DU‘A (SUPPLICATION) – THE QUR’ANIC CONCEPT
By Shaikh Abdool Aziz Shaikh

In the comprehension of the Qur’an, through reflection and pondering and intellect and prudence; one would discover that its truths could never be exhausted; rather it can be said that as man progresses on and on, its further reaches (the one in being searched for) keeps moving farther away.

During this search for the understanding of the great book, a multitude of issues confront man, whereupon man has to reflect for years on end and only then he is able to fully understand them. One of such points is that of Du‘a or supplication. Out of the many verses that appear in the Qur’an on Du‘a, the following verse of surah Al-Baqara Verse 186 has special significance on the subject and in clearing the webs of mystique and understanding. It is stated that:-

“(O Rasool!) When My devotees ask you about Me, tell them that I am close to them at all times. (This means that) when anyone calls upon Me, I listen to the call of the suppliant, to lead him to the right path, (My Guidance that is preserved in the Quran, answers his call) . Therefore, tell them that the way to attain the nearness of Allah is to respond to My (Allah’s) call (to My Laws fully), believing implicitly in their validity (Refer 7/56; 8/24; 32/15-16; 40/60; 42/26). By following these Laws they will be able to walk firmly upon the right path of life.”

It is also critical to note that for Allah to respond to a supplication, the invoker is required to also respond to the call of Allah, have Eeman and righteousness.

The difficulty in comprehending this exposition and translation is the phrase that "I accept the invocations of the supplicatory when he invokes me"; but this kind of Du‘a is inclusive of personal experiences and day to day needs that the supplicators put forward as hundreds, thousands and hundreds of thousands invocations, which are not responded to directly. The claim of Qur’an that Allah answers everybody’s supplication is not comprehensible if we test it in the daily lives of people. Whatever has been said in reply to this objection by scholars and Mullahs, has (more or less) all been tested against facts without emotion, but did not satisfy the required answers. It is often stated that Allah, no doubt, accepts and responds to everybody’s supplication, but it is not necessary that things should happen the way the invoker desires; but that Allah does what is better for the invoker. And further, if after supplicating, the desired result is not attained, then the status quo is decided by Allah to be the best position for the invoker. Besides this argument being very weak, it also goes against another verse of the Quran, in which it is said that, Surah 27 Verse 62/63:

62 Or, Who answers the distressed one when he calls upon Him and removes the evil, and will make you successors in the earth? Is there a god with Allah? Little is it that you mind!
Then ask them, “Who is it that responds to the cries of anguish and distress of the oppressed and helpless people when they ask for assistance from Him. He replies to their call (and tells them that the solution to their problems lies with Him). And when they work according to it, He removes their difficulties and (thus) awards them the state and the authority in the land.” (Refer 24:54-55).

Could there be any law other than the Divine Law that can do all this? However, there are very few indeed, who keep this principle in sight.

Then ask them, “Who is it that guides you (with the help of the shining stars) when you travel in the darkness of night, on land and the sea? (And there is never any mistake in it)”.

“And who sends forth the winds as glad tidings before the rain come down, which brings with it the means of nourishment? Could there be any power other than Allah, whose Law is doing all this? Does this not make it clear that He is beyond any other power ascribing a share in His authority?”

ONE COMPREHENSION!

After pondering and reflecting, one can conclude that in all the cases, invoking, Allah means, “asking for guidance towards the correct course; sometime man reaches cross-roads where he cannot comprehend which way he should proceed to get to the desired process. This confusion is extremely perturbing for him and he often takes to a wrong direction and suffers the consequential loss. If on this crossroad he is guided to the correct direction, his perplexities are removed. Qur’an has taught that at every crossroad man should seek guidance from Allah, that is, turn to His Book. It (the Qur’an) will answer all the required queries and guide one to the right course. This is what is meant by Allah’s being close-by and answering every distressed person.

The closeness to Allah is further illustrated in Surah 50 Verse 16:

16 And certainly We created man, and We know what his mind suggests to him — and We are nearer to him than his life-vein.

This comprehension and understanding would have sufficed until another verse of the Qur’an turned one’s sight to a different understanding.

After the Hijrah, migration of the Nabi AS, and the establishment of the Islamic State in Medina and the Muslims there were protected from all sorts of vexations that they had endured during their Meccan life, but the Muslims who were still entrapped in Meccah continued to suffer torments and oppression and abuse at the hands of their adversaries, the Meccan Kuffar, there. These helpless, oppressed, and weak people were invoking Allah, and entreating him to help them and somehow protect them from their afflictions. It was, in no way, difficult for Allah to settle their problems Himself (directly), but He did not do this. Listen! attentively to what He did say to the Muslims of Medina, entreating, as stated in Surah 4 Verse 75:
War in the cause of Allah is for the help of oppressed people. Allah helps oppressed people through human agency and not directly. This is illustrated by the following: In Al-Madina, the Momineen had established their own state but those who could not leave Makkah were greatly oppressed. They cried to Allah for help and Allah said to the Momineen in Al-Madina:

“What has happened to you that you do not fight in the cause of Allah? Do you not hear the cries of the helpless men, women, and children in Makkah who entreat Allah: “O our Rabb! Rescue us from this city whose inhabitants are oppressors. Send us someone who will protect and defend us.” O Muslims of Medina! What has happened to you that you do not rise to fight in the Divine cause? Do you not hear the cries or the oppressed and powerless men, women and children (in Makkah) who entreat us, O our Sustainer! Rescue us from of this city, whose inhabitants are oppressors. Send us someone who will protect and defend us.”

SECOND COMPREHENSION!

On paying attention to the above explanation, one observes that the oppressed and helpless people of Meccah were entreating Allah, and Allah is telling Muslims of Medina, "Do you not hear the cries of those people, why do you not reach out to help them"! From this the meaning of Du'a, invoking Allah for help, supplicating Him, does not result in Allah helping the invoker directly (Himself); He helps them through the hands of those of His devotees who, consider helping the oppressed as their obligation as Mu'mins and this fact dawned on another aspect of the acceptance of supplication, and its support from other verses of the Qur'an also comes to the fore.

It was from the above comprehensions that one is able to conclude the fact that the Divine Law remains functional in the human world also, exactly in the same manner as it functions in the outer universe; but in the human world its operative speed or the speed of producing results of human deeds is very slow or according to a process. One should be cognisance that a day of Allah’s processes is beyond the time that is experienced by man (the time in the Universe is stated in the Qur’an as one thousand years (Surah 32:5), or rather fifty thousand years of the reckoning (Surah 70:4 of man could be one day in the reckoning of Allah). However, when any group of human beings rise to enforce the Divine Laws in human society, the laws of Allah compile the results according to human reckoning (of time) and thus the revolution (change) which would be according to the Divine speed, to manifest often hundreds of years, comes to fruition in days at the hands of man. From this account, the group of Momineen (Jamaat) becomes associates of Allah (but inferior or subordinate partners the superior partner, in the words of the revered Nabi AS always remains Allah). (Not partners or associates as in Shirk)

The process of acceptance of the invocation of the oppressed people who had been entreating Allah, had resulted in the battle of Badar; In which field, the forces of the Mujahideen formed their ranks against their adversaries, armed to help the oppressed people of Mecca) or, to put it in other words, to help all the oppressed people of the globe by extension and example). Allah, in clarifying this unique (incomparable) striving, has stated that as explained in Surah 8 Verse 17:
“You had not slain your enemies but indeed it was Allah who slew them because you were fighting in His cause. When you sent forth a shaft of arrow it was not you who did it but Allah (Allah’s programme in the world of human beings is carried out through them (Refer Surah 9/14, and Surah 22/40)) By this success Allah meant to bestow a special favour upon the Momineen, He hears and knows all (and Strengthens through means that man cannot understand—Adrenalin). By His strategy He also weakened the opposing K’afireen (through fear and confusion).”

ALLAH’S ARROWS AND YOUR ARCHES!

On reflection on that day of Badr, it was the Mujahideen who were striking with their swords and the arrows were also being shot from their arches, but Allah has attributed all this to Himself. This explains that the responsibilities that Allah has taken upon Himself in the human world are accomplished at the hands of the humans, who undertake their responsibilities as their own account.

Anyhow, this is the sum and the substance, which would be understood through pondering over the Qur’an. However, with all this, one still needs to seek supporting evidence for this import from the first period (of Islam) and this is found in the assertion of Umar Farooq the Great RA; the same meaning and in such wonderfully eloquent manner which could have never been conceived by anyone else.

OMAR’S RA REMARKABLE ASSERTION!

When he despatched the Islamic army under command of Saad-bin-Abi-Waqas, he travelled with the army to bid them farewell up to Aawas. He delivered his address there to the army and said (translated from “tantawi”):

"O people Remember! I stand between you and Allah but nobody stands between me and Allah; Allah has given me the responsibility to prevent your supplications from reaching Him; so let me know of your complaints and needs; and if any cannot bring their needs directly to me, he should deliver the same to the people who have direct access to me. I shall deliver the rights (of every claimant) to him without causing any inconvenience to that person.”

This recorded incident gives substance to all that has been said before in this paper and should brighten the vision of all who search for the Truth, and should pay tribute to this great hero of Islam, who had elevated himself to such a deep comprehension of the Qur’an by the education and nurture imparted by the Nabi AS. These were the very Momineen about whom Allah Himself had said in Surah 33 Verse 43:

43 He it is Who sends blessings on you, and (so do) His angels, that He may bring you forth out of darkness into light. And He is ever Merciful to the believers.

44 Their salutation on the day they meet Him will be, Peace! and He has prepared for them an honourable reward.

(The true meaning of Salawaat or Durood)
“If you continue doing this then all the blessings of the Divine Laws, along with the help and assistance of all the heavenly forces, will remain with you (See also Surah 33 Verse 56). You will continue being showered by their blessings and greetings. The practical result of this will be that He will take you out of all kinds of darkness into the bright light (Refer Surah 14 Verse 1; and Surah 14:5) and continue developing your potentialities (Surah 2:155 –157; Surah 9:103).”

Try to reflect on the words of Umar RA, once again! "Allah has held me responsible to prevent your supplications from reaching Him."

And now enjoy the subtle manner, in which such a profound reality has been explained. It is obvious, that man entreats Allah only when any of his needs are not fulfilled; It is the responsibility of the Head of an Islamic State or the Muslim Community, to ensure that no need of anyone remains unsatisfied or unfulfilled; if the leader comes to know that a need of so and so person awaits being satisfied, he should make immediate arrangements to ensure its fulfilment and prevent his supplication from reaching Allah, then and there.

And this point should also be borne in mind that if a person has to invoke Allah for any of his needs, it will in fact, be an indictment against the Head of state or the Muslim Community that has failed in fulfilling his obligation. This is exactly what was meant by Omar's assertion that, "I shall not allow such circumstances to be created wherein any person has to complain to Allah against me."

This was the object of establishing the Islamic state and such were the responsibilities of its Chief Executive. The Qur'anic Social Order is indispensable for fulfilment of the necessities of the citizens. Allah does not directly solve the human problems Himself; He achieves this through the system, which comes to existance to enforce His commands on His behalf. The brand of the Chief Executive of this Socio-Economic System becomes the hand and responsibilities of Allah (Refer Surah 48 Verse 10). As Ghalib States:
"The hand of the Momin is, in fact, Allah's hand; pre-dominant, creative, revealing and adroit".

The above factors also unveil the reason why our everyday supplication for the removal of our afflictions and difficulties do not meet Divine Approbation; they are not addressed directly (by Allah), they are accepted through the medium of those who are in proximity with Allah (His Laws), but these favourites of Allah are not found in monasteries and tombs, they are found in the chambers of authority raised on the Divine injunctions contained in the Qur'an. These people are not the claimants of spiritualism and divine grandeur of being "Allah's shadow on earth".

They are the ones who establish a social order under the brilliance of the Divine Injunctions and values; wherein no single necessitous person remains deprived of his needs. They do not even take any credit for it but state as in Surah 76 Verse 9:

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And say to the people for whom they do all this, "We do not do all this as a favour to you. No, not at all! We do not expect anything in return; not even a word of appreciation. In fact, we are doing our duty; and our interest lies only in this. Accordingly, not only are our 'selves' nourished and developed, even the Divine attributes grow in our personalities. This is the objective of human life." Leave aside any recompense (for what we do for you) we are not even desirous of any thanks from you!
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FURTHER REFERENCES IN THE QUR’AN TO SUBSTANTIATE ABOVE ARGUMENTS

1. THE DU’A IN SURAH FATEH AND THE RESPONSE

“O Allah! make that path clearly apparent to us which would lead us, without fear and danger, to our destination.” This is the first imploration, which is responded to by Allah in Surah 2 Verse 2:

(This Book shows to the) Muttaqeen the path leading to the ultimate destination prescribed for humanity.

The Muttaqeen are those who wish to avoid pitfalls of the wrong path, who believe in the unseen (which becomes comprehensible through reflection on the Qur’an), and are confident that the right path will lead to the destination even though the former may be obscured initially.

2. LAWS OF THE QUR’AN ARE UNCHANGEABLE

Surah 6 Verse 34 :  لا مِنَّا إِلَّا الْحَكِيمُ الْخَبِيرُ Nothing can change the Laws of Allah.

Surah 30 Verse 30 :  يَكُونُ لعبةُ اللَّهِ عَلَيْهِمُ الشَّيَاتُ Allah’s process in creation never changes.

Surah 17 Verse 77 :  وَكُلُّ نَفْسٍ تَتَّبَعُ لَسْتُمْ لَهَا نَذِيرًا You will not find a change in the workings of our Laws.

Surah 35 Verse 43 :  وَكُلُّ نَفْسٍ تَتَّبَعُ لَسْتُمْ لَهَا نَذِيرًا So you can never find a change in the working of the Divine Laws.

Surah 3 Verse 127 :  لَا تَنفَعُونَ مِنَ الْأَمْرِ إِلَّا مَاتًا (Even a Nabi) is not given any authority to change the Laws of Allah or consequences of the Laws.

3. CONSEQUENCES OF ACTIONS ARE SET – MUKAFAT AMAL - (Illat & Ma’loom)

This word has not been used as such in the Holy Quran, but extensively used in the exposition and understanding the law of God and the Holy Quran. Its literal meaning is to reward and recompense for one's deeds. This concept is explained hereunder.

The entire system of Deen (way of life according to Quran) is based on the principles of the law of Mukafat: in fact, the entire universe revolves around this system. Allah has laid down an unalterable dictum: every action in this universe has a previously decided or determined effect. (as opposed to taqdeer, destiny, Karma etc). This is Mukafat.

For instance, if a kettle full of water were heated, the water at a certain degree of temperature would get warm, start boiling and then turn into vapour. Alternatively, if a human being takes poison he would die. This law of Allah prevalent in the universe does not change (48/23, 17/77, 35/43).
It is normally argued that Allah is All Powerful and the above concept contradicts His Absolute Authority. This contention is not correct. The restriction that the law made by Allah is not changeable is imposed by Him voluntarily upon Himself and not by any outside authority and secondly when He was making this law, there was no compulsion on Him. The whole beauty and the force of this law lie in its permanence and changelessness. The authority which changes the law every now and then, or as and when it desires, particularly for the sake or benefit of either his own self or others is most undependable and unstable. Allah says that His "promise" is absolutely true (28/13), and He would never back out of it (3/8).

Human life has two aspects: the physical and the spiritual. The spiritual side is one that is more than physical, which may be called his "Self."

The physical side is governed by physical laws. In this respect, he is more or less at par with animals, i.e., eating, sleeping, falling sick, procreating and ultimately dying. His knowledge or intention makes no difference in this respect. For instance, if a person puts his finger in the fire, it would get burnt whether he puts it knowingly or unintentionally. The fire has this effect equally on rich, poor, black or white, minor or major, insane or highly intelligent, Momin or Kafir. Again, it is not possible that one can get away from this pain by giving some bribe or by bringing some recommendation of a higher authority, nor is it possible that he can transfer the pain to someone else. However, Almighty Allah, Who has made this law, has also devised ways and means to get rid of the pain by using a particular ointment or medicine.

The other aspect of physical life is that since man is a social animal, the society has to frame certain laws to regulate his conduct. This is done so that there is peace and order in the society, and the society has the right to punish whoever violates the law. It is, however, possible that at times the culprit is not identified, or even after identification escapes law on account of insufficient evidence or undue influence, and continues enjoying the benefits of ill-gotten wealth.

The spiritual aspect of every human being is a "Personality" or a "Self" which is directly and indirectly affected by all his actions. He cannot simply get away by false pretence or clever deed. For this, no police prosecutor or court is required to investigate, prove or announce punishment. The deeds affect his "Self" automatically and this effect is not washed away even by his death - the "Self" carries it over to the life Hereafter. Noble deeds strengthen and misdeeds weaken or disintegrate it and accordingly he finds his positions in the life Hereafter.
Another difference between the physical and the spiritual life is that in physical life a person is held responsible for violating a law unknowingly or even unintentionally, but in the spiritual life, his “Self” will not be affected if he –

1. has no knowledge of the law or the Divine Law (6/131) was not conveyed to him.

2. is minor or insane and not capable of understanding.

3. is forced to do a thing.

(The above exceptions are also applicable in the criminal law of almost all the countries in the world). In short the law of Mukaf’at is that:-
1. Every human action:
   a. affects his “Self” (6/164).

   b. is being recorded every second by Malaika (heavenly forces) and the record is kept up-to date (82/10-11-12).

2. The Self is even affected by hidden and unfulfilled desires or intentions (40:19).

3. Only Allah the Almighty knows how much credit or discredit is to be given to a particular act. (53/32).

4. On the Day of Judgement all the actions would be weighed. Those whose balance of good and constructive deeds tilts in their favour (is heavier) are the successful ones, but those whose balance goes against them (is lighter) are the ones who have harmed themselves by their wilful rejection of Allah’s Message (7/8-9).
5. No one would be able to help any other, nor any intercession is allowed (2/123).

6. No action would go unrewarded or unpunished (3/25).

7. Everyone would get reward or punishment of his own deeds. (7/147, 52/16, 37/39, 45/28).

8. Absolute and full justice would be done, and no one would be dealt with unjustly (16/111, 40/17, 39/70).

9. No one would be able to transfer his good or bad deeds to others - he would himself get the reward or the punishment as the case may be (2/286, 6/105, 6/165, 10/108, 17/7, 17/15, 27/40, 27/92, 29/6, 31/12, 35/18, 39/41, 45/15).
10. And the most important verse is that even the Rasool-Allah (peace be upon him) the most perfect of all the human beings, was asked to proclaim, "Say, surely I fear, if I disobey my Rabb, the chastisement of a grievous day" (6/15-10/15/39/13).

So the Jannah in this world and Hereafter is earned as a result of good deeds, not as alms or gift or on the recommendations of others (7/43, 29/158, 32/17, 70/38-39).
This is the law of Mukafat. Out of dust rose Adam, and out of good deeds would rise the man for the world Hereafter.

Please attempt to read all the above Quranic references not produced above.

5. SUPPLICATION MUST ACCOMPANY INTENTION AND ACTION

Allah does not change the condition of any nation until they change what is within themselves: Surah 13 Verse 11:

إِنَّ اللَّهَ لَا يَتَغَيَّبُ عَلَيْهِمْ مَا يَقْرَأُونَ وَمَا يَفْقَهُونَ

and in Surah 53 Verse 39:

39 And that man can have nothing but what he strives for:

وَأَنَّ لَا تَسْتَرْ فِي الْأَلْسِنَاتِ إِلاَّ مَا صَنَعَهُ

6 AMBIA AS ARE SUBJECT TO THE SAME CONDITIONS

It is laid down in Surah 2 Verse 186 and Mukafate Amal.

a) Nuh AS was asked by Allah to let his son perish as he rebelled against the Laws of Allah. Also refer Surah 9:

45 And Noah cried to his Lord and said: My Lord, surely my son is of my family, and Thy promise is true, and Thou art the Justest of the judges.

46 He said: O Noah, he is not of thy family: he is (an embodiment of) unrighteous conduct. So ask not of Me that of which thou hast no knowledge. I admonish thee lest thou be of the ignorant.

b) Even Nabi Muhammad AS was told that his Du’a would not be acceptable for the mushriks. Surah 9 Verse 80:

80 Ask forgiveness for them or ask not forgiveness for them. Even if thou ask forgiveness for them seventy times, Allah will not forgive them. This is because they disbelieve in Allah and His Messenger. And Allah guides not the transgressing people.

c) Ambia AS (Ebrahim) are not allowed to seek forgiveness for parents, Surah 9:
In conclusion one should consider a couplet by Allama Iqbal:

Teri Dua se Qaza to badal nahi sakti  
Your dua may not be able to change the consequences of your action,

Magar he us se mumkin ke tu badal jaye.  
But it is quite possible that it could change you.

Refer Dua of Musa and Haroon AS: Surah 10 Verse 76;

One Additional Reference Surah 8 Verse 24

(24) O you who believe, respond to Allāh and His Messenger, when he calls you to that which gives you life. And know that Allāh comes in between a man and his heart, and that to Him you will be gathered.

(24) O Jama’at-ul-Momineen respond to the call of the Divine Order when it beckons you to that which will give you life. Remember that it requires great courage and strength to respond to the call and you must be wary of those emotions which weaken your resolve. Bear in mind that the results of all your actions which are based upon emotions will be determined according to the law of Mukaf’at.