

The Virtues of Allah's sacred month of Muharram

Praise be to Allah, the Lord of the Worlds, and peace and blessings be upon our Prophet Muhammad, the last of the Prophets and Chief of the Messengers, and upon all his family and companions.

Allah's sacred month of Muharram is a blessed and important month. It is the first month of the Hijri calendar and is one of the four sacred months concerning which Allah says (interpretation of the meaning):

"Verily, the number of months with Allah is twelve months (in a year), so it was ordained by Allah on the Day when He created the heavens and the earth; of them, four are sacred. That is the right religion, so wrong not yourselves therein..." [al-Tawbah 9:36]

Abu Bakrah (may Allah be pleased with him) reported that the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) said: "The year is twelve months of which four are sacred, the three consecutive months of Dhu'l-Qa'dah, Dhu'l-Hijjah and Muharram, and Rajab Mudar which comes between Jumaada and Sha'baan." (Reported by al-Bukhaari, 2958).

Muharram is so called because it is a sacred (muharram) month and to confirm its sanctity.

Allah's words (interpretation of the meaning): "so wrong not yourselves therein..." mean do not wrong yourselves in these sacred months, because sin in these months is worse than in other months.

It was reported that Ibn 'Abbaas said that this phrase (so wrong not yourselves therein...) referred to all the months, then these four were singled out and made sacred, so that sin in these months is more serious and good deeds bring a greater reward.

Qutaadah said concerning this phrase (so wrong not yourselves therein...) that wrongdoing during the sacred months is more serious and more sinful than wrongdoing at any other time. Wrongdoing at any time is a serious matter, but Allah gives more weight to whichever of His commands He will. Allah has chosen certain ones of His creation. He has chosen from among the angels Messengers and from among mankind Messengers. He chose from among speech the remembrance of Him (dhikr). He chose from among the earth the mosques, from among the months Ramadan and the sacred months, from among the days Friday and from among the nights Laylat al-Qadr, so venerate that which Allah has told us to venerate. People of understanding and wisdom venerate the things that Allah has told us to venerate. (Summarized from the Tafseer of Ibn Katheer, may Allah have mercy on him. Tafseer of Surat al-Tawbah, aayah 36).

The Virtue of observing more naafil fasts during Muharram.

Abu Hurayrah (may Allah be pleased with him) said: "The Messenger of Allah (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) said: 'The best of fasting after Ramadan is fasting Allah's month of Muharram.'" (reported by Muslim, 1982).

The phrase "Allah's month", connecting the name of the month to the name of Allah in a genitive grammatical structure, signifies the importance of the month. Al-Qaari said: "The apparent meaning is all of the month of Muharram." But it was proven that the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) never fasted any

whole month apart from Ramadan, so this hadeeth is probably meant to encourage increasing one's fasting during Muharram, without meaning that one should fast for the entire month.

It was reported that the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) used to fast more in Sha'baan. It is likely that the virtue of Muharram was not revealed to him until the end of his life, before he was able to fast during this month. (Sharh al-Nawawi 'ala Saheeh Muslim).

Allah chooses whatever times and places He wills

Al-'Izz ibn 'Abd al-Salaam (may Allah have mercy on him) said: "Times and places may be given preferred status in two ways, either temporal or religious/spiritual. With regard to the latter, this is because Allah bestows His generosity on His slaves at those times or in those places, by giving a greater reward for deeds done, such as giving a greater reward for fasting in Ramadan than for fasting at all other times, and also on the day of 'Ashoora', the virtue of which is due to Allah's generosity and kindness towards His slaves on that day..." (Qawaa'id al-Ahkaam, 1/38).

Ruling on offering congratulations at the beginning of the Hijri year

If someone offers you congratulations, then respond to him, but do not initiate such greetings. This is the correct view concerning this matter. So if a person says to you, for example, "Happy New Year", then you can say, "May Allah make it a good and blessed year for you." But you should not initiate such a greeting, because I do not know of any report that the salaf [early generations of Islam] congratulated one another on the occasion of the new year, rather the salaf did not regard the first of Muharramas the first day of the new year until the caliphate of 'Umar ibn al-Khattaab (may Allah be pleased with him).

Shaykh 'Abd al-Kareem al-Khudayr said concerning offering congratulations on the occasion of the hijri new year: Praying for another Muslim in general terms, in phrases that are not meant as a kind of ritual on special occasions such as Eid, is acceptable, especially if what is meant by this greeting is friendship and to show a friendly face to one's fellow Muslim. Imam Ahmad (may Allah have mercy on him) said: "I do not initiate the greeting but if someone greets me I return the greeting, because responding to the greeting is obligatory. But being the first to offer congratulations is neither Sunnah nor forbidden."

The virtue of fasting 'Ashoora'

Firstly: Fasting the day of 'Ashoora' does expiate for the past year, because the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) said: "Fasting the day of 'Arafah I hope Allah will expiate thereby for the year before it and the year after it, and fasting the day of 'Ashoora' I hope Allah will expiate thereby for the year that came before it." Narrated by Muslim, 1162. This is by the bounty that Allah bestows upon us, whereby fasting one day expiates for the sins of a whole year. And Allah is the Owner of great bounty.

The Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) used to be very keen to make sure he fasted on the day of 'Ashoora' because of its great status. It was narrated that Ibn 'Abbaas (may Allah be pleased with him) said: I never saw the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) so keen to make sure he fasted any

day and preferring it over another except this day, the day of 'Ashoora', and this month – meaning Ramadan. Narrated by al-Bukhaari, 1867.

What is meant by being keen to make sure he fasted it is so as to earn its reward.

Secondly: With regard to the reason why the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) fasted on the day of 'Ashoora' and urged the people to do likewise is mentioned in the hadeeth narrated by al-Bukhaari (1865) from Ibn 'Abbaas (may Allah be pleased with him), who said: The Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) came to Madeenah and saw the Jews fasting on the day of 'Ashoora'. He said, "What is this?" They said, "This is a good day, this is the day when Allah saved the Children of Israel from their enemy and Moosa fasted on this day." He said, "We have closer to Moosa than you." So he fasted on this day and told the people to fast.

The words "this is a good day" – according to a version narrated by Muslim, "This is a great day when Allah saved Moosa and his people and drowned Pharaoh and his people."

The words "so Moosa fasted on this day" – Muslim added in his report: "In gratitude to Allah, so that is we fast on this day."

According to another version narrated by al-Bukhaari, "So we fast it out of respect for it."

The words "and told the people to fast" – according to another version narrated by al-Bukhaari, "He said to his companions, 'You are closer to Moosa than them, so fast this day.'"

Thirdly: The expiation of sins that is achieved by fasting 'Ashoora' refers to minor sins; with regard to major sins, they need separate repentance.

Al-Nawawi (may Allah have mercy on him) said: Fasting the day of 'Arafaah' expiates for all minor sins, in other words this brings forgiveness for all sins except for major sins. Then he said: Fasting the day of 'Arafaah' is an expiation for two years, and the day of 'Ashoora' is an expiation for one year, and if a person's Ameen coincides with the Ameen of the angels, his previous sins will be forgiven... Each of the things mentioned may bring expiation. If he does something that expiates for minor sins he will be expiated, and if there are no minor or major sins, it will be recorded for him as good deeds and he will rise in status thereby... If there is one or more major sins and no minor sins, we hope that it will reduce his major sins. Al-Majmoo' Sharh al-Muhadhdhab

Shaykh al-Islam Ibn Taymiyah (may Allah have mercy on him) said: The expiation of purification, prayer, and fasting Ramadan, 'Arafah' and 'Ashoora' applies to minor sins only.