97600 - The hadith about the blind man that is quoted as evidence by those who seek to draw closer to Allah (tawassul) by virtue of the dead

the question

Whilst I was reading Saheeh al-Jaami‘ as-Sagheer, I came across a hadith (1279) that says: “O Allah, I ask You and I turn to You by virtue of Your Prophet Muhammad, the Prophet of mercy; O Muhammad, I turn by virtue of you to my Lord concerning this need of mine, that it might be met for me. O Allah, or accept his intercession for me.” I was confused about this hadith. Is there any evidence in it for those who seek to draw close to Allah (tawassul) by virtue of the dead, as is done by worshippers of graves and their ilk? How can we interpret this hadith?.

Detailed answer

Praise be to Allah.

Imam Ahmad and others narrated with a saheeh isnaad from ‘Uthmaan ibn Haneef that a blind man came to the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) and said: Pray to Allah to heal me. The Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) said: “If you wish, I shall pray for you; and if you wish, I shall delay that for you and that will be better for you.” [According to another report, he said: “… Or if you wish, you can be patient and that will be better for you.”] He said: Pray for me (now). So he instructed him to do wudoo’ and do it well, then to pray two rak‘ahs and say this du‘aa’ (supplication): “O Allah, I ask You and I turn to You by virtue of Your Prophet Muhammad, the Prophet of mercy. O Muhammad, I turn by virtue of you to my Lord concerning this need of mine, that it might be met for me. O Allah, accept his intercession concerning me and accept my intercession concerning him.” So the man did that and he was healed.

Some people are confused by this hadith and think that it constitutes evidence for some innovated types of tawassul (seeking to draw close to Allah), but that is not the case.

This misinterpretation of this hadith has been answered by many of the scholars, who explained that it does not constitute evidence for any of those who believe in innovated kinds of tawassul, whether that is by virtue of the Prophet's person or by virtue of his status, let alone tawassul by virtue of the dead and calling upon them instead of Allah. One of the best precise and academic responses concerning this issue is that which was written by the great scholar Shaykh Muhammad Naasir ad-Deen al-Albaani in his book at-Tawassul Anwaa'uhu wa Ahkaamuhu (available in English under the title Tawassul: Its Types and Its Rulings). Among the comments that he made on this hadith is the following:

As for us, we believe that this hadith does not constitute evidence for them to support seeking to draw closer to Allah (tawassul) by virtue of the Prophet's person; rather it constitutes further evidence for the third type of lawful tawassul – which is tawassul through the du'aa' (supplication) of a righteous man – because the tawassul of the blind man was only by means of the du'aa' of the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) (and not by virtue of his person). The evidence for what we say is to be found in the hadith itself, in abundance. The most important points are as follows:

1.

The blind man only came to the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) to ask him to pray for him; that was when he said: Pray to Allah to heal me. This is seeking to draw closer to Allah (tawassul) by virtue of his du'aa', because he knew that the du'aa' of the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) was more likely to be accepted by Allah, unlike the du'aa' of anyone else. If the blind man's intention was to draw close to Allah by virtue of the Prophet's person or his status, there would have been no need for him to come to the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) and ask him to offer du'aa' for him; rather he could have stayed at home and called upon his Lord by saying, for example: O Allah, I ask You by virtue of Your Prophet and His status before You to heal me and give me my sight. But he did not do that.

2.

The Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) promised to offer supplication (du‘aa’) for him whilst advising him of that which would be better for him, which is when he said: “If you wish, I shall pray for you; and if you wish, you can be patient and that will be better for you.”

3.

The blind man insisted that he offer supplication for him, as he said: Pray for me (now). This implies that the Messenger (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) did offer supplication for him, because he (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) was the best one in fulfilling promises, and he had promised him that he would offer supplication for him if he wanted, as stated above. So there is no doubt that he (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) offered supplication for him. Thus what the blind man wanted was done. After that, the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) turned towards the blind man out of compassion towards him and out of keenness that Allah answer his supplications for this man. So he turned to him and advised him of the second type of lawful tawassul, which is tawassul by virtue of righteous deeds, so as to combine all kinds of good and righteous deeds (to ensure that his need would be met). So he instructed him to do wudoo’ and to pray two rak‘ahs, then to offer supplication for himself. These are all acts of obedience towards Allah, may He be glorified and exalted, that came before the supplication of the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) for him, and these are included in the words of the verse in which Allah says (interpretation of the meaning): “Seek the means of approach to Him” [al-Maa’idah 5:35], as stated above.

Based on this, the entire incident revolves around the supplication (du‘aa’) – as is clear – and there is no mention at all of what they claim.

4.

In the supplication that the Messenger of Allah (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) taught him it says: “O Allah, accept his intercession concerning me.” It is impossible to interpret this as referring to tawassul by virtue of the person or status of the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him), because what is meant is: O Allah, accept his (the Prophet’s) intercession for me; in

other words, Accept his supplication for my vision to be restored to me. The Arabic word shafaa‘ah (translated here as intercession) means supplication. It says in Lisaan al-‘Arab (8/184): Shafaa‘ah (intercession) is the words of the shafee‘ (intercessor) to the king asking him to meet the need of someone else, or the one who asks for something for someone else and intercedes for him to get what he is seeking… End quote.

Thus it is proven that the tawassul of the blind man was only by virtue of the du‘aa’ of the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him), not by virtue of his person.

5.

Among the things that the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) taught the blind man to say was: “and accept my intercession concerning him”. What is meant is: accept my intercession, that is my supplication, that his intercession, that is his supplication that my sight be restored, be accepted. This is the only way in which this sentence can be interpreted; there is no other way of interpreting it.

Hence you see those among later generations who hold different views ignoring this last phrase and not referring to it at all, because it utterly demolishes their interpretation of the hadith.

6.

This hadith is cited by the scholars as being one of the miracles of the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) and one of his supplications that were answered, and an example of what Allah manifested through the blessing of his supplication of extraordinary events and healing from sickness. By virtue of the Prophet’s supplication for this blind man, Allah restored his sight. Hence the scholars of hadith, such as al-Bayhaqi and others, narrated it among the signs of Prophethood (dalaa’il an-nubuwwah). This indicates that the reason for the healing of the blind man was the supplication of the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him).

If the reason for the healing of the blind man was that he sought tawassul by virtue of the Prophet’s status, as it was understood by many later scholars, that would imply that this healing

should also have happened for other blind people who sought tawassul by virtue of his status and sometimes added to it the status of all the Prophets and Messengers, and all the close friends of Allah, the martyrs and the righteous, and the status of anyone who has status with Allah among the angels, mankind and the jinn! But we do not know, and we do not think that anyone knows, of any such incident that was fulfilled throughout the many centuries from the death of the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) until the present day.

From this explanation it becomes clear that what is meant by the words of the blind man in his du'aa', "O Allah, I ask You and I seek to draw close to You by virtue of Your Prophet Muhammad", is: I seek to draw close to You by virtue of the supplication of Your Prophet. The text of the hadith does not mention the supplication, but it is implied. This is something that occurs commonly in Arabic, as in the verse in which Allah says (interpretation of the meaning): "And ask (the people of) the town where we have been, and the caravan in which we returned, and indeed we are telling the truth" [Yoosuf 12:82]; in the original text the word "people" is not mentioned but it is implied.

However, I would say: Even if we assume that the blind man did seek to draw close to Allah by virtue of the Prophet's person, that would be a ruling that applied only to him (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) and not to any other Prophet or righteous person, and applying it to them too is something that would not be acceptable to sound reasoning, because the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) is their leader and the best of them all. It is possible that this is something that Allah bestowed exclusively upon him and not them, like many other qualities that were given only to the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him), according to saheeh reports. When it comes to that which was given exclusively to him, there is no room for applying it to others by analogy. If anyone thinks that the tawassul of the blind man was by virtue of the Prophet's person, then he has to apply it to him only and not to anyone else. This view was narrated from Imam Ahmad and Shaykh al-'Izz ibn 'Abd as-Salaam (may Allah have mercy on them) and it is the only conclusion that can be reached by fair-minded academic research. And Allah is the One Who guides to what is correct.

End quote from at-Tawassul, p. 75ff

And Allah knows best.