

Review paper

Death and Effects of its Remembrance to the Life of Contemporary Muslims

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ABSTRACT: Allah created the human soul eternally and He will transmit it to the hereafter after we die. Therefore, human beings should not ignore the evolution of their soul and it is necessary to prepare them in this world for the eternal life. The reasons that unbelievers fear death are not believing in the resurrection, denying it and see death as destruction. Therefore, various factors, such as the lack of proper knowledge about death, lack of faith, committing sins and being their records empty of good deeds, make them fearful of death. On the other hand, the more you are faithful and good doer, the less you fear death. According to religious teachings, the remembrance of death has important and undeniable effects on individual social worldly life and the hereafter. Looking at the nature and scope of the topic analytical method is used when conducting the research.

Keywords: Death, remembrance, life, judgment and contemporary Muslims

INTRODUCTION

Death and life (ALMAWT-WAL HAYAT) are both created by Allah (S.W.T) as an instrument to test or examine human deeds. This can be seen in the Qur'an where Allah (S.W.T) says:

He who created death and life to test (as to) which of you is best indeedⁱ.

So therefore, it is good for Muslims to know that they were created on earth for a certain reason or purpose. The reason is simply to test them and see who among them will keep his duties towards Allah as a servant. In fact, it is well known fact that everyone is bound to die one-day sooner or later depending on his appointed time. In fact, nobody has ever denied death. Allah (S.W.T) says in the Glorious Qur'an:

Every soul will taste death. Then to us you will be returnedⁱⁱ.

This Verse has indicated that no soul will escape from death when it comes. Islamic scholars described death as a stage in which the soul becomes disconnected from the body. Indeed, death is the greatest affliction or

disaster that can happen to human beings on earth. Allah (S.W.T) described this death as disaster as we can see in the following verse of the Glorious Qur'an:

And the great affliction of death befalls on youⁱⁱⁱ.

One of the reasons why it was addressed by the Glorious Qur'an as disaster is that, if the dying person was obedient person, he laments that he did not do more righteous deeds at the point of his death. Likewise, if he is disrespectful, he laments his evil deeds and wishes to return to this life so much so that he could repent and do more good deeds. This is evidenced by the following verses from the Glorious Qur'an:

Until when death overtakes one of them, he says: send me Back, my Lord, send me back. Haply I may do in that which I have left. By no means! It is a (mere) word that he speaks; And before them is a barrier until the day they are raised^{iv}.

Indeed, it is common knowledge that, this life is temporary and the major sign is the death we see in our life time. It is a reminder that Allah (S.W.T) sends to

humans for them to realize that one day their own appointed time will come as well. It is on this basis that prophet Muhammad (Peace be upon him) encouraged us to always remember and mention death. In one of his traditions he says:

Profusely mention the destroyer of Pleasures.(death)^v

Imam Qurtubi, may Allah have mercy upon him, said: Our Scholars, may Allah have mercy upon them, said that this statement from the prophet (Peace be upon him) is short but inclusive of a great reminder, because remembering death and mentioning it frequently is likely to destroy any pleasure one might feel and prevent him from wishing for any other enjoyment in future, making him indifferent to pleasures which he previously craved. But since people's heart have become heedless, we now require longer admonitions with more decorated words; otherwise the words of the prophet (Peace be upon him) "Profusely mention the destroyer of pleasures" and saying of Allah^{vi}:

"Every soul shall have a taste of death, and only on the Day of Judgment Shall You be paid your full recompense. Only he who is saved far from the fire and admitted to the Garden will have attained the object (of life). The life of this world is but goods and chattels of deception^{viii}". Is enough for those who listen and reflect"

Ibn Umar (May Allah be pleased with him) and his father said:

I came to the Prophet (May peace be upon him) along with Nine other people, when a man from the Ansar (Resident of Madinah) Stood up and asked: ' O prophet of Allah! Who is the wisest person? He (May peace be upon him) He replied, the one who mentions and contemplates death the most, and the one who prepares for his death most. These are the wise ones; they gain the glory of this Life as the honor of the hereafter^{viii}.

The above quotations clearly show how important death contemplation is to the betterment of the Muslim's life.

Effects of Death's Remembrance to the Muslims

Islamic Scholars believed that death is not a total nonexistence, but involves the separation of the unity between body and soul. It also shows a change in man's condition and his transference from this worldly life to next life. Imam Qurtubi (May Allah have Mercy on him) was reported to have said:

The Muslim scholars have unanimously agreed that Death is not restricted to certain an age, time or Sickness, so that man would always be ready receive death and be prepared for what comes after it^{ix}.

The following are some of the effects of death's remembrance to our lives as contemporary Muslims:

Its softens the hard heart

Remembering death constantly/ frequently is a great means of softening Muslims heart. It softens the heart, makes the eyes shed tears, assists one in becoming committed to Islam and expels base desires. This is because fearing death/ bad ending will motivate the Muslim to be law abiding servant to worship Allah and renew his faith. Prophet Muhammad (Peace be upon him) to have said:

Remember often the destroyer of pleasure (meaning death)^x

Remembering death prevents one from committing sin and softens his heart. No one remembers death at the time of difficulties but he will feel ease, knowing fully that nothing last forever. Likewise, no one remembers death at the time of joy but he will feel restricted. Yazeed Ibn Tameem was reported to have said:

One who is not prevented from sinning by remembering death and hearing the Qur'an, nothing else can prevent him, even if he were to see the mountains move in front of his very eyes^{xi}.

No doubt remembering death regularly is a path/ road to good death/good ending. Imam Qutubi was reported to have said in his book titled "At-Tadkhirah Fi –Ahwalil Mawt wal –Aakhirah"

Whoever remembers death regularly will benefit in three ways: he will hasten to repent, become content, and will be active in worship^{xii}

One of the major things that remind a Muslim believer about death is visiting graveyards prophet Muhammad (Peace be upon him) urged Muslims to be visiting the graves with the aimed of softening their hearts. This can be seen in the tradition where he says:

I have previously prohibited you of visiting graves, but now I ask you to do so as they help disregard this worldly life and reminds you of the hereafter^{xiii}.

From the above tradition it is clear to us that visiting graves is the best means of softening hearts. The visitor benefits by remembering death, while the dead benefits from the prayer/Du'a of the visitor. Evidence of the dead benefitting from the visit can be seen in the tradition of the Prophet Muhammad (Peace be upon him) where he says:

Peace be unto you, O dwellers of this place Believers and Muslims. May Allah have mercy upon those of us who have gone before and those who will follow later. Insha Allah we will join you soon^{xiv}.

The one who is visiting the grave yard should be God conscious and the purpose of his visit should be for the sake of increasing fear of Allah in his life. He should think about his brothers, sisters, friends and well-wishers who passed away currently lying in their graves. He should think about all the worldly materials they gathered while on earth, their wives and all kinds worldly enjoyment which they enjoyed but finally ends in the grave. In fact, the visit should make him disregard this worldly and reminds him the hereafter.

-Salaf (May Allah forgive them all) used to think of death when they advised a person who was committing a sin. One of the salaf (May Allah have mercy on him), when there was a man in his presence gossiping about another, warned him by saying:

Remember the cotton which they will put on your eyes i.e when shrouding him for burial^{xv}.

The idea or purpose of this quotation by the Salaf is to remind the gossip about the death so much so that he will stop the gossip. This is because he is aware after the death he is going to account for his action before his Lord. In fact, remembering death deters one from committing any sort of crime or evil.

- Strengthens Muslim's heart.

One of the effects of death is that with reminding of Allah's promise, it strengthens man's heart. Allah (S.W.T) says in the Glorious Qur'an:

And convey good news to those who believe and do Good deeds, that they shall have gardens in which rivers Flow; whenever they shall be given a portion of fruit thereof, they shall say: This is what was given to us before; and they shall Be given the like of it, and they shall have pure mates in them, and In them, they shall abide^{xvi}.

This will strengthen the heart of the believers and encourage one to prepare for death before it strikes him or her, by keeping away from evils and abide by Allah's regulations.

-It made a Muslim believer to lose hope in living longer, which is a hope that causes evil ending. Hoping for Long life is one of the means that lead to bad ending. In this regard Allah (S.W.T) says in the Glorious Qur'an

Leave them to eat and enjoy and let them be preoccupied with (false) hope. They will come to know^{xvii}.

The above verse clearly shows that one of the signs that may lead to bad ending in the life of an individual is desire and hope for a long life in this material world.

In relation to this Ali (May Allah be pleased with him) was reported to have said:

What I fear for you is following your desires Hoping for a long life, for following one's desires Makes a man ignore the truth and hoping for Long life makes him forget the hereafter.^{xviii}

This statement of Ali (May Allah be pleased with him) is self-explanatory. Therefore, whoever have this in mind would finally fall into devils' hands. So therefore one of the major effects of death remembrance is that it makes one lose hope for living longer in this material world. It makes one see world insignificant.

-It makes a person content with very little, as narrated by Anas (May Allah be pleased with him), that the prophet (Peace be upon him) passed by a group who were laughing and said:

"Profusely mention the destroyer of pleasures", and he (Peace be upon him) said: 'It is never mentioned during the time of need but would make one feel content, and never mentioned during prosperity but would make one feel restricted. This is because it makes a man content with a very little he has during hardship/poverty his remembering of death will makes him realize how he will account his worldly possessions before Allah (S.W.T) in the Day of judgment. Actually, the world deceives its own lovers. Early scholars used to say:

Anyone who remembers death frequently saves Himself from the hypocrisies of the world^{xix}.

In fact, it makes worldly life and hardship insignificant. It also reminds him how death overtook the people of the past generations and prepare for it before its strikes him.

-It made Muslim to be inclined towards the Hereafter and obedience of Allah. One of the effects death remembrance is that it makes one to be humble before Allah (S.W.T) and be obedient to Him. This is also one of the main causes of attaining good ending in life which would give birth to good death. The more the slave humble himself before Allah (S.W.T) the closer he becomes to Allah. Prophet Muhammad (Peace be upon him) was reported to have said:

The closest slave can be to Allah is when he is Prostrating to Him, so make lots of Dua then^{xx}.

In fact, closeness to God means God's consciousness and God consciousness will never permit one to be committing sins. With this, we can conclude It makes a person humble and prevents arrogance and oppression and any other kind of evil.

- It prevents one from greed and extravagance.

- Another effect of death remembrance is that it encourages a Muslim believer to repent and make up for what he missed in the past. This is because any one who sees death in his presence and awaits him will never delay in his daily worship because he knows that time at his disposal is very short and death can strike him at any given time without notice. In fact, it makes him God conscious and repent. According to Ad-Daqqaq (May Allah have mercy on him).

He who frequently remembers death will be granted Three things: a rapid repentance, a content heart and Enthusiasm to worship Allah; and the one who neglects Remembering death will be afflicted with three things: delay in repentance, discontentment and laziness in Worshipping Allah^{xxi}.

The above quotation shows the effectiveness of death remembrance in repentance. According to Muslim scholars the following are the things that remind Muslims about death regularly:

-Visiting the graves: This is the most effective means of reminding one about death. Prophet Muhammad (Peace be upon him) said:

Visit the graves because they remind about the Hereafter.^{xxii}

-Visiting the places where the dead are washed and witnessing the washing.

-Being around people who are dying to see how they suffer and to try to get them utter the *Shahadah*.

-Accompanying funerals and the funeral prayers and attending the burial of the dead.

Indeed, one of the ways of increasing remembrance about the death is by attending funerals, carrying the dead body on one's shoulders, going to the graveyard, taking part in the burial process, putting in his grave. This no doubt will remind one the hereafter. This can be seen in the tradition which says:

Visit the sick, and follow the funeral procession; this Reminds of the hereafter.^{xxiii}

Apart from reminding one the death there is also another benefit which is getting reward from Allah (S.W.T), as we can see in the following narration.

Whoever follows the funeral procession of a Muslim Out of faith and hoping for reward (From Allah), then He stays until the funeral prayer and burial, will return with two Qirats, each of them is as huge as the amount of uhud. And whoever attends it until the funeral prayer Will a reward equal to one Qirat^{xxiv}.

The above quotation clearly shows that attending funeral prayer has another advantage to the Muslims.

Apart from reminding death, it also earns huge reward from Allah (S.W.T).

-Reciting the Glorious Qur'an, especially the verses that mention the agonies of death, like the saying of Allah:

And the stupor of death will come in truth: This is what you have been avoiding^{xxv}.

-Having gray hair and becoming sick, because these are two messengers of death.

Pondering over earth quakes, volcanoes, floods and landslide which remind one of the nearness of death.

-Reading about previous nations who died and vanished.

-It makes a person kind and forgiving towards his fellow Muslims^{xxvi}.

Conclusion

Death is a reminder to those who are still alive. Understanding and embracing death is one of the major ways to value this life. This is because one knows his/her could be sooner or later. Remembering death forces people to work hard and keep on examining their daily routines for the fear bad ending/death. In fact, remembering death is the most effective weapon of preventing evil in the Muslim life.

ENDNOTES AND REFERENCES

ⁱ AlQur'an 68:4

ⁱⁱ AlQur'an 29:57

ⁱⁱⁱ AlQur'an 5:106

^{iv} AlQur'an 23:99-100

^v Hadith(Muslim)

^{vi} I.Qurtubi, At- Tadhkiah Fi- Ahwalil Mawta wal- Akhirah, Dar manarah, Egypt, 2004, p55

^{vii} AlQur'an 3:185

^{viii} E.d watan, Death is enough as an admonition, Educational department of Dar-watan, Dar watan publishing house, np, p7

^{ix} M.Salih, Weakness of faith, np, nd, p33

^x Hadith(Muslim)

^{xi} E.d.Watan, Opcit, p14

^{xii} I. Qurtubi, Opcit, p57

^{xiii} I. Qurtubi, Paradise and Hell-fire, Dar-manarah, Egypt, 2004, p5

^{xiv} Hadith(Bukhari)

^{xv} M.salih, Opcit, p34

^{xvi} AlQur'an 16:32

^{xvii} AlQur'an 15:3

^{xviii} M.Salih, Opcit, p43

^{xix} I. Qurtubi, opct, p54

^{xx} Hadith(Muslim)

^{xxi} E.d, watan, Opcit, p15

^{xxii} Hadith(Bukhari)

^{xxiii} Hadith(Muslim)

^{xxiv} Hadith(Bukhari)

^{xxv} AlQur'an 46:19

^{xxvi} E.d.watan, opcit13