



JOURNEY TO THE UNSEEN WORLD

FUNDAMENTALS OF ISLAM

LEVEL 3

LESSON 1: THE SOUL

Objectives >>>

Students should:

- Understand the fact that there are things in the world which we know exist but which we cannot see
- Discuss the fact that we know about these things through our 'soul' 'or heart', and that just like we can feel physical pain and pleasure we also feel spiritual pain and pleasure
- Understand the fact that just as our body has foods which benefit it and foods which harm it, our soul has the same
- Discuss the idea that we are born with a pure soul which inclines towards pure goodness, but that our sins slowly corrupt it
- Know examples of things which are harmful to the soul and things which are beneficial to the soul
- Discuss that if we always follow our desires and do what we wish then we will be embarrassed and humiliated
- Know that the human being is really the soul and moves from this world to the next through death
- Know that death is a natural process in all living things and life is only a loan from God
- Know that death is the beginning of the journey to the Hereafter, and that this needs continuous preparation
- Understand that the type of death depends on belief and actions in this world
- Know that there is questioning, punishment and reward in the grave
- Know what the provisions for the Hereafter are, and effects of the remembrance of death in this life
- Understand that death is real and that what knowledge we have of Barzakh, death and resurrection can only come from divine revelation
- Know that Barzakh begins upon death and that the Sakratul Mawt, the pressure of the grave and the questioning in the grave is part of Barzakh as well
- Understand that Barzakh is the journey one takes till they are brought to life on the day of resurrection
- Understand that Barzakh has some properties of the world and some of the hereafter
- Understand that the Reality of our actions in this world will be manifested in Barzakh
- Understand that if we wish to obtain the benefits of Barzakh and avoid the hardships, we have to supervise ourselves and protect our actions till the day of judgement. The best way to ensure this is to be conscious that Allah is always watching.

Over the next few lessons, we will be discussing the last of the fundamentals of our religion, which is the Resurrection. Our belief in the resurrection can be summarized like this: after we die, our body is destroyed in the grave, but our soul lives on in another world called Barzakh. After the world of Barzakh, we are brought back to life, our body and soul are reunited and we experience the Day of Judgement and then enter either Hell or Paradise. The first thing that we need to discuss in this topic is the soul.

There are different words used for the soul in the Arabic language. The most important ones that you need to know are:

- *Al-Rūḥ*: this refers to the soul by itself, when it is separate from the body
- *Al-Nafs*: this refers to the soul, when it is still with the body

THE WORLD BEYOND THE SENSES

Before we begin to discuss the soul, we need to have a short discussion about the world in which we live. Most of us think mostly about the things we can see, hear, smell or feel in this world- things we can experience with our senses. However, there are also many things in this world that we do not experience with our senses, such as emotions. We know for example that we feel love, anger or fear, but we can't see or touch these things, we can't say 'they are here' or 'they are there' or 'they are this big' or 'that small'.

We call the things that we can see, hear, smell, touch or taste material things. These things have shape, colour and size.

We call things that we cannot perceive with our five senses but which we can experience or think about *immaterial* things. These have no shape or size or colour.

Let's listen to the following story:

One day, a teacher was teaching his class and said:

Teacher: can you see my arm? Yes? That means it exists.

Can you see my nose? Yes? That means it exists.

Can you see God? No? That means He does not exist

One of the students raised his hands and asked if he could add something. The teacher allowed him.

Student: Can you see the teacher's ears? Yes? That means they exist

Can you see the teacher's hair? Yes? That means it exists.

Can you see the teacher's intelligence No? That means he has no intelligence!

The class laughed at this, but the student was trying to make the point that there are many things that exist, like our 'mind' which we think with, or our 'heart' which we feel emotions with, that we cannot see. Just because we cannot see or touch something, it does not mean that it does not exist.

THE SOUL

Now that we know there are things in this world which exist but which we cannot see, let us talk about the soul. The soul is what makes you 'you'. Think about the following situation. You have a friend called Zayd. As Zayd grows up, he loses all the cells in his body and gets new ones. In fact, Zayd changes so much in appearance that if you had not seen him for a few years and then ran into him on the street, you might not even recognise him. Now all the cells in his body are different to the old ones and he looks totally different. Is he still Zayd? Yes.

So if it is not his body parts or the cells of his body that make Zayd 'Zayd' what is it that makes him 'Zayd'? What makes a person who they are is their soul. The soul is something that we can't see or experience with our five senses, but it is something that we all know is there within us. We know that a person remains the same no matter what happens to their body because *something*

about them stays the same. That something is the soul which is the 'spirit of life' that they have.ⁱ

THE PURE SOUL

Every human being is born with a pure soul. Allah (SWT) teaches the soul of every person what is good for it and what is harmful to it. This is why we know without being told that certain things, like being fair to people are good and certain things like being unfair to people are evil.

However, when our soul is attached to our body, it has two different paths that it can take. On the one hand, the soul encourages a person to sin and follow their desires. If a person does this, they will end up worse off than an animal. On the other hand the soul has good instincts, which encourage a person to do good and to make themselves as perfect a person as possible. This can make a person better than an angel.

The purpose of our life is to struggle against our instincts to do evil things, and to follow our instincts that tell us to do good things. Look at the following situation:

A poor woman with young children has two neighbours, one to her left and one to her right. Both of her neighbours know that tonight this poor woman has no food for her children. The neighbour on the left thinks about giving her food for the night to her neighbour. A battle starts between her good instincts and her evil ones. The good instincts tell her to stay hungry herself so that her neighbour's young children who need the food more can eat, but her evil instincts tell her that she should look after herself before anyone else. She eats the food herself and sleeps that night with a full stomach, but there is a voice that tells her she did something that was not quite right. The neighbour on the right has the same battle between her good and evil instincts. She makes a different decision though. She brings her food for her neighbour's children to eat. She sleeps hungry that night, but she knows that she did something good and that makes her feel good and happy inside.

In every situation in life, we have a choice to follow the good or evil instincts or our self. This is like a battle that we have to fight all of the time to make sure that we do not go down the wrong path and end up worse than animals. Let's spend the rest of the lesson looking at some tactics and strategies to win this very important battle.

THE PAIN AND PLEASURE OF THE SOUL

There are certain things that hurt our soul and cause it to lean more towards evil things. These things are the sins which Allah (SWT) has forbidden us to do. There are other things that give pleasure to our soul and which cause it to lean towards good things. These things are the obligations and recommendations which Allah (SWT) has ordered us to perform. Let us look at how sins affect our soul:

- *Imam al-Sadiq (as) says: "There is no man who does not have a white spot in his heart. When he commits a sin a black spot emerges from this spot. If he repents, the blackness goes away but if he sinks in sin and continues to sin the blackness keeps on increasing till it surrounds the whiteness of the heart completely. When the white spot is totally covered by the blackness, the owner of this heart will never revert towards goodness."*ⁱⁱ
- Being disrespectful to one's parents makes the soul so impure that Allah (SWT) does not speak to that person on the Judgement Day and does not allow him to even smell paradiseⁱⁱⁱ
- Listening to or playing haram types of music makes a person's soul rot just as moisture causes mould to grow on things. It makes a person lose their dignity and positive shyness^{iv}
- Lying causes a person to 'lose the taste of faith' in Allah (SWT) and the religion of Islam^v

So just like we worry about which food tastes good, and which food is good for us and which is bad, we should also worry about what is good for our soul and what is bad for our soul. Imam Hasan (as) says he is surprised by a person who worries about his physical food for his body, but does not worry about the immaterial food for his soul. ^{vi} Just think and reflect on how these things affect you after you have done them, how do you feel after you lie, after you listen to haram music or after you disrespect your parents?

THE DANGER OF DESIRES

Our desires lead us to do things which are harmful to our soul if we do not control them by following Allah's laws. We need to control and tame our desires before they go out of control and overcome us. The problem with following our desires is that they never end. One desire leads to the next and we never feel like we have enough. Imam Musa al-Kāḍim (as) says:

"This world is like the water of the sea. No matter how much a thirsty person drinks from it, it only makes him thirstier until it kills him."^{vii}

We often think that if we achieve some of the goals we have in this world like being rich or being popular or being comfortable or being famous, then we will be happy. Unfortunately, a lot of people reach these goals but feel miserable because they find they just want more and more, and no matter how much they get they can't seem to be happy. Look at how many actors and pop singers commit suicide, go into depression or lose their families and destroy their lives.

Also, the more evil things we do, the more we get used to them and the more difficult it becomes to change. After a while, we lose the sense of what is good and what is evil, and it becomes normal to do evil things. Therefore, we must be very careful to avoid evil things in the first place.

TRAINING THE SOUL

We need to make sure that we are always battling against our evil desires, and training our soul by keeping it away from bad things like lying, haram music and disrespect of parents. In our next few lessons, we will discuss some of the best ways to train our soul for this major battle.

Review Questions

Q1. Immaterial things are those that:

- a. We cannot touch, hear or see but that exist
- b. Things that do not exist
- c. Things that we can see, touch and hear

Q2. Which of the following is true?

- a. We are all born with a pure heart or soul, but we taint it by sinning
- b. We are all born sinful, but we have to train ourselves to be good
- c. We are born neither pure nor sinful, but somewhere in between

Q3. If a person follows their desires:

- a. They will always have fun
- b. They will be destroyed by following their never-ending desires
- c. They will live happy in this world but suffer in the next

LESSON 2: DEATH

Death is a normal fact of life and is a natural process in all living things. In the previous lessons we learnt that the human body also has a soul, which is really who we are. Our body is only like a tool to help us perform actions and achieve goals. Once Allah, the Almighty decides, our soul enters another world. Just like we entered this world through birth, we enter another world through what is called death.

In this lesson, we will learn more details about the process of death and how we have to prepare for it, so when we enter that other world, we will be ready.

DEATH

This is the time when the soul comes out of the body. For example, when the driver is in the car, it moves, but when the driver comes out of the car, the car stops. Death is the same for the body. When the soul comes out of the body, the body stops working, and the soul is the one that is alive and it is the source of life and movement for the body.

Another way to explain it is this: suppose there is a room having many holes of different shapes in the wall. If a lamp is placed in it, its light will go out through those holes. But as soon as that lamp is moved out of that room it will make the room dark. Similarly, so long as the soul remains in the body it shows life and movement through the organs like eyes and ears etc. But as soon as this lamp of soul is removed from the body, all its parts also stop and the body becomes dark^{viii}.

LIFE: A GIFT FROM GOD

All of us know that we did not come into this world by ourselves. The source of our life and the giver of this life is God. Similarly, it is God that can and does take life and allows us to enter the world of the Hereafter.

All living things that have been created will at one point die. Death is seen in plants, animals, insects, birds and all other living things. One of the basic rules of the creation of physical things is that whatever comes into being will also have to die. The created do not live forever.

When God takes our soul from our body, He does not take our life because our life is in the soul which moves

from one world to another. It is only our body that stops working because we no longer need it for our work in the other world. Everyone is happy when they hear of the birth of a new baby, similarly those who have gone to the next world are happy of our arrival there, but we are sad because we leave the people in this world behind.

THE JOURNEY OF LIFE

God, The Almighty created us out of His mercy for a purpose. In order for us to achieve this goal, we have to perform certain actions.

Our life in this world is like a school, where God tells us what to do for us to be successful in this world and the future, where we will live forever – in the Hereafter. If we don't follow His rules, we will always remain miserable and live in difficulty in both worlds. So for us to live a happy life, we must prepare for this journey, follow the rules of God and learn our lessons so we can pass the exams and use our provisions to continue on our journey. Also, because this journey has already started, and we don't know when we will die, we have to always prepare and collect what will be useful for us in the next world.

TYPES OF DEATH

Human beings generally will face either of two deaths –

1. A painful and difficult one or
2. An easy and pleasant one.

The type of death we will face depends on our actions and beliefs in this world. If we were good people, who did good things and repented when we did wrong and if our beliefs were truthful, then by the grace of Allah, we will face an easy and pleasant death. It is important to note that the ease or pain involved in death cannot be seen physically. For example a martyr may seem to have a painful death when in fact he may only experience pleasantness.

But those people who are proud, who did not believe in Allah, the Exalted, in the Prophets, Imams and day of Judgement because they didn't want to obey, and those who do bad deeds deliberately and did not admit their mistakes– these people generally face a difficult and painful death as part of the punishment for their behaviour and beliefs in this world.

Here is a description from Imam 'Ali (as) about the death of a person who did not care about the Hereafter:

“What is happening to them cannot be described. The pains of death and grief for losing (this world) overtake them. Their limbs become paralysed and their complexion changes. Then death increases its grip over them.

In some, it stands in between him and his power of speaking although he lies among his people, looking with eyes, hearing with his ears, with full wits and intelligence!

He then thinks over how he wasted his life and in what (activities) he passed his time. He recalls the wealth he collected and how he had blinded himself in getting it, and how he got it through legal and illegal means. Now the consequences of collecting it have overtaken him. He gets ready to leave it. It would remain for those who are behind him. They would enjoy it and benefit by it...Death would go on affecting his body till his ears too would behave like his tongue (and lose function). So he would lie among his people, neither speaking with his tongue or hearing with his ears...”

HOW TO PREPARE FOR DEATH

The Holy Prophet and the Imams (as) were sent to us as guides to teach us what to do and what not to do in this world, for the sake of our happiness both here and in the Hereafter.

According to an old story, a man made an unusual agreement with the angel of death. He told the angel that he would be willing to accompany him (as though he had a choice) only if the angel would send him a notice well in advance. The agreement was made. Weeks became months and months became years. One bitterly cold night, as the man sat alone thinking of his success in life, the angel tapped on his shoulder.

"You are here too soon" the man cried out. "You sent no messenger. I thought we had an agreement!" The angel whispered "Notice your hair, once it was full and black, now it has streaks of silver in it! Observe your face in the mirror and see the wrinkles. Yes! I have sent many messages through the years! I have kept my promise. I am sorry that you are not ready for me but the order of Almighty Allah (SWT) cannot be changed!"

The way to prepare is to constantly remember that you will one day die, and that day could be anytime. Death does not know the difference between young and old, it comes to anyone. So by remembering it often, we can

always prepare for it and judge our actions and thoughts according to that.

We can prepare for death by starting to practise good habits and actions at a very young age or immediately. This early preparation makes good actions as our habit and therefore it prevents us from being deceived by Satan. Many people have grown old and regretted that they should have done this or that good deed when they were younger – but it doesn't help – it only makes them sadder.

One of the best ways is to be good to our parents, kind to our teachers and respect our elders. It is these simple things that will take us far and give us much success in both worlds.

By constantly remembering death, we are able to focus on our end and make sure that we don't get distracted with things that take us away from our goals and objectives which are to serve Allah, The Exalted. Remembering death also helps us overcome unlawful temporary desires that cause us loss in this world and the next.

Review Questions

Q1. Death is:

- The end of our life
- When our soul leaves our body and moves to the next world
- When our soul dies

Q2. The best way to prepare for death is to:

- Organise funeral insurance and life insurance
- Repent and start performing good actions
- Neither of the above

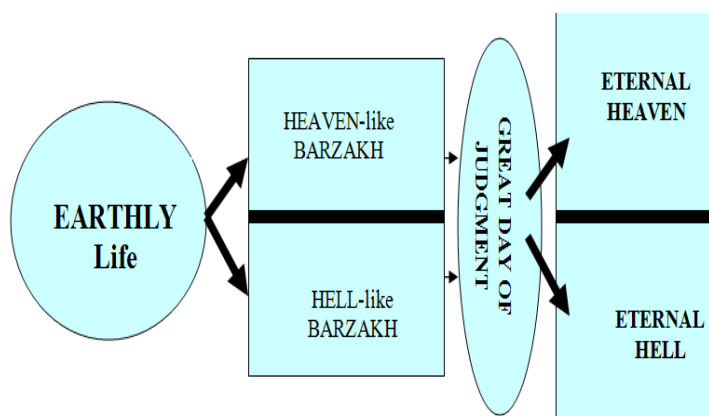
LESSON 3: BARZAKH

Practical: students should begin to keep an action diary, where they record all their good deeds in one column, and all their lesser good deeds in other columns...the teachers can suggest different formats for the diary or table and students should keep this as a completely confidential record for their own self-supervision

INTRODUCTION

In our last lesson, we discussed the last stages of our life in this world and learnt that death is the separation of our soul from our body. Once we die, our body is placed into a grave in the ground and decomposes. However, our soul remains alive and continues its journey without the body. After separating from the body and leaving this world, the soul enters the world of Barzakh, a world which is a barrier between this world and the Hereafter. The souls of human beings remain in this world until the Resurrection Day (yawmul qiyāmah) when everyone will be brought to life again and have their soul joined to the same body they had in this world.

In this lesson, we will discuss the world of Barzakh. Of course no one has visited the world of Barzakh and come back, so the only information we have about this world comes from the Holy Qur'ān and the narrations from the Holy Prophet and the Imams. We will see what life in the world of Barzakh is like and how our actions in this world will affect our life in that world.



THE WORLD OF BARZAKH

After we die, our souls enter the world of Barzakh and remain there until the Day of Judgement. In the world of Barzakh, our souls are attached to bodies similar to the bodies we have in this world, but which are not quite the same. Just like we need a physical body for our soul to

exist in this world, we need a body compatible with the world of Barzakh for our soul to exist in that world. Even though the body is different, it is somehow similar and people will still be able to recognise each other in the world of Barzakh.^{ix}

In the world of Barzakh, we begin to see the results of our actions. The believers who performed good deeds have graves that are very similar to Paradise, while the disbelievers and those who did evil deeds have graves that are very similar to Hell. Imam al-Sajjād (as) was asked about Barzakh, and he said

“The Barzakh is the grave. By Allah the grave is either one of the Gardens of Paradise or one of the pits of Hell.”^x

“(In the world of Barzakh) the souls of the believers are in chambers in Paradise eating and drinking from its foods and drinks. They visit each other saying: Our Lord! Start the Hour (the Day of Judgement) for us to fulfil what you promised us (Paradise). The souls of the disbelievers are exposed to the Hell-Fire, saying: Our Lord! Do not start the Hour for us and do not fulfil your promise to us.”^{xi}

THE QUESTIONING IN THE GRAVE

One of the first things that we experience in the world of Barzakh is a tough interrogation. Two angels, named Munkar and Nakīr visit the person who has just died and begin to ask him some questions. In this new world, this person cannot lie or get around the questions; he or she always tells the truth to these angels because in this world it is the heart that speaks. Our Imams (as) have told us that this is one of the toughest stages of life after death^{xii}.

The two angels ask the following questions:

- Who is your Lord?
- Who is your prophet?
- What is your religion?
- Who is your Imam?

ACTIONS COME TO THE RESCUE

The interrogation by Munkar and Nakīr is very frightening. However, good deeds that we have performed during our life can come to our rescue and help make this stage easier.

Imam al-Ṣādiq (as) says: “When a believer enters the grave, his prayer will be on his right side and his charity will be on his left side, while goodness stands over him. His patience will be standing to one side. When the two angels come to interrogate the person, patience says to prayer and charity: stay at your friend’s side, but if you are not able to help him then I will come and stand at his side (to help him)”.^{xiii}

THE PRESSURE OF THE GRAVE

In the world of Barzakh, there is a particular type of punishment that almost all people experience. It is called ‘the pressure of the grave’. Certain actions cause this type of punishment. The main ones are:

- Bad conduct with one’s family at home
- Being careless about Najasah^{xiv}

There is a famous story from the time of the Prophet (saw) that tells us a little about the pressure of the grave. It is the story of Sa’ad ibn Mu’ādh. Sa’ad was one of the leaders of the Muslims and one of the closest people to the prophet (saw). Unfortunately, Sa’ad was wounded severely by an arrow during the Battle of *Aḥzāb* and passed away soon afterwards. During his funeral procession, the Prophet (saw) would carry different corners of his coffin, moving from one corner to the next, as a mark of great respect for him. The Prophet (saw) even said there were many angels who had come to join the procession of Sa’ad. When they reached the graveyard, the Prophet (saw) himself entered the grave and prepared it for Sa’ad. When Sa’ad’s mother saw all this, she was very happy and congratulated her son. However, the Prophet (saw) said that it was too soon to speak, because Sa’ad would likely suffer the pressure of the grave. When asked why this would happen even though the Prophet had so much respect for him and he was such a great man, the Prophet (saw) responded: ‘He was ill-mannered with his family’.^{xv}

We can see from this story that the pressure of the grave is often a way for Allah (SWT) to purify people from some of their sins before the Hereafter. Even though Sa’ad was a great person, he would still be

tortured in the grave because of his ill manners towards his family, and this would hopefully purify him and save him from punishment on Judgement Day.

SUPERVISING OUR ACTIONS

As we can see from the lesson so far, we will reap the rewards of our actions in the world of Barzakh, even before we reach the Day of Judgement. This is another reminder for us about how important it is to be very careful about the actions that we perform in this world. Allah (SWT) watches over us all of the time, and has complete knowledge of all of our actions. After we die, we will see the consequences of all our actions and we will be questioned about them.

The Prophet (saw) and the Imams have advised us to keep a very close eye on our actions in this world, so that we are not surprised at our book of actions in the Hereafter and so that we are conscious of our actions so we can do more good and avoid evil actions. At the end of every day, we need to look back at our day and assess our actions: what good did we do, what bad did we do, and how can we improve?

One good way of doing this is to make a private actions diary. This is a diary that you can use to record your actions for the day. Before you go to bed each night, open this diary in private and draw up a table for your actions that day. Write the good actions in the good column, the sins or mistakes in the bad column, and also have a column on how you can improve your actions in the coming days. Here, we have provided a sample table. You can use this one or you can make your own table, but make sure that at the end of every day, you are assessing yourself and all of your actions.

Review Questions:

Q1. Which of the following is a major reason for feeling the pressure of the grave?

- a. Not caring about Najāsah
- b. Being rude to one’s family
- c. Both of the above

Q2. Barzakh is:

- a. The Day of Judgement
- b. A world between this world and the Day of Judgement
- c. The world we lived in before we entered this world

Homework

| | My good Deeds | My Bad Deeds | How I can improve tomorrow |
|-----------|---------------|--------------|----------------------------|
| Saturday | | | |
| Sunday | | | |
| Monday | | | |
| Tuesday | | | |
| Wednesday | | | |
| Thursday | | | |
| Friday | | | |

ⁱ Journey to the Unseen World, lecture 2

ⁱⁱ Greater Sins, Ayatollah Dastaghaib, chapter 2

ⁱⁱⁱ Ibid, chapter 8

^{iv} Ibid, chapter 17

^v Ibid, chapter 19

^{vi} Safinat-ul-Bihar, vol. 2, p. 84

^{vii} Bihar-ul-Anwar, vol. 78, p. 311

^{viii} **Ayatollah Dastaghiab Shirazi**, The Hereafter – Ma’ād, Chapter 1

^{ix} eHAWZA, Islamic Theology, lecture 12

^x al-Borhan 5:355

^{xi} Behar 6:234, al-Kaafi 3:245

^{xii} Mostadrak, 2:113

^{xiii} Al-Kafi, 3:240

^{xiv} Journey to the Unseen World, lecture 15

^{xv} Ibid.