

The Knowledge of God, Fate and Divine Decree

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A. THE KNOWLEDGE OF AL GHAYB

al Ghayb means "unseen" or "hidden" things. Ilmu 'l ghayb means knowledge of the things which are hidden at present, like the events of the future. Such knowledge is the sole prerogative of Allah. Nobody can know the ghayb except Allah.

Of course, many of us can forecast hundreds of things which are to happen in future. We know in advance the time and extent of tide; we know the exact day, time and extent of solar and lunar eclipses. Weathermen forecast the rain, storm, cyclone and many such conditions of season and weather. By looking at the feature of a man, some of us can even say with a degree of certainty what is the character and nature of that person. Doctors and physicians can easily gauge the chances of survival of their patients. You may find many such examples in your daily life. Is it same as 'ilmu 'l ghayb? Does the weatherman know the ghayb?

The answer is 'No'. Because all such forecasts and prophecies are based upon the observation of the laws of nature. By keen observation and deduction, we are in a position to know many things in advance. Such advance knowledge is based upon deduction and observation of physical laws. The 'ilmu 'l ghayb which is mentioned in the Qur'an as the sole prerogative of Allah,

is the knowlege of the unseen things and future events which is not based on deduction or observation of physical laws: It is this type of knowledge which has been referred to in the following verse: (Allah is) the Knower of the unseen, and nor does He reveal His secrets to any one, except the one whom He chooses from among the messengers; for verily He causes a guard to march before him and after him. (72:26 27)

This verse and many similar verses declare in unambiguous terms that the knowledge of unseen things and future events, not based on observation of physical laws or deduction, is with God only. And He, in His own wisdom, selects some messengers, prophets and Imams to divulge to them such knowledge as and when He thinks fit. In short, nobody can know the unseen things or future events (without some present signs or deductions) except Allah. And Allah, in His grace, informs whoever He selects for such knowledge, be they angels, prophets or Imams.

In the sayings of the Imams of Ahlu'l bayt, it has been explained that Allah had revealed only one of His Great Names to 'Asif bin Barkhiya (the vizier of Prophet Sulayman); and by that one

part of the knowledge he was able to bring the throne of Bilqis, the Queen of Sheba, from her capital to Jerusalem within any eye wink.[1]

But Allah had given our Holy Prophet (upon him and his progeny be peace) all the knowledge given to all the prophets from Adam onwards (upon them be peace), as well as the knowledge given to all the angels; and then his knowledge was being increased constantly. And he, by divine order, taught all that to 'Ali (upon him be peace); and that knowledge passing through the succeeding Imams has come to Imam al Mahdi (upon all of them be peace).[2] That is why [they have been called 'the Treasurers of Allah's knowledge.[3

Lawh mah fuz" and "Lawh mahw wa ithbat" .1

Lawh means "tablet of wood or stone used for writing". Metaphorically, it is used for "knowledge," because knowledge usually comes from written things. Mahfuz means secure; in safe keeping; something that cannot be apprehended by unauthorised persons; firmly protected. Therefore, "lawh mahfuz" means the knowledge which cannot be apprehended by others; the knowledge which is firmly protected.

Mahw means erasure; rubbing something out. Ithbat means affirmation; writing. Therefore, "lawh mahw wa ithbat" means the knowledge which is capable of erasure and substitution; the knowledge which is liable to change from time to time.

Now that you know the literal meanings of "lawh mahfuz" and "lawh mahw wa ithbat," let me explain what is meant by these two terms in Islam. We know that the knowledge of God can never be wrong. In other words, there can never be any change in the knowledge of God. It is for this reason that God has called His own knowledge as "lawh mahfuz". This phrase describes the knowledge of Allah because His knowledge can never change. It is always correct and needs no erasure or substitution or modification.

"Ummu 'l kitab" is another name used for the knowledge of Allah. It means "the basic book," "the mother of the book." Allah's knowledge is called "the basic book;" that is, the basic knowledge; or "the mother of the book," that is, the source of knowledge because only His knowledge can be called "the true knowledge".

"Lawh mahw wa ithbat" is the name given by God to the knowledge of the angels, prophets and Imams. Their knowledge, though the most complete and perfect of all human beings, is still incomplete when compared to the knowledge of God.

These names have been taken from the following verse of the Qur'an: For every term there is a book prescribed; Allah erases out whatever He pleases and writes (whatever He pleases); and with Him is the mother of the book.(13:39)

This 'mother of the book' is called "lawh mahfuz" in the following verse:
Nay, it is the glorious Qur'an, in the guarded tablet. (85:22) As the knowledge of the angels, prophets and Imams is constantly being replenished, perfected and completed, it is called 'the tablet of erasure and writing lawh mahw wa ithbat..^[4]
.More will be said about lawh mahw wa ithbat in the following section

B. THE THEORY OF BADA'

1. Bada' in the Qur'an

It appears from many stories in the Qur'an that sometimes Allah, in His mercy and wisdom, reveals only a part of His future plan to the angels or the prophets concerned. They are informed of His plan to a certain stage, and the knowledge of the later stage is not revealed to them. Before explaining the theory further, let me give you some examples from the Qur'an

The People of Yunus: .1

First of all comes the episode of the people of Prophet Yunus. Allah refers to that episode in this verse:

And why, there was not a town which believed and its faith profited it except the people of Yunus. When they believed We removed from them the torment of ignominy in the life of this world and provided them (with comfort to enjoy it) for a fixed while. (10:98)

The fact is that the tribe of Prophet Yunus had rejected him; and only two persons had believed in him; one of them a pious person but without knowledge, the other one a righteous man with knowledge. When Prophet Yunus prayed to Allah to send punishment and affliction upon his people because of their disbelief, Allah promised him that on a certain day affliction would visit them.

Prophet Yunus with his pious companion left his people and went away. But the learned man remained with the people and tried to put the fear of God in their hearts. He told them that there still was time to repent from their kufr, to believe in God and His prophet, Yunus, and then to pray to God to avert that affliction.

On the appointed day, the children were separated from the mothers and the calves from the mother cows; everybody fasted, all of them went out of the village; there they cried, they prayed, they prostrated to God and asked His forgiveness and pray, to Him to avert that affliction. The sky was covered with black clouds, day became like night, thunder and lightening were shattering the whole atmosphere.

It appeared that soon the punishment from God would wipe out the whole nation of Prophet Yunus. It was fortunate that they had repented before seeing the punishment; and, therefore, God in His mercy forgave them, and as their prayers, crying and weeping continued, gradually the sky became dear, the clouds went away and all were saved.

Then they waited for Prophet Yunus to return so that they might follow him. Next day Prophet Yunus came back expecting to see the town destroyed. Instead, he saw a shepherd tending to his herd. He thought that God did not keep His promise, and so he did not enter the town.

Here I am not concerned with the whole incident. What I want to show is that Allah knew before hand that the people of Prophet Yunus would repent, accept the true faith and believe in Prophet Yunus and his God; and thereupon they would eventually be saved. But He did not reveal the whole event to Yunus. Prophet Yunus was informed only that the affliction was to visit them.

Naturally he thought that the affliction would wipe out the whole community. Since he was not told, he did not know that before coming of the affliction, the community would repent and that all of them would be saved. It is clear that Allah informed Yunus of the events to a certain stage without telling him the conclusion.

Why was it done so? Because if Prophet Yunus had known that affliction would visit them and then go away, his exhortations would not have in them the force of sincerity that softened the hearts of his people. If that learned companion of Prophet Yunus had known that affliction would visit and then would disappear, he could not have exhorted them so sincerely and so his words would have fallen on deaf ears.

It was because Allah, in His own mercy and according to His wise plan, wanted them to listen to the voice of wisdom, He did not reveal the whole future to Yunus. It was not that Allah had told him a lie, or had not intended to keep His promise. He had not told Yunus that his people would be wiped out by that affliction. The promise was kept. But it was not promised that the people would be destroyed. It was not promised by Allah though all of the parties concerned had thought that the people were going to be destroyed.

This episode clearly shows that God, because of His mercy and wisdom, withheld the knowledge of later stages from Prophet Yunus. Yunus came to know of the whole plan after that plan was carried out and put into effect.

The Sacrifice of Prophet Ismail: .2

Now let us look at another example. Prophet Ibrahim was shown in a dream that he was sacrificing his son in the name of God. As it was a dream, he must have seen how he was to

kill Isma'il. He must have seen himself binding the hands and feet of the child, blindfolding himself and then putting the knife on the child's throat and pressing it down. Naturally, by seeing this dream he thought he was required to kill his only son Isma'il in that way. Therefore, he steeled his heart to sacrifice his only child.

The child heard it and prepared himself to be killed in obedience to the command of God. Father and son both were willing to sacrifice everything in the name of Allah. Prophet Ibrahim did as he had dreamed himself doing; he bound the hands and feet of the child and put him in the position of prostration; and blindfolding himself, put the knife and cut the throat. After removing the blindfold from his eyes, he saw Isma'il smiling and a lamb slaughtered in his place.

Prophet Ibrahim thought that he had failed in his test. But he had done what he had seen himself doing in dream. Of course, Allah had not informed him of the events up to the last stage. Because if Ibrahim had known that Isma'il would be saved, or if Isma'il had known that he would be saved, there would have been no meaning in that test; there would not have been any chance of showing their willingness to sacrifice everything in the name of Allah. So God showed to Ibrahim in his dream the events to

a certain stage but kept him unaware of the first stage; not informing him how the whole episode was to end. Because they did not know the result. Ibrahim and Isma'il were able to show, how willing they were to obey the command of God even to the extent of sacrificing their lives and the lives of their dear ones in His name.

.If they had known the result from the beginning, the test would have been meaningless

Tawrat Given to Prophet Musa: .3

A third example concerns Prophet Musa and the revelation of Tawrat. Prophet Musa was ordered to go to Mount Sinai, fast there for thirty days in preparation for receiving the tablets of Tawrat. On the thirtieth day he cleansed his teeth and went to Mount Sinai. There he was asked by God as why did he cleanse his teeth.

He explained that as he was coming to a holy place, he thought it proper to make himself neat and clean. God told him that the smell of the mouth of a fasting person was sweeter before God than the smell of musk and ambergris. And then he was told to return to his staying place, and fast for ten more days and then come to Mount Sinai without cleansing his teeth. Thus it was on the fortieth day that he was given the stone tablets of Tawrat.

Allah knew from ever that Musa would come after cleansing his teeth, and would be asked to fast for ten more days. But neither Musa nor the Israelites had been told about it; nor Musa

was told before hand that he was riot to cleanse his teeth on the thirtieth day. When Allah refers to His knowledge, He describes the whole period of forty nights together: When we made appointment with Musa for forty nights. then you (the Israelites) took the (image of) calf (for your god) after he left you and thus you transgressed. (2:51) And where He refers to the knowledge of Musa, He mentions the thirty days and the ten days separately: And We made an appointment with Musa for thirty nights; and We completed it with ten (more); thus was completed the term of his Lord forty nights.(7:142) The reason of not giving the advance information is dear from the behavior of the Israelites who because of his ten days delay, left worshipping the only and true Allah and started worshipping the image of a calf. The story is given beautifully in the following verses of the Qur'an, Said God to Musa, "Verily We have tested thy people in thy absence, and the Samiri had led them astray." So returned Musa unto his people angered, and sorrowful. Said he, "O my people, did not your Lord promise you a good promise? Did then the promise seem long to you, or did you want the wrath from your Lord should light upon you, that you violated the promise with me?" Said they, "We violated not thy promise of our own accord..." Then he (Samiri) brought forth for them a calf. a mere body, with a lowing sound. Then they said, "This is your god and the god of Musa, but he (Musa) has forgotten." (20:85 88) Just imagine a whole community of several thousand companions of an ulu 'l ' azm prophet, in the presence of. his successor and vicegerent Harun, leaving the path of true religion and starting idolworship, just because Musa was delayed for a few days! This test of faith could not have been conducted if Allah would had told Musa that he was supposed to stay for forty days; .or if he had been told before hand not to cleanse his teeth on the thirtieth day

The Meaning of Bada' .2

These three examples taken from the Qur'an are enough to show that Allah makes known His plan to the angels, prophets or Imams only to that extent which is beneficial to the mankind or which is necessary to make a test meaningful. When the time comes for the angel, the prophet or the Imam concerned to think that the plan of work is nearing its end, a new development extends the plan or brings it to an unexpected end. This new development is called bada' in Arabic which means "to appear".

There is no need to emphasize that this appearance or clarification does not concern Allah who knew every thing from ever. It refers to the knowledge of His creatures who come to know at the end of God's plan what they did not know before.

And it is also for this reason that the knowledge of angels, prophets and Imams is called *lawh mahw wa ithbat* (the tablet of erasure and substitution), while the knowledge of Allah is called *lawh mahfuz* (the protected tablet) which is above any change or substitution.

The Benefits of Bada' .3

There are many reasons for this partial revelation. Some of them may be enumerated here. (In the above mentioned three stories of the Qur'an, you may find two benefits of bada'.)

1. Bada' helps the servants of Allah to discard their wrong beliefs and come unto the right path, as happened in the case of the people of Prophet Yunus (upon whom be peace).
2. Bada' helps in the test of individuals or the communities, as was the case with Prophet Ibrahim and Isma'il (peace be upon them), and with the Israelites.
3. As the angels can never be sure that the plan of the events as told to them is final, they constantly seek the guidance from Allah. Thus they never think of themselves as being independent of the guidance and commandments of Allah.
4. Likewise, the prophets and the Imams can never think that they had known all there was to know. Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him and his progeny) was advised to always pray: "O My Lord increase my knowledge. "[5] Imam Zaynu'l 'Abidin (peace be upon him) said, "Had there not been for a verse in the Qur'an, I could have told all the events upto the qiyamah." On being asked, "Which verse?, he recited, "Allah erases whatever He pleases and writes (whatever He pleases)."[6] This verse has been explained in section "A" of this chapter. It must be mentioned here that many times Allah informs the angels, the prophets or the Imams about future events, clearly telling them that it was the final word. In such cases there can be no amendment of the plan and no erasure or substitution.
5. The human beings can never know what is in store for them in the future. Thus they will always seek the help and mercy of Allah. It will benefit them in this life as well as in the life hereafter.

A. PREROGATIVES OF ALLAH

it was mentioned in Chapter Two (section "C") that there are some aspects of our life which are beyond our will and power. An example was given of getting treatment and recovering from illness; and it was shown that getting treatment is within our power, but being cured is not within the sphere of our activities.

From birth to death, there are hundreds of such conditions which are beyond our power, which

are under the absolute control of Allah. A man is born in a wealthy and educated family; another in a nomad family of primitive civilization. Naturally, the first one has more chances of material well being and intellectual development than the second one. A man is healthy and strong; another remains chronically sick. One is born blind, another has normal eyesight. Naturally, one can do more work than the other. A man lives up to eighty years, another dies in young age. The first one gets enough time to fulfill his plans, while the second one is not given time even to formulate any plan.

These and many such aspects of life are beyond the control of human beings. These matters are truly subject to "predetermination by God" which is called qada' (fate) and qadar (divine decree).

Why Allah chooses a certain condition of life for a certain man? It is a riddle which is beyond any solution. Many groups have tried to find answer to this puzzle. But all in vain. No theory solves the problems involved even partially.

When all is said and done, the only answer is provided by the verse of the Qur'an: "He is not questioned about what He does; but they (the people) shall be questioned." (21:23) It was perhaps for this reason that Amiru'l mu'minin 'Ali bin Abi Talib (peace be upon him) said about qadar of Allah that "it is a deep ocean; you should not enter it."^[7]

However, we can be confident that whatever is decreed is because of some good reason. What is the basis of this assertion? Let us look at those things which we do understand, like the system of universe, co ordination of different forces of nature, our own biological system and the arrangement which have been made on this earth to make our lives pleasant. All these things convince us that the Creator has done nothing without a good reason. After this manifestation of His wisdom and knowledge, if we come across some aspects of life which we are unable to understand, it is not difficult to assume that these things also must have some valid reasons.

Before going further, it will be a good idea to refresh your memory by going through Chapter One (sections "B" to "D") again. Then you will know that Allah does nothing without purpose; that we are not in a position to know every reason of every thing in this world; that Allah does whatever is most beneficial to the mankind; that if we were told the reasons for these aspects of our lives, we would admit that they are most appropriate

B. THE PREDETERMINED MEASURE

Allah says in the Qur'an: "Verily We have created every thing to a determined measure." (54:49) So, it is according to His own measure and plan that Allah has created every thing. As I have

mentioned previously, we are justified in believing that there is good reason for every aspect of an individual's life as planned by Allah, though that individual may be unable to understand it by himself.

Look at a wrist watch. Some parts are made of gold, others of steel; still others of glass and ruby. There is a flat dial; arrow like hands; hair like spring; and axis-like spring wheel; and various wheels, all of different sizes., The dial is white, the numerals black, the hand of second red and other two hands black: The numbers vary from one to twelve: In short, it takes scores of parts of different type, colour, origin and shape to make an ordinary wrist watch work. Could the wrist watch work if all the components Were of the same shape, size and design? Can the minute and hour hands complain justifiably why they were coloured black while the hand of second was painted red? Can the number 1 complain why it was not given the position of 12? And if all the numerals were put in one and the same position, could anybody know the time from that watch?

If a small ordinary wrist watch cannot work without different types of parts, is there any reason to believe that the human society could go on without different types of people having various colour, outlook, capacity and ability?

And look at what the critics say. They demand that there should not have been any sickness, any handicap, any financial gaps; people should have been of equal strength, intelligence and wealth.

Now let us look at what it envisages. It means that nobody would have depended upon any other person. Nobody would have done any work, because we have already supposed that one person would have as much money as the other. Then why should anybody work when his health, life span, wealth and social status is guaranteed? The world would have remained as it was when Adam came on this earth. No improvement, not even bark cloth! It would have been like spoon feeding little children who have to do nothing for their own needs. But this is not the purpose for which we were created. We were created for a higher purpose, not just to eat, drink and breed.

If there was to be any test, there was bound to be some hardship. And that hardship differs from person to person. That test varies from one person to another. And it is because of this variety of test that we find variety of problems

C. SO WHERE IS EQUALITY & JUSTICE?

Question: If what you say is true, then it means that there is no equality between one person and the other. Where is the equality of which Islam is so proud?

Answer: By "equality" we do not mean that all human beings are of equal health and strength; nor that all of them are of equal intelligence; nor that all of them are born with equal eyesight, or hearing capacity; nor do we mean that man and woman are equal in physical capacity and biological functions. What we do mean by "equality" is the equality before the law. Rich and poor, strong and weak, all are equal in the eyes of religion; all have to follow the same rules and

all are governed by the same civil, criminal and ethical codes.

There is neither high nor low, neither favourite nor neglected in the eyes of law. Another meaning is that anybody in Islam can achieve the highest possible honour and office without any distinction of origin, colour or tribe. The criterion of respect in Islam is neither wealth nor strength, neither birth nor colour. The only criterion is the "character." Allah says, "Verily the

most honoured before God amongst you is the most pious of you." (49:13)

Question: But where is the justice of God when He gives one person normal eyes and deprives another of both eyes?

Answer: You have been told that we are here for test. "The examiner is Allah. It is His prerogative to decide in which way a person is to be examined: The justice is in the fact that the examiner does not burden any one with a test which might be beyond his or her ability.

Allah has not given us wings to fly; and therefore, does not ask of us to fly in the air like birds. This is justice. Had He asked us to fly like birds (without giving us the wings), then it would have been injustice. But can we claim that because He did not give us wings (while birds have got it) we have been wronged by God? No. It is His sole prerogative to decide by which test should a particular person be examined.

And it is His justice and mercy that He does not demand from anyone more than his or her ability. If He has created a man without hands, He at the same time has exempted him from jihad, wudu and tayammum. Had such a person been required to wage war without hands, then we could have rightly complained. But as long as the responsibilities of an individual are tailored to his abilities, nobody can say that Allah has done injustice

We may sum up this topic in the following lines:

1. This world could not work if all people would have been of the same strength, same ability and same life span.
2. The working of the world requires people of different calibre, strength and ability.
3. All are equal in the eyes of the religion and laws of religion.
4. Everybody's responsibilities are tailored to his abilities. And that is the only thing demanded by justice.

Imam Ja'far as Sadiq (peace be upon him) was asked about qada (fate) and qadar (divine decree). He said, "When Allah will gather His servants on the Day of Judgement, He will question them about the things which He entrusted them with, i.e., our obedience to the shari'ah which is within our power; but He will not question them about the things which He decreed and predetermined for them, i.e., the conditions of life which are beyond our [control]."[8]

D. TADBIR & TAQDIR (Our Plans & God's Decree)

It was mentioned in Chapter Two that though the power and opportunity to do a certain work is given by Allah, the ultimate responsibility is ours because we opt to do or not to do that work by our own free will and choice. Thus, while the tools of our actions are provided by Allah, the final choice is ours.

It is interesting to note that to a certain extent in matter of predetermined measures, the opposite is true, that is, while the preliminaries are provided by human beings, the final decision is in the hands of Allah. (Mark the phrase 'to certain extent'. I have used this phrase because the decree of Allah is not 'always' dependent upon our actions:) In this context, our action and planning is known as tadbir, while Allah's decision is known as taqdir.

To give you one example, if we want to reap a harvest, we will have to cultivate the land, sow the seed, irrigate the plants, weed out the grass and remain always on alert. Still, after doing all that was necessary, we cannot be sure of getting the harvest. A cyclone, a fire or a lightening may destroy the produce; armed gangs of robbers may attack; circumstances may force us to sell the farm just before the harvest, and so on. Thus while the preliminary stages are prepared by us, the final outcome of that venture is in hands of Allah. Two of the matters which are of day to day interest to the readers and which are under the direct control of Allah, are life and death, and the means of livelihood. In the following pages, some light will be thrown on these two subjects

Life & Death: .1

Allah says, "He is the one who has created you of clay, then decreed the term; and the predetermined term is with Him; and yet you doubt."(6:2) In another verse, it is said, "And ageeth not any aged, nor is reduced from any one's life, but it is all in a Book; verily it is easy for Allah."(35:11)

These two verses, and especially the last one, show that the life span of a person is liable to be

increased or decreased by the decree of God. And the first verse speaks of a "term" and a "predetermined term" which is with Allah. What do all such references mean? The idea may be understood easily in the light of the previously mentioned two laws (see Chapter Four). For example, Allah decrees that Zayd would live up to hundred years; but if he behaves badly with his relatives, his life span would be reduced, let us say, by thirty years and he would die at the age of seventy. This is the direction given to the angel of death. The angel of death does not know how will Zayd behave with his relatives. Therefore, he cannot know whether Zayd would live up to hundred years or would die at the age of seventy. Now suppose Zayd behaves badly with his relatives. At the end of seventy years, the angel of death must seek guidance from Allah about him. Allah tells him to erase the hundred years, and replace it with seventy years. And Zayd dies.^[9]

Thus the knowledge or information of the angel of death is constantly being updated. This is how the decrease or increase in the life span of a man is effected. And it is the knowledge of the angel of death which has simply been called as a "term" in the first verse. But what about Allah's knowledge? Allah knew from ever that Zayd would die at the age of seventy. There was no change in His knowledge. The actual life span of an individual is known to Allah only; and that life span has been termed as a "predetermined term" in the first verse

Question: Why Allah did not decree a fixed age for all human beings?

Answer: So far as human being is concerned, Allah has designed everything with only one purpose: to help him to acquire virtues and become an obedient servant of Allah. It is precisely for this reason that he has been informed that his life span can be effected by his deeds. When a man knows that, for example, by being generous to his relatives, he will live longer in this world (and that this immediate reward is quite separate from the rewards of akhirah, the hereafter) he will naturally try to be good to his relatives. And thus he would become a virtuous servant of Allah.

Sustenance & Livelihood: .2

Though trying to earn a livelihood is within the sphere of our activities, the final result is not within our power. We see many people endeavouring hard from sunrise to sunset to earn livelihood and still they spend their lives in constant poverty and need. Why is it so? Allah says, "Allah expands the sustenance for whomsoever He desires and straitens it for whomsoever He desires. " (13:26) Similar to what we mentioned about human life span, sustenance also may be of two kinds: For example, Allah may inform the angels that if Zayd endeavours hard he will be given ten thousand dollars. But if he does not endeavour so

hard he will be given five thousand. Allah knows whether or not Zayd will endeavour;

He:knowws whether finally he will be given ten thousand or five thousand.

But Zayd himself does not know and the angels who are able for his sustenance do not know the final outcome. The purpose of keeping every one in suspense is that because of this suspense, man will always try to work up to his utmost capacity to earn more and more; also he will try as many hopeful lines as he can, because he does not know whether he has readied the final stage of his sustenance or not. He does not know .where his better livelihood lies. Therefore, he will always be on alert to try as many opportunities as will come his way. He will remain active and ambitious, and constantly in search for a better life.

According to the verse of the Qur'an and writings of the 'ulama', I have come to the conclusion that Allah has fixed a maximum limit for the livelihood of every person. Try as he may, he cannot go beyond that maximum limit. As the maximum limit is hidden front our eyes and, as a matter of act, even from the eyes of the angels, we cannot or at least should not sit idle without endeavouring to better our condition.

Also, it has been left to our choice whether we want to reach that goal by lawful way or through unlawful means. If we adhere to the commandments of Allah and to the tenets of religion, we will reach the desired limit and, at the same time, will earn the grace of Allah in the hereafter. If we choose the unlawful way, we may get that sustenance; but our allotted share of lawful sustenance will be reduced by that much, and by opting the wrong method, we will make ourselves liable to the pent from Allah in the hereafter. [10]

It must be remembered that in. Islam even a lawful thing becomes unlawful if it is obtained by unlawful means. In Islam, the end does not justify the means. There is no denying that lawful methods sometimes seems to be slow, and therefore those people who want to get rich overnight resort to unlawful means. But such tactics do not benefit very much. The following episode will make my point more clear:

Imam 'Ali (peace be upon him) went to a mosque where he wanted to pray. He asked a man standing nearby to look after his horse. When he came out, he had two dirhams in his hand which he intended to give to that man as reward. But that man was nowhere to be seen. Imam 'Ali came to the horse and found that his rein was missing. He gave someone the two dirhams to buy another rein. The man went to the market.

He saw a man selling a rein and bought it for two dirhams. When Imam "Ali saw the rein, he recognised that it was his own. rein which the supposed guard had stolen. Imam 'Ali had intended to give that guard the same two dirhams as a reward which would have been perfectly lawful for him. But his impatience turned him into a thief and he got nothing except the same

two dirhams. His anxiety did not increase his wages at all and made him a criminal into the .bargain

E. OUR PRAYERS & GOD'S DECREE

Now you know that the knowledge given to the angels is often conditional. For example, they are told by Allah that "If Zayd does this work, he will prosper; and if he opts for that work, he will lose financially. If he goes to this doctor, he will recover from his illness very soon; but if he goes to that doctor, his sickness will increase." One of the most important conditions of prosperity, success and happiness is du 'a, praying to God. If Zayd prays to Allah and seeks His help, his affliction will be alleviated. If he does not seek the help of Allah, he will be left suffering. Thus Allah says, "Say (O Prophet), had it not been for your prayers unto Him, my Lord would care not for you." (25:77)

Some people have misgivings about du'a'. They think that since Allah knows what is good for us, there is no need to ask for His help or assistance; there is no need for du'a . They say that Allah knows what is best for Zayd and He has already decided how much he is to earn or, for example, whether he will be cured of his illness or not. Therefore, what is the need for du'a ?

What purpose will our du'a' serve?

Such people do not appreciate that may be Allah has made Zayd's earning or health dependent upon his du'a. May be He has ordered the angels to increase his earnings if he prays to Allah for an increase! May be the condition necessary for recovery from his illness is a certain course of treatment coupled with sincere du'a' and prayer to Allah. It has been mentioned in many ahadith that one of the things which affect the life of man is du'a'. The other?important thing is his effort and endeavour. We should never minimize the effect and importance of dua, or the effect and importance of hard work.

Of course, if one has already reached his maximum age or maximum livelihood, or if, for example, his sickness is "firmly decreed" to continue, no amount of du'a or effort or treatment can do him any good. But, the point to remember is that nobody knows what is "firmly decreed" concerning his age, livelihood or health. Therefore, we have to do relentlessly whatever is .possible to improve our conditions

F. TAWAKKUL & GOD'S DECREE

Besides du'a, tawakkul is also a very commendable and highly praised virtue. Tawakkul means "putting one's trust in somebody". Allah says, "And put your trust in Allah, and sufficient is Allah

as the dispenser of the affairs."(4.81)

However, putting your trust in God should not become an excuse for idleness. The Prophet said, "Tawakkul means that you should bind the camel with a rope and then say that you have trust in Allah that He will protect your camel. You should not have confidence in the rope only, because many a camel is stolen. with the rope. But neither should you neglect the rope because binding with the rope is part of tawakkul."

This is the spirit of tawakkul. We are to try our best and then we should have trust in God that He will make our efforts succeed. It is a sheer nonsense to sit idle and say that Allah will do all our work for us. He says in the Qur'an, "And man can have nothing but what he strives for."(53:39)

The highest standard of tawakkul was set when Amirul mu'minin 'Ali asked some idle persons as to who they were. "We are those who put their trust in Allah;" came the reply. Imam 'Ali asked, "How is your confidence in Allah" They said, "We eat when we get food, and we have patience when we do not get it." Imam 'Ali retorted, "Yes, that is the very nature of dog." Stunned, they asked him to explain the true meaning of tawakkul. Imam 'Ali said, "When we get, we give to others; when we do not get, we thank Allah."

It means that we are to try our best to improve our condition. But we should not trust our own power and wisdom only. You must have confidence in Allah that He will make your efforts fruitful. Then if you succeed, try to help your brethren with the fruits of your labour. And if you fail, then also be thankful to Allah.

You may ask why should you thank Allah even when you do not succeed. Yes, you should thank Allah because success or failure is not your responsibility. You were expected to do your best and you did. Be thankful to Allah that you were able to perform what was expected of you. It is your efforts that matters. Success or failure is not your province. That is the province of Allah. Have trust and confidence in Him that He will not let your efforts fail. But if He, in His wisdom, does not grant you success, thank Him that still you were able to do your duty.

Notes:

[1]. al Majlisi, Biharul 'Anwar, vol. 26, p.170.

[2] al Majlisi, Biharul 'Anwar, vol. 26, chap. 1 to chap. 3, pp. 18-976

[3] Ibid, chap. 5, pp.105-108.

[4] Ibid, vol. 4, p.130.

[5] The Qur'an, 20:114.

[6] al Majlisi, Biharul 'Anwar, vol. 4, p.118.

[7]. as Sadiq; op. cit., chp. 7, p. 59; al Majlisi, Biharul' Anwar, vol. 5, p.110.

[8]. as Saduq, op. cit., chap. 7, p. 59.

[9]. al Majlisi, Biharul' Anwar, vol. 4, p.121.

[10]. al Majlisi, Biharul' Anwar, vol 5, p.147