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Tawassul (Resorting to Intermediary)

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

Some people claim that asking for help to other than god is polytheism. Such people should never go to doctor when they becomes sick because this is polytheism (shirk)! Their going to doctor is a type of seeking a help from a specialist even though they do not say by their tongue that they are getting help from the doctor. Acting shirk is enough.

Also they should not ask any question from anyone or request anything from any one because all these are shirk. Furthermore, they shouldn't eat any food because they should not help themselves by any other than God!

If they say that we do all these because Allah told us to do so, then based on their own doctrine Allah is also polytheist (Mushrik). Na'udhu Billah! Here is what they are missing: If we get help from any body, we do it with the understanding that he by his own can not help us. He can not benefit us unless Allah wishes to.

If one calls Prophet Muhammad (S) or Imam 'Ali (as) for help, he is, in fact, calling Allah for help through intermediary of the Prophet or the Imams, and he does that with the understanding that the Prophet or the Imams do not have any independent power, but rather what they have (which many others lack) is that they have credit in front of Allah and that Allah does not put down their requests if they pray to Allah on my behalf. Imam 'Ali and all the martyrs are alive as Qur'an clearly testifies, though they are not on the earth. So please do not treat them as dead. Allah states in Qur'an:

Think not of those who are martyred in the way of Allah as dead. Nay! They are living, finding their sustenance in the presence of their Lord."(Qur'an 3:169)

In fact all of our Imams except Imam Mahdi were martyred either by sword or by poison. Moreover, there are quite strong proofs in both Shi'a and Sunni that the Prophet himself was also poisoned by a Jew in

the battle of Khaibar, and the poison slowly worked on his body till it finally killed him. I just bring two traditions from Sahih al-Bukhari:

Sahih al-Bukhari Hadith: 5.551

Narrated Abu Huraira:

When Khaibar was conquered, a (cooked) sheep containing poison, was given as a present to Allah's Apostle. Sahih Bukhari Hadith: 5.713

... Narrated 'Aisha: The Prophet in his ailment in which he died, used to say, "O 'Aisha! I still feel the pain caused by the food I ate at Khaibar, and at this time, I feel as if my aorta is being cut from that poison."

So they should not be called dead since they are alive according to Qur'an. Thus we can make Tawassul to them the same way that the Shi'a of Moses made

Tawassul to Moses:

"And he (Moses) went into the city at a time when people (of the city) were not watching, so he found therein two men fighting, one being of his Shi'a and the other being his enemy, and the one who was of his Shi'a cried out to him for help against the one who was of his enemy"(Qur'an 28: 15)

Two things which distinguishes Tawassul and Shirk should be noted here.

First, we do not believe that the Prophet and Imams have any independent power from Allah. Second, Allah is the one who assigned the intermediate. The idol worshipers used a wrong intermediate, and that was another reason why it was condemned. Moreover, the idol worshippers believed that the idols can cause harm or render a benefit.

Muslims are monotheists and they know that only Allah can cause harm or render a benefit. But calling the Prophet and Imams with the understanding that they could only be an intermediary to Allah, is not polytheism. All Muslims agreed on this point from the time of the Prophet (S) up to the present day, except Wahhabis. They contradict all Muslims with their new creed and accused Muslims of blasphemy; they never let any body touch the blessed grave of Prophet (S).

The Holy Qur'an further supports intermediary for approaching toward Allah where it states:

"O' you who believe! Be mindful (of your duties) to Allah, and seek the means of approaching toward Him."(Qur'an 5:35)

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ

آمَنُوا

اتَّقُوا

اللَّهِ

وَابْتَغُوا

إِلَيْهِ

الْوَسِيلَةَ

Qur'an tells us that there exists a means of approaching "al-Wasilah" for us in each era, which is different than Allah and we should seek him if we want to approach toward Allah. In fact, both Tawassul and Wasilah are from the same root. When we make Tawassul, it means that we seek the Mercy of Allah by resorting to a connection who was more obedient toward Allah and, as a result, Allah answers his/her prayers faster than us. Allah may forgive us for the credit and the honor of that man/woman. It is true every where that doing a job (specially if it is asking for a big courtesy) without any connection is difficult or might be impossible. Approving such a courtesy needs credit, and the one without it should resort to the one who has the credit and the connection. This credit has been acquired by absolute obedience of Allah. Nonetheless, approving any intercession still depends on Allah:

"Who can intercedes with Him except the cases that He permits?" (Qur'an 2:255)

"They (i.e., prophets and Imams) do not say anything until He orders, and they act (in all things) by His command. He knows what is before them and what is behind them and they (i.e., those saints) offer no intercession except for anyone whom Allah accepts, and they are in awe and reverence of His (glory)." (Qur'an 21:27-28)

As you see there are exceptions. Some specific people can intercede with Allah by His permission. But this is not granted to every people. Now, I would like to give also more references from Sunni Hadith collections in this regard. The first reference is on the Tawassul of Ibn Abbas (ra) to Imam 'Ali (as). Please note that Ibn Abbas spoke the following words after the martyrdom of Imam 'Ali. Thus he did ask for intermediary of what you called a dead person.

"When the death time of Abdullah Ibn Abbas (ra) approached, he said: `O Allah! I seek to approach toward you by means of Wilayah (accepting the mastery) of 'Ali Ibn Abi Talib."

Sunni references:

- Fada'il al-Sahaba, by Ahmad Ibn Hanbal, v2, p662, Tradition #1129
- al-Riyadh al-Nadhirah, by Muhibbuddin al-Tabari, v3, p167
- Manaqib Ahmad

لما حضرت عبد الله ابن عباس الوفاة قال: اللهم إني أتقربُ إليك بولاية علي ابن أبي طالب

Please note that Ibn Abbas died in 68/687 which was 28 years after the martyrdom of Imam 'Ali (as). If resorting (Tawassul) to a dead was considered association (shirk), then Ibn Abbas would not dare to say so, and Ahmad Ibn Hanbal would not have recorded it.

As for resorting to alive, al-Bukhari reported that Umar used make Tawassul to al-Abbas for rain:

Sahih al-Bukhari Hadith: 5.59

Narrated Anas:

Whenever there was drought, 'Umar bin Al-Khattab used to ask Allah for rain through Al-'Abbas bin 'Abdul Muttalib, saying, "O Allah! We used to request our Prophet to ask You for rain, and You would give us. Now we request the uncle of our Prophet to ask You for rain, so give us rain." And they would be given rain."

Another related question is that: Is kissing the grave of the Prophet Shirk (association)? Is honoring the belongings of Prophet association?

Sahih al-Bukhari tells us it is NOT Shirk:

Sahih al-Bukhari Hadith: 1.373

Narrated Abu Juhaifa:

I saw Allah's Apostle in a red leather tent and I saw Bilal taking the remaining water with which the Prophet had performed ablution. I saw the people taking the utilized water impatiently and whoever got some of it rubbed it on his body and those who could not get any took the moisture from the others' hands.

Then I saw Bilal carrying an 'Anza (a spear-headed stick) which he planted in the ground. The Prophet came out tucking up his red cloak, and led the people in prayer and offered two Rakat (facing the Ka'ba) taking 'Anza as a Sutra for his prayer. I saw the people and animals passing in front of him beyond the 'Anza.

Sahih al-Bukhari Hadith: 7.750

Narrated Abu Juhaifa:

I came to the Prophet while he was inside a red leather tent, and I saw Bilal taking the remaining water of the ablution of the Prophet, and the people were taking of that water and rubbing it on their faces; and whoever could not get anything of it, would share the moisture of the hand of his companion (and then rub it on his face).

As we see, the great companions were honoring the drop of water which had touched the Prophet (S).

Sayyid Sharafuddin, a famous Shi'a scholar, went on pilgrimage to the House of Allah during the reign of King Abdul Aziz Ibn Saud. He was one of those who were invited to the King's palace to celebrate the Eid of al- Adh'ha. When his turn came to shake the King's hand, he presented a leather bound Qur'an to the King. The King took the Qur'an and placed it on his forehead and then kissed it.

Sayyid Sharafuddin said: "O' King! why do you kiss and glorify the cover which is made of a goat's skin?!" The king answered: "I meant to glorify the Holy Qur'an, not the goat's skin." Sayyid Sharafuddin said: "Well said O' King! We do the same when we kiss the window or the door of the Prophet's Chamber, we know that it is made of iron, and could not harm or render a benefit, but we mean what is behind the iron and wood, we mean to respect the Messenger of Allah in the same way as you meant with the Qur'an when you kissed its goat's skin cover."

The audience was impressed by his speech and said: "You are right." The King was forced to allow the pilgrims to ask for blessings from the Prophet's relics, until the order was reversed by the successor of that King.

The issue is not that they are afraid of people associating others with Allah, rather, it is a political issue based on antagonizing Muslims in order to consolidate their own power and authority over Muslims, and history is the witness to what they have done.

Evidence for Tawassul by a Sunni Writer

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There has been a lot of discussion about intercession recently, and a few ill-informed people have issued "fatawa's" condemning the practice as "shirk". If, as some individuals say, tawassul is "shirk" then from the evidence available it seems that The Prophet (pbuh) taught a man to commit "shirk" and so did the Rightly Guided Khalifa 'Uthman ibn Affan! (May Allah be our refuge from such thoughts).

wa'asalaam

Mas'ud

Tawassul – Supplicating Allah Through And Intermediary

Definition: Supplicating Allah by means of an intermediary, whether it be a living person, dead person, or a name or attribute of Allah Most High. Yusuf Rifa'i: I here want to convey the position, attested to by compelling legal evidence, of the orthodox majority of Sunni Muslim on the subject of supplicating Allah through an intermediary (tawassul), and so I say (and Allah alone gives success) that since there is no disagreement among scholars that supplicating Allah through an intermediary is in principle legally valid, the discussion of it's details merely concerns derived rulings that involve interschool differences,

unrelated to questions of belief or unbelief, monotheism or associating partners with Allah (shirk); the sphere of the question being limited to permissibility or impermissibility, and its ruling being that it is either lawful or unlawful. There is no difference among groups of Muslims in their consensus on the permissibility of three types of supplicating Allah through an intermediary (tawassul):

1 tawassul through a living righteous person to Allah Most High, as in the Hadith of the blind man with the Prophet (Allah bless him and grant him peace) as we shall explain;

2 the tawassul of a living person to Allah Most High through his own good deeds, as in the hadith of the three people trapped in a cave by a great stone, a hadith related by Imam Bukhari in his Sahih (Ref: vol 3 no 418); 3 and the tawassul of a person to Allah Most High through His entity (dhat), names, attributes, and so forth.

Since the legality of these types is agreed upon there is no reason to set forth the evidence for them. The only area of disagreement is supplicating Allah (tawassul) through a righteous dead person. The majority of the orthodox Sunni community hold that it is lawful, and have supporting hadith evidence, of which we will content ourselves with the hadith of the Blind Man, since it is the central pivot upon which the discussion turns.

The Hadith Of The Blind Man

Tirmidhi relates, through his chain of narrators from ‘Uthman ibn Hunayf, that a blind man came to the Prophet (Allah bless him and grant him peace) and said, "I've been afflicted in my eyesight, so please pray to Allah for me." The Prophet (Allah bless him and grant him peace) said: "Go make ablution (wudu), perform two rak'as of prayer, and then say:

“O 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 (Allah bless him and grant him peace) added, "And if there is some need, do the same."

Scholars of Sacred Law infer from this hadith the recommended character of the need, in which someone in need of something from Allah Most High performs such a prayer and then turns to Allah with this supplications together with other suitable supplications, traditional or otherwise, according to the need and how the person feels. The express content of the hadith proves the legal validity of tawassul through a living person (as the Prophet (Allah bless him and grant him peace) was alive at the time).

It implicitly proves the validity of tawassul through a deceased one as well, since tawassul through a living or dead person is not through a physical body or through a life or death, but rather through the positive meaning (ma`na tayyib) attached to the person in both life and death. The body is but the vehicle that carries that significance, which requires that the person be respected whether alive or dead;

for the words "O (Ya) Muhammad" are an address to someone physically absent – in which state the living and the dead are alike – an address to the meaning, dear to Allah, that is connected with his spirit, a meaning that is the ground of tawassul, be it through a living or a dead person.

The Hadith Of The Man In Need

Moreover, Tabarani, in his al-Mu`jam al-saghir, reports a hadith from ‘Uthman ibn Hanayf that a man repeatedly visited ‘Uthman ibn ‘Affan (Allah be well pleased with him) concerning something he needed, but ‘Uthman paid no attention to him or his need.

The man met Ibn Hunayf and complained to him about the matter – this being after the death of the Prophet (Allah bless him and grant him peace) and after the caliphates of Abu Bakr and ‘Umar – so ‘Uthman ibn Hunayf, who was one of the Companions who collected hadiths and were learned in the religion of Allah said: "Go to the place of ablution and perform ablution (wudu), then come to the mosque, perform two rak’as of prayer therein, and say,

“O Allah, I ask You and turn to You through our Prophet Muhammad, the Prophet of Mercy; O Muhammad (Ya Muhammad), I turn through you to my Lord, that He may fulfill my need,’

"and mention your need. Then come so that I can go with you (to the caliph ‘Uthman)."

So the man left and did as he had been told, then went to the door of ‘Uthman ibn ‘Affan (Allah be pleased with him), and the doorman came, took him by the hand, brought him to ‘Uthman ibn ‘Affan and seated him next to him on a cushion. ‘Uthman asked, "What do you need?" and the man mentioned what he wanted, and ‘Uthman accomplished it for him and then said, "I hadn’t remembered your need until just now," adding, "Whenever you need something, just mention it." Then the man departed, met ‘Uthman ibn Hunayf, and said to him, "May Allah reward you! He didn’t see to my need or pay any attention to me until you spoke with him." ‘Uthman ibn Hunayf replied, "By Allah, I didn’t speak to him, but I have seen a blind man come to the Messenger of Allah (Allah bless him and grant him peace) and complain to him of the loss of his eyesight. The Prophet (Allah bless him and grant him peace) said, ‘Can you not bear it?’ and the man replied, ‘O messenger of Allah, I do not have anyone to lead me around, and it is great hardship for me.’ The Prophet (Allah bless him and grant him peace) told him, ‘Go to the place of ablution and perform ablution (wudu), then pray two rak’as of prayer and make these supplications.’" Ibn Hunayf went on, "By Allah, we didn’t part company or speak long before the man returned to us as if nothing had ever been wrong with him."

This is an explicit, unequivocal text from a prophetic Companion proving the legal validity of tawassul through the dead. The account has been classed as rigorously authenticated (Sahih) by Bayhaqi, Mundhiri, and Haytami.

(Muhammad Hamid – a leading Hanafi scholar of this century:) As for calling upon (nida’) the righteous

(when they are physically absent, as in the words "O (Ya) Muhammad" in the above hadiths), tawassul to Allah Most High through them is permissible, the supplication (du'a) being to Allah Most Glorious, and there is much evidence for its permissibility.

Those who call on them intending tawassul cannot be blamed. As for someone who believes that those called upon can cause effects, benefit, or harm, which they create or cause to exist as Allah does, such a person is an idolator who has left Islam – Allah be our refuge! This then, and a certain person has written an article that tawassul to Allah Most High through the righteous is unlawful, while the overwhelming majority of scholars hold it permissible, and the evidence that the writer uses to corroborate his view point is devoid of anything that demonstrates what he is trying to prove.

In declaring tawassul permissible, we are not hovering on the brink of idolatory (shirk) or coming anywhere near it, for the conviction that Allah Most High alone has influence over anything, outwardly, is a conviction that flows through us like our very lifeblood. If tawassul were idolatory (shirk), or if there were any suspicion of idolatory in it, the Prophet (Allah Most High bless him and give him peace) would not have taught it to the blind man when the latter asked him to supplicate Allah for him, though in fact he did teach him to make tawassul to Allah through him. And the notion that tawassul was permissible only during the lifetime of the person through whom it is done but not after his death is unsupported by any viable foundation from Sacred Law (Rudud 'ala abatil wa rasa'il al- Shaykh Muhammad al-Hamid).

Mostly taken from "Reliance of the Traveller" (Umdat as-Salik) by Ahmad ibn Naqib al-Misri (b. 702/1302 d. 769/1368) translated by Noah Ha Mim Keller.

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