114142 - Why do some of the scholars disallow tawassul by virtue of the status of the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him)?

the question

Why do the Salafis regard it as haram to seek Allah’s response to supplication (tawassul) by virtue of the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him), even though all the scholars were agreed that it is permissible, until the emergence of Ibn Taymiyah who was the first one who prohibited it? And even though all the scholars of all madhhabs regarded tawassul as permissible? Why do they insist that it is haram?

Detailed answer

Praise be to Allah.

Firstly:

What is meant by seeking Allah’s response to supplication (tawassul) by virtue of the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) is where a worshipper calls upon his Lord, may He be glorified and exalted, but in his supplication (du`a), he mentions the virtue of the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) so that his supplication may be answered, or so as to expedite his needs; thus he says, I ask You by virtue of the Prophet, or by the status of the Prophet, and the like.

Shaykh al-Islam Ibn Taymiyah (may Allah have mercy on him) said in Majmoo‘ al-Fatawa (1/337-338):

Asking of Allah by mentioning something other than Allah is either swearing an oath thereby, or seeking a divine response by virtue of that thing, such as when the three people in the cave sought a response to their supplication by virtue of their good deeds, or when one seeks a response by asking the Prophets and righteous people to offer supplication for one’s needs.

If it is swearing an oath by something other than Allah in order to urge Him to respond, this is not permissible.

If it is asking Allah to respond by virtue of something that could help to achieve what one seeks, such as asking Him by virtue of righteous deeds in which there was obedience to Allah and His Messenger – such as asking by virtue of one's belief in the Messenger, and one's love for him and loyalty towards him, and the like – this is permissible.

But if it is asking by mere virtue of the person of the Prophets or the righteous, this is not prescribed, and it was prohibited by more than one of the scholars, who said: it is not permissible. However some of them granted a concession allowing it, although the former view is more correct, as stated above, because it is asking through a means that does not lead to the desired outcome.

This is in contrast to one who asks by means of that which may lead to attaining what he seeks, such as asking Allah, may He be glorified, by means of the supplication of the righteous, or by virtue of righteous deeds that one has done in the past. This is permissible, because the supplication of the righteous is a means of attaining what we seek, for which they offer supplication. Similarly, righteous deeds are also a means of attaining Allah's reward. If we seek a response to supplication by means of the supplication of the righteous and by virtue of our good deeds, then we will be seeking a means to draw close to Allah, may He be exalted, and to attain a response to our supplication, through a valid means, as Allah, may He be exalted, says (interpretation of the meaning): "O you who believe! Do your duty to Allah and fear Him. Seek the means of nearness to Him" [al-Maa'idah 5:35]. The means of nearness to Him is righteous deeds. Allah, may He be exalted, says (interpretation of the meaning): "Those whom they call upon desire (for themselves) means of access to their Lord (Allah)," [al-Isra' 17:57].

But if we do not seek to draw close to Allah, may He be glorified, and attain a divine response by means of their supplication or by virtue of our good deeds – rather we seek that by virtue of their persons – the virtue of their persons is not a means that will cause our supplication to be responded to. Thus we would be seeking a divine response through something that is not a means of nearness to Allah. Therefore this was not narrated from the Prophet (blessings and peace of

Allah be upon him) via any sound chain of transmission, and it was not well-known from the early generations (salaf). End quote.

Secondly:

This does not mean that the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) did not have high status before Allah, may He be glorified and exalted, [repeats], as some liars falsely claim to be the view of the Salafis and of Shaykh al-Islam and those who agreed with him, and they accuse them of denying the high status of the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) – Allah forbid, for he is the occupant of the station of praise and glory (al-maqaam al-mahmoud) and is of the most sublime status, the leader of the sons of Adam – blessings and peace of Allah be upon him. But his noble status before Allah does not mean that we should ask of Allah or seek divine response to our supplication by means of his high status.

Shaykh al-Islam (may Allah have mercy on him) said:

What Allah and His Messenger have explained, that there are some people who possess virtue and are of high status before Allah, is sound and true, however the matter should be discussed as follows: if the high status, by virtue of which a person may ask of Allah, is indeed a means of supplications being answered, then it is good to ask by virtue thereof.

But if the worshipper says: by virtue of the high status of So-and-so, then these people (the righteous), if they are really regarded as people of high status and virtue before Allah, which means that He will not punish them and that He will honour them with reward and raise them in status as He has promised them and as He has made it incumbent upon Himself to do – then there is nothing in the fact that they deserve honour from Allah to constitute a means to help this worshipper attain what he is seeking, because that righteous person deserves what he deserves (of honour) because of what he attained of faith and obedience by the help of Allah, whereas this worshipper does not deserve what that great man deserved, so there is nothing in Allah's honouring of that person that is a means to dictate that Allah should respond to this individual's supplication.

If someone says: The means is the supplication (of that righteous man), this is correct if he has already offered supplication for him. But if he has not offered supplication for him, then there is no means. End quote.

He also said in Majmoo‘ al-Fatawa (1/278):

It is well-known that if one said, after the death of the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him): O Allah accept his supplication concerning me– even though the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) did not offer supplication for him, what he is saying does not make any sense.

End quote.

Thirdly:

This matter is to be based on the fact that we know that supplication is worship; in fact it is one of the most sublime acts of worship of Allah, may He be exalted, as the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) said: “Supplication is worship. Your Lord said: ‘Call upon Me; I will answer you.’” Narrated by Abu Dawood (1479) and others; classed as saheeh by al-Albaani.

Acts of worship are to be based on tawqeef [[i.e., they can only be known through divine revelation and sound texts of hadith, and cannot be known through ijtihaad or reason]; in other words, there should be reference to them in the texts of sharee‘ah. As the Messenger of Allah (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) said: “Whoever introduces anything into this matter of ours that is not part of it, it will be rejected.” Narrated by al-Bukhaari (2697) and Muslim (1718), from the hadith of ‘Aa’ishah (may Allah be pleased with her).

According to a report narrated by Muslim: Whoever does an action that is not part of this matter of ours, it will be rejected.”

Imam an-Nawawi (may Allah have mercy on him) said:

What is meant by rejection here is that it is invalid and carries no weight.

This hadith represents an important principle of Islam, and it is an example of the concise speech of the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him). It is a clear rejection of all innovations and fabricated matters.

The second report highlights something extra, which is that some people may stubbornly persist in an innovation that was introduced previously, so when the first report is quoted to them, they say: I did not introduce anything. In that case the second report should be quoted to them, which clearly states that all newly introduced matters will be rejected, regardless of whether the doer introduced it or someone else introduced it previously.

This hadith offers proof for those scholars of usool who say that the prohibition of a thing indicates that it is bad. Those who say that it does not mean that it is bad note that it is an isolated (ahaad) report and is not sufficient to confirm this important principle. But this is an invalid response; this hadith is something that should be upheld and resorted to in order to invalidate evils, and it should be widely used as evidence. End quote.

Once we understand this principle, we will realise that it is not permissible for us to do anything by way of worshipping Allah except things that are referred to in the shar'i texts that were narrated from the Infallible Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him), whether the thing that we do is something that we came up with by ourselves or we are following someone else in that.

Shaykh al-Islam (may Allah have mercy on him) said in Majmoo' al-Fatawa (1/265):

Nothing can be obligatory or mustahabb except on the basis of shar'i evidence which indicates that it is obligatory or mustahabb. Acts of worship can only be obligatory or mustahabb; anything that is not obligatory or mustahabb is not an act of worship. Supplication to Allah, may He be exalted, is an act of worship, if what is sought thereby is something permissible. End quote.

He also said in al-Fatawa (1/278):

With regard to supplication that is attributed to the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him), he did not enjoin it, and what is enjoined is not narrated from the Prophet (blessings and

peace of Allah be upon him). We cannot base any shar'i matter on such reports, like anything else narrated from some individuals among the Sahaabah with regard to that which comes under the heading of worship, what is permissible, what is obligatory or what is prohibited. If no other Sahaabi agreed with him on that and what is proven from the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) is different and is not in harmony with it, then doing it is not a Sunnah that the Muslims should follow; rather at best it is something that is subject to examination and ijtihad, and it is something concerning which the ummah differed so it should be referred to Allah and His Messenger. There are many examples of that.

The Standing Committee was asked about a Muslim who testifies that there is no god but Allah and that Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah, but he says in his supplication: O Allah, give me such and such of the good of this world and the hereafter, by virtue of the status of the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him), or by the barakah (blessing) of the Messenger, or by the sanctity of the Prophet, or by the status of Shaykh at-Tijaani, or by the barakah of Shaykh 'Abd al-Qaadir, or by the sanctity of Shaykh as-Sanoussi – what is the ruling on that?

They replied:

Whoever seeks a response from Allah to his supplication by mentioning the status of the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him), or by his sanctity or barakah, or by the status, sanctity or barakah of anyone else among the righteous, and says "O Allah, by the status, sanctity or barakah of Your Prophet, give me wealth and children, or admit me to Paradise and save me from the punishment of Hell", for example – he is not a mushrik in the sense of major shirk that puts one beyond the pale of Islam, but that is prohibited so as to block the means that lead to shirk, and so as to keep the Muslim away from something that may lead to shirk.

Undoubtedly seeking a divine response (tawassul) by virtue of the status of the Prophets and the righteous is one of the means that may lead to shirk with the passage of time, according to what is indicated and attested to by real-life experience. There is a great deal of evidence in the Qur'an and Sunnah which definitively indicates that blocking the means that lead to shirk and prohibited matters is one of the objectives of sharee'ah, as is indicated by the words of Allah, may He be

exalted (interpretation of the meaning):

“And insult not those whom they (disbelievers) worship besides Allah, lest they insult Allah wrongfully without knowledge. Thus We have made fairseeming to each people its own doings; then to their Lord is their return and He shall then inform them of all that they used to do”

[al-An‘aam 6:108].

Allah, may He be glorified, forbade the Muslims to revile the gods of the mushrikeen that they worshipped besides Allah, even though they are false, lest that become a means that leads the mushrikeen to revile the true God, may He be glorified, in support of their false gods, out of ignorance and enmity on their part. Further examples include the Prophet’s prohibition on taking graves as places of worship, lest they be worshipped; the prohibition on a man being alone with a non-mahram woman; and the prohibition on a woman showing her adornment before non-mahram men… Because seeking a divine response by virtue of the status, sanctity and so on of righteous people in supplication is an act of worship, and acts of worship are to be based on tawqeef [[i.e., they can only be known through divine revelation and sound texts of hadith, and cannot be known through ijtihaad or reason], and there is no text in the Qur’an or the Sunnah of the Messenger (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) and no report from his Companions to support this kind of tawassul, thus it is known that it is an innovation…

See: Fatawa al-Lajnah ad-Daa’imah (1/501-502).

Fourthly:

The questioner’s remark in his question that Ibn Taymiyah was the first one to prohibit this kind of tawassul is not correct. Rather he has learned that from the enemies of Shaykh al-Islam (may Allah have mercy on him). Shaykh al-Islam (may Allah have mercy on him) refuted this argument when he responded to al-Akhnaa’i, who was one of his opponents who made this false accusation against him. He said concerning Shaykh al-Islam: “How many other views did the one who came up with this view hold that were contrary to scholarly consensus.” But Shaykh al-Islam refuted him on several counts, including the following:

… 6. We may accept the statement of one who claims that someone else is going against scholarly consensus, if he is one of those who have knowledge of issues on which there was consensus or concerning which there were differences of opinion, but that requires a great deal of knowledge on the basis of which he may speak of that, and he is not like this one who is objecting to us, even though he does not have good knowledge of the madhhab he claims to follow, or of the views held by the scholars of this madhhab. … How can such a one know the consensus of the Muslim scholars when he is so lacking in knowledge of reports and how to understand them?

7. Using the phrase “How many’ implies that there is a large number of issues, which means that there are so many issues where I went against scholarly consensus. But those who have greater knowledge than this objector and are more widely-read than him tried very hard to count issues where I went against consensus, but they could not come up with even one issue in which I went against consensus. The most that can be said is that they think that in some issue I was going against consensus, as some of them thought with regard to the issue of regarding talaaq as an oath when there is no intention of divorce, concerning which there are reports from the scholars which indicate that there was a dispute concerning this issue and that there was a text of hadith which may indicate that, of which the opponents were not aware.

8. I have never come up with any view concerning any issue except it was based on the view of some scholar who came before me. If any idea or view crossed my mind and I felt comfortable with it, I would not speak of it or support it unless I knew that some of the scholars already held this view. As Imam Ahmad said: “beware of speaking concerning an issue in which you have no precedent from a scholar who came before you.” How can someone who follows this advice come up with a view that is contrary to the consensus of the Muslims, when he does not say anything but it was said by some Muslim scholars before him?

End quote from ar-Radd ‘ala al-Akhnaa’i (457-458)

Fifthly:

With regard to the issue mentioned here, concerning which the questioner said, based on the

views of others, that Shaykh al-Islam went against consensus concerning it, there are proven reports from more than one of the scholars, especially the Hanafis, which state that it is prohibited and is not allowed.

Al-‘Allaamah al-Haskafi said in ad-Durr al-Mukhtaar (5/715):

In at-Taatarkhaaniyyah, quoting from al-Muntaqa, (it is narrated) from Abu Yoosuf, from Abu Haneefah, that it is not appropriate for anyone to call upon Allah except by virtue of His attributes, and the supplication that is allowed and enjoined is what may be understood from the words of Allah, may He be exalted (interpretation of the meaning): “And (all) the Most Beautiful Names belong to Allah, so call on Him by them” [al-A‘raaf 7:180].

The same text appears in al-Muheet al-Burhaani (5/141)

Al-‘Allaamah al-Kaasaani (may Allah have mercy on him) said in Badaa’i‘ as-Sanaa’i‘ (5/126):

It is makrooh for a man to say in his supplication: I ask You by the status of Your Prophets and Messengers, and by the status of So and so – because no one could impose anything on Allah, may He be glorified and exalted.

The same text appears in Tabyeen al-Haqaa’iq Sharh Kanz ad-Daqaa’iq by az-Zayla‘i (6/31). This view was attributed to three scholars, namely: Abu Haneefah and his two companions, Abu Yoosuf and Muhammad ibn al-Hasan. Al-‘Inaayah Sharh al-Hidaayah by al-Baabarati (10/64); Fath al-Qadeer by Ibn al-Humaam (10/64); Durar al-Hukkaam (1/321); Majma‘ al-Anhur Sharh Multaqa al-Abhur (2554).

As-Sayyid Nu‘maan Khayr ad-Deen al-Aloosi al-Hanafi (may Allah have mercy on him) said in Jala’ al-‘Aynayn (516-517):

In all their texts it says that for a worshipper who is seeking a divine response (tawassul) to say “by the virtue of the Prophets and the awliya’ (close friends of Allah), by virtue of the Sacred House and the holy place”, is makrooh in the sense of it being haram, and it is like that which is haram in terms of punishment in Hell, according to Muhammad. They gave us the reason for that,

as they said: Because the created being cannot impose anything on the Creator. End quote.

To see what as-Sayyid Nu‘maan narrated from al-‘Allaamah as-Suwaydi ash-Shaafa‘i, please see: Jala’ al-‘Aynayn (505 ff).

Perhaps from the quotations given above, it will be clear why the Salafis prohibit this type of tawassul, and that Shaykh al-Islam Ibn Taymiyah (may Allah have mercy on him) was not the first one to prohibit it, and he will not be the last either.

See also the answers to questions no. 979, 60041 and 23265

And Allah knows best.