

Part 4: Literal Meanings of `Qadha` and `Qadar`

In Arabic the words 'qadha' and 'qadar' are used for fate and destiny. The word, 'qadha' means to decide; to settle; to judge. A 'qadhi' (judge) is called so because he decides judicially between the litigants. In the Qur'an this word has been used frequently with reference to both man and Allah. It has been used in the sense of giving a final verdict and taking a decisive action.

The word, 'qadr' means to measure; to assess; and to determine. It also has been used in the Qur'an frequently.

The events of the world are said to be dividedly decided because they take place within the Knowledge of Allah and are subject to His Will. They are said to be divinely determined because their time, place and nature are determined in accordance with a system fixed by Allah.

We skip over the questions raised and the terminology used in this connection by the scholastic theologians for what they have dwelt on mostly relates to such questions as Allah's Knowledge and its degrees.

The only question which we may take up in the course of our present study is that the events taking place in the world may be looked at from three angles. Either we may say that they have no past. In other words, an event which takes place at any time is not related to anything preceding it, nor does its existence depend on anything prior to it. Its temporal and spatial characteristics and its scope and extent were not determined in the past.

If this hypothesis is accepted, there is no meaning of destiny. According to this theory the destiny of a thing is not predetermined at the stage of the existence of another thing preceding it, for there is no existential link between the two. If we accept this view, we will have to deny the principle of causation totally and will have to explain unscientifically all events as mere accidents.

However the principle of causation and the existence of an essential link between various events are fact, which are undeniable. Everything acquires its inevitability and its existential characteristics from some other thing or things preceding it. The principle of causation is in a way the basis of all human

knowledge.

Another possibility is that we should maintain that every event has a cause, but deny that every cause necessitates a particular effect and that every effect can emanate only from a particular cause. In this case we can believe that the whole universe has not more than one cause and agent and that is Allah. All existing things and all events emanate from Him directly. His Will attaches to every event separately. His Will and Knowledge of everything is independent of His Will and Knowledge of any other thing.

In this case we can say that there is no agent except Allah. He knows from eternity that such and such event will take place at such and such time, and that event must perforce come into existence at that particular moment. No other factor affects the existence of that event. Human deeds and acts also being a kind of event, emanate direct from the Will and Knowledge of Allah. The human will and power are only a facade or a mere illusion, and not actually effective in bringing about any event.

This is true predestinarianism, that is the view which if held by a person or a nation, will certainly lead them to ruination.

This view, besides the practical and social evils which it entails is logically absurd. There is no doubt that it does not stand to reason. The system of causation or the connection of causes and effects is undeniable. Not only physical sciences and perceptual and experimental observations prove the existence of a system of causes and effects, but also there are very strong philosophical arguments in support of it. The Holy Qur'an also endorses the doctrine of causation.

According to the third view, all the events in the world are governed by a system of causation. Every event acquires its inevitability and its existential characteristics from the causes proceeding to it. There exists an unbreakable link between the past, the present and the future, that is between every phenomenon and its preceding causes.

According to this view the destiny of everything in existence is in the hands of some other thing which is its cause, which has necessitated it and has made it inevitable. It is the cause which determines the existential characteristics of its effect. Every cause in its turn is the effect of another cause. And so on.

The acceptance of the general principle of causation means the acceptance of the view that every event acquires its inevitability and its characteristics of shape, size and quality from its cause or causes. It makes no difference whether we believe or not in a religion and the First Cause, that is the source of every determination.

If this view is upheld then as far as the question of destiny is concerned, there will be no difference between a theist and an atheist. The belief in destiny is corollary of the belief in the principle of causation. The only difference is that an atheist looks at the question from material angle only. He believes that the destiny of everything in existence is determined by the causes are not conscious of the work they do. On the other hand, a theist maintains that at the long end of the chain there are certain

causes which are conscious of their work and their own characteristics. The theists call such causes the 'Book', the 'Tablet' and the 'Pen', whereas the materialistic school has nothing worthy of these names.

Predestination

From the foregoing discussion it is clear that a belief in fate and destiny and that every event, including human deeds and acts, is determined by Divine decrees, does not necessarily mean predestination. It would have certainly meant so, had we believed that man and his will have no role in this respect. As hinted earlier, the Divine Being does not influence the events of the world direct. That is absolutely impossible. He necessitates the existence of a thing through its particular causes only. That everything is decreed by Allah simply means that the system of causation is subject to His Will and Knowledge. As already pointed out, the acceptance of the principle of causation implies that the destiny of everything in existence depended on the causes preceding it. It does not matter whether we believe that the system of causation emanates from the Divine Will or presume that it exists independently, for its independence or dependence does not in any way affect human destiny.

It is foolish to hold that the doctrine of predestination has any relation to the belief in fate and destiny, or to criticize this belief on that account.

There is absolutely no such thing as destiny if it means the denial of an inevitable connection between the causes and their effects. It will amount to the denial of human liberty and volition. In theology very strong and convincing arguments have been advanced to prove the baselessness of such an idea.

But if destiny means a link of inevitability between an event and its causes, then its existence is an undeniable fact. Anyhow, it should be remembered that the belief in destiny is not peculiar to the theists. Every school of thought which believes in the general system of causation has to accept the existence of this link of inevitability. The only difference is that the theists hold that the chain of causes at a dimension other than that of time or place ends at the Essential Being, Who is self-existent. Thus all inevitabilities and determinations stop at a particular point.

Anyhow, this difference neither proves nor disproves the doctrine of predestination.

Source URL:

<https://www.al-islam.org/man-and-his-destiny-ayatullah-murtadha-mutahhari/part-4-literal-meanings-qadha-and-qadar>