

The Divine Link: A Study On Wasilah And Tawassul

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This text explains the concept of Tawassul and Wasilah by clarifying all the controversies and nullifying all the misconceptions by citing many examples from the Holy Qur'an and Ahadith.

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Dedication

We humbly present this work to the court of Waly ul-Asr, Hujjat Ibn al-Hassan, Al-Qaim, Al-Mahdi (atf). May He ('a) be pleased with this little effort and bless it to have the desired effect, Ameen.

وَاخْفِضْ لَهُمَا جَنَاحَ الذُّلِّ مِنَ الرَّحْمَةِ وَقُلْ رَبِّ ارْحَمْهُمَا كَمَا رَبَّيَانِ صَغِيرًا

I dedicate this work to the first and greatest teachers of my life; my parents: Mrs. Rubab Akber Dhalla and Marhum Al-Hajj Akber Habib Dhalla.

And to a very dear friend, Marhum Muhammad Husayn Sikiladha, whose untimely demise at a very young age has left a gap in the lives of many who knew him. The pain inflicted in his heart by anti-tawassul circles inflamed our hearts and laid the foundation for this study. May Allah (SWT) keep him near the Ahlul Bayt ('a), Ameen.

I request the reader to bless the souls of the following and all the Marhumeen by reciting Sura al-Fatihah:

Al Hajj Ahmed Habib Dhalla

Mrs Kanize Fatima Muslim Gulamali

Mrs Shaharbanu Akber Hasham

Mrs Husnabanu Ashiq Kermali

Murabbi Gulamhussein Mawji

Khayrunbai Shariff Meghji

Murabbi Shariff Meghji

May Allah (SWT) place their souls by the vicinity of the Masumeen (‘a).

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The book in your hand is a result of a series of lectures given in the holy month of Ramadhan 1426 AH at the Moshi Imambargah. I am greatly indebted to the Mumineen of Moshi Jamaat who encouraged me with positive feedback to the discussions on the topic.

The idea to put down the whole discussion in writing was first suggested and the first draft prepared by my colleague Dr. Mubarakali NisarHusayn Janmohamed (MD), the medical director of the Jaffery Charitable Medical Services of Moshi Jamaat.

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To all of them and so many others I can only say “Jazakumullahun khayran jazaa”.

Introduction

Tawassul – seeking means to reach Allah has never been a subject for discussion in our communities. All along it was assumed that as Shias of Ahlul Bayt (‘a), Tawassul, especially of Ahlul Bayt is instinctive

in us.

Phrases like:

اللهم اني أسألك بحق فاطمة و أبيها وبعلمها وبنيتها

“O Allah! I beseech You by the status of Fatimah and her father and her husband and her children”.

يَا عَلِيّ مَدِّدْ

O Ali help (me)!

يَا صَاحِبَ الزَّمَانِ اُدْرِكْنِي

O Master of the Time help me!

يَا فَاطِمَةُ اُغِيثِنِي

O Fatimah come to my rescue!

are repeated more often than one's own name on any given day! Further, a number of duas recited on daily or weekly basis have the same connotation. Examples include

- “Dua al-Tawassul”
- “Dua al-Isteghatha”,

and the special prayers of the Laylatul Qadr in the holy month of Ramadhan

بِكَ يَا اللَّهُ

By Your Name O Allah

بِمُحَمَّدٍ

By (the sake of) Muhammad

By (the sake of) Ali

The names of the 14 infallible personalities (Ma'sumin) are also included in the vows (nadhr) taken by Shias all over the world. As a consequence the youths of our communities have accepted this as an inseparable part of the Shia faith.

Of late, however, Tawassul has become a subject of intense debate and discussion in different circles of the Shia Ithna-asheri communities. Such theological discussions may indicate intellectual health, academic thirst and spiritual quest. This would have been the case had the interest been confined to a sincere desire to know the validity of Tawassul.

Instead, a group of "Anti Tawassul" campaigners has arisen with the preconceived notion that this practice is bid'at (innovation), haram (forbidden) and tantamount to shirk (polytheism). The idea is gaining momentum amongst the youth and the helpless elders just watch and see the wave washing away their life long efforts to preserve this legacy to their off-springs.

Alarming, some of the elders who had all along been proponents of Tawassul now find themselves trapped by these questions and, failing to provide answers, join the bandwagon of creating more doubts.

It is worth noting here that Tawassul is not confined to the Shias alone. The adherents of the Ahlul Sunna sect share this concept too and their literature is replete with articles explaining and defending it. The question one asks is why this sudden interest in Tawassul amongst the Shia's, especially the youth?

With the rising temporal power and influence of the Wahabi sect, militant and aggressive propagation of their ideology and interpretation of the Qur'an and prophetic traditions, many well established beliefs, rituals and practices have come under vehement attack and criticism.

The Wahabis have resorted to branding anyone who disagrees with their way of thinking as a non-believer, a "kafir". How all this started is an interesting but not the subject of the present discussion. Some of the objections raised by the Wahabis include:

- Tawassul
- Praying near the graves.
- Celebrating Milad un-Nabi – Birthday of the Prophet.
- Praying for the dead etc.

The electronic media has played a large role in implanting such malignant ideas in our communities. Some of the elders who have been influenced by the Wahabi ideology have also contributed to the confusion prevalent in the younger generation. It is no longer necessary for the Wahabi ideologues to work very hard – the "convertees" now do propagate their beliefs.

Both Shia and the Sunni scholars responded to these objections and allegations with well-researched and logical arguments. This has diluted and in some instances silenced the Wahabi propaganda. However, this knowledge is still confined to the learned circles of the community and the youth are largely left to wander on their own.

On the other hand, people have started realizing the importance of coming out of mere rituals and going into the substance of the matter at an academic and intellectual level. This is a positive response and a backlash against such attacks and challenges.

Another question that comes to mind at this point is why Tawassul specifically? The issue will become clearer if answered with a graphic example.

Imagine a big piece of land over which many buildings stand. The land is a common ground for all the buildings; however, each building has its own foundation, pillars, design, color, furnishing and facilities. Islam is the big piece of land over which many buildings (sects) stand. Islam is the common ground for all the sects.

As long as one believes in the Almighty Allah (SWT) as the Only God without any partner, Muhammad (S) as the last messenger of God and the Day of Judgment, he/she comes under the fold of Islam. The sect to which a Muslim subscribes then, has its own foundation and pillars, and this shapes its practices.

The foundation of the Shia Ithna-ashariyya sect is the Wilayah of Imam Ali ibn Abi Talib (‘a) and the Aimmah from his progeny who, together with the holy lady Fatimah Zahra (‘a), make the Ahlul Bayt al-Rasul or the household of the Holy Prophet (S).

This concept suggests that, after the death of the Holy Prophet (S), the right of leadership of the Muslims belonged to Imam Ali (‘a), that he was appointed to be the vicegerent, successor, inheritor and ‘khalifa’ of the Prophet (S) by Allah Himself and that this was openly declared on a number of occasions and most directly at a place called “Ghadir Khumm” by the Holy Prophet (S).

The leadership of the Muslim Ummah then fell upon the 11 Imams consecutively. The last Imam, Al-Mahdi, (‘a) is in Occultation (Ghaibah) and will make his reappearance at God’s command.

In other words, the Shias reach the Prophet (S) through the 12 Imams (‘a) from his family.

Three main pillars support the “building” of the Shia Ithna-ashariyya sect:

1. **Marjaiyyah** – Allegiance to and following the most learned Islamic Jurist (of the time) in religious, social, moral and personal issues and laws.
2. **Azadari** – Commemorating the martyrdom of the Holy Imams (‘a) especially Imam Husayn (‘a) and the holy souls of the household of the Holy Prophet (S) and the Prophet (S) himself. This includes loving the Ahlul Bayt, loving and befriending those who love them and dissociating with their enemies.

3. **Tawassul** – Seeking means to approach Allah (SWT) through (especially) the “Wasilah” of the Holy Prophet (S) and his Ahlul Bayt (‘a).

The three pillars are unique to the Shia Ithna-ashariyya sect giving it its’ identity. These are the ideological pillars and beams around which the acts of worship and practical issues are attached.

On closer inspection it is apparent that all three pillars converge at one point – Wilayah of Ahlul Bayt (‘a). In turn, Wilayah of Ahlul Bayt (‘a) leads the Shia to the Holy Prophet (S) and ultimately to Allah (SWT) in keeping with the verse from the Holy Qur’an, Surah Ale Imraan:

قُلْ إِنْ كُنْتُمْ تُحِبُّونَ اللَّهَ فَاتَّبِعُونِي يُحْبِبْكُمُ اللَّهُ وَيَغْفِرْ لَكُمْ ذُنُوبَكُمْ وَاللَّهُ غَفُورٌ رَحِيمٌ

Say: “If you love Allah, follow me: Allah will love you and forgive you your sins; for Allah is Oft-Forgiving, Most Merciful.”(3:31)

All three pillars and, more recently, the very foundation of the Shia Ithna-ashariyya sect – Wilayah has come under major attack from within the Shi’a ranks. The attack is from the gullible youth who, having read a couple of books, feel they are in a position to give their opinions and rulings on religious issues! These youths, (and, unfortunately, some elders as well) have become the mouthpiece and pawns of the Wahabis in the Shia community.

Tawassul is now becoming “shirk” and “bid’ah”, Azadari is mocked at and doubts are implanted at the institution of Marjaiyyah. If these three pillars are shaken and destroyed, the connection to Wilayat will be blocked and the Prophet (S) will not be reached. If we fail to reach the Prophet (S) we will not get anywhere near Allah (SWT) and the entire “building” will thus collapse.

We now need to present our point of view to the younger generation in a manner that will convince them. We hope that this will Inshallah be achieved by the end of our discussion.

Preface

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

In the name of Allah, the Beneficent, the Merciful.

Wasilah and Tawassul is a concept that is well understood, accepted and practiced by the Muslims from time immemorial. Some 20 years ago when we were acquiring our basic religious training in Hussayni

Madrasah, such topics were never discussed whether in the Madrasah or amongst the youth circles.

With the current wave of Wahabi thoughts garbed in a monotheistic cloak on one hand and the advent of electronic media, internet technology and globalization on the other, the youth are now exposed to varying ideologies which, many a times, is in conflict with the one he has grown up with.

His faith is scrutinized under the microscope of “friendly curiosity” with dark question marks whose magnitude leaves him baffled. In many instances they have no answer when asked to explain why they are doing what they do.

The youth is now faced with challenges never met before and the elders have to stand up in defense. The situation is further compounded with the limited resources available in terms of literary references in the commonly used language of today’s youth.

Hand in hand with this, the community elders and scholars, especially in the developing countries, have had more important issues to deal with than concentrate on issues that seemed to be part and parcel of the community identity.

This identity is now being threatened and it is a matter of urgency if not emergency that more qualified personnel address such issues from the pulpit and madaris. Any further laxity now will cost us dearly and what will be left of our rich legacy for the future generation is not something one wants to live to see.

This short discussion is a humble attempt at trying to explain the concept of wasilah and tawassul and proving to the youth its validity using the Qur’an, Prophetic traditions and logic. The reader is humbly requested to study the issue with an open and objective mind and remove any preconceived ideas and bias. The reader may not agree with everything that is written, or none for that matter, but that is the beginning of a healthy discussion and scholarly pursuit in search for the truth.

I sincerely ask the Almighty Allah (SWT) with the wasilah of the Holy Prophet (S) and his Ahlul Bayt (‘a) to accept this little effort and empower us all with Divine Knowledge, wisdom and the will to behave in a manner that attains His satisfaction.

Kazim A. H. Dhalla

Summary

Allah has commanded the believer to seek means to achieve nearness to Him in the Qur’an. This is called wasilah and using the means is called tawassul. There are many types of wasilah one can use to achieve nearness to Allah (SWT) and they are all accepted by the Muslims at large with the exception of

one type – the wasilah of Person.

The adherents of the Wahabi school of thought zealously object to this type of tawassul and those who practice it tend to be labeled kafir, even mushriks. This trend is now creeping into our communities and the youth is getting pulled into this whirlpool. Keeping the youth in mind, who will carry this message to the next generation, this short work discusses:

a) The main pillars of the Shia Ithna Ashariyyah school of thought, the Madhhab of Ahlul Bayt ar-Rasul (S).

b) The definition of Wasilah and Tawassul

c) Types of Wasilah – The common Wasilah accepted by all the Muslims

d) Wasilah of Person – Invoking Allah by the name and status of certain personalities, an issue that is quite thorny but still accepted by and large. This is the main objective of this study.

e) Istighatha – Calling for aid of another human being or asking for help from a person and not Allah, for example saying:

يَا عَلِيَّ مَدِّدْ

“O Ali help (me)” or

يَا أَبَا عَبْدِ اللَّهِ أَدْرِكْنِي

“O Aba Abdillah [Husayn (‘a)] help me”

This is the most contentious of all the issues on Tawassul. This is confusing even to the elders when confronted with youth armed with the verse of Suratul Fatihah:

إِيَّاكَ نَعْبُدُ وَإِيَّاكَ نَسْتَعِينُ

“And You only we worship and to You only we ask for assistance”. (1:5)

f) The special type of Tawassul– the “Automatic Tawassul”, the state of such spiritual heights that one’s prayers and wishes get accepted without actively invoking Allah.

g) Tawassul of the “Dead”.

h) Have the Ahlul Bayt (‘a) used Tawassul of person?

The tools used for the study are Qur'an, commonly accepted Ahadith of the Holy Prophet (S) and common logic.

General Discussion On Tawassul

Definition

Tawassul comes from the Arabic word “wasilah” which simply means “medium” or means”.

In theological terms, Tawassul is “Using certain means or medium to gain proximity to Allah or to reach Allah”.

According to Allamah Tabatabai, in his Tafseer Al-Mizan,

“Wasilah to Allah is the observance of His path with knowledge and worship through adherence to the shariah – the divine Laws.”

In other words, Wasilah is a means of communication with Allah and a link between man and his Creator.

The point to note here is that Tawassul has a broad connotation. Any thing or action that can take one closer to Allah becomes the Wasilah to reach Him. It will become apparent in the ensuing discussion that a Muslim cannot avoid Tawassul in his worship at any given instant.

Rationale

Allah says in the holy Qur'an:

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا اتَّقُوا اللَّهَ وَابْتَغُوا إِلَيْهِ الْوَسِيلَةَ وَجَاهِدُوا فِي سَبِيلِهِ لَعَلَّكُمْ تُفْلِحُونَ

O you who believe! Be careful of your duty to Allah and seek means of nearness to Him and strive hard in His way that you may be successful (5:35)

Allah (SWT) lists four ingredients to achieve success in this temporal life. These four conditions are mutually inclusive i.e. all of them have to be present simultaneously. These are:

1. Imaan
2. Taqwa

3. Wasilah

4. Jihad

By invoking the believers to success, Allah (SWT) makes it apparent in this verse that the first and foremost condition for success is Imaan. The next condition is Taqwa, a higher stage, acquired only after believing in Islam.

One would have thought that attaining Taqwa would have been a sufficient condition for a believer to attain success. However, the verse continues and the list grows bigger by the command “and seek means of nearness to Allah” i.e. look for Wasilah to reach Him.

This means that Taqwa is a necessary but not sufficient condition to attain nearness to Allah. The Taqwa that one struggles to achieve has to be attached, connected and brought near to Allah. Allah is commanding us specifically to look for means to attach and connect this Taqwa to Him.

This “means” or “way” of attaching Taqwa to Allah is Wasilah and the process of using Wasilah is Tawassul.

This can be graphically explained using a simple example of the light bulb. In order to light a bulb, 3 components are necessary: a functioning bulb, the mains and a connecting wire. All the three have to be connected to each other for the bulb to glow; otherwise, although the functioning bulb has all the potential to glow, it will not do so.

The bulb cannot be connected directly to the mains without a wire since the electrical current flowing from the mains is much too powerful for the bulb – doing so would result in the bulb being destroyed. The wire of appropriate capacity becomes the ‘Wasilah’, the connection and the means through which the electrical current flows from the mains to the bulb.

In a very similar manner, the human soul, the nafs, which can be substituted for the bulb in the example above, has all the potential to glow and illuminate spiritually but it is necessary for it to be connected to the Main Power, The Source, The Cause of all Causes, and The Centre of everything, The Creator – Allah (SWT).

The soul cannot be attached to Allah directly because of its inherent nature. The soul is finite, limited, weak, impure, sinful and prone to attacks by Shaytan. Allah is All- Powerful, the Omnipotent, The Pure.

There has to be an intermediary to attach the finite to The Infinite, the sinful to The Pure, the weak to The Omnipotent. This intermediary is the Wasilah that Allah instructs the muttaqi to look for so that he can attach himself to Allah. This is the rationale of Wasilah and Tawassul.

However, having attached one’s Taqwa filled soul to Allah: one cannot rest since the verse continues, **“And struggle in His way”**. The chain of Imaan, Taqwa and Tawassul has to be constantly and actively maintained. One has to constantly struggle against forces that try to prevent one from becoming a

mu'min, a muttaqi or from getting the right means of attaching oneself to Allah. If one succeeds in maintaining this right chain constantly the result is “falaah” – success, in this world and the hereafter.

Success is a relative term, relative to one's aims and goals in life. A doctor considers himself successful if he can treat his patients and cure them, similarly a businessman is successful if he can spin money from dust.

What was Imam Ali (‘a)’s criterion for success? There are numerous instances in the history of early Islam that would have been reason enough for Imam Ali (‘a) to consider himself successful. Did he consider it success to become the hero of Badr, Uhud and Khandaq or Jamal, Siffin and Nahrwaan?

Was his idea of success the declaration of his Wilayat on all Muslims on the day of Ghadir? Was the final acceptance by all Muslims of his status as the rightful Khalifa 25 years after the Prophet's (S) demise his notion of ultimate triumph? No indeed!

At none of these incidents did Imam Ali (‘a) declare himself successful. History tells us that this declaration was made on the day he was struck the fatal blow by Abdul-rahman Ibn Muljim (la), the day of his martyrdom. Soon after the blow was delivered he said:

فزت برب الكعبة

“By the Lord of Ka’aba, I have succeeded!”

Attaining martyrdom was Imam Ali's (‘a) criterion of success and he epitomizes the verse quoted above perfectly. As for Imaan, he is the Ameerul Mumineen; for Taqwa he is the Imamul Muttaqeen; he is one of the means to reaching Allah and he struggled every moment of his life in the way of Allah. The pinnacle and climax of every mujahid is shahadat; this he gloriously attained on the 19th of Ramadhan 41 AH. What should be our criteria of success and goal of life? Allah says in Surah al-Mujadila:

لَا تَجِدُ قَوْمًا يُؤْمِنُونَ بِاللَّهِ وَالْيَوْمِ الْآخِرِ يُوَادُّونَ مَنْ حَادَّ اللَّهَ وَرَسُولَهُ وَلَوْ كَانُوا آبَاءَهُمْ أَوْ أَبْنَاءَهُمْ أَوْ إِخْوَانَهُمْ أَوْ عَشِيرَتَهُمْ أُولَئِكَ كَتَبَ فِي قُلُوبِهِمُ الْإِيمَانَ وَأَيَّدَهُم بِرُوحٍ مِنْهُ وَيُدْخِلُهُمْ جَنَّاتٍ تَجْرِي مِنْ تَحْتِهَا الْأَنْهَارُ خَالِدِينَ فِيهَا رَضِيَ اللَّهُ عَنْهُمْ وَرَضُوا عَنْهُ أُولَئِكَ حِزْبُ اللَّهِ أَلَا إِنَّ حِزْبَ اللَّهِ هُمُ الْمُفْلِحُونَ

“You shall not find a people who believe in Allah and the latter day befriending those who act in opposition to Allah and His Apostle, even though they were their own fathers, or their sons, or their brothers or their kinsfolk; these are they into whose hearts He has impressed faith, and whom He has strengthened with an inspiration from Him: and He will cause them to enter gardens beneath which rivers flow, abiding there in; Allah is well pleased with them and they are well pleased with Him; these are Allah’s party: now surely the party of Allah are successful ones”. (58:22)

The criterion for success as mentioned in this verse by the Creator Himself is very clear. If we want to succeed in this temporal life we have to join the party of Allah.

In order to be included in His party, we need to fulfill 4 broad conditions;

1. Imaan.
2. Taqwa.
3. Wasilah to reach Him.
4. Constantly struggle in His way – struggle against internal and external forces.

All four conditions deserve a detailed study, but due to circumstances mentioned in the introduction, we will concentrate on the third condition – Tawassul.

Scope Of Tawassul

Tawassul is often thought of as an act of invoking or imploring some human intermediary to reach Allah or seeking for help from other than Allah. As it is commonly presented, Tawassul is understandably redolent of “shirk”; this is a major misconception and the main weapon used by “Anti-Tawassul” ideologues.

Tawassul, in fact, has a much wider meaning and implication. It is important therefore that before we embark on the subject matter we wash off the stains of “shirk” from Tawassul and distinguish between the two very clearly.

Tawassul And Shirk, What Is The Difference?

As previously mentioned the main objection against Tawassul is that it is suggestive of shirk. Ultimately the mushrikeen too believe in One God – however, they seek intermediaries to reach Him. They use idols, angels and heavenly bodies as liaisons to reach Allah.

Isn't Tawassul then the same thing given that Allah is approached via intermediaries like the Prophet, Imams, Saints etc? Or that, instead of using idols and angels, names of people and personalities are used? And instead of asking for help from the Almighty directly, a human is asked to alleviate one's calamities and fulfill wishes?

Opponents of Tawassul to prove their point often quote the following verses:

- Surah Al-Fatiha:

إِيَّاكَ نَعْبُدُ وَإِيَّاكَ نَسْتَعِينُ

“You do we worship and You do we beseech for help” (1:5)

● Surah Al-A'araf:

إِنَّ الَّذِينَ تَدْعُونَ مِنْ دُونِ اللَّهِ عِبَادٌ أَمْثَالُكُمْ فَادْعُوهُمْ فَلْيَسْتَجِيبُوا لَكُمْ إِنْ كُنْتُمْ صَادِقِينَ

“Verily those whom you call upon besides Allah are slaves like you. So call upon them and let them answer you if you are truthful” (7: 194)

● Surah Al Fatir:

وَالَّذِينَ تَدْعُونَ مِنْ دُونِهِ مَا يَمْلِكُونَ مِنْ قِطْمِيرٍ

“And those whom you invoke or call upon instead of Him, own not even a Qitmir (thin membrane over a date stone)” (35: 13)

إِنْ تَدْعُوهُمْ لَا يَسْمَعُوا دُعَاءَكُمْ وَلَوْ سَمِعُوا مَا اسْتَجَابُوا لَكُمْ وَيَوْمَ الْقِيَامَةِ يَكْفُرُونَ بَشِرِكِكُمْ ۖ وَلَا يُنَبِّئُكَ مِثْلُ خَبِيرٍ

“If you call on them they shall not hear your call, and even if they could hear they shall not answer you; and on the resurrection day they will deny your associating them (with Allah); and none can inform you like the One Who is Aware.” (35: 14)

● Surah Az Zumar:

أَلَا لِلَّهِ الدِّينُ الْخَالِصُ ۖ وَالَّذِينَ اتَّخَذُوا مِنْ دُونِهِ أَوْلِيَاءَ مَا نَعْبُدُهُمْ إِلَّا لِيُقَرِّبُونَا إِلَى اللَّهِ زُلْفَىٰ

“Surely the religion is for Allah only. And those who take helpers besides Him say: We worship them only that they may bring us near Allah” (39:3)

● Surah Al-Jinn:

وَأَنَّ الْمَسَاجِدَ لِلَّهِ فَلَا تَدْعُوا مَعَ اللَّهِ أَحَدًا

“And the mosques are for Allah, so invoke not anyone along with Allah” (72: 18)

● Surah Al-Israa:

قُلِ ادْعُوا الَّذِينَ زَعَمْتُمْ مِنْ دُونِهِ فَلَا يَمْلِكُونَ كَشْفَ الضُّرِّ عَنْكُمْ وَلَا تَحْوِيلًا

“Say: call upon those whom you fancy (to be gods besides Him); they have no power to remove the distress from you nor to change it. (17:56)

أُولَئِكَ الَّذِينَ يَدْعُونَ يَبْتَغُونَ إِلَىٰ رَبِّهِمُ الْوَسِيلَةَ أَيُّهُمْ أَقْرَبُ وَيَرْجُونَ رَحْمَتَهُ وَيَخَافُونَ عَذَابَهُ ۚ إِنَّ عَذَابَ رَبِّكَ كَانَ مَحْذُورًا

Those whom they call upon seek (for themselves) means of access to their Lord (to know) which of them is the nearest (to Him) and they hope for His Mercy, and they fear His Chastisement. Verily the Chastisement of your Lord is to be feared” (17:57)

The clarification comes from the Qur’an itself.

● Surah Hud:

وَقَالَ ارْكَبُوا فِيهَا بِسْمِ اللَّهِ مَجْرَاهَا وَمُرْسَاهَا إِنَّ رَبِّي لَغَفُورٌ رَحِيمٌ

“And he said “Embark on it in the name of Allah, be it sailing or its anchoring; most surely my Lord is Forgiving, Merciful”. (11:41)

وَهِيَ تَجْرِي بِهِمْ فِي مَوْجٍ كَالْجِبَالِ وَنَادَىٰ نُوحٌ ابْنَهُ وَكَانَ فِي مَعْزِلٍ يَا بُنَيَّ ارْكَبْ مَعَنَا وَلَا تَكُنْ مَعَ الْكَافِرِينَ

“And it moved on with them, carried by waves like mountain; and Nuh called out to his son and he was aloof. “O’ my son, embark with us and be not with the unbelievers”. (11:42)

قَالَ سَآوِي إِلَىٰ جَبَلٍ يَعْصِمُنِي مِنَ الْمَاءِ قَالَ لَا عَاصِمَ الْيَوْمَ مِنْ أَمْرِ اللَّهِ إِلَّا مَنْ رَحِمَ وَحَالَ بَيْنَهُمَا الْمَوْجُ فَكَانَ مِنَ الْمَغْرُقِينَ

“He said: I will take refuge of a mountain that shall protect me from the water. Nuh said: There is no protector today from Allah’s punishment but He Who Has Mercy, and a wave intervened between them, so he was of the drowned”. (11:43)

These verses describe the conversation between Prophet Nuh (‘a) and his son when the floods had started and Prophet Nuh (‘a) had gathered his companions in the ark ready to sail. The following points are worth considering:

1. Allah could have saved Prophet Nuh (‘a) and the companions of the ark without the help of the ark. He could have asked Nuh (‘a) to gather his companions on one land and instructed the flood–water NOT to touch that land thus saving them from being drowned. He did that with the fire into which Prophet

Ibrahim (‘a) was thrown.

- Surah Al-Anbiya:

قُلْنَا يَا نَارُ كُونِي بَرْدًا وَسَلَامًا عَلَىٰ إِبْرَاهِيمَ

“We (Allah) said: O’ fire, be cool and safe for Ibrahim” (21:69)

Similarly, He parted the Nile for Musa (‘a) and his followers such so that not even their feet became wet – the very same water in which Firaun drowned.

- Surah Al-Baqarah:

وَإِذْ فَرَقْنَا بِكُمُ الْبَحْرَ فَأَنْجَيْنَاكُمْ وَأَغْرَقْنَا آلَ فِرْعَوْنَ وَأَنْتُمْ تَنْظُرُونَ

“And remember We separated the sea for you and saved you and drowned Firaun’s people while you were looking”. (2:50)

Allah instead instructed Nuh (‘a) to build the ark and take refuge in it.

2. Both Nuh (‘a) and his son took refuge of objects, Nuh (‘a) of the ark and his son of the mountain. In fact, the son’s refuge was God-made and Nuh (‘a)’s refuge was man-made albeit under Divine guidance and supervision.

In essence, both took Wasilah for salvation (from being drowned). Nuh (‘a) was saved and his son drowned. What was the difference? The only difference between the two Wasilah was the source of Wasilah. For Nuh (‘a), the Tawassul for salvation, the ark was from Allah Himself whilst the son sought his own Wasilah.

Although the eventual aim was identical for both, the means they used were different! Both wanted to be saved from drowning; the means used by Nuh (‘a) was Divinely ordained, that of his son chosen by himself.

This is one of the major differences between Tawassul and Shirk. The former is a Divine exhortation and the latter an unholy human attempt at reaching Allah.

In the verses quoted at the beginning, which on the surface appear to be against Tawassul, the central points are:

1. Worshipping the objects/people that are used for Tawassul.
2. Considering them to have powers equal to Allah.

3. Considering them to have independent powers. This is undoubtedly shirk.

In the case of Tawassul we neither:

1. Worship the objects/ people used for Wasilah NOR
2. Consider these people equal to Allah, NOR
3. Do we believe they have independent powers of their own, NOR
4. Do we assert that they can influence or change Allah's decision, NOR
5. Do we suggest they can neutralize or reverse His Command.

Our concept of Tawassul, be that via a person(s) or an inanimate object, is that:

- a. These people have a special place or status in front of Allah.
- b. Allah has given them special powers to be used for the benefit of His creation.
- c. They do not work independently of Allah's Will and only do that which Allah wills.
- d. They will not do anything against Allah's plan. They cannot change, reverse or influence Allah's decision nor suggest to Him, because He is the Lord and they are His servants.

These are the core differences between Tawassul and Shirk and all these qualities will be looked at in more detail in the chapters to come. Any one taking Wasilah of any kind in order to achieve nearness to Allah, with the thought that the Wasilah can change Allah's decisions or reverse His Plan or influence His actions, is in fact committing Shirk. This is an extremely important point for the young reader to keep in mind.

It will not be out of place here to mention the hadeeth of the Holy Prophet (S):

مثل اهل بيت كمثل سفينة نوح من ركبها جنا ومن تلف عنها غرق

"The likeness of my Ahlul Bait amongst my ummah is similar to Nuh's ark, those who embarked on it were saved and those who rejected it, drowned".

In the dua of the Prophet (S) in the Holy month of Sha'ban, we recite;

اللَّهُمَّ صَلِّ عَلَى مُحَمَّدٍ وَآلِ مُحَمَّدٍ الْفُلْكِ الْجَارِيَةِ فِي اللَّجَجِ الْغَامِرَةِ، يَأْمَنُ مَنْ رَكِبَهَا، وَيَغْرَقُ مَنْ تَرَكَهَا، الْمُتَقَدِّمُ لَهُمْ
مَارِقٌ، وَالْمُتَأَخِّرُ عَنْهُمْ زَاهِقٌ، وَاللَّازِمُ لَهُمْ لَاحِقٌ

“O Allah! Send blessing on Muhammad and his family, an unsinkable sailing ship afloat over the fathomless deep waters of the seas. Who so gets into it is saved and who so stays away from it is drowned. Who so steps in front of them misses the aim and goes astray and who so lags behind them wonders in the wilderness, who so holds fast to them reaches the destination”.

The similarity between Nuh (‘a)’s ark and the Ahlul Bait points to the fact that the way the companions of the ark were saved from drowning through the means of the ark, the companions, adherents and those who follow the ways of the Ahlul Bait shall similarly be saved from going astray and drowning in the seas of sins and lowly desires. They are our means of reaching Allah; they are our wasillah to Allah.

This authentic hadith of the Holy Prophet (S) proves that the way Nuh (‘a)’s ark was chosen by Allah to be Wasilah for salvation, Ahlul Bayt too have been chosen by Allah to be the means of salvation for the believer.

In conclusion therefore, we see that Tawassul and Shirk are two different and opposite entities. Allah Has instructed us to look for Wasilah and warned us not to do shirk. This discussion would be enough for the seeker of truth.

However, for the young mind that is exposed to daunting ideological attacks, more academic discussion may be warranted. We shall therefore delve deeper into the discussion.

Types Of Wasilah

As mentioned earlier, Tawassul has a very wide scope and meaning. Often it is taken to mean seeking help of a human being to reach Allah. This is a misconception as we hope to show. However, before we go further, we need to ask ourselves how do we know whether using Wasilah to reach Allah is correct or not? One way of answering this question is to see whether:

1. Allah has used Wasilah to reach His Creatures. If He has then using Wasilah i.e. Tawassul, can never be Shirk because Allah would not go against His Own principles.
2. The Qur’an acknowledges positively or negatively the use of Wasilah
3. The Prophet (S) and the Imams of his house (‘a) approved of Wasilah, taught its use, encouraged it and used it themselves OR expressed a disapproval of it

These points will form the guiding principles through out the ensuing discussion and the conclusion will be based on these premises.

For the sake of our discussion we have classified Wasilah into 4 categories:

A. Downward wasilah:

This is the Wasilah that Allah (SWT) with His Infinite Wisdom Has used to reach His creatures. This can be further divided into 2 groups:

a. Physical

b. Spiritual

B. Upward wasilah:

This is the Wasilah that the creatures use to reach the Creator, which can be further grouped into:

a. Wasilah of Allah Himself

b. Wasilah of Deeds

c. Wasilah of Place and objects

d. Wasilah of Person / People

C. Special type of wasilah

D. Istighathah – asking for help from other than Allah. Each type will be dealt with separately

A. The Downward Wasilah

Allah (SWT), with His Infinite Wisdom and Mercy, has used several means to reach His creation and manage their affairs in spite of Being “kun fa ya kun” (Be and it becomes) and independent of means. This may be a confusing statement initially, but will become clearer as one reads on.

The entire creation is based on the principle of cause and effect. Allah is the Primary Cause of all causes and effects. He is the Originator and Creator of all the causes and gave each cause its effect. One action (cause) becomes the means (Wasilah) of a subsequent action (effect) and this happens in both the physical and spiritual realms.

We shall site a few examples to clarify this point.

1. Physical Wasilah

The entire physical world is regulated by a set of laws based on the principle of cause and effect, action and reaction. These laws, be they physical, chemical, biological or social are the means used by Allah to reach His creatures and regulates their affairs. They also become the testing ground for their obedience.

Allah is by no means dependant on these laws. He can do without them and Has proved that He can do whatever He wills without using any means. The means He uses do not in any way become His partners in the creation because it is He Who creates the means. The following examples will suffice to prove our point:

Example One: Our Own Creation

- Surah Al Hujrat:

يَا أَيُّهَا النَّاسُ إِنَّا خَلَقْنَاكُمْ مِنْ ذَكَرٍ وَأُنْثَىٰ وَجَعَلْنَاكُمْ شُعُوبًا وَقَبَائِلَ لِتَعَارَفُوا

“O Mankind, We have created you from a male and a female and made you into nations and tribes that you may know one another...” (49: 13)

Allah used the “Wasilah” of man and woman to populate the world. The parents thus become the Wasilah for the existence of their children. He could have created all of mankind without any biological means in just the same way He created the angels in a split of a moment. In fact, He did just that by creating Hazrat Adam and Hawa (‘a) without any parents and Hazrat Isa (‘a) without any male intervention:

- Surah Aal-Imran:

إِنَّ مَثَلَ عِيسَىٰ عِنْدَ اللَّهِ كَمَثَلِ آدَمَ خَلَقَهُ مِنْ تُرَابٍ ثُمَّ قَالَ لَهُ كُنْ فَيَكُونُ

“Surely the likeness of Isa is with Allah as the likeness of Adam; He created him from dust then said to him, Be and he was”. (3:59)

Allah uses the wasilah of parents to create us. Does this mean that parents are Allah’s partners in their children’s creation? Of course not! If we were to worship our parents, the Wasilah of our creation, then this would be committing Shirk.

Interestingly, we can use the Wasilah of parents to reach Allah. In well-known traditions the Prophet (S) said:

“Heaven is under the feet of your mothers”

“The pleasure of Allah lies in the pleasure of one’s parents and His wrath lies in their wrath”.

The Wasilah of parents is very powerful. Marhum Allamah Sayyid Saeed Akhtar Rizvi (May Allah raise his status in heaven) quotes the following hadith in his book “Karbala Shanasi” as follows:

Once a companion came to the Prophet (saww), saying that he had kept a vow to kiss the doorsteps of heaven and the heavenly ladies.

The Prophet (S) replied,

“Kiss your mother’s feet and your father’s forehead.”

The companion asked, “What if they are dead?”

The Prophet (S) replied,

“Kiss their graves.”

The companion asked, “What if I don’t know the location of the graves?”

The Prophet (S) replied,

“Draw two lines and assume they are your parents’ grave and kiss them, and don’t go against your vow”

Example Two: Sustenance (Rizq)

- Surah Hud:

وَمَا مِنْ دَابَّةٍ فِي الْأَرْضِ إِلَّا عَلَى اللَّهِ رِزْقُهَا

“And there is no animal on earth but on Allah is the sustenance....” (11:6)

Provision of sustenance is an exclusive quality of Allah. However, sustenance does not come directly to the creature from the heavens though it is very much possible for the Almighty to make this happen:

- Surah Aal-Imran:

فَتَقَبَّلَهَا رَبُّهَا بِقَبُولٍ حَسَنٍ وَأَنْبَتَهَا نَبَاتًا حَسَنًا وَكَفَّلَهَا زَكَرِيَّا كُلَّمَا دَخَلَ عَلَيْهَا زَكَرِيَّا الْمِحْرَابَ وَجَدَ عِنْدَهَا رِزْقًا قَالَ يَا مَرْيَمُ أَنَّى لَكَ هَذَا قَالَتْ هُوَ مِنْ عِنْدِ اللَّهِ إِنَّ اللَّهَ يَرْزُقُ مَنْ يَشَاءُ بِغَيْرِ حِسَابٍ

“... Whenever Zakariya entered the sanctuary to see her he found with her food. He said “O Marium! From where does this come to you? She said: It is from Allah. Surely Allah gives to whom He pleases without measure” (3:37)

- Surah Al Ma'idah:

قَالَ عِيسَى ابْنُ مَرْيَمَ اللَّهُمَّ رَبَّنَا أَنْزِلْ عَلَيْنَا مَائِدَةً مِنَ السَّمَاءِ تَكُونُ لَنَا عِيدًا لِأَوَّلِنَا وَآخِرِنَا وَآيَةً مِنْكَ ۖ وَارْزُقْنَا وَأَنْتَ

“Isa the son of Marium said: O Allah, our Lord! Send down to us food from heaven which should be to us an ever recurring happiness, to the first of us and to the last of us, and a sign from You, and grant us means of subsistence, and You are the best of providers.” (5: 114)

قَالَ اللَّهُ إِنِّي مُنَزِّلُهَا عَلَيْكُمْ ۖ فَمَنْ يَكْفُرْ بَعْدُ مِنْكُمْ فَإِنِّي أُعَذِّبُهُ عَذَابًا لَا أُعَذِّبُهُ أَحَدًا مِنَ الْعَالَمِينَ

Allah said: Surely I will send it down to you, but whoever shall disbelieve afterwards from among you, surely I will chastise him with a chastisement with which I will not chastise anyone among the nations.” (5: 115)

- Surah Al Baqarah:

...وَأَنْزَلْنَا عَلَيْكُمُ الْمَنَّاءَ وَالسَّلْوَىٰ ...

“.... And We sent to you manna and salwa...” (2:57)

This refers to the heavenly food that was sent to Bani-Israel at the time of Hazrat Musa (‘a).

These verses prove that despite the fact that Allah can do otherwise, His plan for the general creation is to distribute rizq through different means and intermediaries. In the mother’s womb the embryo and fetus gets sustenance from the mother’s blood via the umbilical cord. The milk that flows from a mother’s breasts sustains the young infant. A growing child is fed by the hard work of the parents.

In all the instances it is the parents who are responsible for feeding and sustaining the offspring and this is seen across the earth in the higher forms of life. This does not mean that Allah has taken the parents as partners in His Quality of “The Sustainer”, rather He has used them as a “means” through which His Quality flows and through which He reaches His creatures.

In a friendly argument with a close associate who was objecting to the practice of asking the Imams (‘a) for one’s wishes, I asked him whether he had ever asked his father for some money and he promptly replied “Yes I have!”

I immediately said to him “Then on the basis of your argument you are a mushrik! Rizq comes from Allah and only He is the Raziq, how dare you ask from your father? Don’t you recite in Sura Al-Fatihah that “I only pray to You and only ask You for help”? The point here is that Allah uses the Wasilah of different agents to distribute rizq; the final control is in His Hands.

Example Three: Healing And Cure (Shafaa)

Healing the injured and curing the sick is one of the great qualities of Allah.

Consider the words of Hazrat Ibrahim Khalilullah (‘a), as recorded in the Qur’an:

وَإِذَا مَرَضْتُ فَبُهِتَ الشُّعْبَانِ

“and when I am sick, He cures/heals me” (26:80)

When one falls sick, the first things that come to mind are hospital, clinic, doctor and medicines, NOT the mosque. Why don’t people run to the mosque and start praying to The Healer for cure? Isn’t it shirk to go to a doctor and ask him/her to cure you? The answer obviously is NO!

Without a doubt Allah is the Healer and He has made medicines work against diseases, but one has to go to a medical practitioner for treatment. Allah uses the Wasilah of medical practitioner’s knowledge and medicines to cure the sick. The source of the cure and the ultimate Healer is Allah (SWT) but through agencies that He has set.

Example Four: Wasilah for the best of creations

Interestingly, for His Own most beloved creature, the best in the Universe, the leader of all the prophets, Muhammad (S), Allah used “means”, in some instances, to reach him.

Surah Adh-Dhuha:

أَلَمْ يَجِدْكَ يَتِيمًا فَآوَىٰ

“Did He not find you an orphan and gave you shelter?” (93:6)

وَوَجَدَكَ ضَالًّا فَهَدَىٰ

“And found you lost, unrecognized by men, and guided them to you?” (93:7)

وَوَجَدَكَ عَائِلًا فَأَغْنَىٰ

“And found you in want and made you rich?” (93:8)

The Prophet (S) was under the patronage of Hazrat Abdul Muttalib (‘a) and then Hazrat Abu Talib (‘a)

and became rich by Hazrat Khadija ('a)'s property. Allah used the Wasilah of these great personalities to help His most perfect and beloved Prophet (S).

One could argue that all these are physical Wasilah and since we are material and physical beings it is natural for Allah to use physical means to reach us. Has Allah used spiritual or non-material Wasilah to reach us?

As we shall see below He has.

2. Spiritual Wasilah

a. Surah An-Naziat:

وَالنَّازِعَاتِ غَرْقًا

“I swear by the angels who violently pull at the souls of the wicked”. (79:1)

وَالنَّاشِطَاتِ نَشْطًا

“And I swear by those who gently thaw out the souls of the blessed”. (79:2)

وَالسَّابِحَاتِ سَبْحًا

“And by those who float in space.” (79:3)

فَالسَّابِقَاتِ سَبْقًا

“Then those who are foremost going ahead”. (79:4)

فَالْمُدِيرَاتِ أُمْرًا

“Then those who regulate affairs”. (79:5)

The above events take place at a spiritual level and although under the command of Allah, it is brought into effect by angels i.e. Allah now uses the Wasilah of angels.

The entire event of the Laylatul Qadr takes place at a spiritual level in the physical world. Allah uses the Wasilah of the Spirit and angels to bring down His commands and the affairs to the living Imam ('a).

b. Surah Al Baqarah:

قُلْ مَنْ كَانَ عَدُوًّا لِجِبْرِيلَ فَإِنَّهُ نَزَّلَهُ عَلَى قَلْبِكَ بِإِذْنِ اللَّهِ مُصَدِّقًا لِمَا بَيْنَ يَدَيْهِ وَهُدًى وَبُشْرَىٰ لِلْمُؤْمِنِينَ

“Say; whoever is the enemy of Jibrael, for surely he revealed it to your heart by Allah’s command, verifying that which is before it and guidance and good news for the believers”. (2:97)

Jibrael becomes the Wasilah through which the Qur’an gets revealed to the Prophet (S). Allah could have by passed Jibrael as He did in Me’raj but decided, in His great Wisdom and for reasons known to Him alone, not to.

In a similar manner, He Has used the Wasilah of the Prophets, Imams and Awliya to guide His creatures. Many more examples can be cited here but it is left to the young reader to think and ponder on these for himself.

In conclusion therefore, we have proved in this chapter that, in principle, using Wasilah i.e. Tawassul, is neither Shirk nor is it wrong because Allah Himself uses it to reach His creatures and the entire creation.

We shall now turn towards the Upward Wasilah, the means that the humans use to reach Allah by His command.

The Upward Wasilah

In the last chapter we saw the Wasilah that Allah uses to reach His creation. We will now examine the different types of Wasilah used by the creatures to reach the Creator and refer to this as the Upward Wasilah.

There are several broad types of Upward Wasilah:

1. Allah Himself

Here we beseech Allah and seek His nearness by His Own status, His Grandeur, His Majesty and everything to do with His Own Self. This is a direct communication and communion with the Almighty.

For example:

اَللّٰهُمَّ اِنِّیْ اَسْأَلُكَ بِاسْمِكَ بِسْمِ اللّٰهِ الرَّحْمٰنِ الرَّحِیْمِ

O Allah! I beseech You by Your Name In the Name of Allah the most Beneficent The most Merciful.

اَللّٰهُمَّ اِنِّیْ اَسْأَلُكَ بِاسْمِكَ الْعَظِیْمِ الْاَعَزِّ اِلَّا جَلَّ الْاَكْرَمُ

O Allah! I beseech You through Your Name, the great, the most great, the most majestic, the most magnificent and the most noble.

2. Wasilah Of Deed

One's deeds and actions can become the means of attaining nearness to Allah and beseeching His favors. These verses refer to Taqwa as a means to achieve nearness to Allah.

- Surah Al Hujrat:

اِنَّ اَكْرَمَكُمْ عِنْدَ اللّٰهِ اَتْقَاكُمْ اِنَّ اللّٰهَ عَلِیْمٌ خَبِیْرٌ

“Surely the most honorable of you with Allah is the one among you most careful (of his duty); surely Allah is Knowing, Aware” (49: 13)

- Surah Al-Baqarah:

وَاسْتَعِیْنُوا بِالصَّبْرِ وَالصَّلَاةِ وَاِنَّهَا لَكَبِیْرَةٌ اِلَّا عَلَى الْخَاشِعِیْنَ

“And seek assistance (of Allah) through patience and prayer and most surely it is a hard thing except for the humble ones”. (2:45)

The Holy Qur'an is filled with verses to this effect. In the Nahjul Balagha¹, Imam Ali ('a) says:

“The best means by which the seeker of means can attach himself to Allah (SWT) is:

- To have faith in Him and His prophet (S)*
- To struggle in His way (Jihad), for it is a protection for Islam*
- Establishing prayers for it is the basis of Islam*
- Giving Zakat, for it is an obligation*
- Fast of the Holy month of Ramadhan for it is a shield against punishment*
- Pilgrimage to Hajj and Umra as it removes poverty and wipes out sins*

g. Maintaining relations (sile rahm) as it increases property and life

h. Giving charity in public (openly) for it protects against horrifying death

i. Giving charity secretly for it clears the sins

3. Wasilah Of A Place

Certain places, although built by human beings, become the means to attaining nearness to Allah (SWT) because of their special significance, status and position in front of Allah in Surah Al-Tawbah:

إِنَّمَا يَعْمُرُ مَسَاجِدَ اللَّهِ مَنْ آمَنَ بِاللَّهِ وَالْيَوْمِ الْآخِرِ وَأَقَامَ الصَّلَاةَ وَآتَى الزَّكَاةَ وَلَمْ يَخْشَ إِلَّا اللَّهَ فَعَسَىٰ أُولَٰئِكَ أَنْ يَكُونُوا مِنَ الْمُهْتَدِينَ

“The mosques of Allah shall be visited by such as believe in Allah and the last day”. (9: 18)

لَا تَقُمْ فِيهِ أَبَدًا لِمَسْجِدٍ أُسِّسَ عَلَى التَّقْوَىٰ مِنْ أَوَّلِ يَوْمٍ أَحَقُّ أَنْ تَقُومَ فِيهِ رِجَالٌ يُحِبُّونَ أَنْ يَتَطَهَّرُوا وَاللَّهُ يُحِبُّ الْمُطَهَّرِينَ

“Certainly a Mosque founded on piety from the very first day is more deserving that you should stand in it; in it are men who love that they should be purified; and Allah loves those who purify themselves”(9: 108)

Mosques have a special position in Islam. Although human beings build them by their own desire and choice of dimension and architecture, Allah (SWT) calls them His house and praying one unit of prayer in a mosque is superior to praying several units at home.

Amongst the mosques, Masjid ul-Haraam in Makkah occupies a special position and the reward of praying one unit of prayer in Masjidul Haraam is much more than praying in an ordinary mosque. After Masjidul Haraam comes Masjidun Nabii in Medina, Masjidul Kufa, Baytul Muqaddas, Juma mosque of a city, and then the local mosque.

According to the Grand Ayatullah As-Seestani in his Risala (Ruling No:904)

“Saying one’s prayers in the shrines of the Holy Imams is recommended (mustahab) and indeed even better than offering prayer in a mosque. For instance, reward of offering prayers in the shrine of Imam Ali (a.s) is equal to 200,000 prayers.”

Praying per se is one of the means to achieve nearness to Allah but praying in the mosque (and in congregation) carries more weight and makes the process of attaining nearness easier and faster.

The Holy Prophet (S) said:

“Verily, when one of His servants establishes a prayer in congregation and asks Him something which He does not grant, Allah will be ashamed until He fulfils it”

From Imam Ali bin Musa (‘a) we learn

“The excellence of the congregational prayer, comparing to solitary prayer is one rakat to two thousand rakats”

So both, praying in the mosque and in congregation become the means of attaining nearness to Allah (SWT). Different mosques take one closer to Allah (SWT) by different degrees. In Masjidul Haraam, one gets far greater spiritual proximity to Allah than in an ordinary mosque which in turn is far superior to ones own home.

The question is why do such places become Wasilah for us to reach Allah (SWT)?

Allah (SWT) is everywhere, all the time. He is not confined to certain places such that we get closer to Him when we go to these places. Why can one not attain the same proximity to Him wherever he may be?

The following points provide the answer:

- i. There are special and specific signs of Allah (SWT) placed in such places e.g. the Kaba, Maqame Ibrahim, Hajarul Aswad, mounts of Safa and Marwa etc.
- ii. People of special significance and who have attained very close proximity to Allah (SWT) are buried there e.g. Masjidun Nabii, Masjidul Kufa etc. It is by the virtue of these people that the ordinary place becomes transformed into a special mosque with special status in front of Allah (SWT). Thus the presence of such people makes the Wasilah stronger!
- iii. Special angels go to and from these places continuously.

All this creates a highly charged, highly elevated spiritual environment so much so that the spiritual level of one who enters such a place is raised many fold and hence one gets closer to the Lord. The apparently lifeless place becomes a Wasilah to reach Allah (SWT).

4. Wasilah Of Objects

Certain objects have special significance in Islam, and when used make one's ibaadat worthier and attain higher status in front of Allah. Examples include wearing white clothes while praying, applying attar, wearing silver ring on the right hand, brushing one's teeth, combing hair and beard and etc. The use of these objects with the correct intention brings one closer to Allah (SWT).

Most people have absolutely no objection with these types of Tawassul and preach actively in favor of them. The objection starts with the next type.

5. Wasilah Of Person Or People

Here one applies the Tawassul of another human being to approach Allah.

We can further subdivide this type of Wasilah into 3 categories:

A. Beseeching Allah (SWT) by the name or status of a particular person e.g.:

اللَّهُمَّ إِنِّي أَسْأَلُكَ بِاسْمِكَ بِنَبِيِّكَ

O Allah! I beseech you by the name of your Prophet (S)

اللَّهُمَّ إِنِّي بِحَقِّ فَاطِمَةَ وَأَبِيهَا وَبَعْلِهَا وَبَنِيهَا

O Allah! I beseech you by the status of Fatimah and her father and her husband and her children ('a)

B. Asking somebody else to pray for you.

This includes supplicating to the Prophet (S) or one of the Aimmah ('a) to pray to Allah on ones behalf. Here the supplication is made to a person to pray to Allah and to present ones problem and needs to Allah. In other words, that person becomes the Wasilah to reach Allah. This is done in recognition of the person or people's special status he / they hold in front of Allah (SWT). For example in Dua Tawassul we say

إِنَّا تَوَجَّهْنَا وَسْتَشْفَعْنَا وَتَوَسَّلْنَا بِكَ إِلَى اللَّهِ وَقَدَّمْنَاكَ بَيْنَ يَدَيِ حَاجَاتِنَا

"We turn towards you, seek your intercession and advocacy (Wasilah) Before Allah. We put before you our open need O! The one who is very close to Allah, intercede for us in front of Allah." (Dua Tawassul)

C. Asking for help from a person directly.

This is the most contentious issue of all. One is not asking Allah (SWT) directly or indirectly rather he is asking another person to fulfill his needs.

Strictly speaking this is not Tawassul; it is Istighasah i.e. calling for help or aid.

For example:

1. Calling out to Hazrat Abbas ('a) when faced with difficulties

O the one who relieves stress in the name of Husayn ('a), relieve my stress in the name of Husayn ('a)

3. Or saying:

يَا عَلِيَّ مَدِّدْ

“O Ali help (me)” or

يَا مُحَمَّدَ يَا عَلِيَّ اكْفِيَانِي فَأَنْكُمَا كَافِيَانِي، وَأَنْصُرَانِي فَأَنْكُمَا نَاصِرَانِ

– O Muhammad, O' Ali! Be sufficient for me for you (both) are sufficient and help me for you (both) are helpers.

يَا مَوْلَانَا يَا صَاحِبَ الزَّمَانِ الْغَوْثَ أَدْرِكْنِي

– O' our master, O' Master of the Time, I am calling for help, help me!

Those against Tawassul object to this type of Wasilah, arguing that it is “shirk” to invoke help from other than Allah (SWT). This class of Tawassul and Istighatha requires a separate and in depth discussion as it is the most polemical issue in the whole discussion. It will therefore be treated independently in the following chapter.

1. Imam Ali (as), Nahjul Balaghah, Sermon 109:

<https://www.al-islam.org/nahjul-balagha-part-1-sermons/sermon-109-everyt...> [6]

Tawassul Of Person

The issue here is approaching Allah through a human link and intermediary. The main objection is “Why use an intermediary to approach Allah? We say in Sura Al Fatiha

إِيَّاكَ نَعْبُدُ وَإِيَّاكَ نَسْتَعِينُ

“We worship You only and from You alone we seek assistance”. (1:5)

Why then go to or through any body else?

The argument using this verse would have been valid without any further discussion had the verse ended there. But this verse is not an independent statement; rather it is the beginning of a message that Allah is putting across to us.

The Surah continues:

اهْدِنَا الصِّرَاطَ الْمُسْتَقِيمَ

“Guide me (or keep me) on the right path”. (1:6)

صِرَاطَ الَّذِينَ أَنْعَمْتَ عَلَيْهِمْ غَيْرِ الْمَغْضُوبِ عَلَيْهِمْ وَلَا الضَّالِّينَ

“The path of those on whom You have showered Your Mercy and not of those on whom You are angry and have gone astray”. (1:7)

The people who present this argument have taken one verse out of the whole context and made a case out of it. What is apparent in this and subsequent verses are:

- i. These verses are interconnected into one theme and are not separate.
- ii. The verse; “***...and we seek assistance from You alone***”(1:5), is specific i.e. “I pray to You specifically to keep me on the Straight Path, the path of those on whom You have showered Your Mercy...”.

This prayer refers to Sirat al-Mustaqim. Interestingly, these very verses prove the importance of Tawassul as illustrated below.

Sirat al-Mustaqim is the only path that leads to Allah. But how do we find it? How do we identify it? How do we know which path is Sirat al-Mustaqim keeping in mind that there is also another path which leads away from Allah. These verses tell us that there is a group of people who are on the right path; anyone who follows them will reach Allah.

In other words, if one wants to reach Allah:

- He/she has to be on the Straight Path.
- This path is identified by observing the actions of certain people and emulating them
- These are the people on whom Allah has showered His Special Mercy and thus

- Following them will take one to Allah.

To rephrase the above statements, Allah can only be reached by means (Wasilah) of those people who are on the path that leads to Him! We therefore have to look for them and make them our means to reach Allah.

This is precisely what Tawassul is – Using means to reach Allah. The verse “...**and I seek assistance from You Only**” is supplicating to Allah to show us the “Right Wasilah” to reach Him; otherwise there are many other paths that one can take which lead away from Allah. These paths too are identifiable and led by people who are “Maghdhub” (on whom Allah is angry) and “Dhaalliyn” (astray).

Who are the people on the Straight Path?

a. Surah Yasin:

يس

“Ya Seen” (36: 1)

وَالْقُرْآنِ الْحَكِيمِ

“And by the Qur’an, full of wisdom”. (36:2)

إِنَّكَ لَمِنَ الْمُرْسَلِينَ

“Truly you are one of the messengers”. (36:3)

عَلَى صِرَاطٍ مُسْتَقِيمٍ

“On the Straight Path”. (36:4)

This verse clearly shows that the path of the Holy Prophet (S) is the Straight Path. Another verse clarifies it further.

b. Surah Aal-Imran:

قُلْ إِنْ كُنْتُمْ تُحِبُّونَ اللَّهَ فَاتَّبِعُونِي يُحْبِبْكُمُ اللَّهُ وَيَغْفِرْ لَكُمْ ذُنُوبَكُمْ وَاللَّهُ غَفُورٌ رَحِيمٌ

“Say (O’ Muhammad), if you love Allah then follow me, Allah will love you and forgive you your sins. And Allah is Oft-forgiving, Most Merciful”. (3:31)

c. Surah An Nisa:

وَلَهْدَيْنَاهُمْ صِرَاطًا مُسْتَقِيمًا

“And We would have certainly guided them in the right path”. (4:68)

وَمَنْ يُطِيعِ اللَّهَ وَالرَّسُولَ فَأُولَٰئِكَ مَعَ الَّذِينَ أَنْعَمَ اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِمْ مِنَ النَّبِيِّينَ وَالصِّدِّيقِينَ وَالشُّهَدَاءِ وَالصَّالِحِينَ وَحَسُنَ أُولَٰئِكَ رَفِيقًا

“And whoever obeys Allah and the apostle, then they will be in the company of those upon whom Allah has bestowed favors from among the prophets and the truthful and the martyrs and the good and what goodly companions are they?” (4:69)

The picture is now clearer that by following Muhammad (S) we will reach Allah. Muhammad (S) becomes the means (Wasilah) to reach Allah.

In short, we cannot reach Allah on our own. We have to take the Wasilah of the prophet (S) and the people mentioned in the above verse. The Shia ulama record a tradition from the Prophet (S) saying; “O’ Ali, you are the Straight Path”.

In dua Nudbaa, we address the Imam of the age (aj) as

يَا بْنَ الصِّرَاطِ الْمُسْتَقِيمِ

“O Son of the Straight Path”.

Hence, for the Shia, Sirat al-Mustaqim is the Holy Prophet (S) and his Ahlul Bait (‘a), about whom Allah Has said in the Qur’an:

d. Surah Al Ahzab:

إِنَّمَا يُرِيدُ اللَّهُ لِيُذْهِبَ عَنْكُمُ الرِّجْسَ أَهْلَ الْبَيْتِ وَيُطَهِّرَكُمْ تَطْهِيرًا...

“...Verily Allah wishes to remove every type of dirt from you O! People of the house and purify you with a thorough purification” (33:33)

One could still argue that Wasilah of the Prophet (S) and his Ahlul Bayt ('a) means following their footpaths and practicing what they preached and practiced. It does not mean making them intermediaries when beseeching Allah (SWT) or asking them to pray for you when you can call Allah directly. Hasn't Allah Himself said:

e. Surah Al-Ghafir:

وَقَالَ رَبُّكُمْ ادْعُونِي أَسْتَجِبْ لَكُمْ

“And your Lord said “Call Me I will answer you” (40:60)

Is it right asking the Prophet (S) or an Imam ('a) to pray for us instead of us praying directly to Allah (SWT)?

Let us examine what the Qur'an says.

1. Surah Aal-Imran:

فَبِمَا رَحْمَةٍ مِنَ اللَّهِ لِنْتَ لَهُمْ وَلَوْ كُنْتَ فَظًّا غَلِيظَ الْقَلْبِ لَانْفَضُّوا مِنْ حَوْلِكَ فَاعْفُ عَنْهُمْ وَاسْتَغْفِرْ لَهُمْ وَشَاوِرْهُمْ فِي الْأَمْرِ...

“It is due to the Mercy from Allah that you deal with them gently, and had you been rough, hard hearted they would certainly have dispersed around you, therefore pardon them and ask forgiveness for them and take counsel with them in the affairs...”(3: 159)

This verse clearly shows that among the other things the Prophet (S) was asked to pray to Allah for the forgiveness of the Muslims.

2. Surah At Tawba:

خُذْ مِنْ أَمْوَالِهِمْ صَدَقَةً تُطَهِّرُهُمْ وَتُزَكِّيهِمْ بِهَا وَصَلِّ عَلَيْهِمْ إِنَّ صَلَاتَكَ سَكَنٌ لَهُمْ وَاللَّهُ سَمِيعٌ عَلِيمٌ

“Take alms out of their property, you would cleanse them thereby, and pray for them, surely your prayer is a relief to them and Allah is Hearing, Knowing”. (9: 103)

This verse is more explicit. Allah is asking the Prophet (S) to cleanse the Muslims by taking out alms from their property.

However cleansing them is not enough he should also pray for them, as this would bring them relief. Interestingly, Allah mentions that He is hearing and knowing; He can hear everybody's prayer and knows

what everyone's need is and yet asks the Prophet (S) to pray for them. He could for instance have said "Take alms out of their property, you would cleanse them thereby, and let them pray to Me for I am hearing and knowing".

3. Surah Yusuf:

قَالُوا يَا أَبَانَا اسْتَغْفِرْ لَنَا ذُنُوبَنَا إِنَّا كُنَّا خَاطِئِينَ

"They said, O' our father! Ask forgiveness (from Allah) for our sins, indeed we have been sinners". (12:97)

قَالَ سَوْفَ أَسْتَغْفِرُ لَكُمْ رَبِّي إِنَّهُ هُوَ الْغَفُورُ الرَّحِيمُ

He replied; "I will ask my Lord for forgiveness for you, Verily He! Only He is the Oft-Forgiving, the Most Merciful". (12:98)

This verse refers to the conversation between Hazrat Yaqub ('a) and his sons. When they realized the mistake they had committed and the gravity of their sins after throwing Hazrat Yusuf ('a) into the well, they approached their father, an infallible Prophet of Allah, and asked him to pray for their forgiveness on their behalf.

They made their father their means, Wasilah, of approaching Allah for forgiveness. The children knew what position their father held in front of Allah, hence their prayer would carry more weight if they went through the Wasilah of the Prophet. If this were Shirk, Hazrat Yaqub ('a) would have refused to pray for them and would have told them to pray to Allah directly; instead he conceded to their request.

4. Surah al-Mumtahana:

إِلَّا قَوْلَ إِبْرَاهِيمَ لِأَبِيهِ لَا اسْتَغْفِرَنَّ لَكَ

"...except the saying of Ibrahim to his father: "Verily, I will ask for forgiveness (from Allah) for you..." (60:4)

This verse refers to the conversation between Hazrat Ibrahim ('a) and his uncle Azar. The Prophet offered to pray for his forgiveness if he left idol worshipping. Hazrat Ibrahim ('a) could have told him:

"If you leave idol worshipping and pray to Allah, He will forgive you for He is oft Forgiving and Merciful".

The first two verses show that Allah wants the Prophet to pray for us and act as an intermediary between Him and us. The other two verses show that this practice is not a novel one in the Sharia

brought by the last Prophet Muhammad (S). It is an ancient practice, known even by people like Hazrat Yusuf (‘a)’s brothers and was always meant to be the way to reach Allah.

What is even more interesting is the fact that even an ordinary human being can pray to Allah for others and in fact is commanded to do so by Allah Himself.

5. Surah Ibrahim:

رَبَّنَا اغْفِرْ لِي وَلِوَالِدَيَّ وَلِلْمُؤْمِنِينَ يَوْمَ يَقُومُ الْحِسَابُ

“Our Lord! Forgive me and my parents and (all) the believers on the day when the reckoning will be established”. (14:41)

6. Surah Nuh:

رَبِّ اغْفِرْ لِي وَلِوَالِدَيَّ وَلِمَنْ دَخَلَ بَيْتِي مُؤْمِنًا وَلِلْمُؤْمِنِينَ وَالْمُؤْمِنَاتِ

“My Lord! Forgive me and my parents and he who enters my home as a believer, and all the believing men and women”. (71:28)

The above verses are a sample of many such verses in the Qur’an. Allah teaches man to not only pray for his forgiveness but for his parents and other believers too.

There are several ahadith of the Holy Prophet (S) and Aemma (‘a) that point in the same direction. We shall examine just a few.

1. The blind man:

The event most commonly quoted by both the Shia and Sunni sources is that of a blind man. A blind man once approached the Holy Prophet (S) and asked him to pray for his eyesight. The Prophet (S) advised him that it would be good if he exercised patience and accepted his state. The blind man insisted to be prayed for and the Prophet (S) asked him to recite 2–rakat prayers and thereafter recite this dua:

“O’ Allah! I beseech You and turn my attention towards You by the status of Your Prophet, the Prophet of Mercy”.

The Prophet (S) then told the man to turn towards him and address him as follows;

“O Muhammad! I turn towards my Lord through you for my needs, fulfill me”.

The man regained his vision immediately!

2. At the grave of the Prophet (S)

A companion during the time of the third caliph went to him for assistance. Seeing that he was ignored, he turned towards the grave of the Holy Prophet (S) and recited:

“O Allah! I beseech You and turn my attention towards You by the status of Your Prophet, the Prophet of Mercy. O’Muhammad, I turn towards your Lord through your status, fulfill my need”.

If this practice was Bid’at, the poor fellow would have been immediately flogged in the mosque; instead the Caliph felt ashamed and fulfilled his needs. This shows that this practice was not new and indeed was common at the time of the Prophet (S).

These narrations, accepted by both the Shia and Sunni schools of thought (except the Wahabis perhaps), clearly indicate that:

- One can ask for one’s wishes from Allah by the Wasilah of the Prophet (S); this was done when he was physically present as well as after his demise, standing in front of his grave.
- Allah (SWT) asked the Prophets to pray for us.
- The Prophet (S) himself indicated that we could ask him to pray for us.
- We can ask the Prophet (S) directly to fulfill our needs.

It is important to note here that in the first narration the Prophet (S) asked the man to first pray to Allah showing us that the ultimate Power and the Giver is NOT him but Allah; the element of Shirk is therefore removed.

3. Hazrat Adam (‘a)

فَتَلَقَّى آدَمُ مِنْ رَبِّهِ كَلِمَاتٍ فَتَابَ عَلَيْهِ إِنَّهُ هُوَ التَّوَّابُ الرَّحِيمُ

“Then Adam received some words from his Lord so He turned to him mercifully, surely He is Oft Returning, Merciful”. (2:37)

This verse refers to the event after Hazrat Adam (‘a) had vacated his heavenly resting place and came down to earth having committed the ‘tarke awla’. Allah (SWT) sent some words to him through Jibrael for him to recite while supplicating to Him for forgiveness. Once Hazrat Adam (‘a) supplicated to Allah using these words he was forgiven.

Refer to the excellent book written by Abu Ammar “Understanding the Ahle al Sunnah” where he quotes Hafiz Ibn Taymiyya:

“When Adam (peace be upon him) made a mistake, he made du’a like this: ‘O Allah forgive my mistake with the wasila of Muhammad!’ Allah asked Prophet Adam (peace be upon him) [rhetorically] how he

knew about Muhammad (may Allah bless him and grant him peace). Adam (peace be upon him) replied,

‘When you created me, I lifted my head and saw: ‘Laila ha illallahu Muhammadur Rasulullah’ written on the Throne. Therefore I knew that this person must be of a very high status, otherwise You would not have written his name with Yours.’ Allah Most High then said, ‘I have forgiven you. He will be the last Messenger from your children and I have created you because of him.’”

(The book can be read online from the Islamic Information Center web site)

The Shia scholars point to a somewhat similar hadith narrating that Jibrael taught Hazrat Adam (‘a) the following dua asking him to recite it before supplicating for his forgiveness:

اللهم إن أسألك بِحَقِّ مُحَمَّدٍ وَأنتَ المَحْمُودُ وَ بِحَقِّ عَلٍ وَأنتَ العِ وَ بِحَقِّ فَاطِمَةَ وَأنتَ فَاطِرَ السَّمَوَاتِ وَالرَّضِ وَ بِحَقِّ
السن وَأنتَ المَحْسَنُ وَ بِحَقِّ السَّني وَأنتَ قَدِيمَ الحَسَانِ

O Allah, I beseech You for the sake of Muhammad and You are al-Mahmood (The Praiseworthy), and for the sake of Ali and You are al-A’ala (The Most High), and for the sake of Fatima and You are Faatir as-Samaawaati wal Ardh (The Originator of the Heavens and the Earth), and for the sake of al-Hasan and You are al-Muhsin (The Beneficent) and for the sake of al-Husayn and You are Qadeem al-lhsaan (The Eternally Beneficent)

(Tr: Sh. Khalil Jaffer through Br. Ghazanfarali Hamer)

Allah could have forgiven Hazrat Adam (‘a) unconditionally; instead He asked him to take the Wasilah of Muhammad (S) and his holy progeny (‘a). This is the first Dua of Tawassul and the first lesson Allah (SWT) taught the father of mankind on how to supplicate and approach Him. He showed him what means he should seek to attain nearness to Him.

If an infallible Prophet (Adam) had to use Wasilah to reach Him and to gain His favor, then for the sinful human being the use of Wasilah becomes even more important – especially the Wasilah of Muhammad (S) and his Holy Progeny (‘a).

Several Duas taught by the Holy Aimmah (‘a) have direct reference to Tawassul of the Prophet (S) and his Ahlul Bayt (‘a). Among them are:

A. Dua Al-Tawassul

This is one of the most powerful duas taught to us by the Ahlul Bait (‘a) and is accepted and used by the Ahlul Sunnah as well. The name itself suggests the theme of the dua. In this dua one first invokes Allah by the name of His most beloved being, the Holy Prophet (S) and then turns to the Holy Prophet (S) and the 13 infallible souls asking them to act as intermediaries for us to Allah.

B. Dua On The Night Of Arafah

وَأَسْأَلُكَ بِحَقِّ وَ الْقُرْآنِ الْعَظِيمِ وَ بِحَقِّ مُحَمَّدٍ خَاتَمِ النَّبِيِّينَ وَ بِحَقِّ إِبْرَاهِيمَ

“And I beseech You by the status of the great Qur’an, and by the status of Muhammad, the seal of the prophets, and by the status of Ibrahim”.

C. Ziyarat Ashura

This is one of the most recommended Ziyarat of Imam Husayn (‘a) especially during the time of Occultation (Ghaybah). In this Ziyarat we are addressing the Imam as follows:

يَا أَبَا عَبْدِ اللَّهِ إِنِّي اتَّقَرُّبُ إِلَيْكَ إِلَهِ اللَّهِ وَإِلَى رَسُولِهِ وَإِلَى أَمِيرِ الْمُؤْمِنِينَ وَإِلَى فَاطِمَةَ وَإِلَى الْحَسَنِ وَإِلَيْكَ بِمُؤَالَاتِكَ

“O Aba Abdillah! I come near to Allah and to His Prophet and to Ameeril Mumineen and to Fatimah and to Hassan and to you by the means of your love.”

This clearly shows that Imam Husayn (‘a) is the Wasilah to achieve nearness to Allah (SWT) and Ahlul Bayt (‘a). Like wise, keeping away from the enemies of the Imam (‘a) also brings one closer to Allah (SWT) and Ahlul Bayt (‘a). This is exactly what we pray for in Suratul Fatihah when we say:

اهْدِنَا الصِّرَاطَ الْمُسْتَقِيمَ

“Guide me (or keep me) on the right path”. (1:6)

صِرَاطَ الَّذِينَ أَنْعَمْتَ عَلَيْهِمْ غَيْرِ الْمَغْضُوبِ عَلَيْهِمْ وَلَا الضَّالِّينَ

“The path of those on whom You have showered Your Mercy and not of those on whom You are angry and have gone astray”. (1:7)

D. Dua Alqamah

This is the dua that is recited after Ziyarat Ashura as taught by Imam Muhammad Baqir (‘a).

أَسْأَلُكَ بِحَقِّ مُحَمَّدٍ خَاتَمِ النَّبِيِّينَ، وَعَلَى أَمِيرِ الْمُؤْمِنِينَ، وَبِحَقِّ فَاطِمَةَ بِنْتِ نَبِيِّكَ، وَبِحَقِّ الْحَسَنِ وَالْحُسَيْنِ، فَإِنِّي بِهِمْ أَتَوَجَّهُ إِلَيْكَ فِي مَقَامِي هَذَا، وَبِهِمْ أَتَوَسَّلُ، وَبِهِمْ أَتَشَفَّعُ إِلَيْكَ، وَبِحَقِّهِمْ أَسْأَلُكَ وَأُقْسِمُ وَأَعَزُّمُ عَلَيْكَ

“I beseech Thee in the name of Muhammad, the last Prophet, and Ali, the commander of the faithfuls, in the name of Fatimah, the daughter of Thy Prophet, and in the name of Hasan and Husayn. I direct myself towards Thee, through them, in my address, through them I try to get a hearing, through them I

put forward my case to get Thy favours, in their names I make a request to Thee”.

وَبِالشَّانِ الَّذِي لَهُمْ عِنْدَكَ وَبِالْقَدْرِ الَّذِي لَهُمْ عِنْدَكَ، وَبِالَّذِي فَضَّلْتَهُمْ عَلَى الْعَالَمِينَ، وَبِاسْمِكَ الَّذِي جَعَلْتَهُ عِنْدَهُمْ، وَبِهِ خَصَصْتَهُمْ دُونَ الْعَالَمِينَ، وَبِهِ أَبْنَتَهُمْ وَأَبْنَتْ فَضْلُهُمْ مِنْ فَضْلِ الْعَالَمِينَ حَتَّى قَاقَ فَضْلُهُمْ فَضْلَ الْعَالَمِينَ جَمِيعاً.

Bound to Thee by oath, living a life according to Thy commands, I carry out my pledge by every means, in the name of the love and devotion Thou has for them, and the influence and status they enjoy in every dimension of Thy will, the superior most pre-eminence in wisdom and character Thou bestowed upon them to transcend above everything in the whole universe, in the name of Thy name Thou revealed to them in trust, on account of which Thou chose them in preference over everything found in the heavens and the earths, through which Thou built their syndrome, developed to perfection their surpassing excellence in knowledge, learning and deeds, out of all the rest of the people, till their completeness surpassed the total achievement of all the people put together.

The message in the dua is very clear. One pertinent question asked is: “Have the Ahlul Bayt (‘a) taken the Wasilah of Muhammad (S) and his Ahlul Bayt (‘a)?”

Simply put, the answer is YES they have. An example of a common day- to-day practice will illustrate this point:

Prayers (Salaat) are only for Allah. No Muslim can say that it can be prayed to any body other than Allah. From the beginning of Salaat a Muslim is supposed to focus his entire being to Allah (SWT). However, in salaam, his attention now turns to the Holy Prophet (S) as he says:

السَّلَامُ عَلَيْكَ أَيُّهَا النَّبِيُّ وَ رَحْمَةُ اللَّهِ وَ بَرَكَاتُهُ

“Peace be upon you O Prophet and Mercy and Blessings of Allah (be upon you)”

This very Salaat, wherein the entire attention is to Allah alone, is null and void if one does not mention the Holy Prophet (S) and his holy family (‘a) (The Salawaat in Tashahud is Wajib). No prayer is accepted if one does not send blessings (Salawaat) on Muhammad (S) and his family (‘a). The Ahlul Bayt too prayed in a similar manner.

If the most important act in Islam is void and unacceptable to Allah without mentioning the Holy Prophet (S) and his family (‘a), can an ordinary supplication for personal gain be accepted without their Wasilah?

No dua taught by the Ahlul Bait and recited by them is devoid of the Wasilah of Muhammad and his family (‘a). All the duas will contain in the very least the phrase

فَصَلِّ عَلَى مُحَمَّدٍ وَ آلِهِ

“Therefore bless Muhammad and the family of Muhammad”.

This is a statement of tawassul. It is similar to the salaam of the Salaat, for without this statement the dua is incomplete, void and not accepted by Allah! Therefore NO dua made by a Shia is devoid of Tawassul of Muhammad (S) and his family (‘a).

In conclusion Tawassul of a person or people is a practice taught to us by Allah Himself, His Prophet (S) and the Ahlul Bait (‘a). This practice is neither bid ‘at, shirk nor Haram!

So far the discussion has been on approaching Allah for assistance through the Wasilah of the holy names, either by invoking Allah with their names or by asking them to pray to Allah on ones behalf. In both the situations, one ultimately asks Allah for assistance.

The most burning issue however is asking for assistance directly from the holy personalities like the Prophet (S) and Aimmah (‘a). This issue will be dealt separately in the next chapter.

Istighatha

This is the most contentious of all the issues discussed so far. As mentioned earlier, istighatha literally means, “asking for help” or “calling for aid”. In our context of discussion, this is when one asks for help from other than Allah. Some classical examples would be statements like;

يَا عَلِيَّ مَدِّدْ

O Ali help (me)

يَا صَاحِبَ الزَّمَانِ اُدْرِكْنِي

O Master of the Time help me

The tasbeeh of Hazrat Abbas (‘a):

“O the one who relieves distress by the name of Husayn (‘a), relieve my distress by the status of your brother Husayn (‘a)”

يَا فَاطِمَةُ اُغِيثْنِي

O Fatimah come to my rescue

The question is “How can you ask for help from other than Allah?” on the basis that would be Shirk. If this question is valid then the counter argument would be:

- How can you ask for treatment from a doctor when Allah is the Healer? This is shirk
- How can you ask for knowledge from a teacher when Allah is the Aalim? This is shirk
- How can you go looking for rizq in the fields and offices when Allah is the Raziq? Is this Shirk too?

If these and many other favors we seek from another human being in day-to-day life is not shirk, why should asking the Prophet (S) and Ahlul Bait (‘a) be shirk?

Let us now see what principles the Qur’an has laid down on this issue.

1. Surah Yusuf:

وَقَالَ لِلَّذِي ظَنَّ أَنَّهُ نَاجٍ مِنْهُمَا اذْكُرْنِي عِنْدَ رَبِّكَ فَأَنْسَاهُ الشَّيْطَانُ ذِكْرَ رَبِّهِ فَلَبِثَ فِي السِّجْنِ بِضْعَ سِنِينَ

“And he said to him, whom he knew would be delivered of the two; ‘Remember me with your Lord’ but Shaytan caused him to forget, so he remained in the prison a few years”. (12:42)

This verse refers to the conversation between Prophet Yusuf (‘a) and one of the two prison mates he met. Hazrat Yusuf (‘a) requested the one who was going to be released to help him get released from the prison by interceding/mediating for him to the king. In other words, Hazrat Yusuf (‘a) was seeking aid or asking for help from his co-prisoner – a man who was not even a Muslim.

It is important to note the following:

- i. Hazrat Yusuf (‘a) was a Prophet of Allah and therefore infallible i.e. He would not commit a sin however minor.
- ii. He was the proof (Hujjat) of Allah at that time.
- iii. Allah did not condemn this action of Hazrat Yusuf (‘a) in the Qur’an although it is considered to be a ‘Tarke awla’ (leaving the better option) like that of Hazrat Adam (‘a) and Hazrat Yunus (‘a). This means that it does not befit a person of his status as a Prophet of Allah to ask for help from other than Allah especially of an ordinary man. However, it was neither Haraam nor Shirk not even a minor sin.

2. Surah Taha:

قَالَ رَبِّ اشْرَحْ لِي صَدْرِي

“He (Musa) said “O my Lord! Expand my chest”, (20:25)

وَيَسِّرْ لِي أَمْرِي

“ease my task” (20:26)

وَاحْلُلْ عُقْدَةً مِنْ لِسَانِي

“and remove the impediment from my speech”(20:27)

يَفْقَهُوا قَوْلِي

“so they may understand what I say” (20:28)

وَاجْعَلْ لِي وِزِيرًا مِنْ أَهْلِي

“and give me a minister from my family”(20:29)

هَارُونَ أَخِي

“Harun my brother” (20:30)

اشْدُدْ بِهِ أَزْرِي

“add to my strenght through him” (20:31)

وَأَشْرِكْهُ فِي أَمْرِي

“and make him share my task” (20:32)

كَيْ نُسَبِّحَكَ كَثِيرًا

“that we may celebrate your praise without stint” (20:33)

وَنَذْكُرَكَ كَثِيرًا

“And remember You much” (20:34)

إِنَّكَ كُنْتَ بِنَا بَصِيرًا

“for You Have always regarded us”. (20:35)

قَالَ قَدْ أُوتِيتَ سُؤْلَكَ يَا مُوسَى

“He [Allah] said: Your prayer has been Granted O Musa!” (20:36)

Hazrat Musa (‘a) in very clear words asks Allah (SWT) for the ability and strength to confront Firaun. Then he asks for a human helper, his brother

Hazrat Haroon (‘a) who would help and assist him in the task given to him by his Lord. Hazrat Musa (‘a) could have said;

“And You help me and strengthen my back and let my brother Haroon also join me in praising you”.

Allah, on the other hand did not reprimand Musa (‘a) by saying for example:

“O’ Musa! Why don’t you ask for My Help? You want to make your brother your helper, am I not sufficient for you? Why do you want a humanly help?”

Instead, Allah grants Musa (‘a) his wish. In the above situation, a ma’sum asks for the assistance of another ma’sum. If asking for humanly help was wrong, the Prophet of Allah would not have done so or Allah would have immediately reprimanded him.

By granting his wish, Allah ratifies that it is acceptable to ask for help from another person provided one knows that the ultimate helper is Allah and that all help comes from Him albeit it may be via another human being. If it was right for Hazrat Musa (‘a), a Ma’sum, to ask for help of another Ma’sum, it is definitely right for a Non-Ma’sum (Fallible) to ask for help from a Ma’sum.

At this juncture, it would be appropriate to remind the readers of the famous tradition of the Holy Prophet (S); *“O’Ali! Your relationship with me is like that of Haroon to Musa except that after me there is no prophet”*.

Many inferences can be made from this tradition, but in the context of the present discussion, Ali (‘a) was assigned to help the Holy Prophet (S) the way Haroon (‘a) was assigned to Musa (‘a). Ali (‘a) spent his entire life helping, assisting and protecting the Holy Prophet (S). To quote just two examples:

Breaking the idols:

When the Holy Prophet (S) conquered Makka and took control of the Ka'aba, he found the Ka'aba infested with idols kept there by the pagans of Makka. The ones that were accessible were all broken down but those placed higher could not be easily reached. The Prophet (S) asked Ali ('a) to mount on his shoulders and break the idols.

This is a common acknowledged fact among the Muslims. The question here is why the Prophet (S) asked for Imam Ali ('a)'s help. The same Prophet (S) who split the moon into two equal halves could surely make a sign to the idols and they would fall down in pieces.

The night of Hijrat:

When the command to migrate to Madina came to the Holy Prophet (S), he asked Ali ('a) to sleep on his bed while he made his way to Medina. This exchange of place would delay the unbelievers from realizing that the Prophet (S) had left.

Knowing that to sleep on the Prophet's (S) bed meant risking his life, Ali ('a) asked a single question: *"Will your life be saved by my sleeping on your bed?"*

This clearly shows how deeply concerned Ali ('a) was of the Prophet's life and how much precedence he gave the Prophet's life over his own.

The Prophet (S) left his house amidst the enemies who intended to kill him. He recited a few verses of Sura Ya Sin, took a fist full of dust and threw it at their faces; they became blind and could not see him leaving the house. Several other possible scenarios and solutions by which the Prophet's (S) life could have been saved come to mind:

- a) Allah could have paralyzed the unbelievers up to the time the Prophet (S) was safely away from them.
- b) Allah could have caused them to think and feel that the Prophet (S) was still sleeping on his bed.
- c) Allah could have sent Jibrael or any other angel to sleep on the Prophet (S)'s bed and etc.

However, Allah willed that Ali ('a) sleep on the Prophet's bed and become the WASILAH of his safety.

It is important to remember that the Prophet (S) does nothing without Allah's instructions. Both the above quoted actions of the Prophet (S) were by Allah's command. If Muhammad (S) could take the assistance of Imam Ali ('a) why can't I?

3. Surah Yusuf:

اٰذْهَبُوْا بِقَمِيصِيْ هٰذَا فَاَلْقُوْهُ عَلٰى وَجْهِ اَبِيْ يٰٓاَتِ بَصِيْرًا وَاَتُوْنِيْ بِاَهْلِكُمْ اَجْمَعِيْنَ

“Take this my shirt and cast it over my father’s face; he will again be able to see, and come to me with all your families”. (12:93)

فَلَمَّا أَنْ جَاءَ الْبَشِيرُ أَلْفَاهُ عَلَى وَجْهِهِ فَارْتَدَّ بِصِيرًا قَالَ أَلَمْ أَقُلْ لَكُمْ إِنِّي أَعْلَمُ مِنَ اللَّهِ مَا لَا تَعْلَمُونَ

“So when the bearer of good news came, he cast it on his face, so forthwith he regained his sight. He said: Did I not say to you that I know from Allah that which you do not know?” (12:96)

These verses refer to Hazrat Yusuf and Hazrat Yaqub (‘a). When the brothers of Yusuf (‘a) realized that the generous king of Egypt was none other than

Hazrat Yusuf (‘a) himself, they informed him of their father Hazrat Yaqub (‘a) who had lost his vision by excessive crying due to the separation from Yusuf (‘a). Hazrat Yusuf (‘a) then gave them his shirt with instructions as set out in the verses above.

Both Yaqub (‘a) and Yusuf (‘a) were Allah’s Prophets, His proofs of the time (Hujjat) and Ma’sumin (infallible). Several options were possible;

- i. Hazrat Yusuf (‘a) could have prayed to Allah directly for Him to restore his father’s vision.
- ii. Hazrat Yaqub (‘a) could have prayed to Allah himself to be relieved of his blindness the way Hazrat Ayub (‘a) did when he was distressed.

– Surah Al-Anbiya:

وَأَيُّوبَ إِذْ نَادَىٰ رَبَّهُ أَنِّي مَسَّنِيَ الضُّرُّ وَأَنْتَ أَرْحَمُ الرَّاحِمِينَ

“And Ayub when he cried to his Lord saying: Harm has afflicted me and You are the Most Merciful of the merciful”. (21:83)

فَاسْتَجَبْنَا لَهُ فَكَشَفْنَا مَا بِهِ مِنْ ضُرٍّ ۖ وَآتَيْنَاهُ أَهْلَهُ وَمِثْلَهُمْ مَعَهُمْ رَحْمَةً مِنْ عِنْدِنَا وَذِكْرَىٰ لِلْعَابِدِينَ

“Therefore We responded to him and took off what harm he had”. (21:84)

iii. Hazrat Yusuf (‘a) and Hazrat Yaqub (‘a) could have prayed together directly to Allah after being reunited.

iv. After the reunion with his father, Hazrat Yusuf (‘a) could have then touched his father’s eyes with his own hands and pray to Allah for cure.

Instead, he sent him his shirt and that cured him! Hazrat Yusuf ('a) came to his father's aid by "Proxy". Does this smell of shirk? Can anyone dare say YES? What then has happened here?

- a. The prophet's shirt acquired the healing property by virtue of it being associated with ISMAH.
- b. It is Allah who put that property of healing in the shirt; the shirt on its own had no power.
- c. An ordinary thing, even man-made, becomes extraordinary and special when associated with special people. It becomes the cause, means and source of physical as well as spiritual cure. It becomes a Wasilah to get proximity to Allah and for miracles to happen.

This event and the verses are a clear proof of the Wasilah of a person and of the validity of Istighatha. It is appropriate to mention here that objects like the clay of Karbala (Khake Shifaa), Dharih, Alam etc are all associated with masumeen ('a).

No sane person worships these objects. They are used like the shirt of Hazrat Yusuf ('a) and for all practical intents and purposes have a similar effect based on one's faith and sincerity.

Allah (SWT) gives some of these divine powers to selected individuals amongst His creatures as mentioned in the Qur'an.

– Surah Al-Baqarah:

وَإِذْ قَالَ إِبْرَاهِيمُ رَبِّ أَرِنِي كَيْفَ تُحْيِي الْمَوْتَى قَالَ أَوْ لَمْ تُؤْمِنْ قَالَ بَلَىٰ وَلَكِنْ لِيَطْمَئِنَّ قَلْبِي قَالَ فَخُذْ أَرْبَعَةً مِنَ الطَّيْرِ فَصُرْهُنَّ إِلَيْكَ ثُمَّ اجْعَلْ عَلَىٰ كُلِّ جَبَلٍ مِنْهُنَّ جُزْءًا ثُمَّ ادْعُهُنَّ يَأْتِينَكَ سَعْيًا وَاعْلَمْ أَنَّ اللَّهَ عَزِيزٌ حَكِيمٌ

“Behold Abraham said “My Lord show me how You give life to the dead” He (Allah) said “Do you not believe?” He said “Yes but to satisfy my understanding”. He (Allah) said “Take four birds; tame them to turn to you; put a portion of them on every hill, and call to them: They will come to you (flying) with speed. Then know that Allah is Exalted in Power, Wise.” (2:260)

The verses are self-explanatory. Ibrahim ('a) wanted to witness how we are going to be raised on the Day of Judgment after death. Allah could have told him to scatter the remains of the birds on the four mountains and watch what would happen. He could have then instructed the birds to come back to life since it is He Who gives life and death and only He Has that Jurisdiction. Instead, He asked Ibrahim to call the birds and they flew to him alive.

What Allah Did in fact was He empowered Ibrahim to give life to the dead? Does this in any way mean that He made Ibrahim His partner in giving life to the birds? No, obviously. It is He Who ultimately gave life to the dead birds but through Ibrahim's command. Similar powers have also been conferred to people other than the Prophets, people who enjoy special status in front of Allah.

– Surah Al-Naml:

قَالَ الَّذِي عِنْدَهُ عِلْمٌ مِّنَ الْكِتَابِ أَنَا آتِيكَ بِهِ قَبْلَ أَنْ يَرْتَدَّ إِلَيْكَ طَرْفُكَ ۚ فَلَمَّا رَآهُ مُسْتَقَرًّا عِنْدَهُ قَالَ هَذَا مِنْ فَضْلِ رَبِّي لِيَبْلُوَنِي أَأَشْكُرُ أَمْ أَكْفُرُ وَمَنْ شَكَرَ فَإِنَّمَا يَشْكُرُ لِنَفْسِهِ وَمَنْ كَفَرَ فَإِنَّ رَبِّي غَنِيٌّ كَرِيمٌ

“Said one who had knowledge of the Book: "I will bring it to thee within the twinkling of any eye!" Then when (Solomon) saw it placed firmly before him, he said: "This is by the grace of my Lord!" (27:40)

These verses refer to the event of Prophet Sulayman (‘a) and the throne of the queen Sheba of Abyssinia. The throne was brought ‘miraculously’ by one of the ministers of Hazrat Sulayman (‘a), a pious and learned man called Asif Barkhiya. Hazrat Sulayman (‘a) was the messenger of Allah and His “proof” of the time. He had been given the kingdom of the world and all the physical and natural forces were under his command. Sulayman (‘a) had the following options:

- He could have instructed the wind to bring the throne.
- He could have prayed to Allah to send the angels to bring the throne.
- With his own God-given powers, he could have willed the throne to come to him.

This event of Hazrat Sulayman (‘a) shows that some people, although neither prophets nor Imams, have gained special status with Allah and have been granted special powers and authorized to use them for the benefit of mankind.

Personalities like Bibi Zainab (‘a) and Hazrat Abbas (‘a) although not ‘ma’sum’, have come close to that status and are ‘Mahfoodh’ (protected) from committing sins and errors. They have been granted special powers by Allah and have been authorized to use them for the benefit of their followers. It is not surprising that Hazrat Abbas (‘a) is called “Babul Muraad”, the door through which prayers are accepted.

4. Surah Al-Qasas:

وَدَخَلَ الْمَدِينَةَ عَلَى حِينٍ غَفْلَةٍ مِّنْ أَهْلِهَا فَوَجَدَ فِيهَا رَجُلَيْنِ يَقْتَتِلَانِ هَٰذَا مِنْ شِيعَتِهِ وَهَٰذَا مِنْ عَدُوِّهِ فَاسْتَعَاثَ الَّذِي مِنْ شِيعَتِهِ عَلَى الَّذِي مِنْ عَدُوِّهِ فَوَكَزَهُ مُوسَى فَقَضَىٰ عَلَيْهِ

“And he went into the city at a time of vigilance on the part of its people, so he found there in two men fighting, one being of his party (Shi’a) and the other of his foes, and he who was of his party (Shi’a) cried out to him (fastaghatha) for help against he who was of his enemies, so Musa struck him with his fist and killed him....” (28: 15)

(the words in the brackets are the exact words used in the Qur’an)

This verse is “the final nail in the coffin” of the detractors of Tawassul. It clears all doubts surrounding the discussion on Istighatha. This verse refers to the event of two people fighting each other. One was the follower of Hazrat Musa (‘a); the Qur’an in very clear words describes him as the Shia of Musa (‘a). When this Shia saw his leader or master, Hazrat Musa (‘a), he immediately gave a cry of distress to him and called him to his aid i.e. made Istighatha to him. In essence he shouted; *يَا مُوسَىٰ أَدْرِكْنِي* or *مَدَدْ يَا مُوسَىٰ* or *O Musa come to my help!*

If this was wrong, shirk and bid ‘at, the prophet of Allah would have immediately rebuked his follower with words such as “Don’t ask for my help! Don’t call me to your aid, it is shirk and haram. You should only call Allah to help you!” Instead Hazrat Musa (‘a) immediately came to his rescue and relieved his follower’s distress.

If the Shia of Hazrat Musa (‘a) could say *يَا مُوسَىٰ أَدْرِكْنِي* or *مَدَدْ يَا مُوسَىٰ* and it was not wrong to do so (we know this because Hazrat Musa (‘a) did help him), Why can’t a Shia of Ali (‘a) say

يَا عَلِيٍّ مَدَدْ

– “O Ali help”

Why can’t a Shia of Al-Mahdi (aj) say

يَا صَاحِبَ الزَّمَانِ أَدْرِكْنِي

– “O Master of the Time help me”

Why in Hazrat Musa (‘a)’s case, it is not shirk and bid ‘at while in Ali (‘a)’s and Al-Mahdi (aj)’s case it’s shirk and bid’at?

This verse in very clear words shows that calling out for help, asking for the aid of certain people is not only allowed, but is met with a positive response!

In fact we can’t even reach the Holy Prophet (S) without Wasilah let alone Allah who is well beyond the Prophet (S). In the hadeeth quoted by all Muslims, the Prophet (S) has said

“I am the city of knowledge and Ali is its gate, so whoever wants to come to the city should come through its gate”.

This hadeeth clearly shows that Ali (‘a) is the Wasilah to gain proximity to the Prophet (S). The Prophet (S) cannot be reached without going through the Wasilah of the Ahlul Bayt. Thus, it is only by the Wasilah of the Ahlul Bait (‘a) i.e. Ali (‘a) and his family, that we can reach the Prophet (S) and ultimately Allah (SWT).

In conclusion therefore, calling out for help of the Holy Prophet (S) and his Ahlul Bayt ('a) with statements like:

يَا عَلِيّ مَدِّدْ

O Ali help (me)!

يَا صَاحِبَ الزَّمَانِ اُدْرِكْنِي

– “O Master of the Time help me” etc is neither

Bid 'at, Shirk nor Haram provided the conditions mentioned earlier are kept in mind.

It is erroneous to think that we can reach Allah directly without passing through the doors of Muhammad (S) and his Ahlul Bayt ('a). Allah (SWT) can only be reached through the WASILAH of Muhammad (S) and his holy progeny ('a) whether it is by:

- a. Performing the actions they taught us
- b. Using their status to invoke Allah
- c. Asking them to pray for us OR
- d. Asking them directly to grant us our wishes by His Permission.

We need to reiterate the points made earlier in the discussion regarding Wasilah of Muhammad (S) and his Ahlul Bayt ('a).

They:

1. Do not have powers independent of Allah. Whatever power they have is from Allah
2. Will not do anything against Allah's will or command
3. Cannot over rule Allah's decisions
4. Cannot make suggestions to Allah or change His decree.

Whatever they do is strictly by Allah's Permission and Will. Whoever thinks that by invoking the Wasilah of these holy personalities or supplicating to them directly will get what Allah does not want him to get is in error.

Another argument that is commonly presented is:

“These people are dead anyway, how can one talk to and take the Wasilah of a dead person?”

There are two issues here:

1. Can a dead person hear when talked to? And
2. Are the people whom we call for Wasilah or Istighatha dead in the sense of death that we know of?

Let us examine the Qur'an on these issues.

- Can The Dead Hear?

فَعَقَرُوا النَّاقَةَ وَعَتَوْا عَنْ أَمْرِ رَبِّهِمْ وَقَالُوا يَا صَالِحُ ائْتِنَا بِمَا تَعِدُنَا إِنْ كُنْتَ مِنَ الْمُرْسَلِينَ

“So they slew the she camel and revolted against their Lord’s commandment, and they said: “O Salih! Bring us what you threatened us with, if you are one of the apostles.”(7:77)

فَأَخَذَتْهُمُ الرَّجْفَةُ فَأَصْبَحُوا فِي دَارِهِمْ جَاثِمِينَ

“Then the earthquake overtook them, so they became motionless bodies in their abode.” (7:78)

فَتَوَلَّى عَنْهُمْ وَقَالَ يَا قَوْمِ لَقَدْ أَبْلَغْتُكُمْ رِسَالَاتِ رَبِّي وَنَصَحْتُ لَكُمْ وَلَكِنْ لَا تُحِبُّونَ النَّاصِحِينَ

“Then he turned away from them saying “O my people, I did certainly deliver to you the message of my Lord and I gave you good advice, but you do not love those who give good advice” (7:79)

The verses are self-explanatory. They refer to the incident of Nabi Salih (‘a) and his people’s act of slaughtering the she camel and their arrogant behavior.

The last verse very explicitly tells us that after the descent of Allah’s wrath on the people of Salih, and when they were motionless dead bodies, the noble Prophet of Allah spoke to them and addressed them as though they were alive.

This is a clear proof that the motionless bodies, though physically dead, could hear what the Prophet (‘a) was saying other wise the action of the Prophet of Allah would be purposeless and without any wisdom (God Forbid). In another part of the Surah:

فَأَخَذَتْهُمُ الرَّجْفَةُ فَأَصْبَحُوا فِي دَارِهِمْ جَاثِمِينَ

“Then the earthquake overtook them, so they became motionless bodies in their abode”. (7:91)

الَّذِينَ كَذَّبُوا شُعَيْبًا كَأَن لَّمْ يَغْنَوْا فِيهَا ۚ الَّذِينَ كَذَّبُوا شُعَيْبًا كَانُوا هُمُ الْخَاسِرِينَ

“Those who called Shuayb a liar were as though they had never dwelt there in; those who called Shuayb a liar they were the losers.”(7:92)

فَتَوَلَّى عَنْهُمْ وَقَالَ يَا قَوْمِ لَقَدْ أَبْلَغْتُكُمْ رِسَالَاتِ رَبِّي وَنَصَحْتُ لَكُمْ ۖ فَكَيْفَ آسَىٰ عَلَىٰ قَوْمٍ كَافِرِينَ

“So he turned away from them and said “O my people! Certainly I delivered to you the messages of my Lord and I gave you good advice; how then shall I be sorry for an unbelieving people?” (7:93)

Again we see the noble Prophet of Allah talking to the dead showing that they could hear him.

The Battle of Badr:

After the battle of Badr when the Muslims came out victorious and the battlefield was strewn with slaughtered enemies of Allah, the holy Prophet (S) came to the dead bodies and spoke to them. He asked them if Allah fulfilled His Promise on them as He Had fulfilled on the Prophet (S). The companions were surprised to see the Prophet (S) talking to the dead and asked him:

Can these dead people hear you? The holy Prophet (S) replied

They can hear more than you now.

After death, if Allah’s enemies can hear, what about a Muslim? A Mu’min? A Martyr? What about an infallible Prophet and Imam? Won’t they be able to hear and respond as well?

This is the basis of recitation of Talqeen. The dead can hear.

2. Are The People Of Tawassul And Istighatha Dead?

It has been seen in the preceding discussion that the dead enemies of Allah can hear when talked to. The special friends of Allah are not even dead! Though they have died in our sense of the word. They would thus be hearing and responding in a special way though we may not be able to comprehend it. Again the Qur’an is explicit about it:

وَلَا تَحْسَبَنَّ الَّذِينَ قُتِلُوا فِي سَبِيلِ اللَّهِ أَمْوَاتًا بَلْ أَحْيَاءٌ عِنْدَ رَبِّهِمْ يُرْزَقُونَ

“And do not consider those killed in the way of Allah as dead, but they are alive and getting sustenance from their Lord”. (3: 169)

They may not be physically present in front of us but they are very much alive. We can again refer to the example of the Salaam in Salaat. That is sufficient to prove that the Holy Prophet (S) is very much alive, can hear our salutations and replies back.

The major misconception that is spreading around from the Wahabi school of thought is that:

The Prophet (S) is a human being like us and there is no difference between him and us. We die and can have no effect on the living any more. Similarly, the Prophet (S) is dead and gone and therefore he cannot have any influence on our lives.

The often quoted verse is:

...قُلْ إِنَّمَا أَنَا بَشَرٌ مِّثْلُكُمْ

“Say: I am but a man like you...” (18: 110)

There is no doubt that the Prophet (S) is a human being like us and not an angel. He was given a physical body like us and had all humanly feelings such as pain, hunger, thirst, bodily needs, emotions, physical urges and so on that all humans need for survival. But that is where the similarity ends.

At a spiritual level can any one claim that he was like us? Let us see what the Qur'an says, very briefly (as this is a subject on its own), regarding the Prophet (S).

– Surah Al-Hashr:

لَوْ أَنزَلْنَاهُ هَذَا الْقُرْآنَ عَلَى جَبَلٍ لَّرَأَيْتَهُ خَاشِعًا مُّتَصَدِّعًا مِّنْ خَشْيَةِ اللَّهِ وَتِلْكَ الْأَمْثَالُ نَضْرِبُهَا لِلنَّاسِ لَعَلَّهُمْ يَتَفَكَّرُونَ

“Had We sent down this Qur'an on a mountain, you would certainly have seen it falling down, splitting asunder because of the fear of Allah and We set forth these parables to men that they may reflect” (59:21)

This refers to the spiritual power and magnificence of the Qur'an. The power and grandeur of the Qur'an is such that the night in which it was revealed is crowned as “The Night of Power” – Laylatul Qadr.

The Qur'an, whose power and magnificence would have shattered a mountain, was revealed in that form on the Prophet's (S) soul:

– Surah Al-Baqarah:

قُلْ مَنْ كَانَ عَدُوًّا لِجِبْرِيلَ فَإِنَّهُ نَزَّلَهُ عَلَى قَلْبِكَ بِإِذْنِ اللَّهِ مُصَدِّقًا لِمَا بَيْنَ يَدَيْهِ وَهُدًى وَبُشْرَى لِلْمُؤْمِنِينَ

“Say: whoever is the enemy of Jibrael, for surely he revealed it to your heart by Allah’s command. Verifying that which is before it and guidance and good news for the believers”. (2:97)

It is not possible to imagine what strength Allah (SWT) gave to Muhammad (S)’s soul that it could bear the weight of the Qur’an. Indeed, the weight of the Qur’an was such that it had its effect on Muhammad (S).

– Surah Taha:

طه

“Ta Ha” (20: 1)

مَا أَنزَلْنَا عَلَيْكَ الْقُرْآنَ لِتَشْقَىٰ

“We have not sent down the Qur’an to you (O Muhammad) to cause you distress” (20:2)

The Prophet (S) is quoted to have said after the revelation of Sura al Hud: *“Suratul Hud has made me old”*.

This reflects the spiritual powers of the Qur’an and what great spiritual strength the Prophet (S) had. Muhammad (S) is Allah’s special being unlike any one else He created.

– Surah Al Anbiya:

وَمَا أَرْسَلْنَاكَ إِلَّا رَحْمَةً لِّلْعَالَمِينَ

“And We have not sent you but as a mercy to the worlds” (21: 107)

We need to ask at this juncture whether the mercy alluded to in the verse above is a time limited benevolence or one for all eternity. Was he (S) a mercy for the people of his time or is this “mercy” to continue for as long as the Qur’an (and this verse) exists, as long as the Universe exists, as long as the need for the mercy exists? The answer is in the verse itself – he was sent as a mercy to the Worlds!

Not only is he a mercy to our world, but to as many worlds as Allah Has created, and he (S) will continue being Allah’s mercy as long as the worlds exist – even after our world comes to its end. We need to realize that all Allah’s Mercy we see in this world of ours is a direct consequence of the Wasilah of

Muhammad (S) – no matter what form this Mercy takes.

It is not surprising therefore to see Imam Ali ('a) starting the first statement of Dua Kumayl as:

اللَّهُمَّ إِنِّي أَسْأَلُكَ بِرَحْمَتِكَ الَّتِي وَسِعَتْ كُلَّ شَيْءٍ

“O Allah! I beseech You by Your Mercy which encompasses every thing”.

Isn't this the Wasilah of the Prophet (S) that Imam Ali ('a) is taking in this Dua?

The answer is found in the following Ahadith: Imam Ali ('a) said:

“We the Ahlul Bayt are the Most Beautiful Names of Allah (Asmaul Husna) by which when the Almighty Allah is asked, He Responds”.

Imam Muhammad Al Baqir ('a) said:

“We (Ahlul Bayt) are the Most Beautiful Names of Allah (Asmaul Husna), and without knowing us, Allah does not accept any deed of His servants”

In Hadith al-Kisaa, Allah tells Jibraeel:

إِنِّي مَا خَلَقْتُ سَمَاءً مَبْنِيَّةً وَ لَا أَرْضاً مَدْحِيَّةً وَ لَا قَمَراً مُنِيراً وَ لَا شَمْساً مُضِيئَةً وَ لَا فَلَكَاً يَدُورُ وَ لَا بَحَراً يَجْرِي وَ لَا
فَلَكَاً يَسْرِي إِلَّا فِي مَحَبَّةِ هَؤُلَاءِ الْخَمْسَةِ الَّذِينَ هُمْ تَحْتَ الْكِسَاءِ

“I have not created the high heaven nor the stretched earth, neither the illuminating moon nor the shining sun, neither the revolving sky nor the flowing seas, nor the sailing ships but in the love of these five who are under the cloak”.

Jibraeel was curious about the identity of the people who were the reason for his own creation.

فَقَالَ الْأَمِينُ جِبْرَائِيلُ : يَا رَبِّ وَمَنْ تَحْتَ الْكِسَاءِ ؟

Asked Jiraeel: “O my Lord! And who are under the cloak?”

Allah replied:

هُمْ أَهْلُ بَيْتِ النُّبُوَّةِ وَ مَعْدِنُ الرِّسَالَةِ هُمْ فَاطِمَةُ وَ أَبُوهَا ، وَ بَعْلُهَا وَ بَنُوها

“They are the Ahlul Bayt and the source of the Message are Fatimah, her father, her husband and her

children ('a)'.

A point worth pondering on is that the word used for children here is banuwha. In the Arabic language, unlike in English, nouns can be singular, dual or plural. Banuwha is the plural tense i.e. more than two children.

Under the cloak of Fatimah ('a) there were only Imam Hassan ('a) and Imam Husayn ('a). Why then is Allah referring to Fatimah ('a)'s children in the plural and not the dual tense? We will leave this riddle for the reader to solve!

We see therefore that the whole universe and whatever is in it has been created for the love of Muhammad (S) and his Ahlul Bayt ('a).

Can anyone still claim that Muhammad (S) is an ordinary person like us and that he can have no effect on us?

– Surah Al Ahzab:

يَا أَيُّهَا النَّبِيُّ إِنَّا أَرْسَلْنَاكَ شَاهِدًا وَمُبَشِّرًا وَنَذِيرًا

“O Prophet! Surely We have sent you as a witness, and as a bearer of good news and as a warner” (33:45)

وَدَاعِيًا إِلَى اللَّهِ بِإِذْنِهِ وَسِرَاجًا مُنِيرًا

and as one inviting to Allah by His permission and as a light giving torch” (33:46)

Allah has compared Muhammad (S) to a shining lamp (or moon) Are these just flowery words that a lover is using to address His beloved? Certainly not! Just like the way the physical moon has an effect on the earth in spite of it being away from the earth, the Prophet is the shining lamp and the moon of the universe.

He too has an effect on the earth and the universe at large, even if he is physically away. Muhammad (S)'s radiance and effect is not confined to his physical body and being. He is much greater than his physical being and his spiritual influence is way beyond his physical presence.

It only needs a submissive heart to feel him, talk to him and benefit from the Mercy that he has been granted by Allah for the benefit of those who want to take it. Those who say that Muhammad (S) is dead are in fact dead in their hearts and cannot perceive him, and this extends to his Ahlul Bayt ('a) as well as he has said:

“The first of us is Muhammad”.

“The middle of us is Muhammad”.

“The last of us is Muhammad”.

“All of us are Muhammad”.

A quick glance at Ziyarat Jamia Kabira will show what status the Ahlul Bayt (‘a) of the Prophet (S) enjoy in front of Allah. To quote a few verses:

- *You are the true reflection of His Light and Signs, authority to guide has been conferred on you*
- *You are the main means of approach*
- *Peace be on the guides (Imam) who give a calling and lead unto guidance, you are the loving guardians, the protecting defenders, the people of the holy Qur’an, the “those who are in authority” the “that (good) which Allah has left with people”*
- *His good, His group, His wisdom, His argument, His path, His light, His proof, the Mercy and the Blessings of Allah.*

It is imperative that one, especially the Shia of Ahlul Bayt, reads this Ziyarah, understands and ponders over it again and again. It is highly recommended to read this Ziyarah during our times of “Greater Occultation” (Ghaybata Kubra). One gets a very clear picture of who the Ahlul Bayt are from this Ziyarat.

We now see that the question of their Wasilah and Istigatha being void and unacceptable because they are dead is baseless. They (Muhammad and his holy Ahlul Bayt (‘a)) are very much alive and their Wasilah is the basis of our Ibaadah being accepted by Allah (SWT).

The Most Amazing Tawassul

There is yet another type of Tawassul that has defied all classifications and does not fit into any category discussed so far. It is the most amazing, unique and special type of Tawassul. Here, one is NOT:

1. Praying to Allah directly.
2. Asking Allah by anyone's Wasilah.
3. Asking anyone to pray to Allah for him.
4. Asking for help from anyone else.

Instead, duas get accepted even without actively presenting them to Allah. Distress and worries dissolve without even lamenting to Allah. It is a state of such great spiritual height that one comes closer to Allah without any conscious effort. This is an “automatic” Tawassul for achieving nearness to Allah and for prayers to be accepted.

This is the power of “Hadith ul-Kisaa” which is accepted by all the Muslims. The Holy Lady Hazrat Fatimah (‘a) has reported this narration and it has come to us through the great companion Jabir Bin Abdullahi Ansari (ra). The whole event is well known to all the Muslims hence the entire detailed narration will be skipped here and only the part relevant to our discussion will be quoted. Hazrat Fatimah (‘a) reports:

فَقَالَ أَبِي رَسُولُ اللَّهِ (صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَآلِهِ) : يَا عَلِيُّ وَالَّذِي بَعَثَنِي بِالْحَقِّ نَبِيًّا وَاصْطَفَانِي بِالرَّسَالَةِ نَجِيًّا ، مَا ذُكِرَ خَبَرُنَا هَذَا فِي مَحْفَلٍ مِنْ مَحَافِلِ أَهْلِ الْأَرْضِ وَفِيهِ جَمْعٌ مِنْ شِيعَتِنَا وَ مُحِبِّينَا وَ فِيهِمْ مَهْمُومٌ إِلَّا وَفَرَّجَ اللَّهُ هَمَّهُ وَ لَا مَغْمُومٌ إِلَّا وَكَشَفَ اللَّهُ غَمَّهُ وَ لَا طَالِبٌ حَاجَةً إِلَّا وَ قَضَى اللَّهُ حَاجَتَهُ

“Then my father said: O Ali! By Him who rightfully appointed me a prophet, and chose me a messenger of the salvation of mankind, whenever an assembly of our followers and friends mention this event, there shall remain none grieved but Allah shall remove his grief, there shall remain none distressed but Allah shall remove his distress and there shall remain none wish seeker but Allah shall grant his wish!”

The following points are noteworthy:

1. The Prophet (S) swears by Allah
2. The Prophet (S) gave a categorical statement and not a dua.
3. One has just to mention this event and Allah will grant wishes and prayers.

How does this happen? What is the physics and chemistry of this event? The answer is in the narration itself:

فَقَالَ عَلِيُّ لِأَبِي: يَا رَسُولَ اللَّهِ أَخْبِرْنِي مَا لَجُلُوسِنَا هَذَا تَحْتَ الْكِسَاءِ مِنَ الْفَضْلِ عِنْدَ اللَّهِ ؟ فَقَالَ النَّبِيُّ (صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَآلِهِ) : وَالَّذِي بَعَثَنِي بِالْحَقِّ نَبِيًّا وَ اصْطَفَانِي بِالرَّسَالَةِ نَجِيًّا ، مَا ذُكِرَ خَبَرُنَا هَذَا فِي مَحْفَلٍ مِنْ مَحَافِلِ أَهْلِ الْأَرْضِ وَ فِيهِ جَمْعٌ مِنْ شِيعَتِنَا وَ مُحِبِّينَا إِلَّا وَ نَزَلَتْ عَلَيْهِمُ الرَّحْمَةُ ، وَ حَفَّتْ بِهِمُ الْمَلَائِكَةُ وَ اسْتَغْفَرَتْ لَهُمْ إِلَى أَنْ يَتَفَرَّقُوا

“Ali (‘a) Said to my father; O' Prophet of Allah (S), tell me what significance has Allah given for us getting together underneath the cloak? The Prophet replied; By Him Who rightfully appointed me a Prophet and Chose me a messenger for the salvation of mankind, whenever an assembly of our followers and friends mention this event, Allah will bestow on them His blessings and mercy, and the angels will encircle them

asking Allah to forgive their sins until that assembly disperses”.

Therefore, by narrating this event, the following happens:

1. Allah showers His Blessings and Mercy on the people narrating it and those listening to it. Where there is Allah's Blessings and Mercy, there cannot be stress and grief.
2. The angels descend from the heavens and surround these people. Where there are angels, the spiritually pure beings, the whole environment becomes spiritually charged and elevated and the people in that environment too become spiritually closer to Allah.
3. The angels pray for the forgiveness of those present. Angels' prayers are not rejected by Allah as:
 - a) They are spiritually pure and closer to Allah.
 - b) Whatever they do, is by Allah's command. Therefore, it is Allah who commands them to descend and pray for these peoples' forgiveness and Allah cannot reject what He commands to be done.
4. The people whose sins are forgiven, their du'as are accepted.

The Wasilah of Muhammad (S) and his Ahlul Bayt ('a) is the pinnacle of Tawassul. There is NO other Tawassul better and superior to this. The Prophet (S) also said:

“O Ali! Your remembrance (Dhikr) is my remembrance, my remembrance is Allah's remembrance and Allah's remembrance is worship (Ibaadah)”

From the above discussion we can safely say that any gathering that discusses Muhammad (S) and his Ahlul Bait ('a) becomes a gathering of Ibaadah and spiritual elevation. This underlines the importance of our “Majalis” where the Dhikr of Muhammad (S) and Aale Muhammad ('a) is made. It is in such gatherings that we collectively manifest our love for the Holy Prophet (S) and his Ahlul Bayt ('a) as ordered by Allah (SWT) Himself.

...قُلْ لَا أَسْأَلُكُمْ عَلَيْهِ أَجْرًا إِلَّا الْمَوَدَّةَ فِي الْقُرْبَى...

“...Say: I do not ask of you any reward for it but love for my relatives...” (42:23)

This manifestation of love to the Ahlul Bayt ('a) is our mark, identity, heritage and the means for our salvation in this world and the hereafter.

Conclusion

The reader should now be in a position to make his own conclusions after going through the discussion at length. Just to aid the young mind, the following conclusions can be made:

1. One has to look for means to attach ones belief, actions and deeds to Allah for otherwise they will be “hanging in air” and will be of no benefit. This is called Wasilah.
2. The Wasilah has to be the one chosen by Allah Himself and not one that is man made. That is the main difference between Tawassul and Shirk.
3. The Almighty (SWT) Himself Has kept some means to reach Him.
4. The most powerful and superior means to reach Allah is Tawassul of Muhammad (S) and his Ahlul Bayt (‘a) as they are special beings, closest to Allah and have been specifically chosen to be the Wasilah to reach Him.
5. Asking Allah by their names or asking them to pray to Allah on ones behalf is right. In fact a dua is not dua if not done through their means.
6. Calling them directly for assistance (Istighatha) is right and acceptable provided one understands that the Ultimate Giver is Allah and all the power belongs to Him. They (Ahlul Bayt) have no powers independent of Allah, will not do anything against His wishes and will not, and cannot, change Allah's decisions.
7. There is a special type of Wasilah – the recitation of Hadithul Kisaa. By just mentioning this event, one’s duas are accepted and stress and grief relieved.
8. These special people, though physically not present in front of us, are alive and can have an effect on our lives.

Its time the youths woke up and took a deeper look at their religion and equip themselves with the relevant knowledge to defend their faith. This can only be done when they come closer to the mosque, “Mimbar” and the learned scholars (Ulamaa). Hand in hand with this, it’s time the elders and the scholars realize the challenges faced by our youth and redirect their energies and priorities in this direction.

The Ulamaa too should make themselves more accessible to the youth and make it easy for the youth to approach them and identify with them. For otherwise there are many pseudo well-wishers and spiritually-destructive models for the youth that can attract the youth more skillfully to the detriment of the whole society, present and future.

May Allah (SWT) keep us on His path by the Wasilah of Muhammad and his Ahlul Bayt (‘a).

اللهم أدخلن ف ك خري أدخلت فيه ممدا وآل ممد، وأخرجن من ك سوء أخرجت منه ممدا وآل ممد صلواتك عليه
وعليهم أجمعين

Wa Billah al-Tawfiq

17th Sha’baan 1427 A.H.

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