

Why Prostrate on Karbala's Turba

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Article

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The reason why Shi`as prostrate on the *turbah* is based on two sound premises hinging upon two issues:

First: It is commendable for one who prays to use a pure soil he is sure to be clean regardless of where he takes it from; there is no preference nor any distinction of one soil over another in as far as prostrating upon it is concerned. This is only an indication that the person offering his prayers demonstrates concern about the cleanliness of his body and clothes, and about the place where he offers his prayers.

It is something which a Muslim regards as a good plateau upon which he prostrates when at home or when travelling, one which he may not find everywhere, i.e. other towns, bazaars, hotels, inns, rest areas, parks, traveller lodges, transportation stations, ports, shelters, etc. How can one do so since such places may be frequented by non-Muslims and other people who are heedless of and indifferent to religion when it comes to a spot which by necessity has to be pure and clean?

What is wrong with a Muslim taking a precaution relevant to his creed by carrying with him a pure soil with which he feels comfortable and of the cleanliness of which he is sure to prostrate upon when he offers his prayers rather than prostrating on filth, uncleanness and impurities?

The latter never bring one closer to Allah, nor does the Sunnah permit prostrating upon them, nor doing so is accepted by sound reason once a person has made sure that his body and clothes are clean. Moreover, the Sunnah prohibits offering prayers in places such as: garbage collection sites, slaughter-houses, cemeteries, highways, toilets, places where camels rest, mandating that mosques should be cleansed and perfumed.^{[1](#)}

This terse and precious religious attitude was adopted by pious men of the first Muslim century. Such a very highly commendable precaution was adopted by the great *tabi`i* and *faqih* whose *fiqh* was unanimously agreed upon, namely Masrooq al-Ajda`^{[2](#)} who used to carry with him whenever he travelled a block of baked clay upon which he would prostrate, as we are told by the head mentor and the trusted *hafiz*, the Imam of the Sunnah and the authority of his time, Abu Bakr ibn Abu Shaybah. In Volume Two of *Al-Musannaf*, it is recorded that “Whenever Masrooq travelled, he used to carry with him on board the vessel a block of baked clay upon which he would prostrate.”

This is the first premise endorsed by the Shi`as. It has a precedent that goes back to the days of the early *sahabah* and their sincere *tabi`in*. As regarding the second premise, here it is explained:

Second: The rule of “absolute consideration” determines that some lands are better than others, and it

acknowledges the differences between relics and the views in their regard. This is something normal, rational, agreed upon by all nations, governments, authorities, and all the world's rulers. Through relating or attributing one land, place, or area of a specific significance to another, decisions are made and injunctions are derived which should not be violated, nor should those who violate them be pardoned.

Can you not see how autonomous regions, parks, halls, homes, government-controlled offices, especially those owned by the royal palace and whereby the country's monarch is characterized, enjoy a special status and are subject to specific jurisdictions which people have to safeguard and the laws relevant to which have to be adhered to?

Such is the case with places, buildings, and edifices related to Allah Almighty. These enjoy a special status. Injunctions, rites, and obligations, from the adherence to which nobody who submits to Allah is exempted, are sanctioned and safeguarded. Anyone who lives under the banner of *Tawhid* and is a Muslim has to shoulder his full responsibility in safeguarding and following them.

It is according to this same agreed upon rule of “absolute consideration” that there is for the Ka`ba an injunction of its own, and so is the case with the Haram and with both Sacred Mosques of Mecca and Medina. There are injunctions relevant specifically to them both.

There are other injunctions and restrictions relevant to public mosques and places of worship where the Name of Allah is celebrated. Such injunctions include sanctifying and venerating them and keeping them clean of any filth. Those who are in the state of *janaba*, women during their menstruation as well as those during their post-natal periods, are all prohibited from entering them.

They are not to be sold out at all under any pretext whatsoever, unlike the case of private trusts the sale or trade of which (for something better) is subject to other injunctions and regulations. Such a status is due to their being relevant to the King of Kings, the Lord of the Worlds.

The reason why Mecca is regarded as a safe haven sought by all people who perform the pilgrimage and by those who visit it from each and every distant land, and the fact that such pilgrimage rites are obligatory even when it comes to its plants and produces, is due to the mandate derived from such a relationship that necessitates edicts to be enforced, and the fact that Allah had chosen such places [for distinction] rather than any others.

So is the case with regard to considering Medina as a sacred Haram to be venerated. All sanctities relevant to it and to its people and soil [which we find] in the sacred Sunnah as well as those relevant to whoever reaches it or is buried therein, are all due to the same status, to its being belonging to Allah, the most Exalted One, and to its being the capital of the throne of His greatest Prophet, the one who conveyed His conclusive Message, peace and blessings of Allah be upon him and his progeny.

This status, and its law of relationship, does not only concern the legislator, it is also something natural sanctioned by Islam. Not only is it better than all other places, it is the absolute criterion of preferring one

piece of land over another when it comes to issues relevant to prophets and messengers and to their successors, to the truthful, to the martyrs, to the faithful and to their categories, up to whatever distinction one may conceive based on sacred Islam.

Nay! Such a status is the axis upon which the cycle of existence revolves, one through which everything else stands, one to which all wishes aspire and from which every relationship and source of endearment, all links and connections, all factors of grudge and animosity, hostility and spite..., are rendered.

It is also the source of every disagreement, dissension, and hypocrisy. It also is the foundation of every unity and unification, every asylum, every accord and peace agreement. Upon it are the structures of totalities are built and social institutes are erected. In the light of its being the ultimate objective are states formed and governments dispute with one another, causing rivalries, discords, disputes, then punches, then bloody battles and wars.

In its light do nations and tribes group together, then groups and societies abound. In its light do establishments get founded in order to deal with religious and secular issues and theological societies centralize, and so do scientific, social, sociological, nationalistic, sectarian, partisan, and political factions, during crises or ease, when at rest or in motion, when united or disunited, when in agreement or in disagreement.

The mighty and victorious government, the one which governs all humanity since its very first day and till eternity without any bias to anyone or without anyone freeing himself from its authority, day in and day out, is the relative government wherein there is the safeguarding of both the creed and the life in this world and at which man-made systems end, and so do the general social canon, as well as the human affairs of all individuals.

People, though numerous, are subjugated to its authority, shackled in its chains, tied in its webs, having no escape route there from. It is the one that rules and abrogates, over-rules and sustains, lifts and lowers, joins and disconnects, brings closer or distances, gives and takes, elevates and humiliates, rewards and penalizes, honors and abases.

It is the same one that makes the unknown soldier held in high esteem, honored and respected. It finds him worthy of all honoring; in it, he is glorified and dignified by the people and by the government. It scatters roses and flowers on his soil and grave, immortalizing him, keeping his memory alive on the pages of history for all time to come.

Such a government is the same one wherein catastrophes and disasters become tolerable. Through its criteria does man willingly work hard, facing trials, tribulations, and tremendous calamities headlong, [happily] sacrificing his all for its sake. It is the one that prompted the Messenger of Allah, peace and blessings of Allah be upon him and his progeny, as we are told by Lady Ayesha³, to kiss the corpse of the great sahabi Othman ibn Maz`oon as tears were trickling down his cheeks...

It is the same that caused the Prophet, peace and blessings of Allah be upon him and his progeny, to tearfully mourn his grandson al-Husain (as) and hold many a mourning ceremony in his memory and take the *turbah* of Karbala', smell it and kiss it, up to the end of the recorded tradition.

It is the same that caused Lady Ummu Salamah, Mother of the Faithful, to keep a specimen of Karbala's *turbah* in her clothes. It is the same one that caused the Truthful Lady Fatima (as) to take a specimen of the soil of her father's pure grave and smell it.

It is the same that prompted Banu Zabbah during the Battle of the Camel to collect the droppings from the camel on which the Mother of the Faithful Ayesha was riding. They broke them up then sniffed them, as al-Tabari indicates [in his *Tarikh*]. It is the same that caused the Commander of the Faithful Ali, peace be upon him, to take a handful of Karbala's *turbah* when he reached that land, smell it then cry till the ground became wet with his tears as he said, "From this loin, seventy thousand shall be permitted to enter Paradise without being judged." This incident is transmitted by al-Tabrani and is recorded on p. 191, Vol. 9, of al-Haythami's book *Majma' al-Rijal*, a concordance of trusted transmitters of *hadith*.

It is the same that prompted a man from Banu Asad to smell the soil where al-Husain (as) was buried then cry. Hisham ibn Muhammad has said, "When water was released to overwhelm [and obliterate] the grave of al-Husain (as), it dried after forty days, and the grave was completely left without any trace.

A bedouin from Banu Asad came and kept sampling one handful of soil of that site after another, smelling it each time, till he was able to identify al-Husain's grave, whereupon he wept and said, "May my parents be sacrificed for you! How sweet you smelled when you were alive, and how sweet your soil (*turbah*) smells when you are dead!" Then he wept again and composed this verse of poetry:[4](#)

Out of enmity did they want to obliterate his grave,

But the good smell of the grave's soil led to the grave.

A human being, whoever he may be, wherever, whenever, whatever race he belongs to, or however he may be, in all his life's stages remains a subject of such an authority, a hostage to expressions such as: my soul, my body, my wealth, my family, my offspring, my kinsfolk, my relatives, my extended family, my trade, my creed, my sect, my principle, my house, my property, my government, my leaders, my masters..., up to a countless such possessives...!

These are literally, in the possessive form, what are being given lip service by governments, states, societies, committees, creeds, faiths, kings, parties, and ruling authorities that chew their words when they discuss these issues and endlessly many more.

Once the possessive pronoun is applied and the attribution of something partial or complete is established, or when an individual, or a social issue raised by those mentioned above, there will be outcomes, and there will be injunctions which nobody has any choice except to submit and surrender to

them, defend and uphold them.

This is a useful research which provides solutions for the society's problems with regard to its principles, views and beliefs, ties of love or grudge, intricate sects, decrees of the holiest legislative system, philosophy behind what the easy creed recommends. It is a discussion of what Islam and its rites hold as sacred, what it prohibits, the various levels of distinction it sets, and what it holds as holy.

Having provided such a detailed account, we reveal to the discreet and free-minded researcher the secret why the turbah of the sacred land of Karbala' is thus honored, the extent of its relationship to Allah, Praised and Exalted is He, the extent of its sanctity and that of the one to whom it is related in the light of his nearness to the Sublime One, the most High. What would you think of the sanctity of a soil that is the burial ground of someone who was killed in the Cause of Allah, of a supreme leader of His army who never flinched from defending His cause?

Surely it is the soil of one whom He loves, of one who invited others to Him, who led them to Him, who rose for His sake, who sacrificed his family and his own life and everything precious for Him, one who imperiled his blood for the sake of raising the status of His Commandments, for the dissemination of His Unity, so that His Commandments may rule, and so that His path and means may be firmly rooted.

Which of the world's kings or the land's monarchs, since the time of Adam, has a leader who is ever-ready to rise in the defense of such a king or monarch, one who is pure, honorable, faithful, truthful, valiant, dignified, exalted..., like the leader of those who remained sincere till they were all martyred at Taff, namely al-Husain (as) for whom our lives may be sacrificed?

Why does Allah boast about him, and why does He maintain his blood with Him and not permit a drop of it to fall upon the earth when al-Husain (as) hurled it above in the direction of the heavens?⁵ Why should He not prolong the celebrating of his name on His earth and in His heavens, since all Husain's heart was filled with love for Him?

Why should the face of the world not turn black on Ashura and not manifest the venues of His Wrath on the day when he was killed, and on the page of existence? And why should the earth not weep over him and the sky? This is exactly what Ibn Sirin records, and it is recorded by a multitude of *huffaz*. And why should the sky not rain blood on the day when he was killed? A consecutively recorded tradition details such an event.

Did not Allah send His messenger angels who are near to Him to His Prophet, peace and blessings of Allah be upon him and his progeny, to give him a specimen of Karbala's *turbah*? Why did the Messenger of Allah, peace and blessings of Allah be upon him and his progeny, smell it, kiss it, then refer to it as long as he lived? Why did he (P)⁶ even use it as a balsam in his own house?

Come along with me, O true Muslim! Is not prostrating on such a *turbah* in order to seek nearness to Allah as one performs his prayers at the ends of the night and the day anything other than that? Is it,

rather than any other soil, earth, hall, etc., more worthy of being held as pure and clean? Is it not better than rugs, sheets, or carpets woven by weaving machines operated by unknown hands? Moreover, there is nothing in the Sunnah that recommends prostrating on such items...

Is it not more worthy of seeking nearness to Allah and more fit to earn His favor and is more appropriate to do when we submit and solemnly surrender and worship Him, the most Exalted One? Is it not better to place the face's sides and forehead on such a piece of earth since doing so connotes lessons in defending the Cause of Allah, the manifestations of His Sanctity, and the symbol of defending His canon, holy Islam?

Is not a soil that symbolizes the signs of Tawhid and the defense of Tawhid to the end more worthy of prostrating upon? It surely invites one to be kind at heart, to be compassionate, to be affectionate and gentle.

Is it not most exemplary and the best thing to do to make the prostration on a soil from which springs of blood gushed out colored with the dye of love for Allah and crafted on the Sunnah of Allah and on pure and sincere loyalty to Him? Is there anything better than a soil kneaded with the blood of a pure and revered person, an individual the rewards of loving whom are the token of appreciation of the Conclusive Divine Message?

It is a soil fermented with the blood of the Master of the Youths of Paradise, a symbol of love for Allah and for His Messenger (P) and the trust left by Muhammad (P) among his Muslim nation as we are told by the Sunnah.

It is based upon both premises that we take out of the soil of Karbala' such pieces to prostrate upon them just as the *faqih* of past generations, namely Masrooq ibn al-Ajda', used to carry with him a block of baked clay taken out of the soil of sacred Medina to prostrate on. This man was the student of the righteous caliphate, the *faqih* of Medina and the teacher of the Sunnah.

Far away from him to be charged of inventing a *bid'a*. Which of these premises causes us to really feel the pain of unfairness? Which one of them contradicts the call of the Holy Qur'an or the Sunnah of Allah and His Messenger (P)? Which one of them should we denounce and label as a *bid'a*? Which one of them violates reason, logic, or common-sense?

When the Shi'as use Karbala's soil to prostrate upon, they do not claim that doing so is absolutely obligatory, nor do they claim that it is an obligation derived from the Shari'a or the creed, nor is it one of the sect's obligation, nor does anyone among them, from the very first day, distinguish between it and others collected from the earth's soil, when they regard prostrating upon it as permissible, contrary to what ignorant folks claim, those who base their claim on their own personal views.

To them [Shi'as], [such a *turbah*] is mandated by reason and is highly commendable, that's all. It is opting for the best of what one should prostrate upon when one consults his reason and logic and

common-sense alone, as you have already been told above.

There are many followers of this sect who take with them when they travel any such thing other than Karbala's *turbah* upon which the prostration is valid such as a pure and clean rug woven of palm leaves they are confident to be clean, or anything like that upon which they prostrate when they perform their prayers.

We are of the view that anyone who adopts these sound premises and takes into consideration the issues relevant to precaution and to sanctity will conclude that the people who live at the Sacred Mosques: Mecca and Medina, and who seek shelter with them, as well as those who live around them, must take out of that soil round flat pieces or tablets upon which they should prostrate in accordance with both arguments and as a means to rid themselves of the heat of the gravel at the Sacred Mosque especially at noon and during hot weather to prostrate upon and to carry them as pure and blessed places of prostration whenever they travel as was done by their good ancestors, the peers of the *faqih* Masrooq ibn al-Ajda` whose story you have already heard.

They should make them available to those who visit these Mosques and to the pilgrims who go to those sacred lands from other Islamic countries. They should be adopted by the Islamic nation as a place of prostration when at home and when travelling, and they should regard them as souvenirs reminding them of Allah and His Messenger (P) and of the places where His angel of revelation descended, ones which remind them of their Lord and of His Prophet whenever they look at them, smell them, and smell in them the fragrance of Tawhid and Prophethood...

They would be lanterns of guidance at Muslims' homes enlightening the hearts and the minds of those endowed with wisdom. The Muslims would then seek nearness to Allah Almighty in every part of the world by prostrating upon a soil taken from the very best spot chosen by Allah Himself to be a safe, secure, and holy House, a house of sanctity, honor, blessing, the sacred resting place of His Prophet.

Besides, it actually carries a great and effective publicity: It invites people to enter into the folds of Islam, to visit the Ka`ba, in order to worship Allah, to visit the capital of His Sunnah and the grave of the one who carried out the Message of such Sunnah. Indeed, whoever holds Allah's sanctities with high regards, it surely is better for him with his Lord.

Finally, such is our Husain (as), and such is our love for him. Such is his mourning. Such is Karbala' and its *turbah*: the piece of earth upon which we prostrate. Allah is our Lord, and our Sunnah and its tradition is the Sunnah of our Prophet (P) and its tradition, and to Allah does all Praise belong.

***And what reason do we have not to believe in
Allah and in the truth that has come to us while
we earnestly desire that our Lord lets us join the
(ranks of) the good people?
(Holy Qur'an, 5:84)***

And so that those who have been given the knowledge may know that it is the truth from your Lord, so that they may believe in it and their hearts may be humbled before it. Most surely Allah is the Guide of those who believe in a straight path.

(Holy Qur'an, 22:54)

Glossary

Ahadith: singular of *hadith*, a statement (usually attributed either to the Prophet [pbuh] or to one of the members of his Progeny [as] or companions)

***Bid`a:*** (singular of *bida`*) an innovation in the religion, something introduced as part of the Islamic creed, as a Sunnah, and which is not

Faqih: jurist, one who is knowledgeable in *fiqh*, Islamic jurisprudence

Fiqh: the science of Islamic jurisprudence

Hadith: (singular) tradition, a statement made by Prophet Muhammad (pbuh); its plural is: *ahadith*

Janabah: uncleanness caused by seminal discharge

Musnad: a compilation of traditions (*ahadith*) which are consecutively and chronologically traced to their transmitters

Sahaba: (plural) companions of the Holy Prophet Muhammad (pbuh); singular: *sahabi*

Sahabi: companion (e.g. of the Holy Prophet), one of the *sahabah*

Sahih: literally: authentic, correct, accurate; it is generally used to refer to the collection, group of collections, or book, of verified and authenticated *ahadith* of the Holy Prophet (pbuh)

Shari`a: Islam's legislative system

***Tabi`een:*** plural of *tabi`*, one who follows and learns from a *Sahabi*

***Tabi`i:*** (singular:) one who accompanied for a good period of time and learned from a *sahabi*, a companion of the Holy Prophet Muhammad (pbuh); its plural is: *tabi`een*

Tawhid: the concept of the absolute Unity of God, the belief that God is One and indivisible, One __ and Only One __ God

Turbah: literally: soil; in this text, it refers to a piece of soil taken out of the area where Imam Husain (as) is buried

And surely Allah knows best...

[1.](#) Ibid., p. 256, in addition to other references.

[2.](#) Masrooq ibn al-Ajda` is Abd al-Rahman ibn Malik al-Hamadani, "Abu Ayesha," who died in 62 A.H. He was a great tabi`i and one of the main authorities upon which the six sahih books, i.e. Al-Sihah al-Sittah, rely. He quotes Abu Bakr, Omer, Othman, Ali (as), and he was a pious faqih and a good trusted authority. He was one of the companions of Ibn Mas`ood who were teaching people the Sunnah. When he was drawing his last breaths, as Ibn Sa`d tells us in his Tabaqat, he supplicated saying, "O Allah! I do not die following anything which the Messenger of Allah, peace and blessings of Allah be upon him, never sanctioned nor sanctioned by Abu Bakr nor Omer." Refer to the major reference, namely Bukhari's Tarikh, Vol. 4, Chapter 2, p. 35, and to Ibn Sa`d's Tabaqat, Vol. 6, pp. 50-56, to Ibn Abu Hatim's book Al-Jarh wal Ta`deel, Vol. 4, Chapter 1, p. 396, and to Tahtheeb al-Tahtheeb, Vol. 10, pp. 109-111.

[3.](#) This incident is detailed by Abul-Qasim Abd al-Malik ibn Bashran in his book Al-Amaali, by Abul-Hasan Ali ibn al-Ja`d al-Jawhari in Volume Ten of his Musnad, by al-Hakim al-Naisapuri in Volume Three of his book Al-Mustadrak, and by other huffaz and renown authorities.

[4.](#) Refer to page 342, Vol. 4, of Ibn `Asakir's Tarikh and also to p. 293 of the book written by hafiz al-Kanji titled Al-Kifaya.

[5.](#) This incident is recorded by the hafiz al-Khatib al-Baghdadi. It is also discussed on p. 338, Vol. 4, of Tarikh al-Sham by the hafiz Ibn Asakir who relies on the authority of al-Khatib, and by al-Hafiz al-Kanji on p. 284 of his book Al-Kifaya relying on the authority of al-Hasan II who cites Muslim ibn Riyah, a freed slave of the Commander of the Faithful (as), saying, "I was with al-Husain (as) when he was killed. He was shot in the face with an arrow, so he said to me, 'O Muslim! Bring your hands closer to the blood,' which I did. Once I had a handful of it, he said to me, 'Pour it in my hand,' which I poured. He then hurled both his hands in the direction of the sky above as he said, 'Lord! Avenge the shedding of the blood of the son of Your Prophet's daughter!' Muslim continues his narration by saying, "Not a drop of it fell on the ground." It is also recorded that al-Husain, peace be upon him, threw the blood drawn from his chin to the sky when an arrow shot it. A multitude of huffaz have recorded this incident in their books. [The word "heavens," though plural, is synonymous to "sky." In contrast, the singular "heaven" refers to Paradise. --Tr.]

[6.](#) Short for "Peace and blessings of Allah be upon him and his progeny."

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