266021 - He is asking: will he be aware of what happens to him and to his soul after death?

the question

I have an important question to which I would like to know the answer. I have researched a great deal on the Internet but have not found any answer. After death, when the angel of death takes my soul, then gives it to the angels to shroud me with a shroud from Paradise, will I be aware of that? Will I be aware of the angels and see them when they take me up to heaven, and the angels open the heaven for me, and they say: “Who is this good soul?” and they say: “This is so-and-so”? Will I be aware of all that and see it? Will I hear the voice of Allah when I am taken up to the seventh heaven and He says: “Take him down to the earth”? What will happen to me? Or where will I go when I am brought down to the earth? Will I see my body when it is being washed, or when they are taking me to the grave?

Detailed answer

Praise be to Allah.

Firstly:

These matters are matters of the unseen which the Muslim must accept, but not ask about how they happen, for no one knows how the life of al-barzakh is, or its true nature, except Allah.

The soul is something created, like any other created thing, but knowledge of its true nature is something that belongs only to Allah, may He be glorified and exalted, and He has kept the knowledge of that to Himself, as is stated in the hadith that was narrated from ‘Abdullah ibn Mas‘ood (may Allah be pleased with him), who said: Whilst I was with the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) on a farm, and he was leaning on a palm branch stripped of its leaves, the Jews passed by, and some of them said to others, Ask him about the soul. Some of

them said, What urges you to ask him about it? Others of them said, Don't ask him in case he says something you dislike. But they said, Ask him, so they asked him about the soul. The Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) kept quiet and did not respond to them, and I realised that he was receiving revelation, so I stayed where I was. When the revelation of the verse was complete, he said (interpretation of the meaning*): And they ask you, [O Muhammad], about the soul. Say, "The soul is of the affair of my Lord. And mankind have not been given of knowledge except a little"} [al-Isra 17:85]*. Narrated by al-Bukhaari.

Allah, may He be exalted, has mentioned the soul in His Book, and the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) has mentioned it in his Sunnah, ascribing several characteristics to it, including the following: it is taken (in death); it may be chained and shrouded; it comes and goes; it ascends and descends; it is drawn out as a hair is drawn out of dough… What is required of us is to affirm these attributes that are mentioned in the Qur'an and Sunnah, and to know that the soul is not like the body.

Shaykh Ibn 'Uthaymeen (may Allah have mercy on him) was asked:

A person's death means that his soul departs from his body. When he is buried in the grave, is the soul returned to his body, or where does it go? If the soul is returned to the body in the grave, how does that happen?

He replied:

It is proven from the Messenger of Allah (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) that when a person dies, his soul returns to him in his grave, and he is questioned about his Lord, his religion and his Prophet. Allah rewards those who believe with the word that stands firm in the life of this world and in the hereafter, so the believer says: My Lord is Allah, my religion is Islam and my Prophet is Muhammad. As for the disbeliever or hypocrite, when he is asked, he says: Oh, oh, I do not know; I heard the people saying something so I said it.

This return of the soul to the body in the grave is not like when a person's soul is in his body in this world, because it is the life of al-barzakh (the interval between death and the resurrection), and we

do not know how it is, because we have not been told about the nature of this life.

Regarding all matters of the unseen that we have not been told about, we are required to refrain from speculating about them, because Allah, may He be exalted, says (interpretation of the meaning): *{ And do not pursue that of which you have no knowledge. Indeed, the hearing, the sight and the heart - about all those [one] will be questioned} [al-Isra' 17:36]*. End quote from *Fataawa Noor 'ala ad-Darb*, al-'Uthaymeen (4/2).

Secondly:

The deceased person does not see his body as he is being washed or carried to the grave, because the soul has departed from it, and will not return to it until he is in his grave, when he is questioned by the angels.

Regarding the fate of the soul, when the soul of the believer comes down from heaven, it is returned to the body in which it was, then the person is questioned in the grave, and Allah makes him steadfast with the word that stands firm and expands his grave for him as far as the eye can see.

As for the soul of a disbeliever, the angels give him tidings of hellfire and divine wrath, then they take it up, disgraced, humiliated and afraid, and the gates of heaven are not opened for it. Then it returns to its body, and the person is punished in his grave and it is constricted for him, and the intense heat of the Fire comes to him.

This is mentioned in detail in the lengthy hadith of al-Bara' ibn 'Aazib, which we have quoted in the answer to question no. 8829 .

But the return of the soul to the body at the time of questioning is a specific type of return; it will not be like it was in this world, as has been noted above. Rather it will be a return that is appropriate to al-barzakh; so his life, his questioning and his answers will be appropriate to al-barzakh and will not be as they were in this world. Allah knows best about how they are and their characteristics.

Shaykh Ibn ‘Uthaymeen said:

Regarding matters of the hereafter of which Allah has told us, we are required to say: We believe and affirm, and we should not speculate, because the matter is beyond our comprehension. This is the principle regarding matters of the unseen, whether they have to do with Allah, may He be glorified and exalted, or His creation.

Matters of the unseen cannot be subject to the question “Why?” at all or the question “How?”, because the matter is beyond our comprehension. Hence, when they asked the Messenger (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) about the soul, what did Allah say to them? He said: *{And they ask you, [O Muhammad], about the soul. Say, “The soul is of the affair of my Lord}*, a matter that you cannot comprehend, *{And mankind have not been given of knowledge except a little”} [al-Isra 17:85]*. Subhaan Allah! In other words, have you learned all matters of knowledge except knowledge of the soul? Most of the matters of knowledge have passed you by and you have not been given of knowledge except a little. This is strange, that you ask such questions. Your soul, that is inside your body and without which you are nothing, you do not even know what it is! We do not know anything of the soul except what is mentioned in the religious texts of the Qur’an and Sunnah. Apart from that, we do not know anything.

End quote from *Liqaa’aat al-Baab al-Maftooh* (no. 169).

And Allah knows best.