

The Day of 'Ashoora' Symbolizes at-Tawheed

Introduction

The Day of 'Ashoora', which falls on the tenth day of the month of Muharram is a glorious day of great importance for Muslims and an attestation to the Tawheed of Allah. The Prophet ﷺ commanded his Companions and his nation to fast this day.

Due to the importance of belief in the life of the Muslim, it is very important for us to know the objectives and convictions that surround this day. Knowing these objectives and convictions enables one to realize the importance of this day and makes one more able to fulfill the purpose and aims that the Shari'ah calls to. There are many texts in the Shari'ah (from the Ahadeeth) regarding this day.

'Ashoora' in the Sunnah

1- 'Aishah رضي الله عنها narrated: "The Quraish used to fast on the day of 'Ashoora' in the pre-Islamic period and Allah's ﷺ Messenger ﷺ used to fast on that day too. When he ﷺ came to Madinah, he ﷺ fasted on that day and ordered others to fast also. Later, when the fasting of the month of Ramadan was prescribed, he ﷺ gave up fasting on the day of 'Ashoora', and it became optional for one to fast it or not." [Al-Bukhaari no. 2002]

2- Ibn 'Abbaas رضي الله عنه narrated: "The Prophet ﷺ came to Madinah and saw the Jews fasting on the day of 'Ashoora'. He asked them about that. They replied: 'This is a good day, the day on which Allah ﷻ rescued Bani Isra'eel from their enemy. So, Musa عليه السلام fasted this day.' The Prophet ﷺ said: 'We have more claim over Moses than you.' So, the Prophet ﷺ fasted on that day and ordered (the Muslims) to fast (on that day)." [Al-Bukhaari no. 2004]

3- Ibn 'Abbas رضي الله عنه narrated: "I never saw the Prophet ﷺ seeking to fast on a day more (preferable to him) than this day, the day of 'Ashoora', or this month, i.e. the month of Ramadan." [Al-Bukhaari no. 2006]

4- Abu Qatadah reported that a person came to the Messenger of Allah ﷺ and inquired about the fast. Then 'Umar رضي الله عنه asked the Prophet ﷺ about different ways of fasting, whereupon the Prophet ﷺ said: "...and I seek from Allah that fasting on the day of 'Ashoora' may atone for the sins of the preceding year." [Muslim no. 1162]

5- Rubayyi' daughter of Mu'awwidh ibn 'Afra رضي الله عنها said that the Messenger of Allah ﷺ sent (a person) on the morning of 'Ashoora' to the villages of the Ansaar around Madinah (with this message): "He who got up in the morning fasting (without eating anything) should complete his fast, and he who had his breakfast in the morning, should complete the rest of the day (without food)." The Companions said: "Henceforth we observed fast on it (on the day of 'Ashoora') and God willing, made our children observe that. We went to the mosque and made toys out of wool for them and when anyone felt hungry and wept for food, we gave them these toys till it was time to break the fast." [Muslim no. 1136]

6- Ibn Abbaas رضي الله عنه was asked about the observance of fast on the day of 'Ashoora', whereupon he said: "I do not know of Allah's Messenger ﷺ singling out any day's fast and considering it more excellent than another, except this day (the day of 'Ashoora') and this month, meaning the month of Ramadan." [Muslim no. 1132]

7- Abu Musa رضي الله عنه reported: "The day of 'Ashoora' was one which the Jews respected, and they treated it as 'Eid.'" The Messenger of Allah ﷺ said: "You also observe fast on this day." [Muslim no. 1131a]

8- Abu Musa رضي الله عنه reported that the people of Khaibar (most of them were Jews) observed fast on the day of 'Ashoora' and they treated it as 'Eid and gave their women ornaments and beautiful dresses to wear. The Messenger of Allah ﷺ said: "You (only) observe fast on this day." [Muslim no. 1131b]

The Story of 'Ashoora' is an evidence for Tawheed

On the day of 'Ashoora', Allah ﷻ rescued Musa عليه السلام and those who were with him of the people of Tawheed from Fir'awn (Pharaoh), the most aggressive tyrant known in history.

Allah ﷻ, by His Might, destroyed Fir'awn and the disbelievers who rejected His Messenger. And by His Mercy, He saved Musa (*Alayhis-salaam*) and all those who were with him.

The incident of 'Ashoora' is an evidence for how Allah ﷻ supports and gives victory to His Awliyyaa' and how He disgraces His enemies. No matter how high falsehood reaches, a day will come when it will fade away and vanish, like what happened to Fir'awn and his soldiers.

Fir'awn behaved arrogantly in the land because of what he possessed of dominion, authority, troops, and might. He used to oppress Bani Isra'eel (The Children of Israel), killing their sons and letting their womenfolk live; for fear that they might increase in number and gain power, and thus overcome him in his own country. His tyranny had reached an extent where he audaciously (boldly) said (interpretation of the meaning):

"O chiefs, I know not that you have a god other than me." [Surat Al-Qasas (28:38)]

He gathered his people and called them in a loud voice, saying:

"I am your Lord, Most High." [Surat An-Nazi'at (79:24)]

Musa عليه السلام called Fir'awn and his chiefs to acknowledge their real Lord and told them not to worship anything other than Him. Musa عليه السلام brought them signs from Allah ﷻ, but they ridiculed, rejected and denied them wrongfully and arrogantly.

Fir'awn had been deceived by what he had of power and kingdom. He behaved in a tyrannical manner because of the wealth and troops that he had. He said (interpretation of the meaning):

"Is not mine the dominion of Egypt, and these rivers flowing underneath me?"

"See you not then (i.e. do you not see my position of might and power)?" [Surat Az-Zukhruf (43:51)]

This stemmed from his great ignorance, for he took pride in something that was not connected to his attitude and character, but was in fact, bestowed upon him by Allah ﷻ.

Fir'awn used these great favors as a proof for the truthfulness of what he claimed (interpretation of the meaning):

“Thus he fooled his people, and they obeyed him.” [Surat Az-Zukhruf (43:54)]

Because of their weak and foolish minds, they obeyed him.

“Verily, they were ever a people who were rebellious.” [43:54]

Then Allah ﷻ says (interpretation of the meaning):

“So when they angered Us, We punished them, and drowned them all.” [43:55]

Allah ﷻ made Fir'awn and his people as a lesson for others in this world and the Hereafter.

The Exodus of the Children of Israel from Egypt

After that Musa عليه السلام stayed in Egypt for a long time, and the proof of Allah ﷻ was established against Fir'awn and his chiefs. Yet, they were still arrogant and stubborn; there was nothing left for them but punishment and vengeance. So Allah ﷻ commanded Musa عليه السلام to take the Children of Israel out of Egypt by night and take them wherever he would be commanded. So Musa عليه السلام did as he was commanded by his Lord, may He be glorified, and he led them forth after they had borrowed an abundance of jewelry from the people of Fir'awn. More than one of the Scholars of Tafseer mentioned that they left when the moon was rising.

Fir'awn's Pursuit and the Expulsion of the Children of Israel, and how He and His People were drowned

Fir'awn set out with a huge group; a group containing the leaders and the entire government of Egypt at that time (i.e. the decision-makers and influential figures, princes, ministers, nobles, leaders and soldiers), as mentioned by many Scholars of Tafseer.

“So they pursued them at sunrise,” meaning, they caught up with the Children of Israel at sunrise.

“And when the two hosts saw each other,” meaning, when each group saw the other. At that point, **“The companions of Musa عليه السلام said: ‘We are sure to be overtaken.’”**

This was because Fir'awn and his people caught up with them on the shores of the Red Sea, so the sea was ahead of them and Fir'awn and his troops were behind them. Hence, they said: **“We are sure to be overtaken.”**

Musa عليه السلام said: **“Nay, verily with me is my Lord, He will guide me,”** meaning, nothing of what you fear will happen to you, for Allah ﷻ is the One Who commanded me to bring you here, and He does not go back on His promise.

The believer should contemplate this great Tawakkul (reliance) on Allah ﷻ and trust in Him. Musa عليه السلام said: **“Nay, verily with me is my Lord.”** One may ask, “To where should they go? The enemy is behind them and the sea is in front of them.” However, victory and support are from Allah ﷻ. Whoever puts his trust in Allah ﷻ, He ﷻ will suffice him even if all that is in the heavens and earth have plotted against him. Did not Allah ﷻ say in Surat Az-Zumar (39:36):

أَلَيْسَ اللَّهُ بِكَافٍ عَبْدَهُ

“Is Allah not sufficient for His slave?”

And in Surat At-Talaq (65:3):

وَمَنْ يَتَوَكَّلْ عَلَى اللَّهِ فَهُوَ حَسْبُهُ

“And whosoever puts his trust in Allah, then He will suffice him.”

Then Fir’awn and his troops drew very near. At that point, Allah ﷻ commanded Prophet Musa عليه السلام to strike the sea with his staff, so he struck it, and it parted, by the will of Allah ﷻ. Allah ﷻ says:

“And it parted, and each separate part became like a huge mountain.” [Surat Ash-Shu’ara (26:63)]

Meaning, like mighty mountains.

Ibn ‘Abbaas رضي الله عنه said: “The sea divided into twelve paths, one for each of the tribes.” As-Suddi added: “And there were windows through which they could see one another, and the water was erected like walls.” Allah ﷻ sent the wind to the sea to make it solid like the land. Allah ﷻ says:

“and strike a dry path for them in the sea, fearing neither to be overtaken nor being afraid.” [Surat Ta-Ha (20:77)]

Allah ﷻ saved Musa عليه السلام and all those who were with him. They all came out, and not one of them was left behind.

Fir’awn and his soldiers rushed into the sea. When they were all in the sea and the first of them was about to emerge on the other side, Allah ﷻ, the All-Powerful, commanded the sea to shroud them. The sea closed over them and none amongst them was saved.

When Fir’awn was overwhelmed by the stupor of death, he said:

“I believe that none has the right to be worshipped but He (Allah) in Whom the Children of Israel believe, and I am one of the Muslims.” [Surat Yunus (10:90)]

He believed at a time when he could not benefit from his faith. Therefore, Allah ﷻ said, as a response to Fir’awn:

“Now (you believe) while you refused to believe before? And you were one of the mischief-makers.”
[10:91]

These facts about Fir'awn and his state at that time were among the secrets of the unseen that Allah ﷻ revealed to His Messenger Muhammad ﷺ.

It is reported by At-Tirmidhi on the authority of Ibn 'Abbaas رضي الله عنه that the Prophet ﷺ said: "Jibreel عليه السلام said to me: 'If you could have seen me while I was taking black mud from the sea and placing it in the mouth of Fir'awn, out of fear that mercy would reach him.'" [As-Silsilah As-Saheeha no. 2015 and Al-Albaani graded it Saheeh]

Allah ﷻ says:

"Verily, in this is indeed a sign, yet most of them are not believers.

And verily your Lord, He is truly the Almighty, the Most Merciful." [Surat Ash-Shu'ara (67-68)]

Allah ﷻ, by His Might, destroyed the disbelievers who rejected His Messenger ﷺ, and by His Mercy, saved Musa عليه السلام and all those who were with him. This story stands as a proof that Allah ﷻ is All-Powerful, and all creatures are under His ﷻ control. Nothing can stand against His ﷻ anger.

Fir'awn and his people were destroyed on the day of 'Ashoora', the tenth of Muharram, as recorded by Al-Bukhaari on the authority of Ibn 'Abbaas رضي الله عنه who said: "When the Prophet ﷺ arrived at Madinah, the Jews fasted the day of 'Ashoora'. So he asked: "What is this day that you are fasting?" They responded: "This is the day on which Musa was victorious over Fir'awn." So the Prophet ﷺ said: "You have more right to Musa than they, so fast it." [Al-Bukhaari]

The day of 'Ashoora' thus links the Muslim with the Messengers of Allah ﷻ

The Prophet ﷺ commanded his Companions and his followers from his Ummah to observe fast on that day because it is a day on which Allah ﷻ rescued Musa عليه السلام and those who were with him. The Muslim comes after centuries and rejoices for the salvation of Musa عليه السلام and fasts this day out of gratitude to Allah ﷻ. This is the link between the Muslim and Musa عليه السلام which is also shown in the statement of Prophet Muhammad ﷺ: "You have more right to Musa than they (the Jews)." [Al-Bukhaari]

The 'Aqeedah of all the Prophets is one; they called to worship One Lord, and their religion is Islam.

Ibn Taymiyah رحمه الله said: "This religion, which is the religion of Islam; Allah ﷻ will not accept any religion other than it, neither from the early generations nor from the later." [Al-Aqeedah At-Tadmuriyyah]

The Prophet ﷺ said: "I am the closest of the people to 'Eesa ibn Maryam, in this world and in the Hereafter." They said: "How is that, O Messenger of Allah?" He ﷺ: "The Prophets are brothers; their mothers are different, but their religion is one, and there is no Prophet between us." [Muslim no. 2365]

Out of all religions, only Muslims have complete belief in all the Messengers and what they brought. The Jews do not believe in 'Eesa (Jesus) عليه السلام nor in Prophet Muhammad ﷺ and furthermore, attribute the Messengers of Allah with evil descriptions.

It is from the core belief of the Muslim nation to believe in all the Messengers that came before Prophet Muhammad ﷺ. Allah ﷻ commanded them in Surat Al-Baqarah (2:136):

قُولُوا آمَنَّا بِاللَّهِ وَمَا أُنزِلَ إِلَيْنَا وَمَا أُنزِلَ إِلَىٰ إِبْرَاهِيمَ وَإِسْمَاعِيلَ وَإِسْحَاقَ وَيَعْقُوبَ وَالْأَسْبَاطِ وَمَا أُوتِيَ مُوسَىٰ وَعِيسَىٰ وَمَا أُوتِيَ النَّبِيُّونَ مِن رَّبِّهِمْ لَا نُفَرِّقُ بَيْنَ أَحَدٍ مِّنْهُمْ وَنَحْنُ لَهُ مُسْلِمُونَ

“Say (O Muslims), ‘We believe in Allah and that which has been sent down to us and that which has been sent down to Ibraheem (Abraham), Isma'il (Ishmael), Ishaque (Isaac), Ya'qub (Jacob), and to Al-Asbat [the twelve sons of Ya'qub (Jacob)], and that which has been given to Musa (Moses) and 'Eesa (Jesus), and that which has been given to the Prophets from their Lord. We make no distinction between any of them, and to Him we have submitted (in Islam).”

Whoever does not believe in one of Allah's ﷻ Prophets has disbelieved in all the Prophets, including the Prophet ﷺ. Defaming one of them is defamation of all of them, including Prophet Muhammad ﷺ.

Allah ﷻ praised the Muslims for responding to the command of Allah and believing in all of the Messengers in Surat An-Nisaa' (4:152):

وَالَّذِينَ آمَنُوا بِاللَّهِ وَرُسُلِهِ وَلَمْ يُفَرِّقُوا بَيْنَ أَحَدٍ مِّنْهُمْ أُولَٰئِكَ سَوْفَ يُؤْتِيهِمُ أَجْرَهُمُ ۗ وَكَانَ اللَّهُ غَفُورًا رَّحِيمًا

“And those who believe in Allah and His Messengers and make no distinction between any of them (Messengers), We shall give them their rewards, and Allah is Ever Oft-Forgiving, Most Merciful.”

Fasting the day of 'Ashoora' came to prove and affirm this meaning. The Prophet ﷺ clearly mentioned that he and his Ummah have more right to Musa عليه السلام than the Jews. This is because:

1. The Muslims believed in Musa عليه السلام though they did not see him.
2. Musa عليه السلام called them to pure Tawheed, but the Jews altered their Religion.
3. The Muslims did not harm him as the Bani Isra'eel did. Allah ﷻ says in Surat Al-Ahzaab (33:69):

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا لَا تَكُونُوا كَالَّذِينَ آذَوْا مُوسَىٰ فَبَرَأَهُ اللَّهُ مِمَّا قَالُوا ۗ وَكَانَ اللَّهُ عِنْدَ اللَّهِ وَجِيهًا

“O you who believe! Be not like those who annoyed Musa (Moses), but Allah cleared him of that which they alleged, and he was honorable before Allah.”

The Day of 'Ashoora' and Contradicting the People of the Scriptures

Islamic law enjoined Muslims to generally deal with the People of Scripture with justice, kindness, and Ihsan (doing good to them), so long as they are not fighting them. Islam made their slaughtered animals, marrying their women, and doing business with them, lawful in accordance with Islamic laws.

As for their religious relationship, Islamic law forbade Muslims from imitating the Kuffar (disbelievers) generally, and the People of the Scriptures specifically in all matters that are particular to their religion, and which are not mentioned in Islamic law.

Many texts have mentioned the impermissibility of resembling them in acts of worship which are particular to them, and their customs which are symbols for them alone.

Allah's Messenger ﷺ said: "He is not one of us, who resembles other than us, nor who resembles the Jews or the Christians." [At-Tirmidhi no. 2695 and authenticated by Al-Albaani who graded it Hasan]

This is also shown clearly in the story of 'Ashoora'. When the Prophet ﷺ came to Madinah and saw the Jews fasting on the day of 'Ashoora', he ﷺ observed fast on that day. Then at the end of his life, he ﷺ commanded to oppose them.

Ibn 'Abbaas رضي الله عنه narrated: "When the Messenger of Allah ﷺ fasted on the day of 'Ashoora' and enjoined this fast, they said: "O Messenger of Allah, it is a day that is venerated by the Jews and Christians." The Messenger of Allah ﷺ said: "Next year – if Allah wills – we will fast on the ninth day." But the next year the Messenger of Allah ﷺ had passed away." [Muslim no. 1134]

Ibn Taymiyyah رحمه الله said: "Contemplate this: The Day of 'Ashoora' is a virtuous day; it expiates the sins of the previous year. The Messenger of Allah ﷺ observed its fast, and commanded and urged others to fast it. Then before his death, for a while, he was told that the Jews and Christians venerate it, so he commanded to contradict them by adding another day to it, and he ﷺ resolved to do that himself." [Iqtida' as-Sirat Al-Mustaqeem Limukhalafat As'hab Al-Jaheem]

Is the Day of 'Ashoora' a day of mourning?

Out of Allah's ﷻ perfect wisdom, He ﷻ afflicted one of His ﷻ believing servants on the day of 'Ashoora', who was a great man and one of the 'Awliyaa of Allah whom the Prophet ﷺ attested Paradise for. He was Al-Husain رضي الله عنه, the grandson of the Prophet ﷺ who was unjustly killed and martyred in the cause of Allah ﷻ.

Our belief should be that he was unjustly killed and thus martyred, and for him is the highest rank in Paradise, as the Prophet ﷺ said about him and his brother Al-Hasan رضي الله عنه: "The masters of the youth of the People of Paradise." [Reported by Ahmad and authenticated by Al-Albaani in As-Silsilah As-Saheeha no. 796]

In this incident of killing, there was a trial, distress, and purification. The people divided into three categories (groups) after this killing:

1. One group has exceeded the limit, turning the day of 'Ashoora' into a day of mourning and lamenting, doing things that displease Allah ﷻ and what the religion of Islam prohibits of wailing, lamenting, and following the traditions and ways of Jahiliyah (Ignorance). They even commit Shirk by calling unto Al-Husain رضي الله عنه, seeking recourse in him and asking him to deliver them from their distress.

Prophet Muhammad ﷺ said: "If the woman who wails does not repent before she dies, she will be raised on the Day of Resurrection wearing a garment of pitch and a chemise of scabs." [Muslim no. 934]

He ﷺ said: "He who slaps (his) cheeks, tears (his) clothes and calls to (or follows) the ways and traditions of the days of ignorance is not one of us." [Al-Bukhaari no. 1294]

Instead of making the day of 'Ashoora' a day of gratitude to Allah ﷻ, they turn it into a day of wailing in which actions of Jahiliyah are practiced. Some of them seek nearness to Allah ﷻ by shedding blood from their forehead or back, believing that this is a means of forgiveness and elevation of ranks with Allah ﷻ.

2. A different group has breached and neglected the status of the Awliyaa of Allah ﷻ and His chosen slaves, by not giving them their rights and due respect. They are the Naasibah who declare enmity to the family members of the Prophet ﷺ. They have turned the day of 'Ashoora' into a day of happiness and joy by wearing new clothes, buying food, sweets, and adornments.
3. Another group adopted the middle course, and they are Ahl-As-Sunnah wal-Jam'ah. They neither exceed the limit regarding the rights of the family members of the Prophet ﷺ nor do they neglect them. They follow the Sunnah of the Prophet ﷺ by fasting this day as a gratitude to Allah ﷻ.

Let us praise Allah ﷻ for guiding us, opening our breasts to the truth, keeping us away from the way of the extremists and the negligent, and making us from the people of moderation. We seek nearness to Allah ﷻ by our love for the family members of the Prophet ﷺ. Let us recognize their due right upon us and fulfill it, with neither excessiveness nor negligence.

Sources:

- The Day of 'Ashoora' is a day that symbolizes Tawheed by Ibraheem bin Muhammad Siddiq
- The Day of 'Ashoora' by Shaikh 'Abdur-Razzaq Al-Badr
- Tafseer Ibn Katheer
- Tayseer Al-Kareem by Shaikh As-Sa'dee