

# SATANOLOGY AND THEODICY IN ISLAM

by

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(Under the Direction of Alan Godlas)

## ABSTRACT

This Master's thesis explores the major Sufi and Shia scholars' views of Iblīs – one of the two Qur'anic names for the Devil – views rooted in the traditional and orthodox Islamic understandings of the fall of Iblīs and the Ḥallājīan-Sufi tradition built around the defense of Iblīs. However, this thesis also represents a departure from both of these schools of thought in important and significant ways. While agreeing with the Hallājīan tradition's appreciation of the necessity of the cosmic role of Iblīs after his fall – as the embodiment of evil on the human plane – I argue that it does not remove the agency of Iblīs nor does it absolve Iblīs from the responsibility of his actions. Rather, his fateful disobedience reflects a form of arrogance directed not only against Adam, but also against God.

INDEX WORDS: Islam, Sufism, Iblīs, Devil, Adam, Evil, Shiism, Shayṭān.

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## CHAPTER ONE

### INTRODUCTION, NAMES, AND ETYMOLOGY OF IBLĪS

The defense of Iblīs championed by the Ḥallājīan-Sufi tradition conflates the consequence of Iblīs' disobedience of God's command with his motivation for the transgression. Iblīs lost everything as the result of his disobedience – exiled from the presence of God – though, he gained a unique cosmic stature. He tests humankind and seduces them away from the Path of God. The created order necessitates the role of Iblīs as the manifestation of God's name, the Misguider. Following Peter Awn's study of Ḥallāj, 'Ayn al-Qudāt Ḥamadhānī, and Aḥmad Ghazālī, among others, in which he attempted to redeem and rehabilitate Iblīs as the paragon of love and self-sacrifice -- in contrast to the traditional orthodox non-Sufi Islamic conception(s) of Iblīs and theodicy -- further study of the Sufi understanding of Iblīs and evil in Sufi commentaries on the Qur'an (such as the *tafsīrs* of Maybūdī, Qushayrī, and Kāshānī) as well as in the works of Ibn 'Arabī and Muḥammad Ḥusayn Ṭabāṭabā'ī can break new ground regarding their views on Iblīs and the parallels with the question of theodicy in the Islamic context. The central thesis of the paper is two-fold: the creative agency of God (though exclusive, in a sense) does not, however negate the agency of His creation since Iblīs is responsible for his disobedience and is not a mere instrument of God's will, as upheld by the Ḥallājīan-Sufi tradition. Second, Iblīs' disobedience betrays his pride not only against Adam, but also against God.

## *Names and Etymology of Iblīs*

The Qur'anic narrative of the fall of Iblīs is inextricably linked with the creation account of the primordial Adam. Iblīs is one of the two Qur'anic names of the devil (Qur'an 2:34, 7:11, 15:31-32, 17:61, 18:50, 20:116, etc.). The second Qur'anic title for the devil is al-Shayṭān, "the Satan" (2:36, 20:116). The Qur'an employs the name "Iblīs" to refer to the devil's role as the rebel against God's command to prostrate before Adam (2:34; 20:116). When the devil acquires the role of the tempter and seducer after being exiled from God's Presence, he is referred to as al-Shayṭān (2:36, 20:120).<sup>1</sup> Al-Shayṭān appears in the Qur'an more than fifty times.<sup>2</sup> Etymologically, some Western scholars have argued that al-Shayṭān is related to the Hebrew *ḥā-šāṭān*, a generic noun which implies "slanderer" or "accuser."<sup>3</sup> Muslim philologists have argued for two possibilities for the Arabic rooted-ness of al-Shayṭān: *sha-ṭa-na* has been proposed as one possible linguistic root which implies being distant from the Good (as a Divine principle) or from Divine Mercy.<sup>4</sup> The second possibility is the linguistic root *sha-ya-ṭa* which refers to be burnt or scorched.<sup>5</sup> Interestingly, al-Shayṭān often appears in the Qur'an only as an actor who impedes, through various approaches, man's spiritual development. Whitney Bodman, in *The Poetics of Iblīs*, draws a distinction between an actor and a character. Al-Shayṭān appears as an actor, "a participant in the story, who plays a role but never develops."<sup>6</sup> The "Shayṭāni discourse

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<sup>1</sup> Reynolds Gabriel Said, "A Reflection on Two Qur'anic Words (Iblīs and Jūdī), with Attention to the Theories of A. Mingana," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 124, no. 4 (January 2004).

<sup>2</sup> Peter Awn, *Satan's Tragedy and Redemption: Iblis in Sufi Psychology* (Leiden: Brill, 1983), 19.

<sup>3</sup> Henry Ansgar Kelly, *Satan: A Biography* (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 2006).

<sup>4</sup> Mustafa Öztürk, "The tragic story of Iblis (Satan) in the Qur'an," *Journal of Islamic Research* no. 2 (December 2009): 134.

<sup>5</sup> Öztürk, 134.

<sup>6</sup> Whitney Bodman, *The Poetics of Iblis: Narrative Theology in the Qur'an* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2011), 18.

[in the Qur'an] locates the source of evil outside the individual," while Iblīs was led astray by his own nature.<sup>7</sup>

Muslim commentators are divided on the origins of the name Iblīs. Muḥammad ibn Jarīr al-Ṭabarī (d. 923 CE) proposes the Arabic root *b-l-s* from the verb *'ablasa*, meaning despairing or giving up hope for God's Mercy. Maḥmūd al-Ālūsī (d. 1854), Abū Zakariyyā al-Nawawī (d. 1277 CE), and Abū al-Qāsim al-Zamakhsharī (d. 1144 CE) conceive of Iblīs as a loan word.<sup>8</sup> Some Western scholars concur with this view - noting it as a derivation from the Greek διάβολος (diávolos) meaning "slanderer."<sup>9</sup>

Although the name 'Azāzīl is not found in the Qur'an, it is found in early *tafsīr* (Qur'anic exegesis) tradition, where the companion (*ṣaḥābī*), 'Abd Allāh ibn al-'Abbās (d. 687/688 CE) discusses it.<sup>10</sup> It is derived from the biblical 'Azāzēl (Leviticus 16:8-28) and is considered to be the Hebrew name of Iblīs before he disobeyed God, while the Arabic name was al-Ḥārith.<sup>11</sup> In the early Sufī tradition, 'Azāzīl was used for mystical interpretations instead of Iblīs.<sup>12</sup>

Ashraf 'Alī Thānvī (d. 1943 CE) argues that 'Azāzīl is the actual name of the Devil, while Iblīs is only the qualitative / attributive name of the Devil. It is so because Iblīs, being derived from the Arabic *'ablasa / yublisu*, refers to the state of hopelessness. 'Azāzīl lost hope in God's mercy; and one who loses hope in God's mercy is known as Iblīs. Only after the final

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<sup>7</sup> Bodman, 19.

<sup>8</sup> Edmund Teuma, "The nature of "Iblis" in the Qur'an as interpreted by the commentators," *Melita Theologica* 31 no. 2 (January 1980): 10.

<sup>9</sup> Juan Pedro Monferrer-Sala, "One more time on the arabized nominal form iblīs," *Studia Orientalia* 112 (January 2012): 55.

<sup>10</sup> Abū Ja'far Muḥammad ibn Jarīr al-Ṭabarī, *The Commentary on the Quran*, ed. W. F. Madelung; A. Jones (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 1989), 239.

<sup>11</sup> al-Ṭabarī, 242; Don DeWalt, *Leviticus*, trans. Kenneth N. Taylor, Bible Study Textbook Series, (Joplin, MO: College Press, 1975).

<sup>12</sup> Pavel V. Basharin, "The Problem of Free Will and Predestination in the Light of Satan's Justification in Early Sufism," *English Language Notes* 56 (2018): 130.

transition into utter hopelessness in God’s mercy, however, does ‘Azāzīl turn into the Shayṭān. Since he is not content with being the only one to be condemned by God, Shayṭān takes the role of tempter and seducer in the effort to take down with him as many people as he could.

In contrast to the Qur’anic role of al-Shayṭān as an actor, Iblīs, according to Bodman, figures as a character, “the focal point of a story, who develops a personality that evolves and responds to shifting situations.”<sup>13</sup> Iblīs features a certain degree of comparability with the human condition, in that he displays emotions such as pride, jealousy, and envy. Similarly, Thānvī quotes a verse from an Urdu poet to reflect the Iblīs-attribute of ‘Azāzīl:

ہم تو ڈوبے ہیں صنم تم کو بھی لے ڈوبیں گے<sup>14</sup>

I have almost drowned, oh loved one! But I will cause you to drown with me.<sup>15</sup>

This verse reflects the state of despair on the verge of destruction and annihilation, but simultaneously it betrays a determination to be the cause for others’ destruction.

Another perspective is expressed by the Shia scholar, Muhammad Husayn Ṭabāṭabā’ī (d. 1981 CE), who contends that the name “Iblīs” does not refer to his act of giving up on God’s mercy, but to his utmost wretchedness, “to the extent that there is no hope of his deliverance.”<sup>16</sup> Ṭabāṭabā’ī makes a distinction between hope in God’s mercy and hope for one’s deliverance. Nevertheless, the relationship between the two is not clear: losing hope for one’s salvation

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<sup>13</sup> Bodman, 18.

<sup>14</sup> Muḥammad Ashraf ‘Alī Thānvī, *Tafsīr bayān al-Qur’ān* (Delhi: Matb'a Muḥtaba’ī, 1908), Exegesis of Q: 2:34.

<sup>15</sup> The translation has been provided by the author of this thesis.

<sup>16</sup> ‘Allāmah al-Sayyid Muḥammad Husayn al-Ṭabāṭabā’ī, *Al-Mizan fī Tafsīr al-Qur’an* trans. ‘Allāmah Sayyid Sa‘īd Akhtār Rizvī (World Organization For Islamic Services, 1981), Ch. 7, p. 83.

despite being hopeful of God's mercy appears contradictory. In fact, hoping for God's mercy despite one's wretchedness is the state of being a believer.

Iblīs as a character is representative of the Sufi and Shia intellectual traditions who exhibits emotional intelligence, despair, hopelessness, knowledge, and even love. The central premise of such conceptualizations of Iblīs is not only anthropomorphism, but fundamentally, the relationship of Creator-creation that is common among all creations of God. Whether Iblīs' is idealized in the tradition as the paragon of love or pitied as the enemy of humankind, the core of such understandings revolves around his relationship with divinity.

## CHAPTER TWO

### THE QUR'AN, IBLĪS, AND MUSLIM EXEGETES ON HIS ESSENCE, NATURE, AND SUBSTANCE

The Qur'anic material on Iblīs provided Muslim exegetes with the foundation on which they developed various theologies of his essence, nature, and substance. Iblīs is mentioned eleven times in the Qur'an (2:34, 7:11, 15:31-32, 17:61, 18:50, 20:116, 26:95, 34:20, and 38:74-75), in relation to two events in the sacred Qur'anic history: the refusal to prostrate before Adam and his subsequent seduction of Adam and Eve in the Garden. The Qur'anic account of Iblīs' disobedience occurs seven times in the Qur'an with slight variations, six times in the Meccan surahs and once in a Medinan surah.<sup>17</sup>

When God created Adam out of clay and ordered the angels and Iblīs to prostrate before him, everyone obeyed except for Iblīs. Iblīs argued that his fiery essence renders him superior to Adam and refused to obey the command out of pride (Qur'an 7:12). For his disobedience, God cursed him and exiled him from His Presence. However, Iblīs vows to take revenge on mankind, who he holds as the cause for his downfall. He asks God to allow him respite to seduce and test mankind. God grants his wish but it is made clear that Iblīs possess only the power to incite and tempt, but not to coerce (Qur'an 38:82).

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<sup>17</sup> Meccan surahs: al-A'rāf, al-Hijr, al-Isrā, al-Kahf, Ṭā Hā, and Šād. Medinan surah: al-Baqarah.

The first victims to Iblīs' wiles were Adam and Eve, who were tempted in the Garden by Iblīs to procure for themselves fruits of the only tree that was divinely forbidden to them. When they disobey, they are exiled from the Garden and driven to earth. Hence, the story of Iblīs' enmity with mankind begins (Qur'ān 2:35-37, 7:19-24, and 20:117-122).

The particularity of Shia eschatology implies a difference in the way selected Qur'anic verses dealing with Iblīs are interpreted. The Qur'anic verses such as 7:14-15, which state, "He [Iblīs] said, "Respite me till the day they will be resurrected." Said He, "You are indeed among the reprieved" are interconnected with other Qur'anic verses, such as, "He [Iblīs] said, "My Lord! Respite me till the day they will be resurrected." Said He, "You are indeed among the reprieved until the day of the known time" (38:79-81). The predominant understanding of such verses, as exemplified in *The Study Quran*, equate the "day of the known time" with the Day of Judgment. However, Ṭabāṭabā'ī, a Shi'ite scholar, argues that it, in fact, refers to "*ar-Raj'ah* (return), [which] means that after the re-appearance of Imām al-Mahdī and before the Day of Judgement some confirmed friends of Allah and some of His confirmed enemies shall be returned to this world again to live under the rule of the Representative of Allah." God did not unconditionally accept Iblīs' request for respite till the Day of Judgment, but specified the limits of his respite till "the day of the known time," which refers to *ar-Raj'ah*. While Iblīs wanted to be able to deceive mankind throughout their "existence in this world and the *barzakh* (the intermediate real[ity] between this life and the Resurrection)," God limited Iblīs' freedom and powers to this world only, and not to the *barzakh*. Therefore, Iblīs cannot deceive people after their death.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>18</sup>al-Ṭabāṭabā'ī, Ch. 2, p. 140.

## *Muslim Exegetes on Iblīs' Essence, Nature, and Substance*

The early Muslim exegetes of the Qur'an sought to contextualize the pre-Fall account of Iblīs. Ibn al-ʿAbbās and Qatada ibn al-Nu'man (d. 644 CE) narrated that Iblīs was from a tribe of angels called *al-Jinn* who were created from the fire of Samūm. They were called *al-Jinn* because they were the custodians of the Garden (*al-Jannah*). The other angels, outside of this tribe, were created from light.<sup>19</sup> The *Jinn*, who have been mentioned in the Qur'an, were created from smokeless fire who became the first dwellers of the earth.<sup>20</sup> Aḥmad ibn Muḥammad ibn ʿAjība (d. 1809 CE), however, notes that either all *jinn* were created from smokeless fire or only the father of the *jinn*, Iblīs.<sup>21</sup> Soon, the *jinn* instigated corruption and bloodshed in response to which Iblīs and his tribe were charged with reining in the *jinn* by God.<sup>22</sup> One tradition from Muḥammad ibn Ishāq (d. 768 CE) notes that the Quraysh (the ruling tribe of Mecca at the time of the birth of Prophet Muhammad) believed that the angels were the daughters of God. However, God refutes this by saying that if angels were His daughters, then Iblīs would be one of them; "God called them *jinn* because they hid themselves (*ijtannu*) and were not seen, and He calls the children of Adam *ins* (= mankind) because they are visible and do not hide themselves. Whatever is visible is *ins*, and whatever hides itself and is not seen is *jinn*."<sup>23</sup> According to Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī (d. 1210 CE), God's speech was *exclusively* addressed to angels when the divine command to prostrate before Adam was issued. Since it also included Iblīs, it establishes the fact that Iblīs was one of the angels.<sup>24</sup> Al-Qāḍī Nāṣir al-Dīn al-Bayḍāwī (d. 1319 CE) stresses the

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<sup>19</sup> al-Ṭabarī, 241.

<sup>20</sup> al-Ṭabarī, 212.

<sup>21</sup> Aḥmad ibn Muḥammad ibn ʿAjība, *The Immense Ocean: Al-Bahr al-Madid*, trans. Michael Abdurrahman Fitzgerald Mohamed Fouad Aresmouk (Louisville, KY: Fons Vitae, 2009), 13.

<sup>22</sup> al-Ṭabarī, 212.

<sup>23</sup> al-Ṭabarī, 240.

<sup>24</sup> Teuma, 14.

angelic nature of Iblīs by questioning the perceived impeccability of angels. He argues that while the majority of the angels are faultless, but the specific types of angels, known as *jinn*, are not. He quotes a narration on the authority of ‘Ā’ishah bint Abī Bakr (d. 678 CE) which states that angels were created from light while the *jinn* were created from smokeless fire. Bayḍāwī argues that light and fire are one in essence, but different in terms of accidental properties, such as godliness and ungodliness.<sup>25</sup>

What of those who have argued that *Iblīs* was not an angel but only a *jinn*? Ṭabarī records Abī 'l-Ḥasan Yasār al-Baṣrī (d. 728 CE) as stating that Iblīs was never an angel but the origin of the *jinn*, as Adam was the origin of the mankind.<sup>26</sup> Ṭabarī further notes that the Qur’an itself calls Iblīs to be from the *jinn* (Qur’an 18:50) and that unlike the angels, the Qur’an mentions in the same verse that Iblīs has the ability to produce offspring.<sup>27</sup> ‘Abd al-Razzāq al-Kāshānī (d. 1329-35 CE) draws a distinction between “purely earthly angels” who are unable to perceive meanings out of forms and “heavenly rational angels” who can decipher meaning beyond form, such as recognizing the noble status of Adam. Rather, Iblīs belongs to the realm of the earthly power and was of the *jinn*.<sup>28</sup> Sayyid Quṭb (d. 1966 CE) suggests that since the angels’ foremost characteristic is that they “do not disobey God in whatever He commands them and always do what they are bidden” (Qur’an 66: 6), Iblīs’ disobedience establishes him as non-

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<sup>25</sup> Teuma, 15.

<sup>26</sup> Teuma, 17.

<sup>27</sup> Teuma, 17.

<sup>28</sup> ‘Abd al-Razzāq al-Kāshānī, *Tafsir al-Kashani: Great Commentaries on the Holy Quran* (Louisville, KY: Fons Vitae), 30.

angelic and a *jinn*.<sup>29</sup> However, it should be noted that Mu'tazilites held the contrary opinion and believed that the angels could disobey God.<sup>30</sup>

Thānvī equates the spiritual station of Iblīs with the angels before his fall, but the essence between them was different. *Jinn*, according to Thānvī, are beings possessing free-will, along with mankind, who have been given the ability to believe or disbelieve and obey or disobey.<sup>31</sup> The Qur'anic verse "... So they [all] prostrated, but not Iblīs: he was not among those who prostrated" (Qur'an 7:11) excludes Iblīs from the list.

Similarly, Ṭabāṭabā'ī notes that some scholars point to the Arabic grammatical convention of *taghlīb* (generalization) to explain the exception in relation to Iblīs; only the angels were mentioned because they were greater in number. Hence, the exception in the verse is a "connected exception" (*istithnā' mutṭaṣil*), "where what is excepted is part of the original group." Ṭabāṭabā'ī concedes that Iblīs was with the angels without any distinction in the station of *quds* (sanctity), as can be inferred from the Qur'anic verse, "When your Lord said to the angels, "Indeed I am going to set a viceroy on the earth," they said, "Will You set in it someone who will cause corruption in it, and shed blood, while we celebrate Your praise and proclaim Your sanctity?" (Qur'an 2:30). It can also be inferred that the divine command to prostrate was directed at the *station* based on the spiritual position those at the station held. Ṭabāṭabā'ī quotes the Qur'anic verse, "Get down from it! It is not for you to be arrogant therein" (7:13) hints at the station of Iblīs. Iblīs' disobedience and pride did not accord with his station and it split the station into two: the station of proximity [to God] and the station of distance [from God]. Against

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<sup>29</sup> Sayyid Quṭb, *In the Shade of the Quran*, vol. 1, 52.

<sup>30</sup> *The Study Quran*, ed. Seyyed Hossein Nasr, ed. Maria Massi Dakake Caner K. Dagli, Joseph E. Lumbard, Muhammed Rustom (New York: HarperCollins, 2015), 123.

<sup>31</sup> Thānvī, Exegesis of Q: 2:34.

*taghlīb*, some have argued that there were in fact two commands to prostrate before Adam: one to angels and one to Iblīs. This is one way some scholars have argued for an “unconnected exception” (*istithnā’ munqaṭi*) where what is excepted is not part of the original group. However, Ṭabāṭabā’ī is of the opinion that the following Qur’anic verse suggests that God issued a single command; “He holds Iblīs accountable for the same command addressed to the angels: “What prevented you from prostrating, when I commanded you?” (Qur’an 7:12). Ṭabāṭabā’ī explains that the reason why there could be two different responses to God’s single command, even though God’s will is supreme, is that Iblīs and angels were at the *same station*, but had two different essences.<sup>32</sup>

While there are notable exceptions, most scholars tend to argue in favor of Iblīs being one of the *jinn*. The scholars who argue in favor of the angelic nature of Iblīs converge with others on the issue of free-will and assigning responsibility. Both sets of scholars agree that Iblīs was responsible for his disobedience to God and was, therefore, rightly punished for it.

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<sup>32</sup> al-Ṭabāṭabā’ī, Ch. 7, p. 28.

## CHAPTER THREE

### RUMI, IBLĪS' PERVERSION OF THE GOOD, AND KHILĀFAH

One of the ways of leading people astray that Iblīs employs is to turn the good to his own perverse ends. He encourages people to perform good deeds, except that the “good deed” to which he guides is only apparently good; in fact, it is in the service of evil. Rumi can help us to understand how Iblīs' deception obscures the tremendous goodness that is the awareness of the human vicegerency of God. An illustration of Iblīs' manipulation of man towards apparent good that is in fact evil is found in the second book of Jalāl ad-Dīn Muḥammad Rūmī's (d. 1273 CE) *Masnavī*, when Iblīs encounters the Caliph Mu'āwiyah (d. 680 CE).<sup>33</sup> The synopsis of Rūmī's tale involves Mu'āwiyah<sup>34</sup> being awakened at dawn by a stranger, who insists that he woke him up so that he does not miss his obligatory morning prayer. Subsequently, the stranger reveals himself to be Iblīs, but he defends himself against Mu'āwiyah's suspicions of his motive by claiming that even though he has been divinely cursed and exiled, his love for God is ever-present and still strong. When Mu'āwiyah refuses to accept his reasons, Iblīs presents himself as a mere instrument in God's hands, who tests mankind, as per the wishes of God. He presents himself as a tragic victim, who is helpless in the face of God's *qadar* (power / measuring out). When Mu'āwiyah refuses to waver from his position, Iblīs gives in and reveals his true intention:

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<sup>33</sup> Jalāl ad-Dīn Mohammad Rūmī, *Mathnawi of Jalāl ad-Dīn Rūmī*, trans. Reynold A. Nicholson, vol. 2, Book 2 (London, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1926), 356-66 (2604-792).

<sup>34</sup> Since among Shi'ites Mu'āwiyah is normally disparaged, Shi'ites (and those familiar with Shi'ism), when reading this, should be clear that Rumi is presenting Mu'āwiyah in a positive light.

If you had let the time of prayer slip by,  
because of your heartrending grief, you would have sighed and  
made lament.  
That grief and that lament and that longing  
would have surpassed two hundred *dhikrs* [remembrances and  
ritual prayers].  
Therefore I awakened you,  
fearful lest such sighs burn away the veil,  
that such sighs might not be yours,  
that you might not discover a way to it.  
I am the envious one; from envy I acted thus.  
I am the enemy; my work is deception and malice.<sup>35</sup>

While there are many different ways through which Iblīs seeks to manifest his enmity against humankind, turning the good to serve his own ends is considered to be one of his chief insidious strengths.<sup>36</sup> Here, Rūmī recognizes an important paradox in Iblīs’ position: on the one hand, Iblīs’ has a profound love for the divine; yet, on the other hand, his love is distorted and misguided because he harbors a ‘cold, sadistic attitude towards men.’<sup>37</sup> Such a coldness to the greatest gift of human nature, vicegerency of God, enables Iblīs to strive to cause human beings to forget their vicegerency and lose awareness of it.

### ***Khilāfah and Human Vicegerency***

Given this tendency, reinforced by Iblīs, to forget our human vicegerency, what is its Qur’anic basis and how has it been understood by exegetes? The Qur’anic basis for the divine command to prostrate before Adam is the *khilāfat* (vicegerency) of Adam, “I am about to place a vicegerent (*khalīfah*) on earth” (Qur’an 2:30). *Khalīfah* is derived from the verb *khalafa* meaning

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<sup>35</sup> Rūmī, 2, Book 2, 365 (2780-85).

<sup>36</sup> For more information on the ways of Iblīs as *Shayṭān* see Mohsin Ghafari, *Iblīs-Nāmāh*, trans. Al-Sayyid Husnain Al-Rizvi Al-Qararwi, 2 vols., vol. I (Mumbai: Al-Ilm Publication, 2003).

<sup>37</sup> Awn, 87.

to take someone's place after them or succeed someone in some matter.<sup>38</sup> If Adam was to be God's *khalifah* on earth, who was he replacing or succeeding on earth? One of the traditions in this vein to which Ṭabarī refers was reported by Ibn 'Abbās, which has already been mentioned above. There, Ibn 'Abbās stated that it was the *jinn* who were the first dwellers of earth, who upon their corruption and bloodshed were punished by Iblīs and his fellow tribe-angels. According to this view, it was the *jinn* who were being replaced as the vicegerent of God by Adam.<sup>39</sup> In contrast, instead of the *jinn* who are being replaced by Adam as God's vicegerent, Abū 'Abdallāh Muḥammad al-Qurṭubī (d. 1272 CE) envisions the angels as being replaced by Adam, who is God's vicegerent.<sup>40</sup>

Both of these views, however, leave open the question of the textual justification of identifying the *khilafat* of *jinn* or angels prior to Adam. What is the textual evidence that establishes the precedence of *khilafat* before Adam and ascribing that to *jinn* or angels? 'Abd al-Karīm al-Qushayrī (d. 1073 CE) notes, in his discussion of the disclosure of God's "secret" (*sirr*) of Adam, "God created all the things He created, but [He] did not say about any of them what He said about Adam, when He said, "*I am appointing on earth a viceregent* (Qur'an 2:30)."<sup>41</sup> It suggests that Qushayrī's perspective is that there is no definitive Qur'anic textual evidence for ascribing vicegerency to *jinn* or angels before Adam. Rather, the vicegerency of Adam was a unique honor, distinction and responsibility divinely bestowed only on him (and by extension, humankind) out of all the creations of God. Furthermore, rather than replacing *jinn* or angels, this identification of the vicegerency as uniquely Adamic opens the way for the Sufi perspective that

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<sup>38</sup> al-Ṭabarī, 208.

<sup>39</sup> al-Ṭabarī, 209.

<sup>40</sup> Abū 'Abdullāh al-Qurṭubī, *Tafsir al-Qurtubi*, trans. Aisha Bewley (Diwan press, 2018), 140.

<sup>41</sup> Abū l-Qāsim 'Abd al-Karīm al-Qushayrī, *Laṭā'if al-Ishārāt: Subtle Allusions*, trans. Kristin Zahra Sands (Louisville, KY: Fons Vitae, 2017), 54.

Adam (and subsequently the core or “secret” (*sirr*) of each human being) is God’s vicegerent. In turn, the fall of Adam—which results in each person’s being forgetful of her/his vicegerency—sets the stage for remembrance of God (*dhikr* Allah) and the path to recovery or actualization of one’s vicegerency, which is *par excellence* the function of religion in general and the Sufi way, in particular.

Similarly departing from the identification of vicegerency with replacing jinn or angels, early exegetes such as Ḥasan al-Baṣrī and Ibn Mas‘ūd identified vicegerency as a human phenomena. Ḥasan al-Baṣrī conceptualizes Adam’s *khilāfat* as belonging to the human successors who succeed and replace each other: it is these subsequent generations that inherit vicegerency from each preceding generation.<sup>42</sup> One tradition from ‘Abdullah ibn Mas‘ūd (d. 653 CE) interprets *khalīfah* as the representative of God on earth in terms of authority and justice. It is the vicegerent who is charged with justly judging between humankind, identifying those people who do and do not make manifest the unfortunate human tendency to spread corruption and bloodshed on earth.

Subsequently, the Sufi exegetes Kāshānī and Maybūdī—together with the editors of *The Study Qur’an*—identify vicegerency as human nature’s capacity to represent God if God’s guidance is followed. Kāshānī envisions *khilāfat* as the embodiment of “God created man in His own image”.<sup>43</sup> For him, a vicegerent is one who assumes “My character traits and My descriptions and execute My command and rule My creatures and manage their affair, keeping their laws in check, summoning them to obedience of Me.”<sup>44</sup> In the same vein, Rashīd al-Dīn

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<sup>42</sup> al-Ṭabarī, 209.

<sup>43</sup> *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, May 13, 2021 <https://sunnah.com/muslim:2612e> . Also, this is noted in the Hebrew Bible (Gen 1:27).

<sup>44</sup> al-Kāshānī, 28.

Maybudī (d. 1504 CE) states, “In him the subtleties of My generosity and the artifacts of My bounteousness will become apparent.”<sup>45</sup> Not every human being is a *khalīfah*, but everyone has the *access* to being one through perfecting and mirroring the divine attributes in oneself. Similarly, the editors of *The Study Qur’an* interpret the Qur’anic *khilāfah* as a universal inner reality and perfecting potential – that all humans have inherited.<sup>46</sup> At another level, it also refers to the fact that human beings were the last divine creatures after all the creatures and grades of being had already been created.<sup>47</sup> Just as a fruit tree grows the fruit last, human beings are the last and the penultimate creation (and within humanity, the *al-insān al-kāmil* – the one who has reached perfection) to come.

On the one hand, in contrast to such Sufi exegesis, the mainstream Sunni exegete Qurṭubī notes that the *khalīfah* was Adam and not the mankind collectively, according to the tradition of Ibn ‘Abbās and Ibn Mas‘ūd.<sup>48</sup> On the other hand, the mainstream 20<sup>th</sup> century Shi’ite exegete, Ṭabāṭabā’ī, does identify vicegerency as a quality of humanity in general. He posits *khalīfah* as not so much a replacement but as the representation of God on earth, stating that it is not a succession of any earthly creature that precedes Adam. This distinction was not unique to Adam specifically, but is unique to humankind.<sup>49</sup> Ṭabāṭabā’ī quotes the following Qur’anic verses to elucidate the Qur’anic usage of the word *khalīfah* as successors: “And remember (O people of ‘Ād!) when He made you *successors* of Noah's people . . .” (Qur’an 7:69); “Then We made you *successors* in the land after them . . .” (Qur’an 10:14); “. . . and He makes you *successors* in the

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<sup>45</sup> Rashīd al-Dīn Maybudī, *The Unveiling of the Mysteries and the Provision of the Pious*, trans. William C. Chittick (Louisville, KY: Fons Vitae, 2015), 21.

<sup>46</sup> *The Study Quran*, 123.n30.

<sup>47</sup> *The Study Quran*, 123.

<sup>48</sup> al-Qurṭubī, 148.

<sup>49</sup> al-Ṭabāṭabā’ī, Ch. 2, p. 196.

earth” (Qur’an 27:62).<sup>50</sup> It reflects the Qur’anic understanding of *khalifah* as a collective and successive principle. Moreover, Ṭabāṭabā’ī notes that Iblīs is quoted in the Qur’an as saying, “As You have consigned me to perversity I will surely lie in wait for them on Your straight path. Then I will come at them from their front and from their rear...(7:16-17) and “By Your might, I will surely pervert them all” (38:82). The plural pronouns used to refer to humankind indicates Iblīs’ outright hostility to *all* humankind, and not just Adam. It alludes to the fact that the *khilafah* is a universal inheritance of all human beings, and so was the prostration directed towards all human beings and not exclusively to Adam.<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> al-Ṭabāṭabā’ī, Ch. 2, p. 196.

<sup>51</sup>The question of why such an honor was accorded to Adam, and by extension humankind, involves a discussion involving the divine “secret” (*sirr*) and “the Divine names” (Qur’an 2:31), which is beyond the scope of this thesis.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### ADAM AND EVE IN THE GARDEN AND PROSTRATION TO ADAM

Adam and Eve's worthiness of being in the Garden is directly related to their being worthy of being the object of prostration, the reason for which is Adamic vicegerency. Adam's placement in the Garden is mentioned in three places in the Qur'an (2:35-39; 7:19-25; 20:115-127). God creates Adam to be His vicegerent on earth and places Adam and his wife in the Garden (Qur'an 2:30; 2:35). They are at liberty to do whatever they please. However, God prohibits them from eating from a particular tree. Satan appears and convinces them to transgress God's command and to eat from the tree. When they give in to Satan's suggestions, God orders them to leave the Garden and to live on earth. Adam repents and his repentance is accepted by God and God promises His mercy to anyone who follows His guidance. It follows that the traditional or orthodox understanding is that this marks the first victory of the Satan against Adam, who caused his downfall, and by extension, the downfall of humankind of whom Satan is a sworn enemy.<sup>52</sup>

Ṭabāṭabā'ī notes that "Verily I am going to make in the earth a vicegerent" (Qur'an 2:30) shows that "it was for earth that Adam was created; it was the original plan that he should live and die in the world." He was created specifically for the earth and the "way to send him down was through the Garden." They were only placed in the Garden temporarily in order to make them aware of their nakedness. In fact, Ṭabāṭabā'ī observes that the awareness of their nakedness

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<sup>52</sup> Öztürk, 128.

was the “factor which irrevocably showed that they were fit for this earth, ready for this life.” The awareness of their private parts symbolizes the knowledge of the earthly aspects of their being. While Adam and his wife nourished the spiritual aspects of their being through their close proximity to God and angels in the Garden, they were yet to understand the life of this earth and its concomitants. Their stay in the Garden was contingent upon the preparation for an earthly existence. The very nature of the earthly existence is its ephemerality; hence, the stay in the Garden was meant to be limited, not perpetual.<sup>53</sup>

The way of sending Adam to earth through the Garden and that too with a stigma of mistake was designed to show him his true reality – “how humble, dependent, deficient and servile he was.” It allowed him to realize the divine attributes of forgiveness, mercy, compassion, and grace. It is through this process and the stages of the journey that God had decreed for him that Adam was able to attain the stations of spiritual perfection and eternal bliss. For Ṭabāṭabā’ī, Adam and Eve’s nakedness on earth played a role in their attainment of spiritual perfection and eternal bliss. In relation to their nakedness on earth, Ṭabāṭabā’ī notes that the Qur’an says, “what was hidden from them,” and not “what had been hidden from them.” This expression allows us to infer that their nakedness was not meant to be hidden in perpetuity and was only discovered through an accident, but it was hidden for only a short period of time and its uncovering was a pre-determined fact. In fact, the uncovering of their nakedness was the *raison d’etre* of their stay in the Garden. Once it was achieved, their stay in the Garden came to its natural and logical conclusion.<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> Ṭabāṭabā’ī, 2: 216

<sup>54</sup> al-Ṭabāṭabā’ī, Ch. 2, p. 217.

The life of Adam on earth after the descent also indicates that while God accepted his repentance, He did not return Adam and his wife to the Garden. Ṭabāṭabā'ī notes that “they would have been returned to their place in the Garden as soon as they were forgiven their mistake.” The fact that the earthly life continued even after God had forgiven them demonstrates that the life on earth was not causally related to their transgression in the Garden. Their descent to earth was not a punishment for their act, but rather a fulfillment of a pre-determined plan. If it were a punishment for their act, the punishment would have ended the moment God relented unto Adam. Its continuation indicates its nature – earthly life was the purpose of Adam’s existence and his descent to earth was a realization of that end. It is not the ‘Fall’ in the sense it occurs in the Hebrew Bible – it is the realization of the cosmic role of Adam and his progeny.<sup>55</sup>

Ṭabāṭabā'ī nuances his discussion on Adam’s slip and its aftermath by acknowledging that while it did result in him losing his earlier station of honor in the Garden among the heavenly beings and led to a life of toil and hardship on earth, God bestowed dignity and grace to the earthly life by promising divine guidance. In this sense God stated, “We said: “Get down you therefore all together; and if there comes to you a guidance from Me, then whoever follows My guidance, no fear shall come upon them, nor shall they grieve” (Qur’an 2:38). It also demonstrates the nature of the divine prohibition. Ṭabāṭabā'ī argues that the prohibition did not amount to an “authoritative command; it was rather like an advice to guide Adam to his good and comfort.” If Adam had gone against an authoritative command, he would have sinned and the aftermath of his act, namely, his descent to this world, would have amounted to punishment. However, the fact that God forgives Adam but does not restore his original condition further proves that God bestowed dignity and grace on earthly life through his tidings of divine guidance. If the history of

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<sup>55</sup> Ibid.

humanity's existence on earth began with Adam's act, it did not begin as a punishment but rather as a realization of the true nature and purpose of humanity.<sup>56</sup>

We also find such ruminations on divine pre-destination in Rūmī's works concerning Adam:

When Adam sinned, God exiled him from Paradise. God said to him, "Oh Adam! Since I have held you responsible and punished you for that sin you committed, why did you not dispute with Me? After all, you had an argument. You could have said, 'All is from You, and You make all. Whatever You desire in the world comes to pass, and whatever You do not desire will never come to pass.' After all, you had such a clear, correct, and patient argument. Why did you not give expression to it?" Adam replied, "I knew that, but I did not abandon courtesy in Your Presence; love for You did not allow me to reproach You."<sup>57</sup>

It is clear that even though Rūmī acknowledges the divinely ordained nature and inevitability of Adam's act, courtesy and *adab* (Islamic etiquette) require attribution of error to oneself. The idea goes back to distinction that Ṭabāṭabā'ī draws between an authoritative command and divine advice or suggestion. Even though God prohibited Adam from eating from the tree, His will was in accordance with Adam's actions. Adam not only forgot the divine suggestion, he was destined to do so, as Ibn 'Abbās points out, "God drove out Adam from Paradise before He created him."<sup>58</sup> A Prophetic ḥadīth which closely resembles this sentiment is recorded in the *Jami'* of Abū 'Īsā Muḥammad at-Tirmidhī (d. 892 CE):

Adam and Moses argued, and Moses said, "O Adam, you whom God created with His hands and breathed His spirit into have led the people astray and exiled them from Paradise." Adam replied, "And you, O Moses, whom God purified with His own speech, do you blame me for committing an act which God had fated for me before the creation of the heavens and the earth?" So Adam bested Moses in the argument.<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> al-Ṭabāṭabā'ī, Ch. 2, p. 230.

<sup>57</sup> William C. Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Love: The Spiritual Teachings of Rumi* (New York: State University of New York Press, 1984), 85.

<sup>58</sup> M. J. Kister, "Adam: A Study of Some Legends in Tafsir and Hadit Literature," 155.

<sup>59</sup> Jonathan A. C. Brown, *Hadith: Muhammad's Legacy in the Medieval and Modern World* (London, UK: OneWorld Publications, 2017), 176.

Such an emphasis on predestination is a characteristic feature of Sunni and Sufi sources. Al-Qushayrī, in his *Laṭā'if al-ishārāt*, asks, “When [God] said, *I am appointing on earth a vicegerent* [Qur’an 2:30], how could [Adam] have remained in the garden?”<sup>60</sup> The implication here being, the prior appointment of Adam as a vicegerent *on earth*, his stay in the Garden could not have been anything but temporary and purposeful. Sahl al-Tustarī (d. 896 CE) notes:

Then He ordered him [Adam] to enter the Garden and eat from it at ease wherever he wished, after which He decreed to him that he may not eat from the Tree. When he entered the Garden and saw what he saw there, he said, ‘If only we could stay here forever; yet, indeed, we have an appointed time that extends to a known limit.’<sup>61</sup>

In sum, the temporary nature of Adam and Eve in the Garden necessitated the intervention of Iblīs in order that the purpose of the paradisaical stay be realized. While such an emphasis on prior determination and the essentiality of Iblīs’ role may sharpen the tragedy of his fate, it is important to remember that the cosmic role of Iblīs is an *acquired* role post-fall. The consequence and the necessity of it does not translate into compulsion in his refusal to obey God’s command to prostrate before Adam. This point is elaborated further in this paper in the later section dealing with “Pre-destination and Free-Will.”

### ***Prostration before Adam***

The divine command to the angels and Iblīs to prostrate before Adam begs the question of the meaning and nature of prostration. God stated, “He said, “What prevented thee from prostrating when I commanded thee?” He said, “I am better than him. Thou hast created me from fire, while Thou hast created him from clay” (Qur’an 7:12). Iblīs, like all the creation of God, are under the original command of God – which is to worship only God. Therefore, prostrating before Adam,

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<sup>60</sup> al-Qushayrī, 62.

<sup>61</sup> Sahl al-Tustarī, *Tafsir Al-Tustari (Great Commentaries of the Holy Qur'an)*, trans. Annabel Keeler; Ali Keeler, ed. Yusef Meri (Louisville, KY: Fons Vitae, 2011), 16.

someone other than God, “would simultaneously represent an act of obedience to God’s command and – according to the thinking some commentators and mystics imaginatively attributed to Iblīs – a compromise of his obligation to worship only God.”<sup>62</sup> Al-Rāzī interprets prostration as an indication that the primordial Adam holds a station higher than the angels. Prostration, in this case, shifts away from being an act of worship to being symbolic of the recognition of the spiritual greatness of another. The angels, then, were ultimately bowing to God and taking Adam as their *qiblah* (direction of prayer).<sup>63</sup> In the same vein, Rūmī says in a couplet:

The man is like Iblīs, for his pride and blind imitation makes him disdain service  
to the saint.

He says, “God is sufficient as an object of my prostration.”

Adam answers him, “The prostration is to Him. You see two  
because you have gone astray and denied.”<sup>64</sup>

Qushayrī concurs, “It was as if their prostration to Adam was worship of God because it was by His command.”<sup>65</sup> He differentiates between prostration as a form of worship (‘*ibāda*’) and prostration as a form of respect and submission (*khudū’*) to Adam. Prostration as worship is the utmost submission (*nihāyat al-khudū’*) “that is not appropriate toward anything but [God].”<sup>66</sup> Ṭabāṭabā’ī quotes a narration of ‘Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib (d. 661 CE) who distinguished prostration as a gesture of respect from worship: “Allah ordered His angels to prostrate before Adam; yet their prostration was not a prostration of worship; (it was not) that they had worshipped Adam against Allah, Mighty and Great is He! It was rather as an acknowledgement of Adam's superiority and a

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<sup>62</sup> *The Study Quran*, 411.

<sup>63</sup> *The Study Quran*, 409.

<sup>64</sup> Chittick, 84.

<sup>65</sup> al-Qushayrī, 60.

<sup>66</sup> al-Qushayrī, 60.

mercy of Allah towards him.”<sup>67</sup> Therefore, Ṭabāṭabā’ī does not see worship as the quidditative substance of prostration, that renders itself meaningless without it.<sup>68</sup>

Maybudī posits that the heavenly creatures were commanded to bow before Adam on the account of his heart: ‘it was on account of the heart (*dil*) not the clay (*gil*)’.<sup>69</sup> It was not the external form of Adam that accorded him such a distinction in the eyes of God, but the inner divine secret and knowledge of “the names” (Qur’an 2:31). Thānvī points to the, “When I have shaped him, and breathed My spirit in him, fall you down, bowing before him!” (Qur’an 15:29) and “So when I have fashioned him and had a spirit of My Own ‘creation’ breathed into him, fall down in prostration to him” (Qur’an 38:72). The sequence within the verses indicates that the command to prostrate before Adam became active and applicable only after God had breathed His Spirit into Adam. The prostration, therefore, was not directed so much at the form of Adam as to the Spirit that animates the form.<sup>70</sup> Kāshānī renders the prostration to Adam as symbolic of the angels’ pliancy and submissiveness to him.<sup>71</sup> *Khilafat*, implying agency, necessitates the compliance and obedience of angels to humans in order for humans to actualize their potentialities. Being the agents of the universal governance, angels serve humans towards this end, according to Thānvī.<sup>72</sup> Most exegetes, therefore, converge on the point that the prostration to Adam was not one of worship, but as symbolic of respect and spiritual greatness of Adam that is rooted in God breathing His spirit into Adam.

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<sup>67</sup> al-Ṭabāṭabā’ī, Ch. 2, p. 211.

<sup>68</sup> al-Ṭabāṭabā’ī, Ch. 2, p. 208.

<sup>69</sup> Rashīd al-Dīn Maybudī, *Sufi Hermeneutics: the Qur’an commentary of Rashid al-Din Maybudi*, trans. Annabel Keeler (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2006), 135.

<sup>70</sup> Thānvī, Exegesis of Q: 2:34.

<sup>71</sup> al-Kāshānī, 30.

<sup>72</sup> Thānvī, Exegesis of Q: 2:34.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### ḤALLĀJIAN-SUFI TRADITION VIS-À-VIS IBLIS

Manṣūr al-Ḥallāj (d. 922 CE) is the Sufi who is credited with being the first to offer a mystical defense of Iblīs in his work, *Kitāb al-Tawāsīn*. He argued that things are only known and defined through their opposites. Good is not recognizable without evil. Juxtaposing antithetical spiritual realities, such as Iblīs and Muhammad, was one of the pedagogical devices employed by Ḥallāj to jolt the readers' minds to appreciate the wisdom in *Iblīs*' monotheism. At the heart of his refusal, according to Ḥallāj, is not pride of self or coercion through God's will, but the depth of his contemplation of the Beloved. Peter Awn, in the *Satan's Tragedy and Redemption*, says, "The essence of contemplation is the free gift of self in love, a mutual self-donation; such an experience cannot come through compulsion."<sup>73</sup> In a beautiful passage in *Tawāsīn*, Ḥallāj says:

There was no monotheist like Iblīs among the inhabitants of the heavens. When the Essence revealed itself to him in stunning glory, he renounced even a glance at it and worshipped God in ascetic isolation . . . God said to him, 'Bow!' He replied, 'To no other!' He said to him, 'Even if My curse be upon you?' He cried out, 'To no other!'<sup>74</sup>

It is the original, first divine command to worship only God and to not ascribe any partners to Him that kept *Iblīs* from prostrating before someone other than God. *Iblīs*' devotion to absolute monotheism, from Ḥallāj's perspective, required that even if God commands Iblīs to violate his oath and prostrate before someone other than Him, he would refuse. Even if that would result in God's disapproval, *Iblīs*' love for God requires his abandonment and annihilation of this self.

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<sup>73</sup> Awn, 128.

<sup>74</sup> Awn, 124.

Aḥmad al-Ghazālī (d. 1126 CE) echoes Ḥallāj’s refrain when he said, ‘Whoever does not learn monotheism from Iblīs, he is a *zindiq* (dualist).’<sup>75</sup> Even at the risk of eternal damnation, *Iblīs* embodied absolute monotheism by acknowledging God as the only one worthy of his worship and prostration.

In contrast to such a Ḥallājīan perspective, *Iblīs*, as the epitome of evil and seduction, is commonly seen as the spiritual antithesis of Muhammad, who is considered as the guide on the Straight Path. However, they are similar in the sense that they are both fulfilling divine purposes; one leads away from the Path, while the other guides to it. Ayn-al-Quḍāt Hamadhānī (d. 1131 CE) recognizes the paradox in *Iblīs* when he observed that his disobedience earned him cosmic stature. The tension between opposites also features in the Muslim profession of faith. The realm of *lā ‘ilāha* (there is no god) is the realm of falsehood and negation, while the realm of *‘illā-llāh* (but God!) is the station of truth and peace.<sup>76</sup> Hamadhānī posits *Iblīs* as the most qualified and adept at being the chamberlain and guardian of *lā ‘ilāha*, whereas Muhammad is the guide of *‘illā-llāh*. *Iblīs* gains the role of a principal agent in God’s plan, as per Hamadhānī’s views. *Iblīs* says:

The Beloved said to me, ‘Sit at My door,  
do not allow anyone inside who is not in accord with Me.  
To him who desires Me, says, “Be enraptured!  
this state is not suitable for any man unless I find it suitable.”<sup>77</sup>

Paradoxically, God’s curse on *Iblīs* earned him cosmic stature and became his robe of honor. It marks him as the perfect servant and instrument of His will. Hamadhānī argues that the juxtaposition of the Black Light of *Iblīs* and the White Light of Muhammad is necessary for

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<sup>75</sup> Awn, 133.

<sup>76</sup> Awn, 135.

<sup>77</sup> Awn, 134.

advancement on the spiritual path and they exist in mutual dependence. The tension between the opposites only resolves in the unknowable essence of the Absolute.<sup>78</sup> Iblīs says: “He is the creator of the beautiful and the corrupt, the sick and the healthy, has joined together the thing and its opposite in order to manifest the perfection of His power, and the splendor of His might; for things become known only through their opposites.”<sup>79</sup>

Ḥamadhānī advances the role of love inherent in the fall of Iblīs. Iblīs’ intimacy with God enabled him to realize that his role has been preordained. In fact, Iblīs’ intimacy with God has been well-recognized in the Islamic tradition. Spiritual knowledge of Iblīs is unquestioned – he is considered to be a master of all spiritual and legal branches of knowledge. He is most knowledgeable concerning what is considered *ḥalāl* (licit) and *harām* (illicit), and “he is known to discourse eloquently about the seven hundred steps leading to *ma`rifa*, spiritual gnosis.”<sup>80</sup> His refusal to obey the command and risking the divine wrath, then, becomes his ultimate sacrifice of the self to the will of the Beloved. Therefore, Iblīs says:

Whether my fortune be white or black, both are one since the Beloved made me worthy of His remembrance. Whoever considers these separate, he is still raw in matters of love. when it comes from the loved one’s hand, what difference is there between honey and poison? Sugar and colocynth? Kindness and oppression? Whoever is either a lover of kindness or a lover of oppression, he is a lover of self, not a lover of the Beloved.<sup>81</sup>

Such a framework of love and self-annihilation turns Iblīs from the epitome of evil to the paragon of love and self-sacrifice. It does not contradict Iblīs’ role in the world as a guide and tempter away from the Straight Path. Instead, it contextualizes Iblīs’ cosmic role as not one borne out of arrogance and self-sufficiency, but a station of unique honor bestowed on him given his

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<sup>78</sup> Awn, 137.

<sup>79</sup> Awn, 137.

<sup>80</sup> Awn, 79.

<sup>81</sup> Awn, 143.

extreme self-effacement in his love for God. This refrain echoes in the verse of the Sindhi poet, Shah Abdul Latif Bhittai (d. 1752 CE), who says:

‘Azāzīl [Iblīs] is the true lover; the others are all full of  
empty desire. He became accursed of his abundant love.<sup>82</sup>

Another level of the theological question inherent in Iblīs’ actions center around the difference between God’s *irāda* (will) and *amr* (command). Awn discusses ‘Azz ad-Dīn b. Ghānim al-Maqdisī *al-Taflīs al-Iblīs* (*The Bankruptcy of Iblīs*), in which Iblīs presents his reasoning by distinguishing between God’s speech and His intentionality / will. Iblīs re-contextualizes the divine command to prostrate as a test of love and perspicacity. God’s eternal will is to be worshipped alone. Since God’s command to bow to another than Him was in variance with his eternal will, Iblīs distinguished himself by staying true to God’s will from the rest of the heavenly creatures, who only saw the command but did not realize its nature and underlying purpose. It reflects the unique intimacy of Iblīs with God before his fall that enabled Iblīs to decipher the true purpose of the divine command that the angels failed to recognize. Iblīs says:

“From the first, in the exalted assembly of rulers, He made me the one of the most knowledgeable about things of beauty, and I adorned the spheres with them. I was also the most knowledgeable about *tawhīd* (proclaiming the oneness of God) and their leader in glorification and praise.”<sup>83</sup>

In doing so, Iblīs regains agency while invoking the epistemological value of his love. He justifies his act through claiming knowledge of God’s inscrutable will. In the *Futūḥāt al-Makkiyya* (The Meccan Illuminations), Ibn ‘Arabī presents a dialogue between Iblīs and God:

Iblīs said to the Real, “You commanded me to do what You did not desire to occur from me. If You had desired that I prostrate myself before Adam, I would have prostrated myself.” God said to him, “When did you come to know that I did not desire prostration from you? was it after the occurrence of your refusal and the elapse of the time of the

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<sup>82</sup> Shah Abdul Latif Bhittai, *Risalo*, trans. Christopher Shackle (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2018), 51.

<sup>83</sup> Awn, 107.

command, or before it? [Satan] said to Him, “After the occurrence of the refusal, I came to know that, if You had desired for me to prostrate myself, I would have prostrated myself.” God said to him “That is why I took you to task.”<sup>84</sup>

This is an indication of Muḥī al-Dīn ibn `Arabī’s (d. 1240 CE) view on the defense of Iblīs based on a distinction between God’s *amr* and *irāda*. The claim that God’s *irāda* necessitated Iblīs’ disobedience of His direct *amr* is presumptuous and it hints at the original Qur’anic ascription of pride to Iblīs’ disobedience rather than an intimacy and knowledge of God. Ruzbihan Baqlī (d. 1209 CE) criticizes this position by asserting that Iblīs invented a fallacious distinction between God’s *amr* and His *irāda*, which involves sidestepping His *amr* as merely a test, a trial, which was meant to be disobeyed. He posits that if Iblīs had comprehended Adam as “the mirror of God, in the way that Moses perceived the miracle of the mountain, Iblīs would have bowed without question.”<sup>85</sup> Baqlī contends that love of God does not entail disobedience of Him; rather, it demands His unquestioning obedience, even when the command of the Beloved perplexes the lover. However, it could be argued, from the Ḥallājīan-Sufī perspective, that God does not command a thing that is impossible. Since the command to prostrate before someone other than God implies an impossibility for the lover to violate his oath of monotheism, this indicates that the second command was intended to be a test of love, rather than a literal one.

The Hallajian defense of Iblīs valorizes the love and knowledge of Iblīs to the extent where Iblīs’ disobedience turns into an act of self-sacrifice. Such a sacrifice manifests itself into the unique cosmic role that only Iblīs has been divinely entrusted with. However, other Sufis such as Ibn `Arabī and Baqlī ascribe pride to the act of disobedience of Iblīs and distinguish between the necessity of his role post-fall and the reason and responsibility of his disobedience.

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<sup>84</sup> William C. Chittick, "Iblīs: Iblīs and the Jinn in Al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyya," in *Classical Arabic Humanities in Their Own Terms*, ed. Beatrice Gruendler and Michael Cooperson (Leiden, Netherlands: Brill Academic Publishers, 2008), 121.

<sup>85</sup> Awn, 132.

## CHAPTER SIX

### PREDESTINATION AND FREE-WILL

The Hallajian defense of Iblīs directs us to the underlying premise of the understanding of theodicy in Islam. The question of evil or theodicy has been an important theological inquiry in the intellectual history of Islam. How can a perfectly good God (*Ar-Raḥmān*) create a world in which there is suffering and the manifestation of evil? Since God is the creator of everything, is God also responsible for creating evil? If not, is there an agency outside God which is responsible for evil – this line of thinking may be theologically contentious - since it delimits God’s power. If God is omnipotent, why does He not intervene and put a stop to evil?

In the Islamic context, the question of theodicy is inherently linked to the view(s) on Iblīs (Satan). Does Iblīs possess the power to mislead people and create evil, which in turn would imply a creative agency besides God when He is the *Creator of all things* (Q 40:62)? Theologically, God’s power is absolute – everything that exists is through Him. If so, does such a view relegate Iblīs to a mere instrument of God’s Will? Doing so would imply that it is God, rather than Iblīs, who is responsible for the existence and perpetuation of evil in the created plane of existence.

The portrayal of *Iblīs* as a martyr of love and an epitome of monotheistic servitude in the Ḥallājīan-inspired tradition within Sufism rests on the premise of the divine pre-determination and pre-destination. As part of his justification of his disobedience and a consequence of him being exiled from the Presence of God, *Iblīs* is quoted in the Qur’an as saying, “Because You have led

me astray, I will definitely waylay them along Your Straight Path” (Qur’an 7:16). One way to interpret this justification of *Iblīs* is to view the attribution of his error not to himself, but to God. It is a defense of an act without real agency - a mere instrument of God - deprived of any real choice. Abû Hâmid Muhammad al-Ghazālî (d. 1111 CE) presents the predestinarian argument as such, “It is not proper for you to say, ‘This is my act . . .’ We are mistaken if we attribute acts to ourselves. It is God who actually attributes the acts to individuals, be the action good or evil.”<sup>86</sup> Along the same lines, ‘Abdallâh Anṣārî (d. 1088 CE) remarks, “It is God who chose Adam to be one of the elect, and transformed *Iblīs* into a rebellious sinner. Out of reverence, like Adam, we ascribe faults to ourselves, “ . . . but, in truth, You instigated the crime.”<sup>87</sup> This is an allusion to the theological question of free will *versus* predestination. In terms of *Iblīs*’ disobedience, it results in the ultimate responsibility with God, since in the face of God’s absolute *qadar* (power / measuring out), *Iblīs*’ refusal to prostrate sprung out of the coercive power of God’s Will. Such a deterministic framework absolves *Iblīs* of any culpability of his actions.

Maybudî relates that Sahl al-Tustarî once inquired *Iblīs* about his disobedience. *Iblīs*, in a state of grief over his separation and alienation from God, explains that his disobedience was inevitable because ‘his carpet was woven black.’<sup>88</sup> It seeks to indicate that his fate was divinely decreed and there was no escaping it. When questioned by Bāyazîd al-Baṣṭāmî (d. 874 CE), *Iblīs*’ defense revolves around his inability to exercise free will in the face of God’s *qadar* (power / measuring out); “since all opposition or compliance comes from Him, we have no power over it.”<sup>89</sup> Such an exegesis of the fall of *Iblīs* seeks to emphasize the absolute power and control of God over

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<sup>86</sup> Awn, 97.

<sup>87</sup> Awn, 100.

<sup>88</sup> Maybudî, *The Unveiling of the Mysteries and the Provision of the Pious*, 24.

<sup>89</sup> Maybudî, *Sufi Hermeneutics: the Qur’an commentary of Rashid al-Din Maybudi*, 183.

everything in the face of which the self or free-will is effaced. It echoes the *Jabriyyah* school of theology in their emphasis on pre-determinism exclusively.

*Al-Qadā* implies “God’s judgment (divine decree) in all the matters from eternity to the end of the world.”<sup>90</sup> *Al-Qadā*, from the verb *qudiya*, means “predestination or determination.”<sup>91</sup> *Qadā* and its closely related synonym, *Qadar*, are considered to be one of the tenets of faith, as reflected in the Prophetic *ḥādīth* (saying), “No servant of God truly believes until he believes in *qadar*, its good and evil, and until he realizes what has befallen him was not going to miss him and what missed him was not going to befall him.”<sup>92</sup> Such theological weight attributed to *qadar* shifted the focus entirely on Divine determinism for *Jabriyyah* (lit. Compulsionists; from the word *jabr*, meaning constraint), who believed in divine predestination exclusively over human free-will. Their position was supported by the Qur’anic verse: “And you do not will but that God wills. Truly God is Knowing” (Qur’an 76:30). This verse was considered *mutashābih* (allegorical) by al-Zamakhsharī in his *Mu’tazilite* exegesis of the Qur’an.<sup>93</sup> The *Mu’tazilites* (from the Arabic *i’tazala*, meaning those who separated) is a major school of Islamic theology that started in Basra and Baghdad (8<sup>th</sup> – 10 centuries). Their self-designated name is the “Partisans of Unity and Justice” – referring to the absolute unity of God and Justice referring to humans being responsible for their own actions through free-will. *Mu’tazilites* sought to absolve God for the error and shortcomings of humans and argued in favor of people’s responsibility for their own actions.<sup>94</sup> Taking such categorization of the Qur’anic verses in accordance with their theological principles to the logical conclusions, the following verse was considered to be *muḥkam* (decisive) by Zamakhsharī:

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<sup>90</sup> Kifayat Ullah, "Al-Kashshāf: Al-Zamakhsharī's (D. 538/1144) Mu'tazilite Exegesis of the Qur'ān" (Doctor of Philosophy Georgetown University, 2013), 129-30.

<sup>91</sup> "KADA," in *Encyclopaedia of Islam, Second Edition*, Encyclopaedia of Islam (Leiden: Brill).

<sup>92</sup> Sunan al-Tirmidhi May 13, 2021 <https://sunnah.com/urn/722890> . See also *The Study Quran*, 1306.

<sup>93</sup> Ullah, 129.

<sup>94</sup> *The Study Quran*, 1306.

“Whosoever wishes, let him believe; and whosoever wishes, let him disbelieve”(Qur’an 18:29).<sup>95</sup> In the *Mu’tazilite* framework of Zamakhsharī, the acts of disobedience of humans are to be attributed to their own agency; and *Iblīs*’ disobedience is to be attributed to himself and not to a pre-ordained divine decree. From Zamakhsharī’s perspective, the *Jabriyyah* are mistaken in their emphasis on “God has sealed their hearts and their hearing, and on their sight is a veil. For them is a great punishment” (Qur’an 2:7), Zamakhsharī, in contrast, views this verse metaphorically to imply that human agency has resulted in hearts being sealed. He employs the trope of a ‘seal’ as *isti’āra* (metaphor) conveying the fact that truth does not “enter into the hearts of the disbelievers because they turn away and reject it.”<sup>96</sup> The “seal,” if anything, is a consequence of the disbelief, not the cause of it. *Iblīs*’ fate, accordingly, is a consequence of his disobedience, but was not the cause of it and was not divinely pre-ordained. The rationalistic theology of the *Mu’tazilites* emphasizes a theodicy that conceptualizes evil as the result of human free-will as opposed to stemming from God. It is so since God only commands what is in accordance with reason, evil therefore is human, irrational and anti-reason.

Is man the creator of his own actions and consequently, is God’s justice constrained by man’s actions in this world? In terms of our understanding of *Iblīs*, did *Iblīs* create his own action, independently of God, when he chose to refuse to prostrate before Adam? The *Mu’tazilite* theology of free-will views divine will as contradicting and competing with human freedom. It logically necessitates a dualism of creative agency – one of God and one of humans. It is *Iblīs* and man who create their own evil actions and are responsible for it.

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<sup>95</sup> Ullah, 129.

<sup>96</sup> Ullah, 137.

The *Ash`arite* school of theology found this position theologically abhorrent. The *Ash`arite* theologians differentiated between the responsibility/causation of an act and the creation of the act. While humans are responsible for their actions, they are not the creators of these actions, since only God is the “Creator of all things” (40:62). In an effort to preserve human agency and God’s Omnipotence, *Ash`arite* theologians make a distinction between “the creation of acts and their acquisition (*kasb*).”<sup>97</sup> While God is the creator of all possible courses of action, man is free to choose among the various possible courses of action on the horizontal plane. When one chooses an action, its acquisition makes the doer responsible for it, while the action itself was a creation of God.

Such *Ash`arī* inclinations on predetermination of actions are reflected in Qushayrī’s treatment of *Iblīs*. In his disempowering reference to *Iblīs’ qudrah* (power) to lead people astray, Qushayrī states, “*Iblīs* himself is one who is turned about in the grip [of God] according to what the Creator desires. If there was even an atom of [self-sufficiency] that one could affirm in him, [that would mean that] there is an associate to divinity in him. Instead, it is only the Real who brings about in created beings their states and circumstances (*aḥwālan*) and who creates that which follows [satanic] whisperings in being led astray (*ḍalālan*). For He is the Guide and the One who leads astray, and the One who has free disposal over all.”<sup>98</sup> Shifting the attribution of causation and *qudrah* to God, Qushayrī envisions *Iblīs’* as an instrument in the hands of God that is put to use towards His own ends. Qushayrī rejects any notions of creative agency and independence of *Iblīs*, with the implication that neither *Iblīs* nor his human followers are creating their evil actions.

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<sup>97</sup> *The Study Quran*, 1306.

<sup>98</sup> al-Qushayrī, 441.

Rather, it seems to suggest that it is God who creates the action *only after* the human gives in to the satanic whisperings and decides to act on it.

Similarly, in the exegesis of the “Then Satan caused them to slip therefrom and brought them out of what they were in,” (Qur’an 2:36), Qushayrī states, “He caused them to slip (*azallahumā*), that is, “he made them slip” (*ḥamalahumā ‘alā l-zalla*). In actuality nothing gave them free agency except the divine power and nothing turned them about except the divine decree.”<sup>99</sup> Qushayrī conceptualizes free agency as not opposed to or negating the divine decree, but possible and operational precisely *because* of the divine decree. In relation to Iblīs’ power to lead people astray, Qushayrī says, “If Satan were to have authority to seduce others, he would have had the possibility of guiding himself. How can that be? The unique ability to create everything is one of the characteristics that describe [God].”<sup>100</sup> Satan’s ability to entice and tempt humans away from the Path of God, according to Qushayrī, is derived from and sustained through God’s creative power, for God is the ultimate Guide (*Hādī*). In Ibn ‘Arabī’s *Shajarat al-Kawn* (The Tree of the Universe), *Iblīs* says:

O Muhammad, I have no real power to lead astray, rather I am a tempter and dissembler. If I had in my hand the power to lead astray, I would not leave on the face of the earth anyone of those who proclaim, “There is no deity but God, and Muhammad is His messenger,” nor anyone who fasts or anyone who prays. Similarly, you possess no right-guidance in yourself, but rather you are a messenger, a transmitter. If you did possess in your hand right-guidance, you would not leave on the face of the earth an unbeliever.<sup>101</sup>

Do such ruminations on the exclusive creative agency of God renders humans and *Iblīs* free of blame? If God is the one who brings to existence everything, how can His creation be held responsible for their actions? Ṭabāṭabā’ī divides all actions into the categories of existent,

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<sup>99</sup> al-Qushayrī, 63.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid.

<sup>101</sup> Awn, 114.

possible/transient/potential, and non-existent. A possible action has an identical relation with existence and non-existence, but for it to come into existence, it requires a sufficient cause to render it essential – “to become impossible not to exist.”<sup>102</sup> The sufficient cause “may be a single thing or a compound of various causes — the material, the formal, the efficient and the final causes, plus the necessary conditions of time and space as well as other preliminaries.”<sup>103</sup> An action remains only transient and in the realm of potentiality if seen only in relation with its efficient cause, that is human. Only when all of its sufficient causes are fulfilled — “man (the efficient cause), knowledge and will (the final), matter (the material) and its shape (the formal) plus all conditions of time and space including removal of every hindrance" — it would become essential.<sup>104</sup> Since the essential cause (human being) is dependent on God, who is considered the Essential Being, for their existence, Ṭabāṭabā'ī argues that their actions are dependent upon the Will of God as well.<sup>105</sup> The *Mu'tazilite* position where it envisions the independence of man's action to the Will of God fails to sufficiently take into account the dependence of the very existence of man on the Will of God.

The *Jabriyyah* position in favor of absolute predetermination conceptualizes divine will and human agency on the horizontal plane, instead of envisioning the divine will as coming after and above the human will.<sup>106</sup> It is a vertical relation of the two wills that do not run parallel to each other. The divine will creates the action only *after* all the sufficient causes have been fulfilled. The divine will operates on the condition and requirement that an action be willed by a free agent.<sup>107</sup>

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<sup>102</sup> al-Ṭabāṭabā'ī, Ch. 2, p. 183.

<sup>103</sup> al-Ṭabāṭabā'ī, Ch. 2, p. 184.

<sup>104</sup> al-Ṭabāṭabā'ī, Ch. 2, p. 184.

<sup>105</sup> *Ibidl*, 185.

<sup>106</sup> al-Ṭabāṭabā'ī, Ch. 2, p. 171.

<sup>107</sup> al-Ṭabāṭabā'ī, Ch. 2, p. 171.

What of the relationship between the intention of the human agent to give into the “satanic whisperings” or to reject them? Is the intention independent of God’s decree? In reference to the Qur’anic verses (76:29-30) “So let anyone who wills take the way toward his Lord. But you do not will unless it is willed by Allah,” Ṭabāṭabā’ī emphasizes that the “second verse does not say that you do not *act* unless it is willed by God [to imply compulsion], but it says that you do not *will* unless it is willed by God.”<sup>108</sup> It illustrates that human agency operates on the condition that God’s will necessitates the exercise of human will. The will of God, says Ṭabāṭabā’ī, “decrees that the action be done by the man emanating from the man's own free will and choice.”<sup>109</sup> The relationship between the two wills – human and divine – is not a negation of each other, but it is one where one will depends on the other for its very existence and exercise.

In contrast to Ṭabāṭabā’ī, Ibn `Arabī relates the question of human free will and Divine predetermination to two central issues: the human potential to know the Divine names and humankind as a microcosmic mirror of the Divine. “human choice and Divine determinism are understood in the light of the teaching that human beings bear within them the potential to know *the names, all of them* (Qur’an 2:31) and the hadith “God created humankind in His image”<sup>110</sup> and among God’s names are *al-Murīd* (He Who Wills or Wishes) and *al-Qādir* (the Powerful, the Possessor of Power).”<sup>111</sup> Sufi thinkers conceptualized human free-will as an expression of divine freedom. Instead of viewing human free will as a question of choosing among a set of possibilities, they view the individual capacity to act freely pertaining to a particular state of being.<sup>112</sup> Only when human beings surrender their own individuality and free will, do they realize true freedom

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<sup>108</sup> al-Ṭabāṭabā’ī, Ch. 76, pp. 233-34.

<sup>109</sup> al-Ṭabāṭabā’ī, Ch. 2, p. 185.

<sup>110</sup> *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, May 13, 2021 <https://sunnah.com/muslim:2612e> and Gen 1:27 as noted in chapter three, above.

<sup>111</sup> *The Study Qur’ān*, 1307

<sup>112</sup> *Ibid.*

in God. Qushayrī reflects the idea of true freedom in surrendering of free will towards self-effacement in the exegesis of the Qur’anic verse (1:4), “Master of the Day of Judgment:”

He teaches the masters who profess [His] unity that He is their Master (*mālik*) and their own choosing (*ikhtiyār*) drops away from them. They come to know that the servant has no ownership. The one who has no ownership has no power of decision (*ḥukm*) and the one who has no power of decision has no free choice. For them there is no turning away (*i’rāḍ*) from obedience to Him, no resistance (*i’tirāḍ*) to His decision, no working against (*mu’āraḍa*) His choosing, and no move to (*ta’arruḍ*) oppose Him.<sup>113</sup>

Hence, it is in the utter annihilation of the self in the divine that man reaches perfection and true freedom. It is only at the spiritual station of *fanā’* (annihilation) in the divine Unity that man escapes from his limitations to realize complete freedom in God.

As man is made in the image of God, so is the world a mirror and manifestation of God’s qualities and attributes. Ibn ‘Arabī, in his *Futūḥāt al-Makkiyya*, comments: “He (Muḥammad) points out that everything that occurs in the world is for no other reason than to display the application of a divine name. since this is so, there does not remain in possibility anything more wonderful than this world, nor more perfect. There remain in possibility only simulacra (*amthāl*), *ad infinitum*.”<sup>114</sup>

Accordingly, if the prophets manifest the divine name of *al-Hādī* (the Guide) in the created order, Iblīs is a reflection of the name *al-Mudill* (the Misguider). William Chittick comments, in the Qur’an, while God is “the usual subject of the verb “to misguide,” but Satan and not God is described as “misguider.”<sup>115</sup> Ibn ‘Arabī says, “If you move toward Him, He is the Guide; if away from Him, that is from His name the Misguider.”<sup>116</sup> The sanctity of free will is

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<sup>113</sup> al-Qushayrī, 14.

<sup>114</sup> Eric Linn Ormsby, *Theodicy in Islamic Thought* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2016), 104.

<sup>115</sup> Chittick, 116.

<sup>116</sup> *Ibid.*

upheld by Ibn `Arabī, who distinguishes God’s attributes of guidance or misguidance as a consequence of individual action, not the cause of it. Iblīs serves God in manifesting the divine attribute of misguidance. Iblīs serving God also reflects his belief in *tawḥīd* or the Oneness of God. This point is significant for Ibn `Arabī’s treatment of Iblīs’ disobedience and is dealt below in the section “Iblīs’s Pride and the Divine Command to Prostrate Before Adam.”

Ibn `Arabī’s statement aligned with his predecessor, Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī, who controversially stated, “There is not in possibility anything more wonderful than what is” (*laysa fi’l-imbkān abda` mim mā kān*).<sup>117</sup> The statement was criticized for seemingly placing a restriction on the divine omnipotence (*ḥasr al-qudrah*). It seems to limit God’s power and creativity to this world with all of its injustices and afflictions.<sup>118</sup> However, contemporary Iranian philosopher Seyyed H. Nasr argues that “Metaphysically speaking, God cannot create a world without privation and evil and remain God.”<sup>119</sup> Since only the Ultimate Principle or God is absolutely good, Nasr points out that “Creation already implies a separation from the Creator. To talk of creation is to talk of separation, and to talk of separation is to talk of what appears as evil on the human plane.”<sup>120</sup>

Evil on the human plane is the manifestation of God’s wrath (*Jalāl*), according to Ibn `Arabī, or could be conceived of as separation or otherness (*ghayriyya*) from God, who alone is absolutely Good. It is important to note that what appears as evil on the human plane is only relatively real, as Ibn `Arabī notes, “Since God was kind towards us through the names as indicated by the name All-Merciful, He brought us from evil, which is non-existence, to good which is

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<sup>117</sup> Ormsby, 31.

<sup>118</sup> Ormsby, 31.

<sup>119</sup> Nasr, S. H. "Naming Evil." YouTube. n.d. <https://youtu.be/WV7kEztIOxY>.

<sup>120</sup> "Naming Evil," (Video), <https://youtu.be/WV7kEztIOxY>

existence. That is why God reminds us of His kindness through the blessing of existence.”<sup>121</sup> Evil, as such, has no ontological reality and it is why the Prophet stated, “The good, all of it, is in Thy hands, while evil does not go back to you.”<sup>122</sup> Rūmī suggests that everything that issues from God, both good and evil, is always good in relation to Him but not in relation to us. It is an accidental property of creation that exists relatively, but not for its own sake. It has compensatory value, for prior to it are divine mercy and gentleness which encompass it. It exists to make the world a more comprehensive mirror of the divine attributes. Therefore, Rūmī says:

Everything is good in relation to God, but not in relation to us ... In a king’s realm there are prisons, gallows, robes of honor, wealth, estates, retinue, banquets, drums, and banners. In relation to the king all are good. Just as robes of honor are the perfection of his kingdom, so also gallows and executions and prisons are all perfections of his kingdom. In relation to him, all are perfection. But in relation to his people, how could the gallows be the same as a robe of honor?!<sup>123</sup>

In sum, human free-will is an expression of the divine will and the exercise of one is not a negation of the other. This insight leads us to an understanding of the nature of creation, according to the Sufi and Shia exegetes, and the role of evil and Iblīs post-fall in the created order. This brings us to the full development of this theme in the next and final chapter.

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<sup>121</sup> Ozgur Koca, "Ibn ‘Arabī (1165–1240) and Rūmī (1207–1273) on the Question of Evil: Discontinuities in Sufi Metaphysics.," *Islam and Christian–Muslim Relations* 28, no. 3 (2017): 299.

<sup>122</sup> Koca, 301.

<sup>123</sup> Chittick, 54.

## CHAPTER SEVEN

### IBLĪS' PRIDE

He said, “What prevented thee from prostrating when I commanded thee?” He said, “I am better than him. Thou hast created me from fire, while Thou hast created him from clay”  
(Qur’an 7:12)

This Qur’anic verse is commonly understood to mean that Iblīs principal sin was pride. Maybudī brings up the literal reason of Iblīs’ refusal, which is his pride over being created out of a ‘superior’ element of fire while Adam was made out of clay. Maybudī argues that Iblīs failed to recognize the inherent superiority of clay over fire. For example, “earth conceals faults whereas fire reveals them; fire causes things to separate, earth joins them; fire is proud and tries to go upwards, while earth is humble and seeks abasement. But the greatest virtue of earth or clay is its malleability, so that a seal can be stamped upon it.”<sup>124</sup> Maybudī attributes the following explanation to God:

The wisdom in Our creating Adam out of earth and clay was so that We could place the seal of trust (*amānat*) upon the clay of his heart as when We said “Lo, We offered the trust unto the heavens and earth and the hills but they shrank from bearing it and were afraid of it . . . ” (Q. 33:72) . . . It was only Adam who in his manliness put out his hand to receive it.

Maybudī further explains the composition and uniqueness of the human beings by observing that while all elements are combined in them, but other creatures are created out of single elements;

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<sup>124</sup> Maybudī, *Sufi Hermeneutics: the Qur’an commentary of Rashid al-Din Maybudi*, 134.

for instance, the angels of light, the jinn of fire, the sea of water and so on. It is in this sense that human beings are considered to represent the whole macrocosm of the heavenly and sublunary realms in the microcosm of the human being.<sup>125</sup>

In the works of Ṭabarī and Qurṭubī, fire has been associated with “fickleness, recklessness, restlessness, and destructiveness – with grandeur, but also haughtiness, qualities consistent with the arrogance that ultimately leads to Iblīs’ perdition.”<sup>126</sup> Qurṭubī also points out that it is fire, rather than clay, which serves as the medium for divine wrath on the Day of Judgement.<sup>127</sup>

Importantly, Ibn `Arabī does not associate Iblīs’ *kufr* with *širk* (associating partners with God). On a number of occasions, Ibn `Arabī identifies Iblīs as a *muwahḥid* (monotheist) and not a *mushrik* (one who associates partners with God).<sup>128</sup> His sin, however, had to do with his pride.

Ibn `Arabī says:

The most disobedient of the creatures is Iblīs, but the limit of his ignorance was that he saw himself better than Adam because he was from fire and he believed it to be the most excellent of elements. The limit of his disobedience was that he was commanded to prostrate himself before Adam, and he claimed to be too great to prostrate himself because of what we mentioned, and he refused, so he disobeyed God’s command. Hence God named him an unbeliever, since he combined disobedience and ignorance.<sup>129</sup>

Ṭabāṭabā’ī mentions the Qur’anic idea of supremacy that caused Iblīs’ fall (Qur’an 7:12). Iblīs had argued that the dominating element in his composition is fire, and that is an element superior to the dominating element in the composition of Adam, which is clay or mud. However, Ṭabāṭabā’ī states that the idea of supremacy was not limited to only Iblīs, but angels had fallen into it as well. When God informed the angels that, “I am going to make in the earth a

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<sup>125</sup> Maybudī, *Sufi Hermeneutics: the Qur’an commentary of Rashid al-Din Maybudi*, 135., 135.

<sup>126</sup> *The Study Quran*, 410.

<sup>127</sup> *The Study Quran*, 410.

<sup>128</sup> Chittick, 117.

<sup>129</sup> Chittick, 117.

vicegerent” (Qur’an 2:30), this showed that the vicegerent, a mere earthly creature, would have authority over the angels too. Ṭabāṭabā’ī speculates that “on hearing that first announcement some disturbing thought had come into their [angels] minds, as it had never occurred to them that any earthly creature could be given authority over everything including themselves.”<sup>130</sup>

Ṭabāṭabā’ī quotes a tradition from the sixth Imam, Ja’far al-Ṣādiq, who said: "When Allah created Adam and ordered the angels to prostrate before him, it came into the angels' mind: 'We never thought that Allah had created any creature more honorable than us; we are His neighbors, and we are the nearest of His creation to Him.' Thereupon Allah said: 'Did I not say to you that I know what you manifest and what you were hiding?'"<sup>131</sup>

Ibn `Arabī is clear in his exposition of Iblīs’ motivations, which he finds highly objectionable. It was Iblīs’ pride and ignorance that caused him to err. The consequence of his fall – his cosmic role as the tempter and seducer – is necessary and essential. The two positions may come across as contradictory, since it is the second position – that of Iblīs’ role in the world as fundamental to the very nature of creation – that shines as the characteristic of the defense of Iblīs championed by the Ḥallājīan-Sufī tradition. Ibn `Arabī, however, does not go as far as to let Iblīs’ essential function / service in the world to overshadow his original sin.

One of the key elements of the Qur’anic narrative of Iblīs’ refusal to obey the divine command, according to Ṭabāṭabā’ī, is the identification of Iblīs as one of the disbelievers. The Qur’an (2:34) states, “... (the angels) prostrated except Iblīs. He refused and he showed arrogance, and he was one of the unbelievers.” While Iblīs’ refusal to prostrate before Adam amounted to a major disobedience, rebellion, or sin, why does the Qur’an identify the refusal to

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<sup>130</sup> al-Ṭabāṭabā’ī, Ch. 2, p. 207.

<sup>131</sup> al-Ṭabāṭabā’ī, Ch. 2, p. 209.

obey God’s command with disbelief in God? Additionally, Ṭabāṭabā’ī points out the grammatical structure of the Qur’anic statement in 2:33, “... and (that) I know what you manifest and what you were hiding?” suggests that Iblīs had been a disbeliever even before this event. Instead of saying “and what you hide,” Allah said, “and what you were hiding” to signify Iblīs’ hidden disbelief that “he had kept hidden up to that moment.”<sup>132</sup> Ṭabāṭabā’ī further points out that the last part of the verse 2:34 also leads to the same conclusion. Ṭabāṭabā’ī states, “Instead of saying, “ He refused and he showed arrogance, and he disbelieved it says, “ ... he was one of the unbelievers.”<sup>133</sup> His act of disobedience did not signify his descent into disbelief; rather, he already was an unbeliever but had kept it a secret, and this event merely brought it into the open.<sup>134</sup>

Ṭabāṭabā’ī further notes the grammatical shift in the Qur’an in Iblīs’ defense of his disobedience. In response to God’s question “— What prevented you from prostrating, when I commanded you”(Qur’an 38:75) — he should have said: “What prevented me was that I am better than him (*mana ‘anī annī khayr minhu*).” But instead he said: I am better than him.”<sup>135</sup> The hypothetical response from Iblīs is a verbal sentence (*fi’liyyah*) which indicates a *single occurrence* of the verb (“to prevent”) in the past.<sup>136</sup> The actual Qur’anic response by Iblīs is a nominal sentence (*ismiyyah*) without a verb; thus, “it indicates that the predicate (“am better than him”) is established for the subject *across time*.”<sup>137</sup> The difference, albeit subtle, demonstrates that the ego and pride was something that was already established in Iblīs. The moment of his

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<sup>132</sup> al-Ṭabāṭabā’ī, Ch. 2, p. 201.

<sup>133</sup> Ibid., al-Ṭabāṭabā’ī, Ch. 2, p. 206.

<sup>134</sup> al-Ṭabāṭabā’ī, Ch. 2, p. 206.

<sup>135</sup> Ibid., al-Ṭabāṭabā’ī, Ch. 7, p. 30.

<sup>136</sup> Ibid., al-Ṭabāṭabā’ī, Ch. 7, p. 31.

<sup>137</sup> Ibid.

disobedience was not the moment his pride originated in his heart – rather, it was only given expression in that moment.

Ṭabāṭabā'ī quotes a tradition from the seventh Imam, Mūsā ibn Ja'far al-Kāzīm, supporting the disbelief of Iblīs prior to this event. Ṭabāṭabā'ī states that “Allah created Adam, and he remained for forty years in (that) shape (i.e. a statue without life). And Iblīs, the cursed, used to pass by him and say: "Why have you been created?" al-Kāzīm said: "Then Iblīs said: 'If Allah ordered me to prostrate before this, I would certainly disobey Him.'... Then Allah said to the angels, 'Prostrate before Adam'; all of them prostrated; but Iblīs showed the envy that was in his heart and he refused to prostrate.”<sup>138</sup> This demonstrates that the pride of Iblīs precedes the moment of his disobedience of God's command.

Iblīs' rationale – “I am better than him” – seems to imply Iblīs' superiority over and arrogance against Adam. However, Ṭabāṭabā'ī argues that it implies arrogance against God, not exclusively against Adam. The justification that rests on the superiority of fire over clay pits Iblīs against Adam. However, at the root of his disobedience, according to Ṭabāṭabā'ī, lies his arrogance against God.<sup>139</sup> The invocation of “I” in the presence of God betrays Iblīs' sense of grandeur and independence that goes against the very nature of servitude. It is an indication of a selfhood and ego that is not effaced in the grandeur and glory of God. It assumes an independent existence for itself. Such a sense of self-sufficiency and pride led Iblīs to assume a position similar to God. Not satisfied with obeying the command of God *because He is God*, Iblīs subjected it to his own scales of justice and reason, and deemed it unjust. Thus, he refused to obey the command and preferred transgression against God rather than obedience. It was his

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<sup>138</sup> al-Ṭabāṭabā'ī, Ch. 2, p. 211.

<sup>139</sup> al-Ṭabāṭabā'ī, Ch. 7, p. 31..

implied attribution of injustice to God that resulted in his *kufr*, and not necessarily his disobedience. This is the opinion of Shihāb al-Dīn al-Qarāfī (d. 1285) recorded in the Kamāl al-Dīn al-Damiri's (d. 1405) work, *Ḥayāt al-ḥayawān al-kubrā* (Life of Animals).<sup>140</sup>

In Ibn `Arabī's terminology, Iblīs assumed the divine name *al-`Azīm* (The Magnificent) for himself.<sup>141</sup> He assumed a greatness independent of and parallel to his Creator. By emphatically emphasizing the supposed superiority of fire over clay, he "sought to claim incomparability for himself."<sup>142</sup> When Iblīs gave verbal expression to his pride against Adam, it betrayed the arrogance defiance he displayed against God. He sought to place himself equal to God by judging His command unjust and tyrannical – which purportedly was not in accordance with reason and the nature of things. He refused to obey God's command as the command of his Lord; instead, he gave it consideration (*maslahah*) that was based on rationalizing his own assumed greatness and gradation of being. Servanthood requires the obedience of God regardless of any consideration of interest or benefit. Otherwise, "God would be stripped of His lordship (*rubūbiyyah*) and authority (*mawlawiyyah*), and would make considerations of interests and benefits central to everything."<sup>143</sup> Since Adam was chosen by God, Iblīs' pride against Adam was a display of his arrogance against God.

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<sup>140</sup> Elizabeth Marie Sharpe, "Into the realm of smokeless fire: (Qur'an 55:14): A critical translation of al-Damiri's article on the jinn from "Hayat al-Hayawan al-Kubra"" (M.A. The University of Arizona, 1992), 43.

<sup>141</sup> William C. Chittick, *Ibn al-Arabi's Metaphysics of Imagination: The Sufi Path of Knowledge* (New York: State University of New York Press, 1989), 24.

<sup>142</sup> Chittick, *Ibn al-Arabi's Metaphysics of Imagination: The Sufi Path of Knowledge*, 24.

<sup>143</sup> al-Ṭabāṭabā'ī, Ch. 7, p. 33.

## CHAPTER EIGHT

### CONCLUDING REMARKS

A tradition from the fifth Shia Imam, Muḥammad al-Bāqir (d. 733 CE), says, “By God, Allah had surely created Adam for the world, and He gave him place in the Garden, in order that he might disobey Him and thus He might return him to that for which He had created him.”<sup>144</sup>

The Ḥallājīan-Sufi tradition, in its treatment of Iblīs, offers important insights into the nature of the created order which necessitates the role of Iblīs as the embodiment of evil. The potentiality of the world in terms of existence renders it somewhere in between existence and non-existence. While existence is conceptualized as good, non-existence is evil with no ontological essence. Since it has a relationship with both existence and non-existence, manifestation of evil is not only to be expected, but is necessary. From the point of view of religion, for prophetic guidance to be meaningful, “there must also be a call to misguidance, or there would be no reason to turn away from God in the first place.”<sup>145</sup> It is, in fact, God’s guidance and mercy that necessitate the existence of evil as a means to motivate the need for following prophetic guidance.

The departing point for the Sufi and Shia scholars who do not adhere to the Ḥallājīan-Sufi defense of Iblīs to the full extent is their conceptualization of human (and Iblīs’) agency to

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<sup>144</sup> al-Ṭabāṭabā’ī, Ch. 2, p. 253.

<sup>145</sup> Chittick, 120.

act freely in the face of God's prior determination. Sufi scholar such as Ibn `Arabī and Shia scholar Ṭabāṭabā'ī envision the divine will as coming after and above the human will. The two wills – divine and human – stand in a vertical, rather than a horizontal, relationship. This implies the dependence of the human agency to act freely on God's will. God has willed for humans (and presumably Iblīs) to act according to their own will, and it is this relationship to the divine will which allows the free exercise of free will within the normal human limitations.

The necessity of Iblīs' role – the unique cosmic role of manifesting the divine attribute of the Misguider – does not necessarily imply that his decision to refuse God's command was a consequence of divine compulsion. It is this distinction that allows Ṭabāṭabā'ī and Ibn `Arabī to view the necessity of his role yet deny that his fate was tragic. In fact, both of these scholars of Islam hold Iblīs responsible for his actions and find his reasons abhorrent. These scholars agree that while Iblīs gave verbal expression to his arrogance against Adam, his disobedience betrays his underlying arrogance against God. In subjecting God's command to his own rationality and refusing to adhere to it, Iblīs attributes injustice to God which is what forms the underlying basis for his *kufr*.

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