

# Tawassul in the Conduct of Great Scholars



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This article offers a brief explanation of tawassul, its levels, and focuses on examples of scholars' emphasis on calling on to the Infallibles as a source of spiritual upliftment and a key solution to their problems by visiting their shrines, holding occasions on their births and mourning sessions on their death anniversaries. Some of these scholars include Ayatullah Baha'ul-Dini, Allamah Tabataba'i, Ayatollah Boroojerdi, and Ayatullah Bahjat.

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## Abstract

God answers our prayers when we sincerely plead, and He has approved of people asking for His help through a mediator. Tawassul is the practice of using an intermediary to approach God with a request, and is a source of achieving closeness to Him.

Though topic of tawassul has indeed raised questions and includes in-depth discussions on its validity, this article offers a brief explanation of tawassul, its levels, and focuses on examples of scholars' emphasis on calling on to the Infallibles as a source of spiritual upliftment and a key solution to their problems by visiting their shrines, holding occasions on their births and mourning sessions on their death anniversaries. Some of these scholars include Ayatullah Baha'ul-Dini, Allamah Tabataba'i, Ayatollah Boroojerdi, and Ayatullah Bahjat.

## Introduction

Whatever can be conceived of sincerity, purity, and honesty in a society exists in the Shi'a Imams to perfection; thus, through following the example of the matchless Imams, one can cultivate human virtues in himself. Great religious scholars are exemplars of those who have resorted to the Ahlul Bayt and have reached the peak of perfection as a result through comprehending its importance.

This study reflects several aspects of tawassul (resorting to or calling on) in the lives of some contemporary religious scholars. Enumerating instances of great scholars' recourse to the holy Imams, the author draws the attention of the believing friends of the Ahlul Bayt to the concept of resorting as well as their motivation in seeking proximity to the Imams.

## The meaning of Tawassul

Tawassul is regarding an action or a person as an intermediary to reach a certain goal<sup>1</sup>. That is, when someone regards a purpose as important, he takes an action; similarly, if he or she regards a person as a way of approach to achieve that objective, this action or person is called an "intermediary."

Proximity to God, the highest degree of moral perfection, is a major objective that can be achieved only through putting forth much effort. Since this is not achievable by everybody, man needs an intermediary to accompany him in this path.

Addressing the believers, God said in the Holy Qur'an:

***"Seek a means of approach unto Him<sup>2</sup>."***

In other words, seek a way to stay close to God. In another verse, He says, *"Allah's are the most beautiful names. Invoke Him by them."*

The "means of approach" and the "names" as mentioned in the above verses are the Imams, as mentioned in numerous hadiths<sup>3</sup>. Thus, the Infallibles are the manifestations of a perfect man and a way of approach God. They are the best means of compensating for people's imperfections and assistance to those who are unable to tread in the path of perfection and proximity to God alone.

## **The Levels of Resorting**

Resorting has three levels:

- a) Verbal resorting: This is the lowest level and merely a word that is uttered. It does not permeate a person's heart and actions, thus not influencing his or her character and behaviour.
- b) Resorting in the heart: When at heart one believes that the Ahlul Bayt are a connection between the earth and God's grace, and that God has made them the means of receiving His bounty and achieving proximity to Him.
- c) Resorting with the limbs: After heartfelt belief, the limbs which are the functional aspects of the heart, perform actions to pave the way for connection to the Imams. In other words, the hands, tongue, eyes, ears, etc. should work towards the goals of the Imams by putting their teachings into action and should avoid doing anything against their commands and instructions.

If resorting to the Imams reaches the highest level – that of resorting to them with the limbs – its outcomes will be manifested in a person's actions, and his conduct will display the qualities of God and resemble the Imam's deeds. Accordingly, through developing good actions, his manners also become divine; thereby, he achieves the highest levels of proximity of God, so high a degree that a person is considered as one of the Ahlul Bayt, as Salman al-Farsi was: "Salman is one of us – the Ahlul Bayt<sup>4</sup>."

## **Scholars' Resorting to the Imams**

### **1) Ayatullah Bahá'u'lláh**

Since early childhood, this sagacious Shi'a jurisprudent has had immense love for and devotion to Prophet Muhammad as well as the Ahlul Bayt. He said:

At the age of three or four, I really loved the holy shrine of the respected daughter of Imam Musa ibn Ja'far, Lady Masumah. Along with my father, I used to go there and tried to offer services to her pilgrims. In the dark nights, I used to go to the thirty or forty step underground water storage to bring water for the pilgrims of her holy shrine<sup>5</sup>.

As a result of his remarkable devotion, Ayatullah Bahá'u'lláh held ceremonies on the occasions of the birthdays and martyrdoms of the Ahlul Bayt as he would generously gift the guests with the vast wealth of the Ahlul Bayt's knowledge, insight, and grace. On the high status of the Ahlul Bayt and the

importance of holding ceremonies for them, he said:

Their [Ahlul Bayt's] status is inconceivable in this world; there is nobody like them. Know that all these gatherings are these sacred figures' blessings. The speech, works, and gatherings all belong to them. If it were not for Prophet Muhammad, there would be no gatherings. Owing to Prophet Muhammad's life, there is life and vitality in the world. Know that all men and jinns are indebted to the Messenger of Allah until the Day of Judgment6.

## 2) Imam Khomeini

Throughout his stay in Najaf, he visited the holy shrine of the Commander of the Faithful, Imam Ali, every night, never giving up this ziyarah other than some exceptional cases. During the days on which ziyarah was recommended, he would visit the holy shrine of Imam Husayn. In the first ten days of Muharram ending on the day of Ashura, he would recite Ziyarat Ashura every day with its one hundred "salams" on Imam Husayn. According to his son, "One night, a coup in Iraq occurred. Searching every room, I could not find him, so I went up to the roof and saw him reciting Ziyarah of Imam Ali while facing his holy shrine."

According to a relative of the Imam Khomeini:

Every night at a certain hour, he used to go to the holy shrine of Imam Ali and recite Ziyarah Jami'ah Kabeera, which would take an hour to recite. However, by reciting it, one feels that he is in the presence of the Infallible Imams, telling them what is true of them and their virtues. In fact, this ziyarah is a course on knowing the Imams, and it is interesting to note that Imam Khomeini kept reciting this ziyarah every day for fifteen years.

Imam Khomeini's intense love for the Ahlul Bayt cannot be put into words. He loved them so profoundly that whenever the name of Imam Husayn was mentioned, he automatically shed tears. Although Imam Khomeini was patient with calamities – and even in the face of sufferings such as the martyrdom of his son Hajj Mustafa, he did not shed tears, once the Marsiya reciter said, "Peace be upon you! O Aba Abdillah al-Husayn!" tears spilled from his eyes.

Before the Islamic Revolution of Iran, when some so-called intellectuals criticized holding mourning sessions and beating chests, Imam Khomeini fervently promoted traditional mourning customs and recommended that people hold organized and uplifting mourning sessions for Ahlul Bayt as much as possible.

Sometimes the Marsiyeh reciters would shorten their traditional elegies during the mourning sessions in the presence of Imam Khomeini because he would endanger his health by weeping profusely7.

### **3) Allamah Tabataba'i**

Admiration and love for the Ahlul Bayt were considered the prominent features of Allamah Tabataba'i. His devotion to the Ahlul Bayt, particularly to Imam Ali, was substantial and indescribable. One of his students said:

I cannot remember any occasion on which he would name an Imam without paying homage to Imam Ali. He spent his summer in Mashhad, and whenever I accompanied him, I could see him put his shaking hands on the door of the courtyard of Imam Rida's holy shrine and kiss it wholeheartedly upon entering it. Sometimes people asked him to pray for their wants, and he would respond, "Go and ask Imam Rida for your wants. I am powerless here; everything is in the hands of the holy Imam."

He often took part in mourning sessions on Fridays and sometimes wept so wholeheartedly and bitterly that his whole body trembled.

His fascination for and devotion to the household of Prophet Muhammad were so remarkable that sometimes when there were mourning and Marsiyeh sessions, he put aside writing and studying books<sup>8</sup>.

### **4) Ayatollah Boroujerdi**

The respect of the late Shi'a religious authority, Ayatollah Boroujerdi, to the Imams was also exemplary. Ayatullah Shaikh Ali Safi Gulpayegani said in this regard:

Once a group of people came to him, and a person among them called out, 'For the good health of Imam Mahdi and Ayatullah Boroujerdi, please recite a salawat.' Upon hearing this, Ayatullah Boroujerdi expressed his dissatisfaction with this word, saying, "This man uttered my name beside the name of Imam Mahdi [and this is disrespect to the 12th Imam]."

In another incident, once the Saudi Arabian king came to Iran and sent him some gifts. He accepted a copy of the Qur'an and a piece of the Ka'ba covering while rejecting the rest of the gifts. The king also asked for a visit with him, but Ayatullah Boroujerdi rejected his request. When he was asked about this decision, Ayatullah Boroujerdi replied, "If this person comes to Qum and does not pay a visit to holy shrine of Lady Masumah, this will be disrespect to her and I cannot accept this at all."<sup>9</sup>

### **5) Ayatollah Gulpaygani and his dedication to Imam Husayn**

The late religious authority of the Shi'a world, Ayatullah Gulpaygani, who considered his birth owing to resorting to the Ahlul Bayt and witnessed his father's inexpressible love and enthusiasm for Imam Husayn since childhood, has also been familiar with devotion to Ahlul Bayt since his childhood, rendering his soul replete with love for them.

He always shed tears when the sufferings of Ahlul Bayt were recounted. As soon as the Marsiyeh reciter

or anyone else spoke of the hardships of the Imams' lives, he was overwhelmed with sorrow. Even before his role as a religious leader, celebrations were held in his house on all birthday anniversaries of the 14 Infallibles, as well as mourning gatherings for them; and many people from various social classes attended these gatherings.

According to one of the orators in Qum, Hujjat-ul-Islam Bashiri:

During his stay in the hospital, one day I was told to visit him to recite Hadith ul-Kisaa and Marsiyeh for a few minutes. I was about to start reciting when he said, "Wait a moment please." Then he changed his position from lying to sitting and asked for his cloak and turban. Then he said, "The assembly held for elegy to Imam Husayn is different from other gatherings. We must attend it respectfully and in formal clothing."

His son, Hajj Baqir Gulpaygani, also said:

One day on the last days of Ashura, when an orator was reciting Marsiyeh, Ayatollah Gulpaygani was shedding tears. Right after the mourning session, I was about to give him his eye drops, but he stopped me and said, "I do not want my tears to be mixed with anything else<sup>10</sup>."

## **6) Ayatullah Bahjat**

Visiting the holy shrine of Lady Ma'suma in Qum was a daily routine of the prominent religious authority of the Shi'a world, Grand Ayatullah Bahjat. For many years, just after the Morning Prayer, he would visit the shrine, standing humbly in front of her burial chamber and recite her ziyarah (visitation) and the Ziyara of Ashura. Then he would find a place to sit in the shrine and continue his remembrance (dhikr) and worship of God. He was especially attached to the Ziyara of Ashura, as he said:

I think weeping for Imam Husayn is more virtuous than the night prayer because the night prayer is not a deed rooted in one's heart and soul. However, grieving and weeping are deeds rooted in one's heart and soul in such a way that shedding indicates the acceptance of the Witr<sup>11</sup> prayer<sup>12</sup>.

## **7) Ayatullah Quddusi and his continued recitation of Ziyara of Ashura**

Ayatullah Quddusi, who struggled considerably for the victory of Islamic revolution of Iran and was finally martyred for this cause, was a real lover of the Ahlul Bayt. During the Islamic Revolution, Ayatullah Quddusi always encouraged people to get involved in the revolution. After the victory of the Islamic Revolution of Iran, Imam Khomeini appointed him as the Attorney General of Iran.

A prominent feature was his resorting to and loving the Imams as well as his continually holding mourning sessions for them. His yearly religious schedule included holding sessions in his home for reciting Dua al-Nudbah, half-a-century-old mourning sessions in Muharram, commemorating Lady Fatimah's martyrdom (Ayyam Fatimiyyah), and resorting to Imam Mahdi.

Likewise, his daily schedule included reciting Ziyarat Jami'a Kabeera and Ziyarat Ashura with its one hundred "salams" on Imam Husayn. According to one of his friends:

He seemed to recite the Ziyarah of Ashura every day because when he was the Attorney General, I dreamed that because of his reciting the Ziyarah of Ashura, he was granted certain types of [divine] knowledge. When I related the dream to him, he was saddened and said that due to his position as the Attorney General, he failed to recite it for a while because he considered his duties more urgent<sup>13</sup>.

## **8) Hujjat al-Islam Dashti**

The name 'Muhammad Dashti' and the title Nahjul Balaghah are intertwined. His name reminds us of his long-term and valuable works on the enlightening words of Imam Ali. His success in writing, particularly collecting and compiling terms in Nahjul Balaghah, was so considerable that his Mu'jam al-Mufahris li Alfaz al-Nahj-ul-Balaghah turned to a practical and useful book for researchers. The Iranian Supreme Leader, Ayatullah Khamenei, said to him, "Your book, Mu'jam, always lies beside the Qur'an and Mafatihul Jinan in my room. I always refer to it."

Despite his short, albeit fruitful life, the late Dashti left behind more than one hundred and ten books, one of which is in fifteen volumes. Some of his works are: The Future and Those Who make it, Documents Related to Nahjul Balaghah (Vol. I & II), the Messages of Ashura, the translation of Nahjul Balaghah, The Religion of Intellectualism, Glossary of Imam Husayn's Sayings, Nahjul Hayat, The Exemplary Conduct of Imam Ali (15 volumes), and a collection of his poems.

Hujjat al-Islam Dashti's firm resorting and trusting in the holy Imams positively affected his life. He considered trust as the key to solution for all problems and thus he never neglected it. He said:

The holy Imams are the means of achieving God's grace and bounty, a way to approximate to the Almighty God. Through resorting to these heavenly lights, we can overcome all seemingly unsolvable problems.

Through resorting to the Ahlul Bayt, he solved numerous important problems. In challenging cases, he usually resorted to one of the holy Imams and recited fourteen thousand salawat for him.

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