

Sleeping, Death and Life after Death: An Inferential Comparative Study

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Abstract

This paper presents an inferential comparative analysis of the relationship between sleep, death, and life after death. The depiction of sleep and death in the Qur'an and Sunnah is highlighted by delving into the position of the soul and its experience in both circumstances to repudiate the doubt about the life of the body and soul during the period between death and resurrection. In addition to the Qur'anic and Hadith texts that establish this fact, clear, rational evidence is also provided in this paper to bolster the claim. The study uses a qualitative method, relying on analytical, descriptive, comparative, and critical analyses to explore some verses of the Qur'an and hadiths of the Prophet (saw) to present its arguments. Likewise, the daily empirical human experience during their sleep and while awaking is also presented by highlighting the similarities between sleep and death on the one hand and what happens to a person during sleep and after death on the other hand, to prove the possibility of the existence of life in the grave. So, the research establishes the reality of the punishment and enjoyment in the grave -the period between death and resurrection- by inference the relationship between sleep and death on one side, and the connection between the experience of the soul and body in the dream and what the soul and body encounter in the grave after the Soul is restored to the body again on another side.

Keywords: Death, Dream, Grave, Heaven, Life after Death, Sleeping.

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Introduction:

Muslims, based on the principles of Islam, believe in life after death. This belief is one of the pillars of the faith in Islam, and without being convinced that there will be a life after death, one cannot be a Muslim. During this phase of other life, man will receive the reward for all his deeds. This principle is firmly established in many verses of the Qur'an and hadiths of the Prophet (saw). A complete chapter of the Qur'an is named after this notion, i.e., surah al-qiyāmah. The fundamental of this belief requires every Muslim to believe in the occurrence of life after death, whether the one that will happen in the grave or the one that will happen on the Day of Resurrection. However, knowing all the details of everything that will happen to a person in this stage after death is neither obligatory for a Muslim nor is a necessity of faith, except that the belief in everything stated in the Qur'an and all which are mentioned in the authentic Sunnah of the Prophet (saw) in this regard are obligatory in general. Every event that will occur in life after death is addressed in different narrations from the Prophet (saw), starting from the point of death till the judgment is passed on every single soul among the sons of Adam on the Day of Judgement. Every true Muslim believes in such verses and hadiths since it is one of the pillars of faith. 'Umar bin al-Khattab (ra) narrated: "One day, the Prophet (saw) stood up amongst us for an extended period and informed us about the beginning of creation and talked about everything in detail till he mentioned how the people of Paradise will enter their places and the people of Hell will enter their places. Some remembered what he had said, and some forgot it. (Al-Bukhari, (4) 106). So, this research is an attempt to conduct a logical and inferential comparative study to indicate the factuality of life and resurrection after death by highlighting the similarities between sleep and death from one aspect, and between waking up after sleep and life after death from another aspect, as well as the parallel between what happens to a person during sleep and what happens to him in the grave after the soul is restored to him.

Objective and Importance of the Study

The main objective of the research lies in attempting to answer some questions attributed to some Islamic sects in the past; some Islamic sects denied the punishment and enjoyment of the grave. While some others claimed that such punishment and enjoyment will only affect the souls, as for the bodies in their graves, this does not reach them while they are in the

graves. Many atheists and philosophers in the past and present time also deny life in the grave because if we uncover graves, we will find no trace of torment or bliss in them. Likewise, if we put something on the dead person in his grave and open the grave after a while, we will find this thing in its original state. Some also asked how this narrow place can accommodate the angels and the dead. Others said that belief in the torment and bliss of the grave contradicts what is required by logic and common sense because if we place the dead person on the ground for a long time, we do not see him move or answer a question. So, what about someone who has been devoured by wild beasts, bitten by birds, and whose body parts have been scattered in the stomachs of wild beasts? How can the angels ask him, and how can his grave be either a pit of Hell or a garden of Paradise? (Ibn al-Qayyim, 1995, 111.113). Unfortunately, we see some Muslims today doubt the existence of the torment and pleasure of the grave, claiming that it is not explicitly mentioned in the Quran. They said that if the hadiths about the torment of the grave are authentic, why did the Quran not mention such a fundamental issue? So, this research aims to employ an inferential comparative analysis of the relationship between sleep, death, and life after death to address these arguments, in addition to the texts from the Qur'an and Sunnah. (MFTO, <https://muftiwp.gov.my/en/artikel/irsyad-fatwa/irsyad-fatwa-umum-cat/2012-3>).

Some of the previous Muslim scholars, such as Abu al-Hasan al-'Ash'ari, Ibn al-Qayyim al-Jawzi, and others, attributed the denial of the punishment of the grave to some groups among some Islamic sects, i.e., some parts of Kharijites, Mu'tazilites, etc. These scholars made commendable efforts to refute this claim with adequate arguments from the Qur'an, Sunnah, and reasoning. Most of these arguments can only be found in Arabic amid voluminous books inaccessible to many readers and researchers. (Ibn al-Qayyim, 1995, 111.113; Abu al-Hasan, (2) 318). Some other researchers discuss believing in the punishment and enjoyment of the grave as a requirement of faith in Islam. Based on our research, we hardly find a single contemporary research that addresses this issue in this dimension, followed by this paper, which proves the novelty of the research in this field. So, this research is crucial for enlightening many Muslims and non-Muslims who doubt the possibility of life between death and resurrection.

Depiction of Sleep and Death in the Qur'an and Hadith

Sleep as a Sign of Weakness and Imperfection

Fundamentally, every Muslim must know that sleep is a sign of imperfection and dependence. Thus, Allah doesn't sleep and can never sleep. Whoever believes that Allah sleeps is not a Muslim since he denies the Qur'an. The Prophet of Allah (saw) said: "Verily Allah does not sleep, and it does not befit Him to sleep. He raises the scale and lowers it. The deeds of the day are presented to Him in the night, and the deeds of the night in the day." (Muslim, (1) 161). The Qur'an says: "Allah is the Everlasting, the Sustainer of the whole universe. No slumber can seize Him nor sleep. To Him belongs whatever is in the heavens and whatever is on the earth." (al-Baqarah: 255). He oversees the affairs of whomever in heaven and on earth; He has full knowledge of what is ahead and behind them. He brings matters forth daily, i.e., giving life and taking it from some, elevating and downgrading some, and all these activities simultaneously do not tire Allah. Whenever Allah intends that something happens, He commands it by saying 'be', and it will be. (Qur'an Baqarah: 255; Al-Rahman: 29; Yasin: 82). Contrarily, sleep is a means of strength and leisure for humans. Allah, out of his mercy, makes sleep a means of relaxation, so He created the night and made it dark for us to be able to have a deep sleep that relieves us from the daily struggles that occur during the day, which is bright and meant for striving for sustenance. Allah says in the Qur'an (al-Nabai:9-11): "And We [Allah] made your sleep for rest. We made the night as a cover. We made the day for livelihood." In another place in the Qur'an (al-Furqan: 47), He says: "He [Allah] is the One Who has made the night for you as a cover and made sleep for resting, and the day for rising." Sleep is a necessity and irresistible practice for human beings. It is a pleasure for those who need it due to fatigue, illness, and body weakness. Hence, there will be no sleep in paradise since there will be no fatigue, illness, old age, worries, or sorrows for its dwellers, but eternal and complete bliss. (Ibn al-Mubarak, (2) 79; al-Bayhaqi, (60) 409; Aldorar alsaniyyah <https://dorar.net/hadith/sharh/92384>). If Allah is not merciful with His creatures, He would have made the whole time be day-long or night-long without changing, but He is compassionate and merciful. He says in the Qur'an (al-Qasas: 71-73).

Ask them, O Prophet, “Imagine if Allah were to make the night perpetual for you until the Day of Judgment, which god other than Allah could bring you sunlight? Will you not then listen?” Ask them, “Imagine if Allah were to make the day perpetual for you until the Day of Judgment, which god other than Allah could bring you night to rest in? Will you not then, see?” It is out of His mercy that He has made for you the day and night so that you may rest in the latter and seek His bounty in the former, and perhaps you will be grateful.

Relationship Between Death and Sleep

Sleep is similar to death in the depiction of the Prophet (saw). Both characteristics are irresistible for man; no one rebukes a man for sleeping or dying since the occurrence of both is beyond human control. While it is an act of infidelity and a taboo to ascribe any of the two characteristics to Allah because He can't sleep, let alone die. A man asked the Messenger of Allah (saw), do the people of Paradise sleep? He said: “Sleep is the brother of death, and the people of Paradise will not die.” (Abu Nuaym, (7) 90). From the Islamic perspective, sleep is like death in several ways:

1. Both sleep and death are signs of deficiency and independence; thus, Allah is Everlasting and can never sleep. Likewise, the dwellers of al-Jannah will neither sleep nor die.
2. The angels of Allah in charge of recording human deeds will stop recording since there is no obligation in both conditions. However, man can be affected by the commission of his previous deed in these states.
3. Both sleep and death share the same quality of severance of the soul's attachment to the body. The Qur'an affirms that Allah takes human souls during sleeping and death, but He restores them in the first place and holds them in the latter. In the Qur'an, the Arabic word 'tawaffā', which means taking of the soul, is used to describe the circumstance of both sleeping and death. Allah says: “It is Allah Who takes away the souls of people at the hour of their death and takes away at the time of sleep the souls of those that have not died. Then He retains the souls of those against whom He had decreed death and returns the souls of others till an appointed time of their death. Surely there are Signs in this for a people who reflect.”

(Qur'an, al-Zumar: 42). He says in another Place: "And it is He who takes your souls by night and knows what you have committed by day. Then He revives you therein that a specified term may be fulfilled. Then, to Him will be your return, and He will inform you about what you used to do. He reigns supreme over all His creation and sends recording angels, watching over you. When death comes to any of you, Our angels take their soul, never neglecting this duty." (Qur'an, al-An'am: 60-61).

These verses denote that Allah Almighty is the One Who controls and disposes existence as He wills. He causes souls to die major deaths by seizing them and making the soul taste minor death in sleep. So, the Qur'an mentioned the two deaths, the minor and the major, in this verse, while He mentioned the major and the minor in the previous verse. (Ibn Khathir, 1999, (70) 101). One of the hadiths that indicate that Allah takes the soul during sleeping is when the Prophet (saw) said that if anyone goes to bed, he should lie down on his right side and say, Glory be to You, my Lord, I have laid down on my side by You, and I raise it by You. If You hold my soul, then forgive it. If you release it, guard over it as You guard Your righteous slaves. (Al-Bukhari, (8) 70). In another hadith, whenever the Prophet (saw) wanted to go to bed, he would say: O Allah with your name, I die, and I live. When he woke up from his sleep, he would say: All Praise is due to Allah, Who has given us life again after He has taken it, and unto Him is the Resurrection). (Al-Bukhari: (8) 71).

The State of the Souls During Sleep and Death

The commentators of the Qur'an said that the verse in Surat Al-Zumar indicates that when Allah takes the souls of the dead during death and the souls of the living during sleep, the souls gather and meet in heaven; they will come to meet and know each other as long as Allah Almighty wills. Then, Allah will withhold those who have died and send the others to complete their life span. (Ibn Khatir, 1999, (7) 102). Some other commentators narrated that the souls of the living and the dead meet in a dream and come to know each other as Allah wills. If they want to return to their bodies, Allah holds the souls of the dead with Him and sends the spirits of the living to return to their bodies until the end of their life. (al-Baghawi, 1997, (7) 122). So, whatever the sleeping soul saw while it was in heaven before it was sent to its body is the true dream, and whatever it saw after Sending it out and before it settled in its body is a falsehood vision

from the devil. (al-Qurtubi, 1964, (15) 260). It can be clearly understood from these verses and hadiths that the soul that is captured in the two states - the state of sleep and the state of death - is the same thing. So, what Allah seizes during the state of sleep means that He holds it with what prevents it from acting, as if it is something captured, and what He seizes in the event of death means that He will hold it and not send it back until the Day of Resurrection. Allah takes the souls during sleep by removing the senses and creating heedlessness and blight in the place of perception, and He takes it in the state of death by creating death and obliterating the senses. (al-Qurtubi, 1964, (15) 261). By taking note, it is glaring that the soul in these verses is the deceased itself, the one that is inflicted with death, and the soul here is used to refer to the spirit, which is the life and conception. Since the death of the body occurs by losing its soul, it is customary to ascribe the death to the soul, which is the means of living. Even though the soul itself doesn't die, it leaves the body. (Ibn 'Ashur, 1984, (24) 24). There is a clear difference between the soul's exit during sleep and death. Since death is permanent and happens once in a lifetime, the exit of the soul during this process always comes with a stupor. While the soul's exit during sleeping is temporary and recurrent, so out of Allah's mercy, it comes without stupor. The state of the soul during this partial exit -sleep- is not known with certainty since there is neither proof from the Qur'an nor any authentic narration from the Prophet (saw) to clarify this fact, but it remains connected to the body in some way. Allah lets it go wherever He wants it to go before it fully returns to the body. This is the meaning of holding it in the above verses and hadiths. (Zaghloul El-Naggar, 2020, <https://www.alwafd.news/3066538>).

However, it is narrated from 'Abdullah bin 'Amr that the souls ascend to heaven in their sleep, and they are commanded to prostrate under al-'Arsh (the throne of Allah), so whoever is ritually pure (by having ablution) prostrates at the throne, and whoever is not pure prostrates far away from the throne. Reported by Al-Bayhaqi, (4) 284). Abu al-Dardai also narrates the same version of the hadith. (Ibn Mubarak, (1) 441). Imam al-Bukhari faults the chain of the first narration from 'Abdullah bin 'Amr. (Al-Tarikh al-Kabir, (6) 292). Assuming the validity of the narrations, they are not from the words of the Prophet (saw), but rather from the words of the Companions, and this is one of the unseen matters that cannot be ascertained by mere opinion and ijtihad. Still, it must be based on evidence from the Qur'an and Sunnah. Therefore, the most appropriate stance on the state of the souls during sleep is that only Allah knows best.

In contrast, the state of the soul after death is made known by Allah and his Prophet (saw). Many hadiths of the Prophet (saw) discuss the position of the souls after death. The soul's life after death is known as *al-hayah al-barzakhiyyah*; therein, the soul is either in bliss or painful torment until resurrection. 'Abdullah bin 'Umar narrated that the messenger of Allah (saw) said, "When anyone of you dies, he is shown his place both in the morning and in the evening. If he is one of the people of Paradise, he is shown his place in it, and if he is from the people of the Hellfire, he is shown his place there. Then it is said to him, 'This is your place till Allah resurrect you on the Day of Resurrection.'" (Al-Bukhari, (2) 99). There are quite a few numbers of statements by scholars regarding the state of the souls after death, which Imam Ibn al-Qayyim narrated in his book 'Al-Ruh' (The Soul), and suggested that the souls will not be in the same place, - for instance – some souls will be in the courtyards of graves, some other will be in Paradise. At the same time, some will be stuck at the gate of Paradise, others will be in Hellfire, and so on. This is the case since the souls are not in the same categories regarding their righteousness and deeds. Each soul will be treated accordingly, as Allah will never cheat anyone. He says: We (Allah) shall set up scales of justice for the Day of Judgment so that not a soul will be dealt with unjustly in the least of his deed, and if there be (no more than) the weight of a mustard seed (out of his deed), We will bring it (to account): and enough are We to take account. (Al-Anbiyah: 47). Therefore, the state of souls after death is known by the revelations in general, even though we do not fully understand what this life after death looks like, except that a true believer believes in everything in this respect.

Experience of the Soul and Body in Dream During Sleeping and What the Soul and Body Encounter in the Grave after the Soul is Restored to the Body Again

Dreams are a natural phenomenon that man experiences during sleep. Sometimes, the body feels what happened in the dream with the soul. Souls happen to be in this state while sleeping, whereby they derive some knowledge of the future events that they desire or find themselves in a state that is impossible for the physical body to be in and then wake up with this feeling and knowledge. The soul becomes spiritual by leaving the physical entity – body – and human perception. It derives these few glimpses of unknown and unseen expertise because it is potentially a spiritual entity complementary by body and perception. If the soul removes the body and its perceptions, it becomes pure intellect and a complete entity. So, it is a

spiritual entity with self-perception without any physical mechanism. This potential is found in every soul as long as it is in the body. This is what is known as a dream. Some of this potential is specific, such as that of pious servants of Allah. The potential of the Prophets of Allah is by disengaging from humanity to pure angelic, which is the highest spirituality, and this potential appears in them repeatedly in states of revelation, after which they comprehend everything that is revealed to them. This state is similar to the state of sleep, even though the state of sleep is much lower than it. (Ibn Khaldun, 2015, 148-9). So, man can either experience blissful enjoyment in his dream or severe torment. At the same time, many unknown and unseen matters can be revealed to him simultaneously, all of which traces will not manifest in the body. No one will feel that anything is currently happening to the one asleep, no matter how close that person is to the one having the dream.

Likewise, the soul becomes spiritual by departing its body at death. So, the soul begins to experience a strange life different from this life. Man will be able to see the angels of Allah that come to take his soul. The Prophet of Allah (saw) explains in detail in many of his hadiths what the deceased -soul and body- experience at the point of death and in the grave till the Day of Judgement. In a long hadith that is narrated by al-Barrau bin 'Azib, he said:

We went out with the Prophet (saw) to the funeral of a man of the Ansar and came to the grave. It had not yet been dug, so the Prophet (saw) sat down, and we sat around him quietly. He had a stick with which he was making marks on the ground. Then he raised his head and said thrice or twice, Seek refuge in Allah from the punishment of the grave. He then said, When a believer is about to leave the world and go forward to the next world, angels with faces white as the sun come down to him from heaven with one of the shrouds of paradise and some of the perfume of paradise and sit away from him as far as the eye can see. Then the angel of death comes and sits at his head and says, 'Good soul, come out to forgiveness and acceptance from Allah.' Then, the soul emerges as a drop flows from a water skin. The angel of death will seize the soul, and when he does so and gives it to the other angels, they will not leave it in their hand for an instant but place it in that shroud, and that perfume, and from it comes forth a fragrance like that of the sweetest musk found on the face of the earth. They then take the soul to heaven,

and whenever they pass by a company of angels, they would ask them, Who is this good soul? to which they reply, so and so, the son of so and so, using the best of his names by which people called him on the earth. They then bring him to the lowest heaven and ask that the gate be opened for him. This is done in every heaven, and from every heaven, its archangels escort the soul to the next heaven till he is brought to the seventh heaven. Every angel between heaven and earth and every angel in heaven invoke blessings on him, and no gate guardians fail to supplicate Allah so that his soul may be taken up beyond them. Then, Allah who is Great and Glorious says, record the book of my servant in 'Illiyun (Qur'an, al-Mutafiffin: 18) and take him back to earth, for I created mankind from the soil, I shall return them into it, and from it I shall bring them forth another time. His soul is then restored to his body, two angels come to him, and making him sit up and say to him, Who is your Lord? He replies, My Lord is Allah. They ask, What is your religion? and he replies, My religion is Islam. They ask, Who is this man who was sent among you? and he replies, He is Allah's messenger. They ask, What is your source of knowledge? he replies, I have read the Qur'an, believed in it, and declared it true. Then one cries from heaven: My servant has spoken the truth, so spread out carpets from paradise for him, clothe him from paradise, and open a gate for him into paradise. Then some of its joy and fragrance come to him, his grave is made spacious for him as far as the eye can see, and a man with a beautiful face, beautiful garments, and a sweet odour comes to him and says, rejoice in what pleases you for this is your day which you have been promised. He asks, who are you, for your face is perfectly beautiful and brings good? He replies I am your good deeds. He then says, My Lord, bring the last hour; my Lord, bring the last hour, so that I may return to my people and my property. But when an infidel is about to leave the world and proceed to the next world, angels with black faces come down to him from heaven with hair-cloth and sit away from him as far as the eye can see. Then the angel of death comes and sits at his head and says, wicked soul, come out to displeasure from Allah. Then, the soul dissipates in his body, and the angel draws it out as a spit

from moistened wool. He then seizes it, and when he does so, the other angels do not leave it in his hand for an instant but put it in that hair-cloth, and from it, there comes forth a stench like the most offensive stench of a corpse found on the face of the earth. They then take it up and do not bring it past a company of angels without their asking, who is this wicked soul? to which they reply, so and so, the son of so and so, using the worst names he was called in the world. When he is brought to the lowest heaven, a request is made that the gate be opened for him, but it is not opened for him. Every angel between heaven and earth and every angel in heaven curse him, and the gates of heaven are locked, no guardians of a gate failing to supplicate Allah that his soul may not be taken up beyond them. Here the Prophet of Allah (saw) recited, 'The gates of heaven will not be opened for them, and they will not enter paradise until a camel can pass through the eye of a needle.' (Qur'an, al-A'raf: 40). Allah will then say, record his book in Sijjin (Qur'an, al-Mutafiffin: 7) in the lowest earth, and his soul is thrown down. The Prophet then recited, 'He who assigns partners to Allah is as if he had fallen from heaven and been snatched up by birds, or made to fall by the wind in a place far distant.' (Qur'an, al-Hajj, 31). His soul is then restored to his body, two angels come to him, making him sit up and say, who is your Lord? He replies, I do not know. They ask, what is your religion? and he replies, I do not know. They ask, who is this man who was sent among you? and he replies, I do not know. Then one cries from heaven, He has lied, so spread out carpets from hell for him, and open a gate for him into hell. Then some of its heat and hot air comes to him, his grave is made narrow for him so that his ribs are pressed together in it, and a man with an ugly face, ugly garments, and an offensive odour comes to him and says, be grieved with what displeases you, for this is your day which you have been promised. He asks, who are you, for your face is most ugly and brings evil? He replies I am your wicked deeds. He then says, my Lord, do not bring the last hour. (Ahmad, (30) 499; Abu Dawud, (4) 239; Al-Nasai, (4) 78).

Several points can be derived from this narration, some of which are related to the topic of discussion. Everyone will see these angels of Allah at death

since the soul has become spiritual, so it can see what others cannot see. This moment is referred to in the Qur'an: "Then why, when the soul at death reaches the throat. And you are at that time looking on. And Our angels are nearer to him than you, but you do not see." (al-Waqiah 83-5). What happens to the soul here is the same thing that happens to it temporarily while sleeping, so it can see what it cannot see when it is attached to its physical body.

After the soul ascends to heaven- whether righteous or not- it will be restored to its body again in the grave to answer some questions and receive part of the reward of his deed, as mentioned in the narration. This process happens to every human being, whether he is buried or has a grave. It is an unseen process that we -Muslims- must believe in its occurrence without bothering ourselves about how it happens. Allah is the Almighty that says to everything 'be', and it will be. What man experiences in the dream is enough to prove the possibility of this matter to anyone who denies it. Man experiences many things in dreams that are beyond anyone's control, like the experience of the grave. Such as, we cannot find traces of the punishment or enjoyment in the corpse if we dig it out, the same way we cannot see the traces of what one experiences in the dream in his body, even the nearest person to the one asleep has no idea of what is going on during dream.

Conclusion

There is no ambiguity in the fact that the belief in the life after death - resurrection- is one of the pillars of Islam. No one can become a Muslim unless he believes in this notion. One of the major components of this belief is believing in the punishment and reward for the deceased in the grave, although the Qur'an does not explicitly mention it. However, there is consensus among scholars on this issue since it is broadly discussed in detail in several authentic hadiths of the Prophet (saw), parts of which are quoted above.

Based on the arguments presented in this study, apart from the divine evidence that is convincing and sufficient for the believers, it is possible and logical and even enough to prove the reality of what the Sharia has told us about the things that happen to the deceased in the grave, i.e., such as the questioning of the two angels and the torment and bliss of the grave, by inferring what happens to a person in the dream while sleeping. What happens in the dream is similar to what happens in the grave.

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Conflicts of Interest

We hereby declared that we do not have any competing interest, including financial or personal relationships, in connection with the writing of this paper.

Authors' Contribution

I, Dr. Kolawole, Hakeem Adeyinka, and Dr Issah, Abeebllahi Obalowu collaboratively designed this study, gathered some existing literatures, and wrote the article. We both contributed to the article in different angles until it became a research of academic standard.

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