

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

In the name of Allah, the All-Merciful, the All-Compassionate

## Chapter 2: AL-BAQARA (The Cow 82)

وَالَّذِينَ آمَنُوا وَعَمِلُوا الصَّالِحَاتِ أُولَئِكَ أَصْحَابُ الْجَنَّةِ هُمْ فِيهَا خَالِدُونَ

*“But they who believe and do righteous deeds - those are the companions of Paradise; they will abide therein [eternally].”*

Derived from the root /j-n-n/ which means to conceal, cover and veil; the word /jannah/ literally means a garden whose trees and greenery cover the ground. In the terminology of Quran, /al-jannah/ denotes the abode of perpetual bliss in the hereafter, that is the paradise. The verse above promises that paradise would be the eternal residence of those who have true faith and who do good deeds. In the description of Quran and /hadith/, the paradise has gates, it has ranks and degrees, and it does have corporeal and sensual aspects as well as purely spiritual dimensions.

The textual evidences and authentic traditions indicate that the paradise has been created already, and it does exist at the present time. The verse 3:133, for example, reads: *“And hasten to forgiveness from your Lord and a garden as wide as the heavens and earth, prepared for the righteous.”* In several /hadith/, Rasulullah gave details of what he observed during his ascension where he entered the paradise, and had seen great blessings prepared for its inhabitants. On another occasion, he reported that he had a vision of paradise while praying. There is no clear evidence for the location of the existing /jannah/. What is clear, in my opinion, is that it should not be sought in a part of our three dimensional material world.

In a /hadith qudsi/ Allah promised: *“I have prepared for My righteous slaves that which no eye has seen, no ear has heard and has never crossed the mind of any human being.”* In order for us to have some understanding, however, Quran describes the great blessings of /jannah/ and its companions in verses more beautiful than the paradise itself. Read: *“And recompensed them with Paradise and silk garments for what they patiently endured. Reclining therein on adorned couches, they will see neither the excessive heat of the sun, nor the excessive bitter cold. Near above them are its shade, and bunches [of fruit] will hang meekly down. Vessels of silver and cups of crystal will be passed around amongst them. Crystal clear, made of silver, of which they have determined the measure. They will be given a cup (of wine) mixed with ginger. [From] a fountain called Salsabeel. Around them will circulate boys of perpetual youth. When you see them, you would think they are scattered pearls. And when you look there you will see a delight and a great dominion. Their garments will be of fine silk and brocade. They will be adorned with bracelets of silver, and their Lord will give them a pure drink.”* (76:12-21) We also read *“And [therein] houris with wide lovely eyes, as the likeness of hidden pearls.”* (56:22-23)

The Quran and traditions further speak of glorious palaces and mansions made of bricks of gold, magnificent trees of golden trunks, gushing rivers whose water smells musk and whose edges are tents of pearls, rich carpets spread out, cushions set in rows, all kinds of delicious fruits and meats of fowls, fish, and cattle. In short, paradise is the eternal abode of unending bliss such that *“therein is whatever the souls desire and [what] delights the eyes.”* (43:71) All that is in paradise is delightful beyond imagination, and there is no waste in it. The inmates of paradise will not

excrete waste after eating and drinking; will not suffer filths of blood. Their sweat will have the smell of musk as reported in traditions. According to Ibn Taymiyah, there will be no sun and moon in paradise, and no day or night as we know it; but its people will know the morning and evening from a light that shines from the direction of the supreme throne. Even the stones and the plants will comply with the wishes of the believers in paradise.

A moment of joy in paradise is far greater than years of pleasures of this world. The verse 29:64 makes a similar comparison: *“And this worldly life is not but diversion and amusement. And the home of the Hereafter: that is indeed the life, if only they knew.”* Further increasing all such pleasures, the dwellers of paradise will share their joys with their families and friends who are also inmates there. Read: *“Verily, the companions of Paradise, that Day, will be amused in [joyful] occupation. They and their spouses, in shade, reclining on adorned couches.”* (36:55-56) We also recall the verse 13:23 in this regard: *“Gardens of perpetual residence; they will enter them with whoever were righteous among their fathers, their spouses and their descendants.”* Their spouses, the women of paradise, will be even more beautiful than the houris. In an authentic tradition, we hear Rasulullah saying that *“Verily in Paradise there is a market to which the people of paradise will come every Friday. The north wind will blow and scatter fragrances on their faces and on their clothes. This will add to their beauty and their attractiveness. They will then go back to their families after having an added luster to their beauty and their attractiveness. Their families will say to them: By Allah, you have been increased in beauty and loveliness after leaving us, and they will respond: By Allah, you too have increased in beauty and attractiveness after us.”*

Why there is a need for sensual pleasures in paradise? In response to this question, Badiuzzaman writes that even though it is dense, the corporeality is the richest and most comprehensive and all embracing mirror to the manifestation of the divine names. The tongue, for example, is a scale of pleasures for all kinds of foods; it recognizes the contents of numerous treasures of mercy. In addition, the recompense of the duties performed here by the senses will be rewarded as pleasures of otherworldly appetites. He emphasizes, however, that such pleasures will take on a sublime form suitable to eternal life and worthy of paradise. The bodies of the people of the luminous eternal paradise will have the strength and lightness of the spirit and the swiftness of imagination, being in hundreds of thousands of places at the same time, and conversing with hundreds of thousands of houris, and receiving pleasure in hundreds of thousands of ways.

The verse 2:82 above emphasizes the significance of true faith and virtuous deeds for entering paradise. The following tradition also reports that paradise has gates that are named after certain good deeds: *“In Paradise there are eight gates, one of which is called ar-Rayyan. No one will enter it except those who fast, and when they have entered it will be locked behind them and no one else will enter it.”* Even though faith is most essential for entering the abode of bliss, the benefactions one receives in paradise and his rank are comparable to his deeds. In the words of Badiuzzaman *“one recites a /subhanallah/ here, and eats in paradise its fruits.”* One must also exercise patience as he goes through the trials and difficulties of this life putting his full trust in Allah to become worthy of paradise. This is noted in verse 2:214: *“Or do you think that you shall enter the Paradise without such (trials) as came to those who passed away before you?”* Did not the messenger of Allah say *“Paradise is surrounded by hardships and the Hellfire is surrounded by desires.”* The significance of worship and good deeds as an active expression of faith cannot be overemphasized in developing one’s self, his abilities and faculties to their full potentials.

Rasulullah gave glad tidings that every believer will enter paradise; but a sinner may suffer, God forbid, a term of punishment and sanction before he is admitted to the hostel of eternal felicity.

Numerous traditions point out that the rank of a believer in the hereafter depends much on his deeds and works in worldly life. Rasulullah said *“The people of paradise will look at the dwellers of lofty mansions in the same way as one looks at a brilliant star, far away in the East or in the West of the horizon”* pointing out the distinction of the elite who keep the forefront in faith and deeds. The ranks of paradise represent the status of the believer in the sight of Allah. The highest one is known as Firdaws whose roof is the supreme throne; and come below the gardens of Adn and Ma’wa. A tradition states that *“Paradise has one hundred levels,”* pointing out the wide variance within its people. Even the two believers who dwell at the same level in paradise may receive blessings of differing degrees based on their unique spiritual attainment.

It should be noted that such comparisons of the gates and levels of paradise to virtuous deeds do not imply that the luminous and eternal paradise may be earned by means of works and good deeds. When the companions heard Rasulullah saying *“None may enter Paradise by his deeds alone,”* they asked, *“Not even you, O messenger of Allah?”* He responded saying that *“Not even me, unless Allah covers me with His grace and mercy.”* The verse 35:35 stresses the same point: *“Who, of His grace, has installed us in the mansion of eternity, where toil touches us not, nor can weariness affect us.”* A believer relies completely on the infinite grace and mercy of Allah for entry to paradise, and never on his own deeds and works.

The greatest honor awaiting the people of paradise is the vision of the Countenance of Allah from paradise, and the certainty that He is pleased with them. We read about these great glad tidings in the verses 75:22-23 as *“[Some] faces, that Day, will be radiant; looking at their Lord,”* and in the verse 9:72 as follows: *“Allah has promised the believing men and believing women gardens beneath which rivers flow, wherein they abide eternally, and pleasant dwellings in gardens of perpetual residence; but approval (good pleasure) from Allah is greater. It is that which is the great attainment.”* That, indeed, is the ultimate joy and the most precious gift. It is said above that a moment of joy in paradise is far greater than years of pleasures of this world. Likewise, all delights of paradise that surpass the imagination and defy description pale to nothing compared to a moment of watching the Face of Allah.

Rasulullah is reported to have said *“Allah will call onto the people of paradise: O people of paradise! They will say: We are at Your worship, our Lord, and all goodness is in Your hand. He will ask: Are you content? They will respond: Why should we not be content, O Lord, when you have given us what you have not given to anyone else of Your creation? He will say: Shall I not give you better than that? They will say: O Lord, what could be better than that? He will say: I grant you My pleasure and I will never be displeased with you anymore.”* In another tradition, we read: *“When the people of paradise enter paradise, Allah will say: Do you want anything more? They will say: Have You not made our faces white? Have You not admitted us to paradise and saved us from the fire? Then the veil will be lifted, and they will never have been given anything more dear to them than looking at their Lord, the Exalted.”*

May Allah grant us the honor of seeing His Countenance in Firdaws, favor us with certainty of faith and sincerity of worship. May peace and blessings of Allah be upon His messenger, his pure family and companions, and his noble brothers in the office of messengership.