



Fear of Death and the Afterlife: The Islamic Perspective

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The life of this world is merely an amusement and a diversion; indeed, the true life is in the Hereafter, if only they knew.¹

Introduction

Can the fear of death be conquered? And should it be? With rare exceptions, it is a universal fear that has haunted generations and remains one of society's most complex underlying concerns. Modernity, with its many comforts and distractions, has rendered its beneficiaries with a shallow understanding of life and death. We have become so distant from reality in pursuit of misplaced priorities, skewed heavily toward meeting our worldly goals, that we have forgotten—and perhaps cannot even fathom—the faith and conviction required to face our own mortality. This is normative among those who believe in God and the afterlife, let alone those who refute their existence. Naturally, questions about the fear of death arise. Perhaps even more today, in great part because of the current climate.² On one hand is the trauma and fear inflicted by widespread injustice—foremost upon its victims, but also upon those witnessing it vicariously across global media. On the other hand is the juxtaposition of terrifying images broadcast in real time against the excess consumption of a world absorbed in materialism and heedlessness and increasingly indifferent to the plight of others. It is no surprise that the mere thought of death in these conflicting realities conjures up an overwhelming sense of fear. A complex and powerful emotion, fear of death can significantly impact not only our mental health and well-being, but also the virtues we claim to uphold.

Modern secular culture considers fear, especially fear rooted in moral accountability, as inherently negative and looks to eliminate it. While fear itself is universally recognized as an innate protective and adaptive human response to the

¹ Qur'an 29:64.

² See also Rachel E. Menzies and Ross G. Menzies, "Death Anxiety in the Time of COVID-19: Theoretical Explanations and Clinical Implications," *Cognitive Behaviour Therapist* 13, e19 (June 11, 2020), <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1754470X20000215>. Note: The studies referenced here found heightened awareness, fear, and death anxiety during times of widespread death and loss, such as was the case during the COVID-19 pandemic. See also Dr. Tarek Younis, "Facing our Fear: Reflecting on Modern Society's Death Anxiety," Yaqeen Institute for Islamic Research, July 23, 2020, <https://yaqeeninstitute.org/read/paper/facing-our-fear-reflecting-on-modern-societys-death-anxiety>.

perception of threat,³ fear of death is pathologized, medicated, or dismissed as weakness. Contemporary research has relatively recently discovered a correlation between a healthy attachment to God, similar to that of a child who sees a parent as a source of safety and security, and lower levels of death anxiety.⁴ However, this research typically relies on clinical treatment for solutions. Clinical treatment may be a necessary and useful complement to spiritual approaches, but relying solely on medical solutions will not adequately address the root causes of this fear.⁵ In Islamic spirituality, fear is not just a symptom of malfunctioning but can serve as a compass that orients the believer toward meaning, clarity, and closeness to God.

The Islamic approach offers a rich diagnosis and treatment of the spiritual ailments underlying this fear that adversely affect our mindset and behavior. Centuries ago, scholars of Islam relied extensively on the Qur'an and the Sunnah as the foundation for their analysis of the problem and its practical solutions—solutions that remain relevant today. In fact, a recent study conducted on Muslims found that a higher level of spirituality, when accompanied by acts of worship and community service, plays a protective role and results in lower levels of death anxiety. Spirituality, referring to belief in God and the afterlife, provides purpose, existential comfort, and motivation, helping to lessen the fear of death.⁶ A modern-day example is the spiritual resilience of the people of Gaza, who live in the constant presence of fear. For decades and generations, they have endured unrelenting genocide, famine, and forced displacement, all of which have had profound impacts on their well-being. A recent study conducted on children in the Gaza Strip found them to exhibit significant symptoms of depression, continuous traumatic stress, and widespread death anxiety. However, it is noteworthy that the

³ Piero Porcelli, "Fear, Anxiety and Health-Related Consequences After the COVID-19 Epidemic," *Clinical Neuropsychiatry* 172 (2020): 103–11, <https://doi.org/10.36131/CN20200215>.

⁴ "Death anxiety refers to the feelings of dread, fear, and apprehension related to the anticipation, and awareness, of death and dying." Marissa Pifer, Olivia Noel, and Daniel Segal, "Death Anxiety," in *Encyclopedia of Gerontology and Population Aging* (Springer Nature, 2019), https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-69892-2_744-1. See also Stephen R. Harding, Kevin J. Flannelly, Andrew J. Weaver, and Karen G. Costa, "The Influence of Religion on Death Anxiety and Death Acceptance," *Mental Health, Religion & Culture* 8, no. 4 (2005): 253–61, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13674670412331304311>.

⁵ Ali Mohammadzadeh and Mohammad Oraki, "Attachment to God as a Predictor of Death Distress Among Muslims," *Current Psychology* 39, no. 1 (2018): 1–6, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12144-018-9934-3>.

⁶ Faiz Rabbani, Syeda Asma Gillani, Palwasha Nasir, Ramzan Shah Nawaz, Akbar Ali, Nimra Khan, and Anoosha Nadeem, "The Relationship Between Spiritual Well-Being and Death Anxiety Among Muslims," *Research Journal of Psychology* 3, no. 1 (2025): 548–58, <https://doi.org/10.59075/rjs.v3i1.89>.

same study also acknowledged their resilience, which it attributed to family cohesion, faith, education, and steadfastness as protective factors.⁷ These factors, with faith at the forefront, contribute to their consistent demonstration of hope and courage amid unimaginably horrific circumstances. The people of Gaza exemplify that fear is not sinful nor a sign of weak faith; rather, it can be a means to strengthen faith and to elevate one's status before God. For many, faith provides the resilience to endure the unthinkable. "I pray every day for my family's safety and for those we've lost," said one mother. "I ask Allah to give us strength and to reunite us in Jannah." Another reflected, "The Zionists can destroy our homes, but they cannot destroy our connection to Allah. That is something they will never take from us."⁸

The objective of this paper is to present an Islamic perspective on the fear of death, reframing it from a negative emotion to one that can be empowering and adaptive. The paper is written primarily from a pastoral perspective and is not intended to serve as an extensive psychological analysis. Rather, it seeks to clear common misconceptions surrounding fear, death, and the afterlife by offering clarity and guidance through Islamic teachings grounded in the Qur'an and Sunnah. This is accomplished foremost by strengthening our connection and love for our Creator, the most Merciful, who provides countless blessings in this life and promises His sincere servants salvation and everlasting pleasure in the Hereafter. This paper brings to the forefront the optimism and hope found in Islamic teachings, directing us toward positivity and a moral compass for sound and beneficial action—removing the urge to retreat into isolation and replacing it with proactive engagement. The paper targets the pain points commonly associated with this fear, particularly those that have a negative impact, including the potential to contribute to a faith crisis and distance from God. By no means are we denying the potential benefits of clinical treatment of death anxiety. But by reframing conventional

⁷ Anies Al-Hroub, "Death Anxiety and Trauma in Forcibly Displaced Children in the Gaza Strip: A Critical Review of Emerging Research, 2024–2025," *Current Psychiatry Reports* 28 (2026): 1, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11920-026-01670-8>.

⁸ Bilal Hamamra, Fayez Mahamid, Asala Mayaleh, and Dana Bdier, "The Anxiety of Death and the Loss of Loved Ones During Genocide in Gaza," *OMEGA - Journal of Death and Dying*, 2025, <https://doi.org/10.1177/00302228251334277>.

perceptions of death through an Islamic lens and offering practical steps to strengthen our faith and resolve, we see that Islam offers meaningful and effective coping strategies that involve encouraging hope in God and prioritizing the Hereafter.

Fear in the Absence of God

Modern secular culture largely dismisses fear rooted in moral accountability, often relying on clinical diagnostic approaches to death anxiety. Accurate and holistic diagnosis is of course a necessary prerequisite for the effective treatment of any ailment. We begin by outlining contemporary secular approaches to the fear of death, before identifying the underlying spiritual ailments.

Modern secular thought does not have one unified voice in regard to the fear of death. Rather, it offers a number of perspectives that are debated among leading figures across the disciplines of evolutionary science, psychology, and philosophy. Evolutionary and scientific studies explain the fear of death as an adaptive behavior. According to them, fear is built into human biology as a survival mechanism and instinct. As with all instances of human evolution, the cognitive capability of humans contributes to our ability to live, to reproduce, and to care for our offspring, in order for our genes to survive and propagate through future generations of our species.⁹

Psychologists focus on the unique cognitive capacity in humans that enables us to be aware of the inevitability of death. Thomas A. Pyszczynski, a scholar and respected figure in the field of social psychology and Terror Management Theory (TMT),¹⁰ suggests that the awareness of one's mortality provides humans with the motivation "to commit themselves to worldviews that help manage their potential for terror," namely, to cope with the inevitability of death. Cultural groups are essentially people who share views about the reality of life, its purpose, and desirable human behavior. These worldviews provide meaning to life, enabling

⁹ Tom Pyszczynski, "The Role of Death in Life: Exploring the Interface Between Terror Management Theory and Evolutionary Psychology," in *Evolutionary Perspectives on Death* (Springer, 2019), https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-25466-7_1.

¹⁰ Terror Management Theory (TMT) is a social and evolutionary psychology theory that posits that death anxiety arises from the conflict between self-preservation and awareness of mortality. See Pifer et. al, "Death Anxiety."

people to manage and avert anxiety associated with the awareness of their mortality. For example, the affiliation to one's family, ethnicity, or nation fosters a sense of symbolic immortality that allows one to figuratively transcend death through the individual's contributions to society, in their children, culture, or art, through which one has the desire to leave their mark on the world. One's meaningful and valued participation in life is experienced in the form of self-esteem, which is nurtured and developed from childhood as a "central mechanism for managing distress."¹¹

Being certain about one's worldview depends upon social consensus. Hence, positivity and confidence is sought through validation of those who affirm one's worldview. However, when conflict arises between worldviews, the result is often negative, and can become the basis of prejudice against those outside one's beliefs and values, domination, exploitation, and even violence against out-groups. This connects back to the evolutionary perspective that favors group survival; hence, the fear of death is viewed as a potential threat to the group's existence, which must be overcome through seeking means of self-protection.¹²

The evolutionary perspective describes behaviors as evolving within a species as adaptations to environmental conditions. However, according to Pyszczynski, it is also complementary to the existential psychology perspective, giving us valuable insights into the roots of the existential dilemma of facing one's mortality. Evolutionary analysis includes evolved moral beliefs and values that are reflected in cooperation, caring, and reciprocity within group members to help guide human behavior. Religious belief is viewed as an extension and a human construct of these evolved moral values, which may manifest in a number of ways, including belief in folklore, in an invisible spirit world, in God, and in an afterlife, which affirm immortality and motivate ethical behavior for social cohesion and societal benefit—all of which are coping mechanisms for fear and help to "detoxify" death.

Existential psychology is built upon this evolved capability of humans to cope with the reality of life and potential distress, and looks at how human behavior is

¹¹ Pyszczynski, "Role of Death in Life."

¹² Pyszczynski, "Role of Death in Life."

influenced by death-related thoughts. The problem of death is addressed through imagination, cultural transmission, and emotions that serve as motivators for how people perceive their life and place in the universe. Studies have also shown that reminders of death have a positive influence on moral judgment, whereby people want to avoid harm to others, value fairness, become more charitable, and focus on a healthier lifestyle.¹³

Existential philosophers have written extensively about the profound impact of death anxiety on the human psyche. Describing the human condition as an existential contradiction, the renowned anthropologist Ernest Becker (d. 1974), author of the famous secular work *Denial of Death*, whose contribution inspired TMT wrote: “Man is literally split in two: he has an awareness of his own splendid uniqueness in that he sticks out of nature with a towering majesty, and yet he goes back into the ground a few feet in order blindly and dumbly to rot and disappear forever. It is a terrifying dilemma to be in and to have to live with.”¹⁴ Becker drew from the ideas of a diverse array of thinkers like Freud, Rank, Kierkegaard, and Nietzsche. According to Becker, the fear of death is dominant within us and preoccupies humans to the extent that some form of practical denial, accomplished through pursuing and building systems of symbolic meaning to life through personal accomplishment, culture, and other affiliations, becomes necessary in order to shield one from death anxiety. Among the most influential thinkers is Martin Heidegger (d. 1976) who argued that one’s awareness of death actually pushes one toward a meaningful life and an authentic existence. Learning about death and reflecting on one’s mortality can have a significant impact on how we live. For example, Emmy Van Deurzen, an existential philosopher, therapist, and author of numerous books and publications on the subject, suggests that this awareness and acceptance of death is the real challenge of life, but a paradoxical one that is met by embracing the fact that self-affirmation and a full life are attained through confronting the inevitability of death.

¹³ Pyszczynski, “Role of Death in Life.”

¹⁴ Ernest Becker, *The Denial of Death* (The Free Press, 1973), 26.

Existential psychotherapy offers a practical approach, but one that is generally outside the framework of any religious belief. It does not look to eliminate the fear of death, but to help cope with it in order to live a productive and meaningful life. Irvin D. Yalom is a significant contributor to the field of existential psychiatry. He suggests that awareness of death can be a useful catalyst in freeing one from the potential paralysis of death anxiety. The fear of death, which he argues is often repressed, can be a means for personal transformation when one is able to use this fear to clarify one's priorities, while building genuine human relationships to help soften existential anxiety. According to his viewpoint, one finds meaning in life within the "limits of its material and finite reality." Existential therapy aims to help people discover the courage within them, and to choose to face their mortality and fears, thereby enabling them to fulfill life's responsibilities.¹⁵ Despite his secular framing, Yalom acknowledges the significant role of religion in humanity's ability to understand and cope with death, stating: "Death anxiety is the mother of all religions, which, in one way or another, attempt to temper the anguish of our finitude. God, as formulated transculturally, not only softens the pain of mortality through some vision of everlasting life but also palliates fearful isolation by offering an eternal presence, and provides a clear blueprint for living a meaningful life."¹⁶

By relegating belief in God and the afterlife to a human construct and pathologizing fear, the modern secular worldview lacks both the epistemic grounding and spiritual efficacy that faith provides, as well as the motivational force of divine guidance needed to meaningfully harness, address, and heal death anxiety. Gai Eaton (d. 2010), author of *King of the Castle*, critiqued the shortsightedness of the secular modern world, noting among its defining characteristics the prevalence of doubt and uncertainty regarding the life to come. He wrote,

There is a kind of twilight region inhabited by the many who are neither believers nor unbelievers, but are carried along by the tide of these times

¹⁵ Narcisa Ispas, "Existential Perspectives on the Fear of Death," RAIS Conference Proceedings, April 17–18, 2025, <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.15474925>.

¹⁶ Irvin D. Yalom, *Staring at the Sun: Overcoming the Terror of Death* (Jossey-Bass, 2008), 5.

while daylight lasts. There must, they think, be “something” beyond all this, but they doubt whether anybody really knows what this “something” might be and seem quite unaware of great voices, still audible, telling them precisely what it is and summoning them to attend as a man attends when he stands in mortal peril . . . nothing that lies outside their little pool of light seems quite real, and, if they think of divine reality at all, they think of it as something ghostly, abstract, attenuated—the desert sun no longer scorches or dazzles.¹⁷

Doubts about God and the afterlife present a significant challenge to overcoming fear of death. To those harboring these doubts, a faith-based response may seem remote from the quest for tangible, immediate results. When people rely solely on limited human reasoning, capability, and perspective, their response to fear lacks the ethical foresight and spiritual grounding faith provides.

Without the moral strength and confidence gained through the light of divine guidance, the darkness of doubt and fear can become overpowering. The secular mindset assigns little meaning to life after death, rendering it a finality and eliminating any goal beyond this world. Traumatic events, illness, and reminders of death further increase the threat to self-esteem and intensify death anxiety and the need to hold on more tightly to one’s worldview.¹⁸ As one study notes, death challenges the reality of what is taken for granted about day-to-day life. Unlike premodern times, when death held communal and religious significance, today it is privatized. The loss of an individual was once a collective concern—one that meant death was spoken about openly and frequently, and social and religious public rituals provided consolation and coping mechanisms to those left behind. Today, children are shielded from death, their parents reluctant to teach them in fear of causing anxiety and psychological harm. Death has been sequestered within a society focused on the preservation of self-identity and the body, with little individual connection to God or faith-based community. This may allow one the

¹⁷ Gai Eaton, *King of the Castle: Choice and Responsibility in the Modern World* (The Bodley Head, 1977), 16, https://archive.org/details/king-fo-the-castle_202401/mode/1up?view=theater.

¹⁸ Pifer et. al, “Death Anxiety.”

means to a higher sense of self in the short term, but proves costly and unsustainable knowing the inevitable cannot be denied.¹⁹

Another contributor to fear of death is the realization that one is ultimately not in control of their destiny. Believers recognize that control belongs to God Almighty alone, the One who has final authority over all of existence. Without faith, divine decree clashes with the desire for mastery. Guilt also contributes to fear of death, particularly for those who acknowledge God but avoid accountability. In secular society, spiritual weakness is compounded by gruesome and pervasive injustice and oppression, exacerbating the fear of death. Yet fear itself is not the problem—misalignment of understanding its purpose is. Secular perspectives disregard moral accountability, whereas the Islamic approach aligns fear with divine guidance, revealing its true purpose and meaning.

Islam's Reframing of Fear

In Islam, fear is understood not as a weakness, but as a natural and divinely intended aspect of the human experience. It is a compass, guiding the believer toward moral clarity and spiritual growth. Far from diminishing the self, it motivates careful reflection, ethical action, and awareness of one's responsibilities before God. Fear, when rightly oriented, becomes a mercy and a source of protection, helping one avoid harm and align one's choices with divine guidance. This contrasts sharply with the modern secular worldview, which often pathologizes fear, particularly fear related to moral accountability, as something to be eliminated or suppressed.

Islam gives us the most beneficial spiritual framework to address our fears through its two primary sources—the Qur'an and the Sunnah—which offer clarity and depth on the subject, acknowledging it as a natural instinct and emotion God has placed within us to test us. Fear is meticulously detailed in over one hundred verses, including its nuanced manifestations.²⁰ The Qur'an and Sunnah provide us

¹⁹ Philip A. Mellor and Chris Shilling, "Modernity, Self-Identity and the Sequestration of Death," *Sociology* 27, no. 3 (1993): 411–31, <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/epdf/10.1177/0038038593027003005>.

²⁰ For example, "We will certainly test you with a touch of fear and famine and loss of property, life, and crops. Give good news to those who patiently endure." Qur'an 2:155.

with purpose and guidance. We are given essential knowledge of this world and how to navigate it, as well as knowledge of what awaits in the Hereafter and how to prepare for it. Divine perfection comes to light in the holistic prescription Islam provides us to benefit and guide humanity, in order to strengthen our spiritual, emotional, and physical welfare, which includes how to overcome our fears of loss, suffering, and death.

God does not leave us to ourselves without providing us with the way forward in all situations, especially in regard to the means to attain His pleasure and to cure our ailing hearts. Divine mercy and love for His servants is clearly articulated in His affirmation that even those closest to Him dislike death, in order to provide us solace, spiritual fortitude, and motivation. The Messenger ﷺ informed us:

Allah said, “I will declare war against him who shows hostility to a pious worshiper of Mine. And the most beloved things with which My slave comes nearer to Me, are what I have enjoined upon him; and My slave keeps on coming closer to Me through performing *nawafil* [praying or extra good deeds beyond what is obligatory] until I love him, so I become his sense of hearing with which he hears, and his sense of sight with which he sees, and his hand with which he grips, and his leg with which he walks; and if he asks Me, I will give him, and if he asks My protection, I will protect him; and I do not hesitate to do anything as I hesitate to take the soul of the believer, for he hates death, and I hate to disappoint him.”²¹

Classical Insights into Fear

Islamic scholarship has long approached fear as a complex and multidimensional phenomenon, examining both its causes and its potential for spiritual and ethical growth.

Ibn al-Qayyim (d. 1350), writing in *Ranks of the Divine Seekers*, holds fear as a distinguished station on the path to God, beneficial for a living, faithful heart. He outlines its varying shades—from *khawf*, the basic anticipation of harm, to *ijlal*, the trembling awe of those nearest to God—showing that fear deepens as knowledge

²¹ *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, no. 6502.

and awareness of the Divine deepen. He famously summarized this state in a paradox: The one who fears God “flees from his Lord to his Lord.” Fear becomes protection, not paralysis; a mercy that directs the seeker away from harm and toward righteousness.²²

This spiritual logic anchors Ibn al-Qayyim’s broader approach to human weakness in *The Disease and the Cure*, where he argues that every ailment has a God-given treatment. The Qur’an, he emphasizes, is the most complete healing, offering both clarity and certainty to an overwhelmed heart. Rather than pushing fear aside, revelation orients it: toward the One who created life, death, and the soul that will endure beyond the body.²³

Writing centuries before modern psychology, Ibn Sina (d. 1037) recognized that fear often masks deeper distortions in belief or perception. Although his broader metaphysical commitments were not universally accepted by scholars of the normative Islamic sciences, Ibn Sina’s diagnosis is nevertheless worth noting. He classified anxious responses into causes, such as ignorance of what death is, uncertainty about the afterlife, dread of pain, fear of punishment, or attachment to worldly possessions and relationships. His solutions closely resemble cognitive behavioral therapy: provide accurate knowledge, correct misunderstandings, and align one’s emotional responses with truth. For example, those who fear death because they do not know what awaits them are not truly fearing death itself, but the unfamiliar. The antidote, he argues, lies in sacred knowledge that affirms the soul’s continuity and the certainty of the Hereafter.²⁴

Classical scholars further identified the root causes behind the fear of death. Al-Ghazali (d.1111) adds another dimension: heedlessness (*ghafla*). In *Ihya’ ‘ulum*

²² Ibn al-Qayyim, *Ranks of the Divine Seekers* (Koninklijke Brill NV, 2020), 2:158–66. Also, God praises the believers who fear Him: “Indeed, those who live in awe for fear of their Lord, and those who believe in the signs of their Lord, and those who do not associate anything with their Lord, and those who give what they give while their hearts are fearful because they will be returning to their Lord—it is they who hasten in every good work, and they who are foremost in them.” Qur’an 23:57–61.

²³ Ibn al-Qayyim, *The Disease and the Cure* (Hikmah Publications, 2020), 1–5. Also, “We send down the Qur’an as healing and mercy to those who believe” (Qur’an 17:82); and “The Prophet ﷺ said, ‘There is no disease that Allah has created, except that He also has created its treatment’” (*Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, no. 5678).

²⁴ Ahmed Pajević, Izet Pajević, and Mevludin Hasanović, “Islamic Approach to the Treatment of the Fear of Death,” *Psychiatria Danubina* 33, Suppl. 4 (April 2021): 882–88, https://www.researchgate.net/publication/357846134_Islamic_Approach_to_the_Treatment_of_the_Fear_of_Death

al-din, he warns that preoccupation with worldly pursuits dulls one's awareness of mortality, causing people to recoil from death rather than benefit from reflecting on it. In contrast, the believer intentionally remembers death, not to despair but to prioritize repentance, meaning, and purpose.²⁵ Ibn al-Qayyim shares this concern, describing how attachment to fleeting pleasures blinds the heart to the eternal, while the Prophet ﷺ commanded believers to “remember often the destroyer of pleasures [meaning: death].”²⁶

Other scholars, including Ahmad ibn ‘Abd al-Rahman Ibn Qudama al-Maqdisi (d. 1290), identified complementary manifestations of the same disease. In *The Remembrance of Death and the Afterlife*, he highlights lengthy worldly hopes—rooted in love of *dunya* or ignorance of life's fragility—as powerful contributors to spiritual decay. These attitudes delay repentance and heighten anxiety, for when death finally confronts the heedless, fear becomes compounded by regret. Instead, Ibn Qudama urges believers to cultivate awareness of resurrection, reflect on God's creative power, and let fear motivate sincere action rather than avoidance.²⁷

Across these classical insights, a shared theme emerges: Fear is not the problem; misdirected fear is. The scholars describe fear of death as a spiritual signal pointing to deeper issues, such as ignorance, doubt, guilt, attachment, and heedlessness. Note the timeless correlation of these deeper issues to the reasons people fear death, cited in context to our modern secular society. The cure lies not in erasing

²⁵ Al-Ghazālī, *Revival of Religion's Sciences, Ihya' 'ulūm al-dīn* (Dār al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyya, 2011), 4:631–47. Also, “Ever closer to people draws their reckoning, while they turn away, heedless.” Qur'an 21:1.

²⁶ *Sunan al-Tirmidhī*, no. 2307; grade: *ṣaḥīḥ* according to al-Nawawī, *al-Adhkār* (Dār al-Fikr, 1994), 132, <https://www.abuaminaelias.com/dailyhadithonline/2012/09/13/dhikr-mawt/>. See also *Sunan Abī Dāwūd*, no. 4297; grade: *ṣaḥīḥ* according to al-Albānī, *Silsilat al-aḥādīth al-ṣaḥīḥa wa shay' min fiqhīhā wa-fawā'idihā* (Dār al-Ma'ārif, n.d.), 2:647–48, <https://www.abuaminaelias.com/dailyhadithonline/2021/05/25/nations-weak-ummah/>. The Prophet ﷺ foretold that the love of this world and hatred for death will be a destructive spiritual weakness that will become prevalent when he ﷺ said: “Soon the nations will be summoned to you just like one is invited to a feast.” It was said, “Will we be few on that day?” The Prophet said, “No, rather you will be many on that day, but you will be scum like such flowing down a torrent. Allah will remove your esteem from the chests of your enemies, and Allah will insert feebleness or *wahn* in your own hearts.” It was said, “O Messenger of Allah, what is this *wahn*?” The Prophet said, “Love for the worldly life and hatred of death.” See also Ibn al-Qayyim, *Disease and the Cure*, 113–15.

²⁷ Ibn Qudāma al-Maqdisī, *The Remembrance of Death and the Afterlife* (Dār as-Sunnah Publishers, 2018), 15–17, 45. Note: This text has been translated into a standalone book, taken from the original text, a chapter within the famous work, *Mukhtaṣar minhāj al-qāṣidīn*.

fear, but refining it by replacing confusion with knowledge, avoidance with remembrance, despair with repentance, and worldly fixation with eternal orientation. In doing so, fear becomes a force of transformation that brings the believer closer to God and equips them to face the inevitable with clarity, hope, and trust.

Practical lessons emerge when these theoretical insights are applied to everyday life. For instance, a believer confronted with personal mortality, loss, or uncertainty can reflect on Ibn Sina's counsel to examine the source of fear, use reason to contextualize it, and redirect it toward moral and spiritual growth. Following Al-Ghazali, they might engage in regular remembrance of death as a means to motivate gratitude and repentance. The Prophet ﷺ advised the believers to frequently remember death and also to visit the graveyard: "I had prohibited you from visiting graves, but you may visit them now. For it will produce abstinence in this world and remind you of the Hereafter."²⁸ Additionally, the Prophet ﷺ informed us of the tremendous reward of attending funerals and accompanying the burials of the believers, serving as motivation and practical guidance that also bring about collective moral support.²⁹ Ibn Qudama reminds the believer to assess their worldly attachments and reflect on Allah's power, and Ibn al-Qayyim provides tools to discern when fear is corrective versus destructive.

By situating fear within this classical framework, we see that fear can be transformative. It is not a sign of weakness or deficiency but a divine gift that, when rightly understood, aligns the believer's heart with God's guidance, encourages ethical conduct, and fosters spiritual resilience. When the Prophet ﷺ was asked, "Which of the believers is the wisest?" The Prophet ﷺ replied, "Those who remember death the most and have best prepared for it; such are the wisest."³⁰

²⁸ *Sunan Ibn Māja*, no. 1571; grade: *ṣaḥīḥ* (authentic) according to al-Suyutī, *al-Jāmi' al-ṣaḥīḥ* (Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyya, 2004), no. 6430, p. 400. Also, "Visit the graves, for they remind you of the Hereafter." *Sunan Ibn Māja*, no. 1569; grade: *ṣaḥīḥ* (authentic) according to al-Albānī.

²⁹ *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, no. 47.

³⁰ *Sunan Ibn Māja*, no. 4259; grade: *ḥasan* (fair) according to al-Albānī.

Fear in Action: The Battle of the Trench

These classical insights prepare us to understand how fear functions not only in theory and reflection but also in lived experience—a reality vividly illustrated in the Qur'an and *sira*, especially during the Battle of the Trench.

As we have discussed, not all fear is the same. The Qur'an details numerous situations in which fear is present, and it is the believer's response that determines whether fear is praiseworthy or blameworthy in the sight of God, whether it is a source of strength or a pathway to loss. This standing before God is the key motivator for adhering to His guidance and navigating every fear successfully. The following verse offers a clear case study, vividly capturing fear of death in the moments leading up to the Battle of the Trench in the year 5 AH:

They massed against you from above and below; your eyes rolled with fear, and your hearts reached your throats, and you entertained conflicting thoughts about Allah.³¹

“They” refers to the enemy forces, namely, an ill-fated alliance between the Quraysh of Mecca, the Jewish tribe of Banu Nadir (previously expelled from Medina), and neighboring Arab tribes in the Arabian Peninsula, referred to as the Confederates, or al-Ahzab. They conspired with another Jewish tribe in Medina, Banu Qurayza, to break a peace treaty with the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ and eliminate the Muslims and Islam altogether. In what was intended to be the most treacherous and genocidal encounter yet, an army roughly ten thousand strong set out to launch a surprise assault on the vastly outnumbered Muslims in Medina. The situation resulted in a hostile, month-long siege that became a test of endurance, sincerity, and truthfulness over hypocrisy and disbelief. Ultimately, a test of faith and resilience over *fear* and annihilation.

Hearing news of the imminent onslaught, the Prophet ﷺ instructed the Muslims to dig a trench, or *khandaq*, along the most vulnerable entry point to the city, a strategy unfamiliar in Arabia at the time. For almost ten days, it was all hands on deck, with the Prophet ﷺ working in their midst around the clock, staving off

³¹ Qur'an 33:10.

hunger and fatigue. The trench, estimated to be some 2 km long and 13 ft wide, had to be deep and wide enough to prevent the enemy cavalry from crossing.³² During the digging, the Prophet ﷺ prayed for his companions, “O Allah! The real life is the life of the Hereafter, so forgive the Helpers [Ansar] and the Immigrants [Muhajirun].”³³

“You” in this verse is addressed to the believers, drawing our attention to their state of mind and overwhelming sense of fear. These are the best generation of believers, yet they were not reprimanded by God for feeling fearful. While the external threat alone was enough to strike terror in the hearts and minds, another threat emerged: Banu Qurayza’s betrayal inside the city. Numbering as many as eight hundred fighters, their potential attack on Muslim women and children sheltering in their homes, presumed safe from the frontlines, posed an even greater danger. Hence, God’s description “They massed against you from above and below”—namely, the Confederates’ approach from above and Banu Qurayza from below.³⁴

One companion’s testimony brings this fear into sharp focus. Hudhayfa ibn al-Yaman later detailed the intense emotions in the Muslim camp. It was during a particularly stormy night, so dark that he could not even see his own fingertips, with the cold wind escalating, that he recounts being sent by the Prophet ﷺ to the enemy camp for reconnaissance. The narration vividly illustrates fear, obedience, and reliance:

I was with the Messenger of Allah ﷺ on the night of the Battle of Ahzab and we were gripped by a violent wind and severe cold. The Messenger of Allah ﷺ said: “The man who goes and brings me the news of the enemy shall be ranked with me on the Day of Judgment by Allah.” We all kept quiet and none of us responded to him. Again, he said: “A man who brings me the news of the enemy shall be ranked with me on the Day of Judgment by Allah.” We kept quiet and none of us responded to him. He again said: “A man who brings me the news of the enemy shall be ranked with me on the

³² Yasir Qadhi, *The Sirah of the Prophet ﷺ* (The Islamic Foundation, 2023), 276.

³³ *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, no. 4099.

³⁴ *Tafsīr Ibn Kathīr*, Sūrat al-Aḥzāb, 33:9–10.

Day of Judgment by Allah.” Then he said: “Get up Hudhayfa, bring me the news of the enemy.” When he called me by name, I had no alternative but to get up. He said: “Go and bring me information about the enemy and do nothing that may provoke them against me.”

When I left him, I felt warm as if I were walking in a heated bath until I reached them. I saw Abu Sufyan warming his back against a fire; I put an arrow in the middle of the bow, intending to shoot at him, when I recalled the words of the Messenger of Allah ﷺ, “Do not provoke them against me.” Had I shot at him, I would have hit him. But I returned and felt warm as if I were walking in a heated bath. Presenting myself before him, I gave him information about the enemy. When I had done so, I began to feel cold, so the Messenger of Allah ﷺ wrapped me in a blanket with which he used to cover himself while praying. So, I continued to sleep until it was morning. When it was morning, he said: “Get up, O heavy sleeper.”³⁵

This was the condition of the followers of the Prophet ﷺ, who eagerly anticipated every opportunity to earn the favor of their Lord. Those who lived by “we hear and we obey” and followed the Prophet’s ﷺ commands without hesitation now found themselves debilitated by their own fears.³⁶ It was in the extremes of desperation, fatigue, hunger, and fear of death that God tested them and that true faith manifested itself.

After the Prophet ﷺ prayed for Hudhayfa, his fears miraculously dissipated—an indication of divine help that accompanies trust in God and effort. Despite being shaken to the core, the sincere believers remained unwavering, while the hypocrites made excuses and deserted the Muslims. Eventually, in a miraculous turn of events, the Confederates became increasingly fearful they would not outlast the severe conditions and what appeared to be internal betrayal as their allegiances began to collapse. As a result, they retreated in defeat, crippled by fears of humiliation and death.³⁷

³⁵ *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, no. 1788.

³⁶ Qur’an 2:285.

³⁷ Qadhi, *Sirah of the Prophet*, 275–87. See also *Tafsīr Ibn Kathīr*, Sūrat al-Aḥzāb, 33:9–26.

Despite minimal combat and casualty, this incident underscores how overwhelming fear can be and how one's inner orientation determines whether it paralyzes or pushes an individual toward productivity, trust, and obedience. Islam redirects one's fears toward the best outcome—one that is driven and bound within a far greater and noble fear—the overarching fear of God's displeasure, *taqwa*.³⁸ Believers who positively direct their fears in this manner are blessed with the guidance, wisdom, and resilience to overcome them, even if their fears are not entirely eliminated. After the enemy retreat, the Prophet ﷺ said, “After this battle we will go to attack them and they will not come to attack us.”³⁹

Ultimately, the believers' steadfastness and foresight secured a victory well beyond the Battle of the Trench. Their trust in God and His promise of the Hereafter framed the entire encounter and stood in stark contrast to those who could not see beyond that moment, fixated on their pursuit of worldly gain.

When the believers saw the enemy alliance, they said, “This is what Allah and His Messenger had promised us. The promise of Allah and His Messenger has come true.” And this only increased them in faith and submission.⁴⁰

Toward Healing: Practical Pastoral Guidance

Redirecting Fear

How, then, do we practically understand the role of fear and apply it in our lives? Allah instructs the Prophet ﷺ as follows: Say, “I truly fear—if I were to disobey my Lord—the torment of a tremendous Day.”⁴¹ There is a profound lesson in this verse that helps us redirect fear away from distress and paralysis toward empowerment and action. The fear is real; the question is where we allow that fear

³⁸ *Tafsīr Ibn Kathīr*, Sūrat al-Aḥzāb, 33:1–3, Talq bin Ḥabīb said: “*Taqwā* means obeying Allah in the light of the guidance of Allah and in hope of earning the reward of Allah and refraining from disobeying Allah in the light of the guidance of Allah and fearing the punishment of Allah.”

³⁹ *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, no. 4109.

⁴⁰ Qur'an 33:22.

⁴¹ Qur'an 6:15.

to lead us. Allah tests us with the fear of loss, and these fears can push a person toward despair, panic, disobedience, and ultimately His displeasure.⁴²

When fear arises, the believer passes the divine test by deliberately redirecting that fear toward the one mentioned in the verse above—the praiseworthy fear of accountability before God on the Day of Judgment. In practice, this might mean trying to consciously pause in moments of anxiety, followed by taking a deliberate turn toward a simple act that aligns with what pleases Allah, like utterances of *dhikr*. In doing so, fear becomes a catalyst rather than a burden: a force that motivates and directs us to act in accordance with what pleases Allah and that brings about a positive outcome in this life and reward in the Hereafter.

The Prophet ﷺ was instructed to convey this powerful reminder during some of the most difficult seasons in the early Muslim community—amid hardship, persecution, loss, sacrifice, and uncertainty. Redirecting his fear toward Allah is what enabled and strengthened the Prophet ﷺ, those around him, and all the prophets who preceded him to fulfill their purpose despite the fear of death and loss. His special relationship with Allah is captured in a hadith in which it is stated that whenever Allah’s Messenger ﷺ ordered the Muslims to do something, he used to order them to do that which was easy for them to do, according to their strength and endurance. They said, “O Allah’s Messenger ﷺ, we are not like you. Allah has forgiven your past and future sins.” To which he ﷺ replied, “I am the most Allah-fearing, and know Allah better than all of you do.”⁴³ This also establishes a practical principle: Choose actions within your capacity, but remain consistent in them.

‘A’isha, the beloved wife of the Prophet ﷺ once asked him a question through which we gain solace that all of us, and even the most righteous believers, have a natural aversion and hatred for death. The Prophet ﷺ acknowledged this and also clarified that our hatred of death is not the same as hatred of meeting God. He ﷺ said: “Whoever loves to meet Allah, Allah loves to meet him, and whoever hates to meet Allah, Allah hates to meet him.” It was said to him: “O Messenger of

⁴² “We will certainly test you with a touch of fear and famine and loss of property, life, and crops. Give good news to those who patiently endure.” Qur’an 2:155.

⁴³ *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, no. 20.

Allah, does hating to meet Allah mean hating to meet death? For all of us hate death.” He said: “No. Rather that is only at the moment of death. But if he is given the glad tidings of the mercy and forgiveness of Allah, he loves to meet Allah and Allah loves to meet him; and if he is given the tidings of the punishment of Allah, he hates to meet Allah and Allah hates to meet him.”⁴⁴ Reflecting on this, we can relate to the concern felt by ‘A’isha in that moment in which she needed to clarify this point without hesitation, including herself among those who felt hatred toward death. We are motivated to seek the pleasure and forgiveness of God and to hasten good deeds, with hope of attaining His love and mercy. This should translate into acting on good intentions immediately rather than delaying them.

Hope is an Obligation

The heart in its journey towards God the Exalted is like a bird whose head is love, and hope and fear are its two wings.⁴⁵

The beauty of this paradigm is that fear becomes a mercy from Allah rather than a burden. Where there is fear, there must also be hope. Ibn al-Qayyim describes the relationship between these two seemingly conflicting emotions from a spiritual perspective. Just as fear is the obligation of the believer, hope too is an obligation, and there is a balance to be maintained between them in order to safely reach our final destination. He explains that hope rests on three essential qualities that must be present in the believer’s heart: love for what one hopes for, fear of losing it, and commitment to strive for it. Everything outside of this criterion—hope directed toward anything besides God—is a false or baseless aspiration.⁴⁶ Correct hope is always accompanied by fear, and both hope and fear should always be accompanied by righteous deeds. In practice, this balance can be maintained by ensuring that each day includes both acts of repentance (driven by fear) and acts of striving and *dua* (driven by hope). He notes that the pious predecessors were

⁴⁴ *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, no. 6507.

⁴⁵ Ibn al-Qayyim, *Ranks of the Divine Seekers*, 2:170.

⁴⁶ Ibn al-Qayyim, *Disease and the Cure*, 99–100.

known to prefer strengthening the wing of fear in times of ease and the wing of hope when death approached, anchoring their hearts in balance and realism.⁴⁷

Short Hopes

Ibn Qudama gives us a glimpse into the mindset of the righteous predecessors, who intentionally cultivated *short hopes* as the antidote to fear. Short hopes do not signify despair, denial of the future, or withdrawal from the world. Rather, they reflect a conscious narrowing of one's expectations and attachments to what lies ahead, so that the heart remains anchored in the present moment of moral responsibility. Practically, this means not postponing repentance, good deeds, or personal reform to a later time, but treating the present day as the primary opportunity to act. In this way, short hopes reorient attention away from long-term worldly projections that breed complacency and false security, and instead generate urgency in pursuing good deeds, repentance, and ethical excellence. The righteous predecessors adopted this posture not out of pessimism, but out of clarity: They sought to meet Allah with their best deeds already realized, rather than postponed intentions. Short hopes thus function as a spiritual discipline that transforms fear of loss into purposeful action, ensuring that the present is treated as the most reliable arena for drawing nearer to Allah.

Ibn Qudama notes, “Whenever hopes are shortened, actions are perfected.” Al-Ghazali elaborates on the benefit of this in a powerful statement: “Death is happiness for him, and life is addition of good to his account.”⁴⁸ This aligns with the Prophetic call to seize the moment to do good while one has the capability to act. The Prophet ﷺ cautioned: “There are two blessings that many people are deceived into losing: health and free time.”⁴⁹ A practical application of this is to consciously dedicate a portion of one's daily free time to acts of worship, learning, or service, rather than leaving it to be consumed passively.

⁴⁷ Ibn al-Qayyim, *Ranks of the Divine Seekers*, 2:170.

⁴⁸ Ibn Qudāma al-Maqdisī, *Remembrance of Death*, 15–17. See also al-Ghazālī, *Revival of Religion's Sciences*, 4:631–47.

⁴⁹ *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, no. 6412.

‘Abdullah ibn ‘Umar profoundly described how this mindset shapes a life. He said, “Allah’s Messenger ﷺ took hold of my shoulder and said, ‘Be in this world as if you were a stranger or a traveler.’” Ibn ‘Umar used to say, “If you survive until the evening, do not expect to be alive in the morning, and if you survive until the morning, do not expect to be alive in the evening, and take from your health for your sickness, and take from your life for your death.”⁵⁰ These Prophetic teachings emphasize the importance of utilizing our blessings to do as much as we can to secure the Hereafter, as the practical means to realize the short hopes our righteous predecessors spoke of, including maintaining a regular habit of self-accountability and repentance. The Prophet ﷺ taught us to focus on actions within our reach, even if seemingly insignificant, reminding us that what pleases God most is consistency we can turn into good habits.⁵¹ For example, we must first strive to fulfill the obligatory acts of worship, such as the daily prayers, fasting in Ramadan, and striving to be sincere, truthful, and generous. Consistency comes with gradually incorporating voluntary acts such as the night prayer and additional recommended fasts throughout the year. We can assign smaller frequent charitable donations, and portion our time and talents on an ongoing basis, in order to establish regularity with good deeds, rather than waiting for a specific time of the year like Ramadan, or postponing until later accomplishment in life, which is not guaranteed. The most important practical advice is to maintain daily remembrance of God with frequent recitation of the Qur’an, using every opportunity taught to us by the Prophet ﷺ to seek His forgiveness, to seek His help, and to productively engage in doing good. This can be made consistent by attaching remembrance and *dhikr* to daily routines (such as commuting, waiting, or walking), ensuring it becomes a regular habit rather than an occasional effort. In this way, we can make short hopes a tangible and practical means to contentment in this life and success in the Hereafter.

Taken together, these teachings show that fear is not a sign of spiritual failure, nor an obstacle to faith, but a God-given means of movement—an inner signal that redirects us toward Him. When paired with hope, transformed into action, and

⁵⁰ *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, no. 6416.

⁵¹ *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, no. 6465.

grounded in the reality of death and the Hereafter, fear becomes a source of clarity, purpose, and strength rather than confusion or despair. This framework prepares us to meet life's uncertainties with humility and resolve, and to continue walking the path toward Allah with balance, trust, and sincerity.

Provision for the Journey to God

Imam al-Ghazali, taking from a number of the pious predecessors, astutely describes death as a journey to God, for which we will summarize the following spiritual provisions are required.

The first is *taqwa*: deep consciousness of God expressed through vigilance in worship, obedience, and a commitment to increase good deeds while continually rectifying oneself through *tawba* or repentance—the gift of divine mercy that erases all sins.⁵²

The second is to disconnect one's heart from the comforts, pleasures, and emotional ties of this world, including status and privilege. This is *zuhd*: not a rejection of God's blessings, but freedom from the chains of the desire of this world. It must be noted that balance is essential here. We must express gratitude for the countless blessings from God and utilize them in service and obedience to Him, while avoiding an unhealthy attachment to them or outright rejection of provisions that support our holistic well-being. Aversion to death is often a sign that love for worldly comforts has eclipsed the desire to meet God. No doubt, for many of us, the thought of separation is unimaginable and *sabr* or patience is required. The fear of losing everything familiar and comforting to us is painful and can only be softened with the remembrance or *dhikr* of God: through reflection on His beautiful names and attributes, prayer, Qur'an recitation, and pondering on the boundless treasures of Paradise He has promised to those who are sincere in servitude, worship, and sound character. The true knowledge of God increases our love for Him, our gratitude to Him, and reliance upon Him alone (*tawakkul*) while recognizing He provides for us through the means and people He places in our

⁵² "Take necessary provisions for the journey, surely the best provision is righteousness. And be mindful of Me, O people of reason." Qur'an 2:197.

lives. For this reason, it is important to surround ourselves with good company who will remind us of God and strive and spend alongside us for His sake.

When the Prophet Musa and his brother Harun expressed fear in confronting Fir‘awn, God immediately reassured them, and all believers, encouraging us to place our trust in Him: “Allah reassured them, ‘Have no fear! I am with you, hearing and seeing.’”⁵³

Love of God and *tawakkul* remedy fear and anxiety, cultivating hope and courage. This requires ongoing purification of the heart, curing and fortifying it against spiritual diseases such as pride, arrogance, greed, envy, hatred, and all negative character traits that obstruct the journey to God.

Death has exposed the world’s faults, thus the one who has any inner core is not left with any joy therein. A servant does not adhere to the remembrance of death in his heart except that the world becomes trivial in his eyes and all of what is in it becomes immaterial.⁵⁴

Lastly, we must bring our faith or *iman* to present to God as an expression of love for Him. *Iman* is the measure of truly knowing God, and the believer is called to aspire to *ihsan*, the highest level of faith: to worship Him as though one sees Him, and to be conscious that He sees all.⁵⁵ It is this conviction in God, the Day of Judgment, the Hereafter, and the truth brought to us by His prophets and the final Messenger, Muhammad ﷺ, that transforms fear and anxiety into *rida*—contentment with divine decree. From this conviction and contentment, our *dua* gains potency, and surrendering all affairs of life and death to Him is facilitated.⁵⁶

⁵³ Qur’an 20:46.

⁵⁴ Hasan al-Basrī, as quoted in: Ibn Qudāma al-Maqdisī, *Remembrance of Death*, 12.

⁵⁵ T. J. Winter, trans., *Ihya Uloom ad-Din: Al-Ghazālī on the Remembrance of Death & the Afterlife: Book XL of the Revival of the Religious Sciences*, 2nd ed. (Islamic Texts Society, 1995), 7–36.

⁵⁶ One of the most comprehensive supplications taught to us is that of Abū Hurayra, reporting that Allah’s Messenger ﷺ used to supplicate: “O Allah, set right for me my religion, which is the safeguard of my affairs. And set right for me the affairs of my world wherein is my living. And set right for me my Hereafter on which depends my afterlife. And make life for me a source of abundance for every good and make my death a source of comfort for me, protecting me against every evil.” *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, no. 2720.

This reassurance is exemplified in the inspiration God placed in the heart of the mother of the Prophet Musa: “Nurse him, but when you fear for him, put him then into the river, and do not fear or grieve. We will certainly return him to you, and make him one of the messengers.”⁵⁷

It is this same light of faith and contentment we witness today in the hearts of the people of Gaza—whose *ihsan* awakens the entire world, enabling them to remain hopeful and steadfast in the presence of fear. We are given ample signs and proofs from God to place our complete trust in Him. Just as He brought us from the safety and comfort of the womb to this world and blessed us with life, provision, and guidance, He brings His servants from this world to the Hereafter, promising the believers eternal joy in Paradise, where fear and grief no longer exist.⁵⁸

After death the believer uncovers Allah’s virtue and honor to which the worldly life is but a prison. He is like one who is imprisoned in a dark room and then a vast garden is opened up to him, full of trees and he does not like to return to the worldly life much like how he does not like to return to his mother’s womb.⁵⁹

Conclusion: From Constriction to Contentment

The Qur’anic term used to describe the expansion of the chest is *sharh al-sadr*. God reminds His beloved Messenger ﷺ of how God uplifted his heart, providing him ﷺ with relief, given the enormity of the mission of prophethood.⁶⁰ We too are guided to pray for *sharh al-sadr* as did the prophet Musa when faced with the gravity of facing Fir‘awn.⁶¹ This expansion lightens the heart and serves as an antidote that brings about relief, easing the constriction one feels due to anxiety and fear. As we have established in regard to fearing death, there is an anxiety associated with desire of this worldly life, heedlessness, and confusion about death

⁵⁷ Qur’an 28:7.

⁵⁸ “There will certainly be no fear for the close servants of Allah, nor will they grieve.” Qur’an 10:62. Note: This and many other verses like it provide divine reassurance to the believer. See also Qur’an 10:56–64.

⁵⁹ ‘Abdullāh ibn ‘Umar, as quoted in Ibn Qudāma al-Maqdisī, *Remembrance of Death*, 40.

⁶⁰ Qur’an 94:1. See also *Tafsīr Ibn Kathīr*, 94:1.

⁶¹ The Prophet Musa prayed to God for *sharh al-sadr*: “Moses said, ‘Lord, lift up my heart, and ease my task for me.’” Qur’an 20:25–26.

and the afterlife, all of which result in the tightness one experiences when clinging to this life. Among the verses in the Qur'an that beautifully explain the concept of *sharh al-sadr* is the following:

What about the one whose heart God has opened in devotion to Him, so that he walks in light from his Lord? Alas for those whose hearts harden at the mention of God! They have clearly lost their way.⁶²

This opening of the heart is the spiritual light of guidance that brings relief and tranquility to the believer, strengthening the heart with faith, insight, and wisdom. It enables one to recognize this world as fleeting, to loosen attachment to it, and to redirect attention and effort toward attaining the Hereafter. Through this inner expansion, the heart of the believer gains the clarity through which they are able to see life and death for what they truly are, to remember death without distress, and to understand one's purpose is to prepare for it. Thus, the blessings of faith and insight allow us to see the afterlife as our ultimate home—to desire it more than the fleeting gains of this world—and to no longer feel threatened by it.

To you who is fearful and struggles with the thought of death and your standing in the Hereafter—you are not alone. God does not expect perfection from you, He does not burden you with more than you are capable of, nor does He expect you to overcome your fears entirely.⁶³ Remember that even the best of the believers among our pious predecessors had an aversion to death, hence the extent to which this topic is acknowledged and addressed in the Qur'an and Sunnah. While fear is a natural emotion we are both blessed and tested with, it is not a sin, nor a sign of weak faith or the disapproval of your Lord. Above all, it is the mercy of God which encompasses all of His creation. He tasks you with sincerity and effort, and rewards you when you take a step toward Him, reminding you that He is as you think of Him.⁶⁴ So do not despair that your faith is not strong enough. Rather, allow

⁶² Qur'an 39:22.

⁶³ "God does not burden any soul with more than it can bear: Each gains whatever good it has done, and suffers its bad—'Lord, do not take us to task if we forget or make mistakes. Lord, do not burden us as You burdened those before us. Lord, do not burden us with more than we have strength to bear. Pardon us, forgive us, and have mercy on us. You are our Protector, so grant us victory against the disbelieving people.'" Qur'an 2:286.

⁶⁴ *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, no. 7405. The Prophet ﷺ said, "Allah says: 'I am just as My slave thinks I am [i.e., I am able to do for him what he thinks I can do for him] and I am with him if He remembers Me. If he remembers Me in himself, I too, remember him in Myself; and if he remembers Me in a group of people, I remember him in a group

yourself the opportunity to grow, to trust in His decree as best for you, and to be purpose-driven in your journey to Him, one day at a time, striving to know Him and to be close to Him. Always remember that fear is a normal human experience that can be harnessed for your spiritual benefit when properly guided. Among the most comforting and hopeful words the Prophet ﷺ left us with as a reminder of divine compassion to help us overcome our inner fears is the advice he gave to his companion, Jabir ibn ‘Abdullah, who said that he “heard Allah’s Messenger ﷺ say three days before his death: ‘None of you should die but hoping only good from Allah, the Exalted and Glorious.’”⁶⁵

that is better than them; and if he comes one span nearer to Me, I go one cubit nearer to him; and if he comes one cubit nearer to Me, I go a distance of two outstretched arms nearer to him; and if he comes to Me walking, I go to him running.”

⁶⁵ *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, no. 2877c.