

## Is Aashura a day of mourning or rejoicing?

**Doubt:** The tenth day of Muharram is  $\hat{\text{A}}$  Aashura $\hat{\text{A}}$ <sup>TM</sup>. The Jews of Madinah fasted on this day, the day on which Prophet Moses (a.s.) and his followers crossed the Red Sea miraculously. So the Holy Prophet (s.a.w.a.) directed the Muslims to fast on the day of Aashura.

**Reply:** The report is inaccurate. The real report is:

The Prophet (s.a.w.a) on migrating to Madinah found the Jews fasting on the 10th of Muharram. On enquiry, he was told: It is an auspicious day; it is the day when Allah delivered the children of Israel from their enemy (i.e. Pharaoh); and, therefore, Moses fasted on that day.

The Prophet (s.a.w.a) said,  $\hat{\text{A}}$  I am worthier of Moses than you. $\hat{\text{A}}$ <sup>TM</sup>

Thereupon, he fasted on that day and ordered (the Muslims) to fast.

Saheeh-e-Bukhaari vol. 3 Egypt ed.pg 54, Mishkaat al-Masaabih Delhi ed. 1,307 A.H. pg 172

It is noted by the commentator of Mishkaat al-Masaabih that  $\hat{\text{A}}$  it was in the second year, because in the first year the Prophet (s.a.w.a.) had arrived in Madinah after Aashura, in Rabi al-Awwal.

It should be noted that the Jews had their own calendar and monthly cycles. There is no logic in saying that they fasted on the 10<sup>th</sup> of Muharram unless it could be proved that this date always coincided with a Jewish day of fast.

The first month of the Jews (Abib, later named Nisan) coincided with Rajab of the Arabs. W.O.E. Oesterley and Theodore H. Robinson have written that in Arabia the most important of all the new-moon festivals was that which fell in the month of Rajab, equivalent to the Hebrew month Abib, for this was the time when the ancient Arabs celebrated the Spring festival. (Hebrew Religion S.P.C.K., London 1955pg128)

Probably, in ancient times the two branches of Hazrat Ibrahim $\hat{\text{A}}$ <sup>TM</sup> (a.s.) household followed the same system of intercalating an additional month. And in this way the 7th Jewish month, Tishri I, coincided with Muharram. And the Aashura of Muharram synchronized with 10th of Tishri I, the Jewish Day of Atonement  $\hat{\text{A}}$  a day of fast. The two calendars lost their synchronization when Islam, in the 9th year of Hijrah, disallowed intercalation. But on deeper consideration it transpired that this parity was lost long before the advent of Islam, because the Arabs did not follow any mathematical calculation in their intercalation. That was why Muharram of the 2nd year of Hijrah began on 5th July, 623 C.E. (Al-Munjid, 21st ed.), months before Tishri I (which always coincides with September-October).

Clearly, Aashura of Muharram in that year (or, for that matter, during the Prophet $\hat{\text{A}}$ <sup>TM</sup> (s.a.w.a.) whole life at Madinah) had no significance whatsoever for the Jews.

$\hat{\text{A}}$

**Doubt:** In the beginning, fasting on this day was obligatory but later, the fasts of Ramadan were made obligatory and the fast on the day of Aashura was made optional.

The sanctity of Aashura cannot be ascribed to this event for the simple reason that the sanctity of  $\hat{\text{A}}$  Muharram and the day of Aashura was established during the days of the Holy Prophet (s.a.w.a.), much before the birth of Husain (a.s.).

**Reply:**

The question is: Why did they fast on that day?

The Jewish Midrashic literature relates the 10th day of the 7th month (Yom Hakippurim " Day of Atonement) to the event of bringing the tablets of the Covenant from Mount Sinai, as Dr. Mishael Maswari-Caspi has written in his letter.

The question is: If the Jews had wanted to keep the long-lost synchronization of Tishri I and Muharram in view, how was it that they forgot to narrate this tradition to the Prophet (s.a.w.a.)?

The month in which God delivered the Israelites from Pharaoh was Abib (i.e. Rajab), as the Bible clearly states: Observe the month of Abib, and keep the pass-over unto the Lord thy God: for in the month of Abib the Lord thy God brought thee forth out of Egypt by night. (Deut. 16:1)

The question is: How could the Jews transfer an event of Abib (originally coinciding with Rajab) to Muharram, in open defiance of their Torah?

Here is a point to ponder for the Muslims: The Prophet (s.a.w.a.) was sent with a religion to abrogate all previous religions and Shariah. How was it that he deigned to imitate the custom of the Jews?

It is clear from above-mentioned facts that the Jews had no reason at all to fast on Aashura of Muharram at that period; and this story, built on that premise, is just that " a fiction. Obviously, it was invented by a narrator who only knew that once upon a time Muharram coincided with the Jews' Tishri I, but was totally unaware of contemporary Jewish religion and culture.

One feels constrained to mention here that this and other such traditions were forged by camp-followers of the Umayyads, after the martyrdom of Imam Husain (a.s.), as a part of their campaign to turn the 10<sup>th</sup> of Muharram into a day of rejoicing. These traditions are of the same genre as those which say that it was on the 10<sup>th</sup> of Muharram that Nuh's (a.s.) ark rested on the mount, the fire became cool and safe for Hazrat Ibrahim (a.s.) and Hazrat Isa (a.s.) ascended to the heavens. In the same category came the traditions exhorting the Muslims to treat Aashura as a festival of joy, and to store one's food-grains on this very day, as it would increase one's sustenance and bring the blessings of Allah to the household.

**Doubt:** In fact, it is one of the merits of Husain (a.s.) that his martyrdom took place on this day. Another misconception is that it is an inauspicious month since Husain was killed during Muharram. Hence people avoid conducting marriages during this period.

This is baseless. If the death of an eminent person on a particular day renders that day unlucky for all times to come, no day of the year would be free from bad luck. The Holy Quran and the Sunnah of the Holy Prophet (s.a.w.a.) have liberated us from such superstitious beliefs.

**Reply:**

This is nothing but blind prejudice since there are no traditions which state that it is haraam (unlawful) to conduct weddings on Aashura or in the month of Muharram and Safar. But what needs answering is whether a Muslim will choose to get married on the day his father or mother has passed away or on the day the Prophet (s.a.w.a.) has passed away? Or will he exercise discretion and postpone the marriage by a few days as a mark of respect?

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