



Beyond the question, ‘Why is God not answering my prayers?’
“Supplication is worship.”

Thaqib Mahmood

Amongst the many acts of worship, supplication is unique, for it involves overtly pleading with God, which stirs a particular sense of hope and expectation, namely that of a reply. Albeit all other modes of worship inform a sense of expectation from the servant, the act of *Du’a* makes this overtly stated. The act of supplication creates a spiritual inquiry of a different type. If perceived over time as going unanswered, a sense of dejection and abandonment may be felt, which could lead to an unravelling of faith. Therefore, the following Prophetic statements and their explanations provide a way of looking at the role of supplication beyond the question, ‘Why is God not answering my prayers?’ The following Prophetic statements lay down a foundational understanding of how supplicating should be viewed.

فقد صح عن رسول الله ﷺ أنه قال: الدعاء هو العبادة. ثم قرأ: وقال ربكم ادعوني أستجب لكم إن الذين يستكبرون عن عبادتي سيدخلون جهنم
داخرين رواه أحمد وأصحاب السنن وغيرهم

It has been authentically narrated from the Messenger of Allah ﷺ as having said, “Supplication is worship.” He soon after recited the verse, ‘Your Lord said, “Call upon Me, I will answer you.” Indeed, those who are arrogant from my worship will enter hell humiliated.’” Q40/60

Another variant in the meaning of the above Prophetic tradition, although not as authentic, is that the Messenger of Allah ﷺ said, “العبادة مخ الدعاء” “Supplication is the core to worship.”

Both Prophetic traditions place the significance of supplication as a self-standing act of worship. The main point from the cited traditions is that the Messenger of Allah ﷺ equated the act of supplicating as an act of worship. In terming it in this way, the Noble

Messenger ﷺ put to rest anxieties that believers may have over the question of efficacy from their supplications. All acts of worship are undertaken with the following presuppositions: They are done to acknowledge God for being God and, with that understanding, to draw closer to Him, and with an admittance of being dependent upon Him in every sense. The above traditions speak of supplication primarily as an act of worship. Therefore, supplicating draws attention to acknowledging God as God and the inescapable reality of our complete and utter need of Him.

A quintessential aspect of acknowledging this reliance upon Him is resigning one's expectations to God's Omniscience and not convincing ourselves that the expectations we carry in our prayers are only regarded as answered when we are given exactly what we asked for. To undertake supplication this way would be more like telling God what to do and expecting Him to do just that. Assuming how God should respond takes us far from the Prophetic framing of supplication as worship. Any sense of self-entitlement or deservedness thought of because of our obedience to Him undermines the meaning of worship in the truest sense.

Therefore, we must be aware that the matters we raise through supplication to God are more so an admittance of inferiority to Him in every way. All affairs are decreed. Hence, supplication performed as an act of worship carries more of a sense of realising one's needs in front of God and surrendering those needs to the decrees of His wisdom without necessitating upon Him preconceived outcomes. In this sense, supplication is worship as prophetically defined: acknowledging God through accepting our impoverishment and need of Him. In addition, the beloved Messenger ﷺ provides a statement that our supplications are always answered when considering the ways God can answer our pleas. A tradition narrated from Abū Sa'īd al-Khudrī رضي الله عنه that the Prophet ﷺ said,

حديث أبي سعيد الخدري رضي الله عنه أن النبي ﷺ قال: ما من مسلم يدعو بدعوة ليس فيها إثم ولا قطيعة رحم إلا أعطاه الله بها إحدى ثلاث: إما أن يعجل له دعوته، وإما أن يدخرها له في الآخرة، وإما أن يصرف عنه من السوء مثلها، قالوا: إذن نكثر، قال: الله أكثر. أحمد

“A Muslim does not make any supplication, provided it is not for wrong action or the breaking of family ties, except God gives him what he asks for in three ways: The supplication is answered as he had expected, or it is stored for him in the hereafter, or an affliction is removed equivalent to the supplication he made.” The Companions said, “Then we will ask much.” To which he said, “God is always more.” (Ahmad)

Another concern that needs our attention around the query of supplications being answered is fulfilling its prerequisites, of which some are preconditions for a prayer's acceptance. As mentioned in a well-known Prophetic Hadith are some crucial

prerequisites, in which the Messenger of Allah ﷺ described a traveller as being dishevelled, dusty, exhausted and supplicated in this state of desperation but due to him having squandered essential prerequisites, there was no chance his prayers were to be answered despite being in a state when supplications are most favourable in being answered. This was because his entire life was lived by indulging in the unlawful. Then there are the significant practices whilst supplicating: like a consciousness of heart, being in ablution, facing the Qibla, supplicating at opportune times, observing an order of words, beginning by praising God, followed by salutations and prayers upon the Messenger of Allah ﷺ, the contents of supplication, to be ended with salutations and prayers again upon the Messenger of Allah ﷺ

A Prophetic tradition offers much encouragement on always being optimistic for a divine response, as narrated by Abū Hurayrah رضي الله عنه, who said,

عن أبي هريرة رضي الله عنه أن رسول الله ﷺ قال يستجاب لأحدكم ما لم يعجل يقول دعوت فلم يستجب لي البخاري

“The Messenger of Allah ﷺ said, ‘Your prayers are answered provided you do not hasten and say, ‘I supplicated, but it hasn’t been answered.’” (al-Bukhārī)

In conclusion, an aphorism by Ibn Aṭā ilah summates much of what has been explained:

لا يَكُنْ تَأخَّرُ أَمَدَ الْعَطَاءِ مَعَ الْإِلْحَاحِ فِي الدَّعَاءِ مُوجِبًا لِيَأْسِكَ فَهُوَ ضَمِينٌ لَكَ الْإِجَابَةُ فِيمَا يَخْتَارُهُ لَكَ لَا فِيمَا تَخْتَارُهُ لِنَفْسِكَ وَفِي الْوَقْتِ الَّذِي يَرِيدُ لَا فِي الْوَقْتِ الَّذِي تُرِيدُ

“Let not the delay of bestowal, despite persistent supplication, necessitate despair. For He has guaranteed your answer in what He chooses for you, not in what you choose for yourself and in the moment He wants and not in the moment you want.”