



IS TAWASSUL PERMISSIBLE?

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ
السَّلَامُ عَلَيْكُمْ وَرَحْمَةُ اللَّهِ وَبَرَكَاتُهُ

Mufti Taqi Uthmani deals with this issue in detail hence it is sufficient for me to quote his view.

Muhammad ibn Ishaq al-Musayyabi narrated to me, Anas, i.e. Ibn 'Iyad Abu Damra, narrated to me: from Musa ibn 'Uqbah: from Nafi': from 'Abdullah ibn 'Umar: from Allah's Messenger (Allah bless him and grant him peace) that he said:

“While three men set out on a journey, they were overtaken by rain so they took shelter in a mountain cave where at its mouth there fell a rock of the mountain, and sealed them [in the cave]. One of them said to the others: ‘Look to your good deeds that you performed for the sake of Allah and then supplicate to Allah, the Exalted, through them that Allah may relieve you.’

“One of them said: ‘O Allah! I had my parents who were very old and my wife and I had small children for whose sake I used to work as a shepherd. When I returned to them at night and milked [the sheep], I used to start giving [the milk] to drink to my parents first before my children. One day I was obliged to go out to a distant place [in search of] fodder, and did not return till late at night and found that my parents had slept. I milked [my livestock] as I would milk [them] and brought the milk and stood at their heads, and I disliked to wake them up from their sleep, and I disliked to give [the milk] to drink to my children before them though my children were crying at my feet. So this state of mine and theirs continued till the day dawned. If you know that I had done that seeking Your countenance, then make for us an opening thereof through which we can see the sky.’ So Allah made for them an opening through which they could see the sky.

“Another of them said: ‘O Allah! I had a cousin whom I loved as much as a man loves a woman. I tried to seduce her but she refused until I paid her one hundred Dinars. So I worked hard until I collected one hundred Dinars and went to her with that. But when I sat in between her legs [to have sexual intercourse with her], she said, ‘O slave of Allah! Be wary of Allah and do not break the seal [of chastity] but by its proper [means].’ So I left her. If you know that I had done that seeking Your countenance, then make for us an opening thereof.’ So He made an opening for them.

“The last one said: ‘O Allah! I employed a labourer for [wages equal to] a faraq [a certain measure] of rice, and when he had finished his work he said ‘give me my due’. Thereupon I presented his due to him and he did not accept it. Then I kept on sowing [that rice] until I accumulated thereof [enough wealth to buy] cows and their shepherd. Later, he came to me and said, ‘Be wary of Allah, and do not be unjust to me in my due.’ I said, ‘Go and take those cows and their shepherd.’ He said, ‘Be wary of Allah, and do not mock me.’ So I said, ‘I am not mocking you. Take those cows and their shephard.’ So he took them and went away. If You know that I had done that seeking Your countenance, then open for us what remains.’ So Allah opened for them what remained.” (Sahih Muslim)



The Issue of Tawassul (taking a means) in Du'a (supplication)

The hadith of the chapter proves the permissibility of tawassul in du'a through good deeds. As far as tawassul through essences and persons is concerned, there has been much discussion on this between the 'ulama, and many debates on it have taken place, one of the debaters often being led to accuse the other of deviance. If people were to look at the issue with the eye of judiciousness, free from sectarian bias, it will become clear that this dispute amongst the 'ulama and people of truth is not traceable to much substance; rather, the debates were probably generated due to a poor understanding, and not specifying the intended meaning, of tawassul through essences. The reality is that the word tawassul is ambiguous and one cannot rush to make judgement on it except after specifying its intent. What becomes apparent after following [this discussion] is that this word bears the following meanings:

First: the purpose of the mutawassil (the one performing tawassul) is that the Real Giver is Allah (Glorified and Exalted is He), but He authorises these matters to a servant from among His pious servants. So he remembers Allah (Glorified is He) in du'a seeking blessing through His name, but the objective is du'a to the mutawassal bihi (the intermediary), because it is through his execution the matters come to pass according to his belief. This is shirk by ijma' (consensus).

Second: one supplicates to Allah Most High with the intention that He authorises the matters to the mutawassal bihi presently, so he will accomplish his need. This also has the ruling of the first, because the disposer (mutasarraf) in all affairs is Allah Most High, and He has no partner in this.

Third: tawassul in the sense of seeking du'a from the mutawassal bihi, because it is more hopeful that his du'a will be accepted by Allah (Glorified and Exalted is He) due to his righteousness and virtue. Tawassul in this sense is permissible by ijma'. This kind of tawassul has not been established except through the living, so its permissibility is restricted to the living. This meaning [of tawassul] is the intent of the famous hadith of Anas (Allah be pleased with him) that whenever drought threatened them, 'Umar ibn al-Khattab (Allah be pleased with him), used to seek rain through al-'Abbas ibn 'Abd al-Muttalib (Allah be pleased with him). He said: "O Allah! We used to take our Prophet as a means to You, and You would give us rain, and now we take the uncle of our Prophet as a means, so give us rain." Al-Bukhari transmitted it in Kitab al-Istisqa' (no. 1010, Chapter: 3).

Fourth: tawassul in the sense of swearing to Allah by the essence of the mutawassal bihi and this too is not permissible because swearing by creatures, as Ibn Taymiyya (Allah have mercy on him) said, is not permissible to another creature, so how can it be permissible to the Creator?

Fifth: one supplicates to Allah (Glorified and Exalted is He) taking as a means his relationship with a pious servant who it is hoped is one brought close to Allah (Most High), and this is what some 'ulama described as du'a to Allah through the blessing of a pious servant. This includes the living and the dead.



It occurred to this weak servant [Mufti Taqi Uthmani] (Allah pardon him) that tawassul in this sense does not stem from anything besides tawassul through good deeds on the permissibility of which *ijma'* has occurred. This is because one who says, "O Allah I seek a means to You through a certain servant of Yours", and does not intend by it the first three meanings, he does not mean by that anything besides, "I love that servant and I believe in his virtue and righteousness, and perhaps he is beloved to You, so I seek to draw Your mercy through my relationship with him". This in reality is seeking to draw the mercy of Allah Most High through one's relationship with a pious man and his love for him.

If one were to clarify this in his *du'a* and say: "O Allah! Indeed I seek a means to You through my love for the Prophet (Allah bless him and grant him peace)", then it appears that 'Allamah Ibn Taymiyyah (Allah have mercy on him) did not forbid it because he expressed the permissibility of tawassul through good deeds, and the love of the Prophet (Allah bless him and grant him peace) is from the most virtuous of good deeds by *ijma'*. I saw in the words of 'Allamah Ibn Taymiyyah (Allah have mercy on him) what is almost unequivocal in expressing this. He (Allah have mercy on him) said: "Yes, if one asked Allah through his belief in Muhammad (Allah bless him and give him peace) and his love for him, and his obedience to him and his adherence to him, it would be asking Him through a great means which requires the *du'a* be accepted. Rather, this is the greatest of means and intermediaries." (Qa'idatun Jalilatun fi l-Tawassuli wa l-Wasila by Ibn Taymiyyah, p. 65)

Thus, if a man were to abbreviate his statement and say: "O Allah! Indeed I take a means to You through the Prophet" and does not intend thereby anything besides this meaning we mentioned which is from the most obvious meanings of tawassul, then there is nothing in the Quran and Sunnah or the principles established through them that prohibits this form of tawassul. Rather it is more deserving of being permissible than tawassul through other good deeds, because one who seeks a means by his prayer, fasting or charity, it may be tainted by the blemish of vanity in his good deed. As for one who seeks a means through his love for the Prophet (Allah bless him and grant him peace) or through the love of his Companions (Allah be pleased with them), for example, this is closer to humility, as it is akin to saying: "I do not have an action good enough for me to seek nearness to You by means of it, but I love these brought close [to You], and by the means of this love I seek Your help and I seek to draw Your mercy."

This conforms to what Anas (Allah be pleased with him) narrated. He said, "A man asked the Prophet about the Hour saying: 'When will the Hour be?' The Prophet (Allah bless him and give him peace) said: 'What have you prepared for it?' The man said: 'Nothing, except that I love Allah and His Messenger.' The Prophet said: 'You will be with those whom you love.'" Anas said: "We had never been so glad as we were on hearing that saying of the Prophet 'You will be with those whom you love.'" Anas said: "I love the Prophet, Abu Bakr and 'Umar, and I hope that I will be with them because of my love for them though my deeds are not similar to theirs." Al-Bukhari transmitted it in *Manaqib 'Umar (radiya Llahu 'anhu)* (no. 3688) and Muslim in *al-Birr wa l-Silah, Bab al-Mar' ma'a man Ahabb*.



Tawassul in this sense is established from the Sunna. Al-Tirmidhi transmitted from ‘Uthman ibn Hunayf (Allah be pleased with him) that a blind man came to the Prophet (Allah bless him and give him peace) and said: “Pray to Allah to cure me.” The Prophet (Allah bless him and grant him peace) said, “If you wish I will pray and if you wish you may be patient and that will be better for you.” He said, “Pray to Him.” The narrator said, “So the Prophet instructed him to make ablution (wudu), perfect his ablution and then supplicate with this prayer: ‘Oh Allah, I ask You and turn to You through Your Prophet Muhammad, the Prophet of Mercy. I turn through you (O Muhammad) to my Lord in this need of mine, that it be fulfilled. O Allah, grant him intercession for me’”. Al-Tirmidhi said, “this hadith is good and authentic (hasan sahih), uncommon (gharib), we do not know it but from this route from the hadith of Abu Ja’far i.e. al-Khatami” (Kitab al-Da’wat, Chapter 119, Hadith 3478).

Al-Hakim transmitted this in al-Mustadrak (1:519) and his wording is: “Go to the basin and perform ablution, then pray two rak’as, then say: ‘O Allah! Indeed I ask You and turn to You through Your Prophet Muhammad, the Prophet of Mercy. O Muhammad! Indeed I turn through you to my Lord that He may restore to me my sight. O Allah, grant him intercession for me and grant me intercession for myself.’” Al-Hakim authenticated it and al-Dhahabi agreed with him. It was also narrated by Ibn Majah, al-Nasai and Ibn Khuzayma in his Sahih.

Al-Shawkani (Allah have mercy on him) said in Tuhfat al-Dhakhirin (p. 162) after transmitting this hadith, “Al-Tabrani transmitted it and said after mentioning its routes through which he narrated [the hadith], ‘the hadith is sahih.’” Ibn Khuzayma authenticated it. Thus, these imams authenticated this hadith. Al-Nasa’i was alone in mentioning sala and al-Tabrani in some of the routes through which he narrated it agreed with him. The hadith contains proof of the permissibility of tawassul through the Messenger of Allah (Allah bless him and grant him peace) to Allah (Mighty and Glorious is He), with the belief that the Doer is Allah (Glorified and Exalted is He) and that He is the Giver and Withholder. Whatever He wills happens, and whatever He does not will does not happen.

As for ‘Allama ibn Taymiyya’s response to this hadith after recognising its authenticity, that is his statement in his book Al-Tawassul wa ‘l-Wasilah (p 64), “There is no proof for them in the hadith of the blind man, since it is clear that it is only tawassul through the du’a of the Prophet (Allah bless him and grant him peace) and for his intercession”, it is an explanation that does not fit the context of the hadith because the man first sought du’a from the Prophet (Allah bless him and grant him peace), then the Prophet (Allah bless him and grant him peace) commanded him to supplicate himself for himself seeking a means through the Prophet (Allah bless him and grant him peace). If the intent in tawassul here was seeking du’a from the Prophet (Allah bless him and grant him peace), the Messenger of Allah (Allah bless him and grant him peace) would have supplicated for him and the matter would have ended, but he (Allah bless him and grant him peace) taught him the method of du’a for himself for the future and taught him thereby to seek a means through his essence. The meaning of this here is nothing besides seeking a means to Allah Most High through his love for the Prophet (Allah bless him and grant him peace). As for his saying: “O Allah grant him intercession for me”, the intent of it is the acceptance of his (Allah bless him and grant him peace) du’a, for it appears that the Prophet (Allah bless him and grant him peace) promised him that he would soon supplicate for him, so he instructed him to supplicate for the acceptance of his intercession and du’a.



From that which proves the accuracy of what we said is that if it were the case that tawassul here is in the sense of seeking du'a from the Prophet (Allah bless him and grant him peace), this kind of tawassul would not be permissible after his (Allah bless him and grant him peace) death, according to the view that Ibn Taymiyya (Allah have mercy on him) took, but it occurs in the narration of al-Tabrani from 'Uthman ibn Hunayf that he instructed a man to supplicate with this wording after his death. The wording of the narration of al-Tabrani is: "it was narrated from 'Uthman ibn Hunayf that a man would come to 'Uthman ibn 'Affan due to a need he had, but 'Uthman did not turn to him nor consider his need. The man then met 'Uthman ibn Hunayf and complained of this to him. 'Uthman ibn Hunayf said to him "Go to the basin and perform ablution, then go to the mosque, pray therein two rak'ats and then say: 'O Allah! Indeed I ask You and turn to You through Your Prophet the Prophet of Mercy..." Al-Haythami mentioned it in Majma' al-Zawa'id and said: "Al-Tabrani said at the end of it: 'the hadith is authentic.'"

As for du'a "through the right of so and so" and "through the rank of so and so" then its ruling at the outset would depend on the meaning intended by it. Thus, if the one saying it intended that he has a binding right over Allah Most High due to the essence of the one through whom a means is taken, this is clear error. If on the other hand, he intended by it that from the grace of Allah Most High is His promise to reward the righteous and this may be construed as a right over Him, this is a correct meaning. Likewise if he intended that the one through whom a means is taken has a rank in the sight of Allah Most High i.e. an acceptable rank due to his faith and good deeds, then there is no harm in this also.

However, du'a through the means of this right or rank has two possible meanings: First, that one believes that whenever he mentions the right of that pious man or his rank in du'a it is obligatory on Allah to respond to him, then this too is haram, because this is not obligatory on Allah Most High in any circumstance. Second, that one intends that the mutawassal bihi has an acceptable rank in the sight of Allah Most High and I love him, and through the means of my love for him I seek the help of Allah Most High and I seek to draw His mercy; this is a correct meaning, which is not proscribed as has just passed.

However, since his statement "the right of so and so" or the "rank of so and so" bears the corrupt meaning also, rather the corrupt meaning is more obvious, the fuqaha (jurists) have deemed it undesirable. It was narrated from Abu Hanifa (Allah be pleased with him) and his companions that they forbade it. Al-Haskafi (Allah have mercy on him) said in Al-Durr al-Mukhtar, "... and he disliked his statement 'by the right of Your Messengers, Prophets and Saints.'" Ibn 'Abidin (Allah have mercy on him) said in Radd al-Muhtar (6:397), "Merely the conception of what is impermissible in the phrase is sufficient [reason for its] prohibition as we have set forth earlier...And for this reason, and Allah knows best, our imams have unconditionally declared its prohibition."

As for a man saying in du'a, "O Allah! Indeed I seek a means to You through Your Prophet", it is not equivalent to this because his most obvious meaning is what we said of tawassul through the love of the Prophet (Allah bless him and grant him peace), so it is permissible in this sense, and prohibited in the corrupt senses.



All that we mentioned is the verification of the matter at hand. When, however, it is apparent the beliefs of the laity are corrupt, and they begin to intend by tawassul meanings that contain shirk or what comes close to it, then avoiding it is better even if it is [done] with a correct meaning, especially since this kind of tawassul has not been established except in a few incidents in the time of the Companions, and most of their supplications were devoid of it. There is no doubt that adherence to the transmitted supplications is more deserving and more hopeful of being accepted.

It would be best for me to end this short study with beneficial and comprehensive words from the teacher of our teachers Imam Ashraf 'Ali al-Thanawi (Allah have mercy on him). He (Allah have mercy on him) said in Imdad al-Fatawa (4:372), "Indeed tawassul through those accepted by Allah in du'a, whether they are living or dead, is permissible. The tawassul of 'Umar (Allah be pleased with him) through al-'Abbas (Allah be pleased with him) in seeking rain has been established and so has the tawassul through the Messenger (Allah bless him and grant him peace) in the story of the blind man after the death of the Prophet (Allah bless him and grant him peace). There is therefore no doubt in the permissibility. Yes, when extremism in this matter becomes apparent in the laity of the people, and they were prohibited for that reason, the prohibition in this case is also correct. However, the belief that Allah (Most High) must respond to the tawassul, or aid is hoped [directly] from those brought close (to Allah) through whom a means is taken, or their names come to be like the names of Allah (Most High), all of that is an increase in the Shari'ah." Allah (Glorified and Exalted is He) knows best.

والله اعلم وعلمه أحكم وأنم