

Following death, the spirit is taken to the Presence of God. If it led a good, virtuous life and refined itself, the angels charged with taking it there wrap it in a piece of satin and bear it, through the heavens and all inner dimensions of existence, to His Presence. During this journey, angels welcome it in every mansion or station it passes and ask: "Whose spirit is this? How beautiful it is!" The angels conveying it introduce it with the most beautiful titles it had while in the world, and answer: "This is the spirit of the one who, for example, prayed, fasted, gave alms, and bore all kinds of hardship for God's sake." Finally, God Almighty welcomes it and tells the angels: "Take it back to the grave where its body is buried, so that it can answer the questions of Munkar and Nakir, the interrogating angels."

Whatever misfortune we experience is the result of our own sin. If believers are sincere but cannot always refrain from sin, God, out of His Mercy, allows misfortune to strike so that they may be purified. God may subject them to great agony during death, either to forgive their still unpardoned sins or to promote them to higher (spiritual) ranks, but then take their spirit very gently. If, despite all misfortune and death agonies there are still some unforgiven sins, these people are somehow punished in the grave and so will not be punished in Hell. As the grave is the first station on the journey toward eternal life, it features a preliminary interrogation by two angels into what kind of life the deceased lead. And almost everyone, except Prophets, is subjected to some suffering.

It is recorded in reliable books that 'Abbas, the uncle of the Prophet, upon him be peace and blessings, desired very much to see 'Umar in his dream after the latter had died. When he saw him 6 months later, he asked him: "Where were you until now?" 'Umar replied: "Don't ask me that! I have just finished accounting (for my life)."

Sa'd ibn Mu'adh was among the greatest Companions, may God be pleased with them all. When he died, Archangel Gabriel, upon him be peace, told God's Messenger, upon him be peace and blessings: "The Divine Throne trembled when Sa'd died." Innumerable angels took part in his funeral. After Sa'd, may God be pleased with him, was buried, the Messenger said in amazement: "Glory to God! What (will happen to others) if the grave squeezes (even such people like) Sa'd?"

In the grave, everyone is questioned by the angels Munkar and Nakir. They ask: "Who is your Lord? Who is your Prophet? What is your religion?" and many other questions. If the deceased were believers, they can answer these questions. Otherwise, they cannot. The questions continue concerning their deeds in the world.

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The spirit's relationship with the body differs according to which world it inhabits. In this world, the spirit is confined within the prison of the body. If the evil-commanding self and bodily desires dominate it, the spirit inevitably deteriorates and spells the person's final doom. Those who use their willpower in the way taught by God, discipline their evil-commanding selves, nourish their spirits (via belief, worship, and good conduct), and are not enslaved by bodily desires will find their spirits refined, purified, and furnished with laudable qualities. Such people will find happiness in both worlds.

After burial, the spirit waits in the intermediate world between this one and the Hereafter. Although the body decomposes, its essential particles—called in a hadith *ajb al-dhanab*, which literally means coccyx—do not rot. We do not know whether *ajb al-dhanab* is a person's genes or something else. Regardless of this ambiguity, however, the spirit continues its relations with the body through it. God will make this part, which is formed of the body's essential particles, atoms, or all its other particles already dispersed in the soil, conducive to eternal life during the final destruction and rebuilding of the universe. He also will use it to recreate us on the Day of Judgment.

The intermediate world is the realm where the spirit feels the "breath" of the bliss of Paradise or the punishment of Hell. If we led a virtuous life in the world, our good deeds (e.g., prayers, recitations, acts of charity) will appear as amiable fellows. Also, windows onto heavenly scenes will be opened for us and, as stated in a hadith, our grave will become like a garden of Paradise. However, if some of our sins still remain unpardoned, regardless of how virtuous we were, we may suffer some punishment in the intermediate world until we become deserving of Paradise. Unbelievers who indulged in sin will be met by their deeds, which will assume the forms of bad fellows and vermin. They will see scenes of Hell, and their graves will become like a pit of Hell.

When we are alive, our spirit suffers pain and feels joy and happiness. Although it feels pain apparently through the nervous system and uses this extremely complicated system to communicate with all bodily parts, scientists still do not understand how it interacts with the body, especially with the brain. Any bodily failure that causes death can make the nervous system stop operating. However, it has been established scientifically that certain brain cells survive for a while after death. Scientists try to receive signals from such cells. If they succeed in doing so and can decipher those signals, it will be useful, especially in criminology, in solving unsolved crimes. For example, the Qur'an tell us how, during the time of Prophet Moses, upon him be peace, God revived a dead person, who identified his killer:

When Moses said to his people: "God commands you to sacrifice a cow" ... they sacrificed her,

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a thing they had scarcely done. And when you killed a living soul, and disputed thereon—God disclosed what you were hiding—so We said: "Smite him with part of it"; even so He brings to life the dead, and He shows you His signs, that haply you may have understanding. (2:67, 71–73)

As the spirit suffers pain and feels happy, and as it continues its relation with the body (via those essential bodily particles that do not rot) in the intermediate world, it is meaningless to discuss whether the spirit, the body, or both will enjoy Paradise or suffer Hell.

Since the spirit lives the worldly life together with the body and shares all its joys and sorrows, God will resurrect people both bodily and spiritually. The Ahl al-Sunna wa al-Jama'a agree that the spirit and the body will go either to Paradise or Hell together. God will build bodies in forms unique to the Hereafter, where everything will be alive: This life of the world is but a pastime and a game. Lo! the home of the Hereafter, that is life if they but knew (29:64).

Spirits in the intermediate world will see and hear us, provided God allows this. If He does, He may permit some saintly people to see, and hear, and communicate with us.

Our account is not closed after we die. If we leave behind good, virtuous children, books or institutions from which people continue to benefit, or if we have raised or contributed to raising those who benefit others, our reward increases. If we leave evil behind, our sins increase as long as our evil harms others. Therefore, if we want to help our beloved ones who have died, we should do good deeds. If we help the poor, take part in Islamic services, lead a good and virtuous life, and especially spend to promote Islam and the good of Muslims and humanity at large, we will cause their reward to increase.