

WOMEN, ISLAM AND CURRENT
ISSUES IN DEVELOPMENT



Essays

In Honour of
Dr. Lateefah Durosinmi

Edited By:

Wole Abbas

Jade Mohammed

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IN DEVELOPMENT
(Essays in Honour of Dr. Lateefah Durosinmi)

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'Wole Abbas
Jade' Mohammed

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ISBN 978-136-186-7

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Cover Design

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Published by: *University Press Limited*

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Cover Design by:

Jade' Mohammed and Mistura Sanni.

Published & Printed by Obafemi Awolowo University Press Limited
Ile-Ife, Nigeria.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

All praises and adoration is due to the Almighty Allah (S.W.T) without whose permission the thought of this project would not have surfaced or blinked not to mention its realization! It has however pleased Almighty Allah to make use of various persons and institutions to bring this work to fruition. To this end, we register our gratitude as follows: To Federation of Muslim Women's Associations in Nigeria (FOMWAN) and Muslim League for Accountability (MULAC) for granting the permission to use some of their past commissioned papers; To all contributors without whom there will be no work to edit; To the planning Committee for undertaking the task of kickstarting the book project. They are Alhaja Rafiat Sanni; Alhaja Lateefat Giwa, Sis. Mistura Sanni, Sis. Mistura Sanusi; Sis. Surura Bello and SiS. Jade' Mohammed and all those who took keen interest in the project.

We re particularly grateful to all our editorial consultants and our mother in Islam, Hajia Aisha Lemu for agreeing to write the foreword.

To all we say *Jazakumllahu Khayran*.

Special thanks to the publishers for their interest in the book project.

RESURRECTION AND JUDGEMENT IN ISLAM

By

L.O. ABBAS*

1. INTRODUCTION

The day of resurrection, which is in Arabic Language, generally known as *Yawmul-Qiyamah*, calls to query as to resurrection of what? And, moreso "the day". Alluding to what the Islamic conception of the day of resurrection is; the Qur'an states: "I swear by the Day of resurrection. And I swear by the self-reproaching person. Does man think (that) We shall not gather his bone? Yeah, We are powerful to make complete his whole make (75:1-4). The verses assure man that not only his bones are to be resurrected, but also the very tips of his fingers. The Qur'an in another verse also shows clearly that there will be judgement on that day. "So Allah will judge between them on the day of resurrection in that wherein they differ". (2:113)

There are many names with which the Qur'an refers to the day of resurrection which give clear indication of its import and significance. The most prominent among these names is *al-Akhirah*, which signifies that which comes after or in future'. "And seek with the (wealth) which God has bestowed on thee, the home of the hereafter" (28:77). Maududi, in his book: 'Towards understanding of Islam' interprets resurrection day differently. While elaborating on the articles of faith, he says:

The life of this world and of all that is in it will come to an end on an appointed day. Everything will be annihilated. The day is called *Qiyamah* i.e. the last day. That all human beings who had lived in the world since its inception will then be restored² to life and will be presented before God Who will sit in 'court' on the day. This is called *Hashr* resurrection.

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There is, however, according to this extract, a demonstration between the actual day when everything will be annihilated and the subsequent resurrection for re-coming. On their own, the Sufis use the term from spiritual perspective for the state of a man, who having counted himself dead to the world, 'stand up' in a new life in God³. Belief in man's resurrection after his death is one of the basic articles of faith in Islam. Qur'an even makes it the second article of faith. "It is not righteousness that you turn your faces towards East or West, but it is righteousness to believe in God and the last day (2:177).

2. ESSENCE AND PURPOSE OF RESURRECTION

The purpose of resurrection of man cannot be successfully examined in isolation leaving the essence of his existence in life in the first instance. Man, according to the Qur'an, is created mainly for the worship of Allah, his creator (51:56). His sustenance or economic activities therefore become secondary and surely remain a means of keeping his soul and body together to serve God better. His relationship with God and with other human beings and even with animals are considered worship for which he has to account later.

All activities of man while in life are recorded for or against him by the agents of the Divine. The results of such actions shall only be made manifest in another life. That is the basis for the emphasis the Qur'an lays on belief in resurrection as stated above. Different views are held by people of different religious groups, about the day of resurrection. A school of thought claims that there is nothing left of man after his death, and that there is no other life after this one. Another school upholds belief in life after death, but in a different angle. Man, according to this school, is here for a while, first like a buyer in the market who must go home (hereafter) to continue to play his role. This is a Yoruba traditional belief in life after death. A king, according to this belief, will continue in the hereafter as king and pauper will after death, continue as pauper. That was why when one died, some of his precious properties, money, slaves, gold etc. were buried along with him hoping that the property would be of use to him in the hereafter.⁴

Another view calls for belief in the day of judgement, the resurrection, man's presence in the Divine court and the administration of reward and punishment. This is a common belief of all prophets⁵ of God. Examining the first view point, one has the impression that, the proponent of such stand, base their argument on a simple reason that

no one has gone to heaven and returned to inform us. Life after death, they contend, is a mere speculation. The only person who can be definite and dogmatic about life after death, is one who had crossed the barrier and come back. Just like an astronaut who successfully rocketed to the moon. Anything short of his empirical approach is at best considered a mere romanticism and speculations. Such a stand is not convincing. The fact that no man has gone and come physically to tell the story is not enough a reason to deny the existence of life after death.

On the second view point, the Yoruba holds different opinions on the belief in life after death. It is believed that after death, individuals returning to heaven give the accounts of their deed on earth to the gatekeeper. The gate keeper looks into records to either authenticate or falsify the claim of the returnee to heaven. This is why one is admonished to be good as to be free from questions at the gate of heaven. A verse in Ifa poem runs thus:

E ma sika laye o
nitori a nrurun
T'abade bode ao rojo⁶

Meaning:

Desist from wicked deeds
because you will go to heaven
At the gate, you will give account
of your stewardship.

This belief runs counter to the one that allows status *quo ante* in the heaven. The fact that there is a gatekeeper at the post between the earth and the heaven, to whom the account will be rendered, shows that if a king was atrocious on earth, he would have to account for his atrocities. The result of that account would then determine his status. Or else, how do we explain the role of the "Onibode" (gatemanager)?

The third school of thought which is Islamic point of view seems to convince one about the purpose of life after death. The creation of man was done with a purpose. According to the Qur'an; "I do not create the *jinn* and man except that they should worship Me" (51:56). This is surely the obligation expected of him to do. Man is also told of his origin and essence. "He it is who created you from clay and decreed a stated term. And there is in His presence another determined term" (6:2). Here, another determined term is definitely the

life after death. From the point of view of history, it is clear that man is created for an appointed term.

Denial of belief in resurrection, according to Islam, makes all other beliefs, meaningless.⁷ A man who believes in the next world and has a firm conviction of the final consequence of his acts, would look upon worldly gains and losses as temporary, ephemeral and transitory.⁸ Islamic scholars, including the Sufis, expect man's obedience to God to be based on love for Him as the creator and the nourisher, and to seek His favour. According to them, the doctrine of the belief in life after death is not strictly that of reward and punishment. This however needs more time to examine the verses of the Qur'an describing God's punishment as severe. "If you are grateful, I will add more unto you. But if you show ingratitude, truly, my punishment is severe" (14:7). It is when one looks in the light of the Qur'an, at the nature of punishment for evil act and reward for the virtue, and one discovers that the reward for the former is not commensurate with the latter, that one can accept the *Sufi* claim as mentioned earlier. "If one does evil, the doers of evil are only punished to the extent of their deeds", (28:84). In effect, the reward is not apportioned according to the merits of the receiver. The reward to good is in manifold, whereas the punishment is just for evil deed done.

The purpose of faith in life after death sounds more convincing when the Qur'an says: "Do you then think that we have created you in vain and that you will not be returned to us"? (23:115). Purest and highest impulses, so does the resurrection idea introduces seriousness into man's life which cannot be otherwise attained. There is a higher life for man to live beyond this world such is the aim of human life⁹. Belief or disbelief in life after death makes man adopts different courses in life. As a Muslim, if one does not believe in the day of judgement, it is absolutely impossible for him to fashion his life as suggested by Islam.

3. FORM OF RESURRECTION

Having established in our own way, the belief in and purposefulness of the life after death, we can now examine the form and nature of life in the hereafter. It is not possible to come to any conclusion as to how the day will look like, without having examined the Qur'an. Two distinct schools of thought on the matter will be considered.

The first as represented by Al-Ghazali is what can be referred to as traditionalism. Al-Ghazali in his *Ihya 'Ulumud-Din* relies so much on traditions to explain the nature of resurrection corporeally. The other school explains the resurrection basing its argument so much on the Qur'an. Maulana Muhammad Ali, being one of them, tried to marry corporeality with incorporeality. While Yusuf Ali dismisses the whole argument as highly socialized spiritual events, Muhammad Ali, with some air of skepticism, explains that since spirits receive all its impression of pleasure and pain through the body, whether the soul at resurrection will receive back old body is another question.

Going through the Qur'an, there is nothing to show that the body which the soul left at the death will be restored to it. This is purely on the verse: "We have decreed death to be your common lot, and we are not to be frustrated from changing your forms and creating you (again) in (form) that ye know not". (56:60-61). This explains why Muhammad Ali in later exposition said: "The old heaven and the old earth will pass away and there will be a new heaven and a new earth. If the very earth and heaven have changed at the resurrection, how can the body remain the same".¹⁰ That is not be so, especially considering a verse of the Qur'an. "Thereof (from the earth) We created you, and thereunto We return you and thence We bring you forth a second time (20:55).

The strict traditionalism represented by Al-Ghazali saw the resurrection as wrought by the power of God, basing his argument first on the Qur'an.

"And the trumpet is blown, so all those in the heaven and all those in the earth will be shown except such as Allah pleases. Then it will be blown again! They stand up waiting. And the earth beams and the witnesses are brought and judgement is given between them with justice and they are not wronged" (39:68-69).

Interpreting the verses, he says that Asrail will take the life of everything including that of Jibril and other angels, after which Allah will cause him (Asrail) to die. All the creations that were left dead after the blowing of trumpet by Azrafil will be in *Barzakh* for forty years. Allah will then raise Azrafil up to blow the trumpet the second time for all the creation to rise on their feet for judgement¹¹.

Barzakh, literally means interval or obstacle.¹² The Qur'an makes reference to both: "And He it is who has made the two seas to flow freely, the one sweet and the one salty and bitter. And between the two He has made a barrier and inviolable obstruction" (25:53). As

signifying the state of man between death and resurrection, God states: "By no means! It is but a world that he speaks and before them, there is a barrier" (23:100). In effect, *Barzakh* would mean the state between death and resurrection for judgement.

There however, seems to be an inference that *Barzakh* would differ in duration. Forty years according to his description for those who heard the trumpet, makes it shorter than those who had died since inception of the creation. The idea of period may however not hold since they would not have consciousness of time based on the Qur'an: "And when the animals are gathered together, so by their Lord! We shall certainly gather them together and satan then shall We bring them on their knees" (19:68). Al-Ghazali explained that man, animal and the *jinn* shall be assembled for judgement. This, he buttressed on the basis of Qur'an:

And there is no animal in the earth nor bird that flies on its two wings but (they are) communities like yourselves (6:38).

Al-Ghazali paints a painful picture of the day and says that the sun will be at its highest degree of intensity; and that man would sweat profusely. He quotes a tradition of Prophet Muhammad's (SAW) had it:

That man's sweat will engulf him up till his ear shows the intensity of the heat.¹³

However, the Qur'an on the other hand says of the situation in the hereafter: "When the stars are made to disappear, and the heaven is rent asunder (77:8-9). When the sun is folded up (81:1). This suggests that there is no sun to cause intense heat, and no sweat will drown any man. Also the Qur'an says: that it will be a new environment in a new plane altogether.

On that day when the earth will be changed into a different earth and the heaven (14:48)

4. CONCLUSION

Whatever the opinions and beliefs in the doctrine of life after death, it has come to form an essential part of religious belief of man. As for Islam, the belief is basically necessary. There is need for man to offer his best to the uplift of his fellow beings and the community in which he lives without expecting to be rewarded in kind or cash here

on earth, but in the hereafter, a Muslim fulfils his moral obligations. With a strong belief in the hereafter, a Muslim confidently says:

We feed you for Allah's sake only, he desires from you neither reward nor thanks (76:9).

NOTES AND REFERENCES

- (1) Ali. M.M. (1982); *The Religion of Islam*, New Delhi, Taj Company, p. 221.
- (2) Fazlul-Karim, M. (1982); *Ihya Ulumud-Din*, New Delhi: Lahore, Fine Art Press, Vol. IV, p. 516.
- (3) Gib, H.A.R. et. al (1974); *Shorter Encyclopaedia of Islam*, Leiden, E.J. Brill p. 462.
- (4) This was the practice by the Yoruba Kings of old, particularly, the Alaafin of Oyo. The practice was abolished by the British Colonialists.
- (5) David West, T. (1980); *Philosophical Essays*, Ibadan, Ibadan University Press, p. 170.
- (6) Adeoye, C.L. (1985); *Igbagbo ati Esin Yoruba*, Ibadan; Evans Brothers Nigeria publishers Limited, p. 54.
- (7) Fazlul Karim *op. cit.*, p. 117.
- (8) *Ibid*, p. 119.
- (9) Muhammad, A. (1978); *Commentary of the Holy Qur'an*, Beirut, Darul-Arabia, p. 232.
- (10) Ali *op. cit.* p. 315.
- (11) Fazlul Karim *op. cit.* p. 315.
- (12) Ali *op. cit.* p. 223.
- (13) Fazlul Karim *op. cit.* p. 515.