

# Can We Benefit the Dead with Any Good Deeds?

HITS: 4250

## Question

Can the living reward the dead by doing *hajj* for them and reading the Qur'an? In the case of the latter is there any significance in doing Qur'anic recital 3 days and 40 days after someone's passing? This appears to be a common practice by some segments of the Muslim society. Is there any basis for this practice?

## Answer

A person shall only benefit in the life hereafter from his own deeds and, on the other hand, he shall be punished only for his own deeds. The reward of the deeds of one person - whether good or bad deeds - cannot be transferred to another person. The Qur'an clearly says:

"... that no one shall bear the burden of another, that man shall have only that which he strived for, and that his striving shall soon be examined [and] then he shall be rewarded with a [complete](#) reward." (*Al-Najm* 53: 38 - 41)

If you consider these verses closely, you shall see that they completely negate: a) the possibility of transferring the burden of bad deeds on another person (no one shall bear the burden of another); and b) the possibility of transferring the reward of good deeds to another person (man shall have only that which he strived for).

The Nabi (AS) has been reported to have said:

"When a person dies, the reward of his deeds ceases except in the case of three things: in the case of something the benefit of which is reaped [even after his death] for a long time (*Sadaqah Ja'riyah*); in the case of some knowledge that he leaves behind, which benefits the world [even after his death] for a long time; and in the case of a righteous child who prays for his forgiveness." (*Muslim, Kita'b al-Wasiyyah*)

Thus, it is quite clear from the Qur'an and the sayings ascribed to the Nabi (AS) that a person can only benefit from his own deeds. Deeds of another person shall not be credited to his [account](#).

Now coming to your specific question, i.e. "Can the living reward the dead by doing *hajj* for them and reading the Qur'an", the answer is "No". The reward of a person's deeds - whether the performance of *hajj* or the recitation and implementation of the Qur'an- is not transferred to another person. There are only a few obvious exceptions to this rule. For instance, if a person honestly desires and intends to perform *hajj* but due to some reason, is unable to carry out his desire and intention, he may ask or send another person to the *haram*<sup>111</sup> to perform *hajj* (as described in the Quran-being an international gathering) on his behalf. In this case, the first person shall not

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only be rewarded for his desire and intention to visit the *haram* but shall also be rewarded for requesting or sending the other person on his behalf. Or for example, if a person has vowed to carry out a certain religious activity, which is not against the tenets of Islam, but does not get a chance to fulfil his vow, any one of his children or inheritors may fulfil his vow. A vow, it must be remembered, is like a debt on a person and if possible should be fulfilled just as a debt be repaid.

These are the two kinds of instances that have been reported in some of the narratives ascribed to the Nabi (AS).

For instance:

عن ابن عباس رضي الله عنهما أن امرأة من جهينة جاءت إلى النبي صلى الله عليه وسلم فقالت: إن أمي نذرت أن تحج فلم تحج حتى ماتت أفأحج عنها؟ قال نعم حجي عنها أرايت لو كان على أمك دين أكنت قاضية؟ أقضوا دين الله. فالله أحق بالوفاء (بخارى، كتاب الحج)

"*Ibn `abbas* (ra) says that once a woman from *Juhainah* came to the Nabi (AS) and asked: My mother had vowed to perform *hajj* but could not carry out her vow and died. Can I perform *hajj* on her behalf? The Nabi (AS) said: Yes, perform *hajj* on her behalf. If your mother owed a debt to someone, wouldn't you have paid it on her behalf? Pay her debt towards Allah, on her behalf. Allah deserves most that the debts owed to Him be repaid." (*Bukhari, Kita'b al-Hajj*)

Thus, all the narratives reporting this incident (or anything like it) should be considered in the light of the above explanation. Otherwise, they shall be contradicting the verses of the Qur'an and would, therefore, not be acceptable.

Recitation of the Qur'an for the dead is also something, which the Nabi (AS) never did or taught. It has no basis in the Qur'an, the *Sunnah* of the Nabi (AS) or any reliable saying ascribed to the Nabi (AS).