

The purgatory (quiddity, properties and the purgatory dwellers)

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ABSTRACT

The present study deals with the elaboration and explication of the purgatory's quiddity, its properties and the status and state of the purgatory dwellers for such a necessity that if the human beings have a comprehensive and perfect recognition of the world after death, they would undoubtedly make plans and operationalize the instructions of the evident religion of Islam thereby to prepare the purgatory world in a very appropriate manner for themselves because the belief in the resurrection prevents one from perpetrating sins and immoralities. The human soul is placed in a soft body after the end of life and this body is devoid of many of the characteristics of the material body and it is termed "exemplary body" or "exemplary format" which is neither completely abstract nor purely material rather featuring a sort of purgatory-like abstraction. In the holy Quran and the narrations by the immaculate Imams (may Allah hail on them), purgatory and morgue have been resembled to the similar world of examples and world of meanings. The purgatory and the morgue are occasionally interchangeably applied and the world of examples is called so due to its similarity to the material world as understood from its name. anyway, the human beings intrinsically seek the immortality and this tendency towards eternity is indicative of their connectedness to the endless power of the God and their being parts of His quintessence. Thus, the purgatory is a sort of sleep from a perspective in comparison to the otherworld and resurrection but it is a lot vaster than the corporeal life due to its possession of special attributes.

Keywords: purgatory, the world of examples, death, morgue

Introduction

The topics related to the world after death, its properties and the states and statuses of the purgatory-dwellers are amongst the most importantly and most seriously discussed issues of the human life. Purgatory is a world placed by the God between this and the other world. Amongst the properties of the purgatory is that time and place are meaningless therein and nothing reaches annihilation with death and the file of the deeds remains still open.

As for the world after death, some various studies have been carried out since long ago. The present study aims at recognizing and gaining insight about the purgatory and uses credible books like "Bihar Al-Anwar" and "Haqq Al-Yaqin" by Allameh Majlesi, "Kafi" by Koleini, "resurrection in the holy Quran" by Javadi Amoli, "resurrection" by Shahid Dastgheib, "human beings from the beginning to the end" by Allameh Tabataba'ei, "purgatory in several steps from us" by Mohammadi Eshtehardi and some others for data gathering.

The present study endeavors to make it clear what kind of a place is purgatory to which human beings go after death and what are its characteristics? Thus, this issue is investigated in the following three axes:

- 1) The quiddity of the purgatory
- 2) Properties of the purgatory
- 3) Kinds of the purgatory dwellers

Purgatory

In defining purgatory, some definitions have been stated in the lexical books such as the one indicating that the purgatory is the septum and the middle border between two things. Ahmad Ibn Fars states in *Mo'jam Maqābis Al-Loqah* that “Al-Barzakh: Al-Hā'el Bain Al-Shay'ain Wa Kān Bainahomā Borāzan Ay Mottase'an Min Al-Arz Thomma Sāra Kolla Hā'el Barzakhā” (Zakaria, 1984).

The term purgatory [Barzakh] has been applied in the holy Quran three times in two of which the literal meaning thereof is intended. The Eminent God orders that “Bainahomā Barzakhon Lā Yabqīān” (SŪRAH AL-RAHMAN, ĀYA 20) and in another ĀYA “Howa Allazi Marraj Al-Bahrain Hāzā Azabon Forāton Wa Hāzā Melhon Ojājon Wa Ja'ala Bainahomā Barzakhā” (SŪRAH FORQĀN, ĀYA 53). In these ĀYĀT, “Barzakh” [purgatory] means the isthmus between two seas but in the next ĀYA this word means the very unseen world and it has been applied as one of the dwelling places and stages after death which is actually the subject of the present article's discussion.

Quiddity of the Purgatory or the World of Examples

In the holy Quran, there are numerous ĀYĀT that explicitly point to or speak of the purgatory and some of them are expressive of the rewards given to the righteous individuals and some others retell the chastisement of the wrongdoers in the purgatory; for example, in the ĀYĀT 169 and 170 of SŪRAH ĀL-e-IMRĀN, ĀYA 154 of SŪRAH BAQARAH and ĀYĀT 26 and 27 of SŪRAH YĀSIN in which the “believer of Āl-e-Yāsin” (Habib, the carpenter, who was martyred by the sinners) was told by the God to enter the paradise and he answered that “alas, my tribe does not know that my God has absolved me and placed me amongst the dearests” and also in ĀYA 46 of SŪRAH MO'MENŪN which states that “their (followers of Pharaoh) chastisement is fire which is presented to them every morning and every night and the God will order on the day the resurrection is begun that the followers of Pharaoh should enter the hardest of the chastisements”¹.

It has been stated in this regard that “by chastisement of the followers of Pharaoh in the morning and at night, the very chastisement of them in the purgatory is intended” (Makarem Shirazi, 1998)

After the end of the corporeal life, the human soul is placed in a soft body which lacks many of the properties of the material body but it is termed “exemplary body” or “exemplary format” in that it is elemental like this material body and it is neither completely abstract nor purely material rather it features a sort of “purgatory-like abstraction”. Of course, as the perception of the truth of the otherworld is impossible for us, the captives of the material world's prison, getting aware of the purgatory is not possible in a complete manner because it is a higher rank than this world or, in other words, it is a world surrounding this world but not surrounded therein.

However, according to some scientists, it can be resembled to sleeping. In true dreams, the human soul leaves the body cast and flies away and sees landscapes and views and enjoys blessings; it also occasionally watches horrible things and is panicked and yells and wakes up.

The ĀYA “Allah Yatavaffā Ellā Nafson Hina Mawtehā Ea Al-Lati Lam Tamot Fi Manāmiḥā²” also confirms this truth. The late Allameh Majlesi explicitly mentions in *Bihar Al-Anwar* that resembling the purgatory to the sleeping state and dream has been mentioned in many of the news and the following is but one of them.

In “Forū'e Kafī”, the late Koleini cites narrations that explicitly speak about the exemplary body, including the following: it has been stated in a credible narration from Imam Sadeq (PBUH) that one of his

¹ SŪRAH AL-MO'MENŪN, ĀYA 46

² SŪRAH ZOMAR, ĀYA 42

highness's assistants asks him that "some believe that the souls of the believers are put in the green birds' gizzard in the periphery of the empyrean! Imam ordered that "Lā, Al-Mo'men Ajram Alā Allah Min An Yaj'ala Rūhahū Fi Hawselah Tayran Wa Lāken Fi Abdān Kābādānahom" meaning "no, it is not so; the believer is dearer to the God than his soul's being placed in the gizzard of a bird rather the souls will be placed in bodies similar to the former ones"(Makarem Shirazi, 1982).

The difference between the exemplary world and the world of the pure abstract figures is that this world features shape and quantity and its difference from the world of the pure materialities is the non-possession of mass. Amongst the attributes of this world is the possession of shape and amount without mass and heftiness like the forms seen in dream or in mirror. Of course, the creatures of the exemplary world with imaginary forms are different in that the imaginary forms exist only in the regions of the mind not outside it; but the creatures of the world of example, like it itself, feature external actualizations. Elders like Sohrewardi and Ghazzali and Ehsa'ei who believe in this world state the followings about the quality of the life after death: "when the death comes and the soul gets separated from the body, the soul will be accompanying a body which is like the earthly body in all respects in such a way that if it is seen by a person, it will look like the very earthly person and the only difference between the two bodies would be the very its non-materiality and lack of mass"(Ali Akbar Rashad).

Allameh Tabataba'ei divides the general worlds of existence into three sets: the world of intellect, the world of example and the world of matter. He has offered the following introductions for justifying the world of example: 1) partial perceptions as the very sensory and imaginary perceptions that lack materiality and feature abstractness; 2) though being devoid of matter, these perceptions have traces of materiality in them: the sensory and imaginary forms that are created in the ego should have been originated from a source and cause and this source is the very world of example which is devoid of the materiality and is qualified for the material traces like the sensory and imaginary forms with the difference being that the sensory and imaginary forms are soul-based entities but the forms existent in the world of example are stand-alone entities. Here, the question is that whether the human soul can be put into an exemplary corpse as long as it has not died and as far as his soul has not been transferred to the purgatory? Surely, the immaculate Imams (may Allah hail on them) can do such a thing in such a way that Imam Zaman (may Allah hasten his honorable reappearance) is currently appearing in various forms and also in such a way that Imam Sajjad (PBUH) freed himself from the chains during imprisonment and appeared in Karbala for burying the martyrs and in additionally in such a way that Musa Ibn Ja'afar (PBUH) repeatedly came out of the prison.

Properties of the Purgatory

Inherent Nature of the Life After Death

Some researchers have compared the life in purgatory with the soul's status during sleep in which the individual may truly enjoy blessings upon bearing witness to them and/or become panicked by watching horrible things in such a way that the reaction to things seen in dream occasionally appear in this same earthly body and the person shouts, roars and twists and his or her body is wetted by sweat upon having horrible dreams. Some even believe that the soul performs activities truly with the exemplary format during dreaming and, even more than that, some believe that the strong souls can reach the very purgatory-like abstractness during wakefulness meaning that they get separated from the body and travel around the globe and give news of certain issues with the same exemplary format by their own will or through the magnetic dreams (Majlesi, 2001).

The holy Quran has delicate and nice cues to the issue of the soul's persistence; thus, it is necessary to have a brief glance at the issue of the soul's persistence without getting drowned in the issue because the discussions related to the soul are vast and wide and they are in need of separate discussions. These live and clear interpretations well signify the persistence of the soul and life of the martyrs in the world a lot more superior and higher than this world. If the human life was ended with death totally, these interpretations about the martyrs would be insensible and nothing more than some sorceries.

In fact, it can be stated that the holy Quran has founded the foundation of the soul's persistence discussions and started it from the topic of the martyrs. In the ĀYĀT of the holy Quran, the martyrs of the God's path have been recounted as having a real life started after death so some superficial individuals

should not interpret this life as a nominal social life and say that the intention is that the name and the memory of them remains alive in the society. These two ĀYĀT and some other ĀYĀT, as well, some clues have been given about the real life, including 1) “Yorzaqūn” (fed); 2) “Farehin” (live happily); and, 3) “Yastabsherūn” (annunciate good news) and each of these clues are indicative of the real life of the ones martyred on the path of God and it is so much distant from realism if we interpret it as a sort of nominal social life that is also lived by the earthly creatures in the various nations worldwide because even the Marxist community, as well, realizes the devotees of the Marx’s path as the martyrs with live name and memory (Sobhani, 1990).

Chastisement in Morgue

One of the properties of the purgatory is the morgue pressure. The truth of the purgatory pressure is not well clear to us. It is generally known that it is the pressure and endeavor suffered by a dead person upon finding oneself in the grave and feeling the narrowness, the darkness and the dread thereof. Now, the question is if the soul is truly put under pressure or not? Is this like the person whose death penalty has been endorsed and spends his or her last night in hard psychological pressure and/or is it his or her delicate soul and body (as in the world of dream) that is pressurized? Or, does the soul communicate with this earthly body and finds itself in pressure? All the three sayings have been mentioned in various works (Eshtehardi, 1998).

Allameh Majlesi (PBUH) orders that “verily, the questioning and the pressure take place on the main corpses on the first night of the burial and these two are lifted from some believers”(Allameh Majlesi, 1983).

The issue of the morgue pressure has been stated in many hadiths. It has been even mentioned that the morgue pressure exists for everyone unexceptionally but it is severe for some and considered as a sort of chastisement and softer for some others and considered as a sort of absolution from the sins and compensation of the shortfalls.

The perceptions of this world’s fellows are incapable of seeing and hearing and feeling the purgatory. The darkness and pressure and dread of the morgue cannot be compared with the darkness and dreads of this world.

Orifice of Lesson

In SŪRAH YUNUS, ĀYA 92, the holy Quran orders the following about Pharaoh: “Fa Al-Yawm Nonjika Be Badaneka La Takūna Li Man Khalafaka Āya” meaning “today, we bring your body out of the water so that you can be a lesson for those coming after you”.

So, the waves of the sea storm captured pharaoh and his followers and he asserted faith in that state but his fate has already reached its end and he did not have any time for repentance and, due to the same reason, he was addressed with this saying that “you will be drowned but we will bring your lifeless body out of the water so that it can be a lesson for the future generations”. The ĀYA speaks of the saving of the pharaoh’s body and this is indicative of the fact that one thing is saved and the other thing is condemned to chastisement and this is also a testimony to the idea that the body is something different from the human reality and that the God has addressed that reality by saying “today, we save your body”.

This is also a proof that pharaoh has two realities: one is the body that is saved and the other is something that has been subjected to the divine wrath and chastisement and it is the very soul and ego (Sobhani, 1990). And, this ego is the very thing that the God takes away from everybody during death and it is also the very thing that the mankind speaks thereof by stating “me” and “I” during his lifetime and it is this same “I” by which the mankind is actualized; it is the very thing that perceives and wills and performs the human actions by means of the body and the material power and body organs and the body is nothing more than the instrument and tool of the ego’s accomplishment of its willed tasks. Of course, it is the instrument of ego in its material tasks but the ego performs his tasks without any need for the body in regard of the spiritual matters.

The ĀYĀT that were used to reason the persistence of soul after death testify the existence of purgatory life for the human beings. These ĀYĀT clearly prove that the human beings also have psychological and

mental attributes in the purgatory like happiness and joyfulness, grief and sorrow as well as physical features like “sustenance and food” as signified by such words as “Farehin”, “Yastabsherūn” and Yorzaqūn” in the same way that the ĀYĀT related to the chastising of the pharaoh’s followers by fire testify the torturing of the Kaffirs in there.

The other point is that the human being’s combination of the soul and the body is not like the water’s combination of oxygen and hydrogen by the separation of which a compound creature is completely destroyed rather soul is the main element of the human being and the humanity of a human and prestige of a person is reserved as far as it persists so the persistence of every character’s personality is suspended on the same thing that is retaken and deadened by the angel of death hence not on the body organs scattered around the globe and one can say “the person enlivened after death is the very former person” when the soul persists after the smashing of the body; in other words, “every human has an immaterial essence capable of living independently from the body in addition to the material body and the destruction of the body does not harm the persistence of the soul and it does not die and every action performed by a person during his or her life exerts an effect on the depth of his or her soul and the human beings are constantly in close combat with their performances and they should finally see the result of their actions one day. In response to the individuals who think that the human beings die out with death and destruction of their bodies, the holy Quran underlines that the truth and the soul of a person is with us and the chastisement and reward depend thereon and it always persists and that it spends life in the purgatory with an exemplary body till the judgment day and also that its chastisement and blessing is with the exemplary body but the soul is softened and incarnated with the material body on the judgment day.

Place and Time in Purgatory

Upon being transferred to the purgatory, the human beings become aware of some truths and they perceive these truths with their souls which are unified with the exemplary bodies. For instance, the individuals note during death that the corporeal affairs and the customs and habits they have been bound to in the world are nothing more than hallucinations; they find out that the things they considered as their possessions and were proud of have all been in vain and turned into nothing and have no effects on them; if they have had headship positions and exercised haughtiness thereby towards the others, they are now all gone and nothing has remained of that pride and haughtiness and headship for them (Tabataba’ei, 1992) Since the purgatory is a world devoid of matter, it is accordingly enjoying more delicacy in respect to the world of matter (the earth); the effect of the chastisement and the pleasure of the blessings on the human body is far increasingly stronger in the purgatory than in this world very much similar to the world of sleep wherein the beautiful things a person sees in dream and sleeping cannot be described by words and the horrible things one see in sleep are occasionally unexampled in this world (Ayatollah Dastgheib, 1983).

So, the human beings can perceive some truths in the purgatory. Now, we reach this point that whether the human beings can sense the time in purgatory or not in such a way that they would feel it very long if they have entered it earlier than the others or they would feel it very short if they die within a short time to the resurrection day? Finally, how would the lengthiness or shortness of the purgatory and can it be perceived by the ones residing it or not? According to an ĀYA from the holy Quran, it can be stated that the purgatory is generally very much short considering the arrival of the judgment day meaning that when the angels ask “how long have you paused on earth (the purgatory)?”, they would answer “Qalū Labethnā Yawman Aw Ba’aza Yawm” meaning “we spent one or some days therein”³. This is amongst the questions the God asks the people on the judgment day that how long have you been on earth? And, this question has been mentioned in several places in the God’s praised words and the intention is questioning about the time of hesitation in the morgues (Tabataba’ei, 1977) In SŪRAH TĀHĀ, it has been stated about the sinners and criminals that “in this state, the sinners speak quietly amongst themselves about the amount of their stop in the purgatory; some say ‘you have just been ten nights (or ten days and nights) in the purgatory’”; “Enna Labethom Ellā Ashrā”⁴. Undoubtedly, the amount of their stay in the purgatory has been long but those

³ SŪRAH AI-MO’MENŪN, ĀYA 112

⁴ TĀHĀ, ĀYA 103

who think better say “you have been hesitating in the purgatory only for one day (Enna Labethtom Ellā Yawman)”⁵; and, this quietly speaking of them is due to the extreme dread and horror they feel after bearing witness to the scene of the resurrection and/or as a result of the intensity of their weakness and inability (Makarem Shirazi, 1998).

Kinds of Individuals Residing the Purgatory

In the purgatory, the human beings are either believers or disbelievers or wronged persons; the believers live in the purgatory’s heaven and the disbelievers live in the purgatory’s hell and the wronged persons are provided with a solution by the God; the latter individuals are the persons who have not performed wrongdoings and evildoings to deserve the purgatory’s hell (Ayatollah Javadi Amoli) on the one hand, and also have not performed good deeds to deserve the purgatory’s heaven, on the other hand [“Wa Ākherūn A’atarefū Bi Zonūbehem Khalatū Amalan Sālehan Wa Ājhara Sayye’an Asā Allah An Yatūb Alayhem Enna Allah Qafūron Rahim”⁶ meaning “there are also individuals who have confessed to their sins and mixed the good and the bad deeds and it is hoped that the God may accept their repentance; verily, the God is the most compassionate and the most forgiving”; “Wa Ākherun Marjūn Li Amr Allah Emmā Yo’azzebohom Wa Emmā Yatūb Alayhem Wa Allah Alimon Hakim”⁷ meaning “there is another group whose fate has been assigned to the God; he will either chastise them or grant mercy to them and the God is the all-knowing and the wisest”. It has been stated in Tafsir Al-Mizān that the term “Rajā’a” [hope] has been used with the latter meaning and the honorable ĀYA implies the other ĀYA stating that “Wa Ākherūn A’atarefū Bi Zonūbehem” and the delaying of them from reaching the God serves the specification of a chastisement for them or their forgiveness and absolution from the sins; so, their destiny is up to the God and what He would want for them for whatever the God wants will happen. This ĀYA is per se matching with the situation of the wronged persons and they are actually in the middle way between the good people and the evildoers (Tabataba’ei, 1992) It has been narrated in Tafsir Ayyashi from Hamran that “I asked Imam Sadeq (PBUH) that ‘who are the wronged persons?’ His Highness answered that ‘they are those who are neither believers nor disbelievers and their destiny is up to the God’” [Hom Laysū Bi Al-Mo’menin wa Lā Bi Al-Koffār, Fa Hom Al-Marjūn Li Amr Allah!]. It is also stated in Tafsir-e-Nemūneh that “this group do not have such a clean and robust faith and vivid good deeds that they can be considered as felicitous persons and fellows of deliverance and they are not also so much polluted and deviated that a red line can be drawn on them and envision them as miserable and it has to be seen what would the divine grace do to them (of course, according to the psychological expediencies and situations of them)” (Makarem Shirazi, 1998)

When speaking about the three groups of the human beings in the purgatory, Allameh Majlesi (PBUH), as well, calls wronged persons those who have neither good deeds nor wrongdoings and states that “the thing understood from the great many of the ĀYĀT and narrations and the sure proofs is that the ego persists after death and, if a person be a purely Kaffir, s/he will be punished and, if s/he be a pure believer, s/he will be presented with rewards and, if s/he be a wronged person, s/he will be left on his or her own”(Allameh Majlesi, 1983).

Conclusion

According to the presented materials about the properties of the purgatory and/or the morgue, it can be understood that there is a septum between this and the other world wherein life continues because the Islamic texts signify the happiness or grief of some of the souls after death and the soul’s continuation of its life after the destruction of the body but with the characteristics different from the world of matter. That is because time and place are insensible to the soul which possesses a sort of abstractness. In fact, this soul is placed in a delicate and soft body which can be stated is similar to its earthly body from all respects.

⁵ *TĀHĀ, ĀYA 104*

⁶ *SŪRAH TAWBEH, ĀYA 102*

⁷ *SŪRAH TAWBEH, ĀYA 106*

It is due to the same reason that it has been called the exemplary body and this body remains with the soul till the judgment day on which it will be again ready for the acceptance of the soul by the permission of the eminent God who has all the powers in His hands and it cannot be, in fact, stated that the purgatory and/or the judgment day are perfectly spiritual because both of them are both physical and spiritual but with certain differences.

In fact, death is not the end of life from the perspective of the intellect and the narrations rather it is just a resumption hence it needs contemplation from the perspective of the intellect and the proofs that the human life entails persistence and eternity and it is constantly on a path of perfection and a life in the eternal otherworld is definitely awaiting the mankind.

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