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Muharram, Hijra and Ashura -M. Basheer Ahmed M.D.



Muharram is the first month of the Islamic Hijri calendar. It is of a great significance as it marks the monumental journey which Prophet Muhammed and his companions embarked on some 1438 years ago from Makkah to Medina leaving behind their livelihood, property, assets and family members to avoid persecution and oppression. The people who migrated were referred to as Muhajireen. Allah says “A share shall be given to the poor emigrants who were expelled from their homes and their properties, seeking favor from Allah, supporting Allah and His Messenger. Such are indeed true believers.” (59:8). Muhajireen were persecuted in Makkah by their communities because they choose to lead their lives as Muslims. In the next verse, Allah refers to the people of Medina who supported Muhajireen as Ansars, saying “they love those who seek refuge and find not have any want in their chests of what immigrants are given, but give them preferences over themselves. It is those who will be successful” (59:9). The welcome reception the Muhajireen received from the Ansars demonstrates a beautiful example of the humanitarian spirit as early as 1400 years ago. The Ansars willingly invited Muhajireen in their homes and shared their own food, resources and belongings with them without seeking any compensation in return. They gave of their own, willingly and enthusiastically, even when they themselves lacked the food and resources for their own kinfolk. Today, the Muslim world faces an unprecedented refugee crisis. Millions of people have been rendered without a place to call home across several countries in the Muslim world. But the recent atrocities and massive migration of ROHINGYA MUSLIMS is perhaps the most heartbreaking, further worsening the already dire refugee crisis. Allah, through His Messenger has bestowed us with the guidance in the example of Ansars’ treatment of the Muhajireen. Are we fulfilling the right of those Allah has commanded us to be kind to? Are we truly supporting the refugees as has been commanded in the verses of the Holy Quran mentioned above? The month of Muharram also marks Youm-e-Ashura or The Day of Ashura which is also one of the major commemorative events for Muslims. Ashura, which indicates the 10th day of Muharram, marks the martyrdom of Imam Hussain, the grandson of the Prophet of Islam Hazrat Muhammad (pbuh) (this year on October 1st, 2017). Muslims all over the world commemorate the tragic events that occurred on this day in 680AD. Unanimously described as the battle between good and evil, Imam Hussein stood up against Yazid who was unilaterally made caliph (Khalifah) by his father Amir Muawiyya. On one side, Imam Hussain stood for the Qur’anic principles of Justice and demonstrated the qualities of the prophet in his character. On the other side, Yazid represented everything despised by Allah and His Messenger and who was corrupting Islam from within. When Imam Hussain was asked to pay allegiance to Yazid he refused. He disagreed with his appointment due to lack of democratic process which was turned into a dynastic rule and the questionable personal character of Yazid who showed no regard for human life, human dignity or justice. Imam Hussain decided to go to Kufa on the invitation he received from Muslims there. While on his way he received the news of the martyrdom of Muslim Ibn Aqil at the hands of Yazid’s representatives in Kufa and subsequent betrayal of many of his supporters who withdrew at the last moment. He and his family decided to carry onwards to have a dialogue with Yazid. In the battle that followed between the army of Yazid and Imam Hussain’s small group of followers, the inevitable ensued. Imam Hussain was mercilessly martyred alongside his faithful supporters and his male family members, including his 6 months old son Ali Asghar.. Muslims belonging to different sects and denomination commemorate the martyrdom of Imam Hussain but the Shia Muslims of course express their grief in a ritualistic way. They hold daily Sermons (Majlis) and narrate the events that led to his shahadat (martyrdom).The Sunni Muslims also evade any overt display of happiness such as wedding and birthdays. They also focus on fasting on 10th day 0f Muharram following the Sunnah of prophet. It is very appropriate to show the grief for martyrdom of imam Hussain, the grandson of Prophet Muhammed (PBUH), who gave his life to save Islam. But that should and must accompany taking of lessons from the events of Karbala. In order to learn from and embody the spirit of sacrifice and commitment to Islam, we ought to go beyond commemoration and apply the very practical lessons from Karbala to our daily lives. I think it is extremely important that the message of Imam Hussain reaches the Muslim youth, regardless of their sect and denomination, to teach them the importance of spiritual, mental and emotional strength, courage and commitment like that of Imam Hussain in order to face calamities and yet stand firm on the principles of righteousness and justice. The commemoration of Ashura across the world, especially in Muslim countries, serves as a constant reminder to the world to stand up for what is right, by any means possible. We must all be courageous and with an abiding commitment to stand up for justice and speak out against the evil that permeates our world today. Since the martyrdom of Imam Hussain, the world has faced similar situations and we found the same human behavior that Muslims adopted towards Imam Hussain when he stood up for what was right. Ordinary people are fearful of the domination of those in power and fail to follow the path of righteousness in the footsteps of a true leader. The example of Hitler shows that it is easier for people, in a short period of few years and under the leadership of one of the worst human beings, to embrace a vile doctrine like Nazism. But what is even more unfortunate is the silence of others, who stand by the sidelines, and do nothing to help the oppressed. Today, the Muslim world is ruled by dictators who oppress and there is no leader like Imam Hussain whose footsteps we may follow .His sacrifice given in support of human rights, justice and to uphold human values had a profound impact on human ideals. Just as Patrick Henry of US said ”Give me liberty or give me death” There are several world leaders who show courage similar to Imam Hussain and stood firmly against the oppressors by following the Imam’s example. To name a few; Martin Luther King against racism in the US, Nelson Mandela against the most powerful apartheid government in south Africa and Mahatma Gandhi who stood against the British Empire to obtain India’s independence. Gandhi had stated “If I had an army like the 72 soldiers of Hussain, I would have won freedom for India in 24 hours.” He also said, “I learnt from Hussain how to achieve victory while being oppressed”. The oppression that Muslims around world face today is only the beginning. It is important now more than ever that the followers of the two major sects of Islam join hands together with the goal of developing one strong and resilient Ummah. Imam Hussain’s lesson from Karbala should teach us that nothing is more than our commitment to keep Islam alive. Anti-Islamic forces are only looking to divide us and will oppose this movement but we must be outspoken about the importance and benefit of uniting the Ummah. Imam Hussain did not sacrifice his life for sectarian divide but to show us that our differences are inconsequential when it comes to Islam. Islam can only survive and thrive when we, Muslims of all sects and denomination, stand against the oppressive forces under the singular banner of Islam while keeping our differences aside just as it has been instructed by the Holy Quran. “I did not rise up for the cause of wickedness, amusement, corruption or oppression, but I rose up to reform the Muslim community of my grandfather [Prophet Muhammad (PBUH)]. (Imam Hussain) “Qatal E Hussain Asal Mein Marg E Yazeed Hai Islam ZindaHota Hai Har Karbala K Baad” Let us keep Islam alive by uniting the Ummah and following Imam Hussain’s legacy.

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