



**& 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 the Author

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.

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.

He is a prolific author of more than thirty books relating to the universal principles of Islam, the Qur'an, and its core purpose of enlightenment.

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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*, *khalaqa'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 orientalist 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

Decree and Destiny by Shaykh Fadhlalla Haeri
Historical Background

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

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