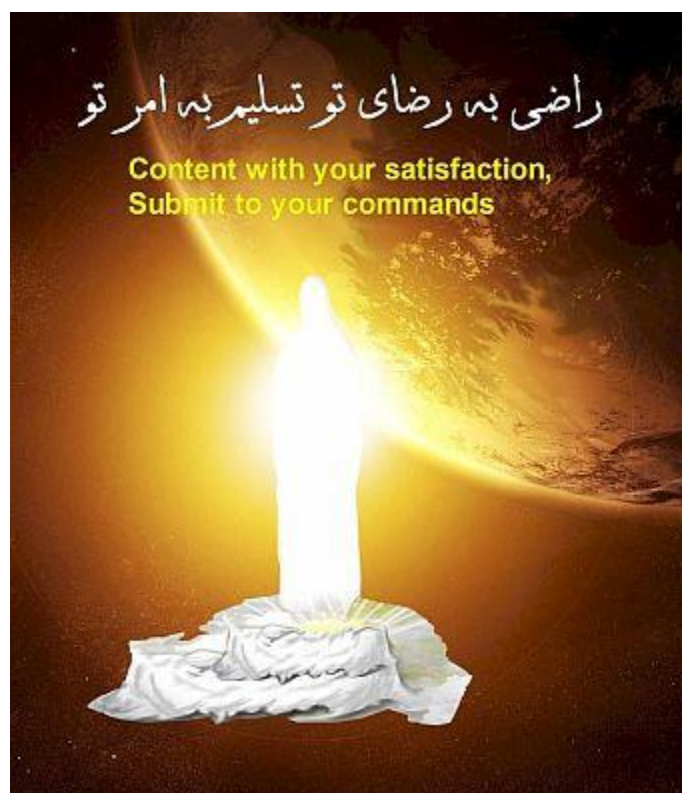




Life & Afterlife

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Life and Afterlife

A Morning Journey of Discovery

Introduction: The Question Before the Question

On the morning of August 4, 2026, after completing my dawn prayer, I remained seated in the stillness that follows Fajr.

The world had not yet fully awakened. The noise of the day had not begun, and for a few quiet moments, it seemed as though creation itself was holding its breath.

I did not have a particular question in mind. I was not searching for a specific answer. What I felt was something more difficult to describe—an inward restlessness, a longing without a name, a quiet invitation to look beyond what is immediately visible.

Sometimes the deepest journeys do not begin with certainty.

They begin with a disturbance in the heart.

A thought appears, not yet formed into words. It moves silently beneath the surface of consciousness until, gradually, it reveals the question it has been carrying.

That morning, the question was one humanity has asked from the beginning:

What becomes of the human being after death?

At first, it seemed like a question about the future, a question about what waits beyond the final breath. Yet the longer I sat with it, the more I realized that death was only the visible entrance to a much deeper mystery.

I was not merely asking what happens after life. I was asking what life itself means.

- What is the human being?
- What is the soul?
- Why were we created?
- What part of us continues when the body returns to the earth?
- What is the relationship between this temporary world and the eternal reality that lies beyond it?

And ultimately:

- **What does it mean to return to Allah?**

I did not want to begin with a predetermined philosophical conclusion. Nor did I want to force the Qur'an to support an idea I had already accepted. I wanted, as sincerely as I could, to allow the Qur'an to lead the inquiry.

So I began with one small question. Then I followed where it led.

Every answer opened another door. Every verse illuminated another part of the path. The journey moved from death to the soul, from the soul to Barzakh, from Barzakh to resurrection, and from resurrection back to the purpose of life itself.

What follows is not merely a collection of theological answers.

It is the record of a morning in which one question became another, and another, until the search for the afterlife became a search for the meaning of existence.

The First Door

What Happens When We Die?

The question entered my mind with an unexpected seriousness:

What does the Qur'an actually reveal concerning the state, journey, and destiny of the human being after death?

Death is among the few certainties of human existence, yet we often live as though it belongs only to others.

We witness people leave this world. We attend funerals. We stand beside graves. We speak words of remembrance and return to our daily lives.

But rarely do we allow the reality of death to remain before us long enough to transform us.

The Qur'an does not speak of death as an abstract possibility. It speaks of it as a moment of unveiling—a moment when the illusions of worldly life fall away and the human being suddenly recognizes the true value of what has been done and what has been neglected.

Allah says:

“Until, when death comes to one of them, he says, ‘My Lord, send me back, so that I may do righteousness in that which I left behind.’ No! It is only a word he is saying. And behind them is a barrier—Barzakh—until the Day they are resurrected.”

Qur'an 23:99–100

I paused over these words.

- The person facing death does not ask to return for greater wealth.
- He does not ask for another home, another possession, another title, or another opportunity to be praised.
- **He asks to return so that he may do righteousness.**

At the moment when the veil begins to lift, the true value of actions becomes clear.

The verse teaches that death brings recognition. The human being sees the reality of what was neglected and wishes to return to earthly life to correct it.

But the request is denied.

The time of action has ended. A barrier stands behind those who have died—Barzakh—until the Day of Resurrection. The Qur'an then offers one of its most direct reminders:

“Every soul will taste death. Then to Us you will be returned.”

Qur'an 29:57

- Every soul.
- The powerful and the powerless.
- The known and the forgotten.
- The wealthy and the poor.
- The believer and the unbeliever.
- Every soul will taste death.

Yet death is not presented as disappearance. The verse does not end with death. It ends with return:

“Then to Us you will be returned.”

Another passage completes the sequence:

“Then after that you will surely die. Then indeed, on the Day of Resurrection, you will be resurrected.”

Qur'an 23:15–16

A pattern began to emerge before me.

The Qur'anic journey is not a movement from existence into nothingness. It is a movement from one stage of existence into another.

- First comes death.
- Then comes entry into Barzakh, the intermediate state.
- Then comes resurrection on the Day of Judgment.
- Then every soul stands before Allah.
- Then comes judgment according to His perfect justice and mercy.
- Finally, there is eternal reward in Paradise or punishment in Hell.

Death, therefore, is not the final page of the human story. It is the turning of the page. But as I reflected on this sequence, another question appeared.

If death is not annihilation, then what exactly occurs at the moment of death?

- What is taken?
 - Who takes it?
 - And where does it go?
-

The Second Door

The Soul That Leaves—and the Soul That Returns

My curiosity had moved from the destination of the human being to the mysterious moment of departure itself. I began thinking about the soul being taken. Then I encountered one of the most profound verses in the Qur'an concerning death, consciousness, and sleep:

“Allah takes the souls at the time of their death, and those that do not die during their sleep. He keeps those for which He has decreed death and releases the others until an appointed time. Indeed, in this are signs for people who reflect.”

Qur'an 39:42

The verse stopped me. Allah takes the souls at death. But He also takes the souls during sleep.

Every evening, the human being closes his eyes and surrenders control. Consciousness withdraws from the ordinary world. Time passes without being fully perceived. Then, if Allah wills, the soul is released and the person awakens.

How many mornings had I opened my eyes without recognizing the mercy hidden in that return?

According to the verse, if Allah has decreed death, the soul is not returned to the body. If the appointed time has not yet arrived, the soul is released until another appointed moment. Sleep, therefore, carries a sign.

It is not identical to death, yet it resembles death sufficiently to awaken reflection. This is why some scholars have described sleep as the **minor death** and physical death as the **major death**.

- Each night, we surrender the soul.
- Each morning, its return is a gift.

The verse also makes clear that Allah alone possesses ultimate authority over life and death. Yet the Qur'an explains that an angel carries out this divine command:

“Say, ‘The Angel of Death, who has been entrusted with you, will take your souls. Then to your Lord you will be returned.’”

Qur'an 32:11

There is no contradiction between Allah taking the soul and the Angel of Death taking it.

Allah is the ultimate cause and sovereign authority. The Angel of Death acts by Allah's command and carries out the responsibility entrusted to him. The soul does not escape. It is received. It is taken according to divine decree. And once again, the verse ends not with disappearance, but return:

“Then to your Lord you will be returned.”

The Qur'an then reminds us what follows immediately after death:

“Behind them is a barrier—Barzakh—until the Day they are resurrected.”

Qur'an 23:100

Barzakh is the intermediate state between worldly life and the Day of Resurrection.

The body has left the ordinary life of the world, but the final resurrection has not yet occurred.

The human being waits in a reality that belongs to the unseen. At this stage of the journey, I felt that the Qur'an had answered one question only to deepen the mystery.

- The soul is taken.
- The soul enters Barzakh.
- The soul awaits resurrection.

But what is the experience of that soul?

- Is death a sleep?
- An awakening?
- A loss?
- A liberation?

To explore this, my thoughts naturally turned toward Imam Ali and the Ahl al-Bayt, whose teachings expand upon the Qur'anic vision while remaining rooted in it.

The Third Door

When the Sleeper Awakens

The curiosity had become more intense. I wanted to know how death was understood by those who stood closest to the prophetic light.

From the Shia perspective, Imam Ali, Imam Ja'far al-Sadiq, and the other members of the Ahl al-Bayt provide profound reflections on death, Barzakh, the soul, and the journey toward Allah.

Their teachings do not describe death as annihilation. They describe it as transition. One of the most widely quoted sayings attributed to Imam Ali ibn Abi Talib is:

“People are asleep. When they die, they awaken.”

Scholars differ concerning the chain of transmission of this saying, yet it has occupied an important place in Islamic spirituality. Its meaning is powerful.

Perhaps worldly life is not false, but our perception of it is incomplete.

- We see the surface of things.
- We mistake the temporary for the permanent.
- We imagine that what we possess belongs to us.
- We chase what disappears and neglect what remains.

Death awakens the human being from this limited perception. What seemed distant becomes present. What seemed uncertain becomes undeniable. What seemed valuable may be revealed as empty, while the smallest sincere deed may appear greater than an entire worldly kingdom.

Another narration attributed to Imam Ali states:

“Death is not the end of the believer; it is the greatest joy, for it is the passage from the abode of hardship to the abode of everlasting bliss. And for the disbeliever, it is the passage from a temporary garden to everlasting punishment.”

Here death appears not as a single experience shared identically by every soul, but as a passage whose meaning is shaped by what the soul has become.

For the believer, death may become liberation from hardship and entrance into lasting peace.

For the one who has turned away from Allah, death may uncover a reality that worldly comfort had temporarily concealed.

This reflects the Qur’anic teaching that the soul continues after the death of the body.

Regarding Barzakh, Imam Ja‘far al-Sadiq is reported to have said:

“By Allah, I fear for you only concerning Barzakh.”

When he was asked what Barzakh was, he replied:

“It is the grave from the time of death until the Day of Resurrection.”

This teaching aligns with Qur’an 23:100, which describes a barrier until the Day of Resurrection. Barzakh is not the final judgment, yet it is not worldly life. It is an intermediate existence in which the soul encounters a foretaste of what lies ahead.

The teachings of the Imams also emphasize that human deeds do not simply disappear after they are performed. They accompany the human being.

The Qur’an says:

“On that Day, people will come forward in separate groups to be shown their deeds. So whoever does an atom’s weight of good will see it, and whoever does an atom’s weight of evil will see it.”

Qur’an 99:6–8

An atom’s weight. Nothing is lost.

- A word of kindness that no one noticed.
- A private act of charity.
- A moment of forgiveness.
- A prayer whispered when the heart was broken.

Likewise, no injustice is truly hidden.

No cruelty disappears merely because others failed to witness it.

Every act contributes to the soul's becoming.

One of Imam Ali's most moving discussions of death appears in *Nahj al-Balagha*. In his sermons, he reminds the living that those who have died can no longer return to correct what they neglected.

- The dead had once possessed time.
- They had opportunities.
- They had intentions.
- They delayed, as the living often delay.
- Then death arrived.

Imam Ali therefore urges the believer to prepare before death comes unexpectedly.

Preparation does not mean abandoning life. It means living with awareness. It means recognizing that every day is shaping the soul that will enter Barzakh.

When the Qur'an and these teachings are brought together, the journey becomes clearer:

- The Angel of Death takes the soul by Allah's command.
- The soul enters Barzakh.
- There, it experiences a foretaste of its final destination according to its faith and deeds.

On the Day of Resurrection:

- Humanity is raised.
- Then Allah judges every soul with perfect justice and perfect mercy.

Yet one question remained unresolved.

What exactly is this soul that continues?

- Is it the **rūḥ**?
- Is it the **nafs**?

What is the relationship between the spirit, the conscious self, and the physical body?

The Fourth Door

Rūḥ, Nafs, and the Mystery Within Us

I had previously been interested in the question of when the spirit enters the body. Now that earlier curiosity returned with greater force.

If the body dies but the human being continues, what aspect of the person survives?

The Qur'an speaks of the **rūḥ**, often translated as spirit. It also speaks of the **nafs**, the self or soul. And it speaks of the physical body formed from earthly material.

Yet these are among the deepest subjects in the Qur'an, and the Qur'an itself warns that human knowledge of the spirit is limited.

Allah says:

“They ask you concerning the Spirit—al-Rūḥ. Say: ‘The Spirit is of the command of my Lord, and you have been given only a little knowledge.’”

Qur'an 17:85

There is humility in this verse. The human intellect is invited to reflect, but it is also reminded of its limits.

- We may investigate the effects of the spirit.
- We may observe life, consciousness, memory, personality, moral choice, and self-awareness.

But the true nature of the rūḥ remains among the mysteries known completely only to Allah.

The verse teaches two essential principles.

- First, the true nature of the rūḥ is known fully only by Allah.
- Second, the rūḥ belongs to the realm of Allah's **amr**, His Divine Command, which is distinct from the ordinary physical world of creation.

Another foundational verse states:

“Then He fashioned him and breathed into him of His Spirit...”

Qur'an 32:9

Similar expressions appear in Qur'an 15:29 and 38:72.

The phrase **“My Spirit”** does not mean that the spirit is literally a part of Allah.

Allah is not divisible. He is not composed of parts.

In Arabic and Qur'anic language, this form of attribution can indicate honor, dignity, or special relationship. The Ka'bah, for example, is called the House of Allah, but this does not mean that it is part of Allah.

Likewise, the expression “of His Spirit” honors the origin and dignity of human life without suggesting that the human spirit is a portion of the Divine Essence.

Shia scholars have often distinguished among the **rūḥ**, the **nafs**, and the body.

- The **rūḥ**, or spirit, may be understood as the life-giving principle connected to Allah's command.
- The **nafs**, or self, is the conscious identity—the one who remembers, chooses, believes, doubts, sins, repents, loves, and is judged.
- The **body** is the physical form created from earthly material.

At death, the body returns to the earth. The **nafs** continues its conscious existence in Barzakh. The precise relationship of the **rūḥ** to the human being after death remains part of the unseen, and the Qur'an does not describe every detail.

The narrations of Imam Ja'far al-Sadiq and other Imams describe the believer's soul after death as continuing to recognize loved ones, experience joy, and receive benefit from prayers and charitable acts offered on its behalf.

These teachings emphasize continuity. Death does not erase identity.

The self that knew, loved, remembered, chose, and worshipped continues by Allah's permission.

The Imams also taught that prophets and the purified servants of Allah possess a special **Rūḥ al-Qudus**, or Holy Spirit—a unique divine aid that strengthens them in fulfilling their mission.

This special spiritual assistance is understood as distinct from the ordinary life-giving spirit possessed by every human being.

As I attempted to understand these distinctions, a simple analogy came to mind. It is only an analogy and must not be taken as a literal description.

- Imagine the body as a lamp.
- Imagine the **rūḥ** as the electricity that gives the lamp life and illumination.
- Imagine the **nafs** as the conscious person who uses the light.

When the lamp breaks, its physical structure can no longer function. Yet the electricity itself is not destroyed by the breaking of the lamp, and the identity of the conscious person is not erased.

In a similar way, when death comes, the physical body ceases to function, but the conscious self continues in the state Allah has decreed until resurrection.

Still, the Qur'an leaves us with humility. The rūḥ remains one of Allah's mysteries.

We are given enough knowledge to recognize our purpose and destiny, but not enough to reduce the spirit to a material formula or fully grasp its unseen reality. Perhaps this limitation is itself a mercy.

Some realities are not given to satisfy curiosity. They are given to awaken reverence. And once the soul's continuity became clearer, another question rose above all the others.

If Allah created us, gave us the rūḥ, allowed the nafs to choose, and appointed death as a passage rather than an ending, then:

Why are we here?

The Fifth Door

What Is Our Purpose?

This may be the central question of human existence.

- Why did Allah create us?
- Why were we given consciousness, freedom, desire, reason, suffering, love, and mortality?

The Qur'an does not offer only one isolated answer. It provides several complementary answers, each revealing another dimension of human purpose.

To Know and Worship Allah

The clearest verse is:

“I did not create jinn and mankind except that they may worship Me.”

Qur'an 51:56

Worship, or **‘ibādah**, is much broader than ritual prayer alone. Prayer is at the heart of worship, but worship includes the entire orientation of life toward Allah.

- To seek truth is worship.
- To act justly is worship.
- To show mercy is worship.
- To care for one's family sincerely is worship.
- To fulfill responsibilities honestly is worship.
- To resist oppression is worship.
- To control anger for the sake of Allah is worship.
- To forgive when forgiveness is righteous is worship.

Every lawful act performed with sincere intention can become an act of worship.

Thus, Allah did not create humanity merely to perform movements without consciousness. He created us to recognize Him, obey Him, love Him, and allow that knowledge to transform the whole of life.

To Become Allah's Representatives on Earth

Allah says:

“Indeed, I am placing upon the earth a khalīfah.”

Qur'an 2:30

The term **khalīfah** may be understood as a vicegerent, representative, or steward. Human beings have been entrusted with responsibility upon the earth.

- We are not its absolute owners.
- We are its trustees.

This trust includes caring for creation, establishing justice, protecting the vulnerable, exercising moral responsibility, and using the gifts of intellect and freedom correctly. Human authority is therefore not permission for domination without accountability. It is a responsibility before Allah.

To Be Tested

Allah says:

“He who created death and life to test you as to which of you is best in deeds.”

Qur'an 67:2

The wording is striking.

Allah does not say “which of you performs the most deeds.” He says **“best in deeds.”**

- Quality matters.
- Sincerity matters.
- Justice matters.
- Patience matters.
- Compassion matters.

A single act performed purely for Allah may weigh more than many actions performed for reputation. Life is a test not because Allah lacks knowledge of us, but because our choices bring what lies within us into actuality.

Through our decisions, we become. Every choice leaves a trace upon the soul.

To Know Allah Through His Signs

The Qur'an repeatedly directs human attention toward creation and inward consciousness:

“We will show them Our signs in the horizons and within themselves until it becomes clear to them that it is the Truth.”

Qur'an 41:53

- The universe is filled with signs.
- The movement of the heavens.
- The emergence of life.
- The order within nature.
- The human capacity for love, sacrifice, reason, and moral awareness.
- History itself carries signs.
- The rise and fall of civilizations carries signs.
- Our own consciousness carries signs.

The Qur'an asks us not merely to look, but to see. Not merely to exist, but to reflect.

Imam Ali's Perspective

Imam Ali ibn Abi Talib taught that the value of a person is not measured by wealth, status, or worldly rank. Human worth is connected to knowledge of Allah, character, and righteous action. One of the most famous statements attributed to him is:

“The beginning of religion is knowing Him.”

Knowing Allah does not mean merely acknowledging that a Creator exists. It means entering into a relationship with Him through faith, reflection, prayer, remembrance, obedience, and ethical living.

Knowledge without transformation is incomplete. A person may speak extensively about Allah and remain ruled by arrogance. Another person may possess fewer words but live with humility, mercy, patience, and trust. True knowledge enters the character.

A Teaching from Imam Husayn

Imam Husayn ibn Ali is reported to have said:

“Allah did not create His servants except that they should know Him. When they know Him, they worship Him; and when they worship Him, they become free from worshipping anything else.”

This statement revealed another dimension of worship. To worship Allah is to become free.

The human being will always serve something.

- If not Allah, then perhaps wealth.
- If not Allah, then status.
- If not Allah, then ego.
- If not Allah, then fear of people.
- If not Allah, then approval, desire, power, or social expectation.

Knowledge of Allah liberates the soul from servitude to temporary things. When the human being truly knows Allah, created things return to their proper place.

- They may be appreciated, but they are no longer worshipped.
- They may be used, but they no longer possess the heart.

The Qur’anic vision of human purpose can therefore be gathered into several interconnected truths.

- We were created to know Allah.
- We were created to worship Him through every dimension of life.
- We were created to develop noble character.
- We were entrusted to serve as responsible stewards of the earth.
- We are tested in how we use our freedom.

And after death, we return to the One who created us. The Qur’an reminds us:

“Indeed, to Allah we belong, and indeed, to Him we shall return.”

Qur’an 2:156

These words are often recited at the time of death or calamity, yet they describe the whole of existence.

- We belong to Allah before tragedy.
- We belong to Allah during life.
- We belong to Allah in death.
- We belong to Allah in resurrection.

From the Shia perspective, the journey may be described simply and profoundly:

From Allah, to Allah.

- We originate by His will.
- We live as a trust.
- We are shaped through our choices.
- We die by His decree.
- And we return to Him.

But another question now became unavoidable.

- If our purpose is to know Allah, how can a finite human being know the Infinite?
- How can the limited mind approach the One who has no limit?

This question opened the door to one of the richest dimensions of Islamic philosophy.

It led me to Mulla Sadra.

The Sixth Door

How Can the Finite Know the Infinite?

Mulla Sadra, who lived from 1571 to 1640, devoted much of his philosophical life to questions of existence, the soul, resurrection, knowledge, and the human journey toward Allah.

The question before him was the same one that now stood before me:

How can a finite human being know the Infinite Allah?

His answer begins with humility.

We cannot comprehend Allah's Essence—His **dhāt**—because Allah is infinite and beyond limitation.

The Qur'an says:

“Vision cannot encompass Him, but He encompasses all vision.”

Qur’an 6:103

And:

“They do not encompass Him in knowledge.”

Qur’an 20:110

- Allah cannot be contained by sight.
- He cannot be enclosed by the imagination.
- He cannot be captured within a human concept.

Whatever the mind imagines is limited, because the mind itself is limited. Allah transcends every image and every boundary.

Then what does it mean to know Him?

We Know Allah Through His Manifestations, Not His Essence

Mulla Sadra taught that creation reflects Allah’s names and attributes.

- Beauty reflects **al-Jamīl**, the Beautiful.
- Justice reflects **al-‘Adl**, the Just.
- Mercy reflects **al-Raḥmān**, the Most Merciful.
- Knowledge reflects **al-‘Alīm**, the All-Knowing.

Creation is like a mirror. When a mirror reflects sunlight, we do not say that the mirror contains the sun. It reflects the sun’s light according to its capacity.

In the same way, the universe is not Allah. Creation is never identical to the Creator.

Yet creation points toward Him.

This is why the Qur’an repeatedly speaks of **āyāt**—signs. A sign does not terminate in itself.

It directs attention beyond itself.

The Qur’an says:

“Wherever you turn, there is the Face of Allah.”

Qur’an 2:115

Mulla Sadra understood this to mean that every reality points beyond itself toward its Creator.

The beauty of a flower is not Allah, but it can point toward al-Jamīl. An act of mercy is not Allah, but it can reveal something of the meaning of al-Raḥmān. The order of the universe is not Allah, but it directs the reflective mind toward divine wisdom.

Thus, knowing Allah begins by recognizing His signs.

The Soul Is Always Moving Toward Perfection

One of Mulla Sadra's most important philosophical contributions is the doctrine of **substantial motion**, or *al-ḥaraka al-jawhariyya*.

Earlier philosophers often treated change as something that occurred mainly in the qualities or external conditions of things.

Mulla Sadra argued that change reaches more deeply. The very substance of existence is in motion. The soul is not static. It is continually becoming.

The soul you possess today is not exactly the soul you possessed as a child—not because you have become a different person, but because your being has been shaped through knowledge, choices, love, suffering, repentance, worship, loss, and hope.

- Every sincere action transforms the soul.
- Every repeated choice leaves a mark.
- Patience practiced over time makes the soul more patient.
- Mercy practiced sincerely makes the soul more merciful.
- Arrogance repeatedly chosen makes the soul more arrogant.
- Repentance softens what sin had hardened.
- Prayer reorients what distraction had scattered.

The Qur'an alludes to this journey:

“O human being! Indeed, you are laboring toward your Lord with great striving, and you will meet Him.”

Qur'an 84:6

This striving is not merely physical. The soul itself is traveling. Every day carries us toward the meeting with Allah.

The question is not whether we are moving. The question is what we are becoming as we move.

Real Knowledge Transforms Being

Modern thinking often treats knowledge as information. A person knows something when he can describe it, define it, or repeat it.

Mulla Sadra's understanding is more profound. Real knowledge transforms the knower.

- If you truly know mercy, you become more merciful.
- If you truly know justice, you become more just.
- If you truly know patience, patience appears in your conduct.
- If you truly know Allah, your soul begins to reflect the divine qualities—not in essence, but in character.

An Islamic saying expresses this aspiration:

“Adorn yourselves with the character traits of Allah.”

This does not mean that the human being becomes divine.

Allah's Essence belongs only to Allah.

Rather, the human being seeks to reflect qualities loved by Allah: compassion, wisdom, patience, forgiveness, generosity, truthfulness, and justice.

A person who claims knowledge of Allah but becomes more cruel has not allowed knowledge to reach the soul.

A person who claims nearness to Allah but becomes more arrogant has mistaken information for transformation.

True knowledge produces humility.

Paradise Begins Before Death

Mulla Sadra believed that Heaven and Hell are not merely external destinations into which an unchanged person is placed. They are also connected to what the soul has become.

If the soul becomes filled with love of Allah, truth, mercy, and goodness, then something of Paradise has already begun within it.

If the soul becomes dominated by hatred, arrogance, greed, envy, and falsehood, it begins carrying the materials of suffering within itself.

The person does not leave his character behind at death. He carries the reality of what he has become. Death removes the veil.

The Qur'an says:

“We have removed from you your covering, and today your sight is sharp.”

Qur'an 50:22

According to Mulla Sadra, death does not suddenly turn us into an entirely different being.

- It unveils the being we have been creating throughout our lives.
- The generous soul does not become generous only after death.
- It has been becoming generous through every sincere act of giving.
- The truthful soul does not become truthful only in the next world.
- It has been formed through truthfulness in this world.

Likewise, arrogance, cruelty, and greed become part of the inner form of the person who repeatedly chooses them.

Life is therefore the workshop of the soul.

We are building the self that will cross into Barzakh.

The Journey Never Ends

Perhaps one of Mulla Sadra's most beautiful insights is that the journey toward Allah is endless.

Allah is Infinite. No finite creature can reach the end of the Infinite. Even in Paradise, the believer may continue to experience deeper knowledge, greater joy, and increasing nearness to Allah.

The journey is endless because the One being known is without end. This transforms Paradise from a static reward into an everlasting ascent.

The believer does not merely receive pleasures. The believer draws nearer. And because Allah's beauty, mercy, knowledge, and perfection are infinite, nearness to Him can never be exhausted.

A Connection to Imam Ali

Imam Ali ibn Abi Talib is reported to have said:

“The perfection of sincerity is to deny Him attributes.”

At first, this statement may seem puzzling. The Qur'an itself describes Allah as Merciful, Knowing, Powerful, Wise, and Just.

Mulla Sadra's philosophical understanding helps clarify the meaning.

It does not mean that Allah lacks attributes. Rather, every attribute as imagined by the human mind is limited by human understanding. Allah has revealed His names so that we may know and worship Him. Yet His actual reality infinitely transcends the concepts we attach to those names.

We understand mercy according to our limited experience. Allah's mercy is beyond our comprehension. We understand knowledge through learning and discovery. Allah's knowledge is eternal and unlimited. We understand power through effort and ability. Allah's power is absolute and dependent upon nothing.

The closer a person comes to Allah, the more humble he becomes concerning what he truly knows. Spiritual growth does not produce intellectual arrogance.

It produces awe.

The Questions Become One

Rūḥ, Barzakh, Purpose, and Becoming

As the morning continued, I began to see that my earlier questions were not separate.

- They belonged to a single vision.
- The rūḥ originates from Allah's command.
- The body belongs to the physical world and eventually returns to the earth.
- The nafs—the conscious self—is shaped through belief, choice, repentance, love, worship, and action.

Life in this world is the workshop in which the soul is formed. Death is not the destruction of the human person. It is the unveiling of what the soul has become. Barzakh is a continuation of the soul's journey. Resurrection is the full manifestation of the soul's reality.

Judgment reveals the perfect justice and mercy of Allah. Knowing Allah is not a matter of reaching the end of a definition. It is an everlasting ascent into His infinite beauty, wisdom, mercy, and nearness.

In this sense, the **purpose of life is not merely to enter Paradise. Paradise is the fruit.**

The deeper purpose is to become the kind of person who can live in the presence of Allah and delight in drawing ever nearer to Him.

For Mulla Sadra, this process of becoming begins now.

- It continues through life.
 - It is unveiled at death.
 - It continues in Barzakh.
 - It reaches fuller manifestation at resurrection.
 - And by Allah's mercy, it may continue eternally.
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The Morning Returns

A Moment of Self-Discovery

When I first sat after Fajr, I believed I was asking about death. But by the end of the journey, I understood that the question had always been about life. Death had simply stripped the question of distraction.

- To ask what survives is to ask what is truly important.
- To ask what follows the body is to ask what we are building within the soul.
- To ask about judgment is to ask how we are living today.
- To ask about Paradise is to ask whether the qualities of Paradise have begun to appear within us.
- To ask about Allah is to ask what occupies the heart.

The Qur'an had not given me permission to treat the afterlife as distant information.

It had brought the afterlife into the present moment.

- Every action is shaping the soul.
- Every intention matters.
- Every act of mercy leaves a trace.
- Every injustice leaves a trace.
- Every prayer reorients the heart.
- Every repentance changes the direction of the journey.
- Every morning is another return after the temporary surrender of sleep.
- Every breath is permission to continue becoming.

I realized that death was no longer the center of the story.

- The center was preparation.
- The center was transformation.
- The center was the journey toward Allah.

Perhaps this is what it means to awaken before death.

Not to abandon the world, but to see it correctly. Not to fear every moment, but to recognize the sacred responsibility hidden within every moment. Not to become paralyzed by the grave, but to become alive to the purpose for which life was given.

The believer does not prepare for death by ceasing to live. The believer prepares for death by learning how to live in the presence of Allah.

That morning, the question with which I began had changed.

I had asked:

What happens to us after death?

But the more urgent question had become:

What am I becoming before death arrives?

The Qur'an had shown me that the soul is traveling whether I am conscious of the journey or not.

- The destination is Allah.
- The time of departure is unknown.

The provisions are faith, sincerity, mercy, justice, repentance, knowledge, and righteous action. And the path begins here.

- It begins in the choices no one applauds.
- It begins in the prayers offered when the heart is tired.
- It begins in the forgiveness that defeats the ego.
- It begins in kindness given secretly.
- It begins when knowledge becomes character.
- It begins when worship becomes freedom.
- It begins when the human being looks at creation and recognizes signs.
- It begins when we understand that we belong to Allah.
- And it begins again every morning.

As I rose from my place of prayer, I did not feel that I had reached the end of my questions.

I had only learned to ask them differently. The afterlife was no longer merely a world waiting beyond death. It was a reality toward which my soul was already moving.

Barzakh was no longer only an abstract theological concept. It was the next stage of a journey already underway. Paradise was no longer merely a reward to be received. It was

the flowering of a soul trained to love what Allah loves. The meeting with Allah was no longer only an event in the distant future.

- Every sincere prayer was already a form of approach.
- Every remembrance was already a turning.
- Every act of goodness was already a step.

Perhaps that is why the Qur'an surrounds us with signs.

- The rising sun is a sign.
- Sleep and awakening are signs.
- Life and death are signs.
- The heavens and the earth are signs.
- The mystery within our own consciousness is a sign.

Every heartbeat is a reminder that the journey continues. Every breath says that the door of repentance remains open. Every morning whispers that Allah has returned the soul for another appointed time.

And every sincere question can become an invitation—not merely to acquire information about Allah, but to draw nearer to Him.

- We came from Allah.
- We live by Allah.
- We are shaped beneath the gaze of Allah.
- We die by the decree of Allah.
- And to Allah we return.

“Indeed, to Allah we belong, and indeed, to Him we shall return.”

Qur'an 2:156

The journey into the afterlife begins long before the grave. It begins within the soul.

It begins now.