



DO'Ā

DO'Ā, the act of offering supplicatory or petitionary prayer, a principal manifestation of Muslim piety. *Do'ā*, with the literal meaning “calling” or “summoning,” frequently signifies worship as such in the Qur'ān (e.g., 6:56, 17:110), but the technical definition of *do'ā* as a distinct practice is “seeking the occurrence or nonoccurrence of a thing with a wording that combines the praise and exaltation of God with the confession of one's own weakness and helplessness” (Tahānawī, I, pp. 503-04). Sufis, however, speak of *do'ā al-ḥāl*, the nonverbal, implicit prayer that a given condition of neediness may silently express, and even praise it as the form of *do'ā* most likely to elicit a positive response (Qoṣayrī, *Resāla*, p. 526, tr., p. 276; Ebn 'Arabī, III, p. 208).

Several verses of the Qur'ān encourage the believer to engage in *do'ā*, e.g., “When My servants ask you concerning Me, (say) I am indeed close, responding to the prayer of the suppliant when he calls on Me, so let them respond to Me and believe in Me in order to be guided” (2:186). Commenting on this verse, Qoṣayrī remarked that God's promise to answer prayers comes before the injunction to supplicate, so that here divine generosity (*takrīm*) precedes the imposition of a duty (*taklīf*; 1390/1971, I, pp. 156-57; echoed in Meybodī, I, p. 502). The Qur'ān (40:60) also guarantees the divine answering of prayer: “Call on Me and I will respond to you; those who do not worship Me shall enter Hell in humiliation.” Qoṣayrī suggested that by equating *do'ā* with worship and condemning as arrogant those who disdain it this verse effectively makes of *do'ā* a duty for the believer (Qoṣayrī, 1390/1971, II, p. 313).

In principle the petitioner may formulate his own *do'ā*, in any language of his



choosing, but prayers in Arabic and hallowed by tradition are generally preferred as a matter of practice. The numerous formulas of *do'ā* that the Qur'ān itself contains are those most favored for recitation because of the divine authority with which they are imbued. The entirety of the first sura (*Fāteḥa*) counts as a *do'ā*, and it is frequently recited as such in order to ensure a favorable outcome for a wide variety of undertakings. Individual verses containing or consisting of supplicatory prayers are 2:286, 3:8, 3:16, 3:147, 3:191-94, 17:24, 17:80, and 23:118. In addition, the Qur'ān ascribes a whole series of supplicatory prayers to the prophets: Noah (23:26, 23:29, 26:117-18, 51:26-28), Abraham (2:126-29, 15:35-41, 26:83-89, 37:99), Moses (7:151, 20:25-35, 28:16, 28:21), Solomon (38:35), Joseph (12:101), Lot (26:169, 29:30), and Zacharia (3:38, 19:5-6, 21:89). The prophet Moḥammad is instructed in his turn to utter certain particular prayers (20:114, 21:112, 23:93-94). The Qur'ān also depicts the angels who bear the divine throne as engaged in *do'ā* for the sake of the believers (42:5).

The importance of *do'ā* is confirmed by numerous traditions of the Prophet, as well as of the imams. After reciting Qur'ān 40:60 the Prophet described *do'ā* as the kernel (*moḳk*) of worship, a description indicating in the view of Qoṣayrī (1966, p. 526; tr., p. 275) that by making *do'ā* man acknowledges God as the sole source of help, this being the very essence of monotheism (*tawḥīd*). In another tradition the Prophet is reported to have said that any prayer not having a sin as its object or tending to the severance of kinship will yield one of three results: immediate fulfillment; a fulfillment postponed to the hereafter; or the averting from the petitioner of a significant evil of which he may be unaware (Meybodī, I, p. 499). Other traditions specify categories of petitioners whose prayers will be answered forthwith, namely the oppressed, the sick, just rulers, those who pray for the welfare of their brethren, those who invoke God's name abundantly, and fathers who pray for their sons. Another category of traditions relate to times and circumstances that are especially recommended for making *do'ā*, examples being the final hours of a night vigil, the breaking of the fast during Ramaḥān, and retreat or isolation, particularly at a distance from human habitation (Meybodī, I, pp. 501-02).

Although *do'ā* is distinct from the canonical prayer (*ṣalāt* or *namāz*), which is clearly obligatory in nature and has fixed times and forms, formulas of *do'ā* are in fact interwoven with every stage of the prayer, beginning with the *do'ā-ye eḥtetāḥ* (prayer of commencement) that is recited after the *takbīr* that inaugurates the prayer and ending with the *ta'qībāt* or *mo'aqqebāt-e namāz*,



i.e., the lengthier and more varied formulas of supplication that follow its conclusion. In addition, a formula of *do'ā* known as *qonūt* is recited, while standing, by Sunnites in the last *rak'ā* of the supererogatory prayer called *wetr* that is performed after the evening prayer and by Shi'ites in the second *rak'ā* of every prayer (Sajjādī, III, pp. 1515-16). Likewise, there are traditional formulas of *do'ā*, most of them ascribed to the Prophet, for recitation in conjunction with other major devotional duties like fasting and pilgrimage, and still others (*a'māl al-yawm wa'l-nahār*) that are prescribed for recitation at certain times of the day. A final category of traditional supplicatory prayers consists of those relating to everyday acts like sleeping, rising, eating, entering a house, departing on a journey, and going to a bathhouse. The most authoritative compendium of all these categories of *do'ā* is, for Sunnites, *al-Adkār al-montakāba men kalām sayyed al-abrār* compiled by Abū Ḍakarīyā' Nawawī (d. 676/1277-78); this work is almost completely unknown in Persia.

A special type of *do'ā* is that in which God is besought to visit misfortune on a given person or group, that is, an imprecation. Qur'ān 4:148 ("God does not love that evil should be uttered in clear speech, except by one who has been wronged; certainly God hears and knows all things") is sometimes seen as justifying this kind of *do'ā*, but, as the Prophet engaged in it but rarely, preferring to pray for the guidance of his enemies, its practice is generally discouraged, particularly with regard to one's personal adversaries (Çağırıcı, pp. 297-98).

Sufis have paid particular attention to the theory and practice of *do'ā*. Although Qur'ān 2:186 ("responding to the prayer of the suppliant when he calls Me") might be taken to suggest unconditional divine willingness to answer supplicatory prayer (Qoşayrī, 1390/1971,I, p. 155), several Sufi authors have laid down *ādāb* (norms or conditions) that ought to govern the making of *do'ā*. Anşārī listed five conditions: contrition (*del-šekastagī*); uttering the prayer softly and in privacy (cf. Qur'ān 7:55: "Call on your Lord with humility and hiddenness"); preceding the *do'ā* with an act of worship or charity; persistence (in accordance with the Hadith "God loves those who are insistant in supplication"); and making the content of one's request general, rather than specific, in nature (Meybodī, I, p. 500). Ġazālī (I, pp. 268-72) stipulated ten: the choice of a blessed day and time; the attainment of a proper inward state; orientation to the *qebla*; uttering the *do'ā* softly; the avoidance of rhying phrases (in order, presumably, to prevent the degeneration of *do'ā* into a kind of literary exercise); complete humility; uttering the prayer three times (cf. the



Hadith”Whenever the servant says, ‘O my Lord!’ three times, God Almighty will respond, “Here I am, o servant of Mine!” cited in Meybodī, I, p. 500); beginning the prayer with a mention of divine attributes instead of proceeding forthwith to the presentation of one’s request; and cultivating a state of regret and repentance for one’s sins. To these varied injunctions may be added the external detail that, while *do’ā* is being made, the hands are held apart, on a level with the breast, with the palms facing upward, except in the case of the prayer for rain (*do’ā-ye estesqā*), when they face downward.

As the devotional life of the Sufis was elaborated into a complex and codified system, formulas of *do’ā* were stipulated for recitation on such occasions as the initiation of novices, the donning of ritual garments (especially the turban), the performance of *dekr*, the consumption of communal meals, and entering or leaving retreat (e.g., Sohravardī, pp. 93, 97, 129; Bākarzī, passim). Certain prominent Sufis, especially the eponyms of the Sufi orders, also composed a special type of *do’ā* known as *awrād*, prescribed for daily recitation, generally after the dawn prayers, by members of the orders. *Awrād* are pastiches of koranic verses, traditional prayers, and sentences composed by the Sufi masters themselves. The best-known example of *awrād* from the Persian-speaking and Persian-influenced world are the *Awrād-e bahā’īya*, attributed to K̄vāja Bahā’-al-Dīn Naqšband (d. 791/1389) and the *Awrād-e fathīya* attributed to the Kobrawī saint ‘Alī Hamādānī (d. 786/1384), which have been widely recited beyond the confines of the Kobrawī order (Komoškānavī, I, pp. 16-25). In addition, the Sufi practice of invoking the mediatory powers of the saints (*tawassol*) led to the composition of versified formulas of *do’ā* in which all the names comprising an initiating chain would be enumerated (e.g., Fārūqī, pp. 479-80).

Perhaps the most distinctive Sufi contribution to the literature of *do’ā* consists of intimate supplications (*monājāt*), which were composed for the most part in Persian. Defined by Abū Naṣr Sarrāj (p. 349) as the “addressing of secrets to God, the Almighty Sovereign, in a state of pure recollection,” *monājāt* differ from other forms of *do’ā* in their complete eschewal of worldly concerns and its frequent recourse to what might be termed the ecstatic impudence sometimes displayed by even the soberest of Sufis. The earliest Persian *monājāt* are probably those ascribed to Abu’l-Ḥasan K̄raqānī (d. 425/1033; Mīnovī, pp. 53, 61-64, 93, 96, 118-19, 147-48). This genre of devotional literature is, however, more commonly associated with his younger contemporary, ‘Abd-Allāh Anṣārī; indeed, so closely linked to the name of Anṣārī is the whole



category of *monājāt* that compositions of diverse and frequently unknown authorship have been unquestioningly assigned to him (e.g., the collection published with English translation by Morris and Sarfeh). The authentic *monājāt* of Anṣārī are scattered in his *Rasā'el* and *Ṭabaqāt al-ṣūfiya*, as well as in Meybodī's *Kaṣf al-asrār*. They have been assembled from these works by Moḥammad Fekrat. Several hundred of Rūmī's quatrains have *monājāt* as their themes (quatrains 65-69, 93, 150, 153, 170, 216), as do many of the somewhat more stylized quatrains of 'Abd-al-Raḥmān Jāmī.

Despite all the foregoing, *do'ā* appeared problematic to many Sufis because of its connotations of concern for the self and the tension or even contradiction that they perceived between it and the virtues of *reżā* (satisfaction with divine decree), *taslīm* (surrender), and *tafwīz* (assignation of one's affairs to God). Thus Qoṣayrī pointed out that, although *do'ā* is desirable because it is an act of worship, the silent endurance of need is also meritorious because of the acceptance of God's will that it implies. He attempted to resolve the problem by suggesting that *do'ā* with the tongue be combined with silence in the heart; that one pray for one's fellow Muslims and not for oneself; and that one engage in *do'ā* only if it results in *baṣṭ* (spiritual expansion). He also maintained that in any event *do'ā* takes on different forms with different classes of men: words with the commonalty, deeds with the ascetics, and inner states with the gnostics (1966, pp. 526-29; tr., pp. 276-78). When asked what might motivate the people of *taslīm* and *tafwīz* to engage in *do'ā* a sheikh replied: "They make *do'ā* either to increase the adornment of their limbs, *do'ā* being a form of service, or in order to obey God's command to engage in it" (Sarrāj, pp. 262-63); in other words, their *do'ā* is free of all egoistic desire. A related dilemma was posed by Yaḥyā b. Mo'ād: How could a man presume to beseech God, given his sinfulness, and how could he refrain from doing so, given God's generosity? The view of 'Abd-Allāh b. Monāzel was, by contrast, categorical: "I have not made a prayer in fifty years, nor do I wish another to make a prayer for my sake" (Qoṣayrī, 1966, p. 532; tr., p. 280).

As most formulas of *do'ā* include the mention of at least one divine name, the selection being determined by the nature of the petitioner's request, *do'ā* clearly overlaps with *dekr*, the invocation of God's names; it is not accidental that Hadith relating to *dekr* and *do'ā* are often grouped together in a single chapter in some collections of traditions, like the *Ṣaḥīḥ* of Moslem. Nonetheless, the two practices are conceptually distinct, and Sufis sought accordingly to establish which of the two is more meritorious. *Dekr* was



generally favored over *do'ā*, not least because of this *ḥādīṭ qodsī*: “I give more to the one who is so occupied with invocation/remembrance of Me that he does not ask things of Me than I give to the suppliants” (Qoṣayrī, 1966, p. 526; Ġazālī, 1361 Š./1982, I, p. 253).

Sufis also addressed themselves to the problem of prayers remaining unanswered. Popular among them was a Hadith to the effect that God delays fulfilling the request of those He most loves because of His delight in hearing them address Him repeatedly; less favored petitioners have their prayers answered without delay (Meybodī, I, p. 501). Attention was drawn to the concluding words of the Qur'ān, 2:186 (“in order to be guided”), which suggest that the true purpose of *do'ā* is the attainment of guidance, not of the object sought in prayer, and to a Hadith that promises the opening of the gates of God's mercy in exchange for the regular practice of *do'ā* (Qoṣayrī, 1390/1971, I, p. 157). The most subtle and imaginative answer was, however, that intimated by Ḥosayn b. Maṣṣūr Ḥallāj (244-309/857-922) and propounded repeatedly by Rūmī: that, as God makes it possible for man to engage in *do'ā*—indeed even invites him to do so—every *do'ā* contains its response within itself or is even identical with that response (bk. 1 l. 1578, bk. 2 l. 691, bk. 3 l. 195, bk. 4 l. 3993, bk. 5, l. 4162).

Shī'ite piety is also extremely rich in supplicatory prayers, including many believed to have been composed by the imams themselves; it can even be said that these prayers constitute, for the mass of the believers, both the chief textual legacy of the imams and the principal means by which they commune with them. Of the prayers attributed to 'Alī b. Abī Ṭāleb the most frequently recited is the *do'ā-ye Komayl*, so called because 'Alī taught it, on the authority of Keẓr, to a companion named Komayl b. Zīād Naḳa'ī; its recitation on Thursday nights (i.e., during the early hours of Friday, according to the traditional method of reckoning time) is strongly recommended. Varyingly attributed to the Prophet himself and to 'Alī b. Abī Ṭāleb are two formulas of *do'ā* to be recited for protection in battle, the *jawšān-e kabīr* (the great cuirass) and the *jawšān-e ṣaġīr* (the small cuirass); these prayers, the effectiveness of which is said to extend to other situations of danger, are often found in Sunnite and Shī'ite manuals of *do'ā*. Much favored, too, is the prayer recited by Imam Ḥosayn on the day of 'Arafa, the eve of the Festival of Sacrifice that concludes the pilgrimage season. The *do'ā-ye semāt*, recited during the final hours of Friday, is attributed to the imams Moḥammad al-Bāqer and Ja'far al-Šādeq. Imam Mūsā al-Kāẓem maintained that *do'ā* might, under certain



circumstances, avert the decree of fate and himself composed prayers of some sublimity. To his successor, Imam ‘Alī al-Reżā, is owed the prayer commonly recited at dawn by Shi‘ites throughout the month of Ramażān, the *do‘ā-ye saḥar*. There is also a *do‘ā* attributed to the Twelfth Imam, conveyed from him during his occultation. The *do‘ā* recited on the fifteenth day of Ša‘bān is attributed collectively to all the imams.

It is, however, the fourth imam, ‘Alī al-Sajjād, who stands alone as the reputed author of a complete collection of supplicatory prayers, known after him as *al-Şahīfa al-sajjādīya*, a book of great beauty that is rich in metaphysical as well as spiritual content (for an analysis of the work as well as Shi‘ite supplications in general, see Chittick, in ‘Al al-Sajjādī, pp. xv-xvi).

In addition to prayers attributed to the imams, there are others of unknown origin, prescribed for recitation on every day of religious significance, as well as for pilgrimages to the resting places of the imams, whether accomplished in both spirit and flesh or in the spirit alone. The definitive compendium of Shi‘ite supplications, found in virtually every religious household in Persia, is the *Mafātīḥ al-jenān*, compiled by Sheikh ‘Abbās Qomī (d. 1359/1940).

In modern Persia the Shi‘ite practice of *do‘ā* came under ferocious attack from Aḥmad Kasrawī, who equated it—together with all the other principal manifestations of Shi‘ism—with superstition and fatalism. A rationalist defense of *do‘ā* was undertaken by Mahdī Bāzargān. It was above all Ayatollah Khomeini (Ayāt-Allāh Komeynī) who defended the practice of *do‘ā* from the strictly traditional point of view, first in *Kašf al-asrār* (pp. 30, 68-80) and later, after the triumph of the Revolution of 1357 Š./1978-79, in his televised lectures on *Sūrat al-Fāteḥa*, in which he described the books of prayer as means for “making true human beings out of men” 1368 Š./1989, pp. 77-82; tr. in Algar, pp. 400-03). Khomeini’s emphatic interest in *do‘ā* had, in fact, been plain from the very beginning of his scholarly career, one of his earliest writings being a metaphysical commentary in Arabic on *do‘ā-ye saḥar*. The practice of *do‘ā* has accordingly enjoyed great visibility in the Islamic Republic. Various *do‘ās* are regularly broadcast on radio and television, and *do‘ā-ye Komayl* was regularly recited in the trenches every Thursday night throughout the war with Iraq. The ceremonies at Khomeini’s funeral on 19 Kordād 1368 Š./9 June 1989 included a recitation of *do‘ā-ye Komayl* into which phrases in Persian tending to associate him with the imams were inserted.

In folk religion recourse to *do‘ā* has often assumed the aspect of magic, its



general purpose being to secure protection (especially for children) against maleficent jinn and the evil eye. The formulas of *do'ā* serve not as texts for recitation and meditation; instead, written on paper, cloth, or occasionally deerskin, they are transformed into objects imbued with magical power that are to be carried or worn as amulets at all times. In addition, the paper on which the *do'ā* is written is sometimes soaked in water, which is then drunk by the person seeking protection. The writing of prayers and the preparation of amulets was traditionally the function of persons known as *do'ānevīs* (see [DO'A-NEVĪSĪ](#)), who also laid claim to power over the jinn. The texts used in this way, although called *do'ā*, appear more frequently to have been passages from the Qur'ān, supplemented with incantatory words of no evident meaning and talismanic signs (Donaldson, pp. 20, 25, 37, 39, 132-33, 203). This approach to *do'ā*, simultaneously magical and mechanistic in its assumptions, is fast becoming extinct in Persia under the dual impact of modernity and the vigorous propagation of standard religious practice by the authorities of the Islamic Republic.

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