this world. So, the journey of the soul after death, as described to us in vivid detail by God and His Prophet, Muhammad, may the mercy and blessings of God be upon him, should and must serve as nothing but an incentive to what all of humanity surely and truly recognizes as its noble purpose: the worship and service of its Creator in selfless love, awe and gratitude. After all,

“...they were not commanded except that they should worship Allah (alone), being sincere to the upright religion (of Islam).” (Quran 98:5)

But, as for those many multitudes amongst mankind who, throughout the ages, neglect their moral duty to their Lord God and their fellow man, let then not forget that:

“Every soul will taste death, and you will only be given your [full] compensation on the Day of Resurrection. So whoever is drawn away from the Fire and admitted to Paradise, it is indeed he who has succeeded. And what is the life of this world except the enjoyment of delusion.” (Quran 3:185)