

Supplication and the Divine Decree and Destiny

Indeed there is a Divine decree (*qadar*) and destiny (*qada'*) with regard to each and every thing in the universe, such that there is no way for man to refrain from it, as it is an irrevocable Divine will (*iradah*).

In this case, what is the position of supplication in relation to this Divine will? Can supplication change something which has been subjected to the invariable will of Allah and is already in His knowledge? What is the benefit of supplication if it cannot alter the definite Divine decree and destiny? And if supplication has a role in changing the Divine decree and destiny, then how is this accomplished?

In order to answer this question, it is necessary to enter into the issue of the Divine decree and destiny, and also the issue of *bada'*. Since addressing this issue might take us away from our current discussion on prayer (*du'a'*) to a philosophical discussion, we will try to avoid the philosophical complexities of the issue, talking about it lightly and briefly to the extent that it is related to the answer.

The Law of Causality in History and the Universe

The law of causality (*'illiyyah*) operates in the course of history as well as in the universe in form of a general and an irrevocable law, without there being any exception to it. Some of the Qur'anic verses pertaining to this fact are:

- ***"To Allah belongs the kingdom of the heavens and the earth. He creates whatever He wishes."***¹
- ***"Indeed Allah does what He desires."***²
- ***"Indeed your Lord does whatever He desires."***³
- ***"All that We say to a thing, when We will it, is to say to it 'Be!' and it is."***⁴
- ***"Had Allah willed, He would have taken away their hearing and sight."***⁵
- ***"But Allah singles out for His mercy whomever He wishes."***⁶

- ***“Allah provides whomever He wishes without any reckoning.”***⁷
- ***“And Allah gives His kingdom to whomever He wishes.”***⁸
- ***“Say, ‘O Allah, Master of all sovereignty! You give sovereignty to whomever You wish, and strip sovereignty of whomever You wish; You make mighty whomever You wish, and You abase whomever You wish; all good is in Your hand. Indeed You have power over all things.’”***⁹
- ***“If He wishes, He will take you away, O mankind, and bring others {in your place}.”***¹⁰

The Qur’an is replete with these verses and the like of them. They are clear in that Allah, the Exalted, has the absolute power over the universe, nothing can delimit Him, render Him incapable, or stop Him from doing what He wishes. He has power over everything; He does what He wants and He is not questioned about anything, but they are questioned.

The Jews had a belief that the will (*iradah*) of Allah is subject to the general system of causality which reigns over the universe and history. According to them, Allah has no control on the universe or history after He has created them. Referring to this view, the Qur’an says:

“The Jews say, ‘Allah’s hand is tied up.’ Tied up be their hands, and cursed be they for what they say! Rather, His hands are wide open.”¹¹

Hence, there is no doubt in whatever we have mentioned above, and the Qur’an is clear in all that and in condemning the Jews for what they believe in.

The Relation between the Divine Will and the Law of Causality

In the light of this power which the Qur’an affirms for the Divine will in the universe, history, and society, it is natural for us to ask about the relation of the Divine will to the law of causality. Does it mean suspension (*ta’til*), in the sense that the will of Allah suspends the law of causality whenever He wills that?

The answer to this is of course negative; for it is He who is the creator of the cause (*‘illah*) and none other than Him. Creating the ‘cause’ is necessarily creating its causality (*‘illiyyah*). If He creates fire, then He has created the heat also.

The creation of fire without heat is similar to the creation of an even number without its being even!¹² Accordingly, it is not possible that Allah creates the fire without it being the cause of heat, unless if He changes its entity to something other than fire but which resembles fire.

Therefore, there is no way to entertain the opinion that the dominion of the will of Allah over the universe and history implies the suspension of the law of causality.

In this case, what then can be the relation between the Divine will and the principle of causality?

The Reign of the Divine Will over the Law of Causality by Itself

The Qur'an elucidates this relation and defines it in many places, stating that Allah, the Exalted, has absolute control and power over the law of causality by the very law of causality, without suspending or nullifying it.

The Qur'an does not suspend the will (*iradah*) of Allah as the Jews do, nor does it nullify the law of causality as the Ash'arite do; rather it affirms the sovereignty of Allah over the universe by the very law of causality.

As a result, when He, the Exalted, wills to bestow His blessings on a people, He sends the winds as a glad tiding before His mercy:

“It is He who sends forth the winds as harbingers of His mercy”¹³,

“It is Allah who sends the winds and they raise a cloud”¹⁴,

“And We send the fertilizing wind and send down water from the sky.”¹⁵

Thus, He is the one who sends down water from the sky, but by sending {first} the fertilizing winds. When He wills to give good news of His mercy to a people, He would send to them winds as sign of His mercy so that they may raise the clouds. Thereafter, He would send to them rainfall which would cause their lands to produce what Allah has deposited in it of His mercy.

In conclusion, when Allah intends to shower His blessings on a people, He blesses them through its means (*asbab*). Similarly, when He decides to punish a people, He does so through its means.

With regard to His punishment on the people of Fir'awn, Allah says:

“Certainly We afflicted Pharaoh's clan with droughts (*sinin*) and loss of produce, so that they may take admonition.”¹⁶

According to this verse, the punishment on the people of Pharaoh and their admonition was accomplished through the drought. '*Sinin*' in the above verse is the plural of '*sanat*' which means drought

In brief, if Allah willed to bless a community, He would do so by employing its means, such as the winds and the clouds. On the contrary, if He intended to punish a people, He would do so through its specified means, such as drought and shortage of rainfall.

The Law of Mediate Causation

The law of mediate causation (*Qanun at-Tasbib*) implies that Allah, the Exalted, in order to achieve what He desires, employs means which would actualize His will (*iradah*). The following verses of the Qur'an

point out to this fact:

1. ***“Whomever Allah desires to guide, He opens his breast to Islam, and whomever He desires to lead astray, He makes his breast narrow and straitened as if he were climbing to a height.”***¹⁷

This verse has clear indication to the point we have just mentioned. Allah, the Exalted, guides a people or misleads them by means of their own deeds. Therefore, when He wills to guide a given community, He will employ for this purpose a means (*sabab*) which would actualize what He has willed, thus He opens their breasts to Islam. In contrast, if He desires a people to go astray, He will employ means which would actualize what He has desired; accordingly He makes their breasts narrow and straitened.

2. ***“And when We desire to destroy a town, We command its affluent ones {to obey Allah}, but they commit transgression in it, and so the word becomes due against it, and We destroy it utterly.”***¹⁸

According to this verse, when Allah intends to annihilate a nation because of their own actions, He would take up a means (*sabab*) which would lead to their corruption. Thus, He would make them affluent, and this affluency (*tarf*) would lead the affluent ones to transgression (*fisq*); as a result, the word would become due against them.

3. ***“When Allah promised you {victory over} one of the two companies, {saying}, ‘It is for you’, you were eager that it should be the one that was unarmed. But Allah desires to confirm the truth with His words, and to root out the faithless.”***¹⁹

When Allah had willed to establish the truth (*haqq*) and wipe off the infidels through those of the Muslims who stood by the Holy Prophet (S) , He chose for them the way of ‘arms’ as a means to actualize this aim.

In the same manner that Allah has made the way of arms and munitions a means for the perfection of the Muslims, their guardianship and leadership over the people on the face of this earth, similarly He has made the affliction with comfort (*lin*) and affluency (*tarf*) a means for the eradication of a nation whose destruction Allah has already ordained.

4. ***“So let not their wealth and children impress you; Allah only desires to punish them with these in the life of this world, and that their souls may depart while they are faithless.”***²⁰

Thus Allah takes up from among their wealth and offspring a means (*sabab*) to punish and destroy them.

The Law of Facilitation

The law of facilitation (*tawfiq*) is very close to that of mediate causation (*tasbib*). This law implies that Allah places his servant in the course of means (*asbab*) leading toward the good (*khayr*).

For instance, when Allah wills the well being of a sick person, He would direct him to a physician who is able to diagnose his illness, and direct him to consume a medicine which would cure his ailment. Likewise, if Allah desires good for His servant, He leads him to the means of good (*khayr*) and guidance. And if He wills to bestow upon him a provision (*rizq*), He would lead him to the means of provision; and if He decides the opposite of this, then He would keep the servant away from its means.

The Absolute Reign of Allah's Will in the Universe

All that we have said above is in the hand of Allah and subject to his command and power. The following verses attest to this fact:

- ***“Whatever mercy Allah unfolds for the people, no one can withhold it; and whatever He withholds, no one can release it after Him, and He is the All-mighty, the All-wise.”***²¹
- ***“Indeed Allah carries through His command.”***²²
- ***“If Allah helps you, no one can overcome you, but if He forsakes you, who will help you after Him?”***²³
- ***“And when Allah wishes to visit ill on a people, there is nothing that can avert it, and they have no protector besides Him.”***²⁴
- ***“Indeed your Lord does whatever He desires.”***²⁵
- ***“Indeed Allah does whatever He desires.”***²⁶

This is what exactly the meaning of Allah's dominion over the universe means,

“...the Sovereign, the All-holy, All-benign, the Securer, the Dominant...”²⁷

The Relation between the Will of Allah and the Law of Causality

The last word with regard to the relation between the will (*iradah*) of Allah and the law of causation is that there is no doubt that this law is operative in the universe in an all-inclusive and a definite manner. However, this law is subject to the will (*mashi'ah*) of Allah, and not dominant over it; rather it is the *iradah* of Allah which is dominant over this law.

Nonetheless, the command of the will of Allah over the law of causation does not mean the annulment or suspension of this law, and how can this be possible when this law is among the creations of Allah, as mentioned earlier. Rather, it means that Allah, the Exalted, suspends what He wills out of these means (*asbab*) and makes effectual what He desires of them. He freely acts in the universe and thus gives sovereignty to whomever He wishes, and strips sovereignty of whomever He wishes, but through its specified means.

It is due to this very reason that man is unable to predict the future of the universe and history in respect to their causes, as the will of Allah may intervene in the affair, changing the means and causes according to His desire.

For instance, if anyone of us were to predict the future of a battle between a powerful and a weak army, he would foresee victory for the strong army and defeat for the weaker side. But if Allah wills the weaker side to triumph over the powerful side, He would arrange for that causes (*asbab*) which are normally unexpected. Thus, He would cast fear in the hearts of the stronger side, and strength and resolution in the hearts of the smaller army. He would make the move of the smaller side steady and sound, causing their affairs to run to their benefit; and the move of the other side unsteady, causing them to commit military errors. Accordingly, the smaller army would overpower the larger army by the will of Allah.

A large or small number is not the only factor which determines the fate of a battle. However, this does not mean that a large number is not among the factors of victory, or the 'small number' is not among the factors of defeat; rather what we mean is that victory has other factors as well, as 'defeat' has different factors.

Accordingly, when Allah wills the triumph of the smaller party, He would prepare for them its factors, as they are in His hand; similarly, if He wills the larger party to get defeated, He would pave the way for their defeat, as this also is in His hand. He, the Exalted, says:

“Those who were certain they will encounter Allah said, ‘How many a small party has overcome a larger party by Allah’s will! And Allah is with the patient.’”²⁸

Change in Allah’s Decree in Creation

This is exactly the meaning of 'change in Allah’s decree' (*bada'*) in respect to the creation. *Bada'* is the change in the course of events in the universe and history in accordance with the will (*iradah*) of Allah.

How many a times has mankind been on the brink of falling –if the law of causation were to be operative in the lives of the people, but the will (*mashi'ah*) of Allah intervened in the appropriate moment and rescued mankind from falling, in contrary to the course required by the law of causation.

Nonetheless, this does not imply the suspension or the nullification of the law of causality, rather the will (*iradah*) of Allah, the All-mighty, overrides the law of causality by itself. This overriding and the implications it involves run against the understanding of the people and their perception of the chain of causes and effects.

Now, this Divine overruling of the law of causality which takes the people by surprise and makes them err in their calculations is what is known as *bada'*, about which there are many narrations from the Ahl al-Bayt (‘a).

With *bada'* there occurs an unexpected change in the universe, history and society. Thus, those whom people did not expect to triumph would become triumphant, and those whom they could not think of being defeated would get defeated; the oppressed would come to power, and the kings would be humiliated.

Obliteration and Affirmation

Bada' as explained above is the very phenomenon of obliteration (*mahw*) and affirmation (*ithbat*) which has appeared in the Qur'an:

“Allah effaces and confirms whatever He wishes, and with Him is the Mother of the Book.”²⁹

The Mother of the Book (*umm al-kitab*) is the knowledge of Allah, known in the tongue of the traditions as *al-lawh al-mahfuz* (the guarded tablet). There does not occur any obliteration or change in it, nor does Allah come to know of something after being ignorant of it.

Shaykh as-Saduq narrates in *Ikmal ad-din* from Abu Basir and Suma'ah, who reported from Imam as-Sadiq ('a), “Whoever thinks that Allah, the All-mighty, the Majestic, comes to realize something which He did not know of yesterday, then you should dissociate yourselves from him.”³⁰

It is worthy of note here that the obliteration (*mahw*) takes place in the book of creation (*kitab at-Takwin*) and not in the Mother of the Book (*umm al-kitab*), which denotes the knowledge of Allah; for the knowledge of Allah is unchangeable. The change and alteration occurs in affairs related to the universe, society and history, in respect to the causes that Allah employs for them.

'Ayyashi relates from Ibn Sinan who narrated from Imam as-Sadiq ('a), “Allah sends forth what He wishes, and delays what He wishes; He effaces what He wishes and confirms what He wishes, and with Him is the Mother of the Book.” He ('a) then said, “Anything which is willed by Allah is there in His knowledge before He creates it. Nothing appears to Him (*yabdu lahu*) except that it is in His knowledge {from before}. Indeed Allah does not come to know {something} after being ignorant of it.”³¹

'Ammar bin Musa narrates that once Imam As-Sadiq ('a) was asked about the verse, “Allah effaces and confirms whatever He wishes...” He ('a) answered, “Indeed that book is a book {from} which Allah effaces and confirms whatever He wishes. It is from it that supplication (*du'a'*) averts the Divine destiny (*qada'*). It is written on such a *du'a'* that this is the one through which the *qada'* is averted. But when the matter ends up to the Mother of the Book (*umm al-kitab*), then the supplication will have no effect on it.”³²

Therefore, Allah establishes whatever He desires from this universal system which is operating by His command based on the law of causation, and obliterates from it whatever He wishes.

For example, the natural course of causes may require a person to die of a particular illness. Here, Allah

may confirm it, and accordingly the course of causes would lead to his death by His will and command; or He may efface it if He wishes, hence He would pave the way for his well-being through its specified means.

Consequently, the phenomenon of obliteration (*mahw*) would come to transpire in the universe. But with regard to the Mother of the Book, there does not occur any obliteration or change in it, as it is not possible that Allah would come to know of something He was initially unaware of it.

The obliteration occurs in the world of creation (*takwin*) –which is functioning based on the system of cause and effect– according to the Divine wisdom (*hikmah*) and mercy (*rahmah*).

Hence, when the wisdom and mercy of Allah necessitates a change in the course of events in the universe or a society, He would prepare for this change its specified means, and efface what was to transpire in the universe or a society based on the law of causation, were it not for the will of Allah.

This system is subject to the command of Allah both at times of obliteration and affirmation, and the power of Allah is in force within it. Thus, if Allah confirms something in it, it will come to take place by His will and order; and if He alters and effaces it, it shall change by His command and power.

The Effect of Belief in Bada'

Belief in *bada'* comes after the belief in *tawhid* in importance. This is because disbelief in *bada'* is tantamount to dissociating the will (*iradah*) of Allah from the running of the universe, and dismissing His dominance over the course of the universe and society, and giving an upper hand to the law of causality over the will of Allah, as believed by the Jews, "**Allah's hand is tied up.**"³³

The correct view which the Qur'an presents is, "**Rather His hands are wide open**", and there is nothing to delimit His power and His hand is stretched out over the universe and the society.

This is the first effect of the belief in *bada'*, which is in fact related to one's belief in Allah, the Exalted. The second effect is with respect to one's relation with Allah. The reason being that belief in the open-handedness of Allah, in all situations, in changing and altering what has been necessitated by the cause-and-effect system, prompts a person to take resort to Allah in all his needs and affairs. And the most effective way in attracting man to Allah and tying him to Him is supplication to Allah for his needs and requirements, at times of difficulties.

In contrast, if man finds no way to change the Divine decree and destiny, and does not see any advantage or benefit in supplication with respect to changing the course of events, he would not take resort to Allah for his needs and requirements.

The reason people take refuge in Allah is because they believe that there are two kinds of Divine destiny (*qada'*); a definite destiny which has been written by Allah in the Mother of the Book, and which in no

way can change or alter; and an indefinite destiny which is subject to change and alteration by the will of Allah. Thus, people take resort to Allah for His response (*ijabah*) to their needs and prayers.

Supplication and Bada'

There are numerous factors which lead to the intervention of the Divine will (*iradah*) in changing the course of causes and events. Some of them are as follows:

1. Faith (*Iman*) and God-woriness (*taqwa*). He, the Exalted, says:

“If the people of the towns had been faithful and Godwary, We would have opened to them blessings from the heaven and the earth.”³⁴

2. Gratitude to Allah (*shukr*):

“If you are grateful, I will surely enhance you {in blessing}.”³⁵

3. Asking for forgiveness (*istighfar*):

“But Allah will not punish them while you are in their midst, nor will Allah punish them while they plead for forgiveness.”³⁶

4. Supplication (*du'a'*) and calling out to Allah:

a. ***“And before that Nuh, when he called out, We responded to him and delivered him and his family from the great agony.”***³⁷

b. ***“And Ayyub, when he called out to his Lord, ‘Indeed distress has befallen me, and You are the most merciful of the merciful.’ So We answered his prayer and removed his distress, and We gave him {back} his family along with others like them, as a mercy from Us, and an admonition for the devout.”***³⁸

c. ***“And the Man of the Fish, when he left in a rage, thinking that We would not put him to hardship. Then he cried out in the darkness, ‘There is no God except You! You are immaculate! I have indeed been among the wrongdoers!’ So We answered his prayer and delivered him from the agony, and thus do We deliver the faithful.”***³⁹

In conclusion, the rule of Allah, the Exalted, extends all over the universe, and there is nothing in it which can limit His dominion or render Him incapable. However, this dominion prevails through the very chain of causes (*asbab*) without suspending the cause-and-effect system.

Moreover, Allah effaces from this system whatever He wishes by His power and command, and confirms whatever He desires by His will. The phenomena of obliteration (*mahw*) and affirmation (*ithbat*) take

place only in the book of creation (*kitab at-Takwin*), and not in the Mother of the Book (*umm al-kitab*).

If He obliterates something in creation, it is according to His wisdom and mercy. This obliteration is the very phenomenon of *bada'* regarding which there are many traditions from the Ahl al-Bayt ('a).

Allah, the Exalted, brings about *bada'* due to many reasons, among them being *istighfar*, *taqwa*, *Iman*, *shukr*, and *du'a'*. And supplication is among the most important factors which cause *bada'*, as Allah, the Exalted, says:

“Call Me, I will answer you.”⁴⁰

-
1. Qur'an, 42:49.
 2. Qur'an, 22:14.
 3. Qur'an, 11:107.
 4. Qur'an, 16:40.
 5. Qur'an, 2:20.
 6. Qur'an, 3:37.
 7. Qur'an, 2:105.
 8. Qur'an, 2:247.
 9. Qur'an, 3:26.
 10. Qur'an, 4:133.
 11. Qur'an, 5:64.
 12. With a slight difference that the first is among the requirements of existence (*wujud*), while the second of quiddity (*mahiyyah*).
 13. Qur'an, 7:57.
 14. Qur'an, 35:9.
 15. Qur'an, 15:22.
 16. Qur'an, 7:130.
 17. Qur'an, 6:125.
 18. Qur'an, 17:16.
 19. Qur'an, 8:7.
 20. Qur'an, 9:55.
 21. Qur'an, 65:3.
 22. Qur'an, 65:3.
 23. Qur'an, 3:160.
 24. Qur'an, 13:11.
 25. Qur'an, 11:107.
 26. Qur'an, 22:14.
 27. Qur'an, 59:23.
 28. Qur'an, 2:249.
 29. Qur'an, 13:39.
 30. Bihar al-Anwar, vol.4, pg.111.
 31. Ibid, pg.121.
 32. Ibid.
 33. Qur'an, 5:64.
 34. Qur'an, 7:96.

35. Qur'an, 14:7
36. Qur'an, 8:33.
37. Qur'an, 21:76.
38. Qur'an, 21:83 84.
39. Qur'an, 21:87 88.
40. Qur'an, 40:60.

Source URL:

<https://www.al-islam.org/supplication-in-the-eyes-of-ahlalbayt-muhammad-mahdi-al-asifi/supplication-and-divine-decree-and>