

### Fast 30: Life after death — Paradise and hell

- **Paradise according to the Quran:** The word *garden (jannah)* or its plural (*jannāt*) is generally used to indicate the abiding place of the righteous in the hereafter. This word indicates something which is concealed or covered so that it cannot be perceived by the senses (a garden is called *jannah* because it is covered by trees). For paradise it may refer to the fact that it cannot be perceived by our human senses.
- The description of Paradise usually given in the Quran is: *gardens in which rivers flow*. Compare this with the description of the righteous in the Quran, which generally is: *those who believe and do good*. In this life, *faith* is the water of a person's spiritual life. In the next world, that faith appears to him as rivers. In this life, *good deeds* spring from faith. In the next world, good deeds appear as trees, bearing fruit.
- Paradise as described in the Quran is called a *parable* or a *likeness*: “A parable of the Garden which is promised to those who keep their duty” (13:35, 47:15). This means that it is not a garden of this world, but it bears a likeness to it.
- The blessings of Paradise cannot be imagined by our minds in this life, as these are not things of this world. The Quran says:

“So no soul knows what joy of the eyes is hidden for them: a reward for what they did.” — 32:17

An explanation of this verse was given by the Holy Prophet himself when he said:

“Allah says: I have prepared for My righteous servants things which no eye has seen, no ear has heard, and which the mind of man has not conceived.”

- Those in Paradise are spoken of as being given *sustenance (rizq)*. But it cannot mean what sustains the body here. It is the sustenance that is needed for the inner self of man. In this life, prayer is that sustenance. The regular five times daily prayer is mentioned in 20:130 and in 20:132. The verse in between these two says: “And the *sustenance* of your Lord is better and more lasting” (20:131).
- All blessings of paradise, whether fruit, shade, rivers of water, milk and honey, thrones, cushions and carpets, etc. — all these are not things of this life, but are mentioned simply to show that whatever may serve to perfect the picture of the happiness of human beings, will be there. As for the exact form they will take, that cannot be made known because human senses are incapable of perceiving it.
- **Women in paradise:** Men and women are both equal in the sight of God, and both will enjoy the higher life if they do good in this life. It is made clear in many places that women, in general, shall have access to Paradise, like men:

“Allah has promised to *the believers, men and women*, Gardens, in which rivers flow, to abide in them, and goodly dwellings in Gardens of perpetual abode. And greatest of all is Allah’s goodly pleasure. That is the mighty achievement.” — 9:72

- The Quran mentions, four times, females in paradise whom it calls as *ḥūr*. In the root meaning of this word, the prevailing idea is that of *purity*. Hence “pure ones” is its nearest rendering in English. A related word *ḥawārī* is used in the Quran to refer to the chosen disciples of Jesus, because it means ‘a pure and sincere friend’. The *ḥūr* of paradise might be the women of pure character of this world who have entered into paradise. Even if the *ḥūr* are taken to be a reward bestowed on those in Paradise, like all rewards of paradise this reward is: (1) not physical, (2) equally bestowed on both the men and the women who will be admitted to paradise, and (3) an unfolding of the good qualities within a person’s soul in this life. A person’s (a man’s or a woman’s) purity, sincerity, honesty, chastity, fidelity, and like qualities, displayed in this world, appear to him or her in the after-life as what the Quran calls *ḥūr*.
- Just as the blessings of Paradise are a manifestation of the hidden realities of this life, likewise the punishments of hell do not come from outside but are the unfolding of the bad feelings created within the soul by wrong-doing in this life.
- **Hell according to the Quran:** There are seven different names of hell given in the Quran. They convey three main meanings:
  1. *A great depth or abyss.* Because a person follows his low desires and baser passions in this life, he makes himself *fall* into the depths.
  2. *Fire.* The burning caused by worldly desires, envy and greed changes into a *flaming fire* after death.
  3. *Something decayed, dried up and broken down.* Since he only wants material gain in this life, his deeds become like dried, decayed vegetation, *bearing no fruit after death*.
- The real purpose of hell is *purification*. The one who lives in sin is debarred from the Divine presence (the Quran, 83:15), but, being purified by fire, he is again made fit for Divine service. Hence Hell is called, in one place, the “friend” or *maulā* of the sinners (57:15), and in another place their “mother” or *umm* (101:9). The faithful are purified through their suffering, in the way of God, *in this life*; and the evil-doers shall be purified by hell-fire. Hell is called a “friend” of sinners, because through suffering it will make them fit for spiritual progress, and it is called their “mother”, because in its bosom they will be brought up, so that they may be able to tread the path of a new higher life in the next world.

- Paradise is a place for further advancement. Those in it will pray as follows:

“Our Lord, make perfect for us our light and grant us protection.” — 66:8

This shows that the soul of the righteous shall still be animated by a desire for more and more light even when in paradise. The Quran also says:

“...those who keep their duty to their Lord, for them are high places, *above which are yet higher places*, built for them...” — 39:20

The new life granted to the righteous in Paradise is thus the starting-point for a new advancement, in which they shall continue to rise to higher and higher places. The joys of Paradise are thus really the true joys of advancement.

- The Holy Quran and the Sayings of the Holy Prophet show that all those who are in Hell shall ultimately, when they are fit for a new life, be released from it to progress further on in the next life. The Quran says that those in hell will be:

“...abiding in it so long as the heavens and the earth endure, except as your Lord please. Surely your Lord is the mighty Doer of what He intends.” — 11:107

And this passage continues by saying that those in the Garden will be:

“...abiding in it so long as the heavens and the earth endure, except as your Lord please — a gift never to be cut off.” — 11:108

In both cases it says they will abide in it forever “*except as your Lord please*”. But in case of paradise the “pleasure” of God is that it shall be “a gift *never to be cut off*”, while in case of hell it says: “your Lord is the mighty Doer of what He intends”, meaning that those in it will ultimately be taken out. The Holy Prophet has said:

“Then Allah will say: The angels have interceded and the prophets have interceded and the faithful have interceded and none remains but the most Merciful of all merciful ones (i.e., Allah). So He will take out a handful from the fire and bring out a people who have never done any good.”

Moving from *narrower* to *broader* circles: (1) the faithful will intercede for people who have come into contact with them personally; (2) the prophets will intercede for all their followers; (3) the angels, who move humans to do good, will intercede for all who have done some good, including people who are not followers of a prophet. And the report adds that the most Merciful of all, i.e. Allah, still remains, so He will bring out from the fire even people who have never done any good. It follows that, thereafter, none can remain in Hell, and in fact the handful of God cannot leave *anything* behind.