



& DECREE DESTINY

THE FREEDOM OF NO CHOICE

Shaykh Fadhlalla Haeri



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Book Description

Free will and predestination have been the frequent topic of philosophical debate from the early civilizations right through to the present day. This book describes how human life is based on the FREEDOM OF NO CHOICE.

DECREE AND DESTINY is a lucid exposition of the extensive body of Islamic thought on the issue of free will and determinism. *Shaykh Fadhlalla Haeri* presents the deepest aspects of the debate through the actual words of the Qur'an, the Prophet Muhammad and the Shi'ite Imams. Many of the sayings quoted have not been examined before in this context. *Shaykh Fadhlalla Haeri's* work offers to the reader the remarkable richness of Islamic thought on this issue, and points out popular misconceptions, such as the belief that Islam is a fatalistic religion. Ultimately, **DECREE AND DESTINY** will serve as a much-needed bridge between Islamic culture and philosophy and the West.

About Shaykh Fadhlalla Haeri

Acknowledged as a master of self-knowledge and a spiritual philosopher, Shaykh Fadhlalla Haeri's role as a teacher grew naturally out of his own quest for self-fulfillment.

He travelled extensively on a spiritual quest which led to his eventual rediscovery of the pure and original Islamic heritage of his birth, and the discovery of the truth that reconciles the past with the present, the East with the West, the worldly with the spiritual – a link between the ancient wisdom teachings and our present time.

A descendant of five generations of well-known and revered spiritual leaders, Shaykh Fadhlalla Haeri has taught students throughout the world for over 30 years. A prolific author of more than thirty books relating to the universal principles of Islam, the Qur'an, and its core purpose of enlightenment, he is a gifted exponent of how the self relates to the soul, humankind's link with the Divine, and how consciousness can be groomed to reflect our higher nature.

The unifying scope of his perspective emphasizes practical, actionable knowledge that leads to self-transformation, and provides a natural bridge between seemingly different Eastern and Western approaches to spirituality, as well as offering a common ground of higher knowledge for various religions, sects and secular outlooks.

Acknowledgments

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Foreword

Nearly every chapter in the long history of Islamic thought is concerned in one way or another with the question of *al-qada' wa'l-qadar*, decree and destiny, or seen in somewhat of a different perspective, free will and determinism. The earliest Islamic community with its intellectual centers in Basra and Kufa was concerned with three basic theological problems: what is the nature of the Qur'an, who is saved, and how is man's free will and moral responsibility based upon choice related to God's omnipotence and also omniscience? Out of these basically Islamic questions related to the teachings of the Qur'an and *hadith*, there grew the earliest schools of theology, or *Kalam*, while the Sufis and the philosophers were also concerned with such questions, especially that of decree and destiny from the earliest times as seen in the utterances of one of the first patriarchs of Sufism, Hasan al-Basri, and the writings of the first Muslim philosophers, such as al-Kindi.

The Qur'an speaks explicitly of both the absolute power and knowledge of God concerning everything in His creation and man's responsibility for his actions, hence his freedom to choose. The *hadith*, which is the supreme commentary upon the Sacred Text, elucidates these teachings by providing additional knowledge concerning a problem which is insoluble upon the plane of rationalistic analysis and without consideration of that inner dimension of the revelation which provides for man's knowledge of the higher levels of existence and of the relativity of man's existence and will vis-à-vis God, who alone is ultimately real.

On the basis of the revealed sources of Islam, numerous responses were to be provided by various schools of thought concerning decree and destiny, free will and determinism. Nearly every Sunni as well as Shi'ite theologian has been concerned with it and in fact the main schools of Sunni *Kalam*, the Ash'ariyyah, Mu'tazilah and Maturidiyyah, have been distinguished from each other mostly on the basis of their attitude towards this question. Likewise, nearly every Islamic philosopher has written on the subject and the separate treatises on decree and destiny by Ibn Sina and Sadr al-Din Shirazi, who came six centuries after him, are well known to students of Islamic thought. As for the Sufis, from the early discourses of Hasan al-Basri and Junayd to the elaborate treatises of `Abd al-Wahhab al-Sha'rani and `Abd al-Rahman Jami nearly a

millennium later, concern with the question of decree and destiny has remained central. Likewise, one finds this theme pervading the *Mathnawi* of Jalal al-Din Rumi, who has provided some of the most profound answers to this central question of human existence.

In Shi`ism the sayings of the Imams as well as the thought inspired by them provided a rich treasury of wisdom dealing with this theme, a treasury which is much less known to the West than the other sources and modes of Islamic thought. Many sayings of the Imams, especially `Ali ibn Abi Talib, concern this subject and provide a solution for it at the highest level of metaphysical understanding.

Usually this problem is approached by conceiving of both God and man as ‘absolute’ realities with ‘absolute’ wills. Then the question is asked as to how it is possible for God to be omnipotent and omniscient and yet for man to have free will and act according to this freedom. As long as the question is posed in such a way, there is no solution for the dichotomy that it presents to the human mind, and one is faced with the choice of either accepting God’s omnipotence and denying human free will or accepting man’s free will and denying God’s omnipotence, solutions which stand opposed to the very text of the Qur’an as well as the intention of its teachings.

From the point of view of Islamic wisdom or gnosis (*al-hikmah* and *al-ma`rifah*), which is none other than pure metaphysics as expounded through the revealed forms of Islam on the basis of the inner dimensions of the Islamic revelation, only God is absolute while man is relative. Moreover, according to the *hadith*, *khalafa'Llahu Adama `ala suratihi* (God has created man upon His ‘form’), man reflects God’s Names and Qualities which constitute the *surah* referred to in this *hadith*. Now, it must be remembered that God is both pure necessity and pure freedom; therefore, something of both qualities have to be reflected in man. Man is determined by God through all the conditions of existention which make him be what he is, but he is also free to ‘unbecome’ what he is through ascending the grades and scales of existence towards the one who alone is pure freedom. Man’s will, moreover, is free in the ultimate sense only in conforming itself to the Will of God. We are free to the degree that we *are*, to the degree that we approach the One who alone *is* in the absolute sense. Man is what he becomes and becomes what he is because his actions affect his existence while his existence determines the modes of his actions.

He is determined because God is pure necessity and the source of all existence; he is free because he is the mirror in which are reflected the Divine Qualities and Attributes including freedom which is concomitant of His absoluteness. Human existence is that great mystery woven of the warp of necessity and the woof of freedom. That is why man alone is the microcosm, the key to universal existence and the only being who while himself, can go beyond himself, who is bound yet free, who realizes real freedom through surrendering his will to God and who realizes pure necessity by making use of his God-given freedom to become what he is in the Divine Presence.

Shaykh Fadhlalla Haeri's book has the great advantage that it presents to the Western reader the deepest aspects of the problems of decree and destiny through the actual words of the Qur'an, the Prophet and the Shi'ite Imams. Many of the sayings translated in this work, especially those of the Imams, have not been available in such a manner before in their direct relation to the intricacies of the question of *qada'* and *qadar*. His work does not attempt to be a complete theological or philosophical treatment of the subject. Rather, he draws from the traditional sources numerous sayings, complemented by his own commentaries, to present to the reader the remarkable richness of Islamic thought on this issue and to remove some of the well-known errors concerning Islam such as Islam being fatalistic and having no room for human initiative and dynamism, as if early Islam did not spread from China to France in a century or it did not create one of the greatest civilizations in human history.

Shaykh Fadhlalla Haeri must be congratulated on making the deepest sources of Islamic thought concerning the question of decree and destiny available to the Western and also modern Muslim reader who often relies upon works in English or French even concerning Islamic subjects. May this work help dispel that cloud of ignorance which surrounds this central issue of human existence. May those destined to profit from the sources of Islamic thought presented in this work, be decreed to benefit fully from it through the freedom of the use of their intelligence which God has bestowed upon all human beings as His supreme gift.

Seyyed Hossein Nasr; Washington, D.C.; Shawwal 1407 (A.H.); June 1987 (A.D.)

Preface

The principal objective of this book is to establish a bridge between the Islamic cultures and philosophies and the West, and to encourage westerners to draw upon this most recent among all revivals of the Eternal Truth, use the knowledge they acquire from its study, and integrate it into their own system, instead of regarding it as an eastern curiosity or an object of study for the sake of scholarly achievement, as has been the case with most of the orientalists of both western and eastern origin. Prophetic knowledge is not the preserve of any nation or culture, for it is Reality's gift to all creation.

This highly condensed book will be of most use if it is taken as one building block from among several complementary units that the author hopes to bring out. This series of publications relating to broad themes such as decree and destiny, personal psychology and cosmology, all dovetail into each other.

As 'Decree and Destiny' has largely been compiled as a usable manual for the English speaking reader, the quotations from the Qur'an and *hadith* (tradition, saying, of the Blessed Prophet and the Holy Imams) are those that would be easily comprehended by the western mind. All the traditions cited are, with few exceptions, those which have been related by the Holy Imams of the *Ahl al-Bayt* (Household of the Blessed Prophet). We firmly believe that without the assistance of these traditions it would not be possible to present a full picture of the question of decree and destiny. In addition, they are those which will be most helpful in dispelling the inaccurate picture many non-Muslims have of Islam as a fatalistic religion.

As this is a multi-dimensional topic, apparent repetitions have been left in the text in order to bring about the proper merging of various interrelated facts. The recurrence of similar themes is like the emergence of a pattern in a mosaic or threads in a tapestry where the use of the same tile pattern or color of thread complements another pattern and holds the total design together. As the concepts that we have tried to cover in this book deal with varying aspects of existence and reality, identical topics will appear in different dimensions. Thus the same grain of truth will support different theories in a multi-faceted panorama.

The nature of Reality has so many dimensions, and each dimension itself integrates and interlinks with other discoveries in an ever-changing spectrum. Thus the knowledge of Reality cannot be disseminated by controlled scientific methods. The seeker has to move from one dimension to another, exploring their different facets, until the entire model begins to take shape subjectively in time. One starts from logic and reason and ends with insight and awakening, hence each voyage of discovery has its own unique flavor. At the best the reader will share some of the subjective experiences of the commentator and, guided by the beams of light he has gleaned from these insights, he will make his own ascent up the mountains of discovery.

He must cross many of these mountains if he is to get the picture of the entire ridge. On his journey he will traverse many valleys and ravines, which are cloaked in darkness. It is only when he gains the total picture of Reality experientially and feels the unifying power of the timeless Source that these gaps will begin to disappear; for it is impossible to fill them by prescriptive, scientific methods.

While the writer does not expect a single reader to emerge content and satisfied, having integrated himself with the total picture, he hopes there will be some who, having seen further and, embarking on the quest for self-knowledge, evolve according to the unchanging program of the Absolute Creator.

Introduction

The issue of the extent to which man has free will has been the frequent topic of philosophical debate from the early civilizations of Egypt and Greece right through to our own times, while western philosophers such as Spinoza, Descartes, Leibnitz and Kant, to name but a few of the most noted, have added their interpretations to the theories of the ancients. Equally it is a most subtle and important topic in the study of Islamic thought, for it cannot be understood by pure philosophical, analytical or spiritual debate. It has to be based on theory and practice for it to be fully comprehended, as it requires both subtle inner understanding as well as gross experiential realization. For this reason it has been misunderstood throughout the ages.

There are two distinguishable problems under discussion. One is the relationship between the will of God and man's will, the other is the relationship between God's power and His overall control.

A large body of verses from the Qur'an and many traditions in the Islamic heritage deal with these issues. This book contains a selection of what the writer believes to be the most significant and illuminating on the subject of decree and destiny.

All of us face situations, within our existential experience, where we have varying degrees of choice. At the same time we are often placed in a position where we appear to be helpless in influencing the outcome of that particular situation. The foundation or the basis that illustrates the reality behind these two different situations is explained in this book. The concept of decree and destiny falls in the interspace between these two possibilities of absolute decree and absolute choice, within which the opposing aspects of 'choice' and 'no-choice', 'freedom' and 'slavery', must be considered.

As we contemplate the meaning of 'freedom', the following questions arise: If there are absolute laws that govern existence, and if these laws are immutable and unchangeable, then how can there be freedom? Why do we blame ourselves if we make mistakes, instead of blaming them on the immutable laws? An apparent dichotomy, however, remains. If there is freedom, and we are

free to choose our course of action, where then is the position of the All-Powerful in relation to the laws that govern our actions in this existence?

Such questions have been examined under various headings and by many different schools of thought within Islamic philosophy. As early as the middle of the first century after Hijrah we find two opposing schools of thought emerging in Islam. One, the Jabariyyah (from *jabr*, to enforce), believe that all of us are subject to an unknown and absolute decree, which we cannot in any way overcome or interfere with; the other, the Qadariyyah, say that human beings have complete freedom of choice to decide their own destiny.

The Jabariyyah maintain that God is entirely responsible for the actions of His creatures – the implication being that He forces them to do wrong, then punishes them for it, and forces them to do good, then rewards them for it. It follows, therefore, that the actions of people are really God's actions but are metaphorically attributed to people because human beings are the locus of God's activity. The reason for this hypothesis arises from the Jabariyyah's denial of the existence of natural causes between things, saying that God is the cause; there being no other cause besides Him. The Jabariyyah base their argument for this assumption on the belief that God is the Creator without any partner. However, it should be noted that such a claim on the part of this school's adherents is the equivalent of attributing injustice to God. This point will be examined later in the book.

The Qadariyyah hold the opposite view; namely, that all actions on the part of humans are free and are not predetermined by the will of God. Adherents of this school maintain that God has given full power to His creatures for their actions; as the power is fore-ordained, the decree of God has no part to play in it. The reason they hold this view is that they consider the attribution of man's actions to God necessitates the attributing of imperfection to Him. Their view is that all existing things have specific causes, and that the chain of causes and effects can be traced back to the Cause of causes, the First Cause, which is God. It must be noted, however, that those who adhere to this school of thought have separated God from His power, and have thus given Him partners in His creation. This presents an equally problematic view with regard to the concept of decree and destiny.

Our beliefs, delineated in this book, concerning the position of man in relation both to Divine Decree and to his destiny, follow the teachings of our Blessed Prophet, Muhammad, and his heirs, the Imams. Our central position is one which maintains that the reality of the question raised lies between the two extremes that are depicted by the opposing schools of the Jabariyyah and the Qadariyyah. This view presents a middle way between the two extreme beliefs mentioned in the preceding paragraphs.

Imam Ja`far al-Sadiq points out that, from one point of view, our actions are truly our own actions. According to this reasoning, we are the cause of our own actions, which are under our control and are subject to our free choice. However, from another point of view, our actions are decreed by God and are subject to His power. This is because it is God Who bestows existence. God does not compel us in our actions; hence He does not wrong us by punishing us for our errors; for we have the power of choice in what we do. Yet, God has not delegated to us the power to 'create' our actions, for the overall control remains with Him. Creation, Judgment and Command all belong to God. He has power over all things, and He has complete authority over all people.

Our belief is that determinism and Divine Decree are among the secrets of God. We maintain that those who have understood Divine Decree and Destiny, in the way that they should be understood without resorting to either of the two extremes we have mentioned, will have attained true knowledge. We hope to explicate this belief for our readers, God willing.

As we examine the philosophical history of Islam, we find that no century has passed without the question of decree and destiny having been raised. Philosophers and gnostics alike have all examined this question deeply. Our belief is that the key to a true understanding of the issue lies in the Sayings of the Imams. It is by examining their Sayings that we plan to unfold the full meaning of what decree is, and how man must realize his own destiny in the world in which he lives.

The traditions related from our first Imam, `Ali ibn Abi Talib, are the most helpful we have seen in human communication regarding the topic of decree and destiny. We consider that other sources we have examined do not yield the full fruit of the knowledge we seek. The utterances of

the Sufis are generally of little assistance for they do not provide us with the key to unlock the complete meaning of decree and destiny. Although we have gleaned from some of these utterances that there have been Sufis who have known the truth, we have equally recognized the existence of a barrier which Sufi literature has not penetrated.

In our present book we shall first examine the Holy Qur'an, so as to enable the reader to become familiar with the philosophical foundations of what has been said regarding this issue; second, we shall turn to the Sayings of the Blessed Prophet and the Holy Imams for further clarification.

This important subject of decree and destiny is the least understood of similar fundamental issues that pertain to the position of man in relation to Reality. The source of the knowledge of this subject is beyond language, beyond mere words and forms, and if one really wants to tap the source, one must die to oneself. One's being must be annihilated in the True Being, the Transcendent, the One God.

Historical Background

During the early days of Islam, the light of the presence of the Blessed Prophet was such that an understanding of the laws of existence and man's freedom within these bounds was transmitted to the people. However, with the confusions and difficulties that followed his death there was, in a sense, a break in that light, and the question of free will and predestination became a much debated issue.

The Umayyad dynasty used theological arguments to justify their rule, declaring that God predetermines all happenings and acts. Their possession of the Caliphate was therefore by God's will, and the people were consequently obliged to submit to their rule. Their political opponents took the opposing stance that while good actions are from God, base actions are from man, so no blame can be attributed to God as He has delegated freedom of action to man.

The name 'Qadarite' was commonly used to describe those who denied the *qadar* or predetermination of God, and were thus believers in human free will. At a later date, it was also used in a negative way to describe those of a fatalistic persuasion. The founder of this school of thought is generally considered to be Ma'bad al-Juhani. He denied that the wrong acts of the Umayyads were determined by God. He joined the rising of Ibn al-Ash'ath in 701 AD, for which he was subsequently executed. Another noted exponent of the Qadarite school was Ghaylan ad-Dimashqi, a Copt, who also rebelled against the Umayyads and was executed. It is claimed that the Caliph Yazid III al-Naqis, who reigned for some months in 774 AD, was a follower of Ghaylan. The Caliph certainly stated that the Umayyads had committed wrong actions and pledged himself to correct them, and to rule according to the Qur'an and the *Sunnah* (way, habitual custom, line of conduct; used in preference to God or the Blessed Prophet).

The Jabariyyah concept of predestination was indigenous to the areas where Islam first arose, where people tended to hold fatalistic beliefs. The pre-Islamic poetry of Arabia is full of references to the control of human life by 'time', which was seen as an abstract, impersonal force. This concept acted as a psychological necessity for the nomad, releasing him from undue anxiety about events he was unable to control, and adapting him to acceptance of extreme irregularities

of even natural phenomena, such as rain. The Arabian nomad believed that it was the outcome of man's acts that were fixed, not the particular acts themselves. They believed that the day of his death was fixed, as was his *rizq* (provision), which was a comforting thought in a land where hunger was prevalent.

The Qur'an revealed man's life to be controlled by a merciful God, rather than the impersonal and unfeeling Time. The doctrine of a final Day of Judgment confirmed the eternal destiny of man, which was to be determined by the quality of his actions.

The people's acquiescence in the abuses of the Umayyad rule can thus be understood as the natural continuation of the pre-Islamic Arab outlook. The Umayyad argument, that as they were the Caliphs or Deputies of God everything they did was decreed by God, including their evil actions, was in harmony with the fatalistic heritage of many of the people they ruled. Nonetheless, it would be over-simplistic to conclude that theological argument was the prime contributor to the survival of the dynasty, power and coercion being equally significant factors.

The Qadariyyah stance that good acts emanate from God, the bad from man, was similar to the principles of Christianity and like Christianity showed clear traces of Hellenistic rationalism. Many proponents of this belief may have been recent converts from Christianity, and may also have come from urban rather than from nomadic backgrounds.

It is clear that a diverse range of views were held by people under the umbrella of Qadariyyah. The more extreme held that total power had been delegated to man, hence he was able to act without God's help and guidance, but others will have had more moderate beliefs. The great Sufi Master, Hasan al-Basri, who was considered to have Qadarite sympathies, for example, rejected a fully deterministic outlook, and preached that a belief in predestination should not be used for inactivity. He emphasized individual responsibility in the moral sphere, but balanced this by insistence on God's mercy, and His ultimate control of man's destiny.

These varying interpretations of the extent of man's free will were later refined by the philosophers of the Mu'tazilite school, who were to develop the doctrines of the Qadariyyah. Their founder, Wasil ibn 'Ata' (80-131 AH/699-749 AD), was originally a member of the circle

of Hasan al-Basri. By the ninth century AD the Qadariyyah school had been largely replaced by the Mu'tazilite. The latter were engaged in endless debate with the Ash'arites, so named after their founder Abu al-Hasan al-Ash'ari (d 330 AH/942 AD), in an attempt to find a balance between the omnipotence of God and the need for personal moral effort.

The Ash'arites, could be regarded to some extent as being the successors of the Jabariyyah; Abu al-Hasan al-Ash'ari himself was originally a pupil of the Mu'tazilite Master, al-Jubba'i, He broke from his teacher in maintaining that Divine Justice could not be defined in human terms, and was in agreement with the orthodox stance as expounded by Ahmad ibn Hanbal (d 241 AH/855 AD) by which all acts, be they good or evil, take place by the will of God; as compared to the Mu'tazilite theories, which appear to restrict the power of God.

One of al-Ash'ari's contemporaries was Abu Mansur al-Maturidi (d 333 AH/945 AD) of Samarqand. Maturidism, which is similar to Ash'arism in basic outlook, differs in saying that although all acts are willed by God, evil acts do not occur with 'the good pleasure of God'. This theory emphasizes the omnipotence of God but allows for some human participation in the process.

The more extreme among the Jabariyyah were sometimes referred to as Jahmiyyah, from the name of Jahm ibn Safwan, who was purported to have upheld the theory of pure determinism. In actuality this was more a term of abuse used by members of the opposing schools to link the Jabariyyah with a known historical character of the period, who was regarded as a renegade. He had fought with a non-Muslim Turkish Sultan against his fellow Muslims. There was never any serious group who was followers of this man or preached his teachings.

As many of the Qadariyyah were motivated by their political opposition to the Umayyads, the rise to power of the Abbasids altered the relationship of this doctrine to the political situation of the day. It was no longer seen as a sign of opposition to the government. Indeed, the Caliph al-Ma'mun and his successors gave official backing to certain Mu'tazilite doctrines. However, after the Caliph Mutawakkil the question of *jabr* once more rose to prominence. This was partly caused by a reaction against the excesses of the extreme Mu'tazilites, who were branded as heretics by the orthodox Muslims, but it was also brought about by the appeal this belief has for

man, when his state seems helpless. Indeed as a philosophy it possessed a great deal of political advantage, because it persuaded people to submit even to despotic rulership. Thus a belief in decree and destiny in its goodness and its badness was frequently twisted to cow people into an acceptance of unjust government.

The advocates of determinism often used the example that man is like a leaf in the wind of destiny, and that God creates in man his actions and all his doings in the same way that He does in stones and other forms of His creation. So man does not have the power to change or do anything. They used selected *ayat* (verses) of the Qur'an and traditions to justify this hypothesis; indeed if one looks at many of these in a simplistic fashion, the theory holds.

Generally speaking the majority of the Sunni oriented Muslim population veered towards the Ash`ariyyah school of thought; while the Shi`as and some Sunnis argued for a more intermediate position, which allowed for the existence of a certain measure of freedom in specific areas, while in other aspects man has no choice. So these divisions are in a sense simplistic, and historians, who like to compartmentalize, have often tended to show the extremes of the argument, while the majority of the believing Muslim population will have fallen between the two positions, without necessarily having total clarity of understanding of the extent of man's freedom of action or the bounds to which he is subjected.

The widespread influence of the Ash`ariyyah can be seen in all Arabic, Persian and Far Eastern literature and poetry. Their influence is even reflected in the culture of the Ja`fari Shi`as. It is largely due to this that many European philosophers and men of literature, casting a cursory glance at the broad spectrum of Muslim attitudes on predestination, have labeled them as fatalistic. Indeed one of the major criticisms and miscomprehensions of Islam by non-Muslims and also by some so-called Muslims is focused on the question of decree and destiny. The accusation is that one of the main causes for the backwardness of some Muslim communities is their belief in predestination. If belief in the knowledge of decree and destiny is a cause of lethargy and inactivity, with the subsequent decadence and collapse of the culture, how then can we explain the many great Islamic effulgences of the past fourteen hundred years?

CHAPTER 1: DECREE AND DESTINY IN THE QUR'AN

Qadr (decree) and *Qada'* (destiny) in Language

In language *qadar* (measure, decree) represents both the delineation and execution of the process by which a final end, signified by *qada'* (destiny) is arrived at. The connotation of processing attached to *qadar* contains within it the possibility of change; whereas, when a destiny (*qada'*) has come about a point of irreversibility has been reached.

The divine meaning of *qadar* signifies 'creational decree', while its human meaning implies 'judgment by word or action'. There is a clear differentiation between Divine *Qudrah* (ability, power) and human *qudrah*, for human ability differs according to the magnitude of the task, the effort and power it needs to be executed, and is subject to time, whereas for the absolute Creator all actions are possible and effortless at all times.

The following are some of the dictionary definitions of *qadar* and *qada'*:

Qadar. 'extent, scope, quantity, scale, rate, measure, number, sum, amount, degree, grade, worth, value, standing, rank, Divine Decree'. *Qadar* can also imply 'clarifying, distinguishing, ordering, ordaining'.

Qada': 'severing, ending, closing; determination, conclusion, winding up, completion, accomplishment, carrying out, execution, performance, fulfillment, satisfaction, payment, passing, Divine Decree, destiny, fate, judgment'.

A Definition of Decree and Destiny

Decrees are the rules of this game of life. Most of these rules are describable or measurable, especially those dealing with the visible realities. The rules that govern all aspects of physical (visible and experiential) existence combine with those that control the unseen forces to form a

network that will result in, for example, the laws of physics. We can describe the phenomenon of light, for instance, as both a waveband and a physical entity called a photon. The rules somehow emerge from an unknown ocean into describable, measurable, physical laws. So the decrees can be seen as a series of multitudinal models by means of which the creation, seen and unseen, is held together. They are abstract and absolute – pure electric power to which man adds his actions.

Destiny is the final judgment (occurrence) that is experienced by the individual through the passage of time, when these laws are enacted. It is when a describable, measurable event has already passed through time.

The concept of destiny is also parallel in Arabic to another term *ajal*, which signifies ‘appointed time, date, deadline, instant of death, respite, delay’. If we say a business partnership has an ‘*ajal*’ of five years, it means that at the end of this period it will have reached its full destiny, which is dissolution.

The final destiny of every man is his awakening to his permanent non-time reality, from which he has emerged. We are given the experience of this life, with all its decrees, for us to know them, accept them and become one with them so that we can see our destiny within them, and our destiny beyond them, when time stops at the point of death.

We have been given the ability, if we use meditative practices, to stop time inwardly, and experience a form of mini-death while we are still alive. This enables us to experience aspects of full death, which is our final destiny, as free will. We are programmed to fear the unknown so we are afraid of death. However, on the other hand, we love and are dependent on deep sleep, which is the nearest experience to death. If we are able to experience the mini-death of inner contemplation, we stand a good chance of realizing that our true reality, the Source of the cause behind existence, is eternal. It is only the body that dies, while the self continues into perpetuity.

As we are all programmed to dislike fear, the universal fear of death betrays the true meaning of death. It is only an experiential barrier that demarcates a natural discrimination by returning the body to where it belongs, and by returning the soul or real self to whence it originally emanated

in the zone of eternal consciousness. So the fact that we do not like death reveals a certain measure of its falsehood, Death does have its reality but this reality has its segregations. Thus the real problem is that of confusion; we have identified our *nafs* (self, soul, mind) with the body. Our reasoning ensures that we will die, yet it is only the body that dies; for it has been the vehicle for the development of the self, and its proper schooling lies in the melting pot of the world of duality, whilst yearning for the knowledge of the One from Whom it emanated in the first place.

It will be unveiled to us that our ultimate destiny is the highest of destinies, as our beginning was the highest of beginnings. We were brought into the lowest level of existence with its laws so we might be prepared for access to the highest. So destiny is at all levels and at all times. Our physical destiny is death, yet we can experience a spiritual death (disconnection) while still alive.

Our destiny is also to know the perfection and reliability of God's creational will; a greater recognition of the flimsiness of man's free will helps us to achieve this objective. Once this recognition of no choice is reached, a point of complete abandonment will come, until we see nothing other than the abundance that is available at all times to everyone. This is the final awakening to the state of oneness. We are brought into time in order that we may face the incredible, unfathomable, foreverness of non-time. So we are already predestined to face endless time. If we veer against this destiny, we have cut across the decree and the decree will cut us.

An examination of the following collection of Qur'anic *ayat* (plural of *ayah*: Qur'anic verse; sign or mark) concerning decree and destiny will bring out the various senses and concomitant modes of the concepts we are studying.

We will begin with some key *ayat* on this topic, then move to other *ayat*, which further clarify the purpose of the Creator and the role of His creation.

God, the Originator of All

They entertained about Allah thoughts of ignorance quite unjustly, saying: We have no hand in the affair. Say:

Surely the affair is wholly (in the hands) of Allah.
(3:154)

The Qur'an confirms that all creational possibilities, and therefore all experiences, emanate originally from God. However, we are only acting out of ignorance and attempting to avoid personal responsibility when we attribute blame to God in situations where we have not exposed and exerted ourselves sincerely. God's will is that good prevails, and that man gears himself towards the positive in order to increase his knowledge of discrimination and awareness. Only the hypocrite sits idly by, and says: "God wills". This will happen automatically, even though his negative stance challenges, in one sense, God's will, and the thought itself indicates separateness and loss.

Whenever beings or nations have cut across natural laws, they have eventually been destroyed. The story of the people of the Prophet Lut (Lot) – the Biblical Sodom and Gomorrah – with their homosexuality is an example of this. These events stand as a lesson to those who are alive, in order that they may reflect and discover the right path of action for every occurrence. Whatever is in this cosmos, be it energy or matter, small or large, is subject to the laws that govern the entirety. We must be prepared to recognize the bounds of these laws and their interactions, which are operative at all times, and know the outcome.

Man's True Impotence

And certainly we have already destroyed the likes of you,
but is there anyone who will mind? And everything they have
done is in the writings. And everything small and great is
written down. (54:51-3)

The implication here is of the impotence of man. He has no power over that which matters most – destiny. All his actions and their outcomes are recorded in the heavenly books, and every cell of his body is a microcosm of the entire heavens. Everything, be it small or large, is accounted for. Nothing escapes the laws, and a small thing out of balance in these multitudinal laws can disturb the entire ecology.

Although we may have a measure of interaction and influence on the worlds within and without us, we are truly impotent as far as the purpose of our creation is concerned. We were created to know the original love of the Creator, with Whom we were before creation, with Whom we are during the experience of existence, and with Whom we will be forever. So our impotence is total where it matters. Once that total impotence is recognized, the freedom of surrender will be chosen. That surrender is Islam.

The Inevitability of Death

And a soul will not die but with the permission of Allah; the term is fixed; and whoever desires the reward of this world, I shall give him of it, and whoever desires the reward of the hereafter I shall give him of it; and I will reward the grateful. (3:145)

Death is an experience that every self will go through according to the unfolding of time and its destiny. No one can escape death, though its specific occurrence in time is usually unknown to man. The freedom man has lies in relation to his achieving desired objectives. If they are worldly and material, he is likely to get them. The person who is in a state of gratitude, and thereby less agitated and concerned, is more likely to succeed whether the objective is material or spiritual.

The Knowledge of the Outcome of Destiny

He it is Who created you from clay, then He decreed a term. And there is a term named after Him; still you doubt. (6:2)

Every destiny is known in the non-time dimension but, for us who are in time, the particular and circumstantial outcome is not known. Man's destiny is known to God, for God is beyond time and space. Man, however, can play a crucial role in that destiny and make changes within the prescribed limitations that have been ordained for Him.

The same issue is referred to, in the communal sense, in:

And for every nation there is a term, so when their term is come they shall not remain behind the least while, nor shall they go before. (7:34)

Every creational phenomenon has a beginning and an end. In the same way that man eventually dies, his community or nation will also reach its end. Sometimes the end of a phenomenon may be postponed, while at other times the course is so firmly set that there is no way of avoiding the final doom. However, all of these destinies are existential and within time frames. What really matters is the destiny and the course, which is timeless, and which occurs after departing from this world. Compared with this fixed destiny, other destinies become so insignificant. It is in this respect that the believer is exhorted to prepare himself and be ready for the next life.

The Ultimate Dependence

Say: I do not control for myself any harm, nor any benefit except what Allah pleases. Every nation has a term. When their term comes, they shall not then remain for an hour, nor can they go before. (10:49)

This *ayah* indicates that man cannot interfere with destiny or the decree. We do not possess for ourselves either harm or goodness unless God has willed it. We can see potentially what is harmful to us, and what is beneficial, if we abandon our will into God's will, Who is the All-Merciful, the All-Beneficent. Everything that is harmful comes from associating other than God with God and denying His reality.

If we see the one and only Reality, we do not see two. We will not see the outer event happening, and worry whether that which we desire or expect will clash with it. If we have no wishes, how can we be harmed? We cannot change events. Even the Blessed Prophet did not have that power. Arrows hit him in the mouth and made him bleed. The natural laws that propelled those arrows are irrevocable. All that can change is in accordance with God's will, and what God wills is the best for His true slaves. The best they can do is to abandon their will into His. This is what happens when the Blessed Prophet and any of those who follow in his footsteps

abandon their will to the will of Reality, accepting that the laws that govern the physical reality are immutable. Once we do this, we see the beauty of the Divine laws and accept them contentedly.

There is no doubt, however, that in our relative worldly existence we continuously call upon and depend on ways and means. The body is made dependent on physical matter – i.e., food – but this is only a means for us to recognize the knowledge that came about because of these limitations and dependences. Dependence on food and our innate love of freedom propels us to discover the optimum way of growing food and these processes increase our network of knowledge of cause and effect.

So on the physical level it is the physical realities that take us to higher realities for, once the body and its needs are satisfied, the mind and the intellect seek their satisfaction. We seek independence at the physical level and move onward.

The final part is the realization of our dependence on One Reality, which guides us from the beginning to the end, for that Reality encompasses both beginning and end and in Itself is devoid of both.

All Creation's Dependence upon the Creator

And there is no animal in the earth but on Allah is the sustenance of it, and He knows its resting place and its depository. All (things) are in a manifest book. (11:6)

There is nothing that moves on the earth except that its provision rests upon reality.

The Ultimate Record

And those who disbelieve say: The hour shall not come upon us. Say: Yea! By my Lord, the Knower of the unseen, it shall certainly come upon you. Not the weight of an atom

becomes absent from Him, in the heavens or in the earth, and neither less than that nor greater, but (all) is in a clear book. (34:3)

This *ayah* is emphatic that no matter how insignificant something may appear to you, it has its place in the book, and it cannot be escaped – i.e., it relates to a clearly defined pattern and presentation.

The following *ayah* is along the same lines.

And Allah created you from dust, then from the life-germ, then He made you pairs. And no female bears, nor does she bring forth, except with His knowledge. And no one whose life is lengthened has his life lengthened, nor is aught diminished of one's life, but it is all in a book. Surely this is easy for Allah. (35:11)

Nothing comes to earth nor within ourselves unless it is according to Divine laws. We understand that whatever comes to us outwardly is according to the laws of physiology, biology and anatomy. Equally, we are affected by what we call 'psychological' laws, which interact with the physical ones, although they are more subtle. They exist more at the energy levels and are less easily measurable, because they are not scientifically defined (or reproducible in controlled conditions).

We cannot easily understand the self (*nafs*), and cure its sicknesses, so we tend to dwell too much on the bodily side of our existence. The Science of the Self (Science of the *Nafs*), as practiced by the spiritual masters, is ignored and dismissed as unscientific. Yet it follows precise laws, which are clearly set out in the Qur'an.

When the Qur'an says that all of this is written in a book, it means everything is according to the laws that govern existence.

Man's Freedom within God's Order

And give him sustenance from whence he thinks not. And whoever trusts in Allah, He is sufficient for him. Surely Allah attains His purpose. Allah indeed has appointed a measure for everything. (65:3)

God's order will prevail; He will attain His decree. There is a measure (decree) for everything, so man's transgressions are according to a measure, and are thus containable.

This aspect is also emphasized in:

He will forgive you some of your faults and grant you a delay to an appointed term. Surely the term of Allah when it comes is not postponed, did you but know. (71:4)

When the appointed time of Reality comes, it will never be delayed.

Measure and Bounds

Imam `Ali al-Rida defined *qadar* as:

The arrangements (*structuring*) as far as its length and its height and its duration are concerned.

The following collection of *ayat* reflects the Imam's definition:

And there is not a thing but with Us are the treasures of it, and We do not send it down but in a known measure. (15:21)

The effect of what manifests into the creational reality can be markedly different from its origin – i.e., something subtle can become gross; also what happens to be good under most

circumstances can also be bad at other times while its origin of pure consciousness is always neutral.

He...Who created everything, then ordained for it a measure. (25:2)

...And there is a measure with Him of everything. (13:8)

He said: Our Lord is He Who gave to everything its creation, then guided it (to its goal). (20:50)

The last *ayah* describes how once creation is manifested it is bound by Reality's laws. The resultant physical manifestations are fully discernible, describable, weighable.

And Who makes (things) according to a measure, then guides (them to their goal). (87:3)

One of the meanings of the above *ayah* is that God has guided what He has created to what He had intended it or measured it for.

Of a small seed He created him, then He made him according to a measure. Then (as for) the way - He has made it easy (for him). (80:19-20)

These *ayat* show that God makes it easy for man to reach the awakening for which he has been created, but it does not contradict the existence of man's relative freedom within his bounds. In fact, the freedom man is given is for the purpose of discovering the bounds, recognizing their perfection, and choosing to remain within those bounds; for he is programmed to undergo afflictions and punishment whenever he transgresses those bounds and, as he dislikes afflictions, he will naturally choose the path of seeking the knowledge of those bounds and keeping within them.

Fixed and Changeable Decrees

We are shown decree and destiny from the standpoint both of God and man in:

Say: I do not know whether that with which you are threatened be nigh or whether Allah will appoint it for a term.

The Knower of the unseen! So He makes His secrets known to none.

Except to him whom He chooses as an apostle; for surely He makes a guard to march before him and after him,

So that He may know that they have truly delivered the messages of their Lord, and He encompasses what is with them, and He records the number of all things.

(72:25-8)

There are two types of decree; those which are changeable and those which are set. As we can never be sure when it is the final decree, it is essential that we constantly make supplication, by expressing permitted and meritorious desires, and maintaining an attitude of optimism for change. We are calling upon that Mercy to manifest that the final decree has been set; again at its point of finality we expect to experience and witness the Mercy. So the Mercy encompasses all states whether we are desirous of a change, or an event has occurred in spite of our being unable to change it.

The first *ayah* implies that man is an integral element in the process of himself experiencing his destiny. Nobody knows for certain the extent of the individual's interference with his own destiny. The outcome or destiny of every situation is a mixture of the environment, which includes society and all other ecologies, as well as the personal individual action. The total outcome is dependent on all of these forces interacting with each other. As far as matters of

personal implication are concerned – e.g., closing one's eyes – the individual can exert maximum influence. The more people a situation involves, the less the certainty of the outcome, such as in politics, which involves the opinions and desires of many.

This *ayah*, therefore, can be seen as a dynamic model involving unseen destiny and that destiny which is directly acted upon by the subject himself.

The Prophets, or those highly evolved souls to whom certain revelations occur, are beings of the highest level of submission. Their state is such that on occasions they experience the bridge between the physical 'in time' and the unseen 'non-time', which gives birth to all realities and their destinies. These Messengers of Truth are the interface between the permanent everlasting, all-encompassing Reality, and the changing realities. They are the interlinks between the All-Knower and the relative knower, man. They see the fixed screen upon which the movie of life is projected, and thereby sometimes see the next act before its actual projection.

Man's Unification with the Decree

So you did not slay them, but it was Allah Who slew them,
and you did not smite when you smote (the enemy), but it
was Allah Who smote, and that He might confer upon the
believers a good gift from himself. Surely Allah is
Hearing, Knowing. (8:17)

When man abandons himself totally to the will of God, he becomes the decree itself by giving in totally to the decree and flowing along with events as they manifest themselves. This is the ultimate prayer, when the actor completely takes on the script. Even when the role is difficult he completely identifies with it.

The above *ayah* referring to the Prophet Musa (Moses) is an example of this. The Prophet Moses acted in accordance with the Divine inspiration he received. He himself was astounded by what transpired. His destiny was to be the decree. In his confrontation with the Pharaoh, the decree and he were one. It had been decreed that certain events would take place, and he was a part of

these happenings. His action was no longer his action. He abandoned himself entirely into God's will. This is the ultimate celebration of slavehood. When the part connects totally with the whole it manifests the characteristics of the whole. When the bondsman recognizes his real slavehood and fully submits to the Master, he acts in such unity with his Creator that the separation of the two almost disappears.

The Qur'an, the Overall Knowledge

And even if there were a Qur'an with which the mountains were made to pass away, or the earth were travelled over with it, or the dead were made to speak thereby. Nay! The commandment is wholly Allah's. Have not yet those who believe known that if Allah pleases He would certainly guide all the people? And (as for) those who disbelieve, there will not cease to afflict them because of what they do a repelling calamity, or it will alight close by their abodes, until the promise of Allah comes about. Surely Allah will not fail in (His) promise. (13:31)

The Holy Qur'an is the word of God. It is the source of all knowledge. The Qur'an, or the Book of Decree and Destiny as it could aptly be described, contains everything gross and subtle, the visible and the invisible laws, all of which interact.

The believers may be despondent about the fate of those who are not in Islam. Yet God says that this is the law, there is going to be *iman* (faith, trust, belief), and there is going to be *kufr* (denial, ingratitude). As we are created beings, it is useless and indeed impertinent to question the Creator. All that we can do is recognize the laws and submit to them, for we too are created according to these laws.

It is natural that those who have faith will wish the others to know the Qur'an and follow it. Yet some of creation is so gross that God says in a *hadith qudsi* (Divinely revealed tradition):

I have created them for the Fire and it does not matter (or affect me).

The foundation of the experiences in this world is based on duality, and this duality is Reality's method of teaching by discrimination and choice. In this world there is health and illness; man is programmed to desire health, so he will discover the laws that bring about health and those that cause illness. He will, therefore, choose to follow the first set and avoid the second. The Garden, which is the original abode, and the desired and sought after abode in this life, could only be experienced fully by the existence of its opposite – the affliction and turmoil of the fire.

God has created this world as a training ground and equipped us with the necessary means of interacting with and analyzing situations in order to understand their full meaning, see the unifying factor underlying them and thereby discover the structure behind all creation. The more we question the perfection of creation, the more we display our ignorance and isolation from Totality.

One of the key words in this *ayah* is *amr* which means command. The ultimate command belongs to God. Yet, we are part of that affair – a part that can reflect the meaning of the whole, and contains within it an understanding of the whole, and of the necessity of harmony with the whole.

Reality Guides to Itself, by Itself

Whomsoever Allah guides, he is the one who follows the right way. And whomsoever He causes to err will be the losers. (7:178)

The above *ayah* shows the direct application to us of decree and destiny. Those people, who begin to really comprehend the meaning of the laws or the decrees that govern existence, and accept the bounds voluntarily, will know how to behave. They will not, for example, walk across the road just as a fast car is passing.

As for those who have learned the laws, yet abuse that knowledge and cross the road at the wrong time, they will be subjected to the 'hell' of the crash that will follow. Those who know and do not act are transgressing because consciously they are disconnecting their inner from the outer.

We have seen that, for those of us who are unaware of the laws, affliction is part of the education process through which we learn to avoid that which is not conducive to our state of well-being and eventually come to know those laws. Hence there is a positive element to it.

If, however, we have knowledge of these laws, yet still go against them, sheer hell (perfect justice) is let loose upon us, and we deserve the consequences. We cannot blame God or Nature for our sufferings. We are simply observing the outcome of cause and effect of the laws that govern our existence.

Heedlessness

And certainly we have created for hell many of the jinn and the men. And they have hearts with which they do not understand, and they have eyes with which they do not see, and they have ears with which they do not hear; they are as cattle, nay, they are in worse errors; these are the heedless ones. (7:179)

The Qur'an says they have hearts but they do not have understanding, they have eyes but they do not see with them, and ears that they do not hear with; for the filter mechanism created by their desires and expectations ensures that they only see and hear what they want to see and hear.

The Excuses of the Prevaricators and the Role of the Prophets

And they who claim association (with Allah) say: If Allah had pleased, we would not have served anything beside Allah, (neither) we nor our fathers, nor would we have

prohibited anything without (an order from) Him. Thus did those before them; is then aught incumbent upon the apostles except a plain delivery (of the message).

And certainly We raised in every nation an apostle saying: Serve Allah and shun the Shaytan. So there were some of them whom God guided and there were others upon whom error (loss) was due; therefore travel in the land, then see what was the end of the rejecters (deniers of truth).

If you desire for their guidance, yet surely Allah does not guide him who leads astray, nor shall they have any helpers.

(16:35-7)

When the Unity of the all-encompassing Reality is explained to the spiritually unevolved being, his reaction is that if God wanted us to see everything as part of this Unity, He would have made us see that.

When the Adamic consciousness was first created (made to rise) in the state of the heavenly garden, it was a consciousness of total harmony and equilibrium. The Adamic nature is trusting and always desires the truth, for it was created to be in submission and obedience to truth. Adam had not heard falsehood until he listened to the voice of Shaytan. Man's inherent tendency is to seek the permanent, the reliable, the tranquil and avoid the distractions of Shaytan. Adam, however, not having heard anything other than the truth, was misled by Shaytan and only remembered the warning of God afterwards.

Thus arose the experience of duality – obedience and disobedience, truth and falsehood, tranquility and agitation, gatheredness and dispersion. Adam had been created to evolve from a state of unquestioning obedience to one whereby his recognition and submission to the perfect will of his Creator would be founded on free will after duality and uncertainty had been experienced.

Man has been given the choice of recognizing the unific way, adhering to it and expanding within its bounds. Prophets are sent to confirm this state to man and to encourage him not to transgress the bounds, beyond which lies the abyss of destruction and loss, but instead to maintain himself by adoration and worship of the unific state, with full freedom of choice, in the safety of the haven (of being within the bounds).

This *ayah* is for those who are concerned that others be guided. Yet God will not guide those who are at a loss. A person is either guided or he is at a loss.

The Prophet as Transmitter of the Ways of Reality

And We did not send any apostle but with the language of his people, so that he might explain to them clearly; then Allah makes whom He pleases err and He guides whom He pleases, and He is the Mighty, the Wise. (14:4)

The *ayah* explains how a Messenger connects with or relates to the people to whom he is sent, not only through language but also through the medium of their specific culture.

The *ayah* goes on to say that those who do not heed the message of God will be misguided or lost. God has made the laws, which are communicated by His Messengers, and it is incumbent upon us to learn these laws, if we wish to progress smoothly, happily and knowingly in this life.

The Gift of Discrimination

And Allah has created you and what you make. (37:96)

God has given us the power to act, and He has given us *`aql* (faculty of reason, intelligence, and discernment) that will guide our actions. This power of reasoning, which He has bestowed upon us, has in it the ability to check and correct our actions. So we are guided rather than misguided. The problem arises when we interfere with the faculties with which we are potentially endowed.

Why Diversity and Duality

And if Allah had pleased He would surely have made them a single community, but He makes whom He pleases enter into His mercy, and the unjust it is that shall have no guardian or helper. (42:8)

God created man in diversity and a life on earth which is not in perfect harmony (outwardly) because it is the school in which mankind learns to apply his inner urge for equilibrium and contentment against an outer arena of action. The Creator could have imposed His will, as is the case with animals, had He wished to do so. The animals have no choice but to follow their physical impulses while man needs to learn and awaken to a code of conduct that will enable him to achieve his best innate tendencies. He has to learn the ways that will bring about desired states such as peace or good health.

The issue of being at a loss is parallel to doing oneself injustice. Man is programmed to dislike uncertainty and desire predictability and knowledge. No one likes unknowns. Therefore those who go against this innate tendency will cause themselves loss and the greatest injustice. God's love and mercy for His creation manifest themselves through the freedom He has given them, so when a person remains in the darkness of his limited animal self, he has only himself to blame; for these people there can be no guardian or helper, for they have overlooked the one and only all-encompassing, in-dwelling Guardian and Helper.

Why Some People Cause Themselves Injustice

What! is he whose evil deed is made fair-seeming to him so much so that he considers it good? Now surely Allah makes err whom He pleases and guides aright whom He pleases, so let not your soul waste away in grief for them; surely Allah is cognizant of what they do. (35:8)

If a person commits an evil action, he will invariably justify it and see his action as a positive one. The man is doing evil, but everyone wants to be in harmony; so perverted harmony is seeing a bad action as a good or appropriate one. His erroneous actions appear agreeable to him, because he has to live with himself. God has created us all with an awareness of *tawhid* (divine unity) within us, which enables us to personalize our situation, and make our own laws. There is only connectedness but there are degrees of it. This is why there is no possibility of a person progressing spiritually in separation. Man needs a community to interact with; otherwise he will fabricate his own laws.

The higher element in all of us makes us grieve for those who are at a loss. However, there is no point in emotionalism because we are powerless to change the laws of Reality. They must suffer from their mistakes, unless they choose the path of knowledge and action based upon the knowledge of those laws. God does not change people unless they change themselves.

The Disconnected Ones

Surely We have placed chains on their necks, and these reach up to their chins, so they have their heads raised aloft.

And We have made before them a barrier and a barrier behind them, then We have covered them over so that they do not see.

And it is alike to them whether you warn them or warn them not: they do not believe.

(36:8-10)

The people referred to in these *ayat* are disconnected. In front of them are barriers, behind them are barriers. They are not connected to the past for they do not see their present state as being the direct product of all the laws that were enacted upon them in the past – the good and the bad of

it. They do not see the connection of the future as being a result of the way in which their will is unified with the Decree.

If their will is the will of abandonment, they will see what has been decreed and there will be no barriers, for they will be unified with the Decree. However, people like those described above, whether they are warned or not, will never benefit from the light and knowledge of faith.

Ten Modes of *Qada'* as Revealed in the Holy Qur'an

The following are a collection of Qur'anic *ayat* on the different facets of *qada'* (destiny) as have been transmitted from the *Ahl al-Bayt*. All ten fundamental modes are associated as concomitants with the concept of destiny.

The first mode is that of *knowledge* as illustrated by

...And surely he was possessed of knowledge because We had given him knowledge, but most people do not know. (12:68)

This implies that the destiny of the Prophet Ya`qub (Jacob), to whom the *ayah* refers, was to come to know.

The second mode is *announcement*, that is to make something commonly known by 'announcing' it. God proclaims in:

We had declared (make known) unto the Children of Israel in the Book: (17:4)

The third mode is that of *judgment*. The Arabic word for judge is '*qadi*':

Allah judges with the truth... . (40:20)

The fourth mode is *saying*, which is shown in:

And We revealed to him this decree... . (15:66)

The fifth mode has the meaning of *being done with something finishing, terminating*:

But when We decreed death upon him. (34:14)

The idea expressed here is of something completed; for the affair is over when death is enforced.

The sixth mode is that of *order or command*:

Your Lord has commanded that you shall not serve any but
Him... . (17:23)

The seventh mode is that of *creation*:

So He ordained them seven heavens in two periods, and
revealed in every heaven its affairs; and We adorned the
lower heaven with brilliant stars and (made it) to guard;
that is the decree of the Mighty, the Knowing. (41:12)

Since God's creation takes place in biological time, there will be another sequence that will evolve in time, into which creation will move. Hence the seven heavens that lay layer upon layer, the least one of which is the physical heaven that we on earth witness and experience. This is the one referred to in the above *ayah*.

We are told that both heavens and earth were created in two periods or two modes. One possible meaning of this is that of the mode of the visible experiential state, and the mode of the inner forces and powers that are at play.

The eighth mode is that of *action*:

Decide what you are going to decide (act). (20:72)

This means *exercise your judgment, act as you will, do what you want*. The emphasis being on *action* within the limitations of what you are able to decide; for your only freedom lies within this realm of action.

The ninth mode is that of *completion*:

So when Musa had fulfilled the term, and he journeyed with
his family. (28:29)

In this context it means to bring a matter to completion, to its end.

The tenth mode is the *close of an affair*. The concomitant here is in reference to *destiny with finality*:

...the matter is decreed concerning which you enquired.
(12:41)

When it is said that affairs are all by the judgment of God, or by God's knowledge, it means that the matter is decreed concerning us who will experience it. God knows the situation according to the measure of what He is. God designates in the matter His judgment of what is right and what is not.

Summary

To summarize what we can glean from the *ayat* that have been quoted, '*qadar*' is the measure that apportions those laws of Reality, such as the laws of gravity, which are not going to change. It is absolute. The overall situation, if you take the environment, for example, may appear different – hot one day, windy the next – but the result is according to laws that are either superimposed or interactive with each other. These absolute forces or laws are understandable, discernible and sometimes measurable, but there is another projection to be considered: the interaction of the so-called 'self' with the external situation. The combination of these two factors results in you being either in harmony or disharmony.

If the extent of this tangent is a small one, one will say: 'What a tremendous day it is today.' It does not mean that there was anything more blessed in it than any other day, but the fact that one was in submission to whatever circumstances one found oneself in gave one the knowledge of how to interact with it; for without those two factors, decree (*qadar*) and the individual's action, nothing can happen.

Qada', judgment or destiny, is dependent upon the interaction between *qadar*, the decree, and the individual's state and action.

Imam `Ali ibn Abi Talib said that the decree is like soul and action is like body. Soul without body cannot be discerned and body without soul has no life. The two combine to produce what is called destiny. This combination brings about a situation which is completely under the laws that govern existence, yet gives the individual a certain measure of freedom within these constraints, from which he may learn that the ultimate freedom is total abandonment into it, intelligently and experientially. This total abandonment is based on *yaqin* (certainty). The relative lack of resistance, which is the product of certainty, brings about a state of freedom.

Freedom should not be the superstitious abandonment to which some of us are prone. One can only say, 'If God wills,' for example, when one asserts one's existence, which is secondary, first. One may want, hypothetically, to build a house to give shelter to the people around. So one says, 'I want to build a house, if God wills.' This means that one has a wish, and in one's ignorance as to what events may transpire one is hopeful that one's wish and God's laws will coincide. This is why one says, 'If God wills', after expressing a certain view.

If one simply says, 'If God wills', it is a meaningless statement as everything is according to the will of God in the long term; even one's own will has been gifted to one so one can recognize its origin and its subservience to the Creator. The Source of all wills may be the same but the use to which each person puts it differs, as does the extent of its allotment to specific people through their lives.

Imagine the world as an Amusement Park, whose government has passed legislation to enable it to test the capabilities of its citizens. To do this they have created an entertainments park full of

cars. The government has decreed the parameters of behavior that are allowed in this park. There are many video cameras hidden to monitor the behavior of the citizens. Most of them start by being very reckless in their handling of the cars. They bash up the vehicles until they learn the decree or system of the cars – i.e., how long a distance it takes for the brakes to be effective, how long it takes to accelerate, and all the idiosyncrasies of the individual models. Once a player has fully comprehended the laws of this arena, he harmonizes and follows them, and his will and the ways of the cars coincide.

The government has no emotional concern as to whether some of the contestants in the Amusement Park have injured themselves through their experiments. The political and commercial machinery grind on, and the overall decree is not affected by the behavior of any individual. They are easily replaceable; after all there are millions of them. The purpose of this experiment was to discover which of the contestants would emerge as a super unifier.

This is also the case with creation. The Creator of this world created according to the most precise laws. We are part of these overall laws but our own arena is a very limited one. If we can discern the laws that govern our inner and outer being, and unify our desires, intentions and actions with the overall decree, then we have succeeded. This state comes when we have stopped our expectations and desires. Then we have fully accepted our destiny because destiny is only our experience of the decree. Our only freedom lies in whether we choose to recognize this truth or not.

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