

A Case Study Analysis of the Perceived Contradiction in Imam Ali's Traditions Concerning the Qur'anic Verses Related to the "Predestination of Sustenance"

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Abstract

According to religious teachings, sustenance (rizq) is divided into two categories: material and spiritual. In the Qur'an, God has promised to provide for both as part of His divine providence. This divine promise has given rise to debate concerning the role of human beings in attaining sustenance, particularly with regard to material sustenance. The apparent discrepancy among the traditions transmitted from the infallible figures, especially those attributed to Imam Ali (as), concerning this group of Qur'anic verses has further intensified this debate. In some of Imam Ali's statements, human effort is presented as the central means of attaining sustenance, whereas in others, the realization of sustenance is described as being contingent solely upon reliance (tawakkul) on God, rendering human endeavor in this regard seemingly futile. The apparent inconsistency between these two groups of traditions underscores the need for further examination. The findings derived from an analytical, library-based examination of interpretations concerning the meaning of God's promise indicate that, although the independent application of either of these two elements—and, in certain circumstances, even the absence of both—may lead to the attainment of sustenance, the optimal approach to attaining one's divinely ordained sustenance appears to lie in the simultaneous application of both. In other words, since divine promises are realized through two complementary domains, namely the spiritual and the material, tawakkul constitutes the spiritual dimension, while human effort represents the material dimension through which

this promise is fulfilled. Accordingly, the apparent contradiction among the statements attributed to Imam Ali in this regard can be resolved.

Extended Abstract

Introduction

God, in several verses of the Qur'an, explicitly emphasizes the provision and guarantee of sustenance by declaring that sustenances have been divinely determined and that their provision is undertaken by God. Some exegetes maintain that this divine promise is realized solely through the practice of tawakkul (trust in and reliance upon God). Others, however, argue that although God has promised to provide sustenance, the fulfillment of this divine promise takes place through work and effort. Furthermore, an examination of the traditions attributed to Imam Ali (as) concerning the seeking of sustenance reveals an apparent contradiction regarding the role of human beings in the process of acquiring sustenance. Accordingly, the central problem addressed in this study arises from the following question: Given, on the one hand, God's promise to provide sustenance and, on the other hand, the apparent contradiction within Imam Ali's statements concerning the explanation and interpretation of these verses and the determination of the human role in obtaining sustenance, how can human beings ultimately attain the sustenance divinely apportioned to them?

Materials and Methods

This study aims to examine and resolve the perceived contradiction among the traditions attributed to Imam Ali (as) concerning the Qur'anic verses related to the predestination of sustenance. The central research problem is how to reconcile two groups of Imam Ali's traditions: the first group associates the attainment of sustenance with tawakkul, servitude to God, and reliance upon God's role as the Provider, and, at least apparently, renders direct efforts to earn a livelihood ineffective; the second group emphasizes the necessity of work, effort, earning, and enduring hardship in securing one's livelihood.

In terms of its objective, this is a fundamental research study, and in terms of methodology, it employs a qualitative, analytical-documentary approach. The data were collected through library-based research and analyzed using fiqh al-hadith conceptual analysis, and comparative content analysis.

In the first stage, the concepts of the two principal components, namely taqdir (divine determination) and rizq (sustenance), were examined with reference to

authoritative lexical and exegetical sources. Subsequently, the meaning of the expression “predestination of sustenance” was reconstructed on the basis of such components as proportionality, capacity, aptitude, and benefit.

In the second stage, exegetical perspectives on the Qur’anic verses concerning the divine provision and predestination of sustenance were examined, particularly Qur’an 11:6, 29:60, 30:40, and 65:3.

In the third stage, the traditions attributed to Imam Ali (as) concerning the role of tawakkul, servitude to God, work, and effort in the process of attaining sustenance were analyzed and categorized. Furthermore, in order to assess the possibility of contradiction, hadith-critical criteria were employed, including attention to the language of the tradition, textual indicators and the context in which the tradition was issued, the rational practice of people, the practical conduct of the prophets and the divine saints, and the principle of the system of causes and effects.

Finally, the views of prominent commentators on the Nahj al-Balaghah and hadith literature, particularly Mazandarani, Ibn Abi al-Ḥadīd, Muhammad Taqi Majlisī, and Hashimī Khūī, were examined and compared in order to evaluate approaches for reconciling the two groups of traditions.

Results and Findings

The findings of the study indicate that rizq (sustenance) within the framework of religious teachings is a gift and bounty from which a living being benefits, and that it may be either material or spiritual. Therefore, the scope of sustenance is not limited to food, wealth, and livelihood.

Furthermore, the expression “predestination of sustenance” can be understood as “the proportionate distribution of divine gifts and bounties among living beings, in accordance with their capacities and aptitudes and in the direction of their survival and perfection.” This understanding is, on the one hand, consistent with the concepts of divine provision and God’s undertaking of sustenance, while, on the other hand, it does not deny the influence of human causes and factors.

Accordingly, some scholars have regarded reliance upon the divine promise and tawakkul as the basis for the realization of sustenance, whereas others have linked the actualization of this promise to human effort. An initial examination—prior to specialized evaluation—of the traditional passages attributed to Imam Ali likewise indicates that both ideas appear to have been accepted within his

thought. This circumstance further complicates the issue and gives rise to the perceived contradiction in his guidance.

In this regard, the views of hadith commentators indicate that attributing the effect solely to one of the two components—*tawakkul* or effort—is inconsistent with the broader body of Qur’anic and traditional teachings, the practical conduct of the prophets and divine saints, and, in particular, the approach of Imam Ali himself.

From the perspective of *fiqh al-hadith*, the emphasis of the first group of traditions on *tawakkul* constitutes an instance of affirming one thing (*ithbāt al-shay’*) and does not necessarily entail the negation of everything else. Therefore, these traditions cannot be interpreted as absolutely negating work and effort. Likewise, the traditions concerning work and endeavor establish the necessity of making use of material means and do not conflict with the fact that such means are not independent in themselves and ultimately remain dependent upon divine will and spiritual factors such as *tawakkul*.

The overall findings indicate that the attainment of divinely apportioned sustenance within the religious framework takes place on the basis of the system of causes and effects. These causes have two principal dimensions:

The spiritual dimension, including *tawakkul*, servitude to God, faith, and reliance upon God’s role as the Provider.

The material dimension, including work, effort, acquisition of skills, agriculture, commerce, and other economic activities.

Although sustenance received “from where one does not expect” (*min haythu la yahtasib*), which generally reaches a person without prior anticipation or direct human effort, may be regarded as an exception to this general pattern, it in no way negates the fundamental necessity of employing causes and means.

Accordingly, the perceived contradiction between the two groups of traditions is not a real contradiction, but rather results from an exclusive and reductionist interpretation of each group of texts.

Conclusion

An examination of the relevant Qur’anic verses, traditions, and *fiqh al-hadith* evidence demonstrates that the “predestination of sustenance” does not mean denying the role of human beings or asserting a deterministic and immutable determination of livelihood. Rather, it signifies the comprehensiveness of divine

knowledge, will, and providence within the system through which the needs of living beings are fulfilled.

Accordingly, tawakkul and effort are neither competing nor mutually substitutive components; rather, they constitute two complementary levels in the process of attaining sustenance. Tawakkul establishes the human being's spiritual and theological orientation and prevents the independent attribution of efficacy to material causes. In contrast, work and effort provide the ordinary material means through which the divine promise is realized.

Therefore, the "ideal model" presented in the teachings of Imam Ali (as) consists of combining reliance upon God with the utilization of available means. Such an interpretation, while resolving the apparent contradiction among the traditions, is consistent with the practical conduct of Imam Ali(as), the prophets, and the divine saints, as well as with the principle of the system of causes and effects. It can thus provide a coherent interpretation of the relationship between divine determination and human endeavor.

Keywords: Imam Ali (as), Divinely Ordained Sustenance, Apparent Contradiction, Tawakkul (Reliance on God), Work and Effort.