

What Does *Wafat* Mean? Do We Experience *Wafat*, or Do We Die?

What Does *Wafat* Mean, What Is the Difference between *Wafat* and Death, and Which One Is More Accurate with Regard to the Human Being?

What does *wafat* mean? Why do we use the word "*wafat*" for a person who passes away? Are the words death, *fawt*, and *wafat* the same, or are they different? Which one is more accurate when it comes to the human being? In the end, do we experience death, *fawt*, or *wafat*?

People around the world speak different languages. Each language has its own unique characteristics and beauties, and there is no doubt about that. However, we must accept that different languages are not on the same level in terms of richness and the breadth and depth of vocabulary. Some languages are richer in words than others. Generally, the richer a language is in terms of vocabulary and the more specialized words it has to describe concepts, the more complete it is. This is because it can use words that create the least ambiguity in explaining abstract and actual concepts. Of course, in this lesson, we do not intend to discuss the characteristics of different languages or compare them with one another. Rather, our goal in raising this issue is to examine a concept called death or *wafat* and the misunderstandings surrounding it.

In English, we do not have a specialized and accurate word to describe what happens at the end of a person's life. For this reason, when someone's life comes to an end, we use the word death and say "He died." In French and Arabic, the words 'mort' and 'mawt' are used, which have the same meaning as death in English. Death is the opposite of life and means loss of life. When we say someone

has died, it means he has been destroyed and perished. While the main dimension of our existence or our 'me' does not perish under any circumstances. In other words, what we call death and the destruction of life only happens in the body, not in the soul. Therefore, death is not an appropriate word to describe what happens at the end of a person's life.

Another term that we usually use in this regard is '*fawt*.' *Fawt* originally means missing something. For example, we say "I missed my prayer or I missed that action." This word is correct somehow because we no longer have the person with us. But it is still not an appropriate word to describe the event accurately. The correct term is '*wafat*.' It is correct to say "That person experienced *wafat*," not using the terms *fawt* or death. Now what does *wafat* mean, and why do we use this term?

The Etymology of *Wafat*

What does *wafat* mean? *Wafat* is an Arabic word that comes from the same root as the words '*tawaffa*' and '*istifa*.' *Istifa* encompasses the idea of fully receiving or obtaining something, or the complete transfer of something from one place to another. For instance, when someone fully receives what is owed to them from someone else, the word *istifa* is used. *Wafat* has the same meaning as well.¹

The word "*wafat*" means "**the complete transfer of something from one place to another.**" God has used the word *wafat* in the Quran to describe what happens at

¹. In Arabic the word '*tawaffa*' is used whenever a person receives something in full, without the least slicing or omission. (<https://www.al-islam.org/eternal-life-life-after-death-murtadha-mutahhari/resurrection>)

the moment of death.² Wherever He uses the word *mawt* about humans, He also means *wafat*.

Obviously, if we want to translate *wafat* into English, we need to provide some explanations about it. But in Arabic, the whole concept can be conveyed with just one word. This is also one of the reasons that God chose the Arabic language for His book. In Arabic, all words have a unique and distinct meaning. Therefore, unlike other languages that usually have some ambiguities, in Arabic, we cannot interpret a word or phrase in different ways. For example, the words '*sabeel*,' '*sirat*,' and "*tareeqe*" are all translated into "path" in English, but in Arabic, each of them refers to a specific type of path.

But why did God use the word *wafat* to describe the transfer to the realm of the hereafter? What does He want to tell us by using this word? In practice, what does *wafat* mean? And at the moment of *wafat*, what is going to be transferred and from where to where?

We Have All Experienced *Wafat* Before!

What does *wafat* mean? To understand the term *wafat* and what is transferred from where to where at the time of *wafat*, we need to refer to the Law of Proportion and the relationship between the world and the hereafter. By understanding this law, we can easily understand what *wafat* means and how it differs from death.

². Quran, 39:42

We stated that the relationship between the world and the hereafter is like the relationship between the mother's womb and the world. Considering this relationship, imagine a mother giving birth to twins. Suppose one of these fetuses is born into the world while the other is still in the womb. Now put yourself in the place of the second fetus in the womb. What do you think he thinks about what has happened to his sibling? Naturally, the one inside the womb thinks that the other one is dead! The second fetus has not seen the world and does not know that it exists. To that fetus, life is only meaningful inside the womb, and anyone who leaves the womb is dead. Now put yourself in the place of the first fetus who has entered the vast, colorful, and amazing world from the small environment of the womb. How do you think he feels? Does he also think that he has died? Of course not! He simply feels that has been transferred from one place to another.

The same thing happens in the relationship between the world and the hereafter. It means that at the end of life, our soul completely separates from the world and is transferred or born into another realm called the *Malakut* or *Barzakh*. That is why God uses the word *wafat* instead of *mawt* or death, which implies non-existence and death. Considering this fact, we have already experienced *wafat* once we exited the mother's womb and were transferred or 'born' into the world.

To sum up, *wafat* literally means a complete transfer and a type of birth. We experience this birth and transfer three times during our eternal existence: first, when we are born into this world from our mother's womb, second, when we are born into *Barzakh* from this world, and third, when we are born into Resurrection from *Barzakh*.