

THE ISLAMIC CONCEPT OF RESURRECTION

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Abstract

Life after death is understood differently by different people. The followers of Abrahamic religions consider resurrection as an event that will take place in the end time when this cosmos gets disintegrated. Non-Abrahamic religions such as Hinduism and Buddhism do not subscribe to resurrection as they believe in transmigration of soul from one physical body into another depending upon the deeds of a person until such time the person gets freedom (moksha/nirvana) from the cycle of rebirths. They also believe in reincarnation, in which a person is born again and again as different personalities. There is a sizeable population in the world who subscribe to Atheism and agnosticism and believe that there is no life after death. Since our research is limited to the topic of resurrection, the issues of 'transmigration of soul' and 'reincarnation' are not discussed in this paper. While discussing the Islamic perspective of Resurrection, we have provided a brief account of resurrection doctrines of Judaism and Christianity as a comparative study. In doing so, we have shed light on the concept of resurrection in Islam and the possible mechanics of it, by means of which, resurrection of the dead could occur on the day of Qiyamah.

Keywords – Resurrection, Salvation, Religion, Islam, Qiyamah

The concept of resurrection

Resurrection means a person coming back to life after death. To understand this aspect, we need to understand what happens when we die.

Death is a natural part of our life cycle. Everything in the Cosmos is made up of matter, including human bodies. When we are alive, the chemical and biological process in our body, because of our breathing, eating, sleeping, etc., keeps us moving and growing. The moment we die, another complex process is initiated in our bodies by which our bodies gradually revert to dust. Forensic experts say that decomposition of our body after death transforms our structure into simple organic and inorganic building blocks usable by plants and animals.

Some people burn the bodies of their dead which is known as cremation. Some people bury their dead in the ground, and some keep their dead in a wooden box and bury the box (coffin) along with the dead body. Some people die in rivers and oceans where their bodies are consumed by the fishes and sea mammals.

The scientists and medical fraternity generally deny that there is a life after death. For them, the physical life of this earth is the only life, and after death, there cannot be any life, as the body is decomposed into dust.

Philosophers say that evolution keeps the movement of life on this planet. The nature chooses the most suitable species to reproduce, who will adopt to the environment and grow in numbers. They say that there cannot be a life after death for individual human being as he dies and become part of dust which is used in the evolution of new life.

The 'life after death' is the subject of theology, which is the study of the nature of the Creator, and the creations in this Cosmos. Theology is the study of supernatural and religious epistemology and the communication of the Creator with His creation known as revelations. Theology helps in understanding religious beliefs and traditions of different cultures. Theologians analyze philosophical, historical, experiential, and ethnographical arguments to explain religious concepts and beliefs.

Resurrection is generally associated with reuniting the spirit or soul of the person with his body after his death. All Abrahamic religions believe that every human being ever lived on planet earth, will be resurrected in the end time to answer for his deeds.

The nature of resurrection has been a subject of debate among philosophical theologians who say that resurrection is the restoration of psychosomatic (psychological) unity of human personality with the body after death. In other words, it is a continuation of personal identity of a person beyond his death. A brief account of resurrection doctrines of Abrahamic religions is provided below.

Resurrection in Christianity

The resurrection of Jesus Christ, three days after his death on the cross and burial, is the primary faith in Christianity. Christians believe that Jesus's resurrection is a prove that he is divine, and the son of God, who lived in the form of a human being in this world. The Apostle Paul said that the entire Christian faith centers around the resurrection of Jesus.

Christians believe that their god lived as human being, and died on the cross when he was crucified, but resurrected from his grave three days after his burial which was claimed to have been seen by some individuals.

On the face of it, the Christian belief of resurrection of Jesus Christ after death looks like the reincarnation theory of non-Abrahamic religions, like Hinduism, where their gods are born like human beings, die, and reappear again as different human beings and are known as Avatars.

The Christian belief of Jesus's resurrection has been a subject of debate within Christianity as to whether the people who are claimed to have seen Jesus Christ after his death, saw him as a vision or with a physical human body. Christians believe that Jesus Christ lived on earth for 40 days after his resurrection and then moved up to the heavens where he is sitting on the right side of the Father God. The Christian beliefs are mentioned in their scriptures as follows.

- (i) God became a human being as Jesus Christ (John 1:1, 14; 8:58; 10:30).
- (ii) He lived a pious and sinless life (1 Peter 3:22; 1 John 3:5).

(iii) Sacrificed his life for his followers (1 Corinthians 15:3; 1 Peter 1:18–19).

(iv) His death is the penalty paid for Christians' sins (2 Corinthians 5:21).

(v) Jesus Christ offers people forgiveness (Romans 6:23b).

(vi) Their forgiveness is subject to professing faith in Jesus Christ as the son of God (John 3:16; Ephesians 2:8–9).

(vii) They should also believe in him as a Savior (Acts 16:31).

(viii) Apostle Paul said, 'if Christ has not been raised (resurrected from his grave), then your faith is futile' (1 Corinthians 15:17, NIV – New International Version). Meaning the entire Christian faith is based on the resurrection of Jesus Christ. If you do not believe in it, you are not a Christian.

Christians say that Christ suffered the painful death for his followers. Because of his sacrifice, the followers of Christianity will be pardoned for their sins by the Father God. Christians celebrate the resurrection of Jesus Christ every year as 'Easter'.

Christians also believe that all people of the world will be resurrected at the end of the world as prophesied by apostle Paul (Acts 17:31, NIV). After resurrection, the followers of Christianity will be pardoned by the Father God and others will be condemned.

Resurrection in Judaism

Resurrection is the basic doctrine of Jewish theology. Jews say that in the Messianic Age (end times) the Jewish temple will be rebuilt in Jerusalem. The followers of Judaism will gather in Jerusalem from all over the world and towards the end of this world, the bodies of their dead will be brought back to life.

The above Judaic belief is mentioned in Hebrew Bible in the books of Isaiah, Daniel, etc. Some references in this context are given below.

(i) He brings down to the grave and raises up (1 Samuel 2:6, NIV)

(ii) After my skin has been destroyed, yet in my flesh I will see God (Job 19:26, NIV)

(iii) Your dead will live; their bodies will rise (Isaiah 26:19, NIV)

(iv) I am going to open your graves and bring you up from them (Ezekiel 37:12, NIV)

(v) Those who do not believe in resurrection have no share in the end times (Mishnah Sanhedrin 10:1).

(vi) A mysterious angelic figure told Daniel that the multitude who sleep in the dust will awake (Daniel 12:2, NIV).

Jewish Medieval Halakhic (legal authority) Maimonide (Torah legal authority) named Moshe ben Maimon (1138–1204 CE) described 13 basic principles of Orthodox Judaism and placed the belief in the revival of the dead at number 13.

Many Rabbinic sources also mention that the dead will be brought back to life in the end time. The Talmud mentions, the buried bodies of the Jews all over the world will be rolled back to Israel through underground tunnels, for resurrection.

Some people say that during pre-Maccabean era (200 BC) the belief of resurrection was absent in Jewish faith. It was developed during the Maccabean struggle as a source of inspiration to fight unbearable persecution of Jews. During this time the Jews hoped for resurrection of their dead to help them fight with their oppressors.

Jews also claim that the resurrection will be for all; but to the followers of Judaism, it will be everlasting blissful life, and to others it will be shame and everlasting contempt.

Comparative study of the teachings of Christianity, Judaism, and Islam

(i) Judaism

According to Hebrew Bible, King Josiah (or Yoshiyahu) of Jews, who was the sixteenth king of Judah (640–609 BC), instituted reform in

Judaism by introducing Monolatry. Monolatry is the worship of one God, at the same time not denying that people can worship other gods / divine beings within the Jewish community with equal truth. Jews believe that Angels are the daughters of God and certain Prophets are the Sons of God. Jews could worship angels, some prophets as sons of God, and other powers in heaven, but they are to offer sacrifices to the god of Israel.

Monolatry was introduced to Jewish society as they were divided into many groups and sub-groups who were worshipping different gods, and there was a lot of infighting among them. Oldest books of Hebrew Bible reflect this scenario. Their famous ancient books like 'Hosea' and 'Nahum', condemned the people of Israel for this reason during that time.

Originally, Yahweh was the national god of the Kingdom of Israel. Later the name of their god was changed to Elohim. Some Jews believe that Yahweh and Elohim are two separate gods who created this world together. Some Jews believe in henotheism, meaning, worship of a single, predominant god while not denying the existence of other lower gods. It is reported that henotheistic Jews had grown increasingly militant, in their opposition to the other groups who were worshipping other gods, and to contain bloodshed, the Sixteenth King of Juda (640–609 BC) introduced Monolatry in Jewish society.

According to Rabbinical Judaism, which is considered authentic in modern times, Moses (Musa - عليه السلام), the prominent Apostle of Allah, under whose leadership Israelis exiled from Egypt, lived among them between (1391–1271 BC).

(ii) Christianity

The same thing happened in Christianity. In the first three centuries of Christ's birth, many groups had been formed within Christian community, some of whom believed Jesus Christ as human being and emphasized that it was the original teaching of Christianity, while others associated divinity with Jesus Christ. Those who associated divinity with Jesus Christ were reported to be

influenced by the Greek Hellenistic philosophy dominant in Roman Empire during (300 BC - 300 CE).

The belief in Trinity (3 gods) was introduced to Christianity in 325 CE by Roman emperor Constantine-I (272-337) in a meeting of different Churches within Roman empire. Those groups who considered Jesus as human being were declared heretic and were banished from the Roman empire and the belief in Trinity became the orthodox belief of Christianity ever since.

There is a reference in the Quran to this effect. 'The Jews say, 'Uzair (عليه السلام) (Ezra) is the son of God'; and the Christians say, 'Isa (عليه السلام) (Jesus) is the son of God.' That is their statement from their mouths; they imitate the saying of those who disbelieved (before them). (9-30).

(iii) Islam

Throughout 1,500 years history of Islam, there have been instances where some groups / sects and scholars tried to mix Greek and other philosophies into Islamic teachings. But these attempts were successfully refuted by the Islamic scholars like Al-Ghazali and others.

In the recent past, during the past 150 years, deviant sects, and groups like Salafis, Wahhabis, Deobandis and likeminded groups who believe in a 'planet size God, who has physical body and limbs and sitting over the skies in a certain direction', tried to change the concept of God in Islam. These sects were successfully refuted by Islamic scholars and were not allowed to change the original teachings of Islam.

The Quran, which was revealed in Arabic, remained intact as no one could alter a single word in it. It has also helped in protecting the original teachings of Islam to this day.

As per the Quran, the concept of God has not changed from Adam (عليه السلام) to Mohammad (صلى الله عليه وآله وسلم). The Quran testifies that all Israeli prophets from Isaac, Jacob, to Moses and Jesus (عليهم السلام) taught the same original teachings of Islam.

The Quran says – [Say (O Prophet ﷺ), 'We believe in Allah and in what was sent down to us and what was sent down to Ibrahim (Abraham), Ismail (Ishmael), Ishaq (Isaac), Yaqaob (Jacob), and the Tribes, and what was given to Musa (Moses), Isa (Jesus), and all the prophets (عليهم السلام) by their Lord. We make no distinction between any of them, and we devote ourselves to Him. (2-136).

Resurrection in Islam

There are six basic principles of Islamic faith, viz, (i) Belief in Allah, (ii) His angels, (iii) His books, (iv) His Apostles, (v) Resurrection after death and accountability of deeds, and (vi) Fate, whether good and bad, is from Allah.

As far as belief in Allah is concerned, Muslims believe that Allah (عَزَّ وَجَلَّ) is One, not in a numerical sense, but in the sense that He has no partner. He does not have children. Nobody has given birth to him. Nobody can match Him or equal Him. He does not resemble anything of His creation, nor does anything among His creation resembles Him. He is free from the considerations of body, form, and shape. Divinity cannot be associated with anyone except Him. He has existed eternally and will exist everlastingly with His names and attributes.

The Quran says, [nothing is like Him, and He is the Seer and Hearer.] (42-11). And [peoples' eyes (be it physical eye, or heart eye, or spiritual eye) cannot see Him. He sees their eyes (them). He has minute vision and is aware of everything] (6-103).

The Day of Resurrection (يوم القيامة) has been referred in the Quran with different names, like (i) the Day of Judgement (يوم الدين), (ii) the (Last) Hour (السَّاعَةُ), (iii) the Calamity (الْفَارِغَةُ), (iv) the (Massive) Earthquake (الزَّلْزَلَةُ), (v) the Blast (السَّيْقَةُ), (vi) the Hard Day (يوم الثقيلة), (vii) the Encompassing Day (يوم الفصل), (viii) the Day of Separation (يوم المحيطة), (ix) the Great Disaster (الطَّامَةُ الْكُبْرَى), (x) the Day of Truth (يوم الحق), (xi) the Day of Reckoning (يوم الحساب), (xii) the Day of Exodus (from graves) (يوم الخروج), (xiii) the Difficult Day (يَوْمٌ عَسِيرٌ), (xiv) the Promised Day (يَوْمُ الْمَوْعُودِ), (xv) the Day of Warning

(يَوْمُ الْوَعْدِ), (xvi) the Day of Regret (يَوْمُ الْحَسْرَةِ), (xvii) the Day of Trumpet (يَوْمُ الصُّورِ), (xviii) the Day of Occurrence (يَوْمُ الْوَأْقَعَةِ), (xix) the Known Day (يَوْمٌ مَّعْلُومٌ), and (xx) the Day of Known Time (يَوْمُ الْوَقْتِ الْمَعْلُومِ).

The Quran says, the Day of Resurrection will be initiated with the blowing of the Trumpet by an angel named Israfeel (عليه السلام). The blow will be so powerful that the entire Cosmos will be destroyed by it. Then the angel will be ordered to blow the trumpet again, and this time the earth will appear in an extended even form, without any mountains, oceans, or vegetation. All people who died with the first blow of the trumpet, including the ones who were dead earlier, will come back to life again. They all will gather at 'the place of Assembly' (المحشر) where their Lord's Effulgence (التجلي الإلهي) will appear on a Divine Throne, and everyone will be required to answer for his deeds during his lifetime.

There will be a period between the first trumpet and the second one, and no one except Allah knows its exact duration. There will be another period between peoples gathering on the place of Assembly and start of their reckoning, and no one except Allah knows its duration. The period of reckoning is also known to Allah. It is said that it will be about 50,000 years long. Muslims belief that some people, after reckoning, will be placed in Paradise and others will be thrown into Hellfire where they will live eternally.

The question arises whether people will have the same material body on the Day of Resurrection in which they lived during their lifetime?

The torment of grave is confirmed from the Quran and Sunnah, which establishes the fact that after death, a new body, as per the requirement of 'life after death', is provided to people with which they live in the 'life after death'. The wrongdoer is punished in the grave and the pious is awarded with a happy and comfortable life in 'after life'. References from the Quran and Sunnah in this context are provided below.

(i) So, Allah protected Musa (عليه السلام) from the evils they plotted (against him), while a terrible punishment encompassed Pharaoh's clan, and

they are exposed to the fire morning and afternoon, and on the Day when the Hour will be established (angels will be told): Cause Pharaoh's people to enter the severest punishment. (40: 45-46)

(ii) But whoever turns away from remembering Me, he will have a life of great hardship (after his death), and We will raise him blind on the Day of Resurrection. (20-124)

(iii) (O' mankind) you are distracted by the mutual rivalry (of piling up of worldly gains), until you end up in (your) graves. But no! You will soon come to know (in your graves).

(iv) And say not of those who are killed in Allah's cause, 'they are dead.' Rather they are alive, but you are not aware. (2-154)

(v) Ibn Abbas (رضي الله تعالى عنه) reported that the Prophet (صلى الله عليه وآله وسلم) once passed by two graves, and those two persons (in the graves) were being punished. He took a green leaf of a date-palm tree, split it into two pieces and fixed one on each grave. The people said, O Allah's Apostle (صلى الله عليه وآله وسلم) why have you done so? He replied, 'I hope that their punishment may be lessened till the leaf become dry.' (Bukhari).

The grave in which the human being is punished is not the earthly grave in which he was buried as this grave is used to decompose the material body of the person. The life after death is apparently kept hidden from our physical eyes but those who are provided with spiritual vision can witness it. We can understand this scenario from the example of our video chatting from people in remote corners of the world via internet. Spiritual vision is something similar provided to some exclusive people.

Thus, it is possible that on the Day of Resurrection the people are provided with a body as per the requirement of the Day of Resurrection. Allah knows the substance of those bodies. It could be the matter, or any other thing, as per the requirement of that Day as the sun will be brought closer to the earth and there will be nothing to eat or drink while people stand for a long period of time during reckoning.

The Quran says, 'the great Horror (that Day) will not disturb them (the believers), and the angels will greet them, (saying), 'this is your Day, which you have been promised. (21-103).

Muslims believe that those who have purity of faith in their hearts will get salvation on the Day of Judgement. Many wrong doers among Muslims may also get salvation because of the Prophet's (صلى الله عليه و آله وسلم) intercession, and mediation of Awliya Allah, and they will be allowed to live an eternal life of bliss in Paradise. The unbelievers and some evil people will enter Hellfire.

The above Muslim beliefs about resurrection are mentioned in the Quran. Some of these references are given below.

(i) The day We shall roll up the skies, like the rolling of the scrolls for writings. We will bring it back as We began the first creation. (Its) a promise (binding) on Us. It will indeed be fulfilled. (21-104)

(ii) O people! If you are in doubt about the Resurrection, then (know that) We did create you from dust, then from a sperm-drop, then (developed you into) a clinging clot, then a lump of flesh, fully formed or unformed, to demonstrate (Our power) to you. (Then) We settle whatever (embryo) We will in the womb for an appointed term, then bring you forth as infants, so that you may reach your prime. Some of you die (young), while others are left to reach the feeblest stage of life (old age) so that they may know nothing after having known much. And (similarly) you see the earth lifeless, but as soon as We send down rain upon it, it begins to stir (to life) and swell, producing every type of pleasant plant. This is so because Allah is the Reality. It is He Who gives life to the dead, and it is He Who has power over all things. And indeed, the Hour will come. There cannot be any doubt about it, or about (the fact) that Allah will raise up all, who are in the graves. (22:5-7)

(iii) Surely, We shall resurrect the dead. We are recording all that they are sending ahead and that they are leaving behind. We have taken record of all things in a book (of evidence). (36-12)

(iv) And each person will get recompense for what he/she did; and Allah is all aware of what they did. (39-70)

(v) And the Trumpet will be blown (on the day of Resurrection). This is (also) the Day (you were) warned of. (50-20)

(vi) Say, 'O My servants who have transgressed against themselves (by sinning), do not despair of the Mercy of Allah. Indeed, Allah forgives all sins. Indeed, it is He who is All Forgiving, Most Merciful. Turn towards your Lord and obey Him before the punishment comes upon you when you will not be helped. (39: 53-54).

Conclusion

Resurrection on the day of Judgement is a concept that is a primary part of the ethos of Abrahamic faiths, namely, Christianity, Judaism, and Islam. Given the strict laws of ethics and code of conduct followed by the scholars in the Islamic tradition, and the historical resistance to any alterations by foreign philosophical ideologies to its core doctrines, the foundational teachings of Islam have remained constant and unblemished by the passage of time.

On the contrary, the foundational teachings of Judaism and Christianity have been subject to a perennial evolution over thousands of years. That is to say that the Christianity or Judaism that we witness today have little to no bearing on the Christianity or Judaism at the time of its conception. The same cannot be said about Islam.

Therefore, it can be concluded that concept of resurrection, as has been detailed by the Islamic holy texts and the interpretations of its scholars are more historically sound and consistent as compared to that of Christianity or Judaism. It is necessary to mention that no one can claim to have absolute understanding about the details of sequence of events of the Day of Resurrection. But the conclusions drawn by interpreting Islamic texts seem to provide the most likely elucidation of the mechanics of Resurrection.

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About the Author



Ash Shaikh Mir Asedullah Quadri is well known all over the world for his explanation of Islamic Tawheed, Sahih Iman, Sahih Islam and Sahih Ihsan. He is a scholar, historian, and poet. He is the author of Tafseer-e-Asedi, Irshad Al Asedi, Fusus Al-Iman and over 1000 books on various Islamic subjects. He has written many research articles on religion, history, and other subjects. He is also the Editor in Chief of CIFIA Global Journal.