

**Tazkiyah Halaqa
Mortality – Session 24
Sheikh Adnan Rajeh**

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Wellness Centre, London, Ontario

Overview

This session advances the mortality module by shifting from “mortality as a gift” into *what, exactly, is feared in death*—and how an Islamic understanding reframes that fear in a spiritually productive way. Sheikh Adnan argues that many people cannot truly accept mortality because they implicitly define death as total non-existence (“the lights go out”), which creates paralysing fear and leads either to denial or unhealthy obsession. The corrective he insists upon is theological and psychological: for a Muslim, death must be understood as a **transition** (to barzakh and then accountability), because only then does fear become motivating rather than disabling.

What humans fear: “nothingness”

Sheikh Adnan claims that the deepest fear beneath death-anxiety is not pain or separation but *non-existence*—the idea of consciousness ending and being “left out” of reality entirely. He links this to an everyday human wound: being excluded (especially in childhood) is profoundly distressing, and death conceived as nothingness becomes the ultimate exclusion, which the psyche struggles to integrate. He therefore argues it is essentially impossible to accept death constructively if one holds an implicit “nothingness” model; at best one can numb and ignore the fear through busyness and distraction.

Two extremes: obsession or avoidance

He describes two historical patterns in response to death-as-nothingness:

- Some societies avoid thinking about it entirely and keep life filled with constant activity to prevent confronting it.
- Others (he points to pre-Islamic Arab tendencies) became preoccupied with death and framed it as an “honourable end,” feeding cycles of conflict and long-running vendettas.

Both are presented as maladaptive extremes created by the same underlying problem: a model of death that does not provide the human psyche with a coherent way to live well.

The Islamic correction: death as transition

Sheikh Adnan argues that the Islamic worldview resolves the “nothingness” problem by insisting death is not annihilation but a passage into another stage of existence (barzakh), and ultimately accountability. He cites prophetic instruction to live in this world as a traveller (gharīb/‘ābir sabīl), with Ibn ‘Umar’s commentary to not rely on reaching morning/evening and to take from health and life for the time when those capacities are gone. He also references prophetic descriptions of the grave as the first stage of the Hereafter, one that may be ease or hardship and foreshadows what follows.

A healthier fear: accountability, not oblivion

The lecture reframes fear of death into a form he endorses: not panic at non-existence, but concern about preparedness—no more chances to repent, rectify, increase good deeds, or improve quality. He calls this fear “healthy” because it pushes moral action (tawbah, ṣalāh, sincerity, and urgency), whereas fear of nothingness tends to produce flight behaviours: denial, avoidance, or clinging to worldly life at any cost. He warns directly that if death is still perceived as the end (despite nominal belief), the rest of Islam becomes difficult to operationalise, because core motivations and moral logic become unstable.

Qisr al-amal: replacing the nafs’ lie

A central practical theme is **qisr al-amal** (shortening one’s long hopes): living with the truthful awareness that death could occur at any time, even if it is *probabilistically* more likely later. Sheikh Adnan critiques a common exercise (“live as if you will die next Tuesday”) as useful for reflection but fundamentally a *lie*—and he refuses to endorse living by lies. He then turns the critique back onto the listener: the nafs also tells lies (“you are fine; you have plenty of time”), and these are accepted because they are emotionally comfortable; the task is to replace them with the truth that the possibility of death is never zero.

What would change if told you will die?

He argues that if mortality is truly internalised, day-to-day life should not require radical scrambling upon receiving news of imminent death. If someone would quit work, abandon obligations, or make reckless choices, that signals deeper problems of intention and life-structure (e.g., working for the wrong reasons, misunderstanding worship, or living in a way that is not defensible if life ends soon). By contrast, a coherent life oriented to Allah would largely continue the same pattern—ṣalāh, family care, halal earning, seeking knowledge, communal worship—while perhaps only accelerating overdue reconciliations or farewells.

Preparation as rational risk management

To make the point concrete, Sheikh Adnan compares mortality preparedness to professional and societal safety norms: even when catastrophic outcomes are low probability, responsible systems plan for them (e.g., fire precautions, medical “worst case” readiness). He argues it is therefore irrational to treat death as though its *possibility* were zero simply because its probability feels low in youth or health. Proper acceptance means aligning lifestyle choices with the reality that death can occur at any time, so that if it comes, one is not “caught unprepared.”

What comes next

He closes by stating that one further “missing piece” will be added in the next session, followed by a dedicated Q&A session to address questions arising from the mortality module. A video link is included in the document.

Video Link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EdRLxcTnRZg>