

Introduction to Islamic Theology

Lesson 5



Free Will and Freedom

- The Shi'i doctrine of free will is similar to some extent to that of the Mu'tazilites. But the two differ with regard to the meanings each attach to free will and freedom.
- Human freedom or free will according to the Mu'tazilites is means that God has delegated His role to human beings, that is, leaving man to his own devices and rendering the divine will ineffective. This is what they refer to as the concept of تفويض
- Freedom and free will, according to the Shia, means that humans are created as free beings. But they, like any other creature, are entirely dependent on God and His mercy for all aspects of their existence, including their agency and exercising their free will.

Free Will and Freedom

- Accordingly, free will, in Shi'ism, occupies an intermediate position between the Ash'arite notion of absolute predestination and the Mu'tazilite belief in divine delegation.
- This is the meaning of the famous statement of the Imams of Ahlul Bayt, "Neither is it Compulsionism, nor Delegationism".

Free Will and Freedom

- When Imam al-Sadiq was asked about Compulsionism and Delegationism, he said:

لا جبر ولا قدر ولكن منزلة بينهما فيها الحق التي بينهما لا يعلمها إلا العالم أو من علمها إياه العالم.

“Neither is it Compulsionism nor Delegationism. Rather, there is a position between the two in which lies the truth. This position which is between the two is not known but to the [infallible] sage or him whom the [infallible] sage has taught.”

Free Will and Freedom

- The true position on the interplay between God's power and our free will lies somewhere between Compulsionism and Delegationism.
- Nobody knows exactly where the balance lies except the infallibles and those who learn from them.

Inherent Goodness and Badness of Deeds

- The Mu'tazilites believe that all deeds are inherently and intrinsically either good or evil. For example, justice is intrinsically good and oppression is inherently evil.
- Since God is Wise, His Wisdom necessitates that He should do good and abstain from evil. Thus the inherent goodness or badness of acts on the one hand, and the Wisdom of God on the other, necessitate that some acts are "obligatory" for God and some "undesirable."

Inherent Goodness and Badness of Deeds

- The Ash'arites are severely opposed to this belief.
- They deny both the inherent goodness or badness of acts and the applicability of such judgements as "obligatory" or "undesirable" to God.
- Some Shi'i thinkers, under the influence of the Mu'tazilites, accepted the Mu'tazilite view in its above-mentioned form, but others, with greater insight, while accepting the doctrine of inherent morality or immorality of acts, rejected the view that the judgements of permissibility or undesirability are applicable to God.

Divine Grace

- There is a contentious debate between the Ash'arites and the Mu'tazilites about whether or not 'grace' or 'choice of the best' for the good of human beings is a principle which governs the universe. This is known as قاعدة اللطف
- The Mu'tazilites considered grace as a duty and obligation incumbent upon God. The Ash'arites denied 'grace' and 'choice of the best.'
- Some Shi'i thinkers have accepted the principle of grace in its Mu'tazilite form, but others, have rejected it.

Independence and Validity of Reason

- Shi'ism affirms a greater independence, authority and validity for reason than the Mu'tazilites.
- According to certain indisputable traditions of the Ahlul Bayt, reason is the internalized prophetic voice in the same way as a prophet is reason externalized.

Independence and Validity of Reason

لما خلق الله العقل استنطقه، ثم قال له أقبل فأقبل، ثم قال له أدبر فأدبر، ثم قال له: وعزتي وجلالي ما خلقت خلقا هو أحب إلي منك، ولا اكملك إلا فيمن أحب أما إني إياك أمر، وإياك أنهي، وإياك أثيب

“When God created intellect, He gave it the faculty of language and said, ‘Come forward,’ whereupon it came forward. Then He said to it, ‘Go back,’ whereupon it went back. Then He said, ‘By My might and My majesty, I have not created a creature more beloved to me than you, and I have not perfected you except in whom I love. Let it be known! You alone do I command, and you alone do I forbid. And You alone do I punish and to you alone do I confer reward.”- Imam al-Baqir

The Aim and Purpose of Divine Acts

- The Ash'arites reject the notion that the Divine Acts may be for one or several purposes or aims.
- They argue that 'purpose' is solely applicable to humans and other similar creatures.
- But God is above such matters, since having a purpose implies subjection of a doer to that purpose. God is free from and above every kind of limit, restriction, and subordination be as it may the limit imposed by a purpose.

The Aim and Purpose of Divine Acts

- Shi'ism affirms the Mu'tazilite belief with regard to the purposefulness of Divine Acts.
- They believe that there is a difference between the purpose of the act and the purpose of the doer. That which is impossible is that God may seek to satisfy some purpose of His own through His Acts; however, a purpose or aim which is directed to the benefit of a creature is not at all incompatible with Divine perfection and the supremacy of His self-sufficing Essence.

Seeing God

- The Mu'tazilites vehemently deny the possibility of seeing God with the eyes.
- They believe that one may only have faith in God, a faith which is rooted in the mind and the intellect. That is, one can acquire a firm conviction in the depth of one's soul and mind in the existence of God, and this is the highest kind of faith one may attain. God can by no means be seen or observed. This is testified by the Qur'an when it says:

Seeing God

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أَتُذْرِكُهُ الْأَبْصَارُ وَهُوَ يُدْرِكُ الْأَبْصَارَ وَهُوَ اللَّطِيفُ الْخَبِيرُ

“The sights do not perceive Him, and He perceives the sights, and He is All-subtle and All-knowing.” Quran 6:103

Seeing God

- The Ash'arites with equal conviction assert that God can be seen with the eyes, but only on the Day of Judgement. They cite certain Quranic verses, for instance:

وَجُوهٌ يَوْمَئِذٍ نَّاصِرَةٌ إِلَىٰ رَبِّهَا نَاظِرَةٌ

"[Some] faces on that Day shall be bright, looking towards their Lord."

Quran 75:22-23

Seeing God

- The Shia believe that God can never be seen with the eyes, neither in this life nor in the Hereafter.
- Nevertheless, the highest kind of faith is not an intellectual one. The intellectual faith is *'ilm al-yaqin*. A higher level of faith than that of the intellect is *'ayn al-yaqin* - certitude of the heart. *'Ayn al-yaqin* (*lit.* certitude by sight) means witnessing God with the heart, not with the eyes.

Seeing God

وَلَمَّا جَاءَ مُوسَى لِمِيقَاتِنَا وَكَلَّمَهُ رَبُّهُ قَالَ رَبِّ أَرِنِي أَنظُرْ إِلَيْكَ قَالَ لَنْ تَرَانِي وَلَكِنِ انظُرْ إِلَى الْجَبَلِ فَإِنِ اسْتَقَرَّ مَكَانَهُ فَسَوْفَ تَرَانِي فَلَمَّا تَجَلَّى رَبُّهُ لِلْجَبَلِ جَعَلَهُ دَكًّا وَخَرَّ مُوسَى صَعِقًا

“And when Moses arrived at Our appointed time and his Lord spoke to him, he said, “My Lord, show me [Yourself] that I may look at You.” [God] said, “You will not see Me, but look at the mountain; if it should remain in place, then you will see Me.” But when his Lord manifested [His glory] to the mountain, He made it crumble, and Moses fell unconscious...” Quran 7:143

Seeing God

- This verse speaks directly to the issue of the human inability to “see” God.
- Moses knew that God transcended all form and corporeality and thus could not be seen physically.
- He poses this question to God only to satisfy the Israelites who had pressured him to ask.

Seeing God

- • The crumbling of the mountain indicates that seeing God with the physical eye is as impossible as the mountains being able to withstand God's Self-Manifestation
- It demonstrates the annihilating power of that vision, since even the mountain, so much larger and stronger than Moses himself, was incapable of bearing it.

Seeing God

ومن كلام له (عليه السلام)

وقد سأله ذِعلَبُ اليماني فقال: هل رأيت ربك يا أمير المؤمنين؟

فقال (عليه السلام): أَفَأَعْبُدُ مَا لَأَرَى؟

قال: قال: وكيف تراه؟

“Dhi’lib al-Yamani asked the Commander of the Faithful whether he had seen God, when he replied, "Do I worship one whom I have not seen?" Then he inquired, "How have you seen Him?"

Seeing God

لَا تُدْرِكُهُ الْعُيُونُ بِمَشَاهِدَةِ الْعِيَانِ، وَلَكِنْ تُدْرِكُهُ الْقُلُوبُ بِحَقَائِقِ
الإيمان

“Eyes cannot see Him face to face, but hearts perceive Him through the realities of belief.”

Faith or Disbelief of the Sinner

- On this issue, which has often been referred to earlier, the Shia position is in agreement with that of the Ash'arites, but is different from the views of the Khawarij (who believe that a *fasiq* is *kafir*) and the Mu'tazilites (who believe in the intermediary position between faith and disbelief).

The Infallibility of the Prophets and Imams

- Although the majority of Muslims believe in the infallibility of the prophets, there is a great difference about the extent of their infallibility.
- As far as the Sunnis are concerned, they have a great difference of opinion among themselves. Their views are as the followings:
 - 1. On lying & infidelity all Sunnis believe that prophets could not tell a lie, neither intentionally nor by mistake, nor could they be infidel before or after the declaration of their prophethood.
 - 2. Other sins intentionally: all Sunnis believe that the prophets could not commit other sins intentionally.
 - 3. Major sins unintentionally: majority believes that the prophets could commit such sins; however, a minority says that this is not possible.
 - 4. Minor sins: majority believes that the prophets could commit minor sins, though not such minor sins which would disgrace them in public's eyes

The Infallibility of the Prophets and Imams

- The Shias believe that all the prophets and imams were infallible, sinless and infallible; they could commit no sin— neither a major sin nor a minor sin; neither intentionally nor inadvertently; and this applies to them from the beginning to the end of their lives.

Forgiveness and Intercession

- On this issue, also, the Shia differ from the cut-and-dry Mu'tazilite position that anybody who dies without repentance cannot possibly get the benefit of Divine forgiveness or (the Prophet's) intercession.
- Similarly, their position is also at variance with the indulgent and extravagant notion of intercession held by the Ash'arites.