

# DEATH AND IMMORTALITY IN ISLAMIC THOUGHT

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## TÜRKÇE ÖZET

*Din ve felsefe alanında birden çok ölümden sonra hayat anlayışı vardır. Dünyanın çeşitli dinî ve felsefî geleneklerinde var olan ölümden sonra hayat anlayışlarının en genel olanlarından başlayıp daha İslamî olanlara doğru gelinmek istenirse, ilk önce iki ana kategoriyi birbirinden ayırmak gerekir: "gerçek ve kişisel olmayan ölümden sonra hayat" anlayışları ve "gerçek ve kişisel olan ölümden sonra hayat" anlayışları. Burada İslamın anlayışı, ikinci kategori içine girmektedir. Bu ikinci kategori de, "bu dünyada gerçek ve kişisel ölümden sonra hayat" ve "öte dünyada gerçek ve kişisel hayat" olmak üzere iki gruba ayrılabilir. Burada da İslamî anlayış yine ikinci grup içine düşmektedir. Bu durumda İslâm dininin bildirdiği ve Müslüman âlimler ve düşünürlerin büyük ekseriyetle üzerinde ittifak ettikleri ölümden sonra hayat anlayışı, "gerçek", "kişisel", ve "öte dünyada" yaşanacak olan bir hayattır.*

*İslâm düşüncesince, bu temel inanç esasının özünde değil ama ayrıntılarının anlaşılmasında, yorumlanmasında, ve kanıtlanmasında farklı düşüncelere rastlanmaktadır. Bu makalede, İslâm düşüncesinde ölümden sonra hayat anlayışı, paireskatolojik (ölüm ve diriliş anı arası) ve eskatolojik (diriliş sonrası) anlayışlar ve bunların dinî ve düşünsel kanıtları olmak üzere iki ayrı bölüm ve amaç etrafında ele alınmaktadır.*

*Paireskatoloji konusunda İslâm düşüncesindeki iki temel anlayış, "yeniden-diriliş" (resurrection) ve "yeniden-yaratılış" anlayışlarıdır.*

*Yeniden-diriliş, ölümden sonra kabirde veya Berzah âleminde varlığını sürdüren ruhun, diriliş gününde, bedeninin yeniden terkip edilmesi ve ruhun bedene döndürülmesi ile insanın yeni bir ruh-beden beraberliği yaşamına kavuşmasıdır. Bu görüşteki insan anlayışı, düalistiktir. İnsan, birbirinden ayrılabilen ruh ve bedenden oluşur. Ölüm olayında*

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da, gerçek anlamda ölen ruh değil sadece bedendir. Daha geleneksel ve daha yaygın olan bu anlayışı savunanlar, görüşlerinin delillendirilmesinde hem dinî nasrlar ve ahlak merkezli çıkarımlar gibi a priori kanıtlara hem de parapsikolojik deneyimler ve spiritüalistik literatüre dayalı a posteriori kanıtlara başvurmuşlardır.

Yeniden-yaratılış anlayışına göre ise, ruh ve beden birbirinden ayrılabilir değil, birbirine bağlıdır. Bu durumda ölüm, ruhu ve bedeni ile birlikte insanın bir bütün olarak ölmesidir. Varlığına bir yokluk fasılası girdikten sonra, diriliş gününde insan, monistik bir ruh-beden bütünlüğü içinde Allah tarafından yeniden yaratılacaktır. Bu anlayışta delil olarak sadece dinî ve ahlakî kanıtlara başvurmakta; parapsikolojik deneyimleri hem dinî hem de bilimsel açıdan güvenilir bulmamaktadır.

Diriliş sonrası ile ilgili eskatolojik meselelerde, hesap, cennet, cehennem gibi inanç esasları dinin bildirdiği ve özünde her Müslümanın ittifak ettiği hususlardır.

Ayrıntılara ve yoruma açık konulara bakıldığında, eskatolojik hayatın mahiyeti ile ilgili üç görüşle karşılaşılır. Uhrevî hayatın bedensel-duyusal olduğunu savunanlar, spiritüel olduğunu savunanlar, ve bir de bunların arasında orta bir yol bulmaya çalışanlar. Bu konuda ele alınan son bir husus da, eskatolojik hayatın zamansallığı ve işlevi ile ilgilidir. Bir kısım ulema ve düşünür, cennet ve cehennem her ikisinin de ebediyen var olacaklarını savunur. Başka bazı âlimler ve düşünürlere göre ise, cehennem geçici bir manevi tedavi yeridir ve sadece cennet ebedidir.

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Death and immortality have always closely interested in human beings and deeply influenced their beliefs, world-views, and way of life. Belief in a life after death is shared by all the major world faiths in one way or another. It is one of the most fundamental and central religious beliefs together with belief in the existence of God or in the existence of an Ultimate Reality. Of course, the image of human being as depicted in various traditions has not been identical. "Some have emphasized the human state more than others and they have envisaged eschatological realities differently. But there is no doubt that all traditions see the final end of human beings in the state or reality which is other than this terrestrial life."<sup>1</sup> Of all the world religions, Islam is the one which has most

<sup>1</sup> Seyyed Hossein Nasr, Knowledge and the Sacred (New York: Crossroad, 1981), p. 161.

strongly and centrally taught the reality and importance of an eternal life beyond this temporary life on earth. It regards it as one of the most essential matters of belief. The Qur'an mentions belief in life after death together with belief in the existence of God: "Those who believe (in the Qur'an), those who follow the Jewish (scriptures), and the Sabians and the Christians, - Any who believe in Allah, and the Last Day, and work righteousness, - on them shall be no fear, nor shall they grieve." (5:69). The term "hereafter" (*al-'akhira*) is used in the Qur'an more than one hundred times; and there is even a chapter (*Surah 75*) in it being entitled "The Resurrection".

In this paper, I will seek to explore the understandings of and arguments for life after death first in the Qur'an and then in Islamic thought within the general framework of standard definitions and major problems of contemporary theology, philosophy of religion and of mind. I will not deal with such totally practical religious aspect of death and immortality as duties and responsibilities of dying and of those around the dying. Instead of this, I will deal both with *pareschatology*, concerned with what takes place between the end of this life and the day of resurrection, and with *eschatology*, concerned with the ultimate and eternal state of human beings. My mode of presentation will be more descriptive and analytical than comparative and critical.

The concepts of life after death which can be found in various religious and philosophical traditions of the world can be divided into two broad categories: non-actual and non-personal life after death (such as immortality by remembrance in this world or by union with the One), and actual and personal life after death. Needless to say, Islamic religion and thought have held the latter view. According to the Qur'an, the life in the Hereafter is incomparably much more real and actual than the life in this world: "This life of the present is nothing but (temporary) enjoyment: It is the Hereafter that is the Home that will last" (40:39). Life after death will also be a personal one; an individual resurrection, accountability, and destiny will occur in the Hereafter. Each human being is responsible for his or her belief and behaviour at the Day of Judgement, and no man can save another. The Qur'an states that: "O Mankind! do your duty to your Lord and fear (the coming of) a Day when no father can avail aught for his son, nor a son avail aught for his father" (31:33).

The second category above, actual and personal life after death, can be divided into two sub-categories: actual and personal life after death in this world, and actual and personal life after death in another sphere of existence which is different from this one. Mainstream Islamic

thought does not accept the former view, for instance, the teaching of some Eastern traditions<sup>2</sup> that a soul is reborn in psychosomatic form not just once but a number of times. The Quran rejects the unrighteous's demand for another chance of life in this world in *Surah* 23: 99,100: "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."

Therefore, it is this second sub-category, the view of the actual and personal life after death in the Hereafter, that deserves real concern from the mainstream Islamic point of view. The proclamation of the resurrection, the day of judgement, and the eternal destiny in accordance with it comes at the beginning of the Qur'anic teachings. The Qur'an describes the day of resurrection like this: "One day the Earth will be changed to a different Earth, and so will be the Heavens, and (men) will be marshalled forth, before Allah, the One, the Irresistable" (14:48). On the Day of Judgement all the race of Adam will be gathered together, each one to receive judgement and everlasting retribution according to his or her beliefs and deeds in this world: "The balance that day will be true (to a nicety): Those whose scale (of good) will be heavy, will prosper: Those whose scale will be light, will find their souls in perdition, for that day wrongfully treated Our Signs" (7:8-9).

When the idolaters of Makkah denied the reality, and even the possibility, of life after death, the Qur'an exposed the weakness of their stand and of those who have thought like them by advancing some rational arguments in support of it: "He says, 'Who can give life to (dry) bones and decomposed ones (at that)?' Say, 'He will give them life Who created them for the first time. ... Is not He Who created the heavens and the earth able to create the like thereof?'" (36: 78-81).

These are the basic Qur'anic, and thus undisputedly Islamic, understanding of life after death and an important argument for it. Within the circle of these basic beliefs and concepts there could have been some differences of opinion and interpretation in the history of Islamic thought. There are two different views about what happens at the moment of death

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<sup>2</sup> See for the idea of the chain of rebirth in Buddhism and Hinduism, Carl B. Becker, "Rebirth and Afterlife in Buddhism", in Perspectives on Death and Dying: Cross-cultural and Multi-Disciplinary Views, eds. A. Berger, P. Badham, A.H. Kutscher, J. Berger, M. Perry, J. Beloff, (Philadelphia: The Charles Press, 1989), pp. 108-125; Jamuna Prasad, "The Hindu Concept of Death", in Perspectives on Death and Dying, pp. 84-88.

and at the period between death and the day of resurrection. Does the soul die or disappear at physical death and bring back to life on the last day or death belong only to body and the human soul continue to exist after its separation from the body? According to some scholars, Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyyah says, the soul dies and has a taste of death because "Every soul shall have a taste of death" (The Qur'an, 21:35). For the other scholars, including himself, the souls do not die because they were created for eternity; death only belongs to bodies. For this group of scholars both the verses of the Qur'an and the sayings of the Prophet indicates that the human soul after death can do without the body until the day of the resurrection of the body. Allah says in the Qur'an (3:169): "Think not of those who are slain in Allah's way as dead. Nay, they live, finding their sustenance from their Lord".<sup>3</sup> The view of the first group of scholars could be called "re-creation", and the view of the second group of scholars, which is traditionally more common among both the scholars and the people, could be called "resurrection".

#### **Resurrection, or Re-creation**

*Resurrection* means, according to one traditional interpretation, that "bodies are resurrected to be rejoined with a continuing soul."<sup>4</sup> In other words, resurrection is the doctrine of the reunion of the soul and body of man after their separation in death.<sup>5</sup> The bodies mentioned here do not mean to be the same bodies as in this world. Rather it is an appropriate body for the different spiritual structure of the world to come.<sup>6</sup>

Many medieval or contemporary Muslim philosophers and scholars believe in resurrection, and defend it. Avicenna (Ibn Sina) says in his book *al-Najat* that "the soul does not die with the death of the body and is absolutely incorruptible"; and he brings two arguments to prove his

<sup>3</sup> Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyyah, *al-Ruh* (Cairo: dar Nehr al-Nil, no date), p. 45.

<sup>4</sup> Michael Peterson, William Hasker, Bruce Reichenbach, David Basinger, *Reason and Religious Belief: An Introduction to the Philosophy of Religion*, (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), p. 175.

<sup>5</sup> Walter Drum, "Resurrection", *The Encyclopedia of Americana: The International Reference Work* (New York: Americana Corporation, 1957), vol. 23, p. 422.

<sup>6</sup> See, Ahmad Anisuzzaman Muwahidi, "Islamic Perspectives on Death and Dying", in *Perspectives on Death and Dying: Cross-Cultural and Multi-Disciplinary Views*, eds., A. Berger, P. Badham, A. H. Kutscher, J. Berger, M. Perry, J. Beloff (Philadelphia: The Charles Press, Publishers, 1989), pp. 50-51; Cf. Paul Badham, "A Case for Mind-Body Dualism", *MC*, (Vol. XXXIV, No. 3, 1993), p. 24; Brian Davies, *The Philosophy of Religion*, (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), p. 233.

view.<sup>7</sup> According to al-Ghazali, death is only a change of state; and the soul survives after its separation from the body, remaining either in a miserable or in a happy condition until the day of resurrection.<sup>8</sup> For Fahrudin al-Razi, another important figure in the history of Islamic philosophico-theological thought, the human being is alive when the body is dead, in other words of him, the human being lives after death. He brings some of the verses of the Qur'an and some sayings of the Prophet as evidence for the truth of this view.<sup>9</sup> One of his evidences is the *Surah* 40:46: "In front of the Fire will they be brought, morning and evening: And the Sentence will be) on the Day when the Hour comes to pass:..." This verse and some sayings of the Prophet show that life between death and the day of resurrection is not peculiar to the martyres or the believers but includes every human being.<sup>10</sup> Contemporary traditionist writers are in agreement with their predecessors that in some senses the dead are aware of the living; they do not die with death of their body and continue to exist.<sup>11</sup> Muhammad Zafrulla Khan, a modernist, also believes in resurrection and expresses it clearly. "The center of the whole process is the soul. ... Up to a point, the soul and the body together constitute a unit and are indissoluble; then dissolution comes and that is the end of life upon earth, but that is not the end of life itself. At death the functions of the body come to an end... The soul then enters upon a process of rebirth."<sup>12</sup>

There is a special concept used in Islamic understanding of death and resurrection: *barzakh*. *Barzakh* is "a state, perhaps of some kind of suspense between Death and Resurrection."<sup>13</sup> After departing from the

<sup>7</sup> F. Rahman, Avicenna's Psychology: An English Translation of Kitab al-Najat, Book II, Chapter VI with Historico-Philosophical Notes and Textual Improvements on the Cairo Edition (Oxford: Oxford University Press, London: Geoffrey Cumberlege, 1952), pp. 58-63.

<sup>8</sup> Abu Hamid Muhammad al-Ghazali, Ihya Ulum ad-Din, (Beirut, Lebanon: Dar al-Qalem, no date), vol. 4, p. 451.

<sup>9</sup> Fahrudin al-Razi, Mefatih al-Gayb, (Istanbul: Şirket-i Sahafiyye-i Osmaniyye, no date), vol. 5, p. 644. See for some sayings of the Prophet concerning the state of some souls in the grave, Abu Abdullah Muhammad b. Ismail al-Buhari, Sahih al-Buhari, (Beyrut: Dar al-Kalem, 1987), vol. 2, p. 584-585.

<sup>10</sup> Mustafa al-Kik, Beyne Alemeyn, (Cairo: Dar al-Maarif, 1965), p. 44.

<sup>11</sup> Smith and Haddad, The Islamic Understanding of Death and Resurrection, p. 104. See for the details, Jan Knappert, "The Concept of Death and the Afterlife in Islam", in Perspectives on Death and Dying, pp. 55-65.

<sup>12</sup> Muhammad Zafrulla Khan, Islam: Its Meaning for Modern Man (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1962), p. 187.

<sup>13</sup> Mohammad Iqbal, The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam, (Lahore: Muhammad Ashraf Publishers, 1986), p. 116. See also for the description and the

physical body, the soul does not enter its life in heaven or hell at once. It remains suspended in the ethereal world. Here its faculties remain in abeyance, though intact, and this state will continue until the hour of resurrection.<sup>14</sup> In many instances the life of the *barzakh* is seen as a particular stage in the development of human life. The three levels of physical development - dust, embryo; and birth - are compared to the three stages of spiritual development. The first is this life, the third is the resurrection, and the second is the stage which intervenes between two, called *barzakh*.<sup>15</sup> Zafrullah Khan states this period of the soul metaphorically as follows:

At death, with reference to the fuller life awaiting it, the soul is, so to speak, in the condition of the sperm drop. It passes through a stage which may be compared metaphorically to the womb, where it develops the faculties that may be needed in, and would be appropriate to, the conditions of the Hereafter. Its birth into a new life after passing through the process of developing its faculties to a certain degree, is the resurrection.<sup>16</sup>

Those who defend the view of resurrection as a concept of life after death have appealed to the *a posteriori* arguments for the existence of the soul and its survival of bodily death as well as to the *a priori* arguments. *A posteriori* arguments based on particularly paranormal experiences and spiritualist writings have been considered as strong empirical proofs for traditional religious ideas and against materialistic views concerning human nature and destiny. In the view of Maulana Wahiduddin Khan, for example, modern research has opened up new vistas of events and realities, so that we can now assert to a certain extent that the permanent existence of the soul, independently of the body, or the survival of the soul after the death of the body is no more a thing which involves blind faith; rather it has become a reality which can be empirically proved. One of his empirical proofs is the fact that although innumerable tiny cells of which the body composed disintegrate each moment and they are replaced with new ones, the soul does not undergo the

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scriptural evidence of *Barzakh*, Abu Abdillah Muhammad b. Ahmad al-Qurtubi, *al-Tazkirah*, (Cairo: Dar al-Deyyan, 1991), p. 200.

<sup>14</sup> Salih Tug, "Death and Immortality in Islamic Thought", in *Death and Immortality in the Religions of the World*, eds. P. Badham and L. Badham, (Paragon House, 1987), p. 88.

<sup>15</sup> Smith and Haddad, *The Islamic Understanding of Death and Resurrection*, p. 110.

<sup>16</sup> Khan, *Islam*, p. 187.

same transformation. This shows that the soul is independent of the body and has its own existence. Moreover, by means of various experiments and demonstrations carried out by psychical research institutes, it was shown that even after bodily death, the human personality survives in some mysterious form. And if life survives after death, there can be no interpretation other than a religious one.<sup>17</sup>

Basic empirical argument for the continuity of the soul after death has been drawn from the writings of the spiritualist movement that arose in the West since the mid-nineteenth century. Tantawi Jawhari relies on these experiences and feels regret that Muslim world remained behind in this field. He points out his view of death and resurrection first: "It is because of the speed of the change that it is called death, but in actuality the souls are alive in this world after leaving the body until the day of resurrection." And then he gives the arguments for this view. "If you read spiritualist writings," he says, "you will be able to understand it, and be able to learn what happens to us after we leave this world and go to the *barzakh* world. We (in the Muslim world) have not had time to do this, and the Western world is getting ahead of us (in spiritualist investigations)."<sup>18</sup>

Some of the contemporary Muslim writers considered these alleged empirical data of spiritual experiences as rational and scientific proof of the traditional Islamic belief about the nature of human being and its destiny after death. According to Abd al-Razzaq Nawfal, not only have cameras caught the image of the spirit, but the measurement of a specific loss of body weight at death proves that something (the spirit) has departed. Citing the various attempts at scientific communication with the dead, he affirms that this possibility of communication has been acknowledged by Islam from the beginning. He sees such means as hypnosis, fingerprinting of materialized spirits, and experimentation with mediums as offering supportive proof.<sup>19</sup>

Some Muslim writers, however, have accused spiritualism of being both non-Qur'anic and non-scientific. On the one hand, they accused spiritualism as nothing but charlatanism. On the other hand, they did not

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<sup>17</sup> Maulana Wahiduddin Khan, Religion and Science, trans. Farida Khanam (New Delhi: Al-Risale Books, 1994), p. 41-45.

<sup>18</sup> Tantawi Jawhari, al-Jawahir fi Tafsir al-Qur'an al-Karim (25 vols. in 13. Cairo: Mustafa al-Babi al-Halabi, 19:9) quoted in Jane I. Smith and Ywonne Y. Haddad, "Afterlife Themes in Modern Qur'an Commentary," Journal of the American Academy of Religion, XLVII/4, Thematic Issue S, (December 1980), p. 710.

<sup>19</sup> Quoted from Smith and Haddad, The Islamic Understanding of Death and Resurrection, pp. 116-117; see for the details, Ibid., pp. 113-126.

find the experimental results compatible with the traditional classifications and expectations concerning the hereafter. For example, M. Muhammad Tayr raises this question: "Some of the spirits that have been brought have said that they are in the Garden and at rest. But their owners were not Muslims, and how could God allow that?"<sup>20</sup> It seems to be true that spiritualistic descriptions of the life beyond death are more or less different from the traditional Islamic or, more generally speaking, religious expectations at some points. In other words, empirical evidences of life after death based on parapsychological experiences and spiritualistic writings do not seem to be fully identical with the traditional afterlife descriptions of any specific religion. Indeed, Raymond Moody points out this as follows: "I have not heard a single reference to a heaven or a hell anything like the customary picture to which we are exposed in this society. Indeed, many persons have stressed how unlike their experiences were to what they had been led to expect in the course of their religious training."<sup>21</sup>

However, if these parapsychological experiences have some real value, then it is true that they supply additional evidential support, weak or strong, in order to meet the historical materialistic attacks based on the reductionist interpretations of human nature in terms of the older epiphenomenalism or of the more recent mind-brain identity theory. Indeed, in an attempt to strengthen the bastion of Islam against contemporary anti-religious forces, some Muslim writers "see spiritualism as one of the strongest weapons in destroying prevailing materialist philosophies."<sup>22</sup> In addition to this, it may also be pointed out that they are not explicitly incompatible with the general religious ideas concerning life after death in their essence. Thus one can say that these empirical arguments as well as ethical ones do supply some critical, convincing and cumulative grounds for belief in the life after death but not conclusive proofs for it.<sup>23</sup> They seem to have some really impressive and persuasive power; but they are still open to critical evaluation from the perspectives of scientific truth, rational interpretation, and Islamic compatibility. In this case, general Islamic faith seems to be the determining factor for belief in the reality and the nature of a life after death; and these empirical

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<sup>20</sup> Quoted in *Ibid.*, p. 115.

<sup>21</sup> Raymond A. Moody, Jr., *Life After Life* (New York: Bantam, 1976), p. 140, quoted in Peterson, et al., *Reason and Religious Belief*, p. 188.

<sup>22</sup> Smith and Haddad, *The Islamic Understanding of Death and Resurrection*, p. 116.

<sup>23</sup> As Paul Badham says, even the best empirical evidence "cannot provide indisputable proof of personal survival, but they are remarkably suggestive." Paul and Linda Badham, *Immortality or Extinction?* (London: SPCK, 1984), p. 119.

arguments, together with some ethico-theological arguments which will be mentioned later, seem to be cumulative rational supports for that.

For some Muslim scholars or writers, however, death and immortality in Islam must be understood not as a resurrection as defined and described above but as a re-creation. *Re-creation* means that individual persons are re-created sometime after their death. There is no literal immortality, no persisting soul, but simply life after death. Human existence is gap inclusive: we live, die and our bodies disintegrate, and in the future are re-created to live again. What is re-created is our entire psychophysical being, which, though it allows the re-created to be the same person as the deceased, might have many features (for example, appearance, physical composition, lack of certain diseases) different from those we have now.<sup>24</sup> As al-Ghazali states, some people thought that death was a state of non-entity until the day of resurrection and that there was neither reward nor punishment in the grave in this period.<sup>25</sup> Those who advocate re-creation see the human being not as an eternal soul temporarily attached to a mortal body, but as a form of finite, mortal, psychophysical life. For this understanding, death "means sheer unqualified extinction - passing out from the lighted circle of life into 'death's dateless night.' Only through the sovereign creative love of God can there be a new existence beyond the grave."<sup>26</sup>

There are, according to Anisuzzaman Muwahidi, a philosopher, two mutually exclusive and extreme but strongly represented views of human origin and destiny: reductionist and pessimistic materialism on the one hand and over-spiritualism and deificationism on the other. The first one, which is based on ordinary observation, holds that we are born at a particular point of time and then live for some time and eventually die, never to rise again. According to this view, human life begins at birth and finishes at death. The other view maintains that a human being is not, in fact, a material being, essentially an embodied one. The human being is essentially a spiritual, immaterial, and nonspatial being. The essential human being is uncreated and hence eternal - that is without a beginning at a particular point of time - and essentially immortal as well.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Peterson, et al., *Reason and Religious Belief*, p. 175. See also al-Ghazali, *Ihya*, vol. 4, p. 451; al-Jawziyyah, *al-Ruh*, p. 45, 70.

<sup>25</sup> al-Ghazali, *Ihya*, vol. 4, p. 451. To him, this is a corrupt opinion (*ibid.*).

<sup>26</sup> John H. Hick, *Philosophy of Religion* (New Jersey: Prentice Hall, Englewood Cliffs, 1990), p. 123.

<sup>27</sup> Ahmad Anisuzzaman Muwahidi, "Islamic Perspectives on Death and Dying", in *Perspectives on Death and Dying*, pp. 39, 40.

In contrast to these two mutually exclusive and extreme views, according to Muwahidi, Islam presents a balanced view of the human beings's creation, nature, and destiny. According to his expression, the Qur'anic concept of life after death is a kind of *re-creation*. "The Qur'an in numerous verses states that," he says, "the person has been created ex nihilo at a particular point of time, lives for some period and eventually dies. The person after death becomes a nonentity again from which, through His blessings and by an act of sovereign will, God recreates that individual."<sup>28</sup> Thus, the life after death is not inherently present in human nature which, as it were, follows its own course of fruition, but is exclusively dependent on God's will and omnipotence. God, however, has promised to re-create human beings after death and will give them a form of existence fully commensurate with their bodily acts, psychological states, and spiritual achievements.<sup>29</sup>

Those who defend a re-creationist concept of life after death have to appeal exclusively to the *a priori* arguments based either on some religious, scriptural authorities or on some ethical considerations. For in this view "life after death is not guaranteed by any continuing thing, as in the soul doctrine. If there is to be life after death, the activity of an omnipotent and omniscient God is necessary."<sup>30</sup> Even God's omnibenevolence seems to be as much important as God's omnipotence and omniscience. In the view of Muwahidi, for example, the evidence or guarantee of life after death is God's will, omnipotence and promise in the Qur'an. Although not essentially immortal, he says, the human being will be re-created by God after death. So, practically speaking, death does not finally extinguish the person. God has promised to give human beings everlasting life and He does not fail in His promise.<sup>31</sup> He brings his evidence from the Qur'an (3:185): "Every soul shall have a taste of death. And only on the Day of Judgement shall you be paid your full recompense."

For some writers, the Qur'an does not only inform people about the hereafter but also gives answers and arguments about life after death which are based upon the rational principles drawn from the observations of nature and the knowledge of the events which occur every time. One of these simple rational principles is as follows: Making a difficult thing includes making an easier one. Someone who made something can make its

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<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.* 42.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>30</sup> Peterson, et al., Reason and Religious Belief, p. 185. Cf. Davies, An Introduction to the Philosophy of Religion, p. 225.

<sup>31</sup> Muwahidi, "Islamic Perspectives on Death and Dying", p. 43.

similar, and can make it again. God created human beings for the first time. Therefore, it is possible for God to create human beings after their deaths again; (because it is easier).<sup>32</sup> Central notion in this reasoning is God's omnipotence. In some other considerations, God's moral attributes become in the center. In the modern times, Mohammad Iqbal points out, the line of argument for personal immortality is on the whole ethical. But ethical arguments depend on a kind of faith in the fulfilment of the claims of justice, or in the irreplaceable and unique work of man as an individual pursuer of infinite ideals.<sup>33</sup>

One of the ethical arguments for life after death relies on the justice of God. Not everything seems to be just in this world and not everybody finds the equivalent of what he or she deserved. But since there is a God who has justice, then there must be a world where justice will be manifested absolutely.<sup>34</sup> In addition to this, it seems that God's wisdom has also been used in this evidential context. Iqbal says, for instance, that "It is highly improbable that a being whose evolution has taken millions of years should be thrown away as a thing of no use."<sup>35</sup>

The major problem confronting the doctrine of re-creation seems to be that of providing criteria of personal identity to link the earthly life and the resurrection life.<sup>36</sup> Does not the existence of a period of nonentity between our first and second creation entail to lose our personal identity? For advocates of this view, 'it does not, if there is a God who is omniscient, omnipotent, and wills to re-create human beings'. According to this view, since God knows everything and has an unlimited power, then God knows every person with his or her psychophysical state and individual identity, and has power to re-create him or her after a certain

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<sup>32</sup> Hüseyin Atay, İslâm'ın İnanç Esasları [The Belief Principles of İslam] (Ankara: Ankara Üniversitesi İlahiyat Fakültesi Yayınları, 1992), pp. 199-200. See for the verses he cites, The Qur'an, 17/48-51; 40/57; 46/33; 36/81; 21/104; 36/77-79; 50/3, 15; 30/11; 29/19-20. One example (17/49-51) is like this: "They say: 'What! When we are reduced to bones and dust, should we really be raised up (to be) a new creation? Say: (Nay!) be ye stones or iron, 'Or any created matter which, in your minds, is hardest (to be raised up,)-(yet shall ye be raised up)!' Then will they say: 'Who will cause us to return?' Say: 'He who created you first!...'".

<sup>33</sup> Iqbal, The Reconstruction, p. 112.

<sup>34</sup> Mehmet Aydın, Din Felsefesi [Philosophy of Religion], (Ankara: Selçuk Yayınları, 1992), p. 238. Cf. Davies, The Philosophy of Religion, p. 229-230.

<sup>35</sup> Iqbal, The Reconstruction, p. 119.

<sup>36</sup> Hick, Philosophy of Religion, p.123.

period as basically the same person.<sup>37</sup> This is not only rationally possible and tenable depending on the existence of the God of theism but is also indicated in the Qur'an. According to the Qur'an (82:10-12), all human actions and psychophysical states are being recorded and preserved: "But verily over you (are appointed angels) to protect you, - kind and honourable, - writing down (your deeds): They know all that ye do."

Re-creationist type of the idea of life after death is necessarily dependent on the existence of the God of ethical monotheism. In other words, it does not have an independent empirical evidence for a future hope. It requires God's existence, omniscience, omnipotence, will, justice, and wisdom. But if its prerequisite is true, then it seems to be a reasonable and possible concept of life after death from both philosophical and Islamic perspective. In addition, it might be seen as more successful than its alternatives in avoiding contradicting contemporary secular assumptions concerning mental life. But these points do not mean that this view has no problem,<sup>38</sup> and is a unanimously agreed concept of life after death among contemporary Muslims. In fact, the most widely accepted concept of life after death among Muslims in general is still the concept of resurrection.

It seems that the vast majority of Muslims continue to hold to the various versions of the traditional idea of a bodily resurrection supporting their views with some of the evidence of modern parapsychology in addition to the foundational *a priori* religious and ethical arguments. On the other hand, the idea of the bodily re-creation after a period of nonentity has also found some advocates among both some scholars who claim that the Qur'anic understanding of human nature is actually a monistic one and some philosophers or philosophically minded writers who are well informed about modern criticisms of Cartesian dualism in the philosophy of mind.<sup>39</sup> But both who believes the concept of resurrection and who

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<sup>37</sup> Turan Koç, Ölümsüzlük Düşüncesi [The Idea of Immortality], (Istanbul: İz yayıncılık, 1991), p. 175.

<sup>38</sup> See for the theological problems of contemporary monistic and re-creationistic views, John Hick, "Present and Future Life", in A. John Hick Reader, ed. by Paul Badham, (London: Macmillan, 1990), pp. 145-150. Hick maintains here that contemporary monistic theories such as mind-brain identity or epiphenomenalist theories are not only unproved but also generates profound philosophical and theological problems.

<sup>39</sup> This seems to be a similar or parallel development to what Paul Badham says: "Much western philosophy of mind is strongly anti-dualist, and at the same time Biblical scholars have re-emphasised the psycho-somatic monism of ancient Old Testament Judaism. The combination of these two features has led many Christian writers to seek to disassociate themselves from belief in the immortality of the

believes re-creation agree on some basic belief principles of faith. For both of them the hope for future life depends on the existence and action of God not on the immortality of the soul on its own natural power. In other words, as Richard Swinburne advocates, for contemporary Muslims too, "If souls exist in purgatory or elsewhere without their bodies or with totally new bodies, they do so by special divine act, not under their own natural powers."<sup>40</sup> Thus, theologico-ethical argument for life after death is another thing both of them have in common. Moreover, both of them also agree with the general idea that there will be a Day of Resurrection and human accountability and then an eternal life for all human beings.

### Heaven and Hell

In this point directly related to the question of revival of the physical body is that of whether the joys and torments of the hereafter are to be understood as physical or spiritual, akin to or totally different from the pains and pleasures we experience in our earthly bodies. While the responses to this question naturally represent a broad range of opinion, they seem to fall naturally into three distinguishable groups: affirmation of the physical nature of ultimate recompense, denial of the physical in favor of its spiritual aspects, and the search for a median or compromise position between these two alternatives.<sup>41</sup>

The following statement by Muwahidi suggests what the orthodox position has been on the realities of the afterlife: "The Quran presents a concrete picture of both heaven and hell in which human life is fully embodied and in many ways like ours in this world."<sup>42</sup> One of the descriptions, among many, in the Qur'an concerning the life in the Heaven seems to support this view (2:25): "But give glad tidings to those who believe and work righteousness, that their portion is Gardens, beneath which rivers flow. Every time they are fed with fruits therefrom, they say:

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soul, and to put the whole weight of their emphasis on the doctrine of resurrection." Paul Badham, "Death and Immortality: Towards a Global Syntesis", *The Christian Parapsychologist*, Vol. 9, Nu. 2, (June 1991), p. 54. See also, John Hick, *Death and Eternal Life* (London: Collins, 1976), pp. 278-279. See for the criticism of the dualist theory in contemporary philosophy of mind, Peter Smith and O.R. Jones, *The Philosophy of Mind: An Introduction* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), Part I.

<sup>40</sup> Richard Swinburne, *The Evolution of the Soul* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986), p. 312.

<sup>41</sup> Smith and Haddad, *The Islamic Understanding of Death and Resurrection*, p. 134.

<sup>42</sup> Muwahidi, "Islamic Perspectives on Death and Dying", p. 50. See for the details, al-Ghazali, *Ihya*, vol. 4, pp. 484-495.

'Why, this is what we were fed with before,' for they are given things in similitude; and they have therein spouses purified; and they abide therein (for ever)". According to Muwahidi, in Islam life in heaven and hell is fully embodied. But, of course, a person need not have all those incidental qualities and features that at times we have found in that person in this world. Thus people need not be ill, maimed, jealous, or the like in the resurrection world.<sup>43</sup>

At the other end there are some who understand the pleasures and pains promised by the Qur'an exclusively as spiritual. Most philosophers did not accept verbatim the ideas of resurrection of the flesh and of a sensual Paradise and Hell. Some Muslim philosophers such as al-Farabi and Ibn Sina defended the immortality of the soul without a body. Under the concept of "cojunction" (*ittisâl*) which is the aim of the Active Intellect, al-Farabi keeps the eternal unity and happiness of the virtuous souls after the destruction of their bodies. al-Ghazali criticises their views concerning the denial of the resurrection of the body, and charges them with infidelity.<sup>44</sup> According to him, the philosophers "were opposed to all Muslims in their affirming that men's bodies will not be assembled on the Last Day, but only disembodied spirits will be rewarded and punished, and the rewards and punishments will be spiritual, not corporal".<sup>45</sup> In fact, many Muslim mystics, too, refrained from much physical descriptions, or used them as allegories which might lead to Reality. The central experience they hoped for when thinking of Paradise was the beatific vision, as they understood it from the Qur'an (75:22,23). The Paradise for which the mystic longed is the permanent presence of God.<sup>46</sup> No one has expressed this idea more beautifully and at the same time more simply than Yunus Emre in his Turkish verse, which has become almost a folksong:

The rivers all in Paradise  
Flow with the word Allah, Allah,

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<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 50-51.

<sup>44</sup> Mehmet Aydın, "Some Misunderstandings concerning al-Farabi's Doctrine of Immortality", *İslâm İlimleri Enstitüsü Dergisi*, 1981, vol. V, pp. 117, 120. See for the debates over immortality in the medieval Islamic philosophy and theology, Oliver Leaman, *An Introduction to Medieval Islamic Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), pp. 87-107.

<sup>45</sup> Ghazali, *Munqidh*, trans. R. McCarthy, p. 76, quoted in Leaman, *An Introduction to medieval Islamic Philosophy*, p. 87.

<sup>46</sup> Annemarie Schimmel, "Creation and Judgement in the Koran and in Mystico-Poetical Interpretation", in *We Believe in One God: The Experience of God in Christianity and Islam*, ed. by Annemarie Schimmel and Abdoldjavad Falaturi, (London: Burns & Oates, 1979), pp. 172-174.

And every longing nightingale  
He sings and sings Allah, Allah...<sup>47</sup>

According to Muhammad Iqbal, too, "Heaven and Hell are states, not localities. The descriptions in the Quran are visual representations of an inner fact, *i.e.*, character. Hell, in the words of the Quran, is 'God's kindled fire which mounts above the hearts' - the painful realization of one's failure as a man. Heaven is the joy of triumph over the forces of disintegration."<sup>48</sup> Muhammad Hamidullah uses similar terms, but in less pretentious expressions. "Paradise as a reward, and Hell as a punishment," he says, "are but graphic terms to make us understand a state of things which is beyond all notions of our life in this world....It is necessary to speak to every one according to his capacity of understanding and of intelligence."<sup>49</sup>

However, the idea of purely spiritual resurrection or immortality has found few advocates in contemporary Islamic thought. With few exceptions, contemporary Muslims affirm the resurrection of the body and disagree only on the nature of that body.<sup>50</sup> From the philosophical point of view, it is argued that because body is extremely important for our identity and personality, to defend only the eternity of the soul-substance does not mean to defend the immortality of human being at all.<sup>51</sup> From the Islamic point of view, as Mehmet Aydın says, if we try to understand the Qur'an without recourse to excessive interpretations, we understand that the immortality talked about is not the immortality of the soul only.<sup>52</sup>

A sizable number of contemporary interpreters of Islamic doctrine choose to maintain a middle position between the extremes of the physical and the spiritual interpretations of the afterlife. In certain cases they view the nature of recompense as being different circumstances. Mustafa Mahmud represents well this middle position in the understanding of the afterlife. In his view "the Garden will contain all the different ranks from the sensual to the purely spiritual, each one of us getting whatever he

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<sup>47</sup> Quoted in Schimmel, "Creation and Judgement in the Koran and in Mystico-Poetical Interpretation", p. 174.

<sup>48</sup> Iqbal, The Reconstruction, p. 123; see also, Zafrulla Khan, Islam, pp. 192-196.

<sup>49</sup> Muhammad Hamidullah, Introduction to Islam (Paris: Centre Culturel Islamique, 1980), pp. 72, 74.

<sup>50</sup> Jane Idleman Smith and Yvonne Yazbeck Haddad, The Islamic Understanding of Death and Resurrection (Albany, N.Y.: State University of New York Press, 1981), p. 133.

<sup>51</sup> Koç, Ölümsüzlük Düşüncesi [The Idea of Immortality], p. 72.

<sup>52</sup> Aydın, Din Felsefesi [Philosophy of Religion], p. 255.

deserves."<sup>53</sup> The last position seems closer to the truth from the perspective of this Qur'anic verse (9/72): "Allah has promised to Believers, men and women, Gardens under which rivers flow, to dwell therein, and beautiful mansions in Gardens of everlasting stay. But the greatest bliss is the Good Pleasure of Allah: That is the supreme triumph." Nevertheless, for most of the Muslims we should not expect to realize the true nature of the conditions of the life after death with our limited faculties of knowledge. As the prophet Muhammad said in a *hadith qudsi*: "Allah said: I have prepared for My righteous servants what no eye has seen and no ear has heard, nor has it occurred to human heart. Thus recite if you wish: 'And no soul knows what joy for them has been kept hidden'."<sup>54</sup>

The last topic related to the eternal life is the question of temporary vs. eternal punishment, as well as to whether or not the Fire itself will endure endlessly. Some Muslims feel that both heaven and hell will continue forever. For them the "Qur'an emphatically states that those who believe and do good work are the inheritors of paradise (*al-Janat*) where they will live forever. And in the Qur'anic view eternal damnation is for those who refuse to believe and do what Allah has enjoined upon mankind."<sup>55</sup> But for some other Muslims, it goes without saying that Paradise will be eternal; but because of the mercy of God, the Hell will not last eternally.

A great majority of the Muslim theologians affirm, on the basis of the Qur'anic verses (4:48, 4:116) that God may pardon every sin and every crime except disbelief in God, and that the punishment that would be meted out for this last sin would be eternal. Others opine that even the

<sup>53</sup> Quoted in Smith and Haddad, The Islamic Understanding of Death and Resurrection, p. 139. For al-Ghazali Fire also has some degrees. In his view, there are "two kinds of fire: the fire of separation [from God] and the hell-fire as described by the Qur'an." Mehmet S. Aydın, "Al-Ghazali's Idea of Death and His Classification of Men in the World-to-Come", Ankara Üniversitesi İlahiyat Fakültesi Dergisi, Cilt XXVI, (1983), p. 230.

<sup>54</sup> Ezzeddin Ibrahim and Denys Johnson-Davies, Forty Hadith Qudsi (Beirut, Lebanon: The Holy Koran Publishing House, 1980), p. 138. This hadith was related by al-Bukhari, Muslim, at-Tirmidhi and Ibn Majah; and the verse at the end of it is from the Qur'an, chapter 32, verse 17.

<sup>55</sup> Sulayman Nyang, "The Teaching of the Quran Concerning Life after Death", in Death and Immortality in the Religions of the World, eds. P. Badham and L. Badham, (Paragon House, 1987), p. 83. This is considerably more common and traditional belief. In the view of al-Ghazali, for example, "It is unbelief which brings eternal destruction." See for the details, Mehmet S. Aydın, "Al-Ghazali's Idea of Death", p. 229-230.

punishment of disbelief may one day terminate by the grace of God. These theologians deduce their opinions also from certain verses of the Qur'an (11:107, etc.).<sup>56</sup> "It is curious that the denial of eternal Punishment in Hell is attributed to Ibn Taymiyyah, who says that after a time the people of Hell shall be transferred to Paradise. He quotes a Prophetic Tradition: 'By God in whose hands my soul is, there will come a time when the gates of Hell will be slamming (i.e. it will be empty) and cress will grow on its floor (i.e. it will be cool).'"<sup>57</sup> In the words of Muhammad Iqbal, "There is no such thing as eternal damnation in Islam. The word 'eternity' used in certain verses, relating to Hell, is explained by the Quran itself to mean only a period of time (78: 23)."<sup>58</sup> According to this understanding, neither Hell is an eternal place of punishment only nor Heaven is a hedonistic holiday place. The eternal life that was particularly the ideal of the mystics and their modern successors is not static. They take their inspiration from the fact that the Qur'an speaks of *daraja*, 'stairs', or 'levels', when mentioning Paradise.<sup>59</sup> Hell is a temporary curative place or state for the sinners in order to heal their spiritual diseases. The souls that are suffering from spiritual diseases and do not come up to a certain standard will be sent to a quasi "spiritual hospital" called hell.<sup>60</sup> The spiritual progress also continues in Heaven. Iqbal states this understanding of heaven and hell as follows: "Hell, therefore, as conceived by the Quran, is not a pit of everlasting torture inflicted by a revengeful God; it is a corrective experience which may make a hardened ego once more sensitive to the living breeze of Divine Grace. Nor is Heaven a holiday. Life is one and continuous. Man marches always onward to receive ever fresh illuminations from an Infinite Reality which 'every moment appears in a new glory.'"<sup>61</sup>

As a result, one can say that among many different views of life after death defended by the world religions and human thought there are

<sup>56</sup> Hamidullah, Introduction to Islam, p. 74. Cf. Abu Hasan Ali b. Ismail al-Aṣ'ari, Maqalat al-Islamiyyin, (Beirut: al-Mektebeh al-Asriyyeh, 1990), vol. 2, p. 167.

<sup>57</sup> A.E. Affifi, The Mystical Philosophy of Muhyiddin Ibnu'l Arabi (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1964), p. 167. According to Ibnu'l Arabi, too, eventually, everlasting happiness will be enjoyed by all (see for further details, Affifi, *ibid.*, pp. 163-170).

<sup>58</sup> Iqbal, The Reconstruction, p. 123.

<sup>59</sup> Schimmel, "Creation and Judgement in the Koran and in Mystico-Poetical Interpretation", p. 176. The verse mentioned here is 17:21.

<sup>60</sup> Tug, "Death and Immortality in Islamic Thought", p. 88. For al-Ghazali Fire is a temporary place for purification of the one who has the basic faith (See, Aydın, "Al-Ghazali's Idea of Death", p. 231).

<sup>61</sup> Iqbal, The Reconstruction, p. 123; see also, Zafrulla Khan, Islam, p. 196-197.

basically two different concepts of life after death articulated and advocated in the mainstream Islamic thought: "resurrection" and "re-creation". The latter is a more modern development in its basic understanding of life after death but more classical in its arguments for that. The former is a more traditional, historical and popular Islamic belief about life after death in its basic concepts, but more modern development in its arguments in the sense of having some new empirical or quasi-empirical evidence for that. The difference between them is essentially based on the understanding of the human being. While those who believe in resurrection describe the human being in dualistic terms in one sense or another, the other group emphasises the Qur'anic origin of the monistic understanding of the human being as an indissoluble self or psychophysical unity. In this case, some Muslim thinkers or scholars understand the belief in the life after death in the full literal sense of the re-creation of the person by God after his or her death. Some other Muslim scholars or writers see it within the continuing common tradition and in the support of new parapsychological evidence as the resurrection of the body to be rejoined with a continuing soul. It seems that this disagreement and debate is at present open and could go either way depending on the developments in arguments and evidence based on the scientific findings concerning the status of mental life and on the empirical parapsychological experiences concerning life after death.

In spite of these two different views articulated and defended in Islamic thought, there are many points concerning life after death on which the great majority of Muslim thinkers agree. Those are some of the Islamic beliefs about life after death which many Muslim scholars or thinkers, who believe in resurrection or re-creation, have in common. Death is not the end of human life. There is an actual life and personal accountability after death which will actually occur in the world-to-come. It will be a kind of bodily life which both preserves the personal identity here and is appropriate for the spiritual conditions or developments there. Spiritual purification and progress will be able to continue in the Hell and Heaven. What is certain and unanimously agreed on to be eternal is only heaven. The only guarantee of this eternal life and destiny is the existence, power, wisdom, justice and mercy of God.

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