

Istikhārah: The Islamic Perspective, Method, and Rulings

Darulifta Ahlesunnat (Dawateislami)

Question

What do the noble scholars and jurists of Islamic law say about the following: What is istikhārah and where is this established from? Please tell the method of performing istikhārah and the rulings related to it.

Answer

The literal meaning of Istikhārah is ‘seeking goodness’. In the terminology of sharī‘ah, istikhārah refers to a specific salāh or du‘ā performed before Allāh to seek proper guidance regarding a permissible matter. In other words, when a person is uncertain whether or not to undertake a permissible course of action and as to whether it is better for him or not, then instead of relying solely on his own intellect and judgment, turning to Allāh with trust in His absolute knowledge and power, asking Him for the best decision is known as istikhārah. The basis of performing istikhārah has been established through the blessed aḥādith. Jābir Bin ‘Abdullah رضي الله تعالى عنه even states that the Messenger of Allāh ﷺ would teach us how to perform istikhārah regarding all matters just as He would teach a sūrah of the Qur’ān.

When a person intends to undertake any mubāḥ action (such as marrying oneself or arranging the marriage of one’s child, travelling somewhere or on some specific day, buying something, etc.), it is mustaḥab to perform istikhārah. Istikhārah is performed only for general permissible matters; not for sinful acts or acts of worship. But in acts of worship, if one is given the choice by sharī‘ah to do an action at a certain time or place, then he may do istikhārah for this. For example, if one intends to perform a voluntary Ḥajj, then one may do istikhārah as to whether they should perform the voluntary Ḥajj this year or next year. Moreover, it is better to perform istikhārah multiple times. One ḥadīth even mentions doing istikhārah seven times. Nonetheless, istikhārah should be done until one’s heart becomes content with one of the options.

The method of istikhārah is to offer two rak‘āt nafl for istikhārah in a non-makrūh time. It is mustaḥab to recite sūrah al-Kāfirūn (قُلْ يَٰٓأَيُّهَا الْكَافِرُونَ) in the first rak‘ah and sūrah al-Ikhlās (قُلْ هُوَ اللَّهُ أَحَدٌ) in the second rak‘ah. After completing the salāh, the du‘ā of istikhārah should be recited (mentioned below). However, if one is not able to offer the nafl salāh for any reason, istikhārah can also be performed by reciting only the du‘ā. But regardless of whether one recites the du‘ā after the salāh or performs istikhārah only by reciting the du‘ā, it is mustaḥab to offer ḥamd to Allāh Almighty

and recite durūd and salām upon the Noble Rasūl ﷺ before and after reciting the du‘ā.

After performing istikhārah, one should act according to whichever option the heart is content with. Some scholars have also stated in light of their experience that, after reciting the du‘ā of istikhārah, one should sleep in the state of wudū while facing the qiblah. If one sees the color white or green in a dream, they should proceed with that action as this is a positive sign. But if one sees the color red or black, then they should refrain from undertaking that action as this is a negative sign. However, having a dream or seeing something in a dream is not necessary for istikhārah. Instead, the purpose is for the heart to incline towards a certain option and for the heart to become content. Therefore, when the heart becomes inclined to one option, then they should put their trust in Allāh and carry out the action. Allāh Almighty's support and help will be with them, and, if Allāh Almighty wills, they will attain success.

The Du‘ā of Istikhārah:

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 عاجِلِ أَمْرِي وَآجِلِهِ فَاقْضْهُ لِي وَيَسِّرْهُ لِي ثُمَّ بَارِكْ لِي فِيهِ وَإِنْ كُنْتَ
تَعْلَمُ أَنَّ هَذَا الْأَمْرَ شَرٌّ لِي فِي دِينِي وَمَعَاشِي وَعَاقِبَةِ أَمْرِي عاجِلِ أَمْرِي وَآجِلِهِ فَاصْرِفْهُ عَنِّي وَاصْرِفْنِي عَنْهُ وَاقْضْ لِي الْخَيْرَ حَيْثُ كَانَ ثُمَّ أَرْضِنِي

بِهِ

(The translation of this du‘ā is in the ḥadīth below) After reciting this du‘ā, one should mention their matter and need for which they are performing istikhārah.

Alternatively, one may replace the words “هَذَا الْأَمْرَ” with their matter or need. For

example, if one is doing istikhārah for travelling, he should say: “اللَّهُمَّ إِنْ كُنْتَ تَعْلَمُ أَنَّ هَذَا السَّفَرَ... خَيْرٌ لِي”.

It is narrated in Saḥīḥ al-Bukhārī, Jāmi‘ Tirmizī, Sunan Abī Dāwūd, Sunan Ibn Mājah, Sunan Nasā’ī, Musnad Aḥmad, Mustadrak ‘Alā al-Saḥīḥain, etc. (the following is cited from al-Bukhārī):

عن جابر بن عبد الله رضي الله عنهما قال: كان رسول الله صلى الله عليه وسلم يعلمنا الاستخارة في الأمور كما يعلمنا السورة من القرآن يقول: إذا هم أحدكم بالأمر فليركع ركعتين من غير الفريضة ثم ليقل: اللهم إني أستخيرك بعلمك وأستقدرك بقدرتك وأسألك من فضلك العظيم فإنك تقدر ولا أقدر وتعلم ولا أعلم وأنت علام الغيوب، اللهم إن كنت تعلم أن هذا الأمر خير لي في ديني ومعاشي وعاقبة أمري، أو قال: عاجل أمري وآجله فاقدره لي ويسره لي ثم بارك لي فيه وإن كنت تعلم أن هذا الأمر شر لي في ديني ومعاشي وعاقبة أمري، أو قال: في عاجل أمري وآجله فاصرفه عني واصرفني عنه واقدر لي الخير حيث كان ثم أَرْضِنِي بِهِ، قال: ويسمي حاجته

Translation: It is narrated that Jābir Bin ‘Abdullah رضي الله تعالى عنهما said: The Messenger of Allāh ﷺ would teach us how to perform istikhārah regarding matters just like He

would teach us a sūrah of the Qur’ān. He would say: “When any of you intend to undertake an action, he should offer two rak‘āt of a non-farḍ salāh and then make this supplication: ‘O Allāh, I seek goodness from You with Your Knowledge, and I seek ability from You by Your Power, and I ask for Your immense grace because You are the possessor of power and I have no power, You know everything and I know not, and You know very well all hidden things. O Allāh, if in Your knowledge this matter (I am intending to undertake) is better for my religion, my worldly life, and the outcome of my affairs, (or He stated: is better for my present and future affairs) then make it destined for me and make it easy for me, and then put blessings in it

for me. O Allāh, if in Your knowledge this matter is harmful for my religion, my worldly life, and the outcome of my affairs, (or He stated: is harmful for my present and future affairs), then turn it away from me and turn me away from it, and wherever goodness lies for me make it destined for me and then make me contented with it.” The narrator says, “The one making the supplication should mention his need.” (Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī, Ch. of Nawāfil, Vol. 01, p. 391, Ḥadīth No. 1109, Publ. Dār Ibn Kathīr, Damascus)

‘Allāmah Abū al-Faḍl Muḥammad Bin Mukarram ibn Manẓūr (d. 711 AH / 1311 CE) writes:

الاستخارة: طلب الخير في الشيء

Translation: Istikhārah means seeking what is better in a matter. (Lisān al-‘Arab, Vol. 04, p. 266, Publ. Dār al-Sādir, Beirut)

‘Allāmah Syed Aḥmad Bin Muḥammad Taḥtāwī Ḥanafī رحمه الله تعالى عليه (d. 1231 AH / 1815 CE) writes:

الاستخارة أي طلب ما فيه الخير وهي تكون لأمر في المستقبل ليظهر الله تعالى خيرا لأمرين

Translation: Istikhārah means seeking that which contains goodness. Istikhārah is performed regarding future matters so that Allāh Almighty may make apparent which of the two options is better. (Ḥāshiyah al-Taḥtāwī ‘Alā Marāq al-Falāḥ, Book of Salāh, Ch. of Taḥiyah al-Masjid, p. 397, Publ. Dār al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyah, Beirut)

‘Allāmah Zainuddīn Muḥammad ‘Abdul-Ra’ūf Munāwī رحمه الله تعالى عليه (d. 1031 AH / 1622 CE) writes:

والاستخارة طلب الخير في الأمور منه تعالى وحقيقتها تفويض الاختيار إليه سبحانه فإنه أعلم بخيرها للعبد والقادر على ما هو خير لمستخيرها إذا دعاه أن يخير له فلا يخيب أملة

Translation: Istikhārah refers to seeking goodness from Allāh Almighty in one’s affairs. The essence of this is to entrust the choice to Allāh Almighty, for He knows best what is better for His bondsmen and is capable of decreeing what is best for the one performing istikhārah. So, when one makes du‘ā to Allāh Almighty to destine for him what is best, He will not disappoint his hopes. (Faid al-Qadīr Sharḥ al-Jāmi‘ al-Sagḥīr, Vol. 05, p. 442, Publ. Egypt)

Ḥakīm al-Ummah Muftī Aḥmad Yār Khān Na‘īmī رحمه الله تعالى عليه (d. 1391 AH / 1971 CE) writes:

استخاره کے معنی ہیں: خیر مانگنا کسی سے بھلائی کا مشورہ کرنا، چونکہ اس دعا و نماز میں بندہ اللہ سے گویا مشورہ کرتا ہے کہ فلاں کام کروں یا نہ کروں، اسی لیے اسے استخارہ کہتے ہیں۔

Translation: Istikhārah means to seek goodness or to seek advice from someone regarding what is better. Since it is as if a person is seeking advice from Allāh as to whether or not to proceed with a particular action through this salāh and du‘ā, they are called Istikhārah. (Mir‘āt al-Manājīḥ, Vol. 02, p. 286, Publ. Maktabah Islāmiyah, Lahore)

‘Allāmah Badruddīn Abū Muḥammad Maḥmūd Bin Aḥmad ‘Aynī رحمه الله تعالى عليه (d. 855 AH / 1451 CE) writes:

فيه استحباب صلاة الاستخارة والدعاء المأثور بعدها في الأمور التي لا يدري العبد وجه الصواب فيها

Translation: This ḥadīth indicates that it is mustaḥab to perform the Istikhārah salāh and then recite the prescribed du‘ā’ regarding matters in which one is uncertain

about the correct course of action. (‘Umdah al-Qārī Sharḥ Saḥīḥ al-Bukhārī, Book of Tahajjud, Ch. of what was narrated about offering nafl in pairs, Vol. 07, p. 224, Publ. Al-Matba‘ah al-Khayriyah)

‘Allāmah Syed Aḥmad Bin Muḥammad Taḥtāwī رحمۃ اللہ تعالیٰ علیہ (d. 1231 AH/1815 CE) writes:

اعلم أن محل ندب الاستخارة إنما هو في الأمور التي لا يدري العبد وجه الصواب فيها أما ما هو معروف خيره أو شره كالعبادات وصنائع المعروف والمعاصي والمنكرات فلا حاجة إلى الاستخارة فيها نعم قد يستخار فيها البيان خصوص الوقت

Translation: It is mustaḥab to perform istikhārah regarding matters in which one is uncertain about the correct course of action. As for the matters which are clearly beneficial or clearly harmful, such as acts of worship, good deeds, sins, and prohibited actions, there is no need to perform istikhārah for them. However, istikhārah can be performed for good deeds to specify a certain time. (Ḥāshiyah al-Taḥtāwī ‘Alā Marāq al-Falāḥ, Book of salāh, p. 398, Publ. Dār al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyah, Beirut)

Muftī Sharīf al-Ḥaq Amjadī رحمۃ اللہ تعالیٰ علیہ (d. 1421 AH / 2000 CE) writes:

جب کسی کام کے کرنے کا ارادہ ہو تو استخارہ کی نماز مستحب ہے، بشرطیکہ وہ عبادات نہ ہوں یا منہیات نہ ہوں، اس لیے کہ عبادات کی ادائیگی اور منہیات سے اجتناب مطلقاً خیر ہے۔ ہاں یہ جائز ہے کہ کسی عبادت غیر موقت کے وقت کے بارے میں استخارہ کیا جائے، مثلاً حج، جہاد کے بارے میں یہ کہا جائے کہ امسال کروں یا نہ کروں؟... چھوٹا کام ہو یا بڑا سب کے لیے استخارہ مستحب ہے، کبھی کبھی چھوٹی چھوٹی باتیں بڑے حوادث و نقصانات کا سبب بن جاتی ہیں۔ بہتر یہ ہے کہ استخارہ متعدد بار کرے۔

Translation: When one intends to undertake any action, it is mustaḥab to perform istikhārah, provided that it is not an act of worship or something prohibited. This is because performing acts of worship and avoiding prohibited actions are intrinsically good. However, it is permissible to perform istikhārah regarding the time for performing an act of worship that is not restricted to a specific time. For example, one may perform istikhārah regarding whether to perform Ḥajj or jihad this year. Istikhārah is mustaḥab for matters both minor and major, as even minor matters can sometimes lead to major mishaps and losses. It is better to perform istikhārah multiple times. (Nuzḥah al-Qārī Sharḥ Saḥīḥ al-Bukhārī, Vol. 02, p. 575, Publ. Farīd Bookstall, Lahore)

Sadr al-Sharī‘ah, Muftī Muḥammad Amjad ‘Alī A‘zamī رحمۃ اللہ تعالیٰ علیہ (d. 1367 AH / 1948 CE) writes:

بہتر یہ ہے کہ سات بار استخارہ کرے کہ ایک حدیث میں ہے: "اے انس (رضی اللہ تعالیٰ عنہ)! جب تو کسی کام کا قصد کرے تو اپنے رب (عز و جل) سے اس میں سات بار استخارہ کر، پھر نظر کرتیرے دل میں کیا گزرا کہ بے شک اُسی میں خیر ہے۔" (کنز العمال)... استخارہ کا وقت اس وقت تک ہے کہ ایک طرف رائے پوری جم نہ چکی ہو۔

Translation: It is better to perform istikhārah seven times, for it is stated in a ḥadīth: "O Anas رضي الله تعالى عنه, when you intend to undertake any action, perform istikhārah from your lord regarding that matter seven times. Then see what has settled in your heart, for that is best for you." (Kanz al-‘Ummāl) The time of istikhārah is until one has firmly settled upon one of the options. (Bahār-E-Sharī‘at, Vol. 01, pt. 04, p. 683, Publ. Maktaba-Tul-Madīnah, Karachi)

‘Allāmah Ibn ‘Ābidīn Syed Muḥammad Amīn Bin ‘Umar Shāmī رحمۃ اللہ تعالیٰ علیہ (d. 1252 AH/1836 CE) cites:

من ہم بأمرو كان لا يدري عاقبته ولا يعرف أن الخير في تركه أو الإقدام عليه فقد أمره رسول الله صلى الله عليه وسلم أن يركع ركعتين يقرأ في الأولى فاتحة الكتاب ﴿قُلْ يَا أَيُّهَا الْكَافِرُونَ﴾ وفي الثانية الفاتحة ﴿قُلْ هُوَ اللَّهُ أَحَدٌ﴾ فإذا فرغ قال اللهم إني، ثم المسموع من المشايخ ينبغي أن ينام على الطهارة ومستقبل القبلة بعد قراءة الدعاء المذكور فإن رأى في منامه بياضاً وخضرة فذلك الأمر خير وإن رأى فيه سواداً أو حمرة فهو شر ينبغي أن يجتنب عنه

Translation: The one who intends to undertake a course of action but is unaware of its outcome and does not know whether it is better for him to abandon it or proceed with it, the Prophet ﷺ instructed such a person to offer two rak‘āt and recite sūrah al-Fātiḥah and sūrah al-Kāfirūn in the first rak‘ah, and sūrah al-Fātiḥah and sūrah al-Ikhlās in the second rak‘ah. Then after completing the salāh, he should recite “اللهم..”. It has been reported from the mashā’ikh that after reciting the aforementioned du‘ā, one should sleep in the state of purity while facing the qiblah. If he sees white or green in his dream, then that matter is good. But if he sees black or red, then it is harmful and he should refrain from it. (Minḥah al-Khāliq ‘Alā al-Baḥr al-Rā’iq, Book of salāh, Ch. of witr and nawāfil, Vol. 02, p. 56, Publ. Dār al-Kitāb al-Islāmī) ‘Allāmah Syed Aḥmad Bin Muḥammad Taḥtāwī Ḥanafī رحمۃ اللہ تعالیٰ علیہ (d. 1231 AH / 1815 CE) writes:

إذا تعذر عليه الصلاة استخار بالدعاء فقد روى الترمذي بإسناد ضعيف عن أبي بكر الصديق رضي الله عنه أن النبي صلى الله عليه وسلم كان إذا أراد الأمر قال اللهم خيري واختر لي

Translation: If offering the salāh of istikhārah is difficult for him, then he should perform istikhārah by reciting the du‘ā. It is narrated in al-Tirmizī, with a da‘īf (weak) chain of narration, from Abū Bakr al-Siddique رضي الله تعالى عنه that when the Prophet ﷺ would intend any course of action, he would say: “O Allāh! Decree goodness for me and choose whatever is best for me.” (Ḥāshiyah al-Taḥtāwī ‘Alā Marāq al-Falāḥ, Book of salāh, Ch. of Taḥiyah al-Masjid, p. 397, Publ. Dār al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyah, Beirut) Imām Abū Zakariyah Muḥyuddīn Yaḥyā Bin Sharaf Nawawī رحمۃ اللہ تعالیٰ علیہ (d. 676 AH / 1277 CE) writes:

ولو تعذرت عليه الصلاة استخار بالدعاء ويستحب افتتاح الدعاء المذكور وختمه بالحمد لله والصلاة والتسليم على رسول الله صلى الله عليه وسلم

Translation: If offering salāh becomes difficult for one, he should perform istikhārah by reciting the du‘ā. It is mustaḥab to begin the aforementioned du‘ā with ḥamd for Allāh and durūd and salām upon the Prophet ﷺ, and to conclude it with them. (Al-Azkār Lil-Nawawī, Book of Invocations and Supplications for Occurring Matters, p. 120, Publ. Dār al-Fikr, Beirut)

Sadr al-Sharī‘ah Muftī Muḥammad Amjad ‘Alī A‘zamī رحمۃ اللہ تعالیٰ علیہ (d. 1367 AH / 1948 CE) writes:

اور (دعائے استخارہ میں) اپنی حاجت کا ذکر کرے، خواہ بجائے "هذا الامر" کے حاجت کا نام لے یا اُس کے بعد۔ (نیز الفاظ حدیث) "أو قال عاجل أمري" میں اوشک راوی ہے، فقہا فرماتے ہیں کہ جمع کرے، یعنی یوں کہے: وعاقبة أمري وعاجل أمري وآجله۔

Translation: In the du‘ā of istikhārah, one should mention their need, whether this is done by replacing the words “هذا الامر” with the name of their need, or by mentioning it afterwards. (It is stated in a ḥadīth) “أوقال عاجل أمري” Here, the أو is for doubt of the narrator. The jurists state that one should combine both wordings and say the following: “وعاقبة أمري وعاجل أمري وآجله”. (Bahār-E-Sharī‘at, Vol. 01, pt. 04, p. 682, Publ. Maktaba-Tul-Madīnah, Karachi)

Ḥakīm al-Ummah Muftī Aḥmad Yār Khān Na‘īmī رحمۃ اللہ تعالیٰ علیہ (d. 1391 AH/1971 CE) writes:

یعنی "هذا الامر" کی جگہ اپنے کام کا نام لے، (مثلاً) هذا النكاح یا هذه التجارة یا هذا التعمير کہے۔ حدیث شریف میں ہے: "جو استخارہ کر لیا کرے وہ نقصان میں نہ رہے گا اور جو استخارہ کر لیا کرے وہ نادوم نہ ہوگا۔" اس استخارہ کے بعد پھر جدھر دل متوجہ ہو، وہ کرے۔ ان شاء اللہ کامیابی ہوگی۔

Translation: In place of “هذا الامر”, one should name their specific need, such as saying “this nikāḥ”, “this business”, or “this construction”. It is stated in a ḥadīth: “The one who performs istikhārah will not suffer loss and the one who performs istikhārah will not regret it.” After performing istikhārah, one should proceed with whatever his heart settles upon. By the will of Allāh, he will attain success. (Mir‘āt al-Manājīḥ, Vol. 02, p. 287, Publ. Maktabah Islāmiyah, Lahore)

وَاللّٰهُ اَعْلَمُ عَزَّوَجَلَّ وَرَسُوْلُهُ اَعْلَمُ صَلَّى اللّٰهُ تَعَالٰی عَلَیْهِ وَاٰلِهٖ وَسَلَّم

(Allah Almighty knows best and His Messenger ﷺ knows best.)

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