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Chapter 8

THE METAPHOR OF PHYSICAL RESURRECTION

This chapter focuses on two other portrayals of death and resurrection in the Qur'an. As the last two chapters concentrated on the most vivid of all portrayals of resurrection in Qur'an 2:259–260, this chapter is devoted to the less intense portrayals of resurrection in the Qur'an, which describe how people shall leave their graves. However, continuing the methodology used throughout, the philological approach and intertextuality with biblical literature are used.

Leaving the grave

The Qur'an explicitly mentions that a dead *nafs* is interred in its grave: ⁷by the soul and the One Who fashioned it ⁸and inspired it as to what makes it iniquitous or reverent! ⁹Indeed, he prospers who purifies it. ¹⁰And indeed he fails who buries it [*dassāhā*]¹¹ (Qur'an 91:7–10). The root '*d-s-s*' can mean to bury under the ground,² as it is also explicitly used in a different verse: 'Shall he keep it in humiliation, or bury it [*yadussuh*] in the dust?' (Qur'an 16:59). The concept of a *nafs* buried in a grave is well attested in the Qur'an. If a *nafs* may be buried in a grave, as in Qur'an 91:10, it may also leave such a grave.

Besides *qubūr*, another term for 'graves' that the Qur'an uses is *ajdāth*, which is cognate to the Hebrew and Aramaic *gedes*, meaning heap.³ It is used in the following passage as a reference to a tomb: 'When he⁴ is carried to the grave [*qēbārôt*] a watch is kept over [the] tomb [*gādīš*]' (Job 21:32). Why is the Book of Job referring to a tomb as a *gādīš*? Perhaps because a grave could be described as an earthly mound. However, it might also be due to the Book of Job analogizing a person placed in a grave to a sheaf gathered up in its season, which is attributed to Eliphaz the Temanite:⁵

²⁵You shall know also that your descendants will be many, and your offspring like the grass of the earth. ²⁶You shall come to your grave [*qāber*] in ripe old age, like a sheaf [*gādīš*] comes up in its season.⁶

Job 5:25–26

In this passage, a person goes to the grave like a *gādīš* (sheaf) due to having numerous descendants. In the rest of the Hebrew Bible, *gādīš* is used only to mean

a stack of sheaves (e.g. Exod. 22:6, Judg. 15:5). This term is rare, appearing only four times in the Hebrew Bible.

The occurrence of the root *j-d-th* in Arabic is also rare, earning it a very short description in *Kitāb al-‘ayn*⁷ and *Lisān al-‘arab* with the definition of grave.⁸ It is, however, attested in a pre-Islamic poem attributed to Abū Muzāḥim al-Thumālī (d. 538) as a reference to graves.⁹ However, the *Brown-Driver-Briggs Lexicon* (BDB) suggests its possible use in Arabic to mean stacking comes from the root *k-d-s*,¹⁰ which means a heap or a stack of things, and it does take on various morphological forms.¹¹ Accordingly, both *k-d-s* and *j-d-th* might share the same etymology.¹²

The Qur'an uses *j-d-th* three times, in the following contexts:

⁴⁹They await nothing but a single cry that will seize them while they dispute among themselves, ⁵⁰and then they can make no bequest, nor return to their people. ⁵¹And the trumpet will be blown. Then, behold, they will *yansilūn* from their *ajdāth* (tombs) unto their Lord. ⁵²They will say, 'Oh, woe unto us! Who has raised us [*ba'athnā*] from our place of sleep [*marqadinā*]?' 'This is that which the Compassionate did promise; and the message bearers spoke true.' ⁵³There shall be but a single cry. Then, behold, they will all be arraigned before Us! ⁵⁴This Day no soul [*nafs*] will be wronged in any way, and you will not be recompensed, except for that which you used to do.

Qur'an 36:49–54

⁴Indeed reports have come to them wherein is a reproof, ⁵conclusive wisdom, but the warnings availed not. ⁶So turn away from them on the Day wherein the caller will call unto a terrible thing. ⁷With their eyes humbled they emerge from the *ajdāth* [tombs] as if they were scattered locusts, ⁸scrambling toward the caller. The disbelievers say, 'This is a calamitous day.'

Qur'an 54:4–8

⁴²So leave them to indulge in idle talk and play until they meet the Day that they are promised, ⁴³a day when they come forth from their *ajdāth* [tombs], hastening as if racing to a goal, ⁴⁴their eyes humbled, abasement overcoming them. That is the Day they have been promised.

Qur'an 70:42–44

These passages put the term in the context of what appears to be resurrection. The first passage (i.e. Qur'an 36:49–54) seems to suggest that the *nafs* is resurrected from some sort of soul-sleep, as in sleep/death relationship. Nonetheless, the passage describes how, when leaving the *ajdāth* (tombs), they are *yansilūn*. This term, though traditionally understood as rushing out, also means to produce offspring,¹³ and is defined as such in the Qur'an (e.g. Qur'an 2:205, 32:8). Keeping in mind how Job 5:25–26 contextualizes the term *gādīš* with having numerous descendants, Qur'an 36:51 fits right in. Resurrection in Qur'an 2:260 was shown to be an allusion to Abraham having numerous descendants. The Arabic root *n-s-l* is cognate to the Hebrew *n-š-l*, meaning to drop off, to draw off, or to clear away,¹⁴

and is also related to the Arabic *n-sh-l*.¹⁵ The Hebrew Bible sometimes uses this root in the context of driving people out from a land, such as when God promises the Israelites that they will drive away the nations from the land He promised they will possess (e.g. Deut. 7:1, 7:22) or when the Israelites were themselves driven out (i.e. 2 Kgs. 16:6). The root meaning of dropping off is probably what gave rise to the meaning of descendants in the Arabic form of *nasl*.

Both Qur'an 2:259 and 2:260 used death and resurrection as a metaphor for the indirect meanings of the root *n-s-l*, with the former concerning the relationship between death and resurrection with the concept of driving away a nation and bringing them back and the latter associating death and resurrection with the concept of descendants.

Qur'an 32:7–22, uses certain keywords – *n-s-l* (progeny), death, *nafs*, and the comparison between believers and nonbelievers – that also appear in Qur'an 35:19–22. First, Qur'an 32:7–9 seems to talk about human physical creation from earth, his progeny's (*nasl*) physical creation from fluid; only then is the human formed and given a spirit and life. Accordingly, it appears that the human's progeny existed even before the human was formed and given life.¹⁶ This may appear paradoxical, but perhaps the Qur'an distinguishes between creation (*khalq*) and being (*takwīn*), especially when it concerns humans.¹⁷ The passage also moves in parallel with the concept that physical life is not to be equated with a spiritual one, or that of the *nafs*.

Second, Qur'an 32:11, like many others in the Qur'an that concern resurrection, states that people will be returned to their Lord. Returning implies being there in the first place. There is no evidence from the Qur'an that the human was physically present with God before this life. However, there is the assertion that God blows or breathes into the human, as shown in this same passage. Perhaps this breath returns to whence it came. The physical body made from earth or the progeny made from fluid was not with God and thus unable to return to God. Accordingly, it seems more likely that the *nafs* is what returns, perhaps like the biblical passage 'and the dust returns to the earth as it was, and the breath [spirit/*rûah*] returns to God who gave it' (Qoh. 12:7), as discussed in Chapter 2.

Third, the term *nafs* is used twice (i.e. Qur'an 32:13, 32:17), reinforcing its centrality among the passage's concerns; and if the *nafs* is disembodied, then the passage necessarily cannot be describing physical resurrection. As in other passages regarding the *ajdāth* (tombs), and Qur'anic eschatological passages in general, a trumpet, a call or a scream (*ṣayḥah*) is sounded on the Day of Resurrection, which will cause the dead to live. This recalls that the dead do not hear and no one except God would make them hear, as in Qur'an 35:22: 'Not equal are the living and the dead. Truly God causes whomsoever He will to hear, but you can not cause those in graves to hear.' However, those described as dead in Qur'an 35:22 are not physically dead; they are the nonbelievers or the spiritually dead. In this Qur'anic context, they are the ones who cannot hear, just as the Qur'an describes nonbelievers having deafness (*waqr*) in their ears (e.g. Qur'an 6:25, 17:46, 18:57, 31:7, 41:5, 41:44). They are described as spiritually deaf, not physically.

With all these passages placed into one context, God emerges as the one who will cause them to hear the trumpet, the call or the scream (*ṣayḥah*). The *ajdāth* are possibly the bodily graves of the souls, as is further exemplified in the following passage:

⁴²So leave them to indulge in idle talk and play until they meet the Day that they are promised, ⁴³a day when they come forth from their *ajdāth* [tombs], hastening as if racing to a goal, ⁴⁴their eyes humbled, abasement overcoming them. That is the Day they have been promised.

Qur'an 70:42–44

This passage shows that the idle talk and play will continue until the promised day when they emerge from the *ajdāth* (tombs), with a phraseology similar to Qur'an 43:83. It does not say that the idle talk and play will continue until they are interred into the *ajdāth* (tombs), but until they emerge. Since being physically dead in the grave means that they will not be able to have idle talk and play, one could then infer that the idle talk and play will stop with some form of spiritual resurrection; Ibn 'Arabi describes it as when the *nafs* emerges from its bodily grave.¹⁸ Therefore, the Qur'anic passages involving the *ajdāth* (tombs) are possibly no different in their context and intertextuality from those that involve the *qubūr* (graves) discussed earlier, which is possibly spiritual death, not necessarily physical.

Spiritual death

When Ibn 'Arabi interprets Qur'an 2:259–260 spiritually, in that the death it addresses is ignorance,¹⁹ he relates the passage with the following verse:

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

This verse shows that there are two deaths and two lives, also resembling the following passage:

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, and even Ibn 'Arabi, interpret the *first death* as the human sperm phase and the first life as a living foetus; the *second death* is the natural death and the second life is resurrection.²⁰ However, when asked how long he has stayed, the man in Qur'an 2:259 whom God causes to die for a hundred years answers, 'for a day or part of a day'. This specific statement provides allusions

to other parts of the Qur'an (e.g. Qur'an 10:45, 23:113, 46:35, 79:46). It is necessary to evaluate them in their context. The context for Qur'an 10:45 is the following:

⁴²And among them are those who listen to you. But do you make the deaf to hear, though they understand not? ⁴³And among them are those who look at you. But could you guide the blind, though they see not? ⁴⁴Truly God does not wrong [yazlim/darken] human beings in the least, but rather human beings wrong [yazlimūn/darken] themselves [anfusahum]. ⁴⁵On the Day when He shall gather them, it will be as if they tarried but an hour of the day, acquainting themselves with one another. Lost indeed are those who denied the meeting with God, and they were not rightly guided. ⁴⁶Whether We show you a part of that which We promise them, or We take you [natawaffayannaka/cause you to die], their return shall be unto Us. Then God is Witness over that which they do.

Qur'an 10:42–46

There is perhaps an inner-Qur'anic allusion between these passages and Qur'an 27:80–81, 30:52–53, and 35:19–22. The commonality between them is that they seem to show that those who do not believe are spiritually blind, spiritually deaf, and spiritually dead – motifs that are recurrent throughout the Qur'an.²¹ The term *zulm* in Qur'an 10:44 is used to mean that God does not wrong people; rather, their *nafs* is what wrongs them. *Zulm* is polysemous, as it is related to *zālām* and *zulumāt*, which mean darkness.²² This may perhaps signify the spiritual darkness that dead souls would be bound, in contrast to those whom God gives life and light (i.e. Qur'an 6:122). Qur'an 10:45 even ends by suggesting those who are spiritually dead are misguided. Nonetheless, if Qur'an 10:41–46 have inner-Qur'anic allusions with passages that speak of spiritual death, then perhaps those verses are themselves referring to spiritual death.

Take Qur'an 46:35 in its context:

²⁵destroying everything by the Command of its Lord. They became such that nothing was seen but their dwellings. Thus do We recompense the guilty people. ²⁶Indeed We established them in a manner in which We did not establish you, and We endowed them with hearing, sight, and hearts. But their hearing, sight, and hearts availed them nothing, since they rejected God's signs, and that which they used to mock beset them. ²⁷And indeed We destroyed the towns around you, and We vary the signs that haply they might return. ²⁸Why, then, did they – whom they had taken as gods apart from God and as a means of drawing nigh [unto God] – not help them? Nay, they forsook them. That was their perversion and that which they used to fabricate. ²⁹And [remember] when We made a group of jinn incline unto you, listening to the Quran, when in its presence they said, 'Hearken!' Then when it came to an end, they went back to their people as warners. ³⁰They said, 'O our people! Truly we have heard a Book sent down after Moses, confirming that which came before it, guiding to the truth and to a straight road. ³¹O our people! Answer God's caller and believe in him, then He will forgive you some of your sins and protect you from a painful punishment.

³²And whosoever does not answer God's caller thwarts not on earth and has no protectors apart from Him – they are in manifest error.³³ Have they not considered that God, Who created the heavens and the earth and did not weary in their creation, is able to give life to the dead? Yea! He is Powerful over all things.³⁴ On the day when those who disbelieve are exposed to the Fire: 'Is this not true?' They will say, 'Yea, by our Lord!' He will reply, 'Taste the punishment for having disbelieved.'³⁵ So be patient, as the resolute among the messengers were patient. And seek not to hasten for them. It shall be for them, on the day when they see that which they are promised, as though they had tarried nothing but an hour of a day. A proclamation! Will any but the iniquitous people be destroyed?

Qur'an 46:25–35

Qur'an 46:25 and 46:27 talk of desolate cities, not unlike the desolate town of Qur'an 2:259. Those who are spiritually deaf and spiritually blind figure in Qur'an 46:26; Qur'an 46:28 and 46:32 speak of misguidance. Then Qur'an 46:33 goes on to speak of God giving life to the dead. Here again, the context refers perhaps to those who are spiritually dead and their resurrection. Najm-ul-dīn al-Kubrā (Aḥmad b. 'Umar) (d. 618/1221), in his *al-Ta'wīlāt al-najmiyyah fil-tafsīr al-ishārī al-ṣūfī*, interpreted death and resurrection in this passage as spiritual.²³

Analysis now turns to a contextualized Qur'an 79:46 – 'The Day they see it, it will be as if they had tarried but an evening or the morning thereof' – especially since it uses an analogy similar to the one found in Qur'an 2:259, where people appear to have only remained a part of a day. The *sa'ā* (strove) of Qur'an 79:35 can also be related to the *sa'yā* (come) similar to Qur'an 2:260. Taking a look at the inner-Qur'anic allusion between Qur'an 79 and Qur'an 102,

³⁶and Hellfire [*al-jahīm*] is made visible for one who sees—³⁷as for one who rebels ³⁸and prefers the life of this world, ³⁹truly Hellfire [*al-jahīm*] is the refuge.

Qur'an 79:36–39

Qur'an 79:36 states that *al-jahīm* (hellfire) will be exposed to those who see, which implies the inverse: those who do not see, hellfire would not be displayed to them. Al-Rāzī acknowledged a trivial debate among exegetes of what it means 'for one who sees' in this verse, but none of the interpretations took it metaphorically.²⁴ However, Ibn 'Arabī interprets it in a way that believers, who will have no veils on their hearts, would see hellfire (*jaḥīm*) and know it, while nonbelievers will burn in it.²⁵ This suggests that nonbelievers may even be unaware of the hellfire (*jaḥīm*) that consumes them because they do not recognize it.

The question here is who *are* those who see? According to Qur'an 102:5–7, those who know certainty (*'ilm al-yaqīn*) will see *al-jahīm* (hellfire). By associating the *yaqīn* (certainty) in this verse with the one in Qur'an 15:99,²⁶ al-Rāzī suggests that those who do not know certainty are perhaps those who are spiritually blind and cannot see *al-jahīm* (hellfire). Qur'an 102 might be talking of those who are spiritually dead; perhaps Qur'an 79:38–39 suggests that the life of this

world is in itself *al-jahīm* (hellfire), but people do not see it or recognize it because they are spiritually blind. There is a likelihood that the Qur'an is describing the life of this world as hell (*al-jahīm*), but people are spiritually blind, not knowing its true reality (*'ilm al-yaqīn*). Perhaps the Qur'an is describing the soul as dead in hell. This issue of souls veiled from knowing reality is detailed in al-Ghazālī's *Mishkāt al-anwār* (*The Niche of Lights*).²⁷ The suggestion that there are people who perhaps do not see *al-jahīm* (hellfire) appears elsewhere too:

⁵¹One among them will say, 'I had a companion ⁵²who would say, 'Are you among those who confirm?' ⁵³What! When we have died and are dust and bones, are we to be requited?' ⁵⁴He will say, 'Will you look?' ⁵⁵So he will look and see him in the midst of Hellfire [*al-jahīm*].

Qur'an 37:51–55

Qur'an 79:11–14 seems to elaborate further about the bones returning, which is described in Qur'an 37:53.

¹¹'What! When we have become decayed bones?' ¹²They say, 'This, then, would be a ruinous return!' ¹³Yet it shall be but a single cry, ¹⁴then, behold, they will be upon a wide expanse.

Qur'an 79:11–14

The bones could be returning as God created them initially, through birth. If Qur'an 21:104 suggests that God can duplicate creation, just as it was the first time, then the resurrection of Qur'an 79:11–14 may also take the form of a reprisal.

As there seems to be two kinds of death and two kinds of life in the Qur'an – spiritual and physical – each kind of death perhaps has its own type of resurrection. The physical death of the body is perhaps returned in the same manner as it was created the first time, through rebirth to remain suffering in hell, as described in the following passage:

Those who disbelieve in Our signs, We shall surely cause them to burn in a Fire. As often as their skins [*julūduhum*] are consumed, We shall replace them with other skins [*julūdan*], that they may taste the punishment. Truly God is Mighty, Wise.

Qur'an 4:56

This passage has frequently been used in some Ismā'īlī and Ahl-i-Ḥaqq *ta'wīl* (interpretation) as proof of metempsychosis.²⁸ This passage is talking about the physical aspect by referring to skin (*julūd*), and not the *nafs*. When their skins (bodies) wither away, they are given other skins (bodies).

After Qur'an 45:24 describes the '*dahr*', as discussed earlier, the passage later continues with a noteworthy ambiguity that might suggest a concept of karmic

reincarnation, where people are judged by their deeds and may be unable to leave this world:

³⁴And it will be said, 'Today We forget you [*nansākum*] just as you forgot [*nasītum*] the meeting with this your Day; your refuge is the Fire and you have no helpers. ³⁵That is because you took the signs of God in mockery and the life of this world [*al-ḥayāt al-dunyā*] has deluded you.' So today they will not be removed from it [*minhā*]; nor can they make amends.

Qur'an 45:34–35

The main question in this passage is to understand what that final 'it' refers to – the Arabic singular third-person feminine pronominal suffix *-hā* in *minhā*. Typically, it is taken as referring to the fire (*al-nār*) in the preceding verse.²⁹ However, there is nothing grammatically that would preclude reading 'it' as the worldly life (*al-ḥayāt al-dunyā*) mentioned within the same verse, which might be a description of hell. Since the worldly life (*al-ḥayāt al-dunyā*) appears in the immediate context, one might think this would be the most obvious reference for this pronominal suffix. Considering that possibility, the Qur'an would explicitly be saying that they will not be removed from this worldly life. Accordingly, this could hint at reincarnation, and perhaps the Qur'an is alluding to this life as the fire (*al-nār*) – or, in other words, hell. This is especially the case when one contextualizes this passage with *al-dahr* in Qur'an 45:24, which, as discussed in Chapter 1, some Muslim scholars have interpreted as a reference to some form of reincarnation.³⁰

Conclusion

The Qur'anic portrayal of people leaving their tombs has been shown to have a possible spiritual connotation rather than simply physical. Qur'an 70:42–44 appears to be the most explicit in the sense that it leaves nonbelievers to their idle talk and play until the day they emerge from their tombs (*ajdāth*). The Qur'an appears to show that the idle pursuits continue as nonbelievers are in their graves; when taken into the full context of the Qur'an's consistent portrayal of nonbelievers as dead in their graves (e.g. Qur'an 35:22), as discussed in the previous chapters, then the emergence from these graves is likely a metaphor, as well. The repeated connection of nonbelievers and the grave-bound dead suggests strongly that the portrayal of resurrection is also metaphorical. Accordingly, one would naturally conclude that the Qur'an assumes two types of life and death: the physical and the spiritual, each with its form of resurrection. For the physically dead, the Qur'an frequently uses the analogy that resurrection could be performed the same way it was created the first time (re-creation or rebirth), as discussed in Chapter 5. However, the Qur'an appears to be more concerned with spiritual death, and therefore spiritual resurrection, when the dead soul (*nafs*) emerges from its grave – although that may be the physical grave of the body, which is made of earth.