

## Willful Death (Dying before Death)

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### ABSTRACT

Orooj (ascent) in mysticism means separation of soul from body in complete health and wakefulness. It is a condition that every human normally experiences after death at the end of one's life. A mystic develops a deep level of recognition to Heaven and Hell in the course of his life. In this condition one is able to see with mind's eye the habitants of Heaven and Hell. A person crosses from Elm al-Yaghin to Ain al-Yaghin when he reaches this state. Ain al-Yaghinis a state where one can see with mind's eye what he has knowledge. To some adepts, Orooj means to reach the first level of Heaven. To some others, Orooj is to reach the second level. This goes on until one reaches the ultimate level or Arsh. The first person who ever reached Arsh was Prophet Mohammad, peace be upon him. When soul returns to a mystic's body, he has full recollection where he went and what he saw. He can remember in full details what happened in his journey and can give a full account of it. Mystic's soul may take a one day journey through universe. This journey may last longer to take two, three, or more days - sometimes, even up to forty days.

**Keywords:** Willful Death, Natural Death, Perfect Human, Day of Resurrection, Mystic's Conquer.

### Introduction

Human is captivated by worldly belongings. When one finds a chance to, temporarily, put the chaotic world behind for moments of recollection, there comes the overpowering horror of death and what befell upon thereafter. It is an unwelcomed feeling that may inundate one's whole being like a horrific shadow. There is no escape from death. It is one aspect of life that incessantly chases us. Life's thread is due to break up, no matter how long it lasts.

Horror of death and the wondering about what will happen thereafter are not limited to a certain group of people; it applies to everyone. We may only exclude the blessed and the devotees who have discovered the

truth of death and afterlife. Theologians and religious adepts see death as one period of life which is followed by a transformation or ascent from darkness of this earthly world to the enlightenment of an ethereal universe. Death represents an involuntary cessation that marks the end of life - a fatalistic fate of any naturally created being (Every being dies except God and every being experience death).

Mystics resort to willful death or perdition. It is type of death experienced by certain devotees during their natural life time in the context of (die before your death)-a narration attribute to Prophet Mohammad.

This article is a tribute to this type of death. It is written with a hope to provide a relief to those perturbed thoughts and scattered illusions that are disturbing to human wellbeing.

### The Reality of Death

Some believe that natural death occurs upon dwindling of the physical forces and the loss of what that empowers one's existence in a quantitative world. A physical death occurs upon deterioration of the forces that bound one's soul to his body. This death dislodges the soul to return back to its origin. A natural death is apt to occur when soul reaches to its perfect state.

Human self strives to actualize its capacities - a process that drives one's focus toward inner self. The ultimate purpose of human existence is not merely to attend to physical needs. The purpose of soul and its bondage to existence is to serve as a link to the original cause death is nothing but the disintegration of the blob that makes physical material of human body. It is this disintegration which returns one's soul to high heavens.

The life and death of a person who achieves good in a never ending quest is - in its essence - Devin (Say: truly my prayer, my service of sacrifice, my life, and my death are all for Allah the Cherisher of the World).

Mysticism defines death as eradication and suppression of self wishes and desires. The existence of self feeds these wishes and desires. These are elements which contribute to one's joy and satisfaction as the requirements of physical existence. When self develops a propensity to lowly levels of human desires, heart simply follows suit. This inclination deprives the individual from reaching a true life in search of knowledge leaving him in a life full of ignorance - a condition that marks one's death.

A different type of death is experienced when one eradicates and suppresses worldly

wishes and desires. It is a type of death that leads one to his origin - a heavenly and enlightened life of perpetuity free from extinction. Plato characterized this type of death by saying or succumbs to a willful death in order to come alive once again. Imam Sadeq, greeting to him, provided a different characterization by saying death is returning to the origin of self which comprises a holly, enlightened, and lively universe.<sup>1</sup> God says likewise return to your creator through dissolution of self.

### Types of Death

**Mot-e Ahmar (Red Death):** Mot-e Ahmar represents remonstrance to self. When Prophet Mohammad, peace be upon him, returned from a battle against pagans, he said "we returned from a minor conflict going to a major one". His followers asked what a major conflict was. The prophet said it is the conflict against self. Prophet Mohammad, peace is upon him, said in another narration "a true warrior is the one who is in fight with own self".<sup>2</sup> Anyone who abandons his own wishes and desires, returns from aberration by own guiding and finds a new life out of own ignorance. God says anyone who resurrects out of ignorance earns a new life of knowledge. Mot-e Ahmar is called a comprehensive death by some as it encompasses every type of death.

**Mot-e Abyaz (White Death):** Mot-eAbyazis the death from hunger. Hunger enlightens inner self and whitens heart. One dies of Mot-eAbyazby abstaining from engorging a full meal to experiences a continual sense of hunger. Gluttony is detrimental to intelligence. Yet, hunger heightens intelligence and perception.

<sup>1</sup> Kashani, A. R. (2008), *Sufism Terminology*, (Khajavi, M., Trans.), Tehran: Mola, pp. 138-9

<sup>2</sup> An'am/122

**Mot-e Akhzar (Green Death):** when one turns away from sumptuous clothing and resorts only to threadbare, discarded, and worthless clothing, he has welcomed a Mot-e Akhzar. It is when one is content to covering body with bear minimum just enough to offer an acceptable prayer. A content life and a palatable appearance are essential in living a life that feeds on the beauty of Devin vitality - a life that is free from adventitious preening.

**Mot-e Asvad(Black Death):** One has succumbed to mot-e asvad when one welcomes agony and mischief from others without expressions of remonstrance or grievance. It is a condition in which one takes pleasure from the hurting and annoyances brought upon him because of this belief that they are bestowed from the beloved. Mot-e asvad is fading away into the Holly being. The person experiences a rebirth by believing that agony and mischief comes from God and by observing that the actions of others dissolve into God's will. Those who have faded away in the beloved benefit from the help of the absolute generosity and the love bestowed upon them by the immortal being to help them achieve a rebirth in cause of the heavenly being.<sup>3</sup>

### Types of Death in View of Golshan Raz

Golshan Raz defines deaths that the absence of intelligence and a state of concealment and dormancy. It further divides death into three types.

The first type of death happens suddenly in a spur of moment as the essential pertinence of a probable being. As Holly Quran stated everything dies and lose existence at any time as pertinence provides. They rebirth at a planned time as the manifestation of Devine will in the context of they are in confused doubt about a new

creation. Death is not perceived as inexistency, but rather as a transformation into a visible being that exists forever.

The second type is a volunteer death which is exclusive to human. Such death is defined as eradication of wishes and desires and abstinence of physical pleasures obtained from satisfaction of natural needs and drives.

Finally, the third type is a death in cause of exigency. It is the separation of soul and its emancipation from attachment to body. Animals experience this type of death.<sup>4</sup>

### Resurrection and Its Types

Resurrection manifests in five forms corresponding to the five levels of existence:

1) The first type of resurrection happens in any moment. We witness every moment, something comes to existence from the invisible world and another thing leaves existence to the invisible world - a world of abstractions, manifestations, good, and evil that only God is aware of. Sa'ah (means a moment) is another name for resurrection. Every day in (new) Splendor doth He (shine)<sup>5</sup>and there appears as new creatures.

2) The second type is the natural death. As Prophet Mohammad, peace is upon him, says "day of reckoning starts as one dies". This is the minor resurrection. Prophet Mohammad, peace be upon him, further had said "you die as you live and you resurrect as you die".<sup>6</sup>

3) The third type is willful death which is unlike natural death. It is a death one experiences before the end of his natural life

<sup>3</sup> See Kashani, A. R. (2008), *Sufism Terminology*, (Khajavi, M., Trans.), Tehran: Mola, pp. 139-141

<sup>4</sup> Lahiji, Sh. M. (1992), *Mafatih al-Ejaz: A Recitation to Golshan e Raz*, (Khaleghi, Ed.), Tehran: Zavar, pp. 425.

<sup>5</sup> Gheysari, D. (2008), *A Recitation to Fossos al-Hekam Introduction*, (SeyedMoosavi, Tran.), Tehran: Hekmat, p. 116

<sup>6</sup> Kashani, A. R. (2008), *Sufism Terminology*, (Khajavi, M., Trans.), Tehran: Mola, p. 113

to begin a journey to reach God. Prophet Mohammad, peace be upon him, commanded "die before your life ends". This is the way Prophet Mohammad, peace be upon him, equated to death all acts of shying away from worldly belongings and everything that comes with them together with abstaining from human desires and their pleasures. That is why devotees are able to experience in life what others can be experienced at death.<sup>7</sup>

Quran says: "would one who died and we gave him a new life and a light to help him walk through people be the same as the one who lives in constant darkness and has no way out?"

4) The fourth type is the promised resurrection that is awaiting everyone. As God says "thus comes the resurrection with no doubt and the resurrection surely comes but the day of reckoning remains unknown".

5) The last type of resurrection happens to monotheist mystics - those who go from (fading away into God) and (to a life of perpetuity in God) -before the major resurrection or day of reckoning that befell upon all at God's will.<sup>8</sup>

### Perfect Human

IbnArabi in *Fusus al-Hekam* says "God created the universe as a lifeless mass resembling a blurred mirror". So, he created human to provide serenity and spirit to universe as its shining surface. Human is the eye of the truth through which God looks at his creation and gives mercy to them. Universe exists in cause of human. Some creatures are manifestation of God's mercy and some others represents his indignation.

<sup>7</sup> Gheysari, D. (2008), *A Recitation to Fossos al-Hekam Introduction*, (SeyedMoosavi, Tran.), Tehran: Hekmat, p. 117

<sup>8</sup> Gheysari, D. (2008), *A Recitation to Fossos al-Hekam Introduction*, (SeyedMoosavi, Tran.), Tehran: Hekmat, p. 117-8

But, human is a reflection of all Devine essence and attributes. The purpose of teaching (names) to human was in cause of his universal talents.<sup>9</sup>

Perfect human makes the spirit of universe and universe makes his body. As human experiment with and emend his own being with physical and spiritual forces, a perfect human amends and manages universe with heavenly names God has taught him or blessed him with. Universe reflects God names and attributes in myriad forms. The manifestation of these forms appears as contraction and expansion. Since these names appear in human collectively and succinctly, human can be called as miner universe, noble epitome, copy of existence, and complete world. Human can also be defined as a collection of truth and myriad representations of existence.<sup>10</sup>

Human is complete representation of God and total reflection of Divine attributes. He is beyond existence. He is the eternal creature, perpetual existence, and collection of truth<sup>11</sup>, but discerner of truth<sup>12,13</sup>. The more the appearance of Holly names in a being the higher goes its divinity. This is how human divinity is defined relative to universe. The verse (God taught to Adam all names) points to human control on the names which translates into his position of divinity. IbnArabi says "the position of "to be" in terms of genesis is equivalent to the word of كُنْ for

<sup>9</sup> Mazaheri, A. R. (2006), *A Recitation to Naghsh al-Fusus*, Tehran: KhoorshidBaran

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., p. 55

<sup>11</sup> Collection means human emanation, especially that of perfect human encompasses the whole truth

<sup>12</sup> Discerner means differentiation of truth

<sup>13</sup> Jahangiri, M. (1996), *IbnArabi: A Renown Islamic Philosopher*, Tehran: Tehran University Press, p. 443

God. It is a position that once reached enables one to generate what he wants.<sup>14</sup>

Human's aspects of truth and creation are sometime referred as (the spiritual world) versus (the earthly world) or sometime as (divinity) versus (obedience). They are two meanings attributed to a single truth and they do not denote duality of representation. According to one meaning, human is a servant and according to the other meaning, he is a master. Thus, he is a servant in a distinctive eminence and he is a master in a collective eminence.

In the first position, being a servant is the result of his inherent discord to his God. It stems from the rift he considers between his obedience and God's divinity. When human approaches to his second eminence, he grows a sense of divinity to find the universe at his service.<sup>15</sup> What human has personally gained from his obedience and servitude - which may include prayers and defiance - is what he deserved. This is what we call as distinction. But, collection is what comes from God in the form of revelations or when he sets up certain conditions for blessings to an individual. This is the eminence that is wished in Sha'banieh prayer.

The next eminence is a higher eminence than collection. The human in collective eminence sees objects through God. But "Jamoljama" represents an eminence which is marked by thorough depreciation and detachment from everything except God - that is the unity eminence. The distinctive eminence is the proof of creatures. The collective eminence is negation of creatures, but in truth is proven by truth.<sup>16</sup> Shah NematollahVali stated in his book *The Four Journeys of Mystics* "once this path is continued, it reaches, which is the one God".

When a mystic returns from God as human, he experiences unity along with multiplicity. But, he sees multiplicity as unity. This represents the second eminence which is a highly tenderstate.<sup>17</sup>

### Conquering Universe

Taskhir (conquer) is to subdue something by external forces in order to influence it. Tasarrof (seizure) is using external forces in order to make changes to the one that is conquered. IbnArabi defined two different types of conquering.

The first type is achieved through a certain force, which is called Hemmat (drive) by Sufis. The second one is to conquer without relying to that force. This is to say that anyone who controls in cause of Hemmat should reach a certain level of mental state called collectivity eminence. One uses collectivity eminence as a way to concentrate his drive toward conquering an object - whether it be an earthly undertaking or a heavenly one. This statement of IbnArabi stems from his belief that all objects in universe come under influence of human drives. If these drives approach collectivity eminence - and we have witnessed it clearly - such conquering is achieved by forces acquired by those in search of God, or the wayfarers. Some of them use these acquired forces and some of them shy away.

The second type of conquering is through forces given by God to the ones he so selects without requiring the person to do anything for it - such as any attempt to earn to mortify or to arrange his drives.

A Sufi in a certain state called Fana can create any effect he wants in the material world. That is to say that God creates the desired effect through sufi's hands. Thus, creation is a Devine act carried out by

<sup>14</sup> Mazaheri, A. R. (2006), *A Recitation to Naghsh al-Fusus*, Tehran: KhoorshidBaran, p. 57

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., p. 58

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., p. 99

<sup>17</sup> Ghosheyri, A. K. (2003), *Amendments to Ghosheyrieh Thesis*, (Mazaheri, A. R., Ed. and Trans.), Tehran: Aghil, p. 105

mediation of a mystic who has put his humanly attributes behind to rebirth with Devine attributes.<sup>18</sup>

### Wayfarers' Fana in God

Fana is annihilation of everything, first in view of science, then in the state of denial (rejection), and finally in the presence of truth (God).<sup>19</sup> Even if the whole world and the kingdom of humanity are given to you with the keys to all worldly treasures it is a mistake to feel attached to them since they are subject to final annihilation.<sup>20</sup>

In contrast, Baghais when one's whole being is enlightened by presence of God. It is a state where one's earthly aspects become annihilated and his heavenly aspects enter in the perpetual state.<sup>21</sup> Perpetuity defines your relation to God, but annihilation defines your relation to the created world (universe). The former relation is superior making perpetuity more desirable in spite of the fact that both states are contiguous.<sup>22</sup>

After a wayfarer crosses barriers lying in darkness or enlightenment, annihilates everything except the truth in his heart, destroys his figurative self which stands in the way of his perception of eternal being, and frees self from duality and multiplicity, then, in comes the time to enter a selfless state and present God as the truth **أنا الحق**. He becomes a speaker of God.

Devine being was speaking of servant before his reaching this stature, now, servant is speaking of God. The former is called Ghorb Navafel and is a state reached by those devotees who practice supererogatory prayer. The latter is called Ghorb Faraz and is a state reached by those who practice monotheism.<sup>23</sup> Devine being sees and hears for servant's in Ghorb Navafel. It has been said in a well-known holey tradition that God loves a person who reaches to Ghorb Navafel; thus, so God becomes his eyes and ears. Yet, God goes further beyond these senses to include servant's tongue, hands, feet, and other organs. In Ghorb Navafel, God appears as Zaher and the servant who is manifestation of God becomes his means and tools. In this stature, servant hears and sees on behalf of God, i.e. servant is acting as God's means of perception. This is a state where servant is hidden in God.<sup>24</sup>

Perfect human becomes manifestation of absolute being in the bondage eminence as he reaches pure unity and collectivity. Existence attributes materialize in such human at the level that exists in Devine. Perfect human has crossed every state and condition to elevate to a state that is beyond Jalal and Jamal - that is to reach a state without state. The state without state in complete glory combines conflicting attributes including absolute unity, pure understanding, total liberty, complete freedom from restrains, and appearance as God's manifestation. The enlightenment that perfect humans perceive is always glowing throughout the darkness of universe, yet, ordinary humans are unable to see it.<sup>25</sup>

<sup>18</sup> See Mazaheri, A. R. (2006), *A Recitation to Naghsh al-Fusus*, Tehran: KhoorshidBaran, pp. 278-80

<sup>19</sup> Ansari, Kh. A. (2000), *Manazel al-Saerin* (Sheikh al-Eslami, A., Ed.), V. 2, Tehran: Ayeh, p. 278.

<sup>20</sup> Ansari, Kh. A. (2003), *Manazel al-Saerin/Elal Al Maghamtva Sad Mydan* (Farhadi, R., Trans.), Tehran: Mola, p. 266.

<sup>21</sup> Ansari, Kh. A. (2000), *Manazel al-Saerin* (Sheikh al-Eslami, A., Ed.), V. 2, Tehran: Ayeh, p. 279

<sup>22</sup> Chitic, (2006), *Imaginary Worlds* (Kakayee, Gh., Trans.), Tehran: Hermes, p. 99

<sup>23</sup> Ashtiyani, J. (2002) *A Recitation to Ghaysari Introduction*, Qom: BostanKetab

<sup>24</sup> Mazaheri, A. R. (2006), *A Recitation to Naghsh al-Fusus*, Tehran: KhoorshidBaran, pp. 103-4

<sup>25</sup> Chitic, (2006), *Imaginary Worlds* (Kakayee, Gh., Trans.), Tehran: Hermes, pp. 102-3

## Willful Death and Rebirth

Willful in this context is opposite to forcibly or involuntarily. Yet, reaching to this state is by no means willful and voluntarily. Rather, it involves inertia and compulsion generated by the attraction of the beloved that drives the lover toward the beloved with no exercise of will or resolve.<sup>26</sup>

Devotees and wayfarers experience willful death before the real death. Prophet Mohammad commanded "die before your death arrives". Only very few blessed individuals are able to see afterlife while still alive. They do not need to experience death in order to examine afterlife and witness the conditions of habitants of heaven and hell because the cover on their mind's eye and their insight is removed. Such people perceive God by their mind's eyes and thus, are able to see all existence levels from earth to heaven. Their earthly life has merged into the afterlife. Imam Ali, bless on him, has said (I pray to God whom I see with my mind's eyes) to point to the removal of dark and light covers in between God and him.

As purified hearts perceive Holly being in cause of their devotion, their eyes and ears, plus other senses have developed to the extent that they can see the truth that ordinary people are unable to perceive. The real perfection is achieved only when the individual can perceive the spirit of existence in his earthly life.<sup>27</sup> Sohrevardi recognized those who have experienced a willful death as the only true wise men. Imam Ali, bless on him, spoke of his redemption and salvation only when he was about to experience his physical death brought about by the sword of his assassin, IbnMoljam.

IbnSina had said that savants recognize two types of death: willful death and natural

death. He explained further that willful death is when one is able to restrain his animalistic desires, selfishness, and self-interest. It is not the same as detachment of soul from body.<sup>28</sup>

Willful death has other names such as transformation, perdition, and rebirth. They all mean devotion and surrender to God's will in gaining freedom from self to join God. This is not possible except, as Molavi put it, by attachment of soul to God's complete manifestations. Willful death is like destruction of a log in fire and disappearance of shadow in light. It requires a continual transformation of human mood and habits.<sup>29</sup>

Willful death is the way to reach wisdom as the ultimate purpose of creation. It is exclusive to human as wisdom. No other creature can experience willful death. Human can achieve the perpetual eternal life only through willful death.

Prophets and devotees experience another death before their lives come to an end. They embrace willful death before their natural death. They've already seen what others see after their natural death; and it represents a transformation from. Human body is a cover and it is removed when soul frees itself from attachment to bodily demands.<sup>30</sup>

Willful death occurs when one exercises practical and cognitive ascesis. Wayfarer discovers certain realities of afterlife once the covers drop. He shies away from worldly belongings and focuses his full attention on a single absolute power as stated in the verse. The gates to afterlife open one by one once the dark and light barriers are crossed. That is when one can perceives the truth about the

<sup>26</sup> Hamayee, J. (1997), *MolaviNameh*, V. 2, Tehran: Homa, p. 788

<sup>27</sup> Ashtiyani, J. (2002) *A Recitation to Ghaysari Introduction*, Qom: BostanKetab, p. 774

<sup>28</sup> Jafari, M. T. (1999), *Islamic Mysticism*, Tehran: Institute for Publication of AllamehJafari Works, p. 77

<sup>29</sup> Hamayee, J. (1997), *MolaviNameh*, V. 2, Tehran: Homa, pp. 787-8

<sup>30</sup> Nasafi, A. (2007), *Perfect Human*, (Mole, M. J., Ed.), Tehran: Tahoori, p. 154

afterlife with a sense beyond the obvious ones. Ordinary life transforms into a different life whereby one can perceive the secrets of resurrection and revival. He experiences his own resurrection and are birth in this life.

Jesus Christ, peace is upon him. (No one can perceive the truth of heaven and earth unless he experiences birth twice). Rebirth is for those who can perceive heaven in this life. It is what ordinary people see after the great inquest and the manifestation of God as *قهار*. Some scholars called the position of reaching a willful death as intermediary resurrection. They imagine that willful death lies between the minor resurrection (which is the natural death) and the great inquest (the day when all return to God and facts fade away into glory of Almighty God).

If willful death occurs before the end of one's life, then, wayfarer's resurrection occurs before his minor resurrection. Then, his willful death is not his minor resurrection; rather, it is his great inquest. Resurrection for perfect human occurs before the final public resurrection. As per Prophet Mohammad said. (Now is the day for resurrection). His immediate successor, Imam Ali, peace be upon him, said (I gain no additional convictions since the cover is removed).<sup>31</sup>

### Willful Death and Awakening

This universe is a shadow of the ultimate being. It is absurd to look at any other way and negligence to think of it another way.

You dream images that are not real but think in sleep that they exist. You do not think that they are only imaginary with no physical existence. Likewise, you think this universe is real but you are only ignorant. You do not know that thinking this universe as something else is nonsense and what you have seen are examples of God's presence. In

reality, there is nothing except God. According to verse anything that is hidden will appear in the day of reckoning.

As the saying goes *الناسُ نيام*, you are in a heedless sleep and your awaking only comes at time of death. Resurrection is collective but if we take resurrection as willful death as the saying, then, as you resurrect out of a willful death and come out of your heedless sleep in the morning, you can perceive unity. Multiplicity is likened to darkness of nothingness representing the night and death is likened to annihilation of character representing the morning of resurrection. Between multiplicity of the night and unity of the day there lies Barzakh.<sup>32</sup> One day the Earth will be changed to a different Earth and so will be the Heavens and men will be marshaled forth before Allah the Irresistible.

### Conclusion

Human is the only creature that sees a gap between self and his nature or between human and humanity. Many a human never reached humanity and remained in animality. There are many others who have gone through metamorphosis only to turn against human. Seeking perfection is inherent to human. Even the lost metamorphosed individuals speak of complete human being as they succumb to a moment of reflection.

Human may reach to heavenly eminence with a drive empowered by his inherent capacities, will, and searching mind. Human is capable of mastering the universe. His attachment to abstract world leads him toward unity of character. Human learned the names of creatures through God. Therefore, he has earned the capacity to control all beings. Human maintains a strong need to confront his physical needs and desires. He has achieved the highest objective

<sup>31</sup> Ashtiyani, J. (2002) *A Recitation to Ghaysari Introduction*, Qom: BostanKetab, pp. 777-9

<sup>32</sup> Lahiji, Sh. M. (1992), *Mafatih al-Ejaz: A Recitation to Golshan e Raz*, (Khaleghi, Ed.), Tehran: Zavar, p. 119-20

of creation if he is successful in this endeavor. It is an achievement that propels human towards salvation in life and afterlife. It represents death before death or volunteer death in the context of Prophet Mohammed Said.

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