



HAPPINESS IN LIFE AND AFTER DEATH

An Islamic Sufi View

SHAYKH FADHLALLA HAERI



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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 THE AUTHOR

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.

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.

He is a prolific author of more than thirty books relating to the universal principles of Islam, the Qur'an, and its core purpose of enlightenment.

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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

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