

10TH MUHARRAM THE SIGNIFICANCE OF ASHURA

According to Muslim tradition after Hijra when the Prophet Muhammad arrived in Madina he found the local Jewish community fasting on this day – both traditions follow the lunar calendar – he asked the Jews as to their reason why and they informed him that this was a practice of Prophet Moses/Musa who fasted on this day as showing gratitude to Allah for freeing the Children of Israel from Pharaoh. This practice then was initiated by Prophet Muhammad amongst the Muslims who followed the practice of Prophet Musa. This is an interesting point as Islam isn't just based on the practices of Prophet Muhammad but also those of prophets who came before when they were incorporated in Islam. Other examples are the practice of Prophet Ibrahim during Hajj and 'Id al-Adha. However Prophet Muhammad was keen to ensure there was no misunderstanding amongst the other citizens of Madina or elsewhere. Islam shares a number of practices with Judaism and some had suggested that Islam was a sect of Judaism; a similar view is espoused about Christianity. Islam has to be distinct with its own practices and rituals even though it will share broader concepts with other faiths. Hence the Prophet instructed to add a day either before or after so Islam would be viewed as an independent religion. However that is when the practice of fasting amongst the Jews and Muslims is on the same day and widespread in the communities they live in. As that is not the case within most of our communities – it would suffice to fast on the 10th but praiseworthy to fast on as many days of Muharram as possible.

The 10th of Muharram took extra significance on 61AH (circa 680AD) when Sayyiduna Husayn ibn Ali, the grandson of the Prophet was martyred in Karbala. The significance of this event cannot be underestimated. The loss of such an individual cannot go without stating his rank and status. To stand against aggression, oppression and tyranny; to stand for justice, fairness and freedom are values which all right-minded communities stand and fall for – Sayyiduna Husayn gave up everything, including his life, to fight for these values. This has always been the practice of Muslims who truly live up to the values of Islam – now and then.

Having said that Islam has never been a religion of individuals' statuses and efforts but of values and practices – it is for this reason Islam is not named Mohammadism, as some wrongly suggest.

We should not forget our leader Husayn, his brother Hasan, his father Ali ibn Talib nor his grandfather Prophet Muhammad; we should include other martyrs like our leader 'Umar and Uthman and Hamza and the many others, may Allah be pleased with them all, who stood against tyranny and oppression similarly. Furthermore it is beneficial, and more relevant, correct to remember and practice what they stood for and eventually died for – this is what they would want and more relevantly what Allah would want.

