

Compulsion or Freedom

A. The Differences

Now comes the most vital difference amongst the Muslim sects; and that is the question of compulsion or freedom of man in his actions.

There are four groups:

1. The Mu'tazilah say that man is completely free to do whatever he wished, and that God has no power over his actions at all. This view is known as *tafwiz*—delegation of power by God to man. This group is also known as Qadariyyah.
2. The Mujabbirah (also known as Jabriyyah) say that "man has no power over any of his actions. He is a tool in the hands of Allah like pen in our hand." This view is known as *jabr*—compulsion.
3. The Asha'irah say that man has no power or will of his own in his actions; but he still "earns" or "acquires" the action. The term they use to describe their belief is *kasb* which literally means to earn, to acquire. What they actually mean is a riddle.
4. The Shi'ah Ithna-'Asharis says that man is neither completely independent of Allah nor compelled by Allah, but the actual position is between these two extremes. The Shiite belief is known as *al-amr bayna 'l-amrayn*. This will be explained later on.

It will be seen that the theories of Mu'tazilah, the Mujabbirah and the Shi'ah are easily understood for what they stand. But the Asha'irah's theory of *kasb* is as incomprehensible as the Christians' belief of three-in-one god.

It is clear that they have used the term *kasb* as a mask to hide their actual belief which is completely identical to the Mujabbirah's belief of compulsion. 'Allamah Shibli Nu'mani, a famous Sunni scholar of India, says, "Those who were bold enough, openly adopted the belief in compulsion and came to be known as Jabriyyah.

Those who were hesitant to use the word *jabr*, used the guise of '*kasb*' and '*iradah*'. This guise was invented by Abu 'l Hasan al-Ash'ari. 1 I therefore, will treat both the Jabriyyah and the Asha'irah as one. And as the present day Sunnis are all Asha'irah and as the topic under discussion is of vital importance, I propose to deal with it in some detail.

B. The Sunni's Belief

The position of the Sunnis in this respect has been explained by Imam Abu Hamid al-Ghazali as follows: "No act of any individual, even though it is earned (*kasb*) by him, is independent of the will of Allah for its existence; and there does not occur in either the physical or the extra-terrestrial world the wink of an eye, the hind of a thought, or the most sudden glance, except by the decree of Allah, of His power, desire and will.

This includes evil and good, benefit and harm, success and failure, sin and righteousness, obedience and disobedience, polytheism and true belief." 2

It will not be out of place to mention that this belief was invented by, and under the influence of, Banu Umayyah to provide a respectable mask to their debauchery and tyranny As 'Allamah Shibli Nu'mani has admitted in his book 'Ilmu 'l-Kalam:

"Although all the causes were present which were responsible for the differences in faith, yet the political differences started the ball rolling. The reign of Banu Umayyah was full of cruelty and bloodshed; and in reaction to that there was a spirit of revolt among the common people.

But the well-wishers of the government always silenced the people by saying that 'whatever happens takes place according to the will of Almighty, and as such people should not raise their voice at all. Everything was destined beforehand; and whatever happens, good or bad, happens according to the will of Allah; and we should bow down to that". 3

I think this disclosure—that the idea of *jabr* (and its disguised version known as '*kasb*') was nothing but a weapon of tyrant rulers to subdue the oppressed masses—is more than enough to discredit this belief.

C. The Shiite Belief

1. al-Amr Bayna 'l-Amrayn

The Shi'ah Ithna-'Asharis, on the other hand, say that we know the difference between falling down from a roof-top and coming down by ladders. The second act is done by our own power, will and intention; while the falling down is not so. And we know that our actions are not like falling down from the roof-top; instead they are like coming down the ladder with our own will and power. Therefore, what we do are our own actions and should not be attributed solely to Allah.

Again, we see that there are some of our actions for which we are either praised or blamed, while for other happenings we are neither praised nor condemned. It clearly shows that the first category is within our power and will, and the second category is beyond our power and will.

For example, we may be advised to treat an ailment in this or that way, but we cannot be advised to recover from the illness. It means that getting treatment is within our power, but getting well is not within the sphere of our activities.

Therefore, we say that there are many things and aspects of life which are within our power and will, while some others are not within our power. Those things for which we can be advised, praised or blamed, are within our power and will.

And the commandments of religion (the *shari'ah*) come under this category, because we have been advised or ordered to do this and not to do that, and because we are praised when we obey those commands and blamed when we disobey them. Therefore, it is absolutely wrong to say that our sins and righteousness, our obedience and disobedience, our true beliefs and wrong belief are by decree of Allah and His desire and will.

Shaykh as-Saduq says, "Allah possesses foreknowledge of human actions, but does not compel them to act in any particular manner." 4

But neither does this mean that man is completely independent of Allah. In fact, the power and will to act as we like is given to us by Allah. Thus Imam Ja'far as-Sadiq (peace be upon him) said, "There is no compulsion (by Allah), nor is there absolute delegation of power (from Allah to man); but the real position is between these two extremes: *al-amr bayna l-amrayn*." 5

The following example clearly portrays this "middle position". Suppose a man's hand is totally paralysed to an extent that he cannot move even a finger. A doctor has fitted an electrical device on his hand which, on being switched on, enables the man to use his hand freely in a normal way. The device is activated by a remote control which the doctor keeps in his own custody.

When the doctor switches the device on, the man uses his hand in any way he intends, but when the device is off, he cannot do anything. Now if the device is on and the patient does any work, can that work be attributed independently to him? No, because the power comes from that device which is fully controlled by the doctor.

Then can it be attributed to the doctor? No, because the man had done it by his own free will and choice. This is exactly the position of our activities. We are not under compulsion because the will and choice is ours; nor are we completely independent, because the power to do whatever we intend to do comes from God. 6

And at what point does our ability to do things start? Imam Musa al-Kazim (peace be upon him) said,

"A man acquires that ability when four conditions are fulfilled:

1. when there is nothing to hinder his plans;

2 his health and

3 the faculties (needed for that work) are up to the required standard; and

4 Allah provides him the occasion of that work. When all these conditions are fulfilled, a man becomes capable of acting according to his own free will."

When asked for an example, the Imam said,

"Let us suppose that there is a man, without any hindrance, of good health and proper strength; yet he cannot commit adultery unless he finds a woman. When he gets a woman (and the fourth condition is fulfilled), then it is up to him to choose one of the two alternatives: either he controls his evil emotions and saves himself as (Prophet) Yusuf did, or he commits adultery. If he protects himself from that sin, it will not be by compulsion of Allah (as some people think). And if he commits the sin, it does not mean that he was above the power of Allah (as others think)." 7

2. Predestination & the Day of Judgement

According to our point of view, if any one believes in predestination, then he cannot at the same time believe in the day of judgement (qiyamat). If Allah decrees every act which is done by us, then why should He inflict punishment upon us for those sins, evils and transgressions, for polytheism, disbelief and immoralities which He Himself predestined for us. It will be gross injustice.

Here is a talk of Imam Musa al-Kazim (peace be upon him) in his childhood with Imam Abu Hanifah, the founder of the Hanafi school of Sunni laws:

Abu Hanifah once went to meet Imam Ja'far as-Sadiq (peace be upon him). The Imam was inside his house and Abu Hanifah was waiting for him to come out. In the meantime, a small child came out and Abu Hanifah, just to pass sometime, asked him, "O child, from whom is the action of man?" The child at once said,

"O Abu Hanifah, there are only three imaginable sources: either the man himself is the originator of his action; or God is the doer of that action; or both together are the originators of that action. Now if God is the doer of the actions of man, then why does He inflict punishment on man for the sins? Is it not injustice (zulm)? And Allah says, "Verily Allah is not unjust to His creatures."

And if both man and God are partners in that crime, then is it not gross injustice that the powerful partner (i.e., God) punishes the weaker partner (i.e., man) for an action which both of them performed together? And as these two alternatives are proved to be illogical and impossible, the third theory is proved to be

correct that man does his actions by his own power and will."⁸

Abu Hanifah kissed the forehead of the child. That child was Musa, later known as al-Kazim, the seventh Imam of the Shi'ahs.

3. Abu Hanifah & Bahlul

Imam Abu Hanifah, of course, believed that man does nothing by his own will and power. In spite of the clever and logical discourse of Imam Musa al-Kazim, mentioned above, he did not change his belief. Once his theory led to a tragic-comic event.

Bahlul means wise and chief. It was the name of a famous companion of Imam Ja'far as-Sadiq who lived up to the last days of Imam 'Ali an-Naqi and saw Imam Hasan al-'Askari also. As a twist of fate, he is commonly referred to as Bahlul *'Majnun'* (*Bahlul*, the lunatic).

This is so because he pretended to be insane in order to save himself from the responsibilities of judgeship offered him by the Caliph Harun ar-Rashid. But, wise as he was, he took advantage of his supposed lunacy and always censured great people of his time (including the kings) for their shortcomings.

Once he heard Imam Abu Hanifah (who lived in Kufa) telling his disciples that, "I have heard three things from Imam Ja'far as-Sadiq which I think are wrong." The disciples asked what those things were. Imam Abu Hanifah said:

"First of all, Imam Ja'far as-Sadiq says that Allah cannot be seen. But it is wrong. If a thing does exist, then it must be seen. Secondly, he says that Satan will be punished in Hell. But it is absurd. Because Satan was created from fire: how can fire do any harm to a thing or person made of fire? Thirdly, he says that a man's action is done by his will and power, and that he is responsible for it. But it is wrong because all the actions of man are done by Allah's will and power, and Allah is, actually, responsible for it."

The disciples' applaud had just begun when Bahlul took a lump of clay and sent it hurtling towards Abu Hanifah. It hit him on the forehead, he cried in anguish and pain. The disciples caught Bahlul, and Abu Hanifah took him to the judge.

The judge heard the complaint and asked Bahlul whether the allegation was true.

Bahlul: "O Judge! Imam Abu Hanifah alleges that he is suffering from a searing pain in his head because of the clay which hit him. But I think he is lying. I cannot believe him until I see the pain."

Abu Hanifah: "You really are mad! How can I show you the pain? Has anybody ever seen a pain?"

Bahlul: "But, O Judge, he was just teaching his disciples that if a thing does exist, then it must be seen. As he cannot show the pain, I submit that according to his own belief, he is not suffering from any pain at

all"

Abu Hanifah: "Oh! my head is splitting because of the pain."

Bahlul: "O Judge, there is another matter which I just remembered. He was also telling his disciples that as Satan is made of fire, the fire of Hell cannot do him any harm. Now man is made of clay, as the Qur'an says, and it was a lump of clay which hit him: I wonder how can he claim that a lump of clay did harm to a man made of clay?"

Abu Hanifah: "O Judge! Bahlul wants to go scotfree by his verbosity. Please, take my revenge from him."
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Bahlul: "O Judge, I think Imam Abu Hanifah has very wrongfully brought me in this court. He was just teaching his disciples that all the actions of man are done by Allah, and that Allah is responsible for those actions. Now, why did he bring me here? If he really is suffering from the effect of that lump of clay, he should file suit against Allah who did hit him with that clay. Why should a poor harmless person like me be brought to the court. When all I am supposed to do was in fact done by Allah?"

The judge acquitted Bahlul.

D. Man's Will in Regard to Belief & Disbelief

It has been mentioned earlier that God does nothing without a purpose. So we may ask: what is the purpose of creating man?

God created man so that he may acquire those virtues which may bring him nearer to God. Man comes in this world like a blank paper. During his span of life various designs appear on that paper as the effect of his thoughts and deeds. Virtues which he acquires are like beautiful designs, and vices are like monstrous drawings. God says,

"Blessed be He, Who created death and life so that He may try you which of you is best in deeds."
(67:1-2)

God gave wisdom, will and power to man so that he may acquire the virtues. He has shown him the right path and has warned him against going astray. But He has not compelled him to do good deed nor to commit vices. He has given him power to do as he wishes in this life. The Qur'an says,

"I swear by—the soul and Him who made it perfect, then He inspired it (the knowledge of) right and wrong for it. He who purifies it (i.e., the soul) will indeed be successful; and he who corrupts it will indeed fail." (91:7-10)

1. Tawfiq & Khidhlan

As the purpose of our creation is to acquire virtues by obeying God and as we have been given freedom of choice, God does not compel us to select a certain path. Still, in His infinite mercy, He helps a man who sincerely wants to obey Him; but that help does not amount to any compulsion from God.

Let us take the example of a mason who is asked to repair a roof. He agrees to do the work, and starts preparation. But then he finds some difficulty in obtaining a ladder of proper height. You know that he is going to do the job any way; but you also know that he will face difficulty because of the shortness of the ladder. So you loan him your own ladder which is of proper height, and thus you make his work easier for him.

But remember that the help was given to him when the mason had the firm intention of doing the job, when he had made all his preparations. So this help did not compel him to start his work, nor did it create the intention or will or power to repair the roof. The power, the intention, the will, all was there beforehand. What you did was just to help him in carrying out his intention.

Such help from God, given to those persons who sincerely want to obey His commands, is called *tawfiq*. *Tawfiq* means helping someone to succeed.

Now let us look at the other side. Suppose the mason did not want to repair that roof and refused outright to accept the job; or even after agreeing to do the work, he started delaying tactics and putting lame excuses. You knew that he had no intention of doing the job.

Therefore, there was no sense in providing him with the ladder and you did not offer it to him. Can it be said that by withholding the ladder from him, you compelled him not to do the job? No. Because that man, with his own free will and choice, had refused the job (or was postponing it without any genuine cause). Your ladder had nothing to do with his decision.

That withholding of the help from those persons who choose to disobey the commands of God by their own free will and power, is called *khidlan*. *khidlan* means abandonment.

You will find many verses in the Qur'an which refer to these two aspects of God's act: helping and withholding the help. Take for example:

Whomsoever Allah wills to guide, He opens his heart to Islam; and whomsoever He wishes to leave straying, He makes his heart narrow and constricted, as if he was climbing into the heights – thus does Allah heap the punishment on those who do not believe. (6: 125)

Mark that God does not mislead the unbelievers—He just leaves them straying. It means that they had gone astray and then God left them to wander. This meaning becomes more dear when you see the last phrase "thus does Allah heap the punishment on those who do not believe."

It clearly shows that they were left in their wandering as a sort of punishment for their disbelief. They had chosen, on their own accord, not to believe in God; and then, as a result of that disbelief, God left them straying. Another verse says:

By it (i.e., the Qur'an) He leaves many straying, and many He leads into the right path. But leaves not straying except those who transgress divine commandments. (2:26)

Here also only those have been left straying who had already transgressed the laws by their own choice. It is dear that they were left in their wandering because they had gone astray themselves by their own wrong choice.

2. Knowledge of God & Action of Man

Question: God knows everything. He knew from ever that, for example, Bakr would be an unbeliever. Now, if Bakr accepts Islam, it would mean that the knowledge of God was wrong; and since God's knowledge can never be wrong, therefore, it is necessary for Bakr to remain an unbeliever. Does it not mean that Bakr had to remain an unbeliever because of the previous knowledge of God?

Answer: It is one thing to know what is going to happen; and quite another to cause that thing to happen. Suppose there is a doctor who, after examining a patient, declares that the patient cannot survive more than half an hour.

Can it be said that the doctor caused the death of that patient because he knew that the patient was going to die? Can a claim be lodged against him that he killed the patient? No. Instead this incident will be quoted to show how experienced that doctor is because he foresaw what was going to happen to the patient after half an hour.

Let us look at this example again. The doctor knew that the patient was going to die, because he was in such a condition that he could not survive more than half an hour. So, that knowledge was derived from the condition of the patient; not that the patient died because of the knowledge of the doctor. The knowledge was the result of the condition of the patient; the condition of the patient was not the result of the knowledge of the doctor.

This simple difference was overlooked by the majority of the Muslims who thought that as God knew everything which was to happen, so it must happen accordingly. They failed to realize that Bakr was to die an unbeliever, because he was going to die in the condition of disbelief by his own will; that the knowledge of God was based upon that independent will of Bakr; not that Bakr died an unbeliever because of the knowledge of God.

Of course, there is a difference between the knowledge of a doctor and the knowledge of God; The knowledge of doctor is imperfect and incomplete. Therefore, his forecast can be wrong at certain times. But the knowledge of God is perfect and complete in every respect for ever. Therefore, His knowledge

cannot be wrong at anytime. Still it does not mean that His knowledge causes the sin or polytheism or hypocrisy or faith and virtue of His creature.

E. Lutf, The Grace of God

If a person can do some thing good to someone without harming any other person and still he does not do so, then his reluctance from helping the others is against virtue, it is evil. Therefore, if God can do any thing beneficial for His creatures and then suppose that He does not do so, it will be against the virtue of God, and not commendable. It is for this reason we believe that "it is morally incumbent upon Allah to do every act of *lutf* (grace) in dealing with mankind." 9

What is the meaning of *lutf* which has been roughly translated above as "grace"? *Lutf* is the action on part of God which would help to bring His creatures nearer to His devotion and obedience, and facilitate moral correction. It must be mentioned here that "Allah has ordered us to be just, but He Himself treats us with something better than justice, names tafaddul— grace." (*Tafaddul* has same meaning as *lutf*.)

The belief that *lutf* is morally incumbent upon God is the distinctive belief of the Shi'ah Ithna'Asharis. The Sunnis do not believe that *lutf* is incumbent upon God. They say that even justice (*'adl*) is not incumbent upon God, let alone *lutf*. According to the examples given by them, if God sends good and virtuous persons to Hell and sends Satan to Paradise, it will be quite right. There would be nothing wrong.

Both *tawfiq* and *lutf*, as mentioned above, are primarily meant to help the individuals or the groups in obeying the commandments of God. However, sometimes such help is offered to an obstinate person not because he is expected to take its advantage and perform his duties, but just to close the door of argument, to refute all his excuses, so that he may not claim that had he been given a bit of encouragement, he would have been an obedient servant of God. This type of help is known as *itmamu 'l-hujjat*.

Some examples of *lutf*: Now we know that God created us to acquire virtues in this life so that we may be nearer to God in the hereafter. The question is: How are we to know what is virtue and what is evil? Human intellect does appreciate inherent virtue or evil of many of our actions, but can we expect everybody to act according to the perfect reason? Certainly not.

Many are the times when desire or anger suppresses the voice of wisdom; many are the times when an immediate benefit (obtainable by evil means) seems more impressive than the fear of condemnation by society or losing the grace of God in the life after death.

If God had left mankind without any effective device to check their evil thoughts and desires, it would have been tantamount to defeating His own purpose. Therefore, He laid down some rules and sent the Prophets and Imams to bring those rules to His creatures, and to explain and protect those laws from corruption.

And He did not leave us at that, He also appointed a day when all will be gathered to give account of their beliefs and actions. And, He, in His mercy and justice, sent us the news that there was to be a Day of Reckoning, a Day of Judgement, a Day of Rewards and Punishments. This information helps the creatures in obeying those laws which were brought by the prophets.

Thus sending the *shari'ah* is a *lutf* which helps the mankind to achieve the purpose of life. Also, sending the prophets and the Imams, and appointing a Day of judgement are *lutf* for the same reason. And because these acts are *lutf*, they are incumbent upon God.

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The rules of the *shari'ah* are called *taklif*. *Taklif* literally means to put in hardship. As any law, though it may be the simplest one, appears to human nature as a 'hardship'; the *shari'ah* is called *taklif*. (By the way, lawlessness in the end brings real hardship and calamities, while the law brings peace and happiness.)

Though the rules of the *shari'ah* are called 'hardship,' in reality they are well below our strength and ability. God says,

"On no soul does Allah place a burden but less than its capacity." (2:286)

Imam Ja'far as-Sadiq (peace be upon him) said,

"Allah did not give orders to His servants but that they were less than their strength ...Because He told them to pray five times a day, fast one month in a year, pay zakat five dirhams in two hundred and to go to hajj once in a life; but the people have strength to do more than this minimum." 10

Significantly, the word used in the above verse is not *taqdt*—strength and ability, but *wus'* which carries the idea of "ease" and "comfort" and here means "less than its strength or capacity. This is one aspect of God's infinite mercy as He says,

"Allah intends every facility for you and He does not want to put you in difficulties." (2: 185)

Some more explanation about the *shari'ah* will be given in Chapter Three.

1. Shibli Nu'mani, 'Ilmu 'l-Kalam, p. 28.

2. al-Ghazali, Ihya 'Ulumi 'd-Din (Kitab Qawa'idu'l-'Aqad), vol,1, p.193; also see al-Ash'ari, Kitab 'l-Luma', p. 53,239.

3. Shibli Nu'mani, 'Ilmu 'l-Kalam, p. 25.

4. as-Saduq, al-'I'tiqadat, chp. 4, p. 58.

5. Ibid, chp. 5, p. 58.

6. al-Khui, al-Bayan fi Tafsiri'l-Qur an, p.102. This example has been slightly modified by us.

7. as-Saduq, al-'I'tiqadat, chp. 9, p. 60.

8. at-Tabrasi, al-Ihtijaj vol. 2, pp. 387-388; al-Majisi, Biharu l-Anwar, vol. 5, p. 4, 27.

9. al-Hilli, al-Babu 'l-Hadi 'Ashar, p. 99

10. as-Saduq, Risalatu'l-I'tiqadat, chp. 3, p. 57

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