

Imam Husayn (A) and Karbala

In the Holy Qur'an, Allah states,

'For every nation We had appointed a rite [of worship] which they used to observe ...' (22:67)¹

Some of these acts of devotion and worship observed by Muslims are shared with people of other revealed religions whilst some devotional rites are unique to Islam.

Fasting, for example, is a religious practice in Islam that is also observed by followers of other religions. Allah states,

'O you who have faith! Prescribed for you is fasting as it was prescribed for those before you...' (2: 183)

However, the *hajj* pilgrimage and its particular rites are specifically prescribed for Muslims, to which Allah refers when He states,

'Indeed Safa and Marwah are amongst Allah's sacraments ...' (2: 158)

The question that arises is that if Allah calls for devotion towards two mountains (Safa and Marwah) which are amongst the 'sacraments' of His religion, what level of devotion should Muslims express toward Imam Husayn (A) who actually saved and reformed His religion?

Due to Imam Husayn's steadfast servitude to Allah and martyrdom on the plains of Karbala, Prophet Muhammad (S) has honoured him by stating, 'Husayn is the lamp of guidance and the ark of salvation.' Moreover, Imam al-Sadiq (A) states, 'Indeed if one of you goes for *hajj* a thousand times but does not visit the grave of Husayn ibn Ali, he has neglected one of his obligations towards Allah, the Exalted.'²

The event of Karbala is considered to be 'the university of Islam', meaning that the entire movement of Imam Husayn (A), from the dispatch of his ambassador Muslim ibn Aqil to Kufa, until the arrival of the captive family back to the city of Medina, is inclusive of every facet of Islam. It is a testimony to all

matters of justice and freedom and is the ultimate template for revolution for any soul and the ultimate inspiration for reform for any community; it is for this reason, Imam Hasan (A) told his brother, ‘There is no day like your day, O Aba Abdillah.’³

Story 1

Ayatullah Shaykh Muhammad Jawad Mughniya wrote in the month of Ramadhan. 1387 AH:

‘I was in Bahrain to give sermons on the pulpit every night in the Husayniyyah Aal al-Uraydh. I would lecture on the topic which I thought would be understood and accepted by modern intellectuals and all others in the same way. I used to focus on achieving this goal each time I lectured and my success in doing so must be decided by the audience in Bahrain.

‘On one of these nights, I ascended the pulpit and just before I started speaking, I heard a person call out, “Peace be upon you, O Husayn, and curse be upon those who killed you!’ However, since the topic I had prepared was not connected with Imam Husayn (A) or Yazid in any way, I was taken aback and so I forgot about the topic I intended to discuss and spontaneously started the speech by explaining the meaning of ‘Husayn’ and the meaning of ‘Yazid’ and the significance of these terms to the followers of the Ahlul Bayt⁴. I said:

“The development of a thing is not contained by the boundaries of a matter but it may encompass many other matters due to their interconnectedness. In the beginning, the word ‘Husayn’ was the name of the personality of Husayn, son of Ali. However, for the Shi’a, the term developed over time to symbolise bravery and great struggle for the sake of liberating humanity from oppression. And ‘Husayn’ now refers to the defence and struggle by men, women and children to revive the religion of Prophet Muhammad (S). This is clearly evidenced by the statement of Imam Husayn (A) himself at the point of martyrdom, when he said, ‘I am following the religion of the Prophet.’⁵

“As for the word ‘Yazid’, it was the name of the son of Mu’awiyah but now, for the Shi’a, it serves as the symbol of corruption and oppression. ‘Yazid’ represents exiting the boundaries of morality and religion and entering the fold of heresy and paganism, the root of evil and corruption. Whenever there is goodness, truth and justice, it is connected to the name, ‘Husayn’. Today, occupied Palestine, the Sinai desert and the Golan Heights symbolise Karbala for the Shi’a. As for the captured women and children of Imam Husayn (A), their example parallels the women and children expelled out of their homes in these places. And the martyrs who die fighting injustice in these lands are referred to by the poet who states, ‘It is as if Karbala is every place to me. My eye and every time is the day of Ashura.’⁶

‘As soon as I came down from the pulpit, one young man welcomed me very happily, saying, “This is the reality and this is how Islamic history and the events of Karbala need to be understood.” When they introduced him to me I realised he was a Sunni and working as a high-ranking government official.’

Story 2

Sayyid Mustafa al-Modarressi narrates:

‘My brothers, Sayyid Muhammad Kadhim and Sayyid Mahdi, were in Australia and walking together. My brother, Sayyid Muhammad Kadhim, had recently suffered from ill health and as they were walking, his health condition resurfaced and all of a sudden he collapsed, literally, in the middle of the street.

‘They rushed to the hospital and Sayyid Mahdi called our father, Ayatullah Sayyid Hadi al-Modarressi to inform him of the situation. Sayyid Mahdi told his father that Sayyid Muhammad Kadhim was experiencing a violent seizure and his health had deteriorated so badly there was a grave risk that he may not survive. Calmly, my father told him, “Place some *khak al-shifa*⁷ on his tongue and he will be aided through the intercession of Imam Husayn (A), God-willing.”

Sayyid Mahdi continues the story:

‘It was not my practice to carry the *khak* of Karbala with me, but it so happened that on that day I had some *khak* with me! And it also happened that one of the staff attending to my brother in the hospital room was a Shi’a. So I asked if we could place some *khak* in his mouth. The nurse opened his mouth and was about to place it inside when the rest of the medical team objected and asked what she was doing. The nurse replied, “This is religious medicine. If he is going to die, it will ease his passing and if he is to survive, it will help him.”

‘Although I had not heard this explanation, I did not say anything. None of the staff continued with their objections and allowed the *khak* to be placed in my brother’s mouth. My brother had been violently shaking throughout this time and we had lost hope of him surviving. The nurse opened his mouth and placed the *khak* in his mouth and as soon as she did so, my brother’s body began to calm down and after a short time he had completely stabilised! Later, the doctors came to me and asked what exactly had been placed in his mouth because they had never seen a recovery like this before.

‘My father says, “God gave us Muhammad Kadhim twice. The first time when he was born and the second was when He literally brought him back from death. And it happened because of two things: supplication and the holy dust of Imam Husayn’s (A) tomb.”

Story 3

Sayyid Salih al-Modarressi narrates:

‘During the period of Saddam’s rule in Iraq, Ayatullah Sayyid Taqi al-Modarressi had published a book under a pseudonym because printing it under his own name at that time would have only increased the oppression and difficulties he would face at the hands of the rulers⁸.

‘One day, a student excitedly came to him with this book, saying, “Sayyid, have you read this book?” and began extolling its virtues and describing its outstanding content. Sayyid, still unable to openly ascribe the book’s authorship to himself, listened to the student’s praise of the book and made a few comments as normal. It was only after the removal of Saddam that Ayatullah al-Modarressi could ascribe the book’s authorship to himself.[9](#)

‘In reference to the excellent quality and far-reaching impact of the book, Ayatullah al-Modarressi received many questions regarding its authorship, to which he replied, “Before writing every single page of the book, I first recited a two unit prayer at the shrine of Imam Husayn (A) and then began writing that page. This book is entirely a product of the blessings of the Master of the Martyrs, Imam Husayn (A).”

‘Ayatullah Sayyid Taqi al-Modarressi has often been heard saying, “Just a glance from Imam Husayn (A) towards us is enough ...”

Story 4

Kawther al-Kufi recounts:

‘Aminah bint al-Huda used to encourage us to focus on working hard for the sake of Islam and the Muslims as the main target for our lives. Once, Bint al-Huda came to me and asked why I had stopped attending the mosque and attending the lessons with the Shaykh, further questioning me as to whether it was not my obligation to study Islam.

‘I hung my head in shame, saying, “You know the situation is difficult at the moment and I’m scared of being imprisoned. I worry that I may fall into the hands of Saddam’s men and they don’t respect the dignity of women when they imprison them.” Bint al-Huda was disappointed by my response and replied, “This is the wrong perspective. Our honour *is* Islam. So only when we protect Islam, do we protect our honour and dignity. Why did Sayyidah Zaynab not leave her struggle? In her, we have the best example![10](#)”

‘This statement had a great influence upon me. It motivated me to be more active and take more responsibilities, especially when I saw Bint al-Huda acting on her own statement when she accompanied her brother, bearing all the hardships of imprisonment, until she received the honour of martyrdom.’

Story 5

Sayyid Salih al-Modarressi relates:

Allamah al-Hilli was the most senior jurist of his time and presided in the city of Hilla in Iraq. He remains until today and will always remain, one of the giant scholars of our school of thought.

‘One day, the Allamah left his city to perform the *ziyarah* of Imam Husayn (A). He travelled by mule, which was the mode of transport of the time. When he returned, his son suddenly stopped praying behind him in the congregational prayers. The Allamah asked him, “Why are you no longer praying behind me?” to which his son replied, “In my eyes you are no longer just. You left leading the seminary, which is a necessity, for a visitation of Karbala which is a recommended action whilst your responsibilities lie here. You preferred a recommended action over a necessary action.’¹¹

‘The Allamah replied, “What you did not know was that I used my time during my travels whilst on the mule, to write the book, *Kitab Alfayn*, a book of two thousand evidences on the divinely appointed leadership of Imam Ali ibn Abi Talib (A).”¹²

‘After a period, Allamah Hilli died and appeared in the dream of his son. He told his son, “Had it not been for the visitation of Imam Husayn (A) and the book, *Kitab Alfayn*, a decree would have been given [by the Angels of punishment], to split your father’s back open!”¹³

Story 6

Sayyid Hossein al-Qazwini narrates about his father, Ayatullah Sayyid Murtadha al-Qazwini:¹⁴

‘My father had the honour of reciting the Muharram *majalis* (lectures) of Imam Husayn (A) every year; sometimes it would be in Iraq, sometimes in Kuwait and sometimes in other places.

‘However, one year, after my father migrated to the States, he was without an invite to recite anywhere. The month of Muharram approached and my father would sit in his house, depressed by the thought of not being able to serve Imam Husayn (A) as he had been doing each year; his heart was truly broken.

‘Literally, three days before the month of Muharram arrived, one Iraqi man came to him and said, “Sayyid, I hear that during this month of Muharram, you are not reciting anywhere. I have a place that I would like to offer you to recite *majalis* in, but it’s very run down and in a very bad state.” Of course, my father was delighted and he and the man went to view the building; it was an old bank, very dirty and in as poor a state as the man had warned.

‘My father immediately called several of his family members, colleagues and friends to inform them that he had found a place to recite and that he would need their help in tidying the place up and getting it ready. Of course, they all agreed, but for varying reasons, all were busy at that moment; some were at work and so they said they would come after 5 p.m., when the working day was finished.

‘Not wanting to lose any time, my father went to a local store and bought a broom; he removed his *amamah* [turban], his *aba* [cloak] and *jubba* [robes] and began sweeping the floor and moving things out of the dilapidated bank by himself and as he was doing so he recited the *maqta* of the Imam [narration of the events of the day of Ashura that led to the killing of Imam Husayn(A)] to himself.

‘After a few hours, when his friends arrived, they found him dusty and busy cleaning the room. They said, “Sayyid, you should not be doing this yourself; we were coming to help you.” My father replied, “I’ve had the honour of reciting *majalis* for Imam Husayn (A), making people cry for Imam Husayn (A), but today, praise be to Allah, I had the honour of becoming a janitor for Imam Husayn (A)!”

‘The next day, an Iranian man came to the bank and saw the progress; people were bringing carpets and wall coverings. He said to my father, “I do not see a pulpit here. I am a carpenter; would you like me to make one?” And so, with only a few hours to go before the first night of Muharram arrived, my father even had a pulpit for the delivery of his *majalis*. My father said that this Muharram was one of the best he had ever partaken in.’

Sayyid Mothafar al-Qazwini continues the story:

‘The day the statue of Saddam was pulled down, my grandfather [Ayatullah Sayyid Murtadha al-Qazwini] decided to leave America and return to Iraq. Aware of the tense situation there, we all advised him not to return, but his ticket was booked that very day. We cried at the thought of losing our grandfather.

‘As soon as he came to Karbala, his first action was to immediately head to the shrine. When he first saw it and after sending his salutations to the Imam, his first supplication was, “O Imam, all I want is to be able to serve you, every day of my life.”

‘As my grandfather entered the *haram* of the Imam, there was *latmiyyah*¹⁵ going on – I think it was Bassim al-Karbalai who was reciting – and as soon as he saw my grandfather enter, he halted his recitation, announced my grandfather’s arrival on the microphone and called for a Salawat.’

With tears in his eyes, Sayyid Mothafar concludes, ‘And immediately my grandfather ascended the pulpit and gave his first lecture in the *haram* of Imam Husayn (A) since his return.’

Story 7

One of the senior students of the great scholar, Ayatullah al-Udhma Sayyid Muhammad Baqir al-Isfahani (commonly known as al-Wahid al-Behbahani), narrates that he was sitting beside the great scholar in the courtyard of the shrine of Imam Husayn (A), when a strange visitor arrived, embraced the hand of Ayatullah al-Behbahani and unwrapped a bag full of gold and women’s jewellery, stating, ‘Spend these in any way you view to be good and useful.’

The scholar asked, ‘Where did you obtain these from and what’s the story behind this?’

The visitor replied, ‘My story is truly strange and if you permit, I can narrate it to you now.’ The scholar replied, ‘Please go on.’ The visitor then narrated:

'I am from the Iranian city of Saravan. I used to travel to Russian lands for business and trade and I managed to earn a great amount of wealth. Once, during my travels, my eyes fell upon a Russian lady and I wished to seek her hand in marriage. She replied, 'I am a Christian and you are a Muslim and only if you join my religion, shall I permit this marriage.' I was very bewildered and confused as to what step I should take. Whilst I was very heartbroken and hurt to be obliged to sacrifice my religion, eventually a Christian marriage ceremony took place between us. After a very short time, I truly regretted my decision. I was very disappointed in myself and I began to criticise my past decision, thinking, 'It is now difficult to return back to my home country and I actually do not believe in the Christian faith.'

'As I was in this sorrowful state, I remembered the tragedy of Imam Husayn (A) and I started to weep, shedding tears as I remembered the oppression against our master. Even though I did not know a great deal regarding Islam, I was aware that Imam Husayn (A) was oppressed whilst defending the true teachings of Islam and was brutally murdered. My Christian wife looked at me and she was shocked to see me in such a distraught state, enquiring as to the reason behind my many tears. I placed my trust in Allah and decided to tell her the truth. I admitted, 'Deep down, I am a Muslim and wish to remain a Muslim and these tears are in remembrance of the tragic martyrdom of Imam Husayn (A).' Upon hearing the name of Imam Husayn (A), and listening to the tragedy of the martyrdom of Imam Husayn (A), her heart was filled with love of the Ahlul Bayt and Islam. She immediately embraced Islam and joined me in shedding tears for Imam Husayn (A).

'One day, I told my wife, 'Without informing others, let us head towards Karbala and visit the holy shrine of Imam Husayn (A) and you can announce your reversion to Islam within the holy shrine.' She agreed with my suggestion and we started to arrange our necessary travel requirements. Then suddenly, my wife fell extremely ill and sadly passed away and her family buried her along with all her gold and jewellery in the Russian Christian cemeteries.

'Her departure from this world was extremely painful for me and I decided to have her reburied in a Muslim graveyard. In the middle of the night, I went to her grave, and quietly started to dig it up, until I reached the coffin. When I opened the coffin, I was absolutely shocked to find that instead of my wife, there was a man with a moustache! What I witnessed was extremely strange and that same night, when I fell asleep, I saw a person in my dream who reassured me with these words, "Glad tidings to you, for the Angels have transferred the body of your wife to Karbala, in the holy place near the holy shrine of Imam Husayn (A) and they have replaced her body with that man's as he was a man who used to always consume forbidden financial interest and so, the trouble and task of transferring her blessed body to the Muslim cemetery has been relieved from you."

'I was very joyful and immediately headed towards Karbala and after visiting the holy shrine of Imam Husayn (A), I approached the senior staff members and enquired as to who was buried in this specific place on this particular day. Their reply was that a man famous for consuming forbidden financial interest was buried there. I informed them of the intriguing events that had occurred and they opened the

specific grave. I found that it was indeed my wife who was buried there near the shrine of Imam Husayn (A), with all the gold and jewellery that her family buried with her. I took the gold and jewellery and have now brought them here to you so that you may spend it on what you find beneficial and that which would bless her soul.'

The grand scholar, Ayatullah Sayyid al-Behbahani, took the gold and jewellery and all of it was used in aiding the poor residents of Karbala.

Story 8

The author narrates:

'A group of youths and volunteers from the [United] States were given an audience with Ayatullah Sayyid Muhammad Taqi al-Modarressi during their visitation to Karbala.

'Ayatullah al-Modarressi addressed them, by asking, "Why have you come to this land, Karbala? Are you here for tourism or a holiday? No; rather you must find the meaning and obtain the goal when visiting the shrines of Karbala.

"Know that there is only one piece of land from the entire earth that is raised on the Day of Judgement to be present on that Day and that is the land of Karbala. And so, if you want to be raised on the Day of Judgement from Karbala and to be considered as one of the people of Karbala, then you must have the attributes of those loyal to Karbala.

"The visitation to Imam Husayn (A) is a means to reform the soul and this takes shape in various stages of progression and development, all of which have the potential to be completed during the visitation to Imam Husayn (A).

"How do you achieve this? Let me ask you: have you ever seen a person covered in dirt, enter a shower and leave still dirty? Does a person who has just finished his shower, enter straight back in the dirt again? In the same way, coming to Imam Husayn (A) cleanses you thoroughly but one should not return to the dirt he was used to.

"Take examples from Hadhrat Hurr bin Yazid al-Riyahi who left the fires of Hell for the gardens of Paradise in a moment, by supporting Imam Husayn (A) and from Shimr bin Dhil Jawshan who was in the army of Imam Ali (A) in Siffin and thus on the verge of Paradise but ended up being Imam Husayn's (A) killer and forever in the pits of Hell.

"And consider the land of Karbala and its events as a school. In every school, there are positions and teachers who teach various sciences. Take Hadhrat Abbas as your teacher and learn the lessons of loyalty and bravery; take Lady Zaynab as your teacher of chastity and patience. And just as in every school there is a principal, take Imam Husayn (A) [who embodies all moral values and principles], as the

principal of this school.”

1. See also Qur'an, 22:34 for a similar verse.
2. Al-Qummi, Kamil al-Ziyarat, Ch. 78, p. 401.
3. Al-Saduq, al-Amali, p. 177.
4. This action is a manifestation of the noble verse,
'And whoever does good spontaneously, then surely Allah is Appreciative, Knowing.' (Qur'an, 2: 158)
5. أمضي غلي دين النبي
6. لدي لكربلاء كان كل مكان. عيني و زمانى كل يوم عشوراء
7. Dust or earth from the land of Karbala, Iraq.
8. This action reminds us of the noble verse,
'And if you hide it and give it to the needy, it is better for you. And this will do away with some of your evil deeds. And Allah is aware of what you do.' (Qur'an, 2:271)
9. Islamic Leadership.
10. This statement is the manifestation of the supplication, 'Guide us to defend Islam, to disapprove wrong and disparage it, to uphold the right and respect it, to guide the erring and aid the weak.' (Supplication 6: 'The prayer in the morning and evening', Al-Sahifa al-Sajjadiyyah by Imam Ali ibn al-Husayn Zayn al-Abidin)
<https://www.al-islam.org/sahifa-al-kamilah-al-sajjadiyya-imam-ali-zayn-a...> [1]
11. It is, in fact, a spiritual obligation for a person to make the visitation to Imam Husayn (A) as often as possible and this indeed preceded Allamah al-Hilli's responsibilities to the hawzah. For example Imam al-Baqir (A) is narrated to have said, 'Order our Shi'a to visit the grave of Husayn. Verily, going to visit him is obligatory on every believer who testifies that Husayn is an Imam appointed by Allah, the Great and Almighty.' (Kamil al- Ziyarat, ch. 43, p 244) and Imam al-Sadiq (A) is narrated to have said, 'Go to the grave of Husayn, for verily the visitation of Husayn is obligatory on both men and women.' (Ibid, p. 245)
12. In addition to demonstrating to his son that his time away from the hawzah was still dedicated to the benefit of the hawzah, Allamah al-Hilli wanted his son to realise that if leading the hawzah was a necessity (wajib) in his eyes, the visitation of Imam Husayn (A) was a greater necessity (awjab) in the eyes of Allah.
13. لو لا زيارة الحسين و كتاب الافين الفتوا ظهر ابيك القصمت نصفين
14. For many years, he led the Maghribayn prayers every evening in the haram of Imam Husayn (A), Karbala.
15. The practice of mourning Imam Husayn (A) through poetic recitations and other methods of remembrance, also known as matam or azadari.

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