

Mawt: a whole new world.

1.0. Introduction.

From the onset, it must be made clear that this paper is not about what happens after death. It is not about life in the grave, the questioning and the events that occur before the Day of Judgement.

Rather it is a broader discussion about what life and death really is. Based on the outstanding works of Imām Muhammad Mutawallī al-Sha'rāwī (1911-1998), the paper gives a brilliant insight into the creation of Allāh. It will also help us understand certain aspects of our *Aqīdah* that others find confusing.

2.0. What is *Hayāt* (life)?

We think that life is restricted to plants, animals, humans and jinns, because it involves movement and feelings. Everything else, we think, is dead. Humans, plants and animals are alive because they breath, move and react. Anything that doesn't move is not alive.

Hayāt is not like this. Life (*Hayāt*) is when everything performs its God-given duty. In this sense, everything in the world is alive because it is performing its function.

3.0. Life in everything.

On closer contemplation, we find that there is 'life' in everything that is around us. For instance:

3.1. Solids and Minerals.

*When a metal is heated, it takes on a different form.

*In the Qur'ān, Allāh states that 'there are some stones which fall down for the fear of Allāh' (2:74).

*Allāh conversed with the sky and the earth when He said: 'Come willingly or unwillingly.' They both said: 'We come willingly' (41:11).

*Abū Jahl approached the Prophet (peace be upon him) and asked: 'O Muhammad! If you are truly a prophet of Allāh, then tell me what is in my hands. The Prophet (peace be upon him) said: 'No, what is in your hands will tell you who I am.' Everyone heard the pebbles in Abū Jahl's hands recite the *Kalima Sharīf*. The miracle was not that the pebbles recited the *Kalima Sharīf*. The miracle was that people actually heard it.

Therefore solids and minerals do have feelings, reactions and the ability to speak. We, however, don't know or feel that.

3.2. Plants.

There is the famous story about the dried tree trunk. The Prophet (peace be upon him) used to lean on it for his Friday sermons. The Companions decided to build him a new pulpit and so he began using that. On the next Friday, everyone heard the a child-like crying from the tree, because it felt sadness upon the departure of the Prophet (peace be upon him). Moreover, it was full of joy when the Prophet (peace be upon him) promised to replant it in Paradise.

Not only does this story indicate that plants have emotions, but that even dried tree trunks believed in the *Baraka* of the Prophet; that there is a purpose in life and that is to be associated with the best of all creations, peace be upon him.

3.3. Animals.

In the Qur'ān, there are stories of animals conversing and displaying intellect.

*For instance:

‘One of the ants said: ‘O ants! Enter your dwellings, lest Sulaymān and his army should crush you...’ (27:18).

Who told the ants this was Sulaymān (peace be upon him)? And that this was his army? Who told the ant what might happen if they didn't move? All was from Allāh.

*The same Sūrah (Sūrah al-Naml) mentions the story of Hudhud, the little bird, which informed Sulaymān (peace be upon him) about Queen Sheba and her throne. As al-Sha'rāwī writes, who told Hudhud that this queen is called Sheba? And that she had a great throne? And that they worshipped the sun? And that by doing so, this was the work of the devil? All came from Allāh Almighty.

In short, what this shows that everything around us has life, plants, solids and animals. Perhaps more importantly, all perform the *Zikr* of Allāh. The Qur'ān states:

‘The seven heavens and the earth and everything within glorify Him. And there is not a thing but glorifies His praise, but you do not understand their glorification’ (17:44).

3.0. What is *Mawt* (life)?

At first sight, *Mawt* means nothingness. We can see, hear and feel when we are alive so that must mean that when we are dead – the opposite of life – we cannot do things. On closer contemplation, we realise this is not the case.

3.1. Does *Mawt* equate nothingness?

a. The three questions in the grave suggest otherwise. All are asked this question, irrespective of faith. There would only be purpose in the questioning if (i) the deceased could hear (ii) the deceased could respond (iii) the deceased could deliberate over the questions.

b. The punishment and reward in the grave suggests otherwise. We know from the Messenger of Allāh that the grave can be a pit from the pits of hell or a garden from the garden from the gardens of paradise, depending on the person's faith and actions. There is only purpose behind a punishment or reward if the deceased can feel something.

c. The order to perform *Salam* upon entering the graveyard suggests otherwise. It is *Wājib* to respond to someone when they offer *Salam*. The Prophet (peace be upon him) would not ask his followers to greet the inhabitants of the graveyard if they could not hear it or respond to it.

Based on these realities, it is clear that a fresh, Islamic perspective is required to truly understand *Mawt*.

4.0. The Islamic perspective on *Mawt*.

Before offering Islam's perspective on *Mawt*, it is worth remembering what *Ghayb* is. *Ghayb* is something that you cannot detect through your senses. Our *Imān* is based largely on belief in the unseen. Angels, heaven and hell are all things we have not seen, smelt, heard or touched, but we believe in all of them, purely because the most truthful of Allāh's creations (peace be upon him) told us.

Mawt too is *Ghayb*. It is hidden from us. And everything that is *Ghayb* is then taken from Allāh and not presumed or second-guessed. When it comes to creation, life and death, we know very little. Allāh says:

'I did not make them witnesses to the creation of the skies and earth, and not even their own creation' (18: 51).

Man did not witness his own creation, so independently, he cannot know about life and death. He has to depend on Allāh for the correct version.

Moreover, it is the *Rūh* which gives life (*Hayat*) to the body. To understand life (and indeed death) you must understand the *Rūh*. But Allāh has told us very little about the *Rūh* (17:85).

4.1. What has Allāh taught us about *Mawt*?

The Qur'ān states:

[Allāh is the] One who created death and life' (67:2).

So in the same way Allāh created life, He also created death. Therefore, death is not simply the absence of life. It is actually a stage, an entity and a reality. In the same way *Hayāt* has certain rules and regulations (of what a person can and cannot do), so does *Mawt*.

4.2. How does Allāh make understand *Mawt*? Through dreams.

Allāh makes us understand the concept of *Mawt* through dreams. When a man sleeps, then he is transferred to a world governed by different rules. Another set of rules look over him. The Qur'ān states:

'It is Allāh who takes away the souls at the time of their death, and those who do not die during their sleep' (39:42).

In both, the soul leaves the body; with death it is permanent and with dreams/sleep, it is temporary. The purpose is so that man can understand that his body can be governed by a new set of rules.

During a dream:

- a. Man has no concept of time whatsoever. The only way he can know he how long he has slept for is through external signs (the change in daylight, or a watch). This is why we sometimes nap in the day, feeling it was for hours yet it was only for a few minutes.
- b. Man sees with his eyes. If his eyes are shut then he cannot see anything. Yet, when we are asleep we are now governed by a different set of rules. We can see things with our eyes firmly shut!
- c. Man can walk to far off places in his dream whilst his feet are firmly in the bed.
- d. He can fall off the mountain [in his dream] and feel nothing.

Perhaps just as important is our waking up. In an effortless second, we can wake up and continue as normal (especially povernaps). Allāh will do exactly the same with our resurrection.

What dreams show is that another world can exist with a different set of rules. In short, whilst a person is asleep, he is not subject to rules governed by sense, intellect or the same ways that exist whilst awake. Allāh Almighty – as a merciful gesture upon us – has informed us that when a person sleeps, he moves to the world of *Mawt*. So when he is informed that in the hereafter, he will live forever, he doesn't find this strange. He remembers that he is now merely subject to a new set of rules.

4.3. Summary.

- a. *Mawt* is not nothingness. *Allāh doesn't do dead*.
- b. Instead, *Mawt* is a different stage. Imām al-Qurtubī: '*Mawt* is the transferal from one state to another.' A human experiences the following stages:

i. Stage One: *Mayyit* in *Ālam al-Dharr*. Allāh states in the Qur'ān:

'And remember when your Lord brought forth from the Children of Adam, from their loins, their seed and made them testify as to themselves (saying): 'Am I not your Lord?' They said 'Of course! We testify.' Lest you should say on the Day of Resurrection 'Verily we have been unaware of this.' (7: 172).

Everyone appeared in the presence of Allāh and no individual was missing. If this episode did not occur, then no man would be able to understand the concept of faith in the unseen. Why? Because man cannot understand what something is until he has seen it. You do not know what a mountain is until you see it or climb it. You do not know what ocean means until you see it directly or through an image. Allāh has not been seen by man, nor can intellect fathom Him. But despite that, when the name of Allāh is mentioned, it means something to you and brings about a change in emotion and sentiment. When you worship Him, you feel a sense of presence and consciousness. This only came about because of the Covenant of Alast. And this also explains why there is a sense of faith in every child that is born. The Prophet (peace be upon him) said: 'Every child is born upon *Fitra*. It is then the parents who turn the child into a Christian, Jew or fire-worshipper.'

ii. Stage Two: *Hayy* in this world.

iii. Stage Three: *Mayyit* in *Ālam Barzakh*. This is the time between burial and resurrection.

Stage Four: Eternal in the next world. This last stage was explained by our Prophet (peace be upon him). Abū Sa'īd al-Khudrī (may Allāh be pleased with him) reports that the Prophet (peace be upon him) said:

'Death will be brought in the form of a ram that is more white than black on the Day of Judgement, and it will be placed in between Paradise and Hell. It will be said: 'O people of Paradise! Do you know what this is?' They will extend their necks to get a better view and will reply: 'Yes, this is death.' It will be then said: 'O people of Hell! Do you know what this is?' They will extend their necks to get a better view and will reply: 'Yes, this is death.' The ram will then be ordered to be slaughtered. It will then be said: 'O people of Paradise! Eternity, and no more death. O people of Hell! Eternity, and no more death.'

3. *Mawt* and *Hayāt* are not opposites but different stages. Allāh says in the Qur'ān:

'Everything (*kulle shay*) will perish except His face.'

Everything can only perish if it had some form of life in the first place. On the basis, Imām al-Sha'rāwī writes that the opposite of *Hayat* is *Hilāk*, not *Mawt*. The Qur'ān implicitly suggests this is the case in the verse:

‘...So that those who were to be destroyed (*halaka*) might be destroyed after a clear evidence, and those who were to live might live (*hayya*) after a clear evidence.’ (8: 42)

4.0. How does this now help us in our *Aqīdah*?

- a. *Isāl Thawāb* is not transferring reward to a being who is dead and who can't benefit. The argument is that 'He's dead now, how can he benefit?' When he is dead, he cannot give *Sadaqa*. This is **not** the same as saying someone else cannot give *Sadaqa* on his behalf.
- b. You wouldn't be asked to send *Salam* to the Prophet (peace be upon him) if he was dead! The deniers say that 'the Prophet is dead! Our response is that it is not in the Qur'ān, it's in your translation of it. *Innaka Mayyit* (indeed you are *mayyit*) means the Prophet too was subjected to different stages.
- c. If infidels have some life in the grave, why can't the same be said about the best of all creations, peace be upon him?

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