

Beyond The Tears for Imam Husayn – Muharram Lecture Series

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This text presents a collection of Muharram lectures that explain the lasting message of Imam Husayn (عليه السلام) and the significance of the tragedy of Karbala. It shows that Ashura is not only a time for mourning but also a call to gain knowledge, strengthen faith, and uphold justice. The lectures connect Qur'anic teachings, the guidance of the Ahl al-Bayt (عليه السلام), and the lessons of Karbala with the challenges faced by Muslims today.

Key themes include ma'rifah, love, obedience, wilayah, and moral responsibility. The discussions encourage readers to move beyond emotion and reflect these values in daily life. This work serves as a practical guide for understanding the purpose of Muharram and building a stronger relationship with Imam Husayn (عليه السلام).

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Foreword

In the Name of God, the Beneficent, the Merciful.

All praise is due to God, the Lord of the Worlds; the Beneficent, the Merciful;

the Master of the Day of Judgment;

Thee only we serve, and to Thee alone we beseech for help;

Guide us in the straight path;

*The path of those upon whom Thou hast bestowed favors, not of those against whom Thou art wrathful,
nor of those who are astray.*

O' God! send Your blessings to the head of Your messengers and the last of

Your prophets,

Muhammad and his pure and cleansed progeny.

Also send Your blessings to all Your prophets and envoys.

In the world of knowledge and wisdom, there are voices that resonate with unparalleled clarity, guiding us through the complex and profound realms of understanding. Sayyid 'Aidarus Sharif Alwy is one such luminary whose lectures have not only enlightened countless minds but have also touched the hearts of many.

In this remarkable collection of Ashura commemorations, we are privileged to present a compilation of Sayyid 'Aidarus' insightful lectures, carefully curated to provide readers with a profound journey into the depths of Ashura and the great sacrifice of the grandson of the Holy Prophet, Imam Husayn ('a). These lectures encapsulate years of dedicated research, reflection, and scholarship, and they invite readers to explore them from a perspective that is both intellectually stimulating and spiritually enriching.

Sayyid 'Aidarus' unique ability to bridge the gap between the timeless wisdom of Ashura and the contemporary challenges of our world is truly remarkable. His eloquence and depth of knowledge shine through in each lecture, making complex ideas accessible to a wide range of audiences. Whether you are a seasoned scholar or a curious seeker of knowledge, this collection promises to be a valuable companion in your quest for understanding.

As we embark on this intellectual and spiritual journey through Sayyid 'Aidarus' lectures, it is important to remember that the essence of his teachings goes beyond the mere exchange of information. It is an invitation to contemplation, a call to introspection, and an opportunity to strengthen our connection with Imam Husayn ('a) and Ashura in a meaningful and profound way.

We must express our gratitude to Sayyid 'Aidarus for his dedication to spreading knowledge and

enlightenment. His commitment to fostering understanding and harmony through Ashura is truly inspiring, and it is our hope that this collection will continue to inspire generations to come.

Furthermore, we extend our deep appreciation to Sister Yasmin (Ebrahim Kermalli) Nasser, the diligent and talented translator, for her excellent contribution. Sister Yasmin not only painstakingly transcribed Sayyid ‘Aidarus’ lectures from Swahili to English but also provided her insightful understanding and interpretation of the lectures. Her dedication to preserving and presenting these valuable teachings in English has been instrumental in making this collection accessible to a wider audience.

It is with great pleasure that we present this book, titled “Beyond the Tears for Imam Husayn,” a tribute to the wisdom and vision of Sayyid ‘Aidarus. May these lectures serve as a source of enlightenment, inspiration, and spiritual growth for all who embark on this journey.

Ali Khalfan (Editor)

Tawheed Institute Australia Ltd.

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Disclaimer

I, Yasmin (Ebrahim Kermalli) Nasser, hereby provide this disclaimer regarding the translation of the lecture series conducted by Sayyid ‘Aidarus Sharif Alwy. As the translator of these lectures, it is important to clarify that this text represents my understanding and interpretation of the content presented by the speaker. While I have made every effort to faithfully convey the essence and message of the lectures, there may be instances where nuances, tone, or specific expressions used by the speaker may not be captured exactly as they were presented during the live sessions.

Translation is an intricate process that involves bridging linguistic and cultural gaps, and despite my best efforts, some degree of subjectivity is inherent in this task. Therefore, readers and listeners should be aware that this text may not be a verbatim representation of the speaker’s words, but rather an interpretation aimed at conveying the core ideas and concepts discussed.

I encourage all individuals who seek a comprehensive understanding of the lectures to refer to the original recordings or transcripts provided by the speaker, if available, for the most accurate representation of their intent and delivery. My role as a translator is to facilitate access to valuable information and insights. My thanks to Allah (s.w.t.) for His Grace and the support of my family that

enabled and motivated me in this work. I appreciate your understanding and hope that this translation serves as a helpful resource for those seeking to engage with the ideas presented in the lecture series.

Finally, I have dedicated this modest work to the memory of my late son, Aarif Riyaz Nasser. I kindly request that readers honor his soul by reciting Surah Al-Fatiha.

Sincerely,

Yasmin (Ebrahim Kermalli) Nasser (Translator)

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About the Speaker

Sayyid ‘Aidarus Sharif Alwy, born in the serene island of Lamu, Kenya, in 1971, has a rich background in Islamic education. His early years were spent absorbing the teachings of the Qur’an and foundational religious principles at Anisa Lamu’s Madrasah al-Ikhlaws, where he studied diligently from 1978 to 1980. His thirst for knowledge led him to Madrasah al-Najah Lamu, where he pursued deeper religious studies and mastered the Arabic language, culminating in a Thanawiyah diploma in 1989.

Sayyid ‘Aidarus’s pursuit of religious scholarship did not cease with his initial education. Between 1990 and 1994, he delved into advanced religious texts and discourses through mosque study circles led by his father, late Sharif Alwy, and his brothers, Syd. Ahmad and Syd. Hussein. This period of intense learning paved the way for his journey to Lebanon in 1995. There, Sayyid Aidarus joined the hawzah of Sheikh Mufid Faqih in the village of Housh before progressing to the Al-Madrasah al-Diniyyah in Sour, studying under the guidance of Sheikh ‘Ali Yasin until the end of 1998.

In 1999, Sayyid Aidarus’s commitment to spreading knowledge led him back to his roots, where he began teaching at Madrasah al-Najah, Lamu under the auspices of “The Ahl al-Bayt Foundation.” His teaching was complemented by continued studies with Sheikh Hussein ‘Ali Baydhun, focusing on Fiqh, Usul al-Fiqh, and the sciences of Hadith and Rijal. The passing of Syd. Hussein Sharif Alwy in 2000 marked a turning point for Sayyid ‘Aidarus, as he took up the mantle of Director of Madrasah al-Najah and supervisor of education at “The Ahl al-Bayt Foundation.”

Sayyid ‘Aidarus’s scholarly journey is marked by the influence of numerous esteemed teachers. In Lamu, he was mentored by his family members and scholars such as Sheikh Ahmad Nin ‘Ali Al-khatib and Sheikh Athman Al-khatib. His academic odyssey in Lebanon introduced him to the teachings of notables like Sheikh Hussein Baydhun and Sheikh Mustwafaa Zayn.

Today, Sayyid ‘Aidarus serves as a beacon of knowledge, enlightening students as a teacher at hawzah and overseeing educational programs at “The Ahl al-Bayt Foundation Kenya.” His deputy directorship at the foundation is complemented by his role as a lecturer, where he brings to life the verses of the Holy Qur’an and the expansive domain of Islamic knowledge for seekers of wisdom. His dedication to education and his profound understanding of the Islamic tradition continue to inspire and educate many.

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A Brief History of Karbala

The event of Karbala and the sacrifice of Imam Husayn (‘a), the grandson of the Prophet Muhammad (S), is a pivotal and profound moment in Islamic history, particularly for the Shi’a Muslim community.

The history of Karbala dates back to the 7th century, specifically to the year 680 CE (10th of Muharram, 61 AH in the Islamic calendar). After the death of the third Caliph, Uthman, and subsequently Ali (the fourth Caliph and the first Imam for Shi’a Muslims), the Islamic community became divided over the issue of succession. This division led to the Umayyad dynasty coming to power with Mu’awiya as its first caliph. Upon his death, his son Yazid took over the rule, which was against the principle of consultation in the community that many expected for choosing a leader.

Imam Husayn (‘a), who is considered by Shi’a Islam as the rightful successor and third Imam, stood for justice and the principles of Islam as preached by his grandfather, the Prophet Muhammad (S). When Yazid demanded his allegiance, Imam Husayn (‘a) refused, as he believed that giving allegiance to a tyrant ruler like Yazid would be tantamount to endorsing corruption and deviation from the true teachings of Islam.

This refusal led to tension that culminated in Imam Husayn’s journey to Kufa, where he had been invited by supporters who later failed to come to his aid. En route, he and his small caravan, which included family and close companions, were intercepted by Yazid’s forces in Karbala, a desert plain in Iraq. Imam Husayn (‘a) and his group were vastly outnumbered and were ultimately surrounded, preventing access to water and supplies.

Despite the harsh conditions and the overwhelming odds, Imam Husayn (‘a) steadfastly refused to give his allegiance to Yazid. On the Day of Ashura, the 10th day of Muharram, the standoff reached its climax. Imam Husayn’s camp, consisting of 72 individuals including men, women, and children, faced an army of thousands. They fought valiantly but were ultimately massacred.

Imam Husayn (‘a) and his companions were slain, their women and children taken captive. The tragedy of Karbala is remembered for the stark contrast it displays between good and evil, between the moral fortitude of Imam Husayn (‘a) and the corrupt tyranny of Yazid.

Imam Husayn’s sacrifice is commemorated annually on the Day of Ashura. It is a day of mourning for Muslims around the world, especially for the Shi’a community. The sacrifice of Imam Husayn (‘a) is seen as a symbol of resistance against oppression and the eternal struggle between truth and falsehood. His legacy is thought to inspire courage and steadfastness in upholding justice and righteousness, regardless of the magnitude of sacrifice required.

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Part 1: The Path Towards Imam Husayn (‘a)

Lecture 1 – Muharram 1445

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

In the name of Allah, the All-Merciful, the Ever-Merciful

Before we explore into the topic of Imam Husayn’s revered journey, it is crucial to address the questions that naturally emerge from such a dis- course, especially from participants of diverse backgrounds. Questioning is a vital human attribute that fosters knowledge and sets us apart from animals. The Qur’an urges us to seek knowledge from the learned, reflecting in numerous verses that responded to the inquiries of the Prophet’s time (peace be upon him).

Questioning is a healthy practice for acquiring and disseminating knowledge, which also fosters the exchange of ideas. Yet, some questions are fruitless, lacking in purpose and designed to sow discord, which the Qur’an explicitly condemns.

Consider, for instance, the trivial question posed to Imam ‘Ali (‘a) about the number of a man’s hairs. Even if answered, what value does such information hold? Let’s turn to more substantial inquiries: Why

focus on Imam Husayn (‘a) and Muharram, when Islamic history is replete with significant events like the death of the Holy Prophet (S), the assassination of Imam ‘Ali, the poisoning of Imam Hasan, the martyrdom of Hamza, the uncle of the Holy Prophet, the martyrdom of Ja’far son of Abu Talib and other tragedies?

In our contemporary era, when Muslims face formidable challenges from adversaries intent on inciting division, unity is imperative. Discussions of past conflicts among Muslims only exacerbate discord and are counterproductive.

Returning to the path of Imam Husayn (‘a), understanding the pertinent questions is paramount. Some inquiries, like those on jurisprudential matters, may have straightforward answers. Yet, questions on ideology, history, and systems demand comprehensive study and discussion for a well-rounded understanding – a process often neglected in today’s fast-paced world.

The question ‘Why Imam Husayn?’ elicits various responses, reflecting individual perceptions. For us, Imam Husayn (‘a) isn’t solely revered for his lineage as the Prophet’s grandson. His significance extends as an inheritor of the Prophets’ legacy, embodying leadership and guidance, as highlighted in Ziyarat Waritha.

The Prophet’s relationship with Imam Husayn (‘a) was unique, as evidenced by numerous hadiths and Qur’anic verses indicating divine inspiration in his actions and words. The repeated foretelling of Imam Husayn’s martyrdom at different stages of his life, even before his birth, underscores its profound significance – further emphasized by the poignant soil given to Umm Salamah, which foreshadowed the tragedy.

Imam Husayn’s martyrdom, divinely foretold, holds a unique place and cannot be equated with any other. Allah’s wisdom transcends our understanding; as believers, we acknowledge the special significance He bestows, evident in instances like the blessed Zamzam water of Prophet Isma’il’s well. The martyrdom of Imam Husayn ignited a flame in the hearts of the faithful, a unique aspect bestowed by Allah (s.w.t.).

It is misguided to rank figures within the Ahl al-Bayt (‘a) against one another. Allah’s system does not rely on popularity; the frequency of a Prophet’s mention in the Qur’an does not dictate their rank.

The essence of the battle of Karbala was the triumph of truth over falsehood, not a sectarian conflict or a power struggle. Misinterpreting it as anything else fosters nothing but division among Muslims – an outcome that benefits only those who seek to harm Islam and its followers in these tumultuous times.

Despite a minority’s deviation in elevating Yazid to a position of respect, the vast majority of Muslim scholars across all sects acknowledge the numerous traditions of the Holy Prophet that elevate the status of Imam Husayn (‘a) and his stance for absolute truth at Karbala. Yazid’s infamy, synonymous with oppression, indulgence, and fear, starkly contrasts with the righteousness of Imam Husayn (‘a).

Imam Husayn (‘a), embarking from Madinah, declared his mission was for the reformation (islah) of his grandfather’s Ummah. His definition of Ummah embraced all of humanity, evidenced by non-Muslims who have drawn inspiration from his sacrifice – such as Mahatma Gandhi, who saw in Imam Husayn (‘a)’s actions the bedrock for his own principles of justice and peace.

The notion that remembrance of Imam Husayn (‘a)’s stand incites discord is unfounded. In fact, understanding his purpose and sacrifice is a unifying force. Claims that such commemorations divide the Muslim Ummah are remnants of Banu Umayyah’s propaganda.

Incorporating Imam Husayn (‘a)’s principles into our lives amid today’s economic, social, and ideological challenges would instill self-respect, motivation, courage, and wisdom. These values enable us to confront obstacles without compromising our beliefs, echoing the Imam’s declaration of dignity over humiliation (Hayhat minna al-dhillah).

We weep for Imam Husayn (‘a), but why? It is essential to recognize that humans are not merely physical entities; our minds set us apart from animals, and our capacity for emotion distinguishes us as truly human. Ayat. Nasir Makarim al-Shirazi emphasizes that compassion (‘atifa) is what differentiates a humane individual from one who is not. For instance, when a person’s awareness of a beggar’s plight reaches the heart, it awakens compassion, prompting action to aid them.

Our tears for Imam Husayn (‘a) reflect this deep-seated compassion. The Holy Prophet himself wept at his son’s death, affirming his humanity and capacity for grief.

The world today is not deficient in education or intellect but in humanity. The irony of nations spending millions on arms while their streets are lined with the hungry is a stark reminder of this deficiency. Tears can soften hearts, awaken empathy, and inspire action against oppression.

Weeping holds the profound benefit of tenderizing the heart, awakening deep feelings of empathy and kindness. This emotional response, particularly felt when exiting the gatherings that commemorate Imam Husayn (‘a)’s trials, should propel us towards acts of benevolence and advocacy for the downtrodden. It is documented that when Imam Husayn (‘a) was compelled to depart from Madinah, he shed tears at his esteemed grandfather’s resting place. This act of weeping in times of adversity is a tradition deeply rooted within the practices of the Imams (‘a) and the Ahl al-Bayt (‘a). Similarly, after the passing of Lady Fatimah (‘a), Imam ‘Ali (‘a) found solace in tears by the grave of the Holy Prophet. Such expressions of grief are not just cathartic; they invigorate us to bravely face the trials that lie ahead.

End of Lecture 1

Lecture 2 – Muharram 1445

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

Recap of Lecture 1

This lecture provided a comprehensive understanding of the significance of Imam Husayn's journey and martyrdom, emphasizing the importance of questioning and seeking knowledge in Islam. It began by highlighting the value of questioning as a means to gain knowledge, distinguishing between constructive questions and those aimed at causing discord, as discouraged in the Qur'an. The lecture then focused on the reasons for emphasizing Imam Husayn ('a)'s story, especially in the context of the challenges faced by contemporary Muslims. It stressed the importance of unity among Muslims and discouraged discussions that could lead to further division.

Sayyid 'Aidarus explored into the unique significance of Imam Husayn ('a), not just as the Prophet's grandson, but as an embodiment of the Prophets' legacy, leadership, and guidance. They referenced the unique relationship between the Prophet and Imam Husayn (peace be upon them), supported by traditions and Qur'anic verses, and the divine inspiration evident in Imam Husayn's life and martyrdom. The lecture emphasized that the martyrdom of Imam Husayn ('a) held a special place in Islamic history and could not be compared to other events.

Sayyid 'Aidarus further argued against ranking figures within the Ahl al-Bayt ('a) and misinterpreting the battle of Karbala as a sectarian conflict or power struggle. Instead, the essence of Karbala was presented as the triumph of truth over falsehood. The lecture also addressed the recognition of Imam Husayn's righteousness across all Muslim sects, contrasting it with the infamy of Yazid.

Imam Husayn's mission for reformation was highlighted, along with his impact beyond the Muslim community, as exemplified by figures like Mahatma Gandhi. The speaker refuted the notion that remembrance of Imam Husayn ('a)'s stand incited discord, asserting it as a unifying force against Banu Umayyah's historical propaganda.

The lecture concluded by emphasizing the incorporation of Imam Husayn ('a)'s principles in confronting contemporary challenges, highlighting the importance of dignity, courage, and wisdom. It also discussed the significance of weeping for Imam Husayn ('a), linking it to human compassion and empathy, and the need for humanity in today's world. The act of weeping was portrayed as a means to awaken empathy and inspire action against oppression, drawing parallels to the emotional expressions of the Imams ('a) and the Ahl al-Bayt ('a) in times of adversity.

Lecture 2

In our previous discussion, we explored the question "Why Imam Husayn?" Now, a crucial question arises: how can we align ourselves with his legacy and be recognized as 'followers of Imam Husayn'?

In today's Islamic world, a significant issue has emerged, influencing key aspects of individual, family,

and community life. This issue concerns the emphasis on responding to various religious questions rather than truly understanding and living the faith.

Historically, the Islamic world has witnessed ongoing debates and discussions, a trend that will persist. While it's vital to present one's beliefs in these discourses, it's even more critical to enact and refine these beliefs through actions and conduct, rather than merely opposing or imposing them on others.

Allah could have created humanity as a single community – (Ummatun Wahidah). The Qur'an states that the Prophet's role was solely to propagate religion, with people free to believe or disbelieve – ***Lakum dinukum wa liya din (109:6)***.

During Ashura commemorations, we must contemplate a significant question: how do we strengthen our bond with Imam Husayn? Our Muharram theme, 'The Path Towards Imam Husayn', begins with acquiring comprehensive knowledge (ma'rifah) about him.

Imam 'Ali ('a) once told his companion, Kumayl Ibn Ziyad, that the human heart, like a vessel, holds both good and evil, its worth determined by its contents. He illustrated that one's inner nature inevitably manifests externally. Nobility arises from inner goodness, while negativity breeds evil. Imam 'Ali ('a) famously said, "Man's true character is hidden behind his tongue.^{[1](#)}"

He categorized people into three groups:

- 1) Those whose knowledge connects them to Allah (Rabbaniy) – using this knowledge to seek Allah's pleasure.
- 2) Those seeking knowledge for personal growth and purification, aiming for salvation, not recognition or accolades.
- 3) Those who possess knowledge but lack steadfastness, easily swayed in different directions.

We should look up to scholars who emulate the Ahl al-Bayt's lifestyles, rather than idolizing actors or sports celebrities. Imam 'Ali ('a) advised that successful endeavors start with acquiring comprehensive knowledge (ma'rifah). This principle applies to worldly and spiritual pursuits alike.

Whether it's starting a business, constructing a building, seeking medical treatment, or practicing religious duties, thorough knowledge is crucial. To truly follow the Ahl al-Bayt ('a), one must seek deep understanding from authentic sources and methodologies, guided by the light (nur) towards the correct ma'rifah.

Imam al-Sadiq's prayer highlights the importance of recognizing Allah, the Prophet, and the Imam^{[2](#)}.

The saying, "the ink of the scholar is mightier than the blood of the martyr," underscores the power of knowledge in inspiring sacrifice for Allah. The ultimate jihad (struggle) is spreading ma'rifah. Recognizing

this, enemies strive to spread ignorance and mental confusion.

The difference between mere knowledge (ilm) and ma'rifah is significant. Unfortunately, in developing countries, the education system often focuses on theory, limiting practical application. This has hindered independence in various life aspects, giving an advantage to colonial powers.

Secular education is essential, but it is only a tool toward acquiring ma'rifah. It is through this understanding that one can effectively apply their secular education.

Many students express curiosity about the journey to becoming successful orators. While studying subjects like Nahw, Balagha, Sarf, Mantiq, and Fiqh³ is crucial, these are merely means to acquire the necessary ma'rifah for public discourse. What is taught theoretically in institutions must be applied and tested in the real world, facing its challenges and realities.

At this juncture, it is evident that simply relaying knowledge from institutions is insufficient when addressing an audience from the pulpit. An impactful speech requires an additional, critical element that is deeply connected to the speaker's personality and upbringing. The authenticity of a speaker – how their message aligns with their lifestyle – is paramount. This authenticity, along with personal and observed experiences, constitutes a scholar's developmental journey. A scholar must be analytical, willing to learn from more knowledgeable individuals, up-to-date with contemporary research, cognizant of global issues, and capable of tailoring discussions to the audience's level.

The Ahl al-Bayt ('a) faced immense challenges, primarily because they encountered individuals who failed to recognize their superiority, leading to widespread misinformation and hostility towards them.

In certain narrations from Sahih al-Bukhari, when the Holy Prophet was questioned about who held the highest status after him, he indicated Abu Bakr, followed by "Umar Ibn al-Khattab, then 'Uthman Ibn 'Affan, suggesting that Imam 'Ali ('a) was on par with the rest of the people, an implication of the intense level of manipulation at the time.

Such was the extent of this brainwashing that those who sought to kill Imam Husayn lacked any true understanding (ma'rifah) of him, believing their actions were in defense of the faith. They seemed unaware of the Qur'anic verse calling for love towards the Ahl al-Bayt ('a) in gratitude for the Prophet's message⁴.

It begs the question: why did the Ahl al-Bayt ('a) feel compelled to assert their status? It was not for self-adulation but to educate the masses about the dangers of opposing them. On the day of 'Ashura, Imam Husayn made one final attempt to enlighten the enemy, urging them to consider who he was, his lineage, and whether it was justifiable to assault his honor. Was he not the son of Fatimah ('a), the Prophet's cherished daughter? The son of 'Ali, the Prophet's stalwart supporter in every mission and battle? Were Hamzah and Ja'far al-Tayyar not his uncles? Did the Prophet not say that Imams Hasan and Husayn would be the leaders of the youth in Paradise?

The criticality of understanding (ma'rifah) the Ahl al-Bayt ('a) was again demonstrated by Imam Zayn al-'Abidin ('a) in Damascus. Before addressing the crowd, he distinguished those who recognized him from those who did not, and proceeded to enlighten the uninformed. He began his renowned address by acknowledging his lineage, leading up to the tragic revelation of Imam Husayn's severed head.

The transformation of the crowd from celebratory to mournful over Imam Husayn's martyrdom illustrates the transformative power of ma'rifah. Fearing this shift in sentiment, Yazid hastily ordered the call to prayer. In a defining moment, when the name of the Prophet was mentioned, Imam Zayn al-'Abidin questioned Yazid pointedly about their relationship to the Prophet, showcasing the profound impact of true understanding.

To conclude, we underscore the importance of possessing ma'rifah of Imam Husayn as the initial path towards him, which is the focus of this Muharram's theme. Imam al-Sadiq emphasizes the importance of recognizing the rights of Imam Husayn, particularly the ma'rifah of the Imam.

Elaborating on this, a scholar has delineated two levels of recognizing (ma'rifah) Imam Husayn ('a):

- 1) Acknowledging Imam Husayn ('a) as our divinely appointed leader (Waliullah), whose guidance and commands are imperative to follow.
- 2) Comprehending the status that Imam Husayn ('a) held, both during his life and the elevated station Allah bestowed upon him posthumously. As the Imam departed Madinah, he dreamt of his grandfather, who informed him that Allah (s.w.t.) had reserved a special status for him, attainable only through his martyrdom at Karbala.

End of Lecture 2

Lecture 3 – Muharram 1445

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

In the name of Allah, the All-Merciful, the Ever-Merciful

Recap of Lecture 2

In this lecture, Sayyid 'Aidarus highlighted the importance of not only understanding Islamic teachings but actively living them. He emphasized that while it is crucial to articulate our beliefs in discussions, translating these beliefs into consistent actions and behaviors is even more essential. This approach demonstrates a true commitment to the principles taught by Imam Husayn ('a) and ensures that our faith is reflected in our daily lives, within the guidance provided by Allah (s.w.t.).

The focus was on deepening our connection with Imam Husayn (‘a) through ma’rifah – comprehensive knowledge. Imam ‘Ali’s wisdom was cited, illustrating how one’s true character is revealed through their actions and speech, and categorizing people based on their use of knowledge for divine pleasure, personal growth, or those who are unsteady in their beliefs.

The need for knowledge that leads to genuine understanding, rather than just theoretical learning, was discussed, highlighting the shortcomings of education systems that fail to prepare students for practical challenges. The Ahl al-Bayt (‘a)’s trials, due to misunderstandings about their status, were explored, showing the necessity for them to educate the community about their true position to prevent opposition.

The transformative power of ma’rifah was exemplified by Imam Ali Zayn al-‘Abidin’s address in Damascus, which shifted the crowd’s emotions from joy to sorrow over Imam Husayn’s martyrdom.

To conclude, the importance of recognizing Imam Husayn (‘a) as our divinely appointed guide and understanding his special status was underlined, pointing to the profound impact of his sacrifice at Karbala.

Lecture 3

We’ve engaged in discussions on the path leading us towards Imam Husayn (‘a), with the initial step being the ma’rifah of the Imam. The significance of ma’rifah is underscored in every endeavor, whether understanding a personality, embarking on a mission, initiating a venture, or following a specific path, as imparted by Imam ‘Ali (‘a) to his disciple, Kumayl Ibn Ziyad.

As adherents of the Ahl al-Bayt (‘a), in our endeavor to approach Imam Husayn (‘a), we must grasp his stature, comprehend his rights upon us, and recognize his role in our lives. There are two methods to understand him. The first is through ma’rifah iktisadiyyah, which involves delving into the narrations by the Holy Prophet about the Imam’s status. The second approach is ma’rifah shuhudiyyah/hudhuriyyah, a heartfelt awareness bestowed by Allah’s grace upon those who forge a deep ‘connection’ with the Imam. These are the avenues to gain ma’rifah – the initial stride towards Imam Husayn.

Proceeding, we will examine the second step towards Imam Husayn: hubb al-Husayn or the love for Imam Husayn (‘a). We will explore the essence of love, how this sentiment is instilled in the human heart, its influence on individual and societal life, and the proper way to love the Ahl al-Bayt (‘a), as well as the love for Imam Husayn (‘a) in Karbala.

What is love? It is an emotion Allah (s.w.t.) has ingrained within humans, alongside joy, sorrow, and anger. These emotions, when harnessed with aql (intellect), can propel a person towards fulfilling their life’s purpose – to attain proximity to Allah. Conversely, misuse leads to deviation from the righteous path.

Often perceived negatively, ‘anger’ is, in truth, an emotion with purpose, given by God. It equips one to

assert their rights, uphold their honor, dignity, and self-respect. Without anger, a person might become passive and defenseless against wrongdoings.

Emotions surface in a person only when conducive circumstances arise. The emergence of love towards an entity arises from a magnetic 'pull' or allure towards it. It is not enough to simply tell people to love Imam Husayn; they must be enlightened about his virtues, deep character (akhlaq), his devotion to Allah (s.w.t.), and his principles.

Imam ar-Ridha' ('a) informed people that if they recognized the true value of the Ahl al-Bayt ('a)'s teachings, they would inevitably gravitate towards them. Consequently, the Imams ('a) consistently exhorted their followers to be exemplary ambassadors of the Ahl al-Bayt ('a). Imam Ja'far al-Sadiq ('a) would advise his disciples to display such commendable akhlaq and conduct that they would be identifiable as students of the Imam. Thus, the crux of true 'love' lies in reflecting the teachings and values of the Ahl al-Bayt ('a) in our lives.

A testament to the profoundness of true 'love' is exemplified by the Holy Prophet's response when asked what the people could reciprocate for his prophetic endeavors – he asked solely for the love for his Ahl al-Bayt ('a). Love is the cornerstone of our existence⁵.

Scholars elucidate numerous pathways to Allah (s.w.t.) – 'Asma' ul-Husna, the 99 Names. Each Name represents a gateway to Allah (s.w.t.), but two are paramount. The widest portal is that of Rahma (Mercy), as expressed in the invocation (Allahumma inni as'aluka bi-rahmatika allati wasi'at kulla shay'in). Regardless of sinfulness or disobedience, Allah (s.w.t.) invites all through Rahma. However, the most direct route to Allah (s.w.t.) is through hubb Allah (Love of God), a love that demands sacrifice and dedication to be attained. Rahma is accessible to all, but hubb Allah is a privilege earned by a few.

Imam Ali Zayn al-'Abidin ('a) in his supplication, Du'a Abu Hamzah al-Thumali, declares even if placed in Hell's fire, his love for Allah (s.w.t.) would remain unabated. Imam 'Ali ('a), in Dua Kumayl, fears not Hell's flames but the despair of separation from Allah's love. Our Imams ('a) have proclaimed that the essence of Islam is the love of Allah (s.w.t.).

An anecdote involves a group from Khurasan, Iran, journeying to Medina to meet Imam al-Baqir ('a). Noticing a man with injured feet, the Imam learned of his long trek without a camel and acknowledged that it was his sincere love for the Imam that brought him forth. Imam al-Baqir ('a) assured him with an oath by Allah (s.w.t.) that he would be resurrected alongside the Ahl al-Bayt ('a), affirming that genuine love for them guarantees companionship in the afterlife.

But what kind of love? It is the love that compels one to recognize the jamal (beauty) and kamal (perfection) of the Holy Prophet (S) and the Ahl al-Bayt ('a) to such an extent that he can propagate this love to others by example. The Holy Prophet has stated that no matter how professed one's faith may be, it holds no value if it does not surpass the love for oneself, one's close ones, or one's wealth.

Some narrations suggest that one of the holiest places is the area between the Hijr al-Aswad of the Ka'bah and Maqam al-Ibrahim (The Standing Place of Ibrahim). Yet, if a person spends his life praying and fasting in such a revered spot but harbors enmity towards the Ahl al-Bayt ('a) in his heart, he will enter Hell's fire on the Day of Resurrection.

In our times, a prevalent challenge among people, families, and societies is the absence of 'love' in their lives. In families where parents are too busy for their children, who are raised by others, the precious gestures that foster parent-child bonds are missed. Societies with the presence of parental love, extended family affection, and neighborly care see fewer psychological, mental, and emotional disorders.

The Holy Prophet's life served as a beacon of love, seen when he played with his grandchildren, Hasan and Husayn, or when he prolonged his prostration for them to play on his back.

Imam 'Ali ('a) stated that a person is either your brother in faith or a fellow human being deserving of love. While we may detest the wrongdoings of individuals, we must not despise humanity. The Imams ('a) provided numerous instances of this in their interactions with foes.

Such is the power of love that it motivates scholars to toil through the night in research and writing, and farmers to nurture their fields with care. As Zig Ziglar, the American motivational speaker, famously said, "Duty makes us do things well, but love makes us do them beautifully."

Allah (s.w.t.) instructs that whatever task is assigned, it should be done with dedication, sincerity, and love, regardless of the giver or the compensation.

It is our duty to perform it to the best of our abilities. Imam 'Ali ('a) highlighted that love is what makes our homelands and childhood places dear to us.

Marriage, an institution grounded in love, is unfortunately often based on business and material gain in contemporary society. Social media too distorts young minds with a skewed portrayal of life focused on materialism, eroding the sanctity of love and respect in marriages.

The Holy Prophet, upon migrating to Madinah, looked back at Makkah with affection, expressing his love and unwillingness to leave were it not for the hostility of its people.

It's noteworthy that love typically carries expectations or desires for reciprocal benefits. However, the love of the Ahl al-Bayt ('a) for its followers is altruistic, desiring nothing for itself; rather, it guides and propels humans towards God and salvation.

Imam Husayn ('a)'s love for Allah (s.w.t.) surpassed all bounds. Prophet Ya'qub's love for Prophet Yusuf ('a) reached the levels of hubb, mawaddah, and shauq. Imam Husayn's love ascended to wala – declaring to Allah (s.w.t.) that even if he were to be dismembered daily, his heart would yearn only for Him. This profound love inspired his companions in Karbala, who, despite being granted leave by the Imam, chose to stay, declaring their unwavering allegiance. They professed that even if they were killed,

dismembered, and burnt repeatedly, their devotion would remain steadfast. Such is the essence of hubb al-Husayn (the love for Imam Husayn).

End of Lecture 3

Lecture 4 – Muharram 1445

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

In the name of Allah, the All-Merciful, the Ever-Merciful

Recap of Lecture 3

The lecture focused on hubb al-Husayn, the love for Imam Husayn (‘a), exploring its essence and societal influence. Love, an emotion given by Allah (s.w.t.), directs one towards their divine purpose when applied wisely. It’s rooted in understanding the Imam’s deep character and devotion.

The Ahl al-Bayt’s teachings urge followers to live lives that reflect their values, embodying true love for them. The Holy Prophet signified this love as essential, with the scholars pointing to Rahma (Mercy) and hubb Allah (Love of God) as pivotal paths to Allah (s.w.t.).

Imam ‘Ali Zayn al-‘Abidin (‘a) and Imam ‘Ali (‘a) exemplified a profound love for Allah (s.w.t.), which is the core of Islam. A story from Khurasan highlighted the transformative power of such love, with a promise of divine companionship for those sincere in their love for the Imams (‘a).

The lecture also noted the modern scarcity of genuine love, the Holy Prophet’s tender interactions with his grandchildren, and Imam ‘Ali (‘a)’s call to love all humanity. The force of love is what drives dedication in life’s pursuits.

The Holy Prophet’s love for Makkah and Imam Husayn (‘a)’s exemplary love for Allah were discussed, culminating in the depiction of hubb al-Husayn’s power among his companions at Karbala, who chose loyalty over life itself.

Lecture 4

“Say, (O Muhammad), ‘If you should love Allah, then follow me, (so) Allah will love you and forgive you your sins. And Allah is Forgiving and Merciful.’” (Qur’an, 3:31).

In the series of discussions on ‘The Path Towards Imam Husayn,’ we’ve delved into two pivotal elements: Ma’rifah and the Love for the Imam. It is the Ma’rifah, derived from his eminent qualities, actions, and the lessons from his life, that cultivates a profound love within us. This love, however,

should not merely be an internal sentiment. It must be actualized through al-Ittiba'u wa al-ta'ah (emulation and obedience). Such obedience is not passive; it energizes us to seek enlightenment and to instigate beneficial transformations in society by heeding the Imam's teachings.

The expression of love and grief for the Imam should transcend the physical displays in majalis (gatherings), evolving into a perpetual warmth in the hearts of believers, manifesting as steadfast obedience to the beloved.

Human beings are created with intellect, the capacity for self-education, and the ability to research their beliefs. Yet, the notion to 'obey and follow' might seem at odds with this. The Qur'an cautions against blind following, highlighting that on the Day of Judgment, followers will seek help from their leaders, only to find that these leaders will deny any association with them.

Then arises the question: How do we justify our adherence to the Ahl al-Bayt ('a)? This is further intertwined with the discourse on Taqlid (imitation) and following religious scholars.

It is essential to recognize that 'following' in this context must synchronize with both religion and logic. Hence, the idea of following traditions blindly, without reasoning, is rejected. This is exemplified by Prophet Ibrahim ('a) when he advised his uncle Azhar to follow him due to the superior knowledge he received, which Azhar did not have.

Similarly, there are times in life when one must look to those with expertise in areas beyond one's own knowledge, such as religious scholars, medical doctors, or other professionals. Seeking their guidance is not a renunciation of one's intellect but an acknowledgment that one cannot possess all knowledge and must, at times, seek it from the right sources. Yet, one must be cautious of blind imitation and ensure initial research for the correct source.

During the Prophet's (S) time, people from Madinah expressed their desire to gain knowledge from him, which was not feasible for everyone. Allah (s.w.t.) then revealed a verse in Surah al-Tawba (9:122), indicating a solution: a group should learn from the Prophet (S) and then disseminate that knowledge among their people. This concept is the essence of Taqlid. Specialization (Ihtisas) is vital, and even non-believers engage in a form of Taqlid within their belief systems, thus dismissing any misinterpretation that confines Taqlid solely to Islamic practice.

However, it is lamentable that in contrast to secular fields that require a certain level of study and qualification, Islamic studies are sometimes trivialized, leading to persons of inadequate or erroneous knowledge engaging with the public, which can be perilous.

Today, the pursuit of quick wealth through avenues like politics – where not all but many succumb to corruption – or through illicit means such as drug trafficking, has become common. Another concern is individuals claiming unwarranted authority in Islamic jurisprudence.

Returning to our main discussion, when we obey and follow the Ahl al-Bayt ('a) for guidance, we do not surrender our capacity to think. We are merely seeking insights from those who are fountains of knowledge about Islam and are divinely appointed.

It's noteworthy that the Ahl al-Bayt ('a) are not mujtahidun – those who interpret the Qur'an and Sunnah to deduce rulings, which can differ among scholars and are subject to human error. In contrast, the Ahl al-Bayt ('a)'s knowledge comes directly from the Holy Prophet (S) and is devoid of error. These claims are not baseless; there is irrefutable evidence to support them.

The Prophet's statement that Imam 'Ali ('a) is with the truth and the truth with him signifies their indivisibility. Furthermore, the metaphor of the 'Ark of Salvation' represents the Ahl al-Bayt ('a) as a means of salvation, asserting that those who embrace them are assured safety, whereas those who reject them are doomed.

The Holy Prophet's Hadith al-Thaqalayn reinforces the inseparability of the Qur'an and his Ahl al-Bayt ('a), promising guidance to those who cling to both, ensuring they shall not go astray and will be reunited with the Prophet on the Day of Resurrection.

The acclaimed Arab poet and Nahw (Arabic grammar) scholar, Al-Khalil Ibn Ahmad al-Farahidi, upon being queried about his frequent references to Imam 'Ali ('a) in his works, stated his admiration for the Imam's unparalleled knowledge, as reflected in Imam 'Ali ('a)'s invitation to the people to ask him questions before losing access to his knowledge (*Saluni qabla an tafqiduni*).

In discussing mawaddah, the distinction between this and mahabbah (affection) is clarified. While mahabbah denotes an innate love arising from recognizing virtue, mawaddah involves a commitment to act upon this love through obedience and emulation. This mawaddah is what the Prophet sought from believers for his Ahl al-Bayt ('a).

The distinction between Shi'a and non-Shi'a Muslims often centers on this principle. While most Muslims express mahabbah towards the Ahl al-Bayt ('a), Shi'as extend this to mawaddah, encompassing both love and adherence to their guidance.

Ibn Khaldun, a notable scholar, described Shi'as as having deviated, introducing a different jurisprudence and engaging in innovation (*bid'a*). This claim was robustly refuted by the Iraqi scholar Asad Haydar, who asserted that all Islamic sects, including the Shi'a, are rooted in the teachings of Imam Ja'far al-Sadiq (the sixth Imam).

Ammar or Salman reportedly lamented that had Imam 'Ali ('a) been granted his rightful leadership, the Muslim community would have been blessed abundantly, both from the heavens and the earth. Yet, many Muslims, including Shi'as, have neglected the study of Imam 'Ali's profound teachings in Nahjul Balagha.

In her pivotal address, “The Sermon of Fadak,” Lady Fatimah (‘a), the linchpin between Prophethood (Nabuwwah) and Leadership (Imamah), declared to the people that in usurping Imam ‘Ali’s rightful leadership, they faced profound loss – the very essence of Islam’s philosophy was at stake. She highlighted the fundamental tenets that underpin a Muslim’s life:

1. Iman acts as the cleansing agent, liberating one from the taint of polytheism (Shirk).
2. Salah serves as a shield against pride and arrogance (kibr).
3. Zakat purifies both the soul and wealth, inviting blessings (barakah) into our lives.
4. Siyam, the practice of fasting, bolsters our faith and nurtures sincerity.
5. Hajj fortifies the very foundations of our Religion.

She underscored that steadfast obedience to the Ahl al-Bayt (‘a) is the guiding light towards the divinely ordained system, a path meticulously laid out by Allah (s.w.t.) for humanity’s journey back to Him.

End of Lecture 4

Lecture 5 – Muharram 1445

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

In the name of Allah, the All-Merciful, the Ever-Merciful

Recap of Lecture 4

In the discourse on “The Path towards Imam Husayn”, we’ve examined Ma’rifah and love for the Imam (‘a). This understanding, stemming from his virtuous life, must be expressed through sincere emulation and obedience (al-Ittiba’u wa al-ta’ah), which leads to societal betterment by applying the Imam’s lessons. Genuine love for the Imam is an enduring warmth that prompts unwavering obedience.

The Qur’an alerts against blind following, which is questioned on Judgment Day. Instead, following the Ahl al-Bayt (‘a) aligns with using intellect and logic. This principle is echoed in the Prophet Ibrahim’s

guidance to his uncle Azhar based on superior knowledge.

Specialization (Ihtisas) is essential, as exemplified by Allah's (s.w.t.) directive in Surah al-Tawba (9:122) for a group to learn from the Prophet (S) and teach others, a model of Taqlid. Following the Ahl al-Bayt ('a) is thus a pursuit of divinely appointed Islamic knowledge.

The Holy Prophet's (S) sayings about Imam 'Ali ('a) and the Hadith al-Thaqalayn affirm the inseparable bond between the Qur'an and the Ahl al-Bayt. Al-Khalil Ibn Ahmad al-Farahidi admired Imam 'Ali's profound wisdom, and the Prophet (S) asked for mawaddah for his Ahl al-Bayt from believers – a love that includes obedience and action.

Ibn Khaldun's mischaracterization of Shi'as was countered by Asad Haydar, showing that Shi'a principles are rooted in the teachings of Imam al-Sadiq ('a). The neglect of Imam 'Ali's insights in Nahjul Balagha is a missed opportunity for many Muslims.

In her "Sermon of Fadak," Lady Fatimah ('a) highlighted the loss incurred by denying Imam 'Ali's leadership. She stressed the importance of Islamic practices for spiritual growth and maintained that loyalty to the Ahl al-Bayt guides us on Allah's path.

Lecture 5

"Your guardian is only Allah, His Apostle, and the faithful who maintain the prayer and give the zakat while bowing down" (Qur'an, 5:55)

"Whoever takes for his guardians Allah, His Apostle and the faithful (should know that) the confederates of Allah are indeed the victorious" (Qur'an, 5:56)

In our discussions on the path to align with Imam Husayn ('a), we've explored three key concepts:

- 1) Ma'rifah al-Husayn – Recognizing and understanding the Imam's distinguished status.
- 2) Hubb al-Husayn – Cultivating sincere love for the Imam, which is reflected in our actions.
- 3) Al-Ittiba'u wa-t-ta'a – Adhering to and implementing his teachings in our behavior and deeds.

Today, we explore into the fourth principle, which is an extension of the third: Tawalli al-Husayn wa-l-intima' ila khattih, which means the concept of being fully governed by the Imam's guidance.

To comprehend this principle, it's vital to differentiate between simple obedience to instructions and complete submission to guidance. Consider a patient following a doctor's medical advice without adopting the doctor's lifestyle in other respects. On the contrary, the concept of Wilayah involves a total integration of the Wali's guidance into every facet of life, including decisions, emotions, and actions.

Surah al-Ahzab (33:6) highlights the Prophet's (S) precedence over the souls of the believers, indicating

a governance that exceeds ordinary leadership. Allah, as Malik al-Mulk, possesses inherent authority (al-wilayatu al-dhatyah) over all creation, as declared in *Innama waliyyukumu Allah* (beginning of verse 5:55)[6](#).

There are realms where His governance is absolute and exclusive, yet He has also bestowed a form of delegated authority (al-wilayatu al-tafwidhiyah) to certain Prophets and Imams, empowering them to guide humanity on spiritual and moral matters. This authority includes the right to legislate and implement divine laws (Haqq al-tashri' wa Haqq al-taqwin), ensuring the faithful are led towards their Creator without misdirection, which underscores the necessity of infallibility ('Ismah) for these chosen individuals, the Ma'sumin.

Humans, with their limited perspective, can't always foresee the outcomes of their choices. The story of Prophet Musa ('a) with (Prophet) Khidhr illustrates that even the most knowledgeable of prophets may lack comprehension of God's intricate plans.

Since Islam is the final religion and the Prophet Muhammad (S) the last messenger, it was crucial that the intricacies of Shari'ah were exemplified by him to prevent misinterpretation. The Prophet (S) didn't invent Shari'ah but elucidated divine revelation. Therefore, the responsibility of guiding the faithful after the Prophet (S) fell to the infallible Ahl al-Bayt ('a), who possess the requisite knowledge.

The debate over the right to Khilafah often overlooks the essence of Wilayah. When questioning why Imam 'Ali ('a) didn't contend for political leadership, we understand that his concern was not for temporal power but for the spiritual Wilayah that applies to all Imams.

Shi'a teachings emphasize the paramountcy of Wilayah, which encompasses all aspects of divine governance, over terms like Khalifah or Imamah. This was illuminated during a conference on Al-Ghadir in Nairobi (Kenya), where Professor Fatimi's interpretation of Surah al-Ma'idah (5:67)[7](#) presented a fresh perspective. The commandment to the Prophet (S) to convey the message pertained to the Wilayah of 'Ali Ibn Abi Talib ('a). The term risalatuhu in the verse indicates the continuity of divine guidance from Prophet Adam through all prophets, culminating in the comprehensive message of Islam, which is the Risalatullah.

This understanding is echoed in Ziyarah al-Warithah, which honors Imam Husayn ('a) as the inheritor of the prophetic legacy, affirming the unbroken chain of Wilayah.

In Sheikh al-Tusi's work, Misbah al-Mutahajjid, a poignant Ziyarah of Imam Husayn ('a) is recounted. It emphasizes that Imam Husayn was bequeathed the legacy of Wilayah from the Prophets, encapsulating a profound spiritual heritage.

As we reflect on the theme of obedience and its manifestation in actions and commitments, even within the Shi'a community, there exists a spectrum of adherence to Wilayah. Some exhibit unwavering obedience, embracing commands with absolute conviction, while others may falter.

The historical episode of the Battle of Siffin serves as a discerning ground. Here, the steadfast were distinguished from the wavering when some of Imam 'Ali's ('a) followers overlooked his venerable status and the wealth of narrations about him, beguiled as they were by the opposition hoisting copies of the Qur'an on their spears.

A quintessential example of unwavering loyalty is Malik al-Ashtar. When questioned about Malik's status, Imam 'Ali ('a) proclaimed, "Malik is to me as I was to the Holy Prophet." This profound statement captures the essence of true Wilayah.

The bounties of Wilayah are immense, spanning this life and the hereafter. It behooves us to meditate on its significance rather than dissipate energies in fruitless sectarian debates. For indeed, Wilayah is a pillar of faith.

Lady Fatimah's ('a) sermon elaborates on Imamah and Wilayah as the pillars that erect the correct system (nidham) in our lives.

Beyond Wilayah, there lies a concept called Intima'. To illustrate, in East Africa, political affiliations are pronounced, with supporters donning party colors and attire – a superficial form of Intima'.

Yet, when Wilayah is deeply rooted in one's being, the natural progression is to walk in the footsteps of the Imams, and herein, we focus on journeying towards Imam Husayn ('a). To align with his path, we must grasp his mission, his teachings, and the profound objectives of his ultimate sacrifice. The dichotomy of the forces in Karbala was stark: the self-proclaimed Shi'atu Bani Sufyan versus the committed Shi'atul Husayn ('a), each with distinct aims.

Some scholars suggest re-narrating the Karbala incident, beginning with Imam Husayn's sermons from his departure from Madinah, including dialogues with individuals like Zuhayr Ibn Qayn, categorized by themes such as leadership, morality, and rights – offering a clear, comprehensive understanding of the event.

As adherents of Imam Husayn's legacy, it is incumbent upon us to embody his mission in all life's domains – be it political, social, or familial. While symbols like wearing black or chanting slogans have their place, it is the embodiment of Wilayah – the right over our souls – that truly matters. To embrace this realm, the operative term is Haq – truth. Proximity to Haq is proximity to Wilayah.

Imam Husayn ('a) outlined his intentions upon leaving Madinah, disavowing any aim to sow corruption or to seize power, but rather to uphold the path of his grandfather (inni lam akhruj...), mirroring the pivotal Islamic tenet of negation followed by affirmation (la ilaha illa Allah). This passage reflects a commitment to peace. He further outlines his intentions, adhering to the path of his grandfather (bi sirati Jaddi...).

In supplication, we express gratitude to Allah for anchoring us in the Wilayah of Amir al-Mu'minin (Imam

‘Ali) and beseech Him for steadfastness.

Yet the path is not without trials. History bears witness to followers who retreated in hardship, and to those like Hurr, who, moments before martyrdom, embraced Wilayah with their very lives.

End of Lecture 5

Lecture 6 – Muharram 1445

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

In the name of Allah, the All-Merciful, the Ever-Merciful

Recap of Lecture 5

The lecture provided a comprehensive overview of the principles that align followers with Imam Husayn (‘a). It examined the concepts of Ma’rifah (recognition), Hubb (love), Al-Ittiba’u wa-t-ta’a (adherence), and Tawalli (complete governance) by the Imam’s guidance, distinguishing between mere obedience and total submission to guidance. It emphasized that Wilayah (guardianship) means integrating the guidance of the Imam into every aspect of life, as highlighted by Surah al-Ahzab, which illustrates the Prophet’s precedence over believers’ souls.

The lecture discussed the inherent authority of Allah (Al-wilayatu al-dhatyah) and the delegated authority (Al-wilayatu al-tafwidhiyah) given to Prophets and Imams to guide humanity. It addressed the necessity of the infallibility of these individuals (Ma’sumin) and the importance of following the Ahl al-Bayt (‘a) after the Prophet Muhammad (S), as they possess the knowledge to guide the faithful.

The essence of Wilayah, transcending political leadership, was highlighted by discussing Imam ‘Ali (‘a) and his concern for spiritual leadership. It was pointed out that the term Wilayah has precedence over other terms like Khalifah or Imamah, as discussed at a conference on Al-Ghadeer in Nairobi, with reference to Surah al-Ma’idah. This understanding is supported by the Ziyarah Warithah, which honors Imam Husayn (‘a) as the inheritor of the prophetic legacy.

The lecture touched on varying degrees of adherence to Wilayah within the Shi’a community, using the Battle of Siffin as an example to distinguish between the steadfast and the wavering. The loyalty of Malik Al-Ashtar to Imam ‘Ali (‘a) was given as an example of true Wilayah.

It also discussed the importance of meditating on the significance of Wilayah and not getting caught up in sectarian debates, as Wilayah is a pillar of faith. The concept of Intima’ (affiliation) was explained through the analogy of political affiliations in East Africa, contrasting superficial forms of Intima’ with the profound adherence to Wilayah.

Finally, the lecture proposed a re-narration of the Karbala incident to provide a clear understanding of Imam Husayn's mission and teachings. It emphasized the importance of embodying Imam Husayn's legacy in all aspects of life, suggesting that true adherence to Wilayah is not in symbols but in embodying the truth (Haq) and following the path of righteousness as demonstrated by Imam Husayn ('a).

Lecture 6

“And among the people is he who sells his soul seeking the pleasure of Allah, and Allah is most kind to (His) servants” (Qur'an, 2:207)

Continuing the discourse on 'Steps towards Imam Husayn ('a):

We have explored four steps thus far. The fifth step is readiness to offer tadhhiya for Imam Husayn ('a). To understand this, we look into several aspects:

The essence of tadhhiya, or 'self-sacrifice'. This raises several queries: What does sacrificing one's 'self' entail? How is it performed? Under what conditions is it necessitated, and what is the ultimate objective of presenting one's 'self'? Additionally, how can this act of sacrifice in support of Imam Husayn's cause impact our lives and those of our families?

Allah (s.w.t.) created humanity in the most noble of forms, endowing us with dignity and honor. Among the most venerable attributes granted by the Creator is the potential for spiritual growth, the core purpose of our creation. The primary mechanism for such growth is the propensity to 'give' (al-'ata') as opposed to 'take'. Each act of genuine giving elevates a person's righteousness.

This admirable trait is exemplified by the Ahl al-Bayt ('a), as seen in their unwavering virtue of generosity. (Ref: Surah al-Insan). This generosity isn't limited to material possessions but extends to the invaluable 'self' (nafs). One might spend all his wealth to safeguard the 'self' but wouldn't give up his 'self' to protect his wealth.

Imam 'Ali ('a) is the epitome of 'self-giving' for the cause of Islam, and this isn't confined to the event of Hijrah. During the chaos of the Battle of Uhud, when Hamza, the Prophet's uncle, was martyred and false rumors of the Prophet's death were spread, it was 'Ali who bravely shielded the injured Prophet. So much so that even Angel Jibril (as reported by the historian Tabari) descended to aid the Prophet had to proclaim his astonishment at 'Ali's unmatched conduct. The Prophet clarified that 'Ali was not just protecting the Prophet's nafs; he was the nafs, highlighting 'Ali's profound connection to the Prophet.

This is further affirmed during the episode when the messenger was tasked with delivering a message to Makkah (Ref. Surah al-Bara'ah). Midway, Angel Gabriel descends with divine instruction that the message must be relayed by the Prophet himself or someone from him (or like him), leading to 'Ali being chosen for this mission.

Another instance of ‘Ali’s self-sacrifice for Islam is seen during the Battle of Khandaq. When challenged to combat the notorious warrior ‘Amr, only the youthful ‘Ali stepped forward.

Islamic scholars define *tadhhiya* as forsaking one’s wealth, self, time, or position for a cause more precious than the sacrifice itself, with the sole intention of pleasing Allah. It’s noteworthy how the term Jihad is often misconstrued as solely physical combat. Such an act is part of *tadhhiya* and is categorized as Jihad al-Asghar (lesser jihad), but the greater form, Jihad al-Akbar (greater jihad), pertains to the ‘self’. Dedication to the teachings of Ahl al-Bayt (‘a) also falls under this category. Indeed, our 6th and 8th Imams have enjoined their followers to perpetuate the message and teachings of the Ahl al-Bayt (‘a) through remembrance – using the term *Ahyu ‘Amrana*. Exhibiting exemplary *akhlaq* also mirrors this principle.

The Qur’an and the Imams’ narrations frequently address *tadhhiya*, citing examples like contributing knowledge, skills, empathy. When faced with life’s choices, the significance of opting for the righteous path, even when it’s not the simplest or most appealing, is emphasized. The Imams have stressed the importance of engaging in labor, farming, business as legitimate means of earning, for these acts are considered forms of worship.

In Surah al-Tawbah, verse 24⁸, Allah (s.w.t.) commands the Prophet to inform his followers that if their attachments to family, wealth, or other life aspects eclipse the remembrance of Allah, it will detrimentally affect their worldly and spiritual well-being. The Qur’an also underscores the importance of a systematic, well-planned approach to managing and prioritizing life’s tasks.

Now arises the question: “How do we discern where and for what we ought to offer sacrifice and contribution?” In a person’s life, the paramount and most precious element is their faith, which precedes all else.

Imam ‘Ali (‘a) in Khutbah al-Sha’baniyah inquires of the Holy Prophet (S) about the most vital act (*amal*) during the month of Ramadhan. The Prophet responds that observing the month without disobedience to Allah (s.w.t.) surpasses all other deeds. He also informs Imam ‘Ali of his impending martyrdom during Ramadhan, to which Imam ‘Ali’s primary concern is the security of his faith on that fateful day.

Following faith, the hierarchy of *tadhhiya* prioritizes our families, society, and country. A missing key value in many families today is the virtue of ‘giving’, often overshadowed by egocentrism and selfishness. The practice of ‘giving’ needs revival.

An Egyptian scholar, recounting the marriage of the Holy Prophet and Lady Khadijah, remarks on their mutual commitment to generosity. Despite her significant financial support, Lady Khadijah lamented that she could not reciprocate the spiritual wealth she received from the Prophet. The Prophet, in turn, felt he could never fully repay her support and belief in him, especially during trying times such as the economic boycott in Shib Abu Talib⁹.

These are the virtues we must weave into the fabric of our lives today. Unfortunately, in cases of divorce or separation, it's common to see former partners disparaging each other, forgetting the essence of *tadhhiya* that should begin at home. Patience and tolerance in relationships are part of this self-sacrifice. The practice of giving, fostered from a young age, can become an intrinsic part of one's character. As Surah al-Insan recounts, it wasn't only Imam 'Ali ('a) and Lady Fatimah ('a) who donated their food to the needy, orphan, and traveler but also their children, Hasan and Husayn. Such habits forge a strong moral foundation in both the family and society. The lessons of Karbala teach us the profound virtue of *tadhhiya*.

End of Lecture 6

Lecture 7 – Muharram 1445

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

In the name of Allah, the All-Merciful, the Ever-Merciful

Recap of Lecture 6

The discourse on 'Path towards Imam Husayn' explored the profound concept of *tadhhiya*, or self-sacrifice, as an essential step towards aligning oneself with the path of Imam Husayn ('a). The notion of *tadhhiya* in Islam extends beyond the mere act of giving; it encapsulates the idea of dedicating one's self, wealth, time, and position for a noble cause, with the ultimate aim of seeking the pleasure of Allah (s.w.t.). Unlike Jihad al-Asghar, which is the physical struggle, *tadhhiya* is considered a part of Jihad al-Akbar, the greater struggle against one's own self.

The concept draws its inspiration from the dignified form in which humans have been created, suggesting that the human potential for spiritual elevation is significantly amplified through acts of selflessness. The Ahl al-Bayt ('a), particularly Imam 'Ali ('a), are upheld as exemplary figures, demonstrating through their lives how self-sacrifice can underpin the growth and establishment of Islam.

Further, the practice of *tadhhiya* is deeply intertwined with the jihad of self-improvement. The teachings of the Ahl al-Bayt ('a) – as cited from the narrations of the 6th and 8th Imams ('a) – encourage a steadfast dedication to personal growth and self-giving. The Qur'an bolsters this concept in Surah al-Tawbah verse 24, warning believers of the spiritual peril that ensues when anything is held dearer than the remembrance of Allah and the pursuit of faith.

The hierarchy of *tadhhiya* prioritizes faith foremost, suggesting that the well-being of one's family, society, and country follows suit. The strength of this hierarchy is exemplified in the relationships and interactions of early Islamic figures, particularly between the Prophet and Lady Khadijah, as well as in

the household of Imam ‘Ali (‘a) and Lady Fatimah (‘a), where generosity and self-giving were practiced with great virtue.

In conclusion, the ethos of *tadhhiya* as illustrated by the tragic yet transformative events of Karbala offers a timeless lesson on the moral virtues necessary for building robust familial and societal foundations. The legacy of Imam Husayn (‘a) and his companions serves as a beacon, guiding the faithful towards a life marked by profound sacrifice and dedication to the divine truth.

Lecture 7

“And amongst them We appointed Imams to guide (the people) by Our command, when they had been patient and had conviction in Our signs” (Qur’an, 32:24)

Today, we will analyze the virtue of Sabr (patience) as we journey towards the path exemplified by Imam Husayn (‘a). Imam ‘Ali (‘a) once described the path to the Ahl al-Bayt (‘a) as one strewn with thorns, a path where upholding truth leaves one solitary.

Truth is inherently sweet yet laden with immense challenges. To walk in the footsteps of the Ahl al-Bayt (‘a), particularly Imam Husayn (‘a), we find guidance in the Qur’an. Surah al-Sajdah, verse 24, confirms the role of our holy guides – the Prophet and the Ahl al-Bayt (‘a) – appointed by Allah (s.w.t.) and based on His wisdom to lead us to righteousness. Their actions and commands are inherently good.

The Ahl al-Bayt’s assignment to this role is anchored in their exemplary display of patience (*sabr*) and unwavering conviction (*yaqin*) in Allah’s will. They embraced trials with the certainty that, regardless of difficulty, Allah’s will encompasses all goodness.

If one could perceive the rewards that accompany *sabr*, as promised by Allah (s.w.t.) for this life and the Hereafter, one would welcome divine tests. Yet, the veils over our perception limit us. Only those with a conviction like the Ahl al-Bayt (‘a) can see with true insight, as illustrated in the verses,

“Kalla law ta’lamuna ‘ilma al-yaqin – were you to know with certain knowledge” (Qur’an, 102:5)

“Thumma la-tarawnaha ‘ayna al-yaqin. – you will surely see it with the eye of certainty” (Qur’an, 102:7).

Imam ‘Ali (‘a), in his Sermon of the Pious in *Nahjul Balagha*, depicts the devout as individuals who, in the silence of night, immerse themselves in prayer and the recitation of the Qur’an. They are so deeply connected that they feel the realities of Paradise and Hell as if present around them. Such is their level of conviction.

Embarking on the path of Imam Husayn (‘a) demands *sabr*, which in Arabic refers to the act of self-restraint and control. A person of *sabr* is one who masters the reins of their mind and desires, steering away from negative inclinations or transgressions. Achieving this mastery requires steadfastness,

willpower, and continuous practice – it's a battle against the compelling urges of the self, not won overnight.

Sabr encompasses multiple facets, including courage and generosity, but it's crucial to strike a balance. Courage must not lead to recklessness, nor should generosity compel one to deprivation. The guiding principles of permissible (halal) and forbidden (haram) must always be observed.

Ayat. Shahid Mutahhari distinguishes between two types of patience in his writings: positive (sabr al-ijabi) and negative (sabr al-salbi). Negative patience refers to a passive state where a person makes no effort to improve difficult situations and remains inactive, claiming to be patient. In contrast, positive patience is when a person makes every effort to overcome challenges and remains patient despite not finding immediate success¹⁰.

Patience is not just a virtue to emulate the Ahl al-Bayt ('a); it also teaches us to allow life to unfold at its own pace, trusting in Allah's timing. The Prophet and the Ahl al-Bayt exemplified ultimate patience, understanding that every action has its appropriate time and place. This is evident when Imam Hasan ('a) agreed to a peace treaty knowing the conditions weren't right for battle, a decision that would have been mirrored by Imam Husayn ('a) had their situations been reversed. Similarly, Imam Hasan ('a) would have fought had he been at Karbala. Such strategic foresight is crucial, and its absence can lead to failure, as seen in the example of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt, which collapsed due to inexperience and lack of strategy.

Returning to the concept of patience, it's linked to understanding and knowledge, which enable a person to endure difficulties. An example is a child's fear of an injection compared to an adult's willingness due to understanding the benefits. The stronger one's certainty (yaqin), the greater their capacity for patience. The Prophet described patience as a guiding light.

Imam Husayn's departure for Karbala epitomized this virtue. He accepted Allah's will with open arms, ready to face any challenge with patience. His call to his followers was to embody Husayniyyun – to maintain a high state of patience in all situations, following the principle that 'every day is Ashura, and every land is Karbala.'

The valor, certainty, patience, sacrifice, and all the virtues we commemorate during Muharram are vividly present in Imam Husayn ('a) and his followers on the plains of Karbala. Their exemplary patience, termed Sabrun Jamil (beautiful patience), makes Karbala a source of learning for those who seek to incorporate these traits into their lives.

End of Lecture 7

Lecture 8 – Muharram 1445

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

In the name of Allah, the All-Merciful, the Ever-Merciful

Recap of Lecture 7

The focus was on Sabr (patience), a central virtue exemplified by Imam Husayn (‘a). Described by Imam ‘Ali (‘a) as a challenging path marked by solitude in the pursuit of truth, the path to the Ahl al-Bayt (‘a) requires steadfastness. The Qur’an, specifically Surah al-Sajdah (32:24), outlines the divine role of the Prophet and the Ahl al-Bayt (‘a) as guides to righteousness, grounded in their exemplary patience and firm belief in Allah’s wisdom.

Patience in this context is more than endurance; it’s an active engagement with trials, holding firm to the belief that Allah’s will is inherently good. This virtue is deemed a guiding light by the Prophet, necessary for overcoming life’s challenges. Imam Husayn’s acceptance of his fate, leading to the sacrifice at Karbala, epitomizes this trait, inviting his followers to embrace sabr in every aspect of life, following the saying that ‘every day is Ashura and every land is Karbala.’

Ayat. Shahid Mutahhari elaborates on two forms of patience: sabr al-ijabi (positive), an active form where efforts are made regardless of the outcome, and sabr al-salbi (negative), a passive form lacking effort to change adverse conditions. The narrative emphasizes the importance of patience coupled with strategic action and knowledge, which together lead to wisdom in both individual and collective contexts, as seen in the historical actions of the Ahl al-Bayt (‘a) and the lessons from Karbala.

Lecture 8

“There is certainly a moral in their accounts for those who possess intellect. This (Qur’an) is not a fabricated discourse; rather it is a confirmation of what was (revealed) before it, and an elaboration of all things, and a guidance and mercy for a people who have faith” (Qur’an, 12:111)

As we wrap up our series of Muharram talks, we have explored the critical steps necessary to embrace and embody the mission of Imam Husayn (‘a), who aimed to preserve the essence of the faith introduced by his grandfather, the Holy Prophet (S).

Here are the six steps revisited:

1) Understanding the significance, esteem, and the unique role of Imam Husayn (‘a) as recognized by God and the Prophet.

- 2) Developing a deep and unwavering love for the Imam ('a) after grasping the depth of his mission.
- 3) Adhering to and implementing his teachings.
- 4) Entrusting him with guidance over all aspects of life as a trusted leader.
- 5) Being prepared for complete self-sacrifice in all forms, whether it be time, wealth, skills, or learning.
- 6) Exhibiting patience, tolerance, and forbearance in every aspect of life to truly follow in his footsteps and make sacrifices with conviction and love.

The essence of Imam Husayn's story raises a question: How has his memory and the values he stood for remained so vividly honored when even speaking his name was once a punishable offense? What is the secret behind this enduring legacy?[11](#)

Efforts to erase Imam Husayn's legacy and even destroy his burial site have all failed. On Ashura, during the 61st year after the migration, he stood bravely, seeking support with his memorable call for assistance, "Is there a helper to help us?" Now, countless followers honor him at Karbala, reflecting a devotion that has stood the test of time. The secret to this enduring veneration may lie in a saying by Imam al-Sadiq ('a): The martyrdom of Husayn kindled an everlasting flame in believers' hearts, a flame that will burn until the arrival of the awaited Imam ('a).

The acts committed for God's sake hold immense value, and one promise from God is the enduring nature of such a person's memory. The magnitude of the reward correlates with the level of one's sacrifice, sincerity, and patience. This principle underlies the enduring remembrance and affection for Imam Husayn ('a) seen to this day.

Historical accounts confirm that the decisions made by the Prophet and the members of the Ahl al-Bayt ('a) were strategically in favor of Islam's longevity, despite some viewing these actions as signs of weakness. Notably, the Prophet's signing of the Treaty of Hudaibiya and Imam Hasan's peace agreement with Mu'awiyah were tactical moves for the welfare of the Islamic community, not signs of capitulation. These treaties were thoughtfully considered compromises, especially evident in Imam Hasan's case, where he set conditions aimed at safeguarding his followers' well-being. Nonetheless, Mu'awiyah failed to honor these terms, an act that Islamic scholars have deemed gravely consequential to his standing in the faith.

One specific term of the peace treaty mandated that Mu'awiyah and his supporters cease their slander and mistreatment of Imam 'Ali's followers and stop vilifying Imam 'Ali publicly, actions that were intended to incite hatred and craft a profoundly negative perception of the Imam ('a).

The second stipulation of the peace treaty was that leadership would pass to Imam Hasan ('a) should Mu'awiyah die while Imam Hasan was still alive, and if not, then to Imam Husayn ('a). Historical records indicate that Mu'awiyah did not honor this agreement. He orchestrated the poisoning of Imam Hasan ('a)

through the latter's wife, Jo'ada. The annals of history are replete with accounts of how Mu'awiyah orchestrated the deaths of several of Imam 'Ali's loyal companions and followers. Among them was Hujr Ibn 'Adi, a respected figure, and Malik al-Ashtar. Another appalling act was the murder of Muhammad, the son of the first Caliph and an ardent supporter of Imam 'Ali ('a), who was cruelly burnt to death.

Historically, the Middle East was primarily divided into three regions: Hijaz, now part of Saudi Arabia; Sham, which includes modern-day Jordan, Syria, Lebanon, Israel, and Palestine; and Yemen.

After Mu'awiyah's death, directives were sent out to all these regions, ordering the governors to secure oaths of allegiance for his son, Yazid. This act blatantly contravened the terms of the peace treaty that Imam Hasan ('a) had established with Mu'awiyah, which had stipulated that leadership should pass to Imam Husayn ('a) upon Mu'awiyah's death. Yazid, known for his dissolute lifestyle and criminal actions, was in Sham, a region long controlled by the Umayyad dynasty to which Mu'awiyah belonged.

While Yazid found it relatively easy to secure oaths of allegiance from most regions, he met stiff resistance from Madinah. Imam Husayn categorically refused to pledge allegiance, knowing well the dire consequences Islam would face under the rule of such a despot.

The directive for allegiance was particularly severe for three individuals: Imam Husayn ('a), Abd al-Rahman Ibn Abi Bakr, and Abdullah Ibn Zubayr. In their cases, the edict was stark: if they declined to pledge their loyalty, their execution was ordered, and their heads were to be sent to Yazid.

Before the envoys arrived with the ultimatum, Imam Husayn ('a) in Madinah was unaware of Mu'awiyah's death and Yazid's ascension to power. Consequently, there was no existing sentiment of dissent or rebellion. Furthermore, the calls from the people of Kufa, Iraq, inviting Imam Husayn ('a) to lead them, had not yet reached him. Thus, the abrupt demand for allegiance to Yazid, under the threat of death, came as a shock to the Imam ('a) and was a command that originated directly from Yazid, the then-reigning head of the Umayyad family.

Imam Husayn ('a) was aware that his refusal to pledge allegiance to Yazid meant his life was in jeopardy, regardless of his location. When questioned about his departure from Madinah, he noted a key motive was to prevent the desecration of his grandfather's city or the holy city of Makkah by his bloodshed. Historians and scholars suggest that his martyrdom in Madinah wouldn't have had the same widespread impact. It was the sequence of events in Kufa, the stand at Karbala, and the journeys to Damascus and back to Madinah that fully brought his sacrifice to the public's attention. The dissemination of his story by his sister, Lady Zaynab ('a), and his son, Imam 'Ali Zain al-Abidin ('a), throughout these travels, was pivotal. This strategy ultimately led to a reawakening and reformation within the Muslim community.

Imam Husayn ('a) was resolute in his decision to include women and children in his journey, despite advice from his brother Muhammad al-Hanafiyya and others against doing so¹². He explained that it was God's will for his men to be martyred and for the women and children to be taken captives – a

destiny that had been divinely ordained. The unfolding of these events was part of a divine plan, integral to the Imam's commitment to uphold Islam.

Aware of the dangers that lay ahead, Imam Husayn ('a) instructed his family to be vigilant during his meeting with the governor of Madinah, especially if tensions rose. He took precautions to avoid any conflict within the city because he knew that any violence there could jeopardize the broader movement of revolution and reformation he aimed to inspire.

It was in Madinah, when faced with demands for his allegiance to Yazid, that Imam Husayn ('a) expressed his refusal with emphatic clarity, declaring that a person from the lineage of prophethood and wisdom could not pledge loyalty to someone like Yazid, known for his vices and oppression.

Imam Husayn ('a) often took opportunities to remind people of the sanctity and exalted status of the Holy Prophet's household, emphasizing their divine purification from all forms of ignorance. He and his family, along with a few followers, left Madinah on the 27th of Rajab, journeying towards Makkah during the Hajj season. The Imam ('a) viewed this as an opportune moment to announce his movement to the diverse gathering of Muslims in Makkah, ensuring his message would spread widely.

In Makkah, he detailed the prevailing circumstances, his strategy for revolution, and extended an invitation to join his cause, but with certain pre-conditions. Meanwhile, Yazid, learning of Husayn's actions, sent assassins disguised as pilgrims to eliminate Husayn. Upon learning of this plot, Imam Husayn ('a) made the difficult decision to depart from Makkah to prevent the desecration of the holy site by violence.

The journey continued, with Imam Husayn ('a) receiving numerous invitations from the people of Kufa, Iraq, prompting him to send his cousin, Muslim Ibn 'Aqil, as his emissary to assess the situation. At first, Kufa appeared supportive, leading Muslim to report back favorably, suggesting that Imam Husayn ('a) should come.

However, when Yazid learned of these developments, he dispatched Ubaydullah Ibn Ziyad to Kufa to counteract the Imam's growing influence. Meanwhile, as Imam Husayn ('a) moved forward, he spread his message, attracting some followers who anticipated material gains from a presumed victory due to the perceived strength of his mission. Yet, as the reality of their dire military prospects became apparent – facing a vastly larger and well-equipped force loyal to Yazid – many deserted Imam Husayn ('a), realizing the likelihood of their defeat.

Imam Husayn's caravan paused for a respite at a site known as Zawrat, en route between Makkah and Iraq. Nearby, a smaller group led by Zuhayr Ibn Qain was encamped. Initially hesitant, Zuhayr – who was not a supporter of Husayn – resisted meeting him. However, at his wife's urging, he relented to understand what Imam Husayn ('a) sought to discuss. The details of their conversation are not fully chronicled, but the outcome was transformative: Zuhayr emerged committed to support Imam Husayn's cause.

Zuhayr Ibn Qain's transformation is a profound illustration of divine guidance. Initially indifferent to Imam Husayn ('a) due to unfamiliarity, his encounter with the Imam led to a swift and complete change of heart – a process reflecting the journey we've explored. Gaining true understanding, or ma'rifah, of the Imam ignited within Zuhayr an unconditional love, propelling him to follow and obey the Imam. This commitment to the Imam's path ultimately led Zuhayr to practice patience and sacrifice, culminating in his martyrdom.

While en route, Imam Husayn's caravan received the sorrowful news of Muslim Ibn 'Aqil's martyrdom. As they approached a region called Sharraf, members of the caravan mistook distant shapes for date palms. However, Imam Husayn ('a) corrected them, recognizing the shapes as the ears of horses – signifying an approaching army. This force was indeed an army of 1,000 soldiers led by Hurr Ibn Yazid al-Riyahi¹³, dispatched to ensure Imam Husayn's caravan would be diverted to Karbala. Hurr's story is notable; he ultimately experienced divine inspiration, leading him to make a decisive turn towards righteousness at a critical moment.

Upon reaching Karbala, the saga of Imam Husayn's supreme sacrifice unfolded – a narrative etched in the annals of history. Imam Husayn ('a), alongside his family and companions, endured tremendous hardships and ultimately sacrificed their lives for the divine cause. The ordeal didn't end with the tragedy of Karbala; the surviving women, children, and Imam Husayn's son, 'Ali Ibn Husayn Zayn al-'Abidin, faced further trials on their harrowing return to Madinah, with many perishing along the way. This enduring sacrifice, as foretold by the Holy Prophet (S), ignited a perpetual flame of devotion and remembrance in the hearts of the faithful, a flame that continues to burn to this day.

End of Lecture 8 and Final

¹. Editor's note: This quote by Imam 'Ali ('a), "A man's true character is hidden behind his tongue," reflects the profound understanding that words often serve as a facade or mask that can conceal one's true nature. In this context, Imam 'Ali ('a) is highlighting the idea that what a person chooses to say and how they express themselves can sometimes be a strategic presentation, rather than a transparent reflection of their actual thoughts and intentions.

The tongue, representing speech, is a powerful tool for shaping perceptions and manipulating realities. People may use their words to appear kind, knowledgeable, or trustworthy, regardless of whether these qualities genuinely reflect their character. Conversely, someone might be reticent or awkward in speech but possess deep wisdom and compassion. Thus, the quote suggests that to truly understand a person's character, one must look beyond their words and observe their actions and decisions, especially in situations where they stand to gain nothing. It is these moments that reveal the essence of a person's character more accurately than their spoken words.🔒🔒

². Here is the prayer: "O Allah, let me recognize You, for if You do not let me recognize You, I will not recognize Your Prophet. O Allah, let me recognize Your Messenger, for if You do not let me recognize Your Messenger, I will not recognize Your Proof (Hujjah). O Allah, let me recognize Your Proof, for if You do not let me recognize Your Proof, I will stray from my religion." (Ed.)🔒🔒

³. Nahw: Grammar, specifically Arabic grammar, focusing on syntax and sentence structure.

Balagha: Rhetoric, the art of effective or persuasive speaking or writing, especially the use of figures of speech and other compositional techniques.

ʿarf: Morphology, the study of the forms of words, typically in Arabic focusing on how words are formed from root letters to convey different meanings.

Mantiq: Logic, particularly the principles of reasoning.

Fiqh: Islamic jurisprudence, the understanding and interpretation of Islamic law. (Ed.)

[4.](#) See Qur'an, 42:23. (Ed.)

[5.](#) See Qur'an, 42:23. (Ed.)

[6.](#) Editor's note: Notice that the term waliyyukum (your guardian) in the verse is in singular form which implies that Wilayah is a single project and therefore the wilayah of the Messenger springs from Allah's Wilayah and that of the one who gives charity while in the state of genuflection springs from the Prophet's wilayah.

[7.](#) Editor's note: The verse also shows that Wilayah occupies a central position or it is the nucleus of the religion of Islam. If the appointment was not made, the whole fabric of the religion would collapse.

[8.](#) "Say, 'If your fathers and your sons, your brethren, your spouses, and your kinsfolk, the possessions that you have acquired, the business you fear may suffer, and the dwellings you are fond of, are dearer to you than Allah and His Apostle and to waging jihad in His way, then wait until Allah issues His edict, and Allah does not guide the transgressing lot'" (9:24)

[9.](#) Editor's note: Shib Abu Talib refers to a valley located near Mecca. It is historically significant because it was the place where the clan of the Prophet Muhammad, specifically the Banu Hashim, sought refuge during a period of socio-economic boycott imposed by the Quraysh tribe. This boycott lasted for three years, during which the Prophet and his followers faced extreme hardship and isolation. The area is named after Abu Talib, the Prophet Muhammad's uncle and staunch protector, who played a critical role in supporting him during the early, turbulent years of Islam.

[10.](#) Editor's note: During the Battle of Karbala on Ashura, Imam Husayn and his companions exemplified sabr al-ijabi (positive patience). Despite facing overwhelming odds and severe hardships, they actively stood against the oppression of Yazid's regime, asserting their commitment to justice and the principles of Islam. Imam Husayn made strategic efforts to engage diplomatically, offer moral choices to the opposing forces, and even when faced with imminent death, chose to stand firm on his principles. This active engagement in the face of adversity, while maintaining steadfastness and dignity, highlights the essence of positive patience.

In contrast, negative patience, or sabr al-salbi, would be akin to those who, knowing the truth and righteousness of Imam Husayn's cause, chose to remain passive or align with the oppressors to avoid hardship or from fear of losing worldly comforts and status. This type of patience involves a refusal to act against injustice and a resignation to the status quo, which Ayatollah Shahid Mutahhari criticizes as contrary to the proactive spirit of Islam.

This distinction deepens the understanding of the moral and ethical stances during Ashura and illustrates the broader Islamic teachings on the righteous application of patience.

[11.](#) Editor's note: The answer may also lie in the impact of his ultimate sacrifice and the timeless principles he stood for, which continue to resonate and inspire millions around the world.

[12.](#) In Usul al-Kafi, v. 1, p. 302, Kitab al-Hujja, the chapter on the explicit designation of al-Husayn Ibn 'Ali ('a), Muhammad al-Hanafiyya describes a perfect human being like Imam Husayn ('a), in addition to stating three characteristics: "the most knowledgeable among us in knowledge, the most forbearing among us in forbearance, and the closest of us to the Messenger of God in kinship." (Ed.)

[13.](#) Hurr Ibn Yazid al-Riyahi was a commander in the Umayyad army who is revered in Shi'a Islam for his role during the Battle of Karbala. Initially tasked with intercepting Imam Husayn Ibn 'Ali and preventing his entry into Kufa, Hurr underwent a profound moral transformation on the battlefield. Deeply moved by Imam Husayn's righteousness and the unjust conditions faced by his followers, Hurr defected to Imam Husayn's side on the day of the battle. He was killed fighting for what he came to recognize as the true path of justice and righteousness. Hurr's story is celebrated for his ultimate choice of conscience and redemption, and he is honored as a symbol of moral integrity and sacrifice in Islamic tradition. His grave in Karbala remains a pilgrimage site. (Ed.)

Part 2: Religion in the Life of a Human Being

Lecture 1 – Muharram 1444

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

In the name of Allah, the All-Merciful, the Ever-Merciful

“He has prescribed for you the religion which He had enjoined upon Nuh and which We have (also) revealed to you, and which We had enjoined upon Ibrahim, Musa, and ‘Isa, declaring, ‘Maintain the religion, and do not be divided in it.’ Hard on the polytheists is that to which you summon them. Allah chooses for it whomever He wishes, and He guides to it whomever returns penitently (to Him)” (Qur’an, 42: 13).

In this Muharram commemorations, we will explore the topic at hand through the following points of discussion:

- 1. The Philosophy of Karbala or Ashura:** Why do we convene these gatherings in remembrance of Imam Husayn (‘a)?
- 2. The Essence of Religion:** In the 21st century, characterized by advancements in education and technology, does the concept of ‘Religion in the life of a human being’ still hold relevance? Is there a place for Religion in our contemporary lives?
- 3. Perceptions of Religion:** When the term ‘Religion’ is mentioned, what associations and connotations come to mind, especially among those who hold opposing views? How is Religion generally perceived in today’s society?
- 4. The Origins of Religion:** When did the idea of Religion in human life emerge, and what drove mankind to seek a divine entity like God? What were the driving forces behind the development of Religion?
- 5. Contemporary Relevance of Religion:** Are there tangible benefits to embracing Religion in today’s world, or is it considered an outdated relic of the past? Is Religion still a necessity for humanity in the present era?
- 6. The Role of Intellect and Education:** Can intellectual pursuits and advancements in scientific

knowledge alone suffice to govern the world, potentially making Religion obsolete?

7. The Youth and Religion: What factors contribute to the estrangement of today's youth from Religion? Why do younger generations tend to distance themselves from religious practices and beliefs?

8. Karbala's Contribution: What role did the events of Karbala and the sacrifices of Imam Husayn ('a) play in reviving and reinforcing the importance of Religion in the lives of human beings?

Why do we convene these gatherings? In accordance with our school of thought and supported by evidence from traditions, it is unequivocally established that expressing both joy and grief is not only encouraged but also enjoined upon us. In simpler terms, we are obligated to partake in their celebrations and commemorate their sorrows – this is a highly recommended practice; indeed, it is considered amrun mustahsan (commendable act).

As a result, the essence of all such gatherings, which serves as our identity or the “face of emotion” (wajh al-’atifah), is what binds us to it. This principle finds validation not only within our traditions but is also echoed in the Qur’an. Allah proclaims:

“... Such is the good news that Allah gives to His servants who have faith and do righteous deeds! Say, 'I do not ask you any reward for it except the love of my relatives'” (Qur’an, 42:23).

Jabir Ibn ‘Abdullah al-Ansari, a renowned companion of the Holy Prophet, recounted the following:

When the desert Arabs inquired about the recompense or reward for the Prophet’s strenuous efforts in spreading the Religion of Islam among the people, this verse (42:23) was revealed.

As human beings, we are endowed with intellect and emotions. Therefore, it is natural for us, especially in the case of our beloved Imams ('a), to empathize with their joy or grief and seek to understand the reasons behind it.

So, as we observe these days of commemoration, aiming to align ourselves with the household of our Messenger in their grief, we must ponder upon the reasons behind their sorrow. Why did the grandson of the Messenger, along with his companions, suffer such a treacherous and inhumane fate?

Why did these highly esteemed individuals, who possessed comprehensive knowledge, strong religious convictions, and exemplary values, willingly face such immense tribulations? What motivated them to make such a profound sacrifice? Imam Ja’far al-Sadiq ('a) provided a succinct answer when describing the actions of his grandfather, Imam Husayn ('a). He stated that Imam Husayn ('a) sacrificed his life and shed his blood to rescue people from the clutches of jahalah (ignorance intertwined with foolishness and stupidity) and dhalalah (wandering astray).

Note: It’s essential to distinguish between jahlun and jahalah. While Jahlun refers to ignorance, jahalah signifies ignorance coupled with stupidity and foolishness. Both these terms find mention in the Qur’an.

Thus, a person may be educated (not ignorant or jahil) but still exhibit jahalah (foolishness). Foolishness and stupidity are not eradicated solely through education but also require wisdom.

Hence, the primary objective behind the shedding of blood and the immense sacrifice in Karbala was to uproot the ignorance (jahalah) and deviation (dhalalah) deeply embedded in society – an arduous mission. Consequently, our mourning and commemorations should be aligned with this very purpose; otherwise, we have not truly connected with them in the profound sense of an tafraha li farahina, wa an tahzana li huznina (that you rejoice in our joy and grieve for our sorrow)¹.

The Messenger (S) and the Imams (‘a) grieved over the prevalence of ignorance and deviation during the events of Karbala, and even today, they continue to experience either joy or sorrow based on the way we lead our lives.

In Chapter 9 (al-Tawbah), God Almighty instructs His Messenger to convey to the people that they should continue to perform good deeds, for soon their actions will be observed not only by Allah but also by His Messenger (S) and the pious believers. The following verse reads:

“And say, ‘Go on working: Allah will see your conduct, and His Apostle and the faithful (as well), and you will be returned to the Knower of the sensible and the Unseen, and He will inform you concerning what you used to do.’” (9: 105)

This verse emphasizes that the Messenger and the Imams (‘a) are aware of our deeds in this world, and even in the Barzakh, they retain the ability to witness our actions, which can either bring them joy or sorrow.

According to both Shi’a and Sunni narrations, including one from a Sunni source, the Messenger of Allah is reported to have said: “When I am alive, it is beneficial for you, and when I am dead, it is still beneficial for you. In both states, I remain with you. While I am alive, you receive divine inspiration, messages, or communications from Heaven through me. When I am deceased, reports of your deeds reach me daily in the realm of Barzakh. When I witness goodness among you, I express gratitude to Allah (s.w.t), and when I witness wrongdoing, I seek Allah’s forgiveness on your behalf.” (Original quote: “Hayati khayrun lakum tuhdathuna wa yuhdathu lakum wa wafati khayrun lakum tu’radhu ‘alayya a‘malukum fa ma ra’aytu min khayrin hamidtu Allaha ‘alayhi wa ma ra’aytu min sharri istaghfartu Allaha lakum.”)

According to a Shi’a narration, Abu al-Hassan (‘a) was questioned about the verse that states, ***“And say, ‘Go on working: Allah will see your conduct, and His Apostle and the faithful (as well), and you will be returned to the Knower of the sensible and the Unseen, and He will inform you concerning what you used to do’” (9: 105)***. In response, the Imam (‘a) stated that every morning, all the actions of people, whether good or bad, are presented to the Messenger.

Another tradition from Imam al-Ridha (‘a), concerning the same verse (9: 105), corroborates this fact,

asserting that every morning, the Messenger receives a report of the deeds of the people, both good and bad.

Furthermore, a tradition from Imam al-Sadiq ('a) regarding this verse (9: 105) reveals that reports reach the Messenger every day, while a more comprehensive presentation occurs weekly, specifically every Thursday.

Given these traditions, it prompts each one of us to reflect and ask a fundamental question: If the Messenger were among us today, witnessing every one of our deeds, whether conducted in secret or openly, what would be the state of our actions? Surely, we would feel a sense of shame in the presence of the Messenger.

It's crucial to emphasize that when we gather to express our grief, we should view it from a broader perspective. Undoubtedly, Yazid, Shimr, Obaidullah Ibn Ziyad, Banu Umayyah, and their supporters were at the forefront of causing grief to the Messenger of Allah (S) through their actions. However, we must exercise caution to avoid inadvertently becoming complicit in this grievance. This can occur when we deviate from the teachings and principles brought by the Prophet Muhammad (S) and remain in a state of ignorance (jahalah) and misguidance (dhalalah), for which they sacrificed their lives to eradicate.

True satisfaction for the Holy Prophet and his progeny is derived when we uphold these values, when our youth adhere to the teachings of Islam, and when our sisters understand and embrace the true significance of hijab and other virtuous principles. It is through this alignment with their ideals that we can share in their joy and pleasure (an nafraha bi farahihi).

Karbala and the Ashura event were not a mere tribal conflict between the Banu Hashim and Banu Umayyah, as some have wrongly claimed. It represented a profound battle between truth and falsehood, a struggle against ignorance (jahalah) and deviation (dhalalah). This mission of Imam Husayn ('a) can be eloquently summarized by a famous poetic quote:

"If the Religion of Muhammad cannot be preserved except by the shedding of my blood, then, O swords, come and claim me."

Imam Husayn ('a) further emphasized: "In times of trials and tribulations, only a few individuals remain steadfast. People are often enslaved by worldly desires, and their faith wavers when tested."

This encapsulates the philosophy of Karbala and the purpose of commemorating Ashura.

Moving on to our second point, let's look into the essence of religion and explore its relevance in our contemporary lives. It's essential to explore the vocabulary surrounding this topic, as the interpretation of words can vary from person to person, even when the same word is used.

People often acknowledge that certain reactions can occur spontaneously, without conscious thought. Imam Husayn ('a) has described this phenomenon as having "knowledge" and a "taste" of impulsive

knowledge. For instance, this can be observed in the context of bid'ah (innovation), where misunderstandings can lead to wrongful accusations.

Another area where this impulsive nature is evident is in the concept of worship (ibadah). Worship entails submitting with humility. Some individuals have argued that since Allah commands us to be humble to our parents, as indicated in the verse: ***“Lower the wing of humility to them, mercifully, and say, ‘My Lord! Have mercy on them, just as they reared me when I was a small child!’” (17:24)***, it might be construed as polytheism (shirk). However, it's important to recognize that there are varying degrees of submission, and the submission to one's parents is distinct from the submission to Allah, the Almighty².

Allah's words in the Qur'an provide us with valuable insights. For instance, in the following verse, Allah says:

“When We said to the angels, ‘Prostrate before Adam,’ they prostrated, but not Iblis: he refused and acted arrogantly, and he was one of the faithless.” (2:34).

Similarly, in the following verse we find:

“When Joseph said to his father, ‘Father! I saw eleven planets, and the sun and the moon: I saw them prostrating themselves before me.’” (12:4).

From these verses, it is evident that the interpretation of certain terms can vary significantly. Were the angels and Iblis commanded to worship Adam (‘a), or were the sun, moon, and stars directed to show reverence to Prophet Yusuf (‘a)? These examples highlight how words and their meanings can be subject to diverse interpretations.

Now, when we engage in a discussion about Religion, it's essential to define it. Let's avoid delving into linguistic interpretations of Religion, such as words like “reward” or “obedience.” Instead, we should aim to grasp the concept of Religion from a Shari'ah perspective. When we examine how the West defines Religion, we encounter a significant disparity in their understanding compared to ours.

It's a natural tendency for humans to interpret the meaning of something based on their personal perception rather than its objective reality. To illustrate this, consider a specific dish that is shared across various regions of a country. Despite having the same name, this dish may be prepared differently according to local environments and preferences. People tend to perceive it based on their familiarity with their own version.

In bygone eras, particularly in England, Europe, and America, the Western world had limited exposure to religions, predominantly Christianity. Consequently, when they encountered Islam, they attempted to interpret it through the lens of their familiarity with Christianity. However, it's crucial to recognize that Islam cannot be accurately equated with contemporary Christianity. Let's explore deeper into this

distinction.

In the present day, we find ourselves confronted with a concept known as “secularism” (al-‘ilmaniyya). Secularism, as it pertains to philosophy, politics, and society, advocates for the separation of God and religion from our daily practical lives.

The matter of God and religion is a deeply personal issue, a connection between you and your deity. This encompasses how you pray, fast, and adhere to basic values. However, secularism does not concern itself with family systems, social structures, economic frameworks, political institutions, government policies, science, or technology. These domains are separate from religious considerations.

Historically, the West has faced conflicts with religion, leading to a pre- dominantly negative perception. This tension stems from the era when science and technology were advancing rapidly, and the Church often opposed scientific progress and research. This resistance contributed to the problems the West experienced with religion, shaping their current secular outlook.

A quick examination of history reveals incidents such as the persecution of Galileo and others who made claims about the shape of the Earth and the nature of the universe, which further exemplify the strained relation- ship between religion and scientific inquiry.

The Church authorities established a special tribunal to scrutinize these ideas. If they suspected you, they would summon you before the court for questioning. If your responses contradicted their established beliefs, you were labeled as a deviant and subject to imprisonment or execution.

This encapsulates the Western perspective on religion, and they apprehend Islam because they view it as a potential impediment to progress. They firmly attribute their apparent development and advancement to the exclusion of religion.

In their view, Christianity hindered success and progress, relegating it to a mere weekly ritual of attending church services. This is the prevailing perception in Europe and many parts of the Western world today.

It’s quite astonishing that when some of our community members traveled abroad to study, got married, and settled in foreign lands, they perceived Muslims in our region (like East Africa) as backward in comparison.

The Orientalists (al-mustashriqun) and certain Muslims heavily influenced by Western ideologies, including the youth who are drawn to secularism, have been conditioned to believe that success hinges on excluding God and religion from their daily lives, relegating them solely to places of worship. Muslims were also subjected to this narrative, and as soon as they embraced it, their decline began.

The Islamic faith, which established a comprehensive framework for a successful life, gave rise to remarkable individuals like Jabir Ibn Hayyan, a student of Imam al-Sadiq (often referred to as Jabir al-

Kimawi or the pioneer of the study of Chemistry and Algebra), al-Khawarismi, Ibn Sina, Ibn Rushdi, and many more. These luminaries were nurtured within a religious environment, not a secular one.

However, when we explore beneath the surface of apparent progress, it becomes evident that secularism has led the majority of Muslims to emulate the Western way of life, leaving us with little to be proud of in terms of our own achievements. We find ourselves unable to even produce simple items like pencils, highlighting the profound impact of secularism on our societal progress.

Consider a comparison with the Republic of Iran: In its earlier days under the influence of Western systems, it struggled to manufacture even basic items like matchsticks. However, upon liberating itself from Western influences and re-embracing the core values of its true religion, Iran has risen to become a formidable competitor with the West in various fields of production and innovation. This remarkable progress has not gone unnoticed by the West, which, in response, has imposed sanctions on Iran for over four decades. One cannot help but wonder where Iran might stand today in the absence of these sanctions. The key to their remarkable success lies not in the adoption of Western practices such as the English language or formal attire but rather in their preservation of their language, culture, and the renewed commitment to their religious heritage. As a result, they continue to advance and excel.

Therefore, it is imperative for us to take a moment to reflect on how the West perceives religion and how we, as Muslims, interpret its essence. It is through this introspection that we must decide which interpretation of religion we wish to embrace in our lives – one that propels us forward or one that leads to regression.

This is precisely why Imam Husayn (‘a) took a resolute stance.

It is worth noting that those who attacked Imam ‘Ali (‘a) were not strangers to religion; they were individuals who had memorized the Qur’an, possessed the ability to recite it fluently, and outwardly displayed religious attributes such as long beards. To gain insight into the consequences of their beliefs and actions, one need only analyze the history of the Khawarij³.

Despite their prominent position within the realm of religion, they were responsible for the assassination of the Imam of their time. Astonishingly, they justified their heinous act by asserting that it was their interpretation of religion that compelled them to commit this deed. This serves as a stark reminder of the peril that arises when the true essence of religion is misunderstood or misinterpreted.

End of Lecture 1

Lecture 2 – Muharram 1444

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

In the name of Allah, the All-Merciful, the Ever-Merciful

Recap of Lecture 1

In our previous session, we deeply explored the philosophy behind the gatherings of Ashura, emphasizing the essential nature of standing united with the Ahl al-Bayt (‘a) during both their triumphant and challenging moments. We explored the significance of truly comprehending the essence, reasons, and profound sacrifices made during such pivotal events, highlighting the necessity of aligning our personal endeavors with their guiding principles.

The tragedy of Karbala served as a central theme, symbolizing the eternal battle between truth and falsehood. Imam Husayn (‘a) vividly demonstrated the challenges of upholding faith in the face of overwhelming adversity, cautioning believers about the perils of letting temporal desires compromise one’s core beliefs.

Further into our discussion, we stressed the importance of precise vocabulary when engaging in religious dialogues. We unpacked the depths of terms like bid’ah and ibadah, emphasizing that their meanings extend far beyond basic linguistic interpretations. Particularly, the term ‘Religion’ took center stage, with its myriad interpretations and varied significance across cultures.

We also touched upon the concept of secularism, known as al-‘ilmaniyya. This perspective was dissected, shedding light on the Western notion that sometimes positions religion as a hindrance to societal progress. Moreover, we reflected on how regional variances shape the understanding of religion, pointing out the influence of Orientalist views that have occasionally distorted these interpretations, particularly in Eastern regions.

To conclude, the lecture aimed to deepen our grasp of religious principles and ensure that these teachings are accurately contextualized in a rapidly changing world.

Lecture 2

Today, we will analyze the usage of the term ‘Religion’ in the Qur’an, examining its various meanings across different verses in various chapters. For instance, we will scrutinize the term din in Surah al-Fatiha: **Maliki yawmi al-din (1:4)**. In this verse, the word din refers to a day when Allah (s.w.t.) will be the “absolute authority.” It symbolizes a day of accountability, consequences, and rewards (Al-Jaza’u wal-Hisabu wal-Mukafa’ah).

In another context, the term ‘Religion’ is described as Al-Qadha’u wal-Hukmu was-Sultan which pertains to the act of judgment and ruling according to the established laws on various matters. This concept can be found in Surah Yusuf:

“Then he began with their sacks, before (opening) his brother’s sack. Then he took it out from his

brother's sack. Thus did We devise for Joseph's sake. He could not have held his brother under the king's law unless Allah willed (otherwise)" (Qur'an, 12:76).

In this verse, we learn that the Prophet Yusuf ('a) strategically arranged for his brother to be accused of theft, knowing that under Egyptian law at that time, the punishment for theft was to become a slave of the ruler. However, it is essential to understand that Prophet Yusuf ('a) did not intend for his brother to become a slave; rather, it was Allah's way of facilitating his brother's presence with him.

Returning to our topic, "Religion in the Life of a Human Being," we will now explore the perspectives on religion presented by two non-Muslims. After careful consideration, we will reflect on the concept of religion that we held before these discussions and how it may have evolved as a result of this dialogue.

One of the eminent Western philosophers, Kent⁴, offered a concise perspective on religion in a brief article. He posited that if an individual chooses to adopt virtuous values such as honesty, truthfulness, righteousness, humility, assisting others, practicing effective time management, maintaining good hygiene, and believes that these actions align with the divine commands of God, then that person is following a path of Religion. In his words, "Religion is that which encompasses our acknowledgment of our duties as divine commands" (Al-dinu huwa al-mushtamilu 'ala al-i'tirafina bi-wajibatina ka-awamira ilahiyyatin).

While these values are certainly noble and essential, they predominantly pertain to one's character and morality, often referred to as akhlaq. However, religion encompasses more than just personal ethics; it extends to one's responsibilities towards family, society, livelihood, and engagement in political matters. The life of a human being encompasses a wide array of aspects beyond individual moral values. In this regard, we concur with the Western perception of religion as being somewhat limited and diverge in our definition of religion.

The second reference comes from the philosopher Rodell⁵, who defines religion as "the Sufi experience through which a person transcends the contradictions of life" (Dini huwa al-tajrubatu al-sufiyyatu allati yujawizu al-insanu fiha mutanaqidhati al-hayati). Here, he alludes to a specific group within religion known as the Sufis. Sufism transcends sectarian boundaries and exists in various religions under different names. Sufis believe that the primary purpose of the universe is self-improvement, the refinement of the soul, and the elevation of one's humanity. They have spiritual leaders known as Imams, each of whom follows a specific method (manhaj) of self-discipline referred to as Turuq. Examples include al-Tariqatu al-Qadiriyyah, al-Tariqatu al-Shadhiliyyah, al-Tariqatu al-Tijaniyyah and many others⁶.

Once again, we find ourselves in disagreement, as for them, religion primarily concerns matters of the soul, involving practices such as prayer, fasting, the recitation of specific supplications, and even periods of isolation.

Now, let's revisit how we define Islam. Islam is typically taught through two methods: secular education

and religious seminary education (Hawza). It's ironic that on occasion, individuals who teach Islamic studies, having acquired diplomas, degrees, masters, or PhDs in the field, may not be Muslims or followers of the religion themselves. This presents a significant and challenging issue that we must address.

In today's context, a young person may possess a certificate in Islamic studies but could have been subtly influenced by Western perspectives on religion. This influence might lead them to believe that Islamic scholars and authorities need not involve themselves in matters of politics or the economy, effectively separating religion from other aspects of life. Consequently, we must remain vigilant against non-Islamic teachings masquerading as genuine Islamic principles.

In summary, from the genuine Islamic standpoint, religion encompasses a comprehensive set of beliefs, laws, ethics, concepts, and principles that Allah (s.w.t.) has ordained for humanity, both in their worldly affairs and in matters pertaining to the hereafter.

The single word 'Religion' encompasses several dimensions:

1) Ideology (I'tiqadi.): Religion teaches us how to 'think,' addressing fundamental questions about oneself, such as 'Where have I come from and who is responsible for my existence? Where am I headed, and to whom am I ultimately accountable? What is my purpose, and what goals should I strive for?' While religion may not always provide direct answers to these questions, it guides individuals on how to think critically and seek answers for themselves.

2) Laws and Worship (Shari'ah, Ahkam, Ibadah): Religion offers guidance on laws (Shari'ah) that govern various aspects of life, worship (ibadah) practices, and ethical deeds (mu'amalah). Ahkam encompasses rules and regulations that pertain to the self, emphasizing adherence to divine laws that benefit individuals and discouraging following one's whims.

3) Interactions with Others: Religion extends its guidance to interactions with fellow human beings, including family members, neighbors, coworkers, the broader human society, teachers, students, leaders, and followers. It emphasizes the importance of ethical conduct and social responsibilities. Reference can be made to Risalat ul-Huquq by Imam Zain al-'Abidin ('a). Furthermore, religion emphasizes the importance of caring for the environment and non-human beings, such as plants, animals, seas, and air. These resources have been provided by the Creator to serve humanity, and humans are prohibited from harming or disrupting them. While contemporary secular teachings emphasize 'environmental friendliness,' Islam has long included such teachings, although they have often been overlooked.

4) Relationship with Allah (s.w.t.): Finally, religion guides individuals in matters concerning their relationship with Allah (s.w.t.), the Creator, who fashioned them, their interactions with fellow human beings, and their stewardship of the environment. It emphasizes the importance of recognizing one's duty toward the Creator and striving to align one's actions with divine principles.

In essence, 'Religion' encapsulates a comprehensive framework that encompasses not only personal beliefs and practices but also extends to ethical conduct, social interactions, environmental responsibility, and a deep connection with the Creator. It serves as a guiding light for individuals seeking to navigate the complexities of life and fulfill their responsibilities to themselves, others, the environment, and their Creator.

To recap our understanding of Religion thus far:

Guidance in Thought: Religion serves as a source of instruction and guidance, teaching individuals how to think critically and contemplate profound questions about existence.

Direction in Laws and Regulations: Religion provides clear directives and rules designed for the benefit of humanity, offering guidance on ethical conduct.

Moral and Ethical Guidance: Religion imparts guidance on akhlaq, encompassing moral values and principles that distinguish humans from animals.

It is essential to note the distinction between ahkam (laws and regulations) and akhlaq (morality and values). Ahkam are external rules given to us, while akhlaq is an intrinsic aspect of our being, requiring only discovery and cultivation. The Holy Prophet Muhammad expressed this concept with the statement, Innama bu'ithu li-utammima Makarim al-Akhlaq, signifying that his mission was to perfect the noble character traits that already exist within individuals, rather than introducing new laws.

Returning to the insights of philosopher Kent, who was in the company of one of the scholars, either Syed Mujtaba Lari or Ayat. Mudhahiri, they introduced two terms: Mahasin al-Akhlaq (Good Traits) and Makarim al-Akhlaq (Noble Traits). While society often admires the West for their good habits, such as punctuality, it's important to recognize that these fall under the category of good traits, not noble traits.

The distinction between the two lies in the motivation behind these behaviors. Good habits may earn praise from society and individuals, but they can also lead to worldly expectations, adulation, and sometimes a desire for reciprocity or favor in return. To illustrate further, consider the example of a person attending a funeral and explaining their presence by saying they had attended the funeral of the deceased's father. Such acts, while considered good habits by societal standards, do not fall under the category of worship (ibadah) aimed at pleasing Allah (s.w.t.). They may carry underlying worldly motives and expectations.

End of Lecture 2

Lecture 3 – Muharram 1444

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

Recap of Lecture 2

In the previous lecture, we embarked on an in-depth analysis of the term 'Religion' as it appears in the Qur'an. The word *din* features prominently in many verses, such as in Surah al-Fatiha where ***Maliki yawmi al-din* (1:4)** refers to Allah (s.w.t.) being the sovereign on the Day of Judgment. This day signifies a time of reckoning, where deeds are assessed and rewards meted out.

Similarly, "Religion" in another verse is akin to judgment and governance based on divine laws. This interpretation can be deduced from Surah Yusuf, 12:76, wherein Prophet Yusuf ('a) uses the prevailing laws of Egypt to ensure his brother's presence with him. Yet, this act was not a cruel intention but a divine plan to reunite the family.

Our exploration also led us to two external views on religion. Western philosopher Kent emphasizes the virtues of honesty, truthfulness, humility, among others, as the essence of religion. He believes that if one aligns these virtuous acts with divine commands, they are treading the path of Religion. While these virtues form a critical component of religion, Islam encompasses more. It also focuses on responsibilities to the family, society, and even political matters, making the Western view seem somewhat constrained in its definition of religion.

On the other hand, philosopher Rodell views religion through the lens of Sufism. Sufis emphasize the inner spiritual journey, the refinement of the soul, and seek to transcend the mundane.

Re-examining Islam, we noted that its teachings are disseminated through secular education and religious seminaries, the Hawza. Interestingly, many teachers of Islamic studies may not practice Islam, thus emphasizing the need for discernment in our learning sources. Modern perspectives some- times blend Western ideologies with Islamic principles, mistakenly isolating religion from other life aspects like politics or the economy.

Conclusively, Islam is a comprehensive religion. It encompasses ideologies that guide our thought processes, helping us grapple with existential questions about our origin, purpose, and destiny. Religion also offers laws and worship practices, known as Shari'ah and ibadah, guiding personal conduct and interactions with the divine. The importance of ethical inter- actions with fellow humans is also emphasized, as highlighted in Risalat ul- Huquq by Imam Zain al-'Abidin ('a). Through religion, we are provided with a roadmap for life, both for our earthly existence and the hereafter.

Lecture 3

Today, we will explore the fourth point, which is the topic of mafahim – understanding concepts and being aware of diverse perspectives on various issues. These issues encompass a wide range of topics, such as the environment, the role of women in society, human rights, the root causes of poverty, family

dynamics, and more.

Throughout the past centuries, Islamic literature has predominantly focused on the first three points we discussed: ideology, rules and laws, and moral aspects. While these aspects are crucial, relatively little attention was given to exploring the Islamic perspective on various contemporary issues and subjects. It's not to suggest that these issues weren't present in the Qur'an or hadith, but they were often not the primary focus. All Praise be to God, in recent times, Islamic scholars and thinkers have initiated substantial efforts in this direction.

For example, Ayat. Shahid Mutahhari dedicated significant work to elucidate the rights of women in Islam in his book. Likewise, the late Ayat. Sheikh al-Misbah Yazdi explored the Qur'anic viewpoint on society, humanity, and the universe. Ayat. Ja'far Subhani meticulously documented ten volumes on the understanding of "Concepts in the Qur'an."

The significance of studying mafahim cannot be overstated. This knowledge equips us to engage in meaningful and informed discussions, whether with non-Muslims or Muslims influenced by Western perspectives and systems. Consider the example of the Hijab issue, as explored in Ayat. Shahid Mutahhari's book, *Mas'alat ul-Hijab* (The Matter of Hijab). When Muslims are confronted with accusations of oppressing women or denying their independence, we often resort to defending our position based on Islamic laws (ahkam). However, how often are we equipped to address such situations from the perspective of 'concepts'? Ahkam can be seen as the roof that covers the foundation, while mafahim or concepts serve as that crucial foundational understanding.

Ayat. Shahid Mutahhari suggests that when the initial question in a debate revolves around whether or not women should wear the hijab, it already implies that the discussion has skipped over the first and second levels of understanding (the concept and its repercussions). To illustrate this point, he explicitly sets aside laws, the Qur'an, and religious considerations for a moment, focusing solely on human innate nature, known as fitra.

In this context, Shahid Mutahhari asks us to contemplate whether a rational and decent person would agree to the idea of individuals walking around naked. Our innate human fitra, he argues, would naturally reject such behavior as it goes against our human nature and leans towards an animalistic side.

Moving on to the matter of intimacy, Shahid Mutahhari encourages us to consider what our innate fitra requires and guides us towards. Even within the confines of our own homes, he notes, there is a need for privacy or a form of hijab (with a broader meaning). In Swahili, the term stara (veil) has been used to signify a 'cover' or 'confinement.'

Shahid Mutahhari further emphasizes, in the context of explaining concepts (mafahim), that we all concur on the necessity of a certain barrier or veil, unlike the ways of animals around us. Human beings require lawful commitments and relationships. Therefore, in order to maintain respect for humanity, something referred to as hijab becomes essential. (It's note- worthy how Shahid Mutahhari explores

deeply into the realm of mafahim to address the initial question of why women in Islam are required to observe hijab.)

He cautions against being deceived by systems that, on one hand, highlight the harm of alcohol yet legalize its consumption or condemn rape as a crime while having no issue with promiscuity. Shahid Mutahhari's approach underscores the importance of understanding the underlying concepts and values that guide our actions and beliefs, beyond just the laws and regulations.

If a person is in disagreement with a particular idea, it logically follows that they must also reject all aspects related to it or leading to it. One cannot object to the consequences while still accepting the concept itself.

So, when the practice of hijab is neglected, and one's flesh is displayed, it is undeniable that there is a risk of succumbing to the consequences of shahwah or lust. To safeguard our children from vices like drugs and alcohol, it becomes imperative to shield them from environments characterized by promiscuity.

Hence, we can deduce that adhering to hijab is a prudent choice, aligning with the teachings of Islam. As for the question of defining the boundaries of hijab for both men and women, this is a separate topic warranting its own discussion.

Another issue that frequently faces criticism is the perception of unequal rights between men and women in Islam.

In his book *Nizam-e Huquq-e Zan dar Islam* (نظام حقوق زن در اسلام) (Rights of Women), Shahid Mutahhari emphasizes the critical importance of the choice of words and vocabulary used in any debate or discussion. He categorizes these choices into two distinct categories:

1) Similarity (mushabahah): This category pertains to using words that aim to balance or align with the integrity of a particular subject or concept. These words are selected to maintain the harmony and correctness of the issue at hand.

2) Equality (musawa'ah): On the other hand, this category involves the use of words that compare and often do not necessarily align with the integrity of the specific matter being discussed. Such words are employed to draw comparisons, even if they don't accurately reflect the essence of the subject.

Shahid Mutahhari illustrates this concept with the following example: Imagine a wealthy father who possesses a substantial amount of property.

He has three sons, each highly qualified in different fields. The first son excels in the study of engineering, the second is well-versed in business studies, and the third has expertise in agricultural studies. Each son has honed their skills and talents in their respective areas of interest.

Now, the father faces a decision about how to distribute his wealth among his three sons.

Shahid Mutahhari explains that there are different approaches to distribution:

One method involves equal distribution, such as assigning one shop to each son if the father has three shops, allocating ten cars to each if there are 30 cars, and distributing land equally, and so on. This type of distribution falls into the category of “equality” (musawa’ah) rather than “balanced” (mushabahah). Despite the equality in quantity, this approach doesn’t align with each son’s expertise. For instance, for the son who is an engineer, receiving land and shops would not correspond to his profession. Similarly, for the son who studied agriculture, receiving shops and cars would not be relevant to his area of expertise, and so forth.

Conversely, if the father assigns the cars to the engineering son, the shops to the business-qualified son, and the land to the agriculture-educated son, this distribution would fall under mushabahah (balanced/in line with integrity).

It’s important to note that in the Western system, particularly concerning men and women’s rights, the argument revolves around “comparison.” However, in reality, it is quite the opposite. For example, in sports, we don’t typically see both sexes participating together in activities like boxing or football. Instead, we have separate men’s and women’s games. This separation is because the two sexes have not been created identical in certain aspects; for instance, men may excel in physical strength, while women possess their own unique strengths.

The Qur’an, in Surah al-Layl (Chapter of the Night) verses 1–4, unequivocally outlines the creation of four entities: night, day, man, and woman. Each of these creations strives towards distinct ends. While night and day are both components of a ‘time period,’ they are not identical in nature.

These verses offer a clear reflection on the concept of equity rather than equality in the Lord’s creation. Consider, could the world exist with only nights or only days? Could it thrive with only men or only women? These questions prompt us to contemplate the wisdom of the Creator in designing these elements as tools to help us reach our destinations. It is how the Creator has orchestrated the tapestry of creation.

Returning to the question of “Why Religion in a human being’s life?” – this inquiry arose in a recent gathering where a young man, who had been influenced by certain thoughts during his time abroad, bravely expressed his desire to live without the burden of religious commitments. Such fundamental questions are essential in any religious discussion and can be explored further in books of Aqa’id, such as Silsilah al-Durus by Ayat. Makarim al-Shirazi.

To address the question of “why should I seek or need a Religion in my life?” one must consider the following reasons, intrinsic to being human. These reasons do not emanate from the Qur’an, Sunnah, any religious scholar, or theologian; rather, they arise directly from the inner soul, propelled by intellect

and senses:

Love of Curiosity (hubb al-Istitla'): It is an inherent quality in human beings to inquire and research. When utilized effectively, curiosity leads to positive discoveries and inventions, such as breakthroughs in medicine and technology. Scientists and naturalists dedicate years to researching health, animals, and nature to unearth valuable findings. In a similar vein, exploring the reasons behind people's worship choices is crucial. Curiosity fuels questions about our origin, purpose, destination, and the possibility of an afterlife. Observing the cycle of life, birth, and death prompts us to contemplate and investigate such profound questions, and this is where the realm of Religion comes into play.

Calculating Profit and Loss (hisabu al-ribhi wa-al-khasarati): Ayat. Makarim al-Shirazi offers an insightful perspective on this. Consider the analogy: You are traveling point A to point B by road for the first time. At a junction where the road splits into three paths, you are faced with a dilemma, as there are no road signs. Three individuals approach you, each appearing knowledgeable about the roads, but they provide conflicting advice on which route to take.

Now, you have several options:

- a) Guess and select a path arbitrarily.
- b) Follow any one of the men without assessing the reliability of their guidance.
- c) Reject all three suggestions, even though you need to reach your destination.

This scenario illustrates the human inclination to evaluate choices based on potential gain or loss. In the realm of Religion, individuals seek guidance to navigate life's intricate paths and make informed decisions about their beliefs and practices, similar to choosing the right road to reach their destination.

The Jew asserts that his Religion is the true one, revealing the paths to Hell and Heaven. Similarly, the Christian conveys his beliefs, and the Muslim does the same. Now, faced with these diverse viewpoints, should one merely opt to follow the religious tradition of their forefathers? Islam rejects this passive approach and urges individuals to engage in investigation and research.

Once we embark on this journey of research, it begins to answer the question of "why the need for Religion?" This need arises because there exist numerous paths, each convincingly presenting its own perspective. It is through diligent research and exploration that we can identify the right path leading us to our destination.

Despite the assertions by some societies that Religion is unnecessary in a person's life, the stark reality is that the rejection of Religion has often been a primary contributor to societal ills, such as crime, depression, and increasing suicide rates. These are the consequences of denying individuals the nourishment of their soul through religious practice. As the Qur'an eloquently states:

“In the remembrance of Allah do hearts find rest” (Ala biḥikri allahi tatma’innu al-qulub) (13:28).

This profound verse underscores the immense peace and tranquility that embracing Religion can bring to the human heart.

End of Lecture 3

Lecture 4 – Muharram 1444

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

In the name of Allah, the All-Merciful, the Ever-Merciful

Recap of Lecture 3

In this lecture, we explored the concept of mafahim – understanding and appreciating diverse perspectives on contemporary issues. This broad spectrum includes environmental concerns, women’s roles, human rights, and family dynamics. Historically, Islamic literature has focused on ideology and morals, but modern scholars like Ayat. Shahid Mutahhari and Ayat. Ja’far Subhani have expanded the discourse to contemporary topics.

A key focus was the discussion on Hijab as analyzed by Shahid Mutahhari in Mas’alat ul-Hijab where he explores the concept beyond legalities, delving into human nature and modesty. This approach helps address common misconceptions and criticisms in modern society.

The lecture also highlighted the importance of understanding the difference between equality and equity in Islam, particularly in the context of gender rights. Shahid Mutahhari’s work emphasizes the need for appropriate word choice in debates, distinguishing between terms that balance or align with a subject and those used for inaccurate comparisons.

The relevance of Religion in modern life was also a significant topic. It stressed the importance of curiosity and spiritual guidance in human life, underscoring the need for thorough research and understanding of various religious paths. The lecture concluded by emphasizing the tranquility and peace that Religion can bring to the human heart, as highlighted in the Qur’an.

Lecture 4

“Certainly there has come to you a light from Allah, and a manifest Book” (Qur’an, 5: 15).

“With it Allah guides those who follow (the course of) His pleasure to the ways of peace, and brings them out from darkness into light by His will, and guides them to a straight path” (Qur’an,

5: 16).

Continuing our discussion on the question, “Is Religion necessary in our lives, and what drives humans to seek Religion?” two critical factors come to the forefront when individuals invest their time and effort in any form of research or study.

Firstly, the underlying rationale for such research must align with human intellect and reason. It’s imperative that our pursuits make sense and resonate with our capacity for logical thinking.

Secondly, the benefits or outcomes of this study should complement the primary objective of the research. To illustrate this point, consider any profession or occupation that occupies a person’s daily life. When asked about their aim, one might respond that they are working to earn a livelihood.

This leads us to raise two important questions:

- 1) Are the fundamental reasons behind this daily toil in sync with human intellectual faculties and reasoning?
- 2) Do the benefits derived from this struggle for survival align with the actual purpose of our existence?

These inquiries prompt us to look deeper into the role of Religion in the life of a human being, as we seek to understand its rationality and how it contributes to our ultimate purpose. Answering the first question, indeed, our intellect and reasoning compel us to pursue income generation.

As for the second question, yes, it is through this income that individuals secure essential necessities for themselves and their families, including food, clothing, shelter, education, and healthcare, among others.

This example reflects a straightforward and practical aspect of life. Now, let’s shift our perspective to the realm of Religion.

Just as the physical aspect of a person requires nourishment, so does the soul. The dedication of time, effort, and resources towards religious practices such as prayers (Salah), fasting (Sawm), Hajj, attending educational and enlightening lectures, and more, serves as means to satisfy the spiritual hunger and quench the soul’s thirst.

When individuals are deprived of these spiritual practices, spiritual mala- dies can take root. Thus, just as in the daily, material example mentioned earlier, Religion too serves as the spiritual response to the innate human quest for knowledge and the call of one’s natural disposition (fitra). When true worship is absent, individuals will still seek it in various forms, and therein lies the potential peril.

Having discussed the necessity of Religion, let’s now analyze its benefits, which encompass not only rewards in the Hereafter but also the manifold worldly advantages:

One such benefit is “hope” (Amal) and its pivotal role in a human being’s life. Philosophers have

extensively explored the concept of hope, and it is undeniably at the core of human existence. Examples abound: parents send their children to nursery school with the hope that, in approximately 20 years, they will receive an education. Likewise, the farmer sows seedlings with the hope of a bountiful harvest, or the poultry keeper tends to chicks with the hope that they will become a source of business in the future. In every endeavor, hope serves as the driving force and the wellspring of this hope is “faith” – a steadfast belief.

Conversely, when individuals lose hope, it can lead to dire consequences. For instance, consider the plight of a young graduate who, despite extensive effort, fails to secure employment and eventually gives up, refusing to persevere or explore alternative avenues. Another example is that of a student facing challenges during their studies, who may, at times, contemplate abandoning their educational journey midway.

Many times, what exacerbates feelings of despair and hopelessness is the continuous narrative that our nation is incapable of progress due to our perceived shortcomings and poverty. However, this perspective is far from the truth when we reflect on history and witness the remarkable achievements of Muslims in fields such as science, mathematics, physics, and religious studies, despite challenging circumstances. The mark of a successful individual is not the absence of challenges but the ability to transform these challenges into opportunities⁷.

This raises an important question: If it is asserted that Religion is the force behind hope, then how is it possible that some people who are deeply religious seem to lack hope? And if this is the case, what purpose does Religion serve?

In response, consider this analogy: When a person falls ill, they consult a doctor to receive the appropriate treatment and medication. However, it's a fact that not every sick individual recovers fully. Should we then conclude that there is no point in having doctors or hospitals since not everyone is cured? Certainly not.

Upon closer examination, the case of the patient who doesn't recover suggests a problem somewhere in the process: Perhaps they didn't adhere to the treatment as prescribed; Maybe the doctor misdiagnosed the illness; It's also possible that the wrong medicine was administered.

Likewise, when we encounter individuals deeply immersed in their religious beliefs but seemingly lacking hope, we can identify potential issues: It's possible that they haven't effectively put into practice the teachings of their religion as required; The religious leader (sheikh/scholar) might not have accurately identified the person's specific issues; Alternatively, the religious leader may not have provided the necessary guidance or advice.

Therefore, it is crucial for us to pause and reflect on the implementation of religious teachings in our lives. We should assess whether the messages conveyed by our religious leaders and preachers are effectively addressing the societal challenges we face. This leads us to the conclusion that the root of

the problem does not lie in Religion itself but rather in how we interpret and put its principles into action.

This discussion pertains to the first benefit of Religion, which is “Hope.”

Moving on to the second benefit, Religion encourages the attainment of “Responsibility,” whether it’s towards oneself, the community, the nation, or humanity at large. When we observe successful individuals in various domains such as education, business, and in raising morally upright families, we often find that a significant contributing factor to their success is the heightened sense of responsibility in their lives.

Today, a significant factor contributing to the decline of many third-world countries is the lack of responsibility and a tendency to blame others for their own shortcomings, often referred to as “passing the buck.” In these societies, there’s a prevailing expectation of perfection from everyone else while individuals may not hold themselves to the same standard.

The path to civilization (hadharah), success in various fields, and the ability to rise triumphantly from the ashes of destruction hinges upon a strong sense of responsibility among the populace. Examples from countries like China and Japan exemplify this.

How is this sense of responsibility cultivated? It’s fostered through the establishment of laws and rules, which are enforced by relevant authorities, and violations result in admonishment or punishment. However, despite such measures, corruption and rule-breaking persist due to the absence of individual inner responsibility.

One significant challenge faced by parents in today’s world of media and technology is the exposure of their children to various influences. While it’s not practical to shield them from everything, the solution lies in educating and enlightening them about the benefits and risks, building a strong sense of responsibility and conscience that acts as a shield against potential dangers.

But can individuals achieve this on their own when faced with temptations and external pressures? Here, a support system is needed, and that support system is an individual’s relationship with their Creator. If this connection is strong and intact, individuals can find guidance from within, with their inner moral compass, akin to the Prophet’s teachings, leading them on the right path.

When it comes to daily prayers, many Muslims exhibit a commendable sense of responsibility. They perform their prayers diligently, without the need for reminders, and even seek out the nearest suitable place to offer their prayers, demonstrating their commitment to this religious duty.

However, the same individual, when employed by someone else, sometimes forgets that their time and effort should be entirely devoted to the work for which they are being compensated, as per the agreement they entered into when accepting the job. Often, the employment contract is taken for granted, and personal matters encroach upon work hours, constituting a breach of trust (khiyanah). Such

actions hold individuals accountable and answerable for each transgression.

Only a robust sense of responsibility and conscience can prevent such mis- conduct, and this can be cultivated through a strong relationship with the Creator, acknowledging that He is All-Knowing and All-Seeing.

A powerful illustration of the perils of lacking responsibility is provided by Sayyid: Before the construction of the Great Wall of China, China faced frequent attacks from outsiders. In response, they decided to fortify their defenses with this monumental wall, which required years and extensive resources to build. Ironically, the year it was completed and guarded at the gates, China suffered even more attacks than before. Why? Because while China had built a formidable physical wall, they had neglected to cultivate a sense of responsibility and conscience among the guards, who could easily be bribed.

In summary, this session underscores two significant benefits derived from Religion in the life of a human being:

- 1) Hope – primarily sourced from faith.
- 2) Responsibility – primarily nurtured through a strong relationship with the Lord.

End of Lecture 4

Lecture 5 – Muharram 1444

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

In the name of Allah, the All-Merciful, the Ever-Merciful

Recap of Lecture 4

The lecture centered on the themes of “Hope” and “Responsibility” in a religious context, exploring their influence on both personal and communal levels.

It highlighted the crucial role of hope, sustained by faith, in motivating actions like education, agriculture, and entrepreneurship. Conversely, a lack of hope was shown to lead to despair and inactivity, as seen in jobless graduates or disheartened students.

The discussion then addressed common misconceptions about a nation’s ability to progress, citing the historical successes of Muslims as evidence that challenges can be transformed into opportunities for growth.

The lecture also explored why some devout individuals may lack hope, suggesting factors like incorrect

religious practice or inadequate guidance. It then transitioned to discussing “Responsibility,” emphasizing its significance in personal and national success. The decline in certain societies was attributed to a lack of responsibility and a blame culture, contrasting with nations like China and Japan, where a strong sense of duty prevails.

The importance of instilling responsibility in children, especially in the digital age, was also discussed, along with the observation of some Muslims’ inconsistency in religious and work ethics.

In conclusion, the lecture affirmed that a true understanding and practice of religion can cultivate hope and responsibility, benefiting both individuals and society.

Lecture 5

“Those who have faith and do not taint their faith with wrongdoing – for such there shall be safety, and they are the (rightly) guided” (Qur’an, 6:82)

The lecture began with the discussion of the third benefit of religion in human life: Patience and Steadfastness (al-Sabr wa al-istiqamah).

Experts extensively discuss the importance of patience and steadfastness in human existence. It is a universally acknowledged quality crucial for navigating life’s challenges and trials. Whether one follows a religion or not, believes in a Creator or not, all humans face obstacles on their life journeys. It is the presence of patience and steadfastness that empowers individuals to persevere. This is the natural order of things.

From the moment of birth, a human being encounters trials, starting with the ordeal of leaving the mother’s womb to enter the world. Each subsequent stage – learning to sit, stand, walk, and more – presents its own set of challenges. It is through these challenges that individuals develop and grow. Consider the example of a butterfly struggling to emerge from its chrysalis, the transitional stage between larva and adulthood. This struggle releases certain fluids that strengthen its wings, transforming it into a fully formed butterfly. Thus, struggle is an inherent and necessary aspect of life’s journey.

This is why, in today’s world, the use of “walking aids” for toddlers who are learning to walk is discouraged. These aids can lead the child to rely on external support rather than their own efforts, potentially causing lasting psychological effects and hindering the child’s natural physical development.

Similarly, excessively suppressing a baby’s cries during the early days of life may impede the crucial development of their organs. Crying is a necessary struggle in this context.

Therefore, throughout various stages of life, struggle remains an essential element. There are no shortcuts. However, qualities such as patience, perseverance, and steadfastness can serve as tools to ease the difficulties. These qualities are often nurtured through spirituality and the presence of religion.

It's worth noting that a common mistake, particularly in affluent families, is the failure to teach children, especially boys in our culture, essential life skills and responsibilities at home, such as washing, cleaning, and basic cooking.

History offers us insight into the immense challenges faced by the Prophets and how they tackled them with patience – a virtue they learned from childhood.

It's crucial to note that sabr or patience, as described by Ayat. Shahid Mutahhari, can be classified into two categories: al-sabr al-ijabi (active patience) and al-sabr al-salbi (passive patience). Religion advocates 'active patience.'

The distinction between these two forms lies in their execution: Al-sabr al-ijabi involves practicing patience while simultaneously persevering in the struggle, such as enduring sickness. It doesn't mean refraining from seeking medical assistance but rather maintaining patience while actively addressing the issue. Al-sabr al-salbi on the other hand, involves passive surrender, where one refrains from taking any action.

Religion provides guidance on various aspects of patience, including how to practice it and the abundant rewards it offers.

In the context of Karbala and Ashura, we find invaluable lessons in how Imam Husayn ('a) demonstrated unwavering patience in his struggle against falsehood, even to the last drop of his blood.

Now, let's move on to the fourth point regarding the benefits of Religion – advancement in science. Contrary to prevailing notions propagated by media, Western societies, and other secular platforms, which sometimes depict Religion as an obstacle to human progress – labeling it as restrictive, regressive, and misleading – the truth is that Religion has played a significant role in advancing science. How so?

Ayat. Ja'far Subhani, in his book "Al-Ilahiyyat" (The Divinity) begins with a thought experiment that invites readers to consider a scenario purely from a standpoint of human reason and common sense:

Imagine a close friend, whom you trust, approaches you with a book recommendation. They provide detailed information about the author's expertise, comparing it to someone well-known in your community, like Professor 'Ali Mazrui in the field of Political Science. Your friend emphasizes the extensive research undertaken by the author.

The following day, your friend returns with another book but knows nothing about the author, the book's subject, its purpose, or any relevant details.

Ayat. Ja'far Subhani poses a question to the reader: "Which book would you be more inclined to read to acquire knowledge?" The answer is evident – the first book.

He extends this analogy to a believer in Religion and the Creator offering a book about the Universe, its creation, purpose, and the wisdom, foresight, and justice of its Creator. In contrast, a non-believer presents a book with scant information about the Universe, asserting that it originated from a mere explosion.

Once again, the question arises: “Which book would you be more drawn to?”

We now understand that Religion and faith in God serve as strong motivators for humanity to engage in research and study of the Universe and the natural world around us.

Religion doesn't restrict itself to mere acts of worship, such as prayer or fasting; it also encourages the exploration of various aspects of creation. It urges us to investigate the intricacies of animals, the Earth, mountains, the sky, as well as the mechanisms of our own bodies, including the eye, lips, and tongue (for example, as mentioned in the Qur'an, Surah Al-Ghashiya 88: 17–19). It promotes the study of agriculture, travel to different lands, and the acquisition of knowledge, which ultimately leads us to the realm of Science.

Therefore, it is unfounded to claim that Religion misguides the intellect, impedes progress, or contributes nothing to the field of Science. Admittedly, certain Muslims in the past misunderstood the true essence of Religion and presented an inaccurate interpretation.

Furthermore, secularism has created a significant divide between Religion and the physical world, between Religion and Science. This “segregational illness” does not align with the teachings of Islam; it is a mindset influenced by foreign ideologies.

Even leaders within Christianity in the mid-twentieth century recognized the contributions of scholars like Ibn Sina⁸ during the Golden Islamic Age, which were made through Islamic channels. However, due to a failure to perceive the Qur'an in its true light, they distanced the Qur'an from Science, labeling it as “secular” versus “non-secular.”

This perspective was introduced to the Muslim community. The colonial powers found it advantageous and thus strongly supported this distorted viewpoint.

Religion provides us with the impetus to engage in research and examination to defend our beliefs. This responsibility weighs particularly heavy on Muballighin, Sheikhs, and those who address congregations, as they have a significant role in shaping the collective mindset.

At this juncture, Sayyid mentioned various topics he has discussed, such as “Life Planning from an Islamic Perspective,” encompassing aspects like financial management, budgeting, savings, and domestic expenses. Another topic he has addressed is “Efficiency in Muslim Work” (al-Kifa'ah fi al-'Amal al-Islami).

He acknowledged criticism from certain Sheikhs regarding these topics. Some argued that the pulpit

should be reserved exclusively for discussing matters like prayer, fasting, Heaven, and Hell, not practical aspects of life, work, science, or technology. People questioned whether these topics were in line with what Imam Husayn (‘a) gave his life for.

In response, it’s essential to recognize that Imam Husayn (‘a)’s great sacrifice had a singular purpose: to preserve and restore Islam to its true essence and meaning, which had been distorted. People had become overly preoccupied with rituals and traditions. Imam Husayn (‘a)’s message, as he left Madinah, was clear:

“I have only risen to bring about reform (islah) in my grandfather’s Ummah...”

The term islah signifies the act of rectifying what is already present but tainted by falsehood. If the pulpits do not address what is wrong or discuss methods to correct the wrongs that afflict the Ummah (community), how can the process of islah or reformation take place? How can we realize the goal of Imam Husayn (‘a)?

Imam al-Khomeini’s perspective on the development in Iran today across various domains, including economics, healthcare, and resources, high- lights the nation’s ability to undergo reformation despite significant challenges. He attributes this progress to the lessons derived from Ashura and the example set by Imam Husayn (‘a).

Another significant benefit derived from Religion in the life of a human being is ‘Identity’ (al-Hawiyah). The importance of identity, whether at the individual, communal, or national level, is universally recognized. When all the elements that comprise an identity, such as name, gender, parents’ names, date and place of birth, profession, nationality, place of residence, and more, are stripped away, a person may physically exist but remains unrecognized, devoid of identity, essentially a non-entity.

Beyond this foundational level of identity lies a concept known as intima (affiliation or belonging) in Arabic, which pertains to one’s religious affiliation, sect, political party, or group. Religion plays a crucial role in bestowing upon individuals this invaluable aspect of their identity.

The late Imam Khomeini once stated that to understand the true value of something you possess, examine how your adversaries regard it. If they seek to take it away from you, it underscores its immense value. Colonizers, in particular, are most apprehensive of individuals who possess strong identities and affiliations with Religion, history, lineage, culture, and tradition. They can only exert control over such people after first eradicating their identities.

Secularism has significantly contributed to the gradual erosion of cherished traditions and culture, affecting areas such as cuisine, attire, language, and lifestyles.

Religion, with its ability to provide this invaluable facet of identity, has the potential to safeguard against external influences encroaching on our cultural heritage. However, the disconnect between today’s youth

and Religion raises questions about why this detachment exists and what steps can be taken to reintegrate Religion into their lives. We will explore this topic in our forthcoming session, God willing.

End of Lecture 5

Lecture 6 – Muharram 1444

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

In the name of Allah, the All-Merciful, the Ever-Merciful

Recap of Lecture 5

Patience is vital for navigating life's challenges, with struggles being a natural part of growth. The journey from birth, similar to a butterfly emerging from its pupa, showcases this. In child-rearing, relying heavily on walking aids for toddlers or not addressing a baby's cries can impede their natural progression. There's a mention of affluent families sometimes overlooking the importance of teaching life skills. Historical figures, especially the Prophets, epitomize the essence of true patience amidst immense adversities.

Ayat. Shahid Mutahhari differentiates between two types of patience: al-sabr al-ijabi (active patience) and al-sabr al-salbi (passive surrender), with religion advocating for the former.

The lecture dispels the notion that religion impedes scientific advancement. Instead, it has been a catalyst for it. Ayat. Ja'far Subhani uses an analogy to highlight that faith in a Creator intensifies the human drive to understand the Universe. Religion not only emphasizes worship but also promotes studying nature, leading to scientific discoveries.

A misinterpretation of religious teachings in history may have caused a perceived rift between religion and science. This chasm, accentuated by secularism, doesn't resonate with true Islamic principles. The lecture emphasized the symbiotic relationship between patience, religious teachings, and the pursuit of scientific knowledge.

Today's discussion will explore the question of why some young people seem detached from Religion or what factors contribute to this detachment. However, it's essential to clarify that our topic is relevant to people of all ages, not just the youth.

Firstly, it is important to note that youth represent a particularly vulnerable segment of society and are often the primary target for those seeking to lead individuals astray.

Secondly, youth are characterized by their intense desires and vivid imaginations, making this stage of

life a period of heightened curiosity and exploration. Furthermore, many young people tend to be impulsive, inclined to challenge norms, and unafraid to take daring actions. They often act without thorough consideration and may easily be swayed by new experiences, taking risks and delving into unfamiliar territories. Therefore, although we are specifically discussing youth, the solutions we will explore are relevant to anyone facing similar challenges.

Returning to the reasons or causes for the distancing of individuals from Religion, we can classify these factors into the following categories:

Elements of Child Upbringing (‘awamilu al-tarbiyati): This constitutes a fundamental factor lying within the hands of guardians, especially parents. During the crucial early formative years of a child’s life, their character and personality begin to take shape. Unfortunately, we have, to a significant extent, faltered in this aspect, leaving room for foreign ideologies to infiltrate and take root. It is essential to acknowledge our own shortcomings rather than habitually blaming others, as the saying goes, “When you point one finger at another, three are pointing back at yourself.”

Imam ‘Ali (‘a) imparted his wisdom to his elder son, Imam Hassan (‘a), saying, “The heart of a child is like an uncultivated piece of land, and whatever is sown there shall be reaped.” He likened a child’s heart to a clean page with no writing on it, emphasizing that parents should be the first to inscribe the right values upon it. Failing to do so can result in a state known as Jahl bil Din – Ignorance of Religion – in a child.

Regrettably, some among us have not fulfilled this responsibility correctly or adequately. It is disheartening to witness children as young as a few months old being entrusted to care centers where they are raised by individuals who may hold different religious beliefs, thoughts, and values. This highlights the importance of a foundational upbringing that aligns with one’s core values and traditions. In contrast, we recognize the pivotal role played by Lady Zaynab (‘a), the sister of Imam Husayn (‘a), in Karbala and beyond. Her unwavering strength in the face of unimaginable suffering, her courage, patience, and wisdom, all bear witness to the fruits of her pure upbringing.

When we examine the life stories of esteemed scholars from the past, we often discover that most, if not all of them, received their foundational lessons in Religion within the confines of their homes, in the embrace of their mothers, under the guidance of their fathers, grandparents, or other family members. They imbibed the Qur’an, the fundamentals of Islam, morals, etiquette, and more at an early age.

Consider the illustrious example of our revered teacher, the late Sheikh ‘Abdillahi Nasir. His initial Qur’anic education was provided by his mother, and his religious studies were nurtured by his father.

The distinguished Egyptian poet Ahmad Shawqi Bek aptly stated, “A Mother is like a complete Madrasah. She can mold an entire nation to become tayyib, with good, strong roots – pure and virtuous.”

However, a pressing concern arises: do we, as modern-day parents, possess the fundamental knowledge of Islam necessary to educate our children effectively before they venture beyond the boundaries of our homes?

At this juncture, the significance of fostering a 'reading culture' in our children was underscored. Establishing a home library can acquaint children with books and nurture a habit of reading. It is encouraged that children always carry a book with them, even if they may not always read it, as the presence of a book can have a profound impact.

As previously mentioned, the primary duty of parents is to plant the seeds of Islamic values in the uncharted territory of a child's mind. Equally important is understanding the type of education and the ideologies to which the child will be exposed. While schools may offer Islamic Religious Education (IRE), it is imperative for parents to be aware of the ideologies and mindsets to which their children are being exposed.

In the context of students pursuing Islamic studies abroad, it becomes paramount for them to exercise caution regarding the content and teachings they encounter. It is essential to discern and critically evaluate the knowledge being imparted to them.

So far, we have examined the factors that profoundly influence a child's identity and their connection with Religion. Among the causes contributing to the youth's growing detachment from Religion, the first and most significant is the environment in which our children are raised. This environment can be categorized into three main sections:

- 1) The Institution of the Home and Family: The foundation of a child's upbringing starts within the family unit.
- 2) The Institution of Education: Educational institutions play a critical role in shaping a child's worldview.
- 3) Tools of Communication (Social Media and Similar Platforms): The creators of these communication platforms have exploited the vulnerabilities of youth, particularly their sexual desires, and have inundated them with the moral decay that we witness in society today. They have effectively enslaved the minds, bodies, and emotions of many young individuals. Sadly, there is often limited control, censorship, or filtering of this content, making it easily accessible to everyone.

What often masquerades as entertainment through television series is, in reality, content that profoundly influences human logic and behavior. It lodges itself in a corner of the human mind, clouding one's ability to distinguish between right and wrong. The Qur'an addresses this issue in Surah Al-Baqarah (2:11 & 2:12).

The esteemed Lebanese scholar late Sayyid Muhammad Husayn Fadhlullah, in his book "Al-'alaqatu al-zawjiyyatu" (Marital Relations), analyzes the reasons behind unsuccessful marriages. He elucidates

how young individuals entering into the institution of marriage for the first time often look to their parents as role models.

For instance, if a young bride has been exposed to media content of questionable quality through certain entertainment programs in her family's household, she may carry these influences into her new marriage. Similarly, if a young man has witnessed abusive behavior from his father, he might erroneously consider such behavior as normal in his relationship with his wife.

Thus, the previous discussion has highlighted the crucial role of child upbringing as one of the primary factors leading children and youth away from Religion. The second cause to be explored is:

We must also consider the psychological aspect of a child's development ('Awamilu nafsiyya). In addition to formal education, it is vital for children to acquire fundamental life skills such as leadership, administration, management, and business acumen. It's important to recognize that the idea of women working and earning income is not a recent development. Historically, women have made significant contributions to family income, primarily within the home environment, where they utilized their skill and expertise while simultaneously tending to household and childcare responsibilities.

A child's mind within the home can be likened to fertile soil – whatever is nourished into it will shape the corresponding psychology. If a child is expected to follow religious laws and rules without being given an understanding of the “why” or the freedom to ask questions, they may grow up harboring resentment towards that religion.

Conversely, a child who is provided with a clear comprehension of their religion is more likely to develop a positive psychological connection to it. To achieve this, it is crucial for parents to be knowledgeable, although they need not possess knowledge about everything. When a child poses a question to which the parents do not have the answer, it should not be dismissed but rather directed to someone more knowledgeable.

End of Lecture 6

Lecture 7 – Muharram 1444

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

In the name of Allah, the All-Merciful, the Ever-Merciful

Recap of Lecture 6

In this insightful lecture, the focus was on the significance of Religion, particularly for the youth. It began by highlighting the benefits of Religion, including hope, responsibility, and identity, which are crucial for

both personal and societal development.

A significant part of the discussion centered on why some youths feel disconnected from Religion. It was emphasized that the environment, including family, education, and media, plays a crucial role in shaping a child's religious perspective. Parents were identified as pivotal in guiding children towards understanding their faith, rather than just practicing it blindly.

The lecture also touched on the impact of media on young minds and the importance of parental guidance in this area. Additionally, it explored the role of psychological development in religious understanding, emphasizing the need for life skills alongside formal education.

In conclusion, the lecture highlighted the importance of a supportive environment and active parental involvement in fostering a deeper connection between youth and Religion.

Lecture 7

In the broader discourse on "The Role of Religion in a Human Being's Life," a critical aspect that demands attention pertains specifically to the Muslim community – namely, the growing disconnection of some young Muslims from their faith. This phenomenon presents a significant challenge and prompts an exploration into the underlying causes that contribute to this spiritual and cultural disconnect.

To unravel this complex issue, the speaker categorized the underlying causes into the following groups:

The Upbringing of Children

Within this category, we have identified three critical facets that demand our attention:

- 1) The Home and Family Institution: It is essential to introspect and ascertain where we may have faltered within the family unit. What factors have contributed to the erosion of religious values within our homes?
- 2) The Educational Institution: Another significant arena to scrutinize is the role of religion in our educational institutions. How prominently does religion feature within the framework of our educational system? What impact does this have on our youth's understanding and practice of their faith?
- 3) The Tools of Social Communication: Lastly, the pervasive influence of the media and the world of entertainment cannot be underestimated, particularly on children and young adults. We must evaluate how these mediums have contributed to the inundation of negative influences and threats to our religious values.

These three areas represent the foundation upon which we will explore the multifaceted relationship between religion and the lives of individuals, particularly our youth.

Today, our ongoing dialogue dives deeper into the reasons why a significant portion of our youth finds themselves distanced from religion.

Psychological Factors

The psychological dimension holds a crucial place in understanding the disconnection between youth and religion. It stems from the negative repercussions experienced by children and adolescents due to a lack of proper guidance or the absence of positive role models during their formative years. These factors can be elucidated as follows:

- 1) **Parental Approach:** One significant misstep that many parents inadvertently make, driven by a sense of overprotection and affection, is treating their children as if they were much younger than they actually are, even when they reach the ages of 13 or 14 years. Instead of encouraging them to question, think independently, and take on age-appropriate responsibilities, they tend to stifle their growth. A well-known Islamic tradition offers guidance in this regard: During the first 7 years, a child is considered as a king, in the subsequent 7 years, they need guidance, discipline, and correction when they err. By the age of 14, a child is deemed mature enough to participate in family matters and decision-making.
- 2) **Family Environment:** The environment within the family home plays a pivotal role in shaping a child's psyche. The behavior of family members toward one another, the values upheld within the household, and the overall atmosphere significantly impact a child's outlook on life and their relationship with religion.

In addition to the home environment, religious leaders and school teachers also exert considerable influence on a child's psychological development. Misguided messages from religious figures or mistreatment by educators can leave deep, lasting scars on a child's psyche, potentially affecting them throughout their lives.

Regrettably, children often form an unfavorable perception of religion due to the impressions conveyed by religious leaders and preachers. These figures sometimes fail to inspire curiosity or enthusiasm in young minds and don't encourage them to explore religion in a positive light or consider pursuing the noble path of a muballigh (a preacher or advocate of Islam). Instead, they may perceive religious leaders as stern, unapproachable individuals who seem disinterested in sports or global development. This is a stark contrast to what these leaders should be as representatives of the beautiful religion for our youth.

Many young people fear that embracing religion will deprive them of their youthful experiences, causing them to distance themselves from it. Therefore, it is imperative for those in religious positions to present religion in a more relatable and palatable manner, especially to the youth. It's unreasonable to expect a 16-year-old to undertake the same rigorous religious practices as an elderly person.

Sheikh 'Abbas al-Qummi, in his work *Mafatih ul-Jinan*, highlights an important perspective. He emphasizes that even on significant nights like Qadr, which involve numerous rituals and prayers, if

children or youth have exams, it is essential for them to prioritize their studies. Islam places a high value on the acquisition and advancement of knowledge, and this should take precedence over religious rituals during such times. It's a balancing act that recognizes the importance of both religious devotion and educational pursuits for our young generation.

Another common misconception within religion is the misguided belief that one should forsake their normal life duties and responsibilities in favor of a life solely centered on religious rituals, all in the name of seeking proximity to God. This represents a skewed set of priorities that Islam vehemently condemns. In reality, a significant form of worship ('ibadah) in Islam is the act of working and assuming responsibilities for one's family and close ones. Numerous traditions from the (the household of the Prophet) and the Holy Prophet himself underline the manifold virtues of this form of worship. There is even a tradition that likens going out to earn a lawful livelihood to taking up the sword for jihad, emphasizing its spiritual significance.

Islam, as a religion, has at times been mischaracterized as one that encourages dependence on charity, alms, and donations for even the most minor needs, rather than advocating honest labor and lawful means to secure one's sustenance. This distortion misrepresents the essence of Islam, which holds the principle of self-reliance and honorable work in high regard.

From the preceding discussion, it becomes evident how the psychology of young individuals is significantly influenced by representatives of religion who:

- a) Portray an unpleasant demeanor, appearing stern and unapproachable.
- b) Provide misguided guidance concerning priorities and responsibilities.
- c) Tend to offer standardized advice, treating a 16-year-old in the same manner as a 60-year-old, disregarding the unique challenges that each age group faces.

An essential attribute that religious representatives should possess when interacting with individuals of all backgrounds is exemplified by the qualities sought by Prophet Moses when dealing with Pharaoh (Fir'aun) and those bestowed upon the Holy Prophet (S) – the quality of Shahr Sadr, which literally translates to “expanded chest.” This quality encompasses excellent tolerance, forbearance, patience, and politeness, allowing one to respond with respect rather than reacting in a confrontational manner.

In today's era, the significance of this quality becomes even more pronounced as religious leaders often confront challenging questions from the youth. These inquiries may pertain to profound topics such as the justice of Allah (s.w.t.), the necessity of following authorities in Islamic Laws and Jurisprudence (Taqlid), and similar issues. While these questions can be answered with wisdom and knowledge, they require the utmost patience in their handling. There is nothing more detrimental to a young person than being deprived of a rational response, particularly when they are confronted by a group of non-believer friends. A leader's inability to provide the right answers can adversely affect a youth's relationship with

their religion.

Taqlid, or the practice of following an expert in a specific field, is a concept that permeates every aspect of our lives. We follow medical experts for health, engineering experts for technology, and business experts for financial guidance, recognizing the importance of expertise in our worldly pursuits. However, following experts in religious laws and rules presents a challenge, despite the crucial understanding that these divine laws, set forth by the Creator, are in perfect harmony with our physical and spiritual well-being.

Historical and Political Factors

A notable factor contributing to the divide between generations is the rapid pace of progress in fields like science, technology, and education. When a young individual pursues further education abroad or moves from a rural environment to an urban one, they find themselves immersed in entirely different developmental contexts and lifestyles. Naturally, they begin to make comparisons and raise questions. Having witnessed a different level of development and progress in their new environment, they may re-evaluate the role of religion, particularly when they encounter the Western notion of separating religion from secularism in the pursuit of progress.

To address these challenges, it becomes imperative to introduce additional subjects within our educational institutions, such as Hawzas, that provide insight into Western civilizations. Just as our students who travel abroad are taught about various civilizations, including Islam, from the perspectives of their host countries, it is equally crucial for our students to gain knowledge about the history and development of foreign civilizations. The glittering facade of progress should not blind our youth; they must also be exposed to the other side of the coin, which reveals the sacrifices made in terms of human values, family relationships, child-rearing, and more.

Furthermore, they should be made aware of the negative aspects prevalent in these societies, including cases of suicide, depression, drug abuse, crime, promiscuity, and sexual violence. This balanced understanding will equip our youth with a broader perspective on the world and help them make informed choices about their own beliefs and values.

Social media, despite its benefits, also exposes individuals to a realm of potential harm. The creation of this virtual world, brimming with emotions and feelings, often stems from a deficiency in genuine human connections. In this digital landscape, the tangible and authentic human touch is conspicuously absent, replaced by fabricated and misleading online personas.

Many people, especially the youth, have grown accustomed to showcasing superficial and inauthentic aspects of their lives on social media platforms. This digital escapade has pulled them away from the genuine realities and authentic challenges of life.

To conclude this discourse, a valuable concept for a Muslim to hold is the understanding that their

religion belongs to them not merely as an inheritance from their ancestors, but as a result of genuine comprehension and acceptance. It is essential to recognize that having questions and doubts about one's religion can be a healthy part of the journey towards certainty. However, these inquiries and deliberations should be rooted in evidence to ensure that one does not stray from the path while seeking the truth.

The fortress that can protect an individual from wandering, even in their thoughts, is Taqwa – a deep sense of God-consciousness. This quality acts as a moderator between a person's intellect and their spiritual steadfastness, preventing them from justifying assumptions as truths when they are not. It guides them on a path of authenticity and certainty in their faith.

End of Lecture 7

Lecture 8 – Muharram 1444

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

In the name of Allah, the All-Merciful, the Ever-Merciful

Recap of Lecture 7

In the ongoing discussion about “The Role of Religion in a Human Being's Life,” the focus has shifted to why and how some Muslim youth have become disconnected from their faith. The discussion can be summarized into three main categories of causes:

Upbringing of Children

The Home and Family Institution: The family's role in instilling religious values is crucial, and it's important to reflect on how families may have contributed to the erosion of these values.

The Educational Institution: The role of religion in the educational system needs examination to understand its impact on youth's understanding and practice of faith.

The Tools of Social Communication: The influence of media and entertainment, particularly on children and young adults, has contributed to negative influences and threats to religious values.

Psychological Factors

Parental Approach: Parents sometimes stifle their children's growth by treating them as younger than they are. Encouraging them to question, think independently, and take on age-appropriate responsibilities is crucial.

Family Environment: The family environment significantly impacts a child's outlook on life and their relationship with religion.

Influence of Religious Leaders and Educators: Misguided messages from religious leaders or mistreatment by educators can leave lasting scars on a child's psyche, potentially affecting them throughout their lives.

Historical and Political Factors

Rapid Pace of Progress: The rapid progress in science, technology, and education can lead young individuals to question the role of religion, especially when they encounter the Western notion of separating religion from secularism in pursuit of progress.

Need for Balanced Education: Introducing subjects that provide insight into Western civilizations and their challenges can help youth make informed choices about their beliefs and values.

Influence of Social Media: Social media, while beneficial, can also lead to superficiality and a disconnect from authentic human connections.

In conclusion, the discourse emphasizes the importance of understanding one's religion through genuine comprehension and acceptance rather than mere inheritance. It encourages questioning and doubt as healthy aspects of faith but advocates rooted in evidence. The concept of Taqwa (God-consciousness) is highlighted as a means to protect one from straying in their faith journey and guiding them towards authenticity and certainty in their beliefs.

Lecture 8

Our focus now shifts to the role of Imam Husayn ('a) in restoring Religion to its original path. However, before delving into this topic, it is imperative to address a fundamental question: Can a Religion be returned to its authentic form merely 50 years after the passing of the Holy Prophet?

When contemplating matters that involve the realm of the human psyche, two distinct scenarios come to light:

1) There exists the possibility that something, on the surface, may appear to align perfectly with our expectations, but upon closer examination, it becomes evident that this is not the case. For instance, certain goods may be presented to us in a manner that seems to meet the expected standards, but in reality, they turn out to be counterfeit. We have observed how stringent some governments are in ensuring that only items that adhere to their regulations and quality standards are allowed into the country.

Similarly, human mindsets can assume varying degrees and standards, and occasionally, they become tainted when it comes to a specific idea or concept, failing to preserve it in its purest form. In this context,

we can draw a parallel to the authentic Islam as brought by the Holy Prophet.

Hence, right after the demise of the Holy Prophet, conflicts emerged stemming from differing mindsets. This gave rise to tumultuous debates within the realm of religion, characterized by mud-slinging, accusations, and insults.

When we analyze the concept of Imamah, it's crucial to understand that it differs significantly from what is commonly associated with the term Caliphate. Imamah encompasses a profound and all-encompassing role, with political leadership and Caliphate represents only a small fraction of its scope.

To elucidate the comprehensive nature of Imamah, consider an analogy involving a tourist visiting our region to immerse themselves in the world of nature, animals, tradition, and culture. As the tourist boards the aircraft, they may have perused in-flight travel magazines offering descriptions of various tourist attractions, hotels, transportation options, and more. This initial information provides them with a basic idea of what to expect.

However, when they arrive and embark on their journey of exploration, is the information from those magazines sufficient to guide them seamlessly through the intricacies involved? Considerations such as safety, language barriers, optimal routes, and timing become paramount. In such situations, the tourist relies entirely on the expertise of a local tour guide. The importance of the guide's knowledge and experience cannot be overstated, as it is crucial for a safe and successful journey. This example illustrates the significance of an expert guide, even in the context of a worldly and pleasurable experience.

Hence, in the journey of human life towards the ultimate destination of returning to the Creator, it becomes evident why having perfect guidance, along with the sacred book, is indispensable. In this spiritual voyage of humanity towards the Divine, there is no room for error in leadership and guidance.

This is precisely where the renowned tradition (hadith) of the Holy Prophet (S) known as the 'Hadith of Thaqaalayn' becomes paramount. Before departing from this world, the Prophet conveyed to the believers that he was leaving behind two weighty treasures: the Book of Allah (s.w.t.) and the Prophet's progeny (or Ahl al-Bayt). Those who hold onto these two will find their path guided toward the ultimate destination.

To comprehend how the initial issues regarding Islamic interpretation arose, we must revisit the past. Following the passing of the Holy Prophet, a gap emerged in the interpretation of the Qur'an. It was during this time that religious experts from the Jewish community, such as Ka'b al-Ahbar and 'Abdullah Ibn Salam, who possessed knowledge of the Torah, were invited by the Muslim leadership of the era to provide interpretations of Qur'anic verses. These individuals presented their viewpoints, which, on the surface, appeared intellectually sound but harbored concealed messages that diminished the status of the Holy Prophet

This infiltration represented a 'Jewish' agenda and mindset masquerading as Islam. Authentic Islam became tainted, and various groups interpreted it in their own ways, necessitating the role of Imamah to preserve and guide the faith.

Why is specific Imamah necessary? As previously mentioned, true guidance can only come from those who possess pure insight and understanding, those who interpret the Qur'an as it was intended to be. Allah (s.w.t.) describes such individuals in Surah al-Waqi'ah, 56:79. (Also, refer to Surah al-Ahzab, 33:33 in the Qur'an).

Following the era of the Holy Prophet (S), it was Imam 'Ali ('a) alone who had the courage to invite the people to seek his guidance on any verse of the Qur'an. He would solemnly swear by Allah that there was no verse about which he did not comprehend why it was revealed, when it was revealed, and the circumstances surrounding its revelation. He lamented that within his chest resided a treasury of knowledge, sadly untouched by anyone.

Imam 'Ali ('a) was known for his level of knowledge, to the extent that he claimed to understand and be more familiar with the celestial paths than with those of this world.

In Nahjul Balagha, it is documented that Imam 'Ali ('a) closely followed the Holy Prophet since his youth, much like a young animal follows its mother, nearly tripping over her in its closeness.

Returning to the tumultuous state of the Muslim community shortly after the Holy Prophet, history recounts instances such as Walid al-'Uqba leading prayers while under the influence of alcohol and Friday prayers being conducted on a different day during the time of Mu'awiya Ibn Abi Sufyan. All of this transpired within a relatively short period following the passing of the Holy Prophet. It was during this period that Imam Husayn ('a) expressed his concerns, emphasizing that if the Muslims were to be led by someone like Yazid Ibn Mu'awiya, a person of ill repute, a drunkard, and a murderer of honorable individuals, and if such a person were to be called Amir al-Mu'minin (Leader of the Faithful), then that would signify the end of the genuine Islam that his grandfather had imparted to the people.

2) One of the primary factors contributing to the contamination of Islam is related to a concept known as ma'har. In Arabic, ma'har refers to the outer protective covering of an object, while the object it shields is referred to as jawhar.

[Sayyid recommended that students read Allamah Sheikh Hasan al-Saffar's book "Al-Islam bayna al-ma'hari wa al-jawhari" (Islam between form and essence) to gain a deeper understanding of these two terms.]

To clarify these concepts, the speaker offered a practical example using a coconut. The tough, outer protective shell of the coconut represents the ma'har, while the inner, white flesh it safeguards symbolizes the jawhar. In a more profound sense, this analogy reflects the relationship between a 'form' and an 'essence,' where the presence of both is essential, as one without the other loses its

significance.

Likewise, Islam operates in a similar manner. There exists a 'form' and an 'essence' within its rituals. For instance, in the practice of prayer, fasting, and pilgrimage, there is a form or ma'har:

a) The form of prayer includes ablution, the specific prayer postures, bowing, prostration, recitation, and other prescribed actions. Diligently following this form can ultimately lead an individual to the essence or jauhar of prayer. This essence is eloquently expressed in the Qur'an: Indeed, prayer prohibits immorality and wrongdoing (29:45).

b) The form (ma'har) of fasting involves refraining from food, drink, and physical desires, with the intention of leading individuals to the essence (jawhar) of fasting, which is 'God Consciousness' or Taqwa. The Qur'anic verse states: ***O you who believe! Fasting is prescribed for you, as it was prescribed for those before you, so that you may attain piety (2: 183)***. Piety or Taqwa is the virtue that prevents individuals from engaging in evil or sin and guides them toward goodness.

c) The forms of Pilgrimage (Hajj) encompass various rituals, including wearing the ihram, activities in Mina, Muzdalifah, the stoning of the devils (taghut), circumambulation (tawaf), and sa'y (moving back and forth). Each of these acts carries an essence that is designed to transform individuals on their journey towards their Lord.

Sayyid recounted an incident from the time of Imam Ali Zayn al-'Abidin ('a). It involved a man named Shibli, who had undertaken numerous Hajj pilgrimages. During a conversation about Hajj, Imam inquired whether, while shedding the attire of the material world and donning the two simple pieces of white cloth (ihram), Shibli had ever contemplated that he was discarding the impure garments of worldly vices and adorning himself in purity, moving closer to the Divine. Shibli responded in the negative.

Imam proceeded to inquire whether, during the circumambulation of the Holy Ka'bah, Shibli had resolved never to approach impure and forbid-den places again. Similarly, during the sa'y, did he intend to exert himself in striving toward righteous deeds for the pleasure of Allah (s.w.t.)? And while casting stones at the devils, did he envision it as a symbolic act of eradicating the evil within him, such as greed, arrogance, dishonesty, and unfaithfulness?

Once again, Shibli replied negatively to all of these inquiries. In response, Imam conveyed to him that, in that case, he had only fulfilled the external form (ma'har) of Hajj and had not examined its essence (jawhar). This incident underscores a fundamental teaching of our Imams ('a) – that in any religious ritual, one should not become fixated solely on the external form but should strive for the deeper essence.

Similarly, and most importantly, we must reflect on the core purpose or essence of these gatherings during Muharram. It's possible that we have meticulously observed all the outward forms and rituals, including coming together to mourn the martyrs of Karbala, engaging in lamentations, participating in

processions, attending lectures, and so on. These observances may have extended over a span of a couple of weeks, culminating on the 40th day, also called Arba'in.

However, as we conclude this period of mourning, it's crucial for us to ask ourselves what deeper essence we have extracted from Ashura in response to Imam Husayn's plea: Hal min nasirin yansuruna...? Imam was not seeking help for himself; he was calling for assistance in upholding the values of the religion that his grandfather, the Holy Prophet (S), had conveyed to us.

Many individuals often wonder why there is no noticeable improvement within themselves, despite diligently fulfilling all the obligatory and recommended acts of religion such as prayers, fasting, reciting supplications, and engaging in the remembrance of Allah (s.w.t.). In such moments, there is a suggestion that inner purification is necessary. There may be an issue within the "inner" self, and a process is required to purify the soul. Adhering to the external "forms" of religious practices may be well-executed, but if the essence is neglected, it often fails to bring about true spiritual transformation and reform.

Here's an example illustrating how the essence of Islamic teachings can be overlooked:

Imagine an elderly, impoverished woman sitting on the streets, trying to make a meager living by selling her limited resources, all without resorting to begging. A passerby approaches her, showing an unreasonable reluctance to pay a fair price for her goods, disregarding her dire circumstances. Out of sheer necessity, the elderly woman agrees to sell at a reduced price. Instead of extending a helping hand to alleviate her plight, which would have been the morally right thing to do, the passerby opts for exploitation.

Ironically, this same individual might later tip a waiter at a high-end hotel, who already earns substantially more than the elderly woman on the streets.

Imam Husayn (‘a) lamented that humanity had become enslaved to worldly pursuits. He emphasized that religion had been reduced to mere lip-service, where the outer forms (maḥḥar) took precedence while the essence (jawhar) was lacking. This discrepancy is poignantly illustrated by the fact that while we read about brotherhood in the Qur'an, as mentioned in Surah al-Hujurat (49:10) and Surah Ale Imran (3:103), and listen to sermons on the topic from the pulpit, it often remains absent in our daily lives.

Consider two individuals, both devout in performing mandatory and recommended prayers and acts of worship. However, their behavior towards family members and others may be deplorable. Imam Husayn (‘a) reminds us that religion is not solely about the act of performing prayers; it's about implementing the values and lessons that prayers teach us. Our religious practices should not be confined to the walls of mosques; they should be manifested through our actions in all aspects of our lives.

It is the failure to put into practice the true teachings of religion that led to the tragic event of Muslims killing the Imam, fully aware that they were taking the lives of the beloved children of the Holy Prophet.

‘Umar Ibn Sa’d possessed a deep understanding of who Imam Husayn (‘a) was and how dearly the Holy Prophet loved him. The Prophet’s sayings were clear on this matter:

“Husayn is from me, and I am from Husayn.” “Hassan and Husayn are the chiefs of the youths of Paradise.”

‘Umar Ibn Sa’d had witnessed the profound love and bond between the Prophet and Imam Husayn (‘a). However, on the Day of Ashura, when Imam Husayn (‘a) asked him if he realized who he had come to kill, ‘Umar

Ibn Sa’d responded that he had been ordered to carry out this heinous act and would be rewarded by Yazid with the coveted land of Raiy. This illustrates the twisted state of faith at the time.

Hujr Ibn ‘Adi, a close companion of Imam ‘Ali (‘a), met a tragic end when he was murdered by Mu’awiyah. His only offense was refusing to curse Imam ‘Ali. A man once visited Hujr Ibn ‘Adi’s grave and was overcome with grief. When asked why he was weeping, he explained that Hujr had been killed by Mu’awiyah (R.A.) for refusing to curse Imam. This highlights the absurdity of the mentality prevalent at the time, where the murderer was referred to with the honorific title R.A. (Radhiya Allahu ‘anhu.), meaning “may God be pleased with him.”

The state of the people demanded a profound awakening, and Imam Husayn (‘a) initiated an awakening that was not intended for immediate reform but was meant to ignite a perpetual flame in the hearts of believers, urging them to resist the Yazids of every era.

Imam Husayn (‘a)’s crucial and vigilant message to the believers, whether in the year 61 AH or the centuries that followed, was crystal clear: never allow Islam, brought by the Holy Prophet (S), to be tainted by the likes of Yazid. To ignite this flame of awareness, Imam Husayn recognized the necessity of making the ultimate sacrifice.

At that time, Yazid had already been declared the Khalifah of the Muslim Ummah, and orders were issued to extract the oath of allegiance from the people in Madinah, particularly from the family of the Holy Prophet. If Husayn refused, the directive was to kill him and present his head to Yazid in Syria.

Understanding that his martyrdom in Madinah would limit the reach of his sacrifice and message, Imam Husayn (‘a) made the difficult decision to depart from his homeland, accompanied by his family and a small group of 72 loyal companions.

That night, Imam Husayn (‘a) went to his grandfather’s grave to bid a tearful farewell. As he wept, exhaustion overcame him, and in his dream, he beheld the Holy Prophet Muhammad. The Prophet conveyed to him that he held a lofty position in Paradise, attainable only through martyrdom.

On the fateful Day of Ashura, as Imam Husayn (‘a) faced martyrdom, he began with the words “Bismillahi wa ‘ala millati Rasul Allah...” (In the name of Allah and following the way of the Messenger of

Allah) and raised his hands to Allah, affirming that he had sacrificed not only his own life but also the lives of (most of) his children and companions for the sake of reforming the Ummah and preserving the true essence of Islam.

Our duty can never mirror the kind of Jihad Imam Husayn (‘a) undertook; rather, our struggle lies in the Jihad al-nafs, the battle within ourselves, the battle between truth and falsehood. It is a battle against the influence of Iblis (Satan). In this internal struggle, we can strive to become like Imam Husayn and wholeheartedly proclaim:

“Labbayka ya Aba ‘Abdillah, Labbayka ya Husayn.”

End of Lecture 8 and Final

[1.](#) This sentiment is commonly associated with the expectations or principles described in narrations related to the followers of the Ahl al-Bayt (‘a) in Shi’a Islam. (Ed.)^{[1][2]}

[2.](#) Editor’s note: Islamic texts offer instances suggesting that under unique circumstances, prostrating before another might be deemed acceptable, especially if it’s in line with divine directives and symbolizes deep respect. The episode of Prophet Yusuf serves as a pertinent illustration:

“And he raised his parents upon the throne and they (all) fell down in prostration before him, and he said: O my father! this is the explanation of my former dream; my Lord has indeed made it a reality (12:100).”^{[1][2]}

[3.](#) Editor’s note: The Khawarij, or Kharijites, were a group that emerged during the time of Imam ‘Ali (‘a) Ibn Abi Talib. The term “Khawarij” comes from the Arabic root “kharaja,” which means “to go out” or “to exit,” because they seceded from the main body of Muslims due to their radical and strict interpretation of Islam. The Khawarij’s emergence is typically traced back to the aftermath of the Battle of Siffin (657 CE), a major conflict between Imam ‘Ali (‘a) and Mu’awiyah I, the governor of Syria. The battle ended in a controversial way with an arbitration that some of ‘Ali’s followers saw as compromising the principles of Islam and the authority of the Caliph. Those who rejected the arbitration declared that “judgment belongs only to Allah,” opposed ‘Ali’s decision to accept it, and subsequently left his camp. They developed extreme and rigorous beliefs, including the idea that any Muslim who committed a grave sin or disagreed with their interpretation was an apostate and should be killed. They also believed in the right of any pious Muslim to become the leader of the Muslim community, opposing the notion of a caliphate based on lineage or nomination.^{[1][2]}

[4.](#) Editor’s note: The philosopher commonly known as “Kent” in English references is Immanuel Kant, a central figure of modern philosophy. He made significant contributions to various branches of philosophy, including epistemology, ethics, and aesthetics. His critical philosophy, particularly as outlined in his works such as the “Critique of Pure Reason,” “Critique of Practical Reason,” and “Critique of the Power of Judgment,” has had a profound and lasting impact on Western philosophical thought.^{[1][2]}

[5.](#) Editor’s note: The speaker is most likely referring to Jeremy Rodell who is known for his involvement with secular and humanist thought. He is associated with the British Humanist Association and is recognized for his contributions to discussions and debates on secularism, humanism, and the role of religion in society.^{[1][2]}

[6.](#) Editor’s note: These refer to different Sufi orders, which are spiritual paths or brotherhoods within Islam, each named after their respective founders and characterized by their unique teachings and practices.^{[1][2]}

[7.](#) Editor’s note: This statement by the speaker highlights a fundamental principle of resilience and adaptive success. It suggests that success isn’t defined by a smooth, untroubled path, but rather by one’s ability to navigate through difficulties and use them as stepping stones for growth. The notion of transforming challenges into opportunities is central to many personal development and leadership philosophies. It encourages a mindset that views obstacles not as insurmountable barriers, but as catalysts for learning, innovation, and improvement.^{[1][2]}

8. Editor's note: Ibn Sina (980–1037), also known in the West as Avicenna, was a Persian polymath and one of the most significant physicians, astronomers, thinkers, and writers of the Islamic Golden Age. He is most renowned for his works in philosophy and medicine, particularly “The Book of Healing” and “The Canon of Medicine,” which were pivotal texts in both the Islamic world and in Europe for several centuries. Ibn Sina’s contributions extended beyond medicine and philosophy to include astronomy, alchemy, geography, and psychology. His works synthesized vast amounts of knowledge from a variety of cultural and intellectual traditions, including Greek, Roman, Islamic, and Persian. His legacy in the development of modern sciences and philosophy is profound, making him a central figure in the history of medicine and a pivotal thinker in philosophical thought. 📖📚

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SHARES

Part 3: Through the Shadows of the Story of Karbala

Lecture 1 – Muharram 1443

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

In the name of Allah, the All-Merciful, the Ever-Merciful

The lecture opens with a profound exploration of the role of narratives, or qissah, in Islam, probing whether these stories are simple tales or possess deeper spiritual and moral significance for Muslims. It highlights how these narratives serve as guides toward the Akhirah (Hereafter), demonstrating the vital link between storytelling and spiritual growth.

Attention then shifts to the complex and emotionally charged narrative of Karbala. The discussion acknowledges the difficulty in fully comprehending and articulating the events of Karbala within the limited scope of sessions or majalis (gatherings). Instead of a detailed analysis, the session opts to explore the “shadows” or subtle impacts of Karbala, focusing on extracting lessons from its nuances and broader implications.

The role of the Holy Qur’an in interpreting such narratives is then woven into the discussion. Turning to the Qur’an provides a foundational guide for exploring stories imbued with themes of nobility, revolution, sacrifice, love, and affliction—themes that are prominently featured in the Karbala narrative. This guidance is vital for both Madrasah students and others seeking deeper insights from historical and religious narratives.

A central point of the discussion is the annual retelling of the Karbala story during Muharram. Skepticism from outside the Madrasah community regarding the purpose of this repetition is addressed, challenging attendees to appreciate the value of ritualistic storytelling. This practice serves to reinforce moral values and strengthen communal identity, ensuring that the lessons of history are remembered and continue to resonate throughout the years.

Reference is made to Ayat. Ja'fari Subhani's scholarly work on the Qur'an, particularly concerning the structure and thematic divisions within the sacred text. According to Subhani, the Qur'an is divided into three principal sections, each serving a unique purpose and delivering distinct types of knowledge and guidance to the believers.

The first section, referred to as 'Aqa'id (Ideology), addresses the core beliefs and the ideological foundation that Muslims are expected to uphold. This includes discussions on creed and the moral and knowledge-based tenets essential to a Muslim's faith. Such a focus underscores the importance of a strong ideological grounding in navigating both personal spirituality and communal religious life.

The second section, Qawanin wa al-Ahkam (Laws and Rules), details the Shari'ah laws that govern daily Muslim life. This includes directives on worship – prayer, fasting, Hajj, and Zakat – as well as social and economic interactions like trade, marriage, and inheritance. This segment of the Qur'an provides the practical framework necessary for organizing both individual actions and societal norms in accordance with Islamic principles.

The third section, Qasas al-Anbiya' (Stories of the Prophets), contains narratives of the prophets and their interactions with both followers and adversaries. These stories not only serve to impart moral and spiritual lessons but also demonstrate the challenges faced by the prophets and the perseverance they exhibited. This narrative approach helps followers understand complex theological and ethical concepts through relatable and compelling storytelling.

By highlighting that one-third of the Qur'an is devoted to these narratives, the significance of Qasas al-Anbiya' in the Islamic tradition is emphasized. The inclusion of stories involving not just the prophets but also their opponents and other non-prophetic figures illustrate the comprehensive nature of the Qur'anic discourse, offering lessons from various perspectives.

The discussion elucidates the pivotal role that stories play within the guidance system revealed by Allah (s.w.t.), particularly in the Qur'an. It addresses the critical question of why these stories are repeated annually, especially during religious observances and gatherings. By referring back to the Qur'an, the source of divine guidance, the lecturer underscores the instructional purpose of these stories, which comprise a significant portion of the sacred text.

Allah (s.w.t.) has emphasized the importance of these stories, a sentiment echoed by scholars across all Islamic schools of thought. Ayat. Ja'fari Subhani's observation that the collective works discussing Qur'anic stories would fill a vast library highlights the extensive scholarly engagement with these

narratives. These stories are not merely recounted for their historical value; they serve as profound lessons in thought, principles, and spiritual reflection, designed to soften the soul and guide the faithful.

Focus then shifts to discuss the objectives of storytelling in the Qur'an. Each story, whether it is the Isra' and Mi'raj, the beginning of prophethood, or a significant religious event like Karbala, is recounted with specific goals in mind. These goals are essential for both the narrator and the audience, providing a framework for reflection and evaluation of spiritual progress following religious gatherings.

In this context, the effectiveness of a gathering is not solely judged by attendance or the eloquence of the speakers. While these aspects are noteworthy, they are not the ultimate objectives. Instead, the true goal lies in the impact of these gatherings on the attendees' spiritual and moral growth. Actions such as preparing venues, offering charity, and other forms of service are recognized as valuable contributions that align with the broader objective of reviving and reinforcing communal and spiritual values.

This perspective encourages a goal-oriented approach to religious gatherings, emphasizing the importance of deriving tangible spiritual benefits that extend beyond the immediate context of the event. Such an approach not only enhances individual faith but also strengthens communal bonds through shared religious and moral aspirations.

The fundamental objective of the narratives within the Qur'an, as outlined in the lecture, is to impart *al-durus wa al-'ibar* – lessons and reflections – that transcend the confines of a traditional classroom setting. These lessons are meant to offer practical insights applicable to everyday life, fostering personal growth and moral development. By embedding these narratives, Allah (s.w.t.) aims to guide the faithful through examples of both human frailties and divine virtues.

The stories of the prophets serve as a mirror reflecting common human conflicts and moral dilemmas. The lecture points specifically to the story of Yusuf ('a) and his brothers, which is not just a tale of sibling rivalry and jealousy but a profound lesson on the destructive nature of envy and the resilience of faith. This narrative illustrates that even those raised in prophetic households are not immune to base emotions, highlighting the universal challenge of overcoming personal vices.

Furthermore, the story of Hurr during the events of Karbala exemplifies redemption and the power of conscience. Initially aligned with the forces opposing Imam Husayn ('a), Hurr's eventual repentance and shift of allegiance underscore a pivotal Qur'anic theme: true faith is demonstrated through actions, particularly when one is tested. His transformation from adversary to ally, driven by his recognition of truth, serves as a potent reminder of the capacity for redemption.

This narrative contrasts sharply with the example of Iblis, whose downfall was precipitated by envy and pride despite his high standing and initial proximity to the divine. The dichotomy between Hurr's redemption and Iblis' fall illustrates that true honor is not conferred by rank or piety alone but by one's choices and actions in moments of moral testing¹.

The discussion dives deeply into the themes of envy, arrogance, and the profound lessons embedded within the Qur'anic narratives, particularly emphasizing the consistent messaging across different prophetic stories. The reference to Iblis's refusal to prostrate to Adam ('a), citing his creation from fire as a marker of superiority, serves as a foundational example of how envy and pride can lead to one's downfall. This story is particularly poignant as it mirrors contemporary issues where individuals often compare themselves to others, fostering internal conflicts and spiritual crises.

Allah (s.w.t.) says,

“Laqad kana fi qasasihim ‘ibaratun li uli al-albab – In their history verily there is a lesson for men of understanding” (Qur’an, 12:111).

This verse highlights that there are profound lessons ('ibaratun) for those endowed with understanding (uli al-albab) in these stories. The lecture encourages participants to reflect on these narratives and envision themselves in similar predicaments to derive valuable lessons. This act of placing oneself within the narrative framework is not just an exercise in empathy but a tool for self-evaluation and spiritual growth.

In the context of Prophet Yusuf ('a) and his brothers, the lecturer explores the dynamics of envy and divine selection, which transcends mere familial ties and explores into the realm of divine wisdom. This story, like many others, is used to illustrate the dangers of jealousy and the often unpredictable nature of God's choices, encouraging believers to trust in divine wisdom rather than succumb to base instincts.

The story of Karbala is particularly emphasized for its multi-layered lessons, as captured in the Qur'anic exhortation to reflect and think deeply about the stories recounted:

Fa'qsusi al-qasas la'allahum yatafakkarun – narrate the stories so that they may reflect (Qur'an, 7:176).

This directive accentuates the purpose of narrative gatherings – not just to recount events but to stimulate profound contemplation about one's beliefs, morals, and behaviors in light of Islamic teachings.

The third goal of the stories in the Qur'an, scholars say, is the unity of the prophets' mission, as discussed by Ayat. Sayyid Muhammad Baqir Sadr in his book *Ahl al-Bayt: Tanawwu' Adwar wa Wahdat Hadaif*. Despite the diverse contexts and challenges each prophet faced, their stories converge on the universal themes of steadfastness, moral integrity, and unwavering commitment to God's message. This unity in diversity exemplifies how different roles and narratives within the Qur'an all serve a cohesive purpose, guiding believers toward a harmonized understanding of their faith and responsibilities.

The discussion explores into the diverse roles assumed by various prophets throughout Islamic narratives, highlighting how each, despite their different life circumstances and societal roles, adhered to

the same divine mission of worshiping and serving Allah (s.w.t.). This consistency underscores the core message of monotheism and obedience that is central to Islamic theology.

Prophets like Nuh, Ibrahim, Yusuf, 'Isa, and Muhammad (peace be upon them all) exemplified different aspects of leadership and servitude, yet their lives revolved around the fundamental principle of Tawhid – the oneness of Allah. Prophet Nuh as a peacemaker, Prophet Ibrahim as a ruler, and Prophet Yusuf as a minister, each tailored their divine message to fit their roles within their communities, yet their ultimate goal remained unchanged.

This thematic unity is reiterated in the Qur'an, as mentioned in Surah al-Anbiya', verse 25, where Allah (s.w.t.) proclaims that all messengers were instructed with the same message:

“La ilaha illa ana fa'buduni – There is no deity except Me, so worship Me.” (21:25 & 20:14).

This message is a constant reminder that the essence of all prophetic missions is to draw people towards the worship of the one true God.

In Surah al-Nahl, 16:36, the message is expanded upon by stating that every nation was sent a messenger to promote the worship of Allah (s.w.t.) and to avoid Taghut (false deities or tyranny), emphasizing the universal scope of this divine directive. Each prophet adapted their approach based on their context but maintained the same overarching objective.

The stories of these prophets serve not only as moral and spiritual lessons but also as sources of comfort and reinforcement for believers facing adversity. Surah Hud, verse 120, illustrates this supportive purpose by declaring that these narratives were meant to strengthen the hearts of the Prophet Muhammad (S) and his followers. Through the example of Prophet Nuh ('a), who persisted in his mission for 950 years despite minimal success, believers are taught the virtues of patience, perseverance, and unwavering faith in the face of rejection and hardship.

This unity of purpose across different prophetic missions and the repeated emphasis on core theological themes within the Qur'an both instruct and fortify believers. They illustrate how, regardless of one's circumstances or societal role, the commitment to divine command and the perseverance in faith are paramount. These stories encourage believers to reflect on their own lives and challenges, drawing strength from the divine examples set by the prophets.

The lecture emphasizes a critical aspect of the Qur'anic stories: the recognition and adherence to the wisdom and divine laws of Allah (s.w.t.), which govern not just moral conduct but societal dynamics and historical outcomes as well. This theme is encapsulated in the phrase:

“La tabdila li khalqi Allah – There is no alteration to the creation of Allah.” (Qur'an, 30:30).

This divine constancy illustrates that societies adhering to these laws thrive, while those that deviate face consequences.

The practical application of this understanding is highlighted through the necessity of planning and effort in human endeavors. Islam does not advocate for passive reliance on fate but encourages proactive engagement in solving problems and improving conditions. This approach is supported by the teachings that if one is sick, they should seek treatment, acknowledging that while healing is ultimately in the hands of Allah (s.w.t.), human effort is a critical component of the process.

The historical battles of Badr, Uhud, and Hunayn serve as instructive examples, illustrating the consequences of either adhering to or deviating from divine guidance and careful planning. At Badr, despite being out-numbered and less equipped, the Muslims' preparation and unity under leadership, coupled with divine assistance, led to a remarkable victory. In contrast, the losses at Uhud were a direct result of deviating from strategic plans, and at Hunayn, pride precluded initial success.

The lecturer also stresses the importance of focusing on the principles conveyed through the Qur'an, rather than getting entangled in the specifics of names, places, or incidental details that do not serve the fundamental lessons. This is exemplified in the story mentioned in Surah Ya-Sin (Ch. 36), where the emphasis is on the actions of a man, not his identity, and in the narrative of Adam ('a), where the type of tree is irrelevant compared to the moral and spiritual lessons derived from the story.

In essence, when engaging with Qur'anic narratives or any historical religious accounts, the focus should remain on what can practically enhance one's understanding and implementation of faith. Discussions that lead to minutiae, which do not fundamentally impact faith or understanding, such as the identity debates regarding the daughters of Imam Husayn ('a), should be secondary to the lessons these figures' lives impart about perseverance, faith, and divine justice.

Through this guidance, believers are encouraged to apply these divine laws and wisdom in their personal, professional, and spiritual lives, fostering a holistic approach that aligns with the enduring truths and directives provided by Allah (s.w.t.). This not only enhances individual faith but also contributes to the health and stability of the entire community.

The lecture concludes with a powerful reminder of the importance of focusing on the essential lessons derived from the Qur'anic stories, rather than getting lost in the trivialities that do not significantly contribute to one's spiritual and moral development. The speaker underscores the efficacy of repetition as an educational tool, which Allah (s.w.t.) employs in the Qur'an to reinforce key messages and ensure they are internalized by believers.

Highlighting the repeated narratives of prophets like Musa, Ibrahim, and Adam (peace be upon them), it was explained that this method of repetition is akin to how modern media works – constant exposure leads to greater acceptance and deeper understanding. This strategy demonstrates divine wisdom in aligning with human psychological traits, making the teachings of the Qur'an profoundly impactful and memorable.

The emphasis on continuous remembrance of Imam Husayn ('a) aligns with the broader theme of

perpetual reflection on the lives and sacrifices of key Islamic figures. By integrating the memory and principles of Imam Husayn (‘a) into daily life, believers are encouraged to embody his values and remain steadfast in their faith. The saying, “Every day is ‘Ashura’ and every land is Karbala’,” serves as a reminder that the lessons of Imam Husayn’s sacrifice are universal and timeless, urging continuous reflection and application.

This introductory session sets the stage for further exploration and discussion, with a promise of continuation, dependent on divine will, emphasizing the ongoing nature of learning and spiritual growth in the life of a believer. The approach taken not only deepens understanding but also enriches the communal and individual experience of the divine guidance provided through the Qur’an and the exemplary lives of its central figures.

End of Lecture 1

Lecture 2 – Muharram 1443

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

In the name of Allah, the All-Merciful, the Ever-Merciful

Recap of Lecture 1

Stories, or qisah, hold a significant place in Islamic teachings, providing guidance and lessons for our journey towards the Akhirah (Hereafter). Reflecting on the narrative of Karbala’, particularly the events from Imam Husayn’s departure from Madinah to the 20th of Safar after ‘Ashura’, reveals its depth and complexity. Instead of a comprehensive analysis, we aim to extract valuable insights from this profound event.

The Qur’an emphasizes the importance of stories, especially those involving noble individuals, revolution, sacrifice, love, and affliction. The repetition of the Karbala’ story each Muharram serves to reinforce its lessons. Ayat. Ja’fari Subhani explains in *Al-Qasas al-Qur’ani* that the Qur’an covers three main sections: ‘Aqa’id (Ideology), Qawanin wa al-Ahkam (Laws and Rules), and Qasas al-Anbiya’ (Stories of the Prophets). These stories, including those of Musa, Adam, and Nuh (peace be upon them), along with their opponents, are crucial for conveying divine messages.

Repetition in the Qur’an ensures that these truths are absorbed. Scholars highlight the vast number of books dedicated to Qur’anic stories, under-scoring their significance. These narratives teach us about divine wisdom and the dangers of envy, as seen in the story of Prophet Yusuf’s brothers and the tale of Hurr’s transformation in Karbala’. Such stories reveal true character during tests, where one is either honored or humiliated.

Islam emphasizes practical solutions and adherence to Allah's laws. Historical battles like Badr, Uhud, and Hunayn illustrate the importance of preparation and divine guidance. The Qur'an focuses on principles over specific details, urging us to avoid unnecessary curiosity and focus on the lessons.

Constant remembrance of Imam Husayn (‘a) is essential, permeating our thoughts and actions. This is encapsulated in the saying, “Every day is ‘Ashura’ and every land is Karbala’.”

In summary, the lecture emphasized the importance of narratives, particularly those found in the Qur'an, in shaping our understanding of faith and guiding our actions. It encouraged reflection, learning from past experiences, and focusing on the essential lessons they provide.

Lecture 2

In the previous session, the focus was on this year's theme, “In the Shadows of the Story of Karbala.” It was highlighted that stories make up a significant portion of the Qur'an, approximately one-third of the text. Allah (s.w.t.) provides accounts of various figures, including prophets, their adversaries, followers, and believers, emphasizing the educational and spiritual value of these narratives.

Furthermore, it was noted that while the Qur'an recounts the deeds of twenty-five prophets as specified in Surah al-Ghafir, Allah (s.w.t.) states,

“We have indeed sent many messengers before you. Among them are those whose stories We have told you, and among them are those whose stories We have not told you.” (Qur'an, 40:78).

This emphasizes that the purpose of these stories is not to document every messenger but to convey divine messages through selected narratives, known as Ahsanul Qasas, to further the propagation of Islam and its teachings.

The session also pointed out a key difference between the Qur'anic approach and that of traditional historical accounts. The Qur'an focuses on the collective experiences of communities rather than detailing individual lives, unlike historical texts that often dwell on the exploits of kings and rulers, such as the Umayyads, providing a more comprehensive view of community dynamics.

Addressing human nature, it was mentioned that emotions play a crucial role in our lives and often underpin intellectual and mental issues. This transitions into the current global discussion, particularly in the Islamic world, about ilhad (atheism). The trend of rejecting religious beliefs, denying God, and leaving religion poses a significant challenge, often driven more by personal turmoil than purely intellectual reasoning. This is supported by studies of prominent atheists who returned to faith, revealing that their skepticism had deep personal and psychological roots.

Additionally, an example was provided on how a child perceives God. Young children, told that God created them and brought them into this world, struggle with such abstract concepts due to their limited

intellectual development, demonstrating the complexity of conveying and understanding spiritual concepts at different stages of human growth. This topic invites further discussion and reflection as the series continues.

The exploration of how children conceptualize God reveals that they often view their fathers as figures of provision and protection, qualities they initially attribute to God until their intellectual development allows them to differentiate between the divine and the parental roles. This distinction generally emerges around the age of ten.

The discussion also explores the influence of media on children's perceptions of the world, noting the shift from passive consumption of stories to interactive involvement, such as in video games and role-playing. This engagement, while innovative, embeds intellectual messages through emotional experiences, emphasizing the significant impact of narratives.

Critiques are raised regarding the portrayal of superhuman abilities in modern films and video games, which set unrealistic expectations and distort children's understanding of real-world challenges. Such portrayals contrast starkly with historical figures like Imam Husayn ('a), who is admired not for mythical prowess but for his real-life perseverance and moral strength in adversity.

These media portrayals are further critiqued for leading to a distorted perception of reality, where fantastical solutions are expected instead of human effort and resilience. This is juxtaposed with the teachings of the Qur'an, which utilizes stories to teach how to effectively confront real-life struggles.

The conversation also highlights the importance of self-awareness and critical evaluation in everyday interactions, like for example, randomly assessing a stranger's character. This emphasizes the need for a reflective approach, encouraging consideration of how preconceived notions might influence judgments and interactions².

Exploring the impact of preconceived notions on judgment, the discussion dives into how trusted sources can heavily influence our perceptions of others. These preliminary judgments, often based on second-hand opinions, tend to persist and skew our interactions, leading to potentially biased evaluations.

This phenomenon is not unique to personal interactions but extends into religious beliefs as well. A specific example provided is the common belief among many Muslims regarding the infallibility of prophets like Prophet Musa and Prophet Adam (peace be upon them). These beliefs are challenged by certain Qur'anic narratives, such as the incident where Prophet Musa ('a) intervenes in a fight and ends up killing a man. Those who view Prophet Musa ('a) as infallible may find themselves wrestling with this narrative, striving to reconcile it with their existing beliefs about his sinlessness.

The discussion highlights how such preconceived notions can profoundly influence one's interpretation of religious texts. If one approaches these texts with the belief that prophets are ordinary humans capable of error, their understanding of the same incident involving Prophet Musa ('a) will markedly differ

from someone who holds him in a light of infallibility.

The question posed, “Who is Imam Husayn (‘a) to us?” invites the audience to reflect on their own perceptions and the potential biases they bring into their understanding of historical and religious figures. This question encourages a deeper examination of how personal and collective preconceptions shape our interpretation of religious history and its figures.

The discussion around the person of Imam Husayn (‘a) underscores the varied perspectives within the Muslim community regarding his status.

The Shi’a view him as Imamun ma’sum, a figure of infallibility, deriving from the family lineage of prophethood, inherently pure and perpetually guided by divine support. This contrasts significantly with other perspectives that range from seeing him as an influential yet non-infallible Imam, to merely a pious individual or even just a virtuous companion of the Prophet Muhammad (S).

Each perspective shapes the interpretation of Imam Husayn’s role and actions in the historical and tragic events of Karbala differently. The narrative of Karbala, thus, is seen through different lenses, heavily influenced by these foundational beliefs about his character and status.

Dr. Sheikh Ahmad al-Wa’ili, categorizing responses to Imam Husayn’s martyrdom, highlights the emotional engagement of the mourners, who express their grief and sorrow through acts of mourning and poetic lamentations. This group, represented by figures like al-Faqih Khalid Ibn Ma’dani, showcases a profound connection to Imam Husayn, reflecting on the tragedy with deep emotional and spiritual pain. Their expressions of grief underscore a recognition of his elevated status and the profound injustice of his death, often emphasizing the betrayal of Qur’anic values by his adversaries.

Such commemorations and the literary outpourings they inspire serve not only as acts of devotion but also as a means of theological and historical reflection, reinforcing the communal memory of Imam Husayn’s sacrifice and the values he stood for. These varied interpretations and reactions continue to influence the way Muslims across the world remember and honor the legacy of Imam Husayn (‘a).

The spectrum of reactions to Imam Husayn’s (‘a) martyrdom exemplifies the profound division in perception and sentiment among different Islamic scholars and poets. Al-Faqih Khalid’s poetry captures the mourners’ view, depicting the tragedy of Karbala as not only a physical assault on Imam Husayn (‘a) but a symbolic affront to the Prophet Muhammad (S) himself. These expressions underscore the gravity of the event, marking it as an attack on the sacred values embodied by the chants of takbir and tahlil.

Imam al-Shafi’i, representing a deep emotional and theological engagement with the tragedy, uses his poetry to express a visceral reaction to the events – sleeplessness, aging, and an enduring sorrow. His commitment to the love of Ahl al-Bayt (‘a), even at the risk of offending some, highlights a staunch stance in the face of widespread controversy and criticism.

Al-Hasan al-Basri's response also reflects a profound sorrow mixed with condemnation of those responsible for Imam Husayn's death, emphasizing the moral and spiritual decline he perceived in the community responsible for such an act.

Conversely, figures like Ibn al-Arabi and Ibn Taymiyya provide critical perspectives on Imam Husayn's actions. Ibn al-Arabi's controversial view frames Imam Husayn's martyrdom as a consequence of his challenge to the established authority of his time, suggesting that his fate was a justified retribution for his rebellion. Similarly, Ibn Taymiyya critiques the practical implications of Imam Husayn's uprising, arguing that it brought neither religious nor worldly benefits, but rather spurred corruption and disorder.

Ibn Taymiyya's critique of Imam 'Ali ('a) during the battles of Jamal, Siffin, and Nahrawan highlights a significant theological debate. He posits that Imam 'Ali's actions were motivated by personal interests rather than divine obedience, which contrasts sharply with Qur'anic principles that praise self-sacrifice for the pleasure of Allah (s.w.t.). These principles are embodied by Ahl al-Bayt, whose actions are depicted in the Qur'an as purely for Allah's sake, not seeking any reward or thanks from others.

The narrative shifts to the twentieth century, where Sheikh al-Khudari from the University of Azhar, in his historical works, presents a perspective that Imam Husayn's stand at Karbala caused enduring division within the Muslim community. This viewpoint suggests that the event not only shaped historical and theological discourse but also had a lasting impact on Islamic unity.

In contrast, several scholars across various Islamic schools of thought have critiqued the harsh judgments against Imam Husayn ('a), recognizing his actions as a legitimate struggle against Yazid's rule, which was marked by egregious violations of Islamic law and moral conduct. These scholars, including Sha'rawi and al-Alusi, emphasize the righteousness of Imam Husayn's cause and challenge the narratives that paint him in a negative light³.

The discussion around the role of the Kufans in Imam Husayn's martyrdom raises crucial questions about collective responsibility and historical accuracy. The focus on Kufa, despite it being only a fraction of the Muslim population at the time, points to broader issues of political and social dynamics within the Islamic world during this period. The silence and inaction of other significant Islamic centers during the tragedy of Karbala call into question the widespread implications of these events and the collective memory of the Muslim community.

As the examination of Imam Husayn's revolution continues, it is essential to contextualize his actions within the broader narrative of divine guidance and prophetic mission, akin to Prophet Yusuf's journey. This perspective underscores the notion that Imam Husayn's stand, while resulting in profound loss and tragedy, was a fulfillment of a divinely ordained path, contributing to the rich Islamic history and its interpretative traditions.

Praise be to Allah, the Lord of all the worlds, and may Allah send blessings upon our master Muhammad and his pure family.

End of Lecture 2

Lecture 3 – Muharram 1443

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

In the name of Allah, the All-Merciful, the Ever-Merciful

Recap of Lecture 2

The lecture again emphasized the significance of stories in the Qur'an as we go through this Muharram's topic of "Through the Shadows of the Story of Karbala." Stories, which make up a substantial portion of the Qur'an, are used to convey divine messages about past prophets, their followers, and their opponents. The Qur'an mentions twenty-five prophets to highlight key lessons rather than to provide a comprehensive history, focusing on community experiences rather than individual rulers.

The lecture highlighted that historical accounts often focus on rulers, whereas the Qur'an aims to provide practical lessons and guidance for the community. It was noted that human beings are driven by emotions, which can influence intellectual perceptions and beliefs.

The discussion also touched on the contemporary issue of atheism (ilhad) in the Islamic world, attributing its rise to personal and psychological problems rather than purely intellectual debates. Media, including films and games, often distort reality and create unrealistic expectations, emphasizing the importance of understanding and confronting real-life challenges, as exemplified by Imam Husayn's struggle in Karbala'.

The concept of preconceived notions was explored, illustrating how prior beliefs influence the interpretation of events and individuals, such as views on the infallibility of prophets like Musa and Adam (peace be upon them). This was extended to differing perspectives on Imam Husayn ('a), ranging from viewing him as infallible to considering him an ordinary pious Muslim.

Sheikh Ahmad al-Wa'ili categorized people's reactions to Imam Husayn ('a) into mourners, who view his martyrdom as a profound injustice, and critics, who justify his killing. Examples included figures like al-Faqih Khalid Ibn Ma'dani and Imam al-Shafi'i, who mourned Imam Husayn, contrasted with Ibn al-Arabi and Ibn Taymiyya, who criticized his actions.

The accusation that the Kufans were responsible for Imam Husayn's death was questioned, noting the broader Muslim community's inaction during the massacre. This highlighted the need to understand Imam Husayn's revolution in its proper context, recognizing it as a divinely guided mission.

The lecture concluded by emphasizing the importance of learning from these historical events and

reflecting on their deeper meanings to guide current and future actions.

Lecture 3

The introductory section of the lecture emphasizes the importance of the Qur'an as a guide for narrating historical events, specifically the events of Karbala'. It highlights the unique narrative techniques employed by the Qur'an, particularly through the use of istifham (questioning), to engage and provoke thought in the audience. This method not only captures attention but also sets a reflective tone, prompting the listener to consider the significance of the stories being introduced.

Several instances from the Qur'an where stories begin with a question, are cited thereby invoking a sense of curiosity and contemplation. For example:

“Hal ataka hadithu Musa? – Did you receive the news of Musa?” (Qur'an, 20:9 & 79:15).

“Wa hal ataka naba'ul khasmi idh tasawwaru al-mihrab? – Has there come to you the story of the two litigants when they made an entry into the private chamber by ascending over the walls?” (Qur'an, 38:21).

“Hal ataka hadithu dhayfi Ibrahim al-mukramin? – Has there come to you the story of the honored guests of Ibrahim?” (Qur'an, 51:24).

“Hal ataka hadithu al-junudi Fir'awna wa Thamud? – Did you receive the news of the hosts of Fir'awn and Thamud?” (Qur'an, 85:17, 85:18).

“Alam tara kayfa fa'ala Rabbuka bi-'Ad? – Have you not seen what your Lord did with 'Ad?” (Qur'an, 89:6).

“Alam tara kayfa fa'ala Rabbuka bi-ashabi al-fil? – Have you not seen what your Lord did with the companions of the elephant?” (Qur'an, 105:1).

These questions are characterized as istifham taqriri⁴ (emphatic questioning), a rhetorical device aimed at engaging the listener more deeply. By starting with such questions, the stories are framed in a way that demands active engagement and reflection, setting the stage for a deeper understanding of the events and their moral and spiritual lessons. This technique mirrors everyday conversational tactics where questions pique interest and encourage further inquiry, thereby enhancing the receptivity and attentiveness of the audience.

In daily conversations, questions are often asked to make someone eager to hear news, like: “Have you heard the news today?” This approach arouses curiosity and attention.

In the lecture, it is pointed out that the story of Prophet Yusuf ('a) in the Qur'an starts with an invitation to the audience to listen to a remarkable narrative. This narrative approach begins with: ***“Nahnu naqussu***

‘alayka ahsan al-qasas –We narrate to you the best of stories” (12:3), signifying not only the value of the story but also its divine selection and revelation through the Qur’an, as emphasized by ***“Bima awhayna ilayka hadha al-Qur’an – by Our revealing to you this Qur’an” (12:3)***. The statement: ***“Wa in kunta min qablihi lamina al-ghafilin – Before this, you were certainly one of those who did not know” (12:3)*** highlights the transformative power of these revelations, which enlighten those previously unaware of such profound truths.

The narrative then shifts to a more personal element, as it recounts the young Yusuf’s (‘a) conversation with his father, where he shares a prophetic dream: ***Inni ra’aytu ahada ‘ashara kawkaban wa-sh-shamsa wa-l-qamara ra’aytuhum li sajidin (12:4)***. This dream not only foreshadows the core events of the story but also encapsulates the entire journey and ultimate destiny of Yusuf (‘a). The lecture further elaborates on how this vision, or ru’ya, represents the destined path, while his mission, or risala, facilitated by his ability to interpret dreams, guides him toward his divine selection and the fulfillment of this vision.

This method of beginning a story with a comprehensive overview followed by a detailed narrative serves multiple purposes. It provides the listener with a framework of what to expect, enhances engagement by setting up key themes and outcomes, and imbues the narrative with a sense of destiny and purpose that aligns with the overarching divine plan.

In discussing the significance of dreams within the Islamic narrative tradition, the lecture highlights a poignant example from al-Mustadrak Sahihayn by al-Imam al-Hakim and al-Isaburi. This example involves a dream experienced by Umm al-Fadhl bint al-Harith, which she brought to the Prophet Muhammad (S) for interpretation.

Initially, Umm al-Fadhl described her dream as disturbing, fearing it foretold harm to the Prophet. However, the Prophet (S) interpreted the dream positively, suggesting that it signified the forthcoming birth of his grandson, Imam Husayn, from his daughter Fatimah. He reassured her by explaining that Fatimah was like a part of him, thus the dream symbolized that a part of him – his grandson – would soon be cradled in her lap.

This narrative also draws a parallel between the dream visions associated with Prophet Yusuf (‘a) and those pertaining to Imam Husayn. Unlike Prophet Yusuf, whose prophetic dreams occurred after his birth, the dreams foretelling the significance of Imam Husayn manifested even before his birth, highlighting his destined role and the profound spiritual implications of his life and martyrdom.

The discussion further explores the emotional depth of these prophetic dreams when describing a later scene where the Prophet Muhammad (S) holds the newborn Husayn. Upon receiving a divine revelation about Husayn’s future through the angel Jibril, the Prophet is moved to tears, foreseeing the challenges and ultimate sacrifice Husayn would face.

A segment of the lecture underscores the recurring theme of predestined trials and tribulations, and the

exalted status these figures hold within Islamic tradition, echoing through the phrase *La yawma kayawmika ya Aba 'Abdillah* ("There is no day like your day, O Aba 'Abdillah"), which commemorates Imam Husayn's unparalleled sacrifice. This reflection on dreams and their interpretations serves not only as a recounting of historical events but also as an exploration of the deep moral and spiritual lessons embedded within them.

In the narrative of Imam Husayn's second dream, as recounted by historians, a profound parallel is drawn between his destiny and that of Prophet Yusuf ('a). Before departing from Madina, Imam Husayn visited his grandfather's grave, seeking guidance amidst the tribulations he faced. His prayer at the grave highlights his commitment to righteousness and his abhorrence of evil. Overcome with emotion, he fell asleep at the gravesite and experienced a significant dream in which the Prophet Muhammad (S) appeared to him.

In this dream, the Prophet Muhammad (S) conveyed to Imam Husayn that he had a distinguished rank ordained by Allah (s.w.t.), reminiscent of the divine selection of Prophet Yusuf ('a). The Prophet Muhammad (S) explicitly told Imam Husayn that his path was one of martyrdom at Karbala', indicating that this was the only path open to him and that his fate would mirror the trials faced by Yusuf ('a).

This dream not only reinforced the inevitability of Imam Husayn's martyrdom but also linked his suffering to the broader narrative of betrayal and trial within the Ummah, similar to Yusuf's mistreatment by his brothers. The comparison extends further as Yusuf was forcibly removed from his family, faced false accusations, and endured imprisonment – each event moving him towards his eventual exaltation by Allah (s.w.t.). Similarly, Imam Husayn's journey from Madina to Karbala' is marked by exile and persecution, underscoring a path that, though fraught with hardship, leads to a profound divine designation.

This narrative segment serves to illustrate the themes of predestination, divine favor, and the redemptive power of suffering within Islamic teachings. It highlights the manner in which significant figures in Islamic history are often depicted as models of steadfastness and moral integrity in the face of overwhelming adversity.

The traditions related to Imam Husayn's birth and the prophecies concerning his martyrdom are deeply evocative and integral to the Shi'a Islamic tradition, illustrating the profound spiritual significance and preordained destiny of Husayn Ibn 'Ali. These hadiths highlight the deep emotional connection between the Prophet Muhammad (S) and his grandson, as well as the prophetic knowledge of the trials Husayn would face.

In one hadith, upon hearing of Imam Husayn's birth, the Prophet's immediate reaction was one of joy mixed with sorrow, as he rushed to see his newborn grandson but also bore the heavy knowledge of Husayn's destined fate. His instructions to Asma' not to inform Fatimah of the prophecy reflect his compassion and sensitivity towards his daughter, who had just undergone the rigors of childbirth. The

Prophet's forewarning that the group responsible for Husayn's death would be denied his intercession further highlights the gravity of their actions and the spiritual consequences they would face.

Another hadith provides a poignant scene where the Prophet, seeking rest in the home of Umm Salama, experiences a divine revelation through the angel Jibril while his grandson Husayn climbs onto his chest. This intimate and tender moment quickly turns solemn as Jibril informs the Prophet of the tragic end that awaits Husayn. The emotional weight of this prophecy is so profound that it moves the Prophet to tears, a reaction that deeply impacts Umm Salama.

The detail of the soil from Karbala', given to Umm Salama as a sign of the impending martyrdom, serves as a tangible connection to the future events. It symbolizes the inevitability and geographical specificity of Husayn's martyrdom. Umm Salama's vigilance over the soil, and its eventual change in color, confirms the fulfillment of the prophecy and marks a moment of immense historical and spiritual significance.

The hadiths concerning Imam Husayn ('a) and the prophecies related to his life and martyrdom serve as profound narrative elements within Islamic theology, especially within the Shi'a tradition. They not only foretell significant events but also set the theological and spiritual context in which these events unfold. These narratives establish Karbala' as not merely a historical incident but a divinely orchestrated event, rich with spiritual lessons and significance.

The comparison between Prophet Yusuf ('a) and Imam Husayn ('a) in these hadiths highlights a shared theme of divine destiny and prophetic dreams guiding their paths. Both figures undergo severe trials and suffering, yet their stories are held as exemplars of moral and spiritual fortitude, embodying ***"Ahsan al-Qasas, the best of stories"*** (12:3). This designation emphasizes that the value of these narratives lies not just in their historical recounting but in their deeper moral and spiritual teachings, which are meant to guide the faithful⁵.

Towards the end of the discussion, the speaker points out that the fore-knowledge of Imam Husayn ('a) about the trials and his ultimate martyrdom at Karbala raises several theological questions, which are crucial for understanding the Shi'a perspective on destiny, the nature of divine justice, and the role of human agency within preordained events. These questions include:

Foreknowledge and Decision: Why would Imam Husayn ('a), knowing fully well the trials and martyrdom that awaited him, choose to proceed towards Karbala'?

Preordination and Greatness: If Imam Husayn's martyrdom was preordained, where does his greatness lie?

Divine Decree and Human Agency: Can the perpetrators of the massacre at Karbala be blamed if their actions were decreed by Allah (s.w.t.)?

These questions are not merely academic; they are central to understanding the theological and spiritual dimensions of the story of Imam Husayn (‘a). They invite believers to reflect deeply on the nature of faith, the purpose of life’s trials, and the essence of divine justice, making the narrative of Imam Husayn (‘a) a continual source of spiritual reflection and learning.

End of Lecture 3

Lecture 4 – Muharram 1443

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

In the name of Allah, the All-Merciful, the Ever-Merciful

Recap of Lecture 3

The lecture provided an in-depth exploration of the narrative methodologies utilized in the Qur’an, focusing on the qasas or stories. These narratives offer profound insights into historical events and serve as guiding principles for the believers.

One of the Qur’an’s distinctive features is its unique approach to storytelling. It sometimes commences with posing direct questions or by revisiting historical occurrences, ensuring the listener’s engagement from the outset. A characteristic method observed is the Qur’an’s technique of introducing a concept briefly and then elaborating on its details. This can be prominently observed in Surah al-A’raf and Surah al-Kahf.

The lecture shed light on the parallelism between the story of Imam Husayn (‘a) and Prophet Yusuf (‘a). Central to their narratives is the role of visions or dreams that foreshadowed significant events in their respective journeys. While Prophet Yusuf’s dream indicated his eventual rise to prominence, Imam Husayn’s was a precursor to his stand in Karbala’. Both these stories emphasize the interconnectedness of divine will, individual destiny, and the tribulations faced by those chosen by God.

Historical accounts were employed to further elucidate the theme, citing the example of Umm al-Fadhl bint al-Harith’s dream. The Prophet’s interpretation of her vision showcased the profound impact such dreams could have on determining one’s path. The lecture emphasized that both Prophet Yusuf’s and Imam Husayn’s tales have been accorded the title of Ahsan al-Qasas (Best of Stories), underscoring their significance.

The second dream described in the lecture detailed Imam Husayn’s decision to leave Madinah. He went to the grave of his grandfather, the Messenger of Allah, and he prayed seeking Allah’s guidance. In his sleep, the Prophet appeared to him, revealing that his mission was martyrdom at Karbala’, a mission preordained by divine will.

The lecture further paralleled the sufferings of Prophet Yusuf and Imam Husayn, noting how both were foreseen in dreams and how their tribulations were part of a divine plan. Prophet Yusuf's journey from the well to imprisonment and eventual rise mirrored the trials that Imam Husayn would face, culminating in his martyrdom at Karbala'.

The lecture concluded by raising thought-provoking questions concerning Imam Husayn's foreknowledge of the events in Karbala' and the nature of preordained events. It explored the theological implications of divine decree and measure, suggesting avenues for subsequent discussions. The essence of both Prophet Yusuf's and Imam Husayn's stories is that they are divinely orchestrated narratives that highlight the profound lessons in their journeys and sacrifices, making them the Ahsan al-Qasas in the Qur'an.

Lecture 4

The lecture began by addressing frequently raised questions about Imam Husayn ('a) and his movement towards Karbala, hinting at the complexity and depth required in answering such inquiries, beyond simple spontaneous responses. This sets a stage for discussing the intellectual rigor exemplified by the 9th Imam, Imam al-Jawad ('a), who, despite his youth, was renowned for his profound wisdom.

During a gathering that involved discussions on Islamic jurisprudence, Imam al-Jawad ('a) was posed challenging questions by scholars. These inquiries delved into the intricate aspects of actions within the sanctified limits of the Haram in Mecca, particularly during the periods of Hajj and Umrah. Such questions reflect the nuanced understanding of Islamic law that considers time, intention, and the sanctity of actions – elements critical to determining the legal and moral implications of one's deeds.

The method employed by Imam al-Jawad ('a) in responding to these inquiries – asking clarifying questions – underscores the importance of context and precision in Islamic jurisprudence. By inquiring whether the actions were performed during Hajj or Umrah, before or after certain rituals, and under what conditions (voluntarily or under coercion, by some – one of mature age and sound mind), he illustrates a meticulous approach to legal rulings, focusing on the specific circumstances and intentions of individuals⁶.

The lecture uses Qur'anic stories to underscore these points, exemplifying how narratives in the Qur'an begin by setting contexts that enhance understanding of the moral and legal intricacies involved. For instance, the Qur'an often introduces stories by highlighting the conditions and intentions of its characters, thereby aligning with the methodological approach of Islamic jurisprudence as demonstrated by Imam al-Jawad ('a).

The discourse on ilm al-ghaib (knowledge of the unseen) within Islamic theology highlights its profound significance as an aspect of divine wisdom that is primarily reserved for Allah (s.w.t.). This knowledge, encompassing outcomes of future events and hidden truths, remains largely inaccessible to humans,

yet, through divine will (bi idhni Allah), a limited measure of it may be granted to the Anbiya (prophets) and Awliya (Imams).

The discussion further explores the restrained application of ilm al-ghaib by the prophets, particularly emphasizing Prophet Muhammad (S). Despite having access to knowledge beyond the sensory perception of ordinary beings, their utilization of this knowledge was selective and purposeful. The ethical implications of such restraint are profound, particularly in the context of judicial processes. Prophet Muhammad (S), for instance, chose to base his judgments on tangible evidence and testimonial proofs, rather than relying solely on his access to the unseen. This practice set a vital precedent for fairness and transparency in judicial proceedings, reinforcing the importance of decisions grounded in observable and verifiable facts.

This careful and limited use of ilm al-ghaib highlights a broader ethical lesson: the significance of justice and transparency in the application of divine knowledge. By aligning divine capabilities with human judicial norms, the prophets ensured that the integrity of the Islamic legal system was maintained, fostering a society that upholds justice based on truth and visible evidence. This balance between divine insight and earthly procedures ensures that the judicial process remains comprehensible and fair, reinforcing the foundational Islamic values of justice and equity.

The episodes involving Prophet Musa and Khidr (peace be upon them), which are detailed in the Qur'an in Surah Al-Kahf (Chapter 18, verses 60–82), provide profound lessons on divine wisdom and the limits of human understanding. These episodes are unique in that they feature direct divine intervention and teach through actions that initially appear perplexing or even wrong to Prophet Musa ('a), but are later revealed to have deeper moral and spiritual significance.

1) Damage to the Boat: Khidr damages a boat belonging to poor fisher- men. Prophet Musa ('a), observing this apparently harmful act, questions Khidr's intentions. Khidr later explains that he damaged the boat to prevent it from being seized by a tyrannical king who was confiscating every seaworthy vessel by force. This action, though seemingly detrimental, actually saved the livelihood of the fishermen.

2) Killing of the Youth: In a more disturbing episode, Khidr kills a young boy, which deeply troubles Prophet Musa ('a). Khidr later clarifies that the boy was destined to grow into a tyrant who would cause great suffering to his parents through his disbelief and rebellion. By taking the boy's life, Khidr was acting on divine command to prevent future evil and to ensure that the boy's parents would be given a better, more pious child in his place.

3) Reconstruction of the Wall: Finally, Khidr rebuilds a wall in a village where the locals had been unwelcoming. Musa ('a) finds this act perplexing, considering their inhospitality. Khidr explains that beneath the wall lay a treasure belonging to two orphan boys in the village. The wall's reconstruction was intended to protect the treasure until the boys came of age, as a mercy from their Lord.

These stories are intended to teach several lessons:

- 1) Divine Wisdom vs. Human Perception: Humans often judge situations based on immediate appearances or limited understanding. These stories highlight that divine wisdom can operate beyond human comprehension and moral frameworks.
- 2) Trust in Divine Decisions: The actions of Khidr, sanctioned by Allah (s.w.t.), illustrate that what may seem inexplicable or harsh at first may have benevolent purposes behind it, emphasizing the need for patience and trust in God's broader plan.
- 3) The Hidden Realities of Life: The episodes emphasize that there are aspects of life and reality hidden from human senses and rationality, accessible only through divine revelation or guidance.

Each event showcases how divine knowledge and command operate on a level far beyond ordinary human judgment, inviting believers to reflect on the complexity of morality, the nature of divine testing, and the virtues of patience and submission to God's will.

The narrative surrounding the Battle of Uhud provides a vivid portrayal of the Qur'anic concept of ilm al-ghaib (knowledge of the unseen), particularly through the experiences of Prophet Muhammad (S). On the eve of this pivotal battle, the Prophet received a prophetic vision, a medium often used for divine revelations, in which he foresaw the challenges his followers would encounter, including the martyrdom of his uncle, Hadhrat Hamza. This vision placed Prophet Muhammad (S) in a profound moral and emotional dilemma, illustrating the weighty responsibilities associated with possessing such divine knowledge.

Despite knowing the fate that awaited Hamza, Prophet Muhammad (S) did not intervene to prevent his participation in the battle. This decision underscores several core principles of Islamic theology and the Prophet's deep commitment to divine will. Firstly, he perceived the events he foresaw as part of a divine test, intended to foster spiritual growth among him and his followers. In this context, intervening could be seen as contradicting the divine plan orchestrated by Allah (s.w.t.), who governs life and death.

Furthermore, the concept of martyrdom in Islam, which is viewed as a noble sacrifice leading directly to Paradise, played a crucial role in the Prophet's decision. Martyrdom is highly esteemed, reserved for those who lose their lives defending their faith. By allowing Hamza to participate in the battle, knowing the honor martyrdom would confer upon him, Prophet Muhammad (S) embraced a broader theological vision, recognizing the higher spiritual status Hamza would achieve.

This episode not only reflects the profound leadership qualities and faith of Prophet Muhammad but also highlights the ethical considerations in the use of ilm al-ghaib. The knowledge of future events, though significant, was managed with discretion and aligned with divine directives, demonstrating that such knowledge should be treated as a sacred trust, requiring patience, wisdom, and a steadfast commitment to the divine plan.

The discussion surrounding the tragedy of Karbala weaves a complex theological narrative concerning Allah's omniscience, particularly regarding the events that unfolded, including the martyrdom of Imam Husayn ('a). The acknowledgment that Allah (s.w.t.) had foreknowledge of these events is central to understanding divine omnipotence and omniscience within Islamic theology. However, it is critical to clarify that such divine foreknowledge does not imply that the actions of the individuals involved were preordained by Allah (s.w.t.) in such a way that absolves them of moral responsibility⁷.

The assailants at Karbala, although part of a divine foreknowledge, exercised their free will. They were not compelled by fate but made deliberate and conscious choices that led to their actions against Imam Husayn ('a). This point is vital in Islamic teachings which assert that while Allah's plan encompasses all knowledge of events past, present, and future, it does not negate the personal accountability of each individual. Every person is responsible for their choices and actions, which are believed to be freely made within the scope of their moral and ethical understanding.

This concept helps address and dispel the fatalistic interpretation that might perceive events as so rigidly predetermined that it strips individuals of moral agency. Islam maintains that divine knowledge of events does not interfere with human free will. People are not mere actors following a divine script; instead, they are moral agents endowed with the capacity to make decisions and bear the consequences of those decisions based on their intentions and ethical judgments.

The analogy of a doctor predicting a patient's death further elucidates this theological stance. Just as a doctor's prediction based on medical expertise does not cause the patient's death, similarly, Allah's foreknowledge of events does not cause those events to occur nor does it force individuals to act in a certain way. Knowledge, in this context, is distinct from causation. This distinction is crucial in understanding the balance Islam draws between Allah's omniscience and the free will granted to human beings, ensuring that moral responsibility remains firmly in the hands of each individual⁸.

The narratives of Prophet Ibrahim ('a) and Imam Husayn ('a) provide profound insights into the nature of faith, sacrifice, and divine will in Islamic theology. These stories are not only pivotal for understanding individual steadfastness in the face of divine tests but also illuminate the broader theological implications of suffering and submission to Allah's (s.w.t.) will.

Prophet Ibrahim ('a) and Isma'il ('a): The story of Prophet Ibrahim ('a) receiving the divine command to sacrifice his son Isma'il ('a) is a cornerstone of Islamic narrative on obedience and faith. Ibrahim ('a), known for his staunch monotheism and opposition to idolatry, faces what is perhaps his greatest test – a command that directly challenges the very essence of his love and loyalty to Allah (s.w.t.). Isma'il's reaction, characterized by his willingness to submit to Allah's command, underscores his own profound faith and understanding of divine will. This story culminates not in tragedy but in divine intervention, where a ram is substituted for Isma'il, signifying that the test was one of devotion and obedience, not sacrifice⁹.

This narrative is often interpreted as demonstrating that true submission to God's will involves a readiness to give up one's deepest attachments for the sake of divine command. Furthermore, it highlights the mercy of Allah (s.w.t.), who rewards unwavering faith and obedience with preservation and blessings, reinforcing the idea that Allah's commands, however formidable, are ultimately aimed at fostering spiritual growth and closeness to the divine.

Imam Husayn ('a) at Karbala: The tragedy of Karbala, where Imam Husayn ('a), the grandson of Prophet Muhammad (S), and his followers were martyred, resonates deeply within the Shi'a Islamic tradition as a moment of immense sacrifice and moral steadfastness. The battle is often seen as a stand against tyranny and injustice, asserting the principles of truth and dignity under the banner of Islam. The narratives surrounding this event frequently include elements of celestial sorrow and divine recognition of the sacrifices made by Imam Husayn ('a) and his companions, adding a metaphysical dimension that transcends the historical and emphasizes the eternal significance of their sacrifice.

In both these stories, the theme of divine testing is central. They highlight a fundamental aspect of Islamic belief – that while Allah (s.w.t.) tests the faith of His followers, often through severe trials, these challenges are meant to refine individuals and elevate their spiritual status. The events are not merely historical but serve as perpetual lessons on the virtues of patience, steadfastness, and the ultimate submission to Allah's will, teaching that moral integrity and faith must be maintained even in the face of overwhelming adversity.

Thus, through these narratives, the Qur'an and Islamic tradition provide a framework for understanding the complexities of faith, the nature of divine tests, and the profound commitment required to uphold divine commandments, emphasizing that the greater good often lies in what these divine encounters engender – spiritual resilience and a closer communion with the divine.

The hadith describing the astonishment of angels at Imam Husayn ('a)'s patience highlights a remarkable instance where even celestial beings, known for their unwavering obedience and worship of Allah (s.w.t.), are moved by his extraordinary endurance and faith during the tragedy of Karbala.

This angelic reaction underscores the exceptional spiritual stature of Imam Husayn ('a), whose actions were beyond ordinary human resilience, meriting divine acknowledgment. The commemorative phrase, "Husayn is the lamp of guidance and the ark of salvation" (Al-Husayn misbah al-huda wa safeenat an-naja'), reflects his role as a guiding light through moral and spiritual darkness and as a means of salvation, embodying the ultimate commitment to truth and justice.

The Qur'anic narrative of Prophet Yusuf ('a), celebrated as "the best of narratives," resonates deeply due to its exploration of forgiveness, redemption, and divine justice through trials of betrayal, hardship, and eventual vindication. It touches on universal human experiences – hardship, betrayal, hope, and forgiveness – providing profound insights into the endurance required to overcome severe adversities. The narrative of Yusuf ('a) is paralleled by the experiences of other revered figures such as Imam Ali

(‘a), struck down in his prime; Imam Hasan (‘a), cruelly poisoned; and the Prophet’s uncle, martyred at Uhud. These stories share themes of grief, jealousy, and torment, resonating deeply within the Islamic collective memory.

However, the emotional depth and historical impact of Karbala remain unparalleled. The enduring sorrow expressed by our 4th Imam (‘a) for his father, Imam Husayn (‘a), and his relatives draws a poignant comparison to Prophet Ya‘qub (‘a), who wept over the loss of his son Yusuf. Just as Ya‘qub (‘a) grieved for decades over a son he believed lost but alive, Imam Zain al-‘Abidin’s (‘a) grief was compounded by the brutal realities he witnessed at Karbala, making the tragedy a central event in the collective memory of the Islamic community, especially within the Shi’a tradition.

These narratives teach the virtues of steadfastness, the importance of justice, and the ultimate victory of divine will over human suffering and injustice, reminding followers of the profound spiritual rewards of unwavering faith in the face of overwhelming trials.

The saga of Karbala transcends a mere recounting of historical sorrow; it emerges as a profound beacon of resilience and moral fortitude. This narrative captures the hearts of the faithful, intertwining the tragedy of Imam Husayn (‘a) with the enduring hope embodied by the living Imam, the 12th Imam. It is this blend of past endurance and future promise that continually inspires and propels the Shi’a community forward. The memory of Karbala not only offers support like a rear wing but also drives believers towards a future marked by purpose and righteousness.

A commentator from the UK has insightfully noted the unique dual dynamic within the Shi’a community, which is both anchored in the profound lessons of the past and motivated by the ongoing guidance of their living Imam¹⁰. This perspective highlights how the events of Karbala serve as a universal lesson, relevant across all aspects of life, urging adherents toward the greater good in this transient world. For lovers of the Ahl al-Bayt (‘a), Karbala represents not only a narrative of profound loss but also a source of deep, actionable guidance. It inspires believers to navigate life’s challenges with unwavering faith and courage.

Imam Husayn (‘a), often hailed as “the beacon of guidance and the ark of salvation,” continues to inspire through his legacy of steadfast faith and commitment to justice, illuminating the path for those who seek to follow in his footsteps.

End of Lecture 4

Lecture 5 – Muharram 1443

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

Recap of Lecture 4

This lecture explored significant theological inquiries surrounding Imam Husayn's ('a) journey to Karbala, alongside an intricate examination of various pivotal Islamic narratives, illustrating the profound teachings embedded within them.

The concept of ilm al-ghaib (knowledge of the unseen), which is primarily reserved for Allah (s.w.t.), is a critical aspect of Islamic theology. While prophets and saints may be granted a portion of this knowledge, it is only to the extent Allah (s.w.t.) wills. This selective endowment underpins numerous historical narratives, including the prophetic abilities demonstrated by Prophet Isa ('a) under divine command. The judicious use of this knowledge by prophets, such as Prophet Muhammad (S), emphasizes an adherence to fairness and transparency in judicial matters, preferring visible evidence over unseen knowledge to maintain integrity and teach the importance of factual justice.

The narrative of Prophet Musa ('a) and Khidr in Surah Al-Kahf of the Qur'an vividly teaches about divine wisdom and human perception's limitations through three mystifying actions performed by Khidr. These actions, which initially seemed morally perplexing to Prophet Musa, were later revealed to have significant benevolent purposes, teaching trust in divine wisdom and highlighting the complexities of divine intervention and moral judgment.

Further illustrating the profound use of ilm al-ghaib, the lecture explored Prophet Muhammad's (S) vision prior to the Battle of Uhud. He foresaw the martyrdom of his uncle, Hadhrat Hamza, yet refrained from intervening, recognizing it as part of Allah's divine plan and a test of faith and leadership, highlighting the revered status of martyrdom in Islam.

Addressing the tragedy of Karbala, the narrative confirms that while Allah (s.w.t.) had foreknowledge of the events, including the martyrdom of Imam Husayn ('a), the perpetrators acted from free will. This theological stance clarifies that divine omniscience does not negate human accountability, emphasizing moral agency within the framework of divine foreknowledge.

The story of Prophet Ibrahim ('a) and his son Isma'il ('a) resonates with themes of sacrifice and divine testing. Ibrahim's daunting command to sacrifice his son epitomizes profound obedience and trust in Allah (s.w.t.), with divine intervention at the critical moment underscoring the test's symbolic nature aimed at affirming their devout submission rather than enacting sacrifice.

Concluding with the enduring impact of the Karbala narrative, the speaker compared it with the story of Prophet Yusuf ('a) highlighted as the "best of narratives," reflecting on deep themes of faith, grief, and redemption. It resonates profoundly, paralleling the emotional depths of Karbala, where Imam Husayn's tragedy reflects a similar intensity of loss and moral resilience. This narrative not only illustrates the strength found in enduring faith but also invites believers to reflect on how such stories influence their

own spiritual understanding and resilience.

Lecture 5

The speaker reiterated the following statement of Imam Husayn (‘a):

“Inni lam akhruj ashiran wa la batiran wa la ʿaliman wa la mufsidan, innama kharajtu litalabi l-islahi fi ummati jaddi; uridu an amura bil- ma’ruf wa anha ‘anil-munkar, wa asira bi sirati jaddi wa abi.”

“Indeed, I have not risen out of passion, or arrogance, or to cause corruption or oppression. Rather, I have risen to seek reform in the nation of my grandfather; I wish to enjoin good and forbid evil, and to follow the path of my grandfather and my father.” (Imam Husayn) [11](#)

In this session, the theme “In the Shadow of the Story of Karbala” continues to be explored, focusing on the pivotal aspects of the story of Ashura. It was previously established that the Qur’an does not simply narrate stories or history; it is, fundamentally, a divine guide for humanity. It utilizes stories and parables as means of conveying its teachings and directives.

For instance, the Qur’an articulates,

“We cite these examples for mankind so that they may reflect” (Qur’an, 59:21).

The use of stories about diverse entities – ranging from creatures to natural phenomena – is meant not to entertain but to enlighten and instruct. This distinction clarifies that while the Qur’an incorporates these narratives, they are not its core essence. Instead, they are instrumental in stimulating reflection, imparting wisdom, and fortifying the believer’s resolve. The Qur’an also expresses,

“Certainly, in their stories is a lesson for those who possess intellect” (Qur’an, 12: 111).

and,

“And all that We relate to you of the accounts of the messengers is to strengthen your heart. (Qur’an, 11: 120).

The narrative of Karbala, similarly, is not merely for annual commemoration but is deeply imbued with specific objectives. The absence of understanding these objectives would render such commemorations hollow and misguided. Notably, the scholarly discourse on the aims of Karbala has evolved, notably highlighted by Sheikh Muhammad al-Rai Shahari in al-Sahih Min Siratil Husayn. He points out that while these discussions began in the fifth century, they saw a resurgence during the social and political awakenings of the 19th century, especially influencing the narrative in the context of the Islamic Revolution and subsequent movements seeking guidance and reawakening.

Ayatollah Shahid Mutahhari, in his work al-Malhamat ul-Husayniyya, offers a profound examination of

Karbala's significance and objectives. He emphasizes the necessity of a systematic approach and credible sources for truly understanding these purposes. This mirrors the method used when studying the Qasas al-Anbiya' where the Qur'an acts as a fundamental reference.

Understanding the goals of Karbala involves recognizing the foundational perspectives of the Imamiya doctrine. The Imams, appointed by the Holy Prophet under divine command, were not only spiritual leaders but also community unifiers and interpreters of the Qur'an. They played critical roles in addressing the needs of the Ummah and responding to new issues as they arose.

The significance of the Imams is encapsulated in the hadith: Al-Hasan wal-Husayn imamani kama awqada, which highlights that Hasan and Husayn are leaders in all circumstances – whether in power or not, and regardless of their acceptance by the people.

In discussing the objectives of the movements led by these figures, it is essential to align with the broad responsibilities they held. The narrative of Karbala, therefore, is not just a historical recount but a source of lessons and leadership principles.

Today, numerous texts focus solely on discussions surrounding Karbala, capturing debates, speeches, and scholarly discussions, which highlight its enduring relevance and the multifaceted discussions it inspires. These works contribute to a deeper understanding and appreciation of the event's profound impact on Islamic thought and leadership.

Diverse efforts have documented the unfolding events of Karbala, including compilations of letters and nearly two volumes dedicated to the spoken words associated with Imam Husayn. By analyzing the utterances from the time he departed Madina, through his journey to Makka, and eventually to Karbala, and considering the subsequent speeches by Imam Zayn al-'Abidin and Sayyida Zaynab in Kufa and Sham, one can discern the underlying aims of Imam Husayn's actions.

Scholars underscore the importance of distinguishing between maqsad (purpose or means) and maqsud (goal or end). This distinction is vital for understanding the journey to Karbala. While many perceive Imam Husayn's move as a reaction to the invitations from Kufans, it transcends this simplistic view. His departure from Madina, following a profound spiritual vision at the tomb of the Messenger of God, was primarily about his destined martyrdom, which he saw as a means to achieve spiritual elevation and reform within the Ummah (litalabi l-islahi fi ummati). This was his maqsud, with the journey itself serving as the maqsad.

In a broader sense, distinguishing between ahdaf (objectives) and nata'ij (outcomes) is crucial. For instance, a teacher's primary objective might be to impart knowledge, but the resulting experiences – like forming friendships and exploring new interests – are also significant. These outcomes should be recognized as valuable, yet they should not detract from the primary objectives. Similarly, understanding Karbala involves acknowledging both the intended reformatory objectives of Imam Husayn and the outcomes that unfolded, shaping the course of Islamic history.

The distinction between ahdaf (objectives) and nata'ij (outcomes) is fundamental in appreciating the depth of the Karbala narrative. Imam Husayn's sacrifice, which forms the core of the ahdaf, embodies a message of moral and spiritual resilience and should be the focal point. It is imperative that these objectives not be obscured by the nata'ij, which include the varied cultural and commemorative practices that have developed over time. The real essence of Imam Husayn's martyrdom extends beyond the rituals of mourning – it is a call for reflection, understanding, and living by the principles he stood for.

Having established where to locate the objectives – through the duties and words of the Imam, and having clarified the concepts of maqsad and maqsud, and the distinction between ahdaf and nata'ij, we can now refocus on the primary question concerning the objectives of the story of Karbala. Scholars have explored various objectives, and while there is some divergence in their views, several key themes consistently emerge.

The first objective, hifdhu al-'izzah li dini l-Islami (preservation of dignity for the Islamic faith), emphasizes the importance of maintaining honor and dignity as core Islamic values. After the foundational principle of tawhid – the belief in the Oneness of Allah (s.w.t.) – the Islamic creed highly values the honor of a Muslim. This principle asserts that defending one's honor equates to defending the core tenet of la ilaha illa Allah (there is no deity but Allah), and those who die protecting their honor are deemed martyrs (shahidan).

The concept of jihad is traditionally understood as striving in the cause of Allah (s.w.t.), particularly through defending the phrase kalimatil la ilaha illa Allah. However, Islamic teachings expand this concept to include defending one's honor and dignity. The hadiths, "Whoever is killed defending his wealth dies a martyr, and whoever is killed defending his honor dies a martyr," illustrate that martyrdom is not limited to the battlefield but encompasses protection of one's life, wealth, and honor.

These teachings highlight that the honor of a Muslim is of such significance that it is considered more sacred than the Ka'aba, the most revered site in Islam. Such comparisons underscore the profound respect for personal dignity within Islamic teachings. Furthermore, it is conveyed that Allah (s.w.t.) has granted Muslims autonomy in their actions, with the exception of self-humiliation. This prohibition is rooted in the Qur'anic declaration that Muslims belong to the best nation (Ummah) and are thus called to uphold a high standard of dignity.

The verse,

"We have honored the children of Adam" (Qur'an, 17:70).

Reinforces this notion, encouraging Muslims to resist feelings of weakness or oppression. The resilience shown by Prophet Muhammad, who consistently exemplified courage and dignity, sets a standard for all believers. This legacy of unwavering faith and refusal to accept humiliation was epitomized by Imam Husayn at Karbala, who, through his ultimate sacrifice, became a timeless symbol of the quest for justice and the preservation of dignity in the Islamic faith.

Prior to the advent of Islam, the Arabian Peninsula was characterized by a profound moral and societal decay, with its inhabitants at the verge of self-destruction. The introduction of Islam radically transformed this community, elevating them from a state of disarray to a formidable force within a mere 23 years, achieving a status on par with the great Roman and Persian empires of the time. This rapid transformation was marked by a newfound sense of dignity and purpose underpinned by Islamic principles.

However, the subsequent years saw a gradual erosion of these noble qualities, as political intrigue and other corruptive influences began to undermine the Ummah's integrity. This decay in moral fiber was starkly illustrated by the brutal murder of Muhammad Ibn Abi Bakr, a revered companion of the Prophet, an act met with disturbing silence by the community. This was not an isolated incident; the breach of the peace treaty by Mu'awiya after the agreement with Imam Hassan ('a), which blatantly disregarded the principles laid out in the Qur'an and Sunnah, further exemplifies the degradation of honor and principle that had come to characterize the leadership.

The silence and inaction that followed such grave transgressions is attributed to *idlal*, a term denoting a weakening of resolve and influence, leading to a diminished capacity to defend justice and uphold moral standards. This weakening contrasts sharply with the early Muslims' resilience, as exemplified by figures such as 'Ammar Ibn Yasir, Habbab Ibn Arat, and Bilal, who endured severe persecution yet remained steadfast in their faith and principles.

Indeed, Imam Husayn's stand at Karbala represents a profound moment of moral clarity and courage. His decision to confront the prevailing injustices and the pervasive moral decline was rooted in a deep-seated commitment to the core Islamic values of honor, dignity, and justice. This was not merely a battle for political power but a profound statement against the erosion of ethical standards and the neglect of spiritual and moral duties within the Ummah.

In a contemporary context, the narrative of dependency fostered by external aid in places like Africa parallels this historical narrative of moral and spiritual decline. Such aid, often laden with conditions and ulterior motives, perpetuates a cycle of reliance and undermines the agency and dignity of the people it purports to help. It's imperative, therefore, to encourage self-reliance and personal effort among the youth, promoting a return to principles that value dignity over dependency.

Imam Husayn's stand during the events of Karbala offers a compelling lesson in dignity and self-reliance, contrasting sharply with current attitudes toward dependence on external aid. Historically, our predecessors built robust economies from the ground up, relying on hard work and perseverance rather than advanced degrees or external support. This history underscores a critical message: true progress demands struggle and incremental advancement.

Today, despite possessing significant resources like oil and gas, many in the Ummah face exploitation and humiliation, while widespread injustices continue against communities in Palestine, Yemen, Syria,

Libya, and Somalia. These circumstances call for a renewed commitment to uphold our inherent dignity and honor, principles deeply rooted in the ethos of Karbala.

Imam Husayn's refusal to pledge allegiance to Yazid highlights this commitment. He described Yazid by saying: *Inna Yazida rajulun fasiq, sharibun lil hamr, qatilun lil nafsi l-muharramah. Wa mithli la yubayi'u mithlah*, which translates to, "Yazid is a sinful person, who drinks wine and kills innocent people. A person like me cannot pledge allegiance to a person like him." This statement not only reflects a rejection of Yazid's moral corruption but also an affirmation of Imam Husayn's noble lineage and the higher ethical standards it embodies.

Furthermore, Imam Husayn ('a) declared, "Indeed, the liar's son has set me between two choices: fighting or humiliation, and humiliation is far from us." This declaration has evolved into a powerful slogan that encapsulates the rejection of humiliation and the pursuit of honor as commanded by Islam. It reaffirms that neither God, His Prophet, nor the believers accept humiliation, an ethos that should permeate every aspect of our lives, guiding our actions and interactions.

In essence, the story of Karbala and Imam Husayn's unwavering stance serve as enduring reminders of the importance of maintaining dignity and striving for self-determination in the face of adversity. This legacy challenges us to reject passivity and actively work towards restoring and protecting the honor that our faith and history command.

The second objective, *Tahrik al-Iradah* (awakening the will), is fundamental in understanding Imam Husayn's mission at Karbala. It highlights the importance of willpower alongside intellect in defining human actions and moral choices. While intellect can inform one of what is right or wrong, willpower is what enables an individual to act upon this knowledge.

Consider the example of a knowledgeable doctor who understands the health risks of smoking yet struggles to quit. This scenario underscores that intelligence alone is not sufficient to guide behavior; rather, it is the strength of will that enforces one's intellectual decisions. Islamic practices such as fasting are designed to strengthen this willpower. Fasting teaches self-discipline by requiring the faithful to resist basic desires, thereby nurturing self-control and enhancing spiritual consciousness.

Imam Husayn's stand at Karbala aimed to catalyze a spiritual and moral awakening within the Ummah. His sacrifice was intended to rouse the community from passivity, inspiring them to reject oppression and injustice. This act of defiance was not just about confronting the immediate tyranny of the Umayyads but was also about igniting a broader movement for justice and ethical governance.

The effects of Imam Husayn's martyrdom extended far beyond his immediate context, as seen in movements like the Arab Spring centuries later, where the actions of a few ignited widespread calls for change. His example continues to inspire resistance and courage in the face of oppression, emphasizing the importance of willpower in achieving social and spiritual goals.

The narrative of Karbala, therefore, serves as a powerful reminder of the value of honor, dignity, and the determination to stand against wrongs. These timeless principles remain vital in guiding the Ummah's efforts to uphold justice and righteousness in their communities.

Concluding today's session with gratitude for the teachings received, the community looks forward to continuing this exploration of the objectives behind Karbala. With hope for health and life, the discussion is set to resume tomorrow to delve further into the profound lessons derived from Imam Husayn's enduring legacy.

Wa al-hamdu lil-Lahi rabbi 'l-'alamin, wa salla Allahu 'ala sayyidna Muhammadin wa alihi at-tayyibin at-tahirin.

End of Lecture 5

Lecture 6 – Muharram 1443

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

In the name of Allah, the All-Merciful, the Ever-Merciful

Recap of Lecture 5

The speaker began the lecture with a poignant statement from Imam Husayn ('a): "Indeed, I have not risen out of passion, or arrogance, or to cause corruption or oppression. Rather, I have risen to seek reform in the nation of my grandfather; I wish to enjoin good and forbid evil, and to follow the path of my grandfather and my father." This set the tone for the session, emphasizing the need to understand the objectives behind Imam Husayn's ('a) movement in Karbala.

The lecture continued by revisiting the purpose of stories in the Qur'an. Unlike a book of tales or history, the Qur'an employs examples and stories to guide humanity. It uses parables and narratives to provoke thought, provide lessons, and strengthen the heart. The story of Karbala, therefore, comes with significant objectives. It would be unfortunate for people to commemorate this event annually without grasping its underlying purposes.

The lecture explained the need to differentiate between maqsad and maqsud. For instance, Imam Husayn's ('a) journey which ended in Karbala, prompted by many factors, was the maqsad. However, his true maqsud (intention) was to reform the Ummah. His departure from Madinah was influenced by divine vision, aiming to attain a distinguished position in the Hereafter through martyrdom and the suffering of his family.

Another crucial distinction is between ahdaf (goals) and nata'ij (out-comes). While the primary goal of

seeking knowledge might result in forming friendships and engaging in activities, these outcomes should not overshadow the main objective. Similarly, the outcomes of Karbala, such as mourning traditions, should not eclipse Imam Husayn's ('a) primary goal of upholding justice and honor.

The first objective discussed was *hifdhu al-'izzah li dini l-Islami*, which emphasizes the honor and dignity of a Muslim. Islam highly regards the honor of a Muslim, considering it greater than the sanctity of the Ka'aba. The hadiths state that anyone who dies protecting their wealth, life, or honor is a *shahidan*. Imam Husayn's ('a) stand against Yazid, a corrupt and immoral leader, underscored this principle of maintaining dignity and rejecting humiliation.

The second objective discussed was *Tahrik al-Iradah* which is the concept of awakening and stirring the willpower of the Ummah in order to inspire them to reject oppression and strive for justice. This awakening is also crucial for maintaining dignity and honor.

The lecture also emphasized the importance of hard work and perseverance, drawing parallels with the elders who built economies from scratch without advanced degrees. The current mentality of seeking Western aid undermines dignity and stifles potential. True progress requires struggle and gradual steps.

In conclusion, the lecture reiterated the need to understand and differentiate between objectives and outcomes, and between goals and purposes. The story of Karbala and the sacrifices made by Imam Husayn ('a) and his companions are a testament to the strength of faith and the importance of standing up for what is right. These principles are timeless and continue to inspire and guide the Ummah in their struggle for justice and righteousness.

Lecture 6

In the ongoing series "Through the Shadows of the Story of Karbala," a deeper examination was conducted into the alignment of Karbala's objectives with the quintessential teachings of the Qur'an. The session was particularly focused on continuing the exploration of three pivotal objectives set forth in this educational trajectory, blessed by divine grace.

The third critical objective under scrutiny, known as *i'adat al-dawr al-risali lil-mar'ah al-muslimah*, focuses on restoring the missionary role of the Muslim woman, thereby reinstating her significant position within both human society and the Islamic religious framework. This discussion sought to further explore this objective by analyzing historical, Qur'anic, and scholarly perspectives.

Historical texts and Islamic traditions depict the grim societal conditions during the *Jahiliyyah* period – marked by widespread moral decay and egregious violations against women. This societal degradation was not confined to the Arab world but was also evident in regions then considered to be centers of civilization, including parts of Europe.

Contrasting this dark historical backdrop, Islam's advent brought profound changes to women's status.

Islamic teachings challenged these oppressive norms and practices, affirming women's dignity and rights and restoring their esteemed positions within society as whole and complete humans deserving of respect and equality.

Ayat. Shahid Mutahhari, in his book *Rights of Women in Islam*¹², sheds light on this perspective. Debates arose questioning whether a woman was even recognized as a human being. Some believed she was merely half a human, while others degraded her to the status of a cursed entity, reducing her to an object for male satisfaction, devoid of any personal identity. Women were often viewed as sources of disgrace; many were even buried alive upon birth. Yet, it was Islam that restored her dignity, rights, and the esteemed position she rightfully deserved.

The Qur'an describes these conditions vividly, highlighting the deep-seated discrimination and injustice that women faced. It is mentioned in the Qur'an,

“When news is brought to one of them, of [the birth of] a female [child], his face darkens, and he is filled with inward grief!” (Qur'an, 16:58).

Further, it recounts the horrendous practice where questions arise regarding the sin for which newborn girls were killed, as stated,

“And when the girl [who was] buried alive is asked” (Qur'an, 81:8).

“For what sin she was killed” (Qur'an, 81:9).

This historical context is essential in understanding the transformative impact Islam had on women's rights and status. Islam, as introduced by the Prophet Muhammad (S), radically shifted these norms by not only condemning these practices but also by establishing women's rights to life, dignity, and respect, foundational to the Islamic belief system.

The discussion regarding early Islamic history vividly illustrates the critical roles that women played, with Lady Khadijah al-Kubra ('a), the first wife of the Prophet Muhammad (S) serving as a prime example. Known for her significant contributions through her wealth and faith, Lady Khadijah ('a) was instrumental in the establishment and spread of Islam. Her involvement not only challenged the pre-existing societal norms but also underscored the transformative impact women had within the nascent Muslim community.

The Prophet Muhammad (S) himself acknowledged this by stating, *Kama al-Islamu bimali Khadijah*, highlighting that Islam's foundation was significantly supported by Khadijah's contributions alongside the valor of Amir al-Mu'minin 'Ali Ibn Abi Talib ('a). These two figures, representing the dual pillars of Islam – one a woman and the other a man – emphasize that the religion stands firmly on the contributions of both genders, portraying a profound partnership that exemplifies Islam's revolutionary approach to gender equality.

This partnership not only advanced the well-being and spiritual health of the society but also marked a fundamental shift in gender roles, showcasing the complementary roles of both men and women in Islamic teachings. Lady Khadijah's role extended beyond the private sphere into the public domains of economic and social reform, establishing her house as a sanctuary for the emerging Muslim community. From this household came Lady Fatimah al-Zahra' ('a), who continued her mother's legacy, and Lady Zaynab ('a), both of whom were pivotal in the preservation and propagation of Islam.

Furthermore, the Qur'anic metaphor of humans having two faces – male and female – yet being one entity, underscores the essential notion that both genders bring unique strengths and perspectives crucial for the whole– some functioning of society. Islam recognizes these roles as equally vital, akin to the two sides of a coin, where each side is indispensable for its value and function.

The story of Lady Khadijah ('a), who was the first to believe in Muhammad's prophethood, and Lady Zaynab ('a), renowned for her resilience and eloquence at Karbala, illustrates the significant roles women held, on par with their male counterparts, in establishing and protecting the faith. This historical acknowledgment serves as a powerful reminder of the equality and respect Islam holds for women, contradicting any claims that the religion marginalizes their roles. Instead, Islam celebrates and elevates their status as co-bearers of the Islamic legacy, essential in both the spiritual and worldly domains.

The lecture expands to discuss the philosophical and theological underpinnings that Islam offers regarding gender roles, illustrating this through the metaphor of day and night. Each, while distinct, contributes equally to the formation of a complete day, symbolizing the complementary roles of men and women within Islamic doctrine. The Qur'anic verses,

“By the night when it envelops” (92:1)

“By the day when it brightens” (92:2)

“By Him who created the male and the female” (92:3)

Are employed to articulate this balance, emphasizing that just as day and night serve different purposes, so too do men and women, yet both are integral to the holistic human experience.

However, the progression of Islamic leadership, particularly under the Umayyad and 'Abbasid dynasties, marked a significant shift from these ideals. The era saw a regression in the roles and recognition of women within the society. Historical figures like Harun al-Rashid, with his vast harems, exemplify how the rulers' practices often diverged dramatically from the egalitarian principles espoused by early Islam. Such disparities highlight the historical shifts that moved away from the prophetic model, increasingly subjecting women's roles to the whims of male rulers rather than the balanced partnership initially set forth in Islamic teachings.

The narrative around Karbala is deeply interwoven with the themes of justice, sacrifice, and the active

role of women in the religious and social life of the community. Imam Husayn (‘a)’s decision to involve his female family members in the significant event of Karbala was a profound demonstration of the integral role that women hold within Islam, countering any misconceptions of their marginalization.

This deliberate inclusion by Imam Husayn (‘a) underscores a pivotal Islamic principle – that true social reform and spiritual awakening cannot occur without the active participation of women. Their presence at Karbala was not incidental but a critical element of divine will, emphasizing that the mission of Imam Husayn (‘a) was not merely about his martyrdom but also about setting a precedent for enduring leadership and advocacy against tyranny through all members of society, including women.

Lady Zaynab (‘a) emerges as a central figure in continuing the mission post-Karbala. Despite the immense personal grief and hardship she faced, her role transcended the traditional confines, moving into the realm of public advocacy and spiritual leadership. Her eloquent speeches and unyielding spirit in the face of oppressors not only preserved the message of Karbala but also highlighted the intellectual and spiritual strength of women in Islam.

While Imam Zayn al-‘Abidin (‘a) was physically limited, his spiritual and moral support continued to fuel the movement. His conditions highlight the human vulnerabilities within these towering figures, making their resolve and dedication even more heartrending. These actions served to communicate the injustices of Karbala to the broader community, ensuring that the sacrifices made were understood and remembered within the larger context of Islamic teachings on justice and resistance against oppression.

The portrayal of women in this context starkly contrasts with some Western critiques of Islam, which often focus on the supposed constraints imposed on women’s rights and freedoms. However, the story of Karbala, and particularly the role of Lady Zaynab (‘a), illustrates a model where women are neither passive entities nor merely symbolic figures; they are active bearers of the faith and defenders of its principles.

This holistic involvement of women in critical religious and social roles reflects Islam’s recognition of the diverse capacities and contributions of all its followers. It champions a view of women that is rooted in respect and dignity, recognizing their roles in both the private sphere of family and the public sphere of societal leadership.

Thus, the events of Karbala and the narratives surrounding Imam Husayn (‘a) and Lady Zaynab (‘a) provide powerful insights into the dynamic role of women in Islam, serving as a rebuttal to misconceived notions of oppression and showcasing the profound respect and equality embedded within Islamic teachings.

The discussion surrounding the fourth goal in the story of Karbala illuminates a profound aspect of Islamic teachings on justice and resisting tyranny and oppression in societal reform. This objective highlights the enduring impact of the martyrdom of Imam Husayn (‘a) and the subsequent mobilization of his family, especially the female members, who played pivotal roles in the dissemination of his

message post-martyrdom. This narrative serves as a stark reminder of the atrocities faced by the family of the Prophet Muhammad (S), with the events of Ashura marking a culmination of systemic oppression. Inna liqatli l'Husayni la hararatan fi qulubi l-mu'minin¹³.

The account of Ashura detailed here does not merely recount the physical brutality inflicted upon Imam Husayn ('a) and his companions but delves into the emotional and spiritual ramifications of such an ordeal. The acts of barbarism they endured – ranging from physical assaults to the desecration of their dignity through acts like stripping and mutilation – are narrated not just as historical facts but as a catalyst for reflection and moral reckoning within the community.

This remembrance of martyrdom transcends mere historical recounting; it seeks to engage the community in a reflection on the nature of injustice and the responsibilities of Muslims to counter oppression. The narrative forcefully argues that the oppression of the Ahl al-Bayt ('a) was not an isolated event but part of a historical continuum of injustice, made pain-fully visible on the Day of Ashura. It challenges the community to see the parallels between the past atrocities and the ongoing injustices in the contemporary world.

By invoking the visceral imagery of Imam Husayn's final moments and the trials of his family, the narrative emphasizes that the struggles against oppression are as relevant today as they were on Ashura. The speaker draws a direct line from the historical to the present, urging the audience to recognize and combat injustices in their environments – from familial disputes to broader societal issues. The mention of places like Palestine and Syria, alongside personal and local injustices, serves to underscore the universal and enduring call to justice embodied by Imam Husayn's sacrifice.

This goal of acknowledging and learning from the oppression faced by the family of the Prophet is positioned as a foundational element of the faith, urging believers to embody the principles of justice, solidarity, and moral courage. It reinforces the notion that every follower of Imam Husayn ('a), by virtue of their faith, inherits the duty to challenge tyranny and support the downtrodden, reflecting the universal message of Karbala that transcends time and geography.

In this context, the message of Karbala is presented not just as a historical event to be mourned but as a continuous call to action – a reminder that every generation must rise to the challenges of its time, ensuring that the values for which Imam Husayn ('a) stood are lived and realized in the daily lives of the faithful.

The fifth goal, known as Al-Mashru'ul-Islahi (The Reformation Project), presents a profound vision for reform, pivotal to understanding the transformative impact of the narrative of Karbala. This objective, deeply discussed in previous dialogues, encapsulates the need to revert to the pristine Islamic principles, which were compromised over time due to the misinterpretations and manipulations by certain historical figures.

The focus is laid on the period of ignorance, Jahiliyyah, where societal norms were overturned with the

arrival of the Prophet Muhammad (S) and the revelation of the Qur'an. This divine intervention uprooted entrenched systems of tribalism, class divisions, and muddled beliefs, establishing a new paradigm based on equality, justice, and clear moral guidelines.

The path set by the Prophet was unequivocal, as symbolized by the metaphor, "Its night is like its day," signifying clarity and the absence of ambiguity in the spiritual and ethical guidance provided. However, post-Prophetic periods, particularly under the reigns of the Umayyad dynasty, led by figures like Mu'awiya, witnessed a regression. These leaders not only distorted the original messages of Islam for personal and political gain but also reintroduced outdated tribal distinctions and class hierarchies into Muslim society.

Significantly, this goal critiques the manipulation of religious texts and the fabrication of hadiths under political duress, which aimed to legitimize the authority of oppressive rulers. These fabricated narratives served to suppress the spirit of questioning and reform, which are essential in Islamic teachings. The mention of figures like Imam Husayn ('a) and his revolutionary stand is crucial here, as it underscores the continuous struggle against such distortions.

Imam al-Husayn's mission was not merely a resistance against a tyrant but a broader call to return to the genuine practices of Islam, which includes commanding good and forbidding evil as fundamental tenets. His reformatory agenda, thus, sought to cleanse the faith of the impurities introduced by the political machinations of his time, advocating for a return to the core values taught by his grandfather, the Prophet Muhammad (S).

This lecture concluded with a reminder and a call to the modern Muslim community to discern the authentic teachings of Islam from the cultural and political accretions that have obscured them over centuries. It emphasizes the role of each individual in ensuring that the essence of Islam, characterized by justice, compassion, and equality, is not only understood but actively practiced. This objective, therefore, is not just about historical reflection but about contemporary action, urging believers to embody the prophetic model in their daily lives and communities.

End of Lecture 6

Lecture 7 – Muharram 1443

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

In the name of Allah, the All-Merciful, the Ever-Merciful

Recap of Lecture 6

The "Through the Shadows of the Story of Karbala" series continues to explore the alignment of

Karbala's objectives with the teachings of the Qur'an. This session focused on three pivotal objectives aimed at deepening the understanding of Karbala's impact on Islamic principles, particularly regarding gender roles and societal justice.

The third objective discussed was i'adat al-dawr al-risali lil-mar'ah al-muslimah, which emphasizes restoring the significant role of Muslim women within society and the Islamic framework. This goal challenges historical views of women during the Jahiliyyah period, a time characterized by moral decay and egregious violations against women, not just in the Arab world but across civilizations including parts of Europe. The advent of Islam marked a dramatic shift, enhancing women's status, affirming their dignity, and acknowledging their rights as complete humans deserving of equality and respect.

Furthermore, the discussion accentuated the roles of influential women like Khadijah al-Kubra, Fatimah al-Zahra' and Zaynab bint 'Ali, who not only supported Islam through their resources but also played central roles in its propagation and defense. Lady Khadijah's partnership with 'Ali Ibn Abi Talib ('a) was particularly noted for demonstrating the balanced contributions of both genders to the foundation of Islam, symbolizing a partnership that significantly advanced the spiritual health and societal well-being of the nascent Muslim community.

The fourth objective highlights the profound impact of Imam Husayn's martyrdom, emphasizing Islamic teachings on justice and resistance against oppression. This objective underlines how the martyrdom and the roles played by his family, especially the women, in spreading his message post-martyrdom, serve as a stark reminder of the systemic oppression faced by the Prophet Muhammad's family. The narrative extends beyond recounting the events of Ashura, urging reflection on injustice and the ongoing responsibilities of Muslims to counter oppression in all forms, underscoring that the struggle against tyranny remains as pertinent today as it was historically.

The fifth objective termed Al-Mashru'ul-Islahi (The Reformation Project), emphasizes a significant vision for Islamic reform. It focuses on reverting to the original principles of Islam, which were obscured over time by historical misinterpretations and political manipulations, particularly under leaders like Mu'awiya. Highlighting the era of Jahiliyyah, the discussion points to how the Prophet Muhammad (S) and the Qur'an revolutionized societal norms, advocating for equality, justice, and moral clarity – values that were later compromised. The project criticizes the manipulation of religious texts and the political suppression of reformative questioning, crucial elements in Islamic teachings.

Lecture 7

That. And whoever venerates the sacraments of Allah – indeed that arises from the Godwariness of hearts” (Qur'an, 22:32)

Today's lecture centers on a pivotal aspect related to the story of Karbala, specifically concerning the outcomes and their relevance to the set objectives. A fundamental distinction is made between

objectives (ahdaf) and outcomes (nata'ij), emphasizing that while the focus remains on objectives, the outcomes or results should also align with and serve these objectives without causing deviation [14](#).

In this lecture, four central themes will be explored:

1) The Standing of Rituals and Practices in the traditions of our Imams: This segment will explore the significance and role of various rituals and

practices as discussed in the teachings of the Imams. The focus will be on how these rituals are embedded within the framework of Shi'a theology and the guidance provided by the Imams on their observance [15](#).

2) The Philosophical Aspect of Upholding the Mourning of Imam Husayn ('a): The mourning for Imam Husayn ('a) holds a profound philosophical underpinning. This theme will explore the reasons behind the enduring emphasis on commemorating the martyrdom of Imam Husayn ('a), linking it to broader themes of justice, sacrifice, and resistance against oppression.

3) The Influences that Might Divert the Rituals, Practices, and Mournings from the Core Intent and Teachings of Karbala: It is crucial to recognize and address potential deviations that could lead rituals and practices away from their intended purposes. This discussion will identify external and internal influences that could alter the authentic representation and observance of these traditions, potentially impacting their effectiveness and sincerity.

4) Ensuring that the Subjects, Discussions, and Traditions in Majalis of Mournings Align with the Narrative of Qissa of Karbala: The final theme focuses on the alignment of discussions and traditions within the majalis (gatherings for mourning) with the historical narrative of Karbala. It will emphasize the importance of maintaining accuracy and relevance in the recounting of events and lessons from the tragedy of Karbala to ensure that the moral and spiritual lessons derived are consistent with the original events and teachings of the Imams ('a).

Addressing the first theme, inquiries commonly surface regarding the adherence to specific rituals and practices within Islamic traditions. Participants often pose questions such as, "Why do you follow certain rituals? Where is the evidence in the Qur'an and hadiths?"

In discussions involving adherence to different Islamic schools of thought, a significant challenge arises when individuals assert privileges for themselves that they deny others. For example, in debates related to one's own school of thought, it is imperative for the questioner to consult the sources recognized by the opposing viewpoint to gain a comprehensive understanding. Forming opinions based solely on one's preferred texts, which may not be acknowledged by the other party, leads to biased and incomplete conclusions.

Within the field of 'ilm al-usul al-fiqh, which governs the methodology for acquiring proofs, the Qur'an is

acknowledged universally as the primary source for deriving Islamic jurisprudence. This consensus is also evident regarding the second source, the Sunnah of the Prophet (S).

However, divergences arise concerning the acceptance of qiyas (analogy) as a valid source of Islamic law. In the school that follows Imam al-Sadiq ('a), there is a clear stance that a religion reliant on qiyas can lead to misguidance. Meanwhile, some schools regard the statements of the Companions of the Prophet as definitive proof (hujjah), whereas others adhere strictly to the teachings and traditions of the Ahl al-Bayt ('a).

Given these differences engaging with the foundational texts and principles recognized by others is essential for fostering a thorough and respectful dialogue within the broader Islamic scholarly community.

Discussions centered around the profound significance of the Ahl al-Bayt, as highlighted in both the Qur'an and the teachings of the Imams ('a). The Qur'an explicitly articulates this through the verse, ***"I ask of you no reward except love for my near relatives."* (42:23)**, a directive that calls for a deep-seated love for the Prophet's family. This love, termed mawaddah, is not merely an internal emotion but is expressed visibly through actions that reflect genuine care and allegiance¹⁶.

This theme of mawaddah resonates through the Sunnah as well, tracing a lineage of devotion from Imam 'Ali ('a), through Fatimah al-Zahra' ('a), to Imam Hasan ('a) and Imam Husayn ('a), thereby reinforcing the central role of the Ahl al-Bayt ('a) in Islamic tradition. It was emphasized that mawaddah goes beyond mere affection; it involves an active commitment to the well-being of the Ahl al-Bayt ('a), manifesting in celebrations of their joys and commiserations in their sorrows¹⁷.

The intrinsic relationship between love and obedience was emphasized by the speaker. Highlighting a fundamental principle, it was noted that true affection towards someone necessitates obedience to that individual. This notion is supported by poetic expressions stating that obedience is a requisite for those who claim to love. It was argued that to disobey someone while professing love towards them is inherently contradictory. The discourse underlined the idea that genuine love naturally engenders obedience; thus, a lover is always expected to be obedient to the beloved. This principle serves as a litmus test for the authenticity of one's love, revealing true intentions and commitment.

Such expressions of love, reverence and obedience form the basis of numerous rituals and commemorations within the Islamic community, serving as vital means for followers to articulate their connection to the Ahl al-Bayt ('a). These acts of devotion are not only a fulfillment of the Qur'anic command but also a demonstration of the followers' loyalty and their adherence to the examples set by the Ahl al-Bayt ('a). Through these practices, believers not only express their emotional bond but also affirm their commitment to the values and teachings upheld by the Ahl al-Bayt ('a).

The discussion advanced to highlight the significance of rituals within Islamic practices, as derived from traditions categorized into two distinct types: riwayat qawliya (verbal traditions) and riwayat fi'liya (action-

based traditions).

The lecture extensively covered the preordained nature and significant impact of Imam Husayn's martyrdom, emphasizing its divine foreknowledge and the subsequent propagation of its message. Insights were provided into the prophetic visions, like that experienced by Umm al-Fadhl, which foresaw the tragic events of Karbala, highlighting the celestial significance attributed to these occurrences even before they unfolded. This prelude set the stage for the enduring educational journey of Imam Husayn's family post-martyrdom, as they moved from Karbala through Kufa to Damascus and back to Medina.

The deep effect of the narrative was further detailed through the rituals and practices that arose from these events, particularly the deeply emotional mourning gatherings led by Lady Zaynab ('a) and Imam Zayn al-'Abidin ('a). These gatherings were not only a form of mourning but also a platform for enlightening the Muslim community about the truths of the tragedy, effectively countering attempts by figures like Yazid to suppress this knowledge.

Furthermore, the lecture touched upon the specific remembrance rituals that have been deeply ingrained in the community's collective consciousness, such as the remembrance and invocation of Imam Husayn's thirst and cursing his killer whenever water is consumed. This ritual, alongside the organization of majalis, as endorsed by Imams al-Sadiq ('a) and al-Baqir ('a), highlights the significant role these practices play in maintaining the connection to the spiritual and historical legacy of the Ahl al-Bayt ('a).

The discussion seamlessly transitioned into the second theme, focusing on the philosophical underpinnings of the mourning ceremonies for Imam Husayn ('a) and exploring the profound emotions they evoke. The question posed was: What drives us to hold these majalis, to recount and reflect upon the harrowing events of Karbala and the immense trials that Imam Husayn ('a) and his family endured? Why are these reflections so deeply moving and often bring us to tears?

The speaker emphasized that the philosophy behind upholding these mourning ceremonies is deeply rooted in the objectives set by Imam Husayn ('a) himself. The ceremonies are not merely about remembering the past; they are about aligning our actions and emotions with the Imam's enduring mission. This alignment involves understanding the significance of the events of Karbala, engaging with them on an emotional level, and ensuring that the outcomes of such gatherings resonate with the transformative goals that Imam Husayn ('a) aimed to achieve through his sacrifice.

The discussion underlined that the act of crying and feeling sorrow during these gatherings is not just an expression of grief but a manifestation of a deeper, philosophical connection to the Imam's stand against tyranny and injustice. This emotional engagement is intended to reaffirm our commitment to the principles for which Imam Husayn ('a) gave his life and to inspire continuous personal and communal growth towards justice and righteousness.

Moreover, it was emphasized that the majalis (gatherings) should be dynamic and inclusive, challenging participants to engage in meaningful dialogues that bridge generational gaps and resonate with

contemporary issues. The focus is on creating a madrasah environment within these gatherings, where open dialogue and mutual understanding are prioritized over mere ritualistic observance. The aim is to ensure that each generation, regardless of age, can grasp the profound lessons of Karbala, thus continuing to elevate their understanding and fostering a deeper connection to their faith.

Imam al-Sadiq's insights into the motivations behind Imam al-Husayn's sacrifices further enrich this discussion. He points out that these acts were meant to liberate humanity from ignorance and misguidance (li yastan- qitha 'ibadaka min al-jahala), a theme that is also resonant in the teachings of Prophet Muhammad (S) as highlighted in Surah al-Jumu'ah. The verse

"It is He who has sent amongst the unlettered an Apostle from among themselves, to rehearse to them His Signs, to sanctify them, and to instruct them in Scripture and Wisdom- although they had been, before, in manifest error" (Qur'an 62:2)

Underscores the transformational intent of these prophetic missions.

The primary objective of commemorating the revolution and tragedy of Karbala emphasizes combating ignorance within human societies. This aim is critical as ignorance leads to a lack of understanding and stagnation of thought, ultimately freezing the intellectual development which is essential for discerning truth.

Hence the gatherings during the ten days of Muharram are envisioned as opportunities for deep reflection and learning, ensuring that the narrative of Karbala remains a living, evolving tradition that continually engages with the challenges and complexities of the modern world, thus fulfilling its timeless mission to guide and enlighten.

The metaphor of the coconut (by the speaker), used to illustrate the layers of learning and understanding, provides a vivid example of the depth and complexity involved in religious education. Just as a coconut is protected by its hard shell and husk, which are necessary despite not being the ultimate goal, so too are the structures of religious learning (form) designed to protect and nurture the core beliefs and knowledge that form the essence of faith.

The essence of mourning and the myriad symbols associated with the commemorations of Imam Husayn ('a), such as flags and T-shirts, serve a profound purpose beyond their apparent display. They symbolize a deeper, intrinsic value akin to the coconut hidden within its shell, representing the core spiritual and moral lessons derived from Imam Husayn's sacrifice.

The gatherings are not merely for the outward expressions of grief but are fundamentally aimed at stirring a transformative spiritual and ethical awakening within the attendees. As Shahid Mutahhari warns in his book *Al-Malhama Al-Husayniyya*, it is critical to avoid misconstruing Imam Husayn ('a) as a figure akin to how Christians view Jesus – as someone whose death erases sins. Instead, Imam Husayn's sacrifice calls for active engagement and personal responsibility towards the truths he stood for.

Forgiveness of sins is contingent not on mere attendance or emotional expression but on the commitment to embody the principles for which Imam Husayn (‘a) gave his life.

The call to action is clear: adherents are urged to not passively accept truths and confront falsehood but to actively engage with both. It is not enough to acknowledge the truth; one must live by it and challenge falsehood wherever it arises. This begins on a personal level – starting with oneself – and gradually extends to larger spheres of influence.

In line with this, the reflections during these gatherings should lead to personal introspection, especially on the night of the tenth. Believers are encouraged to examine the distance between their actions and the ideals of Imam Husayn (‘a). This introspective practice aims to uncover personal flaws – jealousy, gossip, hatred, and other negative traits – that distance one from the teachings and virtues of Imam Husayn (‘a).

Ultimately, the goal of these ceremonies is to eradicate ignorance and elevate the moral and spiritual standards of the Muslim community, thereby fostering a society that is more aligned with the values and principles demonstrated by Imam Husayn (‘a). This commitment to personal and communal transformation is the true essence of the mourning and remembrance, serving as a continual reminder of the need to strive towards justice, truth, and righteousness in everyday life.

End of Lecture 7

Lecture 8 – Muharram 1443

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

In the name of Allah, the All-Merciful, the Ever-Merciful

Recap of Lecture 7

The lecture focused on critical themes related to the commemoration of Karbala, emphasizing the importance of aligning the outcomes of such observances with the objectives set by Imam Husayn (‘a). The discussion covered four main themes: the significance of rituals and practices in Shi’a theology, the philosophical basis for mourning Imam Husayn (‘a), potential deviations from these traditions, and the need to ensure that mourning gatherings accurately reflect the historical narrative of Karbala.

The session highlighted the integration of rituals and practices within the teachings of the Imams (‘a), emphasizing adherence to these traditions for maintaining their purity and effectiveness. The enduring emphasis on commemorating Imam Husayn’s martyrdom was linked to broader themes of justice, sacrifice, and resistance against oppression.

The speaker also addressed potential influences that might alter the authentic representation and observance of these traditions, underscoring the need for vigilance to prevent deviations. Additionally, it stressed the importance of maintaining accuracy and relevance in the recounting of events and lessons from Karbala to ensure consistency with the original teachings of the Imams.

Discussion points included the challenges faced when adhering to specific rituals within different Islamic schools of thought, especially when individuals assert privileges for themselves but deny them to others. The need for consulting sources recognized by opposing viewpoints to avoid biased conclusions was emphasized.

The universal recognition of the Qur'an and the Sunnah as primary sources within 'ilm al-usul al-fiqh was reaffirmed, while divergences concerning the acceptance of qiyas (analogy) and the relative authority of the Companions' statements versus the teachings of the Ahl al-Bayt ('a) were highlighted.

The intrinsic relationship between love and obedience to the Ahl al-Bayt ('a) was discussed, showing how true affection manifests through actions that reflect genuine care and allegiance. This relationship underscores the importance of rituals and commemorations in expressing this devotion.

In conclusion, the lecture underscored the profound significance of the Ahl al-Bayt ('a) in Islamic tradition and the philosophical depth behind the mourning ceremonies for Imam Husayn ('a). It also highlighted the critical role of education and dialogue in ensuring that Imam Husayn's teachings continue to enlighten future generations. The ten days of Muharram were presented as a period for reflection, learning, and spiritual growth, reinforcing the narrative of Karbala as a dynamic and evolving tradition.

Lecture 8

That. And whoever venerates the sacraments of Allah - indeed that arises from the Godwariness of hearts. (Qur'an, 22:32)

This concluding session first explores the influences that may distract from the profound teachings of Karbala and the pivotal role of Imam Husayn ('a).

It was emphasized that assemblies discussing the story of Karbala must serve the purposes of Imam Husayn's entire revolution. Reflecting on insights from Imam al-Sadiq ('a), the previous session highlighted the intention of Imam Husayn ('a)'s sacrifice to counter the pervasive 'ignorance' (jahalah) sustained by the Banu Umayyah to uphold their dominance and un-Islamic practices. In modern times, global powers continue this trend of manipulation and deceit, clouding the masses from their larger agendas, with consequences becoming apparent only after they have taken deep root.

The challenges faced by the Muslim community due to misrepresentation and misuse of Islam for nefarious purposes were highlighted. It was stressed that there is a critical need for enlightenment about the real conditions and the actors involved in corrupting the essence of Islam.

Historical parallels are often drawn to shed light on current events. For instance, the surprising readiness of many to oppose the Holy Prophet's grandson reflects similar trends seen after the Arab Spring in 2011. Here, influenced by fatwas labeling their actions as Jihad, individuals fought against their own nations, while Israel remained unaffected. These actions, spurred by misconceptions, illustrate the profound impact of jahalah on the collective psyche.

The Arab Spring led to two major consequences:

Firstly, it resulted in significant political and social upheaval in historically rich nations like Yemen, Syria, Iraq, and Egypt. These nations, with legacies extending back to the prophets, experienced profound transformations. The upheavals aimed at dismantling long-standing authoritarian regimes and called for democratic reforms, although the outcomes varied widely among the countries, often leading to prolonged conflict and instability.

Secondly, efforts were made to enhance Israel's position by fracturing the unity of Muslim countries through the manipulation of internal factions, leading to self-destruction. This tactic gave rise to groups like ISIS, with individuals outwardly adopting Islamic symbols while promoting internal conflict, a challenge reminiscent of those faced by Imam Husayn ('a) in Karbala. Imam 'Ali ('a) in Nahjul Balaghah (Sermon 27) describes such adversaries as Muslims wearing sheepskin inside out.

In modern times, when people refer to "Islamic countries," there's a tendency to think of nations like Saudi Arabia, U.A.E., and Qatar, often associating them with wealth, dates, and coffee. This perspective significantly underestimates the broad and profound heritage and identity of the Islamic world.

Beyond the issue of ignorance, a loss of hope and the determination to confront injustice also distract from the true essence of Karbala. The story of Karbala presents two contrasting faces: one bright and radiant, the other dark and oppressive. These disparate scenes of Karbala illustrate the profound dichotomy inherent in the event, embodying both illumination and shadow.

Exploring the darker aspects, the narrative delves into the brutalities that unfolded. It recounts the denial of water to Imam Husayn and his followers, the tragic martyrdom of Abu al-Fadhl al-Abbas as he attempted to deliver water to his brother, and the relentless assaults that culminated in his dismemberment. The lecture also described the heart-wrenching moment when Imam Husayn ('a), left with no companions, presented his infant with the hope that the oppressors might show mercy, only for the discussion among the enemies to end in the infant's death by an arrow.

This dark side of Karbala serves as a stark portrayal of the perpetrators as criminals devoid of compassion, embodying hearts hardened to the point of mercilessness. It is a grim reminder of the capacity for human cruelty and the moral depths individuals can descend to under the guise of religious and political motives.

On the other hand, the narrative also highlights the luminous face of Karbala, celebrated through the

actions of Imam Husayn's companions and family. Their resilience, patience, and willingness to sacrifice everything for the sake of Islam exemplify the highest virtues of faith. These individuals stood firm in their convictions, demonstrating bravery and steadfastness that shine through the darkest moments of trial.

Shahid Mutahhari emphasizes that the portrayal of Karbala must balance these aspects to provide a complete understanding. Focusing solely on the dark aspects might lead to despair, akin to the angels' initial dismay at humanity's potential for corruption. Instead, by also acknowledging the profound sacrifices and moral fortitude displayed at Karbala, the narrative can inspire resilience and hope.

In this world, there are luminaries such as Imam Husayn, 'Ali al-Akbar, 'Ali al-Akbar, Lady Zaynab (peace be upon all of them), and other revered figures who exemplify unyielding faith and virtue amidst corruption and despair. Their presence reminds us that despite the overwhelming corruption, there are still virtuous servants of God among us, which should prevent us from succumbing to despair and instead nurture our hope for reform.

This point is crucial because, as we raise the followers of Ahl al-Bayt, we instill in them the philosophy of *intiḡar al-faraj* (awaiting salvation), which contradicts the notion of hopelessness. Even in a world enveloped by darkness and corruption, the presence of these righteous figures provides a beacon of light, suggesting that change is possible and that one day, justice will prevail.

The narrative of Imam Husayn at Karbala, despite the apparent martyrdom of his companions and himself, is fundamentally a story of hope and anticipated reform. He embarked on his mission not with the certainty of immediate change but with the conviction that his sacrifice would lay the foundation for future transformations. Imam Husayn's message, *Innama kharajtu li talab al-islāh fi ummati jaddi* (I only rose to seek reform in my grandfather's nation), underscores his understanding that real change is a gradual process, built over generations rather than instantaneously.

The philosophy taught is to think of oneself as a single brick in the wall of reform. The responsibility is not to complete the task but to contribute to it, knowing that others will follow and add their bricks. This long-term view of communal effort and gradual progress, akin to building a wall brick by brick, encapsulates the essence of our gatherings and discourses.

Ayat. Mirza Jawad al-Tahrani emphasized the importance of ensuring that God is not forgotten in the assemblies dedicated to Imam Husayn ('a). During discussions with preachers before Muharram, he advised that the majalis (gatherings) should not just focus on the tragic events but should also connect attendees more deeply with Allah. He stressed that while reverence for Imam Husayn and the Ahl al-Bayt is fundamental, they are ultimately a means to guide us towards God.

The true journey, he stated, is epitomized in the phrases ***"Inna lillahi wa inna ilayhi raji'un - we belong to Allah, and to Him we return"*** (2: 156) and ***"Innaka kadihun ila rabbika kadhhan fa-mulaqi - indeed, you are laboring towards your Lord laboriously, and will encounter Him"*** (84:6). This journey's ultimate destination is encountering Allah (s.w.t.), for which righteous action is essential.

Ayat. al-Tahrani pointed out that the love for Imam Husayn (‘a) and the Ahl al-Bayt is significant not just for their sake but because they direct us toward Allah (s.w.t.). This relationship is not merely about adoration; it’s about seeing their lives and sacrifices as a pathway to divine love. The love for Husayn, therefore, is a conduit to the love of Allah (s.w.t.), which should be the central focus of the gatherings.

He further explained that the purpose of such gatherings is first and foremost to educate the followers about Allah (s.w.t.), strengthening their faith and understanding of His attributes, acts, and existence. Such foundational knowledge is crucial for facing life’s adversities, exemplified by the staunch faith of Imam Husayn’s companions at Karbala, who, despite facing certain death, remained unwavering due to their strong belief in Allah (s.w.t.) and the afterlife.

Contrasting with those firm in faith were figures like “Umar Ibn Sa’d, who, despite knowing the right path, chose worldly gains over righteousness, illustrating a weak spiritual foundation. The discussions culminate in the point that the gatherings should revolve around Al-Mihwariyya Ilahiyya (the divine axis), ensuring that the central focus of every assembly and action within the community is Allah (s.w.t.).

The lecture then shifts focus to emphasizing the importance of maintaining authenticity and accuracy in the narratives of religious history, particularly concerning the event of Karbala:

In the discourse on the significance of Karbala, it is highlighted that God’s presence, attributes, the concepts of heaven and hell, the Day of Judgment, and divine justice are central themes that should resonate within the hearts and minds of the followers. This is crucial to truly fulfilling the mission that Imam Husayn (‘a) stood for.

The first crucial point raised is the need to integrate these theological principles into the collective consciousness of the followers. This integration ensures that the core values Imam Husayn (‘a) championed are alive and influential in guiding the community’s actions and beliefs.

The second key point involves presenting historical events accurately. Given the historical significance of Karbala, like all significant Islamic narratives, it has faced challenges of authenticity due to the variations and interpolations over time. Just as in other historical narratives within Islam, there have been infiltrations of unreliable sources and accounts, which can sometimes distort the truth.

The discussion extends to the broader issue of historical narratives within Islam, including other significant events like the Isra’ and Mi’raj. These terms refer to the two parts of the Prophet Muhammad’s night and Mi’raj (the Night Journey and Ascension of Prophet Muhammad). It’s noted that these narratives have also been subject to insertions and manipulations. An example provided discusses how, over time, certain narratives were altered to include elements that were not originally part of the Islamic texts, such as the satanic verses incident¹⁸, which has been widely disputed and recognized as an interpolation by critics and scholars alike¹⁹.

The lecturer emphasizes the importance of vigilance against such distortions, particularly in the context

of Karbala. The community is urged to adhere strictly to the most reliable sources and resist the temptation to embellish or modify the narratives to suit contemporary sensibilities or emotional responses. The integrity of Imam Husayn's message – his absolute refusal to accept humiliation and his exemplary stand for justice – must not be undermined by inaccuracies or exaggerations that could portray him or his followers in a light contrary to their esteemed positions in Islamic history.

The discussion shifts towards the emotional and intellectual engagement necessary to grasp the profound lessons of Karbala fully. The lecturer underscores that while the intellect is crucial for understanding, emotions are equally important for a holistic human experience. These should not lead to irrationality but be guided by wisdom and knowledge.

The narrative of Imam Husayn's request for water, potentially anachronistic with the appearance of Abu al-Fadhl al-'Abbas bearing a water skin, serves as a critical example. It is pointed out that historical inaccuracies, such as suggesting that al-'Abbas was present at a time before he was born, must be carefully scrutinized and avoided. Such narratives, while emotionally potent, may lack a factual basis and can detract from the authenticity and the lessons intended by the true events of Karbala.

It was emphasized that the sorrow (huzn) experienced during the commemoration of Karbala should not be just about the sadness of the events but should serve to connect deeply with the virtues and trials of the figures involved. This connection is not meant to incite vengeance against historical oppressors like Yazid but to inspire followers to embody the principles that Imam Husayn ('a) stood for.

The true purpose of mourning during Karbala's remembrance is to awaken the human faculties – both emotional and intellectual – to the injustices faced by Imam Husayn ('a) and his companions, and to foster a resilience that aligns with divine justice and the path of righteousness. This form of mourning should elevate the community, guiding them through the exemplary leadership of the Imams, as followers of Ahl al-Bayt ('a) are encouraged to place their steps firmly on the path they forged, the Sirat al-Mustaqim (The Straight Path).

The final part of the lecture focuses on the poignant story of Abu al-Fadhl al-'Abbas's sacrifice at Karbala, exemplifying supreme loyalty and valor:

Al-'Abbas, during the Battle of Karbala, faced a dire choice at the river-bank, reflecting his deep commitment and love for Imam Husayn ('a). While he could have quenched his thirst amidst the scorching desert heat, he chose to prioritize his Imam over his own needs. This act of supreme selflessness is encapsulated in his decision to pour the water back into the river, reasoning how he could drink when his Imam and the small children were still thirsty.

This narrative showcases his unwavering dedication as he made his way back to the camp. Despite being heavily outnumbered and ambushed, he fought valiantly to protect the water that was meant for the women and children. Tragically, his right arm was severed, and he continued to hold the water skin with his remaining arm until that too was cruelly cut off. Even as he fell, fatally wounded, his concern

remained with fulfilling his promise to bring water back to the camp.

In his final moments, al-‘Abbas was unable to face returning to the camp empty-handed, symbolizing his profound commitment not to let down the daughters of the Prophet Muhammad (S) and the children who awaited the water. It is said that he requested Imam Husayn (‘a) not to take him back to the camp, sparing the women and children the sight of him returning without fulfilling his promise.

The lecture concludes by invoking the deep emotional resonance of al-‘Abbas’s sacrifice, highlighting how his actions reflect the ultimate expressions of loyalty, sacrifice, and steadfastness in the face of adversity. His story is not just one of physical battle but a spiritual struggle against despair and defeat, maintaining integrity and faith in the most challenging circumstances.

End of Lecture 8 and Final

1. Editor’s note: By reflecting on these stories during religious gatherings, particularly those commemorating Imam Husayn (‘a), attendees are encouraged to examine their own lives through the prism of these divine lessons. The ultimate goal of revisiting these narratives is not merely to recount historical events but to derive actionable insights that encourage spiritual resilience and ethical conduct. This alignment of story with personal reflection fosters a deeper, more personal engagement with the teachings of the Qur’an, ensuring that its lessons resonate well beyond the gatherings and into the lives of the believers. ❧❧

2. Editor’s note: The overarching theme stresses the importance of discernment in understanding how narratives, whether in religious texts, media, or daily interactions, influence perceptions and actions. It advocates for an engaged and critical analysis of the messages conveyed and the realities they reflect or distort. ❧❧

3. Editor’s note: These divergent views reflect not only different theological interpretations but also varied understandings of leadership, loyalty, and legitimacy in Islamic history. They illustrate how the story of Karbala continues to evoke a range of interpretations and emotional responses, influencing Islamic thought and sectarian identities. Each perspective, whether of mourning and reverence or critique and justification, contributes to the ongoing dialogue about Imam Husayn’s legacy and its implications for the Muslim community. ❧❧

4. As stated by ‘Allamah Tabataba’i and al-Shahid Sayyid Qutb in al-Mizan and Fi ‘Ilal al-Qur’an respectively. (Lect.) ❧❧

5. Editor’s note: The narrative of Prophet Yusuf (Joseph) in Surah Yusuf of the Qur’an is unique for its detailed account of his life, beginning with a dream he shared with his father, Prophet Ya’qub (Jacob). In this dream, Yusuf sees eleven stars, the sun, and the moon prostrating to him. This vision not only signifies his future elevated status among his brothers but also encapsulates the trials, tribulations, and eventual triumph that would shape his life. ❧❧

6. Editor’s note: This dialogue serves as an exemplar of the depth and careful consideration required in Islamic legal and ethical assessments, emphasizing that the determination of legal and moral consequences hinges significantly on understanding the intentions and capabilities of individuals involved in the actions being judged. ❧❧

7. Editor’s note: The nuanced understanding of divine foreknowledge and human agency in Islam is crucial for comprehending the theological implications of events like the martyrdom of Imam Husayn (‘a) at Karbala. This instance raises profound questions about the relationship between divine omniscience, predestination, and human free will. In Islamic theology, it is a fundamental belief that Allah (s.w.t.) is omniscient, meaning that He has complete and perfect knowledge of all things past, present, and future. Nothing occurs outside the realm of His knowledge. However, this divine foreknowledge does not imply direct causation of events by Allah (s.w.t.). This distinction is vital in understanding the nature of human actions and their moral and ethical implications. ❧❧

8. Editor’s note: In Islamic theology, the concept of divine decree and free will has been a subject of intricate debate. This example illustrates that while Allah possesses complete knowledge of events, human actions are executed through free

will. Just as a doctor's awareness of a patient's health condition doesn't make him responsible for the eventual outcome, Allah's knowledge of events does not directly assign Him as the cause.❏❏

[9.](#) Editor's note: This moment of divine intervention is crucial – it demonstrates that Allah (s.w.t.) never intended to take Isma'il's life but wanted to test the resolve and faith of Ibrahim and Isma'il. The substitution of the ram for Isma'il not only prevents the sacrifice but also (peace be upon them) establishes a lasting ritual for Muslims, which is commemorated during Eid al-Adha, the Festival of Sacrifice. This event is celebrated by Muslims worldwide, who sacrifice animals to honor Ibrahim's willingness to sacrifice his son and to remind themselves of the need to submit to God's will as Ibrahim and Isma'il did.

The story is layered with theological and moral lessons about faith, the nature of tests from God, and the importance of submission to divine will. It reinforces the concept that true obedience lies in the readiness to surrender one's dearest possessions in the path of God, trusting that He is merciful and just. Furthermore, it illustrates the communication and mutual respect within a family devoted to God's path.❏❏

[10.](#) Editor's note: The original commentary described the dynamic propulsion of the Shi'a community as being akin to a cart maneuvered by two concurrent forces: one from behind and one ahead. The speaker illustrated this with the metaphor of a cart laden with goods, propelled forward by elders pushing from behind and guided by figures at the front pulling it with ropes. This interplay of forces symbolizes the dual influences shaping the community's journey. The push from behind was attributed to the legacy of Karbala and Imam Husayn ('a), who inspires perseverance and moral fortitude. Conversely, the pull from the front was ascribed to Imam al-Zaman ('a), whose presence and anticipated return instill a sense of direction and purpose within the community.❏❏

[11.](#) Editor's note: The declaration "There is no god but Allah" (La ilaha illa Allah) in Islamic theology is known as the Shahada, a foundational statement of faith which begins with a negation followed by an affirmation. This formula effectively denies the existence or worship-worthiness of any deity other than Allah before affirming the existence and oneness of Allah. Imam Husayn's dismissal of the four misconceptions about his mission similarly begins with negations:

"I am akhruj ashiran" (I did not set out seeking self-interest or to create mischief),

"Ia batiran" (nor to act wrongly or oppressively),

"Ia dhaliman" (nor to commit injustice),

"Ia mufsida" (nor to instigate corruption or disorder).

These negations serve to clear any misconceptions and lay a foundation for what follows, much like the negation in the Shahada clears the belief system of any polytheistic notions before affirming monotheism.

In both cases, the pattern of negation followed by affirmation is a powerful rhetorical device, first clearing the ground of falsehoods or errors and then establishing the truth. Imam Husayn ('a) used this method to unequivocally clarify the true intent and nature of his movement. It aligns with the principle seen in the Shahada, where one must first deny all false beliefs to affirm the ultimate truth. This approach reflects a principle in Islamic thought and jurisprudence that before one can affirm what is right and true, one must reject what is wrong and false.❏❏

[12.](#) Editor's note: Shahid Mutahhari's book, *The Rights of Women in Islam*, originally published over 40 years ago, offers an insightful examination of women's rights within Shi'a Islam. Contrary to common misconceptions, the book argues that Islamic laws and teachings ensure a dignified and respected life for women, encompassing all life stages, from birth to death. Women are depicted not only as central figures in family life but also as vital societal contributors, with rights to education, political participation, employment, and more. Shahid Mutahhari critically compares these rights to those in various cultures and religions, particularly in modern Western societies, where despite formal equality, women often face exploitation and oppression. This book aims to illuminate and correct misconceptions about women's status in Islam, particularly for readers in the West.❏❏

[13.](#) Editor's note: This phrase translates to "Indeed, the martyrdom of Husayn creates a heat in the hearts of the believers." This metaphorical 'heat' is not merely emotional but serves as a motivational force, compelling believers to act against oppression and injustice. It underscores the deeply ingrained sense of duty within the followers of Imam Husayn ('a) to resist tyranny, drawing inspiration from his ultimate sacrifice. This sentiment is integral to understanding the continuous impact of Imam Husayn's martyrdom on his followers, echoing through generations as a catalyst for social and spiritual renewal.❏❏

- [14.](#) Editor's note: Refer to Muharram 1443 lecture 5 when the speaker discussed the distinction between ahdaf (objectives) and nata'ij (outcomes) which is fundamental in appreciating the depth of the story of Karbala. ﴿﴾
- [15.](#) Editor's note: The scope of these ceremonies extends beyond mere gatherings; they encompass various forms of commemoration such as hanging flags, wearing garments symbolizing Imam Husayn's message, and participating in community activities like classes, distribution of food and water, and sermons. These actions are evaluated within the context of the teachings and expectations of the Imams ('a). ﴿﴾
- [16.](#) Editor's note: This love, as explained by the speaker, is also the "scale" by which a believer is distinguished from a disbeliever. In many hadiths, the Prophet Muhammad (S) is reported to have emphasized the importance of loving his family as part of one's faith. This love is intertwined with the love for the Prophet himself, and by extension, a love for Allah. It is a marker of one's true adherence to the teachings of Islam, as the Ahl al-Bayt are seen as the custodians and interpreters of the Prophet's message. ﴿﴾
- [17.](#) Celebrating their joys and mourning their sorrows is a profound and accessible way to express love for the Ahl al-Bayt, as enjoined in the Qur'an. (Lect.) ﴿﴾
- [18.](#) Editor's note: The speaker was referring to the "Story of the Gharaniq." The story suggests that during the recitation of the Qur'an, Satan (Iblis) allegedly interjected certain phrases into the Prophet Muhammad's (S) recitation, which momentarily acknowledged the pagan goddesses of Mecca. This incident is often cited in discussions about the concept of 'Satanic Verses.' ﴿﴾
- [19.](#) Editor's note: The most notable reference to this story is found in the works of early Islamic historians and scholars such as Al-Tabari in his "History of the Prophets and Kings" (Tarikh al-Tabari) and Ibn Sa'd in his "Kitab al-Tabaqat al-Kabir." However, these accounts are debated and many scholars reject them due to their weak isnads (chains of narration) and the lack of corroboration in more reliable sources. Given the controversial nature and the questionable authenticity of this narrative, it is not universally accepted in Islamic scholarship and is often viewed with skepticism. ﴿﴾

[1] [1]

SHARES

Part 4: Ordeals in Tests and Tribulations

Lecture 1 – Muharram 1442

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

In the name of Allah, the All-Merciful, the Ever-Merciful

We will surely test you with a measure of fear and hunger and a loss of wealth, lives, and fruits; and give good news to the patient” (Qur'an, 2: 155).

“Those who, when an affliction visits them, say, ‘Indeed we belong to Allah, and to Him do we indeed return’” (Qur'an, 2: 156).

“It is they who receive the blessings of their Lord and (His) mercy, and it is they who are the

(rightly) guided” (Qur’an, 2: 157).

The sacred month of Muharram holds profound significance within the Islamic tradition, particularly highlighted by the events of ‘Ashura and Karbala. These events are not mere historical occurrences but are deeply embedded in the spiritual consciousness of the Muslim community. The narratives associated with ‘Ashura and Karbala serve as pivotal moments that reflect on the lineage and virtues of key Islamic figures, emphasizing that a person’s rank in the Qur’an and their standing before Prophet Muhammad (S) transcend mere familial ties.

The essence of these commemorations explores the core of human existence, from birth to death, questioning the divine purpose of creation. According to Islamic teachings, life is a series of divinely ordained trials and tribulations (karb and bala). These tests are not arbitrary; they are meant to engage humanity in a deeper understanding of life’s true purpose. This perspective shifts the existential inquiry from a quest for survival to a quest for spiritual enlightenment and resilience.

In Surah al-Mulk, Allah (s.w.t.) clarifies the rationale behind His creation of death and life: “Li yabluwakum ayyukum ahsanu ‘amala...”¹ The term ‘Li’ here – lam ta’ilil in Arabic – signifies a specified purpose, indicating that death and life are created to test us.²

At the onset, the speaker outlined several key points of discussion during the lecture series titled “Ordeals in Tests and Tribulations”:

- 1) Understanding the laws and principles of sunnah al-ibtila’ (the divine custom of trials and tribulations).
- 2) Defining what is meant by trials and tribulations (ibtila’, bala’, masa’ib).
- 3) Exploring the reasons for these tests and their benefits.
- 4) Examining the wisdom behind humans being created to face trials. Note: These issues often arise, particularly among young people. They question the wisdom and justice of Allah (s.w.t.), especially in the context of natural disasters or congenital disabilities. Thinkers like Hegel³ have challenged Muslims on these points. Therefore, it is crucial for Muslims to comprehend the concept of trials and how it aligns with divine justice and wisdom. Allah (s.w.t.) tests each individual according to their capacity. The hardships in this life, which may evoke pity, may not be as they seem. In the hereafter, the system is different. Those who endure their worldly tests will emerge as the true victors. Thus, Islam focuses on spiritual healing and well-being. When there is a deficiency in the soul, rehabilitation through amr bil ma’aruf (enjoining what is right) and nahy ‘an al-munkar (forbidding what is wrong) is necessary.
- 5) The tools Islam provides to address these challenges.
- 6) The perspectives of Ahl al-Bayt (‘a) on ibtila’ wa bala’
- 7) How the event of Karbala encapsulates these teachings.

First Point: Understanding the laws and principles of sunnah al-ibtıla'

The term ibtıla' in Islamic theology, as defined by the scholars, refers to a sunnah of Ilahiyya 'amma, or a universal divine custom. In the context of the Qur'an, ibtıla' is understood as a test or trial from Allah (s.w.t.) that every individual undergoes, regardless of their religious beliefs or status. This concept underscores the idea that trials and tribulations are an inherent part of human life, designed by God to test faith, patience, resilience, and obedience.

The universality of ibtıla' is such that it spares no one, including the most revered figures in Islam, like the Holy Prophet Muhammad (S). The life of the Prophet, as depicted in Islamic tradition, is filled with numerous instances of hardship and trials, from the loss of loved ones to the persecution he faced from his community. These experiences are often cited to illustrate how trials are a means of spiritual growth and development.

In Islamic belief, these trials are not seen as punishments⁴; rather, they are viewed as opportunities for growth, strengthening of faith, and a means to attain closeness to Allah (s.w.t.). The Qur'an and hadith literature are replete with references that emphasize the importance of patience and steadfastness in the face of trials.

For instance, the Qur'an states in Surah al-'Ankabut:

"Do people think that they will be left alone because they say: 'We believe,' and will not be tested?" (29:2).⁵

"And We indeed tested those who were before them. And Allah will certainly make it known (the truth of) those who are true, and will certainly make it known (the falsehood of) those who are liars" (29:3).

The exploration of this theme is crucial for all, particularly the youth and those who thirst for deeper knowledge. It challenges the conventional approach to religious education, which often confines understanding to brief, isolated sessions. Instead, it calls for a sustained, rigorous engagement with the spiritual and ethical dimensions of Islam. This engagement is not just about acquiring knowledge but about fundamentally transforming one's approach to life's challenges.

In today's world, these challenges manifest in various forms, from the environmental to the economic and social. Each day brings new trials, akin to the natural ebb and flow of the ocean's tides. This year⁶, like any other, has its unique set of difficulties. Yet, it is essential to recognize that there are no inherently bad years, only years with distinct challenges. The modern economic structures, heavily reliant on credit, particularly impact family dynamics and individual livelihoods, presenting modern society with a continuous cycle of financial obligations and pressures.

This contemporary reality necessitates a re-evaluation of how we perceive and respond to life's trials.

The lack of direction felt by global decision-makers mirrors the broader existential confusion prevalent in today's society. This situation highlights the relevance of the lessons from Muharram. Just as the historical figures of Karbala faced their trials with steadfast faith and profound courage, today's challenges call for a similar depth of character and clarity of purpose.

In an era marked by global uncertainty and complex societal challenges, religion stands as a beacon, offering not only solace but also substantial guidance. The teachings of Karbala and Imam Husayn (a) exemplify how religious narratives can shape our approach to modern dilemmas, grounding our responses in deep spiritual insights and values. This connection between historical religious events and contemporary issues accentuates the timeless relevance of spiritual wisdom in navigating life's trials.

Imam Husayn (a), revered both as the grandson of Prophet Muhammad (S) and as an emblematic figure of moral and spiritual fortitude, provides a potent example of how to transform adversity into spiritual growth.

The Prophet's words, "Husayn is from me, and I am from Husayn," echo the profound spiritual and familial bond that illustrates Husayn's pivotal role in Islamic teachings. His life story is a profound narrative of facing seemingly insurmountable challenges with courage and faith, teaching his followers and future generations to perceive trials not merely as hardships but as opportunities for profound spiritual victories.

The discourse further delved into the nature of divine testing and the concept of reward, which are central themes in Islamic theology. These concepts were explored through the lens of divine justice, which, while often beyond human comprehension, is portrayed as ultimately just and merciful. The Qur'anic perspective that every soul will experience trials akin to those faced by previous generations highlights this principle of equitability and the preparatory nature of earthly life for the eventual divine judgment.

This theme of divine oversight and justice was complemented by reflections on the teachings of Imam 'Ali (a) regarding the nature of true worship. Imam 'Ali's response to queries about the unseen nature of God illuminate an essential Islamic teaching: true perception of God does not rely on the physical senses but on the heart's spiritual insight. This profound understanding emphasizes that spiritual awareness transcends the physical, guiding believers to seek a deeper connection with the divine essence beyond the material realm.

Thus, the teachings of Imam Husayn (a) and Imam 'Ali (a) offer invaluable lessons on resilience, faith, and the pursuit of justice, resonating strongly with contemporary global challenges. These teachings encourage a re-evaluation of our responses to life's difficulties, advocating for a perspective that views each challenge as a divinely ordained opportunity to develop deeper faith and spiritual strength. Through such a lens, the trials of the present day can be transformed into pathways towards spiritual enlightenment and fulfillment, drawing on the rich heritage of Islamic teachings to navigate the

complexities of modern life⁷.

The tragic events of Karbala stand as a profound narrative on spiritual resilience and divine justice, pivotal themes in Islamic teachings. During these events, the followers of Imam Husayn ('a) showcased an extraordinary level of devotion, willing to endure immense suffering for their faith. Their experiences during this trial were not merely hardships but were seen as direct encounters with the realities of paradise and hell. This perception reflects a deep-rooted belief in the transformative power of spiritual trials, where tribulations are not just tests of faith but opportunities for profound spiritual realization and closeness to God.

Imam Husayn ('a) so deeply enlightened his companions that their understanding of *karb* and *bala* was entirely transformed. Despite being given the choice to leave the battlefield under cover of darkness, with no dishonor for doing so, they chose to stay. They had attained *ilm ul-yaqin* (certainty of knowledge), perceiving victory and great reward beyond the immediate trials – a testament to the transformative power of true faith in facing life's challenges. This episode encapsulates the essence of spiritual trials within Islamic philosophy, illustrating how devout adherence to faith and principles can transcend even the direst of circumstances.

These historical episodes serve as exemplars within the broader theological and spiritual framework of Islam, which encourages the faithful to view life's challenges from a perspective that transcends the immediate and ephemeral, aiming instead for eternal divine proximity. This perspective is crucial not only for enduring the trials but also for understanding their place within the divine plan.

The discussion also addresses common misconceptions and philosophical challenges about the nature of divine justice, particularly those posed by critics such as Hegel. Hegel's skepticism about the order and justice of a God who allows natural disasters raises critical ethical questions. These events, which indiscriminately affect the innocent and the guilty alike, bring to the forefront debates on the purpose of human suffering and the moral nature of the universe.

In response to such skepticism, Islamic teachings on divine wisdom (*hikma*) and justice (*adl*) offer insights that God's ways are both wise and just, even if beyond immediate human understanding. The apparent randomness of suffering and joy across humanity is interpreted within Islam as part of a larger divine scheme. Each person's experiences are tailored according to their capacity and purpose in life, suggesting a personalized test of faith designed by divine wisdom.

Islamic teachings offer a unique lens through which to view the trials and tribulations of human life, particularly emphasizing the distinction between physical disabilities and moral failings. Unlike physical disabilities, which have no bearing on a person's spiritual standing or their destiny in the afterlife, moral failings such as neglecting prayer or engaging in sinful behavior are seen as substantially more detrimental to one's spiritual health. This perspective shifts the focus from the physical to the moral and spiritual realms, where the real challenges of life lie.

According to Islamic doctrine, the Day of Judgment is a pivotal moment where individuals are assessed not by their worldly afflictions but by their actions and choices. This divine assessment prioritizes spiritual integrity over earthly comforts. Those who endure trials with their faith intact are often regarded as more virtuous than those who enjoy a comfortable life yet falter in their spiritual obligations. This concept reinforces the idea that true tests of faith are not marked by external hardships but by internal moral and spiritual battles.

The discussion extends into the realm of community responsibilities, particularly addressing the 'spiritual diseases of the heart.' Islamic teachings urge the community not only to support those with physical disabilities but more importantly, to help individuals overcome their moral and spiritual shortcomings. This focus on internal rather than external disabilities highlights a deeper understanding of what constitutes real challenges within the community.

Community organizations play a crucial role in this context. The Islamic principle of *amr bi-l-ma'ruf wa-n-nahy 'an il-munkar* – enjoining good and forbidding evil – guides these organizations in their mission to assist individuals struggling with sins. These efforts are not just acts of charity but are fundamental to the spiritual health and cohesion of the community. By helping individuals combat their spiritual ailments, these organizations contribute to the overall moral and spiritual upliftment of the community.

In the annals of Islamic history, few events capture the essence of spiritual resilience and divine wisdom as poignantly as the episode of Karbala. This historical moment, involving the Ahl al-Bayt – the family of Prophet Muhammad (S) – under extreme adversity, offers profound lessons on confronting trials and tribulations. Muslims are taught through these narratives to approach life's inevitable challenges with resilience and patience, embodying the spiritual fortitude demonstrated by the Prophet's family.

The story of Karbala is not merely a tale of historical conflict but a foundational event that illustrates the broader Islamic teaching: trials and tribulations are a divinely ordained part of life, much like the inevitability of death. These experiences are not seen as divine punishments; rather, they are opportunities for spiritual growth and self-improvement. The faithful are encouraged to view these trials as essential tests of their faith, designed to forge spiritual strength through perseverance and steadfastness.

Drawing from the Qur'an, particularly Surah al-Baqarah⁸, the teachings emphasize that no soul is exempt from trials. The verse profoundly challenges believers with a rhetorical question: do they expect to enter paradise without facing the trials that tested those before them? The Qur'an points out that hardships, societal upheaval, and personal tribulations are universal tests of faith, echoing the experiences of prophets and their devout followers. It reassures that divine assistance is close, yet contingent upon demonstrating true faith through continued perseverance.

The contemporary relevance of these teachings is undeniable. The trials faced by the Ahl al-Bayt at Karbala serve as a lens through which to view modern challenges. Whether these are global crises or

personal struggles, the narrative of Karbala provides a perspective on the severity and nature of trials across ages, urging a reflection on how one might respond under similar circumstances. This historical comparison is not just about understanding past events but about drawing strength from them to navigate present difficulties.

In conclusion, the concept of 'ibtala' is fundamental in shaping the Islamic understanding of life's challenges. It teaches that trials are not arbitrary misfortunes but are purposeful events within Allah's greater plan, meant to refine individuals and elevate their spiritual and moral status. The response to these trials – through patience, prayer, and perseverance – is seen as a key aspect of a believer's faith and character.

End of Lecture 1

Lecture 2 – Muharram 1442

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

In the name of Allah, the All-Merciful, the Ever-Merciful

Recap of Lecture 1

The lecture addressed the significance of 'ibtala', or divine trials, as a central theme of the month of Muharram and the event of Karbala. It explored how the terms karb and bala signify the tests and tribulations inherent in human life, from conception to death. These challenges, as elaborated in Surah al-Mulk of the Qur'an, are integral to our existence, purposefully fashioned by Allah (s.w.t.) as a means of testing.

The discussion reinforced that 'ibtala' is a universal divine mandate, a 'sunnah of Ilahiyya 'amma', which every individual experiences, irrespective of their beliefs. This universality extends even to the Holy Prophet Muhammad (S), who, like all humans, underwent various trials and tribulations. These are not punishments but opportunities for spiritual growth, faith strengthening and drawing closer to Allah (s.w.t.).

The concept of 'ibtala' plays a crucial role in shaping the Islamic understanding of life's hardships. The Qur'an, in Surah al-Ankabut, highlights that true believers will be tested, and these trials will reveal the truthful and the liars. This perspective transforms the view of life's challenges from pessimism to optimism, suggesting that comprehension and acceptance are key in navigating life's difficulties.

Karbala was presented as a profound illustration of this concept. The unwavering faith and perseverance of Imam Husayn ('a)'s supporters, who chose to face death rather than abandon their beliefs, exemplified the ultimate expression of faith under trial.

The lecture further explored the laws and principles related to ‘ibtila wa bala’, the reasons and benefits behind these trials, and the wisdom they encompass. It highlighted that Islam prioritizes spiritual well-being, with practices like ‘amr bil ma’ruf’ (enjoining good) and ‘nahi ‘anil munkar’ (forbidding evil) serving as corrective measures.

Additionally, the lecture touched on the tools provided by Islam to address challenges, with a focus on the teachings of the Ahl al-Bayt (‘a) on ‘ibtila wa bala’. It emphasized the need for Muslims to reflect upon these teachings, especially when contemplating God’s wisdom and justice in the face of adversity.

Lecture 2

“Do the people suppose that they will be let off because they say, ‘We have faith,’ and they will not be tested?” (Qur’an, 29:2).

The understanding of divine trials as a normative aspect of life was reiterated at the onset of the discussion, emphasizing its profound role across all humanity. This principle, as decreed by the Almighty, governs human existence much like the inexorable laws of life and death. Every soul, without exception, is subjected to this principle (sunnah al-ibtila’), as highlighted in the verses of Surah al-Baqarah (2: 155–157) and Surah al-‘Ankabut (29:2) in the Qur’an.

The Qur’an and traditions assert the inescapability of divine trials, clarifying that no individual is exempt. The Almighty challenges the assumption that merely professing belief exempts one from testing. This trial is universal and does not discriminate between a Muslim, a polytheist, a disbeliever, or any intellectual disposition. The rhetorical question posed by the Almighty in ***“Do people suppose they will be left off?” (Qur’an, 29:2)***, emphasizes a common human presumption of exemption from divine trials.

A prevalent misconception asserts that once individuals affirm their faith – proclaiming belief in Allah (s.w.t.), acknowledging Islam as their religion, and Muhammad (S) as the prophet – and diligently engage in prayers, fasting, the Hajj, and other religious obligations, they should be spared from life’s trials and tribulations. This notion erroneously suggests that trials are reserved only for those who deviate from God’s commands, implying that righteousness guarantees a life free from hardships.

However, the emergence of the COVID-19 pandemic challenged this assumption, as it affected not only those perceived as sinners but also reached respected scholars and religious figures – that is, even those who say, “We believe.” This illustrates that trials are not exclusive to any group or region, affirming that affirming belief does not shield one from challenges.

The concept of ifitan (examination), or testing, is crucial in understanding that affirming belief does not shield one from challenges. Rather, it is a declaration that prepares individuals for the inevitable trials that life presents, testing the sincerity and resilience of their faith. Thus, it becomes clear that divine trials serve not as punishment but as opportunities for spiritual growth and reaffirmation of faith, reminding everyone that the path of belief is also one of continual testing and perseverance.

Divine tests admit no exceptions. History itself is a testament, reminding humanity that those who walked the earth before us were not spared. The trials of prophets like Ayyub and Yusuf (peace be upon them), and even the Prophet Muhammad (S), who was born an orphan, illustrate that no one is exempt. His early life, beginning in his mother's womb without a father, faced with hardships from the outset, demonstrates this unyielding principle.

It is hard to imagine anyone desiring to confront the world without the presence of a father, especially during the tender years of childhood. Historical records, supported by traditional accounts and even Swahili poetry, suggest that the Prophet's father passed away while he was still in the womb – some say two months into the pregnancy, though six months is the commonly accepted duration.

The adversities faced by the Prophet from such an early age are a stark reminder that divine trials are indiscriminate and form an essential part of God's decree. As stated in Surah al-Fuḥa, the question posed, ***“Did He not find you (O Muhammad) an orphan and gave you refuge?” (93:6)***, highlights that undergoing trials is not a reflection of divine disfavor but a preparation for greater duties and spiritual growth.

Thus, it is vital not to succumb to misconceptions that might comfort but mislead. As Imam ‘Ali (‘a) taught, trials should be met with resilience and faith, not avoidance. His teachings encourage facing challenges with dignity, underscoring that they are not mere obstacles but instrumental in shaping moral and spiritual virtues⁹.

This understanding compels a recognition that trials are not burdens to be shunned but embraced as opportunities for spiritual and moral enhancement, paving the way for higher spiritual stations and responsibilities.

The concept of trials is a fundamental aspect of human existence, urging a deep examination of life. The directive to “Look around you” or “strike with your sight wherever you wish” transcends mere observation; it calls for a profound understanding of the implications of our surroundings and experiences. This instruction encourages viewing life from multiple perspectives – past, present, future, and through the lens of history.

This brings us to the core reason for our creation, a theme intricately woven into our faith and existential reality. While some might suggest that our purpose is to worship, it is essential to recognize that worship itself embodies a series of trials – endurance, learning, and growth through the challenges we encounter. The divine rationale for our creation and the trials we undergo extend beyond mere governance; they form the bedrock of our purpose in existence – al-ibtila’, or divine testing, represents the wisdom of our creation (Inna al-ibtila’ hikmatu al-khalq).

Given that trials are posited as the essence of our being, escape is not an option. We enter this world destined for testing, as illustrated in every life domain, including education, where exams measure our advancement and skills. To propose participation in an educational program without undergoing its

examinations highlights the impracticality of such an idea, as it is through testing that we validate our knowledge and development.

Therefore, divine trials should not be viewed merely as hurdles but as critical milestones directing us towards spiritual and moral growth. They encapsulate the essence of our being and illuminate the path to comprehending the divine intent behind our existence.

In the eschatological narrative, particularly on the Day of Judgment, it is said that those who have failed their earthly trials will lament, wishing they were mere dust. This sentiment is captured in Surah al-Naba', where the regret of the disbelievers, who wish they had turned to dust rather than face eternal regret, is profoundly expressed^{[10](#)}.

The wisdom of these trials is reaffirmed in various Qur'anic verses. For example, as mentioned in the previous discourse, Surah al-Mulk articulates the purpose of life and death: "He created death and life to test you as to which of you is best in deed." This divine statement clarifies that the very essence of our existence is to be tested. Similarly, Surah al-Balad states, "We have certainly created man in travail (kabad)." The word kabad, used in this context, connotes not only physical or economic hardship but also the broader challenges related to one's lineage and the burdens of life, suggesting that human existence is inherently trial-filled.

These divine tests are not limited to worldly experiences but encompass spiritual and eschatological dimensions as well. Surah al-Kahf (18:7) elaborates on this by stating, "And We have made whatever is on the earth adornment for it that We may test them (as to) which of them is best in deed." Here, the creation of the heavens and the earth in six days is described as part of a grand test to see who excels in their actions.

Reflecting on the profound teachings that address the nature of human trials consider the words of Imam Hasan ('a), who observed, "I do not know of a creation that endures more hardship than humans, who face the challenges of this world and the severe trials of the hereafter"^{[11](#)}

The phrase "I do not know" holds a profound significance, especially when articulated by those who are infallible. In Islamic theology, when a scholar who is not infallible says, "I do not know," it does not imply the nonexistence of the fact; it merely indicates the limits of their knowledge. However, when a figure deemed infallible, such as a prophet or an imam, uses this phrase, it conveys that the matter truly does not exist, as their scope of knowledge encompasses what is necessary for their prophetic mission.

Second Point: Defining what is meant by trials and tribulations (ibtala', bala', masa'ib)

In exploring the language and interpretations of terms such as bala' (tribulation) and ibtala' (trial) in Arabic, scholars have provided numerous insights. A single term can encompass a wide range of meanings, showing the complexity and depth of divine tests. The discussions around these terms illustrate that our understanding of divine trials is not as straightforward as one might think.

This ongoing discourse among scholars highlights the vast and nuanced nature of our spiritual tests, hinting at the broader purpose and wisdom of our creation. It invites us to continually reassess our understanding of these concepts, recognizing that our perceptions might not fully capture the divine intent behind our existence.

The trial of Prophet Ibrahim (‘a) is a significant moment in Islamic theology, epitomizing the dual nature of divine trials as both challenges and blessings. Commanded by Allah (s.w.t.) to sacrifice his son Isma‘il (‘a), this episode transcends a mere test; it becomes a transformative experience, showcasing the profound implications of obedience and trust in divine will. The Qur’an characterizes this event as al-bala’u al-mubin – a manifest trial, yet also a manifest blessing, illustrating that the true outcomes of our actions should be judged at their conclusion, not during their unfolding.

This principle is mirrored in various life scenarios, such as sports, where the outcome of a soccer match is determined not by early leads but by which team prevails at the end. Similarly, Prophet Ibrahim’s daunting trial, which initially threatened the loss of his son, culminates in a miraculous turn of events – Allah (s.w.t.) provides a ram as a substitute for Isma‘il. This not only spares his son but transforms a potential tragedy into a significant blessing and marks a pivotal shift in Ibrahim’s life. He is elevated from a prophet to a leader, as affirmed by Allah’s declaration,

“Indeed, I will make you an imam for the people” (2: 124).

This concept highlights the complexity of the term “trial.” What may seem like a hardship can ultimately be a significant blessing. Thus, the trials faced by Ibrahim reflect broader themes that are also addressed in Surah al-Hujurat, guiding both personal and social behavior, particularly regarding the interaction between people and their leader. It emphasizes the importance of respecting the leader’s time and privacy. Historically, people would visit the Prophet at inappropriate times, a behavior that needed correction.

In contemporary society, these lessons on discipline and respect remain relevant. Meeting someone on the road and insisting on lengthy conversations without considering their schedule reflects a lack of discipline. Such behavior, although common, is not in line with Islamic teachings. Discipline should not be mistaken for arrogance, nor should lack of discipline be seen as virtue.

To foster a disciplined community, it is crucial to respect others’ time and commitments. Praising someone for always being available, regardless of their responsibilities, can be misleading. True respect and discipline involve recognizing and honoring the commitments and schedules of others, thus ensuring a balanced and respectful interaction.

The habits of respect and proper conduct are addressed in Surah al-Hujurat, where Muslims are warned against inappropriate behavior towards their leaders. Historically, people would call out to the Prophet from his window while he was resting, addressing him as if he were a peer. This lack of respect prompted the revelation of Surah al-Hujurat, which instructs, “Do not call the Prophet as you call one

another.” This chapter emphasizes that such behavior, if not corrected, can invalidate one’s prayers and fasts.

Surah al-Hujurat also addresses other social issues:

“And do not let a people ridicule (another) people” (49: 11).

Men should not disdain other men, nor should women disdain other women. It warns against using derogatory names, loving gossip, and spying on others. Islam does not endorse investigating people’s private lives or engaging in backbiting. The verse,

“Would one of you like to eat the flesh of his brother when dead? You would detest it” (49: 12).

Illustrates the abhorrence of such actions.

The implementation of these teachings requires purified hearts:

“Ula’ika alladhina... Imtahana Allahu qulubahum – they are the ones whose hearts Allah has tested for Godwariness” (49:3).

Here, the test signifies the purification of the soul from immoral traits. Success lies in nurturing and cleansing the soul, removing envy, jealousy, and bad habits. A person with a purified heart cannot accept backbiting or indulge in unnecessary investigations.

In the Qur’an, tests are sometimes blessings, sometimes purification processes, and sometimes fitnah (trials). The notion that people will be left to say “we believe” without being tested is flawed. True courage and generosity are revealed under pressure and real-life challenges. It is easy to claim virtues in a comfortable setting, but true character is tested during adversity.

When faced with the need to act on virtues such as generosity, the reality of one’s character becomes apparent. The true test lies in actions, not words. This shaking – wahum la yuftanun – distinguishes between mere talk and genuine virtue.

The concept of tests or trials in the Qur’an also encompasses taklif – the obligations imposed by Islamic law. Acts of worship, such as prayer, fasting, and Hajj, serve as tests from Allah. Many young people question the necessity of these acts, arguing that an omnipotent and omniscient God does not need our prayers. The purpose of these tests is to assess our readiness to worship and obey Allah (s.w.t.).

In Surah al-‘Ankabut, it is stated that trials serve to distinguish the truthful from the liars, revealing who truly adheres to their faith under pressure. A common question arises: if Allah already knows who is truthful and who is a liar, why are we tested? If Allah had simply assigned people to heaven or hell on the Day of Judgment, people might argue, “Maybe I would have done better if given a chance.” To eliminate this doubt, Allah brings us into the world to test us, revealing our true selves and removing any

ambiguity. These tests are not meant to inform Allah, as He is already all-knowing. Instead, they are demonstrative, making evident who we truly are. This clarity is crucial for both the individual and the community.

The discussions by scholars like Ayat. Shahid Mutahhari emphasize that trials can take various forms, each serving a distinct purpose in testing and refining individual character. These trials, whether personal or communal, are a means through which spiritual growth and moral fortitude are developed.

Shahid Mutahhari posed a crucial question: what is the purpose of God giving us tests? He identified three types of tests:

1) Personal Test (imtihanun shakhsi): This type of test is used when there is a need to know someone better. For example, an employer may test a potential employee to assess their trustworthiness and capabilities. Similarly, a parent may test a suitor to ensure they are suitable for their daughter. Initially, there is a lack of knowledge about the person being tested.

2) Demonstrative Test (imtihanun ikhtibari): This test is used to demonstrate someone's abilities to others. A manager may already know an employee's capabilities but conducts a test to prove to colleagues that a promotion is based on merit, not favoritism. The purpose is to make the qualities of the individual evident to others, not to the tester.

3) Educational Test (imtihanun tarbawi): This test is designed to help the individual understand their own abilities. Often, people do not realize their potential until faced with challenges. Talents and innovations frequently emerge in times of trouble. An educational test allows individuals to discover their strengths and capabilities.

These trials are designed to unfold the hidden potentials within individuals, which might not otherwise manifest. It's akin to how pressure creates diamonds; similarly, challenging situations can bring out the best in humans, helping them to achieve growth that would not be possible in comfort. This concept echoes the idea that talent and capability often remain dormant until a person is placed in a situation that requires their full exertion.

Moreover, the narrative of these tests teaches us that God's trials are not punitive but are opportunities for growth and self-realization. They help to refine a person's spirit, build resilience, and enhance their understanding of their role in the divine scheme.

In this view, every challenge we face can be seen as a divine invitation to step up and demonstrate our virtues, or to develop new skills and insights that contribute to our personal and communal evolution. It's an opportunity provided by God to achieve a greater understanding of our own capacities and to fulfill our potential in serving the community and adhering to divine guidance.

The discussion of sanctions and challenges often highlights a critical aspect of societal and individual

development. Consider the example of Iran, which despite decades of economic sanctions, has shown significant progress in various fields. This resilience under pressure illustrates how challenges can act as catalysts for development rather than merely obstacles.

In contrast, countries with abundant resources, such as Saudi Arabia, face a different set of challenges. The presence of vast oil reserves might seem like an advantage, but the lack of external pressures such as sanctions can sometimes lead to complacency and a lack of innovation. This scenario is akin to the metaphorical condition where everything is provided easily, from air conditioning at a touch to a car that starts immediately in comfort, without the necessity to innovate or improvise.

This narrative extends to personal life scenarios. For instance, a family facing financial constraints might find itself in a position where everyday comforts are not guaranteed. Such situations, although tough, often drive individuals to become more creative and resourceful. This is the essence of the *imtahanun tarbawi*, or the educational trial, where hardships lead to the development of skills and capabilities that would remain dormant in comfortable conditions.

The Qur'anic principle of *intakunu fuqara'* (you may be poor or needy), which discusses poverty leading to enrichment through marriage, ties into this larger theme. Marriage here is not just seen as a social contract but as an opportunity for growth and responsibility that can lead to spiritual and material wealth. It challenges individuals to rise to the occasion, thus revealing hidden talents and strengths that might not have been evident in more stable conditions.

Life's challenges, therefore, should not be shunned. They should be viewed as opportunities to test one's resilience and adaptability, fostering personal growth and innovation. These trials, whether imposed by external circumstances like sanctions or internal challenges like financial hardship, serve to reveal the true potential within individuals and societies.

The narrative of Iran's advancements in aerospace and medical technologies despite severe international sanctions illustrates a profound lesson in resilience and innovation. Sanctions, rather than merely crippling, have spurred Iran to self-sufficiency, fostering a spirit of determination and creativity. This scenario underscores how challenges can catalyze significant advancements, pushing a nation to develop capabilities that might otherwise have remained untapped.

In discussing the divine wisdom behind trials, it becomes clear that God's testing serves multiple purposes. It is not due to a lack of divine knowledge but is intended to reveal our true capacities to ourselves and others, ensuring that when we meet others in Paradise, there are no grievances or doubts about each other's standings. Trials help us discover and harness our hidden talents, propelling us towards spiritual and moral perfection – qualities necessary for inhabitants of Paradise.

This pursuit of perfection is not confined to the hereafter but is meant to be actively sought in this life. Through trials, whether personal, communal, or national, we are given opportunities to grow, innovate, and excel. The speaker concluded this lecture with the following prayer:

“As we conclude, let us remember that the trials and tribulations we face are not mere obstacles but are divinely ordained opportunities to refine our souls, discover our true potential, and prepare ourselves for the ultimate return to our Creator. May God accept our efforts, heal our sick, fulfill our needs, resolve our problems, guide our children, and grant us the fortitude to face the trials of this world so that we may be successful in the hereafter.”

End of Lecture 2

Lecture 3 – Muharram 1442

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

In the name of Allah, the All-Merciful, the Ever-Merciful

Recap of Lecture 2

In this lecture, the theme focused on the universality and inevitability of divine trials in human lives, drawing extensively from the Qur'an and Islamic traditions. The session underscored that no individual is exempt from such trials, regardless of their faith or piety, challenging common misconceptions that righteousness can shield one from life's hardships.

The discourse elaborated on the notion that trials are not merely tests of faith but also opportunities for spiritual growth and resilience. This perspective was reinforced by the contemporary context of the COVID-19 pandemic, which indiscriminately affected people across all walks of life, including scholars and religious figures, thereby illustrating that trials are indeed non-discriminatory and integral to the divine plan.

The lecture further explored the profound role of trials in shaping moral and spiritual virtues, drawing parallels with the adversities faced by prophets such as Ayyub, Yusuf, and Muhammad (peace be upon them). It emphasized that these trials are a preparation for greater responsibilities and spiritual advancement rather than punishments or mere obstacles.

The talk also addressed common errors in understanding trials, cautioning against views that consider them avoidable or purely punitive. Instead, it presented trials as essential elements of existence that everyone must face, serving not only as tests but also as catalysts for personal and communal evolution.

Exploring deeper, the lecture highlighted how trials serve as instruments for revealing the true character and faith of individuals. It pointed out that through the rigors of trials, the sincerity of one's belief and the steadfastness of one's character are validated, offering a clearer perspective on the metaphysical purpose of our lives. This alignment with divine wisdom underscores the belief that life's challenges, while often daunting, are meant to guide us towards spiritual enlightenment and moral integrity.

Furthermore, the discussion included a call to reassess our attitudes towards trials, advocating for a mindset that embraces challenges as opportunities for growth and self-improvement. By understanding and accepting the inevitable nature of trials, believers are encouraged to foster resilience, harness inner strengths, and cultivate a profound sense of perseverance. This approach not only enriches one's spiritual journey but also fortifies the community's collective resolve to overcome adversities.

In essence, the lecture articulated that divine testing, or al-ibtila', is fundamental to human existence, urging a deeper reflection on life's challenges and their role in fulfilling our spiritual and existential purposes. The wisdom behind these divine tests lies in their ability to reveal and refine the inherent capacities within individuals, steering them towards higher spiritual and moral stations.

Lecture 3

We will surely test you with a measure of fear and hunger and a loss of wealth, lives, and fruits; and give good news to the patient” (Qur'an, 2: 155).

“Those who, when an affliction visits them, say, ‘Indeed we belong to Allah, and to Him do we indeed return’” (Qur'an, 2: 156).

“It is they who receive the blessings of their Lord and (His) mercy, and it is they who are the (rightly) guided” (Qur'an, 2: 157).

In the context of Islamic theology, the discourse on divine trials, or al-ibtila'u wal-masa'ib, reveals a profound understanding of the human condition under the gaze of divine testing. The teachings explore various manifestations of trials as depicted in the Qur'an, illustrating that trials can emerge as blessings, fitna (tribulations), ikhtibar (tests), or taklif (obligations). Each representation offers unique insights into the multifaceted nature of trials that believers may encounter.

During a previous discussion, the focus was on understanding the concept of al-ibtila as it is used in the Qur'an, revealing its diverse applications across different verses. This exploration highlighted that the trials bestowed upon individuals could serve as a form of divine favor or as rigorous tests of faith and character.

Furthermore, the previous discussion introduced a classification of trials into three main types as articulated by the scholar Shahid Mutahhari (imtahanun shakhsi, imtahanun ikhtibari and imtahanun tarbawi).

The tests from Allah (s.w.t.) fall under the second and third categories¹². All three types, despite their differences, serve a common purpose known as idh'har al-haqiqah – to clarify or ascertain the truth about individuals' capabilities and spiritual states. Whether it is for the individual to understand themselves better, for others to gain insights into an individual's character, or for the individual to be shown their own realities, trials serve as a mirror reflecting the true essence of one's faith and character.

Question: What are examples of such tests given to people?

Like the varying exams in secular education and Madrasahs tailored to different subjects, people encounter diverse tests in life's 'University.' The kinds of tests mentioned in the Qur'an (and traditions) include:

1) Al-Ibtila'u Bil-Atayal-Ilahiyyah: Testing through abundance or blessings (ni'mah), as referred to in Surah al-Ma'idah [13](#). Tests of abundance can be challenging, with examples ranging from successful individuals to those who embodied pride and arrogance.

This narrative exemplifies how divine blessings, often coveted, carry inherent tests. Wealth, for instance, can be a trial as much as a blessing. It can open doors to numerous opportunities and comforts but also poses significant spiritual and moral challenges. The Qur'an addresses this duality of wealth in various verses, suggesting that material abundance tests individuals by exposing them to both the temptations of arrogance and the opportunity to perform acts of generosity.

The discussion illustrates that while wealth can elevate one's status and provide material comforts, it simultaneously tests one's humility, gratitude, and the ability to remain grounded in ethical values. The Qur'anic narrative about the figure of Qarun is particularly poignant in this context. Known for his immense wealth, Qarun is depicted as succumbing to pride and arrogance, ultimately leading to his downfall. His story serves as a cautionary tale about the perils of wealth when it leads to moral and spiritual decay rather than being used for good.

2) Al-Ibtila'u Bil-Masa'ib: This type of trial involves testing through various forms of personal misfortune or masa'ib, such as the loss of wealth, children, financial struggles, and health issues, as mentioned in Surah al-Anfal (8:28) [14](#) and Surah al-Baqarah (2: 155). These trials profoundly test an individual's resilience, patience, and faith under pressure.

The challenges presented by financial hardship, health issues, or the loss of loved ones serve as powerful reminders of the transient nature of worldly life. They encourage a deeper connection with the divine, fostering reliance on God during times of distress. These hardships often lead to a reshaping of one's life priorities and perspectives, prompting individuals to focus on spiritual growth and the well-being of their souls rather than on fleeting worldly gains.

Through enduring such tribulations, individuals may come to realize what is truly important, aligning their lives more closely with spiritual and ethical values. These trials serve as crucial opportunities for personal development and spiritual enrichment, steering believers towards a deeper understanding of their faith and purpose in life.

3) Al-Ibtila'u Bittafa'uti Fil-Khalq: Testing through diversity in creation. The diversity in human creation itself – encompassing different races, ethnicity, physical traits and particularly the status of women in society, are all aspects of this test. These differences are designed to test humanity's ability to transcend

superficial divisions and foster a spirit of mutual respect and understanding. The Qur'an urges recognition of this diversity as a means to know one another, not to discriminate or oppress. It challenges individuals to appreciate the variety in God's creation and to treat each other with dignity and respect, regardless of outward differences.

Imam Zain al-Abidin ('a) discusses the love and compassion of a mother in his Risalat al-Huquq. The Imam emphasizes the unparalleled sacrifices of a mother, encapsulating the essence of her devotion through the metaphor of pregnancy and childbirth – a burden no other human willingly bears for another.

This spiritual and physical journey begins with the mother carrying her child in the womb for nine months, a period marked by constant sacrifice and selflessness. The Imam eloquently illustrates the weight of this responsibility by inviting one to imagine carrying a significant burden daily, underscoring the relentless physical demand placed upon a mother during pregnancy. Beyond the gestation, the nourishment a mother provides through her own body, both pre- and post-birth, lays the foundation for a lifelong bond forged from unconditional love and sacrifice.

Moreover, this discussion extends beyond individual relationships to address societal attitudes towards women. It challenges societal norms that might undervalue women's roles or contributions, advocating for a recognition that aligns with the dignity and respect these roles rightfully command. The teaching serves as a reminder of the strength and resilience inherent in motherhood, urging a collective re-evaluation of how women are treated and appreciated in various aspects of life.

Michael H. Hart, in his book "The 100: A Ranking of the Most Influential Persons in History," ranked Prophet Muhammad (S) as the most influential person in history. Hart's choice was based on the unparalleled impact that Prophet had on both the religious and secular worlds. He highlighted that Prophet Muhammad (S) promulgated one of the world's major religions, Islam, and became a highly effective political leader. Hart emphasized the lasting influence of Prophet Muhammad's teachings and his pivotal role in unifying the Arab tribes that significantly shaped human history.

In the narrative of the Prophet Muhammad (S), his life exemplifies that true leadership is consistent in humility and accessibility regardless of one's societal status. He greeted everyone with respect, from children on the streets to the elders, highlighting that authority should not change one's behavior towards others.

4) Al-Ibtala'u Bil-Mulk: Another type of divine trial is through authority. There are people who are tested through positions of power, whether it is governmental authority or any kind of administrative role. This could be as a president, minister, manager, or director. The titles may vary, but the essence remains the same – you have become a boss, a person in charge.

The Almighty bestows authority as a trial, a test to observe how individuals handle the mantle of leadership. History and religious teachings suggest that this test is not only about how one manages when at the top but also how one's character evolves from having little to having much. The

transformation of a person's behavior upon gaining knowledge or authority can be telling. For example, a humble student who becomes a revered scholar should not demand respect but earn it through continued humility and service.

There are those who succeed in this trial, individuals who were once low-level workers but later rose to high positions of authority without changing their character. There are those who were uneducated but later became educated and respected in their communities. Wherever they go, everyone greets them, and sometimes, this prestige can take over. Knowledge itself is a form of authority.

Furthermore, the Qur'an, in Surah Al-A'raf, reminds us that Allah (s.w.t.) might replace one people with another to see how the successors govern. This divine test is about observing the actions of those in power – will they follow the path of justice and compassion, or will they succumb to corruption and tyranny?

This perspective extends to understanding that power should be wielded with a profound sense of responsibility, not as a means to subjugate or oppress. The true test of authority is whether it is used to uplift and improve the lives of others or to further one's own ends at the expense of justice.

As the world faces global challenges like pandemics, which some theorize to be man-made while others see as natural calamities, the role of global leaders becomes even more scrutinized. The actions taken by those in power can lead to significant suffering or collective healing. This forms part of the divine test – how leaders respond to such crises will define their legacy and the moral fabric of their leadership.

5) Al-Ibtala'u fi Akhir al-Zaman: The trials in the end of times. These trials are not merely future possibilities but are seen as unfolding realities that affect our present lives. The belief is that every morning when we wake up, the world appears to be worsening, plunging deeper into moral, social, and environmental chaos. This observation should neither shock nor instill fear in believers. Instead, it should serve as a reminder of the prophetic traditions that forewarn us of these times [15](#).

One might ask, who will be the agents of these tribulations? In contemporary times, it is evident that global leaders, whether from the East or the West, play pivotal roles in shaping the socio-political landscape. Their decisions, policies, and actions have far-reaching consequences, often leading to widespread unrest and instability.

The signs of these tribulations are manifesting in various forms: economic crises, political corruption, social decay, environmental disasters, and wide-spread conflict. Each of these elements contributes to a sense of global instability and foreboding. The rulers, whether through intentional actions or neglect, exacerbate these issues, leading to greater suffering and hardship for the common people.

It is crucial to emphasize the practical application of these discussions in our lives. These gatherings aim to transform our lives, urging reflection and self-examination to understand the trials we face. This understanding is akin to entering a classroom and being given a test paper; the first essential step is to

comprehend the questions thoroughly.

It is important to avoid arguments and conflicts. Scholars, influential in shaping societal dynamics, often highlight how trials can create social divisions. Both secular and religious knowledge contribute to these divisions, underscoring the necessity of recognizing one's role and responsibilities. Wealth, power, or respect granted by God should be used wisely. Not every one possesses financial or educational resources, yet many are honored in their communities due to their wisdom and prudence.

Power and authority in one's hands can be viewed as a gateway to paradise. Understanding the significance of each trial is essential because every trial is an individual's unique gateway. Often, people rush to seek others' gateways, envying their possessions or knowledge, without realizing their own trials are their paths to paradise.

'Allamah Tabataba'i, in his exegesis Tafsir al-Mizan¹⁶, discusses the concept of al-sirat (the path) and al-sabil (the way) as mentioned in the Qur'an. He notes that while God speaks of multiple 'ways' attributed to Himself and His servants, He only attributes to Himself one 'straight path'. This distinction signifies that there may be various methods of worship and submission to God, as practiced by different individuals, yet there is ultimately one 'straight path' that leads to divine pleasure and salvation.

This diversity in paths aligns with the idea that while there is one ultimate truth or destination, there are multiple ways to reach it, depending on one's personal circumstances and the trials they face.

Such an understanding is vital because it emphasizes that the journey towards spiritual fulfillment is not uniform but personalized. Every individual's trials are a gateway to their own form of spiritual success.

This concept is reflected in the teachings where the rich are admonished not to boast just because they can outdo others in charity or religious observances. Instead, there is a beautiful simplicity in realizing that the utterance of praises like Subhana Allah (Glory be to God) or Alhamdulillah (All praise be to God) can equate the rewards of those who give more tangibly in charity. This teaching serves to level the spiritual playing field and allows every individual to contribute in ways that are within their means yet spiritually significant.

The question of why God permits problems, calamities, and trials on earth has puzzled believers for centuries. At first glance, these adversities seem to contradict the divine attributes of mercy, compassion, wisdom, and justice as described in the Qur'an. The Qur'an portrays God as merciful (rahman), compassionate (rahim), wise (hakim), and just ('adil). Despite these attributes, the world is rife with calamities and misfortunes that bring about immense suffering and loss.

Natural disasters such as wildfires in California, earthquakes, floods in India, Pakistan, Afghanistan, and the Philippines, and hurricanes raise questions about the presence of divine mercy and order. These events often lead to substantial destruction and loss of life, causing some to question the existence of a benevolent deity.

Western philosophies, particularly those of the likes of Hegel, have significantly influenced contemporary thought. Hegel argued against the existence of God, citing the apparent disorder on earth as evidence. He posited that the chaos and calamities in the world indicate the absence of a divine being. In contrast, Islamic theology uses the inherent order in the universe to argue for the existence of God, known as the argument from design (burhanu niʿām). This argument asserts that the intricate design of human bodies and natural phenomena cannot be a result of mere chance, but must be the work of a knowledgeable and wise creator.

Hegel's skepticism is addressed by Islamic scholars who argue that what appears to be disorder is, in fact, part of a grand, divine order. al-Hakim al-Sabzawari, a notable scholar, countered Hegel's arguments by explaining that the perceived disorder is actually a component of a broader, perfectly ordered system. To illustrate this point, consider a hypothetical government project to build a large hospital. If the government compensates residents but demolishes their homes for the project, the immediate impact might seem chaotic and disruptive to those residents. However, from a broader perspective, this project benefits the entire community and future generations by providing a state-of-the-art hospital with 5000 beds and modern medical equipment, eliminating the need for people to travel abroad for treatment.

In conclusion, what might seem disorderly or chaotic from a limited human perspective is often part of a larger, divine order. The wisdom of these trials and tribulations can be elusive, but they serve a greater purpose in the divine plan. Recognizing and accepting this broader context helps reconcile the presence of suffering with the attributes of a merciful, compassionate, wise, and just God. Understanding this can provide comfort and perspective, encouraging believers to trust in the divine plan and its ultimate benevolence.

End of Lecture 3

Lecture 4 – Muharram 1442

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

In the name of Allah, the All-Merciful, the Ever-Merciful

Recap of Lecture 3

The lecture explored the profound concept of divine trials (al-ibtila'u wal-masa'ib) in Islamic theology, providing insights into human existence under divine scrutiny. These trials, as depicted in the Qur'an, manifest as blessings, fitna (tribulations), ikhtibar (tests), or taklif (obligations), each offering unique challenges for believers. The Qur'an emphasizes the universal nature of divine testing, highlighting that no one is exempt, as shown in Surah al-Baqarah (2: 155–157) and Surah al-'Ankabut (29:2).

The lecture referenced Shahid Mutahhari's classification of trials into three types: imtahanun shakhsi (personal tests), imtahanun ikhtibari (observational tests), and imtahanun tarbawi (educational tests). All three types of trials serve the purpose of idh'har al-haqiqah, clarifying the truth about individuals' capabilities and spiritual states.

Qur'anic examples of how divine trials manifest in various forms were discussed. Al-Ibtala'u Bil-Atayal-Ilahiyyah (testing through blessings) involves testing through abundance. The story of Qarun (Korah) illustrates how wealth can lead to arrogance and moral decay if not managed ethically. Al-Ibtala'u Bil-Masa'ib (testing through hardships) involves financial struggles, loss, and health issues, testing resilience and faith, as highlighted in Surah al-Anfal (8:28) and Surah al-Baqarah (2:155). Al-Ibtala'u Bittafa'uti Fil-Khalq (testing through diversity in creation) involves differences in race, color, and abilities that test individuals' ability to foster mutual respect, as emphasized by Imam Zain al-Abidin in Risalat al-Huquq.

Wealth and leadership were discussed as significant trials. While wealth can provide material comforts, it also tests humility and gratitude. The story of Qarun serves as a cautionary tale about the spiritual dangers of wealth. Positions of authority, such as presidents or managers, test character and integrity. The life of Prophet Muhammad (S) exemplifies true leadership, characterized by humility and accessibility.

The lecture also addressed philosophical disputes about the existence of God, particularly those posed by Hegel, who argued that natural disasters indicate a lack of divine order. Islamic scholars counter this by asserting that apparent chaos often has inherent order within a divine plan. Al-Hakim Sabzawari's metaphor of demolishing peoples' homes creating apparent disruption in their lives, however leading to the greater good of a new hospital, illustrated this concept.

The lecture concluded by reaffirming that divine trials are essential for spiritual and moral development. These trials prepare individuals for their ultimate return to the Creator, emphasizing the importance of understanding and embracing one's unique set of challenges. Far from being mere obstacles, these trials are opportunities for growth and self-realization.

Lecture 4

The fundamental question in the discussion is how to reconcile the trials and calamities occurring in the world with the belief in the existence and attributes of God.

In Islamic theology, it is believed that everything in creation is placed with precision and order and in its proper place. However, natural disasters such as earthquakes, floods, hurricanes, and diseases challenge this belief. Do these events align with the attribute of divine wisdom, which asserts that everything is established orderly? Do they align with the attribute of justice, where everything is placed in its proper place?

Western philosophers, like Hegel, argue against the existence of God by pointing to these unexplained events. Hegel's criticism suggests that natural disasters and calamities are evidence of a lack of divine order. However, Islamic scholars, like al-Hakim al-Sabzawari, have long addressed this issue. He argues that "What appears disorderly to some is, in the grand scheme, perfectly in order" This perspective invites a deeper reflection on the nature of divine wisdom and justice in the face of life's challenges.

Many religions have grappled with this issue, and some have created dualistic beliefs, attributing good and evil to different gods. However, in Islam, it is understood that the apparent chaos in the world has a higher purpose within God's grand design.

To explore deeper into Divine Wisdom and Justice, scholars categorize the study into two branches: philosophical analysis (Al-tahlil al-falsafi) and educational analysis (Al-tahlil al-tarbawi).

In philosophical analysis (Al-tahlil al-falsafi), a person's view or opinion on any given subject is often shaped by their unique perspective and the limitations of their understanding.

The consideration of personal interests often leads to a narrow and self-centered view. One might assess a situation solely based on how it serves their own interests, saying, "This is good for me." Conversely, another person might have a different opinion, deeming the same situation as bad. This dichotomy can be compared to the nature of a bat. The bat, due to its nature as created by God, finds light problematic and thus prefers darkness. It judges light as undesirable based on its inherent characteristics, without considering the needs of other creatures.

If asked, the bat would likely view the presence of the sun as a punishment rather than a blessing. Therefore, if God were to cater to the bat's narrow interests, He would have to eliminate sunlight, which would be unjust to the rest of the world. For those deprived of sunlight, God would appear unjust, but from the bat's perspective, He would be just. This analogy illustrates the importance of perspective in determining what is considered good or bad.

In human terms, consider a farmer who prays for rain to nourish his crops, while another person whose house leaks prays for the rain to stop. Both have valid concerns, yet their perspectives on rain differ. For the farmer, rain is a blessing; for the person with a leaking house, it is a curse. Here, the question arises: should God consider the interests of the entire community or just a few individuals?

Similarly, when God is perceived as unjust for allowing certain calamities, it is often because people view these events from a limited, personal perspective. God's justice, however, encompasses the greater good and the broader context of all creation. Therefore, while individual suffering might seem unjust, it is part of a larger, divine plan that ensures overall balance and justice.

Demolishing houses along the road in the city halts life and disrupts economic activities. For those affected, it seems like a curse and a disaster. However, for the country as a whole, it is a blessing, as

these actions bring long-term benefits. Despite the immediate distress and anger towards the government, such measures are often necessary for broader improvements.

In understanding these events, it is important to avoid judging them from a narrow, selfish perspective. Often, personal interests overshadow the greater good, leading to misguided conclusions. This narrow view is the primary issue when evaluating the impact of such decisions.

Philosophically, scholars explain that these phenomena are links in a continuous chain¹⁷. Each event is interconnected, much like rings in a chain. To judge one ring accurately, it must be considered within the context of the entire chain. Isolated judgments fail to capture the complete picture, as every event influences another.

Let's consider the broader picture of natural events like earthquakes and volcanoes. Why do they exist? Could God have created the earth without these phenomena? Minerals, gas, and petroleum found inside the earth are often the cause of such events. Imagine life today without gas or petroleum. Many people depend on these resources for their livelihood.

It's unrealistic to want gas and petroleum without the accompanying natural events. Take smoke, for instance. Smoke is bothersome and harmful. But it is a by-product of fire. We need fire in our lives, yet fire cannot exist without producing smoke. This interdependence illustrates that removing smoke means removing fire too.

Now, imagine life without fire. Fire is beneficial; it allows us to cook. But fire also produces smoke. Asking for fire without smoke is like asking for a triangle without three sides. A triangle is defined by its three sides; without them, it's no longer a triangle.

Similarly, Prophet Ibrahim's story where the fire did not burn him is an exception where God intervened. Normally, fire produces heat, and it is this heat we rely on for cooking, not a cold fire.

This analogy helps us understand the perspective of al-Hakim al-Sabzawari: "What appears disorderly to some is, in the grand scheme, perfectly in order"

Transitioning into the second aspect, Educational Analysis (Al-tahlil al-tarbawi), it's important to note that even if we fail to acknowledge certain events as beneficial, they still possess advantages that outweigh their harms. Any intelligent person, regardless of religious belief, understands that if something has both benefits and harms, and the benefits outweigh the harms, it is worth enduring the lesser harm.

Consider the example of an injection. Is it a pleasure or a pain? One might willingly visit a doctor for an injection. Why? Should we then label the doctor as causing harm because of the pain from the injection? Often, individuals even pay for medical treatment. But for God's trials, there's no monetary charge. One might pay for an appointment, buy medication, and endure hospital stays, all to recover health. The temporary pain from an injection is tolerated because the long-term benefits are significant, there- fore

enduring hardships for the eternal rewards in the hereafter.

For instance, enduring a five or six-year hardship on earth could lead to eternal happiness in paradise. The rewards in paradise are described vividly, with rivers of honey and milk and eternal gardens. Even if one does not achieve the highest level, being among the righteous in paradise is still an immense blessing.

In essence, each individual has a unique set of trials, perfectly suited to their capabilities. Some are made wealthy, while others are made poor, based on what is best for their spiritual well-being. Whilst facing trials is beneficial in the long term, this is not to say one must deliberately seek problems with the intention that he or she will be rewarded for enduring them. Trials that come from Allah are according to one's capacity and best suited for their journey to paradise.

Thus, it's crucial not to seek out problems but to accept and endure those that come naturally. Each person's trials are their own, and everyone has their share of challenges. Enduring these with patience and within the bounds set by God will lead to great rewards¹⁸.

The first benefit of trials is their ability to ignite human potential. Challenges, calamities, and trials activate the latent capabilities within individuals. Many people do not realize the extent of their abilities until they are faced with significant challenges. These challenges can serve as a form of divine mercy, redirecting individuals back to the path of righteousness.

Consider modern technology, such as mobile phones, tablets, and computers. Most people use only a small fraction of these devices' capabilities, perhaps only 10 or 20 percent. Similarly, humans use only a small percent- age of their brain's capacity. True potential often remains untapped unless driven by necessity.

The famous saying, "Necessity is the mother of invention," underscores this idea. Innovations arise when there is a need. For instance, marriage brings about new challenges that foster creativity and problem-solving. A person's potential is often unlocked by the challenges they face, leading to significant personal growth.

The Islamic Republic of Iran serves as a contemporary example. Despite facing significant challenges, it has achieved technological advancements, including launching its own satellites. This progress was driven by necessity and adversity, which fueled innovation and development.

While some regions with abundant resources may have talented individuals, their skills remain under-utilized due to a lack of challenges. Conversely, regions facing adversity are often propelled to innovate and excel.

The second benefit of trials and calamities is that they serve as a warning bell, reminding individuals to turn back to their Creator. For instance, someone indulging in worldly pleasures might forget about the

afterlife. Trials can serve as a wake-up call, leading them to repentance and spiritual growth. By facing hardships in this world, they may be spared greater suffering in the hereafter.

Reflecting on the recent pandemic that began around February (2020), it caused global panic and distress. Over time, as the situation began to stabilize, many saw it as a message from God, a yellow card warning, urging humanity to return to righteousness. This period of crisis led many who had neglected their prayers to return to their faith, realizing the importance of their relationship with God¹⁹.

The third benefit of trials and calamities is that they serve as a reminder of blessings (ni'mah). Many people are unaware of their blessings until they lose them. The words of Imam 'Ali or the Prophet (peace be upon them) resonate deeply here: "There are two blessings which are not recognized until they are lost: youth and health." To understand the value of youth, one only needs to ask the elderly, who once moved freely but now struggle with simple tasks. Similarly, health is often taken for granted until it is compromised.

Calamities can temporarily take away these blessings, making their value known. When health or other blessings are restored, individuals tend to appreciate and utilize them better. This realization leads to a more grateful and meaningful life, where blessings are not squandered but cherished and used wisely.

The fourth benefit of trials and adversities, though seemingly harsh, is integral to human growth and spiritual awakening. They help unlock potential, serve as warnings, and highlight the value of everyday blessings. Recognizing these aspects allows one to navigate life's challenges with a deeper understanding and appreciation, fostering resilience and faith in the process.

Concluding with the topic of calamities and trials, it is crucial to understand that not all disasters and tribulations are divine in origin. Many of the problems we face are man-made. Therefore, the blame lies on humanity itself. The solution is to return to God and rectify our ways.

Humanity has created weapons of mass destruction, including nuclear bombs and poisonous chemicals, stored in various places. When these factories leak or these weapons fall into the wrong hands, millions of lives are lost. People then turn to God, asking why He has allowed such suffering. However, it is not God who created these deadly devices; it is humanity that has brought these calamities upon itself.

These human-made disasters should prompt us to reevaluate our actions on this earth. We must reconsider the things we create that endanger our lives and the lives of others. Many modern diseases and disasters are also the result of human actions. Ebola and other diseases, for instance, are largely caused by human activities and negligence.

In summary, the trials and tribulations we experience are often the result of human actions. These afflictions should not be seen as a lack of divine wisdom or justice but rather as opportunities for reflection and rectification. As the scholar al-Sabzawari points out, these disasters and misfortunes in the world do not negate God's wisdom and justice. It is our perspective and understanding that matter.

May God grant us the patience and strength to endure and learn from these trials. May He guide us back to the straight path, as exemplified by Imam Husayn (‘a) in the revolution of Karbala, which served as a reminder for people to return to the righteous path. May Allah (s.w.t.) accept our efforts, have mercy on those who have passed away, and reward those who contribute to righteous causes.

All praise is due to God, the Lord of all worlds, and may His blessings and peace be upon our Prophet Muhammad and his pure family.

End of Lecture 4

Lecture 5 – Muharram 1442

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

In the name of Allah, the All-Merciful, the Ever-Merciful

Recap of Lecture 4

The lecture addresses reconciling trials and calamities in the world with belief in God’s existence and attributes. Islamic theology holds that every– thing is placed with precision and order. Yet, natural disasters challenge this belief. Do these events align with divine wisdom and justice?

Scholars divide the study into two branches: philosophical analysis (Al–tahlil al–falsafi) and educational analysis (Al–tahlil al–tarbawi).

In philosophical analysis, personal interests often lead to narrow, self–centered views. For instance, a bat might view sunlight as a punishment rather than a blessing. Similarly, humans judge situations based on their interests. For example, a farmer prays for rain to nourish his crops, while another person prays for the rain to stop to avoid leaks. Should God consider the interests of the entire community or just a few individuals?

Scholars explain that phenomena are links in a continuous chain. Each event is interconnected, like rings in a chain. For instance, natural events like earthquakes and volcanoes are part of the earth’s processes. Minerals, gas, and petroleum found inside the earth often cause these events. Asking for these resources without their accompanying natural events is unrealistic, much like asking for fire without smoke.

In educational analysis, even if certain events are not acknowledged as beneficial, they still possess advantages that outweigh their harms. For instance, an injection may be painful, but the long–term health benefits far outweigh the discomfort. Similarly, enduring temporary hardships for God’s greater reward is wise. Trials on earth can lead to eternal happiness in paradise.

Each individual has a unique set of trials suited to their capabilities. Trials ignite human potential, serve as warnings, and highlight the value of everyday blessings. Recognizing these aspects helps navigate life's challenges with deeper understanding, fostering resilience and faith.

Many problems we face are man-made. Humanity has created weapons of mass destruction. When these weapons cause suffering, it is humanity's doing, not God's. These afflictions should prompt reflection and rectification, highlighting opportunities for understanding divine wisdom and justice.

Lecture 5

“We shall surely make them taste the nearer punishment before the greater punishment, so that they may come back” (Qur'an, 32:21)²⁰

In the discourse on reconciling Allah's wisdom and justice with the trials and tribulations in life, it is essential to understand that human knowledge is limited²¹. What was unclear yesterday may become evident today due to continuous development and discoveries, and what is not understood today may become clear tomorrow. The signs of Allah's existence and attributes are indisputable and unshakeable, even if we fail to comprehend some matters with our intellect.

Lessons derived from trials and tribulations provide valuable insights. What lessons should Muslims learn? What considerations should Muslims use their minds for? Everything in this world follows complete heavenly calculations, and without these, benefits cannot be derived. Several lessons can be enumerated through the challenges faced in life – the trials encountered and the tribulations that befall.

The first lesson, as the scholars tell, trials and tribulations are a lesson among the lessons of the oneness of Allah (Tawhid), faith (Iman), and affirming the attribute of servitude to Allah ('Ubudiyah), the Lord of the worlds, and reliance on Him (Tawakkul).

When a person lives in the world and sees uninterrupted order in his life – every morning things are in order. Their business is in order, their health is in order, their family is in order, their sustenance is in order, their sleep is in order. Everything runs smoothly. If this continues for a long time, it may generate in the soul the trait of self-sufficiency (istaghna'), thinking that one can sustain themselves now, not needing anyone else's help. And not only not needing anyone's help, but also not needing God's help anymore. This self-sufficiency is a dangerous trait, as highlighted in Surah al-'Alaq:

“Indeed, man transgresses” (Qur'an, 96:6).

“Because he sees himself self-sufficient” (Qur'an, 96:7).

When tribulations strike in aspects such as health, wealth, or any other part of life, they serve to remind of human frailty. These challenges reveal that self-sufficiency is an illusion. It brings one back to the reality of being in need, as stated in the Qur'an:

“Antumu l-fuqara’u wa-llahu huwa l-ghaniyyu – you are the ones in need of Allah, while Allah is free of need” (35: 15).

Self-sufficiency is not a human trait; it is a divine trait. Anyone who adorns themselves with this trait steps out of humanity and attempts to assume a divine role, which can lead to grave consequences. This brings one back to the teachings of Tawhid and Iman, reinforcing the connection to Allah (s.w.t.).

Imam Zain al-Abidin (‘a) emphasizes in his supplication, “Who does a servant turn to if not to their master?” This awareness of servitude inherently acknowledges the presence of Allah as the Creator, affirming that one cannot exist without the Creator.

It’s through these trials that man confesses his limitations and weaknesses, leading to a profound trust in Allah (s.w.t.). This reliance, *tawakkul ala- Allah*, becomes man’s strength in navigating through life’s tests.

The second lesson, as scholars explain, trials and tribulations remove ‘ujb (self conceit) from the soul (*Al-ibtala’u yukhriju l-’ujba mina n-nufus*). Besides arrogance, another trait that can develop in a person who perceives their affairs as always being in order is self-conceit or ‘ujb. This trait often manifests when an individual experiences success and receives praise. The individual may begin to see themselves as superior, leading to a distorted perception of reality.

Imam Zain al-Abidin (‘a), in his supplications, asks Allah (s.w.t.) not to display his attributes to people except to the extent that his weaknesses are revealed to him. This balance helps maintain humility. While receiving praise from people, one should remain aware of personal shortcomings, preventing the development of self-conceit.

Therefore, some scholars, when they sit with non-scholars, appear to be superior. However, when they sit with true scholars, they turn into students.

The peril of considering oneself superior in piety, often referred to as the ‘holier than thou’ attitude, is a significant concern. Historical accounts from Islamic battles, such as those at Badr, Uhud, and Khandaq, indicate that despite being outnumbered, the early Muslims fell into the trap of overconfidence after their victories. This led to their defeat at Hunayn, a lesson that was crystallized in a verse from the Qur’an which addresses this incident of conceit, revealed in Surah al-Tawbah, which begins with ***“Wa yawma Hunaynin idh a’ajabatkum...”*** translated as:

“And on the day of Hunayn, when your great number pleased you...” (9:25).

Their defeat at Hunayn served as a divine test to help them overcome their self-conceit and return to a state of humility and reliance on Allah.

The third lesson, involves recognizing that tribulations provide an opportunity to reflect on one’s blessings (*Al-bala’u wa-l-masa’ibu sababun li-ma’rifati ni’am*). People often fail to see the many

blessings surrounding them, focusing instead on those who seem better off. A person walking envies a bicyclist, the bicyclist envies a car owner, and so on. Each individual overlooks their blessings while desiring what others have. Therefore, when faced with these tests, it is important to look at those below us. You might be poor but are enjoying good health. This makes one appreciate the blessing through tribulation.

An illustrative story speaks of two friends walking through a wealthy neighborhood, lamenting their lack of fortune. To remind them of their blessings, one suggests visiting a hospital. Seeing patients with severe illnesses makes them realize the blessing of health. This story highlights the importance of appreciating one's current blessings, particularly health, which is often taken for granted.

The fourth lesson emphasizes the opportunity for reflecting on faults and reviewing accounts. (Al-ibtila'u fursatun li-t-tafkir fi l-'uyubi wa-muraja'ati l-hisabati). Imam 'Ali ('a) encapsulates this necessity in his saying, *Hasibu anfusakum qabla an tuhasabu* ("Take account of your- selves before you are taken to account"). This principle highlights the importance of self-evaluation before one faces judgment.

In the realm of business, a diligent businessman ends each day by balancing his accounts. He meticulously calculates the profits and losses incurred throughout the day. By assessing how much has been earned versus how much has been lost, he gains a clear understanding of the day's financial performance. This practice of daily reflection and assessment is crucial for the growth and sustainability of his business.

Similarly, by evaluating our actions and their consequences, we can identify the areas where we have succeeded in fulfilling our spiritual and moral obligations. We can recognize the positive actions that have brought us closer to divine satisfaction. This way, we can pinpoint our shortcomings and sins, addressing them to seek forgiveness and improvement.

This daily practice of self-accountability ensures that we remain conscious of our spiritual state. It prevents us from becoming complacent and encourages continuous growth and improvement. In essence, balancing our spiritual accounts helps us stay aligned with our purpose in life and our duties towards Allah.

The Qur'an provides guidance on this matter, encouraging believers to engage in a form of trade that saves them from a painful punishment, as mentioned in Surah al-Saff (61:10). It also poses a rhetorical question about those who are the greatest losers in their works, cited in Surah al-Kahf (18:103). Additionally, it speaks of those who willingly sacrifice their desires for the pleasure of Allah, as highlighted in Surah al-Baqarah (2:207).

The Qur'an uses the term 'trade' (tijara) metaphorically, urging humans to consider their duties in life, especially towards parents, whose prayers hold immense value.

Self-assessment is a crucial practice that involves taking a book and writing down how the day has

gone. Honesty is essential; while one can deceive others, self-deception is impossible when alone. It is necessary to identify mistakes and areas requiring correction. Often, these reflections are neglected, but trials and tribulations compel a thorough reassessment.

Public self-assessment, where individuals proclaim ignorance of their wrongdoings before God, is ineffective. True reflection requires solitude in prayer, kneeling before God, and questioning personal actions: “What have I done wrong in the rights of Allah (s.w.t.).” It’s not just about God; all rights belong to Him. Reflect on the rights of parents, neighbors, spouses, and children. Review these accounts diligently.

In the journey of life, it is often the seemingly small things that are disregarded, yet these minor aspects can cause significant problems. These overlooked actions, though appearing minor, have a substantial impact on both worldly and spiritual well-being. One major aspect of these small but significant actions is kindness to parents. This simple yet profound act can greatly enhance or deteriorate one’s life, emphasizing its critical importance.

Kindness to parents holds immense weight in the moral and ethical framework of life. It is not just an act of respect but a crucial determinant of one’s overall well-being. The enhancement or deterioration of life often hinges on the quality of relationships with one’s parents. This act of kindness, respect, and care towards parents is a reflection of one’s character and moral standing. Its significance cannot be overstated, as it forms the foundation of familial harmony and personal growth.

Observing some individuals, it becomes apparent that outward appearances can be deceiving. There are those who, at first glance, seem to lack good deeds or moral standing. Yet, their lives run smoothly, filled with apparent ease and success. This phenomenon raises an intriguing question: What secret good deeds might these individuals be performing that are not visible to the public eye? The answer to this can be found in the Qur’an, specifically in Chapter 18, in the story of Prophet Musa and al-Khidr (peace be upon them). One of the actions performed by al-Khidr involved restoring a collapsing wall beneath which treasures were hidden. These treasures were left as an inheritance for two orphaned children by their father. Allah protected these treasures because of the righteousness of the father.

Self-introspection and taking account of one’s actions before being held accountable are fundamental aspects of spiritual growth and moral responsibility. The Qur’an emphasizes this through several verses that highlight the consequences of our deeds and the importance of regular self-assessment.

In Surah al-Nisa’, Allah (s.w.t.) says,

“Wa ma asabaka min sayyi’atin fa-min nafsik – And whatever misfortune befalls you it is from yourself”. (4:79).

This verse reminds us that the difficulties and tribulations we encounter are often the results of our own actions. It underscores the importance of recognizing and rectifying our mistakes to prevent further

hardships.

Further, in Surah al-Shura, Allah (s.w.t.) states,

Wa ma asabakum min musibatin fa-bi-ma kasabat aydikum wa ya'fu 'an kathir – And what- ever strikes you of disaster, it is for what your hands have earned, but He pardons much” (42:30).

This verse not only reiterates that our misfortunes are due to our own deeds but also highlights Allah's mercy in forgiving many of our shortcomings. It serves as a reminder to regularly assess our actions and seek forgiveness for our wrongdoings.

Lastly, in Surah al-Sajdah, Allah (s.w.t.) says:

“Wa lanudhiqannahum mina l-’adhabi l-adna duna l-’adhabi l-akbari – And We will surely let them taste the nearer punishment short of the greater punishment” (32:21).

This verse indicates that the smaller punishments we face in this life are a mercy, intended to correct our behavior before the ultimate accountability on the Day of Judgment. It urges us to take our accounts seriously and make necessary corrections in this life to avoid severe consequences in the hereafter.

These verses collectively emphasize the importance of self-reflection and regular self-assessment. By understanding that our tribulations are often a result of our own actions, and by acknowledging Allah's forgiveness, we are encouraged to continuously improve our behavior. This practice not only helps us in this life but also prepares us for the ultimate accountability in the hereafter.

The fifth lesson is that tribulation, calamities, and tests are a cause for the removal of sins (Al-ibtila'u wa-l-masa'ibu wa-l-imtihan sababun li-isqati dh-dhunub). The concept of enduring punishment for sins, either in this world or the hereafter, is well-documented in Islamic teachings. If individuals were asked today about their preference for facing the consequences of their sins – whether in this world or in the hereafter – undoubtedly, many would opt for short-term punishment in this life. This is because the hardships faced here are transient and finite, whereas the punishment in the hereafter is eternal. Allah (s.w.t.) has said, adhab al-adna (the lesser punishment), emphasizing the temporary nature of worldly trials.

Traditions provides profound insights into this subject. A hadith reported from Prophet Muhammad (S) explains: “If Allah wants good for His servant, He hastens his punishment in this world. But if He wants evil for His servant, He withholds his punishment until the Day of Judgment.” This hadith highlights that worldly hardships are a sign of divine mercy, allowing for the expiation of sins before the final reckoning.

Further elaborations in various narrations suggest that if Allah loves His servant and does not punish him in this world, He may subject him to trials during the agony of death. This period, known as “the stupor of death”, serves as a final purification process, ensuring that the individual crosses over to the hereafter free of sins. If this purification does not occur during the agony of death, other narrations indicate that

punishment may be administered in the grave. This ensures that on the Day of Resurrection, the individual will rise cleansed and purified.

The primary purpose of these trials and tribulations is to cleanse sins. Just as dirty clothes are washed clean, transforming them into pure garments, trials serve to purify and sanctify believers. They act as a means of divine cleansing, removing the stains of sins accumulated over a lifetime.

Therefore, understanding the significance of these hardships can provide solace and perspective. Rather than viewing them as mere sufferings, they should be seen as opportunities for spiritual growth and purification. These trials cleanse and purify, preparing individuals for a state of purity in the hereafter.

The sixth lesson focuses on how tribulations reveal the true nature and deceptive enjoyment of worldly pleasures in this transient phase of life (Al-ibtila'u yakshifu laka haqiqata d-dunya wa dha'faha anna-ha mata'u l-ghurur). Life's challenges serve as a lens, clarifying the true nature of our worldly existence. Individuals often become engrossed in the material world, losing sight of the transient nature of this life and the permanence of the hereafter. Death, the inevitable end of every life's journey, is often forgotten as people get caught up in worldly pursuits. These trials and tribulations can be a wake-up call, redirecting attention to the ultimate purpose of life and the reality of our existence beyond the temporal world.

They remind individuals that worldly pleasures and comforts are temporary. Life in this world is a passage, not the final destination. Excessive comfort and enjoyment can lead to the illusion that this world is the ultimate home, causing one to forget the inevitability of death and the hereafter.

A poignant reminder of this reality is found in some government buildings in Arab countries, such as Lebanon, where an inscription at the main gate reads: "The seat you are about to occupy was once occupied by someone else before you." This serves as a powerful reminder that life is temporary and positions are transient.

The Qur'anic verse states:

"Wa inna dara l-akhirati lahiya l-hayawan lau kanu ya'lamun - And indeed, the Hereafter is the [true] life, if only they knew" (Qur'an, 29:64).

The true life is the hereafter, if only humans knew. But the pleasures of the world are leading us astray.

Hence, understanding and embracing these lessons from life's challenges ensure that individuals maintain a balanced perspective, focusing on their ultimate purpose and preparing for the hereafter. This awareness fosters a deeper appreciation for the fleeting nature of worldly comforts and a renewed commitment to spiritual growth and readiness for the eternal life to come.

The final lesson in the face of tribulations, one of the significant insights gained is the revelation of

people's true nature and characteristics (Iḥharu l-haqa'iqi l-nasi wa ma'adinihim). Trials and hardships act as a lens, exposing the genuine disposition of those around. Understanding the true nature of those in one's vicinity – whether they are relatives, spouses, children, uncles, neighbors, or friends – is crucial. These are individuals often relied upon and seen as sources of support. However, it is during times of trouble that true friends are distinguished from mere flatterers.

Distinguishing the corrupt from the good is of paramount importance. For instance, when the Prophet Muhammad (S) entered Medina, he was celebrated by all: "Our leader, you are our guide, you are everything," they said. However, when the day of Badr approached, those who had been spreading propaganda began to express doubts and fears: "What are we going to die for? Our wealth will be ruined; our economy will suffer." Excuses began to surface: "Oh, why should we fight? Oh, why should we do this and that?" It then became apparent that what was thought to be an army of thousands was actually just ten.

This phenomenon is not confined to historical events. Today, similar rev- elations occur. Many speak highly of the companions of Imam Husayn ('a) yet often overlook the trials faced by Muslim Ibn 'Aqil. He entered Kufa with many people praying with him, but on the final day, he stood alone in trials and battles, left with no one in Kufa, not even a hiding place. This trial revealed the true nature of people.

May Allah (s.w.t.) grant hearts and minds the wisdom to understand these lessons and apply them in daily life. May He make believers among those who listen to the words and follow the best of them. May Allah reward all those who organize these efforts and those who have passed to the hereafter. May He have mercy on them. Praise be to Allah, the Lord of the Worlds, and may Allah send blessings upon the master Muhammad and his family, the pure and righteous.

End of Lecture 5

Lecture 6 – Muharram 1442

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

In the name of Allah, the All-Merciful, the Ever-Merciful

Recap of Lecture 5

Tribulations remind us of the oneness of Allah, faith, and servitude. They highlight human frailty and the need for reliance on Allah. When life runs smoothly, individuals may develop self-sufficiency, believing they need no help, not even from God. This self-sufficiency can lead to arrogance, as highlighted in Surah al-‘Alaq:

"Indeed, man transgresses" (Qur'an, 96:6).

“Because he sees himself self-sufficient” (Qur’an, 96:7).

Trials and tribulations also remove self-conceit. Success and praise can lead to self-conceit, where an individual begins to see themselves as superior. Historical accounts, such as the defeat of the early Muslims at Hunayn after their victories at Badr and Uhud, illustrate the dangers of overconfidence and self-conceit.

Trials provide an opportunity to reflect on one’s blessings. People often fail to appreciate their blessings, focusing instead on those who seem better off. Trials compel individuals to look at those less fortunate, fostering gratitude for what they have. An illustrative story speaks of two friends who, after visiting a hospital and seeing patients with severe illnesses, realized the blessing of health.

Self-assessment and accountability are crucial for spiritual growth. Regularly evaluating one’s actions and their consequences ensures consciousness of one’s spiritual state, preventing complacency and encouraging continuous growth.

Trials and tribulations serve as a means to cleanse sins. Enduring punishment for sins in this world is considered a mercy, as it allows for expiation before the final reckoning. A hadith from Prophet Muhammad (S) explains: “If Allah wants good for His servant, He hastens his punishment in this world. But if He wants evil for His servant, He withholds his punishment until the Day of Judgment.”

Tribulations reveal the transient and deceptive nature of the world. They remind individuals that worldly pleasures and comforts are temporary and that life in this world is merely a passage, not the final destination. The Qur’an states:

“And indeed, the Hereafter is the (true) life, if only they knew” (Surah al-‘Ankabut, 29:64).

One significant insight gained from tribulations is the revelation of people’s true nature and characteristics. Trials act as a lens, exposing the genuine disposition of those around. Historical accounts, such as the abandonment of Muslim Ibn ‘Aqil in Kufa, illustrate how trials reveal the true nature of people.

In conclusion, the lessons derived from facing trials and tribulations teach humility, gratitude, self-assessment, and the recognition of true friends. They remind us of the transient nature of worldly life and the eternal significance of the hereafter, leading to spiritual growth and a deeper connection with Allah.

Lecture 6

“If We let man taste a mercy from Us, and then withdraw it from him, he becomes despondent, ungrateful” (Qur’an, 11:9).

“And if We let him have a taste of Our blessings after adversities have befallen him, he will surely say, ‘All ills have left me.’ Indeed, he becomes an exultant braggart” (Qur’an, 11:10).

“Excepting those who are patient and do righteous deeds. For such there will be forgiveness and a great reward” (Qur’an, 11: 11).

In examining the theme of Tests and Trials, the discourse has explored various dimensions, including the definition of tests, their diverse types, the intrinsic wisdom they embody, and the positive outcomes derived from enduring these challenges. As delineated in the Qur’an and Sunnah, the occurrence of tests and trials constitutes an unavoidable aspect of human existence – no one is exempt from experiencing them.

Today’s discussion aims to address a pivotal question: “How does one accept, manage, and persevere through such tests in life?” This inquiry is critical, as the manner in which an individual responds to trials can significantly influence their spiritual trajectory, potentially leading to salvation or, conversely, to eternal damnation.

Scholars have categorized those who face life’s trials into two distinct groups, thereby providing a framework for understanding the varied responses to divine tests. This categorization helps in comprehensively analyzing the behaviors and outcomes associated with each group’s approach to handling life’s inevitable challenges.

The first group identified by scholars consists of those who, when faced with adversity, loss, or misfortune, succumb to their circumstances and fall into deep despair. Such individuals often experience severe psycho– logical effects, including depression and self–harm, which can destabilize both familial and social structures. The repercussions of their inability to cope effectively with trials are extensive, influencing various aspects of their lives and often resulting from a lack of appropriate guidance during such critical times.

Allah (s.w.t.) in Surah Hud portrays these individuals as perpetually rest– less and dissatisfied, regardless of their circumstances:

If We let man taste a mercy from Us, and then withdraw it from him, he becomes despondent, ungrateful. And if We let him have a taste of Our blessings after adversities have befallen him, he will surely say, ‘All ills have left me.’

“Indeed, he becomes an exultant braggart” (Qur’an, 11: 10).

“Excepting those who are patient and do righteous deeds. For such there will be forgiveness and a great reward” (Qur’an, 11: 11).

They often engage in self–pity, struggle to manage their emotions, and exhibit a lack of perseverance. When they lose a blessing, their reaction may be so severe that they renounce their faith, failing to recognize the remaining blessings in their lives. The irony lies in their response when fortunes improve; rather than expressing gratitude for Allah’s mercy, they become haughty, attributing their relief to

personal efforts and becoming fakhur – arrogant and ungrateful.

This ungrateful attitude leads them to overlook all the blessings bestowed by Allah (s.w.t.) and focus solely on their deficiencies, constantly lamenting their situation. Allah (s.w.t.) warns that such individuals, upon regaining a blessing after hardship, might arrogantly claim, ‘I have overcome my troubles,’ attributing their recovery to themselves rather than to divine intervention. However, this behavior is not universal; it is specific to those who lack patience and gratitude. In contrast, those who remain patient and engage in good deeds even in hardship will receive Allah’s forgiveness and substantial rewards.

The Qur’an further elaborates on human nature in Surah Al-Ma’arij depicting mankind as inherently anxious:

“Indeed, man has been created covetous” (Qur’an, 70:19).

“Anxious when an ill befalls him and grudging” (Qur’an, 70:20).

“When good comes his way (all are such)” (Qur’an, 70:21).

“Except the prayerful” (Qur’an, 70:22).

“Those who are persevering in their prayers” (Qur’an, 70:23).

“And in whose wealth there is a known right” (Qur’an, 70:24).

“For the beggar and the deprived” (Qur’an, 70:25).

“And who affirm the Day of Retribution” (Qur’an, 70:26).

It illustrates that when misfortune strikes, individuals typically respond with lamentation; conversely, when they encounter prosperity, they often become stingy, showing a reluctance to share their good fortune. However, exceptions exist among those steadfast in their religious commitments. These individuals, constant in prayer and charitable in their deeds, demonstrate a profound belief in the Day of Judgment. Such behavior contrasts sharply with the typical human tendency to forget previous hardships when faced with new blessings.

Imam Husayn (‘a) provides a poignant reflection on this aspect of human behavior in his observations, often recited during Muharram gatherings: “People are slaves to the world, and as long as they live favorable lives, they adhere to religion. However, when tested with trials, the true followers are few.” These words emphasize the conditional nature of many people’s faith, which remains strong as long as it aligns with their worldly comforts. Yet, during periods of trial, the number of those who steadfastly cling to their faith dwindles significantly. It is noticeable that some individuals, previously regular in their prayers and religious gatherings, tend to drift away when confronted with difficulties, overlooking the importance of sustaining a close relationship with Allah (s.w.t.).

This behavioral pattern highlights a critical spiritual challenge: maintaining faith and devotion through both prosperity and adversity, recognizing that true adherence to religious principles is tested most authentically in times of trial.

The second group views trials through a lens of divine wisdom (*nadhr ijabiyya*), recognizing them as means to achieve a higher purpose and wisdom. They understand that trials are not merely hardships but are also accompanied by hidden benefits, offering a chance to evolve spiritually and morally.

This perspective is encapsulated in the Arabic saying that during times of testing, a person is either honored or debased, highlighting the dual potential outcomes depending on one's response to trials. It becomes evident that trials are akin to steps or stages in one's life journey. Ascending these steps can lead to greatness in this world and the hereafter, earning one respect and potentially paradise. This ascent requires endurance akin to climbing a mountain – a metaphorical representation of overcoming the significant challenges that life presents.

Imam al-Sadiq's teachings urge a deep exploration of the Qur'an to understand the nature of trials in the lives of the prophets and the righteous. His teachings suggest that no individual mentioned with esteem in the Qur'an was spared from trials; rather, it was through these challenges that their true faith and character were revealed and refined. This notion underscores a fundamental principle in Islamic thought – that the path to divine favor and spiritual elevation is invariably paved with trials and tribulations.

The discussion on trials also touches on the importance of perseverance and resilience. For instance, the story of Prophet Ibrahim ('a) highlights how divine trials serve as a means of proving and strengthening one's faith. When Ibrahim ('a) was tested by his Lord through various commands, his compliance and understanding transformed him into a leader and a moral exemplar for humanity. This narrative reinforces the concept that true leadership in faith comes as a result of enduring and understanding the trials decreed by God.

Moreover, the analysis of scriptural interpretations, particularly within the Sunni tradition, reveals a nuanced understanding of the phrase "making you a leader for the people." This phrase not only signifies a physical leadership but also encapsulates the spiritual and moral leadership that arises from successfully navigating divine tests. The exegetical insights suggest that divine acknowledgment in the form of leadership or prophecy is not merely a reward but a confirmation of one's steadfastness and capability in the face of spiritual challenges.

The teachings of Imam al-Sadiq ('a) emphasize that trials and tribulations, though daunting, are interwoven with Allah's *karamah* (generosity), and are essential for attaining closeness to Him, offering believers a pathway to eternal grace. This perspective is particularly evident in the life and trials of Imam Husayn ('a), whose ordeal in Karbala stands as a quintessential example of achieving an exalted status through profound sacrifice. In a heartrending revelation, the Messenger (S) communicated to Imam

Husayn (‘a) in a dream the severe adversities he would face, questioning the moral dissonance of those who would perpetrate such acts yet seek prophetic intercession on the Day of Judgment. This divine communication reassured Imam Husayn (‘a) of his noble lineage and the high station reserved for him by Allah, attainable through his ultimate sacrifice.

An important question needs to be addressed: How can one ensure they navigate successfully through tests and trials that arise?

Firstly, in addressing the challenges and tests that life presents, understanding the philosophical and spiritual underpinnings of these trials – referred to as wa‘yul-bala’ – is crucial. This concept encompasses the wisdom, purpose, and inherent benefits of life’s trials, themes that have been central to previous discussions in these esteemed gatherings. Recognizing and internalizing the reasons behind our earthly existence, the tasks we are meant to accomplish, and the ultimate goals set forth by divine will, equips us with the tools needed to face these challenges effectively.

To illustrate the importance of preparedness in the face of trials, consider a person standing unaware that someone is approaching from behind to push them. If pushed unexpectedly, the individual is likely to fall hard and possibly sustain serious injuries due to the surprise and lack of readiness. However, if the same person sees the assailant approaching through a mirror, their preparedness allows them to brace for impact or even avoid falling altogether. The consequences of the push are significantly less severe because they are mentally and physically prepared.

This analogy reflects the broader principle of wa‘yul-bala’. Those who are unprepared for life’s trials may find themselves overwhelmed by the challenges, unable to comprehend the divine wisdom behind them. In contrast, those who understand the role of trials in the Islamic philosophy are not only mentally ready but also spiritually equipped to handle whatever comes their way. Although they too feel the impact of these challenges, their preparedness ensures that the trials refine rather than devastate them. This is the essence of wa‘yul-bala’: using divine wisdom as a mirror to anticipate and transform trials into opportunities for spiritual growth and fortitude.

Secondly, in facing life’s trials, it is essential to cultivate a profound reliance on Allah, acknowledging our limitations and surrendering to His supreme will. This principle of unwavering trust, or tawakkul, is exemplified in the narrative of Prophet Ibrahim (‘a), particularly during the dramatic moment when he was cast into the fire.

Prophet Ibrahim’s ordeal teaches a profound lesson in tawakkul. As he was thrown into the blazing inferno, a situation that epitomized extreme adversity, Angel Gabriel appeared to offer assistance. The response of Prophet Ibrahim (‘a) was a testament to his deep faith; he declined Gabriel’s help, asserting his complete reliance on Allah. He stated that if it was Allah’s will for him to face the fire, he would do so, trusting wholly in Allah’s plan. This incident highlights the depth of tawakkul that Prophet Ibrahim (‘a) embodied – a level of trust and surrender that is rare and profound.

This exemplary episode is not just historical but serves as a guiding light for believers. It underscores the essence of true tawakkul – not just passive resignation but an active trust in Allah’s wisdom and decrees. While Prophet Ibrahim’s level of trust may seem beyond reach, it presents an ideal that believers can aspire to, in varying degrees, depending on their faith and circumstances. This narrative also resonates in the life of Imam Husayn, (‘a) who displayed similar trust and fortitude under dire circumstances.

While attaining the highest levels of spiritual authority and trust exemplified by figures like Prophet Ibrahim and Imam Husayn (peace be upon them) may be beyond most, each individual can aspire to achieve a substantial measure of this faith. Imam Husayn’s unwavering reliance on Allah amidst the extreme adversities he faced teaches a powerful lesson in surrendering to divine will, maintaining that everything – every trial and tribulation – is in Allah’s hands.

This profound trust necessitates a certainty in Allah’s mercy and salvation, urging believers to view their challenges through a lens of faith and gratitude. A practical manifestation of this outlook is the popular adage to view the “glass as half full rather than half empty.” This philosophy encourages looking beyond immediate losses to appreciate what remains. For example, if a businessman loses one out of ten trucks, focusing on the nine that remain cultivates a sense of gratitude and perspective – recognizing that despite the loss, much has been retained.

This approach is not merely about fostering a positive mindset but involves a deeper spiritual practice of gratitude, expressed through phrases like Alhamdulillah (Praise be to God). It is about seeing every situation, even the loss of material possessions or facing inconvenience, as an opportunity to reaffirm faith in God’s greater plan. Recognizing that material items can be replaced, but the sanctity of life and health cannot, shifts the focus from what has been lost to what has been preserved.

Moreover, this philosophy requires nurturing through consistent practice and a deliberate effort to shift focus from hardships to blessings. It involves training oneself to always find reasons to be thankful, an attitude reinforced by traditional wisdom passed down through generations. As elders often advise, lamenting about what one lacks can inadvertently invite real loss, hence the importance of affirming contentment and trust in divine providence.

In essence, building resilience in the face of life’s trials involves more than mere acceptance; it is about actively cultivating a perspective that embraces challenges as divine decrees, meant to strengthen faith and enhance spiritual growth. By fostering this mindset, believers can transform their trials into avenues of profound personal and spiritual development.

Thirdly, maintaining a foundation of hope and good expectations is essential. Believers are encouraged to always anticipate the best outcomes from the Almighty and resist despair. It is understood that current struggles are not permanent fixtures decreed by the Almighty. Should these challenges persist, it is believed that the Almighty will provide alternatives, enabling individuals to cope without despair.

Removing obstacles is not always necessary; rather, strength may be granted to manage through calamities.

This resilience is exemplified by Stephen Hawking, who, despite severe paralysis, made significant contributions to physics using assistive technology to overcome physical limitations.

The concept of Sidrat al-Muntaha (“The Utmost Boundary”) in Islamic theology reflects limits that are both tangible and metaphorical. It represents a point beyond which even the angel Gabriel could not pass, yet the Prophet Muhammad (S) was able to proceed, symbolizing his unique status. This narrative encourages the recognition of personal limits and the divine assistance that allows one to transcend them when necessary.

Embracing this mindset is not merely about enduring but also about finding meaning and strength in the trials faced. This approach does not diminish the challenges but encourages a proactive stance in dealing with them, fostering resilience and a deeper understanding of life’s complexities.

Finally, a critical aspect in navigating trials is the concept of Dhikru rahmatu Allahi ‘inda al-bala’, the acknowledgment of Allah’s mercy even during hardships. Believers are urged to recognize the inherent blessings within challenges, maintaining a perspective of hope and gratitude. This approach is not about ignoring the pain but rather contextualizing it within a broader narrative of divine benevolence and purpose.

Reflecting on past adversities and how they were navigated with Allah’s mercy can fortify a believer’s resolve. This practice, known as Attajarub al-shaqsiyah, serves as a source of motivation and reassurance during current or future trials. For those who have not personally experienced such challenges, observing and learning from the resilience of others can be equally uplifting.

In moments of hardship, reciting specific supplications and verses provides spiritual strength and comfort. Phrases like Inna lillahi wa inna ilaihi raji’un, La hawla wa la quwwata illa billahil-’aliyyil-’a’im, along with prayers for mercy and intercession such as Ya Ra’ufu Ya Rahim, and Ya Dhal-Jalali wal-Ikram are crucial. Additionally, invoking Allah’s blessings upon Muhammad and his family through phrases like Allahumma salli ‘ala Muhammadin wa ale Muhammad, and reciting protective verses such as Ayat al-Kursi, reinforce a believer’s spiritual defenses.

Conclusively, patience (sabr) and prayer (salat) are fundamental in seeking divine assistance. The adage wasta’inu bi ‘s-sabri wa as-salat (“seek assistance through prayers and patience”) encapsulates the essence of deriving strength from patience and prayer, guiding believers through the vicissitudes of life with resilience and hope. Through a synthesis of understanding, preparedness, trust, and spiritual practice, believers are equipped to transform trials into opportunities for spiritual growth and divine closeness.

End of Lecture 6

Lecture 7 – Muharram 1442

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

In the name of Allah, the All-Merciful, the Ever-Merciful

Recap of Lecture 6

The lecture addressed the pivotal question of how one can accept, manage, and persevere through life's trials. Understanding the response to these tests is crucial, as it significantly influences one's spiritual trajectory, potentially leading to either salvation or eternal damnation.

Scholars have categorized individuals facing life's trials into two distinct groups, providing a framework for understanding their varied responses to divine tests. The first group includes those who, when faced with adversity, succumb to despair. Such individuals often experience severe psychological effects, including depression and self-harm, destabilizing their familial and social structures. This reaction typically stems from a lack of appropriate guidance during critical times.

The Qur'an depicts these individuals as perpetually restless and dissatisfied, illustrating that their despair turns to arrogance when fortunes improve, rather than gratitude. The Qur'an also describes mankind as inherently anxious but highlights exceptions among those steadfast in their religious commitments.

Imam Husayn's reflection during Muharram gatherings highlights this conditional nature of faith: people remain devoted to religion as long as it aligns with their favorable conditions but falter when tested with trials. This emphasizes the spiritual challenge of maintaining faith through both prosperity and adversity, recognizing that true adherence to religious principles is tested most authentically in times of trial.

The second group views trials through a lens of divine wisdom, recognizing them as opportunities for spiritual and moral evolution. This perspective is captured in the Arabic saying that trials can either honor or debase a person, highlighting the dual outcomes depending on one's response.

Imam al-Sadiq ('a) urges deep exploration of the Qur'an to understand how trials shaped the lives of prophets and righteous individuals, emphasizing that these challenges are a path to divine favor and spiritual elevation.

Lastly, addressing the philosophical and spiritual underpinnings of trials – known as wa'yul-bala' – is essential for effectively facing life's challenges. Preparedness, akin to seeing an assailant in a mirror, lessens the impact of trials, allowing one to transform them into opportunities for growth. Cultivating a profound reliance on Allah (s.w.t.), as demonstrated by Prophet Ibrahim's trust during his trial by fire, exemplifies the highest levels of faith and surrender.

In conclusion, building resilience in the face of life's trials involves more than acceptance; it requires actively cultivating a perspective that embraces challenges as divine decrees meant to enhance spiritual growth. By fostering this mindset, believers can transform their trials into profound personal and spiritual development.

Lecture 7

“If We wish, We would take away what We have revealed to you. Then you would not find for yourself any defender against Us” (Qur’an, 12:86).

In addressing the topic of trials and tribulations, the discussion highlighted the approach to managing these challenges effectively, starting with acknowledging the necessity of divine grace. Almighty God plays a crucial role in providing the strength and wisdom required to navigate through hardships. This focus was echoed in yesterday's session, which aimed to explore and expand upon various strategies for confronting adversities.

It is essential to heed the counsel provided by scholars, emphasizing the importance of selective sharing when dealing with personal difficulties. They caution against the routine of openly complaining about one's problems, which often does not yield positive outcomes and may lead to mockery. Instead, sharing troubles should be limited to those who can offer constructive feedback or assistance, ensuring that the sharing of one's challenges is both purposeful and productive.

Moreover, the teachings advocate for directing grievances and supplications towards God, exemplifying profound trust and reliance on the divine. This principle is illustrated by the narrative of Prophet Ya‘qub (‘a) in the Qur’an. Facing severe trials, he opted to express his distress and sorrow solely to God, demonstrating a model of patience and resilience. He recognized that, despite his suffering, the ultimate alleviator of his distress is God. This episode from Surah Yusuf (Ch. 12) highlights the virtue of turning to God during moments of hardship, fostering a personal connection with the divine while maintaining a dignified reserve in the face of adversity.

Continuing with this theme, the discourse advises when overwhelmed, instead of airing grievances to people, it is more fruitful to direct these communications to God. This can be done in any language, reflecting true feelings and thoughts, without the constraints of formal prayer language. This practice not only aligns with how the prophets and righteous individuals addressed their trials as depicted in the Qur’an but also reinforces the spiritual connection and resilience needed to persevere through challenges.

Additionally, scholars recommend reflecting on the rewards and virtues of patience during adversities. Reminding oneself of the divine rewards promised to those who endure trials patiently can significantly bolster one's ability to withstand hardship. This concept was extensively discussed recently, highlighting that the spiritual rewards for enduring trials are immense, as reflected in the Qur’an's teachings on

charitable deeds and their exponential rewards.

In exploring the theme of perseverance and reward, the discussion reveals a profound truth about the nature of divine compensation. Allah (s.w.t.) increases bounty to those He wills, emphasizing that for every act of giving, the return is exponentially greater, like the seven-hundred-fold increase mentioned for charitable deeds. Yet, when it comes to patience, Allah (s.w.t.) assures us that the rewards are boundless ('without measure' – bighairi hisab), far beyond any numerical value, akin to an open cheque where one fills in the amount as desired.

Patience is indeed a impregnable fortress and weapon in facing life's challenges and trials. However, cultivating patience is not inherently easy; it requires deliberate practice and conditioning. One must remind oneself of the rich rewards that lie ahead, akin to a laborer who endures heavy toil knowing the compensation that awaits at the day's end – whether it be ten thousand, twenty thousand, a hundred thousand, or even a million shillings, the promise of reward fuels the endurance through hardships.

The rewards for such earthly endeavors are meager compared to what awaits from Allah (s.w.t.) – the eternal paradise. This ultimate reward should inspire even greater endurance.

As we conclude on the strategies for coping with adversities, it is crucial to self-audit and practice patience. However, it is also important to recognize that sometimes adversities stem from our own mistakes, not merely sins but also errors like poor planning and research in business which lead to severe consequences.

Imam 'Ali ('a), in his advice to his companion Kumayl Ibn Ziyad, stressed the necessity of adequate knowledge (or skills) before undertaking any endeavor. Often, hardships arise because an individual may invest heavily without sufficient understanding of the market or the business dynamics, leading to financial ruin. This serves as a reminder that while relying on God is paramount, it must be accompanied by proper planning and execution. This is based on the teachings of Islam.

Similarly, in the context of marriage, disasters often occur not from sin but from poor foundational choices. Many young people prioritize physical attraction over more substantial criteria, leading to unstable marriages which can impact other areas of life, including business and personal well-being. A successful marriage can lay the groundwork for success in broader societal interactions, whereas failure in this fundamental relationship can have wide-ranging consequences.

The discourse extends into the subtleties of decision-making, likened to a driver in a split-second decision between saving lives and potential peril. These decisions, often made under duress, can have enduring impacts on one's life.

Exploring deeper into our study, we transition to the final point, which involves understanding the tribulations faced by the family of the Prophet (S) in the school of Ahl al-Bayt ('a) and their manifestation during the events of Karbala. A friend recently inquired about a saying attributed to Imam 'Ali ('a), which

translates to, “If you seek our company, prepare for poverty.” Another narration describes their path as thorny. My friend expressed confusion over why followers of Ahl al-Bayt (‘a) might endure poverty and whether pursuing righteousness necessarily entails suffering.

In brief response, the term ‘poor’ in this context is multifaceted, not merely limited to financial scarcity. Following this path involves various challenges, inherent not just to this religious sect but to Islam as a whole. The religion itself is not problematic, but adhering to its principles sets one on a path fraught with hardships. This is because truth often stands in opposition to personal desires and interests. The adage “Paradise is surrounded by hardships, and hell by temptations,” illustrates the endurance required on the path of righteousness. Removing religion simplifies life temporarily, allowing for quick gains or pleasures, but adhering to religious principles demands restraint and adherence to responsibilities, posing significant challenges.

For instance, earning a lawful income is arduous. A worker may wake up at dawn, walk ten kilometers to work due to lack of fare, labor from morning until evening, and return home with meager earnings. In contrast, some quickly amass wealth through illicit means, like drug trafficking, highlighting the stark contrast between the righteous path and the tempting shortcuts.

In Islam, ease and comfort are found amidst challenges. On this earth, there are forces of truth and falsehood, with advocates on both sides. However, those defending falsehood often lack principles and ethics, engaging in any means necessary. In contrast, defenders of the truth are constrained by the righteousness of their means, even when defending their own rights, often plunging them into further difficulties.

This notion was reflected posthumously in the portrayal of Imam ‘Ali (‘a) as politically naive, implying his integrity was a disadvantage in the politically savvy landscape. Unfortunately, some scholars and thinkers perpetuate this view, suggesting that Imam ‘Ali’s political acumen was lacking, leading to his manipulation.

Imam ‘Ali (‘a) himself faced accusations of political naivety, but he responded not by denying his knowledge of politics but by affirming his capability for cunning, asserting that no one could surpass him in cleverness if he chose to engage in deceitful politics, like those practiced by Mu’awiya. Imam ‘Ali (‘a) highlighted that if he had wished to engage in such deceptive practices – promising kingdoms and lands for support – he could have persuaded everyone. However, many deserted him because he refused to partake in corruption. When Talha and Zubayr approached him with their demands for governorships of Basra and Egypt upon his appointment as Caliph, he famously replied that it was not within his principles to grant positions based on personal desires but rather on merit, which led to the Battle of Jamal²³. If ‘Ali had acquiesced to their demands, perhaps the battle might have been avoided.

This instance illustrates how truth can be distorted in history. As Sheikh Muhammad Jawad Mughniyya mentioned in one of his books, either “Shi’a Imam and Justice” or “Shi’a and Governance,” one of the

major mistakes attributed to Shi'as throughout history is that their forebears were often in opposition. Being in opposition typically entails a high cost. In any regime, there are those in power and those in opposition. Over the centuries, excluding the Fatimid rule in Egypt, where the Isma'ili Shi'as had some control, the Ithna'ashari Shi'as and the Ahl al-Bayt ('a) have largely been in a position of opposition, a role that inherently involves significant sacrifice, particularly in monarchical or dictatorial regimes like many modern-day democracies.

Human rights and freedom of speech are relatively recent concepts, emerging prominently in the 20th century following the two World Wars. However, in regions like Bahrain today, people still fight for their rights under oppressive conditions. Royal regimes often exercise authoritarian control, leading to persecution, poisoning, or long-term imprisonment of dissenters. Figures such as Hujr Ibn 'Adi and Muhammad Ibn Abi Bakr, who suffered brutal fates for their allegiance to 'Ali, exemplify the severe consequences faced by the followers of Ahl al-Bayt ('a).

This historical perspective highlights the profound challenges faced by those who stand for truth in oppressive systems, where even naming a child after significant Shi'a figures like 'Ali, Hasan, and Husayn could be dangerous. The tragedy of Islam today is that many are unaware of this history. People might superficially engage with the concept of Taqqiyah (concealing one's faith under threat) without understanding the deep historical trials and tribulations that necessitated such measures. In a world that claims to uphold freedom of expression, the true victims of oppression are often forgotten, blamed for the very conditions forced upon them by oppressive regimes. This misrepresentation and misunderstanding underscore the broader struggle for truth and justice within the historical and contemporary Shi'a narrative.

The narrative discusses the challenges and misunderstandings surrounding the concept of Taqqiyah, illustrating how it has been misinterpreted over time. 'Ammar Ibn Yasir, a figure seemingly wrongly accused in historical narratives, is used to emphasize the profound struggle between maintaining one's faith and facing persecution. His mother was killed, and his father never spoke words of disbelief, yet 'Ammar is often mistakenly associated with the initiation of Taqqiyah. The Prophet Muhammad (S) counseled those like 'Ammar, who were coerced, clarifying that their hearts remained steadfast in faith despite external pressures.

The lecture further explores how, under duress, individuals were forced to insult the Prophet (S) under the guise of Taqqiyah – a defensive measure, not a deceptive one. The focus then shifts to a profound reflection on the philosophy and heavy thoughts that this historical context invites. It emphasizes the importance of understanding the depth of Shi'a history and the various ways rulers have dealt with them over the centuries. This history reveals how the possessions and rights of many were unjustly taken.

The teachings of the Prophet Muhammad (S) are quoted to highlight a crucial Islamic principle: true believers see both hardship and ease as tests from God. A life without challenges is suspicious, possibly a divine punishment called Istidraj – success leading one deeper into wrongdoing. This concept

challenges believers to reflect on their circumstances, suggesting that uninterrupted prosperity without trials might not be a favor but a test leading to spiritual decline.

The lecture also presents insights from Imam Zain al-‘Abidin (‘a), who expressed concern over individuals who live without encountering any difficulties, suggesting such ease might indicate disfavor from God. This perspective is critical in understanding that in Islam, enduring hardships is seen as part of a believer’s spiritual development.

Another tradition from the Prophet (S) outlines the five conditions a believer might find themselves in: envied by a fellow believer, hated by a hypocrite, fought by an infidel, tempted by one’s own soul, and deceived by Satan. These challenges are not just external but internal, highlighting the continuous spiritual and moral jihad (struggle) required to maintain faith and integrity in the face of adversity.

The narrative presented reflects deep theological insights about the nature of trials and their divine purpose. Another narration teaches that God tests His believers with trials much like a mother nurtures her child with milk. These trials are seen not as mere suffering but as sustenance for the soul, essential for spiritual growth and steadfastness.

Imam ‘Ali’s teachings emphasize that tribulations should not be perceived as injustice. If viewed as such, the perception itself is flawed because tribulations are, in fact, blessings in disguise – a divine favor. This perspective is reinforced by a Qur’anic verse²⁴ that highlights God’s intent to test His

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servants, reminding them that these trials are signs of God’s involvement in their lives, not acts of divine cruelty.

The discourse further elaborates on the preparedness required for followers of the Ahl al-Bayt (‘a), portraying the lives of the Imams as exemplars of enduring hardship. This readiness to face trials is depicted as integral to their faith and existence. The narrative conveys that one should not expect a life free from hardship; such expectations are unrealistic and not aligned with the teachings and lives of the Imams.

Reflecting on the experiences of the Imams, from Imam al-Sadiq’s struggles in emulating Imam ‘Ali’s level of worship, to the trials faced by Imam Hasan and Imam Husayn, the discussion illustrates a continuum of sacrifice and steadfastness. This legacy begins with the Lady Fatimah (‘a) whose personal tribulations were so severe that she famously remarked, “The tribulations that befell me, if they had befallen the day, it would have turned into night,” suggesting that her sufferings were enough to extinguish the light of day. Her statement underscores the unbearable nature of her experiences, which she expressed as being so weighty that no one else could possibly endure them.

This theme of enduring immense trials continues with Imam ‘Ali (‘a), who articulately expressed his own

struggles in Nahj al-Balagha. He spoke of enduring pain and sorrow so deep that it was as if there were a thorn lodged within his throat, a metaphor for the persistent and unresolved grief that he carried. His words, “I endured, but I feel that my tears are still inside,” reveal a man burdened with sorrow yet steadfast in his commitment to his faith and duties.

These stories highlight the profound challenges they faced, serving as models for enduring suffering and maintaining faith under extreme conditions.

Imam Husayn’s ultimate sacrifice at Karbala, witnessed by his son Imam Zain al-‘Abidin, is positioned as the pinnacle of these trials. The narrative of Karbala, where Imam Husayn (‘a) and his family were subjected to unimaginable hardships, culminating in his martyrdom and the captivity of his family, is a central theme. It encapsulates the extreme sacrifices made by the Imams, reinforcing their legacy of resilience and unwavering commitment to their principles, even in the face of severe persecution.

In a heart-wrenching account from the aftermath of the Battle of Karbala, Imam Zain al-‘Abidin (‘a) stands as a witness to the unburied bodies of his family and companions strewn across the battlefield. Overwhelmed by profound grief, he contemplates the dire scene, where no one had come to bury the martyrs. His aunt, Sayyida Zaynab (‘a), observes his distress and questions his overwhelming sorrow, to which he responds with poignant clarity about the immense loss of his father, brothers, and companions – leaders and believers alike – whose bodies lay desecrated and abandoned.

Imam Zain al-‘Abidin’s grief is compounded by the absence of traditional funerary rites, with no one to wash or shroud the bodies, echoing the poet’s lament of being unprepared for burial. This stark abandonment highlights the severity of their ordeal and the isolation experienced by the surviving members of the Ahl al-Bayt (‘a). It’s a moment that vividly captures the emotional and spiritual turmoil faced by those who survived the massacre.

The heartache is not confined to Imam Zain al-‘Abidin (‘a) alone but extends to Sayyida Zainab (‘a) and other women of the household who endured the horror of witnessing their loved ones fall one by one. These scenes are juxtaposed with the martyrs’ anticipated reward in paradise, as expressed by ‘Ali al-Akbar, who envisioned his grandfather, the Prophet Muhammad (S), offering him water from the heavenly river of Kawthar.

In his reflection, Imam Zain al-‘Abidin (‘a) challenges the listener to consider whether they have ever faced even a fraction of the tribulations endured at Karbala. This narrative is not merely about mourning; it transforms grief into a lesson – a school of resilience and faith under the most harrowing circumstances. It prepares the believers to carry the burdens of life and continue on the path ordained by God.

The phrase *Inna lillahi wa inna ilayhi raji’un* (We belong to Allah and to Him we shall return) summarizes the acceptance of divine will, affirming that the ultimate victory belongs to the righteous, and that the oppressors will face their reckoning^{[25](#)}.

Ending his discourse, the speaker expresses humility and seeks prayers for any shortcomings in his speech, underscoring his human limitations and the depth of his scholarly humility. He concludes by invoking blessings upon Prophet Muhammad and his purified family, leaving a message of continuity and spiritual perseverance that resonates with the gathered faithful, promising that the lessons of Karbala will be revisited in future gatherings. This poignant reminder serves both as a closure for the session and an invitation to reflect deeply on the enduring spiritual lessons derived from one of the most significant events in Islamic history.

End of Lecture 7 and Final

“O’ Allah! To you belongs the praise, the praise of those who are thankful to You for their tribulations. All Praise belongs to Allah for my intense grief. O’ Allah, grant me the blessing of intercession of Husayn on the Day of Appearance (before You) and strengthen me with a truthful stand in Your presence along with Husayn and the companions of Husayn – those people who sacrificed everything for Husayn.”

In the desert of Karbala, thirsty stood Husayn (‘a), Unyielding, in his quest for justice, amidst the plain. His lips parched, but his heart overflowing with faith, With every step, proclaiming freedom, even in death.

“From the sacred lips of the Prophet (S), my kin, To the sands of Karbala, where truths begin.

Here I stand, a lone star against the tyrant’s might, My blood will ignite the flames of right.”

O, the cry that rose from that forsaken land! It echoes through time, by oppression it stands.

“Am I not,” he cried, “the heir to the Prophet’s call? Yet, here I fall, to show you must rise, not stall.”

And so Husayn (‘a), in his grandeur, sublime, Crafted a saga of courage, defeating time.

Each droplet of his blood, a verse of divine lore,

Teaching us that truth, for eternity, shall endure.

Jangwani mwa Karbala, Husayn (‘a) alisimama akiwa na kiu,

Hakulegeza msimamo wake katika harakati zake za haki, katikati ya uwanda.

Mdomo wake ulikuwa mkavu, lakini moyo wake ulijaa imani, Kila hatua aliyopiga, alitangaza uhuru, hata kwa kifo.

“Kutoka midomo mitakatifu ya Nabii (S), jamaa yangu, Hadi mchanga wa Karbala, ambapo ukweli huanza.

Hapa nasimama, nyota pekee dhidi ya nguvu za kibabe, Damu yangu itawasha mwali wa haki.”

Oh, kilio kilichoinuka kutoka ardhi ile iliyotelekezwa!

Kinanguruma kwa muda, kikisimama dhidi ya ukandamizaji. “Je, mimi si,” alipaza sauti, “mrithi wa wito wa Nabii?”

Lakini hapa ninaanguka, kuonyesha lazima usimame, usisite.”

Na hivyo Husayn (‘a), katika fahari yake adhimu, Aliandika hadithi ya ujasiri, akiishinda muda. Kila tone la damu yake, ni aya ya elimu takatifu, Ikitufundisha kwamba ukweli, milele, utadumu.

1. The complete verse is:

“He, who created death and life that He may test you (to see) which of you is best in conduct. And He is the All-mighty, the All-forgiving” (67:2).^{[1][2]}

2. Editor’s note: Life is the state of a thing whereat it senses and intends, while death is the absence of these things.

However, death, from what comes across from the teachings of the Qur’an, is the transition from one mode of the modes of life to another mode. Consequently, there is no problem in associating the act of creation to death as it is to life.^{[3][4]}

3. George Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel was a German philosopher and an important figure of German idealism. He lived from 1770 to 1831 and is best known for his contributions to dialectical philosophy, a method of understanding the nature of reality and thought processes. (Ed.)^{[5][6]}

4. This is elaborated in the second lecture of the series. (Ed.)^{[7][8]}

5. Editor’s note: The verb yuftanun in verse 29:2 is derived from the root fa–ta–na, which carries connotations of proving or authenticating. This linguistic connection suggests that the trials faced by believers serve not only as tests of faith but also as a means to authenticate their true belief, analogous to how gold is tested for purity. The historical use of the term dinar al-maftun further illustrates this point; it refers to a gold coin that has been authenticated as pure, underscoring the metaphorical and literal value of testing in both spiritual and material contexts. Thus, the verses imply that proclaiming faith will inevitably lead to tests that distinguish the genuine from the deceitful.^{[9][10]}

6. The year 2020 referring to the COVID-19 pandemic. (Ed.)^{[11][12]}

7. Editor’s note: This concept is further illustrated by the spiritual experiences of those deeply devout, who during their prayers and recitations of the Qur’an, encounter verses about paradise and hell as if seeing them before their very eyes. This level of faith allows them to perceive divine signs and warnings as immediate and real, influencing their spiritual and moral decisions.^{[13][14]}

8. "Do you suppose that you shall enter paradise though there has not yet come to you the like of (what befell) those who went before you? Stress and distress befell them and they were convulsed until the apostle and the faithful who were with him said, ‘When will Allah’s help [come]?’ Look! Allah’s help is indeed near!” (2:214).^{[15][16]}

9. Nahjul Balagha, Sermon 129: “Strike with your sight wherever you wish among the people, do you see anything but a poor person struggling with poverty, or a rich person who has exchanged God’s blessing for disbelief, or a miser who has adopted stinginess with God’s right as an excess, or a rebel as if there is a weight in his ear against hearing the admonitions!” Imam ‘Ali (‘a) speaks of observing humanity and finding people in various states: the impoverished struggling with poverty, the wealthy who have turned God’s blessings into ingratitude, the miserly withholding what is due to God, and the rebellious who are as if deaf to admonition. This reflection underscores the diversity of trials and the moral choices people make. (Ed.)^{[17][18]}

10. In Surah Al-Naba’ (78:40) of the Qur’an, it is mentioned that on the Day of Judgement, disbelievers will wish they were

dust. This reflects the deep regret and despair they will feel when confronted with the consequences of their actions. This verse underscores the gravity of that day and the emotions of those who denied faith. (Ed.)

11. Imam al-Hasan ('a), when he states, "I do not know," refers to the absence of any creature who can live on this earth without facing trials and tribulations. This assertion highlights the universality of divine trials as a constant and overarching principle governing our existence. No being is exempt from life's challenges, both worldly and eschatological. (Ed.)

12. Imtihanun shakhsi (personal tests) does not apply to God. (Ed.)

13. "He would have made you one community, but (His purposes required) that He should test you in respect to what He has given you" (5:48).

14. "Know that your possessions and children are only a test, and that Allah – with Him is a great reward" (8:28).

15. The Prophet Muhammad (S) provided a poignant hadith concerning the tribulations of the end times: "There will descend upon my Ummah in the end times a severe tribulation." This statement underscores the severity and intensity of the trials that await humanity. These tribulations are described as unprecedented in their harshness and scope, challenging the very fabric of human society.

16. See al-Mizan Eng. vol. 1 under verses 1:6–7. 'Allamah further elaborates that the multiplicity of 'ways' could either be synonymous with the 'straight path' or that these numerous ways eventually converge into this singular 'straight path'. The 'ways' represent the diverse paths that people may take in their spiritual journeys, reflecting individual experiences and approaches to faith. However, despite this diversity, these paths are unified by their ultimate goal and destination, which is the singular 'straight path' of truth and guidance that leads out of darkness and into light, as emphasized in the Qur'an. (Ed.)

17. al-mu'allama' al-awahir aw al-hawadith halaqah min silsilatin mutasilah (The scholars say: "Phenomena or events are rings in a continuous chain."). (Ed.)

18. Editor's note: In other words, understanding that trials and difficulties are part of God's greater plan can help one endure them with patience and faith. Whether it's enduring personal hardships or witnessing global events, seeing them as part of a larger, beneficial scheme allows for a more profound acceptance and understanding of life's challenges.

19. "This is alluded to in the following verse: Corruption has appeared in land and sea because of the doings of the people's hands, that He may make them taste something of what they have done, so that they may come back" (30:41).

20. Editor's note: Insofar as the purpose behind the punishment is for them to return, and the return desired from them is to return to God through repentance, then the nearer punishment must refer to the punishment that befalls them in this world to frighten them and warn them in order to repent, rather than the punishment of destruction in this world or the punishment that awaits them after they die. Based on this, the greater punishment is the punishment of the Day of Resurrection.

21. The speaker quoted verse:

"Wama utitum min al-'ilm illa qalila – you have not been given of the knowledge except a little" (17:85).

22. Translator's note: This does not imply that there are no further lessons to be learned from trials and tribulations. The speaker simply ran out of time during this discourse.

23. Editor's note: The Battle of Jamal, also known as the Battle of the Camel, took place in 656 CE in Basra, Iraq. This conflict was a pivotal moment in early Islamic history, marking the first fitna, or civil war, within the Muslim community. The battle was primarily between forces loyal to Imam 'Ali ('a), and a faction led by Aisha, Talha, and Zubayr, who sought retribution for the assassination of the previous caliph, Uthman. The battle is named after the camel that Aisha rode during the confrontation. The conflict ended in favor of Imam 'Ali, but it left deep, enduring divisions that contributed to the eventual schism between Sunni and Shi'a Muslims. The Battle of Jamal is significant not only for its historical impact on Islamic politics and sectarian divisions but also for its moral and ethical implications, which continue to be discussed in Islamic thought.

24. Editor's note:

"Most surely there are signs in this, and most surely We are ever testing (men). The context here relates to the story of Prophet Nuh and the flood, where the saving of Nuh and his companions in the ark, and the destruction of the deniers, are signs of God's power and tests of faith for humanity. The verse emphasizes the recurrent theme in the Qur'an that historical events and the fates of past communities serve as signs for those who are reflective and as tests for their faith and obedience" (Qur'an, 23:30).

[25](#). Editor's note: This continuum of sacrifice and steadfastness serves not only as a spiritual legacy but also as a model for enduring suffering while maintaining unwavering faith. These stories, reaching from Lady Fatimah to Imam Husayn, (peace be upon them) highlight the profound challenges faced by the Imams and their exceptional ability to uphold their spiritual integrity in the face of overwhelming adversity. Through their lives and words, they teach their followers the values of patience, resilience, and the eternal perspective that every trial and tribulation is a test of faith, meant to be borne with grace and perseverance. The lessons drawn from their experiences continue to inspire and guide millions, illustrating that the path of righteousness, though fraught with challenges, leads to divine commendation and eternal reward.📖📖

[1] [1]

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