



Muḥarram and 'Āshūrā'

What is the significance of Muḥarram and 'Āshūrā'? Also should we not treat this as a sad day and therefore lament and mourn the loss of the grandson of the Prophet?

Fatwa No: 1441/1

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

هُوَ الْمَوْفِقُ

حَامِدًا وَمُصَلِّيًا وَمُسْلِمًا

الجواب ومنه الصواب

In response I will put forward a translation of a piece from the book, *Latā'if al-Ma'ārif fi mā li'l-Mawāsīm al-'Āmm min al-Wazā'if* written by Ḥāfiẓ 'Abdurraḥmān ibn Aḥmad ibn Rajab – more famously known as Ibn Rajab al-Hanbalī.

Abu Hurayra narrates that Messenger of Allah ﷺ said, “The most superior fasting after the month of Ramaḍān is in the month of Allah, which you refer to as Muḥarram.” (Transmitted by Muslim)

The Prophet ﷺ would fast on the Day of 'Āshūrā' (10th Muḥarram) – (Transmitted by Muslim, ḥadīth no. 1134 and Ibn Māja ḥadīth no. 1744). In his last year alive he said, “If I am alive next year I will fast on the ninth.” (Transmitted by Ibn Māja, p. 1744)

A ḥadīth states that those Angels who take the book of deeds to Allah and He sees good in the beginning [of the year – Muḥarram] and in the end [of the year – Dhū al-Ḥijja] He then says to the Angels, “I make you witnesses to the fact that I have forgiven My servant for the intervening periods.” (Transmitted by Tirmidhī p. 981 and Bayhaqī in *al-Shu'ab* p. 7053)

Therefore, if one's deeds are good in Muḥarram and in Dhū al-Ḥijja then there is an opportunity for his sins to be forgiven which he gathers throughout the year. This should give a person the initiative to have a strong start to the year.

Ibn 'Abbās was asked about fasting on the Day of 'Āshūrā', he replied, ‘I did not see the Messenger of Allah seeking the merits of days except for this day, (i.e. the day of 'Āshūrā') and this month, (i.e. Ramaḍān). (Transmitted by al-Bukhari p. 26 and Muslim p. 1132)

Abu Hurayra narrates that the Messenger of Allah ﷺ passed by some Jews who were fasting on the day of 'Āshūrā' and asked, ‘What is the reason for fasting on this day?’ They replied, ‘This is the day on which Allah saved Mūsā and the Children of Isrā'īl from drowning. This is the day on which He drowned Pharaoh. This is the day on which the ship (of Nūḥ) anchored on Mount Jūdī. So Nūḥ and Mūsā (upon them be peace) kept fast on this day in gratitude to Allah.’ (Transmitted by Aḥmad in *al-Musnad* Vol. 2 pp. 359/360)



Abu Qatāda narrates that a person asked the Messenger of Allah ﷺ regarding fasting on the day of 'Āshūrā', so he replied, 'I have this expectation from Allah that it will atone for the sins of the past year.' (Transmitted by Muslim, p. 1162)

Imām al-Shāfi'ī and Imām Aḥmad are of the opinion that fasting should be observed on the 9th and 10th of Muḥarram and Imām Abū Ḥanīfa disliked, i.e. regarded as makrūh, to fast on the tenth alone.

In summary, one should utilise this month to 'set their stall out' for the year. It is an opportunity to atone for the sins of the past year. It is also an act of worship which was practiced by other Prophets as well as Prophet Muhammad. We sometimes wish each other a 'Happy New Year', however as we have seen that is not the approach neither the Prophet nor his Companions adopted. Rather they took it as an opportunity to draw closer to Allah the Almighty.

As for the second part of your question then according to Muslim tradition after ḥijra when the Prophet ﷺ arrived in Madīna he found the local Jewish community fasting on this day – both traditions follow the lunar calendar – he asked the Jews as to their reason why, and they informed him that this was a practice of Prophet Moses/Mūsā ﷺ; who fasted on this day as expressing gratitude to Allah for freeing the Children of Isrā'īl from Pharaoh. This practice then was initiated by Prophet Muhammad ﷺ amongst the Muslims who followed the practice of Prophet Mūsā ﷺ. This is an interesting point as Islam is not just based on the practices of Prophet Muḥammad but also the practices of prophets who came before when they were incorporated in Islam. Other examples are the practice of Prophet Ibrāhīm ﷺ during Ḥajj and 'Īd al-Aḍḥā. However, the Prophet was keen to ensure there was no misunderstanding amongst the other citizens of Madīna or elsewhere. Islam shares a number of practices with Judaism and some had suggested that Islam was a sect of Judaism; a similar view is espoused about Christianity. Islam has to be distinct with its own practices and rituals even though it will share broader concepts with other faiths. Hence the Prophet instructed to add a day before so Islam would be viewed as an independent religion. However, that is when the practice of fasting amongst the Jews and Muslims is on the same day and widespread in the communities they live in. As that is not the case within many of our communities – it would suffice to fast on the 10th but praiseworthy to fast on as many days of Muharram as possible. Having said that one needs to remain aware of the Jewish calendar in order to avoid the possibility.

The 10th of Muharram took extra significance on 61AH (circa 680CE) when Sayyidunā Ḥusayn ibn 'Alī, the grandson of the Prophet was martyred in Karbala. The significance of this event cannot be underestimated. The loss of such an individual cannot be glossed over without stating his rank and status. To stand against aggression, oppression and tyranny; to stand for



justice, fairness and freedom are values which all right-minded communities stand and fall for – Sayyidunā Ḥusayn gave up everything, including his life, to fight for these values. This has always been the practice of Muslims who truly live up to the values of Islam – now and then.

Having said that Islam has never been a religion of individuals' statuses and efforts but of values and practices – it is for this reason Islam is not named Mohammadism, as some have incorrectly suggested.

We should not forget our leader Ḥusayn, his brother Ḥasan, his father 'Alī ibn Ṭālib nor his grandfather Prophet Muḥammad ﷺ; we should include other martyrs like our leader 'Umar and Uthman and Hamza and the many others, may Allah be pleased with them all, who stood against tyranny and oppression similarly. Furthermore, it is beneficial, and more relevant, correct to remember and practice what they stood for and eventually died for – this is what they would want and more relevantly what Allah would want.

والله أعلم وعلمه أتم

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