

# The Rules of *At-Tawassul*

**M**any Muslims have misconceptions and misinformation regarding At-Tawassul, that is, seeking the means of approach and drawing near to Allah. Many go to the extreme in absolutely allowing or prohibiting it. For example, some Muslims ask Allah by the high status Prophet Mohammad, Salla Allahu Alayhi Wasallam, has with Him, seeking to bring about a benefit or to prevent a harm from touching them. Some ask Allah by the status of the Sacred House, the Kaa'bah, or the grade that the Awliyaa' (Allah's loyal friends) have with Him. Such people call these acts Tawassul and even encourage the people to perform them. They claim that there are some Hadiths that allow and even require these types of Du'aa'.

Some people also go to the extreme in allowing Tawassul to Allah by some of His creation, even insignificant types of creation, such as the graves of the Awliyaa', the metal bars around their monuments, the stones and the dust on and around their graves, the trees that surround them, etc.! They claim that what is in close proximity to the great ones is great itself! They also claim that Allah honors the surroundings of the graves of the Awliyaa'. Some people even allow calling other than Allah in supplication, and call this clear Shirk that negates Taw'hid, a Tawassul!

It is therefore imperative that we explain At-Tawassul and detail its allowed types, and to support this explanation with the Ayat from the Quran and the authentic Hadiths.

## **The Meaning of At-Tawassul**

Transgressing the set limits of Allah regarding At-Tawassul originates from the people's ignorance in its true meaning in the Arabic language and in the Quran and Sunnah. At-Tawassul is an Arabic word that has been frequently used in the Quran, the Sunnah, Arabic poems and in daily life, and it literally means to seek the means to draw closer to what one needs and desires. Further, Ar-Razi had stated that At-Tawassul, as a religious term, entails drawing closer to Allah by performing good deeds. [Mukhtar As-Sihah]. Also, Imam Ibn Kathir said in his Tafsir, "Al-Wasilah is the means that one uses to obtain a need. Al-Wasilah is also the best grade in Paradise, the grade of the Messenger of Allah that is his residence in Paradise. It is the closest part of Paradise to Allah's Throne." Abdullah bin 'Amr bin Al-'Aas narrated that he heard the Prophet say, what translated means, "***When you hear the Athan*** (the call to the prayer), ***repeat its words, then say Salat on me*** (saying, "Salla Allahu Alayhi Wasallam", all the peace and blessings of Allah be upon him), ***for he who says Salat on me once, Allah will grant Salat on him ten times*** (Allah's Salat entails His granting the slave mercy and tranquillity). ***Then, ask Allah for Al-Wasilah for me, for it is a grade in Paradise that only a certain slave of Allah deserves, and I hope I am that slave. Therefore, whoever asks for Al-Wasilah for me will be granted the Shafa'ah*** (the Prophet's intercession on his behalf on the Day of Resurrection)." [Muslim].

The word “Wasilah” was used twice in the Quran. First, Allah said, what translated means, **﴿O you who believe! Do your duty to Allah and fear Him. Seek Al-Wasilah to Him.﴾** [5:35]. Ibn Kathir reported that Ibn Abbas had stated that Al-Wasilah here means good deeds. This is also the Tafsir (explanation, definition) of Mujahid, Abu Wa-il, Al-‘Hasan Al-Basri, Qatadah, Abdullah Ibn Kathir, As-Suddi, Ibn Zayd, etc., all noted Imams and scholars of Tafsir. Ibn Kathir also narrated that Qatadah said that the Ayah means, “Draw closer to Allah by obeying Him and by performing the deeds that please Him.” Then, Ibn Kathir commented that this Tafsir by these scholars is unopposed.

The second instance is Allah’s saying, what translated means, **﴿Those whom they call upon [like Jesus, ‘Uzair (Ezra), angels, Jinn, etc.] desire (for themselves) Al-Wasilah (the means of access to Allah), as to which of them should be the nearest, and they (Jesus, ‘Uzair, angels, Jinn, etc.) hope for His Mercy and fear His Torment. Verily, the Torment of your Lord is something to be afraid of!﴾** [17:57]. Ibn Mas’ood had stated that this Ayah was revealed, “Regarding some Arabs who used to worship some Jinn. These Jinn mentioned in the Ayah later became Muslims, while the humans who were worshipping them were unaware of this fact!” Allah thus explains the error of the ignorant, misguided people who worship the Jinn and continue to worship them, even though the Jinn are but some of Allah’s creation, helpless and powerless and always in need of Allah. The Jinn were and still are unable to bring about their own benefit or to fend harm off of themselves, let alone provide help for others.

Some ignorant Muslims rely on these two Ayat above to provide an excuse for their Tawassul with the status and the grade of the prophets. This is an erroneous practice, indeed. The Ayat do not talk about these invented types of Du’aa’ which have no basis in the religion that allow them. Also, none among the righteous ancestors ever allowed these types of invented Tawassul. Rather, the Ayat only require the Muslims to seek the means of approach to Allah by obeying Him and performing righteous, good deeds that He has legislated for them. These deeds will have to be performed for the sake of Allah alone and in accordance with the Sunnah of the Messenger of Allah, Salla Allahu Alayhi Wasallam, just as Allah has said, **﴿So whoever hopes for the Meeting with his Lord, let him work righteousness and associate none as a partner in the worship of his Lord.﴾** [18:110].

## **The Two Types of Al-Wasilah**

We have stated that Al-Wasilah means the means of approach to achieve a certain need. We should note here that there are two types of Wasilah, material and religious. As for the material type, it entails the material means and methods that will help people attain the benefits that Allah has created for them on earth. This type is the same for both the believers and disbelievers. For example, water is needed to quench thirst, and food is needed to satisfy hunger. Consequently, food and water are the Wasilah to satisfy hunger and thirst.

As for the religious Wasilah, it entails every method that helps obtain the religious objectives that Allah has legislated in His Book or by the tongue of His Messenger in his Sunnah. This type is exclusive for the believers only, those who seek to obey Allah’s Commandments and satisfy the obligations that He has required them to fulfill. This type includes uttering the words of the Two Testimonies, that there is no deity worthy of worship except Allah and that Mohammad is the Messenger of Allah, with sincerity and knowledge in the true meaning of this testimony. This is a Wasilah to being entered into Paradise for eternity and being saved from eternal punishment in Hellfire. Also, this type includes following the sin with a righteous, good deed, so that it will erase the sin. It also includes Silat Ar-Ra’him, that is, keeping good relations with the relatives, which is a Wasilah to live a long life and to have an increase in provisions.

Mankind are unable to uncover the religious Wasilah except through the Shari’ah, that is, through revelation from Allah. Hence, neither experience nor science will ever help us acquire knowledge in the religious Wasilah. For example, we know that Silat Ar-Ra’him is a means of living a longer life and having an

increase in the provision through the Shari'ah, as the Prophet had said, what translated means, "***He who seeks to have an increase in his provisions and to live longer, let him fulfill Silat Ar-Ra'him.***" [Al-Bukhari & Muslim].

Many errors have been committed concerning the two types of Wasilah that we have explained, and consequently, many Muslims use certain material or religious Wasilah in a manner or purpose that were not intended or legislated. This is why some Muslims invoke Allah by the status of His loyal slaves and prophets, erroneously believing that such otherwise illegal acts are means and methods of legal Wasilah that will draw them closer to Allah.

## **The Legal Type of Religious Tawassul**

There are three types of the permissible religious Tawassul: Tawassul by Allah's Names and Attributes; Tawassul by the righteous, good deeds that one performed; and Tawassul by soliciting the Du'aa' of a righteous, living person.

Tawassul to Allah by invoking His Most Beautiful Names and Perfect Attributes is legislated for Muslims, according to the Quran, the Sunnah and the consensus of the scholars of Islam throughout the ages. Allah said, what translated means, ***And (all) the Most Beautiful Names belong to Allah, so call on Him by them, and leave the company of those who belie or deny (or utter impious speech against) His Names.*** ﴿7:180﴾. Also, the Prophet used to say the following Du'aa', "***Ya 'Hayyu Ya Qhayyum, bi Ra'hmatika Astaghith.***" This means, "O You (Allah)! The Ever-Living, Sustainer of everything, I seek refuge with Your Mercy."

Imam Ibn Taymiyyah said in Al-Fatawa, "Asking Allah by invoking His Names and Attributes that are relevant to a certain matter the slave seeks, such as seeking guidance, sustenance or victory, is the greatest Wasilah to invoke Allah (His help and aid)." He also said that when one invokes Allah by reciting such words as, "I invoke You by stating that You Are Allah, the One and only, the Sustainer, Who neither begets nor was He begotten, and there is none like unto You," and, "I invoke You by every Name that You have and which You call Yourself by, whether You have revealed it in Your Book, taught it to some of Your creation, or kept it with You in the knowledge of the Unseen,...", then the person will be asking Allah by invoking His Names and Attributes." He further stated, "Allah's Actions are relevant to His Names and Attributes. For example, His Forgiveness and Mercy are relevant to His Names: Al-Ghafoor (the Ever-Forgiving), Ar-Ra'him (the Most Merciful); and His 'Afw (pardon) is relevant to His Name Al-'Afw. This is why 'Aaishah asked the Prophet once, 'When it is the night of Al-Qadr, what should I say?' He replied, '***Say: O Allah! You are 'Afw and like to grant 'Afw, so forgive me.***'"

As for invoking Allah by the righteous, good deeds, the Messenger of Allah has informed us of the story of the three men who resorted to a cave to rest for the night, when a large rock fell down the mountain and blocked their way out. These three men then started to invoke Allah by the best righteous deed they could remember. The first one invoked Allah by his kindness with his parents, the second person by his refraining from fornication, while the third man invoked Allah by his good deed of investing the salary of a worker who left before he received his compensation. When the worker returned later on to collect his money, he found that it was multiplied many folds, and he took it all. These three people invoked Allah by mentioning the best deeds they could think of, so that Allah would save them from the cave that they were trapped in. Allah then accepted their Du'aa' and the rock moved, allowing them to leave the cave. [Al-Bukhari].

Some may claim that this story had occurred before Islam, and that what was legislated for those before us is not a part of our Shari'ah. To refute this claim, we state that the Prophet mentioned this story in such a positive manner that demonstrates his praise and acceptance for the actions of these three men, such actions that are but a practical explanation for the previous Ayah.

Invoking Allah by the slave's love for the Prophet, which is one of the necessary elements of Islam, is included in the type of Wasilah that entails invoking Allah through one's good deeds. Loving and believing in the Prophet and following his Sunnah are the origin of all good deeds. Ibn Taymiyyah said in *Al-Fatawa*, "If one asks Allah by his belief in Mohammad Salla Allahu Alayhi Wasallam and his love and obedience to him, then he will be asking by a great Wasilah that warrants accepting the Du'aa' (Allah willing)."

Tawassul by asking a righteous living person to perform Du'aa' on one's behalf is yet another type of allowed Tawassul. Once, a Bedouin man asked the Prophet to invoke Allah for rain for his people, and the Prophet invoked Allah and Allah then sent down the rain. Also, a woman once asked the Prophet to invoke Allah to cure her from an illness, and the Prophet gave her the choice to either be patient and acquire Paradise, or that he asks Allah to cure her. She chose patience and Paradise. Furthermore, the companions used to invoke Allah by the Du'aa' of Al-'Abbas, the Prophet's beloved uncle, and the Du'aa' of other righteous Muslims, such as Yazid ibn Al-Aswad Al-Jurashi. One time, Yazid was asked by Caliph Mu'awiyah to invoke Allah for rain, and he did, and Allah then sent down the rain.

### **The Prohibited Types of Tawassul**

The prohibited Tawassul includes all the forms and types of Tawassul other than the allowed types that we have explained above. The scholars of Islam have firmly rejected the prohibited types of Tawassul throughout the centuries. We should note here that some scholars had allowed Tawassul by the Jah (the grade and the high status) of the Prophet. However, there are no proofs in the Quran or the Sunnah that allow this type of Tawassul.

There are basically three types of the innovated Tawassul. The first type entails invoking other than Allah, such as a dead righteous person, for various needs and wants. This is clear Shirk. Imam Ibn Taymiyyah said that invoking the dead or absent Shaykhs for emergencies and various needs, "Is a part of Shirk that Allah and His Messenger have prohibited. It is a well-known fact that Islam disallows this type of Tawassul."

The second type of innovated Tawassul entails asking a dead prophet or righteous person to invoke Allah on one's behalf. This type is also disallowed, as it is innovated and thus an evil act that the Salaf never practiced or allowed. Therefore, no Muslim is allowed to visit the grave of the Prophet, or any other prophet for that matter, to ask him to ask Allah on his or her behalf. Ibn Taymiyyah said, "It is not allowed to ask the dead for anything, such as asking them to invoke Allah on one's behalf. Also, it is not allowed to complain to the dead about the hardships of this life or the trials in the religion that one is experiencing. Even if it was allowed to complain to a righteous living person, this is not like complaining to him when he is dead, as this latter action leads to Shirk."

We must also assert here that the dead cannot hear us, a fact affirmed in the Quran. Allah said, what translated means, *And behind them (the dead) is Barzakh (a barrier) until the Day when they will be resurrected.* ﴿[23:100]﴾, and, *Verily, you cannot make the dead to hear, nor can you make the deaf to hear the call, when they flee, turning their backs.* ﴿[27:80]﴾.

The third type of innovated Tawassul entails invoking Allah by the Jah, that is, the grade and status the prophets and the righteous ones have with Allah. None among the companions or the Tabi'een—the second generation of Islam—ever practiced this type. For example, when the Muslims experienced drought during the reign of Caliph Umar, he did not ask Allah by the Prophet's grade and status to send down the rain. Instead, he called upon Al-'Abbas to invoke Allah on their behalf, saying, "O Allah! We used to invoke You by our Prophet's Du'aa' when we needed rain, and You would send down the rain. We now invoke You by the Du'aa' of our Prophet's uncle." He then said, "O Abbas! Stand up and ask Allah for us." Al-Abbas then performed Du'aa' to Allah, and Allah sent down the rain. Neither Umar nor the companions would abandon invoking

Allah by the status of His Prophet if this was allowed for them, and instead revert to a Du'aa' from Al-Abbas, who is less in grade and status than the Prophet. Therefore, the Tawassul that Umar performed by Al-Abbas is with his Du'aa', not his status with Allah. Otherwise, the companions would have asked Allah by the high status of the Prophet, Salla Allahu Alayhi Wasallam.

In addition, when Prophet Adam committed his mistake, he invoked Allah, saying, ﴿**“Our Lord! We have wronged ourselves. If You forgive us not, and bestow not upon us Your Mercy, we shall certainly be of the losers.”**﴾ [7:23]. Thus, Adam did not invoke Allah by the status that Prophet Mohammad has with Him. This Ayah refutes the fabricated Hadith that is falsely attributed to the Prophet in which he is claimed to have said, “When Adam committed his mistake, he said, ‘O Allah! I ask You by the grade that Mohammad has with You, so that You will forgive me.’ Allah said, ‘O Adam! How did you know Mohammad although I have not yet created him!’ He said, ‘O Allah! When You created me with Your Own Hands and then blew life unto me, I raised my head and read a statement on a pillar of the Throne: There is no deity worthy of worship except Allah and Mohammad is the Messenger of Allah. I then knew that You would not mention a name of a person next to Your Name except for the name of the most dear created being to You.’ Allah said, ‘You have said the truth, O Adam! He is the dearest creation in My Sight. Therefore, invoke Me by his right. Further, I have forgiven you. If it was not for Mohammad, I would not have created you.’” [Al-'Hakim]. The scholars of Hadith have stated that Al-'Hakim was sometimes lenient in authenticating the Hadith, such as in this case. Also, Imam Ath-Thahaby has firmly stated that this Hadith is fake.

## Claims and Rebuttals

The Muftadi'ah, the innovators in the religion, have raised several doubts and false claims regarding At-Tawassul, so that commoners will accept their falsehoods and thus practice the innovated types of Tawassul. For example, they sometimes refer to the Hadith of the blind man, which is as follows: Uthman bin 'Hanif narrated that a blind man once came to the Prophet, Salla Allahu Alayhi Wasallam, saying, “Perform Du'aa' for Allah to cure me.” The Prophet said, **“If you wish, I will ask Allah for you. Or if you wish, I will refrain from doing that, for this would be better for you.”** The man said, “Make Du'aa'.” Hence, the Prophet ordered the man to perform Wudhu perfectly, pray two Rak'ahs and then recite the following Du'aa', **“O Allah! I ask You and invoke You by Your Prophet Mohammad, the Prophet of mercy. O Mohammad! I invoke Allah by you in this need so that it is delivered for me. O Allah! Accept his Shafa'ah** (intercession) **on my behalf, and accept my Shafa'ah on his behalf.”** The man did that and he was then cured. [At-Tirmithi & An-Nasai]. Some people think that this Hadith allows Tawassul by the Prophet's grade with Allah, and consequently, by the grade of the Awliyya' and the righteous, as well. However, this Hadith only legislates calling Allah in supplication by the Du'aa' of a righteous living person, which is a permissible type of Tawassul as we have previously stated. We should also note that:

1 – The blind man came to the Prophet asking him to perform Du'aa' to Allah on his behalf, saying, “Perform Du'aa' to Allah so that He cures me.” Hence, the blind man performed Tawassul to Allah by the Du'aa' of the Prophet. If he had sought to perform Tawassul to Allah by the Prophet's status with Him, he would have done so without having to come to the Prophet and asking him to perform Du'aa' to Allah on his behalf.

2 – The Prophet promised the blind man to perform Du'aa' to Allah on his behalf if he wishes and the blind man concurred. Consequently, the Prophet performed Du'aa' to Allah on his behalf. Also, the Prophet asked the man to perform Tawassul to Allah by his good deeds, for he ordered him to wash up for prayer, pray two Rak'ahs and then ask Allah in Du'aa' to cure him; and all these acts are types of good deeds.

3 – The Du'aa' the Prophet asked the blind man to recite was, **“O Allah! Accept his Shafa'ah on my behalf.”** This means that the man asked Allah to accept the Prophet's intercession on his behalf, meaning by

accepting the Prophet's Du'aa' to cure him. Thus, the man only asked for the Prophet's Du'aa' on his behalf.

4 – The Prophet also ordered the blind man to say, “***And accept my Shafa'ah on his behalf.***” This section means, “Accept my Du'aa' that You accept his Shafa'ah on my behalf, so that You bring back my sight.” This is why the innovators do not discuss this portion of the Hadith that destroys their logic, as they would have to concede, as a consequence to their silly logic, that the Prophet invoked Allah by the status of the blind man!

5 – The scholars listed this Hadith among the miracles of the Prophet and as an example of his accepted Du'aa', for Allah accepted the Du'aa' of the Prophet and restored sight to the blind man. Imam Ibn Taymiyyah said, “The Hadith about the blind man that At-Tirmithi and An-Nasaii have narrated is the second type of legal Tawassul, for the blind man asked the Prophet to ask Allah for him to restore his sight.”

All these arguments prove that the Hadith of the blind man revolves around the Prophet asking Allah to restore sight to the blind man and has nothing to do with Tawassul with the Jah (grade, status, position, etc.) of the Prophet. The blind man's Tawassul to Allah only entailed asking Allah by the Du'aa' of the Prophet.

In addition, among the methods that the innovators use regarding At-Tawassul is that they frequently rely on weak or fabricated Hadiths, such as the Hadith about Adam that we have previously mentioned. They also use another fake Hadith, “Perform Tawassul by my Jah, for verily, my Jah with Allah is great.” Certainly, the Prophet has a high status and grade with Allah, for he is Final Messenger and Prophet from Allah. But, this fact alone does not allow us to perform Tawassul to Allah by the Prophet's Jah.

## **A Summary**

We have so far stated that there are three types of legal Tawassul: Invoking Allah by His Names and Attributes, by the good deeds that one has performed for the sake of Allah alone, and by the Du'aa' of a *living* righteous person on one's behalf. All other types of Tawassul are not allowed and are among the innovated Bid'ahs that the Prophet has warned us against. He has said, what translated means, “***Beware of matters of innovation, for every innovation is a Bid'ah, and every Bid'ah is a heresy.***” [Abu Dawood & Ibn Majah], and, “***Whoever introduces unto our religion that which is not a part of it, he will have it rejected.***” [Muslim].

We should note here that in order for our acts of worship to be accepted by Allah, we are obliged to perform them for the sake of Allah alone and in accordance with the Sunnah of His Messenger. We are thus required to refer to the Sunnah of our Messenger regarding every matter of the religion. This is also the command that the Messenger of Allah has issued to us, “***I have left with you two matters with which you will never be misled as long you hold fast unto them: the Book of Allah and the Sunnah of His Messenger.***” [Malik & Ibn Majah].