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A spiritual view to the fate of people who died in earthquakes

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In the last 40 years, there has been a 6-fold increase in the number of earthquakes worldwide (Kušević et al., 2021). Worldwide, more than one million earthquakes occur each year, or an average of two a minute. Case fatality rates are high in major earthquakes (Pan American Health Organization, 2024). A massive earthquake struck Southern Türkiye and Syria with a magnitude of Mw 7.7 on 6 February 2023 causing more than fifty thousand of deaths. Most people in many cultures around the world wonder about the afterlife of their family members, relatives, and friends who died in the earthquakes. Moreover, losing of a family member in an earthquake is one of the important predictors of mental health problems. Herein, we discuss the fate of people who died in earthquakes to draw attention to the life after death of those people.

After the earthquake, more than one out of four individuals reported severe symptoms of posttraumatic stress disorder, one out of three reported severe symptoms of depression, and

one out of five reported severe symptoms of anxiety (Cenat et al., 2020). Following the earthquake, the level of exposure to the traumatic event (i.e., destruction of environment and home, witnessing death, sustaining injury, losing their job or a family member, etc.) is one of the most important predictor of posttraumatic stress disorder, depression, and anxiety symptoms, for children, adolescents, and adults (Cenat et al., 2020).

In the Abrahamic religions (Judaism, Christianity, and Islam), the dead go to a specific place (e.g. Paradise or Hell) after death, as determined by Allah, based on their actions and beliefs during life. However, the fates of people who died in the earthquake are different. There are many hadiths that those who died in earthquake became martyrs and that martyrs will go to Paradise. The Prophet Muhammad (Sallallahu Alayhi Wa Sallam) said "There are seven types of martyrdom apart from being killed in Allah's path. Those who die of plague, those who are drowned, those who die of pleurisy, those who die of an internal

complaint, those who are burnt to death, those who are killed by a building falling on them, and women who die while pregnant are martyrs." (Sunnah.com, 2024a). The Prophet Muhammad (Sallallahu Alayhi Wa Sallam) has also informed us our Lord's Message that whoever of us is martyred, will go to Paradise (Sunnah.com, 2024b). A Muslim who sacrifices his life in the way of Allah is called a martyr. Martyrdom is the highest rank in Islam (Atar, 2010). Martyr is a concept that takes place in Judaism, Christianity, and Sikh religions as well as Islam (Gürkan, 2010). However, there are some differences about understanding of martyrdom between Islam and these religions. Martyrs are very valuable in the sight of Allah. It is stated that the highest rank in the hereafter is martyrdom after prophethood (Atar, 2010).

Nursi (2012) noted that children and innocent Christians who died in the earthquake were a kind of martyrs as follows: Those who died from celestial calamity and the disaster caused by the murders of cruel people, if they are under the age of fifteen, are considered martyrs regardless of their religion. Like Muslims, their great spiritual rewards reduce that calamity to nothing. Those who are above fifteen, if they are innocent and oppressed, have a great reward and save them from Hell. Even if he is an unbeliever in such calamities, there is some kind of mercy and reward for him, that calamity is relatively cheap for him. Such celestial calamities are a kind of martyrdom for the innocents. Now, it can be said that the disasters suffered by the oppressed Christians, who were in the dark like interregnum and belonged to the Prophet Isa (Alayhi As-Salam), are a kind of martyrdom for them (Nursi, 2012).

In conclusion, based on the Islamic teachings, we would like to emphasize that all children under the age of fifteen who died in an earthquake are martyrs regardless of their parents' religious beliefs. Muslims who died in an earthquake are martyrs

and their damaged or lost property is considered charity. Innocent and oppressed Christians who died in the earthquake are also a kind of martyr. Lastly, there is a kind of mercy and reward for the unbelievers who died in an earthquake. We think that these spiritual teachings can be used when providing psychological support to those who survived the earthquake and lost their loved ones.

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