

**Summary of 4.5 "The Soul"**

We basically tried to make five points last time. ♦ One is the belief in the life hereafter is one of the basic pillars of Islam. ♦ Secondly we tried to make it clear that at the heart of believing in the life hereafter is the belief in the existence of the soul. ♦ The soul is not necessarily something that is material and when we talk about the soul we are not talking about the physical life or biological life but really something that is the secret to our creation endowed to us by God that makes us human beings rather than any other type of creature.

The third point was that the only dependable and authentic source for any knowledge about the soul would have to be divine revelation. ♦ We also said that intellect, experience or experimentation are areas or tools which may be useful but can't really provide a complete non misleading source for information about the soul.

The fourth point emphasizes that the soul doesn't have any particular place where it resides in the body like blood or the heart or the brain, it is something that is probably fused in the whole body but doesn't have any particular location. ♦ We indicated also that according to one of the sayings of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) that the soul is created in the beginning of the fifth month of pregnancy. ♦ The soul doesn't die with the death of the physical body it continues to live. ♦ We talked about the four stages of the soul. ♦ First when the soul is created in the womb of mothers, the second stage when the soul unites with the body in the earthly life, thirdly the stage of the soul's existence between burial and the day of resurrection, fourthly when the soul unites again with the body on the day for the eternal reward or punishment.

Finally, since we were talking about the soul it was inevitable to touch upon the subject of death and the attitude of Muslims towards death. ♦ We said like any human being no person likes to think much about death. ♦ Some people avoid talking about death however we tried to indicate that this is a subject worth looking into because it is a universal experience that everybody has to go through sooner or later. ♦ We indicated that for the Muslim death is merely a transition from one state of existence to another and that it is something that no body can interfere with. ♦ God has already predetermined when exactly when each person is going to die. ♦ There might be a variety of reasons that might appear to us but this is something that is predetermined. ♦ The main worry of a true Muslim really is not whether he is going to die but whether his deeds and beliefs in this life would qualify him for felicity in the hereafter. ♦ We cited in the end of the program from the beginning of chapter 67 in the Quran that life and death are things that are created by God to test us as to whether we are going to conduct life in accordance his commands or not.

### 4.6 ♦ Death

**Host:** ♦ Could we elaborate on what a person feels or sees during the experience of death?

**Jamal Badawi:**

I recall that we first tried to emphasize is that at the time of death a person feels a desire to come back to life in order to catch up with good deeds. ♦ Another verse that would bring the topic into focus appears in the Quran in (23:99-100). ♦ The verses describe people who do not comply with the commands of God and what happens to them at the time of death. ♦ ♦ (In Falsehood will they be) Until, when death comes to one of them, he says: ♦ O my Lord! send me back (to life). ♦ In order that I may work righteousness in the things I neglected. ♦ ♦ By no means! It is but a word he says. ♦ ♦ Before them is a Partition till the Day they are raised up. ♦ ♦ It is interesting here to note that even a good person has the desire to come back and catch up with good works so they can accumulate more rewards. ♦ The interesting thing that perhaps we can come to is when it says there is a partition and that once a person dies it is like a partition between this earthly life and resurrection. ♦ It is like a barrier that is impossible to

break and come back to this life.

In addition to this, the thing that we couldn't get into last time is that a person's soul is actually taken by angels. Remember a few programs back we talked about angels and we covered many aspects but one aspect that we did not describe really is the relationship between angels and the human at the time of death and there after. We find that the Quran indicates that there are certain angels that are in charge of taking the souls of humans. Just to give a sample of the citations in the Quran in (6:61) He is the irresistible, (watching) from above over His worshippers, and He sets guardians over you. At length, when death approaches one of you, Our angels take his soul, and they never fail in their duty. The other verse that I mentioned earlier that there is a particular angel who would be in charge of taking the soul of any particular human being appears in (32:11) The Angel of Death, put in charge of you, will (duly) take your souls: then shall ye be brought back to your Lord. In a sense then the soul is taken by the angels.

One final remark is that the over all experience of death is described in the Quran as *sakrah* which means stupor or unconscious at the time of the exit of the soul. This appears particularly in (50:19).

**Host:** At the time a person is dying is there any way they can find out if his or her life in the after life will be a happy or sad one?

Jamal Badawi:

Yes, there are indications in both the Quran and the sayings of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) and I can give examples in the time available. If we look into the Quran we find that there are profiles of both states for people who would be happy in the hereafter verses those who would miserable.

Let's take the first and more hopeful profile first. First of all a believer who had the right belief and who has done good deeds in life, the Quran indicates that he would be greeted by the angels of death and he would be assured of his destiny. In the very last moments a person would know for sure where his destiny is going to be. I'll give two citations on that profile in (16:32) (Namely) those whose lives the angels take in a state of purity, saying (to them), Peace be on you; enter ye the Garden, because of (the good) which ye did (in the world). Not only this in another moving passage in the Quran in (41:30-32) In the case of those who say, "Our Lord is Allah., and, further, stand straight and steadfast, the angels descend on them (from time to time): Fear ye not! (they suggest), Nor grieve! but receive the Glad Tidings of the Garden (of Bliss), the which ye were promised! We are your protectors in this life and in the Hereafter: therein shall ye have all that your souls shall desire; therein shall ye have all that ye ask for! A hospitable gift from one Oft-Forgiving, Most Merciful! I hope that this is the one that most people would focus on achieving.

The picture must be balanced. The Quran also give a profile of those dying in a state of disbelief or confused belief as well as wickedness in terms of wrong doing. The picture is quite difference but to keep it balanced and fair I also selected two citations from the Quran to describe it. Obviously when the person is wicked or an unbeliever at the time of death the soul will not be too anxious to get out because it knows what it's destiny is going to be. So there will be some reluctance. For example in (8:50) If thou couldst see, when the angels take the souls of the Unbelievers (at death), (How) they smite their faces and their backs, (saying): "Taste the penalty of the blazing Fire. Of course this doesn't mean this is smiting like the physical smiting where you can see the sign on the backs but people do feel that pain at being rebuked at the time of death. In another strong and vivid description also in (6:93) If thou couldst but see how the wicked (do fare) in the flood of confusion at death! - the angels stretch forth their hands, (saying), Yield up your souls: this day shall ye receive your reward,- a penalty of shame, for that ye used to tell lies against Allah, and scornfully to reject of His signs! In that

sense then the Quran gives both profiles, which give a clear indication that any human before departing this world can get the feel as to where exactly where his or her destiny is likely to be.

**Host:** These are very vivid descriptions I am curious to know if there are any additional indications of the kind of things that an individual experiences at the time of death?

**Jamal Badawi:** There is a lengthy saying of Prophet Muhammad which appears in the collection of Ahmad ibn Hanbal called Musnad. But we have to be careful when I go through this description that we do not put it exactly in the same material image because the Hadith describes something that is inaccessible for us to understand in its fullest sense. It is a description which gives a sense of material punishment but the nature of those punishments is something that could be beyond our understanding. Again in the saying of the Prophet give two profiles.

For the pious, the person who is accepted by God in terms of good deeds, he (the Prophet) says that when the person is just on the verge of departing from this life and starting the life hereafter angels will come to him with shining faces just like the sun which reflects their joy. They will sit across from his eyes and then the angel of death (the particular angel in charge of taking his soul) will be sitting at his head. Then at the time the soul is coming out the angel will say "come out you good soul, come to forgiveness and pleasure from your lord." Then he says the soul will leave the body like a drop of water would fall which means it will come out easily and smoothly. He said then that the soul is taken by the angels, again we can think of this as something physical or material but the person perceives what is going on, and they start descending into the heavens. Whenever other angels notice these people passing they say "what is that nice smell" of musk, which is very fragrant. So the angels who are carrying the soul would say this is the soul of so and so the son of so and so he just died. So the angels continue praying on his behalf for forgiveness. Then whenever the angels go from one level of heavens to the other the angels keep coming and participate in praying for the dead soul. He says then that the soul reaches a certain level in heaven where God gives the command to the angels and He says take the book of deeds, as we mentioned before every human being has a book of deeds when we talked about the angels and how they keep our deeds, and put it in the heavens. Then He commands them to return his soul to earth for the accountability immediately after burial.

The second profile is for the wicked or unbeliever. He (the Prophet) says that the person also sees angels coming to take his soul but he sees them with darkened grim faces, which reflects the anger and displeasure of God. Again they will sit or stand across from his eyes and the angel of death will come also to his head but he will say "oh you wicked soul come out to displeasure and anger from God." He described it in such a way that the soul was almost being pulled out rather than flowing smoothly. Then he said the angels would take this soul and the smell of it would stink but again it is not a physical smell because we are talking about a different level of existence. When the soul ascends to the first level of the heavens the angels wonder what the bad smell is and the angels respond that this is the soul of this wicked person who just died. Then it is said in this saying of the prophet that for the wicked soul it is not allowed to keep going up through the heavens like the good soul. In fact when Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) reached this stage he said that the soul will not be permitted to go any further. He recited one verse in the Quran to prove his point from (7:40) "To those who reject Our signs and treat them with arrogance, no opening will there be of the gates of heaven, nor will they enter the garden, until the camel can pass through the eye of the needle: Such is Our reward for those in sin." Since no camel can get through the eye of a needle it

means that the wicked souls would never be permitted to go upward. Then it says that God would give the command to the angels but this time to return the soul back to earth and to put the book in the lowest of the low. Again an expression of what the destiny of the person is going to be. Finally, the Prophet recited on this particular section to show again how the soul is thrown and not permitted to go up in (22:31) if anyone assigns partners to Allah, is as if he had fallen from heaven and been snatched up by birds, or the wind had swooped (like a bird on its prey) and thrown him into a far- distant place. In other words a person is just removed to the earth. This is just part of the Hadith it is actually much lengthier maybe other parts of the saying would come up when we get into what happens after burial. In that sense the Hadith makes it more clear what the sensation of the dying person whether good or bad.

Host: We hear a lot about near death experiences. I would like to ask about your reaction to these stories? Could you summarize some of these experiences?

Jamal Badawi:

This is an interesting area. There have been several books written on this subject like Life After Death, Reflection on Life After Death or Life After Life. Basically these are reports by a large number of people who were near death. They have gone through very serious type of operation, or drown or fall but do not actually die. It is reported in this literature the things that those people see are quite similar. For example they say that they hear a kind of uncomfortable buzzing and they feel as if they are moving fast through a dark long tunnel. Some of them reported that it was as if they were outside of their own physical body and watching their body for example on the operation table. Some report seeing the souls of relatives or friends who died before. Some reported that their lives go by very quickly like a whole program or film and that they were asked to evaluate their own lives. They say they had a different vision all together about time and knowledge and had a totally different feeling that could not be described. Some reported that they had seen souls in bodies which are somewhat similar to the bodies that we see here on this earth. Others said that they heard music and there was lots of light, like a city of light, and that there were rivers, mountains and vegetation but quite different from the physical things we see in this life. Some reported seeing souls that were sad and bewildered. Others talked about those who committed suicide as continuing to face the same kinds of problems that caused them to commit suicide in the first place, in other words they haven't solved their problems. This is just a kind of brief summery as I can't do justice as there is lots of literature. I think these are some of the highlights of the common experiences reported by people.

In general sense, before I come to the Muslim perspective there are some methodological problems in looking at these types of reports. I am not saying we are going to dismiss them all together. One problem is that the whole study or studies are based on the statements or reports by people who experienced this so called near death experience. In one of the books one of the authors gave an excuse for not publishing the names of the people and to some this excuse didn't seem to be quite convincing. There is one issue not only from the Muslim perspective but from that of any believer in any divinely revealed faith. In almost all those reports they report unanimously that they had been enjoying themselves and that death looked like a picnic. Some even say that they wished to go back to death because it was a good experience. This really raises a very serious question because in effect it says that everybody can have this enjoyable picnic of death and life after regardless of his or her own belief or deeds in this life. This is contrary to what any belief or messenger has taught. Promotion of this literature could really result in a very serious attitude of indifference towards good deeds and towards doing the right thing or evil thing. It is quite possible just as

a hypothesis that some of these might be satanic visions to dope people into believing that it doesn't make much difference. The idea that everybody is going to the city of lights, rivers and music and all those types of things which like I said is not even logical let alone religious to equate good with evil.

For the Muslim in particular as I said earlier in the program that the only authentic source of knowledge about the unseen is not through speculation, experimentation or intellect but through divine revelation. One final word on this point of near death experience is not death. In other words an experience of someone who is about to die and survived it is totally different from the actual irrevocable death and experience that no one has seen and came back to tell about it. Everybody will have to find out for himself.