

WITH THE SHAYKH



Why Is My Prayer Unanswered?

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From a young age, Shaykh Ibn 'Uthaymin began studying and learning the Islamic sciences, reaching a great proficiency in them - particularly in jurisprudence (*fiqh*) and Islamic legal theory (*usul al-fiqh*). His mastery in the Hanbali school of Islamic law is amply demonstrated in his magisterial commentary to al-Hajjawi's *Zad al-Mustaqni'*, entitled *Sbarb al-Mumti'*. Known for his simplicity in living as well as his fine mannerisms with one and all, the Shaykh passed away on 10th January, 2001 at the age of seventy-six: may Allah have mercy upon him. The question here is about why a person's supplication may not be responded to by Allah.

The Response

All praise be to Allah, Lord of the worlds. I send benedictions and peace upon our Prophet Muhammad, and upon his Family and Companions. I beseech Allah, Exalted is He, for both myself and my fellow Muslims, to grace us with guidance in belief, words and deeds. Allah, Mighty and Majestic is He, said: Your Lord has said: "*Call on Me, and I will answer you. Those who are too arrogant to worship Me shall enter Hell, disgraced.*"²

The questioner states that he made a supplication (*du'a*) to Allah, but it was not responded to. So he is having difficulty squaring it up with the noble verse in which Allah promises to answer the one who supplicates to Him: and Allah, Transcendent is He, never breaks His promise. The reply to this is that, for a supplication to be responded to, it must fulfill certain condition. They are:

Firstly: Sincerity (*ikhlas*) to Allah, Mighty and Majestic is He. That is to say, one must be sincere in one's *du'a*, in the sense of turning to Allah with presence of heart; being truthful in it; believing that Allah is fully able to answer the *du'a*; and hoping for a response from Him.

Secondly: The supplicant, while making *du'a*, should feel himself in need of Allah, Transcendent is He; in fact, in dire need of Him. He should also feel that Allah alone answers those who call on Him in distress and Who removes all harm. As for making *du'a* to Allah while feeling independent of Allah, or not feeling in dire need of him - but out of mere habit - then such a supplication is not worthy of being responded to.

Thirdly: The one making *du'a* must refrain from consuming whatever is unlawful (*haram*), as this acts as a barrier between the individual and his *du'a* being responded to. This has been established in the *Sabih* collection, from the Prophet, peace be upon him, who said: "Allah, Exalted is He, is good and accepts only that which is good. Allah ordered the Faithful to do that which He ordered the Messengers. Allah, Exalted is He, said: *O Messengers! Eat of the good things, and be righteousness.*"³

And Allah, Exalted is He, also instructed: *O you who believe! Eat of the good things that We have provided for you.*⁴ Then he mentioned [the case of] a man who, having journeyed far, is disheveled and dusty and who spreads out his hands to the sky [saying]: O Lord! O Lord! - while his food is unlawful, his drink unlawful, his clothes unlawful, and he is nourished unlawfully. So how can he be answered!"⁵

Thus the Prophet, peace be upon him, considered it unlikely that this person's *du'a* would be responded to: even after fulfilling the apparent factors which aid the *du'a* being answered. These factors include:

(i) Raising ones' hands towards the heavens, meaning towards Allah; for Allah is above the heavens, above His Throne (*arsh*). Extending the hands towards Allah, Mighty and Majestic is He, is among the causes of *du'a* being responded to - as in the hadith recorded by Imam Ahmad in his *Musnad*: "Your Lord is Most Shy, Most Generous. He is shy, when His servant calls on Him with palms raised, to return them empty."⁶

(ii) This man called on Allah, Exalted is He, by the name Rabb - "Lord". Seeking the means of nearness (*tawassul*) to Allah, Exalted is He, with this name is also one of the causes for *du'a* to be responded to. For the Lord is the Creator, Sovereign Master, Disposer of affairs, and in His hands are the keys to the heavens and the earth. Due to this, you will find that most of the supplications related in the noble Qur'an are by this name: "*Our Lord! We have heard a caller calling us to faith: 'Believe in your Lord!' So we have believed. Our Lord! Therefore forgive us our sins and remit from us our evil deeds, and take our souls in death in the company of the righteous. Our Lord! And grant us what You have promised us through Your Messengers, and do not humiliate us on the Day of Resurrection. You never break Your promise.*" And their Lord accepted [their prayers]: "*Never will I suffer to be lost the work of any of you, whether male or female.*"⁷ So seeking *tawassul* by this name is one of the causes for *du'a* to be responded to.

(iii) This man was a traveller (*musafir*), and travelling is often a cause for *du'a* to be responded to. For a person, when travelling, feels more in need of Allah than if he were at home with his family. He was dusty and disheveled, as if he cared not for himself; as if the most important thing to him was to implore Allah and to call on Him, whatever his state: be he dusty and disheveled, in ease or in comfort. Being dusty and disheveled has a significance in *du'a* being responded to, as per the hadith related from the Prophet, peace be upon him: "Allah boasts to the Angels about those standing at 'Arafat, saying: Look at My servants! They have come to Me dusty and disheveled from every mountain pass."⁸

Yet these factors did not amount to anything because his food, clothing and sustenance were all unlawful. Therefore, the Prophet, peace be upon him, remarked: "So how can he be answered!" Therefore, if these conditions are not satisfied, then the response will be distant; not forthcoming. If, however, the conditions are satisfied and the supplicant is still not being responded to, then this is due to a wisdom which only Allah, Mighty and Majestic is He, knows: *perhaps you hate a thing though it be good for you, and love a thing though it be bad for you.*⁹ So when these conditions are fulfilled and the supplicant is unanswered, then either he is being protected from an evil which is greater than what he asked for, or Allah has kept it in store for him until the Day of Resurrection, and he then gains a far greater reward. This is so because the supplicant, if he has fulfilled the conditions and is not being responded to, nor saved from a greater evil, is in the position of having carried out the causes yet has been prevented from the response. Therefore he has a two-fold reward: one for making *du'a*, another for bearing the trial of not being answered. Hence that which is greater and more complete is stored-up for him with Allah, Mighty and Majestic is He.

Also of importance is that the supplicant must not express dissatisfaction if his *du'a* is apparently not being answered. For this in itself is a reason for *du'a* to not be responded to. The Prophet, peace be upon him, said: "The *du'a* of any of you will be answered so long as he does not become impatient." They said: How does one become impatient, O Messenger of Allah? He said: "He says: I supplicated and supplicated and supplicated, yet He did not respond to me."¹⁰ It is unbecoming, therefore, that a person become impatient about being responded to and abandon making *du'a*. Rather, one should continue to call upon Allah. For every *du'a* you make to Allah is an act of worship which draws you closer to Allah, Mighty and Majestic is He, and which increases you in reward.

So, O my brother, you should take to making *du'a* in all your affairs: be they general or specific, whether in difficulty or in ease. And if *du'a* bore no fruit save that it is an act of devotion to Allah, it would still be worth the while to be consistent and eager in it. And with Allah lies success.



FOOTNOTES

1. *Fatawa Arkan al-Islam* (Riyadh: Dar al-Thurayyah, 2003), 52-56.
2. Qur'an 40:60.
3. Qur'an 23:51.
4. Qur'an 2:172.
5. Muslim, no.1015.
6. Al-Timidhi, *Sunan*, no.3791, where he said: "This hadith is *basan gharib*."
7. Qur'an 3:193-5.
8. Ibn Hibban, *Sabib*, no.1006, and it is authentic (*sabib*). Cf. al-Albani, *Sabib al-Jami'* (Beirut: al-Maktabah al-Islami, 1986), no.1868.
9. Qur'an 2:216.
10. Al-Bukhari, no.6340; Muslim, no.2735.