

Part 8: Qur'an is the Source of Teachings

The Holy Qur'an is the original source of the doctrine which requires man to believe in fate. At the same time it tells him that they are the masters of their destiny. The Qur'an alludes to people the plurality of destiny also.

"It is He who has created you from clay, and them has decreed a term for you to live. There is another fixed term with Him". (Surah al-An'am, 6:2)

The Qur'an does mention the Protected Tablet, the Eternal Book and the ordained destiny. It says: ***"There is nothing green or withered, but is recorded in a clear Book".*** (Surah al-Hadid, 57:22)

But it also says: ***"Every moment He brings about a new manifestation of His Power".*** (Surah al-Rahman, 55:29)

Someone asked the Holy Prophet (s): "Has Allah finished what we are busy with, or are we doing something new". The Prophet (s) said: "He has finished and He has not". (Commentary on Usul al-Kafi by Mulla Sadra).

Invariability In Nature

We have said that the religious leaders have mentioned two kinds of destiny. We have also said that the destiny of the heavenly abstracts, unlike that of the things existing in nature, is always irrevocable. Let us now add that in nature also irrevocable destiny exists. In other words there are events which must take place in a fixed manner. For example in nature everything in existence is preceded by its non-existence. Everything must emanate from some other existing thing. These are examples of an irrevocable destiny. Every natural thing must perish, unless it is converted into an immaterial being. This is another example of an irrevocable destiny. All the things that exist in this world reach a stage at which they cannot change their course. Either they should follow the prescribed course or must vanish.

For example, through the union of a male-sperm with a female ovum one single cell is formed. It lays down the foundation of the hereditary characteristics and temperament of the coming child. These

hereditary traits are bound to affect his future destiny. Had the union of this particular sperm taken place with the ovum of some other female, a different child with a different temperament and some different characteristics would have been formed. But once an embryo has been formed, it is not possible to change its characteristics. At this stage the destiny has become definite and irrevocable at later stages. That is why, in the language of religion mother's womb has been called a "table of fate and destiny".

Unchangeable Systems

The laws and the systems governing the world are also unchangeable. The things existing in nature are constantly changing, but the natural systems governing them are firm. They do not undergo a change. The things develop and evolve. They take various courses. They sometimes attain almost perfection and sometimes remain stagnant. Sometimes they march speedily and sometimes slowly. But the natural systems neither change nor develop. The Qur'an calls these unchangeable systems the divine practice.

"The same was the way of Allah in respect of those who passed away earlier. And you will not find the way of Allah undergoing a change". (Surah al-Ahzab, 33:63)

It is an unchangeable divine practice that the final success pertains to the pious, and the earth belongs to the righteous.

Allah in the Holy Qur'an says: ***"Indeed We have written in the Psalms, after the Torah had been given: The righteous among My slaves shall inherit the earth". (Surah al-Anbiya, 21:105)***

"The earth belongs to Allah. He gives it to whom He pleases. Happy shall be the end of the pious". (Surah al-A'raf, 7:128)

It is an unchangeable divine practice that Allah does not change the general condition of a people unless and until they themselves make an effort to change it.

"Allah never changes the condition of a nation unless it (first) changes what is in its heart". (Surah al-Ra'd, 13:11)

It is an unchangeable divine practice that a people always gets that form of government which it deserves in accordance with its spiritual, moral and intellectual conditions.

"Thus we make the wrong-doers friends of each other because of their own doings". (Surah al-An'am, 6:129)

It is an unchangeable divine practice that easy-going and luxuriously living licentious people are ruined.

"When We intend to destroy a township, We first warn those of its people who live an easy life. If they persist in their wickedness there, they become liable to punishment. Then We totally annihilate them". (Surah al-Isra, 17:16)

It is an unchangeable divine practice that the people having faith and doing right deeds are always successful in the struggle for survival and they come to power in the world.

“Allah has promised those of you who believe and do good deeds that He will surely give them power on the earth as He gave to those who were before them to succeed, and that He will surely establish for them their religion which He has approved for them. He shall give them peace and security after a period of uneasiness”. (Surah al-Nur, 24:55)

It is an unchangeable divine practice that injustice and tyranny lead to ruin and devastation.

“We destroyed the people of all those towns because they were unjust, and we appointed a fixed time for their destruction”. (Surah al-Kahf, 18:59)

The Holy Prophet (s) has said: “A regime can continue with unbelief, but not with tyranny”.

Other Theories

According to the explanation given by us, the fate and destiny are divided into revocable and irrevocable in accordance with the special circumstances of the things concerned. A thing which has more than one possibility and is affected by various causes in various ways, will have several possible destinies. Their number will depend upon the number of the relevant causes. The destiny of a thing which is affected by more than one course is regarded as revocable. In contrast the destiny of a thing having not more than one possibility and having only one possible course will be irrevocable. In other words, the question of revocability and irrevocability is considered from the angle of capability, that is whether a thing is capable of having only one destiny or more than one. That is why the destiny of the heavenly abstracts which lack the potentiality of more than one future and similarly that of certain things existing in nature which do not have more than one phenomena capable of having more than one future is revocable. That sums up the position which regard to revocable and irrevocable destiny.

This question has been interpreted differently also. Some scholars hold that the destiny of the realities which cannot be changed by man is irrevocable, and the destiny of the realities which can be changed by him is revocable. For example, it is not possible for man, at least at present, to bring about any change in the atmospheric conditions with regard to summer, winter, rain, snow, wind etc. or to change the general conditions of the earth with regard to earthquakes, storms, floods etc. These are the happenings which take place whether man wants them or not. Hence the destiny in respect of such things is irrevocable. As for the social conditions, they can be changed and reformed. The divinely ordained destiny in their case is revocable.

This interpretation is incorrect, for there is no reason why we should presume that human power and potentialities are the basis of the revocability or irrevocability of destiny. Moreover, the language of the religious reports and hadiths also does not support this interpretation.

Some other scholars judge the revocability and irrevocability of a destiny by the realization and the non-realization of its prerequisite conditions. We have already said that certain things have several possibilities and are associated with a number of causes. It depends on the working of these causes, what future shape they take. Every cause has a potential capacity of providing a particular destiny and every destiny depends on the realization of a particular cause. It is obvious that certain causes along with their prerequisite conditions are realized, while others are not. It is also obvious that the reason why certain causes are realized is that some other causes which give effect to them exist. Other causes are not realized because the causes which could give effect to them did not exist. The same applies to the third and the fourth degree of the causes and so on.

In short, the things, the causes of which come into existence, are irrevocably destined whereas the things the causes of which do not come into existence are revocably destined.

Suppose a man according to his physical health expects to live for 150 years provided he looks after his health. If he does not, his expectation of the life will be reduced to one half of that period. Now suppose that man does not look after his health and dies at the age of 75. It will be right to say that this man was destined to have two ages, and both of them were conditional. The condition of only one of them was fulfilled.

The destiny, the condition of which has been fulfilled is irrevocable and that the condition of which has not been fulfilled is revocable.

The two destinies in this case may be compared to two rules of law applicable to a person under different circumstances. For example, the law says if an accused makes a confession of his crime, he will be sentenced to a certain term of imprisonment. But if he does not make a confession and there is no other evidence against him, he will be acquitted. Now if the accused makes a confession, he will definitely receive the punishment. That rule of law which says that the accused will be punished if he makes a confession has become irrevocable in respect of this particular man, and the other rule which says that the accused will be acquitted if he does not make a confession provided there is no other evidence against him, could not become so.

According to this explanation irrevocability in this case means the practical application of a provision of law. Otherwise the law itself as a general rule is firm and fixed in all cases.

This world is governed by a series of laws which are fixed and unfailing. As a general rule, they are irrevocable and unexceptionable. For example, there is a definite law that the persons having a certain physical standard should live upto 150 years of age provided they take care of their health. It is also a definite law that if such persons do not take care of their life will be reduced to one half. These laws are the manifestations of divine practice. They form the lines according to which a destiny is appointed. Therefore it may be said that an irrevocable destiny is that law or universal practice the conditions of the applicability of which are not fulfilled.

This interpretation appears to be plausible in itself, and some religious passages may also be found to be alluding to it. But the terms of a revocable destiny and an irrevocable destiny as used in hadiths cannot be taken to have this sense. There can be no doubt that a revocable destiny means a changeable destiny. But, in the cases where the conditions of the applicability of a general law materialize, the possibility of a change does not still totally disappear. These cases could certainly take a different turn, and hence they do not lose their aspect of revocability.

According to another interpretation an irrevocable destiny is that which has been made binding by Allah, and which is indispensable. A revocable destiny is that in relation to which the Will of Allah is neutral or indifferent, or at least a question of inevitability is not involved in it. According to this view the case of destiny is similar to that of legal matters. A law giver does not declare every action to be imperative. Some actions are made obligatory. Some other remain permissible. Still some others may be declared desirable or a abominable.

The same applies to factual matters also. An irrevocable destiny involves obligation, whereas a revocable one does not.

This interpretation is most unscientific. It actually amounts to the negation of fate and destiny, for it is impossible that the Will of Allah be neutral or indifferent to any event, or at least may not make it inevitable.

Similarly, it is also impossible that an event may not be subject to the law of causation or in the case of being subject to it there may be no question of compulsion and obligation in respect of it.

It is not a sound analogy to compare factual realities to conventional matters.

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