

SPIRITUAL DIMENSIONS OF MOURNING FOR  
IMAM HUSAYN (A),  
PART III: HOW TRUE MOURNING CAN LEAD  
TO THE GOODLY LIFE

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**ABSTRACT:** People are to strive to purge themselves of the superficial aspects of this world. Once we do so, a new life – or the “Goodly Life” – is guaranteed to those who believe, purify themselves, and perform righteous deeds. Because the effect of good deeds counts for very little in this long journey, God, with His infinite mercy, provided shortcuts by endowing us with immaculate male and female role models to assist people on this path to prosper in life and achieve everlasting bliss. Sincerely sharing in Imam Husayn’s grief and mourning over the magnitude of his hardship during the Battle of Karbala is one the quickest ways to achieve the Goodly Life. Those who enjoy this status develop their understanding, actions, and determination through firm faith and righteous deeds that must stem from being truthful. This part of the series further delves into the spiritual essence and outcomes of grieving for Imam Husayn, as well as the duties of the speakers, reciters, and participants of gatherings for mourning. All in all, true mourning attracts divine blessings, mercy, and forgiveness, which eventually removes the veils of darkness and moves us into the light.

God, the Almighty, has granted humanity life – an incredibly valuable gift. This life needs to be respected, protected, and regulated according to God’s will. People are not permitted to commit suicide or even harm their health. We cannot eat something that could possibly make us ill, even if it does not make us fatally ill. However, what is much more important than physical life is the Goodly Life (*al-hayat al-tayyibah*) which can be achieved through faith and righteous deeds. In this part, we will further examine the act of mourning for Imam Husayn and how true mourning can lead to the Goodly Life. Those who attain this go beyond the limitations that ordinary people face with regards to their understanding, power (or action) and will (or determination). In other words, they will grow in all three major elements of life: 1) understanding, 2) power, and 3) will.

**Understanding:** The understanding of a person who lives the Goodly Life will go beyond the material world; his understanding would not be limited to what he sees, hears, or touches. He perceives what other people cannot perceive, and this can happen in different ways. Sometimes God sends a message directly to someone’s heart and that person would perceive further layers of meaning from the same message others superficially understood. And sometimes it is possible that several layers of meaning envelop one’s form of expression. For example, we agree that when I ask you for water, you will bring it to me along with checking my car in the parking lot. So if I ask you for water, other people will understand one meaning, though you will understand my second message as well. I might have made another agreement with someone else that when I ask for water, he also makes a phone call. Others will only see that someone asks for water, though they are unaware of the additional messages.

God has put many multi-layered meanings in His Qur’an. According to a hadith, the Qur’an has an inward layer (*batin*); and that inward layer has

another layer inside it, and this continues up to seven layers.<sup>1</sup> Of course, the key to reach its inward and esoteric meanings is its outward and exoteric meanings. Exegetes who provide commentaries on the Qur'an that are not in agreement with its outward appearance are incorrect. However, although more can be understood from the actual appearance of the verses, the laymen cannot do this. Only those who live the Goodly Life receive these messages. Others will only understand the apparent meaning of the words, and they might even find some passages irrelevant to their lives and perhaps deem it boring. Those with Goodly Life find clear and powerful messages in every verse to apply to their day to day lives.

A faithful person understands messages in a person's speech that laymen may not understand. As the Iranian proverb goes, "What an elderly (wise) person sees in a mud brick, a young person would not see in the mirror." We understand the literal meaning, although an insightful person understands much more.

Thus, those who enjoy the Goodly Life might perceive, for example, from a person's speech, either through direct inspiration or through intuition and insight, what others might not. To a lesser degree this might sometimes happen to us. You might have experienced that when you are looking for guidance and suddenly an adult or child who does not know the matter in hand says something that solves the problem. If the soul is not perceptive, even the clearest words would not be understood. A perceptive soul receives implicit messages. However, this topic requires further study and is beyond the constraints of this paper.

In the famous divine saying (*Hadith-i Qudsi*) of proximity to God through voluntary recommended acts (*qurb-i nawafil*), God says:

<sup>1</sup> For example, see *Bihar al-Anwar*, vol. 89, p. 91, where Jabir ibn Yazid al-Ju'fi narrates from Imam Baqir:

عَنْ جَابِرِ بْنِ يَزِيدَ الْجُفَيْفِيِّ قَالَ سَأَلْتُ أَبَا جَعْفَرٍ عَ عَنْ شَيْءٍ مِنْ التَّفْسِيرِ فَأَجَابَنِي ثُمَّ سَأَلْتُهُ عَنْهُ ثَانِيَةً فَأَجَابَنِي بِجَوَابٍ آخَرَ فَقُلْتُ جَعَلْتُ فِدَاكَ كُنْتَ أَجَبْتَنِي فِي هَذِهِ الْمَسْأَلَةِ بِجَوَابٍ غَيْرِ هَذَا قَبْلَ الْيَوْمِ فَقَالَ يَا جَابِرُ إِنَّ لِلْقُرْآنِ بَطْنًا وَ لِلْبَطْنِ بَطْنٌ وَ لَهُ ظَهْرٌ وَ لِلظَّهْرِ ظَهْرٌ يَا جَابِرُ لَيْسَ شَيْءٌ أَبْعَدَ مِنْ عَقُولِ الرِّجَالِ مِنْ تَفْسِيرِ الْقُرْآنِ إِنَّ الْآيَةَ يَكُونُ أَوَّلُهَا فِي شَيْءٍ وَ آخِرُهَا فِي شَيْءٍ وَ هُوَ كَلَامٌ مُتَّصِلٌ مُتَّصِرٌ عَلَى وَجْهِهِ.

None of My servants can seek proximity to Me by that which is dearer to Me than things that I have made obligatory on him. Then, with the performance of *nawāfil* (the recommended acts), he continuously attains proximity to Me so that I love him. When I love him, I will be the ear with which he hears, the eyes with which he sees, and the hand with which he strikes. If he calls Me, I will answer his call, and if he makes a request, I will grant it.<sup>1</sup>

If God becomes the ears by which we hear, there will be no limit to understanding the facts. Such a person sees many hidden things, so much so that when you visit him or her, they might see into your heart or read your mind. Prophet Muhammad said, “Be careful about the piercing eyes of the faithful, because they see [everything] by the light of God.”<sup>2</sup> Therefore, when you stand before a spiritual person, say to God, “O Coverer! (*Ya Sattar!*)” if you prefer to conceal the problems that may exist in your heart. Then, if God wants, that faithful person will not see into your heart.

**Power.** The Goodly Life increases our understanding as well as our capability. In the abovementioned hadith, God will be the person’s hand by which he strikes. Prophet Abraham, who was asked to break the idols, could not do so single-handedly; it was God who gave power to Abraham’s hand:

*You did not kill them; rather it was God who killed them;  
and you did not throw when you threw, rather it was God  
who threw, that He might test the faithful with a good test*

<sup>1</sup> *Al-Kāfi*, vol. 2, pp. 352 & 353.

<sup>2</sup> For example, see *Bal-Kāfi*, vol. 1, p. 218, where Mohammad ibn Muslim narrates from Imam Baqir (a) that the Prophet Muhammad (s) said:

عَنْ مُحَمَّدِ بْنِ مُسْلِمٍ عَنْ أَبِي جَعْفَرٍ ع فِي قَوْلِ اللَّهِ عَزَّ وَ جَلَّ إِنَّ فِي ذَلِكَ لآيَاتٍ لِّلْمُتَوَسِّمِينَ قَالَ هُمُ الْأَيْمَةُ ع قَالَ رَسُولُ اللَّهِ ص اتَّعُوا فِرَاسَةَ الْمُؤْمِنِ فَإِنَّهُ يَنْظُرُ بِنُورِ اللَّهِ عَزَّ وَ جَلَّ فِي قَوْلِ اللَّهِ تَعَالَى إِنَّ فِي ذَلِكَ لآيَاتٍ لِّلْمُتَوَسِّمِينَ.

*from Himself. Indeed God is all-hearing, all-knowing.*  
(8:17)

When we throw an arrow that hits the target, we shouldn't give ourselves the credit. Although this might be clearer in unusual and extraordinary circumstances of success, the faithful should understand that all good actions and successes come from God. Then God enables those closest to Him – those who have emptied themselves of their ego and selfishness – to perform the wonders laymen are unable to do.

**Stronger will:** A person who enjoys the Goodly Life becomes very powerful, and through his will and determination he is able to do what others cannot. God says in a Hadith al-Qudsi:

My servant, obey Me. [If you do so] I will make you an example of Myself. I am alive and will never die; and so I make you alive and never die. I am rich and never become poor, and so I make you become rich and never poor. Whatever I want I say “Be” and it is, so I make you in the way that whatever you want you also say “Be” and there it will be.<sup>1</sup>

Human beings can reach such a position, though we do not usually come across such people on a day-to-day basis; it is hard to believe they exist. Nonetheless, humankind can reach such a position. They can reach it in this world, as in the case of the Prophets and Imams, and is certainly possible for the inhabitants of Paradise, where everything a person wishes is available.<sup>2</sup> The Goodly Life is similar to life in Paradise. Whatever one wishes for will be ready and at hand, though such a person would not

<sup>1</sup> *Al-Jawahir al-Saniyyah fi al-Ahadith al-Qudsiyyah* by Hurr 'Amili, p. 284.

<sup>2</sup> The Qur'an says:

*Enter paradise, you and your spouses, rejoicing (they will be served around with golden dishes and goblets, and therein will be whatever the souls desire and eyes delight in) and you will remain in it [forever]. That is the paradise you have been given to inherit for what you used to do. (43:70-72)*

expect anything and everything to be ready at his disposal. The person living a Goodly Life works for the pleasure of God and eventually achieves firm determination.

A person who lives an ordinary life might be engaged in eating, drinking, and the like, but the desire of one who achieves the Goodly Life is spiritual and radiant, as he emits light and energy to the world. He is far-sighted and loves to bring everyone close to God.

For the person who reaches this stage, one of the most complex and difficult matters is to preserve at least some attachment to this world. This is because he becomes so inclined towards the Hereafter that it is difficult for him to look at this world and simultaneously do justice regarding worldly affairs. For this reason, some of those who do reach this level may not pay much attention to worldly affairs. Indeed, they are obliged to heed to such matters, but because they are not perfect or are still new to this type of life, sometimes they may fail to do justice to them.<sup>1</sup> However, this is also a transitional stage, and if a person progresses further, he would eventually do justice to this world as well. This is when such a person becomes like Imam Ali, who, in the middle of his prayer, without neglecting God, gave his ring to a beggar who approached and asked for help. In any case, it is difficult for those who have recently entered this stage to embody the two attributes together. Perfection is to be at the peak of spirituality and otherworldliness as the Prophet was and yet still do true justice to worldly affairs in a meticulous way. For example, such a person should always be neat and tidy by looking in the mirror or should be careful about the way he greets people or welcomes guests and visitors. His mind might be inclined towards the next world while simultaneously doing justice to this world.

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<sup>1</sup> For example, grandson of a great contemporary philosopher and mystic, whose name I do not want to mention told me that this great scholar was so focused on non-worldly things that could not even find his daughter's house! Why? Because he was so inclined towards the next world and spiritual matters that such things did not matter to him.

However, sometimes the attention of some spiritual people is deflected away from this world. Some mistakenly think that these spiritual wayfarers lost their senses, though they are simply inclined towards the next world. During his final days, Allamah Tabatabai did not speak with anyone, and turned his face away from the food that was brought to him. He simply sat near the window and gazed outside. Ayatullah Amini says, "During those moments I asked him about for advice on self-purification and he answered, 'Surveillance (*muraqabah*). Surveillance. Surveillance!' meaning: 'Observe your soul. Watch your self!'<sup>1</sup> He did not talk as if he was not aware of anything.

The late Ayatollah Ahmadi Mīaneji said about the Grand Ayatollah Hujjat, one of the Islamic authorities in Qum, "Shortly before his demise, the Grand Ayatollah Hujjat refrained from speaking with anyone, and even if someone talked to him, he would not respond, even to such as, 'Sir! Are you alright? Would you like some tea or food?' He would not say a word. Then one man cleverly asked, "What is the Islamic ruling on eating burnt bread?" Since it was the Ayatollah's duty to respond to questions on Islamic issues, he finally spoke. Though he avoided any talk, he answered that question. Such events in the life of such great personalities speak volumes.

Ayatullah Imami Kashani said that Imam Khomeini did not talk to anyone during the last hours of his life, as if his soul already left this world. Imam Khomeini was thought to be unaware of things happening around him. Ayatullah Kashani said, "When it was prayer time, I reminded Imam Khomeini about it. And for a long moment his eyes had been shut without having said anything, though suddenly his lips moved." The soul might be detached from this world and oblivious to material matters, but if it relates to the spiritual aspect, then the soul might heed to it.

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<sup>1</sup> This is what I heard myself from Ayatollah Ibrahim Amini in his visit to Manchester.

***How to achieve the Goodly Life*** - The Goodly Life can be achieved in this world through faith and righteous deeds: *“Whoever acts righteously, [whether] male or female, should he be faithful, We shall revive him with a good life...”* (16: 97)

There is no alternative way or any magic formula. We are only to obey God and do righteous deeds. Why do we look for complexities when we can simply perform our major duties? We tend to make it difficult for ourselves. This is similar to the Israelites’ questions stated in the Qur’an. When God ordered them to sacrifice a cow, they pestered Prophet Moses with questions such as, “What colour should it be?” “How much should it weigh?” “Should it be fat or thin?” It would have sufficed had they sacrificed the first cow they saw. God puts it simply: *“Whoever acts righteously, [whether] male or female, should he be faithful, We shall revive him with a good life...”* (16:97)

Thus, we should be inclined to performing righteous deeds. What is a righteous deed? Simply performing your religious and moral duties and having faith, and you will then achieve everything.

There are certain stages at which one needs special advice, and God will undoubtedly provide us with it afterwards. Regarding Ayatullah Ansari Hamedani,<sup>1</sup> when asked why he journeyed from Hamedan to Pakistan, he answered, “A person who had reached a high level of spirituality was in need of help, and I was ordered to assist him.” God states in the Qur’an: *“As for those who strive in Us, We surely guide them to Our paths...”* (29:69)

God will indeed guide whoever strives on this path. We might think we need someone to push us to strive, yet that is similar to someone who will not put food in his mouth until someone else feeds him. We know we are responsible for working hard. If we do our best and then face a situation in which we do not know what to do, God will definitely help us. It is

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<sup>1</sup>A great contemporary mystic and the teacher of Ayatollah Dastgheyb and Ayatollah Nejabat.



impossible that such people are not guided. We are to employ and increase our capabilities rather than living carelessly. We are to strive to have faith and perform righteous deeds: *“O you who have faith! Respond to God and the Apostle when he summons you to that which will give you life.” (8:24)*

This verse is a clear, unambiguous one. On the Day of Resurrection, we will be so sorrowful, thinking, ‘Such verses were simple and clear; since my youth I knew that I was to tell the truth, respect my parents and elders, pray on time, and give alms. I was aware of the importance of these deeds, although I did not carry them out.’ Perhaps one reason the Day of Resurrection is called *“Yawm al-Taghabun”* (The ‘Day of Loss’) and *“Yawm al-Hasrah”* (‘the Day of Regret’) is that people will realize they did not practice what they knew, especially for actions that were not difficult to carry out.

As said before, God has also provided role models – the Prophet and his Household – whom we should constantly refer to. This is why we say in the chapter *The Opening (al-Fatiha)*, *“Guide us on the straight path; the path of those whom You have blessed; such as have not incurred Your wrath, nor are astray.” (1:6-8)* As said before, Imam Husayn is one of the blessings God has bestowed upon us to find the path; he is also the Light of the Guidance (*Misbah al-Huda*) – there is neither doubt nor darkness in it. Imam Husayn is not like Prophet Khidr whom even Prophet Moses could not understand. He is the Light of the Guidance, in that even the layman – religious or not – can understand. Through enduring a great tragedy, Imam Husayn opened a shortcut to all people. Moreover, he is the Ship of Salvation (*Safinat al-Najat*), especially if we remember that among the Ahlul-Bayt, the Ship of Husayn is the fastest and the largest.

***How do we join Imam Husayn by benefiting from his light and guidance?***

As explained in the first part, the key is to share in Imam Husayn’s hardship:

*I implore Allah to give me because of my suffering in you  
the best which might be given to an afflicted person, for*

*the sake of your place before Him and your rightfulness  
and also the hardship I endured in your way.*<sup>1</sup>

The first condition in expressing our grief is through having piety, or awareness, of God. Moreover, to sincerely mourn, we are to be truthful.

*Truthfulness:* God is the Truth and all true things are from Him: “*That is because God is the True...*” (22:6) He is real and all realities depend on Him. On the other hand, falsehood does not belong or relate to Him. Our actions must be in harmony with reality and with the truth, since the Truth is what exists and must be acted upon accordingly. For example, it is cold here. This is a fact. So, we have to turn on the heater; but if it is warm we should not do so. You won’t say, “I will turn on the heater regardless of it being hot or cold.” A wise person would not talk like that.

The expression “*God is the True*” (*al-Haqq*) does not merely refer to God’s existence since other beings exist as well. But we cannot consider ourselves *the True* (*al-haqq*) since God is the only True One, that what is true depends on Him. All that complies with God and with the generative or legislative will of God will also become true: “*We sent you with Truth.*” This verse means, ‘Your mission is to be at the service of the Truth.’ The message of God cannot be modified, as said in the Qur’an: “*Had he faked any sayings in Our Name, We would have surely seized him by the right hand and then cut off his aorta*” (69:44-46).

This is very strong statement and warning since the Prophet would not do such a thing: “*Nor does he speak of (his own) desire. It is naught save a revelation that is revealed.*” (53: 3-4) The Prophet only says what God wants and thus God is in fact telling us to be aware. You – the clergy, propagators, Muslims – those who speak in the name of Islam, while sometimes not knowing much about it. Be careful.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> An excerpt from Ziyarat Ashura.

<sup>2</sup> In 1999, during my first trip to Rome, I asked one of our hosts who had invited hundreds of Muslims from around the world after inviting Jewish community, “What is the difference between

Nowadays, we frequently face situations in which people of relatively little knowledge, although many times with good intentions, speak in communities and even at universities and academic institutes as the representatives of Islam, and it has created serious problems.

God says that even if the Prophet himself says something wrong, He will cut his aorta. Indeed, this arterial supply for the Goodly Life is cut due to vain speech though we may not realize it. Prophet Muhammad said:

لولا تكثير في كلامكم و ترمج في قلوبكم لسمعت ما اسمع و لرأيت ما اري

If you did not indulge in useless talk and harbor vain thoughts in your heart, you would be able to hear what I hear and see what I see.<sup>1</sup>

This does not mean we would become the Prophet; rather, our inner eyes would open to see the unseen. The faithful would also have broad vision and insight. It is not necessary to be the Prophet to do so. The more we engage in vain talk, the Goodly Life is bound to fade away. If we watch our words and the ideas in our hearts and minds, and put our knowledge into practice, we will move very fast towards perfection. In this atmosphere of piety and surveillance (*muraqabah*), our daily prayer can uplift us beyond our imagination.

Allamah Tabatabai frequently quoted Ayatollah Qadi as saying, "If one performs his prayers on time and does not achieve spiritual positions, he can curse me." This means that is not difficult to progress spiritually. We tend to look for secrets, but the reality is that we do not need anything mysterious. If we preserve our original purity, divine nature, and the light God has given us, our few acts of worship will become both important and

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us and them?" He mentioned two points. The second point he mentioned, and this was very shocking to me, was that he said, "Every Muslim speaks in the name of Islam. Every Muslim says: 'Islam says this or that'. But when members of the other faith community spoke, they always said, 'We cannot speak on behalf of our faith. I am merely giving my own opinion.'"

<sup>1</sup> *Al-Mizan fi Tafsir al-Qur'an*, vol. 5, p. 270, cited from Sunni sources.

powerful. Our prayers, alms, fasts, and our love for the Household will uplift us very quickly.

The problem is that we do good things, but our pure and free soul is hindered or halted due to the poisonous sins committed and the vain talk we engage in. Similar to the stomach's reaction when we eat junk food, we harm our souls when we speak vainly or listen to nonsense. Thus, we are to speak when necessary; moreover, we are to speak truthfully.

***How can we be truthful?*** We have to be truthful in our words, deeds, beliefs, and even thoughts. God tells His Prophet, “*Indeed, We have sent you with the truth*” (2:119) – in other words, ‘Your mission has begun in the service of the Truth!’ The Imams were also fully committed to the truth, as they never committed any wrongdoing. Both Shi‘as and Sunnis have quoted the Prophet Muhammad as saying, “Ali is with the truth and the truth is with Ali.”<sup>1</sup> Imam Ali’s was exceptional because he was in harmony with the truth; he fully observed it, and anyone who doubts the truth should refer to him. His value is not due to God’s fondness for him so much that even if he commits wrong, it would be alright. The Friends of God are not permitted to do everything merely because they are close to God; indeed, they never want to do so, since they comprehend the ugliness of committing sins. There are religious communities who hold their leader at such a high level that they deem it acceptable when he indulges in vicious deeds such as drinking wine, gambling, or refraining from prayer. Such people have not understood the right concept. The requirement of servitude – or a true servant of God – is valuable in this world for his commitment to the truth.

God says that He has sent His Prophet with the truth (“*bi’l-haqq*” - 2:119), but He also warns that “*Had he faked any sayings in Our Name, We would have surely seized him by the right hand and then cut off his aorta*”

<sup>1</sup> For example, see *Bihar al-Anwar*, vol. 30, p. 352 where Allamah Majlisi writes:

وَقَدْ رَوَوْهَا جَمِيعاً أَنَّ رَسُولَ اللَّهِ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَآلِهِ قَالَ عَلِيُّ مَعَ الْحَقِّ وَالْحَقُّ مَعَ عَلِيٍّ يَدُورُ مَعَهُ حَيْثُمَا دَارَ.

(69:44-46). Of course, God says about the Prophet, “*Nor does he speak of (his own) desire. It is naught save a revelation that is revealed*” (53:3-4). There remains no place for anyone to be careless about the truth. When Ali’s honour is with the truth, how is it possible that I, the follower of Ali and Husayn, think I can do or say what I please – or commit sins knowing that Imam Husayn will make it all right – because my masters are great? Your own master, the Apostle, is told that if he says a word in vain, he will be dead. How is that possible or even logical? Is this in agreement with a world based on Truth in which there is nothing false? It’s impossible. What is true is that “*Whoever acts righteously, [whether] male or female, should he be faithful, We shall revive him with a good life...*” (16: 97). Have faith and perform righteous deeds, and do not think too much about our natural shortcomings, that our good deeds are few and imperfect. Strive to be in harmony with the Truth; only then will you be given a helping hand and raised up. But this will not happen if we say, “We will do what we wish and Imam Husayn will make it alright!” Imam Husayn won’t – and cannot – do so. We must follow Husayn and let him colour our thoughts and deeds with the colour from God, indeed “*Whose colour is better than Allah’s?*” (2:138).

Imam Husayn – conditional upon our obedience to God, seeking, telling, and hearing the truth – takes hold of our hands. We must live in such a way that when ordinary people and wise people look at us, they say, “This person reminds us of Imam Husayn. He or she must be his follower.” It would not be enough that a person is a so-called follower of Imam Husayn while his deeds are not similar to his. So if we observe all those points on mourning for Imam Husayn and we share in the hardship he suffered for justice and seeking the truth, we will be rescued and given a high status in sharing in this hardship.

## *How to be truthful in our mourning*

### *Duties of the speakers and reciters*

*The first duty:* The propagators must speak the truth while preaching. Mirza Husayn Nuri<sup>1</sup> in his *Lu' Lu' Wal Marjān* revealed the many lies said regarding the Battle of Karbala. In a chapter entitled “*On the Etiquettes of the First Step of the Pulpit*,” he emphasizes on the importance of truthfulness of the speakers, reciters, and writers in their narration of the events to ensure that nothing false or baseless is said.

What does truthfulness in speech require? Does it suffice to refrain from fabricating stories or hadiths, and repeat what we have heard or read? That's far from demonstrating one's commitment to truth. According to a hadith, the distance between truth and falsehood – between what is seen and heard – is the width of four fingers, the distance between one's eye and ear.<sup>2</sup> What we hear from others can be wrong but what we actually see for ourselves is right. We cannot rely solely on what we hear. We must check from whom we have heard it from. We are to ask ourselves ‘Who is that person?’ ‘What is his source?’ ‘How careful have they been?’ ‘How much do they read and investigate the authenticity of the source?’

*The second duty:* Speaking about a particular issue must be ‘with the truth’ (*bi'l-haqq*); speaking about it must be correct, appropriate, beneficial, and advisable within the correct context to serve the truth since *truth* is a broad concept. Saying something true amongst the Muslims may not be wise if said in a non-Muslim setting, although it would not be a lie. Something said on a pulpit in downtown Tehran may not be right if said in Manchester. No principle states that expressing every fact is advisable,

<sup>1</sup> Author of *Mustadrak Wasā'il al-Shi'a* and the teacher of Sheikh 'Abbas Qummi

<sup>2</sup> *Wasā'il al-Shi'ah*, vol. 16, p. 379, where Hurr 'Amili narrates from the *Nahj al-Balaghah*:

مُحَمَّدُ بْنُ الْحُسَيْنِ الرَّضِيِّ فِي نَهْجِ الْبَلَاغَةِ عَنْ أَمِيرِ الْمُؤْمِنِينَ ع قَالَ أَيُّهَا النَّاسُ مَنْ عَرَفَ مِنْ أَخِيهِ وَثِقَةً فِي دِينٍ وَ سَدَادَ طَرِيقِي فَلَا يَسْمَعَنَّ فِيهِ أَقْوَابِلَ الرِّجَالِ أَمَا إِنَّهُ قَدْ يَزْمِي الرَّامِي وَ تَخْطِئُ السِّهَامُ وَ يَجِيئُ الْكَلَامُ وَ تَأْطِلُ ذَلِكَ بَيُّورُ وَ اللَّهُ سَمِيعٌ وَ شَهِيدٌ (أَلَا إِنَّهُ مَا بَيْنَ الْحَقِّ وَ الْبَاطِلِ) إِلَّا أَرْبَعُ أَصَابِعٍ وَ جَمَعَ أَصَابِعَهُ وَ وَضَعَهَا بَيْنَ أُذُنِهِ وَ عَيْنَيْهِ ثُمَّ قَالَ الْبَاطِلُ أَنْ تَقُولَ سَمِعْتُ وَ الْحَقُّ أَنْ تَقُولَ رَأَيْتُ.

even if it proves harmful for people in general or for the faithful in particular. Is it right (*bi'al-haqq*) if I teach physics in a meeting held about ethics? Is it acceptable to do so and justify it by merely saying that whatever I claim is true? Is it right to suddenly tell a mother that her child has just died and describe the entire accident to her? Would I not be guilty if she dies of a heart attack? Is not backbiting – one of the greater sins – expressing a true fact about a faithful person who does not want it to be known? It is misleading to think that every fact can be said to everyone and everywhere. What is said must be correct and useful, and it should fulfil a need.

There are facts about the Household's hardships that must not be said just anywhere since some aspects may be misconstrued. This point is to be taken into consideration for meetings held in non-Muslim countries or non-Shi'a environments. Of course, today communications have become so easy that even if one makes a speech or recite a eulogy, he must be aware that it might be broadcasted throughout the world, since privacy is no longer guaranteed. Nowadays, even information and intelligence agencies cannot keep certain facts or data secret. Today we must be very careful to say what is right, truthful, appropriate, beneficial, and advisable.

***Duties of the participants:*** A participant in a gathering for mourning must truly mourn. We must not sit and watch indifferently when people are mourning; or stare at the speaker only to be distracted from the subject. If we can't cry, the least is to look grief-stricken and feel sad. Crying is the best way to know if we are really connected to Imam Husayn or not. This is a test. You would not cry for someone for whom you feel no pity. Crying can only happen when you're truly sympathetic. You can easily smile or laugh for someone's success, but to cry for someone's suffering needs strong sympathy. It should also be noted that there are people who can cry and even shed tears falsely. For example, it is mentioned in the hadiths that one of the characteristics of the hypocrites is their ability to cry whenever they like. So when you see a crying person, do not instantly think, 'Wow! What a great emotional state!' Of course, there's no need to

be concerned with him, nor assume he is a hypocrite. We are expected to be concerned with our own feelings. Moreover, at the time of mourning, it is better to sit next to unfamiliar people.

***The core and essence of mourning:*** The core of participating in Imam Husayn hardship is to feel sorrowful and heartbroken. We should thank God if we manage to cry; if we do not, we should still thank God that we at least feel grief, and then later reflect on why we cannot cry. There may be several reasons why we cannot cry: sometimes it is because of our love for the worldly affairs (*hubb al-dunya*), and sometimes it is for other reasons that might not necessarily be negative. People are in different emotional states at different times. In any case, grief is the most important thing. We must be very worried if we do not grieve. Of course, sometimes we cannot actually cry. Although this may be alarming, we should not let this by itself worsen our feelings. Be aware and be penitent.

How does one feel sorrowful? It comes through understanding. People may hit themselves without any understanding, but sorrow cannot come without some kind of understanding. A person would not have a burning heart nor would they cry unless they have understanding. However, he might be able to shout, hit himself, and tear his shirt off without knowledge. If there is grief, then the truth of mourning is revealed. And if someone cries, they can be sure that their grief has deepened. Sorrow that reaches perfection will make us cry. Now we can see why so much crying for Imam Husayn, or even pretending to cry, is advised. I cannot remember that beating oneself on the chest, or on the head or with a chain is ever advised in the hadiths. I do not want to attempt to disapprove these things. Actually, I am not going to approve or disapprove them. We might beat ourselves on the chest too (although, in a way which we think is rational). But what is mostly advised in the hadiths? To cry for Imam Husayn. Why? Because crying shows that we have arrived at perfect grief for Imam Husayn. The Ahlul Bayt have taught us that if you cannot not cry, at least pretend to, because it will show that you are sorrowful.



Thus, the core and essence of mourning is sorrow and its perfection is revealed in crying. This can take different forms and shapes in different cultures and ages, but they do not constitute the heart of mourning. Everyone does extra things based on his own customs. Based on their customs, someone might beat himself on the chest; others might sit or walk while mourning; others might recite elegies; and yet another might read texts. People do different things based on their customs. This is not a problem whilst they are not doing anything wrong and improper. But it will not be right if they do something against the Islamic law or morals. You can show your grief in whichever way we want, but be careful that it does not violate any rules of Islam. Do it correctly.

Crying is the sign of perfection of grief. Some years ago, I saw a video clip of Ayatollah Golpaygani about the last days of his life. He was sitting on a chair while listening to a lamentation. It seemed that he had recently come from a journey to another country for treatment (although he passed away a while afterwards). He remained absolutely still, while tears were streaming down his face. I thought to myself, 'How sorrowful this man must be, to cry without moving!' We normally move to be able to cry. Usually there must be a lamentation or recital by a professional lamenter or recite. Of course, this can be good if they say nothing wrong and it can also be helpful. But I saw that he was sitting completely still and his tears were flowing. You might remember Imam Khomeini bitterly wept the moment Hujjat al-Islam Kawthari described the tragic event of Karbala.

So the important point is grief, and its perfection is manifested in crying. If we do something more than this, it might be good, but we should be unsure that everything is done in accordance with Islamic rulings. Do not consider the extras as the main point. Grief and sadness result from understanding.

***Outcomes of mourning for Imam Husayn:*** In Part I of this series, we mentioned that those who truthfully mourn for Imam Husayn can expect the praised position in the Hereafter as said in *Ziyarat Ashura*: "I ask Him

to take me to the praised position (*al-Maqam al-Mahmud*) which you [the Ahl al-Bayt] have before Him.”

So what we would achieve in this world? In a part of *Ziyarat Ashura*, we read: “O Allah, make me at this moment one of those who receive from You blessings, mercy, and forgiveness.” This is what we can achieve right now, in this world. As we are sitting, standing, or mourning, we can achieve divine blessings, mercy, and forgiveness. If we want to know whether we have shared in Imam Husayn’s hardship or not, or if we want to know whether God has accepted our mourning or not, we can reflect on whether we feel divine blessings, mercy, and forgiveness in ourselves.

**Blessings.** What happens when someone receives divine blessings (*ṣalawāt*)? The Holy Qur’an explains it as follows: “*It is He who blesses you, and so do His angels, that He may bring you out from darknesses into light (33:34).*” If God blesses us, we will leave the darknesses and move into light. Is this not the Goodly Life? The Qur’an tells us that the Goodly Life exists together with light: “*Is he who was lifeless, then We gave him life and provided him with a light by which he walks among the people, like one who dwells in a manifold darknesses which he is not leaving? To the faithless is thus presented as decorous what they have been doing.*” (6:221) Thus, you can achieve the Goodly Life if God accepts your mourning for Imam Husayn.

Another way to achieve light through divine blessings is to send salutations to the Prophet. The Prophet said, “Whoever asks from God blessings (*ṣalawāt*) for me, God will send him blessings.” God gives blessings to those who recite a salawat and as a result, we will be bestowed with light.

True mourning for Imam Husayn should give us light. We should feel like we are coming out of darkness. We should gradually feel like our perspective on everything is changing – that our hearing, speech, mind, heart, behaviour, and intentions are all changing. And this may take time since our spiritual eye is not yet open. The person whose spiritual eye is

open will instantly realize that you have changed after a true mourning for Imam Husayn.

**Mercy.** We should also be able to receive God's mercy, the main factor in running this world in which the entire creation depends on. The creation of the universe is bound up with God's mercy. There is even mercy where God punishes. The phrase "O' One whose mercy exceeds His wrath!"<sup>1</sup> does not just mean that God will have wrath although His mercy exceeds it. One meaning of it is that because of this mercy, sometimes there is wrath. In short, it can be said that nothing happens without God's mercy. If you and I sit and talk continuously about God's mercy we will cover very little of it.

Among all God's qualities in the Qur'an, God's mercy is by far the most frequently mentioned one. It is a key point that God's mercy is mentioned far more than other attributes of God. After mercy, knowledge and power are the most frequently mentioned qualities. To realize the significance of God's mercy, it suffices to reflect on the Chapter *The Opening (al-Fatiha)*. This short and concise manifesto of Islam describes the essence of Islam; it is the only chapter you cannot pray without: "There is no prayer except with the Opening" (*lā ṣalāta illā bi fātihat al-kitāb*).<sup>2</sup> In this brief account in which God wants to state the essence of everything, He begins with: "*In the Name of Allah, the All-Beneficent, the Merciful. All praise belongs to Allah, Lord of all the worlds*" and after this again states: "*The All-Beneficent, the Merciful*". If we are to give a message in a short of time, we might think of cutting redundant parts. But in this short statement, God emphasizes on His mercy four times. And this is in addition to the fact that His lordship is also because of His mercy. Thus, the repetition is because of necessity. The expression "*In the Name of Allah, the All-Beneficent, the Merciful*" is the only phrase that has been repeated 114

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<sup>1</sup> *Bihar al-Anwar*, vol. 95, p. 232.

<sup>2</sup> *Mustadrak Wasa'il al-Shi'ah*, vol. 4, p. 158.

times in the Qur'an. If we want to know God in Islam, the first aspect to know is that He is the all-Beneficent, the all-Merciful.

One function of God's mercy is that it saves and shelters humanity. The Qur'an says: "*And were it not for God's grace on you and His mercy, you would surely have been among the losers*" (2:64).<sup>1</sup>

In contrast, those who are far from divine mercy might commit sins very easily and severely. According to several verses in the Qur'an, 'curse' (*la'n*) refers to being far from God's mercy. It is frequently mentioned in various places that such people's hearts will be sealed, rendering them unable to realize the truth and eventually going astray. One verse reads: "*Indeed those who torment Allah and His Apostle are cursed by Allah in the world and the Hereafter, and He has prepared a humiliating punishment for them.*" (33:57) They will be far from God's mercy in this world; therefore, they are capable of doing any crime or mischief. When we curse the enemies of Imam Husayn, it is not us who withdraw God's mercy; it is mercy that was withdrawn from them to deserve such curses. If mercy had not been withdrawn from them, they would not have committed such hideous crimes. In the Qur'an, the People of Sabbath committed so many wrongdoings that they were cursed (5:13) and were thus transformed into monkeys. The People of Sabbath were not transformed into monkeys just in appearance; their spiritual state was worse. Thus, we should not be surprised by the acts committed by the enemies of Imam Husayn. If someone is not cursed, he would never do such things. So, we should not think that we are cursing them now, that we are informing them about their damnation. Thus, asking God to damn them indeed means that we

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<sup>1</sup> In one hadith, concerning those whom are gifted with a son or a daughter, reads: "*A son is blessing (ni'mah) and a daughter is a good deed (hasanah).*" This means that we must take care of our sons because "*Then, that day [the Day of Judgment], you will surely be questioned concerning the blessings*" (102:8); however, a daughter will take care of you and brings Allah's mercy and reward to you. Of course that does not mean that we do not need to take care of our daughters. It means that a daughter attracts the mercy of God towards your family; therefore, your chance of being safe will increase.

acknowledge that they have already been away from His mercy. It also means that humanity is still suffering from their crimes and the crimes of their allies throughout the history; therefore, we ask God to withdraw His mercy and abandon them so that no further harm occurs as a result of their actions.

In the Qur'an we read: *"Indeed those who torment God and His Apostle are cursed by God in the world and the Hereafter, and He has prepared a humiliating punishment for them."* (33:57) Indeed, one way to torment Prophet Muhammad was to hurt his children, let alone kill them.<sup>1</sup> Those who fought and then killed Imam Husayn and other members of the Ahlul Bayt on the day of Ashura were cursed.

Thus, mercy protects us and it promotes people. The divinity of God is because of mercy. It is the opposite to damnation.

As said before, a request in *Ziyarat Ashura* reads, "O Allah, make me at this moment the one who receives from You blessings, mercy, and forgiveness." Saying "and forgiveness" is another way of asking Allah to forgive us, bestow light upon us, wipe away past sins, and protect us from committing further sins. If we truly mourn for Imam Husayn, our sins would be forgiven, we would be able to better resist against our lusts and lower desires, and we would express more eagerness to pray and do good deeds. This should start at the same time we are engaged in mourning as we read, "O Allah, make me at this moment one of those who receive from You blessings, mercy, and forgiveness."

Thus, the essence of mourning is grief; there are various ways to express it, though crying is the best form. These different forms and expressions can

<sup>1</sup>According to the hadiths narrated by both Shi'a and Sunni scholars, one way to upset Prophet Muhammad was to upset his daughter. Bukhari quotes Prophet Muhammad as saying:

حَدَّثَنَا أَبُو الْوَلِيدِ، حَدَّثَنَا ابْنُ عُيَيْنَةَ، عَنْ عَمْرِو بْنِ دِينَارٍ، عَنْ ابْنِ أَبِي مُلَيْكَةَ، عَنِ الْمُسَوِّدِ بْنِ مَخْرَمَةَ، أَنَّ رَسُولَ اللَّهِ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ قَالَ: فَاطِمَةُ بَضْعَةٌ مِنِّي، فَمَنْ أَعْضَبَهَا أَعْضَبَنِي

Fatima is a part of me, and he who makes her angry, makes me angry. (*Sahih* of Bukhari, vol. 5, Book 57, Hadith No. 61)

vary from culture to culture or from age to age, but the essence must remain the same and nothing against Islamic rulings should take place in the process. For example, we cannot mourn for Imam Husayn in a way that it could harm our body or damage the reputation and image of the school of the Ahlul Bayt.

Moreover, we must not forget Imam Husayn's advice about mourning. According to Abī Makhnaf,<sup>1</sup> Imam Husayn glanced at his sister and said, 'My sister, do not let Satan take your patience.'<sup>2</sup> Then Lady Zaynab again fell unconscious and afterwards regained consciousness. Imam Husayn sprinkled water on his sister's face and told her, "My sister, seek piety and have self-control through the assurance God has given to the patient ... My sister, I want you swear [notice the Imam makes his sister swear an oath] and be loyal to what I say: When I pass away, do not scrape your face and tear your clothes."

However, there is nothing wrong with crying. Imam Ridha told Ibn Shabīb, "Whenever you cry, [you should] cry for Imam Husayn."<sup>3</sup> No one criticizes crying; indeed, it is highly recommended. Unfortunately, some mourning sessions include inappropriate customs that should be avoided. Anything contrary to what Imam Husayn told his sister is wrong. Lady Zaynab is Umm al-Masā'ib [the mother of hardships], although Imam Husayn asked her to swear not to do such things. No further proof is necessary. Whoever they may be, no-one should do what Imam Husayn prohibited his sister from doing.

Such actions are unjustifiable; those who commit to such customs may not realize what they are doing and thus do not feel responsible. Before every

<sup>1</sup> *Abī Makhnaf's Maqatal* – which is the oldest and perhaps the most authentic chronology

<sup>2</sup> This is following the event where Imam Husayn recited the poem:

كَمْ لَكَ بِالْإِشْرَاقِ وَالْأَصِيلِ	يَا دَهْرُ أَفْ لَكَ مِنْ خَلِيلِ
وَالدَّهْرُ لَا يَقْنَعُ بِالْبَدِيلِ	مَنْ صَاحِبٌ أَوْ طَالِبٌ قَتِيلِ
وَكُلُّ حَيٍّ سَالِكٍ سَبِيلِ	وَإِنَّمَا الْأَمْرُ إِلَى الْجَلِيلِ

and Lady Zaynab fell unconscious and then she awoke.

<sup>3</sup> *Bihar al-Anwar*, vol. 44, p. 285 & vol. 98, p. 102.

gathering – and perhaps one should leave during a session while being overcome with grief – we are to reflect, perform ablution (*wudu*), perform two units (*rak'ats*), and be conscious of our actions. God's says regarding prayer: "...*Do not approach prayer when you are intoxicated...*" (4:43) indicates that we are expected to think before we speak and act. Prayer is the pillar of religion. The verse continues: "...*until you know what you are saying...*" (4:43). Thus, we are expected to pray but at the same time we must make sure that we understand what we are saying, and this requires awareness. When I'm not conscious of my speech and feel my emotions are overpowering me, I should step down from the pulpit. Though it is alright to be overwhelmed with grief, the speaker should end the speech and recitation once he feels he might say or do something wrong, such as tearing his dress or injuring himself. He should not use the excuse of being overcome by his emotions to validate saying or doing unjustifiable things during a normal state of mind. We can't give ourselves the excuse by thinking it is done with pure intentions, for surely Lady Zaynab's intentions were pure, although Imam Husayn still asked her to swear not to cry in an inappropriate manner.

Therefore, mourning for Imam Husayn will bring light to our lives and bestow on us the Goodly Life. Though some say love for Imam Husayn has made them mad, love and mourning for Imam Husayn should actually render "mad" people intelligent, intelligent people wiser, help them cure the sick and bring humanity back to those who do not live a human life. Devotion to God and love for His true servants bring light, wisdom, knowledge, and life.

Imam Husayn is a great Divine blessing bestowed on humanity by God and we are responsible to refrain from anything that saddens Imam Mahdi. As Shi'as, we must not do anything that would displease or confuse a non-Shi'a person when he attends our gathering. If we are heedless about this and other inappropriate actions, we might dim the light of Imam Husayn. The light of Imam Husayn must reach every corner. Why are we becoming like veils covering that light?

