

## Discrimination

The objection of discrimination was that if created beings have an equal relationship to the Divine Essence, why then have they been created with differences and distinction? Why is one black and another white? One ugly and the other beautiful? One perfect and the other defective? Why is one an angel, another a human, a third an animal, a fourth a plant and a fifth inanimate? Why was it not the other way around? Why did the animal not become an angel and the angel an animal? Why among the created beings was only man created as man with the capacity for accepting responsibility, reward and punishment but other creatures were not? If it is good, then why aren't all created like this? And if it is bad then why have only humans been created thus?

The answer to this question is possible on two levels: brief and detailed. The brief response is what was pointed out earlier in the discussion on schools of theology. We said there that usually believers satisfy themselves with a brief explanation. Their argument is: These questions are only posing some unknown issues, not presenting fundamental contradictions. The most we can say in these cases is that we don't know the answer.

We have recognised God with attributes like Omniscient, All-Wise, Independent, Perfect, Just, Generous; and since we have known Him with these attributes, we are certain that whatever happens is according to some 'wisdom' and 'purpose', though we may not be able to comprehend all those wisdoms and higher purposes. We are not privy to the so called 'secret of destiny'. It would be very selfish and boastful for man whose collective efforts for several millennia has not yet enabled him to fully understand all the secrets of his own physical body, to now aspire to understand the 'mystery of creation' and the 'secret of destiny'. When man witnesses all this mind-boggling wisdom and design in creation, he ought to confess that his failure to appreciate the wisdom of one issue is based, not on some defect in creation, but rather, on his own shortcoming and inability.

This group never engages itself in such questions and reasoning; instead of spending time on such issues they would rather spend it in research on issues which they can understand and which have some practical implications.

There is no doubt that this response is correct; believers are not required to delve into the depths of

these issues; the laity does not even have the capacity to engage in these discussions; in fact, they have been prohibited from engaging in such discussions. In fact, this argument is a type of reasoning whereby we are convinced of an effect's perfection through the perfection of its cause.

But there is another issue here. The majority of people recognize God through His effects, *i.e.* through the design in the Universe. Such a comprehension will turn out to be a defective comprehension. Obviously when they come across unknowns in their basis of comprehension they will be more or less uneasy, and there is no way to solve their problem except by responding to the objection. They have not recognized God independently of the world and created order, such that their belief in God as the absolute, all-perfect, independent, and infinitely beautiful being or cause would imply the most beautiful creation as an effect. They have only one means of access to the universe, this being the ordinary one through the physical senses. They see God as reflected in the image of the universe; obviously any defect visible in the mirror would affect their view of the image; if they had the capacity to view the universe as a reflection of God, or in other words, if they could view the universe from above, then all the defects and ugliness seen below would disappear, as it would be clear that all of it is due to a faulty perception. This type of view is the one which we said has been termed by Hafiz as “*nazar e pir tariqat.*”<sup>1</sup>

Said our *Pir*: “On the Creator's pen, passed no error:

On his pure sight, error-covering, plaudits be!”<sup>2</sup>

Those people whose basis of perception is confined to the world and created order, know God and His being All-Wise, Omniscient, All-Just, Independent and Perfect, through the image they see reflected only in that world; hence any unknowns or ambiguities they come across in the universe will show up as defects in this image, preventing the perception of a proper image and honest reflection.

On the other hand, in our times, such objections and questions are frequently posed, particularly in the discussions and writings of those inclined toward materialism. I frequently encounter people who pose such questions. Such people are either those who basically do not believe in God at all, or those who have not been given arguments strong enough to satisfy them of that there is a greater wisdom and higher purpose at play. Hence it is essential that we discuss some issues pertaining to the root of this question in order to solve this problem.

Another issue is that there is an important objection regarding the argument from wisdom and purpose which is seldom raised, and if it is not addressed, then even the aforementioned brief explanation will lose its value. The response to this objection depends on us laying down the foundations of a fundamental principle—which will also prove to be the basis of the future detailed response and which most Divine sages and philosophers use in answering the question at hand. It is based on this principle alone that we will be able to give value both to the brief response and the future detailed response. The objection is this:

Can the concept of 'wisdom' and 'higher purpose' essentially have any relevant meaning in God's case? Can one say that God has done so and so work for so and so higher purpose or that the wisdom behind a given Divine act is so and so? Is it not that such concepts about God stem from the comparison of God to His creation?

Someone can possibly claim that essentially 'higher purpose' and 'wisdom' has no relevance and meaningful application to God, and all this has come from comparing the Creator to His creation. This is because the meaning of a higher purpose dictates 'so and so' is that in order to reach a particular goal one ought to use a particular means. This implies that the selection of a particular means is expedient since it enables one to reach the goal, and that the selection of means other than the particular one is not expedient since it will keep one from the goal. For instance, we say expedience dictates that there should be pain and suffering so that pleasure becomes meaningful and relevant; or wisdom requires that a mother ought to have breasts so that a newborn can have access to readymade food; wisdom and expedience dictates that a particular animal ought to have horns in order to defend itself from a predator's attack. Cannot one say that all these are simply comparing God to man and other imperfect creatures?

Wisdom and experience have relevance and meaning for man and every other imperfect creature, since man or any other imperfect creature is located in a system which is, after all, a system comprised of a series of causes and effects. That creature, in order to achieve an effect, has no option but to seek the help of a cause. When such a creature aspires to reach a goal, if it selects as a means the same thing which is actually a cause for that goal in the creative realm, then it has performed an act according to wisdom and expediency. Otherwise it has acted contrary to wisdom and expediency.

Wisdom and expediency then, apply to a creature who is part of the existing order and whose abilities are limited, and has no option but to recognize and work within the limits of the world around it. Hence, the limitation in power and ability forms an integral part of the idea of wisdom and expediency.

But a Being who is above this order and who is the Creator of the order—what relevance or application can the concepts of wisdom and expediency possibly have for Him? What need does He have to seek the help of specific causes in order to reach a particular goal, such that we may designate a particular act of His as corresponding to wisdom and another act of His as devoid of wisdom? Hence, it is incorrect to say that God, for instance, created pain and suffering so that pleasure assumes relevance and meaning; that He created mother's breasts so that a child should not remain without nutrition. God has the power to satiate the child without it ever having the need for breast milk. Likewise, the All-mighty has the ability to allow man the perception of pleasure without ever exposing him to pain and suffering.

Causality is of great consequence to us, but for God it is nothing more than a formality. Thus, we qualify to become wise, not God; our acts can be described as wise when they conform to the contingencies of the existent order, but not God's acts which are the very order itself. The order has not been created to conform to some other order. God is the Creator of the order which, after the fact of its creation and at a

lower level, acts as a criterion for wisdom—depending on whether a created being acts in conformity with it or not.

If it is argued that God has decreed the world to be organized according to causes and effects, means and ends, so as to display His knowledge and wisdom to His creatures, whereby they could gain knowledge about Him (since if the world were to have no design and order, that is, if it were to be haphazard and accidental such that any cause could produce any effect, then there would have been no way of knowing God); the response is that this matter itself—*i.e.* the creatures' knowledge being dependent on the study of the orderly design of the universe—implies that a definite and necessary order governs the universe. Whereas based on the aforementioned principle, to seek help of causes to reach one's goals is the predicament of creatures not the Creator; for God, it is possible to create some knowledge for His creatures without employing these means.

Based on the above explanation, an objection can be possibly raised against the argument of one who explains discrimination and evil based on Divine wisdom and expediency. The objection is: discrimination and evil cannot be justified based on Divine wisdom and expediency, since God could have created all the benefits and advantages which discrimination and evil have without seeking recourse to such discomfoting means.

This is the great objection which must be addressed beforehand so that we can then discuss the issue of wisdom and expediency in response to the objection.

## **Is The Order In The Universe Inherent?**

Now we will address the main answer. The main task is to understand the order of the universe. Is the universe's order an artificial one or is it essential? What is the meaning of creation from this perspective? Does it mean that God creates a set of things and events such that there is no real inherent relationship between them, then He arranges them in a particular order and from this arrangement there emerges an order and pattern, means and ends, cause and effect? Or does it mean that the relationships between causes and effects, and the connection between means and ends, and the interdependence between preliminaries and their results is such that the placement of every effect and consequence after its specific cause and reason, the entailment of every end through its specific means and the appearance of every result after its specific preliminary is its actual existence; in philosophical terms: “the level and state of every existence in the vertical and horizontal hierarchy of being is inherent to the essence of that existence”. This is similar to the levels and states of numbers. For instance:

In numbers we see number one is before number two, and number two is before number three, and after number one; likewise, every number other than number one is after the preceding number and before the succeeding number. Every number occupies a specific grade or level, and in that level, it has specific effects and rules. The totality of numbers, which are unlimited by any limit, create a system or order.

What is the existential status of numbers? Is the existence and quiddity of a number distinct from its level and station, meaning that every number has a distinct existence and essence of its own independent of its level and station of existence, and hence has the potential for occupying any other level and station. For instance, the number five is number five in all cases and it makes no difference whether it occurs between number four and number six or between number six and number eight—meaning that which occurs between number four and number six is the number seven. Is it like this? Is it possible for any number to occur in any level or position whatsoever and still maintain its essence and quiddity? Just like humans in society who occupy posts and those social positions have no effect on their true identity and essence; their identity and essence is also unrelated to their social status; or is the reality contrary to this? Is it not the case that number five has an essence of being five, and being five for five is contiguous with its level and position, *i.e.* inseparable from its being between four and six? This would mean that the number five is not two (realities) and that the supposition of number five occurring between six and eight is equivalent to five not being five, but rather seven. That is, the supposed and imagined five is not really five, rather it is actually the number seven which occupies its own position and we, by an error in supposition, named it five. In other words, the supposition of number five to occur in the position of number seven is merely a nonsensical meaningless and illogical imagination—being no more than a figment of our imagination.

Now let's turn to the sequence of causes and effects, means and ends, preliminaries and results. Have they been created beforehand and then, in the next phase, designated to specific levels and positions? Or is their very existence contiguous with the very level and position they occupy? For instance, Sa'di occupies a specific level and position (in existence) as far as his temporal and spatial conditions are concerned. Clearly, he is temporally precedent to us. The question is, was Sa'di created then placed in those specific conditions? Or is it that Sa'di's creation is inseparable from the specific level of existence with all its accompanying conditions of space, time, level, position, etc. and that the relationships which Sa'di developed with things around him are a part and parcel of Sa'di's existence? To answer, Sa'di's existence means the existence of the totality of all those specificities. Thus, to separate Sa'di from his own time and place is to separate Sa'di from himself; that is Sa'di should not be Sa'di, rather we have assumed someone else, e.g. Jami who lived after Sa'di, to be Sa'di and have mistakenly named him as Sa'di.

Any discussion on order in the universe is an intriguing discussion and some surmise that if we hold the created order to be repaired and fixed. so that every effect occupies its specific position out of necessity, that this would be tantamount to somehow limiting God's unlimited Power. They do not realize that the issue is not the existence of something else in the universe other than existents themselves, (for such a thing must exist and it is nothing other than the order and hierarchy of being); the issue is that this order and hierarchy is inseparable from the essence of the existents, and has emanated from the absolute Being; it is the Will of the Almighty to bestow them with this order but not in the sense that with one will He creates them and with another will assigns them into a particular order, such that one could assume that if this order were to be lifted the will of their original creation would still remain intact. Since the

existence of creatures is inseparable from their position in existence, the will to create them is also the will to bestow them an order, and the will to grant them order is the same as the will to grant them existence.

From this perspective, the Divine will to create anything takes shape only through the will to create the cause, and it is impossible otherwise; and the will to create the cause is through the will to create the cause of the cause, and it is impossible for it to be otherwise. In the vertical hierarchy, existents end up at an ultimate cause which is the direct result of the Divine will to create. Hence the Divine will to create any particular existent, is the very will to create everything and order.

وَمَا أَمْرُنَا إِلَّا وَاحِدَةٌ

***and Our command is but a single (word). (Qur'an, 54:50)***

Thus, wisdom and expediency can apply in a meaningful way to God, the Exalted One, even though His power and Will is unlimited, and even though He is not subject to the system that He creates. The meaning of God's wisdom is that He enables creatures and everything to reach their goals and existential perfection. But in the case of human acts, wisdom means to perform an act to enable oneself reach a given goal and perfection.

As we saw, the existence of a cause and its connection and relationship to its effect is one and the same and not two entities. A duality and separation cannot be postulated into it. Thus, God's willing it means willing the specific relationship between it and its specific cause. This causal chain can be followed until it reaches a cause whereby willing that cause is equal to the relationship with the Absolute Being, and God's willing it– *i.e.*, the proximate cause–is equal to willing of everything and all relationships and all order.

## **A Pleasant And Lasting Memory**

I recall when I was studying in Qum, I took time one day to sit and assess myself, my studies and the path that I had chosen in life. I thought to myself that instead of these studies, would it not have been better if I had taken up one of the modern disciplines? Obviously with the mentality that I had and the value I placed on faith and spiritual teachings, the first thing that came to my mind was what in that case would have happened to my spiritual and intellectual state? I thought that now I believe in the principle of Unity, Prophethood, Resurrection, Imamate, etc. and I am extremely attached to them, but if I had taken up a career in natural sciences or maths or a literary field, what would have been my state?

The answer I came up with was that the belief in these principles and basically to be a true spiritual person is not dependent on one studying the classical studies. There are many who are deprived of these studies but in practice are pious and God-fearing and sometimes even defenders and propagators

of Islam and have more or less done some reading on Islamic subjects on the side. I thought that perhaps if I had studied what they had specialized in, I would have attained a firmer and more scholarly grounding in matters relating to my faith and that I would be better off than I am at present.

Those days I had just gotten familiar with Islamic philosophy and I used to study from a teacher who unlike most other claimants and teachers of this discipline was not merely well informed but had actually experienced Islam divinely and had reached the depths of the most profound teachings of Islam and also taught it in the most eloquent and sweet manner. Some of the unforgettable memories I have of those days is the joy I experienced especially from the beautiful, profound and subtle explanations of the teacher.

In those days I had just learnt this issue with its complete preliminaries; I had comprehended the famous law of *al-wahid la yasdiru minhu illa al-wahid*<sup>3</sup> the way a true philosopher comprehends it, or so I thought. I was seeing the definite inexorable order of the universe with the eye of the intellect, and was observing all my questions and objections being melted away? I could understand there was no contradiction between this definite law that placed everything in a definite order and between the principle of *la mu'aththir fi al-wujud illa Allah*,<sup>4</sup> and how I could place both side by side; I could comprehend the meaning of the statement *al-fi'l filu Allah wa huwa fi'luna*<sup>5</sup> and I would see no contradiction between the two parts of this statement. Moreover, the issue of *amrun bayn al-amrayn*<sup>6</sup> was completely solved, and was immensely influenced and ecstatic by the special explanation offered by Mulla Sadra about the nature of the relationship between effect and cause and especially using this principle to prove the law of *al-wahid la yasdiru minhu illa al-wahid*.

In short, a fundamental paradigm was set up in my mind which became the basis to solve many issues in an ever-expanding worldview; it was the consequence of comprehending this matter and similar issues of this nature that I was convinced of the authenticity of the lofty teachings of Islam. I reached new heights with regards to the sublime teachings on Divine unity of the Qur'an, *Nahj al-Balagha*, and certain narrations and supplications of the Holy Prophet (s) and holy Infallibles of Ahl al-Bayt (a).

At that moment I thought that if I had not been in seminary and had not had the opportunity to enjoy the presence of such a great teacher, all my other things both materially and psychologically would have been perhaps better than what they are now, would have had all the things I have now or at least something similar to them, and perhaps even better. However, the only thing really missing would have been this paradigm of thought with the fruits and conclusions that it has produced; and even now I am of the same view.

The present discussion on Divine Justice, which was originally supposed to be presented in a simpler manner, has dragged on and we have touched on some of the higher philosophical issues that pertain to it. If we wish to travel further, we must be prepared to ascend even higher peaks, but I do not think that we have that readiness. It is better if we analyze the matter in a simpler language and at a lower level. The readers who I think will be reading this book would be better able to understand the issues with a

simpler explanation.

The brief response to the objection of discrimination and evil is based on the argument that there exist a series of higher purposes for “evils” and because advantages, benefits, and profits accrue from them, their existence is not pure evil, it is rather evil mixed with goodness. Now since the goodness is greater than the evil, it is judged overall to be good, not evil. This argument is based on the principle that the causal chain is a definite and essentially necessary order, not an artificial or conventional system. To acknowledge this matter prepares the ground for the next discussion; namely, that that which actually exists is 'differences' not 'discrimination' and 'bias.'

## **Differentiation Not Discrimination**

What exists in creation is 'difference' not 'discrimination'. 'Discrimination' occurs when given equal conditions and similar potentials, a distinction is made between things. But 'differentiation' is when conditions are unequal a distinction is made between things. In other words, discrimination is in the province of the agent making it while differentiation fundamentally resides within the objects being distinguished.

The matter can be illustrated with a simple example: if we place two containers, each with a ten liter capacity, under a tap and fill one with ten litres and the other with five litres of water, here we have discrimination taking place. But if we had two containers, one with a ten liter capacity and the other with a five liter capacity, and to fill them we immerse both in the ocean, again a distinction occurs, but the source of distinction is the difference in the capacities and potentials of the containers themselves and not in the ocean or the pressure of water.

Another example: If a teacher awards different grades to pupils who are all in the same class and have performed the same work, this would be discrimination; but if the teacher were to look at all pupils equally, teach all in the same manner, examine them in the same way, then some pupils due to their poor mental ability and intellectual deficiency or due to lack of hard work fail in the exams or perform poorly whereas some other pupils due to their greater potentials, and hard work, respond to the exam questions correctly and the teacher awards all according to their responses in the exams, which will necessarily be different grades, here there would not be discrimination, rather differentiation. Justice does not mean that the teacher should total all marks and divide equally among the pupils; justice means that everyone is awarded what he deserves. In such cases, to differentiate is true justice and fairness, and not to differentiate is injustice and discrimination.

If an objection is made to the effect that we cannot compare God to a teacher, as God is the Creator of all beings, and every distinction that exists emanates from Him; but a teacher is not the creator of the pupil. If one is clever and another dumb, that is not related to the teacher; if one is full of potential and worked hard whereas another lacks potential or failed to put in the necessary hard work, this has nothing to do with the teacher. In the case of God and creation we must admit that all, the differences and

distinctions are actually in the hands of God. God works on two levels. On one level, He has created beings with differing potentials, and on the second level, has dealt differently with the beings of differing potentials, giving everyone according to his potential. In reality, the objection is directed at the first level, and asks why didn't He create everyone equal right from the outset? We must see what is the secret of these differences?

## The Secret Of Differences

The secret of differences is one statement:

“The differences between beings are innate and essential and a necessity of the system of causes and effects”

It is a profound statement, but there is no option, it must be explained. Here we are compelled to repeat with a different explanation what we had said earlier, and somehow reduce the complexity of the discussion; and in the hope of reaching a lofty and interesting conclusion we must carry on our previous discussion and out of necessity we must become a little philosophical.

As was pointed out earlier, in Divine philosophy, this discussion is posed under the title “the manner in which beings emanate from the Absolute Being”. The subject of discussion is this: Does God's will engage the creation of beings separately? For instance, He wills and creates X; and then with a separate act of the will He creates Y, and with a third will say, creates thing Z. In this manner, He creates everything by a separate will specific for that being? Is it like this, or does He create everything with one single and simple will?

A group of theologians who think superficially in matters of divinity and theology support the first interpretation. But it is the second interpretation which is proved by solid logical proofs, firm philosophical reasoning, and supported by evidence from the Qur'an. According to this interpretation, the whole universe from its beginning till the end, has been created by a single act of Divine will. That is, infinite things come into existence, all created by the Divine will, but not by separate wills for every being, rather through one single act of will, that is also a simple will. The holy Qur'an states,

إِنَّا كُلَّ شَيْءٍ خَلَقْنَاهُ بِقَدَرٍ وَمَا أَمْرُنَا إِلَّا وَاحِدَةٌ كَلَمْحٍ بِالْبَصَرِ

***Indeed We have created everything in a measure, and Our command is but a single (word), like the twinkling of an eye. (Qur'an, 54:49-50)***

According to this view there is a specific order, hierarchy and law for creation and that God's will for the existence of individual beings is exactly His will for the total order. This is where the chain of causation, or the sequence of preliminaries and results emanates from. The sequence of causes and effects means

that every effect has a specific cause and every cause has a specific effect; neither can a particular effect result and come into existence from just any cause and without any intermediary, nor can a particular cause bring into existence any effect without any intermediary. In reality, everything in the sequence of causes and effects has a specific station and known position *i.e.*, the effect is an effect of a specific thing and a cause of a specific thing; and this is the profound meaning of “Indeed We have created everything in a measure”. In order to clarify this matter, we will discuss the order of the universe in two parts: the vertical order and the horizontal order.

## The Vertical Order

The meaning of the vertical order or hierarchy of cause and effect is the hierarchy in the creation and existence of things. In philosophical terms, there is a hierarchy in the activity of God in relation to creation and the emanation of things from Him. The exaltedness and purity of the Divine Essence dictates that the beings are related to Him in a hierarchical way one after another; a first emanation, a second emanation, a third emanation, and likewise, one existent after another is created such that each one is the effect of the previous one. Of course, it should be realized that we do not mean first, second, third in time since time does not apply to that realm of existence, in fact, time itself is one of the created entities.

What has been mentioned in the religious language in terms of angels, Divine hosts, messengers (working in the creative realm not the legislative realm), distributors of affairs, executor of affairs, and concepts like Throne, Seat, Tablet, Pen, which refer to a series of immaterial and Divine entities related to God, are actually all a description of this same reality that God the Almighty, has willed and runs creation with a specific order and a particular hierarchy. This matter has been explained by the Divine philosophers in their specialist language and has been mentioned in the sublime teachings of Islam in a different language. We will choose the Islamic language since it is sweeter and more eloquent:

In this order and hierarchy of being, God is situated at the apex. The next level pertains to the angels who are executors of His orders. Among the angels themselves there also exists a hierarchy: some are heads and commanders while others are helpers and workers. Mika'il is the angel in-charge of provisions, 'Izra'il is the angel of death entrusted with the task of separating souls from bodies, and each of the two have myriads of supporters and helpers, each angel occupying a specific position:

وَمَا مِنَّا إِلَّا لَهُ مَقَامٌ مَّعْلُومٌ

***There is none among us but has a known place. (Qur'an, 37:164)***

We should not forget that the relationship of God with creation and the created order is that of genesis, creation, and origination. We should not imagine His order and organization to be like the social systems and artificial human organizations prevalent in human societies. The system of command and obedience

in the Divine scheme between God and the angels is creative and real not conventional and virtual. God's command is not a literal word, it is creation—the very act. The appropriate response of the angels to such a command is utter obedience. When we say He ordered the angels to do something, it means that He has created them such that they should be the cause and creative agent for the particular effect and act. Hence the meaning of the angels' obedience is this same creative causality and efficiency. This afore-mentioned order is a creative and ontic order.

It is thus that the holy Qur'an sometimes attributes administration of creation to God and sometime to angels; in one instance it states:

يُدِيرُ الْأَمْرَ مِنَ السَّمَاءِ إِلَى الْأَرْضِ

***He directs the command from the heaven to the earth (Qur'an, 32:5)***

In another instance it asserts:

فَالْمُدِيرَاتِ أُمْرًا

***by those who direct the affairs (of creatures): (Qur'an, 79:5)***

Sometimes it attributes to the angels the separation of the human souls at the time of death, sometimes to the chief angel of death, and at other times to God, the almighty. Sometimes it attributes revelation to one angel:

نَزَلَ بِهِ الرُّوحُ الْأَمِينُ عَلَى قَلْبِكَ

***brought down by the Trustworthy Spirit, upon your heart (Qur'an, 26: 193-4)***

and sometimes it attributes the same function to God:

إِنَّا نَحْنُ نَزَّلْنَا عَلَيْكَ الْقُرْآنَ تَنْزِيلًا

***Indeed, We have sent down to you the Qur'an in a gradual descent (Qur'an, 76:23)***

The secret to understanding all this is to know that God's act has an order and hierarchy and that God's will to create and govern the world is the same one which gives it that order and hierarchy.

In the scenario of the absence of any specific order between created beings many outcomes are entailed. Such a scenario entails the outcome that every being can create everything, and also entails

the possibility of everything being created from everything. For instance, it should be possible for a great explosion, which requires a great amount of energy, to result from a small amount of energy. Or the opposite scenario, whereby a great amount of energy produces a disproportionately small burst. It should be possible that a flame from a small match should equal in illumination the whole sun. It should be possible for an effect to take the position of its cause and for a cause to take the position of its own effect; and based on this reasoning, it should be possible for God to be like a created being and a created being to be God.

The necessity of the Necessary being and the possibility of the possible being is inherent and essential to them. It is not such that the possible being could be a Necessary being and the Necessary being could be a possible being. This can never take place, either accidentally or through an external cause. The possible being is possible by necessity and the Necessary being is necessary by necessity.

The situation is similar in the case of the hierarchy between possible beings. Every state of being and level of existence that these contingent existents occupy has the same rule. For instance when one considers the being in-charge of delivering provisions to creation, or the one in-charge of returning and receiving the created beings, one comes to the conclusion that the position which has been entrusted to them is a necessary consequence of the nature and ontic level of the existence which has been bestowed on them. It is not such that, for instance, a mosquito by one decree could take up the position of Mika'il and an ant through another decree could become 'Izra'il, and a human become Jibra'il.

All these errors, that a perfect being can occupy the position of an imperfect or an imperfect can occupy the position of a perfect, stem from people who do not realize the necessity, essentiality, and inherency of relationships existing among created beings. They assume that the hierarchy between beings in creation is similar to the conventional and unreal hierarchy of human societies. All these errors spring from comparison of God to man and comparison of the inherent hierarchy of the universe to the artificial hierarchy in human society. Such people think to themselves that if there is no objection to some ruler possibly becoming ruled or a ruled one becoming a ruler, then why cannot a sheep become human or a human become sheep? Why did He make that a sheep and this a human?

They do not realize that such a thing is impossible, because the causality of a specific cause for a particular effect, and the efficiency of a specific effect related to a particular cause, is not conventional and unreal. If 'a' is a cause for 'b', it is due to a characteristic existing in the essence of 'a' which qualifies it to become a cause for 'b'; and if 'b' is an effect of 'a' it is because of a characteristic existing in it which makes it dependent on 'a'. And this characteristic is nothing but their nature of existence and modality of being; and it is for this very reason, that the characteristic is a real existent entity, not something unreal, conventional, and hence transferable. Thus, the relationship of every effect to its cause and the relationship of every cause to its effect originates from the essence and nature of the cause and essence of the effect. An effect, by the totality of its essence, is dependent on the cause and the cause also, by the totality of its essence, is the source of the effect.

Based on this, as was pointed out earlier, it becomes clear that the level of every existent is inseparable from its essence and inexorable. Just like the order of numbers. In a bus queue one can move individuals forward or backward, but the position of numbers cannot be moved above or below; number five whose position is after number four, cannot possibly be positioned before it. Before number four nothing but number three can be positioned, even though we may name it number five, we would have only changed the name but it is impossible to change its reality.

Such a necessary and profound system operates between created beings. This statement of the holy Qur'an about the angels wherein it asserts:

وَمَا مِنَّا إِلَّا لَهُ مَقَامٌ مَّعْلُومٌ

***There is none among us but has a known place. (Qur'an, 37: 164)***

is actually applicable to every created being. Everything has a specific position, and to transpose it to a position elsewhere other than its own is tantamount to having it abandon its own essence, which is a contradiction.<sup>7</sup>

## **The Horizontal Order**

In addition to the vertical system which allocates the hierarchy of beings according to creativity and activity, there is another order which governs especially the material world and which specifies the material and preliminary conditions for the existence of a phenomenon. This order is termed as the horizontal order; and it is based on this system that world history acquires a definite and specific pattern. Every event transpires in a specific time and space; and every particular time and space becomes the receptacle of a specific event.

Normally when we enquire or investigate an event we focus our attention on that event alone, we do not take into account what status or position that event occupies in the created order. Whereas in fact every event, whether good or bad, is an effect of a series of specific causes and connected to particular conditions. A fire never starts without a previous and particular relationship to other factors and events. The prevention of the fire also rests on a series of other causes and factors, material or immaterial. There is no event in the universe which is 'unique' and totally 'independent' of other events; all parts of the universe are interconnected and interrelated. This connectivity and interrelation pervade all parts of the universe, and brings about a comprehensive all-encompassing unity. The principle of interrelatedness of things to each other, or in other words, the principle of true unity in the universe, "organic unity" as it were, is a principle frequently invoked by Divine philosophers. The principle of interrelatedness of things assumes a profound meaning in Divine philosophy and that is the principle of indivisibility of the universe. We will elaborate further on this principle later.

It is stated in philosophy that:

كُلُّ حَادِثٍ مَسْبُوقٌ بِمَادَةٍ وَمَدَّةٍ

*i.e.* every event occurs in a framework of specific time and a specific place. Every event has a specific time and specific place. It is impossible for all times and all places to be indifferent for an event.

Our physical observations also support this fact. When a fire burns somewhere in the world, it does so in a specific time, particular place, and through a specific material. The fire is dependent on conditions which specify its time and place. The conditions themselves in turn have a specific time and place and are dependent on particular causes and factors. If we continue tracing the origins, we would reach the conclusion that the series of events is interconnected like the rings in a chain; every event is connected to an event preceding it and an event succeeding it, or in other words, everything is connected to its past and future. And this connectivity creates an eternal and endless chain of events.

More interesting is the fact that emerges on an even deeper study. We discover there is interrelatedness even between events which are parallel and contemporaneous to each other.

A carpet worker weaves a carpet and a surgeon operates on a patient. On a superficial plane there seems to be no apparent connection between these two events. But if upon taking a deeper look we found for instance that a fire had caused the burning of both the carpet and the patient, we would be convinced that both the carpet-weaver and the surgeon's work originate from a single source; a single event, which if it had not occurred, neither of these two would have become busy in their work.

The works of all humans who originated from one forefather are connected to the existence of that forefather in his own specific time and place, and as a result the works of all human beings are interconnected.

The event of the separation of the proto-planet that became the earth from the sun, is the common point of all actions and movements which occur on the face of the earth. The occurrence of that event is the cause of all subsequent events.

In philosophy there is a term named 'relative necessity' and another called 'possibility-in-relation to something'. These terms are used to describe an event in comparison to another event. If by assuming the existence of the first event the existence of the second event becomes necessary then we describe the second event to be 'relatively necessary' to the first event. But if by assuming the first event the existence or nonexistence of the second event is both equally possible then we describe the second event to be connected to the first by 'relative possibility'.

By a superficial glance at some events one may get the impression of a 'relative necessity' between them and in other cases where there seems to be less of a connection between them, one would think

that a 'relative possibility' is what presides. But on deeper study we discover that between every two events there is in fact the connection of 'relative necessity', and relative possibility has no real external existence. So, because all events ultimately share one 'primary cause', and because there is a relation of necessity between every cause and its effect, we reach the conclusion that an all-pervasive necessity governs all events.

The principles based on which this necessary and universal interconnectivity can be established are as follows:

1. The principle of universal causation.
2. Necessity of cause and effect (in particular).
3. Correspondence between cause and effect (in their modalities).
4. Ultimate termination (of the causal chain) of all created beings at the Cause of all causes and the Prime Mover.

The first principle is the fundamental and axiomatic law which forms the basis of all sciences and its denial entails denial of everything and plunging into the abyss of skepticism.

The second law enunciates the fact that every effect can only come into existence when, not only its cause is existent, but also only when it attains necessity from its cause. So long as an effect does not attain necessity from its specific cause it is impossible for that effect to come into existence; and vice versa. If the complete and sufficient cause of a thing materializes, it necessitates the existence of the effect, in which case the non-existence of the effect becomes impossible.

The third principle, guarantees the specific relationship between the cause and effect, and hence no cause can create an effect other than its own specific effect; and no effect can possibly emanate from a cause other than its own specific cause.

From these three principles we can conclude that the universe has a definite unalterable order and in association with the fourth principle which is the principle of 'Unity of Origination', we can conclude the definite and universal interrelatedness and interconnectivity of all events.

In the third section under the subject of 'differences in potentials' we will give further elaboration on this issue.

## **Divine Precedent Or Way**

What is known in philosophy as 'order or design of the universe' or 'causation', is termed in religious language as the "Divine precedent". The holy Qur'an states in several places:

وَلَنْ تَجِدَ لِسُنَّةِ اللَّهِ تَبْدِيلًا

***you will never find any change in Allah's precedent. (Qur'an, 33:62, 48:23)***

*i.e.* God's acts have a particular style and fixed pattern which is unalterable. In surah Fatir this theme has been repeatedly emphasised:

فَلَنْ تَجِدَ لِسُنَّةِ اللَّهِ تَبْدِيلًا ۝ وَلَنْ تَجِدَ لِسُنَّةِ اللَّهِ تَحْوِيلًا

***you will never find any change in Allah's precedent, and you will never find any revision in Allah's precedent. (Qur'an, 35:43)***

*(i.e.* “Change”: God's ways do not change to other ways, like a law being abrogated and replaced by another law. “Revision”: like a clause being added to a man-made law, or part of it is abrogated, or changed without the original law being changed)

It is an amazing statement from an amazing book! How great is the Qur'an! Guide to scholars, companion to the pious. The philosophers think and meditates for years to discover the universal law of causality and order of the universe; he wants to boast and take pride in this great achievement that he has managed to discover such a great secret, and recognize such a great law when he suddenly sees the holy Qur'an in front of him stating the same secret in simple but eloquent language: **you will never find any change in God's precedent.**

Who can speak more clearly? Which statement could be firmer and more eloquent than this? **you will never find any change in God's precedent**

The holy Qur'an does not only generally expound on creation having a system and law but also in some cases specifies some of those laws.

Regarding the prosperity or misfortune of a community it states:

إِنَّ اللَّهَ لَا يُغَيِّرُ مَا بِقَوْمٍ حَتَّىٰ يُغَيِّرُوا مَا بِأَنْفُسِهِمْ

***Indeed Allah does not change a people's lot, unless they change what is in their souls. (Qur'an, 13: 11)***

This holy verse explains the secret of progress or backwardness of a community. No people can reach prosperity from misfortune but through repelling from themselves the factors which cause misfortune, and vice-versa, a prosperous community will not be rendered backward by God except if they themselves cause their own degradation.

We complain how can God allow a group of Jews, the police of America, to dominate seven hundred million Muslims in different military, cultural, economic, and intellectual ways? Why did one hundred million Arabs face defeat in the 5th June War? Why does God not grant Muslims honour? Why doesn't He turn the natural laws in favour of the Muslims? We get angry, lose nights of sleep out of grief, we suffer pain and complain, beseech and supplicate to God, but our prayers are not answered. The response the holy Qur'an gives is one statement:

إِنَّ اللَّهَ لَا يُغَيِّرُ مَا بِقَوْمٍ حَتَّىٰ يُغَيِّرُوا مَا بِأَنْفُسِهِمْ

***Indeed, Allah does not change a people's lot, unless they change what is in their souls. (Qur'an, 13: 11)***

God will not change His laws. We must change ourselves. We are immersed in ignorance, swimming in moral decadence, have no unity or co-operation, but still hope God should help and support us! We will make a thousand rumours for a small incident, lying and dishonesty is our working style, we have distanced ourselves from every virtue yet expect to enjoy presiding and ruling over the world! This can never be.

According to the sacred scriptures of the past the Jewish people—who because of their sinfulness and impurity, had more prophets sent to reform them than other peoples—will undergo two social movements, two revolutions and upheavals. Both of these have occurred and the holy Qur'an mentions both the prediction and the upheavals which took place in Jewish history. The prediction mentions that they will do corruption on earth twice and God will punish them for it.

Then the Qur'an enunciates a general law. That law is that every corruption is a prelude to defeat and affliction; and every revival and traditional reform renews God's mercy. Now consider the text of the verses:

وَقَضَيْنَا إِلَىٰ بَنِي إِسْرَائِيلَ فِي الْكِتَابِ لَتُفْسِدُنَّ فِي الْأَرْضِ مَرَّتَيْنِ وَلَتَعْلُنَّ عُلُوًّا كَبِيرًا فَإِذَا جَاءَ وَعْدُ أُولَاهُمَا بَعَثْنَا عَلَيْكُمْ عِبَادًا لَنَا أُولِي بَأْسٍ شَدِيدٍ فَجَاسُوا خِلَالَ الدِّيَارِ ۚ وَكَانَ وَعْدًا مَّفْعُولًا ثُمَّ رَدَدْنَا لَكُمُ الْكَرَّةَ عَلَيْهِمْ وَأَمْدَدْنَاكُمْ بِأَمْوَالٍ وَبَنِينَ وَجَعَلْنَاكُمْ أَكْثَرَ نَفِيرًا إِنْ أَحْسَنْتُمْ أَحْسَنْتُمْ لِأَنْفُسِكُمْ ۖ وَإِنْ أَسَأْتُمْ فَلَهَا ۚ فَإِذَا جَاءَ وَعْدُ الْآخِرَةِ لِيَسُوءُوا وُجُوهَكُمْ وَلِيَدْخُلُوا الْمَسْجِدَ كَمَا دَخَلُوهُ أَوَّلَ مَرَّةٍ وَلِيُتَبِّرُوا مَا عَلَوْا تَتْبِيرًا ۚ وَإِنْ عُدْتُمْ عَدُنَا ۚ وَجَعَلْنَا جَهَنَّمَ لِلْكَافِرِينَ حَصِيرًا

***We revealed to the Children of Israel in the Book: 'Twice you will cause corruption on the earth, and you will perpetrate great tyranny So when the first occasion of the two (prophecies) came, We aroused against you Our servants possessing great might, and they ransacked (your) habitations, and the promise was bound to be fulfilled. Then We gave you back the turn (to prevail) over them, and We aided you with children and wealth, and made you greater in***

***number(saying,) 'If you do good, you will do good to your (own) souls, and if you do evil, it will be (evil) for them.' So when the occasion for the other (prophecy) comes, they will make your faces wretched, and enter the Temple just as they entered it the first time, and destroy utterly whatever they come upon Maybe your Lord will have mercy on you, but if you revert, We (too) will revert, and We have made hell a prison for the faithless. (Qu'ran 17:4-8)***

In fact, these verses are an expansion of that same overall formula:

إِنَّ اللَّهَ لَا يُغَيِّرُ مَا بِقَوْمٍ حَتَّىٰ يُغَيِّرُوا مَا بِأَنْفُسِهِمْ

***Indeed, Allah does not change a people's lot, unless they change what is in their souls (Qu'ran 13: 11)***

## **What Is The Law?**

From the discussion so far, we have come to know that events in the universe are governed by a series of fixed and unalterable Divine laws. In other words, God has some fixed and unchanging ways of operating.

Now let us consider what is the law? What does “fixed way” mean? Is the Divine law and way similar to man-made laws, like social contracts, agreements and commitments? Or is it a special creation made by God? Or none of these two statements are correct about Divine law and practice? And in any case, is it possible for God not to create or design a law? Why is alteration in Divine law impossible?

In response we say: Law and practice is not something which has to be created separately and designed distinctly. Law is a general concept and a mental construct and in the external world does not exist with its universality and as Law. What exists in the external world is the causal order and the multiple states and levels of being. These then are made abstract in the mind, intellectualized, and represented as the concept or idea of law. Existence has levels and every level has a fixed and defined position. It is inconceivable that a cause should transfer its own specific position to another, or that an effect should transfer from its specific position. This reality is expressed in these terms: the universe has a law.

Hence, the law of creation is not an artificial virtual entity, since it is derived from the very nature of the existence of things, and for this reason there is no change or alteration possible in it.

## **Exceptions**

Are the laws of creation subject to exceptions? Are miracles and supra-natural acts a violation of the Divine law?

The answer in both cases is negative. Neither are the laws of creation subject to exceptions nor are miracles and supernatural acts an exception in the Divine law.

If there are alterations witnessed in the laws of creation then those alterations are actually the result of changes in conditions.

For it is but obvious that any law is applicable in specific conditions and with a change in conditions another law springs into operation, and that the original law always remains applicable in its own specific conditions. Hence, an apparent alteration in Divine law and practice is actually within the law and according to established practice, but not in the sense that an older law is abrogated by another newer one, rather, in the sense that the conditions of a law change and new conditions come in its place. And in those new conditions a new law operates. In the universe, there is nothing but the unalterable Divine laws, precedents, and rules. If dead are brought back to life miraculously, that has its own set of laws and rules. If a son is born, like Jesus son of Mary, without a father, it is not contrary to Divine law and practice in creation.

The fact is that man does not know all the laws of the universe, and when he sees something contrary to the laws and rules that he is familiar with, he feels that this “anomaly” is absolutely contrary to (Divine) law and practice and a violation of the principle of causality. Of course, in many cases what he considers as law is actually just the appearance of law but not the actual law. For instance, we think that the law of creation for life is that a living being always results from the marriage between a father and mother, but this is only an apparent law, not the real law. The birth of Jesus son of Mary has violated only the apparent law not the real law. That the laws of creation are unalterable is one matter, and whether the laws we have recognized are the actual laws or just the apparent laws is another matter altogether.

The meaning of a miracle is not that it is without a law or it is above the law. The materialists fell prone to the error that those natural laws of the universe discovered by science were the only real laws and hence miracles were a violation of the laws. We say that whatever has been explained by science is applicable only under specific and limited conditions but when a Prophet or saint wills to perform a super-natural act, conditions change, since in such a case a powerful and pure soul has found recourse to the Unlimited Power of the Almighty, and this changes all the conditions. In other words, a specific factor and new player has entered the scene. Obviously in new circumstances created by the presence of the new actor *i.e.* the powerful and pure will of a saint, another set of laws become operational.

In the case of the effects of supplications and charity in warding off afflictions and the like, the same process applies. There is a narration that the Holy Prophet (s) was asked that if every event that occurs in the universe is according to the predetermination and unalterable will of God what effect can a supplication or medicine have? He replied: supplication also is part of God's predetermination and plan<sup>8</sup>

In another tradition it is narrated that Imam Ali (a) was seated near a wall. He noticed that the wall was broken and it could possibly fall. He immediately stood up and distanced himself from there. Someone

objected that, “Do you flee from Divine decree?” Meaning that if it is decreed you should die it would make no difference whether you avoid the wall or not, death will catch up with you; and if it is decreed that you suffer no affliction, then again you will be protected. Hence, what does it mean to distance yourself from the wall which is about to fall? In response, Imam explained:

أَفِرُّ مِنْ قَضَاءِ اللَّهِ إِلَى قَدَرِ اللَّهِ عَزَّ وَجَلَّ

I flee from God's decree to His plan.<sup>9</sup>

The meaning of this statement is that every event that occurs in the universe is subject to God's decree and plan. If a person exposes himself to danger and suffers injuries, it is Divine law and decree, and if he escapes danger and is saved, that too is God's decree and plan. If a man enters an environment full of microbes and gets infected, it is (Divine) law, and if he takes drugs and gets cured from the infection, that too is (Divine) decree. Thus, if a person stands up from a beneath a wall about to fall, he has not done anything contrary to Divine decree and plan. In such circumstances the Divine law is that he is protected from death; and if continues sitting under a wall about to fall and perishes under the crushing wall, that too is a law of creation.

The holy Qur'an explains this reality in an interesting manner. In *surah al-Talaq* (65:2-3) we read:

وَمَنْ يَتَّقِ اللَّهَ يَجْعَلْ لَهُ مَخْرَجًا وَيَرْزُقْهُ مِنْ حَيْثُ لَا يَحْتَسِبُ ۗ وَمَنْ يَتَوَكَّلْ عَلَى اللَّهِ فَهُوَ حَسْبُهُ ۗ إِنَّ اللَّهَ بَالِغُ أَمْرِهِ ۗ قَدْ جَعَلَ اللَّهُ لِكُلِّ شَيْءٍ قَدْرًا

***Whoever is wary of Allah, He shall make for him a way out (of the adversities of the world and the Hereafter) and provide for him from whence he does not count upon. And whoever puts his trust in Allah, He will suffice him. Indeed, Allah carries through His commands. Certainly, Allah has ordained a measure (and extent) for everything. (Qur'an, 65:2-3)***

In this verse apparently the law which is above all laws and governs all of them is mentioned, and that is the law of God-consciousness and reliance.

From this verse, one can derive the fact that, with reliance, God's special grace is definite and confirmed; whosoever truly relies on God will certainly attract special Divine grace, and Divine support and grace which itself has a special process, is a Divine law which involves a series of causes and effects, reaching one's goals becomes inevitable. This is a law which overrides all other laws. At the same time, so as not to forget that God's act has an order and laws, the verse states “Certainly God has set a measure for everything,” and also states, “And whoever is wary of God, He shall make a way out for him.” That is to say, His acts are not without rules or means, even though those means may be of a nature which are not accessible and knowable but rather “from whence he does not reckon”.

## Divine Decree And The Issue Of Compulsion

If we keep in mind that Divine decree and predestination implies that the universe works in accordance with definite laws and precedents, the objection of compulsion in relation to Divine decree and predestination is also solved. In our book *Man and His Destiny*, we have discussed this matter in detail and those wanting details can refer to that book. Here we will only briefly touch on the topic:

This objection arises from the fact that a group believes the meaning of Divine decree is that God wills every event directly and outside the framework of the law of creation.

It has been attributed to Khayyam: [10](#)

True I drink wine, like every man of sense,

For I know Allah will not take offense;

Before time was, He know that I should drink,

And who am I to thwart His prescience?[11](#)

The composer of this poem thinks man's will regarding any act is pitted against and contrary to the Divine will and hence assumes if man decides not to drink wine, it is impossible, since God's will was that he ought to drink wine, and since the Divine will and knowledge is inviolable, man has no choice but to drink it.

This is a very weak argument and is based on sheer ignorance, and hence it is difficult to believe it was composed by Khayyam the philosopher. Every philosopher and pseudo-philosopher knows at least this much that God neither directly wills the wine-drinking of someone nor does any act in the universe happen outside the framework of the Divine order and law. In as much as no natural event can occur without its natural cause, so also voluntary human acts cannot occur without man's will and choice. God's law regarding human actions is that man should possess freewill, ability and choice; he should select either good or evil acts himself. Freedom to choose is an inseparable part of the human essence.

A man without freedom is impossible; that is, the supposition that there is a human without choice is just a supposition not a reality and implies in actuality a non-man. So, if there is no-man, then he is not dutybound; like the case of a cow or a donkey putting its head into a vessel of wine and drinking some of it. Thus, the Divine decree and predestination which has willed the human has also willed his freedom of choice. Hence, drinking wine by a man without his choice and freedom but just on Divine compulsion is contrary to eternal Divine knowledge and if man were to drink wine by compulsion that would mean God's knowledge is ignorance.

Experts today doubt whether Khayyam the poet is the same as Khayyam the philosopher. There is a

possibility, in fact they have proof, that there may have been two or more people and history has confused between them. Anyhow, whether it was two different people with the same name, or one person with two differing personalities, this argument that Divine knowledge and decree is the cause of committing sins such that it robs man of his responsibility and freedom of choice is false and in response it has been aptly put: [12](#)

To pose Divine knowledge the cause of sins;

Is to the wise ultimate ignorance.

## Summary

From the lengthy perhaps tiring discussion which we had in this section, the response to the argument of discrimination and differentiation can be summarized as below:

1. The world of creation is governed by a series of essential unalterable laws and order, according to which every being and every event has a specific position, level and state; no alteration or change is possible therein.
2. The corollary of the world having an order is the existence of multiple states and varying levels in being, and this is the basis of the appearance of differences and variations, and the appearance of defects and nonexistences.
3. Difference and variation is not created, rather it is the inherent necessity of created beings, and it is an erroneous assumption that someone presumes the Creator has discriminated between his creatures.
4. What would be contradictory and an invalidation of justice or wisdom is discrimination not differentiation and what exists in the universe is differentiation not discrimination.

[1.](#) See Endnote 32

[2.](#) Henry Wilberforce Clarke, trans, Ghazals of Hafez Shirazi in Persian with English Translation, Ghazal 105.

[3.](#) See Endnote 33

[4.](#) See Endnote 34

[5.](#) See Endnote 35

[6.](#) See Endnote 36

[7.](#) For details refer to the book Usul e Falsafeh wa rawishe Realism

[8.](#) Bihar al-Anwar, vol.5, p. 78

[9.](#) Saduq al-Tawhid, p. 369

[10.](#) See Endnote 37

[11.](#) Whinfield, quatrain 197

[12.](#) See Endnote 38