

# Islamic Evidences Relating to the Destruction of Idols

We need look no further than the Quran and the Sunnah of the Prophet Muhammad (SAWS) for evidences which serve as clear proof, not for the mere permissibility of destroying idols, but also for the obligation thereof.

Nevertheless, this section will provide such proof from the Quran and Sunnah as well as from the actions of the companions, the Salaf and the teachings of the prominent scholars of the past (May Allah be Pleased with them).

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Quranic Evidence

Idol-worship is severely rebuked in the Quran. This formed the basis of the message of all the Prophets from Nuh (AS) to Muhammad (SAWS), because idol worship only started during the time of Nuh (AS).

Allah mentions in the Quran, "So shun the abomination of idols, and shun the word that is false." [Quran 22: 30].

The Quran relates how Ibrahim (AS) waged war against the idols, which were worshipped in his time. Ibrahim (AS) called his people in Mesopotamia to worship Allah alone and to stop worshipping the idols, which could neither bring them benefit nor cause harm to them.

He wanted to free his people from idol-worship and rid them of myths and legends. He asked his people about these idols, as Allah tells us (interpretation of the meaning):

"And recite to them the story of Ibrahim (Abraham). When he said to his father and his people: 'What do you worship?' They said: 'We worship idols, and to them we are ever devoted.' He said: 'Do they hear you, when you call on (them)? Or do they benefit you or do they harm (you)?' They said: '(Nay) but we found our fathers doing so'" [Quran 26: 69-74].

The part of the story which is directly relevant in the context of this discussion is the determination of Ibrahim (AS) to destroy these idols, as is related in the Quran:

"And by Allah, I will certainly plan against your idols - after you go away and turn your backs" Quran 22: 57]

And then he broke the idols:

"Then he cast a glance at the stars, And he said: 'Verily, I am sick (with plague). [He did this trick to remain in their temple of idols to destroy them and not to accompany them to the pagan feast]'. So they turned away from him, and departed (for fear of the disease). Then he turned to theiraalihah (gods) and said: 'Will you not eat (of the offering before you)? What is the matter with you that you speak not?' Then he turned upon them, striking (them) with (his) right hand" [Quran 37: 93]

Ibrahim (AS) broke all the idols except the biggest one, which he left so that his people could ask it who had destroyed the others (they would then realise how foolish they had been, when they would see that it obviously couldn't speak let alone answer them):

So he broke them to pieces, (all) except the biggest of them, that they might turn to it" [Quran 21: 58].

Just as Allah commanded Ibrahim (AS) to destroy the idols, He also commanded the Prophet Muhammad (SAWS) to do the same, as we shall see from the Ahadith that follow.

#### Evidence from the Sunnah

Years after the demise of Ibrahim (AS), the Arabs had again begun to pollute the teachings of their forefather with the worship of idols. Encouraged by a man called Amr bin Luhay, they filled the Kabah and its surroundings with various idols. When Allah sent the Prophet Muhammad (SAWS) to mankind, part of his mission was to destroy these idols, as is clearly indicated by the following hadith:

Amr bin Abasa Sulami reported: "I, in the state of the Ignorance (before embracing Islam) used to think that the people were in error and they were not on anything (which may be called the right path) and worshipped the idols. In the meanwhile I heard of a man in Makkah who was giving news (on the basis of his prophetic knowledge) so I sat on my ride and went to him. The Messenger of Allah (SAWS) was at that time hiding as his people had made life hard for him. I adopted a friendly attitude (towards the Makkans and thus managed) to enter Makkah and go to him (the Holy Prophet) and I said to him: 'Who are you?' He said: 'I am a Prophet (of Allah).' I again said: 'Who is a Prophet?' He said: '(I am a Prophet in the sense that) I have been sent by Allah.' I said: 'What is that which you have been sent with?' He said: 'I have been sent to join ties of relationship (with kindness and affection), to break the idols, and to proclaim the oneness of Allah (in a manner that) nothing is to be associated with Him.'" [Bukhari: Book 04, Number 1812]

This hadith makes it clear that breaking idols has been issued as a separate statement from proclaiming the worship of Allah alone. So the message that the Prophet (SAWS) was sent with was not just to worship Allah alone, but also to break all idols, which he (SAWS) did.

Islam does not just prevent an evil, but all paths that may lead to evil. So in this case, the evil would be the worship of idols instead of Allah. The path to this evil would be the presence of idols.

Also, in a hadith related by Ahmad, the Prophet (SAWS) said, "Verily, Allah sent me as a mercy to mankind and my Lord commanded me to smash the idols."

In his chapter on the removal of idols from the vicinity of Makkah, Imam Bukhari relates the following Hadith:

Narrated Abdullah bin Masud: "Allah's Apostle entered Makkah (in the year of the Conquest) and there were three-hundred and sixty idols around the Ka'ba. He then started hitting them with a stick in his hand and say: 'Truth (i.e. Islam) has come and falsehood (disbelief) vanished. Truly falsehood (disbelief) is ever bound to vanish.' [Quran 17: 81] 'Truth has come and falsehood (Iblis) cannot create anything.' [Quran 34: 49]" [Volume 6: Book 60, Number 244:]

Muslim relates a similar Hadith:

It has been narrated by Ibn Abdullah who said: "The Holy Prophet (SAWS) entered Makkah. There were three hundred and sixty idols around the Ka'ba. He began to thrust them with the stick that was in his hand saying: "Truth has come and falsehood has vanished. Lo! Falsehood was destined to vanish" [Quran 17: 81]. Truth has arrived, and falsehood can neither create anything from the beginning nor can it restore to life." [Book 19, Number 4397]

Why would the Prophet (SAWS) destroy these idols? After all, they were not going to be worshipped anymore, since the Muslims had authority in the land, and most of the Makkans had embraced Islam. Even if they had not, no one would dare to go and worship these idols if the Muslims were in command. Why did the Prophet (SAWS) not preserve these idols as 'cultural heritage'? The answer to this is the clear Hadith in which the Prophet (SAWS) stated that part of his message was to destroy the idols.

Sceptics may now say that since this was a special case, and owing to the sanctity of the holy city of Makkah, no idols should be present there.

Wrong, because it is well known that the Prophet (SAWS) sent Khalid bin Al-Waleed to destroy the idol Uzza in Nakhlan, which was close to Makkah, and Khalid not only had to destroy the idol itself, but also the jinn who was related to the idol.

The smashing of idols was not just confined to Makkah and its surroundings, but to wherever the Prophet (SAWS) knew of the presence of idols.

So he sent Amr bin Al-Aas to destroy the idol Suwa' and Sad bin Zaid Al-Ashhali was then sent to Al-Mashallai to destroy the idol, Manat. The Prophet (SAWS) even sent Jarir all the way to Yemen to destroy a house in which idols were worshipped, as related in the Hadith by Bukhari (Volume 5: Book 59, Number 643) - he blessed Jarir and his army five times after they had done the job - which clearly indicates the nobility of this action.

Actions of the companions and the salaf

Further examples of the destruction of all idols can be found in the actions of the Companions and the Salafus-Saliheen (Pious Predecessors):

Abul-Hiyaaj Al-Asadi said: "Ali bin Abi Taalib said to me: 'Shall I not send you on the same basis as the Messenger of Allah (SAWS) sent me? Do not leave any statue without destroying it, and do not leave any built-up grave without razing it to the ground. (According to one report: 'and do not leave any picture without erasing it')." (narrated by Muslim, 969). This clearly demonstrates that destroying idols is NOT un-Islamic because the Prophet (SAWS) himself ordered it.

When Persia was conquered, the Companions came across a large number of Persian books on the history and knowledge of Persia. The Companions wrote to the Caliph, Umar bin Al-Khattab, asking him what to do with the books.

Umar replied by saying that if there was any good in the books, then they already had the good of the Quran. And if there was any evil in the books, then Allah would protect them from the evil. He then ordered the books to be burned or thrown in the river.

Umar even had the tree at Ridwan (under which the Companions made the pledge to the Prophet (SAWS)) chopped down because some people had started to pray their Salaah there, due to the value they attached to the place. Umar had it removed, because he knew that a time might come when people would start worshipping the tree, as has been the case throughout history (and as was obviously the case with Buddhism).

When Qutaibah bin Saeed conquered Samarqand, the people in the city told him of the presence of an idol, upon which was a curse - anyone who wanted to destroy the idol would himself be destroyed. Qutaibah asked to be shown this idol; he then walked towards it shouting the takbeer and destroyed it himself.

Ibn Kathir in his book Al-Bidayah wan-Nihayah relates that Mahmoud bin Subikteen Al-Ghazni, a great Mujahid of the 6th century, destroyed an idol called Al-Bud (the Buddha) who was worshipped in one of the cities.

When Salahuddin Al-Ayubi conquered Jerusalem, Richard the Lion-Heart, as he was called, asked him to return to the Christians the True Cross, which was in the city at that time. Salahuddin replied that there was great reward in breaking in the cross, and that this constituted an act of great piety, which Muslims should not abandon unless there was greater benefit in not destroying.

#### Sayings of the Scholars and actions of the Salaf

The following are some of the sayings of the scholars of the past, and present:

Ibn al-Qayyim said: "Tamaatheel is the plural of Timthaal (statue), which refers to a representative image."

Sheikh-ul-Islam (Ibn Taymiyyah) said: "The command is to destroy two types of images: images which represent the deceased person, and images which are placed on top of graves - because Shirk may come about from both types." (Majmoo' Al-Fatawa, 17/462). (Al-Fawaaid, p 196).

Ibn Abbas said: "The idols of the people of Nuh were known among the Arabs later on. Wadd belonged to (the tribe of) Kalb in Dawmat Al-Jandal. Suwa' belonged to Hudhayl. Yaghooth belonged to Muraad, then to Bani Ghutayf in Al-Jawf, near Sabaa'. Ya'ooq belonged to Hamadaan. Nasar belonged to Humayr of Ale Dhill-Kalaa'. These were names of righteous men from the people of Nuh. When they died, the Shaytaan inspired their people to set up idols in the places where they had used to sit, and to call those idols by their names. They did that but they did not worship them, but after those people died and knowledge had been forgotten, then they started to worship them." (Bukhari: 4636).

Sheikh-ul-Islam Ibn Taymiyyah said: "The reason why Al-Lat was worshipped was the veneration of the grave of a righteous man which was there." (Iqtidaa' As-Siraat Al-Mustaqeem, 2/333).

And he said: "This problem - i.e., veneration - which is why Islam forbids (images), is the reason why so many nations have fallen into committing Shirk to a greater or lesser degree." (Al-Iqtidaa', 2/334).

Ibn Al-Qayyim also said: "It is not allowed to leave places of Shirk and tawagheet (false gods) even for one day after having the ability to destroy them. These are signs of Kufr and Shirk, and this is the peak of evil. So it is never allowed to acknowledge them if you have the power. And this is the ruling for the tombstone which is on the grave which is taken as taghoot, worshipped besides Allah. And it is also the ruling for stones which people go to, to seek barakaah, kissing them and making offerings to them. It is not allowed to leave anything of them on the earth when you have the ability to remove them. A lot of these are at the same level as Lat, Uzza, Manat or are even considered more than these to those people who worship them. Wallahu musta'an." (Source: Zad Al-Maad 3/506)

Sheikh Ibn Baaz ordered the destruction of some idols found recently in Saudi Arabia. The Grand Mufti of Pakistan (Rafi Usmani) also questioned the right of the world leaders to criticize Taleban. "The people who nuked Hiroshima and Nagasaki, who killed hundreds of thousands of people in Iraq, and are killing people in Afghanistan through the recently imposed sanctions, how strange that they should be raising their voice in support of stone statues?"

Allah says in the Quran, "And say Truth has now arrived and falsehood perished: for falsehood by its nature is bound to perish." [Quran 17: 81]. This verse was recited by the Prophet (SAWS) whilst he was smashing the idols in Makkah. Commentating on this verse, Mufti Muhammad Shafi, the late Grand Mufti of Pakistan, writes, "According to Imam Qurtubi, this verse shows that to destroy the idols and other icons of paganism is Waajib (mandatory). Ibn Munzir said that pictures and statues made of wood or metal, etc. are also to be treated as idols." (Ma'ariful Quran: vol. 5, p 509).