

Meeting 2: History, A Source of Human Knowledge Part 2

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“Surely you know that the Prophet (s.a.w.w.) said: Whoever witnesses a tyrant ruler considering the prohibition of Allah as permissible, breaking the covenant of Allah, opposing the practices of the prophet of Allah (s.w.t.), treating His servants sinfully and cruelly, and does not oppose him verbally or with action, then Allah truly associates him with that ruler.”^{[1](#)}

Problems of History

Despite all the benefits that the study of history contains, when we practically approach the history of mankind we face difficulties in gaining access to genuine information. The narrators of events, in many instances being biased, have not related to us the whole story. Frederick Capelston, a British Philosopher who died almost 3 years ago, in his book ‘History of Philosophy’ which is the most comprehensive book in western philosophy, asserts in his preface that no historian can claim that he has no tendency towards any particular opinion.

This problem becomes worse when the historian belongs to the time of the event. The reason being, that narrators usually belong to a particular agency, hence, they show us a particular angle of the event which interests them.

I was reading a book named ‘The Gulf War Never Happened’! It may be surprising?! However, the author is trying to prove that the Western news agencies, on the top of which stands CNN, have very carefully produced a movie called ‘Desert Storm’ in which the president of America is the angel and the president of Iraq is the devil.

You and I are sitting in our living rooms watching our televisions with the assumption that seeing is believing, ignoring the fact that we are seeing an American version of the event by those who are

themselves involved in that event. Hence, their narration must be opinionated.

You may read every day many stories in the daily papers believing them to be accurate. However, if you are aware of the exact details of an event and read it from the papers then you can examine the validity of the narration. Therefore, the problem of studying history is that many narrators are either mercenaries and agents for a particular group, or they are biased due to their own belief.

Three approaches to History

The above problems have caused the three different approaches to history.

1. Ignoring the past totally: The adherents of this idea hold that studying history is just useless. Let's talk about our present problems and current affairs. They suggest that it's always better not to talk in the absence of people who are resting on the bed of history. You will be disturbing them, they say, when speaking of their infamy. Mu'awiyah was one of the adherents of this idea. A famous expression is quoted from him: 'Mention the dead in good'.

Unfortunately, many of the Sunni theologians also hold that we are not allowed to criticize the Muslims of early Islam. Of the Western thinkers, Davy Crockett, American folk hero of the 18th century, also held that we are not able to judge on historical events and hence, it's better to let the dead rest in their eternal place, i.e. their graves.

Al-Ghazali, the famous Sunni Ethician, dared to assert that we are not allowed to castigate Yazid nor to curse him, for he was a Mojtahid and had made a mistake!! Or he may have repented!! Worse than him is another one who wrote a book about the so-called virtues of Yazid![2](#)

Well, for your information, the majority of Sunni scholars have not a single doubt of the enormity of the crime Yazid has committed, which subsequently proves his Kofr, and hence they have endorsed his cursing to the extent that Jahedh says "he who prohibits the cursing of Yazid must be cursed too."[3](#)

2. Ignoring the present totally: This approach is opposite to that of the first. The supporters of this concept always concentrate on the past and have totally ignored the current affairs of the contemporary world. Reciting Maqatal with no analysis given is a stereotypical example of this approach.

Their task is provoking emotions for the sake of a heavenly blessing. They may seem very religious too. You may find them reciting Ziarat Ashoora every day, cursing Yazid hundreds of times, holding Majalis for Imam Husayn (a.s.) beating themselves severely for the Imam.

However, when you are chatting with them about current affairs of this world, they are lost. They actually mean it, for this is their purposeful attitude towards politics, for it is their belief that politics corrupts their piety! A pious person in their terminology is one who does not know who the president of America is, doesn't read the newspapers and is totally ignorant about this world (Addonya)!

3. Being concerned for the past as well as the present: I believe the above two approaches are overdoing it. We ought to read history, but not ignore the present, or it is nothing more than an amusement. We read history in order to find the roots of current conditions on the one hand, and to be able to deduce general law, to foresee the future and the impacts of the current problems on the other.

Different Approaches to the study of History

In order to give you an academic approach, I would like to demonstrate the different approaches to history. There are three historical approaches:

1. Narrative history: That is to narrate the series of historical events; like a movie which shows serial events. This type of history contains no judgment or analysis. It's aim is either amusement, to enjoy listening to fairy tales or adventure stories in its passive sense, or to be used as raw information for analytical history.
2. Scientific history: This is to deduct general laws from partial events. Such laws can be generalized and may also be used as one of the sources of human knowledge. However, this type of history still deals with being, not becoming, although it shows the law of being.
3. Philosophy of history: This is the final task of history and that is what the Quran is advocating for and calls it 'Al-Qessa' or 'Al-Ebrat'. This type of history deals with the development of societies from one stage to another. It takes us from being to becoming.

The useful part of history is to find out the roots of events and their impacts. For instance, when we approach the tragedy of Karbala sometimes we just narrate the events without analyzing. Reciting Maqatal is a stereotypical example of this type of history. Certainly, it reflects some knowledge, as well as provoking the emotions, however, it may not bring a tangible impact to our lives.

Sometimes we analyze the events and arrive at law but are not able to relate it to our present time. This will lead us to the second type of history, i.e. scientific history. Finally, we read the events, analyze them, deduce the general laws, find the roots and the impacts of the events and compare them with our present time. At this stage, we will be searching for a figure in this present stage who resembles Imam Husayn, that we may join his camp.

We will also figure out the present devil of our time who resembles Yazid, to avoid him. This stage is the one that the Quran advocates for and we are intending to discuss it alongside the scientific history which deals with the analysis of the events of Karbala. I will Inshallah, lead you throughout my series of lectures to the roots which caused the most abhorrent catastrophe of Karbala to take place. Also, we are going to discuss, Inshallah, the impacts of Ashoora on the beneficial aspects of Islamic development, to realize the fact that "Islam initiated with Prophet Mohammad (s.a.w.w.) and continued with Imam Husayn (a.s.)".

Therefore, unlike the skeptical approach to history, we believe that despite all the difficulties of finding an accurate record we should and do have the right to investigate the historical events. The reason being, some of the present problems may be traced back to history, and we may not be able to eradicate these unless we find their roots. Secondly, we want to learn from history. By recognizing figures like Yazid and Imam Husayn (a.s.) and their attitudes and characteristics we will be able to assess the present types of each, thus, enabling us to follow the righteous one and avoid the evil. This is the interpretation of the saying of Imam Husayn (a.s.) to Marwan Ibn Hakam: “Farewell to Islam, if the Islamic Ummah is stuck with (a ruler) like Yazid”. [4](#)

And this is the interpretation of the words of Imam Husayn (a.s.) who said to the governor of Madina when he was asked to pledge allegiance to Yazid, “One like me does not pay homage to the one like Yazid”. [5](#) Imam Husayn in this everlasting statement is giving us a standard as to why he did not pay homage to Yazid.

Karbala, A living School

Under the shadow of the above explanation we should now be able to answer the general misconception about the tragedy of Karbala, that it was a personal event and Imam Husayn (a.s.) had a private mission, and hence no one is allowed to follow him. He was an infallible Imam, they say, and had his own mission. They assume such a belief gives a higher respect to the Imam. The adherents of this idea always try to show the Imams as extraordinary humans so that no one can make a model of their lives.

For instance, when they are dealing with the virtues of Lady Fatima (s.a.) they just focus on issues such as; she was not observing monthly menstruation, or the sperm she was made of was consist of a heavenly fruit. You scarcely hear from speakers about her behaviour at home with her husband and her children.

Therefore, Muslim ladies do not normally think that Fatima (s.a.) can be their role model, for the scholars have introduced her in a way which shows her to be a different being. I believe one of the major problems of our community is the lack of practical role models. They do not have any pattern to follow.

Contrary to this false presentation, the Holy Quran states:

“You have indeed in the Messenger of Allah a beautiful pattern.” 33:21

I have not a single doubt that Imam Husayn (a.s.) is Walyullah. I myself have explained to you a lot about the spiritual status of the Ahlul-Bait, to the extent that many may not be able to grasp it. However, this does not imply that they cannot be role models. If we say whatever Imam Husayn (a.s.) has done on Ashoora was by the guidance of an angel, then two problems will be raised:

1. Imam Husayn (a.s.) has never been able to use his brain and intelligence!

2. No angel will come to me and hence he cannot be a role model for me. He was a different creature with a different mission! Now you tell me, does this idea bring respect to Imam Husayn (a.s.)?! So, the argument is whether Imam Husayn (a.s.) rose against Yazid as an Imam who had a private mission, or as the leader of the Islamic Ummah and a true believer in Allah? Thank God, Imam Husayn (a.s.) himself has already solved this problem, if we give up our own pre-assumptions and listen to his own words. Here are some examples:

- Imam Husayn (a.s.) upon his arrival at Karbala wrote a letter to the leaders of the tribes of Kufa. One part of the letter reads: “Surely you know that Prophet (s.a.w.w.) said: Whoever witnesses a tyrant ruler considering the prohibition of Allah as permissible, breaking the covenant of Allah, opposing the practices of the prophet of Allah (a.s.), treating His servants sinfully and cruelly, and does not oppose him verbally or with action, then Allah truly associates him with that ruler.”
- On the day of Ashoora, he addressed his companions saying: “Can’t you see the truth is not practiced, and the false is not avoided, so the believer must be interested in visiting Allah (martyrdom) and indeed I do not see death but as a prosperity, and life with the tyrants a disgrace”.[6](#)

Therefore, a true follower of Imam Husayn (a.s.) never shakes hands with Zionists. This is the philosophy of Karbala, and this is one of the lessons we should learn from this school and this is why Karbala is still alive and will remain alive as long as the struggle between truth & falsehood, between angel & devil, and between light & darkness, continues.

[1.](#) Al-Tabari, Tarikh 3:306

[2.](#) Fadhael Yazid, Ibn Rajab, Tabaqatul-Hanabeleh 1:356

[3.](#) Rasael Jahedh : 298

[4.](#) Al-Kofi, Al-fotooh 5:17

[5.](#) Ibid

[6.](#) Al-Tabari, Tarikh 3:307

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