

Book Review:

Taqdir in the Light of the Quran and Sunnah (of the Prophet)

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The Holy Quran has preserved one of the most instructive and important prayers of Syedina H. Ibrahim (PBUH). The essence of his prayer is:

O God! Save me and my ummah from Fitna, that is, such trials and tribulations wherein we may be constrained to lose faith in our faith and be tempted to believe that may be our misfortunes are crowding in upon us because of our defective belief – system. [Surah Al-Mumtahina, 60:5]

This prayer of the Prophet, I presume, might have saved him and his Ummah, with the grace of God, from such calamities. But the Ummah of his grand-son Muhammad (PBUH), however, seems to have suffered from this grave calamity. The Muslims, in all probability, have lost faith in their faith under the cultural invasions of some of the most powerful civilizations of the world, such as, the Greek, the Persian, the Judao-Christian Western Civilization and more so by their own negligence of the Quran and Sunnah of the Prophet. In some cases they even remained under the subjugation of the Western imperialists. The situation is indeed pathetic so much so that even when the Quran declares that God Almighty has perfected their Deen (Islam) for them and has completed His blessings upon them, they are still found groping in darkness, busy in all sorts of eclecticism, picking different pieces from different places,

and like Akbar, the Mughal Ruler of India, are creating a new Deen, for themselves. As they are guilty of “abandoning” the Quran and the Sunnah of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH), God Almighty, it seems, has abandoned them in return and allowed them to be lost in wilderness. As a mid -most nation, the very purpose and rationale of their creation, it may be recalled was to “Reform the earth” and eradicate corruption, exploitation, evil and injustice from this world and establish instead a just socio-moral order. Since their pre-eminence was predicated to the fulfillment of their obligations, and these obligations have been left unattended, it was but natural that they be made to suffer from these misfortunes and humiliations.

This psycho-moral and religious background prompted some of the best minds of the Muslim World to initiate their reform movements for the revival of the fundamentals of Islam and purge it of all alien and paganistic elements that have apparently sapped the very fabric and foundations of Islam. Sh. Muhammad Fatehullah Gullen, in my dispassionate assessment, is one of the most perceptive mind, a towering personality, a living legend, a vibrant heart and a committed reformer who has devoted his time and talent to the same cause, that is, to resurrect and rediscover Islam and purge it of all Un-Islamic elements, innovations and distortions. Readings of some of his works have left an indelible impression on my mind and I find him truly standing in the company of some of the best minds of the Sub-continent, such as, Sh. Ahmad Sirhindi, Shah Waliullah, Allam Dr. Muhammad Iqbal, Maulana Maududi and others. In this brief write-up my intentions are to present a brief critique/review of his book: Taqdir in the light of the Quran and Sunnah (of the Prophet).

Is man free or determined? If he is free, does his freedom infringe upon the Sovereignty of God? How are we to reconcile the Absolute knowledge of God and the freedom of man? For if His knowledge were to be taken as perfect, man cannot depart from His Knowledge. So where lies his freedom? Likewise, if man is deemed to be determined, how are we going to explain the problem of evil? These and similar other complex and intricate problems are involved in this debate. At least two principles figure out as central: (i) Sovereignty of God; (ii) and the Vicegerency of man. Sh. M. Fatehullah Gullen in his book: Taqdir in the light of the Quran and the Sunnah (of the Prophet) has handled these issues with utmost care and penetrating mind. In the subsequent pages, we intend to present a brief review of this excellent work.

To begin with, we would like to have an operational definition of Taqdir. The term Qadar actually means to “measure out”. The idea is that while God alone is absolutely Infinite, everything else in the Universe is “being measured” out having a finite set of potentialities. According to the Quran, when God creates a thing, He at the same time puts into it, its nature, its potentialities and the Laws of its behavior (i.e. amr or command or *hidaya* and guidance) whereby it falls into a general pattern and occupies its place in the cosmic setting. Since everything in the Universe does behave in accordance with its ingrained Laws, it automatically obeys the command of God. In this sense the whole Universe is virtually a Muslim, surrendering to the will of God. Man is the only exception to this Universal law, for he is the only being endowed with a free choice of obeying or disobeying the command of God. Just as it is “written into” every other creature, this command is written upon “man’s heart”. The only difference is that every other

creature follows the nature automatically, man ought to follow his nature. And this ought, as Kant aptly puts it, implies can. His vicegerency in no way infringes upon the Sovereignty of God. Man, as Sh. M. Fatehullah Gullen insists, can at best take an initiative, or make his intentions loud and clear. He may pray and solicit, for the realization of his ends and objectives. He may do every thing possible within his means to materialize his goals/intentions. That is all he can do. The ultimate approval of his intentions and initiatives lies with the blessings of the Sovereign. His will/volition is to be sub-ordinated to the will of God. Man, however, is deemed responsible for his intentions and initiatives.

But before we begin to analyze the essentials of the Book under reference we would take a little digression and introduce the views of some of the great minds of the Greek Civilization and some of the philosophers of Judao-Christian traditions. This reference is likely to be of immense help in appreciating the Islamic concept of *Taqdir* as it has been enunciated by Sh. M. Fatehullah Gullen's work.

It may be underlined that the problem of free-will and determinism is one of the perennial problems of philosophy. For instance, both Socrates and Plato were strong advocates of human freedom. By freedom they mean, freedom from the bondage of animal passions and submission to the call of reason. They were of the opinion, that our actions should be reflective of our inner nature. Plato, in particular, insisted that an action is free if the agent is in the action and the action in the agent. Only an integral relationship of this nature (between the agent and his action) can hold him responsible for his deeds. They underscored that our actions should be free from the mixture of our passions which tend to lower down the purity of our soul. Their recommendation was: bury your passions in order to become a

reasonable or Perfect Man. It may be observed that Greeks were committed to the self-sufficiency of human reason and were inclined to dismiss revelation as a source of guidance.

Likewise, Socrates has made some other very interesting observations. For instance, he says, that knowledge is virtue while ignorance is vice. Further, he was convinced that knowledge necessitates action. For example, if we know virtue, we are obliged to become virtuous. If we fail to move and translate our knowledge into action, our claim to knowledge, he contends, is vacuous and empty of contents.

Aristotle, it may be underlined, was the first philosopher who delineated the role and place of “will” or “volition” in human action. Unlike Socrates and Plato, he observed that there is a gap between knowledge and action. For instance, it is one thing to know virtue and quite another to become virtuous. Sheer knowledge won’t transform our life. This knowledge needs to be translated into action. And this gap (between knowledge and action) is occupied or filled with will or volition. Strong or weak willed characters are commonly known.

Knowledge, so to say, does not necessitate action. If left to itself, it may remain totally inoperative. Our will has to be moved (by self-regarding or other-regarding passions) in order to translate our knowledge into action. Butler, Hume and Spinoza were strong followers of Aristotelian theory.

God’s recording in the Sacred Book is of a similar nature. It does not interfere with human will or volition or actions. In fact, it is a secret assessment or preview of what is likely to follow in the course of nature or the course of human life.

St. Augustine and St. Thomas Aquinas were determinists, fully committed to the theory of “Original Sin”. The entire human race, they

believed, stand contaminated by the original Sin. Their contentions were that man's action were neither free nor of any value or significance in determining his fate or fortune. Crucifixion of the Christ, they held, has offered the redemption of human Sins and is the only solace for salvation on the Day of Judgment.

Spinoza and Leibniz likewise were staunch advocates of determinism. Particularly Leibniz is known for his theory of Pre-Established Harmony. He contends that the Universe is just like a machine busy in unfolding itself. There is nothing new in nature. Everything is already laid down and things are emerging and passing out at their appointed time and place. Man, though a spiritual entity, is no exception. He is an integral part of nature and is likewise playing out his allotted role. Spinoza was even more radical. He went on to turn God from a "person" to a "principle" (say like law of gravitation) and denied all relevance of prayer, solicitations, interventions, and miracles. As a natural corollary, he dismissed all attributes of God. Spinoza contends that there is only one causal order in nature and as man is a part of nature, his actions are also determined by the same causal order. There is no room for freedom. If you understand the complex causal forces operating in nature, your action is called free, otherwise it would be called determined. In either case the course of nature will remain the same. Man can't effect any change in the course of nature. However, he can effect a change in his own understanding of nature and come to accept the presence of God in and through nature. God and nature for Spinoza are the same as he upholds a pantheistic view.

Kant, Fichte, and Hegel were supportive of self and his freedom and were also willing to entertain the immortality of soul as a postulate. Kant, in particular, advocated that on epistemic grounds, we may not be

able to say that God exists. But on moral grounds we have to acknowledge His Being as a necessary postulate. In a similar way, we have to entertain self and the freedom of self as necessary postulates of morals and metaphysics.

Freud and Jung were also advocates of determinism, psychic determinism to be more precise. Unconsciousness, consisting mostly of sex-frustrations for Freud and collective unconsciousness of the human race for Jung are the vital determinants of human nature.

Existentialism is the strong advocate of human freedom. Sartre insists that man is free, man is freedom. If man were to trade away his freedom, he would virtually trade away his own being. For them man is the author of his own fate. Of course, they do hold that man is responsible for his choice/freedom. It is a different matter though that their philosophy ends/terminates with the death of man on this side of the grave; it doesn't cover the other side.

Let us come home and examine some of our own internal tensions. To begin with, it may be stated that Muslims were very reluctant to meddle with such abstract and abstruse matters. They were, as it seems, fully alive to its complexities and intricacies that were fraught with grave consequences. During the Abbaside period however, they were forced to enter the arena. As a result thereof, two schools of thought emerged with conflicting contentions. They are called the *Jabarites* and the *Qadarites* (or the *Mutazilites*). *Jabarites* were anxious to make man impotent in order to save the Omnipotence of God Almighty. They presumed that the freedom of man would infringe upon the Omnipotence of God. Hence they decided to dismiss it altogether and believed in determinism. *Qadarites* or *Mutazilites* were opposed to *Jabarites*. Their contention was that if we presume that man is not the

author of his good and bad deeds, we would be driven to the conclusion that God is the author of evil as well, something that runs counter to our belief that God is Absolutely Perfect and Absolutely good. No evil can emanate from Him. They insisted that man alone is the author of good and evil and it is incumbent upon God to reward the righteous and to punish the evil doer. He can't reverse the order otherwise it will run counter to His justice. So they were anxious to deny the attributes of God to preserve His Unity and Justice. Another serious dispute between them was the question of supremacy of Reason or Revelation. *Mutazilites* allowed human reason to sit in judgment on revelation. Their most telling belief was that Quran is a created work of God rather than being the eternal. Needless to emphasize that both these schools were anxious to perceive God on anthropomorphic terms and were keen to ensure that God should follow the demands of human logic.

Now we come to analyze Sh. M. Fatehullah's remarkable work: Taqdir In the light of the Quran and the Sunnah (of the Prophet). It may be recalled that in the beginning we have stated that this issue has two dimensions that is, the Sovereignty of God; and the Vicegerency of man. The issue becomes really serious if we were to hold that the freedom of man eventually infringes upon the Sovereignty of God. Hence it becomes obligatory for us to offer an operational definition of the Sovereignty of God and then go on to assess as to how we can accommodate the freedom of man under the shadow of God. Let us first turn to the concept of Sovereignty.

Sovereignty of God

The holy Quran, it may be underscored, is uncompromisingly committed to the Oneness of God and His Absolute Sovereignty. *Shyrk* is unforgivable and intolerable crime in the teachings of Islam. Naturally

Quran expects man to show an absolute reliance on God. He is not supposed to disgrace himself by seeking help from the creatures of God rather than the Creator Himself. Quran insists that God has imposed the law of Mercy upon Himself. Man, his creation, his preservation, his guidance, and his judgment, all are supervised by His out-pouring Mercy. Any violation of the basic norm- submission to God-is treated as a treason against God and a violation of the primordial covenant: hence inexcusable.

The Quran refers to the most terrible fabrication of the Christians whereby Christ is deemed to be the son of God, something so horrible that it could rent asunder the entire universe. The Quran asserts that if God were to destroy Christ and his mother Mary there would have been no one to save them from God. Likewise, the Quran asserts that if God were to suspend the revelation from you, O Muhammad, you won't have found anyone to help you out in this regard and restore the revelation. Similarly, the Quran refers to 17 or 18 prophets in quick succession and says that they were all rightly guided Prophets of God. But if somehow they were found ascribing partners to God, all of their righteous deeds would have come to nothing. Further, God's Sovereignty is expressed through His manifestations. Quran frequently refers to Nature that surrounds us as the greatest miracle and creation of God. Quran underscores that nature is made subservient to human survival and is meant for man (while man is for God). Its harmony, its beauty, its holistic organization and arrangement reflects the greatness and sovereignty of its Creator. Man is constantly invited to see and see again if he could find any rupture, collision or clash in His creation. Everything in this ever-expanding universe is doing its assigned duty. You can't see the sun overtaking the moon, nor moon overtaking the sun. All planets

are rotating or floating in their own orbit or axis. It may be noted that the Quran does not prove the existence of God, it points to Him from the existing Universe. Reflection on Nature, it is expected can give you an intuitive certainty or an invincible conviction of a Being who is the wise Creator and Sustainer of this world. Likewise our reflections on our own finitude may take us to the Infinite: because “one who knows himself knows God” is a bold attestation of the fact that man would recall his primordial covenant; reflection on the rise and fall of the civilizations can also confirm the Sovereignty of God who through the churning process of history wraps up the undesirable and introduces the morally desirable community. So Quranic concept of Sovereignty of God is the solid rock (as opposed to the spider’s web) that can serve as a foundation of our Thoughts and actions.

Vicegerency of Man (and his Freedom)

Man’s intentions precede his actions and are usually well thought out and planned. So often he commits himself to the realization of his planned objectives. But his intentions and initiatives may get frustrated unless he invokes the blessings of God for materializing his goals and objectives. Sh. Fatehullah rightly holds that human volitions are just like a prayer or a solicitation because when all is said and done, it is God, the real Sovereign that bestows success in our actions and accepts our prayers. God’s Sovereignty, as we have already seen, is writ large in the entire Universe. Since Taqdir relates to the Sovereignty of God and is reflective of His attributes, denial of attributes would amount to the denial of God and may lead us to *Kufr*. Faith in Taqdir, Sh. M. Fatehullah has emphasized is an integral part of our belief system and as such it cannot be marginalized.

- Sh. M. Fatehullah contends that we are intuitively aware of our free-will. However, our will is not something physical like our head or hands or other parts of our body that can be referred to (if disputed). In fact, our will is not an entity which may have an identity. In one sense, it is not a part of the physical World. Nonetheless our will can be “seen” or “felt” in and through our actions. Our self (along with its freedom) is posited as the foundational principle of all our actions. Without pre-supposing the Self, we cannot perform any act whatsoever. The point to be noted is that man is endowed with partial and operational freedom but that in itself is not enough. Our free-will should be reinforced by the will of God otherwise our objectives won’t be realized. Sh. M. Fatehullah underscores that our intuition testifies and confirms the existence of our volition. We do feel that our intuition testifies and confirms the existence of our volition. We do feel intuitively convinced that we could have done otherwise had we so desired and that we were totally free from internal and external compulsion and have made the choice freely on our own. After making this decision, we took the initiative to adopt all possible measures for the realization of our goal. We did our part of the duty and exhausted all possible means. Along the line, our first and foremost concern, was to pray and solicit the blessings of God for success in our mission. And at the end of our struggle, we pay gratitude to God for taking us to success.
- God, by His Omniscience, Knows in advance as to what a man may do in his life. However, this knowledge in no way

interferes with human actions. Sh. Fatehullah Gullen gives an example of a map that an architect may draw for the construction of a house. This map may contain all the details of the house and these details may guide us as and when we do undertake the construction work. But this map, left to itself, does not lead to the construction of a house. Same is the situation of God's recording in the Sacred Book. This book preserves all the details of the entire universe including the life of man. But like this map, this sacred Book does not interfere with the life of man. Angels are also engaged in recording the daily performance of human beings. These angels don't interfere with human freedom or his actions either. On the Day of Judgment both these documents would be brought before the agent. Both these documents would correspond with each other without any discrepancy. Our actions, as the Quran puts it, will be hung to our neck and we will be rewarded or punished by our own deeds. So there is an integral relationship between the action and the agent. Man's volitions are in line with the Sacred Book but this issue relates more to the Knowledge of God and does not interfere with what man may do.

- Man, as the Sheikh points out, has two types of tendencies: tendency for good; and the tendency for evil. His tendency for good is reinforced by the grace of God. While his tendency for evil is strengthened by the secret whisperings of Satan-the sworn enemy of man. When our tendency for good is blessed by God, we realize our objectives. On the other hand, God's out-pouring Mercy, does not want us to do evil and thereby

commit violence against our own being. But if man still persists in his evil designs and is all psyched up by Satanic temptations, God creates such circumstances that may be conducive for the fulfillment of his evil designs. In any case, man alone is responsible for his good and bad intentions and initiatives. In this sense, our actions are self-constructive or self-destructive. Man is indeed endowed with Intellect and liberty/freedom: intellect, so that he may see the difference between the devil and the Divine; and freedom, so that he may choose the right course of life. These two elements are central to human psyche. Without assuming their existence, the whole process of prophecy and prophethood-guidance and *hidaya* would make no sense what so ever. Further, man is constantly invited to think, to reflect, and to ponder over various manifestations of God. Obviously, these invitations are predicated to human potentials. Further, man is asked to enjoin good and forbid evil, reform the earth and establish a just socio-moral order in this world. Now if man is not endowed with the requisite potentials for the fulfillment of his “Trust”, how can he be expected to do his job? Freedom of man is indeed a necessary postulate for our ethico-metaphysical and religious life.

- Shah Waliullah takes up the same problem of *Jabbar-o-Qadar* in his *Hujjatulah-hil-Balighah* and explains his contentions through very persuasive and interesting examples. He says, let us presume that a donkey-cart is going ahead of you on the roadside. Suddenly the donkey instead of moving forward, start moving backward. The owner of the donkey cart loses

his temper and start beating the hell out of the poor donkey. You feel sympathy with the poor beast and tell the owner: Sir, have pity on the poor beast. After all it is just a donkey! The owner may retort: I know the beast is just a donkey. But let me assure you, the donkey is not a fool. I have tamed and trained this donkey for these services. Further, I am positive that the donkey understands the commands and is capable of following them if it so desire. Shah Waliullah further states you might not have ever seen any one beating a tree, or a wall, or a mountain for not obeying the commands because no such assumption (having a rudimentary intelligence and rudimentary freedom) are involved in these cases.

Shah Waliullah's contentions are that the Quran holds the same assumptions about man. It is presumed that man is endowed with intellect and freedom: intellect to see the difference between good and evil; and freedom to make the appropriate choice. Without these assumptions, the whole process of prophecy and Prophethood, the guidance and *hadaya*, would make no sense whatsoever. For it is obvious that if man cannot change the course of his life and is fully determined, all those efforts would go in vain.

Shah Waliullah concludes that man's situation is similar to that of a Shepherd. A shepherd may take his herd to a barren and desolate desert where there is no water and no grass or vegetation for his live-stock. Or he may take them to a lush green pasture with an abundance of sustenance for his herd. Now both these *Taqdir*s (finite creations), that is, the barren desert or the green pasture, are the products of God.

They are not the products of man. However, man is endowed with the potentialities to think and choose from the given options and is obviously responsible for his choice.

Sh. M. Fatehullah Gullen, in our assessment, is a thorough-going intuitionist. Like Shah Waliullah, Iqbal, Maulana Maududi, Hume, Kant, Bergson and hosts of others, he leans heavily on Intuition. He contends that our intuition introduces us to our own self and reminds us of our primordial covenant; it is intuition that helps us to see/feel the presence of God in and around the manifestations of Nature; again it is intuition that helps us to see the hidden hand of God in the rise and fall of our Civilizations. Indeed it is intuition that transports us beyond the limits of reason and experience and introduces us to the true spirit of Islam.

In conclusion, we may state that God's Sovereignty does not negate or militate against the partial and operational freedom of man. In fact, man is endowed with intellect and freedom by His own grace, so that he may honor the Trust, that is, reform the earth and establish a just socio-moral order in this world. This seems to be the natural implication of: "God has breathed His own spirit in man". Nor the Vicegerency of man, in any way, infringes upon the Sovereignty of God. Not to speak of man with all his limitations and helplessness, even the self-proclaimed false gods could not pose any threat to His Sovereignty. At the end we would like to express our sincere gratitude to Sh. M. Fatehullah Gullen for delineating the complex issues involved in the problem of Taqdir and explaining them with utmost care and conviction. May God bless him for rendering this most valuable service!

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