

ASHURA: OUR COMMUNAL RESPONSIBILITY TOWARDS JUSTICE

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Jumuah lecture on Friday 14 September 2018 (4 Muharram 1440)

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at the Ahlul Bait (a.s) Masjid, Ottery, Cape Town

Our responsibilities and obligations before our creator Almighty Allah (SWT) is not confined to our individual life, which is limited to the focus on ourselves or our close family (at the most). We have a dual responsibility in this world. Therefore, on the Day of Judgement, we will be held accountable and evaluated against our dual responsibility.

We are not only responsible for our individual “charge sheet”. We are also responsible for the “charge sheet” of the community we live in or the society we are part of. This is the dual responsibility.

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Almighty Allah (SWT) says in verse 25 of Surah Anfaal (chapter 8 of the Holy Quran):

“And guard yourselves against a chastisement which cannot fall exclusively on those of you who are wrong-doers, and know that Allah is severe in punishment.”

There is a very, very important message in this verse. This verse warns us to be mindful of a trial/affliction which will not strike to only those who have oppressed others. This trial will affect all of us and not only the wrong-doers.

This message is clearly saying that perhaps we are very good in our individual capacity ie. we prayer 5 times a day, we pay Zakat, we fast, perform Hajj, were generous, morally upright etc. So we are good individuals. However, this is not the end, because this verse is saying that we will be faced with difficulties on the Day of Judgement which are not as a result of our individual transgression. Instead, it is a result from the wrongdoings of others, which impacts on us all.

What this means is that we live in a community or society where evil and corruption is taking place, even though we may not be corrupt individuals or commit any evil. We may be very good inside our own home, but if we do not play a role in rectifying the ills of society then we are jointly responsible for this.

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Shaheed Ayatollah Sayed Muhammad Baqir Sadr (r.a) very beautifully wrote that according to the Holy Quran, the destruction of societies, communities and nations, is not the result of everyone's evil doing. Instead, it is the evil of a few which results in the destruction of the whole society!

UPRISING OF IMAM HUSSAIN (A.S) HIGHLIGHTS OUR COMMUNAL RESPONSIBILITY

We are in the first Jumuah of the Islamic New Year and we are commemorating the great uprising and courageous sacrifice and protest of Hussain ibn Ali (a.s), who was the grandson of our beloved Prophet Muhammad (SAWA).

If you analyze the uprising of Imam Hussain (a.s) and the condition of the society in which he lived, you would understand why it was impossible for him to remain silent, in light of the above verse of the Holy Quran.

Nobody was worried about the individual character. In the time of Imam Hussain (a.s), there are

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plenty of people who are good, in that they lead righteous lives of performing prayers, zakat, Hajj, etc. Imam Hussain (a.s) left Medina 28 Rajab and arrived in Mecca on 3 Shabaan, where lived until 8 Dhul Hijja ie. the day when people start leaving towards Mina and Arafat.

People were coming for Hajj, but Imam Hussain (a.s) was restless. He challenged these people by asking them:” Don’t you people see that Haqq (Truth) is not being practiced and that Baatil (Falsehood) has not been forbidden?

The cry of Imam Hussain (a.s) was not one of individuality. People were allowed to prayer during the time of Yazeed. Yazeed allowed people to perform the rituals, and people were praying, fasting and performed Hajj etc. So, people were allowed to live a righteous life in their individual capacity.

Imam Hussain (a.s) was therefore crying out about the dearth of social responsibility. He could see where Islam was gradually declining towards an abyss and nobody was feeling anything about it.

The biggest challenge of Imam Hussain (a.s) was insensitivity! People were only concerned about their individual piety, and it was perfectly fine to prayer whole night if they want! However, Imam Hussain (a.s) was more concerned about the depths that society is sinking into under Yazeed.

YAZEED AS A RULER IS THE GREATEST DISRESPECT TO KHILAFAT AND IMAMAT

When Imam Hussain (a.s) was informed that Yazeed became the ruler of Muslims, he obviously had a major problem with it. One problem which Imam Hussain (a.s) had was that Yazeed as a ruler is a flagrant disregard for the credentials required by a leader. These credentials are inscribed in our doctrine of Imamat, which stipulates that leadership is divinely ordained by Almighty Allah (SWT).

Yes, Yazeed being the ruler conflicts with our Shia understanding of Imamat. However, the protest of Imam Hussain (a.s) was not purely from our Shia understanding of Imamat. His challenge to the common masses was that Yazeed being a ruler conflicts with the mainstream belief in Khilafat as well. This is the reality which Imam Hussain (a.s) wanted the masses to wake up to.

Imam Hussain (a.s) wanted people to realize what will happen to society under the leadership of Yazeed. Imam Hussain (a.s) recited the verse which we normally read when someone passes away, because he said that we should bid farewell to Islam under Yazeed!

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This was the challenge of Imam Hussain (a.s). He wrote letters to different parts of the Arabian Peninsula when Yazeed became the ruler, because he refused to pay allegiance to Yazeed. It is important to note that this was long before the people of Kufa wrote letters of invitation to Imam Hussain (a.s). The important message here is that the gradual decline of society under Yazeed was enough for Imam Hussain (a.s) to give his life, and protect this society with his blood.

Again, this was long before the invitation from the people of Kufa.

IMAM HUSSAIN (A.S) PROTESTS BY ABANDONING HAJJ

As noted earlier, Imam Hussain (a.s) stayed in Mecca, and met with different groups of people embarking on Hajj. Naturally, Imam Hussain (a.s) is a highly respected personality, being the grandson of Rasulullah (SAWA). As a result, the caravans of Hujjaaj would visit Imam Hussain (a.s) whenever they entered Mecca for the Hajj season. This is where Imam Hussain (a.s) explains to these people what the destiny of Islam is under the tyrannical rule of Yazeed, and needs the masses to speak out and resist what is going on.

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History has recorded the great respect that people paid to Imam Hussain (a.s), but this is where it stopped unfortunately. They did not heed his call and were complacent.

Finally, Imam Hussain (a.s) decided to leave Mecca (on 8 Dhu Hijja) on the invitation from the people of Kufa. This means that Imam Hussain (a.s) abandoned the Hajj. This is deeply thought-provoking, that this same Imam Hussain (a.s) who loved Hajj so dearly decides to abandon the Hajj at the 11th hour, on 8th Dhul Hijja.

One can imagine how difficult it would have been for Imam Hussain (a.s) to leave Hajj at this late stage. Imam Hussain (a.s) abandoned the Hajj and left Mecca to protect Hajj and the sanctity of the Ka'bah forever. This is the mission of Imam Hussain (a.s), and nobody was interested in answering his noble call.

Imam Hussain (a.s) was very clear when he left Mecca on 8th Dhul Hijja, encouraging people to join him in his resistance to Yazeed, and thereby save the dignity of Islam. Perhaps there were people who suggested to Imam Hussain (a.s) to stay a few more days to complete Hajj and then they will all go together. But this does not agree with Hussain (a.s) approach. For Imam Hussain (a.s), resistance against injustice means that even 1 minute delay is far too long.

IMAM HUSSAIN (A.S) AWAKENS THE DEAD CONSCIENCE OF SOCIETY WITH HIS

BLOOD

This departure of Imam Hussain (a.s) was to protect the sanctity of Mecca and also a show of protest. Yazeed had sent assassins disguised as pilgrims to kill Imam Hussain (a.s) inside the Ka'bah, but Imam Hussain (a.s) rather abandons Hajj in order to protect the sanctity of the Haram.

In addition, my humble opinion is that abandoning the Hajj is a strategy for Imam Hussain (a.s) to hit the conscience of the huge masses congregating for Hajj. Surely, it is a most peculiar situation when Imam Hussain (a.s) does not attend the Hajj, given that he is the grandson of Rasulullah (SAWA), and the soul of Mecca and the dignity of the Ka'bah!

They will then come to realize that something is very seriously wrong, especially since he was in Mecca at the time! This will surely raise a most serious question in their minds. How can we perform Hajj while Imam Hussain (a.s) decided to leave Mecca instead?

Unfortunately, the conscience of the masses was dead! They continued performing Hajj as if nothing is wrong. They did not wonder why Imam Hussain (a.s) was not there. Life was normal for them!

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This insensitivity and nonchalant attitude towards society resulted in the tragedy of Karbala, because everyone was only concerned about their individual comfort, and simply did not care about the situation in society at large.

How did the collective conscience of society reach such levels of despair? Imam Hussain (a.s) tried his level best to awaken their conscience from different angles. On the one angle he highlighted their responsibility towards society. On another angle he highlighted the influence that leadership has on society.

On another angle he spoke about dignity, integrity and self-respect, highlighting that people are being treated with humiliation as slaves by the rule of Yazeed. This is where we know the famous Hadith of Imam Hussain (a.s) where he says that death with dignity is perfection and far greater than life with humiliation under oppressors. Despite this, they still did not understand!

INDIVIDUAL COMFORT STIFLES COMMUNAL RESPONSIBILITY

The big question is, why did they not understand? Imam Hussain (a.s) explains that the culture changed over the period. The culture of devotion and sacrifice, simplicity of life, prioritizing Akhirah over Dunya disappeared. People started getting accustomed to ease, comfort and luxury. They noticed that they will lose their Dunya if they resist the tyrannical rule of Yazeed by

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joining the uprising of Imam Hussain (a.s).

Love of Dunya was the biggest enemy of Imam Hussain (a.s) in Karbala, bigger than the enemy in the form of Yazeed, Ubaidullah ibn Ziyad, Umar ibn Sa'd etc. Imam Hussain (a.s) dissects this problem by the following statement which should honestly be written in gold:

“By default people are slaves of this dunya and religion is like saliva in their mouth. They rotate it inside the mouth, as long as their life is OK, but when they are surrounded by tests and hardships, very few are those who are committed to religion.”

It was through the love of their worldly pursuits that they did not heed the call of Imam Hussain (a.s), and left him all alone with extremely few who were loyal and devoted to Akhirah. Love of Dunya did not touch their hearts.

It is really something to deeply reflect on. At the time of the tragedy of Karbala, the Islamic world was not void from the high profile personalities of Islam, since it was only 50 years after the era of Rasulullah (SAWA). The question is, what was their response to the call of Imam Hussain (a.s)? Why did they not feel the need to stand against Yazeed?

Why did they not realize that Islam is destined for destruction under Yazeed? Why did they not

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have the foresight to predict this? Why did they not respond to the call of Imam Hussain (a.s)?

Imam Hussain (a.s) says that we should always remember him when we remember the truth, because truth is always alone! The loneliness of the truth does not frighten those who travel the path of truth. This is Karbala!

SECOND KHUTBAH

Once again, I remind myself and all of you about our responsibilities towards the Ummah. Our responsibilities are not confined to our own homes, but rather, it extends to the broader society we live in. If there is injustice and oppression committed in a corner of the Ummah, it behooves us to stand up and oppose. This is the message of Imam Hussain (a.s).

Therefore, after 14 centuries, it is so crucial that we repeat this message of Karbala and Imam Hussain (a.s), because it is the most relevant message today. The challenge of corrupt leadership was not restricted to the year 60AH. It is still a challenge today, 14 centuries later!

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The challenge of insensitivity and indifference towards the affairs of the Ummah permeates up until today! The challenge of love for this Dunya is still very much a challenge today. The demand of resistance and martyrdom is still a demand of our time.

SHEIKH IBRAHIM ZAKZAKY – AN INSPIRATION FROM THE HUSAYNI MOVEMENT

Indeed, there are those who follow the path of Imam Hussain (a.s) and his commands. With the blessings of their sacrifice and their stance and commitment, we at least see some semblance of progress in the Ummah (Muslim nation).

We have the situation in Nigeria for a number of years now, where the oppressed Sheikh Ibrahim Zakzaky continues to stand firm, as a true follower of Imam Hussain (a.s) and Karbala. This man has been the voice of solidarity with the Palestinian struggle, on the African continent. There is no stronger voice in Africa for the Palestinian struggle, than Sheikh Zakzaky with his millions of followers.

The punishment is there for all to see, where he continues to be detained by the Yazeeds of our time, despite the court's ruling that he should be released as he is not guilty. Hundreds of his supporters are also detained, while others are missing without trace. Despite this, we see the followers of Sheikh Zakzaky on the streets of Nigeria exclaiming "Labbayk ya Hussain"!

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WE REMEMBER OUR OWN STRUGGLE STALWARTS IN SEPTEMBER

In our own country, we cannot forget to remember those who may not be familiar with Karbala and Imam Hussain (a.s), but in their spirit they clearly followed the path of Imam Hussain (a.s). As a result, we honour these heroes of our own country with the name of Imam Hussain (a.s). I am referring to stalwarts like Steve Biko and Shaheed Imam Abdullah Haron. Their martyrdom is also remembered annually in September.

We remember these heroes from our own soil, who decided not to be indifferent towards injustice and oppression. There are so many Ulama in our beautiful city of Cape Town, with more than 300 years of history of Islam! Why did this particular Imam by the name of Abdullah Haron decide to speak out and support the oppressed and resist the oppressor? This is the path of Imam Hussain (a.s) and Karbala!

CONSPIRACIES FROM OUR ENEMIES TAKES ON A NEW DIMENSION

I would also like to remind that while there are Husaynis resisting in every corner of the world, offering their sacrifice, we also see that there is no shortage of Yazeeds in our time, with their conspiracies to defeat Islam and continue their exploitation.

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We have the front of Kufr which was always there. However, the enemies of Hussain (a.s) were not the disbelievers or the idol worshippers. Rather the enemies of Hussain (a.s) were the front of hypocrisy, calling themselves “Amir al-Mu’mineen”!

There are plenty examples around in our time as well, whose sole effort are to divide this Ummah. This cancer of Saudi Arabia who claim to be the leaders of this Ummah are also now openly seen as the leaders of the world on corruption too!

We see what a disaster they have caused Islam, as the sponsor of the extremely divisive ideology of Wahhabism. However, they are now retreating. Someone accurately said that while Wahhabism as an ideology may seem to be expiring, the sponsors of Wahhabism have certainly not expired! They are now coming with new fronts, which were there but are now being pursued more actively.

Their new approach is that yes, Wahhabism is bad and we should withdraw the divisive literature from the schools. Instead, they are now spending their millions on building centres of dialogue between religions in European countries like Denmark, while they need more such centres in their own country as a matter of fact!

UNFORTUNATE EVENTS IN IRAQ SHOWS THE HYPOCRISY OF THIS WORLD

Today, they are pushing a nationalist agenda, by being divisive between Arab versus non-Arab. In the issue of Syria and Bahrain, their tagline was always one of Sunni versus Shia. Today, this has taken a new dimension, where Shia is not the problem but Iran is the problem! Resistance is the problem!

This is how they are now trying to put Shia against Shia to fight against each other. Last week's incidents in Iran and Iraq unfortunately are evidence of this new plan where they are trying to divide 2 nations which are so closely knitted.

We saw what happened in Basra last week. People are protesting because of their own corrupt government and politicians looting this country. This country Iraq, with its richest resources, still cannot solve the problem of people dying hungry! The people of Basra staged a legitimate resistance against these domestic problems for which they are running out of patience. Who is providing shelter to these corrupt politicians? None other than the Americans and Saudis once again!

This external infiltration caused these protesters to burn down hospitals. Does this make any sense? The nature of these protests was to express their anger at corruption, at not having

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clean water, and with diseases such as cholera spreading as a result. But the result is that they burn down hospitals, which is the very place to treat the people suffering.

This is the result of infiltration, where the name of the worst tyrant in the country's history is resurrected? These people are saying that they will sacrifice themselves for Saddam, who is in the bottom of Hell!

Iran supported the people of Iraq in the most difficult times, when ISIS was supported by the Western conspiracies and left them in the middle of a huge mess. Iran was the country that came to their rescue and these people want to now make Iran the enemy, by turning the direction of the protests to the Iranian consulate in Basra and burning it down.

True to form, this now becomes very big news, where people are saying that Iran is the trouble maker! Is Iran stopping the people of Basra from having clean water? Is Iran saying that the politicians of Iraq should be corrupt? There is absolutely no relation of Iran in this situation, but we see how the conspiracies are active in placing Muslim against Muslim, Arab against Iran, Shia against Shia!

This is the tragedy of this Ummah and the huge mess we are collectively facing! This is the same situation impacting us everywhere, when we become victims of these conspiracies!

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