



Islamic Funeral Ritual and the Concept of the Hereafter

Quran is the last holy book from Allah[God]; it was revealed to Muhammad(peace be upon him) the last messenger of Allah. Muslims adopt their laws from *Quran* and the Sunnah of the prophet Muhammad(peace be upon him). Sunnah means all what the prophet Muhammad(peace be upon him) did, said, acted, and behaved since he became the messenger. So, all the actions and rules of Muslims should be related to these two sources, *Quran* and Sunnah.

This article is about the life after death which is, according to Islam, the real and eternal life.

Allah says in Chapter 29 Verse 64, "And this worldly life is nothing but diversion and amusement. And indeed, the home of the hereafter is the eternal life, if only they knew." We all know, no matter what our belief, thought, nationality, tribe, or color is, one day we will leave this life. Allah says in Chapter 29 Verse 57, "Every soul will taste death. Then to Us will you be returned."

Some people say we will live in a different place, others say we will disappear and nothing remains after this life, and still others say we will become different creatures. For us as Muslims, we follow what Allah says in *Quran*.

Allah says in *Quran* that there will be judgment day, which is big, scaring, and huge; all creatures will be there, humans, jinn, Satan, animals, angels, and of course Allah, the Creator, will be the sole judge. Allah says in Chapter 14 Verse 42, "And never think that Allah is unaware of what the wrongdoers do. He only delays them for a day when eyes will stare in horror."

And also Allah says in Chapter 4 Verse 87, "Allah, there is no deity except Him. He will surely assemble you for account on the day of resurrection, about which there is no doubt. And who is more truthful than Allah in statement."

On judgment day, all of us will get the result of our deeds no matter how big or small they are, including the intention we have had. Was our intention good or bad? Was it for the sake of Allah or for evil needs? Allah knows all these details and He will be the sole judge, and no one will be



unjustified. Allah says in Chapter 99 Verses 7~8, "So whoever does an atom's weight of good will see the good result; whoever does an atom's weight of evil will see the bad result."

Once we die, no more work, deeds, repentance, or accumulation of deeds will be added to our life, except something good we did in our life that remains useful on the earth, such as a hospital, orphanage, mosque, or school we built that is doing useful things for living. In this case, our good deeds will keep accumulating till judgment day.

So, we can understand that this life is the only way for us to build our good life or bad life in the hereafter, and that we are totally free in building it the way we like.

Allah creates everything, but only humans and jinn have the free will; but of course not for everything, as we cannot choose our birthday or death day, we cannot choose our parents, and we cannot choose our gender or color. As for all the others, we have the right and freedom to choose and decide.

People worship whatever they like; some worship idols, some worship their desires, some worship their ancestors, while others may worship fire, water, sun, and other creatures.

We can choose what we like to be. Do we like to be honest and good people, or to be powerful and rich no matter how we make it? Do we like to be humble and easygoing, or arrogant, tough, and complicated?

Muslims worship Allah, the only God, the Creator, who was never born, never married, never has sons or daughters, never feels tired, thirsty, hungry, or sleepy, and never dies. He is able to do anything and is the owner of everything; He knows everything and is the controller of everything; He is the sole judge on judgment day.

Allah says in Chapter 2 Verse 255, "Allah, there is no deity except Him, the ever-living, the sustainer of all existence. Neither drowsiness overtakes Him nor sleep. To Him belongs whatever is in the heavens and whatever is on the earth. No one can intercede with Him except by His permission. He knows what is present before them and what will be after them, and they encompass not a thing of His knowledge except for what He wills. His entity extends over the



heavens and the earth, and the maintenance of all of these tires Him not. And He is the highest, the greatest."

In Islam, life is totally related to Allah. Muslims do everything for the sake of Allah and they want only the satisfaction of Him. Muslims know that they have to fulfill their duties and that Allah is arranging the best for them, and they believe that His arrangement is the best for them.

In *Quran* and Sunnah, all the commands from Allah are very clear. Muslims know exactly what Allah is ordering them to do and what Allah is prohibiting them from doing. A real Muslim who really knows and cares about the hereafter will never do anything to make him a loser on judgment day, because a real Muslim knows how severe the punishment of Allah is and how big loss it will be if Allah is unsatisfied with the deeds of His slave. A real Muslim knows as well how big prizes he will get if Allah is satisfied with him. If he is safe on judgment day, he is going to paradise forever, and he knows how perfect it is to be close to Allah forever.

A Muslim knows that his real and eternal life will start once he sees the angel of death coming to take his soul. In *Quran* and Sunnah we have all the details about death, funeral, and the situation after death. In this article, we will go through these things in detail starting from the moment of death until the judgment day, when this person or jinnie will be resulted in going to hell or to paradise.

What is the first step of death?

When the time for someone to leave this life comes, nothing can stop it. No one can stop the angel of death from taking the soul of the person who reaches his last moment of this life, no matter who he is or where he is, simply because this is the command from Allah to His angel to take this soul and no one can ever stop the command of Allah. Allah says in Chapter 4 Verse 78, "Wherever you may be, death will overtake you, even if you are within towers of lofty construction."



And also in Chapter 6 Verse 61 Allah says, "And He is the subjugator over His servants, and He sends over you guardian-angels until death comes to one of you. Our messengers will take him then, and they do not fail in their duties." So the first step is when the angel of death comes to the person who is ordained to leave this life. This angel is big and strong, and he has the ability to take the soul of those who are ordained to die at the precise time, no matter how many they are, where and who they are, and what they are doing.

The person who is dying will see this very clearly and will know that it is his time, though he is still alive according to what we see. For example, he is still moving his eyes or saying few things, but he can see himself in a different world moving to the other life, but he is unable to tell us what is going on. Allah says in Chapter 50 Verse 22, "It will be said [by angels], 'You were certainly absent minded of this, and we have removed you from your cover, so your sight is sharp on this day.'"

Everything is very clear to the angel of death, and it is written in detail that this person should die at that time, on that day, in that place, with that dress, and in that way; and the angel of death will follow the command of Allah as it is. The angel of death has helpers with him, either his staff or his helpers; he is not alone in this mission. The angel of death doesn't know whether this person is going to hell or paradise, how the belief of this person is, or anything about the past of this person.

Allah says in Chapter 75 Verse 26~29, "When the soul has reached the collar bones, it is said [by the angel of death], 'Who will cure him?' And the dying one is sure that it is the time of separation."

The angel of death is followed by two groups of angels. One group is in charge of the paradise, with some materials from paradise such as cloth made of silk and perfumes from paradise. The other is in charge of the hell, with some materials from hell such as cloth made of fire.

Once the angel of death takes out the soul from the body, he will ask who is going to take this soul. The reply is according to the deeds of this person: whether he is a believer or not. Of course



they are getting the orders from Allah, as He is the one who is telling them where this person is going to live. Whether he is going to live in paradise or in hell depends on his belief, deeds, intentions, and behaviors in this life.

If this person is a believer, the angels from paradise will take his soul, wrap it with the silky cloth, put the perfume on it, and take it right away to the first sky. The guardian angels there will open the sky for this soul and ask, "Whose nice soul is this?" The angels will reply that it is the soul of so so so, and they will address this dead person in the nicest name he likes to hear, as he is hearing and feeling everything around him. The soul will be sent to see its palace and place in paradise and then returned to the body in a different way that the body still feels, hears, sees, but is unable to talk or move.

If the soul belongs to a disbeliever, the angels in charge of the hell will take his soul, wrap it with the cloth made of fire in which the dead person still feels the burning of his body caused by the cloth, and take it right away to the first sky. The guardian angels there will not open the sky for this soul but ask, "Whose bad soul is this?" The angels will reply that it is the soul of so so so, and they will address the name of this dead person in the ugliest and worst name he hates to hear. The soul of this person will be thrown away from the sky, and he will feel it falling down from the sky until it comes into his body again.

So, from the first moment the soul being taken out of the body, the journey of the eternal life starts. It is totally the result of the deeds in this life, and there is no way to come back or repent, and it is useless to regret.

Of course not all Muslims will go to paradise, and not all non-Muslims will go to hell. This is something only Allah knows, and He is the only one who judges. This is why we say believer and disbeliever, for only Allah knows whether this person is a believer or not. However, according to *Quran* and *Sunnah*, we can know who is believer and who is disbeliever, who is Muslim and who is not. We don't have the right to judge that this person will go to hell and that will go to paradise. We can only say that according to *Quran* and *Sunnah*, if someone does something which makes him a Muslim and he is obeying Allah, he will go to paradise; if someone does something which makes him disbelieve in Allah, he will go to hell. But the final



decision and judgment is definitely up to Allah, and we have no right to accept or refuse it since He is absolutely just.

What should be done to the dead body?

Once we are sure that this person is dead, the first thing we should do is to take off his/her clothes and cover the body with a blanket or sheet. We should understand that this body feels, hears, sees, but can't talk or move. So we should treat this body as if it is still alive.

We should finish the funeral as fast as we can, and there is no need to wait for special day or people to come. We can wait maximum one or two nights in case there is a reasonable reason to delay, such as waiting for a close relative of the dead person to come from abroad to join the funeral and the ceremony. If we have to wait for some time, we should move the body's organs from time to time such as his/her legs, hands, and body in order to keep them from becoming hard.

The first thing we do after this is to read the will of the dead person, as it is important to know if he/she asked anyone to be in charge of washing the body or praying the Janazah (funeral praying), and it is also to know whether he/she has any debt to pay before we bury the body.

After that, we wash the body in the way same as we are taking a shower. But before that, we have to check the will first: if he/she asked some of the friends or relatives to wash the body and they agree to do it, it is better; if not, then some Muslim brothers or sisters should wash the body according to the gender of the dead body. If the dead is a female, only females can wash her body and males are not allowed to be inside; if the dead is a male, only male can do it and females are not allowed to be inside.

We should wash the body with warm water, neither cold nor hot, because the body feels everything. We should also move the body gently and carefully. After washing the body, we should wrap it with three pieces of white sheet for males and five pieces of white sheet for females. And we can put some perfume on the body. Once this procedure is finished, we should



put the body on a wooden board or in a wooden box and take it to the mosque for the Janazah, the funeral prayer.

The Janazah is different from the normal prayer Muslims do five times a day; it is specially for the dead body. We recite the first chapter of *Quran* then ask Allah to forgive and mercy this dead body. Finally, we ask Allah to reward us for joining this Janazah and to guide us from going astray before we die. The one who leads this prayer should have knowledge about funeral.

The next step is to bury the body in a Muslim graveyard. Since the body is not supposed to be taken out of the grave for any reason once it is buried, the burial should be taken place in an Islamic graveyard or in a place that no one can dig the dead bodies out of their graves. After a period of time, depending on the weather and the situation, sometimes three years and in some countries five years, the grave can be used again for another body only when the corpse is decayed totally in the grave. In burial, male body should be buried with male, and female with female, unless they have family relation such as father, mother, sister, brother, daughter, and son.

While washing the body and moving it from the house to the mosque and from the mosque to the graveyard, we should not talk or make noise because it will scare the dead body. When we arrive at the graveyard, we should greet the dead people there and say, "Peace be upon all of you. You went before us, and we will follow you one day. May Allah send His mercy upon you. We are all from Allah, and to Him will we return."

We bury the body, put dirt on it, and cover it totally in a nice and gentle way. Because the body feels all of these things, he will feel pain if we move his body roughly while burying. We should be nice and soft dealing with the dead bodies; if they were able to talk, they would tell us their feelings. Yet Allah makes it in this way for us to believe in what He says rather than what we see. Allah says in Chapter 20 Verse 55, "From the earth did We create you; into it will We return you; and from it will We extract you in the other time."

We wait with the body for one hour after burying it. During this time, we make supplication for him and recite some verse from *Quran*. Then we leave the body to start his real life there. This is the end of the funeral and there is nothing after this. All what have been done after this in



Arabic or Muslim countries are only traditions and cultures, and none of them is from Islam as a religion.

What will happen to the body after we leave?

Once we leave the graveyard, two angels will come to this person to ask him three questions. These two angels are in charge of asking each one of us, and the answers will be according to the deeds rather the ability of the person who is being asked.

Whether this body was buried, burned, eaten by an animal, or sunk in the ocean, he will be asked all the same. Allah knows how to send these two angels to ask every dead people.

- The first question will be: Who is your God?

The reply of the one who used to believe in Allah and worship Him will be, of course, Allah, because this is the God he used to worship in his life. However, the one who used to worship idol, fire, sun, and ancestors will never know what to answer. The truth becomes clear and he will not be able to mention the name he used to worship in his life.

- The second question will be: What is your belief?

The one who used to worship Allah will answer, "My belief is Islam," because Islam is the only religion from Allah. Here we should understand that Islam means to worship the only God: the Creator, who was never born, never has wife, kids or sons, never feels tired, thirsty, hungry, or sleepy, and never dies; He is able to do anything, and He is the owner of everything; He knows everything, and he is the controller of everything and the sole judge on judgment day.

Allah says in Chapter 42 Verse 13, "We have ordained for you the religion that We enjoined upon Noah; that We have revealed to you, Muhammad; and that We enjoined upon Abraham, Moses and Jesus, to establish the religion and not to be divided therein. It is difficult for those who associate others with Allah to accept your invitation. Allah chooses for Himself whom he wills to be guided and chooses to Himself whoever turns to Him."



The one who used to worship others but Allah or who used to associate others with Allah will never know how to answer this question.

- The third question will be: Who was the last messenger sent from God?

The one who used to worship Allah must have been following His messenger Muhammad(peace be upon him) if he was born after the period of this last messenger. But if this one passed away before the period of the prophet Muhammad(peace be upon him), he should be following the messenger of Allah in his period such as Jesus(peace be upon him), Moses(peace be upon him), or other messengers. Thus he will know how to answer because the first step of becoming Muslim is to witness that no God but Allah and that Muhammad is His messenger; and because in other holly religions before Islam, it was mentioned that the last messenger would be Muhammad(peace be upon him). Yet the one who never worshipped Allah will not know how to answer this question.

Every one of us will be asked these three questions, and either all the three questions will be answered or none of them. The result of the answers will be shown right away.

The angels will tell the one who knows how to answer, “We knew you would be able to answer.” Then a gate to the hell will be opened, and at the sight of the hell he will feel scared. The angels will tell him, "This would be your place if you didn't believe; as you believed," they will open a gate for him to see his place in paradise and say, “this is your place after the day of judgment.” So he will have double happiness and say, "Oh Allah, please make the judgment day faster." Then he will hear the voice of Allah talking to the angels, “Open a tunnel for my worshiper to be able to see his place in paradise to feel and enjoy the nice things coming from there all the time.”

As for the one who didn't know how to answer, angels will tell him, “We knew you will not be able to answer.” They will open a gate for him to see one palace in paradise and tell him, "This would be your place in paradise if you believed; as you disbelieved," they will open a gate for him to see his place in the hell and say, “this is your place after the day of judgment.” So he will have huge fear, sadness, and regret, saying, "Oh Allah, make the judgment day far." Allah



will order the angels to open a tunnel for this disbeliever to see his place in hell and to let him feel the fire and the punishment from the hell all the time.

Life in the grave

We don't know much about life in the grave, as nothing much was mentioned in *Quran* and *Sunnah* about it; we do know few things but not in detail about that life. We know that it is the life between this life and the hereafter, and that people there can feel, hear, and see, but can't come back, talk to us, or help us in anything.

For those who are dead for the sake of Allah such as prophets and martyrs, their bodies will remain as they are after being buried and will never be changed at all, neither eaten by worms nor decayed. We don't wash martyrs' bodies or change their clothes but bury them as they were when they passed away and cover their exposed parts.

Believers visit each other in their graves. They will meet every new believer who joins them, greet each believer coming to them, and give him/her time to relax from the tiring life he/she just finished.

As for disbelievers, they will be busy with their punishment all the time in the grave until the judgment day, when they will be sentenced finally to go to hell forever.

However, not all Muslims are going to paradise. Some of them will go to hell and be punished in the grave as well. There are some severe punishments in the grave for the Muslims who used to commit sins during their lifetime. We don't know whether the punishment here will be enough for them to go to paradise after the judgment day, or it is only a part of the punishment that there are other punishments for them after the big day. Some sins, such as backbiting, adultery, gossip, etc., will cause double punishments, one in the grave and the other in the hereafter.

What is judgment day?



It is the day when all human beings, jinn, animals, angels, and Satan will be resurrected. It will be launched in a place white and clear with no signs such as trees, hills, or others. The place is big enough for everyone, and it is extraordinary hot because the sun is over the heads of everyone.

On that day, people will be resurrected naked, hungry, thirsty, and tired. They will be forced to go to the judgment area, and there are different ways of going there depending on the person himself. If he/she is a good believer, angels will lead him/her to the judgment area; if he/she is a believer with some sins, he/she will be forced to go there by fire running after him/her; if he/she is a disbeliever, fire will catch him/her once he/she is resurrected, and some among them will be dragged by angels on their heads to reach the judgment area; if the one is a righteous believer, he/she will not be with the normal people on judgment day but under the shadow of Allah.

Angels will surround the area one after another, so no one can run away or be out of that area. The scale will be settled there and Allah is the sole judge. There will be the judgment area and the paradise aligned with the hell in between, and everyone can see them clearly. That day determines the final result, either hell or paradise. No one will forgive anyone on that day because both hell and paradise are in front of them; there is no way to come back or run away, either hell or paradise is he/she going to.

Allah says in Chapter 80 Verses 33~37, "On judgment day, everyone will flee from his brother, mother, father, wife, and children, for everyone on that day will be busy with his final destination." Allah also says in Chapter 22 Verse 1~2, "O mankind, fear your Lord. Indeed, the convulsion of the final hour is a terrible thing. On the day, you will see every nursing mother distracted from the child she is nursing and every pregnant woman aborting her pregnancy. And you will see people appearing intoxicated while they are not. The punishment of Allah is severe."

On the judgment day, Satan, jinn, and human beings will be asked about everything in their lives. They will end up either in hell or in paradise because they have the brain and free will to think and choose during their lifetime. Animals will not be asked, but there will be judgments by Allah to determine who hurt who and who beat who during their lifetime. So the animals will get back their rights; the one who was beaten will beat who had beaten it, and then they will be



turned into dirt with no punishments. At that moment, the disbelievers will wish they could be turned into dirt also; but it is impossible, for they are destined to be in hell forever as the result of their deeds in their lives.

Muslims live their lives for this day, this moment, when they will be safe and enter the paradise. A real Muslim knows the way exactly how to achieve it, and a real Muslim can lead an Islamic life no matter where he/she lives. Practicing Islam is simple, easy, relaxing, nice, and safe at the same time. Muslims know that if Allah is satisfied with their deeds, they are safe and will be safe on the judgment day.

Muslims know that they were dead before they were born, and it is written and confirmed when will be our death day, same as it is written and confirmed when would be our birthday. Muslims know that life and death are together and that the result is the most important. Allah says in Chapter 3 Verse 185, "Every soul will taste death, and you will only be given your full compensation on the day of resurrection. So he who is drawn away from the fire and admitted to paradise is the winner. And what is the life of this world except the enjoyment of delusion."