

Merits of Muharram and Ashura



Reminding the wise people with the merits of Muharram and ‘Ashura

In the name of Allah the Most Gracious the Most merciful

Merits of Muharram:

Ibn Al-Jawzy (may Allah mercy him) said: “Brothers (may Allah mercy you), know that Muharram is honorable month, and it is called Muharram (i.e. forbidden) because it was forbidden to fight in it.” (At-Tabsirah: 2/6).

It is one of the sacred months which Allah almighty said about them: {Verily, the number of months with Allâh is twelve months (in a year), so was it ordained by Allâh on the Day when He created the heavens and the earth; of them four are Sacred (i.e. the 1st, the 7th, the 11th and the 12th months of the Islâmic calendar). That is the right religion, so wrong not yourselves therein, and fight against the Mushrikûn (polytheists, pagans, idolaters, disbelievers in the Oneness of Allâh) collectively as they fight against you collectively. But know that Allâh is with those who are Al-Muttaqûn (the pious)} [At-Tawbah 9:36].

{ إِنَّ عِدَّةَ الشُّهُورِ عِنْدَ اللَّهِ اثْنَا عَشَرَ شَهْرًا فِي كِتَابِ اللَّهِ يَوْمَ خَلَقَ السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضَ مِنْهَا أَرْبَعَةٌ حُرْمٌ ذَلِكَ الدِّينُ الْقَيِّمُ فَلَا تَظْلِمُوا فِيهِنَّ أَنْفُسَكُمْ وَقَاتِلُوا الْمُشْرِكِينَ كَافَّةً كَمَا يُقَاتِلُونَكُمْ كَافَّةً وَاعْلَمُوا أَنَّ اللَّهَ مَعَ الْمُتَّقِينَ } التوبة: ٣٦

Transliteration: Inna AAiddata alshshuhoori AAinda Allahi ithna AAashara shahran fee kitabi Allahi yawma khalaqa alssamawati waalarda minha arbaAAatun hurumun thalika alddeenu alqayyimu fala tathlimoo feehinna anfusakum waqatilo almushrikeena kaffatan kamayuqatiloonakum kaffatan waiAAalamoo anna Allaha maAAa almuttaqeena

Al-Qurtuby said: “Allah Almighty mentioned the sacred four months in specific and forbade injustice in them as a kind of honor to them, although injustice is forbidden in all times.”

And he said about His saying {so wrong not yourselves therein} that it means “not to wrong yourselves therein by committing sins, because when Allah Almighty honors something from one aspect, it gains one sanctity; however, when He honors it from two, or more, aspects, its sanctity becomes multiplex. Therefore, Allah multiplies punishment in it for doing evil deed as He multiplies the reward in it for doing good deed. The person who obeys Allah in the sacred month in sacred city is not like the one who obeyed Him in the lawful month in the sacred city. And the person who obeys Him in the lawful month in the sacred city is not like the one who obeyed Him in lawful month in lawful city.” (Al-Jami’ Li Ahkam Al-Quran: 8/134)

Fasting Muharram:

The merits of Muharram include what is reported by Muslim on the authority of Abu Hurayra (may Allah be pleased with him) that the Prophet (prayers and peace of Allah be upon him) said: “The best fasting after the month of Ramadan is the month of Allah that you call it Muharram.”

«أَفْضَلُ الصِّيَامِ بَعْدَ رَمَضَانَ شَهْرُ اللَّهِ الْمُحَرَّمِ وَأَفْضَلُ الصَّلَاةِ بَعْدَ الْفَرِيضَةِ صَلَاةُ اللَّيْلِ» رواه مسلم

An-Nawawy said: “This is a declaration for its being the best months to observe fasting in it.” (Sharh Muslim: 7/296).

And Ibn Rajab said: “This Hadeeth declares frankly that the best voluntary fasting after Ramadan is to fast the month of Allah, Muharram ... However, it might be said that the Prophet (prayers and peace of Allah be upon him) used to fast the month of Sha’ban, and it is not reported that he used to fast Muharram; rather he used to fast ‘Ashura Day only, and his saying in the last year (of his life): “If I lived till the next year, I would fast the ninth day (of Muharram)” [reported by Muslim], means that he did not use to fast before that.

«فَإِذَا كَانَ الْعَامُ الْمُقْبِلُ إِنْ شَاءَ اللَّهُ صُمْنَا الْيَوْمَ التَّاسِعَ» رواه مسلم

People answered this question with weak answers, and it became clear to me (and Allah knows best) that the voluntary fasting is two kinds:

First: Absolute voluntary fasting, and the best of this kind is fasting Mu-harram as the best voluntary prayer is praying night prayer.

Second: Fasting connected with fasting Ramadan, whether it is before or after it (like Fasting Sha'ban and the six days of Shawal), and this is not absolute voluntary fasting; rather it is a kind of fasting connected with Ramadan and it is better than the absolute voluntary fasting." (Lata'if Al-Ma'arif, in short, page: 46).

Allah's month:

He also said: "And the Prophet (prayers and peace of Allah be upon him) called Muharram 'the month of Allah'. Actually, attributing it to Allah implies its merit and honor, because Allah Almighty attributes to Him only the superior of His created beings, as He attributed Muhammad, Ibrahim, Ishaq, Ya'qub and others among the prophets to Himself as His servants, and as He attributed to Himself His House and His She-camel."

And it is said about attributing this month to Allah the Exalted and Glorious that it implies its being sacred by the will of Allah and nobody should change that, as the people of ignorance were used to make it lawful and make Safar month sacred instead of it. That is why the Prophet mentioned that it is the month of Allah which He made sacred; therefore, none of His creatures could change this or alter it. (Lata'if Al-Ma'arif, page: 49)

Fasting 'Ashura Day:

As for fasting 'Ashura Day, it is reported in the two Sahihs on the authority of Ibn Abbas that the Messenger of Allah (prayers and peace of Allah be upon him) arrived in Medina and found the Jews observing fast on the

day of 'Ashura and say: It is a day of great (significance) when Allah delivered Moses and his people, and drowned Pharaoh and his people, and Moses observed fast out of gratitude and we also observe it. Upon this the Messenger of Allah (prayers and peace of Allah be upon him) said: "We have more right, and we have a closer connection with Moses than you have" [Reported by Muslim];

«فَنَحْنُ أَحَقُّ وَأَوْلَىٰ بِمُوسَىٰ مِنْكُمْ» رواه مسلم

So Allah's Messenger observed fast (on the day of 'Ashura), and gave orders that it should be observed.

And it is reported in the two Sahihs on the authority of Salama Ibn Al-Akwa' that the Messenger of Allah (prayers and peace of Allah be upon him) sent a person of the tribe of Aslam on the day of 'Ashura and commanded him to declare to the people "Whoever didn't observe fasting should fast, and whoever had eaten, should complete his fast till the night."

«بَعَثَ رَسُولُ اللَّهِ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ رَجُلًا مِنْ أَسْلَمَ يَوْمَ عَاشُورَاءَ فَأَمَرَهُ أَنْ يُؤَدِّنَ فِي النَّاسِ مَنْ كَانَ لَمْ يَصُومَ فَلْيَصُومْ وَمَنْ كَانَ أَكَلَ فَلْيُتِمِّمْ صِيَامَهُ إِلَى اللَّيْلِ» متفق عليه

Moreover, the Prophet (prayers and peace of Allah be upon him) used to single out fasting the Day of 'Ashura for gaining its great reward. Ibn Abbas (may Allah be pleased with him and his father too) said: "I do not know Allah's Messenger (prayers and peace of Allah be upon him) singling out any day's fast and considering it more excellent than any other day, except this day (the day of 'Ashura) and this month (meaning the month of Ramadan)" [Agreed upon].

«عَنْ ابْنِ عَبَّاسٍ رَضِيَ اللَّهُ عَنْهُمَا قَالَ: مَا عَلِمْتُ أَنَّ رَسُولَ اللَّهِ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ صَامَ يَوْمًا يَطْلُبُ فَضْلَهُ عَلَيَّ الْأَيَّامِ إِلَّا هَذَا الْيَوْمَ وَلَا شَهْرًا إِلَّا هَذَا الشَّهْرَ يَعْنِي رَمَضَانَ» متفق عليه

And the Prophet (prayers and peace of Allah be upon him) was asked

about the merit of fasting ‘Ashura Day, thereupon he said: “It expiates the sins of the preceding year” [Reported by Muslim].

«وَسُئِلَ عَنْ صَوْمِ يَوْمِ عَاشُورَاءَ فَقَالَ يُكَفِّرُ السَّنَةَ الْمَاضِيَةَ» رواه مسلم

And in another narration: “I seek from Allah that it may atone for the sins of the preceding year.”

«وَصِيَامُ يَوْمِ عَاشُورَاءَ أَحْتَسِبُ عَلَى اللَّهِ أَنْ يُكَفِّرَ السَّنَةَ الَّتِي قَبْلَهُ»

Ibn Al-Jawzy said: “Anyway, it is great day the person should observe in it as much good deeds as possible, because it and its likes are seasons of good; so take benefits of them and beware of inattentiveness.”

Rule of fasting Day of ‘Ashura:

There are Ahadeeth, we mentioned some of them, proof that fasting ‘Ashura Day is obligatory, because the Prophet (prayers and peace of Allah be upon him) enjoined fasting it; furthermore, he ordered whoever ate at this day to stop eating and complete fasting.

However, there are scholars see that its fasting is abrogated by fasting Ramadan month.

Others see that abrogation is for its being obligatory, but its fasting is still desirable.

Phases of fasting ‘Ashura Day:

Ibn Rajab (may Allah mercy him) mentioned that the Prophet’s fasting to ‘Ashura Day took four status:

The first status: He used to fast it in Makkah without ordering people to fast it.

The second status: When he came to Medina and saw the People of Book fast and greaten it, and he was used to like approving their doing as long as there is nothing enjoined upon him in this regard, he fasted it and ordered people to fast it. Moreover, he emphasized the order of fasting it and encouraged its fasting till people ordered their children to fast it. Ar-Rubai'i' Bint Mu'awwidh said: that the Messenger of Allah (prayers and peace of Allah be upon him) sent (a person) on the morning of 'Ashura to the villages of Ansar surrounding Medina (with this message): "He who got up in the morning fasting (without eating anything) he should complete his fast, and he who had had his breakfast in the morning, he should complete the rest of the day (without food)." Ar-Rubai'i' said; we henceforth observed fast on it (on the day of 'Ashura) and made our children observe that. And we used to go to the Masjid and make toys out of wool for them and when anyone felt hungry and wept for food we gave him these toys till it was the time to break the fast. And in another narration: "When they (the children) asked us for food, we gave them these toys to play with, and these made them forgetful till they completed their fast" [Agreed upon].

«أَرْسَلَ النَّبِيُّ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ عِدَاةَ عَاشُورَاءَ إِلَى قُرَى الْأَنْصَارِ مَنْ أَصْبَحَ مُفْطِرًا فَلْيَسِّمْ بِقِيَّةِ يَوْمِهِ وَمَنْ أَصْبَحَ صَائِمًا فَلْيَصِّمْ قَالَتْ فَكُنَّا نَصُومُهُ بَعْدَ وَنُصَوِّمُ صِبْيَانَنَا وَنَجْعَلُ لَهُمُ اللَّعْبَةَ مِنْ الْعِهْنِ فَإِذَا بَكَى أَحَدُهُمْ عَلَى الطَّعَامِ أَعْطَيْنَاهُ ذَلِكَ حَتَّى يَكُونَ عِنْدَ الْإِفْطَارِ. وَفِي رَوَايَةٍ أُخْرَى "فَإِذَا سَأَلُونَا الطَّعَامَ أَعْطَيْنَاهُمْ اللَّعْبَةَ تُلْهِهِمْ حَتَّى يُتِمُّوا صَوْمَهُمْ» متفق عليه

The third status: When fasting Ramadan month had been enjoined, the Prophet (prayers and peace of Allah be upon him) neglected ordering the companions with fasting 'Ashura and neglected emphasizing that order.

It is reported in Sahih Bukhari on the authority of Ibn Omar (may Allah be pleased with them) that the Prophet (prayers and peace of Allah be upon him) observed fast on 'Ashura Day and enjoined fasting it, but when fasting Ramadan had become obligatory, he neglected that.

«عَنْ ابْنِ عُمَرَ رَضِيَ اللَّهُ عَنْهُمَا قَالَ صَامَ النَّبِيُّ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ عَاشُورَاءَ وَأَمَرَ بِصِيَامِهِ فَلَمَّا فُرِضَ رَمَضَانُ تُرِكَ»
رواه البخاري

And in a narration reported by Muslim: (the Arabs of) pre-Islamic days used to observe fast on the day of ‘Ashura and the Messenger of Allah (prayers and peace of Allah be upon him) observed it and the Muslims too (observed it) before fasting Ramadan became obligatory. But when it became obligatory, the Messenger of Allah (prayers and peace of Allah be upon him) said: “Ashura is one of the days of Allah, so he who wished should observe fast and he who wished otherwise should abandon it.”

«أَنَّ أَهْلَ الْجَاهِلِيَّةِ كَانُوا يَصُومُونَ يَوْمَ عَاشُورَاءَ وَأَنَّ رَسُولَ اللَّهِ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ صَامَهُ وَالْمُسْلِمُونَ قَبْلَ أَنْ يُفْتَرَضَ رَمَضَانُ فَلَمَّا افْتُرِضَ رَمَضَانُ قَالَ رَسُولُ اللَّهِ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ إِنَّ عَاشُورَاءَ يَوْمٌ مِنْ أَيَّامِ اللَّهِ فَمَنْ شَاءَ صَامَهُ وَمَنْ شَاءَ تَرَكَهُ» رواه مسلم

The fourth status: the Prophet (prayers and peace of Allah be upon him) intended at the end of his life not to fast ‘Ashura Day alone; rather he intended fasting another day beside it, in order not to fast it like the fast of the People of Book.

It is reported in Sahih Muslim on the authority of Ibn Abbas (may Allah be pleased with them) that when the Messenger of Allah (prayers and peace of Allah be upon him) fasted on the day of ‘Ashura and commanded that it should be observed as a fast, they (his Companions) said to him: “O Messenger of Allah, it is a day which the Jews and Christians hold in high esteem.” Thereupon the Messenger of Allah (prayers and peace of Allah be upon him) said: “When the next year comes, God willing, we would observe fast on the 9th.” But the Messenger of Allah (prayers and peace of Allah be upon him) died before the advent of the next year.

«عَنْ بَنِّ عَبَّاسٍ رَضِيَ اللَّهُ عَنْهُمَا قَالَ: حِينَ صَامَ رَسُولُ اللَّهِ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ يَوْمَ عَاشُورَاءَ وَأَمَرَ بِصِيَامِهِ قَالُوا يَا رَسُولَ اللَّهِ إِنَّهُ يَوْمٌ تَعْظُمُهُ الْيَهُودُ وَالنَّصَارَى فَقَالَ رَسُولُ اللَّهِ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ فَإِذَا كَانَ الْعَامُ الْمُقْبِلُ إِنْ شَاءَ اللَّهُ صُمْنَا الْيَوْمَ التَّاسِعَ قَالَ فَلَمْ يَأْتِ الْعَامُ الْمُقْبِلُ حَتَّى تُوُفِّيَ رَسُولُ اللَّهِ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ» رواه مسلم

And it is reported in another narration on the authority of Ibn Abbas (may Allah be pleased with him and his father too) that the Messenger of Allah (prayers and peace of Allah be upon him) said: “If I lived till the next (year), I would definitely observe fast on the 9th with the 10th” [Reported by Muslim]

«لَئِنْ بَقِيْتُ إِلَى قَابِلٍ لَأَصُومَنَّ التَّاسِعَ» رواه مسلم

(Lata'if Al-Maarif, in short, page: 68-72).

This is the last status that the Messenger of Allah (prayers and peace of Allah be upon him) died on it.

The Most authentic opinion about fasting ‘Ashura Day:

The Most authentic saying is that it is desirable to fast ‘Ashura Day and fast the 9th day along with it in order not to be like the People of Book. Sheikh Al-Islam, Ibn Taymiyah said: “The authentic opinion is that it is desirable for whoever fast it to fast the 9th day with it, because this is the last status of the Prophet (prayers and peace of Allah be upon him). He said: “If I lived till the next (year), I would definitely observe fast on the 9th with the 10th” and this had been mentioned in detail in some of the narrations of this Hadeeth_ this is legislated by the Messenger of Allah (prayers and peace of Allah be upon him)” (Majmu’ Al-Fatawa: 25/312).

Ibn Rajab said: “The majority of scholars see that it is desirable to fast it without declaring its being emphatic. Among the companions about whom it is narrated that they fasted it are; Omar, Ali, Abdurrahman Ibn Auf, Abu Musa, Qais Ibn Saad, Ibn Abbas and others.” (Lata'if Al-Maarif, page: 71)

Grades of fasting ‘Ashura Day:

Some scholars saw that it is best to fast a day before it and another one

after it, in order to be sure that the 10th day had been fasted.

It is narrated on the authority of Shu'bah, the freed slave of Ibn Abbas, that Ibn Abbas (may Allah be pleased with them) used to fast 'Ashura Day during travel and fast two days beside it, lest he might miss it.

Also, it is narrated that Abu Ishaq observed fast on 'Ashura Day and a day before it and another day after it, and he said: "I did that, lest it may miss me."

And it is narrated that Ibn Sirin used to fast three days, as a kind of circum-spection, when there is uncertainty about the beginning of the month.

Therefore, Ibn Al-Qayim (may Allah mercy him) said: "The grades of fasting 'Ashura are three; the best is to fast a day before it and another day after it, the second grade is to fast the 9th with the 10th (this is what is mentioned in the majority of Ahadeeth) and the last grade is to fast the 10th day alone." (Zad Al-Maad: 2:76)

Beware of new creations in religion:

There are many new creations in religion happen in 'Ashura Day, although the Messenger of Allah (prayers and peace of Allah be upon him) legislated nothing of them to his nation. Sheikh Al-Islam, Ibn Taymiyah (may Allah mercy him), warned against such new creations. After his talking about what is allowed in 'Ashura, he said: "As for the other things; such as having exaggerated food, wearing new clothes, spending extra expenses, buying the needs of the whole year in this day, observing special act of worship (i.e. special prayer in this day), slaughtering in this day, saving the meat of the sacrificial animals to be used in cooking the grains, darkening the eyelids with kohl, putting dye on the hands, taking bath, exchanging congratulations, exchanging visits or visiting the Masjid and the sacred places and the like acts are all detested new creations in religion the Messenger of Allah (prayers and peace of Allah be upon

him) did not legislate nor his righteous caliphs did nor it had been approved by one of Muslim Imams (i.e. Malik, Ath-Thawry, Al-Laith Ibn Sa'd, Abu Hanifa, Al-Awza'y. Ash-Shafey, Ahmed Ibn Hanbal, Ishaq Ibn Rahawiyh ... etc,) Although some of the followers of the Imams ordered doing some of these acts and narrated Ahadeeth and sayings in this concern and said that some of these acts are correct; they were certainly wrong in the eyes of those who know best. Harb Al-Kirmaniy said in his questions that Ahmed Ibn Hanbal was asked about the Hadeeth which states: "Whoever increases the expenses to his family on 'Ashura Day ...'" and he didn't count it as a Hadith." (Majmu' Al-Fatawa: 25/312).

Advice and reminder:

- Fasting is a secret between the servant and his Lord; that is why Allah the Exalted and Glorified be he says: "Every act of the son of Adam is for him, except fasting. It is (exclusively) meant for Me and I (alone) will reward it. He (i.e. the son of Adam) had neglected his lust, food and drink for Me" [Reported by Muslim].

«قَالَ اللَّهُ عَزَّ وَجَلَّ: كُلُّ عَمَلٍ ابْنِ آدَمَ لَهُ، إِلَّا الصَّيَّامَ هُوَ لِي، وَأَنَا أَجْزِي بِهِ» رواه مسلم

- In Paradise there is a gate called 'Ar-Rayyan' none enters it but those who observe fast much; once they pass it, it will be closed and none will be allowed to pass it.

- Fasting is a shield protecting the servant from Hellfire like the shield that protects you in fight.

- The one who fasts has two (occasions) of joy, one when he breaks the fast and one when he meets his Lord.

- Allah Almighty says: {Eat and drink at ease for that which you have sent on before you in days past!} [Al-Haqqah 69:24].

{كُلُوا وَاشْرَبُوا هَنِيئًا بِمَا أَسْلَفْتُمْ فِي الْأَيَّامِ الْخَالِيَةِ} الحاقة: ٢٤

Transliteration: Kuloo waishraboo haneean bimaaslaftum fee alayyami alkhaliyati

Mujahid and others said: “This had been revealed about the person who observes fast much. Whoever neglects his food, drink and lust for the sake of Allah, Allah will compensate him with better than them; He will present to him unlimited food and drink and deathless wives.”

Hiding the acts of obedience

- As long as fasting is a secret between the servant and his Lord, the sincere people do their best for concealing it, in order not to make it noticeable to anybody.
- Ibn Mas’oud (may Allah be pleased with him) said: “Whenever anyone of you begins his day with fast, let him comb his hair and anoint it; and whenever he gives a charity with his right hand, let him conceal it lest his left hand knows about it; and whenever he prays supererogatory prayer, let him pray it in his house.”
- Abu At-Tayyah said: “I saw my father and the scholars of the town anoint their hair and wear their best clothes whenever they observed fasting.”
- One of the righteous forefathers observed fasting for forty years without letting anyone knows about that; he had a shop and he used to take from his house two loafs of bread and goes to his shop and gives the bread as charity in his way to the shop; therefore, his family thinks that he eats them in the market, and the people of the market think that he ate in his house before his coming.

- How carefully the righteous people conceal their affairs, but the scent of truth reveals them!
- No body conceals a thing but Allah dresses him with it!
- The breath (of an observer of fast) is sweeter to Allah than the fragrance of musk. Therefore, whenever he does his best for concealing it, his sweet fragrance becomes clearer to the hearts and the souls smell it, and it may appear after death and on the Day of Judgment.
- When Abdullah Ibn Ghalib was buried, the scent of musk got out from the dust of his grave. Then he was seen in a dream and was asked about the scent that comes from his grave; thereupon he said: "It is the scent of reciting (the Holy Quran) and thirst."
(Lata'if Al-Maarif, in short, page: 50-54)

Compiled by: Khaled Abu Salih