

LIKE A SLACK BOW

‘The Believer’s weapon’ is how Rasulullah *sallallahu alaihi wasallam* described *du’aa*. ‘A slack bow’ is how Ibn-ul-Qayyim (ra) described the *du’aa* that . . .

People often wonder why their *du’aas* are not accepted, especially when they hear or read the *aayah*:

وَقَالَ رَبُّكُمْ ادْعُونِي أَسْتَجِبْ لَكُمْ

“And your Rabb said: Call me, I will accept your call.”¹

In fact, Rasulullah *sallallahu alaihi wasallam* is reported to have said, “Whoever is given *du’aa* is (also) given acceptance because Allah Ta’aala says: *Call me, I will accept your call.*”² It is also narrated from Rasulullah *sallallahu alaihi wasallam* that, “Allah does not open the door of *du’aa* for a servant yet close on him the door of acceptance.”³ Thus, Ibn ‘Umar (ra)’s freed slave, Naafi’ (ra), narrates that he heard his former master say on the top of Mount Safa, “O Allah! You said: *Call me, I will accept your call* and You do not break your promises. I therefore implore You that, having guided me to Islam, (please) do not snatch it away from me until You grant me death while I am a Muslim.”⁴

¹ Surah Al-Ghaafir Aayah 60

² Ibn Rajab Hambali, *Jaami’-ul-‘Uloom Wal-Hikam* Page 731 (Tabraani, *Al-Mu’jam As-Sagheer*, Hadith 1022)

³ Ibn Rajab Hambali, *Jaami’-ul-‘Uloom Wal-Hikam* Page 731

⁴ Baihaqi, *As-Sunan As-Sughraa*, Hadith 1641

One Reason

One reason (although not too common) for the non-acceptance of *du'aa* is the *du'aa* itself. This is when the *du'aa* entails something disliked by Allah Ta'aala. For example, a man makes *du'aa* to win the lottery or he makes *du'aa* for *barakah* in his liquor business. A *du'aa* of this sort could be compared to incorrect medication. For example, a diabetic taking hypertension medication to reduce his blood sugar levels. *Du'aas* entailing things that disliked by Allah are fruitless just as incorrect medication yields no results.

A Second Reason

A second reason is inattention of the person making *du'aa*. In the worldly life, inattention when speaking to people is regarded as rude. Inattention when seeking somebody's assistance is not only rude; it indicates a lack of urgency and therefore unconvincing. In *du'aa*, we speak to Allah and seek His assistance. Hence, paying attention and focusing on Allah is of paramount importance. Inattention in *du'aa* is rudeness to Allah. Can we be rude to Allah and expect Him to still accept our *du'aas*? Inattention in *du'aa* also implies that, Allah forbid, we are not really in need of Allah's help. Can anybody claim independence from Allah? It is for this reason that Rasulullah *sallallahu alaihi wasallam* said that, ". . . Allah does not accept *du'aa* from a negligent, thoughtless heart."⁵ 'Like a slack bow' is how Ibn-ul-Qayyim (ra) described such a *du'aa*.⁶ How far will the arrow travel if the bow is slack? If I say, 'not too far', you'll probably say, 'it will hardly leave the bow'. Just as you cannot

⁵ *Sunan At-Tirmidhi* Hadith 3479

⁶ Ibn-ul-Qayyim, *Al-Jawaab-ul-Kaafi* Page 8

hunt with a slack bow, you cannot seek Allah's assistance with a 'slack' *du'aa* – a *du'aa* without concentration. I would compare a person who makes *du'aa* in this manner to a hunter who has the best firearm but does not aim correctly. Alternatively, such a *du'aa* could be compared to incorrectly administered medication. Do you blame your GP, the antibiotic he prescribed or yourself if you do not complete the course?

The Third Reason

The reason for the non-acceptance of *du'aa* comprises of three aspects:

- a. Consumption of *haraam* food and drink – On one occasion, Rasulullah *sallallahu alaihi wasallam* quoted the *aayaat* “O Messengers! Eat from the pure (*halaal*) things and do good actions, I am fully aware of whatever you do”⁷ and “O those who brought *Imaan*! Eat from the pure (*halaal*) sustenance that we give you.”⁸ He thereafter spoke of a traveler on a long journey – his hair is disheveled and his clothes are covered in dust. “Stretching his hands to the sky, he cries ‘O my *Rabb*! O my *Rabb*!’ but his food is *haraam*, his clothes are *haraam* and he has been nourished with *haraam* substances. How can his *du'aa* be accepted?”⁹
- b. Excessive sin – A narration in Imaam Ahmad (ra)’s *Kitaab-uz-Zuhd* tells us that at the time of a particular period of difficulty experienced by the Bani Isra’eel, they all went out of their town in order to beg Allah for His assistance. Allah, however, commanded their Nabi to inform them that, “You

⁷ Surah Al-Mu'minoon Aayah 51

⁸ Surah Al-Baqarah Aayah 172

⁹ Saheeh Muslim Hadith 1015

are going out to the fields with impure clothes. You raise to me hands by means of which you have shed blood and filled your houses with haraam. Now, when I am severely angry with you? (If this is your attitude) you will only get further from me!”¹⁰ In this regard, Sayyiduna Abu Dharr (ra) said that, “a small amount of *du’aa* similar to the amount of salt required when cooking is sufficient if you are righteous.”¹¹

- c. Haste – Rasulullah *sallallahu alaihi wasallam* said, “The *du’aa* of one of you will be accepted so long as he is not hasty, saying ‘I made *du’aa* but it was not accepted.”¹²
- d. Doubt in the acceptance of one’s *du’aa* – Rasulullah *sallallahu alaihi wasallam* said, “Make *du’aa* with conviction that your *du’aa* will be accepted.” It is for this reason that we have been prohibited from saying, ‘O Allah, forgive me if you desire’.

Du’aa accompanied with any of the above could be likened to a diabetic who takes his medication religiously but does not reduce his sugar intake.

Similar to Salaah

Explaining the above in a different manner, many scholars mention that acceptance of *du’aa* is similar to the validity of *salaah*. Just as the validity of *salaah* depends on certain *shuroot* (conditions), the acceptance of *du’aa* is also dependent on certain *shuroot*.

¹⁰ Ibn-ul-Qayyim, *Al-Jawaab-ul-Kaafi* Page 9

¹¹ Ibn-ul-Qayyim, *Al-Jawaab-ul-Kaafi* Page 9

¹² *Saheeh Al-Bukhaari* Hadith 6340, *Saheeh Muslim* Hadith 7110

Is *salaah* valid without *wudoo*? Is *salaah* valid if the *awrah* (private area) is exposed? Is *salaah* valid if the *musallee's* clothes are *najas* (impure)? Is *salaah* valid if the *musallee* (person performing *salaah*) does not face the *qiblah*? The answer to all these questions is 'No!' Why not? Because *wudoo*, concealment of the *awrah* (private area), *tahaarah* (purity) of clothes and facing the *qiblah* are all *shuroot* for the validity of *salaah*. The acceptance of *du'aa* is similar; it depends on certain *shuroot*.¹³

There are two types of *shuroot* for the acceptance of *du'aa*:

1. The *shuroot* of the person making *du'aa* – They are:
 - a. Conviction that nobody but Allah is able to fulfill his need
 - b. Conviction that all apparent means for fulfillment of his need are controlled entirely by Allah
 - c. Conviction that one's *du'aa* will be accepted
 - d. Sincerity
 - e. Concentration
 - f. Abstention from *haraam* food, drink etc.
 - g. Perseverance – He must not get tired of making *du'aa*.
2. The *shuroot* of the *du'aa* – There is only one *shart* (condition) in this regard viz. permissibility, whatever you are making *du'aa* for must be permissible.¹⁴

Three Levels of *Du'aa*

The strength of the *du'aa* also plays a role in its acceptance. In this regard, there are three levels of *du'aa* viz.

¹³ *Khutbaat-e-Mahmood* (V.1 Pg.150)

¹⁴ Adapted from *Tafseer-ul-Qurtubi* (V.2 Pg.206)

1. The *du'aa* is stronger than the difficulty and therefore deflects it.
2. The *du'aa* is weaker than the difficulty and therefore unable to deflect it.
3. The *du'aa* is neither stronger nor weaker than the difficulty. In this instance too, the *du'aa* is unable to deflect the difficulty. In the words of a *hadith* attributed to Rasulullah *sallallahu alaihi wasallam*, the *du'aa* and difficulty “wrestle with each other”.¹⁵

In short, one reason for the non-acceptance of *du'aa* is insufficiency – you are not making enough *du'aa*. A learner failed the physics examination. “Why did you not study?” his father scolded. “But I did study” he pleaded. That was the truth. He did study, except that he only did so on the night preceding the examination. How much could he cram in one night? So yes, he did study, but it was not enough. The same applies to *du'aa*. We often make *du'aa*, but not enough.

I Love Hearing His Voice

Conversely, what is sometimes construed as rejection of *du'aa* is actually a delay – it will be accepted, but not yet. Put differently, the *du'aa* is accepted but the need is not yet fulfilled. The reason for this is the sincerity, dedication and humility of the person making the *du'aa*. It is mentioned in some narrations that when a person who is loved by Allah makes *du'aa*, Allah tells Jibreel (as), “Do not be hasty in fulfilling my servant’s need because I love hearing his voice.”¹⁶

¹⁵ *Mustadrak-ul-Haakim* Hadith 1813 and *Al-Mu'jam Al-Awsat* Hadith 2498

¹⁶ Ibn Rajab Hambali, *Jaami'-ul-'Uloom Wal-Hikam* Page 731

One of Three Things

In fact, Sayyiduna Abu Sa'eed (ra) narrated that Rasulullah *sallallahu alaihi wasallam* said that whenever a Muslim makes *du'aa* in which there is neither sin nor severance of family ties, Allah gives him one of three things:

1. Allah fulfils his request
2. He stores the reward of his *du'aa* for the Hereafter
3. He averts an equal amount of hardship from his path.

"Then we will make a lot of *du'aa*" said the Sahaabah (ra) when they heard this. Rasulullah *sallallahu alaihi wasallam* replied that no matter how much *du'aa* they make, *Allah's treasures are always more!*¹⁷

Considering the divine promise in اِدْعُونِي أُسَجِّبْ لَكُمْ (Call me, I will accept your call)¹⁸ and the above narration, many scholars have concluded that Allah accepts all *du'aas*. Nevertheless, rejection of *du'aa* due to reasons explained thus far is also a reality. Observation of the *shuroot* (conditions) of *du'aa* is therefore essential.

With Fear and Desire

وَادْعُوهُ خَوْفًا وَطَمَعًا إِنَّ رَحْمَةَ اللَّهِ قَرِيبٌ مِّنَ الْمُحْسِنِينَ

Call Him with fear and desire.

*Certainly, Allah's mercy is close to the good-doers.*¹⁹

According to one interpretation, خَوْفًا indicates fear that one's *du'aa* may be rejected and طَمَعًا refers to desire for one's *du'aa*

¹⁷ Musanaf Ibn Abi Shaibah Hadith 29,780

¹⁸ Surah Al-Ghaafir Aayah 60

¹⁹ Surah Al-A'raaf Aayah 56

to be accepted.²⁰ Furthermore, acceptance of *du'aa* is only due to Allah's mercy. Hence, we conclude that *du'aa* accompanied with fear and hope is close to acceptance (sure to be accepted). 'Like the two wings of a bird' is how Shaikh Ahmad As-Saawi described such fear and hope. No bird flies with only one wing. Similarly, our *du'aas* do not 'fly' to Allah without the wings of fear and hope.

Finally

Observe all the *shuroot* (conditions) and *aadaab* (etiquette) of *du'aa* and do not ever give up because 'the door is eventually opened for the one who does not stop knocking'.²¹

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5th Ramadaan 1434 / 13th August 2013
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²⁰ *Tafseer An-Nasafi* (V.1 Pg.417) *Haashiyat-us-Saawi* V.2 Pg.74

²¹ Ibn Rajab Hambali, *Jaami'-ul-'Uloom Wal-Hikam* Page 731