

THE FAST ON THE DAY OF ASHURA - AN ALTERNATIVE VIEW

By Sheikh Yasar Ebrahim on 24 September 2017 in Raslouw, Pretoria

Many hadiths and traditions can be found in the books of the Shia and Sunni corpuses that indicate towards not only the permissibility but rather the desirability of the fast on the Day of Ashura.

The hadiths state that it was the practice of the Jews and many incidents are reported to have occurred on that day for example, the ship of Nuh (as) arriving on land, or that Yunus (as) was returned to his people or that it was the day that Musa (as) defeated Firawn etc. Or that the Prophet (sawa) used to fast on those days until the fast of the Holy Month of Ramadhan became compulsory.

ASTRONOMICAL ANALYSIS

The first discussion is an astronomical discussion, because if the Jews had a fast during those days it must have continued till today, so was the day that the Jews were found fasting on the same as the tenth of Muharram of the Islamic Calendar or was it just coincidental?

For if we go into Jewish literature, as quoted by scholars, we will see that the Jewish fast of Yawm Kipur is roughly around October time, which according to their calendar is the 10th day of Tishrei and as we know the word Ashura merely means the tenth so it is not impossible to assume that during certain times the two dates coincided.

For example below are the dates for the Jewish fast for the next four years and as we can see they are very close to the month of Muharram:

- 2017 – Saturday, September 30
- 2018 – Wednesday, September 19
- 2019 – Wednesday, October 9
- 2020 – Monday, September 28

So as can be seen there is a chance for the 2 days falling on the same day in history and has no ulterior significance.

NARRATION OF MAYTHAM AL-TAMMAR

This then leads to a second possibility of these traditions which make the day of Ashura a day of celebration because of other events that will be mentioned being forged later on to try and hide the event and greatness of Karbala, and this can be seen in the following tradition from the

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great companion of Ali (as) who we remembered yesterday, Maytham al-Tammar.

It is reported by Shaykh Saduq in his Amali that Jibilah Makkiyah narrates that he heard Maytham (ra) saying: I swear by Allah, this nation will kill the son of the Holy Prophet (sawa) on the 10th day of the month of Muharram. But people will take it as a day of blessings and celebrations and this will happen as I heard it from my master Amir al-Mumineen (as). Jibilah then asked Maytham, "How will people make the day of the killing of Husayn (as) a day of blessing?" Maytham replied with tears streaming down his cheeks, "They will forge narrations saying that it was the day that Allah (Swt) accepted the repentance of Adam (as), while in fact that occurred in Zil Hijjah; they will say that it was the day that Yunus (as) was taken out from the belly of the whale, whilst this occurred in Zil Qa'dah; they will say that this was the day that the ship of Nuh (as) reached land, when in fact that occurred in Zil Hijjah; they will say that this is the day that Allah (swt) opened the sea for Musa (as), whilst that occurred in Rabi al-Awwal."

So this is the second opinion that all these hadiths and traditions are forged in order to mask the reality behind the day of Ashura and the killing of Husayn (as).

However if we say, for arguments sake, that it was the tenth of Muharram that we know there is a remarkable hadith narrated from Musa (as), which in fact can be considered as a hadith Qudsi:

Musa (as) asks Allah (swt) why and for what reason has He preferred the nation of Muhammad over all other nations, Allah (swt) replies that he has done so for ten reasons. Musa then asks what are those ten so that I can inform Bani Israeel about them and so that they can know them and Allah (Swt) says: Prayer, Alms, Fasting, Hajj, Jihad (Holy Struggle), Jumuah (Friday Prayer), Congregational prayer, the Holy Quran, knowledge and Ashura.

Then Musa (as) asks. "O my Lord, what is Ashura?" Allah (swt) says. "It is crying and making others cry upon the grandson of Muhammad (sawa) and remembering and grieving over the tribulations of the son of the messenger of Allah (sawa). O Musa there is no slave from amongst my slaves who will live during that time who cries or makes others cry and mourns and remembers al-Husayn (as) except that I will guarantee them a place in paradise. Whoever from amongst my servants gives money or other for the love of the son the daughter of Muhammad (sawa) for the food or anything else a Dirham or Dinar except that Allah (Swt) in this world will give him 70 times that and will be placed in Paradise. I will forgive their sins and by my might and honour, if any man or woman passes a tear on the day of Ashura and other days, even a single tear, I will grant them the reward of a hundred Martyrs.

RECONSIDERATION OF FAST OF BANI ISRAEEL ON ASHURA

So it is possible that Bani Israeel fasted on the Day of Ashura because of the grief and sadness they had for Imam Husayn (as) and this can be seen in the verdicts of our scholars regarding this day and the fast of it.

For example Muqaddis Ardabili says in this regard that the fast being mustahab is only allowed if it has no similitude to the happiness and grandeur that the Bani Umayyah had on that day. Hence to oppose this type of thought the Imams would tell people not to fast but rather not eat

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until just before sunset and then eat a little.

So as can be seen the fast in and of itself is not wrong but the reasons behind holding it are incorrect, as it was done to celebrate the killing of Imam Husayn (as) and in reality to hide the fact about it.

This opposing something that intrinsically is not bad because of secondary reasons is a Quranic Principle. As we read in Surah Baqarah, verse 104:

“O you who have faith! Do not say Ra'ina, but say Unzurna, and listen! And there is a painful punishment for the faithless.”

The verse tells us that the Jews would tease and trouble the Holy Prophet (sawa) using a word that the Muslims would use in order to gain the Prophets attention and they would use it to mean that the message of the Holy Prophet (sawa) is garbage.

That is why Allah (Swt) then ordered the Muslims to use another word which cannot be misconstrued.

So the principle is that do not give the enemies of Islam even a chance to misconstrue something which intrinsically is not wrong in order to give out a wrong impression. This is why the Imams (as) have said that we must not fast on the day of Ashura but rather do Imsaak till before Ghurub in order to show people that we are grieving and not to be seen in the same light as those who fast out of happiness on that day