220690 - Guidance is from Allah and the means are from people

the question

How can we understand the verses “And it is not for a soul to believe except by permission of Allah” [Yoonus 10:100] and “And Allah guides whom He wills” [al-Baqarah 2:213]? I try hard to adhere to the fitrah [sound humannature] with which Allah has created us, and to obey Him by believing in everything that we are required to believe in, but I have started to experience some waswaas (whispers of the Shaytaan; intrusive thoughts) about this matter, so I am hoping for an answer.

Detailed answer

Praise be to Allah.

Firstly:

Success and guidance are in the hand of Allah, may He be glorified and exalted. Whomever Allah wills to guide, He guides him, and whomever He wills to leave astray, He leaves him astray. Allah, may He be exalted, says (interpretation of the meaning):

“That is the guidance of Allah by which He guides whom He wills. And one whom Allah leaves astray - for him there is no guide”

[az-Zumar 39:23]

“Whomever Allah wills - He leaves astray; and whomever He wills - He puts him on a straight path”

[al-An‘aam 6:39]

“Whoever Allah guides - he is the [rightly] guided; and whoever He sends astray - it is those who are the losers”

[al-A‘raaf 7:178].

The Muslim says in his prayer: “Ihdina as-siraat al-mustaqeem (Guide us to the straight path) [al-Faatihah 1:6], because he knows that guidance is in the hand of Allah, may He be exalted, yet at the same time the individual is required to take measures that lead to guidance; he is required to be patient and steadfast, and to take the initiative in adhering to the path of righteousness. Allah, may He be glorified and exalted, has given him sound reason and free will, by means of which he may choose good instead of evil, guidance instead of misguidance. If he takes proper measures and is keen for Allah to bless him with perfect guidance, then help and guidance will come to him from Allah, may He be exalted. Allah, may He be exalted, says (interpretation of the meaning):

“And thus We have tried some of them through others that the disbelievers might say, ‘Is it these whom Allah has favored among us?’ Is not Allah most knowing of those who are grateful?”

[al-An‘aam 6:53].

Shaykh Ibn ‘Uthaymeen (may Allah have mercy on him) discussed this issue at length, which some people may not understand properly. He said:

If the matter is connected to the will of Allah, may He be blessed and exalted, and all matters are in His hand, then what is the role of man and what effort could help him if Allah, may He be exalted, has decreed that he should go astray and not be guided?

We say: The answer to that is that Allah, may He be blessed and exalted, only guides those who deserve to be guided, and sends astray those who deserve to be sent astray. Allah, may He be blessed and exalted, says (interpretation of the meaning):

“And when they deviated, Allah caused their hearts to deviate”

[as-Saff 61:5]

“So for their breaking of the covenant We cursed them and made their hearts hard. They distort words from their [proper] usages and have forgotten a portion of that of which they were

reminded”

[al-Maa’idah 5:13].

Thus Allah, may He be blessed and exalted, explains that the reason why He sends astray those whom He sends astray stems from the individual himself. The individual does not know what Allah, may He be exalted, has decreed for him, because he only comes to know of the decree after what is decreed has come to pass. So he does not know whether Allah has decreed that he will be misguided or guided.

So how can he follow the path of misguidance, then argue that Allah, may He be exalted, willed that for him.

Would it not be more appropriate for him to follow the path of guidance, then say: It is Allah, may He be exalted, Who has guided me to the straight path.

Is it appropriate for him to think like a Jabari (one who believes that man has no free will and is compelled by predestination to do what he does) when he is misguided, and to think like a Qadari (one who believes in free will) when he obeys Allah! It is not appropriate for man to be a Jabari when he is misguided and commits sin, and when he goes astray or disobeys Allah, he says: This is something that was written for me and decreed for me, and I cannot escape what Allah, may He be exalted, has decreed.

In fact man has power and he has the freedom to choose; the gate of guidance is not more hidden than the gates of provision. As is well known to everyone, man has a divinely-allocated share of provision, yet despite that he strives to take measures to earn his provision, in his homeland or overseas, and he explores all avenues of achieving that; he does not sit in his house and say, If my provision is decreed for me, then it will come to me. Rather he strives to take measures to earn his provision, for his provision is connected to effort, as is proven from the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him).

This provision is also decreed, just as deeds, good or bad, are decreed, so why do you go explore

all avenues and travel throughout the land seeking worldly provision, but you do not strive to do righteous deeds, seeking provision for the hereafter and to attain paradise?

The two issues are the same; there is no difference between them. So you strive to earn a living and you strive to have a good life and to prolong your life; if you fall sick you would go to the ends of the earth to find a skilled doctor who can treat your sickness, even though you have the lifespan that is decreed for you, and it will not be increased or decreased. You do not say: I will stay in my house, sick and bedridden, and if Allah has decreed that my life should be longer, He will make it longer. Rather we see you striving as much as you can to look for a doctor who you think is most likely to be the one at whose hands Allah may decree that you will be healed.

So why do you not strive for the sake of the hereafter and do righteous deeds just as you strive for worldly gain?

We have noted above that what is decreed is secret and hidden, and you cannot know about it.

Now you have the choice between two paths:

a path that will lead you to safety, victory, happiness and honour;

and a path that will lead you to doom, regret and shame.

Now you have the choice between these two paths. There is nothing to prevent you from following the path on the right or the path on the left. If you wish you can follow one, or if you wish you can follow the other.

Thus it becomes clear to us that man has freedom of will with regard to the options before him: just as he strives for worldly matters and uses his free will to choose what is appropriate, so too with regard to the hereafter, he should use his free will to choose what is appropriate. Moreover, with regard to the hereafter, the appropriate choices are much clearer than the choices with regard to worldly matters, because the one who explains the paths that lead to the hereafter is Allah, may He be exalted, as He has explained them in His Book and on the lips of His Messenger (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him). So the paths that lead to the hereafter must be

clearer than the paths of this world. Yet despite that, man follows the paths of this world, which have no guaranteed outcome, but he neglects the paths that lead to the hereafter, of which the outcomes are known and guaranteed, because they are proven by the promise of Allah, and Allah, may He be blessed and exalted, does not break His promise.

Moreover, we may note that Ahl as-Sunnah wa'l-Jamaa'ah affirm this, and their belief and view is that man acts on the basis of his freedom of choice, and says whatever he wants, but his will and choice are within the framework of the will and decree of Allah, may He be blessed and exalted.

Furthermore, Ahl as-Sunnah wa'l-Jamaa'ah believe that Allah's will is in accordance with His wisdom and that His will is not random; rather it is in accordance with His Wisdom, because one of the names of Allah, may He be exalted, is al-Hakeem (the Most Wise). In His wisdom, Allah, may He be exalted, decrees guidance for whomever He wills, for the one who He knows is seeking truth and whose heart is righteous. And He decrees misguidance for those who are not like that, for the one who, when Islam is presented to him, finds his heart constricted as if he is climbing up to heaven. The wisdom of Allah, may He be blessed and exalted, dictates that this person cannot be among the guided, unless Allah causes him to change his motives and intentions; Allah, may He be exalted, has the power to do all things, but the wisdom of Allah dictates that causes are connected to effects.

End quote from Risaalah fi'l-Qadaa' wa'l-Qadar (p. 14-21).

This is how the Muslim understands the issue of belief in the divine will and decree in connection with the deeds that man is required to do, on which his happiness or wretchedness depend. The cause of attaining guidance and admittance to Paradise is righteous deeds. Allah, may He be exalted, says of the people of Paradise (interpretation of the meaning):

"And they will be called, 'This is Paradise, which you have been made to inherit for what you used to do'"

[al-A'raaf 7:43]

“Enter Paradise for what you used to do”

[an-Nahl 16:32].

The cause of misguidance and admittance to hell is disobeying Allah and turning away from obedience to Him. Allah, may He be exalted, says concerning the people of hell (interpretation of the meaning):

“Then it will be said to those who had wronged, ‘Taste the punishment of eternity; are you being recompensed except for what you used to earn?’”

[Yoonus 10:52]

“And taste the punishment of eternity for what you used to do”

[as-Sajdah 32:14].

Once the Muslim understands that, he will be able to take his first step on the right path, and not let a single moment go by without striving in the path of Allah, may He be glorified and exalted. At the same time, he is humble towards his Lord and understands that in His hand are the keys of the heavens and the earth, so he feels his need for Him constantly and always, and his need for His guidance and support.

We ask Allah, may He be exalted, to decree guidance for us and for you, and to enable us to do all that is good.

And Allah knows best.