Death is one of the few indisputable facts of life. Regardless of faith, race, status or age, we will all die. While the certainty of death is universally accepted, the question of what happens afterwards has been debated throughout history. Islam teaches that one's life doesn't end on earth; rather, it is followed by the eternal life of the hereafter. This pamphlet explains how this belief has a major impact on our earthly lives, while instilling hope for healing in a perfect world where God’s ultimate justice will prevail.

In the Name of God, the Most Gracious, the Most Merciful

Despite its inevitability, we get so absorbed in living that we forget about death. Our daily routines, the comfort of our homes and our relationships keep us so busy that we have little time left to ponder over the fleeting nature of this world.

Then, suddenly, we are forced to face the reality of our existence when a loved one is afflicted with a debilitating disease or we experience a shocking loss. Helpless, we are jolted by the frailty of life, leading us to question our priorities and reevaluate our lifestyles.

According to Islam, when confronted with a calamity, one should say, “To God we belong and to Him we shall return” (Quran 2:156). This invocation is also recited when someone dies. Reminding us of our origin and our ultimate destiny, it puts the purpose of our lives in perspective. God clearly states in the Quran, the divinely revealed message from God to all humanity, that He has created humankind to worship Him. Since worship is a comprehensive concept in Islam, consisting of specific rituals as well as general actions that promote good, it encourages people to conduct every aspect of their lives with God-consciousness.

Muslims believe they will return to God (Allah in Arabic) when they die. Therefore, instead of the end, death becomes part of a continuum which stretches into eternity.
Believing in the soul and the afterlife is foremost about having faith in the unseen. Just as our souls are intangible beings giving life to our physical bodies, the world we see around us is functioning based on an invisible system created by God who is Ever-Watchful and All-Aware. Muslims believe that God is also just and He maintains a meticulous record of our deeds. We will be recompensed for our earthly lives in the hereafter where ultimate justice prevails.

Humans naturally seek justice in all aspects of their lives. When a person works, they expect to receive an appropriate salary. When an individual is harmed, they seek compensation. When someone helps another, they anticipate appreciation for their effort. Even though humans strive hard to establish justice, the reality is that this world will never be perfectly just. Many criminals go unpunished while the oppressed are denied basic rights. Do their lives simply dissolve without any accountability or fair dealing?

God proclaims in the Quran, “Do those who commit evil deeds really think that We will deal with them in the same way as those who believe and do righteous deeds, that they will be alike in their living and their dying? How badly they judge!” (Quran 45:21).

In the afterlife, the evil doers will not be able to escape the grip of justice and victims of worldly suffering will be recompensed for their pain. People who spent their lives responsibly, avoiding temptations to commit sins, will also be rewarded. As mentioned in the Quran, “God created the heavens and the earth for a true purpose: to reward each soul according to its deeds. They will not be wronged” (Quran 45:22).

According to Islam, one of the greatest injustices humans can commit is to deny God’s existence, add partners to Him or worship worldly idols or materialistic goals. Islam teaches that God is the Creator, Sustainer and Nourisher of every being in the heavens and the earth. As His creation, it is His right that we worship and obey Him. He showers us with His blessings every day out of His love and mercy. Worshiping Him is an expression of gratitude to God, and ignoring Him or worshiping others is ungratefulness and a denial of His blessings.

If our man-made judicial systems punish people for committing injustices against other people, it is even more understandable that God would punish those who deny Him His rights and commit injustices against His creation. God says in the Quran, “We shall set up scales of justice for the Day of Judgment, so that not a soul will be dealt with unfairly in the least, and if there be (no more than) the weight of a mustard seed, We will bring it (to account) and enough are We to take account” (Quran 21:47).

As imperfect beings, we often make mistakes and commit wrong actions. While God does not expect perfection from us, He calls on us to strive to the utmost to worship Him and to live righteously. Out of His Mercy, God pardons whom He wills in the hereafter. God promises us in the Quran: “And those who believe and do righteous deeds - We will surely remove from them their misdeeds and will surely reward them according to the best of what they used to do” (Quran 29:7).

Muslims seek salvation in the hereafter by living a God-conscious and virtuous life in this world. The fear of accountability in the hereafter, along with hope in the promise of God’s ultimate justice, motivates them to orient their present lives around the comprehensive worship of God, the true purpose of human existence. In this way, they endeavor in this temporary life for eternal joy.

[To the righteous it will be said], “O reassured soul, return to your Lord, well-pleased and pleasing [to Him], and enter among My [righteous] servants, and enter My Paradise.” (Quran 89:27-30)

Note: The superscript “p” next to Prophet Muhammad represents the invocation Muslims say with his name: May God’s peace and blessings be upon him.