

212629 - Why does Islam urge us to offer supplication, when Allah, may He be exalted, may not respond to the one who calls upon Him?

the question

It is narrated in the hadith that it is not allowed for a person to say in his supplication: “O Allah, forgive me if You will; O Allah, have mercy on me if You will,” for no one can compel Allah. If that is the case, then why does Islam urge us to offer supplication? In other words, why should we offer supplication if Allah will never answer us?

Detailed answer

Firstly:

Al-Bukhaari (7477) and Muslim (2679) narrated from Abu Hurayrah that the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) said: “No one of you should say: O Allah, forgive me if You will; O Allah have mercy on me if You will; O Allah, grant me provision if You will. Let him be definite in his asking, for Allah does whatever He wills and no one can compel Him.”

Abu Sa‘eed al-Khudri (may Allah be pleased with him) said: When you call upon Allah, then aim high in what you ask for, because what is with Him is inexhaustible. And when you offer supplication, be definite, for nothing can compel Allah.

End quote from Jaami‘ al-‘Uloom wa’l-Hikam (2/48).

Ibn Battaal (may Allah have mercy on him) said:

This indicates that the believer should strive hard in offering supplication, and he should have hope of receiving a response. He should not despair of the mercy of Allah, because he is calling upon One Who is most generous. This was referred to in mutawaatir reports from the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him).

End quote from Sharh Saheeh al-Bukhari by Ibn Battaal (10/90).

Al-Qurtubi (may Allah have mercy on him) said:

The words “if You will” suggest a sense of being able to do without His forgiveness, generosity and mercy, as if the person is saying: If You want to give me such and such, then do it, and such words are only used with someone you feel you can do without. But when a person is in need of something, he is more definite in his asking, and he asks in the manner of one who is in desperate need of what he is asking for.

End quote from Tafseer al-Qurtubi (2/312).

Shaykh Ibn ‘Uthaymeen (may Allah have mercy on him) said:

The reservation about stipulating the condition (“if You will”) is on three counts:

Firstly, it gives the impression that Allah may be compelled to do something, and that there is someone other than Him who could prevent Him, as if the one who offers this supplication in this manner is saying: I am not compelling You; if You will, then forgive me, and if You will, then do not forgive me.

The second is that the words “if You will” make it seem as if the one who is saying this thinks that this matter is too much for Allah, and He may not will it because it is too much to ask of Him. This is similar to when you say to another human being – and the analogy is to explain the matter, not to compare realities – Give me one million riyals, if you wish. If you say that to him, the matter may be too much for him and he may be reluctant to do it, so your saying “if you wish” is to make it easier for him to say no. But Allah, may He be glorified and exalted, has no need for you to say to Him “if You will”, because nothing is too much for Him, may He be glorified and exalted, to give. Hence the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) said: “Let him ask for the greatest thing that he is seeking, for nothing is too great for Him to give.”

The phrase “Let him ask for the greatest thing that he is seeking” means: let him ask whatever he wants, small or great, and let him not think, This is too much; I cannot ask Allah for it. For the same reason, he said, “for nothing is too great for Him to give,” meaning

that nothing is so great for Him that He would withhold it, be stingy and not give it – may He be glorified and exalted. Everything that He gives is not too great for Him, for Allah, may He be glorified and exalted, will resurrect all of mankind with a single word; this is something great, but it is very easy for Him.

Thirdly: it gives the impression that the one who is asking has no need of Allah, as if he is saying: If You will, do it, and if You will, do not do it; I do not care.

End quote from Majmoo' Fataawa wa Rasaa'il al-'Uthaymeen (10/917-918).

For more information, please see the answer to question no. [105366](#).

Secondly:

Allah, may He be glorified and exalted, has commanded His slaves to call on Him in supplication (du'aa') and has promised to respond if they call upon Him with sincerity and express their need of Him, as He says (interpretation of the meaning):

“And your Lord says, "Call upon Me; I will respond to you”

[Ghaafir 40:60].

The issue here is not how much Allah has of stores and how generous He is, for His stores are full and will not be diminished by spending; nothing taken from them is too much to be given, and it is not too much in comparison with what Allah has promised of abundance and generosity, for Allah, may He be glorified and exalted, does not break His promise. Rather the issue is that the slave should stand [before his Lord] in a position of servitude and hope, and offer supplication in the correct manner, doing it as Allah has commanded His slaves to do it. He should give up anything that could form an impediment to a response, and anything that could block the way to Allah, may He be exalted.

Supplication is an act of worship to Allah, may He be glorified and exalted; it is one of the noblest acts of worship, and there is no act of worship that does not have its etiquette, conditions and ways of doing it that the individual is encouraged to follow.

Moreover, there is no cause or means but there are impediments to it which may prevent it from happening and reduce its impact.

Shaykh Ibn 'Uthaymeen (may Allah have mercy on him) said:

Should the one who offers this supplication be certain of a response?

The answer is: if the matter is connected to the power of Allah, then he should be certain that Allah is able to do that. Allah, may He be exalted, says (interpretation of the meaning):

“And your Lord says, "Call upon Me; I will respond to you”

[Ghaafir 40:60].

With regard to your supplication, and what you may have of impediments, or the means of a response being unavailable, then in that case you may become uncertain of a response.

Yet despite that, you should think positively of Allah, because Allah, may He be glorified and exalted, says (interpretation of the meaning):

“And your Lord says, "Call upon Me; I will respond to you”

[Ghaafir 40:60].

The One Who enables you to call upon Him in the first place will ultimately bless you with an answer, especially if you take the measures that lead to having supplications answered, and avoid anything that could prevent that. One of the impediments to having supplications answered is overstepping the mark in offering supplication, such as praying for sin or the severing of ties of kinship....

End quote from Majmoo' Fataawa wa Rasaa'il al-'Uthaymeen (10/918).

See the most important etiquette of offering supplication in the answer to question no. [36902](#), and the things that prevent supplication being answered, in the answer to question no. [5113](#).

Thirdly:

You will not necessarily get exactly what you are seeking in the way you want it, so that you may think that your supplication was answered, for the response may come in various forms: either exactly what the supplicant asked for will be hastened for him, or an equivalent evil will be averted from him, or that will be stored up as reward for him on the Day of Resurrection.

It is proven from Abu Sa'eed al-Khudri (may Allah be pleased with him) that the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) said: There is no Muslim who offers a supplication in which there is no sin or severing of ties of kinship, but Allah will give him one of three things in return for it: either He will hasten for him what he asked for, or He will store it [the reward for it] up for him in the Hereafter, or He will avert from him an equivalent evil." They said: Then we should do a lot of that [offering supplication]. He said "Then Allah will reward you more."

Narrated by Ahmad (10749); classed as saheeh by al-Albaani in Saheeh at-Targheeb wa't-Tarheeb (1633).

Al-Haafiz Ibn Hajar said: Every supplicant receives a response, but the response varies. Sometimes he gets exactly what he prayed for, and sometimes he gets something else as compensation. This is mentioned in a saheeh hadith.

End quote from Fath al-Baari (11/95).

Shaykh Ibn Baaz (may Allah have mercy on him) said: So the individual should persist in offering supplication and think positively of Allah, may He be glorified and exalted, and he should know that He is all-wise, all-knowing; He may hasten the response for a reason, or He may delay it for a reason, or He may give the supplicant something better than what he asked for.

End quote from Majmoo' Fataawa Ibn Baaz (9/353).

And Allah knows best.