

Istikhārah-Its Method and Some Misconceptions

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Istikhārah means to turn to Allāh ta‘ālā and seek goodness from Him. This is because Allāh ta‘ālā knows what we do not know. As Allāh ta‘ālā is fully aware of the end result and consequence of every matter and we merely speculate, we should ask Allāh ta‘ālā to guide us towards goodness in our endeavours or tasks that we are about to embark on. It should be understood that istikhārah is simply a du‘ā like any other du‘ā. However, it has more chance of acceptance in the Court of Allāh ta‘ālā as it has been specifically taught by Rasūlullāh sallallāhu ‘alayhi wasallam to his Ummah. It is a prayer offered to Allāh ta‘ālā before embarking on a particular course of action or choosing from a number of options, asking Him to guide us towards goodness and the correct and better choice, and to save us from that course of action or choice if goodness lies elsewhere.

A point of great importance in istikhārah is to free one’s mind of all thoughts and inclinations before performing it. What would you expect from a person’s istikhārah when he has already resolved to do something!

Method

The method of istikhārah is to perform two rak‘āt at any time of the day, other than the times when nafl salāh is forbidden. It is preferable to recite Sūrah Al-Kāfirūn in the first rak‘ah and Sūrah Al-Ikhlās in the second. Thereafter one should praise Allāh ta‘ālā, send salāh upon the Prophet sallallāhu ‘alayhi wasallam and then recite the following du‘ā

اللَّهُمَّ إِنِّي أَسْتَخِيرُكَ بِعِلْمِكَ وَأَسْتَقْدِرُكَ بِقُدْرَتِكَ وَأَسْأَلُكَ
 مِنْ فَضْلِكَ الْعَظِيمِ، فَإِنَّكَ تَقْدِرُ وَلَا أَقْدِرُ وَتَعْلَمُ وَلَا أَعْلَمُ
 وَأَنْتَ عَالِمُ الْغُيُوبِ، اللَّهُمَّ إِنْ كُنْتَ تَعْلَمُ أَنَّ هَذَا الْأَمْرَ
 خَيْرٌ لِي فِي دِينِي وَمَعَاشِي وَعَاقِبَةِ أَمْرِي فَاقْدُرْهُ لِي وَيَسِّرْهُ لِي ثُمَّ
 بَارِكْ لِي فِيهِ، وَإِنْ كُنْتَ تَعْلَمُ أَنَّ هَذَا الْأَمْرَ شَرٌّ لِي فِي
 دِينِي وَمَعَاشِي وَعَاقِبَةِ أَمْرِي فَاصْرِفْهُ عَنِّي وَاصْرِفْنِي عَنْهُ
 وَاقْدُرْ لِي الْخَيْرَ حَيْثُ كَانَ ثُمَّ أَرْضِنِي بِهِ

O Allāh! I seek goodness from You, through Your Knowledge, and I seek strength through Your Power and ask for Your great Bounty, for You are able to do things while I am not, and You know while I do not; and You are the Knower of the Unseen. O Allāh, if You know that this matter [name your matter] is good for me, in respect to my Dīn, my worldly life and the consequence of my affairs, then decree it for me and make it easy for me, and then grant me barakah in it. And if You know that this matter [name your matter] is bad for me in respect to my Dīn, my worldly life and the consequence of my affairs, then turn it away from me and turn me away from it, and decree for me what is good, wherever it may be, and make me be pleased with it. (Al-Bukhārī)

If after the initial istikhārah you remain unsure about something, then perform istikhārah for 3, 5, or 7 days. Inshā'allāh within seven days the heart will feel at ease.

There is also another method of istikhārah in the form of a short du'ā. If a decision needs to be taken and there is no opportunity to perform two rak'āt and do istikhārah in the aforementioned way, the following du'ā should be recited:

اللَّهُمَّ خِرْ لِي وَاخْتِرْ لِي

O Allāh, grant me goodness, and choose for me. (At-Tirmidhī)

As mentioned earlier, istikhārah is a du'ā and Allāh ta'ālā will accept it and grant you goodness, as long as there are no factors that prevent its acceptance. Obstacles to Allāh ta'ālā accepting prayers include disobedience to Allāh ta'ālā, harām earnings, and praying without the conviction that Allāh ta'ālā will definitely accept the prayer. If there are such obstacles present in one's life, he should do tawbah in

earnest, and then make istikhārah.

Results of Istikhārah

If, as a result of doing istikhārah, a person feels positive, he should proceed accordingly. If his du‘ā has been accepted, he will acquire goodness and success. However, many people feel positive after istikhārah and proceed accordingly, but do not see success. This can be explained by the following:

- 1.** In the du‘ā of istikhārah, a person first asks Allāh ta‘ālā for goodness in one’s Dīn which is the main objective of a believer, and thereafter he asks for the goodness of the world. Therefore, if after istikhārah one finds apparent worldly loss, but his Dīn remains safe, one should believe that through the barakah of istikhārah Allāh ta‘ālā has granted him a minute loss of this world and saved him from a greater loss of the Hereafter.
- 2.** Many times, the du‘ā as a result of istikhārah is accepted and Allāh ta‘ālā grants him goodness, but that goodness takes two forms: one form is that the choice he has made is one hundred percent good, without an iota of harm in it; the other is that he is guided towards the better of two possible outcomes. To understand this, take the example of a person who purchased a house as a result of a positive feeling after istikhārah. After six months, a new neighbour moved in next door and started harassing him. This person needs to understand in this situation that it is through the barakah of istikhārah that he has been saved from a bigger calamity, i.e. if he had chosen another house, the neighbour there would have harassed him even more.
- 3.** Sometimes, a person feels positive after istikhārah despite his du‘ā not being accepted due to the aforementioned obstacles. In this case the positive feeling he was experiencing in his heart was not from Allāh ta‘ālā. It was either a condition that existed before the istikhārah or it was a feeling from Shaytān. Sometimes a young man is deeply in love with a girl and after doing istikhārah he feels very comfortable. What can be expected from such an istikhārah? Are his positive feelings a result of the istikhārah or was that condition present before?

Some Misconceptions

There are a number of common misconceptions about the sunnah practice of istikhārah:

- 1.** One of the main points of confusion is the assumption that if, as a result of doing istikhārah, a positive feeling about a particular course of action results, then it is a guarantee from Allāh ta‘ālā that it will be one hundred percent successful. People incorrectly believe that istikhārah is Divine Revelation. If after istikhārah a person of knowledge and experience was to advise an alternative, their opinion is discarded by saying, ‘I have performed istikhārah and now there can be no change.’ As a consequence, people proceed according to their feelings (e.g. they choose a marriage partner) and then, if some time later things do not work out, they begin to have doubts and negative thoughts about the sayings of Rasūlullāh sallallāhu ‘alayhi wasallam regarding istikhārah. May Allāh ta‘ālā protect us all from such a condition.

2. Likewise, people only do istikhārah nowadays when they are unsure about something. They perceive it to be a remedy for confusion; a way to request Allāh ta‘ālā to fix something for them. Istikhārah should not be limited to occasions when a person has doubts about doing something, or when a person is indecisive about something! Istikhārah is to be performed for all mubāh actions, even if you are 100 % sure about the course of action. For example, you may want to enrol your child in a particular school and have no doubts about it being the right one; even then you should perform two rak‘āt and read the du‘ā of istikhārah so that you are granted goodness and saved from a wrong decision.

3. Nowadays, istikhārah is more or less confined to finding a marriage partner.

4. Many believe it is necessary to perform istikhārah during the night before going to sleep, and compulsory not to talk to anyone after performing the two rak‘āt of istikhārah.

5. Similarly, some believe it to be totally necessary to sleep on the right hand side facing the qiblah.

6. Many expect and desire to see a dream in which one is clearly told that this is the path for you. Seeing a dream guiding towards a particular choice is not necessary in istikhārah. One needs to pay attention to the inclination of the heart whether one sees a dream or not. In all circumstances, the decisive factor is the inclination of one’s heart.

7. Another common misconception is to ask others to perform istikhārah on one’s behalf. Many feel that we are sinful, so what good will our istikhārah do? Thus they search for a pious god-fearing person and ask him to perform istikhārah for them. Rasūlullāh sallallāhu ‘alayhi wasallam did not state any condition that a sinful person cannot perform istikhārah, and moreover, leaving sin and repenting is not an act of difficulty. One should leave sin, repent and perform istikhārah himself. This practice of asking others to perform istikhārah is not in accordance to the sunnah. Yes, when making istikhārah for a marriage partner, it is permissible for the parents of the boy/girl to perform istikhārah. This is because this is a need of the parents too, as it is their responsibility to marry their children into suitable families.

Finally, with istikhārah, istishārah (consultation) is very important too. One should, before, during, and after performing istikhārah, seek consultation from those well-wishers who are learned and experienced in the relevant matter. The Prophet sallallāhu ‘alayhi wasallam said, *“The one who does istikhārah will not be unsuccessful, and the one who consults will not see regret.”* (At-Tabrānī)