

The Ziyarat of Imam Husayn, Its Benefits and Etiquettes

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The ahadith which speak about the **Ziyarat of Imam Husayn (as)** refer to it as being an obligatory (wajib) act which each person who claims to be a Shi'a must perform at least once in his life (this is in reference to the physical visitation of the Imam at his shrine in Karbala' – since the spiritual meeting of the Imam from wherever one lives through the recitation of the words given to us can be performed at any time and any place).

Is this "wajib" commandment in the narrations the same "wajib" which we understand for acts of worship such as Hajj, Khums, Salat, Sawm, etc? Through this discussion and commentary of this Ziyarat, we hope to clarify this issue, however it suffices to mention here that this is an act which the Prophet of Islam (as) told his daughter, Fatimah Az-Zahra (sa), that a group of her Shi'a (followers) would perform (this was foretold over 50 years before the event occurred) and is something which each Imam has emphasized!

There are numerous benefits which have been promised will be granted to the one who pays his respects to the 3rd Imam and include: one's sins will be removed, an increase and also Divine blessings in one's life, removal of difficulties and the acceptance of one's legitimate desires and appeals. In addition, the Ziyarat of the 3rd Imam is equivalent to the (spiritual) visitation of Allah (swt) and the visitation to His Noble Prophet (S).

It goes without saying that such benefits are not acquired simply by the physical visit to Karbala' without any positive change in the morals and character of a person. This point shall be elucidated upon in detail in our next discussion, God willing so that we do not think that by a mere journey of a few hours and the recitation of a few words, that we truly become deserving of such bounties

The Benefits of the Ziyarat of Imam Husayn

The benefits of visiting the Leader of the Martyrs (as) can be divided into two categories: the individual benefits and the societal gains. Although each of these categories contain numerous sub-categories, we will only look at one of each in order to keep this discussion brief.

The Individual Benefits

Without doubt, visiting the Imams, especially Sayyid ash-Shuhada (as) has a very great individual benefit to it since the true meaning of Ziyarat is "to meet someone" and "being one and united" with the person whom we are encountering – either through a physical

engagement or a spiritual and esoteric meeting. From one point of view, we know that these personalities are infallible and without doubt, when a person meets those whom he likes to be around and are his friends, he takes on their characteristics or tries hard to be like them to “fit in” (positive peer pressure). Thus, when a person goes to meet those who are the closest to Allah (swt) in the spiritual hierarchy and who are the most righteous from the point of view of

their actions and demeanour, he would definitely seek to emulate and be like them! Just as a person who has been invited to meet the political head of a country or another personality would ensure that he looks presentable and would make sure that he has showered, brushed his teeth, combed his hair, worn the best clothing and applied the best perfume, so too when a person goes to meet personalities such as the Prophet of Islam (S) and the A’immah (as), he too must ensure that not only is he presentable from the physical point of view, but more importantly that his inside is purified of all sins. It is for this reason that Tawbah or asking forgiveness is one of the introductory steps before a person even entertains the thought of going for Ziyarat. Therefore, one of the benefits of the Ziyarat is both a physical cleaning of our body and also a spiritual cleansing of our heart!

Is it possible for a person who says ‘As-Salam ‘Alaika O’ Aba ‘Abdillah’ to be negligent of the noble ethical traits which this Imam best exemplified? Is it possible for a person who says ‘As-Salam ‘Alaika O’ Aba ‘Abdillah’ to be one who worships his lower desires, the wealth of the world and who shows veneration to the open enemies of Allah (swt)? If we see that we have gone to visit the Prophet (S) or any of our A’immah (as) while we have these negative traits within us then we should be sure that there is some doubt in regards to our visitation...

The Societal Benefits

The societal benefits of this visitation can be best understood if we analyze the reasons why the enemies of the Ahlul Bayt (as) have prevented the Shi’a from visiting their A’immah (as) – those buried in Medina and Iraq, but more importantly, the one buried in Karbala’. The enemies of the Ahlul Bayt (as) , especially the Bani Umayyah, Bani Abbas and even today’s enemies knew and know the power of the Ziyarat. They have probably studied the philosophy and true meaning of the Ziyarat better than we have and thus, understand that if it is carried out with a complete awareness of the individual whom we are paying our respects to, his or her own struggles against injustice and their motives in rising up for Allah (swt), and that if all of these were instilled in the hearts of those visiting them, that a great revolution would take place in their lands!

They know that the true meaning of the Ziyarat of Imam Husayn (as) is the rejection and overthrow of ‘their version’ of Islam and an acceptance and implementation of the true visage

of Islam which calls for justice, equality and freedom for all. The societal effects of this Ziyarat are ones which affect all aspects of one's life – economics, social welfare, arts and humanities, literature, etc. In addition, something as "simple" as the placing of the Turbah during the time of Salat which we prostrate upon reminds us of two things: one is that we are all from Allah and from the ground which He created us and it is back into that Earth that we shall return. However more importantly we are reminded that if we are to go back to Allah, then the best way to return back to Him is through losing our life on the plains of Karbala' – not necessarily the physical land of Karbala' in Iraq, rather as the saying '. 'goes, 'Every day is 'Ashura and every land is Karbala

?Why Ziyarat 'Ashura

Of all the rites of visitation which we can read when we want to salute Imam Husayn and his family and companions, the best and most highly recommended one is that of Ziyarat 'Ashura. In this comprehensive visitation, we combine the concepts of Tawalla [Love for the sake of Allah (swt)] and Tabarra [Hate for the sake of Allah (swt)], the culture of self-sacrifice for the lofty goals of the society and the fact that we must **never** succumb to oppression and tyranny. In addition, through such an encompassing prayer, the issues of Tawhid, Nubuwwat and Ma'ad are explained and we realize that without Imamate, these three principle beliefs have no meaning or power to them!

The truth of this statement is clear since if we look through history, these three beliefs have never brought about any serious change in the Muslim state of affairs [just look at the state of the "Muslims" today throughout the world] nor have these three beliefs been able to conquer foreign occupiers of the Muslim lands nor expel foreign entities who have illegally occupied our sovereign countries!

One Qur'anic proof of this point is the verse of Mubahilah (3:61) in which the Christians, who had come to debate the Prophet about the true character of Jesus the son of Mary, brought forth a very interesting point which all Muslims can learn from.

The delegation told the other Christians that if Muhammad brings his companions to the Mubahilah field then to go ahead and challenge them (as the companions - on their own - have no power or strength). However if Muhammad brings his Ahlul Bayt ('Ali, Fatimah, Hasan and Husayn) then they must not go against him as they would definitely perish!

Thus, if the Christians of Najran knew the power of the Ahlul Bayt, then this is something which the rest of the Muslim Ummah also needs to realize and accept.

Therefore, by reading the Ziyarat of 'Ashura, we are actually seeking to keep the Islam of

Muhammad, 'Ali, Hasan and Husayn up until Imam al-Hujjah alive and through this visitation, we reject the Islam of the likes of Abu Sufyan, the first, second and third "Caliphs", .Mu'awiyah, Yazid and the entire polluted chain of Bani Umayyah, Bani 'Abbas and others

The Etiquette of the Ziyarat of Imam Husayn

When visiting the shrine of Imam Husayn (as), we must first off realize whom we are going to visit and the etiquette which we must observe. Just as we spend time to look presentable when we have an important business meeting or a luncheon with a client, so to when we go to meet the representative of Allah (swt) on the Earth, we must also observe these and many other norms and etiquette.

In a long hadith narrated by Muhammad b. Muslim, he asked Imam Muhammad b. 'Ali al-Baqir (as) in regards to the etiquette of the Ziyarat of Imam Husayn (as). He specifically asked them Imam, "Is it not the same as visiting the house of Allah and performing the Hajj?" To this question, the Imam replied, "But of course it is." The companion then asked, "Thus, are all the things which the Hujjaj must observe also necessary for me to perform?" To this, the Imam (as) replied and stated: "It is incumbent upon you to deal with those who travel with you with goodness; you should speak less except for the remembrance of Allah; you must ensure that you are wearing clean clothes..."

The Imam (as) went on to list over 15 conditions for the visitor of Imam Husayn and concluded his statement by telling b. Muslim that, "If you observe all of these conditions, then you shall receive the reward as if you had performed a Hajj and 'Umrah..."

These are obviously related to that person who is able to physically perform the Ziyarat, however many of them can also be performed by those who are reading this Ziyarat from far away.

In summary, the things which these sorts of ahadith teach us are that we need to mould our lives to conform with the way of life of the person whom we are visiting – spiritually. We need to show humility and humbleness in our day to day life [this can be seen in the fact that when we perform the Ziyarat we are recommended to go barefoot and walk with tranquility], we need to always look presentable when interacting with others [we are recommended to wear clean, white clothes and apply perfume to ourselves], we need to be ready and willing to assist those less fortunate than ourselves [it is recommended to give Sadaqa before the Ziyarat and to offer a gift to others] and we need to show moderation in our lifestyle [we are told that we should not eat heavy and fatty foods before such visits which may only make us feel tired and lazy]...

In addition to the etiquette of Ziyarat related to our physical presence, we must also remember

the spiritual etiquette – the most important one being the rejection of all external despots and enemies and that if we need to be killed to keep our honour and dignity (just as Imam Husayn :did), then so be it. After all, Sayyid ash-Shuhada (as) has told us that

مَوْتُ فِي عِرٍّ خَيْرٌ مِنْ حَيَاةٍ فِي ذُلٍّ

“.A death in dignity is better than a life in humiliation“