

Life is an open-book exam – Part 2

My brothers and sisters, we will come to the Day about which Allahﷻ informed and warned us and told us to ensure that we do what we need to, to ensure that we are not caught unawares and regret our heedlessness.

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا أَنْفِقُوا مِمَّا رَزَقْنَاكُمْ مِّن قَبْلِ أَنْ يَأْتِيَ يَوْمٌ لَّا بَيْعَ فِيهِ
وَلَا حُلَّةٌ وَلَا شَفَاعَةٌ وَالْكَافِرُونَ هُمُ الظَّالِمُونَ

Baqara 2: 254. O you who believe! Spend of that with which We have provided for you, before a Day comes when there will be no bargaining, nor friendship, nor intercession. And it is the disbelievers who are the Zalimun (wrong doers).

Allahﷻ addressed the usual ways in which we seek help in this life; friendship, intercession, and bargaining and told us that none of those would work on the Day of Judgement. Those who will bear witness in our favor or against us, will be those who we will not be able to deny.

Allahﷻ warned us about this:

الْيَوْمَ نَخْتِمُ عَلَىٰ أَفْوَاهِهِمْ وَتُكَلِّمُنَا أَيْدِيهِمْ وَتَشْهَدُ أَرْجُلُهُمْ بِمَا كَانُوا يَكْسِبُونَ

Ya-Seen 36: 65. This Day, We shall seal up their mouths, and their hands will speak to Us, and their legs will bear witness to what they used to earn.

وَقَالُوا لِجُلُودِهِمْ لِمَ شَهِدْتُمْ عَلَيْنَا قَالُوا أَنْطَقَنَا اللَّهُ الَّذِي أَنْطَقَ كُلَّ شَيْءٍ
وَهُوَ خَلَقَكُمْ أَوَّلَ مَرَّةٍ وَإِلَيْهِ تُرْجَعُونَ

Fussilat 41: 21. And they will say to their skins, “Why do you testify against us?”

They will say: “Allah has caused us to speak, as He causes all things to speak, and

He created you the first time, and to Him you are made to return.”

Everyone will realize the cost of what they did in this life. Our clever speech and justifications and the speech of spin artists that we are used to, to get out of tight situations in this life, will not work either.

تَكَادُ تَمَيِّزُ مِنَ الْغَيْظِ كُلَّمَا أُلْقِيَ فِيهَا فَوْجٌ سَأَلَهُمْ خَزَنَتُهَا أَلَمْ يَأْتِكُمْ نَذِيرٌ
 قَالُوا بَلَىٰ قَدْ جَاءَنَا نَذِيرٌ فَكَذَّبْنَا وَقُلْنَا مَا نَزَّلَ اللَّهُ مِن شَيْءٍ إِنْ أَنْتُمْ إِلَّا فِي ضَلَالٍ
 كَبِيرٍ
 وَقَالُوا لَوْ كُنَّا نَسْمَعُ أَوْ نَعْقِلُ مَا كُنَّا فِي أَصْحَابِ السَّعِيرِ
 فَاعْتَرَفُوا بِذَنبِهِمْ فَسُحْقًا لِأَصْحَابِ السَّعِيرِ
 إِنَّ الَّذِينَ يَخْشَوْنَ رَبَّهُم بِالْغَيْبِ لَهُمْ مَغْفِرَةٌ وَأَجْرٌ كَبِيرٌ

Mulk 67: 8. It almost bursts up with fury. Every time a group is cast therein, its keeper will ask: “Did no warner come to you?” **9.** They will say: “Yes indeed; a warner did come to us, but we denied him and said: ‘Allah never sent down anything (of revelation), you are only in great error.’” **10.** And they will say: “Had we but listened or used our intelligence, we would not have been among the dwellers of the blazing Fire!” **11.** Then they will confess their sin. So, away with the dwellers of the blazing Fire. **12.** Verily! Those who fear their Rabb unseen, theirs will be forgiveness and a great reward (Jannah).

Allahﷻ in His Mercy warned us and gave us the questions we will be asked.

Rasoolullahﷺ said, “The two feet of the son of Adam will not move from near his Rabb on the Day of Judgment until he is asked about five (matters) concerning his life – how he spent it; about his youth – how he took care of it; about his wealth – how he earned it; and where he spent it and about that which he acted upon from the knowledge he acquired.” (At-Tirmidhi)

I recall a film about a prison where the walkways outside the cells were made of metal mesh and prisoners wore boots with metal soles. The boots were fixed on their feet so that they could not take them off. Naturally, it made a huge racket when they walked. I wondered at the reason for this until in one scene there was a fight and an attempt by some prisoners at making a break. The guards throw a switch, and the mesh walkway gets energized and becomes a huge electromagnet. The boot soles stick to it and the prisoners who were running fall on their faces and nobody can move. I thought, "If this is the situation in this life, how will I move on the Day of Judgement when my feet are fixed to the ground until I answer the questions that my Rabb will ask me?" May Allahﷻ have mercy on us.

This is the question paper, given to us in advance and upon the answers to which will depend our eternal lives.

1. Our life (time) – how we spent it
2. Our youth – how we took care of it
3. Our wealth – how we earned it; and where we spent it
4. Our knowledge – whether we acted upon it or not

Focus determines action, so let me remind myself and you that Allahﷻ is not going to ask us about the quantum of any of these things but about how we used what had been given to us. On the other hand, I want you to pause a bit and reflect **on what we are most concerned about** with respect to our life, its quantum, or its quality? Please reflect on the criticality of the right focus.

In this life Allah ﷻ decreed some things and did not give us any control over them. Among them are the duration of our lives, our health and strength, our wealth, and our knowledge. We cannot live longer or become stronger or healthier than our genes dictate or earn or learn more than what has been decreed for us. A healthy lifestyle is important because it will help us to improve the quality of our lives, not its duration. Allah ﷻ stated categorically:

وَلِكُلِّ أُمَّةٍ أَجَلٌ فَإِذَا جَاءَ أَجْلُهُمْ لَا يَسْتَأْخِرُونَ سَاعَةً وَلَا يَسْتَقْدِمُونَ

A'araf 7: 34. And every nation has its appointed term; when their term is reached, neither can they delay it nor can they advance it an hour (or a moment).

أَيْنَمَا تَكُونُوا يُدْرِكَكُمُ الْمَوْتُ وَلَوْ كُنْتُمْ فِي بُرُوجٍ مُّشِيدَةٍ

Nisa 4: 78. "Wheresoever you may be, death will overtake you even if you are in fortresses built up strong and high!"

قُلْ يَتَوَفَّاكُم مَّلَكُ الْمَوْتِ الَّذِي وُكِّلَ بِكُمْ ثُمَّ إِلَىٰ رَبِّكُمْ تُرْجَعُونَ

Sajda 32: 11. Say: "The angel of death, who is set over you, will take your souls, then you shall be brought to your Rabb."

Let us look at these four things in a bit more detail and see what the effect of using Allah ﷻ's standard be on our worldly welfare and success. It is when we are convinced that Islam is good for our Dunya, that we will be persuaded to practice it with confidence. Let us ask ourselves:

1. What will be the effect of living our life consciously with respect to how we spend our time? What will be the effect of assessing what we spend

time on with the pleasure of Allah ﷻ as the criterion for decision making? If we use this criterion and structure our time, and want to play football or go on a hike or go fishing or fly a plane or eat a delicious meal, or hang out with our friends or take a college course or read a good book or do any of the innumerable things that we enjoy doing, can we still do them or not? Of course, we can do every one of these things and if we ensure that we remember Allah ﷻ and follow the Sunnah of Rasoolullah ﷺ then all these actions become actions that Allah ﷻ will reward us for.

2. Ask anyone or read any biography of any great leader and answer the question, “Did he/she spend their time consciously or unconsciously?” What do you think is the answer? Do we want to be winners or losers? Do you want me to spell it out even more? This is even more important for those who are still in their youth. The challenges for youth to remain on the straight and narrow – Siratal Mustaqeem – are even more difficult. That is why Allah ﷻ placed special importance on this time and announced a special reward for the young man or woman who remains true to Allah ﷻ during their youth by declaring that one of the seven who will be shaded under the Shade of the Throne of Allah ﷻ on the day when there will be no shade except His Shade, will be the young man or woman who remains pure and pious during their youth. This is your time. Please guard it and value it and make the best use of it.
3. Allah ﷻ told us that He decides how much wealth we will have. We have no control over the amount of wealth we can earn. Allah ﷻ declared:

قُلْ إِنَّ رَبِّي يَبْسُطُ الرِّزْقَ لِمَن يَشَاءُ وَيَقْدِرُ وَلَكِنَّ أَكْثَرَ النَّاسِ لَا
يَعْلَمُونَ

Saba 34: 36. Say (O Muhammad ﷺ): "Verily, my Rabb enlarges and restricts the provision to whom He pleases, but most men know not."

وَلَوْ بَسَطَ اللَّهُ الرِّزْقَ لِعِبَادِهِ لَبَغَوْا فِي الْأَرْضِ وَلَكِن يُنَزِّلُ بِقَدَرٍ مَّا
يَشَاءُ إِنَّهُ بِعِبَادِهِ خَبِيرٌ بَصِيرٌ

Shura 42: 27. And if Allah were to enlarge the provision for His slaves, they would surely rebel in the earth, but He sends down by measure as He wills. Verily! He is in respect of His slaves, the Well-Aware, the All-Seer.

If we have faith in the Qur'an then we know that no matter what we do, we can only earn what Allah ﷻ has written for us. What then is the benefit of disobeying Allah ﷻ and incurring His anger in earning what is written for us anyway? What is the benefit of dealing in interest knowing that Allah ﷻ declared war on those who do that? Do we want to meet Allah ﷻ on the Day of Judgment as His enemies? What do you call those you are at war with? Or as His obedient and humble slaves who seek His Mercy and Forgiveness? The time to choose is now. Not when we are resurrected.

Let us think about this when we are looking at how we earn and where we spend. Some people think that they can do any kind of business and deal in any product or service and then give some money to charity or to the masjid and all will be well. Let me remind you and myself that Allah ﷻ

is pure and accepts only what is pure. Charity from Haraam earning is not accepted. You can't buy off Allah ﷻ.

You can't placate Allah ﷻ by throwing some money at Him Naudhubillah. On the other hand, if you choose to do what pleases Allah ﷻ, you will still get the same things but with blessing, Baraka and the pleasure of Allah ﷻ and be counted among His Awlia. Which is better? Put yourself in your grave and answer that question. Not sitting here. But lying in your grave when they have filled it and gone and Munkir and Nakir have come to ask their questions. What value is your bank loan and mortgage on your lovely house which belongs to the bank or your lovely car or TV set or whatever which belongs to the bank or the stuff you sell in your shops, knowing very well that Allah ﷻ made those products Haraam? What is the value of all that to you then, in the dark, constricted, claustrophobic space of your grave? That is its value today. Is it worth it? So, what do you want to do? Today it is very easy – make Istighfaar and turn towards Allah ﷻ (Tawba). Tomorrow it will be impossible when we face Allah ﷻ.

Imagine that you are standing in front of a huge warehouse made of transparent glass and you can see everything that is inside it. Imagine that inside this warehouse is everything that you desire in life. Everything. The warehouse has two doors with retina scanners which recognize you and open only for you. On one door is a sign saying, "HARAAM." On the other one is a sign saying, "HALAL." You are standing before the door marked "HARAAM" and it opened for you and you are about to enter it.

At that moment, your friend calls out to you, “Don’t enter through that door. Go to the other one marked “HALAL” and enter through it. Everything in the warehouse is the same. Just enter from there.”

You look at the door marked “HALAL” but it is shut. So, you tell your friend, “That door is shut.” He says, “Just go and stand before it and it will open just like this one.” You start to move away and the door before you shuts. You panic and run back, and it opens. You look at the other door, marked “HALAL” and it remains closed. You tell your friend, ‘Get the other door opened and I will go there. Otherwise, I am going in through this one as it is open.’ Your friend says to you, sadly, “The door opens only when you stand before it because it opens by retina scanning. I can’t open it for you. It is YOUR DOOR and it will open only for you. Have faith and move and it will open.” What will you do? This is the reality of our life in this world. What is ours has been given to us. It can’t be increased or decreased. All that we have the power to do is to choose which door we want to use to access it. But on that choice depends the blessing in what we have in this world and Jannah in the Aakhirah.

4. The last question is about applying knowledge. Once again it is not about how much knowledge we acquire or how much Qur’an we memorize or how well we recite it or how many Ahadith we know or how many Matha’il of Fiqh. It is about how we apply what we know in our lives. On the Day of Judgment, there will be many who knew a great deal but didn’t live by it and instead, used it for material benefit or to justify oppression

and legitimize crime by their paymasters – scholars for dollars – who will find that their knowledge will become the witness against them. On the other hand, there will be those who didn't know much but who lived by what they knew and that will be enough for them to earn Jannah.

I want to end with one of the many beautiful stories of the Sahaba who learnt from Rasoolullah ﷺ and understood the reality of the Aakhira.

لَنْ تَتَّالُوا الْبِرَّ حَتَّى تُنْفِقُوا مِمَّا تُحِبُّونَ وَمَا تُنْفِقُوا مِنْ شَيْءٍ فَإِنَّ اللَّهَ بِهِ عَلِيمٌ

Baqara 3:92 [But as for you, O believers,] never shall you attain to true piety unless you spend on others out of what you cherish yourselves; and whatever you spend - verily, Allah has full knowledge thereof.

Abu Talha al-Ansari (RA) gave his date orchard to Rasoolullah ﷺ to give away in charity when this Ayah was revealed, because the Aakhira was real to him. The question is, how real is the Aakhira to us?