Al-Islam.org
Ahlul Bayt Digital Islamic Library Project
Published on *Al-Islam.org* (https://www.al-islam.org)

11. Modification in the Creation

Synopsis: Eternal divine knowledge does not contradict divine omnipotence; the Jewish position about God's omnipotence; the place of modification (*bada'*) in the Shi'ite doctrine; the determination of God's decree (*qada*); the benefit in the belief in modification; the real meaning of *bada'* in the Shi'ite doctrine; Sunni traditions that corroborate *bada'*; disclosures by the infallible Imams of future events.

In chapter 10 we discussed the question of abrogation (*naskh*) of ordinances, and this was in the realm of matters related to the Shari'a. We should now tum our attention to the question of *bada'*, which is a sort of naskh, but in the realm of the matters connected with creation (*takwin*). This subject is important because the actual meaning of *bada'* is unknown to many Muslim scholars, and hence, they have attributed to the Shi'ites that of which they are innocent. Moreover, they have not been able to comprehend the subject well and have not been fair in their critique. If only they had proceeded with caution or had suspended judgment when they did not know the subject.[1]

To preserve complete integrity in citations and to apply caution in passing a judgment on a subject under investigation is a normal expectation in a work of scholarship. Moreover, in the matter of religion, one needs to observe the requirements of piety. In view of all this, it is necessary to make a few remarks to clarify the meaning of *bada'*, even though it is not directly relevant to an introduction to the exegesis of the Qur'an.

To begin our discussion, it is appropriate to state that there is no doubt that the universe in its entirety is under God's sovereignty and His omnipotence. Moreover, the existence of any of the possible things is dependent upon the will of God, the Exalted. Thus, if God wills, He brings that thing into existence, and if He does not will, He does not create it.

Furthermore, there is no doubt that God's knowledge encompasses everything since eternity, and that all things in their entirety possess a cognizant apportionment in the eternal knowledge of God. This apportionment is sometimes designated as God's predetermination (taqdfr), and at other times as God's decree (qada'). However, God's predetermination and His knowledge about things since time eternal neither interferes with nor contradicts His omnipotence over them upon their creation. The reason is that

the possible continues to be dependent for its existence upon its attachment to the will of God, and this is designated as free will or volition. Consequently, if God's will attaches to it, it comes into existence; otherwise, not. Divine knowledge is related to things as they are, as a result of being conditional on divine will, for the uncovering of a thing does not add anything to its existence. Thus, if existence is conditional upon the will of God, the Exalted, the knowledge related to that thing is in accordance with this state, or else the knowledge would not be in any respect a knowledge about that thing revealing for Him its reality. Accordingly, the meaning of God's predetermination of things and of His decree regarding them is as follows: All [possible] things are apportioned in divine knowledge from eternity according to what they would be from the point of view that their existence is conditional upon divine will being attached to them, depending upon what is beneficial and what is the cause of corruption for them, which vary in accordance with varying conditions [in which things would come into being], but which are encompassed by divine knowledge.

The Jewish Position Regarding God's Omnipotence

The Jews maintain that since things have been recorded by the pen of destiny and decrees since eternity, it would be impossible for divine will to encompass anything else. It is for this reason that they say that God's hands are shackled in seizing, unfolding, taking, and giving, because the pen of destiny has fixed these already and there is no possibility of changing them.2 It is astonishing that they have persisted in dispossessing God of omnipotence, but have not maintained such a view of human beings, in spite of the fact that the essential prerequisite in maintaining such a belief is one and the same, since eternal knowledge is related to the divine sanctions as well as to human actions.

The Place of Modification (bada) in the Sh 'ite Doctrine

The *bada'* (modification) that the Imamite Shi'ites speak about occurs only in the alterable decree (*al-qada 'ghayr al-mahtum*). As for the unalterable decree, there does not occur in it any alteration, but divine will shall inevitably be attached to the things that are related to divine decrees. To explain this, we shall examine the three kinds of divine decree.

First, we have the divine decree about which God informed none of His creatures, and the guarded knowledge He has kept exclusively to Himself. Certainly, *bada'* does not occur in this kind of decree. Rather, according to the traditions related on the authority of the Imams, badii' originates from this knowledge.

Inhis book *al-'Uyun*, al-Shaykh al-Saduq relates a tradition he traces back to alHasan b. Muhammad al-Nawfali, who heard the Imam al-Rida say to Sulayman al Marzawi:

It has been related by my father that he heard the Imam al-Sadiq say: "God possesses two kinds of knowledge: one is the guarded, hidden knowledge which no one knows except Him. From that knowledge comes *al-bada'*. The other is the kind which He has taught His angels and His prophets. The

learned ones among the Family of your Prophet [i.e., the Imams] know it . . ."[3]

In *Basa'ir al-Darajat*, al-Shaykh Muhammad b. al-Hasan al-Saffar relates a tradition he traces back to Abu Basir, who heard the Imam al-Sadiq say:

God possesses two kinds of knowledge. [First], knowledge that is guarded, hidden, about which no one except Him knows. From this knowledge originates *al-bada* and [second], from knowledge that He has taught to His angels, messengers, and prophets, and which we know.[4]

Second, we have the divine decree regarding which God informed His Prophet and His angels that it would definitely come to pass. Undoubtedly, *al-bada'* does not occur in this kind, either. The difference between this and the first kind is that *albada'* does not originate in this knowledge.

The Imam al-Rida told Sulayman al-Marwazi, in the abovementioned tradition related by al-Sadiq:

'Ali (peace be upon him) used to say: "Knowledge is of two kinds. [First], knowledge that God taught His angels and His prophets, and what He taught His angels and His prophets will occur. He shall not belie Himself or His angels or His prophets. And [second], knowledge that [is] hidden with Him, of which He informed none of His creatures. He shall cause to pass that of it which He will, and hold back that which He will, and effaces of it what He will, and confirm what He will."[5]

Al-'Ayyashi relates from al-Fudayl, who heard the Imam al-Baqir say:

Some occurrences are inevitable, bound to happen definitely, and others are held back with God, of which He shall send forward what He will, and efface what He will, and confirm what He will. No one knows about them-that is, the occurrences held back by God. As for those [the knowledge of which] comes with the prophets, they are bound to happen, for God does not give lie to Himself, nor to His prophet or His angels.[6]

Third, there is the divine decree (which, God has informed His Prophet and His angels, shall come to pass) that occurs in the external. This is conditional on God's will not becoming attached to a different thing. This is the type in which *al-badli'* occurs:

***God effaces whatever He will, and establishes whatever He will; and with Him is the Essence of the Book* (*Qur'an 13:39*). *To God belongs the Command before and after* [*the event*] (*Qur'an 30:4*).**

A number of traditions support this interpretation about the *bada'*, of which the following are examples.

1. In the *Tafsir* of 'Ali b. Ibrahim, a tradition is related on the authority of 'Abd Allah b. Muskan, who reports from the Imam al-Sadiq:

He [Ibn Muskan] said: "On the Night of Determination (*laylat al-qadar*) the angels, the Spirit, and the angels who record [human deeds] descend to the heaven of the earth. Then they will write what will

occur through the divine decree during that year. Thus, if God wills to hasten or delay something, or decrease something, He commands the angel to efface whatever He will, and, then, establish [in its place] what He will." I asked him, "Is everything recorded with God in a book?" He said, "Yes." Then I asked, "What thing will be there to occur after it?" He replied, "Glory be to God! Then God, the Blessed and Exalted, will create whatever He will."[7]

2. In the same Tafsir, a tradition is quoted on the authority of 'Abd Allah b. Muskan, who heard it from the Imams al-Baqir, al-Sadiq, and al-Kazim, in connection with the explanation of God's saying, ***"Therein every wise bidding is determined as a bidding from Us"*** (***Qur'an 44:4***):

This means that God predetermines everything whether truthful or false, and all that will happen that year, and it is for Him to will it or change it. He hastens what He will and delays what He will in matters connected with preordained time of death, sustenance, calamities, accidents, and illnesses, increasing them or decreasing them as He will....[8]

3. Al-Tabarsi, in his *Kitab al-Ihtijaj*, relates a tradition on the authority of the Commander of the Faithful, 'Ali, who said:

But for one verse in the Qur'an, I would have related to you all that has occurred, is occurring, and is bound to occur until the Day of Judgment. And that verse is this: "***God effaces . . .***" [***Qur'an 13:39***].[9]

A similar tradition has been related by al-Saduq in his *Amali and al-Tawhid*, with a chain of transmission going back to al-Abagh b. Nubata, who reported from 'Ali b. Abi Talib.

4. The Tafsir of al-'Ayyashi cites a tradition reported by Zurara, who reported on the authority of the Imam al-Baqir:

He [Zurara] said, "'Ali b. al-Husayn [the fourth Imam] used to say, 'But for one verse in the Book of God, I would have informed you about what was going to happen until the Day of Judgment.' I asked him, "Which verse is that?" He replied, "God's saying, 'God effaces . . ."[10]

5. [In] *Qurb al-Isnad* [al-Hiyari] relates a tradition from al-Bizanti on the authority of the Imam al-Rida, who, tracing the tradition through all the Imams to the Imam 'Ali, said, "By God! But for a verse in the Book of God, we would have informed you about all that was going to happen until the coming of the Hour. This verse is, 'God effaces . . ."[11]

There are numerous other traditions that prove the occurrence of *al-bada'* in the conditional decree (*al-qada' al-mawquf*). To summarize what we have said: It is impossible for *al-bada'* to occur in the unalterable decree, which is referred to as the Preserved Tablet, or the Essence of the Book, or the Guarded Knowledge with God. How can one even imagine modification taking place in it? Indeed, God, the Exalted, is knowledgeable about things from eternity; nothing escapes from His knowledge, even an atom's weight, in the earth or in the heaven.

Al-Saduq, in his book *Ikmal al-Din*, relates a tradition he traces back to Abu Basir and Sama'a, who heard it from the Imam al-Sadiq. He [al-Sadiq] said, "Anyone who asserts that for God, the Almighty, the Glorified, something appeared which He did not know yesterday, then, keep away from him."[12]

Al-'Ayyasi relates from Ibn Sinan, who heard al-Sadiq say:

Certainly, God hastens what He will and delays what He will. He effaces whatever He will and establishes whatever He will. With Him is the Essence of the Book. [And he added]: Any thing He desires, that thing is in His knowledge before He designs it. There is not a thing that appears for Him [i.e., in which *bada'* occurs] except that it was in His knowledge. Nothing appears for Him [i.e., in which *bada* 'occurs] about which He was ignorant.[13]

The same source reports from 'Amma b. Musa, who reported from al-Sadiq: He [al-Sadiq] was asked about God's saying, ***"God effaces what He will"*** **[*Qur'an 13:39*].**

He said: "That Book [i.e., the Essence of the Book mentioned in the verse] is the one God effaces and establishes as He will. It is from this that He turns down the supplication regarding the decree. The supplication which can stay the decree is predetermined, but when it reaches the Essence of the Book, the supplication has no effect upon anything in it." [14]

In his book al-Ghayba, al-Shaykh al-TiisI relates a tradition from al-Bizanti on the authority of the Imam al-Riqa, who traces it back to 'AII b. AbI Talib, through all the other Imams. He [al-Riqa] said:

How can we discuss [future events] in spite of what the verse "God effaces what He will" says? As for the one who says that God does not know a thing until after it comes into existence, then such a person has certainly adopted disbelief and has departed from the belief in divine oneness (*tawhid*).[15]

The traditions narrated on the authority of the Imams regarding the subject that God possessed knowledge before He created the creation are far more numerous to be recounted here. All the Imamite Shi'ites are in agreement on this, in accordance with the Book of God and the Sunna of His Prophet, and in accordance with what is required in a judgment based on sound innate reasoning.

The Benefit of Belief in al-Bada'

Al-Bada' could obtain only in the conditional decree, designated as the Tablet of Effacement and Confirmation (*lawla al-mahw wa al-ithbat*). Adopting the view that *bada'* is possible in it does not necessitate ascribing ignorance to God, nor is there anything in this view that is incompatible with God's greatness and His glory.

The reason is that belief in *bada* 'is a clear acknowledgment that the creation and survival of the universe are under the sovereignty of God and His omnipotence, and that the will of God is effective over things from eternity to infinity. In fact, belief in *bada'* emphasizes the distinction between divine

knowledge and the knowledge of the creatures. The latter, even if it is the knowledge possessed by the prophets and apostles, does not encompass what is covered by divine knowledge. Although some of them have knowledge--by means of God's endowing them with it--about all aspects of possible things, their knowledge does not encompass the knowledge that God kept exclusively to Himself. Thus, they do not know whether God wills a thing to exist, or does not will it, except when He informs them about it in a definite way.

Furthermore, belief in badii 'causes a human being to concentrate on God and ask Him to listen to his prayer and fulfill his needs, and to aid him in obedience to Him and keep him away from disobedience. This is because rejection of *bada'* in the divine decree and upholding the view that what the Pen of Destiny has already written is unalterable, without exception, would cause a person who holds this belief to lose hope in the acceptance of his prayer. For, if what a person is asking from God has already been decreed by the Pen of Destiny, then, indeed, it is bound to happen, and there is no need for prayer and supplication; and if the Pen has decreed something else, then it would never happen and it would be useless for him to supplicate and to implore God for it to happen. When a person loses the hope of being granted his request, he would give up supplicating his Creator since there is no use in doing so. The same applies to all the devotions and charitable works that are reported, on the authority of the Imams, to be effective in increasing the lifetime, the sustenance, and other things that a person might desire.

This, then, is why numerous traditions narrated on the authority of the Imams lay great stress on the significance of *bada'* in the divine decree.

Al-Saduq relates a tradition in his *al-Tawhid* that he traces back to Zurara, who received it from one of the two Imams, al-Baqir or al-Sadiq: "God has not been worshiped with a thing [more fervently than with] *bada'*."[16] In another tradition he relates that Hisham b. Salim heard the Imam al-Sadiq say: "Nothing has caused God to be seen as powerful more clearly than a thing like *al-bada'*."[17]

In still another tradition, al-Kulayni relates, from Muhammad b. Muslim, that the Imam al-Sadiq said:

God did not send a prophet until He required three characteristics in him: the affirmation of servanthood [in relation to God], the rejection of partners [for God], and the acknowledgment that God hastens what He will and delays what He will. [18]

The reason behind attaching this significance to *al-bada* 'is that the rejection of it has the same effect as the view that maintains that God does not have the power to change what has been decreed by the Pen of Destiny-Exalted is God above that. This is because both views would cause a person to lose faith in his supplications being answered by God, and this would [in turn] lead him to refrain from addressing his requests to God.

The Real Meaning of al-Bada' in the Shi'ite Doctrine

To recapitulate, the meaning of *al-bada'*, as maintained by the Imamite Shi'ites, is derived from *ibda'* (bringing about)–that is, *izhar* (disclosing, manifesting a reality). The term *bada'* is applied to the act of *izhar* on the basis of the revelation and the resemblance between the two acts. It has been used in this sense in some of the Sunni traditions.

Al-Bukhari, for example, relates a tradition, from Abu 'Amra, that Abu Hurayra told him that he heard the Prophet say: "There were three among the Children of Israel: a leper, a blind person, and a bald person. God resolved (*bada lil-Lah*) to test them. Thus, He sent them an angel who came to the leper. . . ."[19]

A similar notion occurs in many Qur'anic passages:

***Now God has lightened it for you, knowing that there is weakness in you* (*Qur'an 8:66*).**

***Afterward, We raised them up again, that We might know which of the two parties would better calculate the time they tarried* (*Qur'an 18:12*).**

***That He might try you* [*to see*] *which of you is fairest in works* (*Qur'an 77:2*).**

There are numerous traditions, recorded in Sunni sources, that maintain that charitable deeds and supplication can change the divine decree (*qada'*).[20]

As for future events foretold in the traditions related on the authority of the infallible Imams, it is relevant to point out that whenever an Imam discloses something that is bound to happen, and that is not conditional upon anything, then, such infor mation falls under the category of an unalterable decree (which, as discussed previ ously in this chapter, is the second type of decree–namely, the unalterable one [*alqada' al-mahtum*]. This is the type in which *bada'* does not occur because God does not give the lie to Himself or to His Prophet. However, when an Imam discloses something which is conditional on the divine will not attaching itself to something else, and when He corroborates it with an attached or unattached context, such a disclosure points to a conditional decree, which is subject to *bada'*. The information related by the infallible Imams is true even when the *bada'* occurs in it and the divine will becomes attached to another thing. The reason is that the disclosed event is conditional upon its not being contrary to the divine will.

Al-'Ayyashi has related a tradition on the authority of 'Amr b. al-Humq (Himq), who said:

I went to visit the Commander of the Faithful ['Ali] when he was struck [with a sword] on his head. At that time he told me, "O 'Amr, I will be leaving you all." Then he added, "In the year seventy (689 C.E.), there will descend a calamity . . . ." I said, "May my father and mother be sacrifice for you! Until the year seventy there will be a calamity. Would there be comfort after the year seventy" He replied, "Yes, O 'Amr! Indeed, after calamity there is comfort." And then he went on to mention the verse "God effaces . . ."

1. This lack of knowledge about the meaning of the word bada' led scholars like Fakhr al-Razi to attribute to Shr'ites the false view ascribing ignorance to God. See his Tafsir on the verse "God blots out, and He establishes whatsoever He will" (13:39).

2. For some traditions pertaining to the will of God, see Majlisi, Bihar, vol. 4, pp. 92-134.

3. Al-Shaykh al-Saduq Muhammad b. 'Al Ibn Babawayh al-Qummi, 'Uyun Akhbar al Rida, 2 vols. (Najaf: Al-Matba'at al-Haydariyya, 1970), vol. 1, p. 145, sec. 13, which describes the meeting between the Imam al-Rida and Sulayman al-Marwazi; and Majlisi, Bihar, the section dealing with al-bada' wa al naskh, in vol. 4, pp. 92-134.

4. Majlisi, Bihar, vol. 4, pp. 92-134. It has also been related by al-Kulayni from Abu Basir; see Kashi, al-Wafi, vol. 1 , p. 113.

5. Ibn Babawayh, 'Uyun Akhbar al-Rida, sec. 13, vol. I , p. 146. Al-Kulayni cites the same tradition from al-Fudayl b. Yasar, on the authority of al-Baqir. See Kashi, al-Wafi, vol. 1, p. 113

6. Quoted in Majlisi, Bihar, vol. 4, p. 119.

7. Ibid.

8. Ibid. p. 134

9. Ahmad b. 'Ali. Abu Talib al-Tabarsi, al-Ihtijaj (Najaf: al-Matba'at al-Murtaqawiyya), p. 137

10. Majlisi, Bihar, vol. 2, p. 139

11. Ibid

12. Ibid., p. 136

13. Ibid.

14. Ibid

15. Ibid., p. 136. Al-Kulayni has also related a tradition to the same effect but through a different chain of transmission, in which al-Sadiq says: "Modification (bada ') does not occur for God in anything except that He knew about it before it came into being." See Kashi, alWafi, vol. 1, p. 113.

16. A variant tradition reads, ". . . more excellent (afdal) than bada'."

17. Al-Shaykh al-Saduq Muhammad b. 'Ali ibn Babawayh, al-Tawhid (Najaf: Al-Maba'at al-Haydariyya, 1966), p. 272; also narrated by Kulayni; see Kashi, al-Wafi, vol. 1, p. 113

18. Ibn Babawayh, al-Tawhid, p. 272; also narrated by al-Kulayni; see Kashi, al-Wafi, vol. I, p. 113.

19. Bukhari, Sahih, vol. 4, p. 443

20. There are numerous traditions, reported by Sunni sources, that suggest that supplication changes divine decree. See, for example, Tirmidhi, Sunan, vol. 8, p. 350; Ibn Maja, Sunan, vol. 1, p. 24; Hakim, Mustadrak, vol. 1, p. 493; Ibn Hanbal, Musnad , vol. 5, pp. 277, 280, and 282

Source URL:

https://www.al-islam.org/al-bayan-fi-tafsir-al-quran-prolegomena-quran-sayyid-abu-al-qasim-al-khoei/11-modification-creation#comment-0