

Notes on the Authenticity of *Du‘ā’ al-Tawassul* with a New English Translation

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ABSTRACT

This article explores *Du‘ā’ al-Tawassul*, a widely recited supplication among Shī‘a Muslims, focusing on its theological significance, historical usage and debates surrounding its authenticity. Despite being deeply rooted in Islamic tradition, the practice of *tawassul*, particularly through this supplication, is scrutinized both within and outside Shī‘a circles. Key issues include the appropriateness of labeling it a *du‘ā’*, a lack of a verified chain of narration, and theological concerns about intercession. This article critically examines these claims to create a comprehensive understanding of the practice’s legitimacy. The broader implications of these discussions on the concept of *tawassul* will also be examined, contributing to a deeper understanding of the overlap between the contentions with *tawassul* and anti-Shia sentiment.

Introduction

Du‘ā’ al-Tawassul is a supplication recited weekly by the majority of Imāmī Shī‘a Muslims, typically on Tuesday evenings. In this prayer, adherents seek intercession from God through His most beloved

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figures, starting with Prophet Muḥammad (s) and concluding with the Twelfth Imam, the Mahdī (may God hasten his reappearance). The term *tawassul* means seeking a means of approaching Allah, in this context, through the use of an intermediary. *Du‘ā’ al-Tawassul*, along with the broader concept of *tawassul*, is a deeply rooted and authentic practice within Islam, supported by a strong theological foundation and historical usage. However, there are points of contention on the dua both within Imāmī Shī‘a thought and outside it. There are three main areas of contention with respect to the *Du‘ā’*. Firstly, there is a theological objection that engaging in *tawassul* is tantamount to polytheism. Secondly, this supplication diverges from the traditional definition of *du‘ā’* and therefore cannot be classified as such; third, it lacks a verified chain of transmission and therefore cannot be authenticated, nor be said to originate from one of the infallibles. While there are ways to invoke intercession outside of this particular supplication, due to its centrality in Imāmī Shī‘a recommended practice, it becomes a common target in debates on the validity of intercession. This article will discuss the aforementioned issues with respect to *Du‘ā’ al-Tawassul* by providing a discussion on the concept of *tawassul*, the use of *tawassul* in the Qur’an and *ḥadīth* to establish its validity from a theological perspective, and finally its origin, and label as a *du‘ā’*.

A Theological contention

The theological objection commonly raised against *Du‘ā’ al-Tawassul* is that directing supplications to the Prophet (s) and his family appears inconsistent with the core Islamic belief of monotheism, that Allah is the only one that has the attributes that permit him to affect existence, and therefore any prayers should be made directly to Allah, the sole Controller of all matters, otherwise it is considered as polytheism. This is further corroborated by the Qur’anic verse: “When My servants ask you about Me, [tell them that] I am indeed nearest. I answer the supplicant’s call when he calls Me. So let them respond to Me, and let

them have faith in Me, so that they may fare rightly.”² When a person holds the above belief, a question is posed as to why one would seek assistance from anyone other than God. To respond to these questions, we must linguistically unpack the concept of *tawassul*, and also its usage in the Qur’an and *ḥadīth* by Allah and those who have been sent to guide us to the right path.

The concept of *tawassul*

Tawassul - intercession - is a theological concept that has been debated amongst Muslims for centuries, with its validity being a contentious issue in Sunnī-Shī‘ī discourse, as well as intra-Shī‘ī discourses. Linguistically, originating from the root of *wasl*, it means seeking nearness to an object by means of an action³ and can be applied in various contexts to determine its meaning in technical usage. In *tawassul*, although the immediate addressee of a request may be someone other than God, the ultimate recipient of the supplication is still God. When a believer engages in *tawassul* through the Prophet (s) or his household, the intention is to seek the fulfillment of their needs from God, even if the supplication is addressed to figures such as “O Muḥammad...!” *Tawassul* involves using an intermediary (*wasīla*) through whom one’s needs are presented to God, but it is God alone who fulfills those needs. The intermediary’s role is to occasion a favorable response from God, due to His love and esteem for that intermediary. Thus, there is no question of associating partners with God, as the one engaging in *tawassul* fully acknowledges that Allah is the ultimate agent who controls all things. The intermediary is simply a beloved figure through whom the supplication is channeled in the hope of a favorable divine response. In the case of *Du‘ā’ al-Tawassul*, this term would mean “seeking nearness to the Allah by means of a specific supplication.”

² Q 2:186.

³ Al-Khalīl b. Aḥmad al-Farāhīdī, *Kitāb al-‘Ayn* (Mu’assisat dār al-hijra al-ṭab‘a: 1989).

Having understood *tawassul* linguistically and technically, it is important to delve into our source texts, the Qur’an and *ḥadīth* corpus, to understand how Allah and the infallibles have utilised this concept and determine what they intend. By doing so, it will be possible to assert a status for *Du‘ā’ al-Tawassul* and its permissibility. We will now turn to the Qur’anic conception of *tawassul*, to establish a theological basis for engaging in it.

The concept of *tawassul* in the Qur’an

Building a Qur’anic conception of intercession is essential for three reasons. Firstly, it can explain how Allah intended for the concept to be understood when He used the word. Further, it can validate or invalidate our use of the term, and finally, it serves as a yardstick to understand the concept when used in the *ḥadīth* corpus and by other scholars.

In the Qur’an, the word *wasīla* has been mentioned twice explicitly in verses 5:35, and 17:57. In the former, Allah instructs the pious to seek nearness to Him through an intermediary, when returning back to Him (*tawba*). In the latter, he speaks about the polytheists of Mecca that make *du‘ā’* to angels, *jinn* and mankind, who themselves seek a means of nearness to Allah. In other words, the angels, *jinn*, and mankind have no power independent of Allah to grant the wishes of the polytheists; rather, they themselves seek an intermediary to attain nearness to Allah. Here, ‘Allama Sayyid Muhammad Husayn Tabataba’i (d. 1402/1981) highlights an important point: while the ultimate power to effect change in the universe is exclusively with Allah (by making reference to verse 2:165), there are numerous verses in the Qur’an indicating Allah’s conferment of power and ownership, to selected creations such as angels, *jinn*, and some from mankind⁴. This is sufficient to demonstrate the explicit usage of the term *wasīla* in the Qur’an.

We can further develop a Qur’anic understanding of how followers of some Prophets would practically seek a *wasīla* when asking for their

⁴ Muhammad Husayn Tabataba’i, *al-Mīzān*, vol. 25, trans. Amina Inloes and Tawus Raja (Tawhid Institute Australia Ltd: 2021).

requests from Allah. The Qur'an provides evidence for instances of *tawassul* in practice by the Children of Israel and the sons of Prophet Jacob (s) who sought intercession from their respective prophets to resolve their difficulties and seek forgiveness from God. Given that Allah does not rebuke them for this practice in the Qur'an, it can be implied that the practice is permitted by Allah. In the first of these verses, the Children of Israel, while wandering in the desert, implore Prophet Moses to invoke God on their behalf for a variety of foods that the earth produces, saying: "O Moses, we can never endure one [kind of] food. So call upon your Lord to bring forth for us from the earth its green herbs and its cucumbers and its garlic and its lentils and its onions." [Moses] said, "Would you exchange what is better for what is less? Go into [any] settlement and indeed, you will have what you have asked."⁵ This request demonstrates their reliance on the Prophet to communicate their needs to God. The verse goes on to describe that they were punished for disobeying God and killing Prophets, however Prophet Mūsā's response to their request for supplication reflects the permissibility of seeking an intermediary.

In the second example, the sons of Prophet Jacob (s), upon recognizing their wrongdoing, approach their father and say: "O our father! Ask forgiveness of our sins for us; indeed, we have been sinners."⁶ Prophet Jacob (s) responds by affirming their request, promising, "Soon I will ask forgiveness for you from my Lord. Indeed, He is the Forgiving, the Merciful."⁷ Both examples emphasize the role of prophets as intercessors, through whom people sought divine assistance and forgiveness.

Finally, the following ayah: "And We did not send any messenger except to be obeyed by permission of Allah. And if, when they wronged themselves, they had come to you, [O Muḥammad], and asked

⁵ Q 2:61.

⁶ Q 12:97.

⁷ Q 12:98.

forgiveness of Allah and the Messenger had asked forgiveness for them, they would have found Allah Accepting of Repentance and Merciful.” (4:64-5) The context and interpretation of this verse illustrates God telling the Prophet that those who sin should seek repentance from God, and should also ask the Prophet to ask God to forgive them as well.

The concept of *tawassul* in *ḥadīth*

The concept of *tawassul* is not an innovation or a novel practice as has been suggested by critiques of the *du‘ā’*. In addition to being narrated in the Qur’an, the concept can be found in numerous narrations from the Ahl al-Bayt, which are supported by reliable chains of transmission. The prevalence of these narrations strongly affirms the legitimacy of *du‘ā’* in general, as well as the specific form of supplication through *tawassul*. A few examples, though not exhaustive, can be utilised to illustrate this point. The first being Muḥammad b. Ya‘qūb al-Kulaynī (d. 329/941), who narrates from ‘Abd al-Raḥmān al-Qaṣīr, who reported:

I entered upon Abū ‘Abdillāh [Imām al-Ṣādiq] (a) and said: May I be sacrificed for you, I have invented a supplication. He (a) said: Leave your invention. When a matter befalls you, seek refuge in the Messenger of God (s) and pray two rak‘as and gift them to the Messenger of God (s),” until he said: “Then take your beard with your left hand, and weep or pretend to weep, and say: ‘O Muḥammad, O Messenger of God, I complain to God and to you of my need, and to your rightly guided Ahl al-Bayt of my need, and through you I turn to God regarding my need.’⁸

Another narration from al-Kulaynī involves Imam al-Kāẓim (a), where al-Baṭā’inī recounts the following narration:

He [Imām al-Kāẓim (a)] said to me: I have been ill for

⁸ Muḥammad b. Ya‘qūb al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfi* (Dār al-kutub al-Islāmiyya: 2008), 6:620.

seven months, and my son has been ill for twelve months, and it has been doubled for us. Do you realise that it does not affect the whole body? Sometimes it affects the upper body and not the lower, and sometimes it affects the lower and not the whole upper body? I said: May I be sacrificed for you, if you permit me, I will tell you a *ḥadīth* from Abū Baṣīr from your grandfather, that when he was ill he would seek aid from cold water. He would have two garments: a garment in the cold water, and a garment on his body, alternating between them. Then he would call out until his voice was heard at the door of the house: “O Fāṭima, daughter of Muḥammad.” He (a) said: “You have spoken the truth.”⁹

The last narration from al-Kulaynī is narrated from Imām al-Bāqir (a), who advised:

When you want something, ask your Lord for it. Perform *wuḍūʿ* (ablution) well, then pray two *rakʿas* (units of prayer). Exalt God, send blessings upon the Prophet (s), and say after the *taslīm* (salutation): ‘O God, I ask You, for You are the Sovereign, and You have power over all things. What You will of a matter comes to be. O God, I turn to You through Your Prophet Muḥammad, the Prophet of Mercy (s). O Muḥammad, O Messenger of God, I turn to God, your Lord and my Lord, through you; that He may grant success to my request. O God, grant success to my request through Your Prophet Muḥammad.’ Then ask your need.¹⁰

Furthermore, Ibn al-Mashhadī narrates in his *al-Mazār al-kabīr*:

It is recommended to supplicate with this supplication

⁹ Al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, 15:266.

¹⁰ Al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, 6:627.

after the prayer of visitation, for it is narrated from him (a): ‘O God, the affliction is great, the hidden has become manifest, the veil has been lifted, the earth has become narrow, the sky has been withheld, and to You, O Lord, is the complaint, and upon You is the reliance in hardship and ease. O God, bless Muḥammad and his family, those whom You have made obedience to them obligatory upon us, and made known to us their status thereby. So grant us relief through them, a speedy relief, as quick as the blink of an eye or even quicker than that. O Muḥammad, O ‘Alī! O ‘Alī, O Muḥammad! Help me, for you are my helpers! Suffice me, for you are sufficient for me! O my Master, O Master of the Time! Help, help, help! Come to my aid, come to my aid!’¹¹

In other narrations of the traditions of the Ahl al-Bayt (as), supplications were often directed from the supplicant to the intermediary. These traditions are so extensively and consistently transmitted that they reach the level of successive narration (*tawātur*), thereby rendering the need for individual verification of their chains of narrators unnecessary. This is visible in the *ziyāra* of Imam Ḥusayn that states “I bear witness that you are upon manifest truth from your Lord. I have come to you confessing my sins. Intercede for me with your Lord!”¹² The *ziyāra* of Imam ‘Alī similarly states “So intercede for me, for you hold a praised position with Allah.”¹³ This demonstrates that *tawassul* exists in a number of supplications that are not as scrutinized as *Du‘a’ al-Tawassul*.

Given this understanding, it is clear that seeking an intermediary with God by saying ‘O Muḥammad!’, ‘O ‘Alī!’, or ‘O Fāṭima!’ or by directly

¹¹ Muḥammad b. Ja‘far al-Mashhadī, *al-Mazār al-kabīr* (Daftar intishārāt-i Islāmī: 1419 AH.), 591.

¹² Ja‘far b. Muḥammad al-Qummī, *Kāmil al-ziyārāt* (Dār al-Murtaḍawīyya: 1356 Sh./1977), 210-1, *ḥadīths* 7 and 8.

¹³ Muḥammad b. al-Ḥasan al-Ṭūsī, *Miṣbāh al-mutahajjid* (Markaz buḥūth al-ḥajj wa-l-‘umra: 1987), 780.

addressing them in their supplications is found in a wide range of sources, thereby indicating its acceptance. The practice itself is deeply rooted in the teachings of the Prophet and his household, who guided their followers to seek the fulfillment of their needs through the intercession of the Infallibles. Therefore, it is incorrect to assert that this practice is not part of Shī'ī traditions or Islamic heritage. If any theological concern exists, it is not with *tawassul* itself, but attempts to discredit the status of the Prophet's family for political purposes, as will be discussed in following sections.

Origins of *Du'ā' al-Tawassul*

Du'ā' al-Tawassul (Appendix A) is originally recorded in *Bihār al-anwār*, by Muḥammad Bāqir al-Majlisī (d. 1110/1699) who dedicated his life to the science of tradition. In 1659, during the Safavid period, 'Allama al-Majlisī began recording traditions and compiling them into an encyclopaedic collection,¹⁴ resulting in *Bihār al-anwār*, roughly translating to "Ocean of Lights", which has been labeled an incomparable piece of literature¹⁵ ¹⁶. It stretches over 110 volumes and includes every narration 'Allama al-Majlisī and his assistants could find. In the compilation, 'Allama al-Majlisī notes sources for the reports, which lends itself to being a point of reference in Shia studies¹⁷ ¹⁸. One of the contentious issues surrounding *Bihār al-anwār* is the authenticity of the narrations, and so it is important to note that while there are differences of opinions on which narrations found within *Bihār* are authentic, the determining

¹⁴ Paula Youngman Skreslet and Rebecca Skreslet, *The Literature of Islam: A Guide to the Primary Sources in English* (Scarecrow Press:2006), 47.

¹⁵ Skreslet and Skreslet, *The Literature of Islam*, 47.

¹⁶ Ethan Kohlberg, "Shi'i Hadith," in A. F. L Beeston, T. M Johnstone, R. B Serjeant, and G. R Smith. (eds.) *Arabic Literature to the End of the Umayyad Period*, (Cambridge University Press: 2012). 307.

¹⁷ Ibid, 307.

¹⁸ William Chittick and Muḥammad Ḥusayn Ṭabāṭabā'ī, *A Shi'ite Anthology*, (State University of New York Press: 1981), 17.

factor is the methodology adopted for authenticating narrations. As such there are varying levels of strength of the chain or narration, and therefore varying levels of authenticity¹⁹. Another key consideration for the acceptance of narrations is its consistency with the Qur’an²⁰. Scholars of principles of jurisprudence discuss this extensively to determine the relationship between the Qur’an and *ḥadīth*. In practice, they verify the contents of a *ḥadīth* by cross-referencing it with the Qur’an, and as long as there is no contradiction they will accept the *ḥadīth* if it passes the standards of authentication. If there is a non-resolvable contradiction between the Qur’an and *Ḥadīth*, then the *ḥadīth* will be rejected, even if its chain of narrators has been authenticated. It is important to note that in referring to the Qur’ān, the scholars will not only analyze verses with the same concepts as those mentioned in the *ḥadīth*, but also take into consideration other related verses and the overarching ethos of the message of the Qur’an.

In *Bihār al-anwār*, *Du‘a’ al-Tawassul* is introduced by ‘Allama al-Majlisī in the following way:

In an old manuscript of one of the works of our colleagues—may God be pleased with them—I found the following words: “This supplication was narrated by Muḥammad b. Bābawayh—may God have mercy on him—from the Imams (s). He said: ‘I have not supplicated to God about a matter [using this supplication] except that I have received a swift response. It reads: ‘O Allah! I do sincerely entreat You and turn towards You in the name of Your prophet, the Prophet of Mercy, Muḥammad — may Allah bless him

¹⁹ Aaron Albert Haley, “Majlisī, Muḥammad Bāqir al-.” in Emad El-Din Shahin (ed.) *The Oxford Encyclopedia of Islam and Politics*, (Oxford University Press, 2014).

²⁰ Al-Shahīd al-Thānī and ‘Abd al-Hadi al-Faḍli, *Dirāyat al-Ḥadīth*, trans. Nazmina Virjee (ICAS Press: 2002).

and his family.²¹

While this supplication is predominantly attributed to ‘Allama al-Majlisī, a similar version can also be found in *Manhāj al-ṣalāḥ* titled *al-Du‘ā’ li-l-wasā’il* (“The Supplication for Means”)²². This supplication does not have the same final component as *Biḥār al-anwār*, along with other minor variations throughout.

Du‘ā’ al-Tawassul lacks an established chain of narrators, making it impossible to conclusively verify its origin from the Imams, and as such has drawn some skepticism to its validity. However, this uncertainty does not necessarily preclude its recitation, as there is a possibility it originated through the Imams, and as we have established, seeking an intermediary to seek nearness to Allah is permitted. Thus, there is a potential of bringing divine reward and facilitating the fulfillment of needs through Allah. Although it cannot be definitively established that this supplication came from the Infallible Imams, the fact that ‘Allama al-Majlisī reported finding it in reliable sources—books he considered trustworthy—and that it was narrated by Shaykh Muḥammad b. ‘Alī al-Ṣadūq (d. 381/991) suggests that its origin from the Imams (as) is plausible. If there is a reasonable likelihood of this, then engaging in *tawassul* with this supplication remains permissible, allowing us to seek its blessings and attain nearness to Allah, provided there are no other prohibitive factors. Furthermore, this supplication is included in ‘Allama al-Ḥillī’s *Manhāj al-salāḥ*, a work composed four centuries before al-Majlisī’s time, and al-Majlisī himself cites it from a different source, indicating two distinct transmission routes. This dual transmission further increases the likelihood of it originating from the Imams.

²¹ Muḥammad Bāqir b. Muḥammad Taqī Majlisī, *Biḥār al-anwār* (Dār iḥyā’ al-turāth al-‘Arabī: n.d.), 99:241.

²² Ḥasan b. Yusuf al-Ḥillī, *Manhāj al-ṣalāḥ fi ikhtisār al-miṣbāḥ* (Maktabat al-‘Allama al-Majlisī: 1388 Sh./2009), 511.

The origin of contention

The topic of *tawassul* and its supposed impermissibility emerged as a point of contention in the religious sphere only after the time of Ibn Taymiyya. Prior to this, it was neither a subject of scholarly debate nor disagreement, but rather a practice ingrained in the beliefs and behaviors of Muslims at large. The legacy of Ibn Taymiyya’s injunction on *tawassul* is visible in contemporary discourses and in inter-sectarian interactions. Sunnī sources have also documented that prior to Ibn Taymiyya’s rejection, *tawassul* was not deemed problematic by either school of thought:

Among the superstitions of Ibn Taymiyya that no scholar before him said, and by which he became an example among the people of Islam: He denied seeking aid and *tawassul* through him (s), and it is not as he fabricated. Rather, *tawassul* through him (s) is good in every situation, before his creation and after it, in this world and the Hereafter.²³

The Wahhabi stance on *tawassul* is notoriously rigid, and widely known for its stark limitation of practices that have been integral to the religious foundations of many Muslims. The position taken on *tawassul* is most visible upon visit to Saudi Arabia where those seeking intercession through the Prophet receive poor treatment to the extent of punishment. The mere act of standing by the grave of the Prophet (s), addressing him, and requesting his intercession with God, or seeking the fulfillment of material or spiritual needs through him, is enough to provoke a swift and harsh reaction from the officials of Saudi Arabia.

Muḥammad b. ‘Abd al-Wahhāb (d. 1206/1792), the founder of the Wahhabi movement in Saudi Arabia, articulates this perspective unequivocally in his writings: “Whoever worships God day and night

²³ Aḥmad b. Muḥammad b. Ḥajar al-Haytamī, *al-Jawhar al-Munazzam fi Ziyārat al-Qabr al-Sharīf al-Nabawī al-Mukarram al-Mu‘azzam*, (al-Maṭba‘ah al-Khayrīyah: 1912), 171.

and then invokes a prophet or a saint at their grave has effectively taken two deities and has not genuinely affirmed that there is no god but God.” Accusations of *shirk* (polytheism) are weaponized to justify the physical removal of individuals engaging in *tawassul* from the sacred sites²⁴. Additionally, Saudi Arabia annually produces and distributes millions of books in numerous languages, which are made available to pilgrims from across the globe and in turn, circulated worldwide²⁵. These texts consistently underscore the prohibition of *tawassul*, solidifying it as a defining aspect of Wahhabi ideology, purposely juxtaposing it with Shī‘ī conceptualisations of supplication. While these arguments are also rooted in contemporary geopolitics, these arguments have been used by Saudi scholars and the likes of ISIS, predating the Iranian revolution and persisting to the present day. The labeling of Shī‘ī thought as polytheistic and anti-Islamic due to the veneration of the Prophet and his household can be seen as largely centered in debates on *tawassul*.²⁶

The label of “*Du‘ā*”

One of the qualms with *Du‘ā’ al-Tawassul* is its status of a *du‘ā’*. The main argument is that this supplication cannot be deemed authentic because a genuine supplication (*du‘ā’*) is an address from a servant to his Lord, whereas this supplication is directed to the Prophet’s Household rendering it ineligible to be considered a *du‘ā’*. Further, there are other structural components that support this particular supplication being less eligible as “*du‘ā*” than other widely accepted *du‘ā*’s. An example of this is the assertion from Shaykh ‘Abbās Qummī (d. 1359/1941), correcting ‘Allama al-Majlisī by not labeling *Du‘ā’ al-Tawassul* as a *du‘ā’*:

²⁴ Nāṣir Makārim Shīrāzī, *Tawassul: Tawḥīd yā Shirk?*, (Imām ‘Alī b. Abī Ṭālib: 2010).

²⁵ Makārim Shīrāzī, *Tawassul*.

²⁶ Simon Wolfgang Fuchs, “The Long Shadow of the State” in Cristophe Jaffrelot and Laurence Louer, eds. *Pan-Islamic Connections* (Oxford University Press: 2018), 220.

Second: *al-Tawassul*. ‘Allama al-Majlisī says that he found in a reliable book that Muḥammad b. Bābawayh narrated this *tawassul* from the Imams (s) and said: ‘I have not sought a means to Allah about a matter [using this invocation] except that I have received a swift response.’²⁷

The use of just the term *tawassul*, refers to the nature of the *du‘ā’* in which the supplicant is seeking a means of approaching Allah, through the use of an intermediary. This emphasizes that the practice does not constitute a supplication addressed to the Ahl al-Bayt (a). Instead, it involves seeking a means to Allah through them by requesting their intercession with Him for the fulfillment of one’s needs.

The term *du‘ā’* is used because it is the commonly accepted name for this invocation. However, while the question about referring to *Du‘ā’ al-Tawassul* as a *du‘ā’* is a valid question, due to its nature as a supplication, it is not incorrect to refer to it as a *du‘ā’*. Simply, it is a point of precision to refer to it as *al-Tawassul* instead of *Du‘ā’ al-Tawassul*. The term *du‘ā’* has become prevalent due to the use of its introductory phrase, “O Allah! I do sincerely entreat You and turn towards You...” or because the ultimate object of the request is Allah. Additionally, it has been transmitted in books of supplications, and according to some accounts, the Prophet instructed the Muslims to use an invocation of *tawassul*, saying, “Supplicate with this!” (*id‘ū bihi.*)²⁸ This is an essential point that leads to the second part of the contention: how theologically sound is the concept of *tawassul*?

²⁷ ‘Abbās b. Muḥammad Riḍā Qummī, *Mafatīh al-Jinān, Les clés du paradis*, (BAA Publications: 2008), 194.

²⁸ Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal, *Musnad Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal*, .trans. Nasiruddin Al-Khattab (Darussalam Publications: 2012), 28:480, no. 17241. The editor of this edition, Shu‘ayb Arna‘ūt says that this tradition is repeated in other sources and that its chain of narration is authentic (*ṣaḥīḥ*) with trustworthy narrators (*rijāl thiqāt*).

Conclusion

The debate over the permissibility of *tawassul* (seeking intercession) arose after Ibn Taymiyya's time, prior to which it was widely accepted and practiced by Muslims. Sunnī scholar Ibn Ḥajar al-Haytamī noted that Ibn Taymiyya's opposition to *tawassul* was an innovation with no precedent. This stance became central to Wahhabi ideology, which strongly opposes *tawassul* and enforces this view rigorously, particularly in Saudi Arabia. Wahhabi teachings equate seeking intercession with *shirk* (polytheism), often leading to the punishment of those practicing *tawassul* at sacred sites. Historically, *tawassul* was a widely accepted form of seeking intercession through the Prophet and his family, deeply embedded in Muslim traditions. However, Wahhabi ideology has redefined and limited this practice, viewing it as inconsistent with monotheism. Despite these objections, *tawassul* remains an important and validated practice within other Islamic traditions, particularly among Shī'ī Muslims, who continue to uphold its legitimacy.

The concept of *tawassul* - and specifically *Du'ā' al-Tawassul* - has been at the center of theological debates concerning the legitimacy of seeking intercession. Critics argue that such supplications, directed towards the Prophet's Household rather than directly to God, diverge from the traditional definition of *du'ā'*, which is an address from a servant to God alone. However, proponents of *tawassul* maintain that while intermediaries like the Prophet and his family are invoked, the ultimate recipient of the supplication is still Allah. This practice is rooted in Islamic tradition, including both Sunnī and Shī'ī sources, and is considered valid within these frameworks. Theologically, *tawassul* acknowledges Allah as the ultimate source of help, with the intermediaries serving as beloved figures whose intercession may prompt a favorable response from Allah. The debate primarily revolves around the legitimacy and understanding of intercession within Islamic theology.

Appendix A

Du‘a’ al-Tawassul (translated by Alexander Khaleeli and Mona Makki)

The Supplication of seeking means to Allah

The Supplication:

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

In the name of Allah, the All Compassionate, the Most Merciful.

اللَّهُمَّ إِنِّي أَسْأَلُكَ، وَأَتَوَسَّلُ إِلَيْكَ بِنَبِيِّكَ نَبِيِّ الرَّحْمَةِ مُحَمَّدٍ، صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ
وَأَلِهِ،

O Allah! I do sincerely entreat You and turn towards You in the name of Your Prophet, the Prophet of Mercy, Muḥammad—may Allah bless him and his family.

يَا أَبَا الْقَاسِمِ،
يَا رَسُولَ اللَّهِ،
يَا إِمَامَ الرَّحْمَةِ،
يَا سَيِّدَنَا وَمَوْلَانَا،
إِنَّا تَوَجَّهْنَا، وَاسْتَشْفَعْنَا،
وَتَوَسَّلْنَا بِكَ إِلَى اللَّهِ،
وَقَدَّمْنَاكَ بَيْنَ يَدَيْ حَاجَاتِنَا،
يَا وَجِيهًا عِنْدَ اللَّهِ،

إِشْفَعْ لَنَا عِنْدَ اللَّهِ.

O Abā l-Qāsim!
O messenger of Allah!
O leader of mercy!
O our master and our patron!
We lift our faces, hopeful for intercession,
And make you our means to Allah,
And we send you forth bearing our appeal,
O one eminent with Allah,
Plead on our behalf with Allah!

يَا أَبَا الْحَسَنِ،
يَا أَمِيرَ الْمُؤْمِنِينَ،
يَا عَلِيَّ بْنَ أَبِي طَالِبٍ،
يَا حُجَّةَ اللَّهِ عَلَى خَلْقِهِ،
يَا سَيِّدَنَا وَمَوْلَانَا،
إِنَّا تَوَجَّهْنَا، وَاسْتَشْفَعْنَا،
وَتَوَسَّلْنَا بِكَ إِلَى اللَّهِ،
وَقَدَّمْنَاكَ بَيْنَ يَدَيْ حَاجَاتِنَا،
يَا وَجِيهًا عِنْدَ اللَّهِ،
إِشْفَعْ لَنَا عِنْدَ اللَّهِ.

O Abā l-Ḥasan!
O Commander of the Faithful!
O ‘Alī, son of Abī Ṭālib!
O Allah’s authority over His creatures!
O our master and our patron!

We lift our faces, hopeful for intercession,
 And make you our means to Allah,
 And we send you forth bearing our appeal,
 O one eminent with Allah,
 Plead on our behalf with Allah!

يَا فَاطِمَةَ الزَّهْرَاءُ،
 يَا بِنْتَ مُحَمَّدٍ،
 يَا قُرَّةَ عَيْنِ الرَّسُولِ،
 يَا سَيِّدَتَنَا وَمَوْلَاتَنَا،
 إِنَّا تَوَجَّهْنَا، وَاسْتَشْفَعْنَا،
 وَتَوَسَّلْنَا بِكَ إِلَى اللَّهِ،
 وَقَدَّمْنَاكَ بَيْنَ يَدَيْ حَاجَاتِنَا،
 يَا وَجِيهَةً عِنْدَ اللَّهِ،
 اشفِعي لنا عند الله.

O Fāṭima, the Radiant One!
 O daughter of Muḥammad!
 O apple of the Messenger's eye!
 O our lady and our patron!
 We lift our faces, hopeful for intercession,
 And make you our means to Allah,
 And we send you forth bearing our appeal,
 O one eminent with Allah,
 Plead on our behalf with Allah!

يَا أَبَا مُحَمَّدٍ،
 يَا حَسَنَ بْنَ عَلِيٍّ،

أَيُّهَا الْمُجْتَبَى،
 يَا ابْنَ رَسُولِ اللَّهِ،
 يَا حُجَّةَ اللَّهِ عَلَى خَلْقِهِ،
 يَا سَيِّدَنَا وَمَوْلَانَا،
 إِنَّا تَوَجَّهْنَا، وَاسْتَشْفَعْنَا،
 وَتَوَسَّلْنَا بِكَ إِلَى اللَّهِ،
 وَقَدَّمْنَاكَ بَيْنَ يَدَيْ حَاجَاتِنَا،
 يَا وَجِيهًا عِنْدَ اللَّهِ،
 اشْفَعْ لَنَا عِنْدَ اللَّهِ.

O Abā Muḥammad!
 O Ḥasan, son of ‘Alī!
 O chosen one!
 O scion of Allah’s Messenger!
 O Allah’s authority over His creatures!
 O our master and our patron!
 We lift our faces, hopeful for intercession,
 And make you our means to Allah,
 And we send you forth bearing our appeal,
 O one eminent with Allah,
 Plead on our behalf with Allah!

يَا أَبَا عَبْدِ اللَّهِ،
 يَا حُسَيْنَ بْنَ عَلِيٍّ،
 أَيُّهَا الشَّهِيدُ،
 يَا ابْنَ رَسُولِ اللَّهِ،

يَا حُجَّةَ اللَّهِ عَلَى خَلْقِهِ،
 يَا سَيِّدَنَا وَمَوْلَانَا،
 إِنَّا تَوَجَّهْنَا، وَاسْتَشْفَعْنَا،
 وَتَوَسَّلْنَا بِكَ إِلَى اللَّهِ،
 وَقَدَّمْنَاكَ بَيْنَ يَدَيْ حَاجَاتِنَا،
 يَا وَجِيهًا عِنْدَ اللَّهِ،
 اشْفَعْ لَنَا عِنْدَ اللَّهِ.

O Abā 'Abdillāh!
 O Ḥusayn, son of 'Alī!
 O martyred one!
 O scion of Allah's Messenger!
 O Allah's authority over His creatures!
 O our master and our patron!
 We lift our faces, hopeful for intercession,
 And make you our means to Allah,
 And we send you forth bearing our appeal,
 O one eminent with Allah,
 Plead on our behalf with Allah!

يَا أَبَا الْحَسَنِ،
 يَا عَلِيَّ بْنَ الْحُسَيْنِ،
 يَا زَيْنَ الْعَابِدِينَ،
 يَا ابْنَ رَسُولِ اللَّهِ،
 يَا حُجَّةَ اللَّهِ عَلَى خَلْقِهِ،
 يَا سَيِّدَنَا وَمَوْلَانَا،

إِنَّا تَوَجَّهْنَا، وَاسْتَشْفَعْنَا،
 وَتَوَسَّلْنَا بِكَ إِلَى اللَّهِ،
 وَقَدَّمْنَاكَ بَيْنَ يَدَيْ حَاجَاتِنَا،
 يَا وَجِيهًا عِنْدَ اللَّهِ،
 اشفع لنا عند الله.

O Abā l-Ḥasan!
 O ‘Alī, son of Ḥusayn!
 O ornament of the worshippers!
 O scion of Allah’s Messenger!
 O Allah’s authority over His creatures!
 O our master and our patron!
 We lift our faces, hopeful for intercession,
 And make you our means to Allah,
 And we send you forth bearing our appeal,
 O one eminent with Allah,
 Plead on our behalf with Allah!

يَا أَبَا جَعْفَرٍ،
 يَا مُحَمَّدَ بْنَ عَلِيٍّ،
 أَيُّهَا الْبَاقِرُ،
 يَا ابْنَ رَسُولِ اللَّهِ،
 يَا حُجَّةَ اللَّهِ عَلَى خَلْقِهِ،
 يَا سَيِّدَنَا وَمَوْلَانَا،
 إِنَّا تَوَجَّهْنَا، وَاسْتَشْفَعْنَا،
 وَتَوَسَّلْنَا بِكَ إِلَى اللَّهِ،

وَقَدَّمْنَاكَ بَيْنَ يَدَيْ حَاجَاتِنَا،
يَا وَجِيهًا عِنْدَ اللَّهِ،
إِشْفَعْ لَنَا عِنْدَ اللَّهِ.

O Abā Ja'far!

O Muḥammad, son of 'Alī!

O one who split open knowledge after the Prophet!

O scion of Allah's Messenger!

O Allah's authority over His creatures!

O our master and our patron!

We lift our faces, hopeful for intercession,

And make you our means to Allah,

And we send you forth bearing our appeal,

O one eminent with Allah,

Plead on our behalf with Allah!

يَا أَبَا عَبْدِ اللَّهِ،
يَا جَعْفَرَ بْنَ مُحَمَّدٍ،
أَيُّهَا الصَّادِقُ،
يَا ابْنَ رَسُولِ اللَّهِ،
يَا حُجَّةَ اللَّهِ عَلَى خَلْقِهِ،
يَا سَيِّدَنَا وَمَوْلَانَا،
إِنَّا تَوَجَّهْنَا، وَاسْتَشْفَعْنَا،
وَتَوَسَّلْنَا بِكَ إِلَى اللَّهِ،
وَقَدَّمْنَاكَ بَيْنَ يَدَيْ حَاجَاتِنَا،
يَا وَجِيهًا عِنْدَ اللَّهِ،

إِشْفَعْ لَنَا عِنْدَ اللَّهِ.

O Abā 'Abdillāh!
 O Ja'far, son of Muḥammad!
 O one truthful in speech!
 O scion of Allah's Messenger!
 O Allah's authority over His creatures!
 O our master and our patron!
 We lift our faces, hopeful for intercession,
 And make you our means to Allah,
 And we send you forth bearing our appeal,
 O one eminent with Allah,
 Plead on our behalf with Allah!

يَا أَبَا الْحَسَنِ،
 يَا مُوسَى بْنَ جَعْفَرٍ،
 أَيُّهَا الْكَاطِمُ،
 يَا ابْنَ رَسُولِ اللَّهِ،
 يَا حُجَّةَ اللَّهِ عَلَى خَلْقِهِ،
 يَا سَيِّدَنَا وَمَوْلَانَا،
 إِنَّا تَوَجَّهْنَا، وَاسْتَشْفَعْنَا،
 وَتَوَسَّلْنَا بِكَ إِلَى اللَّهِ،
 وَقَدَّمْنَاكَ بَيْنَ يَدَيْ حَاجَاتِنَا،
 يَا وَجِيهًا عِنْدَ اللَّهِ،
 إِشْفَعْ لَنَا عِنْدَ اللَّهِ.

O Abā l-Ḥasan!
 O Mūsā, son of Ja'far!

O one restrained in anger!
 O scion of Allah's Messenger!
 O Allah's authority over His creatures!
 O our master and our patron!
 We lift our faces, hopeful for intercession,
 And make you our means to Allah,
 And we send you forth bearing our appeal,
 O one eminent with Allah,
 Plead on our behalf with Allah!

يَا أَبَا الْحَسَنِ،
 يَا عَلِيَّ بْنَ مُوسَى،
 أَيُّهَا الرِّضَا،
 يَا ابْنَ رَسُولِ اللَّهِ،
 يَا حُجَّةَ اللَّهِ عَلَى خَلْقِهِ،
 يَا سَيِّدَنَا وَمَوْلَانَا،
 إِنَّا تَوَجَّهْنَا، وَاسْتَشْفَعْنَا،
 وَتَوَسَّلْنَا بِكَ إِلَى اللَّهِ،
 وَقَدَّمْنَاكَ بَيْنَ يَدَيْ حَاجَاتِنَا،
 يَا وَجِيهًا عِنْدَ اللَّهِ،
 اشْفَعْ لَنَا عِنْدَ اللَّهِ.

O Abā l-Ḥasan!
 O 'Alī, son of Mūsā!
 O one unanimously agreed upon!
 O scion of Allah's Messenger!
 O Allah's authority over His creatures!

O our master and our patron!
 We lift our faces, hopeful for intercession,
 And make you our means to Allah,
 And we send you forth bearing our appeal,
 O one eminent with Allah,
 Plead on our behalf with Allah!

يَا أَبَا جَعْفَرٍ،
 يَا مُحَمَّدَ بْنَ عَلِيٍّ،
 أَيُّهَا التَّقِيُّ الْجَوَادُ،
 يَا ابْنَ رَسُولِ اللَّهِ،
 يَا حُجَّةَ اللَّهِ عَلَى خَلْقِهِ،
 يَا سَيِّدَنَا وَمَوْلَانَا،
 إِنَّا تَوَجَّهْنَا، وَاسْتَشْفَعْنَا،
 وَتَوَسَّلْنَا بِكَ إِلَى اللَّهِ،
 وَقَدَّمْنَاكَ بَيْنَ يَدَيْ حَاجَاتِنَا،
 يَا وَجِيهًا عِنْدَ اللَّهِ،
 اشْفَعْ لَنَا عِنْدَ اللَّهِ.

O Abū Ja‘far!
 O Muḥammad, son of ‘Alī!
 O devout and generous one!
 O scion of Allah’s Messenger!
 O Allah’s authority over His creatures!
 O our master and our patron!
 We lift our faces, hopeful for intercession,
 And make you our means to Allah,

And we send you forth bearing our appeal,
O one eminent with Allah,
Plead on our behalf with Allah!

يَا أَبَا الْحَسَنِ،
يَا عَلِيَّ بْنَ مُحَمَّدٍ،
أَيُّهَا الْهَادِي النَّقِيُّ،
يَا ابْنَ رَسُولِ اللَّهِ،
يَا حُجَّةَ اللَّهِ عَلَى خَلْقِهِ،
يَا سَيِّدَنَا وَمَوْلَانَا،
إِنَّا تَوَجَّهْنَا، وَاسْتَشْفَعْنَا،
وَتَوَسَّلْنَا بِكَ إِلَى اللَّهِ،
وَقَدَّمْنَاكَ بَيْنَ يَدَيْ حَاجَاتِنَا،
يَا وَجِيهًا عِنْدَ اللَّهِ،
إِشْفَعْ لَنَا عِنْدَ اللَّهِ.

O Abā l-Ḥasan!
O 'Alī, son of Muḥammad!
O pure guide!
O scion of Allah's Messenger!
O Allah's authority over His creatures!
O our master and our patron!
We lift our faces, hopeful for intercession,
And make you our means to Allah,
And we send you forth bearing our appeal,
O one eminent with Allah,
Plead on our behalf with Allah!

يَا أَبَا مُحَمَّدٍ،
 يَا حَسَنَ بْنَ عَلِيٍّ،
 أَيُّهَا الزَّكِيُّ الْعَسْكَرِيُّ،
 يَا ابْنَ رَسُولِ اللَّهِ،
 يَا حُجَّةَ اللَّهِ عَلَى خَلْقِهِ،
 يَا سَيِّدَنَا وَمَوْلَانَا،
 إِنَّا تَوَجَّهْنَا، وَاسْتَشْفَعْنَا،
 وَتَوَسَّلْنَا بِكَ إِلَى اللَّهِ،
 وَقَدَّمْنَاكَ بَيْنَ يَدَيْ حَاجَاتِنَا،
 يَا وَجِيهًا عِنْدَ اللَّهِ،
 إِشْفَعْ لَنَا عِنْدَ اللَّهِ.

O Abā Muḥammad!
 O Ḥasan, son of ‘Alī!
 O immaculate one kept in Samarrā’!
 O scion of Allah’s Messenger!
 O Allah’s authority over His creatures!
 O our master and our patron!
 We lift our faces, hopeful for intercession,
 And make you our means to Allah,
 And we send you forth bearing our appeal,
 O one eminent with Allah,
 Plead on our behalf with Allah!

يَا وَصِيَّ الْحَسَنِ وَالْخَلْفَ الْحُجَّةِ،
 أَيُّهَا الْقَائِمُ الْمُنْتَظَرُ الْمَهْدِيُّ،

يَا ابْنَ رَسُولِ اللَّهِ،
 يَا حُجَّةَ اللَّهِ عَلَى خَلْقِهِ،
 يَا سَيِّدَنَا وَمَوْلَانَا،
 إِنَّا تَوَجَّهْنَا، وَاسْتَشْفَعْنَا،
 وَتَوَسَّلْنَا بِكَ إِلَى اللَّهِ،
 وَقَدَّمْنَاكَ بَيْنَ يَدَيْ حَاجَاتِنَا،
 يَا وَجِيهًا عِنْدَ اللَّهِ،
 اشفع لنا عند الله.

O successor of Ḥasan and heir to the Imams!

O guided and awaited one who will arise to establish justice!

O scion of Allah's Messenger!

O Allah's authority over His creatures!

O our master and our patron!

We lift our faces, hopeful for intercession,

And make you our means to Allah,

And we send you forth bearing our appeal,

O one eminent with Allah,

Plead on our behalf with Allah!

[Now make your requests to Allah and they will, god-willing, be answered]

According to another narration, say after this:

يَا سَادَتِي وَمَوَالِيَّ، إِنِّي تَوَجَّهْتُ بِكُمْ أُمَّتِي وَعُدَّتِي لِيَوْمِ فَقْرِي وَحَاجَتِي
 إِلَى اللَّهِ، وَتَوَسَّلْتُ بِكُمْ إِلَى اللَّهِ، وَاسْتَشْفَعْتُ بِكُمْ إِلَى اللَّهِ، فَاشْفَعُوا
 لِي عِنْدَ اللَّهِ، وَاسْتَنْقِذُونِي مِنْ ذُنُوبِي عِنْدَ اللَّهِ، فَإِنَّكُمْ وَسِيلَتِي إِلَى اللَّهِ،

وَبِحُبِّكُمْ وَبِقُرْبِكُمْ أَرْجُو نَجَاةً مِنَ اللَّهِ، فَكُونُوا عِنْدَ اللَّهِ رَجَائِي، يَا سَادَتِي
يَا أَوْلِيَاءَ اللَّهِ، صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِمْ أَجْمَعِينَ، وَلَعَنَ اللَّهُ أَعْدَاءَ اللَّهِ ظَالِمِيهِمْ مِنَ
الْأَوَّلِينَ وَالْآخِرِينَ، آمِينَ رَبَّ الْعَالَمِينَ.

O my masters and my patrons! I turn towards Allah in your names — my leaders and my provision for the day of my poverty and destitution! — and make you my means to Allah, and I place my hope in your intercession for me with Allah. So plead on my behalf with Allah! And ask Allah to save me from my sins! For you are my means to Allah, and it is through my love for you and my proximity to you that I hope for Allah's salvation, so be my hope with Allah, O masters! O intimate servants of Allah! May Allah's blessing be upon them all, and may Allah curse the enemies of Allah who oppressed them, from the first and the last, Amen, Lord of the Worlds!

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