

Shaykh Arif Abdul Hussain

A Case for the Pre-existence of Human Souls: A Qur'ānic Perspective

Questions pertaining to the nature of the human soul and its purpose through bodily existence have perplexed the minds of humanity from time immemorial. The issue is further compounded, for the Abrahamic faiths, due to their presumption of a Merciful God who initiates the existence of the soul and places it in the domain of strife and suffering as a part of God's bestowal. The reconciliation between the notions of a benevolent God who initiates the human soul and the prospect of the soul's eternal damnation, without allowing for a pre-worldly existence for the soul with the ability of discretion and choice to come into this world, becomes extremely difficult.

Through reference to the Qur'ānic verses and its accompanying exegesis, together with the deliberations of Muslim philosophers and mystics, this paper explores the idea of a pre-worldly existence of individual souls who choose to enter a worldly existence. The human souls both pre-exist their embodied states and are eternal posterior to death. This is because death and life are states of the body and not the point for the origination of the soul; the soul is merely initiated in the worldly domain through a bodily medium, and allowed agency through the body during bodily life and denied such agency at the point of bodily death. The life of this world, or the lowly life (*hayat al-dunya*), is an unreal and illusionary life through which human souls find an opportunity to come to the fullest of their potential.

The paper will allude to how this line of reasoning can allow for the formulation of a theodicy in which human beings bear the onus of coming to a world of strife with a prospect of possible damnation. Similarly, through the aid of verses, and the thoughts of the likes of Ibn Arabi, it is postulated that the fate of individual souls at the level worldly existence is left unknown as opposed to the idea of a God Who had foreknowledge of the destinies of the souls. Finally, it will be argued that both paradise and hell cannot be eternal abodes.



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Shaykh Arif Abdul Hussain is the Founding Director of Al-Mahdi Institute, and currently serves as a Senior Lecturer in *Usul al-Fiqh* and Muslim Philosophy. For over twenty years, Shaykh Arif has been at the forefront of developing and delivering advanced Islamic studies, tailored toward training students capable of addressing the needs of contemporary societies.

Shaykh Arif was educated at the Madrassah Syed al-Khoei, London from 1985 and graduated with Honours in 1988 where he also taught Grammar, Logic, Islamic Law and *Usul al-Fiqh*. He then furthered his studies in the Islamic Seminary in Qum, carrying out traditional Post-Graduate Islamic studies between 1989-93. Alongside these studies, he also taught in Qum across a wide spectrum of the traditional Muslim scholarly disciplines. On his return to the U.K., after founding the Al-Mahdi Institute, he continued his graduate (*kharij*) training in *Usul al-Fiqh* and *Fiqh* from 1994 until 2008 under Ayatullah H. Amini.