

13. Seeking Shafa'a (Intercession) From Awliya' Allah

All of us are well acquainted with the term *shafa'a*. When the discussion of crime, sin and guilt of a person is brought up and someone else intercedes and mediates for him in order to save him from death and execution or imprisonment and detention, we say so and so has done *shafa'a* for him.

The word of *shafa'a* has been taken from the root word **شفع** which means 'even' as against **وتر** which means 'odd'. The reason that the mediation of a person for saving a sinner is known as *shafa'a* is that the status and position of the one doing *shafa'a* and his effective powers get attached (and become even) with the factors of salvation which is present in the person receiving the *shafa'a* (even though it may be a little). Both these, with the help of one another become the cause of release of the sinful person.

The *shafa'a* of the beloved ones of Allah for the sinners is apparently because of their proximity and position which they have before Allah, (of course by the will of Allah and under special norms which have general and not personal aspects) they can mediate for the criminals and the sinners and through (invocation), and pleadings ask God to forgive their crimes and sins. Of course, *shafa'a* and its acceptance depend on a series of conditions of which some are related to the sinful person and some to the circumstances of *shafa'a* of sins.

Shafa'a in other words is the help of the beloved ones of Allah (by His will) to the one who in spite of being sinful has not disconnected his spiritual relation with Allah and the beloved ones of Allah. Moreover, this standard should always be safeguarded.

According to one of the meanings, *shafa'a* is: One inferior person who has the aptitude for leaping forward and progressing seeks help from a superior person in the form of one lawful order. However, the person seeking help should not, from the viewpoint of spiritual perfections, fall to such extent that he loses the power of advancing and the possibility of changing into a pious man.

Right from the time of the Holy Prophet (S) till the later periods it had been the practice of the Muslims to seek *shafa'a* from the true intercessors. They were always asking in their lifetime or in their death and such *shafa'a* had never been objected by any of the Islamic scholars on any ground or Islamic principles.

It was only in the 7th century A.H. that Ibn Taymiyyah with his special way of thinking, opposed this and many other lasting customs and traditions that were in vogue among the Muslims. Three centuries after him, Muhammad bin 'Abd Al-Wahhab once again raised the flag of opposition and enlivened Ibn Taymiyyah's school of thought with much more vigor.

One of the point of differences of the Wahhabis with the other Islamic sects is that although they have accepted *shafa'a* as an Islamic principle (like the other Muslims) and say that on the Day of Judgement (*qiyama*) the intercessors will intercede for the sinners and in this matter the Holy Prophet (S) will play a greater role, yet they say that no one has the right to seek *shafa'a* from them in this world. In this matter they have gone to such an extreme that narrating the text of their sayings will be the source of spiritual discomfort. In short, they say:

The Holy Prophet (S), the other Prophets, the angels and the beloved ones of Allah have the right of doing *shafa'a* on the Day of Judgement but one should ask for *shafa'a* from the Master of *shafa'a* and the One who gives permission for that i.e. Allah and say:

اللهم شفّع نبينا محمد فينا يوم القيامة أو اللهم شفّع فينا عبادك الصالحين أو ملائكتك أو نحو ذلك مما يُطلب من الله لا منهم فلا يُقال يا رسول الله أو يا وليّ الله أسألك الشفاعة أو غيرها مما لا يقدر عليه إلا الله فإذا طلبت ذلك في أيام البرزخ كان في اقسام الشرك

“O God, make the Holy Prophet (S) and your virtuous servants and the Angels as our intercessors on the Day of Judgement.” However we are not having the right to say, “O Prophet of Allah” or “O wali of Allah, we ask you to seek shafa'a for us. This is because shafa'a is something which no one is capable of doing except Allah. Asking such a thing from the Holy Prophet (S) who is living in barzakh will be a kind of polytheism (shirk).”¹

The Wahhabis have, with a series of notions, forbidden the seeking of *shafa'a* from the true intercessors and have labelled the one who does so as a polytheist and his action as polytheism.

Before looking into their reasoning, we shall discuss the matter from the viewpoint of Qur'an, *sunnah* and the practice of the Muslims in this regard. After that, we will examine their reasoning.

Our Reasoning On The Logical Firmness Of Seeking Shafa'a

Our reasoning for the permissibility of seeking intercession (*shafa'a*) is a combination of two matters which by proving them, the matter of intercession will become clear. These two matters are:

1. Asking for *shafa'a* is the same as asking for *du'a*.
2. Requesting for *du'a* from some worthy person is a recommended (*mustahab*) order.

1. Asking For Shafa'a Is The Same As Asking For Du'a

The intercession of the Holy Prophet (S) and other true intercessors is nothing but *du'a* and eulogy before Allah owing to the proximity and the position which they have before Allah. It is due to their *du'a* that Allah bestows His mercy and Grace upon the sinners and forgives them. Asking for *du'a* from one believer (what if it is asked from the Holy Prophet) is an approved affair and none amongst the Islamic scholars whether Wahhabis or Non-Wahhabis have doubt in its authenticity.

Of course it cannot be said that the reality of *shafa'a* in all the stations of *mahshar* is this very *du'a* before Allah. But one can say that one of its clear meanings is *du'a* and the one who says:

يا وجيهاً عند الله اشفع لنا عند الله

“O the one who has a position before Allah intercede for us from Allah.”

denotes the same meaning.

Nizamuddin Al-Nishapuri² while interpreting the verse

من يشفع شفاعته سيئة يكن له كفل منها

And whoever joins himself (to another) in an evil cause shall have the responsibility of it. (Holy Qur'an, Surah Al-Nisa, 4:85)

It is narrated from *Muqatil* as such:

الشفاعة إلى الله إنما هي الدعوة لمسلم

“The reality of shafa'a is performing du'a for the Muslims.”

It is also narrated from the Holy Prophet (S) that anyone who performs *du'a* for his Muslim brother will be accepted and an angel will cry out: “The same shall be for you too.”

Ibn Taymiyyah is one of those who believed that the request for *du'a* from a living person is correct. Therefore, asking for *shafa'a* is not confined to the Holy Prophet (S) but one can make such a request from any believer who possesses value and esteem before Allah.

Al-Fakhruddin Al-Razi³ is one of those who have interpreted *shafa'a* as *du'a* and eulogy before Allah. In interpreting the verse:

وَيَسْتَغْفِرُونَ لِلَّذِينَ آمَنُوا رَبَّنَا وَسِعْتَ كُلَّ شَيْءٍ رَحْمَةً

And ask protection for those who believe: Our Lord! Thou embracest all things in mercy. (Holy Qur'an, Surah Al-Ghafir, 40:7)

He says: "This verse shows that the *shafa'a* performed by the carriers of *'arsh* (Throne) is only in connection with the sinners." ⁴

Similarly, the *shafa'a* of the Holy Prophet (S) and other Prophets (S) with regards to the same group (i.e. the sinners) is the same because Allah commands as such:

وَاسْتَغْفِرْ لِدُنْيِكَ وَالْمُؤْمِنِينَ وَالْمُؤْمِنَاتِ

And, ask protection for your fault and for the believing men and the believing women. (Holy Qur'an, Surah Muhammad, 47: 19)⁵

And Nuh (a) sought forgiveness for himself, his parents, those who had faith in him and all the believers who are to come till *qiyama* and in this way he has fulfilled his mission of *shafa'a*.⁶

This description from Al-Fakhruddin Al-Razi bears witness that he has presented *shafa'a* to be the same as *du'a* of the intercessor for the sinner and has reckoned the request for *shafa'a* to be the same as request for *du'a*.

In the Islamic traditions (hadiths), there are clear indications that the '*Dua*' of one Muslim for another Muslims is '*Shafa'at*'.

Ibn 'Abbas narrates from the Holy Prophet (S) as such:

ما من رجل مسلم يموت فيقول على جنازته اربعون رجلاً لا يُشركون بالله شيئاً إلا شفّعهم الله فيه

"If one Muslim dies and forty men who are not polytheist, recite salat over his dead body, then Allah will accept their shafa'a which was done in his favor." ⁷

In this tradition, the person reciting the *du'a* is introduced as an intercessor. Now, if someone in his life-time requests forty of his loyal friends to be present after his death and perform *salat* and *du'a* upon his dead body, he has in reality sought *shafa'a* from them and has prepared the premises of *shafa'a* of the servants of Allah.

In *Sahih Al-Bukhari* there is a chapter entitled as:

إذا استشفعوا إلى الإمام ليستسقى لهم لم يردهم

“When the people would ask their Imam to intercede (do *shafa'a*) and plead before Allah to descend rain, he (i.e. the Imam) would not reject their demands.”

Also, there is a chapter entitled as:

إذا إستشفع المشركون بالمسلمين عند القحط

“Occasions when the polytheists demanded *shafa'a* from Muslims at times of famine.”⁸

Narration of these two chapters is evidence that request for *shafa'a* is the same as request for *du'a* and it should not be interpreted in another way.

Till here, one pillar of reasoning has been clarified and that is, the reality of seeking *shafa'a* is nothing but requesting *du'a*. Now we should engage ourselves in describing the second pillar of reasoning and that is asking from one brother-in-faith (what if it is asking the *Awliya' Allah*) is a desirable and recommended action.

2. Qur'an And Request For Du'a From Worthy People

The verses of Qur'an bear witness that when the Prophets seek forgiveness for the people it is very effective and beneficial such as the following verses:

وَاسْتَغْفِرْ لِدُنْيِكَ وَالْمُؤْمِنِينَ وَالْمُؤْمِنَاتِ

And ask protection for your fault and for the believers. (Holy Qur'an, Surah Muhammad, 47: 19)

وَصَلِّ عَلَيْهِمْ إِنَّ صَلَاتَكَ سَكَنٌ لَهُمْ

And pray for them, surely your prayer is a relief to them. (Holy Qur'an, Surah Al-Tawbah, 9: 103)

If the *du'a* of Prophet (S) has such benefit for man then what is the harm if one requests him to pray as such for him? On the other hand, request for *du'a* is nothing but request for *shafa'a*.

وَلَوْ أَنَّهُمْ إِذْ ظَلَمُوا أَنفُسَهُمْ جَاءُوكَ فَاسْتَغْفَرُوا اللَّهَ وَاسْتَغْفَرَ لَهُمُ الرَّسُولُ لَوَجَدُوا اللَّهَ تَوَّابًا رَحِيمًا

And had they, when they were unjust to themselves, come to you and asked forgiveness of Allah and the Apostle had (also) asked forgiveness for them, they would have found Allah Oft-returning (to mercy), Merciful. (Holy Qur'an, Surah Al-Nisa, 4:64)

By **جاؤك** (they come to you) it means that they would come and ask the Prophet (S) to pray and seek forgiveness. If it means something else then their coming will be useless and in vain. Moreover, the honor of meeting the Prophet (S) and asking him to pray is itself a witness of the spiritual transformation which prepares the ground for acceptance of prayers. The Holy Qur'an narrates from the sons of Ya'qub (a) that they requested their father to seek forgiveness for them and Ya'qub (a) too accepted their request and acted upon his promise.

قَالُوا يَا أَبَانَا اسْتَغْفِرْ لَنَا ذُنُوبَنَا إِنَّا كُنَّا خَاطِئِينَ قَالَ سَوْفَ أَسْتَغْفِرُ لَكُمْ رَبِّي

They said: O our father! Ask forgiveness of our faults for us, surely we were sinners. He said: I will ask for you forgiveness from my Lord. (Holy Qur'an, Surah Yusuf, 12:97)

All these verses show that requesting the Prophet (S) and other virtuous ones to perform *du'a* which is the same as requesting *shafa'a*, is not having the least objection from the viewpoint of Islamic standards. For the sake of brevity, we have not narrated the traditions regarding request of *du'a* from the virtuous ones.

Islamic Traditions (Hadiths) And The Path Of Companions

The famous traditionist, Al-Tirmidhi and the writer of one of the *Sihah* of the *Ahl Al-Sunnah* narrates from Anas as such:

سألت النبي أن يشفع لي يوم القيامة فقال أنا فاعل قلت فأين أطلبك فقال على الصراط

(Anas says): "I requested the Holy Prophet (S) to ask *shafa'a* for me on the day of Judgement and he accepted and said, "I shall request your *shafa'a*. I asked: "Where should I find you? The Prophet said: "Find me near *Sirat* (bridge over Hell)." [9](#)

With his mild disposition, Anas requests for *shafa'a* from the Holy Prophet (S) and he too accepts it and gives him glad tidings. Sawad bin Qarib was one of the Companions of the Holy Prophet (S). In the contents of one of his poems, he seeks intercession from the Prophet (S) and says:

فكن لي شفيعاً يوم لا ذو شفاعة بمغنٍ قتيلاً عن سواد بن قارب

"O' the honorable Prophet! you be my intercessor on the Day of Judgment, the day when the shafa'a of

no one will be useful and beneficial to Sawad bin Qarib.”¹⁰

Before the Holy Prophet's (S) birth, a person by the name of Tubba' from the tribe of Al-Himyar had heard that soon a Prophet was going to be appointed by God in the Arab territory. Before dying, he wrote one letter and requested his near ones that if the day came when such a prophet was sent, then they should hand over his letter to him. In this letter, he had written as such:

وإن لم أدركك فاشفع لي يوم القيامة ولا تنسني

“Though my age was not loyal and I died before seeing you, ask my shafa'a on the Day of qiyama and do not forget me.”

When the letter was handed to the Holy Prophet (S) he said thrice:

مرحباً يتبع الأخ الصالح

“Congratulations to Tubba', my pious brother.”¹¹

If request for *shafa'a* was polytheism then Holy Prophet (S) would never have addressed him as his brother and would not have thrice congratulated him.

Seeking Shafa'a From The Dead

Last section of traditions indicated that seeking *shafa'a* from the true intercessors in their lifetime is absolutely correct.

Now, we shall mention two traditions that show that the companions of the Holy Prophet (S) used to seek *shafa'a* from him even after his demise.

1. Ibn 'Abbas says: When Amir Al-mu'minin (a) finished giving *ghusl* (ablution) and *kafan* (shroud) to the Holy Prophet (S), he uncovered the face (of the Prophet) and said:

بأبي أنت وأمي طبت حياً وطبت ميتاً...واذكرنا عند ربك

“May my mother and father be sacrificed; you are chaste and pure in life and in death. Remember us near your Lord.”¹²

2. When the Holy Prophet (S) passed away, Abu Bakr uncovered his face and kissed him and said:

“May my father and mother be sacrificed; you are chaste and pure in life and death. Remember and

think of us near your Lord.” [13](#)

The aforesaid traditions show that seeking *shafa'a* of the intercessor makes no difference whether the intercessor is alive or dead. Thus, by paying attention to these verses, traditions and the continuing custom of the Muslims in all the ages, the matter of seeking *shafa'a* becomes self-evident and one should never be in slightest doubt with regards to its integrity. Moreover, the companions of the Holy Prophet (S) were requesting the Holy Prophet (S) to pray for them even after his demise and if request for *du'a* (prayers) after his demise is correct, then request for *shafa'a* too which is one kind of request for *du'a* is proper and correct. [14](#)

[1.](#) Al-Hadiyyat Al-Saniyya, 2nd treatise, page 42.

[2.](#) Nizamuddin Hasan Al-Nishapuri (d. 1328 A.H. / 1910 A.D.) was a Persian mathematician, astronomer, jurist, exegete, and poet originally from Qom. He wrote many famous books including exegesis of Qur'an Tafsir Al-Gharaeb Al-Qur'an (تفسير الغرائب القرآن) which is a commentary on the wonders of Qur'an in exegesis a.k.a. Tafsir Nishapuri.

[3.](#) Fakhruddin Razi (1150 – 1210 A.D.) was a famous Sunni Shafi'i Ash'ari Muslim theologian and philosopher from Khorasan. He was born in Rey and died in Herat. He was known as Sultan Al-Mutakallimin (Prince of the Rhetoricians) and Imam Al-Mushakkikin (Leader of the Skeptics). He wrote several books including Tafsir Al-Kabir a.k.a. Mafatih Al-Ghayb and 'Aja'ib Al-Qur'an.

[4.](#) Since the end of the verse says: "وقههم عذاب الجحيم" and protect them from the torment of Hell.(40:7)

[5.](#) Surah Muhammad, Ayah 19, as a decisive evidence bears witness to the inerrancy of the Holy Prophet (S) and other Prophets, naturally the word sin means something else for them. We have written the description of this section in Vol. 5 of the exegesis of Manshur Javid which is the first topic wise exegesis in Persian.

[6.](#) My Lord! Forgive me and my parents, and whoever enters my house in faith, and the faithful men and women.(Holy Qur'an, Surah Nuh, 71:28)

رَبِّ اغْفِرْ لِي وَلِوَالِدَيَّ وَلِمَنْ دَخَلَ بَيْتِي مُؤْمِنًا وَلِلْمُؤْمِنِينَ وَالْمُؤْمِنَاتِ

[7.](#) Sahih Muslim, vol. 3, page 54.

[8.](#) Sahih Al-Bukhari, vol. I.

[9.](#) Sunan Al-Tirmidhi, vol. 4, p. 42. Chapter of: "ما جاء في شأن الصراط"

[10.](#) Qamus Al-Rijal, under the section سواد (Sawad).

[11.](#) Manaqib Ibn Shahr Ashub, vol. 1, p. 12; Bihar Al-Anwar, vol. 15, p. 314.

[12.](#) Nahj Al-Balagha, Sermon no. 230.

[13.](#) Kashf Al-'Irtiyab, page 265 narrated from Khulasat Al-Kalam.

[14.](#) For more details refer to the book Shafa'a in the realm of Reason, Qur'an and Traditions written by (this) author. In this book, you will find 100 traditions (45 traditions from Ahl Al-Sunnah and 55 traditions from Shi'a books).

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