

4.13 Al-Qadar (Measure)

Host: Could you give us a brief summary of the nature of the arguments related to this question of free will and predestination?

Jamal Badawi: Human beings have always faced a very difficult dilemma regarding the questions of having free will, if we really control our destiny or if we just follow a predestined path. If we are truly free agents and we determine our own destiny where does God fit? If we believe in God as any believer would as the soul and ultimate power in this universe and as one who possesses perfect knowledge of the past, present and future then where does He fit if we control our destiny. Again one runs into a dilemma when they take the other assumption.

If we say that we are predestined and that everything we do in this life is something that we are pushed into because God decreed it then why is it that we are held responsible before God in The Day of Judgment? The main point is that any believer accepts the notion that things in this universe don't take place as a coincidence and there is definitely certain plans and wisdom that God has behind the various happenings.

Host: How have the various philosophers and theologians attempted to answer these questions?

Jamal Badawi: Basically there seems to have been two extremes in answering this question. There are those who hold the view that we as human beings are totally free agents and that if God has any knowledge of our deeds it is something that comes after the fact. In other words we make our choice and determine exactly what we want- so God will find out what we do after we do it. We control our destiny and it is up to us to do or not to do certain things.

On the other hand we get another extreme which I call fatalism. This has nothing to do with Islam as some people mistakenly think. That is to adopt exactly the opposite assumption to say that if we truly believe in God then we accept the fact that nothing happens in this universe against His will because he is the supreme power and Sovran of the universe. So whatever happens to us and whatever behavior we chose to do is something that is predestined and that applies not only to believers but non-believers used to hold this kind of approach. For example a person who doesn't believe in God at all would say that time predetermined what I am going to do. Even polytheists had the belief that certain gods determined the destiny in different areas of life. Believers in one God, followers of monotheistic faith, adopted this particular explanation. They all meet fatalistic approach and everything is predestined and everyone is simply doing what they are supposed to do.

Host: What is the position of Islam on this issue? Some people say that Muslims believe in predestination, what is the actual term used in the Quran to refer to this issue and what does it mean?

Jamal Badawi: There is a great deal of confusion when people depend on English translations to explain various concepts and principles of Islam. Many times the errors are done by Muslims themselves who are not aware of the full implication of some of the English terms. Most often people talk about predestination as a Muslim belief. Technically this may be correct in one sense. When one talks about predestination most people get the distinct impression of fatalism. Some writers about Islam, especially non Muslims, fall into the error of interpreting this belief as fatalistic. Thus it is very useful to go back to the original term that is used in the Quran.

The Islamic term for this subject is kadam and the strict meaning of the word is measure. It means something in due measure or proportion, it also means judgment. If we look at verses in the Quran that use this term we find that it has no connotation as some think with fatalism. An example in one verse in (54:49) of the Quran says Verily, all things have We created in

proportion and measure. In another verse in the Quran it talks about God's creation and says God created everything in due proportion. There are plenty of other quotations in the Quran that follow the same explanation of qadar for example when it says that God has ordained the cycle of the moon. This means that God appointed certain laws or cycles for the moon.

When we put all of this together it gives a clear understanding that what the Quran means by qadar is not predestination but rather that God created this universe in accordance with certain laws or due measure which could apply to physical existence like the laws that control the earth's rotation around the sun and the moon. As God created the universe in accordance to these laws there are certain laws in society and behavior which follow certain rules. We find in the Quran the pattern/laws that God created nobody can change. If one asks me to find a word that best describes this article of faith in Islam I find myself hesitant. Some people use the term destiny instead of predestination like a Muslim scholar by the name of Iqbal. There are some who use the term divine decree. I still don't feel comfortable with either translation whether it is predestination, destiny or divine decree; I would rather use the original Arabic term qadar and for the purpose of communication I would use due-measure.

Host: If our destiny is known to God why does he punish us for our deviations?

Jamal Badawi:

On one hand it is erroneous to say that anything happens on this earth against the will of God or else He would not be God and his omnipresence would be negated. It is also erroneous to blame evil deed that we commit on God by saying it is his will. I think the confusion could be a distinction between two separate aspects in our lives. There are certain aspects in our life for which we have some control and there are some aspects we don't have any control of. This may remove the confusion.

The mere question of whether we are free agents or predestined is a result of our observation as we feel that in some aspects we don't have free will and in others we do have a choice. The distinction can then be made in this way. There are aspects in our life where we don't have any control. Some examples are that we don't control when we are to be born, the color of our complexion, we don't control what our features will look like and we don't control how our heart will beat. Are we held responsible for those things? No. God out of His justice doesn't hold us responsible for any of these things. Actually it is out of the mercy of God that we don't have control over these things. If we control our heart, liver and digestive system then what happens to us when we are asleep? How can we keep our heart pumping? It is out of the mercy of God that He relieved us of having control of these basic natural functions. On the other hand this doesn't negate that there are elements in our lives where we do have control. No body can convince me by any argument that I don't have the choice between taking a gun and committing murdering someone and between taking bread and food to someone who is hungry.