

# Muharram and Safar Are the Two Months that Have preserved Islam

## Muharram and Ashura

*Muharram is the first month of the Islamic calendar, when Muslims commemorate the martyrdom of Imam Hussein (as), the grandson of the Prophet Mohammad (saw) and the third Imam and leader of the Shi'a. Imam Hussein's (as) martyrdom is a sad day for all Muslims especially the Shi'a, who mourn the massacre of their "Master of Martyrs" and his family in Karbala in 61AH/680CE .*

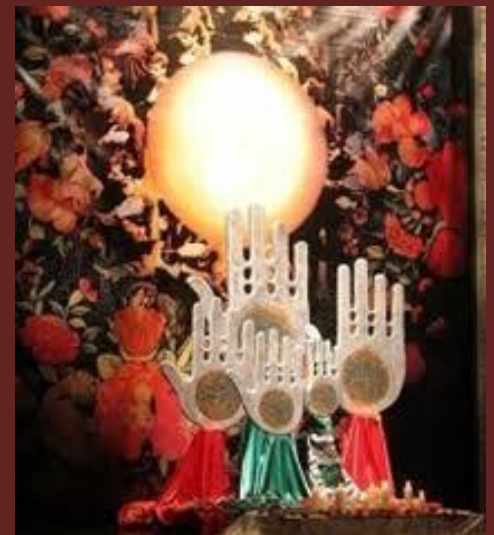
The martyrdom of Imam Hussein ibn 'Ali (as) and his companions in Karbala' proved to be the beginning of the downfall of the Umayyad dynasty which had usurped the Shi'a caliphate by deceit, repression, and corruption of the Muslim community. Though the Imam (as) was martyred with his family and companions, and apparently his murderers seemed to emerge winners from the conflict, it was the martyr of Karbala' who was the real victor. The mourning ceremonies that have been held through the last fourteen hundred years to commemorate this most significant event in the history of Shi'a are generally known as Muharram ceremonies, as they are held during the month of Muharram in remembrance of the 'Ashura' movement. This incident has its background whose elaborate details have been given by Muslim historians and I need not cite them here.

Briefly, it may be said that Imam Hussein's revolt, staged against the tyranny, injustice, and repression of the regime and torture and execution of pious Muslims, which violated the Shi'a

concept of a just Shi'a policy and society, was to uphold the ideals and values of Shi'a propounded in the Qur'an and the traditions of the Prophet (S), to rescue the higher human values, moral, social, political and spiritual, and to preserve the true spirit of Shi'a . It was basically aimed by the martyred Imam (as) to rescue Shi'a as the message of the last Prophet, a message that had to endure, not only in the hearts and spirits of saints but on the plane of society, and he achieved his purpose most completely. The episode of Karbala' became the everlasting stage on which, more than anything else, the great spirit of an Imam of the Ahl al-Bayt was put for eternal display, not in mere words or traditions recorded in books, but against the background of the greatest tragedy in human history and scenes of love and loyalty, bravery and sacrifice, nobility and high spirituality, blood and battle, and also those of treachery and betrayal, human abasement and wretchedness, perversity and depravity. Due to his refusal to compromise with godlessness and tyranny, the Imam has been remembered as the very embodiment of Tawhid, of La laha illallah, by all great Shi'a mystics, thinkers, writers and poets. In the words of the great Indian Sufi of Iranian origin, Khwajah Mu'in-al-Din Chishti: "He gave his life but wouldn't give his hand in the hand of Yazid (for allegiance, bay'ah). Verily Hussein is the foundation of La ilaha illallah (There is no God but Allah)."

The tragedy of Karbala', which was in the words of Imam Khomeini the symbol of blood's triumph-the blood of the martyrs-over the sword, transformed not only the history of Shi'a but also human history forever. Hussein (as) initiated a movement that proved to be an archetype representing an eternal struggle of truth against falsehood, justice against injustice and tyranny, human dignity against dehumanization, the revolt of the oppressed against oppressors, and overpowering of the

strong by society's weak. The un-Islamic rule of the Umayyad's was challenged after him by his followers and descendants, such as Zayd ibn 'Ali, Yahya ibn Zayd, and before them by Mukhtar al-Thaqafi and the Tawwabins, which created a ferment that finally resulted in the overthrow of the Umayyad dynasty and the coming to power of the Abbasids, who deceitfully claimed to avenge the martyrdom of Hussein (as) and to advocate his revolutionary mission.



The remembrance of the tragedy of Karbala' as a ritual did not remain confined to Iran and Iraq, and also influenced the socio-political and cultural life of Muslims in the Indian sub-continent. As a result of this, in India, particularly in Avadh, there developed a culture that was inspired by the spirit of 'Ashura' which was all-embracing. Other Muslim sects and even non-Muslims came under the cultural influence of this movement.

Authentic traditions record that Imam 'Ali ibn al-Hussein Zein al-'Abidin (as) mourned his father and his companions throughout his life after Karbala. He was present at the site of the tragedy and



witnessed all the sufferings of his father. Moreover, he had to shoulder the responsibility of taking care of the womenfolk and children of his family after 'Ashura' and he passed through the tribulations of the journey of the captive family of the Prophet (pbuh) from Karbala' to Kufa and from Kufa to Damascus, putting up with all the humiliation with exemplary equanimity, patience, and firmness of character.

He is regarded by the Sufis as one of their early great masters, who also emphasized the value of God's fear and sorrow for the sake of purifying the heart and soul. His collection of supplications, known as al-Sahifat al-Sajjadiyyah or al-Sahifat al-kamilah, is a valuable source of ma'rifah and high spirituality.

The other great mourner of Karbala was Imam Hussein's sister, Lady Zainab, known as "Zainab-e Kubra" and "Thani-e Zahra" (i.e. the Second Fatimah). She bore the martyrdom of her two young sons, 'Awn and Muhammad, without shedding a tear, but was the first to mourn her brother. After the episode of Karbala, Imam Sajjad (as) and Lady Zainab made continuous efforts to create the institution of mourning for the martyred Imam as a vehicle for the revolutionary message of Shi'a against perverse socio-political conditions that negated the Shi'a ideal of a healthy society ruled by committed and competent leaders. The institution of mourning over Imam Hussein became a vehicle for the propagation of almost everything that Shi'a stood for. It was

not the martyrdom of an ordinary mortal, no matter how pious or saintly. It was the martyrdom of an Infallible Imam and the vicegerent of God and the God-appointed heir to the Prophet's authority and spirituality. To those who understood the sublime spiritual station of Hussein ibn 'Ali it was as if the Prophet himself had been martyred at Karbala'. And what greater calamity could be imagined? As the martyred Imam represented the highest embodiment of Shi'a, his martyrdom was the greatest crime that could be perpetrated against Shi'a and the household of the Prophet (pbuh).

Besides mourning for the martyrs, 'Ali ibn al-Hussein (as), Lady Zainab and her younger sister, Umm Kulthum, made very forceful orations describing the sufferings of 'Ashura' and its aftermath that moved the listeners to tears. These orations and elegies composed by Lady Zainab and Umm Kulthum (as) extempore exercised great influence on the Muslims and were instrumental in propagating the message of 'Ashura' and the message of Imam Hussein's sacrifice.

These may be taken as the early foundations of the 'Ashura' movement and beginnings of the mourning ceremonies.

There are equally authentic traditions of Imam Ja'far al-Sadiq (as) and Imam 'Ali al-Rida (as) exhorting their followers regarding the observance of mourning in remembrance of Imam Hussein (as) and his companions as a means of

redemption. In traditions ascribed to the Prophet (pbuh), Fatimah (as) and the Imams (as) of the Prophet's family there is another significant aspect to be taken note of. A recurring theme that characterizes them is that not only the Prophets and the angels mourned the martyrdom of Imam Hussein (as) and his companions, but also the whole cosmos mourned this tragedy. Strong winds began to blow on that tenth of Muharram and when the Imam was beheaded after he fell in the field of battle, there arose tides in rivers and oceans as if they would flood the entire earth, the stars collided, the sun was eclipsed, mountains moved from their places and the seven heavens rained blood, as blood gushed forth from the ground. Such descriptions of the effect of Imam Hussein's martyrdom on the whole order of being persuade his devotees to participate in a mourning ritual that encompasses all the natural and supernatural realms. If not taken literally, these traditions may be treated as metaphorical expressions of a tragedy possessing cosmic dimensions. There is no doubt that these traditions served as the source of inspiration for the devotees and made them feel one with the whole universe and its purpose.

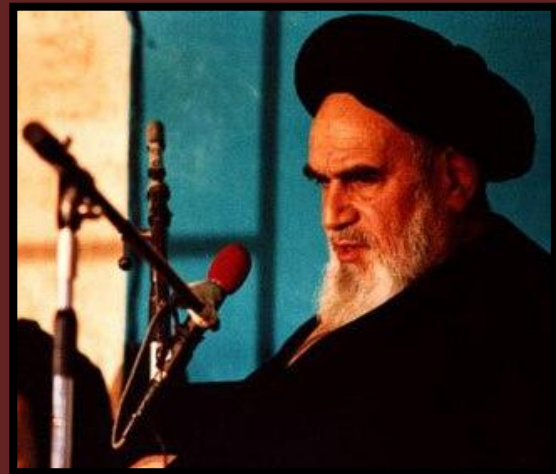
(Selected paragraphs from the article written by Sayyed Wahid Akhtar,



# Ashura uprising in the words and sayings of Imam Khomeini

The Message of Muharram is portrayed in the following selection of texts chosen from the great leader of the revolution's statements and words regarding the importance of the Ashura uprising of Imam Hussein (as):

## The philosophy of the 'Ashoura uprising' [1]



The Doyen of the Martyrs [2] `a (staged an uprising with some of his companions, family members and the ladies of his household. As it was for God, they destroyed the very foundations of that wicked person's monarchy. On the face of it, he( the Doyen of the Martyrs )was killed, but, in reality, he extirpated the foundations of that monarchy; one that intended to turn Islam into a taghouti form. The danger that Mu`awiyah and Yazid posed for Islam did not lie in their usurpation of the caliphate; this was a danger less than that of their attempting to turn Islam into the form of a monarchy. They wanted to render spiritualities into a taghouti form. By calling themselves the successors of the Messenger of God( s ), they wanted to convert Islam into a taghouti regime. This was the important issue. The two of them wanted to do, and did, so much harm to Islam that their predecessors had not. They tried to misrepresent the basic principles of Islam to the utmost. Theirs was a monarchy. There was drinking and gambling at their parties. The `successor' of the Prophet attending parties where wine was being imbibed? And present at gambling sessions? And the Prophet's `successor' would also attend congregational prayers, such things notwithstanding! All this greatly menaced Islam. The Doyen of the Martyrs averted this danger. The issue did not concern the usurpation of the caliphate only. His uprising was against the taghouti monarchy itself; the one that wanted to show Islam in a way such that; had they succeeded, Islam would have become something else. It would have become like the 2, 500- year old monarchy. When Islam appeared, it wanted to put an end to the monarchies and such regimes, and to establish a divine government in the world. It aimed to destroy" taghout" and replace it with" Allah". They, however, wanted to remove" Allah" and install" taghout" instead- the same issues of paganism, the same problems of the past( pre-Islamic times ). The Doyen of the Martyrs being killed did not constitute a defeat as it was for God; rising for Him never ends in defeat.

God, the Blessed and Exalted, says:" All admonishments aside, I have only one that I wish to make. The Noble Prophet is the intercessor; God the preacher; the people, the ones being preached to. I do not have more than one admonishment to make, and that is rising for the sake of God." Rise for God when you see the divine religion in danger. The Commander of the Faithful[ Imam `Ali ]( `a )rose to defend the faith when he saw it in danger as Mu`awiyah was misrepresenting it. The Doyen of the Martyrs, likewise, rose for the divine school [maktab ]. This is not a one-time matter; God's admonishment is for always. You must rise for God whenever you see them act against Islam, against Islam, against an Islamic-humane regime, against a divine one; whenever you see them misrepresent Islamic principles and crush Islam in the name of Islam. You should not be afraid of, perhaps, failing; of the possibility of defeat. There is no question of defeat about it.

### Speech

**Date:** May 29, 1979[ Khordad 8, 8531 AHS/ Rajab 3, 9931 AH ]

**Place:** Qum

**Subject:** Rising for the sake of God; the duty of the Muslims in the present age  
Sahifeh vol. 8, page. 10-11

[ 1 ] Ashoura: the tenth day of Muharram; the day on which Imam Husayn was martyred in Karbala.

[ 2 ] Doyen of the Martyrs[ Sayyid ash-Shuhada' ]: Imam Husayn, grandson of the Prophet. In 06 AH[ 086 CE ], Imam Husayn refused to swear allegiance to Yazid, son of Mu`awiyah and second caliph of the Umayyad dynasty, since Yazid did not possess legitimate authority and had succeeded to the caliphate by hereditary succession. The ensuing death of the Imam in battle at Karbala has always been commemorated by Shi`ah Muslims as the supreme example of martyrdom in the face of tyranny. It served as an important point of both ideological and emotive reference throughout the Islamic Revolution in Iran. `Ashoura, the tenth day of Muharram, is the day on which he was martyred in Karbala. See Shaykh Muhammad Mahdi Shamsuddin, *The Revolution of Al-Husayn*, <http://www.al-islam.org/revolution>; Ibrahim Ayati, *A Probe into the History of Ashoura*( Karachi: Islamic Seminary Publications, 1984 ); Zakir, *Tears and Tributes*( Qum: Ansariyan Publications ); Yasin T. al-Jibouri, *Karbala and Beyond*( Qum: Ansariyan Publications ); Sayyid Wahid Akhtar, "Karbala: An Enduring Paradigm of Islamic Revivalism," *Al-Tawhid Journal*, <http://www.al-islam.org/al-tawhid/paradigm-akhtar.htm>.



Sayyid Hassan Khomeini:

## **“Ashura is an uprising against oppression and deviation.”**

Sayyid Hassan Khomeini said: “We are now faced with a society, which more than ever is in need of learning and understanding the lesson of Ashura. We must always keep Ashura as a fountain of truth in our minds.”

Sayyid Hassan Khomeini had a meeting with the members of the Islamic society of the university students of Tehran University. Their meeting was at Husseiniah Jamaran, where Sayyid Hassan Khomeini told them: “Ashura has an important basis which is related to all times. The heroes of Karbala are without a doubt men with great virtues. Ashura has different appearances; love, bravery, friendship and good character are only a few of them. The most prominent characteristic of the Master of Martyrs compared to others, was his observance of the bases of good character.”

Sayyid Hassan also said the following regarding the definition of Karbala: “If we want to define Karbala, we must say that Ashura was an uprising, which consisted of bravery and insight and was against deviation and oppression.”

Sayyid Hassan further added: “What happened that the society of that time allowed the grandson of the Prophet (saw) to be martyred all comes down to deviation (from religion). This deviation and the problems that were infused with it, lead to the tragedy of Ashura. Ashura was a result of deviation along with different types of oppressions.”

Sayyid Hassan also stated that Ashura is a broadcaster of bravery and tried to define what bravery is exactly: “Bravery refers to a willful act, but even willful acts need initiation. When one wants to carry out an act, he first imagines it, then weighs its benefits and if it is beneficial, he is eager to carry it out. This eagerness slowly rises in intensity and this causes one’s muscles to be provoked and finally one carries out an act.”

He named these four levels as imagination, confirmation, confirmed eagerness and finally act. Sayyid Hassan also said that throughout these four stages, one may be inflicted with doubt. “These doubts are due to the fear one has of the dangers that threaten him if one carries out this act. The factor of danger causes one to doubt the benefits of his act and say to himself this act is not worth the risk.”

He continued to say: “Although carrying out any act always has a possibility of danger and the benefits and disadvantages need to be weighed out against each other, sometimes it is one’s duty to accept the dangers and turn a blind eye to personal disadvantages and not stop himself carrying out an act. It may be that dying is a personal disadvantage but the results are praiseworthy.” “Sometimes benefits and risks are of a material type but there are many times where they are of different types. It is here that bravery can be truly understood. Sometimes one goes through all the stages of imagination, confirmation and confirmed eagerness but greed and fear cause one to fall short of carrying out the act.”

Sayyid Hassan Khomeini continued to say that the condition for bravery is for one to think about what he needs to do and not what others need to do. “The price of bravery should not be paid by others. It should not be so, that you speak and others pay the price, because this is no longer bravery. Bravery is something which you alone need to pay for. If others pay the price or are disadvantaged by your bravery, it is no longer bravery.



Sayyid Hassan further added: “What happened in Ashura, was first the envision of deviation in Prophet Muhammad’s (saw) religion and second the envision of oppression as an aspect of an Islamic society. The confirmation was that this deviation and oppression cannot be tolerated. In the confirmed eagerness stage this eagerness grew and in the final stage Imam Hussein (as) and his companions carried out the act”

“In those days, whoever rose against the government would be labeled an outsider and his reputation would be ruined. The first sacrifice the Master of Martyrs made was his reputation. After this Imam Hussein (as) made many sacrifices and faced many difficulties. This does not, however, mean that Ashura was not a clever or insightful move. Ashura also teaches us another lesson and that is that bravery should not be something which is ill-organized or ill-planned.”

Sayyid Hassan Khomeini, further said: “We are now faced with a society, which more than ever is in need of learning and understanding the lesson of Ashura. We must always keep Ashura as a fountain of truth in our minds.”

Sayyid Hassan Khomeini pointed out the bad characteristics we now have in our society and said: “Many say the problem with our society is fear, but I think the biggest problem of our society is not being fearful. I wish, ‘fear’, was a problem. Many of the bad characteristics we have are because we do not fear God and do not believe that this world has a God. The key to all problems is not being afraid of God.”

At the end of this speech Sayyid Hassan sent his Salams and respects to the martyred university student of the Islamic revolution, eight-year imposed war, and also the martyrs of the 7<sup>th</sup> of December.

# The message of Ashura

## Imam Khomeini and Ashura



*By Dr. Hamid Ansari*

*The leader of the Islamic revolution referred to the life of Imam Hussein (as) and his political aims in many speeches. It was Imam Hussein's (as) uprising that was an inspiration for the Islamic revolution. He explained the philosophy behind Imam Hussein's (as) rise against oppression and the mourning ceremonies that are held for him .*

The leader of the Islamic revolution grew up in an atmosphere filled with love for the household of the Prophet (saw) and Imam Hussein (as). He changed the Iranian people and made them truly understand the message Imam Hussein (as) was trying to spread. He explained the philosophy behind Imam Hussein's (as) rise against oppression and the mourning ceremonies that are held for him. The leader of the Islamic revolution said the following with regards to Imam Hussein's (as) movement:

“The Master of Martyrs (as) spent his whole life standing against an unjust rule, Islamic prohibitions, and the corruption governments bring with them. His whole life he fought to defeat this oppressive government, enjoin good and forbid evil (i.e. sins).

“From the very first day the Master of Martyrs (as) rose up, his aim was to instill justice. The Imam (as) said: “Good is not enjoined and evil is”. The Imam's (as) intention was to enjoin the good and forbid the evil. All deviations are due to the sins that are carried out and apart from the straight path of unity (of God) everything else is evil. This evil and these sins must be obliterated. We, who are the followers of the Master of Martyrs (as),

must see how the Imam (as) lived, understand his uprising and what he intended to do when he forbade the evil. One of his intentions was to defeat the corrupt government...

“The Master of Martyrs (as) sacrificed his life and his children. He sacrificed everything even though he knew what would happen. If one reads his sayings when he left Medina and in Mecca and when he left Mecca, one realizes that he knew very well what was awaiting him. The Imam (as) did not come to just see through a series of events, no, he came to take the government in his hands, and this is something to be proud of. This is because the government should be in the hands of someone who is like the Master of Martyrs (as), or like his followers.....”, “The fact that the Master of Martyrs left Mecca at a time when pilgrims were coming to Mecca, shows that his uprising was a great political uprising. It was an Islamic-political uprising because the Imam (as) was thinking of Islam and the Muslims, and of defeating the Umayyad dynasty. If it was not for this uprising, Islam would have been obliterated....”, “He was thinking of Islam and the Muslims and he did what he did, so that as a result of his jihad and sacrifice, in the future Islam would spread among people.....”



# Imam Khomeini's Approach Toward Imam Hussein's Movement

and

## Its Impact on the Formation of Iran's Revolution

*It is concluded that Imam Khomeini provided chances for changes, evolutions and resistances and made it possible for people to oppose Pahlavi's regime, form Basij, develop Iran's revolution and establish Iran's Islamic government by relying on values resulted from Ashura movement and injecting these values to the culture accepted by the nation.*

In a research done by the research institute of Imam Khomeini and Islamic Revolution's graduates, which is titled "Imam Khomeini's approach toward Imam Hussein's movement and its impact on the formation of Iran's revolution" the author tries to answer the following question:

- **What is Imam Khomeini's approach toward Ashura Movement? In addition, how much impact did this attitude have on the victory of Iran's revolution?**

The author employs the theory of "discourse" in order to illustrate this issue and reviews the relation between establishment of Iran's Islamic government and the change in Iran's dominant regime. Having studied sources about this issue, the author introduced the following hypothesis: Imam Khomeini believes that Ashura movement was a motivational epopee based on reformist desires that caused a drastic change in the basics of government of its time.

- **This treatise consists of two sections:**

**First section:** it reviews literature of Ashura movement and theories introduced about causes and reasons of Imam Hussein's movement. In order to provide a better illustration of this issue old and new theories and opinions are discussed. In addition, philosophy of Ashura movement is analyzed from different points of view and reasons are categorized into major categories using a comparative method. Then Imam Khomeini's attitude toward this issue is also studied. And after doing a comparative analysis it became clear that there exist differences and similarities between viewpoints of Imam Khomeini and those of others and that Imam's attitude toward this movement differs greatly from those of others.

- **Second section:** the impact of Imam Khomeini's attitude toward Ashura movement is studied.

Here it is concluded that Imam Khomeini provided chances for changes, evolutions and resistances and made it possible for people to oppose Pahlavi's regime, form Basij, develop Iran's revolution and establish Iran's Islamic government by relying on values resulted from Ashura movement and injecting these values to the culture accepted by the nation.