

Ibn Qayyim Al-Jawziyyah and Allameh Tabataba'i on Immortality in Hell

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Abstract

The Immortality of the people of hell and their eternal torment is one of the most important and complex debates, preoccupying religious scholars of different religions and sects. Each of them has taken a different way based on their intellectual principles of belief to solve this problem and the questions thereof, including how the immortality of the inhabitants of hell hellions and their eternal torment is consistent with the mercy and justice of God. How is it reasonable to endure infinite torment for limited and finite sins? Does a Merciful God, born a sinful slave forever in the fire of the hereafter? Or is this not the case and He punishes the sinful people for a limited period of time, whether it is short or long, and then releases them from torture and provides them with comfort.

There is a difference of opinions on these problems in the works of Ibn Qayyim Al-Jawziyyah Al-Asfari and Allameh Tabataba'i, the Shiite philosopher and commentator. Ibn Qayyim addresses widely and systematically the issue of the immortality of the inhabitants of hell. In fact, he interprets immortality (*khulūd*) as a long time, so that the long fire and scourge annihilate the evil from the souls that evil has mixed in their being. In his viewpoint God has created human monotheist. If the monotheistic nature of the person is changed by vices, these vices and the corrupted nature can be changed by torment and fire. He quotes in his works the ideas of the believers in immortality in torment and criticizes and rebuts them. Stating so many arguments, Ibn Qayyim Al-Jawziyya tries to deny the immortality and eternity in torment. Interpreting the verses of The Holy Quran on immortality of the inhabitants of hell in torment, Allameh Tabataba'i strongly asserts the immortality principle. He relates the happiness and misery, and good and evil among human beings to the development and appearance of the carnal states and habits they gained in the earthly world. He asserts that if disbelief and polytheism reside and take hold over the soul, they result in perpetual torment. Nevertheless, he insists that everlasting torment is destined for the infidels (*kuffār*) only. He states that immortality in hell has explicit text (*naṣṣ*) in The Holy Quran and believes that not all religious canons and characteristics of the resurrection can be proved by rational arguments. Because the intellect has no access to these characteristics and details, the unique way to understand and prove them is to confirm what the honest Prophet has said.

Ibn Qayyim Al-Jawziyya and Allameh Tabataba'i have provided arguments in explaining the problem of immortality based on their own school and principles of thinking which are different in method and content. However Ibn Qayyim is an Ash'ari theologian, he has a mystical and philosophical approach concerning the explanation of the non-immortality of torment. He has presented twenty five reasons in his book *Hādī Al-Arwāḥ Ilā Bilād Al-*

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Arwāḥ. In this paper the authors will only focus on his philosophical arguments. Among his arguments are an argument based on God's Divine Names and Attributes, an argument based on Wisdom (*hikmah*) and public benefit (*maṣlaḥah*), an argument based on the antecedence of God's Mercy to His Anger, an argument based on human nature (*fiṭrah*), and an argument based on the theory that there is less evil than good in the world. Whereas Allameh Tabataba'i is a famous philosopher he did not present any philosophical argument to prove immortality. Besides his explanation of *khulūd*, he answers the objections to his point of view. One of the objections, for instance, is that infidelity and polytheism lead to one of two possible cases:

a. It may bring a person out of his human nature and transform his/her soul to another species; In this case the person gains a fire nature as a result of infidelity and sin and therefore does not suffer from the fiery devil forms go out from him/her and even enjoys them.

b. The original nature may remain but infidelity is a curtain and constraint (*qāsir*) that does not let the heavenly forms go out of original nature; In this case one can deduce non-immortality in hell according to the philosophical principle "constraint is not permanent."

Allameh replies that in the first case the fiery devil forms that go out of the soul can be perfection in one aspect and can even be consistent and enjoyable. But when truth is revealed in the hereafter and he becomes aware of the harm and consequences of his sins, it will be a great torment for the soul. He will be exactly like an addict who has enjoyed a drug in ignorance but when he becomes aware of the harms, the same joy becomes pain for him. In the second case Allameh agrees that the torment will not be permanent.

In explaining the problem of evil both scholars consider evil unrelated to God and believe that God did not predestine torment and torture for His revenge but each scholar has a different explanation. For Ibn Qayyim torment and torture is Divine Action and the essence of evil in hell is not the creation's purpose and aim in itself but is an object that is foreordained for a desirable result that is heaven. Allameh Tabataba'i, however, believes in the embodiment (*tajassum*) of human actions in life in the hereafter and considers the torments as the result of the actions of sinful people, not the result of the actions of God.

Keywords: Ibn Qayyim Al-Jawziyyah, Allameh Tabataba'i, immortality, hell, torment, psychical properties

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