

Divine Fate & Destiny

(Qada' w Qadar)

Theologians, philosophers and the people of gnosis all hold a special outlook regarding fate, destiny and the divine decree.

Belief in divine fate and destiny is derived from faith in the divinity of Allah (tawheed rububi), in knowing that ultimately everything is in the hands of Allah, and without such faith there is no way in approaching the understanding of this divine and mystical secret.

The destiny of all of existence is decreed in Allah's one action and one will.

Textual sources

The narrations regarding divine fate and destiny are divided into five groups:

- 1) Reports on the contentment with the divine decree. They do not tell us about the formation of destiny, but they tell us to have faith.
- 2) Reports on the level of difficulty in regards to comprehending destiny, and that the only ones who will comprehend this truth are the people who have vision.
- 3) Reports forbidden us from contemplating upon destiny and fate.
- 4) Reports informing us on if one can change their destiny.
- 5) Reports differentiating between destiny and pre-destination.

1. Contentment with the divine decree:

It is narrated that Imam al-Rida has said:

“Allah has said ‘whomsoever is discontent and does not accept the destiny I have decreed for them, then let them find another lord’”

- *Al-Tawheed, Al-Saduq, page 365*

2. The difficulty in comprehending destiny:

A man approaches Imam Ali (a) and asks him;

“Tell me the truth behind destiny.”

“It is a deep sea, and you cannot enter it,” replied the Imam. “Oh Amirul Mo’mineen, tell me about destiny”, the man implored once again. “It is a dark path, and you cannot walk it,” said Imam Ali (a). “Oh Amirul Mo’mineen, tell me about destiny”, he pleaded for the last time. So the Imam finally said: “It is a secret of Allah, and you cannot bear it.”

[1] Al-Tawheed, Al-Saduq, page 365

(continued):

“If you insist (upon knowing the reality of destiny), then let me ask you a question. Was the mercy of Allah before the action of His slaves, or was mercy given to them after their action?”

“His mercy came first”, the man replied immediately, without thinking twice. Imam Ali (a) smiled, turns to his companions and said: “rise and greet your companion, he understands”.

If we delve deeper into the analysis of this tradition, we notice that the Imam (a) is actually telling the man of the veils he must pass through in order to finally attain the secret.

3. Do not contemplate upon destiny

“Destiny is a secret amongst the secrets of Allah, and a veil amongst the veils of Allah, and it is hidden from His creation”.

- Al-Tawheed, Al-Saduq, page 383

4. Can one change their destiny?

The reports concerning the change of destiny emphasise one major point; contentment in the decree of Allah does not mean everything that happens in one's life is final. There is room for one's individual decisions, choices and actions to alter their destiny. Allamah Tabatabaei, in al-Mizan, analyses the following Qur'anic verse:

“It is He who created you from clay and then decreed a term and a specified term with Him" (Quran, 6:2)

Allamah explains that this verse tells us of two terms or times.

- One of these times lay in the divine knowledge of Allah. This specified time has already been determined and can never be altered, as is understood from {specified term with Him}, along with other such verses: {what is with Allah is everlasting} - (16:96), which allude to the unchanging nature of His knowledge and will.
- The other ambiguous term mentioned in the verse has not been specified and has the potential for change. Allamah suggests that is as if the ambiguous term is dependent on several different conditions - the actions of the individual being one of them - and so destiny may be altered by the altering of the conditions (Tafseer al-Mizan, Volume 7, page 8-9).
- It is true that some conditions are not in our control. We have no say in where we are born or who our parents are, but there are several conditions in our lives that we have power over. The human being is powerful enough to alter almost all the conditions in his life, and therefore, according to the Qur'an, change his destiny.

5. Divine decree and destiny do not mean pre-destination:

- This group of reports goes hand in hand with the fourth group, in that one cannot merely succumb to conditions in the wrong understanding that everything has already been decreed and so there is no meaning in one's decisions or actions. Rather, the destiny is something that individual choice may influence whilst remaining the divine decree of Allah.

- In one report, Imam Ali (a) is standing by a wall which was about to fall upon him, and so he moved to a place of safety. He was then called to: "O Ameerul Mo'mineen, are you fleeing from the decree of Allah?"

The Imam replied: 'I moved from one destiny to another'.

Bihar al-Anwar, Volume 41, page 7)

Conclusion:

The different perspectives and angles the Ahlulbayt approach this topic with points to its complexity.

This should not however lead one to suggest that to engage in the topic is forbidden, and a simple glance over the corpus shows us the different approaches the Ahlulbayt had towards destiny and divine decree.

The meaning of Qadaa w Qadr

Linguistically:

Qadar: The limitation and measurement of a thing

Qada': The execution of a plan or to bring something into fruition

Philosophically:

- The Muslim philosophers deemed Qada w Qadar to literally be the same concept as the law of cause and effect.

- Shaheed Muttahari went as far as to say that there is no difference between the materialist--and the monotheist when it comes to the concept of Qada w Qadar as they are an identical reality.

- Ultimately, the monotheistic believer will attribute it to Allah, whilst the materialist will attribute it to a natural order – but both believe in the existence of the law of cause and effect.

Qada' w Qadar are two concepts which differ based on perspectives. Qadar is concerning the perspective of the relationship between the specific effect and its part cause, whereas Qada' is concerning the perspective of the relationship between the specific effect and its complete cause.

Qadar:

- The relationship of the effect to its cause is a very specific one. A specific effect cannot simply emerge from any cause, but it must emerge from its specific cause.

A human being cannot emerge from the seed of the apple tree, rather an apple tree is what emerges from the seed of an apple tree.

- **T**here must always be a correlation between the cause and its effect, otherwise anything would be a cause of anything, which is an absurd idea. This correlation between cause A and effect B is what we mean by Qadar (taqdeer).

Qada':

Once all the conditions for an effect have been met, then grouped together they become a complete cause for a specific effect.

- Once the complete cause exists, the existence of the effect becomes necessary. It is impossible for the complete cause of a thing to come into existence and it not give birth to its effect.
- Every single thing in this external world has only come into existence because the conditions were met for its complete cause to exist. And not only is the complete cause necessary for the effect to exist, but this same effect must necessarily exist wherever its complete cause is met.

The burning of the wood will always occur if all the part-causes and conditions are met.

The plant will always grow if all of the part-causes and conditions are met.

Cause and effect: perspectives on Qada and Qadar

- To attribute a thing to its complete cause is to perceive it from the angle of Qada'.
- Qadar is to trace the roots of and reasons behind the effect back to its cause.

Why doesn't it an apple taste like a banana, and why isn't it shaped like an avocado? The reason for the specific attributes of the apple stems back to its sequence of causes.

Within the conditions and sequences of part causes of the apple, there was a part cause which specified that it would taste like an apple.

- If it was replaced with the same conditions and part causes of a banana, then it would taste like a banana, and indeed it would become a banana. Therefore, it is important to note that the specific conditions within the sequence of causes determines the final effect of apple, and so all fruits taste differently. This is also the case when it comes to any existent reality which is an effect of a cause.

- Qadar is to trace the roots of and reasons behind the effect back to its cause, and to look at the relationship between the specific effect and its part cause. When the apple's roots have been traced back to its cause, more specifically its part causes, then the fate of the apple has been determined (qudiyya amruha).
- The specific humanity in a human being is down to the different part causes which formulated a sequence to make the complete cause, after which the said human being now has a certain size, shape, and varying attributes.
- To look at a specific attribute and effect, colour, taste or shape and to attribute it to its specific part cause, is the perspective of Qadar.
- One can perceive any existent reality in external existence from this perspective, or they could attribute a thing to its complete cause and so perceive it from the angle of Qada'.
- The Qadar of a being comes down to what it truly is

Qada' w Qadar *ilmi wa ayni*

- From the human perspective of the existent reality, it is referred to as Qada' w Qadar ayni, and this is the form we have discussed in this session.
- Qada w Qadar from the Divine perspective, is referred to as Qada' w Qadar ilmi, whereby a thing not only exists externally but pre-exists in the knowledge of Allah
- Similar to the way in which you know what you're going to say before you say it, Allah has direct knowledge (ilm hudoori) of every cause and every effect 'before' it exists.
- Qada' w Qadar ilmi is still only concerning the relationship of the effect and its cause, but in His knowledge, whereas Qada' w Qadar ayni is in regards to the actual external relationship of the effect and its cause.
- The knowledge of Allah, one of His essential attributes, encompasses every taste, touch or smell of a thing, as well as its part and complete cause. His knowledge is indeed that which brings a thing to exist in the first place, as when He knows of a thing – it exists (ilmuhu ijaaduhu).

Common Arguments

The argument of the Asharites: Free will contradicts the eternal will of Allah

If Allah has already determined everything, then the human being cannot ever change his destiny. The will of Allah is eternal, and so the human being cannot do anything about it. Everything that is going to happen happens necessarily because it cannot differ from his will. It has already been written.

Answer:

The will of Allah is eternal, and the human being has free will, and these two facts do not contradict each other. As was explained in the chapter concerning pre-destination, an effect cannot have two complete causes, which is where the problem of the Asharites arises from. This is why they attributed the effect ultimately to God's will. However, we propose that human free will is only an extension given its power by the will of Allah, and so it stems from God's power (tooli) which is ultimately the effects one cause.

Argument 2

Since Allah's knowledge is infinite, unchanging and there is not a thing that He is ignorant of, then He knows the final destiny of every living creature. If Allah knows that person x's fate is hell, then there is nothing person x can do to change their fate, or else it is in contradiction with the infinite and unchanging knowledge of Allah. Therefore, no one actually has a choice when it comes to their destiny.

Answer:

Allamah Tabatabaie answers this question by explaining that it is true that Allah knew person x would act in every way he did – through his own choice. Allah's knowledge is infinite and it is not knowledge 'before' in time, as there is no time for Allah. Therefore, Allah knows of every action that will ever occur through the free will he created in the human being.

A man by the name of Salih al-Nayli asked Imam Sadiq (a): ‘Do the servants of God actually have any power over anything?’ The Imam replied; ‘If they perform a certain action, they did so with the power that God had granted them’. ‘And what is this power?’ asked Salih, to which the Imam said; ‘If an adulterer was to commit adultery, then he had the power of committing this action as he was doing it. Likewise, for a person does not commit adultery, then he had the power to avoid this action as he avoided it. He has no power before acting or avoiding, but his power lies in the very acting and avoiding itself’. Salih then asked: ‘then for what would he be punished?’ Imam al-Sadiq answered; ‘For the proof against him and the forbidden act he acted upon, as Allah does not force his slave into disobeying Him. He did not will the disbelief of anyone, however if one disbelieves in God, then he could only do so with the power granted to Him by Allah’, Salih was taken aback in astonishment, asking; ‘God willed that he disbelieve in Him?!’

‘That is not what I’m saying,’ replied the Imam, ‘rather, He knew that they would disbelieve in Him, so he willed disbelief due to his knowledge of what they would do based on their own choices’. (Usool al-Kafi, Kulayni, Volume One, page 162)