

*Reflections on
Life and
Death*

MAULANA WAHIDUDDIN KHAN

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Death

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Goodword

First published 2017
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www.goodwordbooks.com

Goodword Books, Chennai
Mob. +91-9790853944, 9600105558

Printed in India

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Foreword



Of all the stages through which a person will have to pass, death is the most certain. Yet, it is something that few people bother to seriously think about, leave alone prepare for. Everyone who is alive now will be dead sometime in the future. One day, the eyes of those who now see will fade and their tongues will freeze into silence. Every human being will one day be leaving this world, never to return, and will enter a world which he will never leave.

Death is commonly defined as the end of life in an organism. Upon death, apparently all biological and other-related activities of a living being stop, including the mind and the senses. Research suggests that about 150,000 people die every day around the world.

Throughout history, a great majority of people have believed that humans also have a soul in addition to the physical body and that the soul continues in the afterlife, after leaving the body. It is here that religion adds a very important aspect to the concept of death. That is, religion says that there is a very meaningful relationship between the pre-death and the post-death period of a human being. The period before death in

the present world can be likened to a nursery where human beings are meant to grow and develop, while in the phase after the present life, a human being will find his true habitat. Human beings grow in the nursery of this present world, and in the world of the Hereafter plants from this nursery are selected for being settled in Paradise.

According to Islam, in the pre-death period, the Creator has bestowed complete freedom to a person. This freedom is meant as a person's test. Those individuals who give proof of not having misused their freedom and show that they are competent to lead life in a highly disciplined way will be made deserving of entry to Paradise. Paradise is a sublime society where selected persons from the entire human history will be brought together and where they will live for eternity.

Since all of us must, one day or the other, face death, we need to reflect on death often and lead our lives in this world in such a way that when our death finally arrives, we will be adequately prepared for it, having lived as our Creator wanted us to. Hopefully, this book will encourage readers to give attention to the reality of life and death and to thereby lead their lives in a more truly meaningful way.

Wahiduddin Khan
New Delhi,
April 21, 2017

What is Death?



Dictionaries often define death as ‘the permanent cessation of life’. This definition reflects a negative understanding of death. It seems to suggest that death is the complete extinguishing of a being after having been alive on earth for a short while. It is as if when one dies, one ceases to exist forever.

In contrast to this, religion presents a positive understanding of death. It teaches us that death is not the end of life. Rather, it marks the beginning of a new phase of our life.

According to Islam, man has been created as an eternal being. His lifespan has been divided into two parts. The first is the pre-death phase, spent on earth; and the second is the post-death phase.

The pre-death phase of our life is a time for us to make preparations for our post-death phase, the life that is to come after we die and leave this world. The post-death phase is where we will reap the results of all that we had done in the pre-death phase of our life.

As per God’s Creation Plan, the phase before death is our preparatory period. Accordingly, we should focus completely on preparing ourselves for the eternal life that is to come after we die. We should know that in the post-death phase that we will have to face one day,

we will not have the chance to do any action whatsoever that can be of any use to us. In that phase of our life, we will only reap the fruits, sweet or bitter, of what we had sowed while in our pre-death phase.

Death is a message from life, as it were. And the message it delivers is this—that whatever good you need to do to earn yourself a good life after death, you should do it today, because tomorrow you may no longer be alive.

The First and the Second Life



When a human being takes birth in this world, it is what you could call his ‘first life’. Without having to make any effort at all, a new-born infant finds that everything that it needs has been carefully arranged for. It has a loving family that cares for it. The world around it is incredibly finely-tuned to make it favourable for it to live. It is enveloped by an amazing life-support system that provides all that it requires for survival. All these things the infant gets without having to do anything at all!

This new living being passes through various stages, and, finally, one day, it dies. Death is not its final end, however. Rather, it is the start of a new journey.

After death, man enters a world where, once again,

he is all alone. This time too he is a living, conscious being, but now he has been parted forever from all the many things that he possessed in the world that he came from.

After Death



Almost no one wants to die. Most people want to live long, till a ripe old age. Yet, everyone has to die some day or the other. We all want to set off on a long journey, to travel to somewhere really far-off, but before we reach our hoped-for destination death stops us in our tracks and carries us away.

Why does this happen? Why is it that we want to live long, but yet death arrives, suddenly and without our permission, and blots out all our dreams? Every person has definitely asked himself or herself this question and has tried to find an answer to it. We all want to know why we have to die. We all seek answers to existential questions about life and death.

We can get some clues about the answers to these questions from modern scientific discoveries about DNA. Every person has a certain DNA. Your DNA is a complete encyclopaedia of your personality. It contains information about many things, big and small, related to your personality. If you decode this DNA, you will

find that it is much bigger than the most voluminous encyclopaedia.

Yet, intriguingly, the DNA does not contain information about one major aspect of our personality. If you study someone's DNA, you can get an idea of everything about him except for one thing. And this one thing is when precisely this person will die.

This, then, is nature's announcement to the effect that man is an eternal creature, a creature that will never die. Man has eternal life. Death does not put an end to him.

Among all living beings, it is only man who has a conception of 'tomorrow'. Animals live only in the present moment, in 'today'. No animal has a conception of 'tomorrow'. Because they have a limited or lower-level consciousness, animals are born in 'today' and they also die in the same state. But man is an exceptional creature in this regard. He is the only creature who has an understanding of 'tomorrow'.

To properly appreciate the import of this point, bear in mind that human beings have unlimited ambitions, and that they die with many of their ambitions remaining unfulfilled. In this sense, every man is a case of unfulfilled desires. In the whole of the cosmos, man is the only such creature. No other creature suffers from this painful dilemma.

This fact tells us that there must certainly be an answer to this dilemma. Human desires and ambitions ought to be fulfilled, just as is the case with all other creatures. This indicates that there is a world that will come after

this present one, a world where human beings will find complete fulfilment of their wishes and hopes.

There is another important aspect of this issue—and that is, that the desire for justice is inherent in, or intrinsic to, human nature. By nature, human beings want to be treated justly. They desire justice in this world. They want good people to be fully rewarded for their goodness and evildoers to be suitably punished. This is a basic demand of human nature. This demand, too, requires that there should be another world after this one, where justice finally prevails, because it is not possible for this to happen in this world.

If you keep all this in mind, the concept of the Hereafter will become absolutely real and clear to you. With belief in the Hereafter you get a complete answer to every question. Everything falls into place.

Time's Up!



An examination was being held in a school. The students were bent over their desks, busily writing away, hurriedly answering their examination paper. Then, in a short while, the bell rang, announcing that the time allotted for the examination was over. The invigilator called out: “Stop writing! Time’s up!”

The very same thing that happens in an examination hall in a school happens, on a wider scale, in every

person's life. In this world, every human being is sitting in a vast examination hall as it were. Each of us is writing an examination, whose allotted period extends for the entire span of time that has been given to us, from the time we are born till the moment we die. This period has been fixed for each one of us already. As soon as this period is up, God's angel arrives and announces that the time given to us in this world is up! The angel tells us that we now must face death and appear before our Lord and Creator and be answerable for all that we did while on earth.

What every student goes through in an examination hall helps us understand what the examination of life is all about. Life is just an examination. And death is an event that takes you to the next world, where you will face the consequences of all your deeds while on earth.

While sitting in the examination hall and writing his paper, a student is very alert and serious. His entire attention is on what he is writing. He is determined to perform excellently in the examination, and so he tries his best and puts in all his effort.

We need to lead our lives and to pass through this examination of life with precisely the same mindset. We should be fully determined to correctly answer the 'examination paper' of life that God has given us, so that when the time allotted for the examination is over and our results are out, we should be greeted with the good news of having passed, not with the shame of having failed.

The Purpose of Life



When a child comes into this world, he finds a vast life-support system in place that provides him with everything he needs in order to survive and grow. This system is so perfect and so complete that it fulfils man's every need, small and big, and in just the right way. From the earth to the sun, the entire universe is engaged, in an astoundingly exceptional manner, in the service of man.

After we come into this world, we spend the span of time that has been allotted to us here, and then, all of a sudden, we die. Human beings want to live forever, but, generally within a hundred years or so at the very most, we are forced to leave this world forever, against our will.

Every human being goes through two basic experiences—first, the experience of life; and, then, the experience of death. If you seriously reflect on these two experiences, you are bound to discover the amazing fact that our having been sent into this world is not as a reward for anything, but, rather, for the purpose of an examination.

In this world, we think and feel that we are free. We have been given this freedom so as that it can be ascertained who among us has used this freedom

properly and led a principled life, and who has not done so.

If you think about that seriously, you will realize that death is the moment of our having to appear before God. We are actually eternal beings, but, as mentioned earlier, our lives are divided into two periods: the pre-death and post-death periods. The former period is for the purpose of being tested, while the latter period is when we will be rewarded or punished, as the case might be, according to the record of our deeds in the pre-death phase of our lives.

Today, we find ourselves as living and conscious beings. And when we die, we will be taken, while still as living and conscious beings, towards the next world. Each one of us is going to face that awesome day, sooner or later. It would be an unimaginably serious moment. Even after death we will remain the same beings as we were earlier, but everything that we possessed while on earth will have been stripped away from us forever. We will have left behind for good the world where we had spent the short pre-death period of our lives. In front of us another world will stretch, where we will have to live for eternity.

A truly wise man is he who prepares himself adequately for this day.

The Reality of the Present World



If you are an employee of the government and you take long leave without approval, the government has the right to term this as what is called ‘break in service’. It will cause you to lose your seniority. In fact, you might even be demoted to the same position where you started off from when you joined government service. A break in service is a separation from employment status.

The same principle applies, but on a wider scale, in the case of every human being. This general principle can be called ‘break in history’. In other words, your ‘history’—your life in this world—is, one day or the other, going to come to a complete stop. The ‘history’ that you have brought into being through all your many actions while you were in this world will suddenly come to an end with your death.

In this world, each one of us stands on the foundations of this ‘history’ that we have constructed for ourselves. We all avail of different resources and opportunities—in the form of family, wealth, friends, fame, influence, power and so on—which we use to construct our own individual ‘histories’. This ‘history’ that we create for ourselves establishes our identities, through which

we know ourselves and others know us. Each of us is engaged throughout our life in efforts to build up our own 'history', the basis on which our sense of our identity rests.

Yet, none of us gets to remain living in our 'history' for too long. Within a hundred years or so, death suddenly arrives and whisks us away. Death is a decision that cannot be revoked. It separates us from our pre-death period and takes us into the post-death period of our lives. In this sense, death can be said to mark a 'break' in our 'history'.

In this world, we spend all our energies trying to build a little world of our own, a world of our many hopes and desires. All of us are living in these little worlds that we have ourselves constructed, till death carries us away. Death forces us to leave our worlds behind and takes us into a different world, a world for which we may not have made any preparations at all. Behind us is the world we have left for good, and in front of us is an endless world, which we may not have been at all prepared for.

The pre-death period is for every one of us the opportunity to prepare for the eternal life that is to come after death. If you spend this opportunity simply on worldly pleasures and in accumulating material wealth, you will have to spend the post-death period of life in complete deprivation. Death is bound to separate you from your pre-death 'history'—all the worldly things and name and fame that you had accumulated.

How tragic it is that people are wasting the precious

opportunities that they have today to shape their 'history' in a manner that could help them after they die! How terrible will that deprivation be that people who have wasted these opportunities will face one day, and which they will not be able to save themselves from!

Building This World, or Preparing For the Hereafter?



If you look about you, you will see that everyone (including probably yourself, too) seems frantically busy with something or the other. People are so caught up doing things that they do not seem to have the time to listen to or think about anything else. They know of just one way of using their time and other resources—and that is, to spend it on seeking to achieve the numerous worldly goals they have set for themselves. People's busyness is geared simply to one thing. And that is, to make their little worlds as nice as possible. By and large, they are concerned only with worldly progress.

Death, however, is a bold rebuttal of this worldview. Everyone has to die one day, and so all the worldly wealth you have accumulated will one day be snatched from you. You will have to leave behind forever the little world that you have spent all your energy, time and other resources in building. You will be taken towards

such a world for which you possess nothing at all if you did not adequately prepare for it while in this world.

Every person who is born into this world very soon starts thinking in the same worldly terms as the people around him. Like them, he, too, gets entangled in all sorts of materialistically-oriented pursuits. Because of this, materialistic thinking has become a part of the continuing flow of human history. This sort of thinking has become such an integral part of cultural traditions that it seems almost impossible for anyone to be able to think free from it.

It is here that man's real test takes place. If you want to be truly successful in life, you must extricate yourself from this conventional way of thinking and begin to think for yourself. You must separate yourself from traditional culture and thinking and form your opinions based on reality. If you do this, you will at once realize that the real issue for us human beings is not this-worldly progress, but, instead, preparation for the eternal Hereafter. Our real task is to prepare while in our pre-death period for the post-death period of our lives. We must work on developing ourselves in such a way that in the eternal life that will unfold after death we will be considered to be successful.

This World is Temporary



There was once a man, a Muslim whom people used to call Mullah-ji. He reared buffaloes and sold their milk for a living.

Mullah-ji had a friend, a trader, who had a business in iron goods. One day, one of Mullah-ji's buffaloes died. He mentioned this to his friend. His friend said to him, "Mullah-ji, your business is in things that breathe, and their breath lasts for only a short time and then they are dead. A buffalo is only there as long as it can breathe. Once it stops breathing, that's the end!"

What Mullah-ji's friend said is true not just for buffaloes but for every human being, too. Like buffalos and other animals, we, too, breathe for a short time and then we are dead!

"Many people spend their entire lives earning as much money as they can, only to be taken to task by God in the Hereafter." With great pain, these words often tumble out of my mouth.

When I look at people around me, I see them frantically busy, spending all their time and other resources only to amass money. Their days and nights are spent in this obsessive pursuit.

Reflect, in this regard, on what the Quran (102) relates:

Greed for more and more distracted you [from God] till you reached the grave. But you will soon come to know. But you will soon come to know. Indeed, were you to know the truth with certainty, you would see the fire of Hell. You would see it with the eye of certainty. Then on that Day you shall be questioned about your worldly favours.

It is not just secular people, people who do not believe in religion or who do not take religion seriously, who are caught up in this obsession of earning as much money as they can. Many so-called religious people are no different at all in this regard. Externally, they may look religious, but their religiosity is simply ritualistic. They, too, have made money their purpose and goal. They use every possible means to maximize their money. There is just one use of all this money—and that is to increase what people regard as their material welfare. That is what they see as the purpose of their lives.

But our stay on earth has to end one day, and we have to be separated forever from all the material things that we may have accumulated here. In amassing material wealth, people think they are making great progress. But death tells them that they were only journeying towards their own destruction.

How strange it is, isn't it? People spend the best part of their lives and most of their energies in manner that would make them regret in the Hereafter. Those who dream of luxuriating in a heaven of material pleasures in this world will soon be taken away from all that they have built around themselves. They will then be standing before God to account for their deeds.

Death: A Reminder



We often see or read or hear about people dying. We should take this as a very valuable learning experience. Someone else's death should lead us to be mindful of our own impending death. It should provoke us to remember that we, too, will have to meet the same fate, some day or the other. It should remind us to suitably prepare for our own death, which is on its way.

Death is the end of the pre-death period of life for the deceased, while for those who are still alive in this world it is a reminder of their own impending death. When a person dies, it appears that someone who could speak has now fallen silent. But his silence is in itself a loud announcement to those who remain in this world. It calls out to us: "What had to happen with me has now taken place! It will happen with you, too! And so, prepare yourself for it!"

These days, it has become a fashion to celebrate birthdays. In some families, celebrating birthdays starts as soon as a child turns a year old. Better than that, however, would be to consider a birthday as a day that reminds us about our death, instead of our birth. The fact is that our lives are continuously moving towards our 'countdown', our day of meeting with death. Our

every birthday tells us that we have one year less left of the time allotted to us on earth!

Many people celebrate birthdays with much gusto. “Happy Birthday To You!” they excitedly sing. But if you reflect on the matter realistically, the reality is just the opposite. Every birth anniversary of ours tells us that our death, the day when we will have to account for our lives on earth, has drawn one year closer, and that for preparing for the eternal Hereafter we now have one year less.

On the Other Side of Life



On the face of it, we are complete beings. But in actual fact, we are not. We have eyes to see, but without external light we cannot see. We have ears to hear, but without external air we cannot hear. We have feet to walk, but if the force of gravity did not exist and there was no ground underneath, we would not have been able to walk. We have mouths to eat, but if there is no food available we would not be able to eat anything.

Now, imagine a situation where you are just as you presently are, with all your bodily organs intact, but that the external things that relate to these organs have all been taken away from you. You have eyes, but there is no external light which you need in order to be able to see. You have a mouth, but there is no food available.

You have feet, but there is no ground below you to stand on. Furthermore, you are all alone. Everyone you knew has abandoned you.

This is no imaginary situation. This is precisely what each one of us is going to face one day, when we die!

The day of our meeting with death is racing towards us. We all have to face this day, one day or the other. There is absolutely no way we can avoid it. We need to realize this and to prepare for that momentous moment. That day will be for us as what is called a 'point of no return'. After that, we will have to face the consequences of our actions in this world.

Running Without a Destination



Everyone seems to be talking non-stop, doing this and that, being busy with all sorts of things, chasing all sorts of dreams. They are all driven with the purpose of trying to fulfil unlimited desires. They want to acquire all sorts of comforts for themselves and their children. This is the mad race of materialism. But what is the end result of it all? Everyone feels that his hopes have not been met, that his desires still remain unfulfilled. And so, people are living in terrible despair, bitterness, tension and frustration. They feel they have been deprived of, or denied, what they wanted. Nobody at all seems content. This is how their days and nights pass—

in this sorry predicament—till one day, the little world of their dreams comes crashing down when death sweeps them away.

People are busy with things that belong to this temporary world, instead of preparing themselves for the eternal life after death. The life of this world is a test, and hence it is God's responsibility to provide every one of us with the things that we need to undergo this test. But as far as life after death is concerned, God has not taken responsibility for it. Our life after death depends entirely on our actions in this world. There, you will reap as you have sown here, on earth. Yet, despite this, strangely, people are preoccupied doing everything possible for their life in this world but have completely forgotten the life that will come after death.

In this world, if you face a shortage of something today, you can make efforts and acquire what you need tomorrow. But in the life after death, you will not have the chance of engaging in any actions to make up for any shortage on account of your deeds while on earth.

Terrifying Result



In this world, we have many things that enable us to survive and flourish. We have physical bodies, for instance. We have friends and relatives. We have opportunities for work. We have money. There is an

amazing life-support system all around us that is finely-tuned to support life. And so on.

All these things are available to us in this world. Consciously or otherwise, we think that we own such things, or that they belong to us. We imagine that they will remain with us forever. But after a limited span of time, each of us dies, and we are forced to leave all these things behind. We now have to travel, all alone, to an entirely different world. We are confronted with eternity before us, for which we will find that we possess absolutely nothing at all.

Besides the material things of this world, there is something else that we have—our personal status. Each of us makes efforts in whatever way we can to establish a certain position for ourselves. We acquire a status in society. We create a unique ‘history’ for ourselves, which comes to be seen as part of our personality.

This status or position that we establish for ourselves in this world with great effort is also only temporary. Death will suddenly steal this away as well. After we die, we will enter the next world totally bereft of our material possessions as well as the worldly stature that we had so carefully sought to cultivate while on earth.

How many of us care to be mindful of this?

The World After Death



One day, I was sitting in my room when I heard a song being played from somewhere. The words went like this:

How will I spend those nights?

How will I spend those days?

Hearing these words, my mind suddenly turned to the thought of the life after death. I said to myself, “In his pre-death phase, man has everything. If he feels thirsty, there’s water to drink. If he’s hungry, there are different types of food that he can have. Everything that man needs is available in this world. And comforts and luxuries, too. How wonderful!”

And, I further thought, “All this is in the stage of life before death, though. In the stage of life after death, man might find himself in an eternal desert, where there won’t be anything at all for him. Suddenly, he might be in a state of total deprivation and loss!”

If you are conscious of the fact of your death that is certain to come, it is bound to shake you to the very roots.

Today, man has everything, and tomorrow, when death overtakes him, he will have nothing at all. This is man’s greatest problem. This realization should impel

us to think more about the life after death than about this world. It should lead us to plan for our future—our future in the life after death, so that we can be saved from a terrible fate, about which the Bible says:

There will be wailing and gnashing of teeth. (Matthew 13:42)

News of Death



Consider the case of a man in his mid-70s or so. When he was young, he was healthy. But now he suffers from various ailments. These ailments are actually news or a portent of his impending death. However, he does not consider them that way. Instead, he thinks of them simply as a condition that needs to be cured. And so, he goes from doctor to doctor, from one hospital to the next, in search of good treatment, till at last he exhausts all his money. He does not stop there, though. He takes a loan and goes in for an expensive course of treatment. Yet, that, too, fails to cure him. And then, in a short while he dies!

This is the story of not just one man, but, rather, of almost every single human being in the world.

Old age is for us actually an announcement that death is just round the corner. When you get old, you fall prey to all sorts of ailments. This happens in order to shake you up and make you realize that death is now

not far off. If you are sleeping, illness comes in order to force you to wake up. If you are awake, it comes in order to force you to get up. And if you have got up, it comes in order to force you to walk. Illness comes to make you realize that you are soon about to meet your death.

Old age and the difficulties that come with it always come to you to shock you into this realization so that you start preparing yourself for your death before it actually happens. In this way, you can ponder deeply on what might await you in the life after death and so you can accordingly plan how you want to spend your remaining time on earth.

But the fact is that most people simply do not learn at all from such things. Old age and illnesses are portents or heralds of death, but instead of thinking of death when these things happen, people only think about curing their ailments! They make the rounds of doctors and hospitals, but finally they die, in a state of total hopelessness. They do not manage to get the health that they seek. All that they get is death.

All of us see old and sick people—almost every day. Yet, how many of us take this sight as a portent of our own impending death? How many of us draw appropriate lessons from this and start preparing for our death by leading our life in an appropriate way?

Few, if any, of us do so. In this regard, almost all people are completely blind. It is only when death overtakes them that they might open their eyes. But to open your eyes when you die is absolutely useless. It is simply too late!

Death's Lesson

Once, I attended the burial service of a man. The man's body was washed, and he was wrapped up in a new sheet. People said the prayers that are recited on such occasions, and then, lifting the corpse on their shoulders, they headed to an empty grave. They lowered the body, with great respect, into the space and covered it up.

As this was happening, I thought, "Why has Islam ordained such honourable treatment for a dead body?"

It is a fact that after death, a human body is nothing more than mud. But unlike other mud, it is not thrown about here and there. Instead, it is treated like a human being.

Treating 'mud' as one would treat a human being is a commandment directed not at the dead body. Rather, its significance is for those who are still alive. Through a dead person an important lesson is conveyed to living people—that they, too, will meet the very same fate one day. In this way, the living can see themselves in the form of the dead. They can experience death before death arrives.

A man who was a living being like any of us is now dead. Just the other day, he was walking, talking, seeing, and so on, but now he lies perfectly still. The value he commanded in people's eyes has suddenly been

completely wiped out. God uses this event to convey a lesson about life to others.

When a Muslim dies, people wash and clean and clothe a corpse with great care and carry it to the grave that awaits it. And when they lower the corpse into the grave, each of them takes a handful of mud and puts it in the grave. They do this three times. While doing it the first time, they say *Minha khalaqnakum* ("From the earth We have created you"). When throwing in the mud the second time, they say *Wa fiha nuidukum* ("And We return you to it"). And the third time, they say *Wa minha nukhrijukum taratan ukhra* ("And from it We shall bring you forth a second time").

This putting mud in the grave three times is the climax of the whole event. In this way, it serves to remind us of the reality of man and of what our final destiny is.

Reading Our Own Funeral Prayers

Once, a Muslim man died, and after the funeral prayers were said, he was buried in a graveyard. A friend of mine went to attend the funeral prayers. The prayers were just about to start when a person who was standing next to him asked him, "Should I make the intention of offering *farz* (obligatory) or optional prayers?" My friend replied, "Make the intention of offering your own funeral prayer!"

As you can imagine, the man was really taken aback!

Later, my friend explained to the man that offering funeral prayers on the occasion of someone's death is not a mere ritual. Rather, it is a reminder of a very serious reality—of the fact that just as the person who has died has encountered death, one day, we, too, will meet the same fate. To say funeral prayers in congregation is actually a reminder of this fact.

A truly meaningful funeral prayer is one in which someone else's death provokes you to remember your own impending death. It leads you to realize that whatever has happened with the deceased is bound to happen with you as well. If this is how you think when you see a dead person, when you attend a funeral prayer you will feel that you are praying at your own funeral.

We should be constantly aware of death. We must think of it often. A person who is so heedless that someone else's death does not provoke him to think of his own impending death is a cold, unfeeling stone. To remember death often is an attribute of a truly sensitive person. Not to remember death is a sign of extreme insensitivity.

Marking Someone's Death



These days, it has become a common practice that if some “big” person dies, a large function is organized

in the name of offering condolences to the deceased, and messages of condolence are published in the newspapers. This is a wrongful innovation and is not in accordance with Islam. It was certainly not practised in the time of the Prophet and his Companions.

Islam teaches us that when we witness someone else's death, we should think of our own impending death, and that in our solitude, we should beseech God for ourselves and the deceased. Death is a reminder that God sends to us, telling us that just as one person has now died, every other human being, too, will die, one day or the other.

We should take death in this way, as a reminder. When we hear of, or witness, someone else's death, it should lead us to remember that one day we, too, will have to stand before God in the same way and receive our due. Being mindful of this, we should turn to God and seek His help.

Who is Eligible for Paradise?



Paradise is a world of unparalleled and unimaginable joy and comfort. Only those people will gain entry into Paradise who have paid its price, in the form of developing a heavenly character, thus proving themselves eligible for Paradise. Paradise is an eternal place in the neighbourhood of the eternal God. This place is only

for those fortunate people who are determined to pay the price for it. They need to prove their eligibility for this in terms of their actions while on earth.

To get a seat in eternal Paradise, you should be able to discover God and develop conviction in Him, although He is unseen in the present world. Living in space and time, you need to develop the vision that can see beyond. You need to find meaning in the midst of a dark jungle of words. Living in a sea of desires, you need to save yourself from drowning in it. You need to make yourself egoless. Living among people who wish you ill, you need to become a well-wisher of all. Possessing complete freedom, you need to voluntarily surrender yourself completely to God. You need to hear unspoken words and discover invisible truths. In a world full of lies and deceit, you need always to speak the truth. Surrounded by dishonesty, you need to be scrupulously honest.

God's angels are active, day and night, drawing up a list of people who are considered eligible for entry into Paradise. These are people who have attained God-realization, which has enabled them to shift their attention away from everything else and make God alone their supreme concern. Overwhelmed by the realization of the glory of God, all their feelings of pride and superiority have been wiped off. They are ever mindful of God's admonishment, which makes it impossible for them to indulge in worldly pleasures. They are deaf to the sounds that appear alluring to others. They see worldly progress and worldly deprivation as synonymous. Instead of going around trying to prove

that they are right, they are fond of admitting their own mistakes.

Paradise is a place that has real existence. You can enter Paradise if you possess the right qualities and have led the right sort of life while on earth. Only those people who have developed in them the divine qualities will be settled in Paradise. Entry into Paradise is not on the basis of any mysterious factors. Rather, it is only possible if during your life in this world you were able to cultivate a personality based on divine attributes.

Paradise is a land of the true, of people who have lived in and by the truth. In this world, these people are being selected for entry into Paradise after they die. Those who prove themselves to be true alone will be considered eligible for being settled in that eternal world.

Towards the Most Noble Companion



The Quran (66:11) says that when the king of ancient Egypt issued an order to kill his wife, Asiya, who was a believer, she prayed to God thus:

My Lord, build me a house in nearness to You in Paradise and save me from Pharaoh and his misdeeds. Save me from all evildoers.

These are the words of prayer of a common believer. This same prayer issued from the lips of the Prophet of Islam in his last moments in these words: *Allahumma, ar-Rafiq al-Aala*. It means, “O God, the Most Noble Companion!”

These two prayers are, in essence, synonymous. The first prayer is in the words of a common believer, and the second are the words of prayer that came from a prophet.

These two prayers are actually an expression of the feelings of a person of deep trust in God about death. This means that when death arrives, such a person's emotions are reflected in prayers such as these. At this moment, a person of deep trust in God feels that when he leaves behind everyone he knew in this world, he will attain closeness with God Almighty; that on abandoning the company of fellow men, he will be blessed with attendance in the assembly of angels; that when death separates him from his people, he will not be alone, but, rather, will have the most noble companionship, that of God. And so, for him death will become a journey from a lesser companionship with humans towards a higher companionship with God.

The above-mentioned prayers are not mere words. They are the expression of the inner yearnings of a person of deep faith. Such a person hopes that the stage of life that comes after death should be better for him than the one that with his death will get over for him. In this world, he was blessed with many things from God. These were on a temporary basis. He now hopes that in the world after death he will receive loftier blessings

from God, as an eternal reward. He hopes that death will become for him an exit from this imperfect world and an entry into a perfect one.

The 25th Hour



The 25th Hour is the name of a book by a French writer. It talks about the current state of the world, about how it is divided into rival camps, each trying to eliminate the others, and about how this rivalry can only end in the complete extermination of humanity. A frantic arms race transforms the whole world into a vast dumping-ground for weapons, and continuous war preparations drag the globe to the brink of total destruction. The author remarks that our 24th hour is past, and that now our 25th hour—when the world will end—is just about to start.

What the author relates in connection with this enormous, final war triggered off by human beings has echoes with the Divine Day of Judgment. God has created this world for a limited period of time in order to test human beings. The duration of this period is known to God alone. We humans have no definite knowledge of how long it will be. At any moment, God can announce the end of this period. And then, the whole world and the entire edifice of human civilization will be destroyed.

If you see things in this perspective, you will realize that our every moment on Earth can be the ‘final moment’. When we get up in the morning, we can never be sure if we shall get to see the evening of that same day. And every evening, we have no idea if we will live to see the next morning.

Every moment of ours in this world could very well be our last. Any and every moment can possibly be the last moment for the whole of humanity as well, marking the end of the period that God has determined for it—the passing away of its 24th hour, as it were, and humanity’s entry into its decisive ‘25th hour’.

People are nervous of a nuclear war, but what they should really be petrified of is the announcement of the Day of Judgment, because it is not definite that a nuclear war will ever happen, but that the Day of Judgment will come some day is certain and definite, and its consequences will be ever-lasting.

At Death’s Door



Death is the most certain stage in life. Every one of us definitely has to pass through this stage. For every being that is bestowed with life, the arrival of death is a must. Every living creature will one day die. Every eye that sees will one day lose its light. Every tongue that speaks will one day fall silent. Every person will one

day be brought to stand before Death's door. At that moment, the world will be behind him, and in front of him will be the everlasting Hereafter. He will be leaving a world that he will never visit again and will be entering a world that he will never be able to come out of. He will be removed from the field of action and taken to where he will have to face the eternal consequences of his actions while he was on earth.

Life is an unreliable thing, whereas death is absolutely certain. We are alive only because we have not died as yet. And we do not know when death will happen. Every moment, we are advancing towards death. We are closer to death than to life. People think that they are alive, but actually they are dead. We have no idea of when death will arrive. It can arrive at any moment. In fact, it actually keeps arriving at every moment, and so, it is more appropriate to say that it has already arrived, rather than to say that it will arrive sometime in the future. This is why a saying of the Prophet Muhammad tells us to count ourselves among the dead, or the 'people of the graves'.

Death nullifies everything. It is the most serious event of our lives. If death were simply the end of life, it would not be that significant. If death only meant that we would no longer exist as beings that walk, see and hear, it would, despite all its terrors, be simply an event that occurs at a particular moment, rather than an issue with eternal implications. But the fact is that death is not the end of our lives. Rather, it is the beginning of a new and eternal life. Death means entry into a world

based on the eternal consequences of our actions in the life before death.

Every person is travelling from life towards death. For some, this journey is for the sake of this world. For others, it is for the sake of the Hereafter. Some people spend their lives drowned in the things of this visible world. Others live in the things of the invisible or spiritual world. Some people spend their entire lives rushing about trying to fulfil their desires and satisfy their egos. Others are overwhelmed by the fear and the love of God.

In this world, the difference between these two types of people may not be apparent in all respects, but this is not so as far as what is going to happen after their deaths is concerned. He who lives in God and in the consciousness of the Hereafter is saving himself, while he who lives in worldly pleasures and the desires that his ego constantly hankers after is destroying himself.

The Moment of Death



The moment of death is more serious than any other imaginable or unimaginable moment. All other difficulties that human beings encounter pale into utter insignificance in the face of death.

Death is the journey towards the most serious stage in life, a stage where one has no control on anything

whatsoever, where one is entirely empty-handed and completely helpless.

Human beings are so weak that they are unable to tolerate even a minor unfavourable condition or situation. If you are poked with a needle or have to face hunger or thirst for a while or do not get sleep for a few days, your anguish will know no bounds. But because in this world we have all that we need, we have forgotten how vulnerable we actually are. We are unaware of our own reality.

Suppose this world were snatched away from us, this world where there is air and light and so on and where, by using of the bounties of Nature, human civilization is made possible. In such a situation, it will be impossible for human beings to create a similar world elsewhere in the cosmos.

When human beings face difficulties, they start making a big hue and cry about it. But if they knew about the impending Day of Judgment, they would cry out, "O God! What is going to happen then is much more severe than what is happening now, here in this world!"

Because in this world human beings revel in honour and comfort, they are overwhelmed by pride. But if they knew what is going to happen on the Day of Judgment, they would cry out, "O God! This honour and comfort have no value at all if they do not last after death!"

Death is not the end of our life. Rather, it is the start of a new stage of life. This stage will, for some, be a dungeon, where they will face the most deadly of all

possible torments, while for others it will be the door leading to the highest of all possible joys.

How Strange!



How strange it is that with someone's death, a throbbing life is blotted out all of a sudden! A smiling face is extinguished in a second, as if it were even more valueless than a bit of mud! A soul, with all its hopes and dreams, is suddenly removed completely from sight, as if its hopes and dreams had no reality at all!

Life is enormously meaningful, but death appears to make it meaningless. No matter how free human beings seem to be, they are utterly helpless in the face of death! For human beings, their desires and dreams are very dear, but death snatches all these in a trice!

If we were to remain aware of our impending death, we would never go astray. The secret of a successful life is to agree to live within one's limits, and, for this purpose, death is the greatest teacher.

The Real Journey



Jabir Husain was a guard in the Indian Railways. His term of employment was just about to get over, when, on 17th July 1981, he boarded the Indore-Bilaspur Express. This was his last journey as a railway guard, because the next day he was going to retire. He had chalked out a detailed plan for his life after retirement. Setting off on his last journey as a railway guard, he said to his friends, “Tomorrow is the beginning of my new life!”

As things turned out, this journey did, indeed, prove to be Jabir Husain’s last one, after which his new life began. But it was not at all in the way he thought it would be. It was in a totally different manner. The train in which he was travelling was sixty kilometres from its destination when another train crashed into it. The train’s guard cabin was crushed and Jabir Husain died on the spot. A report in *The Indian Express* (18th July 1981), quoted a railway officer who commented on his death thus:

Sixty kilometres more and it would have been the end of his official journey.

But the very same thing holds true for every single person in this world. Everyone believes that he is going to live for a long time. He thinks that his journey will

end only after ‘sixty kilometres’, but the Angel of Death grabs hold of him before those ‘sixty kilometres’ are crossed.

In this world, every person has made a ‘plan for tomorrow’ for himself—like Jabir Husain’s post-retirement plan—but suddenly, death takes hold of him and tells him that his ‘tomorrow’ will happen not in this world, but in another one. And it is where one thinks one’s journey has ended that one’s real journey starts.

The Journey of Life



Every day, innumerable people enter through the door of death. Every day, hundreds of thousands of people set off from their homes but on the way to their destination they are caught by God’s angels, who take them to the stage of the Hereafter, instead of to where they wanted to go.

Every person has built in his mind an entire world full of hopes and desires. He imagines that he is advancing towards the world of his hopes, that he is walking in the direction of the ‘tomorrow’ of his dreams. But very soon he comes to know that he is heading, not to the world of his hopes, but, rather, to the world of God, towards the Hereafter. People are simply unaware of where they are heading and where they will arrive.

People generally give their all for the sake of their

children. But before they can see and rejoice in their children's future death drags them off to their own future—the eternal Hereafter—for which they had made no preparation at all. People build magnificent houses, hoping to live there in comfort, but even before they can enter their dream-houses, death grabs them away from them. People struggle to become as economically rich as they can, thinking that this will carry them to the pinnacle of honour and progress, but very soon they learn that what awaits them is just a cold, silent grave.

In the Face of Death



Louis XI (1423-83), Emperor of France, did not want to die, and so, towards the end of his life, he began living in a closed fort, which very few people were permitted to enter. A deep moat was dug all around the fort so that no one could come close to him. 40 archers stood on the walls of the fort at all times, while 40 horsemen patrolled the fort, day and night. The Emperor had declared that if anyone tried to enter the fort without permission, he should be killed at once. Inside the fort, all sorts of luxuries were made available for the Emperor to enjoy so that he would never feel sad.

Louis XI was so keen on staying alive that he ordered that the word 'Death' must not be uttered in his presence!

An expert doctor was in constant attendance on him. The doctor was paid a huge salary of ten thousand gold crowns every month.

But all of this could not save the Emperor from old age and from growing infirm. Towards the end of his life, he became so weak that he could hardly lift anything to put into his mouth! Despite this, his desire to live turned into a terrible obsession.

One day, someone told the Emperor that certain sea-turtles lived till around 500 years and that they could help prolong human life. So, the Emperor dispatched some men to bring some of these creatures for him. The turtles were kept in a pond near his chambers in the hope that this would help him live longer!

Finally, Louis XI fell prey to paralysis and death overtook him. Thus he learned, at last, that no one can win over death. When he lay dying, his last words were:

I am not as ill as you think I am.

All his efforts to evade death failed. And on 30th August 1483, he died.

From Riches to Ashes



Ghanshyam Das Birla (1894-1983) was a famous Indian industrialist. He started his career at the age of 18, beginning with a small business. His business

expanded so much that today his family is one of the wealthiest in the whole of India.

Mr. Birla led a very disciplined life. Every morning, he would get up at around five. He remained continuously busy with work till nine in the evening. Instead of alcohol, he would drink coffee. In between meals, he would take nothing but water. Often, he would cook his food himself.

Every morning, Mr. Birla would set out for a walk. No matter where he was, in India or abroad, this was part of his routine. On 11th June 1983, he was in London. That morning, he had his breakfast and went out towards Regent's Park for a stroll. Shortly after, he experienced some pain, and his assistants who were with him took him back to his house. He fell unconscious and was taken to a hospital. There, he recovered his consciousness for a short while.

He asked the doctor, "What is wrong with me, Doctor?"

The doctor replied that he would examine him in five minutes and then let him know. But before the doctor could finish his investigation, Mr. Birla died.

In his will, Mr. Birla had mentioned that his last rites should be conducted in the place where he died. And so, his body was cremated in London. Later, his ashes were brought to India and scattered in rivers there.

Mr. Birla did not study in a regular school. He developed his capabilities through his own hard work. He was the author of several books. One of these was

titled in Hindi *Rupya ki Kahani* or ‘The Story of the Rupee’.

Mr. Birla wrote ‘The Story of the Rupee’, but finally he himself was to become ‘The Story of Ashes’.

Exactly the same holds true for every other person, too. Everyone is writing the story of his success, although finally the place where he will arrive is the grave.

When the Journey Will End



The express train had covered a long distance and was nearing its destination. The railway station was only a short distance away. The passengers received a new boost of life, as it were. They were up and about—some were packing their bags, others were changing their clothes, and yet others were looking out of the window expectantly. Everyone’s heart was beating fast, excited about the joyous moment of arrival, when they would step off the train and head to where they had to.

But just then, there was an enormous blast. The train had crashed into another train, and what happened next is not difficult to imagine. Joys turned, all of a sudden, into sorrows; life turned into death; excitement turned into tragedy.

This is what life is. After an enormous amount of effort, someone seeks to acquire a stable economic status. He puts all his determination into making

a house for himself. He spends his life chasing what he thinks is success. But at precisely that moment, he dies. He abandons his house and is laid to sleep in his grave. His body dissolves into mud or becomes food for insects. He is so completely separated from all the things that he spent his life working for that it seems that there was never any relationship between them at all to begin with.

He who chases the dream of a mansion is compelled to enter the grave, and then, from the grave he will appear on the Day of Judgment. The world in the grave is completely different from the world of his desires. There, he is so poor that he does not have even a shred of cloth for his body. He is separated from all the wealth that he spent his entire life earning. He leaves behind all his companions. He loses all his strength. Not one of the things that he used to boast about when he was in the world remains with him.

O! What an absurd journey it is, if, at its very outset itself it turns out to be a tragedy!

A Door, Not a Grave



“Hafizji’s son has died. The funeral prayer is about to be held. I’ve come to call you.”

Hearing this, I shut my book, and, after making my ablutions, I set off with him.

When I reached the graveyard, I found a few other people standing there. I counted them—they were 17 in all, young and old, including people from the family of the deceased. I recalled an incident from a month ago, when a relative of Sheikh Fazl Ali had died and his body had been brought to this same graveyard. That day, there had been so many people that it was difficult to count them all. It was as if the entire Muslim population of the locality had gathered there.

A few minutes after I got there, the imam, the prayer-leader, of the locality stood up to lead the funeral prayer. I stood in line with the others, making the intention of praying. The imam read the prayer so fast that I could not read even a dua (supplication to God) fully. I heard the phrase *Allahu Akbar* ('God is Great!') being rapidly uttered, and shortly after, the imam finished the prayer. People put on their shoes and got up to go, in such a way as if they had just finished a mere formality in the name of attending a funeral prayer.

The grave was close by. I went towards it. When I got there, I found that it was still being dug. A few people stood around in groups. Some were relating stories of oppression. Someone complained about the severity of the weather. Someone else offered his knowledge about the prices of things. In other words, people were talking about this and that.

I stood by the grave, silently. My mind was churning with verses from the Quran and sayings of the Prophet that talk about the Day of Judgment, Heaven, Hell and so on. It seemed as if this grave was an open door that I was standing in front of, and that, through it, I was

witnessing sights of the other world with my own eyes. My heart turned restless, and I uttered these words:

The real problem of life is not the one in which people are entangled. Rather, the real problem is the one that will appear after death. If only people knew what this person in the grave is facing! He has left this makeshift world and is heading towards the real world. This grave that is being dug before us is not really a grave, but, rather, a door that has been opened for the deceased to enter the other world. Passing through this door, he will cross over to the other side.

Whenever someone dies, it is a very special moment. It is as if at that moment, the door leading out to the other world, which is hidden from us, is opened for a short while. If you possess eyes that can truly see, you can clearly view through this door this other world where all of us, one day or the other, have to go to. But the sights of the present world have so bedazzled people that even when they stand before this opened door they see nothing of what is on the other side. Even though they stand so close to reality, they remain totally unaware of it.

What Really Brings a Person Down



51 year-old Mr. P.V. Venkateswaran was the chief marketing manager in a government organization. It was the evening of the 29th of May 1982. He had attended a meeting, which was held on the eighth floor of a building in Delhi. After this, he stepped out of the office, and, along with his colleagues, went towards the elevator. He saw that the elevator door was open. He thought that the elevator had arrived, although actually the elevator was on the ninth floor.

Mr. Venkateswaran went towards the elevator door. He was very pleased with the decisions that had been taken at the meeting. He put one foot out, meaning to enter the elevator. But since it was empty, he went crashing down all the way from the eighth floor! His doctor was present then, but at this time all he could do was to rush down and see his corpse and announce that he had died.

Mr. Venkateswaran was a very successful officer. A government journal described him in these words:

A thoroughbred professional and a dashing, innovative manager with fire in his belly and ideas in his mind, an astute general.

Mr. Venkateswaran's story is a rare, almost unique, one if you see it from the point of view of this world. But if you look at it from the point of view of the Hereafter, everyone is doing precisely the same thing as Mr. Venkateswaran did on that fateful day. Every person is, in the enthusiasm of intelligence and success, putting his foot on a spot that is going to drop him straight into the pit of the Hereafter.

To speak in a disrespectful way to someone, to torment him, to take revenge against him, to oppress him or to mock him—all these are, as it were, putting your foot on the empty 'eighth floor'. All such actions will take you straight down into the pit of devastation, and then no one can help you—no companion and no wishful thinking of any sort.

Every person is putting his foot into the pit, although he imagines that he is actually stepping onto a safe platform.

The Human Tragedy



Dr. Uttam Prakash (1928-1982) was a famous surgeon. He was the Head of the Department of Surgery of the All-India Institute of Medical Sciences. An international congress on surgery was to be held in Delhi in February 1982, which he was to preside over.

But just three days before this, he had a heart attack and died. He was 54 years old.

The success of the international congress would have greatly boosted the respect that Dr. Prakash enjoyed. He was very concerned that the congress should go off well. He had invited the President of India to inaugurate it. But when all the arrangements had been made, he heard from the Secretariat of the President's House that the President could attend the congress only if the Central Health Minister was also present on the occasion. Apparently, this was necessary according to official protocol.

Before this, Dr. Prakash had not planned to invite the Health Minister, but now it became necessary. And so, he approached the Health Minister's office. But there, he ran into another obstacle. The Health Minister did not agree to attend the congress. Perhaps he thought it an affront to his dignity to attend an event to which he had not been originally invited. This was such a blow to Dr. Prakash that just three days before the congress, he suffered a heart attack and died.

No one dies before his time. But the *Hindustan Times* (16th February 1982) very aptly commented about Dr. Prakash that:

He was the most worried man in town before he took the long road.

In this world, people cannot tolerate losing their respect. But, what will their condition be in the world that is to come after death, when all the blessings of this

world shall be taken away? Then God will decide whom to settle in Paradise and whom to award punishment.

O Man! You cannot tolerate even the hurt that a tiny pebble causes, but if you are not careful, an entire mountain of torments is going to burst upon on you soon when you die and face the eternal Hereafter!

To Leave



When the British ruled India, Calcutta was for long the capital of the country. Then, in 1911, the British decided to shift the capital to Delhi. The British architect, Edwin Lutyens (1869-1944), prepared the plan for the new capital. Construction work began in 1913, to the south of Delhi, and soon a magnificent city—New Delhi—came into being.

This was a time when a new political wave had overtaken much of the world—that of nationalist movements. These revolutionary stirrings had undermined the very rationale of colonialism. A freedom movement had established its roots in India. It was evident that British rule in India would not last very long.

After New Delhi was established, a French leader came on a visit to India. When he came to New Delhi and saw the grand buildings of the new capital, he commented, “What a magnificent world they built to leave!”

This is not the story of the British in India alone, however. In fact, it is everyone's story. In this world, every person has his hopes and desires. He expends all his energies on building a grand palace of his dreams. But just at the time when he has finished constructing his dream-palace, the Angel of Death suddenly arrives and whisks him away from the world where he has toiled so hard to build his palace, taking him to what the Hungarian-British writer Arthur Koestler (d. 1983) aptly terms as the 'Unknown Country'.

If this is all that life is, it would be an absurd and painful story. But just as everything in this world is complete only with its pair, this world, too, has a metaphorical counterpart—the Hereafter. If someone lives oblivious of the Hereafter, his life is definitely nothing but a complete tragedy. But for one who avails of the opportunities of this world for the sake of a good future in the Hereafter, his life here on earth is a valuable step towards a new and more successful life after death.

Without the Hereafter, a human being's life is just meaningless passage of time, ending in sorrow. But if you live with an awareness of the reality of the Hereafter, your life can become profoundly meaningful.

Thinking of Death Leads to Reform



A criminal was told that the court had passed a sentence against him and that the next day he was to be hanged. When he learned about what was going to happen to him the next day, it was as if he had already been hanged. Life, for him, suddenly became totally valueless. He stopped laughing and even speaking. He was drained of all his strength. He could not even move his hands or feet.

Death informs us that this is what is going to happen to us all. Every person who appears to be alive today is going to be taken to the 'gallows' to be 'hanged' tomorrow. Yet, no one wants to think about this at all. Everyone is engrossed in his 'today'. No one thinks of his 'tomorrow', when death will strike. Here, every person is a 'criminal', but very few know this.

We move about, see, talk, hear, and so on. We spend our lives engrossed in material pursuits and in relationships with others. Then, suddenly, something utterly strange happens. Without our being asked, death overtakes us. Our feet stop walking. Our eyes lose their sight. We are separated from everything and enter into the solitude of the grave.

Death indicates to us our reality. It tells us that we are moving from a situation where, in this world, we think we have control over things, to another situation, in another world, where we will have no control over anything at all. It tells us that we are moving from light to darkness, from everything to nothing. Before death, humans are in a world where they think they are the masters of their destiny. But after death, they are taken to a world where they are compelled to accept being completely subordinated to Someone Else—God.

If you keep this reality in mind, your life will be totally transformed. It will make you realize, for instance, how absurd it is to trouble others, because you will have to answer for this after death, when you yourself will be under Someone Else's control. It will make you ashamed of thinking yourself to be superior to others, because you will realize that the supposed superiority that will one day be snatched away from you is actually totally unreal.

Death's Assault



Alexander (b. 356 BCE) was son of the Greek king Philip. Within ten years of ascending the throne he conquered a vast portion of the world. But what happened to him finally? He died in a palace in a town in Iraq as pathetically as a pauper dying in his hovel.

In his life, he got whatever he desired, but he left this world empty-handed. His vast empire was divided up among his three military generals after he died because his only son had been murdered while he was still alive.

Alexander could not tolerate any sort of opposition. He believed that opposition should be crushed as soon as it reared its head. It is said that the secret of his vast conquests was his lightning speed. He would rush and immediately strike at and vanquish his enemy. No other military leader of his times was of the same calibre in this regard. But death proved to be even swifter than him. On 13th June 323 BCE, when death assaulted him, he had no option whatsoever other than to meekly surrender before it.

Death comes to tell us how powerless we are before God's power. Every day, we see death arriving all around us. Yet, we learn no lesson from this. We choose to be blind to this greatest reality of life, till, one day, death arrives at the appointed time for us and takes us away, before we have thought about it and learnt the lessons that we should have from it.

Death is the greatest lesson for Man. Yet, Man refuses to learn from it.

The Impending Storm



On the 11th of August 1979, floods struck the town of Morvi, in Gujarat, in western India, wreaking enormous destruction. Torrential rains caused a dam near the town to burst. A wall of water, some 20 feet high, swept down from the dam into the town, and in a short while, almost the whole town was destroyed. It was estimated that some 25 thousand of the town's roughly 40 thousand people perished in the flood.

An eye-witness account of the havoc unleashed by the flood was published in the 19th August 1979 edition of the *Hindustan Times*. It spoke of the survivors thus:

Some have lost their speech and look absolutely dazed and blank.

Events like this that keep happening in the world remind us of the Day of Judgment. The enormous 'flood' on the Day of Judgment, too, will come about all of a sudden. On that day, too, many people will be so devastated that they will be dumbstruck. Their tongues had never ceased to wag while they were in this world, but at that moment, their tongues will be firmly locked up. They will be stunned at the destruction they are experiencing and will not be able to utter even a single word.

On the other hand, on that Day there will be other

people, who will be told that this enormous destruction and devastation will not harm them at all, and that they will receive God's reward.

On the Day of Judgment



|mam Bukhari, a noted early Muslim scholar, has cited a narration attributed to Abdullah ibn Masud, according to which the Prophet Muhammad told him to read out a portion of the Quran to him. The Prophet explained to Abdullah that he liked hearing the Quran from others. And so, Abdullah began reciting the Surah An-Nisa, a chapter of the Quran, till he reached the verse, "How will it be, then, when We bring from every people a witness and bring you as a witness against these?" (4:41) The Prophet told him to stop. Then, Abdullah saw tears in the Prophet's eyes.

How strange that time will be when God shall assemble His court! At that time, no one will be able to proudly strut about or deny God. People who were thought of by others as valueless and so were ignored by them will be brought forth as His special servants. People whom God had chosen to inform others of the impending Day of Judgment, people whom others thought of as the weakest among them, will be those who shall bear witness that will determine who shall be rewarded and who shall be punished.

Imagine the condition of those people then who, while they were in the world, used to speak incessantly, but will now find that they have turned completely dumb! And of people who in the world were considered to be respectable and powerful but who will now find themselves absolutely powerless! When their reality is exposed, some people who, in this world, have donned the garb of religion will be seen to have actually been completely irreligious! On that day, much apparent goodness will be shown to have actually been its very opposite!

In this world, people conceal their reality under an artificial cover. For some, seemingly charming words are a veil that hides their inner condition. For others, this role is played by material glitter and glamour. But on the Day of Judgment, every person will come forth in his or her real state. What a severe day that will be! If people were to realize this now, they would stop jabbering. Nothing of this world will then give them true joy. They will begin to regard worldly respect as completely utterly meaningless as worldly disrespect.

The Reality of the World



The 13th November 1983 issue of the *Hindustan Times* carried a report about 35 year-old Mr. R.N. Pandey, who was an officer in the Indian Army. On 12th

November 1983, he boarded the Jammu Tawi Express. When the train left the station, he suddenly realized that he was sitting in the wrong train. He should have actually boarded the Utkal Express instead. And so, he opened the door of the train and jumped out. The train was moving fast, and Mr. Pandey fell under its wheels and died on the spot.

This incident depicts the reality of man's utter powerlessness. He makes a train. He sits in it, and it takes him to his destination. But man is so utterly weak when compared to the train that he has made that if he comes under its wheels, he cannot save himself from their deadly effect.

A rich man lives in a mansion, which he thinks symbolizes his prosperity. He owns a factory, the source of his income. His innumerable friends are, he thinks, proof of his influence and popularity. These are things that are conventionally thought of as a measure of a man's worldly success. But if all these things are brought together and thrown on a man's head, he is bound to be completely crushed under their weight.

This is what the reality of worldly progress actually is. All the progress of this world appears as such as long as it retains its deceptive form. But as soon as it appears as it really is, it becomes simply a heap that causes destruction. In terms of its final consequences, this progress can certainly become the cause for someone's ruin, not for his true success.

True joy is that which is enjoyed in Heaven, not the deceptive delights of this world. The mistake man makes

is to want to obtain in this world itself that which can be had only in Heaven. And because of this, he remains deprived of this, both in this world and in the next.

Know Your Tomorrow



In May 1981, Ziaur Rahman (1936-1981), the then President of Bangladesh, visited the town of Chittagong. On the night of the 30th of May, when he was resting at the government guesthouse, he was killed. The man responsible for his assassination was a Bangladeshi Army officer, Major-General Manzoor. This man had thought that by removing Ziaur Rahman from his seat he could grab it and become the ruler of Bangladesh. But his plans proved wrong. Barring only a few men, the Bangladesh Army did not support him. And in just two days' time, on 2nd June 1981, some soldiers opposed to him shot him dead.

The fate that befell Major-General Manzoor is the same fate that will, one day or the other, befall us all. Some of us might die of bullets fired by soldiers; others by being taken away by angels. Yet, no one learns a lesson from this. No 'Major-General Manzoor' thinks that the day after killing his opponent, he, too, will be killed; that after hurling someone into the pit of death, he, too, has to face the same situation.

This world is a testing-ground. Here, every person

enjoys a certain sphere of authority. Someone's sphere is large, while someone else's is small. But no matter what the size of one's sphere, every person becomes in his respective sphere the very same 'Major-General Manzoor'. Everyone is busy trying to push others down. Everyone wants to affirm himself by negating everybody else. Everyone mistakenly thinks that if he can remove someone else from his position, this empty position will be his to occupy. He forgets that what awaits him is not that someone's position, but, rather, his own grave.

Everyone who today imagines himself to be successful will, tomorrow, when death takes him away, be compelled to recognize himself as a failure. This actually happens every single day. Yet, no one is concerned about the tomorrow that will surely follow today. Everyone knows everything about his today, but does not want to even think about his tomorrow, when he shall have to leave this world.

Unaware Humanity



A certain country in Africa produces an immense amount of electricity. The shimmer of the lights in its homes and shops has earned it the sobriquet of 'Showcase of Africa'.

One day, the electricity supply was badly disrupted and the country went under total darkness. It had to

do with limited rains that year and the drying up of the dams. The prolonged power failure meant that industrial production plummeted to some 35 per cent of the normal level.

A rich businessman in the country described his predicament thus:

For years, I had gone from my air-conditioned villa to my air-conditioned car to my air-conditioned office. I never realized just how hot it really is here.

Obviously, this businessman had all this while lived in an artificial, air-conditioned world of his own, because much of Africa is a hot place. And it was only when the electricity supply broke down that he came to know the reality of the place he was living in and how different it was from what he had all along thought it to be.

On a larger scale, this is precisely the case with every person. In this world, we have freedom of action. We also think that we have the ownership of whatever we possess. But when death strikes, we suddenly come to know that this was all simply a deception, that we mistook our freedom, which is a means for us to be tested by God, for a right to do whatever we please. We also then realize that everything we assumed to be ours actually belongs to God.

While in this world, we forget that we will be accountable for all our actions before God, imagining that no one will question us about what we did while we were here.

The Final Destination



Mt. Everest is the highest peak in the world. This famous Himalayan mountain is 29,028 feet or 8848 metres tall. One of the first people to try to ascend this mountain was a British man called Maurice Wilson. This was in 1934. But what Mr. Wilson thought would be the climax of his life turned out to be an enormous anticlimax.

Maurice Wilson had been a soldier in the First World War. He was so keen on climbing the highest peak in the world that for this he gave up his successful family business. He spent all his money on buying a second-hand aircraft, which he flew, over a distance of some 6000 miles, from England to India, and landed at Purnea, in Bihar. He did not get permission to fly in his plane beyond there, and so he sold it. After this, he set off on his journey to Mt. Everest through Darjeeling and Tibet.

Finally, all that he had left with him was a small tent, some rice, a camera, and a few other things. He began his ascent of the mountain, and managed to climb till a height of around 19000 feet. The 21st of April 1934 was to be his 36th birthday, and he hoped to celebrate the occasion atop Mt. Everest. A few days prior to that, he had written in his diary:

Only 13,000 feet more to go. I have the distinct feeling that I'll reach the summit on April 21.

But shortly after writing these lines with such evident confidence, a fierce Himalayan storm broke out. The severe weather conditions put paid to his plans of going further up the mountain, and he was compelled to go down. And so, he descended to a lower level. But after this, it was not in his fate to be able to move up the mountain again. No one really knows what happened to him then, but a year later, when Tenzing Norgay was heading up Mt. Everest, he found Maurice Wilson's corpse, and with it, his diary, the last entry in which were the sentences quoted above.

Maurice Wilson planned to take a picture of himself atop Mt. Everest with his camera. It, he had hoped, would capture his moment of victory. But his time came before that could happen. There was no Maurice Wilson left whose victory his camera could show to the world!

This, in a sense, is the same story of every one of us. Everyone thinks that he is advancing towards the Mt. Everest of success, whereas the reality is just the opposite. In actual fact, everyone is heading towards a destination where there will be no one to welcome him other than death.

In this world, some people only nurse the desire for worldly success, but they have not even set off on the journey to their dream-world when death grabs them. Others manage to attain, to greater or lesser extent, the objects of their desire. Yet, this does not give them

the happiness they are looking for, and so they are no different from the first category of people. After getting what they hankered after, they realize that these things do not give them true and lasting joy. And so, in this world those who obtain the objects of their worldly desire feel as deprived as those who do not. Yet, few people realize this.

Human beings deprive themselves of what is truly worth having and delude themselves into imagining that the things of this world will give them lasting joy. Life is absolutely uncertain, yet people imagine it to be absolutely certain. People are all advancing in the direction of the unknown 'tomorrow', and yet they think that they are building a successful world in the known 'today'.

How unaware people are who think they know themselves!

What failures are they who consider themselves to be the most successful of all!

The Other Side of Death



The Greek king Alexander conquered many lands, but when his time to leave this world arrived, he lamented:

I wanted to conquer the world but Death has conquered

me. I couldn't get even that peace that an ordinary man is able to enjoy.

Napoleon Bonaparte's last words were on these lines:

I thought despair was a crime, but today there is none in the world who is more utterly in despair than me. I was hungry for two things: power and love. I got the former, but it did not remain with me. I searched a lot for love but never found it. If human life is what I got, then it is absolutely meaningless, because its final result is nothing but despair and destruction.

The Caliph Harun al-Rashid was the ruler of a vast dominion. At the end of his life, he rued:

For my whole life, I tried to run away from my sorrow, but, yet, that sorrow still remained. I have led a life of great sorrow and worry. Not a single day of my life have I spent without worrying. Now, I am at the verge of death. Very soon, my grave will eat up my body.

This is what is going to finally happen to every human being. Yet, every one of us is oblivious to this. When the time came for the Abbasid Caliph Mansoor to die, he lamented:

If I had stayed alive a few days more, I would have destroyed this ruler-ship that has repeatedly taken me away from truth. The truth is that one act of goodness is better than the whole of ruler-ship. But I realized this only when Death took me in its grip.

Most people who are conventionally thought of as successful in this world have died feeling that they were the most unsuccessful of all. If whatever happens to a man when he nears death happened before this, his life

would have been totally transformed. Whenever anyone stands near death, the dazzling delights of the world, which he was so taken up with that he had no time for anything else, appear to him as even more unreal than a heap of ashes. Behind him is a world that he has lost and has left forever, while in front of him is a world for which he has made no preparations at all.

There is absolutely no use remembering death only when it is about to overtake you. The time for remembering death is well before this, when you are capable of doing evil and seeking to legitimize it as good. But people are not willing to think about death then. At that time, they will do everything to satisfy their egos. But when they lose all their strength and when they realize that they are in the grips of the unrelenting Angel of Death, they finally remember their mistakes. But the time for such remembering is not then. Rather, it was when they were making those mistakes and when they were not ready to listen to anyone's counsel.

On the Brink of Death



On the 3rd of June 1979, I was in Meerut, a town in northern India. It was evening, and I was walking on the main market road with a companion. Suddenly, a portion of a building just in front of us exploded and collapsed. Mounds of bricks and stones littered

the street. At that moment, the two of us were hardly a five second's walking distance from the spot where the accident had occurred. Had we been just a five seconds' distance ahead or had the building collapsed just five seconds later, we would certainly have come under the collapsing rubble. Our life would have abruptly ended much before than we had thought it would.

I thought to myself:

There is really just a distance of 'five seconds' between man and his death. At any moment, it is possible that a person's 'five seconds' will be up and that he will suddenly find himself in the other world.

If you truly realize that there is only a distance of 'five seconds' between you and your death, your life will be totally transformed. You will become a totally different person. You may continue to exist in this world, but you will begin to live in the awareness of the Hereafter.

The secret of life is to know that you are, at every moment, standing on the brink of death, after which you will either enter a garden in Paradise or a pit in Hell. Every step you take leads you closer to one of these two consequences. But Man is so insensitive that he is completely unaware of this.

People rely on false religiosity, but in the Hereafter, only genuine devotion to God will benefit you. True devotion to God is to fear God in such a manner that you think of Him all the time. It is to live in the awareness that God is constantly watching you, day and night. It is to do whatever you do in the awareness that

you are doing it before God. It is to be concerned much more about the Hereafter than this world.

A Strange Deprivation



If you give someone a one-rupee coin and tell him that somewhere ahead there is a heap of ten million such coins and that if he runs there quickly, he can obtain all that money, what do you think he might do with the one rupee that you gave him? He will forget it and run after the ten million rupees!

The issue of this world and the Hereafter is somewhat similar. This world is an introduction to the Hereafter. Here, people obtain an initial recognition of those blessings and joys that God has arranged for in their full form in the Hereafter. This is in order that man can understand the whole from the part, that he can gauge the ocean from just a drop.

If someone truly realizes what this world is, for him it will seem like the one rupee coin mentioned above. He will leave aside this small joy and rush after a much bigger one. Forgetting this world, he will run towards the Hereafter. On the other hand, someone who does not understand the true nature of this world will take it to be everything. Forgetting the Hereafter, he will remain completely drowned in the things of this world.

The sun exists in order to introduce to man the life

of the Hereafter that is filled with light. But on seeing the sun, man starts taking the sun itself for a deity. The beauty of flowers and trees is in order to convey to people the beauty of the Hereafter. But man takes them to be the ultimate things and wants to create a paradise for himself amidst them, here in this world. The delights of this world exist in order to make people desire the joys of the Hereafter. But man so loses himself in these worldly joys that he completely forgets the Hereafter.

A person who loses himself in the deceptive pleasures of this world has lost his Hereafter. When he reaches the Hereafter and sees its eternal joys, his heart will turn into a graveyard of regret. How foolish he was, he would tell himself, that for the sake of false comforts, he lost all the real comforts; that for the sake of false joys, he lost all the real joys; and how, being deceived by false freedom, he caused himself to be deprived of true freedom.

I Have to Go Till the Hereafter



The well-known Muslim scholar, Maulana Ashraf Ali Thanvi (d. 1943) was once travelling in a train. He had to go to Azamgarh, a town in northern India. A railway guard who was his admirer came to meet him at the station. Just then, a villager also arrived, and presented the Maulana with a bundle of sugarcanes

as a gift. The Maulana accepted the gift and asked his travelling companion to weigh the canes and book them as luggage.

The railway guard said to the Maulana, "What is the need to book them? I will tell the guard who is going on this train. He will keep an eye on them."

The Maulana replied, "Your guard will be with me only till this train reaches its destination, but I have to go further."

The guard thought that the Maulana meant that he had to go to a further station by changing to another train, and so he said, "No problem! I will tell the guard. He will inform the other guard, and you won't have to face any difficulty."

The Maulana answered, "I have to go even further than that!"

The guard was surprised and asked, "Where will you finally go? You just said you were going to Azamgarh!"

The Maulana remained silent for a while. Then, he said, "I have to go till the Hereafter. Which guard will go with me till there?"

This matter is not simply about train journeys. In fact, it relates to everything in life. Every aspect of our lives is related to the Hereafter. In this world, a 'guard' can be with you for a short period of time, but no 'guard' is going to be with you when you reach the destination of the Hereafter. A person who is aware that he has to go till the Hereafter will think of every single thing as valueless which in the Hereafter will have no value at all, irrespective of how valuable it may appear now, in

this world. Likewise, he will value those things that will prove to be of value in the Hereafter, no matter how inconsequential other people might think them to be.

People use seemingly beautiful words in order to deny the truth. But in the Hereafter, they will realize that all that they had clung to in this world has abandoned them. Powerful people commit injustices and exult in the belief that the oppressed cannot harm them in the least. But in the Hereafter, they will see that all their power has been left behind in the world that they have abandoned.

Man's material possessions deceive him. They boost his ego and pride. But in the Hereafter, he will discover that all that he possessed is now far, far away from him.

The difference between a person of deep faith and trust in God and somebody else is that the latter spends his life thinking that he has to live in this world, while a true believer leads his life in the awareness that he has to go till the Hereafter.

The Stage of Life



On the night of the 21st of September 1981, 90 year-old Mr. B.K. Rama Reddy and his 80 year-old wife Phulabai were in their house in Banjara Hills, Hyderabad. There was only one more person in the house at that time—their 50 year-old employee Ramayya.

When the couple was fast asleep, Ramayya grabbed an axe and brutally murdered them. Then, he looted a large sum of money and jewellery, and, in the dark of night, fled from the house.

It so happened that Ramayya reached a spot where there were two policemen on night patrol. The policemen suspected that Ramayya had been up to no good and stopped him. They questioned and threatened him and then Ramayya finally confessed to his crime and surrendered the things that he had robbed. The policemen took Ramayya and handed him over, along with the stolen goods, to the police station.

The policemen's names were Sheikh Mahboob and S.M. Rashid.

When the police officer heard about what had happened, he was very pleased with the honesty of the two policemen. He gave them each a reward in cash and promoted them. Sheikh Mahboob was promoted to the post of Station Officer and S.M. Rashid to that of Head Constable.

This incident illustrates how a single incident can simultaneously mean two entirely different things for two different people or sets of people. One incident brings credit to someone, and discredit to someone else. It leads to someone being proven as a murderer and takes him to jail, while at the same time it shows someone else to be honest and duty-conscious and as eligible for a reward.

All events that happen in this world are of this nature. This world is a sort of divine stage. By creating different

conditions, God gives everyone an opportunity to openly express whatever is inside them. A person with a criminal bent of mind will commit a crime when he finds an opportunity to do so, and so will become eligible for being punished in accordance with God's law. On the other hand, a person who is devoted to the Truth will act truthfully and justly, and so will become eligible for being rewarded by God.

Decisive Day



The Bangalore edition of *The Indian Express* (9th September 1983) carried a report titled 'Glitter is not Gold'. It was about a certain Ms. Sybil D'Silva, a resident of Bangalore.

One day, a 35 year-old woman came to Ms. D'Silva's house. She was carrying a six month-old baby. She told Ms. D'Silva that her husband was very ill and that they needed five thousand rupees immediately for his treatment. She took out a gold chain from her pocket and said, 'I am not begging from you. I want to sell this gold chain. It is very precious to me, but my husband's health is even more precious. In the market, this chain's value wouldn't be less than ten thousand rupees. But because I am desperate, I will give it to you for five thousand.'

Ms. D'Silva declined to take the chain, but the

woman kept on repeating her tale of woe. Finally, she won Ms. D'Silva over. Ms. D'Silva gave the woman five thousand rupees and took the chain.

The next day, Ms. D'Silva went to a market in Bangalore and showed the chain to a goldsmith. The goldsmith tested the chain for the purity of the gold. And then the chain's reality emerged. It wasn't gold at all, but brass!

This is exactly what is going to happen in the Hereafter, too. In this world, everyone is engrossed in doing various things. Everyone thinks his work is 'gold'. But something is truly gold only when a goldsmith gauges it and certifies it to be so. Likewise, in the Hereafter, God will gauge everyone's actions. If someone's actions are tested and proved to be 'gold', he will get an appropriate reward for them. And if someone else's actions are tested and proved to be 'brass', not gold, he will deserve appropriate punishment.

In this world, people cling to some things and refuse to give them up. But on the Day of Judgment, they will pine to be parted from the consequences of this clinging, but that will not be possible at all. What they took great pride in while in this world will prove to be a cause for their downfall in the next.

O Man!



Around a dozen eggs were kept on the table. They all seemed alright. But when they were broken, each one of them turned out to be rotten! Not one was good, even though they all looked fine from the outside.

The same is happening with people these days. Externally, everyone seems to be a decent human being. They wear good clothes. They speak wonderful things. They all have a long list of stories of their doings that they love narrating. But if you really experience them, you will discover that from the inside they are actually very different. They are beautiful from the outside, but not quite so from the inside.

When a difficult situation arises—when there is a question of a business transaction, when there is some complaint or bitterness, when it is a matter of someone's interests being hurt, and so on—one discovers that a person's inner reality is not the same as what appears from the outside. Ugliness is hidden under a beautiful garb. Selfishness, superficiality, show, pride, jealousy, opportunism, prejudice, exploitation—all these are hidden under people's exteriors. Everyone seems like a 'good egg', but the reality is very different if you break the 'egg' and see things for yourself.

This is how the world is today. If you deeply examine

things, you will hear either the sadistic laughter of the oppressor or the pathetic cries of the oppressed. You will see people driven by the most terrible impulses to fulfil their selfish desires, or others strewn in a drunken stupor the gutters, in a state of total unawareness and insensitivity.

But this is not going to remain forever. Very soon, the time will come when man will find himself in another world, a world where the power to make decisions will be God's and not man's.

What Matters in the Hereafter?



Lt. Col. Jaipal penned a book on his memories of hunting. Titled *The Great Hunt*, it was published in New York in 1982.

Jim Corbett was a well-known hunter. He was particularly fond of shooting tigers. He had a seemingly beautiful explanation for this murderous activity: "I kill man-eating tigers in order to save villagers from them."

Most hunters have a similar seemingly attractive explanation or excuse for their violent pastime. But Col. Jaipal did not have to search for a pseudo-excuse like this. He very openly admitted what others do not.

Col. Jaipal was very fond of killing crocodiles. He writes that he loved tracking these animals. The crocodiles would slip into the water, and then, when

he would fire bullets at them, they would lash their tails about and open their mouths wide. “All this,” Col. Jaipal writes, “gave me quite a lot of thrill.”

It is perhaps intrinsic to the human mind to want to go after others, to make plans to trouble them. And when people succeed in these plans, they revel in what they think is their ‘success’. But little do they realize that in the Hereafter they shall be held accountable for their deeds. In contrast, someone who controls this urge and lives in the world in such a way that he becomes a source of mercy for others will find that the doors of Heaven will be opened to him in the Hereafter.

What Will Happen That Day



God is the Lord of everything. Whatever anyone receives is given by God. No one but God has anything to give to anybody. And so, if a person were to snatch away something from someone that the latter has legitimately acquired, it is, as it were, snatching something given by God. This person wants to try to go against God’s plan.

Suppose someone gets a house, and some other people plot to make him houseless. He has a legitimate source of livelihood, but these people want to destroy him economically. He leads a respectable life, but they want to rob him of his respect. He is at peace with

his surroundings, but they institute false cases against him in order to destroy his peace. All such actions are interference in what God has arranged. It is a war against the All-Powerful God by absolutely powerless creatures.

What do such actions amount to? God wants something, but these creatures do not want it. God decided to arrange for the allocation of livelihood among people in a particular way, but these creatures do not agree to this. These creatures' defiance of God appears to work in this world, but this apparent success is only because in this world people have been granted freedom in order to test them. As soon as the period allocated for this test is over, people will find themselves so utterly bereft of power that they will not have even words to utter against others or the capacity to harm them.

In this world, human beings have freedom. Here, people have the freedom to go against what God has laid down as proper for human beings to do. They have the freedom to try to condemn the allocation of livelihoods among people that God has arranged. But what will the condition of such people be when this freedom, linked to the test of life, comes to an end, when whatever will happen will be what God wants, when it is not possible for what God does not want to happen?

On that day, God will say that He gives to whoever He wants, and that no one can overturn His Will, try as hard as he or she might.

Remember Tomorrow



In 1898, Lord Curzon was appointed as Viceroy of India and arrived in the country from England. He had two daughters. Lady Curzon was expecting her third child, and she and Lord Curzon both wanted it to be a boy. But, it so happened that their third child, too, turned out to be a girl. She was born in 1904. At that time, the Curzons were staying in a place called Naldera, and so they named their daughter Alexandra Naldera Curzon.

When Lady Curzon went back to London and Lord Curzon was in Shimla, he sent her a letter, trying to comfort her, because both of them had badly wanted a son. He wrote:

After all, what does sex matter after we are both of us gone?

In penning these words, Lord Curzon tried to conceal his sorrow. But if people permit the broader implications of these words to become deeply embedded in their awareness, then half the world's problems will be solved. Wealth, children, power—these are the things that people desire most, to get which they are ready to do just about anything. But if you start thinking what the use is of acquiring these things if in a few days' time you have to abandon them and move on, following your departure from this world, you will experience a deep

sense of contentment. If this happens on a large scale, all oppression and strife would cease. The fact is that in this world, there is not much difference between acquiring something and not acquiring it—for if the thing you acquire is such that you have to lose it with your death, acquiring it has no meaning at all!

Man puts in all his effort to acquire something, only to lose it the very next moment! Ultimately, everyone meets with death. Every single thing that man is besotted by and accumulates is left behind when he has to leave this world for good.

Man lives in his ‘today’, completely forgetting his ‘tomorrow’. He destroys someone else’s house in order to make his own, although the next day he is going to shift to his grave. Instituting false cases against someone, you drag him to the human court, but you do not want to know that angels are waiting to drag you to God’s court. Turning a blind eye to others, you delight in the tower of glory that you have built for yourself, although very soon this tower is going to come crashing down. Not a single brick will remain standing!

Heavenly Personality



The Quran (95:4-6) tells us:

*We have indeed created man in the best of mould, then
We cast him down as the lowest of the low, except for*

those who believe and do good deeds—theirs shall be an unending reward!

God has made Man with a heavenly personality. Then, He placed him in this world, where conditions are such that they tend to give rise to a personality which is opposite to a heavenly personality. Now, he who while living amidst ‘the lowest of the low’ takes himself to the level of ‘the best of mould’ will be blessed by God after death.

This world is a testing-ground. That is why it has been made in such a way that conditions repeatedly arise that serve a test or trial for people. Here, one is faced with issues of profit and loss and situations that stoke emotions such as greed and selfishness. There are superficial attractions here that lure people towards lust, addiction and worldly delight. Here, people compete with each other, leading to selfishness and egotism. Here, there are constant clashes of interest, which stir emotions such as anger, hatred and depravity.

This is ‘the lowest of the low’ of this world. The task before man is to lift himself above this and take himself to the level of what the Quran calls ‘the best of mould’—which, in terms of his true nature, is his real or authentic level.

Whether a fruit is good or bad can be decided when it is cut open and its inside is seen. The same is true with people. This reality of people can be discovered when they are ‘cut open’—that is, when they are faced with difficult or unfavourable situations, which is when their real or inner reality is expressed. The way

people react at such times indicates what their mindset is—whether or not it is according to the noble society of Paradise. When people start fighting over money and property, when people who think differently start quarrelling about their respective views, when people start squabbling over a job that they each want to grab—these are the sorts of occasion when their reality can be discovered. On such occasions, if people express hatred, selfishness, injustice and egotism, they prove by their actions that their mindset is counter to that of those who will inhabit the society of Paradise. On the other hand, people who respond in such situations with love, unselfishness, justice, and humility prove that their mindset is heavenly and that they are close to God and the angels.

When Death Will Expose Everything as False



What a strange moment it will be when people realize that whatever they did in this world, thinking it to be some very worthy action, is actually inaction of the lowest sort!

In this world, people think highly of themselves and strut about puffed up with pride, whereas actually the only thing that they can take pride in is to submit before

God's commandments. People think that they are being very successful by trying to rationalize or explain away their misdeeds, while their success actually lies in openly acknowledging their faults. They have been given the power of speech so that they use it to praise God, but they employ it instead to shower praises on fellow human beings. Emotions such as fear and love have been placed in them so that they should devote these to God, but they have made created things the objects of their fear and love. They think that accumulating material wealth is the most important thing, whereas actually the highest thing for them is to spend their wealth in God's path and thereby have nothing left. They should have consideration for the weak, but instead they ignore them and flatter the strong. They should devote themselves to searching for and discovering the meaningfulness of life, but they drown themselves in furious agitation instead. The secret of their true progress lies in engaging in constant introspection, but, instead, they are busy inspecting and criticising others. They should consider worldly wealth and respect as unreal should and have no attachment to them, but they begin thinking these to be the biggest thing of all!

Today, people are obsessed with critiquing the oppression of others, taking this to be bravery. Imagine their condition when, in the Hereafter, they will come to know that true bravery is to realize the oppression that one is oneself guilty of!

People seek the support of something or being besides God, imagining it to be a powerful refuge. Imagine their condition when, after they die, they will learn that

besides God, there is no one who can be a refuge for anyone!

People accumulate worldly wealth and fondly imagine that they have obtained what needs to be had. Imagine their condition when death will expose everything of theirs to be false and when they will realize that they have acquired nothing at all!

People prepare long lists of other people's mistakes. Imagine their state when angels will present them with a list of their own misdeeds!

People think that this life is the be-all and the end-all. Imagine their state when they will discover that the real issue was death, and not this life that lasts for just a few days!

People use criteria that they have themselves invented to convince themselves that they are in the right. Imagine their state when they will realize that only those who were right according to the criteria that God has established were truly right!

Finding a huge crowd to welcome them, people think that they are very fortunate. Imagine their condition when they will come to know that only that person is fortunate whom God and His angels were waiting to welcome!

Every person has built a fantasy world of his own and is happy living in it. But the Day of Judgment will destroy all these make-believe edifices. At that time, only those who have taken refuge in the 'edifice' of God and are in God's shade will be safe.

God's Reward



People are searching among thorns for flowers. They are reducing their lives to rubble while imagining that very soon a big palace of their own is going to come up!

Everyone is busy trying to beautify his life. Someone is busy in the field of trade or employment. Someone else is busy in the field of politics, trying to glorify his name. Someone is a clever wordsmith, using his skill with words to draw crowds. Everyone carries with him a beautiful dream of his future, and is busy, day and night, trying to turn this dream into a reality. But if you closely examine them, you will understand that for this dream of theirs to be realized, the only asset they possess is a stock of wrong actions.

Ignoring their relatives' rights, people want to build their children's future. They trouble their neighbours and at the same time think of bringing joy to people who live far away. They do not hesitate to use unjust means when it comes to their personal affairs, but in the outside world they turn into flag-bearers of justice. They will not tolerate even a word being said against them, but they think they can do whatsoever they like to others, imagining that they are God's soldiers.

God has placed in this world everything that a

human being wants—in fact, even more than this. But the means to acquire every good thing in this world are good actions. God rewards those who fulfil the rights of others, who do not harm their neighbours, who deal justly with people, who lead their lives in devotion to God, rather in devotion to themselves, who bow down before the truth, even if it is against them, who surrender their egos to God and who agree to live egoless in this world.

Fear God



Today, there is no place anywhere where there is no oppression. Whom do people oppress? They oppress those who they think are weak, who do not know how to boss around, who do not have companions to come to their rescue, who want to stay away from the police and the courts. People turn bold in front of the weak and appear meek in front of those who seem stronger than them.

This is like seeing with a blind eye. If people truly had eyes that see, those they would fear most would be people whom they consider to be powerless, because God stands behind the powerless.

Whatever happens in this world is according to a plan in order to test people. This test aims to identify

both God-fearing people as well as those who do not fear God.

God has made some people to be powerless and bereft of any status and has placed them among others. He sees how the latter behave with them. Those who fear being unjust with such people fear God. Such people will be destined for Heaven. But those who do not fear dealing unjustly with the weak do not fear God. And so, they shall be taken to task for their actions in the present world.

When the Truth Shall Be Made Clear



Some people have not really submitted to God although they make a big pretence of prostrating before Him. Of such people it is said that in the Hereafter, when they shall be told to prostrate before God, they will not be able to do so. The Quran (68:42) says:

On the Day when the truth shall be laid bare, they will be called upon to prostrate themselves, but they will not be able to do so.

Prostration to God in prayer is not a time-bound, ritualistic physical action. Rather, it indicates one's submission before the Highest Reality. It symbolizes the

willingness to subordinate one's entire life to truth and justice. In this sense, then, this Quranic verse does not mention 'prostration' in a restricted sense, but talks of a very important reality of the whole of life.

If you look around, you will find no person or community who has fully and truly prostrated before, or subordinated themselves to, the truth. However, externally, everyone makes a show of having done so. Everyone claims to be acting very justly. But this deceptive behaviour is possible only in this world where people are being tested. The situation will be totally changed in the Hereafter. A fake coin can work in a market but not in a bank. Likewise, in the Hereafter, it will no longer be possible to lie and cover it up with seemingly beautiful words. You will not be able to try to prove injustice to be justice, and so on. In the Hereafter, words will simply refuse to accept wrong meanings. It will not be possible then for someone to call oppression 'justice' or to present falsehood in the guise of 'truth'. At that time, the difference between the outer and the inner, the external and the internal, will be wiped out. People will speak only what is in their hearts. On the Day of Judgment, everyone will appear as they truly are, not as they artificially make themselves out to be in front of others in this world.

People make a show of being truthful before others. This makes them think that they truly are indeed truthful. But, in actual fact, only those people are truthful who prove to be truthful before God.

A Delicate Question



Death is the strangest, most mysterious happening in our lives. Every person is desperate to know where he will go after his death.

The famous American Christian missionary Billy Graham penned a book titled *The Secret of Happiness*. In this book, he mentioned that one day he received an urgent message from a senior leader, who asked him to meet him at once. And so, he set off. When he met the leader in his office, the latter took him to a separate room and, in the course of their conversation, said to him:

I am an old man. Life has lost all meaning. I am ready to take a fateful leap into the Unknown. Young man, can you give me a ray of hope?

Death is stalking each one of us. In childhood and youth, one forgets about it. But, finally, what Fate has decided has to have its way. When they turn old, people lose their strength and realize that they are soon going to die. And then, they are compelled to think about what happens after Death. They begin to search for a ray of hope that can give their life some light after their death.

God's prophets came to this world to give people this light of hope. They told us that there is another world,

after death, a world that is eternal and ideal. They told us that entry into that world is for those who before their death made themselves deserving of that world through righteous deeds. This reality is indicated in the Quran (10:25) thus:

God calls man to the home of peace.

On the Brink of Death



One day, a man came to meet me at an odd time, and stayed for only a very short while. Unusually, he did not accept even a cup of tea. “I have to go home right away. My wife will be waiting for me,” he said, starting his scooter. And then he sped off.

Hardly half an hour after he had left, the telephone rang. It was his wife. She sounded very nervous. “Your friend...” she said. Her sentence was incomplete, but her sobbing completed it.

I put the phone down and at once ran towards his house. But by the time I got there, I learned that he had already died. He had left my place and reached his house. He was still on the stairs when he slipped and fell. Some people picked him up and took him inside. The doctor was called at once, but the only thing he did was to announce that he had already died.

When he had left my house on his scooter, he was, it

seemed, heading towards his house. But actually he was heading towards death.

This is no chance event. Incidents like this happen every day and everywhere. Everyone who is alive today is actually rushing towards his death. What we—every one of us—are closest to is death. Everyone is standing on the brink of death. At every moment our last moment can arrive, when we will suddenly be lifted from this world and taken to the next, from where one can go only either to Heaven or Hell.

If a blind man walks on and reaches the edge of a well, everyone knows that the right thing to do is to warn him of the danger. At such a moment, people forget about everything else and scream out uncontrollably, “There’s a well there! A deep well! Beware!” But how very strange it is that the whole of humanity is standing at the edge of an even more dangerous ‘well’, but yet everyone is engrossed in many different things and no one feels the need to shout out, “There’s a well there! A deep well! Beware!” If someone who is overwhelmed by the plight of humankind shouts out like this, he would be rebuffed by others, who will say, “This man wants us to become cowards and put us to sleep! He wants to divert people from the real issues! He isn’t a messenger of life, but a missionary of death! He’s spreading despair and cowardice!”

People are standing on the edge of a well, but they think that they are in a safe home. They are advancing towards death but they fondly imagine that they are moving ahead on life’s journey!

The Greatest News



A young man I know is a government employee in Delhi. I have known him for a long time. One day, I had gone out for some work, and when I came home at night, I was told that he had come several times to the house to meet me.

Just then the bell rang. It was him. Seeing me, he burst into a smile and said, “I’ve come to give you some good news.” And then he told me that he had been promoted at work and had received a raise in his salary.

I thought to myself, “If someone has some important news, he just can’t keep it to himself! He simply has to share it with others. In fact, he goes out of his way sometimes just to find someone whom he can share his news with. If someone buys a new car or has built a new house, he can’t survive without talking about it. If in a gathering, his car or house does not become a subject of discussion, he turns the ongoing conversation in such a direction that he can tell others about his car or house. This is human nature. There’s no human being who isn’t eager to tell others his important news!”

Today, uncountable voices compete with each other for attention. Everyone has some message which he wants to convey to others. But in this enormous crowd of people desperate to say something or the other, there is

no one who is eager to convey news about the Hereafter. Speakers and writers there are in plenty, but none knows or is concerned about the Hereafter. Everyone has news about something or the other to do with this world. But no one has news about the Hereafter that they want to tell others about. If they had such news, they would obviously share it with others. In that case, given the enormous importance of the Hereafter, all other news would actually be no news at all, and people would spend all their energy and time only sharing with others news about the Hereafter. They would see no work as 'work' other than the work of making people fearful of Hell and conveying the good news of Heaven.

If people come to know that in the next few moments there is going to be an earthquake or that a volcano is going to erupt, they will talk only about this. They will forget everything else. But speakers are carrying on with their speeches, and writers are carrying on with their writings, and all these speeches and writings are so utterly empty of mention of the Hereafter that it is as if people have no news at all of the impending enormously momentous Day of Judgment.

People are generally entangled in the problems of their immediate environment—such as their personal or community issues of an economic, political and social nature. Because they experience these all around them, they imagine that they are the matters of real importance. And so, they get tangled in discussing and debating such issues. In fact, however, the biggest issue is the issue of the Hereafter. The Hereafter is hidden from our sight, but it is the biggest of all impending

events, and is so much more deserving of being talked about than every other event.

Appearance before the Creator



If a man were to emerge from out of a sealed-up cave all of a sudden, everyone would be completely astounded. They would think this to be some sort of very strange miracle.

An infant emerging from its mother's womb is a similar sort of miraculous happening. But even though people witness this happening, they do not think it to be anything extraordinary at all.

Why this difference?

It is because rarely, if ever, does a man emerge from out of a sealed-up cave, while an infant emerging from a woman's womb is an everyday event. The latter is something that people have got used to. They take it for granted. They do not think it necessary to give it any thought at all.

If people were to really seriously reflect on the miraculous phenomenon of a child emerging from a woman's womb, they would discover the existence of the Creator. When they see a living human being born, a being that can move, see, hear and make sounds, they would realize that every human being is a mobile sign of

the Creator's existence. Every human being would seem a living introduction to the Creator.

When a human being is born and comes into this world, he finds that there is an elaborate life-support system in place for him. This life-support system is so complete that it magnificently fulfils every need of a human being, small or big. From the earth to the sun, everything in the world, without exception, is engaged in the service of man.

Then the day arrives when one suddenly dies. A human being desires eternal life, but generally within a hundred years he dies, against his will, leaving behind this world forever. If you seriously think about the issue, you will discover that death actually is the day of our appearing before our Creator.

Prepare for the Eternal Future



God created humans as eternal beings. Human life consists of two parts: firstly, the pre-death period; and secondly, the post-death period. The first extends over a very short period of time, while the latter will continue for eternity.

Other than man, all things in this world function completely according to the law of nature. They compulsorily do what the law of nature has destined for them. But man's case is different. In possessing

freewill man is an exceptional being. He makes his future according to his free choice. He can use this freedom, but he can also misuse it. He can avail of the opportunities that he is provided with, but he can also foolishly allow them to go waste. This fact is referred to in the Quran in different ways. For example, at one place the Quran (95:4-5) says:

*We have indeed created man in the best of mould, then
We cast him down as the lowest of the low.*

This is a kind of warning to man that invites him to seriously reflect on his present and his future. This verse means that God created man with great potential, but by under-utilizing his potential, man makes himself the worst case of failure.

Man's personality has two sides to it—body and soul. Scientific research tells us that the nature of these two is entirely different. Man's body is temporary, while his soul is eternal. The soul is a non-material reality. Man's soul is beyond physical laws, while, in contrast, his body is subordinate to these laws and is continuously subject to disintegration.

Biology tells us that the human body consists of miniscule cells. Every moment, vast numbers of these cells disintegrate and die. Our digestive system is like a cell-producing factory. It is continuously engaged in supplying cells so that the body maintains its continued existence. In this way, every few years we receive an entirely new body, but our soul continues without any such change. Hence it is said: 'Personality is changelessness in change'.

An enormous blunder we make is ignoring the unchanging part of ourselves—our souls—while doing everything we can to pander to the changing part of ourselves—our bodies. We devote all our attention to catering to what is temporary in us while we think and do nothing about the welfare of our eternal aspect, our souls. Because of this, when after a limited span of time people die, their temporary bodies get destroyed forever, along with all their many achievements and material possessions, while their eternal being or soul must now face the post-death stage, bereft of all the material prosperity that they may have achieved while on Earth.

It is this that the Quran refers to as man's failure. It is the most terrible form of failure that man is born with great potentials but misuses them, or does not use them at all, and then has to pay the price for this in the post-death period of life that carries on forever.

Man is unique in his capacity to think. In the enormous universe only man is capable of conceptual thinking. Seen in this way, man's personality has two components: the non-thinking body, and the thinking soul. Those people who use their potential only within the material sphere may seem to make their non-thinking component of their life very attractive and alluring, but they do nothing at all for the progress of the thinking sphere of their life. In other words, they spend their entire life before death pandering to their bodily or physical desires but they completely ignore their intellectual and spiritual development. When death overtakes such people, they die the death of animals. They have wasted their life beautifying their bodies,

and so they enter the next phase of life—the post-death phase—bereft of real progress, where they will have to face nothing but utter loss.

Man is also exceptional in having the concept of ‘tomorrow’. Everything else in the universe, including all animals, only live in the today, in the now. It is man alone who has an awareness of the tomorrow and who, making it his target, plans his life accordingly. In other words, while all other beings live in the present, man is unique in also living in the future.

According to the Quran, those people are truly at loss who use their potentials only to acquire ephemeral material things and do nothing for building their future. Their life before death may, on the face of it, appear to be happy, but in the life after death they will be the ones to despair. This is because in the life after death the thing that will be of use will be one’s intellectual and spiritual progress, not material progress in the worldly sense.

Every person has within him limitless desires. In the same way, every person also has within him limitless abilities, using which he can fulfil his desires to a limitless extent. But everyone ends up using only so much of his abilities as can provide him some temporary relief in the limited world before death. Finally, every human being takes along with him all his abilities and enters the eternal world after death, where he will suffer because in the pre-death period of life he did not make use of his abilities for the sake of this second period of his life, the life after death.

Given this, then, we need to plan our life in such a way that our abilities are used for the sake of building our eternal future in the life after death. We should understand our potentials and use them in such a manner that we can derive beneficial results from them in the eternal life after death. We must save ourselves from a tragic fate in the Hereafter, where all we might be able to say is: “I was a case of missed opportunities.”

The right way to plan one’s life is that in the life before death one must remain content with only those material things that one needs and use the major portion of one’s time and abilities in such a way that one enters the life after death with a purified personality, being ushered into the perfect world in the life after death to lead a blessed life.

There is just one principle for success in both the life before death and the life after death. And that is, to make oneself a ‘prepared personality’.

A ‘prepared personality’ in the materialistic sense is a means for materialistic progress in the world before death. In contrast, a prepared personality in the spiritual sense is one that will be useful in that phase of life that comes after death and that lasts forever.

Someone who has ‘prepared personality’ in the materialistic sense may have acquired many professional qualifications. Maybe he has got smart business skills. He is popular among people. He hankers after immediate gains. And so on.

But the sort of prepared personality that is required for success in the post-death period of life is one that

avails the opportunities that are available in this world for spiritual and intellectual development. Only such a personality will have any value in the life after death.

A person with this sort of personality uses his intellect to discover the Truth. In the midst of a jungle of doubts, he stands on certainty. He has made God his sole concern. Overcoming the love for oneself, he has adopted the path of devotion to God. Surrounded by negative conditions, he is able to maintain his positive thinking. Instead of becoming a desire-oriented person, he has become a God-centred person. He follows the path of principle, instead of opportunism. He saves himself from hate and cultivates concern for and commitment to the welfare of all beings. Such a person, despite having freewill, has adopted the path of surrender to God.

Learning a Lesson from History



At its zenith, the Roman Empire extended over most of Europe and large parts of West Asia and North Africa. The edifices that the Romans built were so magnificent that some of their bridges still remain in Spain, two thousand years later. Roman law is still the basis of law in Europe and America. However, despite all its glory, the Roman Empire finally came to an end.

Today, all that remains of it are some ruins or references in books that line the shelves of libraries.

If a person takes lessons from such developments, he can save himself from pride. Such developments tell us that a person with true sight is he who sees decline occurring in his own rise, who recognizes well in advance his lofty mansions turning into crumbling ruins.

Creation Plan for This World



Research tells us that our world is based on the principle of pairs. Here, everything is found in pairs: electrons and protons; male animals and female animals; men and women; negative and positive; light and darkness.

This world, too, has a pair—which is ideal and perfect. This pair is free from all imperfections. In that other world, all the desires of human beings will be fulfilled in the complete sense. Only selected people will gain entry into that world, on the basis of merit. Without this merit or eligibility, no one is going to gain entry there.

This present world is the initial and a temporary part of a larger plan. According to this plan, this world has been made as a selection-ground. Here, people are born in order that they spend some time amidst conditions here so that it can be gauged who among them is eligible

for being settled in the perfect world in the Hereafter and who is not. Those who are eligible for this will be selected and settled in the next, perfect world, while the rest, who have failed in this examination, will be declared as a rejected lot.

On what basis will this selection of people happen?

According to the Creator's Creation Plan, there is just one basis for this—and that is, the proper use or the misuse of the freedom that our Creator has given to human beings. The proper or improper use of this freedom is the only basis according to which the decision about people's eternal future will be made.

In line with the Creator's Plan, a true human is one who saves himself from the wrong conditioning of his environment, who leads his life in accordance with God's Will, and who prepares himself while in the pre-death phase of life for the post-death phase of life.

In this present world, every person is on a test. In line with the Creator's Plan, a record is being prepared for each one of us. When history comes to an end and the next age for humankind dawns, our Creator, who is in the Unseen in the present world, will manifest Himself before us so that all people will be able to directly see Him.

This will be the Day of Decision. On that day, all human beings who ever lived will be brought before the Creator. At that time, the Creator will decide the fate of each of us, in accordance with the record of our deeds that He has kept. This decision will be based on perfect

justice. And then some people will be settled in eternal Paradise, while the rest will be cast into Hell.

Conditions tell us that this impending day has now come very close. The final moment has arrived for human beings to awaken and prepare themselves for the impending eternal life.

Nature: An Introduction to Paradise



Nature is truly beautiful. You can never get tired of admiring it. Man wishes that he could continue observing nature. But the demands of life keep him engaged, and thus he leaves this world without being able to satisfyingly appreciate nature's loveliness.

Nature is in this world a representative of the Paradise to come in the next world. It is a glimpse of the Heaven of the Hereafter. In nature there is a glimpse of the unparalleled beauty and attraction that will be found in Paradise.

Nature reminds us of Paradise. It tells us that if we do heavenly deeds here, we can gain Heaven in the Hereafter. In this world, it is not possible for a person to enjoy nature, but in the perfect world of the Hereafter it will be possible for him to enjoy and appreciate the beauty of nature to the ultimate extent.

Age and Health



A man whom I knew died at the age of 45. The first time I met him he appeared to be very strong and healthy. But later, he developed cancer. Despite receiving treatment, his cancer worsened, so much so that he died. In his last days, he had become just a bag of bones. His digestive system had become so bad that he could not eat even simple food. Even drinking water was very difficult for him. When anyone came to meet him to inquire about his health, he would say, “Don’t think about me. Instead, think about yourself! Be grateful that you have a healthy body and that you can eat and drink and walk about. All these things are gifts of God. Whenever He wants, He can take them away, and then nothing will remain with you.”

Man has been given a healthy body. On being born, it appears as if a human being obtains this healthy body automatically. This is why people take it for granted. They never think that this healthy body of theirs is entirely a gift from God, and that, acknowledging this gift, they should bow down before Him.

The same is true about age. As long as man is alive, he thinks that this life will continue forever. He never thinks about his death.

This, without any doubt, is the biggest mistake.

It is this that is the test that all of us are being put to. In this test, people who succeed are those who think more about death than life and who consider everything that they have as a gift of God. It is these people who pass the examination of life. In contrast, those who do not acknowledge God and who have forgotten death fail the examination of life.

Old Age



Man first experiences childhood, then youth, then middle-age, and then, after that, old age. Old age is the last possible stage for anyone in this present world, because the next stage after it is death.

In this sense, old age is a sort of ‘prior notice’ of one’s impending death. In old age, the organs of the body become weak, and some of them even stop functioning. This is a sign that the moment of death is coming near. It is, one could say, a compulsory reminder of death.

Old age makes one stand at the mouth of one’s grave.

If your mind is alert and awake, when you enter old age you will know that very soon, the moment of your death will arrive and that you will then be brought before God to account for your life on earth. In this way, the experience of old age can truly shake you up. It can remind you of the Hereafter.

Old age tells man that his journey does not stop

in this world, and that he will now have to enter the next world and face the Divine Court on the Day of Judgment.

Undoubtedly, that person is the most unfortunate who gets a long life but did not learn from his old age. He remained heedless, so much so that he died in that state.

Old age is not something undesirable. It contains an opportunity—to learn invaluable lessons. In the Quran (35:37) God says:

Did We not make your life long enough to take warning if you were going to?

Man is born into this world for a limited period of time. As soon as he is born here, his countdown begins. Till around the age of 35, his graph moves upwards. Thereafter, it begins to decline, after which there is middle-age, old age, and then death. Along the way, one faces numerous difficulties, such as sickness, accidents, and various other challenges.

In this way, one by one, everything begins to be taken away from man: first, youth, then health, then peace, and so on, till death arrives and everything that man had thought to be his own, even his bodily existence, is taken away from him. After this, all that remains is the soul.

Death is the most serious experience anyone could go through. It signifies that whatever one had earned in his pre-death phase will be taken away from him forever. After this is the post-death phase. In this phase, only the good deeds that a person had done in the pre-death

phase will be of any help to him. This reality is described in the Quran in the following words (59:18):

Believers! Fear God, and let every soul look to what it lays up for the future. Fear God: God is aware of what you do.

Everyone is a Traveller Towards Death



According to a news report, the British reality TV star Jade Goody was diagnosed with cancer. The report went on to say that “she has started planning for her funeral”, adding that she wanted people to cry over her. “Most people plan their weddings. But I am planning my funeral”, Goody said.

Jade Goody was at the peak of her profession when, suddenly, in August 2008, she was told that she was suffering from cervical cancer. She then cancelled her professional plans for the future and decided to prepare for her death.

This same story is that of every other human being, too. People are busy celebrating this or that event, but they die before they can do all that, leaving this world forever and reaching the next one. Hence, what every person ought to do is to recognize that his pre-death phase of life is only a temporary journey and put all his

attention on preparing for the never-ending post-death phase of life.

Wise is one who remembers this greatest reality—the reality of death.

We think we are living life, but the fact of the matter is that each one of us is actually standing on death's doorstep. When we have no idea when death will overtake us, every moment of ours is a possible moment of death. Every step we take is a step that takes us towards death. Life for us is the experience of today. Today is life's day. Tomorrow maybe death's day.

Death is a journey from a known world to an unknown one. We travel every day—sometimes for a short distance, at other times over a long distance. Sometimes, we travel within a country. On occasion, we might travel to another country. All these journeys are travels from one known place to another. We are so familiar with such journeys that we do not take it as something serious at all.

But the journey of death is very different. This journey is a journey from a known world into an unknown one. Undoubtedly, this is something of utterly serious importance for each one of us. But because of our conditioning, we do not feel the seriousness of this issue. We are so used to the sort of travelling that we routinely do in this world that we are not able to grasp the gravity of the journey of death. Because of this, death seems very remote for us, not something that can happen at any moment.

Our thinking is shaped by our conditioning. This is

the greatest cause for a person's insensitivity. To realize the utter seriousness of death, we need to come out of our conditioning. We need to move beyond our familiar ways of thinking. Only then can we understand the reality of death, which is the most serious thing that is bound to happen with every single one of us, some day or the other.

The Pleasures of This World



The Quran (3:185) says:

Every human being is bound to taste death.

Man lives amidst innumerable 'tastes' of this world, but the 'taste' that is finally destined for him is the 'taste' of death. The taste of death is so bitter that it destroys all other tastes. The Prophet Muhammad is said to have advised: "Remember death much because it demolishes all desires."

Man is a pleasure-seeking being. He derives pleasure in all sorts of things—in eating, in drinking, in wearing good clothes, in living in a good house, in travelling in a good car, in good entertainment, in occupying good positions of fame and power. And so on. From all these sorts of things people derive immense pleasure. They get lost in wallowing in them. But if they were to realize that as soon as their death arrives all these pleasures

would suddenly be snatched away from them, their lives would change completely.

On Death's Border



On 2nd February 2003, the headlines of newspapers across the world announced the disintegration of the US space-shuttle Columbia. It was about to land on Earth after a journey of 16 days. It was travelling from a height of 200,000 feet and a speed of 19,000 kilometres an hour when, suddenly, it lost contact with ground control and exploded into smithereens. There were seven people on board, all of whom died.

This news was published in a New Delhi-based newspaper under the title *Just 16 minutes from home...*

When I read this news report, I thought that this is precisely what the final fate of all human beings is in this world. Everyone builds his own dream home, where he wants to lead a happy life, but he is just '16 minutes' from this home when suddenly death arrives. Without even entering this home he is summoned into the court of the Hereafter.

One of the people on board Columbia was an astronaut called Kalpana Chawla, who was of Indian origin. The whole of India was eagerly awaiting her return. Some of her relatives and friends had travelled to America to congratulate her on her arrival. Had she

got back safely, she would have encountered a hero's welcome. But death came as a barrier in between and turned what might have been a joyous occasion into a tragedy.

This was a personal experience for Kalpana Chawla, and a lesson for others. Only those who can see their own image in this event can truly understand its significance and learn the lessons that it contains.

How to Understand Paradise



Once, I met a man, who excitedly told me that he had received a promotion. “I’ll get a higher salary now! I’ll be able to live in a bigger house! I’ll be given a bigger car now! Earlier, I was given a rail-pass, to travel by train. Now, I’ll get tickets to travel by air!” he exclaimed.

Hearing this man, I thought to myself, “This is just what’s going to happen in the Hereafter. Heaven can be described in the terminology of this world. Entry into Heaven is like receiving a promotion. People whose record in this imperfect world is good will be promoted and admitted into the perfect world of the Hereafter—that is, Heaven.”

This situation demands that we live in this world with great caution and alertness. We should gauge everything from the point of view of whether it will help or hinder us in gaining admission into Paradise. If your

mind becomes alert in this way, you will become your own inspector. You will continuously guard and inspect your thoughts, your words, your behaviour—your every action. You will act in line with this advice of the Caliph Umar: “Weigh your actions before they are weighed.”

Detachment from This World



It generally happens that when someone well-known dies, people write articles about him in newspapers and magazines. These articles are full of praise for the deceased. Sometimes, functions are organized in their memory, where speakers recount their deeds and greatness in glowing terms. This actually leads to much misunderstanding.

What really happens when someone dies is that he suddenly leaves behind all signs of his greatness. Death delivers him into a world where he is totally alone and bereft of any possessions. From the point of view of the present, this is exactly what the dead person's condition now is. But those who write and speak about him do not mention this present status of his. They dwell on his past when he lived in this present world and they use that to sing his praises, even though the deceased has, for all practical purposes, been totally cut off from this past.

For a person, death actually means total detachment

from this world. Every deceased person reminds us of this utterly serious reality of life. But this reality finds no place in the writings and speeches that people generally make in the wake of someone's death.

Exaggerating the greatness of a deceased person when writing or speaking about him creates the false impression that even now he possesses the same greatness as when he was in this world. But this is definitely not the case actually. It is quite likely that at the very moment the deceased person is being praised, a 'great history-maker' has become a 'history-less' person, lying about in a state of utter helplessness.

Reflection on Death: A Means of Self-Correction



Every person will have to face death some day or the other. After death, we can no longer act but can only face the consequences of our actions.

Man is an intensely sensitive being. He cannot easily tolerate any difficulty, no matter how small. Therefore, people need to reflect on how they will manage to live amidst very difficult conditions after they die, if that is what is going to happen with them. If we ponder over this issue seriously, it can create a revolution in our lives.

The Quran says that when the inhabitants of Paradise

enter Paradise, they will say: "Praise be to God who has taken away all sorrow from us." (35:34). A life of pain is the most intolerable thing for a human being. A life free of pain is the most desirable thing for a person. If we reflect on this matter with the attention it deserves, death will become our greatest concern. We will think more about death than about life.

The realization that we all have to die can work as a 'masterstroke'. In the game of caroms, a 'masterstroke' is a stroke that causes all the coins on the board to shift from their present position. In the same way, if we develop the awareness of our eventual death, every corner of our minds will be shaken up. Our whole life will be completely transformed. A revolution will happen in our lives that will make us totally new people.

Ignoring the reality of our death makes us unaware of our own reality. In contrast, remembrance of our death makes us fully aware and alert.

Awareness of death makes a person very serious about life. The greatest concern for such a person becomes to realize who he is and what his future is. "What is my life?" he asks. "What is my death? What do I need to do in the phase of life before death? What is going to happen with me in the phase after death?"

Remembrance of death makes a person serious about the affairs of life. He begins to take stock of his life at every moment. If a person seriously thinks about death, it would change the entire focus of his life. His life would become Hereafter-oriented from being solely present world-oriented.

Someone who has adopted the path of worldliness, of worship of the world, is busy, at every moment, trying to earn worldly wealth. This is made possible for him because through this busyness of his he derives a certain sort of pleasure. Through his busyness he thinks he is going to construct a magnificent worldly future for himself. But if he knew that one day he will have to leave all his worldly acquisitions behind and depart from this world, he would no longer have any interest left in his occupation. This realization would become a means for a new thinking to develop in him. He will now think: "If nothing of the worldly wealth that I have earned will accompany me, I need to change the direction of my activities."

In this way, if you get angry with someone and want to take revenge on him, remembrance of death can change the direction of your life. You will think: "When my taking revenge cannot harm anyone in the eternal sense, why should I waste my time doing that?"

Awareness of death serves as a reminder for us. It helps us reform our behaviour. It can take us away from negative actions and make us busy doing good actions. This thinking is a powerful means of self-correction. Awareness of death makes us serious about life and realistic in our approach. Death reminds us that one day we will have to depart from this world of humans and enter the world of God.