

Debating Torment of the Grave: An Optimality-Theoretic Account of (Inter) Textuality

Rasheed Saleem Al-Jarrah

Language Center, Yarmouk University

Irbid, Jordan

Tel: 9-622-721-1111 (4177)

E-mail: rsaljarrah@yahoo.com

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Abstract

Influenced by the on-going discussion on textuality (Halliday and Hassan 1976, 1985, Hassan 1984; Sperber and Wilson 1986/1995) and shielded with the basic premises and conventional notations of some linguistic theory, namely Optimality Theory (Prince and Smolensky, 1993, McCarthy and Prince, 1993a, b), this study aims to present a new religious outlook of grave torment that depends mainly on *ijtihad* (re-interpretations of the scriptures). The main thrust of the argument is like this: grave torment (we believe) is never backed up by verses of the Holy Qur'an. This is not to present a view that conflicts with the previously established canon of belief, but to show two things: (1) the reported prophetic evidence about grave torment is violable; and (2) the often-cited Qur'anic evidence for grave punishment is misinterpreted. In order to do just that, some of the local and global intuitions invoked by some Qur'anic verse (commonly alluded to as evidence for grave torment) are brought to light.

Key words: Grave torment, Grave punishment, Text analysis, Optimal solutions

1. Background

According to the most common understanding of Islam, the following excerpt from *The Encyclopedia of Death and Dying, Entry: Islam* (Note 1) summarizes the basic beliefs of mainstream Muslims about grave torment:

... as Muslims believe that the deceased can hear and understand what is being said. Muslims believe the dead person is not always aware of the transition, and so the one giving instructions informs the deceased that he or she has died, is being laid in the grave, and that two angels known as Munkar and Nakir will soon come into the grave to ask three questions. To the first question, "Who is your Lord?" the deceased is instructed to reply, "Allah." In answer to the second question, "Who is your Prophet?" the deceased should say, "Muhammad," and the correct response to the third question, "What is your religion?" is "Islam." If the individual passes this first phase of the afterlife, the experience of the grave is pleasant, and he or she is given glimpses of the pleasures of paradise. If however, the deceased does not pass this phase, then the grave is the first stage of chastisement. (Note 2)

Although no single Qur'anic verse makes explicit mention of grave torment, most traditional (as well as contemporary) Muslim expositors and scholarly authorities believe that the following Qur'anic verse provides sufficient evidence for grave torment (see Al-abari 1972; Al-Zamakhshari 1980; Al-Qur ubi 2003; Ibn Kathīr 2008, *inter alia*).

The Fire, they are exposed to it, morning and afternoon. And on the Day when the Hour will be established: "Cause Pharaoh's people to enter the severest torment!" (Note 3)
(Qur'an 40: 46)

In addition to this Qur'anic verse (Note 4), most Muslim expositors and scholarly authorities quote some of the reported sayings of the prophet to fuse belief in grave torment.

In our attempt to repudiate belief in grave punishment, we hope to show two things: (1) the reported prophetic evidence about grave torment is violable (Note 5); and (2) the often-cited Qur'anic evidence for grave punishment is misinterpreted. For the first goal, we borrow the machinery of Optimality Theory (Prince and Smolensky, 1993, McCarthy and Prince, 1993a, b); but for the second, we seek the aid of Text Analysis (Halliday and Hassan 1976, 1985; Hassan 1984; Sperber and Wilson 1986/1995).

2. Introduction

Muslim scholars (theologians and philosophers alike), we reckon, have adopted conflicting views regarding the torment of the grave – a state of affairs that has caused overwhelming confusion to the layman (For illuminating discussion see Schacht 1950; Walzer; Nadwi 1971; Khadduri 1987; Nawas 1994; Martin et al. 1997; Craig 2000; Calder, et al. 2003; Rippin 2005; Ess 2006; *inter alia*). In gross terms, mainstream Muslims (traditionally called *ahl as-sunnah wal jama'ah*) believe, beyond the shadow of a doubt, that the grave is either a garden of Paradise or a pit of the Hell-fire (Al-Bayhaqi 1985; Al-Qurtubi 1952; Al-nawawi 1981, 2005;

Ukashah 2001; Siba^ci 2001; al- ah awi 2004; Wilyul 2009; inter alia). Other sects and schools of thought (mainly pioneered by the views of *al-mu^ctazila* who later called themselves *ahl at-taw īd wal-^cadl*(Note 6)) have cast doubt upon the reality of grave punishment (Judi 1994; Mansur 1994; Shahrur 1992; Afanah 2000; inter alia). The debate has called on other schools of thought and independent Muslim clerics (as well as ordinary people, of course) to avoid delving into such extensive theological disputes. (Note 7) To them, the grave torment is relevant to the World of the Unseen, something that may not have serious bearings on one's faith.

However, we believe that this third view is not sound for at least three reasons. First, grave torment is a matter over which the majority of Muslims hold conviction (see Background above). Second, a *sunni* muslim may choose not to cast doubt on the reality of grave torment because s/he prefers not to be labeled a *mu^ctazili* (a promoter of the Mu^ctazilite code of beliefs). For, rejecting (or even questioning) a canon of belief like grave torment may send you outside the sect borderline (a risk that very few would dare to take) (Note8). Third, we cannot give up thinking because of disagreement. Accepted wisdom is always the by-product of debating widely divergent opinions, especially on highly controversial issues.

3. Methodology

Over the past few decades, competing linguistic theories have helped shape our understanding of how language-related debates should be resolved. In this paper, we aim to borrow insights from various language levels of analysis (semantic, pragmatic, discoursal, etc.) in current linguistic theories into long-term divergent views of religious texts. At one end of the scale, we borrow the machinery of OT in conflict resolution and constraint ranking (Prince and Smolensky, 1993, McCarthy and Prince, 1993a, b), namely the mismatch between some difficult-to-challenge interpretations of Qur'anic verses and some reported theme-related *adīths*; i.e. what some Qur'anic verses communicate about grave torment and compare that to what is reported in the prophetic tradition about the subject matter. The goal is to build up an "integrating" model of "Qur'an-Sunnah-ijtihād". At the other end of the scale, in order to re-interpret 'bogus' conflicts, we explore some insights from two informative models of analysis, namely the theory of cohesion (Halliday and Hassan 1976, 1985) and relevance theory (Sperber & Wilson 1986 [1995]). We hope to show that most traditional and contemporary Muslim expositors and scholarly authorities' *ijtihād* (Note 9) (i.e. re-interpretations of the Qur'anic verses) on grave punishment is not linguistically substantiated. On the whole, we aim to show that the 'correct' linguistic reading of the Qur'anic verses substantiates evidence to the contrary, i.e. that grave punishment is nonexistent at all. (Note 10) The main thrust of the argument of this paper is like this: belief in grave punishment contradicts explicit presuppositions, explicatures and implicatures of some Qur'anic verses.

4. Discussion

4.1 An Optimal Solution to Grave Punishment

The goal of an optimal solution here is twofold: (1) to show that conflicting interpretations of religious texts are an inevitable ingredient of Islamic thought, and (2) to provide the machinery on how to settle disputes. For, although most are aware that disagreement is inescapable, little has been done as regards conflict resolution – something that has oftentimes caused unintentional theological abuse. Traditional Islamic expositors and scholarly authorities have oftentimes failed to provide followers of faith with some diagnostic-oriented assessment techniques to help them make conviction decisions for themselves. For a long time, matters of belief have been very much influenced by the traditional sectarian divisions to the extent that crossing the boundaries is oftentimes disallowed.

However, we think that, notwithstanding sect borderlines, understandings of some matters of belief sometimes trigger competing demands that need to be resolved in the most harmonic (i.e. optimal) way. Inherent in this line of thought is the claim that some views incur violations of some criteria of judgment (here called constraints) against which all views must be tested. The sole task of a follower of faith (as well as learned scholars) is to figure out how these constraints are ranked relative to each other. Before we show how this can be achieved, let us sketch out the basic premises and conventional notations of an Optimality-theoretic analysis.

4.1.1 Optimality Theory: An overview

Given the basic tenets of Optimality Theory (Prince and Smolensky, 1993, McCarthy and Prince, 1993a, b), we capitalize on the claim that people have available to them criteria of judgment (technically called constraints) against which all matters of faith should be tested. Because these constraints are violable, we believe that people sometimes fail to rank them in the most harmonic way. In other words, *although different schools of thought share the same set of constraints, they differ in how they rank these constraints relative to each other.* (Note 11)

OT assumes that constraints can never be satisfied perfectly. Constraint satisfaction can only be optimal; some constraints are satisfied at the expense of others: a higher-ranking constraint is satisfied at the expense of a lower-ranking constraint, and so on. Hence, the violation of a higher-ranking constraint is more serious (i.e., yields undesirable output) than the violation of a lower-ranking constraint. To illustrate, whereas one constraint (X) acts against one re-interpretation (call it AB, for example), another constraint (Y) sanctions it, but militates against its mirror image BA, for example.

Constraint X	*AB	(No AB)
Constraint Y	*BA	(No BA) (Note 12)

Put more succinctly, one constraint acts against the realization of B after A; and the other constraint militates against the realization of A after B. This is what we call constraint conflict. OT demonstrates the idea of conflicting constraints in a tableau like (1) below (where the

constraints are arranged horizontally, and the re-interpretations (technically called the outputs) vertically, and where * means violation of a constraint):

Table 1.

Input	Constraint	X	Y	ETC.
outputs				
AB		*		
BA			*	
ETC.				

Table 1 above shows that in one instance X is violated; the other time Y is violated. When two (or more) constraints impose conflicting demands, OT makes use of the notion of dominance. That is, constraint X dominates Y if X is a higher ranking constraint and Y is a lower ranking constraint. All in all, constraints are either higher ranking or lower ranking, represented in the Tableau in a descending fashion from left to right. Violation of a higher-ranking constraint yields a sub-optimal form (indicated by the exclamation point ‘!’ in the cell corresponding to the violation). The pointing hand  indicates the winning configuration:

Table 2.

Input	X (*AB)	Y (*BA)
AB	*!	
 BA		*

By reversing the domination relationship between X and Y, the output configuration BA loses the competition:

Table 3.

Input: AB	Y (*BA)	X (*AB)
 AB		*
BA	*!	

4.1.2 Conflicting Religious Interpretations: Optimal Solutions

In the religious context, constraints (and ultimately competing views) are oftentimes presented as inviolable rules in a serial fashion, one at a time. In other words, Muslim theologians make their presentation (and ultimately people's learning and understanding) of competing views more discrete. And this, we believe, causes a mismatch between what people read in one context and what they find in another. Straightforwardly put, we argue that due to their exposure to constraint presentation in a nonparallel fashion, people of faith may sometimes fall prey of conflicting views regarding matters of conviction. For example, people read in one chapter of the Holy Qur'an the following verse:

And when We decide to destroy a town, We send a definite order (Arabic: '*amarna*) to those among them who lead a life of luxury. Then, they transgress therein, and thus the word is justified against it. Then we destroy it with complete destruction.

(Qur'an 17: 16)

In another chapter, they read that Allah, The Exalted, says:

And when they commit a Fāhisha, they say: "We found our fathers doing it, and Allāh has sent to us a definite order on it (Arabic: '*amarana*)." Say: "Nay, Allāh never commands of (sends a definite order) Fāhisha. Do you say of Allāh what you know not?

(Qur'an 7: 28)

Apart from the problems of the translation, and on the face of it, the original wordings of the two verses impose conflicting demands (ideas) in the mind of the reciters of the Holy Qur'an. Whereas one verse communicates that Allah has sent a definite order (Arabic: '*amarna*) to the people of the town so that they make all kinds of unlawful activities (mischief, wrong-doing, misconduct, transgression, etc. Arabic: '*fasaqu*), the other verse emphasizes that Allah never commands (Arabic: '*la ya'mur*) people to do mischief (wrong-doing, misconduct). As an OT analysis refutes simple linear sequencing in favor of parallel presentation, the two verses should be presented simultaneously, so that people's attention is drawn to the proposal that the correct reading of the two verses should be one that reconciles the 'bogus' conflict between the two verses in the mind of the believer.

In OT terms, we assess the conflict as follows: Whereas the former verse decrees that Allah has ordered the people of the town to make mischief, the latter ordains that Allah never commands people to make mischief, and thus impose two conflicting views which, we believe, need to be ranked relative to each other. We will show that an OT analysis requires that the constraint imposed by one verse be higher ranking, so that a better understanding should be sought for the proposition(s) which the other verse communicates – something we look for with the aid of text analysis (see section below).

4.1.3 Torment of The Grave: Conflicting Evidence

We firmly believe that most of the reported prophetic evidence about grave punishment runs counter to explicit presuppositions, explicatures and implicatures of some Qur'anic verses. To settle the dispute about grave punishment in the two major Islamic sources, we borrow the machinery of an OT analysis. The main thrust of the argument here is like this: By appealing to OT's notions of dominance and violability, we propose that (when the Quranic verse and the reported prophet's saying communicate conflicting views) the proposition which the Qur'anic verse communicates is high ranking, but the proposition communicated by the *adīth* is violable and lower-ranking. For example, we read in one chapter of the Holy Qur'an the following verse:

Nor are alike the living and the dead. Verily, Allāh makes whom He wills to hear, but you (Mohammad) cannot make hear those who are in graves. (Qur'an 35: 22)

In the meantime, we read in *ṣaṭṭh Muslim (Book 040, Number 6869)* the following authentic *adīth*, which basically communicates the proposition that the prophet can make hear those in their graves (see underlined):

Anas b. Malik reported that Allah's Messenger (may peace be upon him) let the dead bodies of the unbelievers who fought in Badr (lie unburied) for three days. He then came to them and sat by their side and called them and said: O Abu Jahl b. Hisham, O Umayya b. Khalaf, O Utba b. Rab'ila, O Shaiba b. Rabi'a, have you not found what your Lord had promised with you to be correct? As for me, I have found the promises of my Lord to be (perfectly) correct. Umar listened to the words of Allah's Apostle (may peace be upon him) and said: Allah's Messenger, how do they listen and respond to you? They are dead and their bodies have decayed. Thereupon he (the Holy Prophet) said: By Him in Whose Hand is my life, what I am saying to them, even you cannot hear more distinctly than they, but they lack the power to reply. Then he commanded that they should be buried in the well of Badr. (Note 13)

When confronted with a conflict like this one, most scholars of Islam do one of two things: (1) they present the material in a serial fashion, i.e. they don't pull the two texts together, and/or (2) they find a way out by alluring to some metaphorical extensions of the meanings of the two texts (see Ibn Kathīr 2008, Al-Qur ubi 2003, Al- abari 1972; Al-Zamakhshari 1980, inter alia). (Note 14) Be that as it may, what concerns the layman is that the Qur'anic verse and the reported prophetic *ḥadīth* communicate two conflicting views. Whereas one stresses the unfeasibility of communicating with the dead, the other shows that this is not completely impossible. We sketch out the conflict in Tableau (4) below:

Table 4.

Input: Communicating with the dead	(Qur'an)	(adīth)
a.  you cannot make hear those who are in graves		*
b. you can make hear those who are in graves	*!	

Because violating a Qur'anic proposition is a more serious business than violating a prophetic saying, we conclude that candidate (a) wins the competition (indicated by the pointing hand).

In the remaining part of this article, we set ourselves the task to present pieces of evidence to support this claim. In section (3.1) below, we bring to the surface some Qur'anic verses which presuppose, explicate, and implicate that grave punishment is nonexistent at all. In section (3.2) we show (with the aid of Text Analysis) how the Qur'anic evidence often used by Muslim expositors and scholarly authorities to promote belief in grave punishment is misinterpreted.

4.1.4 Repudiating Belief in Grave Torment

First, belief in grave torment, we argue, defies belief in a number of tenets of faith communicated in a number of Qur'anic verses. For example, it is one of the main tenets of

faith in Islam to believe in the reality of the Day of Judgment, on which every human being is held accountable for his/her deeds and is judged by Allah accordingly. People are gathered under the intense heat of the sun overhead to receive their books of deeds - detailed, comprehensive accounts. The winner will have his good deeds outweigh the bad deeds. The loser will have it the other way around - an idea recurrent in several verses throughout the Holy Qur'an:

Then as for him who will be given his Record in his right hand, He surely will receive an easy reckoning, And will return to his family in joy! But whosoever is given his Record behind his back, He will invoke (his) destruction, And shall enter a blazing Fire, and be made to taste its burning
(Qur'an 84: 7-12)

Given such tenets of belief, our concern can then be formulated along the following lines: What would be the use of all the accounts of the Day of Judgment if punishment started ahead of time in the grave? Doesn't Allah himself administer a complete and perfect justice on the Day of Judgment before confining people to either Heaven or Hell? We firmly believe that our understanding of the propositions of these Qur'anic verses conflicts with what some reported *hadīths* communicate about grave torment. In OT terms, we hypothesize that the constraint imposed by the *hadīth* is violable, and is again relatively lower ranking.

Second, the Holy Qur'an communicates that the first reaction of the unbelievers to their resurrection on the Day of Judgment will be as follows:

And on the Day that the Hour will be established, the Mujrimūn (criminals, disbelievers, polytheists, sinners) will swear that they stayed not but an hour- thus were they ever deluded
(Qur'an 30: 55)

This verse communicates the idea that their staying in the grave was, to them, not but an hour. If grave torment were real, how could we establish a canon of belief with a number of Qur'anic verses which all call attention to the sternness of Allah's punishment?

And when your Lord proclaimed: "If you give thanks, I will give you more; but if you are thankless, verily My Torment is indeed severe"
(Qur'an 14: 7)

And that My Torment is indeed the most painful torment.
(Qur'an 15: 50)

A third piece of evidence for the violability of grave torment comes from our understanding of the expicature which the following Qur'anic verse communicates:

And the Trumpet will be blown and behold from the graves they will come out quickly to their Lord. They will say: "Woe! Who has raised us up from our place of sleep." (Arabic: *al-'ajdāth*) "This is what the Most Gracious had promised, and the Messengers spoke truth of!"
(Qur'an 36: 51-52)

Given the severity of the Hell-Fire torment discussed above, how come that the deceased be in awe at their resurrection? They even wonder at the source (power) that has caused them to rise from their "place of sleep" (Arabic: *al-'ajdāth*) In other words, the verse basically

communicates that they have put out of their mind their resurrection. Therefore, our concern is like this: If they had been engulfed in the Hell-Fire chastisement while being in their grave, why do they express awe at their resurrection on the Day of Judgment? The least we expect is that they recognize the source (the power) that has caused them to rise. We firmly believe that it is not a because-of-the-torment "amnesia" (state of forgetfulness). For, the idea has never slipped their memory even when they are completely swallowed up in the severe chastisement of the Hell-Fire to which they are confined on the Day of Judgment. Consider:

And, when they will dispute in the Fire, the weak will say to those who were arrogant: "Verily, We followed you: can you then take from us some portion of the Fire?" Those who were arrogant will say: "We are all in this! Verily, Allāh has judged between slaves!" And those in the Fire will say to the keepers of Hell: "Call upon your Lord to lighten for us the torment for a day!" They will say: "Did there not come to you, your Messengers with evidences? They will say: "Yes." They will reply: "Then call! And the invocation of the disbelievers is nothing but in vain" (Qur'an 40: 47-50)

This verse (which shows their confinement in the Hell-Fire on the Day of Judgment) makes clear that, while being overwhelmed by the torment in the Hell-Fire, they still recall the message of their prophets, and more importantly, the *raison d'être* for their torment. (Note 15) In short, had they been going through grave punishment, they wouldn't have been in awe about their rising from their graves, and they would have realized the source which has caused them to rise right on the spot.

One more piece of evidence to defy belief in grave punishment is implicated in the following Qur'anic verse:

He (Allāh) will say: "What number of years did you stay on earth?" They said: "We have stayed a day or part of a day. Ask of those who keep account." (Qur'an 23: 112-113)

The relatively short history of man, as viewed by those rising from their place of sleep, is stressed in a number of Qur'anic verses. Allah, the exalted, says:

And on the Day that the Hour will be established, the Mujrimūn will swear that they stayed not but an hour- thus were they ever deluded (Qur'an 30: 55)

And on the Day when He shall resurrect them together, it will be as if they had not stayed but an hour of a day. They will recognize each other. Ruined indeed will be those who denied the meeting with Allāh, and were not guided. (Qur'an 10: 45)

Therefore be patient as did the Messengers of strong will and be in no haste about them. On the Day when they will see that with which they are promised as if they had not stayed more than an hour in a single day. But shall any be destroyed except the people who are Al-Fāsiqūn (Qur'an 46: 35)

The important point here is that this presupposition conflicts with the assumed reality of grave torment. Had they been undergoing punishment in their grave, they wouldn't have trivialized the whole past of man to just one hour, during which they were only plunging in

vain talk and playing about as stressed in many verses in the Holy Qur'an:

So leave them to speak nonsense and play until (Arabic: *fadhar-hum*) they meet the Day of theirs which they have been promised (Qur'an 43: 83)

So leave them to speak nonsense and play until (Arabic: *fadhar-hum*) they meet the Day of theirs which they have been promised. The Day when they will come out of the graves quickly as racing to a goal. With their eyes lowered in humility, ignominy covering them! That is the Day which they were promised! (Qur'an 70: 42-44)

Of no less importance, we think, is the presupposition which the expression "leave them ...until" (Arabic: *fadhar-hum*) in the previous verses calls for. Grossly speaking, it stresses that Allah has promised to suspended torment for all unbelievers till the Day which they were promised. Belief in grave punishment conflicts with the presupposition communicated by all Qur'anic verses which assert that Allah's Punishment is only due on that Day of Judgment. Allah, the exalted, says:

Consider not that Allāh is unaware of that which the Zālimūn (the wrong-doers who know what they should have done instead) do, but He gives them respite up to a Day when the eyes will stare in horror. They will be hastening forward with necks outstretched, their heads raised up, their gaze returning not towards them and their hearts empty (Qur'an 14: 42-43)

Our concern is like this: What would be the use of Allah's promise to put off their punishment till the Day of Judgment if they had been paid (in full) in their graves. After all, Allah has even promised to delay the punishment of their undisputed leader *Iblīs* till the Day of Judgment:

(Allāh) said: "(O Iblīs) get down from this, it is not for you to be arrogant here. Get out, for you are of those humiliated and disgraced." (Iblīs) said: those respited." (Qur'an 7: 13-15)

Who on earth could have done more mischief than Iblīs?! Yet, the Qur'anic verse explicitly states that Iblīs' punishment has been deferred till the Day of Judgment. How could we then bring together the two presuppositions: the hypothetically-assumed happening of grave punishment and Allah's promise to put off punishment till the Day of Judgment? We firmly believe that Allah's promise is high-ranking and that grave torment is again lower ranking and violable.

Another piece of evidence that we think supports our claim concerning violability of grave torment is implicated by the following verses:

"Does he promise you that when you have died and have become dust and bones, you shall come out alive? (Qur'an 23: 35)

They said: "When we are dead and have become dust and bones, shall we be resurrected indeed? "Verily, this we have been promised - we and our fathers before (us)! This is

only the tales of the ancients!"

(Qur'an 23: 82-83)

And those who disbelieve say: "When we have become dust - we and our fathers - shall we really be brought forth (again)? "Indeed we were promised this - we and our forefathers before (us), Verily, these are nothing but tales of ancients."

(Qur'an 27: 67-68)

"When we are dead and have become dust and bones, shall we (then) verily be resurrected? "And also our fathers of old?" Say (O Muhammad (peace be upon him))

"Yes, and you shall then be humiliated."

(Qur'an 37: 16-18)

"When we are dead and have become dust (shall we be resurrected?) That is a far return." We know that which the earth takes of them (their dead bodies), and with Us is a Book preserved (i.e. the Book of Decrees).

(Qur'an 50: 3-4)

And they used to say: "When we die and become dust and bones, shall we then indeed be resurrected? "And also our forefathers?" Say (O Muhammad (peace be upon him))

"(Yes) verily, those of old, and those of later times." All will surely be gathered together for appointed Meeting of a known Day.

(Qur'an 56: 47-50)

In all the above-cited verses, the unbelievers make the following presuppositions:

1. they will definitely pass away (When we die)
2. they will turn to dust and ashes (and become dust and bones)
3. And they are doubtful about their resurrection for judgment on an appointed day (shall we then indeed be resurrected?)

As for the first presupposition (that they will die), we think it conflicts with belief in grave punishment because Allah's punishment never befalls the dead. Allah, the exalted, says:

But those who disbelieve, for them will be the Fire of Hell. Neither will it have a complete killing effect on them so that they die, nor shall its torment be lightened for them. Thus do We requite every disbeliever!

(Qur'an 35: 36)

What this basically means is that if the people of the pharaoh, for example, are experiencing punishment in their graves right now, then they cannot be dead. For, the above verse states explicitly: Neither will it have a complete killing effect on them so that they die. Then the crux of the matter is like this: if they were experiencing torment in their graves right now, how come that Allah accepts the unbelievers' presupposition that they will definitely die? Notice that Allah's response to them does not deny that they will die, nor does it deny that they will turn to bones and dust, but undoubtedly denies that they won't be resurrected. The following Qur'anic verse shows the dialogue manifestly. The unbelievers question it as follows:

"When we are dead and have become dust and bones, shall we (then) verily be resurrected? "And also our fathers of old?"

(Qur'an 37: 16-17)

Allah responds to their inquisition as follows:

Say "Yes, and you shall then be dakhirūn

(Qur'an 37: 18)

Upon pondering on Allah's response, we find that Allah not only asserts the certainty of resurrection, but also shows how their state of affairs on that day is going to be like *wa 'antum dakhirūn* - roughly translated as humble, modest, lowly, etc. - a state of affairs which by no means entails that they have been experiencing torment in their grave (Note 16) .

This line of reasoning supports the claim that the constraints which sanctions grave torment (namely the reported prophetic sayings) are violable, simply because there are other constraints (the Qur'anic verses) which best them. Given the violability of grave punishment, we move on to the second part of this paper where we show how the often-cited Qur'anic evidence for grave punishment is misinterpreted.

4.2 Text Analysis

As meaning is underdetermined by form (Carston 2000) in the sense that "no sentence ever fully encodes the thought or proposition it is used to articulate" (Kolaiti 2008: 342) (Note 17) the inferential nature of verbal communication is stressed. The task of the reader is to supply missing information by looking for it elsewhere in the text – a process of retrieving information processed at some other stages in the discourse (the presupposing and the presupposed). As Halliday and Hasan (1976: 4), put it, "[T]he one presupposes the other, in the sense that it cannot be effectively decoded except by recourse to it." Halliday and Hasan (1976) recognize that a reiterated item may be a repetition of an earlier item, a synonym and/or a near-synonym, etc.

According to Kolaiti (2008), presupposed information may be sentential, discoursal across adjacent sentences, discoursal across non-adjacent sentences, intertextual, and/or encyclopedic. In Sperber and Wilson's terms, whereas local intuitions account for how "two adjacent segments are related", global intuitions account for how the text "hangs together as a whole" (See Wilson 1998: 64). However, according to Kolaiti (2008: 346) "the core question ought to be *how receivers move from an area X of their cognitive environment* - where X is the utterance under interpretation which, roughly speaking, functions as the *stimulus* that instigates the process of conceptual information retrieval - *to some other area Y of their cognitive environment in search of the presupposed conceptual information.*" In Sperber and Willson's terms, it is the following of 'a path of least effort' until an interpretation which satisfies the expectation of relevance is found. In Halliday and Hassan's terms (1976), it is the movement from the presupposing to the presupposed, where presuppositions can be *anaphoric* (pointing backward), *cataphoric* (pointing forward), *exophoric* (pointing to something outside the text), or/and *endophoric* (pointing to something inside the text). A note worthy of mention here is that, according to the relevance-theoretic model of analysis, the cognitive environment of the individual "consists of not only all the facts that he is aware of, but also, all the facts that he is capable of becoming aware of, in his physical environment" (Sperber and Wilson 1995: 39).

Accordingly, we hypothesize that every single Qur'anic verse, functioning as presupposing information, calls for conceptual information retrieval. Readers are required to navigate across the text to locate the bit of information that is being called for. Realizing that the Holy

Qur'an is an interpretable whole, a lexical item can then enter into relation with another lexical item, which in turn can enter into relation with another in a text, and so on ad infinitum. Needless to say, this lexical relation does not hold between pairs of words as one might wrongly conclude, but through 'lexical chains' (meaning relations), where the goal is, using a Hallidayian term, to establish a 'conceptual tie'. In addition to the social, cultural and situational factors that influence language usage, this lexical cohesion, as referred to in the Hallidayian model, helps construe meaning.

Finally, it should be pointed out that in order to establish conceptual ties, we aim to make the most of all information structuring devices such as, reference, substitution, ellipsis, conjunction, lexical cohesion (Halliday and Hasan 1976, 1985; Hasan 1984), foregrounding and backgrounding, i.e. relating text to one's own knowledge (Chafe 1972; Prince 1981b, 1992; Wallace 1982; Farhady 1982; Bardovi-Harlig 1983; Carrel and Eisterhold 1983), word order (Gundel et al. 1993; Birner 1994; Birner & Gregory 1998), thematisation or 'staging' (Grimes 1975), anaphora and co-reference (Reinhart 1983a, b), syntactic simplification (Siddharthan 2004), repetition, tense and aspect (Yule 1999; Leech 2004;), etc. Cognitive processes, such as bottom-up and top-down processing (Eisterhold 1983) are also relevant. (Note 18)

4.2.1 Re-interpreting the Qur'anic evidence

The verse that has been extensively quoted to promote belief in grave torment, and that, we believe, needs reinterpretation is this one:

The Fire, they are exposed to it, morning and afternoon. And on the Day when the Hour will be established: "Cause Pharaoh's people to enter the severest torment!"

(Qur'an 40: 46)

In Tafseer Al-Qur'ān (15/319), for example, it is stressed that many Islamic expositors (e.g. Mujahid, Ikrimah, Muqatil, Muhammad Ibn Ka'b, etc.) believe that this Qur'anic verse is sufficient proof of the torment of the grave.

With the aid of text analysis, we hope to show that the true linguistic reading does not back up grave punishment at all. On the contrary, it will be shown that once conceptual ties are established (by upon bringing to light the local and global intuitions that the segments of this verse invokes), this same verse corroborates our claim regarding the violability of grave punishment. In order to do just that, the original wordings of this verse are all considered presupposing entities that function as stimuli that instigate the process of conceptual information retrieval. These include: *The Fire* (Arabic: *al-nār*), *exposed to* (Arabic: *yu'ra' ūn 'alyha*), *morning and afternoon* (Arabic: *ghuduwwan wa 'ishiyyan*), *The Day of the hour* (Arabic: *yawma taqumu as-sa'ah*), *The Pharaoh's people* (Arabic: *āla fir'awn*), and finally *the severest torment* (Arabic: *'ashadda al-'adhāb*).

The Fire: (Arabic: *al-nār*) In its Qur'anic context, the expression *The Fire* (*al-nār*) refers to the permanent place of residence of all unbelievers. To illustrate, the expression "*The Fire*",

which recurs about a hundred times in the Holy Qur'an, is associated with the Hereafter. Allah, the exalted, says in one chapter of the Holy Qur'an:

They are those for whom there is nothing in the Hereafter but the Fire (*al-nār*), and vain are the deeds they did therein. And of no effect is that which they used to do.

(Qur'an 11: 16)

It is also referred to as the final abode (*Arabic: ma'wā-kum*) of the wrong-doers on the Day of Judgment:

And it will be said: "This Day We will forget you as you forgot the Meeting of this Day of yours. And your final abode is the Fire, and there is none to help you."

(Qur'an 45: 34)

Then, if they bear the torment patiently, then the Fire is the home for them, and if they seek to please Allah, yet they are not of those who will ever be allowed to please Allah.

(Qur'an 41: 24)

On some other occurrences, it is referred to as their permanent place of residence (*Arabic: mathwa*):

But those who disbelieved and denied Our ayāt, they will be the dwellers of the Fire, to dwell therein forever. And worst indeed is that destination.

(Qur'an 64: 10)

In the meantime, other Qur'anic verses show manifestly that the wrong-doers' (including the people of the Pharaoh) inflowing into *The Fire* will take place on the Day of Judgment:

The Day when they will be pushed down by force to the Fire of Hell, with a horrible, forceful pushing. This is the Fire which you used to belie.

(Qur'an 52: 13-14)

To Pharaoh and his chiefs, but they followed the command of Pharaoh, and the command of Pharaoh was no right guide. He will go ahead of his people on the Day of Resurrection, and will lead them into the Fire, and evil indeed is the place to which they are led.

(Qur'an 11: 97-98)

What this last verse communicates is that the Pharaoh himself will lead his people into the Fire – an event scheduled to take place on the Day of Resurrection (not in their graves).

Exposed to: (*Arabic: yu'ra ūn ʿalyha*) This is an Arabic phrasal verb which deserves in-depth scrutiny in its Qur'anic context. For, this phrasal verb has been considered by many expositors as sufficient proof for grave torment. To them, the act of grave-exposing is equivalent to the act of grave-punishing. Our argument is like this: this Arabic phrasal verb does by no means entail a spatial relation of inclusion; and therefore the act of exposing is never an actual inward bound by *The Fire*. To illustrate, Allah, the exalted, says in the Holy Qur'an regarding the torment of the people of the Pharaoh:

The Fire, they are exposed to it (*yu'ra ūn ʿalyha*), morning and afternoon...

(Qur'an 40: 46)

Although the verse clearly states that the people of the Pharaoh will only be exposed to the Fire, the majority of Islamic expositors and scholarly authorities have made this expression unconditionally synonymous with the phrasal verb for torment (*Arabic: yu^ʿadhabūn fīha*). However, there is ample evidence in the Holy Qur'an to believe that the Arabic phrasal verb for *exposed to* (*yu^ʿra ūn ^ʿalyha*) does by no means presuppose grave torment.

Among the many occurrences of this phrasal verb in the Holy Qur'an, the following two can be retrieved promptly:

And who does more wrong than he who invents a lie against Allāh. Such will be brought before their Lord (*yu^ʿra ūn ^ʿala rabbi-him*), and the witnesses will say, "These are the ones who lied against their Lord!" No doubt! the curse of Allāh is on the Zālimūn.

(Qur'an 11: 18)

And they were brought before your Lord (*wa^ʿuri u ^ʿala rabbi-him*) in rows: "Now indeed, you have come to Us as We created you the first time. Nay, but you thought that We had appointed no meeting for you."

(Qur'an 18: 48)

The two verses communicate the idea of exposition, but this time it is the bringing of all unbelievers before their Lord in rows. One might wonder at the contextual tie these verses create with the verse that communicates the assumed torment of the people of the Pharaoh. In order to establish a tie, we raise the following interesting inquiry: While being brought before their Lord in the act of exposition, do the unbelievers see Him? The answer is definitely negative. For, from an Islamic point of view seeing the Lord on The Day of Judgment is the greatest reward the believers can ever have. A number of Qur'anic verses emphasize this point:

Nay! Surely, they (evil-doers) will be veiled from seeing their Lord that Day

(Qur'an 83: 15)

Some faces that Day shall be nāzīrah (shining and radiant). Looking at their Lord. And some faces, that Day, will be bāṣīrah (dark, gloomy, frowning, and sad). Thinking that some calamity is about to fall on them.

(Qur'an 75: 22-25)

The important point that we are trying to hit is that the Arabic word for the act of exposition (*yu^ʿradūn 'ala*) requires the involvement of two parties that we technically call **the patient** i.e. the one being exposed (*Arabic: ^ʿal-ma'rū*) and **the recipient**, i.e. the one to whom the patient is exposed (*Arabic: ^ʿal-ma'rū ^ʿalayh*). Whereas the recipient sees the patient, the patient may not see the recipient. To illustrate, consider the following Arabic sentences where the separable tri-radical phrasal verb *ʿr ^ʿala* is used:

- *ʿara at-tājir 'al-bi a^ʿah ^ʿala al-zubūn* (literally: the shop attendant exposed the goods to the customers; i.e. *the shop attendant displayed the goods to the customers*).
- *ʿuri a 'al-marī ^ʿala al-tabīb* (literally: the patient was exposed to the doctor; i.e. *the patient was shown to the doctor*)

Whereas the goods are definitely the patient, the customer is the recipient of the act of

exposition. In principle, the customer definitely sees the goods, but the goods cannot see the customer. Similarly, there is evidence (however slim it might be) to believe that the patient may not see the doctor who will definitely see the patient.

In addition, it is almost undisputed observation that a preposition indicates a relation between things mentioned in a sentence. The Arabic preposition *‘ala* indicates a spatial relation of location, direction and proximity. As a phrasal verb particle, it displays on the surface positions in space. Particles like UP-DOWN/ IN-OUT/ ON-OFF literally relate to “spatial orientation”. It is also projective in the sense it shows the location of each party relative to the other. Almost all native speakers of Arabic would agree that *‘ala* explicates that one party is superior to the other at least at the spatial level: the two parties lie at asymmetrical levels. As for the *people of the Pharaoh vis-à-vis the Hell-Fire*, what concerns us is that we need to see where each party lies relative to the other. Given the basic denotations of the Arabic phrasal verb particle *‘ala*, we raise the following inquiry: Does the Arabic phrasal verb *yu‘ra ūn ‘ala* entail a spatial relation of inclusion? For, in order for the people of the pharaoh to be experiencing Hell-Fire torment, they have to be contained in it as in the container-contained schema below (Where the container is the Hell-Fire, and the contained are the People of the Pharaoh):

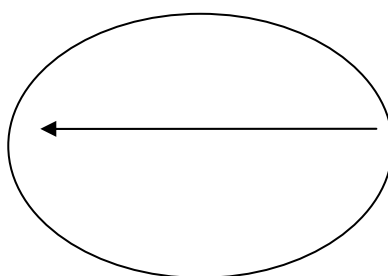


Figure 1. Container-contained Schema

Figure 1 displays on the surface an image of the Container-Contained schema, where the contained object is within the container.

In fact, we hypothesize that the Arabic phrasal verb *yu‘ra ūn ‘ala* entails a spatial relation of exclusion as in the illustrative demonstration below (Note 19):



In addition, for *yu^ʿra ūn ^ʿala* to show that the unbelievers get the chance to see the Hell-Fire, they have to look at it. Had the idea of "looking at" been embodied within the idea of exposition, we would have believed that they did actually see it. Let us consider the conceptual tie that the following verse establishes with the idea of the torment of the people of the Pharaoh:

And you will see them exposed to it (Hell) made humble by disgrace, (and) looking with stealthy glance. And those who believe will say: "Verily, the losers are they who lose themselves and their families on the Day of Resurrection. Verily, the *Zālimūn* (i.e. *Al-Kāfirūn* (disbelievers in Allāh, in His Oneness and in His Messenger (peace be upon him) polytheists, wrong-doers)) will be in a lasting torment (Qur'an 42: 45)

The verse shows that while being exposed to the Hell-Fire, they look at it with stealthy glance. This basically means two things: (1) for people to see the Hell-Fire while being exposed to it, they make a quiet, careful, in-order-not-to-be-seen-or-heard look (i.e. a stealthy glance); and (2) they have not as yet got besieged by the torment because "*looking at something*" entails proximity but not inclusion. The important point is like this, for the phrase looking with stealthy glance to be informative, non-predictable, it shouldn't be implied by the phrase *yu^ʿra ūn ^ʿala*, which otherwise would be redundant – an assumption that no Muslim expositor would dare to challenge.

In light of the explication of this Qur'anic verse, our inquiry is very straightforward: Exposition to the Hell-Fire and seeing the Hell-Fire are two independent afterlife accounts.

Another closely related, yet distinct, phrasal verb which also explicates the idea of exclusion with a somewhat different image schema is *yu^ʿra u li*. The following Qur'anic verse highlights the difference:

... and the Trumpet will be blown, and We shall collect them (the creatures) all together. And on that Day We shall display Hell to (Arabic: 'ara na ... li) the disbelievers, plain to view (Qur'an 18: 99-100)

There is the Hell-Fire; there are the unbelievers; and the idea of exposition (displaying) is on again. However, there is one slight alternation: the phrasal verb *yu^ʿra u li* is used instead of *yu^ʿra u ^ʿala*, and that has, we believe, created all the difference. This shift in preposition usage has caused a shift in roles. In the case of *yu^ʿra u li*, the Hell-Fire switches role with the Unbelievers: The Hell-Fire is the patient, and the unbelievers are the recipients who get the chance to see the Hell-Fire this time.

This dynamic character of the image schemata plays a crucial role for our view of meaning and rationality. We strongly believe that the image schema that the Arabic phrasal verb *yu^ʿra u ^ʿala* creates is often overlooked. Islamic expositors have confused who the patient is (Arabic: *al-ma^ʿrū*) and who the recipient is (Arabic: *al-ma^ʿrū ^ʿalayh*). Whereas traditional scholars have always thought that the people of the pharaoh are the recipients and that the Hell-Fire is the patient, we firmly believe that it is the other way around. In simple terms, the

people of the pharaoh are exposed to the Hell-Fire, but the Hell-Fire is not exposed to them. Accordingly, the people of the pharaoh, being the patient of the act of exposition, do not see the Hell-Fire, but the Hell-Fire does.

The same idea can be reasoned in many verses of the Holy Qur'an where the idea of exposition interjects. For example, the day when Allah taught Adam the knowledge of the Names, they were displayed to the assembly of the Angels (where the presupposing *yu'ra u 'ala* is used):

And He taught Adam all the names, then He exposed (displayed) them (Arabic: *'ara a-hum 'ala*) to the angels and said, "Tell Me the names of these if you are truthful (Qur'an 2: 31)

In this verse, too, the idea of exposition comes on the fore. The Qur'anic verse states that the names are the patients (Arabic: *al-ma'arū*) and the angels are the recipients (Arabic *al-ma'arū 'alayh*). Whereas the names never interjected in the dialogue, the angles response came very swift:

They (angels) said: "Glory be to You, we have no knowledge except what You have taught us. Verily, it is You, the All-Knower, the All-Wise." (Qur'an 2: 32)

The concluding remark is like this: We have acknowledged two contextual ties that the act of exposing establishes with the Hell-Fire and the unbelievers: (1) when the phrasal verb particle *'ala* is used, the unbelievers cannot see the Hell-Fire that definitely sees them (they are the patients but the Hell is the recipient of the act of exposition); and (2) when the phrasal verb particle *li* is used, the two parties (The Hell-Fire and the Unbelievers) exchange roles: the unbelievers act as the recipients, and the Hell-Fire becomes the patient of the act of exposition. Only in this latter case (which takes place on the Day of Judgment after blowing the trumpet) can the unbelievers see the Hell-Fire. What this basically means is that the unbelievers suffer from the punishment once they see the Hell-Fire. Otherwise, it is just the Hell-Fire which prepares itself to welcome the unbelievers who are until now (in their graves) unaware of all that is going on. This conclusion is corroborated by many verses in the Holy Qur'an:

And on that Day We shall present Hell to the disbelievers, plain to view - To Those whose eyes had been under a covering from My Reminder, and who could not bear to hear. (Qur'an 100-101)

Finally, one might question the whole idea of how the Hell-Fire can be the recipient of the act of exposing and thus can see its clients. In other words, some people may question the belief that the Hell-Fire can be subject to anthropomorphism, i.e. attributing uniquely human characteristics to non-human objects. To those, we bring the following interesting Qur'anic verse, which almost all Muslim expositors would agree that it is a personification of the Hell-Fire:

When it (Hell) sees them from a far place, they will hear its raging and its roaring.

(Qur'an 25:12)

Similar metaphors and personifications for the Hell-Fire are evident throughout the Holy Qur'an:

On the Day when We will say to Hell: "Are you filled?" It will say: "Are there any more (to come)?" (Qur'an 50: 30)

When they are cast therein, they will hear the (terrible) drawing in of its breath as it blazes forth. It almost bursts up with fury. Every time a group is cast therein, its keeper will ask: "Did no warner come to you?" (Qur'an 67: 7-8)

Morning and afternoon (Arabic: *ghuduwwan wa ʿishiyyan*) We move on to consider the local and global intuitions that this idiomatic expression invokes in the Qur'anic context. We bring to the surface the followings:

And remember your Lord within yourself, humbly and with fear without loudness in words in the mornings, and in the afternoons and be not of those who are neglectful.

(Qur'an 7: 205)

And to Solomon (We subjected) the wind, its morning (stride from sunrise till midnoon) was a month's (journey), and its afternoon (stride from the midday decline of the sun to sunset) was a month's

(Qur'an 34: 12)

Then they called out one to another as soon as the morning broke, Saying: "Go to your tith in the morning, if you would pluck the fruits." So they departed, conversing in secret low tones: No miskīn (poor man) shall enter upon you into it today. And they went in the morning with strong intention, thinking that they have power

(Qur'an 68: 21-25)

The term *ghuduwwan* denotes the period of time of the day when the morning breaks (around sunrise). It is contrasted with *ʿishiyyan* which refers to the part of the day when the sun starts to sink in the occasion:

And turn not away those who invoke their Lord morning and evening (al-ghadati wa al-ʿishiy) seeking His Face.

(Qur'an 6: 52)

The late afternoon (Arabic: *al-ʿishiy*) is, in turn, collocated with *al-ʾibkār*, i.e. *very early morning*:

He said: "O my Lord! Make a sign for me." Allāh said: "Your sign is that you shall not speak to mankind for three days except with signals. And remember your Lord much and glorify bi-ʾishi (before the sunset) and al-ibkār (in the early morning)."

(Qur'an 3: 41)

Then he came out to his people from al-mihrāb (a praying place or a private room), he told them by signs to glorify Allāh's praises bukratan (in the early morning) and *ʿishia* (before the sunset)

(Qur'an 19: 11)

Another collocation is clear with *a - uhr*, i.e. *mid-day*:

And His are all the praises in the heavens and the earth; and 'ishian (before the sunset) and when tu *hirūn* (when the day begins to decline) (Qur'an 30: 18)

It is further collocated with *al-'ishrā*, i.e. *the time when the sun rises*:

Verily, We made the mountains to glorify Our Praises with him (David) in the 'ishyyi (before the sunset) and 'ishrāq (i.e. after the sunrise) (Qur'an 38: 18)

On more than one occasion, it collocates with *a - uḥa*, i.e. *the break of dawn*:

The Day they see it, as if they had not tarried except 'ishyyi (an afternoon) or *a - uḥa* (*the break of dawn*) (Qur'an 79: 46)

The point worthy of mention here is that the act of exposing the people of the Pharaoh to the Hell-Fire takes place twice a day: one in the early morning (Arabic: *ghuduwwan*) and another in the late afternoon (Arabic: *'ishyyan*). Given this undisputed Qur'anic fact, grave torment would then be impossible. Let us show why. First of all, belief in grave punishment conflicts with the proposition of the following Qur'anic verse, which clearly explicates that once the unbelievers see the Hell-Fire, their torment will never pause. The verse stresses the continuous nature of the Hell-Fire torment:

And when the (unbelievers, transgressors, etc.) will see the torment, then it will not be lightened unto them, nor will they be given respite (Qur'an 16: 85)

In simple terms, what this basically means is that (1) Allah's punishment befalls the unbelievers once they see it; and (2) once that torment takes place, it continues as a non-stop single act. Exposing the people of the Pharaoh to the Hell Fire, on the other hand, is presented as a continual act that takes place twice a day:

The Fire, they are exposed to it, morning and afternoon. And on the Day when the Hour will be established: "Cause Pharaoh's people to enter the severest torment (Qur'an 40: 46)

In grammatical terms, the phrasal verb *yu'radu 'ala* in the verse which talks about the punishment of the people of the pharaoh is simple present tense (not present continuous). For, a present tense form is ambiguous in Arabic; hence the two tenses are grammaticalized in the same way. Only context disambiguates the form. When the verb signifies a dynamic verb in the progressive aspect it typically signifies an ongoing activity. The conclusion is then like this: Whereas Allah's punishment is a continuous activity as the following verse explicates.

And when the transgressors will see the torment, then it will not be lightened unto them, nor will they be given respite (Qur'an 16: 85)

Exposing the people of the people to the Hell-Fire is a continual activity:

The Fire, they are exposed to it, morning and afternoon. And on the Day when the Hour will be established (it will be said to the angels): "Cause Fir'aun's (Pharaoh) people to enter the severest torment!" (Qur'an 40:46)

The Holy Qur'an shows manifestly that once the unbelievers get swallowed up in the

Hell-Fire, they will never be able to get out of it; they are clenched once and for all. Allah, the Exalted, says:

They will long to get out of the Fire, but never will they get out therefrom; and theirs will be a lasting torment (Qur'an 5: 37)

And those who followed will say: "If only we had one more chance to return (to the worldly life), we would disown (declare ourselves as innocent from) them as they have disowned (declared themselves as innocent from) us." Thus Allāh will show them their deeds as regrets for them. And they will never get out of the Fire (Qur'an 2: 167)

This conclusion goes in tandem with the proposition we articulate here: once the unbelievers see the Hell-Fire, they will never be given respite – an assertion that runs contrary to the belief that the people of the pharaoh are right now experiencing continual grave torment.

The Day of the hour (*Arabic:: yawma taqumu as-sā'ah*). The Holy Qur'an makes clear on more than one occasion that the act of exposing to the Hell-Fire is not limited to the people of the Pharaoh; on the contrary, all unbelievers are deemed to be exposed to the Hell-Fire. What concerns us here is that nobody would dispute that this act of exposing takes place on the Day of Judgment:

And on the Day when those who disbelieve will be exposed to the Fire: "Is this not the truth?" They will say: "Yes, By our Lord!" He will say: "Then taste the torment, because you used to disbelieve!" (Qur'an 46:34)

However, according to the verse which talks about the people of the pharaoh, two afterlife accounts will befall them: (1) exposition to the Hell-Fire sometime before the real accounts on the Day of Judgment are established, and (2) actual exposition to (indulging into) the Hell-Fire on the Day of Judgment. The transition is manifest:

1. The Fire, they are exposed to it, morning and afternoon
2. And on the Day when the Hour will be established: "Cause Fir'aun's (Pharaoh) people to enter the severest torment!" (Qur'an 40: 46)

In this respect, our if-then concern is like this: if the people of the Pharaoh are exposed to the Hell-Fire sometime before they get exposed to it on the Day of Judgment, then when does that first act of exposing take place?

Advocates of grave torment would surely argue that this exposition takes place while they are in their grave. However, we would like to show that the Holy Qur'an provides unequivocal answer to this question. For this, we invoke the following global intuitions from the Holy Qur'an, chapter 69 (al- hāqqah):

And Fir'aun (Pharaoh), and those before him, and the cities overthrown (the towns of the people of (Lūt (Lot)) committed sin (Qur'an 69: 9)

And they disobeyed their Lord's Messenger, so He seized them with a strong punishment. (Qur'an 69:10)

Verily! When the water rose beyond its limits (Nūh's (Noah) Flood), We carried you (mankind) in the floating (ship that was constructed by Nūh (Noah))

(Qur'an 69:11)

That We might make it (Noah's ship) an admonition for you and that it might be retained by the retaining ears. (Qur'an 69:12)

Then when the Trumpet will be blown with one blowing (the first one).

(Qur'an 69:13)

And the earth and the mountains shall be removed from their places, and crushed with a single crushing. (Qur'an 69:14)

Then on that Day shall the (Great) Event befall. (Qur'an 69:15)

And the heaven will be rent asunder, for that Day it (the heaven) will be frail and torn up. (Qur'an 69:16)

And the angels will be on its sides, and eight angels will, that Day, bear the Throne of your Lord above them. (Qur'an 69:17)

That Day shall you be brought to Judgment, not a secret of you will be hidden.

(Qur'an 69:18)

Accordingly, the act of exposing (verse 18) takes place on the day when the Great Event (Arabic: *al-waqi'ah*) befalls (verse 15), which in turn takes place when the Trumpet is blown (verse 13). The interesting point is the contextual tie that the expression *the first blowing* brings about (see verse 13 above). Relating the proposition of this verse to other global intuitions in the Holy Qur'an, we bring to light the proposition of the following verse:

And the Trumpet will be blown, and all who are in the heavens and all who are on the earth will swoon away, except him whom Allāh wills. Then it will be blown a second time, and behold they will be standing, looking on (waiting). (Qur'an 39: 68)

This verse communicates that the trumpet will be blown twice: one blowing for all to die, and another for all to get up. Upon creating a contextual tie between the idea of blowing the trumpet and that of exposing to the Hell-Fire, we find tangible evidence that the first act of exposing takes place after blowing the trumpet the first time, but the second act of exposing (the real casting into the Hell-Fire) takes place after blowing the trumpet a second time. Let us clarify this point with reference to the verse which talks about the torment of the people of the Pharaoh:

The Fire, they are exposed to it, morning and afternoon. And on the Day when the Hour will be established: "Cause Fir'aun's (Pharaoh) people to enter the severest torment!"

(Qur'an 40: 46)

Accordingly, two afterlife accounts will befall the people of the Pharaoh:

1. The Fire, they are exposed to it, morning and afternoon
2. And on the Day when the Hour will be established: "Cause Pharaoh's people to enter the severest torment!"

Whereas the second event is scheduled on the Day when the Hour is established (Arabic: *yawma taqum as-sā'ah*), the first event will take place long before that, on the Day when the Great Event befalls (Arabic: *yawma'idhin waqa'at al-waqi'ah*). The transition from the act of exposing to the act of casting into the Hell-Fire is unquestionable in the verse, deducing that the Holy Qur'an draws a fine line of demarcation between The Day when the Hour will be established and the Day when the Great Event befalls. This conclusion settles the inquiry that the following verse incites:

And We took the Children of Israel across the sea, and Fir'aun (Pharaoh) with his hosts followed them in oppression and enmity, till when drowning overtook him, he said: "I believe that none has the right to be worshipped but He (Allah) in Whom the Children of Israel believe, and I am one of the Muslims (those who submit to Allāh's Will)." Now (you believe) while you refused to believe before and you were one of the Mufsidūn (evil-doers, the corrupters). So this day We shall deliver your body that you may be a sign to those who come after you! And verily, many among mankind are heedless of Our 'ayāt (proofs, evidences, verses, lessons, signs, revelations, etc.). (Qur'an 10: 90-92)

The verse clearly asserts that the body of the Pharaoh himself is (at least temporarily) rescued from torment. The crux of the matter here is like this: How come that some people believe that the people of the Pharaoh are experiencing torment in their graves right now when, in fact, *The Pharaoh* himself (their undisputed Leader) is on a recess?

The severest torment (Arabic: *'ashadda al-^hadhāb*). Advocates of grave torment may object to this reasoning, claiming that torment need not be physical. To them, we recall the following global intuitions, and leave it for them to create the contextual ties:

Surely! Those who disbelieved in Our 'ayāt (proofs, evidences, verses, lessons, signs, revelations, etc.), We shall burn them in Fire. As often as their skins are roasted through, We shall change them for other skins that they may taste the punishment. Truly, Allāh is Ever Most Powerful, All-Wise (Qur'an 4: 56)

These two opponents (believers and disbelievers) dispute with each other about their Lord: then as for those who disbelieved, 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. (Qur'an 22: 19-20)

And if you could see when the angels take away the souls of those who disbelieve (at death); they smite their faces and their backs, (saying): "Taste the punishment of the blazing Fire." (Qur'an 8: 50)

Then how (will it be) when the angels will take their souls at death, smiting their faces and their backs? (Qur'an 47: 27)

On the Day when that (Al-Kanz: money, gold and silver the Zakāt of which has not been paid) will be heated in the Fire of Hell and with it will be branded their foreheads, their flanks, and their backs, (and it will be said unto them): "This is the treasure which you hoarded for yourselves. Now taste of what you used to hoard." (Qur'an 9: 35)

Concerning this last enlightening verse, we raise the following interesting inquiry: Who was wealthier than Korah (Arabic: Qārūn)? Wasn't he one of the closest courtiers of the Pharaoh?

To Pharaoh, Hāmān Korah (Qārūn), but they called: "A sorcerer, a liar!" (Qur'an 40: 24) Verily, Qārūn (Korah) was of Mūsa's (Moses) people, but he behaved arrogantly towards them. And We gave him of the treasures, that of which the keys would have been a burden to a body of strong men. Remember when his people said to him: "Do not exult (with ungratefulness to Allāh's Favors). Verily! Allāh likes not those who are glad (with ungratefulness to Allāh's Favors). (Qur'an 28: 76)

Is his body (forehead, flank, and back) on a recess, too?!

The people of the Pharaoh (Arabic: *Arabic: 'āl fir'awn*). In another place in the Qur'an, it is evident that the people of the Pharaoh will run a bitter dispute in the fire. The following verses manifestly show that this dispute is between those who were weak and those who were arrogant.

The Fire, they are exposed to it, morning and afternoon. And on the Day when the Hour will be established: "Cause Fir'aun's (Pharaoh) people to enter the severest torment!" And, when they will dispute in the Fire, the weak will say to those who were arrogant: "Verily, We followed you: can you then take from us some portion of the Fire?" Those who were arrogant will say: "We are all (together) in this (Fire)! Verily, Allāh has judged between (His) slaves!" (Qur'an 40: 46-48)

The weak are of course the people of the pharaoh, and the arrogant are the Pharaoh himself and his courtiers. This reading brings to attention the following two if-then concerns:

1. If the people of the Pharaoh were experiencing physical torment in their graves right now, then how could they dispute with their Lord when in fact his body is rescued (at least for the time being) from the torment?
2. If this bitter dispute takes place after the pharaoh leads his people into the Hell-Fire on the Day of Judgment, then why have they waited for long, i.e. why not disputing earlier while being exposed to the Hell-Fire the first time? For, it is more human to dispute right at the start of the calamity.

We believe that the dispute takes place in the Hell-Fire after being cast into it on the Day of Judgment for at least two reasons:

1. The people of the pharaoh are dead in their graves; they cannot be alive to see each other or to see the fire, and
2. The arrogant (especially the Pharaoh himself) are not physically there. For in order to dispute, the weak and the arrogant have to be present at the same time.

Whereas Verse 47 communicates the concern of the weak, verse 48 sums up the helpless response of the arrogant:

And, when they will dispute in the Fire, the weak will say to those who were arrogant:

"Verily, We followed you: can you then take from us some portion of the Fire?"

(Qur'an 40: 47)

Those who were arrogant will say: "We are all (together) in this (Fire)! Verily, Allāh has judged between (His) slaves!"

(Qur'an 40: 48)

5. Conclusion

The foregoing discussion has focused on re-interpreting one Qur'anic verse that has been commonly used to support belief in grave torment:

The Fire, they are exposed to it, morning and afternoon. And on the Day when the Hour will be established: "Cause Pharaoh's people to enter the severest torment!"

(Qur'an 40: 46)

In order to see how the text "hangs together as a whole", we hope to have shown that decoding the proposition articulated in one occurrence requires recourse to its other occurrences elsewhere in the text. Functioning as a stimulus, each entry (lexical or phrasal) instigates the process of conceptual information retrieval. This is motivated by the claim that language underdetermines meaning, and so reference disambiguation, attained through retrieving relevant conceptual information, helps settle conflict by comparing the propositions articulated by competing structures, technically called constraints in an OT analysis. In addition to showing how invoking the local and global intuitions helps construe meaning, we also hope to have shown that the conceptual ties we have crafted (contrary to the already established cannon of belief) do not back up grave punishment at all. On the contrary, the conceptual ties corroborate our claim regarding the violability of grave punishment.

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<http://images.search.yahoo.com/search/images?p=hell-fire&fr=yfp-t-501&toggle=1&cop=ms&ei=UTF-8&vm=r>

The Encyclopedia of Death and Dying, Entry: Islam [Online] Available:
<http://www.deathreference.com/Ho-Ka/Islam.html>

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<http://www.usc.edu/schools/college/crcc/engagement/resources/texts/muslim/hadith/muslim/040.smt.html>

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Tafseer Al-Qur'an Al-kareem [Online] Available: <http://Qur'an.al-islam.com/arb/>

Tafseer Al-Qur'an Al-kareem [Online] Available: <http://Qur'an.muslim-web.com/>

University of Southern California: Center for Jewish-Muslim Engagement [Online] Available:
<http://www.usc.edu/schools/college/crcc/engagement/resources/texts/muslim/hadith/muslim/040.smt.html>

Notes

Note 1. [Online] Available: <http://www.deathreference.com/Ho-Ka/Islam.html>

Note 2. As our goal is not to re-state the widely-known views about the subject matter, we refer the reader to the following web page which best outlines the main argument for grave torment as advocated by the Saudi House of Fatwa:

http://www.islamonline.net/servlet/Satellite?pagename=IslamOnline-English-Ask_Scholar/FatwaE/FatwaE&cid=1119503543856

Note 3. Translations in English are adapted from the following two web pages:

1. <http://www.usc.edu/schools/college/crcc/engagement/resources/texts/muslim/Qur'an/>
2. <http://Qur'an.muslim-web.com/>

However, it is worth noting that translations are by no means accurate as they are very much influenced by the common belief advocated by traditional Muslim expositors and scholarly authorities of the Holy Qur'an. Therefore, it should be borne in mind that our current linguistic probing is only based on the wording of the original text in Arabic. The original words of the scripture, which prompt extensive linguistic probing, are provided in the translations.

Note 4. We are aware that two more Qur'anic verses are often cited to advocate belief in grave punishment. These are:

And if you could but see when the Zālimūn are in ghamarāt al-mawt (wrongly translated as the agonies of death), while the angels are stretching forth their hands (saying): "Deliver your souls! This day you shall be recompensed with the torment of degradation because of what you used to utter against Allāh other than the truth. And you used to reject His Ayāt with disrespect!" (Qur'an 6: 93)

And if you could see when the angels take away the souls of those who disbelieve; they smite their faces and their backs, (saying): "Taste the punishment of the blazing Fire. (Qur'an 8: 50)

However, we believe that an in-depth scrutiny of the local and global intuitions invoked by the original wordings of the two verses further repudiates belief in grave punishment. Therefore, each verse deserves an independent research paper.

Note 5. We refer the reader to Musnad A amd (especially section 53/p. 364) to see that conflicting views are reported on the subject matter. We also refer the reader to fat al-Bari cala ṣa ī al-Bukhari to see that most of the adīths about grave torment are excerpts taken out of their larger contexts.

Note 6. For details see Martin et al. (1997)

Note 7. In order to avoid mechanical repetition, we refer the reader to the commentaries of some Islamic expositors and scholarly authorities such as al-Ghazali, Ibn Kathīr, al- abari, al-Qurṭubi, Ibn Majah, al-Bukhari, Muslim, and Ibn Khuzayma (inter alia) who explain them in detail.

Note 8. The Saudi House of Fatwa calculates the risk as "It is worth stressing here that all these ḥadīths are authentic and related from the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) with a continuous chain of reliable transmitters and whoever does not believe in what they say is in a great danger. ... Therefore, everyone has to repose faith in these things without asking about the way they take place because this is beyond man's comprehension." [Online] Available:

http://www.islamonline.net/servlet/Satellite?pagename=IslamOnline-English-Ask_Scholar/Fa

twae/FatwaE&cid=1119503543856

Note 9. (For debates on *ijtihād*, see Hallaq 1984; Kamali 1991)

Note 10. A note worthy of mention here is that although Muslim expositors' *ijtihād* (re-interpretation of the scriptures) as regards torment of the grave is based on texts from the two major Islamic legal sources, namely the Qur'an and the sunna, most of the discussion will be devoted to dispute their interpretations of the Qur'anic evidence for at least two reasons. First, most of the reported *adīths* that they believe endorse grave torment are weak *adīths*; and second, some of the authenticated *adīths* that they cite in *ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhari* and *ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, for example, are *āḍ adīths*. Although I prefer not to debate the issue, learned Muslim scholars know what it means to base the argument for a matter of conviction *caqīda* on such kinds of *adīths*. Therefore, I will not argue for or against these 'a *adīths*, not because I do not believe in them (as some might wrongly conclude), but simply because I want my argument to be grounded on that which Islamic expositors and scholarly authorities can never dispute, mainly the Holy Qur'an.

Note 11. For details on conflict resolution, see Kager (1999a).

Note 12. Much has been said in the OT literature about what a possible constraint could be like. As for formulation, research has shown that constraints are subject to at least two major universal constraint schemata: the Generalized Alignment schema of McCarthy and Prince (1993b) and the Correspondence Theory of McCarthy and Prince (1995).

Note 13. *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*[Online] Available:
<http://www.usc.edu/schools/college/crcc/engagement/resources/texts/muslim/hadith/muslim/040.smt.html>

Note 14. For detailed discussion, see *fath al-Bari* 3-277: 1370

Note 15. Given the propositions of the two verses, we reach a paradoxical situation: whereas one verse suggests that lapse (or even loss) of memory can take place presumably because of torment, other verses deny this altogether. In order to overcome this inconsistency, we believe that the memory of the people of the Hell-fire is never disturbed, and is thus a high-ranking constraint which dominates the belief that people lose memory in their graves

Note 16. For, not only the unbelievers are gathered while they are *dakhirūn*, but believers are also gathered in that way, too:

And the Day on which the Trumpet will be blown - and all who are in the heavens and all who are on the earth, will be terrified except him whom Allāh will (exempt). And all shall come to Him *dakhirūn*. (Qur'an 27: 87)

Interestingly enough, all other creatures can also be in that state of affairs even while they are prostrating to their Lord.

Have they not observed things that Allāh has created: (how) their shadows incline to the right and to the left, making prostration unto Allāh while they are *dakhirūn*? (Qur'an 16: 48)

Note 17. Kolaiti's article is available at <http://www.phon.ucl.ac.uk/publications/WPL/05papers/kolaiti.pdf>

Note 18. Reader's characteristics, such as their level of interest, their level of concentration, their emotional states, and ultimately their interpreting abilities are also relevant. However, we assume that people of *ijtihād* are all very motivated competent readers.

Note 19. Images are downloaded from: <http://images.search.yahoo.com/search/images?p=hell-fire&fr=yfp-t-501&toggle=1&cop=ms&ei=UTF-8&vm=r>