

THAT WHICH WILL TRULY OVERTAKE YOU: QUR'ĀN, DEATH, AND DYING

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Abstract

Death, for some people, is a topic that should be avoided. They see death as a negative and fearful event. That would seem to explain why there are various superstitious beliefs around death world over. The purpose of this study is to seek a basic understanding of the Islamic position and attitude towards death by examining the primary source of Islamic teaching – the Qur'ān. The method adopted is exegetical, drawing data primarily from the Qur'ān on the subject of death. This leads to an understanding of the various intents and meanings of the notion of death in the Qur'ān. The paper concludes that the concept of death in the Qur'ān demonstrates a consistent outlook of positivity, hence its constant exhortation to Muslims to recognize the importance of courage, self-sacrifice, truth, reality, regret, good deeds, and Allah's might on life and power.

Keywords: Death; Qur'ān; Islam; Positivity; Muslim

Introduction

There are many verses in the Qur'ān, which speak about death. The word *mawt* (death) is mentioned 72 times in the Qur'ān and twice in *Suratul Ma'ida* (verse 5: 106). The implication is that death is an important theme in the Qur'ān. Often times, people avoid thinking, mentioning, or discussing death. They try to put this absolute end off their minds, apparently because they only think of its negative and unattractive side. Any wonder many superstitious beliefs on death are found in societies worldwide. Yahya notes, for instance, that:

In daily conversations, those who intend to talk about death are interrupted out of hand. Someone who does begin to speak about death, intentionally or not, recalls a sign of God and, even if only to a very slight degree, removes the thick cloud of heedlessness covering people's eyes. Nevertheless, a majority of people who make insouciance a

way of life, feel uneasy when such ‘disturbing’ facts are presented to them. Yet, the more they try to escape from the thought of death, the more the moment of death will obsess them.¹

The “banning” of any discussion on death by some people if not societies, is quite contrary to the approach of the Qur’ān to death and dying. The Qur’ān states that: “Say: ‘The Death from which ye flee will truly overtake you: then will ye be sent back to the Knower of things secret and open: and He will tell you the things that ye did!’” (Sūratul Jumu’ah, 8). According to Al-Ṭabarī, what is meant by fleeing from death in the verse is their resenting death. This he maintains is due to their vigorous love for the joys of the world.² This article investigates the position of the Qur’ān on death, connected with inevitability. Since this paper seeks a basic comprehension of the Qur’anic position on the issue of death, it explores the Qur’ān. As such, the study is based on review of commentaries on related verses in the Qur’ān. It is a qualitative research in which a textual analysis technique is applied on classical and contemporary works. It is exegetical, as it explores verses of the Qur’ān on death related to some Muslim scholarly works. The study is also descriptive in the sense that it shows the various outlook of the Qur’ān on the reality of death and dying.

Various Angles of Death and Dying in the Qur’ān

How Death Occurs

In *Suratul An‘ām* 6:61, the Qur’ān mentions how the Angels take the souls of men without fail, “He is Irresistible, supreme over His servants and He sets guardians over you. At length, when death approaches one of you, Our angels take his soul, and they never fail in their duty”. This verse shows how death takes place. Some commentators quoted from Ibn ‘Abbas that there are some assistants for the king of death (*malik al-mawt*). They bring out the soul from the body and when it reaches the throat, the king of death will catch it.³

Death as Punishment

The Qur’ān also mentions death while talking about the punishment reaped by those who lied about receiving *wahy* (inspiration) from Allah (a false claim made to deceive people and gain cheap popularity):

Who can be more wicked than one who inventeth a lie against Allah, or saith, “I have received inspiration,” when

he hath received none, or (again) who saith, “I can reveal the like of what Allah hath revealed”? If thou couldst but see how the wicked (do fare) in the agonies of death! - the angels stretch forth their hands, (saying), “Yield up your souls: This day shall ye receive your reward, -a chastisement of disgrace, for that ye used to tell lies against Allah, and scornfully to reject of His Signs! (Sūratul An’am, 93).

The above shows that death brings the opportunity to deal with people who have been causing confusion on earth and spreading disbelief amongst the people. Death was also mentioned with fear amongst some believers when they had the option of choosing between two dangerous situations. They thought this is death staring them in the face because they only see the danger and not the far-reaching benefit in the options. The Qur’ān states, “disputing with thee concerning the truth after it was made manifest as if they were being driven to death while they see it”(Sūratul Anfal, 6).The point in the verse is that the believers at that point feared death instead of focusing on the truth that has been revealed. This truth is what will save them from not running or trying to avoid it.

There are also instances where the Qur’ān mentions death with a human being “raised” to give an account for his deeds. This means that it is not only that an individual is going to die, but another fact exists: that individuals will have to be “raised” to relate their actions in the world. Some unbelievers fail to give credibility to the concept of a human being “raised” after they have become mere bones. The Qur’ān addresses this issue by saying:

He it is Who created the heavens and the earth in six Days and His Throne was over the Waters- that He might try you, which of you is best in conduct. But if thou wert to say to them, ‘Ye shall indeed be raised up after death’, the unbelievers would be sure to say, ‘This is nothing but obvious sorcery!’(Sūratul Hud, 7).

To the non-believers, it is nothing but sorcery to say that the skeletons of men that died long ago will be raised to give accounts of what they did on earth. Moreover, the Qur’ān mentions death in respect of the hereafter; a kind of punishment for those who reject Faith, it states:

In gulps will he sip it, but never will he be near swallowing it down his throat; Death will come to him from every

quarter, yet will he not die; and in front of him will be a chastisement unrelenting (Sūratul Ibrahim, 17).

Al-Baqhawī explains that “coming death” means that one feels and perceives the trouble of death from everywhere and that this trouble hurts not only the organs of a person, but even a slight strand of hair on his body is affected. The previous verse mentions what the unbelievers will be made to drink in hell. Every time they take a sip they will wish to die, but of course, death will not come to them easily, because for them to die after taking a sip is easier and better than death coming and going now and then.⁴

The Qur’ān does not want individuals to remember death once in a while, but rather it should be a constant thing in minds. Allah says: “Until when death comes to one of them, he says: ‘O my Lord! Send me back (to life), - In order that I may work righteousness in the things I neglected. - By no means! It is but a word he says.’- Before them is a partition till the Day they are raised up (Sūratul Mu’minun, 99-100).Allah does not also leave one in doubt as to how the soul will be taken. The Qur’ān holds: “Say: ‘The Angel of Death, put in charge of you, will (duly) take your souls: Then shall ye be brought back to your Lord’” (Sūratul Sajdah, 11).The Qur’ān also points out that running away from death does not serve any purpose:

Say: running away will not profit you if ye are running away from death or slaughter; and even if (ye do escape), no more than a brief (respite) will ye be allowed to enjoy! (Sūratul Ahzab, 16).

Fakhr Al-Razi says that some things and affairs are fated and nobody can flee when they take place and that “death” in this verse is such an example.⁵In addition, in describing the death of Sulayman (Solomon), the Qur’ān mentions that it was only a worm that made the Jinns realize that Sulayman was dead. In his commentary to the verse, Ali states that one of the points illustrated by the verse is, “however great and glorious human power and grandeur may be, it is only for a time, it may fade away even before people know of its decline”.⁶

Death and Sleep

The Qur'ān makes an interesting comparison between sleep and death in this verse,

“It is Allah that takes the souls (of men) at death; and those that die not (He takes) during their sleep: Those on whom He has passed the decree of death, He keeps back (from returning to life), but the rest He sends (to their bodies) for a term appointed” (Sūratul Zumar, 42).

In that wise, Ibn Kathīr notes that there are two kinds of demise mentioned in this verse: the first is the greater demise which is death and the minor demise is when we are asleep. With this statement, the Qur'ān brings to an end the mystery surrounding sleep and death. The quotation shows the relationship as well as the differences between sleeping and death, whilst showing at the same time how easy it is for Allah to make one ‘slip’ into death during one’s sleep.⁷

In *Suratul Dukhan*, Allah is quoted as promising the righteous that they only have to die once and never have to face death again, “Nor will they there taste Death, except the first death; and He will preserve them from the Chastisement of the Blazing Fire” (Sūratul Dukhan, 56). The positive angle to this is that the natural death in this world is what would lead the righteous ones to the Garden of felicity in which there will be no more death. This shows that death should be viewed as a vehicle that helps one in attaining felicity in paradise.

The Fear of Death

This brings one to another *ayah* (verse) in the Qur'ān, where mention is made about those who left their homes fearing death. The Qur'ān says:

Didst thou not turn by vision to those who abandoned their homes, though they were thousands (in number), for fear of death? Allah said to them: “Die”: Then He restored them to life. For Allah is full of bounty to mankind, but most of them are ungrateful (Sūratul Baqarah, 243).

The commentators, who said that this was a reference to some Israelites who were called to fight but they fled because of their fear of death, are probably right.⁸ Al-Zamakhsharī further explains that the command for death in the continuation of the *ayah* shows that their deaths are out of their control, and it is a command that was performed and that it took

place without any stopping and halting.⁹ The people who left their homes to escape death were not able to save themselves when it overtook them. This *ayah* is directed at those who are always afraid of death and try all means possible to be free from death. They can never succeed but to completely surrender and be ready to defend their faith with their lives and wealth. Furthermore, the Qur’ān while mentioning the fear of death states:

Or (another similitude) is that of a rain-laden cloud from the sky: in it are zones of darkness, and thunder and lightning: They press their fingers in their ears to keep out the stunning thunder-clap, while they are in terror of death. But Allah is ever round the rejecters of Faith (Sūratul Baqarah, 19).

According to Al-Rāzī, the verse deals with the hypocrites who tend to postpone fighting due to their fear of death, then Allah indicates that their mood in this sense resembles a person who presses his fingers into his ears out of his extreme fear of death.¹⁰ Al-Istanbūlī opines that *'aw kaṣayib mina ssamā'afihi ... ḥadhara l-mawtu* in *al-Baqarah*, meaning “death of the soul” because the soul is like a fish and its life is the sea of the world and the water of desire. Should it be removed, it will die instantly. This is the implication of the phrase ‘die before you die’.¹¹

The Qur’ān does not only mention those who fear death but also those who wish for it, “Ye did indeed wish for death before ye encountered it: Now ye have seen it with your own eyes, (and ye flinch!)” (Sūratul Āl-‘Imran, 143). They flinch when the reality of death is before them and they are frightened. This shows that death is not what you wish for without having strong faith and sincerity and because strong faith and sincerity are important to have the right kind of death.

Repentance before Death

The Qur’ān also enjoins one to repent from sins before the approach of death. This approach is more acceptable to Allah than repenting for sin when faced with death as this is not sincere repentance and since death is a certainty, those who reject the message of the Prophet (upon whom be Allah’s salutations and peace) will have themselves to blame on the Day of Judgment.

Of no effect is the repentance of those who continue to do evil, until death faces one of them, and he says, “Now have I repented indeed;” Nor of those who die rejecting Faith:

for them have we prepared a chastisement most grievous (Sūratul Nisa', 18).

Al-Zamakhsharī quoted from Ibn Abbas that all repentances before death are near to death. He then explains that this is the time of agony when all the signs of death have appeared, thus, such repentance cannot be accepted.¹²

Important Duties before Death

There are certain important duties Muslims are expected to carry out in anticipation of death at any time. A verse of the Qur'ān instructs one as to what individuals' duties and responsibilities are as Muslims when a situation as serious as death draws near:

It is prescribed, when death approaches any of you, if he leaves any goods, that he makes a bequest to parents and next of kin. According to reasonable usage; This is due from the God-fearing (Sūratul Baqarah, 180).

Islam as a complete religion tells Muslims what is expected of them from birth to death. Even when it comes to the situation of death, an individual is still under obligation to do what is right, and the approach of death is no reason to forget what is expected of a Muslim. In other words, the verse is saying one should face death head-on, and do as expected.

The Premium of Faith: Willingness to Die

The Qur'ān makes mention of those who make jest of those who are willing to die for what they believe in when it says:

(They are) the ones that say, (of their brethren slain), while they themselves sit (at ease): 'If only they had listened to us, they would not have been slain.' Say: 'avert death from your own selves, if ye speak the truth' (SūratulĀl-'Imran, 168).

These people try to discourage those who are ready to lay down their lives for their faith while they cannot avoid death no matter how many times they refuse to join the battles or take precautions since they cannot live forever. The Qur'ān states further:

Every soul shall have a taste of death: And only on the Day of Judgement shall you be paid your full recompense. Only he who is saved far from the fire and admitted to the

Garden will have succeeded: For the life of this world is but goods and chattels of deception (Sūratul Āl-‘Imran, 185).

Death will be the grand leveller of all humankind and on the Day of Judgement, an individual will be rewarded according to the good or evil he did on earth. The verse above also compares the life of this world to flitting things that would soon pass away, what will then be most important and recognised in the next world are one’s good deeds, which will save one from hell fire. Showing clearly that death is the ultimate end of every human and when it happens, all sadness will disappear.¹³ The Qur’ān reminds one in the same chapter that: “Whenever ye are, death will find you out, even if ye are in towers built up strong and high!...” (Sūratul Nisā’, 78). The Qur’ān also speaks reproachfully at those who lack the spirit of self-sacrifice:

...But when a Sura of decisive meaning is revealed, and fighting is mentioned therein, thou will see those in whose hearts is a disease looking at thee with a look of one in swoon at the approach of death; but more fitting for them (Sūratul Muhammad, 20).

Al-Tabarī opines that this verse shows the fear of these people with regards to death and that this fear is a result of their hypocrisy.¹⁴ The Qur’ān ends the verse by saying that is what befits a person if they truly understand what their life goal should be.

A promise is made to those who die in the cause of Allah, when the Qur’ān says:

He who forsakes his home in the cause of Allah, finds in the earth many a refuge and abundance should he die as a refugee from home for Allah and His messenger, His reward becomes due and sure with Allah: and Allah is Oft-forgiving, Most Merciful (Sūratul Nisā’, 100).

Death and Truth

The Qur’ān links death to the truth in *Suratul Qaf* verse 19 when it states that “And the stupor of death comes in truth. ‘This was the thing which thou was trying to escape!’” In describing the truth being referred to here, Ali remarks:

What is stupor or unconsciousness to this probationary life will be the opening of the eyes to the next world: for Death

is the Gateway between the two. Once through that Gateway man will realize how the things which he neglected or looked upon as remote are the intimate Realities, and the things which seemed to loom large in his eyes in this world were shadows that have fled. The things he wanted to avoid are the things that have really come to pass. Both Good and Evil will realize the Truth now in its intensity.¹⁵

The Truth that is mentioned in the above verse is the one that will open an individual's eyes to the realities of things, and it is discerned through death (once again death has been put in a positive light). The Qur'ān declares death as a common lot of all when it states that: "We have decreed Death to be your common lot, and we are not to be frustrated." (Sūratul Waqī'ah, 60). Since Allah is the giver of life, He also decrees that death should be the end of all life.

The Qur'ān urges the Jews to ask for death if they believe they are closer and nearer to God than the rest of humankind. This "desire for death" that the Qur'ān mentions is to bring the Jews closer to their claim of nearness to God, which has made some of the Jews arrogant and transgress against divine laws with impunity. The verse further shows that for those who are close to God to die is not a problem or a thing that calls for lamentation since it brings them closer to the 'Object' of Love. The Qur'ān adds further that, since they (the Jews) would not willingly ask for death, they should know that there is no way of escaping it: "Say: "The Death from which ye flee will truly overtake you: then will ye be sent back to the Knower of things secret and open: and He will tell you the things that ye did!" (Sūratul Jumu'ah, 8). It also shows that death is what would lead to the clear visibility of all deeds and plots, which were hidden during an individual's earthly existence.

The Qur'ān uses the message of death to urge people to give alms:
"And spend something (in charity) out of the substance which we have bestowed on you, before Death should come to any of you and he should say, "O my Lord! Why didst thou not give me respite for a little while? I should then have given (largely) in charity, and I should have been one of the doers of good" (Sūratul Munafiqun, 10).

Although, Al-Zuhayli believes that the act of excessive spending when one sees the nearness of death is only for the aim of lengthening the

lifespan, another way of looking at this verse in a positive light is to think about death from the angle of motivation it can give people to accomplish good deeds. The passage is admonishing Muslims to spend in charity while they are healthy before death overtakes them. This is what the verse tries to stir in the readers.¹⁶ Hence in *Suratul Mulk* verse 2, it is stated, “He who created Death and Life, that He may try which of you is best in deeds: And He is exalted in Might, oft-Forgiving.” In commenting on this verse, Ali holds that, “...the state before our present Life, or the state after, we can scarcely understand. But our present Life is given to enable one to strive by good deeds to reach a nobler state”.¹⁷ Ibn Kathīr in his *tafsīr* states about the verse (Q67:2):

Those who say that death is an existing creation use this *Ayah* as a proof because it is something that has been created. This *Ayah* means that He brought creation into existence from nothing to test the creatures. He examines them to see which of them will be best in deeds. This is similar to Allah’s statement ‘How can you disbelieve in Allah seeing that you were dead and He gave you life’ (Q2:28). In this *Ayah*, Allah names the first stage, which is non-existence, “death”. Then He names the origin or beginning of existence, “life”. This is why Allah says, *thummayumeetukum thummayuhyeekum* (then will He cause you to die, and will again bring you to life)

Death through Fighting, Killing, and Murder

If the Qur’ān does not want Muslims to ponder over death, there would not be any reason for it to mention fighting, killing, and murder. In *Al-Baqarah2* verse 216, the Qur’ān states:

Fighting is prescribed upon you, and ye dislike it. But it is possible that ye dislike a thing which is good for you, and that ye love a thing which is bad for you. But Allah knoweth, and ye know not.

The point here is not that Islam encourages unnecessary fighting amongst its followers. In the next verse, it is stated that:

They ask thee concerning fighting in the Prohibited Month. ‘Say: Fighting therein is a grave (offence); But graver is it in the sight of Allah to prevent access to the path of Allah to deny Him, to prevent access to the Sacred Mosque, and drive out its members. Tumult and oppression are worse

than slaughter. Nor will they cease fighting you until they turn you back from your faith if they can... (Sūratul Baqarah, 217).

The Qur'ān answers why it expects Muslims to fight, but the reason fighting is mentioned is to buttress the point on death since most big fights often lead to people dying. If Allah does not want Muslims to die or think of dying, He would not instruct them to put themselves in harm's way. In the same chapter (*Al-Baqarah*), Allah is quoted as citing the story of the Children of Israel concerning fighting, saying:

“Has thou not turned thy vision to the Chiefs of the Children of Israel After (the time of) Moses they said to a Prophet (that was) among them: ‘Appoint for us a King, that we May fight in the cause of Allah’, He said; ‘is it not possible, if ye were commanded to fight, that ye will not fight?’ They said: ‘How could we refuse to fight in the cause of Allah, seeing that we were turned out of our homes and our families?’ But when they were commanded to fight, they turned back. Except a small band among them. But Allah has full knowledge of those who do wrong (Sūratul Baqarah, 246).

This is another verse showing that a Prophet of Allah supported his people to fight to liberate themselves from oppression and sufferings. Fighting and dying for a good cause are fully supported and encouraged in Islam. The support which Islam gave to it can also be seen clearly in *Suratul Nisai* verse 77, where the Qur'ān says:

Hast thou not turned thy thought to those who were told to hold back their hands (from fight) but establish regular prayers and spend in regular Zakat? When (at length) the order for fighting was issued to them, Behold! A section of them feared men as- or even more than they should have feared Allah: They said: ‘Our Lord! Why hast Thou ordered us to fight? Wouldst Thou not grant us respite to our (natural) term, near (enough)?’ Say: ‘Short is the enjoyment of this world the Hereafter is the best for those who do right: Never will ye be dealt with unjustly in the very least!’

At first, the command to fight was not given to the Muslims, apart from the fact that it was not the right time; they would also not have fought for the correct and perfect reason. In his commentary on the above verse, Ali averse:

Before the command for fighting was issued there were some who were impatient, and could scarcely be held back. They wanted fighting from human motives, -pugnacity, hatred against their enemies, the gaining of personal ends. Fighting from such motives is wrong at all times. When the testing time came, and they had to fight, not for their own hand, but for a Sacred Cause, in which there was much suffering and little personal gain, the Hypocrites held back and were afraid.¹⁸

Even though many might see fighting as violence, the good aspects manifest when it is for some noble purposes. That is why in the Qur'ān there are numerous verses on fighting that often end with the order to fight for the right causes. For example, the Qur'ān mentions the fight between David and Goliath, which ended with David killing Goliath. The verse states, “and Allah gave him power and wisdom and taught him whatever (else) He willed and did not Allah check outset of people through another, the earth would indeed be full of mischief: But Allah is full of bounty to all the worlds” (Sūratul Baqarah, 251). This shows that the command to fight placed on believers can also be seen as a way of maintaining checks and balances on earth and to stop evil and oppressive rulers from having their way.

In giving his support to those who have died in noble causes, the Qur'ān holds that, “Think not of those who are slain in Allah's way as dead. Nay, they live, finding their sustenance from their Lord” (Sūratul Āl-'Imran, 169). In addition, the promise of Allah came to these people in verse 195 of the same *surah*:

And their Lord hath accepted of them, and answered them: “Never will I suffer to be lost the work of any of you, be he male or female: Ye are members, one of another: Those who have left their homes, and were driven out there-from, and suffered harm in My Cause, and fought and were slain, - Verily, I will blot out from them their iniquities, and admit them into Gardens with rivers flowing beneath;- A reward from Allah is the best of rewards.”

The same idea of the above verse is repeated in *Suratul Hajj* verse 58, “on them will Allah bestow verily a goodly Provision”. In *Suratul Muhammad* verse 4, an interesting turn in the purpose of fighting or the expectation of fighting can be seen, when the Qur’ān states:

Therefore, when ye meet the Unbelievers (in fight), smite at their necks; at length, when ye have thoroughly subdued them, bind (the captives) firmly: therefore (is the time for) either generosity or ransom: Until the war lays down its burdens. Thus (are ye commanded): but if it had been Allah’s Will, He could certainly have exacted retribution from them (Himself); but (He lets you fight) in order to test you, some with others. But those who are slain in the way of Allah, - He will never let their deeds be lost.

The interesting point here is that fighting was also used according to the verse as a test for Muslims. In his comment to this verse, Ali explains that:

The Believers are tested in Faith by the extent to which they are willing to make sacrifices, even to the laying down of their lives; and the enemies are tested as to whether they would repent and let the righteous live in freedom and security.¹⁹

Death Other than Physical Death

Among the verses in the Qur’ān that speaks about the notion of death, that does not imply physical death but attaining a higher spiritual growth or life are *Surah Al-Baqarah* verse 54 and *Surah Al-Anām* verse 122. About the former the Qur’ān states:

And remember Moses said to his people: ‘O my people! Ye have indeed wronged yourselves by your worship of the calf: So turn (in repentance) to your Maker, and slay yourselves (the wrong-doers); that will be better for you in the sight of your Maker.’ Then He turned towards you (in forgiveness): For He is Oft-Returning, Most Merciful.

Even though this verse speaks of *fāqtulūānfasakum* which is often translated to mean, “you all kill yourselves”, there are commentators who have opined that it is not that they should all kill themselves, rather it is the innocent that are instructed to kill the wrong-doers. For instance, Al-Rāzī in his *tafsir* states that the commentators are unanimous that the Israelites were not told that every person was to kill himself. He elucidates

further that if it is like that there are two hypotheses: first is that, everybody must kill another; second is that those who had repented for their action were ordered to kill those who had not, and he prefers the second hypothesis.²⁰ However, some interpreters such as Al-Baqli have said that this killing is not the killing of the body. Al-Baqli points out that this killing is the killing of lusts and pleasure. He also quotes that the killing here hints at destroying everything inside of you which does not allow you to get close to Allah.²¹ Al-Asfahānī believes that where Allah says in *Al-Baqarah* “*fāqtulūānfasakum*”: some scholars hold the opinion that killing here means that they should kill one another. Others interpret it to mean that they should rid their souls of inordinate desires. In this respect, killing is used figuratively. When alcohol is mixed with water, it is said to be killed. Where Allah tells Isa (upon whom be peace) in ‘Al-Imran’ “*inīmutawafīk*” that He would take his soul, this means I shall rid you of your desires and the inclinations of the soul.²² Al-Naysabūrī also observes that when Allah asked the people of Israel to slaughter the cow, that the sacrifice connoted the slaughtering of the animalistic soul. This will bring the spiritual heart to life and is regarded as the highest level of jihad, die before you die.²³

Another verse that is of importance to this research is:

Can he who was dead, to whom We gave life, and a light whereby He can walk amongst men, be like him who is in the depths of darkness, from which he can never come out? Thus to those without Faith their own deeds seem pleasing (Sūratul An’am, 122).

Looking at the various commentators’ observations on this verse, one concludes that many did not view the word *maytan* (dead) as physical death. For instance, al-Baqhawī holds that the word “dead” here refers to somebody who is astray and *’ahayaynāhu* (We gave him life) refers to, “We lead him to the right way”.²⁴ Ali opines that the verse is an allegory of a good man and an evil man; both examples are being alluded to in the verse. The good man, “before he got his spiritual life, was like one dead”, then, Allah through His grace gave him spiritual life.²⁵ The main aim of exploring these Qur’ānic verses on death is to show not only the positive outlook of the Qur’ān on the idea of dying but to also show that not all killing of self or death means physical death.²⁶

Conclusion

This paper set out to examine fear of death in relation to Qur'ānic perspectives on death. This led one to the various reflections of commentators on relevant Qur'ānic verses. It became clear that death is viewed positively in the Qur'ān. All the verses quoted on death do not describe death or the act of dying as a thing to lament about but as a thing that one should embrace to reach a loftier goal. Of course even if one does not wish for any higher goal, death remains inevitable anyway, and so it should be faced courageously. Otherwise, the Qur'ān sees death not only in a positive way, but also describes it in a compelling detailed manner, and uses the idea of dying to teach Muslims ethical and moral discipline.

The Qur'ān relates the issue of death to topics such as cowardice, courage, soul, earth, material world, self-sacrifice, truth, human inordinate desires, angels, reality, regret, good deeds, Allah's Might and Power, hearts (disbelievers), anger or rage, strong passion, enthusiasm, and 'life' itself. For the Qur'ān, the subject of death should be like any other, to be discussed and mentioned in conversations. In summary, the notion of death in the Qur'ān is a strong base for understanding spirituality in Islam.

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- 11 I. H. M. Al-Istanbūlī, *TafsirRūḥ al-Bayān*. Vol. 1. (Beirut: Iḥyā‘ al-Turāth al-‘Arabī, n.d.), 73.
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- 13 Al-Rāzī
- 14 M. J. Al-Tabarī
- 15 A. Y. Ali, 1601.
- 16 W. M. Al-Zuhaylī, *Al-Tafsīr al-Munīr*, Vols. 1, 28 & 30 (Dimashq: Dār al-Fikr al-Mu‘āṣir, 1988).
- 17 A. Y. Ali, 1781.
- 18 A. Y. Ali, 235.
- 19 A. Y. Ali, 1560.
- 20 Al-Rāzī
- 21 A. R. Al-Baqli, *‘Arāis al-bayān fī haqāliq al-Qur’an*, Vol. 1 (Beirut: Dar al-Kutub Al-Ilmiyah, 2008).
- 22 A. Al-Asfahānī, *Al-Mufradāt fī Gharīb al-Qur’ān*. Vol. 1 (S. A. Muhammad, ed.). (Beirut: Dār al-Ma‘rifah, n.d).
- 23 M. Al-Naysabūrī, *Garā’ib al-Qur’anwaRagāi‘b al-furqān(Tafsir al-Naysabūrī)*. Vol. 1. (Beirut: Dār al-kutub al-‘Ilmiyyah, 1996).
- 24 H. M. Al-Baqhawī, 184.
- 25 A. Y. Ali, 378.
- 26 Al-Rāgib al-Asfahānī in his *Al-Mufradāt fī gharib al-Qur’ān* explained death in five different ways citing verses from the Qur’ān. The first type of death he said is the taking out of power of development in human kind, animal and plant, for the Qur’ān says *yuhyīl-‘ard ba’ada mawtiha* meaning, ‘giveth life to the earth after its death’, *wa ‘ahayaynā bihi baladatun mayitān* meaning ‘and we give (new) life therewith to land that is dead’. The second type of death is the taking out of perceptive ability or power, the Qur’ān says *yā laytanī mata qabul hadhā* meaning ‘Ah! would that I had died before this!’ and *‘a-idhā māmittu lasaufa ukhrajū ḥayān* meaning ‘when I am dead, shall I then be raised up alive?’. The third type is the removal of intellectual ability or power, the Qur’ān says, *‘awa man kāna maytān fa’ahayaynāhu* meaning ‘Can he who was dead, to whom we gave life’, *‘inaka lātasma‘u l-mawtā* meaning ‘Truly thou canst not cause the dead to listen’. The fourth type is sadness i.e., the type of sadness that does not make one to feel alive *wa mā huwa waya’atayhi l-mawt man kuli makān bimayit* meaning ‘Death will

come to him from every quarter, yet will he not die'. The fifth type is that of sleep, this is why some scholars have described sleep as the "small death". The Qur'ān says *wa huwa ladhī yatawafākum bilayl* meaning 'It is He Who doth take your souls by night', *Allahu yatawafa l-anfus hayna mawtahā walatīy lam tamut fī manāmuhā* meaning 'It is Allah that takes the souls (of men) at death; and those that die not (He takes) during their sleep (p. 477). What can be immediately deduced from the opinion of al-Asfahānī is that the word death is not only used in the Qur'ān to mean physical death but that it refers to other concepts as well.

