Editorial

Muharram: Lessons and Insights

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Lexically, the Arabic word "muharram" means "honored, honorable, sanctified; forbidden, interdicted; inviolable". As the name of an Arabic lunar month, it has since been regarded as one of the four "sanctified" months in the ancient Arab culture and civilization. This mode of sanctity is still inseparable connected and attached with it.

Despite the sanctity attached with the month Muharram, the harshest and fiercest war took place in it on the plain of Karbala in 61 AH/ 680. Yazid, the second Umayyad ruler, never paid any attention to the pre-Islamic sanctity of Muharram and waged a battle against the descendants of the Prophet Muhammad. This war took place on the tenth day of Muharram, i.e., on Ashura.

There have occured so many horrible wars in the world, yet the Battle of Karbala on Ashura has proved the most conspicuous of them all. Why? There are many reasons that can briefly be reviewed here.

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The Battle of Karbala took place in the month when clashes are ritually forbidden. However, despite creating clashes, the wronged and oppressed side of the clashes were the descendants of the Prophet Muhammad, notably Imam al-Husayn, who was massively invited by Kufans who had penned at least 12,000 letters of invitation. The most horrible scene is that this praiseworthy guest was not only intercepted on the way to Kufah, he and his camp received the worst kind of treatment there.

However Imam al-Husayn showed zealousness and interest in guiding the ruthless pro-Umayyad Kufan army to the right path, they showed him all sorts of maltreatment. Besides imposing a war on him, they denied him of having easy access to water. Although he had quenched the intense thirst of the enemy forces that had intercepted him, he was denied of water in return to his vital help. His infant babies, children, and female companions were not only deprived of the substance of life, they were taken as prisoners of war, too. Humiliation proved more pressing than martyrdom.

The event of Ashura has since been a lesson not only for Muslims but also for mankind. The more one studies the Karbala phase of the early Islamic history, the more eternal lessons can be derived from it. It has still many, many untold, universal messages for mankind. This is why not only Muslims but all rational people come to venerate Imam al-Husayn and the tragic-but-triumphant event of Ashura.

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