

PROPHETIC INVOCATIONS FOR RAIN



Salāt al-Istisqā'

salāt al-istisqā' (صلاة الإستسقاء) Prayer for Rain
du'ā' (دُعَاء) invocation

INTRODUCTION

This short paper will highlight how Allāh ﷻ always answered the prayers of His Prophet, our Master Muhammad ﷺ. In particular, we will *in sha' Allah* (“God-willing”) draw attention to how Allāh ﷻ answered his invocations when he invoked for rain.

ALLĀH’S RESPONSES TO THE PROPHET’S ﷺ DU‘Ā’S FOR RAIN

A miracle when the Prophet ﷺ was a child

Jul’hama b. Urfata reports, ‘I came to Makka when there was a severe drought there. The Quraysh approached Abū Tālib and complained about the multiple problems caused by the lack of rain. They requested him to come and pray for rain. Abū Tālib appeared and with him was a small, handsome boy, [his beauty was such that] it was as if the sun shone from his face; [accompanying Abu Talib] was the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ.

Abū Tālib instructed him to stand with his back to the Ka’ba. Thereafter, this small child proceeded to point his fingers to the sky. It was only for a short time to pass, that miraculously clouds appeared and rain began to pour profusely, flooding the valleys in and around Makka.

Upon seeing this miracle, Abū Talib remarked,

و أبيضُ يُسْتَسْقَى الغمام بوجهه
ثمَّالُ اليتامي عصمة للأرامل
يلوذ به الهلاك من آل هاشم
فهم عنده في نعمة و فواضل

*That gleaming face by which the rain is sought
The shelter for the orphans, the protector of the widows!
The afflicted from Banū Hāshim seek refuge in him
For because of him, they are in bliss and virtue!*

Drought in Madina

Once the people of Madina were afflicted with a severe drought. Whilst the Prophet ﷺ was delivering the *Khutba* on a Friday, a Bedouin stood up and said, “O, Allāh’s Messenger! Our possessions are being destroyed and the children are hungry; Please invoke Allāh ﷻ for rain”. So the Prophet ﷺ raised his hands. At that time there was not a trace of cloud in the sky. As soon as he lowered his hands, clouds gathered like mountains, and before he got down from the pulpit, rain began to fall on the beard of the Prophet ﷺ. It rained that day, the next day, the third day, the fourth day till the next Friday.

¹ *Al-Khasā'is al-Nabawiyya al-Kubrā*, Imām al-Jalāl al-Dīn al-Suyūti, al-Maktaba al-Qayyima, Cairo, pg. 201.

A week later at the Friday prayers, the same Bedouin or another man stood up and said, “O Allāh’s Messenger! The houses have collapsed, our possessions and livestock have been drowned; Please invoke Allāh ﷻ to protect us”. So the Prophet ﷺ raised both his hands and said, “O Allāh ﷻ! [Descend the rain] around us and not on us!”. So, in whatever direction he pointed with his hands, the clouds dispersed and cleared away, and al-Madīna’s sky became clear. The valley of Qanat remained flooded, for one month. None came from outside but talked about the abundant rain.²

When the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ left this world, the pious Muslims still prayed to Allāh ﷻ for rain via his *wasīla*. This was done by invoking his blessed name or the pious men of Allāh ﷻ who had association with him.

Drought during the reign of the caliph, ‘Umar

Hāfiz Ibn Abī Shayba reports with his chain: ‘Mālik al-Dār, who was the food minister for Sayyiduna ‘Umar, reports that during ‘Umar’s caliphate, a drought inflicted the people. One person (Bilāl ibn Hārith al-Muzanī) went to the resting place of the Prophet ﷺ and said,

يا رسول الله! استسق لأمتك فانهم قد هلكوا

‘O Messenger of Allāh! Please pray for rain for the sake of your Community, because they are being destroyed [as a result of the drought].’

The Prophet ﷺ appeared in the dream of this person and said, ‘Go to ‘Umar; offer my salutations to him and tell him that undoubtedly rain will descend upon you.’³

By the means of al-‘Abbās

Imām al-Bukhārī reports from Anas ibn Mālik that: When there was a drought, Sayyiduna ‘Umar sought rain through the *wasīla* of al-‘Abbās ibn ‘Abd al-Muttalib, the Prophet’s ﷺ uncle. He remarked,

اللهم انا كنا نتوسل اليك بنبينا ﷺ فتسقينا و انا نتوسل اليك بعم نبينا فاسقنا قال فيسقون

O Allāh! We used to seek the *wasīla* of your Prophet and you would provide rain. And we [now] seek the *wasīla* of the uncle of our Prophet so please provide rain.’ The reporter says: ‘They were provided with rain.’⁴

WHAT IS ISTISQĀ’?

The scholars all agree that seeking rain from Allāh ﷻ is *Sunna*, something which is called *Istisqā’*. The only dispute is whether there is a specific prayer for this or not (*Salāt al-Istisqā’*). Imām Abū Hanīfa is of the opinion that there is no specific prayer. Rather, like the above episodes suggest, praying for rain should be ideally done via seeking forgiveness and supplicating to Allāh devoutly.

The other great Imāms (as well as Imām Abū Hanīfa’s disciples Imām Abū Yūsuf and Muhammad) state there is a specific *salāh* that is performed for rain, referring to *Salāt al-Istisqā’*. Imām Mālik deems this as *Sunna* whereas Imām Ahmad and Imām al-Shāfi’ī go one step further and deem it *Sunna Mu’akkada*. Over seventeen Companions have reported this type of *salāh*.

According to these scholars, this *salāh* is a special feature of this Community and can be traced back to the sixth year of Hijrah. In short, it is a simple *salāh* of two units, wherein the Imām leads the prayer of a Muslim congregation.

² *Sahih al-Bukhārī*, Kitāb al-Jumu’a.

³ *Musannaf ibn Abī Shayba*. Cited in A Commentary of Sūrah Fātiha based on Tibyān al-Qur’ān p. 134). Allāma Ghulām Rasūl Sa’idī. Translated by Dr. Ather Hussain al-Azhari, HSBT Publications, Birmingham, UK, 2009.

⁴ *Sahih al-Bukhārī*, Kitāb al-Jumu’a.

There is no *adhan* or *iqāmah* and the Imām will recite aloud in both units. As many people as possible are asked to come. The Imām delivers a *Khutba* at the end of the prayer. During this *Khutba*, the Imām will reverse his cloak (the congregants will not). Then the Imām will stand and recite a collective *du'ā*, facing the *qiblah* with his hands raised. The Muslims will remain seated and will say *amīn* to his supplications.

Muslims are requested to appear in their humblest of clothing and to avoid pride in any shape or form. Moreover, they are encouraged to donate Sadaqa, seek forgiveness from Allāh ﷻ (*istighfār*) in abundance before and after the prayer.

Reversing of the cloak

Imām Abū Hanīfa does not advocate this practice, as he believes that *Salāt al-Istisqā'* is a *du'ā* and normally in *du'ā's*, the cloak is not turned. The other Imāms - Imām Mālik, Imām Abū Yūsuf, Imām al-Shāfi'i and Imām Ahmad - do support this as they see it is an action of the Prophet ﷺ.

The method is that from behind the back, the Imām holds the left corner of the cloak with the right hand and from the back, he holds the right corner of the cloak with his left hand. He lifts his hands over his back and as he does so, the cloak will be reversed. Symbolically speaking, this is done as if one is asking Allāh ﷻ to change and reverse their conditions.

CONCLUSION

Undoubtedly, Allāh ﷻ always responded to the supplications of His beloved Messenger ﷺ and his request for rain was no different. *Salāt al-Istisqā'* itself teaches us many lessons. It shows our dependance on Allāh ﷻ; that no single drop of water falls from the sky except with His permission. If we want rain, it is Him we turn to. Certainly, it shows the importance of *salāh*. Specifically, it shows that for every situation there is a *salāh*. We have prayers for the day and prayers for the night. We have a prayer when there is a solar eclipse. We have a prayer for rain. We have a prayer when we are in the state of fear. We have a prayer for help on an important decision.

Finally, the request for rain from Allāh ﷻ not only reminds us of His favour upon us, but also gives us an opportunity to reflect on our own spiritual states. In *Sūrah Nūh*, Allāh ﷻ recalls what the Community of Nūh were told by him (peace be upon him),

فقلت استغفروا ربكم انه كان غفارا يرسل السماء عليكم مدرارا

I said [to them]: Seek forgiveness from your Lord: 'Verily He is oft-forgiving. He will send you rain in abundance.'

(71:9-10).

In other words, if you seek forgiveness, Allāh ﷻ will undoubtedly send rain. Hardship ensues when people have turned away from Allāh ﷻ.

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