

215016 - What is the ruling on people gathering to receive condolences?

the question

What is the ruling on the family of the deceased sitting and gathering in a specific place to receive condolences?

Detailed answer

What is meant by gathering to receive condolences is when the family of the deceased sit and gather in a certain place where those who wish to offer condolences can go to see them, whether that is in the house of the deceased's family, or in the tents that they set up for that purpose, and so on.

This matter is one of those concerning which there is a considerable difference of opinion among the scholars. There are two scholarly opinions concerning it:

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The first opinion is that there should be no gathering for the purpose of offering condolences, and such gatherings are makrooh. This is the view of the Shaafa'is and Hanbalis, and many of the Maalikis; some of them even stated that it is haraam.

The strongest evidence quoted by those who say that it is makrooh consists of two things:

(i)The report of Jareer ibn 'Abdullah who said: We used to regard gathering with the family of the deceased and making food after the burial as coming under the same heading as wailing (which is forbidden). Narrated by Ahmad, 6866; and Ibn Maajah, 1612.

(ii)This is something that was not done by the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) or any of his Companions, hence it is something that has been introduced; it is also contrary to the practice of the righteous early generations, who did not gather to receive condolences.

Imam ash-Shaafa'i said: I would regard such gatherings as makrooh, even if there is no weeping involved, because it renews grief and imposes a burden on the family of the deceased.

al-Umm, 1/318

An-Nawawi said: With regard to sitting to receive condolences, ash-Shaafa'i, al-Musannif and others stated that it is makrooh. ... They said: rather people should go about their business, and whoever happens to meet them (the family members of the deceased) may offer them condolences. There is no differentiation between men and women with regard to being makrooh to sit to receive condolences.

End quote. Al-Majmoo' Sharh al-Muhadhdhab, 5/306

Al-Mirdaawi said: It is makrooh to sit to receive condolences. This is our opinion and it is the opinion of most of our companions, as was clearly stated.

End quote. Al-Insaaf, 2/565

Abu Bakr at-Turtooshi said: Our Maaliki scholars said: Sitting to receive condolences is an innovation and is makrooh. But if a person sits in his house or in the mosque grieving, without sitting for the purpose of receiving condolences, there is nothing wrong with that. When the news came to the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) of the death of Ja'far, he sat in the mosque grieving, and the people offered him condolences.

End quote. Al-Hawaadith wa'l-Bida', p. 170

This view was mentioned in a fatwa by Shaykh Ibn 'Uthaymeen (may Allah have mercy on him), when he said: With regard to the family of the deceased, it is not prescribed for them to gather in the house and receive condolences, because some of the salaf (early generations) regarded this as being a type of wailing (which is forbidden). Rather they should stay at home and close their doors, and whoever happens to meet them in the marketplace or in the mosque may offer them condolences.

End quote from Majmoo' al-Fataawa, 17/103

-2-

The second opinion is that there is nothing wrong with gathering and sitting to receive condolences, so long as the gathering is free of objectionable matters and innovations, and so long as it does not renew or perpetuate grief, or involve imposing burdens on the family of the deceased. This is the view of some of the Hanafis, some of the Maalikis and some of the Hanbalis. See: al-Bahr ar-Raa'iq, 2/207; Mawaahib al-Jaleel, 2/230

Ibn Nujaym al-Hanafi said: There is nothing wrong with sitting to receive condolences for three days, without committing any objectionable action such as burdening the family of the deceased with requirements to make preparations to receive the visitors and offer food.

End quote. Al-Bahr ar-Raa'iq, 2/207

This view was narrated from Imam Ahmad by Hanbal and al-Khallaal.

Al-Mirdaawi said: And it was narrated from him that he granted a concession allowing that, because he offered condolences and sat to receive condolences. al-Khallaal said: Imam Ahmad was lenient with regard to sitting with the bereaved family in more than one place. ... And it was narrated from him that he granted a concession to the family of the deceased. This was narrated by Hanbal and was the view favoured by al-Majd [i.e., Ibn Taymiyah].

And it was narrated from him that he granted a concession to the family of the deceased and others, to calm them down.

End quote. Al-Insaaf, 2/565

Ibn 'Abd al-Barr said in al-Kaafi (1/283): I hope that the issue of sitting together briefly to offer condolences is not serious. End quote.

Among contemporary scholars, this view was favoured by Shaykh 'Abd al-'Azeez ibn Baaz (may Allah have mercy on him) when he said, as it says in Majmoo' al-Fataawa (13/373):

This is the view favoured by Shaykh Muhammad al-Mukhtaar ash-Shanqeeti in Silsilat Duroos Sharh az-Zaad.

The strongest evidence quoted by those who regard it as permissible is as follows:

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The hadeeth of 'Aa'ishah, the wife of the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) according to which, that if a member of her family died, the women would gather together, then they would depart, except her own relatives and close friends. She would order that a pot of talbeenah be cooked, then some thareed would be made and the talbeenah would be poured over it. Then she would say: Eat some of it, for I heard the Messenger of Allah (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) say: "Talbeenah soothes the heart of the sick person, and it takes away some of the grief."

Narrated by al-Bukhaari, 5417; Muslim, 3216.

Talbeenah is a broth made from (barley) flour and bran, to which honey may be added. It is so called because it resembles milk (laban) in its whiteness and consistency.

This hadeeth clearly indicates that they did not see anything wrong with gathering, whether it was the family of the deceased who gathered, or others who gathered with them.

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It was narrated that Abu Waa'il said: When Khaalid ibn al-Waleed died, the women of Banu'l-Mugheerah gathered, weeping for him. It was said to 'Umar: Send word to them, telling them not to do that, and that you should not hear anything about them that you dislike. 'Umar said: Why shouldn't they shed tears for Abu Sulaymaan, so long as they do not put dust on their heads or make a loud noise

Narrated by Ibn Abi Shaybah in al-Musannaf (3/290) and 'Abd ar-Razzaaq as-San'aani (3/558), with a saheeh isnaad.

They gave two responses to the report of Jareer ibn 'Abdullah:

(i) that the most correct view concerning it is that it is da'eef (weak). It was criticised by Imam Ahmad and ad-Daaraqutni.

This report was narrated by Ahmad ibn Munayyi' in his Musnad, Ibn Maajah in as-Sunan (1612), and at-Tabaraani in al-Mu'jam al-Kabeer (2/307) via Hushaym from Ismaa'eel ibn Abi Khaalid, from Qays, from Jareer.

This isnaad appears to be saheeh, because its narrators are known for their good memory and are trustworthy. Hence it was classed as saheeh by a number of scholars, such as an-Nawawi in al-Majmoo' (5/320), Ibn Katheer in Irshaad al-Faqeeh (1/241), al-Busayri in Misbaah az-Zujaajah, 1/289, ash-Shawkaani in Nayl al-Awtaar (4/148), Shaykh Ahmad Shaakir in Tahqeeq al-Musnad (11/126), al-Albaani in Ahkaam al-Janaa'iz (p. 210), the commentators on Musnad Ahmad (11/505), and others.

However in the hadeeth there is a subtle flaw that was pointed out by the scholars and critics, which is the tadlees of Hushaym ibn Basheer; even though he was trustworthy, he often practiced tadlees [tadlees means giving the impression that he heard it from a particular person when he did not hear it from him directly] and irsaal [irsaal means attributing a hadeeth directly to the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) without mentioning the name of the Sahaabi in the isnaad or chain or narrators], and sometimes narrated from da'eef (weak) and majhool (unknown) narrators.

Al-Haafiz adh-Dhahabi said in Tadhkirat al-Huffaaz (1/249): There is no dispute that he was among those who were known for their good memory and trustworthy narrators, but he practised tadlees a great deal; he narrated from a number of people from whom he did not hear hadeeth directly. End quote.

Hence a number of earlier scholars regarded this hadeeth of Jareer as flawed, because of the tadlees of Hushaym. For example:

Abu Dawood said: I mentioned to Ahmad the hadeeth of Hushaym, from Ismaa'eel, from Qays, from Jareer, "We used to regard gathering with the family of the deceased and making food for them as being acts of Jaahiliyyah." He said: They claimed that he heard it from Shareek. Ahmad said: I do not know of any basis for this hadeeth.

End quote. Masaa'il al-Imam Ahmad narrated by Abu Dawood as-Sijistaani, p. 388

In al-'Ilal by ad-Daaraqutni (13/462) there is something which suggests the possibility of Hushaym practicing tadlees in this hadeeth.

If the one who practiced tadlees is Shareek ibn 'Abdullah an-Nakha'i, the qaadi of Kufah, then the report is da'eef (weak), because his hadeeth is da'eef according to all scholars of hadeeth; a hadeeth that is reported only by one such as he cannot be accepted as the basis for a shar'i ruling concerning halaal and haraam.

Yes, he was followed (in the narration of a similar hadeeth) by Nasr ibn Baab, as is narrated in Musnad Ahmad (6905), but it says in the biography of this Nasr in Ta'jeel al-Manfa'ah (p. 420): al-Bukhaari said: They accused him of lying. Ibn Ma'een said: His hadeeth is worthless. 'Ali ibn al-Madeeni said: I rejected his hadeeth. Abu Haatim ar-Raazi said: His hadeeth is to be rejected. Abu Khaythamah Zuhayr ibn Harb said: He is a liar. End quote.

Therefore the similar hadeeth which he narrated cannot strengthen the report of Shareek; rather there is a strong possibility that the one who practiced tadlees in the report of Hushaym is Nasr ibn Baab himself, and not Shareek.

To sum up: the report of Jareer ibn 'Abdullah al-Bajali has not been proven via any saheeh isnaad, and the well-known report is flawed because of tadlees. For more information see the book: at-Tajliyah li Hukm al-Juloos li't-Ta'ziyah by Shaykh Zaafir Aal Jab'aan, p. 27

(ii) Even if we assume that it is saheeh, what is meant is gatherings in which food is made by the family of the deceased in order to honour those who come and gather with them.

Hence two things are mentioned in the report: "We used to regard gathering with the family of the deceased and making food after the burial as coming under the same heading as

wailing (which is forbidden).” The gathering which involves both of these two things is that which is regarded as coming under the same heading as wailing.

Ash-Shawkaani said: That is, they used to regard gathering with the family of the deceased after the burial and eating food in their house as a type of wailing, because that was burdensome for them and preoccupied them despite what they were preoccupied with of the death of the deceased, and because it is contrary to the Sunnah; they are instructed to make food for the family of the deceased, but they went against it and burdened them with the obligation of making food for others.

End quote. Nayl al-Awtaar, 4/118

Shaykh Ibn Baaz said: What is meant is that gathering to read Qur’an and eat food has no basis; rather this is a kind of innovation. But if a person visits them to greet them, pray for them and offer condolences, and he recites in a gathering a brief recitation without any prior intention of doing so, because they have gathered, so he recites one or more verses for the benefit of all and to offer sincere advice to all, there is nothing wrong with that. But if the family of the deceased bring people together or they bring together a certain group to recite Qur’an, or they give them food or money (in return for doing so), this is an innovation for which there is no basis.

End quote. Fataawa Noor ‘ala ad-Darb, 14/202

With regard to the view that gathering to offer condolences was not done by the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) and his Companions, therefore it is an innovation, the response to that is that gathering to offer condolences comes under the heading of traditions or customs, and not acts of worship, and the issue of innovation is not applicable with regard to traditions or customs; rather the basic principle with regard to traditions or customs is that they are permissible.

Moreover, offering condolences is something that is prescribed in sharee’ah, and there is no means of achieving that nowadays except by receiving people who come to offer

condolences, or sitting to receive condolences, so this is something that helps to fulfil the Sunnah.

Shaykh Ibn Baaz was asked about receiving people who come to offer condolences, or sitting to receive condolences. He said: I do not see anything wrong with the one who has suffered the calamity of the death of a relative or wife and the like receiving people in his house who have come to offer condolences at an appropriate time, because offering condolences is Sunnah, and receiving those who have come to offer condolences is something that helps them to fulfil the Sunnah. And if they honour them by offering coffee or tea or perfume, all of that is fine.

End quote. Majmoo' Fataawa wa Maqaalaat Mutanawwi'ah, 13/373

Shaykh Saalih Aal ash-Shaykh said:

What we see of our scholars in this land and other lands, even the scholars, is that they sit (to receive condolences), because this interest could not be achieved otherwise, and if that is not done, then the Sunnah of offering condolences cannot be done either.

End quote from the shaykh's website (in Arabic): <http://saleh.af.org.sa/node/42>

Even according to the view that it is makrooh, it is no longer makrooh in the case of need, as is well known to the scholars. Undoubtedly sitting to receive condolences is needed more nowadays because it makes it easier for people who want to offer condolences.

The children and relatives of the deceased may live in different places or in locations that are far away from one another in the same city, which makes it difficult for those who want to offer condolences to travel between them.

This reason was mentioned by Shaykh 'Abd al-'Azeez ibn Baaz when he was asked about the ruling on sitting to receive condolences. He replied: If they sit for people to offer them condolences, there is nothing wrong with that, in sha Allah, so that they will not make things difficult for people, but that should be without making food for the people.

End quote. Majmoo' al-Fataawa, 13/382

Shaykh Muhammad al-Mukhtaar ash-Shanqeeti said: The salaf (early generations) disallowed that, and Imam Maalik (may Allah have mercy on him) was very strict on this matter and disallowed it. That was the way of the salaf, but later scholars and fuqaha' issued fatwas stating that there is nothing wrong with it in these later times.

The reason for that is that in earlier times people were few and it was possible to see the family of the deceased in the mosque, or on the road or at the well, and offer condolences to them, and the matter was easy. In fact you could say that if a person died, all the people of the village would know and would attend his burial, and offering condolences was easy.

But nowadays many people live in big cities and it is difficult to go to each relative in his own house; this causes such difficulty the extent of which only Allah knows, and the matter is burdensome. Hence if they gather in the house of one of the relatives, that is easier for the people and easier for them, and it is more effective in achieving the purpose of offering condolences to all and consoling them all. Hence they issued fatwas stating that in this case there is nothing wrong with them sitting (to receive condolences) and this is not regarded as coming under the heading of wailing (which is forbidden); rather it is prescribed because there is a need for it.

End quote from Silsilat Duroos Sharh az-Zaad (86/16).

Many of the scholars only denounced such gatherings because of what usually happens in them of innovations and objectionable matters. But if the gathering is free of that, then there is nothing wrong with it.

Shams ad-Deen al-Minbiji al-Hanbali said: If the gathering includes exhortation to the bereaved to be patient and accept the divine decree, and this social gathering brings consolation and comfort by reminding one another of verses and hadeeths that speak of patience and acceptance, there is nothing wrong with gathering in this manner. Offering condolences is a Sunnah of the Messenger of Allah (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him). But it should be done in a manner other than it is done nowadays, when people sit in

the well-known manner to read Qur'an, sometimes at the grave in most cases, and sometimes in the house of the deceased or in large gathering places. This is an innovation that was disliked by the salaf.

End quote. Tasliyat Ahl al-Masaa'ib, p. 121

Conclusion:

The issue of gatherings (to offer condolences) that are free of objectionable actions and provocation of grief is a matter concerning which there is a difference of opinion, and the matter is broad in scope; however in cases where there are objectionable actions and innovations, then it is not allowed.

But if it is free of such things, then the evidence quoted in support of the second opinion, which is the opinion that it is permissible, is more sound in terms of isnaads, and clearer in terms of evidence. As for the evidence for disallowing it, it is da'eef (weak) reports in which nothing is clearly attributed to the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him). Moreover, the evidence is open to interpretation, as it seems that the prohibition is not on gatherings for receiving condolences, rather it is on burdening the family of the deceased by expecting them to make food for people when they are preoccupied with the calamity that has befallen them.

Moreover, it is quite obvious that the view that it is permissible is closer to making things easier for people, especially as times have changed and people are very busy, which has required them to adopt some customs that help them to organise their affairs, including gatherings in which the family of the deceased may receive condolences from people when the calamity is still fresh, so that those who wish to offer condolences do not have to look for the family of the deceased one by one in their workplaces or mosques or even in their houses, and they do not have to leave their work for several days on end in order to achieve that, when people live further apart and circumstances and times have changed.

If saying that it is permissible did no more than relieve people of some hardship, that would be sufficient to regard it as more correct, so how about when it is supported by clear, sound

evidence?

And Allah knows best.