

Heaven and Hell

According to Islam

Based on the Holy Quran and the Ḥadīth being the
Primary and Secondary Sources of Islam

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Heaven and Hell

Jannah and *Jahannam*, “Heaven and Hell,”¹ are two of the frequently discussed and artistically colored images of the Glorious Quran. The Quran approaches the subjects of the Heaven and Hell in both physical and metaphorical manners. It yields an exceedingly beautiful imagery on these phenomenal concepts, which it had inherited from the Semitic tradition. Islam, nevertheless, embellishes these concepts farther from the previous understanding with more details and psychologically corresponding symbolism.

As a matter of fact, very little has been written in objective terms on the subject of Heaven and Hell, if treated together, in the Muslim world and there is still a wide gap between the modern approach to these metaphysical concepts and the ancient thought. Throughout the history of Islam, a number of different groups came up with different theories pertaining to the two eternal abodes professed in the Glorious Quran. The *Sūfī* gnosis, for instance, treats them in purely spiritual terms. They insist that neither Hell scares a true *mystic* nor does the Heaven allure, because the ultimate destination of ours is the oneness with God.²

It would be important to note that the majority of the Muslim Ummah accepts these places as ‘literal’ where flesh will be with the soul, whereas a minority of the Muslims contend that these are purely spiritual realms. The Quran itself is consistent and clear on the nature of Heaven and Hell. It maintains that the former is the ultimate place of eternal *bliss*, while the latter is the ultimate house of *torment*. Nevertheless, what we need to

¹ Heaven and Hell will be capitalized throughout this text to treat them as proper nouns in their Islamic sense.

² The mystics of Islam speak of the Heaven and Hell in low terms and do not usually grant them the value, *per se*, which the Quran has given them. They believe in communion with God, which, they think, render these two places as meaningless for the true believers.

Heaven and Hell

analyze and understand here is the true nature of both bliss and torment, which are the products of these two places.

The Quranic portrayal of the resurrection of dead, judgment, and final abodes is, beyond question, physical rather than purely spiritual. The Quran does not solely deal with *Rūḥ*, “Soul”, for the addressee in general is the very *being* of man throughout the Scripture—a man breathing and bustling in flesh. For instance, when the Quran speaks of a specific kind of torment, it reports the *burning of skin* and its return afresh.³ Similarly, the state of bliss includes all articles which are compulsory for an earthly garden whose divine archetype has been called “*Eden*”.⁴ Therefore, *Jannah* is an everlasting garden that consists of all known and unknown fruits—perennial and unimaginably sweet. The word for bliss in Arabic is *Na’īm*, which also means ‘the blessed’ or ‘the carrier of blessings’. This particular word has occurred in the Quran in a compound form as *Jannatin Na’īm*, ‘the Paradise of the bliss and blessings’.⁵

“For him (a righteous believer) there is comfort and bounty, and a garden of bliss. And if he be one of those on the Right Hand (the saved), he is greeted with salutation: “Peace be upon you,” from those (also) of the Right Hand.”

(Sūrah Wāqī’ah 56:89-91)

Another description of the Heaven, which includes a metaphoric picture of the available luxuries, has been given in *Sūrah* 88. It is an

³ *Sūrah al-Nisā* 4:56 “Those who rejected Our revelations will soon be thrown into the Fire. No sooner will their skins be burnt out than We shall replace their skins, so that they may taste the real torment. *Allāh* is Mighty, Wise.”

⁴ Both Glorious Quran and Holy Bible agree on this subject of garden. The Bible narrates in Genesis the story of Adam whom God placed in the Garden of Eden. Quran also refers to this garden as ‘*Aden*’. But the Quran’s actual stress is laid on the idea of Eden’s position as a very blessed station inside the realm of Paradise—sometimes the Eden being the representative abode of the Paradise.

⁵ *Sūrah Wāqī’ah* 56:12

Heaven and Hell

illustrious sketch of the place, which procures relatively more details about the nature of the Heaven.

“Some faces on that Day shall be radiant, well pleased with their endeavors (for faith), in a lofty Paradise (they will live). Therein they shall hear no loose talk, nor falsehood. Therein they shall have running springs. Therein they shall be reclining on raised soft couches, with goblets placed before them; silky cushions ranged in order and fine carpets richly spread.”

(Sūrah Ghāshiyah 88:8-16)

Jannah is the abode of eternal blessings, the state of psychological satisfaction and physical perfection, which all manifest *absolute* bliss. No pain or sorrow will ever strike the dwellers of the Heaven. The Arabic word *Jannah* itself implies “garden”. Glorious Quran has used an extensive imagery to portray the situation and internal setting—i.e. the whole interior decoration—of the Heaven. Some of the imagery indeed seems to have a direct appeal to the contemporary Arab brain. These images, nevertheless, keenly correspond to the mental structure and psychological capacity of all human beings. In this particular sense, we can ascertain that the intrinsic nature of the Heaven may be, less or more, different from what the Quran generally paints in images. These images are mere widely understood devices to introduce mankind with the eternal life in an earthly way in order to make sense to the space-time locked human species.

Man needs human examples to understand any given situation. Of course, mankind can only understand what the human beings have experienced in their physical perceptions of a physical realm. No examples of the unseen can really help man comprehend the nature of an unseen entity. Like the previous Scriptures,⁶ therefore, the Quran also uses the common terminology of human speech to construct the supernatural Heaven—the palace of God and His subjects.

⁶ The ‘Scriptures’ mean here all those revealed books which are now in the Bible or were lost to time before being canonized and included in the Bible.

Heaven and Hell

The abode of the Heaven is for the *good* souls and only those are allowed to make their entrance through the gates of the Heaven who will be given the book of judgment in their right hands.⁷

“On the day when We shall summon all men with their record, whoso is given his book in his right hand - such will read their book and they will not be wronged a shred. Whoso is blind here will be blind in the Hereafter, and yet further from the road.”

(Sūrah Isrâ 17:71)

Thus, such a soul will rejoice and live in the garden of Paradise, in the presence of God for all eternity. The word *soul* in the current context has been used in the sense of a *physical* human being, as does the Quran employ this concept. It has already been discussed above that the Quran gives a picture of physical resurrection and judgment, and the fact that the flesh and soul will be together can be induced from the ‘right hand’. Furthermore, it is also clear from the Quranic text that the bodies are inseparable from the souls even in their final *eternal* dwellings after the judgment. Nevertheless, the physical bodies will definitely undergo some kind of transformation, which will make them into quasi-spiritual beings. The evidence of such an afterlife transformation can be found in a number of *Aḥādīth*⁸ where the Prophet Muhammad is reported to have said that the human bodies will be cleansed of a number of organic features that are peculiar to the life on earth.

It is noteworthy that the Heaven is still an empty place with no inhabitants whatsoever. Nobody has ever been assigned a place in the Heaven since the first death of human history.⁹ The gates of the blissful

⁷ Also *Sūrah Wâqī‘ah* 56:8, *Sūrah Ḥāqah* 69:19

⁸ Prophetic Sayings are called *Aḥādīth* in Arabic, which constitute the second source of Islam after the Glorious Quran. *Ḥadīth* is the singular of the plural *Aḥādīth*.

⁹ This assertion also includes the Prophets and Messengers of God that none of them is stationed in the Heaven yet. It is an empty place. These chosen people

Heaven and Hell

place will only be opened after the enactment of the final judgment, *al-Hisâb*. The first person to enter, according to the *Hadîth*, will be the Prophet of Islam, Muḥammad. An authentic *Hadîth* confirms that nobody can make entrance in the Heaven before the moment of ultimate resurrection, *Qiyâmah*, which will be followed by the phase of judgment. The gatekeeper of the Heaven will hear the name of the Prophet Muḥammad and will open the gate, saying: “It is for you that I have been ordered to open the gate, and not to open it before you.”¹⁰ This confirms that the Heaven and the Hell will both be assigned their respective classes after the resurrection and the judgment—not before that as traditionally believed. It is again the period of grave that the majority of the Muslim population generally misunderstands, which gives birth to the belief that the dead people are either in the Heaven or the Hell. This misunderstanding can be corrected with a thorough study of the Quranic paradigm, its theme of death, the resurrection, and the phases of the life after death with supportive texts and survey of the Quranic semantics. Moreover, such *Aḥādîth* as cited above are a good source to understand and reflect upon this subject more clearly. The problematic situation that a dead person tastes the life of either Heaven or Hell in the grave has been discussed under a different heading.¹¹

There is a really strong emphasis on the nature and functions of the Heaven and the Hell in the *Sūrahs* of Meccan period.¹² These *Sūrahs* are,

of the highest ranks will be brought back to life on the Day of Resurrection and will be dispatched to the Heaven in the first batch.

¹⁰ *Ṣaḥîḥ Muslim*, “Faith”, 1:384

¹¹ *Al-‘Adhâb al-Qabr*, “the Punishment of the Grave”, is a popular belief among the Sunni and the Shia Muslims. In some ways, it is similar to the Rabbinic Judaism’s belief of soul’s ‘ascending and descending’ and hovering over the dead body. (*Talmud* in *Shabbat* 152B)

¹² The 13-year period of the Prophetic Ministry of Muhammad before his history-making migration to Madinah (also *Medina*) is remembered in the Islamic history as *Hijrah*, “Migration/Emigration”.

Heaven and Hell

by their nature, classed as the ‘preacher’ *Sūrahs* of the Quran, for they yield moral exhortations and emphatic statements of doctrinal importance, and thus they shape the metaphysics of *Islām*. Since the whole preaching of the Meccan period was carried out in the heartland of Arabia, Mecca,¹³ among the native Arabs, it is asserted once again that the metaphoric portrayal of the Heaven in particular and the Hell in general was primarily meant for an ancient Arab mind.

The later *Sūrahs*, those of the Medinan period, also place a good deal of emphasis on the Heaven and the Hell, but their illustrious details, such as found in the Meccan period, are replaced in this period with the nature of faith and details of the deeds that pave the path of either the Heaven or the Hell. The imagery of ‘lofty garden, running springs, flowing streams, delicious fruits, sweet drinks, golden goblets, silky cushions, soft couches’ etc., deeply appealed the ancient Arab mind. The Arabs had no original experience of the outside world and were restricted to the life of a sterile desert, scorching heat, dry mountains, and sand storms--a hard life full of great difficulties, in nutshell. Historically, it is true that the Quranic imagery is in harmony with the geographical and ontological atmospheres of ancient Arabia, but theologically it does have to do with the whole world and all generations.¹⁴ It is not the form or mode of description that constructs the mental image of a supernatural abode of eternal life, but the content that formulates the theme of a particular doctrine. It could have been left to the imagination of man arising out of abstraction, but such a thing would subsequently lead to major eschatological problems and extreme religious differences. Therefore, it

¹³ The traditional Islamic way to spell the name of *Islām*’s holiest city is “*Makkah*”. However, the Western style of writing *Makkah* is *Mecca*. Universally acclaimed film “*The Message*” also uses the spellings and the pronunciation of *Mecca*. I personally prefer to spell as *Mecca* over *Makkah* to give this sacred name a purely English texture, since the word has been since long Anglicized.

¹⁴ The Quran claims to be the Scripture of Guidance for the whole humanity. (*Sūrahs* 2:1, 3:64, 6:19, 68:52, 74:35-36, 98:1 etc.)

Heaven and Hell

has been given at least a physical foundation to reflect on the concept and feel its soothing nature.

In the Quran, the whole world has been urged by God to receive their share from a greater, peerless reward, which none can experience in this world. And since the immediate addressee of the Quran were the Arabs, who were to receive and further transmit the message after the Prophet, they were given a revelation of those special features of the Heaven which immediately and particularly fascinated their collective thinking.

According to the Glorious Quran, the citizens of *Jannah* will receive fair creatures (some translate as 'virgins'), pure and perfect, as a reward of their righteousness. For instance, the Quran states:

"And We shall wed them unto fair ones with wide, lovely eyes."
(Sūrah Dukhān 44:54)

The same theme runs in three other places in the Quran: *Sūrah Ṭūr* 52:20, *Sūrah Rahmān* 55:72 and *Sūrah Wāqī'ah* 56:22. However, these virgins are neither women in the ordinary sense nor any creature meant for sexual pleasures. The word used in the Quran for the heavenly big-eyed creature is *Hūr*, which stands for the purity of heart and perfection of physique. The word *Hūr* employed by the Quran to mean 'fair creature' is an Arabic plural, and its singular is *Aḥwar* (mesculine) and *Ḥawrah* (feminine). The word in its both forms implies 'light giving big eyes' as a necessary part of its concept. The physical beauty, particularly as is generally conceived of the virgins characterized with sexual appeal, has nothing to do with the original concept dealt in the Quran.

Hūr is, thus, the incarnation of the virtues of a believer that will serve his being for all eternity. In *Hūr* is manifest the eternal satisfaction as well as satiation of a believer's aesthetics as a reward for his temporal good deeds. However, the *salvation* of the believers has a greater reward to offer and it is not the *Hūr* or *Ghilmān* or even the luxuries of the Paradise that constitute the final reward in *Islām*, as is most often theorized. Instead, the greatest blessing, the true luxury and joy of the

Heaven and Hell

believers from the eternal reward is God's presence among them and letting His holy sight overwhelm the believers.¹⁵

In the paradigm of the Quran, the Heaven is a place without a physical time. Since eternity is the only time scheme of the Heaven, the appearance of its dwellers will be in a fixed state of activity, without change in its ambit. However, there will be a sequence of events, not necessarily in the worldly sense, and the things will move in a certain order, only perceivable beyond the imperfect universe of spatial time. There will be no past and no future, but present alone without death—a flowing present rather than static. Our present understanding of time is solely dependent on a beginning and an end of the time; but in the Heaven, there will be no end, though a beginning. Death will not exist in the life of the Heaven. Hence, all conceptions of the end of existence and pains of earthly life will automatically vanish. The real bliss will be the sense of the presence of God, and the satisfaction will arise from the fact of death's permanent absence.

Now we turn to the second aspect of the present study of the Quranic Afterlife. *Jahannam*, "Hell", is a place dreadful and dark. Unbearable heat is the most prominent feature of this house of torment. *Jahīm* is another name of *Jahannam*, and as a matter of fact, the technical function of the Hell is most accurately expressed in the semantics of this particular term.

Traditionally, Hell is rendered as an 'abyss', dark, vast, and deep. This pit is also spoken of in some sources as the sea of fire. However, the actual depth of the Hell is termed in the Quran as *Hâwiyah*, 'a bottomless pit of fire'.¹⁶ *Hâwiyah*, by its nature, is not a state of

¹⁵ *Sūrah Bayyinah* 98:8, "Their reward is with Allah: Gardens of Eternity, beneath which rivers flow; they will dwell therein for ever; Allah well pleased with them, and they with Him: all this for such as fear their Lord and Cherisher."

¹⁶ *Sūrah Qâri'yah* 101:9

Heaven and Hell

permanent activity, or more religiously, not an eternal place, whereas the same conclusion can be reached from the semantic study of the word in question. In this way, therefore, it seems improbable from the description of pit in the Quran that anyone will be placed in fire for all eternity. *Hâmiyah* is the angry fire, which lodges in the pit of *Hâwiyah*.¹⁷ Provided that, the bottomless pit of *Hâwiyah* is full of fiercely blazing fire called *Hâmiyah*. This Quranic portrayal appears to an ordinary mind quite similar to an active volcano full of lava. The pit of *Hâwiyah* has also been rendered in *Hadīth* as *Umm*, ‘the mother or origin of the Hell’, and according to *Ibn Kathīr*, the most celebrated classical exegete of the Quran, this particular pit is the origin of the Hell where the Hell with all of its inhabitants will be eventually thrown.¹⁸ In this respect, *Hâwiyah* is a parallel concept of Hebrew *Gehenna*, ‘the valley of death and burning’. Another rendition of fire in the Quran is *Hutamah*, ‘the fire that tethers’.¹⁹ Nevertheless, *Hutamah* is a less intense fire as compared to the fire of *Hâmiyah*, and also it is a rank above the pit stage. It may be, therefore, the stage of dissolution before complete annihilation of the Hell dwellers—the perished. In other words, all major descriptions of fire have compelling reasons to think of the total destruction of the *existence* of the doomed people classed as the people holding their book of judgment in the ‘left hand’.²⁰

Secondly, a terribly physical punishment in appearance, which can actually thought of as figurative, described in the *Hadīth* is in not in disagreement with the Quranic description. Such an unbearable

¹⁷ *Sūrah Qâri’yah* 101:11

¹⁸ Muḥammad, Mawlana (trans.), Salāḥuddīn Yūsuf, Mawlana (exegete), *Translation of the Meanings and Interpretations of the Noble Quran in the Urdu Language*, p.1741

¹⁹ *Sūrah Humazah* 104:5-6

²⁰ *Sūrah Wâqī’ah* 56:41-56 (Details follow in the coming pages.)

Heaven and Hell

punishment is not literal and/or eternal, for the grace of God cannot allow one to suffer eternal punishment for temporal sins.

Hell is, in fact, a place of perishing and annihilation. However, this perishing is peculiar exclusively to the calls of unbelievers—those who did not believe in the absolute oneness of God. It also plays the role of *purgatory*, which purges those stationed in it of their sins. But this purgation is limited to the people whose sins are transitory in nature and hence eliminable. For the believers, the Hell appears in the *Ḥadīth* as a temporal place, where their souls will be washed off and cleared from the dirt of sin, and in such a way, eventually, the believers will be brought to their original abode, the Paradise.

For the unbelievers, on the other hand, the Hell is the place of permanent perishing. Hellfire is the term frequently employed in the Quran in relation to the final punishment. This term closely corresponds to the idea of the ‘lake of fire’, as stated above. Lake of fire is an epitome of the end of existence of a Hell-destined unbeliever for all eternity. The fire will eat up the body as well as the soul (i.e. complete consciousness) of the culprit; hence, existence ceases to be for such a person. The sense of life will no longer be with the consciousness of the people punished (actually annihilated) for all eternity. The eternal punishment will come out in the eternal death found in the *Gehenna*. This is, in a sense, the actual death—the pre-creation state of death²¹—for all eternity, which gives a very clear picture of what the eternal punishment will be like.

Therefore, the eternal life is reserved for those who believe in the message of God, and eternal death is for those who deny God and His message. According to the faith aided with good deeds and faithlessness polluted with bad deeds, the people will be dispatched to the house of life and house of death respectively. It is from this concept that we find

²¹ *Sūrah Baqarah* 2:28 “Did He not give you life when you were dead—without existence?”

Heaven and Hell

the meaning in the functions of the places termed as Heaven and Hell. However, the conclusion is still hypothetical, for the picture of the Hell is entirely metaphorical. For a solution, we can again draw a conceptual comparison between the lake of fire and the Quranic description of a flowing, blazing fire. Glorious Quran demonstrates that the deepest phase of the Hell is a bottomless pit, *Hâwiyah*, filled with a fierce fire, *Hâmiyah*.

“But he whose scale of good deeds is light shall have abode in *Hâwiyah*; and what will explain to you, what it (*Hâwiyah*) is? It is a (pit of) blazing fire.”

(Sūrah Qâri'yah 101:8-11)

A very ornate description of the Hell, which sheds fairly good light on the nature of Hell, is given in *Sūrah* 56. A reading through these verses will also determine some other important aspects of our present study.

“As for those of the left hand - how *unfortunate* will be the people of the left hand! They will be in the midst of scorching winds and in boiling water: in the shade of a pitch-black smoke, neither cool nor refreshing. For they lived in comfort before meeting this fate. They persisted in heinous sins and used to say: “When we are dead and turned to dust and bones, shall we then be raised to life again? And our forefathers, too?” Tell them: “Surely those of old and those of present age shall certainly be brought together on an appointed time of a known Day. Then, “O the mistaken rejecters, you shall eat of the *Zaqqūm* tree, and fill your bellies with it; and drink on top of it scalding water; yet you shall drink it like a thirsty camel.” Such will be their entertainment on the Day of Reckoning.”

(Sūrah Wâq'ah 56:41-56)

These verses quite unambiguously describe the state of the people given their book of judgment in the left hand, the dwellers of the Hell. The description has a physical setting and it precisely states different kinds of the torment they will suffer. For instance, their bones and flesh will be brought together and they will eat from the sour tree of *Zaqqūm* and drink from the boiling water in the midst of scorching winds and pitch-black smoke. This description is an enough evidence to reject the

Heaven and Hell

thesis of those—including some reputed scholars of the Muslim history—who believe in a spiritual torment, '*Adhâb*, given to the *Rûh*, "soul", and not to the body. In the same fashion, this description of the Hell also rejects the notion of soul's return to the body in the grave, because what has been emphasized here is the gathering of the bones on an 'appointed time of a known Day'. This, of course, means there is no intermediate stage of resurrection, inquisition, torment, or bliss.

The infidels did not believe in the afterlife and resurrection of the death. They strictly adhered to the atheistic notion that their bodies would be reduced to dry bones and dust. Glorious Quran counters such beliefs for all ages, from its time of revelation to the ultimate future, saying that the bodies of the dead will indeed once turn into bones and dust, but what is the promise of God will indeed be fulfilled after they are gone in the state of lifelessness and physical destruction. God will, beyond a shadow of doubt, restore all mankind to life collectively on an appointed moment of an appointed day, *al-Qiyâmah*.

The titles and functions of some of the other major stages in the Hell have also been stated in the Quran. *Sa'îr*, for instance, is such a stage of the Hell that will be filled with the people who are unjust towards the orphans and usurp their rights without fear of God.

"Those who unjustly eat up the property of orphans, eat up a Fire into their own bodies: They will soon be enduring a Blazing Fire (*Sa'îr*)!"
(Sûrah Nisâ 4:10)

Sa'îr will devour them as they devour the possessions of the orphans, and, as some scholars believe, it will broil them. This word has occurred fifteen times in the text of the Glorious Quran.²² It is, therefore, clearly understood from the occurrence of *Sa'îr* in such a great number that the

²² Hughes, Thomas Patrick, *Dictionary of Islam*, New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal Publishers, 1999, "*Sa'îr*"

Heaven and Hell

blazing fire characterizes an important function of the Hell that balances the injustices, usurpations and discriminations of the physical world.

Saqar is another important place in the Hell where the parties of the infidels will be thrown.²³ *Saqar* originally means an exceedingly hot place, which burns down whatever is placed in it. It is this quality of the heat and burning that most of the scholars agree on declare *Saqar* as an alternative title for the Hell. There is certainly no reason to disagree with this stance of the Quranic exegetes and doctors, and it appears compellingly reasonable that fire and heat are the most original, inevitable components of the Hell. In the opinion of some commentators including *Baiḍāwī*, these are the stations assigned to each party of the non-Muslims, such as Infidels, Atheists, Jews, Christians, Zoroastrians, and Sabians. However, the present author cannot agree with this interpretation of the Quran on the subject of Hell. Of course, there are stages in the Hell, but these stages stand for the intensity of the punishment given to the effect of the weight of one's sins. God can forgive anyone among the 'People of the Bible'²⁴ and even among the people of other religions, for God, according to the Quran, is *Raḥmān*, "the most Gracious for the whole creation". There is no doubt that the people who indulge in idolatry (Arabic *Shirk*) and deny the very existence of the true living One God can in no way be forgiven—nor should they expect to be shown mercy. In the opinion of the author, only these two classes are to be branded as the real sinners, the perishable people, who do not deserve forgiveness and salvation at the end of the day.

The current judgment of the Hell and hellfire is also based on the previous Scriptures, the Bible, because we cannot keep those revealed

²³ *Sūrah Qamar* 54:48, "The Day they will be dragged into the Fire on their faces [it will be said], "Taste now the touch of *Saqar*."

²⁴ *Ahl al-Kitāb*, traditionally translated as the "People of the Book". However, it would be more appropriate to use the word 'Bible' instead of 'Book'.

Heaven and Hell

Books of the ancient apart from the Quran. In a sequence, the phenomenon of *Wahī*, “Revelation”, shows a gradual development from primitiveness to maturation. But it is also notable that only the peripheral variable precepts were changed or modified, while the basics, the fundamental principles of God’s message and program, never underwent any crucial change in the Scriptural history. For example, monotheism always meant the worship of a single living and sovereign God, whereas a Prophet in the paradigm of revelation was always a person who was raised and inspired by the Almighty God. Therefore, it is not illogical if we bring Judo-Christian Scriptures in comparison with the Quranic ideas and then propose a more realistic conclusion for certain theological problems, such as the nature of Heaven and Hell.

There is no doubt that any proposition that has no inspired, particularly Quranic, foundation will establish nothing when the study is done in the Islamic frame of reference. But this does not also mean that we should not look back to the previous Scriptures to find explanation for a concept discussed in the Quran in little detail. Any textual assistance that can help us understand and explain a given Quranic concept must be welcomed to establish the final authority of the Islamic Scripture over the rest. For instance, the book of Revelation in the Christian New Testament reports about a certain ‘lake of fire’ which will consume Hell along with its dwellers. This information squares with the portrayal of *Hâwiyah* as held by several commentators of the Quran including *Ibn Kathīr*. However, the book of Revelation further declares that the lake of fire is the state of second death, which is of course an additional aid of knowledge to elaborate the concept in question.

“Then death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. The lake of fire is the second death.”²⁵

²⁵ Revelation 20:14

Heaven and Hell

The word used in the New Testament for the Hell is *Hades*, originally a Greek word meaning ‘state of departed souls, the unseen,’ and ‘the grave’. The Greek mythology refers to *Hades* as ‘underworld’ or more precisely as ‘netherworld’ where the souls continue their journey after the death of the body. Another word employed by the New Testament in this context is *Gehenna*, which is understood as a valley where the wicked souls are punished in burning. This concept has been originally borrowed from the Jewish Old Testament. Another Greek word for the Hell is *Tartarus* and it means almost the same things as *Hades*. For the Greco-Roman philosophers and litterateurs, *Tartarus* was either a hanging place in the center of space or a dwelling in the bottom of the earth.²⁶ The Scriptures of the Hebrew language recurrently use the single word, *Sheol*, which the Jews understood in the developed meaning of afterlife as a place where the souls of the dead are kept. It is a very interesting fact that almost all of the ancient religions developed the theology of an underworld, where the souls would go and rest after death. The Arabs of the time of Prophet Muḥammad also believed in the existence of a wicked place in the bottom of the earth. This has led some old fashioned Muslim scholars to consider *Jahannam* as situated at the bottom of the earth, which in the scientific language means within the core. The particular portion of the Hell that they place in the underworld is believed to be the Quranic term *Sijjīn*. However, interestingly enough, *Sijjīn* only refers to the book of deed-records that is given in the left hand of the person judged as evil.²⁷ Some *Aḥādīth* with obscure origin also support this assumption of the later day scholars whose primary exegetical source for metaphysical descriptions was the fable-tellers namely, *Quṣṣās*. Although it is a scientific fact that the core of the earth is extremely hot, full of molten rocks and iron, it does not imply that this

²⁶ Cf. Virgil in *Aeneid* 4:577 says, “Full twice as deep the dungeon of the fiends; the huge Tartarean gloomy gulf descends.”

²⁷ *Surah Muṭafifīn* 83:7-9, “No! Indeed, the record of the wicked is in *Sijjīn*. And what can make you know what is *Sijjīn*? It is a register of records inscribed.”

Heaven and Hell

heat represents a metaphysical activity. The heat of the earth's center is a natural activity, which not only helps maintain the gravitational pull of the earth, but also forms a protective halo around the planet to shields the living creatures, the flora and the fauna.

Glorious Quran, contrary to the popular belief, does not locate a specific space or place, including the so-called underground location, where the Hell—or even *Barzakh*—can possibly be. In fact, the knowledge of the situation and the size of the Hell is with God alone, maintains the Quran unequivocally. The pure and simple truth about the Hell is that we have insufficient data about the nature, location and the ultimate fate of the Hell and thus on the basis of the available data, our human mind cannot possibly encompass this supernatural phenomenon. This dearth of information and nonexistence of perceptual experience hinders us in conducting the analysis of the Hell in terms of a 'positivism of Hell'.

We can still think, in a way, nonetheless, on certain scientific lines to hypothesize the essentials of the Hell in physical terms. Our universe is a material universe, which can be viewed with naked human eye. This is to say that we can observe far-off activity of the space with the help of astronomical devices developed by the scientists. Modern astronomy believes in a theory of "Bubble Universe", which expounds that many universes can simultaneously appear from the quantum foam to exist along with one another for a long or short period of time. This theory is founded in physics on the principle of a parent universe that gives birth and transfers power to a new universe, whereas it sometimes even pulls back the new appearing universe. This theory maintains that many universes can exist at the same time like bubbles in a boiling water, while none of the universes has the ability to experience the existence of the other, sister universes. As for as our own universe is concerned, no human eye can penetrate through the outer walls of the universe we live in, nor can any scientific device as yet make a hole in it to see beyond. This scientific phenomenon helps discern the frailty of the physical

Heaven and Hell

structure of our universe, and secondly we cannot afford the option of ignoring the possibility of a super-universal zone.

Hell may very likely be one of the other bubble universes or a realm existing outside of the black walls of our universe. It may or may not be a super-universal zone. At least, for the sake argument, we can assert with the help of this scientific theory that our material universe is not the ultimate form of existence. However, the imprisonment of the Hell within the oval shaped tiny planet Earth is a severe mistake, for both are diametrically opposed in nature and size.