

Dua to other than Allah? Tawassul or Istighathah?

By Zuhayr -



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The word “dua” means supplicating to, praying to, invoking, or calling upon someone. The fact that dua is an act of worship is attested to by the Quran and the teachings of the Ahlul Bayt. To worship someone means to show complete submission and humbleness to them, and Islam is nothing but showing such servitude to Allah alone. We are told in the Quran that the very purpose of our creation is to worship Allah (51:56). Therefore, when it is proven that dua is an act of worship, it logically

follows that this act be reserved for Allah alone, and no one else. To supplicate to or invoke entities other than Allah is to consider them partners with Allah in the sense that they can be called upon in times of need. But, in the absence of any proof that makes a creation of Allah worthy of being invoked and called upon, this raises a lot of questions.

A lot of Muslims from different communities believe that it’s permissible to ask for help, aid, and sustenance from prophets, Imams, *awliya*, etc. and they present an array of arguments to support their case. In this article, we will examine those arguments in light of the Quran, authentic hadith, and logic.

We argue that calling upon Allah’s creation (across *ghayb*) is not *tawassul*.

In Sha Allah, we will cover the correct meaning and application of *tawassul* in the light of the Quran and teachings of Ahlul Bayt in another article.

This article focuses on what is often termed as “*istighathah*”.

ARGUMENTS FROM THE QURAN

وقال ربكم ادعوني أستجب لكم ^ع إن الذين يستكبرون عن عبادتي سيدخلون جهنم داخرين

And your Lord says “Call Me, I will respond to you!” Indeed those who are disdainful of my worship will enter Hell, humiliated (Quran, 40:60).

The verse talks about Allah referring to Himself in the third person by using the word رب, which is one of His beautiful names (Quran 7:180, 17:110, 20:8, 59:24), and it means “Lord” or “Sustainer”. It indicates that hearing and answering prayers has to do with Allah’s ربوبية or “Lordship”. The verb ادعوني carries *amr* (أمر), therefore “Call upon Me” is imperative, i.e., an order or commandment from Allah to supplicate to Him. The tone of the verse along with the use of plural pronouns makes it a general one, applicable to us all.

It is incumbent upon His servants to obey the command of Allah. If they refuse to obey Allah, in defiance of His clear injunctions, then they will be labeled as “arrogant”, just like Iblis who refused to prostrate to Adam, peace be upon him, despite Allah’s direct order (Quran, 2:34, 38:74).

Right after the instruction that you call upon Him, Allah promises that He will respond to you, but if you don’t, then Allah promises you a humiliating punishment in Hell.

The use of the word عبادتي (My worship) makes it crystal clear that dua is worship, and refusal to worship the Lord is disbelief, while associating others in this act with Allah is *shirk*. If you call upon other than Allah across the curtain of *ghayb*, you are making dua to them, while knowing that it is reserved for Allah. Allah says, “*All the places of prostration are for Allah, so do not call upon (invoke) anyone with Allah*”. (Quran, 72:18)

وإذا سألك عبادي عني فإني قريب ^ط أجيب دعوة الداع إذا دعان ^ط فليستجيبوا لي وليؤمنوا بي لعلهم يرشدون

And when My servants ask you, [O Muhammad], concerning Me – indeed I am near. I respond to the invocation of the supplicant when he calls upon Me. So let them respond to Me [by obedience] and believe in Me that they may be [rightly] guided (Quran, 2:186).

Some people think that unless they make dua through an intercessor (or mediator, intermediary) (شفيع), which they hold is a form of *wasilah* (وسيلة), their dua won't reach Allah. This is simply not true. Allah says: *We are closer to him (the human) than his jugular vein. (Quran, 50:16).* He (s.w.t.) has opened the door of dua for us, and throughout the Quran he has asked us to call upon Him. And this is not restricted or limited to certain special individuals, but rather, the invitation of Allah that one calls upon him is universal—for all of his servants. You respond to Allah's order by obeying it, making dua to Him alone, and He will respond to you, as promised. This analysis will be confirmed by Imam Sajjad's dua which we will quote later.

أمن يجيب المضطر إذا دعاه ويكشف السوء ويجعلكم خلفاء الأرض أإله مع الله قليلا ما تذكرون

Or who answers the call of the distressed when he calls upon Him and removes his distress and makes you inheritors of the earth? Is there a god with Allah? Little is the admonition that you take! (Quran, 27:62)

The verse is in the form of a rhetorical question, one which is not asked to seek an answer, but rather, to challenge or repudiate, and this is a typical style of discourse present throughout the Quran. What is meant by the above verse is negation of such claims regarding anyone who is not Allah, which encompasses all of creation.

Therefore, the import of this verse is: “No one but Allah answers and responds to the supplication or call of the distressed, needy, troubled person when he calls upon Him. It is only Allah who removes the distress, eases the difficulty, and rids you of your afflictions or burdens and makes you inheritors on the earth. There is no God besides Allah, but you do not take admonition.”

The question *أإله مع الله* (Is there a god with Allah?), proves that doing dua to other than Allah, seeking response and aid, is setting up partners with Allah, taking them as gods with Him. This is because hearing prayers and answering them is Allah's job alone, as He is All-Hearing or the

Hearer of supplications, and He has not made anyone a partner (شريك) with Himself in such attributes.

قل أرأيتم ما تدعون من دون الله أروني ماذا خلقوا من الأرض أم لهم شرك في السماوات^ت انتوني بكتاب من قبل هذا أو أثارة من علم إن كنتم صادقين
ومن أضل ممن يدعو من دون الله من لا يستجيب له إلى يوم القيامة وهم عن دعائهم غافلون
وإذا حشر الناس كانوا لهم أعداء وكانوا بعبادتهم كافرين

Say, "Have you considered that which you call upon besides Allah? Show me what they have created from the earth or did they have partnership in the heavens? Bring me a book from before this or a trace of knowledge if you are truthful." And who is more misguided than one who calls upon besides Allah those who will not respond to him till the day of resurrection, and they are, of their invocation, unaware. (Quran, 46:4-6).

*To be able to supplicate to entities other than Allah, you need to have proof regarding them possessing the ability to hear you and answer you across the curtain of *ghayb*, and this evidence needs to be from Allah Himself.*

To be able to supplicate to entities other than Allah, you need to have proof regarding them possessing the ability to hear you and answer you across the curtain of *ghayb*, and this evidence needs to be from Allah Himself. Allah deserves to be invoked because He has created the earth and the heavens, while those whom you supplicate to are themselves created. They do not have any partnership with Allah in the creation of whatever is in the heavens or the earth. So, who is more deserving of being beseeched? The Creator or the creation?

They are unaware of your supplication while you are in this world, and there is a veil of *ghayb* separating you and them. They will only be informed about you praying to them when all your deeds are out in the open on the day of judgment, the day when the veils will be lifted (Quran, 50:22). **This is what separates seeking help of someone in the same physical realm as us from calling upon someone across the curtain of *ghayb*.**

The phrase من دون الله is a blanket statement, which covers everyone, everything, and every single entity lesser than and other than Allah. There are no exceptions to this, and it covers every single created being—the prophets, the Imams, the awliya, the angels, deceased humans, the martyrs, etc.

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يُولِجُ اللَّيْلَ فِي النَّهَارِ وَيُولِجُ النَّهَارَ فِي اللَّيْلِ وَسَخَّرَ الشَّمْسَ وَالْقَمَرَ كُلًّا يَجْرِي لِأَجَلٍ مُّسَمًّى ذَلِكُمْ اللَّهُ رَبُّكُمْ لَهُ الْمُلْكُ وَالَّذِينَ تَدْعُونَ مِنْ دُونِهِ مَا يَمْلِكُونَ مِنْ قِطْمِيرٍ
إِنْ تَدْعُوهُمْ لَا يَسْمَعُوا دَعَاءَكُمْ وَلَوْ سَمِعُوا مَا اسْتَجَابُوا لَكُمْ وَيَوْمَ الْقِيَامَةِ يَكْفُرُونَ بِشِرْكِكُمْ وَلَا يُنَبِّئُكَ مِثْلَ خَبِيرٍ
يَا أَيُّهَا النَّاسُ أَنْتُمُ الْفُقَرَاءُ إِلَى اللَّهِ وَاللَّهُ هُوَ الْغَنِيُّ الْحَمِيدُ

He merges the night into the day, and He merges the day into the night; and He regulates the sun and the moon, each running for a stated term. Such is Allah, your Lord; His is the sovereignty. As for those you call upon besides Him, they do not possess [even] a qitmir. If you call upon them, they cannot hear your call. And even if they heard, they would not answer you. And on the Day of Resurrection, they will reject your shirk. None informs you like an Expert. O' humankind! It is you who are the poor, in need of God; while God is the Rich, the Praiseworthy (Quran, 35:13-15).

The above verses have some salient features:

1. They begin by introducing Allah, declaring His sovereignty and lordship over the heavens and the earth.
2. They separate from Allah those whom you call besides Him. Again, the blanket statement من دونه is used, which includes every entity lesser than Allah.
3. They negate any sort of sovereignty, authority, or power that you may attribute to those other than Allah when you make dua to them. For Allah, the verse says: رَبُّكُمْ لَهُ الْمُلْكُ, which means “Your

Lord, for Him is the sovereignty”, but for others it says: *ما يملكون*, which comes from the same root as *ملك* (dominion, kingdom). It shows that those entities that human beings invoke besides Allah do not even possess authority over something as small and insignificant as a *قطمير* (*qitmir*) which means “the thread of a date seed”.

4. They negate your assumption that those in *ghayb* can hear your dua by saying: *لا يسمعون دعاءكم*. It corroborates the point made in the aforementioned passage of Surah Ahqaf about them being unaware of your dua until the Day of Judgment.

5. If for the sake of argument the above assumption is accepted as true, then it denies any sort of response you may expect by invoking those apart from Allah by saying: *ما استجابوا لكم* (they would not answer you or respond to you).

6. On the day of *qiyamah*, these very entities whom you invoke besides Allah will deny your “*shirk*”. They corroborate the point made in all the previous verses about dua being worship (*ibadah*) and that *ibadah* of (here, making dua to) *ghayrallah* is shirk. Whoever you claim can hear your supplication across *ghayb* will deny your claims, and express disassociation from your blasphemy on the Final Day when the curtain of *ghayb* is lifted.

7. They remind us of our humanity and dependency on the Almighty Creator, how we are needy of Him, but He is not in need of us.

Keeping the above discussion in mind, let us look at another passage from the same Surah:

قل أرأيتم شركاءكم الذين تدعون من دون الله أرؤني ماذا خلقوا من الأرض أم لهم شرك في السماوات أم آتيناهم كتابا فهم على بينت منه بل إن يعد الظالمون بعضهم بعضا إلا غورا

Say, “Have you considered those partners of yours that you invoke instead of Allah? Show me what they have created from the earth. Or do they have any share in the heavens?” Have We given them a scripture so that they stand on a manifest proof from it? In fact, the wrongdoers promise one another nothing but delusions (Quran, 35:40).

The message in the above verse is similar to that of 46:5, where those that invoke others instead of Allah are asked to show their proof. In order for you to call upon or make dua to anyone, you need

to prove the following things (according to the *ayah*):

1. That they have created some part of the earth OR
2. That they are *sharik* (partners) with Allah in the creation of the heavens OR
3. That Allah has given them a book which serves as clear evidence (بيّنة) that they can be invoked.

Allah sent His Messengers with books and scriptures for the guidance of mankind, but nowhere in those books or scriptures did Allah ever allow His servants to invoke other pious servants of His. Every single messenger or prophet that Allah sent to mankind told them to call upon Allah alone.

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قل ادعوا الذين زعمتم من دونه فلا يملكون كشف الضر عنكم ولا تحويلا
أولئك الذين يدعون يبتغون إلى ربهم الوسيلة أيهم أقرب ويرجون رحمته ويخافون عذابه إن عذاب ربك كان محذورا

Say, "Call upon those you claim besides Him. They have no power to relieve your adversity, nor can they change it." They themselves supplicate, seeking means of access to their Lord, vying to be nearer, and hoping for His mercy, and fearing His punishment. The punishment of your Lord is to be dreaded (Quran, 17: 56-57).

The very contents of the above verse make it clear that it is not referring to the idols of pagans (*mushrikin*), otherwise, أولئك الذين يدعون (*They themselves supplicate*) would not make sense.

Repeatedly in His Book Allah reminds us that those whom we invoke besides Allah have no power to relieve our adversity or change our circumstances. The prophets and Allah's righteous servants,

including Imams themselves used to supplicate and make dua to Allah, and we should follow their teachings in this regard as well as any. Further in this article, we will quote narrations from the Imams regarding this.

Some people argue that when they invoke Imams or *awliya*, their prayers are accepted and their problems are solved. Shias would proudly claim that when they say *Ya Ali Madad*, they do in fact, receive help and aid. And they would not deny that this help comes from Allah, but what they seek to imply is that their action is justified and acceptable in Allah's eyes (metaphorical). However, this is a fallacious argument. Hindus pray to their idols whom they claim as gods having divine powers, and their wishes are fulfilled too—they pray for children, wealth, etc. and their prayers are accepted. Does that mean what they do is right?

Just because you are able to pass an exam by cheating, i.e., it gives you results, that does not mean it is the right way to go about it. Similarly, we know that even when people ask Mawla Abbas for their needs, Allah gives them what they want—however, on the Last Day, when they would be questioned about this deed of theirs—what argument would they have against Allah?

An argument put forward by a lot of those who ask the Prophet or Imams for help, aid, sustenance, etc. is that they do not consider them independent of Allah, but rather, they ask the Imams to intercede for them with Allah. To support their claim, they quote the verse: *Who can intercede with him except with His permission? (Quran, 2:255)*

To them, our answer is twofold: Prove to us that the intercession talked about here is specific or even related to dua in daily life and not *akhirah/qiyamah*. Secondly, show us where Allah has given the Prophet ﷺ or Imams the permission (إذن) to intercede on your behalf **in your duas**.

The pagans of Mecca used to pray to their idols, but they did not claim the idols were independent of Allah, rather, they used to say that the idols pleaded on their behalf to Allah: *They worship besides Allah that which neither causes them any harm, nor brings them any benefit, and they say, 'These are our intercessors with Allah.' Say, 'Will you inform Allah about something He does not know in the heavens or on the earth?'* (Quran, 10:18)

THE PROPHETS AND IMAMS ONLY INVOKED ALLAH

All the duas that we come across in the Quran are addressed to Allah. Most of them start with “*rabbana*” (Our Lord). The same is reflected in the authentic duas taught by the Prophet ﷺ and the Ahlul Bayt.

Imam Ali ibn al Husayn al Zayn al Abidin (ع) said:

الحمد لله الذي أغلق عنا باب الحاجة إلا إليه

All praise be to Allah who closed for us, all doors of needs, except to Him.^[1]

All praise be to Allah alone Whom I call whenever I need something and Whom I secretly converse with whenever I want without need for an intercessor; He thus grants my need. All praise be to Allah alone other than Whom I never call upon, and even if I call upon anyone else, he shall never be able to respond to my prayer.

Imam Ali ibn al Husayn al Zayn al Abidin

The same Imam said:

والحمد لله الذي أناديه كلما شئت لحاجتي وأخلو به حيث شئت لسري بغير شفيع فيقضي لي حاجتي الحمد لله الذي لا أدعو غيره ولو دعوت غيره لم يستجب لي دعائي

All praise be to Allah alone Whom I call whenever I need something and Whom I secretly converse with whenever I want without need for an intercessor; He thus grants my need. All praise be to Allah alone other than Whom I never call upon, and even if I call upon anyone else, he shall never be able to respond to my prayer.^[2]

The above passage from Imam’s dua that he taught to Abu Hamzah Thumali shows that we do not need an intercessor when asking Allah for anything. This is corroborating evidence related to the

argument we presented before regarding those who use verse 2:255 to justify *istighathah*, and what we said in the commentary under verse 2:186.

عن زارة عن أبي جعفر قال إن الله عز وجل يقول: "إن الذين يستكبرون عن عبادتي سيدخلون جهنم داخرين" قال: هو الدعاء وأفضل العبادة الدعاء،

Zurarah narrates from Imam Muhammad al Baqir (ع) that he said: "Allah, the Most Majestic, said: Indeed those who are disdainful of my worship will enter Hell humiliated (40:60)—that [worship] is dua. And the best form of worship is dua."^[3]

OBJECTIONS AND ANSWERS:

Objection: We do not make dua to Imams, rather we just make them a *wasilah* to Allah. In the end, we know the source of all help is Allah.

Answer: As long as the one being called upon or invoked is Allah, there is no problem in it. For example—there is no problem in saying “Ya Allah I ask you by the right of Prophet Muhammad ﷺ and Imam Ali”. However, if you are invoking the Prophet ﷺ or Imams directly, as in “Ya Rasul Allah” or “Ya Ali Mawla”—that is problematic, because now these holy personalities are being directly invoked across *ghayb*, and that constitutes dua to them, not *tawassul* to Allah.

Objection: Why can we not call upon the Imams when we know the martyrs are alive?

Answer: This assumption is based on two Quranic verses. Allah says: “Do not call those who were killed in Allah’s way ‘dead’. No, they are alive but you are not aware.” (Quran, 2:154) and “Do not suppose those who were slain in Allah’s way to be dead. No, they are alive, with their Lord, receiving sustenance.” (Quran, 3:169)

These verses do not mean that the martyrs are alive in the same way or realm as us. Rather, Allah says, “they are alive with their Lord”. Exegetes (*mufassirin*) have argued that this realm is *barzakh*. In fact, the souls of the martyrs are “receiving sustenance” from their Lord. How does this prove that they hear us or respond to our duas? How does this prove that the recipients of *rizq* are also the distributors? The answer to both is negative. The Quran does not say that you are allowed to call upon martyrs and ask them to help you, aid you, or grant you *rizq*.

Objection: What is the problem in seeking the help of the Ahl al-Bayt when Allah has given them special powers?

Answer: Allah has not given Ahl al-Bayt special powers that enable them to help you when they have passed away from this world to the other. The Quran says that prophet Isa (peace be upon him) could perform miracles by the permission of Allah, as in he could revive the dead, heal the sick, create birds—all by His permission (Quran, 5:110). Does that mean prophet Isa (peace be upon him) is aware of our supplications to him and can respond to them or pray to Allah for us? This is anti-Quranic. Prophet Isa (peace be upon him) said: *And I was a witness over them as long as I was among them; but when You took me up, You were the Observer over them, and You are, over all things, Witness (Quran, 5:117)*. The verse tells us two things:

1. Prophet Isa [a], despite being a possessor of miracles by Allah's permission, was only a witness over his people as long as he was amongst them.
2. When he was taken away by Allah, he lost touch with the realm his people were in, thereby proving that all communication between him and his people was cut off.

This is why, even if you can prove that the Ahl al-Bayt possessed miracles from Allah, it is not proof enough that they can aid you from that side of the world.

Moreover, the belief/concept that the Imams control the atoms of the universe was actually invented by the *ghulat*, and was refuted, debunked, renounced, and rejected by the Imams themselves. In their time, this delegation of divine powers was called *tafwidh*, which has been now rebranded and repackaged in the form of “Wilayah Takwiniyyah”. The Imams themselves refuted the concept, as has been showcased beautifully by the Al Islaah channel with proofs from the Imams of the Ahl al-Bayt themselves^[4].

REFERENCES:

1. See Dua No. 1: (His supplication in praise of Allah), *Sahifah Sajjadiyyah*.

الصحيفة السجادية (ابطحي) - الإمام زين العابدين (ع) - الصفحة ١٩

وَكَانَ مِنْ دُعَائِهِ عَلَيْهِ السَّلَامُ إِذَا ابْتَدَأَ بِالِدُّعَاءِ بَدَأَ بِالتَّحْمِيدِ لِلَّهِ عَزَّ وَجَلَّ وَالثَّنَاءِ عَلَيْهِ، فَقَالَ (1)

Second source (with English translation):

Sahifa Sajjadia-Dua 1 In praise of God – Duas.org

In Praise of God | Thaqalayn

↩

2. See “Dua of Abu Hamzah Thumali” in *Iqbal al A'mal* by ibn Tawus, volume 1 page 157. (Allamah Majlisi quotes this dua in his *Bihar al Anwar* from the same source).

إقبال الأعمال - السيد ابن طاووس - ج ١ - الصفحة ١٥٧

Also, in *al Misbah* by Kaf'ami, page 588.

المصباح - الكفعمي - الصفحة ٥٨٨

↩

3. See *al Kafi* by Kulayni, volume 2, Book of Supplications, chapter 1 (Excellence of dua and recommendation of it), hadith 1.

الكافي - الشيخ الكليني - ج ٢ - الصفحة ٤٦٦

It has been graded “Hasan kal Sahih” by Allamah Majlisi in his *Mirat ul Uql*.

<https://thaqalayn.net/hadith/2/2/1/1>

<https://ar.lib.eshia.ir/71429/12/1>

↩

4. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iwGW2ipK83s> ↩