

Stages of the Life Hereafter, the Path to Eternity

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An-Naza` al-Akheer: Drawing the Last Breath

Another name for it is **سكرات الموت**, **Death Stupors**. Reference to these stupors exists in this **Qur'anic verse**: "And the stupor of death will bring truth (before his eyes): "This was the thing which you were trying to escape!" (Qur'an, 50:19).

These are the moments when the dying person bids this vanishing world goodbye, casts a last look at it, mostly at his own self: Life will pass before his eyes like a flash, and he will realize how short it really was, how he wasted it, how he did not perform the purpose behind his very creation: to worship the Almighty his Lord and the Lord of all creation. How will one naturally die? The answer is in verses 88-96 of Surat al-Waqi`a (Chapter 56): "Thus, then, if he is of those nearest to Allah, (there is) rest and satisfaction (for him) and a Garden of delights. And if he is of the companions of the right Hand, (for him there is salutation:) "Peace be unto you!" from the companions of the right Hand. And if he is one of those who treat (truth) as falsehood, who commit wrong, for him there is entertainment of boiling water and burning in Hell-Fire. Truly this is the very truth, so celebrate with praise the Name of your Lord, the Supreme" (Qur'an, 56:88-96).

See how the Almighty in these verses classifies three methods of death perhaps the first of which is particularly interesting: One who is near to his Maker will smell fragrance which will turn death into a very pleasant and pleasurable experience. Of course an opposite type of death awaits those who are not close to Him and who apparently will experience death by way of suffocation. According to some traditions, two angels pull life out of each and every cell of the dying person's body, and it will not be fun at all. During these moments, the dying person will have a moment of contemplation on what he has just left behind: worries about the little ones, separation from wealth, estates, precious items, homes on which he spent fortunes, wealth which he amassed without making sure where it exactly came from, etc. And there will be worries about how much he fell short of carrying out with regard to his duties to others and to his Maker. In Nahjul-Balagha, the Commander of the Faithful Imam Ali (ع) has summarized it thus: "He shall remember wealth which he had overlooked where it had come from, accepting its sources as they were claimed to be, or as they were thought to be, the consequences of having collected it now are round his neck, haunting him, as he is about to leave it behind him for those who will now enjoy it, thus the pleasure will be for others while he bears the burden." Verse 22 of Surat Qaf states the following: "You were heedless of this, so We have removed your veil, and your sight is sharp (on) this Day!" (Qur'an, 50:22).

Indeed, the sight of the dying person during the stupors of death will be quite sharp: He will for the first time be able to see angels, who are created of light that can easily blind any human eye, and the jinns who are created of smokeless fire. He will be able to see and hear his family, relatives, friends and strangers who are around him at the time of death and who will soon bear his casket to the cemetery. But he will not be able to show any reaction because he has lost control over his temporal body and his soul **روح** now takes over. On the other hand, there will be a tremendous transformation in the process of changing from one form into quite another which now enables him to see what he could never see before: According to p. 170, Vol. 6 of Bihar al-Anwar, "He will see the Messenger of Allah and his Pure Family, peace and blessings of Allah be with them all, the angels of mercy and those of torment, all present near him as he awaits their verdict and what they will decide. On the other hand, the army of Satan and his helpers (will also be present in order to prevent him by all means from saying **La ilaha illa-Allah** لا إله إلا الله, There is no god save Allah, which is the key to salvation), to cast doubt in his heart and try hard to rob him of his belief (**iman** إيمان) so he will come out of this life without iman. At the same time, he is overwhelmed by expecting the presence of the angel of death: In what form it will approach him and how he will take his life away, etc.

The Commander of the Faithful

#65225;) has said: 'The stupors of death surround him, so no description can be made for what has afflicted him.'" What about the munjiyat المنجيات during this very critical and dangerous phase, the acts of adoration which one can

form during his lifetime so they may help ease or even cancel his pain of death? We are told on p. 9 of Abbas al-Qummi's precious work *منازل الآخرة* Manazil al-Akhira, which is the main source for this text material, that it is reported that the Messenger of Allah (ص) was present during the death of a young man. The Prophet (ص) told the dying youth to testify that لا إله إلا الله La ilaha illa-Allah (There is no god save Allah), but his tongue was tied and he could not.

Whenever the Prophet (ص) repeated his تلقين talqeen (instruction to the dying person to make a pronouncement), the dying young man could not respond. The Prophet (ص) asked a woman who was sitting at the head of the dying young man if she was his mother, and she answered in the affirmative. He again asked her if she was angry with her young son, and she again answered in the affirmative, adding that she had not spoken to him for the past six years. The Prophet (ص) asked her to be pleased with her son now, so she said, "May Allah be pleased with him on account of you being pleased with him, O Messenger of Allah."

When the mother thus expressed her pleasure with her dying son, the latter was able to pronounce لا إله إلا الله La ilaha illa-Allah. The Prophet

#65209;) then asked the youth to tell him about what he saw. The youth said, "I see a very dark man, very ugly, extremely smelly, wearing very filthy outfits, emitting a stench, coming in my direction, pressing on my mouth and respiratory passages." The Prophet

#65209;) ordered him to say: "O One Who accepts little (of good deeds) while forgiving a lot (of sinning), do accept what is little [of the good deeds which I have done] and forgive a lot (of my sins); surely You are the Forgiving, the most Merciful." The young man did as instructed by the Prophet (ص), so the Prophet (ص) asked him again about what he now saw. The dying young man said, "I now see a man with a glowing face, pleasant, smelling very nicely and wearing clean outfits coming in my direction, whereupon the dark one is going away and getting ready to depart."

The Prophet (ص) ordered the young man to repeat the statement which he had taught him then asked him once more about what he then saw. "The dark

one has already gone, leaving no traces," the young man said, adding, "while the one having a glowing face remains beside me." It was at that moment that the young man passed away. This is recorded on p. 92, Vol. 1 of Mustadrak Wasa'il ash-Shi`ah.

We also read on p. 380, Vol. 74 of Bihar al-Anwar that Imam Ja'far as-Sadiq

#65225;) has said, "One who gives an outfit to his [believing] brother, whether for the summer or for the winter, it will be incumbent upon the Almighty to outfit the first with one of the outfits of Paradise, ease the stupors of death for him and expand his resting place." The greatest Prophet

#65209;) has said: "One who feeds his Muslim brother something sweet, Allah will remove from him the bitterness of death." What also helps the dying person and eases his pain is hearing the recitation of Surat Ya-Sin (Chapter 36 of the Holy Qur'an) and Surat as-Saffat (Chapter 37) as well as "du'a al-faraj" which is: "There is no god save Allah, the Clement, the Great; there is no god save Allah, the all-Knowing, the Great; praise to Allah, Lord of the seven heavens, Lord of the seven earths and everything in them and everything between them, and the Lord of the Great `Arsh; peace be with the Messengers, and praise be to Allah, Lord of the worlds."

We read on p. 33, Vol. 97, of Bihar al-Anwar that according to Imam as-Sadiq (ع), as we are told by the mentor as-Saduq, "One who fasts the last day of the month of Rajab will be placed by Allah in security against the intense pain of the stupors of death and the horror after death as well as the torment in the grave."

As quoted by al-Kafami on p. 397, Vol. 2, p. 397 of his Musbah, the Prophet

#65209;) is quoted as having said that if one recites the following supplication ten times every day, ten thousand of his major transgressions will be forgiven by Allah Who will also save him from the stupors of death and from the constriction of the grave as well as grant him security from one hundred thousands of the horrors of the Judgment Day; He will also protect him from the evil of Satan and his hosts, will pay his debts on his behalf and remove

his worries and concerns; this very precious supplication, which you should share with all the ones you love, is as follows: "I have prepared for every horrific thing "There is no god save Allah", for every worry and distress "The will of Allah be done", for every blessing "Praise to Allah", for every prosperity "Thanks to Allah", for every amazing thing "Blessed be Allah", for every sin "I seek forgiveness of Allah", for every transgression "We belong to Allah, and to Him shall we return", for every hardship "Allah suffices me, and how good a Helper He is!", for every decree and destiny "I have relied on Allah", for every enemy "I have sought refuge with Allah" and for every obedience and disobedience "There is neither power nor might save in Allah, the most Sublime, the most Great". Another supplication has as many as seventy merits one of which is that one who recites it will be given glad tidings at the time of his/her death; it is this: "O You, the most Hearing of those who hear, the most Seeing of those who see, the most Wise of those who decree!" Al-Kulayni has quoted Imam as-Sadiq (ع) as saying, "Do not ever be bored with reciting Surat az-Zalzala (Chapter 99 of the Holy Qur'an), for if one recites it in the voluntary prayers, Allah will keep earthquakes away from him; he will not die because of an earthquake or be struck by lightning or any of this life's catastrophes; a glorious angel will descend upon him, sit at his head and address the angel of death thus: 'Be kind to him, for he is a servant of Allah who used to recite me quite often,'" as we read on p. 331, Vol. 92, of Bihar al-Anwar.

Remember that in the life hereafter, there will be personification of everything:

Each and every action or intention, good or bad deed, will have a form, a shape, an entity. Every verse of the Holy Qur'an, every chapter and the Qur'an as a whole will also have forms. So will desires, wishes, hopes, aspirations, remorse, regret, prayer, fast and all other norms of adoration: All will have forms. How one will distinguish one from the other is a faculty which will be created with him as he is re-created, re-formulated, re-born in a new form, for the hereafter is the true life awaiting all of us, so get ready for it; there is no escape from it.

But if you do not believe in the Hereafter, this book is not written for you, and it is a pity it fell in your hands; someone else can make better use of it. Also, some non-Muslims may feel "sorry" for what the Muslims will have to go

through in the Afterlife, feeling happy with the thought placed in their heads by their clergymen that they had nothing to worry about, that nothing but many good things await them after they die. Muslims, however, think that all followers of religions, or those who do not follow any religion at all, are entitled to their own wishful thinking.

The Adeela at the Time of Death

It means one turning from right to wrong as he dies due to the presence of Satan at the time of his death who will cast doubts in his heart through his evil insinuations in order to get him out of the right creed. There are many supplications to seek protection for such `adeela. For example, the pride of all critics, may Allah have mercy on his soul, has said that if one seeks security against Satan, he must bring into his presence the proofs of conviction and the five basic principles of Islam through irrevocable evidences, with ease of conscience, then he hands them all over to Allah Almighty so He may return them to him at the time of his death. Having stated all the right doctrines, he should say the following: "O Lord, the most Merciful of those who show mercy: I have entrusted You with this conviction of mine, with the firmness of my creed. Since You are the best of trusted ones, and You commanded us to safe keep the trusts, do return it to me at the time when I am to die." What also helps is performing the prayer rites on time; doing so helps during such a critical stage.

According to one tradition, the angel of death looks at all people five times a day, that is, during the five daily prayers, so he may teach those who perform them on time the shahada and spare him the evil of the cursed Satan. It is also highly recommended to recite the following supplication/ Qur'anic verse on every Sunday during the month of Thil-Qi'da: "Our Lord!" (they say,) "do not let our hearts deviate now that You have guided us, but grant us mercy from Your Own Presence, for You are the Giver of unlimited bounties" (Qur'an, 3:8).

Other Qur'anic Chapters that have the same effect include Suras 23 and 109.

Wahshat al-Qabr: Grave's Loneliness

According to the book titled *Man la Yahdhuruhu al-Faqih*, there are tremendous horrors in the grave; therefore, when the deceased person is taken to his burial spot, he must not be entered into it suddenly. He must be placed near the pit for a while so the dead person may get ready to enter it. Then one must bring him closer to it and wait a short while again after which the deceased person is to be placed in the grave. Al-Majlisi, the father, has explained the wisdom in these steps. He says that, true, the soul has already left the body, the "animal spirit" (spiritus animalis in Latin) or the moving soul; as for the "articulate soul", it is yet to sever its ties with the body: There is fear about the grave's constriction, the questioning by Munkir and Nakeer, Ruman who tries to cause the dead to slip away into the torment, and the barzakh; so, the deceased person has a lot to worry about. Ar-Rawandi has narrated saying that Jesus Christ (as) once addressed his mother, Maryam (Mary) (as), after her death saying, "Speak to me, Mother! Do you wish to return to the abode of the living?" She said, "Yes, so I may perform the prayers during an extremely cold night, and so I may fast during a very hot day. O Son! This path [of the dead] is frightful, horrific." It has also been narrated that Fatima az-Zahra (peace be with her) said once to her revered husband, Commander of the Faithful Ali (as), by way of her will: "When I die, wash my body and outfit me [with the shrouds], perform prayers for me, get me inside the grave, place the grave stone, bury me in the earth, sit at my head facing me, recite the Book of Allah and recite many supplications, for it is time when the deceased person needs the company of those alive." We are told on p. 148, Vol. 1, of *Mustadrak al-Wasa'il* that Ibn Tawoos, may Allah have mercy on his soul, has quoted the Prophet (P) as saying: "There is nothing harder for the deceased person than the first night in the grave; so, send mercy to your dead by offering charity on his behalf, and if one does not have charity to offer, let him perform two rek'ats (prostrations) in the first of which he should recite Surat al-Fatiha, the Verse of the Throne and twice Surat at-Tawhid (al-Ikhlâs). In the second, he should recite Surat al-Fatiha followed by reciting ten times Surat at-Takathir (Chapter 102 of the Holy Qur'an). Then he should offer the tasleem [greeting the Prophet of Allah (P)] and say, "Lord! Bless Muhammad and the Progeny of Muhammad, and send the rewards [of this prayer] to the grave of the deceased person so-and-so."

Allah Almighty will then instantly send a thousand angels to the grave of that dead person. Each angel will be carrying an outfit. His grave will be widened till the trumpet is blown. The

person who performs this prayer will be granted good deeds as many as the expanse of what is under the sun, and he will be raised forty stations." What also helps lessen the pain of loneliness in the grave is one during his lifelong perfecting rukoo' (bowing down) very well during the prayers. Imam al-Baqir (as) is quoted as having said: "One who perfects his bowing down [during the performance of the daily prayers] will not feel lonely in his grave," according to p. 244, Vol. 6 of Bihar al-Anwar.

Actually, the doers of good do not have to worry about such loneliness, for angels will keep them company and they will be permitted to visit their relatives, the living or the dead, escorted by these angels, and this will be a diversion for them. Another act of munjiyat, acts that save one from penalty, is repeating a hundred times this beautiful statement: **There is no god save Allah, the true and obvious King.** Such act will save one from poverty in his lifetime and from loneliness in the grave in the Hereafter. He will be wealthy in this life and the gates of Paradise will be opened for him in the next.

According to p. 217, Vol. 8 of Bihar al-Anwar, one who fasts 12 days during the month of Sha`ban will be visited in his grave every day by seventy thousand angels till the trumpet is blown. Here we must point out that "every day" means days of our own counting, days of this short life, for the barzakh period precedes the Judgment Day. Starting with that Day, time will bear a different dimension.

And one who goes to visit a sick person will be rewarded by Allah Who will assign an angel to visit him in his grave till the Day of Gathering, the Assembling Day. Also, it is recorded in Rawandi's Da`awat that the Prophet (P) has said that if one recites the following supplication three times when a deceased person is buried, the torment from the latter will be lifted till the Trumpet is blown: **Lord! I plead to You through the status reserved with you for Muhammad (P) and the Progeny of Muhammad (P) not to torment this deceased person till the Day when the trumpet is blown."**

Grave's Constriction (pressure)

The constriction (pressure) in the grave is a very terrifying stage to the extent that it is not just difficult for the living to imagine, it is impossible to imagine. Commander of the Faithful Imam Ali ibn Abu Talib (ع) has said the following about it: **"O servants of Allah! There is nothing harder, on those who are not forgiven, than death save the grave: So, beware of its constriction, darkness and loneliness. Each day, the grave says: 'I am the abode of loneliness! I am the abode of worms!' And the grave is either like one of the gardens of Paradise or one of the pits of Hell... Indeed, the "life of hardship" about which Allah has warned those who are hostile to Him is the torment in the grave: The unbeliever is assaulted as he is in his grave by ninety-nine dragons that tear up his flesh, crush his bones and keep visiting him thus till the Day of Resurrection. Had one of these dragons blown on earth, no vegetation would have ever grown in it. O servants of Allah! Your weak selves, tender and soft bodies which are satisfied with little, are too weak to withstand all of this."**

As indicated above, the sins, transgressions and wrongdoings will each take a form in the hereafter, and the worse one is the worse its form will be. What will help during this difficult situation? Page 327, Vol. 4 of Usul al-Kafi, tradition No. 13, says that whenever Imam as-Sadiq (ع) woke up at the end of the night, he would raise his voice so his family members could hear him saying the following: **"Lord! Help me with regard to the horror of what is awaiting me [after death] and expand for me the narrowness of the grave. Lord! Grant me a blessing at the time of death, and grant me goodness before death, and grant me goodness after death. Lord! Help me during the time of the stupors of death. Lord! Help me against the agonies of the grave. Lord! Help me against the constriction of the grave. Lord! Help me against the loneliness of the grave. And Lord! Do marry me to the huris with large, lovely eyes."**

Be informed, dear reader, that most torment in the grave is due to one not paying enough attention and care while using the toilet, taking lightly the sources of najasa, uncleanness, and also due to committing calumny and backbiting as well keeping a distance from his family, according to p. 222, Vol. 6 of Bihar al-Anwar.

From a narration by Sa'eed ibn Jubair, another cause is one having bad manners with his wife, speaking to her roughly rather than with kindness and consideration. Whatever the reason may be, we are assured by Imam Ja'far as-Sadiq (ع) that **"No believer is spared the grave's constriction,"** according to p. 221, Vol. 6 of the same reference. On p. 221, Vol. 6 of Bihar al-Anwar and on p. 74, Vol. 2 of Safeenat al-Bihar, Imam as-Sadiq (ع) is quoted as having said: **"The grave's constriction is atonement for a bliss wasted by a believer."**

Now let us review what helps in this terrible stage of the afterlife: Luckily, there are many acts of adoration which one can perform during his lifetime which will help him in the life to come, and the book titled Manazil al-Akhira by Abbas al-Qummi counts 15 of them. But we,

in order to be brief, would like to cite the following for you:

- 1) Commander of the Faithful Imam Ali (ع) has said, "One who recites Surat an-Nisaa (Chapter 4 of the Holy Qur'an) every Friday will have security against the grave's constriction," according to p. 330, Vol. 74 of the same reference.
- 2) It is recorded on p. 397, Vol. 2 of Safeenat al-Bihar that "One who recites Surat an-Nisaa (Chapter of the Women [Chapter 4] of the Holy Qur'an) every Friday will be granted security in his grave from the earth's insects, animals and the grave's constriction."
- 3) According to the same reference and page, some traditions of the Prophet (P) indicate that "If one recites Surat Noon (Chapter 68 of the Holy Qur'an which is also called Surat al-Qalam), during obligatory or optional prayers, Allah will grant him security from the grave's constriction."
- 4) On pp. 221 and 243, Vol. 6 of Bihar al-Anwar, we are told that Imam ar-Ridha (ع) has said: "One who dies between the periods of zawal زوال (midday) of Thursday and Friday, he will be secured by Allah from the grave's constriction."
- 5) Imam ar-Ridha (ع) is also quoted as having said: "Uphold the Night Prayer; no believing servant of Allah stands at the end of the night to offer 8 rek'ats (prostrations), two Shaf' rek'ats, one Witr Rek`a, then he seeks forgiveness of Allah in the Qunoot (invocation) of the Witr seventy times except that Allah will grant him security against the torment of the grave and against the torture of the Fire, grants him a longer lifespan and expands his means of livelihood for him", as we are told on p. 397, Vol. 2 of Safeenat al-Bihar where the subject of the grave is discussed.

Questioning by Munkir and Nakeer

On p. 223, Vol. 6 of Bihar al-Anwar, Imam Ja'far as-Sadiq (ع) is quoted as having said: "Not among our followers (Shi'as) is one who denies three things: the ascension [to heavens], the questioning in the grave (by angels Munkir and Nakeer) and the intercession." In the same reference on p. 261, we are told the following: It has been reported that the two angels (Munkir and Nakeer) come in a terrifying form: Their voice is like thunder and their eyes like lightening. They will ask the dead person: "Who is your God? Who is your Prophet? What is your religion?" And they will ask him about his wali and Imam. Since the answers under such conditions will be very difficult for the dead person, and he undoubtedly needs help, the talqeen becomes a must in two places: One of them when he is placed inside the grave, and it is recommended that his right shoulder be held by the mulaqqin and his left shoulder by the left hand and moved then instructed with talqeen when his body is being shaken and entered into the grave.

The other place is after the deceased person is put in the grave and buried: It is recommended that the mulaqqin, who is a close relative and a wali of the deceased person, sits at the area of the head after everyone else had left. He should raise his voice as he conducts the talqeen, and it is recommended that the mulaqqin places both his hands on the grave and brings his mouth close to the grave.

Someone else who acts on behalf of the mulaqqin may do so. It is reported that when both angels hear the talqeen, Munkir will say to Nakeer: "Let us go back, for they have taught him the talqeen of evidence, and he needs no question," whereupon they both leave. On p. 183, Vol. 1 of Mustadrak al-Wasa'il, we are told that Imam as-Sadiq (ع) has said the following: If the believer enters the grave, prayer come at his right and zakat at his left as kindness and benevolence look on. As for perseverance, it will stand aside. When both angels (Munkir and Nakeer) come to question him, perseverance will address prayer, zakat and kindness saying, 'Help your fellow,' meaning the deceased person, 'and if you cannot, I am ready.'" Also, On pp. 145-146 of the old edition of as-Saffar's Basa'ir al-Darajat, through isnad which goes back to Zurr ibn Jubaish narrating an authentic tradition in the Mahasin book from one of them, peace be with them, namely Imams as-Sadiq and al-Baqir, saying: "When a believer dies, six faces (forms or shapes, i.e. personifications) enter the grave with him, each is more beautiful, more fragrant and more clean than the rest. These faces settle in six positions: on his right side, on his left, behind him, in front of him and at his feet. The most beautiful and the most fragrant one rests at his head. If questioning or torture approaches him from all sides, it will be prevented by one of the six faces. The most beautiful face will ask the other faces saying: 'Who are you, may Allah reward you well on my behalf?'

The face settling at the believer's right side will say, 'I am the prayers.' The face settling on the believer's left side will say, 'I am the zakat.' The face settling opposite to the believer's face will say, 'I am the fast.' The one settling behind the believer will say, 'I am the pilgrimage', while the one settling at his feet will say, 'I am kindness and benevolence towards the believing brothers.'

Everyone will then ask him about himself thus: 'And who are you with your dazzling beauty

and extra-ordinary fragrance?' He will say, 'I am the wilaya (mastership) of the Progeny of Muhammad (peace and blessings of Allah be with them all).'"