

Experiencing Jahannam

Hell – the punishment of Allah – has been mentioned in the Quran and Sunnah many times. It is the eternal abode of those who commit shirk with Allah, and the temporary abode of the sinning Muslims whom Allah chose to purify through the fire of Hell. We all read about it from time to time, but how often do we say to ourselves: “What if I was in Jahannam?” Let's take a look at what experiencing jahannam would be like, may Allah protect us from ever experiencing it.

The root word for Jahannam (جهنم) is jeem haa meem, and its meaning is to frown, glower, scowl, to regard with displeasure. The word Jahm (from the same root) means sullen, glum, morose, gloomy.¹ From these meanings, we can see that Jahannam is an extremely depressing place, full of darkness. It just doesn't burn and torture, it frowns at its inhabitants while doing so!

Entry into Jahannam

We are told about the entry of the disbelievers into Jahannam in Surah Zumar:

And those who disbelieved will be driven to Hell in groups, till, when they reach it, the gates thereof will be opened (suddenly like a prison at the arrival of the prisoners). And its keepers will say, "Did not the Messengers come to you from yourselves, reciting to you the Verses of your Lord, and warning you of the Meeting of this Day of yours?" They will say: "Yes, but the Word of torment has been justified against the disbelievers!"

It will be said (to them): "Enter you the gates of Hell, to abide therein. And (indeed) what an evil abode of the arrogant!"

[39:71-72]

Regarding حَتَّىٰ إِذَا جَاءُوهَا فَتُحْتَأَمُّ أَبْوَابُهَا “when they reach it the gates thereof will be opened (suddenly)”, Al Hafidh ibn Kathir [RA] explains in his tafsir, “this means, as soon as they arrive, the gates will be opened quickly, in order to hasten on their punishment”². So, the entry into Jahannam will be a shock entry for the disbelievers. They are quickly and humiliatingly pushed into the Fire.

This misery is further compounded by the presence of the angels at the gate who will mock those who are entering Jahannam and remind them of the Messengers that Allah sent to them and the numerous ayaat (proofs, signs) that Allah sent their way while they were in the dunya. Thus, the physical pain and torment of Jahannam is increased by psychological pain and torment by the mockery of the angels at the inhabitants of Jahannam.

Feeling Jahannam

Some of the things a person in Jahannam will feel are:

- Taste a boiling fluid (hameem) and dirty wound discharges (gassaq) [38:57]
- Eat poisonous thorny plant (daree'), which will be given as food [88:6]

- Pain (at the non-stop torture), regret and sorrow. The regret and sorrow stems from their desire to leave the Fire, “They will long to leave the Fire, but never will they leave there from; and theirs will be a lasting torment.” [5:37]

Hearing Jahannam

Some of the things a person in Jahannam will hear are:

- Arguments and pleas from the inhabitants of the Fire. The inhabitants of Jahannam will plea and plead with the angels who are guardians over the Fire. Two of these encounters are mentioned in the Quran:
 1. “And those in the Fire will say to the Guards of Hell, ‘Call upon your Lord to lighten for us the torment for a day!’” [40:49]
 2. “And they will cry: ‘O Malik! Let your Lord make an end of us’ He will say: ‘Surely, you shall abide forever.’ Indeed We have brought the truth to you, but most of you have a hatred for the truth” [43:74-78]
- The furious and raging flames of Jahannam, “It almost bursts up with fury.” [67:8]

Seeing Jahannam

The size of Jahannam is massive. It's beyond human comprehension. A hadith of the Prophet [SAWS] states,

If a stone as big as seven pregnant camels was thrown from the edge of Hell, it would fly through it for seventy years, and yet it would not reach the bottom.

[Sahih Al-Jami]

This massive place – frowning and torturing those who live in it non-stop – will be witnessed by the inhabitants of Jahannam.

Of the things that the people of Jahannam will see are their clothes. Not just any clothes, but clothes of fire! They are given food that is thorny and does not satisfy the hunger, and they are given a boiling fluid and blood discharges to drink. By clothing them with clothes of fire – clothes that torment the person, instead of protecting him/her! – Allah increases their punishment and humiliation.

The shuddering description of these garments and their effect on its wearer is given in Surah Hajj:

Then as for those who disbelieve, garments of fire will be cut out for them, boiling water will be poured down over their heads.

With it will melt or vanish away what is within their bellies, as well as (their) skins.

And for them are hooked rods of iron (to punish them).

Every time they seek to get away therefrom, from anguish, they will be driven back therein, and (it will be) said to them: "Taste the torment of burning!"

[22:19-22]

Truly, Jahannam is the worst abode. It's miseries, shuddering. It's sufferings, relentless. In the dunya, the worst off human being still finds pleasures: the pleasure of the meal whenever they get one, the pleasure of sleeping and rest. In Jahannam, there is NO pleasure! No food, no rest. May Allah protect us all, ameen!

References:

1. Wehr, Hans. The Hans Wehr Dictionary of Modern Written Arabic. Spoken Language Services; 4th edition.
2. ibn Kathir. Tafsir ibn Kathir. <<http://www.tafsir.com>.>