

What can be done on behalf of the deceased (dead)

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بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

In the name of Allaah, the Most Merciful, the Bestower of Mercy

The scholars differed as to whether it is permissible to give reward to the dead and whether that reaches them.

There are two views:

1 – That any righteous deed may be given to the dead and that (the reward) reaches them – such as reading Qur'aan, fasting, praying and other acts of worship.

2 – That no righteous deed reaches the dead except those for which there is evidence that it reaches them. This is the more correct view. The evidence for that is the verse in which Allaah says (interpretation of the meaning):

"And that man can have nothing but what he does"¹

And the Prophet (sallallaahu alaihi wa sallam) said: **"When a man dies all his good deeds come to an end except three: ongoing charity (sadaqah jaariyah), beneficial knowledge and a righteous son who will pray for him."**²

The paternal uncle of the Prophet (sallallaahu alaihi wa sallam) – Hamzah (may Allaah be pleased with him) – died, as did his wife Khadeejah and three of his daughters, but it is not narrated that he read Qur'aan for any of them, or offered a sacrifice or fasted or prayed on their behalf. No such thing has been narrated from any of the Sahaabah either. If it were prescribed, then they would have done it before us. The exceptions for which there is evidence that the reward does reach the deceased are: Hajj, 'Umrah, obligatory fasts, charity and Du'aa'.

Al-Haafiz Ibn Katheer (may Allaah have mercy on him) said: **" 'And that man can have nothing but what he does'."**³

From this verse al-Shaafi'ee and those who followed him understood that the reward for reading Qur'aan does not reach the deceased, because it is not something that they did or earned. Hence the Messenger of Allaah (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) did not recommend or encourage his 'Ummah to do that, and he did not tell them to do that through any statement or gesture. Nor is it narrated that any of the Sahaabah (may Allaah be pleased with them) did that. If it were good they would have done that before us. So the acts of

¹ Soorah al-Najm [53:39]

² Narrated by Muslim, 1631, from the hadeeth of Aboo Hurayrah (may Allaah be pleased with him).

³ Soorah an-Najm [53:39]

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worship are restricted to those mentioned in the texts, and there is no room for analogy or personal opinions. With regard to Du'aa' and charity, there is scholarly consensus that the reward for them reaches the deceased and that they are mentioned in Sharee'ah.⁴

If we assume that the reward for all righteous deeds reaches the deceased, then the best thing that can benefit the deceased is Du'aa'. So why should we ignore that which the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) has encouraged us to do, and turn to other things that he did not do and that none of his companions did? All goodness is to be found in the guidance of the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) and his companions.

Shaykh Ibn Baaz (may Allaah have mercy on him) was asked about giving the reward for reading Qur'aan and charity to one's mother, whether she is alive or dead.

He replied: With regard to reading Qur'aan, the scholars differed as to whether the reward for that will reach the deceased. There are two scholarly views, the more correct of which is that it does not reach the deceased because there is no evidence to that effect. The Prophet (sallallaahu alaihi wa sallam) did not do that for his deceased Muslim loved ones such as his daughters who died during his lifetime, and the Sahaabah (may Allaah be pleased with them) did not do that or approve of it, as far as we know. It is better for the believer not to do that and not to read Qur'aan for the dead or the living, or to pray on their behalf, or to observe voluntary fasts on their behalf, because there is no evidence for any of that.

The basic principle concerning acts of worship is that we do not do anything except that which is proven to be prescribed by Allaah or His Messenger (sallallaahu alaihi wa sallam).

Charity benefits both the living and the dead, according to Muslim consensus. Similarly Du'aa' benefits both the living and the dead according to Muslim consensus. Undoubtedly the living benefit from charity given by them and by others, and they benefit from Du'aa'. If a person makes Du'aa' for his parents when they are alive, they benefit from his Du'aa', as they also benefit from charity given on their behalf when they are still alive, and from Hajj done on their behalf if they are unable to do it themselves because of old age or incurable sickness. So a person may benefit them by doing that. Hence it is narrated that a woman said to the Prophet (sallallaahu alaihi wa sallam): "O Messenger of Allaah, Allaah's command to perform Hajj has come when my father is an old man and cannot sit firmly in the saddle. Shall I perform Hajj on his behalf?" He said: "**Perform Hajj on his behalf.**" Another man came to him and said: "O Messenger of Allaah, my father is an old man and cannot perform Hajj or travel; shall I perform Hajj and 'Umrah on his behalf?" He said: "**Perform Hajj and 'Umrah on behalf of your father.**" This indicates that it is permissible to perform Hajj on behalf of one who has died or on behalf of a living man or woman who is unable to do it because of old age. So giving charity, making Du'aa' and performing Hajj on behalf of one who has died or

⁴ Tafseer Ibn Katheer, 4/258.

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one who is unable to do it will benefit him, according to all the scholars. Similarly one may fast on behalf of a deceased person, if he owed an obligatory fast – whether as the result of a vow, as an expiation or to make up for a Ramadhaan fast – because of the general meaning of the words of the Prophet (sallallaahu alaihi wa sallam); **"Whoever dies owing a fast, his heir must observe the fast on his behalf."**⁵ And there are other ahaadeeth which say the same thing. But whoever delays Ramadhaan fasts for a legitimate reason, such as sickness or travel, then dies before he is able to make them up, there is no need to fast them on his behalf or feed the poor, because he is excused.⁶

Shaykh Ibn 'Uthaymeen (may Allaah have mercy on him) was asked: Is it permissible for a man to give money in charity and to share the reward for it with someone else?

He replied: It is permissible for a person to give money in charity and intend for it to be on behalf of his father, his mother or his brother or anyone else he wants among the Muslims, because the reward is great. If charity is given sincerely for the sake of Allaah and from wealth that is acquired in a Halaal manner, then the reward will be multiplied greatly, as Allaah says (interpretation of the meaning):

"The likeness of those who spend their wealth in the way of Allaah, is as the likeness of a grain (of corn); it grows seven ears, and each ear has a hundred grains. Allaah gives manifold increase to whom He wills. And Allaah is All-Sufficient for His creatures' needs, All-Knower"⁷

And the Prophet (sallallaahu alaihi wa sallam) used to slaughter a single sheep on behalf of himself and the members of his household.⁸

From the above it is clear that what you have mentioned about giving the reward of dhikr to your parents is not correct according to the more correct of the two scholarly opinions, whether they are alive or deceased.

Rather what we advise you to do is to make a great deal of Du'aa' for them and give charity on their behalf, for all goodness is in following the guidance of the Prophet (sallallaahu alaihi wa sallam) and his noble companions. The scholars are agreed that the benefits of Du'aa', praying for forgiveness, giving charity and Hajj reach the deceased.

With regard to Du'aa' and praying for forgiveness, Allaah says (interpretation of the meaning):

⁵ Saheeh – agreed upon.

⁶ Majmoo' Fataawa wa Maqaalaat al-Shaykh Ibn Baaz, 4/348

⁷ Soorah al-Baqarah [2:261]

⁸ Fataawa al-Shaykh Ibn Uthaymeen, 18/249

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"And those who came after them say: 'Our Lord! Forgive us and our brethren who have preceded us in Faith' ⁹

The Prophet (sallallaahu alaihi wa sallam) said: **"Pray for forgiveness for your brother and ask that he be made steadfast, for now he is being questioned."**

And he (sallallaahu alaihi wa sallam) said: **"When you offer the (funeral) prayer for the deceased, then make Du'aa' sincerely for him."**

With regard to charity, it was narrated in al-Saheehayn¹⁰ from 'Aa'ishah that a man said to the Prophet (sallallaahu alaihi wa sallam): "My mother died suddenly and she did not leave a will, but I think that if she could have spoken she would have given in charity. Will she have a reward if I give in charity on her behalf?" The Prophet (sallallaahu alaihi wa sallam) said: **"Yes."**¹¹

And it was narrated by al-Bukhaaree from Sa'd ibn 'Ubaadah that his mother died when he was absent, and he said: "O Messenger of Allaah, my mother has died when I was absent. Will it benefit her if I give in charity on her behalf?" He said: **"Yes."** He said: "I ask you to bear witness that my garden that bears fruit is given in charity on her behalf."¹²

With regard to Hajj, the Prophet (sallallaahu alaihi wa sallam) said to one who asked him about Hajj: **"Don't you think that if your mother had a debt, you would pay it off for her?"** She said: "Yes." He said: **"A debt owed to Allaah is more deserving of being paid off."**¹³

From the above you will know that giving charity on behalf of the deceased will benefit him and its reward will reach him. There is a da'eef (weak) hadeeth about offering prayer on behalf of the dead. Imaam Muslim mentioned in his introduction to his Saheeh that 'Abdullaah ibn al-Mubaarak regarded this hadeeth as weak, then he said: There is no difference of opinion concerning giving charity (i.e., on behalf of the dead). **End quote.**

Al-Nawawee said: "There is no difference of opinion concerning giving charity (i.e., on behalf of the dead)" means that this hadeeth is not to be taken as evidence. But whoever wants to honour his parents, let him give charity on their behalf, for (the reward of) charity will reach the deceased and benefit them, and there is no difference of opinion among the Muslims concerning this point. This is the correct view. With regard to the report narrated by the Qaadhi Abu'l-Hasan al-Maawardi al-Basri al-Faqeeh al-Shaafi'ee in his book al-Haawi from some of the scholars of al-kalaam, that no reward can reach the deceased after his death, this is a view that is definitely wrong and is clearly contrary to the texts of the Qur'aan and Sunnah and the consensus of the 'Ummah, so no attention should be paid to it.

⁹ Soorah al-Hashr [59:10]

¹⁰ Narrated by al-Bukhaaree and Muslim.

¹¹ Narrated by al-Bukhaaree, no. 1388; Muslim, no. 1004.

¹² Narrated by al-Bukhaaree, 2756.

¹³ Narrated by al-Bukhaaree, 6699; Muslim, 1148.

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With regard to praying and fasting on behalf of the dead, the view of al-Shaafi'ee and the majority of the scholars is that the reward for that does not reach the deceased, unless it is a fast that was obligatory for the deceased, so his heir or someone to whom the heir gives permission makes it up on his behalf. Two views concerning this were narrated from al-Shaafi'ee, the better known of which is that it is not valid; the more correct view according to the later Shaafi'ee scholars is that it is valid.

With regard to reading Qur'aan, the well-known view of the Shaafi'ee madhhab is that the reward for that does not reach the deceased. Some of his companions said that its reward does reach the deceased. Some of the scholars were of the view that the reward of all acts of worship – prayer, fasting, reading Qur'aan, etc – reaches the deceased... Then al-Nawawee mentioned that the reward for Du'aa', charity and Hajj reaches the deceased, according to scholarly consensus. **End quote.**

It says in Tuhfat al-Muhtaj (7/72): The deceased can benefit from charity given on his behalf, which includes a waqf of a Mus-haf etc, or digging a well, or planting a tree, whether he does that during his lifetime or it is done by someone else on his behalf after his death. With regard to the best ways of benefiting ones deceased loved ones, you should make a lot of Du'aa' for him. Allaah says (interpretation of the meaning):

"and say: 'My Lord! Bestow on them Your Mercy as they did bring me up when I was young'"¹⁴

And the Prophet sallallaahu alaihi wa sallam said: ***"When a person dies, all his good deeds come to an end except three: ongoing charity, or beneficial knowledge, or a righteous child who will pray for him."***

With regard to charity, the best things on which charity may be spent are Jihaad for the sake of Allaah, building mosques, and helping seekers of knowledge by printing books for them or giving them money that they need. And Allaah knows best.

¹⁴ Soorah al-Isra' [17:24]