

82357 - Ruling on eulogizing the dead

the question

What is the ruling on eulogizing the dead and holding parties and gatherings for that purpose?.

Detailed answer

Eulogizing (ritha') means weeping and mourning for the deceased after his death and praising him, or poetry composed for that purpose.

See: Lisaan al-'Arab (14/309).

It also means expressing anguish when calamity comes. For example, in the hadeeth of Sa'd ibn Abi Waqqaas (may Allaah be pleased with him), it is narrated that the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) said: "But poor Sa'd ibn Khawlah (died in Makkah)"; the Messenger of Allaah (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) was expressing his regret (yarthi) that Sa'd had died in Makkah. Narrated by al-Bukhaari (1296). Al-Haafiz said in al-Fath that the phrase "the Messenger of Allaah (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) was expressing his regret (yarthi) that Sa'd had died in Makkah" was the words of al-Zuhri.

See: al-Faa'iq (2/36).

There are two scholarly views about eulogizing the dead.

1 – That there is nothing wrong with eulogies. This is the view of the Hanafis and Shaafa'is.

See: Haashiyat Ibn 'Aabideen (2/239); Nihaayat al-Muhtaaj (3/17).

They quoted as evidence the fact that many of the Sahaabah (may Allaah be pleased with them) did that, as did many of the scholars.

See: Sharh al-Minhaaj li'l-Jaml (2/215).

2 – That eulogies are makrooh. This is the view of the Shaafa'is.

See: Nihaayat al-Muhtaaj (3/17).

They quoted as evidence the fact that the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) forbade eulogies. It was narrated that ‘Abd-Allaah ibn Abi Awfa (may Allaah be pleased with him) said: The Messenger of Allaah (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) forbade eulogies. Narrated by Imam Ahmad (18659) and Ibn Maajah (1592).

The narrator of this hadeeth is Ibraaheem al-Hijri who narrated it from ‘Abd-Allaah. Al-Busayri said on him in Misbaah al-Zajaajah: He is da’eef jiddan (very weak). He was classed as da’eef by Sufyaan ibn ‘Uyaynah, Yahya ibn Ma’een, al-Nasaa’i and others. Al-Bukhaari said of him: he is munkar al-hadeeth, i.e., his hadeeth is to be rejected. Hence al-Albaani classed him as da’eef in Da’eef Ibn Maajah.

It says in al-Mawsoo’ah al-Fiqhiyyah (22/98):

It says in al-Durr al-Mukhtaar, which is a Hanafi book, that there is nothing wrong with eulogizing the deceased in verse or otherwise, but it is makrooh to go to extremes in praising him, especially at his funeral. Al-Nawawi said in al-Majmoo’, quoting from the author of al-Tatimmah that it is makrooh to eulogize the deceased by mentioning his forefathers, his attributes and his deeds, and it is better to pray for forgiveness for him. The Hanbalis said that that which stirs up the feelings of loss, whether it comes in the form of exhortation or reciting poetry is a form of niyaahah (wailing for the deceased), i.e. it is forbidden. This was stated by Shaykh Taqiy al-Deen. End quote.

In al-Furooq (2/174), al-Qaraafi divided eulogizing into four categories, and said:

It is not just the matter of allowing eulogies and not regarding as faasiqs (evildoers) the poets who eulogize deceased kings and prominent figures in all cases, even though that view is well known among the people. In fact eulogizing falls into four categories, haraam and a major sin, haraam and a minor sin, permissible, and recommended.

The guideline on that which is haraam and a major sin is any words which make people feel that Allaah, may He be exalted, has been unfair in His decree or that expresses discontent with His

will, and suggests that the death of this deceased was not a good thing, rather it was a great evil. Making the listeners believe that is haraam and a major sin, whether it is done in prose or poetry, such as if the poet says in his eulogy:

“There has died one among whose troops was death, one before whom the divine decree felt scared”

This line of verse includes a rejection of the divine decree in the words “one among whose troops was death”, which is a veneration of this person who has died. One such as this deceased person should not have resigned from the position of caliph; how could there ever be such a person again in the future? Similarly, the words “one before whom the divine decree felt scared” suggest that Allaah, may He be exalted, was afraid of him. If this is not blatant kufr then it seems from these words to be very close to it. Hence when Shaykh ‘Izz al-Deen ibn ‘Abd al-Salaam was in the gathering in which the sultaan assembled the prominent, Qur’aan readers and poets to mourn the caliph in Baghdad, and one of the poets recited the line, “There has died one among whose troops was death, one before whom the divine decree felt scared”, when the Shaykh heard that, he ordered that he be disciplined and imprisoned, and he denounced that in the strongest terms and criticized his eulogy. After his ta’zeer punishment he remained in prison for a long time, then he asked him to repent after the governors and leaders interceded for him. He told him to compose a qaseedah praising Allaah, as expiation for what his poem had said about condemning the divine decree and suggesting that Allaah, may He be exalted, was afraid of the deceased. The poets often tried to indulge in such critical issues so as to attract attention by coming up with unique ideas.

This type is the worst type of eulogy.

The guideline on that which is haraam and a minor sin is any prose or poetry that does not go as far as the type mentioned in the first category, but it deprives the family of the deceased of consolation and stirs up their grief to such an extent that they torment themselves and have little patience, and it may lead them to despair, rending their garments and striking their cheeks. This is haraam and is a minor sin.

The guideline on that kind of eulogy which is permissible is words that do not include any of the things mentioned in the two previous categories, rather it mentions the religious commitment of the deceased, and states that he has gone on to the reward for his good deeds and will be in the company of the people who are blessed; that there has come to him that which is decreed for all people; this is inevitable and it is something that all creatures have in common, a door which they will inevitably enter. This is permissible and is not forbidden.

The guideline on the kind of eulogy that is recommended is everything that falls into the permissible category and will increase the family of the deceased in patience and encourage them to seek reward, and remind them to seek reward for their loss for the sake of Allaah and rely on Allaah's care, etc. This is recommended and enjoined.

An example of this is what was narrated from al-'Abbaas ibn 'Abd al-Muttalib (may Allaah be pleased with him), when he died and his son 'Abd-Allaah found it too difficult to bear. A Bedouin came from the desert and asked after 'Abd-Allaah ibn 'Abbaas. When he entered upon him he said:

“Be patient, we are being patient for your sake, for the people will be patient when their leader is patient.

The reward that comes after is better than al-'Abbaas and Allaah is better for al-'Abbaas than you.”

When 'Abd-Allaah ibn al-'Abbaas heard this eulogy and understood his poetry, he felt relieved.

These words were the best kind of eulogy, that lessened the impact of the calamity, took away grief, and expressed a positive attitude towards the divine decree, praising the Lord in the best of ways. This is a good thing.

Based on the four categories described above, we may categorize eulogies accordingly. And Allaah knows best. End quote.

It says in Tuhfat al-Ahwadhi:

If it is said that the Messenger of Allaah (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) forbade eulogizing as was narrated by Ahmad and Ibn Maajah, and classed as saheeh by al-Haakim, if he forbade it than how could he have done it? i.e., in the hadeeth of Sa'd ibn Abi Waqqaas (may Allaah be pleased with him) quoted above.

The answer is that the kind of eulogizing that is forbidden is that which praises the deceased and mentions his good qualities, so as to stir up grief and renew the sorrow, or which is done in gatherings convened for that purpose, or when the eulogy is limited to that without mentioning anything else. What is meant in this hadeeth is the Prophet's expression of sorrow for Sa'd because he died in Makkah after having migrated from it, not praising the deceased and stirring up grief. This was stated by al-Qastallaani. End quote.

See: Fath al-Baari (3/164-165)

Shaykh Ibn Baaz was asked: Do the qaseedahs which eulogize the dead come under the heading of death announcements that are forbidden?

He replied: The qaseedahs that eulogize the dead do not come under the heading of death announcements that are forbidden, but it is not permissible for anyone to go to extremes in speaking of anyone or describe him in false terms, as is the habit of many poets. End quote.

Majmoo' Fataawa Ibn Baaz.

Based on this, holding gatherings to eulogize the deceased is forbidden, especially if that is accompanied by stirring up grief or expressing discontent with the divine decree, or describing the deceased in false terms that were not true, and other haraam things.

As for simply listing the good qualities of the deceased and expressing one's sorrow at his passing, there is nothing wrong with that so long as it is free of the haraam things mentioned above, etc.