

## Relativity of Time

### Is Time an Absolute Truth or Dependent on the Material World?

#### What Does the Relativity of Time Mean in the Material World? Why is Time a Construct?

Have you ever felt that time passes slowly at certain moments and flies by at others? This is an experience most of us have had throughout our lives. We see ourselves trapped in time, running along its course, believing that it advances steadily from the past to the future. But is this perception accurate?

Upon deeper reflection, we realize that time is not always fixed and real; it largely depends on our feelings and circumstances. What we recognize as time is merely a conceptual construct. From an Islamic self-knowledge perspective, time is a construct dependent on the material world and cannot be defined independently of humans and their surroundings. The relativity of time is evident in various life experiences, and we have witnessed this many times. For instance, for a newborn, a day seems endless because they do not yet understand the passage of time. In contrast, the same day flies by for a forty-year-old, whose mind is filled with daily concerns, and for a ninety-year-old, every moment is precious because they know time cannot be reclaimed; thus, they value every second more.

Do you think that in every temporal context, from the womb of the mother to the material world and even the hereafter, time operates as we imagine?

One of the best ways to understand the relativity of time is to compare different existential contexts. If we look at the various stages of human life in the realm of

existence, we see that time has different meanings and functions at each stage.

Join us as we explore this topic in detail across different wombs.

### **The Womb of the Mother: Astonishing Growth in a Short Period**

The womb of the mother is the first environment in which a human experiences life. During this nine-month period, all body organs develop, transforming from a single cell into a complete being. In contrast, if ten times this duration passes in the outside world, not even a fingertip is formed, let alone a complete human.

Thus, each day in the womb holds more value than many years in the outside world. Moreover, time in the womb is unique not only in terms of development but also in vulnerability; if the fetus encounters issues like congenital defects during this period, they cannot be easily compensated for after birth. For example, chromosomal mutations that occur in the womb in just seconds can lead to severe physical or mental disorders that are nearly impossible to correct after birth. This difference in the speed and significance of the passage of time in the womb clearly illustrates the concept of the relativity of time.

### **The Womb of the World: A Context for Choice and Evolution**

After birth, humans enter a larger womb called the world. Although the creative power and impact of the world are not as profound as that of the mother's womb, its spiritual constructiveness is unparalleled compared to the womb of the hereafter. According to religious narrations, one hour in this world is equivalent to

thousands of years in the hereafter in terms of value and constructive power<sup>1</sup>. This means that in the womb of the world, with a moment of repentance, a good deed, or a right decision, a person can shape their eternal destiny—something impossible in the hereafter.

Just as a fetus in the mother's womb finds it very difficult or impossible to compensate for any defects in the world, we too, if we harm our hearts and souls through sin or negligence in the womb of the world and do not correct it, will find it much harder and more time-consuming to remedy these damages in the hereafter. In fact, we may not have any opportunity to change what we have lost in this world. The relativity of time at this stage clearly indicates that a person can change their eternal fate with every moment in this world.

### **The Womb of the Hereafter: Transcending the Concept of Time**

When we enter the realm of the hereafter, the veil of time is completely lifted. There, time does not exist in the form we know and experience in the world. We will enter an eternal space that is no longer limited by day and night or past and future. Everything is present all at once. The constructive power of time in the hereafter is entirely halted, and we no longer have the ability to act, worship, or compensate.

The function of time here is merely to show the results of actions, not to create change. However, in the hereafter, everything is permanent and eternal. That is

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<sup>1</sup>. "And indeed, an hour in this world is better than an hour in the Hereafter because one can gain thousands of hours with a single hour in this world, and perhaps with it, one can purchase eternity in Heaven." (Mohammad Taqi Modarresi, *Man Huda al-Quran*. Beirut: Dar al-Qari, 1429 AH, second edition, vol. 10, p. 282)

why Heaven and Hell are eternal. In narrations, it is stated that when the inhabitants of Heaven enter Heaven and the inhabitants of Hell enter Hell, death is brought forth, placed between Heaven and Hell, and slaughtered. Then a voice calls out: “O inhabitants of Heaven, there is no more news of death, and O inhabitants of Hell, there is no more death!” So, the joy of the inhabitants of Heaven increases, while the sorrow of the inhabitants of Hell grows <sup>2</sup>. This eternal presence testifies that time only has meaning in the material world, and upon leaving this world, a person is freed from its constraints.

### **The Truth of Time in Higher Realms**

In higher realms of existence, time no longer has meaning as a continuous and limited flow like in the material world. The further we move beyond the material world, the more we are liberated from the constraints of time and place. In these realms, time is not defined as past, present, and future; rather, everything exists in an “absolute present.”

Regarding the infinite essence of God, time is entirely meaningless because He transcends all the temporal frameworks that humans experience. In this state, there is neither beginning nor end, nor change or transformation. God is not limited or dependent on beginnings and endings at any time <sup>3</sup>. Everything is present before Him without the need for the passage of time. Thus, time is merely a construct in

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<sup>2</sup>. al-Muttaqi al-Hindi, Ali ibn Abd al-Malik, *Kanz al-'Ummal fi sunan al-aqwal wa'l-af'al*. vol. 14, p. 515.

<sup>3</sup>. Quran, 57:3

lower realms, gradually fading as one ascends to higher levels until it is completely obliterated in the divine realm.

### **The Veil of Time: Limitation in Understanding the Truth**

Now that we have clarified the concept of the relativity of time and its importance, it is essential to understand the veil of time, which results from a misunderstanding of the concept of time. If we do not grasp the relativity of time, this ignorance becomes a veil that prevents us from recognizing the truth and understanding the path of growth.

Most of us are often preoccupied with the past and the future, unable to transcend this framework. This means that time, as a mental construct, limits our material lives and causes us to see the truth only from a specific angle. Just like a fetus in the womb experiences time differently and is unaware of a broader world beyond, we too are often trapped by this veil. However, in higher realms of existence, this limitation disappears, and the truth becomes fully and continuously revealed to us.

If someone can free themselves from worldly constraints, they can experience time differently. Understanding the relativity of time allows us to break the veil of time and reach a broader understanding of the truth and meaning of life. Divine saints and great men of God sometimes reach a stage where the concept of time loses its significance, and they achieve a state of eternity.

In this article, we first discussed the concept of the relativity of time, stating that time is not something that is always fixed and constant; rather, it depends on the conditions and environment in which we find ourselves. Then, by providing

examples from the womb, the world, and the hereafter, we demonstrated that time is experienced differently in each of these stages.