

Forgiveness in Islam

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There is a beautiful “whispered prayer” known as Munaajat Sha’baniyyah, also referred to as the Munaajat of Imam Ali, peace be upon him. It was recited by him and all of the other Imams and ranks amongst the most sublime of their prayers.

Before we delve into the discussion on this beautiful whispered prayer, we must first understand that in Islam, we have various methods of communication and communion with Allah – we have the recitation of the Noble Qur’an, we have the supplication (du’a) and we have the whispered prayer (munaajat).

The whispered prayer is different from du’a in that du’a is a general and encompassing term which literally means “to call upon [someone]”. It can be recited in a multiple of ways: from far away or close by, loudly or quietly, from a known person or a stranger – all of these kinds of sounds can be referred to as a du’a. In the Islamic tradition, such an appeal forms an inner connection between the finite and the Infinite – the servant and Allah, the Most High.

However, the munaajat or whispered prayer, and its source word in Arabic, which is najwah, is a whisper or secret talk – a specific communication with someone such that no one else hears the one making such a petition – in essence, it is an form of spiritual intimacy between two individuals.

In a munaajat, therefore, sometimes Allah talks to an individual while at other times, one talks to Allah – and this is what is known as a reciprocal dialogue or form of communication.

In this regards, there is a beautiful statement from the Creator of the World – Allah – in which He has stated the following: “When a person has no other aim except for My pleasure, then I love him and in the darkness of the night, and the quietness of the day, I enter into intimate discourse (munaajat) with him.”

Therefore, the munaajat is such that one speaks knowing that Allah has spoken to him, but no one else knows about this conversation. Indeed when this occurs, it can be said that it is the words of Allah coming out of a servant’s mouth!

There are many ‘well-known’ whispered prayers that have been conveyed to us through the endless teachings of the Ahlul Bayt, peace be upon them; some examples of these are the fifteen whispered prayers (munaajaat) of Imam Ali b. al-Husayn Zaynul Abideen, peace be upon him, which can be found at the end of as-Sahifah as-Sajjadiya [for an in-depth and inspiring explanation of each of these Whispered Prayers of the 4th Imam, please refer to the lectures of Shaykh Mohammad Ali Shomali

found at www.quranstudy.com [2]; the munaajat of Imam Ali, peace be upon him, that he used to recite and is famously known as the “Munaajat of Imam Ali in Masjid al-Kufa”; and the Munaajat Sha’baniyyah which was a personal favourite of the late Ayatullah Khomeini who even recommended its recitation when he wrote his final will and testament.

The late founder of the Islamic Republic of Iran is quoted as having said that it is not known to him if there is any other intimate whispered prayer or supplication that has been recited by all of the 12 Imams, other than Munaajat Sha’baniyyah.

Thus, munaajat is an expression of our love to Allah; it is the language of love – not the language of logic.

It contains many different etiquettes of invocation to Allah – how to ask Him for forgiveness and reach out for His mercy.

Turning our attention to Munaajat Sha’baniyyah, one part of this intimate whispered prayer deals with a servant pleading for forgiveness from Allah for his wrong doings and evil deeds.

When it comes to asking for forgiveness, there are many different methods and the manner of seeking pardon varies.

For example, let’s say that one has an argument with a friend and says something bad to them. Shortly afterwards, one regrets what transpired and resolves to ask him or her for forgiveness.

The method of doing this is not to say to oneself that, “I did not do anything bad,” rather one must acknowledge the fact that something was done wrong, then we seek forgiveness by humbling ourselves until they accept our words of repentance. In this situation, one will be forgiven by their friend, God willing.

Another kind of seeking forgiveness is that a person understands the fact that in order to reach “perfection” they have to ask for forgiveness for their evil actions with humility and the proper etiquette. However it does not matter for this person if the other side accepts one’s repentance or not, they just want to be content that they have very crucial that his forgiveness is accepted by the other party, and therefore he will plead and plead with the family and beg them to pardon him, because he realizes that it is a life and death situation that he is in.

When one is seeking forgiveness from Allah for the many sins that we commit, it should like this last manner that we plead to Him – meaning that it is very crucial that our apology be accepted by Allah and we make ourselves worthy of attaining His forgiveness

In one part of Munaajat Sha’baniyyah, we are taught to recite:

إلهي اعتذاري إليك اعتذار من لم يستغن عن قبول عذره فاقبل عذري يا أكرم من يعتذر إليه المُسيئون

“My God! My offering excuses to you is the offering of not, they just want to be content that they have “fulfilled their obligation”; and this is all that is important for them – nothing else matters. They feel that they are not really in need of having their excuses of one who cannot do without the acceptance of this excuse – so accept my excuse – O the Most Generous of those to whom the evil doers offer excuses.”

Therefore as we mentioned, our asking for forgiveness from Allah must be such that we plead with Him until He accepts our apology – forgiveness accepted, they just want to say sorry as a duty that needs to be done.

A third instance is when a person has killed another individual and a ruling has been passed that unless the family of the dead person forgives that killer, he must be put to death. For him it is for there is no other choice that we have in the matter. If He does not forgive us then we are doomed in this world and in the next There is a similar phrase which is mentioned in Du’a Kumayl which reads:

اللهم فاقبل عذري

“O Allah! So then please accept my excuse!”

This line in the supplication taught to us by the Commander of the Faithful, peace be upon him, conveys the same meanings as the line found in Munaajat Sha’baniyyah.

When it comes to the acceptance of an apology, there are many different dimensions to it:

1. Sometimes the other party may only say “I accept your apology”;
2. Some people may console you and respond by saying, “I know that you did not do this bad thing intentionally;”
3. A greater person may actually remind the other person how to ask for forgiveness;
4. Another one may respond back by also saying sorry and even console them for the bad action that was committed by the culprit.

Therefore an “ordinary person” will just accept the apology, a “spiritually higher person” would indirectly teach them how to ask forgiveness and the individual who is standing at the “highest spiritual level” would be the one who forgives beforehand and even consoles the wrong doer for their evil action!

Different reasoning for why people accept apologies from one another

When it comes to us human beings, there are various different reasons that we accept apologies from other people – some of them include the following:

1. One may accept the apology of another person with the intention or hope that if one day they are need of something or require help, then they can remind that person and almost in a way, make them feel obliged to help them out – just because they had accepted their apology previously.
2. Some people may forgive another person because they too in turn want to be forgiven by them;
3. Often times, friends may forgive each other because they want their friendship to take on a new or greater form and in turn they want to benefit from that personally;

Another situation is that one wants to be forgiven by Allah, and we know that if one wants the forgiveness and mercy of Allah to be showered upon us, then we need to manifest this trait of Allah – The Oft-Forgiver within ourselves; and in order for Allah to forgive us, then we need to forgive others as well.

In all of these above scenarios, one is looking at the rewards involved – be it from other people or from Allah. There is some aim in mind for which one is willing to forgive the other party for their shortcomings. However when Allah accepts our apologies – provided that we plead to Him and beg Him in the right way – then it is not for any reward or any benefit that He gets or is looking for, rather, He forgives us out of His greatness and exaltedness. In fact, not only does He accept our apology and forgive our lapses, but He even teaches and guides us on HOW to go about doing this.

All praise belongs to him – the Most Merciful, the Most Forgiving and we pray that we can forgive others just as we would like Allah to forgive us and overlook all of our many faults and slips.

References

- 1) Splendor of the Whisper Prayer a Commentary of Munajaat Sha'baniyyah written by Ayatullah Muhammad Taqi Misbah Yazdi
- 2) Dua Kumayl
- 3) Lecture by Shaykh Mansour Leghaei from www.ihic.org.au [3]

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