

## دنیا و آمادگی برای مرگ از دیدگاه امیرالمؤمنین علیه السلام

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### چکیده

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**کلید واژه‌ها:** دنیا، حب دنیا، مرگ، تفکر در مرگ، آمادگی برای مرگ.

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## **This-Worldly Affairs and Preparation for Death from Imam Ali's Viewpoint**

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### **Abstract**

Concerning purpose of man's creation there, at least, can be two viewpoints. First, man has no purpose but to participate in the competition of gathering wealth, reaching high ranks in the society, and taking power ignoring all human virtues and principles, as if he would live for good and death would never capture him. This is the practical conduct of human beings in general. The second is that of divine religions which stands in opposition to the first. The present essay is an attempt to describe the second viewpoint in a literally fashion, focusing on the words of the Commander of the Faithful, Imam Ali.

**Keywords:** The world, Love of this-worldly affairs, death, preparation for death.

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When man sets foot in this world, he is but a stranger, a traveler coming from and also heading toward a faraway land. He dwells in this world for a short while, and once he decides to leave for his ultimate destination, he notices a pond in his way: it contains some water, refreshed occasionally by a narrow stream; upon it lily pads float, and toads sing on the other side. A bit further stands an unstable cabin, built upon unsteady pieces of wood, and inhabited by phantoms empty of active life that call upon man to go inside and settle down. Stepping into that dwelling, you would see a long dining table resting upon human skulls and windows covered with beautiful, colorful curtains of gold with an unreal yet enchanting glitter. At the table you would see enchanted deaf people who fondly speak of the mesmerizing sound of music in the air! Blind men describing the beauty and captivating glitter of mounts of pure gold as well as the fascinating colorfulness of the dining table! And mute men standing on stools, composing poetry and prose on all the enchanting beauty around!

Together, they all beckon toward themselves the newly-arrived and tired man, inviting him to settle down and join them, drink from the tasty goblet of negligence, dance with joy, sing, and play songs, after which he shall fall down out of exhaustion and go to sleep, only to wake up another day and spend it just the same way; thus shall his days and nights pass on!

It is as though everything is right here and he has arrived at his remote destination! If this is not the final destination, then what are these humans doing here?!

Those who dwell in the house admire the newcomer's

decision and genius, and cries of adulation fill the air: “Indeed! Do stay! You have come from far away; you must be tired! Your comfort and peace rests in this house! Beyond it there is nothing!”

And he chooses... to stay! He puts down his luggage and steps into the unstable residence. At first he desired only to rest for a short while, freshen up, and continue down his path once he gained enough strength to keep walking; and here he is now: choosing to stay, forgetting already that he is but a traveller!

He fancied that the floating lily pads were there to stay; he listened to the painful cries of toads as though they were nightingales singing gracefully; taking nothing from the flowing water and the greenery, he just put down his luggage and settled down!

But that was not all. From time to time, a freshening breeze would blow through the land, combing the disturbed hairs of trees, and thus address him with its sound: “You! Rise! You must leave! You have not come here to stay! These phantoms you see are but blind, deaf, and mute men whose desire is to turn you into one of their own. Do not get attached to them! Continue down your path, for it is a lengthy one, and you are in need of provisions for the journey... So rise!”

But he chooses to... stay!

Indeed! That is the story of man and this world; he takes a hostel for a home, a rest stop for a dwelling, and a mirage for pure water.

Such thick dust covering our hearts shall not disappear but with the file of knowledge and cognition, of this world and the hereafter: remembering death. So let us take this file and brush

away the darkness from our hearts through Islamic teachings in general and Imam Ali's wisdom in particular.

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I have now pictured this world for you. You were told that it's simply a stop, not a place to stay. It is a bridge between non-existence and eternal life. It is only a means.

Not every kind of world is disapproved, though! It is quite admirable should one use it as a vessel for the achievement of perfections. Imam Ali (A.S.) said that "it is with this world that the hereafter is attained," and: "I truthfully say that the world has not deceived you but you have had yourself deceived by it. The world had opened to you the curtains and divulged to you (everything) equally. And in all that it foretold you about the troubles befalling your bodies and the decay in your power, it has been too true and faithful in promise, and did not speak a lie to you or deceive you. There are many who advise you about it but they are blamed, and speak the truth about it but they are opposed. If you understand the world by means of dilapidated houses and forlorn abodes, then with your good understanding and far reaching power of drawing lessons you will find it like one who is kind over you and cautious about you. It is good abode for him who does not like it as an abode, and a good place of stay for him who does not regard it a permanent home for stay. Only those who run away from this world today will be regarded virtuous tomorrow." (*Nahj al-Balagha*, Sermon 221)

And just as admirable is the world which denotes the world of Creation, for it is a grand sign amongst the signs of God.

What is disapproved about the world is its assets and

attachment to them: my things, my position, my leadership, my knowledge, my perfections... along with boasting and hoarding wealth. The world is disapproved when used as a vessel for the fulfillment of lust, dragging man down to a rank lower than that of animals, and as a playground for the wild desires of the self. Indeed, how low, despicable, and worthless is such a world! Notice how Imam Ali (A.S.) has spoken about it: “The world is but a transient shadow,” (Al-Amidi, No. 318), “The world is transient and mortal; even if it stays with you, you shall not stay with it!” (*Ibid.*, no. 1802). Indeed, what beautiful words! Suppose that this world lasts forever; what is it to you?! You shall leave after a while and will not be here to take advantage of it!

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Now contemplate a little. Notice how everyone who gathered wealth and built palaces did so, in fact, only for destruction and loss! Were it not true, where are those majestic palaces made of gold? Where are all those gold crowns and thrones? Where are the treasures of Croesus? Wealth that is unmatched but disappears entirely by a crack in the earth is not worth getting attached to.

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Be aware that the world is just as unfaithful as it is transient: an enchanting seductress that bewitches fools, and once it has them under its spell, it tears their lives apart!

Describing the world, Imam Ali (A.S.) said: “This is a house surrounded by calamities and well-known for deceitfulness. Its conditions do not last and those who inhabit it do not remain safe. Its conditions are variable and its ways changing. Life in it

is blameworthy and safety in it is non-existent. Yet its people are targets; it strikes them with its arrows and destroys them through death.” (*Nahj al-Balagha*, Sermon 224).

How can you love and value this world when you have seen how prophets avoid it and how the pious worry that it might approach them?

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Indeed, what makes man look away from the obvious truth that this world is transient and everyone shall leave behind what they have gathered with great effort and leave in poverty? Why does man not contemplate the outcome of his deeds? Why does he let himself sink into this cesspool and refuses to come to his senses? And so many other questions whose answer is but a single word: longing! When one does not draw a limit for his wishes and desires, a new one emerges as soon as the old one is fulfilled, and the endless chain of longing carries on. Thus it is no surprise that one fails to learn the truth about himself and to remember God and the hereafter, forgetting what he is, his worth, and the reason he has stepped into this world of ruin. Indeed, instead of pondering and dealing with such matters that shape the ultimate purpose of his creation, he indulges in the endless longings of this world, and out of avarice he does not feel content by achieving one goal and aims for a greater one, coming to his senses only when the messenger of death knocks on his door and he has lost everything! It is this longing that drags one into pursuing fruitless activities and forgetting God, resulting in his being left alone by Him: “Leave them to eat, and to take their joy, and to be bemused by hope certainly they will soon know!” (Qur., 15:3)

Imam Ali (A.S.) said, “The smartest of all is one who stands



up to his world, tears from it his longing, and does not lay his hopes and desires in it.” (Al-Amidi, no. 3276). He also said, “God bless those who are aware that every breath takes them closer to their death. So they act with haste and cut short their longings.” (Ibid., no. 5214). And also: “No servant of God cultivated a longing except that he made his efforts worthless.” (Al-Kulayni, 3, 25).

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Now, if you have the will to fight the love for this world and find in yourself the will to uproot this large and strong tree which has taken root in the depths of your heart, going through your veins and flesh, rise and practice *zuhd* so that you would prepare the ground for tearing away this unholy root from your heart.

*Zuhd* is to avoid attachment to this world and its useless things, to not feel joy when it gives to you and not feel sad when it turns its back on you. Imam Ali (A.S.) said, “This world is a place for which destruction is ordained and for its inhabitants departure from here is destined. It is sweet and green. It hastens towards its seeker and attaches to the heart of the viewer. So depart from here with the best of provision available with you and do not ask herein more than what is enough and do not demand from it more than subsistence.” (*Nahj al-Balagha*, Sermon 44).

And also: “Certainly, in the Prophet of Allah (peace and blessing of Allah be upon him and his progeny) was sufficient example for you and a proof concerning the vices of the world, its defects, the multitude of its disgraces and its evils, because its sides had been constrained for him, while its flanks had been



spread for others; he was deprived of its milk and turned away from its adornments.

“If you want, I will, as a second example, relate to you concerning Musa, the Interlocutor of Allah (p.b.u.h.) when he said: O' Allah! I need whatever good You may grant me (Qur., 28:24). By Allah, he asked Him only for bread to eat because he was used to eating the herbs of the earth, and the greenness of the herbs could be seen from the delicate skin of his belly due to his thinness and paucity of his flesh. If you desire I can give you a third example of David (p.b.u.h.). He is the holder of the Psalms and the reciter among the people of Paradise. He used to prepare baskets of date palm leaves with his own hands and would say to his companions: "Which of you will help me by purchasing it?" He used to eat barley bread (bought) out of its price.

“If you desire I will tell you about Jesus (p.b.u.h.) son of Mary. He used a stone for his pillow, put on coarse clothes and ate rough food. His condiment was hunger. His lamp at night was the moon. His shade during the winter was just the expanse of earth eastward and westward. His fruits and flowers were only what grows from the earth for the cattle. He had no wife to allure him, nor any son to give grief, nor wealth to deviate (his attention), nor greed to disgrace him. His two feet were his conveyance and his two hands his servant.

“You should follow your Prophet, the pure, the chaste, may Allah bless him and his descendants. In him is the example for the follower, and the consolation for the seeker of consolation. The most beloved person before Allah is he who follows His Prophet and who treads in his footsteps. He took the least (share)

from this world and did not take a full glance at it.

“Of all the people of the world he was the least satiated and the most empty of stomach. The world was offered to him but he refused to accept it. When he knew that Allah, the Glorified, hated a thing, he too hated it; that Allah held a thing low, he too held it low; that Allah held a thing small, he too held it small. If we love what Allah and His Prophet hate and hold great what Allah and His prophet hold small that would be enough isolation from Allah and transgression of His commands.

“The Prophet used to eat on the ground, and sat like a slave. He repaired his shoe with his hand, and patched his clothes with his hand. He would ride an unsaddled ass and would seat someone behind him. If there was a curtain on his door with pictures on it he would say to one of his wives. ‘O’ such-and-such, take it away out of my sight because if I look at it I recall the world and its allurements.’ Thus, he removed his heart from this world and destroyed its remembrance from his mind.

“He loved that its allurements should remain hidden from his eye so that he should not secure good dress from it, should not regard it a place of stay and should not hope to live in it. Consequently, he removed it from his mind, let it go away from his heart and kept it hidden from his eyes. In the same way he who hates a thing should hate to look at it or to hear about it.

“Certainly there was in the Prophet of Allah all that would apprise you of the evils of this world and its defects, namely that he remained hungry along with his chief companions, and despite his great nearness the allurements of the world remained remote from him. Now, one should see with one's intelligence

whether Allah honored Muhammad (the peace and blessings of Allah be upon him and his descendants) as a result of this or disgraced him. If he says that Allah disgraced him, he certainly lies and perpetrates a great untruth. If he says Allah honored him, he should know that Allah dishonored the others when He extended the (benefits of the) world for him but held them away from him who was the nearest to Him of all men.” (*Nahj al-Balagha*, Sermon 159).

And yet another statement by Imam Ali (A.S.): “Know that the loss of anything of this world will not harm you, if you have guarded the principles of your religion. Know also that after the loss of your religion nothing of this world for which you have cared will benefit you.” (*Nahj al-Balagha*, Sermon 172).

In a sermon Imam Ali (A.S.) said: “Make your ears hear the call of death before you are called by death. Surely the hearts of the abstemious weep in this world even though they may (apparently) laugh, and their grief increases even though they may appear happy. Their atred for themselves is much even though they may be envied for the subsistence they are allowed.

“Remembrance of death has disappeared from your hearts while false hopes are present in you. So this world has mastered you more than the next world, and the immediate end (of this world) has removed you away from the remote one (of the next life)...What is your condition? You feel satisfied with what little you have secured from this world while much of the next world of which you have been deprived does not grieve you. The little of this world which you lose pains you so much so that it becomes apparent in your faces, and in the lack of your

endurance over whatever is taken away from you; as though this world is your permanent abode, and as though its wealth would stay with you for good.” (*Nahj al-Balagha*, Sermon 112).

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Indeed, now that you have come to know your problem, find the cure in the words of Imam Ali (A.S.): the cure for the incurable disease of love for this world is remembering and contemplating death. Once you think about death and remember it, persist in doing so, engrave upon your heart the truths mentioned so far and shall be said later, and believe that you are a captive in the powerful claws of death and it might unexpectedly take you away and leave for others what you have gathered with much effort, the love for this world shall definitely depart from you heart and be replaced by a feeling of dislike. Then you would step by step prepare yourself for death and gather provisions for you eternal life. Be certain that there is no other cure for the disease in question.

Imam Ali (A.S.) said, “One who often remembers death shall be safe from the deceptions of the world” (Al-Amidi, no. 8506), and “Whosoever awaits death shall rush towards virtues.” (Ibid., no. 8507).

You who deem yourself a clever man! Being clever is not to see the short life in this world as the true life, to violate the rights of others for your own happiness, and to make the wealth of others that of your own by deception; cleverness is to contemplate the life after your death, to eliminate the root of vices – i.e. love for this world – by remembering death, and to collect more and more provisions for your life in the world to

come. It is due to the said truth that the holy Prophet (S) replied thus when asked about the cleverest among believers: “It is one who remembers death more often and is ahead of others in preparing himself for it.” (Al-Kulayni, 3, 258).

Imam Ali (A.S.) said, “The cleverest of all is one who is hostile toward this-worldly life and has no desire, avarice, and hope for it.” (Al-Amidi, no. 3276).

The above-mentioned quotes are not the only ones. Great divine figures have repeatedly urged us to contemplate and remember death. The holy Prophet (S) said, “Remember frequently the destroyer of pleasures – i.e. death.” (Al-Fayd al-Kashani, 8, 23).

Imam Ali (A.S.) said, “Constantly remember death and what awaits you after it.” (Al-Amidi, no. 2402), and: “Often remember death and what you would suddenly come upon and end up with after you die.” (Ibid., no. 2431) And also: “Hark! When proceeding to commit wrong deeds, remember the destroyer of pleasures, terminator of lusts, and annihilator of wishes.” (Ibid., no. 4123).

Hark! Now rise, and open your eyes, lest your awakening takes place in your deathbed, when you are powerless. Contemplate death and the world beyond it before the opportunity flies away.

As the first step of such contemplation, you must realize – and engrave upon your heart – that death is a fate from which there is no escape. Not a single soul is destined for immortality in this world: “We have not granted immortality to anyone before you;

would they live forever if you died?!” (Qur., 21:34).

Imam Ali (A.S.) said, “If there was anyone who could secure a ladder to everlasting life or a way to avoid death it was Solomon son of David (p.b.u.h.) who was given control over the domain of the jinn and men along with prophethood and great position (before Allah), but when he finished what was his due in food (of this world) and exhausted his (fixed) time the bow of destruction shot him with arrow of death. His houses became vacant and his habitations became empty. Another group of people inherited them.” (*Nahj al-Balagha*, Sermon 181).

*It is in death that true life rests; it is death that grants immortality!* Thus do not assume fruitlessly that you shall live for eternity, and do not go out of your way in attaining eternal life, for before long the messenger of death shall arrive and take you with him to eternity.

God states, “Say: Surely death, from which you flee, shall encounter you; then you shall be returned to the Knower of the Unseen and the Visible, and He will tell you that you have been doing (62:8).” Also: “Wherever you may be, death will overtake you, though you should be in raised up towers (4: 78).”

Imam Ali (A.S.) said, “Death is a closer companion to you than your shadow and enjoys greater authority than you do” (Al-Amidi, no. 3611);

“Death is engraved upon your foreheads” (*Ibid.*, no. 3614);

“You try to avoid death, while it is something that cannot be avoided and will eventually embrace one who runs away from it” (*Ibid.*, no. 3712);

“You turn your back on death and run, while death

approaches you from that very direction: how soon you two shall meet!” (*Ibid.*, no. 4123); and

“How close life is to death!” (*Ibid.*, no. 8487)

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Then ponder over the fact that the end of your life may come this very day, and know that death is not just for others. Notice the people around you and how many of them have been taken by death all of a sudden. Open your eyes upon the truth: once death arrives, it shall make no difference whether you are old or young, ill or in good health, poor or a man of wealth, feeling joy or despair... Thus there is no telling whether you shall be among those who reach old age; as far as death is concerned, today could be your last. Imam Ali (A.S.) said, “Whosoever believes that he shall be alive the next day has not understood death the way it is meant to be understood.” (Al-Kulayni, 3, 25).

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Next, have a look at history, a profound and constructive look, not one of negligence and entertainment. See how your ancestors, kings, powerful leaders, men of great wealth, tyrants, and the like – men far more powerful and wealthy than you – have bid the world adieu, leaving behind nothing but remnants of their palaces. Even they were erased by death from the world, only to lie deep below the ground. By contemplating such remnants and ruins, you shall learn your lesson and awaken from your sleep.

Imam Ali (A.S.) said: “Certainly, the by-gone centuries have a lesson for you. Where are the Amalekites and the sons of Amalekites? Where are the Pharaohs? Where are the people of



the cities of ar-Rass who killed the prophets, destroyed the traditions of the divine messengers and revived the traditions of the despots? Where are those who advanced with armies, defeated thousands, mobilised forces and populated cities?" (*Nahj al-Balagha*, Sermon 181).

In a sermon Imam Ali (A.S.) said, "Know, O' creatures of Allah, that, certainly, you and all the things of this world that you have are (treading) on the lines of those (who were) before you. They were of longer ages, had more populated houses and were of more lasting traces.

"Their voices have become silent, their movements have become stationary, their bodies have become rotten, their houses have become empty and their traces have been obliterated. Their magnificent places and spread-out carpets were changed to stones, laid-in-blocks and cave-like dug out graves whose very foundation is based on ruins and whose construction has been made with soil.

"Their positions are contiguous, but those settled in them are like far flung strangers. They are among the people of their area but feel lonely, and they are free from work but still engaged (in activity). They feel no attachment with homelands nor do they keep contact among themselves like neighbors despite nearness of neighborhood and priority of abodes. And how can they meet each other when decay has ground them with its chest, and stones and earth have eaten them.

"It is as though you too have gone where they have gone, the same sleeping place has caught you and the same place has detained you. What will then be your position when your affairs

reach their end and graves are turned upside down (to throw out the dead)? There shall every soul realize what it hath sent before, and they shall be brought back to Allah, their true Lord, and what they did fabricate (the false deities) will vanish (away) from them. (Qur., 10:30).” (*Nahj al-Balagha*, Sermon 224).

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Then ponder over death, its process, and the fear it brings. Picture with your mind's eye how horrified and in perpetual distress you would be were you taken, in this ephemeral world, to a terrifying and unfamiliar place where you would have to undertake various daunting tasks all by yourself; in that respect death resembles the described situation – though the unknown nature of death and its horrors are far from the fears exemplified. Thus, contemplate such matters and situations to the best of your knowledge. Through its special way, bring to perfection what imperfect knowledge that you have, for such contemplations are among those which are deemed greater than worshipping for one whole year. An hour of pondering over the punishments of unbelievers and transgressors and the rewards of believers would perhaps wake you from negligence and place you in the ranks of true mystics.

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I have not spoken in vain, so heed my words! These truths I mentioned so that you might wake up from the sleep of negligence, climb the steps of knowledge, and drag yourself out from the heedless crowd, those thus described by God: “They have hearts, but understand not with them; they have eyes, but perceive not with them; they have ears, but they hear not with

them. They are like cattle; nay, rather they are further astray... They are the heedless.” (Qur., 7:179).

Down with such negligence! Imam Ali (A.S.) said, “I am surprised how one could be heedless when death is approaching them in such haste!” (al-Amidi, no. 6243).

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Now rise and prepare yourself for death, for the perilous yet inevitable journey ahead! Gather provisions so that your hands would not be empty when the messenger of death appears without prior notice; be not among those who depart empty-handed and regret that they did not prepare ahead the required provisions.

Imam Ali (A.S.) said:

1. “Gather provisions for your journey, for you shall be taken in haste, and prepare for death, for it has its shadow cast upon you.” (Al-Amidi, no.4514).

2. “One who postpones his preparation for death and fails to seize opportunities is unaware of the sudden arrival of death.” (*Ibid.*, no. 4513).

3. “I am surprised at one who notices how his life becomes shorter day after day but does not prepare himself for death.” (*Ibid.*, no. 6253).

4. “Be weary of provision shortage and be completely prepared for your journey.” (*Ibid.*, no. 2614).

5. “One would prepare himself should he remember how long his journey is going be.” (*Ibid.*, no. 8488).

6. “One who is familiar with the way of the world would not forget to prepare himself.” (*Ibid.*, no. 8403).

Also in a sermon, Imam Ali (A.S.) said, “May Allah have pity on you. You should therefore hasten towards (the reparation of) houses which you have been commanded to populate, and towards which you have been called and invited. Seek the completion of Allah's favors on you by exercising endurance in His obedience and abstention from His disobedience, because tomorrow is close to today. How fast are the hours of the day, how fast are the days in the month, how fast are the months in the years and how fast the years in a life.” (*Nahj al-Balagha*, Sermon 187).

Also: “O' people, certainly this world is a passage while the next world is a place of permanent abode. So, take from the passage (all that you can) for the permanent abode. Do not tear away your curtain before Him Who is aware of your secrets.

“Take away from this world your hearts before your bodies go out of it, because herein you have been put on trial, and you have been created for the other world. When a man dies people ask what (property) he has left while the angels ask what (good actions) he has sent forward. May Allah bless you; send forward something, it will be a loan for you, and do not leave everything behind, for that would be a burden on you.” (*Nahj al-Balagha*, Sermon 202).

And: “Everyone of you should do whatever he has to do during his days of life before the approach of death, in his leisure before his occupation, and during the breathing of his breath before it is overtaken by suffocation, should provide for himself and his journey and should collect provision from his place of halt for his place of stay.” (*Nahj al-Balagha*, Sermon 155).

Imam Ali (A.S.) would often address his companions with the following words: “May Allah have mercy on you! Provide yourselves for the journey because the call for departure has been announced. Regard your stay in the world as very short, and return (to Allah) with the best provision that is with you, because surely, in front of you lies a valley, difficult to climb, and places of stay full of fear and dangers.

“You have to reach there and stay in them. And know that the eyes of death are approaching towards you. It is as though you are (already) in its talons and it has struck itself against you. Difficult affairs and distressing dangers have crushed you into it. You should therefore cut away all the attachments of this world and assist yourselves with the provision of Allah's fear.” (*Nahj al-Balagha*, Sermon 203).

He also said, “Perform (good) acts while you are still in the vastness of life, the books are open (for recording of actions), repentance is allowed, the runner away (from Allah) is being called and the sinner is being given hope (of forgiveness) before the (light of) action is put off, time expires, life ends, the door for repentance is closed and angels ascend to the sky.” (*Nahj al-Balagha*, Sermon 235).

Indeed! Whosoever fails to prepare provisions for his destination beforehand shall get lost, wandering the boundless desert of eternity, only to end up in the fires of Hell.

### **Conclusion**

Considering what we said in the present essay we come to the conclusion that man has been created for a specific sublime purpose, i.e., to attain the most perfection possible. In this

connection man is supposed to realize that though this-worldly affairs are necessary for his attaining that purpose they must only be taken into consideration as means of achieving that goal and not as purposes of man's creation – as if he is created to live in this world for a very long time and then die like other animals. What can assist man in the realization of this significant, vital point is to deliberate upon death and to think constantly that he is a target of death any moment, and that is why he must be careful of what he is doing. He is supposed not to lose any opportunity for preparing himself for the other world where he is going to live for good.

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