

## CHAPTER FOURTY ONE

### Physical Meaning of Death<sup>1 i</sup>

*O Allah (The Exalted) bless our master Muhammad (may Allah bless him and grant him peace) and his good and noble family with blessings which are perpetual and eternally bound up with the duration of the Owner of Majesty and Nobility.*

Many people perceive death as a separation from beloved ones and material belongings and consequently do not want to think about it. Every person has the desire to live forever. Nowadays, the phenomenon of death is a subject that is being researched by numerous scientists. Using different methods, these scientists are trying to unveil the secrets of death in order to find the truth behind it and to explore the possibility of life after death.

The physical body is in fact a coordinated and cooperative organisation consisting of billions of cells. Every hour, millions of old cells die and millions of new cells are produced. A young body can produce new cells as fast as they degenerate. However, the total number of cells decreases in the body as a result of ageing. Brain cells cannot be renewed after a certain age. Cell loss increases and the number of healthy cells decreases as the body ages. As a result of the loss of balance, the harmony and order of the body tend to break down, and death becomes inevitable.

#### **The Indications of Death and its Occurrence**

There are different methods used today to accurately detect the exact moment of death. It is accepted that a moribund (dying) person displays typical signs of death. According to research, there is a period of struggle that precedes the actual moment of death. For sudden death situations, this period is short. On the other hand, if the death is due to a chronic illness, this period may consist of hours or days. The major signs of death are as follows: the skin becomes pale and loses its elasticity, in the eyes the circulation stops in the retinal arterioles. The muscles lose their tension and there is a loss of bulk. Respiration stops and the pulse fades. The body loses heat until it reaches room temperature. 2-3 hours after death, rigor mortis<sup>2</sup> occurs, due to the hardening of the muscle fibres.

Despite all of these signs, it still seems impossible to detect the exact instance of death. It is well known that many people who have been assumed to be dead have returned to life after some time has passed. According to the information in the book by Lyall Watson, *The Biology of Death*,<sup>ii</sup> the definition of death in the Experimental Reanimation Physiology Laboratory is: "A state where all life signs, such as consciousness, reflexes, respiration and the heart beat cease, however the organism, as a whole, is not dead yet, the metabolic processes inside the tissues continue and under certain circumstances, all the vital functions can be resumed."

Ibn 'Umar (may Allah be pleased with him) stated that the Prophet (may Allah bless him and grant him peace) held me by my shoulders and said, "Live in this world like a stranger or a traveller."

Ibn 'Umar (may Allah be pleased with him) always said, "When it is night do not wait for the morning and when it is morning do not wait for the night and when in good health and during life make preparations for death (meaning good deeds)."<sup>iii</sup>

Imam Ghazali (may Allah be pleased with him) writes, "It is man's soul that represents his real nature, which is everlasting. Upon death his state changes in two ways. Firstly, he is now deprived of his eyes, ears and tongue, his hands, his feet and all his parts, just as he is deprived of his family, children, relatives, and all the people he used to know, and his cars, his houses and properties, and all that he used to own. There is no connection to be drawn between his being taken from these things and these things being taken, separation may take place through the grasping of a man's wealth, and at others when a man seized and led away from his power and wealth: in both cases the pain is identical. The meaning of death is simply the removal of a man's property resulting upon his being moved into another world which does not correspond to this."<sup>iv</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> See Volume One, Chapter Seventy-Two for this Sunnah

<sup>2</sup> The stiffening of a body that occurs within some eight hours of death.

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<sup>i</sup> October-December 2003: Issue 44; By Osman Cakmak

<sup>ii</sup> Watson, 1987

<sup>iii</sup> Bukhari