110439 - Lengthening and shortening lifespans

the question

My father (may Allah have mercy on him) died on 27th Ramadan – may Allah admit him to Paradise, Ameen – and he was no older than seventy years. My question about this topic is: Firstly: does each of us have an allotted lifespan that he cannot go beyond? Secondly: does Allah increase or shorten a person's lifespan depending on whether he does righteous deeds or bad deeds? Thirdly: if a person neglects his physical well-being and does not take medicine, is it possible that that could be a cause of Allah shortening his lifespan? Fourthly: if the lifespan of each of us is already decided, regardless of what we do, then why should we take medicine? If our lifespan is already decided, no one will die before the end of his allotted lifespan, even if he does not take medicine.

Detailed answer

Praise be to Allah.

Death and lifespans are part of the will and decree of Allah that He wrote in al-Lawh al-Mahfooz with Him, fifty thousand years before He created all of creation. That is not subject to change or alteration; He, may He be glorified, wrote it according to His knowledge that cannot err, and according to His will that cannot be changed.

Allah, may He be glorified and exalted, says (interpretation of the meaning):

"And spend [in the way of Allah] from what We have provided you before death approaches one of you and he says, 'My Lord, if only You would delay me for a brief term so I would give charity and be among the righteous.'

But never will Allah delay a soul when its time has come. And Allah is Acquainted with what you do"

[al-Munaafiqoon 23:10-11].

And He, may He be blessed and exalted, says (interpretation of the meaning):

“He said, ‘O my people, indeed I am to you a clear warner,

[Saying], Worship Allah , fear Him and obey me.

Allah will forgive you of your sins and delay you for a specified term. Indeed, the time [set by] Allah , when it comes, will not be delayed, if you only knew’”

[Nooh 71:2-4].

That does not mean that death and lifespans are not subject to the laws of cause and effect that Allah has created in this universe; rather the issue of death, like anything else that is decreed in this world, is based on tangible causes that were also written in al-Lawh al-Mahfooz.

The one who wants to memorize the Qur’an – for example – should take appropriate measures in order to achieve that, such as reading, revising, listening, repeating and so on. If he takes all appropriate measures, he will be able to memorize it, but if he falls short in that, he will not attain what he wants.

The knowledge of Allah, may He be exalted, from eternity encompasses all that will happen to this individual. Allah, may He be glorified, knows whether he will strive to memorize and recite, or will fall short in that, and He commanded that what is known to Him should be written in al-Lawh al-Mahfooz with Him, may He be glorified, and His knowledge is not subject to any error.

The same is applicable to death: it has physical causes which are known to all people, such as falling from a great height, or a deep wound in the body of a fighter, or grave illnesses, and the like.

And there are tangible measures that could delay or postpone death, such as taking care of one’s health, keeping away from dangerous places and situations, and so on.

There are also intangible measures which the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) told us may increase our lifespan, such as du‘aa’ (supplication), upholding ties of kinship, honouring our parents, and all other righteous deeds.

It was narrated that Anas ibn Maalik (may Allah be pleased with him) said: I heard the Messenger of Allah (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) say: “Whoever would like his rizq (provision) to be increased and his life to be extended, should uphold the ties of kinship.” Narrated by al-Bukhaari (2067) and Muslim (2557).

It was narrated that Salmaan (may Allah be pleased with him) said: The Messenger of Allah (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) said: “Nothing can ward off the divine decree except du‘aa’ (supplication) and nothing can increase lifespan except honouring one’s parents.”

Narrated by at-Tirmidhi (no. 2139). He said: It is hasan ghareeb. It was also classed as hasan by al-Albaani in as-Silsilah as-Saheehah (154).

Whoever takes such measures will deserve an increase in his lifespan, and whoever falls short in taking appropriate measures to preserve life is exposing himself to death. All of that – whether cause or effect – is known and written with Allah, may He be exalted, from beginning to end, and cannot change, because it is known to Allah how it will unfold, regardless of what man changes in the measures that he takes. The pens have been lifted and the ink has dried.

This is the meaning of the verse in which Allah, may He be glorified, says (interpretation of the meaning):

“And no aged person is granted [additional] life nor is his lifespan lessened but that it is in a register. Indeed, that for Allah is easy”

[Faatir 35:11].

Ibn ‘Abbaas said, commenting on this verse:

[What it means is:] there is no one for whom I have decreed a long life but he will reach the age

that has been decreed for him. That is what I have decreed, so his life will reach the length that I have written for him in the book, and no more than that. There is no one for whom I have decreed that he should live a short life who will live a longer life; rather he will reach the point that I have written for him in the book. That is referred to in the verse: “nor is his lifespan lessened but that it is in a register”. That is, it is in His book which is with Him. End quote.

Narrated by al-Bayhaqi in al-Qadaa’ wa’l-Qadar (1/218).

Al-Bayhaqi (may Allah have mercy on him) said:

What this means is that Allah, may He be glorified, has written what will befall a person of calamity, deprivation, death and so on, and that if he calls upon Allah, may He be exalted, and obeys Him by upholding ties of kinship and the like, this calamity will not befall him, and Allah will give him abundant provision and grant him a long life. And He wrote in al-Lawh al-Mahfooz what will happen in either case. End quote.

Al-Qadaa’ wa’l-Qadar (1/211).

Shaykh al-Islam Ibn Taymiyah (may Allah have mercy on him) said:

Allah commanded the angel to write the lifespan, and said: If he upholds ties of kinship, I will increase it by such and such, but the angel does not know whether his lifespan will be increased or not; rather Allah knows how things will turn out. Then when the end of his lifespan comes, [his death] cannot be brought forward or put back. End quote.

Majmoo‘ al-Fataawa (8/517).

Shaykh Ibn Jibreen (may Allah preserve him) says:

You should understand that lifespans and provision – like all other things – are connected to the divine will and decree. Therefore Allah, may He be exalted, grants abundant provision to whomever He wills, or He restricts provision. “And for every nation is a [specified] term. So when their time has come, they will not remain behind an hour, nor will they precede [it].” [al-A‘raaf

7:34].

This is something concerning which there is no doubt. Nevertheless, it is also like other things that are religious measures and natural, tangible measures to be taken, and taking measures is subject to the divine will and decree. Some of the religious measures for increasing one’s lifespan and attaining abundant provision include: constantly fearing Allah and showing kindness to people, especially relatives.

It is proven in as-Saheehayn from the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) that he said: Whoever would like his provision to be increased and his lifespan to be extended, let him uphold ties with his kinfolk.”

That is because Allah requites a person in a manner that matches the nature of his deeds. So whoever upholds (wasala) ties with his kinfolk, Allah will extend (wasala) his lifespan and provision in a true sense [the verb for each action is the same in Arabic and comes from a root meaning to extend]. And the opposite of that also hold true: whoever cuts off ties with his kinfolk, Allah will cut off his lifespan and provision.

Allah, may He be exalted, says (interpretation of the meaning):

“And whoever fears Allah - He will make for him a way out

And will provide for him from where he does not expect”

[at-Talaaq 65:2-3].

The religious reasons for shortening one’s lifespan include: transgressing against people and wronging them. The transgressor will die early, and Allah will not overlook the punishment of the wrongdoer; He may punish him in this world by shortening his life. End quote from the shaykh’s website on this link:

http://www.ibn-jebreen.com/book.php?cat=1&book=69&toc=4468&page=4036&subsid=29295

Seeking medical treatment is one of the tangible means of preserving life and health, by Allah’s

leave. If a person neglects that, it may lead to harm or death. That does not contradict in any way what the verses and hadiths say about a person's lifespan being already defined on the basis of means and measures. It is defined on the basis of means and measures, and everything with Him is by due measure (cf. 13:8). If a person seeks medical treatment and recovers, and lives longer in this world as a result, that happens by the decree of Allah. If he is negligent or fails to seek medical treatment until he dies, that also happens by the decree of Allah.

It was narrated from Abu Khuzaamah that his father said: I asked the Messenger of Allah (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him): O Messenger of Allah, do you think that the ruqyah by which we seek healing, the medicines with which we treat ourselves, and the means of protection that we seek change the decree of Allah at all? He said: "They are part of the decree of Allah."

Narrated by at-Tirmidhi (2065) and Ibn Maajah (3437). It was also narrated with a mawqoof isnaad. At-Tirmidhi said: This is more sound.

We ask Allah to shower His mercy upon your father, and to have mercy on us when we die too.

For the ruling on seeking medical treatment, please see the answers to questions no. 2148, 2438 and 13272.

And Allah knows best.