

The World and the Hereafter

H A R U N Y A H Y A

Fair in the eyes of men is the love of things they covet: Women and sons; Heaped-up hoards of gold and silver; horses branded (for blood and excellence); and (wealth of) cattle and well-tilled land. Such are the possessions of this world's life; but in nearness to God is the best of the goals (To return to). Say: "Shall I give you glad tidings of things Far better than those? For the righteous are Gardens in nearness to their Lord, with rivers flowing beneath; therein is their eternal home; with companions pure (and holy); and the good pleasure of God." For in God's sight are (all) His servants. (Al-e Imran 14-15)

Essentially all the attempts to seek in religion something crooked, stem from peoples' lack of understanding the reality of the Hereafter.

As it is stated in the Qur'an, God has created the World as a temporary home for us. It is for testing the believers, having them purified, letting them to be worthy of heaven and witnessing the unbelievers.

However, members of the society of ignorance disregard this reality and hold on to the World alone as if it will never end. That is the reason that shapes the mentality of the society of ignorance. "Life is short, so get a life", "we come to this world only once, so enjoy it" kind of statements are actually simple reflections of this mentality which urge people to live their lives without considering their religious duties and the hereafter. You should enjoy your life while you are alive. You can try anything for fun and for your benefit because in the society of ignorance, as long as you benefit from something, there is nothing wrong with it. From that perspective, everything is legitimate.

The society of ignorance is in a state of deep ignorance. It is clear that death is an unavoidable end and it will come sooner or later to everyone on earth. Yet, people of ignorance disregard this fact and keep it out of the agenda as much as possible. They insistently avoid thinking about it and hinder people from talking about it. Everybody leads his life as if he will never die, although most people do not deny the existence of God. When they are asked, they claim they do believe in the afterlife as well, as it is a prerequisite of being a Muslim. However their actions prove just the opposite. That is because of their lack of faith in the hereafter as it is stated in the verses as follows:

"As to these, they love the fleeting life, and put away behind them a Day (that will be) hard." (Al-Insan 27)
"Thou wilt indeed find them, of all people, most greedy of life,-even more than the idolaters: Each one of them wishes He could be given a life of a thousand years: But the grant of such life will not save him from (due) punishment. For God sees well all that they do." (Al-Baqara 9)
"Ah indeed! Are they in doubt concerning the Meeting with their Lord? Ah indeed! It is He that doth encompass all things!" (Fussilat 54)

Since they think their death will be an ultimate end for their being, their desire to live forever is fulfilled in another way. Most of the people of ignorance want to leave some kind of a work to make people remember them after their death. They think, by doing so, they will be living in people's minds. They are unaware how an unreasonable way of thinking it is. Instead of doing some good deeds for their afterlife, they try to leave a "name" in the world and want to be "unforgettable" after their death, which will bring no benefit to them.

"Behold, their brother Hud said to them: 'Will ye not fear (God)? I am to you a messenger worthy of all trust: So fear God and obey me. No reward do I ask of you for it: my reward is only from the Lord of the Worlds. Do ye build a landmark on every high place to amuse yourselves? And do ye get for yourselves fine buildings in the hope of living therein (for ever)?'" (Al-Shuara 124-129)
"Who pileth up wealth and layeth it by, Thinking that his wealth would make him last for ever!" (Al-Humaza 2-3)

The belief of the Hereafter is a kind of consolation to repress the pain experienced during the life in the world. Even the most religious ones hold a suspicious faith. They choose to believe in it **"just in case"**. They believe they guarantee the gardens in the hereafter. What is interesting is those who approach the hereafter with such a suspicion, claim that they are people of the gardens. The person mentioned in the chapter **Al-Kahf** symbolizes this general point of view of the society of ignorance;

"Set forth to them the parable of two men: for one of them We provided two gardens of grape-vines and surrounded them with date palms; in between the two We placed corn-fields. Each of those gardens brought forth its produce, and failed not in the least therein: in the midst of them We caused a river to flow. (Abundant) was the produce this man had : he said to his companion, in the course of a mutual argument: 'more wealth have I than you, and more honor and power in (my following of) men' He went into his garden in a state (of mind) unjust to his soul: He said, 'I deem not that this will ever perish. Nor do I deem that the Hour (of Judgment) will (ever) come: Even if I am brought back to my Lord, I shall surely find (there) something better in exchange.' His companion said to him, in the course of the argument with him: 'Dost thou deny Him Who created thee out of dust, then out of a sperm-drop, then fashioned thee into a man? But (I think) for my part that He is God, My Lord, and none shall I associate with my Lord. Why didst thou not, as thou wentest into thy garden, say: 'God's will (be done)! There is no power but with God!' If thou dost see me less than thee in wealth and sons, It may be that my Lord will give me something better than thy garden, and that He will send on thy garden thunderbolts (by way of reckoning) from heaven, making it (but) slippery sand! Or the water of the garden will run off underground so that thou wilt never be able to find it.' So his fruits (and enjoyment) were encompassed (with ruin), and he remained twisting and turning his hands over what he had spent on his property, which had (now) tumbled to pieces to its very foundations, and he could only say, 'Woe is me! Would I had never ascribed partners to my Lord and Cherisher!' Nor had he numbers to help him against God, nor was he able to deliver himself. There, the (only) protection comes from God, the True One. He is the Best to reward, and the Best to give success" (Al-Kahf 32-44)

In another chapter of the Qur'an, we see another example of a person with such a mentality. While he says "if I am brought back to my Lord..." he, in fact, confesses his suspicion of the hereafter;

"When we give him a taste of some Mercy from Ourselves, after some adversity has touched him, he is sure to say, 'This is due to my(merit): I think not that the Hour (of Judgment) will (ever) be established; but if I am brought back to my Lord, I have (much) good (stored) in His sight!' But We will show the Unbelievers the truth of all that they did, and We shall give them the taste of a severe Penalty." (Fussilat 50)

It is in fact hard to understand the reason why people of the society of ignorance insist on their blindness. If someone believes in God, then he inevitably comes to the conclusion that the hereafter also exists. **God creates the human, lets him live a life, gives him countless blessings and shows a great compassion and mercy. So, why should He want to annihilate him at a certain age?**

Let's remember an example given by a great Islamic scholar about this subject: Can a mother execute her child after bringing him up all through the years? In fact, a mother cares about her child a lot and she feels a great deal of compassion towards her child. She does not even think about doing him any harm, let alone wanting him to die. While these feelings have been given to her by God as the ultimate owner of compassion and any concept we know of good, how can anyone believe that God annihilates humans whom he creates and bestows with all kinds of blessings, especially when those people are thankful to him and choose to be servants of God.

Perhaps we could have a reason to think that death was an end, if good people lived endlessly on the earth while evil ones died. However as mentioned in the verse: **"Every soul shall have a taste of death" (Al-Anbiya 35)** God ends one's life after allowing him to live for a certain period of time. As it has been stated in the verse; **"Did We not give you long enough life so that he that would should receive admonition? and (moreover) the warner came to you" (Al-Fatr 37)** and this period of time is sufficient for each one of us to make a choice.

During this period of time, people should realize that their souls are immortal. God has made us want various things and He has given all what we want and need. God has created us in such a way that we feel hunger and He has bestowed us with plenty of foods on earth. He has given us the feeling of thirst and he has created water resources for humans when he created the earth. Then, in the same way, will not God let us live forever, as He has made us desire to live forever? God has created human as His caliph on the earth and given all other created things, like the Sun, stars and the earth to his service. After all that perfect creation of God, it would be unreasonable to think that God allows mankind to live on the earth for a period of time and ends his life forever. In short, when we pass away, we do not get lost in "nothingness" but we step into our real lives.

It is very obvious for a thinking person that life in the world is temporary and a simple sample of the real life. All the beauties in the world are temporary and bare many deficiencies. The most good-looking human can keep his good outlook only for one or two decades. As he gets older and older, his physical appearance changes, his skin becomes puckered, his body loses its shape and he starts to suffer many kinds of illnesses related with aging. It is not necessary to get older to witness the shortcomings of the life of this world. His body mechanisms are built with many weaknesses. If he does not take a shower for a few days, he starts to stink. No matter how attractive he is, he has to use lavatory as every human does and has to deal with this kind of weaknesses of himself every single day all through his life.

Since people are used to all of this, they usually are not aware that these weaknesses have been given to them on purpose. They consider the presence of these weaknesses very normal and never think another way could be possible. However, God's creation is perfect. When we look at the creation of the universe, the earth, the nature and all living creatures from complex organisms to single celled structures, we clearly see that there is a perfect order and design in everything. So, if God had willed, people would not have any weaknesses as those mentioned above. But all these deficiencies are for reminding people of the fact that they stand in need of God. They are also for reminding people that, the life in this world is only an example of the real life in the hereafter, which is free of all deficiencies.

"Know ye (all), that the life of this world is but play and amusement, pomp and mutual boasting and multiplying, (in rivalry) among yourselves, riches and children. Here is a similitude: How rain and the growth which it brings forth, delight (the hearts of) the tillers; soon it withers; thou wilt see it grow yellow; then it becomes dry and crumbles away. But in the Hereafter is a Penalty severe (for the devotees of wrong). And Forgiveness from God and (His) Good Pleasure (for the devotees of God). And what is the life of this world, but goods and chattels of deception." (Al-Hadid 20)

Then, one may ask, "what is the real life like?" It is known to all that, there will be two different places in the hereafter, one for the believers, Paradise, and the other for the unbelievers, Hell. However, the society of ignorance has not abstained from producing tales about Paradise, and Hell. Therefore, we again need to refer to the Qur'an to understand the true nature of the hereafter.