

29) Supplication and Its Importance

واعلم أنّ الذي بيده خزائن السموات والارض قد اذن لك في الدعاء وتكفل لك بالإجابة وامرك أن تسأله ليعطيك" وتسترحمه ليرحمك ولم يجعل بينه وبينك من يحجبك عنه، ولم يلجئك إلى من يشفع لك إليه ولم يمنعك إن أسأت من التوبة ولم يعاجلك بالنقمة و لم يعيرك بالإنابة ولم يفضحك حيث الفضيحة بك أولى ولم يشدد عليك في قبول الإنابة ولم يناقشك بالجريمة ولم يؤيسك من الرحمة بل جعل نزوعك عن الذنب حسنة وحسب سيئتك واحدة وحسب حسناتك عشرًا.

وفتح لك باب المتاب وباب الاستعتاب فإذا ناديتك سمع نداءك وإذا ناجيتك علم نجواك فأفضيت إليه بحاجتك وابتنته ذات نفسك وشكوت إليه همومك واستكشفتك كربك واستعنته على أمورك وسألته من خزائن رحمته ما لا يقدر على إعطائه غيره من زيادة الأعمار وصحة الأبدان وسعة الأرزاق.

ثم جعل في يديك مفاتيح خزائنه، بما اذن لك من مسألتيه، فمتى شئت استفتحت بالدعاء أبواب نعمته واستمطرت شأبيب رحمته فلا يفتنك إبطاء إجابته، فإن العطية على قدر النية وربما أخرت عنك الإجابة ليكون ذلك أعظم الأجر السائل وأجزل لعطاء الأمل وربما سألت الشيء فلا تعطاه وأوتيت خيراً منه عاجلاً أو آجلاً أو صرفت عنك لما هو خير لك فلرب أمر قد طلبته فيه هلاك دينك لو أوتيته فلتكن مسألتك فيما يبقى لك جماله وينفى عنك وباله فالمال لا يبقى لك ولا تبقى له

"Know that He in Whose hand are the treasures of the heavens and the earth has given you the permission for supplication and has guaranteed the acceptance of your requests. He has commanded you to ask Him so that He may grant you, and to seek His mercy so that He may have mercy on you. He has not placed anyone between you and Himself who will veil you from Him, and He has not entrusted you to one who will mediate for you before Him. He has not prevented you from repentance, if you sin, and He has not hastened with punishment to you, and He did not reproach you for repenting. He did not disgrace you when you were worthy of disgrace. He did not treat you with severity in the acceptance of (your) repentance. He did not take you to task for your sins and did not make you despair of (His) mercy.

Rather, he has appointed your restraint from sin to be a good deed, and counted each of your evil deeds as one and each good deed as ten.

He has opened for you the door of repentance and the door of seeking a return to His pleasure. Thus, when you call upon Him he hears your call and when you whisper to Him, He knows your secret talk. You acquaint Him with your needs and reveal your self to Him, complain to Him of your sorrows, seek from Him the removal of your afflictions and ask for His help in your affairs. You ask Him (to grant you) from the treasuries of His Mercy an increase in lifespan, good health and the abundance of sustenance that none other than He is able to grant.

Then He placed in your hands the keys to His treasures such that He permitted you to petition Him for them. So whenever you wish, you seek to open the doors of His blessings through supplication, and ask for the downpour of His Mercy. Do not let the slowness of His response dishearten you, for the grant is in accordance with the intention; sometimes the response has only been delayed for you so that it may be a greater reward for the petitioner and a more abundant grant for the hopeful one. Sometimes you ask for a thing and you are not given it, but you are given something better than it now or later; or it is turned away from you for what is better for you, because sometimes in the fulfillment of what you ask for is the destruction of your religion. Therefore let your request be for that, the beauty of which remains for you, and the evil consequences of which pass away from you. For wealth does not remain for you, nor do you remain for it”.

Commentary

In this part of the letter, Imam ‘Ali (as) puts stress on two points: Supplication and repentance, both of which are used for the spiritual reconstruction of man.

Man, due to his over-engagement in current daily affairs, gets self-centered and indulges in too much of self-reliance, with little attention for Divine bases, and erroneously assumes that he is mighty enough to carry on every action. He is not aware that in this world there are a thousand agents involved in the arrangement of affairs. Man, through his supplication and his obedience to God, could benefit a lot in order to surmount complexities of life.

For this reason, in this letter, Imam (as) teaches his son to be aware of the fact that in this world the worldly affairs are not effected solely through material and physical agents. Rather, spiritual factors, such as supplication and worship are also at work. The second point emphasized in this letter is the fact that if man, through his sins, temporarily distances himself from God, he can compensate for it through his repentance to gain, once again, God’s favour.

The Role Of Supplication And The Conditions For Its Fulfillment

In order for man to come close to God, to gain spiritual peace of mind, to attain ethical values, to stay away from sins, to cleanse mental disturbances, to avoid Satan’s temptations, to strengthen his

intelligence and cognitive powers, and to satisfy his physical and mental needs, he needs to worship God. For this very reason, the major part of the Prophet's educational programs in general and the Prophet of Islam's program in particular consists of teaching people to carry out prayers.

But in today's world more than ninety percent of people suffer from some sort of nervous and mental disturbance. Every day we witness millions of crimes in the world. A lot of people, due to distresses and worries and because of their indecisions, resort to narcotics and drugs and tranquilizers and alcohol and pornographic films. Most of them, towards the middle part of life, give up their education, jobs and families to engage in suicides or live a parasitic life. It seems as if Alexis Carrel's prediction had come true when he said, "This is the price we pay for the industrial civilization and for the changes of life we are receiving."¹

At such a time, we even need more prayers and supplication. Dale Carnegie presents the following statistics for the American community: "In the United States, in general, every thirty five minutes one person commits suicide and every two minutes a person goes mad." He then adds: "If people went after the peace which is contained in religious supplications, most of these suicides and mental diseases could be avoided"²

Elsewhere Alexis Carrel is reported to have said, "The greatest power man can produce is through supplication and worship. Such a power acts like gravity whose existence is real and touchable. In our medical life we have come across patients who were not treated through medicines but were cured through supplication and worship. The secret behind this is the fact that man uses his meager power and strength and extends it into an immense power. When we are worshipping or are engaged in supplication we are connecting ourselves with an eternal power that is in charge of all creation. We beg that power to look for our needs. Such a pleading removes our difficulties and magnifies our power"³

It is for this reason that the Prophet (S) has described supplication as the believer's weapon, the pillar of the religion, the light of the skies and the earth:

الدُّعَاءُ سِلَاحُ الْمُؤْمِنِ وَعَمُودُ الدِّينِ وَتُورُ السَّمَوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ "490"

And Imam 'Ali (as) calls supplication as the key to victory and salvation:

In the Du'a Kumayl he introduces supplication as a means for the strengthening of the body and mind and as an agent to serve both God and people and a means for a journey towards Heaven.

قَوِّ عَلَى خِدْمَتِكَ جَوَارِحِي وَأَشْدُدْ عَلَى الْعَزِيمَةِ جَوَانِحِي وَهَبْ لِي الْجِدَّ فِي خَشْيَتِكَ وَالِدَوَامَ فِي الْإِتِّصَالِ بِخِدْمَتِكَ
حَتَّى أَسْرَحَ إِلَيْكَ فِي مَيَادِينِ السَّابِقِينَ وَأَسْرِعَ إِلَيْكَ فِي الْبَارِزِينَ وَاشْتَاقَ إِلَيْكَ فِي الْمُشْتَاقِينَ وَأَدْنُو مِنْكَ دُنُوَّ
"المُخْلِصِينَ وَأَخَافَكَ مَخَافَةَ الْمُوقِنِينَ وَاجْتَمَعَ فِي جَوَارِكَ مَعَ الْمُؤْمِنِينَ"

"Strengthen my limbs for Your service and fortify my determination. Grant me earnestness in fear of You

and continuity in attachment to Your service, until I move towards You in the racing fields of the foremost ones, hasten to you among those who strive in hastening (towards You), yearn for Your nearness among the ardently desirous, draw near to you with the nearness of the sincere ones, and fear You with the fear of those possessed of certainty, and gather in Your Proximity together with the believers".[4](#)

Persuasion Towards Supplication And Worship

Because of the miraculous effects of supplication and worship, they have always been emphasized by God, Prophets and God's men. At one point the Holy Qur'an considers supplication as a means for the value of people:

" قُلْ مَا يَعْجَبُ بِكُمْ رَبِّي لَوْلَا دُعَاؤُكُمْ "

"Say: My Lord would not care for you were it not for your prayer".[5](#)

At another place God orders people to call upon Him and He will answer them and if they refuse to do so they will go to Hell:

" وَقَالَ رَبُّكُمْ ادْعُونِي أَسْتَجِبْ لَكُمْ إِنَّ الَّذِينَ يَسْتَكْبِرُونَ عَنْ عِبَادَتِي سَيَدْخُلُونَ جَهَنَّمَ دَاخِرِينَ "

"And your Lord says: Call upon Me, I will answer you; surely those who are too proud for My service shall soon enter hell abased".[6](#)

The Prophet (S) considers supplication as the best weapon against the enemy and the best means to get sustenance.

"أَلَا أَدُلُّكُمْ عَلَى سِلَاحٍ يَنْجِيكُمْ مِنْ أَعْدَائِكُمْ وَيُذِرُّ أَرْزَاقَكُمْ؟ قَالُوا بَلَى يَا رَسُولَ اللَّهِ قَالَ: تَدْعُونَ رَبَّكُمْ بِاللَّيْلِ وَالنَّهَارِ فَمَا آتَاكُمْ مِنْهُ؟ قَالُوا لَا نَدْرِي. قَالَ: سِلَاحُ الْمُؤْمِنِ الدُّعَاءُ "

"Should I not lead you to have a weapon which could save you from your enemies and give you abundant sustenance?" They said: "Yes, O Messenger of Allah". Then he said: "Pray to your Lord, day and night, because the weapon of a believer is supplication."[7](#)

Some people assume that the world is solely based on cause and effect factors. Therefore, they think, there is no room in the Divine destiny for prayer and supplication. They, however, ignore the fact that supplication is among cause and effect factors. This assumption is rejected in numerous traditions including the following. Zurarah narrated that Imam al-Sadiq (as) said:

أَدْعُ اللَّهَ عَزَّوَجَلَّ وَلَا تَقُلْ: إِنَّ الْأَمْرَ قَدْ فُرِغَ مِنْهُ قَالَ زُرَّارَةَ: إِنَّمَا يَعْنِي لَا يَمْنَعُكَ إِيْمَانُكَ بِالْقَضَاءِ وَالْقَدْرِ أَنْ تُبَالِغَ
"بِالدُّعَاءِ وَتَجْتَهِدَ فِيهِ"

"Call on God, and do not say: 'The matter has been settled'". Zurarah said: It only means that your faith in decree and destiny should not prevent you from doing your utmost to strive in supplication".[8](#)

Abdullah Ibn Sinan says that he heard Imam al-Sadiq (as) saying:

الدُّعَاءُ يَرُدُّ الْقَضَاءَ بَعْدَ مَا أُبْرِمَ إِبْرَامًا فَاكْثِرْ مِنَ الدُّعَاءِ فَإِنَّهُ مِفْتَاحُ كُلِّ رَحْمَةٍ وَنَجَاحُ كُلِّ حَاجَةٍ وَلَا يُنَالُ مَا عِنْدَ اللَّهِ
"عَزَّوَجَلَّ إِلَّا بِالدُّعَاءِ وَإِنَّهُ لَيْسَ بَابٌ يَكْثُرُ قَرَعُهُ إِلَّا يُوشِكُ أَنْ يُفْتَحَ لِصَاحِبِهِ"

"Supplication repels decree after it has been concluded. Therefore, engage yourself in supplication often, since it is the key to every mercy and the fulfillment of every need. What is with God is only attained through supplication. There is no door that a person knocks on often, but that it soon opens for him".[9](#)

Since the supplication is among the factors of cause and effect, therefore, you should always call on God.

The Prophet (S) has said:

يَدْخُلُ الْجَنَّةَ رَجُلَانِ كَانَا يَعْمَلَانِ عَمَلًا وَاحِدًا فَيَرَى أَحَدُهُمَا صَاحِبَهُ فَوْقَهُ، فَيَقُولُ يَا رَبِّ بِمَا اعْطَيْتَهُ وَكَانَ عَمَلُنَا
"وَاحِدًا؟ فَيَقُولُ اللَّهُ تَبَارَكَ وَتَعَالَى: سَأَلَنِي وَلَمْ تَسْأَلْنِي"

"Two men whose actions are identical enter paradise, but one of them sees his companion has a higher status. The man says: My Lord! Why did You grant him that when our actions were the same? God, the Exalted, replies: He asked and called on Me, but you did not".[10](#)

Imam Baqir (as) has said:

إِنَّ اللَّهَ كَرِهَ الْحَاحَ النَّاسِ بَعْضُهُمْ عَلَى بَعْضٍ فِي الْمَسْأَلَةِ وَاحَبَّ ذَلِكَ لِنَفْسِهِ إِنَّ اللَّهَ جَلَّ ذِكْرُهُ يُحِبُّ أَنْ يُسْأَلَ
"وَيُطْلَبَ مَا عِنْدَهُ"

"God dislikes people beseeching one another for a request, but He likes that for Himself. God, the Exalted, likes to be asked and requested for what is with Him".[11](#)

He has also said:

"والله لا يُلِحُّ عَبْدٌ مُؤْمِنٌ عَلَى اللَّهِ عَزَّوَجَلَّ فِي حَاجَتِهِ إِلَّا قَضَاهَا لَهُ"

"I swear by God, a believer does not beseech God for a need but that He fulfils it for him". [12](#)

In this regard, of course, there is no difference between big needs and small ones. Imam Baqir (as) has also said,

"لا تُحَقِّرُوا صَغِيرًا مِنْ حَوَائِجِكُمْ فَإِنَّ أَحَبَّ الْمُؤْمِنِينَ إِلَى اللَّهِ اسْأَلَهُمْ"

"Do not belittle your small needs because the believers dearest to God are those who ask the most. [13](#)

God told Prophet Moses (as):

"سَلْنِي كُلَّ مَا تَحْتَاجُ إِلَيْهِ حَتَّى عَلَفَ شَاتِكَ وَمَلَحَ عَجِينِكَ"

"Ask Me for all that you need, even the grass for your sheep and salt for your dough". [14](#)

God Will Not Need Anything, Nor Does He Need Any Recommender

Since God dominates all creatures and is closer to them even than they themselves:

وَنَحْنُ أَقْرَبُ إِلَيْهِ مِنْ حَبْلِ الْوَرِيدِ - أَنَّ اللَّهَ يَحُولُ بَيْنَ الْمَرْءِ وَقَلْبِهِ "502"

"...and since We are nearer to him than his life-vein." ". (And know that) Allah intervenes between man and his heart".

Therefore God hears people's supplication and prayers even if they are offered in a whisper, let alone loudly. He is aware of the intentions of all. He does not suffer from any kind of jealousy. There is no need for a servant or mediator to connect people with God. Allah says:

"وَإِذَا سَأَلَكَ عِبَادِي عَنِّي فَإِنِّي قَرِيبٌ أُجِيبُ دَعْوَةَ الدَّاعِي إِذَا دَعَانِي فَلْيَسْتَجِيبُوا لِي وَلْيُؤْمِنُوا بِي لَعَلَّهُمْ يَرْشُدُونَ"

"And when My servants asks you concerning Me, then surely I am very near; I answer the prayer of the supplicant when he calls on Me, so they should answer My call and believe in Me that they may walk in the right way". [15](#)

Thus, if God has led us towards "*means of nearness*"¹⁶ and has let the interceder¹⁷ intercede with Him, it is not because the asking of the believers will affect God, but it is a sign of the believers' attainment of perfection.¹⁸

The Conditions For The Acceptance Of Supplication And

Prayers:

In accordance with God's promises, God accepts every supplication and prayers of the believers. But not every supplication is accepted under any kind of conditions. In some circumstances they are accepted, in others they are rejected.

1. The Physical And Spiritual Readiness

The first condition for the acceptance of supplication and prayers is the believer's physical and spiritual readiness; the time and place also should be appropriately selected: midnight and at the dawn, for instance.

There is a tradition narrated from Imam al-Sadiq (as) which states that God has told Moses (as):

يا بَنَ عِمْرَانَ هَبْ لِي مِنْ قَلْبِكَ الْخُشُوعَ وَمِنْ بَدَنِكَ الْخُضُوعَ وَمِنْ عَيْنِكَ الدُّمُوعَ وَادْعُنِي فِي ظُلْمِ اللَّيْلِ فَإِنَّكَ تَجِدُنِي قَرِيباً مُجِيباً

*"O son of Imran, give me from your heart humility, from your body submissiveness and from your eyes tears, and call on me in the darkness of the night. You will find Me very near and answering your supplication."*¹⁹

Nawf al-Bikali says: One night I saw Imam 'Ali (as), had left his bed, and was looking at the stars. He said: 'O Nawf, are you awake or asleep'? I replied I was awake, He then said:

'O Nawf, Prophet David (as) woke up at such an hour saying: "At this time any kind of supplication and prayer will be accepted unless the performer of the supplication is a tax official for a tyrant governor, or his secret spy or his policeman, or a musical player of tambour or an entertainer"²⁰

The Avoidance Of Sins

The other condition for the acceptance of the prayer and supplication is the being at a distance from sins. It is because most sins are a thick curtain in the way of the acceptance of prayers. We observe this in the Du'a Kumayl:

"اللَّهُمَّ اغْفِرْ لِي الذُّنُوبَ الَّتِي تَحْبِسُ الدُّعَاءَ"

“O God! Forgive me the sins that hold back the supplication”.

Ayatollah Kalbasi mentions the sins which hinder the supplication and prayers to be accepted: suspicion, quarrel with brethren, delaying the performance of prayers, the parents’ dissatisfaction with children.[21](#)

He, then, reports the following poem from Mawlawi:

The smell of haughtiness, of greed, and of excessive need,
In the speech will show themselves like onions;
If you swear that you have not taken onions,
That you have stopped taking onion and garlic;
When you open your mouth to swear,
The smell of these will surely betray you;
Then your prayers will be rejected for the lies you told,
Your tongue is not in harmony with your heart;
That supplication will be rejected,
It will not find acceptance;
If your intention is straight, but your speech not straight,
This distortion of speech is accepted by God;
But if your intention is not straight but your speech is all right,
That sort of intention is worth nothing.

The Purity Of Foods

As we know our prayers and actions stem from a power which is based on foods. If these foods are gained illegally, our prayers are not clean and as a consequence they are not accepted.

The great Prophet (S) has said:

"مَنْ أَحَبَّ أَنْ يُسْتَجَابَ دُعَاؤُهُ فَلْيُطَيِّبْ مَطْعَمَهُ وَمَكْسَبَهُ"

"Whoever wishes his supplication to be answered, let his food and his earnings be lawful"[22](#).

In response to somebody who had said he wanted his prayers to be accepted, the Prophet (S) said:

"طَهِّرْ مَأْكَلَكَ وَلَا تُدْخِلْ فِي بَطْنِكَ الْحَرَامَ"

"Purify your food (i.e. eat what is lawful) and do not let unlawful food enter your stomach."[23](#)

He said also:

"أَطِيبْ كَسْبَكَ تُسْتَجَابُ دَعْوَتُكَ فَإِنَّ الرَّجُلَ يَرْفَعُ اللَّقْمَةَ إِلَى فِيهِ حَرَامًا فَمَا تُسْتَجَابُ لَهُ أَرْبَعِينَ يَوْمًا"

"Purify your earnings and your supplication will be accepted. This is because the supplication of a person who raises a morsel of unlawful food to his mouth is not answered for forty days".[24](#)

Imam Sadiq (as) has said:

"إِذَا أَرَادَ أَحَدُكُمْ أَنْ يُسْتَجَابَ لَهُ فَلْيُطَيِّبْ كَسْبَهُ وَلْيَخْرُجْ مِنْ مَظَالِمِ النَّاسِ وَإِنَّ اللَّهَ لَا يَرْفَعُ إِلَيْهِ دُعَاءَ عَبْدٍ وَفِي بَطْنِهِ حَرَامٌ أَوْ عِنْدَهُ مَظْلَمَةٌ لِأَحَدٍ مِنْ خَلْقِهِ"

"If anyone of you wishes his supplication be accepted, let him purify his earnings and cease defrauding people. This is because the supplication of a believer is not raised up to Allah while there is unlawful food in his stomach and he has a due wrongfully taken from one of His creatures".[25](#)

The Possibility And Contingency Of A Deed

Among the conditions set for prayers to be acceptable are the possibility of the occurrence of the actions and the contingency of the desired action. Imam 'Ali (as) has said:

"يَا صَاحِبَ الدُّعَاءِ لَا تَسْأَلْ مَا لَا يَكُونُ وَلَا يَجِلُّ"

"O performer of supplication, do not ask for anything unattainable or unlawful".[26](#)

The Hindrances On The Way Of Accepting Supplication

Although God is kind towards the believers and hears their overt and covert prayers and has promised to answer their calls, there are factors which may cause the prayers not to be accepted. Among these factors are the following:

1. Sins

Indulging in sins may be a factor for the rejection of a prayer. Imam Sadiq (as) is reported to have said, "Musa b. 'Imran (as) was passing by one of his followers who was prostrating. After some time he was still prostrating. Musa told him: If I could, I would satisfy your needs.

At this moment God revealed to him,

"لَوْ سَجَدَ حَتَّى يَنْقَطِعَ عُنُقُهُ مَا قَبِلْتُهُ حَتَّى يَتَحَوَّلَ عَمَّا أَكْرَهُ إِلَى مَا أُحِبُّ"

"I will not accept his prayers even if he engages in prostrating till his neck breaks. I will accept his prayers if he stops doing what I hate and turn towards doing things which I like".[27](#)

2. Injustice

One of the factors which hinder the acceptance of prayers is the injustice done to others. In the book *Ihtijaj* there is a tradition narrated from Imam Sadiq (as) depicting this truth:

إِنَّهُ سُئِلَ أَلَيْسَ يَقُولُ اللَّهُ أَدْعُونِي أَسْتَجِبْ لَكُمْ؟ وَقَدْ نَرَى الْمُضْطَرَّ يَدْعُوهُ وَلَا يُجَابُ لَهُ وَالْمَظْلُومَ يَسْتَنْصِرُهُ عَلَيَّ
عَدُوهُ فَلَا يَنْصُرُهُ قَالَ وَيْحَكَ مَا يَدْعُوهُ أَحَدٌ إِلَّا اسْتَجَابَ لَهُ أَمَّا الظَّالِمُ فِدَعَاؤُهُ مَرْدُودٌ إِلَى أَنْ يَتُوبَ وَأَمَّا الْمُحِقُّ فَإِذَا
دَعَا اسْتَجَابَ لَهُ وَصَرَفَ عَنْهُ الْبَلَاءَ مِنْ حَيْثُ لَا يَعْلَمُهُ أَوْ ادَّخَرَ لَهُ ثَوَابًا جَزِيلًا لِيَوْمِ حَاجَتِهِ إِلَيْهِ وَإِنْ لَمْ يَكُنْ الْأَمْرُ
الَّذِي سَأَلَ الْعَبْدُ خَيْرًا لَهُ إِنْ أَعْطَاهُ أَمْسِكَ عَنْهُ

‘He was asked: Doesn’t God tell the believers: “Call upon Me and I will answer you” (40:60)? And this is while we see the distressed call upon Him and they are not answered, and the wronged seeking help against the enemy, but they do not receive any help.

Imam Sadiq (as) replied: Woe be to you! No one calls Him except that He answers Him. But a tyrant’s prayer is rejected till he repents. When a rightful person prays, he is answered and affliction is turned away from him while he is unaware of it, or abundant reward is stored for him for the day of his need. But if the servant asks for something that would not be good for him if he was granted it, then God holds it back from him.”²⁸

3. When Natural Factors Are Not Considered

According to the Islamic traditions, prayers and supplication are specific to occasions when man’s trials and struggles are of no use. Imam Sadiq (as) has stated:

أَرْبَعَةٌ لَا تُسْتَجَابُ لَهُمْ دَعْوَةٌ: رَجُلٌ جَالِسٌ فِي بَيْتِهِ يَقُولُ اللَّهُمَّ ارْزُقْنِي فَيُقَالُ لَهُ: أَلَمْ أَمُرْكَ بِالطَّلَبِ، وَرَجُلٌ كَانَتْ لَهُ
إِمْرَأَةٌ فَدَعَا عَلَيْهَا فَيُقَالُ لَهُ: أَلَمْ أَجْعَلْ أَمْرَهَا إِلَيْكَ، وَرَجُلٌ كَانَ لَهُ مَالٌ فَاسْرَفَ فَيَقُولُ اللَّهُمَّ ارْزُقْنِي فَيُقَالُ لَهُ: أَلَمْ أَمُرْكَ
بِالِاقْتِنَادِ، أَلَمْ أَمُرْكَ بِالِاصْلَاحِ...، وَرَجُلٌ كَانَ لَهُ مَالٌ فَادَانَهُ بِغَيْرِ بَيِّنَةٍ فَيُقَالُ لَهُ: أَلَمْ أَمُرْكَ بِالشَّهَادَةِ

“There are four groups of people whose calls are not answered:

A man who sits at home saying: ‘O God, give me daily bread’. He is then told: ‘Didn’t I command you to seek it?’

A man who has a wife and he prays to God against her. It is said to him: ‘Didn’t I give you the right of divorce?’

A man who had wealth, but was extravagant, and then he says: ‘O God, give me sustenance’. He is told: ‘Didn’t I command you to be moderate in your expenditure?’

And a man had wealth which he lent to another without any receipt. Then the owner asks God to soften the man’s heart to return to him what he owes him. It is said to him: ‘Didn’t I command you to have witnesses when you lend anything to anyone?’”²⁹

Considering the fact that the world is based on the cause and effect principle, it is useless to lie under a date-tree and keep your mouth open in order for the dates to fall in your mouth. You should stand up and pick the date and chew and then swallow it till the act of digestion takes place. This is shown in the tradition about the Bani Isra'il concerning Moses who fell ill but did not take the necessary medicine. God then said:

"وَعِزَّتِي وَجَلَالِي لَا أُبْرِؤُكَ حَتَّى تَتَدَاوَى بِمَا ذَكَرُوهُ لَكَ، أَرَدْتَ أَنْ تُبْطِلَ حِكْمَتِي بِتَوَكُّلِكَ عَلَيَّ فَمَنْ أَوْدَعَ الْعَقَاقِيرَ مَنَافِعَ الْأَشْيَاءِ غَيْرِي"

"I swear by My Glory and My Majesty, I shall not cure you until you take the medicine which Bani Israel have brought for you. Do you wish to annul My Wisdom through your trust in me? Who other than Me has put these benefits in the herbs?"³⁰

The Reasons Of Delaying Responding To Supplication

Sometimes the supplication of a person will not be answered quickly for the following reasons:

a) The qualification for the acceptance of the supplication is still absent in the person. This qualification is only obtained through the person's struggle and perseverance.

Concerning this issue, Imam 'Ali (as) in the above letter has stated:

"فَلَا يُفْنِطَنَّكَ إِبْطَاءُ إِجَابَتِهِ فَإِنَّ الْعَطِيَّةَ عَلَى قَدَرِ النِّيَّةِ"

"Do not let the slowness of His response dishearten you, for the grant is in accordance with the intention".

b) If the supplication is not answered immediately, he may try to be more qualified. In that case he will get more reward for his endeavors. God has not answered to this person's call in order that he may try to be more qualified. Imam 'Ali (as), in this regard, says:

"وَرُبَّمَا أُخِّرَتْ عَنْكَ الْإِجَابَةُ لِيَكُونَ ذَلِكَ أَعْظَمَ لِأَجْرِ السَّائِلِ وَاجْزَلَ لِعَطَاءِ الْأَمَلِ وَرُبَّمَا سَأَلْتَ شَيْئاً فَلَا تُعْطَاهُ وَأَوْتَيْتَ خَيْراً مِنْهُ عَاجِلاً أَوْ آجِلاً"

"Sometimes the response has only been delayed for you so that it may be a greater reward for the petitioner and a more abundant grant for the hopeful one. Sometimes you ask for a thing and you are not given it, but you are given something better than it now or later".

c) Sometimes the desired object is not to the benefit of the asking person both in this world and in the other. Examples are: social position, wealth, children, and the like. In such cases God will not answer

the call since He is generous towards the person. Regarding this, Imam ‘Ali (as) states in this letter:

"أَوْ صُرِفَ عَنْكَ لِمَا هُوَ خَيْرٌ لَكَ فَلَرُبَّ أَمْرٍ قَدْ طَلَبْتَهُ فِيهِ هَلَاكُ دِينِكَ لَوْ أُوتِيْتَهُ"

"..or it is turned away from you for what is better for you, because sometimes in the fulfillment of what you ask for is the destruction of your religion.

Therefore let your request be for that, the beauty of which remains for you, and the evil consequences of which pass away from you. For wealth does not remain for you, nor do you remain for it".

The Access To Repentance And Its Role In Correcting The Sinner

Since one of the requirements for the acceptance of our supplication is the state of being innocent, Imam ‘Ali (as) in this letter emphasizes on repentance.

He points out the following issues:

1. God Did Not Deny Your Right Of Repentance

Because of this animal/angel nature, man may commit sins in his selection of good–bad affairs. If there were not a way to repent for man, he would get completely destroyed. In that case, a guilty person might think since there is no way for him to cleanse himself of his guilts, he might continue his evil–doing and might tell himself "If I want to go to hell, let me go there like a man." This kind of attitude would hinder man to arrive at the perfection which is important in the philosophy of creation.

For this reason God has opened a door to this group of people to return to Him through the door which Imam Zayn al-‘Abidin (as) mentions in the supplication of the repentant (*munajat al-tawwabin*):

"إِلَهِي أَنْتَ الَّذِي فَتَحْتَ لِعِبَادِكَ بَاباً إِلَى عَفْوِكَ سَمِيئَةَ التَّوْبَةِ فَقُلْتَ: تَوْبُوا إِلَى اللَّهِ تَوْبَةً نَصُوحاً 519 فَمَا عُدْرُ مَنْ
"أَغْفَلَ دُخُولَ الْبَابِ بَعْدَ فَتْحِهِ"

*"O My God! You have opened for Your servants a door to Your Pardon which You have named repentance, for You have said: **“Turn to Allah with a sincere repentance” (66:8)**. Then what is the excuse of one who neglects entering this door after it is opened?"[31](#)*

Thus, in Islam, a sinner can repent and there are no heavy conditions for his repentance and he also is addressed not to despair but to return to God:

"قُلْ يَا عِبَادِيَ الَّذِينَ أَسْرَفُوا عَلَىٰ أَنفُسِهِمْ لَا تَقْنَطُوا مِن رَّحْمَةِ اللَّهِ إِنَّ اللَّهَ يَغْفِرُ الذُّنُوبَ جَمِيعًا إِنَّهُ هُوَ الْغَفُورُ الرَّحِيمُ"
وَأَنِيبُوا إِلَىٰ رَبِّكُمْ وَأَسْلِمُوا لَهُ مِن قَبْلِ أَن يَأْتِيَكُمُ الْعَذَابُ ثُمَّ لَا تُنصِرُونَ وَاتَّبِعُوا أَحْسَنَ مَا أُنزِلَ إِلَيْكُم مِّن رَّبِّكُمْ مِن قَبْلِ

أَنْ يَأْتِيَكُمْ الْعَذَابُ بَغْتَةً وَأَنْتُمْ لَا تَشْعُرُونَ

“Say: O my servants, who have acted extravagantly against their own souls, do not despair of the mercy of Allah; surely Allah forgives the faults altogether; surely He is the Forgiving, the Merciful. And return to your Lord time after time and submit to Him before there comes to you the punishment, then you shall not be helped. And follow the best that has been revealed to you from your Lord before there comes to you the punishment all of a sudden while you do not even perceive.”[32](#)

And this return is so favorable that we read in one tradition from Imam Baqir (as):

"إِنَّ اللَّهَ تَعَالَى أَشَدُّ فَرَحًا بِتَوْبَةِ عَبْدِهِ مِنْ رَجُلٍ أَضَلَّ رَاحِلَتَهُ وَزَادَهُ فِي لَيْلَةٍ ظُلْمَاءَ فَوَجَدَهَا"

"God, the Exalted's rejoicing at the repentance of His servant is far greater than a person who has lost his horse and provisions in a dark night and then found them."

Even despair of being forgiven is enumerated as a major sin.

2. There Is Still Time For Repentance

Man should not put off his repentance until he suddenly opens his eyes and confronts the Angel of Death while his shoulders are weighed down with sins. His delay might be the result of his ignorance (due to instincts and untamable desires and their dominance over man's reasoning and faith) and not to the factor of aggression. In such cases, he has time to repent and God is not in a hurry to revenge the worldly wrong-doings here or in the Hereafter.[33](#) God says:

إِنَّمَا التَّوْبَةُ عَلَى اللَّهِ لِلَّذِينَ يَعْمَلُونَ السُّوءَ بِجَهَالَةٍ ثُمَّ يَتُوبُونَ مِنْ قَرِيبٍ فَأُولَئِكَ يَتُوبُ اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِمْ وَكَانَ اللَّهُ عَلِيمًا
حَكِيمًا

“Repentance with Allah is only for those who do evil in ignorance, then turn to Allah soon, so these it is to whom Allah turns mercifully, and Allah is ever knowing, Wise”.[34](#)

On the other hand, God rejects repentance at the time of death:

وَلَيْسَتِ التَّوْبَةُ لِلَّذِينَ يَعْمَلُونَ السَّيِّئَاتِ حَتَّى إِذَا حَضَرَ أَحَدَهُمُ الْمَوْتُ قَالَ إِنِّي تُبْتُ الْآنَ وَلَا الَّذِينَ يَمُوتُونَ وَهُمْ كُفَّارًا
أُولَئِكَ أَعْتَدْنَا لَهُمْ عَذَابًا أَلِيمًا

“And repentance is not for those who go on doing evil deeds, until when death comes to one of them, he says: Surely now I repent; nor for those who die while they are unbelievers. These are

they for whom we have prepared a painful chastisement”.[35](#)

In traditions, we read that the Prophet (S) has said:

"مَنْ تَابَ قَبْلَ أَنْ يُعَايِنَ قَبْلَ اللَّهِ تَوْبَتَهُ"

“Whoever repents before he confronts death, God will accept his repentance”.[36](#)

The Prophet, on the other hand, has said,

"إِذَا بَلَغَتِ النَّفْسُ هَذِهِ - وَاهْوَى بِيَدِهِ إِلَى حُنْجُرَتِهِ - لَمْ يَكُنْ لِلْعَالِمِ تَوْبَةً وَكَانَتْ لِلْجَاهِلِ تَوْبَةً"

“When the soul arrives here – and he pointed at his throat – there is no repentance for a scholar, but there is repentance for an ignorant person”.[37](#)

Thus, the possibility of repentance prior to death is a sign of God's Kindness and is indicative of the fact that God wishes to save any sinner from his sin and has left the door of repentance open.

3. In Accepting Repentance, God Is Not Strict

Although God is strict towards those who aggressively indulge in wrong–doings and would not pardon them:

"وَوَجَدُوا مَا عَمِلُوا حَاضِرًا وَلَا يَظْلِمُ رَبُّكَ أَحَدًا" - "وَمَنْ يَعْمَلْ مِثْقَالَ ذَرَّةٍ شَرًّا يَرَهُ"

“And what they had done they shall find present (there); and your Lord does not deal unjustly with any one”.[38](#) ***“And he who has done an atom's weight of evil shall see it”.***[39](#)

He will, however, be generous towards those who regret their wrong deeds and turn towards Him.

"إِلَّا مَنْ تَابَ وَآمَنَ وَعَمِلَ عَمَلًا صَالِحًا فَأُولَئِكَ يُبَدِّلُ اللَّهُ سَيِّئَاتِهِمْ حَسَنَاتٍ وَكَانَ اللَّهُ غَفُورًا رَحِيمًا"

“Except him who repents and does a good deed; so these are they of whom Allah changes the evil deeds to good ones; and Allah is Forgiving, Merciful”.[40](#)

"إِنَّ اللَّهَ لَا يَظْلِمُ مِثْقَالَ ذَرَّةٍ وَإِنْ تَكُنْ حَسَنَةً يَضَاعِفْهَا وَيُؤْتِ مِنْ لَدُنْهُ أَجْرًا عَظِيمًا"

“Surely Allah does not do injustice to the weight of an atom, and if it is a good deed He multiplies

it and gives from Himself a great reward".[41](#)

Since repentance is a suitable action, God will carry out His promise:

"مَنْ جَاءَ بِالْحَسَنَةِ فَلَهُ عَشْرُ أَمْثَالِهَا وَمَنْ جَاءَ بِالسَّيِّئَةِ فَلَا يُجْزَى إِلَّا مِثْلَهَا وَهُمْ لَا يُظْلَمُونَ"

"Whoever brings a good deed, he shall have ten like it, and whoever brings an evil deed, he shall be recompensed only with the like of it, and they shall not be dealt with unjustly".[42](#)

This fact shows that God is lenient towards those who repent and rewards those who stop carrying out sins. This is another way for sinners to be absolved by God.

The Conditions For The Perfect Repentance

At the end of this discussion, it is necessary to point out one important issue: As we understand the term repentance involves a sinner's regret for what is previously done and a decision not to do it again. Such repentance erases the past record.

But in some other traditions there are some restrictions such as the payment of what a person owes others. Such a restriction is seen in Nahj al-Balaghah:

قال أمير المؤمنين عليه السلام لقائل قال بحضرته (استغفر الله): تكلفتك أمك، اندري ما الاستغفار؟ الاستغفار درجة العليين، وهو اسم واقع على ستة معان: أولها الندم على ما مضى، والثاني العزم على ترك العود إليه أبداً، والثالث أن تؤدي إلى المخلوقين حقوقهم حتى تلقى الله أملس ليس عليك تبعه، والرابع أن تعمد إلى كل فريضة عليك ضيعتها فتؤدي حقها، والخامس أن تعمد إلى اللحم الذي نبت على السحت فتذيبه الاحزان حتى تلصق الجلد بالعظم وينشأ بينها لحم جديد، والسادس أن تذيب الجسم ألم الطاعة كما أذقت حلاوة المعصية فعند ذلك تقول: "استغفر الله".

'Somebody used the expression "Astaghfirullah" (I ask Allah to forgive me) in front of Imam 'Ali (as). Imam 'Ali (as) said: "May your mother weep on you! Do you realize what Istighfar (seeking forgiveness) means? Istighfar is the station of the 'Illiyin and it includes six phases: First: remorse at deeds committed in the past; second: the determination never to return to them again; third, returning to people their dues so that you meet God free of blame, with no claim of wrongdoing against you; fourth, attending to every obligatory act that you have neglected and fulfilling its due; fifth, to attend to the flesh that you have grown through unlawful earnings and to melt it down through grief until the skin adheres to the bones and new flesh is formed in between; sixth, to make the body taste the pain of obedience just as it had tasted the sweetness of disobedience. Then say: "Astaghfirullah".[43](#)

Similar statements are observed in traditions which are apparently in contrast with the ease of

repentance that we have been discussing so far. Thus, our scholars have tried to set forth a kind of compromise among these apparent contradictions. One of these scholars is al-Majlisi who after mentioning the tradition from Imam ‘Ali (as) said:

"ما سوى الاولين عند جمهور المتكلمين من شرائط كمال التوبة"

“For scholars, repenting from the past doings and return from evil-doings is among the perfect conditions of repentance and not among the principal conditions”.[44](#)

Allamah in his commentary on *Tajrid* says, concerning this:

"Affairs such as compensation for the lost prayers or the payment of people's rights are among the extra conditions on repentance and are not included in the essence of repentance. Later on, if the person did not carry out the lost prayers and did not pay people's rights, these will be considered as the shunning of one's tasks which entails new punishments and which is not related to the principle of repentance".[45](#)

- [1](#) . Man, the Unknown, p. 150.
- [2](#) . How to Stop Worrying and Start Living, p.227.
- [3](#) . Man, the Unknown, p.229.
- [4](#) . Mafatih al-Jinan, p.89.
- [5](#) . Qur'an 25:77.
- [6](#) . Qur'an 40:60.
- [7](#) . Usul al-Kafi, vol.2, p.468.
- [8](#) . Usul al-Kafi, vol.2, p.467.
- [9](#) . Uusl al-Kafi, vol.2, p.467.
- [10](#) . Bihar, vol.93, p.302.
- [11](#) . Bihar, vol. 77, p. 173.
- [12](#) . Usul al-Kafi, vol.2, p.475.
- [13](#) . Bihar al-Anwar, vol.93, p.346.
- [14](#) . Bihar, vol. 93, p.303.
- [15](#) . Qur'an 2: 186.
- [16](#) . “O you who believe; be careful of your duty to Allah and seek means of nearness to Him and strive hard in His way that you may be successful”. [Qur'an 5:35].
- [17](#) . “Who is he that can intercede with Him but by His permission”? [Qur'an 2:255]
“He knows what is before them and what is behind them, and they do not intercede except for him whom He approves, and for fear of Him they tremble”. [Qur'an 21:28].
- [18](#) . Ibn Maytham, commentary on Nahj al-Balaghah, vol.5, p.35; Mutahhari, Divine Justice.
- [19](#) . Wasa'il al-Shi'ah, vol.4, p. 1125.
- [20](#) . Nahj al-Balaghah, Hikmah 104.
- [21](#) . Anis al-Layl, in the commentary on Du'a Kumayl, Ayatollah Haj Sheikh Mohammad Reza Kalbasi, p. 137.
- [22](#) . Bihar, vol.93, p.372.
- [23](#) . Op. cit. 373.
- [24](#) . Bihar, vol.93, p.358.
- [25](#) . Bihar, vol 93, p.321.
- [26](#) . Mizan al-Hikmah, vol.3, p.268, reported from Bihar, vol.93.
- [27](#) . Bihar, vol.78, p.226.

- [28.](#) . Tafsir Namunah, vol.20, p.152. Tafsir al-Safi, vol.2, p.490.
- [29.](#) . Usul al-Kafi, vol.2, p.511.
- [30.](#) . Jami' al-Sa'adat, vol.3, p.2276. Of course such an act will not take place from Moses, who is an infallible Prophet. But the essence of the issue is acceptable as a principle.
- [31.](#) . From the 15 whispered prayers, Mafatih al-Jinan, p.161.
- [32.](#) . Qur'an 39:53-55.
- [33.](#) . Refer to al-Mizan, vol.4, p2-251; Refer to Tafsir Namunah, vol.3; Refer to the verses following this verse.
- [34.](#) . Qur'an 4:17.
- [35.](#) . Qur'an 4:18.
- [36.](#) . Al-Kafi, vol.2, p.44.
- [37.](#) . Op. cit.
- [38.](#) .Qur'an 18:49
- [39.](#) .Qur'an 99:8
- [40.](#) , Qur'an 25:70.
- [41.](#) ..Qur'an 4:40.
- [42.](#) . Qur'an 6:160.
- [43.](#) . Nahj al-Balaghah, Hikmah 417.
- [44.](#) . Bihar al-Anwar, vol.6, p.37.
- [45.](#) . Kashf al-Murad, p.423.

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