103099 - Unanswered Du`as – A Test of Faith and Trust

the question

I would like to ask you a question and I hope that you will take the time to answer me. I am an ordinary Muslim; I do not have great faith or weak faith. I do the obligatory duties with some shortcomings – and I hope that Allah will forgive me – and I do some of the Sunnahs. I believe in the divine will and decree, both good and bad. About seven years ago I suffered great distress because of a calamity – which I will not trouble you with – but I will tell you honestly that initially I panicked, and I was filled with despair, but after approximately one year Allah guided me, and good people taught me that there was something good in it, by Allah's leave. They told me that the calamity was either because of a sin that I had committed or it was a test from Allah, and they advised me to call upon Allah (du'a') and ask for forgiveness, and to ask of Allah from his bounty, and to seek to draw closer to Him by means of His beautiful names and sublime attributes, and to do a lot of good deeds, and that by Allah's leave my request would never be rejected, and that Allah would answer my prayers. I did all of that, although I do not say that I did it perfectly, but I did the best I could. I said a lot of du'a' and did a lot of good deeds, and I repented to Allah sincerely from all my sins, and I asked Allah to relieve my distress and take away my worry.

I prayed to Allah for guidance (istikharah) before doing some things in my life so that my affairs would be set straight, but after doing all these things, my worry and distress only increased, and the calamities and grief grew worse. All the things about which I prayed istikharah failed, and brought me trouble. All doors were closed in my face. Allah forbid that I should complain about Allah to you, rather I complain about my sorrow and grief to Allah. But I want to know why Allah did not answer me?

And why did I not succeed in any of my worldly affairs, even though I took the necessary means and put my trust in Allah, and I did not do anything without praying istikharah beforehand, and Allah helps the kafir in his worldly affairs if he takes the necessary means. I do not eat haram things and I do not intend to do bad things to anyone and I pray for everyone to be guided. I heard

one of the Shaykhs telling the story of Pharaoh and he said that Allah said to Moosa: “By My Might and Majesty, if he had asked Me to save him I would have saved him.” Some questions began to form in my mind: Am I more insignificant before Allah that Pharaoh, even though I have not committed the sins that he did? If that is not the case, then why is Allah testing me with these trials even though I do not have a lot of faith? If the reason is my sins, then I have repented from all sins, and I have said a lot of Du’a’. If Allah wants to raise me in status in Paradise thereby, how can that be when Allah knows that I am not able to bear this trial?

Many questions are going around in my mind, they are haunting me and I cannot find any answer.

In fact my resolve has started to fail and my faith is beginning to weaken, and I feel very distressed about everything in this world. I can no longer bear this burden. It has gone on too long and I am filled with deep despair and doubt is entering my heart. Were it not that Allah has forbidden suicide, I would have done it and given myself a break. I apologize for going on at such length.

Summary of answer

5 Reasons Why Du`as May Be Delayed

A test of sincerity and patience
Protection from potential harm
A greater reward in the Hereafter
Timing isn’t right – Allah’s wisdom prevails
The Du`a itself may not be best for you

Detailed answer

Praise be to Allah.

Understanding the Purpose of Du`a

We ask Allah to accept your repentance and forgive your sin, and to help you to do that which He loves and which pleases Him.

Undoubtedly there is some error in your understanding of the issue of Du`a and response and calamity. What you are suffering from is something natural, if you do not have a proper understanding of these and similar matters.

We empathize with you and feel your pain, and we hope that you will pay attention to what we are going to explain to you, and follow it. We see from your letter that you are prepared to accept what we want to tell you, and this has encouraged us to write back to you and tell you what will be good for you in this world and in the Hereafter.

The Test of True Repentance

Many people think that all they have to do is to declare their repentance to their Lord, then they will immediately have it easy and be relieved of trouble, and wealth will come to them, and they will live a life of luxury! But none of that is necessarily the case. Rather there is a test and trial of this person’s repentance: is it sincere or not? Is it for the sake of Allah or not?

All of that means he will face a new test. Indeed the purpose and wisdom behind this life is that it is a test and trial. Allah says (interpretation of the meaning):

{Verily, We have created man from Nutfah (drops) of mixed semen (sexual discharge of man and woman), in order to try him, so We made him hearer and seer.} [Al-Insan 76:2]

How Allah Rewards the Believers

If he understands this fact, then he should surrender in his heart to his Lord and accept it, but if he does not understand that, then he will not be able to surrender in his heart to his Lord, even if he seems to have surrendered outwardly. Hence it was narrated that some of the Salaf said: “If the

kings and sons of kings knew what joy we experience, they would fight us for it with their swords." What joy could be referred to here? It is the joy of the heart that has certain faith in its Lord, may He be Exalted, and the joy of obeying Him and the happiness of drawing closer to Him, even if they were going through hardships. This is the measure of a good life, as Allah says in His Holy Book, where He says (interpretation of the meaning):

{Whoever works righteousness — whether male or female — while he (or she) is a true believer (of Islamic Monotheism) verily, to him We will give a good life (in this world with respect, contentment and lawful provision), and We shall pay them certainly a reward in proportion to the best of what they used to do (i.e. Paradise in the Hereafter).} [An-Nahl 16:97]

Shaykh `Abdu Ar-Rahman As-Sa`di (may Allah have mercy on him) said:

The one who combines faith and good deeds, "to him We will give a good life" by giving him tranquillity in his heart and peace of mind, and by causing him not to pay any attention to that which could disturb his heart. Allah will grant him a goodly provision from sources he could not imagine, and "We shall pay them certainly" in the Hereafter "a reward in proportion to the best of what they used to do", all kinds of delight such as no eye has seen, no ear has heard and it has not crossed the mind of any man. So Allah will give him good in this world and good in the Hereafter. (End quote from Tafsir As-Sa`di, p. 448)

The Deception of Worldly Prosperity

With regard to others, such as the disbelievers and sinners, listen to what Allah says about them (interpretation of the meaning):

{But whosoever turns away from My Reminder (i.e. neither believes in this Quran nor acts on its teachings) verily, for him is a life of hardship, and We shall raise him up blind on the Day of Resurrection.} [Ta-Ha 20:124]

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

“But whosoever turns away from My Reminder” means: goes against My command and that which I have revealed to My Messenger, and turns away from it and ignores it, and follows something other than its guidance, “verily, for him is a life of hardship” i.e., in this world, so he will have no tranquillity or peace of mind, rather he will be in a state of anxiety because of his misguidance, even if he appears outwardly to be living a life of luxury, wearing what he wants, eating what he wants, living where he wants, but so long as his heart has no certain faith and is not guided, then he will be in a state of anxiety and confusion and doubt, and he will remain doubtful and hesitant. This is part of the life of hardship. (End quote from Tafsir Ibn Kathir, 5/322, 323)

Is it in any way wise or reasonable to give up that which Allah has given you of different kinds of worship, and has honoured you with belief in it, because you are deceived by the ease and ample provision enjoyed by the disbelievers in this world?

{Do they think that in wealth and children with which We enlarge them

We hasten unto them with good things. Nay, [it is a Fitnah (trial) in this worldly life so that they will have no share of good things in the Hereafter] but they perceive not.} [Al-Mu’minun 23:55 - interpretation of the meaning]

Moreover you are ignoring the clear evidence in the Book of Allah and the Sunnah of His Messenger about Du`a and its great importance, and the causes of it being answered , and you are focussing on things such as the phrase “By My Might and Majesty, if he had asked Me to save him I would have saved him” which is more akin to the words of story tellers and reports from the Children of Israel.

Even if we assume it is sound, is simply getting what one wants in this world of good living and ample provision a sign that he is accepted by his Lord?

Allah says (interpretation of the meaning):

{As for man, when his Lord tries him by giving him honour and bounties, then he says (in exultation): “My Lord has honoured me.” But when He tries him by straitening his means of life, he

says: “My Lord has humiliated me!” Nay! But you treat not the orphans with kindness and generosity (i.e. you neither treat them well, nor give them their exact right of inheritance)! And urge not one another on the feeding of Al-Miskeen (the poor)! And you devour the inheritance — all with greed. And you love wealth with much love. Nay! When the earth is ground to powder. And your Lord comes with the angels in rows.And Hell will be brought near that Day. On that Day will man remember, but how will that remembrance (then) avail him? He will say: “Alas! Would that I had sent forth (good deeds) for (this) my life!” So on that Day none will punish as He will punish. And none will bind (the wicked, disbelievers and polytheists) as He will bind.} [Al-Fajr 89:15-26]

Even if we assume that this provision came to him after a great deal of Du`a , does this indicate that this person is acceptable and pleasing to his Lord?

{He it is Who enables you to travel through land and sea, till when you are in the ships, and they sail with them with a favourable wind, and they are glad therein, then comes a stormy wind and the waves come to them from all sides, and they think that they are encircled therein. Then they invoke Allah, making their Faith pure for Him Alone, (saying): “If You (Allah) deliver us from this, we shall truly, be of the grateful.” But when He delivers them, behold! They rebel (disobey Allah) in the earth wrongfully. O mankind! Your rebellion (disobedience to Allah) is only against your ownselves, — a brief enjoyment of this worldly life, then (in the end) unto Us is your return, and We shall inform you of that which you used to do/} [Yunus 10:22-23 - interpretation of the meaning]

Shaykh Ibn As-Sa`di (may Allah have mercy on him) said:

They understood that they were doomed, so they ended their dependence on created beings and they realized that no one could save them from this hardship except Allah alone, so they called upon Him, making their Faith pure for Him Alone and promising that they would adhere to that, and they said: “If You (Allah) deliver us from this, we shall truly, be of the grateful” but “when He delivers them, behold! They rebel (disobey Allah) in the earth wrongfully” i.e., they forget that hardship and that Du`a’, and what they committed themselves to, and they associate others with Allah whom they acknowledge cannot save them from hardships or protect them from difficulty.

Why are they not sincere towards Allah in worship in times of ease as they are at times of hardship?

But they will face the consequences of their rebellion, hence Allah says: “Your rebellion (disobedience to Allah) is only against your ownselves, — a brief enjoyment of this worldly life” i.e., everything that you hope when you rebel and turn away from Allah, is to make some worldly gains, which will soon come to an end, then you will leave them behind: “then (in the end) unto Us is your return” on the Day of Resurrection, “and We shall inform you of that which you used to do”. This is the ultimate warning to them against persisting in what they are doing. (End quote from Tafsir As-Sa`di, 361)

Think about the meaning of the words of Allah (interpretation of the meaning):

{Whoever desires the quick-passing (transitory enjoyment of this world), We readily grant him what We will for whom We like. Then, afterwards, We have appointed for him Hell; he will burn therein disgraced and rejected __ far away from Allah’s Mercy). And whoever desires the Hereafter and strives for it, with the necessary effort due for it (i.e. does righteous deeds of Allah’s obedience) while he is a believer (in the Oneness of Allah __ Islâmic Monotheism) — then such are the ones whose striving shall be appreciated, (thanked and rewarded by Allah). On each __ these as well as those __We bestow from the Bounties of your Lord. And the Bounties of your Lord can never be forbidden. See how We prefer one above another (in this world), and verily, the Hereafter will be greater in degrees and greater in preferment.} [Al-Isra’ 17:18-21]

You should understand that the matter is not as you think, that the one who gets his share or has his Du`a answered is better, and that the one who does not get anything is of lesser status. No, it is not like that.

Common Misconceptions about Du`a

Many people are mistaken about the issue of Du`a in many ways. With regard to your question we want to point out two mistakes:

- You think that Du`a is answered just because you say Du`a. This is wrong, because there are conditions for Du`as to be answered and there are impediments which prevent it from being answered.

For a detailed discussion concerning this matter, please see the answer to question no. 5113.

In that discussion you will see that one of the impediments to Du`a being answered in your case is your being impatient and getting frustrated.

It was narrated from Abu Hurayrah that the Messenger of Allah (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) said: “A person will still be answered so long as his Du`a does not involve sin or severing ties of kinship, and so long as he does not become impatient.” It was said: O Messenger of Allah, what does being impatient mean? He said: “Saying, I said Du`a, and I said Du`a, and I did not receive any response, then he becomes frustrated and stops saying Du`a’.” (Narrated by Muslim, 2735)

- You think that the response can only be of one kind, which is getting what you asked for in Du`a such as wealth, children, a job and so on. This is wrong, because the response may be of three types: it may be by getting what one asked for in Du`a , or it may be that evil commensurate with one’s Du`a is warded off, or that may be stored up for one as reward for the Day of Resurrection.

It was narrated from Abu Sa`id (may Allah be pleased with him) that the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) said: “There is no Muslim who does not offer any Du`a in which there is no sin or severing of family ties but Allah will give him one of three things in return: either He will answer his Du`a sooner, or he will store it up for him in the Hereafter, or He will divert an equivalent evil away from him because of it.” They said: “We will say a lot of Du`a.” He said: “Allah is more generous.” (Narrated by Ahmad (10749); classed as authentic by Al-Albani in Sahih At-Targhib wat-Tarhib, 1633)

Wisdom Behind Delayed or Unanswered Du`a’

If a Muslim is falling short in his worship and obedience, that should make him feel that he is not worthy of having his Du`a answered, and perhaps that will motivate him to do more acts of worship and obedience that will bring him closer to Allah. If the caller believes that he has done that which Allah loves and is pleased with, and that he deserves an answer, that will make him think badly of his Lord, may He be Exalted, and will make him feel let down and begin to despair, until he wishes that he could escape from life by committing suicide. All of that, unfortunately, we can see in your words.

This is unlike the one who is aware of his shortcomings before his Lord. This will make him think badly of himself, not of his Lord, may He be Glorified and Exalted, and that will motivate him to keep away from forbidden things and do obligatory things, and to follow the path of piety, and to avoid overindulging in permissible things which may distract him from obeying his Lord.

Ibn Rajab Al-Hanbali (may Allah have mercy on him) said:

It was narrated that `Umar Ibn Al-Khattab (may Allah be pleased with him) said: By avoiding that which Allah has forbidden, Allah will accept Du`a and Tasbih. And it was narrated that Abu Dharr (may Allah be pleased with him) said: “The amount of Du`a with righteousness that is sufficient is like the amount of salt that is sufficient with food.” And Muhammad ibn Wasi` said: A little Du`a is sufficient with piety.

One of the Salaf said: Do not expect a response when you have blocked the way with sins . One of the poets also commented on this by saying:

We call upon Allah for every hardship, then we forget Him when the hardship is relieved.

How can we hope for an answer to our du`as, when we have blocked its way with sins? (End quote from Jami` Al-`Ulum wal-Hukam, 1/107, 108)

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

It was said to Ibrahim ibn Adham: Why is it that we supplicate and receive no response?

He said because you know Allah but you do not obey Him, and you know the Messenger but you do not follow his Sunnah, and you know the Quran but you do not act in accordance with it, and you eat from the blessings of Allah but you do not give thanks for them, and you know Paradise but you do not seek it, and you know Hell but you do not flee from it, and you know the devils but you do not fight him rather you agree with him, and you know death but you do not prepare for it, and you have buried the dead but you do not learn a lesson from that, and you ignore your own faults and are preoccupied with other people's faults. (End quote from Tafsir Al-Qurtubi, 2/312)

Study this brilliant passage from the writings of Ibn Al-Jawzi concerning this matter. He (may Allah have mercy on him) said:

I think part of the test is when a believer supplicates and receives no response, and he repeats the Du`a for a long time and sees no sign of a response. He should realize that this is a test and needs patience.

What a person experiences of Waswas when the response is delayed is a sickness which needs medicine, I have experienced this myself. A calamity befell me and I supplicated and did not see any response, and Iblis started to lay his traps. Sometimes he said: The generosity (of Allah) is abundant and He is not miserly, so why is there a delay?

I said to him: Be gone, O cursed one, for I have no need of anyone to argue my case and I do not want you as a supporter!

Then I told myself: Beware of going along with his whispers, for if there was no other reason for the delay except that Allah is testing you to see whether you will fight the enemy, that is sufficient wisdom.

My soul (Nafs) said: How could you explain the delay in the response of Allah to your prayers for relief from this calamity?

I said: It is proven with evidence that Allah, may He be Glorified and Exalted, is the Sovereign, and

the Sovereign may withhold or give, so there is no point in objecting to Him.

- The wisdom behind that is proven in definitive evidence. I may think that something is good, but wisdom does not dictate it, but the reason for that may be hidden, just as a doctor may do things that appear outwardly to be harmful, intending some good purpose thereby. Perhaps this is something of that nature.
- There may be an interest to be served by delay, and haste may be harmful. The Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) said: “A person will be fine so long as he does not become impatient and says, ‘I prayed but I did not receive any answer.’”
- The response may be withheld because of some fault in you. Perhaps there was something dubious in what you ate or your heart was heedless at the time when you said the Du`a , or your punishment is being increased by means of your need being withheld, because of some sin from which you have not repented sincerely.

So look for some of these reasons, so that you might achieve your aim.

- You should examine the intention behind this request, because attaining it may lead to more sin, or prevent you from doing some good, so withholding it is better.

It was narrated that one of the Salaf used to ask Allah to help him to go out on campaign, but a voice called out to him: If you go out on campaign you will be taken prisoner, and if you are taken prisoner you will become a Christian!

- Perhaps losing what you have missed out on will cause you to turn to Allah and getting it will distract you from Him. This is obvious, based on the fact that were it not for this calamity you would not have turned to Him, because the real calamity is what distracts you from Him, but what makes you stand before Him is good for you and is in your best interests.

If you ponder these things you will focus on what is more beneficial for you, such as correcting a mistake or seeking forgiveness or standing before Allah and beseeching Him, and forget about what you have missed out on. (End quote from Sayd Al-Khatir, 59-60)

And Allah is the Source of strength.