

Preparation for the Afterlife: Connecting the Shor Life in the World to Eternity

Preparation for the Afterlife: A Fresh Look at the Meaning of Worldly Life

Our life is not confined to this visible, finite world. Death is not an end, but our entry into another realm. The quality of our presence is directly determined by what we have built here. Therefore, when we discuss preparation for the afterlife, we are actually examining how we approach our daily lives, rather than merely focusing on a distant future.

The relationship between this world and the hereafter closely mirrors the relationship between the womb and earthly life. Just as a fetus's development in the womb dictates its health and quality of life after birth, the way we live our worldly life directly shapes the quality of our entry into and life in the hereafter. The womb serves as a temporary yet critical environment for physical formation, while this world acts as the environment where our existential structure for eternal life takes shape. In both stages, the central focus is building for birth.

Before entering this world, we continuously develop the essential tools for earthly life while in the womb. Vital organs, such as the heart and the visual system, gradually mature. The true quality of this development only becomes apparent after birth. In essence, birth is the beginning of the realization of the hidden past we experienced during our fetal stage. A sign of a healthy birth is that the fetus progressively resembles a fully developed being whose organs are perfectly suited

for postnatal life. Similarly, our worldly life is a stage in which our existence is being formed, an existence that, after death, enters the Barzakh with the same quality.

To grasp this reality, we can reflect on simple daily examples. When we fail to cultivate divine attributes like *Ar-Rahman* (The Most Merciful), *Al-Ghafur* (The Forgiver), *Ash-Shakur* (The Appreciative), and others, we are actively failing to build the necessary tools for the living conditions of the hereafter. Just as a newborn without healthy lungs cannot breathe easily and without pain after birth, an individual who has not nurtured divine attributes within themselves will face severe limitations and suffering upon entering the Barzakh. This suffering is the natural result of existential deficiency and the lack of enough tools suited for the afterlife.

From this standpoint, preparation for the afterlife is not merely about accumulating a checklist of good deeds; it represents our profound growth. This growth is the core essence of readiness for the hereafter. In this state, time is not neutral. With each passing day, we are either expanding our capacities for eternal life, or we are losing the opportunity for growth. This world is our womb, and departing from it is our birth. The quality of this rebirth will be nothing less than the result of who we choose to become today.

Death: A Rebirth on the Path of Preparation for the Afterlife

When we think of death, we often imagine it as the end of life. However, from a divine perspective, death is simply a birth into a new stage of existence. The quality of this transition relies entirely on what we are building right now. Just as a newborn's health reflects its fetal development, death reveals the ultimate outcome of our worldly endeavors.

In this context, an accepted deed carries a profound meaning that goes far beyond simply doing good or avoiding evil. A truly accepted deed is one that creates a real change within us, and this change leads to the growth of our existential potentials and capacities for life in the Barzakh. This inner transformation is the true foundation of preparation for the afterlife. In a mother's womb, the mere presence of a fetus is not enough, and it is the growth of its organs that enables continued life. Similarly, in this world, merely living or even accumulating rewards is not sufficient. Genuine existential growth is what truly matters.

An accepted deed has two simultaneous purposes. First, it purifies us of qualities, worldly attachments, and tendencies that would otherwise manifest as suffering and limitation in the hereafter. Second, it creates qualities within us that enable us to live a heavenly life full of peace, inner security, and spiritual harmony, completely free from tension and futility ¹.

If we view this world as a womb, our actions parallel the growth processes within it. No organ develops instantly; everything grows gradually through a consistent, orderly process. Similarly, acquiring divine attributes, such as patience and forbearance, does not happen overnight. These traits are built through continuous, righteous actions.

Consider our everyday experiences. If we habitually react with unchecked anger, we actively resist the acquisition of divine attributes. Consequently, upon entering the Barzakh, we will experience immense pressure due to this lack of spiritual capacity, much like an infant struggling to breathe with underdeveloped lungs.

Conversely, when we consciously practice fairness in difficult situations, manage our anger, and protect the rights of others, we are actively constructing the tools

required for the next world. This is the difference between an accepted deed and a fruitless one.

Our primary responsibility in this world is to build the tools necessary for life in the next realm. This is how we prepare for the hereafter. This world offers us a brief yet decisive opportunity that ends at death, while its true results begin at that exact moment. Death is simply the stage of realization: a birth that will either be healthy or burdened by deficiency and limitation.

Hidden and Visible Obstacles on the Path of Preparing Ourselves for the Afterlife

If this world is a womb and death is the moment our birth is evaluated, we must recognize that a healthy birth depends less on the volume of our outward actions and more on the absence of obstacles hindering our inner growth. On the journey of preparation for the afterlife, we encounter two highly destructive barriers: one visible, and the other hidden yet remarkably dangerous. These obstacles, sin and self-admiration, severely disrupt our vital capacities for eternity.

We must not view sin merely as a broken rule or a bad habit. In the context of our birth into the hereafter, every sin creates a structural defect or an unbalanced formation in our existential structure. A person who is prone to sin is like a fetus that, instead of developing harmoniously, suffers from severe distortion. Even if such a fetus remains alive, it is not progressing toward a healthy birth. Each time we commit a sin, we actively weakening a part of our capacities for a healthy birth into the afterlife. Sin leaves us incapable of living well in the elevated conditions of the future, and this existential deficiency becomes the very source of our suffering.

However, the greatest danger is not always visible. The Prophet (Peace be upon him and his family) warns that a person who avoids outward sin may still fall victim to a state far more destructive, known as self-admiration or existential self-infatuation. In this state, we become deeply captivated by our own acts of worship, knowledge, status, or perceived spiritual progress. The fatal danger of self-admiration is that it not only blinds us to our flaws but completely halts our existential growth, freezing us in our current state.

The critical difference between self-admiration and sin is that a sinner eventually recognizes their illness, leaving the door open for repentance and return. In contrast, a person suffering from self-admiration believes they are perfectly healthy and superior to others. Feeling no need for repentance, they cease all efforts to change. This mirrors a fetus with a fatal defect that presents no outward warning signs because the problem is ignored, a healthy birth becomes impossible. In this state, good deeds no longer bring us closer to God. Instead, they inflate the ego and destroy our spiritual assets, moving us further away from a healthy birth through the illusion of perfection.

Becoming highly defensive against constructive criticism, harboring feelings of superiority, a lack of need for self-correction, are all signs that our growth has been stunted by self-admiration. We might successfully avoid obvious sins while simultaneously destroying our own path to a healthy birth through these hidden traps.

Our ultimate responsibility is to eliminate the barriers that prevent our preparation for the hereafter. We must address both the obvious sins that defect our birth by creating flaws, and self-admiration which stops our growth with the illusion of

perfection. If this world is our womb, we must be mindful of what is forming within us because we will be born into the afterlife with that very same quality.

This perspective reveals that our worldly existence is the developmental stage for eternal life. An accepted deed is not a mere obligation, but a vital catalyst that strengthens our inner capacities. By actively overcoming visible sins and the silent trap of self-admiration, we maximize our brief worldly opportunity. Through conscious self-cultivation, we can ensure a healthy, vibrant transition into eternity and achieve the ultimate preparation for the hereafter.

References

¹. Quran, 56: 25-26