Synopsis of the Friday Sermon delivered by Ameer Mustapha Elturk on Jan 18, 2013

Islam Iman & Ihsan (Part 3)

Today’s khutba is a continuation of the previous khutba that discussed Hadith Jibril on the subject of Islam, iman, and ihsan. The discussion will focus on the topic of divine destiny or decree (qadar), which constitutes the sixth article of faith (iman). The concept of qadar, although philosophical and esoteric in nature, becomes less obscure and easier to understand when we take recourse to the abundant guidance provided on this subject in the Qur’an, the hadith, and the sayings of the sahaba (athar).

It is said that one of the tabi’een (followers of the companions) came from al-Basra to al-Madinah and told Abdullah ibn Umar (RA) about the doctrine of qadar founded and advocated by Ma’bad al-Juhani, and later propagated by Ghaylan al-Dimashiqi. He told Ibn Umar that the Qadariyyah (followers of the doctrine of qadar) denied qadar. They were of the opinion that after Allah created the creation all matters are happening for the first time without any prior decree. Ibn Umar (RA) is reported to have expressed his aversion and disassociation with the Qadariyyah and to have totally subscribed to Hadith Jibril narrated by his own father Umar ibn al-Khattab (RA) according to which belief in divine destiny (qadar) was an integral part of one’s faith.

Basically the concept of qadar is to believe that (1) Allah (SWT) has prior knowledge of what good and evil His servants will do; of who will be obedient and who will be defiant; of who will go to hell and who will go to paradise. In order to compensate His servants for their actions, He created reward and punishment even before creating them. He wrote down everything that is to happen till the end of times in the Preserved Tablet (al-Lawh al-Mahfouz). Everything in the universe is running according to what is decreed in His knowledge; and that (2) All actions of Allah’s servants, good or bad, are carried out only with His permission and will (mashi’ah).

These two points make it clear that Allah (SWT) ordained the destiny of all creatures before their creation and that nothing takes place in His universe without His will. This fact is upheld by the ayah 49 of Surat al-Qamar, “Indeed, We have created everything in due measure and proportion (qadar).” The term qadar mentioned in this ayah literally means measure or proportion but has been interpreted variously by different exegetes of the Qur’an. Some of the well-known translations of the meaning of the ayah are, “Indeed we created all things with predestination.” “We have created everything to fulfill a certain purpose.” “Verily we have created everything according to Our predestination.” “Indeed we created all things with a predestined fate.” “Verily we have created all things with qadar (the divine pre-ordainments of all things before their creation as written in the Book of Decrees or al-Lawh al-Mahfouz).” Another ayah of the Qur’an lends support to this concept of qadar, and that is, “Nothing occurs, either in the earth or in yourselves, without its being in a Book before We make it happen.” (al-Hadid, 57:22).

There is a hadith which says, “Allah wrote down the decrees of creation fifty thousand years before He created the heavens and the earth.” The word ‘years’ is not necessarily the limited span of time of 365 days but refers to an unknown epoch of time, only known to Allah (SWT). According to the meaning of another hadith,
the acts of everyone will be facilitated in that which has been created for him so that whoever belongs to the company of the blessed ones will have good works made easier for him and whoever belongs to the unfortunate ones will have evil acts made easier for him. It is said that the Prophet (SAW) after narrating this hadith recited these ayat of Surat al-Layl, “Then, who gives to the needy and guards against evil and accepts the excellent (the truth of Islam and the path of righteousness it prescribes), We shall make easy for him the easy end and who is miserly and considers himself above need, We shall make easy for him the difficult end.” (al-Layl, 92:5-10). There is another hadith which tells us, “Verily, the first thing which Allah (SWT) created was the pen, and He said to it, ‘Write;’ The pen inquired, ‘What do I write?’ Allah told the pen, ‘Write the destiny (qadar)’. The pen wrote everything that will happen from now up to the Day of Resurrection.” It is reported that the prophet (SAW) said, “Whoever disbelieved in al-Qadar, the good and the bad of it, will be burnt in the Hell-fire.”

Unfortunately, this was the position of ahl al-Qadariyyah (the people of Qadariyyah). Their belief indicated that Allah (SWT) was not aware of things until after they came to pass and this was a clear negation of Allah’s pre-knowledge of all things. Our ulama have opined that those who subscribe to the doctrine of Qadariyyah have committed disbelief (kufr). Anyone who openly declares disbelief in any one of the six articles of faith makes the person step outside the fold of Islam even though that person may be holding on to other articles of faith and fulfilling other modes and requirements of worship.

It is important, however, to understand that there are certain things that are completely outside our control. Among them are our sustenance (rizq) and our life span, here on earth. A very well-known hadith says, “On the authority of Abu Abdul Rahman Abdullah ibn Masood (RA) who said, ‘The Messenger of Allah (SAW) and he is the truthful, the believed (al-Sadiq al-Masduq), narrated to us, ‘Verily, each of you is brought together in his mother’s womb for forty days in the form of a drop of fluid. Then it is a clinging object for a similar [period]. Thereafter, it is a lump looking like it has been chewed for a similar [period]. The angel is then sent to him and he breathes into him the spirit. He is also commanded to issue four decrees: to record his sustenance, his life span, his deeds, and [whether he will be] unhappy [by entering Hell] or happy [by entering Paradise].’ I swear by Allah, other than whom there is no God, certainly one of you will perform the deeds of the people of Paradise until there is between him and Paradise except an arm’s length, and then performs the deeds of the people of Hell and enter it. And, certainly, one of you will definitely perform the acts of the people of Hell until there is not between him and Hell except an arm’s length and then performs the deeds of the people of Paradise and enter it.’”

A very significant lesson from this hadith is that we as humans should not judge any person based on his or her outwardly actions whether he or she is a dweller of heaven or hell. The destiny of that person has already been ordained by Allah (SWT) but this pre-ordainment is based on the knowledge of Allah of what this person is going to do in this world.

There is a fine line between the concepts of destiny and pre-destiny. Pre-destiny means that we have already been programmed by Allah (SWT) to do what is to be done, and if this is so, then the concepts of accountability in the hereafter and that of reward and punishment are meaningless. Verses such as the ones in Surat al-Kahf and Surat al-Insan clearly lay bare the fact that man has the power to choose for himself and that he is not compelled by Allah (SWT) for the choices he makes. “Say, ‘Now the truth has come from your Lord: let those who wish to believe in it do so, and let those who wish to reject it do so.” (al-Kahf, 18:29). “We showed him the way, whether he be grateful or ungrateful” (al-Insan, 76:3).

We conclude that we do have a will and a choice of our own but these have been known to Allah (SWT) even before our creation. This is the existing pre-knowledge of Allah (SWT) of all things. Thus, everything that has happened in the past since the time of creation, or that is happening now in the present, or that is to happen in the future has been in the knowledge of Allah (SWT) before He created His creation.

Even though man has been granted the freedom of choice, his actions are carried out by Allah’s will (mashi’ah) based on His infinite knowledge of everything and His power over everything. “This is merely a reminder to all mankind; to every one of you who wishes to take the straight path. But you will only wish to do
so by the will of God, the Lord of the worlds” (al-Takwir, 81: 27-29). This is why it is a practice among Muslims to say in sha’Allah (if God wills) whenever they intend to do something in the future. “Never say of anything, I shall certainly do this tomorrow without adding, ‘God willing’” (al-Kahf, 18:23-24).

Using the concept of qadar as a pretext for committing sins is unacceptable. A murderer cannot take the plea that he was compelled to murder because it was with Allah’s will and permission that he did so. Allah’s letting someone commit a crime does not mean that Allah is pleased with the criminal act of the person responsible for the crime. Most certainly man is responsible for the moral choices he makes. Indeed, in this sense, it is man himself who makes his destiny, either to hell or to paradise, and he better be mindful of this.

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