

Dua (Supplication)

(part 1 of 4): What is Dua?



Dua – an Arabic word written here in English letters. Three small letters that make up a word and a subject that is large and breathtaking. This word ‘dua’ could be roughly translated to mean supplication or invocation. Although neither word adequately define dua. Supplication, which means communicating with a deity, comes closer than invocation which is known to sometimes imply summoning spirits or devils.

In Islamic terminology dua is the act of supplication. It is calling out to God; it is a conversation with God, our Creator, our Lord, the All Knowing, and the All Powerful. In fact the word is derived from the Arabic root meaning to call out or to summon. Dua is uplifting, empowering, liberating and transforming and it is one of the most powerful and effective act of worship a human being can engage in. Dua has been called the weapon of the believer. It affirms a person’s belief in One God and it shuns all forms of idolatry or polytheism. Dua is essentially submission to God and a manifestation of a person’s need for God.

Prophet Muhammad, may the mercy and blessings of God be upon him, said, “A slave becomes nearest to his Lord when he is in prostration. So increase supplications in prostrations.”^[1] *“The supplication of every one of you will be granted if he does not get impatient and say, ‘I supplicated my Lord but my prayer has not been granted’.”*^[2]

At this point in understanding exactly what dua is, it would be easy for someone from a Christian background to think that dua is prayer. Dua certainly holds certain similarities to the prayer of Christians, however it should not be confused with what Muslims call prayer. Prayer or in Arabic-Salat, is one of the pillars of Islam, and in performing the five daily prayers a Muslim actually

engages in a physical form of Dua asking God to grant them Heaven through their actions. Throughout the prayer one also supplicates to God directly.

For Muslims prayer is a set of ritual movements and words performed at fixed times, five times per day. God says in Quran, **“Verily, the prayer is enjoined on the believers at fixed hours”**. (Quran 4:103) Muslims pray in the early morning before sunrise, in the middle of the day, in the afternoon, at sunset and at night. Prayer is an act of worship, in which a Muslim reaffirms his belief in One God and demonstrates his gratefulness. It is a direct connection between God and the believer and it is an obligation.

Dua on the other hand is a Muslims way of feeling that connection to God at anytime, in any place. Muslims call on God frequently throughout the day and night. They raise their hands in supplication and ask for His help, mercy, and forgiveness. Dua incorporates praise, thanksgiving, hope, and calling on God to assist the one in need and grant his or her requests.

Dua can be made for the individual, their family, friends, strangers, those in dire circumstances, for the believers, and even for the whole of humanity. When making the dua it is acceptable to ask for good in this worldly life and in the hereafter. A person making dua should not hold back, but ask God to grant both the largest and smallest requests.

Prophet Muhammad, may the mercy and blessings of God be upon him, encouraged the believers to make dua. He said, **“The dua of a Muslim for his brother in his absence is readily accepted. An angel is appointed to his side. Whenever he makes a beneficial dua for his brother the appointed angel says, Ameen. And may you also be blessed with the same”**.^[3]

Although making dua is not an obligation, there are many benefits to making dua to God frequently and with full submission. Feeling the closeness to God that comes with sincere dua, it increases faith, gives hope and relief to the distressed and saves the supplicant from the despair and isolation. Throughout the Quran, God encourages the believer to call on Him, He asks us to lay our dreams, hopes, fears and uncertainties before Him and to be sure that He hears every word.

**You Alone do we worship and You Alone do we ask for help.
(Quran 1:5)**

**And your Lord says, Call on Me; I will answer your (prayer).
But those who are too arrogant to worship Me will surely find
themselves in Hell, in humiliation. (Quran 40:60)**

**Say, O My slaves who have transgressed against their souls;
despair not of the Mercy of Allah: For Allah forgives all sins;
for He is oft Forgiving, most Merciful. (Quran 39:53)**

Say, Call upon Allah, or call upon ArRahman (The Most Beneficent): By whatever name you call upon Him, (it is well): For to Him belong the Most Beautiful Names. (Quran 17:110)

And when My slaves ask you (O Muhammad) concerning Me, then (answer them), I am indeed near (to them by My Knowledge). I respond to the supplications of the supplicant when he calls on Me (without any mediator or intercessor). So let them obey Me and believe in Me, so that they may be led aright. (Quran 2:186)

Prophet Muhammad, may the mercy and blessings of God be upon him, called dua the essence of worship.^[4] He also suggested that the believer be humble, yet firm when making dua and said, **“When one of you supplicates, he should not say, ‘O God, forgive me if You will,’ but be firm in asking and make the desire great, for what God gives is nothing great for Him.”**^[5]

When we make dua, when we call upon God in our hour of need, or express our gratefulness, or for any other reason including simply to feel the comfort of being close to God, we must remember to examine our sincerity and to check our intention. Dua must be addressed to God Alone, who has no partners, sons, daughters or intermediaries. Our intention when making the dua must be to please God, obey Him and trust Him completely.

When a person makes dua God may give him what he asked for or He may divert a harm that is greater than the thing he asked for, or He may store up what he has asked for, for the Hereafter. God has commanded us to call upon Him and He has promised to respond to our call. In the next article we will examine the etiquette of making dua and discuss why some duas seemingly go unanswered.

Footnotes:

^[1] *Saheeh Muslim*

^[2] *Saheeh Al-Bukhari, Saheeh Muslim*

^[3] *Saheeh Muslim*

^[4] *At Tirmidhi*

^[5] *Saheeh Muslim*

(part 2 of 4): Praise God in the way He deserves to be praised

Dua is essentially submission to God and a sign of our need for God. Dua has been called the weapon of the believer because it increases faith, gives hope and relief to the distressed and saves the supplicant from the despair and isolation. And perhaps most importantly God loves to be asked and He encourages us to call on Him for all our needs, wants, and desires.

The renowned Islamic scholar Imam Ibn al-Qayyim described dua in the following way. He said, “The Dua and prayers for seeking refuge with God are like a weapon, and a weapon is only as good as the person who is using it; it is not merely the matter of how sharp it is. If the weapon is perfect and free of faults, and the arm of the person using it is strong, and there is nothing stopping him, then he can lay waste to the enemy. But if any of these three features is lacking, then the effect will be lacking accordingly”.

It is incumbent upon us then, when we make our dua that we do so in the best possible way. As a way of metaphorically sharpening our sword we should endeavour to call on God in the best way and with the best manners. There is etiquette to making dua. Following that etiquette is an indication that a person is sincere and is endeavouring to maximise his or her chances of having the dua accepted by God, who says that He will **“I answer the prayer (dua) of the supplicant when he beseeches unto Me”**. (Quran 2:186)

A firm and unwavering belief in the Oneness of God is an essential ingredient for dua. True sincerity and a willingness to accept that God Alone is able to change the course of events or grant requests is also necessary. The supplicant should eagerly and urgently call on God, however he should remain humble and quiet without getting either exasperated or bored. Prophet Muhammad, may the mercy and blessings of God be upon him, liked to say his dua three times and he also asked for forgiveness three times.^[1]

Praising God in the way He deserves to be praised is the starting point for a person making dua. Whilst Prophet Muhammad was sitting, a man came in and prayed and said, “O God, forgive me and have mercy on me.” Prophet Muhammad heard him and said, “You have been too hasty, O worshipper. When you have prayed and are sitting, praise God as He deserves to be praised, and send blessings upon me, then call upon Him.”^[2] Prophet Muhammad also recommended raising one’s hands when making dua. He said, “Your Lord, may He be blessed and exalted, is Kind and Most Generous, and He is too kind to let His slave, if he raises his hands to Him, to send them back empty”.^[3]

Praising God the way he deserves to be praised essentially means recognising His Oneness. He is the First, the Last, the Beginning and the End. He Alone has the Power and the Strength. Recognise this and send blessings on the Prophet Muhammad, before beseeching God

When the supplicant reaches out to God he should do so with humility. God tells us in Quran that humility is a desirable quality and that a believer should call on his Lord with a mixture of hope and fear. Hope that God will hear his dua and keep him safe from life's trials and tribulations, and fear that his actions will displease his Lord.

“Invoke your Lord with humility and in secret. (Quran 7:55)

Verily, they used to hasten on to do good deeds, and they used to call on Us with hope and fear, and used to humble themselves before Us. (Quran 21:60)

And remember your Lord within yourself, humbly and with fear and without loudness in words in the mornings and in the afternoons.” (Quran 7:20)

The best times for making dua include just before Fajr (dawn prayer), in the last third of the night, during the last hour of Friday (i.e. the last hour before Maghreb prayer), when rain is falling, and between the call to prayer and iqamah (the call raised immediately before prayer begins). Other excellent times to make dua are when the believer is in prostration.

The believer should endeavour to use the clearest and most concise words when offering his supplications. The best duas are those used by the Prophets; however it is permissible to say other words according to the specific needs of the supplicant. There are many wonderful collections of authentic duas and believers should take extra care to authenticate the duas they use to supplicate to God.

When making dua it is important to either say authentic duas found in the Quran or traditions of Prophet Muhammad, or the words that spontaneously come to mind when one is seeking the protection or forgiveness of God. It is not permissible to set your own specific time, place or number of repetitions. To do so would be an act of innovation in the religion of Islam and that is a very serious matter.

For instance when one turns to God in his darkest hour or in a moment of joy, he or she speaks from his heart with sincerity and love. A person must never be afraid to converse with God, to pour out his heart, his longing, his love, fears and desires. However, if one begins to make strange rituals, such as making a dua 30 times on Wednesday after Asr prayer, this is how trouble begins. As a general rule dua must either be spontaneous or from the authentically narrated. This is not complicated, Islam without manmade rituals and superstitions is pure devotion to God, and it is easy and comforting.

To close this week's article let us mention situations in which dua is more likely to be accepted. These situations include, when one is mistreated or

oppressed, when one is travelling, when one is fasting, when one is in desperate need, and when a Muslim makes dua for his absent brother.

Footnotes:

[1] *Abu Dawood, An-Nasai*

[2] *At-Tirmidhi*

[3] *Abu Dawood*

(part 3 of 4): Why dua remains unanswered

As believers we know that God is above the heavens, above His creation yet He is unrestrained by any of physical dimensions. God is close, very close, to those who believe in Him and He answers their every call. God knows all of our secrets, dreams, and wishes, nothing is hidden from Him. God is with His creation by His knowledge and power. Why then do some dua's (supplications) remain unanswered?

A mighty question indeed and even the first Muslims were concerned with the answer. Abu Hurairah, one of the Prophets closest companions said that he heard the Prophet, may the mercy and blessings of God be upon him, say "A person's duas will be answered so long as he does not pray for something sinful or for the breaking of family ties." [1] From this we learn that if the dua is inappropriate or one is asking for something sinful God will not respond.

If the person making dua communicates with God in an arrogant manner, perhaps complaining or raising his voice in anger or petulance God may not respond. Another reason for God not responding to dua is when the supplicant begs God for help or comfort yet he has surrounded himself with unlawful wealth, food, or clothing. One cannot continuously engage in sinful behaviour and activities without even a second of remorse yet at the same time expect God to answer his duas and requests.

Prophet Muhammad told his companions that "God is far removed from every imperfection and only accepts that which is lawful. God commanded the pious to follow the same commandments as He gave to the Messengers.

"O (you) Messengers! Eat of the *Tayyibaat* [all kinds (lawful foods which God has made lawful (meat of slaughtered eatable animals, milk products, fats, vegetables, fruits)] and do righteous deeds. Verily, I am Well-Acquainted with what you do." (Quran 23:51)

“O you who believe! Eat of the lawful things that We have provided you with.” (Quran 2:172)

Thereafter Prophet Muhammad mentioned a man who had travelled on a long journey, he was dishevelled and covered in dust and stretched his hands towards heaven “O Lord, O Lord”, but his food was unlawful and his drink was unlawful so how was his dua to be accepted?”^[2]

The man described here had some of the characteristics that make dua more likely to be accepted. These were mentioned at the end of the second article addressing this topic. It can be deduced that on account of this man not living his life within the lawful limits his dua was not accepted.

Another important point to remember is not to be hasty. A supplicant must never give up, he must never say, “I pray and pray, I make dua after dua but God does not hear me, He does not respond!” Just when a person feels like giving up he must make more dua, ask God again, and again for more and more. There is no power or strength except with God alone. There is no solution or outcome except from God. When supplicating to God a person must be both resolute and sincere.

The dua of any one of you will be answered so long as he is not impatient and says, ‘I made dua but it was not answered.’^[3]

Let not any one of you say, ‘O God, forgive me if You will, O God have mercy on me if You will. Let him be resolute in the matter, whilst knowing that no one can compel God to do anything.’^[4]

It is also important to understand that a response to a dua may not be exactly what you expect. God may respond and fulfill the desire of a person immediately. Sometimes duas are answered very quickly. However sometimes God responds in a different way, He might keep some evil away from the supplicant, or He will reward him with something good but not exactly what the supplicant asked for. It is important to remember that God knows what the future holds and we do not.

“... it may be that you dislike a thing which is good for you and that you like a thing which is bad for you. God knows but you do not know.” (Quran 2:216)

Sometimes God will save his response to a dua until the Day of Resurrection when a person will be most in need of it.

Dua has unlimited power, it can change many things and it is an important act of worship that we must never lose faith in. Making dua demonstrates our great need for God and it recognises that He is able to do all things. He gives and He withholds but when we trust God completely we know that His decree is just and wise.

Make dua and be patient, for God will answer, in the best possible way, at the best possible time. Never give up hope, never stop asking, and ask for more and more and more. Ask for good in this world and in the hereafter. Dua is the weapon of the believer.

“So We answered his call, and delivered him from the distress. And thus We do deliver the believers (who believe in the Oneness of Allah, abstain from evil and work righteousness).” (Quran 21:88)

“And He answers (the supplication of) those who believe (in the Oneness of Allah - Islamic Monotheism) and do righteous good deeds, and gives them increase of His Bounty. And as for the disbelievers, theirs will be a severe torment.” (Quran 42:26)

(part 4 of 4): Even Prophets feel distress and turn to God

In the past three articles about dua (i.e. supplication) we have learned many righteous and inspiring things. We know that dua is the weapon of the believer, therefore, there is no need to resort to despair, or anger, because sharing our grief with God is a way of relieving and overcoming burdens. We have learned that dua is the essence of worship and that there is an etiquette when supplicating God for anything, both in times of need and when we praise and thank Him. We have discussed the way some dua seemingly go unanswered, and finally today, in our fourth and final part, we will look at the way the Prophets made dua.

As we know the Prophets throughout time always had special and close relationships with God. They turned to Him in times of distress and need, and they never forgot to praise and thank Him for the countless blessings in their lives. The Prophets were aware of the importance of patience and gratitude and above all their relationships with God were bonds formed due to their complete and utter submission to His will. However, even with such trust and love they still at times became scared or distressed, and felt alone and overwhelmed.

Consequently, the Prophets turned to God and called on Him to make them patient and steadfast, they asked for help in this life and bliss in the next. They called on God to make their families and companions righteous and patient, and to make themselves and all around them, grateful and serene. Although God loves us to turn to Him and speak the words that flow from our hearts, the words of the Prophets are more complete and submissive to God's will, then we could hope to be. Supplicating God with the duas found in the Quran and the authentic traditions of Prophet Muhammad, may the mercy and blessings of God be upon him, is a righteous and comforting practice.

When Adam and Eve were expelled from heaven Adam turned to God in repentance.

"Our Lord! We have wronged ourselves. If You forgive us not, and bestow not upon us Your Mercy, we shall certainly be of the losers."(Quran 7:23)

Humankind continues to make mistakes and commit sins but we only harm ourselves. Our sins and mistakes do not harm God. However if God does not forgive us and have mercy on us, we will surely be among the losers.

When Prophet Jonah awoke in the belly of the whale he thought he was dead and was lying in the darkness of his grave. He felt around him and realised that this was not a grave but the belly of the giant whale. He was afraid and raised his voice calling out to God.

"None has the right to be worshipped but you oh God, far removed are you from every imperfection and truly I have been one of the wrongdoers!" (Quran 21:87)

Throughout his life Prophet Job was put through many trials and tests by God but he remained steadfast, patient and was constantly turning to God for forgiveness. Even when he felt at his most helpless he did not complain but turned to God and begged for forgiveness. He said:

"Verily distress has seized me and You are the Most Merciful of all those who show mercy." (Quran 21:83)

The Quran relates to us the stories of the prophets in order that we might learn from them. They are worthy role models and their lives are not so different from our own. How many times has each one of us sunk to the ground or into a chair in despair? How many times have we felt so physically or mentally exhausted that it seems we will be unable to go on for even one more second?

Prophet Moses was forced to flee Egypt and walk out into the desert to face an unknown future. After walking for more than a week across the burning sands, he came to an oasis. It was there that this man of honour helped the women at the well before flinging himself under a tree and calling out to God for help.

Moses knew that God was the only One who could deliver him from his predicament, so he turned to God and before his supplication was finished help was on its way. Moses was probably hoping for a slice of bread or a handful of dates but instead God gave him safety, provisions and a family.

"My Lord! Truly, I am in need of whatever good that You bestow on me!" (Quran 28: 24)

There are lessons for humankind throughout the story of Prophet Moses. When Moses was sent by God to confront Pharaoh, he was afraid that he would not be able to live up to God's demands, but instead of complaining or despairing Moses turned to God and made dua.

“O my Lord! Open for me my chest (grant me self-confidence, contentment, and boldness). And ease my task for me; and make loose the knot (the defect) from my tongue, (remove the incorrectness of my speech) that they understand my speech.” (Quran 20:25-28)

After Moses learned of the great evil his people had committed by building the golden calf, he was angry. However, even amidst such wrongdoing he called upon God to have mercy upon them all.

“You are our Protector, so forgive us and have Mercy on us, for You are the best of those who forgive. And ordain for us good in this world, and in the Hereafter.” (Quran 7:155-156)

King (and Prophet) Solomon was acutely aware of the power of God. He always praised God for any condition that he was put in. He said, **“All praise and thanks is due to God” (Quran 27: 15)**. Solomon also understood that no power or strength would be his, unless he requested it from God. He made dua and asked for a kingdom that would never be surpassed. God granted his request and Prophet Solomon reigned over an empire the like of which we cannot imagine.

“He said, “My Lord! Forgive me, and bestow upon me a kingdom such as shall not belong to any other after me. Verily, You are the Bestower.”(Quran 38:35)

These duas are a small example of how the Prophets made dua. Their stories and their duas are found throughout the Quran. When we read the stories of Prophets Solomon, Joseph, Jacob or Abraham we find that they, and all of the Prophets completely submitted to God. They raised their hands in supplication and requested help from God Alone.

As believers we must never forget that God hears our duas and supplications, and answers. Sometimes the wisdom behind the answers is beyond our comprehension but God desires only good for us. Putting our trust in God and submitting to His will allows the believer to weather any storm, and to stand tall in the face of adversity. We are never alone.