

# Paradise (part 1 of 2)

**Description:** A two-part lesson providing a glimpse of Paradise and what it holds for the believer with reference to the Quran and the sayings of Prophet Muhammad, may the mercy and blessings of Allah be upon him. Part 1: Definition and types of happiness and the desire of Paradise as a significant factor in motivating a Muslim's behavior and sense of happiness.

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## Objectives

- To learn the definition and types of happiness.
- To realize that the desire for Paradise is a significant factor in motivating a Muslim to do good deeds.
- To become familiar by means of a modest prelude, the nature of the gardens of Paradise.

## Arabic Terms

- *Sunnah* - The word *Sunnah* has several meanings depending on the area of study however the meaning is generally accepted to be, whatever was reported that the Prophet said, did, or approved.

What drives us? What makes us do the things we do? What makes us happy?

Many people will answer maximizing pleasure and minimizing pain is the ultimate key to human happiness.

If so, how come people can be happy while in pain and unhappy while experiencing pleasure? If pleasure is not the only motivating force that drives us, what does? What desires must we fulfill to live a happy life?

For most of those who see happiness in the carnal, rather than the spiritual, it is pretty basic: desire to avoid pain and anxiety, desire to spend time with relatives, desire to eat, desire for sexual gratification, desire for companionship, and desire for recognition to name a few.

Life for such can be toilsome, provoking the plain query; what is it really aiming for? In their quest for happiness, all too often people fall short of achieving any kind of inner peace. We think that by always reaching higher and accomplishing more - more money, a better body, the perfect mate - we will automatically be happy. That is an illusion. People get caught up in chasing the materialistic dream under the illusion money can buy

happiness until they discover the limits of materialism. Impressing the neighbors and envy of possessions leaves us devoid of passion and depth in our lives, leading to the Modern Man's Paradox: Spiritual hunger in an age of plenty.

What is the paradox? Simply put, it is this: As members of certain materialistic societies have grown richer, they have grown less content with their lives. No society in the history of the world has ever enjoyed the standard of living known today in these societies: Incomes are up, prices are stable, unemployment is down, life expectancy is rising; they enjoy more freedom and opportunity than ever before. Even their poor live well by world standards. Yet in America, for example, since 1960, the divorce rate has doubled, teen suicide has tripled, violent crime has quadrupled, the prison population has quintupled, and some estimates put the incidence of depression in the year 2000 at ten times what it was in the year 1900. Americans are less happy today than they were 40 years ago, despite the fact that they make 2.5 times as much money. Our bellies may be filled, but we are left spiritually hungry.

To find out what really drives human behavior, two kinds of happiness must be distinguished: feel-good happiness and value-based happiness. Feel-good happiness is sensation-based pleasure. When we joke around or eat our favorite food, we experience feel-good happiness. This type of happiness rarely lasts longer than a few hours at a time.

Value-based happiness is a sense that our lives have meaning and fulfill the larger purpose of our existence by connecting us to Allah. It represents a spiritual source of satisfaction, stemming from our deeper purpose and values. Living a God-conscious life rooted in the values of the Quran and *Sunnah*, a Muslim is driven - beyond sensual pleasures - by the desire to make it to Paradise and to be safe from Hell after death.

Islamic values that take a person towards Paradise and away from Hell are the most significant factors in motivating a Muslim's behavior and in contributing to his or her sense of happiness. The desire to achieve Paradise in the afterlife puts the meaning back into life, superseding all other desires, to bring a sense of direction. An empty lifestyle focused on wealth, possessions, drugs, alcohol, and sex is replaced with the hope of making it to Paradise, a sense of connection with God's creation, and a life of devotion to Allah instead of wealth and possessions. A person is focused on pleasing Allah even at the cost of our fellow human beings' disapproval. One must remember that the jewel of Paradise is veiled by hardships.

To be happy, wake up from materialistic dreams and realize that nothing save Allah alone is capable of satisfying man!

Ultimate satisfaction will be in reaching our ultimate goal - Paradise, not in this world, where we are like travelers and strangers. Paradise is not God's residence, or a spiritual state where one becomes a part of God, as some mistakenly think. Paradise is a spiritual and sensual residence of pleasure in which all one's senses will be gratified to the fullest. It is an abode of manifold enjoyments for the faithful, its dwellers will not feel the least pain or sadness. A place where every aspiration will be finally realized.

# Islamic Gardens

*Jannah* (a beautiful garden) has historically inspired beauty, something which can be clearly seen in the beautiful gardens which were present throughout the Muslim world, such as those in Persia, Spain, and India, typically designed as a sort of escape or peaceful seclusion from the outside world. Waterworks and fountains were a common inclusion in Muslim gardens for their free flowing beauty and soothing sound. Artificial decorative elements were used in Muslim gardens as well, including the making of carpet-like parterres, and artificial trees and flowers made of precious metals and gemstones.

For generations of Muslims, these gardens represented a kind of sacred art, the aim of which was to draw the visitor closer to God. Today, the Muslim gardens on earth are like shadows of the true Paradise. These gardens serve as reminders to mankind of the heavenly abode to which the righteous will return.

Shade is provided by canopies and pavilions. Emphasis is placed on creating a space that indulges all the senses. Fragrance is a common feature of Muslim gardens, and herbs were potted up to fulfill this role. The decking provides a space for teaching and relaxing. Muslim gardens never contain statues, carved stone fountains with figures, or representational sculptures. Islam does not allow the use of such images. Some Muslim gardens are so famed for their beauty that people come from far and wide to enjoy their tranquility. Among them are the Alhambra Palace garden in Granada, Spain, the Jag Mandir Palace garden in India and the Major Elle residence garden in Marrakech, Morocco.

The lush gardens created by Muslims are man-made inspirations for an earthly Paradise. A secret haven secluded from the outside world; a place of tranquility, meditation, reflection, and prayer. A modest prelude for what it is to come for believers in the Hereafter.

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