

*In the name of Allah*  
*the Merciful the Compassionate*

*A JOURNEY OF FOUR  
STAGES*

*Reviewed by*  
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*29<sup>th</sup> Rabi I, 1422 AH*

## PREFACE

In the Name of Allah, the Beneficent, the Merciful. May the Praise of Allah in the Highest Assemblies of the Angels, and His Peace be upon His Final Prophet and Messenger, Muhammad, his companions, noble family and all who follow in their way of righteousness.

“A Journey of Four Stages” is an attempt to present to the reader the reality of our existence, and to remind us that our ‘life’ is not limited to the ‘existence’ in this world alone. But in fact, our life begins in the “*world of our mother’s womb*”, then continues with the ‘*life of this world,*’ before going on the ‘*world of al barzakh*’ – the interim period between this world and the fourth and final stage ‘the Life in the Hereafter’ (i.e. after death).

This brief essay brings this reality into focus and makes us know that each of these aspects of our existence are only **stages** in our **journey** to return to our Lord and Creator.

***"O man! Verily, you are returning towards your Lord – with your deeds and actions (good or bad), a sure returning, - so you will meet" (i.e. the results of your deeds which you did). [Inshiqaaq 84:6]***

With this in mind, a sensible person will live their life in this world knowing full well that it is not the **end** – but only a **stage** in the **journey of returning to your Lord**. Therefore, everyone must prepare for that day of meeting their Lord; a day in which all accounts will be settled from the life of this world.

***"Then as for him whose balance (of good deeds) will be heavy, he will live a pleasant life (in Paradise). But as for him whose balance (of good deeds) will be light, he will have his home in a pit." (i.e. Hell Fire) [Al-Qaari’ah 101:6-9].***

Addressing the whole of humanity – rich and poor, young and old, powerful and weak, rulers and ruled – the Lord of all the Worlds says:

***‘I have not created jinn and men except to worship Me (Alone)’ [Zaariyaat 51:56]***

The above statement, though consisting of only a few short words, is indeed the most important statement which the human being needs to know and understand if one wants to have true success in this life and the next.

Indeed, these words are the *statement of purpose* – from the Lord of all the worlds, the Creator of the heavens and earth – wherein He has clearly stated the reason, objective and purpose of our existence: To worship our Lord and Creator Alone, by living a life in accordance with His Will.

In **‘A journey of Four Stages’** the author has explained these important truths and more. He has outlined the important **Principles, Forms of Worship and Standards of Behavior** which the human being needs to observe for success in life. He has also given some descriptions of the destinations (Paradise and Hell Fire) of the people in the final stage of our existence. Finally, he closes by inviting the reader to *take the initiative to seek the path of Truth, the path of believing in the Only True God...*

I pray for success for everyone who reads this brief essay with an open mind and pure heart. And may Allah reward the author abundantly. Ameen!

**Abdur-Ra’uf Shakir**  
**Doha, Qatar 29<sup>th</sup> Rabi I, 1422 A.H.**

## **Is there any room for ‘Terrorism’ in the True Religion of God?**

*This day, I have perfected your religion for you, completed My Favor upon you, and have chosen for you Islam as your religion.1 And We have not sent you (O Muhammad) except as a mercy to all the worlds 2.*

Is it possible that the perfect way of life – designed by the Creator of the heavens and the earth – would allow, or approve of, that which is *imperfect* and *unacceptable* even by human standards and intellect?

Could you imagine that the Lord of the Words, the all-Wise and Most Merciful Creator of mankind and all that exists, would approve of that which every decent and sane human being disapproves of?

Indeed, He (the Most High) has completed His Favor upon humanity in choosing for us Islam as a *Way of Life* – a complete system of righteousness; truth, justice and mercy.

**The Most High says in the Qur’an:**

*God does not forbid you from showing kindness and dealing justly with those who have not fought you about religion and have not driven you out of your homes. God loves just dealers 3.*

The Prophet Muhammad (may the Blessings of Allah and Peace be upon him) *prohibited* (soldiers) *from killing women and children 4.* He also instructed the soldiers: *...Do not be excessive, do not kill a new born child 5.* He said: *Whoever has killed a person having a treaty with the Muslims shall not smell the fragrance of Paradise, though its fragrance is found from a distance of forty years 6.*

The Prophet Muhammad (may the Blessings of Allah and Peace be upon him) has informed us that: *The first cases to be adjudicated between people on the Day of Judgment will be those of bloodshed (killing and injuring) 7.*

He said that: *A woman was punished because she imprisoned a cat until it died 8. And...a man gave a very thirsty dog a drink, so God forgave his sins for this action 9. And when you slaughter an animal, do so in the best way. One should sharpen his knife to reduce the suffering of the animal [while taking its life for food] 10.*

From these few quotations, it should be clear that: (a) the act of inciting terror in the hearts of defenseless civilians, (b) the wholesale destruction of buildings and properties, (c) the bombing and maiming of innocent men, women and children are all forbidden and detestable acts according to Islam and the Muslims. And if an individual Muslim were to commit an act of terrorism, this person would be guilty of violating the laws of Islam.

- 1. Qur'an 5:3**
- 2. Qur'an 21:107**
- 3. Qur'an 60:8**
- 4. Sahih al-Bukhari, no. 3015**
- 5. Sahih Muslim, no. 1731**
- 6. Sahih al-Bukhari, no. 3166**
- 7. Sahih al-Bukhari, no. 6533**
- 8. Sahih al-Bukhari, no. 2365**
- 9. Sahih al-Bukhari, no. 2466**
- 10. Sahih Muslim, no. 1955**

## A JOURNEY OF FOUR STAGES

### **First Stage: Fetus**

The story of this journey starts at the mother's womb. A child in the fetal form thinks that this womb is the entire world. If he were to think and be asked about existence outside the womb, he might say that it would mean sure death. If the embryo consisted of twins and one was born before the other, the second one who was born late would say that his co-brother had died and been buried in an unknown place. And he would have wept in the same manner as a mother would cry over the dead body of her son.

If you tell him that the Great Creator has created his *two eyes*, which are now in the dark, for another life with full light, his *hands* and *legs* in this narrow place for another wider place, his *two lungs* to be filled with oxygen, and that this world is full of deserts, seas and water-falls, fascinating scenery, beautiful forests, pretty virgins, he – without a doubt – can not imagine that. But this does not mean that he can deny or disbelieve, since this is an accomplished fact.

This is the example that shows us the difference between this world and the other (i.e. the next life). It is like that vastness of this world when compared to the narrow space in the mother's womb.

### **Second Stage: This World**

Allah (God), the Creator, has satisfied the *needs* of our members, not our *wishes*. Thus, our *eyes* became satisfied with light and our *lungs* with air. But He, i.e. the Maker, has granted us unlimited aspiration, that which is not to be satisfied even if we possess a half of the wealth of this world.

In reality, although one comes close to his last breath, one's longing does not become satisfied. One wants money, fame, bliss, health, youth and every perpetual good.

For sure, one's mind believes that an eternal life will be awaiting us. It is prepared under the Divine Decree to be eternal, delightful and blissful.

As we know that delight of communication in love, which lasts only moments, is the best source of pleasure in this life. But, this pleasure is nothing if compared with the delights and pleasures of the Hereafter. There will be a perpetual youth and an everlasting immortality.

It is a sign of Allah's (God's) Mercy that He feeds the embryo in his/her mother's womb. Then, at the time when one is begotten, mother's breast becomes one's best source of food. And finally, He has provided us with an uncounted number of species of food.

At the same time, He acts patiently towards those who disobey Him and He showers them with His good bounties so that they may return to the right.

*{ If you count up Allah's favors, you would never be able to number them }* [14:34] Noble Qur'an

### **What are we created for?**

Allah (God), the Maker, has created everything as He likes, has made everything in perfect obedience to Him: the sun, stars, planets, and the other creatures even members of the human body such as the heart, which beats properly and propels the blood tirelessly.

Only man has been granted freedom and *free-will*. Thus, he can surrender to his Creator or even rebel; he can do good or bad. And this demonstrates the meaning of the word: Islam.

### **Islam?**

It means surrender to the Creator's commands, following Messengers and Prophets, whose goals and means are identical: Inviting people to worship Allah and to put His teachings into practice. So, nations and Prophets came one after the other to be tested in this world.

Each and every Prophet preached the same principle: to believe in Allah (God), with no partner, and that the believer will be rewarded and the disbeliever will be punished.

And with the passing of time, changing of nations, and losing the true Creed, people go astray and become Idolaters (worshippers of idols and great men), and evils prevail. Thereupon, Allah (God) sends a new Prophet to renew and correct people's beliefs and behavior: To believe in Allah (God) and to do good deeds. Life continues in this manner until people face their ends: *death*, being called to account concerning their beliefs, deeds, sayings, wealth..., and if they worshipped others besides Allah. One must know that Allah is the Only God and Maker, who has created *Adam* from nothing, *Eve* from Adam, *Jesus* from Mary (his mother) and all other creatures from a father and mother. It is a practical demonstration of His ability to create; there is nothing like Him! Glory Be To Him.

## THE FINAL DIVINE MESSAGE

Many Prophets and Messengers, but only one Message!? *{And there is not a nation but a Warner has passed among them}*

As a matter of fact, all Prophets and Messengers were sent to proclaim one creed and the importance of following Allah's Will, in words and deeds. And this is the essence of all the principles of Islam and that which was taught by the earlier Prophets. However, each Prophet or Messenger was sent to explain that to his own community and in their own language, i.e. to a specific nation in a particular *place* and *time*.

As for the Final Divine Message, it was revealed to the Prophet Muhammad (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) to be the seal and last of all Divine Messages to Mankind.

Islam, therefore, came with a comprehensive law suitable to all times and places and for the whole community. It is the only Message, which recognizes the needs and interests of all people, all individuals as well as groups. It has opened the door of reform and granted the authority to use the intellect and to depend on human thinking concerning matters which are left open by the Divine Revelation. It is applicable to every age and society. This Message can be briefly stated in the following three topics: *Principles, Forms of Worship and Standards of Behavior*.

### (A) Principles:

There is a collection of principles that one has to accept. The most important among them are:

1. This material world is not the be-all of existence, and this worldly life is only a stage of our existence.

2. Man existed even before he was *born* and will continue to exist after *death*: he did not create himself but he has been created before he knew himself.
3. The inanimate objects around him did not create him because he is a rational being whereas they are not.
4. Everything in this universe has been created from nothingness by One God, Allah the Almighty.
5. Allah (God), Glory Be To Him, is the only One Who grants life and causes death. It is He who has created everything, and if He wishes He will destroy and obliterate it.
6. Allah (God), Glory Be To Him, has no resemblance with any of His creation. He is the infinitely pre-existent, the eternal, the omnipotent and the omniscient.
7. He is fully just and His justice cannot be assessed on the norms and human justice.
8. It is He Who has laid down the rules, which we call the laws of nature.
9. He has created everything according to a well-defined measure since eternity. Thus, all the phenomena of activity and inactivity, consistency and inconsistency that take place in animate and inanimate beings have been clearly defined and demarcated.
10. Man has been bestowed with the power of *intellect* with which he can think and decide on whatever matters that are subject to his disposal. Likewise he has been granted the power of *reasoning* with which he can make his own choice, and *will-power* by which he can achieve what he wants.
11. Allah (God), Glory Be To Him, has created an eternal life beyond this temporary life, wherein the good-doers will be rewarded with a life in paradise and the evil-doers will be punished in the Hell-fire.

This God is the One and Only: Allah. He has no partner to be worshipped with Him; no intermediary can take us nearer to Him

to plead on our behalf without His permission. Thus, He and only He is to be worshipped in all sincerity and purity.

He has created all the material beings that we can see and feel. He has also created unseen beings, some animate and others inanimate, which we cannot see. Among the unseen beings are the **Angels**, who have been created for absolute good, and then the **Satan**, who have been created as totally evil beings. A part from these, there is a third category of unseen beings that have in them both the elements of good and evil. They can be virtuous and wicked, i.e. the **Jinn**. And from amongst human beings Allah, Glory Be To Him, selects certain people to whom the Shari'a (Divine Law) is revealed so that they can guide humanity to it. Such people are the Prophets and Messengers.

The Shari'a (Divine Law) is contained in all the books revealed from the Heavens. Every successive book abrogates or amends the preceding book, and the Noble Qur'an is the last of these books. All the books that preceded it were either distorted or lost and forgotten. Only the Noble Qur'an has remained intact.

The last of these Prophets is Muhammad Ibn 'Abdullah, an Arab of the "Quraysh" tribe. With him came an end to all the previous Divine Legislations. There is no Prophet after him.

Thus, the moment one believes in these principles, he is only to pronounce "***there is nothing worthy of worship except Allah, and Muhammad is His servant and Messenger***" to become a Muslim. This leads us to say that he is also requested to perform all the duties enjoined upon him by Islam.

## **(B) Forms of Worship:**

Allah, who is transcendent beyond any need of the universe, has prescribed several major forms of worship (*Ibadah*) on all

Muslims. These forms of *Ibadah* (worship) lead human beings to success and righteousness in both this life and the Hereafter. They demonstrate the fact that all creatures are servants of their Lord, Allah the Almighty.

*They are few in number, easy to perform and do not require much effort or exertion. They are the following:*

**First:** One has to perform the prescribed ***Salah*** (prayers) 5 times a day. At Dawn: 2 Rak'as; Midday: 4 Rak'as; Late afternoon: 4 Rak'as; After sunset: 3, and at Night: 4 Rak'as during which one has communion with his Lord. One asks Him goodness and seeks refuge in Him from His punishment. Before offering *Salah* (prayers), one has to perform *Wudu* (washing the face, and the hands up to the elbows, rubbing the head and washing the feet) or take a bath if one is in a state of ritual impurity.

These are the obligatory times of *Salah* (prayers), the performing of which will not, on the whole, take more than an hour everyday. There is no particular place or person required for the performance of *Salah*, neither does it need an intermediary between a Muslim and his Lord.

**Second:** In the month of **Ramadan** (Fasting) of every year, Muslims have to change their normal daily routine of meals: breakfast is eaten late at night, lunch is taken after sunset, and during the day they abstain from food and water and sexual intercourse. It is the month of self-purification for every Muslim, body and soul. It is also the month which represents the human desire to do good, to be generous and to reflect the brotherhood of man in the material life.

**Third:** A Muslim has to render 2.5% of his excess wealth as ***Zakah*** (charity) to the poor and needy. He has to do this yearly whenever a certain amount of saved money remained with him

after his own needs and those of his family have been met. This financial support comes as a great source of comfort to the poor, the sick and the needy. It thus helps to alleviate poverty and to establish a form of social security.

**Fourth:** Islam has devised certain periodical gatherings for Muslims. Every day they get together five times in order to offer *Salah* (prayers) in congregation. This gathering is similar to a quarter meeting which is held five times a day like school teaching hours. That is the congregational *Salah* through which Muslims can reap the reward of virtue.

There is no disruption of work for anyone, whatever be his/her career. Those who miss the congregation, can offer *Salah* (prayer) at home even though they will deprive themselves of the reward of performing *Salah* in congregation.

Then, there is the weekly congregation on Friday for *jum'ah salah*. It lasts less than one hour and it is compulsory for all adult male Muslims to attend.

Besides the above, there are mass congregations held twice a year on the occasion of the Two *Eids* (Religious Festivals). Attendance is not compulsory and they last less than an hour.

**Finally**, there is the annual world congregation, in Makkah, known as **Hajj** (Pilgrimage). It is a kind of mammoth public gathering, held once a year in a certain place and time. This congregation, in fact, provides guidance in all aspects: spiritual, physical, and intellectual. A Muslim is required to partake in it only once in his lifetime, if he can afford it.

These are the most important acts of *'Ibadah* (worship) enjoined upon every Muslim, male or female.

### **(C) Standards of Behavior**

Apart from the above, abstention from certain actions is also considered as *Ibadah* (worship). These are actions which are deplored by all sensible people and condemned as evil actions. They are acts such as killing without a valid reason, encroachment and aggression on others; all forms of injustice, all intoxicants which affect the brain; *Zina* (adultery and fornication), since it destroys honor and dignity and violates the sanctioned forms of blood relationship. *Riba* (usury), utterance of lies, cheating, betrayal and deserting military service which seeks to uphold the cause of Allah (God); and above all, disobedience to one's parents, making a false oath and producing false witness. These are some of the vile deeds that are condemned by all sensible persons.

However, if a Muslim fails to do some of his duties or commits some actions that are not permissible, and then, repents and seeks pardon from Allah (God), verily He will pardon him. Even if he does not repent, he shall still be considered a Muslim – but a disobedient one who may be punished in the Next world. This punishment will, however, be only temporary and will not be equal to that of a *Kafir* (disbeliever).

#### ***The Sweetness of Faith***

The Beloved Prophet (Blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) has summed up the characteristics of the true Muslim in one eloquent sentence which states the essence of faith and action in a nutshell: ***“You should worship Allah (God) as though you see Him; for though you do not see Him, He sees you”***. This is the essence of Islam. It enjoins upon every Muslim to be God-conscious in all his actions, seen or unseen, serious or non-serious. Verily Allah, Glory Be To Him, is watching us constantly and is aware of our every move. Therefore, no one who is God-conscious will embark on any act of disobedience, nor will he

despair because he will realize that Allah (God) is with him. Thus, a person who is fortified with such a consciousness will not cringe for help from anybody, because he will ask of Allah what he needs. And if a person commits an act of disobedience to Allah – and every human being is subject to sin – he shall repent for action and Allah (God) will pardon him.

**Third Stage: Barzakh** (the interim period between death and resurrection)

Here, it is urgently needed to present the state of one's last breath, last hour in this world. People will be divided into: Muslims (True Believers) and Non-Muslims (Disbelievers and Hypocrites).

As for the Muslim, angels of death – with Bright Faces – will bring good news to him: *Gardens of Eden*, easy passing away, great bliss, being placed in the grave easily and pleasantly, his soul's being in comfort and luxury in paradise. And every thing passes in no time.

As to the Disbeliever and Hypocrite, angels of death – with Black Faces – will bring bad news to them: the wrath of Allah, who has granted them intellect, health...so that they may turn to Him, but in vain.

His soul will harshly taken out from his body, causing the worst pains and tortures. His soul will be refused in the Heaven and be returned to earth to be imprisoned in a grave that is full of fire, distress..., etc, wishing that the Resurrection will not come.

This is the state called Barzakh.

It is an important stage. The vastness of this world when compared to the narrow space in the mother's womb is like the vastness of Barzakh when compared to life in this world.

This stage begins when the soul leaves this limited body for the eternal life in the Next World.

### ***Soul?***

The soul which lies in our bodies is not governed by limits of time and space. For example, a person in your presence may doze off for fifteen minutes, and yet he may have traveled to America or India, lived there for twenty or thirty years and experienced great joy or extreme sorrow. But how could a span of 20 years be contained in 20 minutes? This example shows how we can undergo the sufferings or enjoy the blessings of the grave.

The soul is not affected by disease nor health. It was in existence before it was committed to this body, and it will remain even after the breaking up of this body and after passing away of the self. This means that the soul is the essence of the human being.

### **Forth Stage: Immortality:**

It is the stage of eternal existence: Eternal Bliss or eternal Distress. It starts on the Day of Reckoning. Our beloved Prophet (Peace and Blessing of Allah be upon him) mentioned many signs that will come before that Great Day such as earthquakes.., etc.

### **In the Qur'an:**

In the name of Allah the Beneficent, the Merciful!

*When the earth is shaken in her [final] quaking, and the earth throws forth her burdens, and every man says: "What is [happening] to her"?*

*On that day she will report her news which your Lord has inspired her with. On that day men will appear in droves to be shown their actions;*

***And whoever had done an atom's weight of good will see it; while whoever has done an atom's weight of evil will see it.***  
[99:1-8] Noble Qur'an

So, Allah (God) raises the dead to be called to account concerning their past deeds, since this world is for work and the next world for reward or punishment.

On that day, all tyrants, killers, criminals and wrong-doers will be called to hard account before the only Just Judge, Allah, who will give rights back to their owners. Hands, legs, and tongues will be the credible witnesses. ***{That Day shall We set a seal on their owners mouths. But their hands will speak to Us, and their feet bear witness to all that they did.}*** [36:65] Noble Qur'an.

On that near inevitable Day, believers will be in great happiness. ***{Those for whom the good from Us has gone before, will be removed far therefrom. Not the slightest sound will they hear of Hell: what their souls desired, in that will they dwell.}*** [21:101-102]

## **Paradise**

The human mind can not imagine what Allah, the Great and Almighty, has prepared for the faithful believers.

***{Be quick in the race for forgiveness from your Lord and for a Garden whose width is that (of the whole) of the heavens and of the earth, prepared for the righteous.}*** [3:133] Noble Qur'an.

***{...There will be there all that the souls could desire, all that the eyes could delight in: And you shall abide therein for ever.}***  
[43:71] Noble Qur'an.

## **Hell-Fire**

The very mention of the Hell-Fire turns our attention to a mental image of the fire of Hell similar to the fire we know of in this world. But, in reality, there is no comparison between the two, although they both belong to the species of fire.

There are trees, shade, water in the Hell-Fire of the Hereafter, but those trees, water and shade are for the purpose of torture and suffering and not for comfort and luxury. If someone falls into a fire in this world, he meets instant death and is thus saved from the resultant pains and sufferings. However, a person condemned to the Hell-Fire –May Allah (God) forbid us from such – will suffer eternally.

***{But those who reject (Allah) for them will be the Fire of Hell: no term shall be determined for them, so they should die, nor shall its chastisement be lightened for them} [35:36] Noble Qur'an***

***{Those who reject our sign, We shall soon cast into the Fire; as often as their skins are roasted through, We shall change them for fresh skins, that they may taste the chastisement} [4:56] Noble Qur'an***

By the way, the above mentioned verse constitutes a scientific miracle that was recently discovered. This fact says that the worst pain of burning lies in the outer layer of the skin. That is why Allah changes the skin of the inhabitants of the Hell-Fire. And this is another proof to those who are looking for Truth: The Message of Islam.

Now, Why don't you take the initiative to seek the path of Truth, the path of believing in the Only True God, Allah. Then, convert to Islam before it is too late. You should seek the Truth!

*What is the True Religion?  
What were you Created for?*

*What is the Purpose of Existence?*

*What is the Goal of life?*

*Where is the End?*

You should test and examine the authenticity of your ideas!