

INTERCESSION: What Is The Right Concept? (By Bashir Abid)

INTERCESSION - dictionary meanings are: i) Mediation ii) Prayer or petition in favour of another. INTERCEDE: To act between parties with a view to reconciling differences. Arabic tri-literal root of this word is: (sheen - fa - ain) - shafa'a; to double something; to attach, add something with another; pairing of things; either part of a pair; even numbers (opposite of this is watter). Raghīb Asfahani in Mufredaat wrote: Al shafa'at is to accompany someone with a view to take care and help him. In Islamic Jurisprudence Shuffa'h means: A special right of purchasing a property whereby a person can own it at market price. Ain al shaafeh - eyes which due to weakness or disease see the things double (double vision). Naaqah al shaafeh - a she camel with two babies; one accompanying her and the other in the womb (yet to born). Naaqah al shafooh - a she camel who let the entire milk in one milking instead of twice a day. Al shafa'ai - different kinds of grasses which grow together in pairs (Taj ul A'roos). Al shaa't al shaafeh - a goat accompanied along with her baby (Ibn Faris).

It becomes clear from these definitions and examples that basic meaning of INTERCESSION (Shafa'at) is to act jointly and to look after each others interests. Nepotism or undeserved favoritism (Sifaarish or Wasta or Waseela) is its corrupted meanings which has been adopted and spread by characterless persons.

The main goal of Quran is to establish a socio-economic system which satisfy man's needs and develop his human potentials. For this purpose, Quran advocates a system of collective living rather than individualism because the development of human potential, the character building, and the satisfaction of man's needs could be achieved only in an healthy and stable society. A social system which promotes or encourages selfishness, greed and exploitation of fellow human beings; and where the individual interests prevails over the collective interests; and where the haves do not care for the haves not; in that system, in spite, of all progress, developments and abundances, the human potentials remain suppressed and the human needs remain unsatisfied. Such a social system produce corrupt and character less individuals and creates severe imbalances in all spheres of the society.

Accordingly, in a Muslim society (that follows the Quranic Values System) every individual is an INTERCESSOR - (shafeeh), in the sense that they look after each other's affairs and protect each other's interests. They show friendly regards, make every effort on each other's behalf to achieve the objectives and are kind among themselves graciously. Similarly, The Chief Executive of an Islamic State (The Ruler) is INTERCESSOR of his fellow-citizen. His primary responsibility is to ensure protection for every citizen and not to let any of his subjects to feel lonesome and neglected in respect of his individual rights and basic needs.

This sort of INTERCESSION among the Muslims is not limited to themselves but extends to other nations also because their commitment with God is to make His System of Economy (Rububiut al a'limeeni) successful and useful for the whole of humankind. For this purpose they are enjoined to cooperate with other nations in all works which are carried out according to divine laws for the welfare, peace, stability and strength of mankind (Bir wal Taqwa). On the contrary, they are prohibited not to cooperate with those who acts against the interests of humankind and make plans which create division, rifts and disunity among the people and sap their energies and vigor and leave them unsubstantial (Ithm wal A'dwan). Accordingly, Quran says: "Mann Yashf'a Shafa'atan Hassanatan... Whoever help and support a good cause, he shares in all its credit and in its eventual victory - Wa Mann Yashf'a Shafa'atan Sayie'atan... And whoever supports a bad cause he shares in its evil consequences... (4:85).

This is Quranic concept of INTERCESSION. Now, compare this with the traditional concept. It is believed that on the Day of Judgement, after hearing and looking into everybodys' record, God will sentence the criminals and the sinners to hell. Then, the pious and the holy men, particularly the prophets (and from among them Prophet Mohammed in particular) would come forward for the defence of these criminals and request general amnesty. God will pardon them on the request of these holy and pious men and send these criminals from hell to heaven. They call it INTERCESSION.

Obviously, this concept of INTERCESSION is not meant in the Quran rather it demolishes the whole edifice of Islam which is firmly established on the principle of accountability. Quran says: "Fa Mann Ya'mal Misqala Zarratin KhairanYara ho. Wa Mann Ya'mal Misqala Zarratin Sharran Yara ho... (meaning) On the day of judgment everyone will be shown the exact import of everything that they had thought, said or done in this life of probation, however they may have concealed or misinterpreted it in this life. Everything will be considered in taking the account and the account will convince the persons concerned themselves. It will be done openly and convincingly: they "shall see it". (99:7-8).

It seems that this concept of INTERCESSION (patronage of the criminals) is originated during the era of despot kings when the Quranic Values System was put aside and the principles of fairness, justice and accountability were ignored. Influential men in the royal courts used to intercede to protect the criminals. Quran calls it - (Shafa'atan Syie'stan) - supporting a bad cause or an evil person. Moreover, this concept might have got strength from the concept of Atonement (Kuffara) in Christianity. According to this concept Lord Jesus (as) would intercede for all sinners among his believers on the Day of Judgement. It was a strong argument with Christians to show their superiority over the Muslims. Therefore, it might have inspired the Muslims to contrive similar beliefs about Nabi Mohammed (pbuh). They concocted such stories (Hadith) that on the Day of Judgement when God shall sentence the sinners to Hell Nabi Mohammed (pbuh) will fall down in prostration before God and will not raise head until He forgives all the sinners and send them to heaven. These falsehoods might have given some sort of superiority to Muslims over the Christians but at the same time these proved very fatal to Islam which is firmly founded on the principles of accountability. All The Ahadith regarding INTERCESSION attributed to the Nabi (pbuh) are false and, in fact, did great harm to Muslims' morality. Quran does not advocate such INTERCESSION. It states explicitly: "On the Day of Judgement none shall avail another, nor shall INTERCESSION be accepted, nor shall COMPENSATION be taken, nor shall be anyone helped" (2:48). In other words, Quran strictly warns: Be on your guard; do not think that special favours exempt you from the personal responsibility of each soul.

In order to prove their standpoint, the believers in INTERCESSION also quote some verses from Quran. For example, in verse 2:255 it is stated: "...who is there can intercede in His presence except as He permits...." They conclude that God in His Wisdom and Plan may grade His creatures and give one superiority over another. Then by His Will and permission such a one may intercede or help. Nabi Mohammed would intercede for the Muslims by the will and permission of God.

This conclusion is absolutely wrong.

In the same verse, it is stated: "...His are all things in the heavens and on earth...." -(2:255), How can then any creature stand before Him as of right, and claim to intercede for a fellow-creature? In the first place, both are His, and He cares as much for one as for the other. In the second place both are dependent on His Will and Command which He never changes (eternal and immutable). God's knowledge is absolute, and is not conditioned by Time or Space. Moreover, this conclusion is basically against the principle of fairness, justice and accountability which is continuously repeated throughout the Quran. If we believe in INTERCESSION as much as we believe in ACCOUNTABILITY then it will be a manifest contradiction which mislead the reader to think of Quran (ma'az Allah) as a book of contradictory beliefs. For example, in the preceding verse (quoted above) Quran says: "O ye who believe! spend out the bounties We have provided for you, before the Day comes when no bargaining will avail, nor friendship, nor INTERCESSION...." - (2:254). And, then in the subsequent verse it says: "...Who is there who can intercede in His presence except as He permits..." - (2:255). If we take this meaning of the verse that one can intercede with the permission of God and his intercession will be accepted then these verses clearly contradict each other.

The question arises, then what is the correct meaning of this and the other similar verses? Actually, our thoughts and actions produce results simultaneously but often we cannot see or perceive them until these get matured and become visible. There is a well measured period for the maturity of each act to produce visible results. For some of our acts, this period is so short that we can see the results in our life time but for the others, it is so long that in order to see the results we have to wait till the Final Day. In order to understand it in a better way, we can classify the phenomena of human

activities into concrete realities and abstract realities. Former, we face in our life span and the latter, we will face in the hereafter. In other words, there is a built-in system of reward and punishment in the Divine Laws. God does not need help or advocacy of anyone whosoever.

Quran has explained the process of reward and punishment figuratively so that human mind can grasp it easily. Regarding the Day of Judgement, it presents somewhat similar scenario as we often see in our judicial courts. For example, we see the criminals are being brought to the court and then follows the proceedings. The judges, the lawyers, the witnesses, and the police, all are present there and listen to the hearing and judgements. Similarly, Quran says: "And behold! ye come to us bare and alone.....We see not with you, your intercessors....(6:95) ; " And there will come forth every person: with each will be a person (just like a policeman) to drive and a person to bear witness" - (50:21). These persons, who will bear witness, will not come along with the person by themselves but will be called and given permission to bear witness. In fact, they (the witnesses) are called INTERCESSORS and they are the one who are mentioned in verse 2:255 and other similar verses: "mann zalazee yashfa'a ho illah beh izneh - who can stand with the others against His will or without His permission".

These INTERCESSORS, among others, will also include Messengers about whom Quran says: "One day will God gather the Messengers together, and will ask: 'what was the response you received (from men to your teachings)?'....(5:112). Similarly, Angels (malaika) will also be asked: "The day that the Spirit and the Angel (malaika) will stand forth in ranks, none shall speak except any who is permitted by God and he will say what is right." - (78:38). In these verses, therefore, the Witness (Shahid) means the Intercessor (Shafeeh). Because, to bear witness in one favour is a great help to him. This meaning is also supported in verse 43:86: "And those whom they invoke besides God have no power of INTERCESSION. - only he who bears witness (Shahid) to the truth, and they know him. "In other words, INTERCESSION means to bear true Witness.

Traditional meaning of INTERCESSION are misleading. Quran did not use the word ' INTERCESSOR ' - (Shafeeh) - for Nabi Mohammed (pbuh). It uses the word 'WITNESS' - (Shahid) for him (16:89). Quran repeatedly warns those who believe in INTERCESSION. It states: "Then will no Intercession of (any) Intercessors profit them."-(74:48). And again,....." No intimate friend nor Intercessor will the wrong doers have, who could be listened to." - (40:18). And again, "...Every person draws the meed of his acts on none but himself, and no bearer of burdens can bear the burden of another.... (6:164). Heaven is not for those who look for Intercessors to help them enter it. Heaven is for those who earn it by their righteous deeds. This fact is stated in the Quran in these words, "Behold! this is your Heaven! You have been made its inheritors for your deeds."- (7:43).

Such beliefs (traditional) in INTERCESSION are held by those nations who have lost the will and energy to work hard. They have become idle and inert and look for easy means and short cuts to success. Could you imagine, how easy it is to get Paradise through INTERCESSION? You are simply required to profess in the Nubawwat of Mohammed (pbuh) or Jesus (as) - if you are a Christian! or Moses (as) - if you are a Jew! or to revere any holy and pious man - if you are a Mushrik! Quran states that when the Jews suffered downfall and lost their noble values, they started to believe in similar INTERCESSION as we find among the Muslims today. They believed: "The Fire shall not touch us but for a few numbered days.... (2:80). In reply, Quran said: "Ask them; Have you taken a promise from God? and then answered itself that tell them this is a wrong belief. God's Law, in this regard is: "Those who do wrongs they shall go to hell and those who do righteousness they shall go to heaven" - (2:82-83). It is an immutable moral law with no exception.

It becomes quite clear from the above discussion: i) In this world, INTERCESSION is to stand with someone in order to help, advocate, and support him. If this support is for good cause, the intercessor will get good reward and if it is for a bad cause he too, will share a part of the punishment along with the criminal. ii) In the hereafter, the concept of intercession is stated figuratively. It is like witnesses which are often called upon in judicial courts. In reality, God does not need advocacy of anyone whosoever. iii) To intercede for criminals or to favour someone undeservedly is against the teachings of Quran. Therefore, this sort of belief in INTERCESSION is not right. We should not rely upon any

power or person other than God to help us or intercede for us. No one has more power and intelligence than God.

Quran says: "What! Do they take intercessors others besides God? Say: "Even if they have no power whatever and no intelligence?" - (39:43). Say: "To God belongs exclusively all sort of INTERCESSION".... (39:44). He Grants this right to those who follow Him in Quran.

God Says: "One Day We shall raise from all people a Witness (Shahid): Then, there will be no permission for unbelievers nor they will receive any favour."-(16:84).

Wa Ma Aa'laina Illalbalagh

NB: Most humbly, I dedicate this article to my honorable teacher (late) Allama Ghulam Ahmed Parwez - (1903-1985). In fact, this article is based on his interpretation of Intercession in his highly acclaimed and scholarly work: LUGHAT-UL-QURAN. (in Urdu language).