

Al-Tawassul

What is the rule regarding Al-Tawassul through the Prophets and Saints?

The rule regarding Al-Tawassul through the Prophets and Saints and invoking them to help for gaining ones necessities in this world and the hereafter is permissible. This is in accordance to the unanimous consensus of the Muslim scholars, those who are known as the Al-Sawaad Al-A'zam. Their consensus is a source of Islamic evidence. This is because Allah has protected them from gathering on the wrong. Imam Ahmed and Al-Tabraani have mentioned a Hadeeth narrated from the Prophet (peace be upon him), he said "I asked my Lord not to gather my nation upon misguidance. The Lord accepted." (1)

Imam Hakim narrates from Abd Al-Allah Ibn Abbas, he narrates from the Prophet (peace be upon him) that Allah will never gather my nation upon misguidance. (2)

It has also been narrated from the Prophet (peace be upon him) "Whatever the Muslims regard as good, Allah regards as good." (3)

What is the meaning of Al-Tawassul?

The Arabic word Al-Tawassul comes from the Arabic word "Waseelah" which means device, way, medium, tool or means. The Arabs define the word Waseelah as, "that through which one reaches or gets closer to another to gain his pleasure."

In the discussed context the word Al-Tawassul is defined as, "requesting Allah through the means of another closer and dearer to Allah than oneself to gain His divine pleasure."

Al-Tawassul is used for gaining the pleasure of Allah and for the acceptance of one's prayers and needs. In Al-Tawassul we request Allah through something dear to Allah to gain his pleasure or through someone closer and dearer to Allah than us because their supplications are more likely to be accepted than ours.

The Prophet (peace be upon him) narrates a Hadeeth directly from the Lord himself. This type of Hadeeth is known as an al-Hadeeth al-Qudsi which means a Devine Hadeeth. The Lord says, "I wage war against he who becomes an enemy of my friend. Every person who continues gaining closeness to me through voluntary worship, which is dearer to me than the worship I have made compulsory upon him, becomes my friend. When he becomes my friend, I become his hearing with which he

listens, his sight with which he sees, his hand with which he holds and his leg with which he walks. If he requests from me, indeed I give to him. If he seeks refuge in me, indeed I give him refuge.” (4)

What is the evidence for the permissibility of Al-Tawassul?

The evidence for the permissibility of Al-Tawassul is from the Qur’an and Hadeeth.

Allah says in the Qur’an, “O those who believe! Fear Allah and seek means to approach him.” (5)

Before the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) came to this world, the Jews used to request Allah for victory in war through the means of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him). According to a narration of Abd Al-Allah Ibn Abbas, they would always be victorious. However, when the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) came to the world and announced Prophet Hood, the Jews rejected his call. Upon their rejection, Allah revealed a verse of the Qur’an. He says, “And before that, they used to ask for victory through the means of the very same Prophet. When he; known and recognised, came to them, they rejected him.” (6)

This shows that Al-Tawassul was practised by the Jews and they were not condemned for it.

Also in the Qur’an, Allah orders the believers to ask the prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) for forgiveness of their sins. Surely it is Allah who is the forgiver. So why ask the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) for forgiveness? The answer is, Allah is who will forgive but through the means of his beloved messenger. He says, “And when they do injustice unto their souls, if they come to you and ask forgiveness from Allah and the messenger asks for their forgiveness, surely they will find Allah accepting their repentance and merciful.” (7)

There are many prophetic traditions which prove the fact that Al-Tawassul was widely practised amongst the companions of the beloved Prophet (peace be upon him). Whenever the companions needed anything they would always ask for it from the Prophet (peace be upon him). They knew that Allah is the one who provides and fulfils our needs. However, they also knew that Muhammad (peace be upon him) is the means of Allah in providing and fulfilling needs. The Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) never prohibited neither condemned his companions for directly asking him their needs but instead he had announced amongst his companions, “Allah is the provider and I am the distributor.” I shall mention a few traditions from which the reader can understand Al-Tawassul and its permissibility.

Imam Tirmizi mentions a narration from Uthman Ibn Hunayf. He said, A blind person came to the Prophet (peace be upon him) and asked him to pray to Allah for cure. The Prophet (peace be upon him) replied, “If you desire, I shall pray (and you will gain your eyesight) and if you desire, be patient and that will be better (more rewarding) for you.”

The blind person said “pray for me.” The Prophet (peace be upon him) ordered him to perform ablution in the best way he can then to perform two units of prayer and finally supplicate to Allah in these words, “O’ Allah, I ask you and come to you through the means of your Prophet, Muhammad (peace be upon him), the Prophet of mercy. O’ Prophet of Allah, I come to my Lord through you for this need of mine, fulfil it for me. O’ Allah accept his intercession on behalf of me.” The blind person

did exactly as ordered by the Prophet (peace be upon him). The narrator of the Hadeeth says that when the blind man stood up after the supplication, he was cured and could now see. (8)

Imam Bukhari mentions a narration from Anas Ibn Malik. He said that when a drought would occur, Umar Ibn Khattab would supplicate to Allah for rain through the means of the Prophet's (peace be upon him) Uncle Abbas Ibn Abd Al-Muttalib in these words, "O' Allah, we used to use the means of your Prophet (peace be upon him) and you gave us rain. Now we ask you through the means of the uncle of our Prophet (peace be upon him), give us rain." Anas Ibn Malik says Allah would give them rain. (9)

Ibn Hajar mentions more detail on the aforementioned Hadeeth. He narrates from the son of Umar, Abd Al-Allah. He said, Umar lectured the people. In the lecture Umar said to the people, "Indeed the messenger of Allah treated Abbas in the same way a child treats his father. Therefore, O' People, we should follow the way of the messenger of Allah and treat Abbas the way he did. And we should use him as a means to reach Allah. (10)

Imam Ibn Sa'd has mentioned a narration from Sulaym Ibn Aamir. There was a drought In Damascus. The Sky was clear. There was no sign of a cloud. Mu'awiyah Ibn Ab Sufyan and the people of Damascus gathered to perform the Salah of drought (in which they ask the Lord for rain). Mu'awiyah sat on the pulpit and asked the people, "Where is Yazeed Ibn Al-Aswad Al-Jarshiy?" The people called for him. Yazeed Ibn Al-Aswad appeared. He was coming towards the pulpit slowly taking step after step (he was quite old). Mu'awiyah ordered him to sit on the pulpit. So he did whilst Mu'awiyah sat by his feet. Then Mu'awiyah supplicated. He said, "O' Allah, today we bring forth in your court the best amongst us and the most superior amongst us. We bring forth in your court Yazeed Ibn Al-Aswad." Then he looked at Yazeed Ibn Al-Aswad and said, "O' Yazeed, raise your hands in the court of Allah." Yazeed raised his hands and so did the people. It was not long when a cloud appeared from the west with a breeze. It rained and rained, so much that it became difficult for the people to return home. (11)

Did the four Imams mention anything regarding Al-Tawassul?

The four Imams also agree in the permissibility of Al-Tawassul.

Imam A'zam Ab Hanifah in his famous piece of poetry, the Al-Qasidah Al-Nu'maniyah writes a couplet which translates as,

"You are the one that when Adam used as a means, he succeeded from his calamity and he is your father." (12)

The couplet indicates that when Adam, the father of mankind asked Allah to forgive his mistake for eating from the forbidden tree. He asked Allah through the means of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him). In the Qur'an Allah says,

"Then Adam found certain words from his Lord. So Allah accepted his repentance." (13)

According to a narration, Adam, whilst on earth remembered some words he saw written on the throne of Allah whilst he was in heaven. The words read, “There is no God but Allah, Muhammad is his messenger and servant.” Adam realised that Muhammad is very dear to Allah and therefore used Muhammad as a means for his forgiveness. (14)

Imam Qadi Ayadh in his Al-Shifa mentions that when Ab Ja’far Mansoor, the second caliph of Ban Abbas came to the holy shrine of the Prophet (peace be upon him) Imam Malik was also present in the Masjid of the Prophet (peace be upon him). The Caliph Mansoor asked Imam Malik, “O’ Father of Abd Al-Allah, shall I face the holy Ka’bah or shall I face the shrine of the beloved?”

Imam Malik replied, “Why would you turn your face away from the beloved Prophet (peace be upon him) as he is your means to reach Allah as was for your father Adam (peace be upon him). Therefore face him and ask his intercession. Allah will accept his intercession.” (15)

Imam Khateeb Al-Baghdadi writes that in the days when Imam Shafa’i was in Baghdad he would practise al-tawassul through Imam Ab Hanifah. He would come to the shrine of Imam Ab Hanifah as a visitor and would greet him (by saying Al-Salam Alayk). After, he would use him as a means in the court of Allah for gaining his needs. (16)

Imam Ibn Hajar Al-Makki Al-Shafa’i mentions a couplet in Arabic poetry written by Imam Al-Shafa’i. The couplet translates as, “The children of the Prophet are my aid and in the court of Allah my means, through them I wish tomorrow I am given in my right hand the book of my deeds.” (17)

Imam Al-Nabhani has written that Imam Ahmad Ibn Hanbal practised al-tawassul through Imam Al-Shafa’i. Upon that, his son Abd Al-Allah was amazed. Imam Ahmad Ibn Hanbal said, “Imam Shafa’i is such a great person that he is like the sun for mankind.” (18)

Is it lawful to practice Al-Tawassul through the deceased?

The Scholars agree that there is no difference between practising Al-Tawassul through the living or through the deceased. There is no difference whether it is a something or a someone. The fact of the matter is, whatever we practise Al-Tawassul through, has to be dear and beloved to Allah. The Qur’an clearly mentions that the Prophet Ya’qub (peace be upon him) recovered his eyesight through his son, Prophet Yusuf’s (peace be upon him) shirt. Surely it was Allah who returned his eyesight but through the means of a shirt that had been worn by a beloved of Allah. Water that had touched the blessed body of our most beloved Prophet (peace be upon him) was used as a means for cure from many illnesses. We shall speak of this and many other relics in more detail in the section of Al-Tabarruk.

Here are some authentic narrations that clearly establish the permissibility of practising al-tawassul through non-living things and beings that have left this worldly life.

Imam Muslim and Imam Bukhari have recorded a Hadeeth from Abd Al-Allah Ibn Umar. He said, I heard from the Messenger of Allah (peace be upon him),

“In time before you, three men were travelling until the night urged them to seek protection in a mountain cave. After they entered the cave, a rock fell covering their exit. They came to an agreement that Allah would not free them from this cave until they supplicated to Allah through their good deeds.

One of them said, O’ Allah, my parents were very old and I used to go out for grazing my animals. On my return I would milk the animals and take the milk in a vessel for my parents to drink. After they had drunk from it, I would give it to my children and wife. One day I was delayed. On my return I found my parents sleeping. I disliked waking them up. The children were crying at my feet for the milk, however, I had always given my parents first priority. I waited by their side with the vessel in my hands until it was dawn. They awoke and drank from the vessel. O’ Allah, If I did this solely to seek Your pleasure, then please move this rock so that we may be free from what we are in. The rock moved a bit but not enough for them to exit.

Another one of them said, O’ Allah, I fell deeply in love with my female cousin. She was dear to me above all people. Once I intended to spend time with her but she refused. Later when she was going through hard time she returned to me and I gave her a hundred dinars (gold pieces) on the condition that she would spend time with me in seclusion. When we were alone, she told me to fear Allah and restrain from the unlawful. Immediately I moved away from her even though she was most dear to me and I left her and told her to keep the gold. O’ Allah, If I did this solely to seek Your pleasure, then please move this rock so that we may be free from what we are in. The rock moved a bit but not enough for them to exit.

The third person said, O’ Allah I employed a few labourers and I paid them their wages with the exception of one man who did not take his wages and went away. I invested his wages and I got much property thereby. After some time he came back and said to me, O Allah's slave, Pay me my wages. I said to him, all the camels, cows, sheep and slaves you see, are yours. He said, O Allah's slave, don't mock at me. I said, I am not mocking at you. He took the entire herd and drove them away and left nothing. O’ Allah, If I did this solely to seek Your pleasure, then please move this rock so that we may be free from what we are in. The rock moved a bit enough for them to exit. They walked out and away they went.” (19)

Imam Bukhari narrates from Uthman Ibn Abd Al-Allah. He said, “Once my wife sent me to Um Salamah with a bowl of water. She had a hair of the Prophet (peace be upon him) in a glass. If someone became ill, she would put the blessed hair in the water, move it about and then remove it. The ill person would drink the water and be cured.” (20)

From the above two narrations we can understand that Al-Tawassul can be practised through good and sincere deeds and through relics of those beloved to Allah.

Imam Bayhaqi and Imam Ibn Ab Shaybah have recorded a narration that in the time of Umar’s caliphate the people faced a drought. Bilal Ibn Al-Haris came to the grave of the Prophet (peace be upon him) and said, “O’ Messenger of Allah, plead rain for your nation for they will be destroyed.” The messenger of Allah came into his dream and said, “Go to Umar, give him my greeting and tell him they will be given rain.” Bilal Ibn al-Haris came to Umar and gave him the news. Umar cried and they were given rain. (21)

Imam Hakim narrates that when the mother of Ali Ibn Ab Talib passed away, the Prophet (peace be upon him) supplicated to Allah in these words, “O’ Allah, forgive my mother, Fatimah Bint Asad and make spacious the place she shall enter through your Prophet and through the Prophets that were before me (that have passed away).” (22)

The conclusion of this discussion is that it is permissible to practise Al-Tawassul to reach Allah and gain his divine pleasure through his beloved beings. Whether the being is living or non-living, whether they are in this world or have passed away and whether we directly ask them or we ask Allah through them. This was practised by all the Prophets of Allah (peace be upon them all), the companions of our beloved Prophet (peace be upon him) and by our great scholars.

Why are some people confused regarding Al-Tawassul?

The reason why some people are confused on this topic is because they do not differentiate between that which is dear to Allah and that which is disliked by Allah and between the friends of Allah and the enemies of Allah. If one asks Allah through his enemies or through something Allah dislikes, it is not only bad-mannered but also disrespectful and blasphemous. Can you imagine a person asking Allah through his sins? The people of Makkah who did not accept Islam used to practice Al-Tawassul through idols. This, Allah condemned and forbade. Allah had already announced that the idols were the enemies of Allah.

If we imagine there are four people, Zaid, Umar, Bakr and Amr. Zaid is a very rich person and has plenty of wealth. Umar is a poor person and needs to borrow money from someone. Bakr is a very good friend of the rich Zaid and is always doing favours for him. Amr is an enemy of Zaid and is always trying to cause problems for Zaid. Zaid hates Amr and loves Bakr.

One day Umar decided to borrow money from rich Zaid. He thinks of an idea. His idea is to take Amr with him to Zaid’s house. Umar thinks that Zaid might give him the money he needs if Zaid sees that he has brought Amr with him. When Zaid opened his house door seeing Umar standing with Amr, he slammed the door closed after pulling a face full of hate.

The next day Umar has another idea. This time his idea is to take Zaid’s friend Bakr to Zaid’s house. This time Umar thinks Zaid will give him the money he needs when Zaid sees his very good friend Bakr with him. After persuading Bakr, they both knock on Zaid’s door. Zaid opened the door and his face was full of happiness with a big smile after looking at Bakr. Zaid invited them both inside for some tea. They both entered the house. After sitting for a while, chatting and drinking tea, Bakr asks Zaid if he could let Umar borrow some money. Zaid gave Umar double the amount of money he needed as a gift rather than a loan.

This is the difference in practising Al-Tawassul through those who are beloved and through those who are disliked. May Allah give us all the ability to understand that which is correct as correct and that which is incorrect as incorrect through all that is beloved to Him, the almighty Lord.

References

1. Imam Ahmad in his Al-Musnad narrated from Abu Basrah Al-Gifari and Imam Al-Tabrani in his Al-Kabeer.
2. Al-Tirmizi, Al-Sunan Ibn Majah and Al-Mustadrak of Imam Hakim.
3. Al-Musnad of Imam Ahmed and Al-Mustadrak of Imam Hakim.
4. Bukhari
5. Surah: 5 Verse: 35
6. Surah: 2 Verse: 89
7. Surah: 4 Verse: 64
8. Imam Tirmizi says the Hadeeth is sound. Imam Al-Suyooti says in Al-Tahreer that Imam Bukhari has mentioned this Hadeeth in his Taareekh. Imam Bayhaqi has mentioned it in Al-Dalaa'il Wa Al-Da'waat and said it is sound.
9. Bukhari.
10. Fath Al-Baari.
11. Al-Tabqaat of Ibn Sa'd.
12. Al-Qasidah Al-Nu'maniyah.
13. Surah: 2 Verse: 37
14. Al-Mustadrak of Imam Hakim narrated from Umar Ibn Al-Khattab.
15. Al-Shifa.
16. Al-Taareekh of Imam Khateeb Al-Baghdadi.
17. Al-Sawaa'iq Al-Muhriqah.
18. Shawaahid Al-Haq.
19. Bukhari and Muslim.
20. Bukhari, Kitaab Al-Libaas.
21. Ibn Ab Shaybah in his Musannaf narrated with a sound chain. Imam Bayhaqi in his Al-Dalaa'il. Ibn Katheer in Al-Bidayah Wa Al-Nihayah.
22. Ibn Hiban, Imam Hakim and Imam Tabrani in his Al-Kabeer and Al-Awsat.