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The Issue of Bada' (Alteration in the Divine Will) and the Tradition of Abu Hamza

Question:

A tradition has been narrated by Abu Hamza Thumali from Imam Al-Baqir (peace be upon him) according to which Amir al-Mu'minin (peace be upon him) said that relief will come after the 70th year after Hijra, but because of the martyrdom of Imam Husayn (peace be upon him) the affair was delayed until the year 140 after Hijra. Then, because the Shi'a did not protect the secret, Allah once again delayed the affair such that He did not place any time for it in the knowledge of the Imams.

Please explain the commentary of this tradition along with the many other traditions that indicate that the promised relief shall occur after long periods and following great events and happenings. And doesn't the occurrence of *bada'*, which is understood from this tradition, cause the presumption that something became known for Allah—we seek refuge with Allah—after it had been unknown? In any case, what is the correct explanation?

Answer:

First: This tradition has objections in its chain of narrators, since according to books of *rijal*, Abu Hamza al-Thumali did not belong to the fourth generation of narrators; his demise occurred in the year 150 A.H. Hasan ibn Mahbub, who according to the chain of narrators narrated this tradition from Abu Hamza, is from the sixth generation, and passed away at the age of 75 years in the year 224 A.H. Thus, Hasan ibn Mahbub was not more than one year old when Abu Hamza passed away. In such a case it is absolutely not possible for him to narrate from Abu Hamza, and without doubt another individual was an intermediary between him and Abu Hamza. However, since it is not known who that person is, we cannot regard this tradition as reliable; moreover, a tradition narrated by only one person cannot be an authority in doctrinal principles, let alone when its chain of narrators is also unknown.

Second: With the existence of many reliable traditions that all explicitly indicate that the reappearance of Imam Mahdi (may Allah hasten his return) and the just government of the righteous shall not come to pass that quickly and that one must await magnificent changes and grave events over very long periods before his reappearance, how can a forged tradition with only one chain of narrators be relied upon in the face of all those traditions? Moreover, many sermons and traditions have been related from Amir al-Mu'minin (peace be upon him) in which both the length of the period during which one must await the reappearance and the great events and severe trials of the believers have been referred to. With the existence of this, how is it possible to say that a singly-narrated, forged traditions that says that the Imam specified the time of reappearance as the year 70 A.H. is reliable.

In addition, alteration in Divine decrees is a conceivable matter, though this does not mean that Allah the Exalted is unaware of affairs in the beginning and then acquires knowledge of them. Such a belief is invalid according to the Shi'a, since all Shi'a believe Allah to be free and far removed from ignorance coming to know about something after its being concealed. *Bada'*, in the conception which the Shi'a believe in, is a Qur'anic and Islamic principle, and an important part of the issues of theology and similarly the issues of prophecy are based on it.

Among the verses related to *bada'* are;

وَلَوْ أَنَّ أَهْلَ الْقُرَىٰ آمَنُوا وَاتَّقَوْا لَفَتَحْنَا عَلَيْهِم بَرَكَاتٍ مِّنَ السَّمَاءِ وَالْأَرْضِ وَلَٰكِن كَذَّبُوا فَأَخَذْنَاهُم بِمَا كَانُوا يَكْسِبُونَ

“Were the inhabitants of the cities to believe and adopt piety, We would open them blessings from the sky and the earth; yet they denied (the truth), so We requited them what they had earned.”¹

ظَهَرَ الْفَسَادُ فِي الْبَرِّ وَالْبَحْرِ بِمَا كَسَبَتْ أَيْدِي النَّاسِ

“Corruption has manifested in the land and in the sea on account of what the hands of the people have earned.”²

وَقَالَ رَبُّكُمْ ادْعُونِي أَسْتَجِبْ لَكُمْ

“Your Lord has said, Call on Me that I may answer you.”³

أَسْتَغْفِرُوا رَبَّكُمْ إِنَّهُ كَانَ غَفَّاراً يُرْسِلُ السَّمَاءَ عَلَيْكُمْ مِدْرَاراً

“Seek forgiveness from your Lord, since He is Ever-Forgiving; He constantly sends rain upon you from the sky.”⁴

وَوَاعَدْنَا مُوسَى ثَلَاثِينَ لَيْلَةً وَأَتَمَمْنَاهَا بِعَشْرٍ

“We covenanted Musa thirty nights, then completed them with ten (nights more).”⁵

فَلَوْلَا كَانَتْ قَرْيَةٌ آمَنَتْ فَنَفَعَهَا إِيمَانُهَا إِلَّا قَوْمُ يُونُسَ لَمَّا آمَنُوا كَشَفْنَا عَنْهُمْ عَذَابَ الْخِزْيِ فِي الْحَيَاةِ الدُّنْيَا وَمَتَعْنَاهُمْ إِلَىٰ حِينٍ

“So why did not one of the cities believe that its belief might benefit it except the people of Yunus; when they believed we remove from them the debasing punishment in this world and cause them to enjoy until a specified time.”⁶

لَئِنْ شَكَرْتُمْ لَأَزِيدَنَّكُمْ

“Verily, if you be grateful, I shall increase you (in blessings).”⁷

وَمَنْ يَتَّقِ اللَّهَ يَجْعَلْ لَهُ مَخْرَجاً وَيَرْزُقْهُ مِنْ حَيْثُ لَا يَحْتَسِبُ

“Whoever adopts piety with regard to Allah, He creates for him an escape (from difficulty) and grants him sustenance whence he does not expect.”⁸

ذَٰلِكَ بِأَنَّ اللَّهَ لَمْ يَكُ مُغَيِّرًا نِعْمَةً أَنْعَمَهَا عَلَىٰ قَوْمٍ حَتَّىٰ يُغَيِّرُوا مَا بِأَنْفُسِهِمْ

“That is because Allah does not change any blessing He had granted unto a people until they change what is in themselves.”⁹

The *bada'* that the Shi'a believe in, along with belief in the absolute knowledge and power of Allah, is a concept that is understood from such verses. For example, in them it is said that gratitude causes blessings from Allah to increase; Allah delivers a pious person from hardships by virtue of piety (*taqwa*) and sustains him from an unexpected source; He fulfills needs through prayer; on account of repentance and faith, He distances people from punishment; and because of misuse of blessings, He removes them from people.

Of course, abundant traditions that have been narrated by *Shi'a* and Sunnis and similarly manifold stories which have been related in original Islamic sources indicate this point. In fact, if *bada'* were not to exist, many religious concepts, such as prayer, reliance on Allah, repentance, charity, kindness towards relatives, gratitude, seeking forgiveness, admonition, granting tidings, and threatening, will be impossible to explain. *Bada'* means belief in the effect of these affairs in the life of a person.

Whether we are able to explain *bada'* in view of Allah's absolute knowledge and cognizance of all affairs or are unable to understand its secret and reality, in any case we must believe in the issue of *bada'* in accordance with the content of manifold verses of Qur'an and *mutawatir* traditions.

This is because sometimes, though all the factors and preliminaries for the occurrence of something are present, other factors strip them of their effect and as a result prevent that thing from occurring. In such a case, the existence of those factors, their continuation, and the factors that strip them of their effect are all preserved in the *Umm al-Kitab* by Divine decree in accordance with the order and arrangement He has specified. Those affairs are also linked to people's actions by choice, they occur through the will of Allah and His decree. That is, neither compulsion (*jabr*) is involved, nor delegation (*tafwid*); rather it is a reality between the two:

لَا جَبْرَ وَلَا تَفْوِيضَ بَلْ أَمْرٌ بَيْنَ الْأَمْرَيْنِ.

“Neither compulsion (*jabr*) nor delegation (*tafwid*), but a matter between the two ideas.”¹⁰

As an example, Allah has decreed that fire should burn or that every created being should develop in its particular course, and if an obstacle comes about, that thing will not exist. Of course, it should be kept in mind that in matters pertaining to matter, if an obstacle to their coming about blocks the causes of an event, this is not called *bada'*. Only in instances when things like charity, kindness to family, and prayer influence the occurrence or nonoccurrence of an affair such that humanity considers its existence or non-existence definite from the point of view of apparent causes and then the opposite occurs, that is called *bada'*.

This is though apparently this instance does not have much difference from the previous instance except that the object of effacement and affirmation in the first issue was observable matters and able to be

perceived by most or all people, but in the second issue it is non-observable matters; thus, most individuals are unable to perceive it. The second type indicates the existence and influence of the unseen world and the existence of Allah more than the first, though all affairs are from Him.

In summary, the concept of *bada'* is the same concept that is well understood from this verse of Qur'an in which Allah the Exalted refutes the false belief of the Jews:

وَقَالَتِ الْيَهُودُ يُدُّ اللَّهُ مَغْلُوبَةً غَلَّتْ أَيْدِيهِمْ وَلُعِنُوا بِمَا قَالُوا بَلْ يَدَاهُ مَبْسُوطَتَانِ
يَنْفِقُ كَيْفَ يَشَاءُ

“And the Jews said, Allah’s hand is fettered, may their hands be fettered and they be cursed on account of what they said. Rather His hands are outspread; He bestows howsoever He wishes.”¹¹

Thus *bada'* in its correct meaning is the negation of this erroneous belief of the Jews, who say that Allah’s hand is fettered from acting in affairs. In other words, *bada'* means that Allah’s hands are extended and His absolute power is unlimited, without this having any conflict with His absolute knowledge.

In other words, the reality of *bada'*, with its correct meaning such that it is compatible with Allah’s absolute knowledge, in accordance with His freedom from all forms of ignorance, and opposed to the erroneous view of the Jews and all other deniers of the issue of *bada'* who view Allah’s power as limited, must be explained thus: According to Divine decree, everything has particular effects, and things take place in accordance with those effects in conformance to Divine Will.

In other words, it is a Divine decree that, for example, fire should burn, but the realization of this characteristic—its occurrence—is pursuant to Divine Will. In addition, there are a number of unseen causes, such as reliance on Allah, charity, and prayer—which are not common material affairs—all of which have a peculiar effect. In the stage of action, whichever of those material or non-material causes—apparent or unseen—is stronger will be effective in the occurrence of affairs, and its entailed result will come about. For example, in many cases, in spite of the existence of barriers, kindness to relatives, which has been decreed as a factor in lengthening one’s life overcomes all other factors and as a result a person’s life is lengthened. Thus, it has come in a tradition:

صَلَّةُ الرَّحْمِ تَزِيدُ فِي الْعُمُرِ وَتُدْفَعُ مِيتَةَ السُّوءِ.

*“Kindness to relatives lengthens the life and repels the difficulties of death”*¹²

The summary of the reality of *bada'* is that causes and factors are not limited to material causes. Rather, in addition to material causes, there are also non-material causes in accordance with Divine decree.

On this basis, one must have faith both in unseen causes and in Divine Will and that:

كُلُّ يَوْمٍ - هُوَ - فِي - شَأْنٍ < كُلُّ يَوْمٍ هُوَ فِي شَأْنٍ .

“Every day He is in a state [of glory]”¹³

and the continuance of His acting in sustaining, curing, guiding, and so forth. Without Allah’s will, nothing can produce an effect, though we are unable to fathom the details of these Divine matters and their connection to one another.

It is possible that the meaning of “effacement” in *bada'* is the effacement of these decrees by other decrees, such as the effacement of the effect of illness and being cured by medicine or prayer, which takes place by the will of Allah. The decree and effect of the illness is also by Divine will, just as we see that in material and apparent causes and effects a particular factor prevented a person from falling into the ocean or from a high place or prevented the occurrence of an accident or collision. And sometimes this change is effaced or affirmed by the influence of unseen causes.

Perhaps the meaning is that decrees are not definite; it is only through the will of Allah that these decrees are effaced or affirmed, and without that no decree comes to fruition. And the meaning of:

وَعِنْدَهُ أُمُّ الْكِتَابِ

“And with Him is the ‘Mother of the Book’ ¹⁴

is that all relations and decrees are in the “Mother of the Book,” or that whatever takes place does not take place in contradiction to it, and everything is in the “Mother of the Book.”

In any case, *bada'* has an intelligible and logical meaning and it can’t be said to mean the uncovering of a matter hidden from or unknown by Allah. The purpose of explaining *bada'* in terms of each of the mentioned explanations is so that by understanding these realities people’s attention to Allah increase and so that they do not forget Him in any circumstances or rely only on apparent and ordinary means in their affairs. And even when those means are present they should still consider themselves in need of Allah’s attention, and when those means are not present, they should not become hopeless; Allah may very well bring about that matter through other means.

In short, unlike the Jews, he should not consider Allah's hands to be tied, and should believe in the great truth of Divine unity that:

قُلِ اللَّهُمَّ مَالِكُ الْمُلْكِ تُؤْتِي الْمُلْكَ مَنْ تَشَاءُ وَتَنْزِعُ الْمُلْكَ مِمَّنْ تَشَاءُ وَتُعِزُّ مَنْ تَشَاءُ وَتُذِلُّ مَنْ تَشَاءُ بِإِذْنِكَ عَلَى كُلِّ شَيْءٍ قَدِيرٌ.

“Say: O’ Allah, Master of the Kingdom, You grant the kingdom to whomsoever You please and remove it from whomsoever You please; You make mighty whomsoever You please and debase whomsoever You please. All good lies in Your hand; verily You have power over all things.”¹⁵

As a matter of principle, without such a conviction, the development of humanity and their traveling the worlds of cognizance and true advancement and ascension to celestial positions is not possible. This is a reality that also has a basis in human nature, and even if he denies the issue of *bada’* with his tongue, he admits it with his conscience. Thus, in situations of danger, he supplicates to Allah to repel them and takes recourse to His most beautiful names, like the Sustainer, the Healer, the Sufficient, the Protector, all of which make sense through belief in *bada’*.

And as Allah says in the Qur’an:

قُلْ أَرَأَيْتُمْ إِنْ أَتَاكُمْ عَذَابُ اللَّهِ أَوْ أَتَتْكُمُ السَّاعَةُ أَغَيْرَ اللَّهِ تَدْعُونَ إِنْ كُنْتُمْ صَادِقِينَ بَلْ إِيَّاهُ تَدْعُونَ.

“Say: Do you think that if Allah’s punishment come to you or the Hour (of Resurrection) come, that you will call upon other than Allah, if you be truthful; rather Him alone will you call.”¹⁶

Based on this importance which belief in *bada’* has in worshipping Allah and paying attention to Him, it has come in Shi’a traditions that:

مَا عُبِدَ اللَّهُ بِشَيْءٍ مِثْلُ الْبَدَاءِ

“Allah has not been worshipped by anything like belief in *bada’*”¹⁷

In summary, the issue of *bada’*, no matter how it is explained, does not contradict Allah’s absolute knowledge. That is, just as He is “All-Knowing,” He is also “All-Powerful.”

Two objections have been raised regarding the issue of *bada*'.

First Objection:

The first objection is from the believers in predetermination, who say that when Allah has knowledge with respect to something, it is impossible for His knowledge to be in disagreement with the thing that is known. Thus, the meaning of "Every day He is in a state of glory" is that every day and every instant whatever Allah's knowledge is associated to occurs; He creates and sustains and withholds. All actions are from Him, and nothing occurs that is outside the range of His knowledge. In fact, outside the limits of His knowledge, no action is possible. Similarly, it is obligatory for all events to which His knowledge is associated to take place, since for such actions not to take place entails His being ignorant, while The Divine Essence is pure of all forms of ignorance, defect, and fault. From this they raise the objection of Allah—as well as His creation—being compelled.

Of course, this objection is rejected by referring to one's reason, since every individual clearly and unambiguously sees himself as free in his actions. In reality, this is a form of objection with respect to obvious matters, just like if someone doubts whether fire burns or makes hot.

Another answer to this objection is that first of all, it doesn't disprove the issue of *bada* even if it is valid, since if one believes in predetermination and denies free will, effacement and affirmation, which are among Allah's actions, will in the end occur either by compellation or free will, like all other actions.

In other words, a person who believes in predetermination cannot negate effacement and affirmation with this objection; he can only say that the occurrence of effacement and affirmation, which are both Divine actions, is necessary and certain.

Second, the correct answer to the objection itself is that effacement and affirmation are both uncompelled Divine actions, and like all other Divine actions take place through free will; and "Allah's knowledge of their occurrence through free will" cannot negate their being uncompelled. Otherwise, it would entail knowledge influencing the thing that is known, which is impossible. Similarly, with regard to the actions of people, Allah has knowledge that they will occur through free will. Such knowledge does not negate the person's free will. It appears that the sage Muhaqqiq al-Tusi refers to this answer when he says (in the form of a poetical couplet) in answer to Khayyam:

*To term the timeless Divine knowledge the cause of disobedience
Is, among those possessed of reason, out of extreme ignorance*

That is, knowledge of the performance of actions by individuals possessing free will does not contradict the uncompelled nature of those actions.

Second Objection:

How can the prophecies of the Prophets and Divine friends regarding unseen future events, especially the prophecies of the Noble Messenger (peace be upon him and his family) and the pure Imams (peace be upon them) be explained and justified if *bada'* is possible with regard to them? That is, how have they given information with certainty about so many future events without taking into account the possibility of *bada'* with respect to those prophecies?

Answer: The possibility of occurrence of *bada'* and its occurrence in some instances does not mean that it occurs in all instances. Thus, the prophecies of those personages, whose knowledge was grounded in Allah's knowledge and teaching and inspiration, indicates that *bada'* will not occur, and is not in contradiction with the possibility of *bada'*.

The objection may also be worded in a different way: according to some traditions, in some instances the reports of the prophets and Imams (peace be upon them) did not come to pass, and the reason for that has been mentioned as *bada'* or other factors. And this entails having informed about something that is untrue and being accused of lying, and causes a weakening of the position of prophecy and vicgerency.

In addition, the prophet or vicegerent who makes the prophecy either knows about the occurrence of *bada'* or doesn't know about it. In the first case, it is obvious that announcing with certainty the occurrence of an event that will not occur even though the announcer knows that it will not occur constitutes a lie. And the position of the prophets is far removed from that.

In the second case as well, announcing with certainty the occurrence of an event that may or may not occur because of the possibility of *bada'*, if not a lie, does not much benefit the position of prophecy or *Imamah*.

Answer: First, according to reliable traditions, the knowledge and awareness of unseen matters that Allah grants to the prophet or his successor and commands him to announce belongs to the definite affairs in which there is no *bada'*. For example, the Prophet's (peace be upon him and his family) prophecy about 'Ammar being killed at the hands of the rebellious party, about the martyrdom of Amir al-Mu'minin and Imam Husayn (peace be upon him) and the remaining tragedies to befall the Ahl al-Bait (peace be upon them), or about Fatimah (peace be upon her) being the first of the Ahl al-Bait to meet him, all are definite matters not subject to *bada'*. The same is true about the prophecy that Islam shall subdue the world, that Imam Mahdi (may Allah hasten his return) will appear at the end of time and the explanation of his qualities and characteristics, and tens of other undeniable prophecies. Similarly, the reports about the unseen given by Amir al-Mu'minin (peace be upon him), much of which the Ahl al-Sunnat have also narrated, and the reports of the remaining Imams (peace be upon them) about unseen affairs are not subject to *bada'*, or more correctly, *bada'* will not take place in these matters, or else those personages would not have given information about them.

The traditions which mention the existence of *bada'* in their reports of the unseen are either very rare or contain a weak chain of narration, or else their indication of such a point is incomplete. Take for example the same tradition of Abu Hamzah which was discussed earlier.

If there is a *sahih* (sound) tradition in this regard, it is the tradition of Amr ibn Hamq from Amir al-Mu'minin (peace be upon him) which says, I had the honor of coming to the presence of Amir al-Mu'minin (peace be upon him) when he had been struck with the fatal blow; he (peace be upon him) said, O' Amr, I shall part from you... until the year 70, calamities will take place; he repeated this statement thrice.

I said, O' Amir al-Mu'minin (peace be upon him), you said that calamities will occur until the year 70; is there deliverance after that year?

He said, Yes, Amr. After every trial there is deliverance and ease.

يَمْحُو اللَّهُ مَا يَشَاءُ وَيُثَبِّتُ وَعِنْدَهُ أُمُّ الْكِتَابِ

“Allah effaces whatsoever He pleases and affirms, and with Him is the Mother of the Book.”¹⁸

This tradition does not prophesy the appearance and uprising of the Imam of the Time (may Allah hasten his return); rather it gives information about a Divine custom,

إِنَّ مَعَ الْعُسْرِ يُسْرًا

“Verily with difficulty is ease.”¹⁹

At the same time, it mentions the point that this deliverance will come to be in the case that *bada'* does not occur. In reality, the Imam, by reciting the verse “Allah effaces whatsoever He pleases and affirms, and with Him is the Mother of the Book” wanted to say that this matter is not definite; it may very well be that *bada'* will occur and prevent it from occurring.

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1. Surah A'araf (7), Verse 96
 2. Surah Rum (30), Verse 41
 3. Surah Ghafir (40), Verse 60
 4. Surah Nuh (71), Verse 10, 11
 5. Surah A'raf (7), Verse 142
 6. Surah Yunus (10), Verse 98
 7. Surah Ibrahim (14), Verse 7
 8. Surah Talaq (65), Verse 2, 3

9. Surah Anfal (8), Verse 53
10. Bihar al-Anwar, Volume 4, Page 197
11. Surah Ma'idah (5), Verse 64
12. Bihar al-Anwar, Volume 77, Page 172
13. Surah al-Rahman (55), Verse 29
14. Surah Ra'd (13), Verse 39
15. Surah Ali-Imran (3), Verse 26
16. Surah Anam (6), Verse 40
17. Bihar al-Anwar, Volume 4, Page 107, hadith 19
18. Surah Ra'd (13), Verse 39 [Tafsir al-'Ayashi, Volume 2, Page 217, hadith 68]
19. Surah Inshirah (94), Verse 6

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