Reflections On The Supplication (Du'a) Of Kumayl

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According to Allamah Al-Majlsi, Du'a Kumayl is the best du'a. This du'a, narrated from the prophet Khidr (‘a), has been taught by Imam 'Ali (‘a) to a prominent companion of his named Kumayl Ibn Ziyad Al-Nakha'i. Although apparently prophet Khidr (‘a) is the one who initially composed this du'a, it can be claimed that because he is still alive and is with the Hujjah of every age and era, he may indeed have been inspired by Imam 'Ali (‘a).

According to Sayyid Ibn Tawus, Kumayl had attended an assembly at the Mosque in Basra which was addressed by Imam 'Ali (‘a) during which the night of the 15th of Sha'ban was mentioned.

Imam 'Ali (‘a) said, "Whosoever keeps awake in devoutness on this night (15th Sha'ban) and recites the du'a of Prophet Khidr, undoubtedly that person's supplication will be responded to and granted." When the assembly at the mosque had dispersed, Kumayl called at the house where Imam 'Ali (‘a) was staying and requested him to inform him about Prophet Khidr's (‘a) du'a. Imam 'Ali (‘a) asked Kumayl to sit down, record and memorize the du'a which Imam 'Ali (‘a) dictated to Kumayl. Imam 'Ali (‘a) then advised Kumayl to recite this du'a on the eve of every Friday (that is the evening preceding the day of Friday) or once a month or at least once every year so that, as Imam 'Ali (‘a) added, "Allah (swt) may protect thee from the evils of enemies and the plots contrived by impostors. O Kumayl! In consideration of thy companionship and understanding, I grant thee this honour of entrusting this du'a to thee."[1]

The recitation of this du'a has been especially recommended on the night preceding Friday and in the middle of the month of Sha'ban. It is said that the recitation of this du'a, gives one protection from one's enemies, opens the gates of sustenance for one and offers a very helpful way for a servant to ask God's forgiveness for their sins.

Sources

This precious du'a has been mentioned in the following books, among others:

- Sheikh Tusi (A.H. 385–460) in his Misbah al–Mutihajjid, Qom: Isma'il Zanjani, c. A.H. 1401, 774–781.
- Sayyid Ibn Tawus (A.H. 589–664) in his 'Iqbal al–'A'mal, Tehran: Dar al–Kutub al–'Ilmiyya, A.H. 1390, 706–710.
- Ibrihim Ibn 'Ali al–'Amili al–Kaf'ami (A.H. 840–905) in his Al– Balad al–Amin, 188–191.
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Sublime Ideas In Du'a Kumayl

Du'a Kumayl is full of numerous profound ideas and requests, the most prominent of which is asking for God's forgiveness (maghfirat). Maghfirat occupies a high position in Islam indeed to such an extent that

without it one cannot do anything. If we are not forgiven, then other things will not benefit us. If we achieve maghfirat, then we can hope to achieve more. Therefore, first of all, we have to be sure that we are forgiven.

In addition to maghfirat, Imam 'Ali (‘a) also makes other requests including the ability to remember God. Regarding this, he (‘a) says,

واجعل لساني بذكرك لهجا

"And cause my tongue to accentuate Thy remembrance."[2] Elsewhere he (‘a) says:

يا من اسمه دواء وذكره شفاء

"O Thou! Whose Name is the remedy (for all ills) and Whose remembrance is a sure cure for all ailments." [3]

Also, he (‘a) says:

اللهم إني أتقرب إليك بذكرك

"O Allah! I endeavour to draw myself nigh to Thee through Thy remembrance."[4]

Here, Imam 'Ali (‘a) emphasizes the importance of remembering God to the extent that even if we are destined to be placed in hell, we will still remember Him (swt) and His blessings and bounties towards us.

In addition to remembrance of God and asking for forgiveness, other requests include asking for sustenance, asking for protection against enemies and whoever has bad intentions, asking for love for God and so forth.

Forgiveness

Forgiveness has a very significant position in Islamic spirituality and is the major request in Du'a Kumayl.

However, the first question is why we need to be forgiven.

In a very eloquent way, Imam 'Ali (‘a) explains that this request is not a secondary or marginal one and one cannot continue without it; rather, for him, it enjoys utmost importance since he (‘a) cannot tolerate God's punishment. Imam 'Ali (‘a) admits that Divine punishments are severe while he (‘a) is so weak and so too are his body and skin. Hence his declaration:

يا رب ارحم ضعف بدني ورقة جلدي

"My Nourisher! Have mercy on the infirmity of my body, the delicacy of my skin and the brittleness of my bones."[5]

Elsewhere in Du'a Kumayl, Imam 'Ali (‘a) states that even supposing he were able to physically tolerate such torments, he (‘a) cannot endure them mentally and spiritually since he (‘a) could not bear to imagine that God were punishing him and he (‘a) could not tolerate the spiritual punishment of being far from Him (swt) and of being deprived from gazing on His generosity. Here he (‘a) says,

فهبني يا سيدي ومولاي وربي صبرت على عذابك فكيف أصبر على فراقك وهبني صبرت على حر نارك فكيف أصبر عن النظر إلى كرامتك أم كيف أسكن في النار ورجائي عفوك

"I reckon that though I may patiently endure the scorching fire of Thy hell, yet how can I resign myself to the denial of Thy pity and clemency? How can I remain in the fire while I have hopes of Thy forgiveness?" [6]

For him, it would be an intolerable punishment to see others receiving God's mercy while he (‘a) was rejected since he (‘a) had loved Him (swt) and hoped for His mercy all his life. Is it possible that God puts into hell someone who had loved Him (swt) and declared that He (swt) is his Lord and the only Lord? Is it possible that God places and leaves in hell the one who is calling upon Him (swt)? Certainly, such a person cannot remain in hell:

فتراك سبحانك يا إلهي وبحمدك تسمع فيها صوت عبد مسلم سجن فيها بمخالفته وذاق طعم عذابها بمعصيته وحبس بين أطباقها بجرمه وجريرته وهو يضج إليك ضجيج مؤمل لرحمتك ويناديك بلسان أهل توحيدك ويتوسل إليك بربوبيتك يا مولاي فكيف يبقى في العذاب وهو يرجو ما سلف من حلمك أم كيف تؤلمه النار وهو يأمل فضلك

My Lord! Glory and praise be to Thee, wouldst Thou (wish) to be seen (disregarding) the voice of a Muslim bondman, ... crying out to Thee the utterance of one who has faith in Thy mercy and calling out to Thee in the language of those who believe in Thy unity and seeking to approach Thee by means of Thy epithet "the Creator, the Nourisher, the Accomplisher and the Protector of the entire existence?" My Lord! Then how could he remain in torment when he hopefully relies upon Thy past forbearance, compassion and mercy? My Lord! And how can the fire cause him suffering when he hopes for Thy grace and mercy?[7]

Answering these questions, Imam 'Ali (‘a) clearly declares that such things are not even imaginable regarding God:

ما ذلك الظن بك ولا المعروف من فضلك ولا مشبه لما عاملت به الموحدين من برك واحسانك

"Alas! That is not the concept (held by us) of Thee nor has Thy grace such a reputation nor does it resemble that which Thou hast awarded by Thy kindness and generosity to those who believe in Thy unity." 8

In other words, one can say that such actions are not worthy of God since people do not expect Him (swt) to put such a person in hellfire; a person who obviously really loves Him (swt) because he (‘a) declares that even if he (‘a) were placed in hell and punished, yet he (‘a) would still cry out that he (‘a) loves God since he (‘a) knows that such tortures are due to his own faults and all Divine judgments are correct. Thus, this is a real and true love and not a deceitful one. Someone who pretends to love God while he does not really love Him in his heart, would start blaming Him (swt) and complaining as soon as he faces a problem.

Divine Punishments

Imam 'Ali (‘a) then continues:

فباليقين أقطع لولا ما حكمت به من تعذيب جاحديك وقضيت به من إخلاد معانديك لجعلت النار كلها برداً وسلاما وما كان لأحد فيها مقراً ولا مقاما لكنك تقدست أسماؤك أقسمت أن تملأها من الكافرين من الجنة والناس أجمعين وان تخلد فيها المعاندين

"I definitely conclude that had Thou not ordained punishment for those who disbelieved in Thee, and had Thou not decreed Thy enemies to remain in hell, Thou would have made hell cool and peaceful and there would never have been an abode or place for anyone in it. But sanctified be Thy Names, Thou hast sworn to fill hell with the disbelievers from among the jinns and mankind together and to place Thy enemies therein forever."9

This phrase implies several principles:

- Divine punishment is in accordance with wisdom (hikmah)
- Those who deny God will be punished while those who fight against Him (swt) will be in hell forever. Thus, those who deny Him (swt) but do not fight against Him (swt) may remain in hellfire for a while and not forever.
- Hellfire is a necessity of creation and its philosophy; otherwise, God would close it down

and turn it into a kind of paradise.

- Hellfire is not the destiny of those who have real faith (i.e. those who would keep their faith up to that stage and would not lose it during their lifetime, while dying or later on) even if they may have some shortcomings. Even if they were put in hell for a short while, that would be for their purification and preparation to enter paradise. However, we must be very cautious and careful and not take any risk since there are some sins that cause one's faith to be lost and one's du'as to be unaccepted. There are also some sins that change and transform the blessings of God into calamities and difficulties. Enumerating several types of sins, at the beginning of Du'a Kumayl Imam 'Ali (‘a) says:

اللهم اغفر لي الذنوب التي تهتك العصم، اللهم اغفر لي الذنوب التي تنزل النقم، اللهم اغفر لي الذنوب التي تغير النعم، اللهم اغفر لي الذنوب التي تحبس الدعاء، اللهم اغفر لي الذنوب التي تنزل البلاء

"O Allah! Forgive me such sins as would tear apart safeguards. O Allah! Forgive me such sins as would bring down calamity. O Allah! Forgive me such sins as would change divine favours (into disfavours). O Allah! Forgive me such sins as would hinder my supplication. O Allah! Forgive me such sins as bring down misfortunes (or afflictions). O Allah! Forgive such sins as would suppress hope". 10

Based on this part of the du'a, there are some sins which would hinder one's supplications and prayers. Du'a (prayer) has to go higher and higher to reach God. If you send a message to a very kind person asking for help, there is no doubt that when he receives the message he would come and help you. However, you should make sure that the message has reached him. Therefore, if it is put in the wrong envelope or is without a proper stamp, then no help would be offered because the message did not reach the person.

Similarly, we should make sure that our prayers reach God since there are some sins that act as obstacles in their progress towards Him (swt). As we do not know what kind of sins these are, we should be cautious about every individual sin because that very sin which we commit may be exactly the one which hinders our supplication.

The same is true regarding good actions and Allah's (swt) pleasure as we have some narrations to the effect that God has hidden His pleasure (Rirja) in good things. Since we do not know what is meant by these "good things" which will make God fully satisfied with us, we should not miss any opportunity to do a good thing since that particular good action may be in reality the one which pleases God.

On the other hand, God has put His dissatisfaction (sakhat) among sins. Here again we do not know

which sin is meant and thus we should not take any risk by doing any sin because it may be that very sin that brings about Divine anger. Regarding this, Imam 'Ali (‘a) has been quoted as saying:

> إن الله أخفى أربعة في أربعة: أخفى رضاه في طاعته ، فلا تستصغرنّ شيئا من طاعته ، فربما وافق رضاه وأنت لا تعلم. وأخفى سخطه في معصيته ، فلا تستصغرنّ شيئا من معصيته ، فربما وافق سخطه وأنت لا تعلم وأخفى إجابته في دعوته فر تستصغرن شيئا من دعائه فربما وافق اجابته وانت لا تعلم واخفى وليه في عباده فلا تستصغرن عبدا من عبيد الله فربما يكون وليه وأنت لا تعلم.

"Verily Allah (swt) has hidden four things in four things: He has hidden His satisfaction in His obedience. So do not belittle any act of obedience since that very act may cause His satisfaction while you do not realise. He has hidden His dissatisfaction in His disobedience. Therefore, do not belittle any act of disobedience as that very act may cause His dissatisfaction while you do not realise. He has hidden His response in His calling. Thus, do not belittle any prayer because that very prayer may lead to His response while you do not realise and finally, He has hidden His special friend among His servants. So do not belittle any of His servants since that very servant may be His special friend while you do not realise."[11]

The Prayer That Is Never Blocked

A very important question arises here: if there are some sins that hinder our supplications and we may already have committed them, then the very supplication in which we ask God to forgive those sins which hinder our supplications, would also be hindered and blocked. . So, if we have already committed that very sin, then there is no use in reciting this supplication and if we have not committed it that then there is no need to make such a request. What then is the solution?

The answer to this question is that istighfar (seeking Allah's (swt) forgiveness) is the only du'a which is never blocked. If someone manages to ask God for forgiveness it will be heard and answered. However, although the sin itself may actually stop him asking for forgiveness, it is impossible for istighfar to be hindered and blocked once it is done. Regarding this, surah 4, ayah 17 reads:

> إِنَّمَا التَّوْبَةُ عَلَى اللَّهِ لِلَّذِينَ يَعْمَلُونَ السُّوءَ بِجَهَالَةٍ ثُمَّ يَتُوبُونَ مِنْ قَرِيبٍ فَأُولَٰئِكَ يَتُوبُ اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِمْ ۗ وَكَانَ اللَّهُ عَلِيمًا حَكِيمًا

"Acceptance of repentance by Allah (swt) is only for those who commit evil out of ignorance, then repent promptly. It is such whose repentance Allah (swt) will accept, and Allah (swt) is all-Knowing, all-Wis." (4:17)

According to this ayah, God has made it incumbent upon Himself to accept the repentance of those who do some wrongdoings out of ignorance and then, before they die, ask for forgiveness. Thus, as long as a

person does istighfar sincerely, they can be hopeful of God's mercy. The most horrendous situation is when a person does not do istighfar claiming that they have not done anything wrong and other people are immersed in sins while they are free from any act of disobedience. The worst punishment for the heart is its inability to do istighfar.

Towards the end of the du'a, Imam 'Ali (‘a) once again draws attention toward forgiveness and shows that it is of the utmost importance to such an extent that he (‘a) requests to be forgiven of all his sins precisely on that very night and indeed at that very moment:

> إلهي وسيدي فسألك بالقدرة التي قدرتها وبالقضية التي حتمتها حكمتها وغلبت من عليه أجريتها أن تهب لي في هذه الليلة وفي هذه الساعة كل جرم أجرمته وكل ذنب أذنبته وكل قبيح أسررته وكل جهل عملته كتمته أو أعلنته أخفيته أو أظهرته وكل سيئة أمرت بإثباتها الكرام الكاتبين

"My Lord! My Master! I therefore implore Thee by that power which Thou determine and by the decree which Thou hast finalised and ordained whereby Thou hath prevailed upon whom Thou hast imposed it, to bestow upon me this night and this very hour forgiveness for all the transgressions that I have been guilty of, for all the sins that I have committed, for all the loathsome acts that I have kept secret and for all the evils done by me, secretly or openly, in concealment or outwardly and for every evil action that Thou hast ordered the two noble scribes to confirm."[12]

A General Look At Other Concepts In Du'a Kumayl

In part of this du'a, we read:

> اللهم مولاي كم من قبيح سترته وكم من فادح من البلاء أقلته وكم من عثار وقيته وكم من مكروه دفعته وكم من ثناء جميل لست أهلاً له نشرته

"O Allah! My Lord! How many of my loathsome acts hast Thou screened (from public gaze). How many of my grievous afflictions (distresses) hast Thou reduced in severity. And how many of my stumblings hast Thou protected, how many of my detestable acts has Thou averted, and how many of my undeserving praises hast Thou spread abroad!"[13]

Here Imam 'Ali (‘a) refers to some of the blessings of God towards His sinful servant. It is God who has covered their sins from other people and has removed so many calamities from them, their family, their friends and so on. It is He (swt) Who, through His favour, gave His servant such dignity and reputation among people even though it was never deserved and if people knew everything about them, they would cease to praise them anymore.

Then Imam 'Ali (‘a) continues:

اللهم عظم بلائي وأفرط بي سوء حالي وقصرت بي أعمالي وقعدت بي أغلالي وحبسني عن نفعي بعد آمالي
وخدعتني الدنيا بغرورها ونفسي بجنايتها ومطالي

"O Allah! My trials and sufferings have increased and my evilness has worsened, my good deeds have diminished and my yokes (of misdeeds) have become firm And farfetched hopes prevent me from profiting (from good deeds) and the world has deceived me with its allurements and my own self has been affected by treachery and procrastination."[14]

In this part, Imam 'Ali (‘a) describes the critical situation of such a servant. The problem is that their bad condition has reached a peak. Their actions are too few and not good enough. There are many kinds of obstacles stopping them. Having farfetched hopes, dreams and ambitions has disabled them since they compare whatever they want to do with their dreams and then find it of no value and consequently do nothing.

Therefore, one should have realistic wishes in order to be able to start struggling. Besides these things, both the world and their own soul have betrayed them. I Instead of encouraging them to do good things and helping them along this path, their very own soul has deceived them. This is their terrible situation and meanwhile God has done so many favours to them and yet they have not been a thankful servant of Him (swt).

Interestingly, although in such a bad condition, we still ask God to complete His favour towards us! If a person solves 90% of someone else's problems, only solving the remaining 10% would make them a perfect benefactor. If someone invites us to their house and provides us with every kind of facility, food and so on and only forgets to bring us water, then we would not call them a perfect host. If we open a school for poor students and throughout the school year, we offer them everything needed and only close the school for a week, claiming that they have received 95% of their education, then that would have a negative effect on them. Regarding this, an Arabic maxim says:

الأكرام والإتمام

"The [perfect] benefaction is the complete one." Here we address God in the same manner:

فأسألك بعزتك أن لا يحجب عنك دعائي سوء عملي وفعالي ولا تفضحني بخفي ما اطلعت عليه من سري ولا
تعاجلني بالعقوبة على ما عملته في خلواتي من سوء فعلي وإساءتي ودوام تفريطي وجهالتي وكثرة شهواتي وغفلتي،
وكن اللهم بعزتك لي في كل الأحوال رؤوفا وعليّ في جميع الأمور عطوفا

"Therefore, my Lord! I implore Thee by Thy greatness not to let my sins and my misdeeds shut out access to my prayers from reaching Thy realm and not to disgrace me by exposing those (hidden ones) of which Thou hast knowledge nor to hasten my retribution for those vices and misdeeds committed by

me in secret which were due to evil mindedness, ignorance, excessive lustfulness and my negligence. O Allah! I beg Thee by Thy greatness to be compassionate to me in all circumstances and well disposed towards me in all matters."[15]

Here, we acknowledge that Allah (swt) has done 95% of the task and 5% remains. However, that 5% plays a very important role in our salvation.

In another part we read:

أن تهب لي في هذه الليلة وفي هذه الساعة كل جرم أجرمته وكل ذنب أذنبته وكل قبيح أسررته وكل جهل عملته كتمته أو أعلنته أخفيته أو أظهرته وكل سيئة أمرت بإثباتها الكرام الكاتبين الذين وكلتهم بحفظ ما يكون مني وجعلتهم شهوداً عليّ مع جوارحي وكنت أنت الرقيب عليّ من ورائهم والشاهد لما خفي عنهم وبرحمتك أخفيته وبفضلك سترته وأن توفر حظي من كل خير أنزلته أو إحسان فضلته أو بر نشرته أو رزق بسطته أو خطأ تستره يا رب يا رب يا رب

"....to bestow upon me this night and this very hour, forgiveness for all the transgressions that I have been guilty of,. and for every evil action that Thou hast ordered the two noble scribes to confirm whom Thou hast appointed to record all my actions and to be witnesses over me along with the limbs of my body, while Thou observeth over me besides them and wast witness to those acts concealed from them. Which Thou in Thy mercy hast kept secret and through Thy kindness unexposed and I pray to Thee to make my share plentiful in all the good that Thou dost bestow; in all the favours that Thou dost grant; and in all the virtues that Thou dost allow to be known everywhere; and in all the sustenance and livelihood that Thou dost expand and in respect of all the sins that Thou dost forgive and the wrongs that Thou dost cover up. O Lord! O Lord! O Lord!"[16]

Based on this phrase:

a. When we do any action there are certain witnesses to it who will give testimony on the Day of Judgment. Among them are one's own organs (like tongue, hands, ears, eyes and so on) and the angels.

b. Above all, God is the main witness over all things.

c. According to the phrase "and was witness to those acts concealed from them", there are some sins about which God does not allow even the angels, who have been appointed to a certain person as the recorders of their actions, be aware. Rather, due to His mercy, He (swt) conceals them. There is a narration from the Holy Prophet (S) to the effect that once

he (S) asked God for he himself to be in charge of his nation's actions on the Day of Judgment so that no one else would be informed of their actions. Receiving a negative answer from the Divine, the Noble Prophet (S) asked for the reason. God replied that "It is because I do want even you to realize what they have done. Thus, I Myself will judge about them on that day."

d. The last part of the above-mentioned phrase in which Imam 'Ali ('a) asks God to have a share in every kind of goodness, favour and virtue granted by God, shows his truly great true ambition. This teaches us that we should always have great intentions and never limit them. Therefore, if someone is only able to help 10 people, it is nevertheless recommended that they intend that they want to help all people. While on a practical level it is true that they cannot help more than 10 people, however having such a great intention will result in them receiving the reward of helping all people.

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