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Visitation (Ziyarat) of Graves of Believers From The View-Point of The Holy Qur'an And Sunnah

The scholars of Islam with the support of verses of Qur'an and traditions have recommended *ziyarat* of grave especially the *ziyarat* of the Holy Prophet's grave and those of the pious people and consider this to be a virtue and honour. However, Wahhabis do not consider the principle of *ziyarat* to be *haram* (in apparent terms) but declare that the journey for *ziyara* towards the grave of the awliya Allah as unlawful and *haram*. After completion of the principle of *ziyarat*, we shall discuss the matter of journey for *ziyarat* of the graves of the awliya Allah

Ziyarat of graves has many ethical influences and is important for moral education and training that we shall mention here very briefly.

Looking at this silent valley (i.e. graveyard) which has blown off the light of life of everyone from the poor to the rich and the weak to the powerful and all of them being buried with only three pieces of cloth, purifies the mind and the heart and reduces greed and avarice of a person to a great extent. If a person possesses an eye which can see warnings he can there by learn a lesson and think within himself as such: A transient life of 60 or 70 years ending in getting concealed under the soil and then decaying and getting destroyed is not so much valuable that a person strives hard to achieve wealth and position and does injustice upon himself and the others.

Witnessing this silent valley which softens the most adamant heart and makes the most heavy ear to hear and gives brightness to the most poor eye-sight, causes a person to review his plans in life and ponder over the great responsibilities which he has before Allah and the people and controls his desires.

The Holy Prophet (s) referring to this point in a tradition says:

زوروا القبور فإنها تذكركم الآخرة

“Visit the graves; for visiting them becomes the cause of remembering the next world.” 1

While the authenticity and firmness of *ziyarat* of graves is so obvious that it is needless to produce proofs and reasoning to a great extent yet, we reflect here some of the proofs for those who are doubtful.

Qur’an and ziyarat of Graves

Qur’an clearly instructs that the Holy Prophet (s) should not perform prayer over the dead body of the hypocrites and should not stand near their graves. It says:

وَلَا تُصَلِّ عَلَى أَحَدٍ مِنْهُمْ مَاتَ أَبَدًا وَلَا تَقُمْ عَلَى قَبْرِهِ إِنَّهُمْ كَفَرُوا بِاللَّهِ وَرَسُولِهِ
وَمَاتُوا وَهُمْ فَاسِقُونَ.

“And never offer prayer for anyone of them who dies and do not stand by his grave, surely they disbelieve in Allah and His Apostle and they shall die in transgression. (Tauba 19:84)”

In this verse, for destroying the character of the hypocrites and rebuking the members of this group, the God commands the Holy Prophet (s):

1. Not to perform *salat* over the dead body of anyone of them.
2. Not to stand over their graves; and this reality is presented with the sentence;

وَلَا تَقُمْ عَلَى قَبْرِهِ

When the Holy Qur’an commands that one should avoid these two actions with regards to the hypocrites it means that for others who are not hypocrites these actions are good and worthy to be performed.

Now let us see what *عَلَى قَبْرِهِ* means? Does it refer only to the standing at the time of burial which in the case of hypocrites is not permissible and in the case of the believers good and necessary? Or it also refers to standing at the time of burial and at other instances?

Some of the commentators think that the verse refers to the matter of standing at the time of burial but some others like al-Baydawi see the verse from a far angle and interpret it as such:

وَلَا تَقُمْ عَلَى قَبْرِهِ لِلدَّفْنِ أَوْ لِزِيَارَةِ

“Don’t stand on grave for burial or pilgrimage.”²

Paying attention to the contents of verse will show that it is having a wider meaning i.e. it concerns standing at the time of burial as well as stopping after the burial.

This is because two sentences form the gist of the subject matter of this verse and these two sentences comprises of:

1.

لَا تُصَلِّ عَلَى أَحَدٍ مِنْهُمْ مَاتَ أَبَدًا

“**And never offer prayer for anyone of them who dies..... (Tauba 19:84)**”

The word of **أحد** which has been placed in the course of prohibition is good for all individuals.

The word of **أبدا** is good for all times and the meaning of the sentence will be as such: “Do not perform *salat* for any one of the hypocrites at any time.”

By paying attention to these two words we can easily understand that the meaning of this particular sentence is not referring to recitation of *salat* over the dead body because reciting *salat* over the dead body takes place only once and that is before the burial and it cannot be repeated. If it specifically meant recitation of *salat* over the dead, then it was needless to bring the word **أبدا** . And to imagine that this word serves the purpose of expressing all individuals is completely irrelevant because the sentence **لَا تُصَلِّ عَلَى أَحَدٍ** is sufficient for such inclusion and purpose and there is no need to mention it once again.

Moreover, the word **أبدا** in Arabic refers to time and not individuals such as:

وَلَا أَنْ تَنْكَحُوا أَزْوَاجَهُ مِنْ بَعْدِهِ أَبَدًا

“**Nor that you should marry his wives after him ever;... (Ahzab 33:53)**”

Therefore the essence of the first sentence is: Never seek forgiveness and mercy for anyone of the hypocrites whether at the time of reciting *salat* or otherwise.

2. And now we will discuss the second sentence:

وَلَا تَقُمْ عَلَى قَبْرِهِ

The meaning of this sentence in connection with the previous sentence is as such:

وَلَا تَقُمْ عَلَى قَبْرِ أَحَدٍ مِنْهُمْ أَبَدًا

Because the adverbs which are present in **معطوف عليه** are also applicable for **معطوف**.

Therefore it cannot be said that *qiyam* (standing) refers to the *qiyam* at the time of burial because it is presumed that *qiyam* at the time of burial for each one is not subject to repetition and the word **أبداً** too is commendable in this sentence which shows that this action is worthy of repetition.

The reply to the supposition that this word is applicable for all individuals was given in the previous sentence since with the presence of **أحد** it is needless to express that once again.

By paying attention to these two points in the words **لا تصل** and **لا تقم** one can say:

God has prohibited the Holy Prophet (s) from seeking any kind of mercy for the hypocrites whether by means of reciting *salat* upon the dead body or merely by means of *du'a* and from any kind of standing over their graves whether at the time of burial or after the burial. This means that these two actions i.e. 'seeking forgiveness' and 'standing' is permissible and worthy for the grave of a believer in all the instances and one of such instances is standing for *ziyarat* and recitation of Qur'an for a believer who has been buried there for years.

Now we shall discuss the virtue and excellence of *ziyarat* of graves from the viewpoint of traditions.

Traditions and ziyarat of Graves

From the Islamic traditions which the authors of *Sihah* and *Sunan* have narrated, we derive the conclusion that the Holy Prophet (s) had prohibited, due to a temporary reason, the *ziyarat* of graves and later on allowed the people to make haste for *ziyarat*.

Perhaps the reason for prohibition was that their dead ones were predominantly polytheists and idol-worshippers and Islam had cut off their relation and affection with the world of polytheism. It is also possible that the reason for prohibition was something else and that is the newly converted Muslims were writing elegies and saying un-Islamic things over the graves of the dead polytheists. But after the expansion of Islam and the 'faith' entering into the hearts of people, this prohibition was lifted and the Holy Prophet (s) permitted the people to go for the *ziyarat* of graves because of the educative benefits, so that people should hasten to visit graves

The writers of *Sunan* and *Sihah* narrate as such:

كُنْتُ نَهَيْتُكُمْ عَنْ زِيَارَةِ الْقُبُورِ فَزُورُوهَا فَإِنَّهَا تُزَهِّدُ فِي الدُّنْيَا وَتُذَكِّرُ الْآخِرَةَ

*"I had prohibited you from ziyara of graves. From now on, go for ziyara because it will make you feel unattached towards this world and make you remember the hereafter."*³

It is on the same basis that the Holy Prophet (s) was visiting the grave of his mother and informing the people to visit the graves since ziyara is the source of remembering the hereafter. Here is the text of the tradition:

زار النبي قبر أمه فبكى وأبكى من حوله...إستأذنت ربي في أن أزور قبرها فاذن لي فزوروا القبور فإنها تذكركم

الموت

*"The Holy Prophet (s) visited the grave of his mother and cried near her grave and also made others around him to cry. Thereafter he said: I have taken permission from my Lord to visit the grave of my mother. You too should visit the graves because such a visit will remind you of death."*⁴

4. Ayesha says that the Holy Prophet (s) freely allowed the ziyarat of graves:

إن رسول الله رخص في زيارة القبور

*"The Prophet of God permitted the visit of graves."*⁵

5. Ayesha says: The Holy Prophet (s) taught me the manner of visiting the graves. Here is the text of the tradition:

فامرني ربي أتي البقيع فاستغفر لهم قلت كيف أقول : يا رسول الله قال قولي:
السلام على أهل الديار من المؤمنين

والمسلمين يرحم الله المُستقدمين منا والمستأخرين وإنا إن شاء الله بكم
لاحقون.

“My Lord commanded me to come to Baqi’ and seek forgiveness for them. (Ayesha) says: I asked him how one should seek forgiveness to which the Holy Prophet (s) replied: Say Peace (Salaam) be upon the people of this place from the believers and muslims, May God have mercy on those who have left and those who are to follow. We shall join you all very soon.”⁶

6. In another tradition, there are some sentences which the Holy Prophet (s) used when performing ziyarat of graves. It is as follows:

السلام عليكم دار قوم مؤمنين وإنا وإياكم مُتواعدون غداً ومُواكلون وإنا إن
شاء الله بكم لاحقون اللهم اغفر لأهل

بقية الغرقد

“Peace be with you the groups of believers and we will be return to you and rely on you and certainly if God wishes, we will join you. O God, have mercy on all those (buried) in Baqi’ al-Garqad”⁷*

*Garqad was a tree in Baqi’ graveyard. And because of this tree, it was commonly called as the land of Garqad.

7. In another tradition, the text of ziyarat is narrated in a different way:

السلام عليكم أهل الديار من المؤمنين والمسلمين وإنا إن شاء الله بكم
لاحقون أنتم لنا فرط ونحن لكم تبع أسئل

الله العافية لنا ولكم.

“Peace be with you the groups of believers and Muslims, and certainty we will join you. You will exhilarate us and we will follow you. We ask welfare from you for ourselves and for yourself.”⁸

8. In the third tradition, the text is narrated still differently:

السلام عليكم دار قومٍ مؤمنين وإنا إن شاء الله بكم لاحقون

“Peace be with you the groups of believers and if God wishes, we will join you.”⁹

From the tradition of Ayesha, we got knowledge that whenever the last part of night was approaching, the Holy Prophet (s) would go towards Baqi’ and say:

السلام عليكم دار قومٍ مؤمنين واتاكم ما توعدون ، غداً مؤجلون وإنا إن شاء
الله بكم لاحقون اللهم اغفر لأهل بقيع

الغرقد.

“Peace be with you! The groups of believers and what has been promised to you will be given to you, soon in future your destiny will reach you. And certainly, we will be the joiners to you soon. And if God wishes, will be with you. O God! Have mercy on all those (buried) in Baqi’ al-Garqad.”¹⁰

From another tradition we come to know that the Holy Prophet (s) used to hasten, along with a group of people for *ziyarat* of graves and teach them the manner of doing *ziyarat*:

كان رسول الله يُعلمهم إذا خرجوا إلى المقابر فكان قائلهم يقول: السلام على
أهل الديار (يا) السلام عليكم أهل الديار

من المؤمنين وإنا إن شاء الله لاحقون أسئلكم الله لنا ولكم العافية.

“The Prophet (s) used to teach them that when they go out to graves they should say: Peace be with those who live in houses (graves). Peace be with you the groups of believers and Muslims. Certainly if God wishes, we will be joiners to you. We ask safety for ourselves and you.”¹¹

Women and ziyarat of Graves

The only matter which is remaining is the matter of *ziyara* by women which in some of the traditions, the Holy Prophet (s) has prohibited them from doing so:

لعن رسول الله زوارات القبور

“The Prophet of God has cursed the women who go excessively for ziyarat.”¹²

But it should be known that utilizing this tradition for proving prohibition of *ziyarat* is not correct due to a number of reasons: firstly, most of the scholars think this prohibition to be in the *makruh* sense and the reason for it being *makruh* was because of the special conditions prevailing at that time. One of the commentators of tradition i.e., the writer of *Miftah al-haja fi sharh Sahih Ibn Maja* refers to that and says:

إختلفوا في الكراهة هل هي كراهة تحريم أو تنزيه ذهب إلا أكثر إلى الجواز إذا
أمنت بالفتنة.

*“The scholars are having two opinions about the prohibition. That whether it is prohibited in the makruh sense or prohibited in the haram sense! But most of the scholars believe that women can go for ziyara if they are certain of remaining safe from any trouble.”*¹³

Secondly, we have read in the previous traditions (kindly refer to tradition number 4) that Ayesha narrates from the Holy Prophet (s) that the latter declared free the *ziyara* of graves. If the women were excluded from this declaration then it is necessary to remind that this declaration is exclusively for men especially when the narrator is a lady and amongst the people to whom he (i.e. Prophet) was addressing was a lady and every addressee will naturally think that the order and declaration is directed to him or her.

Thirdly, some of the traditions mention the manner in which the Holy Prophet (s) taught Ayesha to perform *ziyara* of graves¹⁴ and Ayesha herself used to personally visit the graves after the Holy Prophet (s).

Fourthly, al-Tirmidhi narrates that when Ayesha's brother i.e. ‘Abd al-Rahman bin Abi Bakr died in Ethiopia, his body was taken to Mecca and buried there. When his sister Ayesha came to Mecca from Medina, she visited grave of her brother and by the side of his grave, recited two couplets in his sorrow and made speech (about him).¹⁵

The commentator of *Sahih al-Tirmidhi* Imam Hafiz Ibn al-‘Arabi [al-Maliki] (born in 435 AH and died in 543 AH) writes in his additional notes on Sahih.

“The fact is that the Holy Prophet (s) has permitted the men and the women to go for *ziyara*. If some of the traditions mention it to be *makruh* it is because of restlessness and impatience near the grave or because of not observing proper *hijab*.”

Fifthly, Bukhari narrates from Anas that the Holy Prophet (s) saw a woman crying over her beloved one and comforted her to have faith and be patient. The woman not recognising the Holy Prophet (s), said: “you release me from the calamity which has befallen upon me and not befallen upon you”. When it was said to her that he was the Holy Prophet (s) she left the grave and went to the house of the Holy Prophet (s) pleading pardon for not recognising him. The Holy Prophet (s) replied: “Patience is advised at the time of misfortunes.”¹⁶

If *ziyara* was forbidden, the Holy Prophet (s) would have prohibited her from this action while he only asked her to adopt patience. Moreover, after the women visited the house of the Holy Prophet (s) he talked of patience and steadfastness at the time of misfortunes and did not say anything about *ziyara* of grave; otherwise he would have ordered her not to visit the grave of her beloved one anymore.

Sixthly, Fatima (‘a), daughter of the Holy Prophet (s), used to visit every Friday the grave of her uncle Hamza and recite prayer (*salat*) and cry sadly at his grave.¹⁷

Seventhly, al-Qurtubi says that the Holy Prophet (s) did not prohibit any lady going for *ziyara*. Instead he cursed those ladies who were going for *ziyara* very often as he uses the words **زوارت القبور** and **زوار** which is used for exaggeration.¹⁸

Perhaps the reason of cursing such a habit is that excessive *ziyarat* is the source of spoiling the rights of husband. If such factors are absent in the *ziyara* of one lady then there is no problem as such since remembering death is a matter which is necessary for both men and women.

Eighthly, if *ziyara* of grave is the source of getting unattached towards this world and a reduction of the greed of the person in helping him to remember the Hereafter, it also brings some benefit for the dead one i.e. for the one who is buried under the soil and is helpless from doing anything. This is because the Islamic *ziyara* is usually accompanied by recitation of *al-Fatiha* and giving its reward to the deceased. In fact this is the best gift which an alive person can give to his or her beloved dead one.

Ibn Maja narrates in his *Sahih* that the Holy Prophet (s) said:

إِقرءوا يس على موتاكم

Therefore, there is no difference between man and woman that one should be permitted and the other should be forbidden, except that if the women are faced with some special situations that we previously discussed. Now, that the matter of *ziyara* of the graves of believers is clear for us and it is now necessary to refer to the valuable effects of *ziyarat* of the graves of the awliya Allah and the beloved ones of Allah.

1. Tafsir al-Baydawi, vol. 3, p. 77.

2. Tafsir al-Baydawi, vol. 3, p. 77.

3. Sunan Ibn Maja, chapter of زيارة القبور في ما جاء vol.1, p.114, (Indian edition); Sahih al-Tirmidhi chapter of جنائز vol. 3 p. 274 along with commentary of Ibn al-‘Arabi Maliki, (Lebanon edition); After narrating the tradition from Burayda, al-Tirmidhi says:

حديث بريدة صحيح والعمل على هذا عند اهل العلم لا يُرون بزيارة القبور باسأ وهو قول ابن المبارك والشافعي وأحمد واسحاق.

‘The tradition of Burayda is correct and the people of knowledge act upon it. They do not put forward any obstacle for performing ziyara of graves and they are people such as Ibn al-Mubarak, al-Shafi’i, Ahmad and Ishaq.’ Meanwhile, you may refer to the following documents:

Sahih Muslim, vol. 3. page 65 chapter of

استئذان النبي ربه غم وجل في زيارة قبر امه

Sahih Abu Dawud, vol.2. p. 195, book of جنائز chapter of زيارة القبور

Sahih Muslim, vol. 4 p. 73, book of جنائز chapter of زيارة القبور

4. Sahih Muslim, vol. 3, p. 65, chapter of استئذان النبي ربه غم وجل في زيارة قبر امه

Sahih Ibn Maja, vol. 1, p. 114.

According to the narrators of this tradition, the reason the Holy Prophet (s) took permission from Allah for visiting the grave of his mother was that his mother was a polytheist. Undoubtedly the mother of Holy Prophet (s) was a monotheist and a believer like her father, grandfather and ancestors. For this reason all the portion of this tradition is incompatible with the religious standards.

Sunan Abi Dawud, vol. 2 p. 195. Book of جنائز Egyptian print along with the additional notes of Shaykh Ahmad Sa’d from the scholars of Azhar.

Sahih Muslim, vol. 4 p. 74, book of جنائز chapter of زيارة قبر المشرك

5. Sahih Ibn Maja, vol. 1, p. 114.

6. Sunan al-Nasa’i, vol. 3 p. 76; and Sahih Muslim, vol. 3, p. 64 chapter of

القبر ما يقال عند دخول

7. Sunan al-Nasa’i, vol. 40, pp. 76– 77.

8. Sunan al-Nasa’i, vol. 40, pp. 76– 77.

9. Sunan Abu Dawud, vol. 2, p. 196.

10. Sahih Muslim, vol. 3, p. 63 chapter of القبر ما يقال عند دخول

11. Sahih Muslim, vol. 3, p. 110 chapter of القبر ما يقال عند دخول

12. Sahih Ibn Maja, (1st Edition, Egypt), vol. 1, p. 478, book of جنائز chapter of

ما جاء في النهي عن زيارة النساء القبور

13. Hawashi of Sunan Ibn Maja, (Indian edition), vol. 1, p. 114.

14. Refer to tradition no. 5.

15. Sunan al-Tirmidhi, vol. 4, p. 275 book of جنائز chapter of زيارة القبور في ما جاء

16. Sahih Bukhari, p. 100, book of جنائز chapter of زيارة القبور; Sunan Abi Dawud, vol. 2 p. 171.
17. al-Hakim, Mustadrak al-sahihayn, vol. 1, p. 377; al-Samhudi, Wafa' al-wafa', vo1. 2 p. 112.
18. Sunan Abu Dawud, vol. 2, p. 196 has narrated "زائرات"
19. Sahih Bukhari, p. 100, book of جنائز chapter of زيارة القبور; Sunan Abi Dawud, vol. 2 p. 171.

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