

ISTIKHARAH

TEN THINGS TO KNOW

"Without it, your worship is incomplete"

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ISTIKHARAH: TEN THINGS TO KNOW

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Question 1: What Does Istikharah Mean?

The literal meaning of Istikharah is “to desire good from God” (Fiqhul Masih). This Istikharah Prayer is a specific prayer taught to us by the Holy Prophet (saw) to pray prior to making integral decisions in our lives i.e. choosing a job, moving, travelling, choosing a life partner, etc.

Hazrat Maulvi Sher Ali (ra) narrates the explanation given by the Promised Messiah (as):

“The true purpose of Istikharah is to seek good from God in our matters. By result of the Istikharah prayer, Allah opens the doors to such work that is deemed beneficial for us and is made easy for us to access them. One is then able to achieve it with far greater ease and with a content heart and mind, that what I am about to do is right and good for me.” (Fiqhul Masih)

Question 2: How Important Is the Istikharah Prayer?

Hazrat Jabir bin Abdullah (ra) said:

“The Holy Prophet (saw) taught us to perform the Istikharah prayer for all matters of our lives. He would teach it to us with the same emphasis as he did with Surahs of the Holy Quran.” (Sunan Nasai, Book of Marriage)

To seek “good” from God in various affairs of our lives was also the practice of the Prophets. Prophet Moses (as) has been recorded in the Holy Quran praying:

رَبِّ اِنِّيْ لِبَاۤءۡ اَنْزَلْتۡ اِلَيَّ مِنْ خَيْرٍ فَقِيْرٌ ﴿٢٥﴾

“My Lord, I am in need of whatever good You may send down upon me.” (28:25)

Regarding this prayer of Moses (as), Hadhrat Khalifatul Masih 4th (rah) states:

“I love this prayer deeply. If you look at the life of the Prophet Moses (as) and the blessings in his life, including the Shariah and prophethood, it came after this prayer.”

This goes to show that seeking “good” in our lives through the guidance of God was a standing practice of the greats of God and enabled them to achieve the highest of levels of success. The Istikharah prayer is a way for us to practice this in our own lives as well.



“Nowadays, most Muslims have abandoned the practice of offering the Istikharah prayer. People have been affected by the winds of Atheism, they are now very proud and rely heavily on their own knowledge and resources. Some start their work based on their own knowledge (without prayer). Then in the middle of it, they come to me seeking advice. What’s the point of seeking advice now?”

THE PROMISED MESSIAH (AS)

Question 3: On What Occasions Should I Pray the Istikharah Prayer?

Hazrat Maulvi Sher Ali (ra), a companion of the Promised Messiah (as) shares how the Promised Messiah (as) would use the Istikharah Prayer in his life. He states:

“It was the practice of the Promised Messiah (as) to pray the Istikharah Prayer before beginning any important work or matter in his life. The true purpose of Istikharah should be to seek God’s blessing in any endeavor you are about to start. When we pray the Istikharah prayer, Allah will then open the doors of ease and opportunity for such things that are deemed beneficial for our lives. You are then able to achieve these things without any hurdle, and God places a sense of contentment and peace in your heart for that particular matter.”

This is why we are taught to pray this prayer when picking a life partner. Hazrat Musleh Maud (ra) states:

“Marriage, and who you chose to marry, is a choice that will affect you for the rest of your life.” (Farmoodat-e-Musleh Maud (ra))

Do Your Homework

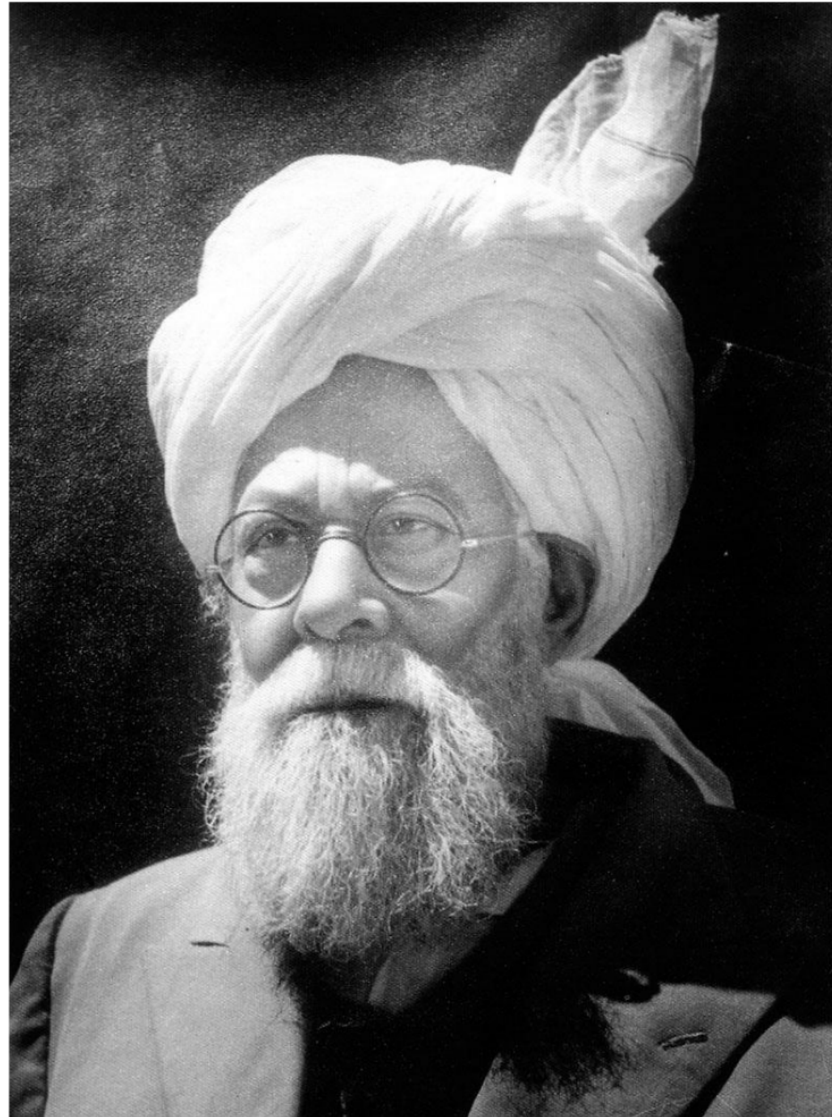
When making a big life decision, say, buying a house, we ensure that we do our homework. We weigh all our options and look for the best possible location, property and price point. We realize this is where we will build memories with our loved ones and a strong emotional attachment to it. This will affect how long it will take us to get to work, where our children will go to school, etc. Choosing a life partner is a decision that will carry far more weight than simply choosing where to live. We need to ensure that we do our homework here as well. Prayers are the prerequisite to any excellence we hope to achieve. This is where our homework for a life partner should start and end. This is why Istikharah is integral to the process of choosing a life partner.

One point to remember: Istikharah isn’t just to be prayed for at the time of looking for a rishta. Istikharah means to seek good from God. We don’t need God’s blessings in just one aspect of our life, but in all aspects. So, even, when making other important decisions of our lives, we should use the Istikharah Prayer.

Even when it comes to travelling. The Promised Messiah (as) writes:

*“Nowadays people don’t care about doing the Istikharah prayer. **When in fact, the same amount of emphasis laid on Salat is also the same emphasis laid on Istikharah.** That is why, it’s my practice, that even if I’m travelling 10 kos (roughly 20 miles) I pray the Istikharah prayer. There are thousands of things that can go wrong when travelling and it is God’s promise that, after Istikharah, He will be your Guardian and Protector and His angels will watch over you until you reach your destination.”*

Case in point, the Istikharah prayer should be an integral part of our lives.



"I've come to know that there are many people who do not know what Istikharah is. When in fact, Istikharah is an essential pillar of Islam. It is such an essential pillar, that it is mandatory for every Muslim to incorporate it in their worship. Without it, their worship is incomplete."

HAZRAT MUSLEH MAUD (RA)

Question 4: How is The Istikharah Prayer Performed?

The following points are guidance given by the Promised Messiah (as):

1. *The Istikharah prayer should be done after Isha.*
2. *After Isha, one should offer two Nawafil.*
3. *In First Rakat: recite "Surah Al kafiroom" (Chapter 109)*
4. *In Second Rakat: recite "Surah Al-Ikhlaas" (Chapter 112)*
5. *In the "At-tahiyyaat" position of Salat, (the sitting position) after Darood Sharif and other prayers, one should offer the Istikharah prayer (See Question 10).*
6. *After the two nawafil, one should go immediately to sleep and refrain from speaking.*
7. *If needed, one can also offer the Istikharah prayer in other times of the day.*

(Fiqhul Masih)

Question 5: How Do I Know My Istikharah Prayer Has Been Answered?

Hazrat Musleh Maud (ra) explains it to us in very simple terms. He (ra) states:

"It is not necessary for one to see dreams after praying the Istikharah prayer. The Istikharah is in fact, a prayer. After seeking good through Istikharah, whatever one feels in their heart towards that particular matter, they should do. If God grants one contentment and certainty of mind towards that matter, one should do it. If there is a hesitancy or an internal block in wanting to do that matter, then one shouldn't do it."

He (ra) further elaborates:

"God does not bow to us. We bow to God. He is our Master. Many a times, in the silence of your Master lies your answer." (Khutbaat-e-Mahmood)

To illustrate this, think about a child who is playing and running around. Many a times, the child will look back at their parents and try to gauge if what they're doing is okay or not. When they look back, and the parents haven't said anything to stop them, they take that as a sign to continue on and what they're doing is okay to do. At times, parents don't spell it out for them, their silence is their permission. In the same manner, if we as children turn to Allah, and we seek His help and guidance in a manner, His silence along with a contentment of heart towards the thing being asked for is our answer and we should move forward.

The Promised Messiah (as) writes: *"The Istikharah prayer offers one a peace of mind towards the task he wishes to take on. If one carries forward on his work after he has received this peace of mind and certainty of heart, one attains success."* (Al-Badr June 13 1907)

At the end of the day, after true objective prayer, casting aside our own thoughts on the particular matter, one should see what his heart tells him.

The Promised Messiah (as) writes:

“The heart is a very strange thing. When it comes to our own hands, we can move them in any which direction we may choose. But the heart, isn’t like this. God has control over our hearts. At times the heart will desire to do something very badly, and then a short time later will no longer want to do it at all. These changes that occur in the heart are in fact from God.” (Fiqhul Masih)



"You are not asking God for dreams, you are asking for God's grace in your work, that if this particular work is good for me, make it easy for me to access it and bless it."

HAZRAT MIRZA MASROOR AHMAD (AYA)

Question 6: What if I Don't See A Dream?

Hazrat Musleh Maud (ra) clarifies this matter. He (ra) states:

*“Some people think that after offering the Istikharah prayer, God must tell them by way of a dream or a voice what they should or shouldn't do. Is this what happens when we offer our prayers as well? Absolutely not. The true reality of Istikharah is that you are asking for God's blessing and grace in the endeavor you are about to take on. If the matter you are seeking guidance on is good for you, Allah blesses it. If it's harmful for you, He stops you from attaining it. **At times, God can tell you by way of dreams if it's good for you or not, but He doesn't have to.** God is not under our control. In fact, we are under His control and He is our Master.”*

He (ra) further elaborates:

“It's not necessary for you to receive dreams or revelations after praying Istikharah. But there are such people who think it is and they desire that a dream should be shown to them. If one now even does see a dream based on the desire of wanting to see one, this cannot be considered guidance from God.”

Some people may see dreams after their Istikharah prayer, others might not. At the end of the day, we are not turning to God for dreams, but for seeking success in important and integral matters of our lives.

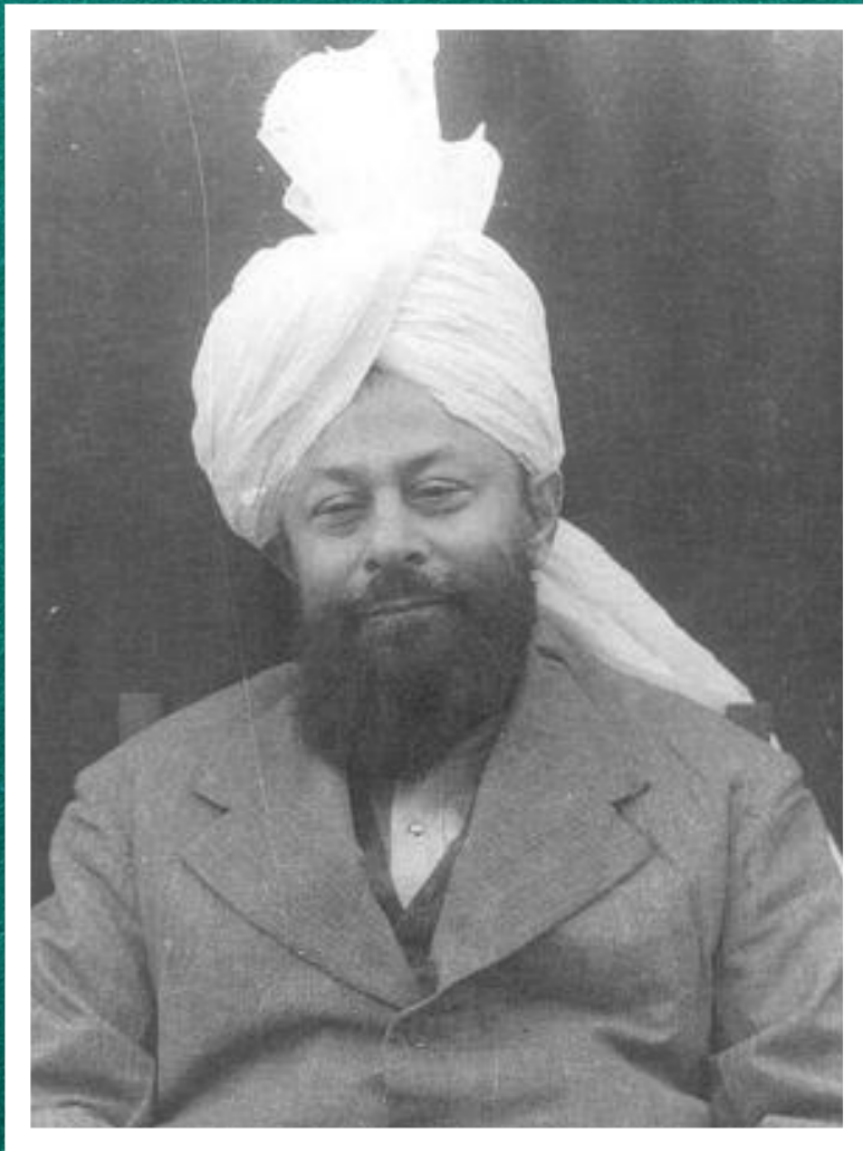
Question 7: How Long Do I Do Istikharah For?

There is no set time for how long one should do Istikharah. One should pray Istikharah up until the point where one receives certainty in which direction he or she should go. This can vary from person to person, and from situation to situation. Some may find an answer to their Istikharah sooner, others may find it later. At the end of the day, it's important to remember we cannot rush God, and we are not setting a timer for this process. Each situation has its own variables and circumstances.

For example, when Hazrat Musleh Maud (ra) was deciding on his marriage with Sarah Begum, he observed Istikharah at least 300 times (Khutbaat-e-Mahmood, vol. 3, Khutbaat-e-Nikah, pg. 206)

From this we can realize that it is about truly putting our outmost effort in prayer for however long necessary. When Hazrat Khalifatul Masih 3rd (rah) was considering his second marriage, he observed Istikharah for 40 days and asked three people to observe Istikharah for 7 days. (Hazrat Mirza Nasir Ahmad, p. 75, 78)

Every situation is different. The general principle is to pray until one receives certainty in one direction or another. (See Ask A Murrabi, pgs 16-17).



The Istikharah which is truly blessed is the one in which your own desires have not played a role. Completely leave your case to God and trust in Him."

HAZRAT MUSLEH MAUD (RA)

Question 8: What If I Don't Know It in Arabic?

The Promised Messiah (as) writes:

“Even though this prayer is found in Arabic, but if you don't know it in Arabic, you can pray it in your own words.” (Maktubaat-e-Ahmad vol 2)

One should learn the Istikharah prayer in the blessed words that the Holy Prophet (saw) taught us in himself. But if one is not able to, or is in need of the prayer prior being able to learn it in Arabic, simply go over the translation multiple times and pray it in your own words.

Question 9: How To Offer Istikharah When Choosing A Rishta?

Hazrat Musleh Maud (ra) states:

“Prior to the Nikah, one should do Istikharah. There are two types of Istikharah: the General Istikharah and the Specific Istikharah. The General one is done first and the Specific one after.”

The General Istikharah is when one prays without a specific person in mind. One prays that “O Allah grant me a spouse with whom I am compatible with.” The Specific Istikharah is offered when (a specific rishta is being thought of). One should then mention that person's name when doing the Istikharah. By doing the Istikharah in this manner, the General Istikharah protects the Specific one. Some offer the first Istikharah but not the second one, and vice versa. One should offer both the General and the Specific Istikharah for the best results.”

(Khutbaat-e-Mahmood vol 3)

When it comes to any major life choice or milestone we achieve, we can see that many years lead up to that decision. For example, if a person becomes a lawyer and gets a job at a prestigious firm, this was not the concentrated efforts of a couple of weeks. The thousands of hours of studying, applying to the best of schools, endless hours of networking, thousands dollars invested into the education lead up to this decision. On paper, it may seem that one did well in the interview and got the job. But there were multiple factors that even allowed a person to be in the position to achieve this.

In the same way, choosing a rishta is not just about having been put into contact with a specific family, exchanging pictures and talking to one another. As Hazrat Musleh Maud (ra) puts it, the General Istikharah will enable one to have been put into the best possible position and circumstance to link with the family. This will be in result of sincere pray that was offered way before even discussing that specific rishta. Then, for the potential husband and wife to have compatibility cannot be measure in a few conversations. This will come ultimately from God's Grace and Blessing.

In a nutshell, prayers and seeking God's grace are a must prior to making a decision that will affect the rest of your life.

Question 10: What is The Istikharah Prayer?

THE ISTIKHARAH PRAYER

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

Transliteration

Allahumma inni astakhiruka bi'ilmika wa astaqdiruka biqudratika wa as'aluka min fadlikal 'azim. Fa innaka taqdiru wala aqdiru, wa ta'lamu wala a'lamu wa anta 'allamul ghuyub. Allahumma in kunta ta'lamu anna hadhal amra khairun li fi dini wa ma'ashi wa 'aqibati amri faqdirhu li wa yassirhu li thumma barik li fih. Wa in kunta ta'lamu anna hadhal amra sharrulli fi dini wa ma'ashi wa 'aqibati amri fasrifhu 'anni wasrifni 'anhu, waqdir liyal- khaira haithu kana thumma ardini bih.

Translation:

"O Allah, I seek good from You out of Your knowledge and seek power from You out of Your power and I beg of You out of Your boundless Grace, for You have power and I have no power, and You have knowledge and I have no knowledge, and Your knowledge encompasses the unseen.

O Allah! If according to Your knowledge this task is for my good, both materially and spiritually, and in respect of my ultimate end, then make it possible for me and bless me therein, but if according to Your knowledge this is harmful for me in my spiritual and material life and in respect of my ultimate end, then turn me away therefrom, and enable me to attain good wherever it may be and cause me to be blessed therewith." (Bukhari)

Specify Your Need

When praying this prayer, whatever the need may be, one should specify this in the prayer. For example, if a person is praying this prayer seeking guidance and God's grace for a specific individual as a rishta, one should mention that person's name when praying. When doing the Istikharah, the Holy Prophet (saw) taught us to "specify the need for what you seek". (Bukhari)