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## Chapter 4: The Holy Qur’an and Prayers (Salah)

### [Question 31: Do the Shias have another, different Holy Qur’an? Do you believe the Holy Qur’an is incomplete?](#)

The answer to both the above is a definitive “No”! But this is a question that Shias have been asked for centuries, despite the fact that Shias use, and believe in, the same Holy Qur’an as the Ahlul Sunnah. Whether you are Shia or Sunni, there is only one Holy Qur’an and no other.

#### [Evidence from the Holy Qur’an](#)

The Ahlul Sunnah believe that the Holy Qur’an was first compiled by Uthman ibn Affan, the third caliph. But the Shias believe that the Holy Qur’an was gathered and compiled by the Holy Prophet Muhammad (S) during his lifetime. The proof is in the tradition of Ghadeer Khumm: “I leave you the book...” How can the Prophet (S) refer to a “book” if it was not yet in existence?

The Holy Qur’an is protected from change or human interference or tampering, as the following verse of the Holy Qur’an itself confirms:

***“Certainly, we revealed the Reminder and certainly we shall preserve it.” (15:9) [Surah Al Hijr].***

This is a guarantee from Allah (SwT) that the book is preserved. Unlike any other holy book, one of the miracles of the Holy Qur’an is that there are no changes to it wherever you go in the world.

Now, unfortunately, there have been some Shia narrations suggesting “tahrif”, (changes to the text of the verses) may have occurred, but they are not considered authentic by the Shia scholars (ulema) and should be disregarded and ignored.

In fact, as the sixth Shia Imam, Jafar as Sadiq (as), declared in a hadith narrated in Usul al-Kafi: “Test the various reports by the Book of God; whatever agrees with it take it, whatever disagrees with it reject

it.”

### **Other Shia scholars' verdicts**

The completeness of the Holy Qur'an is so indisputable among the Shias that the greatest Shia scholar of Hadith, the 10th century aalim, Shaykh Saduq, wrote: “Our belief is that the Holy Qur'an which Allah (SwT) revealed to His Prophet Muhammad (S) is (the same as) the one between the two covers (daffatayn). And it is the one which is in the hands of the people, and is not greater in extent than that. The number of surahs as generally accepted is one hundred and fourteen ...And he who asserts that we say that it is greater in extent than that, is a liar.”

Sayyid al-Murtadha, another prominent and classical Shia scholar states: “... our certainty of the completeness of the Holy Qur'an is like our certainty of the existence of countries or major events that are self-evident.”

Ayatullah al-Udhma Abul-Qassim al-Khoei, one of the most influential Shia scholars of the 20th century, teacher to the great contemporary marja Ayatullah al-Udhma Sistani, writes in his Tafsir al-Bayan that to hold a belief in: “...tahrif (corruption of the Holy Qura'nic text in any form) is nothing more than a delusion and an imagination, maintained by those with weak reasoning.”

### **References from books of Ahlul Sunnah**

It seems strange that the Ahlul Sunnah attack the Shias for supposedly believing in tahrif, in changes to the Holy Qur'an, while ignoring the fact that their own books of ahadith include traditions (wrongly) suggesting that tahrif has occurred.

For example, according to Umar and Aisha, there were once verses in the Holy Qur'an that were called the “verse of stoning” and the “verse of suckling” that were subsequently lost from the Holy Qur'an after the death of the Prophet (S).

According to Sunan Ibn Majah, Book of Suckling, Hadith No. 2020, Aisha said: “When the verse of stoning and verse of suckling descended, they were written on a piece of paper and kept under my pillow. Following the demise of Prophet Muhammad (S) a goat ate the piece of paper whilst we were mourning.” A goat?

Hafiz Jalalludin as Suyuti narrates a similar tradition from Umar ibn Khattab, the second caliph, saying the verse of stoning was lost after the death of the Prophet (S).

Then there are the Sunni traditions suggesting the Holy Qur'an was once longer than it now is. For example, Suyuti narrates from Aisha, in his book, al-Durr al-Mansur: “Aisha narrated that during the lifetime of the Holy Prophet 200 verses were recited in Surah Ahzab but when Uthman collected the [text of the Holy Qur'an], he only succeeded in locating the present number of verses (which is 78).”

So where do the Sunni ulema believe the other 122 verses went? Such traditions, of course, are nonsense. The Holy Qur'an is the same Qur'an that the Prophet (S) left behind, and that Allah (SwT) says He will protect and preserve; any traditions which suggest otherwise – be they Shia or Sunni – should be rejected as false, as per the afore- mentioned hadith of Imam Jafar as-Sadiq (as).

## Question 32: Why don't Shias wash their feet in wudhu, as the Ahlul Sunnah do?

Shias wipe their feet in the wudhu while the Ahlul Sunnah tend to wash their feet.

### Evidence from the Holy Qur'an

According to Shias, the Qur'anic mandate for wudhu comes in the sixth verse of Chapter 5, Surah Maidah. The English translation by Abdullah Yusuf Ali – a famous Ahlul Sunnah scholar and translator states:

***“O ye who believe! when ye prepare for prayer, wash your faces, and your hands (and arms) to the elbows; Rub your heads (with water); and your feet to the ankles. If ye are in a state of ceremonial impurity, bathe your whole body. But if ye are ill, or on a journey, or one of you cometh from offices of nature, or ye have been in contact with women, and ye find no water, then take for yourselves clean sand or earth, and rub therewith your faces and hands, Allah doth not wish to place you in a difficulty, but to make you clean, and to complete his favour to you, that ye may be grateful.” (5: 16) [Surah Maidah]***

Those who practice the washing of their feet during wudhu argue that “your feet” in the Holy Qur'an is linked to washing the face, whereas the followers of the Ahlul Bayt argue that “your feet” is linked to rubbing the head; therefore, it should be wiped or rubbed, rather than washed.

Allah (SwT) did not repeat the verb for “feet”, and joined “heads” and “feet” together under one verb “rub”. This is exactly what he did for “faces” and “hands” that came under one verb “wash”.

### References from books of Ahlul Sunnah

In support of the latter view, Abdullah ibn Abbas narrates from the Prophet (S), in a hadith included in the book of al-Shahrastani, a famous Ahlul Sunnah scholar and philosopher of the 12th century, that, the companions used to rub their feet during the time of the Holy Prophet (S).

The fact is that all of the Muslims during the time of the Prophet (S) would have performed the wudhu in the same way. No disagreements would have occurred between them then since the Messenger of Allah was present among them to clarify the correct procedure.

The same situation existed during the time of the first caliph, Abu Bakr and no disagreements over the

performance of wudhu have been reported from that time period either. This was also the case during the period of the second caliph, Umar ibn Khattab except for the fact, that he allowed wiping of the socks rather than the bare feet as the Holy Qur'an directs.

However, the disagreement regarding the performance of the wudhu began during the time of the third caliph, Uthman ibn Affan, after he began to wash his feet instead of wiping them.

The Sunni scholar Muttaqi al-Hindi, in his book Kanz al-Ummal mentions how the third caliph was the first to differ in performing the wudhu. According to Allama Muttaqi al-Hindi, more than twenty narrations – all narrated by the third caliph – are about his new manner of performing wudhu. These traditions indicate his responsibility for establishing the new method of washing, rather than wiping.

Now, some Muslims might argue that the washing of the feet leads to better cleanliness and hygiene than merely wiping the feet. However, Allah (SwT) is more aware of the advantages and disadvantages of washing versus wiping. It has been narrated that Imam Ali ibn Abu Talib (as) once said, "If religion was according to human opinion, the bottom of the foot would be more worthy of wiping than the top. But I saw the Messenger of Allah (S) wiping the top of his feet."

### Common sense

It is irrational, and incredible, that the same Ahlul Sunnah scholars who say you must wash your feet, and not wipe your bare feet, also say that it is permissible to do wudhu by wiping wet hands over your socks or even over your shoes. How does this make sense? How is this consistent or logical?

## Question 33: Why do Shias combine their prayers into three sittings?

The Shias allow for the combination of the 5 daily prayers (salah) into three times – whereas the majority of Ahlul Sunnah scholars say that this is only permissible during journeys or in state of danger or war. Some Hanafi scholars don't accept the combination of prayers even in the aforementioned situations.

### References from books of Ahlul Sunnah

The combining of the prayer is based on the sunnah of the Holy Prophet (S), as narrated in leading Sunni books of hadith.

Sahih Muslim, Book 4, Hadith Number 1523: "Abdullah ibn Shaqiq reported: Ibn Abbas one day addressed us in the afternoon (after the afternoon prayer) till the sun disappeared and the stars appeared, and the people began to say: Prayer, prayer. A person from Banu Tamim came there. He neither slackened nor turned away, but (continued crying): Prayer, prayer. Ibn Abbas said: May you be deprived of your mother, do you teach me Sunnah? And then he said: "I saw the Messenger of Allah (S)

combining the noon and afternoon prayers and the sunset and Isha prayers.”

Sahih Muslim Book 4, Hadith Number 1520: “Ibn Abbas reported that the Messenger of Allah (SW) combined the noon prayer with the afternoon prayer and the sunset prayer with the Isha prayer in Madinah without being in a state of danger or rainfall.” And in the hadith transmitted by Waki the words are: “I said to Ibn Abbas: What prompted him to do that? He said: So that his ummah should not be put to (unnecessary) hardship.”

These ahadith appear in a chapter called, appropriately: “Permissibility of combining two prayers on a journey”.

Others include this one from Sahih Muslim, Book 4, Hadith Number 1515: “Ibn Abbas reported: The Messenger of Allah (S) observed the noon and afternoon prayers together, and the sunset and Isha prayers together without being in a state of fear or in a state of journey.”

### Evidence from the Holy Qur’an

All Muslims observe the five daily prayers, but Shias believe these five prayers can be prayed at three (rather than five) different times – as stated in the Holy Qur’an:

***“Establish regular prayers at the sun’s decline till the darkness of the night, and the recital of the Qur’an in the morning prayer; for the recital of the dawn is most witnessed.” (17:78) [Surah Bani-Israel]***

How many prayer times are mentioned in this verse? Yes, three, not five: “Sun’s Decline, Darkness of the Night, and the Morning Prayer.”

## Question 34: Why do Shias include “Aliyun Waliyullah” in the kalima and adhan?

### Not compulsory (wajib)

The first point to remember is that this line of the adhan is not wajib. It is not considered to be a compulsory part of the adhan, iqamah or kalima and most Shia scholars state that it should not be recited with the niyyat (intention) of it being wajib. Most of them believe that it is something which is only mustahab, (recommended).

For example, the world’s leading Shia aalim, Ayatullah al-Udhma Sistani says on his website, [www.sistani.org](http://www.sistani.org): [1] “Ash hadu anna Amir al-Mu’minin Aliyyan Waliyyullah (I testify that the Commander of the Faithful, Imam Ali (as) is the vicegerent of Allah (SwT))” is not a part of either adhan or iqamah. But it is preferable that it is pronounced after “Ash hadu anna Muhammadan Rasulullah (S)” with the niyyat of Qurbat (nearness to Allah).”

## References from books of Ahlul Sunnah

However, the vast majority of scholars view the proclamation as a non-essential, non-mandatory, non-wajib, yet recommended part of the adhan. The logic is, among other things, that we have many narrations instructing us to proclaim the divine appointment of Imam Ali (as) every time we proclaim the oneness of God and the prophethood of the Messenger.

The Sunni scholars Allama Tabari in his Tafsir and Shaykh Suleman ibn Ibrahim al-Hanafi al-Qandozi in his Yanabi al-Mawaddah both narrate that Abu Hurayrah, of

all people, says that the Holy Prophet (S) told him: “It is written on the Divine Arsh [throne] that ‘There is no god but Allah, the One Who has no associate; and Muhammad is my servant and Prophet, whom I helped through Ali ibn Abu Talib.’”

Hafiz Jalalladin as Suyuti, in his al-Durr al-Mansur, narrates how Anas ibn Malik said the Prophet told him that he had seen, on the Me’raj, written on the Arsh: “There is no god but Allah; Muhammad is the Prophet of Allah; I have given him support through Ali.”

Hence according to Ahlul Sunnah scholars, the coupling together of Muhammad (S) and Ali’s (as) names has not been done by Shia Muslims but by Allah (SwT) Himself in the highest of the Heavens!

## Prophet’s lifetime

Did this line appear during the lifetime of the Prophet? That of course is the crucial, historical question, and it has been narrated that it did.

The author of Kitab al-Salafa fi Amr al-Khilafa, Shaykh Abdullah al-Maraghi al-Misri, a leading Ahlul Sunnah scholar, says that during the time of the Prophet (S), Salman al-Farsi attested to the imamat and wilayat of Ali ibn Abu Talib (as) in the adhan and iqamah, straight after attesting to the prophethood of Muhammad (S). He did so after the coronation of Imam Ali (as) by the Prophet (S) at Ghadeer Khumm.

In his book, Shaykh Abdullah narrates how a man came to see the Messenger of Allah (S) and said: “O Prophet of God, I have heard a thing which I have not heard before.”

He [the Prophet] said: “And what is this?” The man replied: “After the shahadah to the risalah, Salman bore witness in his adhan a shahadah to the wilayah of Ali.” The Prophet said: “You have heard a good thing.”

## Umar’s innovation

Shias are attacked for supposedly adding a man-made line to the adhan and iqamah, relating to Ali ibn Abu Talib (as). Yet the Ahlul Sunnah ulema gloss over the fact that Umar ibn Khattab confessed to

adding his own line, his own innovation to the adhan and iqamah.

The Sunni scholar, Imam Malik ibn Anas, reports in his Muwatta: “Yahya related to me from Malik that he had heard that the muadhin came to Umar ibn Khattab to call him to the morning (fajr) prayer and found him sleeping, so he said, “Prayer is better than sleep,” and Umar ordered him to put that in the adhan for morning prayer (fajr).”

So let’s be clear: the Ahlul Sunnah are willing to say this line at fajr time, which was added to the adhan by Umar ibn Khattab but are unwilling to say a line about Ali (as) which is written on the arsh of Allah (SwT) and which was approved by His Messenger? Does this make any sense?

## **Question 35: Why don’t Shias cross their arms during the prayers?**

Is it not sad and depressing that the Muslims cannot even agree whether the Prophet crossed his arms or not in prayers? The Holy Prophet (S) prayed at least 40,000 compulsory (wajib) prayers in front of his sahabah over the 22 years of his prophethood, yet Muslims cannot agree what he did with his hands while he was praying.

### **Ahlul Sunnah internal divisions**

It is important to note that the issue of arms is not just a Shia–Sunni conflict; it is an intra–Ahlul Sunnah conflict too. The Malikis, one of the four Ahlul Sunnah schools of fiqh agree with the Shias in rejecting what they call “qabd” (or “grasping” – holding the left hand with the right), and opting for “sadi” (letting your hands drop at your side).

### **References from books of Ahlul Sunnah**

Allama Ibn Rushd, the famous 12th century Sunni scholar of Muslim Spain, writes in his famous legal manual, Bidayat al–Mujtahid: “The reason behind their differing is that there are some ahadith narrating the way the Prophet prayed which did not mention him placing his right hand over his left, and on the other hand, it was reported that the people were ordered to do that.”

As for the traditions that Ibn Rushd is referring to, one of the most commonly cited is the hadith of Abu Humaid al–Sa’idi, narrated by Imam Ahmed ibn Hanbal, Abu Dawud and Bukhari, Volume 1, Book 12, Hadith Number 791:

“Narrated by Muhammad ibn ‘Amr ibn ‘Ata’: “I was sitting with some of the companions of Allah’s Apostle and we were discussing about the way of praying of the Prophet. Abu Humaid as–Saidi said, “I remember the prayer of Allah’s Apostle better than any one of you. I saw him raising both his hands up to the level of the shoulders on saying the Takbir; and on bowing he placed his hands on both knees and

bent his back straight, then he stood up straight from bowing till all the vertebrate took their normal positions.”

The statement “he stood up straight from bowing till all the vertebrate took their normal positions” is considered to be proof that the Holy Prophet (S) did not place his right hand over his left, for this is not the natural position at which the bones and limbs rest, rather, this is what is known as *sadl* – hands and arms at your side! If the Prophet placed his right hand over his left in the prayer, then (at least) one of the sahabah present would have objected to Abu Humaid’s failure to report that in his narration. But none of them did so!

In another tradition, the Sunni scholar Allama Ibn Hajr Asqalani writes that “...when the Prophet would stand for *salat*, he would raise both hands to his ears, and after saying *Takbeer* would then drop his hands.”

Drop, not cross, his hands! Sunni scholar Allama Ibn Abd al-Barr, in his book *al-Tamheed*, narrates: “Abdullah ibn al-Izar said, ‘I used to make *tawaf* around the *Kabah* with Said ibn al-Jubayr [a leading member of the second generation of companions, the *Tabi’een*]. Once, Said saw a man placing one hand over the other, so he went to him, separated his hands, and then returned to me.’”

So, to sum up, the Shia practice of leaving one’s arms at one’s side matches those of the sahabah and the children of the sahabah from the period straight after the Holy Prophet.

One final and important point to remember: not only do the Maliki Sunnis agree with the Shias on the uncrossing of the arms but even amongst the Hanafis, Hanbalis and Shafi’is there is no consensus on where exactly on the abdomen one’s hands should be held, or how exactly both men and women should hold their hands during the *salah* (prayer).

## **Question 36: Why do Shias pray on a stone, on a piece of earth (a “sajdagaar” or “turbah”)?**

Prostrating on the earth (*turbah*) or nature made material does not in any way imply worshipping the earth or stone which one is prostrating upon. You are prostrating to Allah (SwT) and Him alone but remember: the prostration itself is a gesture of humiliation and insignificance before the Creator and if it is done on the dirt, on earth, then it will have more of an effect than prostrating on a man-made carpet. This is the philosophy behind the *turbah*, the *sajdagaar*.

### **Prophet’s Sunnah**

It is important to note that as with the uncrossing of the arms during the daily prayers, the use of a *turbah* is a practice associated with *salah* which has a firm foundation in the tradition, in the *sunnah*, of the Holy Prophet (S).

The Shias, after all, never forget that they are followers of the Prophet's Sunnah.

### References from books of Ahlul Sunnah

So how did the Prophet prostrate? According to Sahih Bukhari, Vol 1, Book 8, Number 378: "Maimuna (a wife of the Prophet) narrated, "Allah's Apostle used to pray on a 'khumra'."

The "khumra" is a small, palm-leaf mat, only big enough to place your face on during the sajdah.

Then there is Sahih Bukhari, Vol 1, Book 12, Number 798: "Abu Said al-Khudri says: "I saw Allah's Apostle prostrating in mud and water and saw the mark of mud on his forehead."

There are numerous such ahadith in Sahih Bukhari, the pre-eminent book of traditions for the Ahlul Sunnah.

Al-Bayhaqi, Ahlul Sunnah scholar of ahadith, in his Sunan, goes even further than Bukhari; he says the famous companion of the Prophet, Anas ibn Malik once narrated: "We used to pray with the Messenger of Allah during the enormous heat, and one of us would take pebbles in our hands and once they were cool, put them down and prostrate on them."

On pebbles!

### Karbala turbah

Now, of course, the majority of Shias pray on a "stone" which, on inspection, turns out to be baked piece of soil from the desert of Karbala, in Iraq. It is not considered compulsory or wajib to pray only on the soil of Karbala but Shia Muslims prefer to use such turbahs because the soil of Karbala is the holiest of all soils. It is the soil that the Holy Prophet (S) held in his hand as he wept and prophesied the death of his youngest grandson. It is the soil under which the third holy Imam Husayn (as) is buried; it is the soil that represents the very principles of Islam. So what better soil to worship on and prostrate on than the soil of Karbala?

It is worth noting here: Shias are sometime smeared by some members of the Ahlul Sunnah as "stone worshippers" for praying on a turbah. Yet, according to this logic, should Sunni Muslims then be referred to as "carpet worshippers" for prostrating on prayer rugs?

### Question 37: Why do Shias say "Allahu Akbar" three times at the end of the prayer?

This issue is another point of contention between the Shi'a and the Ahlul Sunnah. According to the Sunnah of Prophet that has reached us through Imams of Ahlul Bayt, a Muslim should commence the salah by loudly reciting "takbeer" (Allahu Akbar") and finish it by admitting the greatness and supremacy

of Allah (SwT), by reciting “takbeer” thrice after the “tashahud” (the final kneeling prayer of the salah).

## **References from books of Ahlul Sunnah**

During the days of the Holy Prophet (S), the daily prayers were ended with the recitation of takbeer, and not with the turning of head from side to side.

In Sahih Bukhari Volume 1, Book 12, Hadith Number 803 states: “Abdulla ibn Abbas narrated: ‘I used to recognize the completion of the prayer of the Prophet by hearing takbeer.’”

Similarly, it is stated in Sahih Muslim, Book 4, Hadith Number 1209: “Abdulla ibn Abbas said: ‘We used to know that Allah’s Messenger had finished his prayer when we heard the takbeer (Allahu Akbar).’”

In Ahlul Sunnah tradition, the imam of the prayers turns right and left and prays the “salam” in a loud voice so it can be heard by those in the back rows. In Shia tradition, the imam of the prayers recites the salam in tashahud and then loudly recites takbeer thrice and the congregation understands that the salah has finished.

## **Why don’t the Shia turn their heads from side to side while reciting the “salam”?**

To support this Shia stance there is a tradition from the Sunan of Abu Dawud, one of the six authentic Sunni books of ahadith, in which Holy Prophet holds Abdullah ibn Masud’s hands and teaches him the recitation of tashahud.

In Sunan Abu Dawud, in the Chapter of Prayer (Kitab al-Salat): Hadith Number 965 states:

“Abdullah ibn Mas’ud narrated: ‘...the Apostle of Allah (S) caught hold of his (Ibn Mas’ud’s) hand and taught him the tashahud during prayer.’”

He then narrated the tradition of tashahud. This version adds: “When you say this or finish this, then you have completed your prayer. If you want to stand up, then stand, and if you want to remain sitting, then remain sitting.”

There is no mention of the turning of the head!

## **Question 38: Why don’t Shias offer “tarawih” prayers in the month of Ramadhan?**

Shias, do not pray “tarawih”, which refers to the extra congregational prayers performed by a number of Sunni Muslims at night in the holy month of Ramadhan.

Why not? Because Shias believe that there is no reliable, historical evidence that the Holy Prophet (S) ever performed such prayers.

The truth is that it is “bid’at”, an “innovation”, the word that the more extreme Wahhabi members of the Ahlul Sunnah often use to smear the Shias. This is the opinion not of the Shia ulema but of Umar ibn Khattab, the second caliph of the Ahlul Sunnah, who proudly introduced this particular bid’at of tarawih prayers.

Sahih Bukhari, vol 3, book 32, hadith number 227: Narrated Abu Hurayrah: ibn Shihab (a sub-narrator) said, “Allah’s Apostle died and the people continued observing that (i.e. nawafil offered individually, not in congregation), and it remained as it was during the caliphate of Abu Bakr and in the early days of Umar’s caliphate.” Abdur Rahman ibn Abdul Qari said, “I went out in the company of Umar ibn Khattab one night in Ramadhan to the mosque and found the people praying in different groups. A man praying alone, or a man praying with a little group behind him.

So, Umar said, ‘in my opinion it would better to collect these (people) under the leadership of one Qari (reciter) (i.e. let them pray in congregation!)’. So, he made up his mind to congregate them behind Ubai ibn Ka’b. Then on another night I went again in his company and the people were praying behind their reciter. On that, Umar remarked, ‘what an excellent bid’at (i.e. innovation in religion) this is; but the prayer which they do not perform, but sleep at its time is better than the one they are offering.’ He meant the prayer in the last part of the night, “the tahhajud”.

The Shias prefer to pray Tahhajud, which Umar refers to here, at the end of this tradition, and which Umar admits is “better” than the tarawih that the Sunni Muslims recite in congregation during Ramadhan.

With due respect to our Ahlul Sunnah brethren, Shias do not perform tarawih in Ramadhan. It is, like the line Umar added to the adhan for fajr, an innovation of the second caliph; it is not the sunnah of the Holy Prophet (S).

## **Question 39: How do Shias justify praying at graves?**

### **Bid’at and Shirk**

The Wahhabis and Salafis of the Ahlul Sunnah are obsessed with graves. Praying at graves, they say, is banned and forbidden. Even touching the grave of the Holy Prophet (S) is considered to be prohibited. Consider how Shias are treated in Madinah, during Hajj and Umra, especially at Jannatul Baqi.

Ahlul Sunnah rely on an alleged tradition of the Prophet: “May Allah’s curse be upon the Jews and Christians for taking the graves of their Prophets as places of worship.”

It is a nonsensical hadith. Jews and Christians have every right to respond to a Muslim who mentions this hadith: You hypocrites: you yourselves combine your Prophet’s mosque with your Prophet’s grave in Madinah!”

On a related note, if the Holy Prophet's grave is so unimportant, so unholy, if going to visit the Prophet in Madinah has no value, as some Wahhabis claim, then why did the first two caliphs of the Ahlul Sunnah insist on being buried next to the Prophet's grave? And why did Aisha, the widow of the Prophet, refuse to allow the Prophet's eldest grandson Imam Hasan (as) to be buried next to him?

Then there is the House of Allah (SwT), the Kabah, in Makkah, the holiest site in Islam, under which are buried the Prophet Ismail and his mother, Lady Hajira. Is it now shirk to visit the Kabah?

The Ahlul Sunnah scholars have misunderstood the nature of prostrations, or sajdah, near graves – the issue is one of intention, niyyah. If the intention of the sajdah is to pray to the person buried in the grave, then this is of course forbidden and haram and an act of “shirk” (ascribing power to those other than Allah). But if the intention is to pray to Allah in the presence of a holy personality, then how is this wrong or shirk? Intention matters!

Remember: the Shias' prostrations during salah are always intended for Allah (SwT) and for Him alone. There are other prostrations which are unrelated to worship, and which are more symbolic and respectful but these are not forbidden either.

### Evidence from the Holy Qur'an

The Holy Qur'an refers to prostrations which were carried out by or to our prophets, but which were not considered to be acts of shirk. For example:

***“And when we told the angels, “prostrate yourselves before Adam!” – they all prostrated themselves, save Iblis, who refused and gloried in his arrogance: and thus he became one of those who deny the truth.” ( 2:34) [Surah Al Baqarah].***

And:

***“Behold! Joseph said to his father: “O my father! I did see eleven stars and the sun and the moon: I saw them prostrate themselves to me!” ( 12:4) [Surah Yusuf].***

Were the angels committing shirk by prostrating themselves before Prophet Adam? Was Prophet Yusuf (Joseph) committing a sin by having this dream?

## Question 40: What about intercession? Why do Shias pray to the Prophet and the Imams, and not to Allah?

### What is intercession?

Intercession refers to the act of praying to Allah (SwT) on behalf of another – that is, the use of intermediaries to approach Allah (SwT), who pray to Him on our behalf by virtue of their higher status in

the eyes of Allah (SwT).

The Sunni critics of intercession point to:

***“Thee (alone) we worship; Thee (alone) we ask for help.” (1:5) [Surah Fateha].***

However, intercession doesn't go against this verse of Surah Fateha; those of us who engage in intercession are still worshipping Allah (SwT) “alone” and asking only Allah (SwT) for help, but we are making this request through an intermediary. The prayer, ultimately, is still directed towards Allah (SwT), not towards the chosen intercessor or intermediary.

Common sense tells us that we ask others for help all the time in everyday life but we still recognize Allah (SwT) is sovereign over the entire universe. For example, when we are ill we go to doctors and take the medicine that they prescribe for us. Do Sunni critics of intercession like Wahhabis and Salafis practise what they preach? Do they deny themselves medicine and pray only to Allah (SwT) when they are ill? If not, why not? A doctor is, technically, an intercessor – the healing still, ultimately, comes from Allah (SwT).

To ask for help from someone else, whether medical or spiritual, is not an attack on the sovereignty of Allah (SwT); it is not an act of shirk.

### **Evidence from the Holy Qur'an**

The Holy Qur'an addresses this issue in three manners. First, there are the verses which seem to negate intercession, such as:

***“O you who believe! spend out of what we have given you before the day comes in which there is no bargaining, neither any friendship nor intercession, and the unbelievers – they are the unjust.” (2:254) [Surah Al Baqarah].***

Then there are those verses that say that intercession is exclusively the domain of Allah (SwT), not humans – that is, that He and only He has the ability to intercede, such as:

***“Say: “To Allah belongs exclusively (the right to grant) intercession: to Him belongs the dominion of the heavens and the earth: In the End, it is to Him that ye shall be brought back.” (39:44) [Surah Al Zumar].***

Finally, there are those verses which contextualize and explain the first two categories and give the complete and final verdict about the validity and efficacy of intercession in Islam. They state that intercession is only the right of Allah (SwT), but He will, whenever He wishes, extend it to certain people in His creation. So, for example:

***“...no intercessor can plead with Him except after His permission.” (10:3) [Surah Yunus].***

And Surah Maidah makes it even clearer:

***“O you who believe! Be careful of (your duty to) Allah (SwT) and seek means of nearness to Him, seek a means of approaching Him, and strive hard in His way that you may be successful.” (5:35) [Surah Maidah].***

This intermediary, this “wasilah”, to use the terminology of the Holy Qur’an, can only be people like the Prophets and the Imams:

***“We sent not a messenger, but to be obeyed, in accordance with the will of Allah. If they had only, when they were unjust to themselves, come unto thee and asked Allah’s forgiveness, and the Messenger had asked forgiveness for them, they would have found Allah indeed Off-returning, Most Merciful.”(4:64) [Surah Al Nisa].***

Here is the best definition of intercession, or “tawassul” or “shifa’a”, which justifies why the Shias go to see the Holy Prophet (S) in Madinah and try and pray near his grave: to ask the Prophet to ask Allah (SwT) for forgiveness, as mentioned in the Holy Qur’an, Ch4:V64. Shias are not praying to the Prophet or the Imams, but through them – to Allah (SwT)!

### **References from books of Ahlul Sunnah**

Tirmidhi, in his Sunan, relates, through his chain of narrators from Uthman ibn Hunayf, that a blind man came to the Holy Prophet (S) and said, “I’ve been afflicted in my eyesight, so please pray to Allah for me.” The Prophet (S) said: “Go make ablution (wudhu), perform two rak’as of prayer, and then say: “Oh Allah, I ask You and turn to You through my Prophet Muhammad, the Prophet of mercy; O Muhammad (Ya Muhammad), I seek your intercession with my Lord for the return of my eyesight [and in another version: “for my need, that it may be fulfilled. O Allah, grant him intercession for me”].”

The Prophet (S) added, “And if there is some need, do the same.”

In his discussion of the above sahih hadith, Shaykh Nuh Ha Mim Keller, the famous Sunni Sufi scholar and theologian, states: “The hadith explicitly proves the validity of supplicating Allah (SwT) (tawassul) through a living intermediary, as the Prophet (S) was alive at the time.

The author of the article holds that the hadith implicitly shows the validity of supplicating Allah (tawassul) through a deceased intermediary as well, since the Prophet told the blind man to go perform ablution (wudhu) pray two rak’as, and then make the supplication containing the words, “O Muhammad, I seek your intercession with my Lord for the return of my eyesight,” which is a call upon somebody physically absent, a state of which the living and the dead are alike.

Supplicating Allah (tawassul) through a living or deceased intermediary is, in the author’s words, “not tawassul through a physical body, or through a life or death, but rather through the positive meaning

attached to the person in both life and death, for the body is but the vehicle that carries that significance.”

And perhaps the most telling reason, though the author does not mention it, is that everything the Prophet (SwT) ordered to be done during his lifetime was “legislation” “valid for all generations until the end of time unless proven otherwise by a subsequent indication from the Prophet himself. . .”

Shaykh Keller adds, in relation to the authenticity of this important tradition: “This hadith was recorded by Bukhari in his “al-Tarikh al-Kabir”, by Ibn Majah in his “Sunan”, where he said it was rigorously authenticated (Sahih), by Nasa’i in “Amal al-yawm wa al-layla”, by Abu Nu’aym in “Ma’rifa al-Sahaba”, by Baihaqi in “Dala’il al-Nubuwwa”, by Mundhiri in “al-Targhib wa al-Tahrib”, by Haythami in “Majma’ al-Zawa’id wa manba’ al-Fawa’id”, by Tabarani in “al-Mu’jam al-Kabir”, by Ibn Khuzayma in his “Sahih”, and by others. Nearly 15 hadith masters (“huffadh”, hadith authorities with more than 100,000 hadiths and their chains of transmission by memory) have explicitly stated that this hadith is rigorously authenticated (sahih).

### Common sense

As mentioned above, it has come with a chain of transmission meeting the standards of Bukhari and Muslim, so there is nothing left for a critic to attack or slanderer to disparage concerning the authenticity of the hadith. Consequently, as for the permissibility of supplicating Allah (tawassul) through either a living or dead person, it follows by human reason, scholarship, and sentiment, that there is flexibility in the matter. Whoever wants to can either take tawassul or leave it, without causing trouble or making accusations, since it has been thoroughly checked [“Adilla Ahl al-Sunna wa al-Jama’a”, 79–83].”

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#### **Links**

[1] <http://www.sistani.org>: