

How Deep Should a Grave Be? (Detailed Fatwa)

Darulifta Ahlesunnat (Dawateislami)

Question

What do the noble scholars and jurists of Islamic law say about the following: What guidance does Shari'ah provide regarding the depth of the grave, meaning how deep should the grave be? Some people in our group only dig the grave deep enough so that the body is hidden when laid in it, which is approximately one and a half to two feet deep. Then, they cover the top with a slab and put the dirt on top. Please provide guidance with evidence so that I can show the people in my group and then they will prepare the graves accordingly.

Answer

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ
الْجَوَابُ بِعَوْنِ الْمَلِكِ الْوَهَّابِ اللَّهُمَّ هِدَايَةَ الْحَقِّ وَالصَّوَابِ

Islam is the religion of 'Fitrah' (natural disposition) and nature requires that the body be buried deep enough into the ground that wild animals cannot eat the body in a general case, the winds do not cause the upper part of the grave to easily open up, and so the secrets affairs of Allah Almighty and the decomposed body of the deceased do not become exposed to the people. Due to these reasons, Islam has instructed that the deceased be buried in the grave and that the grave be dug deep. Digging the grave one or two feet isn't sufficient because there is a likely chance that the body will get exposed or that the animals will dig up the body. Especially during rain or due to other water related causes, graves become exposed. Because of this, the ruling of Sharī'ah regarding the depth of the grave is that it is best for the grave to be dug equal to the height of a standing person. The middle level is that the grave be dug equal the chest of a person. Otherwise, the grave should be dug at least equal to half the height of a person; it shouldn't be any less than this. Furthermore, there is no difference in the depth of the grave for a male and female. The above-mentioned ruling is for both, men and women.

Burying the deceased is a Qur'anic command. Thus, it is stated in The Noble Qur'an:

﴿فَبَعَثَ اللَّهُ غُرَابًا يَبْحَثُ فِي الْأَرْضِ لِيُرِيَهُ كَيْفَ يُورِثُ سُوءَةَ أَخِيهِ ۖ قَالَ يُورِثُنِي أَخْبَرْتُ أَنْ أَكُونَ مِثْلَ هَذَا الْغُرَابِ فَأُوَارِثُ سُوءَةَ أَخِي ۖ فَاصْبِرْ مِنَ التَّائِبِينَ﴾ (31) ﴿

Translation (Kanz-Ul-Irfan): Then, Allah sent a crow digging then earth to show him how to conceal his brother's corpse. He (Qabil) said: "Alas! I could not even be like this crow to conceal my brother's corpse."

Thus, he became one of the remorseful. (Part 5, Surah Al-Ma'idah, Verse No. 31)

It is stated in Tasir Al-Qurtubi under this verse:

وَأَمَّا دَفْنُهُ فِي التُّرَابِ وَدَسُّهُ وَسِتْرُهُ فَذَلِكَ وَاجِبٌ، لِقَوْلِهِ تَعَالَى -- الخ

Translation: Burying the deceased and hiding it in dirt is wajib due to the mentioned verse. (Al-Jami' Li-Ahkam Al-Qur'an Lil-Qurtubi, Vol. 4, p. 301, Publ. Dar Al-Kutub Al-Misriyah, Cairo)

Burying the deceased is a way of honoring it. Thus, it is stated in The Noble Qur'an:

﴿ثُمَّ أَمَاتَهُ فَأَقْبَرَهُ﴾

Translation (Kanz-ul-Irfan): Then He caused him to die, se He made him enter the grave. (Part 30, Surah 'Abas, Verse No. 21)

Explaining the wisdoms of burial, Shah Abdul-'Aziz Muhaddith Dehlwi رحمۃ اللہ علیہ states:

یہ تعلیم الہی جو پہلے تو استعداد کی کمی کی وجہ سے قابل کو کوڑے کے ذریعے واقع ہوئی اور دوسری دفعہ حضرت آدم علیہ السلام کی اولاد کو فرشتوں کے ذریعے تعلیم دی گئی، ایک عظیم نعمت اور قابل تحسین اعزاز ہے۔ اگر آدمی کی لاش کو دوسرے حیوانات کی طرح سطح زمین پر ہی چھوڑ دیتے، تو متعفن ہو کر بدبو پھیلاتی اور لوگوں کے مشام کو پریشان کرتی اور اس میت سے لوگ متنفر ہوتے اور بدگوئیاں کرتے۔ نیز درندے اور پرندے اس کے اعضاء کو ٹکڑے ٹکڑے کر کے لے جاتے اور ناپاک مردار خور جانور اسے اپنا لقمہ بنا لیتے اور اسے بڑی حقارت لاحق ہوتی اور اس کے عیب بے پردہ ہو کر عام خاص میں مشہور ہو جاتے اور اس کی قدر لوگوں کی نظر میں کم ہو جاتی۔ ناچار اسے عزت دینے کے لیے اس طریقہ کی غیب سے تعلیم دی گئی۔

Translation: This instruction from Allah Almighty, which was first taught to Qabeel by a crow due to the lack of understanding and then to the children of Adam علیہ السلام by an angel, is a great blessing and an admirable honor. If the bodies of humans were left above the ground like is done with other animals, it would decompose and spread a foul odor and would bother people's sense of smell. Because of this people would be repulsed by the body and speak negatively about it. Furthermore, predators and birds would tear the limbs into pieces and dirty carrion-eating animals would make this their meal. This would cause great disrespect to it and the secrets of people would get revealed and be known amongst the people causing the respect of that person to diminish. Without any other alternative, to honor the body, this method was divinely taught. (Tafsir-e-'Azizi Translated, Part 30, p. 96, Publ. Nooriyah Razawiyah Publications, Faisalabad)

It is stated in a hadith:

عَنْ ابْنِ عَبَّاسٍ عَنِ النَّبِيِّ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ قَالَ إِذَا مَاتَ أَحَدُكُمْ الْمَيِّتَ فَأَحْسِنُوا كَفَنَهُ وَعَجِّلُوا بِإِنْجَازِ وَصِيَّتِهِ وَأَعْمِقُوا لَهُ فِي قَبْرِهِ

Translation: It is narrated on the authority of Ibn 'Abbas رضي الله تعالى عنهما that The Prophet ﷺ said: When anyone of yours dies, prepare a good shroud for them, hasten to fulfill their will, and dig their grave deep. (Sharh Al-Sudoor, p. 107, Publ. Dar Al-Ma'rifah, Beirut)

On the day of the battle of Uhd, the blessed companions were wounded and tired. Despite this, The Prophet ﷺ commanded that the graves of the martyrs be dug deep. Thus, it is stated in Al-Mu'jam Al-Kabir Lil-Tabarani:

شَكُّوا إِلَى النَّبِيِّ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ الْقَرْحَ وَالْحَفْرَ لِكُلِّ إِنْسَانٍ يَوْمَ أُحُدٍ فَقَالَ: «أَحْفِرُوا وَأَعْمِقُوا وَأَحْسِنُوا وَادْفِنُوا الْإِثْنَيْنِ وَالثَّلَاثَةَ فِي قَبْرِ

Translation: On the day of Uhd, when the blessed companions mentioned in the court of The Prophet ﷺ about their injuries and the matter of preparing a separate grave for each person, The Prophet ﷺ stated: Dig the graves deep and good and bury two or three deceased in one grave. (Al-Mu'jam Al-Kabir Lil-Tabarani, Vol. 22, p. 172, Publ. Cairo)

Shaykh Abdul-Haq Muhaddith Dehlwi رحمۃ اللہ علیہ states in the explanation of this hadith:

اس سے معلوم ہوتا ہے کہ قبر گہری کرنا سنت ہے، کہ اس میں میت کے ضائع ہونے سے حفاظت ہے۔

Translation: Through this we get to know that making the grave deep is a sunnah because it provides protection against the body being wasted. (Ashi'ah Al-Lam'aat Translated, Book of funeral, Chapter: burial, Sect. 2, Vol. 2, p. 876, Publ. Fareed Bookstall, Lahore)
The Prophet ﷺ has also told the reason for digging the graves deep. Thus, it is stated in a hadith:

رُوِيَ عَنِ النَّبِيِّ - صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ - قَالَ "عَمَّقُوا قُبُورَ مَوْتَاكُمْ لِأَنْ لَا تَرِيحَ عَلَيْكُمْ"

Translation: It is narrated from The Prophet ﷺ that he said: Dig the graves of your deceased deep so that the smell does not spread.

(Al-Hawi Al-Kabir Fi Fiqh Al-Shafi'ee, Book of funeral, Chapter: Number of shrouds, Vol. 3, p. 24, Publ. Beirut)

Shaykh Khateeb Shirbeeni رحمۃ اللہ علیہ writes:

ان الحکمة فی وجوب الدفن عدم انتهاک حرمتہ بانتشار رائحته واستقرار جیفته، وأکل السباع له۔۔۔ إنه لا يكفي الدفن فيما يصنع الآن ببلاد مصر والشام وغيرهما من عقد أزج واسع أو مقتصد شبه بيت لمخالفته الخبر وإجماع السلف۔۔۔ وهذا ظاهر؛ لأنه ليس بدفن كما أشار إلى ذلك ابن الصلاح والأذرع وغيرهما، واحترز بالحفر عما إذا وضع الميت على وجه الأرض ووضع عليه أحجار كثيرة أو تراب أو نحو ذلك مما يكتم رائحته ويحرسه عن أكل السباع، فلا يكفي ذلك

(Mughni Al-Muhtaj, Book of funerals, Vol. 2, p. 36, Publ. Dar Al-Kutub Al-'Ilmiyah, Beirut)

It is clear from the above-mentioned evidences that digging the grave deep is a sunnah, as stated in Al-Muhit Al-Burhani:

في قوله عليه السلام: أعمقوا دليل على أن السنة في القبر أن يعمق

(Al-Muhit Al-Burhani, Book of funerals, Part 32, Vol. 2, p. 193, Publ. Beirut)

Proofs regarding how deep a grave should be:

The depth should be up to the chest or equal to the person's height. Regarding this, it is stated in Al-Muhit Al-Burhani:

وعن عمر رضي الله عنه أنه قال: يعمق القبر صدر رجل، وإن عمقوا مقدار قامة الرجل فهو أحسن

(Al-Muhit Al-Burhani, Book of funerals, Part 32, Vol. 2, p. 193, Publ. Beirut)

It is stated in Tanwir Al-Absar Ma'a Al-Durr Al-Mukhtar:

(وحفر قبره مقدار نصف قامة) فان زاد فحسن

Under this, it is stated in Radd Al-Muhtar:

قوله: (مقدار نصف قامة الخ) أو إلى حد الصدر أو زاد إلى مقدار قامة فهو أحسن كما في الذخيرة فعلم أن الأدنى نصف القامة والأعلى القامة والوسط ما بينهما، شرح المنية

(Radd Al-Muhtar 'Ala Al-Durr Al-Mukhtar, Book of Salah, Chapter: funerals, Topic: Burying the deceased, Vol. 3, p. 164, Publ. Quetta)

It is stated in Fath Bab Al-'Inayah:

ويحفر القبر نصف القامة، أو إلى الصدر، وإن زيد كان حسنا، لأنه أبلغ في منع الرائحة، ودفع السباع

(Fath Bab Al-'Inayah Bi-Sharh Al-Niqayah, Book of Salah, Vol. 1, p. 452, Publ. Beirut)

Shaykh Al-Islam Wal-Muslimeen, The Imam of Ahl-US-Sunnah, Imam Ahmad Raza Khan رحمۃ اللہ علیہ writes:

شریعت مطہرہ نے قبر کا گہرا ہونا اس واسطے رکھا ہے کہ احیاء کی صحت کو ضرر نہ پہنچے۔

Translation: Shar'ah instructed that the grave be dug deep so that it doesn't affect the health of the living. (Fatawa Razawiyah, Vol. 9, p. 382, Publ. Raza Foundation, Lahore)

There is no difference in the depth of a grave for a male and female. Thus, Sadr Al-Shari'ah, Badr Al-Tariqah, Mufti Muhammad Amjad 'Ali A'zami رحمۃ اللہ علیہ states:

عورت اور مرد کی قبر میں کچھ فرق نہیں کہ عورت کی زیادہ گہری ہو اور مرد کی کم (ایسا کچھ نہیں ہے) قبر کا ادنیٰ درجہ نصف قد ہے اور اوسط درجہ سینہ تک اور سب سے بہتر یہ کہ قدر برابر ہو۔ ریتلی زمین میں جس میں سے جانور مردے کو نکال لیتے ہیں اگر ممکن ہو تو قدر برابر کھودیں کہ مسلم کی لاش بے حرمتی سے محفوظ رہے۔

Translation: There is no difference between the depth of the grave of a female and male such that the grave of a female should be deeper than the grave of a male (this is not the case). The minimum depth of a grave is half of the height of a person, the middle level is up to the chest, and best is that it is equal to the height of a person. In sandy soil, where the animals dig up the deceased from the grave, if possible, dig the grave equal to the height in order to protect the body of a Muslim from being disrespected. (Fatawa Amjadiyah, Vol. 2, p. 365, Publ. Maktabah Razawiyah, Karachi)

وَاللّٰهُ اَعْلَمُ عَزَّوَجَلَّ وَرَسُوْلُهُ اَعْلَمُ صَلَّى اللّٰهُ تَعَالٰی عَلَیْهِ وَاٰلِهٖ وَسَلَّم

(Allah Almighty knows best and His Messenger صَلَّى اللّٰهُ عَلَیْهِ وَاٰلِهٖ وَسَلَّم knows best.)

Answered By: Mufti Muhammad Qasim Attari

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