

Tawassul

By Ebrahim Saifuddin

Introduction

In this day and age when Muslims are being attacked by people of almost all faiths, it is quite sad and disturbing that Muslims are busy attacking each other. Why is it that we, who belong to the Ummah of Muhammad (saw), have fallen so low that we take not a second before declaring each other of being from those who practice shirk or kufr?

Our internal issues should be our internal issues and differences amongst the Ummah should be dealt in a civilized manner. It is no wonder why we, the Muslim nation, cannot today stand on our feet and hold firm our ground and voice for our rights in the international community.

Mu'awiyya (ra) who despite his differences with Ali (ra) responded to the Christian ruler calling him "You Christian dog" and then vowed to join forces with Ali (ra) and destroy him if he dared tried to even look at Ali (ra) in a bad way. While we claim to follow the way of the Prophet Muhammad (saw) and the earliest generations, we are in practice very far away from it.

Martin Sean Indyk is a former United States ambassador to Israel. He is also the ex-deputy research director for the main Israeli lobby group, The American Israeli Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC). In one of the Doha debates held by BBC in Oxford, UK on May 1, 2007, he said:

"There are more American Muslims than there are American Jews, but they're not organized as a monolithic community. You know, there are Pakistani Muslims, there are Arab Muslims, there are Black Muslims, and on the other hand, the Jewish community, you know, if you have two Jews, you have three organizations. They're probably the most highly organized people in the world."

Contemplate on the following verse of the Qur'an in Surah Al-Hujurat (49) Verse 10:

إِنَّمَا الْمُؤْمِنُونَ إِخْوَةٌ فَأَصْلِحُوا بَيْنَ أَخَوَيْكُمْ وَاتَّقُوا اللَّهَ لَعَلَّكُمْ تُرْحَمُونَ

Innama almuminoona ikhwatun faaslihoo bayna akhawaykum waittaqoo Allaha
laAAallakum turhamoona

All believers are but brothers, therefore seek reconciliation between your two brothers, and fear Allah, so that you may be blessed with mercy.

Allah (swt) informed us that we should be like brothers - like a single brotherhood but yet it is those who are not Muslims that adhere close to this command and not us.

There are certain issues over which the Ummah fights a lot. One such issue is Tawassul. Some of us, without understanding the concept, term it as shirk and go to

the extent of calling our brothers in Islam "mushriks". What a sad time for the Muslims.

While our brothers and sisters are being martyred all over the world, we are too busy pointing fingers at each others and giving each other labels. Shameful indeed!

Many scholars of Islam have written and explained this topic in much detail. My limited knowledge does not permit me to go into even a fraction of the detail which the 'ulema have expounded. I am not a scholar of Islam but a person thirsty for knowledge. This attempt I have made to clarify whether Tawassul is shirk or not is like a minute drop of water in the ocean and maybe it will not make a difference in the Muslim world. But if Allah (swt) will open the heart of even one person through this, then, Alhamdulillah.

Is Tawassul "Shirk"?

I believe that most of the arguments regarding Tawassul are deeply rooted in the ignorance regarding its concept. Some say it is permissible, some say it is not permissible and some say only certain aspects of it are permissible. There are others who claim that it is "shirk". This article, which does not necessarily reflect my beliefs on this topic in entirety, is a humble effort on my part to investigate the matter of Tawassul in Islam and whether it can be called "shirk".

The primary argument, by the people who term it "shirk", is that we should only pray to Allah (swt) for our needs.

This, while true, has nothing to do with Tawassul being "shirk". People who believe in the permissibility of Tawassul do not pray to anyone but Allah (swt). The concept of Tawassul is to ask someone to make du'a to Allah (swt) for you while at the same time you also pray to Allah (swt).

For example:

A asks B to pray to Allah that the former will pass his exams. So this leads to:

- B prays to Allah that A passes his exams.
- A also prays to Allah that he would pass his exams.

All prayers are directed to Allah (swt) alone.

I ask people who call this "shirk": Do you not ask your family and friends to pray for you when you face hard times in life? Surely you do. Does that mean you are committing shirk? I am sure none of them will say they are committing shirk by doing so.

Thus their primary argument gets defeated. Tawassul has nothing to do with praying to an entity other than Allah (swt). Like we also see in the following verse in the Qur'an in Surah An-Nisa (4) Verse 64:

وَمَا أَرْسَلْنَا مِنْ رَسُولٍ إِلَّا لِيُطَاعَ بِإِذْنِ اللَّهِ وَلَوْ أَنَّهُمْ إِذْ ظَلَمُوا أَنْفُسَهُمْ جَاءُوكَ فَاسْتَغْفَرُوا اللَّهَ وَاسْتَغْفَرَ
لَهُمُ الرَّسُولُ لَوَجَدُوا اللَّهَ تَوَّابًا رَحِيمًا

Wama arsalna min rasoolin illa liyutaAAa biithni Allahi walaw annahum ith thalamoo
anfusahum jaooka faistaghfaroo Allaha waistaghfara lahumu alrrasoolu lawajadoo
Allaha tawwaban raheeman

We did not send any Messenger but to be obeyed by the leave of Allah. Had they,
after having wronged themselves, come to you and sought forgiveness from Allah,
and had the Messenger prayed for their forgiveness, they would certainly have found
Allah Most-Relenting, Very- Merciful.

In this verse we can see that the Prophet Muhammad (saw) would pray for
forgiveness of others. This is acting as a wasilah and this is Tawassul. Hence
Tawassul is also established by the Qur'an itself.

We can further go into this topic after reading a hadith recorded by Imam Tirmidhi
with a sound chain of narrators.

Uthman ibn Hunaif (Allah be pleased with him) said:
"A blind man came to the Messenger of Allah (saw) and said: "I've
been afflicted in my eyesight, so pray to Allah for me". The Prophet
(saw) asked the blind man that he has two options; to practice
patience or that the Prophet (saw) can make du'a for him. The
blind man said: "Make du'a for me." The Prophet (saw) said: "Go
perform ablution (Wudu), perform two Rak'at Salat and then say:
"O Allah! I ask you and turn to you through my Prophet
Muhammad, the Prophet of Mercy. O Muhammad! I seek your
intercession with my lord for the return of my eyesight, that it may
be fulfilled. O Allah! Grant him intercession for me". The Messenger
of Allah (saw) then said: "and if there is some other need, do the
same."

Investigating this hadith shows that in the chain of narrators there is a person by the
name of Abu Jafar. Some claim that this was not Abu Jafar Khatmi and was Abu Jafar
Raazi. They say that Abu Jafar Raazi had a weak or bad memory. However when
looking into the reality of this person's identity, Ibn Hajar, in Taqrib al-tahdhib, and
Ibn 'Abd al-Barr, in Al-Istii'ab fi ma'rifa al-ashab, mention that he is Khatmi. Some
others who have authenticated this hadith are Ibn Majah, Dhahabi, Hakim, Baihaqi,
Tabarani, Shawkani, and even Ibn Taymiyya and al-Albani. The authenticity of this
hadith is strongly established.

Looking at the hadith, one needs to note that the blind man left the place where the
Prophet (saw) was present in order to perform his wudhu and Salah. Then in the
absence of the Prophet (saw) he said the following words in his du'a as taught to him
by the Prophet (saw): "O Muhammad! I seek your intercession with my Lord for the
return of my eyesight, that it may be fulfilled."

The above was a case of seeking someone's intercession in their physical absence.
To elaborate:

- A sought the intercession of B in the physical absence of the latter.

My questions to all who claim Tawassul is "shirk":
Did the blind man pray to Prophet Muhammad (saw)?

Was the du'a which the Prophet Muhammad (saw) taught to the blind man "shirk"?

One counter argument would be: "But the Prophet Muhammad (saw) was alive and not dead. If we say the dead can hear then that is shirk because they cannot hear or make du'a for anyone else."

On surface one might say "makes sense". But lets analyze this argument and investigate the matter even further Insha'Allah.

Firstly like I stated earlier, the du'a where the blind man used the words "O Messenger" (Ya Rasulallah) was made in his physical absence. Man can only hear that which is within the range of his hearing and not beyond that. While sitting in a room you might not be able to hear what people are saying outside your house. So does this mean the Prophet Muhammad (saw) taught the blind man that he is All Hearing? Certainly not and neither did the Prophet Muhammad (saw) ask the blind man to scream out the du'a so that the voice would reach the Messenger of Allah (saw).

Tawassul is neither through physical matter like the body nor through living or dead. Rather it is through the positive essence and status of a person whether living or dead. Hence it was not required for the Prophet Muhammad (saw) to have heard the words uttered in the du'a by the blind man.

Let us further delve into the matter of Tawassul regarding people who have died. There are three important questions regarding the dead here:

- a) Can the dead hear?
- b) Can the dead make du'a for people who are living?
- c) Is there Tawassul through the dead?

Can the dead hear?

People who claim that Tawassul is shirk use some verses from the Qur'an. We will use those same verses to answer the question "Can the dead hear?"

The Qur'an says in Surah An-Naml (27) Verses 80-81:

إِنَّكَ لَا تَسْمَعُ الْمَوْتَىٰ وَلَا تَسْمَعُ الصُّمَّ الدُّعَاءَ إِذَا وَلَّوْا مُدْبِرِينَ
وَمَا أَنْتَ بِهَادِي الْعُمْيَ عَنْ ضَلَالَتِهِمْ إِنْ تُسْمِعُ إِلَّا مَنْ يُؤْمِنُ بِآيَاتِنَا فَهُمْ مُسْلِمُونَ

Innaka la tusmiAAu almawta wala tusmiAAu alssumma aldduAAaa itha wallaw
mudbireena

Wama anta bihadee aAAumyi AAan dalalatihim in tusmiAAu illa man yuminu
biayatina fahum muslimoona

Surely, you cannot make the dead to hear, nor can you make the deaf to hear your call when they turn their backs in retreat,
Nor can you show the right path to the blind against their wandering astray. You can make no one to listen (to you) except those who believe in Our verses, then submit themselves (to Allah).

The essence of these two verses is seen in two other places in the Qur'an. One is in Surah Ar-Rum where almost the same words are used and the other is in Surah Al-Faatir (35) verse 22 which is as follows:

وَمَا يَسْتَوِي الْأَحْيَاءُ وَالْأَمْوَاتُ إِنَّ اللَّهَ يُسْمِعُ مَن يَشَاءُ وَمَا أَنتَ بِمُسْمِعٍ مَّن فِي الْقُبُورِ
Wama yastawee alahyao wala alamwatu inna Allaha yusmiAAu man yashao wama
anta bimusmiAAin man fee alquboori

And the living and the dead are not alike. Allah makes to hear whomsoever He wills.
And you cannot make to hear those who are in the graves.

Ibn Kathir in his tafsir of the Qur'an Vol.3 pg 393 writes regarding 27:80 the following:

"(Verily, you cannot make the dead to hear) meaning, you cannot cause them to hear anything that will benefit them. The same applies to those over whose hearts is a veil and in whose ears is deafness of disbelief."

Abdur Rahman bin Nasir as-Sa'di, explaining the same verses in his Tafsir Vol.3 pg 1963-1964 states:

"When the prophet (saw) stands for the truth and puts his trust in Allah (swt) then anyone who goes into misguidance (even after receiving the clear message) will not cause any blame to be on the prophet (saw) and giving such people guidance is not his responsibility. Hence Allah (swt) says 'No doubt, you cannot make the dead to hear'....and like Allah (swt) says in Surah Qasas (28) verse 56 'You cannot give guidance to whomsoever you wish, but Allah gives guidance to whomsoever He wills'"

It is very interesting to note that none of the verses in these three places states that the dead cannot hear. The message repeated is that we cannot make the dead to hear.

Mufti Muhammad Shafi Uthmani in Ma'ariful Qur'an Vol.6 pg 613 writes:

"The consistent expression used in all the three verses seems to be a clear indication that the dead may have the ability to hear but we cannot cause them to listen to us."

In Anwar-ul-Bayan, Mufti Aashiq Ilahi in Vol.4 pg 71 explains regarding "Can the Dead Hear":

"Even the Sahabah (ra) differed in this matter. While many Sahabah (ra) like Abdullah ibn Umar (ra) maintained that the dead can hear, others like Ayesha (ra) denied it....Therefore, although the dead may have the ability to hear, none has the power to make them hear his message."

If believing that dead can hear was so clearly "shirk" then no Sahabah (ra) would have held this view. They (ra) would have unanimously declared it impermissible and labeled it "shirk". Yet this was not the case. Neither did the Sahabah, who believed

dead cannot hear, went around saying that the Sahabah who believe the dead can hear are committing shirk.

A look into the exegesis of the Qur'an proves that these verses do not carry the meaning which some wish to advocate. These verses do not mean that the dead cannot hear.

We take a look at one of the answers given by Maulana Ashraf Ali Thanvi in Imdad-ul-Fatawa Vol.5 pg 379, while answering the question "Can the dead hear?" He wrote:

"There is evidence and opinions of the scholars that support both views. Who is then able to make a ratified decision? It is not even necessary that any verdict be passed on this issue to support one view and deny the other. Then too, there exists differences between those who support the view that the dead are able to hear."

Moving further deeper into this topic, let's view two other verses in the Qur'an from Chapter 3 Verses 169-170:

وَلَا تَحْسَبَنَّ الَّذِينَ قُتِلُوا فِي سَبِيلِ اللَّهِ أَمْوَاتًا بَلْ أحيَاءٌ عِنْدَ رَبِّهِمْ يُرْزَقُونَ
فَرِحِينَ بِمَا آتَاهُمُ اللَّهُ مِنْ فَضْلِهِ وَيَسْتَبْشِرُونَ بِالَّذِينَ لَمْ يَلْحَقُوا بِهِمْ مِنْ خَلْفِهِمْ أَلَّا خَوْفٌ عَلَيْهِمْ وَلَا هُمْ
يَحْزَنُونَ

Wala tahsabanna allatheena qutiloo fee sabeeli Allahi amwatan bal ahyeon AAinda rabbihim yurzaqoona

Fariheena bima atahumu Allahu min fadlihi wayastabshiroona biallatheena lam yalhaqoo bihim min khalfihim alla khawfun AAalayhim wala hum yahzanoona

Never take those killed in the way of Allah as dead. Rather, they are alive with their Lord, well-provided, happy with what Allah has given them of His grace; and they feel pleased with the good news, about those left behind them who could not join them, that there shall be no fear for them nor shall they grieve.

These verses suggest that even after death, the spirit may retain some intellect and perception. One might present a counter argument that this verse deals with martyrs. I do not disagree because the verse clearly talks about martyrs. However the verse does teach us of the possibility of such retention with the permission of Allah (swt) of course. Similarly Allah (swt) can also bestow on others who are not martyrs some ability.

A hadith reported by Abdullah ibn Umar classified as Sahih by ibn Kathir is as follows:

"When a person passes by the grave of a Muslim brother whom he knew when was alive and he offers salam to him, Allah (swt) returns his spirit into his body so that he may return the salam"

This hadith, which is one of the evidences upon which Abdullah ibn Umar based his view that dead can hear, proves that when you visit someone you know (who was a Muslim) at his grave and offer your salam, the dead hears it and replies. This ability

is given to the dead by Allah (swt) without doubt and thus this hadith is not in contradiction with the Qur'anic verses quoted above from Surah An-Naml, Surah Ar-Rum and Surah Al-Faatir.

Another hadith in Sahih Muslim narrated by Ayesha (ra) states:

"(whenever it was her turn for Allah's Messenger (saw) to spend the night with her) He would go out towards the end of the night to al-Baqi' and say: Peace be upon you, abode of a people who are believers. What you were promised would come to you tomorrow, you receiving it after some delay; and God willing we shall join you. O Allah, grant forgiveness to the inhabitants of Baqi' al-Gharqad."

These traditions, among many others, establish that you can offer your salam to the dead which they hear and reply back to you. This does not necessarily mean that the dead can hear everything but it is now clear that holding the belief that dead can hear is nowhere near "shirk" like some claim.

Imam Ghazali and Imam Subki, after extensive research on this topic, came to a conclusion as noted down by Mufti Aashiq Ilahi in Anwar-ul-Bayan Vol.4 pg 72:

"While it is established that the dead do have the ability to hear, it cannot be said that they can hear everything that anyone says. While they may be able to hear at times, there are times when they might not be able to hear as well."

In a hadith recorded in Bukhari and Muslim we are informed that the person who is laid down in his grave can hear the footsteps of those that laid him down as they leave:

"When a human being is laid in his grave and his companions return and he even hears their foot steps, two angels come to him and make him sit and ask him: What did you use to say about this man, Muhammad? He will say: I testify that he is Allah's slave and His Apostle. Then it will be said to him, 'Look at your place in the Hell-Fire. Allah has given you a place in Paradise instead of it.' The Prophet added, 'The dead person will see both his places. But a non-believer or a hypocrite will say to the angels, 'I do not know, but I used to say what the people used to say! It will be said to him, 'Neither did you know nor did you take the guidance (by reciting the Quran).' Then he will be hit with an iron hammer between his two ears, and he will cry and that cry will be heard by whatever approaches him except human beings and jinns.'"

Further in Baihaqi, Abu Hurairah (ra) is reported to have said that the Prophet Muhammad said:

"If anyone sends darud at my mausoleum I shall personally hear it; and if anyone sends darud on me from a distance, the angels convey it to me."

As stated previously, the power to make the dead hear lies with Allah (swt) alone. We do not have the power to make them hear. And in the cases presented above it can be seen that there are times when the dead are granted the ability to hear. This completely shatters the claims by some that believing the dead can hear is "shirk". It is also important to note here that some believe that prophets (pbut) are alive in their graves. However this article is not about this and in this article the general assumption is taken that the prophets (pbut) are not alive because the people who generally claim Tawassul to be "shirk" hold the belief that the prophets (pbut) are not alive in their graves.

Another tradition worth quoting here is by Imam Ahmad ibn Hanbal. It is recorded in Mishkat Masabih:

"Ayesha said: 'I used to enter my house in which the Messenger of Allah (saw) was and put off my garment saying that only my husband and my father were there; but when Umar was buried along with them, I swear by Allah that I did not enter it without having my clothes wrapped round me owing to modesty regarding Umar.'"

Shah Abdul Haq Dehalvi in Sharh Mishkat in Vol.2 pg 931 writes regarding this hadith:

"This hadith is a clear hadith which proves the dead has its senses and while visiting a grave, giving respect to it is wajib."

Another incident which is quite interesting is mentioned by Abul Qasim Ali bin al-Hasan ibn 'Asakir with his sanad:

"Yahya bin Ayub al-Khiza'i reports that during the time of Umar ibn al-Khattab there was a young man who had made praying at the masjid a must for himself. Umar was very pleased with him. He would pray 'isha and then head home to his old father. A woman fell in love with him and would often stand in his path on the way home. One day she convinced him to go in her with her. When he entered her house he started remembering Allah (swt) and Surah A'raf Verse 201 came on his tongue and he recited it. After which he fainted. The woman along with her maid managed to pick this man and put him outside his house. His family took him inside. Late at night the young man regained consciousness. His father inquired and after hesitation he finally told him the incident. His father asked which verse he recited. He repeated the verse for him and died. When Umar found out in the morning he went to the young man's father and asked for where he was buried. Then Umar addressed to the young man in his grave saying: "O young man! Whoever fears to stand in front of his Rabb, are there 2 Jannah for him?" To this the young man replied to Umar from his grave: "O Umar! My Rabb has given me both Jannah"

This incident has been also been recorded in Tarikh Damishq al-Kabir 48-307, Matbu'a Darul Haya al-Tarath al-'Arbi (Beirut, 1421), Tafsir ibn Kathir Vol.2 pg 277 (under Surah 'Araf verse 201), Darul fikar (1419) and Sharh as-Sadur pg 213.

Whether one holds to the opinion that the dead can hear or holds that they cannot hear, neither of them are committing any form of shirk. These are two opinions which were prevalent among the Companions (ra) and there is nothing wrong in adhering to either of the two. However making takfir and calling it "shirk" is purely ignorance and nothing else.

Can the dead make du'a for the living?

Some object to the notion that the dead can make du'a for the living. This objection is not rooted in any concrete evidence. Certain traditions, however, suggest that indeed the dead can make du'a for the living.

In an authentic hadith recorded in Jama-ul-Fawaid, it is seen that the Prophet Muhammad (saw) prays for our forgiveness even after his death:

"Abdullah Ibn Mas'ud reports that the Messenger of Allah (saw) said: 'Both my life and death are beneficial to you. Your Record of Deeds will be presented to me; if they are good I shall praise it; if they are bad, I shall invoke Almighty Allah for forgiveness.'"

Some of the scholars who have verified the soundness of this hadith are: Imam Suyuti in his Manahil al-Safa, Haythami in Majma' al-Zawa'id, al-Zarqani in his Sharh al-Muwatta, Mahmud Mumduh in his Raf' al-Minara, Shihab al-Deen al-Khafaji in his commentary of Qadi 'Iyad's al-Shifa. In the introduction of his book Al-Wafa, Ibn al-Jawzi mentions that he has incorporated only sound ahadith in it - he has quoted this hadith in the same work.

The same hadith is also narrated elsewhere with weak chains from Anas. It is also narrated with two sound mursals where the link of the Companion is missing from the isnad and the hadith is from Bakr ibn Abdullah al-Muzani. In his Silsilah Da'eefa (Vol.2 pg 405), Albani has verified the latter chain to be sound. Moreover, Imam Subki in Shifa al-Siqam and Mullah al-Qari in his Sharh al-Shifa among others have also verified its soundness.

Al-Harith ibn Abi Usama in his Musnad has recorded a third version of this hadith related by al-Muzani. Al-Albani declares this hadith weak on the premise that some authorities questioned the memory of one of the people in the isnad. This person is Abdul Majeed bin Abdul Aziz bin Abi Rawwad and ahadith by him have been recorded by Imam Muslim. He has been declared as reliable and trustworthy by, to name a few, Abu Dawud, Nasai, Ibn Shahin and Darqutni.

Even if one would say that Albani's classification of this third version is correct, the final judgment would be that the narration is authentic as Albani authenticated the mural version of the hadith.

Furthermore, Mahmud Mamduh quoted Albani in the latter's effort to refute Ismail al-Ansari, entitled Kitab al-Shaybani:

"The sound mural hadith is a proof in all Four Schools and other than them among the Imams of the principles of hadith and fiqh. Therefore it is apparent to every fair-minded person that the position whereby such a hadith does not form a proof only because it is mural, is untenable."

Mufti Aashiq Ilahi in his book "What Happens after Death" on page 18 quotes Tabrani as having reported that the Prophet Muhammad (saw) said:

"Your deeds and actions are undoubtedly presented to your relatives who have gone to the Hereafter. If your deeds are virtuous, they become happy and pray to Allah for your welfare and a happy end. If bad deeds are presented, they pray to Allah for infusing virtues in his heart so that he seeks Your favor."

Both the ahadith presented above show clearly that not only does the Prophet (saw) pray for the Ummah after death but even normal people, who have died and are not from among the prophets or martyrs, pray for their living relatives.

A question arises that if the dead cannot pray for themselves then how is it possible that they can make du'a for those living. I fail to see the connection between the two. True the person who has passed away cannot do 'ibadah to help him but how does that negate his ability awarded to him by Allah (swt) to make du'a for the people alive. These two scenarios are completely different. When a person dies his status does not drop. A prophet when passes away from this world does not become a non-prophet. And it is by that status that Tawassul can be made. Like stated earlier, Tawassul is not about the physical body, living or dead.

Is there tawassul through the dead?

This question will also be answered from the ahadith. First we look at a hadith in Sahih Bukhari where Anas (ra) reported:

"Whenever drought threatened them, 'Umar bin Al-Khattab, used to ask Al-Abbas bin 'Abdul Muttalib to invoke Allah for rain. He used to say, 'O Allah! We would use our Prophet as a means to You and You then sent us rain; now we use our Prophet's uncle as a means to You, therefore send us rain!' And so it would rain."

Note: The English translation available online is not very accurate hence a translation more close to the Arabic text of the hadith is used here.

There are two opinions regarding this hadith. One view is that Umar (ra) meant to say that when the Prophet (saw) was alive, only then they used to ask him to invoke Allah (saw).

The other opinion states the contrary. It analyses the hadith and points out that the words of Umar (ra) make no such distinction or claim. They say this inference is not based on any explicit evidence. Imam Suyuti in Tareekh-ul-Khulafa page 140 mentions Ibn Sa'd's narration from Niyar al-Aslami that when Umar came out to pray for rain, he wore the cloaks of Prophet Muhammad (saw). This was a clear-cut example of Umar making Tawassul through the Messenger (saw). Another hadith in Sahih Muslim supports this form of Tawassul. The hadith is narrated by Abdullah, the freed slave of Asma (daughter of Abu Bakr), who reports Asma as saying that she and Ayesha would use the cloak of the Prophet Muhammad (saw) as a means to cure the sick.

Proponents of this latter view further support their stance by pointing out that the Tawassul in this case was also through the Prophet Muhammad (saw) because the status of al-Abbas ibn Abdul Muttalib was due to his relationship with the prophet (saw). This is why we see that in the hadith Umar mentions that now they are using

the Prophet's uncle as wasilah. Further they mention that the Companions had made tawassul through the Prophet Muhammad (saw) as the words in the hadith are "We would use our Prophet as a means to You." If it is argued that from the start of Umar's Caliphate they would always use al-Abbas (ra), it still does not answer as to who they used as wasilah during the Caliphate of Abu Bakr (ra) unless one makes another assumption that during his Caliphate the drought ceased and no one experienced it. Regardless, the hadith does not prove that al-Abbas (ra) was always used as a wasilah during the Caliphate of Umar (ra). If anything, it suggests the opposite.

Again a question here arises: 'If Tawassul through the prophet (saw) is permissible after his death, then why did Umar (ra) make al-Abbas a wasilah?'

To answer this question, Mufti Muhammad Sharif-ul-Haq Amjadi in Nuzhat-ul-Qari Vol.2 pg 614 states:

"If there are different ways to do something then opting to do it in one way does not invalidate the other ways of doing it especially when the method opted for has some benefit. Seeking Tawassul from al-Abbas instead of Prophet Muhammad (saw) has one clear benefit. Everyone knew about Tawassul through the prophet (saw). It was possible that a thought could arise in the hearts of the people that Tawassul through a person who is not a prophet is haram. Hence by making al-Abbas a wasilah, Umar (ra) established that seeking Tawassul from a non-prophet is also permissible"

Some try to suggest that Umar (ra) was only asking al-Abbas (ra) to pray for rain. A basic reading of the text proves that this was certainly not the case. However, both interpretations of the hadith have been presented above and the conclusion, as to which is correct, is left for the reader to decide.

In Sunan ad-Darimi in the Chapter of the Introduction titled: "Allah's generosity to His Prophet after his death," related from Aws ibn 'Abdullah with a good chain and declared authentic by hadith experts is the following hadith:

"The people of Madina complained to Ayesha of the severe drought that they were suffering. She said: 'Go to the Prophet's grave and open a window towards the sky so that there will be no roof between him and the sky.' They did so, after which they were watered with such rain that vegetation grew and the camels got fat. That year was named the Year of Plenty."

Al-Albani and some others tried to raise objections on the authenticity of this hadith. In Fath al-Manan, Shaykh Nabil ibn Hashim al-Ghamri refutes all such claims. Those interested in the details of the claims and their refutation can refer to Fath al-Manan.

Further evidence of Tawassul through the Prophet Muhammad (saw) after his death comes from another hadith. Ibn Hajar al-Asqalani in Fath al-Bari, Ahmed ibn Muhammad Khateeb Qastalani in al-Muahib al-Ladunniya have recorded from Ibn Abi Sheeba that Malik al-Dar, the treasurer of Umar (ra) said:

"The people suffered a drought in Umar's khilafa, whereupon a man came to the grave of the Prophet (saw) and said: 'O Messenger of Allah! Ask for rain for your Community, for verily

they have but perished.’ After this the Prophet appeared to him in a dream and told him: ‘Go to Umar and give him my greeting, then tell him that they will be watered. Tell him: Be clever!’ The man went and told Umar. The latter wept and said: “My Lord! I spare no effort except in what escapes my power.”

Both Ibn Hajar and Ahmed Khateeb have classified it as Sahih. Ibn Hajar identifies this man as Bilal ibn al-Harith. Albani, bin Baz and others tried to declare this hadith “weak” but their attempts were made futile in a deep analysis and study by Mahmud Mamduh in Raf al-Minara li-Takhrij Ahadith al-Tawassul wal Ziyara.

For a moment just recall the hadith quoted earlier by Uthman bin Hunaif regarding a blind man who went to the Prophet Muhammad (saw). Tabarani in al-Mu’jam al-Saghir reports another hadith from Uthman bin Hunaif where a man constantly visited Uthman ibn Affan (ra) concerning something he needed, but Uthman paid no attention to him or his need. The man met Uthman bin Hunaif and complained to him about the matter so Uthman bin Hunaif, who was one of the Companions who collected ahadith and was learned in the religion of Allah, said:

“Go to the place of ablution and perform ablution (wudu), then come to the mosque, perform two rak’as of prayer therein, and say: ‘O Allah, I ask You and turn to You through our Prophet Muhammad, the Prophet of mercy; O Muhammad (Ya Muhammad), I turn through you to my Lord, that He may fulfill my need,’ and mention your need.”

Note: This hadith is very long hence only the relevant part is quoted here.

This incident took place after the death of Prophet Muhammad (saw) and after the caliphates of Abu Bakr (ra) and Umar (ra). This hadith makes the case clear that Tawassul through the Prophet Muhammad (saw) is legally valid and was even advised by the Companions to others.

This hadith has been thoroughly authenticated by Tabarani, Baihaqi, al-Haythami, Mundhiri among others.

As pointed out by Abu Bakr al-Marwazi in his Mansak, Imam Ahmad ibn Hanbal preferred for one to make Tawassul through the Prophet in every supplication in the following words: “O Allah! I am turning to you with your Prophet, the Prophet of mercy. O Muhammad! I am turning with you to my Lord for the fulfillment of my need.” This is mentioned in various books of Hanbali school of thought. Some of these are: Ibn Muflih’s Furu’, al-Mardawi’s Insaf and Ibn Aqil’s Tadhkira.

Rashid Ahmed Gangohi in Fatawa Rashidiyya on page 139 while quoting Shah Muhammad Ishaq’s Mi’ah Masail and Arba’in Masail writes that there is a difference of opinion among the scholars regarding going to a grave and saying “O such and such person pray for me that Allah (swt) fulfills my such and such work.” He further mentions that the permissibility of this is given by those who hold the belief that the dead can hear and those who believe that dead cannot hear disallow it.

What would be “shirk”?

After dealing with the basic concepts, I would like to point out what would constitute as “shirk”. And to deal with this one has to know “what is shirk?” Without knowing what shirk is, you cannot recognize it.

Allah (swt) says in the Qur'an in Surah An-Nisa (4) Verse 48:

إِنَّ اللَّهَ لَا يَغْفِرُ أَنْ يُشْرَكَ بِهِ وَيَغْفِرُ مَا دُونَ ذَلِكَ لِمَنْ يَشَاءُ وَمَنْ يُشْرِكْ بِاللَّهِ فَقَدِ افْتَرَىٰ إِثْمًا عَظِيمًا
Inna Allaha la yaghfiru an yushraka bihi wayaghfiru ma doona thalika liman yashao
waman yushrik biAllahi faqadi iftara ithman AAatheeman

Surely, Allah does not forgive that a partner is ascribed to Him (yushraka), and He forgives anything short of that for whomsoever He wills. Whoever ascribes a partner to Allah commits a terrible sin.

This verse in the Qur'an informs Mankind that if we associate a partner with Allah (swt) then this will be "shirk". Shirk can be done in a number of ways and hereunder are some forms of shirk mentioned pertaining to the topic at hand.

Shirk in Power: This is ascribing powers or ability to others which are exclusive to Allah (swt). For example, if we held the belief that person 'A' has the power of his own to inflict harm or grant wishes, then this will be shirk.

Shirk in 'Ibadah: The right of being worshipped belongs to Allah (swt) alone and no one else. No creation is worthy of any worship. Hence if one ascribes a partner to Allah (swt) and worships that partner then that is shirk. If one worships a tree, rock, sculpture, man, animal, jinn - all this will be shirk because worship is sole due of Allah (swt).

Shirk in Knowledge: Having a belief that some person has 'Ilm of all that is in the Universe and beyond at every moment in time, then this would be shirk. It will be ascribing a partner to Allah (swt) in matter of knowledge. Absolute knowledge belongs to Allah (swt) alone and no one else. No one other than Allah (swt) is All-Knowing. Allah (swt) can grant His chosen people with knowledge like He granted the Prophet Muhammad (saw) with knowledge about certain events but granting such limited knowledge about the unseen does not make one All-Knowing. Only the Creator has that attribute.

In Radd al-Muhtar Vol.2 page 439, Ibn Abidin states that it is kufr to believe a dead person acts freely in issues apart from Allah (swt).

Maulana Yusuf Ludhianvi in Irshad al-Talibin on page 18 quotes Qadhi Muhammad Thanauallah to have said that praying to the Prophet or other pious personalities whether living or dead is impermissible.

In Fatawa Rashidiyya on page 139, Rashid Ahmed Gangohi quotes Shah Muhammad Ishaq's Mi'ah Masail and Arba'in Masail and writes that to address someone in the grave, whether far away from the grave or at it, saying "you fulfill my work" is shirk.

Keeping these in mind it can be said that if a person worships someone living or dead then that will be shirk. If one thinks that a person has the power of his own to grant one's wish then again this is shirk. This is established by the Qur'an and Sunnah to fall into the category of shirk and thus can be termed as such.

If some practice Tawassul in a way which is shirk that does not mean that Tawassul should be labeled "shirk". If some people perform the Salah but their Salah is not directed to Allah (swt) and it is directed to lets say an idol, would we then label Salah as "shirk" and abandon it? No. A distinction will be made and explained that Salah is to be only towards Allah (swt) and not towards an idol and whosoever offers Salah towards an idol is committing shirk. But it will never be said that Salah is shirk. Similarly one cannot call Tawassul shirk just because some people might be doing it incorrectly.

Concluding the topic

This topic has been dealt with considerable details to establish whether Tawassul is shirk or not. However there is no evidence anywhere that Tawassul is shirk. If one wishes to call the belief that the dead can hear as shirk then he will have to say that all the Companions who held the same belief also committed shirk naudhubillah. If one suggests the seeking Tawassul through the dead or through someone in their physical absence is shirk then they will have to say that the Companions who practiced this and preached it committed shirk naudhubillah and in the case of the Prophet Muhammad (saw), he taught shirk to the blind man naudhubillah.

Let us recall the hadith in Muwatta Imam Malik which states:

"Abdullah ibn Umar said that the Messenger of Allah (saw), said: 'If a man says to his Muslim brother, 'O kafir!' it is true about one of them.'"

We need to analyze all evidence which proves a position held by scholars whether it is regarding Tawassul or any other issue in matters of Fiqh, Aqeeda etc. At most, if someone wants to believe that Tawassul, in entirety or partially, is impermissible then they should voice their opinion that they think or believe it is not allowed, as opposed to saying that it is shirk without any evidence from the Qur'an and Sunnah.

If the prayers were directed to some person, or it would be thought that this person (dead or alive) possesses some power of his own whereby he can make needs come into being, then that can be classified as haram and shirk. One's belief in Aqeedah should be firm and correct. Having a weak or incorrect Aqeedah can lead a person into deviance in many things. In addition one should also not believe that their du'a is not accepted by Allah (swt) without Tawassul.

Abdul Haq bin Sayf al-Deen Bukhari Dehalvi who was a well learned Sufi and was generally quite relaxed in such issues, wrote in his commentary of Mishkat Masabih that it is haram and wrong aqeedah for one to abandon supplicating to Allah (swt) and instead visiting graves thinking that the person in the grave has full power and ability of his own to grant him his need. He further stated that it is simply forbidden to prostrate to a grave.

People who ask those whom they consider to be awliya but have passed away, to pray to Allah (swt) on their behalf while being at a considerable distance from the mausoleum of the awliya do not hold the belief that the awliya are All-Hearing or that they cause the awliya to hear. Their belief is based on that the angels deliver the message to them. Whether this belief is correct or incorrect is a whole new debate but regardless of the conclusion, this cannot be shirk.

I urge people to understand the concept of Tawassul. There are certain forms of Tawassul, or ways it is practiced by, that I might have reservations with but this does not mean I start calling it shirk without any investigation into the matter. There is evidence for various types of Tawassul and one should analyze this evidence before coming to a conclusion. If the conclusion reached is that Tawassul (in entirety or partiality) is not proven, one still cannot label it as shirk unless there is concrete evidence for it rooted in the Qur'an and Sunnah. Many works have been written by scholars from all over the Muslim world refuting the claim that Tawassul is shirk. There is no evidence that Tawassul is shirk because all prayers are directed to Allah (swt).

And Allah (swt) knows the Truth of this world and the Hereafter.