

# Justice of God



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A short text on the nature of Allah's attribute of `Adl (Justice) where the author discusses philosophical issues about its seeming incompatibility with events like natural disasters as well as with Allah's own Divine Will.

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**What is Justice?**

Justice contains two varying meanings. The extensive meaning of justice is “to put everything in its place,” or in other words, being in balance and equilibrium. This meaning or sense of justice rules over the entire created universe – in the galaxies, within an atom, in the structure of a human being’s existence and in all plants and animals. This is what the famous tradition of the Holy Prophet refers to when he says:

*“It is by means of justice that all of the heavens and the earth exist.”*

For example, if the powers of attraction and repulsion of the earth lose their sense of balance and one of

these two is removed or destroyed, the earth will be drawn towards the sun, set on fire and destroyed or it will leave its orbit and wander in the endless space of the universe until it is destroyed.

Another meaning of justice is “following individual rights.” The opposite of justice, then, is oppression in the sense of taking the rights of some and giving them exclusively to others or to take away someone’s rights and give them to another, or to discriminate in the sense that some people are given their rights and others are not.

It is clear that the second meaning is a particular one and the first one is general. It should be noted that both meanings are truthful in relation to God, even though the second meaning will be more emphasized here.

The meaning of God’s Justice is to neither remove the rights of a person nor give the rights of one to another or to discriminate between people. He is Just in all senses of the word and the reasons or proof of His Justice will be mentioned in the next lesson.

Oppression whether it is by way of taking away a person’s rights or by way of giving the rights of one to another, or by waste and discrimination, does not exist in the pure Essence of God. He never punishes a person who does good and He never encourages a person who does evil. No one will be held responsible for the sins of another. He does not burn the wet and dry together.

If everyone is in error in a community except for one person, God separates the accounts of that one person from that of others and does not punish that person along with the sinners.

And the fact that the Ash’arites said, *“Even if God sends all of the prophets to hell and all of the criminals and sinners to heaven, it is not oppression,”* is vain babble and baseless. The intellect, which is never polluted with superstition and discrimination, will not listen to these ugly words.

## **The Difference between Justice and Equality**

Another important point which should be pointed out in this lesson is that sometimes justice is confused with equality so that the meaning of justice becomes “equality should be maintained,” when this is not so.

Equality is not a condition for justice. Rather, rights and priorities must be considered. As an example, justice in a classroom of students is not that they all receive equal grades and justice between two workers is not that they receive equal wages. Rather, justice is that each student should be graded according to his knowledge and ability and each worker be judged according to his work and activity.

In the world of nature also, justice in the extensive sense means just this. The heart of a whale, which weighs one ton, cannot be compared to the heart of a sparrow, which is perhaps not more than one gram in weight. If they were equal in size, there would be no justice. Similarly, if the roots of a very tall

tree were equal in size to the roots of a small plant, this is not justice but is equivalent to oppression. Justice is that every creature receives its rights in proportion to its abilities and needs. In other words, justice is not equality but equity.

## The Proof or Reason for the Creator's Justice

### 1. Goodness and Evil

We have learned – and it seems that this issue is necessary – that our intellect distinguishes between good and evil to a certain extent. (This is that very thing which scholars speak about in ethical terms: “Goodness” and “Evil.”)

For instance, we know that justice and goodness are good and oppression and stinginess are evil. Before religion even mentioned these things, it was clear to us. However, there are other issues which exist which our intelligence is not sufficient to understand and we must seek guidance from Divine Leaders and the Prophets.

Thus, if a group of Muslims like the Ash'arites, deny intellectual goodness and evil and the way of distinguishing between good and evil, then they are completely wrong.

For, if our intellect does not have the ability to choose between good and evil, how would we know whether God would send His message through false prophets or not? However, the moment we say God would lie, we know that God's Promises are always true and that He is always truthful. He would never encourage deceit and never give miracles into the hands of a deceitful person. It is here that we can rely upon what religion and the Divine Law says.

Thus, we can conclude that the belief in intellectual good and evil is from religion. (Note this with care). Now, let us return to the proof of Divine Justice. In order to understand this, we must know:

### 2. The Sources of Oppression

The source of oppression is one of the following things:

- **Ignorance:** It sometimes happens that an oppressive person does not, in truth, know what he is doing. He does not know that he is destroying someone's rights and he is not aware of what he is doing.
- **Need:** Sometimes a person is tempted to commit a satanic act in order to attain something that another has, whereas if he were self-sufficient, he would have no need to commit oppression.
- **Inability:** Sometimes a person is not willing to have the rights of another curtailed but he does not have the power or ability to do anything about it. So, unwillingly, he commits oppression.
- **Selfishness, Bearing Grudges and Seeking Revenge:** Sometimes none of the above-stated qualities

exist; however, selfishness or a sense of seeking revenge or bearing a grudge makes that person commit oppression against another. Sometimes, the spirit of exclusiveness and monopolization causes injustice to others.

Note that none of these ugly qualities and deficiencies exist in God, for He is The All-Knowing, The Needless, The All-Powerful and The Most Kind. It makes no sense for God to commit oppression. He is a Being who is Endless, Perfect and Unlimited. Only Goodness, Justice and Mercy can stem from such a Being.

If he punishes those who commit evil, in reality, it is the result of their deeds which causes this, just like a person who, as a result of the use of narcotics or alcohol, is afflicted with an incurable disease. The Holy Qur'an says:

***“You receive but the recompense of what you have earned.” (Surah Yunus, 10:52).***

### **3. The Qur'an and the Justice of the Creator**

It is important to note that the Holy Qur'an greatly emphasizes God's Justice:

***“Verily God will not deal unjustly with man in aught: it is man that wrongs his own soul.” (Surah Yunus, 10:44).***

And in another place, it says:

***“God is never unjust in the least degree.” (Surah An-Nisa, 4:40).***

And,

***“We shall set up scales of justice for the Day of Judgement so that not a soul will be dealt with unjustly in the least.” (Surah Al-Anbiya, 21:47).***

Note, what is meant by “balance” in the above verse, is the method of weighing good and evil, not like scales of this world.

### **4. Invitation to Justice and Equity**

The qualities of the human being must be like a ray of God's qualities and in human society, God's qualities are widespread. According to this principle, to the same extent that the Holy Qur'an stresses the Justice of the Creator, He has also stressed justice and equity in human society and the individuality of individuals.

The Holy Qur'an says that oppression and injustice will destroy society and that the fate of oppressors is of the most painful kind. In addition to mentioning the fate of past tribes, the Holy Qur'an has often repeated this truth for people to see the result of oppression and corruption and what punishment will be

given. The Holy Qur'an clearly states as a principle:

***“God commands justice, the doing of good and kindness to family members and He Forbids all shameful deeds and injustice and rebellion....” (Surah An-Nahl, 16:90).***

It should be noted that committing oppression is an ugly act, to accept oppression and suffer suppression is also wrong according to Islam and the Holy Qur'an:

***“Deal not unjustly and you shall not be dealt with unjustly.” (Surah Baqarah, 2:279).***

In general, submission to inequity encourages oppression, increase suppression and aids oppressors.

## **The Philosophy of Natural Calamities**

When unexpected catastrophes such as hurricanes, earthquakes and other natural calamities occurred, people, from the earliest times to the present, used it to prove that God's Justice did not exist. Sometimes, they not only negated justice but used these calamities as a means of proving the nonexistence of God.

## **Relative Judgement and Limited Knowledge**

Normally, all of us, in our judgements, stress the relation things have with us. For instance, we say, such and such is near us or far from us. Or such and such a person is strong or weak, that is, in comparison to our physical ability or spiritual situation.

In issues relating to good and evil and calamities and natural catastrophes, people's judgement is usually the same. For instance, if rain falls in a region, we have nothing to do with what the total effect of the rain was. We only think about our own environment, home or pasture areas, or, at the most, our own city. If it was a positive event, we say that it was God's Blessing and if negative, we call it a negative event, even if the rain had positive effects in other parts of the city.

When they destroy a building in order to build a new one, and we only share in its dust, we say that it was a bad event even if in the future a hospital will be built there which everyone can make use of.

In our normal judgements, we consider a snake bite to be a calamity without recognizing the fact that this very bite and poison is an effective means of defence for this animal and disregarding the fact that sometimes from this very poison, a life-giving medicine is produced which saves the lives of thousands of people.

Thus, so as not to be misled, we must look at our limitations in judgement. We must not only look at things in relation to ourselves but rather consider all sides of the issue and judge from all points of view.

In principle, events in the world are all linked together like a chain. The hurricane which hits our city

today and a heavy downpour of rain which brings floods is one of these long links which is completely related to other links and is related also with an event which took place in the past and will take place in the future. The conclusion or result is that putting one's finger on only a small part of an issue and judging it accordingly is not to have used one's intellect and logic properly.

That which is worthy of creation (that which creation deserves) is complete goodness but if something, from one point of view, is evil, overall goodness still prevails. A surgical operation is discomfoting, from one point of view, and from another, beneficial. Thus, goodness is relative.

Let us look at the occurrence of an earthquake. It is true that in one area, destruction occurs but if we consider its relation to other issues, we can change our opinion. Does an earthquake relate to the temperatures and pressure within the earth or does it relate to the attractions of the moon which continuously draws the earth towards itself or does it relate to both? Scientists have differing views.

But whatever the reasons, the effects upon another thing must be considered. That is, we must know what effect the temperature inside the earth has in creating oil resources, which is the most important energy material in our age and also the creation of coal, etc. Thus, goodness is relative.

If the reason is the ebb and flow of the tides stemming from the pull of the moon, then the effects the oceans has upon life within the water and its creatures and often, watering a dry coastline in places where sweet water meets the oceans should also be considered. This is also a relative good.

It is here that we understand what relative judgements and limited information we have when we look at issues like this. The Holy Qur'an tells us:

***“Of knowledge, it is only a little that is communicated to you.”(Surah Al-Isra, 17:85).***

## **Undesirable Events and Warnings**

We have all seen people who when drowned in blessings, fall under the influence of pride and selfishness and in this state or condition, many of the important human issues and duties are forgotten.

And, also, we have all seen that at the time of the calmness of the oceans of life and complete restfulness, a state of sleep and heedlessness affects a person – were such a state to continue, it would bring great misfortune to that person.

Without doubt, some of the undesirable events of life are in order to end that state of pride and to do away with this sleep and heedlessness.

You have most certainly heard that experienced drivers complain about roads which are flat, level and lacking any twists or turns, ups or downs and they describe these attractive qualities as dangerous ones. Why? Because the monotony of this road causes a driver to fall asleep and it is here that danger comes

to him. It has even been seen that some countries have created artificial ups and downs or variations on roads to prevent such a danger.

The path or way of life of a human being is also the same. If life does not have any ups and downs, and if undesirable events never occur, a state of forgetfulness of God and sleep will come and prevent a person from undertaking his or her duties and responsibilities.

We are not suggesting that human beings must create undesirable events for themselves or welcome misfortunes. Rather, we say that one must pay attention to prevent oneself from pride and from forgetfulness because these are enemies and barriers to wellbeing and happiness. We repeat, this is the philosophy of a part of these undesirable events, not all of them because they have other aspects, as well, which, with the Will of God, will be mentioned in further lessons. The Holy Qur'an tells us:

***“When the suffering reached them from us, why then did they not learn humility?” (Surah Al-Anaam, 6:43).***

## **The Philosophy of Difficulties in Life**

We have said that a group of the materialists have coercively made use of the issue of unpredictable occurrences of calamities and difficulties which occur in the life of human beings as an excuse to deny the justice of God! Now we will continue the discussion of the previous lesson.

## **Nurtured Through Facing Difficulties**

We again repeat that we should not create difficulties for ourselves, but, at the same time, it often happens that difficulties increase our willpower just as iron is strengthened when placed in hot smelting pots. In the smelting pot of difficulties, we become experienced and more persevering.

War is basically not good but sometimes a difficult and long war causes the abilities of a nation to blossom and transforms dispersion into unity and progress. A famous Arab historian says:

“The blossoming of civilization has appeared throughout history in various parts of the world. It followed a country being attacked by a powerful foreign country, being awakened and mobilizing their forces.”

Of course, reactions to difficulties are not uniform among all people and all societies. One group falls into despair, weakness and pessimism and reaches a negative conclusion but there are individuals who have the right attitude when faced by these difficulties and are stimulated and mobilized by them. But because in such situations, many people judge by what appears on the surface, they only see the bitterness and difficulties and ignore the positive and constructive effects.

If you study the life of geniuses of the world, you will see that almost all of them suffered difficulties and great misfortunes. There are fewer people who are raised in comfort and luxury who have shown



themselves to be geniuses and who have arisen to a high position. A good commander of an army is a person who has seen a difficult and long battle. Economic geniuses are people who have fallen into difficulties in the economic market. Great politicians are those who have passed through hard and difficult political struggles. In summary, we can say that the difficulties and anguishes which human beings bear, improves them.

The Holy Qur'an says:

***"It may be that you dislike a thing and God brings about through it a great deal of good." (Surah An-Nisa, 4: 19).***

## **Turning Back to God through Facing Difficulties**

In the previous discussion, we have seen that our being has a goal or purpose. Our eyes are for a purpose; our ears are for a purpose; our hearts, brain and nerves each have been created for a purpose. Even our finger tips have a philosophy behind them. Thus, how is it possible that our total being be without a purpose?

One should look at one's sins and transgressions in this light as well. In facing difficulties in following God's Commands, one becomes familiar with one's ugly and evil deeds and will turn back to God. It is here that a part of the difficulties and unforeseen events are, in reality, Divine blessings. The Holy Qur'an says:

***"Corruption has appeared on land and sea because of (the need) that the hands of men have earned, that (God) may give them a taste of some of their deeds: in order that they may turn back (from evil)." (Surah Ar-Room, 30:41).***

Hence, it is far from logic and intellectual reasoning to consider painful events as confirmations of evil or to interpret them as calamities that are considered to be in opposition to Divine Justice. Indeed painful events may lead us to become better human beings.

## **Value of Life through Facing Difficulties**

Perhaps it is difficult for some people to understand that if life were only filled with blessings, it would lose its value.

It has been proven today that if you place an object in the middle of a room and you give it a strong, uniform light from all directions and the object and the room are both completely smooth, we will not be able to see the object due to lack of contrast between light and shadow. When shadows are placed next to light, the dimension of the form is made clear.

The value of the gifts of life as well as the weak and strong shadows of difficulties cannot be seen. If

throughout life, there was no such thing as sickness, the pleasure of health would never be sensed. The dawn that brings relief following a night of high fever brings about the realization of what a jewel good health is.

In general, a uniform kind of life, even the most comfortable kind of life is tiresome, spiritless and deathlike. It has often been seen that individuals, because of a comfortable life, empty of any kind of difficulties, find it so boring that they attempt to commit suicide or else they continuously complain about their life.

You will find no architect with taste who will design the walls of a large room to be totally smooth and uniform. Rather, he carves the rooms and adds texture.

Why is the world of nature so beautiful? Why is the view of jungles which fill the sides of mountains and streams with twist and turns among the small and large trees so interesting and attractive? One reason is the lack of uniformity.

The order of light and darkness and the coming and going of day and night which the Holy Qur'an emphasizes in various verses, has a great effect upon ending any kind of a tiresome life for human beings. Why? Because if the sun were continuously in one place in the sky and uniformly gave light to the earth, if its position never changed and night would never come, in a short period of time, all human beings would get tired.

It is because of this that we must accept that at least most of the problems caused by unforeseen events give a spirit to life, making it sweet and bearable. It gives more value and meaning to the blessings we have and gives the human being the possibility to benefit from the gifts to the greatest extent possible.

## **Difficulties Brought About by Human Beings**

Many people fall into error in their judgment of the causes and effects of unforeseen events when the oppression which takes place through the hands of oppressors are considered to be signs of the injustice of the Creator of the world. Additionally, the disorder in the work of humanity is considered to be the fault of disorder in the structure of creation.

Just as they sometimes ask: Why do some earthquakes strikes cities and cause little damage but in the rural areas, many people are taken as sacrifices and many lose their lives in the fallen shelters of their homes? What kind of justice is this? If calamity is to be divided, why is it not divided up equally? Why is the edge of sorrowful catastrophe always falling upon the deprived people? Why is it that deprived people suffer the most with contagious diseases?

These are all beside the fact and do not relate to the system of creation and justice of God. These are the results of oppression, exploitation and colonialism of human beings in relation to one another.

If it were not for the fact that rural people are abased and poverty-stricken due to the oppression of the cities and they were able to build better and stronger homes for themselves like those in the cities, earthquakes would not have such an effect upon them.

But when their houses are built of mud or stones or wood and very little stucco or cement is used in the building of their homes, even a strong wind or a slight earthquake hurts them. But what does this have to do with God?

This criticism should be made against the unbalanced situation and erroneous system of society. We must arise and end these injustices to society. We must wage war against abasement and poverty and give the deprived their rights so that such phenomena do not appear.

If all groups of society have sufficient nourishment, health care and treatment, they will be able to face diseases and sickness with greater strength and perseverance.

But when an erroneous and false social system rules a society in the form of colonialism, one person is given so many possibilities that even their cats and dogs have veterinary doctors and medication. Meanwhile, many humans do not have even the most basic necessities of life and health care for their children. Such unpleasant events are plentiful and have been seen by all.

Instead of complaining about God in such situations, we should reproach ourselves.

We have to tell oppression not to be oppressive! And we have to tell the oppressed not to bear oppression!

We must make efforts so that all individuals of a society have at least the minimum amount of healthcare facilities, food, housing, educational and cultural possibilities.

In summary, we should not place the blame for our sins on creation. When did God ever impose a system like this upon us? Where has He ever recommended this? Of course, He created us free because our being free is the key to our development and progress. But it is we who misuse our freedom and oppress each other and this oppression then shows itself as imbalance in society. Unfortunately, this error has come to affect a great many people. The Holy Qur'an says:

***“Verily God will not deal unjustly with man in aught: it is man that wrongs his own soul.” (Surah Yunus, 10:44).***

And now we end the discussion of signs of catastrophes here even though there is still a great deal which could be said, but this brief discussion is sufficient for us in this short study.

## **God's Justice and Eternal Punishment**

We know that the Holy Qur'an directly speaks of the eternal punishment to be given to the kufar. That is,

it speaks about eternity.

***“God has promised the hypocrites, men and women., and the kafirs, the fire of hell; therein shall they dwell; sufficient is it for them; for them is the curse of God, and an enduring punishment.” (Surah At-Tawba, 9:68).***

The Qur'an also promises the believing men and the believing women gardens in Paradise forever. It speaks about eternal reward.

***“God has promised to believers, men and women, gardens under which rivers flow, to dwell therein and beautiful mansions in gardens of everlasting bliss. But the greatest bliss is the good pleasure of God: that is the supreme felicity.” (Surah At-Tawba, 9:72).***

The question then arises: How can one accept that in one's lifetime of eighty or one hundred years, one commits evil deeds and then for eternity – millions of years – one is punished? How can this be reconciled with God's justice?

Of course, this question does not arise about eternal reward because the ocean of God's Mercy is very great and so, His eternal reward shows greater virtue and mercy.

Should a balance not exist between punishment and reward?

In order to reach a final answer to this question, several points need to be noted:

Punishments on the Day of Resurrection do not resemble punishments in this world. For instance, a person is found guilty of aggression and plunder and he spends some time in prison whereas the punishment on the Day of Judgment takes into consideration the efforts of one's deeds and the particularities of a person's acts. In clearer terms, the difficulties which one will bear in the other world will be the direct result of one's deeds. The Holy Qur'an explains this very clearly where it says,

***“Then on that Day, not a soul will be wronged in the least and you shall but be repaid the needs of your past deeds.” (Surah Ya Sin, 36: 54).***

With one simple example, we can visualize this truth that a person who goes after narcotics and alcoholic drinks and no matter how much one explains that these things will ruin him, sicken his heart and destroy his nerves, he does not listen. He spends several weeks or months drowned in these killing pleasures. Gradually, he develops ulcers, heart or nerve disease and then he spends tens of years until the end of his life suffering because of this and he groans night and day.

Can one object here as to why a person who only drank or did drugs for several weeks or months have to suffer for ten of years?

It is reality stated in response that this is the result of his own actions. Even if he were to live longer than

the Prophet Noah and were to live for tens of thousands of years and we were to continuously see him in pain and anguish, we would say that this is something he brought upon himself with his deeds.

Punishment on the Day of Judgment is similar. Thus, no one can object to the justice of the situation.

Some people assume that the time limit of the punishment must be the same extent as the sin. However, this is an erroneous belief because the relation between a sin and punishment is not a temporal one; it depends upon the result and quality of the sin.

For instance, it is possible that a person can kill an innocent person in one second, but according to the laws of some countries, he is given life imprisonment. Here we see that the time of the sin was one quick second whereas the punishment is for tens of years. No one considers this to be oppressive. Why? Because the question here is not one of days or weeks or months or years, it depends upon the kind of crime and the effect of the crime.

Eternity in hell and eternal punishment only belongs to those people who have closed all doors to salvation for themselves and they have drowned themselves in corruption, recklessness, *kufr* and hypocrisy so that the darkness of sin takes over their entire being and, as a result, that person takes on the colour of sin and *kufr*.

The Holy Qur'an says:

***“Nay, those who seek gain in evil and are girt round by their sins– they are companions of the fire: therein shall they abide (for ever).” (Surah Al-Baqarah, 2:81).***

These kinds of individuals have completely cut off their connection with God and have closed all doors to their salvation and well-being.

These kinds of individuals are like birds that purposefully break their own wings and pull out their own feathers, hence, are obliged to walk forever upon the earth and are deprived of flying through the skies.

The three points given above clarifies the issue that eternal punishment which belongs to a particular group of hypocrites or *kuffar* does not oppose the principle of justice. This is the ominous result of their deeds themselves. The Divine Prophets had previously told them that their deeds would have these results.

It is clear that if individuals are ignorant and the invitation of the Prophets is not known to them and if they commit evil deeds out of ignorance, they will not receive such a difficult punishment.

It is also necessary to point out that the ocean of Divine Mercy is so great and extensive that a large group of transgressors are given God's Mercy; some by means of intercession; some by means of forgiveness and some because of small, good deeds which they performed. God, by His greatness, gives great reward for those small, good deeds. And another group, after they have been punished for a

time in hell and have been purified, will return to Paradise due to Divine Mercy.

The only group remaining is the one which has enmity towards the truth and commit oppression, corruption and hypocrisy so that their whole being is covered in oppression, *kufr* and faithlessness.

One of the issues which is directly related to the issue of the justice of the Creator is the question of predestination or free will.

According to the fatalists (those who believe in predestination), a human being has no choice whatsoever in his or her actions, behaviour or words and the movement of his organs are just like the predestined movements of the parts of a machine.

Thus, the question arises, how does this opinion relate to Divine Justice? And perhaps because of this, the previously-mentioned group of the *Ash'arites*, deny intellectual good and evil and have accepted predestination. Their belief in predestination is a denial of justice. Why? Because when one accepts predestination, justice makes no sense.

In order to further clarify this point, we are obliged to study several subjects with care:

## **Why Believe in Predestination?**

All people, within their being, sense that they are free to make decisions. For examples, whether or not to give a loan to such and such a friend or whether or not to drink a glass of water placed before oneself. If another person commits an error in relation to this person, this second can forgive or not forgive the error. Everyone can tell between a hand which shakes because of illness or old age from a hand which one purposefully causes to shake.

In spite of the fact that the issue of free will is a general human sense, why do some people follow the school of the fatalists?

There are several important factors that can affect a human: environment, education, propaganda, social culture and without doubt, the thoughts of a person. Sometimes, even one's economic position can provide a motive for why a human being acts a certain way.

The totality of these cause one to assume that a person does not have free will, but rather that the external and internal factors join hands and force us to make a decision and that if these factors did not exist, we would not be forced with these problems.

These are things which can be called 'the environmental determinants,' 'economic determinants,' 'educational determinants' and predestination are among the factors considered to be important by the school of fatalists.

## **The Main Error of the Fatalists**

But those who think this way have forgotten an important point and that is that the discussion is not about motives and defective causes, but rather the discussion is about complete causes.

In other words, no one can deny the role played by the environment, culture and economics in the thoughts and acts of a human being. The discussion is that with all of these motives, the final decision still remains with us.

Because we clearly sense that even in an erroneous system, one which rebels against God's Commands like the monarchical system of the past – which had laid the groundwork for deviation – we were not obliged to deviate and go to the centers of corruption.

Thus, one must distinguish between and separate out defective causes from complete causes. A great many people who live in comfort or have been nurtured in a deviated culture or they inherited unsuitability, at any rate, have separated their way from that of others, and have either arisen or revolted against their environment. If every human being was supposed to be the child of his or her environmental culture and the propaganda of the times, no real or basic revolution would ever take place in the world. Everyone would have to adapt to his or her environment and never build a new one.

All of these show that the above-mentioned factors do not make one's destiny; one's principle or main fate is determined by one's own will power.

For instance, if we were to decide to fast on a very hot summer day, despite our body needing water, we would be doing so in order to obey God's commands while denying our own needs. It is possible, on the other hand, that others follow their body's request for water and not fast. Thus, all motives which cause one's destiny exist within the human being's free will.

## **The Social and Political Factors for Belief in Fatalism**

The truth is that the issue of predestination and free will has been misused throughout history. A series of factors have increased the belief in fatalism and the denial of free will of the human being. Among them:

### **1. Political Factors**

Many of the despotic and selfish politicians in order to extinguish the fire of revolution among the deprived and in order to assure the continuation of their illegal rule (for every rule of regime which oppresses the people and denies people their rights is illegal from the point of view of Islam) convinced the people through all the means available to them that they have no free will, that predestination and predetermination of history holds our destiny in its hands. If one group rules and another is ruled, this is

a rule of fate and the destiny of history!

It is clear how this kind of thinking can silence people and aid the policies of colonialism whereas according to our intellect and our Divine Law, destiny and fate lies in our own hands and fate and destiny in the sense of predestination and predetermination does not exist. Divine fate and destiny is determined through our action, desire, willpower, faith, effort and endeavour.

## **2. Psychological Factors**

Lazy, indifferent and lethargic individuals exist who most often meet up with defeat in life. They never desire to admit the bitter truth that their laziness or errors have caused their defeat. Thus, in order to avoid confronting themselves with their deficiencies and developing themselves into better people, they turn to fatalism and they think that their sin is a result of coercive fate so that they find a false sense of security. They say: “What can be done? We were blackened from the beginning. It will not be whitened even with the water of Zamzam or Kawthar. We are extremely talented and make great efforts, but unfortunately, we have no luck.”

## **3. Social factors**

Some people want to be free to be able to follow their carnal desires and commit every sin which is to their liking, at the same time, they want to somehow convince themselves that they are not sinners and they want to deceive society that they are sinless!

It is here that they turn to fatalism as their justification that we have no free will -- neither to choose nor avoid these sins. But they know well that all of these are lies and even those who make such claims and raise such issues know that they are baseless but their pleasures and passing fantasies do not allow them to admit this truth. Thus, in order to build a healthy society, we must struggle against this fatalistic way of thinking. We must realize these are tools used in the hands of colonialism and exploitation and an instrument to deceitfully justify defeat and the factor which causes corruption to increase in a society.

# **Reasons for Belief in Free Will**

## **1. The Collective Conscience**

Philosophers and divine scholars give different reasons for free will of the human being. The clearest reason given by the supporters of free will: The ‘universal’ or ‘collective’ conscience of human beings.

That is, no matter what we deny, we cannot deny the reality that in all human societies, including both the worshippers of God and the materialists, East and West, ancient and modern, wealthy and poor, developed or underdeveloped, of whatever culture, all without exception, agree that a law should rule human beings and that human beings are responsible before the law and people who disobey the law must be punished.



In other words, the rule of law, the responsibility of individuals before it and the punishment of those who disobey the law are things which all intelligent people agree with and it was only primitive tribes who did not officially recognise these three things.

The fact that we explain this as the general conscience of human beings of the world is the clearest proof of the existence of free will in human beings and the fact that they have free choice.

How can it be accepted that a human being be obliged in their actions and that they have no freedom of choice but are still responsible before the law? And, that when a law is broken, the person must be tried and asked why they did – or did not – commit a certain action. If proven guilty, that person is sent to prison or even, depending upon the crime, executed. This is exactly as if we were to punish stones which slide down a mountain causing a landslide on a mountain road which results in the death of one or more human beings.

It is true that a human being differs from a stone, but if we deny free will and choice in a human being, the difference between a human being and a stone will not be relevant in this instance – as both will be the victims of fate.

A stone, following the law of gravity, falls upon the roadside and a human being who murders another, is the victim of another factor of fate. Thus, the logic of those who believe in predetermination allows for no distinction to be made between a stone and a human being from the point of view of result as neither the stone nor the human acted according to their own free will. Why should the human be tried and not the stone?

We are at a crossroads. We either have to deny the existence of the common conscience of all of the people of the world and consider the courts, punishment of those who disobey the law to be ridiculous and useless and even oppressive or we have to deny the beliefs of the fatalists. Obviously the latter is preferable.

It is interesting to note that those who believe in the school of fatalism, and give reasons for their belief, when they are faced with a real life situation, they act according to free will!

For instance, if a person aggresses against them, or annoys or bothers them, they take this person to court and do not rest at ease until that person is punished.

Well, if it is really true that a person has no choice or free will, what is all of this commotion and court and trial about?

At any rate, this common conscience of the intelligent beings of the world is a living idea for the reality that human beings have accepted the existence of free will in the depths of their being and have always been loyal to that. They cannot live without the belief in free will for even one day. This belief has caused the wheels of social and individual programs to progress.

A great Iranian philosopher, Khawjeh Nasir al-din Tusi, in discussing predestination and free will says in one short sentence in his book, "Kitab Tajrubaah bih al- 'Aqa'id:" *'Our necessary under-standing and conscience tells us that we are responsible for all of our deeds.'*

## **2. Justice**

That which we have said above was about the contradiction between the school of predestination and the common conscience of the intelligent of the world, both from the point of view of supporters of religion and people who do not at all accept religion.

But from the point of view of religion thought, there is another sure reason for recognising the falsity of the school of fatalism. (And if fatalism were to be believed, religion as we know it, would have to be altered).

How can we reconcile the Justice of God which we proved in previous lessons with the school of fatalism? How is it possible that God oblige someone to do an evil deed? Then punish him because he did it. This does not agree with any kind of logic!

Thus, by accepting the school of fatalism, spiritual rewards, punishments, heaven and hell are meaningless as well as 'scroll of deeds', 'questioning', 'Divine reckoning', 'reprimanding the evil doers in the Qur'an', 'encouragement and praise for those who do good', all of these lose their meaning. Because according to the school of fatalism, neither the good doers nor the evil doers have a choice.

In addition, in religion, one of the first issues we encounter is 'duty' or 'responsibility', but does 'duty' or 'responsibility' make any sense if a person has no choice?

Can we tell a person whose hands involuntarily shake not to shake their hands? Or can we tell a person who is falling down a steep mountain to stand still? It is because of this that Imam 'Ali, peace be upon him, says in a famous tradition (Usul al-Kafi, Vol. 1, p. 119) that the school of fatalism is a school of idol worship whose followers are members of Iblis' party:

"These words of idol worshipping brothers, enemies of God, members of Iblis' part."

## **The Middle Way**

### **1. The Opposite of Fatalism**

Of course, opposing the belief in fatalism, which is one kind of an extreme, is the school of 'conferring', which is at the other extreme.

Those who accept this school believe that God created us and then put everything at our disposal and that, in general, He is not responsible for anything that we do and in this way, we are completely

independent in choosing what we do.

Doubtlessly, this belief does not agree with monotheism because monotheism has taught us that God rules the entire world and nothing is beyond His control. Even our free will and free choice cannot be beyond His realm, otherwise duality or polytheism would, of necessity, result.

In other words, we cannot believe in many gods, one, the great Creator of the universe and the others, the human beings who are free to do whatever they wish, completely free and independent – even God cannot affect what they wish to do!

## **2. The School of the Middle Way**

What is important is that we know human beings have freedom of choice and free will at the same time we know God to be the Ruler over all persons and deeds.

The fine point to recognise here is that we should not imagine that there is a contradiction between the two. The fact is that we can accept His Justice and Rule over the entire universe of existence as well as freedom and responsibility of His servants – and this is that very thing which is known as the middle way (the way which is between two extremes).

Let us clarify this with an example as the issue is a very complicated one. Let us assume that there is an electric train that is being driven by a train driver. A strong electric cable has been placed along the line of the train and the train is connected with a link to this electric cable. The electricity is passed to the locomotive in such a way that if for just one moment, the electricity to the locomotive stops, the whole train will stop. Without doubt, the train driver is free.

He can stop wherever he wants and he can move at his own speed. But in spite of all of this freedom, the person who is sending the electricity can, at any moment, make the train stop because all of the train's power and strength is through that electric cable. The person who holds the key to the electrical cable is in charge.

When we note this example with care, we see that one can have freedom, choice and responsibility (the train driver), while one is completely at the disposal of the power of another (the electric cable operator) and these two concepts do not contradict each other.

God has given us physical power or strength and from moment to moment, it continues and if it is cut off for even a moment, and our connection with Him be cut off, we would be destroyed.

If we can do anything it is because we have strength which He has given us and it continues moment by moment and even our freedom and choice is also from Him. That is, He willed that we be free and by making use of this great Divine Kindness, one can transform one's self.

Thus, at the same time that we have free choice and free will, we are in His grasp and we will never

move beyond His realm. At the same time that we have strength and power, we are dependent upon Him and without Him, we will be destroyed. This is what “The Middle Way” means. Neither have we recognised any creature to be equal to God (which would result in polytheism) nor do we believe creatures are obliged to act according to a set destiny (which would result in oppression). We have learned this lesson from our pure Imams, peace be upon them (Usul al-Kafi, vol. 1, p. 121). Whenever they were asked, “Does anything exist between fatalism and conferring?”

They said, “Yes. More extensive than the distance between heaven and earth.”

## **The Holy Qur'an and Free Will**

The Holy Qur'an states this issue directly and proves the free will of human beings and there are hundreds of verses which talk about free will.

All of the verses which relate to commanding virtue and preventing vice are all proof of the free will of human beings because if a person was destined to do so, commanding them to do so would make no sense.

All of the verses which speak of blame and reproach against the evil doers and praise for the good doers are proof of free will because if one was destined to do whatever one did, blame or praise would make no sense.

All of the verses which speak about the questioning on the Day of Judgement and the Judgement in that Court and then the rewards and punishments and heaven and hell are proof of free will because if one was to assume that everything was predestined then questioning, judging, rewards and punishments would all be oppressive.

Some explicit verses of the Qur'an which say that a human being is responsible for his or her deeds are:

***“Every soul will be (held) in pledge for its deeds.” (Surah Muddathir, 74: 38).***

***“(Yet) in each individual in pledge for his deeds.” (Surah At-Tur, 52: 21).***

***“We showed him the Way: whether he be grateful or ungrateful (rests on his will).” (Surah Al-Insaan, 76:3).***

***“But you will not except as God wills...” (Surah Al-Insaan, 76:30).***

## **Guidance and Error are in God's Hands**

### **1. Means of Guidance**

A traveller has an address in his hand. He meets you and asks you to help him find the address. You

have two choices before you:

First, to go with him and complete your good deed by accompanying him to his destination and then say goodbye and leave him.

Second, indicate with your hand and giving various signs guide him towards his destination.

It is evident that in both cases, you have guided him towards his destination but there is a difference between these two; the second one is just telling which way to go and the first, is taking one to one's destination. The Holy Qur'an and Traditions of Islam mention both ways.

On the other hand, sometimes guidance only has a legal quality to it, i.e., formed by means of laws and rules. Whereas, sometimes it has an instinctive quality, i.e., by means of facilities provided by creation like the guidance of an embryo to becoming a complete human being and both of these ways are mentioned in the Holy Qur'an and the Traditions. By clarifying the means of guidance (and, naturally, the point opposite it, leading astray or error), we return to the main discussion.

We read in many of the verses of the Holy Qur'an that guidance and leading astray is God's work. Doubtlessly, the 'indication of the way' comes from God. Why? Because He sent the Prophet and sent a heavenly Book to show people the way.

But 'reaching the goal' through coercion or force clearly does not agree with free will and choice. However, because all power and strength which is necessary to reach one's goal is given to us by God and it is He Who gives us success upon this way, this sense of guidance is also from God. That is, preparation of the equipment and the preliminaries and providing them is at the disposal of humanity.

## **2. The Question of God's Guidance**

Now, an important question arises and that is that we read in many verses of the Holy Quran:

***"God guides whom He wills and misleads whom He wills." (Surah Ibrahim, 14: 4).***

Some people, without considering other verses of the Holy Qur'an, and the interpretation which one verse has relative to others, immediately, upon seeing this verse, object and say, "If God guides whom He will and misleads whom He wills, what are we supposed to do in the middle?"

The important point is that the verses of the Holy Qur'an must always be studied in relation to each other in order to understand them in truth. Here we will recall several other verses about guidance and leading astray so that you can study them in relation to the above verse:

***"God will establish in strength those who believe, with the Word that stands firm in this world and in the hereafter; but God will leave, to stray, those who do wrong: God does what He wills" (Surah Ibrahim, 14:27).***

***“Thus does God leave to stray such as transgress and live in doubt.” (Surah Al-Mu’min, 40:34).***

***“And those who strive in our (Cause), We will certainly guide them to Our paths: for verily God is with those who do right.” (Surah Al-Ankabut, 29: 69).***

As we see, God’s will is not inexplicable. He neither gives the success of guidance to a person nor does He deny a person success. Those who undertake the jihad upon God’s Way, war with their difficulties and show strength and firmness of purpose, have been promised guidance and this is justice.

But those who create oppression and suppression and those who take steps towards extravagance, doubt, injustice and causing temptation in hearts, God takes away their possibility of guidance. Their hearts, as a result of these deeds, are darkened and they will not be able to succeed in reaching the station of wellbeing. This is how the Creator leaves the results of our deeds in our own hands and this is justice.

## **God’s Knowledge**

The last point which we feel should be mentioned here in the discussion of predestination and free will is the excuse used by some fatalists as knowledge of the eternal of God.

They say, “Does God know that so and so at such and such an hour on such and such a day will kill someone or will drink an alcoholic beverage?”

If we say, “He does not know,” we have denied God’s knowledge. And if we say, “Yes, that person must do this, otherwise God’s knowledge will be imperfect,” then, in order to preserve God’s knowledge, a person is obliged to sin and obey God!

But the fact is, this excuse was fabricated in order to cover over the sins they wanted to commit but they have forgotten the fact that we say that God knew from eternity whether we would be inclined towards free will and choice and will obey or sin. That is, our will or choice was also part of God’s knowledge. Thus, if we are obliged to sin, God’s knowledge will become ignorant.

Allow us to put forth some questions on this point to clarify them. Assume that a teacher knows that a lazy student will fail at the end of the year and the teacher is one hundred percent sure of this fact because of years of experience as a teacher.

When the student fails, can the student take the teacher to task and say: “Your knowledge and what you foresaw caused me to fail.”?

Or, let us assume that there is a sinless and pure person and he knew of a murder which would take place on such and such a day and interferes to prevent it, does the knowledge of this pure person take away the responsibility of the criminal, obliging the criminal to commit the crime?

Or, assume that a new machine has been invented which can predict the occurrence of an event several hours before it happens and it can say that so and so at such and such an hour in such and such a place will commit such and such an act. Does this oblige that person to do this?

In summary, God's knowledge never obliges anyone to do anything.

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