Galadari, Abdulla. "Life." *Metaphors of Death and Resurrection in the Qurʾān: An Intertextual Approach with Biblical and Rabbinic Literature*. London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2022. 55–74. *Bloomsbury Collections*. Web. 26 Apr. 2023. <<http://dx.doi.org/10.5040/9781350244559.ch-005>>.

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Chapter 5

LIFE

In Qur'anic perspective, the concept of death operates in relation to that of life. To distinguish those granted life from those who are not, the biblical tradition used the motif of the book written in heaven (of the living) and the book written on the earth. After touching on this biblical precursor only briefly – for comparative purposes, since a similar concept is also found in the Qur'an, suggesting a possible adoption of a Near Eastern concept of life into the Qur'anic discourse – this chapter delves into how the Qur'an compares this worldly life (*al-ḥayāt al-dunyā*) and the other (*al-ākhirah*) to understand further what the Qur'an means by 'life', which is also compared with biblical literature identifying how the Qur'an might adopt these concepts from within its Near Eastern background. In the analogies it uses for resurrection, the Qur'an constructs an argument of how the human was created the first time through natural birth. Whether birth or even rain that allows plants to grow, the analogues used in the Qur'an situate resurrection as a natural phenomenon and not some supernatural force. It seems that the Qur'an makes analogies for resurrection that would constitute resurrection more as a form of re-creation.

The book of life

The Qur'an developed in a place where the notion of the resurrection of the dead was well known to some of its audience, such as Jews and Christians, and it does not shy away from emphasizing the resurrection of the dead throughout its text. However, the question is, what exactly does the Qur'an suggest is resurrected: is it a monist or dualist *nafs*? Or, in other words, is resurrection spiritual, physical, or both?

In a few instances, the Qur'an makes the analogy that just as rain pouring down brings the dead earth to life, so would the resurrection of the dead occur (e.g. Qur'an 43:11). This analogy is not unique to the Qur'an. Of the core Eighteen Benedictions (now nineteen) of Rabbinic prayer,¹ it is written in the Mishnah, 'They mention [God's] power to bring rain in [the blessing for] the resurrection of the dead, [the second blessing in the *Eighteen Benedictions*].'² Written in the Babylonian Talmud, 'Rain is the same thing as making a living.'³ The rabbis, in Talmudic tradition, also make a connection between the resurrection of the dead and rain, referring to 1 Sam. 12:17, in which God sends rain and thunder.⁴

Referencing rain and lightning (instead of thunder) with the resurrection of the dead can also be seen in the Qur'an:

²⁴And among His signs is that He shows you lightning, arousing fear and hope, and that He sends down water from the sky, then revives thereby the earth after its death. Truly in that are signs for a people who understand. ²⁵And among His signs is that the sky and the earth stand fast by His Command. Then, when He calls you forth from the earth with a single call, behold, you will come forth.

Qur'an 30:24–25

The image of a resurrection at Judgement Day and the books of deeds that are opened to determine who enters heaven and who enters hell (e.g. Qur'an 83:4–36) is also not unique to the Qur'an. The book of deeds in heaven has roots going far back, from Sumerian to Talmudic times,⁵ before finding itself situated within the Qur'an; Shalom Paul gives a brief overview of the various Near Eastern texts that refer to the book of life starting with Mesopotamian myths and its usage in the Hebrew Bible, Pseudepigrapha, Dead Sea Scrolls, and other Near Eastern literature.⁶ The book of life is an ancient Near Eastern motif that continued to develop.

In the Talmud, Rabbi Naḥman b. Yitzḥak suggests that the book referred to in Exod. 32:32 are the books of the thoroughly wicked, the thoroughly righteous, and the middling.⁷

³²'But now, if you will only forgive their sin—but if not, blot me out of the book that you have written.' ³³But the LORD said to Moses, 'Whoever has sinned against me I will blot out of my book.'

Exod. 32:32–33

A depiction of three similar groups can also be found in the Qur'an:

⁷and you shall be of three kinds: ⁸the companions of the right; what of the companions of the right? ⁹And the companions of the left; what of the companions of the left? ¹⁰And the foremost shall be the foremost.

Qur'an 56:7–10

The book mentioned in the Exodus passage seems to be understood as the book of life or the living (*sēper ḥayyīm*), which is also mentioned in Pss. 56:8, 69:28, and 139:16, Dan. 12:1, Phil. 4:3, and Rev. 3:5.⁸ Allusions to this book, as in the writing in heaven (*engraptai en tois ouranois* / *apogegrammenōn en ouranois*), are also found in Lk. 10:20 and Heb. 12:23.⁹ The writing in heaven is in contrast to the writing on the earth in Jeremiah:¹⁰

O hope of Israel! O LORD! All who forsake ['ōzēbē] you shall be put to shame; those who turn away from you shall be recorded in the earth¹¹ [*yikkātēbū bi-ha-'āreṣ*], for they have forsaken ['ozbū] the fountain of living water [*mēqôr mayim ḥayyīm*], the LORD.

Jer. 17:13

Although the contrast between the writing on earth and that of heaven is not seen elsewhere in the Bible, the Milanese church father Ambrose (d. 397 CE)¹² suggests, along with some biblical commentators,¹³ that this is what Jn. 8:6–8 demonstrates. This is the story of Jesus saving an adulteress from the hands of those who intended to stone her when he started writing in the earth with his finger.¹⁴

After writing in the earth, Jesus asks those without sin to cast the first stone and then continues writing on the ground. John never elaborates on what Jesus wrote. However, John describes God and Christ as the fountain of life (e.g. Jn. 4:10, 4:14, 7:38). If the fountain of living waters is compared to those written in heaven described in Jeremiah, then it seems likely that John did not need to elaborate further on the textual context of what Jesus was writing in the earth, in line with Jeremiah; according to Paul Minear, Jesus is depicted as if writing the names of the sinners in the earth.¹⁵ Ambrose proposes that what Jesus is writing in the Gospel of John is a reference to Jer. 22:29–30, where the earth is asked to write the names of those who are disowned.¹⁶ Ambrose contrasts the names of sinners written on the ground and the names of the righteous written in heaven, citing Lk. 10:20.¹⁷

Some manuscripts of the Gospel of John suggest that Jesus was writing the sins of those present in the ground.¹⁸ Biblical scholar George Aichele argues that one should not pursue what the Gospel of John denotes, due to its wide use of metaphors, and this is also the case in John 8.¹⁹ Instead, he argues that one needs to pursue its connotation. While the canonicity of this passage and its possible insertion in the Gospel of John are brought into question by recent biblical scholars,²⁰ such a debate may not necessarily have played a role in the seventh century. What matters is not authorship but the possible motif that is being alluded to as part of the Near Eastern background, which the Qur'an might be using.

There is much debate amongst scholars on the intratextuality and intertextuality of what Jesus writes on the ground, according to the Gospel of John. Aichele, for example, argues that Jesus was writing the text of the Gospel of John itself.²¹ With the lack of supportive evidence for such an allusion within the Gospel, I find it unconvincing, though I agree with Aichele that Jesus's writing in the Gospel of John might connote Jesus as the Word.

Early Church Fathers, such as Ambrose, Jerome (d. 420 CE), and Augustine have written about this episode in the Gospel of John.²² Each speculates a different theory about what was written, and their traditions might have been passed down through Late Antiquity to the period when the Qur'an emerged. In these passages from the Gospel of John, the fountain of living water that leads to eternal life is understood to be with Christ, which can thrust from within the body of the believer. This can be compared with the following passage from Jeremiah:²³

for my people have committed two evils: they have forsaken me [*'ozbû*], the fountain of living water [*mêqôr mayim ḥayyim*], and dug out cisterns for themselves, cracked cisterns that can hold no water.

Jer. 2:13

The fountain of life is also seen in the following passage from the Psalms:

⁸They quench²⁴ [*yirwēyun*] on the abundance of your house, and you give them drink [*tašqēm*] from the river [*naḥal*] of your delights. ⁹For with you is the fountain of life [*mēqôr ḥayyīm*]; in your light we see light.

Ps. 36:8–9

Additionally, Ps. 69:28 states 'Let them be blotted out of the book of the living; let them not be enrolled among the righteous.' The context of this passage appears to be eschatological, and accordingly, everlasting life is understood as those whose names are written in the book of the living.²⁵ Ps. 69:28 is the only passage that calls this book *sēper ḥayyīm* (book of the living), and thus, is a *hapax legomenon*.

Giving long life to someone is a topic arising elsewhere in Psalms: 'He asked you for life; you gave it to him—length of days forever and ever' (Ps. 21:4),²⁶ The following Ugaritic text may be a point of comparison:²⁷

And Virgin Anat replied: 'Ask for life, O hero Aqhat: ask for life [*hym*] and I shall give [it] you, immortality [*blmt*] and I shall bestow [it] on you: I shall make you number [your] years with Baal: With the son of El you shall number months, "Like Baal he shall live indeed! Alive, he shall be feasted, he shall be feasted and given to drink. The minstrel shall intone and sing concerning him."

2 Aqhat 6:26–32²⁸

Ugaritic texts may serve as a possible background to the Book of Isaiah,²⁹ which describes one of the few instances of the resurrection of the dead in the Hebrew Bible:

Your dead [*mētēkā*] shall live, my corpse³⁰ [*nēbēlātī*] shall rise. O dwellers in the dust, awake and sing for joy! For your dew is a radiant dew, and the earth will give birth to the dead³¹ [*rēpā 'īm*].

Isa. 26:19

When this passage of Isaiah is contrasted with verse 14, which shows how other ruling lords besides God are dead and not alive – they are *rēpā 'īm* (dead souls?) that will not arise – one might think that Isa. 26:19 is metaphorical: *your* dead will live, but *their* dead will not.³² However, it has been proposed that the use of *nēbēlātī* (my corpse) might suggest a physical resurrection.³³ A problem exists with the use of *nēbēlātī* in the Masoretic text that scholars continue to debate.³⁴ The passage seems to use both the plural and singular terms, variously in the first, second, and third person:³⁵ 'Your [*pl.*] dead shall live; my corpse [*s.*] they [*pl.*] shall rise.' Faced with this obscure grammar,³⁶ Philip Schmitz suggests that *nēbēlātī* is not using the first-person pronominal suffix but is a gentilic suffix (a demonym), as found in '*admōnī* (red) in Gen. 25:25. He translates the passage as 'Your dead shall live. [As] a corpse they shall rise. Awake and shout for joy, you who dwell in the dust.'³⁷ The root *n-b-l* has various meanings, including a corpse or a lifeless idol

(e.g. Jer. 16:18).³⁸ The image of a lifeless idol mirrors some of the interpretations of Qur'an 16:21, by now familiar.

The last statement in Isa. 26:19 depicts dew that waters the dust of the earth giving birth to the dead. This depiction may be compared with Gen. 2:5–6:³⁹

⁵when no plant of the field was yet in the earth and no herb of the field had yet sprung up for the LORD God had not caused it to rain upon the earth, and there was no one to till the ground; ⁶but a stream would rise from the earth, and water the whole face of the ground.

Gen. 2:5–6

In their commentary on this passage in *Genesis Rabbah*, some rabbis interpret that rain is as important as (if not even more important than) resurrection,⁴⁰ which is in keeping with the Eighteen Benedictions' connection of the prayer for rain with the resurrection of the dead.

In comparison, Ezekiel gives a detailed depiction of the resurrection of the dead in the valley of dead bones, although the text interprets it as a metaphor for the revival of the nation.⁴¹

¹The hand of the LORD came upon me, and he brought me out by the spirit of the LORD and set me down in the middle of a valley; it was full of bones. ²He led me all around them; there were very many lying in the valley, and they were very dry. ³He said to me, 'Mortal, can these bones live?' I answered, 'O Lord GOD, you know.' ⁴Then he said to me, 'Prophecy to these bones, and say to them: O dry bones, hear the word of the LORD. ⁵Thus says the Lord GOD to these bones: I will cause breath [spirit / *rûah*] to enter you, and you shall live. ⁶I will lay sinews on you, and will cause flesh to come upon you, and cover you with skin, and put breath [spirit / *rûah*] in you, and you shall live; and you shall know that I am the LORD.' ⁷So I prophesied as I had been commanded; and as I prophesied, suddenly there was a noise, a rattling, and the bones came together, bone to its bone. ⁸I looked, and there were sinews on them, and flesh had come upon them, and skin had covered them; but there was no breath [spirit / *rûah*] in them. ⁹Then he said to me, 'Prophecy to the breath [spirit / *rûah*], prophecy, mortal, and say to the breath [spirit / *rûah*]: Thus says the Lord GOD: Come from the four winds, O breath [spirit / *rûah*], and breathe upon these slain, that they may live.' ¹⁰I prophesied as he commanded me, and the breath [spirit / *rûah*] came into them, and they lived, and stood on their feet, a vast multitude. ¹¹Then he said to me, 'Mortal, these bones are the whole house of Israel. They say, 'Our bones are dried up, and our hope is lost; we are cut off completely.' ¹²Therefore prophecy, and say to them, Thus says the Lord GOD: I am going to open your graves, and bring you up from your graves, O my people; and I will bring you back to the land of Israel. ¹³And you shall know that I am the LORD, when I open your graves, and bring you up from your graves, O my people. ¹⁴I will put my spirit [breath / *rûhî*] within you, and you shall live, and I will place you on your own soil; then you shall know that I, the LORD, have spoken and will act,' says the LORD.

Ezek. 37:1–14

Ezekiel's depiction parallels Gen. 2:7 on the creation of man through the breath of life.⁴² Since a consensus does not appear to have always existed on the doctrine of the resurrection of the dead among early Jewish communities,⁴³ a literal interpretation of these passages in Ezekiel exists only in the Jewish communities that accept this doctrine.⁴⁴ The Talmud depicts an array of rabbinic interpretations of this passage, some of which considered this a parable, while others understood it literally.⁴⁵ When in Ezekiel's vision he is asked whether these bones can live, he gives an agnostic response. One may extrapolate two points from this: (1) the doctrine of resurrection may not have been universally espoused by the community during the authorship of Ezekiel, or (2) even if the doctrine did exist, Ezekiel is being respectful in his response to God. If the former were the case, it would mean that even Ezekiel, as a prophet, did not hold the issue of resurrection as a creed. At the very least, he or the author of Ezekiel may not have understood the doctrine of resurrection as dry bones coming back to life in the vivid way described in this vision. There is not much evidence of an eschatological interpretation of this passage in pre-Christian Jewish literature.⁴⁶ The medieval Jewish commentator Rashi (d. 1105 CE) did consider Ezekiel's passages to be mostly metaphorical, except for the opening of the graves in Ezek. 37:12, which he considered a reference to the resurrection.⁴⁷

Matthew 27:51–53 suggests that tombs were opened and that many bodies of saints who had died were raised after Jesus's body gave up the spirit. It has been suggested that such a depiction in Matthew might have taken Ezekiel's description as its basis.⁴⁸ However, whether Matthew considered this a literal historical account, a preface to a future eschatology, or a depiction of people who were spiritually dead ('asleep') becoming alive is a point for a different discussion.⁴⁹ Early church fathers did find the doctrine of the final resurrection present in these passages from Ezekiel,⁵⁰ although they might have been aware of the various Jewish views on these passages, ranging from metaphor to literal. Elaborating on the significant parallelism between the prophetic text of Ezekiel 37 and the later Epistle to the Ephesians,⁵¹ Robert Suh has said that Eph. 2:1–10 give the message of spiritual death as a separation from God.⁵² Yet both Ezek. 37:1–10 and Eph. 2:1–10 portray new creation from death to life.⁵³ Accordingly, the author of Ephesians 2 appears to understand Ezekiel 37 in its context not as a physical resurrection but the return of the House of Israel from exile.⁵⁴ This point is very important, as it will be seen in Chapters 6 and 7 that the Qur'an also uses motifs of resurrection as an allusion to the return from exile. Furthermore, the earliest evidence does not suggest that Ezekiel 37 was understood as stating the doctrine of resurrection.

Some scholars have argued that another allusion to Isa. 26:19 appears in Dan. 12:2,⁵⁵ which gives a representation of resurrection:

¹'At that time Michael, the great prince, the protector of your people, shall arise. There shall be a time of anguish, such as has never occurred since nations first came into existence. But at that time your people shall be delivered, everyone who is found written in the book [*kātūb ba-sēper*]. ²Many of those who sleep in

the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life [*le-ḥayyê 'ôlām*], and some to shame [*la-ḥārāpôt*] and everlasting contempt [*le-dir'ôn 'ôlām*].

Dan. 12:1–2

If Dan. 12:2 is alluding to Isa. 26:19, it would be similar to Ezekiel 37, in which resurrection is a metaphor for the restoration of the nation of Israel.⁵⁶ Dan. 12:2 appears not only to possibly allude to Isaiah but also to refer to the book of the living, those who are written to enjoy everlasting life.⁵⁷ Given Isaiah 24–27, Bernhard Duhm states that it would be easy to misconceive that the same author could have also authored the Book of Daniel – the affinities and allusions common to the texts are considerable.⁵⁸

The Qur'an also appears to allude to the book of the living. Although it refers several times to a book of deeds (e.g. Qur'an 17:71, 69:19, 69:25, 84:7, 84:10), it seems at least in one instance to indicate the book written in the depth of the earth and the book in heaven and constructs it as part of an allusion to the resurrection of the dead:

⁴Do they not think that they will be resurrected ⁵unto a tremendous day – ⁶a day when humankind shall stand before the Lord of the worlds? ⁷Nay! Truly the book of the profligate [*al-fujjār*] is in Sijjīn. ⁸And what will explain you of Sijjīn? ⁹A book inscribed. ¹⁰Woe that Day to the deniers, ¹¹who deny the Day of Judgment, ¹²which none deny except every sinful transgressor. ¹³When Our signs are recited unto him, he says, 'Fables of those of old!' ¹⁴Nay! But that which they used to earn has covered their hearts with rust. ¹⁵Nay! Surely on that Day they will be veiled from their Lord. ¹⁶Then they will burn in Hellfire. ¹⁷Then it is said unto them, 'This is that which you used to deny.' ¹⁸Nay, truly the book of the pious is in 'Ilīyyīn. ¹⁹And what will apprise you of 'Ilīyyūn? ²⁰A book inscribed, ²¹witnessed by those brought nigh [*al-muqarrabūn*]. ²²Truly the pious shall be in bliss, ²³upon couches, gazing. ²⁴You do recognize in their faces the splendour of bliss. ²⁵They are given to drink of pure wine sealed, ²⁶whose seal is musk – so for that let the strivers strive – [*fal-yatanāfas al-mutanāfisūn*] ²⁷and whose mixture is of Tasnīm, ²⁸a spring whence drink those brought nigh [*al-muqarrabūn*].

Qur'an 83:4–28

Qur'an 83:7 says the book of the *fujjār* is in *sijjīn*. There is a debate on the root of the term *sijjīn*, which appears to be *s-j-n*, the same as 'prison' (*sijn*).⁶⁰ The term *sijn* (prison) is used only in Qur'an 12 in the story of Joseph (e.g. Qur'an 12:25), but the root *s-j-n* is also found in Aramaic and possibly Akkadian,⁶¹ meaning chief or official.⁶² In Ethiopic, *sagannat* holds the meaning of a watchtower.⁶³ There is also the possibility that the root of this term is the biconsonantal *s-j* or *s-j-j* with the suffix *-in* being for the plural. If that is the case, its meanings would include being smeared in mud,⁶⁴ which is a definition also attested in Syriac,⁶⁵ or could also hold the meaning of inscriptions.⁶⁶ Devin Stewart dismisses this because it occurs in this form in both the genitive and nominative cases.⁶⁷ That is, it does not appear as

sijjūn, which should be the case if it were plural. Although *sijjīn* in this Qur'anic verse is usually understood as a description of hell as an eternal 'imprisonment' from the meaning of *s-j-n*, O'Shaughnessy argues that the passages that immediately follow (i.e. Qur'an 83:8–9) suggest that the intention is that it is an inscribed register (i.e. a record) and therefore is related to the root *s-j-l*.⁶⁸ Accordingly, he suggests that *sijjīn* is not a description of hell⁶⁹ but simply a description of a book of register, where the deeds of the wicked are written,⁷⁰ a conclusion Devin Stewart also makes.⁷¹

Nonetheless, those conclusions are not only from modern scholars. Makkī b. Abi Ṭālib (d. 437/1045) also suggested that *sijjīn* is *sijjīl* with the /l/ converted to /n/.⁷² Al-Qurṭubī (d. 671/1273) also considers *sijjīn* to derive from *s-j-l*, as a register of deeds,⁷³ an assumption made by al-Suyūṭī (d. 911/1505) as well. According to al-Suyūṭī, it is called *sijjīn* because it causes the person to be imprisoned in hell.⁷⁴ Thus, those various scholarly debates have already existed and been hypothesized by earlier Muslim scholars.

Regardless of their etymologies, *sijjīn* and *sijjīl* may inscribe a royal edict.⁷⁵ Daniel Beck suggests the possibility that both *sijjīn* and *sijjīl* are derived from the Greek *sigillon*,⁷⁶ from *sigillio* and corresponding to the Latin *sigillum*, meaning seal.⁷⁷ Therefore, he particularly emphasizes it as an authoritative seal.⁷⁸ The English 'sign' is derived from the Latin *signum*, in which *sigillum* is a possible derivative.⁷⁹ The PIE root is *sek-*, 'to cut', and shares the same meaning of the Afroasiatic root *ṣ-k*.⁸⁰ The Arabic *ṣakk*, means to press hard on something and, consequently, also means seal or inscription.⁸¹

Traditional Muslim commentators like al-Ṭabarī, interpret *sijjīn* as the depth of the earth, or the deepest (seventh) level of the earth.⁸² Ibn 'Arabī associates *sijjīn* with *sijn* (prison), describing the imprisonment of those who are egotistical, which is what he interprets as the *muṭaffifīn* in Qur'an 83:1.⁸³ The depiction of the souls of the unrighteous to be in some sort of prison is found in 1 Enoch 69:28, 2 Bar. 56:13, and the First Epistle of Peter:

¹⁸For Christ also suffered for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, in order to bring you to God. He was put to death in the flesh, but made alive in the spirit, ¹⁹in which also he went and made a proclamation to the spirits in prison [*phylakē*].

1 Pet. 3:18–19

The Greek term used for prison in this passage is *phylakē*, while the Aramaic Peshitta translates it as *sheol*, which is a term used by the Hebrew Bible for the realm of the dead. The understanding of this passage to refer to the realm of the dead was shared by various church traditions, including the Alexandrian and Greek traditions, and not only the Syriac tradition.⁸⁴

The New Testament also portrays sinning angels bound in chains (e.g. 2 Pet. 2:4, Jude 6, Rev. 20:1–4).⁸⁵ The depiction of people in hell bound in chains, as in a prison, is a recurring theme in the Qur'an (e.g. Qur'an 14:49,⁸⁶ 40:71, 76:4).⁸⁷ The Qur'an also shows that those who are bound are not always to be understood as

physically in hell. Nonbelievers who are currently physically alive are also depicted bound in chains:

⁶that you may warn a people whose fathers were not warned; so they were heedless. ⁷The Word has indeed come due for most of them, for they do not believe. ⁸Truly We have put shackles upon their necks, and they are up to their chins, so that they are forced up. ⁹And We placed a barrier before them and a barrier behind them and veiled them; so they see not. ¹⁰It is the same for them whether you warn them or warn them not; they do not believe. ¹¹You only warn whosoever follows the Reminder and fears the Compassionate unseen. So give such a one glad tidings of forgiveness and a generous reward. ¹²Truly We give life to the dead and record that which they have sent forth and that which they have left behind. And We have counted all things in a clear registry [*imām*].

Qur'an 36:6–12

These passages describe nonbelievers as bound⁸⁸ and give the consolation that you (the assumed the recipient of the message) are only a warner. This sort of consolation is also found in Qur'an 35:22–24, after describing nonbelievers to be dead in graves. Qur'an 36:12 also states that God gives life to the dead and that it is all recorded in a clear *imām*.⁸⁹ Nonetheless, these passages also seem to be alluding to some sort of book of deeds,⁹⁰ perhaps the book of the living, according to its context and intertextuality. The term *imām* as some sort of book can also be perceived in Qur'an 17:71–72. Additionally, as Qur'an 35:19 differentiates between the blind and the seeing (spiritually speaking) in the context of the nonbelievers as dead (i.e. Qur'an 35:19–24), so does Qur'an 17:72.

If O'Shaughnessy is correct that the Qur'an explicitly defines *sijjīn* as a book of register and not a description of hell,⁹¹ then it appears that the Qur'an means something *written* in the depths of the earth, which may or may not be a metaphor for hell. This is especially true when compared to the other book of register, *'illiyūn*, which is written in a high place that the Qur'an mentions later within the same context. Based on the web of intertextualities between these passages, one can deduce a likelihood that the Qur'an does allude to the books of the dead, which are written in the earth (*sijjīn*) (e.g. Qur'an 83:7–9), and of the living, which are written up high in heaven (*'illiyīn*) (e.g. Qur'an 83:18–20). The description's similarities to those found in the Hebrew Bible contextualizes it within Near Eastern traditions, especially in light of the morphological form of the contrasting term *'illiyūn*, which appears to be most likely a loanword.

Qur'an 83:18–20 appears to call the book of the living *'illiyīn* or *'illiyūn* – a term rooted in *'-l-y*, which means most high. Although the form *'illiyūn* appears peculiar in Arabic, it is a very common term in Hebrew for the Most High (God), as used by the Hebrew Bible (i.e. *'elyōn*). The term is a conjunction between *'āl* (*'-l-h* or *'-l-y*) and the affirmative *-ōn*.⁹² Otherwise, the Qur'an typically calls God the Most High, using the term *al-'alyy* in conjunction with *al-'aẓīm* or *al-kabīr* (the Great) (e.g. Qur'an 2:255, 22:62, 31:30, 34:23, 40:12, 42:4). It is noteworthy that in the Hebrew Bible the term *'elyōn* occurs only in poetry or

blessings and praise that can also be categorized as a form of poetry.⁹³ The contrast between 'elyôn and death (*mōth*) is found in proto-Hebrew/Phoenician myth that narrates a battle between two rival gods and the death and resurrection of the saving-god.⁹⁴

The descriptions in the Qur'an of those who are in 'illiyūn being witnessed by those brought near (*al-muqarrabūn*) drinking from a spring may be compared with the following passage:

4'There is a river whose streams make glad the city of God, the holy habitation of the Most High ['elyôn]. 5God is in the midst of it [*qirbā*]; it shall not be moved; God will help it when the morning dawns.

Ps. 46:4-5

Drinking from a river as the fountain of life (*mēqōr ḥayyīm*) specifically is also seen in Ps. 36:8-9, discussed earlier, and the broader depiction of the book of the living or the book written in heaven ('illiyīn) and the book written in the depth of the earth (*sijjīn*) found in the Qur'an can be compared with that of the Bible and the general motif existing in the Near East.

Worldly life

The term *dunyā* in the Qur'an is used to refer to the current world, and the term *ākhirah* is used to mean the later world (e.g. Qur'an 2:86). Its root, *d-n-y*, means to befall or to be near,⁹⁵ meanings which occur in the Qur'an (e.g. Qur'an 53:8, 69:23, 76:14). Among the other Semitic languages, this term is attested in Syriac and Ethiopic.⁹⁶ The root *d-n-y* or *d-n-h* is also used as a demonstrative pronoun in Aramaic meaning 'this',⁹⁷ from the meaning of near/occurring. Sabeian also uses *dhan* as the demonstrative pronoun meaning 'this', while Ethiopic uses *zentu*.⁹⁸ Accordingly, *al-ḥayāt al-dunyā* can mean the occurring life, the near life, or simply 'this life'. This definition contrasts perfectly with *al-ākhirah* ('the other', not 'this').

Frequently, the Qur'an refers to this life as *al-ḥayāt al-dunyā* (this/nearer life) (e.g. Qur'an 2:86). The term *ḥayāh* appears sixty-eight times, sixty-four of them using a definite article, and sixty-one of them in reference to *al-ḥayāt al-dunyā*. The Qur'an only uses the term *al-ḥayāh* without associating it with *al-dunyā* in Qur'an 17:75, 20:97, and 67:2; and the only times it is used without a definite article are in Qur'an 2:96, 2:179, 16:97, and 25:3. Overall, the Qur'an therefore mostly refers to this/nearer life (*al-ḥayāt al-dunyā*), and it usually refers to it negatively and criticizes those who seek it. In contrast, the Qur'an asks its audience to strive for a different kind of world, which it sometimes refers to as 'the later' or 'the other' (*al-ākhirah*).

On these terms for nearer and later lives, Toshihiko Izutsu writes:

From an entirely different point of view, this world as man actually experiences it and lives in it is, as a whole, called *al-dunyā*, lit. 'the Lower' or 'the Nearer' world.

The Qur'an mostly uses the phrase *al-ḥayāt al-dunyā* ('the lower life') in place of the simple word *al-dunyā* . . . the word *al-dunyā* belongs to a particular category of words, which we might call 'correlation' words, that is, those words that stand for correlated concepts, like 'husband' and 'wife', 'brother' and 'sister', etc. : each member of the pair presupposes the other semantically and stands on the very basis of this correlation. A man can be a 'husband' only in reference to 'wife'. The concept of 'husband', in other words, implicitly contains that of 'wife', and vice versa. In just the same way, the concept of *al-dunyā* presupposes the concept of the 'world to come', *f.e.*, the 'Hereafter' (*al-ākhirah*), and stands in contrast to it.⁹⁹

Izutsu suggests that in pre-Islamic literature, the term *al-dunyā* (this/nearer life) occurs frequently, which implies that the concept of *al-ākhirah* (the later or after) is well known and that Umayya b. Abī-l-Ṣalt (d. 626) emphasized it.¹⁰⁰ He proposes that pre-Islamic Arabia had known about such concepts from Jews and Christians. While this might be a possibility, the authenticity of pre-Islamic Arab literature has been disputed by scholars who consider much of it to have been either edited or created by later Muslims.¹⁰¹

The root *ʾ-kh-r* is attested in Akkadian to mean 'the far end', 'a later time',¹⁰² 'other',¹⁰³ or 'the remainder'.¹⁰⁴ Thus, it has also taken the meaning of 'the future' or 'progeny'.¹⁰⁵ The root *ʾ-kh-r* also means the one absent or far away.¹⁰⁶ In the Qur'an, the term can be understood to indicate the later or future time as well as the other world. Unlike the negative outlook and the critique of this/nearer life (*al-ḥayāt al-dunyā*), the later or other (*al-ākhirah*) is depicted positively as something to which one aspires.¹⁰⁷ This sense is not unique to the Qur'an. The Hebrew Bible uses *ʾahārīt ha-yāmīm* to refer to the latter days (e.g. Gen. 49:1; Num. 24:14; Deut. 4:30, 31:29; Jer. 23:20, 49:39; Ezek. 38:8)¹⁰⁸. However, it does not necessarily connote a world other than this one, but rather conjures a limited future time in this world, perhaps without an eschatological aspect, although that does occur in some of the later books of the Hebrew Bible.¹⁰⁹

The Qur'an describes this/nearer life as a pathetic game, in which people strive for something that is wasted (e.g. Qur'an 3:14, 47:36, 57:20). The recurring message of the Qur'an urges individuals to trade the worldly life that expires for the other life.¹¹⁰ When speaking of this worldly life, the Qur'an frequently refers to life in conjunction with its adjective (*al-dunyā*) denoting 'this life' (*al-ḥayāt al-dunyā*). Life (*ḥayāh*) need not mean life in this world; otherwise, if *al-ḥayāh* alone would have meant this/nearer life, the Qur'an would not be compelled to specify *al-ḥayāt al-dunyā*. *Ḥayāh* (life) must have multiple aspects and not always denote this/nearer life. This understanding is widespread. It is typically agreed, as Muhammad Abdel Haleem states, that the Qur'an speaks of a life-death-life continuum.¹¹¹ In Abdel Haleem's view there are two kinds of life in the Qur'an, this/nearer life (*al-ḥayāt al-dunyā*) and the later, last, or other (*al-ākhirah*). However, the Qur'an also understands death and life in a spiritual or figurative sense, as in the following:

Is he who was dead, and to whom We give life, making for him a light by which to walk among humankind, like unto one who is in darkness [*al-ẓulumāt*] from

which he does not emerge? Thus for the disbelievers, what they used to do was made to seem fair unto them.

Qur'an 6:122

This passage, also discussed earlier, clearly uses a spiritual or figurative sense of death and life,¹¹² about which both traditional Muslim commentators, such as al-Ṭabarī,¹¹³ and Sufi commentators, such as Ibn 'Arabī, agree.¹¹⁴ It depicts a person who was dead and was given life and walked among humankind, in contrast to those in *ẓulumāt* (darkness). This means that the Qur'an considers those in *ẓulumāt* to be dead and holds that God can bring them out of this darkness and into life and light among people. The depiction is not of two different physical worlds but a single one, where some people are dead (zombies) and, yet others are alive.

Therefore, the Qur'an gives various valences for life as *ḥayāh*. The question to consider is whether the other, *al-ākhirah*, is a physically different life and in a different world, or whether the 'other life' is simply the spiritual life to which the Qur'an sometimes alludes. In other words, is it possible that when the Qur'an is condemning this/nearer life (*al-ḥayāt al-dunyā*) and revelling in the other/later (*al-ākhirah*) life, it is actually condemning the life of one who is spiritually dead and revelling in one who is spiritually alive? This is a difficult question to answer, partly because, though the other/later (*al-ākhirah*) is sometimes contrasted with this/nearer life (*al-ḥayāt al-dunyā*), the Qur'an does not associate the other/later (*al-ākhirah*) with the attribute of 'life'. The formulation *al-ḥayāt al-ākhirah* never appears, although *dunyā* and *ākhirah* seem to be in perfect contrast with one another in the Qur'an.¹¹⁵ When the Qur'an associates life (*ḥayāh*) with the *ākhirah*, it takes the atypical form (*al-ḥayawān*):

The life of this world [*al-ḥayāt al-dunyā*] is nothing but diversion and play. And surely the Abode of the Hereafter [*al-dār al-ākhirah*] is the lively [one] [*al-ḥayawān*],¹¹⁶ if they but knew.

Qur'an 29:64

Notably, this passage is not contrasting this life (*al-ḥayāt al-dunyā*) with the other life (*al-ḥayāt al-ākhirah*). The 'other' that the Qur'an considers is not another life, but another abode (*dār*). It is the 'other abode' (*al-dār al-ākhirah*) that is *al-ḥayawān* (life?). The grammatical form *ḥayawān* is atypical and a *hapax legomenon* in this form in the Qur'an. Various early Arabic grammarians consider this a peculiar form and interpret it as everlasting life; Sībawayh (d. 180/796),¹¹⁷ for one, suggests that it is in intensive (*mubālaghah*) form.¹¹⁸ The form ending with *-ān* may be also considered a plural form (*fi 'lān*), as the Qur'anic term *wildān* (e.g. Qur'an 56:17), but the majority of grammarians do not concede such a hypothesis and instead compare it with *raḥmān*. For such a form to be understood as intensive (*mubālaghah*) is itself unusual. The term *raḥmān* is a rabbinic usage for one of God's names in Aramaic – even in Arabic, it is exclusively used for God¹¹⁹ – so interpreting it as an intensive (*mubālaghah*) form does not seem self-evident.

There are two possible explanations of this feature: proper name and adjective. The proper name would be similar to *ʿAdnān* or *Qaḥṭān*.¹²⁰ It is unlikely to be a proper name, since it uses a definite article. The other, more likely situation is that it is an adjective in the form of *faʿlān*,¹²¹ similar to *maḥḍān* (one who is sick). In this sense, *al-ḥayawān* could be the adjective of the 'other abode' (*al-dār al-ākhirah*), making it the 'lively place' (*dār al-ḥayawān*). The adjective is usually used for a person, so if *al-ḥayawān* is an adjective perhaps it is not for the 'other abode' but the adjective of the *person* in the 'other abode'. The person in the other abode (*al-dār al-ākhirah*) is the lively one (*ḥayawān*). In this case, *al-ḥayawān* would not refer to the place unless one assumes that *al-dār al-ākhirah* is being described as a person and not a place. If that were the case, then *al-dār al-ākhirah la-hiya al-ḥayawān* might mean that the *person* in the 'other abode' is the one who is alive or the 'other abode' itself is alive. The latter might be unusual, but so is the form used to describe it.

Hence, *al-ḥayāt al-dunyā* means 'this/nearer life', and *al-dār al-ākhirah la-hiya al-ḥayawān* means the 'other abode' is the alive one. The Qur'anic passage could be stating that this life is not even life; it is the other abode that is truly alive. This reading would appear more natural than assuming the passage is using an unusual intensive (*mubālaghah*) form. Interestingly, in this passage, *dunyā* is called *lahuw* (a descriptive name meaning a diversion, but looks like the masculine singular third-person pronoun, *la-huwa*) and *ākhirah* is referred to *la-hiya* (an actual feminine singular third-person pronoun), which could be part of the poetic style of the Qur'an.

The peculiarity of *ḥayawān* is difficult to interpret, but it does support the hypothesis that the term *ḥayāh* in the Qur'an encompasses various meanings and that the term connotes not only a physical but also a spiritual or metaphorical sense of life; after all, a lively abode is considered figurative.

Resurrection as re-creation

The Qur'anic argument for what Patricia Crone assumes is bodily resurrection is partly determined by its discourse with nonbelievers, who do not appear to believe in bodily resurrection because the body decomposes or get cut into pieces (e.g. Qur'an 34:7).¹²² Crone suggests that such an argument resembles those that Greek and Roman pagans lodged against Christians, or even arguments against a Zoroastrian resurrection, and that it appears to have also been used by Christians who argued in favour of resurrection in a spiritual body, instead of the original flesh. In answer to those who argue against a decomposed body coming back to life, the Qur'an offers God's ability to re-create. However, does this require that the Qur'an is arguing in favour of physical resurrection, in the sense that a decomposed body would be revived and brought back to life?

According to the Gospel of John, when Jesus speaks of a person needing to be born anew or from above, Nicodemus asks how can a person enter back into his mother's womb and be born again (i.e. Jn. 3:1–15). Nicodemus appears to have interpreted Jesus's words literally, when Jesus appears to have meant it spiritually.

Similarly, if the Qur'an appears to show that the nonbelievers argued against a decomposed body reviving again, that does not prove the Qur'an is necessarily arguing for physical resurrection in a literal sense; it might suggest that the nonbelievers thought that the Qur'an speaks of physical resurrection literally, when perhaps the Qur'an means it spiritually.

According to O'Shaughnessy and Crone, the analogy of physical resurrection as a form of re-creation was common among Christians and others in the Near East.¹²³ For example, Isa. 26:19 offers birth imagery for resurrection. The author of 4 Ezra appears to use similar imagery, saying those who dwell in the dust of the earth shall arise (7:32). Further, 4 Ezra 4:40–42 describes Sheol (the abode of the dead) in birth pains, where souls are likened to be in a womb,¹²⁴ making it more likely that the author is keeping Isa. 26:19 as the subtext of such an image.¹²⁵

Similarly, 2 Macc. 7:22–29 images resurrection as a second creation and likens it to the first birth.¹²⁶ Ezekiel 37, discussed earlier for the metaphor of the rebuilding of a nation and not a literal resurrection, also uses the imagery of re-creation.¹²⁷ *Pseudo-Ezekiel*¹²⁸ also uses Ezekiel 37 as its subtext and further elaborates on resurrection using imagery of re-creation with phrases that allude to Genesis 1.¹²⁹ Johannes Tromp argues that *Pseudo-Ezekiel* should not be interpreted in any way that differs from Ezekiel 37 in its reference to the rise of the Israelite nation instead of physical resurrection.¹³⁰

Contextualizing some of the Qur'anic passages pertaining to resurrection with some Syriac arguments against the denial of bodily resurrection,¹³¹ David Bertaina argues that the Qur'an echoes Syriac Christian Miaphysite debates against Tritheism, a theological movement that emerged during the time, on the issue of resurrection. There were, indeed, many different understandings of resurrection, including some form of re-creation with a new spiritual body circulating in the Near East during Late Antiquity, as Bertaina demonstrates. However, he assumes that the Qur'an is specifically advocating the resurrection of the original body, which may not necessarily be the case. While the Qur'an advocates for resurrection, it is difficult to understand what kind of resurrection – spiritual or bodily. And even if it means bodily, is it the original body or a new one? There does exist some tension in defining the exact meaning(s) of resurrection in the Qur'an.

A close examination of some of the passages that discuss resurrection, such as Qur'an 36:70, suggests that the Qur'an is given to those who are spiritually alive, implying that those who are spiritually dead would not understand the message it contains, as is suggested elsewhere in the text as well. To put Qur'an 36:70 in its context of spiritual life, we find a few verses later the following statements about resurrection:

⁷⁷Has the human¹³² not seen that We created him from a drop, and behold, he is a manifest adversary? ⁷⁸And he has set forth for Us a parable and forgotten his own creation, saying, 'Who revives these bones, decayed as they are?' ⁷⁹Say, 'He will revive them Who brought them forth the first time, and He knows every creation.'

Qur'an 36:77–79

This passage poses the question of who would bring dead bones back to life. The answer given is whoever created them the first time through the process of birth. Hence, resurrection would echo birth. This concept of re-creation can also be inferred from the following passages:

Unto Him is your return all together; God's Promise is true. Verily He originates creation, then He brings it back, that He may recompense with justice those who believe and perform righteous deeds. As for the disbelievers, theirs shall be a drink of boiling liquid and a painful punishment for having disbelieved.

Qur'an 10:4

Say, 'Is there, among your partners, one who originates creation and then brings it back?' Say, 'God originates creation, then brings it back. How, then, are you perverted?'

Qur'an 10:34

That Day We shall roll up the sky like the rolling of scrolls for writings. As We began the first creation, so shall We bring it back – a promise binding upon Us. Surely We shall do it.

Qur'an 21:104

He, Who brings creation into being, then brings it back, and Who provides for you from Heaven and the earth? Is there a god alongside God? Say, 'Bring your proof, if you are truthful.'

Qur'an 27:64

¹⁹Have they not considered how God originates creation, then brings it back? Truly that is easy for God. ²⁰Say, 'Journey upon the earth and observe how He originated creation. Then God shall bring the next genesis into being. Truly God is Powerful over all things.'

Qur'an 29:19–20

God originates creation, then brings it back; then unto Him shall you be returned.

Qur'an 30:11

He it is Who originates creation, then brings it back, and that is most easy for Him. Unto Him belongs the loftiest description in the heavens and on the earth, and He is the Mighty, the Wise.

Qur'an 30:27

Furthermore, the following passage also discusses the creation of humans discussing their process of birth, death, and resurrection.

¹²And indeed We created the human¹³³ from a draught of clay. ¹³Then We made him a drop in a secure dwelling place. ¹⁴Then of the drop We created a blood clot,

then of the blood clot We created a lump of flesh, then of the lump of flesh We created bones and We clothed the bones with flesh; then We brought him into being as another creation. Blessed is God, the best of creators! ¹⁵⁷Then indeed you shall die thereafter. ¹⁶Then surely you shall be raised up on the Day of Resurrection.
Qur'an 23:12–16

If the Qur'an suggests that God can repeat creation as done the first time, then the resurrection in Qur'an 23:16 may also be a repeat process defined in Qur'an 23:12–14. Similarly, Qur'an 22:5–7 states that people should not be in doubt about resurrection when God created them through foetal evolution to birth and kept some alive into old age. Relating resurrection to how the human was initially created might suggest that any physical resurrection may also occur through rebirth. Some traditional Muslim thought does hold a concept of resurrection as a second birth¹³⁴ – one might look to al-Rāghib al-Iṣfahānī¹³⁵ and al-Ghazālī.¹³⁶ Additionally, rebirth or re-creation in the Qur'an has been understood by traditional Muslims as a metaphor of God's power to revive the dead.¹³⁷ If the Qur'an's portrayal of resurrection as rebirth or re-creation is understood metaphorically,¹³⁸ then is its description of resurrection also metaphorical in general? The possibility is there.

While the Qur'an suggests that human bones and dust will revive, it does not establish explicitly how human resurrection will occur.¹³⁹ For that reason, medieval Muslim philosophers put forward many visions of Qur'anic resurrection. Al-Ghazālī, in *Tahāfut al-falāsifah*, argued fervently against philosophers who dismissed resurrection as spiritual instead of physical,¹⁴⁰ especially bearing Ibn Sīnā in mind,¹⁴¹ who rejected the concept of physical resurrection. Ibn Rushd's (d. 595/1198) response to al-Ghazālī's arguments, in *Tahāfut al-tahāfut*, was that philosophers, including himself, agreed on physical resurrection necessarily, but disagreed on its nature.¹⁴² If the body were reborn somehow, then the new body would not necessarily be identical to the present body.¹⁴³ Accordingly, Ibn Rushd also disagrees with Ibn Sīnā's allegorization of the resurrection.

When portraying the revival of bones, the Qur'an depicts some sort of re-creation, and therefore in the human sense, a form of rebirth as initially conceived, which may be inferred from Qur'an 36:77–81. Needless to say, bones emerging from graves is not analogous to the birth of the human being. Additionally, if the analogy is meant to portray the power of God, the natural power of human birth is also not analogous to the supernatural power needed for bones to leave their graves. Similarly, when the Qur'an also uses the analogy of a dead earth being revived with plants, it does not suggest any supernatural power. In fact, all the analogies used by the Qur'an for resurrection, whether vegetation or birth, are all natural phenomena.

The following Qur'anic passages appear to discuss two kinds of death and two kinds of life:

How can you disbelieve in God, seeing that you were dead and He gave you life; then He causes you to die; then He gives you life; then unto Him shall you be returned?

Qur'an 2:28

They will say, 'Our Lord, You have caused us to die twice over, and given us life twice over; so we admit our sins. Is there any way out?'

Qur'an 40:11

Traditional commentators like al-Ṭabarī state that the *first death* is nonexistence before creation, the first life is the existence from birth, the *second death* is the physical death, and the second life is resurrection.¹⁴⁴ To analyse this interpretation carefully, it is necessary to understand each phase. The first phase is nonexistence. It is not a dead physical body because the body does not yet exist. If the *first death* is not physical, then is it necessary to interpret the second life as physical?

If the *first death* is not a bodily death and is not interpreted accordingly, there is no reason to interpret the *second life* as bodily death. Even if we are to agree to the first life is physical and, therefore, the *second death* is physical, but since the *first death* was not physical, then there is no reason to understand the final life as physical either.

The Druze actually use Qur'an 2:28 and the following passage as evidence of reincarnation: 'From it We created you, and unto it We shall bring you back, and from it We shall bring you forth another time' (Qur'an 20:55).¹⁴⁵ Qur'an 2:28 is open to interpretation, and further analysis is necessary before one can conclude this issue. If the passage is a kind of ring structure, then the first and last are of the same spiritual nature, while the inner part is physical. This would translate to the *first death* being that of the soul (*nafs*). The first life is bodily life. The *second death* is physical. Finally, the second life is a soul-life. In other words, the dead soul enters a living body, then the body dies, and thereafter the soul lives. Alternatively, it could be speaking of two truly different kinds of death and life, both spiritual and physical.

As discussed, O'Shaughnessy interprets the *second death* as punishment in hell, which he derives from Judaeo-Christian literature.¹⁴⁶ The notion of a living death in hell already exists in the Qur'an.¹⁴⁷ Independently, Crone concurs with this analysis, finding that in Jewish, Christian,¹⁴⁸ Mandaean and Manichaean literature,¹⁴⁹ the *second death* is understood as ultimate damnation, as in Rev. 2:11.¹⁵⁰ The concept of a *second death* is also in a number of the *targumim* (e.g. Targum Neofiti, Targum Isaiah).¹⁵¹ The Book of Revelation uses *second death* to symbolize hell, and some scholars have argued that the *second death* is used to contrast it with the Hebrew Bible's concept of the *book of life*.¹⁵²

¹²And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Also another book was opened, the book of life. And the dead were judged according to their works, as recorded in the books. ¹³And the sea gave up the dead that were in it, Death and Hades gave up the dead that were in them, and all were judged according to what they had done. ¹⁴Then Death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire; ¹⁵and anyone whose name was not found written in the book of life was thrown into the lake of fire.

Rev. 20:12–15

Another possible interpretation is to think of the *first death* and life cycle as repeated the second time. Whatever it means, spiritually or physically, it may simply suggest a cycle. As it was, so will it be. When discussing how God has the power to bring things back to life, the Qur'an uses natural analogies.¹⁵³ It does not show that resurrection requires some sort of supernatural forces, for example:¹⁵⁴

And God sends down water from the sky, and thereby revives the earth after its death. Surely in this is a sign for a people who hear.

Qur'an 16:65

This passage seems a bit unusual in that it does not describe the natural process of reviving the dead earth to people who can see or feel the rain and what it does; rather, their revival is a sign for those who hear. It is an odd notion that someone would *hear* this process – it would be awe-inspiring to those seeing or feeling it, unless what is meant are those who hear this passage. However, the passages directly preceding this one describes nonbelievers and mention that God sent messengers to warn them (i.e. Qur'an 16:60–64). It appears as if it is an inner-Qur'anic allusion to Qur'an 35:14–26, which as discussed, describes how the nonbelievers, who are dead in their graves, would not be able to hear the message of the Qur'an, just as the people before them did not hear the messengers sent to them. Thus, it would not be surprising that this passage portrays death and resurrection in terms of those who hear since the dead (nonbelievers) do not hear. Another example, describes a natural force (rain) resurrecting the dead earth:

⁶³And were you to ask them, 'Who sends down water from the sky and revives thereby the earth after its death?' They would surely say, 'God.' Say, 'Praise be to God!' Nay, but most of them understand not. ⁶⁴The life of this world is nothing but diversion and play. And surely the Abode of the Hereafter is the lively [one] [*al-ḥayawān*],¹⁵⁵ if they but knew.

Qur'an 29:63–64

This passage distinguishes between the two different kinds of life, this and the next. Another example of the Qur'an using natural power to bring life to the dead is the following, which is part of a larger context describing natural divine signs:

³⁹Among His signs is that you see the earth diminished; then, when We send down water upon it, it quivers and swells. He Who gives it life is surely the One Who gives life to the dead. Truly He is Powerful over all things. ⁴⁰Truly those who deviate [*yulḥidūn*] with regard to Our signs are not hidden from Us. Is one who is cast in the Fire better, or one who comes in security on the Day of Resurrection? Do what you will; truly He sees whatsoever you do.

Qur'an 41:39–40

This passage again makes an analogy for the power of resurrection as God's power through natural forces. Since the Qur'an describes those not believing in its signs

as *yulhidūn*, which can also mean ‘entomb’, it is as if one is resurrected from this type of death, a spiritual kind of death, through the same powers as natural forces.

In the Qur’an, resurrection is not depicted as a supernatural miracle. It is portrayed as something completely natural, requiring nothing beyond natural forces. Thus, if the Qur’an is representing any kind of physical resurrection, it suggests a process that is no different from the one in which the physical came to life the first time, and that is through natural birth. The only passage in the Qur’an that appears to explicitly describe some sort of physical resurrection supernaturally, albeit nonhuman, is Qur’an 2:259–260, which is analysed closely in the next two chapters.

Conclusion

The Qur’an uses symbolism common to the Bible and Near Eastern heritage for the book in heaven and the book written in the depths of the earth to portray people of the living and the dead, respectively. The Qur’an’s typical portrayal of resurrection proceeds in the same way that God created the first time (perhaps physically), which functions more as a kind of rebirth – it is not bones coming out of their graves. It may be that the Qur’an is describing physical resurrection as rebirth or re-creation, and therefore the bones being clothed with flesh is not depicted as coming out of graves but simply an analogue to physical birth, in which the bones of the foetus are also clothed with flesh (e.g. Qur’an 23:14).

This does not mean that the Qur’an is not necessarily discussing physical resurrection. However, if it does, the Qur’an does not depict it as happening through some supernatural forces of bones coming out of their graves, but through natural forces like childbirth, or rejuvenating rain.