112154 - Istikhaarah asking to be guided to the more correct of two scholarly opinions

the question

Can a person pray istikhaarah to be guided towards doing something the CORRECT way regarding a matter over which there is a scholarly dispute, because both opinions are convincing yet opposing, and the person wants to know which one is right and which one s/he should follow.

Detailed answer

Praise be to Allah.

It is narrated that some of the salaf prayed istikhaarah concerning matters of knowledge concerning which there was a difference of opinion, and it is proven that some of them prayed istikhaarah asking to be guided concerning the status of narrators (of hadeeth) concerning whom there was a difference of opinion. For example:

1.

'Abd al-Razzaaq narrated in al-Musannaf (10/301) from Ibn al-Musayyab that 'Umar ibn al-Khattaab wrote a document about the grandfather and kalaalah (issues of inheritance when a grandfather of the deceased was still living, or if the deceased left behind no children), and he continued to pray istikhaarah, saying, "O Allaah, if You know that there is some good in it then let it be." Then when he was stabbed he called for the document, and erased it, and no one knew what was in it. He said: "I wrote something about the grandfather and kalaalah, and I prayed istikhaarah asking Allaah for guidance, then I decided to leave you as you are now."

2.

Imam al-Shaafa'i (may Allaah have mercy on him) was one of the scholars who prayed istikhaarah the most with regard to matters of knowledge. He stated in his book al-Umm almost fourteen

issues concerning which he prayed istikhaarah asking for guidance. For example, he said in al-Umm (2/44):

It was said that zakaah is due on jewellery for personal use, and this is what I pray istikhaarah about, asking Allaah for guidance. Al-Rabee' said: He prayed istikhaarah, asking Allaah for guidance concerning it, and al-Shaafa'i said: There is no zakaah on jewellery for personal use. End quote.

3.

Among the muhadditheen, Ibn Hibbaan used to pray istikhaarah, asking Allaah for guidance concerning narrators whose status was uncertain or unclear. He mentions this often in his books, especially in al-Majrooheen, for example when he says (1/194): Bahz ibn Mu'aawiyah ibn Heedah al-Qushayri, one of the people of Basrah, who narrated from his father, from his grandfather; al-Thawri and Hammaad ibn Salamah narrated from him. He made many mistakes. As for Ahmad ibn Hanbal and Ishaaq ibn Ibraaheem (may Allaah have mercy on him), they quoted him as evidence and narrated from him, but a number of our imams ignored him. Were it not for the hadeeth, "We will take them [the camels that are due as zakaah] and half of his camels as the due of our Lord", I would have included him among the thiqaat (trustworthy). He is one of those concerning whom I pray istikhaarah, asking Allaah for guidance. End quote.

There are many examples of scholars who turned to praying istikhaarah when they were uncertain about issues. I have only quoted a few of them in order to make the point.

But what is meant by their words "This is one of the matters concerning which I pray istikhaarah, asking Allaah for guidance" and "He is one of those concerning whom I pray istikhaarah, asking Allaah for guidance"?

The apparent meaning is that they said du'aa', asking Allaah to guide them to the correct opinion concerning an issue or a narrator. It does not mean that they used to pray istikhaarah in the sense of the naafil salaah and du'aa'. That is because the du'aa' is not applicable to what they sought. In du'aa' al-istikhaarah it says "then ordain it for me, make it easy for me, and bless it for me." How

can this be applicable to a matter of fiqh or the status of a narrator of hadeeth?

It seems that these imams were asking Allaah to help them to reach the right conclusion with regard to matters of knowledge, not that they were saying the du'aa' of istikhaarah with the salaah offered beforehand.

The aim of istikhaarah is to ask for guidance from Allaah to the better of two matters concerning which one is hesitating, because guidance and help come from Allaah; He knows and we do not know; He is the Knower of the unseen. The one who relies on himself will go astray, and the one who trusts in his reason and does not seek the help of his Lord will be doomed. The most important thing concerning which a person should seek the help of Allaah is correct understanding of Allaah's religion and choosing the most correct and best opinion, and istikhaarah or seeking Allaah's guidance in choosing is the best means of achieving that; it may be the best way of choosing between two opinions when the evidence is very confusing.

There is no reason why the du'aa' of the imam or faqeeh, asking his Lord to guide him to the correct opinion regarding issues of knowledge should not be preceded by salaah (prayer), and this action may loosely be called istikhaarah, or that name can be applied to the du'aa' and not the prayer. As for the salaah and du'aa' mentioned in the famous hadeeth of Jaabir, this cannot be what they were referring to when they spoke of praying istikhaarah, asking Allaah for guidance concerning such and such.

And finally:

It should not be thought that asking for guidance with regard to matters of knowledge is contrary to what Allaah has enjoined of seeking evidence and proof. Resorting to istikhaarah or praying for guidance is to be resorted to when there is no evidence or it is not clear, or there is a contradiction with equally strong evidence, or when the issues is confused in the scholar's mind and he cannot understand it. None of that means ignoring evidence and proof, rather it is seeking the help of Allaah to understand, and turning to Him and asking Him for guidance to the truth. The Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) used to ask Allaah to guide him to the truth.

It was narrated that ‘Aa’ishah the Mother of the Believers (may Allaah be pleased with her) said: When the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) got up to pray at night, he would start his prayer with the words: “O Allaah, Lord of Jibra’eel, Mika’eel and Israfeel, Originator of the heavens and the earth, Knower of the unseen and the seen, You judge between Your slaves concerning that wherein they differ. Guide me concerning that wherein they differ of the truth by Your leave, for You guide whomsoever You will to a straight path.”

Narrated by Muslim (770).

For information on Salaat al-Istikhaarah and some of the rulings concerning it, please see the answer to question no. 2217 and 11981.

And Allaah knows best.