

Fifteenth Rule

SOLITUDE

There exist two kinds of solitude - 'General Solitude', which means not to mix with people known for ill behavior, in particular the ignorant. Allah (SWT) has advised us and says,

In addition, forsake those who take their religion for a pastime and a jest, and whom the life of the world beguiles.
(Qur'an - Chapter 6, Verse 70)

'Particular Solitude' means to abstain oneself from company from all others. Such seclusion is necessary at times only when we are to reflect on a particular act we have done, or a creation of Allah (SWT), or anything that deserves and requires seclusion. A spiritual traveler should always try to keep himself away from such gatherings and disturbing noises. For example, the advice is to say our prayers in those places where we are certain to have no disturbances of any kind. In one way, one can remind himself of his grave which he will most certainly visit one day.

The advice is also not to associate with persons belonging to five categories, to not also converse with them and not accompany them in any case:

Shun the liars because they are like a mirage. With their baseless words, they depict matters different from what they actually are. With their lies, they show a distant thing, to be near and a thing, which is near to be far off and thus deviate you from the right path.

Avoid the licentious and the sinners because their friendship is not dependable and they will sell you for a morsel or even lesser than that.

Avoid stingy persons because at the time of need and difficulty these people will make you suffer humiliation.

Keep away from foolish persons because they may be desirous of doing you good but will involve you in hardship due to their ignorance and folly.

Shun those persons who have dissociated from their kith and kin and misbehave with them because Allah (SWT) in The Qur'an has cursed these people.

The suggestion is that it is better to remain in solitude and alone than with a bad company. In addition, if we befriend a person, we should

Find out before everything else what the standard of his intelligence is, what is his opinion about good and evil? What importance does he attach to honor and insult? What constitutes good luck and adversity in his eyes? This is necessary so that you may not get surprised later because of what you hear from him or what he tells you because you will see that all his actions are compatible with what he said and according to his line of thinking.

(Mark Orwell)

Truly, friendship has certain limits and conditions. One who does not fulfill some of these conditions is not a perfect companion and one who does not fulfill anyone of them cannot be termed a friend at all. His exterior and interior should be alike and whatever he professes about you by his tongue should come from his heart as well. He should consider your good things to be his own good things and your bad things to be his own bad things. Similarly, he should consider your honor to be his honor and your disgrace to be his disgrace. If his financial condition improves and he amasses wealth or acquires a higher position, he should not change his attitudes towards you. He should not fail to assist you to the extent of his capability and competence. He should not abandon you and leave you alone when you are involved in adversity.

A Brief Note on Death

Whenever we are alone, we need to and should think about Death, which is certainly to over-take us one fine day. Solitude should bring to us awareness of such an event that will over-power every one of us, and we will have no spare time to make amends, for we have been given enough time already. Insha Allah, if one truly understands and appreciate the happenings of this event, then only are we going to make alterations in our lives and make the goal of reaching the goal of spiritual perfection a little easier.

Allah (SWT) says in Hadith al-Qudsi,

I am surprised at that person who is sure of death and yet laughs (unnecessarily)!

O' Son of Adam (AS)! Everyday your life is getting shorter but still you do not understand! Each day I send down to you My Bounties but you are not thankful to Me about them. Neither are you satisfied with My little provision nor are you satisfied with a lot of it.

From the time, you get out of your mother's womb you are getting nearer to your grave. So, do not be like wood, which burns itself in fire for the sake of others.

One should appreciate the fact that we can only fear death if we have knowledge of what is to happen to us before, during and after death. Indeed, The Pure and Infallible Aimmah (AS) have advised us to constantly think and fear death. **'Frequent remembrance of death decreases one's desires.'** (Imam Ali (AS))

Unlike some people's belief that the remembrance of death and The Resurrection Day makes one negligent about worldly affairs and material gains, our belief is that the remembrance of death prevents one from heedlessness and indiscipline. He, who is cautious about his performances, big or small, will not commit any wrong act. Apparently, this is one of the most efficient ways to scrutinize our behavior and lead a good and decent life.

al-Sadiq (AS) says the following about the effects of remembering death and The Day of Judgment:

Remembering of death suppresses the inordinate desires; it uproots the very foundation of negligence and apathy; with the reminding of Allah (SWT)'s promise, it strengthens a man's heart; it softens the hard mentality of a man; it demolishes the banners of inordinate desires and transgression, and it suppresses the evil of greediness and makes the world humble before one's eyes.

The report in authentic narrations is that, *the most wise and thoughtful are those who keep remembering death at all times.*

The Prophet (S) once cautioned his followers that a man's heart can rust like the way iron rusts. The followers then asked as to what would clean this dirt. The Prophet (S) then replied,

By remembering death and reciting The Qur'an.

Another advice from The Prophet (S) is to remember death frequently for it has four effects,

It washes off your sins; it reduces your keen fondness for the world; it checks your indulgence in bad practices and improper use of wealth during the period of affluence, and finally, it makes a man content with whatever little quantity of wealth he has. As during poverty his remembrance of death makes him realize how he will account before Allah (SWT) for the wealth he has spent and the deprivation of the people, because he sees that when he has a small quantity of wealth his accountability would also be less.

Imam Ali (AS) says,

He who remembers death frequently will remain content with whatever little quantity of wealth he has. He never craves for more and he neither becomes greedy nor miser.

Actually, this world deceives its own lovers and anyone who after having the thought of death and the Resurrection Day diverts his heart to the next world. Further,

Anyone who remembers death frequently saves himself from the hypocrisies of the world.

In another tradition, we read that,

Anyone who sees death in front of him and awaits it, he will not be laid behind in his daily performances because he knows that the time at his disposal is short and death can overtake him any moment. He gets busy in doing the noble deeds as much as is humanly possible.

The Final Destination

Human being has been created for eternity not oblivion.
(Prophet (S))

Scholars have written that movement is the very essence of living. Movement in time from past into the present, towards the future, and movement in space, horizontally and vertically, both represent a progression towards a destination. There is a starting point and a halting point. But, the halting point in this movement is called 'Mortal Life' which is the beginning of the final journey, a transition towards the final destination which is the 'Eternal Life' hence, The Prophet's (S) tradition is that man has been created not for annihilation but for preservation.

The movement from the 'Mortal' to the 'Eternal' world is through Death and Resurrection. We therefore need to ponder over death, which Allah (SWT) has destined for every creature, as revealed in this verse of The Qur'an,

Every soul shall taste death.
(Qur'an - Chapter 21, Verse 35)

What is Death?

Death is not the end of life, for when a person dies that is not the end of him. His body decays and disintegrates because it has lost its preservative element, the soul. This is the 'Spirit', for which Allah (SWT) says,

Moreover, breathed into him My Spirit.
(Qur'an - Chapter 15, Verse 29)

Apparently, death is a transition between physical and spiritual life, and in other words, the transference stage of soul from this life on earth to life in The Hereafter. Death is inevitable and a must, and both it and life have a definite purpose.

He who created death and life, that He may try which of you is the best in deeds.

(Qur'an - Chapter 67, Verse, 2)

It follows that if we excel in our actions in this brief physical life, we will pass the test and be judged as successful and enjoy eternity. To fail the test would mean eternal affliction.

It is for the sake of helping us pass the test that The Prophet (S) and Aimmah (AS) have exhorted us towards good deeds and eschewing bad deeds. This is because God bestowed them with Divine Knowledge of the pains and torments of death and the afflictions of Hell. Our guides want us to get to our destination in comfort and joy and enjoy eternity in Paradise.

Warning us against the transitory nature of worldly enjoyments, The Commander of Faithful, Imam Ali (AS) has said,

World is a prison for a believer, death is his offspring and Paradise his destination.

Continuing in the same vein, he asked his followers the following question:

How can you enjoy a life that grows shorter every hour?

In another narration, when Imam al-Hasan (AS) was asked about death, he said,

It is the greatest joy that comes to a believer when he goes from the house of affliction to eternal bliss. In addition, it is the greatest tribulation, which comes upon an infidel when he goes from (his) Paradise on earth to a Fire, which abates not nor is it extinguished. Death is but a bridge by which one crosses over from misfortunes and afflictions to spacious gardens and eternal favors.

Imam al-Husayn (AS) once exclaimed to his followers:

Patience, O' Scions of Nobility! For what is death, but a bridge by which you cross over from misfortune and harm to spacious gardens and eternal favors. Now which of you would dislike proceeding from a prison to a palace?

Moreover, as for those, your enemies, they are like people who go from a palace to a prison and to a painful torment. Verily, concerning this, my father (Imam Ali (AS) related to me from my grandfather, The Messenger of Allah (SWT) (S), *'Behold! The world is a prison for the believer and a paradise for the unbeliever, and death is the bridge for the former to their gardens, and for the latter to their Hell-Fire. And he did not lie nor do I.'*

When Imam al-Sajjad (AS) was asked concerning death, he replied,

For a believer, it is like taking off clothes which are dirty and lousy, or breaking heavy shackles and fetters, and changing into the most gorgeous and perfumed of apparel, and riding on well-trained mounts, and alighting in familiar resting places. In addition, for the unbeliever, it is the pulling of gorgeous apparel and changing into the most filthy and coarse clothing, and the transformation from familiar places to the wildest resting places and the greatest torment.

Imam al-Baqir (AS) considered death as,

A sleep, which comes to you every night, except that it is of long duration. The sleeper does not awake from it except on The Day of Resurrection. Some see in their sleep certain kinds of joy the worth whereof cannot be estimated. Others experience certain kinds of terrors, which are beyond the pale of estimation. How then can his condition (be described) who may be happy or fearful in death. This is then death, so be prepared for it.

When asked to describe death, Imam Sadiq (AS) replied,

To the believer it is like the most perfumed breeze, which he inhales and then doses off because of the perfume, and his weariness and pain disappear from him. To the unbeliever, it is like the biting of vipers and the stinging of scorpions. No! It is even more painful.

Imam Sadiq (AS) was then told, *'There are some people who say that it is more painful than being sawed (with a saw), or being cut by scissors, or being crushed to death by stones, or the circular motion by the pivots of hand-mills in the pupils of the eye.'* He (AS) replied,

Such is the travail of death on some of the unbelievers and sinners. Do you not see that among them are those who have witnessed such calamities? Now that death is more painful than this and is more painful than all the worldly torments.

Imam al-Sadiq (AS) was further asked, *'Why is it that we see occasionally an unbeliever, who at the moment of death is not in pain, and who dies while he is relating stories, laughing or talking? In addition, the same is the case with some believers. Again both among the believers and unbelievers, there are some who endure hardships during the pangs of death'* He (AS) replied,

Whatever happiness the believer enjoys is part of his early reward, and whatever pain he suffers is the forgiveness of his sins, so that he may arrive in the next world in a state of cleanliness, purity and spotlessness, fit for the reward of Allah (SWT), and without there being anything to keep him from it.

Moreover, whatever of ease is to be found in the case of some unbeliever is the compensation of his good actions in this world, so that when he arrives in the next world, nothing remains of him save that which brings torment on him. In addition, whatever of distress comes upon an unbeliever (at the moment of death) there is the commencement of the punishment of Allah (SWT), in as much as the reward of his good actions is at the end. That is because Allah (SWT), The Mighty and Glorious, is Just and does not act erroneously.

Imam al-Kadhim (AS) had this to comment on death,

Verily death is a purifier. It purifies the believers from sins. It is the last pain, which afflicts them and the atonement of the last sin (or burden) upon them. Whereas death separates the unbelievers from their good actions, and is the last delight, favor or comfort which reaches them. It is the last reward in respect of their good deeds.

It is clear that those who are prepared for the journey after death, nothing could be simpler, but those who heed it not beforehand are tormented by it. According to Sheikh Saduq (AR), Imam al-Ridha (AS) describes those who dislike death as having no faith and should renew their faith in Allah (SWT), in *The Prophethood of Muhammad (S)*, and *The Leadership of Imam Ali (AS)*.

Imam al-Taqi (AS) was asked, *'What is the matter with these Muslims that they dislike death?'* He (AS) said,

They are ignorant of it and therefore dislike it. If they had possessed knowledge of it, and were true friends of Allah (SWT), they would love it and surely, they would have accepted the world of Hereafter better than this one.

O' Slave of Allah (SWT)! Why does the child or the mad man refuse to take the medicine, which cleans his body and gets rid of his pain.

The person who asked the question in the first place replied, *'Because they are ignorant of the benefits of that medicine.'* He (Imam al-Taqi (AS) then said,

I swear by Him who sent Muhammad (S) as a Prophet of Truth, verily as for those who prepare themselves for death as they really should, death will be more beneficial to them for curing themselves than this medicine. Lo! If only they knew what blessings death would bring them, they would call out for it and desire it even more than the wise and the resolute man desires his medicine for the removal of his calamities and the recovery of his well-being.

Imam al-Naqi (AS) once visited one of his companions who was weeping and wailing for fear of death. Thereupon he (AS) said,

O' Slave of Allah (SWT)! You fear death because you do not possess any knowledge about it. What say you! When you find your clothes filthy and loathsome, and you suffer from excess of filth and dirt, and are full of wounds and scabs and you know that a bath in a public bath-place will remove all these from you, would you not wish to enter it and bathe so that all that filth may disappear? Moreover, would you not like to enter the bath so that the wounds and scabs should disappear from you?

The man said, 'Yes', *O son of the Messenger of Allah (SWT) (S).*' The Imam (AS) said, This death is the bath-place, and it is the last portion of what remains against you of the forgiveness of your sins and the purification from your evil actions. For when you will enter upon it (i.e. death) and cross over it, you will be saved from all grief, anxiety and injury, and you will have attained complete joy and gladness.

Once a man went to Abu Dhar (AR), a respected companion of The Prophet (S), and asked him as to why some people disliked death. He replied,

Some of us have staked everything for this world and ruined our prospects for the next, and naturally, we would not like to shift from a settled habitation to ruin.

When Abu Dhar (AR) was asked as to what he thought about our return to Allah (SWT), who is Exalted above all, he replied,

As for the virtuous, he will be like one who after being absent returns to his own people. And as for the wicked, he will be like a runaway slave returning to his master in fear and dread.

Imam Ali (AS) says in one of his sermons,

Death will come and take you away from your life. You will be placed in a dark and narrow grave, bound-hand and foot, and alone. There, the insects and reptiles will eat their way through your skin and flesh. Gradually, normal decay will destroy your body and passage of life will obliterate your memory. What will happen to you?

Your strong and robust body will decay; even the bones will turn into dust. Your soul will be your first-hand knowledge, but this knowledge will not be of any use to you. There will be no time for you to increase the stock of your good deeds or to repent for your sins.

O' Creature of Allah (SWT)! Can you tell me where are those people who were given long lives but wasted them in ease and comfort, and in vice? Where are those people who were provided with good mind and equally good opportunities to acquire wisdom and to know the truth, but who, even after realizing and understanding, did not make good use of it? They were conferred with long life and plenty of good things, they were warned of the consequences of bad deeds, and they were promised of the heavenly rewards. However, nothing kept them away from vice and wickedness.

O' you who have been created by Allah (SWT)! Keep in mind the purpose of which you have been created and fear Allah (SWT). Be afraid of Him as much as He wants you to be afraid. If you believe that He will bring His Promises to fulfillment and if you fear the terrors of The Day of Judgment, then try to deserve all the blessings He has reserved for you

Explaining the torment of death, Imam Ali (AS) once said; *dying from one thousand strokes of a sword is simpler than dying on bed.*

Imam al-Taqi (AS) went to visit one of his companions who had fallen sick. The fear of death had robbed him of all tranquility and calm, so The Imam (AS) addressed him as follows:

O' Servant of Allah (SWT)! You fear death because you do not understand it correctly. Tell me, if your body were soiled with dirt so that you were pained and discomforted and afflicted with running sores, and you knew that a washing in the bath-place would rid you of all that filth and pain, would you not wish to avail yourself of the bath-place to cleanse yourself of the dirt? Or would you be reluctant to do so and prefer to remain in your polluted state?

Know, then, that death is exactly like the bath-place. It represents your last chance to rid yourself of your sins and to purify yourself of evil. If death embraces you now, there can be no doubt that you will be freed of all sorrow and pain and attain everlasting happiness and joy.

Dear servant of Allah (SWT), anyone who decides to go on a journey must collect all the necessary provisions before travelling. The journey towards eternity is long and should be prepared for with care. It is reported that Imam Ali (AS) used to warn people in the thick of night in his loud holy voice to prepare for the journey after death. We all know that the time and date of our departure from this world is unknown to us and this is one valid reason why we should be prepared at all times during our life.

Rousseau says,

I know that I am destined to die. Why, then, should I create attachments for myself in this world? In a world where all things are changing and passing, where I myself will soon become non-existent, of what use to me are attachments? I must, nonetheless, prepare myself for such an intolerable eventuality, because no one can assure me that I will die before you.

So if you wish to live happily and rationally, attach your heart only to beauties that are imperishable. Try to limit your desires and hold duty in higher esteem than all else. Seek only those things that do not violate the law of morality, and accustom you to losing things without distress. Accept nothing, unless your conscience permits you. If you do all of this, you will surely be happy, and not become over-attached to anything on earth.

Imam Ali (AS) was true in saying, *today is the day of work (actions), not the day of accounting. Tomorrow is the day of accounting, not the day of work.*

Stages of Death

The following sections describe some of the stages that we all may have to encounter before and after death, and the strategies that might help ease our passage through this torment.

It is reported that the first stages of a dying person who was a faithful believer involves *perspiration on his forehead, dilation of his nose and wetness in his eyes*. If he was unfaithful to Allah (SWT), then he would *snarl like a camel, the color of his skin would change to red and the corner of his mouth would change color to brown*.

It is also reported in authentic traditions that while dying, a person is confronted with Shaytan, The Accursed. The person would be very thirsty and yearn for water, hence the importance of giving water to a dying person. At this time, Shaytan will try his level best to make the dying person prostrate with his eyes and bestow water upon him. If a person was unfaithful then he would prostrate and loose his belief instantly. A faithful person however, would never prostrate and reject him there and then.

The Four Blessed Angels

Imam al-Sajjad (AS) informs us that Allah (SWT), The Exalted has said,

I do not hesitate in any order, except a death of a believer, he dislikes death and I do not like displeasing him.

Imam (AS) continues,

Allah (SWT) sends two Angels to him, one called Mushkiyyah (one who makes him generous with his family and wealth) and the other called Munsiiyyah (one who makes him forget all worldly affairs). After Mushkiyyah and Munsiiyyah have done their work, The Angel of Death arrives and informs the dying person not to worry and tells him that 'By Allah (SWT)! I am kinder to you than your father is. Now open your eyes and look.'

It is clear that the work of Munsiiyyah will be to make one forget all worldly affairs that will be difficult to part with. Angel Mushkiyyah will bestow everlasting hopes upon us and will convince us of the bounties in store. We will then be pleased to leave this mortal world.

However, before The Angel of Death arrives, Angels Ateed and Raqeeb will appear in front of the dying person. These two Angels are the ones that never separated from us for even a second during our lifetime, The Angels on top of our shoulders. Ateed will be there to give the person his record of good deeds, which on reading he will become very pleased. Raqeeb will then present the record of bad deeds to the dying person, which on reading he will become very displeased. Unfortunately, the time will have ended for corrections and repentance.

A person at the time of death becomes tongue-tied, and loses bodily strength on the one hand, while on the other he hears the cries of his family. According to Aimmah (AS), three things appear as friends in the presence of that dying person (wealth, children and actions), but only one (actions) will assist him throughout his journey in The Hereafter.

The Angel of Death

It is reported that The Angel of Death Malikul-Maut, appears very frightening in front of an unfaithful dying person. He approaches the person with a towering personality, his eyes like lightning and writes on earth with his teeth! With a fiery club he would then, by force, take the soul through the nostrils! However, he looks very smart and handsome in front of a faithful person and removes the soul with mercy.

It is true that when a person is about to die, the relatives beside him cry and lament like babies. It is reported that The Angel of Death addresses them and informs them that he is doing nothing wrong and that he will come to them when their time of death arrives.

Imam Ali (AS) says in one of his sermons,

If you could see what has befallen those of you who have died, you would be puzzled and troubled. Then you would have listened and obeyed. But what they have seen is yet curtained off from you. Shortly the curtain will be thrown off. You will see what you have never seen before.

It is reported that the dying person will see The Prophet (S) and his pure Progeny (AS). The Angels of Mercy and The Angels of Vengeance will be present too to deal with the dying man. The Devil will also be present to distract the attention of that person so that he dies an unbeliever. The dying person will be worried about The Angel of Death, the shape he will appear therein and the manner he will extract the soul.

Imam Ali (AS) once forgot the pain in his eyes when The Prophet (S) informed him that The Angel of Death would bring an iron instrument with which he would extract the soul of an unbeliever. Imam (AS) asked The Prophet (S) if this would happen to his followers, The Prophet (S) replied,

A person who cheats orphans of their wealth and gives false evidence will receive such treatments.

Imam al-Sadiq (AS) once exclaimed to the son of Zubyan and said,

Glory is to Allah (SWT)! The believer is honorable near Allah (SWT) than this (their souls being placed in the claws of green birds!). When it happens (i.e. when the believer dies), there come to him The Messenger of Allah (SWT) (S), Ali, Fatima, Hasan and Husayn (AS), and with them come The Angels of The Mighty and Glorious Allah (SWT) (who are near to him). So, if Allah (SWT) lets his tongue speak the witness of His Oneness, The Prophethood of The Prophet (S), and the love and obedience of The Ahlul-Bayt (AS), then The Messenger of Allah (SWT) (S), Ali, Fatima, Hasan and Husayn (AS) and with them the near Angels become his witness for it.

And if his tongue is tied, Allah (SWT) confers on His Prophet (S) the knowledge of what is in his (that believer's) heart of that (belief), so he (i.e. The Prophet (S) becomes his witness, and then bear testimony of Ali, Fatima, Hasan and Husayn (AS) because of the testimony of The Prophet (S), on their group be the best of Allah (SWT)! And (so do) those Angels who are present with them.

When Allah (SWT) takes him to Himself, He sends that soul to the garden, in a shape similar to his (worldly) shape. They eat (there) and drink. When a newcomer comes to them, he recognizes them by that shape which they had in the world.

Salman Farsi (AR) Talks with a Dead Person

Asbagh, the son of Nubata, a trusted companion of The Prophet (S), who went to see Salman Farsi at the time of his death says I found him very sick near his death. He told me,

O' Asbagh! The Messenger of Allah (S) had informed me that at the time of my death a dead person would talk to me. Now, put me on a wooden plank and take me to the cemetery.

Salman on reaching the cemetery faced towards Makkah and in a loud voice saluted the dead. Nobody replied. After saluting them several times without getting any reply Salman said,

O' Inhabitants of the Graves! I am Salman, a slave of The Messenger of Allah (S). The Prophet (S) told me that at the time of my death a dead person would converse with me. Now, if the time has arrived, then for the sake of Allah (SWT) and His Messenger (S) please converse with me.

Suddenly someone responded to him and said,

O' people who build and plant and ultimately the buildings turn into ruins and gardens decay! Ask me what you desire and I will reply.

Salman asked,

Are you from the people of Paradise or Hell?

The dead person replied that he was from the people of Paradise. Salman then requested him to describe how he died and what agonies he had to undergo to that time. He instantly replied,

O' Salman! Please do not ask this. By Allah (SWT)! If someone has snipped my flesh (by scissors) in little bits and removed the flesh from bones, it would have been easier than the agony of death. O Salman! I always did good deeds in your world, I always prayed on time, I used to recite The Qur'an, and I was good to my parents and lived on lawful earnings. I then fell ill and my life came to its end. At that time, a very tall person with a frightening countenance stood in air before me. He pointed to my eyes and they lost sight; to my ears and they became dumb; to my tongue and it lost its speech. I asked him who he was and why he was doing this to me. He said, 'I am The Angel of Death. Your life has ended in this world. You have to go from here to another world.'

Then two persons came to me, one of them sat on my right and the other on my left. They informed me that they were the two Angels who had written all my deeds in the worldly life. One, whose name was Raqeeb, gave me my record of good deeds, which on reading I was much pleased. Then the other Angel whose name was Ateed gave me the other record, a complete record of my sins, which on reading I was sad.

Then The Angel of Death came nearer and removed my soul through my nose and I have not forgotten its agony yet. Seeing me dead, my relatives and family members started crying. The Angel of Death said, 'Why are you crying? I have not done any injustice that you are complaining. When his life came to an end, I removed his soul on The Command of Allah (SWT). And I will come to you so many times.'

Then another Angel took my soul and I was brought to Heaven where I was asked about my deeds (i.e. prayers, fast, zakat, khums, pilgrimage, jihad, recitation of Qur'an, obedience to parents, and so forth). Likewise, I was asked whether I murdered anyone or taken someone's property without any right or been unjust to other people and so forth.

Then The Angel brought my soul back to earth. At that time, a person wanted to wash my body. He removed my clothes and started the ritual washing. My soul cried out, 'O' Servant of Allah (SWT)! Have mercy on this weak and broken body. By Allah (SWT)! All its veins since I have come out have been broken and its limbs are like they have been minced.' My soul was imploring him in such a touching way that if the people washing me were to hear it, they would have left washing the dead bodies together.

Then they covered me with a shroud, gave me Hunoot, and prayed upon me. When they laid me on the grave, I was so much frightened that words cannot describe it.

When they closed my grave, my soul entered my body again. An Angel Munabbih (one who awakens and reminds) by name came to me and made me sit. He ordered me to write all the deeds, which I had done in the world. I said that I did not remember. He said, 'I will go on reminding you, you go on writing.' I said, 'Where is the paper?' He said, 'This shroud of yours will do for paper.' I said, 'Where can I find a pen?' He said, 'Your finger will be your pen. I asked about ink and The Angel told me that my saliva will work like ink.

When I had written all my deeds, The Angel put my writings around my neck like a band. It is as Allah (SWT) says in The Qur'an,

And the Bird (deeds done by you) of every man have we bound about his neck, and We shall produce unto him on The Day of Resurrection, a Book (in which his actions will have been recorded) which he will find open. (It will be said to him) Read your book. You yourself will be a sufficient reckoner against your actions.

(Qur'an - Chapter 17, Verse, 13-14)

Then an Angel, very frightening and Munkar by name came to me with a fiery club and asked me, 'Who is your Lord? Who is your Prophet and who are your Imams? What is your Religion?'

I was so afraid that I became very confused, my limbs were trembling and I could not understand what to reply. In that confusion, The Mercy of Allah (SWT) supported me and my heart was at peace. I replied, 'Allah (SWT) is my Lord; Muhammad (S) is my Prophet; Ali the son of Abu Talib (AS) is my Imam; Islam is my religion; The Qur'an is my Book, and The Ka'bah is my Qiblah.'

Then another Angel called Nakeer interrogated me in the same manner about my beliefs. By The Grace of Allah (SWT) I replied the questions and said, 'I bear witness that there is no Allah (SWT) but Allah (SWT); Muhammad (S) is His Messenger; Ali (AS) and his infallible progeny (AS) are The Proofs of Allah (SWT); Paradise is a fact; The Fire of Hell is a Truth; the Questioning of Munkar and Nakeer in the grave is a truth; The Balance of Deeds (Mizan) is a truth; Resurrection is a truth; raising of the dead is a truth; flying of the books (in which deeds of a person are recorded) is a truth, and that The Hour (Day of Judgment) is sure to come, there is no doubts in it and Allah (SWT) will raise all the dead who are in the graves.'

Hearing these true answers, The Angel said to me, 'Sleep as a bride sleeps.' They opened a door of Paradise towards my head and the Breeze of Paradise came to me. My grave (which previously looked like a prison) became a vast place extending beyond my vision and the whole place became a garden.

O' Salman! A man must remember his Lord at all times and must spend his life in His obedience, because death is a sure thing and everyone will have to face all those experiences that I have informed you.

The Grave

The Prophet (S) says,

None passes a graveyard that the dead call out to him: 'O' you neglectful person! Were you aware of what we have been made aware of, it would make your blood run cold!

Allah (SWT) states in Hadith al-Qudsi,

O' Son of Adam (AS)! The earth always says, 'You walk on me, but in the end you will be within my bowls. I am a dwelling where you will have to stay alone. I am a dwelling, which is full of ferocious things as well as serpents and scorpions. So, O' Son of Adam (AS)! Do good deeds and thereafter enter me; only then would you be happy and without hardships.'

Indeed! The Grave says everyday,

I am the House of Loneliness! I am the House of Wilderness! I am the House of Ants and the grave can be one of the gardens from The Gardens in Paradise or a ditch from one of The Ditches in Hell.

Surely, He (Allah (SWT)) will over-power the unbelievers in his grave with enormous snakes that will chew his flesh and break his bones, and will continue doing so until The Day of Resurrection. If only one of these enormous snakes were to blow on earth, no vegetation could ever grow. O' servants of Allah (SWT)! Surely, your weak souls and your delicate pleasure loving bodies, which enjoy comfort, will not be able to withstand it.

(Imam Ali (AS))

The Questioning in the Grave

Says the Sheikh Abu Ja'far (AR),

Our belief concerning the questioning in the grave is that it is true and that there is no escape from it. He who answers in the proper manner will obtain rest and perfume in his grave and The Garden of Delight in the life to come. And he who does not answer in the proper manner, for him there will be the feast of boiling water in his grave, and the roasting in The Hell-Fire in the next world.

Most of the torment of the grave takes place on account of backbiting, rudeness and making light of the impurity of urine. The severest form of torment that is inflicted in the grave on the rightful believer is like the involuntary trepidation of the eyelid or scarification. These torments are in expiation of sins for which his anxieties, grief, diseases and the excess of pain at the moment of death did not atone.

Barzakh

Barzakh is a name given to the period of life after death and just before The Judgment Day. As Allah (SWT) states in The Qur'an,

In addition, behind them is the Barzakh until The Day they will be resurrected.

(Qur'an - Chapter 23, Verse 100)

The life of Barzakh is indeed a difficult life for all of us alike. Imam al-Sadiq (AS) has said,

Whoever is subject to the questioning in The Grave is also squeezed by The Grave therein and the one who is exempted from questioning in the grave is also exempted from the squeeze.

The very Imam (AS) has said that The Prophet (S) went to attend the funeral of Sa'd while seventy thousand Angels accompanied the ceremonies (indicating how pious Sa'd was). The Prophet (S) of Allah (SWT) raised his head towards The Heavens and said,

Does anyone face the squeeze (inside the grave) as Sa'd faced?

The Prophet (S) asked this question in relation to the severity of the squeeze in one's grave and the level of difficulty to bear the squeeze. Imam al-Sadiq (AS) then exclaimed and remarked that Sa'd's only fault was that he was harsh in his treatment of the people of his household.

According to some traditions, the squeeze in The Grave for the believers and the faithful will be like two friends embracing each other, but for some other believers who have not been forgiven the squeezing will be severe enough to break the ribs into bits.

Traditions report that Ma'az, the son of Jabal, a trusted companion of The Prophet (S) who received all the services for his funeral by The Prophet (S) himself, still had to suffer from the afflictions of The Grave. It is reported that even Angels descended down on earth to say funeral prayers for him, The Prophet (S) walked bare-foot to the cemetery, and the companion was lowered down the grave by The Merciful Hands of The Prophet (S), but still suffered from the squeeze in his grave. To an extent that he screamed and the wailing was heard by The Prophet (S) as he was leaving his companion's grave.

Further, Sawaid, the son of Ghafalah (AR) narrates from The Commander of Faithful Imam Ali (AS) having reported the following tradition,

Indeed! When the son Adam (AS) comes to his last day on this world and the first of the next, his property, his children and his actions are portrayed before him so he turns to his property and says, 'By Allah (SWT)! I was covetous of you and avaricious. What have you got for me?' Then he turns to his children and says, 'By Allah (SWT)! Surely, I was your love and I was your protector. What have you in store for me?' They will say, 'We shall convey you to your grave and bury you in it.'

Then he turns to his actions and says, 'By Allah (SWT)! I was indifferent to you and you were distasteful to me. What do you have for me?' Therefore, it says, 'I am your companion in your grave as well as on The Day of Gathering when I am presented with you before your Lord.'

After his death, if he is a friend of Allah (SWT) there comes to him a visitor, the most sweet-scented of all people, of most beautiful appearance and wearing the most adorned apparel, and says to him, 'Rejoice with refreshments from Allah (SWT) and flowers from The Garden of Bounties. You made a good arrival.' Thereupon he says, 'Who are you?' The visitor then replies, 'I am your good actions. Proceed from the world to The Garden?' And he recognizes the one who washes his body and earnestly appeals to his carrier to hasten him to the grave.

Then when he enters his grave, two Angels come to him and they are the interrogators in the grave, with elegantly dressed hair, writing on earth with their teeth, their voice like roaring thunder and their eyes like streaking lightening. They ask him, 'Who is your Lord? And who is your

Prophet? And what is your Religion?'

And he says, 'Allah (SWT) is my Lord, Muhammad (S) is my Prophet and Islam is my Religion?' They exclaim, 'May Allah (SWT) confirm you in what you like and are pleased with.' In addition, this is the meaning of the Word of Allah (SWT),

Allah (SWT) confirms those who believe with the sure word in this worldly life and The Hereafter.

(Qur'an - Chapter 14, Verse 27)

They make his grave spacious for him as far as his eyes can see and they open for him a gate to Heaven and say, 'Sleep with joy, the sleep of a fine looking youth.'

And it is the Word of Allah (SWT),

On that Day, the dwellers of The Garden shall be in a better abiding place and a better resting place.

(Qur'an - Chapter 25, Verse 24)

And if he is an enemy of his Lord, then comes to him a (visitor), the ugliest of the creatures of Allah (SWT) in attires and the foulest-smelling. And he tells him, 'Welcome to the entertainment of boiling water and roasting in Hell.' Moreover, he (the dead person) recognizes the one who washes his body and earnestly appeals to his carrier (the bier-bearer) to hold him back.

And when he is buried in his grave, the examiners of the grave come to him and remove his shroud from him. Then they ask him, 'Who is your Lord? What is your religion? And who is your Prophet?' He says, 'I do not know.' Therefore, they say to him, 'You did not know, nor were you on the right path.' Then they hit him with an iron-rod, a hitting that frightens every creature of Allah (SWT), except the Jinn and the men! Thereafter they open for him a door to The Hell and tell him, 'Sleep in the worst condition.' Therefore, he is squeezed in a narrow space like a shaft in an arrowhead, until his brain comes out from between his nails and flesh. In addition, Allah (SWT) sets on him the serpents of the earth and its scorpions and insects, which go on biting him until Allah (SWT) will raise him from his grave, and he will long for the advent of The Hour, because of the trouble in which he finds himself.

It is related on the authority of Imam al-Ridha (AS) that he once told his companions that on The Day of Resurrection,

The true believers (Shia) will not be (or hardly be) questioned, because the sinful ones among them will be sufficiently punished during Barzakh (the period between death and resurrection), so that when they rise, they will not be answerable to any sin.

Imam Ali (AS) says in one of his sermons in Nahjul-Balagha,

Know that the delicate skin of your body cannot tolerate or bear The Fire of Hell. So pity yourselves. You who have experienced the discomforts of this world, who know your own capabilities, who have seen how when a thorn enters your foot and makes it septic, the warm stones on the ground burn it and you cannot bear the pain. So how will it be when you are between two wells of fire, when you lie on stones and your companion is Shaytan?

O' those who are slaves of Allah (SWT)! Remember Allah (SWT), remember Allah (SWT)! While you are well before you are ill and while you have the opportunity before you become constrained. Strive to be free of The Fire of Hell before the way of salvation becomes impossible for you. Give yourself to the way of Allah (SWT), with clear of sleep and your stomach empty (due to fasting). Walk in His Path; give your possessions in His Path...

The Judgment Day

Allah (SWT) would take them out from the corners of the graves, the nests of birds, the dens of beasts and the centers of earth. They will hasten towards His Command and run towards the place fixed for their final return, group-by-group, quiet, and standing and arrayed in rows. They will be within Allah (SWT)'s sight and will hear everyone who would call Him.

They would possess the dress of helplessness and coverings of submission and indignity. (At this moment) Contrivances would disappear, desires would be cut, hearts would sink quietly, voices would be curbed down, sweat would choke the throat, fear would increase and ears would rebound with the thundering voice of The Announcer calling towards The Final Judgment, award of recompense, striking of punishment and paying of reward.

Imam Ali (AS) continues in another sermon as follows,

Allah (SWT) knows hidden matters and is aware of inner feelings. He encompasses everything. He has control over everything. Every one of you should do whatever he has to do during his days of life before approach of death; in his leisure before his occupation, and during the breathing of his breath before it is overtaken by suffocation, should provide for himself and his journey, and should collect provision from his place of halt to his place of stay.

1) Evidence from The Qur'an

A man extracted a piece of bone from underneath a wall and after pulverizing it brought to The Prophet (S) and putting on air insolently said, 'Who can bring this decayed and powdered bone to life ?' Allah (SWT) says in The Qur'an,

He has said, 'Who will give life to the bones which have become ashes?'
(Muhammad) Tell him, 'He Who gave them life in the first place will bring them back to life again. He has the best knowledge of all creatures.

(Qur'an - Chapter 36, Verse 78-79)

Once Prophet Uzayr (AS), while on a journey, passed through a deserted place, and there he thought to himself (not by way of disbelief but out of inquisitiveness) as to how Allah (SWT) will bring them back to life after they have been dead for so many years.

History and The Qur'an narrates that Allah (SWT) kept him dead for 100 years. He (Prophet Uzayr (AS)) thought he slept for half an hour only. His donkey had perished but his food, which should have decayed, remained fresh in front of his eyes. Allah (SWT) then revived the donkey in Prophet Uzair's (AS) presence.
(Qur'an - Chapter 2, Verse 259)

Once Prophet Ibrahim (AS) encountered a similar incident after having observed a corpse, one portion of which was in water and the other on the ground. He was then asked to take four different kinds of birds, slaughter them, mix up their flesh together and put them on different mountains. Thereafter he called each one of them (a chicken, a pigeon, a peacock, and a crow) and gradually each one appeared in front of The Prophet (AS) from ten different mountains.
(Qur'an - Chapter 2, Verse 260)

2) Evidence from the Life in this World

Coming of the dead to life is not impossible, even the world attests to it. Allah (SWT) cites several examples in The Qur'an for us to apprehend this concept.

Do you not see that Allah (SWT) sends down water from the cloud, then We bring forth therewith fruits of various colors, and in the mountains are streaks, white and red, of various hues and (others) intensely black.

(Qur'an - Chapter 35, Verse 27)

Sustenance for the creatures and We give life thereby to a dead land; thus will be the resurrection.

(Qur'an - Chapter 50, Verse 11)

3) Evidence from The Religions

History is evident that the majority of people with different religions, in the past and at present, confirmed and attested to the belief in Resurrection.

People in the past (until present) kept morsels of food, ornaments, and even clothes inside the grave of a dead person close to their family. The belief, although an ignorant one, was that the dead would come to life as soon as after burial and enjoy the food.

In the past whenever a king died, ten women fought until one died and was buried with the king. This was a highly respected practice among various religions and a woman sacrificed her life only to be resurrected with the king.

Every man out of his natural disposition has some conception of The Day of Resurrection because there is no one who would not like to know the ultimate future of man and of this world.

The materialistic view considers that this world and the men will be ultimately annihilated. This is indeed a very dangerous and disappointing view. Allah (SWT) says in The Qur'an,

They say, 'the only life is this worldly life and here we shall live and die. It is only time which annihilates us.' They have no knowledge about this. It is only their speculations.

(Qur'an - Chapter 45, Verse 24)

Do you think We created you for nothing, and that you will not return to us?

(Qur'an - Chapter 23, Verse 115)

Therefore, this whole universe and its contents and the complex human being have not been created in vain. There is a purpose of creation. It is natural to believe that a Day will come when JUSTICE will be served at last. Or is it that every human being is free to do whatever evil he desires and gets away for it!

4) Resurrection, Evidence for Allah (SWT)'s Justice, Wisdom and Power
Since Allah (SWT) is Just, resurrection must take place. If there is no resurrection, The Justice of Allah (SWT) will be in question. The good and the evil cannot and will never be the same. In addition, neither can a believer be compared to a non-believer.

And what about reward and punishment? If there is no accounting for our deeds then people would go to extremes and the good and virtuous would always suffer. This is one reason why rational laws are set in Islam to deter sexual relations outside marriage, or stop thieves from stealing, and so forth. Otherwise, this world would become a bitter place to live!

With all this in practice (including the belief in resurrection), the world becomes a much better place to reside in and people are not scared of what others do because of The Final Day when all shall be asked, including The Qur'an, the feet, etc. People would also yearn to perform virtuous acts and help people in their endeavors. The best examples can be cited in the lives of The Prophets and Imams (Peace be upon all of them).

Shall We treat those who believe and do well like the mischief-makers on the earth? On the other hand, shall We make those who guard against evil like the wicked?

(Qur'an - Chapter 38, Verse 28)

Allah (SWT) is indeed Powerful and history is self-evident and self-explanatory on this fact.

5) Evidence from Science

The three common questions often raised are,

How can a cremated/buried and decayed body be resurrected?

How can good deeds be weighed on a scale?

How can good deeds assume a shape of a person inside the grave?

Lavoisier, the celebrated French scientist and the founder of modern chemistry provides an answer to the above three questions. The law concerns the fact that matter is anything that occupies space and weight; matter cannot be destroyed; transformation of matter into energy and energy to matter is indeed a scientific fact. Therefore, nothing is ever lost. This includes a drop of water that falls and is absorbed, the smoke of a cigarette that rises in the air, and so forth, and the reason why the walls and trees - besides other objects - will also testify on The Final Day.

Therefore, the decayed body parts are never lost in the ground and one day, Allah (SWT) will gather all these parts with His Power and transform them to living beings again.

We created you from earth and will return you to earth, and then bring you forth from it once more.

(Qur'an - Chapter 20, verse 55)

Whenever a person performs good deeds, energy is released. One day this energy will convert to matter and can assume shape and weight.

It is our belief that all deeds of men have a profound effect on their beings. All of our words and deeds are stored in the vast and mysterious archive of our body and soul, and they will be brought forth in the tribunal of resurrection. The totality of our acts, good and bad are stored up within us and will ultimately take shape to confront us.

The advise is to fear Allah (SWT) before The Day of Judgment: *The Great Event, The Day of Calamity, The Day which measures 50,000 years, The Day on which no one can talk, The Day when excuses won't be accepted, The Day of predominating calamity, The Day when the deafening cry comes forth, The Day of stern and distress, The Day when no soul shall control anything for another soul, The Day of Destruction, The Day of Earthquake, The Day of terrible*

calamity.

Thus, fear Allah (SWT) for The Day when the mountains will perish because of the earthquake, The Day of horror that turns children into old people. Do not become one of those people who will say we heard and we disobeyed.

The 10 Groups of People on The Final Day

After Angel Israfeel (AS) blows the huge Trumpet, we will emerge from our graves by The Order of The Almighty in groups. As Allah (SWT) says in The Qur'an,

The Day when The Trumpet shall be blown, you shall come forth in huge groups.

(Qur'an - Chapter 78, Verse 18)

It is reported by Aimmah (AS) that once The Prophet (S) informed Fatima, the daughter of Asad and the mother of Imam Ali (AS) that after The Trumpet is blown, everyone will emerge from their graves naked with the exception of some fortunate believers who will be covered with light and be resurrected fully clothed.

Imam al-Sadiq (AS) has summarized the groups as follows,

One group will emerge from their graves in the form of monkeys.

These will include those people who engaged in backbiting and slandering others.

One group will emerge from their graves and soon after will be placed in small and narrow chamber lit with fire, which will burn their skin inside out.

Those women who never observed hijab and insulted it will face this kind of punishment.

One group will be ordered to sleep sideways as soon as they emerge out from their graves. They will then have tiny, sharp and horny objects forcefully inserted into their ears, which will result in tremendous painful experience.

These will include those people who used their ears for forbidden matters.

One group will experience sharp and horny objects inserted into their eyes.

This group will be concern those who employed their eyes in forbidden matters.

It is reported by Imam al-Baqir (AS) that on The Day of Resurrection, all eyes will be crying except the following three kinds,

The eyes of someone who spent his nights awake in worshipping for the pleasure of Allah (SWT); the eyes of someone who shed tears, because of fear from Allah (SWT), and the eyes of someone who prevented them from looking at forbidden things for the pleasure of Allah (SWT).

One group who after being raised out from their graves will be transformed into tiny little forms and will be trampled by all those present in the mass and endless congregation.

This group will include people who practiced pride in their life. As Allah (SWT) confirms this ordeal by saying to Prophet Musa (AS),

'O' Musa (AS)! Listen to Me what I say, and what I say is The Truth. Indeed, one who has pride and does not associate himself with the poor, I will raise him on The Day of Judgment with the size of an atom under people's feet.

Imam al-Sadiq (AS) says,

Do not show off your actions to someone who neither gives life nor causes death, and who cannot take away from you your burdens. Showing off is a tree whose only fruit is hidden association of other gods with Allah (SWT), and its root is hypocrisy. The vain one will be told on The Day of Judgment, *'Take what you consider to be the reward of your actions from those you took as your partners with Me. Look to those whom you worshipped and called on, from whom you entertained hopes and whom you feared. Moreover, know that you cannot conceal anything inside of you from Allah (SWT); you will be deceived by yourself.'*

The final group will be forced to stand on a particular platform and whose bodies will be crushed by huge falling stones.

These people will be the ones who never said their morning prayers or purposely performed the prayers late.

Ayatullah al-Khumeini (AR) says, Allah (SWT) has made man superior to other living beings by endowing him a superb constitution and a beautiful appearance. Yet there is another form and a different face of him, which is determined by the qualities of his soul and his inner nature. If fiendish forces govern the power of imagination and invention and his inner self is made vicious, governed by vices like deceit, dishonesty, slandering, which are the attributes of Shaytan, he may undergo a metamorphosis and assume one of the forms of Shaytan on The Day of Judgment.

Sometimes it is also possible that he would have an appearance that symbolizes two or several vices. In that case, a form which does not resemble any of the brutes, but an unusual and queer form, with which cannot be compared the most terrible and ugliest monster in the world, will be acquired by him.

It has been recorded from The Prophet of Allah (SWT) that some persons will be raised on The Last Day in such a manner that even monkeys and dog flies will appear better looking than that, because that world is not like this world, where one individual cannot acquire more than one form.

According to Ayatullah al-Khumeini (AR), this account itself is logical as well as self-evident. Because, the criterion of those different forms (of which human form is one) would be the state of soul at the time of death, the state in which the soul departs from the body. It is in this very state and form that man's soul enters the realm of Barzakh. At the time of entering the other world, that is, the domain of The Hereafter, the first stage of which is Barzakh, in whichever state one's soul departs from the body, it assumes a form suited to it in the next world also. Because, it is not necessary that man may enter the next world in the same physical state as he had in this world. Allah (SWT) Himself says,

He will say, O Allah (SWT)! Why have you raised me blind when I had sight before?

(Qur'an - Chapter 4, Verse 76)

Sheikh Abbas Qummi (AR) says that no one shall escape The Fire (on that Day), and no one shall enter The Garden (merely) by virtue of his actions, except by The Mercy of Allah (SWT), The Exalted. May Allah (SWT) forgive us and absolve us from sins on behalf of The Prophet (S), Ali, Fatima, Hasan & Husayn, and The Nine Purified Leaders after al-Husayn (AS).

The Book

Says the Sheikh Abu Ja'far (AR) that Allah (SWT) will confront each person with a Book which will be found to be wide open, informing him of all his actions, omitting neither a minor nor a major sin.

In this fashion will Allah (SWT) constitute each person his own reckoner and judge, for he will be informed,

Read your book! Your soul is a sufficient reckoner against yourself this Day.

(Qur'an - Chapter 17, verse 14)

Allah (SWT) will put a seal upon the mouth of certain people, and their hands and feet and all their limbs will testify to things to which they are hiding. Because these materials vibrate with energy, science has proven these living to store information and therefore, these limbs and other non-living materials in this world will testify.

In addition, they say unto their skins, 'Why do you testify against us?' They reply, 'Allah (SWT), who gives speech to all things, has given speech to us, and it is He Who created you at the first and to Him shall you return. You did not hide yourselves lest your ears, your eyes and your skins should testify against you. You deemed that Allah (SWT) was ignorant (Allah (SWT) forbid!) of your action?'

(Qur'an - Chapter 41, Verse 21)

The Balance

Allah (SWT) says in The Qur'an,

And the measuring out on that Day will be just. Then as for him, whose measure (of good deeds) is heavy shall be successful, and as for him whose measure is light, they are those who will have made their souls suffer a loss because they disbelieved in Our Communications.

(Qur'an - Chapter 7, Verse 8-9)

In addition, We shall set a Just Balance on that Day of Resurrection, so no soul shall be dealt with unjustly in the least. An act whose weight of a grain of mustard seed will even be brought forward! Moreover, sufficient are We to take account.

(Qur'an - Chapter 21, Verse 47)

Mizan is a Divine Instrument that will weigh our good and bad deeds. It is at this stage where we are going to understand the value and weight a good deed carries in the eyes of Allah (SWT), The Great.

Sheikh Abbas Qummi (AR), an eminent Shia scholar writes in his book 'Manazil al-Akherat' that *Salawat* will be of great help to that person in need of extra weight in his Mizan, The Balance on The final Day.

During The Ascension, The Prophet (S) saw an Angel with a towering appearance possessing a thousand hands and in every hand a thousand fingers. The Angel was observed counting something. When asked as to what he was counting The Angel replied that he has been endowed with great mathematical powers and could calculate the number of raindrops that have fallen in any forest, city, and so forth. However, he confessed that he did not possess the power to count the rewards people achieve when they recite Salawaat when in groups.

According to traditions that have reached us, Shaytan is equipped with three main weapons to fight us. First, he tries to make one feel inferior so that he or she loses all the respect Allah (SWT) has gifted him. Once under this satanic spell, we always rate ourselves lower than others equal to us and we become discouraged at all times. Second, he makes us feel proud of our good actions. Verily,

Allah (SWT) does not accept good deeds infected with pride.

Never can the person who possesses a speck of pride inside his heart enter Paradise.
(Prophet (S))

Imam al-Sadiq (AS) has warned us as follows:

Refrain from pride and self-glorification, since pride is Allah (SWT) Almighty's Mantle, and one who contests with Allah (SWT) regarding His cloak, Allah (SWT) will shatter him and disgrace him on The Day of Resurrection.

Verily there is a valley in Hell for the proud called *Saqa*. Once it complained to The Almighty about the intensity of its heat, and requested Him to relieve it for some time so that it may take a breath. As soon as it breathed, its breath filled the entire Hell with fire.

Finally, the advice is to avoid feeling whatever evil you have done as small and insignificant. Small sins always multiply to bigger and major sins. So take care of yourself and never consider any disobedient act as small and negligible. Allah (SWT) deserves as much obedience as possible.

Just reflect for a moment the universe and its contents, the food, water, the beautiful sceneries, everything created for us because of His Mercy. We enjoy every second of our life because of His Benevolence and Love. He loves us so much. He takes care of us and looks after us every part of our life. He never lets us down. He always answers our prayers and there is none who can respond to our invocations except Him. We commit sins throughout our life and He is ever prepared to hide them and forgive us with His Mercy. Indeed! How merciful is our Lord!

The Bridge

All of you will pass over it (Sirat). This is a firm decree of your Lord. Then We shall save those who guarded themselves against evil and shall leave the wrongdoers therein (brought down) to their knees.
(Qur'an - Chapter 19, verse 71-72)

'Sirat' is reported by Aimmah (AS) to be thinner than hair, sharper than a sword and hotter than fire. You will have to pass this Bridge with all the difficulties involved in it. However, authentic traditions from our Aimmah (AS) report that faithful believers will be able to pass this Bridge at a lightening speed and overcoming all the hurdles.

On The Bridge, it is reported that our belief in The Imamate of Imam Ali (AS) and the rest of The Infallible (AS) will be of utmost assistance. Even if a person lives for 2500 years performing good actions, gives alms to the poor and the needy large amount of gold equivalent to the size of Mount Ohad and is martyred unjustly in a battlefield, that person will not even smell the fragrance of Paradise if he does not store in his heart the love of Ali (AS).

O' Ali (AS)! On the Day of Qiyamat shall sit I, You and Jibraeel (AS) on The Sirat, and no one shall pass over The Sirat except he who would have a petition of release from Hell based on your love and obedience.

The Prophet (S) once exclaimed,

No one will be able to enter The Garden except he who recognizes them (The Prophet (S) himself and The Imams (AS) and him whom they recognize. And no one will enter The Fire except he who denies them (their rights), and him whom they deny (as not belonging to their party).

Ibn Abbas (AR) narrates that once a person asked The Prophet (S) if The Love of Ali (AS) would benefit him on The Day of Judgment! So The Prophet (S) said to that person that,

When The Day of Judgment shall arrive, Allah (SWT) will order an Angel to set The Fire ablaze, and He will order an Angel by the name of Ridhwan (AS) to bring Paradise near. Then He will extend The Bridge and establish The Scale under The Throne and a caller shall call out to Muhammad (S) and bring his followers for the Accounting.

Then He will extend on The Bridge 7 archways; and after every archway will be (the distance of) 7 thousand years, and on every archway shall be Angels who shall sweep away humankind. (By Allah!) No soul shall pass these archways but one who befriended Imam Ali (AS) and his Ahlul-Bayt (Peace be on all of them); and the one who knew them and they knew him.

And whoever didn't know them (the Ahlul-Bayt (AS) will fall into The Fire on the top of his head, even if he had with him the worship of 70,000 servants, because, all the worship will not bear weight on The Gathering Day on The Scale and no foot of a human shall be firm on The Bridge except by The Love of Imam Ali (AS). In addition, to this is the indication with His, Allah (SWT)'s Word,

In addition, Allah shall make firm those who believe, with the firm word in this world and in the hereafter.

(Qur'an - Chapter 14, Verse 27)

Ibn Abbas (AR) further narrates that the Messenger of Allah (S) also said to Ali (AS),

O' Ali! Love of you has not become firm in the heart of any believer but his foot will be firm on The Bridge, until he enters heaven.

Paradise

Jabir ibn Abdullah Ansari (AS) narrates that I once said to Imam al-Baqir (AS),

'May I be your sacrifice, son of Allah's Messenger (S), narrate to me a hadith in regards to the traits of your grandmother, Lady Fatima (AS), so that if I report it to your Shiites, they would rejoice at hearing it.'

Abu Ja'far (AS) said,

My Grandfather, The Prophet (S) has said that on The Day of Rising, Pulpits of (Divine) Light shall be the highest (from amongst the things visible) on that Day. Allah (SWT) will then say, 'Deliver a sermon', so I will deliver a sermon that none of The Prophets (AS) or The Messengers (AS) have ever heard before.

Then for the successors (of Prophets (AS) shall be erected Pulpits of Light, and in the middle of these Pulpits one shall be erected for my successor, Ali ibn Abi Talib (AS), which will be higher than all other Pulpits. Allah (SWT) will then say, 'Ali! Deliver a sermon.' So he will deliver a sermon like the one no successor has ever heard before.

Then for the children of The Prophets (AS) and Messengers (AS) shall be erected Pulpits of Light, and among them shall be a Pulpit of Light for my two sons, grandsons and the two flowers of my life, Hasan ibn Ali (AS) and Husayn ibn Ali ibn Abi Talib (AS). Then it shall be said to them, 'Deliver a sermon.' So they will deliver two sermons like those that none of the children of The Prophets (AS) have ever heard before.

A caller (by the name) Jibraeel (AS) shall then call, 'Where is Fatima binte Muhammad (S)?' She will then rise.

Allah (SWT), Blessed and Exalted is His Name, shall say, 'O' People of The Gathering! To Whom does Honor belong Today?' So, Muhammad (S), Ali, Hasan, Husayn (Peace be on all of them) will say, 'To Allah (SWT), The One, The Almighty.' Allah (SWT) The Exalted will then say, 'O' People of The Gathering! Lower your heads and cast your eyes down, for this is Fatima proceeding towards Paradise.'

Jibraeel (AS) shall then bring her a female camel from the female camels of Paradise. Its sides shall be embellished, and its muzzles with fresh pearls and it shall have a saddle of coral. It shall kneel down in her presence, so she will ride it. Allah (SWT) will then send 100,000 Angels to accompany her on her right side, and 100,000 Angels to accompany her on her left side, and 100,000 Angels to lift her onto wings until they bring her to The Gate of Paradise. When she is near The Gate of Paradise, she will look to her side.

Allah (SWT) will then say, 'Daughter of My Beloved! Why did you look to your side after I gave the command that you enter My Paradise?'

She will say, 'My Lord! I wish that my position be realized on such a Day.'

Allah (SWT) will say, 'Daughter of My Beloved! Go back and look for everyone in whose heart was love (and obedience) for you or for any of your progeny. Take their hands and lead them to Paradise.'

Abu Ja'far (AS) says,

By Allah (SWT), Jabir (AR), she will pick her Shiites (i.e. obedient followers) and those who loved her just like a bird picks good seeds from bad seed.' However, when her Shiites are near The Gate of Paradise, Allah (SWT) will inspire their hearts to look to their sides. And when they do so, Allah (SWT) The Almighty will say, 'My beloved ones, why did you look around when Fatima, The Daughter of My Beloved interceded for you?'

The people will answer, 'Our Lord! We hoped that our position would (also) be known on such a Day.'

Allah (SWT) will then say (to the selected people), 'My beloved ones, go back and look for everyone who loved you for your love of Fatima. Look for everyone who fed you for the love of Fatima; Look for every one who clothed you for the love of Fatima; Look for every one who gave you a drink for the love of Fatima; Look for everyone who prevented backbiting from being done against the love of Fatima. Take their hands and lead them into Paradise.'

Indeed, there are various degrees of serving Allah (SWT), but affection (and cordial inclination) for us, Ahlul-Bayt (AS), is the highest one.
Imam al-Sadiq (AS)

Says the Sheikh Abu Ja'far (AR),

Our belief concerning Paradise is that it is a permanent abode and an abode of safety. There is in it neither death, nor old age, nor disease, nor calamity, nor decline, nor palsy, nor care, nor sorrow, nor need, nor poverty. It is an abode of plenty, of happiness, of quiet and of nobility. Affliction shall not touch its inmates, or weariness. In it, there will be things for which the souls of men yearn and which give delight to their eyes, and they shall reside therein forever.

It is an abode the inmates whereof are neighbors of Allah (SWT), and His friends (Imams (AS) and loved ones, and the recipient of His Generosity. And they are of different kinds and ranks.

Among them will be some who, like Angels, will receive their favors by sanctifying and glorifying Allah (SWT) and declaring His Greatness. And there will be others who will find pleasure in different kinds of food, drink, fruit, comfortable couches, and fair women with beautiful big black eyes, and in being served by young pages endowed with perpetual youth, and in sitting on cushions and rich carpets and in dresses of silk brocade. All of them will be able to enjoy what they like and desire, in accordance with their own aspirations, which shall be granted to them by Allah.

Paradise is of Allah (SWT), The Almighty and he will be our Host once we are in Heaven. The pleasures of Paradise cannot be described and it is indeed beyond the capacity of human imagination. Everything there will be different and to our liking. Heaven will be the world of pleasures, which no ear has ever heard of, and no human heart has ever experienced. One would enjoy for eternity the hospitality and reception of Allah (SWT) Himself, The Creator. The highest stage in Paradise will include people enjoying Nearness to Allah (SWT), The Almighty with everything just a command away. The following narration is enough for us to get preoccupied in our thoughts. It describes Paradise in a way that one will never ever be able to comprehend.

Sheikh Abbas Qummi (AR) narrates in his book 'Manazil al-Akherat' the following tradition from Aimmah (AS),

Angel Jibraeel (AS) once decided to fly with his powerful wings and estimate the length and vastness of Paradise. The permission was granted by Allah (SWT) and he was away on his project. Angel Jibraeel (AS) flew for 30,000 years and became exhausted. He prayed for more strength and was granted. He then flew for another 30,000 years and in each year 30,000 times. He finally completed his project and lay down to rest for a while to gain strength which he had lost for years and years. While resting, he came across a Heavenly Woman who asked Angel Jibraeel (AS) as to what his endeavors were and why he was so tired and worn out. Once she was given a reply, the Lady in Paradise who was reserved for just one faithful believer exclaimed, 'O' Jibraeel (AS)! You have not been able to traverse even one mansion reserved for a faithful believer when he enters Paradise!

Indeed, only a pale and inevitable deficient portrayal of The Blessings of Paradise can be given for the inhabitants of this finite world. The fruits of The Hereafter are not tied to any season or subject to blight. They are constantly within reach of the blessed. Allah (SWT) confirms in The Qur'an that,

None can perceive what blessings are hidden for man in that realm which will delight his eye.

(Qur'an - Chapter 32, verse 17)

Whatever the hear desires and delights the eye will be brought into being.

(Qur'an - Chapter 43, Verse 71)

Hell

Sheikh Saduq (AR) exclaims,

And our belief concerning Hell is that it is a place of degradation or that of revenge on unbelievers and sinners. None but the polytheists will reside therein permanently. As for those monotheists (who believe in Allah (SWT)) who are sinners, The Mercy of Allah (SWT) and The Intercession, which they obtain, will take them out of it.

It is related that no pain shall afflict a single one among the monotheists in hell when they enter it. They will only be inflicted with pain at the time of their exit from it. And these ills will be the requital of their own actions and,

Allah (SWT) is not unjust towards His slaves.

(Qur'an - Chapter 41, verse 46)

And the residents of Hell will be miserable indeed. It is not decreed for them that they shall die, nor shall the torment of Hell abate for them.

Therein they shall taste neither coolness nor any drink, save boiling water and pus. This is a reward proportioned to their evil deeds.

(Qur'an - Chapter 78, verse 24-26)

If they ask for food, they will be fed on Zaqqum (a fruit of bad taste and foul smell). And if they ask for showers, they will be showered with water like unto molten lead, which burns the faces.

Calamitous the drink and ill the resting place!

(Qur'an - Chapter 18, verse 29)

And from a distant place shall they cry out and say,

O' Our Lord! Remove us from here. If we return (to evil) then we shall indeed be wrong doers.

(Qur'an - Chapter 23, Verse 107)

It is reported by Aimmah (AS) that there exists 8 grades in Hell, namely Jaheem, where people will stand on stones which have been severely heated; Ladha, which hosts huge fire that sucks anyone entering its valley; Saqar, a valley where one changes color due to its severe heat; Hutamah, where people will be crushed into pieces and death shall never be a solution for these sufferings; Hawiyah, an endless pit of fire.

During Ascension (Me'raj), The Prophet (S) heard a loud sound at one stage and was quite overtaken by the severity of the nature of that sound. On explaining this event he says,

Once upon a time, two Angels had a desire to estimate the length of one of the pits in Hell. They decided to throw a stone and wait for it to reach the bottom. It took 70 years for that rock to reach the bottom of that particular pit!

Saeer, which consists of 300 curtains of fire. In each curtain there are 300 abodes of fire and in each abode there are 300 different types of punishments. Finally Jahannam, which consists of wells of fire (Falaq), mountains of fire (Sa'ud) and valleys of molten brass (Atham).

After waking up from his sleep, The Prophet (S) once narrated a tradition that was revealed unto him while asleep by Angel Jibraeel (AS). He informed his daughter, The Honorable Lady Fatima (AS) that,

There exist 70 mountains in Hell. In every mountain, there exists 70 valleys; in every valley, there are 70 pits; in each pit, there are 70 stations, and in each station, there exists 70 different types of punishments.

This abode has been mainly reserved for those who ignore the importance of daily prayers, besides many others. Fearing Hell should be part of our life. It is true that by fearing the punishments in Hell we improve our lifestyles and there is no shame in that. Of course, obedience to Allah (SWT) without fear of Hell or want for Paradise is better and comprises the highest quality of worship.

Hell and its Attributes

Allah (SWT) has clearly stated,

O' Son of Adam (AS)! How could you disobey Me while you can't resist the hot sun and hot desert? And indeed, for Hell there are seven levels in which there are fires which eat each other; in each level of Hell, there are seventy thousand valleys of fires; in each valley of fire, seventy thousand sections of fires; in each section of fire, seventy thousand cities of fires; in each city of fire, seventy thousand castles of fires; in each castle of fire, seventy thousand houses of fires; in each house of fire, seventy thousand rooms of fires; in each room of fire, seventy thousand wells of fires; in each well of fire, seventy thousand chests of fires and in each chest of fire, seventy thousand trees of 'Zaqqum.'

Under each tree of Zaqqum, seventy thousand nails of fires - with each nail, seventy thousand chains of fires, and in each chain, seventy thousand serpents of fires.

And the length of each serpent is seventy thousand yards; and in the stomach of each serpent there is one ocean of black poison, in which there are seventy thousand scorpions of fires; and each scorpion has seventy thousand tails of fires; and the length of each tail is seventy thousand vertebrae (each segment of back-bone), and in each vertebra, seventy thousand, (approximately) 450 grams of red poison.

I swear by Myself, by Mount Sinai, by The Written Book, by an Outstretched Fine Parchment, by The House that is visited, by The Elevated Canopy, by The Swollen Sea!

O' Son of Adam (AS)! I have not created this Hell Fire but for all the unbelievers; for the miser; for the gossip; for those disinherited by their family; for the people who do not pay Zakaat (alms to poor); for the eater of usury, for the adulterer; for the collector of unlawful (elements); for the one who forgets The Qur'an; for the bad neighbor.

Sheikh Saduq (AR) reports, one day The Prophet (S) of Allah was seated when Angel Jibraeel (AS) came into His presence, with a sad face and changed complexion. The Prophet (S) asked as to why he was looking so sad and grieved. Jibraeel answered, 'O' Muhammad (S)! Why should I be not grieved, while today I saw the bellows of hell being set.'

The Prophet (S) asked him what the bellows of Hell were. Jibraeel told him that,

It referred to the Hell-Fire, which according to The Commandments of Allah (SWT) Almighty was ablaze for one thousand years. After it became red hot, He ordered it to burn for another one thousand years until it was white-hot. Then He commanded it to burn for one thousand years more until it turned black. Now that it was black and dark, if a slice of seventy cubits of it was to drop on this world, verily its heat would be sufficient to melt the whole world into fluid.

If a single drop of its Zaqquum (an infernal tree, mentioned in The Qur'an proverbial for its extreme bitterness) and Dhari' (something in Hell more bitter than aloe, more fetid than carrion, and hotter than fire, which will be the food of the condemned) trickles down in the water reservoirs of the earth everybody therein would die due to its stench.

Thereupon The Prophet (S) wept and Jibraeel (AS) also wept with him. On seeing this, Allah (SWT) sent His Angel, who came to them and said that Allah (SWT) sent peace and greetings to them along with the message that He exempted them both from the committing of sins and the consequent punishments.

This will be The Hell of one's actions, which is comparatively milder, cooler and tolerable, and is reserved for those who committed sins in the world. But for those who have acquired the viciousness of character and villainy of conduct like, greed, lust, hoarding, avarice, and so forth, The Hell will be their place, a place beyond human apprehension, a state and form which can never be anticipated by any stretch of imagination, and emanates from within the soul itself.

The inhabitants of that Hell will be so distressed that they will try to escape from it, (but in vain). In some of the authentic traditions, al-Khumeini (AR) reports that there is a valley in Hell, which is reserved for the proud, and which is named 'Saqa.' Once it complained to Allah (SWT) about the intensity of its heat and asked The Almighty for relief, so that it might take a breath. After the relief was granted, when it breathed, its breath filled the Hell with fire.

Advise from the Leader of The Islamic Revolution in Iran

My friend, the higher knowledge has proved that the grades of intensity are infinite. The punishment is severer than what you imagine or what others imagine. If you do not believe in the arguments advanced by philosophers, or the revelations made to mystics, thanks to Allah (SWT), being a true believer you have faith in the teachings of The Prophets of Allah (AS), and you consider all the reports recorded in the authentic books of the traditions which are accepted by all the Imamiyyah scholars as true and authentic.

I hope that you believe in the prayers of Infallible Imams (AS), and have read the prayers and sermons uttered by Imam Ali (AS), and the invocation by Imam Sayyid al-Sajideen (AS) uttered in the prayer of 'Abu Hamza al-Thimal.' My friend, reflect a little upon their subject matter and think for a while on their wordings. It is nowhere required to make a rapid reading of the lengthy prayer in a hurry without pondering over its meaning. You and I are not blessed with the spiritual state of Imam al-Sayyid al-Sajjad (AS) to recite that lengthy prayer in a state of sustained ecstasy at one time. Try to read one-third or one-fourth of it every night with feeling, and meditate upon its words. You may feel ecstatic while reading it. Apart from this, pay a little more attention to the meaning of Qur'anic Verses, and see what punishment has been prescribed for the inhabitants of Hell, to escape which they will pray to The Lord for death, and alas, death will not help.

Ayatullah al-Khumeini (AR) continues and warns us as follows,

... Existence of Hell and its horrible chastisements are among the essentials of all the religions of the world, which bring forward many arguments in favor of their necessity ... What is the reason for our complacency and ignorance? Have The Angels of Allah (SWT) given us the tidings of being exempted from this punishment as they had given one to The Prophet (S) and Jibraeel (AS)? ... What is wrong with us that we do not feel ashamed?

Even in our supplications to Allah (SWT), we so much violate and insult Divine principles, that a thousand pities on our thoughtlessness! Have pity on yourself and the extremity of the pangs of death. Again a thousand pities on our condition in Barzakh, the agonies of The Hereafter, and The Doomsday and its darkness! How pitiable are we who have to face the horrors of Hell and its chastisement!

Ba Yazid (AR) was correct in saying,

You know that you are in a crying need of your Lord at every hour and on many counts. You are needful of His Guiding Light as well as His Merciful Glance, Guidance and Sustenance at every moment. You are also in need of Him at the time of death so that The Light of Islam and its knowledge is kept intact in your heart. In the grave, too, you are in need of Him so that you successfully answer the questions of Munkar and Nakeer. He will be your friend in the terrors of the grave.

The greatest of all your needs is your dependence on Him in Judgment Day, the day of regret and remorse, so that Allah (SWT), The Exalted may make your face luminous, conceal your blemishes and enhance the weight and worth of your good works in His Balance. All this because He may facilitate the clearance of your account and place the book of your deeds in your right hand, that He may keep you firm on the path and save you from Hell Fire and lead you towards Paradise. His highest Generosity and the excellent favor are to bless you with His Beatific Vision.