

Unit 5: Are We Programmed or Do We Have Free Will?

Discussions on Fate and Genetic Determinism

Lesson 1 - Islamic View on Free Will & Determinism

Time Length: 45-55 min.

INSTRUCTIONAL OUTCOMES:

Next Generation Science Standards (NGSS)

Science and Engineering Practices

- Asking Questions and Defining Problems: The lesson encourages students to ask questions about free will and determinism.
- Engaging in Argument from Evidence: Discussing different theological and scientific perspectives involves evaluating evidence and forming arguments.

Common Core State Standards (CCSS)

English Language Arts Standards - Reading: Informational Text

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.9-10.1 & RI.11-12.1: These standards involve citing strong and thorough textual evidence to support analysis, which is relevant to the activities involving the Quranic verses and theological perspectives.

English Language Arts Standards - Speaking and Listening

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.9-10.1 & SL.11-12.1: These involve engaging effectively in discussions, which is a key component of this lesson plan.

English Language Arts Standards - Writing

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.9-10.1 & W.11-12.1: The lesson requires students to write arguments to support claims, which aligns with these standards.

Literacy in History/Social Studies, Science, & Technical Subjects

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RST.11-12.1: This involves citing specific textual evidence to support analysis of science and technical subjects, which can be applied in the context of discussing genetic determinism.

Content Learning Outcomes:

- Describe the Islamic view on determinism and free will.
- Explain the basic dimensions of human life.
- Identify the meaning of Man's accountability (mukallaf).

Materials:

- **Presentation Slides** (Slides 3-24)
- **Triple-Entry Vocabulary Journal** (Student Responsibility)
- **Entry and Exit Tickets** - 3"x5" index cards or online survey tool (Slido or Nearpod etc)
- Quran.com - Reference the Quranic Ayaat

Instruction/Teacher Facilitation:

- ❖ Today we will engage in an age-old discourse of whether human beings are programmed or we have free will. Usually, this is a topic that brings about a lot of questions. So let's start with questions that you might have about the concept of qada and qadar.
- ❖ Entry Tickets:
 - On the entry ticket (formal **entry ticket**, or an index card, or through an online survey tool), ask the students to respond to the question: **“What do you think? Are we programmed or have free will? What are your thoughts and questions regarding Qada and Qadar?”**
 - If using index cards as the entry ticket, the teacher can collect them or allow students to keep them until the end of class so that the back can be used as the exit ticket. If using an online survey tool, close the survey or stop the acceptance of any more responses (re-open for exit ticket question).

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- ❖ These are some preliminary questions that I want you guys to think about and these will help guide our discussion today. (Ask the students if any of these were among the questions they had or wrote on their entry ticket.)
 - What does 'free will' and 'determined' mean? - to talk about these, we need to define them.
 - Can we understand Qada and Qadar? - again, what do these terms mean and how do we define them?
 - Is it true that all of human life and human behavior is determined?
 - What is the role of Prophethood in human behavior? - If everything is determined, and ordained, then what is the use or purpose of Prophets (because the purpose of Prophets is to guide people.)
 - Do Muslim theologians hold the same opinion about human free will? - Is there one overarching definition of Qada and Qadar, or do they differ in their opinions?
 - What is the scientific perspective on genetic determinism? (This will be covered in the next lesson.)
- ❖ In this discussion, the way we define these terms is essential. Whenever you want to discuss something, methodologically, always focus on the concept and the definition first (thasawwur). If you have a proper definition, then it will help you to set the proper analysis of the discussion or answer to the questions we have. So let's do exactly that and start with some definitions:

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- Free will - (These are the ways the Ulema have defined free will.)
 - The ability to *freely* and *consciously* make choices that are not externally determined. Freely i.e. not forced to do something; and consciously meaning that you are aware and understanding of what you are doing.
 - The capacity of human beings to choose a course of action from among various alternatives/options/choices.
 - It also means: “voluntary choice or decision”

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- Determinism -
 - It implies “ordained in advance”
 - It is the belief that all events, including human actions, are ultimately *determined* by causes regarded as *external* to the will.
 - This implies that individual human beings have no free will and cannot be held morally responsible for their actions.

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- Let’s look at these two through some examples: Looking into human life, one observes that every person can *freely*:
 - Drive a car
 - Choose to eat this food or that food/drinks
 - Choose his/her spouse
 - Act with kindness towards others
 - Help someone in need
 - Work to achieve certain goals in life
 - Improve certain conditions of life

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- But we also see that certain aspects of human life seem to be *pre-determined*: (were we consulted for these things? Given options and then able to choose for these things?)
 - Place of birth
 - Race/Ethnicity
 - Date of birth
 - Sex/Gender
 - The functions of body systems
 - Respiratory system
 - Immune system
 - Cardiovascular system
 - Urinary system, etc

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- Wait A Minute!?! (Reflection) - Very interesting; this means that:
 - There is an area of human life in which we can make choices, i.e., free will.
 - AND, there are aspects of our lives that have been predetermined.

Now, let’s put that into perspective... Let’s see which areas of our human existence we have the ability to freely act and which areas we are determined.

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- ❖ Human Nature - Human nature is the physiological and psychological characteristics shared by all humans.
 - There are three dimensions that form human nature/life;
 1. Laws of the physical world (body)
 2. Natural instincts
 3. Optional choices

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- Laws of the physical world - in the picture, we see that the person and the apple are both being acted on by gravity/gravitational forces.
 - Our bodies, like everything else in the universe, are controlled by the laws of the physical world. In this case, we are referring to the physiological functioning.
 - Examples: these laws govern our physical life
 - Laws of Motion
 - Gravitation force
 - Laws of reproduction
 - Functions of the human anatomy
 - Others

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- Therefore, in this dimension:
 - Human life functions according to laws of nature (we can't fly on our own, no matter how much we will/want to)
 - Mankind is programmed and determined
 - Men and women have no free choice in these aspects.
 - Man is, therefore, not accountable for the events and incidents of this area of life.
 - Textual evidence that the natural order of human life is already set:
- [Activity: Instruct students to look up the following verses on their electronic devices, one by one, as the teacher mentions them; competition style to see who can find it first. Use Quran.com. The first student to find it can read the translation of the verse out loud to the class. This will be done for all the ayaat mentioned in the three following sections.]
 - ◆ Surah Al-Qamar 54: Ayah 49 - **إِنَّا كُلَّ شَيْءٍ خَلَقْنَاهُ بِقَدَرٍ** - "Indeed, We have created everything, perfectly **preordained**." - Everything is created following measures that ALLAH swt has set/fixed.
 - ◆ Surah Al-Furqan 25: Ayah 2 - "Allah is 'the One to Whom belongs the kingdom of the heavens and the earth, Who has never had 'any' offspring, nor does He have a partner in 'governing' the kingdom. He has created everything, **ordaining it precisely**." **فَقَدَرَهُ تَفْدِيرًا** - Everything is well-measured, things happen in due time with perfect measurements.
 - ◆ Surah Ali-Imraan 3: Ayah 6 - **هُوَ الَّذِي يُصَوِّرُكُمْ فِي الْأَرْحَامِ كَيْفَ يَشَاءُ ۚ لَّا إِلَهَ إِلَّا هُوَ الْعَزِيزُ الْحَكِيمُ** - "He is the One Who shapes you in the wombs of your mothers as He wills. There is no god 'worthy of worship' except Him—the Almighty, All-Wise."
 - ◆ Surah Ash-Shuraa 42: Ayah 49 - "To Allah 'alone' belongs the kingdom of the heavens and the earth. He creates whatever He wills. He blesses whoever He wills with daughters, and blesses whoever He wills with sons,"
- The conclusion here is that, this bodily, physical aspect of human life, is determined and fixed. No free will here.

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➤ Natural Instincts - الجبالت أو الغرائز الطبيعية

- Inborn desires of the human psyche, or the ways of behaving: feelings that are not learned but inborn and common to all.
- Examples:
 - Reflection
 - Activity
 - Sexual Desires
 - Hunger
 - Ownership

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- Innate instincts are inborn, not acquired, hence:
 - The fulfillment of these innate instincts is acquired - we did not create these desires, but we were born with these desires/needs.
 - Man is not accountable for having such instincts, i.e. these instincts are **gifted**. BUT fulfilling these instincts is our **choice** (i.e. how we manage it)
 - Man has the *choice* to guide his/her desires in the right way.
 - Man is accountable for directing the *fulfillment* of his/her inborn desires (not accountable for having them):
 - ◆ Surah Al-Araaf 7: Ayah 31 - وَكُلُوا وَاشْرَبُوا وَلَا تُسْرِفُوا “O children of Adam,... eat and drink, but be not excessive...” - ALLAH swt is telling us, when you feel this feeling of hunger, eat and drink. This feeling is not in your control, it is instinctive, but how you react to this is in your control. ALLAH swt is not telling you do not feel hunger, HE is saying when you fulfill that need, do it within in limit. Quran is guiding you to not overeat. Don't have wasteful behavior. And this is the choice you have.
 - ◆ Surah Al-Israa 17: Ayah 32 - “Do not go near adultery. It is truly a shameful deed and an evil way.” - Human beings have a natural sexual desire instinct, (again, not telling you that you do not have sexual desires) but in the Quran, ALLAH swt is saying to fulfill it in the right way, within the limits of marriage, not zina. This way of fulfilling it is your choice.
 - ◆ Surah Aal-Imraan 3: Ayah 134 - “They are those who donate in prosperity and adversity, control their anger, and pardon others. And Allah loves the good-doers.” - We have an anger instinct, when people do things wrong, others insult us, etc, we get angry, it is natural. BUT وَالْكُظُمِينَ الْعَظِيمَ And ALLAH swt is saying to control it and keep it within our control, don't let the anger control you. Whether we do that or not is within our choice and ability.
- Through these verses, we see that ALLAH swt has given us certain innate aspects that we have been gifted with, and ALLAH swt, through the Quran, is guiding us to make the right decisions in life, to manage these instincts, direct them, fulfill them appropriately. So what we do with those innate aspects is our choice and within our free will, and that is what we will be accountable for.

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- Optional choices - الخيارات المكتسبة - These are elements that are completely within our choice.
 - This means:
 - Left to one's choice; the ability to make a choice from given options.
 - It is the quest for the best of given options, with the will and ability to do the matter.
 - Accountable for making given choices - reward and punishment follow accordingly.
 - For example to pray or not to pray, both options are there; to fast or not to fast; to work hard, who to marry etc. So we can pick our choice, but we have to be ready also to accept the consequences of our choices; accountability follows.
 - ◆ Surah Al-Insan 76: Ayah 3 - وَإِنَّمَا كُنُوزًا - “We already showed them the Way, whether they chose to be grateful or ungrateful.” - no predisposition here, purely our choice of how we view things, we have the intellect to think about it, and whether we are grateful or not grateful is our choice.
 - ◆ Surah Al-Balad 90: Ayah 10 - وَهُدًى لِّلْجَدِّينَ - “And shown them the two ways ‘of right and wrong’” - both paths are open in front of every human being, it is us who chooses which path we would like to take. (The previous ayaat in Surah Al-Balad can also be discussed here further to advance this point.)
 - ◆ Surah Al-Muddaththir 74: Ayah 38 - ۚ كُلُّ نَفْسٍۭ بِمَا كَسَبَتْ رَهِينَةٌ - “Every soul, for what it has earned, will be retained.” - And for each of our freely chosen decisions, there are consequences.
 - The ability to make choices makes us what we can in the Islamic tradition as Mukallaf.

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- ❖ MUKALLAF (RESPONSIBLE) - so from these three elements of our lives, we see that we are not responsible for half (natural laws and having natural instincts), but the other half we are responsible for because we are free to choose (fulfilling natural instincts and optional choices). This freedom to choose and the responsibility that is attached to it is referred to as being mukallaf.
 - Not everyone is able to make choices on their own. As we know in our deen, children are not punishable for their deeds because they are not able to make consequential decisions. So the question arises who is a mukallaf.
 - A mature and mentally sound person who can make a choice between given options:
 - right or wrong
 - good or bad
 - Accountable for the consequences of his/her actions:
 - A continuation of what was mentioned earlier, in Surah Ash-Shams, we said that ALLAH swt gave us a soul and proportioned our bodies, and

here ALLAH swt is saying that after this, HE "... inspired it [with discernment of] its wickedness and its righteousness," (Surah Ash-Shams 91: Ayah 8) - Meaning HE gave us the ability to differentiate good and bad, right from wrong. Therefore, since it is within our capacity to differentiate, then we are accountable for properly differentiating right from wrong and choosing the right. If we choose the right way, we are choosing to be guided, and if we choose the wrong way, we are choosing to go astray.

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- Man is accountable **only** for what he is capable of and able to do; physically and mentally.
- The presence of the faculty of the mind makes the person accountable for their choices (mukallaf).
- Options and actions are created by God, yet human beings have the ability to acquire (kasb). - The opportunities being present are from ALLAH swt and so are the results, however, it is within our capacity to make the effort that is needed to yield the desired results.
- Without the ability, due to mental immaturity (child, insane, sleep, etc) → absence of taklif.
 - Surah Al-Baqarah 2: Ayah 286 - لَا يُكَلِّفُ اللَّهُ نَفْسًا إِلَّا وُسْعَهَا ۚ لَهَا مَا كَسَبَتْ وَعَلَيْهَا مَا اكْتَسَبَتْ
"Allah does not obligate anyone beyond his capacity. It will have [the consequence of] what [good] it has gained, and it will bear [the consequence of] what [evil] it has earned." - IF it is not within your capacity, ALLAH swt will not ask you about it. But you will definitely be asked and have the consequences for what was indeed within your capacity.
- The Messenger of Allah ﷺ said, "The pen is lifted from three people: a sleeping person until he awakens, a child until he becomes an adult, and an insane person until he regains his sanity." (Sunan al-Tirmidhī 1423) - three types of people are NOT accountable for their deeds done at that time; insane, the child, and sleeping person.
- So for a Mukallaf to choose a way, the options have to be present and presented... This is where hidayah comes in.

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- ❖ What is the role of guidance (hidayah)?
 - This means: To be shown the way because we are mukhallaf...
 - Hidayah is advice or information provided to someone to do right or choose the best option.
 - Only in areas in which you have a choice because that is the area of accountability.
 - Prophethood and Revelation are given to us, to aid the mind to choose the best of available options in life.
 - Surah Al-Aaraaf 7: Ayah 68 - أَتِلَّعُكُمْ رَسُولُ رَبِّي وَأَنَا لَكُمْ نَاصِحٌ أَمِينٌ
"I convey to you the messages of my Lord, and I am to you a trustworthy adviser." (statement of Hud A)

- And Surah Al-Aaraaf 7: Ayah 79 - "And he [Ṣāliḥ A] turned away from them and said, "O my people, I had certainly conveyed to you the message of my Lord and advised you, but you do not like the advisors."

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- ❖ Two Methods of Divine Guidance: (Use the example of giving directions to someone.)
 - Guidance in the sense of showing the good way (hidayah al-dilalah) - generally guiding
 - Surah Fussilat 41: Ayah 17 - "And as for Thamud, We guided them, but they preferred blindness over guidance, so the thunderbolt of humiliating punishment seized them for what they used to earn." - The Thamud was given guidance, but they chose not to take that guidance/chose to not follow it.
 - When giving directions and guiding someone to some place, you can generally say, "Go north, not south."
 - Guidance in the sense of actual support to achieve the goals (hidayah al-tamkin) - actual assistance, practical application of the guidance given.
 - Surah Al-Qasas 28: Ayah 56 - "Indeed, [O Muḥammad], you do not guide whom you like, but Allāh guides whom He wills. And He is most knowing of the [rightly] guided."
 - Surah An-Nur 24: Ayah 46 - "We have certainly sent down distinct/clear verses. And Allāh guides whom He wills to a straight path."
 - When giving directions, this would be like putting it in the GPS and giving detailed instructions, or actually taking that person to the destination yourself.
 - ALLAH swt gives us both of these types of guidance. ALLAH swt shows us the general direction (dilalah), and then also assists the person in reaching that destination.
 - And when a person doesn't take the directions you give them, that means they aren't interested in your help/assistance. The same goes for our lives; when ALLAH swt sends Messengers, we can choose to follow it, and then we ask/seek ALLAH swt to assist us in reaching our destination.

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- ❖ This leads us to the main concept of Qada and Qadar:
 - **Qada** refers to the *knowledge of God*, whose knowledge covers the past, present, and future.
 - The events and conditions of the entire universe are covered by His eternal knowledge before things and events take place.
 - The divine measurement, or **Qadar**, reflects another level of divine destiny, which allows *particular events and conditions to happen at a specific time and place*.
 - Qada means God's knowledge of all the events in life, while Qadar refers to bringing events according to HIS knowledge in their specific condition, time, and place.
 - The first level is Qada, ALLAH swt possessing knowledge of everything and every time.
 - The second level is the actual occurrence of the event at its specific time and conditions.

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❖ Four Pillars of the Divine Decree

1. God is All-knowing, and nothing falls beyond His knowledge.
2. God has written down part of His eternal knowledge (recorded), which covers everything.
3. God's will is all-encompassing; there is nothing that falls outside His will (mashiyyah- will). Nothing happens in this world without the will of ALLAH swt.
4. Allah swt is the True Creator, Who created everything and everyone.

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- First, The Divine Knowledge: God is All-Knowing, and nothing falls beyond His knowledge.
 - Surah Al-Ankabut 29: Ayah 42 - "Surely, *Allah knows* whatever thing they invoke besides Allah, and He is the Mighty, the Wise."
 - Surah Al-Hajj 22: Ayah 70 - "Do you not know that *Allāh knows* what is in the heaven and earth? Indeed, that is in a Record. Indeed that, for Allāh, is easy."
 - Surah Al-Jinn 72: Ayah 28 - "so that He knows that they (angels) have conveyed the messages of their Lord. And He has encompassed all that is with them, and has *comprehensive knowledge* of everything by numbers."
- Second, The Divine Record: God has written down part of His eternal knowledge in a record, which covers everything, regardless of how big or small the thing or event might be.
 - Surah Al-Anaam 6: Ayah 59 - "And with Him are the keys of the unseen; none knows them except Him. And He knows what is on the land and in the sea. Not a leaf falls but *He knows it*. And no grain is there within the darknesses of the earth and no moist or dry [thing] but that *it is [written] in a clear record.*"
 - Surah Al-Hadid 57: Ayah 22 - "No calamity befalls the earth or your own selves, but *it is (pre-destined) in a Book before We bring it into being*, Indeed it is easy for Allah."

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- Third, The Divine Will: God's Will is All-Encompassing; there is nothing that falls outside His Will. Whatever He wills, happens, and whatever He does not will, does not happen.
 - Surah Yaseen 36: Ayah 82 - "His command is only when *He intends a thing* that He says to it, "Be," and it is."
 - Surah Al-Insan 76: Ayah 30 - "And you do not will except that *Allāh wills*. Indeed, Allāh is ever Knowing and Wise."
- Fourth, The Divine Creator: Allah (swt) is the True Creator, Who created everything and everyone, including human actions and handiworks.
 - Surah Ghafir 40: Ayah 62 - "That is Allāh, your Lord, *Creator of all things*; there is no deity except Him, so how are you deluded?"
 - Surah Al-Furqan 25: Ayah 2 - "The One to whom belongs the kingdom of the heavens and the earth, and who did neither have a son, nor is there any partner to Him in the kingdom, and *who has created everything* and designed it in a perfect measure."

- Surah Fatir 35: Ayah 3 - “O mankind, remember the favor of Allāh upon you. *Is there any creator other than Allāh* who provides for you from the heaven and earth? There is no deity except Him, so how are you deluded?”

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- ❖ Are we Free or Programmed? - Summary of Responses from Muslim schools of theology that have particular views on Qada and Qadar. There are 3 main schools of thought on this topic:
 - Pro-deterministic school of theology - Jabriyyah - says that we do not have any free will, we are completely programmed.
 - Pro-freewill school of theology - Mu'thazila (Rationalists) - says we create options for ourselves, and from those options/choices, we have free will to choose.
 - The Sunni school of theology - Denies both being completely programmed and a completely free-willed existence. They took the middle path; saying there are particular areas in which we are pre-determined and other aspects of life in which we have free will.

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- ❖ Summary: (Take home points)
 - Humans have the ability to choose within the power of Allah.
 - We are held accountable only in matters in which we have free choice. (IF we do not have a choice in something, we are not held accountable for it.)
- ❖ Exit ticket: Using the formal [exit ticket](#), or the other side of the index card “entry ticket,” or the online survey tool, have the students answer the following questions:
 - **What questions from among the preliminary questions do you still have? Have they all been answered?**
 - **What questions arise or do you still have about the concept of qada and qadar?**