

Intercession (Shafa'ah)

Intercession of people is an important Islamic concept, which would be there at the time of accounting and on Judgment Day. Its negation and proof and limits and conditions have always been topics of discussion in scholastic theology and interpretation of Quran.

True cognition of the meaning of intercession is very important for one who believes in Allah and the Judgment Day and who considers following the laws of Shariat to be the means of success and salvation in the hereafter. We shall study this important aspect under the following headings:

Definition of Intercession

The literal meaning of intercession is mediation or recommendation of forgiveness or kindness with regard to a person deserving of mercy from another powerful person. Intercession is found in all small and big human societies and is even customary between members of a family and it is considered a necessary factor of social life. Intercession in a place creates an implication that a person or a powerful group of people control administration of social matters, and frame rules and regulations for those subordinate to them and they also fix rewards for those who obey and punishments for disobedient.

In such a society if all the people perform their duties they would be rewarded for it and there would be no need of intercession; but if some of them oppose it, the ruler or rulers have the right to punish the wrong doer as they had promised.

But sometimes higher exigencies dictate that some of their mistakes be overlooked. It is in these circumstances that the possibility of intercession arises or that the ruling person himself is included in the action and by observing some qualities or good deeds, which he knows are present in the person who is to be interceded for, points which deserve mercy; in that case he forgives his crime and orders his release. Or that a respectable and well-wishing personality interferes and asks the ruler to forgive.

Sometimes the same action is taken with regard to some persons, who have performed their duties nicely and are given more rewards than that which is fixed for such deeds so that they may be appreciated and encouraged. However in any case, some points must not be overlooked:

One: Acceptance or rejection of intercession is under the discretion of ruler and criminals should not sin in hope that they would get intercession. Two: Intercession would not be without criteria; on the contrary it would be possible in circumstances that the person to be interceded should possess qualities making him eligible to be interceded for.

The interceder does not ask the ruler to forsake the commands of his guardians or to disable the law of punishing criminals; on the contrary he mentions some specialties of the person to be interceded for and appeals to the greatness and mercy of the ruling person and keeping in mind the present exigencies, requests the ruler that he should exercise the rights of his rulership and have mercy on the person who is to be interceded for and that he should bestow his favor and forgiveness on him. Therefore, intercession is a social exigency and does not conflict with laws of recompense.

Intercession in Quran

Now it must be seen what Quran says about intercession. In this matter it is better to study the verses related to intercession:

Verses on this topic can be divided into different types:

First Group: Verses that apparently negate intercession

وَاتَّقُوا يَوْمًا لَا تَجْزِي نَفْسٌ عَنْ نَفْسٍ شَيْئًا وَلَا يُقْبَلُ مِنْهَا شَفَعَةٌ وَلَا يُؤْخَذُ مِنْهَا عَدْلٌ وَلَا هُمْ يُنصَرُونَ

And be on your guard against a day when one soul shall not avail another in the least, neither shall intercession on its behalf be accepted, nor shall any compensation be taken from it, nor shall they be helped. (2:48)

وَاتَّقُوا يَوْمًا لَا تَجْزِي نَفْسٌ عَنْ نَفْسٍ شَيْئًا وَلَا يُقْبَلُ مِنْهَا عَدْلٌ وَلَا تَنْفَعُهَا شَفَعَةٌ وَلَا هُمْ يُنصَرُونَ

And be on your guard against a day when no soul shall avail another in the least neither shall any compensation be accepted from it, nor shall intercession profit it, nor shall they be helped. (2: 123)

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا أَنْفِقُوا مِمَّا رَزَقْنَاكُمْ مِنْ قَبْلِ أَنْ يَأْتِيَ يَوْمٌ لَا بَيْعَ فِيهِ وَلَا خُلَّةٌ وَلَا شَفَعَةٌ وَالْكَافِرُونَ هُمُ الظَّالِمُونَ

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)

يَوْمَ لَا يُغْنِي مَوْلَىٰ عَنْ مَوْلَىٰ شَيْئًا وَلَا هُمْ يُنصَرُونَ

The day on which a friend shall not avail (his) friend aught, nor shall they be helped. (44:41)

Second Group: Negation of intercession for a Special Category

مَا لِلظَّالِمِينَ مِنْ حَمِيمٍ وَلَا شَفِيعٍ يُطَاعُ

...the unjust shall not have any compassionate friend nor any intercessor who should be obeyed. (40: 18)

وَمَا أَضَلَّنَا إِلَّا الْمُجْرِمُونَ * فَمَا لَنَا مِنْ شَافِعِينَ * وَلَا صَدِيقٍ حَمِيمٍ

And none but the guilty led us astray. So we have no intercessors, nor a true friend. (26:99–101)

وَأَنْذِرْ بِهِ الَّذِينَ يَخَافُونَ أَنْ يُحْشَرُوا إِلَىٰ رَبِّهِمْ لَيْسَ لَهُمْ مِنْ دُونِهِ وَّلِيٌّ وَلَا شَفِيعٌ لَعَلَّهُمْ يَتَّقُونَ

And warn with it those who fear that they shall be gathered to their Lord- there is no guardian for them, nor any intercessor besides Him- that they may guard (against evil). (6:51)

Third Group: Verses that limit intercession to Allah

قُلْ لِلَّهِ الشَّفَاعَةُ جَمِيعًا لَهُ مُلْكُ السَّمَوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ ثُمَّ إِلَيْهِ تُرْجَعُونَ

Say: Allah's is the intercession altogether; His is the kingdom of the heavens and the earth, then to Him you shall be brought back. (39:44)

إِنَّ يَوْمَ الْفَصْلِ مِيقَاتُهُمْ أَجْمَعِينَ * يَوْمَ لَا يُغْنِي مَوْلَىٰ عَنْ مَوْلَىٰ شَيْئًا وَلَا هُمْ يُنصَرُونَ * إِلَّا مَنْ رَحِمَ اللَّهُ إِنَّهُ هُوَ الْعَزِيزُ الرَّحِيمُ

Surely the day of separation is their appointed term, of all of them. The day on which a friend shall not avail (his) friend aught, nor shall they be helped. Save those on whom Allah shall have mercy; surely He is the Mighty the Merciful. (44:40–42)

Fourth Group: Proof of intercession by the approval of Allah

يَوْمَئِذٍ لَا تَنْفَعُ الشَّفَاعَةُ إِلَّا مَنْ أَذِنَ لَهُ الرَّحْمَنُ وَرَضِيَ لَهُ قَوْلًا

On that day shall no intercession avail except of him whom the Beneficent God allows and whose word He is pleased with. (20: 109)

وَلَا يَشْفَعُونَ إِلَّا لِمَنِ ارْتَضَىٰ وَهُم مِّنْ خَشْيَتِهِ مُشْفِقُونَ

...and they do not intercede except for him whom He approves, and for fear of Him they tremble. (21:28)

وَلَا تَنْفَعُ الشَّفَاعَةُ عِنْدَهُ إِلَّا لِمَنْ أَذِنَ لَهُ

And intercession will not avail aught with Him save of him whom He permits. (34:23)

وَكَم مِّن مَّلَكٍ فِي السَّمَوَاتِ لَا تُغْنِي شَفَاعَتُهُمْ شَيْئًا إِلَّا مِن بَعْدِ أَنْ يَأْذَنَ اللَّهُ لِمَنْ يَشَاءُ وَيَرْضَىٰ

And how many an angel is there in the heavens whose intercession does not avail at all except after Allah has given permission to whom He pleases and chooses. (53:26)

إِنَّ رَبَّكُمُ اللَّهُ الَّذِي خَلَقَ السَّمَوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضَ فِي سِتَّةِ أَيَّامٍ ثُمَّ اسْتَوَىٰ عَلَى الْعَرْشِ يُدَبِّرُ الْأَمْرَ مَا مِنْ شَفِيعٍ إِلَّا مِن بَعْدِ إِذْنِهِ

Surely your Lord is Allah, Who created the heavens and the earth in six periods, and He is firm in power, regulating the affair, there is no intercessor except after His permission. (10:3)

Reconciling The Different Types Of Verses

To reconcile different types of verses, it can be said that:

Firstly: Intercession is the right of the Almighty Allah and it is limited only to Him and in this aspect has no fixed limit, since He is the true owner of all existing things. All are in need of Him and He alone is absolutely needless. All causes and effects since in their own being, are in need of the creator of the world, in their causation and action also are attached to Him, so that whenever He desires He may take their being, causation and effect.

And in this regard, additions and negation of additions to His qualities like: beneficence, generosity, forgiveness, kindness, force and anger are mediums and intercession is also in the same meaning.

What was mentioned was with regard to innate matters; it is the same in legislative matters also. Reward and punishment of people on Judgment Day is also at discretion of Almighty Allah and no one can interfere in it, except through His permission and approval. Therefore intercession is also under His discretion.

Secondly: Other than the Almighty Allah other people may also intercede, but subject to the fact that Almighty Allah should accord them permission to intercede and that He should accept their intercession.

Thirdly: Those who would be permitted to intercede are only those who can intercede; as Almighty Allah has approved their intercession. Therefore intercession is not without criterion and it originates from particular circumstances of one who is to be interceded for.

Who all would be included in intercession?

Now let us see who would be included in intercession of the intercessors.

In this matter also, the best solution is to refer to verses of Quran:

The Holy Quran says:

يَوْمَ نَحْشُرُ الْمُتَّقِينَ إِلَى الرَّحْمَنِ وَفِدَاءً * وَنَسُوقُ الْمُجْرِمِينَ إِلَى جَهَنَّمَ وَرِدَاءً * لَا يَمْلِكُونَ الشَّفَاعَةَ إِلَّا مَنِ اتَّخَذَ عِنْدَ الرَّحْمَنِ عَهْدًا

The day on which We will gather those who guard (against evil) to the Beneficent God to receive honors. And We will drive the guilty to hell, thirsty. They shall not control intercession, save he who has made a covenant with the Beneficent God. (19:85-87)

It can be concluded from this verse that only those would be able to benefit from intercession that are promised intercession from Almighty Allah. In the interpretation of this promise it can be said: The Almighty Allah, glorified be He, in the Holy Quran has limited His forgiveness only to those who give up particular sins or subjected it to performance of particular good deeds.

For example it says: If you refrain from so-and-so, I will forgive your other bad deeds also. And this in itself is a sort of promise between Allah and His servants, and the Almighty Allah would invariably fulfill His promise. This is the meaning of intercession of Allah and intercessors with Allah. One of those promises is glad tiding of acceptance of repentance of sinners as clearly mentioned in verses of Quran.

The Holy Quran says:

وَالَّذِينَ عَمِلُوا السَّيِّئَاتِ ثُمَّ تَابُوا مِنْ بَعْدِهَا وَعَازَمُوا أَنَّ رَبَّكَ مِنْ بَعْدِهَا لَغَفُورٌ رَحِيمٌ

And (as to) those who do evil deeds, then repent after that and believe, your Lord after that is most surely Forgiving, Merciful. (7: 153)

And also says:

وَهُوَ الَّذِي يَقْبَلُ التَّوْبَةَ عَنْ عِبَادِهِ وَيَعْفُو عَنِ السَّيِّئَاتِ وَيَعْلَمُ مَا تَفْعَلُونَ

And He it is Who accepts repentance from His servants and pardons the evil deeds and He knows what you do. (42:25)

Further it says:

إِلَّا مَنْ تَابَ وَآمَنَ وَعَمِلَ عَمَلًا صَالِحًا فَأُولَئِكَ يُبَدِّلُ اللَّهُ سَيِّئَاتِهِمْ حَسَنَاتٍ وَكَانَ اللَّهُ غَفُورًا رَحِيمًا

Except him who repents and believes and does a good deed; so these are they of whom Allah changes the evil deeds to good ones; and Allah is Forgiving, Merciful. (25:70)

Another group, which is promised forgiveness by the Almighty Allah, is of those who have faith in Allah, the Prophet and resurrection and those who are pious and who refrain from greater sins.

The Holy Quran says:

إِنْ تَجْتَنِبُوا كِبَائِرَ مَا تُنْهَوْنَ عَنْهُ نُكَفِّرْ عَنْكُمْ سَيِّئَاتِكُمْ وَنُدْخِلَكُمْ مُدْخَلَ كَرِيمٍ

If you shun the great sins which you are forbidden, We will do away with your small sins and cause you to enter an honorable place of entering. (4:31)

And also says:

ذَٰلِكَ أَمْرُ اللَّهِ أَنْزَلَهُ إِلَيْكُمْ وَمَنْ يَتَّقِ اللَّهَ يُكَفِّرْ عَنْهُ سَيِّئَاتِهِ وَيُعْظِمْ لَهُ أَجْرًا

That is the command of Allah which He has revealed to you, and whoever is careful of (his duty to) Allah, He will remove from him his evil and give him a big reward. (65:5)

It also says:

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا اتَّقُوا اللَّهَ وَآمِنُوا بِرَسُولِهِ يُؤْتِكُمْ كِفْلَيْنِ مِنْ رَحْمَتِهِ وَيَجْعَلْ لَكُمْ نُورًا تَمْشُونَ بِهِ وَيَغْفِرْ لَكُمْ وَاللَّهُ غَفُورٌ رَحِيمٌ

O you who believe! be careful of (your duty to) Allah and believe in His Apostle: He will give you two portions of His mercy, and make for you a light with which you will walk, and forgive you, and Allah is Forgiving, Merciful. (57:28)

Quran has also said:

يُصْلِحْ لَكُمْ أَعْمَالَكُمْ وَيَغْفِرْ لَكُمْ ذُنُوبَكُمْ وَمَنْ يُطِيعِ اللَّهَ وَرَسُولَهُ فَقَدْ فَازَ فَوْزاً عَظِيماً

He will put your deeds into a right state for you, and forgive you your faults; and whoever obeys Allah and His Apostle, he indeed achieves a mighty success. (33:71)

Whatever was mentioned was about the promise of the Almighty Allah that He would overlook some sins subject to particular conditions.

The glorified Lord has also promised the righteous an increase in rewards. The Quran say:

مَنْ جَاءَ بِالْحَسَنَةِ فَلَهُ عَشْرُ أَمْثَالِهَا وَمَنْ جَاءَ بِالسَّيِّئَةِ فَلَا يُجْزَى إِلَّا مِثْلَهَا وَهُمْ لَا يُظْلَمُونَ

Whoever brings a good deed, he shall have ten like it, and whoever brings an evil deed, he shall be recompensed only with the like of it, and they shall not be dealt with unjustly. (6: 160)

Ibne Abi Umair says: I heard Imam Musa Kazim (as) say:

Every believer who keeps away from greater sins, would not be interrogated about his small sins. The Almighty Allah says:

إِنْ تَجْتَنِبُوا كَبَائِرَ مَا تُنْهَوْنَ عَنْهُ نَكَفَّرْ عَنْكُمْ سَيِّئَاتِكُمْ وَنُدْخِلْكُمْ مُدْخَلًا كَرِيماً

If you shun the great sins which you are forbidden, We will do away with your small sins and cause you to enter an honorable place of entering. (4:31)

Then the reporter asked: “In whose favor would intercession take place?”

The Imam replied:

“My father has narrated from his father from Imam Ali (as) and he has narrated from the Messenger of Allah (S) that he said: My intercession is for those who have committed greater sins; as for the righteous, they would have no problem.”

Ibne Abi Umair asked: “O son of Allah’s Messenger, how would intercession be done for sinners of great

sins when the Almighty Allah has said:

وَلَا يَشْفَعُونَ إِلَّا لِمَنْ ارْتَضَىٰ

...and they do not intercede except for him whom He approves... (21:28)

That is I will never forgive one who has committed great sins?"

Imam (as) said:

“The real believer, whenever he commits a sin, he becomes restless and regretful and the Holy Prophet (S) has said: Regret is enough for repentance and he said: One who is pleased on performing a good deed and is regretful on committing a sin is a believer...and one who is not regretful of his sins is not a believer and intercession would not benefit him.”¹

If faith is taken in this meaning, it can be said: Most or all the believers would enter Paradise by intercession of the Holy Prophet (S).

Quran says:

وَلَسَوْفَ يُعْطِيكَ رَبُّكَ فَتَرْضَىٰ

And soon will your Lord give you so that you shall be well pleased. (93:5)

The Messenger of Allah (S) said:

“The Almighty Allah has left a matter at my discretion, and I delayed it till Judgment Day so that I may intercede for the believers.”²

In the same way, the Holy Prophet (S) said:

“When I assume the seat at the Praised Station (Maqaam Mahmood), I would intercede for those sinners of my nation who have committed greater sins and it would be accepted by the Almighty Allah. But by Allah, I would not intercede for anyone who had harassed my descendants.”³

With reference to these verses and traditions and tens of similar statements, intercession cannot be rejected as a whole. The Almighty Allah has promised it to sinners and He would definitely keep His word. But the promise of intercession is not such that should abrogate the foundations of Shariat laws and religious duties as a result of which in hope of intercession, people commit all sorts of sins.

Laws and rules of Shariat, obligatory duties and prohibited acts have grown through actual exigencies and evils; the straight path is specified only for perfection of humanity and wayfaring to Allah, which may

guarantee spiritual salvation and save from destructions. Paradise and bounties of Paradise; Hell and chastisements of Hell are there as a result of good and bad deeds in the world.

Therefore anyone who commits a bad deed would definitely be recompensed for it in the world or the hereafter, except that he should repent before death and make amends for his behavior.

The following points must also not be overlooked:

Firstly: Even if you suppose that some sinners would be included in intercession, you should know that intercession is only in Qiyamat; and as mentioned in traditions, Barzakh is not the place for intercession.

Amr bin Yazid says: I asked Imam Ja'far Sadiq (as): "I have heard that you said:

All our Shias would go to Paradise?"

He replied:

"Yes, I said it and I am right; by Allah, all of them would enter Paradise."

The narrator asked: "May I be your ransom, even if they have numerous great sins to their credit?"

The Imam said:

"As for Judgment Day, all of you would enter Paradise through intercession of the Prophet or his successor. But I am fearful about you with regard to Barzakh."

The narrator asked: "What is Barzakh?"

He replied:

It is there from the time of death and burial up to Judgment Day."⁴

Chastisements of Barzakh and the long period of it should not be considered minor according to traditional reports, it is a sample of the chastisement of Hell.

Secondly: Hardships and back breaking difficulties of Judgment Day; and the accounting of deeds of the sinners also must not be overlooked.

Thirdly: It is correct that a large number of believer sinners would be saved from entering Hell through the intercession of Prophet and other intercessors, but all would not be like this; on the contrary those who committed more and deadlier sins, would be sent to Hell to wash off their crimes and after a period of time, less or more, after tasting chastisement, in the end would be saved from punishment of Hell through the intercession of intercessors and finally enter Paradise; hence the true believer in monotheism would never remain in Hell forever.

Fourthly: That which is promised is intercession with regard to believers and monotheists and committing some great sins especially committing them repeatedly may lead to loss of faith; in that case one would not be included in intercession.

Fifthly: Although the glorified Lord has promised intercession to the doers of greater sins, it would never be unconditional. It is not known who would be included in it, with what conditions and in what position they would be.

From all that was mentioned so far we can conclude that committing sin in hope of intercession is the greatest fallacy.

Who Would Intercede?

In the above-mentioned verses, intercession is proved for the Almighty Allah, absolutely, without any limit and for angels, through the approval of Allah, although their intercession is innate. In the same way it is proved for the Holy Prophet of Islam (S), under the permission of Allah:

وَأَسْأَلُكَ بِعُطِيِّكَ رَبُّكَ فَتَرْضَى

And soon will your Lord give you so that you shall be well pleased. (93:5)

Although after reconciling the unequivocal traditions recorded about this. Except for these circumstances, Quran does not declare intercession for anyone else, but it has also not denied it, if it is by the permission of Allah.

However in traditions, intercession is proved for other groups also:

- a) Quran and memorizers of Quran; and those who act on it.
- b) Successors of the Prophet and the Infallible Imams (as).
- c) Lady Fatima (as), the respected daughter of the Prophet and the mother of the Holy Imams (as).
- d) Martyrs who laid down their lives in defense of Islam.
- e) Divine scholars who propagated Islam verbally, practically and through their writings and who have a role in guidance of people.

Lastly, we think that it is necessary to mention a few points:

1. Power of intercession would depend on the role of intercessors in spread of Islam and how faithful they were to its rules and regulations.

2. Intercessors would intercede for their own followers and not for everyone else.
3. Their intercession would depend on permission of Almighty Allah.
4. Intercession will not be like a business deal without criteria and based on whims without any eligibility in one who is interceded for.

Therefore, it is but a great fallacy and a satanic deception to avoid religious duties and to consider sins as minor hoping in intercession of intercessors.

[1.](#) Wasailush Shia, Vol. 15, Pg. 335.

[2.](#) Biharul Anwar, Vol. 8, Pg. 37.

[3.](#) Biharul Anwar, Vol. 8, Pg. 37.

[4.](#) Biharul Anwar, Vol. 6, Pg. 267.

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