

Tawassul and Tabarruk of the Salaf

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I. Ibn Abī Shayba

‘Abd Allāh ibn Muḥammad ibn Abī Shayba Ibrāhīm ibn ‘Uthmān ibn Khuwasta, Abū Bakr al-‘Abasī (d. 235), described by al-Dhahabī as the brother, father, and uncle of ḥadīth Masters and their most prestigious representative, “the master of ḥadīth Masters,” “one of those who have reached the sky, an apex of trustworthiness,” “one of the oceans of knowledge,” the author of *al-Musnad*, *al-Aḥkām*, *al-Muṣannaf*, and *al-Tafsīr*, “one of the peers of Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal, Iṣḥāq ibn Rāhūyah, and ‘Alī ibn al-Madīnī in age, place of birth, and ḥadīth memorization.” Abū Zur‘a al-Rāzī said: “I never saw anyone with more mastery of the ḥadīth than Abū Bakr ibn Abī Shayba,” rather lavish praise in light of al-Rāzī’s familiarity with Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal and al-Bukhārī. His scholarly relatives are: his brothers ‘Uthmān ibn Abī Shayba and al-Qāsim ibn Abī Shayba; his son Ibrāhīm ibn Abī Bakr ibn Abī Shayba; and his nephew Abū Ja‘far Muḥammad ibn ‘Uthmān ibn Abī Shayba. (All are ḥadīth Masters except al-Qāsim, who is weak.)

Ibn Abī Shayba narrates in the *Muṣannaf*, in the chapter entitled: “Touching the grave of the Prophet” with a *ṣahīḥ* chain according to Ibn Ḥajar and al-Qāḍī ‘Iyāḍ in *al-Shifā’* (in the chapter entitled: “Concerning the visit to the Prophet’s grave ﷺ, the excellence of those who visit it and how he should be greeted”):

Yazīd ibn ‘Abd al-Mālik ibn Qusayṭ and al-‘Utībī narrated that it was the practice of the Companions in the mosque of the Prophet ﷺ to place their hands on the pommel of the hand rail (*rummāna*) of the pulpit (*minbar*) where the Prophet ﷺ used to place his hand. There they would face the *Qibla* and supplicate to Allāh ﷻ hoping He would answer their supplication because they were placing their hands where the Prophet ﷺ placed his while making their supplication. Abū Mawdūda said: “And I saw Yazīd ibn ‘Abd al-Mālik do the same.”¹

It is also narrated that Ibn ‘Umar would place his hand on the seat of the Prophet’s ﷺ *minbar* then wipe his face with it² and that Abū Ayyūb was seen resting his face on the Prophet’s ﷺ grave.³ This practice of the Companions clarifies two matters. The first is the permissibility of asking Allāh for things by the Prophet ﷺ (*tawassul*) after his death since by their act the Companions were truly making *tawassul*. Likewise it is permissible to ask Allāh ﷻ for things by means of other pious Muslims. The second is the permissibility of *tabarruk* or seeking blessing (*baraka*) from objects connected to the Prophet ﷺ.

It is similarly related that in the year of the drought called al-Ramāda (17-18) during the successorship of ‘Umar the Companion Bilāl ibn al-Ḥārith, while slaughtering a sheep for his kin, noticed that the sheep’s bones had turned red because the drying flesh was clinging to them. He cried out “*Yā Muḥammadāh!*” Then he saw the Prophet ﷺ in a dream ordering him to go to ‘Umar with the tidings of coming rain on condition that ‘Umar show wisdom. Hearing this, ‘Umar assembled the people and came out to pray for rain with al-‘Abbās, the uncle of the Prophet ﷺ.⁴

The same is related from the Companion or Successor Mālik ibn ‘Iyāḍ, also known as Mālik al-Dār:⁵ A man came to the grave of the Prophet ﷺ and said: “Messenger of Allāh, ask for rain for your Community (*istasqi li’ummatik*), for verily they have but perished!” after which the Prophet ﷺ appeared to him in a dream telling 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!”⁶ Ibn Ḥajar identifies Mālik al-Dār as ‘Umar’s treasurer and the man who visited and saw the Prophet ﷺ in his dream as the Companion Bilāl ibn al-Ḥārith, counting this ḥadīth among the reasons for al-Bukhārī’s naming of the chapter “The people’s request to their leader for rain if they suffer drought.”

II. Aḥmad Recommended Tawassul in Every Du‘ā’

Abū Bakr al-Marwazī narrated in his *Mansak* that Imām Aḥmad preferred for one to make *tawassul* through the Prophet ﷺ in every supplication with the wording: “O Allāh! I am turning to you with your Prophet, the Prophet of mercy. O Muḥammad! I am turning with you to my Lord for the fulfillment of my need.” The report is mentioned in the books of the Ḥanbalī *madhhab* as it bears on the *adab* of *du‘ā’* as a *fiqh* issue.⁷ Ibn Taymiyya cites it in his *Qā’ida fīl-Tawassul wal-Wasīla* (p. 98 and 155) where he attributes it to “Imām Aḥmad and a group of the *Salaf*” from *Mansak al-Marwazī* as his source – and in his *Radd ‘alā al-Akhnā’ī* (p. 168) where he cites the text of the *du‘ā’* in full, similar to the *du‘ā’* of the blind man in al-Tirmidhī and elsewhere and with the wording *Yā Muḥammad*.

The practice of *tawassul* is also reported from Imām al-Shāfi‘ī and Imām Mālik. Al-Khaṭīb narrates in *Tārīkh Baghdād* that the truthful (*ṣadūq*) qāḍī al-Ḥusayn ibn ‘Alī al-Saymarī narrated to them, that the trustworthy (*thiqa*) Imām ‘Umar ibn Ibrāhīm [ibn Aḥmad] al-Muqri told him, that the trustworthy Shaykh Makram ibn Aḥmad told them, that ‘Umar ibn Iṣḥāq ibn Ibrāhīm told them, that the trustworthy Shaykh ‘Alī ibn Maymūn told them: “I heard al-Shāfi‘ī say: ‘I swear that I seek the blessing of Abū Ḥanīfa (*innī la’atabarraku bi Abī Ḥanīfa*) and come to his grave every day’ – meaning as a visitor. ‘Whenever I have a certain need I pray two *rak‘as* as then I come to his grave and ask Allāh ﷻ for my need at his grave, and little time passes until it is fulfilled.’”⁸ Al-Qāḍī ‘Iyāḍ narrates in *al-Shifā’* and *Tartīb al-Madārik* from Ibn Ḥumayd that the Caliph Abū Ja‘far al-Manṣūr asked Mālik whether it is preferable he face the Prophet ﷺ or the *Qibla* when supplicating. Mālik answered: “Why should you not face him when he is your means (*wasīla*) to Allāh and that of your father Adam on the Day of Resurrection?”⁹ This report is also narrated by Abū al-Ḥasan [‘Alī ibn al-Ḥasan ibn Muḥammad ibn al-‘Abbās] Ibn Fihri al-Mālikī al-Miṣrī (fl. 440) in his *Fadā’il Mālik* while al-Zurqānī in his commentary on *al-Mawāhib al-Lāduniyya* said al-Qāḍī ‘Iyāḍ narrated it in *al-Shifā’* from Mālik “with a good, or rather sound chain” as did al-Khafājī in his commentary on the *Shifā’*.¹⁰ Ibn Qunfudh positively attributes it to Mālik¹¹ while the ḥadīth Master Ibn Jamā’a

said: “The report is related by the two hadīth Masters: Ibn Bashkuwāl and al-Qādī ‘Iyād in *al-Shifā’*, and no attention is paid to the words of those who claim that it is forged purely on the basis of their idle desires.”¹²

III. Aḥmad Practiced Tabarruk or Blessing from Relics

Al-Dhahabī relates that Imām Aḥmad used to seek blessings from the relics of the Prophet ﷺ. Al-Dhahabī then lambasts whoever would fault the practice of *tabarruk* or seeking blessings from blessed objects:

‘Abd Allāh ibn Aḥmad said: “I saw my father take a hair that belonged to the Prophet ﷺ, put it on his mouth, and kiss it. I think I saw him put it on his eyes. He also dipped it in water and drank the water to obtain cure. I saw him take the Prophet’s ﷺ bowl (*qas‘a*), wash it in water, and drink from it. I saw him drink Zamzam water in order to seek cure with it, and he wiped his hands and face with it.” I say: Where is the quibbling critic of Imām Aḥmad now? It is also authentically established that ‘Abd Allāh asked his father about those who touch the pommel of the Prophet’s ﷺ pulpit and touch the wall of the Prophet’s ﷺ room, and he said: “I do not see any harm in it.” May Allāh protect us and you from the opinion of the *Khawārij* and from innovations!¹³

The above is a proof from Imām al-Dhahabī that he considers those who object to *tawassul* and *tabarruk* to be innovators and *Khawārij*. In the entry of his *Mu‘jam al-Shuyūkh* devoted to his Shaykh Aḥmad ibn ‘Abd al-Mun‘im al-Qazwīnī, al-Dhahabī writes the following lines:

Aḥmad ibn al-Mun‘im related to us... [with his chain of transmission] from Ibn ‘Umar that the latter disliked to touch the Prophet’s ﷺ grave. I say: He disliked it because he considered it disrespect. Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal was asked about touching the Prophet’s ﷺ grave and kissing it and he saw nothing wrong with it. His son ‘Abd Allāh related this from him. If it is asked: “Why did the Companions not do this?” We reply: “Because they saw him with their very eyes when he was alive, enjoyed his presence directly, kissed his very hand, nearly fought each other over the remnants of his ablution water, shared his purified hair on the day of the greater Pilgrimage, and even if he spat it would virtually not fall except in someone’s hand so that he could pass it over his face. Since we have not had the tremendous fortune of sharing in this, we throw ourselves on his grave as a mark of commitment, reverence, and acceptance, even to kiss it. Do you not see what Thābit al-Bunānī did when he kissed the hand of Anas ibn Mālīk and placed it on his face saying: “This is the hand that touched the hand of the Messenger of Allāh ﷺ”? Muslims are not moved to these matters except by their excessive love for the Prophet ﷺ, as they are ordered to love Allāh and the Prophet ﷺ more than their own lives, their children, all human beings, their property, and Paradise and its maidens. There are even some believers that love Abū Bakr and ‘Umar more than themselves...

Do you not see that the Companions, in the excess of their love for the Prophet ﷺ, asked him: “Should we not prostrate to you?” and he replied no, and if he had allowed them, they would have prostrated to him as a mark of utter veneration and respect, not as a mark of worship, just as the brothers of the Prophet Yūsuf ﷺ prostrated to him. Similarly the prostration of the Muslim to the grave of the Prophet ﷺ is for the intention of magnification and reverence. One is not to be accused of disbelief because of it whatsoever (*lā yukaffaru aṣlan*), but he is being disobedient [to the Prophet’s injunction to the Companions]. Let him, therefore, be informed that this is forbidden. It is likewise in the case of one who prays towards the grave.”¹⁴

(Footnotes)

¹Ibn Abī Shayba (4:121).

²Ibn Qudāma, *al-Mughnī* (5:468) and al-Buhūtī, *Kashshāf* (2:517) cf. al-Mardāwī, *Inṣāf* (4:54), Ibn Muflīh, *Furū’* (3:523). Ibn Bāz had the effrontery to call this act *shirk*.

³Narrated by Aḥmad (38:558 #23585 *isnād da‘īf*), and al-Ḥākim (4:515=1990 ed. 4:560 *ṣaḥīh*), both with a weak chain because of Dāwūd ibn Abī Sālih who is unknown.

⁴Narrated by al-Tabarī in his *Tārīkh* (2:509).

⁵“Umar ibn al-Khattāb’s freedman. He narrated from Abū Bakr and ‘Umar. He was known.” Ibn Sa‘d (5:12). “He is agreed upon (as trustworthy), the Successors have approved highly of him.” Abū Ya‘lā al-Khalīlī ibn ‘Abd Allāh al-Khalīlī al-Qazwīnī, *Kitāb al-Irshād fī Ma‘rifat ‘Ulama’ al-Hadīth*, ed. Muḥammad Sa‘īd ibn ‘Umar Idrīs, 1st ed., 3 vols. (Riyad: Maktabat al-Rushd, 1989), as quoted in ‘Abd Allāh al-Ghumārī, *Irghām al-Mubtadi’ al-Ghabī bi-Jawāz al-Tawassul bil-Nabi*, ed. Ḥasan ‘Alī al-Saqqāf, 2nd ed. (Amman: Dār al-Imām al-Nawawī, 1992 p. 9). “Mālīk ibn ‘Iyād: ‘Umar’s freedman. He is the one named Mālīk al-Dār. He saw the Prophet ﷺ and heard narrations from Abū Bakr al-Siddīq. He narrated from Abū Bakr and ‘Umar, Mu‘ādh, and Abū ‘Ubayda. From him narrated Abū Sālih al-Samān and his (Mālīk’s) two sons ‘Awn and ‘Abd Allāh...” *Isāba* (6:164 #8350 Mālīk ibn ‘Iyād).

⁶Ibn Kathīr cites it thus from al-Bayhaqī’s *Dalā’il al-Nubuwwa* (7:47) in *al-Bidāya wal-Nihāya* (Ma‘ārif ed. 7:91-92=Dār Ihyā’ al-Turāth ed. 7:105) saying: “*isnāduhu ṣaḥīh*” and he also declares its chain sound (*isnāduhu jayyidun qawī*) in his *Jāmi’ al-Masānīd* (1:223) in *Musnad ‘Umar*. Ibn Abī Shayba cites it (6:352=12:31-32) with a sound (*ṣaḥīh*) chain as confirmed by Ibn Ḥajar who says: “*rawā Ibn Abī Shayba bi-‘isnādin ṣaḥīh*” and cites the hadīth in *Fath al-Bārī*, Book of *istisqā* ch. 3 (1989 ed. 2:629-630=1959 ed. 2:495) as well as in *al-Isāba* (6:164 #8350=3:484) where he says that Ibn Abī Khaythama cited it. It is also thus narrated by al-Khalīlī in *al-Irshād* (1:313-314) and Ibn ‘Abd al-Barr in *al-Istī‘āb* (2:464=3:1149). Al-Albānī attempted to weaken this report in his *al-Tawassul* (p. 120) but was refuted in the lengthy analysis given by Mamdūhīn *Raf’ al-Mināra* (p. 262-278), which refutes other similar attempts cf. Bin Bāz’s marginalia on *Fath al-Bārī*, Abū Bakr al-Jazā’irī’s tract *Wa Jā’u Yarkuḍūn*, Ḥammād al-Ansārī’s articles “*al-Maḥūm al-Ṣaḥīh lil-Tawassul*” also titled “*Tulfat al-Qārī fil-Radd ‘alā al-Ghumārī*,” and other such literature.

⁷Cf. Ibn Muflīh’s *Furū’* (1:595=2:204); al-Mardāwī’s *Inṣāf* (2:456); Ibn ‘Aqīl’s *Tadhkirah*; al-Buhūtī, *Kashshāf al-Qinā’* (2:68); Shams al-Dīn ibn Muflīh, *al-Furū’* (2:159); al-Ḥajjāwī, *al-Iqnā’* (1:208).

⁸Narrated by al-Khaṭīb in *Tārīkh Baghdād* (1:123) cf. al-Kawtharī in his *Maqālāt* (p. 453) and by Ibn Abī al-Wafā’ in *Tabaqāt al-Hanafīyya* (p. 519) through al-Ghaznawī. Al-Haytamī cites it in the thirty-fifth chapter of his book on Imām Abū Ḥanīfa entitled *al-Khayrat al-Hisān*. This is a strong rebuttal of those who claim that none among the *Salaf* visited the graves of the *awliyā’* for the mere purpose of making *du‘ā* there, such as al-Shawkānī in *al-Durr al-Nadīd*, although he declares it permissible to make *du‘ā* once there.

⁹‘Iyād, *al-Shifā’* (p. 520-521) and *Tarīb al-Madārik* (2:101).

¹⁰Cf. al-Nabhānī, *Shawāhid al-Ḥaq* (p. 186-188); and al-Khafājī, *Nasīm al-Riyād* (3:398).

¹¹In *Wasīlat al-Islām* (p. 145-146).

¹²In *Hidāyat al-Sālik* (3:1381), in reference to Ibn Taymiyya’s claims in his *Fatāwā* (27:166, 28:26). The report is also stated without attribution to Mālīk by al-Bahūtī, *Kashshāf al-Qinā’* (2:516-517) and al-Shirwānī, *Hawāshī Tulfat al-Muhtāj* (2:164) while ‘Iyād’s chain was graded “weak or forged” (*sic*) by Sulaymān ibn ‘Abd Allāh ibn Muḥammad ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb in his book *Taysīr al-Azīz al-Ḥamīd fī Sharḥ Kitāb al-Tawḥīd* (p. 312) cf. al-Shawkānī in *Nayl al-Awtār*, following in this Ibn Taymiyya and his student Ibn ‘Abd al-Hādī in *al-Sarīm al-Munkī* (p. 244), although

al-Zurqānī in *Sharh al-Mawāhib* rejects this claim as “stemming from either ignorance or arrogance” and stated that the books of the Mālikīs are replete with the stipulation that *du‘ā* be made while facing the grave cf. al-Qābisī, Abū Bakr ibn ‘Abd al-Rahmān, Khalīl’s *Mansak*, al-‘Abdarī, *al-Tāj wal-Iklīl* (3:400), al-Hattāb, *Mawāhib al-Jalīl* (3:400), and others. As for the words of Dr. Muḥammad Sa‘īd al-Būṭī in his *Fiqh al-Sira* that *du‘ā* facing the Grave is an innovation and the act of the ignorant, see the reply of al-Zurqānī.

¹³Al-Dhahabī, *Siyar* (9:457). Ch. on Imām Ahmad, section entitled *Min ādābih*.

¹⁴Al-Dhahabī, *Mu‘jam al-Shuyūkh* (1:73 #58). See on the prohibition of the prostration of respect the fatwa of the *Mujaddid* Imām Ahmad Ridā Khān, titled *al-Zubdat al-Zakiyya li-Tahrīm al-Sujūd al-Tahīyya*.