

Testing in Islam & the Day of *Aashura*

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Introduction - the Day of *Aashura*

Our calendar starts from the Hijra (Migration) of the Prophet (peace & blessings of Allah be upon him). The first month is Muharram, which is also one of the sacred months (of four; Rajab, Dhu'l Qa'da, Dhu'l Hajj and Muharram). This month is also important because the Day of *Aashura* falls on the tenth (*Aashura* originates from the Arabic for 'ten').

From our religion, it is evidently clear that this day holds great significance and superiority. Throughout the course of history, many important events have taken place on the tenth of Muharram. Imam al-Ghazali writes in *Mukhashfa al-Qulub* that: "The Leader of the Believers, Sayyiduna Umar (may Allah be pleased with him) was asked why this day [of *Aashura*] is considered so noble. In reply, Umar said:

- *Allah created the skies and earth on the Day of *Aashura*, along with the Preserved Tablet.
- *Allah created Jibril (peace be upon him) on this day.
- *Allah created Adam (peace be upon him) on this day, as well as Hawwa.
- *Allah created paradise on this day.
- *Allah enabled Adam (peace be upon him) to live in paradise on the Day of *Aashura*.
- *The first rain to fall on earth was on the Day of *Aashura*.
- *Also, the Day of Judgement will fall on this day. (*Min Fada'il al-Shuhur al-Hijriyya*, pp. 24-5)

Aashura and the tests of the prophets and messengers

In addition to the above, the Day has been memorable for many prophets and messengers. We know that Allah's chosen servants have always been tested by their Lord, with trials and tribulations. The Day of *Aashura* has been the day when Allah has given some form of good news to his prophets, after passing their test from Allah. Consider the following:

- *Allah raised Isa (peace be upon him) to the heavens on this day, as well as Sayyiduna Idris (peace be upon him).
- *Allah accepted the repentance of Adam (peace be upon him) on this day and forgave him.
- *Yusuf (peace be upon him) was released from prison on this day.
- *Allah forgave the people of Yunus (peace be upon him) on this day.
- *Ibrahim (peace be upon him) was saved from the cauldron of fire on the tenth of Muharram.
- *Ayyub's (peace be upon him) test finished on the Day of *Aashura*.
- *The Ark of Nuh (peace be upon him) rested on Mount Judi on this day.
- *Sulayman (peace be upon him) was given his kingdom on this day.
- *Musa (peace be upon him) and his followers were saved from Fir'awn on this day (when he drowned in the sea).

Also it is the day Allah chose for the martyrdom of Imam al-Husayn (may Allah be pleased with him).

So from reflecting on the Day of *Aashura* and its importance in relation to previous prophets, **one common theme is that of testing**. All prophets were tested, and many passed their test

or found relief on this day. The same applies to Imam al-Husayn (may Allah be pleased with him).

Testing in Islam

We face tests all the time. What do we need to know as Muslims about testing? What does a trial and tribulation from Allah mean? Is hardship a bad thing?

1. Fact number one: Testing is inevitable.

No one is immune from it. Allah makes this clear from the opening verses from Surah al-Ankabut. Allah asks:

أحسب الناس ان يتركوا ان يقولوا امنا وهم لا يفتنون

‘Do you think people will be left alone because they say ‘We believe [in Allah]’ and will not be tested? (29:2).

Elsewhere, Allah reminds us that testing - which often leads to hardship and difficulty - is inevitable:

و لنبلونكم بشيئ من الخوف و الجوع و نقص من الأموال و الأنفس و الثمرات

And certainly We shall test you with something of fear, hunger, loss of wealth, lives and fruits (2: 155).

Note that this verse starts with added stress in the verb, namely ‘we shall *surely* test you.’ During our own lives, we all have to face some sort of examination or test. It could be our GCSEs, a driving test or an important job interview. The same applies to our religious life too.

2. Fact number two. Not only were prophets tested, but in fact we are told that they were tested the most.

Sayyiduna Musa, Ibrahim, Yusuf and Ayyub (peace be upon them) were all very close to Allah. Yet they were all tested by Him too. Then above them all, Prophet Muhammad (peace & blessings of Allah be upon him) was tested the most. The more pious a person is, the harder the test from Allāh is. Ibn Mājā reports:

يا رسول الله اي الناس اشد بلاء قال الانبياء ثم الامثل فالامثل (أي الاشرف و الاعلي)

[A Companion asked]: ‘O Messenger of Allāh! Which type of people are tested most?’ He replied: ‘The Prophets, then the ones similar to them, then the ones most similar to them [i.e. the most noble and highest].’

3. Fact number three. The closer you are to Him, the more you are tested.

The harder the test, the closer a person is to his Lord. Ibrahim (peace be upon him) was the *Khalil*, the friend of Allah. Yet despite this great title, he went through many different ordeals and trials. Musa (peace be upon him) was the one who spoke directly to Allah. But he also faced great abuse from his people.

In the same hadith mentioned above, Prophet Muhammad (peace & blessings of Allah be upon him) went on to explain:

فَيُتْلَى الرَّجُلُ عَلَيَّ حَسَبَ دِينِهِ فَإِنْ كَانَ دِينُهُ صُلْبًا اشْتَدَّ بَلَاءُهُ وَإِنْ كَانَ دِينُهُ رِقَّةً أُبْتَلِيَ عَلَيَّ حَسَبَ دِينِهِ فَمَا يَبْرَحُ الْبَلَاءُ بِالْعَبْدِ حَتَّى يَتْرُكَهُ يَمْشِي عَلَيَّ الْآرِضَ وَمَا عَلَيْهِ خَطِيئَةٌ

So a man is tested according to [the strength of] his religion. Thus if his religion is firm, then the testing will be severe. And if his religion is flimsy, then he will be tested accordingly. So a servant is continuously tested by Allāh until he walks the way without a sin to his name (Ibn Maja 4013, Ahmad 1400, 1412, 1473, 1521, al-Darimi 2664).

In our culture, we look down on Muslims that go through difficulties. We should not. We should be envious of them in fact. The more pious a person is, the harder the test from Allāh is.

4. Fact number four. Our suffering is never in vain.

When Allah tests a servant of his, then this results in the forgiveness of his (minor) sins. In a famous hadith reported by Imam al-Tirmidhi, the Prophet (peace & blessings of Allah be upon him) said:

مَا يَزَالُ الْبَلَاءُ بِالْمُؤْمِنِ وَالْمُؤْمِنَةُ فِي نَفْسِهِ وَوَلَدِهِ وَمَالِهِ حَتَّى يَلْقَى اللَّهَ وَمَا عَلَيْهِ خَطِيئَةٌ

'A male and female believer are continually tested in their selves, their children and their wealth, until they meet Allāh and they are clean of all sins' (al-Tirmidhi 2323, *Kitab al-Zuhd, al-Sabr ala'l-Bala*).

Moreover, the nature of the trial does not matter. It can be a short-term test yet our sins are still forgiven. We are informed that when a person is harmed even with a prick of a thorn - a pain which lasts only a second - then some of his results are forgiven as a result. Reflect on this beautiful hadith:

عَنْ أَبِي هُرَيْرَةَ رَضِيَ اللَّهُ عَنْهُ عَنِ النَّبِيِّ ﷺ قَالَ مَا يَصِيبُ الْمُسْلِمَ مِنْ نَصَبٍ وَلَا وَصَبٍ وَلَا هَمٍّ وَلَا حُزْنٍ وَلَا أَذًى وَلَا غَمٍّ حَتَّى الشُّوْكَةِ يُشَاكِهَا إِلَّا كَفَرَ اللَّهُ بِهَا مِنْ خَطَايَاهُ
(نصوص مختارة ٨٩)

'A Muslim does not suffer from *Nasab*, *Wasab*, *Hamm*, *Hazan*, *Aza* or *Ghamm* - even a thin he is pricked with - except Allah removes his sins as a result.'

Nasab (نصب): Tiredness, physical and mental.

Wasab (وصب): Illness. It is said it means a more permanent illness.

Hamm (هم): Inner illnesses. It is said it is related to forthcoming worries, the worries that one has regarding them.

Hazan (حزن): It is read *Hazan* and *Huzn*. This is also an inner illness. This relates to past worries and issues; perhaps a person has lost something he had in the past and now this causes him discomfort.

Aza (أذى): Any pain in general.

Ghamm (غم): It is being sad and depressed due to unknown reasons. In other words, you are sad, but you cannot work out exactly why. This differs from *Khawf* in the sense this is sadness

and depression due to *known* reasons. You know where the fear is coming from; it is a fear of heights, or spiders or stairs, for instance.

With all of them, Prophet Muhammad (peace & blessings of Allah be upon him) explained that when a Muslim suffers from any of these, then his sins are forgiven.

5. Fact number five: Our suffering leads to self betterment.

Allah tests His servants so that they can appreciate His favour and blessings upon them. Allah sometimes takes a favour away from a Muslim temporarily so that they can appreciate it once again. A person may be subject to a severe illness so that once again, he can appreciate the favour of good health. Someone may be deprived of money for a period of time so that he can appreciate how lucky he was. Allah likes Muslims to be thankful. So by taking the favour away, we once again return to Allah and remember how great His benevolence really is. This is in reality what the whole purpose of Ramadan is: to take away food and drink for a temporary period so we can appreciate it once again.

6. Fact number six: Allah never burdens you with more than you can carry.

لا يكلف الله نفسا الا وسعها

Allah does not burden any soul beyond its capacity (2: 286).

Perhaps this is the most merciful verse in the entire Qur'an. Allah knows what you are going through, He knows how much your shoulders can carry. If you have a mortgage, difficult job, children to look after, parents to look after, mouths to feed, then rest assured, Allah has given you that because He knows you can cope.

When a car manufacturer designs and builds a car, then they know the top speed, range and carrying weight. After all, they are the ones who created it. In the same way, Allah knows what we can cope with and what we cannot. If we could not cope with a particular trial or tribulation, He would not have given it to us in the first place. He knows best. After all, He created us.

7. Fact number seven: We learn more from failure than we do success.

We learn more from defeat than we do from victory. We learn more in austerity than we do in prosperity. This is why Allah tests us.

When elite sport stars are interviewed, then they pinpoint their defeats as great learning curves rather than their success. Boxers learn more from one defeat than they do 26 wins.

How do we react to a test?

- a. Salah. Imam al-Husayn (may Allah be pleased with him) certainly taught this. There is a Salah specifically for when we want a need of ours fulfilling, called Salah al-Haja. If you have an important decision to make, then there is Salah al-Istikhara. For every difficulty, Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) asked his followers to find solace in Salah, just like he did.

- b. *Sadaqa* (charitable donations). It is said that giving in charity removes difficulties and hardship.
- c. *Sabr*. This alone decides whether this is a punishment from Allah (a bad thing) or a test (a good thing). Hunger and fear can be a test or a punishment. In the Qur'an Allah explains that if a person has patience during hunger and fear, then it is a test from Allah, leading to the forgiveness of his sins. If, however a person becomes ungrateful during hunger and fear and shows no patience, then this is a punishment from our Lord. The difference between a test and punishment is clarified in these two verses.

و لنبلونكم بشيء من الخوف و الجوع و نقص من الأموال و النفوس و الثمرات و بشر الصابرين

And certainly We shall test you with something of fear, hunger, loss of wealth, lives and fruits (2: 155).

و ضرب الله مثلا قرية كانت آمنة مطمئنة يأتيها رزقها رغدا من كل مكان فكفرت بأنعم الله فأذاقها الله لباس الجوع و الخوف

Allah gives the example of the city which had peace and security and its provisions came abundantly to it from every direction, but they were ungrateful for the favours of Allah, so Allah afflicted them with hunger and fear because of what they did (16: 112).

Both verses mention fear and hunger. In the first, it is a test when the subject has patience. In the second, it is a punishment because they were ungrateful.

d. *Shukr*.

- e. Thought and deliberation. What do the failures do? They find scapegoats, point fingers at others, but never self-reflect. Nowadays, Muslims everyone but themselves. A Muslim's only true enemy is Shaytan.

Conclusion

***Muslims must simply accept that this world is a test.** The more thankful and patient we are, the more chances we have to pass this exam from Allah. We should also take comfort in the fact that during this *Imtihaan* (exam), Allah forgives some of our sins. Allah's test is five-fold - fear, hunger, loss in wealth, lives and fruits (2: 155).

***The closer you are to Him, the more you are tested.**

***Allah never burdens you with more than you can carry.**

May Allah give us the ability to show patience and gratitude in times of difficulty, Ameen.

What to do on *Yawm Aashura*?

*One should have a bath.

*He should visit an ill person (or at least enquire of their wellbeing).

*He should provide food and water for others. Not only is this a desired act *per se*, it is also a symbolic show of support of Imam al-Husayn, who were denied food and water during the battle of Karbala.

*A four rak'at nafl prayer in which Surah al-Fatiha and Surah al-Ikhlās is recited in each rak'at. After completing this, he should recite this du'a seven times:

سُبْحَانَ اللَّهِ مَلِيءِ الْمِيزَانِ وَ مُنْتَهَى الْعِلْمِ وَ مَبْلَغِ الرِّضَا وَ عَدَدِ النُّجْمِ وَ زِينَةِ الْعَرْشِ لَا مَلْجَأَ وَ لَا مَنْجِي مِنَ اللَّهِ إِلَّا إِلَيْهِ سُبْحَانَ اللَّهِ عَدَدَ الشَّفْعِ وَ الْوَتْرِ وَ عَدَدَ كَلِمَاتِ اللَّهِ التَّامَاتِ كُلِّهَا أَسْأَلُكَ يَا رَبَّ السَّلَامَةَ بِرَحْمَتِكَ يَا أَرْحَمَ الرَّاحِمِينَ وَ لَا حَوْلَ وَ لَا قُوَّةَ إِلَّا بِاللَّهِ الْعَلِيِّ الْعَظِيمِ وَ هُوَ حَسْبِي وَ نِعْمَ الْوَكِيلُ نِعْمَ الْمَوْلَى وَ نِعْمَ النَّصِيرُ وَ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَي خَيْرِ خَلْقِهِ مُحَمَّدٍ وَ عَلَي آلِهِ وَ صَحْبِهِ أَجْمَعِينَ

*One should spend on themselves and family. Imam al-Bayhaqi reports in *Shu'ab* and Ibn Abd al-Barr, from Jabir Ibn Abd Allah (may Allah be pleased with them) that the Messenger of Allah (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) said:

من وسع علي نفسه و أهله يوم عاشوراء وسع الله عليه سائر السنة

'Whosoever spends openly upon himself and his family on the Day of Ashura, Allah will be open for him for the entire year.'

*One should try to fast, a stressed sunna on this day. Before the obligatory fasts of Ramadan, Muslims fasted on *Aashura*. When the fasts of Ramadan became obligatory, then the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) gave Muslims the option to fast or not fast:

عن عائشة رضي الله عنها قالت (كانوا يصومون عاشوراء قبل ان يفرض رمضان و كان يوما تستر فيه الكعبة فلما فرض الله رمضان قال رسول الله صلى الله عليه و سلم من شاء ان يصومه فليصمه و من شاء ان يتركه فليتركه)
Aisha (may Allah be pleased with her) reports that 'The Muslims would fast on the Day of *Aashura* before the fasts of Ramadan were made compulsory, and it was the day the Ka'ba would be clothed. When Allah made the fasting of Ramadan compulsory, the Messenger of Allah (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) said: 'Whosoever wished to fast the Day of *Aashura* should fast, and whosoever wishes to leave it, can leave it.'

Imam Muslim reports that Abu Qatada said: 'The Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) was asked about fasting on the Day of *Aashura*. He replied: [Fasting on it] expiates the sins of the previous year.' (*Min Fada'il al-Shuhur al-Hijriyya*, p. 23)

يكفر السنة الماضية

Imam Ahmad reports in his *Musnad*, from Abu Hurayra (may Allah be pleased with him) that the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) passed by some Jews who were fasting on the Day of *Aashura* (after the migration to al-Madina) and asked 'What is this fast?' They replied: 'This is the day when Allah saved Musa from drowning and drowned Fir'awn. And this is the day when the Ark rested on Mount Judi. So both Musa and Nuh (peace be upon them) fasted on this day as a form of thanks to Allah.' The Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) said: 'I am more closer to Musa and more deserved to fast on this day.' So he ordered the Companions to fast. (*Min Fada'il al-Shuhur al-Hijriyya* 23-4)

Imam Muslim reports in his *Sahih*, from Ibn Abbas (may Allah be pleased with him), that the Messenger of Allah (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) said in the year he left this world: 'If I remain till next year, I shall certainly fast on the ninth [of Muharram] with the tenth.'

In another hadith, he (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) said:

صوموا يوم عاشوراء و خالفوا اليهود صوموا يوما قبله و يوما بعده

Fast on the Day of Aashura and oppose the Jews. Fast a day before and after it [too]!

*Pray for the Muslim Ummah.

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