

The Quran and its Message

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سَلَامٌ عَلَيْكُمْ

Salamun Alaikum (Peace be upon you)

PRAYING 'FOR' THE DEAD IS DIFFERENT FROM PRAYING 'THROUGH' THE DEAD

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(1) PRAYING THROUGH THE DEAD IS NEGATED

Praying **through** the dead is not a doctrine that is either sanctioned **or** supported by the Quranic teachings. In fact, it is completely negated. There are countless verses in the Quran which deal with the principle that it is only God one asks for help. In every prayer, a Muslim recites the Surah Fateha, a verse of which reads:

001.005

“Thee (alone) we worship; Thee (alone) we ask for help”

However, amongst some Muslims there exists a belief that prayer through the dead is possible as they can hear one’s supplication and can help the living. This belief is then exercised through practice where prayer is directed through those who have long departed.

The fact that this prayer is possible in this way is completely negated by the Quran's teachings as is the notion that the dead can hear.

016.018-21

“And if you would count God's favours, you will not be able to number them; most surely God is Forgiving, Merciful. And God knows what you conceal and what you do openly. **And those whom they call on besides God have not created anything while they are themselves created; Dead (are they), not living, and they know not when they shall be raised.**”

027.080

“ **Truly you cannot cause the dead to listen, nor can you cause the deaf to hear the call, when they turn back in retreat.**”

030.052

“For verily you (Muhammad) cannot make the dead to hear, nor can you make the deaf to hear the call when they have turned to flee”

035.022

“Neither are the living and the dead alike. Surely God makes whom He pleases hear, and you cannot make those hear who are in the graves”

(2) PRAYING FOR THE DEAD IS SUPPORTED BY THE QURAN

There is an important point which is worth considering. When one prays for anyone (living or deceased) or anything else, one directs their prayer to their Creator. He is the only One that has complete authority.

If a ‘prayer’ made to the Lord is to benefit a person, whether this prayer is made for one during their life or after it, the Lord Almighty **knew** this **before** He even created the Universe, before He put His universal master-plan into action, before he hurled the truth against the falsehood. He knew this, when there was **nothing and no one** except Him. He is not bound by space, time or the natural laws He Himself creates. That is simply the enormity of His Majesty, the extent of which is unfathomable to the human mind.

He knew exactly, what and when and how one would pray. Whether this prayer was to be made for one during the lifetime of the deceased or after it, **knowledge** of the prayer was **with God already**. **Of course, this is not to be confused with free will or volition (which is often a common mistake)**. Humans have been granted free will and they make their choices independently, **but the knowledge of those choices** are already with God. In other words, these choices were not made for us, we made them, **He just knew of them**.

Whether another soul is to benefit from our prayer or not, we can certainly benefit our souls if we ask for good and mercy for another soul with sincerity. Ultimately, it is for God to decide for we have no knowledge of His plan other than what He informs us.

The Quran does provide evidence of support for a prayer 'for the dead' albeit through a negative context. Quranic narratives capture a situation where prayer for the dead is not feasible and for this a specific context is imparted. Through logical deduction of the narrative, it is clear that prayer for the dead as a practice of choice is not prohibited per se. However, prayer for the dead in a particular context certainly is.

009.084

“And do not pray for any of them that dies, nor stand at his grave; for they rejected God and His Messenger, and died in a state of perverse rebellion (Arabic: Fasiquna)”

This verse has a preceding context and deals with a certain people **that were clearly known to the Prophet** and the true state of their hearts had been revealed to the prophet through their perversely rebellious nature. The prophet was told **not** to pray for them nor stand by their graves. **It was only the exception that the Quran prohibited not the practice as a whole.**

PROPHET ABRAHAM ^(pbuh)

One immediate question that may arise in the mind of those familiar with Quranic verses is with regards Prophet Abraham's ^(pbuh) prayer for his disbelieving father. Why was it that he prayed for his father?

If we read all the related verses in context, it becomes clear that Prophet Abraham ^(pbuh) **only** prayed for his father due to a promise made to him. As soon as it became clear that he was an enemy of God, he dissociated himself from him.

026.086

"Forgive my father, for that he is among those astray"

009.114

"And Abraham prayed for his father's forgiveness **only because of a promise he had made to him. But when it became clear to him that he was an enemy to God, he dissociated himself from him: for Abraham was most tender-hearted, forbearing"**

JANAZAH PRAYER (BURIAL PRAYER)

There is also evidence of a practice of burial prayer amongst the Prophet's contemporaries captured by the Quran.

005.106

"O you who believe! call to witness between you when death draws nigh to one of you, at the time of making the will, two just persons from among you, or two others from among others than you, if you are travelling in the land and the calamity of death befalls you; the two (witnesses) **you should detain after the prayer (Arabic: Salati)**; then if you doubt (them), they shall both swear by God, (saying): We will not take for it a price, though there be a relative, and we will not hide the testimony of God for then certainly we should be among the sinners"

تَحْبِسُونَهُمَا مِنْ بَعْدِ الصَّلَاةِ فَيُقْسِمَانِ

Salati

As can be seen clearly in the above verse, detaining the witnesses of the deceased by other members is **after** funeral prayers. Therefore, the principle of permissibility for praying **for** the dead is confirmed. Janazah prayer is also confirmed by general Muslim practice.

FINAL THOUGHTS

Muslims are encouraged to pray for others whether they are dead or alive as the feeling of hope is powerful. The above verses which deal with a restriction on praying for disbelievers is primarily context specific which involved rebellion against Prophets of God after they made the message clear to them. This is not a situation that can be readily applied outside the scope where God appointed messengers are absent. Furthermore, the state of 'disbelief' (kufr) and when it is actually entered into is not a judgment that can be made by any other than God. (See article: [Understanding 'Kufr' \(Disbelief\) from a Quranic Perspective](#))

The Quranic narratives deliver a consistent message with encouragement to help others, be it for the orphan, destitute or the wayfarer as it is a form of selflessness (altruism) which remains good for the soul. Having empathy and wanting to assist others is what humanity is all about: praying for others is just an extension of that.

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