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Why Do We Fear Death?

The fear of death, for most of the people, is not a matter which requires any evidence because it is totally obvious and we also see that a lot of people manifest extra-ordinary sensitivity with respect to the term 'death' and its reality. Thus the actual matter is self-evident. That which requires proof and an answer is the reason for this fear and alarm as to why we fear death?

Reasons for the Fear of Death

In answer to this question, it is possible to mention some reasons, which have also appeared in our traditions, and which are as follows:

1. Not having a correct insight

In the previous discussions, we had mentioned that a lot of people considered death to be an eternal destruction of themselves. Consequently, it is but natural that they fear death and visualize it dark and gloomy, because the love for permanence and eternity is one of the natural instincts of people and each one in his own way, tries to protect himself from calamities and diseases and ensure his own permanence, and death, in his view, is greater and more pain-inflicting than any disease or calamity, because it is the start of his everlasting extinction.

Nevertheless, if the alarm and fear of death is as a result of non-recognition of the reality of death, then for the removal of this fear, it is vital that its reality, which is found in the Islamic insight, be understood and with regard to it, a strong conviction be developed. If a person bases his views regarding death on correct foundations, many of his fears regarding death will cease to exist because, once he comprehends that with death, he shall enter into a world, more extensive and eternal and also that he shall be liberated from the material, natural and corporeal shackles, how then would he consider it to be abominable and hateful.

2. A new and an unfamiliar path

One of the causes due to which man tends to fear death is that man, after death, steps onto an entirely new path and embarks upon an entirely new journey. Man, usually tends to travel on frightful paths, over which he has traveled a number of times and has not encountered any trouble, better than paths which are comparatively safer, but which are totally new. Since, the path being new and unfamiliar, it becomes reason for hesitation and anxiety, especially since no one, who has traveled this path, has brought any news about it, for the others.

Anyway, if the fear of death is due to the place and path being unfamiliar, then it is necessary that the reality of death be completely comprehended and one's conviction strengthened. In addition to this, it is necessary to obtain the necessary information by means of the Revelation and the traditions of the Infallible Imams (a.s.) and the righteous people, regarding the stages, places of danger and the other particularities of death and after it, then believe in them and prepare oneself to encounter them. Just like a person, who during the course of a journey, finds himself lonely and unaware of his whereabouts, manages to lessen his perplexity with the help of necessary information, maps and equipment's, we too must obtain the map of the way and the necessary information from authentic and reliable sources.

دخل عليّ بن محمّد (عليهما السلام) على مريض من أصحابه و هو يبكي و
يجزع من الموت. فقال له: يا عبد الله تخاف من الموت لأنك لا تعرفه, أرأيتك
إذا أتسخت و تقدّرت و تأذيت من كثرة القذر و الوسخ عليك و أصابك قروح و
جرب و علمت أنّ الغسل في حمّام يزيل ذلك كلّهُ أما تريدان تدخله فتغتسل
ذلك عنك أو ما تكره أن تدخله فيبقي ذلك عليك؟ قال: بلى يا بن رسول الله. قال:
فذلك الموت هو ذلك الحمّام...

In a tradition from Imam 'Ali ibn Muhammad ('a), it is narrated that he ('a) approached one of his companions who was sick and in a state of crying and grieving and complaining due to fear of death. The Imam ('a) then addressed him saying: "O servant of Allah, you fear death because you do not comprehend it". Then the Imam ('a) presented an example and said "If you had become dirty, and due to the excess of dirt and dirtiness you were in suffering and inconvenience, and you knew that the cure for all this lay in your taking a shower, would you wish to go to a bath and clean yourself or would you wish to remain in the same state of dirtiness and as a result continue to undergo the suffering." The sick man said, " Yes, I would wish to take the shower ". Then the Imam ('a) replied "death (for you) is the very same shower..."¹

The point to be considered in the above tradition is that, the sick person was one of the companions of the Imam ('a) and was aware of the Islamic insight regarding death, but in spite of this, was intensely

fearful of death. And so, the Imam ('a) by presenting an example explained to him the states and circumstances after death and thus calmed him.

3. Lack of preparation

Some of the people have comprehended the reality of death and are also aware of the Islamic insight regarding death. On the other hand, they have also obtained some information regarding the stations and the journey after death, however, in spite of all this, they still fear death. This fear is not due to the two reasons previously mentioned but because they have not made available for themselves the tools and things necessary for this journey of theirs, while, on the contrary they have been paying more-than-necessary importance to their present lives; like a person who knows that he would have to spend the rest of his life in another country, but has not collected any money for his journey.

Instead, all that he has gathered is in the form of house, shop, land or other things which, presently, are neither capable of being changed, nor transferred. In other words, he has strived and worked and collected a capital, but the capital is such that it cannot be transferred and there is also nobody who will buy it. In short, it is not useful in any way for the objective, which he had in mind. It was because of this that Imam Husayn ('a) said:

انكم اخرجتم آخرتكم و عمرتك دنياكم فأنتم تكرهون النقلة من العمران الى
الخراب

“You have ruined and destroyed your hereafter and instead have made habitable the present life. So you do not like the transfer from a inhabited and comfortable place to a ruined and destroyed one.” 2

This kind of fear of death, which results from the lack of preparedness and the absence of the provisions of the journey usually occurs with the believers, which in reality is not fear of death but instead, fear of not possessing the sufficient provisions necessary for this journey.

Another point is that such a fear is usually mixed with eagerness. Because, on the one hand, a believer is eager for the Divine meeting and also for the companionship of the Righteous people. On the other hand, due to lack of sufficient piety and the necessary provisions, finds himself in a state of anxiety and fear, whereas the unbelievers do not possess such a fear and eagerness. They fear the actual death, because they consider it to be a complete annihilation. Of course, it could be said that the fear of the unbelievers could have a universal meaning, and the causes of it could be those mentioned and also those not mentioned.

Nevertheless, death or transfer into another world is a universal law, acceptance of which or fear of which shall create no change in the law itself, and finally sooner or later, everyone shall taste the nectar

or the poison of death. That, which is more important than death, is the preparation for it, and Insha-Allah, Allah shall bestow such a success upon us.

1. Ma'anil Akhbar, Pg. 290

2. Ma'anil Akhbar, Pg. 289

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