

16. Concerning Al-bada’

Abu Ja‘far, may Allah have mercy upon him, says: "Our belief concerning al-bada' . . ."

Abu ‘Abdillah comments that the belief of the Imamiyyah concerning al-bada’ is approved by textual proof (sam’) rather than reason, and further affirmed by the narrations related on the authority of the divinely guided Imams, peace be upon them. Originally, al-bada’ means emerging (circumstances).

Allah says:

But there would appear to them from Allah that on which they had not reckoned [39:47],

which signifies that the retribution which Allah has prepared for them, and which they had not taken into account or consideration. And He says:

There would appear to them and surround them the evils of what they have amassed [39:48].

That is, they will be confronted with the recompense which they have earned, and that this will be made plain to them.

The Arabs used to say, "bada li fulan ‘amal hasan", that is, it appeared to him as a praiseworthy act. And also, "bada lahu kalam fasih", that is, it seems to him an eloquent speech. Also they say, "bada min fulan kadha" – in some case the (lam) may be substituted for (min). It will then read, "bada li fulan". The interpretation of what the Imamiyyah meant by: "bada li Allah fi kadha", is that something about (a particular thing) appeared to Him, the meaning of 'something about it appeared to Allah" is that something (i.e., a particular statement) about it emerged from Him.

This is not to imply an amendment of opinion (on the part of the Almighty), or that the heart of the matter, from being unintelligible, has been made plain to Him, since all the works of Allah (which are now) apparent in His creation, although (at one time) not in existence, were always known to Him from eternity. Then the term bada’ can only apply to things which are unexpected or the occurrence of which was not taken into account, and can never apply to what was known to Him as bound to happen.

As for the saying of Abu ‘Abdillah, peace be upon him: "Allah has never been influenced by a new

consideration, as in the case of my son Isma‘i1"1, he meant by this what Allah did for him in shielding him by abolishing the decree of death, al- though it was feared and expected for him; yet Allah responded favorably to his petition by withholding this.

The reports related on his authority, "that death was decreed for Isma‘il twice, but I requested Allah to abolish it and He did", supports this. Nevertheless, there may be a decree which is suspended and may be changed in certain cases; Allah says:

And He has decreed a term for you, and a term is fixed with Him [6:2],

which makes it clear that there are two different sorts of terms of which one is conditional (liable to change), and might be lengthened or shortened, as may be seen in the saying of Allah:

And no one groweth old who groweth old, nor is aught lessened of his life, but it is recorded in a book [35: 11].

And His saying:

And if the people of the township had believed and kept from evil, surely We should have showered them with blessing from the heaven and from the earth [7:96].

These verses demonstrate plainly that their terms were conditional, being lengthened in accordance with righteousness and cut short on account of evil. Allah Almighty, reporting the speech of Noah, peace be upon him, says:

Ask forgiveness of your Lord; surely, He is ever forgiving, He will send down upon you rain pouring in abundance [71: 10–11].

So He made the length of their term and also the showering of His favour conditional upon their sincere contrition; then, when they failed (in this), He cut short their term and annihilated them. Thus, (the reasoned argument given above) affirms that bada’ is concerned only with what is a conditional decree, and never involves a change of mind from one decision to another, or the mutability of opinion – Allah is Exalted far above what the liars allege.

Nonetheless, some of our companions asserted that originally bada’ designated the amendment of opinion, and the change of mind from one particular decision to another, and that it applied to Allah only in its metaphorical sense, in the same manner as ‘anger’ and ‘pleasure’ were applied to Him metaphorically. Yet this assertion does not harm our School, since metaphorical nouns can be applied to Allah if they are mentioned in Scripture (lit. authorized by sam‘, that is, textual proof), and bada’ is, as we have demonstrated, one of these mentioned in Scripture.

What was approved by us in our interpretation was that it has the meaning of ‘emerging’, as we demonstrated above, and it means merely the emergence of what was unexpected and extraordinary,

since, if it comes to be generalized so as to cover each one of the particular actions of Allah, then it will involve the attribution of mutability to Allah, and this is unanimously held to be absurd.

1. Isma‘il ibn Ja‘far as-Sadiq: The eldest son of the sixth Imam, His father at first nominated him as his successor to the imamate, but later on deposed him from this position because of his excessive addiction to drink. Though he died five years before his father at Medina in 143/760–1, and though his body was publicly exposed and his death attested to by numerous witnesses, many among his followers held that he survived his father and ascribed to him many miraculous acts.

The Seveners (as- Sab‘iyah), that is, the Isma‘iliyyah sect of the Shi‘ah, with its various offshoots, derives its name from him. See al-Maqrizi, *Itti‘azu l-hunafa*, vol. I, p. 16; Ibnu ‘1-Jawzi, *Talbis Iblis*, p. 102; an-Nawbakhti, *Firaqu sh- Shi‘ah*, p.35; ash-Shahrastani, *al-Milal*, vol.2, p.5; Lewis, B., *The Origins of Isma‘ilism*, p.38; E.I., the article "Isma‘il ibn Ja‘far", by Huart, C.H., vol.2, i, p.549. [This view has been quoted from the non-Imamite sources, but for the right opinion concerning Isma‘il and his life history see our "Introduction" to the English translation of *Kitab al-Irshad* which will be published by the Will of Allah (ed.).]

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