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Home > A Shi'ite Creed > Concerning Intersession (ash-shafa'a)

Concerning Intersession (ash-shafa'a)

Says the Shaykh Abu Ja'far, the mercy of Allah on him: We believe that *shafa'a1* (*here,* the state of being forgiven) belongs to him whose religion is approved (by Allah), whether he be of those who have committed great sins or small sins (*kaba'ir, sagha'ir*)2. As for those persons who have repented of their evil deeds, they are not in need of intercession. Says the Prophet: May Allah not grant my intercession to him who does not believe in my (power of) intercession. And he (the Prophet) said: No mediator (*shafi'*) is more successful than repentance (*tawba*)3.

(The right of) intercession belongs to prophets (*anbiya'*) and *awsiya'*. And among believers (*mu'minln*) also there are some who can intercede on behalf of people equal in number to the tribes of Rabi'a and Mudar.5 Even the least of believers will be liable to intercede on behalf of 30,000.6

There can be no forgiveness for skeptics (*ahlu'sh-shakk*) and polytheists (*ahlu'sh-shirk*); nor for unbelievers (*ahlu'l-kufr*) and those who are persistent in their denial (*ahlu'l-juhud*). But the sinful amongst those who believe in the unity of Allah (*ahlu't-tawhid7*) may be forgiven.

- 1. الشفاعة is not merely "intercession" but also "passing over without punishment", or forgiving sins, etc. (Lane). MB makes no distinction between غفران and غفران. Wensinck discusses intercession very fully, MC, 61. Rejected by the Muˈtazilites, it was generally accepted by the canonical tradition. Intercession appears to be against the doctrine of justice and retribution, and even the Qur'an in some passages is not favourable to the idea, ibid., 181, 183. Compare also Fiqh Akbar II, art. 20, MC, 194. The Wahhabis do not reject intercession altogether; they merely limit its operation, MC, 183. According to Ibnu'l`Arabi there is no real shafi'a; the term implies merely a relation between two Divine Names, the Merciful and the Avenger, Affifi, 165. BHA, nos. 234, 235. FC, no. 29. Among Isma'ili intercession cannot be had except through the walaya of the Imam, KP, trans. 30, Fayzee, Ismaili Law of Wills, 70,71,72.
- 2. On these two terms see BHA, no. 226 and note on p. 100.
- 3. MB, 398; MC, 194 (art. 20), 169 and 180sqq.; BHA, nos.237-238.
- 4. In Sunnite traditions the privilege of intercession belongs also to angels, martyrs and saints, MC, 182. Ithna `Asharites generally restrict it to prophets and Imams, BHA, nos. 234, 235.
- 5. These were big tribes and are selected to indicate the large number of persons on whose behalf effective intercession will take place by the instrumentality of a single individual.
- 6. In the Sunnite tradition, 70,000, Wensinck, Handbook, 112.
- 7. In the Wasiyat Abi Hanifa, art. 25, even mortal sins may be forgiven, MC, 130, 182, 268.

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