Abstract: Scholarship and research in the field of thanatology require creative responses to address contemporary concerns regarding how people – individually and collectively – make sense of events and experiences associated with death and dying. This present study focuses on the broader Islamic traditions of the experience of death and the afterlife and provides a conceptual overview of the practices of mourning and memoria. This overview offers an exploration of considerations for the well-being of the deceased, interactions between the living and the dead, as well as how dreams act as conduits between the seen and unseen worlds. Additionally, this study draws from the narratives contained within the fortieth and final book of the eleventh-century Persian Muslim philosopher and jurist, Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī’s epic, titled The Remembrance of Death and the Afterlife, to address and juxtaposition Muslim conceptions pertaining to death and the afterlife with death anxiety research not currently articulated within the wider Islamic scholarship. Through the exploration of Islamic traditions and the contribution of al-Ghazālī’s citations within The Remembrance, this work will demonstrate how broader reflections on recognising the inevitability of death and the importance of relinquishing earthly attachments posit a creative response to contemporary death anxiety research. Bearing in mind the commonly studied tenets within the wider corpus of al-Ghazālī’s impressive epic, The Revival of the Religious Sciences, it is the literature presented here which warrants full consideration for creative responses to the discussion on death that may consequently be of pastoral significance and provide techniques for lessening death anxiety.

Keywords: death, afterlife, mourning, death anxiety, terror management theory, Islam, al-Ghazālī

1 Introduction

In a popular narrative attributed to the Prophet Muḥammad, a recently deceased man witnesses himself being carried out of his home for the last time as his wife and children wail in distress. He watches his body being prepared for burial as it is washed, and he yelps out in pain when the water is “too hot” or “too cold.”¹ The man cries out that he has been enshrouded too tightly and he pleads to be carried slowly as he is rushed towards the cemetery for burial. Yet, all his cries of anguish fall on deaf ears. While he is carefully lowered into the ground and as the dirt falls upon his body, the man sobs inconsolably as he looks out at the faces of his loved ones and says, “this is the last time I can look at them, for today I will be separated from them and will not see them until the Day of Resurrection.”² Classical Islamic literature is replete with narratives

¹ Smith and Haddad, The Islamic Understanding of Death and Resurrection, 37.
² Ibid.

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relating to the experience of death and the afterlife. Arguably, many of these narratives resonate well within our own contemporary thanatophobic societies.

In contemporary history, the rise of the scientific study of death (thanatology) began in the 1970s and produced a plethora of interdisciplinary scholarly work on approaches to death and death anxiety. The majority of these have come from the fields of psychology, sociology, cultural anthropology, and the forensic sciences. Prominent thinkers of this discipline include Swiss psychiatrist, Elizabeth Kübler-Ross (On Death and Dying, 1969); American psychologist, Robert Kastenbaum (The Psychology of Death, 1972); and American cultural anthropologist, Ernest Becker (The Denial of Death, 1974). And yet, Western definitions of death and death anxiety are continuously reworked and reconsidered in light of wider concerns pertaining to issues such as physician-assisted suicides or dignified end-of-life care, including access to palliative and hospice facilities, and changing attitudes towards the disposal of human remains and funerary rites. Scholarship and research in the field of thanatology require creative responses to address contemporary concerns regarding how people – individually and collectively – make sense of events and experiences associated with death and dying.

This present study focuses on the broader Islamic traditions of the experience of death and the afterlife and provides a conceptual overview of the practices of mourning and memoria. To present this comprehensive assessment, this study draws from a range of Islamic sources; however, these accounts and the themes included are not exhaustive. As such, this work offers an exploration of considerations for the well-being of the deceased, interactions between the living and the dead, as well as how dreams act as conduits between the seen and unseen worlds.

It would be disadvantageous to explore death and memoria in Islam and fail to include considerations for the most celebrated eleventh-century Persian Muslim philosopher and jurist, Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī. Much attention has been given to the contribution of al-Ghazālī’s attempts to reconcile Islamic jurisprudence (fiqh/fikhl) and religious sciences (‘ulūm al-dīn) with that of Sufism and with the intention to “resuscitate religious learning.”5 Indeed, the wider corpus of al-Ghazālī’s impressive epic, The Revival of the Religious Sciences (Iḥyā’Ulūm al-Dīn) demonstrates this synthesis through the use of the Qur’ān, ḥadīth, law, as well as ritual and religious observances. And yet, it is the fortieth and final book in al-Ghazālī’s epic, titled The Remembrance of Death and the Afterlife (Kitāb dhikr al-maut wa-mâ ba’dahu), that grounds his “Science of the Hereafter” (‘ilm al-ākhira)6 – a term he coined to refer to his “commitment on the synthesis of philosophy and Sufism and to [call] Muslims to the pursuit of felicity7 [in the hereafter] as the most urgent task of a human lifetime.”8 Within the Sciences of the Hereafter, there are two further branches: the Science of Practice (‘ilm al-mu’āmala) and the Science of Unveiling (‘ilm a-mukāshafa), the former of which presents the pedagogic method of his work: “leading his readers step by step, like children, to the fullness of the Islamic message, to the degree accessible to them.”9

There are exceptionally meticulous scholarly works on The Revival which verge beyond the scope of this exploration. Thus, while bearing in mind the commonly studied tenets within the wider corpus of al-Ghazālī’s impressive epic, it is the synoptical text presented in this study that warrants consideration. Drawing from the citations within The Remembrance, this study presents three prevalent points attributed

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3 According to the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM), the term “thanatophobia” is used to describe the specific intense fear of death or dying (see American Psychiatric Association, Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders).

4 The term “‘ulūm al-dīn” translates more directly to “religious sciences” (see Gianotti, “Beyond Both Law and Theology,” 607. For further discussion on formal theology (“‘ilm al-kalām), see also Gardet, “’Ilm al-Kalām”).

5 Moosa, Ghazālī and the Poetics of Imagination, 102.

6 As Garden (2013) states: “al-Ghazālī calls the science he details in the Revival as the Sciences of the Hereafter (‘ilm al-ākhira) and he contrasts it to the Sciences of the World (‘ulūm al-dunya) by which he means primarily law and kalām” (see Garden, The First Islamic Reviver, 69).

7 “The highest aim ot telos in the Revival... is the attainment of felicity (sa’āda) in the hereafter, a state of bliss that is beyond salvation (najāt) alone” (Garden, The First Islamic Reviver, 70).

8 Garden, The First Islamic Reviver, 102.

9 Treiger, Inspired Knowledge in Islamic Thought, 4.
to al-Ghazālī’s broader message: death is an emancipation from the trials and tribulations of mortal life; the surge of emotions, such as the anxiety associated with confronting death,⑩ stem from not preparing for death whilst still alive; and finally, remembering (zikr/dhikr)⑪ death consistently will influence the overall experience of death and the afterlife. As such, al-Ghazālī reframes traditional Muslim practices, such as the visitation of graves and shrines, on the ontological level as pragmatic methods for dispelling death anxieties.

The contribution of this exploration is to retrieve and rearticulate Islamic tradition pertaining to death and memoria for the purpose of resourcing and stimulating a conversation concerning death and death anxiety. Woven into the overarching discussion on Islamic perspectives on death, this study draws upon the narratives cited within The Remembrance to demonstrate how these prevalent points may be of considerable value in confronting thanatophobia. As such, this study will begin by including contemporary considerations for death anxiety research, such as terror management theory (TMT), to present an introductory framework that may allow for the juxtaposition of Muslim conceptions pertaining to death and the afterlife with death anxiety research not currently articulated within the wider Islamic scholarship.

Through the exploration of Islamic conceptions pertaining to death and memoria, this study will demonstrate that al-Ghazālī’s reflections on recognising the inevitability of death and the importance of relinquishing earthly attachments posit a creative response to contemporary death anxiety research. If interpreted within their religious and social contexts, these creative responses may consequently be of pastoral significance and provide techniques for lessening the existential angst associated with death.

2 A brief overview on navigating death anxiety through religion

American cultural anthropologist, Ernest Becker, initiated the sociological and psychological study of how human behaviour is influenced by anxieties triggered by death. In his 1973 Pulitzer Prize-winning book, The Denial of Death, Becker argues that the awareness of death is the most basic source of anxiety for humans, and this awareness has “had one great penalty for man; it gave him dread or anxiety”⑫ (emphasis his own). Becker illustrates what he considers the existential paradox of being human:

> Man is literally split in two: he has an awareness of his own splendid uniqueness in that he sticks out of nature with a towering majesty, and yet he goes back into the ground a few feet in order blindly and dumbly to rot and disappear forever. It is a terrifying dilemma to be in and to have to live with… What does it mean to be a self-conscious animal? The idea is ludicrous, if it is not monstrous. It means to know that one is food for worms. That is the terror: to have emerged from nothing, to have a name, consciousness of self, deep inner feelings, an excruciating inner yearning for life and self-expression – and with all this yet to die. It seems like a hoax[...].⑬

For Becker, the realisation of mortality instigates a surge of emotions, including anxiety and terror. The escalation of these emotions stimulates a reactionary response because the “deepest need is to be free from the anxiety of death and annihilation.”⑭ The emotions brought on by existential angst, coupled with a desire for the justicication of having lived, initiate the anxiety of death; death transforms into the great enemy that provokes fear and resistance. And yet, sustaining intense emotions is hardly beneficial.

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⑩ Death anxiety includes the expressed fear of death (thanatophobia) rooted in a pessimistic existential outlook; however, fear is often associated with a response to an imminent threat, whereas anxiety is considered a response to a conceptual threat (see Jong and Halberstadt, Death Anxiety and Religious Belief, 65).

⑪ Within Sufism, the concept of zikr/dhikr refers to the remembrance of Allāh, which is reinforced through meditations involving breathing technique, recitation of the ninety-nine names of Allāh (‘asmā’u l-lahi l-husnā), as well as disputed practices such as singing and dancing (samā’), (Massington et al., “Taṣawwuf”). These practices are significant as they are both a method of prayer and for attaining higher spiritual states (aḥwāl) (see Massington et al., “Taṣawwuf,” and Gardet, “Dhikr”).


⑬ Ibid., 87.

⑭ Ibid., 66.
Becker’s work has led to the development of TMT. Originally coined in 2015 by the social psychologists, Sheldon Solomon, Jeff Greenberg, and Tom Pyszczynski, TMT extricates the core thesis of Becker’s analysis and posits TMT as an evolutionary psychological response to self-preservation.¹³ The contribution of this framework lies within its quantitative approaches to demonstrating Becker’s argument that biological evolution has programmed these emotions to be channeled into the creation of psychological defences, termed immortality projects by Becker. These defences may be symbolic, such as having children, or literal, as in concepts relating to an afterlife or reincarnation, and serve to unwittingly negate mortality by giving the impression of immortality;¹⁴ however, although these defences may instinctively attempt to repress death, they are not indicative of attempts to repress it, but rather act as psychological efforts to contain existential anxieties instead.

According to TMT, religious beliefs in the afterlife may offer a solution to the angst associated with death as identified by Becker. Citing a 2007 survey conducted by the Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life, Solomon et al. argue that not only does religious beliefs demonstrate low death anxiety, but individuals who are reminded of their mortality report having a stronger belief in the existence of God.¹⁵ Conceptions of an afterlife and salvation provide both symbolic immorality through the notion of being remembered after death, and literal immorality in which the afterlife offers a spiritual dimension that promises a life after death.¹⁶ Furthermore, the idea in which individuals have the potential to transcend their earthly life is a “particularly attractive option for overcoming mortal terror because they explicitly deny that death is the end.”¹⁷ The recognition that death in this worldly dimension is not the end soothes the crippling anxiety associated with confronting definite existential annihilation.

Islam has a fascinating preoccupation on death and the afterlife. As death and the afterlife are central themes within Islam, the narratives presented in this study provide a framework from which further exploration on TMT may be considered. Intense descriptions of the experience of death, beginning at the moment of burial, bring awareness to the existence of an afterlife and salvation provide both symbolic immorality through the notion of being remembered after death, and literal immorality in which the afterlife offers a spiritual dimension that promises a life after death.¹⁸ As further sections demonstrate, the Islamic traditions of mourning and memoria, as well as the parameters introduced by al-Ghazâlî for navigating this worldly life (al-dunyâ) to prepare for the next (al-akhirah), demonstrate a core point within the wider discussion of TMT: “religion cannot be understood without acknowledging the role that it plays in helping people cope with death and deny the possibility that it entails the absolute end of life.”¹⁹ Shifting awareness away from the worldly attachments of children, property, and pleasures, to the existence of Allâh and of a hereafter allows for the individual to overcome their mortality salience. The worldly life is ephemeral, and death is inevitable: “And what is the life of this world except for the enjoyment of delusions?” (Qur’ân 3:185). The world to come is of greater concern.

3 An overview of death and the afterlife in Islam

3.1 The body, soul, and spirit

The human body (badan), whether living or deceased, is subject to inviolability (hurmanah) and dignity (karâmah) within Islamic law and the importance of upholding these two concepts stems from the belief

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¹⁵ For a compilation of their studies as well as the development of this relatively new theory within the wider field of thanatology, refer to their book, The Worm at the Core: On the Role of Death in Life (London: Allen Lane, 2015).
¹⁶ Sheldon et al., The Worm at the Core, 103. Works of art and literature are meant to last forever, and children are ideally expected to outlive their parents (see Jong and Halberstadt, Death Anxiety and Religious Belief, 72, 105).
¹⁷ Sheldon et al., The Worm at the Core, 88–9.
¹⁸ Vail et al., “A Terror Management Analysis of the Psychological Functions of Religion,” 85.
¹⁹ Ibid., 87–8.
²⁰ Sheldon et al., The Worm at the Core, 88.
²¹ Ibid., 91.
that humans were made in the likeness of Allāh.²² Inviolability and dignity are also demonstrated within narratives pertaining to Prophet Muḥammad, such as one in which the Prophet chastises “a careless grave digger by noting that breaking the bones of the dead is akin to breaking the bones of the living.”²³ As such, Islamic rituals and rites for the dead express profound attention to the physicality and bodily sensibilities related to death.

In the context of the classical Islamic approach to the complexities of the body, al-Ghazālī argued that the body is composed of mutable matter ruled by the laws of the physical realm it inhabits (i.e. gravity and time). The body encapsulates “the tools of the spirit, which, when put to use, enable it to strike with the hand, to listen with the ear, to see with the eye, and to know the true nature of things with the heart.”²⁴ The eyes, ears, and limbs all provide the sensory processing which are indispensable implements that allow for navigation and interaction within the earthly world; however, the body is destructible, whereas the spirit and soul are not.

In the Qur’ān, the term for “spirit” is the masculine singular noun, rūḥ (زوح), meaning “breath” that is used in reference to the revelation of the Qur’ān to the Prophet,²⁵ or as the breath of Allāh which created life from a lump of clay.²⁶ Similarly, the term for soul, nafs (نفس), also connotes “breath” but is a feminine noun used reflexively in relation to the self, or more ambiguously to the “soul”; however, the Qur’ān does not explicitly demonstrate the association of nafs with soul.²⁷ As such, classical Muslim scholars contested the differentiation between the soul and the spirit to the body; some scholars decided not to use the two terms interchangeably, opting instead to differentiate between what constitutes nafs and rūḥ.

Implicitly, al-Ghazālī describes the nafs as “the sum of man’s passions, the root of his ‘blameworthy qualities.’”²⁸ Furthermore, he states, “by the ‘spirit’ I mean that abstraction through which man apprehends the sciences, and the pains of sorrow as well as the pleasure of happiness.”²⁹ In this context, al-Ghazālī may be implying rūḥ, which he associates with the inanimate matter, or the origin of the spirit of Allāh (al-rūḥ al-amin) as it is referred to in the Qur’ān.³⁰ Thus, al-Ghazālī may have subscribed to the common opinion held by other classical scholars³¹ of his time: the soul and spirit are indestructible subtle bodies (jism latif) that exist within a destructible material body (badan).³²

Though al-Ghazālī made distinctions between the terms, as evident in the statement, “it is man’s soul and spirit that constitute his real nature, which is immortal” (emphasis added),³³ soul, spirit, and even the heart (qalb) are often used interchangeably within The Remembrance. Additionally, a further characteristic quality of the heart is the intelligence (‘aql) which does not simply denote the ability to acquire knowledge or to collect information, but rather it implies a specific quality that uniquely differs from person to person and is what sets humans apart from animals.³⁴ Thus, it is the immaterial and indestructible qualities, distinct from the solely physical components, that not only makes humans so exceptional, but that

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²² Padela and Qureshi, “Islamic Perspectives on Clinical Intervention Near the End-of-Life,” 553.
²³ Ibid.
²⁴ al-Ghazālī, The Remembrance, 122.
²⁵ “Say [Muḥammad]: Truly the holy spirit (rūḥ) brought down [revelation] from your Lord to strengthen those who believe, as guidance and glad tidings for those who submit” (Qur’ān 16:102; Homerin, “Soul”).
²⁶ “He who perfected everything He created and originated the creation of man from clay. Then made his reproduction from an extract of an insignificant fluid. Then he proportioned him and breathed into him of His Spirit” (Qur’ān 32:7–9). See, also, Smith and Haddad, The Islamic Understanding of Death and Resurrection, 18.
²⁷ Homerin, “Soul.”
²⁸ Gardet and Vadet, “Kalb”
²⁹ al-Ghazālī, The Remembrance, 123.
³⁰ Calverley and Netton, “Nafs.”
³¹ Scholars have demonstrated the influence of the Persian polymath and Ibn Sinā’s teachings on al-Ghazālī’s positionality on the discussion of the soul, including on the immaterial and incorruptible characteristics of the soul upon death. In addition to Treiger, Inspired Knowledge of Islamic Thought, see, also, the translation notes included by Winter (p. 122 of “The Remembrance”), and Gianotti, al-Ghazālī’s Unspeakable Doctrine of the Soul.
³² Smith and Haddad, The Islamic Understanding of Death and Resurrection, 20; See also Griffel, al-Ghazālī’s Philosophical Theology, 71.
³³ al-Ghazālī, The Remembrance, 123.
³⁴ Treiger, Inspired Knowledge, 19.
contributes to the distinctive experience of death.\textsuperscript{35} The event of death allows for the soul, spirit, and heart to disengage completely from the physical constraints of the body and the worldly life and enter the realm of afterlife.\textsuperscript{36}

Although his generous interchangeability of the terms may leave his reader with a rather convoluted and befuddled understanding, there may be an explanation for this. Perhaps one presupposition that can be inferred from al-Ghazālī’s rather vague and inconsistent use of these terminologies is that this is done on purpose. By not providing distinguishing definitions of heart, soul, and spirit, al-Ghazālī may be alluding to the Qur’ānic verse: “And they ask you [O, Muḥammad] about the Spirit.\textsuperscript{37} Say, ‘The Spirit belongs to the domain of my Lord; and you were given only little knowledge’” (Qur’ān 17:85). In The Remembrance, al-Ghazālī states: “[Muḥammad] was not given leave to speak of this more than by saying ‘the spirit is by the command of my Lord’” (emphasis his own).\textsuperscript{38} Imaginably, al-Ghazālī is demonstrating that if Prophet Muḥammad was not given a full description of the nature of the spirit, then it must not be within the realm of human understanding.

Nevertheless, as classical Islam posited that the dead retain awareness within the grave, scholars considered the possibility that some element of the human form remained cognisant. They theorised that at death the soul “does not go anywhere beyond the environs of the corpse; the soul remains with the body for the full timespan (ajal) between death and resurrection.”\textsuperscript{39} Thus, an additional aspect of the experience of death in Islam is the notion that the dead possess an awareness of their condition and physicality which highlights the importance of considerations for their well-being through observances of mourning and memoria.

3.2 The experience of the grave

As descriptive narratives related to the experience of death is a unique feature within Islam, there is little left to the imagination of a Muslim who may ponder what happens when they die. The most illustrative of these narratives are the ones that describe the immediate experience following the burial (dafn). According to al-Ghazālī, the experience of death begins within the grave with the appearance of the death angels: ‘Azrā’il (“The Angel of Death”)\textsuperscript{40} and Munkar and Nakīr.\textsuperscript{41} The intermediate condition of the grave depends on the correct answers given during the interrogation by the angels, Munkar and Nakīr. The angels will ask which God, Prophet, and religion (din) the newly departed adheres to. Those who answer correctly – namely, Allāh, Prophet Muḥammad, and Islam – are greeted into blissfully spacious graves that offer a cool breeze and a view of Paradise – the abode that awaits them at the time of the Resurrection. By contrast, individuals who answer incorrectly are tossed into a tight hot grave inhabited by snakes and scorpions and other terrifying creatures, and with no relief from the torments they experience (‘adhāb al-qabr).\textsuperscript{42}

\textsuperscript{35} Ibid., 17.
\textsuperscript{36} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{37} The term used in this verse is al-raḥ [الرَّحُول].
\textsuperscript{38} al-Ghazālī, The Remembrance, 123.
\textsuperscript{39} Archer, A Place Between Two Places, 9.
\textsuperscript{40} Classical Islam posited that death begins with the appearance of ‘Azrā’il, as described in the Qur’ānic verse: “Say, ‘The Angel of Death will take who you have entrusted with you. Then to your Lord you will be returned’” (Qur’ān 32:11). The name ‘Azrā’il or ‘Izrā’il [عزرآئیل] is an adaptation of [عزرآئیل] (malak al-mawtī) that appears within the Qur’ān. Furthermore, upon its creation, ‘Azrā’il boldly proclaims to the other angels: “I am death who separates all loved ones. I am death who subdues the power of the sons of Adam. I am death who inhabits the graves...Not a creature will remain who does not taste me” (Smith and Haddad, The Islamic Understanding of Death and Resurrection, 35). According to al-Ghazālī, ‘Azrā’il will appear to sinners as grotesque with “hair erect, evil-smelling, and garbed in black, from whose mouth and nostrils sparks and smoke [issue] forth” or appears to the pious in “his best and most beautiful form” (see al-Ghazālī, The Remembrance, 43–4).
\textsuperscript{41} These names do not explicitly appear in the Qur’ān (see Smith and Haddad, The Islamic Understanding of Death and Resurrection, 41).
\textsuperscript{42} Smith and Haddad, The Islamic Understanding of Death and Resurrection,” 42.
In addition to narratives exemplifying the distinctive Islamic concept of the dead experiencing punishment or reward in the gravely abode, there are also descriptions of the living witnessing the anguish of the recently departed.⁵³ In one account, a man, who after burying his sister, realizes he had left an item of his behind in her grave.⁴⁴ The man exhumes his sister’s grave to retrieve the item, but stops to curiously peer into the niche (lahd).⁴⁵ He discovers the niche in flames and radiating a scorching heat. Terrified, the man rushes out of the grave and returns home to inquire about his sister’s behaviour whilst she was alive. After some hesitation, his mother confesses to him that his sister would often neglect her daily prayers, not perform the ritual ablutions carefully, and that she had a habit of eavesdropping on neighbours and sharing what she heard with others.

Though the poignancy of such chilling descriptions of the death experience is not likely to dissipate thanatophobia,⁴⁶ these accounts demonstrate some key arguments presented by TMT. The description of the death angels expresses how supernatural agents “serve as gatekeepers to an afterlife”⁴⁷; and by reminding individuals of their mortality through the sharing of these accounts, they become “more interested in, and accepting of, supernatural phenomena in general.”⁴⁸ Additionally, for an individual intend on pursuing the attainment of felicity in the afterlife, narratives such as these serve as important reminders of adhering to the tenets of the faith and ensuring the observance of ritual obligations.

### 3.3 Considerations for the well-being of the dead

Islamic funerary rituals and rites express profound attention to upholding the dignity and welfare of the deceased. Two fundamental rituals that establish this concept are demonstrated in the custom of washing the dead and praying for them after the burial. Washing a corpse is considered an essential task by the Muslim community (fard kifaya)⁴⁹ and performed by individuals of the same sex, or those who are either related to the deceased (such as a spouse), or professional washers.⁵⁰ The body is washed an odd number of times⁵¹ in the direction of Mecca in an isolated room with a sheet covering the private areas (‘awrat) at all times to maintain the privacy and inviolability of the deceased.⁵² After the body has been washed, it is

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43 Additionally, there are accounts that describe how the anguish of the dead are sensed by animals. For instance, in one account, the “camel of the Prophet was afraid while going through a graveyard at hearing, as only animals can, the shrieks of the damned suffering the torments of the grave” (see Smith and Haddad, *The Islamic Understanding of Death and Resurrection*, 45).


45 If possible, some Islamic graves also are constructed with a vault or small niche (lahd) in which the body is carefully placed into the niche headfirst with the feet in the direction of the qiblah (direction of the Kaaba in Mecca) and the body facing perpendicular to the qiblah on its right side (see Reinhart and Denny, “Funerary Rites”).

46 Indeed, a 2013 study on cross-cultural and interreligious comparisons on death anxiety and religious belief in Malaysia found that individuals who identified as Muslims reported the highest levels of death anxiety compared to Christians, Hindus, and Buddhists. For a compilation of results obtained from worldwide and multidisciplinary studies on death anxiety, refer to Jong and Halberstadt, *Death Anxiety and Religious Belief*, 116–35.

47 Vail et al., “A Terror Management Analysis of the Psychological Functions of Religion,” 86.

48 Solomon et al., *The Worm at the Core*, 88.


50 Ordinarily, all Muslims are washed prior to burial; however, the bodies of Muslim martyrs are not washed as they are not considered dead: “And do not say about those who are killed in the way of Allāh, ‘they are dead.’ Rather they are alive, but you perceive [it] not” (Quran 2:154; see, also, Reinhart and Denny, “Funerary Rites”).

51 Washing the body an odd number of times and perfuming with camphor is attributed to the Prophet Muhammad who instructed the women to wash the corpse of his daughter, Umm Kulthūm, “three times, or five, or more than this with water and ground leaves of the lote-tree [sidr]. At the end place camphor [kāfūr], at least a small amount” (see Halevi, “Muhammad’s Grave,” 53).

52 Halevi, “Muhammad’s Grave,” 70.
enshrouded and ready for burial. Once the body arrives at the site of burial, the funerary procession partakes in the mandatory funerary prayers (salāt al-janāzah).\(^{53}\)

Praying for the deceased is considered an obligation and a morally central part of Islamic funerary practices. These prayers are thought to aid the deceased during the interrogation in the grave by Munkar and Nakir by reminding the dead of the tenets of their faith.\(^ {54}\) Indeed, al-Ghazālī particularly emphasises the importance of funerary prayers for their effect on the immediate experience of the grave by citing the following narrative: “It was said by a certain man, ‘A brother of mine once passed away. I saw him in my sleep, and asked, ‘In what state were you upon being lowered onto the grave?’ And he replied, ‘I was approached by someone bearing a brand of fire, and had someone not prayed for me I saw that he would have beaten me with it.’”\(^ {55}\)

An example of how prayers can influence the experience of the grave is also demonstrated in a narrative describing a group of pious Muslims visiting the Qarāfā\(^ {56}\) in south-eastern Cairo, Egypt. The pious visitors come across the leg of a dead young man protruding out from his grave. Disturbed by the sight, the visitors quickly buried the protruding leg; however, several days later, the pious visitors came across the grave and once again the leg was seen sticking out. This time, the visitors decided to ask the locals about the young man’s deeds whilst he was alive. According to the local accounts, the young man had kicked his mother once and died without repenting for his sin. Thus, while the pious visitors buried the leg once more, they pleaded with Allāh to “seeking His forgiveness on behalf of the unrepentant son.”\(^ {57}\)

In addition to accepted practices of mourning and memoria that consider the well-being of the deceased, there are also practices that are contested for the possibility that they are detrimental to the welfare of the dead. These practices include the act of wailing and the construction of tombstones. In its simplest sense, lamentation or wailing (nāḥa) may be understood as a way to manage the trauma or intensity of pain felt at the initial onset of death as mournfully crying out verbalises the agony of separation for both the living and the dead and validates the emotional intensity of the experience.\(^ {58}\) After the initial emotional outpourings, the mourning may shift to a more narrative expression of grief which includes calling out the name of the deceased; a narration of how the death occurred; expressing feelings of anger or remorse; or speaking directly to the deceased. In this way, the lamentation becomes an act of dialogue between the living and the deceased in that “laments do not so much remember the dead as summon [them] to the presence of the living.”\(^ {59}\)

And yet, the practice of wailing has been contested for a multitude of reasons. One such argument is that the intense outpouring of emotion affiliated with wailing is unnecessary and torments the deceased because the dead can hear them in the grave.\(^ {60}\) This presupposition is demonstrated in various hadith, including one in which the Prophet Muḥammad states, “the deceased who is wailed over is tortured for that wailing” (al-Bukhārī 23:50). Another argument against the practice posits that wailing can be interpreted as “an act of complaining against the judgement of God, a manner of rebelling with exasperation against His decree.”\(^ {61}\) Death is a fate determined by Allāh as He fixes the lifespans (ajal) of all beings; therefore, it should be met with acceptance.\(^ {62}\) One hadith illustrating this notion describes the death of the son of Abū Ṭalḥa, a companion of the Prophet: while Abū Ṭalḥa was away one day, his son fell sick and died. Abū
Tālḥa’s wife washed and enshrouded the body of the child and adorned herself for her husband. When Abū Tālḥa returned home that evening, he inquired about his son. His wife responded, “The child is quiet and I hope he is in peace,” and the couple spent the night together. The following morning, his wife informed him that his son had died. Abū Tālḥa went to offer the morning prayer with the Prophet Muhammad and told him what had happened. The Prophet blessed Abū Tālḥa and his wife for their reaction to their misfortune and said, “May Allah bless you with good offspring” (al-Bukhārī 23: 41). After this event, Abū Tālḥa’s wife bore nine sons. Perhaps the implied message of this hadith is that a calm acceptance of death is preferable and rewarded.

Additionally, the construction of tombstones is also considered detrimental to the well-being of the deceased as it is thought that the additional weight of a tombstone inflicted physical pain on the corpse.63 Furthermore, Muslim scholars also argued against the construction of tombstones because not only do ornamentation of tombstones encourage outward vanities, but they may also encourage venerating the deceased as it is thought that the additional weight of a tombstone in ḥālī (ḥālī) may delay the soul’s free passage into the otherworldly realms.64 Additionally, they serve as a reminder that no one, not even the most pious, is spared from death.

4 Interactions between the living and the dead

After experiencing the interrogations of Munkar and Nakir, the soul of the deceased is thought to linger in a transitory abode identified as the barzakh.65 The barzakh is mentioned three times in the Qur’an; twice in reference to the partition of salt and fresh water,66 and once about the barrier separating the dead from the living.67 The barzakh is often referred to as an isthmus separating the physical realm from the spiritual realm;68 however, the barzakh does allow for interactions between the living and the dead. Most often, these interactions are thought to occur during sleep.

The relationship between death and sleep is most explicitly described in the Qur’an: “Allah takes the souls at the time of their death, and those that do not die [He takes] during their sleep. Then He keeps those for which He has decreed death and releases the others for a specific term. Indeed in that are signs for a people who give thought” (Qur’an 39: 42). This verse suggests that a disembodied soul travels outside of the body during sleep and into other-worldly realms, such as the barzakh. As both the spirit of a dreamer and the dead are separated from the body and potentially free to wander otherworldly realms, this might even suggest that the spirit of a dreamer may wander into the barzakh. The souls of those fated to die do not return from those realms, whereas those who are permitted to live do return.

Dreams are conduits through which the dead may be able to communicate and provide insights into the experience of the afterlife. Evidently, al-Ghazālī supported the notion that the dead and the living can interact with one another through dreams stating, “death is a wondrous thing because it bears a faint similarity to

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63 As demonstrated by the Prophet who had tombs levelled to ease the suffering of the dead (see Leisten, “Between Orthodoxy and Exegesis,” 15–6).
64 Leisten, “Between Orthodoxy and Exegesis,” 16.
65 Tetsuya, “Cairene Cemeteries,” 86.
66 According to Muslim commentators and philologists, the term barzakh is not Arabic in origin but rooted in the Persian word faršakh referring to a measure of land (see Halevi, “Muhammad’s Grave,” 325).
67 “And it is He who has released [simultaneously] the two seas, one fresh and sweet and one salty and bitter, and He placed between them a barrier and prohibiting partition” (Qur’an 25: 53). As well as: “He released the two seas, meeting [side by side]; Between them is a barrier [so] neither of them transgresses” (Qur’an 55: 19–20).
68 “For such is the state of the disbelievers until, when death comes to one of them, he says, ‘My Lord, send me back that I might do righteousness in that which I left behind.’ No! It is only a word he is saying; and behind them is a barrier until the Day they are resurrected” (Qur’an 23: 99–100; see, also, Halevi, “Muhammad’s Grave,” 201).
69 Kinberg, “Interaction Between this World and the Afterworld in Early Islamic tradition,” 286.
70 The term used here is the plural term for nafs, which is al-anfūs (الأنفس).
[sleep], in that sleep raises the cover from the unseen world so that the sleeper comes to know what will happen in the future.”⁷¹ One particular narrative describes an event involving the students of a tedious teacher who died:

Someone has related this story: Our father engaged for us a teacher to teach us our lessons at home. Then the teacher died. After six days we went to this grave to visit him...Someone passed by us selling a plate of figs, which we bought and ate, throwing the stems onto the grave. When night came, [our father] saw the dead man in a dream, and said to him, “How are you?” “Fine,” he replied, “except that your children took my grave for a garbage pile and talked about me, with words that are nothing but infidelity!” [Our father] reprimanded us, and we said [to each other], “Glory be to God! He [the teacher] continues to bother us in the hereafter just as he did on earth.”⁷²

In a narrative attributed to the late tenth-century Persian Ṣūfī, Abū Bakr al-Kalābādhi, Ibrahim ibn Shaybān describes having had a disciple die and momentarily return to life. Shaybān asked his disciple, “Is there life after death?” to which his disciple responds, “Knowest thou not that His friends do not die, but are moved from one abode to another?”⁷³

In addition to narratives depicting interactions between the living and the dead, there are a variety of accounts on the particular interactions the dead have with one another. For instance, in one anecdote, the Prophet describes a man who dreams that his recently deceased wife was not amongst the community of the dead because she was too embarrassed of her burial shroud. Upon awakening, the husband searched for and found a more suitable shroud to give to his wife. The husband wrapped the newly acquired shroud around the enshrouded body of a recently deceased and pious man. The following night, the husband had another dream in which he saw his wife amongst the community of the dead and satisfied with her new shroud. The unique attribute of this narrative is that it demonstrates that not only was the wife able to interact with her husband in the afterlife, but that the enshrouded pious man was able to give her the new shroud thus allowing her to continue interacting with the other dead.⁷⁴

The purpose of these anecdotes is that they establish interactions between the living and the dead in two ways: they demonstrate that the dead retain their awareness, and they can express themselves to the living, particularly if they are experiencing anguish or discomfort (as the example of the tedious teacher has illustrated); and these interactions offer a glimpse into the experience of the afterlife. Furthermore, these narratives reenforce the notion of a life after death, which, in turn, assuages the fear of death by reiterating the existence of an afterlife in which one does not die. For instance, in yet another account, a man sitting next to the body of his enshrouded younger brother witnessed the dead brother suddenly removing the cloth covering his face and greeting his living brother: “The living brother asks if there is a life after death, and the deceased answers affirmatively...he tells him how he met a merciful Lord...[and] he declares that death is easier than people usually think.”⁷⁵

5 Remembering death

5.1 Confronting death anxiety in Islam

The phrase, “Every soul will taste death,” appears upwards to three times within the Qur’ān.⁷⁶ Arguably, this does more than demonstrate that Islam has an exceptional preoccupation with the subject of death; it acts as a reminder that the only certainty of life is that it will end. Not only is this an important underlying

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71 al-Ghazālī, The Remembrance, 154; and 149–69.
72 This narrative is attributed to al-Ghazālī (see Smith and Haddad, The Islamic Understanding of Death and Resurrection, 52).
74 This narrative appears in Smith and Haddad, The Islamic Understanding of Death and Resurrection, 54.
75 Kinberg, “Interactions,” 290.
76 “Every soul will taste death, and you will only be given your [full] compensation on the Day of Resurrection” (Qur’ān 3:185);
“Every soul will taste death. And We test you with evil and with good as trial; and to Us you will be returned” (Qur’ān 21:35);
“Every soul will taste death. Then to Us will you be returned” (Qur’ān 29:57).
fact reiterated throughout *The Remembrance*, but it also allows for the introductions of parameters for navigating this worldly life to prepare for the next. The core tenet is the understanding that the real world is the world to come (akhirah) – everything else is just a distraction embedded in the material and temporally confined world (dunyā); “People are asleep, and when they die, they awake” (Qur’ān 50:22).²⁷ In an effort to better understand how best to prepare for this awakening, al-Ghazālī advocated for traditional practices, such as visiting graves and meditating on death, as a method of recognising the inevitability of death in order to better prepare for the afterlife.

By not remembering their impending mortality and depriving themselves of the pursuit of felicity²⁸ in their earthly life, the individual subjects themselves to an eternity of punishments and agonies and is barred from entering the abode of Paradise upon the hour of the Resurrection (al-qiyāma).²⁹ Instead, they experience dreadful tortments in their graves and are bound for a seven-levelled hell³⁰ where the damned drink festering waters and repeatedly vomit pus and blood, all while their skin is continually burned by the scorching winds (Qur’ān 56:42–43; Qur’ān 7:41).³¹

As far as al-Ghazālī was concerned, “the meaning of death is quite simply the deprivation of man’s property consequent upon his being pitched into another world which does not correspond to this.”³² Evidently, al-Ghazālī is revealing a significant observation: with every breath drawn, each individual confronts the inevitable event of death, and yet they seemingly go about their life without giving this fact any attention. He points to earthly attachments and sheer ignorance as to the unmistakable agents that divert the attention of individuals away from the awareness of death.

The problem with attachments is twofold: firstly, attachments distract from remembering the real and inevitable event of death. This attachment manifests when there is a lack of awareness of one’s certain death:

> Always does he think that death is ahead of him, but does not reckon upon its befalling him and that before long he will tumble into it. Constantly does he imagine that he will be following funeral cortèges, and never imagines that his own cortège will some day be followed, because witnessing the demise of others is something which is often repeated and has become familiar. But as far as his own death is concerned, he has no experience of it, and cannot imagine that he will experience it, for it has never transpired; and when it does it will never do so again: it will be the first and the final time.³³

Death should not just be remembered during a funerary procession or when one visits the graves of the dead, but rather it should be a necessary and almost daily practice for all. Death implies the separation of attachments which can be a painful process if these attachments were the primary concern of the individual whilst they were alive. To avoid the pain and trauma of separating from these attachments, it is best to recognise that attachments will be left behind. Only when death is acknowledged and attachments have been released, the focus shifts from anxiety to anticipating “the only true life, that of the Hereafter.”³⁴ In *The Remembrance*, al-Ghazālī cites the following āthār:

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²⁷ Gianotti’s, *al-Ghazālī’s Unspeakable Doctrine of the Soul* (2001) includes a passage from al-Ghazālī’s Jawāhir which demonstrates his emphasis on the non-literal interpretation of the afterlife: “Understand from this that, as long as you are in this life of al-dunyā, you are sleeping. Indeed, your awakening is after death” (p. 163).


²⁹ The righteous will be rewarded by entering through the gates of Paradise (janna) where they live eternally (Qur’ān 7:42). The realm of Paradise is seven levelled and is described as bountiful, and consists of majestic rivers of water, milk, wine, and honey where the righteous are honoured with their fill of food and drink, and adorned in finery; they want for nothing and experience only peace and comfort (Qur’ān 47:15; see, also, Smith and Haddad, *The Islamic Understanding of Death and Resurrection*, 86–9).

³⁰ Referred to within “The Night Journey” (al-Isrā’ wa-Mi’rāţ), which describes the Prophet Muḥammad’s experience of travelling through the Islamic conception of heaven and hell (jannaham) (see Papan-Matin, *Beyond Death*, 85).


³³ Ibid., 27.

³⁴ O’Shaughnessy, *Muhammad’s Thoughts on Death*, 80.
Said Ya’lā ibn al-Walid, “I was walking one day with Abu’l-Dardā, and asked him, ‘What do you like to happen to those you like?’ ‘Death,’ he answered. ‘But if one has not died yet?’ I asked, and he answered, ‘That his progeny and wealth should be scanty. I feel a liking for death because it is liked only by the believer, whom it releases from his imprisonment. And I like one’s progeny and wealth to be scanty because these things are a trial, and can occasion familiarity with this world, and familiarity with that which must one day be left behind is the very extremity of sorrow. All that is other than God, His remembrance, and familiarity with Him must be abandoned upon one’s death.’”

As this account and other narratives cited throughout The Remembrance demonstrate, recognising death entails recognising the attachments which not only make separating from this life more difficult, but also distract one from the “attainment of otherworldly felicity.”

5.2 Visiting graves and meditating on death

In addition to demonstrating that mundane and structured day-to-day activities can be used to evoke the practice of remembrance of death,87 visiting graves, washing the dead, and praying on their behalf are also suitable practices that evoke the living of the inevitability of death. According to al-Ghazālī, the Prophet Muhammad particularly encouraged the visitation of graves and other funerary practices: “Visit graves, and you will be reminded of the Afterlife; wash your dead, for truly in the touching of an empty body there is an eloquent lesson; and offer prayers at funerals, that perhaps you may grieve.”88 More specifically, al-Ghazālī posited that the best practice is spending time at cemeteries and meditating upon the graves of deceased, pious Muslims.

While they were alive, the pious were examples of virtue and would have been asked to bless and pray for other individuals; therefore, it is believed that in their death they still retain the influence to intercede on behalf of others. This can be demonstrated in reference to the Qarāfā in Egypt. As the Prophet encouraged the practice of visiting graves, visitors of the Cairene cemeteries would congregate to pray for intercession at the tombs or shrines of the pious and the saints.89 Additionally, the cemeteries became places of religious education, particularly for Sūfis, who flocked to the shrines of saints to receive education from religious mudarrisūn or shaykhs with the hopes of employment opportunities at the end of their studies. Thus, the Qarāfā not only represented the location in which the physical remains of the dead are interred, but they served as an important place for both the living and the dead; the living benefit from intercessions of the dead, and the dead benefit from the prayers of the living.90

Regularly contemplating death brings to mind mannerisms, deeds, and attachments to the world—superfluous notions that bind to the material world and which must be recognised and overcome in the pursuit of felicity in the afterlife. To demonstrate how contemplating death can be practiced, al-Ghazālī suggests imagining the dead decomposing beneath the ground:

Said ‘Umar ibn ‘Abd al-‘Azīz91 to a man with whom he was sitting, ‘O So-and-so! Tonight I have not slept because of thinking of the grave and its occupant. Truly, if you were to behold a dead man after three days in his grave you would be

85 al-Ghazālī, The Remembrance, 128.
86 Garden, The First Islamic Reviver, 66.
87 al-Ghazālī curated a series of meditations to keep death salient, including a mediation which he recommends prior to falling asleep: “When you want to go to sleep, lay out your bed pointing to Mecca, and sleep on your right side, the side on which the corpse reclines in the tomb. Sleep is the similitude of death and waking of the Resurrection. Remember that in like manner you will lie in the tomb, completely alone; only your works will be with you, only the effort you have made will be rewarded” (see Montgomery Watt, The Faith and Practice of al-Ghazālī, 115).
88 al-Ghazālī, The Remembrance, 112.
89 However, not all tombstones and mausoleums were properly ascribed as some were incorrectly reattributed throughout time. For example a particular tomb ascribed to the eleventh-century caliph, al-Mustaṣfīr, was, in actual fact, the tomb of al-Mustatīr – a local onion merchant (see Tetsuya, “Cairene Cemeteries as Public Locii in Mamluk Egypt,” 95).
90 Tetsuya, “Cairene Cemeteries as Public Locii in Mamluk Egypt,” 87.
91 ‘Umar ibn ‘Abd al-‘Azīz (Umar II) was a Caliph during the Umayyad Caliphate (see Fahn, “A Brief Analysis of the Meditation on Death in Sufism,” 8).
repelled by his presence even had you been familiar with him for a long while. You would see a house with a changed smell in which vermin move about, and where pus flows, where worms penetrate, and where the shrouds have decayed, where once there was a sweet odour, pure garments and an excellent appearance. ’Then he moaned and fell down in a swoon.”

In imagining their death in this way, the contemplator of these meditations can experience “dhawq (literally ‘tasting’) of death, the result of which would be a decisive reorientation of the moral compass and direction of one’s life.” To illustrate the effects of tasting one’s death further, al-Ghazâlî cites another narrative attributed to ‘Umar ibn ‘Abd al-‘Azîz, who responds to the reaction of a jurist who was taken aback with his rather macabre contemplation of his death:

’O So-and-So!’ [the Caliph] said, ’Could you but see me three days after having been set in my grave, when the pupils of my eyes have come forth and flowed across my cheeks, when my lips have shrivelled back over my teeth, when my mouth has opened and the pus runs out, when my belly is inflated and rises above my chest, when my spine protrudes from my rear, and when the worms, and the pus have emerged from my nostrils; then you would behold something far more remarkable than that which you see now.”

These inspired descriptions illustrating the liberation from the constraints of the physical abode may also imply that one does not need to wait until physical death to experience this liberation. Contemplating death induces a shift in the existential framework of how death is interpreted.

Frequently contemplating death allows for the death of one’s lower qualities, or carnal soul (fanâ’ al-nafs) which leads one towards the acceptance of corporeal death and the subsequent reunion with Allâh. Within Şûfism, the death of the carnal soul (nafs) implies the destruction of qualities that prevent the possibility for experiencing the spiritual, or mystical union with Allâh, and “the ensuing spiritual resurrection in this life.” Essentially, the remembrance of death allows for the annihilation of the carnal soul which consequently liberates the individual into a state of surrender and contentment harbouring no fear of death nor attachments to life.

There are thorough scholarly works on this concept which verge beyond the scope of this present study; however, it is important to note that voluntary death refers to the experience of the death of the conventional self before dying a natural death. Furthermore, the notion of a radical break from the attachments of the earthly world requires a substantial period of preparation and practice; an approach not likely attainable for even the most devout practitioners, nor is this concept likely useful for individuals nearing the end of their lives.

6 Conclusion

The field of thanatology has become increasingly exciting in the last decade, particularly as it both incorporates and delves further into examinations of interreligious and intrareligious conversations. Part of the work in this study has been to introduce conceptions pertaining to death and the afterlife in Islam and to suggest that not only are these conceptions still relevant, but if they are considered appropriately (meaning

95 Schimmel, Mystical Dimensions of Islam, 136.
96 “The primary obstacle to progress was the ego (nafs) and its whims and appetites. The ego must be so thoroughly overcome that the practitioner becomes ‘as a corpse in the hands of a corpse washer,’ gratefully accepting the dictates of the divine will” (Garden, The First Islamic Reviver, 33).
97 Perreira, “Die Before You Die,” 262. This requires a deeply inward contemplation of core tenets contained within Şûfism which includes the concept of voluntary death (al-mawt al-ikhtiyârî), or the notion of “die before you die” (see, also, Chittick, “Rûmi’s View of Death,” 36).
interpreted within their religious and social contexts), they may offer insights into navigating modern challenges on death and dying.

By exploring death and memoria in Islam through the narratives within al-Ghazâlî’s *The Remembrance*, this study presents an introductory framework that may be significant within a pastoral setting. Furthermore, this framework reiterates concepts put forth by TMT that demonstrate how contemplating death and the afterlife within a religious context strengthens the religious beliefs of those who adhere to the faith. Religious beliefs offer an impression of immortality; death is not the end but rather the gateway to the hereafter. Additionally, the idea of transcending this earthly life strengthens religious beliefs and thinking about the afterlife provides opportunities for reflection on the possibility for salvation.

Islamic literature contains a plethora of wildly descriptive narratives illustrating the experience of death and the afterlife. Arguably, these narratives also draw attention to the immense anxiety associated with confronting mortality that resonates within our own contemporary thanatophobic societies. By positing death as a transitional state which begins with the physical cessation of bodily functions and the subsequent experience of the *barzakh*, these narratives demonstrate that transitioning into a state of death does not necessarily assume the total absence of *being.* As presented throughout this work, it can be argued that these descriptive narratives serve to remind an individual intent on attaining felicity in the afterlife of the tenets of the faith and observances of ritual obligations. Such narratives advocating for the contemplation of death before the advent of the phenomenon provides the individual with the opportunity to make amends, atone for their sins, and be weary of their earthly attachments. These narratives may also serve to recalibrate the focus from navigating this worldly life (*al-dunyâ*) to preparing for the afterlife (*al-akhirâ*) by providing the possibility for redemption. Thus, the pastoral significance lies in the recognition of the importance of contemplating death and the firm belief of the afterlife for Muslims. In this way, death anxiety may present itself not as the fear of the cessation of life, but rather as being unprepared for life after life.

A limitation of this present study is that it has only broadly examined narratives cited in the available literature, some of which are present within the first half of *The Remembrance*. It has not included causal references to the complete works of *The Revival*, nor has it regarded concepts related more specifically to Islamic eschatology. The vast majority of the scholarship on the works of al-Ghazâlî has examined the developments in significant doctrines within the wider corpus. And yet, there is value in further exploration of al-Ghazâlî’s perspectives on death and the afterlife within a more contemporary framework which has not been fully articulated within the wider Islamic scholarship. As attitudes towards death are most challenged when confronted with death, there is value in revisiting advocations for reflecting on the inevitability of death that may provide pastoral significance to those confronted with death, dying, and bereavement.

The complexity of defining death and providing resources for confronting death and death anxiety is becoming increasingly harder to address. Death anxiety reveals itself more and more in various ways, particularly in the West as more individuals prefer to die in hospitals, or those in the process of dying are placed in palliative or hospice care institutions. Furthermore, death is no longer considered an active reminder; urban planning has opted to build cemeteries outside of city limits, and graveyards have become physical archival records of family trees rather than frequently visited places of reflection and contemplation on mortality. Moreover, newly structured ways of confronting death have impacted the experience as physicians and families may find themselves reluctant to discuss death and dying. The British historian Arnold Toynbee summarises the repercussion of this reluctance because “to die unprepared is the worst spiritual misfortune that can befall a human being.” Perhaps al-Ghazâlî would agree.

The impact and overall value of studying death and afterlife beliefs from a religious scholarship point of view lies within the shared recognition of mortality. This speaks to the core of human existence and is what connects us to the most fundamental fact of human life – the fact that it ends.

100 Ibid.
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