



Answering Prayers

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“In the Name of Allah, Most Gracious, Most Merciful”

Introduction

Why is it that sometimes our prayers seem unanswered? Why do we experience delays in receiving what we ask for? And why, at times, does the outcome differ from what we had hoped?

For years, I prayed to own a large house, yet that prayer appears to remain unanswered. I prayed for a prestigious, high-paying job at a renowned company, but instead, I was offered a position elsewhere. These are just a few examples, but many of us can relate to similar experiences.

This naturally leads us to wonder: *Do prayers really work?* Since Allah (SWT) already knows everything, including the deepest desires of our hearts, then why do we need to pray at all?

Such questions are not uncommon. They arise in moments of reflection and even doubt. Yet, the Holy Qur'an reminds us in numerous verses that Allah (SWT) indeed responds to our prayers. Sometimes the answer comes in ways we do not expect, sometimes it is delayed for reasons beyond our understanding, and sometimes it is granted in a form that is ultimately better for us.

Prayer is not merely about asking—it is about connecting. It is an act of humility, a recognition of our dependence on Allah (SWT), and a means of strengthening our faith. Even when the outcome is different from what we envisioned, prayer shapes our hearts, aligns our will with His wisdom, and reminds us that His plan is always greater than ours.

وَإِذَا سَأَلَكَ عِبَادِي عَنِّي فَإِنِّي قَرِيبٌ أُجِيبُ دَعْوَةَ الدَّاعِ إِذَا دَعَانِ فَلْيَسْتَجِيبُوا لِي وَلْيُؤْمِنُوا بِي لَعَلَّهُمْ يَرْشُدُونَ

And when My worshipers ask you about Me, say:

I Am truly near, and I answer the prayer of the one who prays to me when he calls on Me.

So, they must answer My call affirmatively and believe in Me

so that they may find the right way. 2:186

Imam Ali ibn Abi Talib (AS), known as the “**Gate of Knowledge**”, offers a profound explanation of how prayers are answered in his renowned Letter 31. This timeless letter, addressed to his son Imam Hassan (AS), stands as an unparalleled educational guide for both individuals and society.

Within its extensive passages, Imam Ali (AS) imparts wisdom, recommendations, and insights firmly rooted in the Holy Qur'an. Scholars well-versed in Arabic and Islamic texts unanimously affirm that such a letter could only have come from the Imam himself, given its depth, eloquence, and divine resonance.

What makes Letter 31 extraordinary is its universality—the Imam speaks not only to his son but to all of humanity across generations. Having been nurtured and taught directly by Prophet Muhammad (PBUH), purified by Allah (SWT) as affirmed in Verse 33:33, and endowed with divine knowledge as the “*Representative of Allah*” on Earth, Imam Ali (AS) shares guidance that transcends time. His words illuminate the path of faith, reminding us that prayer is both a means of supplication and a bridge to understanding Allah's Wisdom.

The following is not an exact translation, but it reflects the substance of Dr. Muhammad Ansari's commentary of Letter 31.

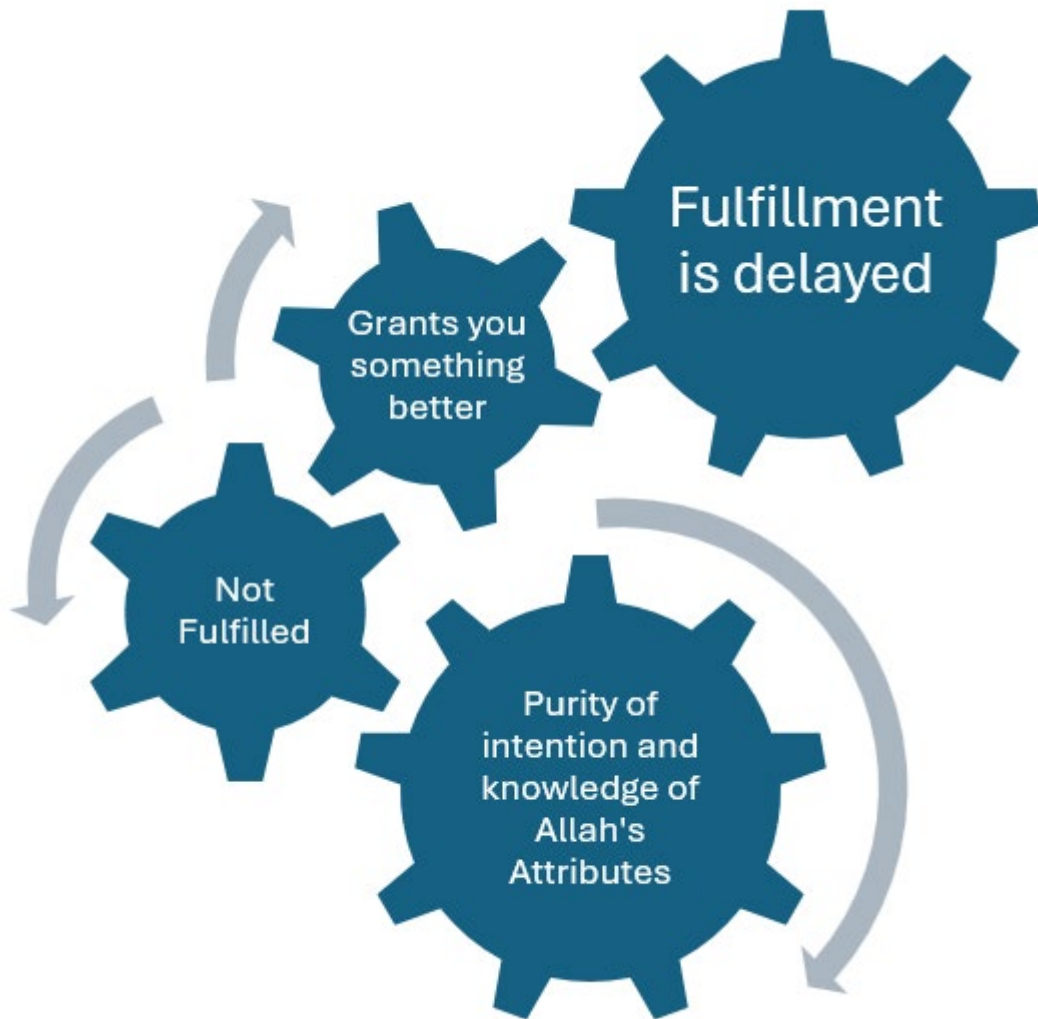
What a profound blessing it is that Allah (SWT) has granted us the privilege to call upon Him—to seek forgiveness, guidance, and countless other needs. All the treasures of the heavens and the earth belong solely to Him, and through prayer, He allows us to access them. Whenever we face trials or difficulties, the remedy lies within reach. Yet, to unlock these divine treasures, we require a special key—and that key is “*dua*” (prayer).

In his celebrated Letter 31, Imam Ali ibn Abi Talib (AS) speaks about how Allah (SWT) responds to our supplications. He reminds us:

*“Never be disappointed when the answer to your prayers is delayed,
or if you do not receive the response you desire.”*

This timeless counsel teaches us that prayer is not merely about immediate fulfillment. It is about trust, patience, and surrender to Allah's wisdom. Sometimes the delay is a mercy, sometimes the answer comes in a form we did not expect, and sometimes the response is withheld because Allah (SWT) knows it is not in our best interest. Through prayer, we are not only asking—we are strengthening our bond with the Divine, acknowledging His sovereignty, and cultivating resilience in our faith.

Imam Ali (AS) provides 4 key insights into how prayers are answered.



1. Pure Intention along with knowledge of Allah's Attributes

God's response to a person's prayers (*dua*, دعا) depends on several important factors:

A - Pure Intention and Sincere Heart

The purity of one's intention is the foundation of prayer. Does the request align with Islamic principles, or is it rooted in greed, jealousy, arrogance, or ignorance? For example:

- Praying for money to indulge in gambling or intoxication.
- Asking for a house out of envy because a friend owns one.
- Seeking a high-paying managerial position without qualification or effort.

Allah (SWT) knows the truth of our intentions and the secrets of our hearts. As Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) stated in the Shabaanieh (شعبانية) Sermon:

"When you ask something from Allah, do so with a pure intention and a sincere heart."

B - Knowledge of God's Attributes

The depth of one's understanding of Allah's Names and Attributes determines closeness to Him. To truly know Him is to let these attributes live in our hearts and shape our prayers and actions. True prayer requires not only words but heartfelt recognition of His qualities such as:

- **Al-Qadir (The All-Powerful):** He has complete power over all things.
- **Al-'Aleem (The All-Knowing):** Nothing escapes His knowledge—past, present, or future.
- **Al-Hakeem (The Most Wise):** His decrees are always just and full of wisdom.
- **Al-Samee' (The All-Hearing):** He hears everything, even unspoken thoughts.
- **Al-Baseer (The All-Seeing):** He sees all things, visible and hidden.
- **Al-Adl (The Just):** Allah is perfectly fair and never wrongs anyone.

C - Trust and Surrender to Allah (SWT)

When asking from Allah (SWT), do we fully believe that He alone possesses ultimate Power and Knowledge? Do we place our complete trust in Him? Do we turn to Him only in times of difficulty? True prayer requires unwavering faith—believing in His words with every fiber of our being. It demands that our lives not revolve around wealth, power, or worldly desires, but around seeking closeness to Him. Extending our hands in supplication while our hearts remain distracted is not true prayer. Real *dua* is when the heart and tongue are united in sincerity, trust, and devotion.

You alone we worship; and unto You alone we turn for aid. 1:5

2. Fulfillment is delayed

Imam Ali (AS) explains that sometimes the fulfillment of our prayers is delayed. What is the wisdom behind receiving our wishes later than expected?

Prayer, when offered with pure intentions and deep knowledge of Allah's Attributes, becomes far more than a plea—it is a sacred method of forging a firm connection with Allah (SWT). It builds a stronger bridge between the worshipper and the Creator, accompanied by love, trust, spiritual joy, and hope.

Imam Ali (AS) beautifully explains that when Allah (SWT) delays the fulfillment of a prayer, *His purpose is not neglect but mercy*. The delay is part of His response, and it is meant to prolong and intensify those feelings of closeness, trust, love, and devotion, so that the believer may draw nearer to Him.

*The true reward of prayer lies not in the object of our request,
but in the journey itself.*

The act of supplication becomes so profound, so spiritually nourishing, that one may even forget the original request. *What remains is the sweetness of connection with Him, which is greater than any worldly gain.*

3. He grants you something better than what you wished for

Imam Ali (AS) states that at times, Allah (SWT) may not grant the exact request we make, but soon He blesses us with something far greater—something we never imagined and yet perfectly suited to our needs. Many of us have experienced moments when what we received turned out to be far better than what we originally desired.

Often, the answer to our prayers is indeed superior to what we asked for, though its true value may not be immediately clear. We may feel disappointed, unsatisfied, or even confused in the present moment. Yet, with time, we come to realize that Allah's choice was the best option for us all along.

This is the wisdom of divine response: Allah (SWT) sees the entire picture—past, present, and future—while we see only fragments. His Mercy ensures that what He grants us is not merely what we want, but what we truly need. In the long run, His decision always carries hidden blessings, guiding us toward growth, protection, and ultimate success.

4. Allah (SWT) does not grant your request

The Imam continues his discussion by saying that sometimes Allah (SWT) does not grant our requests. This is not a sign of rejection, but rather a manifestation of His wisdom and mercy. He knows what is hidden from us—the unseen consequences, the paths that may harm us, and the desires that may lead us astray. Allah (SWT) is the Most Wise, possessing complete knowledge of the past, present, and future. In His infinite wisdom, He knows that some of our requests may lead to harmful outcomes or guide us down paths where we would lose ourselves.

**When Allah (SWT) does not grant your request,
it is not a reason for despair but an invitation to trust.**

Often, it is only later in life that we come to realize the truth: had we received what we once wished for, it might have brought ruin or hardship. In those moments of reflection, we recognize that the denial of our request was, in fact, a hidden blessing from Allah (SWT).

Therefore, if you truly believe in Him as *Al-Hakeem (The Most Wise)*, there is no need for worry or disappointment when your wishes are not granted. His wisdom surpasses our limited understanding, and His decisions are always for our ultimate good.

**Trusting in Him means accepting that every unanswered prayer
carries within it mercy, protection, and guidance toward what is best for us.**