

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

In the name of Allah, most Kind, most Merciful



Surat ad-Dahr, 76:3

إِنَّا هَدَيْنَاهُ السَّبِيلَ إِمَّا شَاكِرًا وَإِمَّا كَفُورًا

Indeed We have guided him to the way, be he grateful or ungrateful.

Learning Objectives

- To define the concepts of free will and predestination
- To compare and contrast the Shi'a and Sunni beliefs on the *adalah* of Allah
- To evaluate whether we have free will in this world or not

Key Words

إِخْتِيَار

Ikhtiyar
free will

جَبْر

Jabr
force; compulsion; determinism

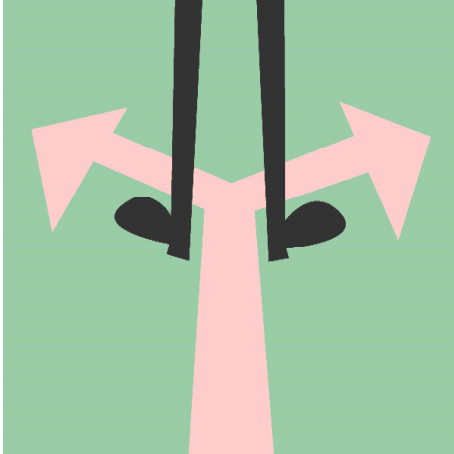
قَضَاء

Qadha
fate

قَدَر

Qadr
destiny

Free will is defined as the ability to act at one's own discretion, while predestination is the notion that everything has already been decided by Allah and cannot be altered.



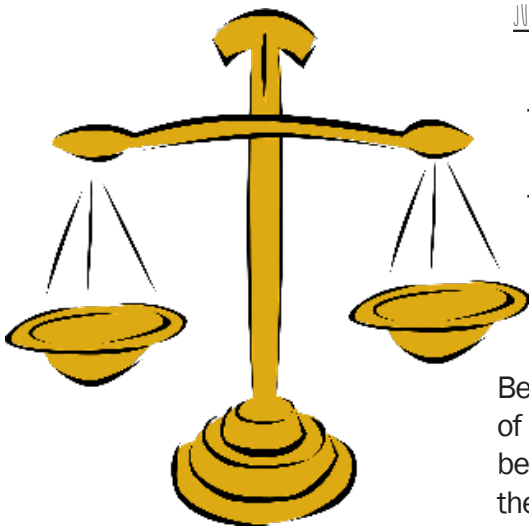
Adalah of Allah

The literal meaning of *adalah* is 'to put everything in its rightful place'. With respect to Allah, *adalah* is the belief that Allah is just. He never wrongs anyone or neglects any matter. Belief in *adalah* means we should not accuse Allah of injustice or favouritism because we understand that He is just. He will never command beyond our capabilities or punish us beyond what we deserve. Imam Ali (a) tells us: '*Tawhid* means you should never bring Allah to your imagination and *adalah* means you should never accuse Allah of anything.'

Equality is not a condition for justice. Give one example that clearly demonstrates the difference between equality and justice:

A CRUEL KING TREATS ALL HIS SUBJECTS BADLY. ALTHOUGH THEY ARE TREATED EQUALLY, THEY ARE NOT TREATED

JUSTLY.



**Surah Ya Sin,
36:54**

فَالْيَوْمَ لَا تُظْلَمُ نَفْسٌ
شَيْئًا وَلَا تُجْزَوْنَ إِلَّا
مَا كُنْتُمْ تَعْمَلُونَ

This day no soul will be wronged in the least, nor will you be recompensed except for what you used to do.

Belief in *adalah* varies slightly among Muslims of different schools of thought. As we saw in the previous lesson, Sunni Ash'arites believe that Allah is not bound by the rules of justice because He is the All Powerful. As such, He can punish His creatures even if they have not committed any sins or reward them even if they have not done any good. They believe that justice is not an intrinsic quality of Allah; rather justice is defined by what Allah does even if it looks unjust to us. The Ash'arites have developed such a strange view to justify their view on lack of human free will. If we do not believe in free will, it means that Allah forces some people to do good then he takes them to paradise, and forces some to do evil and then he takes them to hell. It is because of this problem that they have given up the belief in justice.

Shi'as maintain that Allah is just and would not force people to do what they do and then punish or reward them. Human free will does not reduce His power, but rather it shows how excellent He is. That is why the principle of justice that applies to Allah has become one of the five pillars of religion (Usul ad-din) for the Shi'a. Shi'as also believe Allah will judge humans on those acts committed out of their own free will:

Free will and predestination

The Sunni view of free will and predestination has developed over time. Sunni Muslims who used to follow the Mu'tazili theology believed that humans are completely free and that Allah does not interfere in their actions. They argued that Allah created humans and then left them in a world of cause and effect, where everything happens because of something we do or something that is done to us.

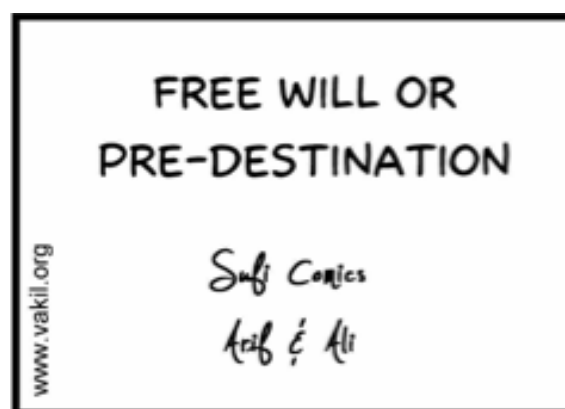
This view changed as Ash'ari theology came into play. Today, Ash'ari theology is considered one of the main schools of Sunni orthodox Islam. Ash'ari views are pre-deterministic although they have tried to give some role to human will.

Shi'as disagree with both the Mu'tazali and Ash'ari views and follow the principle of *al-amru bayn al-amrayn*, as explained by Imam Ali (a) and later reiterated by Imam Ja'far as-Sadiq (a).

The principle of *al-amru bayn al-amrayn*

Al-amru bayn al-amrayn translates to 'the reality of the matter is between the two issues'. It is the defining principle of the Shi'a view of *adalah*. Through it, Imam Ja'far as-Sadiq (a) points out that the reality of *adalah* (the matter) lies between the two views we have mentioned, in other words, Shi'as believe that humans have neither complete freedom (*ikhtiyar*) nor are they under complete compulsion (*jabr*). They maintain that certain matters, such as our place of birth, or when and where we will ultimately die, are predestined for us, but our actions are governed by the freedom of choice. For example, when we are tempted to sin or follow our desires we have the choice to act or to stop out of devotion to Allah.

When asked to explain his concept of *al-amru bayn al-amrayn* and how humans can be partly free but partly bound by Allah at the same time, Imam told the man to stand on one foot and then raise that one foot which is on the ground whilst the other foot is still off the ground. When the man could not, Imam informed him that he could raise one foot because he had been given the free will to do so but he could not raise the other without falling because he was bound by gravity, a law of the universe governed by Allah.





Faith in Action

There is also much debate and discussion on the topic of predestination and free will within other faiths. Select a faith outside Islam and conduct research into its teachings on the concepts of free will and predestination. Present your research in the form of a spider diagram, short paragraph, or video clip.

DID YOU KNOW?

Imam Ja'far as-Sadiq (a) has recommended us not to forget to mention *inshallah*. Once, Imam asked someone to write a letter and on observing that the letter did not include the phrase *inshallah*, he asked the writer: 'How do you hope that this work will be completed?'

Remember: faith and action go hand in hand; when we recite or write *inshallah* we should also be connecting to the essence of the term and not merely uttering it with our tongues.

The requirement to recite *inshallah* is from the Qur'an. See verses 18:23-24. Look up these verses from the Qur'an.



STORYTIME!



Abu Hanifah is the founder of the Hanafi school of *fiqh* of the Sunnis.

One day, Abu Hanifah came to see Imam Ja'far as-Sadiq (a). While he was waiting outside he saw a young Imam Musa al-Kadhim (a) and asked him: 'Tell me, are we responsible for our actions or does Allah make us do everything?' Five years old at the time, the young boy responded: 'There are only three possibilities: either Allah forces us to act, or we and Allah are both responsible for our actions, or we are free to act ourselves. If we accept that Allah forces us to act, then it follows that there is no point in the Day of Judgement because all our deeds would be attributed to Allah. If we say Allah and humans are partners in committing acts then it is not fair that the stronger partner should punish the weaker partner on the Day of Judgement. So the only possibility is that we are free to act and we are responsible for our actions. That is why Allah can judge us and reward or punish us.'

Briefly reflect over the response of Imam Musa al-Kadhim (a). What type of answer was this? What does it tell us about the way Imam was thinking? Imam's logical response highlights the importance of critical thinking and the use of logic and reasoning within theological discussions.

Are our lives predestined?

Lawh al-mahfudh refers to the secure knowledge of Allah. *Lawh* means 'a tablet of wood or stone used for writing', and *mahfudh* means 'secure'. *Lawh al-mahfudh* is a metaphor for a creation of Allah in which He has deposited all knowledge of the creation, past, present and future. Like our DNA in which all information about our bodily development is placed, the information is placed in *lawh al-Mahfudh* about how the whole creation should unfold. This knowledge is secure as it is known and understood only to Him.

With regards to predestination, there are areas which are outside human control. For example, the human heart beats independently about 100,000 times per day. It works within its own system but is not controlled by humans. Similarly, the exact time of death or place of birth of an individual are known only to Allah. Can you think of any other such examples?

Alternatively, there are areas within human control. Our daily actions that mould our spiritual, family, social, and educational life are generally in our control. We have free control over and are accountable for the spiritual and moral decisions we take on a daily basis.

Although Allah has ultimate power over all existence, He can change or replace a given destiny with another if He wills. Some of these changes can be brought about by the choices and way of life of humans; who, through the free will granted to them by Allah, can lay the groundwork for changes in their destiny. The Qur'an tell us:

Surat ar-Ra'd, 13:11

لَهُ مُعَقِّبَاتٌ مِّن بَيْنِ يَدَيْهِ وَمِنْ خَلْفِهِ
يَحْفَظُونَهُ مِنْ أَمْرِ اللَّهِ إِنَّ اللَّهَ لَا يُغَيِّرُ
مَا بِقَوْمٍ حَتَّى يُغَيِّرُوا مَا بِأَنْفُسِهِمْ

He [a person] has guardian angels, to his front and his rear, who guard him by Allah's command. Indeed Allah does not change the condition of a people unless they change what is in their souls.

DID YOU KNOW?

Another name for *lawh al-mahfudh* is *umm al-kitab* (the Mother Book).

There is also another book which is more detailed than the Mother Book in the sense that it records the alterations that must take place in destiny of people because of their supplications, actions, or God's mercy.

This Book is called *lawh al-mahw wa al-ithbat* which is 'the tablet of removal and substitution'. Such changes are already incorporated in *lawh al-mahfudh*.

Followers of the Ahlul Bayt (a) believe that humans are not forced to act nor do they have complete free will, but that they can mould their own fate through the choices they make. God has provided guidance but has also allowed humans to traverse the path through the decisions they choose to make in their lives. Humans have the potential to ascend to the highest levels of perfection by adhering to the laws of God and placing God's wishes above their own desires.

Facets of our lives written by Allah in the *lawh al-mahw wa al-ithbat* which is 'the tablet of removal and substitution' can be altered by His will during our lifetime.



Sincere *du'a* and good acts can alter the course of our lives. Good deeds, such as giving *sadaqah*, may allow us to avoid calamity and increase our sustenance. In *ayat* 92:5-7, Allah says he will smoothen the path for those who give charity, have *taqwa*, and believe in His promise. For example through *sila al-rahm* we can extend length of our lives (but not the final ultimate knowledge of our death that is with Allah). At times, Allah provides us with opportunities, such as *laylat al-qadr* in which further decrees are sent down.

This does not limit or alter the knowledge or power of Allah. Remember, that it is only by the will of Allah that things occur.

ACTIVITY...

Carefully read the statements in the table below. Rate each statement on a scale of 0-5, where 0 = strongly disagree and 5 = strongly agree. Note down your reasons for agreeing or disagreeing.

Statement	Response	Reason/Key Points
Allah cannot be merciful and just at the same time		
We do not have the freedom to make choices because Allah, the All-Knowing, knows what lies in our future		
Allah forces us to act against our free will		
There are degrees of free will and predestination		
There is no need for <i>anbiya</i> or <i>wahy</i> because our lives are predestined		
Allah is not bound by the rules of justice as He is the creator and owner of everything		
We can find our way through life without Allah		

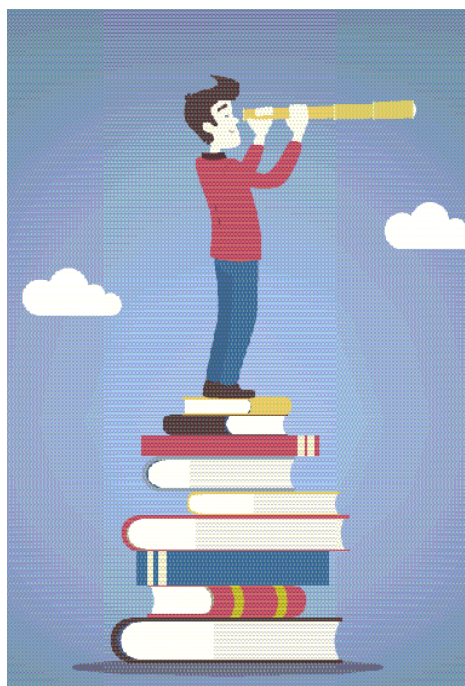


HIGHER LEVEL

In Arabic, the word *bada'* literally means “change of mind”, and according to Shi'a scholars it applies to the change in the natural course of someone's destiny as a result of his or her righteous and wholesome behaviour.

We must always rely on our creator for help, mercy, and guidance, especially when in a difficult situation. Recall the story of Nabi Ibrahim and Nabi Isma'il. Discuss whether it was fair for Allah to ask Nabi Ibrahim to sacrifice his son. Present your argument in three paragraphs. Show you have considered the following concepts within your answer:

- *Adalah*
- Free will
- Predestination
- Moral obligation
- Divine wisdom



KEYPOINTS



- 1 Free will is the freedom to make one's own choices; predestination is the belief that Allah has already decided our future and it cannot be altered.
- 2 Sunni Ash'arites believe that Allah is not bound by the rules of justice because He is the All Powerful. As such, He can punish His creatures even if they have not committed any sins or reward them even if they have not done any good.
- 3 Shi'as believe that Allah has total power and freedom, and justice is part of His perfection.
- 4 Imam Ja'far as-Sadiq's (a) principle of *al-amru bayn al-amrayn* states that man is partly free and partly bound by Allah at the same time.
- 5 Shi'as believe that humans are not forced to act nor do they have complete free will and that they can mould their own fate through the choices they make.



- 1** Define the concept of predestination.

- 2 State the Ash'ari view of *adalah*. How does this differ from the Shi'a view?

- 3 Briefly describe the principle of *al-amru bayn al-amrayn*. Where do its origins lie?

- 4** Based on what you know, how would you explain the Shi'a belief on predestination and free will?

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