

Intercession

Intercession is one of the evident principles of Islam, accepted by all the Islamic sects due to its presentation in the holy Quran and the traditions, though they have diversity of opinions on the result of it. Intercession specifies that the holy men, who enjoy a special status before God, ask Him for the forgiveness of other men's transgressions or their soul elevation.

The holy Prophet (peace be upon him and his descendants) in this regard said,

اعطيت خمساً ... و اعطيت الشفاعة فادخرتها لامتي*

(I was granted with five qualities.... Intercession was granted to me, and I stored it for my nation.)

The limitation of intercession scope:

The holy Quran rejects the idea of the absolute and unconditional intercession. According to the holy Quran, the intercession works when:

Firstly, the intercessor has been permitted to intercede by Allah. Only a special group of human beings who, in addition to their spiritual connection with Allah, have been permitted by Him are able to intercede. The holy Quran in this regard says:

لايملكون الشفاعة الا من اتخذ عند الرحمن عهداً*

(No one has the power of intercession save those who have a covenant with Allah.)

And somewhere else, it says:

* Masnad Ahmad, vol.1, p. 301; Sahih, Bokhari, vol. 1, p.91, Eqtypt edition.

* Maryam Sura, verse no.87

** Maryam Sura, verse no.87

يؤمئذ لا تنفع الشفاعة الا لمن اذن له الرحمن و رضي له قولا**

(On that Day, no intercession is accepted save of him who has Allah's permission and whose word he is pleased with.)

Secondly, he who is interceded must deserve to enjoy the Divine grace. In other words, he should have not cut his spiritual connection with Allah and the intercessors. Therefore, the unbelievers, having no belief in Divinity, as well as some of the Muslim sinners, such as those performing not their prayers, and the murderers, who do not hold any spiritual connection with the Divine intercessors, do not deserve the intercession.

With regard to this fact, the holy Quran says,

فما تنفعهم شفاعة الشافعين*

(No intercession of any intercessor will benefit them.)

And concerning the transgressors, it says,

ما للظالمين من حميم و لا شفيع يطاع**

(The disbelievers swallow their anger since there is no intimate friend to talk to about their distress and no intercessor to help them by listening to their complaint.)

The philosophy of intercession:

Like repentance, intercession is considered as the ray of hope for those who can forsake their own sins and turn back to the straight direction after they have been deviated. And there after, they really change to become Allah's obedient servants. Due to this fact, whenever the sinner feels that he can attain this opportunity in some special conditions (and not in every condition), he endeavors to adjust himself to the conditions.

* Moddassir Sura, verse no.48

** Momen Sura, verse no.18

The result of intercession:

The commentators have diversity of opinion on the result of intercession, whether it causes the forgiveness of one's sins, or brings about the elevation of one's rank; however, according to the Prophet (peace be upon him and his descendants), the former is approved. The Prophet (peace be upon him and his descendants) said,

ان شفاعتي يوم القيامة لاهل الكبائر من امتي*

(My intercession on the Day of Resurrection will even include those who have committed the mortal sins.)

Question: Is it polytheism to beg the real intercessors for intercession?

The answer:

To answer the question, it should be stated that intercession belongs only to Allah; as stated in the holy Quran:

قل لله الشفاعة جميعاً*

(Say: "to Allah belongs all of the intercessions".)

Therefore, begging intercession, which is no more than His due, of others is indeed an act of worshipping none-gods and totally incompatible with monotheism.

The term 'polytheism' is not to attribute polytheism in Allah's Essence, His Creative Power, or His Will but polytheism in worshipping Him.

It is evident that the elaboration of this issue needs a precise interpretation on the concept of worship and servitude, and every one of us clearly knows that any kind of submission or request from the people is not deemed as servitude.

As stated explicitly in the holy Quran, the angels prostrated to Adam:

فاذا سويته و نفخت فيه من روعي فقعوا له ساجدين. فسجد الملائكة كلهم اجمعون*

* Sonan Ibn Majah, vol.2, p.583; Mosnad Ahmad, vol.3,p.213, Sonan Ibn Davood, vol.2, p.537

* Zomar Sura, verse no. 44

* Sad Sura, verses no. 72 & 73

** Yousef Sura, verse no. 100

(After I fashioned him and breathed a spirit from My Presence into him, then you all bow to him. The angels all bowed down to him.)

But the essence of this prostration was not an act of worship; otherwise, Allah would never order the angels to do that.

Also, we all know that Jacob and his sons prostrated to Joseph:

ورفع ابويه علي العرش و خروا له سجدا**

(Joseph placed his father and mother on the throne and they all bowed to him.)

If such a state of prostration was really an act of worship to Joseph, neither Jacob, the Divine and infallible prophet, would do it, nor he would be contented with his sons' act of prostration. Therefore, we must draw a clear distinction between the concept of worship and humility. The reality of worship signifies that man conceives One as God and then worships Him, because He has the strongest Will-power and is Omnipotent to forgive the sins. But, on the contrary, the homage to other men is a sign of reverence when we conceive them neither as God, nor as the Omnipotent.

To answer the question, if we believe that the right of intercession has been submitted to the real intercessors, and they can intercede unconditionally and, as a consequence, forgive our transgressions, such a belief is, no doubt, accounted as polytheism, because we have begged none-gods what only and only God can do. But if we believe that God has permitted a number of His infallible servants the right of intercession in a certain frame without having the sole possession or control of it, we have never thought of those pious as God, but we have begged them for what they deserve to do. In the Prophet's lifetime, the sinners frequently begged him for forgiveness, but he never accused them of polytheism. As quoted from the Prophet (peace be upon him and his descendants):

اتدرون ما خيرني ربي الليلة؟ قلنا الله و رسوله اعلم. قال فانه خيرني بين ان يدخل نصف امتي الجنة و بين الشفاعة فاخترت الشفاعة، قلنا يا رسول الله ادع الله ان يجعلنا من اهلها قال هي لكل مسلم*

(Do you know what Allah bestowed upon me tonight? We replied, "Allah and His Messenger know the best". He went on, "He empowered me to choose

* Sonan, Ibn Majah, vol.2, section Zekr Ul-Shafaa, p.586

** Nesa Sura, verse no.64

between two options: whether half on my nation enter the heaven, or the right of intercession; and I chose the latter”. Then, we said, “O, Messenger! Ask Him for our intercession”, and he said, “Intercession will be for every Muslim”.)

In this hadith, the Prophet’s disciples begged him clearly for intercession as they say,
... ادع الله (*Ask Allah...*)

The holy Quran in this regard says,

ولو انهم اذ ظلموا انفسهم جاؤك فاستغفروا الله و استغفرلهم الرسول لوجدوا الله تواباً رحيماً**

(If they had come to you when they have wronged themselves and had begged Allah’s forgiveness, and the Messenger had begged forgiveness for them, indeed, they would have found that Allah is the Merciful Repentance Acceptor.)

And somewhere else, it says as quoting Jacob’s sons,

قالوا يا ابانا استغفر لنا ذنوبنا انا كنا خاطئين*

(They said, “O, our father! Ask for us, forgiveness from Allah against our sins; verily, we have been sinful”.)

And Jacob (a.s) promised them the Divine forgiveness and never accused them of polytheism.

قال سوف استغفر لكم ربي انه هو الغفور الرحيم**

(Jacob said, “I will soon ask my Creator and Nurturer’s forgiveness for you; verily, Allah is the Merciful Forgiving”.)

* Yousef Sura, verse no.97

** Ibid, verse no 98