



Analyzing the Manifestations of Popular Religion (The Use of Istikhara During the Period of Naser Al-Din Shah to Muhammad Ali Shah Qajar)

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Abstract

Religion is one of the most important sources of the formation of individual and social beliefs over time and with the influence of various factors, developed and some of the undocumented and popular beliefs, sometimes inconsistent with its main purpose, take a religious aspect. This evolution may manifest in different forms. Distortion of religious propositions, forgery, errors in usage meaning excessive or short in implementation, misplaced usage and such things form a part of new beliefs that some have referred to as Popular or common religiosity. This type of religiosity is influenced by sometimes undocumented and populist beliefs and is called popular. Popular religion refers to a form of religion in contrary to the ortodox religion, which includes a set of beliefs that have a religious appearance. An ortodox religion is a religion that is officially supported and approved by the main congregation of believers and accordingly a government. Popular religion, like other types of religiosity, had social and cultural manifestations, one of which was resorting to Istikhara and making micro and macro decisions as a result of it. On the other hand, Istikhara is a well-known practice in the religious community, which is common among Muslims, and some firmly believe in it. Istikhara has its own customs and traditions and its field of application is very limited. This important thing is recommended about valuable matters and its development to trivial and everyday tasks shows weakness and incapacity and is in conflict with wisdom.

During the Qajar era (1210-1344 AH), Iran entered the modern world whether it was willy-nilly or not and was influenced by the current relations and special issues in it. The ruling body, the government of men and even the common people who saw themselves in new conditions and times, for the comfort of themselves or their dependents or to reduce the coefficient or the possibility of error in decision-making, inevitably sought refuge in Istikhara, which they thought meant reflecting the will of their God. They took it and made it the basis of their decisions. In this period, Istikhara flourished and with the increase of its use, this tradition, which had its roots in the



official religion, was drawn to the direction of popular religion, and along with some other popular beliefs such as fortune-telling and prayer-writing, it became popular among the rulers and the people. It was left to destiny in many cases of decision-making in life matters, and on the other hand, popular beliefs flourished at the level of society and among the people of that era.

The current research, using the historical contextual approach and using documents and sources related to the field of religiosity, politics and the dominant public atmosphere, the prevalence and functions of Istikhara, especially in the context of politics in the Qajar era, during the reigns of Naser al-Din Shah (1848-1896) until Muhammad Ali Shah (1906-1909). Here, the question that arises is why the rulers of the Qajar era, especially the era of Naser al-Din to Muhammad Ali Shah, referred to Istikhara when making important and effective decisions. The method of historical context is actually that approach that tries to discuss and examine the events in its specific time and place context and according to the conditions of that time, taking into account all the historical evidences and evidences of the period under discussion. It is according to that Istikhara becomes the most important tool in decision-making, that too in the very risky arena of politics.

The findings show the causes and reasons such as the individual and authoritarian nature of the government, lack of public trust, the low level of awareness of various classes, spiritual and individual needs, fear of facing the results of wrong decisions, justifying oneself and others, reaching peace and avoiding doubt and of course escaping the responsibility of big decisions and attributing it to God has caused the spread of Istikhara in the discussed time period. By referring to the information and Istikharas made, especially the Istikharas in important situations, he showed that these Istikharas were not authentic religious traditions and were somehow a solution to maintain one's position, interests, and comfort. Only limited cases such as Istikharas during the constitutional revolution and after that have been considered to be part of the positive and undistorted use of Istikharas. One of the important points is that in each period of the reign of these kings, Istikharas were not performed with a different content from the previous period. Rather, the Istikharas were made on similar topics and their content did not change with the passage of time, but the amount and intensity of these Istikharas varied according to the Shah's belief, as Muhammad Ali Shah based on the belief and conditions that ruled the society of that era, the most Istikharas did in different subjects. The Istikharas that were performed for the king were interpreted not according to the religious order and tradition, but sometimes based on the personal wishes of the king and sometimes based on the interests and wishes of other courtiers.

In addition, examining examples of Istikhara in the discussed time period and taking Istikhara out of its specific religious context and of course placing it in a political and decision-making context in political affairs, shows that we are dealing with another type of Istikhara. We are facing that it should be called political Istikhara. These studies also show that although this type of Istikhara, i.e. political Istikhara, existed before the time period under discussion, the importance of this era, which should be referred to as the period of transition from traditional Iran to modern Iran, caused it to happen that the



formation of the concept of political Istikhara, according to the requirements and special issues of this era, will reach its final completion.

Keywords: Qajar Dynasty, Naser al-Din Shah, Muhammad Ali Shah, religion and government, Istikhara, political Istikharas, Popular Religion(Common religiosity).

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