

THE SPIRITUAL SIGNIFICANCE OF BARZAKH IN THE QUR'AN: AN ANALYSIS OF QURAISH SHIHAB'S THOUGHT

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Abstract

This study explores the concept of Barzakh in the Qur'an, focusing on Surah Al-Mu'minun verses 99-100 and 46. The research aims to understand the differences between the grave and Barzakh, whether humans sleep or are punished in barzakh, and the spiritual implications of these concepts. The novelty of this study lies in addressing the spiritual purpose of Barzakh as a 'checkpoint,' a topic not yet comprehensively examined in scholarly journals. Although Quraish Shihab has extensively discussed this in various YouTube content, it has not been systematically analyzed in academic literature. This study is a library research project employing a qualitative approach. The methodology involves descriptive analysis and content analysis of Quraish Shihab's interpretations, particularly his exegesis in Tafsir Al-Misbah. The findings conclude that Barzakh is a waiting realm (checkpoint) where rewards or sins from the world continue to affect the deceased. The spiritual significance of Barzakh underscores the importance of one's life record, encouraging the increase of good deeds and the avoidance of sinful deeds.

Keywords: *Barzakh, Spiritual, Qur'an, Quraish Shihab*

Abstrak

Studi ini mengeksplorasi konsep alam barzakh dalam Al-Qur'an, dengan fokus pada Surat Al-Mukminun ayat 99-100 dan 46. Tujuan penelitian adalah untuk memahami perbedaan antara alam kubur dan barzakh, di barzakh manusia tidur atau disiksa, serta implikasi spiritual dari konsep-konsep tersebut. Posisi tulisan ini dari penelitian yang sudah ada (noveltnya) adalah untuk menjawab tujuan spiritual diciptakannya alam barzakh sebagai 'checkpoint' yang belum dikaji secara koherensif di jurnal ilmiah. Padahal, sudah banyak Quraish Shihab membahas hal tersebut dalam berbagai konten youtube. Artikel ini tergolong dalam penelitian pustaka dengan pendekatan kualitatif. Metodologi yang digunakan adalah studi analisis deskriptif dan studi konten terhadap pemikiran Quraish Shihab khususnya tafsir Al-Misbah. Hasil penelitian menyimpulkan bahwa alam barzakh adalah alam tunggu (checkpoint) terhadap kiriman pahala atau dosa di dunia walaupun manusia tersebut sudah meninggal dunia. Adapun makna spiritual dari alam barzakh menekankan pentingnya rekam jejak hidup manusia di dunia, mendorong peningkatan amal jariyah dan menghindari dosa jariyah.

Kata Kunci: *Barzakh, Spiritual, Al-Qur'an, Quraish Shihab*

Introduction

Barzakh is a significant concept in Islamic teachings that connects the worldly life with the afterlife. The term 'barzakh' means barrier or partition, which, in a theological context, refers to the realm of waiting between death and the Day of Resurrection. In the Qur'an, this concept is outlined to provide an understanding of the state after death, where souls await final judgment by Allah Swt.¹ Barzakh represents an essential phase, indicating that death is not the end of human existence but the beginning of a new journey towards eternal life.

The interpretation of barzakh has been a subject of extensive study by many Islamic scholars and intellectuals, including M. Quraish Shihab, a prominent Indonesian scholar. Through his works, Quraish Shihab provides a comprehensive and profound understanding of this concept, linking it to spiritual lessons that can be applied to human life. Ideally, a deep understanding of Barzakh should enhance spiritual awareness, strengthen faith, and motivate Muslims to perform good deeds and avoid sins.²

However, in reality, there is a significant gap between the ideal understanding of barzakh and the actual comprehension of concepts such as the difference between Barzakh and the grave, the spiritual significance of barzakh, and whether humans are

¹ Khairil Anwar, "Kematian Dan Alam Barzakh Dalam Syair Fatwa Kiamat (Telaah Terhadap Naskah Islam Klasik Di Barito, Kalimantan Tengah)," *Jurnal Studi Agama Dan Masyarakat* 1, no. 1 (2007): 1–16, <http://digilib.iain-palangkaraya.ac.id/1395/>.

² Muhammad Quraish Shihab, "Maut: Perjalanan Menuju Keabadian," *Jurnal Bimas Islam* 4, no. 2 (2011): 203–2012, <https://jurnalbimasislam.kemenag.go.id/jbi/article/view/760>.

punished or sleep in barzakh. These determinations are referenced differently in the Qur'an; on one hand, the Qur'an indicates that humans receive either blessings or punishment in Barzakh, while on the other hand, it mentions that humans complain about being awakened from a long sleep. These discrepancies are the focus of the author's research, particularly how the interpretations and analyses of Quraish Shihab are utilized as analytical tools to address these research questions.

The study of barzakh and Quraish Shihab's thoughts is not a recent research topic; several researchers have examined and published on it. Nurhadi, in his work on barzakh, narrates effectively how the description of barzakh is based on mutawatur hadiths.³ In that work, 18 hadiths are mentioned that narrate about punishment in the realm of barzakh. This inspires readers that the existence of barzakh is clear and does not need further debate. However, the focus of the work is solely on mapping out barzakh based on prophetic hadiths, without delving into the spiritual significance of barzakh as presented by the author. Meanwhile, Irfan, in his work on eschatology from Quraish Shihab's perspective, extensively elaborates on life after death. He covers topics ranging from the separation of the soul and body, the grave, barzakh, the field of resurrection (*yaumul mahsyar*), and other realms, all the way to Heaven and Hell.⁴ While Irfan does discuss aspects of the realm of barzakh, his emphasis on the spiritual significance and urgency of barzakh is not deeply explored.

In his journal article, Juwaini has also researched the realm of barzakh, considering it as one of the stages in the journey of human creation as described in the Qur'an.⁵ Although both discuss barzakh, Juwaini's work focuses more on the philosophical perspective of barzakh, unlike the author's study which centers on barzakh in the thought of Quraish Shihab. Several publications mentioned above are the closest research works to the theme and title of the author. Based on this literature review, after exploring dozens of similar works, the author's analysis suggests that no single work specifically and cohesively addresses the spiritual meaning of barzakh from Quraish Shihab's perspective. This indicates that this paper possesses originality and novelty in its approach.

The issues addressed in this research are crucial and require definitive answers. Particularly, the academic concern regarding the spiritual urgency of barzakh is significant. Additionally, the controversy surrounding the punishment in the grave is pertinent: whether humans in the grave experience punishment or simply sleep until the Day of Resurrection. Furthermore, there is a perception issue regarding the similarity or difference between barzakh and the grave. Based on the literature review

³ N. Nurhadi, "Siksa Alam Barzah Menurut Hadis Nabi Muhammad Saw (Study Naskah Kitab Shahih Muslim)," *Jurnal Penelitian Medan Agama* 11, no. 1 (June 17, 2020): 49–79, <https://doi.org/10.58836/jpma.v11i1.8632>.

⁴ Mohamad Irfan, "Eskatologi Islam Dalam Perspektif Tafsir Al-Mishbah," Skripsi (UIN SATU Tulungagung, August 5, 2023), <http://repo.uinsatu.ac.id/38528/>.

⁵ Juwaini Juwaini, "The Process of Human Creation in The Qur'an (an Islamic Philosophy Study)," *Jurnal Ilmiah Al-Mu'ashirah: Media Kajian Al-Qur'an Dan Al-Hadits Multi Perspektif* 21, no. 1 (February 28, 2024): 16–31, <https://doi.org/10.22373/jim.v21i1.20912>.

conducted, it has not been widely published in various academic studies that these issues are important to address. Specifically, the meaning of barzakh as a '*checkpoint*' is crucial because it signifies that the record of deeds, both good and bad, continues to be open even after a person has left the world.

This article is classified as a literature review using a qualitative approach. The methodology employed includes descriptive analysis and content analysis of Quranic verses. The primary sources for this research are the Quran itself and Tafsir Al-Misbah by Quraish Shihab. Secondary sources include scholarly journals or other academic research on Quraish Shihab, spirituality, barzakh, eschatology, among others. Supplementary sources include additional data such as YouTube content, where Quraish Shihab frequently discusses barzakh.

The discussion section below will explore the spiritual meaning of barzakh inductively (from general to specific). The inductive approach will follow a thematic format, beginning with a description of spirituality in Islam, spiritual verses in the Quran, barzakh in the Quran, the urgency of barzakh, and finally a narrative on the spiritual significance of barzakh.

Spirituality in Islam

Spirituality in general is a concept that refers to the search for deeper meaning and purpose in life, transcending the material and physical aspects of daily existence. It is often associated with profound inner experiences, a sense of connection to something greater than oneself, and the pursuit of values that provide true meaning in life. Spirituality can encompass a wide range of practices and beliefs, which are not necessarily tied to formal religion.⁶ For some, spirituality involves finding inner peace, harmony, and balance through meditation, reflection, or connection with nature. For others, it may mean following specific teachings that provide moral and ethical guidance.

In general, spirituality involves the search for meaning and purpose in life, connection with oneself, others, nature, and possibly with entities or forces greater than oneself, such as God or the universe. Many associate spirituality with transcendent experiences that go beyond ordinary physical and mental limitations, such as feelings of ecstasy, heightened awareness, or a sense of unity with the universe.⁷ Additionally, spirituality often entails continuous efforts to develop positive inner qualities, such as compassion, wisdom, and peace.

In the context of Islam, spirituality is known as *tasawwuf* or Sufism, which focuses on developing a deeper and more intimate relationship with Allah. Islamic spirituality emphasizes the search for meaning and purpose in life through profound

⁶ Ahmad Muttaqin, "Islam and the Changing Meaning of Spiritualitas and Spiritual in Contemporary Indonesia," *Al-Jami'ah: Journal of Islamic Studies* 50, no. 1 (June 26, 2012): 23–56, <https://doi.org/10.14421/ajis.2012.501.23-56>.

⁷ M. Nasir Agustawan, "Spiritualisme Dalam Islam," *Jurnal Ilmiah Hukum Dan Keadilan* 4, no. 2 (September 5, 2017): 88–106, <https://doi.org/10.59635/jihk.v4i2.110>.

understanding of the Quran, Sunnah, and teachings of Prophet Muhammad (Saw). At the core of Islamic spirituality is belief in the Oneness of Allah (*tawhid*). Everything in the universe is considered a manifestation of Allah's will and power, and spiritual seeking aims to deepen understanding and closeness to Him.⁸ Acts of worship such as prayer (*salat*), fasting (*sawm*), charity (*zakat*), and pilgrimage (*hajj*) are ways to draw nearer to Allah and strengthen spiritual awareness. Worship is not merely a ritual obligation, but a means to purify the soul and attain inner peace.

Purification of the soul (*tazkiyah an-nafs*) is a crucial process in Islamic spirituality, where a Muslim strives to cleanse oneself from negative traits such as arrogance, jealousy, and hatred, while cultivating noble qualities such as honesty, patience, and compassion. Dhikr, or remembrance of Allah, is a highly encouraged practice in Islam to keep the heart connected with Allah, which can be done through specific recitations, prayers, or deep reflection on Allah's greatness.⁹ Sincerity (*ikhlas*) in all actions is a key element in Islamic spirituality, where every deed should be done with pure intention to seek Allah's pleasure, not for praise or worldly gain. Additionally, *tawakkul* or relying on Allah is an important attitude, with the belief that everything that happens is by His will and is best for His servants.

Spirituality in Islam is also often illustrated through the stories of Sufi saints, who are known for their profound spirituality and close relationship with Allah. These individuals emphasize the importance of introspection, meditation, and total devotion to Allah as paths to achieve inner peace and spiritual perfection. Overall, spirituality in Islam is about seeking closeness to Allah, purifying oneself, and living in accordance with the principles outlined in the Quran and Hadith.¹⁰ It encompasses devotion, sincerity, and complete submission to Allah's will, with the ultimate goal of attaining eternal happiness in the hereafter.

In the modern era, the challenges and complexities of life have intensified with the advancements in technology, globalization, and rapid social changes. Amidst these developments, many individuals experience a sense of emptiness and loss of meaning in life, even if they are materially well-off. In this context, spirituality becomes profoundly important as it offers a way to find inner peace, balance, and deeper meaning amidst the hustle and bustle of modern life.¹¹ For the Indonesian society, where the majority are Muslims, spirituality plays a crucial role in shaping the morals and ethics of individuals and communities alike. Islamic spiritual values such as

⁸ Surindi, "Konsep Spiritual Islam Untuk Meningkatkan Mutu Pelatihan," *Jurnal Honci* 4, no. 1 (December 17, 2022): 57–69.

⁹ Lita Fauzi Hanafani and Radea Yuli A. Hambali, "Hakikat Penyucian Jiwa (Tazkiyat An-Nafs) Dalam Perspektif Al-Ghazali," *Gunung Djati Conference Series* 19 (April 11, 2023): 530–40, <https://conferences.uinsgd.ac.id/index.php/gdcs/article/view/1329>.

¹⁰ Mohammad Rindu Fajar Islamy et al., "Spiritual Healing: A Study of Modern Sufi Reflexology Therapy in Indonesia," *Teosofi: Jurnal Tasawuf Dan Pemikiran Islam* 12, no. 2 (July 8, 2022): 209–31, <https://doi.org/10.15642/teosofi.2022.12.2.209-231>.

¹¹ Harisman Harisman and M. Iqbal Irham, "Neo-Sufisme: Corak Dan Model Spiritualitas Masyarakat Modern," *El-Afkar: Jurnal Pemikiran Keislaman Dan Tafsir Hadis* 12, no. 1 (April 17, 2023): 1–15, <https://doi.org/10.29300/jpkth.v12i1.3018>.

honesty, patience, sincerity, and generosity provide a strong foundation for leading a meaningful and ethical life. In Indonesia, where cultural and religious diversity are integral parts of daily life, spirituality can serve as a bridge connecting various societal groups, enhancing tolerance, and promoting social harmony.

In the modern context, the importance of spirituality is increasingly recognized in various aspects of life. In the field of health, for example, a spiritual approach can help alleviate stress, anxiety, and depression, which often arise as consequences of the pressures of modern life. Practices such as meditation, prayer, and dhikr (remembrance of God) can assist individuals in finding inner peace and emotional balance. This has been acknowledged in various studies showing that spirituality and religious practices can enhance both mental and physical health.¹²

In the field of education, incorporating spiritual values into the curriculum can help shape young generations who are not only intellectually competent but also emotionally and morally mature. Education that emphasizes spiritual values can assist students in developing more positive attitudes, such as respect, responsibility, and empathy, which are crucial in building a better and more harmonious society. In the workplace, spirituality can also play a significant role.¹³ With increasing demands and competition in the workplace, spiritual values can help individuals find meaning and satisfaction in their jobs. Principles such as honesty, integrity, and hard work, rooted in spiritual teachings, can contribute to creating a healthier and more productive work environment.

For Indonesian society, spirituality can also serve as a source of strength in facing various national challenges such as corruption, social injustice, and conflicts. By internalizing and applying spiritual values in daily life, people can contribute to the development of a more just, peaceful, and prosperous nation. Spirituality offers a way to overcome the alienation and fragmentation often encountered in modern life. Strengthening relationships with God, fellow human beings, and nature, spirituality helps create a sense of community and common purpose. In an increasingly individualistic society, spiritual values serve as reminders of the importance of care, cooperation, and solidarity.

Spiritual Verses

Essentially, the Quran extensively discusses spirituality. This includes spirituality whose impacts can be observed directly during worldly life, as well as spiritual dimensions that will be encountered in the Hereafter. Here are some examples of spiritual verses found in the Quran.

¹² Sandy Aji Suhada et al., "Konsep Spiritualisme Masyarakat Di Era Modernisasi Dalam Kehidupan Sosial-Beragama," *Gunung Djati Conference Series* 21 (March 24, 2023): 151–59.

¹³ Akhmad Faozi and Didik Himmawan, "Nilai-Nilai Pendidikan Spiritual Menurut Syekh Zainal Abidin Abdul Karim Al Husaini Dalam Kitab Al Barzanji," *Journal Islamic Pedagogia* 3, no. 1 (March 29, 2023): 90–97, <https://doi.org/10.31943/pedagogia.v3i1.93>.

No.	Surah and Ayah	Translation	Spiritual Meaning
1	Al-Baqarah (2:186)	<i>"And when My servants ask you concerning Me, indeed I am near. I respond to the invocation of the supplicant when he calls upon Me..."</i>	Illustrates Allah's closeness to His servants and the importance of prayer and obedience to attain truth.
2	Ar-Ra'd (13:28)	<i>"Those who have believed and whose hearts are assured by the remembrance of Allah. Unquestionably, by the remembrance of Allah hearts are assured."</i>	Emphasizes the importance of remembrance and meditation on Allah to find peace of heart and soul.
3	Az-Zumar (39:53)	<i>"Say, 'O My servants who have transgressed against themselves [by sinning], do not despair of the mercy of Allah. Indeed, Allah forgives all sins..."</i>	Conveys the message of Allah's boundless forgiveness and mercy, emphasizing the importance of not losing hope.
4	Al-Hadid (57:16)	<i>"Has the time not come for those who have believed that their hearts should become humbly submissive at the remembrance of Allah..."</i>	Calls believers to always humbly remember Allah and keep their hearts soft and receptive.
5	Al-'Ankabut (29:69)	<i>"And those who strive for Us - We will surely guide them to Our ways. And indeed, Allah is with the doers of good."</i>	Highlights the importance of striving and struggling for Allah's sake to achieve His pleasure and guidance.
6	Al-Furqan (25:63)	<i>"And the servants of the Most Merciful are those who walk upon the earth easily, and when the ignorant address them [harshly], they say [words of] peace."</i>	Describes the virtues of humility and gentleness in responding peacefully to ignorance.
7	Al-Mu'minun (23:1-2)	<i>"Certainly will the believers have succeeded: They who are during their prayer humbly submissive."</i>	Emphasizes the importance of humility and concentration in prayer as signs of

			success for believers.
8	At-Tawbah (9:51)	<i>"Say, 'Never will we be struck except by what Allah has decreed for us; He is our protector.' And upon Allah let the believers rely."</i>	Teaches reliance (tawakkul) on Allah's decree and protection, emphasizing trust in His plan.
9	Ash-Sharh (94:5-6)	<i>"For indeed, with hardship [will be] ease. Indeed, with hardship [will be] ease."</i>	Conveys the message that every hardship is followed by ease, providing hope and perseverance.
10	Al-An'am (6:162)	<i>"Say, 'Indeed, my prayer, my rites of sacrifice, my living and my dying are for Allah, Lord of the worlds.'"</i>	Affirms dedication to Allah in all aspects of life and death, emphasizing complete devotion to the Lord of the worlds.

Quraish Shihab provides a profound explanation of the first verse in the table above, Surah Al-Baqarah (2:186), highlighting the importance of prayer and faith in communicating with Allah. He teaches that this verse not only teaches that Allah is near to His servants who pray sincerely, but also conveys a message about the close relationship between prayer and obedience to Allah's will. According to Quraish Shihab, Allah not only listens to the prayers of His servants but also pays deep attention to their supplications. However, he emphasizes that this relationship is not just about asking and expecting, but also involves the obligation to obey Allah's commands and live in the truth as stated in the Qur'an. Strong conviction and steadfast faith are required for our prayers to be accepted by Allah.¹⁴

Furthermore, Quraish Shihab teaches that obedience to Allah and living life according to His teachings are key to deepening one's spiritual relationship with Him. In the context of this verse, he asserts that prayer is not merely a ritual but an expression of a personal and intimate relationship between humans and Allah, requiring sincerity, sincerity, and genuine obedience from a heart convinced of Allah's love and care. Quraish Shihab's perspective on this verse reflects his deep understanding of the essence of spirituality in Islam, where prayer serves not only as a request or desire but also as a means to strengthen the spiritual bond with the Creator. He encourages Muslims to draw closer to Allah through sincere prayer while steadfastly upholding the values of truth and obedience to Him in every aspect of life.

¹⁴ Ramli, Hamnah, and Hadari, "Konsep Doa Mustajab dalam Alquran: Analisis Surah al-Baqarah ayat 186 dalam Tafsir Al Mishbah," *Jurnal Ilmiah Al-Muttaqin* 9, no. 2 (February 15, 2024): 66–71, <https://doi.org/10.37567/al-muttaqin.v9i2.2624>.

Quraish Shihab provides a profound insight into the second verse in the table, Surah Ar-Ra'd (13:28), which emphasizes that inner peace and tranquility can be found through remembrance (zikr) and mindfulness of Allah. He teaches that remembrance of Allah is not merely a ritualistic activity but a key to calming the heart and achieving true inner peace. According to Quraish Shihab, this verse teaches that one's spiritual life is closely related to how often and sincerely they remember Allah in every circumstance. Remembrance of Allah not only strengthens the spiritual bond between the servant and the Creator but also brings significant psychological benefits in calming the mind and alleviating the restlessness of the soul.¹⁵

He emphasizes that awareness of Allah's presence in every aspect of life, as taught in this verse, provides a solid foundation for Muslims to attain true tranquility. By contemplating Allah's names, His attributes, and his abundant blessings, people can deepen their spiritual relationship with Him and find peace in facing life's trials. Quraish Shihab's perspective on this verse inspires Muslims to live remembrance (zikr) as an integral part of daily life, not just as a ritual of worship. He asserts that remembrance of Allah is not only an expression of gratitude and reverence but also a means to achieve inner peace, which is the primary goal in the pursuit of spirituality.

Regarding the verse in Surah Az-Zumar (39:53), which emphasizes Allah's boundless mercy and the importance of not despairing of His mercy, Quraish Shihab explains that Allah is the Most Forgiving and the Most Merciful, always ready to forgive the sins of His servants as long as they sincerely strive to improve themselves and do not give up on His grace. This verse illustrates to Muslims that although humans may commit mistakes and sins, Allah still offers His vast mercy and great forgiveness to anyone who sincerely repents and changes their behavior for the better.¹⁶ Quraish Shihab emphasizes that the awareness of Allah's abundant mercy and infinite generosity should be a source of hope and motivation for Muslims in their spiritual lives. His view reflects that in Islam, when someone shows sincere remorse and intention to improve, Allah is always ready to forgive and provide a new opportunity for His servant. He stresses that no sin is too great to be forgiven, as long as one adheres to the principle of sincere repentance and earnestness in seeking Allah's pleasure.

Regarding the verse in Surah Al-Hadid (57:16), which emphasizes the importance of humility in remembering Allah and following the truth revealed by Him, Quraish Shihab explains that this verse teaches that devotion in worship and adherence to Allah's teachings are key to keeping the heart soft and receptive to His guidance. According to Quraish Shihab, humility (khusyuk) is a deep state of the heart that reflects complete devotion and obedience to Allah. When a person worships with

¹⁵ Roziana Amalia and Faizah, "Urgensi Zikir Perspektif Al-Qur'an (Analisis Tafsir Al-Misbah)," *Jurnal Ilmu Al-Qur'an Dan Tafsir Nurul Islam Sumenep* 3, no. 2 (2018): 317–407, <https://ejournal.kopertais4.or.id/madura/index.php/alqorni/article/view/4493>.

¹⁶ Yuhaswita Yuhaswita, "Akal Dan Wahyu Dalam Pemikiran M. Quraish Shihab," *Jurnal Ilmiah Syi'ar* 17, no. 1 (February 20, 2017): 95–106, <https://doi.org/10.29300/syr.v17i1.909>.

humility, they are fully aware of Allah's presence and serve Him with utmost sincerity and respect. This involves not only the outward aspects of worship but also the profound inner dimension, where the heart and soul are entirely focused on Allah SWT.¹⁷

This verse also indicates that humility helps to keep the human heart sensitive to Allah's guidance and open to the positive influences of His revelation. By maintaining humility in worship, one can achieve a deeper closeness with Allah and strengthen their spiritual relationship. This reflects Quraish Shihab's approach, which emphasizes that worship is not just about performing rituals but about cultivating deep spiritual awareness and maintaining sensitivity to the moral and ethical values taught by Islam.

In Surah Al-'Ankabut (29:69), it is emphasized that those who strive to seek Allah's pleasure will be guided by Him. Quraish Shihab explains that this verse teaches the importance of jihad in attaining Allah's pleasure, both in personal efforts and in spreading goodness within society.¹⁸ In Surah Al-Furqan (25:63), humility and generosity are highlighted as the hallmarks of praiseworthy servants of Allah. Quraish Shihab elaborates that this verse instructs believers to maintain humility and kindness towards others, even when dealing with ignorant people. Regarding Surah Al-Mu'minun (23:1-2), the emphasis is on the importance of humility in worship, particularly in prayer. Quraish Shihab explains that this verse teaches that successful believers are those who are humble in their worship and obedient to Allah's commands.

Surah At-Tawbah (9:51) emphasizes the importance of trust in Allah and the belief that everything happens by His will. Quraish Shihab explains that this verse teaches that Allah's servants must relinquish all dependencies on anything other than Allah and fully trust in Him when facing life's trials. Surah Ash-Sharh (94:5-6) promises that every difficulty will be followed by ease. Quraish Shihab explains that this verse teaches that when people face trials or difficulties in life, they must remain patient and believe that Allah will provide ease afterward. Surah Al-An'am (6:162) underscores that all aspects of life and death, including worship, are solely for Allah. Quraish Shihab explains that this verse teaches that a Muslim should live with full awareness and dedication to Allah, without deviating from His path.¹⁹

¹⁷ Nashratun Hasanah, "Makna Khusyu', Khudu', Dan Tadarru' Dalam Al-Qur'an Dan Tafsir Al-Mishbah" (skripsi, UIN Sunan Kalijaga Yogyakarta, 2022), <https://digilib.uin-suka.ac.id/id/eprint/51186/>.

¹⁸ Husni Waladi, "Makna Jihad Pada Quran Surat Al-Hajj Ayat 78 Dalam Konteks Tafsir Dan Pemahaman Kontemporer," *SKULA: Jurnal Pendidikan Profesi Guru Madrasah* 3, no. 1 (August 1, 2023): 15–29.

¹⁹ Abd Basid and Abd Ghani, "Konsep Ketentruman Hidup Perspektif Quraish Shihab (Studi Surah Al-Insyirah Dalam Tafsir Al-Misbah)," *Syariat: Jurnal Studi Al-Qur'an Dan Hukum* 9, no. 1 (May 1, 2023): 13–22, <https://doi.org/10.32699/syariat.v9i1.4561>.

The Barzakh Realm in the Qur'an

The Barzakh Realm in Islam is the phase between this worldly life and the Hereafter. This concept describes the period after a person's death, where the soul enters a spiritual dimension separate from the physical world we know. In the Qur'an, although it does not explicitly detail the Barzakh Realm, there are verses that hint at the existence and experiences of the soul after death. The Barzakh is considered a place where the soul undergoes transformation and preparation before being resurrected for judgment on the Day of Resurrection.²⁰ It is a period where the soul experiences a state corresponding to their deeds in the world. For the righteous, they may experience peace and spiritual blessings, while for the sinful, they may undergo suffering or torment in accordance with their sins.

During this period, the soul may also undergo questioning in the grave, where they are asked about their faith and deeds. This is part of the soul's preparation for the final judgment in the Hereafter, where the ultimate decision about their fate will be made. The Barzakh Realm is also considered an opportunity for the soul to learn, grow, and perfect itself. It is a time where the deeds performed in the world have a direct impact on their existence after death. This concept reinforces the Islamic belief that life after death is not the end, but the beginning of an eternal life in the presence of Allah. Understanding the Barzakh gives Muslims a deeper insight into the meaning of life in this world and the importance of living with the awareness that one's actions have long-term consequences that determine one's fate in the Hereafter.²¹

It also teaches values such as piety, goodness, and patience in facing life's trials, because all of these will have an impact on the spiritual life in the Barzakh and in the Hereafter. Here are some examples of verses that discuss the Barzakh in the Qur'an;

حَتَّىٰ إِذَا جَاءَ أَحَدَهُمُ الْمَوْتُ قَالَ رَبِّ ارْجِعُونِ

لَعَلِّي أَعْمَلُ صَالِحًا فِيمَا تَرَكْتُ ۚ كَلَّا ۚ إِنَّمَا كَلِمَةٌ هُوَ قَائِلُهَا ۖ وَمِنْ وَرَائِهِمْ بَرْزَخٌ إِلَىٰ يَوْمِ يُبْعَثُونَ

Translation: “And when death comes to one of them, he says, 'My Lord, send me back that I may do righteousness in that which I left behind.' No! It is only a word he is saying; and behind them is a barrier (Barzakh) until the Day they are resurrected.” (QS. Al-Mu'minun 99-100)

These verses depict the moment of someone's death and what they will utter at that time. When someone faces death, they pray to Allah, pleading for a chance to return to this world so they can perform righteous deeds and rectify their life according to Allah's will. However, Allah explains that such requests are merely words spoken in

²⁰ Abdur Rohman, “Konsep Ayat-Ayat Eskatologi Perspektif Fazlur Rahman,” *AL-IFKAR: Jurnal Pengembangan Ilmu Keislaman* 16, no. 02 (September 30, 2021): 4–17.

²¹ Irfan, “Eskatologi Islam Dalam Perspektif Tafsir Al-Mishbah.”

the final moments before death. Allah asserts that there will be no second chance after death to return to this world and perform improvements or righteous deeds.²²

After that, Allah mentions the existence of "barzakh," which is the realm between this worldly life and the Hereafter. Barzakh is the phase between these two lives where human souls reside after death and before being resurrected for judgment on the Day of Resurrection. During the barzakh phase, souls experience different states depending on their deeds performed during their worldly life. The righteous may experience peace and pleasure, while the wicked may face torment or suffering corresponding to their actions.²³ These verses indicate that life in this world is a limited opportunity for humans to do good and be obedient to Allah. Those who make good use of this opportunity will receive good rewards in the Hereafter, whereas those who neglect it or commit sins will face appropriate consequences in Barzakh and on the Day of Judgment.

وَهُوَ الَّذِي مَرَجَ الْبَحْرَيْنِ هَذَا عَذْبٌ فُرَاتٌ وَهَذَا مِلْحٌ أُجَاجٌ وَجَعَلَ بَيْنَهُمَا بَرْزَخًا وَحِجْرًا مَحْجُورًا

Translation: "And He it is who has let loose the two seas, this one sweet and pleasant, and that one salty and bitter; and He placed between them a barrier and a forbidding partition." (QS. Al-Furqan: 53)

The verse found in Surah Al-Furqan (25:53) depicts the greatness of Allah in creating two flowing seas side by side, yet with contrasting qualities: one sweet and fresh, while the other salty and bitter. Allah has placed between them a barrier (barzakh) to prevent them from mixing. This verse provides us with an understanding of Allah's diversity in creation within the universe. Each of His creations possesses unique qualities and purposes, all reflecting His boundless greatness and power. These two seas with their distinct characteristics serve as a metaphor for human life in this world, which is filled with diversity in every aspect.²⁴

Although this verse describes a natural phenomenon, Quranic commentators often interpret this 'barzakh' as an illustration of the barrier that humans will experience when they are within it. Quraish Shihab, in his commentary, explains that this barrier is like a partition where humans can see both ahead and behind it (on the other side), but they cannot pass through it; they can only observe what is displayed on the barrier. In this context, what is displayed includes the past (previous deeds) and the future (the consequences of deeds performed during life in the world).

النَّارُ يُعْرَضُونَ عَلَيْهَا غُدُوًّا وَعَشِيًّا وَيَوْمَ تَقُومُ السَّاعَةُ أَدْخِلُوا آلَ فِرْعَوْنَ أَشَدَّ الْعَذَابِ

²² Shihab, "Maut: Perjalanan Menuju Keabadian."

²³ Nurhadi, "Siksa Alam Barzah Menurut Hadis."

²⁴ Nur Rizka Aulia and Siti Amanah Nurul Hidayah, "Pembuktian Ayat-Ayat Al-Qur'an Tentang Perbedaan Warna Air Laut Dalam Perspektif Fisika," *Religion: Jurnal Agama, Sosial, Dan Budaya* 3, no. 3 (May 8, 2024): 522–39, <https://doi.org/10.55606/religion.v3i3.1034>.

Translation: “They will be exposed to it (Hell) morning and evening. And on the Day the Hour appears [it will be said], “Admit the people of Pharaoh into the severest punishment.” (QS. Al-Mu'min: 46)

Quraish Shihab explains that this verse indicates the torment received by Pharaoh and his people since they entered the Barzakh, which is the period after death and before the Day of Judgment. This phase is when a soul experiences life after death but before resurrection on the Day of Judgment. The torment they experience is the continuous exposure to Hell morning and evening. This can be understood as a form of punishment in the grave, described in Islam as the torment received by sinners in the Barzakh before the arrival of the actual Day of Reckoning.²⁵

Further, Quraish Shihab explains that on the Day of Judgment, the punishment endured by Pharaoh and his people will be even more severe. When the Day of Resurrection arrives, they will be resurrected along with all other beings to be judged. At that time, the angels will be commanded to admit Pharaoh and his people into a very severe punishment. This illustrates the final punishment that is far more dreadful compared to the torment in the grave they experienced earlier. Quraish Shihab emphasizes that this verse also teaches the importance of divine justice. No wrongdoing escapes the retribution of Allah SWT. Even after death, there are consequences that the unjust must face. This serves as a reminder to every individual about the importance of living in accordance with Allah's teachings to avoid such severe punishment.

Moreover, Quraish Shihab's interpretation encourages believers to reflect that life in this world is temporary and full of tests. The existence of the Barzakh and the Day of Judgment reminds humans of the afterlife that requires preparation through good deeds and abstaining from injustice. Thus, according to Quraish Shihab, this verse not only depicts the punishment for Pharaoh and his people but also provides a crucial warning and lesson for everyone to always tread the right path and obey the commandments of Allah SWT.

The Realm of Barzakh According to Quraish Shihab and Its Urgency

According to Quraish Shihab, after humans pass away, they enter a new realm known as Barzakh. Quraish Shihab explains that ‘barzakh’ means a separator. In the Qur'an, there are two instances where ‘barzakh’ is defined. Firstly, in Surah Ar-Rahman, verses 19-20: *“He released the two seas, meeting [side by side]; Between them is a barrier [so] neither of them transgresses.”* This indicates that ‘barzakh’ is a separator. Similarly, within the sea, there are flowing rivers beneath it. They do not mix because Allah has placed a separator between them. In the field of science, two

²⁵ Shihab, “Maut: Perjalanan Menuju Keabadian.”

bodies of water do not mix due to differences in their densities. Likewise, when water and oil are mixed in a glass, they do not blend because of their different densities.²⁶

According to Qurais Shihab, 'barzakh' is also defined as the speech of those who have passed away. Those in the realm of barzakh, as described in the Qur'an, engage in dialogue. There are hopes expressed, as mentioned in Surah Al-Mu'minun, verses 99-100. Qurais Shihab explains that those who have died say, *"O Allah, return me to the world, that I may do righteousness in what I left behind."* Allah responds, *"It is but a word he is saying; and behind them is a barrier until the Day they are resurrected."*²⁷

According to Qurais Shihab, once humans enter the realm of barzakh, their position is closer to the Hereafter than to the worldly life. In one verse, it is stated; *"The worldly life is behind them."* This indicates that they have left the world behind and are facing the future, which is the Hereafter. However, if they were to look back, they would see the world, and when they look forward, they see the Hereafter. This is how Qurais Shihab describes the realm of barzakh, where humans exist with awareness. Qurais Shihab elaborates that the belief humans live only once is a misconception. The Quran explains that at minimum, humans experience life twice.

كَيْفَ تَكْفُرُونَ بِاللَّهِ وَكُنْتُمْ أَمْوَاتًا فَأَحْيَاكُمْ ثُمَّ يُمِيتُكُمْ ثُمَّ يُحْيِيكُمْ ثُمَّ إِلَيْهِ تُرْجَعُونَ

Translation: "Why do you disbelieve in Allah while you were lifeless and He brought you to life; then He will cause you to die, then He will bring you [back] to life, and then to Him you will be returned?" (QS. Al-Baqarah: 28)

According to Qurais Shihab, the term 'yuhyiikum' (He will cause you to die, then He will bring you [back] to life) refers to the realm of Barzakh. It's a different kind of existence compared to the worldly life, indeed very distinct. Many scholars have explained the concept of Barzakh. In one book, it is mentioned that a man had four wives. Feeling lonely about going to Barzakh alone, he asked all his wives if they would accompany him there. Starting from the youngest wife (the fourth), none of them wanted to go except for the first wife. The first wife was willing to go anywhere with her husband, whether in the world or in the Hereafter. In this analogy, the first wife represents the deeds (amal) of a person during their worldly life. The others represent worldly matters such as popularity, wealth, position, career, and so on. All these worldly matters will be left behind and forgotten after death.

According to Qurais Shihab, generally, everyone who passes away feels regretful. The world is depicted as a very dark place where people clamor to gather as much provision as possible. However, the more they accumulate from the world, the greater their regret will be. In Barzakh, it will be shown that people pursued gold and diamonds during their worldly life, yet in Barzakh, they will question why they did not

²⁶ Azzam Nur Wahid, "Gejala Dan Fenomena Bahr Dalam Al-Qur'an: Relasi I'jaz Al-Qur'an Terhadap Ilmu Pengetahuan," *Al-Dzikra: Jurnal Studi Ilmu al-Qur'an Dan al-Hadits* 11, no. 2 (July 31, 2019): 209–38, <https://doi.org/10.24042/al-dzikra.v11i2.4379>.

²⁷ Shihab, "Maut: Perjalanan Menuju Keabadian."

worship or at least remember Allah in their leisure time. This illustrates that the perspective of humans in Barzakh differs greatly from their paradigm during their worldly life.

Furthermore, Qurais Shihab also explains that the Barzakh realm is where humans will be shown the next realm they are approaching. Some will be shown paradise, while others will be shown hell. The Qur'an explains;

النَّارُ يُعْرَضُونَ عَلَيْهَا غُدُوًّا وَعَشِيًّا وَيَوْمَ تَقُومُ السَّاعَةُ أَدْخِلُوا آلَ فِرْعَوْنَ أَشَدَّ الْعَذَابِ

Translation: *“They will be shown Hellfire morning and evening, and on the Day of Judgment. (It will be said to the angels): ‘Place Fir’aun and his people into a severe punishment.’”* (QS. Al-Mu’min: 46)

Qurais Shihab explains that this verse literally describes how every day (morning and evening) Fir'aun is shown the Hellfire that awaits him. This indicates that although he is not directly punished, being shown the punishment he will receive is a source of fear and itself a form of punishment. This condition is what is known as one of the punishments of the realm of barzakh, or what humans understand as the punishment of the grave. However, according to Qurais Shihab, although the grave is where a person's body is placed, barzakh's reality is not in this world. The grave is merely a place where the body is interred, whereas barzakh is another realm where processes of reflection, dialogue, or punishment occur.²⁸ Regarding humans in the Barzakh realm, who are said to sleep until the Day of Resurrection, Qurais Shihab also responded to this. Allah SWT says:

قَالُوا يَا وَيْلَنَا مَنْ بَعَثَنَا مِنْ مَرْقَدِنَا هَذَا مَا وَعَدَ الرَّحْمَنُ وَصَدَقَ الْمُرْسَلُونَ

Translation: *“They will say, ‘Woe to us! Who has raised us up from our sleeping place (grave)’ [It will be said to them], ‘This is what the Most Merciful had promised, and the messengers told the truth.’”* (QS. Yasin: 52)

This verse has been a subject of debate among scholars, especially the commentators of the Qur'an. The question revolves around whether in the realm of Barzakh or the grave, humans are punished or asleep. Some scholars argue that humans are asleep while being punished, sleeping but dreaming of being punished. Qurais Shihab, on the other hand, suggests that the intensity and duration of punishment in Barzakh vary based on the severity of one's sins. Once the retribution for sins in Barzakh is completed, they enter a state akin to sleep until the Day of Judgment arrives.²⁹ So according to Qurais Shihab, the blessings or punishments received in Barzakh are a prelude to the complete rewards or retributions in the Hereafter.

²⁸ Shihab.

²⁹ Muhammad Luthfi Kamal, “Kematian Dalam Al-Qur'an (Studi Komparasi Tafsir al-Qur'an al-Adzim Dan al-Misbah QS. Al-Anbiya' 34-35)” (skripsi, IAIN KUDUS, 2023), <http://repository.iainkudus.ac.id/11502/>.

As for the urgency of Barzakh, Qurais Shihab explains that it serves as a checkpoint for humans while awaiting the accumulation of their rewards and sins. This means that one's rewards or sins can increase even after they have left the world. This includes ongoing charitable deeds (*sadaqah jariyah*), righteous offspring, or beneficial knowledge left behind. Conversely, if a person invests in perpetual sins during their earthly life, they will bear the consequences of those sins even after their death. For instance, someone who starts a prostitution business, which continues after their death, will accumulate perpetual sins from what they initiated previously.³⁰

According to Qurais Shihab, children who behave unjustly or who deviate from parental guidance pose challenges for their parents in the Barzakh. This situation can increase the burden of sins on the parents. However, if the parents have sincerely tried their best to educate their children but the children still lead a corrupt life, then the parents are relieved of the responsibility for their children's actions during their earthly life. At this moment, parents observing their children's conduct from the Barzakh may experience either happiness or sadness. All of this is part of the blessings or punishments that occur in the Barzakh.

Another urgency, as explained by Qurais Shihab, is that the Barzakh serves as an intermediary to ensure that deeds continue to benefit individuals after their worldly life. This is why prayers are offered for the deceased, charitable acts are dedicated to them, and even Hajj can be performed on behalf of those who have passed away. This means that as long as individuals are in the Barzakh and the world has not yet ended, there remains significant potential for them to receive intercession through prayers from children, family, friends, or anyone sincerely praying for them.

The Spiritual Meaning of Barzakh Realm

Speaking of the realm of Barzakh, understanding it offers deep spiritual wisdom and can provide valuable essence for life. As mentioned in Surah Al-Mu'minun (23:100), it explains that the deceased are obstructed by Barzakh until the day they are resurrected. In the realm of Barzakh, those who have done good and been obedient to Allah will experience happiness and peace, while those who are sinful will face various forms of punishment. Understanding the concept of Barzakh brings several important spiritual insights.³¹ The realm of Barzakh reminds us that life in this world is temporary. Death is not the end but the beginning of the next phase of life, where we are held accountable for all our actions. It urges us to be constantly aware of death and to prepare ourselves with righteous deeds.

The concept of Barzakh also illustrates that Allah (SWT) is supremely just. Every action will receive a just recompense. Those who commit injustices will begin to experience the consequences of their deeds in Barzakh, while those who do good will find peace and happiness. Knowledge of the existence of Barzakh and the punishment

³⁰ Shihab, "Maut: Perjalanan Menuju Keabadian."

³¹ Irfan, "Eskatologi Islam Dalam Perspektif Tafsir Al-Mishbah."

of the grave motivates us to continually improve ourselves. We become more motivated to avoid sinful actions and increase our acts of worship, knowing that every action has consequences that will be felt in Barzakh.

Barzakh also teaches us the importance of maintaining good relationships with fellow human beings.³² Good deeds towards others and improving our social relationships will bring positive impacts that will be felt after death. This includes respecting the rights of others, being fair, and assisting those in need. Awareness that life is a continuous test until Barzakh encourages us to be grateful for every blessing and to be patient in facing trials. Understanding Barzakh enhances human spirituality, enabling us to learn and accept all of Allah's decrees with openness and sincerity. Moreover, spiritual meaning is crucial amidst rapid modernization; human spiritual dimension promotes balance and counters materialism.

Understanding Barzakh continually enhances spiritual growth, particularly in preparing for the metaphysical (spiritual) provisions needed after death. For instance, Quraish Shihab explains that in Barzakh, some individuals peacefully sit while others rush towards places where prayers flow for Muslims in general. These prayers are sought to rescue souls in Barzakh, leading to competition or overcrowding. However, some individuals sit peacefully because they have received sufficient prayers, be it from their children, family, or others. These prayers are specifically addressed by name, ensuring they are not contested in Barzakh and become aids to tranquil souls. In this context, the spiritual wisdom extracted emphasizes the importance of educating and nurturing families that are faithful, pious, righteous, and virtuous. Families that remember to pray for their parents alleviate their difficulties while waiting in Barzakh.³³

At certain moments, Quraish Shihab also explained that righteous Muslim souls will enjoy their waiting period (in Barzakh) by traveling here and there. He likened this experience to being akin to the wing of a bird, flying to various places and enjoying their beauty. This analogy resembles the beliefs of Sufi mystics, where a few believe that their souls are not confined like ordinary souls.³⁴ Their souls can wander freely, engage in dialogue, and even offer advice and intercession for other humans as they wish, as stated in the words of Allah SWT;

أَوْمَنْ كَانَ مَيِّتًا فَأَخْيَيْنَاهُ وَجَعَلْنَا لَهُ نُورًا يَمْشِي بِهِ فِي النَّاسِ كَمَنْ مَثَلُهُ فِي الظُّلُمَاتِ لَيْسَ بِخَارِجٍ مِنْهَا ۚ كَذَلِكَ زُيِّنَ لِلْكَافِرِينَ مَا كَانُوا يَعْمَلُونَ

Translation: “And is one who was dead and We gave him life and made for him light by which to walk among the people like one who is in darkness, never to

³² Ozi Setiadi, “Kematian Dalam Prespektif Al-Quran,” *Al Ashriyyah* 6, no. 1 (May 15, 2020): 45–62, <https://doi.org/10.53038/alashriyyah.v6i01.126>.

³³ *Misteri Alam Barzakh M. Quraish Shihab Podcast*, 2020, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2bp0vqF0V40>.

³⁴ *Shihab & Shihab Part 3 - Bekal Diri Menuju Ilahi: Persiapan Alam Kubur*, 2018, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=D7DRyg2lSD8>.

emerge therefrom? Thus it has been made pleasing to the disbelievers that which they were doing.” (QS. Al-An'am: 122)

The phenomenon above indicates that there are different spiritual experiences among individuals. This distinction is closely related to the level of righteousness and piety towards Him. It serves as a catalyst for individuals to enhance righteous deeds, increase devotion in monotheism and social worship, and consistently spread goodness while avoiding harm.

Conclusion

Information about Barzakh in the Quran is most prominently found in Surah Al-Mu'minun, verses 99-100, and Surah Al-Mu'minun, verse 46. Qurais Shihab explains in these verses that the grave is not the same as Barzakh. The grave represents a symbolic existence, allowing the deceased to maintain a connection with the living if they choose to visit. Barzakh exists in another realm where humans are confined by a barrier or partition (wall). According to Qurais Shihab, if one looks backward from this barrier, they see the world, but looking forward, they see the Hereafter that awaits them. Qurais Shihab asserts that the urgency of creating Barzakh lies in its role as a 'checkpoint', where humans await the rewards or punishments that may still occur despite their earthly life having ended. These rewards or punishments are reflections of their past actions during their earthly existence.

According to Qurais Shihab, concerning the sleep or punishment of humans in Barzakh, individuals will experience a period of enjoyment or punishment during their stay in Barzakh. The remainder will be received upon entry into the next realm, either Paradise or Hell. This enjoyment or punishment corresponds to the extent and weight of human behavior. When this period is completed, humans will feel as though they are asleep until the Day of Resurrection. However, Qurais Shihab mentions that the friends of Allah (awliya Allah) have special privileges. Among these privileges, even in Barzakh, they can roam freely or engage in dialogue with people in the world. The spiritual meaning derived from the above description emphasizes instilling vigilance in people to be more aware of their actions during their earthly life. Humans should enhance perpetual charitable deeds and avoid potential sinful actions.

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