

Dua in Islamic Teachings, Parts IV

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In the previous part of this article, we talked about the necessity of always being in communication with God, calling on Him, and the fact that if we properly called Him, he would always answer. Sometimes, in addition to calling Him, we also make some requests, and those requests also are given to us if they are possible and not in conflict with the wisdom of God or the large plan that He has for the world and for humanity or for us. At times, the results of the requests can be delayed; your *dua* is accepted, but the result can be seen after sometime. However, it is possible that for some reason the answer is given, but the result is not what you expected. This happens because there is something better that God wants for you.

In this part, we will discuss the conditions and some of the etiquettes that we have to observe when we pray to God.

MA ʿRIFAH (knowledge)

The first thing to do is to have proper understanding of God. When you ask someone for help, you should first know who you are asking. If we

think that God's power is limited, His resources are restricted, or His love for us will not reach us, then we will not genuinely call for His help, though we may call Him because everyone says to do so. But a person who knows God and His qualities knows that everything lies in His hands, and everything is dependent on Him.

Once in the presence of Imam Sadiq (a), the following verse was recited:

أَمَّنْ يُجِيبُ الْمُضْطَرَّ إِذَا دَعَاهُ وَ يَكْشِفُ السُّوءَ وَ يَجْعَلُكُمْ خُلَفَاءَ الْأَرْضِ أَلِلَّهِ مَعَ اللَّهِ قَلِيلًا
مَا تَذَكَّرُونَ

He who answers the call of the distressed [person] when he invokes Him and removes his distress, and makes you the earth's successors... (Qur'an 27:62)

When asked why our *duas* are not sometimes accepted, the Imam (a) replied that the problem is that you don't know the person you are calling. You do not have proper *ma'rifah* of God and proper understanding of Him. If you know properly yourself and your request, then you know God, and your *dua* is a real *dua*; otherwise, it is just a formality. For example, sometimes I say to someone: "Please help me." However, in my heart, I believe that he cannot do anything for me, so I just say it to be polite; just as some of us may say, "*Iltimās dua* (please pray for me!)" as a farewell expression, without really meaning what we say.¹ Therefore, our prayers will be effective only when we really know the one whom we ask for help and when we do it in a serious manner.

¹ Needless to say, this is not a good habit. We should mean what we say. It is reported that once a person visited the late Ayatollah Milani in Mashhad, and when was leaving, he said, "*Iltimās dua!*" He then saw Ayatollah Milani preparing to leave the house. The man asked where he was going, and the Ayatollah said, "You told me: '*Iltimās dua*', so I am going to the Holy Shrine to pray for you."

Purity

Another thing that is key to prayer is to maintain a pure body and heart.

Purity of Body

Purity of the body and dress is what can be achieved through washing and ritual ablution i.e. by having **WUDU** or **GHUSL**. This gives us a clean body and clean dress. It is very important when I go to someone to ask for help that I do not do so while dirty. I put on my best dress to look nice before going to the important personality.

Purity of Heart

More important than physical purity is purity of the heart. If my heart is full of spiritual germs, then I am not ready to ask for help. Spiritual germs range from attachment to *dunya*, which is the greatest germ that a heart can have, or to vices like arrogance or greed. If I possess these qualities, it means that I am not clean, and I cannot go to God with these qualities that are disliked by God. How can I expect His mercy if I possess these bad qualities?

God says in the Qur'an:

إِنَّ اللَّهَ يُحِبُّ التَّوَّابِينَ وَ يُحِبُّ الْمُتَطَهِّرِينَ

Allah loves the people who go (return) to Him and those who seek cleanliness (purity). (2:222)

If you are not pure, at least you must be *mutatahbir*; that is, the one who seeks purity. God loves the people who seek purity. He commands His Prophet to say his prayer in the mosque that is built from the first day on *taqwa* (God-wariness) and then says:

فِيهِ رِجَالٌ يُحِبُّونَ أَنْ يَتَطَهَّرُوا وَاللَّهُ يُحِبُّ الْمُطَهَّرِينَ

Therein are men who love to keep pure, and Allah loves those who keep pure (Quran 9:108)

Thus, Prophet Mohammed (s) was asked by God to be in the company of good people, particularly those who seek purity. Imagine how important it is to be in company of the people who struggle to be pure. If such people come together and call God, then He would answer to their call.

Halal Income

It is very crucial to make sure you have a *halal* (lawful) income. This means your earning must come from permissible sources and ways. A hadith from Imam Sadiq (a) reads:

مَنْ سَرَّهُ أَنْ يُسْتَجَابَ لَهُ دَعْوَتُهُ فَلْيُطِيبْ مَكْسَبَهُ

The one who likes his *dua* to be answered, his way of making money (way of earning money) must be pure. (Kulayni 1407AH, 2:486)

One's income must be *halal*, and it must also be pleasant, because even among the *halal* jobs not all are pleasant and sweet. Some types of work might be *halal* but just near the margin. They perhaps are permissible but do not help the community or the people needed to serve.

One of the best and most pleasant ways of earning is farming. Of course, that is not possible for everyone, but it is a blessing if someone is involved in farming. Farming is where someone is close to nature and to God. It is very much recommended in our hadiths, because it benefits both God's land and His people.

Teaching, helping people with their problems, practicing medicine are all good jobs and available. You have to always look for something that is

both *halal* and beneficial. You shouldn't just look at the amount of the salary.

There is a *hadith qudsi* (a divine saying) that reads:

فَمِنْكَ الدُّعَاءُ وَ عَلَيَّ الإِجَابَةُ فَلَا تُحِبُّ عَنِّي دَعْوَةً إِلَّا دَعْوَةَ أَكِلِ الْحَرَامِ

You should pray and I should answer, but no prayer is hidden from me, nor is concealed except the prayer of someone who eats from *haram* (unlawful). (*Bihar al-Anwar*, vol. 90, p. 373)

We also read in hadiths that Prophet Muhammad (s) said:

مَنْ أَكَلَ لُفْمَةً حَرَامٍ لَمْ تُقْبَلْ لَهُ صَلَاةٌ أَرْبَعِينَ لَيْلَةً وَ لَمْ تُسْتَجَبْ لَهُ دَعْوَةٌ أَرْبَعِينَ صَبَاحًا

Whoever eats from *haram*, his prayer (*salat*) will not be accepted for forty nights and his duas will not be heard for forty days..(Ibid., vol. 63, p. 314)

Presence of Heart

Another condition is that we should have presence of heart. If I am speaking to you, and you realize that I am not paying attention, you will be offended. We should give attention and respect to those speaking with us. God answers our prayer but when we call Him, we should give proper attention to Him and to our request.

Believing That Only God Can Help

Another point is that when I ask God for something, I should know that it is God who can help me and no one else. A divine saying reads:

مَنْ سَأَلَنِي وَ هُوَ يَعْلَمُ أَنِّي أَضُرُّ وَ أَنْفَعُ أُسْتَجِيبُ لَهُ

Whoever asks me for something while he knows that I am the one who is able to benefit or harm [i.e., knows that I am in charge], I will answer him. (Majlisi 1403AH, 305)

However, if one thinks that there are other people to solve his problems, then God may not be attentive to his request.

Trust and Certainty in God's Answer

It is necessary to believe and remember that you turn to God because He is in full control. All power, law, and mercy belong to Him. Therefore, you must be very hopeful. There are hadiths that say you must be sure that God will give you what you ask for. If you are sure, then He will give you. The Prophet (s) said:

ادْعُوا اللَّهَ وَ أَنْتُمْ مُوقِنُونَ بِالْإِجَابَةِ

Call God while you are certain about the fulfilment [of your prayers]. (Majlisi 1403AH, 90:305)

We can understand from hadiths that your trust, your certainty, your confidence in God's answer is very valuable and provides a ladder for success.

The idea that God treats us in the way that we expect to be treated is very instrumental in Islam. This is a very important point, and it has a lot of outcomes and implications. If you always are optimistic, then God will reward you for that mentality; if you have such a positive view about God, then you will see that God will treat you as such. God Himself says:

أَنَا عِنْدَ ظَنِّ عَبْدِي الْمُؤْمِنِ بِي إِذَا خَيْرًا فَخَيْرًا وَإِنْ شَرًّا فَشَرٌّ

I am like what my believing servant thinks of me.
(Kulayni 1407AH, 2:72)

If we pray and believe that God is going to forgive us, then God-willing He will forgive us. However, there has to be sincerity in these thoughts. If you insist on doing evil because you believe God will forgive you, then it will disprove your sincerity in remorse. If you doubt God's greatness or believe that He will abandon you, then you will lose faith in God. You have to be always positive and optimistic. Always be hopeful and say that God-willing my *dua* will be answered. Maybe you have already made this request many times, but when you ask for *dua*, always be fresh! Don't believe that if God was capable of answering your request, then He already would have. Perhaps He already has, but we do not have the wisdom to see His answers. Ask again! Always ask! Never stop! This is very important: "Ask God while you are sure that He's going to answer" (Majlisi 1403AH, 90:305).

Avoiding the Obstacles

Even though we may observe all of the necessary steps, we have to also be careful about obstacles that may prevent our *duas* from being accepted:

Sins

Something that can serve as an obstacle is committing sins. If a person commits sins, then his *dua* can be blocked. In *Dua Kumayl* we say:

اللهم اغفر لي الذنوب التي تحبس الدعاء

O God! Forgive my sins that captivate my prayers!

Sins in general can block your *dua*. They do not let your *dua* reach God, so He will not answer them. Imam Ali (a) said:

المعصية تمنع الإجابة

Sins prevents *duas* from being answered. (Tamimi al-Amidi 1366 Sh, 47)

Sin is a declaration of war against God. How can we call God and expect Him to answer while we commit sins?

As mentioned, *duas* can be stopped by sins in general, but some specific sins are very hard to overcome, specifically upsetting one's parents. If I have *halal* income, maintain good *akhlaq*, fulfil my obligatory duties, but disobey my parents, I will not have pleased God.

One of the blessings of God is that He regards pleasing one's parents as equal to pleasing Himself. If you want to do something for God, do it for your parents! Let them be happy! Let them smile! Let them pray for you! This is very important. Just looking at your father or mother with love is an act of worship; and if we anger or annoy them, then we have surly displeased God. Imam Sadiq (a) is quoted as saying:

مَنْ نَظَرَ إِلَىٰ آبَوَيْهِ نَظْرَ مَا بَيْتٍ وَهُمَا ظَالِمَانِ لَهُ لَمْ يَقْبَلِ اللَّهُ لَهُ صَلَاةً

Whoever looks at his parents with anger when they have done injustice to him God will not accept his prayer (*salat*).²

This is the way God has elevated parents. You can benefit from this. This is a blessing, but if we don't treat them properly, this becomes a

² *Al-Kafi*, vol. 2, p. 349.

challenge to us. God has provided an opportunity for us to worship Him by just serving your parents. Heaven is under the feet of mothers. Everyone who wants to go to heaven must show humbleness to his mother. Whoever want success in this world and the hereafter has to be kind to his parents. We must not treat our parents like ordinary people.³

Another destructive sin that could prevent the fulfilment of our *duas* is dishonesty with people; to be kind while they are present, but say bad things about him or do something to harm him or her when they are not around. We have to be honest; we have to treat them as we would want to be treated. It is important to avoid acting like hypocrites and to be honest.

Another similar sin is to wish bad things for people. A believer must always want good for everyone. In the month of Ramadan, we read this beautiful *dua*:

اللَّهُمَّ أَدِجِلْ عَلَيَّ أَهْلَ الْقُبُورِ السُّرُورَ

³ At times, some people try to be very kind to their parents but unfortunately they don't know how to do it wisely and in the process, they annoy others in their life, like their wife. You have to use your time and energy to please your parents, but you cannot sacrifice someone else's rights for the sake of your parents. You have to find a way to please everyone in a way that God will be pleased with. God is never happy with you if you please your parents but annoy your wife. There are instances when a man is fully happy with his wife, yet because of his parents, he will divorce her. This is not the proper way to respect your parents. You have to find a balance without going from one extreme to another. You can be very kind, humble and supportive to your parents but not compromise the rights of other people. Find a way that you can meet all the needs and observe all the rights of people.

O God! Bring happiness to the people in graves! (Majlisi
1403AH, 95:120)

Note that it does not say, only the believers can be forgiven or receive God's mercy. It's up to God to decide! The *dua* continues by praying for those who are poor or hungry, those who lack proper clothes, those who are far from their hometowns, and captives:

اللَّهُمَّ اغْنِ كُلَّ فَقِيرٍ اللَّهُمَّ اشْبِعْ كُلَّ جَائِعٍ اللَّهُمَّ اكْسُ كُلَّ عُرْيَانٍ اللَّهُمَّ رُدَّ كُلَّ غَرِيبٍ اللَّهُمَّ
فُكِّ كُلَّ أَسِيرٍ

This is very beautiful prayer. This shows how much in Islam we care for humanity and wish good for everyone. So, if a person has a bad heart, wants bad for people, and always prays against people or wishes bad for them, then his or her *dua* will not be answered.

Failing to Enjoin Good and Prohibit Evil

According to our hadiths, if we failed to enjoin good and prohibit evil, bad people would dominate us and then our prayers in this regard would not be answered. Imam Husayn (a) tried to fulfil his duty with regard to this important obligation, but people did not help him, so they were afflicted with the rule of Yazid.

In what follows, we will refer to the etiquettes and conditions for acceptance of our prayers that we have to observe as well as obstacles that we have to avoid.

One of the requirements of *dua* is that it must be accompanied by proper action. *Dua* is to ask God and request Him for something, and if we really want something, then it is impossible that we don't take

appropriate measures. If, for example, we become really hungry, we don't just sit somewhere and pray for food; rather, we make efforts to acquire it. Likewise, we cannot just sit somewhere doing nothing but say, "O God! Fulfill my prayer. I want sustenance (*rizq*), I want good children." Such *duas* are not genuine, sincere requests.

So a *dua* that contains a request must always come with proper actions. It is like *tawakkul* (putting one's trust in God). When we trust God, it doesn't mean that we stop doing what we have to do on our part. *Tawakkul* is that you do your best, do whatever you can, and leave the rest to God. For example, I know that my car is OK, I have checked everything, I know how to drive, I have the direction, but I still may face many problems that are beyond my control. For instance, the road may become blocked because of an accident or because of bad weather. For such things, we have to put our trust in God and ask Him for help. Likewise, *dua* must always accompany action. A person who works hard—like a student who does all the assignments, attends all the classes, and studies for many hours—can pray for good results, and God will help him. But the one who does not take any action—such as a student who misses his classes, doesn't do the assignments, does not study, wastes his time—is not really making a genuine *dua*. If such a person really wanted good results, he would show this with his action. So *Dua* requires effort and serious action.

Another thing is that when you pray, not only you should be active with regard to the fulfilment of your prayers, but you should be active with regard to all your responsibilities in life. If I wish, for example, to be a good father and have good children and good relation with my children, I cannot separate this from the rest of my life. I cannot treat my parents or my other relatives or friends in a bad way and then expect or pray that my wish comes true. Life is very much inter-connected; what you do in some area, you will see its result elsewhere. When you help someone with

something, God helps you with another thing. We need to make sure that our entire life is a life of piety and righteousness.

There is a beautiful hadith from Imam Sadiq (a) (Kulayni 1407AH, 8:7) that reads:

أَكْثِرُوا مِنْ أَنْ تَدْعُوا اللَّهَ فَإِنَّ اللَّهَ يُحِبُّ مِنْ عِبَادِهِ الْمُؤْمِنِينَ أَنْ يَدْعُوهُ وَ قَدْ وَعَدَ اللَّهُ عِبَادَهُ
 الْمُؤْمِنِينَ بِالْإِسْتِجَابَةِ وَ اللَّهُ مُصِرٌّ دُعَاءَ الْمُؤْمِنِينَ يَوْمَ الْقِيَامَةِ هُمْ عَمَلًا يَزِيدُهُمْ بِهِ فِي الْجَنَّةِ
 فَأَكْثِرُوا ذِكْرَ اللَّهِ مَا اسْتَطَعْتُمْ فِي كُلِّ سَاعَةٍ مِنْ سَاعَاتِ اللَّيْلِ وَ النَّهَارِ ... فَأَعْطُوا اللَّهَ مِنْ
 أَنْفُسِكُمْ الْإِحْتِهَادَ فِي طَاعَتِهِ فَإِنَّ اللَّهَ لَا يُدْرِكُ شَيْءٌ مِنْ الْخَيْرِ عِنْدَهُ إِلَّا بِطَاعَتِهِ وَ اجْتِنَابِ
 مَخَارِمِهِ الَّتِي حَرَّمَ اللَّهُ ... حَامِلُوا النَّاسَ وَ لَا تَحْمِلُوهُمْ عَلَى رِقَابِكُمْ تَجْمَعُوا مَعَ ذَلِكَ طَاعَةَ
 رَبِّكُمْ وَ إِيَّائِهِمْ وَ سَبَّ أَعْدَاءِ اللَّهِ حَيْثُ يَسْمَعُونَكُمْ فَيَسُبُّوا اللَّهَ عَدْوًا بِغَيْرِ عِلْمٍ وَ قَدْ يُنْبَغِي
 لَكُمْ أَنْ تَعْلَمُوا حَدَّ سَبِّهِمْ لِلَّهِ كَيْفَ هُوَ إِنَّهُ مِنْ سَبِّ أَوْلِيَاءِ اللَّهِ فَقَدْ انْتَهَكَ سَبَّ اللَّهِ وَ مَنْ
 أَظْلَمَ عِنْدَ اللَّهِ مِمَّنْ اسْتَسَبَّ لِلَّهِ وَ لِأَوْلِيَاءِ اللَّهِ فَمَهْلًا مَهْلًا فَاتَّبِعُوا أَمْرَ اللَّهِ وَ لَا حَوْلَ وَ لَا
 قُوَّةَ إِلَّا بِاللَّهِ

According to this hadith, we must pray to God a lot, as much as we can, because God loves His believing servants to call and pray to Him. He has promised His believing servants that He would answer their prayers. Maybe you cannot hear the answer or understand that your *dua* is answered, but keep praying! Keep asking God! All your *duas* will appear on the Day of Judgment as righteous deeds, which will increase your rewards in Paradise. This is very important. So always try to remember and pray to God!

Then Imam (a) says that you should work hard to please God. *Al-ijtihad* means to work hard. You must prove to God that you are a person who is very serious and sincere in his request. You cannot achieve those things which are with God unless you fulfill your religious obligations and avoid sins. Although God gives worldly things to everyone, including His enemies, those things that are with Him—things that relate to our

eternal life in the next world and spirituality—require *taqwa* (God-wariness).

Then the Imam (a) says something—not directly connected to *dua*, but very much needed today—about how to treat people. The Imam (a) says that one of the requirements of *taqwa*, especially for us as community of Ahl al-Bayt (a), is that we must be very careful about our treatment of others.⁴

⁴ The word *naas* here means those who don't belong to this community that we belong to, be they Muslims from other schools of Islam, or non-Muslims. A requirement of *taqwa* is to be very careful about the way you treat them. The Imam (a) tells us to treat them with love, care, and warmth. So *taqwa* has to come along with good treatment of others. This is very much applicable to our situation today, especially people who live in multi-cultural societies. We need to know how to treat others, and this is a requirement of *taqwa*. This is also a requirement of the fulfilment of our *duas*. Then the Imam (a) tells us to be careful and never say bad words to the enemies of God when they hear you, because then they would say bad words to God. As the Qur'an says, "Revile not those unto whom they pray beside Allah lest they wrongfully revile Allah through ignorance (6:108)."

Imam Sadiq (a) adds that saying bad things to the Friends of God (*awliya' Allah*) is like saying bad things to God. So if you say something bad to the personalities that they admired, then they say bad things to your Imams; to your beloved personalities. The Imam (a) considers this as insulting God Himself, because to say bad things to God can be directly to Him or to His Friends. If we do not listen to this, we should know that we have been the ones who caused this problem. Imam Sadiq (a) says in this hadith, "Who is a greater wrongdoer in the eyes of God than a person who causes others to revile God and His Friends?" Therefore, the followers of Ahl al-Bayt (a), have to be very careful and very polite. This is what our Imams (a) expected of us.

Imam Sadiq (a) in this beautiful Hadith connects *dua* to remembrance of God and connects that to having a life of piety, which requires fixing your relation even with the enemies of God in a wise way. So everything is inter-connected. You cannot expect to solve one problem, while leaving other issues in chaos. Our lives must be lives of *taqwa*, wisdom, and morality. If you want to have a healthy body, you have to look after the needs of all organs of your body; you have to be worried about the health of all parts of your body. Life is the same. And if you are pious, if you adjust everything according to the will of God, then God helps you in every aspect of your life—He will make everything according to your will. Be a servant of God, and God will make everything at your service. Imam Hasan (a) said,

مَنْ عَبَدَ اللَّهَ عَبَّدَ اللَّهُ لَهُ كُلَّ شَيْءٍ

Whoever serves God, God will make everything his servants. (Majlisi 1403AH, 68:184)

Of course such a person would not be selfish, but wise and benevolent, as his will is in accordance with the will of God. Indeed, such a person becomes so good person that he wants only good things to happen for everyone. God puts love for such a person in people's hearts and makes everyone help him. Sometimes even the enemies of such a person, without their knowledge, help and serve him.

Lady Fatimah (a) said:

مَنْ أَسْعَدَ إِلَى اللَّهِ خَالِصَ عِبَادَتِهِ أَهْبَطَ اللَّهُ إِلَيْهِ أَفْضَلَ مَصْلَحَتِهِ

Whoever sends towards God his pure worship God sends down to him his best interest.

Therefore, we must make sure that we do things in the way that God wants and with pure intention and then what happens is that God will make sure that our best interests are secured. God is such a kind Lord.⁵

Imam Husain (a) also said:

مَنْ عَبَدَ اللَّهَ حَقَّ عِبَادَتِهِ آتَاهُ اللَّهُ فَوْقَ أَمَانِيهِ وَكَيْفَاتِهِ

The one who worships God in the way that God should be worshipped, God gives him more than his expectations [his dreams] and more than what is sufficient for him.

Of course, we cannot really worship God in the way that He deserves and He Himself knows that we are limited. God does not expect from us to do miracles, but we should try to worship Him as good as we can. If someone worships Him in the way that he can God gives him more than his expectations and more than what is sufficient for him. If you work for a generous person and suppose that for example the wage for working for such thing for one day is 100 pounds, a generous person would not give you less or even equal. He will give you so much that you will be surprised and in the case of God, you will be shocked. When God describes His reward as being “great” (أَجْرٌ عَظِيمٌ) it means that it would be certainly beyond our understanding and even beyond our imagination.

⁵ If I try to please Him, He will try also to please me. I do my best to serve Him; He makes sure that then my affairs will be sorted out. He would not forget me. The best things will be planned for me.

He also describes His reward as being “generous” (أَجْرٌ كَرِيمٌ), “big” (أَجْرٌ كَبِيرٌ), “unstopped” (أَجْرٌ غَيْرُ مَمْنُونٍ), “without measure” (أَجْرُهُمْ بِغَيْرِ حِسَابٍ).⁶

This is Allah (s). So what we need to do when we have a request is to take relevant measures for what we ask. For example, if I want good result for my exam, I have to study and do the assignments; if I want to be healed, I have to go to the doctor, take my medication, observe the right diet, and so forth.

⁶ If you know how to work for Him you should not worry about how He is going to reward you or pay you back. He knows how to do it. He would give you so much that you would feel embarrassed. You would say to God: “I have done just little. How much are You going to give me? Everyone who would be rewarded by Allah (swt), would be given so much that he would be really embarrassed. But Allah is kind and He knows our need, He just is looking for some excuse. Like for example you know that there is a person who is just married, he has lots of financial problems, he has debt, he needs also to find house. If you give him money right away without anything, maybe that person would feel bad because he doesn’t want to get help from people and also other people would expect the same. So you say: come and work for me. He comes and works for you but you don’t just pay him salary; you say: now our policy is that we help people with their marriage, we help people with their loan; so you give him lots of things. Why? Because you are a generous person and this work is just an excuse; you didn’t need any worker. You just employed him so that there is an excuse to give him something without him feeling bad and without other people asking the same thing without deserving. So Allah is looking for some excuse; He gives the people who try to be good people so much that *Imam Husayn* (a) says it will go beyond their dreams (wishes) and (beyond) what they need.

The second thing is that we should try to dedicate our entire life to God. You cannot say, “O God! I have this problem, but please don’t interfere with the rest of my life!”

I would like to conclude this part with the following divine saying (*hadith qudsi*), which is narrated by Imam Ali (a):

قَالَ اللَّهُ تَعَالَى مِنْ فَوْقِ عَرْشِهِ يَا عِبَادِي اعْبُدُونِي فِيمَا أَمَرْتُكُمْ وَ لَا تُعَلِّمُونِي مَا يُصْلِحُكُمْ
فِيَّيَّ اعْلَمُ بِهِ وَ لَا أَبْخُلُ عَلَيْكُمْ بِمَصَالِحِكُمْ

God Almighty said from above His Throne: “O My Servants! Worship me in what I have commanded you to! And do not teach me what suits you! I know it better, and I have no problem to give you your good.” (Majlisi 1403AH, 68:184)

Sometime you feel something is suitable for you, but when you get it, you realize that you have made a big mistake. Sometime you work hard to get a job, but after a few weeks you regret. Sometime you work hard to move to a house, but after some time you realize that it was a terrible house. So it not right for us to expect God to give us the exact thing that we want. God says: “Don’t teach me what suits you.” If God doesn’t give us something, there is a reason (*maslahah*): either it is not good for us at all or it is not good for us at this particular time. So God either delays it or gives us something else instead. If a person is injured, and as a result becomes very thirsty and constantly asks for water, should you listen to that person and give him plenty of water, or should you listen to his doctor who tells you, drinking water is harmful for him? Or imagine a child with diabetes who insists that he would like to have lots of cookies; as a parent, what would you do? You love your child, and it is difficult for you to say no, but still you refuse to give him cookies because of your child’s own good.

If a child asks his mother for some snack to eat, he will get her approval easily if his mother is not a doctor; but if the mother is a doctor or a nutritionist, the child will have a hard time getting the tasty things he desires. Now, God, who is above all in knowledge and wisdom, does not always approve whatever you ask Him for. What is important is that we have to trust Him and be sure that He wants the best for us. There is no doubt about this. Surely, if we ask God for something in a genuine and sincere way, He grants us our prayers if they are to our best.

Once, a person asked one of the Imams (a) about why sometimes God doesn't answer our prayers. The Imam (a) said, "Do you trust me when I say something?" The man said, "Yes, you are the Proof (*hujjah*) of God; if you say you do something, I trust you. Then the Imam said, "You must trust God more as God has promised you when He says, 'When My servants ask you about Me, [tell them that] I am indeed nearest. I answer the supplicant's call when he calls Me (2:186)... So trust God more than anyone else!'"⁷

We must definitely trust God, but we must not teach Him what is good for us. We must not tell Him: "I want this, and I want it here right now!" Rather, we should ask Him and say, "O God! If it is good for me, please grant me what I ask You for when and where You will!" You decide where to give. If You want to give it in this world please give it then in this world. If You want to give it in the hereafter please give it then in the

⁷ *Al-Kafī*, vol. 2, p. 488. Arabic text of hadith is as follows:

أَخْبَرَنِي عَنْكَ لَوْ أَنِّي قُلْتُ لَكَ قَوْلًا أَكُنْتُ تَتَّبِعُ بِهِ مَجِيئًا قُلْتُ لَهُ جَعَلْتُ فِدَاكَ إِذَا لَمْ أَتَقِ بِقَوْلِكَ فِيمَنْ
أَتَيْتُ وَ أَنْتَ حُجَّةُ اللَّهِ عَلَى خَلْقِهِ قَالَ فَكُنْ بِاللَّهِ أَوْثَقَ فَإِنَّكَ عَلَى مَوْعِدٍ مِنَ اللَّهِ أَلَيْسَ اللَّهُ عَزَّ وَ جَلَّ
يَقُولُ وَ إِذَا سَأَلْتَ عِبَادِي عَنِّي فَإِنِّي قَرِيبٌ أُجِيبُ دَعْوَةَ الدَّاعِ إِذَا دَعَانِ وَ قَالَ لَا تَقْنَطُوا مِن رَّحْمَةِ اللَّهِ وَ
قَالَ وَ اللَّهُ يَعِدُكُمْ مَغْفِرَةً مِنْهُ وَ فَضْلًا فَكُنْ بِاللَّهِ عَزَّ وَ جَلَّ أَوْثَقَ مِنْكَ بِعَيْرِهِ

hereafter. If You want to give me something else which is better me please do so, because my knowledge is very limited.

One of the things that we find in our hadiths is that if a calamity happens to you and you are able to pray and call God, it is a good sign; when you are inspired to do *dua*, it means that God wants to help you and stop that calamity. Imam Kazim (a) said:

مَا مِنْ بَلَاءٍ يَنْزِلُ عَلَى عَبْدٍ مُؤْمِنٍ فَيُلْهِمُهُ اللَّهُ عَزَّ وَجَلَّ الدُّعَاءَ إِلَّا كَانَ كَشَفَتْ ذَلِكَ الْبَلَاءَ
وَشِيكًا وَ مَا مِنْ بَلَاءٍ يَنْزِلُ عَلَى عَبْدٍ مُؤْمِنٍ فَيُمْسِكُ عَنِ الدُّعَاءِ إِلَّا كَانَ ذَلِكَ الْبَلَاءُ طَوِيلًا

There is no calamity that happens to a believer and then God inspires him to do *dua*, but the end of that calamity is near. And there is no calamity that happens to a believer and he stops praying, but that calamity will be prolonged. (Kulayni 1407AH, 2:471)

So Imam Kazim (a) continues:

فَإِذَا نَزَلَ الْبَلَاءُ فَعَلَيْكُمْ بِالْدُّعَاءِ وَ التَّصَرُّعِ إِلَى اللَّهِ عَزَّ وَجَلَّ

So whenever a calamity happened to you, pray and entreat to God! (Ibid.)

So we must try to always remember to do *dua*; if we forget to do *dua*, then your problems may remain as they are.

Another point mentioned in our hadiths about *dua* is that we should not wait till the problem happens and then we start praying. It is not good for a believer that when everything is going smoothly, he doesn't pray, but when he faces difficulties, he remembers God. We have to start praying and calling God right away, even if we have no problems.

In another hadith, we are told that if someone remembers and calls God before facing problems, his prayers will be accepted when difficulties

occur; when he calls God in that situation, angels say: "This is a familiar voice, this is the voice we used to hear before." So the angels help him and his *dua* reaches God. But for the one who was not praying before, the one who was always forgetful of God, the chance for the fulfilment of his prayer becomes little; angels say about such a person: "This is a voice we are not familiar with" (Kulayni 1407AH, 2:472). So it is very important that we pray in all situation.

According to another hadith from Imam Sadiq (a), if you have something in mind that makes you worried, start praying for it beforehand; don't postpone praying until you are actually faced with that problem. For example, you may have no children at the moment, but you are worried about what type of children you are going to have? Will your children be healthy? Will they become good believers? If you are worried, start praying now. Do not wait till you have children and you actually see that they have wrong behaviours and then you start doing *dua*. So this is very important: we must do *dua* even when we do not have any problems.

Another thing about *dua* is that you must insist. If you really want something, never give up! Keep asking God! Of course, provided that you take into account the other things we said previously; that is, if you are asking for something good, something that is pleasing to God, something that is possible, then insist. Do not say, "Because I have prayed several times, I feel embarrassed," because God loves us to insist. God is different from people. If you need something, first of all you shouldn't ask people as much as possible. Asking people may damage your honour and reputation, except if you ask good and pious believers. If you had no other choice but to ask people, then it is better not to insist; this is not again good for your honour. However, when it comes to God, it's different; no matter how many time you have asked Him,

you should keep asking. God loves those who insist in their prayers. Imam Sadiq (a) says:

إِنَّ اللَّهَ عَزَّ وَ جَلَّ كَرِهَ إِجْحَاحَ النَّاسِ بَعْضِهِمْ عَلَى بَعْضٍ فِي الْمَسْأَلَةِ وَ أَحَبَّ ذَلِكَ لِنَفْسِهِ إِنَّ
اللَّهَ عَزَّ وَ جَلَّ يُحِبُّ أَنْ يُسْأَلَ وَ يُطْلَبَ مَا عِنْدَهُ

God does not like people insist when they ask each other, but He loves that for Himself. He loves to be asked. (Kulayni 1407AH, 2:475)

When people go to God, they do not lose their honour; rather, they gain more honour. And God loves to be asked. He loves people to ask Him for what they need, because He knows that this relation with Him is very beneficial for us.

Another thing that we have in our hadiths about *dua* is that although God knows what we need or want, even if we don't mention anything, still we are encouraged to mention what we need in our prayers. Imam Sadiq (a) says:

إِنَّ اللَّهَ تَبَارَكَ وَ تَعَالَى يَعْلَمُ مَا يُرِيدُ الْعَبْدُ إِذَا دَعَاهُ وَ لَكِنَّهُ يُحِبُّ أَنْ تُبَيَّنَّ إِلَيْهِ الْحَوَائِجُ فَإِذَا
دَعَوْتَ فَسَمِّ حَاجَتَكَ

God Almighty knows what His servant wants when he prays, but He loves the requests to be mentioned. So when you want to ask Him for something mention your request! (Kulayni 1407AH, 2:476)

This is why you see that Ahl al-Bayt (a) mention their requests in *duas*.⁸ Perhaps one reason for this is that when you mention something, it helps you in gaining better focus. Psychologically, when you put something

⁸ If they had kept everything in their hearts between them and God, we wouldn't have had all these beautiful *duas*.

into words, it brings more attention; it helps you with concentration. Some psychologists have suggested that if you can summarize all your problems in a few words, then somehow those words bear some of the difficulty. At any rate, it is better that we mention our requests in our prayers.

Special Times and Places

The other thing about *dua* is that there are certain times and places and conditions in which *dua* is more quickly answered. For example, one of the times that is very good for prayer is midday (*zubr*). Imam Sadiq (a) says:

كَانَ أَبِي إِذَا طَلَّبَ الْحَاجَةَ طَلَبَهَا عِنْدَ زَوَالِ الشَّمْسِ فَإِذَا أَرَادَ ذَلِكَ قَدَّمَ شَيْئاً فَتَصَدَّقَ بِهِ، وَ
شَمَّ شَيْئاً مِنْ طَيِّبٍ، وَ رَاحَ إِلَى الْمَسْجِدِ، وَ دَعَا فِي حَاجَتِهِ بِمَا شَاءَ اللَّهُ

When my father had an important thing to ask God, he would pray for it right at the time of *zubr*. First, he would give some charity (*sadaqah*), then he would put some perfume on himself, go to the mosque, and then ask for his request. (Kulayni 1407AH, 2:477)

So, we learn that the time of *zubr* and also to pray in a mosque is very important.⁹ If there is a holy shrine or a mosque or a place of worship

⁹ There is something special in mosques. For example, you cannot gain everything by reading or by listening online to a sermon given in a mosque. Of course, it is good that those who cannot go to the mosque at least they listen online. This gives them connection, this gives them knowledge but it is not equal to a person who goes to the mosque. Allah says: these are my houses. Blessed is the one who makes his *wudu* at home and then comes to mosque to visit me. He is my visitor when he comes to my house and then Allah says: every

that you can go to, then go and pray there! If not, at least go to the place that you normally say your prayers at home. Mosques are the houses of God on earth:

أَلَا إِنَّ بُيُوتِي فِي الْأَرْضِ الْمَسَاجِدُ تُضِيءُ لِأَهْلِ السَّمَاءِ كَمَا تُضِيءُ النُّجُومُ لِأَهْلِ الْأَرْضِ ...
 أَلَا طُوبَى لِعَبْدٍ تَوَضَّأَ فِي بَيْتِي ثُمَّ زَارَنِي فِي بَيْتِي أَلَا إِنَّ عَلَيَّ الْمُرُورَ كِرَامَةً الزَّائِرِ أَلَا بَشِّرِ
 الْمَشَاءِينَ فِي الظُّلُمَاتِ إِلَى الْمَسَاجِدِ بِالنُّورِ السَّاطِعِ يَوْمَ الْقِيَامَةِ

Beware that my houses on the earth are mosques. They shine for the people of heaven, as stars shine for the people of the earth ... Blessed is the one who makes *wudu* at his home and then visits Me at My home. Verily, it is a duty for the one who is visited to honor his visitor. Give good news to the people who walk in darkness (i.e., at dawn) that they will have a shining light on the Day of Judgment. (Majlisi 1403AH, 81:14)

There are other times that are good for praying; for instance, before dawn and after midnight, Thursday night, and whenever your heart has a good spiritual state. According to a hadith (Kulayni 1407AH, 2:478), the

person who is visited should honour his visitor so those people who visit Me in My house give them good news of having shining life on the Day of Judgment. When everyone is in need of light these people would have light which is shining. So going to mosque is very important.

Imam Ṣādiq (p) said:

مَنْ مَشَى إِلَى مَسْجِدٍ لَمْ يَضَعْ رِجْلًا عَلَى رِطْبٍ وَلَا يَابِسٍ إِلَّا سَبَّحَتْ لَهُ الْأَرْضُ إِلَى الْأَرْضَيْنِ ...

The one who goes to the mosque doesn't take any step towards mosque unless the earth does *tasbeeh* for him...

This is the significance of going to mosques.

time when your heart becomes so soft that your tears start to come is a very good time for praying. In another hadith we read that God loves those who do *dua* a lot, and that the time between dawn and sunrise is very good for praying because it is the time when the doors of heaven are opened, the sustenance is distributed, and great requests are granted (Kulayni 1407AH, 2:478)

Praying Together

Another point is to pray together. When believers come together and pray, their prayer is more likely answered. According to a hadith, If forty people come together and pray God will grant them what they ask for. If their number is less than forty, they should repeat their *dua* until it is pronounced forty times (Kulayni 1407AH, 2:478).

Sometimes people are worried about children being among the people who do *dua*; they think they should keep children somewhere, because they disturb other; this is not really right. Of course, some measures should be taken so that everyone can feel comfortable, but the presence of children is indeed good. Imam Sadiq (a) said:

كان أبي إذا حزنه أمر جمع النساء و الصبيان ثم دعا و أمنوا

Whenever something happened that made my father sad, he would gather the ladies and children; then he would pray and they would say “amen.” (Kulayni 1407AH, 2:487)

So when children are there, ladies are there, men are there, all the community together, then the probability of the prayer being fulfilled increases. Imam Sadiq (a) says in a hadith:

وَلَوْ أَنَّ بَاكِيًا بَكَى فِي أُمَّةٍ لَرِحْمُوا

If a person cries in a nation, all of them will be included in [God's] mercy [because of him]. (Kulayni 1407AH, 2:481)

This is the power of community. So it is very good to be together; it is very good to have all the members of the community together. When God sees that we have all come together and we are asking Him for forgiveness, for His mercy, God will answer our *duas* and grant our requests.

Another point about *dua* is not to limit it to yourself or to your family or even to your community. Be generous in your *dua*! You are not going to lose anything. God is going to give. So at least be generous in your request and include everyone! The Prophet (s) said,

إِذَا دَعَا أَحَدُكُمْ فَلْيُعَمِّمْ فَإِنَّهُ أَوْجِبَ لِلدُّعَاءِ

When one of you is praying, he should make his *dua* general. This makes the chance of *dua* being accepted higher. (Kulayni 1407AH, 2:478)

God wants us to be together, so He wants us to ask for other people as well!

This series of articles tried to reflect very briefly the rich literature in the school of Ahlul-Bayt (a) on *dua*. The effort was made to discuss some of the main aspects of *dua* in their teachings. What remains is to put our knowledge into practice—to actually remember God, our Merciful Lord, and be constantly connected to Him, no matter whether we have problems and requests or not. What a great honour it is to be in

conversation with God and what a great impact it has when you are a person who is in communication with Him.¹⁰

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¹⁰ Whenever you want to know value of a person, whenever you want to know what type of person this person is; you always look at his friends, his companions; the people with whom he spends time. If someone spends his time with learned people, with pious people, with people who have prestige, with people who have honour; then we say: this man is a good man. If a person spends his time always in bad gatherings ... bad people; then you say: this person must be one of them because otherwise why he is always with them. Now imagine if a person spends his time with Allah (s) and is in communication with God. Who is his main friend? God. Who is the one that when he is very happy he talks to? God. Who is the one when he is very sad he talks to? God. Who is the one that when he is alone he prefers to be with? God. So the value of this person cannot be understood by anyone other than God Himself.