

Reflections

IESAAL AL-THAWAAB

(Benefitting the Dead or Alive through acts of Charity or Nafl deeds)

Iesaal al-Thawaab means to dedicate the reward of a particular NAFL deed to someone deceased or alive.

Iesaal al-Thawaab is permissible and in fact (Mustahab) meritorious. There are basically two forms of Iesaal al-Thawaab:

1. The conveying of the reward of (NAFL) charitable deeds.
2. The conveying of the reward of (NAFL) physical deeds that do not entail wealth, e.g. Salaah, Fasting, Dhikr, Recitation of the Noble Qur'an, Tawaaf of the Ka'abah, etc.

The '**charitable**' first form is unanimously acceptable by the Ahl al-Sunnah Wal-Jama'ah Scholars.

The '**physical**' second form is correct and acceptable according to the Hanafi and Hanbali Schools of Thought (Madhhabs) and several Shafi'i and Maliki scholars as well.

As for the reward of Du'a (which is separate from the above), there is also unanimity of the scholars in its reward reaching and benefiting the deceased.

(Kitab al-Adhkaar of Imam Nawawi).

Hafiz ibn al-Qayyim (ra) states that if one accepts the **charitable** form of Iesaal al-Thawaab and refutes the **physical** form, he should be asked: 'What is the proof to show that the recitation of the Noble Qur'an does not reach the deceased?' Allamah Qurtubi (ra) says: 'Just as the reward of **charitable** deeds benefit the deceased, similarly, the recitation of the Noble Qur'an, Du'a and Istighfaar (seeking forgiveness) also do the same, because all of these are regarded as sadaqah (charity) in Shari'ah.' (al-Tadhkirah, pg.71). He (Allamah Qurtubi) thereafter mentioned two narrations recorded in Sahih Muslim which prove that even Salaah and Dhikr of Allah (tasbeeh, tahlil and takbir) were all classified as Sadaqah by Rasulullah (Sallallahu Alayhi Wasallam). Hence, there remains no dispute in whether the reward of Qur'anic recital benefits the deceased or not.

For academic reasons, let us now look at some proofs that substantiate both forms of Iesaal al-Thawab:

1. Rasulullah (SAW) slaughtered sheep during his Farewell Hajj and made intention for himself and all those (alive, deceased and to come) who bring faith on his Prophethood. (Sahih al-Bukhari)

2. Imam al-Bukhari has reported on the authority of Sayyiduna Abdullah ibn Abbas (RA) that Sayyiduna Sa'd ibn Ubadah (RA) was away when his mother passed away. When he returned, he asked Rasulullah (SAW), 'Will it be of any benefit if I give charity on her behalf?' Rasulullah (SAW) replied in the affirmative. (Sahih al-Bukhari hadith 2762). Hafiz ibn Hajar al-Asqalaani (ra) states in his monumental commentary of Sahih al-Bukhari entitled 'Fath al-Bari', 'this hadith proves the permissibility of charity on behalf of the deceased and that the reward will reach him.' (Fath al-Bari - Vol.5 pg. 477 Hadith 2761)

3. Sayyiduna Abdullah ibn Abbas (RA) reports a man once asked Rasulullah (SAW): 'O Messenger of Allah! My father has passed away and he did not perform Hajj, can I perform Hajj on his behalf?' Rasulullah (SAW) enquired of him, 'If your father had any debt, would you have paid it?' The man replied, 'Yes.' Upon this, Rasulullah (SAW) said, 'In that case, the Deen of Allah has more right.' (Sunan al-Nasa'i - Hadith 26331)

4. A separate incident of a similar nature has been recorded by Imam al-Bukhari in his Sahih (Hadith 6698). Hafiz Ibn Qayyim (ra), the famous student of Hafiz Ibn Taymiyah (ra), after quoting the above Hadiths, states: 'These references all concur with the fact that when the living carry out any deed on behalf of the deceased, the reward will benefit him'. (Kitab al-Rooh – ibn Qayyim pg. 161)

5. Sayyiduna al-Lajlaj (RA), a companion of Rasulullah (SAW), had bequeathed his son that after he leaves this world, he should recite the beginning and end of Surah al-Baqarah at the head side of his grave. Sayyiduna al-Lajlaj (RA) then mentioned that he heard this from Rasulullah (SAW).

(Refer to al-Mu'jam al-Kabir of Imam al-Tabrani; Hafiz al-Haythami has regarded the narrators of this tradition as reliable – refer Majmu' al-Zawa'id - Vol.3 pg. 44)

This has also been recorded to be the practice of Sayyiduna Abdullah ibn Umar (RA). (Sunan al-Kubra of Imam al-Bayhaqi vol.4 pg. 56). This narration has been classified as Hasan (sound) by Imam al-Nawawi and Hafiz ibn Hajar). (Refer to al-Adhkaar pg. 212 Hadith 493; al-Futuhaat al-Rabbaniyyah Vol.3 pg. 194)

6. An incident of Imam Ahmad ibn Hanbal has been recorded by Imam Abu Bakr al-Khallal in his Kitab al-Jami' as well as in his booklet entitled, 'Amr bil Ma'ruf Wa Nahi 'An al-Munkar. According to this, Imam Ahmad ibn Hanbal had approved of the recitation of the beginning and end of Surah al-Baqarah . (Refer Athar al-Hadith of al-Muhaddith Shaykh Muhammad Awwamah pgs. 162-163)

7. Allamah al-Qurtubi (ra) states that, 'Some of our 'Ulama have based the permissibility of Iesaal al-Thawaab of the recitation of the Noble Qur'an on the Hadith of Sahih al-Bukhari (Hadith 216, 1361) and Sahih Muslim wherein there is mention of Rasulullah (SAW) placing fresh branches on 2 graves and He (SAW) said, 'Perhaps their punishment will be lightened through it as long as the branches do not dry up.' (The Ulama explain the reason for the punishment being repelled was the Tasbeeh that those fresh branches will recite). This is also echoed by Allamah Nawawi (ra) in his commentary of Sahih Muslim. (vol. 1 pg. 141.) Allamah al-Qurtubi further states, 'If the Tasbeeh of tree branches can benefit the deceased, then why not the recitation of the Noble Qur'an by a believer in Allah?' (Al-Tazkirah pg. 70)

It thus becomes abundantly clear through the abovementioned references of Ahadith that Iesaal al-Thawaab is totally permissible in all its forms and is in fact a very virtuous deed. This is the view of the overwhelming majority of the classical scholars (Muhaddithin and Fuqaha) of Islam. Refer to the following:

Kitab al-Rooh of Ibn Qayyim pg.153;
Fath al-Bari - Vol.5 pg. 477 Hadith 2761;
Sharh al-Sudur of Allama Suyuti pgs. 402, 403 Dar ibn Kathir;
Al-Hidaya - Vol.1 pg. 296-297;
Fath al-Qadeer - Vol.3 pg. 65-66;
Rad al-Muhtar - Vol.2 pg. 243)

However, if after reading the above, one still denies the validity of the physical form of Iesaal al-Thawaab, then the following method can in no circumstance be refuted. The method is as follows: After one carries out a physical form of worship (i.e. Nafl Salaah, Fasting, Recitation of the Noble Qur'an, etc.), one should

- a) Firstly, make a Du'a to Almighty Allah that Allah accepts that noble deed**
- b) Thereafter ask Allah to grant the reward to such and such a person**

In this way, if Allah accepts one's Du'a, the reward will automatically be conveyed to that specific person, alive or deceased.

REASON: The Messenger of Allah (SAW) said: "When a man dies, his deeds come to an end except for three things: Sadaqah Jaariyah (ceaseless charity); knowledge which is beneficial; or a virtuous child who prays for him (the deceased)." (Sahih Muslim).

This method has been prescribed by great scholars like Imam Nawawi (ra) and Hafiz ibn Hajar (ra) and removes all differences of opinion.

Lastly, we should also note that this issue is not something connected to primary pillars of belief. Instead, it is of a secondary nature which is open to differences of opinion. Hence, no one should claim that either party is guilty of perpetrating an act of bid'ah (innovation), bearing in mind that the majority of the scholars accept all forms of Iesaal al-Thawab. (Refer to Kitab al-Rooh – Hafiz ibn Qayyim).

O Allah! Your Forgiveness is far greater than my sins and I have more hope in Your Mercy than in my deeds.

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