



## EVIL II. IN SHI'ISM.

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### ii. IN SHI'ISM.

#### the struggle against evil

Imami Shi'ites, more than any other group in Islam, have an overwhelming sense that evil is all-pervasive. This attitude to their surroundings, amply reinforced by historical events, was handed down from one generation to the next. The Shi'ite scholar Rażī-al-Dīn Ebn Ṭāwūs (q.v.) teaches his son: "The ascendancy of falsehood over truth is attested from the earliest times" (Ebn Ṭāwūs, p. 75). The cosmic dimensions of the struggle between the forces of good and evil come to the fore in a tradition ascribed to Ja'far Ṣādeq, the sixth Imam, which also appears in the instruction of his son, Imam Mūsā Kāzem to Hešām b. al-Ḥakam. In this tradition, 'aql (intelligence) and *jahl* (ignorance) are described as the first of God's creations. 'Aql was created from light, and *jahl* from the briny ocean. Each was given seventy-five armies with which to confront the other as an opponent (*żedd*). The first of the armies of 'aql is the army of good (*ḵayr*); the first of the armies of the *jahl* is the army of evil (*šarr*). Good is the assistant of 'aql, and evil the assistant of *jahl* (Barqī, I, pp. 196-98; Kolīnī, I, pp. 20-23; Mas'ūdī, pp. 9-11; Ebn Šo'ba, pp. 295-97; Ebn Bābūya, 1971, pp. 555-57; Amir-Moezzi, pp. 7-8; Crow, chap. 13).

The combat that began in the world of pre-existence continues in the world of human history. According to the *Eṭbāt al-waṣīya* (commonly ascribed to Mas'ūdī), there have existed from the creation of Adam two domains of power: the domain of God, which is that of the legatees (*waṣīs*) and prophets, and the



domain of Eblīs or Satan. Eblīs (q.v.) was the opponent of Adam, and this set the pattern for all future generations (Mas'ūdī, pp. 14-15). The first fratricide thus assumes considerable significance: Cain murdered Abel because he resented Abel's appointment as legate and successor to Adam ('Ayyāšī, I, p. 312; Āmolī, p. 25). In consequence, Abel's successors—ultimately identical with the Shi'a—are the wronged ones (*mazlūmūn*), while Cain's progeny become the evildoers (*zālemūn*); *Āmolī, pp. 12-13*. *In order to safeguard their lives, Abel's successors practise self-protection (taqīya) by concealing their beliefs and occasionally also themselves. The rationale for the practice of taqīya in the antediluvian world is identical to the one used by Shi'ite apologists in justifying 'Alī's inaction after Moḥammad's death: the numerical superiority of the enemy. In this context the Koranic phrase, "The people were one nation" (2:213), is interpreted as meaning that they were one nation in error and unbelief (Kohlberg, 1980, pp. 47-48). Various pre-Islamic evildoers are seen as prefigurations of the enemies of the historical Shi'a; they include the tyrant Bīwarāsh, who belonged to the progeny of Cain, and the Koranic Pharaoh and Hāmān. Ranged against them are the forerunners of the Shi'a, aptly called Rāfeza ("those who reject evil"; Kohlberg, 1979).*

In the Islamic era, the Imams led the community of believers. They are the source of all goodness, and all branches of goodness spring from them; conversely, their enemies are the source of all evil, and all branches of evil spring from them (Kolīnī, VIII, pp. 242-43). Evil is personified in those who deprived 'Alī and the *ahl al-bayt* of their divinely given right to rule over the Muslim community. The wrongdoers include the first three caliphs, as well as most Omayyad and 'Abbāsīd rulers. Abū Bakr, 'Omar, and 'Oṭmān are depicted as usurpers who acted against God's command, introduced odious innovations (*beda'*) and were only outwardly Muslims; they are referred to by various derogatory appellations, and their fate in the next world is described in horrifying detail. Imami traditions mention grades of evil: a Nāṣebī (anti-'Alīd Sunni) is more evil (*šarr*) than someone who does not perform any religious duties (Kolīnī, VIII, p. 101); someone who fought against 'Alī is worse than someone who fought against the Prophet, because those who fought 'Alī acknowledged Islam and then rejected it, whereas those who fought the Prophet never acknowledged Islam (Kolīnī, VIII, p. 252); those who usurped 'Alī's rights are worse than (any other) unbelievers (Eṣfahānī, p. 198); the three most evil creatures are Abū Sofyān (who fought against Moḥammad), Mo'āwīa (who fought against 'Alī) and Yazīd (who murdered Ḥosayn) (Kolīnī, VII, p. 234).



Imami exegetes find numerous allusions in the Qur'ān to the Shi'ites and their enemies. According to one tradition, fully one quarter of the Qur'ān deals with the Shi'a, while another quarter deals with their enemies (ʿAyyāšī, I, p. 9; Forāt, pp. 1-2, 89). For example, the words *al-faḥṣā' wa'l-monkar wa'l-bāḡy* (indecent, disreputable conduct and greed) (Qur'ān 16:90) refer to Abū Bakr, ʿOmar and ʿOṭmān (ʿAyyāšī, II, p. 268); the word *sayye'āt* (evil deeds) refers to the Omayyads, or to the Omayyads and the first three caliphs (Eṣfahānī, p. 173); *al-jebt wa'l-ṭāḡūt* (Qur'ān 4:51) are Abū Bakr and ʿOmar (Ṣaffār Qomī, p. 34), *al-mofsedūn fi'l-arḏ* ("those who cause corruption in the land"; Qur'ān 38:28) are the first two caliphs and their supporters (Qomī, II, p. 234), and *al-qāseṭūn* (the deviators) (Qur'ān 72:15) are Mo'āwīa and his followers (Qomī, II, p. 389; this last interpretation may well be based on ʿAlī's utterance: "I have been ordered to fight the breakers of covenants, the deviators and the renegades," referring to ʿAlī's enemies at Baṣra, Ṣeffīn and Nahrawān respectively). In contrast, "the two seas" (Qur'ān 55:19) are ʿAlī and Fāṭema, neither of whom is superior to the other, and "the pearl and coral" that come out of the two seas (Qur'ān 55:22) are Ḥasan and Ḥosayn (Majlesī, 1956-74, XXIV, pp. 97-99 and the sources cited there). The Shi'ites and enemies to whom the Qur'ān refers can only be identified by those who possess knowledge of the inner meaning (*bāṭen*) of the verses. At the same time Ja'far Ṣādeq, in a message to his disciple Mofaḍḍal b. ʿOmar Jo'fī, warns of the danger of disregarding the external meaning of such verses. This is the practice followed by the extremist Kaṭṭābiya: they argue that Koranic words or phrases which, in their outward sense, impose certain religious obligations and forbid certain sins, refer in their inner meaning to particular persons. The ignorant are bound by the outward sense, but those who know the inner meaning are not (Ṣaffār Qomī, pp. 526-36).

The correct attitude to be adopted towards evildoers and unbelievers is one of dissociation (*barā'a*) and enmity (*adāwa*). Dissociation from evildoers and its opposite, loyalty towards the imams (*walāya*), are portrayed as essential elements of the faith (Kohlberg, 1986, pp. 145-46). In practice, an accommodating attitude was often adopted towards those in power, even when they were regarded as usurpers; yet readiness to risk one's life in the fight against oppression has also been a significant element of Shi'ite history.

The forces of evil will reach the height of their power during the period immediately preceding the return of the Mahdī. At that time morality will be perverted, religious duties neglected, and family ties severed. The Shi'a will be



put to severe tests in order to sift the true believers from the rest. When the Mahdī arrives, he will lead the final battle against the evildoers and will wreak vengeance on those responsible for the deaths of Ḥosayn and of other members of the *ahl al-bayt* (Majlesī, 1956-74, LII, pp. 274, 304, 313). He will then “fill the earth with justice, as it has been filled with iniquity and injustice” (Amir-Moezzi, pp. 116-23, 127-28).

### god and evil

Shi'ite scholars, like other Muslim savants, were preoccupied with the relationship between evil, free will, and God's justice and omnipotence. Early Imami traditions reflect various attitudes to this subject. Some emphasize that God is the creator of both good and evil. He is said to have revealed to Moses in the Torah that He created goodness and gave it to those whom He loves and created evil and gave it to those to whom He wished to give it; the former will be happy, the latter are condemned to misery (Barqī, I, p. 283; Kolīnī, I, p. 154). According to Ja'far Ṣādeq, God will never hate him whom He created to be happy (*sa'īd*); when such a person does evil, God will hate that person's action but will not hate that person. Conversely, God will never love him whom He created to be unhappy (*šaqī*); when such a person does good, God will love his action but will hate him (Barqī, I, p. 279; Kolīnī, I, pp. 152-53). When God wishes evil on a person, He causes a black mark to appear on his heart and sends a devil to lead him astray (Kolīnī, I, p. 166). Yet there are also traditions of a less deterministic character. According to one of them, man's sinful acts come first, and it is only as a result of these acts that a black mark appears on his heart (Kolīnī, II, pp. 271, 273). God placed His power (*qowwa*) in man, and it is through this that man performs evil actions (Ayyāšī, I, p. 259; Kolīnī, I, p. 158). A moderately deterministic view was also espoused by Ebn Bābawayh (q.v.; d. 381/991), who equated divine will with divine foreknowledge: in other words, God's will that some people should perform evil is His knowledge that they will do so (Ebn Bābawayh, 1899, p. 73 = tr. Fyze, p. 33; McDermott, p. 344).

Later Imami and Zaydi theologians largely adopted Mo'tazilite notions about evil. They thus argued that the fundamental truths of religion can only be established by reason; that the nature of good and the nature of evil are fundamental truths; and that the nature of good and evil can therefore only be established by reason. God is just in the sense that He does not do any evil, though he is capable (*qāder*) of doing so (Mofīd, 1952b, p. 16; Karājakī, I, p. 241;



Ṭūsī, 1986, p. 84; Ḥellī 1959, pp. 89-90). His actions are necessarily good since He knows evil for what it is and has no need to do it (Mortazā, III, p. 12; cf. Gimaret, 1988, p. 344). Some theologians, like ‘Allāma Ḥellī (q.v.), based their arguments on the theory that God can only act when both capability and motive (*dā’ī*) exist. A motive in regard to God is the knowledge that a certain act is good or beneficial; hence God has no motive to do evil (Ebn Miṭam, pp. 111-12; Schmidtke, pp. 104-6, 112, 127). Traditions which refer to God creating evil were reinterpreted in line with Mo‘tazilite tenets: it was argued, for example, that what God creates are only the means for doing evil (Majlesī, 1956-74, V, p. 161). In addition, a number of Koranic passages (e.g. 32:7, 67:3) were adduced as proof that God does not create evil (Ṭūsī, 1956-63, VIII, pp. 295-96, X, p. 59; Ṭabresī, XXI, p. 77, XXIX, p. 9). The Qur’ān speaks of God creating sickness, famine and other calamities; yet these calamities—to which the Qur’ān refers by terms such as *ẓorr*, *šarr*, *sū’* or *mošība*—are not morally evil acts and the term “evil” may only be applied to them in a metaphorical sense (Mortazā, II, pp. 193-94; cf. Qomī, I, pp. 144-45; Majlesī, 1956-74, V, pp. 201-3; Gimaret, 1988, pp. 331-33).

Not only does God not create or do evil, He also rejects it and does not desire it. One reason for this is that God prohibits all evil acts (*ma‘āšī*), and such a prohibition only makes sense if the one who prohibits rejects that which he is prohibiting. God cannot desire evil and reject it at the same time, for this would be absurd (Karājakī, I, p. 113; Ṭūsī, 1986, pp. 89-90). Furthermore, to desire evil is itself evil, and since no evil issues from God, it cannot be the case that He desires it (Ḥellī, 1989-90, p. 60). In explaining how evil can occur against God’s will, Shi‘ite scholars distinguished two kinds of divine will (*mašī’a* or *erāda*): one which is invariably carried out and another which humankind is free either to follow or to reject. This distinction already appears in a tradition of Mūsā Kāẓem (Kolīnī, I, p. 151) and it is mentioned by Aš‘arī as a thesis of those who fused Mo‘tazilite theology with Imami Shi‘ite teachings (Aš‘arī, I, p. 116); it was also upheld by the Zaydi Imam Aḥmad Nāṣer (d. 322/934) (Nāṣer, pp. 179-83, 255-56) and by ‘Alam-al-Hodā Šarīf Mortazā (q.v.), who speaks of “a will that constrains” (*erādat ejbār wa eḏṭerār*) and “a will that puts to the test” (*erādat balwā wa eḳtebār*). God’s will that all men should believe and obey Him and refrain from evil acts is of the latter kind (Mortazā, II, pp. 229-30, 232-33). Such a distinction made it possible to argue that human beings are free to choose between good and evil—a position also adopted by the Ṭayyebī Isma‘ilis (Erbn al-Walīd, pp. 148, 168, 178). It also made it possible to accept traditions whose original meaning may have been



deterministic, for example that good and evil only occur with God's will (*māšī'a*; *Kolīnī, I, p. 150; cf. Reżā [attrib.], p. 411*).

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