

Comparison of Life of this world (Dunya) and the hereafter (Aakhirah)

Belief in the life in the hereafter (Aakhirah) – after a person’s death and also at the end of this world – is one of the six tenets of a Muslim’s faith (the others being belief in Allah, His angels, His revealed books, His prophets and messengers, and Qada wal-Qadr or the Divine decree). Allah provides us the complete picture of our existence in this verse in the Quran:

كَيْفَ تَكْفُرُونَ بِاللَّهِ وَكُنْتُمْ أَمْوَاتًا فَأَحْيَاكُمْ ثُمَّ يُمِيتُكُمْ ثُمَّ يُحْيِيكُمْ ثُمَّ إِلَيْهِ تُرْجَعُونَ
“Seeing that you were dead and He gave you life. Then He will give you death, then again will bring you to life (on the Day of Resurrection) and then unto Him you will return” (Quran, [Sura Al-Baqarah: 28](#)).

The verses make it clear that this life (dunya) constitutes the first part of our journey following which we will die and then will be resurrected (in the hereafter), and depending on our performance in this life we will get due rewards or punishment.

How does this life compare with the hereafter?

We know from our observations and also from the revelations to the prophets that our time in this life is limited. We have at best a few years and then we will move on to a world about which the [Quran](#) provides numerous references. [Allah](#) has repeatedly reminded us in the Quran (a fact that has been further clarified by the Prophet (S.A.W.S.) as well) that the value of this life (dunya) compared to the hereafter (Aakhirah) is very miniscule. Consider some of the verses of the [Quran](#) on this topic:

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا مَا لَكُمْ إِذَا قِيلَ لَكُمْ انْفِرُوا فِي سَبِيلِ اللَّهِ أَنْتَقَلْتُمْ إِلَى الْأَرْضِ أَرْضَيْتُمْ
بِالْحَيَاةِ الدُّنْيَا مِنَ الْآخِرَةِ فَمَا مَتَاعُ الْحَيَاةِ الدُّنْيَا فِي الْآخِرَةِ إِلَّا قَلِيلٌ

“...Are you pleased with the life of this world (dunya) rather than the hereafter (Aakhirah)? But little is the enjoyment of the life of this world as compared with the Hereafter” (Quran, [Al-Tawbah: 38](#)).

اللَّهُ يَبْسُطُ الرِّزْقَ لِمَنْ يَشَاءُ وَيَقْدِرُ وَفَرِحُوا بِالْحَيَاةِ الدُّنْيَا وَمَا الْحَيَاةُ الدُّنْيَا فِي الْآخِرَةِ إِلَّا مَتَاعٌ

“

...as compared with the life of the hereafter, the life of this world is nothing but a brief passing enjoyment” (Quran, Ar-Rad: 26).

وَمَا الْحَيَاةُ الدُّنْيَا إِلَّا لَعِبٌ وَلَهْوٌ وَلَلدَّارُ الْآخِرَةُ خَيْرٌ لِّلَّذِينَ يَتَّقُونَ أَفَلَا تَعْقِلُونَ

“And the life of this world is nothing but play and amusement. But far better is the house in the hereafter for those who are Al-Muttaqun (the pious). Will you not then understand?” (Quran, [Al-An'aam](#): 32)

So, by likening this life to a brief passing enjoyment, play, amusement and a deception, Allah the All Knowing has clearly put the matter regarding the hereafter in perspective for us to ponder over and reflect. He cautions us not to get carried away by the charms of this life because in comparison with the hereafter, this life has quite a limited span. And as we go through facing the life's challenges as well as its attractions, we have to ensure that we do not deviate from the straight path. Be it the diversion of temptations, or problems and sufferings, we should always be wary of not having our minds fall prey to manmade philosophies, but rather should adhere to the straight path chalked out by Allah (also referred to as Sirat-ul-Mustaqeem in [Surah Al-Fatihah](#).)

The Prophet (S. A. W. S.), too, clarified the value of this life in relation to the hereafter. He said, **“The life of this world compared to the hereafter is as if one of you were to put his finger in the ocean and take it out again then compare the water that remains on his finger to the water that remains in the ocean”** [[Sahih Muslim \(2858\)](#)].

Ibn 'Umar said: The Messenger of Allah (S. A. W. S.) took me by the shoulder and said: **“Be in this world as though you were a stranger or a traveler/wayfarer.”**

What is the value that we tend to give to this life?

Knowing the limited time that we have in this life, giving it anything more than its due proportion, therefore, wouldn't be prudent. But we also know that Allah has made this life a test and adorned it with enough temptations and attractions to make the weak among us get diverted and deceived. To such people, Allah warns us in the Quran in the following words:

يَا أَيُّهَا النَّاسُ إِنَّ وَعْدَ اللَّهِ حَقٌّ فَلَا تَغُرَّنَّكُمُ الْحَيَاةُ الدُّنْيَا وَلَا يَغُرَّنَّكُم بِاللَّهِ الْغُرُورُ
“Let not then this present life deceive you” (Quran, [Surah Fatir](#): 5).

But the reality is that the attractions of this life do blind us from seeing the big picture that includes our impending departure from this life and then resurrecting in the next eternal life. Fearing that our means of sustenance in this life are indispensable, we make the mistake of turning means into goals. We run after wealth believing it to buy and secure our present and the future. Thus we become obsessed with gaining benefits, pleasures and comforts and in doing so we go after acquiring more power and authority. We vie and compete with others in pursuit of these and lose sight of the hereafter. Allah reflects this situation in the following verses:

أَلْهَاكُمْ التَّكَاثُرُ
حَتَّىٰ زُرْتُمُ الْمَقَابِرَ

1. • ***“The mutual rivalry (for piling up of worldly things) diverts you,***
2. ***Until you visit the graves (i.e. till you die)”*** (Quran, [Surah At-Takathur](#): 1 – 2).
He also says:

كَلَّا لَوْ تَعْلَمُونَ عِلْمَ الْيَقِينِ
“Nay! If you knew with a sure knowledge (the end result of piling up, you would not have been occupied yourselves in worldly things)” (Quran, Surah, At-Takathur: 5).

What is the price we pay for going overboard?

Focusing on the present life with lack of consideration for the hereafter can push us to the edges of narcissism or something called *“the entitlement syndrome”*, by which psychologists refer to a state where one feels that one is rightfully entitled to the fulfillment of one’s wishes and desires, and is entitled to enjoy all that life can offer. Confronted with the reality of limited time in this life, therefore, and to acquire and enjoy this life’s resources, we plant the seeds of greed and dissatisfaction within us that in turn lead to injustice, deprivation of the rights of people, to the misuse of power and authority, and so on.

The Prophet (***Sallallahu Alayhi Wa Sallam***) expressed his concern for our Imaan when he said:

“By Allah, it is not poverty that I fear for you, but I fear that this world will be spread out in front of you as it was spread out in front of those before you, and then you will vie for it as they vied for it, and it will destroy you as it destroyed them” [Riyad as-Salihin (The Meadows of the Righteous) by Imam Nawawi].

The price that we pay for going overboard in our quest for the best that this world can offer is that we become part of a cut-throat culture where material [success](#) is a measure of a person’s worth, and failure in worldly acquisitions is regarded as a matter of shame and humiliation. Enamored by this life, people become heedless of Allah, the hereafter,

the moral bounds and moral responsibilities, the rights of others, and of their own obligations to render those rights. They strive to acquire more at any cost and become wholly oblivious to their end. About such people Allah (SWT) says:

أُولَئِكَ الَّذِينَ اشْتَرُوا الْحَيَاةَ الدُّنْيَا بِالْآخِرَةِ فَلَا يُخَفَّفُ عَنْهُمْ الْعَذَابُ وَلَا هُمْ يُنصَرُونَ

Those are they who have bought the life of this world at the price of the hereafter (Quran, [Surah Al-Baqarah](#): 86).

But then Allah, the Most Benevolent, gives people what they yearn for and whatever they work for as He also says this:

مَنْ كَانَ يُرِيدُ الْحَيَاةَ الدُّنْيَا وَزِينَتَهَا نُوفِّ إِلَيْهِمْ أَعْمَالَهُمْ فِيهَا وَهُمْ فِيهَا لَا يُنْحَسُونَ

“As for those who care for (no more than) the life of this world and its bounties – We shall repay them in full for all that they did in this(life), and they shall not be deprived of their just due therein” (Hud 11:15).

Allah, therefore, lets those who are eager to lose themselves in this world remain content with it, but also warns that they’re buying these pleasures at the price of the hereafter.

Abu ‘Abbas Sahl ibn Sa’d as-Sa’idi said, “A man came to the Prophet, (S. A. W. S.), and said, ‘**Messenger of Allah, show me an action for which Allah will love me and for which people will love me if I do it. He said, “Do with little of this world and Allah will love you, and do with little of what belongs to other people and people will love you”** [Ibn Majah].

What is the price we pay for not giving this life its due share?

However, we do have to give this life its due share. We have to live it; we cannot escape from it, nor can we ignore the real challenges it poses. Moreover, [Islam](#) does not expect us to withdraw ourselves from the world. Allah tells us in the Quran:

وَابْتَغِ فِيمَا آتَاكَ اللَّهُ الدَّارَ الْآخِرَةَ وَلَا تَنْسَ نَصِيبَكَ مِنَ الدُّنْيَا وَأَحْسِنَ كَمَا أَحْسَنَ اللَّهُ إِلَيْكَ وَلَا تَبْغِ الْفُسَادَ فِي الْأَرْضِ إِنَّ اللَّهَ لَا يُحِبُّ الْمُفْسِدِينَ

“But seek, with that (wealth) which Allah has bestowed on you, the home of the hereafter, and forget not your portion of lawful enjoyment in this world; and do good as Allah has been good to you, and seek not mischief in the land. Verily,

Allah likes not the Mufsidun (those who commit great crimes and sins, oppressors, tyrants, mischief-makers, corrupters)” (Quran, Surah Al-Qasas: 77).

We see from the life of the Prophet (*sallallahu ‘alayhi wasallam*) that he was an active and successful merchant before being chosen as a prophet. During his life of prophethood, he had family and dealt with worldly affairs like any fully-engaged human being. We, too, are supposed to lead life, utilizing all the resources Allah Most Gracious has bestowed on us. Accordingly, we need to educate ourselves in worldly matters and to use that knowledge to lead a good life and also to help prevent injustices and exploitation of humanity at large.

The life and example of the Prophet (*sallallahu ‘alayhi wasallam*) should make it clear as to how we should engage ourselves in the activities of this life. No one should withdraw from life forgetting his responsibilities.

Hakim ibn Hizam narrated that the Prophet (s.a.w.s.) said: “The upper hand is better than the lower hand, (i.e., he who gives charity is better than him who takes it)... And whoever abstains from asking others for some financial help, Allah will give him and save him from asking others, Allah will make him self-sufficient” (Bukhari, Vol. 2, Hadith 508).

How can we strike the right balance?

The obligation to live this life while providing for ourselves and our families effectively and by ensuring that we are not violating others’ rights does create internal conflicts that must be managed accordingly. We ought to adopt attitudes where our actions strike the right balance between any competing and conflicting situations. We need to remind ourselves that by respecting the tenets of **halal** (lawful) and **haram** (unlawful) as laid out by Allah, we can lead a life where we can make the most of this life while our hearts are always conscious of, and devoted to, Allah and the hereafter. He says in the Quran:

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا كُلُوا مِن طَيِّبَاتِ مَا رَزَقْنَاكُمْ وَاشْكُرُوا لِلَّهِ إِن كُنتُمْ إِيَّاهُ تَعْبُدُونَ

O you who believe (in the Oneness of Allah – Islamic Monotheism)! Eat of the lawful things that We have provided you with, and be grateful to Allah, if it is indeed He Whom you worship (Quran, Surah AL-BAQARA: 172).

We can thus lead fulfilling lives by bringing more Islam into our lives. For example, we can become wise in our interactions and dealings with each other, fulfill our trusts and duties toward each other, be patient in adverse circumstances with an unwavering Faith in Allah, become thankful to Allah for His blessings and show gratitude to people as well for what we get from them, earn our livelihood through lawful means, and so on. Let’s remember that when we live our lives according to what Islam teaches us, we not only live fulfilling lives, we are also pleasing Allah and thus contributing toward credits that will count in the hereafter.

However, while living this life none of these should take precedence over Allah’s Commands and none of these should divert us from our real purpose of life. The desire

to attain the Favor of Allah (SWT) should supersede all other considerations. Allah says in the Quran:

بَلْ تُؤْتِرُونَ الْحَيَاةَ الدُّنْيَا
وَالْآخِرَةَ خَيْرٌ وَأَبْقَى
إِنَّ هَذَا فِي الصُّحُفِ الْأُولَى
صُحُفِ إِبْرَاهِيمَ وَمُوسَى

- ***Nay, you prefer the life of this world;***
- ***Although the hereafter is better and more lasting.***
- ***Verily! This is in the former Scriptures,***
- ***The Scriptures of Ibrahim (Abraham) and Moosa (Moses) (Quran, Surah Al-Aala: 16 – 19).***