Taqdir
or
Pre-Measurement in Islam

by

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FOREWORD

The Islamic doctrine known as Taqdir has unfortunately come to be rendered as fatalism in English. The word 'Kismat' regarded as a synonym of Taqdir creates a queer feeling in the mind of Western people. Nothing can be farther from reality. The popular conception of fatalism has been the cause of many a misconception about Islamic taqdir. Let us, therefore, be quite clear at the very outset as to its true significance. There is little in common between the notions of fatalism and taqdir. It is no exaggeration to say that the two stand at antipodes, so far as their effect on practical life is concerned.

Whatsoever one may do, right or wrong, whatsoever may befall one, the minutest movement of man and the meanest event of his life has been irrevocably ordained beforehand. His fate is indelibly writ on his forehead and with mathematical exactness too. No amount of effort to the contrary can alter the course of events predetermined by an absolute necessity. This, in a nutshell, constitutes the sum total of the prevalent
notion of fatalism. Obviously enough, this unfortunate piece of metaphysics strikes a death-blow at the very root of all morality. Denying the freedom of will in man, it eliminates the factor of individual responsibility from human conduct, and with that vanishes the sense of individual accountability which is the mainspring of moral life. Furthermore, it tends to damp all enthusiasm for progress. If what is to be, must be with the infallible turn of the wheel of fortune, then why at all trouble about it? Thus, the doctrine puts an end to all struggle of life which, in fact, is responsible for every form of advancement. This is the outcome of the doctrine of fatality. Depriving him of the freedom of will, it reduces man, the lord of creation, to the status of an automaton, dancing on this stage of earthly life to a wire-puller behind the scene. It destroys morality and retards progress.

Islamic taqdir, on the other hand, is an indispensable principle of every form of existence, mineral, vegetable, or animal, as I will attempt to show in the following pages, on the authority of the Holy Qur-án. According to taqdir man is not born with a destiny. He has to work it out on his own account. Taqdir in Islam is the fly-wheel, so to say, for this vast universe, but for which the gigantic machinery would crash.

BASHARAT AHMAD.
TAQDIR
OR
Pre-Measurement in Islam
"He who created everything, then ordained for it a measure (Taqdira)"—THE HOLY QUR-AN, XXV. 2.
The Islamic doctrine wrongly labelled as fatalism goes by the name of taqdir in the theology of that religion. The term fatalism or predestination may more appropriately be substituted by pre-measurement; for this, in fact, is the sense the Arabic word taqdir conveys. We will draw upon the Holy Qur-án itself to make out what exactly the term taqdir connotes.

In the above verse, the Holy Qur-án draws attention to a twofold testimony, pointing to the existence of God—creation and measurement. Just as creation is a clear testimony to the existence of a Creator or First Cause, in like manner the specific measure of capabilities embedded in the nature of things and the specific set of laws, they have to obey, furnish an unmistakable clue to the existence of a purposive designing Mind, at work behind the scene. This latter phenomenon betokens the existence of a Being Who has created everything with a set purpose. In order that this purpose may find fulfilment, certain laws have been laid down for each thing to obey. In other words, all creation is purposive, each thing to realize its particular purpose through obedience to particular laws. This is taqdir or pre-measurement, pre-prescribed function for each thing with pre-prescribed laws to discharge it. So far, but no further, is the province of pre-determination in Islam.
Islam claims to be the universal religion of the entire realm of Nature, from the microscopic atoms to the gigantic planets, from the insignificant worm to sublime man, the lord of creation. The religion of Islam is only another name for the laws of Nature. There is no truth taught by Islam, but finds confirmation in the phenomena of Nature. The law of *taqdir* or pre-measurement as expounded by Islam is corroborated by every form of existence in Nature. It is, in fact, the basic principle of all existence. The law that everything shall have an express function of its own, thereby promoting the well-being of one another and contributing to the ultimate realization of the single purpose of the whole creation, is writ large on the face of every atom in the universe. Call it by whatever name you will, division of labour, or economy of Nature, it is unmistakably there.

Unity presupposes diversity. That there runs a common purpose throughout the universe, goes without saying. This unity of purpose is not attainable but through diversity of function so far as the component parts are concerned. Needless to labour a point which is a matter of common observation. That an ordinary watch may serve its purpose of showing correct time, each one of its component parts and particles, whether great or small, must have a different function to discharge: the spring, the pivot, the key, must each
have an assigned part of its own to play. Sight, hearing, speech, smell, motion, locomotion, intellection and a hundred and one others are the diverse functions that go to make up man what he is. It is in their diversity that lies the utility of things. Sameness can be prolific of no good. A combination of a million of eyes, or as many ears or another limb by itself would be a nonsensical juxtaposition, serving no purpose except, perhaps, as a testimony to the tomfoolery of its creator. In like manner, though on a more extensive scale and in a far more intricate way, each thing in this vast universe has been ordained to fulfil some definite purpose, by innumerable ties connected to other things, served by others and in its turn serving others. This, exactly this, neither more nor less, is the conception of *taqdir* in Islam—a specified function for each thing and for the matter of that, a specified set of laws suited to the fulfilment of that function. It is to this law of Nature that the Holy Qur-án draws attention in the following verses:—

And the sun runs on to a term appointed for it; that is the ordinance of the Mighty, the Knowing.

And the moon. We have ordained for it stages till it becomes again as an old dry palm branch.

Neither is it allowable to the sun that it should overtake the moon, nor can the night outstrip the day; and all float on in a sphere.¹

¹ The Holy Qur-án, xxxvi. 38—40.
These verses clearly point out that even the sun has got a revolution of its own round some centre, not yet discovered, just as the earth revolves round the sun. This alternation of day and night is also the outcome of a preordained law, the law of rotation. With the advance of scientific investigation in the domain of physical geography, it is now a matter of common knowledge how much we owe to these fixed motions of the earth. In fact, our very life depends upon the regular, uninterrupted working of the system. But what is all this blessing due to? Obviously enough to the fact that neither the sun, nor the moon, nor the earth can go out of its way by a single inch. Chained by the law of taqdir or pre-measurement, they keep to their fixed orbits, but for which they would bring about their own destruction by clashing against one another. This is Islamic taqdir or predestination, the vital indispensable principle of existence. Let those in the habit of twisting Islamic doctrines, in season and out of season, ponder.

Qur-ánic verses may be multiplied to show how much this all-important principle of life has been emphasized, in order to drive the truth home. Time and again, man has been reminded that, like the rest of the universe of which he is a part and parcel, he too is intended to fulfil a special object. Now the question might arise as to the express purpose, the end in view,
in the creation of man and how to achieve it.

The object in the creation of a thing, it is plain enough, must needs be no other than that for which it possesses the requisite adaptability. The innate capabilities, engraved in the nature of a thing must therefore be referred to, in order to ascertain the special purpose for which it has been designed. Besides such a reference to the potential properties of a thing, a knowledge of the various ways and means to be adopted, the rules and regulations to be obeyed, is also indispensable for the realization of its set object. It is to allay this anxiety that the Holy Qur-án thus assures us:

Glorify the name of your Lord, the Most High, Who creates, then makes complete, and Who makes (things) according to a measure, then guides (them to their goal).  

In these verses man’s attention is directed to certain Divine favours which entitle Him to glorification by man. He did not only create things in a haphazard manner, but equipped them with the requisite adaptability to the set of circumstances in which they were placed. Again, He did not only ordain a special function for each thing, leaving it in the dark to grope its way towards the destined end, but also furnished it with the necessary guidance, following which it may attain to its goal. With this Divine

1 The Holy Qur-án, lxxxvii. 1-3.
assurance let us investigate the particular function Islam has assigned to man to discharge and the particular laws it has laid down for the fulfilment of that object. The above verses show that the object of the creation of man cannot be ascertained but in reference to the set of circumstances in which he has to lead his life and to his latent capabilities. These are the two considerations that must not be lost sight of in determining the proper function of man. In other words, we must find out man’s position with regard to the rest of the universe as well as his innate capabilities, upon which alone we can base, according to the verses quoted above, our conclusion as to the object designed for man to realize. For light on these points let us turn to the pages of the Holy Qur-án again.

As regards the first, viz., man’s position in this system of Universe, the Holy Qur-án has conceived of him in three distinct relations:

(a) Man’s relation to the rest of the universe.
(b) Man’s relation to his Creator.
(c) Man’s relation to his fellow-beings.

Qur-ánic verdict in respect of man’s relation to the universe elevates him to the status of the lord of creation:

Whatever is contained in the heavens or on the earth has been made subservient to you (man).

And again:

Verily I am creating a Caliph (God’s representative) on earth.
The verses are too eloquent to need comment. Everything in this infinite universe, the sun, the moon, the starry creation, the earth with its teeming life, has been created for the service of man. Further on, he has been spoken of as God’s representative on earth. In other words, God has vested man with some of His own powers, in order to enable him to control the forces of Nature and put them to his own use. But this is not all. Even the angels are enjoined to bow to the authority of this human khilafat on earth, if developed in obedience to the Divine dictates revealed from time to time for man’s guidance.

Man’s position in relation to his fellow-beings has been defined in the verse:

I am no more than just a man like you.

The words put in the mouth of the Holy Prophet of Arabia. Human equality constitutes the cardinal doctrine of Islam. Islam knows no distinctions of caste, colour or clime. Under the universal Providence of One God, Islam recognizes only one universal brotherhood of humanity. So far as human rights and obligations are concerned, no line is drawn between the high and the low. Even the Holy Prophet Muhammad (may peace be on him !) is made to confess, with all his sublimity of personality, that there was nothing superhuman in him.

Then comes man’s relation to his Creator:

I created man nor jinn but for the sole purpose of worshipping me.¹

¹ The Holy Qur-án xiii : 35.
Divine worship, it must be pointed out, has suffered grave misconceptions, like so many other Islamic notions. Let there be no misunderstanding as to the true purpose of worship. Divine worship does not aim but at the elevation and edification of man himself. Its performance by man cannot add a jot, any more than its neglect can detract from God, Who is self-sufficient and perfect in every respect. To this effect says the Holy Qur-án:

O man! Worship your Lord Who created you and those before you so that you may attain purity of life.

Purity of character, when attained through Divine worship, leads to that state of mind known as celestial life, as the Holy Qur-án says:

The likeness of the paradise that has been promised to the pure of life. . . .

What clouds of misconception everhang the notion of paradise requires a separate discussion. It may suffice to point out in this connection that according to a report from the Holy Prophet it consists of blessings the eyes have never seen, nor the ears have heard, nor the tongue has tasted, nor the mind has fancied. It is therefore unfair to compare its enjoyments to our worldly enjoyments. As a matter of fact Muslim paradise is a state of mental bliss, experienced by the virtuous in this very life, which will assume a more palpable form in the life hereafter when the

1 The Holy Qur-án xiii : 35.
human soul, freed from the prison of this corporeal frame, will no longer have to perceive things through physical sense-organs. This handicap will cease to limit the sphere of human experience, and things now conceived as abstract experiences will put on a more tangible form.¹ This, however, is a digression. To revert to the point under discussion, Divine worship is a means of human purification consisting in cheerful submission to Divine Will on the part of man, under all circumstances and resulting in qualifying men for a life of eternal bliss.

The Holy Qur-án has thus enlightened us as to the various relations in which man stands to the rest of the universe, to his fellow-beings and to his Creator. Each of these relations, we have seen, devolves upon him a corresponding obligation. To subjugate and rule over the entire universe, to meet his fellow-men on terms of scrupulous equality and to tender cheerful resignation to the Will of God, is the only object of man’s life in Islam. Or to speak in technicalities, this is his taqdir, the definite measure of function ordained for him to discharge.

But this is not enough to conclude our quest after the human sumnum bonum. We must know for certain that man has been endowed with the necessary capabilities to acquit himself in his various positions. As we have already pointed out, a thing must possess the

¹ See Hell and Heaven by Khwaja Kamal-ud-Din.
indispensable adaptability to the purpose of its creation. Is man equipped with the qualities necessary for the due discharge of the various functions the Holy Qur-án has fixed for him? Let us address the question to the Holy Book itself, which claims to be a perfect guidance. As to the latent powers of man, it gives us emphatic assurance in the words:

Verily We created man in the best of mould.¹

And again:

Verily We offered the trust to heavens and earth and mountains; but all refused to undertake the responsibility and dreaded it; man, however, accepted it, for he possessed the power to put himself to task (for God’s sake) and of losing himself in Divine love.²

These verses furnish conclusive testimony to the vast capabilities ingrained in the nature of man, enabling him to undertake responsibilities which the most stupendous of creation dare not accept. The trust referred to here consists in the hundred and one faculties of man, both physical and spiritual, his passions, his will, his strength of body and of mind. These Divine blessings have been aptly spoken of as trust; for all of these capabilities have to be solely dedicated to the ways of Allah. Dissipation of them would mean a betrayal of Divine trust. It is to this effect that the Holy Qur-án says:

Verily God enjoins upon you to make over the trust to whom it legitimately belongs.³

Man is not the sole master of his physical and spiritual faculties, to make or mar them at his own sweet will. He is no more than a mere trustee of every form of Divine blessing on him. His position as such requires that he should consecrate these blessings one and all to the exclusive service of God. He must lose himself in the Will of God, and the verse says he possesses the power to do so. In obedience to Allah's Will, he has got the capacity to curb his passions and entirely forget himself. A glance at Islamic history reveals the fact that instances of a practical illustration of this virtue of losing self in God are neither few nor far between.

Now we come to the consideration as to whether the Holy Qur-án has furnished any guidance to man for the realization of the object of his creation, as promised in the verse. In other words, we have to ascertain the various laws, obeying which man may succeed in discharging his specified function. How should he regulate his faculties, so as to fulfil the Divine trust reposed in him? Human faculties may be divided into two classes, controllable and uncontrollable, i.e. those he can exercise at his will and those which must work in spite of him. The faculty of speech, for instance, falls under the first category. He may make use of it for good or for evil, just as he would. But the faculty of taste is beyond such a control. He cannot
make it report sour as sweet or vice versa. The operations of the whole of the internal system, of heart, of stomach, of liver, belong to the automatic class of faculties.

As regards guidance for such faculties, it is not far to seek. They work automatically in implicit submission to the laws of nature, discharging their respective functions on their own account. The science of dealing with this branch of human organism is known as physiology. Neither man nor God holds one accountable for these functions, which are not within the province of his volitional control:

God does not saddle any one with responsibility beyond his capacity.¹

But there is a vast sphere of human activities where man’s will enjoys freedom of control and direction. There it is that man is held responsible and accountable for the right or wrong exercise of his faculties. It is therefore a matter of the deepest concern to man to ascertain the rules and regulations which should guide his conduct in that sphere. To supply this need, God has endowed man with two weapons wherewith to chalk out the right course for himself—intellect and revelation.

Out of the three functions designed for man to discharge, as already enumerated, the first, viz., subjugation of the universe, can adequately be achieved by

¹ The Holy Qur-án ii: 286.
discovering the laws of nature through the weapon of intellect. The science dealing with an explanation of these laws goes by the name of natural philosophy. The wonderful achievements of modern science are but a slight manifestation of the intellectual might of man. This also constitutes partial acquisition of khilafat on earth. This khilafat is obtainable through purely intellectual exertions and is commensurate to the mastery one may obtain over the forces of nature. The Holy Qur-án does in no way belittle the importance of human domination over nature, as unfortunately not a few of the Muslims of the day are inclined to think. On the other hand strong impetus is intended to be given to exploitation of the realm of nature in the verses:

Most surely in the creation of the heavens and the earth and the alternation of the night and the day there are signs for men of understanding.

Those who remember Allah standing and sitting and lying on their sides and reflect on the creation of the heavens and the earth: Our Lord! Thou hast not created this in vain! glory be to Thee! save us then from the chastisement of the fire!

Attention has been directed in these verses to the truth that the more we ponder over the creation of the heavens and the earth, the alternation of night and day, the greater conviction takes hold of our mind that this

1 The Holy Qur-án iii: 189—90.
vast universe contains nothing that we cannot turn to some account or other.

The conviction, *Thou hast not created this in vain*, forms the foundation of all scientific progress. If we fail to derive some benefit from a thing, it is due to our own lack of knowledge. The thing in itself is not devoid of some good or other to mankind. Man is thus encouraged to carry on research in the realm of nature, acquire knowledge of its laws and he shall find that there is naught that cannot be of some avail or other to him. The phenomenal success modern scientific civilization has achieved in the exploitation of nature is solely due to the faith in the utility of all creation, as inculcated in this part of the verse. But the Holy Qur-án could not content itself with bestirring man to materialistic progress to the disregard of certain undesirable consequences that inevitably follow in its wake. Dazzled with the glimmer and glitter of material achievements, one is apt to regard them as all-in-all, forgetting God, the real source of all these blessings. Thus taking a materialistic turn, the human heart tends to degenerate into bestiality, evils such as greed and licentiousness stealing therein. The Western un-Godly civilization of the day, with its mania for self-aggrandizement ensuing in pillage, bloodshed, arson and a hundred and one other miseries is a concrete illustration of such one-sided progress. The Holy Qur-án which
emanates from an All-Wise source has rightly forewarned man in the concluding portion of the verse—‘then save us from the chastisement of fire’ lest he should, in the hour of his triumph and felicity, lose sight of his Creator and thereby convert his own handiwork into a veritable hell.

Man does not live by bread alone. It forms only part of his function, as already discussed, to obtain supremacy over nature. He has a higher purpose to fulfil. He has to work out his moral and spiritual evolution through his dealings with his fellow-men and his Creator. He owes it to one to mete out equitable treatment and to the other to submit with cheerful resignation. This is a sphere where human intellect by itself is not adequate to ensure propriety of conduct. Man's obligations towards man and God involve complications too delicate for unaided human reason. Besides, an intellectual error in this sphere would ensue in the violation of human or Divine rights. Hence the absolute necessity of direct guidance from God to make up for the frailties of reason. Just as a telescope or a microscope helps the naked eye in perceiving what was otherwise too distant or too minute, similarly Divine revelation comes to the assistance of human reason to enlighten man as to the laws that ought to regulate his relation to man and God. The laws thus revealed go by the name of a
Divine Book or a Religious Code. In obedience to these laws, man can discharge his functions and attain the *summum bonum* of his life. Virtue and sin are only other names for the observance or violation of these laws. The Holy Qur-án has laid great emphasis on obedience to these laws, which is conducive to human happiness and peace of mind. Contravention of these engenders mental anguish. Laws pertaining to inter-human relations have been summed up in the following verse:

Surely Allah enjoins the doing of justice and the doing of good (to others) and the giving to the kindred, and He forbids indecency and evil and rebellion; He admonishes you that you may be mindful.\(^1\)

\(^{\text{1 Adl}}\) consists in giving each one his just due. \(\text{Ihsán}\) requires doing good even in the case which does not deserve it. \(\text{Itáí zil-gurba}\) enjoins kindness to others, as spontaneously and affectionately as in the case of blood-relations. Just as a mother loves and looks after her child out of pure maternal love, even so does Allah want us to show sympathy to our fellow-beings, regardless of reward or gratitude. These are the positive virtues laid down to be practised. Then come the sins to be shunned, \(\text{Fahsha}\) or manifest evil: this comprises all the evils one commits simply to gratify his low carnal desires, which are limited in their effect to the doer himself. \(\text{Munkar}\) is the evil whose effect extends

\(^1\) The Holy Qur-án xvi: 90.
to others and involves an encroachment upon others’ rights. Baghy is the evil that tends to have a prejudicial effect upon the government of the country.

In a single verse the Holy Qur-án has condensed volumes of ethical code. What a man ought and what he ought not to do, in relation to his fellow-men, has been beautifully and pithily set down. The various forms of evil, beginning with the one limited in its effect to the individual doer himself, and gradually leading up to violation of others’ rights, and consummating in disturbing the peace of the country, exhausts the entire range of human wrongs. Abstention from evil, however, falls at best under the head of Negative Virtues. Edification of man, which is the sole purpose of Islam, could not be achieved by such half-measures. In the same breath, therefore, a code of Positive Virtues has been laid down. Respecting the rights of others is the minimum; we must be charitable to others, regardless of recompense in any shape. But not even so far. We must rise to the plane where charity and kindness to others may attain the characteristic of a spontaneous outpouring of the heart. Let it not escape critical notice that the whole process of man’s elevation from a self-seeking bestial stage is so accurately marked by what may be called the various stages of moral evolution. Graduation between the lowest point, abstinence from the harmful to one’s self to the
highest rung, spontaneous charity is so true to nature. Step by step the moral infant is led from stage to stage, falling here, stumbling there; yet rising each time, day by day, gaining strength to climb higher and higher till he attains the pinnacle of moral glory. Egoism is supplanted by altruism of the highest order.

But Islam has an unending, an infinite progress in store for man. It is but a humble flight of the human soul to break open the prison of the self to roam about in the sphere of humanity at large. Losing the self in humanity is only a stepping-stone to a yet higher plane. From the ashes of the love of humanity has to rise the love of Divinity, the self to merge into God. This is the millennium presented by Islam—at-one-ment with the Creator. Thus says the Holy Qur-án:

Say: my prayer, my sacrifice, my life, my death, is for Allah, the Lord of the Worlds. None there is His equal. With this am I enjoined and I am the first to submit.

Divine love must now be the mainspring of human conduct. All other motives, however noble in themselves, must sink into insignificance before this all-absorbing passion of Divine love. Man shall at this stage own allegiance to none but to the Creator of the infinite universe. Him alone shall he worship. Whatever sacrifice he might make, must be for the sole object of winning favour with Him. In the entire
course of his life, with all its ups and downs, Divine Love must be the one and only guiding principle. In the thick and thin of life, whether fortune should smile or frown on him, in fair weather as in foul, Divine Love must be the keynote of his life. A king or a subject, a peasant or a prince, in whatever station of life, high or low, Divine Love must be the burden of each and every item of his conduct.

The Universal Cherisher of all, the Creator of the Universe, should be the only object of his life. No vicissitude of life, neither sunshine nor storm, should deter him from the pursuit of this one object. This is the ultimate purpose for which man, according to Islam, has been destined. In other words, this is the taqdir or pre-measurement of man.

**THE BLESSINGS OF MISFORTUNES.**

“And We will most certainly try you with somewhat of fear and hunger and loss of property and lives and fruits; and give good news to the patient, who, when a misfortune befalls them, say: Surely we are Allah’s, and to Him we shall surely return. Those are they on whom are blessings and mercy from their Lord, and those are the followers of the right course”.

A superficial critic of the doctrine of taqdir may raise the point, to support the theory of fatalism, why these heart-rending scenes of human suffering, if not due

1 The Holy Qur-án, ii. 155—157.
to some preordained absolute necessity? Death, disease, famine, fire, starvation, wailing widows and orphans, groaning naked destitute beggars, and quite a host of this or that canker eating into the body or mind of man. There is not an individual, male or female, high or low, that has not a sad tale of his own. There is not a pleasure but has a dark fringe of sorrow and grief about it. And look at the anomaly! A helpless window is robbed of the little she has to eke out her existence on, and the knave escapes scot-free. It is this state of things that has driven the fatalist to attribute every occurrence to an absolute necessity. And consequently his frame of mind looks at the course of events with cynical indifference. The inevitable must happen in spite of human efforts to the contrary, even setting at naught the settled course of cause and effect. From the data of sufferings which to him are unaccountable, he arrives at the conclusion, far more general than the original premises would warrant, that every event of human life has been unalterably sealed beforehand, and hence the futility of exertion to achieve pleasure or avoid pain. That Islam pooh-poohs this idle view, we have said enough to show while discussing the true conception of taqdir in Islam when we come to deal with the Freedom of Human Will, we would attempt to throw further light on the point. What we want to point out here is the difference in the concrete
effect on a fatalist and a Muslim. From the same phenomenon, the experience of sufferings, they arrive at conclusions diametrically opposed. To a fatalist they betoken a capricious, angry and inexorable deity. To a Muslim they serve as a message of yet brighter future. In the one they engender a pessimistic mood of mind, in the other they foster an optimistic vein. They degenerate the one and sublimate the other.

Islam has hallowed misfortunes with a grace of their own. Nay, it regards them as the indispensable groundwork for all moral superstructure. They form the very material necessary to bring the latent powers of human mind into play, but for which no mental development is possible. A seedling may contain a gigantic oak in a potential form; but the actual oak will not grow up, unless the seedling should pass through many a process. Some external conditions must be there or the potential will never become the actual. Suitable soil, suitable climatic conditions, proper watering and manuring, and quite a number of other necessaries must be forthcoming, that the oak in embryo may rise to be what it is. Exactly so is the case with the various virtues lying dormant in the nature of man, awaiting suitable conditions to find manifestation. An anchorite, for instance, away from the trials and temptations of a social life, can hardly boast of virtues such as chastity, sympathy, generosity and so forth. One who has never been in the heat of the battle or braved
the brunt of it, is in no way entitled to the proud epithet of "daring." And, as a matter of fact, man's greatness of character is just in proportion to the situations met, the hardship undergone, the obstacles surmounted, the temptations resisted and the passions curbed. It is this lesson that the above Qur-ánic verses teach. The Arabic word یبتل، rendered as "trial" in English, signifies manifestation of what is hidden.

The various inflictions enumerated above are intended to bring out the various traits of man's character. Virtues such as patience, forbearance, resignation, faithfulness, can have only one nursery, the nursery of sufferings, hardships, and tribulations. It is thus in the best interests of man himself that he is put under such-like trials. If manfully borne, one emerges purer, loftier and stronger, from the furnace of troubles.

A Muslim is enjoined in these verses to display cheerful resignation to the will of God, under hardships however trying. "For God we are, to God we return," a Muslim must say under such circumstances. These are the words a Muslim never fails to utter as soon as he hears about the death of another. What a consolation under conditions when the bravest may lose heart! It may not be without interest to compare, in passing, the saying—Dust thou art, to dust returnest—which sums
up the Christian outlook on life. The Qur-án, however, has a more sublime destiny for man: "For God we are, to God we return." Those possessing such a submissive frame of mind under adverse circumstances, "On them," says the Holy Qur-án, "are the blessings and mercy of God." Islam has thus transmuted misfortunes into blessings. It has imparted to miseries a deeper meaning. With Islam, a calamity is a mercy in disguise. Alive to the Divine purpose in inflicting hardships on him, a Muslim’s breast pulsates with yet greater hope, while a fatalist may get deeper into the slough of despondency and content himself with cursing his stars. "For God we are, to God we return" are the words on every Muslim’s lips in time of loss, pain or calamity of any kind. His resignation is cheerful; nay, he is enjoined to offer even gratitude for whatever may befall him. At the funeral of his father, the very first words a bereaved son utters are "All praise to God who is the Nourisher, the Sustainer and the Evolver of all"; for he looks upon the incident as a means of his own upliftment.

Misfortunes in Islam are in no way incompatible with the doctrine of taqdir, as the fatalist may take it to be. If taqdir has fixed a certain object for man, misfortunes pave the way to the realization of the object.

It may not be out of place to deal with just the opposite phase of human life, with a view to show its
bearing on the doctrine of *taqdir*. Just as misfortunes and calamities are so many opportunities to bring out the dormant virtues of the human soul in like manner, felicity, ease and plenty that fall to the lot of some in this life are also means to the same end:

O believers! Let not your wealth and your children make you forget God.1

Prosperity and plenty are perhaps more potent in turning away man from God than misfortunes. They lull him to security and foster a sense of self-sufficiency. Why should he turn to God? Or, what is the same, he may make these very blessings of God instrumental in encroaching upon the rights of others and thus change them into a curse for himself.

And again:

Your possessions and your children are only a trial, and Allah it is with Whom is a great reward.2

The Arabic word *fitna*, rendered as “trial” here, signifies the process of purifying gold of whatever dross it may contain by putting it into fire. Man’s property and his offspring are here spoken of as a furnace to purify him of his shortcomings. Love of either may stand in the way of his responding to the call of his higher nature. In the sacrifice of these at the altar of Divine Will lies the secret of his self-elevation. But what a pang the wrench of either involves, is not an uncommon experience. In respect of fury, it is a

1 The Holy Qur-án lxiii: 9.  
veritable furnace to put aside either the love of children or of wealth. But this in fact is the very gateway through which man must pass in order to realize his higher self. Thus it is that his character is purified of the alloy of low sordid attachments.

It is thus obvious that prosperity and plenty are as much a means of self-culture as misfortunes. They are no more than mere opportunities for the manifestation of various qualities of the human soul, which would otherwise remain dormant. It makes therefore no material difference, so far as the human taqdir or his summum bonum is concerned, whether a man is elevated with one kind of lever or another, for both are meant for the sole purpose of human edification. Each man is undergoing the process of a test in this life. It is of vital moment to him, no doubt, that he should acquit himself creditably. But it counts little what kind of material he is tested with. If, for instance, a child were to be trained in the skill of counting, it would make no difference whether he is given pebbles or pounds to practise the process. Let him be correct at counting, even though with pebbles, and up will he go, while his class-fellow, with sovereigns to handle but bad at counting, must keep back.

Islam thus looks upon felicity and adversity as means to a common end—self-sublimation. Whether they will ultimately turn out to be for the real good of man or his evil, depends solely upon the way in which
he may acquit himself, under these circumstances. Man is the undisputed master of his own destiny, the passing vicissitudes of life providing only the material with which to work out his destiny. In themselves adversity and prosperity constitute neither good nor evil. By an irony of fate, however, as one would put it in common parlance, the means have been mistaken for the end. Avoidance of the one and achievement of the other have come to be regarded as the ultimate goal of human life.

Freedom of Will.

Whether man is absolutely free to choose between right and wrong is the main point upon which hangs the whole issue. The psychologist may have his own discussion whether or not man’s will is influenced by external and internal circumstances such as heredity, environments, education, physical health and so forth. We are not concerned in our present discussion with the correctness or otherwise of his conclusions. What we want to ascertain is the verdict of Islam on the point. The Holy Qur-án has left this all-important problem untouched. It has positively declared man’s undisputed right to make a choice between good and evil. Again and again the point has been emphasized to drive the idea home to man, lest he should forget his own responsibility for his conduct. In fact the
whole trend of Qur'anic ethics points in this direction:

*Surely the Truth is from your Lord, whosoever may wish he may believe and whosoever may wish he may disbelieve.*

God has simply pointed out the right course. Whether that may or may not be followed, is left to man himself to choose. He refrains from any interference with the free choice of man. Again:

Verily We have shown to him (man) the (right) path; he may be grateful or ungrateful.

There is no compulsion, on the part of God, brought to bear upon man to adopt this course or that. Yet again:

Verily this is a reminder to the peoples; for those of you who wish to take the right course.

Here too man has been let alone in the matter of selection. Further on:

It is for God only to furnish strong proof, and if He allowed His wish (to influence man), He would have guided all.

Denial of interference cannot be made in clearer terms. If He were so pleased as to thrust His own wish upon man, He would not have let a single one go astray. To the same effect the Holy Qur'án says:

If God determined things of His own wish, He would have made all men as one religious nation.

*i.e.*, He would have brought together the whole of humanity to the same path—the path of righteousness. But He has so ordained that He shall in no way bring any

pressure to bear upon man to incline him this way or that. Man is the sole master of himself. He must steer his ship on his own account, whether to a haven of safety or against a rock of destruction.

It would not be out of place to refer in this connection to a few misunderstandings having a direct bearing on the problem in hand, arising merely out of ignorance of the real significance of certain expressions in the Holy Qur-án. For instance, the verse:

He (God) leads astray therewith (with the Holy Qur-án) many and guides therewith many.¹

It is argued on the strength of such-like statements that God deliberately guided some and misled others. God, in other words, is held responsible for the doings of man. The authors of this calumny against Islam must bear in mind that the Holy Qur-án, which claims to be a guidance for the whole world, could not in the same breath give utterance to a statement quite contradictory. How can it serve as a guidance for the whole of the human race if, as it is taken to mean, it aims at misleading many? It cannot at once guide and misguide people. There are no contradictions in the word of God. The fault lies with the shallow knowledge of the interpreter. The verse simply regrets that the Holy Qur-án, which was meant for the guidance of people, was made by some an occasion to go astray. Let it be noted that the Qur-án does not play the part

of an efficient cause to mislead some people, but they themselves make it an occasion for themselves to go wrong. Such constructions are not infrequently used in the Holy Qur-án itself. The words put in the mouth of the Prophet Noah:

My preaching did not increase them but in running off.¹

Amply illustrate the point. Obviously enough, Noah’s preaching, which was intended for their good, could not be the cause of their apathy; it only became an occasion for their turning away. Noah preached to them with a view to draw them to his own ways. They, however, turned a deaf ear to his exhortations out of obstinacy and prejudice. Thus, instead of coming round to the path of truth, they grew in aversion. The preaching of Noah is in no way responsible for their attitude. In the same way the Holy Qur-án cannot be said, to the disregard of clear testimony to the contrary, to have misled people. Another verse usually picked out for hostile criticism runs thus:

Surely those who disbelieve, it being alike to them whether you warn them or do not warn them, will not believe. Allah has set a seal upon their hearts and upon their hearing, and there is a covering over their eyes, and there is a great chastisement for them.²

The sense of these verses is misconstrued to amount to this: Because God has set a seal on their

¹ The Holy Qur-án lxxi ; 6.  ² Ibid ii : 6, 7.
hearts and upon their hearing, it is therefore in vain for you to warn them. It is then argued that God Himself has deprived them of their faculties. Why? To hold them responsible if they do not listen to the call of Truth. This is again a case of misinterpretation. The real significance of the verses point to the admitted law of nature that whichever faculty should suspend discharging its proper function, the time shall by and by come when it will get totally atrophied. If the hand, for instance, is not put to use, as not a few Hindu ascetics subject themselves to this form of rigour, the limb is sure to lose all vitality, and no amount of cure will then do it any good. Exactly the same is the case with every other faculty—physical, mental or moral. If the heart, the eye or the ear is not regularly exercised, it will gradually grow unfit for the discharge of its true function. This is what the verses say. If the opponents are such as have made up their minds not to listen to you at all, they will get, according to the law of nature, deprived of their faculties of head and heart. It is their own neglect that has brought about the loss of their mental faculties. Why should the blame be laid at the door of the Divine Being? It is unfair to single out a verse here and a verse there, put thereon a wrong interpretation, and then jump to the conclusion that the God of Islam thrusts His own will upon man.
Another common objection against the freedom of human will is put as thus: God knows beforehand all the events of the world, as also who will do good and who evil, what will befall one and what another. God's knowledge being perfect, everything must inevitably happen accordingly. Where, then, is the room for a free choice of man between right and wrong? Such an objection is the outcome of ignorance of Divine attributes. It is a truism that an event gives birth to the knowledge of the event, and not *vice versa*. In other words, knowledge is the outcome and hence not the cause of an event. To illustrate the point, it is only when John has murdered Jack, that a third person, Jill, gets knowledge of the murder. First comes the event and then the knowledge thereof. It is inconceivable that Jill should have knowledge of the murder unless it has actually taken place. It is ludicrous to imagine that such a knowledge on the part of Jill has constrained John to commit murder. In this case it is Jill, whose knowledge has compelled John, and not the latter that ought to be sent to the gallows. It is plain that knowledge cannot be the cause of an event, but its outcome. Now, the knowledge of God, unlike that of man, is not limited by time. It comprises the future as much as the *present* and the *past*. He is beyond the human limitations of time and space. What is *past* or *future* in human sphere is present to
Him. Just as man gets knowledge of a past event, He can have cognisance of a future event as well. But the fact remains that knowledge is the outcome of the event, in the case of God as in that of man. But we have shown that knowledge can in no wise be said to have been the cause of the event. It would be a funny perversion of the natural order of things. The knowledge of God, therefore, cannot be said to have compelled the coming about of the event; for knowledge springs from the occurrence. The event, though yet to happen in the future from the human point of view, is to Him as present. The Holy Qur-án aptly speaks of the Divine knowledge in the metaphor of a book. A book holds all the knowledge contained therein at one and the same time. It is the reader in relation to whom the notions of past, present and future arise. The portion of the book he has gone through has become to him as past, that he is reading is the present, and that he has as yet to study the future. But it must be marked that the book itself is above such considerations. To it all knowledge it comprises is present knowledge. In like manner the knowledge of God is all-comprehensive, whether past, present or future. He holds it all at one and the same time. Like the reader of the book, the limitations of past, present or future, are conceivable only in relation to man. To God is attributed Omniscience. All the events are as if
just now before His eyes. Thus His knowledge is as much the product of the events as that of man. It is therefore absurd to argue that His knowledge is in any way responsible for the various events of life. His knowledge, like human knowledge, exerts no compulsion to bring about the event, which is already there, to Him. Man himself is responsible for his deeds; Divine knowledge does not interfere with his privilege to exercise his will as he would.

THE CONCLUSION.

To recapitulate, the conception of taqdir in Islam amounts to this. God has created everything on a particular measure which is determined by the function the object is intended to discharge. Consequently it has been endowed with appropriate faculties, as also with the capacity to observe certain laws by obedience to which it may achieve its end. The whole system of the universe having a single object to fulfil, it is indispensable that the component parts, in order to be useful to one another, should vary in respect of their respective functions. Man, who is a part and parcel of the universe, must therefore have his own position in the system, his own faculties, his own capabilities, his own end to serve, and his own obligations to discharge. To seek light on the various points concerning him we turn to the pages of the Holy Qur-án, and
we find that in relation to the rest of the universe, man occupies the position of the overlord. He has to subjugate and put it to his own service. As regard interhuman relations, the Holy Book assigns a common platform for all, the high and the low. Universal brotherhood of man, irrespective of caste, colour or clime, under the common Providence of Allah, the Creator, the Nourisher and the Evolver of all, is the rule to regulate the relations of man to man. God alone should be the object of man’s endeavours, under all circumstances. As to his capabilities, he has been endowed with the best conceivable. He is capable of making infinite progress and of attaining union with his Creator. He has been furnished with the requisite equipment to fulfil his obligations. The universe which is meant to be subservient to his welfare, he can control and exploit with the help of his intellect. But to enable him to acquit himself creditably in more delicate situations, viz. in his relations to his fellow-men and to his Creator, his intellect, which is not infallible, has been supplemented by Divine Light. Revelation enlightens him as to the laws, obeying which he may achieve the sumnum bonum of his life, viz., at-one-ment with his Creator. The diverse vicissitudes of life, its pleasures and pains, its prosperity and adversity, are mere opportunities to bring his dormant virtues into play and thereby effect their evolution. Assigned a set
purpose to fulfil, endowed with particular faculties and capabilities suited to the realization of his fixed end, and provided with necessary guidance, he is left alone to work out his own edification. Thereafter there is no Divine interference with him in the matter of choice between right and wrong. Thus the Holy Qur-án, allowing him freedom of will, saddles man with responsibility, which serves as a spur to self-exertion.

Islamic *taqdir*, recognizing freedom of human will, infuses into man a sense of responsibility and accountability, and thus gives an impetus to the advancement of culture of the right sort. Islamic *taqdir* makes man the lord of the universe, controlling the forces of nature, putting them to the service of man and thereby promote general welfare. Islamic *taqdir* brings paradise to the door of man by creating goodwill and fraternal affection between man and man.

Above all, Islamic *taqdir* uplifts man from a self-centred brute to spiritual heights, where he loses himself in the service of humanity and of the Lord, his Creator. He is borne to celestial regions where there is neither snow nor storm, where the virtuous drink deep at the cool fountain of Divine love, basking in the sunshine of Divine bliss.