

PROOF-TEXTS OF INTERCESSION

IN THE QUR'AN AND HADITH

1. Linguistic definitions

Shafa`a is the Arabic noun for intercession or mediation or asking forgiveness from Allah for someone else. The word is used also in laying a petition before a king,[8] interceding for a debtor,[9] and in judicial procedure:

"Whoso makes a righteous intercession shall partake of the good that ensues therefrom, and whoso makes an evil intercession will bear the consequence thereof" (4:85);

"He who by his intercession invalidates one of Allah's hudud (laws concerning transgressions) is challenging (tahadda) Allah" (Bukhari, Anbiya' ch. 54).

He who makes intercession is called shfi` and shaf`.

2. Statement of the Doctrine of Intercession in Islam and the Obligations of Belief Therein

Hujjat al-Islam Imam Ghazali said:

It is obligatory to believe in the intercession of first the prophets, then religious scholars, then martyrs, then other believers, the intercession of each one commensurate with his rank and position with Allah Most High.

[Cf. "Allah Himself is witness that there is no God save Him. And the angels and the men of learning too are witness" (3:18) and "Whoso obey Allah and the Messenger, they are with those unto whom Allah has shown favor, of the Prophets and the saints and the martyrs and the righteous. The best of company are they!" (4:69).]

Any believer remaining in hell without intercessor shall be taken out of it by the favor of Allah, no one who believes remaining in it forever, and anyone with an atom's weight of faith in his heart will eventually depart from it.[10]

3. Proofs of intercession and mediation in the Qur'an

In the Holy Qur'an intercession is:

- a) negated in relation to the unbelievers,
- b) established categorically as belonging to Allah,
- c) further defined as generally permitted for others than Allah by His permission,
- d) further specified as permitted for the angels on behalf of whomever Allah wills,
- e) explicitly attributed to the Prophet in his lifetime,
- f) alluded to in reference to the Prophet in the afterlife, and
- g) alluded to in reference to the generality of the Prophets and the believers in the afterlife.

3.a) The Day of Judgment is described as a day on which no intercession will be accepted from the Children of Israel (2:48) or the unbelievers generally speaking (2:254), or the idolaters (10:18, 74:48):

- 2:48: "And guard yourselves against a day when no soul will avail another, nor intercession be accepted from it";

- 2:254: "O believers, spend of that wherewith We have provided you before a day comes when there will be no trafficking, nor friendship, nor intercession. The disbelievers, they are the wrong-doers."

- 10:18: "They worship beside Allah that which neither hurts nor profits them, and they say: These are our intercessors with Allah."

- 74:48: "The mediation of no mediators will avail them then."

3.b) In absolute terms intercession belongs to Allah alone:

- 39:43-44: "Or choose they intercessors other than Allah? Say: What! Even though they have power over nothing and have no intelligence? Say: the intercession belongs to Allah."

3.c) A further definition that "intercession belongs to Allah" is that intercession is actually permitted to others than Allah but only by His permission:

- 2:255: "Who should intercede with Him, except by His permission?"

- 10:3: "There is no intercessor save after His permission."

- 19:87: "They will have no power of intercession, save him who has made a covenant with his Lord."

- 43:86: "And those unto whom they cry instead of Him possess no power of intercession, except him who beareth witness unto the truth knowingly."

3.d) Angels are permitted to intercede for whomever Allah wills, specifically among the believers:

- 21:26-28: "And they say: the Beneficent hath taken unto Himself a son... Nay, but honored slaves [angels]... and they cannot intercede except for him whom He accepteth, and they quake for awe of Him."

- 40:7: "Those who bear the Throne, and all who are round about it... ask forgiveness for those who believe."

- 42:5: "The angels hymn the praise of their Lord and ask forgiveness for those on the earth."

3.e) The intercession of the Prophet in his lifetime is explicitly and frequently established:

- 3:159: "Pardon them and ask forgiveness for them and consult with them upon the conduct of affairs."

- 4:64: "And if, when they had wronged themselves, they had but come unto thee and asked forgiveness of Allah, and the Messenger had asked forgiveness for them, they would have found Allah forgiving, merciful."

- 4:106-107: "And ask forgiveness of Allah (for others). Allah is ever forgiving, merciful. And plead not on behalf of those who deceive themselves."

- 8:33: "But Allah would not punish them while thou wast with them, nor will He punish them while they seek forgiveness."

- 9:80, 84: "Ask forgiveness for them (the hypocrites) or ask not forgiveness for them; though thou ask forgiveness for them seventy times Allah will not forgive them... And never pray for one of them who dieth, nor stand by his grave."

- 9:103: "Pray for them. Lo! thy prayer is an assuagement for them."

- 9:113: "It is not for the Prophet, and those who believe, to pray for the forgiveness of idolaters even though they may be near of kin (to them) after it hath become clear that they are people of hell-fire."

- 24:62: "If they ask thy leave for some affair of theirs, give leave to whom thou wilt of them, and ask for them forgiveness of Allah."

- 47:19: "Know that there is no god save Allah, and ask forgiveness for thy sin and for believing men and believing women."

- 60:12: "Accept their [believing women's] allegiance and ask Allah to forgive them."

- 63:5-6: "And when it is said unto them: Come! The Messenger of Allah will ask forgiveness for you! they [the hypocrites] avert their faces and thou seest them turning away, disdainful. Whether thou ask forgiveness for them or ask not forgiveness for them, Allah will not forgive them."

3.f) The intercession and mediation of the Prophet on the Day of

Judgment has been established by the consensus of scholars (ijma') and is an article of belief in Islam as stated in section 2. The Mu'tazili heresy rejected it, as they held that the man who enters the Fire will remain there forever. The consensus of scholars is based on the principle of permission (see the verses in section 3.c above), on the allusive verses in the present section, and on the more explicit hadiths quoted further below:

- 17:79: "It may be that thy Lord will raise thee to a Praised Station."

- 93:5: "And verily thy Lord will give unto thee so that thou wilt be content."

3.g) The intercession of the generality of the Prophets as well as the believers has similarly been established by the verses of sections 3.c and 3.e above, i.e. based on permission, and also because Prophets have made a covenant with their Lord (33:7, 3:81) and do bear witness unto the truth knowingly. The latter is true also of the elite of the believers (3:18: "Allah, the angels, and the men of learning"). There are also the following verses concerning the Prophets' intercession in their lifetime:

- 12:97-98: "And they said: O our father! Ask forgiveness of our sins for us for lo! we were sinful. And he [Jacob] said: I shall ask forgiveness for you of my Lord. He is the forgiving, the merciful."

- 19:47: "He [Abraham] said: Peace unto thee. I shall ask forgiveness of my Lord for thee."

- 60:4: "Abraham promised his father: I will ask forgiveness for thee, though I owe nothing for thee from Allah."

There are also the following verses concerning the believers' intercession in their lifetime:

- 9:113: "It is not for the Prophet, and those who believe, to pray for the forgiveness of idolaters even though they may be near of kin (to them) after it has become clear that they are people of hellfire."

- 59:10: "And those who came after them say: Our Lord! forgive us and forgive our believing brothers who lived before us."

4. Proofs of intercession/mediation in the hadith

In the hadith the power of intercession is emphasized as given:

- a) to the Prophet exclusively of other prophets;
- b) to special members of the Prophet's Community, such as saints and scholars;
- c) to the common believers of the Prophet's Community.

4.a) Intercession of the Prophet:

4.a.1) In his lifetime for those who passed away:

- All the authentic traditions concerning the Prophet's prayer and takbir over the graves of the believers.

- Muslim (jana'iz): Abu Hurayra narrates that a dark-complexioned woman or young man used to sweep the mosque. When that person died, no-one told the Prophet until he enquired about it and then went to pray over the grave. He remarked: "Verily, these graves are full of darkness for their dwellers. Verily, Allah Mighty and Glorious illumines them for their occupants by reason of my prayer for them."

- Muslim (jana'iz): `Awf ibn Malik said that after he heard the words of the Prophet's prayer over a dead person, he earnestly desired that he were that dead person.

- Muslim (jana'iz): Muhammad ibn Qays narrates from `A'isha that the Prophet on every night that he was with her used to quietly get dressed and leave at the end of the night, and she once followed him surreptitiously until he reached Baqi` [the graveyard of the believers] where he prayed for the dead. Later he told her that Jibril had come to him and said: "Your Lord has commanded you to go to the inhabitants of Baqi` and beg forgiveness for them."

4.a.2) In the afterlife:

- al-Daraqutni, al-Dulabi, al-Bayhaqi, Khatib al-Baghdadi, al-`Uqayli, Ibn `Adi, Tabarani, and Ibn Khuzayma in his Sahih, all through various chains going back to Musa ibn Hilal al-`Abdi from `Ubayd Allah Ibn `Umar, both from Nafi`, from Ibn `Umar: "Whoever visits my grave, my intercession will be guaranteed for him."

Ibn Hajar al-Haytami said in his commentary on Nawawi's *Idah fi manasik al-hajj*:

Ibn Khuzayma narrated it in his Sahih but alluded to its weakness. Ibn al-Kharrat and Taqi al-Subki declared it sound (sahih). Darraqutni and Tabarani also narrate it with the wording: "Whoever visits me with no other need than visiting me, it is my duty to be his intercessor on the Day of Judgment." One version has: "It is Allah's duty that I be his intercessor on the Day of Judgment." Ibn al-Subki declared it sound.

Although declaring all the chains of this hadith imperfect (layyina), Dhahabi nevertheless said that they strengthened each other and declared the chain jayyid (good) as narrated, in *Mizan al-`itidal*, (4:226): That is, the hadith is hasan. Sakhawi confirmed him in the *Maqasid al-hasana*, while al-Subki declared it sahih in *Shifa' al-siqam* (p. 12-13) and Samhudi in *Sa`adat al-darayn* (1:77). Imam Lucknawi in *al-Ajwiba al-fadila* (p. 155) said: "And this [declaring it authentic] until today is the custom of the people who have reached mastery of this science."

About Musa ibn Hilal, Dhahabi in his *Mizan* (3:220) said: "Huwa salih al-hadith" which means: "He is good enough in his narrations." Ibn `Adi said in *al-Kamil fi al-du`afa* (6:2350): "He (Musa ibn Hilal) is most likely acceptable; other people have called him unknown (majhul) and this is not true... He is one of the shuyukhs of Imam Ahmad and most of them are trustworthy." Lucknawi said in *al-Raf` wa al-takmil* (p. 248-249): "Abu Hatim [al-Razi]'s saying whereby Musa ibn Hilal is unknown is rejected, because it is established that those who are trustworthy narrated hadith from him." Even Albani declared him thabit al-riwaya (of established reliability) in his *Irwa'* (4:338).

About `Ubayd Allah ibn `Umar al-`Umari: Dhahabi calls him *saduq hasan al-hadith* (truthful, of fair narrations) in *al-Mughni* (1:348); Sakhawi says of him *salih al-hadith* (his narrations are good enough) in *al-Tuhfa al-latifa* (3:366); Ibn Ma`in said to Darimi about him: *salih thiqa* (good enough and trustworthy) in *al-Kamil* (4:1459).

al-Lucknawi also said about this hadith in his book *Zafr al-amani* (p.422): "There are some who declared it weak, and others who asserted that all the hadiths on visitation of the Prophet are forged, such as Ibn Taymiyya and his followers, but both positions are false for those who were given right understanding, for verification of the case dictates that the hadith is hasan, as Taqi al-Din al-Subki has expounded in his book *Shifa' al-siqam fi ziyarat khayr al-anam*."

Among those who fall into the category of "Ibn Taymiyya and his followers" on this issue: Ibn `Abd al-Hadi who wrote *al-Sarim al-munki* in an attempt to refute Subki's book *Shifa' al-siqam* on the great merit of visiting the Prophet; the Saudi author Bin Baz who said: "the ahadith that concern the desirability of visiting the grave of the Prophet are all weak, indeed forged" (*kulluha da`ifa bal mawdu`a*) in the 1993 edition of *Fath al-bari* (3:387); Nasir al-Din Albani, who claimed that the visit to the Prophet ranks among the innovations in *Talkhis ahkam al-jana'iz* (p. 110) and elsewhere in his writings; and Nasir al-Jadya`, who in 1993 obtained his Ph.D. with First Honors from the University of Muhammad ibn Sa`ud after writing a 600-page book entitled *al-Tabarruk* in which he perpetuates

the same claim (p. 322). One will find such books printed and distributed far and wide, while the classical books of Ahl al-Sunna are deliberately ignored and made unavailable to Muslims at large.

Despite the claims of Wahhabis and "Salafis," the hadith "Whoever visits my grave is guaranteed my intercession" is one of the proof-texts adduced by the ulama of Islam to derive the obligation or recommendation of visiting the Prophet's grave and seeking him as wasila (intermediary/means), as will be seen further down, in the chapter on visiting the Prophet's grave. Sakhawi said in al-Qawl al-badi` (p. 160):

The emphasis and encouragement on visiting his noble grave is mentioned in numerous hadiths, and it would suffice to show this if there was only the hadith whereby the truthful and God-confirmed Prophet promises that his intercession among other things becomes obligatory for whoever visits him, and the Imams are in complete agreement from the time directly after his passing until our own time that this [i.e. visiting him] is among the best acts of drawing near to Allah.

- Muslim: "Whoever repeats after the words of the mu'adhdhin, my intercession will be guaranteed for him."

- Tirmidhi (hasan gharib) and Ibn Hibban: "Those closest to me in the hereafter are those who invoked blessings upon me the most (in dunya)."

- The Prophet said: "My intercession is for those people of my Community who commit major sins." It is narrated by Tirmidhi (hasan sahih gharib), Abu Dawud, Ibn Majah, Ahmad, Ibn Hibban in his Sahih, and `Abd al-Haqq Ibn al-Kharrat al-Ishbili cited it in Kitab al-`aqiba. Ibn Hajar in Fath al-bari specified the following meaning of this hadith: "He did not restrict this to those who repented." [11]

- In Bukhari, from `Imran ibn Husayn, whereby the Prophet said: "A people will come out of the Fire through the intercession of Muhammad, and will enter Paradise. They will be called the Jahannamiyyun."

- In Muslim's Sahih: `Abdullah ibn `Amr ibn al-`As narrated that the Prophet recited the prayer of Ibrahim: "My Lord! Lo! They have led many of mankind astray. But whoso followeth me, he verily is of me. And whoso disobeyeth me -- Still Thou art Forgiving, Merciful" (14:36). Then he recited the saying of `Isa: "If Thou punish them, lo! they are Thy slaves, and if Thou forgive them (lo! they are Thy slaves)" (5:118). Then he raised his hands and said: "My Community, my Community!" and he wept. Allah said: "O Jibril, go to Muhammad and ask him what causes him to weep." When Jibril came and asked him he told him, upon which Jibril returned and told Allah -- Who knows better than him -- and He said: "O Jibril, go to Muhammad and tell him: We shall make thee glad concerning thy Community and We shall not displease you." (A reference to 93:5)

- Tirmidhi (hasan sahih) and Ibn Maja: Abu ibn Ka`b narrated that the Prophet said: "On the Day of Judgment I shall be the Imam of Prophets and their spokesman and the owner of their intercession and I say this without pride" (a reference to 4:41).

- Tirmidhi (hasan gharib): From Anas, similar to the one before but applying to all people not only to Prophets.

- Tirmidhi (hasan gharib sahih): Abu Hurayra narrates that the Prophet said: "I shall stand before my Lord Glorious and Mighty and I shall be adorned with a garment from the garments of Paradise, after which I shall stand to the right of the Throne where none of creation will stand except myself."

- Tirmidhi (gharib): Ibn `Abbas narrates: "Some people close to the Prophet came and waited for him. When he came out he approached them and heard them saying: What a wonder it is that Allah Almighty and Glorious took one of His creation as His intimate Friend -- Ibrahim -- while another one said: What is more wonderful than His speech to Musa, to whom He spoke directly! Yet another one said: And `Isa is Allah's word and His spirit, while another one said: Adam was chosen by Allah. The Prophet said: I heard your words, and everything you said is indeed true, and I myself am the Beloved of Allah (habibullah) and I say this without pride, and I carry the flag of glory on the Day of Judgment and am the first intercessor and the first whose intercession is accepted, and the first to stir the circles of Paradise so that Allah will open it for me and I shall enter it together with the poor among my Community, and I say this without pride. I am the most honored of the First and the Last and I say this without pride."

- Bukhari and Muslim: Jabir narrated that the Prophet said: "I have been given five things which no Prophet was given before me:

I was made victor over my enemies through fear struck in their heart;

I was permitted to take the booty of war;

The whole earth was made a place of prostration for me and its soil ritually pure, so when the time to pray comes upon anyone of my Community, let him pray there and then;

I was given shafa`a (intercession/mediation with Allah);

Every Prophet was sent to his people in particular and I was sent to all peoples.

- Tirmidhi (hasan) and Ibn Maja: Abu Sa`id al-Khudri narrated that the Prophet said: "I am the leader of human beings and I say this without pride. I am the first whom the earth will give up when it cleaves, and the first intercessor and the first whose intercession is accepted. I hold the flag of glory in my hand, and under it comes Adam and everyone else."

- Bukhari and Muslim: Anas and Abu Hurayra respectively narrate that the Prophet said: "Every Prophet has a request that is fulfilled, and I want to reserve my request of intercession for my Community for the Day of Judgment."

- Ahmad and Tabarani (hasan): Burayda narrates that the Prophet said: "Verily I shall intercede on the Day of Judgment for more men than there are stones and clods of mud on the earth."

- Bukhari and Muslim: Abu Hurayra narrates a long hadith wherein the Prophet intercedes and his intercession is accepted when all other Prophets are powerless to intercede. In al-Hasan's version in Bukhari, the Prophet intercedes and is accepted four times:

For those who have a grain of faith in their heart;

For those who have a mustard seed of faith in their heart;

For those who have less than that of faith in their heart;

For those who ever said: la ilaha illallah.

4.b) Intercession of special members of the Prophet's Community:

4.b.1) In their lifetime for the living

- Bukhari [Istisqa']: Annas narrated: Whenever drought threatened them, `Umar ibn al-Khattab used to ask Allah for rain through the mediation of al-`Abbas ibn `Abd al-Muttalib. He [`Umar] used to say: "O Allah! We used to ask you through the means of our Prophet and You would bless us with rain, and now we ask You through the means of our Prophet's uncle, so bless us with rain." And it would rain.

4.b.2) In the afterlife

- Tirmidhi (hasan), Ibn Majah, and al-Hakim: Abu Umama narrated that the Prophet said: "More men will enter Paradise through the intercession of a certain man than there are people in the tribes of Rabi`ah and Mudar," and that the elders considered that this was `Uthman ibn `Affan.

- Tirmidhi (hasan sahih), Ibn Majah, and al-Hakim (sahih): Abu Abi al-Jad`a narrated that the Prophet said: "More men will enter Paradise through the intercession of one man than there are people in the tribe of Banu Tamim." They asked him: "Other than you?" He said: "Other than me," and it was said Uways al-Qarani was meant.

4.c) Intercession of the common believers among the Prophet's Community:

4.c.1) In their lifetime for those who passed away

- Muslim (jana'iz): `A'ishah reports the Prophet as saying: "If a company of Muslims numbering one hundred pray over a dead person, all of them interceding for him, their intercession for him will be accepted."

- Muslim (jana'iz): Ibn `Abbas said: "I have heard the Prophet say: If any Muslim dies and forty men who associate nothing with Allah stand over his body in prayer, Allah will accept them as intercessors for him."

- Abu Dawud (Book 20, Number 3194): Narrated Abu Hurayra: `Ali ibn Shammakh said: I was present with Marwan who asked Abu Hurayra: Did you hear how the Prophet used to pray over the dead?... Abu Hurayra said: O Allah, Thou art its Lord. Thou didst create it, Thou didst guide it to Islam, Thou hast taken its spirit, and Thou knowest best its inner nature and outer aspect. We have come as intercessors, so forgive him.

- Ahmad [4:79, 4:100] and others: In many traditions the number of acceptable intercessors in the funeral prayer is reduced to three rows of men, even if the number is under forty. Nawawi says the scholars of usul al-fiqh adduce these traditions also.

4.c.2) In the afterlife

- Tirmidhi (hasan), al-Bazzar: Abu Sa`id al-Khudri and Anas respectively narrate that the Prophet said: "One will be told: Stand, O So-and-so, and make intercession, and he will stand and make intercession for his tribe and his family and for one man or two men or more according to his works."

- The du`a that is recited in the funeral prayer of a non-adult: "O Allah, make him/her our forerunner, and make him for us a reward and a treasure, make him one who will intercede (shafi`an) and whose intercession is accepted (mushaffa`an)."

In this du`a we are clearly asking for intercession from a person who has passed away, in fact we are asking for intercession from a child who has not done any deeds in this world at all. A version of it mentioning intercession is in Nawawi's Adhkar, in the chapter of the du`as over the dead, and it is translated in Nuh Keller's Reliance in the section on Funerals.

In fact every janaza prayer contains a request for the intercession of the deceased in the phrase wa la tahrinna ajrahu which means "and do not prevent his reward from reaching us."

Bukhari related that the Prophet also said: "He whose three children died before the age of puberty, they will shield him from the Hell-Fire, or will make him enter Paradise."

5. Overview of the events of the Last Day at the stage of intercession

The following is quoted from Dr. Muhammad Abul Quasem's book Salvation of the Soul and Islamic Devotions:

Islamic [belief] is that for salvation intercession will take place at two stages: on the Day of Judgment and after the sinners' entry into hell.

On the Day of Judgment it will take place first before the divine questioning; it is the Prophet Muhammad who will intercede first for the forgiveness of his community. Accepting this intercession, Allah will grant him permission to take to Paradise through its right gate (al-bab al-ayman) built for them especially, all those people of his community who are entitled to it without giving an account of their actions.[12]

Then when, following the weighing of actions in the Balance the verdict of damnation will be passed to numerous groups of believers who commit major sins, intercessors, including all Prophets, will intercede for the forgiveness of many of them. The Prophet said: "My intercession is for those people of my Community who commit major sins." [13] Allah out of mercy will accept... and save a large number of sinners. This salvation is free from damnation.

The second stage of intercession is after the sinners being like coal as a result of constant burning in Hell-fire for a long time.[14] When they are suffering thus, intercessors will pray to Allah for the rescue of many of them. The result of this will be divine forgiveness of them before the end of their redemptive punishment. This is salvation after damnation.

Who will intercede in the Hereafter? Not only the angels and all Prophets, but also those believers who have high status with Allah, such as saints, sufis, religious scholars, and other pious men [and women], will be able to intercede for others.[15]

May Allah send blessings and peace upon the Intercessor Brought Near to Him, our Master Muhammad, and upon his Family and Companions, and may He grant us his Prophet's intercession on the Day of Reckoning.