

Throwing sand over the Dead Body in the Grave without First Placing Planks or Unbaked Bricks

Q: Janaa'iz-97: When we bury the dead in our town, we usually dig a box-type grave and then place planks over the body before filling the grave with sand. There are however a few people amongst us belonging to the Mahdawiyyah sect, who claim that this conflicts with the Sunnah. Their method of filling the grave is for the person standing at the side of the feet to first throw three handfuls of sand in, after which they use spades to fill the grave with sand. They claim that this is the Sunnah method.

We have argued with them that our method is correct and that it accords proper respect and honour to the deceased. They are however adamant in their view and cite the incidents of Jihaad where many Sahabah RADI. were buried in a single grave. Where, they claim was the opportunity to place planks or bricks over the bodies? They also say that the Kafan needs to be soiled and this will not happen when it is shielded from the sand. Please shed light on the subject for us.

Answer: Both the box-type (SHAQ) and the niche-type (LAHAD) graves are permissible. When the ground is hard, the niche-type (LAHAD) grave is prescribed and when the ground is soft, the box-type (LAHAD) is recommended. When the niche-type grave is used, the Sunnah practice is to place unbaked bricks or bamboo-type sticks across the niche and when the box-type grave is used, unbaked bricks or planks may be placed across the box as a roof. This is to prevent sand from falling on to the body. In fact, unbaked bricks were used in Rasulullaah SAW.'s grave.

When on his deathbed, Hadhrat Sa'd bin Abi Waqqaas RADI. said, "Dig a niche type grave for me and place unbaked bricks across the niche just as was done for Rasulullaah SAW.'s grave.

Commenting on this Hadith, Allaama Nawawi RAH. states that this proves that the niche type grave and placing unbaked bricks is preferred since it was done for the grave of Rasulullaah SAW. with the consensus of the Sahabah RADI.

It is therefore evident that placing such bricks to prevent sand falling on the deceased is a Sunnah practice, which accords respect to the deceased. This practice has been passed through the generations and may not be refuted. Baked bricks should not be used because they have been baked in fire and should therefore be kept away from the deceased. The gaps in the bricks should be filled with mud to prevent sand falling through. The Fuqahaa have established all of these regulations from the Ahadeeth. See Kabeeri (Pg.595) and Umdatul Fiqh (Vol.2 Pg.531).

The above makes it evident that whether the grave is box-type or niche-type, the deceased should be buried in such a way that the sand does not fall directly on to the body. This accords respect to the deceased, just as the pages of old Qur'aans are to be buried in a niche-type grave so that sand does not fall on to them. There is also no harm in erecting a roof of planks over the pages of the Qur'aan after burying them to prevent the sand from falling on them.

The situation in battles is something completely different because the focus is on burying as many people as possible in the shortest possible time. There is no chance during times of war to bury every person separately and with the complete ceremonial procedures. In fact, there are instances where the sheets to cover the bodies of the martyrs were too small and would expose the feet when the head was covered and vice versa. Rasulullaah SAW. then instructed that the head be covered with the sheet. It would therefore be wrong for any person to base his argument for not properly covering the deceased on such incidents of battle.

The Kafan will invariably become soiled because it is laid on sand to rest. There is no instruction (from the Shari'ah) to physically soil the Kafan. In fact, we are directed to shroud the deceased in a good Kafan and also to apply perfume. Hadhrat Jaabir RADI. reports that Rasulullaah SAW. said, "when any of you shrouds his brother, he should shroud him well. Their conclusion is therefore incomplete. And Allaah knows best what is most correct.

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