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Mourning for Imam Husayn (a) and its Outcomes

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Abstract

Mourning is grief of the loss of a loved one and the expression of this grief varies from culture to culture. One who loves the Ahl ul-Bayt and holds sincere sympathy for any oppressed victim mourns over the loss of Imam Husayn and the 72 members who accompanied him during the tragedy of Karbala. Various hadiths emphasize on the value of mourning for the martyrs, both publicly and privately.

One way is to express extreme grief over this tragedy as well as acknowledge Imam Husayn's virtues and strive to emulate him as he proved to be the perfect exemplar. Consequently, the mourner receives bounteous rewards, both in this world and the next. In this article, I offer the outcomes of mourning for Imam Husayn (a) using evidence from Qur'anic verses and passages from Ziyarat 'Ashura. Acknowledging the valiance and sacrifice of Imam Husayn and his companions and displaying inner and outward sorrow for the tragedy helps one attain divine mercy, divine forgiveness, and companionship with the Ahlul Bayt in this world and the next.

Introduction

Imam Husayn (a), the son of Imam Ali and grandson of the holy Prophet Muhammad (s), refused to pledge allegiance against the tyranny of Yazid I, the Umayyad caliph. As a result, Imam Husayn and his 72 family members and companions were brutally massacred on the sands of Karbala as they rose up against the oppressive and religiously misguided regime. For this reason, the Shi'a honor Imam Husayn, the Chief of Martyrs, and commemorate the event every year during the holy month of Muharram.

Questions still arise as to why the Shi'a fervently honor and mourn for the martyrs and have never failed to miss a year in publicly and privately commemorating the tragedy. Honoring exemplars that hold impeccable characteristics of true empathy, sincerity, and unwavering courage against oppression is a

reminder for people to follow their lead. In what follows, the true meaning of mourning in general and mourning for the martyrs in particular will be defined, in addition to describing the divine blessings granted to those who display inner and outward grief for them.

The Meaning of Mourning

The essence of mourning is to grieve the loss of a dear one. People may have different ways of expressing this grief such as wearing black (or white clothing in some cultures), having processions, holding ceremonies, visiting the graves of the deceased, beating their chests, and so forth.

What is important is to distinguish between the essence of mourning and its forms. It looks as if what constitutes mourning is the grief itself. Usually, grief is also openly expressed, since its strong feeling of sorrow is difficult to hide. Of course, it is possible to think of cases in which one may need to hide his or her mourning from others for personal reasons.

Therefore, mourning is one's expression of grief for the loss of a dear one or dear ones. There are also various ways of expressing and exhibiting this grief based on cultural and religious contexts.

True Meaning of Mourning for Imam Husayn (a)

Thus, the true essence of mourning for Imam Husayn (a) is to grieve over the tragic event: the martyrdom of him and 72 members of his family and companions, and the abduction of the women and children of the Ahlul Bayt (a) alongside Imam Ali ibn Husayn (a) who was severely ill. This mourning is a result of love for the Ahlul Bayt (a). It is also an expected sympathy with the oppressed victims of the brutality of tyrants and mischief- makers. Whether a Muslim or not, those who are informed of at least some of the events of Karbala cannot help but display respect and sympathy for Imam Husayn (a) and his family and companions.

Islamic hadiths emphasize the merits of mourning for the martyrs of Karbala, both privately and publicly, and the great reward that is promised as a result. Of course, exceptional situations in which public mourning may lead to unnecessary risks and endanger innocent lives are excluded. Mourning for Imam Husayn (a) is to commemorate the event in which virtue stood against vice and the blood of the oppressed overwhelmed the swords and spears of the oppressors. Therefore, mourning for the martyrs of Karbala in addition to expressing our grief over their loss, especially in such a brutal manner, and showing respect for their bravery and sacrifice, is to attain insight and motivation to follow their path by taking them as our role models. Therefore, a union is to be shaped and strengthened between those who mourn and those who are mourned for.

The emotional essence of this unity is sadness and grief. This would reach its climax when one's tears overflow for the martyrdom of Imam Husayn (a) and his companions. The prerequisite for this sadness is to understand the tragic incidents of the event of Karbala and its aftermath. This event affects any

person who comes to know about these incidents. However, this sadness can strengthen with further recognition of the exemplary status of Imam Husayn (a) and his companions in their position with Allah (swt).

For this reason, for centuries the followers of the Ahlul Bayt (a) continue to find the events of Karbala to be the most painful tragedy of their own and their grief is renewed, instead of forgotten, year after year.

The intellectual essence of this unity is to acknowledge the manifested virtues and values that Imam Husayn (a) and his party demonstrated and to resemble them in the best way possible. To truly mourn and feel sad over a teacher who spent and gave his life making an effort to teach those in need of knowledge is to appreciate his accomplishments and to safeguard and continue his unfinished tasks. We are to truly mourn for a doctor who took risks by travelling to remote and unsafe places to treat the ill and consequently gets killed for a number of reasons. Such a person deserves our respect. We are to emulate him and continue his job. To merely look sad or cry is not enough; it does not fully demonstrate one's loyalty and unity with the lost ones.

Essence of Mourning versus Forms of Mourning

In addition to the emotional and intellectual constituents of true mourning, what matters is how to practice or illustrate it. People should be able to use any form that suits their culture and customs, provided that it does not conflict with the rulings of Islam. Thus, the essence of mourning is religious and sacred and must be preserved, but its forms and expressions may change from culture to culture or from age to age.

Outcomes of True Mourning for Imam Husayn (a)

The main achievement of the sincere mourners for Imam Husayn and his companions is to resemble them in experiencing their virtuous lives and in their honourable deaths. This attitude or condition can bring about other achievements as well. In other words, true mourning is by itself an achievement that can lead to future accomplishments.

In a passage of Ziyarat[2] 'Ashura, we read:

اللّٰهُمَّ اجْعَلْنِي فِي مَقَامِي هٰذَا مِمَّنْ تَنَالُهُ مِنْكَ صَلَوَاتٌ وَرَحْمَةٌ وَمَغْفِرَةٌ

Oh Allah! Please include me right now among those who receive from you salutation and mercy and forgiveness.

Receiving salutation, mercy, and forgiveness can be achieved in this world as said in the phrase "…include me right now among…". It does not only refer to its occurrence in the hereafter.

Divine Salutations

By reflecting on some verses of the Holy Qur'an we can understand the meaning of God's salutation:

هُوَ الَّذِي يُصَلِّي عَلَيْكُمْ وَمَلَائِكَتُهُ لِيُخْرِجَكُمْ مِنَ الظُّلُمَاتِ إِلَى النُّورِ

It is He who sends salutations to you, and so do His angels, that He may bring you out from darknesses into light… (***33:43***)

This means that if Allah blesses us and sends us salutation, we will go out from darknesses into light. This movement from darkness to light marks a process of receiving a new life i.e. the spiritual life or the goodly life (al-hayat al-tayyibah):

أَوَمَنْ كَانَ مَيْتًا فَأَحْيَيْنَاهُ وَجَعَلْنَا لَهُ نُورًا يَمْشِي بِهِ فِي النَّاسِ كَمَنْ مَثَلُهُ فِي الظُّلُمَاتِ لَيْسَ بِخَارِجٍ مِنْهَا

Is he who was lifeless, then We gave him life and provided him with a light by which he walks among the people, like the one who dwells in a manifold darknesses which he cannot leave? (***6:122***)

Life which is mentioned in this verse refers to the spiritual or goodly life:

مَنْ عَمِلَ صَالِحًا مِنْ ذَكَرٍ أَوْ أُنْثَىٰ وَهُوَ مُؤْمِنٌ فَلَنُحْيِيَنَّهُ حَيَاةً طَيِّبَةً وَلَنَجْزِيَنَّهُمْ أَجْرَهُمْ بِأَحْسَنِ مَا كَانُوا يَعْمَلُونَ

Whoever acts righteously, [***whether***] ***male or female, should he be faithful, We shall revive him with a good life and pay them their reward by the best of what they used to do.*** (***16: 97***)

In this verse, Allah (swt) speaks of the goodly life (al-hayat al- tayyibah), a high spiritual position that comes with light. This can be achieved after being a true believer and performing good acts.

Reflecting on these verses we understand that when Allah gives us salutation we will be bestowed with light and a kind of new life. In addition to in the phrase read in Ziyarat 'Ashura, we come to the conclusion that those who truly mourn for Imam Husayn (a) receive salutations from God and through that they can gain light and the goodly life.

Divine Mercy

Significance of divine mercy in the Qur'an

Divine mercy occupies a central position in Islam. For example, in the chapter Al-Hamd, the Opening of

the Qur'an, and the only chapter without which no prayer can be said[3], Allah emphasizes His mercy four times in it. Its repetition is because of necessity; moreover, it means that if we want to know Allah in Islam, then we must first know that He is Al-Rahman (the All-Merciful) and Al-Rahim (the Most-Merciful).

Now a question arises: What happens to us when we receive divine mercy? To answer this question, we should study the significance and functions of God's mercy.

Divine mercy as the aim of creation: The entire creation depends on mercy. Fundamentally, the creation of the universe is bound up with Allah's mercy. The Qur'an says:

وَلَوْ شَاءَ رَبُّكَ لَجَعَلَ النَّاسَ أُمَّةً وَاحِدَةً وَلَا يَزَالُونَ مُخْتَلِفِينَ إِلَّا مَنْ رَحِمَ رَبُّكَ وَلِذَٰلِكَ خَلَقَهُمْ

Had your Lord wished, He would have made mankind one community; but they continue to differ, except those on whom your Lord has mercy —and that is why He created them... (***11:118-119***)

According to the preferred interpretation of this verse, "that is why" means that mercy is the aim of the creation and God has created mankind to give them His mercy. Imam Sadiq (a) was asked about this verse and he replied, "He created them so that they do something by which they deserve His mercy, and then He provides mercy."[4]

Divine mercy protects us

The fact that God protects us from many dangers has been stressed on in several verses of the Qur'an. For example, the Qur'an asserts that God's mercy and grace helps us to avoid Satan:

وَلَوْلَا فَضْلُ اللَّهِ عَلَيْكُمْ وَرَحْمَتُهُ لَاتَّبَعْتُمُ الشَّيْطَانَ إِلَّا قَلِيلًا

...And were it not for God's grace upon you and His mercy, you would have surely followed Satan, [***all***] ***except a few.*** (***4:83***)

The Qur'an also refers to God's mercy as an aid to believers by halting their enemies devising of plots against them. Were it not for God's mercy, more plots were to be devised by the enemies:

۞ وَلَوْلَا فَضْلُ اللَّهِ عَلَيْكَ وَرَحْمَتُهُ لَهَمَّتْ طَائِفَةٌ مِنْهُمْ أَنْ يُضِلُّوكَ وَمَا يُضِلُّونَ إِلَّا أَنْفُسَهُمْ ۖ وَمَا يَضُرُّونَكَ مِنْ شَيْءٍ
وَأَنْزَلَ اللَّهُ عَلَيْكَ الْكِتَابَ وَالْحِكْمَةَ وَعَلَّمَكَ مَا لَمْ تَكُنْ تَعْلَمُ ۚ وَكَانَ فَضْلُ اللَّهِ عَلَيْكَ عَظِيمًا

Were it not for God's grace and His mercy on you, a group of them were bent on leading you astray; but they do not mislead anyone except themselves, and they cannot do you any harm.

God has sent down to you the Book and wisdom, and He has taught you what you did not know, and great is God's grace upon you. (***4:113***)

Divine mercy also protects us from our own carnal soul

وَمَا أُبَرِّئُ نَفْسِي إِنَّ النَّفْسَ لَأَمَّارَةٌ بِالسُّوءِ إِلَّا مَا رَحِمَ رَبِّي ۚ إِنَّ رَبِّي غَفُورٌ رَحِيمٌ

Yet I do not absolve my [***own carnal***] ***soul, for the*** [***carnal***] ***soul indeed prompts*** [***men***] ***to evil, except inasmuch as my Lord has mercy. Indeed my Lord is All-forgiving, All-merciful.*** (***12:53***)

We can also understand from the Qur'an that when someone insists on performing immoral actions and maintains his vicious qualities, he distances himself from divine mercy. Being far from God's mercy is introduced in the Qur'an as "la'n" (curse).

Those who are far from God's mercy will become hard-hearted, or their hearts will be sealed, and therefore, they would not be able to realize or acknowledge the truth and are bound to go astray:

فَبِمَا نَقْضِهِمْ مِيثَاقَهُمْ لَعَنَّاهُمْ وَجَعَلْنَا قُلُوبَهُمْ قَاسِيَةً

Then, because of their breaking their covenant We cursed them and made their hearts hard... (***5:13***)

Among those whom Allah cursed are the People of Sabbath:

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ أُوتُوا الْكِتَابَ آمِنُوا بِمَا نَزَّلْنَا مُصَدِّقًا لِمَا مَعَكُمْ مِنْ قَبْلِ أَنْ نَطْمِسَ وُجُوهًا فَنَرُدَّهَا عَلَىٰ أَدْبَارِهَا أَوْ نَلْعَنَهُمْ كَمَا لَعَنَّا أَصْحَابَ السَّبْتِ ۚ وَكَانَ أَمْرُ اللَّهِ مَفْعُولًا

O you who were given the Book! Believe in what We have sent down confirming what is with you, before We blot out the faces and turn them backwards, or curse them as We cursed the People of the Sabbath, and God's command is bound to be fulfilled. (***4:47***)

قُلْ هَلْ أُنَبِّئُكُمْ بِشَرٍّ مِنْ ذَٰلِكَ مَثُوبَةً عِنْدَ اللَّهِ مَنْ لَعَنَهُ اللَّهُ وَغَضِبَ عَلَيْهِ وَجَعَلَ مِنْهُمُ الْقِرَدَةَ وَالْخَنَازِيرَ وَعَبَدَ الطَّاغُوتَ أُولَٰئِكَ شَرٌّ مَكَانًا وَأَضَلُّ عَنْ سَوَاءِ السَّبِيلِ

Say, 'Shall I inform you concerning something worse than that as a requital from God? Those whom God has cursed and with whom He is wrathful, and turned some of whom into apes and swine, and worshippers of the Rebel! Such are in a worse situation, and more astray from the right way.' (***5:60***)

Those who disregarded the divine rulings like the People of Sabbath who insistently committed immoral acts were cursed and transformed into apes as a result.

This can explain some of the brutal acts which were committed by the enemies of Imam Husayn (a) on the Day of 'Ashura. Those who went to Karbala to fight unjustifiably against Imam Husayn (a) and his family and companions were deprived of divine mercy and were cursed; consequently, their inner beings resembled wild animals. Indeed, it was because mercy was withdrawn from that they did what they did. Therefore, we are not the ones who curse the killers of Imam Husayn (a). When we ask Allah (swt) to curse them, it is more of an acknowledgement of what has already happened and accepting that it should continue as before. The merciless enemies of the Imam have not repented, nor did they attempt to restore the damage they caused. As a result of what they did, humanity continues to suffer. About those who annoy the Prophet (s), during or after his physical life, the Qur'an says:

إِنَّ الَّذِينَ يُؤْذُونَ اللَّهَ وَرَسُولَهُ لَعَنَهُمُ اللَّهُ فِي الدُّنْيَا وَالْآخِرَةِ

Indeed those who torment Allah and His Apostle are cursed by Allah in the world and the Hereafter. (***33:57***)

Those who are said to be cursed and are consequently distant from Allah's mercy in this world are apt to commit any immoral act, since they do not have any protection from Allah.

Thus, reflecting on the above mentioned passage of Ziyarat 'Ashura, we understand that a true mourner for Imam Husayn (a) who receives God's mercy can be protected from various dangers and threats.

Divine forgiveness

If we truly mourn for Imam Husayn (a) we will achieve Allah's forgiveness. We implore Allah to forgive us and wipe away our past sins.

Being with the Ahl ul-Bayt (a) in this world and the Hereafter

After we discussed that which we can achieve in this world by mourning for Imam Husayn, we now refer to another passage of Ziyarat 'Ashura. This section of the ziyara refers to what we can achieve merely in this world, or both this world and the Hereafter. In this passage, the very first thing we ask for is recognition of the Infallibles (a):

So then I ask Allah, who has honored me with recognition of all of you and recognition of your followers (*walis*) *and has also granted me the opportunity to denounce your enemies, that He places me with you, both in this world and the Hereafter, and that He makes firm my honest and truthful stance in your presence both in this world and in the Hereafter.*

And I ask Him (Allah) that He enables me to reach the most praised station that you have with Allah and that He grants me the ability to seek justice for those who shed your blood with the rightly guided Imam, who shall surely reappear and speak the truth.

To be with the Prophet (s) and his household in this world means to remain in their faction and work for their causes; to be with them in the Hereafter means to join them on the Day of Resurrection when every assemblage are asked to join their leaders:

The day We shall summon every group of people with their imam, then whoever is given his book in his right hand they will read it, and they will not be wronged so much as a single date-thread. (17: 71)

After joining the Prophet (s) and his household, the believer hopes to reach the praised position (al-maqam al-mahmiid) that belongs to them. That is the high position for which the Prophet (s) earned through much effort:

يَوْمَ نَدْعُو كُلَّ أُنَاسٍ بِإِمَامِهِمْ ۖ فَمَنْ أُوتِيَ كِتَابَهُ بِيَمِينِهِ فَأُولَٰئِكَ يَقْرَءُونَ كِتَابَهُمْ وَلَا يُظْلَمُونَ فَتِيلًا

And stay awake for some part of the night as a devotion for you. It may be that your Lord will raise you to a praiseworthy station to (a position of Great Glory). (17:79)

In the Hereafter, the Prophet and his Household hold a position in which all the Prophets and Saints (Awliya) will envy. The one who truly mourns for Imam Husayn (a) asks Allah (swt) to give him the ability to reach the same position, because he is not going to separate from his masters; therefore, we are to follow their lead. And this is a great achievement. We achieve closeness and companionship of the Prophet and his Household without having performed outstanding actions or holding highly-esteemed virtues.

Of course, we are expected to have faith, perform the daily prayers, fast, and try to observe Islamic rulings, but considering the long spiritual journey we have ahead, our good deeds are not sufficient, because they are very limited and very few.

Here, we are still encouraged to aspire for something very high: to ask Allah (swt) to give us the opportunity to enjoy their praised position. That is one reason why the Prophet (s) called Imam Husayn (a) as “the ship of salvation” (safinat al-najat).

Conclusion

If we truly mourn for Imam Husayn (a), we should feel like we are coming out of darkness, a feeling of becoming radiant. We should feel that we have been released from the burden of our sins and that resisting our desires, performing prayers, helping others with kindness and compassion have become easier. We can reach the Praised Position and the Goodly life through sharing in Imam Husayn’s (a)

hardship. This is one way to explain why the Prophet (s) called Imam Husayn (a) as “the ship of salvation.”

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2. Arabic term literally meaning “visit” used to refer to a pilgrimage to sites associated with Prophet Muhammad, his family members, and his descendants. Ziyarat can also refer to a form of supplication in which people send salutations and greetings to Prophet Muhammad and his family.
3. For example, see Mustadrak al-Wasa’il, vol. 4, p. 159.
4. Wasa’Il al-Shi‘ah, vol. 1, no. 85.

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