

Hosay – An Unislamic Festival

The arrival of the sacred month of Muharram marks the coming of a new year which is extremely significant to all Muslims.

The New Year reminds the Muslims of the historical journey of the blessed Prophet (S.A.S) from Makka to Madina which is known as the 'Hijrah' or 'Migration'. For this reason, we see that many Muslims reflect on the lessons of the trials and sufferings of the early Muslims which lead to the Migration (Hijrah).

Along with this, Muslims also observe the 10th Muharram by fasting on this day which is known as the day of 'Ashoora'.

Both these are from among the acts which Muslims are aware of, and while reflecting on the migration (Hijrah) of the Prophet (SA) they also observe the fast of Ashoora.

While this was established even among the sahabahs and continued in the centuries that followed, deviated sects, opposed to the pure teachings of Islam, innovated and fabricated new customs which they associated with the observance of the month of Muharram.

From among these misguided customs, is the celebration of 'a hosay festival' here in Trinidad.

The word 'Hosay' is an indo Caribbean name which is not used by Shias in other parts of the world. In fact, it is known by different names in countries such as Iran, Iraq, Pakistan and other places.

The manner in which 'the Hosay' is celebrated is also totally different from the way in which the Shias celebrate the occasion in other parts of the world, especially in the hometown itself which is known to be Iraq.

At this juncture, it is important to note that the entire celebration of 'Hosay' or the 'Muharram procession' is linked to the teachings of Shiasm, which according to all scholars of Ahlus Sunnah Wal Jamaah from the period of the pious predecessors until today, is opposed to the blessed teachings of Islam.

As for those who are acquainted with the 'Hosay' in Trinidad and the Caribbean, they would see that everything associated with this festival contradicts the teachings as well as the spirit of Islam.

The beating of the drums, the stick fight, the usage of intoxicants, the dancing and prancing on the streets, and all the other acts of hosay have been totally condemned in Islamic teachings. Such loose and wild behaviour finds no place in Islam, and no intelligent person would describe it as a 'religious festival'.

In fact, in the nineteenth century, Trinidad newspapers, as well as government reports called Hosay the 'the Coolie Carnival' (Trinidad sentinel 6th August 1857).

Obviously, it is nothing but the uncivilized, irreligious and unruly behaviour displayed at the Hosay festival that caused it to be given the name 'the Coolie Carnival'. In short, its observance in Trinidad was more of a parade on the road, inventing new ways and means of attracting crowds and paraders. This can be clearly seen from the following article which described early hosay parades in Trinidad: It states, 'after a ban on all types of parades was imposed by the British colonialist government in 1884 following riots on sugar estates, approximately 30,000 people defiantly took to the streets for hosay in Mon Repos, San Fernando on Thursday October 30th 1884' (Hosay Trinidad).

Similarly, it is written, 'In Trinidad, Indian Muslims and Hindus, and Africans co-workers, joined in the street parade (hosay) that was open to white spectators also. (Hosay Trinidad).

At another place while defining Hosay, the following is written, 'Hosay or Tadjah is a West Indian street festival, where multi – colored model mausoleums are paraded, then ritually offered up to the sea, or any body of water.' (Hosay Trinidad).

Again, it is mentioned 'Hosay has become accepted as a national culture' (Hosay Trinidad). If we look at the above quotations which highlighted the start of Hosay in Trinidad, it becomes clear that 'Hosay' was not regarded as a religious or an Islamic festival. In fact, based on its history, we see that 'people defiantly took the streets for Hosay', which goes to show that this parade was a means of getting back at the colonial power. The article also referred to it as a 'West Indian street festival' and a 'national culture'.

One can therefore clearly see, that there is absolutely no religious attachment to this festival which in reality is a 'carnival' under the guise of 'religion'.

As for that which is celebrated by Shias in other parts of the world and is known as the 'Muharram procession', this is also contrary to the teachings of Islam, and its practices have also been condemned.

From that which is known to be present practices of those who do the 'Muharram mourning' or 'Muharram procession', we see that there is the beating of the chest, beating oneself with chains, hitting oneself with swords and knives. Mourners and paraders in many places shed blood by beating themselves with these objects and inflicting wounds and bruises (to themselves).

At an onset, a Muslim would immediately condemn these practices since there is absolutely no teaching in Islam which allows any of these actions.

To justify these horrible shams by saying that it is to commemorate the martyrdom of Imam Husain (RA), is also a grave misunderstanding, a deception and a clear deviation from the straight path. Beating the drums, chanting the name of 'Ya Ali' (O Ali), cutting oneself with swords, knives and razors, hitting the chest and beating oneself with chains, were never done by any of the children or grandchildren of Imam Husain (RA), who witnessed his death and had more right of lamenting his death than any other Muslim.

In fact, mourning the death of someone in the manner the Shias do, have no source and origin in Islam and are all innovations. During the life of the blessed Prophet (SA), many close companions, family members and relatives died, but on no occasion did the Prophet (SA) mourned and lamented as the Shias do in the 'Muharram procession'. There were others who were martyred and killed in a ruthless manner, however, even in these cases, the Prophet (SA) expressed his grief in a subtle manner, performed the janaza and supplicated for them.

Those familiar with the Seerah (Life of the Prophet SA) can recall the bloody killing of the Prophet's uncle, Hamza in the battle of Uhud. The Prophet (SA) as well as the Muslims were severely affected and grieved, however, they did not raise their voices, beat their chests or become uncontrollable. The family of Hamza (R.A) was also overcome with pain and sorrow, and when their crying was heard, the Messenger of Allah ordered them to lower their voices.

Another incident is that which took place in the Battle of Mauta where three of the great and beloved companions namely, Zaid bin Haritha, Jafar bin Abi Talib and Abdullah bin Rawaha were killed. This was also a sad and sorrowful moment for the Prophet (S.A) and the Muslims, yet in all these cases, none of the Muslims behaved in an uncontrollable manner.

The Prophet (S.A) also gave clear directives and warned about one's behaviour while expressing grief and sorrow. In one of his beautiful traditions, he said, 'Whosoever wails upon a deceased person, then the deceased person is punished to the extent of the wailing'. (Bukhari).

In another tradition, the Prophet (SA) said, 'He is not of us (not a Muslim) who slaps his cheeks, burst his clothes and follows the path of the ignorant ones (while expressing grief and sorrow over the death of someone). (Sahih Al Bukhari)

These are only a few traditions which speak against un-Islamic behaviour while expressing grief over the death of someone. There are many more which highlight the same message that it is totally Haraam and unlawful for a person to raise his voice with loud cries and screams, to beat oneself, to pull the hair, to tear the clothing, to cry loudly- while mourning the death of someone.

Along with this, it is also totally haraam in Islam to commemorate the death of any Muslim by beating drums, dancing, building tadjahs etc.

More so, it will be even worst to commemorate the death of the grandson of the Prophet (SA) in this unholy, unruly, sinful and ungodly manner. Claiming to remember his martyrdom in this devilish manner, is no more than an insult to Imam Husain (RA) and what he stood for.

Hosay therefore, is a concoction and fabrication of some deviated elements of our community who lack guidance and knowledge in religious matters. It is a parade which is meant to only appease the appetite for a 'Carnival type behaviour' and lacks any moral lesson.

Muslims must not view this 'show' as an Islamic celebration, and must not support or participate in this haraam festival, in any form or fashion. This is nothing but the devil's handiwork, from which one must protect himself.