



## Phenomenon of Death in Nahj al-Balāgha: A Qualitative Study

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### Abstract

Death and the way humans facing it differs in various societies. In the present article, with the method of “thematic analysis” and with the six-step pattern of Braun and Clarke, a model for religious morbidity has been provided which focuses on Nahj al-balāgha. The goal of the present study is exploring the quiddity, reason, and quality of death from the perspective of Nahj al-balāgha. First, by choosing the explicit theme of “mawt” (death) and its synonyms, inductively 171 preliminary themes were derived, which then were cut down to 77 basic themes. These basic themes later were reduced to 31 organizing themes and 4 global themes (“the inner truth and function of death”, “features and requirements of death”, “positive encounter with death”, and “negative encounter with death”. In analyzing the reason of death, the results of the study consider the inner truth of death as a divine tradition, and the function of death as the goal of this world as well as a medium for transferring and returning to the other world and beginning of a new life. As an answer to the quiddity of death, in place of explicating the mysterious and unexplainable quiddity of death, twelve features and requirements of death have been investigated, from which the feature of inevitability has the most frequency. Nahj al-balāgha introduces positive encounter as acceptance, preparedness, anticipation, nearness assumption, remembrance, postponement, and readiness for and reception of a valuable death (martyrdom). It also introduces negative encounter as farness assumption, sadness, ignorance, grandness assumption, and morbidity.

**Keywords:** Imām ‘Alī (a), Nahj al-balāgha, morbidity, thematic analysis, phenomenon of death.

### Introduction

Death in biology is the end for the life cycle of living creatures, and in medicine it is the complete and irrevocable cease of biotic acts (Pūr Jawāhirī, 2004: 20). As the word of life, the word of death is evident to everybody. However, the inner truth of death and questions surrounding it draw a veil of ambiguity over it. Humans have no option as to death and always have questions about the meaning, reason, and quality of death. Thinking about the issue of death, contemplating over its quiddity, and overcoming the fear of it have been the concern of many thinkers.

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It is clear to everyone that researching about death is necessary, though many humans overlook it due to various reasons including the daily routines. Morbidity often is caused out of observing the death of other people. This is whereas in a few cases, some individuals may experience autoscopia, by which the understanding made through this procedure can be used by the person undergoing it firstly and then that understanding can be provided for the other people.

Theoretical approaches about the phenomenon of death are classified into five groups: “philosophical”, “psychological”, “anthropological”, “historical”, and “sociological”. The focus of philosophical approach is on the quiddity of death and the way to encounter it. Ignoring the life and perpetual thinking about the death by Stoics, seeking pleasure and forgetting the death by Epicureans, and ontological investigation of death by Heidegger are conspicuous instances of philosophical approach that should be pointed out. But in the psychological approach, mental and personal aspects of death are examined. Freud’s dealing with the issue of death after the First World War and Kübler-Ross’s psychological explication of the five-stage death are instances of this approach. In anthropological approach, the origin of attitude toward death and the rites associated with it are taken into account. This approach can be seen in the works of Frazer, Rivers, Tylor, and Malinowski. In the historical approach, ideas formed about death are probed historically. Philippe Aries, French historian, has introduced the periods of “Tamed Death”, “One’s Own Death”, “Thy Death”, and “Forbidden Death” as four attitudes regarding death in the history of west. Finally about the approaches, it is appropriate to talk about the sociological approach which analyzes the social aspects of death. Norbert Elias (in the book *Tanhā’ī Dam-i Marg*), Thomas Luckman, Peter Bregman, and Tony Walter have followed a sociological approach about death (Sirājzāda, 2015: 156).

In addition to the aforesaid approaches, religions have always paid attention to death. Accordingly, the present study attempts to identify and offer a pattern about morbidity, which is based on Islamic teachings and describes the quiddity, reason, and quality of religious morbidity. Thus, it has based its case study on the *Nahj al-balāgha* of Imām ‘Alī’ (a), a book in which the issue of death is very frequent.

## Review of the literature

Thinking about the phenomenon of death has been a twin of mankind’s living. Socrates (d. 399 B.C.) is one of the most ancient thinkers. In his opinion, death is nothing other than the separation of soul from the body. Since the truth cannot be attained except through thinking – which is done by the soul – so the philosopher who thinks properly should be wishful of death so that he would reach the truth (Plato, 1989: 491). The outlook of Epicurus (d. 270 B.C.) is that as we have not experienced death, we are not allowed to conclude any results about death. Therefore, we should set aside our concern about death entirely and enjoy our life. In view of that, this famous sentence is accredited to him: where I am death is not, where death is I am not (‘Askarī Yazdī, 2018: 46). Pointing out the non-existence before birth and not having any concern thereof, Lucretius (d. 55 B.C.), the pupil of Epicurus, also holds that we, therefore, should not be concerned about the non-existence after the death too (Narāqī, 2019: 90-93).

To Cicero (d. 43 B.C.), the Roman philosopher, if the human believes that the soul returns to its eternal station after death, he should not be afraid of death. If one is doubtful, then he should accept that death is “the end of everything” (in which there would be no pain and suffering) or that “death is the beginning of the soul’s eternal life” (in which prosperity awaits him) (Gūsha Gīr, 2001: 155).

Spinoza (d. 1677), the 17th century philosopher, states that a free human thinks about death less than anything else and his wisdom is not contemplating over death, but rather it is contemplating over life (Spinoza, 1997: 276). Moreover, Nietzsche (d. 1900) holds that death is the end of life, but morbidity is the beginning of it. Quoting Zoroaster, Nietzsche teaches the prompt death and sees such a death the outcome of a prompt living (Nietzsche, 1976: 101).

It could be said that existentialism, more than any other school of thought, has been concerned with the phenomenon of death. Heidegger, Sartre, Camus, Jaspers, and others have always considered various aspects of death like existence, non-existence, or anxiety (Barthes, 1983: 26). To Barthes (d. 1969), although death is the most certain thing in the universe, we live as if there is no death because its time is not certain. He points out the blurry state of death reminds us that in doing everything we should consider death (q.v.: Khātāmī, 2006: 151-158).

In the thinking framework of Heidegger (d. 1976), human experiences the death of others every day, and the only experiential certainty belongs to death (Heidegger, 2010: 566). He deems three features for death. First, we always like to talk and think about the death of others, as if death only happens to others. Next, there is no way to escape from death. Third, it is possible for death to come every moment. Considering these three features completely, we feel the presence of death in the core of our life (Hāshimī, 2018: 141).

The thought of death has caused Yalom (d. 1931) in his book *Rawān Darmānī-i Igzīstānsīyāl* – from the mentioned four ontological concerns – initially to propound death which seems to have more importance than the other three concerns, namely, freedom, loneliness, and nihilism (Yalom, 2011). To Yalom, there has always existed the fear of death, but the modern world and weakening of religious beliefs of humans have made it more noticeable (Yalom, 2012: 10). He explores death and life together; to him, most of life's passion and excitement vanishes without the thought of death (Hāshimī, 2018: 123).

Considering his personal experience in the concentration camps and the deaths he witnessed, Frankl (d. 1997), the originator of Logotherapy, also looked for an answer to the human's sufferings. To him, if suffering and death were meaningless, then certainly life would have no meaning (Frankl, 2019: 107). In fact, not death but the consciousness about death has been problematic for humans (Ilyās, 2016: 31).

The issue of death and its thinking has also been propounded by the Islamic philosophers. That the souls of whom will remain after death has always attracted the attention of Islamic philosophers. In the thinking of Fārābī (d. 339), when the secondary perfections of the soul are actualized, the soul can remain after the decay of the body (Fārābī, 1987: 75). A century later, Avicenna (d. 416 AH), in the treatise *Daf'u khawf al-mawt (Daf'u al-nasam)*, emphasizes that the fear of death is futile, and a perfectionist should see his perfection in death (q.v.: Avicenna, n.d.).

In the viewpoint of Mullā Ṣadrā, the fear of death is not logical, and the reason for it is the attachment of the human to the world and the difficulty he feels to separate from it. An everlasting human who prepares himself for what is beyond death has a beautiful picture of death (Ṣadr al-Dīn Shīrāzī, 1987, vol. 6: 103). 'Allāma Ṭabāṭabā'ī introduces death a certain and inescapable fate that no one fails to experience, even if one takes refuge in the firmest shelters in order to escape from it (Ṭabāṭabā'ī, 1993, vol. 5: 7). In present era, 'Allāma Ja'farī writes, "The ambiguity of the inner truth of life has caused the darkness of death (Ja'farī, 1987, vol. 8: 392). He continues, "If one wants to know his death well, it is necessary for him to know his life well (Ibid, vol. 13: 209).

In the religious texts of Christianity, sometimes the remembrance of death is manifested in warnings as to preparations for death and avoidance of endless promises to the soul. In *The Imitation of Christ*, we read, “Blessed is he who keeps the moment of death ever before his eyes and prepares for it every day. If you have ever seen a man die, remember that you, too, must go the same way. In the morning consider that you may not live till evening, and when evening comes do not dare to promise yourself dawn. Be always ready, therefore, and so live that death will never take you unprepared (à Kempis, 2010: 87).

In the present time, it seems morbidity is increasing; for instance, some organizations can be mentioned which teach how to encounter death. Nonetheless, there is an effort to talk less about the life after death. This is whereas religion thinks of death in the posthumous form. But the modern world thinks of death as a phenomenon and a happening with its consequences, without regarding the posthumous world.

Researching and writing about the phenomenon of death has a considerable background and range. Therefore, main part of these written works has been allocated to morbidity in the religious teachings and Islamic sources. These works have often interpreted and described death in the Islamic teaching with a descriptive and library research method. That said no work was found that explores the phenomenon of death with a focus on a book like Nahj al-balāgha using a “thematic analysis”.

In the present article as to the phenomenon of death in Nahj al-balāgha, it is attempted, with an inductive method, to discover, derive, organize, and analyze the basic, organizing, and global themes – after choosing semantic themes (Attride-Stirling, 2001: 385-405) – with a focus on the quiddity, reason, and quality of encountering the phenomenon of death.

## Method of research

This study is done using the qualitative analysis, a method which is used to “see what is behind those” and also to “gain a new perspective regarding things about which there is some awareness” (Strauss, 2006:19). One of the simple and very efficient methods in the qualitative analysis is the thematic analysis (TA). In fact, thematic analysis is a method to recognize, analyze, and determine the patterns in qualitative data. It is in effect a kind of general and comprehensive method for the other qualitative studies. If the method of thematic analysis seeks to discover theoretical models for the themes, it is “grounded theory”; and if it focuses on gathering data based on the subjective experiences of the subject, then it is close to phenomenology.

To some, thematic analysis is not a certain method but is a suitable tool for the methods of qualitative analysis. However, Braun and Clarke believe thematic analysis itself is a certain method that one of its benefits is its flexibility.

To identify and describe the reason and quiddity of a phenomenon, one can use the thematic analysis; also to describe its quality, a network of themes can be used. What are usually used in the thematic analysis are the tools of this method, analysis of the template of themes, and the analysis of the network of themes. Template analysis provides a list of themes in a hierarchical manner. Thematic network also shows the relationship between the themes in web-like illustrations (‘Ābidī Ja‘farī, 2011: 151).

Theme makes evident important information about the research data and questions and to some extent, it shows the meaning and concept of the existing pattern in a collection of data. In other words, theme is a repeated and distinguished feature in the text that to the researcher, it shows a certain perception and experience concerning the research questions. Namely, a theme is a pattern which can be found in the data. It, at least, deals with the description and

organization of observations and, at the most, interpretation of the features of the explored phenomenon.

Thematic analysis looks for extracting conspicuous themes in a text at various levels. Network of themes also seeks to ease arranging and describing these themes. With a certain process, the network of themes organizes all the themes. These themes include the main themes (key codes and points existing in the text), organizing themes (the achieved categories out of the combination and reduction of the basic themes), and global themes (superb themes involving the rules that dominate the text as a whole). In the next level, these themes are illustrated in the form of a web in which each of the conspicuous themes of the three levels is shown together with the relationship between them (Attride-Stirling, 2001: 390).

Themes are categorized and named regarding various aspects such as the time of theme recognition; theme quiddity in the text; theme hierarchy in the template of themes; the position of themes in the network of themes; the origin of theme identification; the visibility in the text; the role of the theme in the analysis; and the positioning in the theme. The key feature of this method is organizing the themes in a hierarchical manner and categorizing the lower level themes into clusters and creating higher level themes out of them (Qāsimī, 2020: 527).

To execute the theme analysis, various patterns have been offered. From these patterns, the six-step pattern of Braun and Clarke is more common, which includes familiarizing, coding, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and writing reports (Shaykhzāda, 2020: 138).

### Research domain and sampling method

The domain of the present research is the book *Nahj al-balāgha* in which the sermons, letters, and sayings of Imām ‘Alī (a) have been compiled. Sampling is done with the method of theoretical sampling. This sampling method is based on this idea that in the research process for collecting the data, the method should focus on that area by which it could develop the theory (Īmān, 2018: 87). However, to achieve more certainty, with the help of the application of *Dānishnāmayi ‘Alawī*, all propositions of this book whose meaning and concept are related to the phenomenon of death and at least have the key word “mawt” (death) or one of its synonyms were chosen based on the following table. This was done to provide the researcher with the most number of identifiers for coding and finding the three-fold themes.

No.	Word	Meaning and concept
1	mawt	death
2	ajal	time of death; death
3	ḥimām	a certain affair; an unavoidable affair; destiny and decree, fate, ; death
4	ḥatf	death
5	Mannīyya	to die; death
6	raḥīl	migrate; death

### Research assessment benchmarks

The method of thematic analysis is very flexible; for this, various methods of qualitative research can be used to assess it. The most important methods to assess the thematic analysis are: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Credibility is the homogeneity of collecting data from various sources to study a particular phenomenon. Transferability means the correspondence of the obtained findings to the opinions of scholars

as well as the valid literature reviews. Dependability emphasizes that the research should be designed elaborately before it enters into the field of research. And finally, confirmability means providing the subjects with the research results and asking for their opinion as for the extent of confirmation or triangulation and also the extent of confirmation of a number of expert and independent analyzers.

After accepting these indexes, in addition to the sermons of Nahj al-balāgha, in this research the letters and sayings of this valid document were also taken into account in order to increase its validity index. On the other hand, the findings of the research were corresponded to the perceptions of thinkers and interpreters of Nahj al-balāgha to realize the transferability index. Likewise, to attain the dependability index, before beginning the research, its special designing was formed with the six-step pattern of “Braun and Clarke”. Finally, to achieve confirmability, coding of the themes and the results obtained from them were given to some experts who also confirmed the results.

### Findings of the research

In this research, with using the application of Dānishnāmayi ‘Alawī and also through searching the key word “mawt” and its synonyms, 137 identifiers related to the phenomenon of death were extracted from the book Nahj al-balāgha. First, 171 basic themes were obtained from this number of the chosen identifiers. Then with mixing and removing the repeated items, the number of the basic themes was reduced to 77. Next, with combining and summarizing the basic themes, 31 organizing themes were identified. And lastly, 4 global themes were achieved. These themes include the theme of “features and requirements of death” with 72 identifiers, the theme of “positive encounter with death” with 53 identifiers, the theme of “the inner truth and function of death” with 32 identifiers, and the theme of “negative encounter with death” with 13 identifiers, which, respectively, have the most to the least number of identifiers in the book Nahj al-balāgha. This shows the abundance of the theme of “features and requirements of death” in the words of Imām ‘Alī (a), which is followed by the theme of “positive encounter with death”, the theme of “the inner truth and function of death”, and the theme of “negative encounter with death”. Thus, the theme of “negative encounter with death” has the least frequency in the words of Imām ‘Alī (a). Also compared with the theme of “positive encounter with death”, it shows Nahj al-balāgha pays more attention to and puts more emphasis on how to encounter the phenomenon of death positively.

Among the organizing themes related to the inner truth and function of death, “death as the goal of this world” and “death as a divine tradition” have the most identifiers and “death as a medium for transferring”, “death as a new life”, and “death as a medium for returning” have the least frequency among the identifiers of this part. Exploring the organizing themes related to the features and requirements of death also indicate that most of the achieved themes from Nahj al-balāgha involve the features and requirements of “death inevitability”, “death in ambush”, and “death unpleasantness”, respectively. After these come the features and requirements of “closeness”, “temporality”, “scariness”, “difficultness”, “comprehensiveness”, “suddenness”, “certainty”, “concealment”, and “causativeness”. Investigating the kind of “encountering the death” shows that “preparedness”, “reception”, “remembrance”, “acceptance”, “anticipation”, “nearness assumption”, “postponement”, “edification”, and “thinking” have the most frequency in the realm of positive encounter with death, respectively. Moreover, in the realm of negative encounter with death, the themes of “morbidity ignorance”, “farness assumption”, “sadness”, and “grandness assumption” have the most identifiers, respectively.

In the following table, there are global and organizing themes of the death phenomenon in Nahj al-balāgha as well as some instances of basic themes:

Global themes	Organizing themes	Some of the basic themes
Inner truth and function of death	divine tradition; medium of transferring; goal of this world; new life; medium of returning	death as the rule of this world; the end of this worldly life with death; death to be a medium between this world and the hereafter; death to be the beginning of a new life in the other world; death to be the return to God...
Features and requirements of death	scariness; inevitability; in ambush; causativeness; difficulty; nearness; certainty; comprehensiveness; temporality; concealment; suddenness; unpleasantness	death to be scary; death to be after the humans; death to be sudden; death to be causal; death to be inevitable; death to be horrible; life to be short; humans to be the inmates of death; death to be near; death to be for everyone
Positive encounter with death	Acceptance; preparedness; thinking; anticipation; postponement; reception; nearness assumption; remembrance; edification	to prepare for death; to repel death with alms; to accept death; to await death; to deter death by observing one's relatives; to look forward to death; to think of death to be near ...
Negative encounter with death	farness assumption; sadness; morbidity ignorance; grandness assumption	to be afraid of death; to deem death unlikely; death not to be relieving; to be ignorant of one's death; to think of bodily death as striking....

## Discussion and conclusion

Based on the achieved themes from coding the propositions related to the phenomenon of death in Nahj al-balāgha and also considering the three primary questions of this study, i.e. reason, quiddity, and quality of the phenomenon of death, the following results were attained:

### *a) Reason of death from the perspective of Nahj al-balāgha*

Analysis of the global theme of the “inner truth and function of death” with five organizing themes in Nahj al-balāgha shows Imām ‘Alī (a), analyzing the reason of death, pays his attention to this strategic point that the main reason of the phenomenon of death is the will and volition of God and the “divine tradition” about all the living creatures. He says, “The Lord who is the Master of death is also the Master of life. The Creator is the Annihilator” (Nahj al-balāgha, letter 31). According to the divine tradition, the human is created for the hereafter, and not for this world. Also, he is created for death, and not for residing in this world (Ibid). Also, he says, “Death is with you as if it has been twisted and tied round your head” (Nahj al-balāgha, letter 27). This divine tradition is also stipulated in the noble Qur’ān, and the rule of death is for all the creatures on the earth. Qur’ān reads, “All that is on earth will perish: But will abide (forever) the Face of thy Lord, full of Majesty, Bounty and Honor” (Qur’ān 55:26, 27).

To describe the reason of death, Nahj al-balāgha also indicates this point that every human has a certain life in this world and death is the “goal of this world”. The end of this present world is death and with it the world ends (Nahj al-balāgha, sermon 155). The lifetime of everybody is like a shade which should be inevitably finished (Nahj al-balāgha, sermon 104), and that the human is a guest for some days in this world (Nahj al-balāgha, sermon 129). By this, the function of death becomes clear.

To Imām ‘Alī (a), “new life”, after this world, is through the medium of death. The reason of death and its mysteriousness is due to this issue. In fact, there is nothing between the human and

attendance in Paradise or Hell and beginning of a new life except death (Nahj al-balāgha, sermon 63). Death acts as a “transferring medium” and takes one from this world to the other world. The human should return to his main station and homeland, and death is the “medium of return” to his own main home (Nahj al-balāgha, sermon 108). This issue has also been emphasized in the Divine Word, “To God we belong, and to Him is our return” (Qur’ān 2:156).

*b) Quiddity of death from the perspective of Nahj al-balāgha*

Exploring and analyzing the global theme of “features and requirements of death” with 12 organizing themes in Nahj al-balāgha show that Imām ‘Alī (a), in explicating the quiddity of death, points out the features and requirements of death more, rather than mentioning its quiddity. This is because the quiddity of death is very mysterious and concealed. His Holiness confesses that he has spent many days discussing and searching for the secrets of death and its esoteric side, but God has wanted nothing save its concealment, and this issue has remained concealed (Nahj al-balāgha, sermon 149).

Nonetheless, there is a conspicuous frequency in the words of the Commander of the Faithful (a) as for the features and requirements of death. The most frequent feature of death in Nahj al-balāgha is its “inevitability”. Running away from death is meaningless, and every living creature is exposed to death (Nahj al-balāgha, sermon 110). The final destination of the human is death, and running away from it is actually facing it (Nahj al-balāgha, sermon 149). If running away from death were possible, Solomon (a) would have done it (Nahj al-balāgha, sermon 181). This theme is depicted in the noble Qur’ān with a beautiful metaphor, “Every soul shall have a taste of death. In the end to Us shall ye be brought back (Qur’ān 29:57).

In other sermons, his Holiness says, “As for destruction, the time has its bow pressed (to readiness) and its dart does not go amiss” (Nahj al-balāgha, sermon 113), and finally takes him away from this world (Nahj al-balāgha, saying 423). Death earnestly watches the human (Nahj al-balāgha, sermon 195), and waits for its prey (Ibid).

Moreover, it is recorded that the human habitually deems the death unpleasant (Nahj al-balāgha, saying 142). “Unpleasantness of death” is not separated from the death, and most humans have a negative stance toward death. Death destroys the pleasures and joys of the human (Nahj al-balāgha, sermon 221), and such a thing, of course, is not pleasant to the mankind. In spite of his too much inclination toward martyrdom, Imām ‘Alī (a) thanks God for continuing his life and not saying farewell to this world (Nahj al-balāgha, sermon 206). Therefore, he recommends that people never wish for their death without a great cause (Nahj al-balāgha, letter 69).

Nahj al-balāgha puts an emphasis on the “nearness” of death and states its surprise that how close the living are to the dead (Nahj al-balāgha, sermon 113), and that since the life passes and death comes forward, how soon these two meet each other (Nahj al-balāgha, sermon 28). Therefore, it warns that how close death is to the human (Nahj al-balāgha, sermon 182). Nevertheless, the words of Imām ‘Alī (a) stipulates the “temporality of death” as an outstanding feature. The lifetime and death time of everybody are both definite (Nahj al-balāgha, sermon 184), and this definiteness protects the human like a shield (Nahj al-balāgha, sermon 192). In fact, definiteness of lifetime protects the human like a guard against death (Nahj al-balāgha, sermon 298).

Of the other features of death in the words of the Commander of the Faithful (a) is its “scariness”. Death and its parameters like graveyard, loneliness, and narrowness of the grave make the human scared (Nahj al-balāgha, sermon 82). Imām ‘Alī (a) explicitly states if you could see what has been seen by the dead, you would be scared (Nahj al-balāgha, sermon 20).



In Nahj al-balāgha, death is considered a tough issue, and “difficultness of death” is a notable feature which comes next to the other parameters of death. To Imām ‘Alī (a), death has such difficulties that cannot be expressed and that no one can think of them (Nahj al-balāgha, sermon 212).

Among these features, however, “suddenness of death” is a challenging feature. Death appears abruptly and takes the human suddenly. Due to this, Imām ‘Alī (a) warns about the sudden occurrence of death (Nahj al-balāgha, sermon 113). This is because while one is overlooking the death, it attacks him suddenly (Nahj al-balāgha, sermon 63).

What can be a soothing point for the unpleasantness of death and reduce its scariness and difficultness is the feature of the “comprehensiveness of death”. In consoling a group who had lost a dear, Imām ‘Alī (a) pointed out the generality and comprehensiveness of death (Nahj al-balāgha, saying 349), and, on the contrary, he reproached those who think death is only for the others (Nahj al-balāgha, saying 118).

That said death is a “definite” issue and is not lighthearted with anybody (Nahj al-balāgha, sermon 132). When the container of death is complete and the time of death comes, the spirit departs the body (Nahj al-balāgha, sermon 164), and the human lies like a carcass among his own family (Nahj al-balāgha, sermon 108).

In the divine knowledge, the lifetime of everybody, less or more, late or soon, is determined. Arrival of death certainly has a “reason”, and when its reason comes, death happens (Nahj al-balāgha, sermon 90). In spite of this fact, no one knows the time and place of his death and the death of others. Death is “concealed (Nahj al-balāgha, saying 411), and does not inform anybody of its arrival. Only does the Wise God know where death comes for a human. Qur’ān reads, “Nor does anyone know in what land he is to die. Verily with God is full knowledge and He is acquainted (with all things)” (Qur’ān 31:34).

### *c) Quality of death from the perspective of Nahj al-balāgha*

Probing and analyzing the global theme of “positive encounter with death” with nine organizing themes as well as the global theme of “negative encounter with death” with five organizing themes shows that Imām ‘Alī (a) – in explicating the quality of death – deals with the way the human faces death, in place of dealing with the quality and type of death. In the view of Imām ‘Alī (a), the human’s encounter with death is sometimes positive and appropriate – which is recommended by his Holiness – and sometimes it is accepted by the human negatively – which is reprimanded by his Holiness.

To encounter death positively, Imām ‘Alī (a) in Nahj al-balāgha mostly emphasizes the “preparedness for death”. His Holiness insists that before the arrival of death, the human should prepare himself for it (Nahj al-balāgha, sermon 232, letter 31), and introduces himself among those who has been ready for death (Nahj al-balāgha, letter 35). He deems the best Servants of God those who are ready to leave this world (Nahj al-balāgha, sermon 182). In a beautiful simile, he sees the people of this world like a caravan whose drivers have hailed the migration and all of them are ready to march off (Nahj al-balāgha, saying 415).

“Accepting death” and getting along with it is another theme which is clear in the words of Imām ‘Alī (a). Realization of death is certain and its acceptance is necessary (Nahj al-balāgha, sermon 187). Imām ‘Alī (a) is willing as for the acceptance of death and says that he has no fear if death comes to him or he proceeds to it (Nahj al-balāgha, sermon 54). Thus, he stipulates there is no sign of death coming to him for which he is unhappy (Nahj al-balāgha, letter 23).

“Anticipation of death” paves the way for being good. Facing death, one who awaits death hastens in affairs of benefaction (Nahj al-balāgha, saying 30). Nahj al-balāgha suggests that, before the arrival of death, you make your ears hear the call of death and you await its arrival (Nahj al-balāgha, sermon 112).

Dealing with the phenomenon of death, Nahj al-balāgha strongly recommends the “remembrance of death” (Nahj al-balāgha, sermon 230). Remembering the death softens and subjugates the heart of the human (Nahj al-balāgha, letter 31). Therefore when dealing with this phenomenon, it is necessary to remember death and the life after it a lot (Nahj al-balāgha, letter 69), and who remembers death a lot is content with the little of this world (Nahj al-balāgha, saying 341).

To face the death of others appropriately, words of Imām ‘Alī (a) mention “edification”. Phenomenon of death is sufficient for exhortation and edification (Nahj al-balāgha, sermon 232), and his Holiness points to getting lessons from the dead seen by one when the dead are carried to the graves involuntarily and are buried in there (Nahj al-balāgha, sermon 230).

One of the other approaches in facing the death is “thinking” about it. Such an encounter undoubtedly suppresses endless wishes and false pride (Nahj al-balāgha, saying 328), and makes facing with the death desirable.

Religious teachings and particularly the propositions of Nahj al-balāgha teach us that as for the death, one can “postpone” it and avoid a horrible death by giving alms and observing his relatives. However, it is necessary to regard death near. In Nahj al-balāgha, “nearness assumption” is a positive and appropriate encounter with the issue of death, and is recommended. Those who consider death to be near turn to good acts (Nahj al-balāgha, sermon 113) and because they believe death to be near, they reject endless desires (Nahj al-balāgha, sermon 113).

Among various types of positive and appropriate encounters with death, the option of “reception” of death in Nahj al-balāgha seems at first strange, particularly regarding that in the words of Imām ‘Alī’ (a) there can be seen cases which point to the unpleasantness of death. It is clear that death normally is not an ideal and desire of his Holiness, but in certain cases like being killed on the way of God he welcomes death and desires it. Due to this, he swears the dearest death to him is being killed on the way of God (Nahj al-balāgha, sermon 122). In fact, a death is welcomed which comes with dignity (Nahj al-balāgha, sermon 51), leading, finally, to meeting God and paving the way for entering into the divine Paradise (Nahj al-balāgha, sermon 184).

In addition to explicating the positive and desired encounter with death, there are indications as to the negative encounter with death in Nahj al-balāgha. “Moribidity” and an attitude which is fearful of death is a kind of negative encounter with the issue of death. Although awareness of death – which is a feature telling apart the human from the other creatures – is itself a prelude to moribidity (Nahj al-balāgha, sermon 155), due to the certainty and inevitability of death, fear of death cannot save the human from it (Nahj al-balāgha, sermon 38). If death is going to have a positive function, at least the opportunities should be seized and not wasted (Nahj al-balāgha, saying 142).

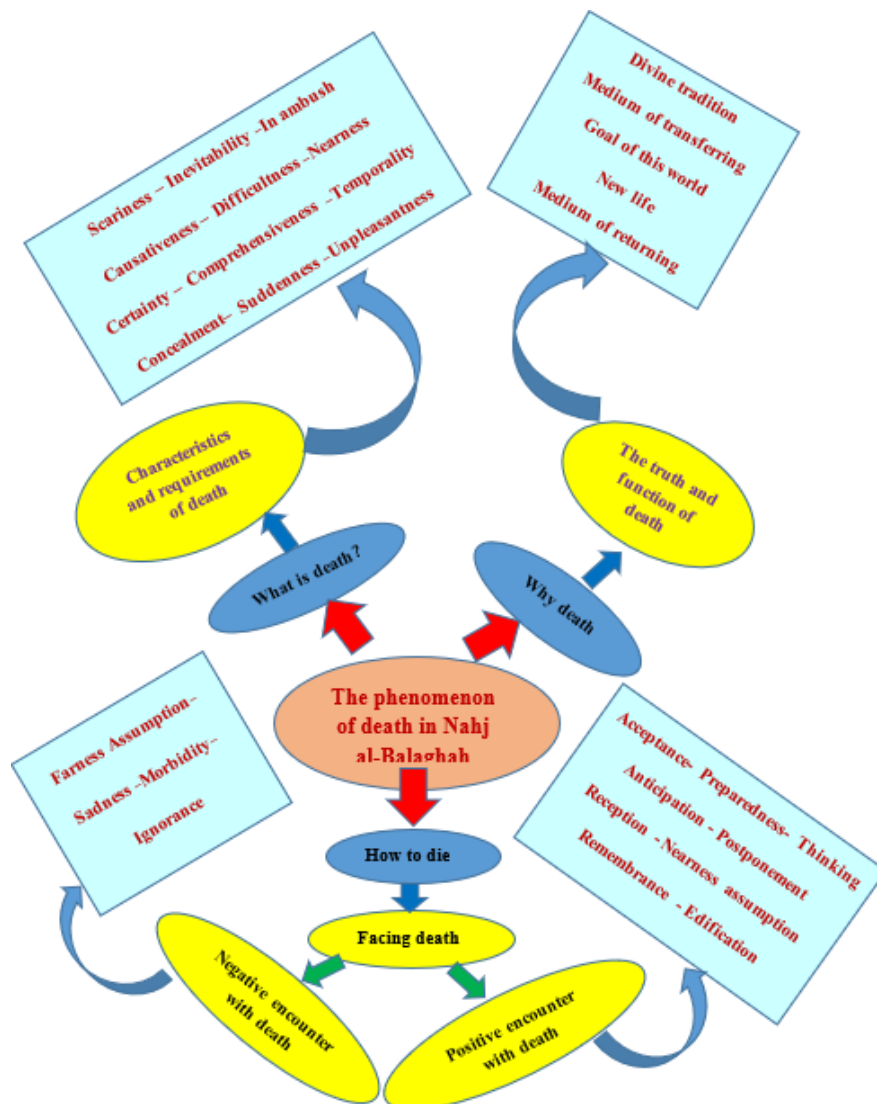
One of the other negative encounters with death is “farness assumption” which entangles some people. A wrong perception of death causes the death to be considered far. Imām ‘Alī (a) warns: have not you seen how death reached some who were before you and regarded death far?!

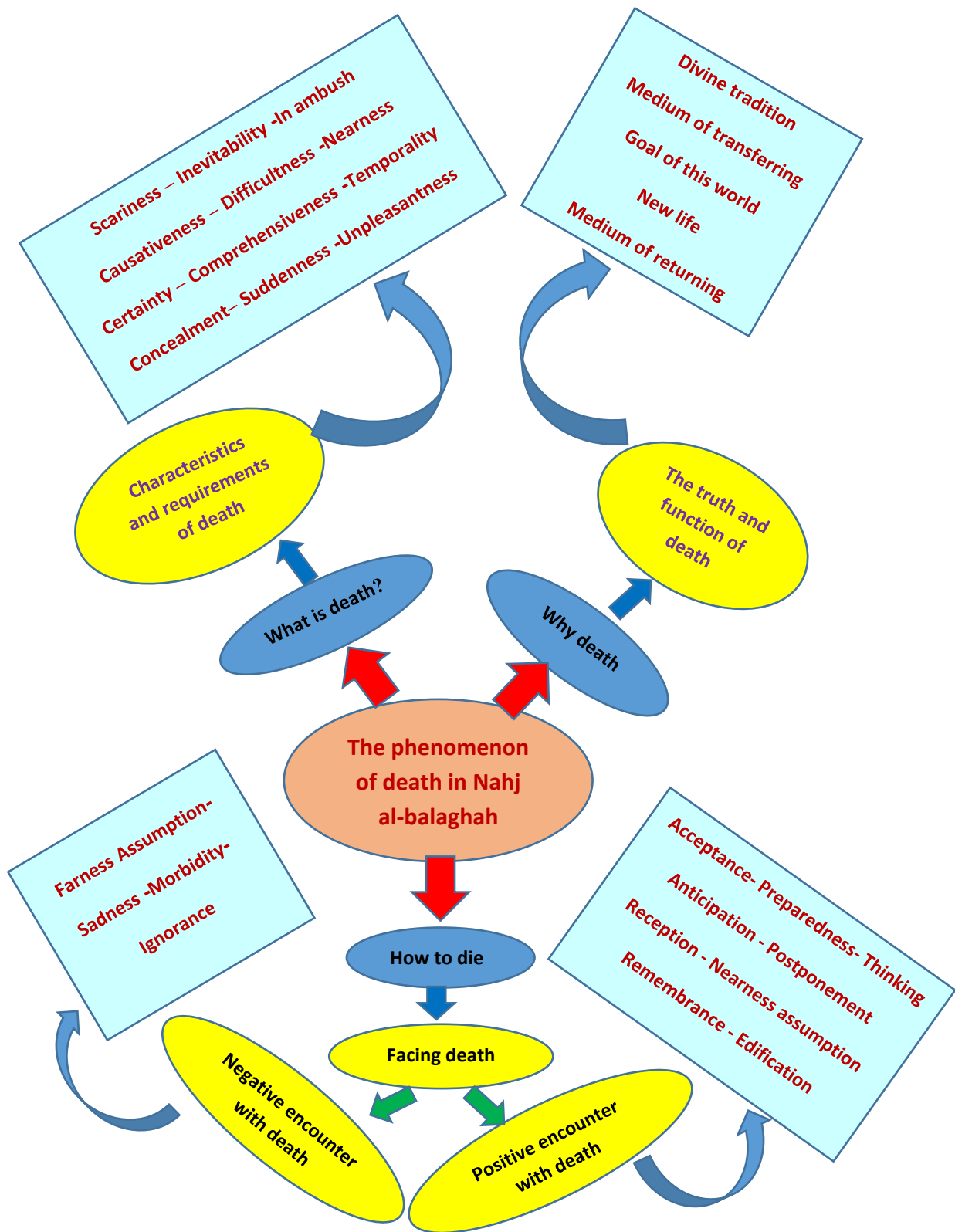
“Ignorance of death” and failure to remember it is another type of negative encounter with death. Imām ‘Alī (a) sympathetically recommends that the human remember death and not ignore it. His Holiness expresses his surprise to the effect that how people ignore something

which does not ignore them (Nahj al-balāgha, sermon 230). Somewhere else, he expresses his surprise as for someone who sees the dead but forgets the death (Nahj al-balāgha, saying 121). Imām ‘Alī’ (a) points to the world seekers who deem bodily death a grand issue, but do not care about the death of the heart (Nahj al-balāgha, sermon 221). “Assumption of bodily death as grand” against assumption of heart death as trivial is a kind of negative encounter with death.

In the opinion of Imām ‘Alī’ (a), after a while the public become fed up from everything, except the life that as it passes, the desire toward it does not decrease. This desire to continue life originates from not seeing any comfort and convenience in death by the humans (Nahj al-balāgha, sermon 133).”Sadness” in facing the death is a kind of general reaction to the phenomenon of death which happens when the human sees no logical meaning in death. Of course, sadness in respect of death may happen to decent people because they see the life as their capital for the hereafter. The more one’s lifetime is, the more it is possible for him to amass provision for the hereafter.

Based on what is mentioned, the theme network of death phenomenon can be offered as follows:





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