Spiritual Dimensions of Mourning for Imam Husayn (a) Part 2

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Part 2: The Role of Hardship and Suffering in the Spiritual Progress

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Spiritual Dimensions of Mourning for Imam Husayn (a) Part 2

Part 2: The Role of Hardship and Suffering in the Spiritual Progress[1]

Mohammad Ali Shomali

Abstract

In the previous part, we discussed divine plan for human salvation in general and then we focused on the role of hardship in human life and what the faithful can achieve if they forebear the hardships with patience. We also stated that God will not impose more on the faithful than they are able to endure, though He might gradually increase their capacity and their hardships accordingly, like a good teacher or trainer who gradually introduces to his students more difficult subjects.

In this world, the hardships of those whom God loves may increase so that they become more detached from this world and be more attached to the spiritual life. In this part, we will study how one can

spiritually gain from mourning for Imam Husayn and his sufferings.

Point One

Imam Husayn was very close to Prophet Muhammad and received everything from him. It is [frequently] reported from both Shi'a and Sunni authorities that the Holy Prophet stated, "Husayn is from me, and I am from Husayn." Naturally, it is interpreted as, 'Husayn is my son and my religion depends on him.'

If it were not for Imam Husayn, the religion of the Holy Prophet would not have remained – the religion in which he had devoted his life to and for which he made a great deal of effort. Therefore, if it was not for Imam Husayn, Islam would have ceased to exist. Imam Husayn himself said:

If the religion of the Holy Prophet would not remain but by murdering me, then O' swords! Take me!

Muhammad Hanafiyyah, a soldier whom Imam Ali sent to the Battle of Siffin several times asked why the Imam did not send his other sons – Imam Hasan and Imam Husayn – to the battle. Imam Ali answered, "You are my son and they are the Prophet's." Thus, Imam Ali felt more responsible to protect the lives of the sons of Lady Fatima[2] more than his other son who was not from the Prophet's progeny.

Only one thing that could be more important than Imam Husayn's life was the religion of the Prophet. Thus, Husayn stated in the form of a conditional proposition, "If it is only through murdering me that the religion of the Holy Prophet could survive, then O' swords! Take me!" If protecting the religion does not hinge upon the Imam's life, then his life must be protected.

But when it is a matter of protecting the religion, not only Husayn ought to be martyred, but also dozens of people like him. Not one Imam died naturally; they were all killed by poison or sword. If protecting Islam requires it, the family of the Imam was ready to be taken captive because the value of Islam is beyond everything else.

When Imam Husayn saw the Prophet in a dream on his way to Karbala, the Prophet told him, "Surely, Allah wants to see you martyred. And surely, Allah wants to see them [Imam Husayn's children and family] captive." The phrase "God wants to" refers to a fact that there was no other way except for it to happen. If Islam were to be preserved, Imam Husayn were to be ready for martyrdom and his children and family were to be ready for captivity. Of course, this does not mean that God wanted Yazid to accomplish his heinous actions or approved of it. This dream was a sign of God's approval of Imam Husayn's decision at that time. Imam Husayn was going to Karbala anyway, but this dream along with the Prophet's hadiths confirmed that there was no other option for him.

The meaning of the Prophet's saying, "Husayn is from me and I am from Husayn" is much deeper than what is normally thought in that it demonstrates extraordinary nearness.

Once Hudhayfah – a companion of the Prophet – heard Imam Husayn (who was a child at the time)

talking about his murder by the Umawid tyrants under the command of ‘Umar ibn Sa‘d. Hudhayfah was surprised and asked Imam Husayn if he had heard about this event from the Prophet, and the Imam said he had not. After relaying this incident to the Prophet, the Prophet replied, “My knowledge is his knowledge and his knowledge is my knowledge, because we know an event before it happens.”3 This was Husayn’s knowledge when he was just a child.

As stated in several hadith, everything the Imams declared was received from the Prophet though there is much that can be said about how they received their knowledge from him. It was not always through conventional methods of receiving information or knowledge as we quote hadith; they did not receive it in the ordinary way we might assume, such as recording speech word for word which may have included mistakes. Imam Ali stated, “The Prophet opened a door of knowledge to me, after which, thousands of doors were opened…” Thus, the method of transferring knowledge was not by the usual means of speaking and writing.

Point Two

Thus, carefully studying Imam Husayn’s life is a necessity for both his friends and foes. It is not possible to find a flaw in his life, not a single imperfection. Not only is there no negative point, but no ambiguous point in Imam Husayn’s life. If we give only the facts of the event of Karbala to any person, he would not doubt consider Imam Husayn right and his enemy wrong. Sometimes there are noble men who were flawless throughout their lives, but their lives still contain ambiguity. The events in Karbala occurred in such a way that they clearly manifest Imam Husayn and his mission. This is where the statement, “Surely, Husayn is the light of guidance” holds true.

Throughout history, there have been many guides though we do not fully understand some of them, since it needs patience, endurance, and preparation. Khidr, the Prophet, was a guide, but even Moses could not benefit from him. The problem was from neither Moses nor Khidr. But Khidr was not that “light of guidance” the way Husayn was and still is. Anyone – a Christian, Hindu, or an illiterate person who does not believe in Islam or knows little of it – can understand Husayn. This is why many non-Muslims take part and spend money in ceremonies that commemorate Imam Husayn’s martyrdom.

Point Three

Imam Husayn endured a great hardship that no one in history had or will ever endure. The hardship Imam Husayn faced was extremely severe. In Ziyarat Ashura, we read:

O Abu Abdullah! Unbearable is the sorrow; nerve- racking is the agony you put up with, for us and for all the (true) Muslims. The crimes committed against you also shocked and unnerved the dwellers of the heavens, one and all.

The hardships endured during the Battle of Karbala were so great it goes beyond our imagination, a

hardship that cannot be perceived by our minds, a hardship so great that even after fourteen centuries it is unforgotten.

No one should think that the reason we mourn is because we are emotional and sensitive people. It was the hardship of this event that was so enormous. On one hand, the task carried out by the Imam and his companions was tremendous; on the other, the wretchedness of the enemies was so great that it is neither forgotten nor has it depreciated. No matter how much time passes after the event, nothing can have an impact on it. More than one thousand and four hundred years have passed, and within the next thousand years, nothing more severe than Imam Husayn's hardship will ever happen:

"No day has ever been like your day, O Abu Abdillah!"[4]

Point Four

So why did Imam Husayn endure such a hardship? To protect Islam. How can we benefit from this great sacrifice? We must share in Imam Husayn's grief and suffering. If we can regard Imam Husayn's grief as our own, then we too can benefit in his hardship. Of course, we do not have the capacity to endure this type of hardship. If something slightly bad happens to us, we weep and wail, cry to the heavens, complain to God, and say that our supplications are of no use or ask why our requests are not granted.

But one way has been prepared for us, which is possible for everyone to seek. Christians can also come and seek this way. Jews can also do so. And even non believers. Everyone can more or less benefit. When they hear what happened to Husayn and his Household, they can come and share in Imam Husayn's grief. Another part of Ziyarat Ashura reads:

I implore Allah to give me because of my suffering in you the best which might be given to an afflicted person, for the sake of your place before Him and your rightfulness and also the hardship I endured in your way.

Here the supplicant does not ask God to give him the reward for his own actions. He asks for the reward as a result of suffering. As explained before, the reward for a believer's enduring hardship is not comparable to anything else. What adds to the significance of this particular suffering is that it is not personal. This suffering is because of the loss of great friends of God in the most tragic event.

We should welcome "the hardship I endured in your way." Today we must be stricken with grief, similar to a person who has shared in Husayn's hardship. We must wear black and mourn. We must cry and weep and not just sit somewhere saying that we are very sorry about what happened. Neither must we be like those who merely hold a conference where articles are presented about the tragedy, or, God forbid, hold parties because Imam Husayn achieved his goal and became martyred.

There are those who do so. But the heart of the matter is that we must be stricken with grief. The suffering of the Ahl al-Bayt must become your own suffering. We must pay attention to the fact that the

more stricken we are, the closer to Imam Husayn we will be. We will be granted rewards according to how much we endure hardships. When we say, “Give me the best which might be given to an afflicted person for the sake of the hardship I endured in your way,” means that we are imploring God for the best thing given to an afflicted person.

This is a way God has laid out for us. If we understand, we will gain the greatest rewards through sharing in Imam Husayn’s hardship. In hadiths we read that if someone makes a hundred people to weep, or even a single person weep, he would go to heaven. Other hadiths state that if we weep we would go to heaven and furthermore, it is stated that if at least we pretend to weep, we might go to heaven. It means that the very least we can do to show that we share in Imam Husayn’s suffering is to be sad and prepared to cry. Sometimes we cannot cry. Although it is better to be able to cry, if we cannot, then we should not think that we have missed everything. Even if we have only come to the mourning session and pretended to weep, it still shows that we are stricken with grief. Of course, the more grief we feel, the higher our level will be.

If we really feel the grief and take the tragedy as our own, is it practically possible that we are not in opposition to Husayn’s enemies? Be fair! If someone does to you what they did to Imam Husayn, that they killed his brothers, his nephews, his young son, and his six-month old son, and then also took his Household captive, then, can you help taking those people as your own enemies and ask God to keep them away from His mercy? Of course, you should have so much control over your emotions that you remain calm and not swear at them. But can you really say that you are truly heartbroken when tens of your family members, including the children, are brutally killed, the tents are looted and burnt and the rest of the family, mostly women and girls, are taken captive by the army of Yazid, and still not have any negative feelings for those enemies? Is this possible?

In any case, we must share in Husayn’s hardship. We must be stricken with grief today. Contrary to some Christian friends believe Jesus to have suffered and finally crucified to have everyone’s sins forgiven, we believe that Imam Husayn endured a great hardship, although not everyone is forgiven because of it. We must have done righteous deeds and be under Husayn’s leadership in his camp. It is not possible to act sinfully like the enemies of Husayn and still hope to accompany him in the Hereafter. But if we are like Husayn, then there is hope for us. Indeed, the whole point is that your love for Husayn as a true servant of God must increase so much so that you resemble him in his conduct.

When people love and admire ordinary talented person, they subconsciously imitate his every move. How can we claim that we truly love Husayn and then act against his conduct and teachings?

Point Five

One of the great outcomes of sharing the suffering of Imam Husayn is that we would be able to be with him in the hereafter. Another part of Ziyarat Ashura reads:

I ask Him to take me to the praised position (al-maqiim al-mahmud) which you (the Ahl al-Bayt) have before Him.

What is the Praised Position? God told His Prophet:

"And stay awake for some part of the night, beyond what is incumbent on you. It may be that your Lord will raise you to a praised position." (***17:79***)

In the Hereafter, the Prophet and his Household will enjoy the uppermost status everyone will wish to have. In Ziyarat Ashura, those who are heartbroken over Imam Husayn's hardship will say, "I ask Him to take me to the praised position that you have before Him."

This is a great business, if we fully understand. If this prayer is answered we would be able to be with the Prophet and his Household in the Hereafter without having done the great services they did. It is true that we have faith, perform daily prayers, fast, and so on, but, as mentioned before, these deeds are very few considering the long journey we have ahead; however, we can see the aspiration mentioned in this ziyarat. We are told to ask God to give us the position of Great Glory which the Household will indeed have.

How can we reach that position? Through sharing in Imam Husayn's hardship, God the Almighty will let you share with Imam Husayn in his reward without reducing his own. This is the mercy of Allah that through love, sympathy, and agreement you can share the reward for the good any person does or the suffering he undergoes without that person losing anything. In any case, by following Husayn, he will take you where he himself is heading. That is why the Prophet described Imam Husayn as safinat al-najat or "The ship of salvation".

Because life's troubles are like a vast ocean ahead of us which is full of dangers and we do not know how to swim in such an ocean, embarking on this "ship of salvation" is a necessary blessing.

What do we know? What are we proud of? Sometimes we cannot even find an address in the city we live in! How can we hope to find our way in this vast ocean? It may take a lifetime of a thousand years to do this!

Considering the tiny amount of good deeds we do, even if we do not commit any sins, we might need to live for thousands of years to gain something worthy enough as a provision for the journey to eternity that we have ahead of us. In mathematics, we learn that any number divided by infinity would come to approximately zero; which means that if we even live and work for hundreds of years, compared to our eternal journey, it will be nothing.

We need something to take us through this. To put our mind at ease, we need a safe and fast vehicle moving us in the right direction because we do not have thousands of years to live. With regards to this, in some sources, it has been reported from the Ahl al-Bayt: "We are all ships of salvation, but the ship of

Husayn is the largest and the fastest." All the guides in history have been like rescue ships, but this one is special. This is the rescue ship that will quickly take us to our destination.

Why? Because it is driven by the power of suffering and love and does not depend solely on our deeds. Our good actions are very few. To be honest, how much are we committed to the night prayers? How much do we give charity? Let us come and share in Husayn's hardship! Come and embark on this ship!

Obviously, this ship has different levels depending on the deeds we have performed. Some people have taken the back seat, some may have taken seats in the engine room, and some people are in the most luxurious rooms of the ship. At least let us just get on the ship to be safe! Do not be like the son of Noah who told his father,

***"I shall betake me* (*for refuge*) *to some mountain that will save me from water"* (*11:43*).**

There is no mountain that can save the sinful from going astray! There is no mountain that can save us from hell! We have to get on that ship. May Allah give us the opportunity to experience such a pleasant life:

***"Whoever acts righteously,* [*whether*] *male or female, should he be faithful, We shall revive him with a good life and pay them their reward by the best of what they used to do"* (*16:97*).**

May Allah enable us to get on board the ship of Husayn and place ourselves under his flag and in his camp. If we do so, we should not have to worry about anything. But we should not deceive ourselves. Do not say that it is enough to love Imam Husayn. Become like him. Seek his way and adopt his manners. Look at Imam Husayn's regard for prayer: While the enemy did not stop the war for a moment, Imam Husayn performed the prayer on time at noon on the day of Ashura.

Today we can see that even non-believers respect us when they see us performing our prayers. They even try not to make any noise. The enemies of Imam Husayn pretended to be Muslim, but they did not even respect the prayers. However, Imam Husayn did not consider this as an excuse to avoid praying on time. While Imam was praying two of his companions i.e. Sa'eed ibn 'Abdullah and Zuhayr ibn Qayn stood in front of Imam Husayn to guard him.

They were so loyal that even though they were frequently hit by the enemies' arrows, they did not leave the Imam alone. Neither did Imam Husayn give up praying on time. Why have we kept such distance from Imam Husayn? How will someone be able to look him in the eye on the Day of Judgment and tell him that he is his Shi'a but that he sometimes forgot his prayers?

Let us persevere with our good deeds, board the ship, and be at ease. If we are pious and get on Imam Husayn's ship, God willing, we will not face any harm at all, for

***"Surely God's friends shall have no fear nor shall they grieve."* (*10:62*)**

1. This Address was originally presented at the Manchester Islamic Institute in Manchester on Ashura 1429 on 19th January 2008); it is reprinted here more or less as delivered.

2. The daughter of Prophet Muhammad (s).

3. Bihar al-Anwar, vol. 44, p. 186.

4. Bihar al-Anwar, vol. 45, p. 218.

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