Islamic Eschatology

Man is Composed of Spirit and Body

Those who are acquainted to a certain extent with the Islamic sciences know that within the teachings of the Holy Book and the traditions of the Prophet there are many references to spirit and corpus, or soul and body. Although it is relatively easy to conceive of the body and what is corporeal, or that which can be known through the senses, to conceive of spirit and soul is difficult and complicated.

People given to intellectual discussions, such as the theologians and philosophers, Shi'ite and Sunni alike, have presented different views concerning the reality of the spirit (ruh). Yet, what is to some extent certain is that Islam considers spirit and body to be two realities opposed to each other. The body through death loses the characteristics of life and gradually disintegrates, but it is not so with the spirit.

When the spirit is joined to the body, the body also derives life from it, and when the spirit separates from the body and cuts its bond to the body - the event that is called death - the body ceases to function while the spirit continues to live.

From what can be learned through deliberation upon the verses of the Holy Holy Qur'an and the sayings of the Imams of the Household of the Prophet, the spirit of man is something immaterial which has some kind of relation and connection with the material body. God the Almighty in His Book says, "Verily We created man from a product of wet earth ; Then placed him as a drop (of seed) in a safe lodging ; Then fashioned We the drop a clot, then fashioned We the clot a little lump, then fashioned We the little lump bones, Then clothed the bones with flesh, and then produced it as another creation" (Holy Qur'an, XXIII, 12-14). From the order of these verses it is clear that at the beginning the gradual creation of matter is described and then, when reference is made to the appearance of the spirit, consciousness, and will, another kind of creation is mentioned which is different from the previous form of creation.

In another place it is said, in answer to skeptics who ask how it is possible for the body of man, which after death becomes disintegrated and whose elements become dispersed and lost, to have a new creation and become the original man, "Say : The angel of death, who hath charge concerning you, will gather you, and afterwards unto your Lord ye will be returned" (Holy Qur'an, XXXII, 11). This means that your bodies disintegrate after death and are lost amidst the particles of the earth, but you

yourselves, namely your spirits, have been taken from your bodies by the angel of death and remain protected with Us.

Besides such verses the Holy Qur'an in a comprehensive explanation expresses the immateriality of the spirit in itself when it asserts, "They will ask thee concerning the Spirit. Say : The Spirit is by command of my Lord" (Holy Qur'an, XVII, 85).

In another place in explaining His command (amr) He says, "But His command, when He intendeth a thing, is only that He saith unto it : Be! and it is. Therefore glory be to Him in Whose hand is the dominion over all things!" (Holy Qur'an, XXXVI, 81-82). The meaning of these verses is that the command of God in the creation of things is not gradual nor is it bound to the conditions of time and space. Therefore, the spirit which has no reality other than the command of God is not material and in its being does not have material characteristics ; that is, it does not have the characteristics of divisibility, change, and situation in time and space.

A Discussion of Spirit from another Perspective

Intellectual investigation confirms the view of the Holy Qur'an about the spirit. Each of us is aware of a reality within himself which he interprets as "I" and this awareness exists continuously within man. Sometimes man even forgets his head, hands, feet and other members or the whole body. But as long as his self exists, the consciousness of "I" does not leave his awareness.

This perception cannot be divided or analyzed. Although the body of man is continuously undergoing change and transformation and chooses different locations in space for itself and passes through different moments of time, the reality of "I" remains fixed. It does not undergo any change or transformation. It is clear that if the "I" were material it would accept the characteristics of matter which are divisibility, change, and situation in time and space.

The body accepts all the characteristics of matter and, because of the relation of the spirit and the body, these characteristics are also considered to belong to the spirit. But if we pay the least attention, it becomes evident to man that this moment in time and the next, this point in space or another, this shape or another shape, this direction of motion or any other, are all characteristics of the body.

The spirit is free from them; rather each of these determinations reaches the spirit through the body. This same reasoning can be applied in reverse to the power of consciousness and apprehension or knowledge which is one of the characteristics of the spirit. Obviously if knowledge were a material quality, according to the conditions of matter it would accept divisibility and analysis, and be determined by time and space.

Needless to say, this intellectual discussion could go on at length and there are many questions and answers related to it which cannot be considered in the present context. The brief discussion presented here is only an indication of the Islamic belief concerning body and .spirit. A complete discussion will be found in works of Islamic philosophy

Death from the Islamic Point of View

Although a superficial view would regard death as the annihilation of man and see human life as consisting of only the few days that stand between birth and death, Islam interprets death as the transfer of man from one stage of life to another. According to Islam man possesses eternal life which knows no end. Death, which is the separation of the spirit from the body, introduces man to another stage of life in which felicity or disappointment depends upon good or evil deeds in the stage of life before death. The Holy Prophet has said: "You have been created for subsistence, not annihilation. What happens is that you will be transferred from one ".house to another

Purgatory

From what can be deduced from the Holy Book and prophetic traditions, it can be concluded that between death and general resurrection man possesses a limited and temporary life which is the intermediate stage (barzakh) and link between the life of this world and eternal life. After death man is interrogated concerning the beliefs he has held and the good and evil deeds he has performed in this life. After a summary account and judgment he is subjected to either a pleasant and felicitous life, or an unpleasant and wretched one, depending on the results of the account and judgment.

With this newly acquired life he continues in expectation until the day of general resurrection. The condition of man in the life of the intermediate state (purgatory) is very similar to the condition of a person who has been called before a judicial organization in order to have the acts he has committed investigated. He is questioned and investigated until his file is completed. Then he awaits trial.

The soul of man in the intermediate state possesses the same form as in his life in this world. If he be a man of virtue, he lives in happiness and bounty in the proximity of those who are pure and close to the Divine Presence. If he be a man of evil, he lives in affliction and pain and in the company of daemonic forces and "leaders of those who have gone astray."

God, the Most Exalted, has said concerning the condition of a group of those in the state of

felicity, "Think not of those who are slain in the way of Allah, as dead. Nay, they are living. With their Lord they have provision. Jubilant (are they) because of that which Allah hath bestowed upon them of His bounty, rejoicing for the sake of those who have not joined them but are left behind: that there shall no fear come upon them neither shall they grieve. They rejoice because of favor from Allah and kindness, and that Allah wasteth not the wage of the believers" (Holy Qur'an, III, 169-171). And in describing the condition of another group who in the life of this world do not make legitimate use of their wealth and possessions, He says, "Until, when death cometh unto one of the, he saith : My Lord! Send me back, that I may do right in that which I have left behind! But nay! It is but a word that he speaketh ; and behind them is a barrier [barzakh] until the day when they are raised" (Holy Qur'an, XXIII, 99-100).

The Day of Judgment - Resurrection

Among sacred texts the Holy Qur'an is the only one to have spoken in detail about the Day of Judgment. Although the Torah has not mentioned this Day and the Gospels have only alluded to it, the Holy Qur'an has mentioned the Day of Judgment in hundreds of places, using different names. It has described the fate awaiting mankind on this Day sometimes briefly and on other occasions in detail.

It has reminded mankind many times that faith in the Day of Recompense (Day of Judgment) is on the same scale in its importance as faith in God and is one of the three principles of Islam. It has mentioned that he who lacks this faith, that is, who denies resurrection, is outside the pale of Islam and has no destiny other than eternal perdition.

And this is the truth of the matter because if there were to be no reckoning in God's actions and no reward or punishment, the religious message, which consists of an assemblage of God's decrees and what He has commanded and forbidden, would not have the least effect.

Thus the existence or nonexistence of prophecy and the religious mission would be the same. In fact, its nonexistence would be preferable to its existence, for to accept a religion and follow the regulations of a Divine Law is not possible without the acceptance of restrictions and loss of what appears as "freedom." If to submit to it were to have no effect, people would never accept it and would not give up their natural freedom of action for it. From this argument it becomes clear that the importance of mentioning and recalling the Day of Judgment is equivalent to that of the principle of the religious call itself.

From this conclusion it also becomes evident that faith in the Day of Recompense is the most effective factor which induces man to accept the necessity of virtue and abstention from unbecoming qualities and great sins, in the same way that to forget or lack faith in the Day of

Judgment is the essential root of every evil act and sin. God the Almighty has said in His Book, "Lo! those who wander from the way of Allah have an awful doom, for as much as they forgot the Day of Reckoning" (Holy Qur'an, XXXVIII, 27). As can be seen in this sacred verse, the forgetting of the Day of Judgment is considered to be the root of every deviation. Meditation on the purpose of the creation of man and the Universe, or on the purpose and end of Divine Laws, makes it evident that there will be a Day of Judgment. When we meditate on creation, we see that there is no action (which of necessity is also a kind of motion) without an immutable end and purpose. Never is the action, considered independently and in itself, the end. Rather, action is always the prelude to an end and exists by virtue of that end. Even in actions which superficially appear to be without purpose such as instinctive actions or will discover purposes in conformity with the kind of action in question. In instinctive actions, which are usually a form of motion, the end toward which the motion takes place is the purpose and aim of the action. And in the play of children there is an imaginary end, the attainment of which is the purpose of playing.

The creation of man and the world is the action of God and God is above the possibility of performing a senseless and purposeless act such as creating, nourishing, taking away life and then again creating, nourishing, and taking away life, that is, of making and destroying, without there being an immutable end and a permanent purpose which He pursues in these acts. There must of necessity be a permanent aim and purpose in the creation of the world and of man. Of course, its benefit does not accrue to God, who is above every need, but rather to the creatures themselves. Thus it must be said that the world and man are directed toward a permanent reality and a more perfect state of being which knows no annihilation and corruption.

Also, when we study with care the condition of men from the point of view of religious education and training, we see that as a result of Divine guidance and religious training people become divided into the two categories of the virtuous and the evil. Yet in this life there is no distinction made between them. Rather, on the contrary, success usually belongs to those who are evil and unjust. To do good is combined with difficulty and hardship and every kind of privation and endurance of oppression. Since this is so, Divine Justice requires the existence of another world in which each individual receives the just reward ho actions deserve, and lives a life in conformity with his merits.

Thus it is seen that careful consideration of the purpose of creation and of the Divine Laws leads to the conclusion that the Day of Judgment will come for every person. God, the Exalted, makes this clear in His Book, saying, "And We created not the heavens and the earth, and all

that is between them, in play. We created them not save with truth ; but most of them in vain. That is the opinion of those who disbelieve. And woe unto those who disbelieve, from the fire! Shall We treat those who believe and do good works as those who spread corruption in the earth ; or shall We treat the pious as the wicked?" (Holy Qur'an, XXXVIII, 28-29).

In another place He says, "Or do those who commit ill-deeds suppose that We shall make them as those who believe and do good works, the same in life and death? Bad is their judgment! And Allah hath created the heavens and the earth with truth, and that every soul may be repaid what it hath earned. And they will not be wronged" (Holy Qur'an, XLV, 21-22).

Another Explanation

In discussing the outward and inward meaning of the Holy Qur'an we pointed out that the Islamic sciences are explained in the Holy Qur'an through different means and that these are in general divided into the two dimensions of the exoteric and the esoteric. The exoteric explanation is the one that conforms to the level of the simple thought patterns and understanding of the majority, in contrast to the esoteric, which belongs to the elite alone which can be comprehended only with the aid of the vision which comes through the practices of the spiritual life.

The explanation from the exoteric view presents God as the absolute ruler of the world of creation, all of which is His dominion. God has created many angels, whose number is legion, to carry out and execute the commands He issues for every aspect of creation. Each part of creation and its order is connected to a special group of angels who are the protectors of that domain. The human species is His creation and human beings are His servants who must obey His commands and prohibitions ; and the prophets are the bearers of His messages, the conveyors of the laws and regulations which He has sent to mankind and has demanded that mankind obey. God has promised reward and recompense for faith and obedience, and punishment and painful retribution for infidelity and sin, and will not break His promise. Also since He is just, His justice demands that in another state of being the two groups of virtuous and evil men, who in this world do not have a mode of life in accordance with their good and evil nature, becomes separated, the virtuous to possess a good and happy life and the evil a bad and wretched existence.

Thus God, according to His Justice and the promises He has made, will resurrect all men who live in this world after their death, without exception, and will investigate in detail their beliefs and works. He will judge them according to the truth and give everyone who has a right his due. He will carry out justice on behalf of all who have been oppressed. He will render to each

person the reward for his own actions. One group will be assigned to eternal heaven and the other group to eternal hell.

This is the exoteric explanation of the Holy Qur'an. Of course it is true and correct. But its language is composed of terms and images born of man's social life and thought in order that its benefit might be more general and the radius of its action more widespread.

Those who have penetrated into the spiritual meaning of things and are to a certain extent familiar with the esoteric language of the Holy Qur'an, however, understand from these sayings meanings which lie above the level of simple and popular comprehension. The Holy Qur'an, amidst its simple and uncomplicated expositions, occasionally alludes to the esoteric aim and purpose of its message. Through many allusions the Holy Qur'an affirms that the world of creation with all its parts, of which man is one, is moving in its "existential becoming" which is always in the direction of perfection toward God. A day will come when this movement will come to an end and will lose completely its separate and independent existence before the Divine Majesty and Grandeur.

Man, who is a part of the world and whose special perfection is through consciousness and knowledge, is also moving with haste toward God. When he reaches the end of this becoming, he will observe plainly the Truth and Oneness of the Unique God. He will see that power, dominion and every other quality of perfection belong exclusively to the sacred Divine Essence ; the reality of each thing as it is will be revealed to him. This is the first stage in the world of eternity.

If, through his faith and good works in this world, man is able to have communication, relation, familiarity, and friendship with God and the beings of his proximity, then with a felicity and joy that can never be described in human language he will live near God and in the company of the pure beings of the world above.

But if, because of desire and attachment to the life of this world and its transient and baseless pleasures, he is cut off from the world above and has no familiarity with or love for God and the pure beings of His Presence, then he becomes afflicted with painful torment and eternal adversity. It is true that a man's good and evil acts in this world are transient and disappear, but the forms of these good and evil acts become established in the soul of man and accompany him everywhere. They are the capital of his future life, be it sweet or bitter.

These affirmations can be drawn from the following verses: God says, "Lo! unto thy Lord is the (absolute) return" (Holy Qur'an, XCVI, 8). And He says, "Beware all things reach Allah at last?" (Holy Qur'an XLII, 53); and "The (absolute) command on that day is Allah's" (Holy Qur'an, LXXXII, 19). Also in the account of the address made to certain members of the human race

on the Day of Judgment He says, "(And unto the evildoer it is said): Thou wast in heedlessness of this. Now We have removed from thee thy covering, and piercing is thy sight this day" (Holy Qur'an, L, 22).

Concerning the hermeneutic interpretation (ta'wil) of the Holy Qur'an (the truth from which the Holy Qur'an originates) God says, "Await they aught save the fulfillment [ta'wil] thereof? On the day when the fulfillment thereof cometh, those who were before forgetful thereof will say: The messengers of our Lord did bring the Truth! Have we any intercessors, that they may intercede for wise than we used to act? They have lost their souls, and that which they devised hath failed them" (Holy Qur'an, VII, 53).

He says, "On that day Allah will pay them their due, and they will know that Allah, He is the Manifest Truth" (Holy Qur'an, XXIV, 25). And, "Thou verily, O man, art working toward thy Lord a work which thou wilt meet (in His presence)" (Holy Qur'an, LXXXIV, 6). Also, "Whoso looketh forward to the meeting with Allah (let him know that) Allah's reckoning is surely nigh..." (Holy Qur'an, XXIX, 5). And, "And whoever hopeth for the meeting with his Lord, let him do righteous work, and make none sharer of the worship due unto his Lord" (Holy Qur'an, XVIII, 111).

And, "But ah! thou soul at peace! Return unto thy Lord, content in His good pleasure! Enter thou among My bondmen! Enter thou My Garden!" (Holy Qur'an, LXXXIX, 27-30). Also He says, "But when the great disaster cometh, The Day when man will call to mind his (whole) endeavor, And hell will stand forth visible to him who seeth, Then, as for him who rebelled, And chose the life of the world, Lo! hell will be his home. But as for him who feared to stand before his Lord and restrained his soul from lust, Lo! the Garden will be his home" (Holy Qur'an, LXXIX, 34-41).

Concerning the identity of the reward of actions God says, "(Then it will be said): O ye who disbelieve! Make no excuses for yourselves this day. Ye are only being paid for what ye used to do" (Holy Qur'an, LXVI, 7).

The Continuity and Succession of Creation

This world of creation which we observe does not possess an endless and perpetual life. A day will come when the life of this world and its inhabitants will come to an end as confirmed by the Holy Qur'an. God says, "We created not the heavens and the earth and all that is between them save with truth, and for a term appointed." (Holy Qur'an, XLVI, 3)

One could ask if before the creation of this world and present race of humanity there had been another world and another human race; or, if after the life of this world and its inhabitants terminates, as the Holy Qur'an declares that it will, another world and humanity will be created. The direct response to these questions cannot be found in the Holy Qur'an.

There, one can only discover allusions to the continuity and succession of creation. But in the traditions (rewayat) of the Imams of the Household of the Prophet transmitted to us it is asserted that creation is not limited to this visible world. Many worlds have existed in the past and will exist in the future. The sixth Imam has said, "Perhaps you think God has not created humanity other than you. No! I swear to God that He has created thousands upon thousands of mankinds and you are the last among the."

And the fifth Imam has said, "God, the Exalted, since creating the world has created seven kinds none of whom were of the race of Adam. He created them from the surface of the earth and set each being one after another with its kind upon the earth. Then He created Adam, the father of mankind, and brought his children into being from him." And also the sixth Imam has said, "Do not think that after passing away of the affair of this world and the Day of Judgment and the placing of the virtuous in heaven and the evil in hell there will no longer be anyone to worship God. No, never! Rather, again God will create servants without the marriage of the male and the female to know His Oneness and to worship Him."