

Re-centering Our Lives Around the Hijri Calendar: Lessons of Muharram, Ashura, and Divine Victory



Introduction: Why the Hijri Calendar Matters

As the Islamic month of Muharram and the new Hijri year begins, it is important to reflect on the profound significance of the Hijri lunar calendar, a system ordained by Allah ﷻ. The Hijri calendar is not a human invention but a divine structure that Allah ﷻ has established within His ﷻ eternal order. This calendar consists of 12 lunar months, as mentioned in the Qur'an, in Surah At-Tawbah, where Allah ﷻ says:

إِنَّ عِدَّةَ الشُّهُورِ عِنْدَ اللَّهِ اثْنَا عَشَرَ شَهْرًا فِي كِتَابِ اللَّهِ يَوْمَ خَلَقَ السَّمَوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضَ

Indeed, the number of months ordained by Allah is twelve—in Allah's Record since the day He created the heavens and the earth (9:36)

Furthermore, the twelve-month structure is rooted in Allah's ﷻ divine wisdom and order, established at the beginning of creation, reflecting His ﷻ eternal and unalterable knowledge and authority over all that exists. This sacred calendar is a reflection of Allah's ﷻ perfect creation and serves as a blueprint for time itself, guiding us to live in harmony with His ﷻ commands.

The Hijri calendar is more than a tool for counting days; it is a sacred framework that guides our lives, shaping our identity, strengthening our community, and anchoring our acts of worship. A fundamental aspect of the Hijri calendar is that it calls for us to revolve our lives around what Allah ﷻ has legislated. It urges us to think deeply about how we structure our days and months in accordance with what pleases Him ﷻ.

Centering the Hijri calendar in our homes and lives enables us to uphold our Ibadah in a way that is directly connected to the Sunnah of the Prophet ﷺ. By following the Hijri calendar, we become more aware of the specific days and months in which the Prophet ﷺ performed particular acts of worship, allowing us to emulate his practices and draw closer to his way of life.

Following the lunar calendar, unlike the solar calendar, helps ensure that acts of worship such as fasting are fair and balanced for all Muslims. Since the lunar months shift through seasons over time, the month of Ramadan does not stay fixed in one season. Instead, it gradually moves across different times of the year, so that whether you are in Sweden or South Africa, the experience of fasting is fair in terms of day length and climate. This means that the difficulty or ease of fasting varies from year to year across different regions. With the lunar calendar, the seasons rotate approximately every 32 or 33 years, so that over time, Muslims in different climates experience fasting under a variety of conditions. The same applies to Hajj, which is performed at different times within the solar year, allowing Muslims to undertake this pillar across diverse climatic conditions and further emphasizing the fairness embedded within the Hijri calendar.

Moreover, the Hijri calendar keeps our hearts deeply connected to the Seerah, the history and sacred timeline of the completed revelation of our religion. Allah ﷻ says in the Qur'an,

الْيَوْمَ أَكْمَلْتُ لَكُمْ دِينَكُمْ وَأَتَمَمْتُ عَلَيْكُمْ نِعْمَتِي وَرَضِيتُ لَكُمُ الْإِسْلَامَ دِينًا



“And today I have perfected for you your religion and completed My favor upon you and have chosen Islam as your religion” (5:3)

This profound verse was revealed on the day of Arafah during the month of Dhul-Hajj, a day of immense significance. This verse reminds us that every month and every day within this blessed calendar bears witness to Allah ﷻ promise and completion of His ﷻ favor upon us. By centering our lives and our homes around the Hijri calendar, we draw closer to our religion and better understand the wisdom behind its order.

The Month of Muharram

It is important to note that the actual month in which the Prophet ﷺ observed the Hijrah was in Rabi' al-Awal. However, during the caliphate of 'Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb (d. 23 AH), through ijtihad and mutual consensus among the Sahaba, 'Umar (RA) designated the month of Muharram as the first month of the Hijri calendar. They chose Muharram as the beginning, because it was considered the month of separation between truth and falsehood. This decision was not arbitrary; it was made after careful deliberation, reflecting the collective effort of the companions to lay the foundation for a system rooted in the establishment of the Muslim community. The month of Muharram, therefore, commemorates the Hijrah, the migration of Prophet Muhammad ﷺ from Mecca to Medina in 622 CE. This moment in history marks not only the escape from oppression but also the foundation of the Islamic state and the rise of Islam as a complete way of life.

This Hijrah was not only a means of refuge for the Prophet ﷺ and his followers from oppression but also a foundational milestone where Islam flourished in a new land. It symbolizes sacrifice, hope, and unwavering trust in Allah ﷻ in the midst of uncertainties. The Hijrah teaches us that sacrifice is a sign of virtue, and the migration of Prophet Muhammad ﷺ from Mecca to Medina is the ultimate example of such sacrifice. The Prophet ﷺ and his companions left their homes, possessions, and comfort to follow Allah's ﷻ command and establish a just community. Their willingness to sacrifice worldly attachments for the sake of divine obedience highlights that true virtue is exemplified through such acts of selflessness.

The Hijrah reminds us that true virtue is found not only in the physical act of migrating but also in leaving behind the desires and temptations that distract us from His ﷻ obedience. The greatest Hijrah for every believer is leaving the nafs (ego) and worldly attachments behind and seeking Allah's ﷻ pleasure above all else. The Prophet ﷺ said:

عَنْ أَبِي هُرَيْرَةَ قَالَ: قَالَ رَسُولُ اللَّهِ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ: أَفْضَلُ الصَّلَاةِ بَعْدَ الصَّلَاةِ الْمَكْتُوبَةِ الصَّلَاةُ فِي جَوْفِ اللَّيْلِ، وَأَفْضَلُ الصَّيَامِ بَعْدَ شَهْرِ رَمَضَانَ صِيَامُ شَهْرِ اللَّهِ الْمُحَرَّمِ



The Messenger of Allah, peace and blessings be upon him, said, "The best prayer after the prescribed prayers is a prayer offered in the middle of the night. The best fast after the month of Ramadan is fasting in the month of Allah, al-Muharram."
(Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim 1163)

This signifies that fasting during Muharram, especially on the White Days and the Day of Ashura, is an act of sacrifice and obedience, a way to leave behind one's desires and to seek Allah's ﷻ reward. During this blessed month, the rewards for good deeds are multiplied, and sins are magnified in their expiation, urging us to renew our commitment towards the Akhirah by controlling our love for worldly pursuits. Hence, fasting on the White Days, 13th, 14th, and 15th of each lunar month is a practice that embodies this sacrifice. It involves leaving behind food, drink, and desires not only for physical discipline but as an act of devotion and trust in Allah ﷻ reward. Similarly, fasting on the Day of Ashura reminds us of the support Allah ﷻ granted Musa (AS), a day when our acts of obedience and sacrifice align us with the prophetic legacy of surrender and reliance on Allah's ﷻ.

The Wisdom Behind Ashura: Remembering the Past, Embracing Justice Today

Ashura is a day that encapsulates Allah's ﷻ support for His servants; it is a day that reminds us that victory is not contingent solely on worldly success or failure but is primarily connected to the state of the heart and its strength in taqwa, sabr, and righteous actions.

When we remember Ashura, we recall how Allah ﷻ saved Musa (AS) and the Children of Israel from Pharaoh's tyranny, and how Prophet Nuh (AS) endured the flood through steadfast obedience. These stories teach timeless lessons of resistance, sacrifice, patience, and reliance on Allah ﷻ. They illustrate that truth always prevails, and that victory is inevitable for those who uphold justice with sincerity, humility, and perseverance.

Fasting on Ashura is a means of expressing gratitude (Shukr) to Allah ﷻ for His divine mercy, victories, and support. It is an act of humbleness, a way to show that we acknowledge His ﷻ favors and seek His forgiveness. This act serves as a powerful reminder of Allah's ﷻ support for the prophets and underscores the importance of reflecting on His ﷻ mercy and assistance in all periods of hardship.

Ashura's Lessons for the Ummah Today

Ashura remains a fundamental day in our remembrance of Allah's ﷻ support and the victories He grants to His righteous servants. It is a day to reflect on sacrifice, steadfastness, and the importance of upholding the truth against oppression. The day of Ashura reminds us that Islam experienced stages of low and high, victory and defeat. The ups and downs of our history help us make sense of the reality of this worldly life (dunya), reaffirming that with perseverance and righteous action, triumph will inevitably follow. This day helps us to draw lessons of resilience and unity, strengthening our resolve to fight for justice, especially in the face of ongoing oppression.

وَتِلْكَ الْأَيَّامُ نُدَاوِلُهَا بَيْنَ النَّاسِ وَلِيَعْلَمَ اللَّهُ الَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا وَيَتَّخِذَ مِنْكُمْ شُهَدَاءَ ۗ وَاللَّهُ لَا يُحِبُّ الظَّالِمِينَ

وَلِيُمَحِّصَ اللَّهُ الَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا وَيَمْحَقَ الْكَافِرِينَ



“We alternate these days ‘of victory and defeat’ among people so that Allah may reveal the ‘true’ believers, choose martyrs from among you—and Allah does not like the wrongdoers and distinguish the ‘true’ believers and destroy the disbelievers”.

(3:140-141)

The Stories of Victory and Resilience

The stories of Musa (AS) and Nuh (AS) stand as timeless reminders that ultimate victory and support come solely from Allah ﷻ. The Prophets (AS) did not rely on their own strength or worldly power but placed their trust entirely in Allah's ﷻ. Musa (AS) and his followers, when confronted with Pharaoh's tyranny, faced imminent doom as they reached the Red Sea, overwhelmed and powerless. Yet, Musa (AS) did not rely on human means but turned to Allah ﷻ, trusting that He would support them. Allah ﷻ commanded him: “Strike the sea with your staff,” and in obedience, Musa (AS) struck, and the seas parted. The victory was solely Allah's ﷻ, evident in the miraculous parting of the waters and the drowning of Pharaoh's army.

Similarly, Nuh (AS) endured years of rejection, mockery, and hardship, his people refused to follow his message for decades. Despite their opposition, he remained obedient and steadfast, trusting that Allah's ﷻ support would come. When Allah ﷻ commanded him to build the Ark, he did so without knowing how or when the flood would come. When Allah ﷻ decree came, Allah ﷻ sent the rain and the waters of the flood, and Nuh (AS) and the believers were saved.

These stories emphasize that:

- *Victory is solely in the hands of Allah ﷻ.*
- *Prophets (AS) relied on His support, despite not knowing the timing or the outcome.*
- *Their perseverance and trust in Allah ﷻ assured their success.*
- *Divine support is granted to those who persevere in faith and righteousness.*

This same principle is alive today in the ongoing struggle of the oppressed in our Ummah. Just as Musa (AS) and Nuh (AS) trusted Allah's ﷻ support amid their trials, the Palestinian people, and indeed all those fighting for justice, must similarly rely on Allah ﷻ as it is He who created the heavens and the earth, and it is He ﷻ who has promised support to His ﷻ righteous servants. Our trust must be in Allah ﷻ alone, because He is the one who turns the tides of history and bestows support upon His ﷻ righteous servants.

As we reflect on these stories and lessons, we are also reminded on the day of Ashura of one of the most unfortunate events in our history; the martyrdom of Imam al-Husayn (RA), the beloved grandson of our Prophet ﷺ. This is a moment of immense sorrow in our history that could not have occurred had Muslims shed aside their differences and realized that unity is more important than all other banners raised at the time. For the ummah, the loss of Imam Husayn (RA) was a tragic loss and an eternal lessons that resonates with us today.

The Victory of Palestine and Reflections of Martyrdom

Reflecting on Ashura today, and reflecting on the current realities of the ummah, Palestine embodies the ongoing struggle that echoes the stories during Muharram and Ashura. The martyrdom, resistance, and resilience of Palestinians are directly linked to the themes of divine victory and trust. Though the struggle is long and arduous, the recurring message of Ashura is that ultimate victory belongs to Allah ﷻ, and truth always prevails. Fasting during Ashura symbolizes gratitude, resilience, and trust in Allah ﷻ plan. It is a call to remain patient, to resist unjust forces, and to trust that His ﷻ support will manifest in ways that will lead to victory and justice.

وَلَا تَحْسَبَنَّ الَّذِينَ قُتِلُوا فِي سَبِيلِ اللَّهِ أَمْوَاتًا بَلْ أَحْيَاءٌ عِنْدَ رَبِّهِمْ يُزْرَقُونَ



*“And never think of those who have been killed in the cause of Allāh as dead.
Rather, they are alive with their Lord, receiving provision. (3:169)*



مَا يَجِدُ الشَّهِيدُ مِنْ مَسِّ الْقَتْلِ إِلَّا كَمَا يَجِدُ أَحَدُكُمْ مِنْ مَسِّ الْقَرْصَةِ

“The martyr does not feel the pain of being killed except as one of you feels the pinch of an insect bite.” [Jami’ al-Tirmidhī #1668]

This day reminds us that at all times and in every place, whether facing tyranny in Gaza or elsewhere, the relentless pursuit of justice is ultimately supported by Allah ﷻ. It also teaches us that regardless of hardships, a believer’s attitude should be rooted in gratitude and patience, trusting that every outcome is good for those who seek Allah’s ﷻ pleasure and remain steadfast in obedience.



عَجَبًا لِأَمْرِ الْمُؤْمِنِ إِنَّ أَمْرَهُ كُلَّهُ خَيْرٌ وَلَيْسَ ذَاكَ لِأَحَدٍ إِلَّا لِلْمُؤْمِنِ إِنْ أَصَابَتْهُ سَرَاءٌ شَكَرَ فَكَانَ خَيْرًا لَهُ وَإِنْ أَصَابَتْهُ ضَرَاءٌ صَبَرَ فَكَانَ خَيْرًا لَهُ

“Wondrous is the affair of the believer for there is good for him in every matter and this is not the case with anyone except the believer. If he is happy, then he thanks Allah and thus there is good for him, and if he is harmed, then he shows patience and thus there is good for him”. (Sahih Muslim)

Conclusion: Centering Our Lives on Islamic Values

As we reflect on the stories of Musa (AS), Nuh (AS), and the lessons of Ashura, we recognize that these narratives transcend time; they are living teachings that call us to align our lives with divine principles of patience, justice, resistance, and faith. Re-centering our lives around the Hijri calendar nurtures a natural reminder and guidance for how we organize and live our lives. Each year, Muharram and Ashura serve as powerful reminders that truth and justice will prevail, and that divine support is promised to those who uphold righteousness. So, as we mark Muharram and Ashura each year, let us be reminded that divine victory is not merely about worldly conquest, but about embodying the virtues that guarantee Allah ﷻ support. In doing so, we connect our personal and collective struggles to the divine plan—a plan rooted in justice, mercy, and victory for those who trust in Allah ﷻ.

May we be inspired to carry these lessons into our daily lives, within our homes, in our commitment to helping develop our communities, resisting injustice, and trusting that Allah ﷻ support is always near. It is upon us to center and live our lives on the True message to attain that nearness.