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Reflecting on Mortality: Grave Visiting in Light of the Quran and Hadith

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Abstract: Graves as well as death have been surrounded by mystery before and after the introduction of Islam. One of the oldest graves are located in Palestine and the tradition of burying the deceased has continued through the time. However, there is still a controversy on-going about visiting graves, especially in the Muslim societies. In the early ages of Islam, visiting graves were prohibited but later on permitted as it reminds the people about the death, life hereafter and soften the hearts. Many passages in the Quran and several hadiths from Sahih Bukhari and Sahih Muslim encourage people to remember the death, the deceased and the life hereafter. The main purpose of people remembering the death and the life after death is to change people's behaviour for the better. In this comprehensive review, we evaluate the legitimacy of visiting graveyards based on references from Quran and the two books of hadiths, Sahih Bukhari and Sahih Muslim.

Keywords: Death; Graves; Quran; Sahih Bukhari; Sahih Muslim.

Introduction: Death has always been a sensitive and unavoidable element of life, which marks the end of the worldly life and beginning of the unknown. Death is the only thing, which is for sure for every living soul. It has been feared, mystified and even worshipped. One of the earliest graves has been traced back more than 100,000 years. This grave is known as the Grave of Qafzeh located in Palestine, a group tomb of 15 people buried in a cave along with their tools and other ritual things.

Interestingly, the tradition of burying the deceased has been on-going regardless of geographic location and is the most used form of handling death people around the world.³ The tradition has definitely a connection to avoid the spread of illness and putrefaction process along with having a place to remember the loved ones. Moreover, the burial process has also been considered as a step towards entering the life after death. Even though, the beginning of life may be easier to recognise, the death can be difficult to determine.⁴ Conventionally, the death has been associated to the permanent cessation of the heart and respiratory function, but the technological development has challenged this approach. ^{5,6}

Interestingly, humans are probably the only living species who are aware of their death. Therefore, the human species have tried to take many measures to avoid or postpone death. However, no one has yet managed to avoid death.





Literature Review: Around the world, great monuments and tombs can be found, which have been worshiped, respected and feared. The Vikings and Egyptians buried their loved ones with tools, money and even slaves to help the deceased in the life afterwards.⁷ In Uppsala, Sweden, monuments were created, through which the descended was believed to pass onto Valhalla, the major hall, where half of those who died in combat were considered to enter according to the Norse Mythology.⁸ In Egypt, tombs were constructed to make sure those in life would not forget the Pharos after their death.⁹

In India, the Mughal emperor Shah Jahan constructed a garden-tomb, Taj Mahal, in the memory of his beloved descended wife who passed away during childbirth.¹⁰ Twenty thousand people made this mausoleum over a period of 2 decades.¹¹ Even the Jews and Christians made graves to worship people, whom they considered as saints.¹²

Methodology: Visiting graveyards has been largely debated in the Islamic world with both arguments pro and against. Especially, questions related to females visiting of graves have created great controversy and is still an on-going issue. Quran, books of hadiths collections and historical books have debated the purpose and benefits for the visitors and the descended.

The intention of this article is to evaluate the legitimacy of visiting graves, both for men and women, based on Quran and the two books of hadiths, Sahih Bukhari and Sahih Muslim. The approach of this comprehensive review is based on a qualitative collection of references from the three above-mentioned books. Sahih Bukhari and Sahih Muslim are widely considered as the most authentic collections of hadiths. These collections are based on strict rules by the authors. However, hadiths not mentioned in these books may also be authentic even though they may not fulfil the criteria set by the authors.

Every Soul has to Taste the Death in the Light of Quran: Death is the permanent end of the worldly life for the human body with irreversible cessation of cardiac and respiratory activity or irreversible cessation of all the functions of brain including brain stem ultimately leading to rigor mortis, hypostasis and putrefaction within short time.

In the Quran, it is clearly stated several times that the power to grant life and death is solely subject to the will of Allah almighty. And He alone controls the cycle of life and death. This power of giving life and death is indeed associated with being the Lord. And beside the power of creating life and death, Allah almighty also possesses the ability of aging. All of which is mentioned in the following verses:

"There is no God but He. He is the One Who gives life and causes death. He is your Lord and the Lord of your fathers (as well)." ¹³

"(O Beloved!) Have you not seen him who began to dispute with Ibrahim (Abraham) about his own Lord because Allah had given him the kingdom? When Ibrahim (Abraham) said: 'My Lord is He Who gives life and (also) causes death,' (the king) said (in reply): 'I (too) give life and cause death.' Ibrahim (Abraham) said: 'Surely, Allah causes the sun to rise in the east; bring





it up from the west.' So, the infidel was stunned. And Allah does not guide the transgressors to the right path."¹⁴

"He is the One Who gives life and causes death, and you will be returned to Him alone." ¹⁵

"And indeed, We alone give life and cause death, and We alone are the Inheritor (and the Owner of all)." ¹⁶

"And Allah has brought you into being; then He causes you to die; and He turns some of you to the most worthless age (i.e., senility) so that after knowing (so much in life) he should now know nothing (i.e., man may see to his helplessness and paucity of resources before death). Surely, Allah is All-Knowing, All-Powerful."

In the following Quranic verse, it is clearly stated that the power to grant life and death is solely subject to the will of Allah almighty in addition to trusting the messenger sent by Allah almighty and His holy books.

"Say: 'O mankind! I have (come) to all of you (as) the Messenger of Allah to Whom belongs the kingdom of the heavens and the earth. There is no God except He. He is the One Who grants life and causes death.' So believe in Allah and His Messenger, who is a Prophet crowned with the glory of being al-Ummi (i.e., he has not learnt anything from anyone except Allah, but knows far more than the entire creation, and is innocent and pure like a newborn baby, despite his upbringing in an infidel and polytheistic society), who believes in Allah and (all) His (revealed) Book and follow him alone so that you may take guidance." 18

Furthermore, it is stated in the Quran that the death is not related to a specific place or a single act. It is solely subjected to the will of Allah almighty. And nor can any human being interfere with the decision of Allah almighty to give life or death. Allah almighty can create whatever He wants to create in no time, whether it is life or death, He only has to say: "Be and it will be".

"O believers! Be not like the infidels who say of those of their brothers who go (somewhere) on a journey or go to fight (and die there): 'Had they stayed with us, they would have neither died nor been slain,' so that Allah may make this (assumption) a regret in their hearts. Allah alone keeps alive and causes death. And Allah is All-Seer of what you do." 19

"Verily, He is Allah to Whom belongs the sovereignty of the heavens and the earth. He (is the One Who) gives life and causes death. And besides Allah, there is for you no friend or helper (who can support you against Allah's command)."²⁰





"He is the One Who gives life and causes death. Then when He decides upon a thing, He says to it only: 'Be,' so it becomes."21

Death is the natural consequence of life. Death will lead to the return to Allah almighty. Moreover, no soul has ever escaped the taste of death and no soul will be able to do so. Additionally, your worldly act will be judged after death. Where death is inevitable, the life after death is also definitive according to the following verses mentioned in the Quran.

"Every soul is going to taste death. And your full recompense will be paid back only on the Day of Resurrection. So, whoever will be saved from Hell and admitted to Paradise will be truly successful. And the worldly life is nothing but illusory wealth."²²

"Every soul has to taste death, and We make you undergo foul and fair for trial, and towards Us will you be returned." ²³

"Every soul is to taste death and then to Us you will be returned."24

"And He is the One Who gave you life, then He causes you to die and then will give you life again. No doubt, it is man who is highly ungrateful." ²⁵

"He is the One Who brings forth the living from the dead, and brings forth the dead from the living, and enlivens and freshens the earth after its death. And you (too) will be brought forth (from the graves) the same way." ²⁶

"Surely, it is We Who give life, and it is We Who cause death, and to Us is the return."²⁷

"And that He is the One Who causes death and gives life;"28

The method used to cause death is through the angels of death by Allah almighty, which is mentioned in the following verses:

"The angels take their lives whilst they are pure, clean, pleased and contented (due to obedience and piety. The angels tell them the moment they take their lives:) 'Peace be upon you! Enter Paradise due to (the pious deeds) that you used to do."²⁹

"Say: 'The angel of death, that is appointed over you, will terminate your life. Then you will be sent back to your Lord." ³⁰

Some passages in Quran guide people to pray and stand at graves of believers and supplication made for the sake of the dead people's souls could be beneficial for them:

"And never perform (funeral) Prayer over any of these (hypocrites) who dies, nor stand at his grave (because your stepping on some place also brings about





mercy and blessings, and they do not deserve your mercy and blessing). Indeed, they disbelieved in Allah and His Messenger (blessings and peace be upon him) and died in a state of defiance."³¹

"And those (too) who came after these (Emigrants and the Ansar [Supporters]) submit: 'O our Lord, forgive us and our brothers, who have proceeded in embracing faith. And let not any spite and rancour be in our hearts against the believers. O our Lord, surely, You are Most Clement, Ever-Merciful." 32

Placing Green Leaves on Graves Based on Hadiths: In the early years of Islam, the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) prohibited both men and women from visiting graves. It was a period of time when Islam and Toheed, accepting Allah as the unique Creator and worshipping Him only, was not yet settled in the hearts of Muslims and traditions of the pre-Islamic era were still being practiced. People used to prostrate in front of graves, ask for help from the dead and even worshipping them. It was customary for grieving women to wail loudly, beat on the chest and cheeks, tearing hair or clothes and even say phrases that could make a Muslim lose faith. This has been explained as some of the reasons why visiting graves was prohibited in the early years of Islam. The same reasons were behind the prohibition of writing hadiths in the early era of Islam, which afterwards were allowed again.

Narrated Warrad: (the freed slave of Al-Mughira bin Shu`ba) Muawiya wrote to Mughira. 'Write to me what you heard the Prophet saying after his prayer.' So Al-Mughira dictated to me and said, "I heard the Prophet saying after the prayer, 'None has the right to be worshipped but Allah Alone Who has no partner. O Allah! No-one can withhold what You give, and none can give what You withhold, and the fortune of a man of means is useless before You (i.e., only good deeds are of value).³³

Narrated Hudhaifa: Allah's Apostle related to us, two prophetic narrations one of which I have seen fulfilled and I am waiting for the fulfillment of the other. The Prophet told us that the virtue of honesty descended in the roots of men's hearts (from Allah) and then they learned it from the Qur'an and then they learned it from the Sunna (the Prophet's traditions). The Prophet further told us how that honesty will be taken away: He said: "Man will go to sleep during which honesty will be taken away from his heart and only its trace will remain in his heart like the trace of a dark spot; then man will go to sleep, during which honesty will decrease further still, so that its trace will resemble the trace of blister as when an ember is dropped on one's foot which would make it swell, and one would see it swollen but there would be nothing inside. People would be carrying out their trade but hardly will there be a trustworthy person. It will be said, 'in such-and-such tribe there is an honest man,' and later it will be said about some man, 'What a wise, polite and strong man he is!' Though he will not have faith equal even to a mustard seed in his heart." No doubt, there came upon me a time when I did not mind dealing (bargaining) with anyone of you, for if he was a Muslim his





Islam would compel him to pay me what is due to me, and if he was a Christian, the Muslim official would compel him to pay me what is due to me, but today I do not deal except with such-and-such person.³⁴

Narrated Hudhaifa: Allah's Apostle said to us, "Honesty descended from the Heavens and settled in the roots of the hearts of men (faithful believers), and then the Qur'an was revealed and the people read the Qur'an, (and learnt it from it) and also learnt it from the Sunna." Both Qur'an and Sunna strengthened their (the faithful believers') honesty. 24,35

Narrated Warrad: (The clerk of Al-Mughira) Muawiya wrote to Al-Mughira 'Write to me what you have heard from Allah's Apostle.' So he (Al-Mughira) wrote to him: Allah's Prophet used to say at the end of each prayer: "La ilaha illalla-h wahdahu la sharika lahu, lahul Mulku, wa lahul Hamdu wa hula ala kulli shai'in qadir. 'Allahumma la mani' a lima a'taita, wala mu'tiya lima mana'ta, wala yanfa'u dhuljadd minkal-jadd." He also wrote to him that the Prophet used to forbid (1) Qil and Qal (idle useless talk or that you talk too much about others), (2) Asking too many questions (in disputed Religious matters); (3) And wasting one's wealth by extravagance; (4) and to be undutiful to one's mother (5) and to bury the daughters alive (6) and to prevent your favors (benevolence to others (i.e. not to pay the rights of others (7) And asking others for something (except when it is unavoidable).³⁶

Abu Sa'id Khudri reported that Allah's Messenger (may peace be upon him) said: Do not take down anything from me, and he who took down anything from me except the Qur'an, he should efface that and narrate from me, for there is no harm in it and he who attributed any falsehood to me-and Hammam said: I think he also said: deliberately -he should in fact find his abode in the Hell-Fire. 37

However, when the seed of Toheed was settled in the hearts of Muslims, the Prophet (pbuh) permitted people to visit graves because they reminded them of the hereafter and softens their hearts.

Abdullah b. Buraida reported on the authority of his father that Allah's Messenger (may peace be upon him) said this: I prohibited you from visiting the graves, but (now) you may visit them, and I prohibited you (from eating) the flesh of sacrificed animals beyond three days, but now keep it as long as you like. I prohibited you from the use of Nabidh except (that preoared) in dry waterskins. Now drink (Nabidh prepared in any utensil), but do not drink when it becomes intoxicant. 38,39,40

According to dalalah-al-nass, when an act is proven for one particular group, the act is then also accepted for everyone equal to that group or higher in rank. Since the above





mentioned hadith is not restricted to any gender, the permission is granted equally to both men and women.

The prohibition from visiting graves was abrogated by the Prophet (pbuh), when He (pbuh) was permitted to visit the grave of his mother.

Abu Huraira reported: The Apostle of Allah (may peace be upon him) visited the grave of his mother and he wept, and moved others around him to tears, and said: I sought permission from my Lord to beg forgiveness for her but it was not granted to me, and I sought permission to visit her grave and it was granted to motel So visit the graves, for that makes you mindful of death. 41,42

The Prophet (pbuh) used to visit other graves as well, especially in Al-Baqi, and used to make Dua for the deceased.

Narrated Al-Bara': The Prophet went towards Al-Baqi (the graveyard at Medina) on the day of Id-ul-Adha and offered a two-rak`at prayer (of `Id-ul-Adha) and then faced us and said, "On this day of ours, our first act of worship is the offering of prayer and then we will return and slaughter the sacrifice, and whoever does this concords with our Sunna; and whoever slaughtered his sacrifice before that (i.e. before the prayer) then that was a thing which he prepared earlier for his family and it would not be considered as a Nusuk (sacrifice.)" A man stood up and said, "O, Allah's Apostle! I slaughtered (the animal before the prayer) but I have a young she-goat which is better than an older sheep." The Prophet (p.b.u.h) said to him, "Slaughter it. But a similar sacrifice will not be sufficient for anybody else after you."43

'A'isha reported (that whenever it was her turn for Allah's Messenger [may peace be upon him] to spend the night with her) he would go out towards the end of the night to al-Baqi' and say: Peace be upon you, abode of a people who are believers. What you were promised would come to you tomorrow, you receiving it after some delay; and God willing we shall join you. O Allah, grant forgiveness to the inhabitants of Baqi' al-Gharqad. Qutaiba did not mention his words:" would come to you". 44, 45

Sulaiman b. Buraida narrated on the authority of his father that the Messenger of Allah (may peace be upon him) used to teach them when they went out to the graveyard. One of the narrators used to say this in the narration transmitted on the authority of Abu Bakr:" Peace be upon the inhabitants of the city (i. e. graveyard)." In the hadith transmitted by Zuhair (the words are):" Peace be upon you, the inhabitants of the city, among the believers, and Muslims, and God willing we shall join you. I beg of Allah peace for us and for you." ⁴⁶

Jubair b. Nufair says: I heard it from 'Auf b. Malik that the Holy Prophet (may





peace be upon him) said prayer on the dead body, and I remembered his prayer:" O Allah! forgive him, have mercy upon him, give him peace and absolve him. Receive him with honour and make his grave spacious; wash him with water, snow and hail. Cleanse him from faults as Thou wouldst cleanse a white garment from impurity. Requite him with an abode more excellent than his abode, with a family better than his family, and with a mate better than his mate. Admit him to the Garden, and protect him from the torment of the grave and the torment of the Fire." ('Auf bin Malik) said: I earnestly desired that I were this dead body.⁴⁷

Visiting graves is the Sunnah of the Prophet (pbuh) and an act reminding us of the hereafter. The Prophet (pbuh) even educated the Sahaba in phrases they should say when visiting graves and how the punishment on the grave may be lessened on the descended.

Narrated Ibn `Abbas: Once the Prophet, while passing through one of the graveyards of Medina or Mecca heard the voices of two persons who were being tortured in their graves. The Prophet said, "These two persons are being tortured not for a major sin (to avoid)." The Prophet then added, "Yes! (they are being tortured for a major sin). Indeed, one of them never saved himself from being soiled with his urine while the other used to go about with calumnies (to make enmity between friends). The Prophet then asked for a green leaf of a date–palm tree, broke it into two pieces and put one on each grave. On being asked why he had done so, he replied, "I hope that their torture might be lessened, till these get dried." 48,49,50,51,52,53,54

Umm Salama reported: The Messenger of Allah (may peace be upon came to Abu Salama (as he died). His eyes were fixedly open. He closed them, and then said: When the soul is taken away the sight follows it. Some of the people of his family wept and wailed. So he said: Do not supplicate for yourselves anything but good, for angels say" Amen" to what you say. He then said: O Allah, forgive Abu Salama, raise his degree among those who are rightly guided, grant him a successor in his descendants who remain. Forgive us and him, O Lord of the Universe, and make his grave spacious, and grant him light in it. 55,56

The above-mentioned hadiths give us a message that, placing green leaf on the grave can lessen the punishment on the death person. As long as the leaf is green, it will worship Allah almighty, and the punishment on the descended will be lessened. It is not possible to place a leaf on a grave, unless you actually are visiting graveyard. Consequently, if visiting graveyards were not permissible, there was no reason to tell how placing green leaf reduces the punishment on the grave.

According to another hadith from Sahih Bukhari, Sayedna Aisha (RA) asked the Prophet (pbuh) specifically which phrases she should say, when visiting the graves, where upon the Prophet (pbuh) said:





I [Sayedna Aisha (RA)] said: Messenger of Allah, how should I pray for them (How should I beg forgiveness for them)? He said: Say, Peace be upon the inhabitants of this city (graveyard) from among the Believers and the Muslims, and may Allah have mercy on those who have gone ahead of us, and those who come later on, and we shall, God willing, join you.⁵⁷

This shows that, visiting graves is not asl'an (origin of this act) forbidden for women, otherwise the Prophet (pbuh) would have told her (RA) that "women are not allowed." Sayedna Aisha (RA) asked the Prophet (pbuh) because either she (RA) was planning to visit a grave or she (RA) needed that knowledge to tell the women, she (RA) was teaching, so they could act appropriately.

In another hadith from Sahih Bukhari and Sahih Muslim, the Prophet (pbuh) passed by a graveyard and saw a women weeping for her dead child, whereupon the Prophet (pbuh) told her to "Fear Allah and show endurance". He (pbuh) did not instruct her to leave the graveyard immediately or said that women were not allowed to visit graves.

Narrated Anas bin Malik: The Prophet passed by a woman who was sitting and weeping beside a grave and said to her, "Fear Allah and be patient." 58,59,60,61,62

If there are no danger or sin related, both Muslim men and women are allowed to visit graveyards. Remembering the hereafter, weeping and softening your heart are not limited to men only but women benefit from it as well. However, wailing, lamenting and tearing hair or clothes are not documented allowed neither for women nor men in Islam. Additionally, Muslims are not allowed to make graveyards place of worship as done by the Jews and Christians.

Umar reported Allah's Apostle (may peace be upon him) as saying: The dead is punished in the grave because of wailing on it.⁶³

Abu Burda narrated on the authority of his father that when 'Umar was wounded Suhaib uttered (loudly in lamentation): O brother! Upon this 'Umar said: Suhaib, did you not know that the Messenger of Allah (may peace be upon him) said:" The dead is punished because of the lamentation of the living"? ⁶⁴

Jabir b. 'Abdullah reported: My father fell as a martyr on the Day of Uhud and I attempted to uncover his face and weep, but they (the Companions of the Holy Prophet) forbade me to do this, whereas Allah's Messenger (may peace be upon him) did not forbid me and Fatima bint Amr, the sister of my father, was also weeping There– upon Allah's Messenger (may peace be upon him) said: You may weep or you may not weep; the Angels provide him shade with the help of their wings until you lift him (to be buried in the grave). 65





'A'isha reported: Umm Habiba and Umm Salama made a mention before the Messenger of Allah (may peace be upon him) of a church which they had seen in Abyssinia and which had pictures in it. The Messenger of Allah (may peace be upon him) said: When a pious person amongst them (among the religious groups) dies they build a place of worship on his grave, and then decorate it with such pictures. They would be the worst of creatures on the Day of judgment in the sight of Allah.⁶⁶

Narrated Um Atiyya: We gave the Pledge of allegiance to the Prophet and he recited to me the verse (60.12). That they will not associate anything in worship with Allah (60.12). And he also prevented us from wailing and lamenting over the dead. A woman from us held her hand out and said, "Such-and-such a woman cried over a dead person belonging to my family and I want to compensate her for that crying" The Prophet did not say anything in reply and she left and returned. None of those women abided by her pledge except Um Sulaim, Um Al-`Ala', and the daughter of Abi Sabra, the wife of Al-Mu`adh or the daughter of Abi Sabra, and the wife of Mu`adh.

After the Prophet (pbuh) left this world, He (pbuh) was buried in his own house, the place where He (pbuh) left this world, which was the place where sayedna Aisha (RA) was living. Even when Abu Bakr Siddique (RA) was buried next to the Prophets (pbuh) grave, she (RA) was still living in that house, and consequently visiting the graves every day. Thus, visiting graves for women is allowed and any possible prohibition is not mutlaq'an mamnu, meaning any prohibition is restricted and conditioned to specific circumstances such as starting worshipping graves, wailing or danger of temptation or sin.

Conclusion: In this article, we evaluated the legitimacy of visiting graveyards based on references from Quran and the two books of hadiths, Sahih Bukhari and Sahih Muslim, which are the two collections of hadiths considered most authentic. This is still an on going issue in the Muslim societies around the world. Visiting graves was first prohibited in the early years of Islam, but afterwards the Prophet (pbuh) encouraged both Muslim men and women to visit the graveyards, because it reminds us of the hereafter and softens our hearts. The Prophet (pbuh) himself used to visit graves and pray for the descended and sayedna Aisha (RA) used to visit graves, in fact she (RA) lived in the house where the Prophet (pbuh) and later her father Abu Bakr Siddique (RA) were buried. However another hadith exist cursing women, who frequently visits graves, but this hadith is neither mentioned in Sahih Bukhari nor in Sahih Muslim.

People remembering the death and the hereafter are believed to be more thoughtful in their acts compared to those people who do not have the death and the hereafter in mind. Sometimes it is not enough to read or talk about things but to see and experience enlighten our minds and makes us remember things and alter our actions. To act according to the *sunnah* of the Prophet (pbuh) will make us remembering *Akhira* and the Day of Judgment and prepare us for that time. There is an unmet need to remind people about the *Akhira*,





unite and inform the *ummah* about the *sirah* and the *sunnah* of the Prophet (pbuh). If visiting graveyards can help softening hearts, make people better human beings and better Muslims, and if there is no danger of temptation and sin, visiting graves are not prohibited.

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