

THE PROOFS FOR INTERCESSION (*SHAFĀ`A*) IN ISLAM

In Islam every action of a believer is an intercessor, and the Prophet has told us that the Qur'an also will intercede for us on the Day of Resurrection,^[2] while he himself is the greatest intercessor other than Allah. The position of the Prophet as the Intercessor between creation and the Creator is illustrated by his position as the one whom Allah consults with regard to his Community. This is established by the following authentic hadith narrated by Imam Ahmad in his *Musnad*:

- Hudhayfa said: The Prophet was absent and he did not come out until we thought that he would never come out anymore. When he did come out, he fell into such a long prostration that we thought that his soul had been taken back during that prostration. When he raised his head he said:

My Lord sought my advice (*istasharani*) concerning my Community, saying: "What shall I do with them?" I said: "What You will, my Lord, they are Your creation and Your servants!" Then He sought my advice again (*fa istasharani al-thaniya*), and I said to him the same thing, so He said: "We shall not put you to shame concerning your Community, O Muhammad."

Then He informed me that the first of my Community to enter Paradise will be seventy thousand, each thousand of whom will have seventy thousand with them [4,900,000,000], and none of them shall incur any accounting.

Then He sent me a messenger who said: "Supplicate and it will be answered to you. Ask and it will be given to you." I said to His messenger: "Will my Lord give me whatever I ask for?" He replied: "He did not send me to you except to give you you whatever you ask for."

And indeed my Lord has given me whatever I asked for, and I say this without pride: He has forgiven me my sins past or future while I am still alive and walking about; He has granted me that my Community shall not starve, and shall not be overcome. And He has given me al-Kawthar, a river of Paradise which flows into my Pond; and He has given me power and victory over my enemies, and terror running in their ranks at a month's distance from my Community; and He has granted me that I be first among the Prophets to enter Paradise; and He has made spoils of war lawful and good for me and my Community, and He has made lawful much of what He had forbidden those before us, nor did He take us to task for it."

Narrated by Imam Ahmad, and Haythami said in *Majma` al-zawa'id* (10:68) that its chain was fair (*hasan*).

According to Shari`a even the good action of the greatest apostate intercedes for him and profits him, as established by what is related in Bukhari whereby Abu Lahab freed his slave Thuwayba on the day the Prophet was born and that subsequently his punishment in the grave is diminished every Monday. Scholars have quoted this hadith to highlight the importance of praising the Prophet in that even non-believers benefit from the intercession of their own actions that denote his praise -- even unintentional. Two examples of such scholars are the *hafiz* of Syria and supporter of Ibn Taymiyya, Muhammad ibn Abi Bakr al-Qaysi, known as Nasir al-Din al-Dimashqi (777-842) in his several books on the praiseworthiness of Mawlid, among them *Jami` al-athar fi mawlid al-nabi al-mukhtar* (The compendium of reports concerning the birth of the Chosen Prophet), *al-Lafz al-ra'iq fi mawlid khayr al-khala'iq* (The shining expressions for the birth of the Best of Creation) and *Mawrid al-sadi bi mawlid al-nabi al-hadi* (The continuous spring: the birth of the Guiding Prophet) and

the *hafiz* Shams al-Din al-Jazari in his book *Urf al-ta`rif bi al-mawlid al-sharif* (The beneficent communication of the Noble Birth of the Prophet).

Another principle of that hadith is that the benefit of intercession takes place before Resurrection.

Whether persons other than the Prophet are intercessors as well the answer is: yes, since the Prophet has explicitly declared it in many sound hadiths which quote below, among them the following:

"More people than the collective tribes of Banu Tamim shall enter Paradise due to the intercession of one man from my Community." It was said: "O Messenger of Allah, is it other than you?" He said: "Other than me."^[a]

The belief in the Prophet's intercession and that of other than him is obligatory in Islam. It is stated clearly in the *Aqida tahawiyya* of Imam al-Tahawi, in Ghazali's *al-Iqtisad* and the chapter on *aqida* in his *Ihya'*, in the works of al-Ash`ari, and even in the *Aqida wasitiyya* of Ibn Taymiyya. These intercessors are a mercy from Allah and it is an obligation and an order for mankind to seek out Allah's mercy.

The seeking of intercession has two effects: one is immediate, in increasing the faith of the person and availing him all sorts of benefits in the world; the other is delayed until Resurrection.

About the statement in *al-Wala' wa al-bara'* that among the "ten actions that negate Islam" is "relying on an intermediary between oneself and Allah when seeking intercession,"^[a] then the deceptiveness of the statement is obvious, since the meaning of intercession is intermediary. How can one at the same time seek an intermediary and refrain from relying on him? This would not be the act of a believer but of a duplicitous person. Besides language and logic it is clear in the hadith of the Great Intercession in Bukhari and Muslim that the people will seek intercessors in vain among all the Prophets **until they come to the Seal of Prophets seeking to rely upon him for intercession, and he confirms that he is able to fulfill their request.** This is one of the matters which the Prophet boasted about in the hadith "I have been given five things..." What then is the import of reducing it to an "action that negates Islam" other than to reduce the status of the Prophet himself and of his intercession?

Allah has created intercession as He has created everything else, out of mercy; He also said: "My Mercy encompasses all things" (7:156). No doubt His greatest Mercy is the Prophet, concerning whom He said: "We did not send you save as a Mercy to the Worlds" (21:107). Belief in the Prophet's intercession is tied to the witnessing to the truth he brought and the recognition by the believers of his right as Allah's greatest Mercy. The angels intercede according to Qur'an, yet the Prophet is nearer to Allah than the nearest among them. No-one will speak on the Day of Judgment except those who have permission, and it is related in authentic hadith that Allah gave permission to the Prophet. The Prophet will not be saying "I and Myself" but will be saying "*ummati, ummati* (My Community)" and that is intercession which, unless it is reliable, cannot be hoped for nor looked forward to, as the "Salafis" try to suggest.

Allah said in Surat Yunus:

Is it a matter of wonderment to men that We have sent Our revelation to a man from among themselves? that he should warn mankind and give the glad tidings to the Believers that they have with their Lord a truthful foothold/forerunner. But the unbelievers say: This is an evident sorcerer. (10:2)

The following is one of the authoritative explanations for the expression "a truthful foothold/forerunner" (*qadama sidqin*):

"A truthful foothold/forerunner": Bukhari in his *Sahih* [book of *Tafsir* for Surat Yunus, ch. 1], Tabari in *Jami` al-bayan*, Qurtubi in *al-Jami` li al-ahkam*, Ibn `Uyayna in his *Tafsir*, Ibn Kathir in his *Tafsir*, Suyuti in *al-Durr al-manthur* and *al-Riyad al-aniqa*, Abu al-Fadl al-Maydani in *Majma` al-amthal*, Abu al-Shaykh, Ibn Mardawayh in his *Tafsir*, Ibn Abi Hatim in his *Tafsir*, and others said, on the authority of the Companions: `Ali ibn Abi Talib and Abu Sa`id al-Khudri, and the Tabi`in: al-Hasan, Qatada, Mujahid, Zayd ibn Aslam, Bakkar ibn Malik, and Muqatil: "It is Muhammad, blessings and peace upon him."

Qurtubi said: "It is Muhammad *sallallahu `alayhi wa sallam*, for he is an intercessor whom the people obey and who precedes them, just as he said: I will be your scout at the Pond (*ana faratukum `ala al-hawd*). And he was asked about its meaning and said: **It is my intercession, for you to use me as a means to your Lord** (*hiya shafa`ati tawassaluna bi ila rabbikum*)." Ibn Kathir mentioned the latter meaning in his *Tafsir* (2:406, 4:183) as well as al-Razi in his (8:242).

al-Hakim al-Tirmidhi said: "Allah gave him precedence (*qaddamahu*) with the Praiseworthy Station (*al-maqam al-mahmud*). Qurtubi mentioned it.

Suyuti said: "Ibn Jarir al-Tabari and Abu al-Shaykh narrated that al-Hasan said: It is Muhammad blessings and peace upon him, who is an intercessor for them on the Day of Rising; and Ibn Mardawayh narrated from `Ali ibn Abi Talib through al-Harith and from Abu Sa`id al-Khudri through `Atiyya: It is Muhammad blessings and peace upon him, he is an intercessor in truth on their behalf on the Day of Rising."

Intercession in no way diminishes the fact that everything is under Allah's sovereignty. However, Allah created secondary causes and means, and He has said: "Seek the means to Allah" (5:35). Intercession is but one of those means and not the smallest. The fact that the Prophet said that to utter *la ilaha illallah* from the heart guaranteed his intercession, implies that there is immense good in his intercession; what would we wish for in addition to the benefit brought by uttering the *kalima*, if it were not to be prized immensely?

That is why sincere love of the Prophet and of pious people is of a tremendous benefit, as one hopes thereby to be loved back. The Prophet said to the Arab who had prepared nothing for the Final Hour other than love for Allah and His Prophet: *yuhshar al-mar' ma` man ahabb*, "One is raised in the company of those he loves," and the Companions who were present said this was the happiest day of their lives for hearing this promise.^[5] All this implies reliance, and contradicts the assertion of the book *al-Wala' wal-Bara'* that "relying on an intermediary between oneself and Allah when seeking intercession negates Islam."

The asking of intercession from the intercessor, as the asking of *du`a* from a pious Muslim, in no way implies that the person who asks believes any good can come apart from Allah. In effect he is asking Allah, but he is using the means that Allah put at his disposal, including the intercession of those who may be closer than himself to Allah. To refuse to believe that other may be closer than us to Allah is the sin of Iblis.

Imam Ghazali said in the section on doctrine of his *Ihya'*:

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.^[6]

A contemporary scholar wrote the following explanation of the meaning of intercession:

