

Qur'ani Fa'l: Seeking Guidance in the Light of the Qur'an

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Abstract: *Fa'l, in its broadest Islamic usage, refers to seeking a favourable indication in moments of uncertainty, particularly where the course of action appears clouded. Although often treated as proximate to Istikharah, the two are doctrinally and methodologically distinct. Istikharah is a prescribed devotional act consisting of Salah and Dua through which a believer seeks Allah's guidance when choosing between lawful alternatives. Fa'l, by contrast, is not a ritual of decision-making in the Prophetic sense, but an expression of lawful optimism inspired by a good word or pleasing sign. The present study examines both the classical Nabawi conception of Fa'l and its later development, especially in Shi'i and South Asian religious practice, where "Fa'l Qur'an" came to denote the opening of the Qur'an for indications regarding the beginning, progress, and outcome of a contemplated matter. The article argues that this later practice may be treated as a form of devotional guidance only if it remains confined within the boundaries of sound creed, reverence for the Qur'an, and rejection of superstition. It further distinguishes acceptable reliance upon divine indication from impermissible fortune-telling, omen-seeking, and commercial exploitation by charlatans who trade upon fear and ignorance. Particular attention is given to matrimonial contexts, where Fa'l is frequently invoked to assess suitability, though its use is not restricted to marriage. The study concludes that neither Istikharah nor Fa'l should displace reasoned inquiry, consultation, or moral responsibility. Properly understood, Istikharah is a Sunnah-based means of seeking divine guidance, while Fa'l, if stripped of superstition and false claims to the unseen, may function only as a limited and hopeful spiritual reassurance. Their legitimate role is therefore not to control destiny, but to calm the heart and orient the believer toward trust in Allah.*

Keywords: *Fa'l; Istikharah; Qur'ani prophecy; Islamic devotional practice; omens; Tiyyarah; Sunnah; Ahl al-Bayt; South Asian Islam; Islamic ethics*

1. Introduction:

Within Islamic devotional and ethical thought, the question of how a Muslim should proceed in moments of uncertainty has long attracted theological and practical attention. Among the concepts associated with such uncertainty are Istikharah and Fa'l, both of which are widely invoked in Muslim societies, yet frequently conflated. That conflation has generated significant misunderstanding, especially in popular religious culture, where practices attributed to Fa'l are often treated as though they were part of the Nabawi method of seeking divine guidance. A careful examination, however, reveals that the two are neither identical in origin nor equal in normative status. Istikharah is a recognised Sunnah practice: a believer performs Salah and Dua for guidance when confronted with more than one permissible option and ordinary deliberation fails to resolve the matter. Fa'l, in its original Nabawi sense, is of a different order. It denotes a good word or pleasing indication that inspires hope and Husn al-Zan billah-a good expectation of Allah-without attributing causal power to the sign itself. Rasulullah (S) rejected Tiyyarah and superstition, yet approved good Fa'l as a lawful form of optimism. In that sense, Fa'l does not determine destiny, disclose the unseen, or replace personal judgment.

The root word of Fa'l in Arabi is Fey, Alif, Hamzah, Laam. A Fa'l is resorted to when a person faces uncertainty and seeks an indication as to whether a proposed course of action ought to be undertaken. In later Muslim usage, particularly in relation to Fa'l Qur'an, it is treated as a means of seeking guidance not only on whether it is expedient to begin an undertaking, but also on its general character, progress, and possible outcome. Notwithstanding its original meaning, later Muslim practice-particularly in Shi'i and Ismaili contexts-developed a more structured form of Fa'l Qur'an, whereby the Qur'an is opened according to certain etiquettes and passages are read for guidance concerning the commencement, progress, and eventual outcome of a contemplated matter. In one commonly described method, an Aalim opens the Qur'an in the same way as for Istikharah, but instead of reading the first words or Ayah on the first page, he turns six pages and on the seventh page looks at the seventh line and acts according to the indication of the Ayah. Unless a person is well versed in the meaning of the Qur'an, he will not be able to understand the wisdom and meaning behind the Ayah. If an Ayah indicates something good, it connotes that the beginning of the undertaking will be auspicious. He then turns to the end of the passage to learn what the final outcome will be, and reads where he first opened to ascertain the character of the matter while in progress. The meanings, however, are often not self-evident and cannot properly be forced to fit every situation.

Its help is sometimes taken on the occasion of marriage, although its application and use are not restricted to matrimonial issues. For the purpose of marriage, it is often used to work out the suitability of a prospective spouse and the character of their immediate family members. The help of Fa'l is usually sought when people are confused and desire some divine indication. Its legitimacy, however, depends upon strict limitations. It must not become a substitute for investigation, consultation, and reasoned choice; nor may it descend into fortune-telling, paid clerical manipulation, or superstition disguised in religious form. For that reason, clergymen who demand fees or gifts for performing Fa'l should be avoided. Only the Fa'l of a pious person who refuses to charge and is not greedy may be regarded as acceptable. It is absolutely unacceptable to determine one's affairs through Fa'l other than the Qur'an. Due to ignorance of the Talim of

Islam, people sometimes even rely on parrots and their masters to open Fa'l. Those who indulge in such activities, and those who solicit the services of such pretenders, are sinning and should desist immediately. This article therefore examines the meaning of Fa'l, its distinction from Istikharah, its later ritualised development, and the theological limits within which it may be regarded as acceptable. It argues that the sound Islamic position lies in preserving the devotional and ethical integrity of both practices while firmly excluding all claims that transform sacred guidance into commerce, omen-based fatalism, or illicit attempts to penetrate the unseen.

2. Difference between Istikharah and Fa'l:

Istikharah is Dua with Salah. It is a prescribed devotional practice, while Fa'l is not a Dua. It is simply a hopeful impression from a good word. Istikharah is done when one wants guidance in choosing between permissible options. Fa'l does not choose for you; it merely gives emotional encouragement and positive expectation. Istikharah has a known method: two Rak'ah and the reported Dua. Fa'l has no set method, no fixed wording, no ritual time, and no special recitation. Istikharah is a Sunnah, Fa'l, in the Nabawi meaning, is permissible and liked, because Rasulullah (S) said he liked it. Fa'l in the Nabawi sense means a good word or pleasing sign that creates lawful optimism, without believing that the word or sign itself controls destiny. Rasulullah (S) said: "There is no Tiyyar (superstitious belief in bad omens, ill fortune, or negativity), but I like good Fa'l,"

And when asked what Fa'l is, he replied:

"A good word."

(Sahih al-Bukhari; Sahih Muslim).

In "Man La Yahduruh al-Faqih", Al Imam al-Shadiq (as) is reported to have said that when a person intends a matter, he should first "consult Allah," explained as performing Istikharah, and then consult people (for Fa'l); Allah may then cause the better course to emerge through others.

(a) Fa'l is a hopeful, positive sign that does not independently determine reality, or

(b) Fa'l is an Amal, below to Istikharah used only after consultation.

Therefore, for example, a sick person hears someone say "Salim" or "Salamah" and feels hopeful about recovery; or a person awaiting success hears a positive word and becomes encouraged. This is optimism, not a ritual for decision-making.

3) What is Fa'l?

In South Asian settings, the word "Fa'l" is often used for practices such as:

Opening the Qur'an or another text randomly to "get an answer,"

Asking someone:

"take out a Fa'l,"

Using names, numbers, dates, birds, or incidents as hidden signs,

Treating random occurrences as messages that one must obey.

This common usage is not the same as the Nabawi Fa'l, which is just a good word that gives hope; it is not a divination technique. Once it becomes a system for discovering the unseen or making decisions by omens, it resembles condemned superstition rather than Sunnah. The Qur'an explicitly forbids divining arrows and related forms of seeking decisions through omens.

Fa'l does not mean:

Believing in lucky and unlucky omens,

Changing plans because of random events,

Thinking a sound, date, animal, or accident has hidden causal power,

Using a religious text as a fortune-book.

Rasulullah (S) rejected Tiyyarah while approving only good Fa'l, meaning a good word. Therefore, lawful Fa'l is optimism without superstition.

Reports attributed to Rasulullah (S) and Al Imam Jafar al-Şadiq (as) describe opening the Qur'an after specific Adiyah and then taking guidance from the passage encountered. At the same time, Shi'i texts also draw an important distinction: this is acceptable as seeking divine guidance, but not as claiming knowledge of the unseen or fortune-telling. That distinction is stated quite clearly in later Shia compilations of hadith and devotional practice. Historically, the practice seems to have developed in three broad stages.

i. There is the early ethical idea of Fa'l as hopeful omen and trust in Allah.

ii. In Shi'i Hadith culture, this became a more structured practice of Istikharah by the Qur'an for moments of indecision.

iii. In Safavid Iran and the post-Safavid Shi'i world, especially in later South Asian Shi'i surroundings, Fa'l Qur'ani became markedly more visible and culturally rooted.

4. The Method of Fa'l:

Suppose someone receives two lawful marriage proposals and cannot decide. The proper course is: ask about Deen and character, consult trustworthy people, pray Istikharah, then proceed with Tawakkul. That is Istikharah. If that same person later hears someone say:

"May Allah make it blessed,"

And this increases hope in the heart that is Fa'l in the acceptable sense-provided the person does not believe that those words themselves determine the outcome. But if the person says, "I heard a certain sound, or opened a page, so now I know this marriage is doomed," that is closer to superstition, not Sunnah.

Sirah Literature guides about the etiquettes of opening Fa'l. Whenever you want to seek the best from the Qur'an, do as follows: [20]

i). Perform Wadu and take the Qur'an in your hands.

ii). Sit on Musalla.

iii). If the time is between morning till 10 am, use Qur'an Surah 1 till Surah 10.

iv). If the time is between 10 AM till 2 PM, then open Qur'an Surah 11 till Surah 20.

v). If you do it between 2 PM till sunset, you will use Surah 21 till 30.

vi). If it is during the night, then use the whole Qur'an.

These are the times when the Fa'l should be taken. Then recite: [21]

1). Salawaat 11 times

2). Surah al-Fatiha once

3). Ayat al-Kursi once

4). Surah al-Ikhlās 3 times

5). Salaw'at 11 times

Then recite following Dua:

Allāhumma innī tawakkaltu ‘alayka wa tafā’altu bi-kitābika, fa-arinī mā huwa al-maktūbu fī sirrika al-maknūn, wa fī ghaybika. Allāhumma bayyin lī mā huwa mina al-khayri wa ash-sharri, wa as-sa‘di wa an-naḥsi, wa an-naf‘i wa an-nuqṣi. Anta al-Ḥaqqu, wa kitābuka al-Ḥaq, wa amruka al-Ḥaq, wa mā shi’ta al-Ḥaq, wa qaḍā’uka al-Ḥaq. Fa-anzil ‘alayya al-Ḥaq, bi-ḥaqqi Muḥammadin wa ālihi aṭ-ṭayyibīn aṭ-ṭāhirīn, ṣalawātu-llāhi ‘alayhim ajma‘īn.

“O Allah, I place my trust in You, and I take an omen/seek indication by Your Book. So show me what is written in Your hidden secret and in Your unseen. O Allah, make clear to me what contains good and evil, fortune and misfortune, benefit and loss. You are the Truth; Your Book is the Truth; Your command is the Truth; whatever You will is the Truth; and Your decree is the Truth. So cause the truth to come down upon me, by the right of Muhammad and his family-the pure, the immaculate-may Allah’s Salawaat be upon them all.”

Open the Qur’an and read the Ayah from the right side of the page. Count 7 pages forward from there, not backwards. Your answer is on the seventh page, on the 7th, 8th or 9th line depending on the length of the Ayah. For example when you open the Qur’an you see page 1 and page 2 but your answer will be on page 7. Sometimes understanding the translation is very difficult. The words often will not convey a direct answer but are taken as affirmative or negative accordingly, as their general meaning may be good or bad, promising a blessing, or denouncing a threat.

It is important to note that the practice of Fa’l is different from the fortune telling activities which are Har’am. Many have turned it into a business and people with weak Aqidah visit these charlatans frequently to seek solutions to their problems. The trick of the trade of most practitioners is to tell their client that they are in dire circumstances, and that only they can save the troubled. The usual questions asked are about one’s personality, travel, marriage, love affairs, financial success or business wellbeing, success in examinations, health, etc. It must be remembered that these methods are recommended only in case of extreme confusion and their practice must not be turned into a habit. Hence, follow these practices using common sense, as the original purpose is to remove doubt and make one’s mind at peace.

5. Concluding Remarks:

Istikharah, as presented through Nabawi instruction and Ahl al-Bayt (as) traditions, functions as a principled method of seeking Allah’s guidance when ordinary deliberation reaches genuine uncertainty. Its spiritual logic is consistent: one performs Salah, Dua, and Adhkar, then proceeds with reliance upon Allah and acceptance of what He facilitates, rather than treating outcomes as a substitute for moral agency or informed counsel. The associated practice of Fa’l-particularly “foresight by the Qur’an”-reflects a longstanding Muslim impulse to seek reassurance through sacred text, yet it remains defensible only when constrained by reverence, sound creed, and strict avoidance of superstition, exploitation, and commercialised fortune-telling.

Many Professional Fa'l Observers, Clergy operate by taking money under different names and false identities, misleading vulnerable people through deception and fear. They often invent fake causes for ordinary problems, claim hidden spiritual dangers, and manipulate individuals into believing that only repeated visits to clerics or so-called spiritual experts can protect them. This pattern is not guidance but calculated fraud, designed to exploit trust, create dependency, and extract money from innocent people through misrepresentation and intimidation.

A Fa'l must be observed with sincerity, purity of intention, and freedom from worldly motive. When a person begins taking money from seekers in exchange for observing Fa'l, the matter is no longer kept free from material desire. The introduction of financial gain creates the risk that the act is influenced by greed, self-interest, or the lust of the world rather than by honesty and spiritual restraint. Once such worldly motive enters, the reliability and spiritual integrity of that Fa'l become doubtful. For that reason, it may rightly be said that Fa'l taken for money is incorrect, because it becomes mixed with worldly desire, and worldly desire is a pathway through which Shayt'an Mardud corrupts what ought to remain pure.

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