

1.5

Predestination

■ Predestination in Islam

There are different ideas about **predestination** in Islam. Some Sunni Muslims believe that God has already determined everything that will happen in the universe. He has written down everything that will happen in a 'book of decrees'. God creates all things, including the actions of his creatures, so they must act according to his will.

“Only what God has decreed will happen to us. He is our Master: let the believers put their trust in God.” Qur'an 9:51

This is linked to the Sunni belief in the supremacy of God's will. Some Sunni Muslims believe that because God's will is so powerful, he can determine everything that is going to happen. This view places greater emphasis on God's omniscience and less emphasis on human freedom, but it does not mean that people have no choice about how they behave.

■ Human freedom

Many Shi'a Muslims believe that God *knows* everything that is going to happen, but this does not mean that he *decides* what is going to happen. This means that people still have free will, so they can make their own choices.

Here is one way to think about it: a mother of a little boy knows her child very well, and knows in advance what he is going to do. If he is given a choice between a bowl of peas and an ice cream, she is very sure he will choose the ice cream. That's not to say the boy was forced to eat the ice cream – it was his choice. Another time he might be offered peas or spinach, and he might choose the peas then if he likes them better. Just because a mother might be able to predict what will happen does not mean the boy is not being given a real choice.

Or imagine you have travelled in time 100 years into the future. You spend some time observing what people are doing and writing down their actions. You take this written record back with you to the present year. Does this mean that the people you observed 100 years in the future suddenly have no free choice? No; those people are still deciding for themselves what they want to do – you just happen to have been able to see in advance what they are going to decide.

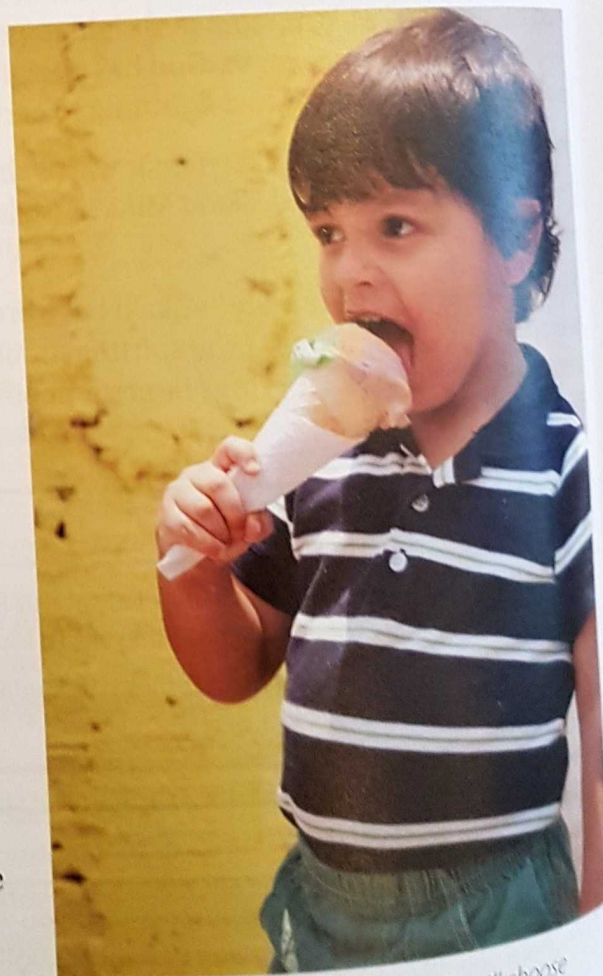
Another way to think about it is this: God is the creator of time so is not bound by it. For God there is no past, present and future – for him it is as if everything has already happened. Human events happen in time due to cause and effect or

Objectives

- Understand Muslim beliefs about predestination and human freedom.
- Know how these beliefs relate to the Day of Judgement.

Key term

- **predestination:** the idea that God knows or determines everything that will happen in the universe



▲ A mother knows what her child will choose

human free w
not see any c
freedom to a

“ God d
unless the

■ The D

We will lea
pages. Mus
humans ac
Many Mus
themselves
for the ch
though G
responsib
of them.

▲ Mus
including

Act

- 1 Ex
- 2 'P
st
M

Summary

human free will, but God is outside time. Therefore many Muslims do not see any conflict between the supremacy of God's will, and human freedom to act freely and make choices.

“ God does not change the condition of a people [for the worse] unless they change what is in themselves. ”

Qur'an 13:11

■ The Day of Judgement

We will learn more about the Day of Judgement in the next two pages. Muslims believe that on the Day of Judgement, God will judge humans according to everything they have done throughout their lives. Many Muslims believe that as God has given humans free will, they themselves are responsible for whether God rewards or punishes them for the choices they have made. This emphasises the point that even though God knows everything that is going to happen, people are still responsible for their actions and will be rewarded or punished because of them.



▲ Muslims believe that God will judge them on the choices they make in their lives, including how well they follow their faith

Activities

- 1 Explain the Muslim idea of predestination.
- 2 'Predestination means that humans have no freedom.' Evaluate this statement. Be sure to include more than one point of view, and refer to Muslim beliefs and teachings in your answer.

Summary

You should now understand what Muslims believe about predestination and human freedom, and how this affects what happens on the Day of Judgement.

Links

To read more about the supremacy of God's will see page 8–9.

“ Those who believe, do good deeds, keep up the prayer, and pay the prescribed alms will have their reward with their Lord. ”

Qur'an 2:277

★ Study tip

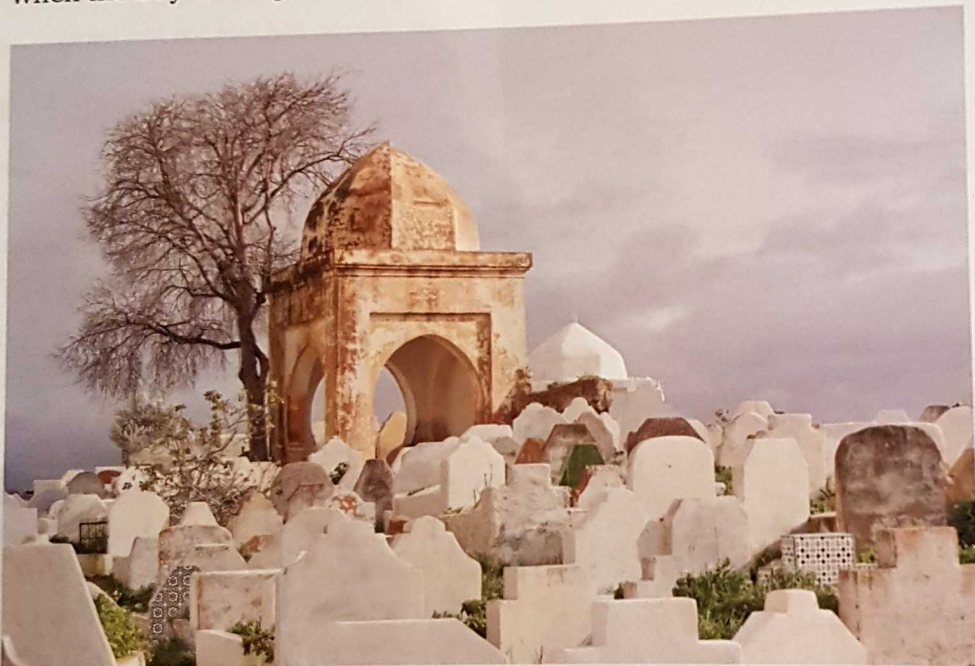
Take care not to confuse the Muslim belief in predestination with the idea that people have already been chosen to go to heaven or hell regardless of their behaviour.

Life after death

All religions believe that there will be a time of perfect peace and happiness that can be reached by living a good life on earth. For Muslims, death is not the end but the beginning of a new stage of life called **Akhirah**.

Many Muslims believe that after death the person still has a conscious existence in the grave. Here they will enter a state of waiting called 'barzakh', which means 'a barrier': no one can cross the barrier to amend things they have done wrong or warn the living. They are waiting for the Day of Judgement.

Muslims believe that as they lie in the grave, God sends two angels to question them about their faith. If people answer correctly, they will see the rewards to come, but if they deny God, they will see the punishments they will have to endure. Some believe the punishments start right away. Others think that people sleep in their graves until the end of the world when the Day of Judgement will come.



▲ Muslims believe they are questioned by angels while lying in the grave

The Day of Judgement and resurrection

Muslims believe that a day will come when God's purpose for the universe has been fulfilled. Only God knows when that will be. On this day the angel Israfil will blow a trumpet to announce that the world will be destroyed. The present world will be totally transformed into a new world (Akhirah) and then the angel Israfil will blow the trumpet again. Everyone who has ever lived will be raised from the dead (**resurrection**) and judged by God.

People will be given new bodies and the book of their life will be handed to them to read out. Just as human DNA is a sort of 'book' that dictates how the body develops, the book of deeds dictates how one lives in the

Objectives

- Consider Muslim beliefs about life after death.
- Understand the importance of human responsibility and accountability for Muslims.

Key terms

- **Akhirah**: everlasting life after death
- **resurrection**: rising from the dead or returning to life
- **heaven**: the state of eternal happiness in the presence of God; also called paradise
- **hell**: the state of total separation from God

Discussion activity

In small groups discuss what you think happens after death. Share your ideas with the class.

Activities

- 1 Explain what is meant by Akhirah.
- 2 Describe what happens after a person's death, according to Muslims.
- 3 Can God be both merciful and a judge who punishes? Explain your opinion.
- 4 'If there is no life after death, there is no point in living a good life.' Evaluate this statement. Be sure to include more than one point of view, and refer to Muslim beliefs and teachings in your answer.

afterlife. If people are given it in their right hand they will go to **heaven**; if they receive it in their left hand they will go to **hell**.

On this day everyone will be faced with their good and bad deeds and realise what they have done. If they are believers who have shown sorrow for their failings, God will forgive them. God sorts the souls by making them cross the narrow 'Sirat Bridge' that spans the fires of hell. Good people are transported across the bridge quickly and enter heaven.

■ Heaven and hell

Heaven is described in the Qur'an as gardens of happiness (Qur'an 22:23). It is the reward for faith and good deeds.



▲ Paradise is often imagined as a beautiful garden

“ On couches of well-woven cloth they will sit facing each other; everlasting youths will go round among them with glasses, flagons, and cups of a pure drink that causes no headache or intoxication; [there will be] any fruit they choose; the meat of any bird they like; and beautiful-eyed maidens like hidden pearls: **a reward for what they used to do.** ”

Qur'an 56:15–24

The Qur'an describes hell as a place of fire and great torment. It is the punishment for those who reject God and do evil.

“ They will dwell amid scorching wind and scalding water in the shadow of black smoke, neither cool nor refreshing. ”

Qur'an 56:42–44

Muslims accept God's word in the Qur'an but have different interpretations of these verses. Some think they are exactly what heaven and hell are like. Others think they are just hints or suggestions because heaven and hell are beyond human understanding. Others think they are symbolic of the spiritual life a person will live after their death, either in the presence or absence of God.

■ The importance of belief in life after death

Belief in life after death is one of the six articles of faith for Sunni Muslims and one of the five roots of 'Usul ad-Din in Shi'a Islam. It is an important belief because it encourages human responsibility and accountability: the idea that people must be responsible for their own actions as they will be held accountable for them by God.

Belief in life after death urges people to avoid sin and do the right thing. It also satisfies a deep human need for justice. Sometimes it seems that some people get away with almost anything in life; the belief in God's judgement means that one day they will be held accountable and punished for their wrongdoing. For those good people who have suffered in life, there is something better to look forward to.

“ Garments of fire will be tailored for those who disbelieve; scalding water will be poured over their heads, melting their insides as well as their skins; there will be iron crooks to restrain them; whenever, in their anguish, they try to escape, they will be pushed back in and told, 'Taste the suffering of the fire.' ”

Qur'an 22:19–22

★ Study tip

You should know Muslim beliefs about life after death but also be able to explain (with reasons) your own viewpoint.

Summary

You should now understand Muslim beliefs about life after death (Akhirah) and their impact on the lives of believers.