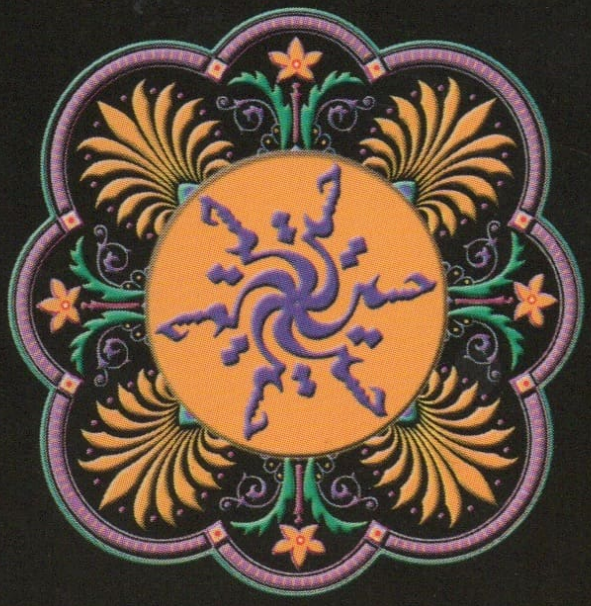
Ashoora

An Islamic Perspective

Sayyid Mohammed Hosain Fadlollah



Translation
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Dar AL- MALAK

ASHOORA

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In the name of God the Gracious the Merciful

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Preface

Ashoora[1] can be regarded as a school that balances the Muslim personality, because it manifests all the greatness of its individuals in their relationship with God, and in their high spirituality, in that prophetic attitude with each other and towards their enemies, and in their demonstration of the Islamic concepts, whether on the political level regarding the question of who should become the ruler, or on the religious level in general. Such concepts became stagnated in the minds of many people so that they could no longer give them clarity in seeing reality, something that could be repeated at any time, in many forms. This is because history repeats itself with regard to the continuous struggle between truth and falsehood, which makes the commemoration of Ashoora a responsibility in terms of following the role model, a springboard from which to advance, and a wealth of values from which to benefit. This is why the Imams of Ahlul Bayt (as) wanted Ashoora to continue for

all time, so as to become the prophetic tree that provides fruit to bring benefit to all of man's essential.

People have added a lot of traditions to Ashoora, and over time many of its elements have lost their dynamism and, at various stages, they turned into mere rituals that fail to encourage the consciousness to rise against injustice. In some places, it has even become the practice to torture oneself, and to neglect one's humanity, and some people have seized it as an opportunity to instigate sectarian disputes, to vent historical grudges and so on, which contradicts the sacredness of the event and its sacred individual, and does not conform to the Islamic attitude that approaches everything from a standpoint of purity and faithfulness.

On this basis, his eminence the grand scholar Sayyid Mohammed Hosain Fadlollah started – and for more than fifty years has continued – to highlight the thought of Ashoora, and likewise the emotions, to confirm its Islamic identity that calls all Islamic sects to benefit from its lessons in the present and the future, so that Muslims rally around al-Hosain (as) as an Imam and symbol of Islamic unity in both stance and act. His eminence rejects any kind of diminishment of this great event, including the forms that simply commemorate and do not conform to its sacredness, that contradict the Shari'ah

and tarnish the pure Islamic image of Ahlul Bayt (as) in the eyes of people.

His eminence has brought attention to the necessity of developing the acting forms of commemoration, whether in the theatre, cinema or otherwise, so as to enable Ashoora to appeal to the biggest audience possible and with the greatest effect possible, reflecting all those truthful scenes that express the Islamic and humane depth of Ashoora.

It is from the talks given by his eminence, some of which were published in *Min Wahy Ashoora* and *Hadith Ashoora*, that his son Ja'far compiled the thoughts presented here so as to give a relatively comprehensive image of Ashoora - its causes, nature, the forms of commemoration and the theorisation of the duality of emotion and thought in commemorating the Hosaini cause – in a book that is small in size but big in the goal aspired to.

The publisher

Why indulge in the past?

Some may ask: why commemorate Ashoora every year in a manner that causes sadness and crying for an event that happened more than thirteen centuries ago?

Any history will contain its share of tragedies that were subject to their particular circumstances, whether in the struggle between two courses or in the oppressors' acts against the oppressed – something which makes the issue of historical tragedy a normal matter that must be dealt with on this basis.

Others may look upon Ashoora as a way to stir up sectarian sensitivities, especially if the historic context of its commemoration has made it into a Shi'ite act against the Sunnis, on the basis that the Sunnis respect the Umayyads, which makes mentioning them in a negative way - which is unavoidable in this instance - result in a negative consequence in relation to Islamic unity or general Islamic peace.

There are two points to consider when looking into the above:

First: Commemorating history is civilised

Reliving history through commemoration is a civilised human matter that all societies do, regardless of their cultures or thinking. We find that the whole world celebrates every year some anniversary of an event: it might relate to a national victory in a battle that may have taken place hundreds of years back, or to a tragedy that resulted from a social or political struggle that happened tens or hundreds of years back. Independence days are evidence that this behaviour is entrenched in the general human consciousness.

In addition, the present - in all its aspects - is not separate from history. We see that the person who tries to find himself – to find the conceptual basis of his situation and to strengthen his course in the direction of his development and advancement – feels that history has illuminating points that bring light to every stage in which he experiences darkness, or that it offers lessons that relate to life in the round, not to a particular stage only. He may find that there is a

need for a certain example, the vital elements of which he fails to find in the present, so he tries instead to find it in history. All this makes reliving history a matter that brings many benefits to a man's life.

This is perhaps what the Holy Qur'an pointed to: **'In their stories there is certainly a lesson for men of understanding' 12:111**, which emphasises that the value of history in Islam lies in the lessons that open an event up to thought, and that bring to light the unchanging concepts that are not subject to time but that are true throughout time because they are essential elements of life itself. This is precisely the thing that bonds us to certain figures in history, especially those who were in leadership positions in Islam, because their acts were not simply of the moment when they lived, but the acts of the Message that were manifested in their thinking, and in their spiritual and practical initiatives.

In light of this, the question of commemorating past events that relate to the present and future through the lessons that can be drawn from them is not contrary to a civilised attitude, but rather it proceeds from the depth of human civilisation with regard to the value of man's actions in making history; a nation

that does not relive the memories of its history is a nation that does not engage the spirit of advancement into the future.

Second: Ashoora is not sectarian

The Islamic Qur'anic fundamentals emphasise that responsibility for the past lies with those who lived in it and made it, both in its positive and negative outcomes. These are God's words: **'This is a people that have passed away; they shall have what they earned and you shall have what you earn, and you shall not be called upon to answer for what they did.' 2:141.** Historic glory will not, thus, be our glory, in the dynamic meaning of glory, but rather the glory of those who made it, and we - at the same time - have to abstain from blaming others for history's negative twists and turns as a way of allotting responsibility to this party or that party, as if one of them follows a historic group which was engaged in struggle with another group that the other follows.

On this basis, the Shi'ah of the present are not responsible for the negative acts that were witnessed within the circle of past Shi'ite–Sunni disputes, nor should they hold contemporary Sunnis responsible for

what befell the Shi'ah at the hands of those who were Sunnis in the past. Rather, the Shi'ah and the Sunnis today live in one era and they are responsible for what they themselves do in it; at the same time each of them will continue to have their viewpoints in understanding Islam and how to act accordingly, and what to view as sacred or holy, about which everyone can engage in dialogue.

In this matter, we would like to point to the reasonable way that the Holy Qur'an emphasises how to manage disputes, which is based on agreeing on the common points and engaging in dialogue about the disputable points. This will make Ashoora an act of awareness, not an act performed through fervour, because that is when a person understands where he stands and how the atmosphere around him and the political situations that are active and effective. Fervour, on the other hand, makes you enthuse without control of your position, will or stance. That said, we do need enthusiasm and some fervour, to shout slogans and cry out, but before that we must understand why we enthuse, cry and shout.

A reasonable person must think of the outcome of words before saying them, and think of the goals of a deed before starting it, and refrain from entering into

disputes via cursing and swearing, in order to give vent to anger or to pursue a grudge. The question here is: when the Shi'ite erupts in anger and verbally abuses the Sunnis' sacred persons, can this possibly make the Sunni convert to Shi'ism? And when the Sunni erupts in anger and attacks Shi'ah's sacred persons, will he be acting along Islamic lines in thought and belief?

God almighty showed us how to treat the sacred things of any group of people: **'Revile not those whom they call upon besides Allah, lest they out of spite revile Allah in their ignorance; thus have We made alluring to each people its own doings' 6:108**, since if you revile (verbally abuse) the sacred things and persons of others they will react by reviling your sacred things and persons.

Imam Ali (as) drew from this verse in his criticism of his army when he heard them verbally abusing the army of Sham[2] who came to attack them[3]; he said: '**I dislike you starting to verbally abuse and curse them, but if you describe their deeds and recount their situations that would be a better mode of speaking and a more convincing way of arguing.** If, **instead of verbally abusing them, you say: ''O' God! Save our blood and their blood, make**

reconciliation between us and them, and lead them out of their misguidedness, so that he who is ignorant of the truth may know it, and he who inclines towards rebellion and revolt may turn away from it'''[4].

We have to proceed in the direction of Islamic unity, which does not mean that each group has to give up its convictions, but that all Muslims should gather around what they can agree on, cooperate in common issues and engage in dialogue on the issues that they dispute, following an objective, scientific approach. This will be especially important in the places of mixed sectarian affiliation that represent, one way or the other, some kind of sectarian front line, where some might seize the opportunity of anniversaries - such as Ashoora - to stir up sectarian sensitivities.

This is why we have forbidden - from our position of authority of jurisprudence-everyone to raise any slogan that stirs up sectarian sensitivities, or to say any word in that direction; rather, they should observe the approach of dialogue and discussions with the best of means. Because we want to bolster the strength of Islam, especially now, when our nation is witnessing one of the most dangerous times for Islam and all

Muslims in the world, regardless of their sects or tendencies.

Islamisation of Ashoora

By this title, we do not intend to suggest that Ashoora lacks an Islamic nature, but we want to emphasise that the Hosaini cause is a general Islamic cause, not a cause for one sect in particular.

Kerbela' was based on Islamic ideas as manifested in the concepts and ideas that Imam al-Hosain (as) put forward as slogans for his movement, and in the stances that were manifested throughout the Hosaini course culminating in martyrdom.

The title of the movement was reform. He said: **'I did not revolt for the cause of evil tyranny or corruption, but to reform the nation of my grandfather (Prophet Mohammed (sawa)). I want to enjoin all that is good and denounce all that is evil'**[5] on the basis of God's command: **'Let there arise out of you a group of people inviting what is good, enjoining what is right, and forbidding what is wrong' 3:104.**

Part of enjoining what is right is enjoining the unjust oppressor, and part of forbidding what is wrong is forbidding the unjust oppressor from doing it, even if through rebelling against him, for enjoining the good and forbidding the wrong can be carried out through words, through taking firm stances and through force, all according to the nature of circumstances and the outcome.

Imam al-Hosain (as) refused to give *bay'ah* (oath of allegiance) on the basis of the image of the Islamic ruler and caliph that Islam had provided; he said: **'For the person who sees a tyrant ruler who is committing as lawful what is (Islamically) unlawful, violating the pledge (to God), opposing the Sunnah of the Messenger of God (sawa), and ruling over the servants of God with sins and oppression, and does not strive to change what the ruler is doing either through words or deeds, it is incumbent on God to hurl him (into Hell) along with the ruler'**[6].

This is from the angle of theory. From the angle of application, he (as) said: **'These people have abided by obedience to Satan and have shunned obedience to God; they are instigating corruption and dismissing the divine laws, making the public revenues exclusively**

their own, changing prohibited things to permissible things and making permissible things prohibited; and I am the person on whom it is most incumbent to change (this)'[7].

In another of his sayings, emphasising the position of dignity and strength and its meaning in the personality of the believer he said: **'No way! By God I will never surrender to them like a humiliated person, and never pledge allegiance to them like slaves'**[8].

He also said: **'The illegitimate son of an illegitimate son**[9] **has placed me facing two choices: to draw my sword and fight or be humiliated (by allegiance to Yezid). But it is impossible for us to be humiliated: (for) God, his Messenger, the believers ... never accept this'**[10].

These are some of his slogans which, when we look into them, show us that they were clearly not just slogans for the era in which he lived, making the matter merely historical. Also, they are not sectarian slogans, but slogans for life in its entirety, and Islam in all its aspects.

Who among us does not see political corruption on the level of the ruler, the people ruled, and the rule in general?

Who among us does not see how morals within the individual, society and the whole of the Muslim nation are being corrupted through those who use these issues as vehicles for their interests?

Who among us who does not reject the state we find our nation in whereby a lot of Muslims are abandoning the worship of God, and abandoning truthfulness, trust, chastity, loyalty and the rest of the fundamentals of Islamic morals, when at the same time they recite 'There is no God but Allah and Mohammed is the Messenger of Allah'?

Who among us does not reject the kinds of deviation in our lives that entail torn relationships and disturbances on the level of individuals, families, political parties and Muslim sects?

Who among us who does not see that in dignity lies the greatest value on both individual and social levels?

The revolution of Imam al-Hosain (as) was destined not to be a victory by the military consideration, but it had a head-on collision with the reality in which society found

itself, and shook it to its foundation, so that it confirmed the original course that would protect Islamic life and confirm justice inside it – because the reality that was witnessed had reached such a level of relaxation under Yezid's rule that some people went to fight al-Hosain (as) when they were emotionally with him. So, the Muslim situation was ready for injustice to continue, and to mobilise all people against any call for truth, leading people to end up placing atheism before Islam in the name of Islam!

From this, al-Hosain (as) represents a course and approach and a living manifestation for Islamic and human values in dignity, strength and straightforwardness of the course that God entrusted all of us with, and for fighting injustice and corruption at any time and in any era, regardless of the forms that this injustice takes, or of the colours that the corruption wears, and for emphasising that reform in the nation of the Prophet (sawa) is the responsibility of every individual in the nation, each according to his or her role and capabilities in all fields.

In all this, he was following the guidance of his grandfather, the Prophet (sawa), who warned Muslims against abandoning the drive to enjoin what is right and good, and to forbid what is wrong and evil, and who

warned them that they would bring all kinds of disaster and calamity upon themselves if they failed to observe these two deeds, when he (sawa) said: **'You will (either) enjoin what is right and forbid what is wrong or (failing that) God will give evil people the upper hand over your good people, then your good people will pray but will not be answered'**[11].

Politics is central to the course of religions

There are some people who regard the issues of justice and injustice, reforms by rulers and the changing of regimes as political matters that have nothing to do with religion, and that religion - being pure and sacred - should distance itself from such issues. But we find that the Qur'an confirms that politics is fundamental to the course of the (prophetic) messages; it says: **'We verily sent Our messengers with clear arguments, and sent down with them the Book and the balance (of right and wrong) that men may observe justice' 57:25**, which means that any religion proceeds from the will of God to establish justice amongst people, for God did not reveal the religion to us so as to manage our affairs in the Hereafter, but to manage our affairs in this life, which God has made the place of our acts and deeds, and he

wants man to be His appointed tool for observing justice between people.

Religion is justice launched into man's individual, social, political, security, economic concerns, and touches all other aspects of his life. This is why we find that God almighty did not command anything in the Qur'an as strongly as He did on the subject of justice: **'and when you speak, then be just even if a near relative is concerned' 6:152**; and: **'O you who believe! Be maintainers of justice, bearers of witness of God, though it may be against your own selves or (your) parents or near relatives' 4:135**; and: **'and let not hatred of any people incite you to act in an unjust way; act in a just way, for that is nearer to piety'5:8.**

Even regarding the atheists, Islam commanded that justice is observed: **'God does not forbid you with regard to those who have not fought you on account of (your) religion, and have not driven you forth from your homes, that you show them kindness and deal with them justly; surely God loves the doers of justice. God only forbids you with regard to those who fought you on account of (your) religion, and drove you forth from your homes or supported**

(others) in your expulsion, that you make friends with them' 60:8-9.

The emotions in Ashoora

Many people argue against the justification of insisting on raising emotions in Ashoora, on many counts:

a- The content that stirs up all elements that cause sadness towards the particulars of an event, in a way that makes people cry in an exceptional way.

b- Artistic recital, which indulges in sad melodies that evoke such elements in its tones and content.

c- Sharp acts that express the scream within the self in its interaction with the tragedy and its painful particulars, with violent crying, hitting the chest, lashing the back with chains, wounding the head with swords or any other such acts that some people perform.

All this makes some people call for limiting the commemoration to the aspects of thought and intellect, so that the value of Ashoora is learnt on an intellectual basis, and to abandon the traditional ways that have become laden with a lot of negative aspects, whether on

the level how the masses commemorate the event, or the level of sectarian sensitivities which such commemoration may stir up.

To discuss such argument, which has many issues to consider, we have to address many points.

First: Emotions are necessary

The question of emotions is one of the most important aspects of the commemoration of Ashoora, and must be preserved for the following reasons:

1. Emotions are part and parcel of the event, because the content of Ashoora is by its very nature tragic and sad, and separating commemoration of the event in the minds of people from the emotional approach means separating the matter from its own self and losing one of its most important and vital elements.

2. Emotions allow the memory to continue in life though their effect on human feelings, something that builds an emotional relationship between people and the individuals involved in the event, exactly the same as the relationship between people and their loved ones when they instinctively react towards tragedies that

befall them; this has great, positive outcomes in the human dimension when it opens up to the dynamic aspect, which should give a similar outcome on the Islamic dynamic level in the person's life.

3. The emotional approach represents a kind of education of the feelings, which transforms the matter into one that is related to the self, exactly as if the event relates to present day events. This is what we notice in the traditional course of people when it comes to religious values, as we find the feeling aspect is what keeps people in a state of permanent mobilisation to activate these values in reality and to protect them through facing all challenges instigated against them by others, as if such challenges are directed towards a personal issue. This is what makes religious and sectarian issues sensitive issues in the arena of struggle.

4. Emptying Ashoora of emotions and keeping to the content of thought only turns the matter into a static, non-active matter in human awareness, similar to all historic issues that relate to the struggle between truth and falsehood that are forgotten in time, because the multitude of challenges that a person finds himself facing in the present may entail a lot of

problems that press on his thought and feeling, on a level that does not leave for him a space to indulge in history. This gradually leads him to forget the matter and neglect it – except in emergencies that push some historic issues rapidly into the present so that it does not take long before the historic issues melt away under the pressing reality that overwhelms the person.

All this makes it imperative that Ashoora is washed with emotions, if it is wished to see it continue to live in the consciousness of the generations; for taking emotions from Ashoora means transforming it into a mere issue of history that is relegated to books or to a framework of inactive commemoration.

Second: Thought in addition to emotions

Although we emphasise the importance of emotions in Ashoora, we believe that there are some negative points that stem from restricting the commemoration to emotional and tragic elements only, something which makes striking a balance between thought and emotions necessary, so that one side does not become dominant. The reasons for this are:

1. The issue of thought is linked to the great goal for which Ashoora happened, that is the question of change and life and people, through the variety of elements that the Hosaini revolution had – something which makes it valid for the present and future, for Imam al-Hosain (as) did not rise against tyranny so that we should weep for him, but he rose up in pursuit of reform and change. Yes, emotions are a result of the revolution which the Imams of Ahlul Bayt (as) tried, through them, to keep the matter alive in the consciousness of Muslims throughout history so that it turns into a matter that relates to human consciousness when looking into the relation between the present and history. There is a difference between emotions being a goal of the revolution and being one of the means for it to continue in the human consciousness.

2. The Hosaini cause is not one of these human issues that concern the self only, rather it is one of the grand Islamic causes that are subject to the general concepts relating to religious obligations on one hand and the revolutionary political course on the other. Therefore, concentrating on emotions away from reason distances the matter from the general Islamic nature and turns it towards the nature of the self.

This is because indulging in tragedy through the weeping practices fills the soul with a lot of emotional smoke that prevents clarity in seeing the real elements that represent its general nature; even the bond to Islamic leadership figures may turn into an individualistic bond that relates to the self, indulging in inactive tradition that makes weeping - and other emotional practices - a kind of acting that may become linked to the appearance of sadness more than to the content, and may even become a means to vent the pain that a person stores in his own life, more than a serious interaction with the historic event.

3. The traditional way of commemoration may turn the matter into some mundane religious rituals that do not have any content of the thought, whether on the political level of the revolutionary dimensions or on the dynamic Islamic level in general; we have even noticed - in our present times - some deviant tyrants amongst the Shi'ite politicians holding the commemoration in emotional ways on the basis that these are precious Shi'ite traditions, but these are also used to stop a person reciting the Hosaini history from going beyond the emotional part to the political issues.

4. Failing to adopt a thoughtful scientific approach in studying the Hosaini cause may lead to the distortion of the pure concepts of the Hosaini revolution, whether coming directly from the nature of the revolution or drawn indirectly from the stances of the heroes of Kerbela' described in history books. Some of those reciting may say things that contradict Islamic concepts, or steer the issues away from balance, or limit the matter to a certain circle that involves familial partisanships, away from message-bound feelings and thoughts. This is bound to be reflected negatively in the mentality of the public, who will store these concepts, in the realms of the feelings, through tears and pain that will deepen all these disruptive elements within the self. (This point will be treated in the next chapter, the Content of Ashoora.)

5. Failing to include thought in Ashoora is perhaps one of the reasons behind some erroneous tendencies that do not accept the Hosaini approach in confronting falsehood and deviant rulers as a general Islamic approach that Muslims adopt, but regard it as a peculiar Hosaini approach that stemmed from the peculiar Hosaini elements in his imamate position, on the basis that indulgence in the self in respect of the

tragedy made the bond to Imam al-Hosain (as) a self-bond that relates to his person not his message, which led Ashoora to end up, for these people, void of the role model significance that successive Islamic generations can draw from.

6. The emphasis on the aspect of thought of the commemoration allows us to benefit from it through determining the courses of thought, deeds and jurisprudence that relate to the Hosaini conduct in both form and content, because Ashoora has a lot of such content, the particulars of which must be attained through precise scientific analysis – something that makes Ashoora a subject for careful planning regarding the Islamic issues for the near and far future, so that Islam becomes the basis for thought, emotions and life.

7. Failing to give to Ashoora's side of thought its proper role deprives us of a pulpit for the call to Islam, because the Hosaini pulpit (*al-Minber al-Hosaini*) readily attracts large Muslim audiences, which gives the propagators of Islam a lot of opportunities to penetrate the hearts and minds of people through the grand Islamic title of the commemoration, so as to allow the audience to open up to the Islam of

thought, dynamic movement and revolution by their opening up to al-Hosain (as), who represents the absolute manifestation of all this, turning the commemoration into a popular Islamic school that has a variety of dimensions and methods and a means for the propagation of Islam.

8. Keeping to emotions, but separated from reason, may lead to repeating the tragedy that Imam al-Hosain (as) experienced! His tragedy did not stem from a lack of emotions amongst the Muslims towards him, for their hearts were beating with love for him, but it was a blind, superficial love that did not stem from a depth of knowledge, will and suffering; therefore when they found themselves facing the sacrifice of their interests, possessions or desires, love went away and interest and possessions had the upper hand. Al-Ferezdeq, the poet, described the situation that the people of Kufa, who went out to fight al-Hosain (as), experienced by saying to al-Hosain (as): 'Their hearts are with you (but) their swords are against you'[12]. We should love al-Hosain (as) with awareness, reason and suffering, not in a superficial and frenzied way that is short-lived, and ends when it faces reality and challenges. This

requires awareness of all content from which Ashoora proceeded, which are the content of Islam.

In light of these points that make the aspect of thought in commemoration a vital and necessary matter, and in light of what we have said regarding the necessity of strongly preserving the aspect of emotions of Ashoora, we emphasise again that the emotions issue has human dimensions, and Islamic spirit, rich in effects and benefits, and gives thought vitality, releases it from its stagnation, leads it to activity and turns it from a static state into a state of belief and consciousness, and strengthens the person's relationship with all its aspects and issues, something that makes the thought - in the particulars of the principle, the individual and one's stance - become similar to feelings, related to consciousness so that this gives it some strength and firmness inside the soul and outside in life.

We emphasise that adopting both emotions and thought is what achieves for the message its deep content in a man's awareness and deeds, so that the thought develops into a belief and the belief develops into love or otherwise through the interaction between the mind and the heart. This is what we can draw from the

concept of love towards God's chosen individuals and hatred towards God's enemies in Islamic belief as being a proof of seriousness and faithfulness, as it is to be noted that the goal here - which is expressed in the slogans of Ashoora - has to conform with the means of commemoration and that the content acts within the circle of religious adherence.

Once again we say: we have to educate our hearts as we do our minds, to educate our hearts with the culture of emotion, because if the heart fails to find the correct direction in emotions this can destroy one's life. If we proceed from a superficiality in our love and offer it to whomever is not worthy of it, this person might suffer a deeply concealed corruption that would destroy our lives in the future; similarly if we hate someone not on objective basis, he might be a good person in his depth and so our hatred of him would deprive us of the good he can offer.

We have to rationalise our emotions so that they operate on the basis of awareness and proceed from the depth, not from the surface, and not allow our emotions to run out of control or to become childish in nature and deed.

Third: Developing the commemoration methods

If emotions are needed so as to guarantee the continuation of Ashoora throughout time and to deepen it on the level of human feelings, it is necessary, then, to be in permanent study of the commemoration methods, because there is diversity in what affects the person according to the development of his culture and mentality.

In other words: mentality is a language, so if mentalities can be different and can develop, this means that what may affect them has to conform to the mentality being addressed. Some points used may relate to a certain era, so they fail to have effect in another. Or the situation may be one of an undeveloped cultural level that interacts with a certain method when this method fails to have effect in a situation involving a developed cultural level. We perhaps notice this matter in some Hosaini poetry, both what is written in classical Arabic and what is written in dialect, that came from tribal traditions when women would try to encourage men to express their enthusiasm, manhood and courage, which, when used in a society of different culture, is not affected by it, as the cultural situation had developed the emotions area in that society as it developed thought[13].

In the light of this, we have to address a few fundamental points:

First: We must preserve the commemoration methods of Ashoora in its popular traditional way because the simplicity of these forms secures a bigger expansion of the Hosaini cause in the present and the future, and manifests a popular mobilisation state that achieves great positive results on the level of producing the Ashoora masses in every time and place; this is perhaps what has guaranteed its continuation over almost fourteen centuries. Therefore, any change to this aspect is bound to subject the cause to a reduction in the public consciousness, albeit gradually.

Second: In spite of what is said above, preserving the traditional dimension of the commemoration calls for a study of the traditional form so as to protect it from things that do not conform to the correct Islamic concepts on the level of thought, morals and the Shari'ah – all in light of what we have said previously on the necessity of adopting both thought and emotions.

Third: All popular means adopted in Ashoora commemoration must be looked into from the point of view of the Shari'ah, because some of these means - such as wounding the forehead with swords (*tetbir*) -

are forbidden in the Shari'ah, whether on the primary-level basis (of the ruling) (*al-'Onwan al-Awelli*) or on the secondary-level basis (*al-'Onwan ath-Thanewi*) that arises according to the situation and circumstances. In this context, we deal with this issue from different aspects:

1- Some of these matters are not religious rituals, despite the fact that some people try to apply to them the Qur'anic verse: **'And whoso magnifies the offerings consecrated to God, it surely is from devotion of the hearts' 22:32**, because for anything to be a religious ritual it has to come from a religious command, i.e. it must be made clear in the Shari'ah that it is a ritual. So, in that nothing came from the Prophet (sawa) or the Imam (as) to this effect, there is no evidence that it is a religious ritual. The late Sayyid al-Kho'i mentioned this when he was answering a question on making the head bleed and the like; he said: 'Nothing in the Scripture was narrated about its ritual status, so there is no way we can rule that it is recommended (*mostehabb*)'[14].

2- Wounding the forehead and lashing the back using chains and similar acts are harmful to the self,

and some scholars - we among them - rule that harming the self is absolutely forbidden, whether it leads to death or not; therefore such acts are forbidden on the primary-level basis (of the ruling), as they represent a clear form of harming the self.

3- Not ruling that harming the self is forbidden when such harming does not lead to death does not mean that such acts are allowed in the Shari'ah, as some secondary-level basis (of the ruling) may arise in an allowed act to make it forbidden owing to these secondary-level considerations being forbidden. This is why we find that Sayyid al-Kho'i replies to a question in this regard as follows: 'It is not allowed if it causes considerable harm, or if it leads to dishonouring and belittlement'; then - in a reply to another question - he clarifies the meaning of dishonouring and belittlement by saying that they are 'what leads to humiliation and the weakening of the sect in the eyes of the common norm'[15].

And if some people object saying that the atheists and hypocrites used to ridicule some worship or non-worship obligations that cannot be ruled as prohibited because of this, we reply to

this that there is a difference between ridiculing Islam itself, and its obligatory or forbidden rulings and obligatory or forbidden acts, and ridiculing the allowable or recommended where, when a secondary-level consideration applies, it turns the allowable and recommended to the forbidden as well. This is because since both, allowing an act or ruling it as recommended, share the state of being not obligatory to the person, then when a prohibitive consideration is applied to any of these allowable or recommended acts it freezes their said states to the benefit of the negative effect of the prohibitive aspect.

Therefore, the problem lies in the speech of many people on the Islamic ruling in such matters from the angle of the primary-level basis in that the position of the scholars differ towards it, when it must be discussed regarding other angles that relate to the general aspects of the Islamic conduct within the issue of interests and blights (*mesalih* and *mefasid*) in this position or that, that are subject to the secondary-level considerations.

4- If we try to analyse these habits (rituals) in their elements of thought away from Shari'ah considerations, we find that those who carry them out say: we are offering our support to al-Hosain (as) when we strike our heads with swords because he was stricken on his head with a sword, and we are offering our support to Zainab (as) when we lash our backs with chains because she was beaten with lashes. However, this is not a valid argument, since al-Hosain (as) was wounded when he was fighting for justice and truth and did not strike his head with the sword; so supporting him would mean that the person is to be wounded in a similar struggle of *jihad*. Zainab (as) equally was beaten with lashes in the centre of the cause: she did not do this to herself of her own free will.

These practices are backward habits in the expression of sadness, for sadness has other civilised, human ways of expression. Sadness is not an act of self torture, but rather an act that expresses the humanity of the self.

Fourth: Parallel to the traditional, popular methods of commemoration, we must strive to benefit from the

modern means of expression such as the theatre, cinema etc, as this guarantees that Ashoora will reach contemporary people by manifesting the values which it sets out to confirm, and by deepening the tragedy that took place around it, and by interacting with the atmospheres that are produced, something which can give Ashoora a universal human dimension in addition to its Islamic dimension.

This is quite natural, for any idea has to enter the human consciousness through the means that this consciousness can open up to; as man is educated through the means of interaction and communication that he is used to in his era, this gives such means a capability of effect that is far greater than the traditional ways.

This matter calls for innovative artistic initiatives in cinema, television and theatre, whether in the scenarios, direction, acting or the rest of the requirements, in a way that preserves the Islamic atmosphere of Ashoora, in its dynamic aspects as in its religious nature.

In our opinion, there is no problem from the Shari'ah standpoint to act out the Kerbela' personalities, in a play, film or in other forms, provided that it is done in a

manner that preserves the holiness and position of the personalities. Moreover, it is possible to manipulate the acting script in a way that does not contradict its content and spirituality, and which succeeds in giving the idea its realistic vitality through the personality in question. This is because the nature of theatrical or film production - if it is to succeed in its role in this field - assumes another mechanism to present the idea or the cause in a way that cannot accept limiting it only to what history narrates.

When we talk about this matter like this, we are talking from the principle standpoint, as we emphasise that to apply this it must be done in a way that guarantees that all the elements that represent the historic event possess all its vitality and credibility, and all the positive reactions aimed for. In light of this, close study must be applied to choosing the actors, and there must be strict monitoring of the nature of performance.

In this area, we call upon writers and authors – just as we ask all the propagators of Islam – not to set about presenting the personality of Imam al-Hosain in anything less than a comprehensive manner, because al-Hosain (as) was an Imam of Islam and his Imamate -we believe - was a dynamic continuation of the prophethood, and he lived it as a call for Islam, as a reinforcement of its

original concepts, through words and deeds, and lived it as a movement to correct internal and external deviation; so it is necessary that all the elements of the imamate in his personality, and in every stance he took, and in every act he did, should be highlighted.

On the basis of this, we have rejected any stance that history narrated which does not conform to pure Islam or to the leadership position of the Imamate, regardless of their contradiction to the wonderful stances he took that the same historians narrated. We are now going to address this in our discussion of the content of Ashoora.

The content of Ashoora

We drew the attention previously to the necessity of considering the element of content that is presented in Ashoora, whether on the popular traditional level or through the very few trials in the theatre, cinema or television. This matter stems from the fact that the nature of the mentality of the person reciting the Hosaini commemoration,, the Hosaini poet, the director, the script-writer or anyone involved, may play a role in distorting the correct concepts of the Hosaini cause, especially when the aspect of thought is ignored in favour of the emotional tragic aspect that strives to produce tears from the audience by any means. Here, we shall try to present some of the concepts that the sermon-givers present to the audience, knowingly or unknowingly, in different categories.

1- <u>When Islamic concepts are contradicted</u>

In this regard, we may cite an example from a Hosaini poem by the late Sayyid Hayder al-Hilli[16]

when he was trying to encourage Imam al-Mahdi (as) to rise up; he said:

And annihilate even the breastfed baby boy,

From the family of Harb[17]*, and the breastfed baby girl!*

We find here a vigorous and forceful call to annihilate the Umayyads including the breastfed babies, boys and girls, among them. This is a clear contradiction to the concept of justice of the Qur'an: **'and no bearer of burden (guilt) shall bear the burden (guilt) of another' 6:164**, and at the same time it does not conform to what was narrated in Hosaini history about the humanitarian stance of some soldiers in the Umayyad army: when they saw their army refusing to give water to al-Hosain's baby, they said: 'If it is a guilt of the adults, what is the guilt of this breastfed baby?!'

How could the Muslim audience listen to this aggressive call that the poem presents against children who had no guilt, especially if they are breastfed babies, which increases the human feeling of pain, when the whole of the commemoration of Ashoora centres around raising human feelings against the entire

situation that caused the tragedy of al-Hosain (as), his family and companions? An Islamic rejection militates against any similar situation, and requires us to stand up to face those who want to reproduce the tragedy of man in the present and future.

Another example is another piece of poetry in which the poet was talking on behalf of Ahlul Bayt (as):

We are masters and the people slaves,

And we have a magnificent and exalted past,

Our father Mohammed is the master of people,

And it is appropriate that his offspring become masters.

This concept - at face value - contradicts the Muslim mentality that rejects the enslavements of a human being to another human being, as it forbids anyone to regard himself likewise; the Prophets and their successors abstained from using such speech when they talked to people, as the Qur'an talked about them in a different way.

We have never noticed in all the religious traditions, in general, and the Islamic traditions in particular, such pride in looking down on

people, so that people are slaves and they are the masters. Rather, we know - through religious facts - that they (the Prophets and their (divinely appointed) successors) – are a chosen group who have the highest degree of regard for God, so that they are elevated higher than the people in their nearness to Him. We also know that obedience to them is obligatory on people from the position of God's Message that they were entrusted with; however, obedience is one thing and slavery is another, because obedience relates to responsibility not human evaluation.

And while the literary style might justify a person to show his humbleness to another person of whom he has a high regard of some sort, and to say to him: I am your slave, the Islamic education does not permit that highly regarded person to talk about himself like this. This is why drawing the image of Ahlul Bayt (as) to people so that they talk about themselves and about people in this way does not translate to their exalted spirits in their humbleness to God when they deal with people.

2- Undermining the Hosaini cause

In the following example, these lines of poetry, by the famous poet Abu al-'Ala' al-Ma'arri[18], - which is an example found a lot in the Hosaini poetry - gives an image of the struggle as if it was between the two families, the Hashimites[19] and the Umayyads:

'Abd Shams[20] waged for the Hashimites a war

Because of which the born baby becomes grey-haired,

The son of Harb for al-Mostefa[21] and the son of Hind[22]

For Ali, and for al-Hosain was Yezid.

This is an example of a lot of Hosaini poetry - both in classical Arabic and dialect - which is still recited in the commemoration gatherings, that led to the formation of a mentality among the public centred around partisan feelings for the Hashimites and against the Umayyads. This is contrary to Islamic thinking, to the extent that some may imagine religion in this matter is a question of the particulars of the family, not a message-bound programme that interacts with the Islamic awareness of the Muslim and with the symbols and leaders of Islam in their arenas,

so that the bond is established through Islam not through the familial particularities.

Such emotional sides that turn into partisanship for the family is perhaps what has left its effect on the political awareness of the public in some unstable political stages in the life of the nation, when we have noticed how certain kings acquired a lot of emotional support from some religious scholars and innocent popular masses on the basis of their ancestry to the Hashimite family, without looking into their Islamic adherence and without looking into their sectarian affiliation in an arena that sees in the sectarian affiliation as an important part in the evaluation on the levels of thought and emotions. This led to the disruption of the political situation in more than one Muslim country and allowed for the colonial plans to establish themselves in them.

When we raise this issue here, we do not want to make the message-bound cause something that is abstract, devoid of symbolism, because the leadership personalities have their particular weight in the depth of the Message, something which makes the absolute allegiance to the

leadership - as a representation of the bond with the Message - imperative, making the relationship message-bound, not only personal, and with this there is no role for the family, as a family continues. From this, our relationship with Ahlul Bayt (as) does not stem from their Hashimite descent, but from their message; also, the Hashimite element does not become holy because it is found in the holy symbols in the way that makes any Hashimite comes near to holiness, even if he is quite distant from its values.

The literary legacy of poetry and prose may require some imagination, and some artistic elements related to the emotions for the tragedy and for the effect of the tragedy on the internal awareness of the Muslim; but such imagination must proceed from the content of the cause, and not create dimensions that are distant from it, and not produce for it thought that is different to the thought of the cause. In addition, the artistic aspect - in its implications, expressions and derivations - must give the thought some of the real beauty that it has in itself, and not impose on it a beauty from outside its meanings

or give it particularities that are distant from its proper meanings.

Therefore, we call for Hosaini literary works that feed upon the Islamic elements of the Hosaini movement, and which relate to the dimensions of spirit, thought and deeds of Imam al-Hosain (as)[23], so that the commemoration serves the cause through the continuous implicit reminding of its validity throughout time, so that what is seen is that Ashoora is the springboard not the end, and therefore it wants to produce a new audience for its concept in every time and place by emphasising its lively elements in the awareness of the person in the future that is in a never-ending process of renewal, growth and continuation.

3- Distorting the image of the exalted role models

Our study of what history books narrate, in which real events and fabricated events are mixed, shows that when the emotional aspect was given the priority over the realistic aspect in describing the Hosaini cause a distorted image of the symbols of Kerbela' was given, especially with regards to

Imam al-Hosain (as) and his sister Zainab (as). For example, there are many poetry and prose images that present al-Hosain (as) crying in vain for help, and pleading in vain, and asking the enemy for a drink of water but getting no response, until the story reaches the moment when Imam al-Hosain (as) was dying. A person called Hamid bin Muslim saw him and noticed that he was moving his lips, so the man said to himself: 'If al-Hosain was praying (for God's wrath to befall us) we have absolutely lost, by the Lord of the Ka'bah', so he came near to him and found him saying: **'O people, give me a drink of water for my liver has gone into pieces because of thirst'**; another narrator adds to this his saying: **'(I swear) by the position of my grandfather that I am thirsty'.**

This is an image that implies weakness and does not imply strength, something which does not conform to the image that Imam al-Hosain (as) developed as a great person who rebelled against all points of weakness and elements of pain in his confrontation with the tyrannical deviant forces that massed all these people against him to defeat his stance, shake his resolve, divert him away from his firm and distinguished position,

and to impose on him the rule of Yezid, while he rejected retreat, giving in or submission. He withstood all cruel and hard consequences so as to manifest the important human values that God wanted for man in life, because the matter was not a matter of his self, but that of the Message in the challenges it faces and its needs of standing firm and balanced in difficult times. This was manifested in the slogans that he announced and in the stances that he took, especially when his breastfed baby was slain and he (as), according to what history tell us, said: **'I find solace in the fact that what has befallen me is with the knowledge of God'.**

We do not deny that a person - even a prophet or imam - may be affected by human weakness owing to his human nature, but al-Hosain (as) had taken his decision for this difficult confrontation after a close and long study of all the consequences and he knew the barbaric nature of the tyrannical enemy, seeing in the battle itself how cruelty was shown in their attitude even towards a breastfed baby. So how come he begged them for a drink of water when his body was wounded all over in such a terrible manner?!

The real image of Imam al-Hosain (as) is the image that was expressed by one of his enemies in Yezid's army, who said: 'By God, I have never seen anyone with all that has befallen him, his sons and family killed, more brave or determined than al-Hosain, as (when) the fighters were attacking him he would attack them and they would flee like goats when a wolf attacks them!'

Likewise the image of Zainab (as), especially in vernacular poetry: we do not see the image of a strong, challenging heroine who stood up with firmness and determination in the palace of Ibn Ziyad[24] to challenge his rule, and in the Kufi society to confront their deviation and failure to keep up their covenant, and in the Yezid court to attack him; rather, we see an image of a Bedouin woman who talks in a weak and shaky manner that is searching for the tribe that she cannot find, and her supporters, but in vain, and she confronts the matter using a call of revenge in the tribal manner. It is the image of a weak woman who is enslaved after the battle, and who is facing all kinds of calamity, as well as her pain and that of the children and women around

her - in spite of the importance of all this - without having any considerations of the main cause, when history emphasises that Zainab (as) had the greatest role in keeping the cause alive in the consciousness of the people and lifting its banner on the basis of the Islamic values and pure principles.

Some might imagine that talking about the tragedy as part of the cause represents a kind of psychological mobilisation against those who were behind that tragedy or those who might be behind any similar tragedies which produce for the cause a lot of factors of strength in the awareness of the masses when their feelings become receptive to the revolution through it. We say: this is true in what we have emphasised regarding the importance of emotions in Ashoora; however this calls for a kind of balance between the role of emotions and the image of the exalted model of the event when the elements of revolution integrate to serve the cause. Therefore, we do not object to raising the emotions in relation to the real elements of tragedy, but we reject some of the content that distance the tragedy from the atmospheres of strength and determination of the event, just as we reject the

manner in which the implications of the atmosphere and the thought do not conform.

In the light of this, we call for a formulation of the content of Ashoora - whether it is what those reciting the commemoration present, or what poets and writers do - through attention to the great goals of the Hosaini cause, treating its events through aware criticism that takes into consideration all the circumstances of the event, from the personality of the hero to the kind of victory achieved, and to the nature of the enemy and the image of the era, so as to bring all this to the situation in which the nation is currently living, in a process of raising awareness of the importance of change on the basis of Islam, so that we can utilise the anniversary and commemorations throughout time as something good and a blessing for the present and future, just as it was in the past.

Scientific study of history

In this framework, the Hosaini history must be studied in a scientific and objective way, because what we find is books of history in which true and false narrations and quotes are mixed, combining contradictions and what does not conform to the nature of things. Yes, it

is not as necessary to look closely, and with scientific precision, at the chain of narrators (*sened*) of the narrations (of historical events) as is necessary when jurisprudence is concerned, but narrations must be studied for their content with regard to their relationship with the circumstances around them, so that we can establish them on firm foundation.

In addition, we must refer to trusted sources that are regarded as the main channel of historical narrations without becoming overwhelmed by the many books the content of a lot of which does not conform to the Kerbela' cause has been added.

Moreover, sermon givers - and others - must not rush into narrating things the authenticity of which has not been proven through study and reflection merely to raise emotions, as it was narrated that Imam Ja'far as-Sadiq (as), in criticism of one of his companions with regard to the latter's way of dialogue with others, said: **'You mix truth and falsehood, and (with) a little truth (you) can do without a lot of falsehood'**[25].

Endnotes

[1] The word Ashoora is derived from *ashr*, which means ten, and *ashoora* is the word for the tenth day of a month, a usage found among the Arabs in the past. Nowadays, it is used exclusively for the tenth day of Moharram, the first month of the lunar year, to commemorate the annual anniversary of the battle of Kerbala' where Imam al-Hosain (as), the grandson of Prophet Mohammed (sawa), was killed – an event that has had a most profound effect on Muslims since that date. Commemoration of that event is not held exclusively on this particular day of the year, but the nine days before it and the days after it witness all sorts of commemorative acts and sermons, culminating in the day of Ashoora itself, when millions of people come to visit the tomb of Imam al-Hosain (as) in Kerbala', Iraq, with many of them engaging in various forms of rituals, which are part of what this book addresses. *(The translator.)*

[2] Sham means present day Syria, Lebanon, Jordan and Palestine and the army was that of Mu'awiyyeh bin Abi Sufian, who was the governor of Sham and refused to accept Imam Ali's rule, then fought him in the battles of Siffeen (37Hijri/657AD). Today, the word Sham is still commonly used to denote Damascus, capital of Syria. *(The translator.)*

[3] This is despite that fact that the status of war, by its very nature, allows for a form of negative psychological mobilisation against the enemy, so as to raise enthusiasm for battle. However, war was not something that Ali (as) liked, but rather an act to correct deviation when all other means failed; this is why he said: **'I swear by God that I have not**

postponed the war one day except in the hope that a group of them will come over to me, be guided by me and attracted to my light, and this is more preferable to me than killing them in a state of deviance [yes?] and ending up shouldering their sins' *Nahj al-Balaghah*, vol.1, sermon 55.

[4] *Nahj al-Balaghah*, vol.1, sermon 205.

[5] Al-Majlisi, *Bihar al-Anwar*, vol.44, p.329.

[6] *Ibid.*, p.382.

[7] *Ibid.*; also At-Tabari, *At-Tabari history*, vol.3, p.307.

[8] Al-Majlisi, *Bihar al-Anwar*, vol.45, p.7, sec.37.

[9] He means 'Obaidullah bin Ziad, the governor of Kufa, Iraq, for Yazid, the Umayyad caliph. 'Obaidullah was born illegitimate to Ziad, who was also born illegitimate and was later appointed the governor of Kufa, Iraq, by Mu'waiyeh, the first Umayyad caliph, after announcing that Ziad was his father's son. See At-Tabrasi, *al-Ihtijaj*, vol.2, p.20, and Al-Majlisi, *Bihar al-Anwar*, vol.33, p.211. *(The translator.)*

[10] Al-Majlisi, *Bihar al-Anwar*, vol.45, p.83, sec.37, narration 10.

[11] *Ibid.*, vol.90, p.378, sec.24, narration 21.

[12] Al-Mufid, *al-Irshad*, vol.2, p.67.

[13] It must not be thought that what is being said here aims to reduce the effects of such methods, but what is said is the fact that succeeding in serving the Hosaini cause in a certain era or a certain place does not necessarily mean that these methods will serve the cause as they may not do so owing to their inappropriateness for that time or place.

[14] Abul Qasim al-Kho'i, *al-Mesa'il ash-Sher'iyyeh*, vol.2, p.337.

[15] *Ibid.*

[16] Sayyid Hayder al-Hilli (died 1304Hijri/1886AD), one of Iraq's most prominent poets of his time, famous for his Hosaini poems.

[17] Harb is Umayya's son and the great grandfather of Yezid bin Mu'waiyeh, the ruler who gave the orders to fight and kill Imam al-Hosain (as) after the Imam rejected his caliphate by refusing to give him an oath of allegiance. *(The translator.)*

[18] Abu al-'ala' al-Ma'arri (362H/973AD-448H/1057AD), the famous blind Arab poet who was known for his philosophical views, which he presented in his poems, some of which seemed to question the divinity of religion itself. *(The translator.)*

[19] The descendants of Hashim, the great grandfather of Prophet Mohammed (sawa); his tomb is Gaza, Palestine.

[20] 'Abd Shams is Umayya's father and Hashim's brother.

[21] Al-Mostefa, the chosen, is one of the most famous names the Muslims use for Prophet Mohammed (sawa).

[22] This refers to Mu'awiyeh, who was the son of Hind the wife of Abi Sufian, son of Harb.

[23] Just as they should feed from the Islamic terminology that represents the pure Islamic concepts.

[24] 'Obaidullah bin Ziyad, the ruler of Kufa, Iraq, at the time.

[25] Al-Mufid, *al-Irshad*, vol.2, p.199.