

Chapter 12: Tahawism

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[Tahawi's Life and Works](#)

Abu Ja'far Ahmad b. Muhammad b. Salamah al-Azdi, al-Hajri, al-Tahawi, was born at Taha, a village in Upper Egypt. His forefathers came from the Yemen to Egypt and settled there after it had come under the Muslim rule. There is a considerable difference of opinion as to the year of his birth. The years 229/843, 230/844, 238/852 and 239/853 are mentioned by different biographers. Al-Sam'ani asserts that he was born in 229/843 and this is correct. He died in Egypt in 321/933.¹

Al-Tahawi was mainly interested in Hadith and Fiqh, and was regarded as one of the greatest *Muhaddithin* and *fuqaha'* of his time. According to Abu Ishaq al-Shirazi, he was the last leader of Hanafi Fiqh in Egypt.²

He began to study Shafi'i Law under his maternal uncle abu Ibrahim Ismail al-Muzani (d. 264/878), the most celebrated pupil of Imam al-Shafi'i, and then leaving his school he took up the study of Hanafi Law under al-Shaikh abu Jafar Ahmad b. abi ,`Imran (d. 285/898), who became the Chief Qadi of Egypt in 270/883. Different versions are given by his biographers of his conversion to Hanafi school, but the most probable reason seems to be that the system of Imam abu Hanifah appealed to his critical insight more than that of Imam Shafi'i.

Al-Tahawi went to Syria in 268/882 for further studies in Hanafi Law and became a pupil of Qadi abu Khazim `Abd al-Hamid b. Ja'far, the then Chief Justice of Syria.³ He learnt hadith from a large number of Shaikhs especially from those who visited Egypt at his time, and had also many pupils of distinction.⁴

He is a distinguished author of many important works of which the following may be mentioned here: 1. *Sharh Ma'ani al-Athar*, 2. *Mushkil al Athar*, 3. *Ahkam al-Qur'an*, 4. *Ikhtilaf al-Ulama'*, 5. *al-Nawadir al-Fiqhiyyah*, 6. *Kitab al-Shurut al-Kabir*, 7. *al-Shurut al-Ausat*, 8. *Sharh al-Jami` al-Saghir*, 9. *Sharh al-Jami' al-Kabir*, 10. *al-Mukhtasar*, 11. *Manaqib Abi Hanifah*, 12. *Tarikh al-Kabir*, 13. *al-Radd `ala*

Kitab al-Mudallisin, 14. *al-Radd `ala Abi `Ubaid*, 15. *al-Radd `ala `Isa b. Abban*, 16. *Hukm `Aradi Makkah*, etc.

His original contribution to Hadith literature, so far as we can estimate is that he introduced a new system of collecting legal traditions, developed a new method of interpreting and harmonizing the conflicting traditions, and adopted a new criterion for criticizing them. His predecessors and contemporaries, the authors of *al-Sihah al-Sittah* (the Six Canonical Compilations) collecting traditions according to their own standards and principles, left out a large number of genuine traditions.

Al-Tahawi made a strenuous effort to collect all the genuine legal traditions of the Prophet, narrated by different authorities on a particular subject, together with the opinions of the Companions of the Prophet, their Successors and the distinguished jurists. He then scrutinized traditions (*ahadith*) and showed by evidence which of them were authentic, strong, weak, unknown, or such as might be supposed to have been repealed.

Thus, his collection provided for the scholars an unprecedented opportunity to judge for themselves the merits or demerits of a particular tradition. The criterion for judging the genuineness of a tradition, according to the Traditionists in general, was the *isnad* (chain of the narrators), and so they paid greater attention to the scrutiny of the *isnad* than to the scrutiny of the text (*matn*) of a tradition. But al-Tahawi, while scrutinizing a tradition, took into consideration the *matn* as well as the *isnad* of the tradition. He also aimed at a harmonizing interpretation in case of conflicting traditions.

Al-Tahawi, like al-Maturidi, was a follower of Imam Abu Hanifah (d. 150/ 767) in jurisprudence as well as in theology. He wrote a little treatise on theology named *Bayan al-Sunnah w-al-Jama'ah*, generally known as *al`Aqidat al-Tahawiyyah*.⁵

In the introduction to this treatise he says he will give therein an account of the beliefs of the *Ahl al-sunnah w'al-jama'ah* according to the views of Imam Abu Hanifah, Abu Yusuf, and Muhammad al-Shaibani – the well-known jurists of the community. So the importance of his creed lies in the fact that it corroborates the views of Imam Abu Hanifah, the founder of the school, that have come down to us from different sources. Al-Tahawi made no attempt to explain the views of the Imam or to solve the old theological problems by advancing any new arguments. His sole aim was to give a summary of the views of the Imam and to show indirectly that they were in conformity with the traditional views of the orthodox school.

The difference between him and al-Maturidi the two celebrated authorities on the views of the Imam is quite evident. Al-Maturidi was a thorough dialectician and his main endeavour was to find out a philosophical basis for the views of the leader and to support these views by scholastic reasoning, and thereby bring them closer to the views of the rationalists.

Al-Tahawi, as a true traditionist, did not favour, as will be seen, any rational discussion or speculative thinking on the articles of faith, but preferred to believe and accept them without questioning. There is no

reference in his creed to the critical examination of the method, sources, and means of knowledge, or the foundation on which his theological system is built. So his system may be termed as dogmatic, while that of al-Maturidi as critical. The critical method followed by al-Tahawi in Hadith is quite lacking in theology. Thus, though both of them belong to the same school and uphold faithfully the doctrines of their master, they differ from each other in temperament, attitude, and trends of thought.

In order to indicate the characteristics of the system of al-Tahawi and to make an estimate of his contributions to theology, we propose to give in the following pages an outline of the views of Imam Abu Hanifah along with the views of both al-Tahawi and al-Maturidi on some of the most important theological problems that arose in Muslim theology.

Imam Abu Hanifah directed his movement against the Kharijites, Qadarites, Mu'tazilites, Shiites, Jabrites, the extreme Murji'ites, and the Hashwiyyah, the last being a group of the orthodox people who under the influence of the converted Jews, Christians, and Magians fell into gross anthropomorphism, and ascribed to God all the characteristics of a created being.⁶

He was the first theologian among the *fuqaha'* who adopted the principles and method of reasoning and applied them to a critical examination of the articles of faith and the laws of the Shariah. That is why he and his followers were called by the Traditionists the People of Reason and Opinion (*ashab al-ra'i w-al-qiyas*). This rational spirit and philosophical attitude were more consistently maintained by al-Maturidi than by al-Tahawi. Their views on the nature of faith, attributes of God, beatific vision, divine decree, and human freedom may be mentioned here to indicate the distinctive features of their methods.

Nature of Faith

Faith, according to the well-known view of Imam Abu Hanifah, consists of three elements: knowledge, belief, and confession; knowledge alone or confession alone is not faith.⁷ Al-Maturidi holds the same view and lays emphasis on knowledge (*ma'rifah*) and belief (*tasdiq*). But, according to his explanation, knowledge is the basis of faith and confession is not in reality an integral part of faith but only an indication (*alahamah*) of faith, a condition for enforcement of Islamic laws and enjoyment of the rights and privileges of the Muslim community. So the belief based on the knowledge of God is the basis of faith.⁸

Al-Tahawi excludes knowledge from his definition of faith and holds that it consists in believing by heart and confessing by tongue.⁹

As regards the relation between faith and action Imam Abu Hanifah maintains that Islam demands from its followers two things: belief and practice, and both are essential for a perfect Muslim. The two are very closely related like back and belly, but they are not identical. Practice is distinct from faith and faith is distinct from practice, but both are essential elements of Islam. "Allah has ordained practice for the faithful, faith for the infidel, and sincerity for the hypocrite." The term *al-din* (religion) includes both faith and action.¹⁰

Faith, according to him, is a living conviction of the heart – an absolute and indelible entity having its own existence independent of action. From this definition of faith he arrived at the following conclusions: (a) Faith is not liable to increase or decrease. [11](#) (b) Faith is impaired by doubt. [12](#) (c) The faithful are equal in faith but different in degree of superiority regarding practice. [13](#) (d) No Muslim should be declared devoid of faith on account of any sin, if he does not declare it to be lawful. One may be a man of faith with bad behaviour, but not an infidel. [14](#) (e) A believer who dies unrepentant, even though guilty of mortal sins, will not remain in hell for ever. Allah may grant him forgiveness or punish him in accordance with his sins. [15](#)

Pointing out the differences between himself and the Murji'ites, Imam Abu Hanifah says: "We do not say that sins do not harm the faithful, nor do we say that he will not enter hell, nor do we say that he will remain there for ever, although he should be a man of evil practice (*fasiq*), after having departed from this world as a man of faith. And we do not say that our good actions are accepted and our sins are forgiven, as the Murji'ites say.

But we say that no one who performs a good action, fulfilling all its conditions and keeping it free of all defects, without nullifying it by infidelity, apostasy, or bad conduct during any part of his life, shall be neglected by God. God may punish in hell or grant complete forgiveness to a person who commits an evil deed (polytheism and infidelity excluded) and dies without repenting. [16](#)

The Kharijites and Mu'tazilites laid so much emphasis on the doctrine of threats (*wa'id*) that they led the believers to despair and take a depressing view of life; while the Murji'tes emphasized the doctrine of promise (*wa'd*) so much that they quite endangered the ethical basis of Islam. Imam Abu Hanifah endeavoured to strike a middle course between these two extremes.

Sins, according to him, are not without consequences; a sinner is always liable to blame or punishment, but to drive him out from the fold of Islam, to declare him an infidel, or to condemn him to eternal punishment is quite inconsistent with divine justice. His broad outlook and tolerant attitude were consistently continued by al-Maturidi and al-Tahawi. The latter has summarized the views of his master on these questions in the following words:

"We do not declare anyone of the people of *qiblah* an infidel on account of a sin, so long as he does not deem it lawful. And we do not say that sin with faith does no harm to him who commits it. We entertain hope for the righteous among the faithful, but we have no certainty about them, and we do not certify that they will be in paradise. We ask forgiveness for their evil actions and we have fear for them, but we do not drive them into despair. Sense of security and despair both turn a man away from religion. The true way for the people of *qiblah* lies midway between these two. A faithful servant does not go out of the field of faith except by renouncing what had brought him into it." [17](#)

Al-Tahawi substituted the phrase *ahl al-qiblah* for *mu'min* and Muslim, evidently to avoid the theological controversies regarding their identification, and to make the circle of the believers wider and at the same

tune to give the question a practical bias. He also avoided the theoretical definition of a Muslim or *mu'min*, and instead described how one could be regarded as such. He says: "We give those who follow our *qiblah* the name Muslim or *mu'min*, so long as they acknowledge what the Prophet brought with him and believe in what he said and what he narrated."¹⁸

Knowledge of God and belief in Him may save those who are guilty of mortal sins from eternal punishment, and they may entertain hope of deliverance from hell through divine mercy and the intercession of the righteous. "Those who are guilty of grievous sins will not remain eternally in hell, if they died as unitarians, even if they were not repentant. They are left to God's will and judgment; if He wills He will forgive them out of His kindness, as He has said: **'Surely Allah will not forgive the setting up of other gods with Himself; other sins He may forgive if He pleases;**'¹⁹ and if He wills He will punish them in hell in proportion to their sins as demanded by His justice. Then He will bring them out of it through His mercy and the intercession of His obedient people, and finally He will send them to paradise. This is because Allah is the Lord of those who know Him well, and He has not destined them in either world to be like those who denied Him, went astray from His guidance, and did not obtain His help and favour."²⁰

It may be noticed here that, although al-Tahawi did not include knowledge in his definition of faith, he was fully conscious of the cognitive aspect of it.

As regards intercession, Imam Abu Hanifah seems to restrict it to the prophets in general and particularly to Prophet Muhammad,²¹ but al-Tahawi extends this privilege to the righteous and the pious among the faithful.

As regards the independent character of faith and equality of the faithful, al-Tahawi says: "Faith is one and the faithful are equal; their comparative eminence lies in fear²² (of Allah), in righteousness, in disobeying lust, and in pursuing what is best. All the believers are friends of the Merciful. The most honourable among them before God are those who are the most obedient and the best followers of the Holy Qur'an."²³

On the question whether it is obligatory for a man to know God before the advent of His messenger, and whether to follow precedence (*taqlid*)²⁴ is allowed in matters of faith, al-Tahawi does not express his opinion explicitly, though his master was quite outspoken on these questions. These questions pertain to the Mu'tazilites doctrine of promise and threat (*al-wa'd w'al-wa'id*), which gave rise to the discussion of the nature and value of reason and revelation.

They held that as God has endowed men with reason and they can easily perceive by proper use of this faculty that the world has a creator, it is obligatory on their part to know God even if the call of the Prophet does not reach them. But they were divided as to whether knowledge of God is acquired and a posteriori (*kasabi*) or necessary and a priori (*daruri*).²⁵

Imam Abu Hanifah agreed with the Mu'tazilites on the original question and maintained that "no one can

have any excuse for ignorance about his creator, as he sees the creation of the heaven and the earth of his own as well as of others. So even if Allah should not have sent any messenger to the people, it was obligatory on them to know Him by means of their intellect.”

God's Essence and Attributes

As to the relation between God's essence and attributes Imam Abu Hanifah is stated to have advised his pupils not to enter into discussion on this question, but to be content with ascribing to God the qualities which He Himself ascribed to Himself.²⁶ He even once declined to discuss this problem with Jahm.²⁷ In order to avoid the difficulties involved in affirming attributes, he simply declared that “they are neither He, nor other than He” (*la huwa wa la ghairuhu*).²⁸ According to the explanation of al-Maturidi, this phrase means that the attributes of God are neither identical with nor separate from His essence.²⁹

Al-Tahawi made no reference to the philosophical problem of the relation between God and His essence, nor did he make a clear distinction between the attributes of essence and those of actions. But he emphatically asserts the eternity of the attributes and says: “Allah has eternally been with His attributes before He created the world and nothing has been added to His qualities after the creation, and as He has been from eternity with His qualities, He will remain with these to eternity”³⁰

Expressing his vigorous attitude against the Anthropomorphists he declared “Whosoever attributes to Allah any of the human senses (*ma'ani*), he becomes an infidel.” The true path lies, he asserts, between *tashbih* and *ta'til*. “He who does not guard against denial (of attributes) and assimilation, slips and does not attain *tanzih*. Verily our Lord the High and Exalted has been attributed with the attribute of oneness and has been qualified with the quality of uniqueness. No one of the creation possesses His qualities. Allah is most high and praise be to Him. He is without limits, ends, elements, limbs, and instruments. The six directions do not encompass Him as they do the created things.”³¹

It may be inferred from the above statement and the similar one in the *Aqidah*, that al-Tahawi is against the literal interpretations of the anthropomorphic expressions of the Qur'an, such as the face of Allah, His eyes and hands, etc. But he does not indicate what these terms signify. Abu Hanifah clearly states that these terms denote His qualities. Even then he also is not in favour of giving any rational interpretation of them, as he fears that this may lead to the denial of His qualities.

He says: “He has hand, face, and soul as mentioned in the Qur'an, and whatever Allah mentioned in the Qur'an as face, hand, or soul is unquestionably His quality. It should not be said with the Qadarites and the Mu'tazilites that by His hand is meant His power or His bounty, because this leads to the rejection of certain attributes. Nay, His hand is His attribute without description.”³²

The Imam had also adopted the principle of leaving the judgment to God (*tafwid*)³³ regarding the interpretation of the ambiguous verses of the Qur'an; al-Tahawi stuck to this principle very consistently.

He says: “The foot of Islam does not stand firm but on the back of submission and surrender. Who-soever wishes to attain that knowledge which was forbidden for him and whose intelligence does not remain content with submission, his desire certainly hinders him from access to pure concept of unity (*tawhid*), clear knowledge, and correct faith, and he then wavers between faith and infidelity, belief and disbelief, confession and denial as a sceptic, distracted, eccentric, and fugitive person without being a faithful believer or a faithless disbeliever.”³⁴

The attitude of al-Maturidi on this question is more rational and liberal than that of al-Tahawi. According to the former, leaving judgment to God and passing an interpretative judgment for oneself are both allowed; and he is in favour of interpreting them in the light of explicit verses of the Qur'an.³⁵

Throne of Allah

Regarding the Throne of Allah (*‘arsh*) as mentioned in the Qur'an,³⁶ Abu Hanifah maintains that the expression should not be taken in the literal sense to mean a particular place. God being the creator of place cannot be thought of to be limited by place. He is where He has been before the creation of place. Abu Muti` al-Balkhi, one of the disciples of the Imam, asked him, “What will you say if anyone asks: ‘Where is Allah the Exalted?’” He replied: “He should be told that Allah has been existing while there was no place before He created the universe; He has been existing while there was no `where (*aina*), no created being, nor anything else. He is the creator of everything.”³⁷

Refuting the idea of the Anthropomorphists that God is in a particular place, he declared: “ We confess that Allah has seated Himself on the Throne without any necessity on His part, and without being fixed on it. If He had been under any necessity, He would not have been able to create the world and would have governed it like the created beings; and if He should feel any necessity to sit down and remain seated, where then was He before the creation of the Throne? God is exalted and high far above such ideas.”³⁸

It is evident that, according to Abu Hanifah, God, being eternal and incorporeal, cannot be conceived as being encompassed by direction and place. Al-Tahawi, as has been quoted above, firmly holds this view. “God is without limits, ends, elements, limbs, and instruments. The six directions do not encompass Him as they encompass the created things.”³⁹ Referring to the Throne and the Chair, he states: “The Throne and the Chair are realities as Allah described them in His honoured Book. But He is not in need of the Throne nor of what is besides the Throne. He encompasses everything and is above everything.”⁴⁰

Al-Maturidi went a step further to allow rational interpretation of those verses, the apparent sense of which created an impression of His being in a place. He refuted the view of those who thought that the Throne was a particular place and God was on it, in it, or encompassed by it, as well as the views of those who thought that He was in every place.

According to him, God being eternal, infinite, and incorporeal is free of time and space which imply rest, change, motion, and movement. Explaining the verses⁴¹ which were interpreted to prove His being in a particular place or in every place by the champions of these views, he asserts that these verses refer to His creative function, controlling power, absolute authority, sovereignty, eternity, and infinitude and indirectly prove that He is above the limitations of time and space.⁴²

Beatific Vision

This question was discussed with much fervour by the Companions of the Prophet. Besides their intense love of God and an ardent desire to enjoy the happiness of seeing their Lord in the next world, the accounts of Ascension (*mi'raj*), and the prayer of Moses to have a vision of his Lord as referred to in the Qur'an,⁴³ aroused in them fervent zeal for a discussion of this topic. It seems quite certain that as a result of this discussion they arrived at the following conclusions: (a) God is invisible in this world; no human being saw Him or will ever see Him in this world⁴⁴ except the Prophet Muhammad who, according to some of them, saw Him on the night of *mi'raj*; (b) God will be seen by the faithful in paradise.⁴⁵

The eager inquiries of the Companions of the Prophet whether he saw his Lord⁴⁶ or whether believers will see Him in the next world⁴⁷ and the vehement opposition of a group of leading Companions, including `A'ishah, to the common belief that the Prophet saw his Lord,⁴⁸ all clearly indicate that the Companions were fully conscious of the difficulties involved in answering these questions.

Their standpoint on this question, like that on the problem of essence and attributes was just to believe and refrain from a detailed discussion of such matters as cannot be comprehended by human reason. The seeing of God in paradise was regarded by them as the highest blessing and happiness for the believers and the summum bonum of their life. They believed in it without description (*wasf*) or rational explanation. (*ta'wil*).

The Anthropomorphists, in the subsequent period, found in this belief a strong basis for their gross and crude anthropomorphic conception of God. As God will be seen in paradise He must have body and form and may be seen in this world, nay, He may even assume the form of a beautiful man.⁴⁹

It was Jahm who, in order to oppose *tashbih*, laid great emphasis on *tanzih* and quite consistently with his idea of abstract God denied for the first time, according to our present information, the vision of God in paradise.⁵⁰ The Mu'tazilites adopted this view and interpreted the beatific vision allegorically. Imam Abu Hanifah upheld the view of the Companions and discarded both anthropomorphic and allegorical interpretation of "seeing God."

God will be seen by the faithful in paradise, he maintains, with their bodily eyes, but without any idea of place, direction, distance, comparison, or modality and without any description.⁵¹ Al-Tahawi maintains the same position and emphasizes that beatific vision is an article of faith and it must be accepted with-

out any doubt, without any rational interpretation, and without any idea of anthropomorphism. Any attempt to interpret it by reason will amount, according to him, to the denial of this tenet.[52](#)

Al-Maturidi also supported this orthodox view and opposed *tashbih* and *ta'wil* and showed by elaborate discussion that the verses of the Qur'an and the traditions of the Prophet on this question do not allow any allegorical interpretation. His main argument, as we have already seen, is that the conditions of seeing a physical object in this world should not be applied to seeing God who has no body and no form and is not limited by time and space, and that too in the next world where nature of things and state of affairs would be quite different from what prevails here.[53](#)

Speech of God and the Qur'an

Speech (*kalam*), according to Abu Hanifah, is an attribute of God pertaining to His essence and is eternal like all other divine attributes, and God speaks by virtue of this eternal speech.[54](#) As regards the relation between *kalam* of Allah and the Qur'an, he says: "We confess that the Qur'an is the uncreated speech of Allah; inspiration or revelation from Him is neither He nor other than He, but His quality in reality, written in the copies, recited by the tongues, and preserved in the breasts. The ink, the paper, the writing are created, for they are works of men.

The speech of Allah, on the other hand, is uncreated; the writings, the letters, the words, and the verses are signs (*dalalat*)[55](#) of the Qur'an for the sake of human needs. The speech of Allah is self-existing and its meaning is understood by means of these symbols. Whosoever says that the speech of Allah is created, he is an infidel: His speech, though recited, written, and retained in the hearts, is yet never dissociated from Him."[56](#)

Abu Hanifah thus refutes the ideas of the Mu'tazilah who denied the attribute of speech being identical with divine essence and declared the Qur'an to have been created, as well as the ideas of those Mushabbihah and Hashwiyyah (extreme orthodox) who thought that divine speech, like human speech, consists of words and sounds and that the script in which the Qur'an was written was as eternal as the Qur'an itself.[57](#)

Kalam of Allah, according to him, is not identical with His Being, for this will make His Being complex and lead to the plurality of Godhead; nor can it be something other than Himself, for this will mean that He acquired a new quality and became what He was not before. This also implies imperfection and change in the divine nature; hence absurd. Divine speech, therefore, must be eternal, and as the Qur'an is universally accepted to be the speech of Allah, it is necessarily uncreated.

Al-Tahawi treated this subject with great caution and condemned controversies about the Qur'an and practically declined to enter into a philosophical discussion on the nature of divine speech. He says: "Verily the Qur'an – the *kalam* of Allah – originated (*bada`*) from Him as words without description (*bila kaifiyyah*) and He sent it down to His Prophet as revelation; and the faithful believed it to be truly as

such, and they knew for certain that it was in reality the *kalam* of Allah, the Exalted, not created like the speech of the created beings. So whoever supposes it to be human speech is an infidel.”[58](#)

The main point of controversy, it may be mentioned here, between the Jahmiyyah and Mu'tazilah, on the one hand, and the orthodox, on the other, was on the nature of the divine word and its relation to the Qur'an, after they had all agreed that the Qur'an was the revealed book of Allah. So al-Tahawi, in fact, bypassed the main point at issue. He also made no reference to the relation of the speeches of created beings or that of Allah's word addressed to them such as to the Prophet Moses, as mentioned in the Qur'an, with the eternal speech—a problem, which evidently bewildered the minds of Ja'd, Jahm, and their followers. Abu Hanifah sought to remove this doubt with reference to the eternal divine attributes of knowing and creating. “Allah had indeed been speaking before He spoke to Moses, as Allah had indeed been creating from eternity before creating any creatures.

So, when He spoke to Moses, He spoke to him with His speech which is one of His eternal attributes.” Similarly, “whatever Allah mentions in the Qur'an, quoting from Moses and other prophets and from Pharaoh and Iblis, is the eternal speech of Allah about them. The speech of Allah is uncreated, but the speech of Moses and other created beings is created. The Qur'an is the speech of Allah and not their speech; therefore, it is eternal.”[59](#)

Divine Will and Human Freedom

The all-pervading will of God, His eternal decree (*qadar*) and infinite power, on the one hand, and freedom of the human will and action, on the other, are equally stressed in the Qur'an.[60](#)

According to the Qur'an, divine will, decree, and power are not inconsistent with human freedom. These problems were discussed by the Prophet and his Companions. Belief in *qadar* was declared by the Prophet as an article of faith, but at the same time he asserted that *qadar* does not deprive a man of his freedom in his limited sphere.

Thus, according to the Qur'an and the Tradition, God is the creator of all things including their nature, and nothing can go against this nature. He is the creator of the human soul and its nature and He has created in it freewill and bestowed upon it the faculty of knowing, thinking, and distinguishing and the power of judging, choosing, and selecting. God, being the omniscient creator, knows from eternity what His creatures will do in future – this is the “writing of the destiny” and “the eternal divine decree.”[61](#)

That the Prophet laid stress both on *qadar* and human freedom and on the possibility of human action side by side with divine action, is also evident from his famous saying on natural religion (*din al-fitrah*): “Every child at birth is born in the *fitrah*, then it is his parents who make of him a Jew, a Christian, or a Magian.” This is testified by the Qur'anic verse, “The *fitrah* of Allah in which He hath created mankind, there is no change.”[62](#)

The sayings of the Prophet that divine decree comprises all human care and precautions for life, that

prayer can change destiny,[63](#) and that God has provided remedy for every disease,[64](#) and similar other traditions also clearly indicate that the divine decree is not despotic or tyrannical in its nature and that it does not imply any compulsion, nor is it inconsistent with freedom and responsibility.

The Companions of the Prophet also believed both in *qadar* and human freedom and emphatically denied the idea of compulsion (*jabr*). Some prominent Companions explained *qadar* as foreknowledge. Abu Musa al-Ash`ari said: "God decreed as He knew."[65](#) `Abd Allah b. `Amr (d. 63/682) used to say: "The Pen has dried up according to the knowledge of God."[66](#)

`Ali (d. 40/661) gave a clear exposition of his view on the problem and said: "Perhaps you think that the judgment (*qada'*) is binding and the decree (*qadar*) is final. Had it been so, then reward and punishment would be meaningless and the promise and threat null and void, and no reproach then should have come from Allah against a sinner and no promise for a righteous person. This is the view of the brethren of Satan Verily Allah has enjoined discretion, issued prohibitions, and given warnings. He has not burdened (men) with compulsion, nor has He sent the prophets in vain"[67](#)

Imam Abu Hanifah made a bold attempt to harmonize the contradictory views of the self-determinists and the predeterminists by explaining the nature of divine power, will, and decree and enunciating the doctrines of natural religion (*din al-fitrah*), divine help, and guidance (*taufiq*), abandoning (*khadhlan*) and acquisition (*kasb*). God had knowledge concerning things before they existed from eternity, and His will, decree, decision, and writing on the Preserved Tablet are in accordance with this foreknowledge. So the eternal decree is of a descriptive nature and not of a decisive nature. God created men with natural dispositions (*fitrah*), endowed them with intellect, then addressed them and commanded them through His messenger to believe and abstain from unbelief.

Thereupon some people deviated from this natural religion, disavowed truth, and turned to unbelief. This unbelief is their own act, their own acquisition, preferred by their free-will, which God created in them, and is not due to any compulsion from Him, but due to His leaving them to themselves. Those who clung to their nature received divine help and guidance. "Allah did not compel any of His creatures to be infidel or faithful, and He did not create them either as faithful or infidel, but He created them as individuals, and faith and unbelief are acts of men All the acts of man, his moving as well as his resting, are truly his own acquisition, but Allah creates them and they are caused by His will, His knowledge, His decision, and His decree." But while good actions are according to His desire, pleasure, judgment, command, and guidance, evil actions are not in accordance with these.[68](#)

Al-Maturidi, as we have already noticed, explained this view quite elaborately and laid emphasis on the freedom of acquisition and choice. Al-Tahawi discourages all speculative thought on the subtle and mysterious question of predestination (*taqdir*), because this may lead one to despair and disobedience.[69](#) But he asserts that all human actions are creations in relation, to God and acquisition an relation to men, and God is never unjust to them so as to burden them beyond their power and capacity.[70](#)

Conclusion

It will be noticed from what has been said in the foregoing pages that al-Tahawi did not introduce any new doctrine or system in theology, but summarized faithfully and honestly the views of his master on important theological questions, in his own language. So "Tahawism," in fact, does not imply a new school of thought in Islamic theology; it is only another version of Imam Abu Hanifah's theological system. The importance of al-Tahawi's creed, mainly consists in the fact that it makes the position of his master quite clear. Imam Abu Hanifah occupied so important a place in theology and law and his system exerted so much influence on the educated mind that the Mu'tazilites, the Murji'ites, and the orthodox equally claimed him for themselves. The Mu'tazilites for this reason even denied his authorship of any book in theology.⁷¹

Prominent pupils of Imam Abu Hanifah and his followers mainly engaged themselves in a close study of the problems of practical life, and generally it was they who occupied the posts of judges and legal advisers during the reign of the `Abbasids and even afterwards. By virtue of their work they could get little time for a detailed study of speculative theology.⁷²

Their trends of mind also, it appears, were not in favour of pure speculation. Their time, energy, and genius were devoted to legal studies, and theological speculation was left for others. Thus, their contribution to theology is negligible in contrast to their contributions to law and jurisprudence. A few of them, like Hammad and Isma'il, the son and grandson of Abu Hanifah, Bishr al-Marisi, Hafs al-Fard, Bishr b. Walid, Muhammad b. Shuja', and others who took some interest in theology, could not quite consistently explain and expand the views of their leader.

During the reign of al-Mamun and his immediate successors, the Hanafi judges openly supported the Mu'tazilites' stand on some of the controversial questions and co-operated with the rulers in suppressing the views of the extreme orthodox. Besides the Mu'tazilites and the Murji'ites, the followers of Imam Abu Hanifah themselves were divided in interpreting his views.

Al-Tahawi, like al-Maturidi, rendered valuable services in removing the doubts and confusions and making the position of the Imam quite clear. The influence of al-Tahawi on theology can easily be estimated from the numerous commentaries written on his creed. In short, al-Tahawi's credit lies in the fact that he very nicely and elegantly presented the summaries of the views of Imam Abu Hanifah, the first founder of the theological school of Ahl al-sunnah – summaries for which he must have relied, besides the latter's works, on other reliable sources which had already received recognition from a large number of orthodox people.

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al-Din Suyuti, *Husn al-Muhadarah*; Ibn Khallikan, *Wafayat al-A'yan*; al-Dhahabi, *Tadhkirat al-Huffaz*, Hyderabad, 1334/1915; 'Abd al-Hayy Lakhnawi, *al-Fawa'id al-Bahiyah*, Cairo, 1324/1906; Muhammad Zahid al-Kauthari, *al-Hawi*, Cairo, 1368/1948; Sadr al-Din 'Ali b. Muhammad al-Adhra'yi, *Kitab Sharh al-Tahawiyah fi al-'Aqidat al-Salafiyyah*. Mecca, 1349/1930;

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1. Al-Sam'ani, *al-Ansab*, Leiden, 1912, fol. 368; Ibn Qutlubugha, *Taj al-Tarajim*, ed. G. Flugel, Leipzig, 1862, p. 6; Ibn al-Nadim, *al-Fihrist*, Cairo, 1348/1929, p. 292; 'Abd al-Qadir al-Qarashi, *al-Jawahir al-Mud'iyah*, Hyderabad, 1332/1913, Vol. I, pp. 102-05; Jalal al-Din, *al-Suyuti*, *Husn al-Muhaddrah*, Vol. I, p. 147; Ibn Khallikan, *Wafayat al-A'yan*, Vol. I, p. 19; al-Dhahabi, *Tadhkirat al-Huffaz*, Hyderabad, 1334/1915, Vol. III, p. 28; 'Abd al-Hayy Lakhnawi, *al-Fawa'id al-Bahiyah*, Cairo, 1324/1906, pp. 31-34.
2. Al-Dhahabi, op. cit., Vol. III, p. 28; al-Suyuti, op. cit., Vol. I, p. 147.
3. Cf. authorities cited above.
4. Muhammad Zahid al-Kauthari, *al-Hawi*, Cairo, 1368/ 1948, pp. 6- 11; al-Qarashi, op. cit.; *Lisan al-Mizan*.
5. The 'Aqidah was published in Halab in 1344/1925. Several commentaries were written on this creed (cf. *Kashf al-Zunun*, Istanbul, II, 1143) one of which named *Kitab Sharh al-Tahawiyah fi al-'Aqidat al-Salafiyyah* was published at Makkah in 1349/1930, and was ascribed to Sadr al-Din 'Ali b. Muhammad al-Adhra'yi.
6. It was 'Abd Allah ibn Saba, a convert from Judaism, who introduced and propagated anthropomorphic ideas among the Muslims during the caliphate of 'Ali. The foreign influence is traceable at the background of all sorts of ideas of tashbih, tajsim, and hulul (cf., al. Shahrastani, *al-Baghdadi*). The anthropomorphic expressions in the Qur'an were never understood by the Prophet or his Companions in the strict literal sense.
7. Abu Hanifah, *Al-'alim w-al-Muta'allim*, ed. Muhammad Zahid al-Kauthari, pp. 13, 29, idem, *al-Wasiyyah*, MS. Cairo, pp. 1, 2; al-Fiqh al-Akbar, Hyderabad, p. 11; al-Qari, *Sharh Fiqh al-Akbar*, pp. 76 et sqq.; *Sharh Wasiyyah*, Hyderabad, p. 75; ibn Abd al-Barr *al-Intiqa*, Cairo, 1350/1931, p. 168; al-Ash'ari, *Maqalat*, Cairo, 1950, Vol. I. p. 202.
8. Maturidi, *Kitab al-Tauhid*, MS. Cambridge, pp. 193 et sqq.; al-Makki, *Manaqib Abi Hanifah*, Vol. I, p. 148; *Sharh al-Tahawiyah*, Makkah, 1349/1930, p. 261; al-Taftazani, *Sharh al-'Aqa'id al-Nusafiyyah*, Cawnpore, 1347/1928, p. 91.
9. Al-Tahawi, *Bayan al-Sunnah w-al-Jama'ah*, Halab, 1344/ 1925, p. 7.
10. Al-Fiqh al-Akbar, pp. 10-11; al-Wasiyyah, MS. Cairo, p. 2; *Sharh al-Wasiyyah*. p. 78 ; al-'Alim w-al Muta'allim, pp. 12 et sqq.; *Risalat Abi Hanifah*, ed. al-Kauthari, pp. 35 et sqq.
11. Al-Fiqh al-Akbar, p. 10; al-Wasiyyah, p. 2; al-'Alim w-al Muta'allim. pp. 14 et sqq.; *Sharh al- Wasiyyah*, p. 76; al Qari, *Sharh al-Fiqh al-Akbar*, pp. 78 et sqq.; Abu al-Muntaha, *Sharh al-Fiqh al-Akbar*, Hyderabad, pp. 58 et sqq.
12. Al-Wasiyyah, p. 2; *Sharh al-Wasiyyah*, p. 77 ; al-Fiqh al-Absat ed. al-Kauthari, pp. 45 et sqq.; *Musnad al-Imam al-A'zam*, ed. Muhammad 'Abid al-Sindhi, Lucknow, 1316/1898, p. 12.
13. Al-Fiqh al-Akbar, p. 10; al-'Alim w-al-Muta'allim, pp. 14, et sqq.; *Sharh al-Wasiyyah*, p. 76.
14. Al-Fiqh al-Akbar, p. 9; al-Fiqh al Absat, pp. 41 et sqq.; *Risalat Abi Hanifah*, p. 37; al-'Alim w-al-Muta'allim, pp. 25 et sqq.; al-Makki, op. cit., Vol. I, pp. 78 et a'qq.; *Musnad al-Imam al A'zam*, p. 10.
15. *Musnad al-Imam al-A'zam*. pp. 11 et sqq.
16. Abu Hanifah, *al-Fiqh al-Akbar*.

- [17.](#) Al-Tahawi, al-'Aqidah, p. 7.
- [18.](#) Ibid., p. 7 .
- [19.](#) Qur'an, iv, 48.
- [20.](#) Al-Tahawi, al-'Aqidah, p. 8.
- [21.](#) Al-Fiqh al-Akbar, p. 11.
- [22.](#) In the printed text the word is al-Haqiqah which most probably is al Khashiyyah, cf. Sharh al-Tahawiyyah, p. 261.
- [23.](#) Al-'Aqidah, pp. 7-8.
- [24.](#) To act or believe on the authority of others.
- [25.](#) Cf. the views of the Mu'tazilites, especially of 'Allaf and al-Nazzam, in al-Badghadi's al-Farq and Usul al-Din, and al-Shahrastani's Milal. This question was discussed by the Mu'tazilites, by Ghailan al-Dimashqi (prosecuted by Hisham b. 'Abd al-Malik [d. 125/743]), who taught that knowledge is of two kinds: natural or instinctive (fitri) and acquired (muktasab). Faith, according to him, is the rational knowledge, not the instinctive knowledge. (Milal, Vol. I, p. 274; al-Farq, p. 125; Maqalat, Vol. I, p. 200.)
- [26.](#) Al-Biyadi, Isharat, p. 149.
- [27.](#) Al-Makki, al-Manaqib, Vol. I, p. 145.
- [28.](#) Al-Wasiyyah, p. 4; al-Biyadi, op. cit., p. 118.
- [29.](#) Al-Isharat, p. 118; Sharh al-Fiqh al-Akbar, ascribed to al-Maturidi, Hyderabad, p. 19.
- [30.](#) al-'Aqidah, p. 4.
- [31.](#) Ibid., p. 5.
- [32.](#) Al-Fiqh al-Akbar, p. 6.
- [33.](#) Leaving the true meaning to the knowledge of Allah.
- [34.](#) Al-'Aqidah, p. 4.
- [35.](#) See the chapter on al-Maturidi.
- [36.](#) Qur'an, vii, 54; xx, 5; xxx, 75; lix, 17, etc.
- [37.](#) Al-Fiqh al-Akbar, p. 57.
- [38.](#) Al-Wasiyyah, pp. 3-4; Sharh al-Wasiyyah, p. 81; Isharat, p. 195.
- [39.](#) al-'Aqidah, p. 5.
- [40.](#) This translation is according to the text given in the Sharh al-Tahawiyyah, p. 213.
- [41.](#) Such verses of the Qur'an as vii, 54; xx, 5; xlvi, 84; lix, 17; 1, 16; lvi, 58; lviii, 7.
- [42.](#) Kitab al-Tawhid, pp. 32-37; Ta'wilat, Surah vii, 54; xx, 5.
- [43.](#) Qur'an, vii, 143.
- [44.](#) "None among you will ever see his Lord till he dies" is a saying of the Prophet, Isharat, p. 65.
- [45.](#) Traditions on this point have been narrated by more or less thirty Companions: Sharh al-Tahawiyyah, p. 24; Isharat, p. 205.
- [46.](#) Ibn Kathir, Tafsir, Vol. III, p. 9; al-Nawawi, Sharh Muslim, Cairo, 1929, Vol. III, p. 12.
- [47.](#) Al-Nawawi, op. cit., Vol. III, pp. 17 et sqq.
- [48.](#) Ibid., pp. 8, et sqq.; Isharat, p. 317; Ibn Kathir, Tafsir, Vol. II, pp. 161 et sqq.; Vol. IV, pp. 247 et sqq.
- [49.](#) Al-Ash'ari, Maqalat, Vol. I, p. 263.
- [50.](#) Shahrastani, Milal, Vol. I, p. 137
- [51.](#) Al-Fiqh al-Akbar, p. 10; al-Wasiyyah, p. 7 ; Sharh al-Wasiyyah, p. 97 ; Isharat, p. 201.
- [52.](#) Al-'Aqidah, p. 4.
- [53.](#) Cf. the chapter on Maturidism.
- [54.](#) Al-Fiqh al-Akbar, p. 5.
- [55.](#) In one MS. the word. is alah. (instrument).
- [56.](#) Al-Wasiyyah, p. 4; Sharh al-Wasiyyah, pp. 82-83.
- [57.](#) Al-Ash'ari, Al-Irshad, pp. 128-29.
- [58.](#) Al-'Aqidah, p. 3; cf. p. 7.
- [59.](#) Abu Hanifah, al-Fiqh al-Akbar, pp. 5-6.

- [60.](#) Qur'an, vi, 39, 125, 149; xxii, 14; lxxxv, 16; lxxxvi, 30; liv, 49 and other verses referring to the divine will and decree. And the verses: iv, 111; x, 44, 108; xi, 101; xiii, 11; xvii, 15–17; 84; xviii, 29; xli. 46: xlv. 15, and many others refer to freedom.
- [61.](#) Cf. also verses of the Qur'an, 1, 4, 16.
- [62.](#) Bukhari and Muslim, "Kitab al-Qadar"; also Qur'an, xxx, 30.
- [63.](#) Tirmidhi, "Kitab al-Qadar."
- [64.](#) Mishkat, "Kitab al-Tibb."
- [65.](#) Al-Biyadi, op. cit., p. 33. This sentence has been chosen by Bukhari as the heading of a section of "Kitab al-Qadar" in his Sahih.
- [66.](#) Wali al-Din, Mishkat al-Masabih, Delhi, Ch. "Qadar," p. 22.
- [67.](#) Al-Murtada al-Zabidi, al-Munyat al-'Amal. Hyderabad, 1920, p. 7.
- [68.](#) Al-Fiqh al-Akbar, pp. 7–8; al-Wasiyyah, pp. 3, 5–6; Sharh al-Wasiyyah, pp. 79–80, 84–85; cf. al-Makki, op. cit., Vol. II, p. 104; al-Bazzazi, al-Manaqib, Vol. II, p. 84; ibn 'Abd al-Barr, al-Insab, pp. 164–65.
- [69.](#) Al-'Aqidah, p. 5.
- [70.](#) Ibid., p. 11.
- [71.](#) Al-Bazzazi, op. cit., Vol. I, p. 107; Tash Kubrazadah, Miftah al Sa'adah, Hyderabad, 1328/1910, Vol. II, p. 29.
- [72.](#) Some books on theology were written by Muhammad al-Shaibani, al-Hasan b. Ziyad and Zufar b. Hudhail—all pupils of Abu Hanifah.

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