

## Al-Qadā' wal Al-Qadar: Divine Will Made Easy

One of the shortfalls of the human psyche is evident in the way we tend to handle conflict, whether intellectual or in application. When faced with accountability, one defense mechanism often relied upon is the 'blame game' where we shift the onus of responsibility away from our shoulders and onto a plethora of innocent parties with the aim of saving face or to arrogantly perpetuate any shortcomings.<sup>1</sup> From a historic standpoint, this tendency has led many to apply this faulty reasoning to matters of creed and in particular, the last article of faith – *divine will and predestination*. The idol worshippers among the *Jahili* Arabs extended a similar argument in response to the call of monotheism as Allah ﷻ mentioned in Surah Al An'aam:

سَيَقُولُ الَّذِينَ أَشْرَكُوا لَوْ شَاءَ اللَّهُ مَا أَشْرَكْنَا وَلَا آبَاءُنَا وَلَا حَرَمْنَا مِنْ شَيْءٍ كَذَلِكَ كَذَّبَ الَّذِينَ مِنْ قَبْلِهِمْ حَتَّىٰ ذَاقُوا بَأْسَنَا قُلْ هَلْ عِنْدَكُمْ مِنْ عِلْمٍ فَتُخْرِجُوهُ لَنَا ۚ إِنْ تَتَّبِعُونَ إِلَّا الظَّنَّ وَإِنْ أَنْتُمْ إِلَّا تَخْرُصُونَ

***Al An'aam 6:148 - "Those who associated with Allah will say, 'If Allah had willed, we would not have associated [anything] and neither would our fathers, nor would we have prohibited anything.' Likewise did those before deny until they tasted Our punishment."***

The disbelieving *Quraysh*, who were given the opportunity to recognize the divine nature of the Qur'anic verses and to witness, firsthand, the impeccable character of the Messenger of that book (ﷺ), relegated their own desirous misguidance directly to God All-Mighty.<sup>2</sup> This is the height of misguidance that human beings can reach due to their corrupted understanding of *Al-Qadā'* and *Al-Qadar* with which the creator subjected His creation. Therefore, this short article will seek to understand the Prophetic guidance towards this article of faith, along with the deviated beliefs of those who either rejected it completely or twisted its effects on the creation. One notable caveat is that even though it is essential to accept this pillar of faith and to understand its essence in light of the Qur'an and Sunnah, excessive discussion of details and specificities are discouraged. The Prophet ﷺ said in response to the companions seen debating about *Al-Qadar*, "...the people who came before you were destroyed when they disputed and debated about this matter. I urge you not to dispute about this".<sup>3</sup> As with any attribute or quality emanating from the unseen, orthodoxy limit its discussion to the extent and boundaries established by revelation.

### Definition of Al-Qadā' wal Al-Qadar

From a linguistic point of view, the word *Al-Qadar* is defined by the likes of Al-Rāghib al-Asfahānī (d. 501 AH) and Ibn Hajar al-'Asqalānī (d. 852 AH) as the implication of power or ability, and the object of ability which exists in the knowledge of Allah.<sup>4</sup> It also means to decree, give judgement for, and the ultimate destiny. From a technical standpoint, the scholars have defined *Al-Qadar* to contain three (3) main elements:

- 1) Something of which there was prior knowledge.
- 2) One of the things which was written by the Pen when it wrote down everything that was going to happen for the rest of eternity in *Al-Lawh Al-Mahfūz* (the preserved tablets), when Allah ﷻ decreed the affairs of all His creation and what would happen before its occurrence.
- 3) He knew that these matters would happen at certain times that were known to Him, and in its specific way, therefore events manifest in the way that He has decreed.

These points can be summarized in the statement of Imam Ahmad ibn Hanbal (d. 241 AH) that “*Al-Qadar* is the power of Allah” with the nuance of creating and decreeing the actions of His creation, as clarified by the famous *Hanbalite*, Abu’l-Wafā’ Ibn ‘Aqīl (d. 513 AH).<sup>5</sup>

In conjunction with the above, *Al-Qadā’* is linguistically defined as decree and judgement, along with implying “the completion/finishing of something, everything that is carried out properly, is known, completed, fulfilled, has become obligatory, is known, or is done”.<sup>6</sup> In its technical definition when contrasting with *Al-Qadar*, the scholars formed two major opinions.

- 1) The first is to refer *Al-Qadā’* to the total and general decree of Allah while distinguishing the specific details of that decree to *Al-Qadar*.
- 2) The second camp defined the *Al-Qadā’* as creation itself while the *Al-Qadar* is relegated as its prior decree or discernment.<sup>7</sup>

Both concepts are grounded within the texts of the Quran and authentic narrations of the Prophet ﷺ such as the following:

وَمَا كَانَ لِنَفْسٍ أَنْ تَمُوتَ إِلَّا بِإِذْنِ اللَّهِ كَتَبْنَا مُوَدَّعًا

*Ale’ Imran 3:145 – Nor shall a person die except by Allah’s leave, the term being fixed by writing*

إِنَّا كُلَّ شَيْءٍ خَلَقْنَاهُ بِقَدَرٍ

*Al Qamar 54:49 – Verily, We have created all things with divine pre-ordainment [bi-Qadar]*

وَكَانَ أَمْرًا مَقْضِيًّا

*Maryam 19:21 - ...and it is a matter already decreed by Allah*

فَقَضَيْنَهُنَّ سَبْعَ سَمَوَاتٍ فِي يَوْمَيْنِ

*Fussilat 41:12 – Then He completed and finished from their creation [fa Qadāhunna] as seven heavens in two days...*

*Narrated by Ubadah ibn Al Samit: Indeed, I heard the Messenger of Allah ﷺ saying: "Verily the first of what Allah created was the Pen. So, He said: 'Write.' It said: 'What shall I write?' He said: 'Write Al-Qadar, what it is, and what shall be, until the end.' [Tirmidhi 2155]<sup>8</sup>*

### **Position of Ahlus-Sunnah wal Jamā‘ah**

These elements have caused much confusion once the students and prominent scholars in the generation of the *Tabi’een* such as Sawsan<sup>9</sup>, Ma‘bad al-Juhanī (d. 80 AH)<sup>10</sup>, Ja‘ad ibn Dirham (d. 124 AH), Wāṣil ibn ‘Aṭā’ (d. 131 AH), and others started discussing such matters with greater nuances. The confusion that stems from this topic is often the result of questioning the knowledge of Allah ﷻ and whether the actions written by the Pen in the preserved tablets can concurrently exist with an active free choice in the hands of mankind. *How can man be said to have choice and accountability (as a result of that choice), when all actions have already been written by Allah ﷻ and each and every single person and their judgements have already been decreed? Does Allah ﷻ have full knowledge of what is to occur in the future – and if He does,*

would it be fair to punish man for their sins knowing that it is the Pen that Allah commanded to write those sins to begin with and created the tools by which the sin was committed? If man does in fact control his actions, then how is it possible for Allah ﷻ to know exactly which choices will be adopted by man? Is man responsible for going astray when Allah ﷻ reiterates that it is He who guides and He who misguides? These are some contentious questions that caused many deviations in creed that drove the latter generations away from orthodoxy.

In order to reconcile these *supposed* contradictory notions, we must first identify the ideas that are contended at heart. The majority of doubters did not necessarily intend to deny the knowledge and power of Allah ﷻ as those are established from clear verses of the Qur'an. However, the doubtful effects disputed from the above questions are regarding the capacity of man to direct his/her own actions and whether those actions are subjected to reward and punishment.<sup>11</sup> When observing the reality and actions of human beings, we clearly see that there are certain matters that we have no control over whatsoever, while in others, we have either full or partial influence. Therefore, one method established by the orthodox position to reconcile these matters is to divide *Al-Qadā'* and *Al-Qadar* into two spheres with four components in total, and identify exactly which components are influenced by man and which ones are in the control of Allah ﷻ.

The first sphere with its first component can be understood as matters which the creation of Allah ﷻ is dominated by in an absolute sense as all control, will, intent, and action is exercised by Allah. Example of such events are the time of our birth, the time of our death, our skin colour, height, gender, and other genetic matters, and more. These are simply matters that are decreed by divine decision and the creation is simply subjected to follow its due course without any interception or influence.

The second component of this sphere is also controlled by Allah ﷻ and pertains to actions that are within the confines of the natural law established to govern the creation, and are beyond man's control from their subjective perspective. For example, a person is driving in downtown traffic and suddenly, a slab of concrete falls from the adjacent building and hits his car. The driver had no direct influence on this action here, yet it was a simple effect of a concurrent chain of causes involving other elements of the creation (i.e. that concrete slab subjected to gravity fell down due to the negligence of a specific construction worker). From the perspective of the driver, he didn't influence any aspect directly as it was divinely ordained that the slab will fall at the exact time that the driver was underneath it.

Both of the aforementioned elements demonstrate a lack of influence from the perspective of the one experiencing, and therefore, there is no accountability or punishment, as in the example of the driver. This form of divine will is considered by some scholars as '*Al-Qadā'*'.

As for the sphere of *Al-Qadar* or the pre-destined action, power, and knowledge of Allah ﷻ, we must examine man's actions in relation to the world he lives in and the attributes it carries from two components. Firstly, every single created object or being has been endowed with certain attributes. For example, fire has been given the ability to burn. Whether it is the attribute of heat, or the appropriate temperature that causes combustion, the chemical after-effects, or any other quality associated with burning; neither were determined by a created being. Rather, these

attributes were all determined by its creator, Allah ﷻ, in a manner that is pre-ordained and dominates our subjectivities. As such, man is also alleviated of its correlated accountability.

Secondly, what we do with those pre-ordained attributes can very well be within our control or sphere of influence. For example, Allah ﷻ has given a sharp object such as a knife with the natural/physical ability to cut. However, man can decide how to use that attribute by either cutting food ingredients to prepare a meal for his family or he can use that sharp object to harm other human beings. Another example is that we are created with a functioning brain and a biological vessel (the body) that has the pre-ordained attribute of sensing its environment, capturing data via electrical signals interpreted through its neuron pathways, organizing that data into coherent thoughts, and then having the physical capabilities to carry out willful actions. That same body and brain are given an innate and natural disposition (*Fitrah*) from birth of believing in a singular entity that caused the beginning of creation itself, as concluded by the likes of Professor Justin Barrett.<sup>12</sup> Therefore, man has been made responsible by virtue of both its disposition and its rational capabilities to understand causality and arrive at the conclusion of God's existence, our dependency to Him, and our subsequent submission to Him. As the action of utilizing our pre-ordained attributes to arrive at a deliberate and willful action is within the sphere that man dominates and controls, he will be subjected to its accountability.<sup>13</sup>

### **A Simple Analogy**

A way to simplify the concept of *Al-Qadā'* and *Al-Qadar* of Allah ﷻ is also to analogize it to a familiar concept, such as a coded computer program or a virtual video game. A programmer begins with a willful concept and idea of a game with a purpose, its characters, their attributes and styles, and then maps out a pre-determined set of choices and paths that are all built into the program itself. When the player begins the story line, there is a coded environment that is clearly laid out that dominates the virtual character. However, throughout its timeline, the character is given a controlled set of options that are within the laws coded into that virtual reality. The player simply chooses a path out of those made available from their own subjective will, and the effecting reality ensues based on that choice.

In other words, **all** of the virtual reality is fixed by the programmer, and within certain aspects of the game, there are elements of choice with pre-determined/fixed outcomes built-in by design. Note, that all activity is contained within this programmed environment, and all accountability or results of that game will be correlated with the finite paths chosen by the player. Befittingly, the programmer who coded this environment has full knowledge of its timeline, the possible choices, the various compounding paths, and the final result of the player. Meanwhile, the player still enjoyed their participation from their limited exercise of choice and consequences.<sup>14</sup>

### **Deviations in Al-Qadā' and Al-Qadar**

The first deviations in this creedal pillar really started to take shape in the intellectual circles of the *Tabi'een* and their students. In total, there were two major sects that opposed Ahlus-Sunnah: *Al-Qadariyyah* and *Al-Jabbariyah*.

The first group, headed by the likes of Ma‘bad al-Juhanī (d. 80 AH), posited that Allah ﷻ is deficient in His knowledge of the actions of His creation, or who will enter paradise and who will not, that Allah ﷻ did not command the writing of His decree beforehand, and other misguided beliefs.<sup>15</sup> These ideas were then transmitted to the leaders of other sects like the *Mu‘tazilites* through the likes of their leader, Wāṣil ibn ‘Aṭā’ (student of Ḥasan al-Baṣrī (d. 110 AH)) who modified the beliefs of the deniers by similarly applying rationality in interpreting revelation. They violated the express command of the Messenger ﷺ to avoid speaking excessively about *Al-Qaḍā’* and *Al-Qadar* along with its specific nuances in fear of the deviations that it will cause.<sup>16</sup> The Prophet ﷺ said **“I fear for my ummah two things after I am gone; disbelief in *Al-Qadar* and belief in the stars [astrology]”**.<sup>17</sup>

*Al-Qadariyyah* simply gave preference to their intellect over revelation and denied *Al-Qadar* altogether as they compared Allah ﷻ and His abilities (*Qudrah*) to that of a deficient human being limited by the temporal laws of this universe. However, as Allah ﷻ mentions that **“...there is nothing like unto Him”** (42:11), He is not bound by a unidirectional passage of time. The past, present, and the future are all laid out in front of Him in a manner that befits His majesty. The deniers of *Al-Qadar* posited the belief that mankind has total control over its own affairs and actions while Allah ﷻ is devoid of this power.<sup>18</sup> In their reverence for Allah ﷻ, they attributed disbelief and other sins to the full control and accountability of man, thereby, going against the verses that highlight total power and control of Allah ﷻ at the highest level of causes. As such, the judgement decreed for the deniers is that they are disbelievers as a result of their heresies by the consensus of orthodox scholars.

The evolution of this extreme ideology of the deniers took a different shape when the *Mu‘tazilites* sought to rationally find the middle ground between total relegation of will to Allah and its total denial. According to them, in the matter of good and evil, they accepted that every action is either good or evil, beneficial or corrupt, and that Allah ﷻ will reward people for adhering to justice and legality, while punishing people for actions that are divinely decreed as corrupt. However, they rejected the attribution of the creation of evil actions to Allah ﷻ as they considered that to be a form of disrespect; not befitting of a true God. However, this contradicts the clear verses of the Qur’an such as when Allah ﷻ commands us to seek protection **“from the evil of what He has created”** (113:2). They also twist other general commands such as **“...who made everything He has created good...”** (32:7) without looking at the totality of commands and the reality of *Al-Qadar* as explained earlier. Both good and evil are created by the singular and all-powerful creator, but with a purpose; to see who will best adhere to His commands in obedience to His divine being.

The discourse of *Al-Qadariyyah* and the *Mu‘tazilites* strengthened with the acceptance of this creed by the early Abbassid caliphs during the infamous, ‘*mihna*’. On the opposite extreme of this ideology stood *Al-Jabariyyah*. Ja‘ad ibn Dirham (d. 124 AH), who was the teacher of the last Ummayyad caliph (Marwan II) and of Jahm ibn Ṣafwān (d. 128 AH), introduced the idea of only ineffective forms of power in the possession of man. This led to the understanding of *Al-Qadar* that Allah ﷻ has full control and imposition of power over His creation and that every action conducted by the human-being is the effect of the pre-determined cause empowered by His creator. The result of such a belief is that the obligations and prohibitions established over us are all overshadowed by this power or ‘*jabr*’ that makes us incapable of choosing a willful

path. Effectively, it is legitimizing the prohibited and alleviating the burden of our obligations. People are free to commit shirk (mimicking the excuse given by the idolatrous Arabs as mentioned in the Qur'an 7:148), murder one another, fornicate, or steal, as all of these actions were already documented in the *Lawh al-Mahfuz* according to them. In addition to the gross deviation from the truth, this posed a significant threat to the unity and harmony of the Muslim community as society's foundations and health rests upon the firm pillars of objective standards of justice. They misapplied the term 'jabr' to overshadow the apparent attribute of limited choice in the hands of man while claiming that Allah is pleased with His creation (both good and evil) in direct conflict with verses of the Qur'an.

Both, the Qur'an and the Sunnah clarified that the implication of *Al-Qadar* is never mutually exclusive with seeking means to certain ends, as that indicates an undue excuse to avoid responsibility. A homeowner who leaves their door unlocked at night is certainly not absolved of blame if their home is robbed; as the Prophet ﷺ taught us to tie our camels before putting our trust in Allah ﷻ.

### **Implication in the Field of Da'wah**

A disturbing trend observed in the field of *Da'wah* which is directly related to the matter of pre-destination is the concept of earning victory from Allah ﷻ. There are movements who are sincerely seeking to mobilize the *Ummah* back to their golden years via the adoption of Islamic governance with systems and laws of Allah ﷻ over the affairs of humanity. However, in the formulation of their methodologies, some seem to relegate both the quality/effort of their *Daw'ah* and the end result to Allah ﷻ alone. While it is true that victory is only from Allah ﷻ as He said:

وَمَا النَّصْرُ إِلَّا مِنْ عِنْدِ اللَّهِ الْعَزِيزِ الْحَكِيمِ

*Al Anfal 8:10 – ...and victory is not but from Allah. Indeed, Allah is exalted in Might and Wise”*,

this ascription of victory to Allah ﷻ must be balanced with the utmost exertion of strength, will, quality, and effort in that cause, as other verses connect succession with a condition of allegiance to Him. Allah ﷻ says:

وَعَدَ اللَّهُ الَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا مِنْكُمْ وَعَمِلُوا الصَّالِحَاتِ لَيَسْتَخْلِفَنَّهُمْ فِي الْأَرْضِ كَمَا اسْتَخْلَفَ الَّذِينَ مِنْ قَبْلِهِمْ وَلَيُمَكِّنَنَّ لَهُمْ دِينَهُمُ الَّذِي ارْتَضَىٰ لَهُمْ وَلَيُبَدِّلَنَّهُمْ مِنْ بَعْدِ خَوْفِهِمْ أَمْنًا يَعْبُدُونَنِي لَا يُشْرِكُونَ بِي شَيْئًا وَمَنْ كَفَرَ بَعْدَ ذَلِكَ فَأُولَٰئِكَ هُمُ الْفَاسِقُونَ

*Al Nur 24:55 – Allah has promised those who have believed among you and done righteous deeds that He will surely grant them succession [to authority] upon the earth just as He granted it to those before them and that He will surely establish for them [therein] their religion which He has preferred for them and that He will surely substitute for them, after their fear, security, [for] they worship Me, not associating anything with Me. But whoever disbelieves after that - then those are the defiantly disobedient.”*

The conditions highlighted in the above verse are:

- 1) “**Belief**” → Faith that entails all its pre-cursors and conditions.
- 2) “**Righteous Deeds**” → Adopting the best and most wise strategy and application.

- 3) **“Do not associate anything with Allah”** → True monotheism that directs our intentions, efforts, sacrifices, worship, and obedience only for Allah ﷻ’s cause, without fearing any of His enemies.

The continued regression of the Ummah cannot be attributed simply to Allah ﷻ’s will in an unrestricted manner. Nor can it be left to a super-natural intervention, the advent of Al Mahdi, or the return of Prophet ‘Isa. Rather, the objective and timeless conditions of victory revealed by Allah ﷻ remain as constants awaiting our fulfillment.

*May Allah ﷻ give us the correct understanding of His Deen and allow us to be His true worshippers. Ameen!*

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<sup>1</sup> Susan Krauss Whitbourne PhD, ABPP (2015). *5 Reasons We Play the Blame Game*. Retrieved from *Psychology Today*: <https://www.psychologytoday.com/ca/blog/fulfillment-any-age/201509/5-reasons-we-play-the-blame-game>

<sup>2</sup> Abū al-A‘lā al-Maudūdī. *Tafhīm al-Qur’ān* 1/575

<sup>3</sup> Sunan al-Tirmidhī 2133. Grade: Hasan (Al-Albani)

<sup>4</sup> Ibn Ḥajar al-‘Asqalānī. *Fath al Bari*, 11/477

<sup>5</sup> Umar al Ashqar. *Divine Will and Predestination* 8/24

<sup>6</sup> Definition of Al Zuhri as mentioned in *Al Nihaayah fi Ghareeb al Hadith* (ibn Al-Atheer 4/78); Quoted by Umar al Ashqar in *Divine Will and Predestination* 8/35.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.* 8/36

<sup>8</sup> Sunan al-Tirmidhī 2155. Grade: Sahih (Darussalam)

<sup>9</sup> *Sharh Usul al I’tiqaad* 3/750; Quoted by Umar al Ashqar in *Divine Will and Predestination* 8/29

Al Awzai’ said: *“The first person to speak about Qadar was a man from Iraq called Sawzan. He was a Christian who accepted Islam, then went back to Christianity. Ma’bad al Juhani learned from him, and Gheelan [al Dimashqi] learned from Ma’bad.”*

<sup>10</sup> Executed in 80 AH by crucifixion on the orders of Umayyad Caliph Abd al-Malik for promoting heresies of Al-Qadariyyah

<sup>11</sup> Al Nabahani. *The System of Islam*. Pg 26

<sup>12</sup> Justin Barrett. *Born Believers: The Science of Children’s Religious Belief*. (2012 – Free Press). Pg 35-36

*“...This tendency to see function and purpose, plus an understanding that purpose and order come from minded beings, makes children likely to see natural phenomena as intentionally created. Who is the Creator? Children know people are not good candidates. It must have been a god...”*

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.* Pg 29

<sup>14</sup> **Note:** All analogies are deficient in capturing the true nature of the reality they are exemplifying. Programmers coding video games are still subjected to the passage of time, are devoid of knowledge of the player’s choices, their final result, and more. Whereas Allah ﷻ cannot be limited to any dependencies or ascribed any deficiencies. His knowledge and ability are unlimited and cannot be fully comprehended by us nor captured by a limited analogy.

<sup>15</sup> ‘Aqīdat Al-Ṣafārīnī (d. 1188 AH). 1/300, Umar al Ashqar. *Divine Will and Predestination* 8/70

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.* 8/70

<sup>17</sup> *Sahih Jami’ As Sagheer*, no. 120

<sup>18</sup> Umar al Ashqar. *Divine Will and Predestination* 8/74