

Question 12: Allah's Will in Human Guidance

Question: Considering the verse of the Qur'an in Surah 32, verse 13 which reads, "Had We wished We would have given every soul its guidance," – can it not be concluded that Allah (awj) has not desired the guidance of all humanity? If Allah (awj) had desired the guidance of all humanity He would have willed such, but obviously He has not. Why?

Brief Answer

Allah (awj) has willed the guidance of all His creatures. For, after taking all the [relevant] Qur'anic verses into consideration, the following points can be deduced:

1. Divine guidance is divided into existential (*takwini*) and legislative (*tashri'i*) guidance. Existential guidance is the all-encompassing guidance that embraces the entire creation. Allah (awj) has put all creatures in motion by ingraining in their nature their inclination for seeking perfection and reaching their ultimate goal.

The legislative guidance, which is more specific, is exclusive to the bearers of intellect and thought and pertains to religious issues, such as rightful doctrines and the Divine *oughts* and *ought-nots*. The prophets and their infallible successors serve as the conduit for this latter guidance. It is this guidance that is an extra favour bestowed upon mankind, and hence they enjoy both types of guidance.

2. There are many verses in the Qur'an which confirm the free will of the human being, such as, "Indeed We have guided him to the way, be he grateful or ungrateful." This ability to choose is a measure of existential guidance from Allah (awj), for the human being cannot himself be the source of his free will as it would entail the problem of circularity or infinite regress.

3. The entire creation is founded on a framework of causality, and the Divine norm (*sunnat Allah*) requires that all affairs be guided through the causal matrix. In this vein, He has provided the means of guidance for all human beings, by which they can attain the ultimate goal of their existence. So although the human being has been blessed by existential guidance, at the same time he is a free being and can choose to take the path of Divine guidance—thereby preparing in himself the grounds for further

guidance—or he could choose to take the opposite direction, which leads to disbelief and oppression.

What the verse in question intends is that if Allah (awj) had wished, He could have created the human being without free will. But Allah (awj) chose to mould the human being as a volitional creature by the means of His existential and legislative guidance so that he would be responsible for his actions and distinguish truth from falsehood. It is in line with the same Divine norm that if the human being embarks on the path of oppression and disbelief, consequently he would be deprived of Divine guidance. But on the other hand, by choosing to follow the path of truth, the human being earns the blessing of further guidance.

Detailed Answer

Before answering the question, it is necessary to mention some preparatory points.

1. It would be helpful to reflect on the entire verse in question: “Had We wished We would have given every soul its guidance, but My word became due [against the defiant]:

‘Surely I will fill hell with all the [guilty] jinn and humans.’¹

2. The definition of *hidayah*: It signifies enlightening and showing the way, out of kindness and goodwill.

3. The Qur`aan recognizes two general types of Divine guidance: existential (*takwini*) and legislative (*tashri`i*). The existential is that all-inclusive guidance that benefits the entire creation. Allah (awj) guides all creatures to their ultimate perfection and goal by means of that which He has imparted in their nature. In this regard the Qur`an explains, “He said

‘Our Lord is He who gave everything its creation and then guided it’².

This point is reiterated in the following verse:

‘[He] who created and proportioned, [He] who determined and guided.’³

The legislative guidance, which is the one specific to the bearers of intellect and thought, pertains to religious matters such as the true doctrines and the Divine law. This guidance has been delivered to humankind through the channels of Divine prophets and their infallible successors. Allah (awj) says,

‘A part [of mankind] He has guided and a part has deserved [to be consigned to] error’⁴;

also,

‘and Allah guides whomever He wishes to a straight path.’⁵

As these verses allude to a limited guidance, it can be inferred that the guidance in question is the legislative. Nevertheless, this guidance in the context of the human community is an all-inclusive one

[meant for all human beings].

4. The human being, as a creation of Allah (awj) who is subservient to Him, is the only creature moulded a free being. There are numerous verses in the Qur`an that emphasize the volitional nature of the human being, such as:

“And say, [This is] the truth from your Lord: let anyone who wishes believe it, and let anyone who wishes disbelieve it.”⁶

In addition:

“Indeed We have guided him to the way, be he grateful or ungrateful.”⁷

Hence it is the individual himself who is responsible for what he does.

This freewill is part and parcel of human existence and is by no means separable from it. Thus the human being is predestined in possessing freewill. There is no human being who could decide not to be free. From this it can be deduced that the source of human volition cannot be the human being himself, for then we would have the problem of circularity or infinite regress. But in the context of his deeds and actions, he is free by nature, and this is one instance of that existential guidance.

5. The existential system is founded on the system of causality. The Divine norm (*sunnat Allah*) has established that all events come about by means of their natural causes. The same norm applies to the question of guidance in which case He provides the means of guidance so that truth would be clear for those who seek it and so that they could attain the ultimate goal by recognizing those means.

Based on the aforementioned points and according to the explicit connotations of various verses of the Qur`an, the existential guidance encompasses all creatures. In addition, the human being has been blessed by the Divine legislative guidance as well. Due to the fact that freewill has been existentially inscribed in his nature, he has the option of following the exclusive Divine guidance, thereby preparing the grounds for further elevation. But he could also choose to abandon the way of truth, plunging into disbelief and darkness. The verse in question indicates that had Allah (awj) wished, He could have created the human being without freewill. But He chose to favour humankind by both the existential and the legislative guidance, by which He could hold the human being accountable for his actions, and by which He intended to distinguish truth from falsehood.

Conclusion

It has been clarified that understanding the verse in question to mean that God does not wish the guidance of all human beings is a misconception. Rather, the contrary holds true. For He has wished the guidance not only of all human beings but of all creatures. The difference lies in that Allah (awj) has ordained by His Divine norm that if the human being decided to walk on to the path of disbelief and

oppression, he would be naturally deprived of Divine guidance. But if he chose to traverse the path of truth, he would be blessed by that Divine guidance.

“As for those who strive in Us, We shall surely guide them in Our ways, and Allah is indeed with the virtuous.”⁸

1. Surat al-Sajdah (32), Verse 13:

﴿ وَلَوْ شِئْنَا لَآتَيْنَا كُلَّ نَفْسٍ هُدَاهَا وَلَكِنْ حَقَّ الْقَوْلُ مِنِّي لَأَمْلَأَنَّ جَهَنَّمَ مِنَ الْجِنَّةِ وَالنَّاسِ أَجْمَعِينَ ﴾

2. Surat Taha (20), Verse 50:

﴿ قَالَ رَبُّنَا الَّذِي أَعْطَى كُلَّ شَيْءٍ خَلْقَهُ ثُمَّ هَدَى ﴾

3. Surat al-A'la (87), Verses 2-3:

﴿ الَّذِي خَلَقَ فَسَوَّى. وَالَّذِي قَدَّرَ فَهَدَى ﴾

4. Surat al-A'raf (7), Verse 30:

﴿...فَرِيقًا هَدَى وَفَرِيقًا حَقَّ عَلَيْهِمُ الضَّلَالَةُ ﴾

5. Surat al-Baqarah (2), Verse 213:

﴿...وَاللَّهُ يَهْدِي مَنْ يَشَاءُ إِلَى صِرَاطٍ مُسْتَقِيمٍ ﴾

6. Surat al-Kahf (18), Verse 29:

﴿...وَقُلِ الْحَقُّ مِن رَّبِّكُمْ فَمَنْ شَاءَ فَلْيُؤْمِنْ وَمَنْ شَاءَ فَلْيُكْفُرْ ﴾

7. Surat al-Insan (76), Verse 3:

﴿ إِنَّا هَدَيْنَاهُ السَّبِيلَ إِمَّا شَاكِرًا وَإِمَّا كَفُورًا ﴾

8. Surat al-Ankabut (29), Verse 69:

﴿ وَالَّذِينَ جَاهَدُوا فِينَا لَنَهْدِيَنَّهُمْ سُبُلَنَا وَإِنَّ اللَّهَ لَمَعَ الْمُحْسِنِينَ ﴾

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