

# **The Secret of Ashura's Immortality**

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**Al-Islam.org**

**Article**

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## The Secret of Ashura's Immortality

**This is a translated summary of a speech given by Ayatullah Misbah Yazdi.**

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الْحَمْدُ لِلَّهِ رَبِّ الْعَالَمِينَ وَالصَّلَاةُ وَالسَّلَامُ عَلَيَّ؛ سَيِّدِ الْأَنْبِيَاءِ وَالْمُرْسَلِينَ حَبِيبِ إِلَهِ الْعَالَمِينَ أَبِي الْقَاسِمِ مُحَمَّدٍ وَ  
عَلَيَّ؛ آلِهِ الطَّيِّبِينَ الطَّاهِرِينَ الْمَعْصُومِينَ

We all believe that throughout human history, the event of Karbala holds a unique position and its value cannot be compared with any other occurrence. However for some people, it is possible that certain questions regarding this event may arise.

In the incident of Karbala, extraordinary types of oppressions took place upon the children of the Prophet (pbuh). In this unequal battle, which took place between the loyalists of Imam Hussain (as) – who were about 72 persons – and the opposing side, about whom it has been said were roughly 30,000 to 120,000, the opposers committed crimes upon the Ahlul Bayt (as) and eventually caused the old, the young and even a suckling baby to become martyrs and then took the women of the Chief of Martyrs (as) into captivity. We more or less, see such crimes taking place in different events and incidents as well. For example the crimes that take place during current times, such as what the former Iraqi regime did in Halabja and other locations, and many innocent civilians including men, women and children were slaughtered and martyred. Or the events that take place in Palestine, the oppression that the Zionist regime and its allies carry out upon the Palestinians.

Even if someone says for example, that the event of Karbala was a few degrees worse than these other events, it would still not be enough to declare it completely incomparable with any other event. Others also had objectives such as defending their right for water, land and their honour and struggled for them

and became martyred in this way. The goal of the companions of Karbala was more honourable than the goals of others, but it isn't such that others have not voluntarily given their lives for great humanitarian causes.

So what is the secret in the movement of Ashura, due to which we say that this event is unique in history and it's like has never taken place and will never take place? What is so important about this event that throughout the 14 centuries, people become so engrossed during the days of Muharram, that they give out of their own lives and wealth for holding ceremonies on Ashura and Muharram? This mourning, chest-beating and chain-beating, sustentations and the like of these indicate that the incident of Ashura has an extraordinariness attached to it.

If we want to evaluate the value of a simple human phenomenon or a great congregational movement, on what factors should we reflect upon till we can understand its value? It is possible that some may look at the number of people that participated in an event or the way the work was carried out. For example, if someone brings a gift for you, will you just pay attention to the way it was given to you or price of the gift? This type of evaluation is childish and those who have a greater understanding and a more complete intellect, will not find these standards suffice to evaluate the value of a phenomenon.

For further explanation, I will give a simple example. If you want to purchase a keffiyeh from the marketplace, what is its price or value? If someone wants to give this cloth to another person as a gift, what is the value of this gift? It is clear that it has a specific and limited price. However you have seen that people, even elders, if they were to receive a keffiyeh from the hands of the rahbar, they will go head over heels. Despite the fact that this is the very same cheap piece of cloth, but when they receive it from the hands of the rahbar, it becomes very valuable for them.

From this very example, it can be understood that in order to evaluate the value of a phenomenon or event, we should not just look at its quantity or its price, rather other standards must also be taken into consideration. The principle here is that how does an evaluator view a phenomenon and how does he measure its form and juxtaposition. The first standard of evaluating a human phenomenon is the motivation of the individual who performs the act. It is possible that one act can attain a negative value due to the intention, however if that very act is done with another intention, it may have a much greater value. For example, how much value does bowing down in front of someone have? It is possible that bowing over can be done in order to make a mockery out of someone, and likewise it is possible that through this act he garners great devotion and love towards himself even though in the apparent sense both acts are the same. If this very act is done with the intention of glorification, it becomes a valuable act and if it is done with the intention of ridiculing, it attains a negative value.

In the midst of all the sword strikes by the warriors of Islam, it was only on one occasion that the Messenger (pbuh) declared a sword strike to be more valuable than the worship of all the Jinns and Humans. «ضربة علي يوم الخندق أفضل من عبادة الثقلين». The quantity or the apparent quality of this strike was not different from the sword strikes of others. However, why did this strike find excellence over

others? The reason for its great value was first and foremost the intention of Imam Ali (as), and the other proof was the effect that resulted through this strike.

Now if we want to evaluate the phenomenon of Ashura and compare it to similar events, we must determine the motivation of Imam Hussain (as), the motivation behind the martyrdom of his companions, children and infants, and the captivity of the women of Ahlul Bayt (as) and what effect was derived through this movement.

Everyone understands the motivation of Imam Hussain (as), to the extent of their own understanding. What we have generally heard is that the movement of Imam Husain (as) was a struggle against oppression, defense of their honour, and defense of their goals and faith, and if this very amount can be understood correctly by us, a lot can be taken away in regards to its value. But these are merely primary steps to understanding the event. The value of the act carried out by Imam Hussain (as) is not comparable to any other act in this universe. Although defending of one's water, land, honour is a very sacred act, and someone who gets killed in this way while defending, receives the reward of a martyr, but are the motivations of others comparable to the motivation of Imam Hussain (as) in Karbala? He had a more meaningful motivation than others. We can understand the true value of the act of Imam Hussain (as) when we understand the importance and value of the religion correctly. However, our evaluation of the worth of the religion is also in accordance to our own grasp and our conduct shows what scale we have used to evaluate its worth. Some people have a correct understanding regarding religion's value and thus they will follow even the most trivial of rulings. The value of the religion for Imam Hussain (as) was such that he sacrificed someone like his fruitful son Ali Akbar (ra) and his honourable brother Abul Fadhil Abbas (ra) – unique personalities, virtuous and complete, whose counterparts can't be found after the Imams (as). Imam Hussain (as) had such devotion because he knew the true value of the religion and thus he was such a believer that he was present and ready to even sacrifice someone like Ali Akbar (ra) and Abbas (ra) and other loved ones who were unique in this universe, so that the religion of Islam continues to remain.

In his last moments before attaining martyrdom, Imam Hussain (as) recited an affectionate munajaat in which he described his own motivation in regards to this self-sacrifice and devotion. He (as) who understood Allah (swt) and understood the value of love, devotion and self-sacrifice in the way of God, whatever calamities befell upon him and as his loved ones went towards martyrdom, his colour and face became more inflamed and exhilarated. A narrator said, I never saw anyone like him in the world that during calamity, rather than his body trembling, his colour leaving, and his hands and feet becoming frail, his colour and face became more inflamed with exhilaration and he became more determined. Love demands that whatever a person has in their hold, be submitted in the way of the loved one. This is just one aspect of Karbala's importance.

Another factor that needs to be taken into consideration while evaluating the event of Ashura is the effect that is associated with it. It is possible that a small act, during a short period of time is carried out by a

few people, but it leaves its impact in history in such a way that every day that passes by since the occurring of event, it flourishes more and rejuvenates itself and leaves its effect in every alleyway and corner, and on every human with every belief and profession. Today, after 1400 years since the event of Ashura, its mark is still fresh and everyday becomes more luminous, more bright and more radiant and anyone who becomes aware of this incident, feels as if he has lost one of his own loved one.

Which event in this world do you know of – which are in the thousands – have left such an impact in the world? Gandhi the well-known saviour of India, whose struggle became the reason for independence of India from the colonization of the English, he prided himself in that he was a lover of Imam Husain (as) and in his struggle, took him as his role model. A second example is the Islamic Revolution of Iran, that by the blessing of the uprising of Ashura, found fruition and an Iran that was fallen backward and was a slave of the West, by the blessing of this revolution, garnered esteem and today even the biggest personalities of the world bring their heads down in front of the greatness of Iran, and all this respect and honour is by the blessing of the name of the Chief of Martyrs (as).

Now, which other phenomenon can you really compare with this event? The point here is that whatever Imam Hussain (as) had, he gave for the sake of Allah (swt) and inversely, God gave to him whatever he wanted. We must gain lessons regarding our individual and congregational lives from the event of Ashura. If we want our lives to be valuable, we must behave in a way where our acts are connected with the name and memory of Imam Hussain (as) and we must take steps in his ways. If we can't understand the complete value of the Chief of Martyrs (as), at the very least we should try to become Hussain-like. And to the extent that our intellect allows us we should try to resemble Imam Hussain (as), so that some understanding of his reaches our intellect.

Just this little relationship that we develop with Imam Hussain, in which we mourn for him, wear black clothes, shed tears and beat our heads and chests, is effective. Why? Because until one does not possess the love of Hussain (as) in their hearts, tears will not shed. This love is what gives the heart its connection with the Chief of Martyrs (as) and God forbid, Allah (swt) accounts someone who has a connection with Imam Hussain (as) equally with someone who don't. But we must not be satisfied with just this amount. Hussain (as) did not attain martyrdom so that we solely shed tears for him and find salvation from punishment; he attained martyrdom so that he becomes a model for all servants of God who wish to travel on the Path of Allah and attract His satisfaction. Although His Holy Door is open and His Table widespread, we must also have politeness and shame. Firstly, we must try to increase our understanding and love for Hussain (as) and then try, to the extent possible and with the capacity that we have, increase our resemblance towards Imam Hussain (as).

Imam Hussain (as) attained martyrdom for the rights of the weak, then how can we say that we are the Shi'a of Hussain (as), and with what face will we look at the noble face of his, when by theft and trickery, bribery and interest we violate the rights of others? When knowledge, affection and love of Imam Hussain (as) is greater, we can also make our way of living nearer to his way of living. In this case, with

the limited capacity that we have, we can reap the benefits from the perfections that he (as) had and invited us towards. All this is redeemed only if we make the roots of our beliefs within us firmer. Because all human behaviour that one has control over, his desires and non-desires, are rooted in belief. The belief that Hussain (as) and his companions had, which made them become more inflamed despite every calamity that befell upon them, was the belief that after this world there is another world in which the Messenger (pbuh), Prophets, and the awliyyah reside, and that they will be beside His Divine Mercy for eternity.

Belief in the Day of Resurrection and an eternal life and as well as love for martyrdom in the way of God had its roots in the heart of Aabis Shakeri, that on the day of Ashura when he entered into the battlefield, he took off his armour. He wished to face and tolerate as many difficulties as he could in the way of his lover. Where can such a type of love for martyrdom be found? How does this Hussaini culture force our thirteen-year old teenager to wear grenades around his waist and amorously lay underneath a tank<sup>1</sup>.

Why were our warriors, lovers of martyrdom and made vows that martyrdom be written in their destinies? Because they had faith that the moment they attain martyrdom, they will find themselves beside the Chief of Martyrs (as) and they knew that if Imam Hussain (as) did not come to them during their time of martyrdom, he was not satisfied, and this faith had its firm roots in their hearts. And with the love of the fact that they would see the face of Hussain (as) after their martyrdom, they were ready to tolerate a thousand arrows and injuries till they were able to get a glance of their loved one for even a moment, and they knew that after this such happiness would be eternal.

We must try to strengthen our belief in the Day of Resurrection and the Eternal World, which is the origin of developing the love of martyrdom. We should become so serious that upon the foundations of these beliefs, the worth of martyrdom matures in our hearts and it becomes something that we value. We should be careful that this culture of ours does not depart from us, and that the love of martyrdom forever remains preserved in our communities as a valuable act. We should all live by such a culture and our children should grow up in this very culture.

In order for us to become like this, we must begin by solidifying our beliefs and faiths and then we should strengthen the values that are attained from such faiths. We should try to make our behaviour pure, and not for pleasing others. We should perform every act for the fact that God and our Imam (as) like those acts, so that our Imam applauds us for them. For a lover of the Chief of Martyrs (as), one applause from Imam Hussain (as) is more valuable than all the pleasures of the world. We stated that one of the standards of measuring the value of an act is the understanding of a person doing an act and his motives. From this point, we can conclude that we must try to understand what acts are a cause of satisfaction for Imam Hussain (as) so that we can perform them. Does man perform an act while knowing that his loved one will be upset by it?

<sup>1</sup>. Referring to incidents during the Iran–Iraq War

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