

Muharram and Aashura

It is the divine system of Allah Ta'ala that He has afforded special virtue and significance to certain things over others. From mankind, it is the Ambiyaa عَلَيْهِمُ السَّلَام who have been blessed with the highest status and most distinguished position over others. From the different places in the world, it is the Haramain Shareefain (Makkah Mukarramah and Madinah Munawwarah) and Masjidul Aqsa that have been accorded a special rank over the rest of the world. From the twelve months of the Islamic calendar, special sanctity and sacredness has been given to four specific months i.e. Zul-Qa'dah, Zul-Hijjah, Muharram and Rajab. Likewise, amongst the days of the Islamic year, the day of Aashura has been blessed with exclusive virtues and immense blessings.

While the month of Zul-Hijjah has been divinely selected for the fulfilment of the rituals of Haj and sacrifice, it is the month of Muharram that enjoys the honour of being the month of Allah Ta'ala and the month which contains the fast of the Mubaarak day of Aashura. The immense virtues and abundant blessings of this day can be gauged by the desire and eagerness that Rasulullah ﷺ expressed in awaiting its arrival.

عن ابن عباس رضي الله عنهما قال ما رأيت النبي صلى الله عليه وسلم يتحرى صيام يوم فضله على غيره إلا هذا اليوم

يوم عاشوراء (بخاري رقم ٢٠٠٦)

Hazrat Abdullah bin Abbaas رَضِيَ اللهُ عَنْهُ reports: "I did not see Rasulallah ﷺ await the fast of any virtuous day with more eagerness than the day of Aashura." (Saheeh Bukhaari #2006)

عن أبي قتادة رضي الله عنه قال قال رسول الله صلى الله عليه وسلم سلم صيام يوم عاشوراء إني أحتسب على الله أن يكفر

السنة التي قبله (ابن ماجه رقم ١٧٣٨ ، مسلم رقم ١١٦٢)

It is reported from Hazrat Abu Qataadah رَضِيَ اللهُ عَنْهُ that Rasulallah ﷺ said, "On account of observing the fast of the day of Aashura, I have hope that Allah Ta'ala will expiate the sins of the past year." (Ibnu Maajah #1738, Saheeh Muslim #1162)

Reward for Fasting an Entire Month

The month of Muharram is regarded as the month of Allah Ta'ala and the fast observed in it is considered as the best of fasts after the month of Ramadhaan. It is a special virtue, exclusive to the month of Muharram, that for each fast that one observes, one receives the reward of fasting for an entire month. This reward is exclusive to the month of Muharram as no other month enjoys this divine virtue.

عن ابن عباس رضي الله عنهما قال قال رسول الله صلى الله عليه وسلم سلم من صام يوم عرفة كان له كفارة سنتين ومن

صام يوما من المحرم فله بكل يوم ثلاثون يوما (الترغيب والترهيب رقم ١٥٢٩)

It is reported from Hazrat Abdullah bin Abbaas رَضِيَ اللهُ عَنْهُ that Rasulallah ﷺ said, "The one who observes the fast of the day of Arafah (the 9th of Zul-Hijjah) will have two years of his sins forgiven, and the one who fasts during the month of Muharram, then for each day that he fasts, he will receive the reward of fasting for an entire month." (At-Targheeb wat-Tarheeb #1529)

عن أبي هريرة رضي الله عنه قال قال رسول الله صلى الله عليه وسلم أفضل الصيام بعد رمضان شهر الله المحرم وأفضل

الصلاة بعد الفريضة صلاة الليل (مسلم رقم ١١٦٣)

It is reported from Hazrat Abu Hurairah رَضِيَ اللهُ عَنْهُ that Rasulallah ﷺ said, "The best of fasts after the month of Ramadhaan is the fast of the month of Allah, the month of Muharram, and the best of Salaahs after the Faraaidh (obligatory Salaah) is the Tahajjud Salaah." (Saheeh Muslim #1163)

The Sunnah Fast of Aashura

Rasulullah ﷺ himself fasted on the day of Aashura and exhorted the Sahaabah رَضِيَ اللَّهُ عَنْهُمْ to observe this fast as well. The extent of enthusiasm and passion with which the Sahaabah رَضِيَ اللَّهُ عَنْهُمْ upheld this Mubaarak Sunnah could perhaps be gauged from the following Hadith:

عن الربيع بنت معوذ بن عفراء رضي الله عنها قالت فكنا بعد ذلك نصومه ونصوم صبياننا الصغار منهم إن شاء الله ونذهب إلى المسجد فنجعل لهم اللعبة من العهن فإذا بكى أحدهم على الطعام أعطيناهم إياه عند الإفطار (مسلم رقم ١١٣٦)

Hazrat Rubayyi رَضِيَ اللَّهُ عَنْهَا reports, "We (the Sahaabah رَضِيَ اللَّهُ عَنْهُمْ) would observe the fast of Aashura and would also encourage our children to observe this fast. We would make toys out of wool for our children, and if any child felt hungry during the fast and wept for food, we would give them these toys to occupy them until the time of iftaar." (Saheeh Muslim #1136)

History of Aashura

Prior to performing Hijrah, Rasulullah ﷺ would observe the fast of Aashura in Makkah Mukarramah. After migrating to Madinah Munawwarah, Rasulullah ﷺ witnessed the Jews of Madinah Munawwarah fasting on the day of Aashura. When Nabi ﷺ inquired from them as to the reason for their fasting, they explained that it was on this day that Allah Ta'ala had delivered Nabi Moosa عَلَيْهِ السَّلَام and the Bani Israa'eel from the tyranny and oppression of Fir'oun and his people and Allah Ta'ala destroyed Fir'oun and his army.

عن ابن عباس رضي الله عنهما قال قدم النبي صلى الله عليه وسلم المدينة فرأى اليهود تصوم يوم عاشوراء فقال ما هذا قالوا هذا يوم صالح هذا يوم نجى الله بني إسرائيل من عدوهم فصامه موسى قال فأنا أحق بموسى منكم فصامه وأمر بصيامه (بخاري رقم ٢٠٠٤)

Hazrat Abdullah bin Abbaas رَضِيَ اللَّهُ عَنْهُمَا reports, "When Nabi ﷺ migrated to Madinah Munawwarah, he witnessed the Jews observing the fast of Aashura. After inquiring, they replied that this was a virtuous day and this was the day in which Allah Ta'ala had delivered the Bani Israa'eel to safety from their oppressive enemy (Fir'oun and his army). In expression of gratitude and thanks to Allah Ta'ala, Nabi Moosa عَلَيْهِ السَّلَام fasted on this day. Nabi ﷺ remarked, 'We are more worthy of following Nabi Moosa عَلَيْهِ السَّلَام than you.' Thereafter, Nabi ﷺ continued fasting on this day and ordered the Sahaabah رَضِيَ اللَّهُ عَنْهُمْ to fast as well." (Saheeh Bukhaari #2004)

Initially, before the fast of Ramadhaan become compulsory, fasting on the day of Aashura was Fardh (obligatory). After the fast of Ramadhaan became compulsory, fasting on the day of Aashura was declared optional (Sunnah).

عن عائشة زوج النبي صلى الله عليه وسلم أنها قالت كان يوم عاشوراء يوما تصومه قريش في الجاهلية وكان رسول الله صلى الله عليه وسلم يصومه في الجاهلية فلما قدم رسول الله صلى الله عليه وسلم المدينة صامه وأمر بصيامه فلما فرض رمضان كان هو الفريضة وترك يوم عاشوراء فمن شاء صامه ومن شاء تركه (موطأ الإمام مالك رقم ٨٤٢)

Hazrat Aa'isha رَضِيَ اللَّهُ عَنْهَا mentioned, "In the pre-Islamic era, the Quraish would fast on the day of Aashura. Nabi ﷺ also observed the fast of Aashura. After migrating to Madinah Munawwarah, Nabi ﷺ continued with this noble practice (of fasting on the day of Aashura) and instructed the Sahaabah رَضِيَ اللَّهُ عَنْهُمْ to fast on this auspicious day (as it was made obligatory). However, after the fast of Ramadhaan became obligatory, fasting on the day of Aashura no longer remained Fardh." (Rather, it was made Sunnah [optional]) (Muatta Imaam Maalik #842)

Observing the fast of Aashura thus remained the blessed practice of Rasulullah ﷺ and the Sahaabah رَضِيَ اللَّهُ عَنْهُمْ till the end of the life of Rasulullah ﷺ. However, prior to his demise, Rasulullah ﷺ commanded the Sahaabah رَضِيَ اللَّهُ عَنْهُمْ to oppose the Jews by joining an additional day of fasting to the fast of Aashura.

عن ابن عباس رضي الله عنه قال قال رسول الله صلى الله عليه وسلم صوموا يوم عاشوراء و خالفوا فيه اليهود صوموا قبله يوما أو بعده يوما (السنن الكبرى للبيهقي رقم ٨٤٠٦ ، التلخيص الحبير رقم ٩٣١)

Hazrat Abdullah bin Abbaas رَضِيَ اللَّهُ عَنْهُمَا reports that Rasulullah ﷺ said, "Observe the fast of Aashura and oppose the Jews by also fasting a day before or after i.e. the ninth and tenth or tenth and eleventh of Muharram." (As-Sunanul Kubra lil Baihaqi #8406, At-Talkheesul Habeer #931)

The Lesson of Aashura

Together with the fast of Aashura being a means of reaping immense virtues, it also emphasises and teaches an important lesson. This is the lesson of firmly maintaining one's Islamic identity at all times and completely refraining from imitating the kuffaar (disbelievers, Jews and Christians) in their culture. Hence, Rasulallah ﷺ instructed the Ummah to fast for two days (i.e. the ninth and tenth or tenth and eleventh) in order to oppose the Jews.

When Rasulallah ﷺ expressed such dislike for his Ummah to resemble the Jews in the aspect of fasting (which is an ibaadah), then one can well imagine how much more Rasulallah ﷺ would dislike his Ummah emulating the disbelievers in their culture, dressing and other aspects of their lives. "Emulating the ways of the kuffaar", which is known as 'tashabbuh', is totally forbidden in Islam as it reveals that one is identifying with the ways and culture of the enemies of Islam and is opposing the Mubaarak way of Rasulallah ﷺ. Emulating the kuffaar is so abhorred in Islam that Rasulallah ﷺ has declared:

عن ابن عمر قال قال رسول الله صلى الله عليه وسلم من تشبه بقوم فهو منهم (أبو داود رقم ٤٠٣٣)

"The one who imitates a people will be counted from amongst them." (Abu Dawood #4033)

No person chooses to resemble the one who is his enemy. Rather, all prefer to resemble those whom they love. A true follower of Rasulallah ﷺ will thus love to resemble and imitate his beloved. He will love to identify with Rasulallah ﷺ, not with those who are the enemies of Rasulallah ﷺ and the Muslims.

Dressing

Imitating the kuffaar can occur in many aspects of life. However, the most obvious and apparent is imitation in the aspect of appearance and dressing. The appearance and dressing which one adopts clearly show who it is that he identifies with. Furthermore, it is generally witnessed that the clothing which one wears influences and has an impact on one's behaviour and conduct. Similarly, one's principles and values are gradually moulded and fashioned according to his attire and dressing. The influence of appearance and dressing is so significant that even the kuffaar perceive its far reaching effects. The banning of Muslim women from wearing scarves and hijab in some countries is clear testament to this and speaks volumes of the fact that Islamic dressing and appearance has a tremendous impact on others. The kuffaar thus wish to ban the visible identity of Muslims and force them to follow their ways and culture. Allah Ta'ala says:

وَلَنْ تَرْضَى عَنْكَ الْيَهُودُ وَلَا النَّصَارَى حَتَّى تَتَّبِعَ مِلَّتَهُمْ (البقرة: ١٢٠)

The Jews and Christians will never be satisfied with you until you follow their religion. (Surah Baqarah, Aayah 120)

Thus, when the dressing and appearance taught by Rasulallah (Sallallahu Alayhi Wasallam) is not adhered to and the kuffaar are imitated, it often becomes difficult or even impossible to distinguish a Muslim from a Jew, Christian or an Atheist.

Baseless practices

There are many baseless practices and customs which people engage in on the tenth of Muharram. Among these baseless customs and practices is mourning over the martyrdom of Hazrat Husain رَضِيَ اللَّهُ عَنْهُ. The gruesome martyrdom of Hazrat Husain رَضِيَ اللَّهُ عَنْهُ was undoubtedly among the most tragic and heart-breaking events that occurred in the annals of history. However, it should nevertheless be understood that the occasion of Aashura and its virtues are not associated with the martyrdom of Hazrat Husain رَضِيَ اللَّهُ عَنْهُ. Instead, Aashura had received its virtue and auspiciousness even before the birth of Hazrat Husain رَضِيَ اللَّهُ عَنْهُ. Hence the custom of mourning the martyrdom of Hazrat Husain رَضِيَ اللَّهُ عَنْهُ, as practised by the Shias, has no basis in Islam.

Virtue of spending on one's family on the Day of Aashura

Apart from the virtue of fasting on the day of Aashura, Nabi ﷺ has also encouraged that one should be more generous towards his family on this auspicious day and spend upon them.

عن أبي هريرة رضي الله عنه أن رسول الله صلى الله عليه وسلم قال من أوسع على عياله وأهله يوم عاشوراء أوسع الله

عليه سائر سنته (رواه البيهقي وغيره من طرق وعن جماعة من الصحابة وقال البيهقي هذه الأسانيد وإن كانت ضعيفة فهي إذ ضم

بعضها إلى بعض أخذت قوة والله أعلم - الترغيب والترهيب رقم ١٥٣٦)

Hazrat Abu Hurairah رَضِيَ اللَّهُ عَنْهُ reports that Nabi ﷺ said, "Whoever spends freely upon his family on the day of Aashura, Allah Ta'ala will bless him with abundant sustenance for an entire year." (At-Targheeb wat-Tarheeb #1536)

The Fast of Aashura

Q: Is it a Sunnah for one to fast during the first ten days of Muharram?

A: The month of Muharram is one of the four sacred months of the Islamic calendar. Carrying out any righteous action in any of the sacred months earns multiplied rewards. Apart from this, it appears in the Hadith that fasting on any day of the Mubaarak month of Muharram earns one the reward for fasting for an entire month. Hence fasting in the month of Muharram is encouraged, especially fasting on the two specific days which are regarded as Sunnah (i.e. the ninth and tenth or tenth and eleventh). The Hadith explains that fasting on the tenth of Muharram expiates the previous years minor sins. (Shuabul Imaan #3806 ; Tafseer ibn Katheer 2/355 ; Majmauz Zawaaid #5244 ; Ahkaamul Qur'an 3/143)

Q: My mother was feeling weak so she did not fast on the tenth of Muharram. However, she fasted the following day, the eleventh of Muharram. Will she obtain the rewards and virtues of Aashura?

A: The fast is valid. However, the virtues of Aashura mentioned in the Ahaadith are for the one who fasts on the ninth and tenth or the tenth and eleventh of Muharram. (Saheeh Muslim #1162 ; As-Sunanul Kubra lil Baihaqi #8667 ; Shaami 2/374 ; Badaaius Sanaa'i 2/79)

Q: Can one only fast on the tenth of Muharram without fasting a day before or a day after?

A: It is against the Sunnah and makrooh for one to fast on only the tenth of Muharram. The Sunnah is that one fasts on the ninth and tenth or the tenth and eleventh of Muharram. (Shaami 2/374 ; Badaaius Sanaa'i 2/79)

Q: Please advise if the two Muharram fasts can be split as follows, ninth and eleventh?

A: The tenth of Muharram is the day of Aashura. The virtues of Aashura mentioned in the Hadith are for the one who fasts on the ninth and tenth or the tenth and eleventh of Muharram. We should thus fast on the ninth and tenth or on the tenth and eleventh of Muharram. If one fasts on the ninth and eleventh and does not fast on the tenth, he will not receive the virtues of fasting on the day of Aashura though his fasts will be valid. (As-Sunanul Kubra lil Baihaqi #8667 ; Shaami 2/374 ; Badaaius Sanaa'i 2/79)

Q: If one fasts on the ninth and tenth or tenth and eleventh with the intention of qadha fast, will one receive the reward of the fast of Aashura?

A: The fast will be valid. However, one will not obtain the reward and virtue of Aashura through keeping qadha fast. The reward and virtue of Aashura is for the one who observes nafl fasts on these days. (Azeezul Fataawa 1/389 ; Ahsanul Fataawa 4/440)

Spending on One's Family

Q: Regarding the Hadith relating to spending on one's family on the day of Aashura, does one have to purchase the items on the day of Aashura itself or can one buy it few days before due to work commitments and give it to his family on the day?

A: If one purchases food, etc. before the day of Aashura and feeds his family and spends on them on the day of Aashura, he will also receive the reward and virtue mentioned in the Hadith .

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عليه سائر سنته (الترغيب والترهيب رقم ١٥٣٦)

Hazrat Abu Hurairah رَضِيَ اللهُ عَنْهُ reports that Nabi صَلَّى اللهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ said, "Whoever spends freely upon his family on the day of Aashura, Allah Ta'ala will bless him with abundant sustenance for an entire year." (At-Targheeb wat-Tarheeb #1536)

Baseless Practices

Q: In South Africa, should one avoid wearing black clothing during Muharram as the Shias wear black clothing?

A: Yes, if wearing black clothing has some resemblance with the Shias then this should be avoided. (Abu Dawood #4033 ; Fataawa Mahmoodiyah 27/411)

Q: What is the significance of performing nikaah on the day of Aashura? Is there any special virtue in this?

A: There is no special significance for performing nikaah on the day of Aashura. The Hadith teaches us that when a suitable match is found, one should immediately perform the nikaah and not delay. (Tirmizi #1084)

Q: Is exchanging gifts among friends on the day of Aashura an established practice?

A: It is Sunnah for one to spend on his family on the day of Aashura. Exchanging gifts among friends is not a Sunnah practice and hence should be discontinued. (Saheeh Bukhaari #2697)

Q: Some people say that it is recommended to apply surma on the day of Aashura. Is this proven through the Sunnah?

A: Applying surma is a Sunnah of Rasulullah صَلَّى اللهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ. It is reported in the Mubaarak Hadith that Rasulullah صَلَّى اللهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ used to apply surma every night before sleeping. However, the practice of applying surma during the day, especially on the day of Aashura, has no basis in Deen. (Shaami 6/430 ; Umdatul Qaari 11/118)

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