291824 - Virtue of Du`a in the Last Third of the Night

the question

With regard to the Hadith, “Who will call upon Me so that I may answer him?”, is what is meant by calling upon Allah here the supplication (Du`a) that a person may offer as he wishes for the good of this world and the hereafter? With regard to the words “Who will ask of Me so that I may give him?”, does asking here mean the same as calling or supplication? Why is asking mentioned in particular in the second instance? What is the difference between them? What is the reason behind this variation, as the first phrase says “call upon Me” and the second phrase says “ask of Me”? Should the calling and asking mentioned in the Hadith occur in the night prayer, or may they be offered at any time During the last third of the night? With regard to asking for forgiveness, can a person mention a specific shortcoming and include seeking for forgiveness for it among these other supplications?

Summary of answer

The virtue of Du`a in the last third of the night lies in the fact that Allah descends to the lowest heaven during this time and invites His servants to supplicate to Him. This period is highly praised in Hadiths, where Allah promises to answer those who call upon Him, forgive those who seek forgiveness, and grant requests to those in need. It is a time of divine mercy and an unparalleled spiritual opportunity.

Detailed answer

Praise be to Allah.

The Divine Descent During the Last Third of the Night

It was narrated from Abu Hurayrah (may Allah be pleased with him) that the Messenger of Allah

(blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) said: “Our Lord, may He be Blessed and Exalted, comes down to the lowest heaven every night when the last third of the night is left, and He says: `Who will call upon Me, that I may answer him? Who will ask of Me, that I may give him? Who will ask Me for forgiveness, that I may forgive him?’” (Narrated by Al-Bukhari, 1145 and Muslim, 758)

Understanding the Difference between Du`a, Asking, and Istighfar

What is well established is that asking and seeking forgiveness are included in the general meaning of supplication (Du`a). Asking (Su’al) is a term that usually refers to seeking benefit, whether it is a spiritual or worldly benefit, and asking forgiveness (Istighfar) is a term that usually refers to seeking to ward off the harm and negative impacts of sin. Rather it is singled out for mention by way of asking for something specific after asking for good in general terms.

Shaykh Al-Islam Ibn Taymiyah (may Allah have mercy on him) said:

First of all he mentioned supplication (Du`a), then he mentioned asking and seeking forgiveness. The one who seeks forgiveness is asking, just as the one who is asking is supplicating or calling upon Allah, but he mentioned the one who asks to ward off evil after mentioning the one who asks to seek good, and he mentioned both of them after mentioning the one who calls upon Allah in supplication, which includes both of the above, as well as other things. So this comes under the heading of asking for something specific after asking for good in general terms. (End quote from *Majmu` Al-Fatawa*, 10/239)

Al-Badr Al-`Ayni (may Allah have mercy on him) said:

What is mentioned here is supplication, asking, and seeking forgiveness.

The difference between these three is:

1. What is sought is either to ward off something harmful, or to bring something good, and the latter may be either spiritual or worldly.

2. Seeking forgiveness refers to the first of these.
3. Asking refers to the second.

Supplication refers to the third. (End quote from `*Umdat Al-Qari*, 7/201). See also: *Fat-h Al-Bari* by Ibn Hajar, 3/31)

Al-Karmani (may Allah have mercy on him) said: If you say: What is the difference between supplication and asking?

I say: What is sought is either to ward off something undesirable or to bring something that is desirable, which may be either worldly or spiritual.

Seeking forgiveness is seeking concealment of sin, so it refers to the first.

Asking refers to the second.

Supplication refers to the third.

Or [it may be said that] supplication is that in which there is no request, such as when we say, "Ya Allah, ya Rahman (O Allah, O Most Gracious)."

And asking is requesting or seeking.

Or it may be said that what is meant [by these terms] is one thing, and the different phrases are by way of emphasis. (End quote from *Al-Kawakib Ad-Darari* by Al-Karmani, 6/200)

Two other additions [to this Hadith] were narrated:

1. Imam Ahmad narrated in *Al-Musnad* (15/362): "… Is there anyone who will repent, so that I might accept his repentance ?"
2. He also narrated in *Al-Musnad* (12/478): "… Who is there that will ask Me for provision, so that I might grant him provision? Who is there that will ask Me to relieve harm, so that I might relieve him of it?"

The purpose of this elaboration, in which a specific meaning is mentioned after a general meaning, is to emphasize that which is singled out for mention, as well as to further encourage the listener to offer supplication. This is something that everyone who hears this Hadith will experience, because when hearing the Hadith in full, he will sense the importance and virtue of offering supplication (Du`a) at this particular time more than he would if he only hears part of the Hadith.

Du`a Without Prayer: Is It Still Rewarded?

The Hadith mentions supplication at this time in general terms and does not restrict it to the prayer only . Therefore the basic principle is that supplication is encouraged and is good at this time in general terms, whether it is offered whilst praying or otherwise.

It was narrated from `Ubadah ibn As-Samit (may Allah be pleased with him) that the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) said: “Whoever turns over at night and says La ilaha illallah wahdahu la sharika lah, lahul-mulk wa lahul-hamd wa huwa `ala kulli shay’in qadir. Al-hamDu-lillah wa subhan-Allah wa la ilaha ill-Allah wa Allahu akbar, wa la hawla wa la quwwata illa Billah (There is no god but Allah Alone, with no partner or associate. To Him belongs praise and His is the sovereignty, and He is Able to do all things. Praise be to Allah, glory be to Allah, there is no god but Allah and Allah is Most Great. There is no power and no strength except with Allah), then he says, Allahumma ighfir li (O Allah, forgive me), or he offers supplication, his supplication will be answered. If he does wudoo’ and prays, his prayer will be accepted.” (Narrated by Al-Bukhari, 1154)

In this Hadith, there is a differentiation between the status of the one who wakes up at night and remembers Allah, seeks His forgiveness and calls upon Him, and the status of the one who does more than that by getting up, and doing Wudu [and praying].

Allah, may He be Glorified, has promised His bounty and grace to both of them.

It was narrated that Abu Umamah Al-Bahili (may Allah be pleased with him) said: I heard the Messenger of Allah (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) say: “Whoever goes to his bed in a

state of purity, and keeps remembering Allah until sleep overtakes him, then he will not turn over at any time in the night, asking Allah for something of goodness in this world and the hereafter, but He will grant it to him." (Narrated by At-Tirmidhi, 3562, and others. At-Tirmidhi said: This is a sound Hadith. (For more information, please see: Nata'ij Al-Afkar by Al-Hafidh Ibn Hajar, 3/82-84)

In conclusion, in this Hadith, there are two virtuous scenarios:

1. The scenario of supplication and asking of Allah, and beseeching Him, even if that is outside of prayer, whether it is done before praying or after finishing one's regular acts of worship at night, or even without praying at all; a person may wake up, call upon Allah (Du`a), remember Him (Dhikr) and ask Him for forgiveness, then go back to sleep.

The more virtuous scenario is to combine all of that by praying as much as Allah wills of Tahajjud prayer at night, when people are sleeping, asking his Lord for forgiveness in his Tahajjud , and calling upon Him, asking Him for whatever he wants of the goodness of this world and the hereafter.

Hence the Salaf (early righteous generations) used to prefer to pray at this time, as Az-Zuhri said.

It was narrated from Ibn Shihab Az-Zuhri, from Al-Agharr and Abu Salamah ibn `Abd Ar-Rahman, that Abu Hurayrah (may Allah be pleased with him) said: The Messenger of Allah (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) said: "Our Lord, may His name be blessed, descends every night, when the last third of the night remains, to the lowest heaven and says: `Who will call upon Me so that I may answer him? Who will ask of Me so that I may give him? Who will seek My forgiveness so that I may forgive him?' until dawn breaks. Hence they used to prefer to pray at the end of the night rather than at the beginning thereof." (Narrated by Imam Ahmad in Al-Musnad, 13/35; classed as authentic by Al-Albani in *Irwa Al-Ghalil*, 2/196)

Imam Muhammad ibn Nasr Al-Mirwazi (may Allah have mercy on him) said:

Chapter on seeking forgiveness before dawn, and praying at that time.

Allah, may He be Exalted, says (interpretation of the meaning):

{And in the hours before dawn they would ask forgiveness.} [Adh-Dhariyat 51:18]

{and those who seek forgiveness before dawn.} [Al `Imran 3:17]

It was narrated from Nafi` that Ibn `Umar (may Allah be pleased with him) used to pray at night, then he would say: O Nafi`, has dawn broken yet? And I would say no, so he would pray again, then when I said yes [dawn had broken], he would sit and ask Allah for forgiveness and offer supplication until the time for Fajr prayer.

It was narrated from Ibn `Umar and Mujahid concerning the verse (interpretation of the meaning): {And in the hours before dawn they would ask forgiveness.} [Adh-Dhariyat 51:18], that they said: They would pray. It was narrated from Ad-Dahhak: And they would get up and pray.

It was narrated from Qatadah (may Allah have mercy on him) : They were people of prayer.

It was narrated from Al-Hasan concerning the verse (interpretation of the meaning): {They used to sleep but little of the night} [Adh-Dhariyat 51:17]: They would sleep little During the night, and {And in the hours before dawn they would ask forgiveness.} [Adh-Dhariyat 51:18]. He said: They would continue praying until the time before dawn, then they would offer supplication and beseech Allah. According to one report: They would pray During the night, and would seek forgiveness in the time before dawn, at the end of the night.

It was narrated that Zayd ibn Aslam said: Those who attended Fajr prayer.

It was narrated from Ibn `Abbas that a caller calls from heaven every night During the time before dawn (saying): Who will ask so that he may be given? Who will call so that he may be answered? Who will seek forgiveness so that he may be forgiven? And everyone between heaven and earth hears it except jinn and humans. Do you not see how the rooster and other creatures like him call out at that time?

`Abdullah ibn Mas`ud (may Allah be pleased with him) used to slip out from his house and say: “O Allah, You called me and I am responding to You; You commanded me and I am obeying You. This is the time before dawn, so forgive me.” It was said to him: Why do you say, “This is the time

before dawn, so forgive me”? He said: When Ya`qub (peace be upon him) he would pray for forgiveness for his sons, he deferred that until the time before dawn. It was narrated from Ibraheem at-Taymi that he said, with regard to the words of Ya`qoob, “I will ask forgiveness for you from my Lord” [Yoosuf 12:98]: He deferred it until the time before dawn… (End quote from *Mukhtasar Qiyam Al-Layl*, 96)

No Specific Wording Required for Istighfar

The term seeking forgiveness is used in a general sense in this Hadith, and is not limited to a particular wording . Therefore, anything that may be described as seeking forgiveness in Islamic terms is encouraged at this time, whether it is seeking forgiveness in general terms, or seeking forgiveness for a specific sin or shortcoming that the Muslim thinks of.

And Allah knows best.