

Prostrate on soil (Torbat)

Some people suppose that prostration on the clay or the soil of the martyr means to worship them and consider it as an polytheistic act.

To answer this question, it should be pointed out that the difference between السجود لله [prostration for Allah] and السجود على الارض [prostration on earth] is clear; this problem arises because this difference is neglected.

No doubt, the phrase السجود لله signifies the prostration for Allah, while the phrase السجود على الارض means the prostration on earth. On the other hand, when one prostrates on earth, he actually is worshipping Allah, and indeed, all the Muslims throughout the world prostrate on something, but it is a prostration before Him. The whole pilgrims of Mecca prostrate on the stones of Masjid Ul-Haram while their aim is to worship God, the Almighty.

As a result, prostration on soil, plants, etc. does not signify that we worship them; rather, we prostrate before Allah by submitting our selves to the lowest level as soil. Besides, it is concluded that prostration on earth is not to worship it. The holy Quran in this regard says,

وَاللَّهُ يَسْجُدُ مِنْ فِي السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ¹

(And whoever is in the heavens and the earth, prostrates before Allah.)

The Prophet (peace be upon him and his descendants) also says,

جَعَلْتُ لِي الْأَرْضَ مَسْجِداً وَطَهوراً²

(The earth was made to be a prostrating place as a cause for purification for me.)

Thus, the prostration on earth, soil, etc. is inconsistent with polytheism, because the prostration on earth and plant is the sign of ultimate humility and submission before the One.

1- Rad Sura, verse no. 15

2- Sahih, Bokhari, the book on prayer, p. 91

Now, to illuminate the Shia standpoint on this issue, we refer to one of the traditions of Imam Sadeq (a.s):

(Hesham Ibn Hakam narrated that he had asked Imam Sadeq (a.s) about what he could prostrate on, and Imam (a.s) replied, “prostration is merely permitted on earth or what is grown from it, save comestibles and the items of clothing”. Then, I went on, “May my soul be sacrificed for you, what is the reason?” He answered, “Because prostration shows man’s humility towards God, and it should not be done on clothing and comestibles, due to the fact that the materialists are the slaves of victuals and clothing. When prostrating, man is indeed worshipping Allah, so he should avoid placing his forehead upon the materialists’ objects of worship. Thus, the prostration on earth is superior, because it is more proportionate to humility and submission before God, the Almighty”).³

This tradition clearly states why prostration must be done on earth, because it is more compatible with humility and submission before the Absolute.

Now, another question is posed and that is why do the Shia prescribe the prostration on earth and some plants and not all the objects?

To answer the question, it must be stated that as the religious principles are legislated by the Islamic and the Divine law, their executive conditions must be extracted from the words and deeds of the Prophet (peace be upon him and his descendants), because according to the holy Quran the Messenger of God is the practical sample of the pious.

Now, we consider the Islamic hadiths, illustrating the prophet’s practice and tradition, which all signify that the Prophet (peace be upon him and his descendants) prostrated on earth, and some plants, such as mat, as the Shia believe in it:

1- A group of Muslim narrators have set forth that the Prophet (peace be upon him and his descendants) introduced the earth as a place for prostration in their sound books, where he said,

جعلت لي الارض مسجداً و طهوراً

3- Biharul Anvar, vol. 85, p. 147, quoted from Elalul Sharae.

(The earth was made for me as the place for prostration and the cause for purification.)

The term جعل connotes legislation and transfers the idea that prostration on earth is a Divine decree for the Muslims.

2- A group of traditions denote that the holy Prophet (peace be upon him and his descendants) ordered the Muslims to put their foreheads on soil when prostrating, but Omme Salameh (the Prophet's wife) quotes from him as saying, **ترب وجهك لله (Put your face on soil for the sake of Allah.)⁴**

The term ترب means soil, and also this act is obligatory due to the fact that the term ترب, extracted from the term تراب [soil] is an imperative verb.

3- The holy Prophet's behaviour is also another evident proof, which directs the Muslims to the right way. Vael Ibn Hijr said,

رايت النبي صلي الله عليه وآله وسلم اذا سجد وضع جبهته وانفه علي الارض⁵

(The Prophet (peace be upon him and his descendants) put his forehead and nose on earth when prostrating.)

According to Anas Ibn Malik, Ibn Abbas, some of the Prophet's wives, such as Ayesheh and Ome Salamah, and a number of narrators,

كان رسول الله يصلي علي الخمره⁶

(The Prophet (peace be upon him and his descendants) used to prostrate on Alkhomrah, that was a kind of mat, made from the fiber of palm tree.)

Abu Saeed, one of the Prophet's disciples, said,

دخلت علي رسول الله صلي الله عليه وآله وسلم و هو يصلي علي حصير⁷

(I visited the Prophet (peace be upon him and his descendants) praying on a mat.)

4- Kanz Ul – Amal, Vol.7, Halab edition, P.465

5- Ahkam Ul – Quran, Jahas Hanafi, Vol.3, P. 209, Beirut edition, Section prostration on face

6- Sonan, Beihaghi, Vol.2, P. 421

7- Ibid.

This is another evidence, proving the Shia standpoint on the legality of prostration on what is grown from the earth, except victuals and clothing.

4-The words and deeds of the Prophet's disciples also testify his practice.

Jabir Ibn Abdollah Ansari said,

كنت اصلي الظهر مع رسول الله صلي الله عليه و آله و سلم فاخذ قبضه من الحصاء لتبرد في كفي
اضعها لجبهتي اسجد عليها لشده الحر⁸

(Performing my noon prayer along with the Prophet (peace be upon him and his descendants), I kept a handful of pebbles in my hand until they cooled, and I could put my forehead on those when prostrating, and that was because of the excessive heat.)

Then, the narrator added, “If prostration was permissible on clothes, it would have been easier to prostrate on instead of keeping the pebbles in the hand and cooling them”.

Ibn Sad (died in 209 year of Hijra) writes in his book, ‘Al-Tabaghat Ul-Kobra’, as such,

كان مسروق اذا خرج بلبنه يسجد عليها في السفينه

(When traveling, Masrugh Ibn Ajda used to take a piece of soil to prostrate on in the ship.)⁹

It is noteworthy to say that Masrugh Ibn Ajda was one of the Prophet's disciples and Ibn Masud's companion. The writer of the book ‘Al-tabaghat Ul-Kobra’ has considered him as one of the prominent figures of Kufa and

8-Ibid, vol.1,p. 439, the book on prayer

9-vol.6, P. 79, Beirut edition.

10- For more information, refer to Siratena by Alameh Amini's book.

of the ones who has narrated some traditions from Abubakr, Omar, Othman, Ali (a.s), and Abdollah Ibn Masud. This tradition defuses the claim of those who consider prostration on a piece of soil as heresy or polytheism and proves that the heralds in the history of Islam had done this act, too. ¹⁰

Nafe says,

ان ابن عمر كان اذا سجد وعليه العمامه يرفعها حتي يضع جبهته بالارض ¹¹

(When prostrating, Ibn Omar removed his turban to put his forehead on earth.)

Razin says,

كتب الي علي بن عبدالله بن عباس رضي الله عنه ان ابعث الي بلوح من احجار المروه اسجد عليه

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(Ali Ibn Abdollah Ibn Abbas wrote to me that I send him a chunk of stone from marvel mount so that he could prostrate on them).

5-Some narrators have presented some traditions that the holy Prophet (peace be upon him and his descendants) prohibited those who prostrated on their turbans.

Salih Sabaee in this regard says,

ان رسول الله صلي الله عليه واله وسلم راي رجلاً يسجد بجنبه وقد اعتم علي جبهته فحسر رسول الله صلي الله عليه وآله وسلم عن جبهته ¹³

(The holy Prophet (a.s) observed a man prostrating while his turban had covered his forehead. The Prophet (peace be upon him and his descendants) then removed the turban from his forehead.)

11- Sonan, Beihaghi, vol.2, P.105, first edition.

12- Azraghi, the news of Mecca, Vol.3, p.15 1

13- Sonan, Beihaghi, vol.2, P.105

راي رسول الله (ص) رجلاً يسجد علي كور عمامته فاوما بيده ارفع عمامتك و اوما الي جبهته¹⁴
(The Messenger of God (peace be upon him and his descendants) observed a man prostrating on the corner of his turban. He pointed to him to remove his turban and then pointed to his forehead.)

It is clearly comprehended from the above-mentioned traditions that the prostration on earth at the time of the Prophet (peace be upon him and his descendants) was a matter of certainty, so that the Prophet (peace be upon him and his descendants) prohibited anyone of the Muslims who did not prostrate on earth.

6-The Shia infallible Imams, who are the Prophet's household as well as the inseparable mate of the holy Quran, - according to Saglayn hadith- have also certified this fact.

Imam Sadeq (a.s) says,

السجود علي الارض فريضه و علي الخمره سنه

(The prostration on earth is a Divine commandment, and on mat, the Prophet's tradition.)¹⁵

He also says,

السجود لايجوز الا علي الارض او علي ما ارنبت الارض الا ما اكل او ليس

(Prostration is not permissible, except on earth and what grows from it apart from clothing and victuals).¹⁶

Conclusion:

14- Ibid.

15- Vasael Ul Shia, vol. 3, p. 593; the book on prayer, the 7th hadith.

16- Ibid, the 1st hadith.

To sum the whole aforementioned traditions up, it is ascertained that prostration on earth and what grows from it (except clothing and victuals) is permissible.

Moreover, it is quite evident that prostration on the mentioned objects is permissible while the legality of prostration on other things is a matter of irresolution. As a result, we'd better prostrate on the permissible things just as precaution, which is the means of prosperity and salvation. In the end, this issue is a matter of religious jurisprudence, which may raise the diversity of opinions among the Muslim jurists; however, these kinds of jurist objections are no matter of concern, because these differences are also discerned among the four main sects of the Sunnite. For instance, the Maleki believe that when prostrating, the nose must be placed on the ground while the Hanbali knows this act obligatory and its abandonment invalidates the prostration.¹⁷

17- Al-Figh Alal Mazhabul Arbaa, vol.1, P. 161, Eyypt edition, the book on prayer. Prostration section.