

A Re-reading of the Concept of the Answering of Prayer (Istijābat Du 'ā'), With a Close Examination of Ḥakīm Sabzawārī's Views

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ABSTRACT

One of the most challenging concepts in the domain of religious beliefs is the "concept of the answering of prayer" (istijābat-i du 'ā'). Most religious believers understand answered prayer exclusively as the fulfillment of their request, equating non-fulfillment with non-answering. However, numerous rational and transmitted evidences indicate that the concept is broader than this common understanding. This research, employing a descriptive-analytical method and focusing on the views of Mullā Ḥādī Sabzawārī, presents a systematic theosophical explanation (tabīn-i ḥikmī-yi nizāmmand) of the "answering of prayer." Close examination of Ḥakīm Sabzawārī's views yields three explanations as the fulfillment of the servant's request (ḥāsil shudan-i khwāstah-yi bandah); answering as the very success (tawfiq) to pray (nafs-i tawfiq-i du 'ā'); and answering as the transformation of the prayer into a higher good (tabdīl-i du 'ā' bih khayr-i bartar). In the first, most common interpretation, "non-answering of prayer" becomes meaningful; according to the second and third, prayer is always answered. This distinctive reading, consistent with transmitted proofs, has valuable consequences: resolution of apparent contradictions in religious texts, effectiveness of all prayers, intrinsic desirability of prayer, re-examination of "importunate prayer" (du 'ā' -i lahn), and prayer as existential wayfaring (sulūk-i wujūdī). This research clearly reveals the conformity of theosophical principles with revealed teachings, highlights the importance of rational foundations for explaining religious doctrines, and deepens understanding of the philosophy of acts of worship (falsafah-yi 'ibādāt) in Transcendent Theosophy.

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1. Introduction

Prayer (du‘ā’) has always held an important place in the religious beliefs of the faithful as one of the most significant religious rituals. One of the most challenging concepts in this domain is the "concept of the answering of prayer" (istijābat-i du‘ā’). In the conventional understanding, the "answering of prayer" means the concrete realization of the request for which the supplicant has prayed. The majority of religious believers, when this does not occur, consider their prayer "unanswered." The apparent meaning of verses such as "Call upon Me, I will answer you" (ud‘ūnī astajib lakum, Q. 40:60) and "I answer the call of the supplicant when he calls upon Me" (ujibu da‘wat al-dā‘i idhā da‘ān, Q. 2:186)—coupled with the absolute nature of these verses and the certainty of divine promises—intensifies the aforementioned challenge, and an apparent contradiction seems to exist between these universal promises and "cases of non-answering."

Among those who have offered valuable content on this issue is the sage Mullā Hādī Sabzawārī (1212–1289 AH / 1797–1872 CE). Within his works, unique and valuable discussions on the "answering of prayer" are found that are well suited to resolve the aforementioned contradiction and to provide a comprehensive theosophical formulation (taqrīr-i ḥikmī) of the concept of the answering of prayer.

In light of the above, the present article seeks to present a classified compilation of the scattered views of Ḥakīm Sabzawārī on this issue and to offer a systematic, rationally sound (‘aql-pasand), and transmitted-sound (naql-pasand) explanation of the "concept of the answering of prayer."

2. Methodology

The present research was organized using a descriptive-analytical method (rawish-i taṣṣīfī-taḥlīlī) and employing library-based sources. Three interpretations (tafsīr) of the concept of the answering of prayer were extracted from the scattered works of Ḥakīm Sabzawārī, systematically classified and formulated, and then the consequences and achievements of this reading were explained.

The research is qualitative and theoretical, drawing on primary sources including Sabzawārī's philosophical and mystical writings, as well as Qur’ānic verses and ḥadīth traditions relevant to prayer and its answering.

3. Findings

The research findings indicate that through a close examination of the scattered views of Ḥakīm Sabzawārī, three theosophical interpretations (tafsīr-i ḥikmī) of the "concept of the answering of prayer" can be explicated:

Answering in the sense of the fulfillment of the servant's request;

Answering in the sense of the very success (taḥfīq) to pray;

Answering in the sense of the transformation of the prayer into a higher good.

3.1. First Interpretation: Fulfillment of the Supplicant's Request

The most obvious and tangible interpretation of the answering of prayer is the "realization of the content of the prayer" and the fulfillment of the servant's request. In common parlance, the answering of prayer means the realization of the supplicant's desire, such that what he prayed for occurs for him by virtue of the prayer. "Non-answering" means that the supplicant's request is not granted by God in accordance with his petition. It is on the basis of this interpretation that "non-answering of prayer" becomes meaningful, and the traditions (riwāyāt) concerning the conditions for the answering of prayer pertain to this interpretation.

3.2. Second Interpretation: The Very Success to Pray

Drawing on mystical and philosophical foundations, Ḥakīm Sabzawāri expands the concept of "answering" and posits a kind of general answering (istijābat-i ‘āmm) for every prayer, meaning that the very success to pray (apart from the fulfillment of the prayer's content) is itself a type of answering. He presents three formulations for this type of answering:

a) The timelessness of answering: God Almighty is the "Answerer" (mujīb). One who is truly deserving of the attribute "Answerer" is one whose response is not deferred to the future; the right of response is that it be immediate. Thus, there is no time interval between the servant's prayer and its answering—the time of prayer is the time of answering. However, "answering of prayer" is distinct from "granting of the request" (ijābat-i ḥājat). The very act of prayer itself entails a type of answering, not in the sense of fulfilling the servant's request, but rather the light and grace that shines upon the human heart and grants him success to call upon God. Therefore, when the servant prays, God has already answered him by bestowing the success to pray. The servant's prayer is the manifestation, expression, and interpretation of that divine success. Hence, the very success to pray and the servant's very utterance of "Allāh" is a sign of God's response. The mystics (ahl-i ‘irfān) refer to this general answering as "answering by response" (ijābat-i labīkī).

b) Prayer through divine power and might: That remembrance (dhikr), that invocation, and that prayer occurred through divine power and might (ḥawl wa quwwah-yi ilāhī). Thus, the servant's prayer is by divine power and a sign of God's prior gracious regard. This formulation is based on the unity of divine action (tawḥīd-i af‘ālī), according to which every action in the universe occurs through divine power and might.

c) The very capacity for prayer is from God: Generosity and beneficence are from God absolutely and by way of pure grace (tafaḍḍul) and favor (imtinān), without any prior deserving. God is the "Initiator of blessings before any deserving" (mubtadi’ bi al-ni‘am qabla istiḥqāqihā). Thus, even the

capacity to pray and the aptitude to request from God are themselves among God's prior gifts.

The conclusion is that the very success to pray (apart from the fulfillment of the prayer's content) is itself a sign of divine success and God's gracious regard for the servant. On the basis of this interpretation, prayer is always answered.

3.3. Third Interpretation: Transformation of Prayer into a Higher Good

The third interpretation of answering is the transformation of prayer into the better (*tabdīl-i du'ā' bih aḥsan*). Ḥakīm Sabzawārī states: If you ask God for physical health but God does not see it as your benefit and your request is not granted, do not be sad, for your prayer has been transformed into a better benefit. According to the principle of the "union of the knower and the known" (*ittiḥād-i 'ālim wa ma'lūm*), in every prayer, "inner soundness" (*ṣiḥḥat-i bāṭinī*) is obtained for the human being, because the soul is like a "simple substance" (*māddih-yi sādih*) that becomes characterized by any form to which it attends. This is higher than any desired thing—that the divine names and attributes become the very form of the human soul. Thus, prayer is a type of substantial motion (*ḥarakah-i jawharī*) and existential intensification (*iṣhtidād-i wujūdī*). In every prayer, depending on the intensity of the supplicant's connection and attention to God Almighty, an existential elevation and transcendence occurs for the soul. By turning toward the source of light, the human inner self becomes illuminated, and the heart takes on the form of the beautiful names of God. Therefore, even if the servant's request is not granted, a blessing greater than what he sought is bestowed upon him.

4. Conclusion

The most important results and achievements of this research are as follows:

1. Resolution of apparent contradiction in transmitted texts: The aforementioned re-reading of the concept of the "answering of prayer," in addition to being fully consistent with revealed teachings, resolves the apparent contradiction in transmitted texts. Those verses and traditions that absolutely promise answering in exchange for the servant's prayer are interpreted according to the second and third meanings. Those traditions that set forth various conditions for answering and consider only some prayers as answered are interpreted according to the first meaning of answering.

2. The absolute efficacy of all prayers: One of the most important achievements of this re-reading is that absolutely no prayer is without effect, and a type of answering is always inherent in every prayer. For, as a result of prayer: either the servant's request is granted (the first meaning of answering); or the success to remember and invoke God is bestowed upon the human being, which itself entails many other blessings (the second meaning of

answering); or the prayer is stored up and transformed into another good and blessing (the third meaning of answering).

3. The intrinsic desirability of prayer: The aforementioned reading leads to the intrinsic desirability (maṭlūbīyat-i dhātī) of prayer. It is not the case that prayer is merely a means to the servant's desired end and is devoid of value in itself. Rather, prayer has intrinsic desirability. Ḥakīm Sabzawārī explicitly states that prayer and remembrance have "absolute desirability" (maṭlūbīyat-i muṭlaq), and needs and requests are desirable only insofar as they are means of remembrance.

Finally, this article reveals the importance and rare capacity of the philosophical views of Mullā Hādī Sabzawārī in addressing religious issues and provides a better understanding of the philosophy of acts of worship (falsafah-yi ‘ibādāt) in Transcendent Theosophy.

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Authors’ Contributions: The contributions of the authors are as follows:

- First author (50%): Content preparation and development, text writing.
- Second author (25%): Analysis and interpretation of data and results; review, direction, and control of results; revision, review, and finalization of the article.
- Third author (25%): Analysis and interpretation of data and results; review, direction, and control of results; revision, review, and finalization of the article.

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