

The Psychology of Mourning

The most important benefits derived from mourning ceremonies are its psychological effects. Most people who take part in mourning gatherings do so with the desire of gaining psychological and emotional benefits.

Nevertheless, some people say that holding mourning ceremonies and having many sorrowful rites during the course of a year deprives the society of happiness and joy. They contend that these practices cause people to feel more unhappy and downcast and in effect bring about more discouragement and depression in the society. In this section, we will examine and analyze this issue.

The stages of mourning

Mourning or crying has an exterior (outer manifestation) and an interior (inner manifestation). Its outer appearance is physiological, and is a result of psychological influences by means of external or internal stimuli, such as thought and reflection. These psychological effects enter the physiology of the brain and the nerves and activate a special part of the brain which sends messages to the lachrymal glands to stimulate the eyes to become active. The result is that tears flow and this is what is known as crying.

The interior or mental manifestation of crying comprises its internal psychological effects. The psychological view, to which we concur, is that crying establishes affectionate and benevolent feelings.

Crying is emphasized in the traditions [*hadiths*], to the extent that it has been said that crying, causing others to cry or even being in a mood of lamentation when a person attends mourning ceremonies for Imam al-Husayn (as) is a source of both worldly and heavenly benefits. Here that which is implied is the internal effects.

The internal psychological consequences of crying are divided into four types. The first is directed at the self and its repressed needs. This type of crying can intensify depression and can also cause an individual's social abilities to be disturbed or confused.

However, the other three types of crying are encouraging and motivational because they have an inverse relationship with sorrow and depression. The first kind of crying is as a result of real sorrow caused, for example, by death; but the other three types do not possess real sorrow for present events, even though they take place in present-day mourning ceremonies. The four types of crying are as follows:

1. Crying as a result of relationship and affection

This type of crying takes place due to problems or when tragic events, like bereavement of a beloved, come to pass. Crying of this kind does not usually happen out of one's own volition, but occurs involuntarily. This type of crying, in the terminology of psychologists and mental therapists, is termed psychological emptying or emotional release of the aroused feelings and is related to the individual and his repressed or unfulfilled needs.

2. Crying as a result of belief

This type of crying is that of a person who sheds tears during supplication while evaluating his present and future deeds and circumstances. This type of crying has its roots in faith and ideology and is not related to fears about this world and our day to day life.

3. Crying to seek perfection and excellence

Sometimes crying is a result of seeking virtue and moral perfection, like the crying which takes place when a teacher, a moral adviser, a prophet, an *imam* or anyone of high moral calibre departs this life. This type of crying views things from this perspective that we, in the deepest recesses of our hearts, have a strong admiration for perfection and spiritual growth.

We are overwhelmed when these types of perfection are available, and we become distressed when they are lost. The crying that takes place in mourning ceremonies is sometimes of this type.

4. Crying for the persecuted and oppressed

In this type of crying, we feel sympathy for one who is being treated unjustly or inhumanely like when we cry because of the harsh oppression that was imposed upon the Holy Prophet (S) and the Holy Imams (as), especially the brutal oppression which was committed against the Doyen of Martyrs, Imam al-Husayn (as), and other numerous hardships that the *Ahl al-Bayt* (as) suffered.

Mourning ceremonies and depression

Depressive disorders are divided into three main groups:

1. Major depression.

2. Habitual depression.

3. Circumstantial depression. [1](#)

Major depression is the most intense type of depression. Some of its signs include:

- a. Feelings of sorrow, emptiness or purposelessness for the greater part of the day or even the whole day.
- b. Visible and apparent decrease of interest in and enjoyment of daily activities for the better part of the day.
- c. Visible decrease in body weight without abstaining from food or noticeable increase in body weight in the course of one month.
- d. Inability to sleep (insomnia) or sleepiness throughout the day.
- e. Fatigue and loss of energy for most of the day.
- f. Lack of self-worth or excessive feelings of guilt.
- g. Decrease in mental capacity, lack of concentration and inability to make decisions.
- h. Recurring thoughts about death.

Upon consideration of these three types of depression, it is clear that the first and third types are not intended by those who say that mourning ceremonies are a cause of sorrow and depression in the society.

The first type is extreme and it is clearly invalid to claim that the Shi'ah societies are widely afflicted by major or chronic depression and sorrow.

The third type of depression is also not intended by the sceptics because it is related to special and particular instances like premenstrual syndrome (PMS) or depressive disorders that follow psychological distress like schizophrenia.

Therefore, habitual depression and sorrow is that which is intended by critics. Habitual depression is relatively minor and has the following features:

- a. Lack of appetite or excessive appetite.
- b. Lack of sleep (insomnia) or excessive sleepiness.
- c. Lack of energy or excessive fatigue.

- d. Difficulty in decision making or feelings of helplessness.
- e. The appearance or manifestation of these symptoms for the greater part of the day or for most days for a period of at least two years.
- f. The symptoms are not a result of physiological effects due to inappropriate use of medicines, etc.
- g. The symptoms result in disruption of the individual's work and social activities.

Now, we will examine whether or not mourning ceremonies bring about the symptoms of habitual depression in man, and therefore cause social despondency.

In order to make this issue clear, it is necessary to scrutinize the factors which cause depression and despondency from the viewpoint of psychology. Psychologists have enumerated three main factors that cause depression: existential, hereditary and environmental stimulants.²

The surroundings or situation alone do not cause depression. In fact, negative stimuli in the environment are only effective in people who have a background of hereditary depression or biological disorder in the brain affecting its normal function.

In addition, mourning ceremonies cannot be classed as environmental causes that generate intense stress. Real grief and sorrow resulting from current tragic events can cause extreme distress and depression, but mourning ceremonies for the *awliya*' of Allah play no part in producing intense stress.

On the contrary, and with due attention to issues discussed in social psychology about the characteristics of religious rituals, it can be said that mourning ceremonies play a strong part in stress relief.

In cases where tears and sorrow arise as a result of belief, because of seeking moral perfection and excellence, or due to sympathy for the persecuted and oppressed, they can produce tranquillity in man and remove agitation from his soul. To substantiate this issue, we will refer to an example in this regard.

Doctor Tayjani Tunisi says, "My friend called Mun'im came and together we traveled on pilgrimage to Karbala. There, like the other Shi'ahs, I came to understand the hardships and sufferings which befell our master al-Husayn (as).

That was when I understood that Imam al-Husayn (as) had not really ever died. The people were crowding and pressing upon one another all round his shrine. They were crying with unmatched grief and anguish the like of which I had never seen before. They showed so much agitation that it seemed like al-Husayn (as) had just been martyred.

I heard clergymen reviving the tragic event of Karbala. Their retelling of what came to pass on the day of 'Ashura was arousing the people's emotions and causing much wailing and lamentation. No one could

listen to the story and bear its intense sorrow. On the contrary, some who listened to the account would involuntarily pass out. I, too, cried. I cried and cried.

I cried so much that it seemed as though grief had been trapped in my throat for years, and it was now exploding out.

After that wailing though, I felt inner peace. I felt tranquillity like I had never felt before. It seemed as though previously I had been one of the enemies of Imam al-Husayn (as), and in a split second I had been converted and become one of his companions. In a moment, I had become a follower of that great man who had sacrificed his life for the preservation of Islam.

Even more interesting is that at that very moment, a clergyman was giving an account of the story of Hurr. Hurr was one of the leaders of the enemy troops who had come to Karbala with the intention of fighting Imam al-Husayn (as). All of a sudden, Hurr started shaking and trembling on the battlefield.

His friends asked him, 'What is wrong with you? Are you afraid of death?' He answered: 'I swear upon Allah! I do not fear death at all, but I see myself having the option to choose between eternal bliss in heaven and eternal perdition in hell.' Suddenly, Hurr mounted his horse and started riding towards al-Husayn (as).

He hastened to meet the Holy Imam (as) and, as he was crying, said, 'O son of the Holy Prophet! Is there repentance for me?'

Believe it when I say that this was the very moment when I could not bear it any more. I started wailing and threw myself on the ground. It seemed as though I was reliving Hurr's part and was asking al-Husayn, 'O son of the Prophet! Is there repentance for me? O son of the Prophet! Forgive me!'

The preacher's voice had such a strong impact on the listeners that it caused the wailing voices of the people to raise to unprecedented levels. My friend, who had heard my wailing voice, took me in his arms while he himself was crying. He embraced me in the same way that a mother embraces her child. He, too, was shouting, 'O al-Husayn! O al-Husayn!'

Those were moments when I perceived and understood what real crying was. I felt that my tears were cleaning and cleansing my heart. My entire body was being cleaned right from the core. It was at that moment when I understood the meaning of the Prophet's words when he said, 'If you knew what I know, then you would laugh less and cry more.'

' I spent that whole day in deep sorrow. My friend wanted to console me, so he brought some juice and cookies, but I had lost my appetite. I refused to eat and instead asked my friend to repeat the story of the martyrdom of Imam al-Husayn (as), because I did not know anything about it at all...'”[3](#) 

The Religious Verdict Concerning Attending Mourning Ceremonies for the Awliya' of Allah

On his own chain of transmission, Bukhari narrates that 'A'ishah said, "When the news of the martyrdom of Zayd ibn Harithah and Ja'far and 'Abd Allah ibn Rawahah was brought to the Holy Prophet (S), he entered the mosque and sat there with signs of grief and sorrow showing on his face."⁴

Ibn Hisham recounts, "When the Noble Prophet (S) returned to Medina, he heard sounds of crying and mourning. His eyes filled with tears. Then, the Noble Prophet (S) said, 'But no one cries for Hamzah.' When they heard this, the women of Bani Ashhal came out and started crying for the uncle of Allah's Prophet (S)."⁵

Holding Mourning Ceremonies in the Interest of Unity

It is sometimes said that holding mourning rites is not compatible with Islamic unity because these ceremonies include protest against and condemnation of some of the Muslim caliphs. Therefore, it is felt by some that discontinuation of such protests and cursing for the sake of creating unity among the Muslims is binding and necessary.

Response

Firstly, remembering the uprising of Imam al-Husayn (as) is not only in the interest of Shi'ah Muslims, but also in the interest of all Muslims and freedom-seekers of the world, because holding mourning rites in memory of Aba 'Abd Allah al-Husayn (as) establishes in man the spirit of seeking martyrdom for the sake of securing and establishing freedom and faith. This orientation can help free human societies which are now living under the yoke of captivity and exploitation.

Secondly, when the suffering of Imam al-Husayn (as) is kept alive there is no negative mention of the Prophet's faithful companions. It must be realized that the Prophet's loyal companions loved and respected Imam al-Husayn (as). Some of them were even with him at Karbala and they attained martyrdom. The Prophet's companions who were martyred include Habib ibn Mazahir, Muslim ibn 'Awsajah, Burayr ibn Khadir Hamadani, 'Urwah Ghaffari and others.

Commemorating the 'Ashura uprising of Imam al-Husayn (as) has not been and will never be a cause of disagreement and disunity among Muslims.

Commemorating the struggle of Imam al-Husayn (as) against those hypocrites that desired to blot out the religion of Islam can only bring about more unity among Muslims and create division and discord between the Muslims and such deceitful tyrants as Yazid, Ibn Ziyad, 'Umar ibn Sa'd and others that wish to destroy Islam, but, then again, this is precisely what the tyrants and oppressors fear.

Beating the Chest to Mourn Imam al-Husayn (as)

It can be understood from Shi'ah and Sunni traditions [*hadiths*] that there is no prohibition for beating the chest when mourning and grieving for Imam al-Husayn (as), even though it may cause redness of the chest. On the contrary, the action of beating the chest is in fact preferred.

A. The Shi'ah traditions

The following traditions show that it is permissible and legitimate to hold different types of mourning ceremonies, including beating the chest.

1. Shaykh Tusi recounts that Imam al-Sadiq (as) said,

«لا شيء في اللطم على الخدود سوى الاستغفار والتوبة، وقد شققن الجيوب ولطمنن الخدود الفاطميات على الحسين بن علي عليهما السلام وعلى مثله تلطم الخدود وتشق الجيوب.»

“Hitting the face is nothing but seeking forgiveness and repentance, because the women from among the descendants of Fatimah (as) tore their clothes and hit their faces when mourning for Imam al-Husayn (as). For people like al-Husayn (as), we should hit our faces and rend our clothes.”⁶

2. A part of the holy prayer of “*Ziyarat Nahiyah Muqaddasah*” (Pilgrimage to the Holy Places) reads,

«فلما رأين النساء جوادك مخزياً... برزن من الخدود ناشرات الشعور، على الخدود لاطمات وبالعويل ناحيات»

“Like wounded horses, the women saw you... they came from behind their curtains with their hair disheveled and they were hitting their faces and wailing in loud voices.”⁷

3. In the same prayer, we read that the Imam of the Age, Imam al-Mahdi (as), addresses Imam al-Husayn (as) in this way,

«ولأنديتكَ صباحاً ومساءً، ولأبكين عليك بدل الدموع دماً»

“I weep for you every mourning and evening, and instead of shedding tears, I cry blood.”⁸

4. It is narrated that Imam al-Rida (as) said,

«ان يوم الحسين اقرح جفوننا وأسبل دموعنا وأذل عزيزنا بأرض كرب وبلاء، وأورثنا الكرب والبلاء الى يوم الانقضاء.»

“Verily the day of al-Husayn (as) has lacerated our eyes and made our tears flow. It has made our beloved one (Imam al-Husayn) become forlorn in the land of affliction and grief. Al-Husayn (as) has left grief for us to inherit and sorrow to accompany us until the Day of Resurrection.”⁹

5. Shaykh Mufid recounts, “When Zaynab heard her brother, al-Husayn (as), reciting verses,

«...يا دهرُ أفِّ لك من خليلٍ»

She slapped her face, rent her clothes and passed out.”¹⁰

6. Sayyid ibn Tawus narrates, “When the captives reached Karbala on their return from Sham to Medina, they saw that Jabir ibn ‘Abd Allah Ansari along with a number of people of Bani Hashim had come for pilgrimage to the grave of Imam al-Husayn (as). All of them reached the place at the same time and started crying. They were grieving and hitting themselves. They mourned bitterly. The women of that land joined them and copied their mode and they mourned for Imam al-Husayn (as) for three days.”¹¹

7. Ibn Quluyah narrated that the houris of paradise in the high heavens hit their breasts and faces for the sake of Imam al-Husayn (as).¹²

8. On his authorized chain of transmission, Kulayni relates that Jabir asked Imam al-Baqir (as) to explain what grief [*jaza*] meant. He (as) said,

«...أشدُّ الجزعِ الصراخُ بالويلِ والعيويلِ، ولطمُ الوجهِ والصدرِ»

“The most intense grief is yelling, crying, shouting and hitting the face and chest...”¹³

B. Sunni traditions

Sunni Muslims have also recounted a number of traditions which prove the desirability of beating the chest when mourning over the *awliya*’ of Allah, especially the Doyen of Martyrs, Imam al-Husayn (as).

Now, we will refer to some of these *hadiths*,

1. Ibn Kathir narrates that when the captives passed by Karbala on their way back to Medina and remembered Imam al-Husayn (as), the women started crying and hitting their faces. Zaynab raised her voice and said, “O Muhammad!”¹⁴

All this took place in the presence of Imam al-Sajjad (as), who was in their company, but he showed no protest against their behavior.

2. Imam al-Husayn (as) recited the following epic verse at Karbala,

يا دهرُ أفّ لك من خليلٍ كم لك في الاشراقِ والاصيلِ

When Zaynab heard his words, at that moment she rent her clothes, hit her face and and came out of the tent bareheaded and cried out loudly, “O my sorrow! O my misery!” [15](#)

3. Among the reasons cited to substantiate the permissibility of hitting one’s chest and face when mourning for the prophets, the *awliya’* and their descendants, especially unique and unparalleled people in the history of mankind, is a *hadith* which Ahmad and other historians have recounted on authentic chains of transmission. They have recounted that ‘A’ishah said, “... The soul of the Prophet of Allah (S) was taken [...], then I put his head on a pillow and the other women and I arose and started hitting ourselves. I was hitting my face...”

Regarding the chain of transmission of this tradition, Muhammad Salim Asad says, “This chain of transmission is correct and authentic.” (It must be mentioned, that the Shi’ahs do not consent to the truth of all parts of this tradition, but that argument is reserved for another place and time. The current argument is in regard to the acceptability of hitting oneself to show grief.) [16](#)

4. It cannot be said that hitting oneself due to an affliction that has befallen him is prohibited, because Ahmad ibn Hanbal, on his own chain of transmission, has recounted through Abu Hurayrah that an Arab man came to see the Prophet of Allah and started hitting himself on the face. He was pulling out his hair while saying, “I see myself delivered to destruction and perdition.” The Prophet of Allah asked him, “What is it that has delivered you to destruction and perdition?” He answered, “In the holy month of Ramadan, my wife and I had intimate relations!” The Holy Prophet (S) asked him, “Are you able to free one slave?” [17](#)

We notice from this *hadith* that the Holy Prophet (S) did not protest against this man’s action of hitting himself and pulling out his hair. In addition, he did not announce a particular prohibition regarding hitting the face and pulling one’s hair out. Instead he only told the man what to do to atone for his sin.

5. Ibn ‘Abbas narrates about the Holy Prophet’s (S) divorce from some of his wives, ‘Umar said, “I went to see Hafsa at her house. I noticed that she was standing and hitting herself, and the other wives of the Holy Prophet (S) were standing and hitting themselves.” I asked Hafsa, “Has the Prophet of Allah granted you a divorce?” [18](#)

6. Sibt ibn al–Jawzi says, “When al–Husayn was killed, Ibn ‘Abbas was constantly crying for him until finally his eyes became blind.” [19](#)

7. Jurji Zaydan says, “There is no doubt that Ibn Ziyad committed a great crime when he killed al–Husayn, a crime whose atrociousness has never before been seen nor occurred in the whole universe. Therefore, it is not a matter of concern if the Shi’ahs expose the oppression which characterized the killing of Imam al–Husayn. It is not a cause of worry if the Shi’ahs weep or cry for him every year, and

rend their collars while showing their remorse and sorrow, because he was killed in an unjust way.”[20](#)

Examination of the reasoning of opponents

Those who oppose beating the chest in intense grief for Allah’s *awliya*’ have resorted to a number of *hadiths* recorded by different Islamic sects and schools of thought:

Hadith recounted by Sunni Muslims

Bukhari quotes from ‘Abd Allah that the Holy Prophet (S) said,

«.ليس منّا من لطمَ الخدودَ وشقَّ الجيوبَ ودعا بدعوى الجاهلية»

“A man who slaps his face, rends his collar and promotes the legacy of the Age of Ignorance (before the advent and rise of Islam) is not from us.”[21](#)

Some have made use of this *hadith* to prohibit beating the chest and mourning for the *awliya*’ of Allah, including the Doyen of Martyrs, Aba ‘Abd Allah al-Husayn (as).

Response

This *hadith* views the act of beating the chest as an objection to Allah’s decree and mourning as a means of protesting against one’s destiny when a beloved one dies. This is the view which most of the commentators of the book of *hadith* of *Sahih Bukhari* have adopted; among them ‘Asqalani, Mulla ‘Ali Qari, Kirmani and Qastalani.[22](#)

Kirmani writes, “If a person says that rending one’s collars and hitting one’s face will not cause man to be banished from this *ummah* (Islamic community), what therefore is the meaning of such a prohibition?” In response, we say that this prohibition is a result of intensity and severity. If the statement regarding the Age of Ignorance is interpreted to mean disbelief [*kufr*], like making lawful what is unlawful [*haram*] or the lack of submission to and acceptance of divine decree, then the prohibition is correct.[23](#)

Manawi adds a footnote to this *hadith* saying, “The above interpretation denotes lack of contentment, and assumes a lack of satisfaction with divine decree.”[24](#)

In conclusion, this *hadith* is not proof against beating the chest on the day of ‘Ashura while mourning over the sufferings of Imam al-Husayn (as) and the other *awliya*’ of Allah, because in this case beating the chest is a deed which is meant to show homage and paying tribute. It is done to show reverence to the religion and as a manifestation of love for the *Ahl al-Bayt*.

This sorrow and grief is in no way a display of discontentment with Allah’s decree. Such grief, in fact, is in one aspect exhibition of intense sorrow over the failure of Muslims to support Imam al-Husayn (as) in

his struggle to keep alive Allah's law and decree.

B. The traditions of the Ahl al-Bayt (as)

There are some traditions in Shi'ah sources of *hadith* which appear to prohibit beating the chest and mourning.

1. Jabir ibn 'Abd Allah Ansari says, I asked Imam al-Baqir (as) about grief [*jaza'*]. He (as) said,

«أشدُّ الجزعِ الصراخُ بالويلِ، ولطمُ الوجهِ والصدرِ وجزُّ الشعرِ من النواصي، ومن أقامَ النواحةَ فقد تركَ الصبرَ،
«واخذ في غيرِ طريقةٍ»

“The most intense grief is wailing while saying “woe”, slapping the face and pulling the front hair out. Anyone who mourns and expresses grief has certainly lost his patience and is on the path of impatience.”²⁵

2. It has been recounted that Imam al-Sadiq (as) said,

«نهى رسول الله صَلَّى اللهُ عَلَيْهِ وَآلِهِ عن الرنة عند المصيبة، ونهى عن النياحة والاستماع إليها»

“The Prophet of Allah forbade crying loudly when one is afflicted with a misfortune. He also forbade mourning or listening to it.”²⁶

3. 'Amru ibn Abi Miqdam narrates that I heard Imam al-Baqir (as) commenting on the Qur'anic verse, “And will not disobey you in what is good.”²⁷ He said,

«إِذَا أَنَا مِتُّ فَلَا تَخْمَشِي عَلَيَّ وَجْهًا، وَلَا تُرْخِي عَلَيَّ شَعْرًا، وَلَا تَنَادِي بِالْوَيْلِ، وَلَا تَقِيمَنَّ عَلَيَّ نَائِحَةً»

“The Prophet of Allah (S) told his daughter, Fatimah (as), ‘When I die, do not scratch your face, dishevel your hair nor mourn or cry loudly’.”²⁸

Response

Firstly, this type of *hadiths* does not prohibit the holding of mourning ceremonies. On the contrary, they intend to restrain or prohibit any action that is not compatible with submission to divine decree and the will of Allah because some people lose their control when a beloved one dies or when they are afflicted with calamity.

They complain and grumble in protest, and question Allah's decree. However, when holding mourning ceremonies involves the recounting of the virtues and good deeds of the deceased through elegies and

mournful poems, there is no problem with this.

Secondly, the traditions which apparently prohibit mourning and the reading of mournful poems are related to instances that do not have positive practical effects. However, mourning for the *awliya'* of Allah is reasonable and rational. We have previously shown that mourning for Allah's *awliya'* (as) is reasonable under stated general rationales.

It has also been shown that mourning for Allah's *awliya'* was the conduct of the Prophet of Allah (S), the pure and chaste *Ahl al-Bayt* (as) and the Prophet's companions. Even the generation which came after the Noble Prophet and Muslims throughout the entire history of Islam have been holding mourning ceremonies for the *awliya'* of Allah, especially for the sufferings of Imam al-Husayn (as).

We have also shown that such ceremonies have practical positive results for Muslim individuals and society.

Thirdly, in some *hadiths*, it has been explicitly stated that holding mourning ceremonies is permissible and that it is even quite desirable and preferable to grieve and express sorrow over the sufferings of Imam al-Husayn (as).

1. A *hadith* has been recounted that Imam al-Sadiq (as) said,

«كُلُّ الْجَزَعِ وَالْبِكَاءِ مَكْرُوهٌ سِوَى الْجَزَعِ وَالْبِكَاءِ عَلَى الْحُسَيْنِ عَلَيْهِ السَّلَامُ.»

“Every kind of despondency and crying is disapproved [*makruh*], except grieving and crying for Imam al-Husayn (S).”²⁹

2. Imam al-Rida (as) told his son,

«إِنَّ يَوْمَ الْحُسَيْنِ عَلَيْهِ السَّلَامِ أَقْرَحَ جَفَوْنَنَا وَأَسْبَلَ دُمُوعَنَا وَأَذَلَّ عَزِيزَنَا بِأَرْضِ كَرْبٍ وَبِلا وَأَوْرَثَنَا الْكَرْبَ وَالْبِلا...»
«... إلى يومِ الانقضاء»

“... Verily, the day of al-Husayn (the day of ‘Ashura) has lacerated eyes and made them swollen. It has caused our tears to flow because our beloved one has been exposed to abjectness in the land of Karbala. He has left for us to inherit sorrow and affliction for as long as we are to live in this world...”³⁰

3. Imam al-Sadiq (as) told ‘Abd Allah ibn Hammad, “News has reached me that a group of people around the area of Kufah and other places and also a group of women gather on the 15th of Sha‘ban near the holy shrine of al-Husayn ibn ‘Ali and mourn the loss of al-Husayn (as). They recite the Holy Qur’an, and some among them recount the story of ‘Ashura and the events that came to pass while the rest of them weep and wail.”

Hammad told the Imam (as), “I witnessed these mourning ceremonies myself.” Imam al-Sadiq (as) said, “Praise be to Allah that He has made some men inclined and affectionate towards us (the *Ahl al-Bayt*), so that they may praise and extol us. They mourn for us and rebuke our enemies, and in this way clearly expose the ugly and unacceptable deeds of those who oppose us.”³¹

4. Ibn Quluyah quotes Masma' Kardin recounting that Imam al-Sadiq (as) asked him, “Do you commemorate the events of Karbala?” I answered, “Yes, I do.” He asked, “Do you grieve and express sorrow?” I said, “Yes, I swear upon Allah that I cry!” The Imam (as) said, “May Allah accept your crying and reward you for it. Be aware that you are one of those people who express sorrow for our sake, and show joy for our joy.”³²

Wearing Black Clothes

There is no doubt that wearing black clothes, especially during recitation of prayers, is widely considered as disapproved [*makruh*]. Muslim scholars have unanimous agreement on this verdict. The question here is whether or not this aversion to black is inherent? In other words, are black clothes disapproved just because they are black in themselves or are they disapproved for a specific reason, such as because they were the banner of the tyrannical caliphs of Bani ‘Abbas³³ or because they are the clothes of the people dwelling in hell?³⁴

Shi‘ah traditions

1. On his authentic chain of transmission, Barqi recounts that Imam al-Baqir (as) said, “When my forefather al-Husayn was killed, the women of Bani Hashim wore black clothes while mourning him. They did not change this practice whether in the hot summer or in the cold winter. My father ‘Ali ibn al-Husayn prepared their food during this period of mourning.”³⁵

1. On his authentic chain of transmission, Ibn Quluyah recounts that an angel from heaven landed on the sea and spread its wings. Then, she yelled and cried out aloud, “O inhabitants of the sea! Wear mourning clothes, because the child of the Prophet of Allah has been killed (today). Then, he took some of the holy soil from Karbala, and took it with himself to heaven. Every angel it passed by stopped it in order to smell the holy soil. Spiritual effects and graces derived from it remained on them.”³⁶

Sunni traditions

1. Ibn Abi al-Hadid quotes Mada'ini saying, “When ‘Ali (as) passed away, ‘Abd Allah ibn ‘Abbas ibn ‘Abd al-Muttalib came to the people and said, ‘Verily, Amir al-Mu‘minin (as) has passed away. He has left someone to succeed him. If you endorse him, he will come to meet you. If you are displeased with him, you will not be coerced to accept his leadership.’ The people broke down crying and said, ‘Let him come to meet us because we endorse him.’ Al-Hasan (as) came to meet the people and gave a sermon while wearing black clothes’.”³⁷

2. Abi Mukhnaf recounts that Nu'man ibn Bashir communicated the news of Imam al-Husayn's martyrdom to the people of Medina... All the women of Medina came out of their houses wearing black clothes and started mourning.[38](#)
3. 'Imad al-Din Idris Qurashi quotes Abi Na'im Isfahani recounting on his authentic chain of transmission that when the news of Imam al-Husayn's death reached Umm Salamah, she made a black tent in the Prophet's Mosque and wore black clothes.[39](#)
4. Ibn Abi al-Hadid recounts that Asbagh ibn Nabatah said, "After the martyrdom of Amir al-Mu'minin (Imam 'Ali) (as), I entered the Mosque of Kufah. I saw al-Hasan and al-Husayn wearing black clothes."[40](#)

- [1.](#) Anjuman-e Rawanshenasi-ye Amrika (American Psychological Association), p. 602.
- [2.](#) Anjuman-e Pezeshki-ye Amrika (The American Medical Association), Trans. Mahdi Ganji, pp. 67-88.
- [3.](#) Thumma Ahdaitu (Then, I was Guided), pp. 96-98.
- [4.](#) Irshad al-Sari, vol. 2, p. 393.
- [5.](#) Al-Sirah al-Nabawiyah, vol. 3, p. 105.
- [6.](#) Tahdhib al-Ahkam, vol. 8, p. 325.
- [7.](#) Kamil al-Ziyarat, pp. 260-261.
- [8.](#) Ibid.
- [9.](#) Bihar al-Anwar, vol. 44, p. 284.
- [10.](#) Shaykh Mufid, Al-Irshad, p. 232.
- [11.](#) Luhuf, pp. 112-113; Bihar al-Anwar, vol. 45, p. 146.
- [12.](#) Kamil al-Ziyarat, p. 80; Bihar al-Anwar, vol. 45, p. 201.
- [13.](#) Wasa'il al-Shi'ah, vol. 2, p. 915.
- [14.](#) Al-Bidayah wa al-Nihayah, vol. 8, p. 210; Khwarazmi, Maqatal al-Imam al-Husayn (as), p. 39.
- [15.](#) Tarikh Tabari, vol. 4, p. 319; Ibn Athir, Al-Kamil fi al-Tarikh, vol. 4, p. 59; Mufid, Al-Irshad, vol. 2, p. 94.
- [16.](#) Ahmad ibn Hanbal, Al-Musnad, vol. 6, p. 274; Abu Ya'la, Al-Musnad, note written in the margin, vol. 5, p. 63.
- [17.](#) Ahmad ibn Hanbal, Al-Musnad, vol. 2, p. 516.
- [18.](#) Kanz al-'Ummal, vol. 2, p. 534.
- [19.](#) Tadhkirah al-Khawass, p. 152.
- [20.](#) Tarikh al-Niyahah, vol. 2, p. 30, as narrated by Jarji Zaydan.
- [21.](#) Sahih Bukhari, no. 1220.
- [22.](#) Fath al-Bari, vol. 3, p. 195; Sharh al-Kirmani 'ala al-Bukhari, vol. 7, p. 88; Irshad al-Sari, vol. 2, p. 406; 'Umdah al-Qari, vol. 8, p. 87.
- [23.](#) Sharh al-Kirmani 'ala al-Bukhari, vol. 7, p. 88.
- [24.](#) Fayd al-Qadir, vol. 5, p. 493.
- [25.](#) Wasa'il al-Shi'ah, vol. 2, p. 915, Bab Kirahat al-Sirakh bi'l-Wayl wa'l-'Awil.
- [26.](#) Ibid.
- [27.](#) Surat al-Mumtahanah 60:12.
- [28.](#) Wasa'il al-Shi'ah, vol. 2, p. 915.
- [29.](#) Bihar al-Anwar, vol. 44, p. 289.
- [30.](#) Ibid., p. 285.
- [31.](#) Ibn Quluyah, Kamil al-Ziyarat, p. 539, section [bab] 108.
- [32.](#) Bihar al-Anwar, vol. 44, p. 289.
- [33.](#) Man la Yahdaruhu al-Faqih, vol. 2, p. 252.
- [34.](#) Wasa'il al-Shi'ah, vol. 3, p. 281, section [bab] 20 from among the sections on clothing of one reciting prayer [libas musalla], hadith 3.

- [35.](#) Bihar al-Anwar, vol. 45, p. 188; Wasa'il al-Shi'ah, vol. 2, p. 890.
- [36.](#) Kamil al-Ziyarat, pp. 67-68; Bihar al-Anwar, vol. 45, pp. 221-222.
- [37.](#) Ibn Abi al-Hadid, Sharh Nahj al-Balaghah, vol. 16, p. 22.
- [38.](#) Abi Mukhnaf, Maqtal, pp. 222-223.
- [39.](#) 'Uyun al-Akbar wa Funun al-Athar, p. 109.
- [40.](#) Ibn Abi al-Hadid, Sharh Nahj al-Balaghah.

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