49004 - Belief of Ahl al-Sunnah concerning al-Qada’ wa’l-Qadar (Divine Will and Decree)

the question

Could you explain to me the Islamic view of the Divine Will and Decree (al-qada’ wa’l-qadar)? What should I believe with regard to this topic?.

Detailed answer

Praise be to Allah.

and blessings and peace be upon the Messenger of Allaah.

We could talk at length about the Islamic view of the Divine will and decree but to make the subject easier to understand, we will start with an overview of this topic, then explain as much as space permits, asking Allaah to benefit us thereby and to accept our efforts.

Note that what is meant by belief in al-qada’ (the Divine will) is: certain belief that everything that happens in this universe happens by the will and decree of Allaah.

Belief in al-qadar (the Divine decree) is the sixth pillar of faith, and no one's faith is complete without it. In Saheeh Muslim (8) it is narrated that Ibn ‘Umar (may Allaah be pleased with him) heard that some people were denying al-qadar. He said: “If I meet these people I will tell them that I have nothing to do with them and they have nothing to do with me. By the One by Whom ‘Abd-Allaah ibn ‘Umar swore, if one of them had gold equivalent to Mount Uhud and he spent it, Allaah would not accept it from him unless he believed in al-qadar.”

You should also note that belief in al-qadar is not valid unless you believe in the four aspects of al-
qadar, which are as follows:

1 - Belief that Allaah knows all things, in general terms and in detail, from eternity to eternity. Not a single atom is unknown to Him in the heavens or on earth.

2 - Belief that Allaah has decreed all things in al-Lawh al-Mahfooz, fifty thousand years before He created the heavens and the earth.

3 - Belief that the will of Allaah is irresistible and His decree is comprehensive, so nothing happens in this universe, good or bad, but by His will.

4 - Belief that all that exists was created by Allaah. He is the Creator of all beings and the Creator of their attributes and actions, as He says (interpretation of the meaning):

“Such is Allaah, your Lord! Laa Ilaaha illa Huwa (none has the right to be worshipped but He), the Creator of all things”

[al-An’aam 6:102]

Correct belief in al-qadar also involves believing in the following:

That the individual has free will by means of which he acts, as Allaah says (interpretation of the meaning):

“To whomsoever among you who wills to walk straight”

[al-Takweer 81:28]

“Allaah burdens not a person beyond his scope”

[al-Baqarah 2:286]
That a person’s will and ability do not operate outside the will and decree of Allaah, Who is the One Who has given him that ability and made him able to distinguish (between good and evil) and make his choice, as He says (interpretation of the meaning):

“And you cannot will unless (it be) that Allaah wills the Lord of the ‘Aalameen (mankind, jinn and all that exists)”

[al-Takweer 81:29]

That al-qadar is Allaah’s plan for His creation. What He has shown us of it, we know and believe in, and what He has hidden from us, we accept and believe in. We do not dispute with Allaah concerning His actions and rulings with our limited minds and comprehension, rather we believe in Allaah’s complete justice and wisdom, and that He is not to be asked about what He does, may He be glorified and praised.

This is a summary of the belief of the first generations concerning this important topic. We will discuss some of this in more detail below, asking Allaah to help us to say the right thing:

1 – The meaning of al-qada’ wa’l-qadar in Arabic:

The word qada’ means perfection and completion, and the word qadar means evaluating and planning.

2 – Definition of al-qada’ wa’l-qadar in Islamic terminology:

Qadar means Allaah’s decree of all things from eternity, and His knowledge that they will come to pass at the times that are known to Him and in the specific manner that He has decreed and willed. They will happen the way they are meant to and the way they are created.

3 – Is there a difference between al-qada’ and al-qadar?
Some of the scholars said that there was a difference between them, but perhaps the most correct view is that there is no difference in meaning between al-qada’ and al-qadar, and that each of them points to the meaning of the other. There is no clear evidence in the Qur’aan or Sunnah to indicate that there is a difference between them. The scholars are agreed that the one may be applied to the other, but it should be noted that the word qadar is most usually used in the texts of the Qur’aan and Sunnah, which indicates that we must believe in this pillar. And Allaah knows best.

4 – The status of belief in al-qadar in Islam:

Belief in al-qadar is one of the six pillars of faith which were mentioned in the words of the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) when Jibreel (peace be upon him) asked him about faith (eemaan). He said: “(It is) to believe in Allaah, His angels, His Books, His Messengers, the Last Day, and to believe in the Divine will and decree (al-qadar) both good and bad.” Narrated by Muslim, 8. Al-qadar is also mentioned in the Qur’aan, where Allaah says (interpretation of the meaning):

“Verily, We have created all things with Qadar (Divine Preordainments of all things before their creation as written in the Book of Decrees Al-Lawh Al-Mahfooz)”

[al-Qamar 54:49]

“And the Command of Allaah is a decree determined [qadran maqdooran]”

[al-Ahzaab 33:38]

5 – Aspects of belief in al-qadar:

Note, may Allaah help you to do that which pleases Him, that belief in al-qadar cannot be complete until you believe in the following four aspects of this doctrine:
(a) Knowledge: this is the belief that the knowledge of Allaah encompasses all things and not a single atom in the heavens or on earth falls outside of His knowledge. Allaah knew all of His creation before He created them. He knew what they would do by means of His ancient and eternal knowledge. There is a great deal of evidence that points to this such as the verses in which Allaah says (interpretation of the meaning):

“He is Allaah, beside Whom Laa ilaaha illa Huwa (none has the right to be worshipped but He) the All-Knower of the unseen and the seen. He is the Most Gracious, the Most Merciful”

[al-Hashr 59:22]

“and that Allaah surrounds all things in (His) Knowledge”

[al-Talaaq 65:12]

(b) Writing: this is the belief that Allaah has written the decrees concerning all created beings in al-Lawh al-Mahfooz. The evidence for that is the verse in which He says (interpretation of the meaning):

“Know you not that Allaah knows all that is in the heaven and on the earth? Verily, it is (all) in the Book (al-Lawh al-Mahfooz). Verily, that is easy for Allaah”

[al-Hajj 22:70] And the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) said: “Allaah wrote the decrees concerning all created beings fifty thousand years before He created the heavens and the earth.” Narrated by Muslim, 2653.

(c) Will: this is the belief that everything that happens in this universe happens by the will of Allaah. Whatever Allaah wills happens and whatever He does not will does not happen. Nothing exists outside of His will. The evidence for that is in the verses where Allaah says (interpretation of the meaning):
“And never say of anything, ‘I shall do such and such thing tomorrow.’

24. Except (with the saying), ‘If Allaah wills!’”

[al-Kahf 18:23, 24]

“And you cannot will unless (it be) that Allaah wills the Lord of the ‘Aalameen (mankind, jinn and all that exists)”

[al-Takweer 81:29]

(d) Creation: this is the belief that Allaah is the Creator of all things, including people’s actions. Nothing happens in this universe but He is its Creator, because He says (interpretation of the meaning):

“Allaah is the Creator of all things”

[al-Zumar 39:62]

“While Allaah has created you and what you make”

[al-Saaffaat 37:96]

And the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) said: “Allaah has made every doer and what he does.” Narrated by al-Bukhaari in Khalq Af’aal al-‘Ibaad (25) and by Ibn Abi ‘Aasim ‘Asim in al-Sunnah (257 and 358); classed as saheeh by al-Albaani in al-Saheehah, 1637.

Shaykh Ibn Sa’di (may Allaah have mercy on him) said: Just as Allaah is the One Who created them – meaning people – He has also created that by means of which they act, namely their abilities and will, then they do various actions of obedience and sin, by the abilities and will which Allaah has created. (al-Durrah al-Bahiyyah Sharh al-Qaseedah al-Taa’iyyah, p. 18).
Warning against arguing about issues of al-qadar on the basis of (human) reasoning:

Belief in al-qadar is the real test of the extent of a person’s belief in Allaah. It is the true test of how much a person really knows about his Lord and what results from this knowledge of certain and sincere faith in Allaah, and His attributes of majesty and perfection. That is because al-qadar raises many questions for the one who gives free rein to his reasoning to try to fully comprehend it. There have been many disputes concerning the issue of al-qadar and many people have engaged in debates and misinterpreted the verses of the Qur’aan that mention it. Indeed, the enemies of Islam in all eras have provoked confusion in the Muslims’ beliefs by discussing the issue of al-qadar and stirring up doubts about it. So no one can have true and certain faith except the one who knows Allaah by His beautiful names and sublime attributes, submitting to His commands with peace of mind and trusting in his Lord. In that case no doubts or specious arguments can find a way into his heart. Undoubtedly this is the greatest proof that belief in al-qadar is more important than belief in the other pillars of faith, and that the human mind cannot independently come to understand al-qadar, because al-qadar is one of the mysteries of Allaah in His creation; whatever Allaah has disclosed to us in His Book or on the lips of His Messenger (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) we know, accept and believe in, and whatever our Lord has not told us, we believe in and we believe in His perfect justice and wisdom, and that He is not to be questioned about what He does, but they will be questioned.

And Allaah knows best. May Allaah send blessings and peace upon His slave and Prophet Muhammad and upon his family and companions.