

lm7

MUHARRAM

In the pre-Islamic times, the month of Muharram was considered one of the four months of peace in which no fighting was allowed. The Holy Quran refers to these four months as Rajab, Zul Qad, Zul Haj & Muharram. These months were kept free of inter-tribal fights and all the Arabs travelled and gathered in fairs and came to Kaaba during pilgrimage period.

The second Caliph Omar b. Khattab after consultation with Ali b. Talib fixed the Islamic Calendar beginning from the Hijra (migration) of the Holy Prophet from Mecca to Medina, which took place in Rabi-ul-Awwal. However Muharram was kept the first month of the Islamic Calendar as it was during the pre-Islamic period.

During this month, on the 10th of Muharram the 61 A.H. Imam Husain (as), the grandson of the Prophet, was martyred along with his 72 companions including his six-month old baby on the plains of Kerbala (Iraq) by the forces of Yezid bin Muawiya bin Abu Sufyan. It is considered a decisive battle between Islam and anti-Islamic forces. It is considered a turning point in the history of Islam and but for the willing sacrifices of Imam Husein, Islam would have been destroyed by the evil conspiracies of Banu Omayya.

Muslims of different sects have been commemorating this martyrdom in one way or the other. The Shias however give it a special significance and commemorate it on a grand scale. For the first 12 days, they get together in mosques and Imam Baras to hear preaching by learned men on the truth of Islamic teachings, Islamic history and culminating into the events of heart-rendering killing of the close members and companions of the prophet's house.

They also take out replicas of the Mauseulem of the Imam 'Taboots' (coffins) and 'Alams' (banners) in procession as symbols of the tragic event. They offer 'Sherbat' a sweet drink to the public in remembrance of the three-day thirst of the martyrs. The 'matam' (beating of selves) and weeping over the martyrs portray their love and extreme grief over the tragic events unparalleled in the history of mankind.

But why perpetuate crying and mourning over an episode of 1350 years ago, and of what benefit is it in doing so? This is the criticism made by a sect of ignorant and heretic Muslims. In response to such attack, the Shias argue that:

Mourning and crying with grief is a natural and human phenomenon. One naturally tends to cry over the calamity

stricken and afflicted beloved ones. The Shias and those Muslims who love the household members of Prophet Muhammad (saw) in accordance with Quranic injunction (Refer ayat 23 - Sura Shura) and the Sunnah of the Prophet express their inner shock and grief on hearing the detailed history of the tortures made upon the innocent children of the Prophet. The Holy Quran has on several occasions mentioned and commended the natural human action of crying shedding tears:

"And when they hear what has been revealed to the Messenger, you will see their eyes overflowing with tears on account of the truth that they recognize" (Sura Maida v. 83)

This ayat refers to the shedding of tears by Najashi the Christian King of Abyssinia when he heard Jaafer bin Tayyar in his court reciting the Quranic verses relating the story of Bibi Maryam (Mary) and when he was impressed with the truth in the Islamic message and teachings of the Prophet as described by him.

This incidence goes to prove that whenever religious truth is exposed and narration is made about one's beloved Saint and religious leader, however old it may be, one is apt to be moved with tears. So what wrong the Shias do in crying over the narration of heart-rendering episode of the Martyrdom of Kerbala when they recognize the Islamic truth as against the untruth of the enemies of Islam.

Crying is not restricted to man only. Other created beings are liable to do so as is evident from the following Quranic Ayat:

"So the heaven and earth did not weep for them nor were they respited" (Sura Dukhan v. 29)

From this ayat we can conclude that the heavens and the earth do weep and mourn. And this can happen for those chosen ones who sacrifice their lives in the way of Allah and not for those who are punished with death for their wickedness.

History relates of instances when signs of extraordinary manifesting in the heavens and fresh blood having been found underneath stone that was removed from the earth on the occasion of the Martyrdom of Husain b. Ali (as)

A prominent Sunni Alim Shah Waliyullah Abdul Aziz Dehlevi in his book 'Sirru Shahadatain' writes:
"When the martyrdom of Imam Husain (as) took place, it manifested itself by the earth turning into blood and the raining of blood from the sky."

If weeping and mourning over martyrs was a 'BIDA'T' - innovation and unIslamic, the sky and earth would not have done so. And the Holy Quran would not have mentioned but with despise which the Holy Book has not done.

Again in the case of Prophet Yakoob on separation from his dear son Yusuf, the Holy Quran describes his intense grief in these words:

"And he turned away from them and said: 'Alas ! my grief for Yusuf' and his eyes were whitened with the grief and he was repressor (of grief)"

Prophet Yakoob had 12 sons and he was separated only from one son Yusuf about whom he knew that he was alive. Yet despite the temporary separation, the Prophet of Allah was so much stunned with grief as to cry so much till his eyes became white.

If crying and shedding tears over a separated and dear ones were prohibitive and an innovation, the holy Quran would have condemned it and not mentioned it. Nay, the holy book on the contrary praises Prophet Yakoob, despite his wailing with grief that he was repressive of grief.

The fact is that those ignorant who look down upon the tradition of mourning and crying do not understand the underlying spiritual strength of mourning the martyrdom of Imam Husain (as). It is the cause of refreshing the message of truth of Islam and it helps in boosting its propagation.

Mourning over the martyrs of Kerbala infact provides and example and opportunity of raising voice of protest against oppressors and tyrants whenever they raise their heads and indulge upon oppression of the poor and the weak ones.

Monseur Morbin - a famous German Author when writing about the martyrdom of Imam Husain says:

"The Shias consider mourning (over Imam) as an important part of their faith. Consequently a kind of power has erupted from them. As the memory of Imam Husain became open, their struggle and efforts increased and the more powerful and progressive they became."