26259 - Types of Intercession in Islam

the question

I hear some people saying that intercession belongs only to Allah and can only be asked of Him, while others say that Allah has given the power of intercession to His Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) and to His righteous close friends (Awliya') so that we may ask them to intercede for us. What is the correct view, and can you quote shar'i evidence to support it?

Summary of answer

Intercession in Islam means mediating for someone else to gain some benefit or ward off some harm. Intercession in Islam is of two types: 1- intercession that will take place in the Hereafter, 2- intercession concerning matters of this world.

Detailed answer

Praise be to Allah.

What is intercession in Islam?

Intercession means mediating for someone else to gain some benefit or ward off some harm.

Types of intercession in Islam

It is of two types:

1. The first type: intercession that will take place in the Hereafter, on the Day of Resurrection.
2. The second type: intercession concerning matters of this world.

Types of intercession in the Hereafter

With regard to the intercession that will take place in the Hereafter, it is of two types:

- The first type: exclusive intercession, which will be granted only to the Messenger (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him), and no one else in creation will have a share in that with him. This is of various kinds:
- The greater intercession. This is the station of praise and glory (Al-Maqam Al-Mahmud) which Allah has promised to him, when He said (interpretation of the meaning):

{And in some parts of the night (also) offer the Salah (prayer) with it (i.e. recite the Quran in the prayer) as an additional prayer (Tahajjud optional prayer Nawafil) for you (O Muhammad). It may be that your Lord will raise you to Maqam Mahmud (a station of praise and glory, i.e., the honour of intercession on the Day of Resurrection)} [Al-Isra' 17:79]

What this intercession means is that he will intercede for all of mankind when Allah delays the Reckoning and they have waited for so long in the place of gathering on the Day of Resurrection. Their distress and anxiety will reach a point where they can no longer bear it, and they will say, "Who will intercede for us with our Lord so that He will pass judgement amongst His slaves?" and they will wish to leave that place. So the people will come to the Prophets, each of whom will say, "I am not able for it," until when they come to our Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him), he will say, "I am able for it, I am able for it." So he will intercede for them, that judgement may be passed. This is the greater intercession, and it is one of the things that belong exclusively to the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him).

There are many Hadiths which speak of this intercession, in Al-Bukhari and Muslim and elsewhere, such as the Hadith narrated by Al-Bukhari in his Sahih (1748) from Ibn `Umar (may Allah be pleased with him): "The people will fall on their knees on the Day of Resurrection, each nation following its Prophet, saying, 'O So and so, intercede!' until intercession is granted to the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him). On that Day Allah will resurrect him to a station of praise and glory."

- Intercession for the people of Paradise to enter Paradise.

Anas ibn Malik (may Allah be pleased with him) said: “The Messenger of Allah (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) said: ‘I will come to the gate of Paradise on the Day of Resurrection and will ask for it to be opened. The gatekeeper will say, “Who are you?” I will say, “Muhammad.” He will say, “I was commanded not to open it for anyone before you.”’” (Narrated by Muslim, 333)

According to another report narrated by Muslim (332), “I will be the first one to intercede concerning Paradise.”

- The intercession of the Messenger (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) for his uncle Abu Talib:

It was narrated from Abu Sa`id Al-Khudri (may Allah be pleased with him) that mention was made of his uncle Abu Talib in the presence of the Messenger of Allah (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him). He said, “Perhaps my intercession will benefit him on the Day of Resurrection, and he will be placed in a shallow part of the Fire which will come up to his ankles and cause his brains to boil.” (Narrated by Al-Bukhari, 1408 and Muslim, 360)

- His intercession so that some people of his ummah will enter Paradise without being brought to account.

This kind of intercession was mentioned by some of the scholars, who quoted as evidence the lengthy Hadith of Abu Hurayrah concerning intercession, in which it says: “Then it will be said, ‘O Muhammad, raise you head; ask, it will be given to you; intercede, your intercession will be accepted.’ So I will raise my head and say, ‘My ummah, O Lord; my ummah, O Lord; my ummah, O Lord.’ It will be said, ‘Admit those among your ummah who are not to be brought to account through the right-hand gate of Paradise. They will share the other gates with the people of other nations.’” (Narrated by Al-Bukhari, 4343 and Muslim, 287).

- The second type: general intercession. This will be granted to the Messenger (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) and others – angels, Prophets and righteous people – will

share in it as Allah wills. This is of various kinds:

1. Intercession for some people who have entered Hell, that they might be brought forth from it. There is a great deal of evidence for this, for example:

The Marfu` Hadith of Abu Sa`id Al-Khudri (may Allah be pleased with him) in Sahih Muslim (269): “By the One in Whose hand is my soul, none of you can be more insistent in asking Allah to restore his rights against his opponent than the believers who will ask Allah, on the Day of Resurrection, (to grant them the power of intercession) for their brothers who are in the Fire. They will say, ‘Our Lord, they used to fast with us and pray and perform Hajj.’ It will be said to them, ‘Bring out those whom you recognize, so the Fire will be forbidden to burn them.’ So they will bring out many people… And Allah will say: ‘The angels have interceded, and the Prophets have interceded, and the believers have interceded. There is none left but the Most Merciful of those who show mercy.’ Then He will seize a handful of the Fire and bring forth from it people who never did anything good.”

2. Intercession for people who deserve Hell, that they may not enter it. This may be indicated by the words of the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him): “There is no Muslim who dies and forty men who associate nothing with Allah pray the funeral prayer for him, but Allah will accept their intercession for him.” (Narrated by Muslim, 1577). For this intercession happens before the deceased enters Hell, and Allah will accept their intercession concerning that.
3. Intercession for some of the believers who deserve Paradise, that they may be raised in status in Paradise. For example, Muslim (may Allah have mercy on him) narrated (1528) that the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) prayed for Abu Salamah and said: “O Allah, forgive Abu Salamah and raise his status among those who are guided, and take good care of his family that he has left behind. Forgive us and him, O Lord of the Worlds, make his grave spacious for him and illuminate it for him.”

Conditions of intercession in the Hereafter

The evidence indicates that intercession in the Hereafter will only happen if the following conditions are met:

1. Allah must approve of the one for whom intercession is made, because Allah says (interpretation of the meaning):

“and they cannot intercede except for him with whom He is pleased.” [Al-Anbiya’ 21:28]

This implies that the one for whom intercession is made must be a believer in Tawhid, because Allah is not pleased with the polytheists. Al-Bukhari (97) narrated from Abu Hurayrah (may Allah be pleased with him) that he said: “It was said, ‘O Messenger of Allah, who will be the most blessed of people by your intercession of the Day of Resurrection?’ The Messenger of Allah (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) said: “I thought, O Abu Hurayrah, that no one would ask me about this Hadith before you, because I have seen how keen you are to learn Hadith. The people who will be most blessed by my intercession on the Day of Resurrection are those who say La ilaha illallah sincerely from the heart.’”

2. Allah must give permission to the intercessor to intercede, because Allah says (interpretation of the meaning):

{Who is he that can intercede with Him except with His Permission?} [Al-Baqarah 2:255]

3. Allah must approve of the intercessor, because Allah says (interpretation of the meaning):

{…whose intercession will avail nothing except after Allah has given leave for whom He wills and is pleased with} [An-Najm 53:26]

And the Messenger (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) has stated that those who curse much will not be intercessors on the Day of Resurrection, as Muslim narrated (4703) that Abu Ad-Darda’ (may Allah be pleased with him) said: “I heard the Messenger of Allah (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) say, ‘Those who curse much will not be witnesses or intercessors on the Day

of Resurrection.’”

Type of intercession in this world

The second type of intercession is that which has to do with matters of this world. This is of two types:

1. That which is within a person’s ability to do something. This is permissible, subject to two conditions:

- That it should have to do with a permissible thing. It is not correct to intercede concerning something that will result in the loss of people’s rights or in wrong being done to them. It is also not correct to intercede concerning something that is haram, such as those who intercede concerning those who deserve the hadd punishment, asking that it not be carried out on them. Allah says (interpretation of the meaning):

{Help you one another in Al-Birr and At-Taqwa (virtue, righteousness and piety); but do not help one another in sin and transgression.} [Al-Ma’idah 5:2]

According to a Hadith narrated by `A’ishah (may Allah be pleased with her), Quraysh were concerned about a Makhzumi woman who had stolen, and they said, “Who will speak to the Messenger of Allah (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) concerning her? Who better than Usamah, the beloved of the Messenger of Allah (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him)?” So Usamah spoke to him, and the Messenger of Allah (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) said, “Are you interceding concerning one of the hadd punishments prescribed by Allah?” Then he stood up and addressed the people, and said, “O people, those who came before you were only destroyed because if one of their nobles stole they would let him off but if one of the weak stole they would carry out the punishment on him. By Allah, if Fatimah the daughter of Muhammad were to steal, I would cut off her hand.” (Narrated by Al-Bukhari, 3261 and Muslim, 3196).

Al-Bukhari (5568) and Muslim (4761) narrated that Abu Musa (may Allah be pleased with him) said that if someone came with a need to the Messenger of Allah (peace and blessings of Allah be upon

him), he would turn to those who were sitting with him and say, “Intercede, and you will be rewarded, and Allah will decree what He wills through the lips of His Messenger.”

- In his heart, the person must depend on Allah alone to realise his aim and ward off what is disliked. He should know that this intercessor is no more than a means which Allah has permitted to us, and that benefit and harm are in the hand of Allah alone. This meaning is expressed clearly in the Book of Allah and the Sunnah of His Messenger (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him).

If either of these two conditions is not met, then the intercession is not allowed.

2. That which is not within a person’s ability to do something, such as seeking intercession from the dead and occupants of graves, or from a living person who is absent, believing that he is able to hear and meet one’s needs. This is the kind of intercession that constitutes shirk, which is clearly forbidden in many verses of the Quran and hadiths from the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him), because it ascribes to them attributes which belong only to the Creator, for He is the Ever-living Who never dies.

Their specious argument is that the awliya’ (“saints”) and Sayyids intercede for their relatives and for those who call on them and take them as friends and love them, and because of that they ask them for intercession. This is exactly what Allah described the early polytheists as doing, when they said,

{These are our intercessors with Allah.} [Yunus 10:18 – interpretation of the meaning] –referring to those whom they worshipped among the angels, righteous people and others, and meaning that they would intercede for them with Allah. In the same way, the contemporary polytheists say “the Awliya’ (‘saints’) intercede for us; we cannot ask of Allah (directly) so we ask them and they ask of Allah.” And they say that the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) and all the Prophets and righteous people were given the power of intercession, and we call upon them and say, intercede for us as Allah has given you the power of intercession. They give the example of kings in this world, and say that the kings of this world can only be approached through

intercession; if you need something, you go to their friends and those who are close to them, their ministers, gatekeepers, servants, etc., to intercede for you so that the king can deal with your matter; so we reach Allah by approaching and asking His awliya' and the Sayyids who are close to Him. By doing this they fall into the same shirk as those who came before them, and they compare the Creator to His creation.

Allah tells us of a righteous man in Surat Ya-Sin, who said (interpretation of the meaning):

{Shall I take besides Him Alihah (gods)? If the Most Gracious (Allah) intends me any harm, their intercession will be of no use for me whatsoever.} [Ya-Sin 36:23]

And Allah tells us that the disbelievers will confess it themselves:

"They will say: 'We were not of those who used to offer the prayers, Nor we used to feed the needy; And we used to talk falsehood (all that which Allah hated) with vain talkers. And we used to belie the Day of Recompense, Until there came to us (the death) that is certain' So no intercession of intercessors will be of any use to them} [Al-Muddaththir 74:43-48 – interpretation of the meaning]

The Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him), even though he will be given the power of intercession on the Day of Resurrection, will not be able to use it until after Allah has given him permission and has approved of the one for whom intercession is to be made.

Hence he (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) did not let his ummah ask him to intercede for them in this world, and that was not narrated from any one of his Companions (may Allah be pleased with them). If that had been a good thing, he would have conveyed it to his ummah and called them to do it, and his Companions who were keen to do good would have hastened to do it. Thus we know that seeking intercession from him now (in this world) is a great wrong, because it involves calling upon someone other than Allah and doing something which is an obstacle to intercession, for intercession is available only to those who sincerely believe in Allah alone (Tawhid)

The people in the place of standing (on the Day of Resurrection) will only ask the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) to intercede for them so that judgement will be passed, because he will be there with them and because he will be able to turn to his Lord and ask Him. This is like asking a person who is alive and present to supplicate for one, which is something that he is able to do.

Hence it is not narrated that any of the people in the place of standing will ask him (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) to intercede for them that their sins might be forgiven.

Those who ask him for intercession now, based on the fact that it will be permissible to ask him for that in the Hereafter, if their claims were justified, would have to limit what they say to, “O Messenger of Allah, intercede for us that judgement may be passed”! But they do something other than that. They do not limit it to a request for intercession, rather they ask the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) – and others – to relieve their distress and send down mercy; they turn to him at times of calamity; they pray to him on land and sea, at times of ease and times of difficulty, ignoring the words of Allah (interpretation of the meaning):

{Is not He (better than your gods) Who responds to the distressed one, when he calls on Him, and Who removes the evil, and makes you inheritors of the earth, generations after generations?} [An-Naml 27:62]

From the above it is clear to every fair-minded person that the correct kind of intercession is intercession that depends on the permission and approval of Allah, because all intercession belongs to Him. That also includes asking for intercession from living people who are able to do that concerning worldly matters, for which Allah has granted permission. It should be pointed out here that this kind of intercession is permitted because Allah has given permission for it, since it involves no kind of emotional attachment to the person, rather the point is that it is a means, like all other means which Islam permits us to use. The kind of intercession which is forbidden is asking someone other than Allah to do something that no one is able to do except Allah, because intercession belongs to no one besides Allah, and no one can do it unless Allah grants him leave and approves of him. So whoever seeks intercession from anyone else has transgressed upon the

exclusive preserve of Allah and has wronged himself, and has exposed himself to being deprived of the intercession of the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) on the Day of Resurrection. We ask Allah to keep us safe and sound, and we ask Him to cause our Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) to intercede for us … Amin.

For more information see *Ash-Shafa`ah ‘Inda Ahl As-Sunnah wal-Jama`ah* by Shaykh Nasir Al-Juday`; *Al-Qawl Al-Mufid* by Shaykh Muhammad ibn `Uthaymin (1/423) and *A’lam As-Sunnah Al-Manshurah* (144).

For more, see these answers: 200252, 121948, and 196054.

And Allah knows best.