

Suratul Baqarah: Verse 186

﴿۱۸۶﴾ وَإِذَا سَأَلَكَ عِبَادِي عَنِّي فَإِنِّي قَرِيبٌ ﴿۱﴾ أُجِيبُ دَعْوَةَ الدَّاعِ إِذَا دَعَانِ ﴿۲﴾ فَلْيَسْتَجِيبُوا لِي وَلْيُؤْمِنُوا بِي لَعَلَّهُمْ
يُرْشَدُونَ

And when My servants ask you concerning Me, then verily I am near, I answer the prayer of the supplicant when he calls on Me, so they should answer My call and believe in Me, so that they may walk in the right way. (2:186)

Commentary

Qur'an: And when My servants ask you concerning Me, then verily I am near, I answer the prayer of the supplicant when he calls on Me.

This is the best expression of the subject matter in the most elegant and beautiful style.

The whole verse is based on the first person singular pronoun which shows the great importance which the speaker, i.e. Allah attaches to this subject; then come the words **My servants** and not “people” or such other words, and this enhances its importance even more; the reply (**then verily I am near**) starts dramatically just after the question without any preamble like: “then say that I am near”; and the reply has been emphasized with “verily” (*inna* اِنَّ); and the nearness of the speaker is described with the adjective *near* and not with any verb like “I come near him”, thus it shows that He is already near and will always remain near; then it mentions answering the prayer with the verb the *mudhari'* (المضارع = aorist tense) which combines both the present and the future tenses, and indicates that He answers at present and will continue to answer the prayers of the supplicant; then the answer (I answer the prayer of the supplicant) is conditioned with **when he calls on Me**, but in reality it is not a condition separate from the main clause, both are one and the same thing, and it serves to emphasize that the prayer of the supplicant is answered without any condition or stipulation (as we see also in the verse:

call on Me, I will answer you 40:60).

These seven points show how much importance has been attached to the answering of prayers. In addition, this verse — short as it is — repeats the first person singular pronoun seven times; it is the only verse with this characteristic in the whole of Qur'an.

“*Du'a*” and “*da'wah*” (call, **الدعاء** and **الدعوة**) mean to turn the attention of the called one to the caller.

Asking (*su'al*, **السؤال**) means to gain a benefit or advantage from the one whose attention is drawn towards the asker and before whom his (asker's) need is put.

Therefore, asking (*su'al*, **السؤال**) is the final aim of calling (*du'a*, **الدعاء**). This meaning covers all types of asking, for example, asking for the removal of ignorance, asking with the meaning of reckoning, asking in the sense of seeking beneficence.

Literally, “bondage” (*ubudiyah*, **العبودية**), as explained earlier, is the status of being owned. It is not used for any other owned thing except human beings. Therefore, “servant” (*abd*, **العبد**) is used only for a human being or another intelligent being (like an angel).

The ownership of Allah is as different from the ownership of others as is the truth from pretence or the reality from metaphor. Allah owns His servants; His ownership is total and comprehensive.

They have no authority, independent from Allah, over their own selves or over matters or things which are subordinate to them; for example, their attributes and actions and all things which are related to them, like wives, children, property, honour, etc.

Everything which they own and is related to them in any way — as we say, his self, his body, his ears, his eyes, his actions, his impression (and these are a sort of natural and real possessions), or as we say, his spouse, his wealth, his honour, his right — (and these are a sort of supposed or assumed possession) — is in his possession only because Allah allowed the establishment of that relation of ownership between man and his possession, whatever it may be.

It is Allah, glorified be His name, who gave their selves and their persons to them — and if He did not wish so, it could not be attributed to them and they would have remained without any self or person — in other words, non-existent. It is He who gave them hearing and sight and hearts; and it is He who created everything, then fixed for it a measure.

Therefore, Allah intervenes between a thing and its self, between it and between all its associates like child, spouse, friend, property, honour and rights.

It means that He is the nearest of all to His creatures. In other words, He is the Near One in the true sense of this word. He has said:

And We are nearer to him than you, but you see (Us) not (56:85);

and We are nearer to him than his life vein (50:16) ;

and know that Allah intervenes between man and his heart (8:24).

‘Heart’ here means the rational soul or spirit.

In short, Allah’s ownership of His creatures is real ownership, and as they are His servants He is near to them in its true sense, which means nearest of all things.

This ownership gives Him authority to make use of them as He wishes, without any hindrance or obstruction.

Also it gives Him authority to answer any prayer which is put before Him by any of His creatures, and to fulfil his need by accepting his supplication, because the ownership is all encompassing, and His Power and pervasiveness cover all possible situations.

It is not as though He has authority in one eventuality and not in the other, as the Jews say that when God created things and decreed their destinies, His work was finished and now His hands are folded up, He can not take any new decision; there is no abrogation (of previous laws), no change and no answering of prayer because every affair is already finished.

Nor is it, as a group of this *ummah* said, that Allah has no power about the actions of His creatures. They are called Qadariyyah and were named the Magians of this *ummah* by the Messenger of Allah.

Sunnis and Shi’ahs both have reported that the Messenger of Allah (s.a.w.a.) said: “Qadariyyah are the Magians of this *ummah*”.

The truth is that real ownership in its totality is by Allah only and nobody owns any thing but when He makes him its owner and allows him to possess it.

Therefore, whatever Allah wills and gives in possession and allows its coming into being, comes into being. And whatever He does not will, and does not give in possession and does not allow, does not come into being, even if one strives his utmost to bring it into being.

Allah has said:

O people! You are they who are needy unto Allah, and Allah is He who is the Self-sufficient, the Most Praised One. (35:15)

It is, thus, clear that this verse not only mentions a fact, i.e., answering prayer, but gives its reasons also: because the supplicants are servants of Allah, He is near to them, and because He is near to them, He answers their prayers without any reservation.

And the unconditional answering of prayer means that there is no condition imposed on prayer also; whatever prayer is addressed to Him, He shall answer it.

Of course, it seems that His promise ‘I answer the prayer of the supplicant’ depends on the condition, ***when he calls Me.***

But this condition is not something different from the main clause; and such a mode of expression indicates that the main clause is free from metaphor and analogy; that its meaning is what appears from the words.

For example, when we say, “Listen to the sincere advisor when he sincerely advises you”, or “Respect the scholar if he be a scholar”, it means that we want him to be sure that the advisor is really sincere or the scholar is really a scholar so that listening to him or respecting him becomes necessary.

In the same way, the condition ***when he calls on me*** shows that the promise of answering the prayer shall apply when the supplicant is a supplicant in reality; when he wants that thing according to his natural and deep ingrained knowledge and when his heart is really in what his tongue is asking for.

The reality of prayer and supplication is what the heart decries and the tongue of nature asks for, not this tongue of flesh which moves as it is moved without caring whether the word spoken is a truth or a lie, a reality or a metaphor, a serious talk or a joke.

It is because of this that Allah has even mentioned such prayers in which the tongue is not used at all. He said:

And He gave you of all that you asked Him; and if you count Allah’s bounties, you will not be able to compute them; Verily, man is very unjust very ungrateful (14:34).

Mankind prays to Him and beseeches Him for bounties which they cannot count, but this asking is not done by the tongue of the mouth, it is done by the tongue of their neediness, the tongue of nature and existence. Also He said:

All those in the heavens and the earth do beseech Him; every day He is in a (new) splendor (55:29).

This verse more clearly proves what we have just said.

Therefore, the natural prayer addressed to Allah shall always be answered. If a prayer is not answered then it lacks both or one of the two things mentioned in the verse: ***the prayer of the supplicant when he calls on Me.*** It may happen in following ways:

First: There may be no prayer at all; it may only be a misunderstanding of the supplicant. For example, a man prays for an impossible thing (but he does not know that it is impossible), or for a thing which, if he knew the fact, would not have wanted at all.

Let us say that someone was sick and died but his friend is unaware of his death and prays for his

recovery, while now the prayer should be for bringing him back to life.

If he had been really sure that a dead body could be resurrected and had asked for its resurrection (as the prophets did) his life would have been returned to him; but he does not have such firm conviction and therefore the prayer is not answered.

Or, let us say, he asks for a thing which, had he known it really, he would not have wanted. Therefore, it is not granted.

Second: There is indeed a prayer, but it is not addressed exclusively to Allah. For example, a man beseeches Allah for his needs, but his heart is looking towards its apparent causes or to some imaginary beings whom he thinks have power to fulfil his needs.

In this case, his prayer is not addressed exclusively to Allah. In other words, he did not beseech Allah at all, because Allah, Who answers the prayers, is the One who has no partner in His affairs. He is not the one who works in partnership with apparent causes and imaginary beings.

So these are the two groups of supplicants whose hearts were not sincere in their prayers even if their tongues were.

This is the gist of the subject of prayer according to the verse of the Qur'an. The meaning of all verses on this subject may be understood from this explanation. See, for example, the following verses:

Say, my Lord would not care for you, were it not for your prayer; but you have indeed rejected (the truth), so soon you shall be in the grip (25:77).

Say, think you that if the chastisement of Allah comes to you or the Hour comes to you, will you call upon other than Allah, if you are truthful [Nay! Him you will call upon, so He clears away that for which you pray, if He pleases, and you will forget what you set up (with Him) (6:40-41).

Say, who is it that delivers you from the (dread of the) darkness of the land and the sea (when) you pray to him (openly) humiliating yourselves and secretly: "If He delivers us from this, certainly we shall be of the grateful ones". Say, Allah delivers you from them and from every distress, yet again you associate (others) with Him (6:63-64).

These verses prove that man has been created with a natural prayer and inborn request, which is silently addressed to his Lord.

But when he spends his life in ease and prosperity, his soul becomes blinded by apparent causes and he treats them as partners to his Lord; thus he becomes confused and thinks that he does not ask his Lord for anything and does not beseech Him, while the fact is that he does not beseech anyone other than Allah, because this prayer (to Allah) is ingrained into his nature, and there is no change in the creation of Allah.

Later comes the hardship and the apparent causes become divorced from the expected effects, and those whom he treated as partners of Allah or intercessors before Him disappear completely; then he realizes that there is no one to fulfil his needs and to answer his prayers except Allah.

Thus, he returns to his natural monotheism and forgets every other cause and turns his face towards the Beneficent Lord; and the Lord clears away his hardship and fulfils his wants and places him under the shade of opulence.

But as soon as he regains his prosperity and happiness he goes back to the previous polytheism and forgetfulness.

And your Lord said: Call upon Me, I will answer you. Verily, those who are arrogant to My worship shall soon enter Hell, disgraced (40:60).

This verse invites mankind to beseech Allah, and promises the answering, and goes even further by naming the prayer as worship in the clause, ***arrogant to My worship*** which means “to my prayer”.

Rather, it equates the worship with prayer: it threatens with Hell those who do not pray, and such a threat can only be justified when one neglects worship completely, not on neglecting only one kind of it.

Therefore, the prayer is not just an important type of worship; it is the foundation of worship itself.

From the above, one may appreciate the meaning of other verses on this subject:

Therefore, call upon Allah, being sincere to Him in religion, though averse be the disbelievers (40:14).

And call on Him fearing and hoping; surely, the mercy of Allah is near to those who do good (7:56).

... surely they used to ... call unto Us with love and reverence, and were humble before Us (21:90).

Call upon your Lord humbly and secretly; surely He loves not those who exceed the limit (7:55).

When called he (Zakariyya) unto his Lord in low voice. He said: My Lord! Surely my bones are weakened and my head flares with hoariness, and, my Lord! Never have I been unsuccessful in my prayer to Thee (19:3-4).

And He answers those who believe and do good deeds, and increases unto them of His grace (42:26).

There are other relevant verses, and all of these contain the pillars of prayer and explain the manner of the supplication.

And the most important of all is to keep the prayer exclusively for Allah; it will come true when the feeling of the heart conforms with the words spoken by the tongue; when one abandons reliance on all apparent reasons other than Allah and depends exclusively upon Allah.

Also among them are: fear of Allah, hope in His answering, His love and reverence, humility and humbleness, as well as perseverance in prayer, remembrance of Allah, good deeds, true faith, presence of heart at that time and similar things.

Qur'an: *So they should answer My call and believe in Me.*

This sentence branches out from the previous one. Allah is near to His servants; nothings comes between Him and their prayer; He cares for them and for the things they ask for; that is why He invites them to call upon Him and He is of such high attributes.

Therefore, they should accept this invitation of their Lord and should advance towards Him, and have faith in Him about this attribute, having firm belief that He is near and He answers their call; so that they may be guided rightly in praying unto Him.

Traditions

The Sunnis and Shi'ahs both have narrated from the Prophet (s.a.w.a.) that "Prayer is the armament of the believer."

It is narrated in *al-Hadith al-qudsi*: "O M^usa! Ask from Me all that you need, even fodder for your goat and salt for your dough." [*'Uddatu'd-da'i*]

The Prophet said: "Calling (upon Allah) is better than reciting the Qur'an, because Allah (Powerful and Great is He!) said, 'Say, My Lord would not care for you were it not for your prayer.'" [*Makarimu 'l-akhlaq*]

The same *hadith* has been narrated from al-Baqir and as-Sadiq (a.s.).

Muhammad ibn 'Ajlan narrates from Muhammad ibn 'Ubaydullah ibn 'Ali ibn al-Husayn from his cousin, as-Sadiq (a.s.) from his forefathers from the Prophet that he said:

"Allah informed one of his prophets in a revelation: 'By My Power and Dignity! Verily I shall change into despair the hope of everyone who hoped from other than Me, and I shall dress him with the clothing of disgrace before people, and I shall remove him from My relief and bounty.

Does my servant put his hope in other than Me in hardships, while hardships are in My hand; And does he expect anything from other than Me, while I am the Self-sufficient, the Munificent?

In My hand are the keys of the doors, while they are closed; and My door is open for the one who calls

on Me . . . ’ ” [‘Uddatu ’d-da’i]

The Prophet said: “Allah said, ‘No creature seeks refuge in another creature, leaving Me, but that I cut off all the means in the heavens and the earth for him.

Then if he asks from Me, I do not give him; and if he calls on Me, I do not answer him. And no creature seeks refuge in Me, leaving My creatures, but that I make the heaven and the earth responsible for his sustenance; then if he calls on Me, I answer him and, if he seeks pardon from Me, I forgive!’” [ibid.]

The author says: The aim of the above two traditions is to emphasize that the invocation must be purely for Allah. It was not meant to negate the positive causes which Allah has created as instrumental links between the things and their needs.

But these instruments are not independent causes. The Independent Cause is only Allah. And man does have an inner feeling of this fact; he feels by his nature that there is a Perfect Cause who fulfils his needs and who can never fail in bringing about the desired effect.

On the other hand, he knows that all the apparent causes which are expected to produce an effect; some times fail to do so. Thus he knows that the First Cause, who is the Source and Origin of everything and upon whom every need relies and depends for its fulfilment, is other than these apparent causes.

Once he realises it, he will never entirely rely on these causes, forgetting the Real Cause. Man may appreciate this fact after just a little thinking.

Now, if he prays for something and that need is fulfilled, it will prove that he asked his Lord for it, and that the prayer, which emanated from his inner feeling and knowledge, reached through the apparent causes to His Lord and was granted by Him.

On the contrary, if he prays to some apparent causes for it, then it does not originate from natural inner feeling and knowledge; it is just an imaginary need, based not on inner feeling but on some imaginary reasons.

It is one of the situations where appearance goes against reality, because he thinks that he is praying, while his inner self knows nothing about that prayer.

Another example: Many times a man likes a thing and makes all efforts to get it; but when he gets it, he finds that it is harmful to another thing which is far more important and far more dear than that thing.

Then he leaves that which he had strived for and keeps that which is more important. Likewise, sometimes he dislikes a thing, but once it comes to him he finds it far more beneficial and far better than the alternative which he previously preferred.

A child is sick; when he is given a bitter medicine, he refuses to take it and starts crying. But at the same

time he wants to regain his health. Now the position is this: his natural inner feeling prays for health and, therefore, for the medicine; but his words and deeds reject the same medicine.

Likewise, man, in his life, has a discipline based on natural understanding and inner feeling, and he also has a system based on his imagination only.

The natural discipline makes no mistake; it never leads astray while the imaginary discipline often goes wrong. It is clear from the example of the sick child that sometimes man asks for some thing urged by his imagination but in reality that very prayer is the prayer for its opposite.

This discourse will help the readers in understanding the meaning of the traditions, and it is also the implication of the words of 'Ali (a.s.) which come later, "Verily, the granting (of Prayer) is according to the measure of the intention ..."

The Prophet said: "Call upon Allah and you can be confident for the answering." [*'Uddatu 'd-da 'i*]

"I am near the opinion (i.e. expectation) of My servant about Me; so, he should not have any opinion about Me (i.e. should not expect from Me) except good." [*al-Hadith al-qudsi*]

The author says: It is because if one prays and at the same time is pessimistic or doubtful about its outcome, then it shows that the prayer is just a formality, the supplicant has no real intention of asking for it (see the previous explanation). And the traditions forbid asking for a thing which one is sure will not come about.

The Prophet said: "Resort to Allah in your needs; and seek refuge in Him in your misfortunes, and humiliate yourselves before Him and beseech Him, because, verily, supplication is the essence of worship.

And no believer calls upon Allah but He answers him: either it is speeded up to him in this world, or is kept in reserve for him for the next one, or his sins are forgiven in proportion to his supplication, provided he does not pray for a sinful thing." [*'Uddatu'd-da'i*]

'Ali (a.s.) wrote in his will for his son, al-Husayn (a.s.): "Then He placed the keys of His treasures in your hands in the sense that He allowed you to ask Him.

Therefore, whenever you wish, you may get the doors of His bounties opened with prayer, and get the heavy rains of His Mercy to fall upon you.

Delay in acceptance of the prayer should not disappoint you, because the granting (of prayer) is according to the measure of (your) intention. And sometimes, the answering of your prayer is delayed so that it brings a greater reward to the asker and a better granting to the expectant.

Sometimes you ask for a thing and it is not given to you, but a better thing is given to you, immediately

or later; or a thing is diverted from you for some greater good for you, because often you ask for a thing which would have destroyed your religion had it been given to you.

Therefore, your prayer should be for things whose beauty should last for you and whose evil should remain away from you. As for wealth, it will not last for you, nor will you last for it.” [Nahju 'l-balaghah]

The author says: “The granting (of prayer) is according to the measure of (your) intention.” ‘Ali (a.s.) means that the answer is given according to the call.

The supplicant is granted whatever he asks for from Allah with the firm conviction of his conscience and with his heart, and not what is asked for in words.

As explained earlier, the words sometimes do not completely conform with the real requirement demanded by the nature. This sentence, therefore, shows in the most lucid and comprehensive way, the relationship between prayer and its answer.

‘Ali (a.s.) has, in this writing, explained many cases in which it appears that the prayer was not granted, e.g. where there is delay in answering the call, or a material bounty is asked for but it is changed to some thing which is far better for him either in this world or in the next, or it is diverted to some thing more beneficial for the asker.

The supplicant had, for example, asked for a pleasant bounty, and if he were given it without delay it would not have been really appreciated and valued, and, therefore, its granting was delayed.

In short, when he asked for a “pleasant” bounty, he implicitly asked for a delay in granting of the prayer. Likewise, a believer who seriously pays attention to his religion prays for some thing which would be harmful to his religion, although he does not know it and thinks that it would bring him happiness.

But his happiness is in his religion and in the next world. Therefore, his prayer is in fact for the next world, not for this one, and, accordingly, it is granted for the next world, not for this one.

al-Baqir (a.s.) said: “A servant does not extend his hand towards Allah, but that Allah is ashamed to return it empty. He puts in it from His bounty and mercy whatever He wishes.

So, when one of you calls (upon Allah), he should not return his hand until he wipes it on his head and face.” [‘Uddatu 'd-da 'i] In another *hadith* it is “on his face and chest”.

The author says: There are in *ad-Durru 'l-manthūr* eight similar traditions narrated by a number of the companions, like Salman, Jabir, ‘Abdullah ibn ‘Umar, Anas ibn Malik and Ibn Abi Mughith from the Prophet, and all of them mention raising of the hands in the prayer.

Therefore, it is meaningless to reject raising of hands in the prayer as someone has done saying that “it is suggestive of the belief that Allah has a body, because the raising of the hands towards the sky is an

indication that He is there – Holy and Sanctified is He from it.”

But this statement is wrong. All acts of worship performed by the body are in reality the heartfelt sense of gratitude and inner attention which is reduced to the level of symbolic appearance; and the spiritual realities are demonstrated in the moulds of the body, as one may see in the *salat*, the fast, the *hajj*, etc., their parts and conditions.

Had it not been so, there would not have been any justification for worship by the body. And invocation is such a form of worship.

It is the attention of the heart and the inner supplication demonstrated by the symbol of the begging of a wretched pauper coming near a powerful and wealthy person, raising and extending his hands towards him and asking his needs from him, humiliating himself before him and imploring him to grant him his requirements.

ash-Shaykh has reported in *al Majalis wa 'l-akhbar*, with his *sanad* (chain of narrators) from Imam Muhammad al-Baqir (a.s.) and Zayd from their father, Imam 'Ali ibn al-Husayn from his father al-Husayn (a.s.) from the Prophet that “The Messenger of Allah (s.a.w.a.) used to raise his hands when he prayed and beseeched (Allah) as a pauper begs for food.”

The same *hadith* is written in *'Uddatu 'd-da'i* without *sanad*.

'Ali (a.s.) heard a man saying “O Allah! I seek refuge in Thee from temptation.” 'Ali (a.s.) said: “I see, you are seeking refuge against your wealth and children.

Allah says:

Verily your wealth and your children are temptations (8:28).

You should rather say: O Allah! I seek refuge in Thee from misleading temptations.” [*Biharul 'l-anwar*]

The author says: It is another way of determining the meaning of a word. And there are many such examples in traditions.

The fact is that the true meaning of every word is that for which it has been used by Allah in His talk. And some examples of this are the traditions which explain the meaning of 'part', 'many' etc.

as-Sadiq (a.s.) said: “Verily, Allah does not answer the memorised prayer by a forgetful heart.” [*'Uddatu 'd-da'i*]

'Ali (a.s.) said: “Allah does not accept the prayer of an inattentive heart.” [*ibid.*]

The author says: There are other traditions with this meaning; and the reason is that there is in reality no prayer and supplication with forgetfulness and inattention.

There is in the Torah: Allah says to His servant, “Verily, when you pray against one of my servants because he was unjust to you, then at the same time there may be another of my servants praying against you too because you were unjust to him.

Now, if you so wish, I shall grant your prayer and also his prayer against you; and if you so wish, I shall postpone the cases of both of you for the Day of Resurrection.” [ar-Rawandi, *ad-Da‘wat*]

The author says: If someone prays for something then it means that he is pleased with it and this pleasure naturally extends to all those things which are similar to it in all respects.

He prays for punishment of his oppressor; he prays against him because of his oppression and injustice. It means that he is pleased with the punishment of the unjust.

Now, if he himself oppressed another person then the same prayer against his oppressor shall become a prayer against himself.

If he is pleased that he himself should be punished (and he shall never be pleased with it), then he will be given the same punishment which he wanted for his oppressor.

And if he is not pleased with it, then there is in reality no prayer at all. Allah said:

And man prays for evil as he ought to pray for good, and man is ever hasty (17:11).

The Messenger of Allah (s.a.w.a.) said to Abū Dharr: “O Abū Dharr! Should I not teach you some words by which Allah will benefit you? I (Abū Dharr) said:

‘Surely! O Messenger of Allah.’ He said: ‘Guard (the commands of) Allah, (and) Allah will guard you. Keep (the remembrance of) Allah, (and) you will find Him before you.

Make the acquaintance of Allah in opulence, He will know you in hardship. And when you ask, ask from Allah ; and when you seek help, seek help from Allah, because whatever is to happen upto the Day of Resurrection has already been written, and if all the creatures together strived to benefit you with what Allah did not write for you, they would not be able to do so.’ ” [‘*Uddatu’d-da‘i*’]

The author says: His words, “Make the acquaintance of Allah in opulence, He will know you in hardship”, mean “Call upon Allah in opulence and do not forget Him, so that He will answer your call in hardship and will not forget you.”

Anybody who forgets his Lord in opulence is as if he believes that the apparent causes are the total and real cause of his opulence. Then comes the hardship and he starts calling on his Lord.

His action indicates that he believes in the Lordship of Allah only when he is afflicted with hardship. But Allah is not so. He is the Lord in every condition and every situation.

Therefore, if he calls on a lord whose lordship is limited to the time of hardship only, he does not call on the True Lord.

This meaning has been explained in some traditions in a different language. as-Sadiq (a.s.) said: “One who goes on calling (on his Lord) in advance, his call will be answered when there comes down an affliction (on him), and it will be said, ‘(it is) a known voice’, and it will not be screened out of the heavens.

And the one who does not call (on his Lord) in advance, his call is not answered when an affliction comes, and the angels say, ‘It is a voice which we do not know...’ ”[*Makarimu’l-akhlaq*]

And it is understood from the word of Allah,

They forget Allah, so He forgets them (9:68).

There is another tradition that *du‘a*’ (prayer) is not rejected if one cuts oneself (from all apparent causes and turns exclusively towards Allah).

There is no contradiction between this tradition and those mentioned before, because affliction and hardship is something different from exclusively turning towards Allah.

His words:

and when you ask, ask from Allah, and when you seek help, seek help from Allah.

It teaches one to adhere only to Allah in reality while asking and seeking help, because so far as these nominal causes, which we find in this world are concerned, their relation with their effects is confined within the limit set for it by Allah.

They are not independent in producing the effect as it appears to un-informed eyes; they are only a means to produce that effect that is incumbent on the man to turn towards Allah in all his needs, without relying on nominal causes and means, although Allah has decreed not to produce an effect if its cause is missing.

In short, the above sentence tells one not to rely on nominal causes and not to forget that it is Allah who has made it a cause of that effect. It does not mean that one should neglect the causes and means and ask for one’s needs without striving for its cause; it would be rather asking for the impossible.

One should realise that even the heart where the prayer originates, the tongue which utters the words of the prayer and the hands, etc., which are used in praying are but some of the causes and means. So, how can one escape from the apparent causes?

Let us look at the example of man himself. Whatever he does, is done with his limbs and organs: he gives with his hands, sees with his eyes and hears with his ears.

Now, if one asked his Lord to fulfil his needs neglecting its causes and means, it would be as if he asked someone to give him something without using his hand, or to look at him without using his eyes or to listen to his pleas without using his ears.

On the other hand, if one relies on the nominal causes without remembering Allah, it would be as though one thinks that it is the man's hand which gives, his eyes which see and his ears which hear, and forgets that the real doer of these actions is man himself. Such a person is stupid and a simpleton.

The above explanation does not mean that the Power of Allah is limited, or that His Authority is conditional. No, His Power and Authority are All-encompassing and without limit.

In the same way the limitations are meant to apply to the deeds not to doers. Obviously, it is man who has the power to give, see and hear, though he gives with his hand, sees with his eyes and hears with his ears.

Likewise, Allah is All-powerful, but the specification depends on intermediate causes. Zayd is a creation of Allah, and he was born through the union of his parents in a certain place on a certain day when certain conditions were fulfilled and certain obstacles removed.

Now, if even one of these causes is missing and one of these conditions is not fulfilled, there would be no Zayd. Thus the existence of Zayd depends on the fulfilment of all these causes and means; but what depends is the creature, i.e., Zayd, not the Creator. (Think on this point.)

His words:

Whatever is to happen upto the Day of Resurrection has already been written.

It is based on the sentence, ***And when you ask, ask from Allah***, and gives its reason.

It means that all events are written and decreed by Allah; no cause has any real influence on them; therefore, you should not ask from anyone other than Allah, and should not seek any one's help other than that of Allah.

As for Allah, His authority is everlasting; His Power is Eternal; His Will is effective; and every day He is in a new Splendour.

It is for this reason that this sentence is followed by the words:

and if all the creatures together strived to benefit you with what Allah did not write for you, they would not be able to do so.

Among the traditions of *du'a'* is the near *mutawatir hadith*: "Verily, *du'a'* (prayer) is a part of destiny."

The author says: This is the reply to the objection of the Jews and others on *du'a'*. They say: The need

asked for is either already measured or decreed (to happen) or not.

If it is already decreed, then it would happen in any case and the prayer would be superfluous. If it is not decreed, then it can never happen and the prayer would be meaningless. In either case, the prayer will have no effect at all.

The reply: Even when an event is already decreed, it does not mean that it is independent of its causes, and one of the means of its coming into existence is *du‘a’*.

If one beseeches Allah for his need, one of the conditions of its existence is fulfilled, and the effect follows the cause. This is the meaning of the tradition, “Verily, *du‘a’* (prayer) is a part of destiny.”

And there are other traditions with the same meaning. There is a *hadith* from the Prophet: “Nothing turns away the decree (fate) except prayer (*du‘a’*).” [*Biharul ‘Ulwan*] And there is another one from as-Sadiq (a.s.): “Prayer (*du‘a’*) turns away the decree even after it is confirmed.”

[*ibid.*] Another one from Abu‘l-Hasan Mūsā al-Kazim (as.): “On you is *du‘a’*, because *du‘a’* and asking from Allah turns the calamity away even when it is measured and decreed and nothing remains except its enforcement; then if Allah is called upon and asked, He removes that calamity entirely.” [*ibid.*]

as-Sadiq (a.s.) said: “Verily, the prayer (*du‘a’*) turns away the confirmed decree even after its confirmation. Therefore, pray often (and repeatedly), because it is the key to every mercy and the fulfilment of every need.

And what is with Allah is not obtained except through prayer because verily, no door is knocked repeatedly but it is hoped that it will be opened to the knocker.” [*ibid.*]

The author says: This *hadith* exhorts one to pray often and repeatedly; and this is one of the important elements of prayer, as repeated remembrance of a need creates purity of intention.

Isma‘īl ibn Hammam narrates from Abu ‘l-Hasan (a.s.): “One secret prayer of a servant is equal to seventy open prayers.”

The author says: This teaches one to keep one’s prayer (*du‘a’*) secret and confidential because it helps in keeping the prayer pure.

as-Sadiq (a.s.) said: “The prayer is kept screened (i.e. is not granted) until he (the beseecher) prays for the blessings of Allah upon Muhammad and his progeny.” [*Makarimu ‘l-akhlaq*]

Also, as-Sadiq (a.s.) said: “Whoever advances (the names of) forty believers (in his prayers) then prays (for himself), his call will be answered.” [*ibid.*]

One of the companions of as-Sadiq (a.s.) said to him: “There are two verses in the Book of Allah (the application) for which I am seeking without finding it.”

The Imam asked: “And what are those?” The companion says: “I said, ‘(there is the verse): **Call upon Me, I shall answer ...** but we call upon Him and do not get any answer.’

The Imam said: ‘Well, do you think Allah has broken His promise?’ I said: ‘No!’ He said: ‘Then what?’ I said: ‘I do not know.’ He said: ‘But I will tell you. Whoever obeys Allah in His commandments, and then calls upon Him in the proper way, He will answer him.’

I said: ‘And what is the proper way of prayer (*du‘a*)?’ He said: ‘You shall begin with the praise of Allah and shall glorify Him and remember His bounties upon you and thank Him; then you shall pray for His blessings upon Muhammad and his progeny; then you shall remember your sins and confess them ; then you shall seek (His) pardon for them.

So this is the proper way of prayer (*du‘a*).’ Then the Imam asked: ‘And what is the second verse?’ I said:

‘and whatever thing you spend, He returns it (34:39),

and I find that I spend but He does not return it.’

He said: ‘Well, do you think Allah has broken His promise?’ I said: ‘No!’ He said: ‘Then what?’ I said: ‘I do not know.’ He said: ‘If any of you earn his wealth lawfully and spend it in its proper place, he will not spend a single dirham but that Allah shall return it to him!’ ” [*ibid.*]

The author says: The reason of the manners of prayer (*du‘a*) mentioned in these traditions is clear, because these things bring the servant (of Allah) nearer to the reality of prayer and request.

Ibn ‘Umar reported that the Messenger of Allah (s.a.w.a.) said: “Verily, when Allah wishes to answer (the call of) a servant, He allows him to call (upon Him).” [*ad-Durru ‘l-manthūr*]

Also, Ibn ‘Umar narrates from him (the Holy Prophet): “Whenever the door of prayer (*du‘a*) is opened for anyone among you, the doors of Mercy are opened for him.”

Another tradition says: “When the (door of) prayer is opened for anyone among you, the doors of the Garden (Paradise) are opened for him.” [*ibid.*]

The author says: The same thing has been narrated from the Imams of *Ahlu ‘l-bayt* also: “Whoever is given *du‘a*, is given (its) answer.” Its meaning is clear.

Also there is a tradition from Ma‘adh ibn Jabal from the Messenger of Allah (s.a.w.a.): “Had you known Allah, as He should be known, verily the mountains would have been moved by your prayer.” [*ibid.*]

The author says: If a man does not know the dignity of the Creator and the power of His Lordship, and if he relies upon the causes, then he believes that these causes have real influence upon the result, and that events cannot happen without their normal and apparent causes.

Sometimes he does not believe that these causes have any real effect upon the outcome, still he thinks that they are essential in order to bring a thing into existence.

For example, we see that movement and walking brings one nearer to one's destination.

And even when we do not believe that movement has any real effect on the nearness, we go on believing that movement is a means, though it is Allah who is the real cause, of that nearness, and in this way we go on believing that the middle causes are essential, at least as a means, if not as the real cause.

Thus, we think that if there is no movement, we cannot come near our destination. In short, we believe that the effect cannot be separate from its causes, even if these causes are just apparent means and not the real cause.

But such a belief is below the dignity of Allah; it does not conform with divine authority which is total and perfect.

It is this belief which creates the idea that effects cannot come into being without their normal causes, e.g. a body cannot be without a weight and gravity; movement is necessary for bringing two things nearer; eating and drinking is essential for satisfying the hunger and thirst, etc. etc.

We have already mentioned in the discussion of miracles that the system of cause and effect is an inescapable fact, but it does not mean that the 'cause' is confined to the normal causes only.

Reason as well as the Qur'an and the traditions prove that while everything depends upon a cause, that cause is not confined within the limits of normal ones.

The Creator may create causes for it, quite different from the normal ones. So, while it is true that the effect depends upon a cause, it is not true that it depends upon a particular cause.

Of course, the things which are, according to reason, impossible, cannot come into being.

In short, when you properly know Allah, you will believe that the prayer for what is not impossible by reason, even if normally it does not happen, will be answered. A major portion of the miracles of the prophets was basically the answer to their calls.

There is in the *at-Tafsir* of al-'Ayyashi under the words of Allah: ***So they should answer My call and believe in Me***, a *hadith* from as-Sadiq (a.s.): "They should know that I have power to give them whatever they ask from Me."

And there is another *hadith* in *Majma'u 'l-bayan* from the same Imam that he said: "***and believe in Me*** means that they should have firm belief that I have power to give them what they ask for; so ***that they may walk in the right way*** means so that they may reach the Truth."

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