



# **AFTER LIFE**

**(Religion, Iqbal and the  
Hereafter)**

Ghulam Sabir



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## My Personal Gratitude

My first thanks is to God for bestowing me with enough strength to write “After Life”. I am also indebted to all of those who have helped me in my work and have enabled me to articulate my thoughts and shape them into a book. In particular, I am thankful to those I have quoted. I also acknowledge the director of Iqbal Academy Pakistan Mr. Suheyl Umar, who has been a constant source of literary provision. A number of the works he has passed to me have served as a source of inspiration for this manuscript and are listed in the Bibliography.

Finally I am extremely grateful to the authors of the following books on the subject:

- 1) Mary T, Browne, author of Life after Death.
- 2) Tom Harpur, author of Life after Death.
- 3) Raymond Moody, author of Life after Life.
- 4) Anthony Peake, author of Is There Life after Death.
- 5) David Fontana, author of Life after Life.

G. Sabir



## **Dedication**

To my son Khalid and his family who have been a constant source of strength and assistance to me in the Golden Age of my life.

And to Suraiya, a comfort and joy to our family in the many years she was with us.





## **FOREWORD**

### **Death– the Great Outdoors of the Human Spirit by Muhammad Suheyl Umar**

Simply stated, life is composed of a few basic elements: life and death, loneliness and love, hope and defeat– not many more. In making our way through these givens, affirmation is better than complaint, hope more viable than despair, kindness nobler than it’s opposite. These might seem like pious platitudes but they are infinitely valuable to help people cut through the ambiguities and complexities of a confusing century. This is the traditional worldview, held by all the human collectivities before the advent of a Modern worldview. It is preferable to the one that now encloses us because it allows for the fulfilment of the basic longing that lies in the depths of the human heart.

There is within us– in even the blithest, most light-hearted among us – a fundamental dis-ease. It acts as an unquenchable fire that renders the vast majority of us incapable in this life of ever coming to full peace. This desire lies in the marrow of our bones and the deep regions of our souls. All great literature, poetry, art, philosophy, psychology, and religion tries to name and analyze this longing. We are seldom in direct touch with it, and indeed

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the modern world seems set on preventing us from coming close, by covering it with an unending phantasmagoria of entertainments, obsessions, addictions, and distractions of every sort. But the longing is there, built into us like a jack-in-the-box that presses for release. Whether we realize it or not, simply to be human is to long for release from mundane existence, with its confining walls of finitude and mortality. Release from those walls calls for space outside them, and the traditional world provides that space in abundance. It has about it the feel of long, open distances and limitless vistas for the human spirit to explore –distances and vistas that are quality-laden throughout. Our received wisdom denies its existence, but that wisdom cannot prevent us from having experiences that feel as if they come from a different world. Ghulam Sabir invites us to ponder about this crucially important aspect of human life against the back drop of our prevalent paradigm.

The entire scientific worldview has been spun from a relatively few crucial experiments, which can be likened to a dot-to-dot puzzle. Myths are like the lines traditional peoples collectively and largely unconsciously draw to connect the “dots” of the direct disclosures that their visionaries report. But the scientific worldview, the received wisdom of our age, looks at the human heritage with contempt. It is, however, a commonplace that the modernization of the world is accompanied by a spiritual malaise that has come to be called alienation. At its most fundamental level, the diagnosis of alienation is based on the view that modernization forces upon us a world that,

although baptized as real by science, is denuded of all humanly recognizable qualities; beauty and ugliness, love and hate, passion and fulfilment, salvation and damnation. It is not, of course being claimed that such matters are not part of the existential realities of human life. It is rather that the scientific worldview makes it illegitimate to speak of them as being “objectively” part of the world, forcing us instead to define such evaluation and such emotional experience as “merely subjective” projections of people’s inner lives.

It was Max Weber’s merit to see that it is historically a specific kind of mind, *not human mind as such*, which is subject to this compulsion. We have become habituated to and dependent on effective knowledge [read scientific] and hence have bound ourselves to this kind of genuine explanation... “Reductionism,” the view that everything in the world is really something else, and that something else is coldly impersonal, is simply the ineluctable corollary of effective explanation.

This epistemology that our Prometheanism has forced upon us carries morally disturbing consequences because there is no way that a happy ending can be worked into the scientific worldview. Death is the grim reaper of individual lives, and whether things as a whole will end in a freeze or a fry, with a bang or a whimper (or keep cranking out more insentient matter in an expanding universe) is anybody’s guess.

Hannah Arendt carries these thoughts to their metaphysical conclusion:

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*What has come to an end is the distinction between the sensual and the supersensual, together with the notion, at least as old as Parmenides, that whatever is not given to the senses... is more real, more truthful, more meaningful than what appears; that it is not just beyond sense perception but above the world of the senses... In increasingly strident voices, the few defenders of metaphysics have warned us of the danger of nihilism inherent in this development. The sensual... cannot survive the death of the supersensual [with-out nihilism moving in].*

If number is the language of science, myth is the language of religion. It does not map literally onto the common sense world but works with symbols and provide us with intimations of “another world to live in.” The signature of myth is always its happy ending, which makes myths like fairy tales writ large. Fairy tales locate their happy endings—marrying the princess— in this world; myths anchor that ending in the final nature of things, which conquers death itself. It is the most successful plot device that has ever been conceived, and it is easy to see why, for it stretches our imaginations to their limits and goes on from there to assure us that we can have what they reach for. But only after, let it never be forgotten, we have faced and surmounted ordeals of daunting magnitude.

A decisive thing about the “great outdoors of the Human Spirit” needs to be mentioned here. No socio-cultural environment in the pre-Modern times had turned its back on Transcendence in the systematic way that characterized

Modernity. Traditional peoples did not think of the tangible world as freestanding. It derives from a divine source, called the Great Spirit, God, the One, the Infinite, whatever. This source is not separate from the world– separation is the only thing it is separate from. It is, however, exempt from the world’s limitations: time with its perpetual perishings, space with its separations, and finitude with its oppressive restrictions. Our forebears took this distinction between Transcendence and immanence (the former capitalized to indicate its superiority) as a summons to return to the source from which they derived. “God became man that man might become God” is the way Christians put the matter. The Buddhist version reads, “There is an unborn, an unbecome, an unmade, an uncompounded, therefore there is an escape from the born, the become, the made, the compounded.” The Islamic perspective epitomizes it in “verily we are from God and unto Him shall we return.” Iqbal recognized that this hidden self, the Infinite within, is called by many names but all point to a single Reality. Hindus call it Brahman that is “End of all love-longing”, vouchsafing the “unshakeable deliverance of the heart” in Buddhism which Christianity terms as “Beauty so ancient and so new.” For the Jews it is “Eternal” which, in Islam, is “closer to us than our jugular veins.”

Ghulam Sabir’s short treatise reminds us of the Return, the great “inevitable” the Alpha and Omega of human existence. It also underscores another very important point. The pilgrim is not alone in the heroic journey of Return, for it is the spark of divinity that God plants in human beings

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that initiates the journey in the first place. Transcendence takes the initiative at every turn: in creating the world, in instantiating itself in the world, and in shaping civilizations through its revelations— revelations that set civilizations in motion and establish their trajectories. This is the invincible ground for hope that writes optimism into the traditional worldview. That the divine must take the initiative if the world's return to it is to succeed is evident to anyone with the slightest metaphysical flair, for the incommensurable difference between the finite and the Infinite renders absurd the notion that the finite might bridge the gap with its own resources. If there is to be a wooing of God by humanity, it must be God who is the real agent in the wooing, as well as its object.

Suheyf Umar

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## EDITORS' PREFACE

### The Undiscovered Country

When contemplating death, few in western literature have encapsulated the fear of a life hereafter than Shakespeare's Hamlet, whose anguish over his father's murder lead him to contemplate an easier exit from this mortal coil...

*“But that the dread of something after death,  
The undiscovered country, from whose bourn  
No traveller returns, puzzles the will,  
And makes us rather bear those ills we have  
Than fly to others that we know not of?”*

In writing this essay, my grandfather seeks to lay bare Hamlet and other's anxiety over this most unknowable of unknowns. Modern society has become increasingly obsessed with death. Advances in modern medicine, genetics and biotechnology allow us to cheat a few years here and there from the grim reaper, however the finality of the scythe remains permanent; like it or not death comes for all of us one day.

It is with this in mind that one asks the question: is it the drive for life that spurs us on to live longer, or the fear of death? The answer could lie in the realisation that these are



not in fact competing concepts but derive from the same impulse. Death is that indistinct which makes life distinct, by denying it's distinctness we can assert life. And in denying death's significance the quality of life becomes focussed, as light through a convex lens. It sharpens the mind and makes us realise how precious our time is on this plane.

Nevertheless is it really that insignificant? When the fear of death paralyses even the most logical minded men and women, surely there must be some element of power that death holds over us? And it is this: the fear not simply of death but of what comes after life. The multitude of questions which this poses push and then break the limits of the rational horizon and our only recourse are the realms of metaphysics and theology.

## INTRODUCTION

Over the last decade I have seen many loved ones, including my beloved wife of sixty years, shuffle off this mortal coil. As a lifelong Muslim, I have always believed in a Hereafter; where the judgement and forgiveness of a loving God leads our souls to an Eden, where our souls may rejoin those loved ones for eternity.

It is clear in this modern age that such a viewpoint is no longer popular and if at all entertained, it is because the concept serves a fanaticist purpose for some wider manipulation of the uneducated masses. For the rest there is general disbelief, even among the Believing, that a life hereafter exists at all. My interest in writing this therefore is not to stand to refute the modern rationality, nor to become a bastion of unwavering faith, blinded by dogma. My purpose is to explore, for those who are willing to believe in an afterlife and for those who may fear death, what a life after death might mean to those of us who are still living. What comes After Life?

Before embarking on this project, I perused a number of well-known works on the subjects of life, death and the world hereafter. This essay modestly attempts to accomplish three main tasks:

- 1) a contextualisation of the religious view of life after death; including therein a short summary of the

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views of a number of world religions and extending this to a more universal religious viewpoint on the stages of life and death

- 2) observations on the phenomena of Near Death Experiences and how this may lend to the credibility of an afterlife
- 3) finally and most importantly a comparative discourse on how Iqbal, and ultimately how most mainstream Islamic traditions, view the subjects of divine forgiveness and the continuing journey of the soul.

Moreover I have sought to do so without the rhetoric of inflamed fundamentalism. It is my belief and the belief of many others that the soul does not perish with the bodily death of a person.

In writing this tome it has become both a personal and spiritual journey for me. The concepts surrounding life after death are numerous but to stick to my initial aim, of religious rational view of this subject in a world where the religious irrational has become prevalent, I have attempted to focus on the journey of the soul in a divine context and how forgiveness and the divine help shape what comes After Life.

Thus, unashamedly, I hope to present a spiritual viewpoint of death which one hopes will bring comfort to the minds of those who believe in the afterlife and ease the fear of Death from the minds of other readers.

It is our hope, dear reader, to impart some of the belief that death is a pleasant event – the moment of death is timeless, after which a person enters into the beauty and grace of the hereafter. A world, as Muslims believe, that is nearer to God, the Almighty, the most Merciful and the most Benevolent. The same scripture encourages us not worry about minor sins committed during one's time on the Earth and instead to trust in divine forgiveness and the trust a believer must have that the soul's continuing journey is predicated on abstaining from causing any harm to your fellow human beings and resting assured in the benevolence of the divine.

G. Sabir

## Introduction

## Chapter 1 – Persistence of the Concept

We find the key of our happiness by understanding the continuity of life.

(Mary T. Browne)

### What happens now?

Many of the world's major organised religions and a number of philosophers believe in a life after death. This is far from a modern concept. On the contrary it has been with us since time immemorial. Life is taken by the believing man as not ending with the death of a body; indirectly considered this is the Soul Immortal.

Over five thousand years ago Egyptians believed in life after death. Well preserved, mummified remains have been shown to be buried in graves with their worldly wealth as well as with the food of their liking. In the graves of some of the Egyptian kings their favourite servants were also buried alive. The kings in their lifetime had these elaborate tombs built in the shape of huge pyramids or as excavations in the side of hills. These graves were equipped with all necessities of life, as if they would be required after life as well.

Our mind always tries to ignore or set aside the idea of death but the fact remains that none of us can escape death. Two questions have plagued us since man was able to think:

- 1) What is the nature of death?
- 2) Does bodily death mean a total extinction of man including the soul?

Science fails to answer the first question as death is not a thing which can be brought under some sort of laboratory test. The second question is in the realm of belief and the very nature of the theology behind the question establishes for people of faith irrefutable proof that we are possessed of a soul whose existence continues beyond death. Thus a third and most important question arises:

- 3) if the soul does not perish with the death of a body, what happens to it after leaving the body– where does it go– is there any other place or another world for the soul to live when it leaves the bodily abode?

And it is with this question that we concern ourselves in *After Life*.

Some people think that man does not want to die and therefore the term ‘life after death’ has been invented as a refuge from the idea of death. Philosophers like Bertrand Russell call the life after dying as ‘wish-projection to remove the fear of death from the mind of man’. This is not

something new with human reasoning. The metaphysics of religious thought dictates that when the existence of a deity is absent from the mind the ensuing chaos results in a lack of insight into the Reality which our material eye is unable to see. In the ancient world prior to the birth of Judaism two religions emerged between the period 1200 and 500 B.C. These were Zoroastrianism and Buddhism. To the luminaries of both of these respective religions the first revelation was the oneness of God. As a result of this they framed moral laws and began teachings on morality, the basis of which, besides the existence of one God, was to live a life preparing oneself for the world hereafter. Continuity of life after death remained an integral part of faith among both these religions. The followers of Buddhism also refer to death as '*the emergence of a new birth*'. Following is a brief account of some major religions starting from the period of Zoroastrianism and ending at Islam.

### **Zoroastrianism**

Zoroastrianism is a religion founded by Zoroaster around 1500 BC. It is one of the oldest religions of which the followers are still living in various countries both East and West. At its heart is a belief in one God, life after death and the day of judgement. At the age of thirty it is said that Zoroaster received his first revelation that there was only one God, the Lord of Light, Ahura Mazda. After this Zoroaster started preaching that there is one and only one God and that polytheism was a great sin. He warned the people that in the life hereafter there would be a day of



judgement when everybody will have to face God, who will evaluate their good and bad deeds during their lifetime on the earth. God will then decide their fate for future life in the world hereafter. As with most prophets, biblical and otherwise, he faced great adversity but ultimately success, and now his followers are found in many countries around the world. They believe in one God, a life after death and resurrection of all human beings on the Day of Judgment.

In the Zoroastrian universe, souls will come to bridge where they will be met by three angels who evaluate the kindness, conscience and justice of an individual. Deeds both good and bad are weighed on scales (much as in the Islamic tradition) The doctrine of eschatology is further developed through the concept of a Day of Judgement or Frasho-Kereti where all souls will pass through a river of molten metal to be cleansed.

## Confucianism

Confucianism and Taoism, two ancient schools of thought, preached to improve social life in China; the so-called “ideal relationship between human beings.”

Considered “The First Teacher” (“not that there were no teachers before him, but because he stands first in rank”), Confucius, the founder of Confucianism was born 551 B.C. Perceiving a “divine mission” at the age of fifty, he wandered into several states ‘proffering unsolicited advice to rulers on how to improve their governing and seeking a

real opportunity to put his ideas into practice.’ But he was a failure in politics and he prepared himself instead to teach history, poetry, government, propriety, mathematics, music, divination and sports; becoming a one-man university and teaching in a Socratic method. To best understand Confucius it may be useful to examine this short excerpt from his teachings:

*“If there is religiousness in the heart, there will be beauty in the character.*

*If there is beauty in the character, there will be harmony in the home.*

*If there is harmony in the home, there will be order in the nation.*

*If there is order in the nation, there will be peace in the world.”*

Confucius’ thought could at best be described as a form of dichotomy. While he believed in some form of spiritual survival, and in the ongoing presence of those who have departed this life, he did not believe in a hereafter which offered a form of redemption for life on Earth.

To be more precise it was Confucius’ notion that we understood too little of this life here and now, to waste it planning for a hereafter which was even less comprehensible. “Heaven” therefore in Confucianism is simply the next plane to which one transcends after this one. The unknown nature of this plane in Confucianism therefore makes it irrelevant to this one. One thing is clear however,

there is an end goal: to achieve one-ness with the cosmos and in this regard actions on each plane contribute towards achieving that aim. The power of “ren” is to motivate humans to do good and thus achieve this harmony.

To understand the total dimensions of Confucianism as a religion, it is important to see Confucius shifting the emphasis from “the next plane” to Earth without dropping the former out of the picture entirely.

## Taoism

Taoism’s founder Lao Tzu was born about 604 B.C. “He is a shadowy figure. We know nothing for certain about him and scholars wonder if there ever was such a man. We do not even know his name, for Lao Tzu – which can be translated “Old Boy,” “the Old Fellow,” or “the Great Old Master”- is obviously a title of endearment and respect. All we really have is a mosaic of legends, some of these are fantastic: that he was conceived by a shooting star, carried in his mother’s womb for eighty-two years, and born already a wise old man with white hair.” As said in the under review, “he retired for three days and returned with a slim volume of five thousand characters titled Tao Te Chin, or the Way and its Power. A testament to humanity’s at-homeness in the universe.”

Most schools of thought prescribe to one of three kinds of Taoism, a) philosophical Taoism, b) Taoist vitalizing programme and c) Popular or religious Taoism. “The Taoist

priesthood made cosmic life-power available for ordinary villagers.” As a pacifist movement the Taoist believes that even the finest arms are an instrument of evil. An Army’s harvest is a waste of thorns. (ch.30).

With regards to the life hereafter Lao-Tzu had no faith in physical immortality or the endurance of the personal soul. The afterlife doesn’t exist in terms of a Taoist belief system as we are eternal in the Tao. “The afterlife is within life itself.” To compound this are the multiple interpretations of death and immortality in Taoism. Ultimately all of these focus upon one or more echoes of existence: being re-instantiated into a new form; living in the memories of others; becoming one with the all-truth of the universe. A quote from a Taoist teacher, Chuang-Tzu, summarises this aptly:

“The true men of old did not know what it was to love life or to hate death. They did not rejoice in birth, nor strive to put off dissolution. Unconcerned they came and unconcerned they went. That was all. They did not forget whence it was they had sprung, neither did they seek to inquire their return thither. Cheerfully they accepted life, waiting patiently for their restoration (the end). This is what is called not to lead the heart astray from Tao, and not to supplement the natural by human means. Such a one may be called a true man. Such men are free in mind and calm in demeanour.”

## Hinduism

Founded millennia before Christianity, Hinduism, is a complex subject which defies being tied to a single definition. It has often been described as both a religion and a religious tradition encompassing a number of different beliefs, which vary from a monotheistic tradition where God takes on various aspects to a truly pantheistic panoply. There are some common themes throughout these beliefs and amongst them are beliefs on the soul and the hereafter.

The Hindu tradition of burning the dead stems from the belief that the soul would not require the same body any more. Therefore, they do not give any importance to the dead body and hence burn it, believing in the immortality of the soul. In the past it was their faith that the soul of sinners remain deprived of heavenly grace and these souls go on hovering under the canopy of heaven, assuming different bodily shapes till their redemption. Buddhism brought this concept to its logical end that a soul without a body cannot redeem itself. Hence the concept of transmigration of the soul is now the part of religious belief of Hindus. Before 600 B.C. all the Hindu societies did not subscribe to the concept of the transmigration of souls, though some Hindu ascetics did believe in it. However, Hindu societies gradually, as the time passed, started accepting this belief under the impact of Buddhism, which flourished in India as the religion of the ruling dynasties for about a thousand years.

## Buddhism

The founder of Buddhism was born at Lumbini in Nepal or around 563 B.C. His original name was Siddhartha Gautama. Lumbini was very near to the border of India. He was born in a rich family, but his quest of knowledge brought him in India, where he met with many saints, then started preaching of his own accord. At odds with the Hindu concept of the cycle of rebirth and he believed that the soul of the dead would ultimately be united with the Godhood. Buddhism as a religion is spread over in India, China, Tibet, Japan, Burma, Sri Lanka, Korea and other countries of the East and the West. Common to all followers of Buddhism, regardless of where they may be, is the idea that death is *“The emergence of a new birth.”*

## Judaism

Jews believe in an afterlife. The Torah says, “And the Almighty formed the man of dust from the ground, and He blew into his nostrils the soul of life” (Genesis 2:7). On this verse, Zohar states that “one who blows, blows from within himself,” indicating that the soul is actually part of God’s essence. Since this essence is part of the eternal divine, it is impossible that the soul should die. (The commentator Chizkuni adds that this is why the verse calls this the Soul of Life”).

As stated by Tom Harpur, the heart of the religion is found in the Shema (from the Hebrew word for “hear”), being the name given to three passages of the Hebrew Bible. These

three passages are recited daily by pious Jews. The Shema begins: “Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one, and you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might. And these words which I command you shall be upon your heart.”

Judaism, Christianity and Islam believe in “life hereafter” and also believe in resurrection of the body on the day of judgement when everyone has to appear before God and will be accountable to Him for his deeds and behaviour in this world, as a result of which he/she will be either rewarded for good conduct in their life on the earth or awarded punishment according to his misdeeds. Man, therefore, does not perish with death. What happens in the life after death prior to the Day of Judgement no one knows. What happens to a person and what type of life is there after death? The question agitates the mind. Obviously that shows man’s natural belief in some sort of life after death, but surely this does not lead to a belief of total extinction of man after death.

## Christianity

There are four Gospels in the New Testament. These and the letters of St. Paul provide, the most Christian depiction of the soul’s journey beyond this life and to the next. Building on the Judaic principles of the Old Testament, these accounts of the early Christians attempt to reframe the passing of the soul from this life into the next in the context of a messianic saviour, who himself transgressed Death’s

door in both directions. Paul wrote his first letter approximately between fifteen and twenty years before the first Gospel (Mark). This letter is a first-hand account of the resurrection of Jesus supported by authentic eye witnesses. This historical documentation, written by St. Paul, also contains the detail ‘about the nature of a “bodily” resurrection for humanity’. To him ‘our physical body decays in the grave, but we are raised in a spiritual body’. With respect to the nature of the resurrected body, Paul writes “So, too, with the resurrection of the dead. It is sown in decay, it is raised up in immortality, It is sown in dishonour, it is raised up in glory; it is sown in weakness, it is raised up in power,”<sup>1</sup> (this is from Tom Harpur’s translation of the writings of Paul from the original Greek). It was around 50 A.D. that Paul wrote the first letter to the young Christians. While the ‘the bible as a whole offers no tidy, logical theory of life after death’, I have found that universally Christians of all walks of life have an innate belief in the afterlife which resonates with most other faiths.

## Islam

The very basis of Islam lies in the belief in one God, a life hereafter and the day of judgement. Prophet Muhammad was born in Mecca in 571 A.D. He received the first revelation from God through Angel Gabriel while meditating in a cave at Mount Hira in the year 610 A.D. There followed over time a multitude of revelations from

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<sup>1</sup> LAD II p.137



God to Muhammad, which were recorded by his companions and ultimately gathered in the shape of the Quran.

Death, being the last day on this earth for everyone, Prophet Muhammad also left our planet on Monday (late morning) of 12<sup>th</sup> Rabi-ul-awwal, 11 A.H. at the age of 63.<sup>2</sup>

In Islam, the life of man has three stages, which are as follows:

- 1) Life in the world of space-time.
- 2) Death and Near Death Experiences.
- 3) Life hereafter.

As our treatise here is mainly concerned with a comparative study of Iqbal's view on the hereafter we will postpone our discourse on the Islamic view of the afterlife to the main body of this text.

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<sup>2</sup> In the whole of our above writing on Islam we have used two books. They are :

- 1) MAM - Mamhammad A Mercy to All the Nations, by Al-Hajj Qasim Ali, first published in 1937, printed in U.K by Unwin Brothers Ltd., London. AND
- 2) TSN - The Sealed Nectar, by Ar-Raheeql -Mukhtam , published by Darussalam, Global Leader in Islamic Books, London,,Houston and New York.

## Chapter 2 – Stages of Life

### Life in the world of space-time.

In the grand scale of the universe our existence is merely a short tour; our life and death is just a moment in the vastness of space and time. In this world everyone has a finite lifetime. This is commonly divided into three stages: 1) childhood, 2) young age and 3) old age, the last leg of our life on earth, after which there is a moment of transition, to that state which we call death; the doorway to the world hereafter.

As prefaced in the foreword to this work, our discourse stems from the religious and spiritual traditions of our ancestors. Non-spiritual viewpoints may be valid but as the very axioms on their perspectives of death and the afterlife differ to compare this with religion and to stand them side-by-side is not our goal.

In this dialectic, it is the spirit or soul of a person, which leaves its earthly home of space-time and enters into another world – the so-called astral plane. Given mankind's struggle with the innate unknowableness of death and despair this

brings, happiness for believing men then lies in our understanding of the continuity of life. We must be prepared to meet the promised day of death just as one makes preparation when going travelling. Our hand baggage for the journey to the eternal world must contain our good deeds and love for other human beings. In this way we can prepare our Heaven while on earth and will carry the same with us to the world hereafter.

Man has a very limited time at his disposal in this world, during which he is given the opportunity and liberty to choose his way. During the allotted time he can choose to live a life at the expense of others, blissfully ignorant of what consequence this may have. People of this ilk could be deemed to contribute little to society. They pass their lives on earth without love, purely selfish in nature. Fortunately such individuals seem to be few and far between. Equally rare are purely selfless individuals who live their life for others with no thought or material gain for themselves. Such martyrs are as lauded by society as the former group are villainised. The majority within every society seem to lie somewhere in-between these two extremes; if anything the majority of a population, god-fearing or otherwise, err on the side of good. They make the best use of their time on earth by devoting their existence to the betterment of society. They help others and take care of those who are in need. And, this is key, many of them are the people who have faith in the world hereafter. It seems that belief in an afterlife enables these individuals to behave more selflessly.

They acquire pleasure in having a belief to the continuity of life; hence they are never afraid of death.

## Death

Confucius (551 – 479 B.C.) said that ‘When I do not know what is life, how could I know anything about death’. During prehistoric times, death was not considered unavoidable but people believed that man was immortal. To them the death was taken as an act of some unseen ill power causing death due to one reason or the other. In the Old Testament it was said that man was made immortal but due to his disobedience to God and taking fruit from the prohibited tree he was punished by putting death in his nature.

Death is universally considered as an inescapable reality. Despite the fact that the death is indispensable, the mind of man is never ready to accept that he has to, one day, die. In fact he avoids thinking of his own mortality even when accompanying the funeral of a relative or friend. Being afraid of death he unconsciously suppresses the idea of his own death. This fear of death is the absence of God in oneself; the act of suppressing thoughts of our own mortality transform death into an idea where the concept itself becomes fantastical.

The moment of death to a dying person is not for him a moment in the world of space-time. It also does not relate to eternity. It is just a timeless moment– a transitory moment–

similar to a no man's land between the borders of two neighbouring states. This transition; a slowing down of time as we move from the physical to the metaphysical is the point at which death no longer remains a fantasy to us and becomes a stark reality as we are confronted by that which we thought impossible. In the moment of this transition man enters the world of the hereafter. The soul leaves its earthly cage and reaches a place unknown to us— rather unthinkable to the mind of men living in this material world. No one has ever returned to tell the story of that world. Religion, however, tells us a great deal.

Raymond Moody's book, *'Life After life'*, explores the subject of Near Death Experiences. From studying his subjects, he notes that those who had not previously expected that anything took place after death have, after experiencing a Near Death Experience (NDE), changed their attitude towards physical death. Nearly every such person interviewed in his book said to him that 'he is no longer afraid of death'.

In the context of a religious dialectic these NDEs tell us that the last moment of death is like the first ray of the morning sun – it follows the bright days of a new life. There will be no time to the person in between last moment of death and his next abode. The moment of death is timeless, passing like a flash of lightning in the clouds. Dr. Muhammad Iqbal, the philosopher-poet, has written many verses on the subject of death scattered in his various books of Urdu and Persian poetry. Below are a couple of verses from his two of the

poems in *Bang-e Dara*, namely, “*khuftgan-i Khak sey istifsar*” (Questions to those sleeping in the dust) and *Walda marhooma ki yaad mein* (In the Memory of his mother):

1. تم بتادو راز جو اس گنبد گرداں میں ہے  
موت اک چبھتا ہوا کانتا دلِ انساں میں ہے

*Tum-batado raaz jo is gumbade gardan mein hai  
Maut ek chubtha-hua kanta dil-e insaan mein hai*

Translation: Addressing the sleeping persons in the graveyard Iqbal asks them to tell him what is the secret under the heavens which is called death; I know that the death is a prickling thorn in the human breast.

2. موت ، تجدیدِ مذاقِ زندگی کا نام ہے  
خواب کے پردے میں بیداری کا اک پیغام ہے

*Maut tajdeed-e mazaake zindagi ka naam hai  
Khwab keh pardeh mein, beidari ka ik peighaam hai*

Translation: The death is the change of taste in the life; it is the message of awakening after a sleep.

3. موت کو سمجھے ہیں غافلِ اختتامِ زندگی  
ہے یہ شامِ زندگی صبحِ دوامِ زندگی

*Maut ko samjhe-hain ghafil, ikhtedaam-e-zindagi*

*Hain(!) yeh shaam-e zindagi, subh-e dawaam-e zindagi*

Translation. The imprudent ones consider death as the end of life, but death is the evening of temporal life that followed the morning of eternal life.

- 1) In the first couplet Iqbal, standing in a graveyard, puts a question to those who were sleeping under dust of that place, asking them that since you know better the secret under the heavens, tell me also something about death, which pricks like a thorn in the heart of all men.
- 2) The second couplet says that death is just a moment of change in the style life when we depart from this material world to eternity. It is just like awakening after a short sleep.
- 3) In the third couplet Iqbal says that forgetful people think that the death brings an end to the life. As a matter of fact death is like an evening in this world. Just as every evening follows a bright morning, similarly death is the evening in this world that follows a shining morning of eternity in the world hereafter.

Mary T. Browne writes in ‘Life After Death’:

“Death is the ultimate test of our ability to let go. Be it our own transition, or that of our loved ones, death is the most significant forward move in our lives.”

## Life hereafter

As we have mentioned earlier the idea of something after life is one which, whether through religious or cultural upbringing or the fear of the unknown, takes root in our psyche. This belief in another world is so widely evident in all ages and among the major world religions that we cannot possibly ignore it. In spite of the fact that we cannot prove it scientifically, mathematically or through some sort of test in a laboratory, the continuity of life remains as a concept which by its very ambiguity upholds the notion that it may very well be possible that there is an existence after life. Such a concept by its very nature would also therefore be one which our material mind is unable to grasp this by way of any method applicable in the material world. ‘The world hereafter’ still lies beyond the reach of a material human mind.

If we continue on this premise then our existence in space-time is a short tour of our life, after which follows death a transition and timeless moment between the life on this plane and the realm hereafter. In the foregoing pages we have briefly studied the three interconnected phases of a greater concept of “Life” encompassing physical life in this world, death as a moment of passing and the world beyond. Man is thus part of this ‘whole’ and a fundamental extension of our faith-premise is that the “soul”, being that of us which passes to the next realm is part of the Soul of God, which has no beginning and no end. Thus if the Whole has no end, consequently this part of our being becomes immortal. In short the metaphysical conclusion of a premise which states



that, that of us which passes beyond physical life is immortal, leads us inevitably to state that the Real which is beyond our conscious realm is in fact the true permanence and that life in the mortal arena is immaterial with respect to this Real. Since the soul is part of this Real, this permanence beyond our conception and comprehension, it remains eternal, and does not perish with the body

The metaphysical nature of this eternity cannot be defined literally through the means at our disposal in this material world. According to Mathematicians any truth not proven mathematically cannot be accepted as a truth. However mathematical equations are the product of man's mind and more importantly axioms which the mind has created to explain the physical world of space-time. Thus if we are to believe in a Real which has a greater permanence, any such axioms would merely be a subset of a larger axiomatic paradigm one which encompasses a greater truth. Much like Plato's cave, we understand by the limited axioms of our observable universe that two and two were four yesterday, they are four today and will be four tomorrow. Similarly a belief in something after life commands us to admit that eternity is a truth, the eternal life is a truth and life hereafter is a truth. There is no need of any mathematical equation to prove this.

Tom Harpur writes in his book *Life After Death* that he spent several hours interviewing an elderly Native American from the Ojibway Nation of North America, the old man according to him 'is an internationally respected

spokesperson for Native Religion. His baptismal name is Art Solomon and his Ojibway name is Kesheankwut, which means ‘fast-moving cloud.’ Tom first met him in February 1990 when he was one of the guests on “Harpur’s Heaven and Hell” programme. ‘what struck to me most of all Solomon (the leader of Native Spirituality) had to say ... The spiritual sphere is so penetrated by the natural and the natural is so imbued and surrounded by the spiritual that life and death, and life beyond death, all seemed to flow as part of a seamless unity. He describes death as “just completely natural as birth, part of the life process,” and he went on to say he found it surprising and distasteful to hear anyone saying they feared and couldn’t face death. “Only those who have no idea of how to live don’t know how to die. We are spiritual beings and our journey here on Earth is very short. It only makes sense that death is the gateway to our return to the spiritual world that gave us birth.”

## Reincarnation

Reincarnation, in the doctrine of the belief in Karma, is the origin of the East, but now many in the West also believe in reincarnation of man after death. About the law of Karma there are different views of different people according to their religious and social background. Some believe that our soul after leaving its earthly body is reborn in a new human body, which is quite different from the old body. To them this process continues for ever. But there is a good number of those who believe that during the tenure of every new life one learns lessons through which his/her knowledge

improves and the person becomes better and better in his deeds and behaviour towards his fellow beings till the stage comes when he gets rid of the circle of rebirth and finally died in peace.

It is interesting to note that the common concept between this and the planar existence is the idea of progression. One moves from this point to the next with death as the transition. It is this idea which ties many faiths and philosophies with the concept of the hereafter. As we will show Iqbal's writing is open to accepting the variation in ideologies, and while the Muslim perspective does not lend to a constant cycle of rebirth the key principles of doing good in the now to progress in the beyond allow for a common dialogue of good in this world.

## Chapter 3 – Near Death Experiences

Sociologists and psychologists who have examined near death scenarios have experienced that, with negligible exception, everyone comes across three phases in the immediate moments before death. They are as follows:

1. Resistance
2. Panoramic view of life
3. Transcendence

Briefly among the above ‘Resistance’ is but natural. The ‘Panorama view of life’ indicates the possible existence of life hereafter. And ‘Transcendence’, reveals to us the existence of the Real of which, as we have mentioned earlier, man usually remains doubtful during lifetime.

In this section we will discuss the written work and interpersonal experiences of some of those who have delved into this area. It is useful at this juncture to examine the nature of the work of these authors we are discussing. It is clear that this field is an esoteric one to say the least with findings rooted in subjectivity and level of scepticism in the

wider world around the validity of communication with the other side. While it is healthy to maintain a level of scepticism around these findings, the authors of “*After Life*” maintain that the good intent of these researchers in exploring this disputed topic be not overlooked. It is the case that the theories here are not scientifically rigorous, however our examination is that of the experiences of the individuals in question, in particular those who have suffered NDE, and the conviction that these individuals have. It is their faith in what they have undergone which addresses the mirrored reflections in religious scripture; our aim is to unite the mystic experience with the mystic message within the framework of faith. When debating the unknowable this is the best we can hope to offer.

### **What do we know about Near Death Experiences?**

So what do we know about Near Death Experience (NDE) and what is its history?” As explained by Peake (who we will review later) “the concept of NDE was introduced to the public in the early 1970s with the publication of Moody’s book *Life After Life*’. Peake writes that Moody’s interest was stimulated when he heard two separate stories about two persons, who had died ‘and returned to tell the tale.’ One of the first ever documented cases of a Near Death Experience happened in Abilene, Texas in 1943, in which George Ritchie, a private in the US Army aged 21 years died of double Pneumonia. After he was declared dead, the following was recounted by the officer on duty:

*“As they were wheeling the ‘corpse’ to the mortuary, one of the orderlies noticed Ritchie’s hand move. Adrenaline was then administered directly into his heart and this, it seems, brought Ritchie back to life.”*

The second case was also similar to the first one. At that time Moody was a teacher at a university in North Carolina. One of his students told him about ‘an amazing occurrence his grandmother had experienced when she also died during an operation’. Sparking his interest Moody then set about collecting ‘all the anecdotal evidence that he could find, [to be finally] published in 1973’.<sup>3</sup>

Since these early occurrences there have thousands of recorded cases of Near Death Experiences. It is no wonder then that a plethora of “experts”, has arisen to try to explain this phenomena and to bring it into context with our cosmic cycle. It therefore behoves us to understand this from the viewpoint of psychic, scientist, journalist, mystic and physician.

### **Mary T. Browne**

Mary T. Browne writes in the introduction of her book *“Life after Death”* that she was born with “a psychic gift.” She says that when she was seven years old she saw the spirit of a woman who was dead and that experience, as related by Mary, was not at all frightening. She began her a career as

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<sup>3</sup> ITL p. 331 – 32

an actress and a singer, while at the same time exercising her psychic gifts. When the demand for her psychic gift grew, she left the theatre and engaged herself in consoling the minds of patients suffering extreme illness; most of those whom she visited were close to death.

At the time of her book's publication she had helped 'over five thousand persons' through private sessions. Those she helped were from all walks of life; a Wall Street broker, a typist, an Oscar winning actor, a telephone operator, a student, or a psychiatrist. But they all had one thing in common: a desire to seek out a more metaphysical understanding for the experiences they were going through. In describing her own experience of her gift she says:

*"I am able to focus on an astral screen, using a form of psychic concentration that allows me to break through the barrier between earth and spirit (world). When I am looking at this screen, precious pictures of the spirit world and its inhabitants are shown to me."*

She also claims that she has been visited by many of the spirits of the departed.<sup>4</sup> In her own words: 'We find the key of our happiness by understanding the continuity of life. We do not die we pass over. We cast aside our physical bodies as we would cast aside our old garment.'

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<sup>4</sup> LAD p. 1

Some of these patients had mentioned to her their experience after the surgery or at the time of serious accident, when they passed through a life and death experience. In these cases the persons reported hearing someone declaring them as dead. These were either doctors in the surgery room or the police officers at the scene of the accident. Those who passed the stage of dying and then revived after death narrated their experience to Browne that they felt as if they were floating and could see themselves ‘lying on the operating table or possibly on a stretcher, and observed the people moving around their physical body’. Some of them saw glimpses of the next realm and also at a distance they saw the departed souls of their friends waiting to welcome them. During their short time of staying at the other side they generally observed in front of them an extremely beautiful **light** enveloping them. Nearly everyone said that the other plane was so pleasant that none of them wanted to go back to an earthly existence. One experience however remains constant amongst all she spoke to: life, after a Near Death Experience, was completely changed. She remarks that ‘they understood the sacredness of life and its deeper meaning. Also they realised that the real purpose of our life on earth is to learn, to grow, to improve, and to serve others.’<sup>5 6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> LAD p. 7-8



Browne had many occasions to be with the dying at their bedside a few moments prior to their death and observed that some of them passed peacefully but in a few cases the soon-to-be-deceased was found in extreme uneasiness. She says that invariably she found that the person at his/her last moment on earth was unable to die and it is her speculation that this happens in cases where such persons were leaving some unsettled affairs behind. Expanding further on this, she recommends to the relations and friends of the dying that when you come to know that a person is going to die then you should approach the patient in a kind manner and try to get his/her things in order. You should ask the patient how he/she would like the pending affairs to be handled. In this way the person's uneasiness will be removed and he/she will die in peace. This, however, must be done before it is too late. Explaining the moments before the death Browne says:

*“The spirit body is simply beginning to make the transition. The patient can genuinely see the spirits who are waiting for him. Being half on the earth and half in the world of spirit, the dying person begins to relate to both worlds. Just as it takes time to give birth to a soul, it takes time to leave the earth. Death is birth into the realm of the spirit.”<sup>7</sup>*

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<sup>7</sup> LAD p. 9

In the spirit world, according to Browne, the body of a person is whole and in perfect health. ‘The physical body ages but not the spirit body.’ As proof she has quoted many instances confronting and talking to those who had passed away. She says that life is continual process of letting go. Or should I say going forward.’ According to her we must listen to the person who is facing the transition from earth to spirit world. We should allow them to express their feelings. The fact is that someone who is dying needs to talk and we must listen to them patiently.

Mary T. Browne is a prominent writer of Love and Afterlife. She stresses the power of love and believes that we can change our life through the power of love. Love makes this world a Heaven for you - not only in this world but in the world hereafter. This earthly place may also be a Hell to you if you ignore loving your fellow human beings. This has been her lifelong preaching. We ourselves are the architect of our Heaven or Hell in this physical world through our deeds.

### **Dr Raymond Moody**

Raymond Moody is well known in the field of those who have so far tried to explore the secret of the other realm through closely watching the dying. After twenty-five years of experience in this field he wrote “*Life after Life.*” This book proved to be a bestseller after publishing more than 20 million copies worldwide. As a psychiatrist.. Moody is also a professor of psychology at West Georgia College,

Carrollton, Georgia. At the time of writing “*Life after Life*”, the author had spent the last twenty-five years hearing the stories of about two-thousand five-hundred patients with regard to their Near Death Experience. Out of these, a hundred and fifty were those ‘who died or almost died and then recovered’. He said that his father was a ‘hard-headed sceptic about matters of faith’, and Moody himself used to believe that the death meant an end of everything including consciousness. But his opinion was changed when he could no longer ignore or explain away the evidence his patients were bringing to him. Tom Harpur, whose work we shall also discuss, quotes him saying:

*“The fact that it is not scientific proof doesn’t worry me in the slightest. I want to tell you that I have absolutely no doubt now that there is a transformation of consciousness at the point of death and we do go on.”*

Moody also states in interviews later, that his research is being carried out on a larger scale post-publication of “*Life after Life*” and that during his tour of nine European countries he discovered that ‘doctors there are reporting exactly the same experiences he has documented.’

During the period of study encompassing “*Life after Life*” he encountered many similarities in the reports, ‘despite the fact that they come from the people of highly varied religious, social, and educational background.’ (similar to Mary T. Brown). One of the stories recollected is the patient

who heard his doctor pronouncing his death. The patient begins to hear some strange noises and suddenly he finds moving himself out of his earthly body. He was seeing his own body at a distance as a spectator. At this stage he found that he had a body but it was quite different from the physical body which he had on earth before his “death.” As in other cases observed by Moody and also reported by other researchers on NDE, the dying person saw the spirits of his relatives who came to see and help him. He noticed in them a loving and warm spirit which he never came across during his lifetime. He also noticed something like a barrier or border between the physical world and what could only be described as “something eternal.” At this moment he decided to go back to his physical body as he felt his time of death had not come yet. Moody writes: ‘still the experience affects his life profoundly, specially his views about death and its relationship to life.’

Moody maintains that while the dying may be in intense pain, as soon as he or she leaves their body the pain is no longer there, and they feel themselves to be at peace. Some people experienced that they passed through a dark tunnel at a high speed until they observed a ‘radiant golden-white light, but some stated rising suddenly into the heavens and seeing earth and the celestial sphere as they would be seen by astronauts in space.’<sup>8</sup>

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(<http://webcache.googleusercontent.com/search?q=cachse:62VLE5et04cj:www.near-d...>)

*“the newly dead person does not realize that he is dead, for he is still in a “body” which resembles his physical body in several respects.”*

These out of body experiences mirror, as we shall see later, some of Iqbal’s own thinking on the passage from this realm to the next. Out of the experiences which Moody has documented the following bears the closest resemblance to our subject:

*“I was out of my body looking at it from about ten yards way, but I was still thinking, just like in physical life. And where I was thinking was about at my normal body height. I wasn’t in a body, as such. I could feel something, some kind of a- like a capsule, or something like a clear form. I couldn’t really see it; it was like it was transparent, but not really. It was like I was just there – an energy, may be sort of like, may be sort of like just a little ball of energy. And I really wasn’t aware of any bodily sensation – temperature, or anything like that.”<sup>9</sup>*

In the same way that spiritual revelation for Iqbal reveals a possible reality to these experiences, Moody writes that:

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<sup>9</sup> LAL p. 60

*“There is something very persuasive about seeing a person describe his experience which cannot easily be conveyed in writing. Their near-death experiences were very real events to these people, and through my association with them the experiences have become real events to me.”<sup>10</sup>*

Moody has also documented first-hand accounts of the feelings of those who have experienced a near-death event. One such person stated afterward:

*“I am not afraid to die. It’s not that I have a death wish, or want to die right now. I don’t want to be living over there on the other side now, because I’m supposed to be living here. The reason why I am not afraid to die, though, is that I know where I’m going when I leave here, because I’ve been there before.”*

Commenting on such views Moody writes that

*“after his experience a person no longer entertains any doubts about his survival of bodily death. It is no longer merely an abstract possibility to him, but a fact of his experience.”*

It would be remiss not to mention the experience of encountering a very bright light. In Moody’s chapter on the

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<sup>10</sup> LAL p. 183

subject he states, ‘[this] has the most profound effect on the individual’. For those who have experienced it, the light in the beginning is dim but very soon its brightness increases until it is extraordinarily brilliant. At the same time it does not dazzle the eyes of the spectators as they supposedly have spiritual eyes at that time and not the physical ones, which they possessed during their life on earth. Moody adds:

*“Not only that, it is personal being. It has a very definite personality. The love and the warmth which emanates from this being to the dying person is utterly beyond words, and he feels completely surrounded by it and taken up by it, completely at ease.”<sup>11</sup>*

Some have claimed that the being of light begins to communicate with them, through some kind of telepathy, the words appearing in their thoughts. The being of light is said to have asked the dying person questions like these, “Are you prepared to die?” “What have you done with your life to show me?” The questions from the being do not frighten or threaten the person; on the other hand those questions carry with them a feeling of love. All such persons say that they felt the total love and acceptance from the light. Moody recounts several such experiences of the light which differ in the retelling but maintain a similar essence throughout.

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<sup>11</sup> LAL pp58-59

Moody has dedicated most of his life to this research and continues to do so. As mentioned in the preface to this chapter, while there is criticism of the method and the rigour of this work, there is nevertheless a commonality amongst a significant number of subjects to warrant further investigation. Further to this, as Moody and the others we have investigated point out, the experiences related are near-death and not induced by hypnotherapy or through any other means (e.g. drug use). While this may not lend necessarily to the reliability of the data being gathered it is consistent with the religious framework of the transcendental experience we are trying to describe. In other words the near-death experience is one which brings us closer to an alternative plane of existence.

### Tom Harpur

Tom Harpur is a prominent Canadian writer on religious and ethical issues. He is an ordained priest as well as a TV presenter and columnist for the *Toronto Sunday Star*. He is also one who has devoted himself to discovering more about the world hereafter. His book *Life after Death* is a bestseller and he is a member of the International Association for Near Death Studies (IANDS).

An IANDS survey shows that 35 to 40 percent of patients, who had almost died but survived, can recall their after death experience. He says that all of these had some kind of ‘mystical experience’. In 1987 Harpur decided to conduct



his own survey to find out the truth behind these stories of NDE. He wrote a footnote in his *Toronto Sunday Star* column in July 1987 stating that he wanted to hear from readers if they believed in the life beyond death and if they had ever experienced anything that amounts to solid evidence to the fact. He received around two hundred letters in response. Again, like Moody and Browne, these letters were written by ‘people of all ages, all walks of life, and from various regions of the country’. Harpur says that just three percent of them said that they do not believe in a life after death. Typical of the latter was one who ‘concluded his articulated rebuttal’ by saying ‘what is after your life is what was before your life – nothing. Sorry but at times the truth hurts’. Most of the other letters received by him were quite interesting and in the final analysis used his critical powers to gradually sift them down to a final score. *‘The overriding criterion was believability’*.<sup>12</sup>

As well as recounting the stories of those who had written to him Harpur tracked down a man who was shot at close range by a shotgun and critically wounded at the abdomen in an encounter with two thieves. The man was performing his duty as a security guard at the gate of a Canadian Tyre Store. Harpur recounts:

*“What caught my eye about the statement in the story that this security guard had died twice*

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<sup>12</sup> LAD II pp. 29-30

*during the many hours of surgery required to save him.”*

Harpur spent months tracking down the security guard. When he finally did he spent several hours with him without expressing his interest. At first the guard was reluctant to tell about anything that had happened to him, but later he came out and revealed that the incident was to him “a kind of religious conversion.”

This put Harpur in mind of the psychoanalyst, Carl Jung, who had also experienced, in his own words an event “ranked among the most wonderful of his eventful life.” He said:

*“It seemed to me it was high up in space. Far below I saw the globe of earth bathed in a glorious blue light. Ahead of me I saw a shining temple and was drawn towards it...There I would understand at last the meaning of my life.” His doctor injected him with a strong heart stimulant and Jung ‘then realised he was being pulled back into his physical body.’”*

Harpur has criticised the religious preachers who are bent on exaggerating the existence of Heaven and Hell; evangelists who relish in recanting tales of a luxurious paradise or a horrible torment. Ultimately these preachers cause only to create doubt in the minds of the faithful. It is our belief and his that religion teaches us that the life after death is

wonderful, when we will be seeing our God. If we are to believe what has been witnessed by so many persons passing through Near Death Experience, the other side has a glamorous light from which no one would like to return to the earth. Speaking on the torturous life in the Hell, Harpur says that if a father in this world cannot torture his son by closing him into a dark room how it is possible that our loving God, the Father of all of us throws some of us into the fiery hell? Harpur writes, “The idea of hell as a place of fiery punishment for the wicked appeared for the first time in Jewish writings in the second century B.C.”<sup>13</sup>

In his book Harpur mentions the ideologies of a number of religions. Regarding in particular Islam and the West he remarks that ‘in spite of the fact that Islam is a religion of peace and conciliation, as its holy book, the Quran, makes quite clear, there is a widespread tendency in the West to equate Muslim with terrorism.’<sup>14</sup> Harpur says that the Qur’an more than once addresses the doubts and hesitations of those who find the idea of a physical resurrection impossible to believe. He quotes:

*“O mankind if you are in doubt concerning the resurrection, (remember that) verily we have created you out of dust, then out of a drop of sperm, then out of a germ-cell, then out of an embryonic clump complete and yet incomplete, so*

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<sup>13</sup> LAD II p. 169-70

<sup>14</sup> LAD II p. 281

*that we might make your origin clear unto you ... And (if you still doubt) you can see the earth dry and lifeless – and suddenly when we send down waters on it, it stirs and swells and puts forth every kind of lovely plant! All this happens because God alone is the Ultimate Truth and because He alone brings the dead to life ... and will indeed resurrect all who are in graves.”<sup>15</sup>*

It seems that Tom Harpur has studied the Qur’an more than most. He has quoted a number of verses in his book. Including:

*“And we will set up a just balance on the Day of Resurrection so no soul shall be dealt with unjustly in the least, and though there be the weight of a grain of mustard seed, We shall bring it forth and sufficient are We to take account.”<sup>16</sup>*

Commenting upon Qur’anic truth and straight forwardness Harpur comments that ‘on reading through the Qur’an in its entirety, the non-Muslim will be struck by the vividly detailed description both of heaven and of hell. They occur with almost startling frequency and there is no indication that they are meant to be taken as purely symbolic or metaphorical.’ At the end of his book he writes:

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<sup>15</sup> The Qur’an 22:5-7

<sup>16</sup> The Qur’an 21:47

*“A day is coming when all separations will be over. We will one day be reunited (in the words of the old hymn) with those whom we had loved long since and lost a while.” He adds, “We will return to the source of our being, not as rivers return to the ocean and are swallowed by it, but as recognisable individuals.”*

Like him it is our belief that we are but pearls that move in the Ocean of Eternity.

### **Anthony Peake**

Anthony Peake is a common name when it comes to writing about Near Death Experiences; his seminal work on the subject is titled *Is There Life after Death*. Peake is well known for his unique style when it comes to describing the existence of life after the bodily death of a person. To him God has not created man without any purpose. Bruce Greyson M.D. writes in the foreword:

*“Tony Peake does not think that we survive the death of our bodies, he argues instead that we do not die at all, that bodily death as we usually think of it is in fact not possible. Presenting insights from contemporary neuroscience and quantum physics as well as ancient cosmologies and mystical traditions, Peake presents a*

*coherent picture of a universe that literally requires you to be immortal.”<sup>17</sup>*

Physics tells us that whatever we observe is made of matter. These are particles that are building blocks of everything in our use or observed by us. According to Peake if you break a certain thing into its constituent parts you will get particles “that zip in and out of existence as they are observed. When they are not observed they do not exist.” In fact they exist but our eyes cannot see them. Similar is the case when a person is put into the grave, to an observer he/she no longer exists. But the fact is otherwise. The body of the person disintegrates and becomes atoms and molecules, the tiny building blocks of the universe which never expire. Iqbal says in one of his Urdu verses, (translated in English):

*“It (death) is the evening of life but (in fact) it is the morning of an eternal life.”*

The view of Iqbal, from the Islamic perspective, can be brought back as always to the Qur’an: God made us when we were nothing, therefore, it will not be difficult for Him to revive us on the Day of Judgement. Peake’s unique approach to life after death expounds on this principle. It is his claim that quantum entanglement is a possible approach to transcending to the unknown:

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<sup>17</sup> ITL p. 4

*“these ‘particles’ can be in two places at the same time. Not only that, but they disappear from one location and reappear in another without travelling through the intervening space.”*

Does this also apply to the human being when the person dies? Could it be that death is not the extinction of life? Instead an extension towards an everlasting life that has no end.

Peake quotes Einstein and Bohm in describing Niels Bohr’s Copenhagen Interpretation<sup>18</sup>.

At this point we would like to say a few more words about Bohr for those readers unfamiliar with modern physics. Niels Henrik David Bohr (1885 – 1962) won the Nobel Prize in 1922 “for his services in the investigation of the structure of atoms and of the radiation emanating from them.” He made a fundamental contribution to understanding atomic structure and quantum mechanics, for which he received the Nobel Prize in Physics. Sometime after receiving his Nobel Prize, Bohr remained a controversial figure due to a misunderstanding of his comments Copenhagen Interpretation: “sub-atomic particles only come into existence at the point of observation by a conscious mind. Before this observation the particle is just a wave of probability.” Einstein accused Bohr of quantum mysticism and while the controversy eventually died out

there has been a renewed interest in this area from New Age mystics.<sup>17</sup>

Peake is a proponent of new age mysticism. Quantum mysticism and the transcendence of the soul by this mechanism is key to understanding his approach. Nowhere else is this better explained in his book than in the chapter “Only the Lonely.” He quotes a mystic saying, “If you understand yourself, you would understand God.” Peake is trying that we first understand universe, only then can we understand our “self.” Quoting Wheeler he says,

*“As we go on trying to understand the universe we are at the same time trying to understand man. Today I think we are beginning to suspect that man is not a tiny cog that doesn’t really make much difference to the running of huge machine but rather that there is a much more intimate tie between man and the universe than we heretofore suspected.”<sup>19</sup>*

Peake continues by telling us, “*We all have two temporal existences, external and internal.*” It is a crucial and very meaningful phrase in relation to the concept of time. Further that:

*“we never think of time in itself, we measure it with other things. For example, we all use the*

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<sup>19</sup> ITL p.57



*term 'now'. Now is the present moment, the point in which the future turns into the past. But how long is 'now' in terms of time?"*

No one can answer the question. Peake attempts to solve the problem by saying,

*"There is only a continual 'now', not an imaginary point moving at a second per second from the past into the future."*

Peake is of interest to us when we start to understand the concept of the hereafter within the framework of Iqbal's metaphysics. Iqbal says that there are two sorts of time, temporal time and real time (mirroring Peake's internal and external). He expresses his viewpoint in Urdu of which we quote below an English translation:

*"Human mind is worshipping time and space as idols;  
In the Divine Order such time and space are non-existent."*

The above cited verses were in fact Iqbal's sharp reaction to Einstein's declaration that 'there is no absolute or real time but there exists only a time which is part of space and has its one dimension out of four of the space-time'. Einstein's second remark was that 'space and time should be no more a subject for the poets and philosophers'. Upon this

declaration many philosophers including Iqbal were disturbed.

Iqbal particularly is very much mindful of the existence of serial time and physical space. Further explaining his view point he goes on to say that serial time is ‘the time of which we predicate long and short’ and also that serial time is divided into past, present and future. It is useful in our daily life in dealing with the external order of things. Iqbal agrees with Einstein that it is hardly distinguishable from space, but adds that ‘beneath the appearance of serial there is true duration’, and to him true duration or pure time is *the change without succession*. We quote below extracts from Iqbal’s *Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam*:

*“Pure Time, then, as revealed by a deeper analysis of our conscious experience, is not a string of separate, reversible instants. It is an organic whole in which the past is not left behind, but is moving along with, and operating in, the present. And the future is given to it not as lying before, yet to be traversed; it is given only in the sense that it is present in its nature as an open possibility. It is Time regarded as an organic whole that the Qur’an describes as Taqdir or the destiny – a word which has been so much misunderstood both in and outside the world of Islam. Destiny is time regarded as prior to the discloser of its possibilities. It is time freed from*

*causal sequence. In one word, it is Time as felt and not as thought and calculated.”*<sup>20</sup>

While Peake is a controversial New Age figure and his methods far from scientific, he nevertheless raises some interesting questions which reflect in part the thoughts of Iqbal on the nature of transcendence through space and time.

In contemplating Near Death Experiences, Peake talks about an article, “The Unknown Country” by Pim van Lommel a cardiologist at the Rijnstate hospital in Amhem, which appeared in the medical journal *The Lancet*. Van Lommel documented the outcome of his interviews with 344 patients over eight years. All these patients were ‘successfully resuscitated after suffering from cardiac arrest’. Van Lommel said that eighteen percent of the patients told interviewers that ‘they experienced what is commonly termed as Near Death Experience (NDE)’, 12 percent of these said that it was a ‘core experience’ for them.

Peake explains that “this article is interesting for two reasons. The first is that it shows that the NDE phenomenon is not only real but also something that is taken seriously by the medical profession. The second is confirmation that whatever is taking place in an NDE is not experienced by all.

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<sup>20</sup> RRT p.40

## Professor David Fontana

Professor David Fontana is a fellow of the British psychological society (BPS). His many books have been translated into 25 languages in different countries. In his book, *Is There an Afterlife?*, he has extensively dealt with research on survival beyond the world of time and space. He says:

*“death means coming to an end in what relativity theory terms the space-time continuum.”*

Atheists do not believe in religion and take this physical world as the only reality in which they live and die for ever. The world beyond is something out of their vision. To Fontana death *means coming to an end in the space-time continuum*, in our physical world. But there is an element of mind that works during one’s lifetime and can see outside space-time.

Fontana tells us that “the world ‘out there’ is very different from the way we perceive it.” Talking about the evidence from mysticism he writes:

*“These mystical experiences are taken by the spiritual traditions as providing additional first-hand support for the idea that death is not the end of us and that the afterlife, for some people at*

*least, is more glorious and all-embracing than our sojourn on earth.*”<sup>21</sup>

For Fontana death means coming to an end in what physics terms *the space-time continuum*. In other words it means that we cease to exist in the dimensions which compose the material world. He says that the findings of parapsychology are highly relevant to the question of survival after death, ‘for they demonstrate not only that telepathy and clairvoyance are realities but they operate outside space’, hence these are unaffected by distance and are outside time. He adds:

*“from this it follows that although death means coming to an end in the space-time continuum, there is an element of mind that appears able to operate during one’s lifetime outside space and time, it further follows that the element of mind concerned is unaffected by death.”*<sup>22</sup>

Fontana’s book under study consists of a number of further interesting topics on the subject of apparitions (ghosts), mediums, the paranormal and the supernatural. These are of interest within a wider context of “beyond-life phenomena”, but for us let us focus on the experience of death and what lies beyond, within the work and inspiration of Iqbal.

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<sup>21</sup> ITA p. 15

<sup>22</sup> ITA p. 20

## My Own Near Death Experience

I, the writer, had personally an experience around 60 years ago; when at a dental hospital in Lahore (Pakistan) where I was put under a general anaesthetic for treating a serious problem with one of my teeth. At that time dental surgery was not so advanced - maybe the doctors were not familiar with local anaesthesia. As soon the anaesthetic took effect I found myself floating in the air and moving towards the skies. However I did not see my body lying down on the surgery table neither did I hear any voice of the dentist, or the nurse present in the operating theatre. Whether this was a near death experience or not, I am sceptical to this day. However, while floating upward I heard the voice of the Dentist calling me by name and telling me, “Come on Mr. Sabir. You are OK now!” I remember that I started coming down at once and within no time I had opened my eyes.

While in this chapter we have talked exclusively about Near Death Experiences, there is still great scientific speculation about the nature of these experiences and what *actually* happens. Our aim is not to provide scientific proof or a link between these experiences and the nature of the hereafter but to at least raise the question of that those who undergo such experiences may actually see the next world that so many faithful believe in.

## Chapter 3 – Near Death Experiences

## **Chapter 4 – Iqbal and the Views of Christianity and Islam on Life After Death.**

The question of death held a priority in the thinking of Greeks during the fourth and fifth centuries B.C. Socrates tells us his views about death in a part of his dialogues entitled “Apology”, wherein he says that ‘death is one of two things. Either death is a state of nothingness and utter unconsciousness, or, as men say, there is a change and migration of soul from this world to another. Now if you suppose there is no consciousness but a sleep of him who is undisturbed even by dreams, death is unspeakable gain... Now if death be of such a nature, I say that to die is gain; for eternity is then only for a single night. But if death is the journey to another place, and there, as men say, all the dead abide, what good, O! my friends and judges, what can be greater than this? If indeed when the pilgrim arrives in the world below he is delivered from the professors of justice in this world, and finds the true judges who are said to give judgement there, Medos and Rhadamanthus and Aeacus and Triptolemus ... what would not a man give if he might



converse with Orpheus and Musacus and Hesiod and Homer? Nay if this be true, let me die again and again.’<sup>23</sup>

Moody writes about Plato:

*“He accepted that there were planes and dimensions of reality other than the sensible, physical world and believed that the physical realm could be understood only by reference to these other, “higher” planes of reality. Accordingly, he was interested mainly in the incorporeal, conscious component of man – the soul – and saw the physical body only as the temporary vehicle of the soul, from the physical part, the body. ... Plato defines death as the separation of the incorporeal part of a living person, the soul, from the physical part, the body. ... Plato remarks that the soul, which being separated from the body upon death can think and reason even more clearly than before, and that it can recognize things in their true nature far more readily. Furthermore soon after death it faces a “judgement”, in which a divine being displays before the soul all the things – both good and the bad – which it has done in its life and makes the soul face them.”*<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> The Four Socrates Dialogues of Plato (translated by Benjamin Jowett Oxford 1903, reprinted 1949, p.90-91

<sup>24</sup> LAL pp. 116,117,118.

Thus the question of death and what comes after remained largely unsolved to the Western mind until the birth of Christianity relegated its importance; for the faithful religion had solved the riddle to a greater extent. At the heart of this solution lies a concept central to both Christianity and Islam, and one which has found root in most theosophy and philosophy since: death is the most *important* part of the life of human being. The question of death and the afterlife becomes unimportant once we realise how important the transition from here to the hereafter must be for the soul-eternal.

Similar to most major world religions, for Christians and Muslims alike, life hereafter is a universal truth. As well as establishing the concept of the eternal Real, a faith-premise also inclines us to do some good work or assist the other human beings in one way or another. Thus it has become a near-universal concept that for every good deed one will be rewarded in the afterlife. We have already stated earlier that all the known religions including Islam, Christianity and Judaism believe and preach that there is a life hereafter (or in some cases a plane of further existence). In Islam and Christianity for certain there is going to be a last day of judgement and that after resurrection on that day there will be an eternal abode.

This eternal life has to be earned by doing good deeds, not harming anyone in this world and becoming a useful and loving person to society. This is the how a person becomes

an **existent** individual, about which McTaggart, in his book “Nature of Existence” writes: “An existent being was to be called immortal if it was a **self** which has an endless existence in future time.” Iqbal supports this view and further elaborates that Self within an existent results in his/her immortality just like a pearl in the ocean. Following is the full text of his view:

“I have conceived the Ultimate Reality as an Ego; and I must add now that from the Ultimate Ego only egos proceed. The creative energy of the Ultimate Ego, in whom deed and thought are identical, functions as ego-unities. The world, in all its details, from the mechanical movement of what we call the atom of matter to the free movement of thought in the human ego, is the self-revelation of the ‘Great I am’. Every atom of Divine energy, however low in the scale of existence, is an ego. But there are degrees in the expression of egohood. Throughout the entire gamut of being runs the gradually rising note of egohood until it reaches its perfection in man. That is why the Qur’an declares the Ultimate Ego to be nearer to man than his own neck-vein. Like pearls do we live and move and have our being in the perpetual flow of Divine life.”

Iqbal said: “*Maut ik chubhta hua kanta dil-e insan men hai*” (The death is a sharp prickling thorn in the heart of human being). This verse refers to both the significance, brevity and yet insignificance in the context of the Real of our life on this plane. A similar concept also arose with Confucius and more than two-thousand years later the

Danish philosopher Søren Kierkegaard. Both observed that *“death is [the] briefest summary of life, or life traced back to its briefest form.”*

As already established in our faith-premise in earlier chapters, the life of the soul is unlimited and the death does not touch the soul or spirit of a person, as said by Iqbal: *“Farishta maut ka choota hai go badan tera; Teray wujood kay markaz say door rahta hai”* (Translation: The angel of death simply touches your body; it remains far away from the centre of your being). Death brings a rejoicing moment to the dying person’s soul. The veil between the physical world of space-time and the world hereafter is removed at the time of death.

Sometimes, as our exploration of Near Death Experiences demonstrates, the dying person sees his next abode in front of him.

In fact death is an extremely beautiful moment of life. Even Socrates took death in a pleasant mood. All the existentialist philosophers have hailed the role of death in the life of a person, including Søren Kierkegaard, the father of existentialism. I would say that death is an essential ingredient in the philosophy of existentialism. Our life does not end with the death of our body but it is death that opens the door to a larger world hereafter, where we enter after a short tour of our earthly life. The life in that world is eternal and wonderful, where there is no fear of death. All the religions of the world advocate an eternal life of the soul

after man's bodily death. Mary T. Browne says, 'when you sleep you wake up on this side, when you die you wake up on the other side'. Iqbal, and thus most Muslims, declare: death is the renewal of life; it is a message of awakening behind the veil of sleep."<sup>25</sup>

As for Christianity, The Bible has much to say about the events that transpire upon death or precise nature of the world after death. However most of the interpretation comes in studying the New Testament. The Old Testament is fairly quiet on the matter, save for some significant passages:

- 1- *"Thy dead men shall live; together with dead body shall they arise. Awake and sing, ye that dwell in dust ... the earth shall cast out the dead."* (See full text in Isaiah 26:19).
- 2- *"And many of them that sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt."* (Daniel 12:2).

Paul also believed in the doctrine of bodily Resurrection. We repeat below the extract of Paul's writing, as translated by Tom Harpur and stated by us earlier too:

*"So too, with the resurrection of the dead. It is sown in decay, it is raised up in immortality, it is*

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<sup>25</sup> Kulliyat Urdu (book Bang-e Dara) p. 263

*sown in dishonour, it is raised up in glory, it is sown in weakness, it is raised up in power.*”

The followers of Christianity do believe in the day of resurrection and a life hereafter. Tom Harpur comments upon this issue in his book ‘Life After Death’ saying:

*“My own conviction, following much thought and in light of what I consider to be the evidence and also the vast range of arguments for and against, can be put in far stronger terms. I am today fully persuaded and assured that death is very much like birth. It is the traumatic but essential passage into a new phase of life. It is not for some holy huddle or a select few.”<sup>26</sup>*

### **Iqbal and the Islamic perception**

As our treatise, from this point forward, focusses on the framework of what comes after life as predicated by the work of Iqbal, it is useful to return to his primary sources: Islam and the Holy Qur’an. All the prophets of God called their people to worship God and to believe in life after death. However more than others, in its core scripture of the Qur’an and also the Had’ith of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH), Islam has dealt more extensively than most with

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the metaphysical aspect of the life hereafter. When it comes to man the Qur'an says:

*“And he has coined for us a similitude, and has forgotten the fact of his creation, saying: who will revive these bones when they have rotten away? “Say: He will revive them who produced them at first, for He is the knower of every creation, Who has appointed for you fire from the green tree, and behold you kindle from it. Is not He who created the heavens and the earth, able to create the like them? Yes and He is indeed the supreme creator, the All-knowing.” (36:78-81).*

Islam teaches that the day of resurrection will be the day when God's attributes for Justice and Mercy will be in full manifestation. God will shower His mercy on those who suffered for His sake in the worldly life, believing that an eternal bliss was awaiting them. But those who abused the bounties of God, caring nothing for the life to come, will be in the most miserable state. The belief in life after death not only guarantees successes in the hereafter but also makes this world full of peace and happiness by making individuals most responsible and dutiful in their activities. Besides belief in the life hereafter, there is something more to act upon in our life on earth and that is to understand and develop Self or Ego.

We have not explored in greater depth so far the most important part of life in a person, which is human ego or

self. Life, when it wears the garment of a human being, is called self or ego. One has to be aware of his own ego and then develop it with the help of love. Danish philosopher, Søren Kierkegaard, said: “Self is fortified by love.” David Fontana writes:

*“It is important to add that there is an almost universal emphasis from mystics and communicators alike, upon that ultimate reality is ‘love,’ and that the purpose of our life on earth is to learn how to love, how to behave selflessly and compassionately, and to overcome ignorance, creed and hatred to which material existence lays us open.”*

Let us now relate this to Iqbal. The following three couplets of Iqbal from his Urdu poetry tell us the achievements when *Khudi* (Self) is developed in man individually and collective self when it is developed in nations. The translation given along with these verses is self-explanatory:

- 1) *Khudi ki parwarish-o tarbiat pay hai mauqoof,  
Kay musht-i khak men paida ho aatish-i hama soze.*
- 2) *Khudi kay saaz men hai umr-i jawidan ka suragh,  
Khudi kay soze say roshan hain ummatone kay  
chirgh.*
- 3) *Suna hai maeney ghulami say ummatone ki nijaat,  
Khudi ki parwarish-o lazzat-i namud men hai.*



English translation:

- 1) If self is bred with perfect care,  
It can acquire such force and strength that a handful  
dust of man can easily set untruths and wrongs afire.
- 2) A nation's life is illuminated with selfhood,  
Selfhood is the pathway to everlasting life.
- 3) I know that subject nations freedom gain,  
If they would nourish self, display its main.  
(The above is versified translation).

### **Life when it wears the garment of man is called as Self**

Iqbal's teacher Professor Reynold Nicholson, while translating, wrote a letter to Iqbal for clarification around the subject of the Self. Iqbal promptly replied, the full text of which has been quoted by Prof. Nicholson in his introduction of the English translation of "*Asrar-i Khudi*", ("*The Secrets of the Self*"). Here is an extract from the reply:

*"In man the centre of life becomes an Ego or Person. Personality is a state of tension and can continue only if that state is maintained. If the state of tension is not maintained, relaxation will ensue. Since personality, or the state of tension, is the most valuable thing of man, he should see that he does not revert to a state of relaxation. That*

*which tends to maintain the state of tension tends to make us immortal.*”<sup>27</sup>

Moreover Iqbal says:

*“we can intuit the self. We can directly see that self is real and existent. Indeed our selfhood is the most real thing we can know. Its reality is a fact. We directly apprehend and perceive our own self or ego to be existent. Not only through the medium of intuition but the self is revealed as the centre of all our activities and action. This centre is essentially the core of our personality. The self is revealed in our intuition, and it is our ego which is directly revealed to be real and existence by our likes, dislikes, judgments and resolutions. Turn to the inner depths of our own consciousness, and have recourse to intuition, although it is difficult to describe in words. It is in intuition that the true nature and essence of the self is revealed.”*

We have mentioned earlier that the ego is fortified by love. Love then gives a new force to life and the ego grows and expands into a strong and powerful personality. “*Asrar-i-Khudi*” deals extensively on this aspect of life. In the following verses of this book he explains what the self is

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<sup>27</sup> TSS p. xxi

and how we can develop it both in our person and in the society in order to achieve the required results. He says:

- 1) *Nuqta-i noor-i Kay naam-i ou khudeest,  
Zer-i Khak-i ma sharar-i zindgest.*
- 2) *Az muhabbat mee shawad pa-inda tar  
Zinda-tar sozinda-tar tabinda-tar.* (Asrar-i-  
Khudi III)

Following is the English translation:

- 1) The luminous point whose name is the Self,  
Is the life-spark beneath our dust.
- 2) By love it is made more lasting, more living, more  
burning, more glowing.

### **Three abodes in world hereafter,**

Eternity is the world hereafter, which has no end and which is out of reach to our perception faculties in material world. According to Qur'an there are following three places for man after death:

- 1) Barzakh,
- 2) Heaven or Paradise and
- 3) Hell.

All three belong to eternity and exist beyond physical Time and Space. We are quoting below a brief description of all the three places in eternity as mentioned above:

### **1) Barzakh**

This is the place in which the souls of human beings will go after leaving their earthly body, and then reside there till the last Day of Judgment. The Arabic word Barzakh means “barrier” or something that intervenes between two other things. It is a sort of barrier between death and the fixed hour of resurrection, when the soul and body of every person will unite after being raised from the grave, as said in the Qur’an. What happens to pious and impious souls during the time when they stay in Barzakh no one knows. But religion indicates that the period of stay to a pious soul is shortened to their convenience while impious soul remains uncomfortable in Barzakh - their stay period at Barzakh to them will be too long as if never ending.

### **2) Heaven or Paradise**

Heaven or Paradise is the final abode of the righteous persons. The saved (deserving salvation) will be sent to Paradise. The question then arises, how one could qualify for salvation? The Qur’an answers,

*“But those who believe and do deeds of righteousness, We shall soon admit (them) to Gardens, with rivers flowing beneath - their eternal homes; therein shall they have*

*companions pure and holy; We shall admit them to shades, cool and ever deepening.” (4:57)*

Paradise is a place of love for loving people. It is a home for those who have earned it by their good deeds while living on earth and by winning the hearts of other people by loving them. God loves those who love their fellow beings. Mary T. Browne says that

*“The place I’ll call heaven is a place you arrive into if you have earned it through your actions. A loving person earns his place in heaven, the home of the loving, through living a good (pious) life while on earth.”<sup>28</sup>*

Paradise is a supreme place of happiness. The real pleasure in paradise is the communion of loving people with God.

The greatest gift of God to man is the sense to conceive the Transcendent. After the creation of Adam, according to Qur’an,

*“every human being born later on earth was imbued with the knowledge of the Divine Lordship.”*

Hence everyone has in the depth of his nature a strong sense of the presence of the Absolute. The greatest sin, as

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<sup>28</sup> LAD II p.66

indicated in the Qur'an, is turning one's back on Transcendence. This is the greatest betrayal of trust leading a person to step away from Heaven. Thus we tie Transcendence to Heaven as a process inextricably linked with the nurturing of the ego and more importantly the nurturing of the ego within a loving society. Dr. Mustansir Mir, professor of Islamic Studies and the director of the Centre for Islamic Studies, Youngstown State University, Ohio, writes:

*“Life is an arena for the ego’s activity. Weak egos dissolve at death. Those that survive the shock of death gain, in the stage between death and resurrection, fresh opportunities for growth. Sufi experiences show that the ego, during this period, continues to possess consciousness. At its re-emergence, the ego’s character manifests itself in the form of heaven or hell, which are states and not locations. But hell is not eternal abode of misery, just as heaven is no holiday. The ego, in its new life after death and resurrection, continues to receive ever new opportunities for self growth and creative self-unfolding.”<sup>29</sup>*

### **3) Hell**

Just as in the case of the Paradise, Hell is also a place which you build through your actions on earth. According to Søren Kierkegaard:

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<sup>29</sup> IQ p.89

*“Sin has its roots in willing, not in knowing, and this corruption of willing embraces the individual’s conscious.”<sup>30</sup>*

Similarly a good deed takes birth in willing and then embraces the individual’s consciousness. We have already mentioned above a little about Paradise. As regards Hell, Mary T. Browne describes this (by means of a psychic vision from her late mentor Lawrence) as:

*“it is a dark realm on the other side waiting for us if we do not care about others and lead our life without loving our fellow beings. Our sins provide fuel to the fire of Hell.”*

She says that Hell is a land of no shape. Iqbal similarly recalls a vision of Hell. While in trance his spiritual teacher Rumi appeared to him and took him to the other realm. He showed him Hell. Seeing Hell from inside Iqbal was surprised when he felt that it was so cold that he was about to freeze. When he inquired from the angel guarding the gates that he had heard ‘hell is a place with terrible flames of burning fire’. The angel replied,

*“Ahl-e Dunya Yahan jo aate Hain, Apne angar sath latay hain.”* (Translation: Those who come

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<sup>30</sup> (SUD p.95)

here from the earth bring their own fire with them).

The Qur'an tells us that the people of Hell will abide therein forever:

*“Those who are wretched shall be in the Fire: there will be for them, therein (nothing but) the heaving of sighs and sobs.” (11:106).*

But this ‘forever’ has to be understood in a relative sense in the light of the following passage of the Qur'an in which a limitation has been put on the everlastingness of Hell, as explained by Martin Lings. In the subsequent passage Qur'an says:

*“They will dwell therein for all the time that heavens and the earth endure, except as thy Lord willeth: for thy Lord is the (sure) Accomplisher of what He planneth.”(11:107).*

Martin Lings explains the above verse:

*“As to the second limitation, it clearly refers to the possibility of a Divine intervention, which is explained in a well known saying of the prophet that after the Judgment, when the wretched are in Hell and the blessed are in Paradise, God will call together the Angels and the Prophets and the believers and bid them intercede for those in Hell,*



*and in consequence a multitude of souls are released until finally He orders the release of all those in whom there is any good so that only those who have no good to their credit are left in Hell. Then He will say: 'The Angels have interceded and the Prophets have interceded and the believers have interceded and none is left to intercede save the Most Merciful of the merciful.' And He will take out of Hell all who are left and will throw them into the River of Life at the entrance to the Gardens of Paradise."*

### **Nature of life in next world.**

In the foregoing pages, we learnt the views of various religions and belief systems. The nature of world in which we live is material. Physicists hold that 'it is made up of small, hard and inner substances existing in a void called space. These substances are atoms, very small, impenetrable and indivisible physical entities'.

There is going to be an end to this material world. On the last day the Universe may well be squeezed to become a singularity just like the one that existed before the Big Bang, or it will be destroyed as some religions predict. One way or another there will be another world hereafter, the nature of which will not be material. Our material mind cannot imagine or intuit the nature of that world. However we should be content with what our spirituality comforts us in this respect. Tom Harpur quotes Carl Jung as saying:

*“What happens after death is so unspeakably glorious that our imaginations and our feelings do not suffice to form even an approximate conception of it.”*

Rabbi Barry Levy, Professor of Jewish Studies at McGill University, Montreal says that he himself is not sure about the matter of a literal, physical resurrection. Tom Harpur mentions in his book, *Life after Life* (p.277), a saying from an ancient rabbinical source in support of their literalist belief:

*“If God can put a soul into the body of a baby which doesn't yet exist, why can't He put a body which once did exist back together with its soul?”*

Tom Harpur quotes Nancy Ackerman, director of public affairs for the Canadian Bahai's National Centre at Thornhill, Ontario:

*“mysterious part of us which is the essential self, the capacity for conscious thought and moral striving.”*

As a Baha'i she believes deeply in the immortality of the soul. She writes that Death “comes as a messenger of joy” to the believer. According to Harpur, Ms Ackerman said that she and her fellow members see life after death as:

*“the world of vision where all concealed realities will be disclosed. We will know the truth. We will also discover those who influenced our lives unknown to us as well as those whom we knew.”*<sup>31</sup>

Our life is endless as explained earlier and our soul or spirit is immortal. Similarly the Ego is free and eternal. According to Ibn Rushd, Islamic philosopher of history, the Intellect is also eternal; hence it is obvious that man is immortal. Our soul leaves the body on earth in that process which we call death, but man’s soul together with his self or ego and intellect does not die. Iqbal also says that we do not die, but:

*“Like pearls do we live and move and have our being in the perpetual flow of Divine life.”*

Those who have died in a worldly sense are alive in another world, the nature of which is beyond our conception.

Much has been written about the nature of life in the next world. The religious tradition we are examining agrees that God will decide the fate of every person after judgement and people will be sent to Paradise or to Hell. The Qur’an says,

*“And we will set up a just balance on the day of resurrection so no soul shall be dealt with unjustly in the least, and though there will be a*

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<sup>31</sup> LAD II p.203,204

*grain of mustard seed, We will bring it forth, and sufficient are we to take account.”<sup>32</sup>*

Now the question arises as to what will be the nature of life on the above mentioned two abodes of man?

Man’s way of life in a transcendent plane is such an elusive subject that we look again to the more esoteric work of Fontana to provide some speculation in this department. In his book *Life after Life* he addresses this under heading “The Nature of an Afterlife”, wherein he quotes the views of Sir Oliver Lodge, a physicist from the 19<sup>th</sup> century. According to Lodge it is possible to

*“imagine another structure just as solid and substantial as matter is, but making no appeal to our present sense organs. (Lodge 1928).”*

According to Fontana some people regard such a body as astral body. He remarks

*“the astral body is said to resemble the physical body in appearance but to be free from its imperfection, and to be even more susceptible to our thought process than is the physical body when we are on earth – thus it may in due course*

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<sup>32</sup> The Qur’an 21:47

*come increasingly to resemble the individual's  
ideal image of him or herself.”<sup>33</sup>*

As bizarre as this sounds, could this be how we exist in the plane beyond this? Would this put us beyond desire? Would desire still remain? These questions and more remain unanswered but the desire to seek their answers drives our intellectual curiosity ever forward.

## How to live on earth and die in peace?

Iqbal tells us:

*“Come – turn this earthly world into a garden,  
And make the old world young again.  
Come – just take a little of my solicitude,  
And build, under the heavens, an everlasting  
paradise.  
We have been on intimate terms since the day of  
creation,  
And are the high and low notes of the same  
song.”*

*(Payam-i Mashriq p.268)*

The above verses are the English translation of Iqbal's poetry quoted by Mustansir Mir in his book *Iqbal*.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> ITA p. 445- 446

<sup>34</sup> IQ: p 41..

If you have not done any harm in any way to anyone during your lifetime you should be sure of a death in peace. Another important factor which creates uneasiness at the time of death is that during our lifetime we ignore the fact that we have to die one day and when the time of our death arrives we realise that we are leaving some of our affairs unsettled.

This results in prolonging the time of transition during which the dying person feels terrible pain and uneasiness. Mary T. Browne's detailed accounts of sitting with the dying, corroborate this to a great extent. Thus, in order to die peacefully, you must ensure that you have settled your affairs in this world, you owe nothing to anybody and you have written a will for your loved ones without depriving anyone of their right.

Once you have cleared your affairs you should be sure to die peacefully; not only this but you will carry a peaceful mind with you to the other world. When you cross the border between the two realms you will find that the good deeds of your earthly life are there in front of you in the shape of your hereafter. You in fact create your own paradise through your righteous deeds in the world of space-time as well as for the world hereafter.

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