

Shia's Belief in Fate and Destiny

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As soon as I became acquainted with the Shi'ah 'ulamà',¹⁹⁷ reading their books, I became aware of a new science called fate and destiny.

Al-'Imàm 'Ali (peace be upon him) has elucidated this, through the most express statement, when giving a reply to someone who asked him about fate and destiny (al-qadà' wa al-qadar), saying:

"Woe to you. You take it as a final and unavoidable destiny (according to which we are bound to act). If it were so, there would have been no question of reward or chastisement and there would have been no sense in Allah's promises or warnings. (On the other hand) Allah, the Glorified, has ordered His people to act by free will and has cautioned them and refrained them (from evil). He has placed easy obligations on them and has not put heavy obligations. He gives them much (reward) in return for little (action). He is disobeyed, not because He is overpowered. He is obeyed but not under force. He did not send down prophets just for fun. He did not send down the Book for the people without purpose. He did not create the skies, the earth and all that is in between them in vain. That is the imagination of those who disbelieve; then woe unto those who disbelieve — because of the fire." (38:27).¹⁹⁸ What an express statement it is! I have never read a speech more rhetorical than this one, nor a proof better pointing to truth than it. Any Muslim is assured that his acts are (done) according to his free will and choice, as Allah, the Glorified, has given us His command but left for us the free will to choose (the acts), as said by the Imam (Amir al-Mu'minin): "Allah has ordered His people to act by free will."

Besides, He — the Glorified — has prohibited and warned us against contradicting and disobeying Him. So his speech indicated that man being free to do whatever he wills, and can disobey Allah's commandments, deserving in this case the chastisement ('iqàb), according to al-'Imàm's saying: "and has cautioned them and refrained them (from evil)."

The point was more elucidated by al-'Imàm 'Ali (A) when he stated that: "He is disobeyed, not because He is overpowered", meaning that if Allah intends to coerce and compel His people to do something, all of them will be unable to overpower Him (or contradict Him). That means that He has granted free will in cases of obedience and disobedience, as indicated clearly in the holy verse: "And say thou: "The truth is from your Lord; so let him who pleaseth believer"; and let him who pleaseth disbelieve ..." (18:29) Then al-'Imàm 'Ali addresses the conscience

of man, to reach the depth of his inner consciousness, giving the decisive proof that if man being compelled in all of his acts as believed by some, so sending down the prophets and scriptures would be but a sort of play and sport, from which Allah is far above. That is due to the fact that the role of the prophets (peace be upon them all) and sending down of scriptures being for the aim of reclaiming people, taking them out from darkness into light, giving them the cure that is beneficial for their psychological illnesses, and clarifying the ideal way of living in felicity. The Almighty Allah said: "Lo! This Qur'ân guideth unto that which is straightest ..." (17:9)

Al-'Imâm 'Ali concludes his statement with saying that to believe in good, being the same as believing that "He createth the skies and earth and all that is between them in vain," which being a disbelief whose holders are promised by Allah to be thrown in fire.

When examining the Shi'ah's belief in fate and destiny, we find it quite an apposite belief and a right opinion. As while a sect went to extremes by believing in determinism (jabr), another one extravagated through holding the belief in free will (tafwid).

But Ahl al-Bayt Imams (peace be upon them) undertook the task of correcting and rectifying the concepts and beliefs held by these and those ones, through calling to believe in the dictum: "Neither determinism nor free will, but a state in between the two."¹⁹⁹ For this belief, al-'Imâm Ja'far al-Sâdiq cited a simplified example, easy to understand by all people in accordance to their thinking, when he replied to a questioner asking him: "What do you mean by saying: Neither determinism nor free will but a state in between the two"? He (A) answered him thus: "Your walking on earth is not like your falling down on it", meaning that we walk on earth by our free will, but when we fall down on it, it is out of our will. Is there anyone among us like falling down that may cause fracture of some organs of our body, rendering us disabled?

Hence fate and destiny will be a state in the midst of two states, i.e a part being on our part and by our choice, and we do it according to our free will. And the second part being out of our will, and we submit to it, without being able to repel it. So we shall be called to account for the first one, while we shall not be called to account for the second part. Thus man, in this case and that will be authorized (mukhayyar) and compelled (musayyar) at the same time.

A. Free in the acts produced by him out of contemplation and meditation, as he goes through the stage of option and struggle between risk-taking or abstaining, concluding at either doing (the act) or abandoning (it). To this Allah, the Glorified referred when saying: "By the soul as it is perfected. And inspired unto it (against) its vices and (about) its piety! Indeed succeedeth he who purifieth it! And indeed faileth he who polluted it!" (91:7-10)

So purifying and polluting the soul being the result of testing the conscience of every man, as

success and failure being the inevitable and fair consequence for that test.

B. Being compelled (musayyar) in respect of the surrounding rules and movements of the universe, which all being subdued to Allah's Will with all its parts, components, planets and particles. Man has no option to select his sex, of maleness or femaleness, or to choose his skin colour or his parents, to be brought up, for instance, by well-off parents not poor ones.

Moreover he can never choose the length of his stature nor the shape of his body. Man is verily subject to several compulsory factors, like inherited diseases for instance, beside numerous natural rules made for his advantage, with no need for any toil on his part. As man sleeps when feeling tired, gets up when being restful, eats when feeling hungry, drinks when feeling thirsty, laughs and be delighted when feeling happy, and weeps and frowns when feeling sad, while having inside his body factories that manufacture hormones, vivid cells, and transformative semens, building at the same time his body in a wonderful well-arranged equilibrium. Despite all these manifestations, man being ignorant not knowing that the Divine grace is encompassing him at every moment of his life, and rather even after his death! Allah, the Mighty and Glorious, says in this regard: "What! Thinkest man that he will be left uncontrolled? Was he not a (mere) drop of sperm emitted? Then was he a clot of blood, then He created (him), and (He) made (him) proportioned. Then made He of him of two kinds, the male and the female. What! Is not He potent enough to give life (again) unto the dead?"
(75:36-40)

True, glorified and praised Your Name, O our Lord, the Most High! You are the One Who created then fashioned (all things), planned and guided, and caused (creatures) to die and to live. Blessed and Exalted are You, and may wretchedness and separation inflict those who contradicted and turned away from You, never esteeming You with the estimation that that befits You.)

We conclude this discussion by a saying for Al-'Imàm 'Ali ibn Musà al-Ridà, the Eighth of Ahl al-Bayt Imams, who was known of having abundant knowledge during the reign of al-Ma'mun, though not reaching the age of fourteen, to the extent of being the most knowledgeable of his contemporaries.200)

A man asked him about the explanation of the hadith of his grandfather al-'Imàm al-Sàdiq: "Neither determinism nor free will but a state in between the two (extremes)." Al-'Imàm al-Ridà replied:)

"Whoever claims that Allah does our acts (determines them), and then chastises us for them, has in fact believed in determinism (jabr). And whoever claims that Allah has left the affairs of creation and sustenance completely to (be undertaken by) His trustees (hujaj) – i.e. the Imams

—, has in fact believed in tafwid (authorization). Whoever believes in jabr is a disbeliever, and whoever believes in tafwid is a polytheist (mushrik). And concerning the phrase “a state in between the two”, it shows the way toward doing and undertaking whatever commanded by Allah, and abandoning what He forbade. That is, Allah the Glorified has given him power to do the evil act and abandon it, in the same way as He made him able to do the good and to abandon it, and as He ordered him to do this (act) and forbade him of doing that one.”)

By my life, it is verily a sufficient and convincing statement that to be conceived by all minds, and can be comprehended by all people: the educated and uneducated.)

The Messenger of Allah (S) disclosed the truth when saying in their regard:) “Do not outstrip them, for then you shall perish, and do not fall short of them, for then you shall perish. Do not teach them for they are more knowledgeable than you.”²⁰¹