

What is 'Ashoora?

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Article

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What led to this tragic event of Karbala?

Even in the lifetime of the Prophet of Islam, there were people whose tongues professed faith in Islam but whose hearts lay elsewhere. These people were called “Munafiqeen” (hypocrites) by the Holy Quran. The reasons that these people joined the ranks of Muslims were manifold, some of which were as follows:

1. Enmity towards Islam prompted them to sow discord among the Muslims from within, by distorting the Prophet's message wherever and however possible.
2. Islam was spreading fast and gaining power. They decided to join the winning side and seize whatever worldly gains they could lay their hands on.

The activities of such people gained impetus after the Prophet's passing away, and reached a peak when Muawiya, the son of Abu Sufyan, claimed himself the ruler of Syria.

The hypocrites were now in power and so they mounted a highly organized assault against the very roots of Islam, and they were on the verge of total success. Some of the priorities of the attack were to destroy the awareness of the common Muslims or to destroy their faculty of expression. This was achieved through bribes, through terror and through propagation of ignorance. When these weapons failed in silencing the tongue of a strong Muslim, then that tongue was silenced by death.

By all these means, within half a century after the Prophet's passing away, Islam had been distorted so much that it became totally unrecognizable, so unrecognizable that people knew of the debaucheries of Yazid, son of Muawiya, and still accepted him as a successor of the Prophet and a true leader of the Muslims.

With the advent of Yazid, the vilest of the vile, the mission of destroying the roots of Islam had reached its peak. The right and the wrong had been intermixed so much that it became impossible for a common man to differentiate between them.

This would have been the end of Islam, but for Husayn (as), grandson of the Prophet (S) and son of Ali ibn Abi Talib (as) and Fatima az-Zahra (sa).

What Imam Husayn did was to gather about him in Karbala the exalted members of his family and his hand-picked friends and companions, many of whom had been the companions of the Prophet (S) and of Ali (as) and of Imam Hasan (as). These people were the very best examples of humanity in that

period, or for that matter, in any period in the history of the world. Imam Husayn had virtually gathered the sum total of the strength of Islam to himself. This strength comprised not of physical might, but of moral might. With this strength, he proceeded to resist Yazid.

The fact that he traveled from Madinah toward Kufa with his family (including his infant son Ali Asghar as) is a clear indication that it was not his intention to fight for Caliphate and worldly power. No. His aims were higher. He was fighting for the life of Islam.

His sermons, which he delivered in front of his companions during his journey from Madinah to Karbala, clearly indicate that he knew what was going to happen in the next few days. He informed his companions time and again, that he, and those who would accompany him, were going to die. He gave his companions a free and clear choice: death with him, or life away from him. His companions showed that they were fully prepared for the sacrifice of their lives in the company of Husayn (as).

The purpose of this sacrifice

With his sacrifice, Husayn (as) attracted to himself the eyes of all the free-thinking people of his time and of all the time to come. In that time of confusion, when right and wrong had become so intermixed that they had lost distinction, Husayn, in Karbala, irrevocably re-established that distinction, creating a clear, incisive demarcation between right and wrong, and leaving no doubts (for even the most prejudiced of historians) about the fact that the right lay with Husayn, and the wrong lay with those who opposed him.

Establishing this fact, Husayn, through his words and actions and the words and actions of his companions, encapsulated all the teachings of Islam within a short span of time, in the field of Karbala, creating a beacon of light for the truth seekers of all times.

It is this event that is marked on the tenth of Muharram every year. It is this event that has made free thinking people of all times love Husayn with a selfless love beyond compare. And it is this love that expresses itself through mourning during the month of Muharram, and particularly on 'Ashura', the 10th of Muharram, every year.

The mourning is a way to remind oneself of Husayn's incomparable sacrifice, a way to thank him, a way to express love for him, and a way to broadcast to the world his message of true freedom.

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