

Explanation of Du‘ā 20 from *Sahifa Sajjadiyya*

Summary of the Supplication of Noble Moral Etiquettes¹

The Islamic tradition emphasizes the idea that man has been created for a purpose that goes beyond the boundaries of corporeal existence. He has a unique potential that allows him to reach great spiritual and metaphysical heights. Prophetic teachings allowed for humanity to recognize this potential and see their unique abilities. In this way it brought them out of darkness and into light...out of ignorance and into the depths of knowledge and understanding. The teachings train the human being, allowing him to develop himself and manifest the development in his behavior. Prophet Muhammad (s) thus said: *Surely I was sent to perfect noble etiquette.*

In understanding the reality of human potential we must understand the fact that we cannot reach those levels without Divine support. The Quran states: *O mankind! You are the ones who stand in need of Allah, and Allah—He is the All-sufficient, the All-praised* (35:15). We are in absolute dependence of God in every facet of our lives and cannot fulfill our responsibilities to Him without His Light shining upon us. The means to unlock the divine support of the Creator is to firstly to submit to Him, and secondly supplicate to Him through recitation of Du‘ās.

In supplication 20 of the *Sahifa*, Imam al-Sajjād (a) demonstrates what it means to submit and supplicate to Allah (swt) for the purpose of reaching the best of *akhlāq*. The term *akhlāq* is often translated as “good etiquette” or “good behavior” but the reality is that attaining *Makārim al-akhlāq* is a physical portrayal of etiquette and behavior as much as it is a spiritual state. In other words, *akhlāq* is not a manifestation of *Islam* but rather a manifestation of *īmān*, for the Quran makes reference to those who testify and submit, but belief is not there in their hearts—*When the hypocrites come to you they say, ‘We bear witness that you are indeed the apostle of Allah.’ Allah knows that you are indeed His Apostle, and Allah bears witness that the hypocrites are indeed liars* (63:1). For the individual who wants to attain perfect moral etiquette, the starting point would be the purification of the soul. This then translates to external and visible behavior in society. The opening lines of the Du‘ā demonstrate this notion as we are presented with a general framework in regards to what needs to be sought from God—perfection in faith (*īmān*), certainty (*yaqīn*), and intentions (*niyyat*).

The supplication begins with a common theme within the Du‘ās of the Ahlul Bayt (a), the salutations and blessing upon the Prophet and his family. Interestingly enough, the *salawāt* is repeated 18 times throughout the Du‘ā. This is not necessarily found in other supplications within the *Sahifa* or across other commonly recited Du‘ās. The apparent reason is to use the intercession of the Prophet and his immaculate family in having our Du‘ās answered. But upon deeper reflection it is perhaps a reminder that those who have illuminated *Makārim al-akhlāq* in its absolute meaning are the Prophet and his family.

¹ By Shaykh Faiyaz E. Jaffer, NY, USA. 16th Rajab 1438 | 13th April 2017

In the Du‘ā we supplicate for the qualities embodied by the Ahul Bayt (a). We recite in the earlier part of this Du‘ā: *and make me worship You, and do not corrupt my worship with self-admiration [‘ujb]...give me the highest moral traits and protect me from pride [fakhr]*. What makes the worship of the Prophet (s) or Ali (a) unique is that they would worship God at every phase in their life—with absolute sincerity; perfection of faith, height of certainty and pure intentions—the same requests we have at the beginning of the Du‘ā. These qualities help us feel the presence of the Creator at each step of our life and our relationship with Him is then void of self-admiration (‘ujb) and pride (fakhr). We continue to seek the trait of humbleness with God when we state: *[Oh God] Raise me not a single degree before the people, without lowering me its like within my own self.* Imam Ali (a) in an oft-quoted narration would state: *The one who humbles himself in front of God is raised in front of the people.* A major theme of Du‘ā Makārim al-Akhlāq, and in reality all the supplications of Ahlul Bayt (a) is to ask God for His divine support in allowing us to be the best of His servants.

As the Du‘ā progresses, we continue to invoke Allah’s support for the cultivation of our hearts and souls. We plead to God in the midst of the supplication: *O God, deposit in me no quality for which I will be faulted, unless You set it right, no flaw for which I will be blamed, unless You make it beautiful, no deficient noble trait, unless You perfect it!* The idea behind such a request is to recognize that the purification of our souls cannot be facilitated without the help of God—a key theme of this Du‘ā.

The supplication also offers a roadmap for the negative traits we need to change in ourselves as well as those characteristics that we need to perfect. The human being is overtly interested in their own physical appearance and are quick to find a remedy for any physical deficiencies. We often spend many hours a day seeking to beautify the external without paying heed to the fact that we have a soul that also needs to be beautified. Similarly, if we had any sort of physical disease or pain on our body we would immediately seek out an expert to look for a cure. But we can go for years without acknowledging the diseases of the heart and soul. Du‘ā Makārim al-Akhlāq seeks to provide us with a means to awaken us, to help us reflect upon our spiritual states and find a moral compass towards which we should strive. In a powerful segment, we state: *O God, bless Muhammad and his Household, adorn me with the adornment of the righteous, and clothe me in the ornaments of the God-fearing, through spreading justice, restraining rage, quenching the flame of hate, bringing together the people of separation, correcting discord, spreading about good behavior, covering faults, mildness of temper, lowering the wing (humbleness), beauty of conduct...* To be able to embody these traits we would need to recognize the internal spiritual diseases.

Toward the end of the supplication, Imam Zaynul ‘Ābidīn (a) teaches us to pray for three vital blessings from God: pardon (*afw*), mercy, and contentment (pleasure). We state in the Du‘ā: *Oh God, seal my life with your pardon, confirm my expectation of hope with your mercy, and make my path easy to reach your pleasure.* In striving to reach spiritual heights God’s pardon, mercy and contentment are all stages that we need to aspire towards. It is the ultimate goal of one who has *ma’rifah* of the Creator and seeks to establish a close relationship with Him.

Du‘ā Makārim al-Akhlāq is rich in terms of the practical lessons and motivation we derive from its immaculate language. While scholars have recommended that it be recited on the nights of *Layāl al-Qadr* and throughout the month of Ramadan, it would be prudent to take parts of the supplication on a daily basis, to read, reflect, and apply the lessons learnt in our daily lives.