

Programme Eight; Belief in *Taqdīr* (Destiny).

8. 1. Introduction.

There are two very important elements that we must keep in mind before looking at our belief in destiny.

a. The flawless knowledge of Allāh.

Firstly, we must wholly believe that Allāh's knowledge is perfect. He has the knowledge of what has happened and what will occur. Nothing occurs in the skies and heavens without His knowledge. The Qur'ān states:

'And with Him are the keys of the hidden (*Ghaib*), none knows them but He. And He knows whatever there is in the earth and in the sea. Not a leaf falls but He knows it' (6:59).

b. This world is a test.

Secondly, we all accept that this world we are in is a test for humans. The Qur'ān states:

'Do you think that you will enter Paradise before Allāh tests those of you who fought in his cause?' (3:142)

'You shall certainly be tried and tested in your wealth and in your personal selves...' (3: 186).

'Verily We have made that which is on earth as an adornment for it, in order that We may test them...' (18: 7).

It can only be a worthwhile test if we have some freedom to perform actions, whether good or bad. Otherwise, there is no point in a system of reward and punishment.

Both these points are very important in understanding the concept of destiny in Islam.

8.2 What is *Taqdīr*?

Before the creation of the universe, Allāh – with his eternal knowledge – wrote every good and bad deed. Whatever was to happen and whatever an individual, by his own choice and happiness, was to do; Allāh wrote it in the Preserved Tablet (*Lawh Mahfūz*). This is referred to as destiny or fate.¹ In Arabic, it is called *Qadr* or *Taqdīr*.

However, it is not the case that whatever Allāh has written that is what we have to do and that we are helpless and compelled to do just what He has written. Rather,

¹ p. 100. *Reflections: A Quest for Answers to Today's Questions*. M.I.H. Pirzada. Al-Karam Publications, UK, 2009.

whatever we are about to do by our own intention, choice and desire, that is what Allāh has written.²

8.3 The sensitivity surrounding Taqdīr.

Taqdīr is very difficult to understand and sometimes leads to many unanswered questions. The true secrets of this issue cannot be comprehended by most people. This is why Umar (may Allāh be pleased with him) strictly forbade any arguments on the topic of Taqdīr.³

Owing to its complexities, we are not required to have a detailed and comprehensive understanding of Taqdīr. Rather, like the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allāh be upon him) said, we simply need to ‘believe in Qadr, the good and bad of it.’

8.4 The different sects on Taqdīr.

8.4.1 Al-Jabariyya.

In short, they believe that man is compelled and constrained like a mere stone and has no free will of his own. Hence, whatever good or bad Allāh has written for a person, he is forced and obliged to do just that. This belief is contrary to Islam since Allāh has granted every human free will and the choice to perform good or bad. If this freedom was not granted, there would have been no need to send prophets to show people right from wrong. Rūmī gives an example to show the shallowness of this position:

‘A person who belonged to the Jabariyya sect once passed by a garden. He felt hungry and so he entered the garden and began eating its grapes. The owner of the garden happened to arrive and caught this person eating his grapes. ‘How dare you eat from my garden without permission?’ He replied, ‘Without the permission of Allāh, no leaf can come into existence. This is God’s garden, I am God’s servant and I am eating with God’s permission and command. I have no choice. Go and ask Him as to why He is making me eat.’ Upon this response, the owner tied the person’s feet and hands up and began to beat him with a stick. ‘You are being cruel and tyrannical!’ he shouted. The owner responded, ‘Just like you, I am also compelled and constrained. The sticks of God, with God’s permission, are falling upon you!’ After this episode, the person repented from his heretical beliefs.’⁴

After citing this story, Rūmī concluded:

‘O human being! If you throw a stone at a dog, the dog will not attack the stone but will attack you. The dog is aware that the stone is constrained and has no free will whereas you possess free will and can do as you please. O

² p. 100. *Reflections: A Quest for Answers to Today’s Questions*. M.I.H. Pirzada. Al-Karam Publications, UK, 2009.

³ p.13. *Islam: The Basic Articles of Faith, according to the Beliefs of the Ahl Sunna wa al-Jama’ah: A Modern English Translation of Bahar-e-Shariat*. Part One. Crescent Publishing, Rochdale, 1998.

⁴ p. 104. *Reflections: A Quest for Answers to Today’s Questions*. M.I.H. Pirzada. Al-Karam Publications, UK, 2009.

naïve human being! A dog can differentiate between you and a stone. If you cannot see the difference, then you are no better than a foolish dog!’⁵

One can see how this viewpoint leads to apathy in religion. Why should Zaid perform Salāh when Allāh has already written that He will not read Salah? Why strive for a bright hereafter when Allāh has already written where we are destined for and when we cannot reverse that?

8.4.2 Al-Qadariyya.

This refers to an early group of Muslims who showed extremist tendencies in their belief that humans have independent power and autonomy, and that humans are not dependent on divine help in their actions. This belief is contrary to Islam since only Allāh Almighty possesses complete authority and autonomy. The first person to conceptualise Taqdīr in such a way was Ma’bad al-Juhānī. He used to sit in the gatherings of Hasan al-Basrī. Under the orders of Abd al-Malik Marwān, he was punished for his extremist views and was crucified in 80 A.H.⁶

In order to refute this position, there is a famous story with Ali (may Allāh be pleased with him) and a man who had Qadariyya beliefs:

‘One day a person came to him and stated that a human is all-powerful and can do as he pleases. Ali ordered: ‘Lift one of your legs up and stand on the other.’ The person did as instructed. Then Ali said: ‘Leave this leg raised and lift the second leg up.’ The person replied: ‘If I try that I will fall to the ground.’ In response, Ali said: ‘It is just this much free-will which humans possess. If man was all-powerful, he would be able to raise both feet in the standing position.’⁷

8.4.3 The Ahl Sunna.

The Ahl Sunna rejects the extreme views held by the Jabariyyas and Qadariyyas and occupies the middle ground. Allāh Almighty has predestined every good thing and every bad thing in accordance with His eternal and perfect knowledge. He has ordained everything. This, however, does not imply that what we do is predestined to be done by us. On the contrary, it implies that Allāh predestines what we are to do.⁸

Concerning the future, Allāh has written the fate of every individual with His perfect knowledge, that x will perform such and such action at this time. Taqdīr has no compelling power in this. The decision belongs to the individual person and he himself is responsible for the resulting reward or punishment for his action. Allāh, through his perfect knowledge, has simply recorded it in advance.⁹

⁵ p. 104. *Reflections: A Quest for Answers to Today’s Questions*. M.I.H. Pirzada. Al-Karam Publications, UK, 2009.

⁶ pp. 17-18. *Sharh al-Risala al-Nafi’a wa al-Hujaj al-Qaat’ia*. Sheikh Muhammad Abd al-Latif Salih al-Farfur (d. 1407 A.H.). Dar al-Nu’man li al-Ulum Publications, Damascus.

⁷ p. 105. *Reflections: A Quest for Answers to Today’s Questions*. M.I.H. Pirzada. Al-Karam Publications, UK, 2009.

⁸ p.10. *Islam: The Basic Articles of Faith, according to the Beliefs of the Ahl Sunna wa al-Jama’a; A Modern English Translation of Bahar-e-Shariat*. Part One. Crescent Publishing, Rochdale, 1998.

⁹ p. 101. *Reflections: A Quest for Answers to Today’s Questions*. M.I.H. Pirzada. Al-Karam Publications, UK, 2009.

It is up to every individual whether he chooses to do good, for which he will be rewarded, or do bad, for which he will be punished. There are certain things in which we are helpless and simply cannot change, like life and death, where a person is born, where he dies and physical appearance. But no individual will be questioned or held responsible for such things.¹⁰

8.5 Possible Objections.

1. In Sūrah Baqara, Allāh states:

‘Indeed, the ones who have chosen disbelief in Islam will not believe (in Allāh), whether you warn them or not. Allāh has sealed their hearts and ears. And there is a veil on their hearts. And they shall be subject to a great torment’ (2: 6-7).

From this verse it seems unfair that since Allāh has already sealed their hearts and proclaimed them as disbelievers, it will not be possible for them to accept Islam.

Answer

In answer to this, we can compare their situation to a patient whose doctor proclaims that the patient’s illness is incurable. Has the patient become incurable due to the doctor’s declaration, or due to the illness now reaching its terminal stage? Clearly, the patient has already become incurable due to the extent of the illness and the doctor merely informed the patient of his critical state. In the same manner, these people had already decided that they are not going to accept Islam, due to their staunch prejudice. Allāh merely informed us of their intentions and state.¹¹

2. In the Holy Qur’ān, it seems there are verses contradicting one another regarding Taqdīr.

‘And if some good reaches them, they say ‘this is from Allāh’, but if some evil befalls them, they say ‘this is from you (O Muhammad!)’ Say: All things are from Allāh...’ (4: 78).

In the next verse, Allāh states:

‘Whatever of good reaches you is from Allāh. But whatever evil befalls you is from yourself.’ (4: 79).

The first verse suggests that any favour or mishap a person experiences is from Allāh. The second verse states that favours come from Allāh, whereas evil come from people themselves. This apparently seems like a contradiction.

Answer

The first verse means that Allāh is the *Creator* of all actions, good and bad. The second verse refers to the *cause* of good and evil. This lies in human hands.

¹⁰ p. 105. *Reflections: A Quest for Answers to Today’s Questions*. M.I.H. Pirzada. Al-Karam Publications, UK, 2009.

¹¹ p. 102. *Ibid*.