

Acceptance of the Prayer

Prayer is Surrounded by Success and Acceptance

A prayer is surrounded by the mercy of Allah from two sides; by success (*tawfiq*) from Allah, and by the response (*istijabah*) from Him.

Basically, a servant cannot engage himself in supplication without the *tawfiq* from Allah. Such a facilitation by Allah is necessary before supplication. In this case, if a servant calls on Allah, He would indeed answer his prayer:

“Call Me, I will answer you.”¹

Hence, a prayer is preceded by success from Allah and followed by the response from Him. A prayer is always surrounded by these two elements which are, in fact, two doors from among the doors of Allah’s mercy which are opened for a servant before and after supplication. It is reported from the Holy Prophet (S) , “For whosoever among you the door of prayer (*du’a*) is opened, then the doors of mercy (*rahmah*) shall be opened for him.”²

Imam ‘Ali bin al-Husain, Zayn al-’Abidin (‘a), says: “Thus they remembered You by Your benevolence, and thanked You...” The moment a servant remembers his Lord, he comes under the protection of Allah and His grace, and He would, subsequently, deserve to be thanked by his servant.

In the whispered prayer (*munajat*) of *al-muti’in* (the obedient toward Allah), of the famous fifteen whispered prayers³, Imam as-Sajjad (‘a) says: “For we exist through You and belong to You, and we have no means to {reach} You but Yourself.”

Thus, a servant does not remember his Lord except after this remembrance has been preceded by benevolence and grace from Allah, as he has no way to reach Allah but by His grace and mercy. So if he remembers Allah, it is by His grace; and if he prays to Him, it is through the success He, the Exalted, has granted him; and if he thanks Him, it is through His mercy.

In the supplication of *'arafah*, Imam al-Husayn ('a) says: "My ignorance and audacity against You did not stop You from guiding me to that which would take me closer to You, and from facilitating for me that which would take me closer to You."

Among the most subtle of prayers is the prayer of man to his Lord, the Exalted, to grant him success to pray to Him. In one of his supplications, Imam 'Ali bin al-Husayn Zayn al-Abidin ('a) says: "Fill my night with life by keeping me awake therein for worshipping You... and setting my needs before You."⁴

In his supplication praying for facilitation (*tawfiq*) from Allah, Imam as-Sadiq ('a) says: "So assist me in obeying You, and grant me success to carry that which You made incumbent on me, of all which pleases You; for I have not seen anyone who has been able to attain something of Your obedience (*ta'ah*) except that it was through Your bounty upon him prior to his obedience. So bless me with a bounty through which I can attain Your pleasure (*ridwan*)."⁵

Imam 'Ali bin al-Husayn ('a) says: "O Allah, make me leap to You in times of distress, ask from You in needs, and plead to You in misery; tempt me not to seek help from other than You when I am distressed."⁶

Two Benefits of the Acceptance of Prayer

There are two benefits in the acceptance of man's prayer by Allah, the Exalted, one of them greater than the other.

The minor benefit is the fulfillment of the request and petition made by him to Allah, be it regarding this world or the Hereafter, or both.

As for the greater benefit, it is the response (*ijabah*) itself from Allah, the Exalted; for every response involves a turning (*iqbal*) from Allah toward His servant, as every prayer entails a turning of the servant toward Allah.

However valuable a thing may be, it is limited and has an end, but there is no limit and end to the value of the turning of Allah toward His servant. As there is no limit for the felicity of a servant so long as he is under the care, providence and special attention of Allah, the Exalted. This is a felicity above which there is no felicity with which Allah can single out a servant from among His servants; a state in which He turns to him, listens to him, responds to him, and makes him aware of His response, whatever the enormity of the request and petition made by the servant to Allah.

Imam as-Sadiq ('a) is reported to have said, "Once I had called on Allah, so He answered me and I forgot my need; for His response by turning toward His servant when he implores Him is greater and momentous than that which a servant desires from Him, even if it is the Heaven and its everlasting bounties. But this is not comprehended except by the learned ones (*'alimun*), the lovers (*muhibbun*), the worshippers (*'abidun*), the knowers (*'arifun*), the chosen ones (*safwah*) of Allah and His special

servants.”⁷

Hence, prayer (*du'a*) and the response to it (*ijabah*) denote a reciprocal relation between Allah and His servant, the best and the most distinctive of its kind. Which relation between Allah, the Exalted, and his servant can be better than the one in which the servant turns toward his Lord with a need, request and petition, and Allah turns to His servant with response, singling him out for it.

I believe that the joy and pleasure derived from this kind of relation with Allah, and from this providence (*inayah*) and success (*tawfiq*) granted by Him to His servant –when He singles him out for secret conversation with Him, His remembrance and imploring Him, and that He honours him with meeting (*liqa*) with Him, getting closer to Him and answering Him– engrosses man and occupies him from his need which he had presented before Allah.

And which pleasure can equal such a pleasure? Or which joy can be on a par with the joy of being in the presence (*hudur*) of Allah, meeting with Him, whispering to Him, remembering Him and being occupied in gazing at His majesty and beauty.

Standing before Allah for supplication is, in itself, a form of being in the presence of Allah, meeting with Him and whispering to Him. One of the mystics is related to have said, “Among the shameful things for man is that he should ask from Allah, while in His presence, other than Allah, and that he should be occupied in His presence with other than His majesty and beauty.”

A Divine Narration (*hadith al-qudsi*) related by the Holy Prophet (S) says: “He who is occupied by my mention (*dhikri*) from asking Me, I shall give him the best of what I give to the beseechers (*sa'ilin*).”⁸

Imam as-Sadiq ('a) says: “If a servant who has a need to Allah begins {his prayer} with praising Allah and sending blessings on Muhammad and his Progeny, to the extent that he forgets his need, then He will fulfill it without him asking Him for it.”⁹

In the whispered prayer (*munajat*) of *al-muhibbin* (the lovers), Imam Zayn al-'Abidin ('a) says: “O my Lord... make us among those whose heart You have captivated for Your will, whom You have chosen for seeing You, whose attention You have secured purely for Yourself, whose heart You have freed for Your love, whom You have made desirous of what is with You... and from whom You have cut off all things which cut him off from You.”

The Relation of the Response to Prayer

“Your Lord has said, ‘Call Me, I will answer you. Indeed those who are disdainful of My worship will enter hell in utter humility.”¹⁰

What is the relationship of the response (*istijabat*) to prayer? And how is the acceptance of a prayer accomplished? We will attempt to address this issue in this section, by the will of Allah.

The response from Allah, the Exalted, is indeed accomplished through the Divine laws (*qawanin*) and norms (*sunan*), as it is true of all other Divine acts.

It should be noted, however, that there is nothing like affection (*infi'al*) in the case of Allah, the Exalted, as is the case with us, the human beings, when we get angry or are happy, or when we are active or worn out. Rather, the act (*fi'l*) of Allah is a law and norm which does not change in cases of satisfaction or anger, expansion (*bast*) or contraction (*qabd*), giving (*'ata'*) or withholding (*imsak*); all these take place within the fixed Divine laws and norms.

These Divine norms (*as-Sunan al-ilahiyyah*) operate in the realm of the unseen (*ghayb*) as they operate in physics, chemistry and mechanics, without any difference.

“And you will never find any change in Allah’s precedent (sunnat).”¹¹

“And you will never find alteration in the norm of Allah.”¹²

Now, what is the norm (*sunnah*) of Allah with respect to the acceptance (*istijabah*) of a prayer?

Prayer: the Key of Mercy

In the Islamic sources, the relation between prayer and response has been referred to by the assertion that ‘prayer is the key to the response.’ This statement denotes the kind of relation between prayer and response. Imam ‘Ali (‘a) says: “Supplication is the key of mercy.”¹³

In his will to his son al-Hasan (‘a), Imam Amir al-Mu’minin ‘Ali bin Abi Talib (‘a) says: “Thereafter, He put the keys of His treasures in your hand, in that He has allowed {you} to ask Him from it. So whenever you wished, you opened the doors of His treasures through supplication.”¹⁴

The phrase ‘So whenever you wished, you opened the doors of His treasures through supplication’ has a clear indication to the kind of relation which exists between prayer and response.

Therefore, supplication is the key by which we unlock the treasures of Allah’s mercy. The treasures of Allah’s mercy have no end, but not everyone possesses the keys to His treasures, and not everyone is able to open the treasures of His mercy.

With reference to the verse:

“Whatever mercy Allah unfolds for the people, no one can withhold it”¹⁵,

Imam as-Sadiq (‘a) is reported to have said, “{The mercy implies} the prayer (*du'a'*).”¹⁶ In other words, supplication is the very key by which Allah opens the doors of His mercy for the people, and which He has placed in their hands.

The Holy Prophet (S) says: “For whosoever among you the door of prayer (*du’a*) is opened, the doors of response (*ijabat*) shall {also} be opened for him.”¹⁷

It is Allah who opens up toward His servant with prayer, and He is the one who opens for him the doors of its acceptance.

Imam ‘Ali (‘a) says: “Whoever knocks at the door of Allah, the Glorious, it will be opened for him.”¹⁸

Imam as-Sadiq (‘a) is narrated to have said, “Supplicate frequently, for it is the key of every mercy and the fulfillment of every need. And that which lies with Allah cannot be attained but through prayer (*du’a*). A door which is frequently knocked at is likely to be opened for the one who knocks it.”¹⁹

Imam Amir al-Mu’minin ‘Ali (‘a) says: “Prayer (*du’a*) is the key of fulfillment and the key of success. And the best prayer is that which emanates from a pure breast and a pious heart.”²⁰

The Holy Prophet (S) once said, “Shall I show you a weapon that will deliver you from your enemies and increase in your provision (*rizq*)?”

{His companions} said, “Indeed!”

He said, “Supplicate your Lord day and night, for the weapon of a believer is supplication.”²¹

Action and Prayer: the Two Keys of Allah’s Mercy

Allah, the Exalted, has placed in our hands two keys through which we can unlock the treasures of His mercy, and seek through them His provision (*rizq*) and bounties. These two keys are action (*amal*) and prayer (*du’a*). Neither dispenses with the other. Action does not dispense with prayer, nor does prayer dispense with putting effort. Therefore, one should not confine himself to prayer to the exclusion of endeavour.

In his advice to Abu Dharr, the Holy Prophet (S) is narrated to have said, “O Aba Dharr! The example of he who supplicates without acting is that of him who shoots {an arrow} without a bow.”²²

Imam as-Sadiq (‘a) says: “The call of three people is rejected; a person who sits in his home and says: ‘O my Lord, give me sustenance’, so it is said to him, ‘Did I not appoint for you the way to seek provision?’...”²³

However, it is also not correct that one should confine himself to acting and forsake supplication.

The Holy Prophet (S) is reported to have said, “Indeed Allah has servants who do {righteous} deeds, so He gives them {of His mercy}; and there are others who sincerely ask Him, so He grants them.

Thereafter, He will gather all of them in the Heaven. So those who performed {good} deeds shall say, ‘Our Lord, You gave us because we acted {righteously}, but why did You give to these {people}?’ He will say, ‘These are my servants. I gave you your reward without wasting anything of your deeds. These

people besought Me, hence I gave them and enriched them; this is My grace, I give it to whosoever I desire.”²⁴

Allah, the Exalted, has made prayer a means to compensate for the inadequacy of man’s efforts, so that he might not rely on himself and be deluded with what he has been given of power and strength, and with the efforts he has put.

Hence, action and prayer are two keys among the greatest keys through which man unlocks the doors of Allah’s mercy.

We are not concerned at the moment about discussing the ‘action’ and its relation to Allah’s mercy vis-à-vis the relation between ‘prayer’ and the treasures of Allah’s mercy and that between the action and prayer; for this relation is among the principal Islamic issues.

He, the Exalted, bestows upon His servants because of both, effort and prayer. This implies that Allah gives His servants through what is with them and what is not with them. What is with them is their efforts, actions, and what they send forth before Allah of their endeavour and spend of their persons and wealth. What is not with them is denoted by their indigence (*faqr*) and neediness (*hajat*) to Allah, and their presentation of poverty and need before Allah.

Through each of these two man attracts the mercy of Allah; by raising toward Him his efforts, actions, his self and wealth, and by displaying before Him his need, indigence, non-existence and desperation.

The Relation between Prayer and Action

It would not be correct to try to fathom prayer (*du’a’*) independent of the norms (*sunan*) of Allah; for He, the Exalted, has laid for His servants some norms in the universe, and with respect to their affairs and needs. Thus, people ought not to neglect these norms in their affairs and wishes.

However, prayer is not a substitute for these norms, nor does following these norms dispense man of prayer. To comprehend this point is to understand one of the subtle Lordly (*rabbaniyyah*) customs in Islam.

Hence, a farmer, for instance, should not confine himself to prayer only, forsaking ploughing, irrigating the land, pulling out the weeds, looking after the plants, protecting them from diseases and so on; for such a prayer shall never be accepted as it is categorized under this narration from Imam as-Sadiq (‘a), “One who supplicates without acting is like one who shoots {an arrow} without a bow.”

Similarly, the prayer of a sick man would not be accepted if he does not visit a physician and consume medication. How can such a prayer be answered when the supplicant has turned away from the norms (*sunan*) of Allah? No prayer can be accepted but within the framework of the Divine norms; for the one who answers the call of His servants is the very one who has laid these norms in nature, and he is the

one who has commanded His servants to follow these norms, and seek their provision and needs through them.

He, the Exalted, says in this regard:

“It is He who made the earth tractable for you; so walk on its flanks and eat of His provision...”²⁵

and:

“And when the prayer (salat) is finished, disperse through the land and seek Allah’s grace...”²⁶

In the same way that prayer cannot be a substitute for putting effort, likewise acting cannot be a substitute for prayer; for the keys of this universe are in the hand of Allah, He bestows upon His servants through prayer what they are not able to achieve by their efforts, as He facilitates for them by virtue of prayer those natural means (*al-asbab at-Tabi’iyyah*) which they are unable to attain by their endeavours.

However, the facilitation of the natural means by Allah for His servant does not imply that one becomes needless of prayer, petition and invoking Allah. This is because it is Allah, the Exalted, who expands (*al-basit*) and tightens (*al-qabid*), who gives and withholds, who benefits and harms, who gives life and causes death, who exalts and abases; in His hand are the keys of the universe; nothing in the universe can disobey His command; every power in this universe which can benefit or harm is subject to His order and strength.

The natural agents in this vast universe have no independent existence from the will (*iradah*) of Allah and His power, so that by employing them man should be needless of prayer, petition and imploring Allah. And we glorify and declare Allah to be above what the Jews say about Him:

“The hand of Allah is tied up!”²⁷

Instead we believe in what the Qur’an says:

“Rather His hands are wide open.”²⁸

Hence, we interact with Allah in all situations, as we do not distinguish between interaction with Allah and interaction with the norms which Allah laid as means for the provision of His servants. We believe that these norms and natural causes benefit and harm us in extension to the will (*iradah*), desire (*mashi’ah*) and strength of Allah, not independent of, and on a par with, the Divine will and power.

Moreover, we perceive the hand of Allah, the Exalted, His mercy, bounties and wisdom in all of our affairs, small and big, as we perceive the will of Allah, facilitation by Him (*tawfiq*) and His favours throughout our lives. Thus, we are in need of Allah at every moment and at every turn of our lives, and we are destitute in the face of His mercy, bounties, care, success and guidance. Accordingly, we pray to

Him that He alone should take charge of all our affairs with uprightness, and we seek refuge with Him that He should not leave us on our own even for a moment, and should not make us dependent on other than Himself.

However, the like of the above supplication does not mean that since one has asked Allah to take charge of His needs, he should now keep away his needs and affairs from the people and should not employ the natural causes operating in the universe. It rather implies that one should pray to Allah to make his need toward others in extension to his need toward Him, the Exalted, and to make his reliance on other than Him in extension to his reliance on Him, and to make his dealing with other than Him in extension to his dealing with Allah, not independent of Him or in parallel (*'ard*) to one's dependency on Him, the Exalted; for all the causes in this universe are, at the first stage, subservient to Allah, and He it is who has made them subservient to His creatures.

Employing the natural means and relying on them in extension to the interaction with Allah and relying on Him is, in fact, the essence of *tawhid* (monotheism) toward which the Qur'an invites the people. The effect of the natural causes is not in parallel to, nor independent of, the existence (*wujud*) and act (*fi'l*) of Allah.

It is on this basis that we say that man should pray to Allah in all affairs and ask Him for everything, small or big; from the salt of his bread and the fodder of his cattle to the victory against the enemy in the battlefields. None of his affairs in life should be an exception to this principle. He should not consider himself needless of Allah in any of his needs and requests by relying on other than Him from among His creatures.

At the same time, we believe that seeking asylum with Allah in everything and asking Him for everything does not contradict man's employment of the means which Allah has created for him and made subservient to him in this world. Hence, he should pray to Allah for his health and recovery from illness, and thereafter utilize all that which Allah has placed as means of remedy and physical well-being in the field of medicine.

To the extent that we believe that if one were to break this equilibrium and then pray to Allah, away from the norms of Allah in this universe, his prayer would not be answered and he would rather be like 'an archer who shoots without a bow'.

With this clear and subtle vision, Islam tries to educate us as to how to deal with Allah and His norms in the universe. And with this very perspective, we find the supplications from our A'imma (a) replete with beseeching Allah that He alone should take charge of the affairs of His servant and not to make him dependent on other than Himself, nor entrust him to his own self; and that He should connect his cord to that of His own, and cut him off from everything which cuts him off from Allah.

Imam Zayn al-'Abidin (a) says in one of his supplications, "And entrust me not to Your creatures, but take care of my need alone and Yourself attend to sufficing me. Look upon me and look after me in all

my affairs ...”²⁹

In the supplication of *‘arafah*, Imam al-Husayn (‘a) says: “O Allah, suffice me from what I fear, save me against that which I am cautious of, guard me and my religion, protect me in my journey, take charge of my family and property in my absence, bless me in what You have granted me, humble me in my self, make me distinguished in the eyes of the people, guard me against the evil of the jinn and mankind, do not disgrace me because of my sins, do not embarrass me because of my secret, do not put me to test through my deeds, do not deprive me of Your bounties, and do not entrust my {affair} to other than You.”

We shall now discuss the relationship between prayer and the response (*istijabah*).

The Relationship between Prayer and the Response

The comprehension of our {ontological} neediness (*hajat*) and indigence (*faqr*) is the very secret by which we can discover the relationship between prayer and response. This would also lead us to understand how prayer can be the key to Allah’s mercy and how can it be effective in attracting the mercy of Allah.

In fact, every prayer embodies a certain degree of the perception of poverty by the supplicant, as it denotes a level among the levels of realization of one’s neediness toward Allah. The more one’s awareness of his need toward Allah, the closer would be his prayer to acceptance and the nearer he would be to the mercy of Allah. This is because there is no such thing as miserliness in the mercy of Allah. The difference among the people in receiving the mercy of Allah is solely due to the difference in the receptacle of their souls and their capacity.

It is, nonetheless, amazing that the ontological neediness and indigence, and one’s awareness of such neediness and indigence, is the receptacle of man through which he procures the mercy of Allah, such that the more his awareness of his neediness toward Allah, the greater his receptacle in which he receives Allah’s mercy.

Allah, the Exalted, gives everyone according to his capacity. Everyone procures Allah’s mercy according to the wideness of his receptacle; the greater the receptacle, the greater one’s share from the mercy of Allah.

Based on what has been said, we can summarize the reality of prayer (*du‘a’*) as such:

1. The ontological need (*faqr*) to Allah.
2. The perception of the need.
3. The presentation of the need before Allah.

Each of the three statements differs in meaning from the other. Poverty is other than the perception of it; for there might be a person who is in need (*faqir*) of Allah in everything, but is not aware of his neediness to Him. And at times, he might be aware of his neediness, but he may not be good in raising his need toward Allah and presenting it before Him, as he may not be good in asking Him and calling upon Him.

It is when these three statements come together that the reality of prayer is realized. It is worthy of note here that the need (*faqr*), from the philosophical point of view, is not only restricted to the need and dependency in 'the coming into existence' (*huduth*), the way a building stands in need of a builder. Rather, it implies the 'need' both in the 'coming into existence' as well as in the 'continuity of the existence' (*baqa'*), exactly the way the light produced from electricity is in constant need of the flow of electrons. The lantern will give light so long as there is a constant flow of electrons, such that there would be an immediate break up in the brightness if the flow were to be cut even for a moment.

Man's neediness and dependency on Allah is exactly such. His coming into existence as well as the continuity of his existence is dependent. The existence of man, his talents, movement and life are all connected to Allah, and they are in need of Him, moment after moment, constantly and continuously. He, the Exalted, says:

"O mankind! You are the ones who stand in need of Allah, and Allah- He is the All-sufficient, the All-laudable."³⁰

The need and indigence attract Allah's mercy, whether man is aware of them or not, and whether he raises them to Allah and presents them before Him or not. However, the poverty and neediness, which is perceived by man and raised toward Allah and presented before Him, is much stronger in attracting Allah's mercy.

Accordingly, we will talk about the 'need' (*faqr*) and its relation to the 'mercy of Allah', before and after its perception and presentation before Allah.

The Need before its Perception and Presentation before Allah

The ontological need (*faqr*) toward Allah inherently attracts the mercy of Allah, even before one becomes aware of it and raises it to Allah. The example of need is that of a low and soft land which naturally attracts water and absorbs it.

On the contrary, the parable of haughtiness and disdain for worshipping Allah is that of a high and solid land which does not accept water. Such are the people who are disdainful of Allah's worship and of calling upon Him in repelling the mercy of Allah. Accordingly, He deprives them of it, even though His mercy embraces the heavens and the earth.

There exists an ontological (*takwiniyyah*) relation between indigence (*faqr*) and the mercy of Allah. Each of the two seeks the other and pursues it. The need toward Allah is in pursuit of Allah's mercy, and the

mercy of Allah seeks the object of need and indigence.

This is similar to the relation that exists between the weakness and neediness of a baby and the love and affection of a mother, each of the two seeks the other; the feebleness of the infant seeks the affection of the mother, whilst the affection and sympathy of the mother are in pursuit of the weakness of the infant, so that she may take care of her. In fact, in the sphere of the contingent existents (*mumkinat*), each of the two is in need of the other, such that the need of the mother toward caring for the weakness of the infant is, in no way, lesser than the need of the infant for the sympathy of her mother.

Similarly, a learned man is in search of an ignorant one so that he may teach him, as is the ignorant man in pursuit of a learned one so that he may learn from him. Here also, the need for a learned man to impart his knowledge to the ignorant is not lesser than the need of an ignorant man to learn from the learned.

Likewise, a physician seeks the sick to cure him, such that he declares his profession and specialization in order to attract the sick toward himself. So is the sick in pursuit of a physician. And the need of a physician for the sick is not lesser than the need of the sick toward the physician.

The strong always searches for the weak in order to support him, as the weak is in pursuit of the strong in so that he may take shelter with him. In this case too, the need of the strong to defend the weak is not lesser than the need of the weak for the protection of the strong.

In brief, this is the norm (*sunnah*) of Allah which is functioning in everything.

The same applies to the mercy of Allah and the ontological indigence of his creatures. The way the need seeks Allah's mercy, so is the mercy in search of the need.

It should, however, be noted here that the Beautiful Attributes (*sifat al-husna*) of Allah are above any need and His divinity is beyond all needs. Rather, the mercy of Allah seeks the objects of need and indigence.

Also, His divinity is beyond any miserliness. Accordingly, the difference in the levels of mercy is due to the difference in the levels of need and indigence.

The land needs heat, light, water, and air for its growth, and Allah, the Exalted, grants her with what it needs. This 'need' of her is an ontological (*takwini*) request and demand. Whatever a thing is in need of and demands by nature, then that is its request and demand in an ontological language. Allah, the Exalted, says in this regard:

“Everyone in the heavens and the earth asks Him. Everyday He is in a different state.”³¹

And that which a thing needs and demands ontologically is never left unanswered.

When a suckling baby, who has no knowledge of her own self, becomes thirsty and the thirst becomes unbearable for her, Allah, the Exalted, teaches her to express her need by crying and weeping, as He awakens the sympathy of her father and mother towards her so that they may attend to her and give her drink.

The thirst and hunger of the infant attracts the mercy and affection of Allah without there being any request and demand from the infant. In the same way, the pain and difficulties which a sick person undergoes invoke the mercy of Allah.

We, the human beings, disobey Allah and commit sins. But the very wrong deeds we commit seek the forgiveness of Allah by means of prayer and asking, and at times even without that. However, this is so long as the servant does not rebel against his Master and does not become stone-hearted such that he is driven away from the mercy of Allah:

“Say {that Allah declares}, ‘O My servants who have committed excesses against their own souls, do not despair of the mercy of Allah. Indeed Allah will forgive all sins. Indeed He is the All-forgiving, the All-merciful.’”³²

This relation which exists between the forgiveness and mercy from Allah and our sins and disobedience, between the power of Allah and our weakness, between His Self-sufficiency and our poverty, between the cure He grants us and our illness, between His salvation and our being in need of Him desperately, and between His knowledge and our ignorance and our exceeding the limits set by Him, even without there being a request, demand and prayer from our side, is to be considered as one of the secrets of Islam in my opinion, as it is also among the secrets of this universe and the laws that govern it. And unless man understands this law in the universe and comprehends it within the context of man’s relation with Allah, he will not be able to understand a major part of the teachings of this religion and its secrets.

How many a sick has been cured by Allah’s mercy without demand and prayer:

“And when I get sick, it is He who cures me.”³³

How many a needy and hungry whom Allah provided and appeased his hunger without him asking and praying to Allah. How many a helpless in the depth of the oceans, or beneath the rubbles, or under the swords, or amidst the burning fire, has been embraced by the mercy of Allah and rescued without asking and imploring Him.

How many a thirsty who could not resist the severity of his thirst was surrounded by Allah’s mercy and was satisfied without having prayed for it from Allah. How many a person who counters a danger such that he is within two bow’s length from it, whether he is aware of it or not, but the covering of Allah (*sitr allah*) overtakes him and rescues Him.

How many a person has reached a blind alley in life and Allah has opened for him thousands of ways

without him asking Him, rather without even having much knowledge of his Master; let aside the case wherein he would know Him but not ask from Him. And how many a suckling baby has been embraced by the mercy of Allah without her praying to Him.

A phrase in the supplication of *al-iftitah* reads, “O Allah, how many troubles You have relieved me of, griefs You have dispelled, mistakes You have undone, blessings You have spread, and series of afflictions You have separated.”

A phrase in a prayer of the holy month of Rajab says: “O He who gives to one who asks Him, O He who gives to one who does not ask Him and does not know Him, out of His affection and mercy.”

The following has appeared in the whispered prayer (*munajat*) of *rajabiyyah*, “But Your forgiveness precedes our deeds.” This statement implies that the forgiveness of Allah is constantly seeking our wrong deeds.

Hence, the ontological need and poverty are among the places where Allah’s mercy descends. Wherever there is this kind of indigence and neediness, there you will find the mercy of Allah.

The famous Persian mystical poet has a remarkable verse in this regard. He says: “Do not ask for water; ask for thirst, so that water might spring up from everywhere around you.”

This relation between the mercy of Allah and the need of His servants has also been referred to in the eloquent and touching whispered prayer of Amir al-Mu’minin ‘Ali (‘a):

“My Master, O my Master! You are the Master and I the servant! Has anyone mercy upon the servant but the Master? My Master, O my Master! You are the Possessor and I the possessed! Has anyone mercy upon the possessed but the Possessor? My Master, O my Master! You are the Exalted and I the abased! Has anyone mercy upon the abased but the Exalted?

My Master, O my Master! You are the Creator and I the created! Has anyone mercy upon the created but the Creator? My Master, O my master! You are the Strong and I the weak! Has anyone mercy upon the weak but the Strong?

My master, O my Master! You are the Needless and I the needy! Has anyone mercy upon the needy but the Needless? My Master, O my Master! You are the Giver and I the beggar! Has anyone mercy upon the beggar but the Giver? My Master, O my Master! You are the Living and I the dead! Has anyone mercy upon the dead but the Living?”

This was all about the need before it is realized by man and before his demand from Allah. It can also be termed as the ‘un-realized need’.

The Need after its Perception and Request

This is the need which man perceives and raises it toward Allah. Sometimes man realizes his neediness toward Allah and raises it to Him and presents it before Him, asking Him and praying to Him. This is what is known as the 'realized need'.

This need which is accompanied with awareness and request attracts the mercy of Allah more than the first kind of need which is devoid of prayer (*du'a'*). The mercy of Allah descends at both places, here and there, but the need which is accompanied with request and prayer is much stronger in attracting Allah's mercy, as His mercy is more responsive to the second kind of need than the first one.

It is the second kind of need that the following verse in the Qur'an refers to:

"Is not He who answers the call of the distressed {person} when he invokes Him and removes his distress..."³⁴

This verse focuses on two points, distress and prayer, as it says: ***"...the distressed {person} when he invokes Him."*** Each of the 'distress' and 'prayer' attract Allah's mercy. But when both of them come together, then the descent of Allah's mercy is inevitable.

There has been great emphasis in Islam on prayer and request from Allah, giving importance to presenting one's need before Allah and invoking His mercy. Parallel to this, we find in the Islamic sources that a prayer is always accompanied by the response (*istijabah*):

"Your Lord has said, 'Call Me, I will answer you.'"³⁵

On the other hand, the Qur'an insists that the value of a servant in the eyes of Allah is due to his prayer (*du'a'*) to Him:

"Say, 'My Lord would not care for you were it not for your supplication..."³⁶

The Qur'an also asserts that disregard for prayer is equal to showing arrogance in worshipping Allah:

"Your Lord has said, 'Call Me, I will answer you.' Indeed, those who are disdainful of My worship will enter hell in utter humility."³⁷

It is obvious that being arrogant in worshipping Allah is to be arrogant toward Allah Himself. And whoever is arrogant toward Allah, he will be driven away from the mercy of Allah and ***"...will enter hell in utter humility."***

The Three Laws Regarding the Relation between Prayer and the

Response

Let us ask why the descent of Allah's mercy is more intense if the need is accompanied with prayer (*du'a'*)? And why is the relation between prayer and the response much stronger here than in the first case, that is, in the relation between the need which is devoid of prayer and the mercy of Allah?

By answering this question we will answer the question with which we began this section, that is, 'What is the secret behind the relation between prayer and its acceptance?'

Our reply to the above question is that prayer attracts the mercy of Allah based on the following three laws.

The first law is the relation which exists between the need (*faqr*) and the mercy of Allah, as we have just explained in the above passages.

Each state from among the different states of prayer (*du'a'*) entails the state of indigence and neediness toward Allah's mercy. This is the first station among the various stations of Allah's mercy.

The second law is denoted by the relation between the 'need' after its realization and the 'mercy of Allah'. No doubt, the 'realized' need differs from the need before its perception. Both of them are need and indigence, and both of them attract Allah's mercy and invoke it. However, one of them is of the kind of the 'non-realized' need (*al-faqr ghayr al-wa'i*), while the other is of the kind of the 'realized' need (*al-faqr al-wa'i*).

The 'non-realized' need is a state in which man is in need of Allah without him being aware of his neediness toward Him, as, at times, he might not even know Him.

By the 'realized' need we mean a state in which the needy is well aware of his ontological need toward Allah. This awareness brings out the 'need to Allah' from the darkness into the light, whereas the 'non-realized' need continues to remain in darkness, unnoticed by the needy.

The needy who is aware of his ontological indigence to Allah can attract from the mercy of Allah and His grace what a needy who is unaware of his neediness cannot. It is as if being aware of the need solidifies the state of neediness, such that the greater and more firm the neediness, the greater the capacity of the soul for receiving the mercy of Allah.

We mentioned earlier that there is nothing like inability and miserliness with regard to the treasures of Allah's mercy. Rather, it is the capability of the people in receiving the mercy of Allah that differs. The greater the capacity of a person, the greater would be his share from the mercy of Allah. The capacity here implies the 'ontological poverty' which gets intensified as man's degree of awareness about his own neediness toward Allah increases.

For instance, a guilty person who is aware that he is being taken for execution is able to attract the

sympathy of the people and the rulers much more than a guilty who is being taken for execution without being aware of that. Although both of them are being taken for the same kind of execution, one who has confessed his guilt and knows the punishment that awaits him attracts the affection of the people more than others; as he is aware of his crime and punishment while the other is not.

Signs of the Realization of One's Neediness to Allah

The awareness of man about his neediness toward Allah has signs which become manifest in his prayer to Him. The higher the degree of one's awareness of his need to Allah, the more distinct shall be these signs in his prayer.

Among the most significant of these signs are: humility (*khushu'*), submission (*khudu'*), weeping (*buka'*) and pleading (*tadarru'*), turning (*iqbal*) toward Allah, and the state of desperation (*idtirar*) and taking resort (*luju'*) with Allah during prayer.

There has been great emphasis in the Islamic sources on these spiritual states and signs during supplication as well as on their role in its acceptance.

In matter of fact, these signs reveal the intensified presence of the second and third elements in the prayer, that is, the 'perception of one's indigence' and the 'petition and pleading with Allah'. The increase in one's imploration, humility and desperation during prayer signifies, firstly, the profundity of one's demand and request, and secondly one's awareness of his need toward Allah. These two things are effective in the acceptance of a prayer during the aforesaid spiritual states.

There has appeared in the Qur'an injunctions and exhortation to acquire these spiritual states. We will mention here some of them:

1. ***"... You invoke Him suppliantly (tadarru'an) and secretly (khufyatan)..."***³⁸

2. ***"... And supplicate Him with fear (khawfan) and hope (tama'an), indeed Allah's mercy is close to the virtuous."***³⁹

Tadarru' and *khawf* in the above verses are two states which confirm man's awareness of his need to Allah and his need for protection from Him. *Tama'* is a state which affirms man's awareness of his desire for that which is with Allah, while praying secretly (*khufyatan*) gives rise to the state of 'turning' (*iqbal*) toward Allah.

3. ***"And the Man of the Fish, when he left in a rage, thinking that We would not put him to hardship. Then he cried out in the darkness, 'There is no god except You. You are immaculate. I have indeed been among the wrongdoers.' So We answered his prayer and delivered him from the agony; and thus do We deliver the faithful."***⁴⁰

Here, there is admission and confession of wrongdoing by a servant before Allah, the Exalted: ***“You are immaculate. I have indeed been among the wrongdoers.”***

Confession of an offence is part of one’s awareness of the wrong he has done. This in itself deepens in the heart of man the state of pleading for forgiveness and taking shelter with Allah. The higher one’s awareness of his offence and sin, the more intense would be his need to Allah, seeking repentance from Him and taking refuge with Him.

4. “...And they would supplicate Us with eagerness and awe and were humble before Us.”⁴¹

Such psychic states as eagerness, awe and humility also confirm man’s awareness of his need to Allah, his fear of His punishment, and his desire for that which is with Allah of the good provision and the best reward.

5. “Is not He who answers the call of the distressed {person} when he invokes Him and removes {his} distress ...”⁴²

Distress is also a psychic state which affirms man’s perception of his poverty and need to Allah, as well as his awareness that there is no means left for salvation and succour except from Allah.

6. “...They supplicate their Lord in fear and hope ...”⁴³

The response from Allah, the Exalted, comes in accordance with the intensity of man’s distress and his awareness of his need, and in accordance with the extent to which he displays his need in his imploration and prayer. He, the Exalted, says:

“... And supplicate Him with fear and hope, indeed Allah’s mercy is close to the virtuous.”⁴⁴

The closeness of Allah’s mercy to a servant is proportional to the degree of his fear of Allah’s punishment and his eagerness for His benevolence. The more intense the fear in the heart of a servant, the stronger shall be his sense of seeking refuge with Allah, and the nearer shall be his prayer to acceptance.

The third law regarding the relation between prayer and its acceptance, which is among the most evident of the laws that are perceived by man through his innate disposition (*fitrat*), is the law which has been asserted by the Qur’an, ***“Call Me, I will answer you.”⁴⁵***

For every call there is a response. And this is exactly what the above verse means. This is a natural and evident law discerned by man through his innate nature. This is a universal law which is operative in all cases except when there is an obstacle standing against the response.

The obstacles which may hinder the response to a prayer are of two types; those related to the one-called (*mas’ul*), and those related to the one-calling (*sa’il*).

The impediments related to the one-called can be such as his inability to answer a call, or his being miser in responding. Those related to the one-calling can be such as that the acceptance of his prayer might not be to his benefit whilst he himself is unaware of this, whereas Allah, the Exalted, knows that and hence does not grant him his request.

As for the obstacles related to the one called, there is no room for them in relation to the power of Allah; for His power is absolute, He is not weak, nor does anything elude Him. Nothing is beyond His power and strength, and there is no limit to His existence and generosity. His treasures never diminish and the frequency of giving increases Him not but in generosity and kindness.

Therefore, impediments of the first kind are unimaginable.

As for the obstacles related to the supplicant, they are conceivable. It often happens that Allah, the Exalted, delays in responding to the prayer of His servant, not out of His niggardliness or inability, but because of His knowledge that delay is good for His servant.

Many a times the acceptance of a prayer is harmful to the servant, thus Allah does not answer his prayer and instead recompenses him with either abundant good in this world together with the forgiveness of his sins, or with lofty stations in the world hereafter, or, sometimes, with both of them.

We will first talk about the impediments of the first and the second kind, and thereafter discuss the relation between prayer and the response.

Obstacles of the First Kind

As mentioned earlier, these kind of obstacles are unimaginable in relation to the existence and power of Allah; for His power is absolute, He is not incapable of doing anything, nothing eludes Him, and there is no limit to His power and strength. Everything in this universe is submissive to His power. Nothing refuses to carry out His ontological will and order when He says to it: 'Be' (*kun*).

He, the Exalted, says in this regard:

"...And when He decides on a matter, He just says to it: 'Be!' and it is."⁴⁶

"All that We say to a thing, when We will it, is to say to it: 'Be' and it is."⁴⁷

"All His command, when He wills something, is to say to it: 'Be' and it is."⁴⁸

Nothing in the universe is out of the fist of His power and strength:

"...Yet the entire earth will be in His fist on the Day of Resurrection, and the heavens, scrolled, in His right hand..."⁴⁹

"Indeed Allah has power over all things."⁵⁰

His order is accomplished without there being anything to stop or to hinder it.

“... The matter of the Hour is just like the twinkling of an eye, or {even} swifter. Indeed Allah has power over all things.”⁵¹

All this was regarding the vastness of His power and strength, and the accomplishment of His order and command.

Similarly, niggardliness is also inconceivable in relation to Allah. He, the Glorious, the Exalted, is the Generous to whose generosity and kindness there is no limit:

“...Our Lord! You comprehend all things in mercy and knowledge...”⁵²

“But if they deny you, say, ‘Your Lord is the dispenser of an all-embracing mercy...”⁵³

His bounty is endless, not limited:

“To these and to those –to all We extend the bounty of your Lord, and the bounty of your Lord is not confined.”⁵⁴

“As for the felicitous, they will be in paradise... an endless bounty.”⁵⁵

No one can stop the mercy of Allah when He wishes to release it:

“Whatever mercy Allah unfolds for the people, no one can withhold it, and whatever He withholds, no one can release it after Him...”⁵⁶

There is no end to the treasuries of His mercy:

“...Yet to Allah belong the treasuries of the heavens and the earth...”⁵⁷

“There is not a thing but that its sources are with Us, and We do not send it down except in a known measure.”⁵⁸

His treasuries do not run out because of what He grants His servants of provision. A phrase in the supplication of *al-iftitah* reads, “All praise is due to Allah whose command and praise are spread among His creation... whose hand is outstretched with generosity, whose treasuries never decrease, {rather} the frequency of giving increases Him not but in generosity and kindness.”

In his will to his son al-Hasan (‘a), based on the narration of Sharif ar-radiyy, Imam ‘Ali (‘a) says: “Know that He in whose hand are the treasuries of the heavens and the earth has allowed you to supplicate and has guaranteed you its acceptance. He has commanded you to ask from Him so that He may give you, and to request Him to have mercy on you so that He may shower His mercy on you.

He has not placed anyone between you and Him to veil you from Him, nor has he compelled you to one

who would intercede with Him on your behalf. He does not prevent you from repentance were you to commit a sin, nor does He hasten you to punishment. He does not embarrass you {because of it} when you deserve to be embarrassed, nor does He show strictness in accepting your repentance. He does not object on you if you committed a wrong, nor does He despair you of {His} mercy.

Rather, he has regarded your abstention from sin to be a good deed. He counts your evil deed as one, but he counts your good deed as ten. He has opened for you the door of repentance and the door of propitiation.

When you call Him, He listens to your call, and when you whisper to Him, He is aware of your whisper. Thus, you inform Him of your need, unveil before Him what is in your heart, complain to Him of your worries, beseech Him to remove your troubles, seek His help in your affairs, and ask from the treasuries of His mercy that which no one other than Him is able to give, of long life, sound health and abundance in sustenance.

Then He put in your hand the keys of His treasuries by allowing you to ask from Him. So whenever you wished, you opened the doors of His blessings through supplication and invoked the shower of His mercy. Thus, delay in His response should not disappoint you, because that which is granted is according to the intention {of the supplicant}.”⁵⁹

According to a Divine Narration (*hadith al-qudsi*), “O My servants! All of you are in error except for him whom I have guided. So ask guidance from Me, I will guide you. And all of you are poor except him whom I have enriched. So ask Me for richness, I will provide you. And all of you are sinful except for him whom I have protected.

So plead for My forgiveness, I will forgive you... If the first and the last of you, and the living and the dead of you, were to come together and each of them were to ask Me whatever he wished and I were to grant him his wish, yet this would not affect My kingdom... When I decide on a matter, all that I say to it is: ‘Be’ and it is.”⁶⁰

Obstacles of the Second Kind

Obstacles belonging to the second category are many. Some of the time, the acceptance of a prayer might be detrimental to the supplicant and he might not be aware of this; but Allah, the Exalted, knows his condition better than himself, and He knows what is good for him and what is bad.

At other times, the quick acceptance of a prayer might be harmful for the supplicant, and Allah knows best that the delay in the response is better and more beneficial for him, so He withholds its acceptance for sometime, without nullifying or rejecting the prayer.

A phrase in the supplication of *al-iftitah* says: “So I became habituated to call You trustingly and ask You familiarly, neither fearing nor scared, pointing out to You that because of which I turned toward You.

Then if there was a delay {in Your response}, I would blame You due to my ignorance, {whereas} perhaps the delay was the best for me, for You know the outcome of all affairs.”

Sometimes, Allah, the Exalted, may delay in responding to the prayer of His servant so that he may prolong his standing (*qiyam*) and pleading before Him; as Allah loves the prolonged standing and entreating of His servant before Him. According to a Divine Narration, Allah said to Prophet Musa (‘a), “O Musa, I am not neglectful of My creatures, but I love My angels to listen to the cry of supplication {rising} from My servants.”⁶¹

Imam as-Sadiq (‘a) is narrated to have said: “{It so happens that} a servant makes supplication and Allah, the All-mighty, the Majestic, says to the two angels, ‘I have indeed answered him, but confine him to his need, for I love listening to his voice.’ And {at times} a servant makes a petition and Allah, the Blessed, the Exalted, says: ‘Grant his need quickly, for I hate his voice.’”⁶²

However, even if the acceptance of a prayer is detrimental for the supplicant, Allah, the Exalted, does not absolutely annul the response to his prayer. Rather, He transforms it to be the expiation (*kaffarah*) of his sins and a means of forgiveness; or converts it to a provision for him in this world; or grants him, instead, lofty stations in the Heaven.

Here we will mention three narrations from the Holy Prophet (S) and Imam ‘Ali (‘a) regarding the two situations mentioned above in brief, that is, substitution (*tabdil*) and delay (*ta’jil*).

Delay and Substitution in the Acceptance of a Prayer

The Holy Prophet (S) is narrated to have said, “No Muslim calls on Allah, the Glorious, provided that his prayer has not been made for severing the ties of kinship or committing a sin, except that Allah shall grant him one of the three things; either He will quickly grant his prayer, or He will delay it, or He will avert calamity from him of its like.” “O Messenger of Allah, we will increase {in praying} in this case”, said his companions. He (S) replied, “{Indeed} do increase.”⁶³

He (S) is also reported to have said, “Prayer (*du’a*) is the essence of worship. There is no believer who prays to Allah but that He responds to him; either He quickly grants it to him in this world, or delays it to the Hereafter, or forgives from his sins to the extent that he has prayed to him, so long as he does not pray for a sin.”⁶⁴

In his will to his son al-Hasan (‘a), according to the narration of Sharif ar-radiyy, Imam ‘Ali (‘a) says:

“Thus, delay in His response should not disappoint you, because that which is granted is according to the intention {of the supplicant}. Some of the time, the response might be delayed so that it may greatly increase in the reward of the supplicant and cause ample bounties for the hopeful {in Allah}.

At other times, you may ask for a thing but it is not given to you, and a better thing is given to you,

sooner or later, or it will be taken away from you for some greater good of your's; because you may have asked for a thing in which there is destruction of your religion, were it to be given to you. So let your request be for things whose beauty remains for you and whose evil consequences are averted from you. Wealth is not going to remain for you nor are you going to remain for it.”⁶⁵

If we were to closely examine the above narrations, we would come across the following five cases as far as the acceptance of a prayer is concerned:

1. Quick response (*ta'jil*) to the need for which the supplicant has prayed to Allah.
2. Delay (*ta'jil*) in the response to his prayer.
3. Substitution (*tabdil*) in the response. This is by warding off evil from the supplicant, if responding to his prayer is not to his benefit.
4. Substitution in the response by conferring upon him lofty stations, blessings and rewards in the Hereafter, if answering the need of the supplicant is not to his benefit.

Imam as-Sadiq ('a) says: “Allah will transform the prayer of the believers on the Day of Resurrection into an action which will increase {in their stations} in the Heaven.”⁶⁶

In another narration, Imam al-Baqir ('a) is related to have said, “By Allah, that which Allah, the All-mighty, the Majestic, delays in granting the believers of what they ask from this world, is better for them than that which He quickly grants them from it.”⁶⁷

5. Substitution in the response by forgiving his sins and wrongdoings, if the response to his prayer is not to his benefit.⁶⁸

Nonetheless, substitution and delay in the response (*istijabah*) may not only be to the benefit of the supplicant alone, rather it may also be to the benefit of the entire system which surrounds the supplicant as well as others. Accordingly, granting his need or responding to his prayer quickly would result in a disturbance in the system which Allah, the Exalted, has decreed for the human species in particular, or in the system which He has ordained for the universe in its entirety.

Transformation of a Prayer into Deed

Prayer and action (*'amal*) are two different things. Each of them is among the stations of Allah's mercy. Putting effort attracts the mercy of Allah as much as prayer (*du'a'*) attracts His mercy. Allah, the Exalted, says:

“And say, ‘Go on working, Allah will see your conduct and His apostle...’⁶⁹

In another verse in the Qur'an, Allah says:

“So whoever does an atom’s weight of good will see it.”⁷⁰

Prayer also is among the keys of mercy, as the Qur’anic verse says:

“Call Me, I will answer you.”⁷¹

Nevertheless, not everything that man prays for can be actualized within the general system of the universe, for one might pray to Allah for something whose occurrence is impossible within the general system (*al-qada’ wa al-qadar*) operating in the universe. Accordingly, his prayer {cannot and} would not be answered.

At other times, the acceptance of a prayer or quick response to it might not be to the benefit of the supplicant, so what shall be the outcome of all that effort put by the supplicant in praying?

The answer to this question is that the prayer itself, in the above case, is converted to an action (*‘amal*) and an act of devotion (*‘ibadah*) which, in turn, causes Allah’s mercy to descend on the supplicant.

As a result, the Divine decree and destiny (*al-qada’ wa al-qadar*) is not a barrier to the acceptance of a prayer. This is because if Allah, the Exalted, does not answer the prayer of His servant, then He would convert it to a good deed and reward the supplicant for it in this world and the Hereafter.

There are indications in the Islamic sources to this subtle concept of the ‘transformation of a prayer into good deed’.

Hammad bin ‘Isa narrates from Imam as-Sadiq (‘a), “I heard him say, ‘Supplicate, and do not say that the matter has been decided⁷²; for indeed supplication *is* the {only} worship (*‘ibadah*).”⁷³

In another tradition⁷⁴, Imam as-Sadiq (‘a) says: “Pray to Him, and do not say the matter has been decided, for indeed supplication *is* the {only} worship. Allah, the All-mighty, the Majestic, says: ***‘Indeed those who are disdainful of My worship will enter hell in utter humility.’***⁷⁵”

The Relation between Prayer and the Response

We mentioned earlier that the first kind of obstacles is impossible in relation to Allah, the Exalted. As for the second kind, it is a reality prevalent in the lives of human beings and their prayers. It is due to this fact that sometimes Allah, the Exalted, delays in responding to the prayer of His servant, and, at times, makes a substitution in the response.

In other than these two situations, the acceptance of a prayer is certain. This ‘certainty’ stems from the indubitable judgement of man’s innate disposition (*fitrah*), so long as an asker is in need and desperate of the one-asked, and the one-asked is capable of fulfilling his need, and is not miser in relation to his creatures.

This definite relation between prayer and response has been affirmed by the Qur’an as well.⁷⁶ He, the

Exalted, says:

1. “Is not He who answers the call of the distressed {person} when he invokes Him and removes his distress...”⁷⁷

According to this verse, a distressed person needs only to invoke Allah for his prayer to be answered and his distress to be removed (...when he invokes Him...). So if he prays to Him in such a state, then Allah will undoubtedly answer his prayer and remove the distress from him.

2. “Your Lord has said: ‘Call Me, I will answer you.’ Indeed those who are disdainful of My worship will enter hell in utter humility.”⁷⁸

This verse is crystal clear in showing the relation between prayer (*du’a*) and its acceptance (*Call Me, I will answer you.*)

3. “...I answer the supplicant’s call when he calls Me.”⁷⁹

The definitive nature of the relation between prayer and the response is clear and explicit from this category of verses in the Qur’an. These verses negate any kind of doubt from the heart about the certainty of the response from Allah to every prayer, so long as its acceptance is not detrimental to the supplicant, or to the general system of which the caller is a part. Moreover, the acceptance of a prayer in these verses is not conditional or dependent on anything else.

As for the conditions which we are going to talk about in chapter two of this book, they are in fact conditions necessary either for the realization and confirmation of the prayer (*du’a*), or for the benefit of the supplicant himself, without which the *du’a* will lack effect or become null and void.

In conclusion, the relation between prayer and its acceptance is of a definitive nature which does not vary. It is an unconditional relation which cannot be suspended on anything else. Any condition in this regard is one which affirms and realizes the state (*halat*) of prayer, as the verse says:

“...when he invokes Him and removes {his} distress...”⁸⁰

The Islamic sources, the narrations of the Holy Prophet (S) and his Progeny, entail what confirms and deepens this relation between prayer and its acceptance. A Divine Narration says: “O ‘Isa! Indeed I am the best of the listeners; I answer the supplicants when they call Me.”⁸¹

The Holy Prophet (S) says in a tradition, “No servant {of Allah} walking in a valley stretches out the palms of his hands, remembering Allah and invoking Him, except that Allah will fill that valley with virtues, whether the valley is big or small.”⁸²

In another tradition, Imam as-Sadiq (‘a) is reported to have said, “If a servant {of Allah} were to shut his mouth and not supplicate, he would not be given anything. So ask, you will be given.”⁸³

Maysir bin ‘Abd al-‘Aziz narrates from Imam as-Sadiq (‘a), “O Maysir! Indeed there is no door which is knocked at but that it is about to be opened for the one who knocks it.”⁸⁴

Imam ‘Ali (‘a) is reported to have said, “If you consistently knock at the door {of Allah’s mercy}, it shall be opened for you.”⁸⁵

In his advice to Amir al-Mu’minin (‘a), the Holy Prophet (S) said, “O ‘Ali! I advise you to supplicate (*du’a*), for it is {always accompanied} with the response (*ijabah*).”⁸⁶

Imam as-Sadiq (‘a) says: “If anyone of you is inspired with prayer (*du’a*) at the time of affliction, then know that the {duration of the} affliction is short.”⁸⁷

In another tradition, Imam as-Sadiq (‘a) says: “Nay, by Allah, no one earnestly invokes Allah, the All-mighty, the Majestic, except that Allah will respond to him.”⁸⁸

In a Divine Narration (*hadith al-qudsi*), Allah, the Exalted, says: “My servant has not been fair to Me; {when} he calls Me, I feel ashamed to reject {his prayer}, {but} he disobeys Me and is not {even} ashamed of Me.”⁸⁹

Imam as-Sadiq (‘a) has said, “No servant {of Allah} stretches out his hand toward Allah, the All-mighty, the All-compeller, except that He, the All-mighty, the Majestic, feels ashamed to reject {his prayer}.”⁹⁰

According to another Divine Narration, “Whosoever relieves himself (*ahdatha*) and then performs ablution and performs prayers (*salat*) and {thereafter} calls Me, then if I do not answer him in relation to what he has asked me of his religious or worldly affair, then I have disregarded him; but I am not a contemptuous (*jafin*) Lord.”⁹¹

Imam ‘Ali (‘a) says: “Allah would not open the door of supplication {for a person} and {then} close on him the door of acceptance (*ijabah*).”⁹²

In another tradition, Imam ‘Ali (‘a) is narrated to have said, “He who is given {the opportunity to make} supplication will not be deprived of the response.”⁹³

In the last two narrations there is a meaningful indication containing an ‘*alawi* breath, and that is that Allah, the Exalted, is generous and trustworthy. So if He opens the door of prayer for anyone, then it is not possible that He would shut on him the door of acceptance. Also, if He facilitates (*tawfiq*) for His servant to supplicate Him, then He will not deprive him of the response.

The Holy Prophet (S) is related to have said, “The door of supplication (*du’a*) has not been opened for anyone but that the door of acceptance is {also} opened for him. So if the door of prayer is opened for any one of you, then he should strive; for Allah never gets tired {of listening to His servant}.”⁹⁴

This was the third station among the stations of Allah’s mercy. O Allah, we heard Your message, bore

witness to it and have believed in it.

The Three Stations of Mercy

In the story of Lady Hajar and her son Prophet Isma'il ('a), and also in the story of the father of the prophets, Ibrahim ('a), we come across a remarkable and unique scene wherein all the three stations of mercy are seen at one place.

These stations are: poverty (*hajat*) and need (*faqr*), prayer (*du'a'*) and request (*su'al*), and endeavour (*sa'y*) and movement (*harakah*).

The story took place when Prophet Ibrahim ('a) left his wife, Lady Hajar, in a barren valley together with her infant baby, Isma'il ('a). Then he said:

“Our Lord! I have settled part of my descendants in a barren valley, by Your sacred House, our Lord, that they maintain the prayer (salat). So make the hearts of a part of the people fond of them, and provide them with fruits, that they may give thanks.”⁹⁵

Prophet Ibrahim ('a), the friend of Allah, then went away on the order of Allah, leaving alone this woman and her baby in that desert valley by the command of Allah. The little water they had finished, and the infant was struck by thirst and overwhelmed by it. The mother came up in search of water but could not find any trace of it.

The infant started crying, hitting the ground with his hands and feet, while the mother ran here and there. She would go up the hill of *safa* looking at the far away horizon in search of water. She would then come down and run in search of water toward the hill of *marwah*, praying to Allah to grant them water in that barren valley, while the infant was screaming and weeping, and hitting his hands and feet on the ground by the sacred House.

Suddenly, Allah, the Exalted, made a spring to gush forth under the feet of the infant. The mother quickly ran toward the water so that she may give drink to her suckling baby and stop the water from going waste. She was saying to the water as she raised a basin to collect it: “*zam...zam*”.

This astonishing event attracted the mercy of Allah on that particular day. He, the Exalted, brought forth the spring of *zamzam* in a barren land and made it to be a source of many blessings in that Holy Land.

This event was later made by Allah to be part of the practices of *hajj* and He gave it a place in one of the noble Islamic obligations decreed by Him.

Now, what is the secret hidden in this event? Why has it been given so much significance in {our} religion and has been made part of the *hajj* rituals? What is the main reason which attracted the mercy of Allah so strongly in this event, such that He made it a source of many blessings for the generations of

the monotheists?

There must be a secret behind this event which necessitated Allah's mercy in that barren valley, and caused the continuation of this mercy and its permanence, and which led it to be entered in the *hajj* rituals of the generations of monotheists (*muwahhidin*) by the Sacred House.

I believe –and Allah best knows the secrets of this incident– that this unique incident entailed three stations of Allah's mercy on that particular day, each of which is effective in attracting His mercy.

The first station is the need (*al-hajat*) which is embodied in the thirst which was harming the suckling baby. Indeed indigence and need to Allah are among the stations of Allah's mercy.

The more the need is injurious to a person, the closer he shall be to the mercy of Allah. That is why we find that the infants are much closer to Allah's mercy, when they are struck with pain, hunger, thirst, cold or heat, than the adults who are able to endure it; as the need in case of the babies does more harm to them than to the adults.

A phrase in one of the supplications reads as follows, "O Allah, give me because of my neediness." Neediness to Allah alone is enough to attract His mercy. The greater the need to Allah, the more effective it shall be in attracting His mercy.

Indigence puts a person at the doorstep of Allah's mercy and takes him closer to it, whether he is aware of his neediness toward Him or not, though one's awareness of the need increases it in its value and in its effectiveness in attracting Allah's mercy, as mentioned earlier. However, this is so long as one does not pervert the 'need' (*faqr*) from its meaning, by thinking that it implies need toward wealth or the vanities of this world or some of the servants of Allah, instead of comprehending the reality of the need, which is one's neediness toward Allah.

There is indeed a great difference between these two kinds of indigence. That which attracts Allah's mercy is the need (*faqr*) toward Him. Consequently, when a person perverts this kind of indigence, from the 'need to Allah' to the 'need to His creatures', then the 'need' loses its value in attracting Allah's mercy. Unfortunately, the need of the people, for most of the time, is of this kind and not of the kind of the need toward Allah.

Now, in the above mentioned incident, the cry and scream of the baby due to severe thirst is an effective scene for attracting Allah's mercy. Among the scenes of indigence and need toward Allah, there is no scene more touching and effective in attracting Allah's mercy than the one in which a baby is burning of thirst and the mother cannot find water for her.

The second station of Allah's mercy in this incident is the 'endeavour' (*sa'y*). One of the conditions for attaining provision (*rizq*) is to strive, as there is no provision without putting effort. Allah, the Exalted, has made endeavour and movement in man's life a key to His provision.

If the element of need (*faqr*) requires man to be in the state of desperation and want, then the element of endeavour demands from him determination (*'azm*), firmness, strong-will (*iradah*), movement and activity. It is in accordance with man's efforts, activity and determination that Allah would grant him of His mercy.

In the above incident, Lady Hajar, the mother of Prophet Isma'il, put effort to search for water as they were running short of it and her baby was overcome by thirst. She would go up the hill of *safa* looking for water at the farthest horizon, come down and move toward the hill of *marwah* in search of it. Although she did not find water, she did not despair and repeated her search, going up and coming down, from *safa* to *marwah* and vice-versa, seven times.

Had it not been for the 'hope' in her, she would have ceased to struggle right after her first attempt. But the hope with which her heart was filled persuaded her every time to go in search of water another time, until Allah delivered them by bringing forth the spring of *zamzam* under Isma'il's feet. Nevertheless, her hope was in Allah and not in her efforts, otherwise she would have despaired right in her first or second attempt.

Allah, the Exalted, has decreed such an endeavour and activity to be a condition for His provision and for the descent of His mercy on man. No doubt that it is Allah, the Exalted, who bestows upon His servants and sends down His mercy on them. But He has so willed that man's endeavour and efforts be the key to His provision and mercy.

The third station of Allah's mercy in this incident is the prayer of Lady Hajar, her total absorption in Allah (*inqita' ila allah*), and her being in desperate need (*idtitar*) of Him in searching for water in that barren land.

The more one's detachment from all other than Allah during prayer, the nearer he is to the mercy of Allah. I do not know in which state among the states of 'total absorption in Allah' this righteous lady was in during those moments in that deserted valley, with no animal or human being beside her, while her only baby was burning with thirst and about to breathe her last.

This lady had completely turned toward Allah alone during that critical moment such that even the angels began praying to Allah, joining their voices and prayers to that of her's. If all the people were to attain the like of this state of total absorption in Allah, "they would surely have drawn nourishment from above them and from beneath their feet"⁹⁶, and Allah's mercy would have embraced all of them.

Peace be upon you, O our mother! Isma'il is among your sons whom Allah endowed with light (*nur*), guidance (*huda*), belief (*Iman*), and prophethood (*nubuwwah*), and he is among those who have been guided aright. Were it not for your loneliness in that deserted and barren valley during the midday heat of Hijaz⁹⁷, and were it not for that suffering and difficulty, you would have not attained the like of the state of total absorption in Allah which you attained during that difficult situation, on the hills of *safa* and *marwah*.

And were it not for this detachment from all other than Allah, His mercy would not have embraced you and your child. And had it not been for this mercy, your total absorption in Allah and endeavour between *safa* and *marwah* would not have become part of Allah's sacraments (*sha'a'ir*) in *hajj*.

“Indeed Safa and Marwah are among Allah’s sacraments. So whoever makes hajj to the House, or performs the ‘umrah there is no sin upon him to circuit between them. Should anyone do good of his own accord, then Allah is indeed appreciative, All-knowing.”⁹⁸

O our mother! Allah has engraved in the memory of history your total absorption in Him in that midday heat, and your endeavour in search of water, and the cry of your infant Isma'il, so that people after you may know how to present themselves before Allah and plead for His mercy.

Indeed Allah's mercy is all-embracing. There is no niggardliness, defect, or inability with regard to His mercy. But it is the people who are unaware of the places of His mercy and its stations, and are not acquainted with the correct way of beseeching His mercy and to benefit from it.

We have come to learn from you, O our mother, how to invoke for the stations of Allah's mercy and how to present ourselves for it. From you, O our mother, have we taken the keys of mercy.

But we apologize, O our mother, if we, your children, could not preserve these keys which you handed to Isma'il after yourself, and which were thereafter inherited by the descendents of Isma'il, and which eventually reached us from your son, Muhammad, the Prophet of Allah (S) . We lost them as we lost the other heritage and legacy of the prophets.

We learned from our father, Ibrahim, how to profess the Oneness of Allah (*tawhid*), and we learnt from our mother, Hajar, how to implore Allah. But we lost both of them due to our indulgence in lowly desires.

Help us, O Allah, to regain what we have lost of the heritage of our father Ibrahim and our mother Hajar, and make us among the members of their family, and do not oust us from this holy house, from the family of Ibrahim and 'Imran.

“Indeed Allah chose Adam and Nuh, and the progeny of Ibrahim and the progeny of 'Imran above all the nations; some of them are descendents of the others, and Allah is All-hearing, All-knowing.”⁹⁹

“Our Lord, make us submissive to you, and {raise} from our progeny a nation submissive to you, and show us our rites {of worship}, and turn to us clemently. Indeed You are the All-clement, the All-merciful.”¹⁰⁰

On that day, our mother employed in that barren and burning valley all the means of goodness; endeavour, supplication, and displaying neediness.

She would sometimes go up *safa* in search of water, and at other times up *marwah*; as Allah loves

movement and endeavour from His servants, and has made it among the most important requisites for attaining provision (*rizq*).

But at the same time, she was absolutely detached from all other than Allah in her endeavour, praying and invoking Him alone in that situation, the like of which is to be rarely found in the history of mankind.

Neither did her putting effort and struggling veil her from Allah and cut her off from Him, nor did her complete absorption in Allah (*inqita'*) hinder her from activity and exerting effort in search of water, as much as a woman could have done in that barren valley and under that scorching midday heat, in seven rounds from *safa* to *marwah* and vice-versa.

Today in the sacraments (*sha'a'ir*) of the *hajj*, we take these rounds between these two hills without experiencing any difficulty, suffering, trouble, or distress, still we get tired and this activity exhausts us. While our mother, Hajar, performed this activity in that barren valley and under that midday heat, while she was thirsty, drained of all her strength and her suckling baby was about to breathe her last. Yet she carried out this activity in search of water with firmness, resolution, determination and strong-will.

But with all that, this endeavour did not cut her off or veil her from Allah even for a moment. Rather, she was continuously in contact with Allah and detached from all other than Him during whole of this tenacious endeavour. Thus, she bound her endeavour to achieve a worldly affair with complete absorption in Allah, and vice versa. Who among us is able to do such a thing?

The angels were, at this stage, looking at her in amazement. How could she attain such a perfect detachment from all other than Allah?! How could she tenaciously look after water when she was encumbered with pain and difficulties?! How could she so supremely combine her endeavour with total absorption in Allah?! So they all raised their cries to Allah to answer her prayer and efforts, and that her endeavour and prayer may attract Allah's mercy, and that she may attain proximity to Allah's mercy.

A beam of prayer and good deed ascended on that day from the earth to the heavens, and a beam of mercy descended from the heavens to the earth. The earth was connected to the heavens and the heavens to the earth. The crowd of angels raised their cries to Allah, pleading with Him, as they witnessed this unique event. And all of a sudden that which had never entered any thought or imagination happened; a spring of clear, cool and pleasant water gushed forth under the feet of the suckling baby.

Glory be to Allah! All praise is due to Allah! He eventually answered her call and endeavour, but not at the place she had put her efforts, rather under the feet of the suckling baby who was at that time hitting the ground with her hands and feet, out of severe thirst. This was for her to know that Allah alone is the one who blessed her in that barren and burning valley with the cool and pleasant water, and it was not she who actualized that by her efforts and activity, though it was necessary for her to struggle in order for Allah to bless her with *zamzam*.

Accordingly, He made *zamzam* to gush forth under the feet of the suckling baby and He raised His

sacred House in that valley. He blessed *zamzam* and made it a source of providing water to *hajj* pilgrims for generations to come. He engraved this activity and prayer in the memory of history and made it a sacrament among the sacraments (*sha'a'ir*) of *hajj*, so that the pilgrims may follow her example every year and send salutations from a distance to their mother, Hajar, and to their fathers, Ibrahim and Isma'il ('a).

In conclusion, three means of Allah's mercy had come together in that barren valley on that particular day; neediness (*faqr*), endeavour (*sa'y*) and prayer (*du'a'*); neediness at the farthest level of weakness (*da'f*) and lack (*faqah*); endeavour accompanied with firmness, resolution and determination; and prayer in the state of desperation (*idtirar*) and detachment (*inqita'*) from all other than Allah.

Every year during *hajj* we revive the memory of this great event, so that we may learn from our mother, the mother of Isma'il ('a), how to beseech and attract Allah's mercy and bounties.

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1. Qur'an, 40:60.
 2. Al-Mizan, vol.2, pg.42, quoting from al-Durr al-Manthur.
 3. Al-munajat al-khams 'asharah.
 4. Sahifat As-Sajjadiyyah, supplication no.47.
 5. Bihar al-Anwar, vol.93, pg.320.
 6. Sahifat As-Sajjadiyyah, supplication no.20.
 7. Misbah al-Shari'ah, pg.14 15; and Bihar al-Anwar, vol.93, pg.323.
 8. Bihar al-Anwar, vol.93, pg.323.
 9. Ibid, pg.312.
 10. Qur'an, 40:60.
 11. Qur'an, 33:62.
 12. Qur'an, 35:43.
 13. Bihar al-Anwar, vol.93, pg.300.
 14. Bihar al-Anwar, vol.77, pg.299.
 15. Qur'an, 35:2.
 16. Bihar al-Anwar, vol.93, pg.299.
 17. Kanz al-'Ummal, hadith no.3156.
 18. Ghurar al-Hikam, hadith no.8292.
 19. Bihar al-Anwar, vol.93, pg.295; and Wasa'il al-Shi'ah, vol.4, pg.1086, hadith no.8616.
 20. Wasa'il al-Shi'ah, vol.4, pg.1094, hadith no.8657; and Usul al-Kafi, vol.2, pg.517.
 21. Wasa'il al-Shi'ah, vol.4, pg.1095, hadith no.8658.
 22. Wasa'il al-Shi'ah, abwab al-du'a', bab no.32, hadith no.3.
 23. Wasa'il al-Shi'ah, kitab as-Salat, abwab al-du'a', bab no.50, hadith no.3.
 24. Wasa'il al-Shi'ah, vol.4, pg.1084, hadith no.8609.
 25. Qur'an, 67:15.
 26. Qur'an, 62:10.
 27. Qur'an, 5:64.
 28. Qur'an, 5:64.
 29. Sahifat As-Sajjadiyyah, supplication no.22.
 30. Qur'an, 35:15.
 31. Qur'an, 55:29.

32. Qur'an, 39:53.
33. Qur'an, 26:80.
34. Qur'an, 27:62.
35. Qur'an, 40:60.
36. Qur'an, 25:77.
37. Qur'an, 40:60.
38. Qur'an, 6:63.
39. Qur'an, 7:56.
40. Qur'an, 21:87 88.
41. Qur'an, 21:90.
42. Qur'an, 27:62.
43. Qur'an, 32:16.
44. Qur'an, 7:56.
45. Qur'an, 40:60.
46. Qur'an, 2:117
47. Qur'an, 16:40.
48. Qur'an, 36:82.
49. Qur'an, 39:67.
50. Qur'an, 3:165.
51. Qur'an, 16:77.
52. Qur'an, 40:7.
53. Qur'an, 6:147.
54. Qur'an, 17:20.
55. Qur'an, 11:108.
56. Qur'an, 35:2.
57. Qur'an, 63:7.
58. Qur'an, 15:21.
59. Nahj al-Balaghah, letter no.31.
60. Tafsir al-Imam, pg.19 20; and Bihar al-Anwar, vol.93, pg.293.
61. 'Uddat ud-Da'i.
62. Wasa'il al-Shi'ah, kitab as-Salat, abwab al-du'a', bab no.21, hadith no.3.
63. Wasa'il al-Shi'ah, vol.4, pg.1086, hadith no.8617.
64. Wasa'il al-Shi'ah, kitab as-Salat, abwab al-du'a', bab no.15, and vol.4, pg.1086, hadith no.8618.
65. Nahj al-Balaghah, letter no.31.
66. Wasa'il al-Shi'ah, vol.4, pg.1086, hadith no.8615.
67. Qurb al-Isnad, pg.171; and Usul al-Kafi, pg.526.
68. The last three cases are peculiar to the situation when the prayer of a servant is absolutely annulled. However, at times, Allah, the Exalted, may answer the prayer of his servant together with forgiving his sins, warding off evil from him and granting him lofty stations in the Hereafter.
69. Qur'an, 9:105.
70. Qur'an, 99:7.
71. Qur'an, 40:60.
72. That is, this matter is among the cases of Divine decree and destiny which cannot be penetrated and altered by supplication (du'a').
73. Wasa'il al-Shi'ah, vol. 4, pg. 1092, hadith no.8643; and Usul al-Kafi, pg. 516.
74. Wasa'il al-Shi'ah, vol.4, pg.1092, hadith no.8645; and al-Kafi, al-furu', vol.1, pg.94.
75. Qur'an, 40:60.
76. The definitive nature of this relation should not imply that Allah is obliged to answer a prayer by this very relation.

Rather, He, the Glorious, has made mercy incumbent upon Himself, "...Say, 'Peace to you! Your Lord has made mercy incumbent upon Himself..." (Qur'an, 6:54)

77. Qur'an, 27:62.

78. Qur'an, 40:60.

79. Qur'an, 2:186.

80. Qur'an, 27:62.

81. Usul al-Kafi.

82. Thawab al-A'mal, pg.137.

83. Wasa'il al-Shi'ah, vol.4, pg.1084, hadith no.8606.

84. Wasa'il al-Shi'ah, vol.4, pg.1085, hadith no.8611.

85. Wasa'il al-Shi'ah, vol.4, pg.1085, hadith no.8613.

86. Wasa'il al-Shi'ah, kitab as-Salat, abwab al-du'a', bab no.2, hadith no.18.

87. Wasa'il al-Shi'ah, vol. 4, pg. 1087, hadith no.8624.

88. Usul al-Kafi, kitab al-du'a', bab al-ilhah fi al-du'a', hadith no.5.

89. Irshad al-Qulub of al-Daylami.

90. 'Uddat ud-Da'i; and Wasa'il al-Shi'ah, kitab as-Salat, abwab al-du'a', bab no.4, hadith no.1.

91. Irshad al-Qulub of al-Daylami.

92. Wasa'il al-Shi'ah, kitab as-Salat, abwab al-du'a', bab no.2, hadith no.12; and vol.4, pg.1087, hadith no.8624.

93. Wasa'il al-Shi'ah, kitab as-Salat, abwab al-du'a', bab no.2; and vol.4, pg.1086, hadith no.8622.

94. Wasa'il al-Shi'ah, vol.4, pg.1087, hadith no.8624.

95. Qur'an, 14:37.

96. Qur'an, 5:66.

97. The Arabian Peninsula. {Trns}

98. Qur'an, 2:158.

99. Qur'an, 3:33-34.

100. Qur'an, 2:128.

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