

Explanation of Du‘ā 44 from *Sahifa Sajjadiyya*

Summary of Imam al-Sajjād’s Supplication at the onset of the month of Ramadan¹

Imam al-Sajjād (a) used to recite this Du‘ā to welcome the month of Ramadan. Whilst it is not clear whether he used to recite it at the end of Sha‘bān, or at the onset of the month of Ramadan, one can assume from the title of the Du‘ā that he may have recited it during the first few days of the holy month. It forms Du‘ā no. 44 of *al-Sahifa al-Sajjadiyya*, and is by far the most comprehensive guide on how to achieve spiritual and ethical elevation during the month of Ramadan.

The content and style of the Du‘ā is reminiscent of the famous sermon of the Holy Prophet (s) on last Friday of Sha‘bān. Much like the Prophet’s (s) sermon, the Imam draws the attention of the supplicant to the greatness of the holy month, coupled with a detailed explanation of one’s ethical, spiritual and social responsibilities. These guiding principles are presented in the form of individual invocations, which is in line with the style of Zayn al-‘Ābidīn (a) throughout the *Sahifa*. In fact the *Sahifa* in its entirety is a spiritual and ethical treatise couched in the form of distinct prayers owing to the political circumstances of the Imam (s).

The *Sahifa* in general, and this Du‘ā in particular, demands a specific mindset from the reader for its efficacy. The reader must adopt every invocation as a goal for the month of Ramadan, and the act of recitation as a commitment towards that goal. Threaded in the fabric of the Du‘ā is a realization that the month of Ramadan is a period of spiritual exercise for the believer. This is initially captured by the terminology used to describe the month of Ramadan in the opening statements of the Du‘ā. The Imam (a) describes the holy month as being one of “paths (*subul*) leading to His goodness”, so that we may “traverse through his favor to His pleasure”. This attribute is uniquely found in this Du‘ā, and has not been observed in any other narration. The Imam (a) further elaborates upon this when he emphasizes that God has “appointed for it a clear time”, which neither can be put “forward” nor “behind”.

The late Sayyid Ali Khan elaborates on this phrase in his *Riyād al-Salikīn* in the following manner:
Surely man is habituated to following his desires and his whims. To prohibit him from doing so at all times would entail much hardship for him. Therefore the Almighty made certain places² and times³ specific to certain acts of obedience, so that it may be easier for him to fulfill them and he would not be averse to them. Then if he suffices himself to this (period), then it is something desirable in itself. However if the practice inspires him to continue and persevere owing to his affinity, habit or belief that acting to the contrary will cancel his previous efforts, then that is the totality of what is desired.⁴

¹ By Shaykh Murtaza Bachoo, Vancouver. 18th Rajab 1438 | 15th April 2017

² Such as Makkah and the prohibitions of ihrām.

³ Such as the month of Ramadan and the prohibitions during fasting.

⁴ Al-Shirāzī, Al-Sayyid Ali Khān, *Riyād al-Salikīn*, Muassa al-Nashr al-Islāmī, v. 6, p. 27.

This Du‘ā should not only be recited as a guideline for the month of Ramadan, but guide for spiritual journeying in the “rest of the days and months”. The Du‘ā can be divided into the following five segments:

- (a) Praise and gratitude to Allah for His guidance
- (b) The glory of the month of Ramadan
- (c) Etiquettes of fasting and worship
- (d) Social and ethical responsibilities
- (e) Praying for Divine assistance and acceptance

The depth and breadth of the instructions captured within the nuances of this supplication are beyond the scope of this article. Below are some of the points that a reader may want to reflect upon whilst reciting this supplication.

(a) Praise and gratitude to Allah for His guidance

The Du‘ā opens with a confession of servitude by praising the Almighty for guiding the supplicant to the “paths” (*subul*) of attaining His pleasure. The Imam (a) reminds the supplicant that whilst God’s “reward” (*jazā‘*) is granted because of the servant’s actions, God’s initial guidance is a *hibah*, a gift that is acquired without any exchange. The servant therefore always remains indebted to his master for the guidance towards goodness, and should not allow pride or vanity to enter his thoughts. The opening lines set the tone for the Du‘ā and also for the month of Ramadan.

(b) The glory of the month of Ramadan

A fundamental principle of Islamic spirituality is that the understanding (*ma‘rifah*) must precede the deed. It is narrated from Imam al-Bāqir (a) that, “*No deed will be accepted without understanding, and there is no understanding except through action. Hence the one who understands will be guided to the deed by his awareness, and there is no deed for the one who does not have awareness.*”⁵

In this segment of the Du‘ā, the Imam (a) develops for the supplicant a profound understanding for the month of Ramadan. He describes the month of Ramadan as “His (God’s) month”, either to give it due greatness or to remind us of the sacred tradition, “*Surely the fasting is for me, and I give its reward.*”⁶

Imam al-Sajjād (a) also alludes to a point that may be misunderstood amongst the believers. It may be assumed that the Quran acquired some greatness by its revelation in the month of Ramadan. The Imam clarifies that the month of Ramadan acquired its attribute as the month of fasting and purification because of the revelation of the Quran.

(c) Etiquettes of fasting and worship

Here the tone of the Du‘ā changes from addressing God in the third person to addressing Him directly in the second person pronoun. Having praised God and acquired the necessary awareness

⁵ Al-Majlisī, Muhammad Bāqir, *Bihār al-Anwār al-Jami li Durar Akhbār al-A‘immat al-Athar*, Dar Ihyā’ al-Turāth al-‘Arabī, vol. 75, pg. 174

⁶ Al-Shirāzī, Al-Sayyid Ali Khān, *Riyād al-Sālikīn*, Muassa al-Nashr al-Islāmī, v. 6, p. 20.

of the holy month, the supplicant has now formulated an effective spiritual attitude for supplication. In the first supplication after the salutations on the Prophet (s) and his progeny, the Imam prays to be “inspired with the understanding of the merits of the month of Ramadan”. Concealed in this statement is the realization that the merits of the holy month are beyond description, and the reality of the holy month can only be grasped through experiential knowledge.

The Imam (a) draws our attention to the conditions for the acceptance of a fast, which are different from the conditions for the validity of a fast as explained in the books of Islamic law. In particular, he prays for the aide to “prevent our limbs from disobeying” the Almighty and “using them” in a manner that pleases Him. The Imam (a) also elaborates on duties of each organ of the body, and sets a higher standard than what would be anticipated by most readers.

The Du‘ā also segues into sincerity as another condition of the acceptance of fasting, with a very practical definition of the term. The Imam (a) defines sincerity as state where one does not “seek any object of desire” but the Almighty. The late Āyatullāh Muhammad Taqī Bahjat (r) would state that it was acceptable to desire praise for one’s deeds, except that one ought to seek the praise and pleasure of Allah (s)⁷. The section ends with a section on prayer and its etiquettes as the third condition for the acceptance of the fast of the month of Ramadan.

(d) Social and ethical responsibilities

This portion of the Du‘ā can be seen as a continuation of the conditions mentioned in the previous segment. It does however deserve its own section given the importance afforded to it in the Du‘ā and within Islamic traditions.

The Du‘ā highlights the effectiveness of the month of Ramadan in developing *makarim al-akhlāq* (the most noble of character), which are character traits that normally demand struggle and effort. Islamic traditions draw a distinction between *mahāsin al-akhlāq* (good character) and *makarim al-akhlāq*. The sixth Imam (a) when asked about the latter, stated, “It is to forgive one who has wronged you, and to establish kinship with one who has cut-off from you, and to give to the one who has deprived you and to speak the truth even if it is not in your interest.” Imam al-Sajjād (a) makes a similar allusion by praying to be guided to “return to the one who has deserted him”, and to “act with justice to the one who has wronged him” and to “be peaceful to the one who has shown enmity towards him”.

The Du‘ā is magnificent in the manner in which it consistently raises the standards of Islamic ethics for the believers. Having prayed for the success to fulfill one’s humanitarian responsibilities towards family, neighbours and friends, the Imam then prays for the ability to fulfill his responsibility towards social justice in the month of Ramadan. This is presented in the form of an exclusion to the ethical instructions mentioned above, where the Imam prays that that his affection should not be extended to those whom he has taken as “enemies for the sake of Allah (s)”, such as tyrants and

⁷ The late Āyatullāh Bahjat in response to a query on showing off wrote that one should continue to show off, but in the presence of a king and pauper, one ought to show off to the king and not the pauper. (<http://bahjat.ir/fa/content/957>)

oppressors. These are enemies whom “we are not to befriend”, nor hold “devoted love (*musāfāt*) for them in our hearts”.

(e) Praying for Divine assistance and acceptance

The Imam (a) ends the Du‘ā through a series of invocations for the assistance to observe the sanctity and the etiquettes of the month of Ramadan. The Imam (a) prays for the acceptance of his efforts in the form of transformative changes in his life and spirituality. Through a series of Quranic verses, the supplicant is encouraged to strive for the highest levels of faith, and in line with the consistent style of the *Sahifa*, the Imam (a) ends his supplication with salutations upon the Holy Prophet and his pure and immaculate progeny (a).