

Islam Question & Answer

General Supervisor:
Shaykh Muhammad Saalih al-Munajjid

27075 - The degrees and levels of Paradise and Hell, and the deeds that take one to them

the question

How many heavens and hells are there? How do these levels differentiate? And what do you need to do to get into each level?.

Detailed answer

Praise be to Allah.

With regard to numbers, there is one Hell and one Paradise, but each of them has degrees and levels. Paradise is sometimes mentioned in the plural in the Sunnah, but this does not mean that there are several types of Paradise; rather this is indicative of its greatness and the various degrees and levels in it, or it is indicative of the greatness of the reward of the one who enters it, as it says in the hadeeth of Anas ibn Maalik that Umm al-Rubayyi' bint al-Bara' , who was the mother of Haarithah ibn Suraaqah, came to the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) and said: O Prophet of Allaah, will you not tell me about Haarithah?" - who had been killed at the battle of Badr by a stray arrow. "If he is in Paradise I will bear it with patience but if it is otherwise then I shall weep long and hard for him." He said: "O Umm Haarithah, there are gardens in Paradise - according to another report: many gardens - and your son has attained the highest Firdaws." Narrated by al-Bukhaari, 2809.

Secondly:

The levels of Hell differ according to the extent of their inhabitants' kufr in this world. The hypocrites will be in the lowest level of Hell, as our Lord has told us (interpretation of the meaning):

Islam Question & Answer

General Supervisor:

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“Verily, the hypocrites will be in the lowest depth (grade) of the Fire; no helper will you find for them”

[al-Nisa’ 4:145]

The least severe (in torment) of its levels – from which we seek refuge with Allaah – was mentioned by the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) in the hadeeth reported by al-Nu’maan ibn Basheer who said: The Messenger of Allaah (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) said: “The least severely punished of the people of Hell will be a man who has two shoes and shoelaces of Fire – according to another version: two live coals will be placed on the soles of his feet – because of which his brains will boil as a pot boils. He will not think that anyone is being punished more severely than him, but he will be the one who is punished most lightly.” Narrated by al-Bukhaari, 6562; Muslim, 212. The person is named specifically in a report narrated by Muslim, where it says that this is Abu Taalib, the paternal uncle of the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him), for whom Allaah will reduce the punishment because of the role he played in protecting Islam at the beginning.

Thirdly:

We know of no limit to the number of degrees and levels in Paradise. It was said that their number is equal to the number of verses in the Qur’aan, based on the hadeeth of ‘Abd-Allaah ibn ‘Amr, who said that the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) said: “It will be said to the companion of the Qur’aan: ‘Recite and rise in status as you used to recite in the world, and your position will be at the last verse you recite.’” Narrated by Abu Dawood, 1646; al-Tirmidhi, 2914; classed as saheeh by al-Albaani in Saheeh Abi Dawood.

Al-Mundhiri said in al-Targheeb: al-Khattaabi said: It said in the report that the number of verses in the Qur’aan is the number of degrees or levels of Paradise in the Hereafter, and it will be said to the reader: ‘Rise through the levels to the extent that you used to read the verses of the Qur’aan.

Islam Question & Answer

General Supervisor:
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Whoever recites all of the Qur'aan, will reach the highest degree of Paradise in the Hereafter, and whoever recites part of it will reach a level commensurate with that, and the limit of his reward will match the limit of his reading. Al-Targheeb wa'l-Tarheeb, 2/228

But this idea is subject to further discussion, because the hadeeth speaks of the manaazil (status, position) of those who memorized Qur'aan, not of their darajaat (degrees, levels). The darajah (degree or level) varies according to their efforts in this world, just as there are other acts of faith in which people vary in status, such as sincere faith, jihad and others. So we cannot say that the one who memorized the entire Qur'aan will be in the highest degrees of Paradise in absolute terms.

The highest of the degrees of Paradise is al-Firdaws, as it was narrated that Abu Hurayrah (may Allaah be pleased with him) said: The Messenger of Allaah (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) said: "... When you ask of Allaah, ask Him for al-Firdaws, for it is in the middle of Paradise and is the highest part of Paradise, and above it is the Throne of the Most Merciful, and from it spring forth the rivers of Paradise." Narrated by al-Bukhaari, 2637; Muslim, 2831

What is meant by the "middle of Paradise" is the best of it, as when Allaah says (interpretation of the meaning):

"Thus We have made you a just (and the best) nation (lit. a middle nation)"

[al-Baqarah 2:143]

The Sunnah also describes the position of those who do certain actions. For example:

1 - Faith in Allaah and belief in the Messengers:

It was narrated from Abu Sa'eed al-Khudri (may Allaah be pleased with him) that the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) said: "The people of Paradise will be able to see the

Islam Question & Answer

General Supervisor:

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people in the apartments above them as you see the shining stars on the horizon in the east and the west, because of the differences in their status.” They said: “O Messenger of Allaah, is that the status of the Prophets which no one else will reach besides them?” He said: “No, by the One in Whose hand is my soul, they are men who had faith in Allaah and believed in the Messengers.” Narrated by al-Bukhaari, 2082; Muslim, 2831.

2 - Jihad for the sake of Allaah:

It was narrated that Abu Hurayrah (may Allaah be pleased with him) said: The Messenger of Allaah (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) said: “In Paradise there are one hundred degrees which Allaah has prepared for those who strive in jihad for the sake of Allaah. The distance between each two degrees is like the distance between the heavens and the earth.” Narrated by al-Bukhaari, 2637.

3 - The one who sincerely desires martyrdom may also attain that.

It was narrated from Sahl ibn Haneef that the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) said: “Whoever asks Allaah sincerely for martyrdom, Allaah will cause him to reach the status of the martyrs even if he dies in his bed.” Narrated by al-Bukhaari, 1909.

4 - Spending for the sake of Allaah.

It was narrated that Abu Hurayrah (may Allaah be pleased with him) said: The poor came to the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) and said: “The rich people have taken all the highest positions. They pray as we pray, and they fast as we fast, but they have surplus wealth with which they perform Hajj and strive in jihad and give in charity...” Narrated by al-Bukhaari, 807; Muslim, 595.

5 - Doing wudoo' properly even when it is difficult, taking many steps towards the mosque and waiting for prayer after prayer.

Islam Question & Answer

General Supervisor:
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It was narrated from Abu Hurayrah that the Messenger of Allaah (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) said: "Shall I not tell you of something by means of which Allaah erases sins and raises you in status?" They said: "Yes, O Messenger of Allaah." He said: "Doing wudoo' well even when it is difficult, taking many steps to the mosques and waiting for prayer after prayer. That is (equivalent) to guarding the frontier." Narrated by Muslim, 251.

6 - Memorizing Qur'aan

'Abd-Allaah ibn 'Amr narrated that the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) said: "It will be said to the companion of the Qur'aan: 'Recite and rise in status as you used to recite in the world, and your position will be at the last verse you recite.'" Narrated by Abu Dawood, 1646; al-Tirmidhi, 2914; classed as saheeh by al-Albaani in Saheeh Abi Dawood.

The one who is keen should set his sights on the highest position in Paradise and strive to earn the pleasure of Allaah and enter the Paradise of al-Firdaws, which is the highest that Allaah has promised.

And Allaah knows best.