

## *Book of the Hereafter*

**Friday Khutba by Dr Zahid Aziz, for Lahore Ahmadiyya UK, 26 February 2021**

وَكُلِّ إِنْسَانٍ أَلْزَمْنَاهُ طَبْعَهُ فِي عُنُقِهِ ۖ وَنُخْرِجُ لَهُ يَوْمَ الْقِيَامَةِ كِتَابًا يَلْقَاهُ مَنشُورًا ﴿١٣﴾ اِقْرَأْ  
كِتَابَكَ ۖ كَفَىٰ بِنَفْسِكَ الْيَوْمَ عَلَيْكَ حَسِيبًا ﴿١٤﴾

“And We have made every human’s actions to cling to his neck, and We shall bring forth to him on the day of Resurrection a book which he will find wide open. Read your book. Your own soul is sufficient as a reckoner against you this day.” (The Quran, 17:13–14)

In previous recent *khutbas* I have dealt with a verse from the beginning of chapter 2 of the Holy Quran (2:4) which requires Muslims to believe in “what has been revealed to you (O Prophet) and what was revealed before you” and it is added that “and of the Hereafter they are sure”. The revelations to the Holy Prophet and the earlier revelations became actual books. Belief in the life after death also involves a book, but it is separate book for each person containing the records of his or her deeds.

Let me first say, regarding matters relating to the life after death, that although these are expressed in the Quran in physical terms, such as gardens and fire, they are not physical things and the concepts which we learn from this world, like place, distance and time, do not apply to them. This can be seen from the Quran and Hadith.

It is stated in the verse I have read that the effect which a person’s actions have on him will be seen in the next life as a book, and everyone will be confronted by his book which will list his or her own actions. Of course, it is not a physical book consisting of pages with writing on it by means of ink. Each one will be asked to judge his own record. His or her very self will be enough as a judge of its own self. The book will be “wide open” (*manshūr*). This means that all parts of the book will be open to view, and not in the manner in which we open a book wide and see only two pages, left and right. In fact, the book will be inscribed on that person’s own soul. The

actions during this life which were made to cling to a person's neck could not, of course, be seen in this life as clinging to his neck. But their effect is on his soul. When, after death, only the soul remains, then it will show the effect of those deeds plainly and openly. The person himself is the record of his deeds and he himself is asked to become the judge because the evidence of the deeds is clear and undeniable.

The word translated as “actions” is *tā'ir*, which means “birds”. Actions are described by this word because, once done, they depart from you like birds flying away. They cannot be recalled and undone. While they are gone, their effect remains clinging to the neck. That expression indicates that you will be held responsible for them.

This meaning is further supported by the next verse:

مَنْ اهْتَدَىٰ فَإِنَّمَا يَهْتَدِي لِنَفْسِهِ ۗ وَمَنْ ضَلَّ فَإِنَّمَا يَضِلُّ عَلَيْهَا ۗ وَلَا تَزِرُ وَازِرَةٌ وِزْرَ أُخْرَىٰ ۗ وَمَا كُنَّا مُعَذِّبِينَ حَتَّىٰ نَبْعَثَ رَسُولًا ﴿١٥﴾

“Whoever goes aright, goes aright only for the good of his own soul; and whoever goes astray, goes astray only to its detriment. And no bearer of a burden can bear the burden of another. Nor do We punish until We raise a messenger.” (17:15)

The person who has followed the right path has done good to his own soul. The effects of his deeds have been beneficial to his soul. For those who go wrong, the effects are the opposite, detrimental. It is these effects which appear in the next life in the form of a book. As the benefit and the harm are personal to an individual, it is added here that no one, because he himself has to bear his burden of responsibility, can bear the burden which another person must bear himself. If a good deed is required of each of us, then a person doing that deed cannot relieve another person of doing it. Similarly, if a person does wrong, its responsibility and punishment cannot fall on another person. It is also added here that God does not punish anyone for not acting on His messages until He has sent that message to them through a messenger.

Later in the same chapter it is stated:

يَوْمَ نَدْعُوا كُلَّ أُنَاسٍ بِإِمَامِهِمْ فَمَنْ أُوْتِيَ كِتَابَهُ بِيَمِينِهِ فَأُولَئِكَ يَقْرَءُونَ كِتَابَهُمْ وَلَا يُظَلَمُونَ فَتِيلًا  
﴿٥٧﴾ وَمَنْ كَانَ فِي هَذِهِ أَعْمَى فَهُوَ فِي الْآخِرَةِ أَعْمَى وَأَضَلُّ سَبِيلًا ﴿٥٨﴾

“On the day when We shall call every people with their leader (*imam*): then whoever is given his book in his right hand, these will read their book; and they will not be dealt with unjustly in the least. And whoever is blind in this (world) he will be blind in the Hereafter, and further away from the path.” (17:71–72)

The last part of this quotation shows that physical objects and attributes are not meant. We know it for a fact that physically blind people can be righteous as much as any sighted person can be. So “blind in this world” cannot possibly mean a physically blind person. It means blind to the guidance sent by God. Anyone who is blind to it while living in this world is spiritually blind and will find that he cannot see spiritual light when he or she reaches the next world. Starting at a disadvantage in the next world, that person will get further and further behind the righteous who advance in the next world by the light they find there.

Turning to the first part of this passage, the “right hand” mentioned here cannot mean any person’s right hand. The word “right” is symbolic of power and strength, and how you rightfully acquire something. In one place the Quran says about God: “the whole earth will be in His grip on the day of Resurrection and the heavens rolled up in His right hand” (39:67). But God has no right hand. What is meant by being given the book in the right hand is that during his life he acted on the right teachings with all his power and strength and this has given him strength to advance further in the life after death. In another place the Quran says that in the life after death, as regards the believers, “their light will gleam before them and on their right hands — they will say: Our Lord, make perfect for us our light, and grant us protection” (66:8). This light in their right hands is produced by, or it actually is, the book of their deeds,

and it shows them the way forward in the next life, as it did during this life, and they wish for that light to become more perfect.

In the above passage (17:71–72), in contrast with the person who is given their book in the right hand, is the blind person. In another place, the Quran says: “Then as for him who is given his book in his right hand, he will say: Here, read my book. Surely I knew that I should meet my account. So he will be in a life of bliss, ... And as for him who is given his book in his left hand — he will say: If only my book had not been given to me! And I had not known what my account was!” (69:19–21 and 25–26). The second person being given his book in his left hand is meant to indicate that he did not follow the correct guidance with power and strength, but weakly and unsteadily, like a right-handed person using his left hand to write. The result is that he is stumbling in the next life. In another place, the person who is given his book in his right hand is compared to the person “who is given his book behind his back” (84:10). This is because during his life he ignored the true guidance of God and turned his back on it. As a result, in the afterlife his deeds do not take him forward.

In the life after death, there is no physical body of a man or woman, no right hand, no left hand, no back, no eye which can see or is blind. There is only the body consisting of deeds. A person’s behaviour in this life towards God’s guidance carries forward to the next life and either helps his progress there or hinders his progress.

In yet another place in the Quran it is stated that: “the book of the wicked is in the prison. And what will make you (O reader) know what the prison is? It is a written book” (83:7–9), and a little later: “the book of the virtuous is in the highest places. And what will make you know what the highest places are? It is a written book” (83:18–20). The book of the wicked is not only in prison but the prison is the book. The book of the virtuous is not only in the highest places but the highest places are the book. In fact, in the case of the wicked, the book which is in the prison is the person himself. And it is not an external prison that he is in, because he himself is the prison.

Similarly, in the case of the virtuous person, the book which is in the highest places is the person himself. And the highest places are not something external that he is located in, because he himself is the highest places.

As I indicated at the beginning, there is a difficulty in understanding these concepts because they are describing things which are not in our physical world and can only be described by comparing them to what we see and know in this world.

بَارِكْ اللَّهُ لَنَا وَكُفِّرْ فِي الْقُرْآنِ الْعَظِيمِ، وَنَفَعْنَا وَإِيَّاكُمْ بِالآيَاتِ وَالذِّكْرِ الْحَكِيمِ، إِنَّهُ تَعَالَى جَوَادٌ كَرِيمٌ  
مَلِكٌ بَرٌّ رَوْفٌ رَحِيمٌ-