

# *Decree & Destiny*

Free Will or Determinism



**Shaykh Fadhlalla Haeri**

Revised Edition



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## **Book Description**

Free will or determinism has been the frequent topic of philosophical debate from the early civilizations right through to the present day. Shaykh Fadhlalla Haeri shows how according to Islamic thought the answers to this important question lie in understanding two inseparable spheres of consciousness: the earthly causal and the realm of the Absolute.

‘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 Muhammad and the Imams of his Household. Many of the Sayings translated in this work, especially those of the Imams, have not been available in such a manner before’. (From the Foreword by Seyyed Hossein Nasr)

## **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.

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.

## **Acknowledgements**

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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*. The Sufis and philosophers were also concerned from the earliest times with such questions, especially that of decree and destiny, 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,

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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's, are concerned with 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

This book is a review and an update of a work first published in 1991. Its principal objective is to establish a bridge between Islam and other cultures and religions. Islam's Prophetic revelations, practices and knowledge are not the preserve of any nation or culture; they are a divine gift to all creation.

This book will be most useful when used as an integrated package, informative as well as transformative. The quotations from the Qur'an and the Prophetic traditions and teachings are translated and explained for the modern reader. It would not be possible, without these traditions, to grasp the complexity of decree and destiny or free will and predestination.

As this is a multi-dimensional topic, some repetitions occur in the text. This brings about a proper merging of various interrelated issues. The recurrence of similar themes is like the emergence of a pattern in a mosaic or a tapestry, where the use of same tile pattern or color of thread complements another pattern in order to complete the total design. 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.

Truth and Reality appears as countless realities and events, and each one integrates and interlinks with others. Thus, the knowledge of Reality cannot be disseminated by controlled scientific methods. We need to link different facets for the entire model to take shape. The start is rational and logical and ends with insight and subtle openings in higher consciousness. The pursuit of spiritual wisdom is like climbing a rocky mountain. The seeker on his journey will traverse many valleys and ravines, which are often shrouded in darkness. It takes patience, persistence and Divine grace to perceive and experience the whole picture regarding the nature of free will and God's laws and decrees.

## Introduction

The issue of the extent to which man has free will has been the frequent topic of philosophical and religious debate from the early civilizations of Egypt, Mesopotamia and Greece right through to our own times. Western philosophers, such as Spinoza, Descartes, Leibnitz, Kant and others, have added their interpretations to the theories of the ancients. The question of free will and predestination is a most important topic in the study of Islamic thought, for it cannot be understood by pure philosophical or analytical debate. It deals with two spheres of consciousness, one is earthly and causal, the other is to do with the Absolute and sacred patterns. This is one major reason for the difficulty in understanding the fundamentals of this issue.

A large body of verses from the Qur'an and many traditions in the Islamic heritage deal with the relationship between the will of God and man's will, and the relationship between God's power and His overall governance over the universe.

We all face situations in life, where there are several choices and possibilities. At most times we are helpless in influencing the outcome of the situation. Often we have limited choices and the outcome can be very different from what was expected. Our freedom of choice is exceptionally limited by physical and mental needs and pre-conditioning. The unconscious part of our mental processes also plays a crucial part in our decisions.

The natural world is governed by limitations, boundaries, patterns and cycles. Most of these laws have exceptions and mutations. A similar map applies to freedom of choice. Absolute freedom belongs to the mysterious zone of God alone. Human freedom lies within conditioned and limited consciousness, often driven by the urge to survive and thrive. This freedom is limited to circumstances and can only determine limited outcome.

In Islam's early history two different schools of thought emerged. One, the Jabariyyah (from *jabr*, to enforce), believed in an unknown and absolute decree, which we cannot in any way overcome or interfere with; the other, the Qadariyyah, say that human beings have freedom of choice to decide their own destiny. The Jabariyyah maintain that God is the real cause of the actions of all of creation. The implication is that it is God, Who causes wrong or good and then punishes or rewards. Therefore, all actions belong to God but are metaphorically attributed to people because human beings are the locus of God's activity. This idea overlooks the existence of causes and effects between things, at a natural, basic level.

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The Qadariyyah hold the view that all human actions are free and are not predetermined by the will of God, Who 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, and that attribution of man's actions to God necessitates the attributing of imperfection to Him. All existing things have specific causes, and the chain of causes and effects can be traced back to the First Cause, Which is God. This school of thought has separated God from His power, unless we distinguish between Supreme Power (God's) and limited and conditioned power as it manifests in creation.

This book is based on the Qur'an and the Prophetic teachings, which demonstrate that the human position lies between those two extreme beliefs. There is some freedom but this is limited to the boundaries and restrictions defined by space and time. Human life on earth is work in progress. It starts with basic sentiency and leads to awakening to the One Source and destiny of the whole universe.

From a basic personal view our actions are truly our own actions and thus, we are the cause of our own actions, which are under our control and are subject to our free choice. However, from a higher point of view, our actions follow patterns and directions beyond us and are primal designs. God does not compel us in our actions; hence He does not wrong us by punishing us for our errors, as 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 the divine Reality, Who has power over all things.

Ultimately it is human mind, intention and action that can resolve this issue by following the Prophetic map that shows our limited freedom relates to a short span of space and time. I may be free to lift this cup from the table and drink from it. The ultimate outcome of the liquid's effect on me is not in my hands. Intention, attention and action do not always result in the anticipated outcome. What is most desired is sustainable goodness to enable human beings to be in balance in body, mind and heart. Happiness is the outcome of a situation with least misery, anxiety or insecurity. The hierarchy is from the material to the spiritual.

## Historical Background

During the early days of Islam, the light of the Prophet Muhammad's (Allah's salutations and peace be upon him and his family)<sup>1</sup> presence was such that an understanding of the laws of existence and man's freedom within these bounds was transmitted and understood by 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 six months in 744 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 reference to God or the 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

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<sup>1</sup> *Salla Allahu `alayhi wa-alihi wa-sallam*: Allah's salutations and peace be upon him and his family. This invocation is implied every time the Prophet's name is mentioned.

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 as an excuse 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 the rule of despots. 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

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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 Muslims 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 and contributes to the subsequent decadence and collapse of the culture, how, then, can we explain the great Islamic effulgence of the past fourteen hundred years?

## Chapter 1: Decree and Destiny in the Qur'an

### ***Qadar* (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 the worldly 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 which define life's experiences on earth. 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 particle called a photon. The rules somehow emerge from an unknown domain into describable, measurable, physical laws. So the decrees can be seen as a series of multitudinous models by means of which the creation, seen and unseen, is held together.

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Destiny is the final occurrence that is experienced by the individual through the passage of time when these laws are enacted. It is when a describable 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.

Through the discipline of meditative practices, time can be experienced as coming to a stop. Whilst we fear death 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 and ever present. It is only the body that dies, while the soul or spirit 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 to whence it originally emanated from in the zone of eternal consciousness. So the fact that we do not like death reveals a certain measure of its falsehood as a termination of life. It is in fact a process of segregation. The confusion is due to identifying with the body and mind rather than the soul within. It is only the body that dies; for it has been the vehicle for the development of the self, whose 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.

The human destiny is potentially the highest of known creations – as was our beginning. We start life with a basic level of existence and are driven to reach the highest levels of consciousness and experiences.

Enlightenment is to know the perfection and reliability of God's plan; with reflection and wisdom we realize that human will is a very small factor in contentment and sustained happiness.

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Spiritual wisdom leads to witnessing the utter perfection of the instant and abandonment to the moment. Then we come to understand the truth that abundance 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, never-ending non-time. So we are already predestined to face eternity. This is the intended perfect destiny and anything else is incomplete.

The following verses of the Qur'an explain different aspects of free will and determinism.

## **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 all experiences, emanate from God. Equally, it is ignorance that avoids attributing personal responsibility in undesirable situations and blaming God! All of creation and existence follows patterns and laws that are both visible as well as unseen. Human consciousness enables us to follow reason and rationality. This much we are responsible for and beyond that we need to rely on the invisible or subtler domains. By fulfilling our part we come to realize the perfection of what is beyond us.

All natural patterns and laws have boundaries; when these are transgressed a new situation will arise, including destruction. 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 situation. Whatever is in this cosmos, whether it is energy or matter, small or large, is subject to the laws that govern it. Wisdom is to recognize the bounds of these laws and their interactions, which are operative at all times. This can happen on a collective as well as a personal level. The Qur'an relates stories of several communities in Arabia, who were destroyed after warnings which they did not heed.

## **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. (54:51-53)

With all his intelligence and abilities man still cannot be sure of the outcome or destiny of most actions. Energy and matter interact in existence in subtle as well as obvious ways. Thus, it

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is not possible to plan the exact outcome of events, especially when emotions and inner values are concerned.

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 ultimate purpose of our creation is concerned. We were created to know the way and qualities of the Creator, Whom we were with before creation, Whom we are with during the experience of existence, and with Whom we will be forever. We are never independent and once that truth is recognized, the freedom of surrender will be chosen. This 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 more 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 with 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. 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 behind for an hour, nor can they go before (their time). (10:49)

Man is not in control of destiny or the decree. Our power is limited to specific situations and times. We do not, ourselves, possess either harm or goodness unless God has willed it. We can see potentially what is harmful to us, and what is beneficial in limited ways. The confusion is due to the mental illusion of being separate from the supreme Reality and Its universal governance.

If we see the one and only Reality, we do not see two. We will not see the outer events as chaotic happenings. Liberation is to abandon our will into His and accept the laws that govern the physical reality as well as the invisible domain. Once we do this, we see the beauty of the divine laws and accept them contentedly.

## **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)

All living creatures draw provisions and energies from the creative Source.

## 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)

No matter how insignificant something may appear to you, it has its place in the 'book' (patterns of the universe), and it cannot escape from the original design.

The following verse 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 exists within us, 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).

Due to the natural complexity of the self we tend to dwell more on the bodily side of our existence. The Science of the Self, as practiced by spiritual masters, is not easy to follow by the uninitiated as it follows precise laws. These 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 and order 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)

For every beginning there is an end and every existence is limited within time and space.

## **Measure and Bounds**

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)

Every pattern or design emanates from a Source that contains all possibilities. We are living in a material world which is ever connected and originates from the metaphysical realm. 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 is judged to be good under some 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)

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

The last verse describes how once creation is manifested it is bound by Reality's laws. The resultant physical manifestations are fully discernible and describable.

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

God guides what He has created to what He had intended it or measured it for.

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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 verses show that God makes it easy for man to reach the awakening for which he has been created. This 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. As he dislikes afflictions, he will naturally choose if he is wise the path of seeking the knowledge of those bounds and keeping within them.

### **Fixed and Changeable Decrees**

Say: I do not know whether that with which you are threatened be nigh or whether my Lord will appoint for it 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. (72:25-28)

There are two types of decree; those which are changeable and those which are final. Our life on earth is based on uncertainty. This gives us the driving force to know and predict outcomes. Hope and expectations for a good life propel us towards higher consciousness and spiritual growth. God's mercy encompasses all of existence and its states.

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 complex a situation, the less is the certainty of the outcome; such as politics or business which involve the opinions and desires of many.

The Prophets and other evolved beings attain the highest level of submission. Their state is such that on occasions they experience the unity between the physical 'in time' and the unseen 'non-time', which gives birth to all realities and their destinies. These Messengers of Truth are

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the interface between the permanent everlasting, all-encompassing Reality, and the changing realities. They are the connection 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 lives the decree itself by giving in totally to it and flowing along with events as they manifest themselves. This is like, when the actor completely takes on the script. Even when the role is difficult he completely identifies with it.

The historical reference of this verse is the Prophet Musa (Moses), who acted in accordance with the divine inspiration he received. He himself was astounded by what transpired. His perfect destiny matched the perfect decree. In his confrontation with the Pharaoh, he unified with the decree. His action was no longer his personal action. His will was aligned with 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 merges into the consciousness of the Master, he acts with the supreme power of the One.

### **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 please 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)

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The Holy Qur'an is the word of God. It is the source or root of all knowledge. The Qur'an, or the Book of 'Collection' as the name implies contains everything visible and subtle, and the mysteries of the universe and creation – God Himself.

The natural and healthy attitude of man regarding the ways of the Creator is to reflect and understand the higher patterns or forces that govern the base ones. It is futile to act against the ways of the Divine. Our abilities are limited to space and time, and our freedom is minute in comparison to Allah's Immensity.

It is natural that those who live according to faith wish the others to know the Qur'an and follow it. Yet some of creation is so gross<sup>2</sup> 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).

All experiences in this world are based on duality, and this is how we learn discrimination and appropriate 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.

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 fully understand them, see the underlying unifying factor behind them and thereby discover the truth that pervades all of creation. The more we question the perfection of Reality, the more we display our ignorance and isolation from the everlasting truth – God.

One of the key words in this verse is '*amr*' which means command. The ultimate power belongs to God and human beings are given a small portion of that ability to act as agents or stewards of God on earth.

## **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)

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<sup>2</sup> Unqualified; Total; Complete; Opposite of subtle.

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Whoever really comprehends the meaning of the laws or the decrees that govern existence, and accepts the bounds, will act and evolve successfully in the visible and causal realm whilst guided by the invisible powers.

As for those who have been exposed to the laws and do not live by them they will taste afflictions and confusions. With knowledge comes the responsibility to act according to reason and the heart's inspiration. God or nature is blameless for our sufferings.

## 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 closed hearts have no lights or understanding. Eyes that see but do not comprehend or ears that do not respond belong to those lesser creatures. These senses are the means by which we access higher levels of understanding and consciousness leading to God-consciousness and enlightenment.

## 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.

(16:35-37)

When the Unity of the all-encompassing Reality is explained to the common people the reaction can be that if God wanted us to see everything as part of this Unity, He would have made us see that.

When the Adamic consciousness arose in the state of the heavenly garden, it was in perfect harmony and equilibrium with truth. Adam had not heard falsehood until he listened to the voice of Shaytan (Satan). Man's inherent tendency is to seek the permanent, the reliable, the tranquil and avoid distractions of Shaytan. Adam, however, was misled by Shaytan and only remembered the warning of God afterwards. Thus the world of dualities and the need for choice and human will arose.

Every state is subject to 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 way of Unity, 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. Man has been created to worship and adore the Creator with full freedom of choice, in the safety of the haven of eternal Unity.

These verses are for those who are concerned that others be guided. Yet God will not guide those who are in denial of truth. A person is either guided or he is at a loss.

## **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 messenger needs to connect and relate by the culture and language of his people. The messenger is the means that connects human consciousness with supreme Reality, in order to bridge the gap between earthly limitations and spiritual lights and liberation.

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## **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 reason, intelligence, and discernment that can guide our actions. Through the wisdom of intellect we can check and correct our conduct and actions. We can refer, with this foundation to the light of the soul and higher wisdom.

## **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)

Life on earth is a challenge and preparation for the hereafter. 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 highest potential. He has to learn the ways that will bring about the desired states of sustainable goodness to body, mind and heart.

We are programmed to dislike uncertainty and desire predictability and knowledge. Whoever ignores this innate tendency will be confused and at a loss. To remain in darkness and ignorance is a self-inflicted injustice and affliction. In this case help and guidance from outsiders is unlikely to be of use. Allah's light and guidance to such souls is veiled.

## **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)

We often tend to justify our intentions and actions, whether right or wrong. Erroneous actions are often made agreeable to the perpetrator, as he has to live with himself. God has created us all with an awareness and desire for unity in actions and thoughts.

The light of our souls and the higher element in all of us makes us grieve for those who are disadvantaged and unhappy. Yet, we are powerless to change the laws of Reality. Some people

must suffer from their mistakes, until they choose the path of knowledge and action based upon the natural laws, seen or unseen. God does not change people unless they change their ways and habits.

## 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)

When we are disconnected from higher consciousness it is like having a barrier in front of us, as well as behind. This isolation from the flow of reality is a cause of confusion and misery. If there is reference to the intellect and heart the barriers may become less solid and the light of higher consciousness flow through to liberate one from the worldly exile of the soul.

## Modes of Destiny

The following is a collection of Qur'anic verses on the different facets of destiny as have been transmitted from the Prophet and Imams.

The first mode is *knowledge*:

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

The destiny of the Prophet Ya`qub (Jacob), to whom the verse refers, was to come to know the earthly reasons as well as Allah's will.

The second is *announcement*, and make something commonly known to a people:

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



The third is that of *judgment and justice at its different levels*:

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

The fourth mode is *saying*, as described in:

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

The fifth deals with *finishing, terminating*:

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

The sixth is that of *order or command*:

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

The seventh relates to *creation*:

So He ordained them seven heavens in two periods, and revealed in every heaven its affair; 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)

Initially creation takes place in biological time, then the souls experience infinite time after death. The last of the seven layers of heavens is the physical heaven that we on earth witness above us. Both heavens and earth were created in two periods or two modes. One of these is the visible experiential state, the other the unseen.

The eighth is *action*:

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

This means to *exercise judgment and act sincerely*.

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 a conclusion and end.

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

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

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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 and acts according to His perfect justice.

## Summary

Decrees are the laws and natural patterns and ways, which are often perceived as natural and predictable. These laws are visible, as well as subtle and unseen. In the ultimate outcome they can be superimposed or interactive with each other.

Destiny is the outcome of the patterns and laws that are in existence. Imam `Ali ibn Abi Talib compared the decree to the soul and action to the 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. Thus he may learn that the ultimate freedom is total abandonment into it, intelligently and experientially. This total abandonment is based on spiritual certainty. The relative lack of resistance, due to certainty, brings about a freedom from earthly illusions and confusions.

Freedom is often connected with superstitious abandonment or detachment to which some of us are prone. Real freedom belongs to pure consciousness without any iota of movement, change or mental activity. It is the domain of the soul or spirit and not body or mind.

The Creator of this world brought about existence according to the most precise and multifaceted 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. Liberation comes with unity between the mind and heart of the seeker, who then yields to the universal soul – Allah.

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Attributes or Qualities resonate from their Majestic and Beautiful Higher Realm into the heart of the active seeker, and through it back into the world.

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### ***The Wisdom (Hikam) of Ibn `Ata`allah: Translation and Commentary***

*Translation & Commentary by Shaykh Fadhlalla Haeri*

These aphorisms of Ibn `Ata`Allah, a Shadili Shaykh, reveal the breadth and depth of an enlightened being who reflects divine unity and inner transformation through worship.

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*Imam Ja`far Al-Sadiq (Translated By Shaykh Fadhlalla Haeri)*

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### ***The Pilgrimage of Islam***

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*Compiled By: Shaykh Fadhlalla Haeri*

*Translated By: Asadullah ad-Dhaakir Yate*

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***Shaykh Abd al-Qadir al-Jilani***

A collection of extracted spiritual nourishment from Shaykh Abd al-Qadir al-Jilani's existing works.

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***Son of Karbala***

***Shaykh Fadhlalla Haeri***



The atmosphere of an Iraq in transition is brought to life and used as a backdrop for the Shaykh's own personal quest for self-discovery and spiritual truth.

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### *Health Sciences in Early Islam – Volumes 1 & 2*

*Collected Papers By: Sami K. Hamarneh*

*Edited By: Munawar A. Anees*

*Foreword By: Shaykh Fadhlalla Haeri*

*Health Sciences in Early Islam* is a pioneering study of Islamic medicine that opens up new chapters of knowledge in the history of the healing sciences. This two volume work covers the development of Islamic medicine between the 6th and 12th centuries A.D.