

There is no contradiction in asking Allah both with or without an intermediary, although in reality there are always several kinds of intermediary present, beginning with one's own state, obedience, belief, acts, sincerity, etc. Only those with deficient knowledge or imperfect belief imagine that the person who asks Allah through an intermediary has associated another to his worship of Allah. The Prophet explained this to the Companions once and for all when he said to Abu Bakr al-Siddiq: "Help is not sought with me (i.e. in reality), help is sought with Allah." [37] He did not say to Abu Bakr: "Asking me is forbidden and constitutes association to Allah." What he said meant that the Prophet is not the source of help but only the most effective intermediary to obtain help from Allah.

The meaning of the hadith is elucidated by the Qur'anic verses: "You did not throw when you threw, but Allah threw" (8:17) and: "Those who swear allegiance unto thee swear allegiance only unto Allah" (48:10). Further, the Prophet said, "I did not bear you but Allah bore you." [38] Thus the meaning of the hadith "Help is not sought with me" is:

(Even if I am the one ostensibly being asked
for help,) I am not the one being asked for help,
in reality Allah Himself is being asked.

The hadith "Help is not sought with me" must therefore be interpreted in the light of the fact that asking for help applies to whoever the help comes from including in respect to causation and acquisition (i.e. secondary causes); this is what the Arabic means and the Shari`a permits. This meaning is supported by the hadith in Bukhari (Kitab al-tawhid) touching on intercession on the Day of Resurrection, in which people sought help from Adam, then Musa, then Muhammad, on him be Allah's blessings and peace, and the latter replies: "I can do it."

It is essential to understand that it is not, in reality, the Prophet who is the ultimate object of supplication, nor is he the one who grants it, but he is the best means of forwarding it to Allah and for its being granted by Allah. This is clear in the Prophet's prayer to Allah, in his words, "through Your Prophet and the Prophets before me" and "through those who ask" in the following two hadiths:

On the authority of Abu Sa`id al-Khudri, may Allah be pleased with him: He relates that the Messenger of Allah said: "The one who leaves his house for prayer and then says: O Allah, I ask you by the right of those who ask you and I beseech you by the right of those who walk this path unto you that my going forth bespeak not of levity, pride nor vainglory nor done for the sake of repute. I have gone forth in the warding off your anger and for the seeking of your pleasure. I ask you,

therefore, to grant me refuge from Hellfire and to forgive me my sins, for no one forgives sins but yourself. Allah will accept for his sake and seventy thousand angels will seek his forgiveness."

It is related in Musnad Ahmad 3:21, Ibn Majah (Masajid), al-Mundhiri in al-Targhib 1:179, Ibn Khuzayma in his Sahih, Ibn al-Sani, and Abu Nu`aym. Ghazali mentions it in the Ihya and `Iraqi said: "It is hasan." Nawawi mentions only Ibn al-Sani's two chains in the Adhkar and says they are da`if (weak). However, Ibn Hajar al-`Asqalani says it is hasan in al-Amali al-masriyya (#54) and also in the Takhrij of Nawawi's book, explaining that the latter neglected Abu Sa`id al-Khudri's narration and omitted to mention Ibn Majah's. See Imam Kawthari's remarks on this hadith below.

The Prophet also said on the authority of Anas ibn Malik: "O Allah, grant forgiveness to my mother, Fatima Bint Asad, and make vast for her the place of her going in [i.e. her grave] by the right of thy Prophet and that of those Prophets who came before me" and so on until the end of the hadith.

Tabarani relates it in al-Kabir and al-Awsat. Ibn Hibban and al-Hakim declare it sound. The "Fatima" referred to here is the mother of Sayyidina `Ali who raised the Prophet. Ibn Abi Shayba on the authority of Jabir relates a similar narrative. Similar also is what Ibn `Abd al-Barr on the authority of Ibn `Abbas and Abu Nu`aym in his Hilya on the authority of Anas Ibn Malik relate, as al-hafiz al-Suyuti mentioned in the Jami` al-Kabir. Haythami says in Majma` al-zawa'id: "Tabarani's chain contains Rawh ibn Salah who has some weakness but Ibn Hibban and al-Hakim declared him trustworthy. The rest of its sub-narrators are the men of sound hadith." Imam al-Kawthari says about this hadith in his Maqalat (p. 410): "It provides textual evidence whereby there is no difference between the living and the dead in the context of tawassul, and this is explicit tawassul through the Prophets, while the hadith of Abu Sa`id al-Khudri, O Allah, I ask You by the right of those who ask You, constitutes tawassul through the generality of Muslims, both the living and the dead."

The Prophet used to say after the two rak`at of the dawn prayer: "O Allah, Lord of Jibril, of Israfil, of Mika'il, and Lord of Muhammad the Prophet: I seek refuge in You from the Fire..."

Nawawi mentions in the Adhkar that it was narrated by Ibn al-Sani, and Ibn Hajar graded it hasan or fair as mentioned by Ibn `Allan in his Commentary on the Adhkar (Vol. 2 p. 139). Shaykh Muhammad ibn `Alawi al-Maliki said: "The specific mention of the above in his du`a is understood as tawassul, as if he were saying: "O Allah, I ask You and I seek as means to You Jibril, Israfil, Mika'il, and Muhammad the Prophet. Ibn `Allan referred to this in his commentary." [39]