

14. The Natural Religion (Al-Fitrah)

Abu Ja'far, may Allah have mercy upon him, says, concerning the natural religion, that "Allah has undoubtedly created man with a disposition towards (accepting) the Unity of Allah (tawhid)".

ash-Shaykh al-Mufid, may Allah have mercy upon him, adds that Abu Ja'far, may Allah have mercy upon him, mentions fitrah without expounding its meaning, and he related the tradition without referring to its implications. The explicit meaning of his saying (i.e., Imam Ja'far as-Sadiq, peace be upon him), "Allah has created men", is that He brought them into existence in the beginning (ibtada'ahum bi 'l-huduth), hence fitrah means to create.

Allah, the Almighty, says:

Praise belongs to Allah, Originator of the heavens and earth [35: 1]

which means the Creator of the heavens and earth in the beginning and for the time to come. He also says:

Allah's pattern (lit. origin) upon which He modelled mankind [30:30],

which means design on the basis of (or proto-type upon) which He created mankind. And this is what as-Sadiq, peace be upon him, meant by his saying: "Allah has created men with a disposition towards accepting the Unity of Allah", which also signifies that Allah created them to affirm His Unity and that they should hold Him One.

Yet this does not imply that He willed them to accept His Unity, because if He did so, then the whole of mankind would be monotheists (muwahhidun), whereas we see among ourselves those who are not, a fact which indicates that the Almighty has not decreed monotheism for mankind; rather He has created them to acquire it (through their own endeavour) – a fact which can be supported by the speech of Allah:

I have not created jinn and mankind except to worship Me [51:56],

which plainly demonstrates that He has created them to worship Him.

He (Abu Ja'far) also has related a tradition which is accepted as genuine both by al-'Ammah and al-Khassah¹ (lit. the generality and elect) which runs thus, "Every infant is born according to the fitrah, then his parents make him a Jew or a Christian"², which also confirms the explanation mentioned above, which states that Allah has created mankind to serve Him and with the disposition to affirm His Unity, hence whatsoever errors they commit on their own originate only from them- selves and from the delusion of jinn and man with nothing from Allah.

As for the interpretation, Abu Ja'far brings forward concerning Allah's right guidance to men, this states the case exactly, and he has followed the ideal course. And what he has mentioned is in accordance with the principle of Divine Justice, and approved by reason, and is contrary to what the Predestinarians maintain, who contradict the speech of Allah and what is approved sound by reason.

¹. The Shi'ah theologians call themselves al-Khassah, whereas they denote by al-'Ammah the Sunnites generally.

². See al-Bukhari, as-Sahih, tafsir of surah 30; Muslim, as-Sahih, Kitabu 'l- Qadar, Tradition no.22.

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