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3. Construction Of Mosque Near The Graves Of Pious People

Is construction of mosque near or in front of the grave of pious people permissible or not? Supposing it is permitted, then what is the main purpose of the tradition (*hadith*) of the Holy Prophet (S) regarding the actions of Jews and Christians as it has come in a tradition that the Holy Prophet (S) has cursed these two groups for considering the graves of their Prophets as objects of worship? Moreover, is construction of mosque near the graves of the *Awliya' Allah* inseparable with what has come down in this tradition!?

Answer: By paying attention to the general principles of Islam, construction of mosques, in the vicinity of graves of the *awliya'* and pious doesn't not have the least problem. This is because the purpose of construction of mosque is nothing more than worshipping Allah near the grave of His beloved who has become the source of receiving gifts. In other words, the aim of establishing mosque in these instances is that the visitors to the Divine leaders either before or after their *ziyarat*, perform their duty of worship (*'ibadah*) over there in as much as neither *ziyarat* to graves is forbidden (even from the viewpoint of Wahhabis) nor performing of *salat*, after or before *ziyarat*. Therefore, there is no reason to believe that the construction of mosque near the graves of *awliya'* for the purpose of worshipping Allah and performing divine duties is forbidden.

By paying attention to the story of *Ashab Al-Kahf* it is deduced that this action was a custom prevalent in the previous religions and Qur'an has narrated that without any criticism. When the incident of Companions of Kahf was disclosed to the people of that time after 309 years, they expressed their views about the ways of honoring the Companions of Kahf. One group said that a structure should be made over their grave (so that apart from honoring them their names, signs and memories are kept alive). Qur'an expresses this view as such:

فَقَالُوا ابْنُوا عَلَيْهِمْ بُنْيَانًا

…Build a building over them…. **(*Holy Qur'an, Surah Al-Kahf, 18:21*)**

Another group said that a mosque should be built over their grave (and in this way *tabarruk* sought). The Islamic commentators are unanimous in their views[1] that the suggestion of the first group was related to the polytheists and the suggestion of the second group was that of the monotheists. The Qur'an, while narrating this saying, says:

قَالَ الَّذِينَ غَلَبُوا عَلَىٰ أَمْرِهِمْ لَنَتَّخِذَنَّ عَلَيْهِمْ مَسْجِدًا

Those who prevailed in their affair said: We will certainly raise a masjid over them. **(*Holy Qur'an, Surah Al-Kahf, 18:21*)**[2]

History has it that the period of occurrence of the incidence of Companions of *Kahf* was the period of victory of monotheism over polytheism. There was no more of the sovereignty of the polytheists, nor their calling the people towards idol-worshipping. Naturally, this victorious group will be the same monotheist group, especially, that the content of their suggestion was the matter of construction of mosque for the sake of worshipping Allah. This itself is a witness that those making the suggestion were monotheists and God-worshippers.

If really the construction of mosque over or near the grave of the holy persons is a sin or polytheism, then why the monotheists made such a suggestion and why Qur'an narrates this without any criticism? Is not the narration of Qur'an together with this silence a testimony upon its permissibility? It is never proper that God narrates the sign of polytheism from a group but without specifically or implicitly criticizing them. And this reasoning is the same 'assertion' which has been explained in *'ilm Al-'usul.* (Methodology)

This event shows that it has been one kind of lasting conduct amongst all the monotheists and was one way of honoring the one in grave or a means of seeking *tabarruk*.

It was reasonable and polite of the Wahhabis that before arguing about hadith, they should first have sought the reference from the Holy Qur'an and then attempted the analysis of the tradition.

Now we shall discuss and examine their reasonings.

Reasoning Of Wahhabis That Construction Of Mosque Near Grave Is Forbidden

By presenting a series of traditions, the Wahhabis have analyzed the matter of construction of mosque near the grave of pious people to be forbidden. We shall examine all such traditions:

Bukhari[3] in his *Sahih* under the chapter of **يكره من إتخاذ المساجد على القبور** narrates two traditions as such:

لما مات الحسن بن الحسن بن عليّ ضربَت إمراته القُبة عل قبره سنة ثم رفعت فسمعوا صائحاً يقول الأهل وجدوا ما فقدوا فاجابه الأخر بل يئسوا فانقلبوا

1. *When Al-Hasan bin Al-Hasan bin 'Ali passed away his wife made a dome* (*a tent*) *over his grave and after one year she removed it. It was heard that one person cried out: "Have they found that which they had lost", another person replied: "No they have become disappointed and have given up."*

لعن الله اليهود والنَّصار إتخذوا قبور انبيائهم مسجداً قالت (عائشة) ولولا ذلك لابرزُوا قبره غير أنَّي أخش أن يُتخذ مسجداً

2. *May the curse of Allah be upon the Jews and Christians* (*for*) *considering the graves of their Prophets as mosques. She* (*Ayesha*) *said: "If it was not for this fear that the grave of the Holy Prophet* (*S*) *would become a mosque, the Muslims would have kept his grave open* (*and not put up a barrier around it*).

3. Muslim has narrated in *Sahih* the same tradition with slight variation. As such we confine ourselves to narrating only one text.[4]

ألا وإن من كان قبلكم كانُ,ا يتَّخذون قبور أنبيائهم وصالِحيهم مساجد ألا فلا تتخذوا القُبور مساجد إنى أنهاكُم عن ذلك

Know that people before you took the graves of their Prophets and the pious people as mosques. Never take the graves as mosques, I forbid you from that.[5]

إن أُم حبيبة وأم سلمة ذكرتنا كنيسة رأيتها بالحبشة فيها تصاوير لرسول الله (صلى الله عليه وأله) فقال رسول الله إن أولئك إذا كان فيهم الرجُل الصالح فما بنوا على قبره مسجداً وصوَّروا فيه تلك الصُور أولئك شرار الخلق عند الله يوم القيامة.

4. *Umme Habiba and Umm Salama* (*Wives of the Holy Prophet*) *saw a prophet's picture in the country of Ethiopia* (*when they had travelled to that place along with a group*). *The Holy Prophet* (*S*) *said: They are such people that whenever a pious man dies amongst them they construct a mosque over his grave and draw his picture on it. They are the worst of the people before God on the Day of Judgement.*[6]

Al-Nasa'i narrates from Ibn 'Abbas in his *Sunan* under the chapter:

التغليط في اتخاذ السُرج على القبور

as such:

لعن الرسول زائرات القبور والمُتخذين عليها المساجد والسُرج

5. The Holy Prophet (S) has cursed those ladies who visit the grave and those who take them as mosques and light a lamp over it.[7]

Ibn Taymiyyah who is the leader of such beliefs and Muhammad ibn 'Abd Al-Wahhab sharing his views interpret the aforesaid traditions in such a manner that building mosque over or near the grave of pious people is not permitted.

Thus Ibn-Taymiyyah writes:

قال عُلمائنا لا يجوز بناء المسجد على القبور

"Our scholars have said that it is never allowed to construct a mosque over the grave."[8]

A Probe Into The Context Of Traditions

Now we have to pay attention to the contents of the traditions and derive its correct meanings. We should not remain negligent to this principle and it is as such: As one verse (*ayah*) can remove the ambiguity of another verse and help its correct interpretation, in the same way, one tradition too can remove the ambiguity and interpret another tradition.

The Wahhabis have stuck to the apparent meaning of one tradition and relied on that in such a manner that any kind of building of mosque over or near the graves of *awliya'* is prohibited whereas if they would have collected all the traditions together, they would have understood the objective of the Holy Prophet (S) in sending this curse.

The Wahhabis have closed the door of *ijtihad* and thus committed too many mistakes in understanding many of the traditions.

Superficially, it is possible that the authenticity of the traditions be reliable and its narrators trustworthy. Since the deliberation on the references of these traditions will lengthen our discussion, we shall limit ourselves to their contents only.

Our Views About This Matter

Awareness about the objective of the traditions is related to throwing light on the actions of the Jews and Christians near the graves of their respective Prophets (S) because our Holy Prophet (S) has prevented us from the actions which they used to do. If the limits of their actions are clarified, then surely the limits of *haram* in Islam too would be clarified.

In the previous traditions there exist evidences which testified to the fact that they took the graves of their prophets as their *qibla* and refused from paying heed to the true *qibla*. More still, they were worshipping their prophets near their graves instead of worshipping Allah or at least were taking partners with God in their worship.

If the context of the traditions is this that we do not choose their graves to be their *qibla* and do not consider them as partners with God in worship, then we can never consider the construction of mosque over or near the graves of the pious and virtuous as *haram* where the visitors neither take their graves to be as their *qibla* nor do they worship them. Moreover, they worship the one God facing the *qibla* in their *salat* and the aim of constructing mosque near the graves of awliya' Allah is only to seek t*abarruk* from their places.

What is important is that it should be proved that the aim of the tradition (that we should not take their graves as mosques) is the same as what we have just said. Here are the evidences:

1. The tradition of *Sahih Muslim* (4th tradition) elucidates the other traditions because when the two wives of the Holy Prophet (S) explained to him that they had seen a portrait of a Prophet in an Ethiopian church, the Holy Prophet (S) said:

"They are such people that whenever a pious person passes away they would construct a mosque over his grave and put up his portrait in that mosque."[9]

The purpose of putting portraits near the graves of pious people was that people would worship them such that they considered the portrait and grave to be their *qibla* or still more, consider them as idols for worship and prostration. Worshipping of idols is nothing but placing the idol in front and respecting and falling into humiliation before them.

The probability which we are having in this tradition, keeping in mind the actions of the Christians who were and are always inclined towards human worship and are always worshipping portraits and statues, is very worthy of attention. With such strong probability we can never rationalize with the help of this tradition, the prohibition of construction of mosque over or near the grave of *Awliya' Allah* which is devoid of such embellishments.

2. Ahmad ibn Hanbal in his *Al–Musnad* and Imam Malik[10] in his *Al–Muwatta'* narrate the tradition that the Holy Prophet (S) after prohibiting the matter of construction of mosque said:

"Allah, do not make my grave as an idol which is subject to worship"[11]

This sentence shows that they were behaving with the grave and the portrait which was next to it like one idol and taking them as their *qibla* and still more is worshipping them in the form of idol.

3. Pondering over the tradition of Ayesha (2nd tradition) will elucidate this fact to a greater extent. After narrating the tradition from the Holy Prophet (S) she says:

"*If it was not for the fear that the grave of the Holy Prophet* (*S*) *would be taken as mosque the Muslims would have kept his grave open*". (They would have not constructed a barrier around the grave)

Now it should be seen that from what aspects the barrier and wall around the grave can become an obstacle? Undoubtedly the barrier will prevent the people from reciting *salat* over the grave, from worshipping the grave as one idol or at least from taking it as a *qibla*. However, performing *salat* near the grave without worshipping the grave or considering it as a *qibla* is absolutely possible, whether there exists a barrier or not and whether the grave is open or hidden. This is because for fourteen centuries the Muslims have been performing *salat* near the grave of the Holy Prophet (S) facing the *qibla* and have been worshipping Allah without the barrier preventing them from doing this action.

To sum up, the appendix of the *hadith* which is the text of the sayings of Ayesha clarifies the contents of the tradition because *Umm Al-mu'minin* says: 'In order that the grave of the Holy Prophet (S) would not be taken as mosque, they kept his grave hidden from the eyes of the people and constructed a barrier around it.' Now it should be seen as to what extent this barrier can serve as an obstacle.

A barrier can prevent from two things:

1. The grave from taking the shape of idol and the people from standing in front of it and worshipping it since with the presence of a barrier, people are unable to see his grave to be able to treat it as an idol.

2. The grave from becoming a *qibla* since fixing it as a *qibla* is the outcome of seeing and we can never compare it with the *Ka'ba* which is a *qibla* in all the situations whether it is seen or not. This is because *Ka'ba* is a universal conventional *qibla* in all the conditions, making no difference if it is seen or not. However taking the grave of the Holy Prophet (S) as a *qibla* for the attendants in the mosque will be related to those who offer *salat* in his mosque and such a deviation is more achievable in case the grave is uncovered and seen; but when the grave is concealed the thought of prostrating over his grave even in the form of *qibla* is much less. Due to this, *Umm Al-mu'minin* says that if no possibility existed for considering the grave as mosque (i.e. prostrating over the grave) it would have been kept uncovered. Moreover, such a deviation takes place more when the grave is seen and much less when the grave is hidden.

3. Most of the commentators of the tradition offer the same interpretation as we have done.

Al-Qastallani in *Irshad Al-Sari* says: For keeping alive the memories of their past ones, the Jews and Christians were fixing the portraits of their virtuous ones near their graves and worshipping their graves. However, their sons and successors, under the influence of whisperings of *shaytan*, started to worship the portraits near the graves. Thereafter he narrates from *Tafsir Al-Baydawi*[12] as follows:

لما كانت اليهود والنصارى يسجدون لقبور الأنبياء تعظيماً لشأنهم ويجعلونها قبلة يتوجهون في الصلاة نحوها واتخذوها اوثاناً ، مُنِع المسلمون في مثل ذلك فاما من إتخذ مسجداً في جوار صالح وقصد التبرك بالقُرب منه لا

للتعظيم ولا للتوجيه إليه فلا يدخل في الوعيد المذكور.

“In view of the fact that the Jews and Christians were taking the graves of their Prophets as their qibla for the purpose of respect, and were paying attention towards them at the time of their prayers, their graves took the position of idols. For this reason the Muslims have been forbidden from this action. However, if someone constructs a mosque near the grave of a pious person for the purpose of seeking tabarruk and not for worshipping or paying attention towards them, he will never be included in this prohibition.”[13]

It is not only Al-Qastallani who in his commentary on *Sahih Al-Bukhari* interprets this tradition as such but also Al-Sindi, the commentator of *Sunan Al-Nasa'i* speaks with the same effect. We mention some of them here.

إتخذوا قبور انبيائهم مساجد أي قبلة للصلاة ويُصلون إليها أو بنوا مساجد عليها يُصلون فيها ولعلَّ وجه الكراهة أنه قد يُفض إلى عباده نفس القبر.

“The outcome of his dispensation is this that construction over the grave is haram and occasionally makruh. If the grave is considered as qibla it is haram, since it may lead to the worship of the one buried, otherwise it is makruh.” [14]

Again he says:

يُحذر أمته أن يصنعوا بقبره ما صنع اليهود والنصارى بقبور أنبيائهم من إتخاذهم تلك القبور مساجد إما بالسجود إليها تعظيماً لها أو يجعلها قبلة يتوجهون في الصلاة إليها.

“He (i.e. the Holy Prophet) prohibits his ummah from treating his grave in the same manner as what the Jews and the Christians have done to the graves of their Prophets. This is because, in the name of honor and respect, they were prostrating over the grave or considering it as their qibla.” [15]

Regarding this matter, the commentator of *Sahih Muslim* says:

“*If the Holy Prophet (S) has prohibited us from considering his grave and other graves as a mosque, it is due to this reason that the Muslims should stop from exaggerating his honor which might lead to infidelity. Thus, when the Muslims were compelled to develop the mosque of the Holy Prophet (S) and place the chamber of the prophet's wives and the chamber of Ayesha in the middle of the mosque, they fixed a round wall around the grave so that it could not be seen and the Muslims would not prostrate over it.*” The speech of *Umm Al-mu'minin* too is a witness to the same:

لولا ذلك لأبرزوا قبره غير أنه اخش أن يُتخذ مسجداً

"If it was not for this fear that his grave (*i.e. the grave of Holy Prophet*) *would become a mosque, the Muslims would have kept his grave open* (*and not put up a barrier around it*)*."*

Another commentator says: "*The words of Ayesha are related to that period when the mosque was not developed nor extended. After extension and the admittance of her chamber inside the mosque, the chamber was made in the shape of a triangle so that nobody could perform salat over the grave. Thereafter he says that the Jews and Christians were worshipping their Prophets near their graves and were taking them as partners in their worship. With such evidence and perception of the tradition, one cannot understand any meaning other than this*."

We shall now overlook all these evidences and will approach this issue from another angle:

Firstly, the tradition is applicable to a situation where a mosque is constructed over the grave and this matter does not bear any relation to an adjacent place of the buried. In all the buried places, the mosque is placed near the grave of Imams (*a'imma*) and *awliya'* in such a manner that the mosque is separated from the shrine. In other words, we are having one shrine and one mosque. The shrine is set aside for *ziyarat* and *tawwasul* and the mosque near that, for the worship of Allah. Therefore these adjacent places (shrines) are outside the scope and contents of the tradition assuming that the contents of the traditions are the same as what the Wahhabis say.

Basically speaking how can it be said that the construction of mosque over the grave is *haram* or *makruh* whereas Masjid Al-Nabi (mosque of the Holy Prophet) is placed near his grave?

If the companions of the Holy Prophet (S) are like the stars which should be followed then why, in this case, we should not follow them. They extended the mosque in such a manner that the grave of the Holy Prophet (S) and the *Sheikhayn* have been placed in the middle of the mosque.

If really, construction of mosque near the grave of Holy Imams was unlawful, then why the Muslims expanded the mosque of the Holy Prophet (S) from every angle; while the mosque during the time of the Holy Prophet (S) was placed on the eastern side of the grave, after the expansion, the western side of the grave too became the part of the mosque.

Is it that following the **سلف** i.e. predecessors and being **سلفي** which the Wahhabis are always proud of, means that we should follow them in one instance and disobey them in another?

From this description, it becomes clear that to what extent the sayings of Ibn Al-Qayyim that in Islam, grave and mosque do not exist together are baseless and against the path of Muslims. Secondly, we do not derive any meaning from these traditions other than the Holy Prophet (S) prohibiting construction of mosque over or near the graves of the *awliya'*. However, no argument exists to prove that this prohibition is a *haram* prohibition. Instead, it is possible that this prohibition is a *makruh* prohibition just as Bukhari has interpreted the traditions and discussed them under the title:

باب ، يكره من اتخاذ المساجد على القبور

Chapter: It is aversion to build mosques on graves. 16

Another testimony is that this matter has come along with the curse upon female visitors to the grave.17 Surely visiting the graves is *makruh* and not *haram* for the ladies.

If the Holy Prophet (S) has cursed this group, this curse is no testimony of it being *haram* because in many of the traditions those committing *makruh* acts have been cursed too. In tradition, it is mentioned that those who travel alone or eat alone or sleep alone are cursed.

In the end we remind that the construction of mosque over the grave of pious people was an act which was in vogue in the beginning of Islam.

Al-Samhudi says: "When the mother of Ali (a), Fatima bint Asad, passed away, the Holy Prophet (S) ordered that she be buried in a place where today stands a mosque named as 'Grave of Fatima'. He meant that the place of grave of Fatima appear as a mosque in later time. Again he says: "Mus'ab bin 'Umayr and 'Abdullah bin Jahsh were buried under the mosque which was built over the grave of Hamza."18

He further says that in the 2nd century there existed a mosque over the grave of Hamza (r).19

This mosque existed till the domination of the Wahhabis. They demolished this mosque on these unfounded reasons.

1. Refer to Tafsir Al-Kashshaf of Al-Zamakhshari, Ghara'ib Al-Qur'an of Al-Nishapuri, Tafsir Al-Jalalayn of Al-Mahalli and Al-Suyuti (it was started by Jalaluddin Al-Mahalli in 1459 and completed after his death by his student Jalaluddin Al-Suyuti).
2. Sahih Al-Bukhari, book Al-jana'iz, vol. 2, page 111.
3. Muhammad ibn Isma'il Al-Ju'fi Al-Bukhari (810 – 870 A.D.) also known as Imam Bukhari was a famous Islamic scholar from Bukhara (current Uzbekistan). He authored the hadith collection known as Sahih Al-Bukhari, regarded by Sunni Muslims as one of the most authentic hadith collections.
4. Sahih Al-Bukhari, book Al-jana'iz, vol. 2, page 111; Sunan Al-Nasa'i, book Al-jana'iz, vol. 2, p. 871.
5. Sahih Muslim, vol. 2, p. 68.
6. Sahih Muslim, book Al-masajid, vol. 2, p. 66.
7. Sunan Al-Nasa'i, (ed. Mustafa Halabi), vol. 4, p. 77.
8. Ziyarat Al-Qubur, p. 106 by Ibn Taymiyyah.
9. إن اولئك إذ كان فيهم الرجل الصالح فمات بنوا على قبره مسجداً وصورا فيه تلك الصور
10. Malik bin Anas bin Malik (711–795 A.D.) also known as Imam Malik was famous Muslim jurist, theologian, and hadith traditionist. He was founder of Maliki School of thought. His most work was Al-Muwatta' which combines hadith and fiqh (jurisprudence) together.
11. Ibn Hanbal, Al-Musnad, vol. 3, p. 248 and also mentioned in Al-Muwatta' of Imam Malik.
12. Written by Nasir Al-Din Abu Al-Khayr Al-Baydawi (d. 1286 A.D.). He was a Sunni Shafi'i scholar from Fars, Iran. His most famous book Anwar Al-Tanzil wa-Asrar Al-Ta'wil is an exegesis of Qur'an popularly known as Tafsir Al-Baydawi.
13. Al-Qastallani, Irshad Al-Sari; and Ibn Hajar Al-'Asqalani, Fath Al-Bari, vol. 3, p. 208 approve this view. He mentions

that the prohibition is applicable under circumstances where the grave appears in the manner which was in vogue amongst the Jews and Christians. Otherwise there is no problem and objection.

14. Sunan Al-Nasa'i, (Al-Azhar edition), vol. 2, p. 21.
15. Ibid.
16. Sahih Al-Bukhari, vol. 2, p. 111.
17. Sunan Al-Nasa'i, (Egyptian edition), vol. 3, p. 77.
18. Wafa' Al-Wafa' fi Akhbar dar Al-Mustafa, Al-Samhudi, (ed. Muhammad Muhyiuddin), vol. 3, p. 897.
19. Ibid., vol. 3, p. 922 and 936.

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