83133 - The Sunnah is to make the grave convex, a handspan in height

the question

I read a hadith narrated from `Ali (may Allah be pleased with him) about levelling graves that have been built up high. My grandmother's gave was built up to a height of approximately four feet, built of marble. But I demolished the upper part of the grave and made it low, following the Sunnah.

After that, it so happened that I read the answer to question no. 8991 on this website, which contains the words: Making graves high, as is mentioned in the hadith, especially includes the domes and shrines that are built over graves, and the taking of graves as places of worship…

Now I feel anxious and worried that I may have done something that was disrespectful towards the grave or towards the soul of my grandmother.

Secondly, the family elders are cursing me because of what I did. Did I do something wrong, and if that is the case, what should I do?

Detailed answer

Praise be to Allah.

Firstly:

The Sunnah is to make the grave the height of a handspan, and to make it convex, not flat, according to the view of the majority of scholars, because of the report narrated by al-Bukhari (1390) from Sufyan at-Tammar, which says that he saw the grave of the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) and it was convex (heaped up, with a rounded shape).

It was narrated by Ibn Hibban in his *Sahih* (6635) and al-Bayhaqi in *As-Sunan* (6527), and classed as sound (hasan) by al-Albani, from Jabir ibn `Abdillah (may Allah be pleased with him) that the

Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) was buried in a niche (lahd) in the wall of his grave, and bricks were used to close up the niche, and his grave was made to a height of approximately one handspan above the surrounding ground.

It says in *Zad al-Mustaqni`*: The grave should be made to the height of a hand span above the surrounding earth, heaped up with a rounded shape.

Shaykh Ibn `Uthaymin (may Allah have mercy on him) said in his commentary *Ash-Sharh al-Mumti`* (5/364): That is, the Sunnah is to make the grave higher than the surrounding ground. In addition to being Sunnah, it is something that naturally happens, because the soil of the grave will be put back into the grave, and it is well known that before digging, the soil is more solid than it is after it is dug, so it will inevitably be greater in volume.

Moreover, the place where the deceased is placed was previously filled with soil, and now it has become an empty space, so the soil that was where the deceased is now will be above him…

The scholars made an exception from that: If a Muslim dies in *dar harb*, meaning a place in which the disbelievers are at war with the Muslims, his grave should not be made high; rather it should be made level with the ground, for fear that the enemy might disinter him and mutilate him, and the like.

What is meant by the grave being convex is that it is made like the hump of a camel, in the sense that the centre is higher than the edges. The opposite of that is when the grave is made level or flat, so that its top is like a flat roof.

The evidence for that is that this is how the grave of the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) was, and so were the graves of his two companions [Abu Bakr and `Umar]. End quote.

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

It was not the practice of the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) to make graves high or to build them up with bricks and stones, or to build them up with plaster or build domes over them. All of that comes under the heading of reprehensible innovation that is contrary to the

teachings of the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him)… The graves of his companions were not made high and were not made level with the ground, and the same is true of his grave and the graves of his two companions. His grave was made convex and covered with soft red pebbles; it was not built up and neither were the graves of his two companions, and for anyone who wanted to know where his grave is, it was marked with a rock.

End quote from *Zad al-Ma`ad* (1/524).

Secondly:

With regard to the report narrated by Muslim (969) from Abu'l-Hayyaj al-Asadi, who said: `Ali ibn Abi Talib said to me: Shall I not send you on the same mission as the Messenger of Allah (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) sent me? Do not leave any image without erasing it or any high grave without levelling it,

what is meant by levelling here is making it level with all other graves, and we have noted above that they were the height of approximately a handspan.

An-Nawawi (may Allah have mercy on him) said in his commentary on Muslim: This indicates that the Sunnah is not to make the grave much higher than the ground, and not to make it convex; rather it should be raised approximately one handspan above the ground and levelled out. This is the view of ash-Shafa`i and those who agreed with him, but al-Qadi Iyad narrated from most of the scholars that the best is to make it convex, with a rounded shape, and this is the view of Malik. End quote.

Shaykh Ibn `Uthaymin (may Allah have mercy on him) said in *Al-Qawl al-Mufid Sharh Kitab at-Tawhid*:

What is meant by a high grave is one that has been built up and made high.

What is meant by levelling it is two meanings:

The first meaning is making it the same height as the surrounding graves.

The second meaning is making it look proper, as dictated by Islamic teachings. Allah, may He be Exalted, says: {Who created and fashioned in due proportion} [al-A`la 87:2]; that is, He has made His creation in the best shape and proportions, and this meaning is better, even though the two meanings are very close.

What is meant by making the grave high may be several things:

1. It is high in the sense that the markers on the grave are large.
2. A structure has been built on top of it, and this is a major sin, because the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) cursed those who take graves as places of worship and set up lamps on them.
3. Making graves stand out by making them colourful, which means adorning the grave markers with colours.
4. Piling up the soil on the grave to make it higher than the surrounding graves, so that it becomes prominent.

So anything that stands out and looks different and distinct from other graves must be made to look the same as others, lest that lead to exaggeration about graves and shirk. End quote.

Thirdly:

From the above it is clear that building domes and shrines over graves is prohibited, and it is a means that could lead to veneration of the graves and associating their occupants with Allah. Similarly, making the grave higher than the height of a handspan is also prohibited.

Ash-Shawkani (may Allah have mercy on him) said:

Making graves high, as referred to in the hadith quoted above, primarily refers to building domes and shrines over graves. That also comes under the heading of taking graves as places of worship, and the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) cursed the one who does that.

How many bad consequences result from building structures over graves and adorning them, that are diametrically opposed to Islamic teachings. That includes the beliefs of the ignorant

concerning these graves and their occupants, which are akin to the beliefs of the disbelievers about their idols. That has gone so far that the ignorant think that the graves (and their occupants) are able to bring benefit and ward off harm, so they take them as a place to visit to ask for needs to be met and for help to attain what they want; they ask of them what people ask of their Lord, and they travel from afar to visit them, touching the graves for blessing and seeking help from them. To sum up, they did not leave anything that the ignorant people of the Jahiliyyah used to do with their idols but they do it too. Indeed to Allah we belong and indeed to Him we will return.

In spite of these evil deeds and blatant disbelief, we do not find anyone who will get angry for the sake of Allah and be upset by this violation of belief in Tawhid; no scholar, no seeker of knowledge, no governor, no minister and no king!

We have heard many reports that cannot be doubted that many of those grave worshippers – or most of them – if their opponent asks them to swear an oath, they would swear an oath by Allah, even if they are lying. But if they are told after that: Swear by your shaykh, the holy man (wali) So and so, they will hesitate, think and refuse, then they will admit to the truth!

This is one of the clearest proofs that their shirk has reached a more grievous level than the shirk of those who say that Allah, may He be Exalted, is the second of two or the third of three. O scholars of Islam, O kings of the Muslims, what calamity could befall Islam that is greater than disbelief? What is more damaging to this religion than worshipping anything other than Allah? What calamity could befall the Muslims that is equal to this calamity? What evil should be denounced if the evil of this blatant shirk is not denounced?

[Poetry] Had you called out to one who is alive, he could have heard you, but you are calling out to one who is lifeless.

Had you blown into a fire, it could have shone, but you are blowing into ashes.

End quote from *Nayl al-Awtar*, 4/83-84.

Thus you should know that what you did of removing the marble and removing the upper part of

the grave is good and is in accordance with the Sunnah, which the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) enjoined. It is not disrespectful towards the grave or its occupant at all; rather it is honouring the grave and its occupant by making the grave in accordance with the Sunnah of the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him).

As for what you mentioned about the elders of the family cursing you for what you did, this is transgression and wrongdoing on their part, and you should bear with patience what befalls you because of what you did of obedience and following the Sunnah. This is the situation of the one who enjoins people to do what is right and forbids them to do what is wrong. Allah, may He be Exalted, says, telling us about the advice that the wise man Luqman gave to his son:

{O my son, establish prayer, enjoin what is right and forbid what is wrong; be patient and steadfast in the face of whatever befalls you; that is something that must be adhered to [as it is enjoined by Allah]} [Luqman 31:17].

But the one who wants to denounce evil should make sure that what he does will not lead to a greater evil, because one of the conditions of denouncing evil is that it should not lead to an evil that is worse.

Therefore if a man thinks it most likely that if he levels the grave, it will lead to turmoil in his city or among his people, or that he will be harmed by being imprisoned or beaten, then in that case he may keep quiet, and it may even be prohibited to denounce it openly if the consequences will lead to a great deal of trouble, or trouble that could affect someone else such as a brother or relative.

And Allah knows best.