224914 - Is it permissible to pray “O Allah, if this matter is bad for me, then make it good and decree it for me”?

the question

Is it permissible to pray to Allah to bless me with a certain matter and to say: “O Lord, if you kept it from me because it is bad for me, then make it good by Your might, and decree it as part of my share”, because as far as I know, the divine decrees may be changed by du‘aa’ (supplication)?

Detailed answer

Firstly:

The basic principle is that the Muslim should ask Allah to decree good for him, and to divert from him what is bad. If he does not know whether this matter is good or bad for him, then what is prescribed for him is to make his request in supplication dependent upon the knowledge of Allah, may He be glorified and exalted.

If it is good, he should ask Allah to let him attain it, and he should offer supplication to Allah, may He be exalted, and beseech Him in his supplication, for He, may He be glorified, answers the prayer of those who are in desperate straits and persist in beseeching Him. If it is bad, it is not permissible for him to ask Allah to let him attain something that is bad.

If he does not know whether it is good or bad, then let him say – as in du‘aa’ al-istikhaarah – : “O Allah, if it is good, then ordain it for me, make it easy for me, and bless it for me; and if it is bad, then turn it away from me and turn me away from it, and ordain for me the good wherever it may be and make me pleased with it.”

Al-Haafiz Ibn Rajab said: The things that a person may ask for from Allah, may He be glorified and exalted, are of two types:

The first type is that which he knows is purely good, such as asking Him to instil fear of Allah in his heart and make him obedient and righteous, or asking Him for Paradise and seeking refuge

with Him from Hell. These things may be sought from Allah, may He be exalted, without hesitation and without making it dependent upon divine knowledge of their appropriateness and whether it is in the individual's best interests, because they are purely good and entirely appropriate and in the individual's best interests, so there is no point in stating a condition when what is sought is known to be definitely good.

The second type is that which it is not known whether it is good for the individual or not, such as death and life, wealth and poverty, children and family, and all other worldly needs of which the consequences are unknown.

It is not appropriate to ask Allah for any of these things except what Allah knows to be good for the individual, because he does not know the outcomes and consequences of things. Moreover, he is unable to bring what is in his interests or ward off what is harmful to him. So he must seek his needs from One Who is All-Knowing, Almighty. Hence it is prescribed to pray istikhaarah and seek guidance in all worldly matters, and it is prescribed for the supplicant to say in his prayer for guidance: "O Allah, I seek Your guidance [in making a choice] by virtue of Your knowledge, and I seek ability by virtue of Your power, and I ask You of Your great bounty. For You have power and I have none; You have knowledge and I have none, and You are the Knower of the unseen. O Allah, if in Your knowledge, this matter [then it should be mentioned by name] is good for me both in my religious and worldly affairs…"

End quote from Majmoo' Rasaa'il Ibn Rajab (1/153).

Secondly:

It is not prescribed for a person to ask Allah to help him to attain what he seeks regardless of whether it is good or bad, or to say in his supplication, If attaining this matter is bad, then make it good. That is for the following reasons:

· Such a supplication is unheard-of in the Sunnah and in the words of the early generations. Rather what is known is du'aa' al-istikhaarah, which is the opposite of that. So we should not turn away from istikhaarah to the opposite.

· The individual should call upon his Lord in a humble manner, expressing desperation, asking Him to make what is good easy for him and to ward off from him what is bad. If, every time he wants something, he asks Allah to help him to attain it if it is good, and to make it good if it is bad, then his supplication will not be a supplication of need and humility; rather it will be a supplication based on the desire to attain the hoped-for thing by any means, to the extent that even if attaining it is bad for him, he asks Allah to make it good!

What this means is that the individual is insisting on getting what he wants, and that is contrary to delegating the matter to Allah and submitting completely to Him, may He be exalted.

· The one who supplicates in this manner is forgetting the meaning of the verse in which Allah, may He be exalted, says (interpretation of the meaning):

“and it may be that you dislike a thing which is good for you and that you like a thing which is bad for you. Allah knows but you do not know” [al-Baqarah 2:216].

Supplication (du‘aa’) may alter the divine decree if altering it will achieve something good and ward off something bad or evil. The hadith “Nothing changes the divine decree except supplication (du‘aa’)” does not mean that supplication turns something bad into something good; rather what it means is that supplication is one of the means of warding off calamity after the causes thereof are present. see the answer to question no. 112094.

We put this question to our shaykh, ‘Abd ar-Rahmaan al-Barraak (may Allah preserve him) and he said:

This supplication is contrary to the Islamic prescription of du‘aa’ al-istikhaarah, and it is giving preference to one’s whims and desires and opinion; it is insisting on the thing that one wants and failing to delegate the matter to Allah. Therefore it comes under the heading of exceeding the bounds in supplication. End quote.

For more information please see question no. 105366.

And Allah knows best.