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Tawassul {Resorting To Inter mediation}, Death and Shafa'Ah {Intercession} According to the Shi'ah and the Wahhabis

Tawassul according to the Wahhabis

In this chapter, *tawassul* {resorting to intermediation} according to Wahhabism shall be examined. The 'ulama' of this sect believe that *Tawassul* to other than God, paying homage {*ziyarah*} to a grave and praying in a place where there is a grave in front of the person praying are not consistent with *Tawhid* in Lordship. According to them, the requisite of *Tawhid* is that one should not resort to the intermediation of other than God even if he is the Prophet of Islam (s), because *tawassul*, *shafa'ah* {intercession} and the like are outside the *Sunnah* of the Prophet and the pious predecessors {*as-Salaf as-salih*}, and the Qur'an also regards this belief as polytheism.^{[1](#)}

It is thus stated in the book, *al-Tawhid bi'l-Lughati al-Farisiyyah*:

Seeking the help of other than God is polytheism and seeking refuge in other than God is also within the sphere of polytheism... The Words {*kalimat*} of God are identical with the uncreated {*qadim*} Essence of God. So, for this reason, one may entreat {*istighathah*} these Words otherwise, such act of entreating will be regarded as polytheism.^{[2](#)}

In refuting this proposition, it must be stated first of all that the pertinent verse had been revealed with respect to the *jinn*. Concerning the circumstances surrounding the revelation of this verse, it must be said that the Arabs used to believe that the *jinn* live in the desert, and during the pre-Islamic period of ignorance {*al-Jahiliyyah*}, they used to turn to the "chief of the *jinn*" at the time of going out of the city for help, addressing him thus: "O chief of the *jinn*! Save us from the evil of the *jinn* and preserve us from their annoyance."

Of course, resorting to the jinn is absolutely unlawful because God has explicitly prohibited this practice. In addition to this, seeking help from anyone who denies God is obviously more so. Secondly, there are a lot of differences between the prophets {*anbiya'*} and messengers {*rusul*} who have direct connection with God, and the receivers of the divine revelation, on one hand, and the jinn who do not recognize God on the other. Therefore, the Islamic belief demands that we have to beseech and entreat God, the Exalted, and seek the intercession of those who are closer to Him.

We have mentioned earlier the viewpoint of the Wahhabi '*ulama*' regarding the status of *tawassul* to other than God. Now, we shall examine their reasons:

First reason: By citing as proof the noble verses,

قُلْ ادْعُوا الَّذِينَ زَعَمْتُمْ مِنْ دُونِهِ فَلَا يَمْلِكُونَ كَشْفَ الضُّرِّ عَنْكُمْ وَلَا تَحْوِيلًا. أُولَٰئِكَ الَّذِينَ يَدْعُونَ يَبْتَغُونَ إِلَىٰ رَبِّهِمْ
الْوَسِيلَةَ أَيُّهُمْ أَقْرَبُ وَيَرْجُونَ رَحْمَتَهُ وَيَخَافُونَ عَذَابَهُ

Say, 'Invoke those whom you claim {to be gods} besides Him. They have no power to remove your distress nor to bring about any change {in your state}. They {themselves} are the ones who supplicate, seeking recourse to their Lord, whoever is nearer {to Him}, expecting His mercy and fearing His punishment.' Indeed your Lord's punishment is a thing to beware of,³

they have concluded that one should never seek help and resort to anyone other than God.

Analysis of the above verses

If one contends oneself with the literal meaning and not take into consideration other Qur'anic verses, these two verses will conform to the statements of the Wahhabi '*ulama*' because based on these words of God, when man abandons the “nearer means” (that is, God Himself) in order to get closer to God and resorts to a “remote means” (that is, “other than God” {*min duni allahi*}) and one who has no power to remove distress and the like, it will fall within the spheres of polytheism in Lordship {*shirk-e rububi*}.

It must be noted, however, that there are other verses indicating that with God's permission, one may also resort to other than God, in which case, the issue of polytheism would be irrelevant, and one could turn for help from the individuals approved by God. If these '*ulama*' had only paid attention to these other verses, they would have never committed such a glaring mistake.

Turning for help {istimdad} of the weak to the strong

In principle, *tawassul* is one of the laws of creation and it means resorting to a superior means in order to attain an objective. One manifestation of *tawassul* is a child's *tawassul* to his mother when something happens to him. This meaning is true in all spheres of human life—social, political, ideological, material,

and spiritual. *Tawassul* to God is the same *tawassul* to that which is perfect in power and force. *Tawassul* to the prophets and the saints of God is a case of the *tawassul* of the weak to the strong, because the prophets are stronger than other human beings. One may resort to the prophets and saints for help and take their practical conduct, which we called *sunnah*, as models for ourselves.

Tawassul in the Qur'an

Many verses of the Qur'an and Prophetic traditions speak about the subject of *tawassul* to the *awliya'*. As an example, one may refer to the verses related to the sons of Ya'qub (Jacob) ('a):

﴿قَالُوا يَا أَبَانَا اسْتَغْفِرْ لَنَا ذُنُوبَنَا إِنَّا كُنَّا خَاطِئِينَ. قَالَ سَوْفَ أَسْتَغْفِرُ لَكُمْ رَبِّي إِنَّهُ هُوَ الْغَفُورُ الرَّحِيمُ﴾

They said, 'Father! Plead {with Allah} for forgiveness of our sins! We have indeed been erring'. He said, 'I shall plead with my Lord to forgive you; indeed He is the All-forgiving, the All-merciful'.⁴

In these verses, the sons of Ya'qub ('a) resorted to the inter mediation of their father. They had committed mistakes so many times; they had annoyed and disturbed two prophets of God (Ya'qub and Yusuf (Joseph) ('a)), and transgressed the command of God by annoying their parents and telling lies. Since those mistakes required the sons to seek forgiveness, they took their father as their intercessor; so this action has not been denied or rejected in the Qur'an.

Since God does not reproach the sons of Ya'qub for resorting to two persons of those who are near to Him {*muqarrabun*}, it can be concluded that there is nothing wrong in entreating the Prophet (s) especially since the eminence of his rank and the loftiness of his station are not hidden to anyone. The other verse which may be cited is the following:

﴿وَلَوْ أَنَّهُمْ إِذْ ظَلَمُوا أَنْفُسَهُمْ جَاءُوكَ فَاسْتَغْفَرُوا اللَّهَ وَاسْتَغْفَرَ لَهُمُ الرَّسُولُ لَوَجَدُوا اللَّهَ تَوَّابًا رَحِيمًا﴾

Had they, when they wronged themselves, come to you and pleaded Allah for forgiveness, and the Apostle had pleaded for forgiveness for them, they would have surely found Allah All-clement, All-merciful.⁵³³

It can be deduced from this verse that the inter mediation of the Holy Prophet (s) can also be resorted to in asking God for forgiveness of sins.

It is possible to criticize the deduction based on the first verse with the answer that the *tawassul* of the sons of Ya'qub ('a) to their father had been confined to their own time; that is, one may seek the help of the living and not the dead. We shall talk about this point later on in the section concerning *tabarruk*.

What can be inferred from the second verse is that *tawassul* to the Prophet (s) is in a general sense.

That is, it includes both the time when the Prophet (s) was alive and the time afterward. And there is no reason to distinguish between *tawassul* during and after his lifetime.

Since the following verse reproaches *tawassul* to idols and regards it as a form of polytheism, some individuals might cite it as proof that *tawassul* to other than God leads to misguidance:

وَقَالُوا لَا تَذَرُنَّ آلِهَتَكُمْ وَلَا تَذَرُنَّ وَدًّا وَلَا سُوَاعًا وَلَا يَغُوثَ وَيَعُوقَ وَنَسْرًا. وَقَدْ أَضَلُّوا كَثِيرًا وَلَا تَزِدِ الظَّالِمِينَ إِلَّا ضَلَالًا ﴿٦٦﴾

They say, 'Do not abandon your gods. Do not abandon Wadd, nor Suwa', nor Yaghuth, Ya'uq and Nasr,' and they have certainly led many astray. Do not increase the wrongdoers in anything but error'.⁶

In reply, it must be said that if what is meant by “other than God” are idols, then one cannot find fault with this statement, but if “other than God” includes the prophets and *awliya'*, then it would be contrary to the truth because these beloved ones are approved by God and are vicegerents of Allah {*khulafa' Allah*}. Idols are in contrast and contradiction with God while the prophets (*'a*) and saints are concordant with Him and are means of His grace. In the same manner, idols are a source of deviation from God while the prophets (*'a*) are means of guidance and righteousness. In sum, the comparison between *tawassul* to the prophets (*'a*) and *tawassul* to the idols is an asymmetrical and false analogy.

The other point is that an idol is basically an object of worship and not a means of nearness to God {*taqarrub*}. There are two types of means of nearness to God: One is legitimate, referring to the prophets (*'a*) and the saints, and the other is illegitimate such as idols and the like which religion has made forbidden to man.

Death according to the Wahhabis

There are different viewpoints concerning death, and we shall deal with the viewpoint of the Wahhabis on the subject. Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyyah is reported to have said:

Tawassul to the dead, even if he be the Prophet of Islam (s), is an act of polytheism because based on the statement of the Qur'an, he is dead and extinct:

﴿إِنَّكَ مَيِّتٌ وَإِنَّهُمْ مَيِّتُونَ﴾

You will indeed die and they {too} will die indeed.⁷³⁵

He then continues:

Entreating the dead and uttering words such as: “O my master, O the Messenger of Allah! Help me,” “O

my master 'Ali ibn Abi Talib! Assist me,” and the like are acts of polytheism.⁸³⁶

It is indeed amazing that Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyyah and the Wahhabis could have no belief in the purgatorial life {*hayat al-barzakh*}, thinking that the dead cannot establish spiritual relations with others, while the Qur'an affirms that those who are in the *barzakh* are alive.⁹ How could the Wahhabis regard the martyrs {*shuhada'*} as dead while the Qur'an says,

﴿وَلَا تَحْسَبَنَّ الَّذِينَ قُتِلُوا فِي سَبِيلِ اللَّهِ أَمْوَاتًا بَلْ أَحْيَاءٌ عِنْدَ رَبِّهِمْ يُرْزَقُونَ﴾

Do not suppose those who are slain in the way of Allah to be dead; rather they are living and provided for near their Lord. ¹⁰

Accordingly, how could Shaykh Muhammad ibn 'Abd al-Wahhab also say that “Anyone who dies would be annihilated,”²⁰ while the Holy Qur'an says,

﴿فَكَشَفْنَا عَنْكَ غِطَاءَكَ فَبَصَرُكَ الْيَوْمَ حَدِيدٌ﴾

We have removed your veil from you, and so your sight is acute today. ¹¹

In another place, it states thus,

﴿وَلَهُمْ رِزْقُهُمْ فِيهَا بُكْرَةً وَعَشِيًّا﴾

And therein they will have their provision morning and evening. ¹²

Since there is morning and evening in the world of *barzakh* according to the verse quoted, and that the dead have provisions, those who are in the world of sojourn (*barzakh*) cannot be regarded as nonexistent {*ma'dum*}. Of course, morning and evening are special characteristics of *barzakh* because there is no sun on the Day of Resurrection which could portray this case. So, death is not equivalent to nonexistence, and the theory of the Wahhabis is consequentially rendered false.

The permission to resort to the sacred personages

In the following verse, the Holy Qur'an regards it permissible and acceptable to resort to and seek the intermediation of the chosen ones of God in seeking nearness to Him {*taqarrub*}:

﴿يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا اتَّقُوا اللَّهَ وَابْتَغُوا إِلَيْهِ الْوَسِيلَةَ وَجَاهِدُوا فِي سَبِيلِهِ لَعَلَّكُمْ تُفْلِحُونَ﴾

O you who have faith! Be wary of Allah, and seek the means of recourse to Him, and wage jihad

in His way, so that you may be felicitous. [13](#)

Although in this verse seeking the means of recourse is discussed in a general sense, based on the other proofs and pieces of evidence mentioned in the Holy Qur'an and the traditions, one of its vivid manifestations is the prophets and saints. Therefore, the purport of this verse may be expressed in the following words:

Though approaching God is the outcome of grace, you have to observe God-wariness {*taqwa*} perfectly and since it is possible that the persons resorted to have no independence of their own and have obtained such station through sincerity {*ikhlas*} and God-wariness {*taqwa*}, you also have to maintain God-wariness in resorting to them.

Istimdad and tawassul to the living ones

Seeking help and assistance from the living is permissible and it cannot be treated as a form of polytheism. This is a point which has been endorsed and affirmed by stories in the Qur'an. For example, when Hadrat Yusuf (Joseph) (‘a) was in prison he requested his cellmate, that if the latter was released, he should mention his case to the king:

﴿اٰذْكُرْنِيْ عِنْدَ رَّبِّكَ﴾

Mention me to your master. [14](#)

Or, when Hadrat Musa and Khidr (‘a) arrived at a certain village, they made a request to the inhabitants of the village, hence:

﴿فَانْطَلَقَا حَتّٰى اِذَا اَتٰىاْ اَهْلَ قَرْيَةٍ اسْتَطْعَمَاْ اَهْلَهَا﴾

So they went on. When they came to the people of a town, they asked its people for food. [15](#)

It can be said that the acts of these three great personalities, apart from not being acts of polytheism, they are rational and customary behaviors, having no inconsistency with their infallibility {*ismah*}. Also, in confirming this statement, the following verse, which is addressed to the Prophet (s), can be cited as proof:

﴿وَلَوْ اَنَّهُمْ اِذْ ظَلَمُوْا اَنْفُسَهُمْ جَآءُوْكَ فَاسْتَغْفَرُوْا اللّٰهَ وَاسْتَغْفَرَ لَهُمُ الرَّسُوْلُ لَوَجَدُواْ اللّٰهَ تَوَّابًا رَّحِيْمًا﴾

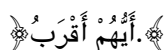
Had they, when they wronged themselves, come to you and pleaded Allah for forgiveness, and the Apostle had pleaded for forgiveness for them, they would have surely found Allah all-

clement, all-merciful. [16](#)

Based on this verse, the Prophet (s) has been granted the permission to be the intercessor of sinners. According to the Shi`ah, this intercession is still valid and is not confined to the lifetime of the Prophet (s).

The preeminence of tawassul to the Divine Essence

Before ending the discussion, it is necessary to pose this question: Which is superior, *tawassul* to God, or *tawassul* to the saints of God? It can be concluded from the verse,



“whoever is nearer {to Him}” [17](#)

that *tawassul* to God is superior. That is, as much as possible, one must seek help from God and this is a principle to which Muslim mystics are steadfast. But just as he makes use of his intellect, natural instinct and other means in managing his life, man also seeks the assistance of intermediaries in the domain of spirituality and seeking nearness to Allah.

Tawassul as identical with servitude {‘ubudiyyah}

Since *tawassul* to the prophets and the *awliya*’ of God is like the angels’ act of prostration (to Adam) with the permission and command of God, resorting to these beloved ones is identical with servitude {‘ubudiyyah} and worship {‘ibadah}. Among the Muslim sects, only the Wahhabis do not believe in *tawassul* and its devotional dimension. It must be noted that this sect is trying to make its incorrect and false ideas dominant.

Of course, if we ever regard the Wahhabis’ opposition to *tawassul* as incorrect, it is because there are authoritative traditions and *hadiths* that prove the incorrectness of this sect’s belief. For example, after the demise of the Prophet (s) a certain Arab came to the grave of the Prophet (s) and threw himself on the holy shrine. While pouring the soil of the grave over his head, he said: “O Messenger of Allah! I heard from you the verse, “*Had they, when they wronged themselves, come to you...*” And now I have wronged myself and I have come here to ask you to plead for forgiveness for me.” At the end of the *hadith*, it is thus stated regarding this episode: “Then a voice from the grave was heard: ‘You are forgiven!’” [18](#)

In another tradition, it has been narrated that there was once a famine in Medina. Bilal ibn Harith, one of the Companions, went to the grave of the Prophet (s) and said: “O Messenger of Allah! There has been no rain for quite sometime. Pray to God to shower the rain of His mercy upon us. During the night, Bilal

saw the Prophet (s) in a dream, saying: “You shall soon benefit from the rain of the Lord.”

It is not useless to note the fact that Muhammad ibn Idris ash-Shafi'i, one of the leading figures of the Ahl as-Sunnah, regards *tawassul* to the *Ahl al-Bayt* ('a) as permissible, thus saying:

آلُ النَّبِيِّ ذَرِيعَتِي وَهُمْ إِلَيَّ وَسِيلَتِي

The family of the Prophet is my shelter

and they are means of my nearness to Him (God).

Regarding Hadrat Fatimah az-Zahra ('a), the following tradition has been narrated:

“أَنَّ فَاطِمَةَ جَاءَتْ فَوَقَفَتْ عَلَى قَبْرِ رَسُولِ اللَّهِ فَأَخَذَتْ قُبْضَةً مِنْ تُرَابِ الْقَبْرِ فَوَضَعَتْهَا عَلَى عَيْنَيْهَا فَبَكَتْ.”

“Fatimah ('a) went to the grave of the Messenger of Allah (s); picked up some soil from the grave, put it on her eyes and cried.”

It can be inferred from the above *hadith* that to seek the help of the Prophet, the infallible Imams and the pioneers of religion is not against the religion because a personage such as Fatimah az-Zahra ('a) used to go to the grave of her great father and seek this beloved's assistance. There is another *hadith* which is as follows:

Because of the effect of famine and the lack of rain, a number of people went to the house of 'a'ishah (wife of the Prophet (s)), asking for her guidance. She said to them: “Make holes on the holy shrines of the Prophet (s) in such a way that the sky would become the watcher of the holy grave of the Prophet (s) so that it would shower rain in respect for the Prophet (s). When the people followed 'A'ishah's instruction, the rain came.

Many traditions have been recorded in the book, *At-Tabarruk*,¹⁹ all of which show the *tawassul* of the Companions to the soil of grave of the Messenger of Allah (s) for cure and blessings {*tabarruk*}.

Shafa'ah according to Muhammad ibn 'Abd al-Wahhab and Ibn Taymiyyah

Based on some verses of the Qur'an, Shaykh Muhammad ibn 'Abd al-Wahhab, Ibn Taymiyyah and the contemporary Wahhabis regard seeking help from other than God or asking for their intercession {*shafa'ah*} as an act of polytheism. Their main proof is the phrase, “other than God” in verse 18 of *Surah Yunus*.²⁰ The Wahhabis regard the prophets, saints, idols, the *jinn*, and the dead as the most vivid manifestations of this verse.

In reality, they have not made any distinction between the idols during the pre-Islamic period of ignorance {*jahiliyyah*}, which were taken by the people as their intercessors and were held in high

esteem by their forefathers, and the person of the Prophet (s) because they believe that the Prophet (s) has passed away, and as such, he could not do anything and nothing could not be expected from him anymore. Therefore, they imagine the intercession of God on the Day of Resurrection as positive, and that of the Prophet (s) or other *awliya'* as negative.

It can perhaps be inferred from the apparent purport of their contention that this sect rejects intercession in general. They have divided intercession into positive and negative in the following manner:

1. Positive intercession is that which comes from God. There are many verses that substantiate it, and there is no debate and dispute concerning this type of intercession.

2. Negative intercession is that which comes from other than God such as the Prophet (s), other prophets ('a) and the *awliya'*—of course, when they are not alive.

The most fundamental basis for this belief of the Wahhabis is the following blessed verse:

﴿وَيَعْبُدُونَ مِنْ دُونِ اللَّهِ مَا لَا يَضُرُّهُمْ وَلَا يَنْفَعُهُمْ وَيَقُولُونَ هَؤُلَاءِ شُفَعَاؤُنَا عِنْدَ اللَّهِ﴾

They worship besides Allah that which neither causes them any harm, nor brings them any benefit, and they say, 'These are our intercessors with Allah'![21](#)⁴⁹

An analysis of the quoted noble verse:

What the apparent purport and text of the verse substantiates is that God rejects the intercession of idols, not the intercession of human beings. In other words, “besides Allah” refers to idols and it is these idols whose intercession is not acceptable to God. The following verse also confirms this contention:

﴿وَلَا يُقْبَلُ مِنْهَا شَفَاعَةٌ وَلَا يُؤْخَذُ مِنْهَا عَدْلٌ وَلَا هُمْ يُنصَرُونَ﴾

Neither intercession shall be accepted from it, nor any ransom shall be received from it, nor will they be helped.[22](#)

The absolute negation of intercession of other than God can be deduced from the phrase, “besides Allah” which is mentioned many times in the Holy Qur'an. The absoluteness and generality of “besides Allah”, however, is mitigated by other verses, and the intercession by individuals who possess the conditions for intercession is permissible and acceptable. Some of the verses that can substantiate this claim are the following:

﴿وَلَا تَنْفَعُ الشَّفَاعَةُ عِنْدَهُ إِلَّا لِمَنْ أَذِنَ لَهُ﴾

Intercession is of no avail with Him except for those whom He permits. [23](#)

﴿مَنْ ذَا الَّذِي يَشْفَعُ عِنْدَهُ إِلَّا بِإِذْنِهِ﴾

Who is it that may intercede with Him except with His permission? [24](#)

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

Intercession will not avail that day except from him whom the All-beneficent allows and approves of his word. [25](#)

﴿وَلَا يَشْفَعُونَ إِلَّا لِمَنْ ارْتَضَى﴾

And they do not intercede except for someone He approves of. [26](#)

Based on these verses, the intercession of those who have the permission of Allah is acceptable. Now, a question that lingers in the mind is this: Have not those who negate the intercession of the prophets and saints come across these verses, or do they have other reasons?

In reply, it must be said that the intensity of their enmity to the Shi`ah have prompted the Wahhabis to focus on the verses that negate, and not affirm, intercession. Through this method and policy, they are determined to accuse the Shi`ah of disbelief {*kufr*} so as to incite the entire Muslim world against the Shi`ah as much as possible. At this juncture, the hidden hand of imperialism can be witnessed in some of the religious beliefs of Wahhabism.

In opposing and besmirching Shi`ah beliefs, the Wahhabis oppose the Qur'an and the *Sunnah* of the Prophet (s) upon which this belief is based. The Qur'an and Sunnah acknowledge the intercession of the prophets and the saints on the Day of Resurrection. They respect the soil of their graves, encouraging the Muslims to honor and respect them, especially the Holy Prophet (s); and are the foundations of many material and non-material activities and achievements. The Wahhabis not only regard *tawassul* and visitation to the graves {*ziyarah*} as unlawful and acts of *kufr* and *shirk*, but also deny the principle and basis of intercession. [27](#) The consequence of this practice will be drifting away from the Prophet (s) and the infallible Imams ('a), which is itself a kind of secret attack against Islam.

The precedence of the negation of tawassul and shafa'ah

Ibn Taymiyyah, one of the Sunni '*ulama*' of the Hanbali *madhhab* during the 8th century AH, says regarding *tawassul* and *shafa'ah*:

Seeking help from the dead without paying attention to God, even if that person is a prophet, or requesting the dead to pray to God to grant our request, or for us to implore God, “O God! By the station and position of so-and-so, grant our request”, etc. are forbidden and impermissible, which will finally lead to polytheism in worship.[28](#)⁵⁶

As we can observe, the intellectual cornerstone of Wahhabism is traceable to Ibn Taymiyyah, however, Muhammad ibn 'Abd al-Wahhab discusses these doctrines with more fanaticism and extremisms, especially the negation of *tawassul* and *shafa'ah*. As it is always looking for every opportunity to catch fish in troubled waters imperialism has been trying to take advantage of the record and opposition of the Wahhabi thought to the other schools {*madhahib*}.

They have been attempting to do this when the precedence of the Wahhhabi creed is not a proof for the *madhhabi* nature of the Wahhabi movement. It cannot be considered one of the Islamic schools of thought because from the very beginning, the Muslim nation, the Ahl as-Sunnah in particular, has declared the ideas of Ibn Taymiyyah and his followers as an innovation in religion {*bid'ah*} and to be against the religion.

The ideas of Ibn Taymiyyah and the reaction of Ahl as-Sunnah

Taqi ad-Din Abu'l-'Abbas Ahmad Ibn Taymiyyah was born in 661 AH in a Kurdish-populated village called Urfah in Turkey. When the Tatars invaded the Muslim lands, he along with his family went to Damascus (Syria) and studied in the religious school {*madrasah*} of the Hanbalis where he engaged in the memorization of the Qur'an. He read *Musnad Ibn Hanbal* and the book, *Mu'jam at-Tabari*, and engaged in learning other sciences. It has been said that he had good memory and talent.[29](#)

Profound talent and enthusiasm prompted Ibn Taymiyyah to encounter many intellectual problems and issues during the different stages of his studies. Since he would not be convinced of the views and opinions of the professors, he gradually reached a point in his beliefs that he elicited the reaction of the '*ulama*' and *fuqaha* {jurists} at the time which led to his imprisonment and banishment.

Before Ibn Taymiyyah had the opportunity to repent, Sultan Nasir, the ruler of the time, allowed him to return to Damascus in 709 AH and Ibn Taymiyyah also made peace with the '*ulama*' and *fuqaha*.[30](#) In 720 AH, he was again put behind bars for having a clash with the *fuqaha* on the issue of divorce but in 721 AH, he was released from prison through the letter of the Sultan.

After his release, he once again languished in the prison cell of Damascus on the order of the government for the contradictions his religious edicts had with that of the Sunni and Shi'ah *fuqaha* in his region.

This time, the government prohibited him from issuing religious edicts, and as per judicial decree of a Shafi'i judge, all his students including Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyyah were imprisoned. Meanwhile, the

people had been so angry with him that they decided to kill him.

The 'ulama's opposition to Ibn Taymiyyah

Ibn Taymiyyah used to regard traveling to visit the graves of the prophets (‘a) and the pious as impermissible, deeming it as a sinful travel, and would rule for the completion (instead of shortening) of prayer during this travel, which led the Shafi'is to rise up in opposition to him.

In a bid to portray a veneer of moderation to his creed, Ibn Taymiyyah used to say that since the Prophet (s) and the Companions had neither visited their graves nor sought their intermediation, and that the Followers {*tabi'un*}³¹ have also not done so, none of the Muslims should deem it recommended {*mustahabb*}. Anyone who observed this practice had gone against the consensus of Muslims. After issuing this religious edict, Ibn Taymiyyah considered the following *hadiths* from the Prophet (s) as fabricated {*maj'ul*}:

مَنْ حَجَّ وَلَمْ يَزُرْنِي فَقَدْ جَفَانِي.

He who performs the *Hajj* (pilgrimage) without paying a visit {*ziyarah*} to me has indeed deserted.

لَا تُشَدُّ الرِّحَالُ إِلَّا إِلَى ثَلَاثَةِ مَسَاجِدَ: الْمَسْجِدِ الْحَرَامِ، وَمَسْجِدِي هَذَا، وَالْمَسْجِدِ الْأَقْصَى.

You are not supposed to travel except for the visitation {*ziyarah*} of three mosques: al-Masjid al-Haram (in Mecca), this mosque of mine (Masjid an-Nabi in Medina), and al-Masjid al-Aqsa (in Jerusalem).

These kinds of views incited the opposition of the Sunni 'ulama'. So, it becomes clear that there had been no difference of opinion regarding it until that time and the first person to initiate this difference was Ibn Taymiyyah who, while in prison, wrote books in support of his creed.

After more than two years of imprisonment in the prison cell of Damascus, Ibn Taymiyyah passed away in 728 AH and was buried in Bab as-Saghir beside his brother. In the book, *Al-Kunya wal-Alqab*, Shaykh 'Abbas al-Qummi opines that he was buried in Jordan. Ibn Taymiyyah was later known as Taqi ad-Din Ahmad ibn 'Abd al-Halim al-Harrani ad-Damishqi.

Nowadays, there is no trace of his grave and the books attributed to him, as per reported in the book, *Ibn Taymiyyah batal al-Islah ad-Dini*, are estimated to be as many as seventeen books.

What we quoted regarding the issue of *shafa'ah* was from the book entitled, *Ibn Taymiyyah batal al-Islah ad-Dini*. Similar subjects are also recorded in the book, *Fath al-Majid*, which is a commentary on the book, *At-Tawhid*, by Muhammad ibn 'Abd al-Wahhab. In a recently written book entitled, *At-Tawhid bi'l-Lughati al-Farisiyyah*, there has been some modification of issues about which the Shi'ah have

opposing views.

This book in which some of those issues were presented was distributed freely among the Iranian pilgrims at the Jeddah Airport in 1374 AH (1995 CE). Concerning *shafa'ah*, it states that *shafa'ah* is exclusive for God. The inclusion of the divine grace and compassion has conferred this merit upon some of the servants of God. This book narrated a certain subject from Ibn Taymiyyah, at the end of which it says:

لَا تَكُونُ إِلَّا لِأَهْلِ التَّوْحِيدِ وَالْإِخْلَاصِ.

Intercession includes individuals who are monotheists and sincere, and by the decree of God, intercession extends to these individuals.

In this book, the author writes that according to the Shi`ah, those individuals who best embody these qualities of *Tawhid* and *ikhlas* {sincerity} are the prophets, *awliya'* and infallible Imams (*'a*) who, according to the above quotation, are supposed to possess the privilege to intercede on the Day of Resurrection.³²

- ¹. Fath al-Majid, p. 98.
- ². Al-Tawhid bi'l-Lughati al-Farisiyyah, p. 140.
- ³. Surat al-Isra' 17:56-57.
- ⁴. Surat Yusuf 12:97-98.
- ⁵. Surat an-Nisa' 4:64.
- ⁶. Surat Nuh 71:23-24.
- ⁷. Surat az-Zumar 39:30.
- ⁸. Fath al-Majid, p. 198.
- ⁹. Surat Ghafir (or al-Mu'min) 40:46: "The Fire, to which they are exposed morning and evening."
- ¹⁰. Surat Al 'Imran 3: 169.
- ¹¹. Surat Qaf 50:22.
- ¹². Surat Maryam 19:62.
- ¹³. Surat al-Ma'idah 5:35.
- ¹⁴. Surat Yusuf 12:42.
- ¹⁵. Surat al-Kahf 18:77.
- ¹⁶. Surat an-Nisa', 4: 64.
- ¹⁷. See Surat al-Isra' 17:56-57.
- ¹⁸. "غفر لك قد القبر من فنودي."
- ¹⁹. Ayatullah 'Ali Ahmadi Mayanji, At-Tabarruk (Beirut), pp. 147-151.
- ²⁰. Surat Yunus 10:18: "They worship besides Allah that which neither causes them any harm, not brings them any benefit, and they say, 'These are our intercessors with Allah.' Say, 'Will you inform Allah about something He does not know in the heavens and on the earth? Immaculate is He and exalted above [having] any partners that they ascribe [to Him].'"
- ²¹. Surat Yunus 10:18.
- ²². Surat al-Baqarah 2:48.
- ²³. Surat as-Saba' 34:23.
- ²⁴. Surat al-Baqarah 2:255.
- ²⁵. Surat Ta Ha 20:109.

[26.](#) Surat al-Anbiya' 21:28.

[27.](#) For more information, see Sayyid Ibrahim 'Alawi, Tarikhcheh-ye Naqd wa Barrasi-ye Wahhabiyyah, pp. 257-353 and other books included in the bibliography of this book.

[28.](#) Mahmud Mahdi al-Istambuli, Ibn Taymiyyah batal al-Islah ad-Dini (Beirut: Nashr Maktaba'l-Islami, n.d.), pp. 136, 139.

[29.](#) Mahmud Mahdi al-Istambuli, Ibn Taymiyyah batal al-Islah ad-Dini (Beirut: Nashr Maktaba'l-Islami, n.d.), pp. 136, 139.

[30.](#) Mahmud Mahdi al-Istambuli, Ibn Taymiyyah batal al-Islah ad-Dini (Beirut: Nashr Maktaba'l-Islami, n.d.), pp. 30.

[31.](#) Tabi'un ['Followers' or 'Successors'] refers to the second generation of Muslims who came after the Companions, who did not know the Prophet (s) but who knew his Companions. [Trans.]

[32.](#) At-Tawhid bi'l-Lughah al-Farisiyyah, no. 27, p. 123.

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