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Reciting elegies in the form of poetry

There is no doubt that reciting elegies in the form of poetry has a useful effect on the spirit, psyche and emotions. Therefore, if lamentation is presented in the form of poetry, the hearts and souls of people are affected more.

When the event of Karbala, which in itself is a stimulator of the emotions and feelings of Muslims, is presented in the form of poetry, the effects produced are even more worthwhile. Poetry is highly effective at awakening the feelings and emotions of people, so through poetry Imam al-Husayn (as) and his lofty aims and objectives can be made known to the people more effectively.

Now, we will examine this issue from the viewpoint of the divine law of Islam:

Reasoning regarding the recitation of poetic elegies

To substantiate that it is permissible, even desirable, to recite elegies in the form of poetry, we refer to a number of proofs:

1. The precept of permissibility [ibahah]

The basic principle in all acts is that all things are permissible [*mubah*] so long as there is no evidence that contradicts it. This precept is applicable to the recitation of elegies also. Because reciting elegies in the form of poetry has not been refuted, on the contrary, there is evidence to prove that it is desirable; it is therefore included in this basic principle of permissibility [*ibahah*].

2. Exalting and venerating the mottos [sha'a'ir] of religion

If the person about whom one intends to recite mourning poetry is an *awliya'* of Allah or one of the pious leaders of the Islamic community, we can easily attract the people's attention towards him by reciting elegies in the form of poetry. In the end, this will encourage people to follow and obey that person.

This is what is meant by following and obeying the friends and trusted ones of Allah and their orders.

Therefore, it can be said that reciting elegies in the form of poetry is one of the most evident forms of exalting divine sanctities and venerating the signs of Allah.

3. The poetic elegies of Prophet Adam (as)

On his chain of transmission, Tabari narrates that Imam ‘Ali said, “When the child of Adam (Abel) was killed by his brother (Cain), Prophet Adam cried and recited this elegy,

تغيرتِ البلادُ ومن عليها فلونُ الارضِ مغبّر قبيح

تغير كلّ ذي طعمٍ ولونٍ وقلّ بشاشةُ الوجهِ المليحُ[522]

4. Poetic elegies recited for the Holy Prophet (S)

A large number of the Prophet’s (S) companions used to recite elegies when mourning over the Holy Prophet (S).

A. Poetic elegies of Fatimah al-Zahra (as)

Ibn ‘Abd Rabbah recounts that Fatimah (as) stood at the head of her father’s tomb and recited,

فقد ناك فقدَ الارضِ وابلها وغابَ مذغبت عنّا الوحيُّ والكتب

فليتَ قبلك كانَ الموتُ صادفنا لمّا نعيتَ وحالتْ دونك الكتبُ[523]

B. Poetic elegies of the daughter of ‘Abd al-Muttalib

ألا يا رسولَ اللهِ كنتَ رجاءَنا وكنتَ بنا برّاً ولم تك جافياً

وكنتَ رحيماً هادياً ومعلّماً لبيكِ عليك اليومَ من كانَ باكياً 524

C. Poetic elegies of Hassan ibn Thabit

ومالك لا تبكينَ ذاالنعمةِ التي على الناسِ منها سائغٌ يتغمّد

فجودي عليهِ بالمدموعِ وأعولي لفقدِ الذي لا مثلهُ الدهرُ يوجد

وما فقدَ الماضونَ مثلَ محمّدٍ ولا مثلهُ حتّى القيامةِ يفقد

D. Poetic elegies of Abu Sufiyan ibn Harith

Ibn Ishaq says, “Abu Sufiyan ibn Harith cried a lot in grieving for the Holy Prophet and recited this elegy,

أرّقتُ فباتَ ليلي لايزولُ وليلُ أخي المصيبةِ فيه طول

فاسعدني البكاءُ وذاك فيما أُصيب المسلمونَ به قليل

لقد عظمتْ مصيبتنا وجلّتْ عشيةَ قيلَ: قد قُبِضَ الرسولُ525

E. Poetic elegies of Abi Dhu’ayb ibn Hadhali

كُسفِتْ لمصرعهِ النجومُ وبدرُها وتزعزعتْ آطامُ بطنِ الأبطحِ

وتزعزعتْ أجبالُ يثربَ كلُّها ونخيلُها لحلولِ خطبٍ مفدحِ526

F. Poetic elegies of Abi al-Haytham ibn Tayyahan

لقد جدعتْ آذانُنا وانوفُنا غداةَ فجئْنا بالنّبي محمّدِ527

G. Poetic elegies of Umm Ra‘lah Qushayriyyah

يا دارَ فاطمةَ المعمورُ ساحتُها هيجتِ لي حَزَناً حُيِيتِ من دارِ528

H. Poetic elegies of ‘Amir ibn Tufayl

بكتِ الارضُ والسماءُ على النو رِ الذي كانَ للعبادِ سراجاً

من هدينا به الى سبيل ال قٍ وكنّا لانعرفُ المنهاجا529

I. Poetic elegies of Suad ibn Qarib

بكتْ عليهِ ارضُنا و سماؤُنا وتصدّعتْ وجداً به الاكبادُ

لو قيلَ: تفدون النّبيَّ محمداً بُذلتْ لهُ الاموالُ والاولادُ

5. Recitation of poetic elegies before the Holy Prophet (S)

The Prophet's (S) companions used to recite elegies for many people in the presence of the Holy Prophet (S) himself and the Prophet not only did not prohibit them from doing so, but he encouraged them as well.

A. Poetic elegies for Hamzah ibn 'Abd al-Muttalib

Safiyyah, the daughter of 'Abd al-Muttalib and the sister of Hamzah, recited,

أسائلةٌ اصحابَ أحدٍ مخافةً بناتِ أبي من أعجمٍ وخبيرِ

فقالَ الخبيرُ إنّ حمزةَ قد ثوى وزيرُ رسولِ اللهِ خيرُ وزيرِ

دعاهُ الى الحقّ ذوالعرشِ دعوةً الى جنّةٍ يَحيا بها وسرورُ 530

When mourning for Hamzah, Ka'b ibn Malik used to recite,

صفيةُ قومي ولا تَعجزي وبكّي النساءَ على حمزةِ

ولا تسأمي أن تطيلي البُكا على أسدِ اللهِ في الهزّةِ

فقد كانَ عزّاً لأ يتامِنا وليثَ الملاحمِ في البزّةِ

يريدُ بذاك الرضا احمداً ورضوانُ ذي العرشِ والعزّةِ531

B. Poetic elegies for ‘Ubaydah ibn Harith ibn ‘Abd al-Muttalib, one of the martyrs of the Battle of Badr

When ‘Ubaydah was killed at Badr, Ka‘b ibn Malik Ansari cried mournfully and recited,

ايا عينُ جودي ولا تبخلي بدمعكِ حقاً ولا تنزري

على سيدٍ هدّنا هُلَكه كريمِ المشاهدِ والعنصرِ 532

C. Elegies for Ja‘far ibn Abi Talib and those Martyred with him

Hassan ibn Thabit recited,

فلا يبعدنَّ اللهِ قتلى تتابعوا بمؤتةَ منهم ذو الجناحينِ جعفرُ

وزيدُ وعبدُ اللهِ فيمن تتابعوا جميعاً وأصحابُ المنيةِ تخطرّ533

Ka‘b ibn Malik Ansari recited,

نامَ العيونُ ودمعُ عينكَ يهملُ سحّاً كما وكفَّ الطبابُ المخضّلُ

في ليلةٍ وردتْ عليّ همومُها طوراً أحِنُّ وتارةً أتململُ

صبروا بموتةِ للإلهِ نفوسَهُم حذَر الردى ومخافةً ان ينكلوا

اذ يهتدونَ بجعفرٍ ولوائهِ قدّامَ اوّلهِم فنعمَ الاوّلُ534

D. Poetic elegies for those killed on the day of Raji‘

A group of people came to see the Prophet of Allah (S). They requested that a number of people be sent to their area to teach them the laws of Islam. The Prophet (S) sent six of his companions to them.

When these six companions arrived at the spring of Raji‘, which was the source of water for the tribe of Hudhayl, those who had made this request from the Prophet attacked these six people with the help of the local people of the tribe of Hudhayl. The attackers first said, “We do not intend to kill you, but just want to hand you over to the people of Mecca so as to receive a reward from them.”

Some of the Prophet’s companions started fighting their attackers and in the process were martyred. However, Khabib and his companion surrendered themselves. Along the way, Khabib’s companion wanted to draw his sword against these people, but they martyred him with a large stone. In the end, Khabib was given over to the people of Mecca, who hanged him.

Hassan recited the following about these six martyrs,

صلّى الإلهُ على الذينَ تتابعوا يومَ الرجيعِ فأكرموا واثيبوا

رأسُ السريةِ مرثدُ واميرُهُم وابُن البكيرِ امامُهُم وخُبيبُ535

And then, while crying, he said,

ما بالُ عينك لا ترقْأ مدامِعُها سحّاً على الصدرِ مثلَ الؤلؤِ القلقِ

على خُبيبٍ فتى الفتيانِ قد علمِوا لا فشلُ حتّى تلقاهُ ولا نزقِ536

E. Poetic elegies of Na‘am when grieving over her husband who was one of the martyrs of the Battle of Uhud

يا عينُ جودي بفيضٍ غيرِ ابساسِ على كريمٍ من الفتيانِ لبّاسِ537

F. Elegies for Sa‘d ibn Ma‘adh, wounded at Khandaq

A man from among the Helpers [*ansar*] says this about Sa‘d,

وما اهتزَّ عرشَ اللهِ من موتِ هلكٍ سمعنا بهِ الاّ لسعدِ أبي عمرو538

Hassan ibn Thabit, while mourning Sa‘d, recited,

لقد سجمتْ من دمعِ عينيَّ عبرةٌ وحقَّ لعيني أن تفيضَ على سعدِ

قتيلٌ ثوى في معركٍ فجعتْ بهِ عيونُ ذواري الدمعِ دائمةُ الوجدِ539

G. Elegies for the martyrs of the Well of Ma‘unah

Abu Barra’ said to the Holy Prophet (S), “If you send someone from among your companions to invite the people of Najd, there is hope that they will accept your call to Islam.” The Noble Prophet (S) sent a number of his companions to Najd. On their way, they stopped for a time at the well of Ma‘unah.

When they were confronted, they gave a letter from the Holy Prophet (S) to their attackers, but the attackers paid no attention to it. They martyred the carrier of the Prophet’s letter and, with the help of other tribes, killed the remaining Muslims. ‘Abd Allah ibn Rawahah grieved for Nafi‘ ibn Badil ibn Warqa’ Khaza‘i, who was among the martyrs and recited,

رحَم اللهُ نافَع بَن بديلِ رحمةَ المبتغي ثوابَ الجهادِ

صابرٌ صادقٌ وفيٌّ اذا ما أكثَر القومُ قالَ قولَ السدادِ540

While grieving over them, Hassan ibn Thabit recites,

على قتلي معونةُ فاستهلّي بدمعِ العينِ سحاً غيرَ نزرِ541

H. Poetic elegies for ‘Uthman ibn Maz‘un

When ‘Uthman ibn Maz‘un passed away, his wife said this about him,

يا عينُ جودي بدمعٍ غيرِ ممنونِ على رزيّةِ عثمانَ بنِ مظعونِ

على أمري كانَ في رضوانِ خالقهِ طوبي لهُ من فقيدِ الشخصِ مدفونِ542

I. Poetic elegies for Walid ibn Walid ibn Mughayrah

Umm Salamah, the Prophet’s (S) wife, while grieving for Walid, recited,

ألا يا ليتَ امّي لم تلدْني ولم اكُ في الغزاةِ لدى البقيعِ

ولم أرَ مصرعِ بنِ الخيرِ زيدٍ وهدّتهُ هنا لكَ من صريعِ543

J. Elegies for Zayd ibn ‘Umar ibn Khattab

Ayas ibn Bakir in an elegy for Zayd ibn ‘Umar ibn Khattab, who was killed in the war with the tribe of Bani ‘Uday, says,

يا عينُ فابكي للوليدِ بنِ الوليدِ بنِ مغيرة قد كانَ غيثاً في السنينِ ورحمةً فينا وميره544

K. Poetic elegies of Imam ‘Ali (as) grieving Fatimah (as)

Amir al-Mu’minin Imam ‘Ali (as) stood at the tomb of Fatimah al-Zahra (as) in a sorrowful state. Sorrow was choking his throat, and he could not stop the burning tears flowing from his heart. It was at this time that he recited,

لكلَّ اجتماعٍ من خليلبنِ فرقةٌ وكلُّ الذي دونَ الممات قليلُ

وإنّ افتقادي واحداً بعد واحدٍ دليلٌ على أن لا يدومُ خليلُ545

Poetic elegies recited for Imam al-Husayn (as)

Abu al-Faraj Isfahani maintains that, “Poets did not recite elegies for Imam al-Husayn (as).”1

However, in fact, there are many records of people that recited poetry while grieving for Imam al-Husayn (as). Sibt ibn Jawzi narrates from Sadda that he said, “The first person who recited elegies for Imam al-Husayn (as) was ‘Utbah ibn ‘Amru ‘Abasi.”

In addition, upon study of history, one can see that there have been poets who recited elegies when grieving for Imam al-Husayn (as). Some of these instances are listed in the following discussion:

1. Sulayman ibn Quttah

Ibn Quttah was one of the men of the tribe of Bani Tamim ibn Marrah ibn Ka‘b ibn Lu’ay and one of the supporters of Bani Hashim. He was from among the generation which came after the Holy Prophet (S) [*tabi‘in*]. He has composed a poem eulogizing Imam al-Husayn (as) in verse. The first part reads,

مررتُ على ابياتِ آلِ محمّدٍ فلم أرَها كعهدِها يومَ حلّتْ547

2. Abu al-Rajah Khaza'i

Marzbani narrates, "Abu al-Rajah Khaza'i went to see Fatimah, the daughter of al-Husayn ibn 'Ali (as), and recited elegies to her about al-Husayn, including,

أجالتْ على عَيني سجائبُ عبرةٍ فلم تصحُّ بعدَ الدمعِ حتى ارمعلّتِ

تبكي على آلِ النبيَّ محمّدٍ ما اكثرتْ في الدمعِ لا بلْ اقلّتِ548

3. Zaynab, the daughter of Imam 'Ali (as)

When the blessed severed head of Imam al-Husayn (as) and the captives reached Medina, all the people of Medina came out of their houses crying and weeping. At this time, Zaynab (as), the daughter of 'Ali ibn Abi Talib (as), cried out sorrowfully, "O al-Husayn! O my brother! O members of my Household! O Muhammad!" Then, she recited prose saying,

ماذا تقولونَ إذ قالَ النبيُّ لكمْ ماذا فعلتْم وانتْم آخرُ الأممِ

بأهلِ بيتي وأولادي أما لكُمُ عهُد أما أنتمُ توفونَ بالذّممِ

ذريتي وبنو عمّي بمضيعةٍ منهمْ أسارى ومنهمْ ضرّجوا بدمِ

ما كانَ هذا جزاءي اذ نَصحتُ لكُمْ أن تخلفوني بسوءٍ في ذوي رَحمي549

4. Ja'far ibn 'Affan

Ibn 'Affan was one of the companions of Imam al-Sadiq (as). He eulogizes Imam al-Husayn (as) in this way,

لبّيكِ على الاسلامِ من كانَ باكياً فقد ضُيّعتْ احكامُهُ واستحلّتِ

غداةَ حسينٌ للرماحِ دريئةٌ وقد نهلَتْ منهُ السيوفُ وعلّتِ

وغودِر في الصحراءِ لحماً مبدّداً وقد نهلتْ منهُ السيوفُ وعلّتِ

فما نصرتْه أمّةُ السوءِ اذ دَعا لقد طاشتِ الاحلامُ منها وضلّتِ550

5. Muhammad ibn Idris Shafi‘i

Muhammad ibn ‘Izz al-Din Yusuf ibn al-Hasan Zarandi, the scholar of traditions [*hadith*s] in the Prophets Mosque in Medina, quoted from Abu al-Qasim Fadl ibn Muhammad Mustamla, who quotes Qadi Abu Bakr Sahl ibn Muhammad, from Abu al-Qasim Bakran ibn Tayyib that news reached him that Shafi‘i used to recite the following,

تأوّبَ همّي والفؤادُ كئيبُ وأرّقَ عيني والرقادُ غريبُ

وممّا نفى نومي وشيّبَ لُمّتي تصاريفُ ايّام لهنَّ خطوبُ

تزلزلتِ الدنيا لآلِ محمدٍ وكادتْ لهمْ صمُّ الجبالِ تذوبُ

وغارتْ نجومٌ واقشعرّتْ ذوائبٌ وهتّكَ استارٌ وشقَّ جيوبُ

فَللنصلِ إعوالٌ وللرّمحِ رنّةٌ وللخيلِ من بعدِ الصّهيلِ نحيبُ

فمنْ مبلغٌ عنيّ الحسينَ رسالةً وإن كرهتْها انفسٌ وقلوبُ

قتيلٌ بِلا جرمٍ كأنّ قصيصَهُ صبيغٌ بماءِ الأُرجوانِ خضيبُ

يُصلّي على المختارِ منْ آلِ هاشمٍ ويغزي بنوهُ إنّ ذا لعجيبُ

لئنْ كانَ ذنبي حبُّ آلِ محمّدٍ فذلكَ ذنبٌ لستُ عنهُ أتوبُ

هُمُ شفعائي يومَ حشري وموقفي وحبُّهُمُ للشافعيَّ ذنوبُ551

6. Amir Adid al-Din

Zarandi recounts that Amir Adid al-Din Muhammad ibn ‘Ali ibn Ahmad ibn ‘Ali ibn ‘Abd Allah Wazir narrates that elegies have been recited about al-Husayn ibn ‘Ali (as) and his household (as) that are as lucid as water, rather even more subtle and exquisite, such as the following,

بدتْ كربلا ملأى من الكربِ والبَلا فقوما معي في ارضِها وقِفا نبكي

بها قتلوا سبطَ النبيَّ محمدٍ وباعوا هذاكَ الرّشدِ بالمالِ والمُلكِ

وضاعتْ دماءٌ بالعراقِ عزيزةٌ مكرّمةٌ اذ كانَ راماً من المسكِ

فياويلَ اقوامٍ طغاةٍ تعرّضوا لتلكَ الدماءِ الفاطمياتِ بالسفكِ552

7. The grandfather of Sibt ibn Jawzi

Sibt ibn Jawzi narrates from his grandfather that he used to recite elegies when grieving for Imam al-Husayn, some parts of which read,

ولمّا رأَوا بعضَ الحياة مذلّةً عليهِمْ وعزَّ الموت غَير محرّمِ

أبَوا أن يذوقوا العيشَ والذلُّ واقعٌ عليهِ وماتوا ميتةً لم تذمّمِ553

8. Rubab, the wife of Imam al-Husayn (as)

Abu al-Faraj Isfahani recounts from Hisham that he said, “After the martyrdom of Imam al-Husayn (as), a marriage proposal was presented to Rubab, the wife of Imam al-Husayn (as). She refused the proposal, and said, ‘After the Prophet’s child, I will never marry anyone.’ Then, she recited these verses while grieving for Imam al-Husayn (as),

إنّ الذي كانَ يستضاء به بكربلاء قتيلٌ غيرُ مدفونِ

سبطُ النبيِّ جزاكَ اللهُ صالحةً عنّا وجنّبتَ خسرانَ الموازينِ

قد كنتَ لي جبلاً صعباً ألوذُ بهِ وكنتَ تصحُبنا بالرّحمِ والدينِ

من لليتامى ومن للسائلينَ ومَنْ يُغني ويُؤوي اليهِ كلّ مسكينِ

واللهِ لا أبتغي صِهراً بصحرِكُمُ حتى أُغيّبَ بينَ الرملِ والطينِ554

9. ‘Ubayd Allah ibn Hurr Ju‘fi

Ibn Athir recounts, “When Mu‘awiyah passed away and al-Husayn ibn ‘Ali (as) was killed, ‘Ubayd Allah ibn Hurr was one of the people who had not participated in killing Imam al-Husayn and had deliberately hidden himself.

When al-Husayn was killed, Ibn Ziyad started searching for the nobles and renowned figures among the people of Kufah but he did not find ‘Ubayd Allah ibn Hurr until ‘Ubayd Allah, on his own accord, presented himself to Ibn Ziyad.

Ibn Ziyad said to him, “Where were you?” He replied, “I was ill.” Ibn Ziyad said, “Was it your heart or your body which was sick?” He replied, “My heart was not ill. My body was, but thanks to Allah, who has now granted me good health.” Ibn Ziyad said, “You lie. You were with our enemies.” He replied, “If I were with them, then you would find me, too.”

Later, Ibn Ziyad became inattentive of ‘Ubayd Allah ibn Hurr. Therefore, ‘Ubayd Allah managed to leave the governor’s palace and got on his horse. Ibn Ziyad asked about his whereabouts. Others replied, “He got on his horse, went out of the palace and is now riding away.” Ibn Ziyad said, “Bring him back to me.”

The officials of the palace followed ‘Ubayd Allah and when they found him, they said, “You have to follow the orders of the governor and return.” He replied, “Inform him that I will never return to him of my own accord.” Then, he rode to the house of Ahmad ibn Ziyad Ta’i where his friends and companions gathered around him.

Then, he left that place and went to Karbala. He looked at the death place of Imam al-Husayn (as) and his companions and asked forgiveness. He then set out for Mada’in. In a eulogy of the massacred martyrs he said,

يقول أميرٌ غادرٌ وابنُ غادرٍ ألا كنتُ قابلتُ الشهيدَ بنَ فاطمهْ

ونفسي على خذلانِهِ واعتزالهِ وبيعةِ هذا الناكثِ العهد لائمهْ

فيا ندمي أن لا اكونَ نصرتُهُ ألا كلُّ نفسٍ لا تسدَّدَ نادمهْ

ويا ندمي أن لم أكنْ من حماتِهِ لذو حسرةٍ ما أن تفارقَ لازمهْ

سقى اللهُ ارواحَ الذينَ تآزروا على نصرِهِ سقياً من الغيثِ دائمهْ

وقفتُ على اجداثِهِمْ ومجالِهِمْ فكادَ الحشى ينفضُّ والعينُ ساجمهْ[1]

1. Maqatil al-Talibiyyin, p. 90.

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