

Reflections on the Supplication of AL-IFTITĀH

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ABSTRACT: Supplication of *Al-Ifitāh* is generally recited during each night of the month of Ramadan. This article is to explain some of its main themes such as: praising of Allah, salutations to the prophet and his household, and special salutations to Imam Mahdi (a). These themes are explained according to some verses and hadiths.

KEYWORDS: supplication, praising of Allah, salutation, Imam Mahdi.

Du‘ā al-Ifitāh is a very well-known supplication and generally is recited during each night of the month of Ramadan. It is called “*Du‘ā al-Ifitāh*” because it begins with:

"اللهم انى افتتح الثناء بحمدك"

“O Allah, I begin (or open) the glorification with praise of Thee.”

Thus we say that we begin or open praising Allah (*swt*) by remembering all the great qualities that He (*swt*) possesses and all the many favours that He (*swt*) has bestowed upon us.

Sources:

This *du‘ā* has been cited in the following sources amongst others:

- Sheikh Ṭūsī in *Tahdhīb al-Aḥkām*¹
- Idem, in *Miṣbāḥ al-Mutahajjid*²
- Sayyid ibn Ṭawūs in *Iqbāl al-A'māl*³
- Ibrāhīm ibn Ali 'Āmilī Kaf'amī in *Al-Balad al-Amīn*⁴
- Idem, in *Al-Miṣbāḥ*.⁵

The main themes

There are several points that have been emphasized in this *du'ā*, the first and foremost of which is praise of Allah (*swt*). Praising God the Almighty is perhaps the most important thing mentioned in this *du'ā*. Obviously, praising Allah (*swt*) is not the same as thanking Him (*swt*). There is a difference between *ḥamd* (praising) and *shukr* (thanksgiving). Praising Allah (*swt*) requires remembering and mentioning the good qualities that He (*swt*) possesses and all the good things that He (*swt*) has done for us, whether they relate to oneself personally or not. However, thanksgiving is about those things that in a way or another actually relate to oneself. For example, an artist may produce a beautiful work of art and then someone who sees this work of art may praise the artist but would not thank the artist, unless the work had been produced specifically for this person or for someone who relates to this person. Therefore, in general, when Allah (*swt*) does something good for other people, or even other creatures such as animals, we can praise Him (*swt*) for this. Indeed the performance of an action by Him (*swt*) is not even necessary in order to praise Him (*swt*) as we can praise Him (*swt*) simply for the qualities that He (*swt*) possesses.

¹ Ṭūsī, Muhammad ibn Ḥasan, *Tahdhīb al-Aḥkām* III, (Tehran: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmīyyah, 1390 A.H.) pp. 108 - 111, no. 266.

² Idem, *Miṣbāḥ al-Mutahajjid*, (Qum: Ismā'īl Anṣārī Zanjānī, 1401) pp. 520 - 524.

³ Sayyid ibn Ṭawūs, *Iqbāl al-A'māl*, (Tehran: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmīyyah, 1390 A.H.), pp. 58-61

⁴ Kaf'amī, Ibrāhīm ibn Ali ibn 'Āmilī, *Al-Balad al-'Amīn*, pp. 193-195

⁵ Idem, *Al-Miṣbāḥ*, (Qum: Ismā'īliyyān & Tehran: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmīyyah, 1349 A.H.) pp. 578 - 582

Universal praise of Allah (swt)

According to the Glorious Qur'an, all the angels, all the inhabitants of the heavens and every being in general praises Allah (*swt*) although we may not understand how they do so. Regarding this, Chapter 17, Verse 44 reads:

﴿تُسَبِّحُ لَهُ السَّمَاوَاتُ السَّبْعُ وَالْأَرْضُ وَمَنْ فِيهِنَّ وَإِنْ مِنْ شَيْءٍ إِلَّا يُسَبِّحُ بِحَمْدِهِ وَلَكِنْ لَا تَفْقَهُونَ تَسْبِيحَهُمْ إِنَّهُ كَانَ خَلِيمًا غَفُورًا﴾

“The seven heavens glorify Him, and the earth [too], and whatever is in them. There is not a thing but it celebrates His praise, but you do not understand their glorification. Indeed He is All- Forbearing, All- Forgiving.”

It should be mentioned that by their very nature creatures other than human beings automatically praise Allah (*swt*), but, by virtue of having free will, human beings are asked to do so voluntarily.

According to hadiths, one should start every important task with *bismillah* and praising Him (*swt*) otherwise that task may not be completed.¹

Praising Allah (*swt*) has many effects, one of which is that when we praise Allah (*swt*) for a certain attribute that He (*swt*) possesses, it encourages us and other people to try to acquire something similar. For example, when we praise Allah (*swt*) for His forgiveness or generosity, this motivates us to acquire the same qualities.

Praising Allah (swt)

The following verses are parts of this *du'ā* in which Allah (*swt*) has been praised:

الحمد لله الذي لم يتخذ صاحبه و لا ولدا و لم يكن له شريك في الملك و لم يكن له ولي
من الذل و كبره تكبيرا

“All praise be to Allah, Who has not taken unto Himself a wife, nor a son, and Who has no partner in sovereignty, nor any

¹ See: Ḥurr ‘Āmilī, Muhammad ibn Ḥasan, *Wasā'il al-Shī'a*, vol. 7 (Qum: Mu'assesseh 'Āl al-Bayt li Ih'yā' al-Turāth, 1410 A.H.), p. 170, no. 9032.

protecting friend through dependence. Magnify Him with all magnificence.”¹

Here, we praise Allah (*swt*) for being absolutely free from any need for support or help and so on and for His omnipotence. This gives us hope that He (*swt*) is able to do anything and everything. So when we ask Him something, He (*swt*) is not in need of asking for assistance from a partner or anyone else. Allah (*swt*) has absolute authority and power and is neither obliged nor needs to consult or to ask permission from anyone.

الحمد لله الذى لا مضاد له فى ملكه و لا منازع له فى امره

“All praise be to Allah, Who has no opposition to His rule, nor any challenge to His commands.”²

This is a beautiful and re-assuring quality of Allah (*swt*).

الحمد لله الفاشى فى الخلق امره و حمده الظاهر بالكرم مجده الباسط بالجوود يده

“All praise be to Allah, Whose commandments operate in Creation; His glory is evident through love and kindness. His distinct overflowing generosity is freely available through His unlimited bestowals.”³

Here we praise Allah (*swt*) for His very obvious and manifest command and glory which, by means of a little reflection, can be understood by anyone and because He (*swt*) has opened His hands in generosity to us.

In other places in this *du‘ā*, we praise Allah (*swt*) because thus far He (*swt*) has always given us everything which we have ever needed and He (*swt*) has taught us how to make requests to Him (*swt*) while assuring us that He (*swt*) will answer our calls to Him (*swt*). We can find complete peace with Allah (*swt*), feeling no fear of Him (*swt*), because although we know that we have committed many mistakes and sins, we know we can feel safe and secure regarding Him (*swt*). If we have any problem with or worry about our relationship with Allah (*swt*) it comes from ourselves and our actions and

¹ Tūsī, *Al-Taḥdīb al-Aḥkām* III, p. 110.

² *Ibid.*

³ *Ibid.*

not because, for example, we think that He (*swt*) is angry with us. Allah (*swt*) is always there for us, it is we who turn away from Him (*swt*) or create barriers and distance between Him (*swt*) and ourselves.

Salutations to the Noble Prophet (s)

The second theme which is repeated in this *du'ā* regards salutations being offered to the Noble Prophet (s) and his Household (a) and when such salutations are mentioned, then several qualities of the Noble Prophet (s) are also described. Some of the qualities of the Prophet's Household in general are also briefly mentioned but then when the 12th Imam (a) is described, several of his qualities are referred to. The *du'ā* continues in this spirit of remembrance of the 12th Imam (a) with various requests being made to Allah (*swt*) regarding the last Imam (a) right up until the end of the *du'ā* where the emphasis then shifts to asking Allah (*swt*), because of the Imam (a), to grant us our requests concerning what we need for our community.

Regarding the Noble Prophet (s) we read:

اللهم صل على محمد عبدك ورسولك وامينك و صفيك و حبيبيك و خيرتك من خلقك و
حافظ سرک و مبلغ رسالاتك افضل و احسن و اجمل و اكمل و ازكى و انمى و اطيب و اطهر
و اسنى و اكثر ما صليت و باركت و ترجمت و تحننت و سلمت على احد من عبادك و
انبيائك و رسلك و صفوتك و اهل الكرامه عليك من خلقك

“O Allah, send blessings on Muhammad, Thy servant, messenger, confidant, friend, beloved intimate, mercy unto all the created beings, bearer of Thy sacraments, quotient of Thy messengers, the most superior, the exquisite, the most handsome, the most perfect, the upright, the more prospering, the more pleasant, the thoroughly purified, the sublime; who has more and better blessings, advantages, mercies, affections and salutations than Thou made available to any one of Thy servants, prophets, messengers, friends, and those honoured by Thee from among Thy created beings.”¹

It is interesting to see that the very first quality which has been mentioned here for the Noble Prophet (s) is that he is a servant of Allah (*swt*). This is

¹ *Ibid.*

not some kind of dishonour for him; rather, it is indeed the best quality that he achieved and thus comes before such qualities as Messenger of Allah (*swt*), the one who was trusted, chosen and beloved and the one who protected the secret of Allah (*swt*) and delivered His message. Then the unique characteristics of this salutation are listed. It is impossible to imagine any better form of salutation more beautiful and complete than “*the most superior, the exquisite, the most handsome, the most perfect, the upright, the more prospering, the more pleasant, the thoroughly purified, the sublime.*”

According to this part of the *du‘ā*, salutations can increase and expand. When we send *ṣalawāt* (salutations) or *salām* (peace) to the Noble Prophet (s) and our Imams (a), we do not send our salutations or peace directly but instead we ask Allah (*swt*) Himself to send them these salutations and peace. Indeed *salām* is a prayer and so we are asking Allah (*swt*) to send peace to that person.

Thus, we say:

اللهم صل على محمد و آل محمد

“O Allah! Send salutations to Muhammad (s) and his Household.”

And so when we ask Allah (*swt*) Himself to send salutations, such salutations are not limited to the time when we say them: rather, we can ask Allah (*swt*) to send salutations all the time. Therefore, we read in one of the *ziyārāt* for Imam Husayn (a):

عليك مني سلام الله ابدًا ما بقيت و بقي الليل و النهار

“Be with you, from me, the peace of Allah (*swt*) as long as I live and (even if I am not alive) as long as there is day and night.”¹

So this means that we request Allah (*swt*) to send His peace to Imam Husayn (a) until the end of time. So, again we have this beautiful concept that the *salām* does not remain in the same state but grows and becomes better and better.

¹ Tūsī, *Miṣbāh al-Mutahajjid*, p. 776.

Salutations to the Household of the Prophet (s)

In the continuation of the *du'ā*, we list the names of the members of the Household of the Prophet (s) one by one and ask Allah (*swt*) to send salutations on them:

اللهم و صل على امير المؤمنين و وصى رسول رب العالمين عبدك و وليك و اخى رسولك و
حجتك على خلقك و آيتك الكبرى و النبا العظيم و صل على الصديقه الطاهره فاطمه سيده
نساء العالمين و صل على سبطى الهدى و امامى الرحمه الحسن و الحسين سيدى شباب اهل
الجنه و صل على ائمه المسلمين على بن الحسين و محمد بن على و جعفر بن محمد و موسى بن
جعفر و على بن موسى و محمد بن على و على بن محمد و الحسن بن على و الخلف الهادى
المهدى حججك على خلقك و امنائك فى بلادك صلوه كثيره دائمه

“O Allah send blessings on 'Ali the Leader of the Faithful, the successor to the Messenger of the Lord of the worlds, Thy servant, Thy beloved representative, brother of Thy Messenger, Thy decisive argument over mankind, Thy most important sign, the great news from Thee. O Allah, send blessings on the truthful pure Fatima, the chosen leader of the women of the worlds. O Allah, send blessings on the sons of 'the mercy unto the worlds', the leaders and guides, the Imams al-Hasan and al-Husayn, the leaders of the dwellers of paradise. O Allah, send blessings on the leaders of the Muslims, 'Ali ibn al-Husayn, Muhammad ibn 'Ali, Ja'far ibn Muhammad, Musa ibn Ja'far, 'Ali ibn Musa, Muhammad ibn 'Ali, 'Ali ibn Muhammad, al-Hasan ibn 'Ali, and his son, the rightly guided guide, Thy decisive argument over Thy servants, Thy trustworthy confidant on Thy earth; blessings, numerous, and forever.”¹

Special salutations to Imam Mahdi (a)

However, the salutations to Imam Mahdi (a), the Imam of our time, are not limited to simple salutations but instead are expanded on in several phrases and then attention is focused on the last Imam until the end of the *du'ā*. Firstly we read:

¹ Tūsī, *Al-Tahdhīb al-Aḥkām*, vol. 3 , p 110.

"اللهم صل على ولى امرک القائم المومل و العدل المنتظر و حفه بملائکتک المقربين و ايده بروح القدس يا رب العالمين"

"O Allah, send blessings on the custodian of thy commandments, the vigilant guardian, the reliable patron, the awaited justice, surrounded by Thy favourite angels, assisted by the Holy Spirit. O Lord of the worlds."¹

In this passage we ask Allah (*swt*) to support our Imam (a) with the Holy Spirit. The concept of the Holy Spirit (*Rūḥ al-Qudus*) is very important, especially for Shi'a Muslims. According to the Glorious Qur'an and various narrations, one of the jobs of the Holy Spirit is to support and guide good people. For example, the Qur'an says that the Holy Spirit supported Prophet Jesus (s) and thus we read in Chapter 5, Verse 110:

﴿إِذْ قَالَ اللَّهُ يَا عِيسَى ابْنَ مَرْيَمَ ادْكُرْ نِعْمَتِي عَلَيْكَ وَ عَلَىٰ وَالِدَتِكَ إِذْ أَيَّدْتُكَ بِرُوحِ الْقُدُسِ﴾

"When Allah will say, O Jesus son of Mary, remember My blessing upon you and upon your mother, when I strengthened you with the Holy Spirit."

If we are good and pious people, we too can hope that Allah (*swt*) will support us and one of the ways in which He (*swt*) does this is to ask the Holy Spirit to help us.

It should be mentioned that whilst Sunni scholars normally identify the Holy Spirit with the archangel Gabriel, Shi'a Muslims, as taught by the Holy Imams (a), hold that the Holy Spirit is a creature at a higher level than Gabriel. Abu Baṣīr, a great companion of Imam Ṣādiq (a), says:

سالت ابا عبد الله (ع) عن قول الله عزوجل يسفلونك عن الروح قل الروح من امر ربي قال خلق اعظم من جبرائيل و ميكائيل

"I asked Imam Ṣādiq (a) about the verse 'They question you concerning the Spirit. Say, 'The Spirit is of the command of my

¹ *Ibid.*

Lord' (17:58).¹ He responded that the Spirit is a creature greater than Gabriel and Michael."¹

As confirmation of the fact that the Holy Spirit is not the same as Gabriel, one may refer to Verse 4 of Chapter 97 of the Glorious Qur'an which reads:

﴿تَنْزِيلُ الْمَلَائِكَةِ وَ الرُّوحِ فِيهَا بِإِذْنِ رَبِّهِمْ مِنْ كُلِّ أَمْرٍ﴾

"In it the angels and the Spirit descend, by the leave of their Lord, with every command."

This verse explains that on the night of *Qadr*, the Holy Spirit descends along with the angels. This suggests that the Holy Spirit is different from the angels which include Gabriel as the Archangel.

In the continuation of *Du'ā al-Iftitāh*, we make further requests to Allah (*swt*) regarding Imam Mahdi (a):

اللهم اجعله الداعي الى كتابك و القائم بدينك استخلفه في الارض كما استخلفت الذين من قبله مكن له دينه الذى ارتضيته له ابدله من بعد خوفه امانا يعبدك لا يشرك بك شيئا

"O Allah, send him to call the people unto Thy Book for establishing Thy religion, and make him succeed in the earth, as Thou caused those who were before him to succeed, and establish for him his faith which Thou has approved for him, and give him in exchange safety after fear. He serves Thee. He ascribes nothing as partner unto Thee."²

According to our narrations, when the last Imam (a) rises, people will finally experience peace and be able to worship Allah (*swt*) without any fear. This indicates that during the time leading up to the rising of the Imam (a), the fear felt by religious people, due to a lack of religious freedom and an inability to practice their faith without restraint or humiliation, will continue more or less right up until the time of the rising of Imam Mahdi (a) when it will end at last. So, we should ask Allah (*swt*) to support and help the Imam (a) and make his victory easy.

¹ Kulayni, Muhammad ibn Ya'qūb, *Uṣūl Al-Kāfi*, vol. 1 (Tehran: Dār al-Kutub al-Islāmīyah, 1388 A.H.) p. 273, no. 3.

² Ṭūsī, *Al-Taḥdhīb al-Aḥkām*, vol. 3 pp. 110-111

Then we address Allah (*swt*) saying:

"اللهم انا نرغب اليك في دوله كريمه تعز بها الاسلام و اهله و تذل بها النفاق و اهله و تجعلنا فيها من الدعاه الى طاعتك و القاده الى سبيلك و ترزقنا بها كرامه الدنيا و الآخرة"
 "O Allah, we ardently desire that in [his] kind, just, and fair era, Thou should reactivate Islam and stimulate its followers, and humble and humiliate the hypocrites and their double-dealing, and include us among those who invite people unto Thy obedience, and lead them to Thy approved path, and give us the good of this world and the world to come."¹

Here we ask Allah (*swt*) for the establishment of the honourable government of Imam Mahdi (a) under which people of faith would be honoured and hypocrites would be dishonoured; we ask Allah (*swt*) to make us of those people who invite others towards Him (*swt*) and we ask to be given respect in this world and in the Hereafter.

Then we make a very beautiful and important request to Allah (*swt*) for ourselves:

اللهم ما عرفتنا من الحق فحملناه و ما قصرنا عنه فبلغناه
 "O Allah, enable us to bear and uphold that which You have made known to us of the truth, and let us be fully aware of that which we fall short of knowing."²

This concept of "bearing" is very important. Regarding this, Chapter 62, Verse 5 reads:

﴿مَثَلُ الَّذِينَ حُمِّلُوا التَّوْرَةَ ثُمَّ لَمْ يَحْمِلُوهَا كَمَثَلِ الْحِمَارِ يَحْمِلُ أَسْفَارًا بِئْسَ مَثَلُ الْقَوْمِ الَّذِينَ كَذَّبُوا
 بِآيَاتِ اللَّهِ وَاللَّهُ لَا يَهْدِي الْقَوْمَ الظَّالِمِينَ﴾

"The example of those who were charged with the Torah, then failed to carry it, is that of an ass carrying books. Evil is the example of the people who deny Allah's signs, and Allah does not guide the wrongdoing lot."

¹ *Ibid*, p. 111

² *Ibid*.

Thus, someone may be given a divine book but it does not mean that they will necessarily be able to ‘bear’ it, meaning they may not be able to take it on board. Therefore, it is important to carry and uphold the truth that we know, to take it on board, and whosoever is able to do this enjoys a high position. Furthermore, we ask Allah (*swt*) to inform us about the parts of the truth of which we are unaware. It is surely enough for us if this part of the *du‘ā* is answered, because we will then know the truth about which we were previously unaware and we will be able to commit ourselves to and implement the truth which we already do know. It would seem that these are actually the only two things which we really need because in Islam everything is facilitated by commitment to the truth and so if we are committed to the truth then everything else will be sorted out.

Then, we ask Allah (*swt*) to bless us and fulfill our needs and for this we constantly remember Imam Mahdi (a) and use him as a mediator between ourselves and Allah (*swt*). Thus, we ask Him (*swt*) to give us the following blessings because of Imam Mahdi (a):

اللهم المم به شعشنا و اشعب به صدعنا و ارتق به فتقنا و كثر به قلتنا و اعزز به ذلتنا و اغن به
عائلنا و اقض به عن مغرمنا و اجر به فقرنا و سد به خلتننا و يسر به عسرنا و بيض به وجوهنا
و فك به اسرنا و انجح به طلبتنا و انجز به مواعيدنا و استجب به دعوتنا و اعطنا به سولنا و
بلغنا به من الدنيا و الاخره آمالنا و اعطنا به فوق رغبتنا يا خير المسؤولين و اوسع المعطين
“O Allah, through him, set in order our disorder, gather and
unite our flock, stitch together our sundered separation; increase
our numbers, lift us up from our degradation; turn our want
and poverty into sufficiency, free us from our misery, pull us
out from our debts, help us to get out of the ditch of cares and
sorrows, fill the gap created by confusion amongst us, let our
difficulties be easy to deal with, brighten our faces, free our
prisoners, let our efforts succeed well and secure success, fulfill
our promises, give answers to our prayers, listen to our requests,
cause us to obtain the good of this world and the hereafter, give
us much and more than our expectations, O the Best of givers
and bestowers.”¹

¹ *Ibid.*

One of the requests we make is for unity to be established amongst us because of Imam Mahdi (a). Indeed, the Imam (a) comes to unite and unify not only the Shi'a but all people of goodwill. Towards the end of the *du'ā*, we complain to Allah (*swt*) saying:

"اللهم انا نشكو اليك فقد نبينا صلواتك عليه و آله و غيبه و لينا و كثره عدونا و قله عددنا و
شده الفتن بنا و تظاهر الزمان علينا"

"O Allah, we feel uneasy about and are disturbed by the departure of our Prophet, Thy blessings be on him and on his family, the absence of our guardian (i.e. master), too many enemies, our numerical scarcity, widespread disorder, and the vicissitudes of time."¹

Finally we end the *du'ā* with some further requests related to the above-mentioned complaints:

اللهم فصل على محمد و آله و اعنا على ذلك بفتح منك تعجله و بضر تكشفه و نصر تعزه و
سلطان حق تظهره و رحمه منك تجلناها و عافيه منك تلبسناها برحمتك يا ارحم الراحمين

"So send blessings on Muhammad and on his family, and help us to overcome this state of affairs at once. Disperse the ominous clouds hanging over our heads, lend a helping hand to achieve success, bring in the rule of justice and fair play, make us bright, free from grief; and take care of us, through Thy mercy, O most Merciful."²

Thus, *Du'ā al-Ifitāh* opens with praising Allah (*swt*) and by the means of such praises and after making some sort of preparations in our heart by asking Allah (*swt*) to send salutations to the Noble Prophet (s), and the Ahl al-Bayt (a), we then offer some prayers for assistance for our last Imam (a) in his mission. Finally we reach a level at which we feel that we can make our requests to Allah (*swt*) for ourselves and our community through His mercy.

¹ *Ibid.*

² *Ibid.*