Editorial

Where Do Deceased Children Go? A Spiritual View

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Death, which means the end of life, is the loss of the material source of life by the separation of the soul from the body. Every living thing that comes to earth will surely die. For thousands of years from the first man and the Prophet Adam (Aleyhisselam), children have been dying for various reasons in different geographies of the world and despite the great advances and developments in modern medicine, child deaths will continue until the apocalypse. According to data of the World Health Organization, an estimated 5.2 million children under 5 years died mostly from preventable and treatable causes and an additional 500,000 older children (5–9 years) died in 2019.1

The death of children is sad and painful for their parents, siblings, and close relatives, and it causes psychological, sociological, and spiritual distress for almost all parents in all cultures and societies in the world. Frei-Landau et al2 examined divine struggle following child loss in Israeli bereaved Modern-Orthodox parents. Their analysis showed three types of divine struggle including explicit, implicit/silenced, and none. The findings differentiated by four categories: core emotional experience, response type, significance of faith in the coping process, and the impact of grief-induced divine struggle on parent–Allah relationship.2 In another study, Golden and Abel3 noted that many parents who experienced the death of children relied heavily on religion to help make sense of the tragedies medicine could not prevent.3 Furthermore, most parents wonder about their fate after their child’s death. Herein, we have presented the position of children after death from Islamic perspective to attract the attention to deceased children’ spiritual worlds.

There are many ayats of the Holy Quran and hadiths about destiny of children of believers and unbelievers as follows: When the Messenger of Allah (Salla Allahu Alayhi Wa Sallam [SAW]) saw in a dream a garden wherein there is a man surrounded by many children, the man was the Prophet Ibrahim (Aleyhisselam), and children are all children who die before the age of puberty. Commenting on this, the Companions inquired, “Including the children of polytheists?” and the Prophet Muhammad (SAW) replied, “Yes, including the children of polytheists.”4 Those who died and were devastated as a result of the heavenly calamity and murder of the cruel part of the human being are judged martyrs regardless of their religion, if they are up to the age of 15. Their great spiritual reward, like Muslims, makes that calamity look nothing.5 Dead small children are the fowls of paradise. If one of them meets his father (or his parents), the child would take hold of his cloth (or with his hand). And the child would not take off his hand from it until Allah causes his father to enter paradise.6 The Prophet Muhammad (SAW) said: When a child of the slave (of Allah) died, Allah says to the angels: “Have you taken the fruits of his work.” They reply: “Yes.” So, He says: “What did My slave say?” They reply: “He praised you and mentioned that to You is the return.” So, Allah says: “Build a house in paradise for My slave, and name it ‘the house of praise’.”7 Allah, the Most Merciful of the Merciful, will return children who die before reaching the age of 15 years, that is, the age of puberty, once more to the embrace of their fathers and mothers, in a manner appropriate to paradise. They will be most beautifully adorned and lovable, in the form of the children of paradise, who are known as immortal youths.8–10 In our daily practice, we have observed that many parents who lost a child find spiritual relief and peace and consolation because they believe in the above-mentioned Islamic teachings.

In conclusion, we would like to stress that (a) religious coping is frequently used by bereaved parents who had a deceased child in many cultures in the world; (b) based on the Islamic teachings, all deceased children would be in paradise regardless of their parents’ belief and religion; and (c) health-care providers caring for bereaved parents

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who had a dead young child should be aware of the formal Islamic teachings and perspectives about deceased children.

Conflict of Interest
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