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What does the term البداء [Bada] mean?

The term البداء [Bada] in Arabic signifies ‘the appearance and revelation’, and in the Shia terminology, it denotes a change in the natural course of someone’s destiny under the auspices of performing good deeds. The issue of البداء [Bada], which has its origin in the Word of revelation and intellectualism, is one of the fundamental teachings of the Shia school of thought.

According to the holy Quran, man is not always helpless toward his destiny, knowing that the pearly-gate of prosperity is open to him, and he can alter the course of his life through returning to the way of truth and performing good deeds. It represents this issue as a constant and general principle as follows:

ان الله لا يغير ما بقوم حتى يغيروا ما بانفسهم *

(Verily, Allah will not change the good and bestowed condition of a people until they change what is in them.)

Or somewhere else, it says,

ولو ان اهل القرى آمنوا و اتقوا لفتحنا عليهم بركات من السماء والارض *

(And if the people of the towns had believed and tried to be pious, We would have opened upon them gates of blessings from the heaven and the earth.)

With regard to the change of Jonah’s destiny, it also claims,

فلولا انه كان من المرسجين للبث في بطنه الي يوم يعثون **

* Rad Sura, Verse no.11

* Araf Sura, Verse no. 96

** Safat Sura, Verse no.143-144

(Had it not been that he invoked to Allah for accepting his repentance, he would have surely remained in the belly of the dolphin up to Day of Judgment.)

From this verse, it is deduced that Jonah seemed destined to remain in the belly of that dolphin forever, but his good deeds, such as glorifying Allah, changed the course of his life and delivered him.

This fact has been approved in the Islamic traditions, too. With regard to this fact, the holy Prophet (peace be upon him and his descendants) said,

ان الرجل ليحرم الرزق بالذنب يصيبه ولا يرد القدر الا الدعاء و لا يزيد في العمر الا البر.*

(Due to his persistence in committing sins, man's sustenance is cut short, and nothing can change this decree, save prayer for forgiveness, and nothing can prolong his life span, save benevolence.)

From the above-mentioned tradition, one is forced to the conclusion that man's persistence in committing sins results in his deprivation from the Divine blessings and vice versa.

Conclusion:

From the verses of the holy Quran and the traditions, it is deduced that man's bad deeds may drive him to a special destiny, and if he continues his deeds, the Divine guardians, such as the Prophet (peace be upon him and his descendants) and the Imams (a.s), may admonish him of the unpleasant consequences of his deeds in advance. Then, if he alters his way of life through showing signs of repentance, he has, in turn, made a change in his destiny.

This fact which has its origin in the Word of revelation, the Prophet's tradition, and the common sense is known as **الدعاء** [Bada'] in Shia terminology.

It is noteworthy to mention that this term does not only belong to the Shia, but also is observed in the writings of the Sunnite and the Prophet's words. For instance, the Prophet

* Mosnad, Ahmad, vol.5, p.277; Mostadrak, Hakim, vol.1, p.493; and similar to this in 'Altaj Aljame Ulusool, vol.5, p. 111

(peace be upon him and his descendants) has employed this term in the following tradition:

بدالله عزوجل ان يتلبيهم*

It must be stated that the issue of البداء [Bada'] does not signify the alteration in the Divine omniscience, because Allah is fully aware of man's natural disposition as well as the factors that may influence this process and bring about البداء [Bada'] in advance; as stated in the holy Quran.

يمحو الله ما يشاء و يثبت و عنده ام الكتاب**

Therefore, when البداء [Bada'] occurs, God, the Almighty, discloses a reality, having been known to Him since eternity, to us. This is why Imam Sadeq (a.s) said,

ما بدالله في شئ الا كان في علمه قبل ان يبدوله*

(Bada' has never occurred to God, save that He has been aware of it since eternity.)

The Philosophy of Bada':

Apparently, if man cherishes the hope that he is able to make changes in his destiny through performing good deeds, he will strive to elevate his mind and morals and, as a result, build a bright future.

To put it in other words, like repentance and intercession, Bada' delivers man from despair and then makes him hopeful toward the bright future under the auspices of his efforts. As the last word, man knows that this outlook can alter his destiny to better through taking steps ahead toward a bright future.

* Al-Nahayato Fi Gharib El- Hadith Val Athar, written by Majd Din Mobarak, Vol.1, P. 109

** Ra'd Sura, verse no. 39

* Osul Kafi, vol.1, Kitab Ul – Tawheed, Section Al-Bada', Hadith no.9