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TAWASSUL IN THE LIGHT OF THE ISLAMIC TENET OF SOLE AUTHORITY OF GOD | CIMS

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Tawassul, the act of seeking an intermediary to God is a belief not bereft of controversy, as it may be perceived as contravening the belief in oneness of God (*tawhīd*). This issue was discussed by the Centre for Intra-Muslim Studies (CIMS) on the 17th of March 2018 with a Sunni perspective presented by Dr Khurram Bashir – Spokesperson of Greenlane Mosque & member of Islamic Sharia council, and a Shia perspective presented by Shaykh Arif Abdulhussain – Director and Senior lecturer Al-Mahdi Institute.

Dr Khurram's main premise was that *tawassul* is not a permissible act as the Prophet never practiced it and is in contradiction with the Quranic injunction on not calling other than God.¹

He was clear that the view he presented could be considered by some as a puritanical understanding of Islam and may differ from the popular Sunni view. Explaining the different types of *tawhīd* as a basis for his presentation, he went on to outline the Prophetic practice which entailed calling out only to Allah in times of difficulty². Therefore, any act therefore not practiced by the Prophet should be rejected, which would mean according to him rejecting the practice of *tawassul*. Referencing Ibn Taymiyya's view on *tawassul*, Dr Khurram also pointed out that certain practices, including *tawassul*, carried out by some Shia and Sunnis contradicted his understanding of *tawhīd*, and deemed their actions as misguided.

Shaykh Arif divided *tawassul* into two types: a permissible form and an impermissible one. The permitted *tawassul* is asking God directly but petitioning Him via means of his creation, whilst the unacceptable one is asking other than God as it contravenes unity in worship (*tawhīd fil 'ibāda*)

¹ Quran 72:8

² Quran 2:154



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Whilst there is no problem in asking the living directly, the point of dispute arises amongst Muslim scholars regarding the invoking of the dead directly. The classical Shia argument as pointed out by the Shaykh would permit invoking the Prophets and Imams by considering them alive based on the Quranic verse “*Do not call those who were slain in Allah’s way ‘dead.’ No, they are living, but you are not aware*”³. However, Shaykh Arif referred to other verses in the Quran which indicate that deceased prophets have no knowledge of the current world⁴, nor can the dead hear or at the very least respond to requests from the living: “*If you invoke them, they will not hear your invocation, and even if they heard they cannot respond to you*”⁵. In addition to the Quranic evidence, Shaykh presented the practice of the Prophet and Ahlul Bayt as being bereft of invoking other past prophets or saints and hence the invoking of the dead being problematic. He went on to highlight certain current Shia practises such as *du‘ā’ al-tawassul*, a supplication invoking the Prophet and the Imams, as being weak in the chain of narrators and being inconsistent with the Quran (detailed discussion on of *du‘ā’ al-tawassul* can be found [here](#)). The Shaykh did mention however that asking God to accept a request through consideration of His creation has precedent in the practice of the Ahlul Bayt and is consistent with the Quranic ethos and is therefore permitted.

From the points raised in the discussion was on the verse “*and seek the means of recourse to Him*”⁶ The ‘means of recourse’ or *wasīla* mentioned in the verse was not referring to any means independent of God and hence stood up the test of being consistent with the Quran and Prophetic practice. It was concluded that *tawhīd* is theologically accepted across the board by all Muslims, and whilst there differing opinions regarding petitioning God via means, it is accepted by all that directly asking someone independent of God is prohibited.

³ Quran 2:154

⁴ In the conversation God has with Isa Quran 5:117 - I did not say to them [anything] except what You had commanded me [to say]: “Worship Allah, my Lord and your Lord.” And I was a witness to them so long as I was among them. But when You had taken me away, You Yourself were watchful over them, and You are witness to all things.

⁵ Quran 35:14

⁶ Quran5:35