

# You and God

## A. Human Efforts and Divine Decree

Both Muslims and non-Muslims who readily use the belief in predestination and divine decree to explain the present backwardness of some Muslim societies often misunderstand the issue of divine decree vis-à-vis the seeking of livelihood. Therefore, the role played by humans and God in this issue needs to be clearly understood.

When it comes to human actions, Muslims believe that while the power to act is given to us by God, the ultimate decision whether to act or not is our own—this is why we are accountable for our deeds and will be questioned for them on the Day of Judgment.

The story, however, is completely different when we talk about those aspects of our Lives that are predetermined by God (taqdir). There are only a few aspects of our lives (like life, death and sustenance) which can be listed under the category of predestination –taqdir.

When it comes to taqdir, to a certain extent, we believe that while human beings provide the preliminaries, the result is in the hands of God. Farmers, for example, can cultivate the land, sow the seed, irrigate the plants, weed the grass and always remain on alert. Yet, they cannot be sure of getting the harvest. A drought, cyclone, fire or lightening may destroy the crop.

The issue of livelihood is one of the taqdir's of God. Therefore, we believe that seeking of livelihood is within the sphere of our capabilities but the result is not within our powers. That is the meaning of the verse:

***“Allah expands the sustenance for whomsoever He desires and straitens it for whomsoever He desires...”*** (13:26)

However, we as humans have no knowledge of the nature and the quantity of the sustenance that God has decreed for us; therefore, we are expected to work as hard as we can and then pray to Allah to bless our efforts and not let our toils go fruitless.<sup>1</sup>

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The Quran gives an interesting parable of two men: one who exclusively relied on his own hard work and denied the Divine role in his wealth, while the other was cognizant of God's role:

***"For one of them We made two gardens of grape vines, and We surrounded them both with palms and in the midst of them, We made cornfields.***

***Both these gardens yielded their fruits, and failed not at all, and We caused a river to gush forth in their midst. Moreover, he possessed much wealth.***

***So he said (one day) to his companion, while he disputed with him:***

***"I have greater wealth than you, and am mightier in followers."***

***And he entered his garden while he was unjust to himself. He said:***

***"I do not think that this will ever perish; and I do not think the hour [of judgment] will come. And even if I am [resurrected and] returned to my Lord, I will most certainly find a returning place better than this."***

***His companion said to him, while disputing with him:***

***"Do you disbelieve in Him who created you from dust, then from a small seed, and then He made you a perfect man?"***

***"As for me, He, Allah, is my Lord, and I do not associate anyone with my Lord.***

***"And when you entered your garden, why didn't you say: 'It is as Allah has pleased (masha'Allah); there is no power except with Allah?'"***

***"If you consider me to be inferior to you in wealth and children, then maybe my Lord will give me what is better than your garden, and send on it a thunderbolt from heaven so that it shall become even ground without plant, or its water would sink down into the ground so that you are unable to find it."***

***And [lo] his wealth was destroyed: so he began to wring his hands for what he had spent on it, while it lay, having fallen down upon its roots and he said, "Ah me! I wish that had not associated anyone with my Lord."***

***However, he had no host to help him besides Allah, nor could he defend himself.***

***The power and authority belongs only to Allah, the True One: He is the best reward –giver and the best punisher." (18:32–44)***

There are many examples of millionaires who lost everything in spite of their expertise and hard work – this proves that a person should not rely solely on his or her own knowledge and efforts that he or she

should trust in the power of the Almighty, and pray for His grace and guidance.

## **B. Seek from Lawful Means**

"The Trustworthy Angel has informed me," said the Prophet Muhammad (s.a.w), "that no soul shall die before the completion of its sustenance.<sup>2</sup> Therefore, fear Allah and do your best in seeking [of the sustenance].

"But delay in any portion of your sustenance should not push you to seek it by disobeying Allah (i.e... By unlawful means) because Allah, the Blessed and the High, has distributed the sustenance among his creatures by lawful means and did not divide it through unlawful means.

"One who fears Allah and has forbearance, Allah will give him the sustenance from the lawful [means]; and one who transgresses the limits of propriety, makes haste and seeks it from unlawful means, his lawful sustenance will be decreased and he will be held accountable for it on the day of resurrection ."<sup>3</sup>

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Imam as-Sadiq (a.s) said: "The sustenance is divided into two types:

- One type of sustenance [from Allah] will reach its owner even if he does not seek it.
- Second type of sustenance is dependent upon his seeking it.

"The first type of sustenance will reach to the person in any case even if he does not work for it. As for the second type of sustenance that has been decreed for him conditional upon his work, he has to seek it from the proper means that are the means made lawful by Allah. If he seeks it through illegitimate (haram) means and finds it, then he will be questioned about it."<sup>4</sup>

Once Imam 'Ali (a.s) went to a mosque. He saw a man standing by the door and asked him to look after his horse. When the Imam came out of the mosque, he had two dirhams in his hand that he wanted to give to that man as appreciation for looking after his horse. However, the man was nowhere to be seen.

When Imam 'Ali went over to his horse, he saw that the rein was missing. He found one of his companions and gave him two dirhams to buy another rein for his horse. The companion went to the market place; he saw a man standing by the road and selling a rein. The Imam's companion bought it for two dirhams. When he brought it back to the Imam, the Imam recognized it to be his own rein that had been stolen by that person.

Imam 'Ali had intended to give two dirhams to the person whom he had asked to look after the horse; but the impatience of the 'guard' turned him into a thief who in the end got nothing more than the same two dirhams. His greed and anxiety did not increase his wages at all, he got the same but through haram means!

## C. Tawakkul and Du'a

So the question of tawakkul, relying upon Allah, comes up: Are we not supposed to rely on Him? Does not Allah say?

***"And put thy trust in God and sufficient is God as dispenser of the affairs."?*** (4:81)

In the light of what was said above, the concept of tawakkul should also be clear. You have to work hard and then trust in Allah to make your efforts fruitful.

Tawakkul is not an excuse for idleness or laziness. The Prophet Muhammad (s.a.w) said:

"Tawakkul means that you should bind the camel with a rope and then say that you have trust in God that He will protect your camel. You should not have confidence in the rope alone, because many a camel has been stolen with the rope. And, likewise, you should not neglect the rope, because binding with rope is a part of tawakkul."

Allah also says,

***"And that man shall have nothing but whatever he strives for."*** (53:39)

## Tawakkul and Insurance

Some Muslims refuse to take out insurance because they think that it is contrary to the concept of tawakkul. Taking out insurance for one's property or even one's life is not a violation of tawakkul; rather it is like binding the camel with a rope.

The Shi'i jurists have allowed insurance of all kinds (car, property, health, life or liability). In their search for a similar kind of transaction in classical legal terms of Islam, the jurists have correctly identified it as "*al-hiba al-mashruta or al-hiba al-mu'awwada* – conditional gift or recompensible gift".

This works as follows: The insured gives the premium to the insurer as a "gift" with a condition that if this or that happens to his property or himself, then the insurer will pay for the replacement or service or lump-sum amount to the insured or his heir.[5](#)

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*Example of how, many times, our efforts are required for sustenance:*

Maryam's birth: When Maryam was born, her mother gave her up for the service of the synagogue. Prophet Zakariyya became her custodian. The Qur'an describes God's favor upon her as follows:

***"Whenever Zakariyya entered the sanctuary to (see) Maryam, he found with her food. He said, 'O Maryam! From where did this come to you?' She said, 'It is from Allah. Surely, Allah gives to***

***whom He pleases without measure.” (3:37)***

Then God selected her for the miraculous birth of 'Isa.

***“And the pains (of childbirth) compelled her to take herself to the trunk of a palm tree... Then (the child) called out to her from beneath her: ‘Grieve not, surely your Lord has made a stream to flow beneath you; and shake towards you the trunk of the palm tree, it will drop on you fresh ripe dates...”*** (19:23–25)

When she was under the care of Zakariyyah , God helped her but, look how when she was alone and in pain of childbirth, she was told to shake the trunk of the palm tree so that she could get the ripe dates! Why? Perhaps God wanted to show that even His blessings are often contingent to efforts on our part.

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One day, Imam 'Ali (a.s) passed by a group sitting in the corner of a mosque. He asked, "Who are you?" They said, "We are *mutawakkilun* (i.e., those who do tawakkul)."

Imam: "No, you are *muta-akila* (i.e., dependents on others); and if you are *mutawakkilun* then where this tawakkul has taken you?"

They said, "We eat when we get food, and we have patience when we do not get it."

The Imam said, "This is what the dogs do in our area."

They asked, "What should we do?"

The Imam, "Do like what we do."

They said, "And what is that?"

Imam 'Ali replied, "When we get, we give to others; and when we do not get, even then we thank Allah."[6](#) That is, we try our best and share the blessings of Allah with others; if we do not succeed in our work, then also we are thankful to Allah for the chance of trying.

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Even our prayers (du'as) teach us that we should actively seek sustenance, and not just sit idle praying for sustenance.

There is a balance between hard work and prayer. See for example the du'a after the daily night ('isha) prayer:

*“O' Allah, I have no knowledge of the place of my sustenance.*

*I, however, seek for it on basis of the ideas that come to my mind; I travel in search of my sustenance in*

*various cities. My situation in this is like that of a perplexed person:*

*I do not know whether it is in the plain land or on the mountain: on this earth or in the skies; on the land or in the sea; neither do I know in whose hand [You have placed my sustenance] nor in which direction.*

*However, I surely know that the knowledge of my sustenance is with You, its sources are in Your hands, and You are the one who distributes it with Your grace and brings it about by Your mercy.*

*So O' Allah, send Your blessings on Muhammad and his family.*

*Moreover, make, O my Lord, my sustenance plentiful, its seeking easy, and its source near.*

*And do not try me by [my] seeking what You have not decreed for me as a sustenance; for You do not need to punish me whereas I am in need of Your mercy.*

*Therefore, send Your blessings on Muhammad and his family; and give Your servant generously with Your grace. You, indeed, are Master of Great Grace.”*

1. See S.Saeed Akhtar Rizvi, Justice of God. chapter 5.

2. According to Peter Roset, co-author of World Hunger, 12 Myths, enough food is available to provide at least 4.3 pounds of food per person a day worldwide.

The true source of hunger is not scarcity of food, but government policies. In the Third World, the policies of the International Monetary Fund have increased hunger by wiping out subsidies on basic food items. Hunger is quite simply the product of simple human decisions.

As Imam 'Ali once said:

“Whenever a destitute remains hungry it is because some rich person has denied (him his share). Allah, the Sublime, will question them about it.”

(Nahju 'l Balagha, saying no. 328.)

3. Al-Usul. vol. 2. p. 74;al-Furu', vol. 5, p. 80.

4. Al-Mufid, Al-Muqni'ah. p.586–587.

5. Al-Khui. Minhaju 's-Salihiyn, vol. 2. p. 389.

6. An-Nuri ,Mustadraku 'l-Wasa'il, vol . II (Qum: Al al-Bayt, 1408 AH) p. 220.

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