7222 - Are Statues Prohibited in Islam?

the question

I am having difficulties explaining to a muslim that erecting a non-muslim statue is prohibited. His response was this woman was a heroine and fought the muslims to defend her land, and she is my ancestor before islamization.. Can a muslim idolise a statue, or erect one in memory of a hero?, even if the hero and/or heroine was not a muslim?

Summary of answer

It is forbidden to make statues, whether the statue is of a Muslim or a disbeliever. Whoever does that is trying to match the creation of Allah and thus deserves to be cursed.

Detailed answer

Praise be to Allah.

Praise be to Allah, and peace and blessings be upon the Messenger of Allah and his family.

Are Statues Prohibited in Islam?

Firstly, it may be understood from your question that what is to be denounced is the fact that the statue is of a disbeliever, and that if it was a statue of a Muslim it would be permissible to erect it. This is a mistake, because all statues of animate beings are equally prohibited, regardless of whether they are made in the images of a Muslim or a disbeliever.

Indeed, making a statue of a disbeliever is worse, because it combines two evils, that of making the statue and that of glorifying this disbeliever.

Why Are Statues Prohibited in Islam?

There follow details of the prohibition on the making of images and statues.

- The prohibition on statues is not just the matter of Fiqh; it goes beyond that to the matter of `Aqidah, because Allah is the Only One Who has the power of giving shape to His creation and creating them in the best image. Making images implies that one is trying to match the creation of Allah. The matter also has to do with `Aqidah when these images are taken as idols which are worshipped instead of Allah.

Among the evidence that image-making is the exclusive preserve of Allah are the following:

Allah says (interpretation of the meaning):

1. {He it is Who shapes you in the wombs as He wills.} [Al `Imran 3:6]
2. {And surely, We created you (your father Adam) and then gave you shape (the noble shape of a human being); then We told the angels, 'Prostrate yourselves to Adam'.} [Al-A`raf 7:11]
3. {He is Allah, the Creator, the Inventor of all things, the Bestower of forms. To Him belong the Best Names. All that is in the heavens and the earth glorify Him. And He is the All-Mighty, the All-Wise.} [Al-Hashr 59:24]
4. {O man! What has made you careless about your Lord, the Most Generous? Who created you, fashioned you perfectly, and gave you due proportion. In whatever form He willed, He put you together.} [Al-Infitar 82:6-8]

These verses clearly state the belief that creating and giving form to creation is the preserve of their Lord, Creator and Fashioner, so it is not permissible for anyone to encroach on that and to try to match the creation of Allah.

- It was reported from `Aishah that Umm Habibah and Umm Salamah mentioned a church which they had seen in Ethiopia, in which there were images. They told the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) about it, and he said: "Those people, if there was a righteous man among them and he died, they would build a place of worship over his grave

and put images in it. These will be the most evil of creation before Allah on the Day of Resurrection." (Narrated by Al-Bukhari, 417 and Muslim, 528)

Ibn Hajar (may Allah have mercy on him) said:

This Hadith indicates that making images is prohibited. (End quote from Fat-h Al-Bari, 1/525)

An-Nawawi (may Allah have mercy on him) said:

Our companions and other scholars said: making images of animate beings is extremely prohibited and is a major sin, because severe warnings have been issued against it in the Hadiths. Whether the image is made to be used in a disrespectful fashion or for other purposes, it is prohibited to make it in all cases, because it implies that one is trying to match the creation of Allah, whether the image is to appear on a garment, carpet, coin, vessel, wall or whatever. With regard to pictures of trees, camel saddles, and other pictures in which no animate beings appear, these are not prohibited. This is the ruling on making images. (End quote from Sharh Muslim, 14/81)

- Sa`id ibn Abil-Hasan said: I was with Ibn `Abbas (may Allah be pleased with him) when a man came to him and said, O Abu `Abbas, I am a man who lives by what his hands make, and I make these images. Ibn 'Abbas said: I will only tell you what I heard the Messenger of Allah (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) say. I heard him say: "Whoever makes an image, Allah will punish him until he breathes life into it, and he will never be able to do that." The man became very upset and his face turned pale, so [Ibn `Abbas] said to him, Woe to you! If you insist on making images, then make images of these trees and everything that does not have a soul. (Narrated by Al-Bukhari, 2112 and Muslim, 2110)
- `Abdullah ibn Mas`ud (may Allah be pleased with him) said: I heard the Messenger of Allah (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) say: The people who will be the most severely punished before Allah on the Day of Resurrection will be the image makers. (Narrated by Al-Bukhari, 5606 and Muslim, 2109)
- It was reported from `Abdullah ibn `Umar (may Allah be pleased with them both) that the

Messenger of Allah (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) said: Those who make these images will be punished on the Day of Resurrection. It will be said to them, Give life to that which you have created! (Narrated by Al-Bukhari, 5607 and Muslim, 2108)

- It was reported that Abu Hurayrah entered a house in Madinah and saw somebody making images in it. He said: I heard the Messenger of Allah (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) say: [Allah says:] Who does greater wrong than one who goes and creates something like My creation? Let them create a seed or a small ant! (Narrated by Al-Bukhari, 560 and Muslim, 2111).

An-Nawawi (may Allah have mercy on him) said:

Concerning the words of Allah. “Let them create a small ant or a seed or a grain of barley!” means, let them create a small ant which has a soul and moves by itself, like this small ant which was created by Allah. Or let them create a grain of wheat or barley, i.e., let them create a grain which is eaten as food or which can be planted so it will grow and which has the characteristics of a grain of wheat or barley or other seeds which were created by Allah. This is impossible, as stated above. (End quote from Sharh Muslim, 14/90)

None can bring forth living vegetation out of nothing except Allah, may He be glorified.

- Abu Juhayfah said: the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) forbade the price of a dog and the price of blood, and he forbade tattooing and asking to be tattooed, and the consumption or paying of Riba, and he cursed those who make images. (Narrated by Al-Bukhari, 1980)

- Islam prescribes that idols should be destroyed and smashed, not made and repaired. Among the evidence for this is the following:

1. `Abdullah ibn Mas`ud (may Allah be pleased with him) said: when the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) entered Makkah [at the Conquest], there were three hundred and sixty idols around the Ka`bah. He started hitting them with his stick and saying, “Truth has come and falsehood has vanished. Surely, falsehood is ever bound to vanish.” [Al-Isra’

17:81 – interpretation of the meaning] (Narrated by Al-Bukhari, 2346 and Muslim, 1781)

2. Abu Al-Hiyaj Al-Asadi (may Allah have mercy on him) said: `Ali ibn Abu Talib said to me: Shall I not send you on the same basis as the Messenger of Allah (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) sent me? Do not leave any statue without destroying it, and do not leave any built-up grave without razing it to the ground. (According to one report: and do not leave any picture without erasing it.) (Narrated by Muslim, 969)

Ibn Al-Qayyim (may Allah have mercy on him) said:

Tamathil is the plural of Timthal (statue), which refers to a representative image.

Shaykh Al-Islam (Ibn Taymiyah) (may Allah have mercy on him) said:

The command is to destroy two types of images: images which represent the deceased person, and images which are placed on top of graves – because Shirk may come about from both types. (End quote from Majmu` Al-Fatawa, 17/462 and Al-Fawa'id, p. 196)

1. The Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) warned against bringing images into the house, and said that this is a sin and deprives a person of good. Among the evidence for that is the following:

1. Abu Talhah said: I heard the Messenger of Allah (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) say: The angels do not enter a house in which there is a dog or statues." (Narrated by Al-Bukhari, 3053 and Muslim, 2106)

1. `Aishah Umm Al-Mu'minin (may Allah be pleased with her) said that she bought a pillow on which there were images. When the Messenger of Allah (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) saw it, he stood at the door and did not enter. She saw on his face that he was upset, and said: O Messenger of Allah, I repent to Allah and His Messenger (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him). What is my sin? The Messenger of Allah (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) said: What is this pillow? She said, I bought it for you so that you could sit on it and recline on it. The Messenger of Allah (peace and blessings of Allah be

upon him) said: On the Day of Resurrection, the makers of these images will be punished and it will be said to them, Give life to that which you have created. And he said: The angels do not enter a house in which there are images. (Narrated by Al-Bukhari, 1999 and Muslim, 2107)

- Making images is a way of falling into polytheism, because polytheism starts with the veneration of those who are depicted in the images, especially when people have little or no knowledge. The evidence for this is:

Ibn `Abbas (may Allah be pleased with him) said: The idols of the people of Nuh were known among the Arabs later on. Wadd belonged to (the tribe of) Kalb in Dawmat Al-Jandal. Suwa` belonged to Hudhayl. Yaghuth belonged to Murad, then to Bani Ghutayf in Al-Jawf, near Saba'. Ya`uq belonged to Hamadan. Nasr belonged to Humayr of the tribe of Dhil-Kala`. These were names of righteous men from the people of Nuh. When they died, the Shaytan inspired their people to set up idols in the places where they had used to sit, and to call those idols by their names. They did that but they did not worship them, but after those people died and knowledge had been forgotten, then they started to worship them. (Narrated by Al-Bukhari, 4636)

Shaykh Al-Islam Ibn Taymiyah (may Allah have mercy on him) said:

The reason why Al-Lat was worshipped was the veneration of the grave of a righteous man which was there. (End quote from Iqtida' As-Sirat Al-Mustaqim, 2/333)

And he said:

This problem – i.e., veneration – which is why Islam forbids (images), is the reason why so many of nations have fallen into committing Shirk to a greater or lesser degree. (End quote from Al-Iqtida', 2/334).

Ibn Al-Qayyim (may Allah have mercy on him) said, describing how the devil plays with the Christians:

He plays with them with regard to the images which they have in their churches and which they

worship. You cannot find any church which is free of these images of Maryam (Mary), the Messiah, George, Peter and others of their saints and martyrs. Most of them bow to these images and pray to them instead of to Allah. The Patriarch of Alexandria even wrote a letter to the ruler of Rome supporting the idea of bowing to these images: (he said) Allah commanded Musa to make images of cherubim in the Tabernacle; and when Sulayman the son of Dawud built the Temple, he made images of cherubim and put them inside the Temple. Then he said in his letter: this is like when a king sends a letter to one of his governors and the governor takes the letter and kisses it then touches it to his forehead [a sign of respect], and stands up to receive it. He does not do this to venerate the paper and ink, but to venerate the king. In the same way, when one bows to an image, it is to venerate the person represented by the image, not to venerate the paints and colours.

This is exactly the same as the example given to justify idol worship. (End quote from Ighathat Al-Lahfan, 2/292)

And he said:

In most cases, the reason why nations fall into Shirk is because of images and graves." (End quote from Zad Al-Ma`ad, 3/458).

- The verses and Hadiths quoted above indicate that the prohibition of images is for three reasons:

1. The first is: because it implies that one is trying to match the creation of Allah.
2. The second is: because it is an imitation of the disbelievers.
3. The third is: because it is a means of veneration and falling into polytheism.

From the above, it is clear that it is forbidden to make statues, whether the statue is of a Muslim or a disbeliever. Whoever does that is trying to match the creation of Allah and thus deserves to be cursed.

We ask Allah to keep us safe and sound, and to guide us. May Allah bless our Prophet Muhammad.