



## **PRE-DESTINATION (AL-QADR) AND THE RESPONSIBILITY OF MAN**

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In this article, we want to deal with an important matter that concerns all Muslims: Pre-Decree and Pre-Destination (*al-Qadaa' wal-Qadr*), a subject that has been a point of contention for the Scholars throughout the ages. It has been related that the Messenger of Allaah (*sallallaahu 'alayhi wa sallam*) once found his Companions arguing about *Qadr*. He forbade them from indulging in such a debate and told them that communities before them had been destroyed for that reason.<sup>1</sup>

However, by the grace of Allaah, our *Salafus-Saalih* were able to understand the issue and formulate a moderate view based upon equity and justice. In their understanding, the issue of *Qadaa'* and *Qadr* stems from the *Tawheed* of Allaah's Lordship (*Tawheedur-Ruboobiyyah*). This is one of the three categories of the *Tawheed* of Allaah:

**[1]:** Unity of Divinity (*Tawheedul-Uloohiyyah*), which is to direct all forms of worship to Allaah alone.

**[2]:** Unity of Lordship over the entire universe (*Tawheedur-Ruboobiyyah*), which means to believe that all creation, sovereignty and planning belong to Allaah.

**[3]:** Unity in the matter of the Names and Attributes of Allaah (*Tawheedul-Asmaa' was-Sifaat*).

*Eemaan* (faith) in pre-destination is implied by Allaah's Attribute of nourishing and sustaining the entire universe. Imaam Ahmad (d.241H) – *rahimahullaah* – said, “*Qadr* (pre-destination) is the power of Allaah. It is one of the affairs of the Unseen that no one besides Allaah knows, as it has been recorded in the Preserved Tablet. We do not know what Allaah has destined, either for us or against us or it has been told by the Prophet (*sallallaahu 'alayhi wa sallam*) himself.”<sup>2</sup>

Regarding this issue, the people of the Muslim *Ummah* has divided into three factions:

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<sup>1</sup> Related by Muslim (no. 6420)

<sup>2</sup> Quoted by Imaam Ibnul-Qayyim in his *Shifaa'ul-'Aleel* (1/88)

**[1]:** The first group is so extreme in its attempts to prove pre-destination that it has completely deprived man of any power and any ability to choose. For them, man has no independence but is coerced into doing all that he does; he is a helpless being, at the mercy of *Qadr*. There is no doubt that this group is wrong. By using our powers of reason and the pillars of *eemaan*, we know that there is a difference between the things that happen without our will and those in which we play an active part.

**[2]:** The second group goes to the extreme of attributing complete power and freedom of choice to the individual, at the expense of denying Allaah any role in the process, by saying that Allaah the Exalted does not know of an action until after it has occurred! This view is also mistaken.

**[3]:** Allaah has guided others to a more moderate and sensible view, and we, *Ahlu-Sunnah wal-Jama'ah* have adopted it because it is based upon legal as well as rational evidence. We agree that everything that happens in the universe falls into one of the following two categories:

**[A]:** The things that Allaah does and in which no one else has any power of intervention. For example, there is the falling of rain, the growth of vegetation, life and death, illness and health.

**[B]:** The actions done by all the creatures that have the power of will. These actions are a consequence of their efforts and their choice, a power that has been given to them by Allaah. He thus says in the *Qur'aan*,

**“To whomever amongst you wills to go straight.”** [81:28]

**“Amongst you are some that desire this world and some that desire the Hereafter.”**  
[Soorah aali-Imraan 3:152]

Man knows very well the difference between what he does from his own free will and what he does because of external force. The person who reaches safely the bottom of a flight of stairs knows that this is because he walked down carefully. However, if he is pushed down from the top, he has no power over how he lands at the bottom. The first instance is an example of choice; the second is clearly one of compulsion. Similarly, a person who suffers from incontinence of urine knows that urine is passed without his will and that if he did not have this illness, he would be able to control the discharge. The difference between the two requires no further explanation.

It is a mercy of Allaah that there are certain actions which, are in the voluntary power of the individual but are recorded as if they are not, and so he is not held answerable for them. For example, there are actions done out of forgetfulness or during sleep. Allaah says in the story of the people of the cave,

**“And We turned them on their right and on their left sides.” [18:18]**

The men themselves are turning over, but Allaah the Exalted attributes their movements to himself, since a sleeping person has no control over his action. The Prophet (*sallallaahu 'alayhi wa sallam*) said, “The one who forgets while fasting and eats or drinks, he should complete his fast because Allaah is the One who feeds him and gives him drink.”<sup>3</sup>

Thus, actions done in a state of forgetfulness are also treated as if the person is acting outside his own will and are attributed to Allaah Himself.

If we were to agree with the first group mentioned earlier (those who give man no free will whatsoever), we would be distorting the facts. We would not be able to praise someone for their good actions or castigate someone who voluntarily does wrong, because we would have attributed all their actions to the will of Allaah. Another dangerous implication of this argument is that Allaah the Exalted behaves unjustly if He punishes the disobedient and rewards the good, as He alone is the source of all these actions. Not only is such reasoning nonsensical, but it is contradictory to the *Qur'aan* as well,

**“And his companion (angel) will say, “Here is (this Record) ready with me!”** (And it will be said,) **“Both of you throw** (order from Allaah to the two angels) **into Hell, every stubborn disbeliever, hinderer of good, transgressor and doubter who set up another ilaah with Allaah, then both of you cast him in the severe torment.”** His companion (the devil) **will say, “Our Lord! I did not push him to transgress,** (in disbelief, oppression and evil deeds) **but he himself was in error far astray.”** Allaah will say, **“Do not dispute in front of Me, I had already sent you the threat in advance. The sentence that comes from Me cannot be changed and I am not unjust to the slaves.”** [50:23-29]

Allaah the Exalted clearly states that the punishments He inflicts are not cruel but just, since He has already warned His creatures and sent them guidance. He has clearly defined the two paths of piety and disobedience, just as He has defined the consequences of following each path. Man thus has total freedom to choose either path, remembering that if he opts for the path of disobedience, he will not have the excuse of ignorance to offer Allaah on the Day of Judgement. The *Qur'aan* says in this regard,

**“Messengers as bearers of good news as well as of warning in order that mankind should have no plea against Allaah after the Messengers.”** [4:165]

The *Qur'aan* and reality also refute those who go to the other extreme of giving man complete freedom of action, leaving no role for Allaah. We are told that the will of man follows the will of Allaah,

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<sup>3</sup> Related by al-Bukhaaree (4/135) and Muslim (no. 1155)

**“To whomsoever amongst you wills to go straight. However, you shall not will except as Allaah, Lord of the worlds wills.”** [81:28-29]

**“And your Lord creates whatever He wills and chooses.”** [28:68]

**“And Allaah calls to the home of peace and guides whom He wills to a Straight Path.”**  
[10:25]

Those who hold this view are thus rejecting Allaah’s Omniscience, one of His essential Attributes, by effectively claiming that in His Kingdom, there are many things, which He does not wish or does not create. However, Allaah the Exalted wills everything, creates everything and predestines for everything! It is impossible to conceive of something happening that He does not wish to happen. This poses problems for us, such as what is the fate of someone whom Allaah wishes to misguide? It surely cannot be his fault that he did not receive the message of truth. The truth is that Allaah guides those who want to be guided, and misguides those who do not wish to receive guidance. We read this in the *Qur’aan*,

**“Then when they turned away, Allaah turned their hearts away.”** [61:5]

**“So because of their breach of their covenant, We cursed them, and made their hearts grow hard: they change the words from their right places and have abandoned a good part of the Message that was sent to them.”** [5:13]

In other words, the wish to be pious emanates from the individual himself, and Allaah guides him because of this. The issue can be further explained by comparing it to the acquisition of knowledge or to the earning of a living. Allaah has decreed the amount of understanding or wealth a person will be able to acquire in his life. This does not mean that the individual can thus sit at home and wait for the wealth or learning he receives will be proportional to the effort put in, and this is just as true for guidance. The Prophet (*sallallaahu ‘alayhi wa sallam*) said in this regard, “Indeed, the creation of each one of you is brought together in his mother’s belly for forty days in the form of a seed, then he is a clot of blood for a like period, then a morsel of flesh for a like period, then there is sent to him the angel who blows the breath of life into him and who is commanded with four matters: to write down his means of livelihood, his life span, his actions, and whether he will be happy or un-happy.”<sup>4</sup>

Just as we make all conceivable sacrifices for the nourishment of the stomach, so should we work hard for the sustenance of the soul. When ill, we are prepared to travel the world in search of a doctor who can cure us, but when our souls are diseased, we leave them to rot, waiting for Allaah to send down guidance upon a plate!

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<sup>4</sup> Related by al-Bukhaaree (1/116) and Muslim (no. 1599)

The correct opinion is thus that there are many routes open to the discretion of man, and it is up to him to choose the one he wishes to follow. He is like a merchant with many commodities in front of him, and it is his choice which one to trade in. He will obviously pick the one that he thinks will be most profitable. The difference is that the merchant is uncertain and has no guarantee of success; his commodity may have a market and he may make a profit, but he could just as easily lose all his capital.

The Believer on the other hand, is completely sure that if he follows the path of guidance, there will undoubtedly be success and reward waiting for him at the other end because Allaah has promised so, and Allaah never breaks His promise. Similarly, the disbeliever can be sure that only pain and punishment await him at the end of his path.

I would like to add that what has so far been said has been agreed upon and adopted by us, the *Ahlu-Sunnah wal-Jamaa'ah*, as our belief. Man does what he wants, but his will follows that of Allaah. We also believe that Allaah's will does not act on its own but is strongly linked to His wisdom, one of His Attributes. As a wise and just ruler, He decrees guidance for the person who wants guidance and truth, who wishes to be close to Allaah and who aims to follow the Straight Path. For anyone who does not want the truth, Allaah decrees error and misguidance; were Islaam to be presented to him, his heart would constrict as if he was ascending to the sky. [6:125] Allaah's wisdom declines to offer guidance to such a person, unless the person changes his attitude.

The *Ahlu-Sunnah al-Jamaa'ah* say that Allaah's *Qadaa'* and *Qadr* have four components. The first is knowledge: man must believe with certainty that Allaah has knowledge of everything; He knows the minute as well as the general details of all that happens, whether it is His own doing, or that of His creatures.

The second constituent of *Qadr* is writing. Allaah has written all His knowledge of the fate of His creatures in the Preserved Tablet, as He tells us in the *Qur'aan*,

**“Do you not know that Allaah knows all that is in the heavens and in the earth? Indeed, it is all in the Book (the Preserved Tablet) and that is easy for Allaah.” [22:70]**

In one *hadeeth*, the Prophet (*sallallaahu 'alayhi wa sallam*) is reported to have said, “Indeed, the first thing that Allaah created was the pen. He said, ‘Write!’ It said, ‘What shall I write?’ He said, ‘Write down everything that is going to happen.’ So that moment flowed everything that was going to happen until the Day of Judgement.’ At this the Prophet (*sallallaahu 'alayhi wa sallam*) was asked whether the actions we do are new actions, or are they actions that have been decreed already. He replied, ‘They are already decreed.’ The Companions said, ‘O Messenger of Allaah, should we then not work and just depend?’ He said, ‘Work and everything that was created for you will be made easy.’ The Prophet added, ‘Work O my brother, work and whatever was created for you will be facilitated for you.’ Then he recited the words of Allaah the Exalted,

**“As for he who gives in charity and keeps his duty to Allaah and fears Him, and believes in the best, We will make smooth for him the path of ease. However, he who is a greedy miser and thinks himself to be self-sufficient, and gives lie to the best, We will make smooth for him the path for evil.” [92:5-10].**<sup>5</sup>

The third component of *Qadr* is that of will. Allaah wills the presence or absence of everything in the heavens and in the earth. Nothing can exist without His Will. This is reiterated in the *Qur’aan*,

**“To whomsoever amongst you wills to go straight. However, you shall not will except as Allaah, Lord of the worlds wills.” [81:28-29]**

**“If your Lord had so willed, they would not have done it.” [6:112]**

**“If Allaah had willed, they would not have fought each other; but Allaah does what He likes.” [2:253]**

Allaah also relates that His actions always yield to His own will,

**“And if We had willed, surely We would have given every person his guidance.” [32:13]**

**“And if your Lord had so willed, He could surely have made mankind one nation.” [11:118]**

Thus, true *eemaan* is not complete unless we believe that Allaah’s will is total and all-embracing.

The fourth component of *Qadr* is creation. This means that we believe that Allaah is the Creator of everything and anything, even death, although it is the absence of life. The *Qur’aan* says,

**“He who has created death and life, that He may test which of you is best in deed.” [67:2]**

The skies, the mountains, the winds, the vapours, the growth of living organisms, the droughts – all are the creation of Allaah. A difficulty arises: how can we claim that our actions and words are products of our own free will when they are in fact creations of Allaah? The answer is that our actions and utterances are the result of our ability and desire to do them. Since Allaah alone is the one who created us and gave us the ability and the will to distinguish, choose, and act, our actions are His creations; He created the cause which generates the result, so He is the Creator of the result as well as the cause. However, this does in no way belittle our choice and will. For example, fire burns. The One who

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<sup>5</sup> Related by al-Bukhaaree (6/472)

gave this power to fire is Allaah, as fire on its own does not have the capability to burn. We see an instance of this in the *Qur'aan*,

**“We said: O fire! Be a coolness and safety for Ibraaheem!”** [21:69]

Thus, the fire did not burn Ibraaheem (*'alayhissalaam*) in this case. It is Allaah who gives fire the power to burn, just as He gives man the power to choose and act in according to his decision.

Finally, I would like to say that were it not for the increasing number of questions that have been raised about this issue and the ensuing controversy, we would not have entered into the debate. However, we felt there was a need for clarification and so we spoke out.

I ask Allaah the Exalted to facilitate the good actions that have been decreed for His pious creatures and to record for us and for them righteousness in this world and in the next. The praise is due to the Lord of the universe. May the peace and blessings of Allaah be upon our Prophet Muhammad, upon his family and upon all his Companions.