

Divine Providence

While it is believed by all Muslims that God is active in human history and that, ultimately, everything is within God's power and decree, the question of free will versus predestination remains a mystery. After the death of the Prophet, one of the first theological disagreements among the Muslims was over this question, and both sides found ample Quranic and prophetic statements to support their claim. The debate was finally put to rest (to some extent) a few centuries later, when a widely respected traditional theologian (Abul Hasan Al Ashari) unfolded a theory of "acquisition" (*kasb*), by which God was understood to be the Originator or the Creator of the deed while the human being was held responsible. In other words, the debate was put to rest by acknowledging the paradox: **God is the only real "actor" or "creator" in the universe, and His power and knowledge envelop everything past, present, future; on the other hand, we feel as if we make choices, and we are promised reward and punishment based upon those choices.**

For everyday purposes, pious Muslims live within this mystery. They worship and struggle to be virtuous as they ponder the Divine message hidden in the events of their days and of the larger, global situation. Perhaps, the most tangible way this is perceived is through the pious phrase of exception, "if God wills" (*in sha Allah*). Whenever a pious Muslim declares her intention to do something or to go somewhere, she says, "if God wills" as an acknowledgement that it may not come to pass even if she makes her best effort. In such cases, it is simply accepted as God's will, which is inscrutable and eternally beyond both human understanding and human judgment.

Sharing Truth - Al-Imran (The House of Imran) Sura 3: Verses 187

"Recall that God took an agreement from those who received previous revelation. They were (supposed to make the message of God) clearly evident to people and not to hide it, but they threw it away behind their backs and made a little profit off of it. What a despicable bargain they made!"

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ
الْحَمْدُ لِلَّهِ الَّذِي هَدانا
لِلْإِسْلَامِ
وَمَا كُنَّا لِنَكْفُرَ بِهِ
لَوْلَا إِيمَانُ سُلَيْمَانَ
بِآيَاتِ رَبِّهِ
لَكُنَّا مِنَ الْخٰسِرِيْنَ

Ibn Kathir writes: In this verse there is a warning to the scholars that they ought not conceal religious knowledge from the people. The Prophet, peace be upon him, has said, "**Whoever was asked about a piece of knowledge and he concealed it, shall have a rein of fire in his mouth on the Day of Resurrection.**"

It is said that when Zuhri had given up narrating hadith, Hasan bin Ammara went up to him and asked him to relate some hadith. Zuhri told him of his resolve. Hasan told him: "Either you narrate or I will." Zuhri said: "Alright. You do." Hasan narrated Ali's (may Allah be pleased with them) words: "**Allah did not make it obligatory upon the ignorant to ask before He had made it obligatory upon the scholars to teach.**" Hearing this Zuhri narrated forty hadith to Hasan (Qurtubi). Yusuf Ali adds: "Truth - Allah's Message - comes to any man or nation as a matter of sacred trust. It should be broadcast and published and taught and made clear to all within reach. Privileged priesthood at once erects a barrier. But worse, when such priesthood tampers with the truth, taking what suits it and ignoring the rest, it has sold Allah's gift for a miserable ephemeral profit."

