

Karbala: A Revolution of Hearts and Minds

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The event of Karbala always evokes strong emotions and deep intellectual thoughts which touch and affect the whole existence of those who seek to find a path through it. But the significance of this event goes much beyond the mere unveiling of the corruption and deviations perpetrated by Banu Umayya. Karbala changed the course of history and continues to inspire all truth-seeking revolutionaries.

Heedlessness makes man worse than animals. It deprives him of his biggest gift given by Allah - the faculty of intellect. The Holy Qur'an regards the heedless people as worse than animals and declares that the hell is the destiny of such people:

"And certainly We have created for hell many of the jinn and the men; they have hearts with which they do not understand, and they have eyes with which they do not see, and they have ears with which they do not hear; they are as cattle, nay, they are in worse errors; these are the heedless ones." (7:179)

Karbala killed the heedlessness of the masses. Water can bring back an unconscious man into consciousness, but to awaken a heedless community from the deep slumber of ignorance, blood is required. The blood of Imam al-Hussain (peace be upon him) affected the collective consciousness of a sleeping Ummah and caused tremors which shook the very foundations of the Umayyad regime and led to their complete uprooting in the period which followed.

The Holy Prophet (peace be upon him and his progeny) has said: "Surely there exists in the hearts of the believers, with respect to the martyrdom of Hussain, a heat that never subsides." This heat of faith and awakening of consciousness has led to innumerable revolutions in human history, both in individual lives and in society as a whole. The message of Imam Hussain still resonates in the hearts of truth seekers. It inspires leaders to fulfill their obligations with respect to opposing evil and protecting goodness. It enjoins all those who heed the call of truth to rise against the unjust powers and confront evil:

"O people! Verily the Messenger of Allah said: 'Whoever observes a sovereign legalizing what God has made unlawful, violating the covenant of God, opposing the Sunnah of the Messenger of God, and treating the creatures of God sinfully and oppressively, and does not oppose him with his speech and action, God has a right to bring him to the same fate as that of the tyrant.' Indeed, these people (i.e. Yazid and the Umayyads) have committed themselves to the following of Satan and abandoned obedience to God. They have given currency to corruption,

abolished the Islamic laws, plundered the public treasury, and made lawful what God has forbidden and unlawful what God has permitted. And I, of all people, have a greater right to act
[in accordance with the Prophet's exhortation].”

“Indeed, I have not risen up to do mischief, neither as an adventurer, nor to cause corruption and tyranny. I have risen up solely to seek the reform of the Ummah of my grandfather. I want to enjoin what is good and stop what is wrong, and (in this) I follow the conduct of my
grandfather and my father Ali ibn Abi Talib.”

“Life under tyranny is not worthy of man, unless the people rise in an attempt to restore the higher values. Don’t you see that what is true and right is not acted upon, and what is false and wrong is not forbidden? In such a situation, the man of faith yearns for the meeting with his Lord. Indeed, (in such conditions) to me death is happiness, and life under the yoke of tyrants
is disgrace.”

Imam Khomeini, who acknowledged that the Islamic Revolution had been possible because of
Karbala, instructed on the observance of Muharram:

“Let the mourning congregations for the Master of the Oppressed and the Lord of the Free - congregations in which wisdom and intellect overcome ignorance, justice overpowers cruelty and oppression, trust rules out treason, and Islamic rule supersedes the rule of tyranny - be held with grandeur, eminence, and brilliance. And let the blood-smeared banners of Ashura be hoisted to mark the dawn of the day where the oppressed avenge the oppressor. Our sons and youth must not think that it is a matter of weeping only or that we are a weeping nation - this is what others want to brainwash you into believing and then repeating, because they fear those tears. They fear them because they are tears for the oppressed and a cry against the oppressor, and these processions stand up against oppression. These lamentation processions are a symbol of our victory; hold mourning congregations throughout, and let speakers read their elegies, and let people cry. Speakers must not condense elegies into a few words; speak at length about the tragedies of the Ahlul Bayt, as was the case before, and read elegies, poems, and narrations. The excellences of the Holy Progeny and the tortures inflicted on them must be rendered with such sincerity and passion that the people get ready for field action. They ought to know that our Infallible Imams (as) devoted their lives to promoting
Islam.”

But the question arises: why do many of the communities who observe mourning so religiously still remain plunged in ignorance and heedlessness? Why does the warmth generated after mourning on the immortal Chief of Martyrs not lead to internal revolutions in all the communities equally? Why do the tears not wash the hardened blots of sins from the hearts of

the mourners?

One reason for this ineffectiveness of mourning is the lack of purity and sincerity in some of the people to such an extent that even tears shed in Imam Hussain's remembrance do not awaken their souls. The other reason could be in the veil of ignorance put before eyes in the form of an overemphasis on rituals which have caused separation and deviation from the real message and goals of Karbala and have made the people oblivious of the true purpose of Karbala. Despite their importance, these rituals have taken center stage, and the true message of Karbala has been eclipsed.

The spirit and revolution of Karbala, like all teachings of Islam, require a pure heart and a sincere truth seeking soul to affect. Karbala can bring about revolution in our lives only if we observe it along with all other teachings of Islam.

May Allah make our souls adapt to the teachings of Karbala, allowing it to bring a revolutionary change in our lives, eliminate ignorance, illuminate us, and lead us to salvation in both worlds

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