

The Legacy of Sacrifice: From Ashura to Hijrah to Karbala

Introduction

All praise is due to Allah, the Lord of the world. We praise Him, seek His help, seek His forgiveness, and place our trust in Him. We seek refuge in Allah from the evils of our souls and the consequences of our actions. Whomever Allah guides, none can misguide, and whoever He allows to stray, none can guide. We bear witness that there is no deity worthy of worship except Allah alone, and we bear witness that Muhammad ﷺ is His servant and Messenger.

Dear respected brothers and sisters!

Allah has blessed certain times, places, and individuals with special significance. Among the sacred months honored by Allah is the month of Muharram. The Messenger of Allah ﷺ described it as "Shahrullah al-Muharram" (The Month of Allah). Throughout Islamic history, Muharram has become associated with some of the most significant events that continue to inspire believers until today. Among them are the blessed Day of Ashura, the historic Hijrah (migration) of the Prophet ﷺ and his Companions, and the martyrdom of Sayyiduna Imam Hussain (RA).

The Islamic calendar itself reminds us of the importance of sacrifice. Although the actual migration of the Prophet ﷺ took place later, the Muslim Ummah chose to begin its calendar with the year of Hijrah because it marked the beginning of a new chapter for Islam. The Hijrah was not merely a journey from Makkah to Madinah. It was a tremendous sacrifice. The Prophet ﷺ and his Companions left behind their homes, families, businesses, wealth, and comfort solely for the pleasure of Allah. Likewise, Ashura reminds us of the deliverance of Prophet Musa (AS) and his people through faith and trust in Allah, while Karbala reminds us of the courage, sacrifice, and steadfastness of Imam Hussain (RA) in defense of truth and justice.

These events teach us some of the most important lessons of faith. Ashura teaches gratitude, obedience, and reliance upon Allah. Hijrah teaches sacrifice, commitment, and

trust in Allah's promise. Karbala teaches courage, patience, and unwavering adherence to truth. Together, they remind us that true faith is not merely a matter of words or emotions. Faith requires worship, obedience, sacrifice, and perseverance. Every generation of Muslims must learn these lessons if it wishes to preserve its religion and remain faithful to Allah and His Messenger ﷺ.

1. The Significance of Ashura

The tenth day of Muharram is known as Ashura, derived from the Arabic word "Asharah," meaning "ten." Long before Islam, this day was recognized as a significant day. When the Prophet ﷺ migrated to Madinah, he found the Jews fasting on the Day of Ashura.

The Prophet ﷺ asked them about the reason for their fasting. They replied that this was the day on which Allah saved Prophet Musa (Aleheslam) and the Children of Israel from Pharaoh and his army. Therefore, they fasted out of gratitude to Allah.

The Messenger of Allah ﷺ then declared:

نَحْنُ أَحَقُّ بِمُوسَى مِنْكُمْ

"We have more right to Musa than you." (Bukhari and Muslim)

After saying this, the Prophet ﷺ observed the fast of Ashura and instructed his Companions to fast as well.

In the early years of Islam, fasting on Ashura was highly emphasized. However, when fasting during the month of Ramadan became obligatory in the second year after Hijrah, the obligation of Ashura was removed, and it became voluntary.

Sayyidah Aisha رضي الله عنها narrates:

كَانَ رَسُولُ اللَّهِ ﷺ أَمَرَ بِصِيَامِ يَوْمِ عَاشُورَاءَ، فَلَمَّا فُرِضَ رَمَضَانُ كَانَ مَنْ شَاءَ صَامَ، وَمَنْ شَاءَ أَفْطَرَ

"The Messenger of Allah ﷺ used to command the fasting of Ashura. But when Ramadan was made obligatory, whoever wished could fast Ashura, and whoever wished could leave it." (Sahih al-Bukhari)

Although fasting on Ashura became optional, its virtue remains tremendous. The Prophet ﷺ said:

يُكَفِّرُ السَّنَةَ الْمَاضِيَةَ

"It expiates the sins of the previous year." (Sahih Muslim)

What a great opportunity Allah has given us. By fasting one day sincerely for His sake, a believer receives forgiveness for an entire year's minor sins.

2. The Martyrdom of Imam Hussain

Dear brothers and sisters!

Muharram is also remembered because of one of the most painful and significant events in Islamic history: the martyrdom of Sayyiduna Imam Hussain (RA), the beloved grandson of the Messenger of Allah ﷺ.

This was not merely a political conflict or a historical tragedy. It became a defining moment that clearly distinguished truth from falsehood, justice from oppression, and principle from compromise. Imam Hussain stood firm when many people chose silence. He refused to legitimize injustice at the cost of Islamic principles.

The Prophet ﷺ loved Hassan and Hussain dearly. He said:

الْحَسَنُ وَالْحُسَيْنُ سَيِّدَا شَبَابِ أَهْلِ الْجَنَّةِ

"Hasan and Hussain are the leaders of the youth of Paradise." (Tirmidhi)

At Karbala, Imam Hussain and his small group of companions faced overwhelming odds. Yet they chose dignity over surrender and truth over worldly gain. Their sacrifice became an eternal lesson that faith sometimes requires paying a heavy price.

3. Worship, Obedience, and Sacrifice

Brothers and sisters!

Our relationship with Allah is expressed through three fundamental realities:

Worship (Ibadah), Obedience (Ta'ah), and Sacrifice (Qurbani).

A believer worships Allah with his prayers, fasting, and remembrance. He obeys Allah by following His commands. But the highest level of faith appears when a person sacrifices his desires, comfort, wealth, and even life for the sake of Allah.

The history of Islam is a history of sacrifice. Every prophet sacrificed. Every righteous servant sacrificed. No one reaches nearness to Allah without sacrifice.

In a remarkable way, the Islamic calendar begins with the memory of sacrifice and ends with the memory of sacrifice. Muharram reminds us of the sacrifice of Imam Hussain (RA), while Dhul-Hijjah reminds us of the sacrifice of Ibrahim and Ismail (AS).

Between these two great sacrifices stands another monumental sacrifice: the Hijrah of the Prophet ﷺ and his Companions. Ibrahim (AS) sacrificed for the command of Allah, the Muhajirun sacrificed their homes and possessions for the command of Allah, and Imam Hussain (RA) sacrificed his life and family to preserve the religion of Allah. These examples teach us that Islam was built and preserved through sacrifice.

4. The Sacrifice of Ibrahim and Ismail

Allah says:

وَإِذِ ابْتَلَىٰ إِبْرَاهِيمَ رَبُّهُ بِكَلِمَاتٍ فَأَتَمَّهُنَّ ۖ قَالَ إِنِّي جَاعِلُكَ لِلنَّاسِ إِمَامًا

"And when Ibrahim was tested by his Lord with certain commands and he fulfilled them completely, Allah said: Indeed, I am making you an Imam for humanity." (Al-Baqarah 2:124)

Ibrahim (AS) attained the rank of leadership because he succeeded in the greatest tests of obedience and sacrifice.

When he and his son Ismail submitted completely to Allah's command, Allah declared:

وَفَدَيْنَاهُ بِذَبْحٍ عَظِيمٍ - وَتَرَكْنَا عَلَيْهِ فِي الْآخِرِينَ

"And We ransomed him with a great sacrifice. And We left for him an honorable mention among later generations." (As-Saffat 37:107-108)

Allah loved their submission so much that He made their sacrifice a permanent symbol for all generations until the Day of Judgment.

Many scholars and spiritual teachers have reflected upon the deeper connection between the sacrifice of Ismail and the sacrifice of Imam Hussain (RA). While the Qur'an explicitly refers to the ram substituted for Ismail as the "great sacrifice," many scholars of spirituality have also viewed Karbala as one of the greatest manifestations of sacrifice in Islamic history because, through it, the values of Islam were preserved and revived.

5. The Sacrifice of Hijrah: A New Beginning for Islam

When we reflect upon the month of Muharram, we usually remember Ashura and the martyrdom of Imam Hussain (AS). However, there is another great sacrifice connected to the beginning of the Islamic year: the Hijrah of the Messenger of Allah ﷺ and his noble Companions.

The Islamic calendar was established during the caliphate of Sayyiduna Umar ibn al-Khattab (RA). When the Companions discussed which event should mark the beginning of the Islamic era, they did not choose the birth of the Prophet ﷺ, nor the beginning of

revelation, nor the conquest of Makkah. Instead, they chose the Hijrah because it represented sacrifice, commitment, and the establishment of the Muslim community.

The Hijrah was not merely a journey from one city to another. It was a sacrifice of home, wealth, business, comfort, family ties, and social status for the sake of Allah. The Muhajirun left behind everything they loved because they loved Allah and His Messenger ﷺ more.

Allah praises them in the Qur'an:

لِلْفُقَرَاءِ الْمُهَاجِرِينَ الَّذِينَ أُخْرِجُوا مِنْ دِيَارِهِمْ وَأَمْوَالِهِمْ يَبْتَغُونَ فَضْلًا مِنَ اللَّهِ وَرِضْوَانًا

"The poor emigrants who were driven from their homes and their properties, seeking the bounty and pleasure of Allah." (Al-Hashr 59:8)

The Prophet ﷺ himself left his beloved city of Makkah. As he departed, he looked back at Makkah and expressed his deep love for it, yet he chose obedience to Allah over personal attachment. Thus, the Islamic year begins with a reminder that every success in Islam requires sacrifice.

Conclusion

Dear respected brothers and sisters!

Muharram is not merely the beginning of a new Islamic year. It is a month filled with lessons that strengthen faith and renew commitment. Ashura teaches us gratitude to Allah, remembrance of the prophets, and devotion through fasting. Karbala teaches us courage, integrity, and steadfastness when facing trials. Together, they remind us that faith survives through sacrifice.

The life of Ibrahim (A), the submission of Ismail (A), and the martyrdom of Imam Hussain (RA) all point toward one reality: true honor comes through obedience to Allah. Every believer must ask himself: What am I willing to sacrifice for my faith? Am I sacrificing my ego, my sins, my desires, and my attachment to this world for the sake of Allah?

As we enter this sacred month, let us renew our love for Allah, His Messenger ﷺ, and the noble Ahlul Bayt. Let us fast on Ashura, remember the lessons of Karbala, stand firmly upon truth, and raise our families upon faith and righteousness.

As we begin a new Islamic year, we should remember that our calendar opens with the memory of sacrifice. The sacrifice of Musa (AS) on Ashura teaches gratitude. The sacrifice of the Muhajirun teaches commitment and trust in Allah. The sacrifice of Imam Hussain

(RA) teaches courage and steadfastness upon truth. Together, these events remind us that the path to Allah has always been a path of sacrifice, sincerity, and unwavering faith.