

ARE WE “BORN TO BE FREE”? (PART 2 OF 2): WHAT GOD WANTS FROM US

Rating: 4.3

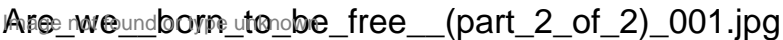
Description: An Islamic view of Destiny, and how Muslims practically implement this concept into their lives.

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Published on: 10 Mar 2008

Last modified on: 20 Oct 2010

Each of the  prophets, including Abraham, Moses, Jesus and Muhammad, taught that what people chose to do with respect to belief in God and obedience to His will made a very great difference to the final outcome of their affairs. Humans have a tremendous ability to love and be kind, or to hate and be destructive. This means that although they may have all been born with souls of equal worth, they do not remain equal. Freewill is actually the most difficult of God's gifts to understand or appreciate. The point of freewill is to make sense of human morality - without it there is no such thing as good or evil conduct, for we should simply be automatons.

If we cannot make real free choices then judgment cannot apply to us - it would be totally against justice. Whenever people are not free to make choices, then they cannot be held responsible. Aishah recorded that the Prophet, may the mercy and blessings of God be upon him, made it clear that those whose freedom or intellect was limited - for example, those too young or too ignorant, or whose balance of mind was disturbed - could not be held morally responsible for their actions, either in a shari'ah court of law, (or a UK court, for that matter), or in the judgment to come.

So, what about the Muslim concept of *al-Qadr*, the key doctrine of God's complete and final control over the fulfillment of events, or Destiny? How does one balance the idea of God knowing absolutely everything with the idea of freewill? If God knows in advance everything that will happen, then surely a person's life must be entirely predestined? Furthermore, if God does not intervene to stop particular things happening, then one can say that He alone is responsible for them. This is linked to the problem of evil. Who is responsible for evil, if God is ultimately responsible for everything? A thief might plead innocence, because he was surely predestined to steal, and therefore how can it be his fault?

Many people think that all Muslims are fatalists, who believe that since 'everything is written', and that God knows everything in advance - therefore it must all be predetermined. No human brain has actually been able to untangle this problem totally

- certainly not mine - but the whole business of God sending Messengers with revelations surely indicates that humans are expected to listen, and then make choices, and then adjust their lives accordingly (Quran 6:91; 23:73). God in fact revealed:

“Truly, God does not change the condition of a people until they change what is in themselves.” (Quran 13:11)

This certainly seems to indicate that humans have the power to change through their own freewill, and these decisions alter their fates. It must be true that God does know everything and every possibility, but humans do not. Therefore, if a human chooses a particular thing, there will be a particular outcome leading to a particular conclusion. If the human chooses a different course of action, then the outcome and conclusion will be different. If you choose to swallow a whole bottle of painkilling tablets, you will die this afternoon; but if you choose to swallow only two, it may cure your migraine and you may live to be a hundred. God, knows all the possible outcomes but He leaves the choice to you. We cant understand it, but God can - His ‘intelligence’ is millions of times greater and totally different from ours.

The real truth lies in the realm of *al-Ghayb* [matters which lie beyond human perception]. All that believers can do is to ask for guidance along our path of life. We may not be able to see the road way into the distance, but we can pray that God will show us the next step, one step at a time. If it were impossible for people to choose because their futures and destinies were already fixed, not only would God be unfair instead of just, but there would also seem to be very little point in us even trying to live good lives. Fatalism leads to despair and helplessness, defeatism, and hindering people from making any effort to improve either their own lot or the lot of those around them.

What does God want for us? He wants us to achieve happiness and success. He wants us to find true freedom. If true freedom brings happiness, then it seems things are not quite as many folks think. I might be very happy to be free to have a relationship with a different partner every week, or to stuff myself with tasty but unhealthy food, or to spend a fortune on clothing or jewelry or pop CDs, or to smoke, or stay out late worrying my parents, or avoid chores or homework, or have a laugh at my enemies, or earn lots of money perhaps dishonestly, or be famous and admired by lots of people. Surely these are the things that make people happy?

How simple it would be if that were so. It’s so easy for Satan to fool people - the way that leads to destruction is so tempting and enjoyable. But stop and think. Many of the richest and most powerful people in the world are the loneliest. People who stuff themselves get all the problems and misery of being overweight. Those who are lazy and avoid learning and training in their youth wake up to the realities of failed lives later on. Smokers puffing away contentedly behind the bike-sheds will die young of cancer or heart failure - to the great grief of those who love them. People who are promiscuous usually end up with heartbreak for themselves and the children they later neglect, abandon (usually the young fathers) or kill in abortion (the young mothers).

True happiness is to look after that which God has loaned to us and entrusted to our safe-keeping for such a brief time - our bodies, our families, our talents, our sensitivity towards others. This means not being free to give in to our lusts and desires, the things we know very well will hurt us and others in due course. But here's the odd thing - the person who gives up that kind of selfish freedom and agrees to be God's servant will always be truly free. They will know that they have done their best; their consciences will be clear, their inner persons confident and full of hope, and they will never be slaves to their own selves, or to any other person or thing.

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