

Life after Death

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Excerpt:

In his talk, the Maulana explains that death is not the end of life, rather is the beginning of a new life. Explaining the creation plan of God he elaborates how upon his death, man leaves the present world and goes into a new world. In other words, he leaves one phase of human life to enter into another phase of life.

The Maulana also dispels the notions that death makes man a pessimist; rather it makes him a hero. What should man do to become a hero? He must accomplish, in this world that which will be of avail in the world, hereafter. If he makes money, property, government, or other material things his goal, man must know that these items shall be left behind in this world; death will make man part with these material amenities. Therefore, these cannot be the purpose of life. Man's purpose should be that which he does not have to abandon on death.

Introduction

The concept of death is not well understood. The literal definition of death is, “end of life or *khatam-e-hayat*.” However, this is against fact, because death, in reality, is beginning of a new life. It is very strange that man is forgetful of the greatest reality. This fact has been mentioned in the Quran on two occasions, in Chapter 3 and Chapter 21.

Every human being is bound to taste death (3:185)

This verse was revealed 1400 years ago. Man is a witness that there is no exception to this rule. The question that arises is who except God, could have made such a sweeping remark? In olden times, several doctors, physicians, etc were devoted to look after the well-being of their kings and queens, yet the royal died. Realising the truth in the above verse should suffice to serve as a proof that Quran is the word of God. No human being can ever make a statement which holds true for the entire history of mankind. Reflecting upon death therefore becomes critical.

Death is not the end of life, rather is the beginning of a new life. When man dies, he leaves the present world and goes into a new world. In a way, he leaves one phase of human life to enter into another phase of life.

Reflecting on death

Man must reflect and think about death before his life ends. Death makes man aware about the fact that in he has only one chance to perform. Man's life is eternal but it has been divided into two periods: pre-death and post-death. The lesson is that man will have only one chance to succeed in the pre-death life, whether he uses it or misses it. Thinking about death is a mark of realistic thinking. The following Hadith explains the importance of remembering death:

Remember death much because it demolishes all desires (Al-Tirmidhi)

The above Hadith means that death is killer of distraction. The greatest obstacle to progress in life is distraction. Many times we face such things which make us deviate from the real purpose of life. These things could be our desires, ambitions, temptations, etc. Thinking about death saves man from getting distracted. There is an uncertainty associated with death, it can strike anytime. People die while speaking, sleeping etc. It can come any moment, in childhood, in young age, at any time. The element of uncertainty linked with death makes a person very alert, and tells him that he has no time for getting distracted.

During an interaction in America, a person told me that if we keep remembering death it will make us pessimistic. He said thinking about death will make one scared and he won't be able to perform any task effectively. I told him that this was not right thinking. The thought of death creates a sense of urgency in a person. He begins to think that he must do whatever he has to do, immediately, without any procrastination, since he can die any moment. This pattern of thinking makes a person super-active. The concept of death makes man realize that he has come on this planet earth for a few days, after which he will have no opportunity to do anything, and thus he'll become super-active in order to avail whatever time is at his disposal.

Examples from history

In Islamic history, Umar ibn Abdul Aziz Umawi (d. 720 AD) is regarded as the Fifth Pious Caliph. The day he was made a caliph, the entire day was spent in taking the oath of allegiance. People from various parts of the empire came to take the pledge. The ceremony started at the *Juma* (weekly congregational prayer) and continued till evening. After the *Isha* prayer he returned home extremely tired and went to bed. His oath had taken place in Damascus, and when people came to know that he has become the new caliph, they gathered around his house on order to have their problems solved. The Caliph was resting in his room. In the meantime, people met Umar's son and asked for his father. He came and told him that people were waiting to meet him outside. Umar said that he wouldn't be able to meet that day, and told his son to tell them to come the next day. His son was a very sincere and God fearing person. After listening he said: "*Father, are you sure that you'll be alive to meet them tomorrow?*" This response of his son startled Umar. He immediately got up from his bed, did *dua* for his son and went out to hear people's problems. This incident shows that death creates an acute sense of urgency. When a person is aware that he may die any moment, he prepares himself to do the task at hand as quickly as possible.

Death doesn't make a man pessimist; rather it makes him a hero. What should we do to make ourselves hero? The task we accomplish in this world must be of avail in the world, hereafter. If we make money, property, government, or other material things our goal, we must know that they shall be left behind in this world; death will make us part with these material amenities. Therefore, these cannot be the purpose of life. Our purpose should be that which we do not have to abandon on death.

The purpose of man's life

In his pre-death life, man must strive to attain three things. The first thing that we need to do in this world is to attain *realization of God (khaliq ki daryaft)*, also known as *marefat* in the *shariat*. There is no beginning without God-realisation. This is the starting point of life. Next, we should know about the Creation Plan of God.

In other words, first man discovers the Creator and then reflects on why the Creator created him. This leads man to the realisation of afterlife, the discovery of paradise and hell. This realisation arouses in man the strife to make him worthy of being selected for paradise.

The greatest concern of man should be to save himself from hell and become worthy of paradise. The central task (*nukta-e-dawah*) of all prophets was to make man aware about this reality. Prophet Muhammad received prophethood in 610 AD. The Prophet gave his first public address from the hillock Safa (this was a raised platform used to warn people of something imminent). Ascending the height of the rock of Safa, the Prophet called the people together and said:

By God, as you sleep so will you die, and as you awaken so will you be raised after death: you will be taken to account for your deeds. The good will be rewarded with good and the evil with evil. And, for all eternity, the good will remain in heaven and the evil will remain in hell.

(Jamharatu Khutab al-Arab)

And, the first speech that the Prophet made in Medina on migration was:

Save yourself from Hell-fire even it be by giving half a date-fruit in charity. (Bukhari)

Thus, telling people of the Creation Plan of God was of paramount importance for all prophets. This is so because knowing why he is here and what will be done with him in the Hereafter, is the biggest concern (*maslah*) of a man. What makes a person most active is death. A person came to me and asked how the difference in the Muslim community can be solved? I replied that it is not a matter of difference, but is a matter of lack of fear of God.

Once I was invited to a conference of the *Ulema* (Islamic scholars) in Hyderabad. The scholars had gathered to discuss issues pertaining to madrasa system. One of the proposals made was that a certificate issued from a particular madrasa should be recognized by other madrasas as well. Another suggestion was to make the syllabus uniform in all madrasas. These were the kind of issues being debated. However, there was absolutely no consensus on any one issue.

All people present were saying whatever they wanted to say, none conforming with the view of the other. I was sitting there silently and listening. When asked to speak, I got up and said, “*If a black snake was to emerge here, then the opinions of all would be one. All will say: ‘Save yourself from the cobra!’*” Since there is no such deadly snake here, all have different opinions. Then I said the fact is that the *shiddat-e-khauf rayon ke taaddud ko khatm kar deta hai*.”(extreme fear makes the difference in opinion disappear)

If you really fear God, you’ll become so serious and sincere that you’ll think of only that which is to be thought of and not engage in distractions. If man develops this fear there will be no difference on any issue. The root cause of difference is lack of fear of God, and the punishment in the hereafter.

Death is an ideology

Death is an ideology, a philosophy, a concept of life. Therefore, all prophets warned people of this. Today there is great emphasis on reading the *namaz* in the most correct manner, but there is no fear of God. According to a Hadith,

A time will come when you won’t find even a single God-fearing person (Jame Bayan al-Ilm)

In another Hadith this point is expressed thus:

Their mosques will be full of people but void of guidance (Al-Baihaqi)

It is therefore the spirit of *deen* (religion) and not the outward form, which is important. Man must develop an acute sense of accountability before his Creator. The concept of death develops this feeling in a person’s mind. This is a very important aspect of death.

Quran gives many arguments to explain death. According to a verse:

We bring dead land to life. Such shall be the Resurrection (50:11)

This verse uses the language of metaphor. All trees, grass, and plants have life. At point they get dried up and die, but after rain they are again enlivened and become verdant. Thus, the natural phenomenon referred to here is a metaphor, which explains that just as trees and greenery enliven, so will man be resurrected after his death.

Another verse in the Quran says:

By the Lord of the heaven and the earth, it is certainly the truth. It is as true as your ability to speak. (51:23)

Man's speech is an example that proves that man doesn't die after end of his life on earth. The other day I heard on radio the voice of a person who was already dead. The voice was absolutely the same as I had heard in his real life. The above verse refers to a phenomenon, that man's speech can be repeated. This shows that at least one part of man's personality can be repeated in this world itself, even after his death. And, if a part is repeatable, then undoubtedly the entire personality is also repeatable.

According to a Hadith,

The miracles of the Quran will never get over (Al-Baihaqi)

The Quran is an eternal book, so it incorporates the discoveries of the later times as well. The above verse, which presents man's speech as a reason for belief in resurrection, was taken in a simple manner when it was revealed. But today we know that man's voice can be preserved and then repeated at a later time. Thus, what was said in the Hadith about Quran's miracles has been proved correct through the coming true of this verse in the modern age. Speech has been presented as an argument. This is an argument for life after death. God has kept these things in the world so that man can know that there is life even after death.

Knowledge of religion through contemplation

There are two levels of knowing religion: one is the simple level, the other level is to know religion through contemplation (*tadabbur*). A Hadith:

Every verse of the Quran has an apparent meaning (*zahr*) and an inner meaning (*batn*)
(Mishkat)

The above Hadith means that Quranic verses have an explicit meaning, which is easily understandable and an implicit meaning, which has to be understood through deliberation.

The simple aspect of death is that when you hear of a person's death remember your death as well. The other aspect is that it implores you to seriously contemplate. Let me explain this with an example. Our body has countless unseen cells; of which the old cells are continuously replaced by new ones.

It has been observed that, on an average, within ten years all the cells in the body of an individual, change. If an individual has lived for ninety years this means that he, in a way, died and was reborn nine times. However, during this process of change of body of cells, one's memory remains intact. Modern psychology has raised questions pertaining to this phenomena. That, if the cells that compose the old body have broken away and a new body has come in its place, where was the memory stored that it did not get renewed. This proves that memory is apart from the physical being - body dies but memory remains intact. A scientist has said of the human personality: 'Personality is changelessness in change'. (*Ek badalti hui cheez ke darmiyan ek na badalne wali cheez*). This can be understood only through deep thinking.

According to the Quran, there are two levels of paradise (55:46). Hadith say that there are hundred levels of paradise. Broadly speaking, there are two gardens (*jannatan*). One level is for those who simply read the Quran and Hadith and then follow, while the other is for those who think and activate their mind. Depending on how man prepares himself, he'll be rewarded with the suitable level of paradise.

Conclusion

Death is not a negative concept, it creates in man a deep realization of the reality facing him (*haqiqat ka gehra sha-oor*). The thought of death doesn't render a man useless or hopeless (*be-amal*), rather it makes him very much active (*ba-amal*), and also prevents man from wasting the potential of his mind. I find most of the people underutilized as they focus less on essentials and more on their desires and whims. If a person develops the thinking that he can die tomorrow, he will leave behind all distractions and focus only on his main purpose. In this sense, death creates a sense of urgency, it has a hugely positive role in human life.

Daily, I count the number of people I knew but who are no more in this world. None of them have returned after death. There was a surgeon in Azamgarh who was a well-built person. Then I saw a stage when he had afflicted by Parkinson disease and was even unable to hold a cup of tea in his hand. Then he died and never returned. This means death comes at the point of no return.

There's no returning after death. People should take every day as countdown and not count-up. People often say that so and so was born with a silver spoon in his mouth. The person has to also die. I thought it is more correct to say that he was born with a "death-spoon" in his mouth. People are so unaware of realities.

When you remember your helplessness you are reminded of death and then you remember the meeting with God on the Day of Judgment. In earlier times there used to be much mention of death and Hereafter in day-to-day life. My father Fariduddin, who died on Dec 29, 1929, used to say that we have to show our face to God. But now there is no mention of these things, now nobody even thinks on this pattern because of so many distractions such as shopping, watching TV, being involved in entertainment, etc. However, from another perspective the modern trend is not at all a matter of despondency. If there is no mention of death in the society where you live, and you on the other hand, rediscover its importance then you'll be given double reward. We must not complain of the age in which we are, rather if we rediscover these realities, we'll be given double reward.

Questions and Answers

Q1. What should they do who complain about others and forget about themselves?

A1. Charity begins at home. What you don't see in others, develop in yourself with greater intensity and it will then be transmitted to others. George Bernard Shaw was asked to spread education in Ireland. He asked the person whether he was educated. He said he wasn't. Then Bernard Shaw told him: "You should first educate yourself so that at least one person of my nation is changed and educated." Changing of one person is not an individual event, it is always transmitted. People complain about others but do not create in them the determination to change themselves. Change yourself and you will be able to change the society.

Q2. What should we do with those who do not believe in the Hereafter?

A2. Make them read books. Search of perfection is in actuality search for paradise. People want perfection in this world. We must correct this contradiction. We must make ourselves deserving candidates of paradise.

Q3. Please distinguish between life after death and Awagaman.

A3. If Awagaman is life after death, then that is correct. But if it is also the indefinite continuation of life-death cycle then that is unreasonable, as it has no proof in either religion or science.

Q4. Why did Gabriel embrace the Prophet?

A4. This was the first experience of its kind that the Prophet had. Therefore, he was naturally startled. So, in order to end his fear (*ajnabiyat, dehshat*), Gabriel embraced him.

Q5. *Why do others not know of Hereafter?*

A5. Thank God that you know of this and tell others about it. This is the positive response of the discovery. You have been saved from becoming “*a case of missed opportunities!*”

Q6. a) *What is the reason of differences amongst Muslims and what is its solution? Is it a result of abandoning dawah, because dawah alone gives common ground for unity?*

A6. That's right. Dawah work never creates differences. If more dawah work is done by Muslims, it will lead to less differences among them.

b) *Is violence, in the name of dini ghairat (religious pride or sentiments) a bidat?*

A: Yes, the word *ghairat* (pride) is in itself a *bidat*. There is no such word in the Quran or Hadith. There's no word of *shaan-e-rasul* in the Quran or Hadith. Many words have been invented and portrayed as essential for religion. Before making any opinion, we must see the Quran and Sunnah. Abu Hanifa said whatever you say, give me its reference from the Quran or Sunnat otherwise it is rejected (all *biddat* is rejected). On the Day of Judgement, the Prophet will disown all these concepts. He will say: Why did you raise the banner of *shaan-e-rasul* when I didn't say anything about it? According to Hadith, On the Day of Judgement, the Prophet will see the angels taking some people to Hell. The Prophet will say to them that these are my companions, where are you taking them. The angels will reply: These people changed the religion after you. Then the Prophet will say: “Go away. Go away”

Q7. *What makes us forgetful of death?*

A7. This is Satan's inducement. He wants man to remain forgetful of death. This is the Satanic sunnah. He revolted against God. Had he known that he had to face God, he would have not done so. He was unaware that he too has to face God. So being forgetful of death is Satanic sunnah. He had said that I would make all tread my path. God said to Iblis (Satan):

I shall fill Hell with all of those who follow you. (7:18).

Thus, forgetting death is same as following Satan.

Q8. *I am a shopkeeper and like all other businessmen, I am prompted for more and more. How do I tackle my greed and the resultant tension?*

A8. This is called *takasur* in the Quran (102:1). Why should you desire for more money? Will it give you peace of mind? Certainly not. It only disturbs peace of mind. If it doesn't provide the required result, then why yearn for it. There are two things: contentment (*qanaat*) and greed (*takasur*).

Former means being content with what God has given. More money should be spent in the path of God, not on yourself. If God has given you less money then the option before you is contentment. If He has given you more money, then use it in accordance with your need and spend the rest in the path of God.

Q9. Is it right to be proud of being a Muslim?

A9. This is the greatest evil in Muslims today. Everything should be judged from the yardstick of the *Sahaba* (the companions of the Prophet). None of the *Sahaba* said so. This is what the Satan said: I am better than him. This is not the Sunnah of the Prophet and *Sahaba*. Islam is about modesty, not at all about pride. Those who adopt the latter conduct will be punished by God.

Q10. What is the meaning of the Hadith: Mutu qabla an tamutu?

A10. It means, 'Die before death comes unto you'. It is a way of saying that one should remember much the fact that one has to die. This will make one's thinking death-oriented.

Q11. Please tell some practical methods to save ourselves from under-utilization?

A11. Under-utilization means that God kept man in the world to do work that makes him worthy of paradise, while he remains engrossed in worldly things. All instances of distraction are under-utilization. Joking, poetry, and entertainment: all these are under-utilization. God has created man for greater things, while he is involved in third-class entertainment. I think *ilm* (knowledge) is in books and not in watching TV. One has to evaluate oneself and discover where he is engaged in distraction; self-evaluation is the only method of saving oneself from distraction.

Q12. a) Some people emphasize the physical attributes of the Prophet, is it right thing to do?

A12. Focussing on Prophet's physical attributes is of no importance at all. Only what is said in the Quran, which is the character of the Prophet, is of importance. Other things have been self-styled. Muslims all over India created a furore over Rushdie's invitation to the Jaipur Literature Festival. This response was totally against the teaching of the Prophet. On the other hand, our companions meticulously planned and went there to distribute the Quran to the large gathering.

This is the correct response. Spreading Prophet's mission is following the Prophet, this is what the *Sahaba* did, rest is all *bidat*.

b) Love of humanity is absent among the Muslims, why is there stiffening of heart in Muslims?

A: This is due to abandoning the teaching of the Quran. This results in stiffening. Learning and knowing Quran will only create softening of heart for others.

Q13. How to tell non-Muslims about life after death?

A13. It is important that one develops his intellect and parallel encourage others to read books.

Q14. Why is despondency unlawful in Islam?

A14. It's unlawful because God has made the world in such a manner that there is no reason to be despondent. There are unlimited opportunities in the present world, thus despondency is against the very law of nature. It is equivalent to being distrustful of God, and this is the reason why it is unlawful. There is no justification for it.

Q15. Will man stay in Paradise forever?

A15. Quran says that man will stay forever (61:12). One who is born as Muslim won't automatically go to paradise, rather only one who deserves will go.

Q16. Abu Bakr said after Prophet's death that there couldn't come any harm to religion while he was still alive. Can we say that this is an example of dini ghairat?

A16. It's a matter of determination, not *ghairat*.

Q17. What is the difference between ruh (soul) and sha-oor (conscious mind)?

A17. It is the same thing. Science has proved that only soul is different from body. Literary-wise words such as these are valid, but not scientifically.

Q18. Shayr (poetry) is satanic thing?

A18. Poetry makes man romantic, and a wishful thinker. They have nothing to do with realities. Europe abandoned this after advent of science, so did the Arabs after Islam. *Shayr* is symbolic of degeneration, and not of life.

Q19. Will man stay forever in Hell?

A19. Yes, according to the Quran.