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The Spiritual Importance of the Arbaeen Pilgrimage and the Pervasive Silence of the International Media for This Huge Community

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ABSTRACT

SUBJECT AND OBJECTIVES: Despite the many uprisings in human history, the revolution of Imam Hussein and his companions is a key example of the Islamic revivalism that has retained its distinct characteristics and reformist features throughout the ages. The philosophy of millions marching to Karbala every year is in commemoration of Ashura Day. In addition to reflecting humanity's thirst for freedom and the populations outrage against social injustice, oppression and tyranny, it also represents the spiritual and practical aspects of love and loyalty to the Master of Martyrs who through his pure blood and the sacrifices of his beloved ones, revived the true spirit of Islam.
METHOD AND FINDING: This idea of pilgrims visiting Imam Hussein's sanctified physical shrine has been extensively covered in anthropological and social studies. It has also prompted international observers to closely monitor this series of events which are not present at such a massive scale in other parts of the world. Despite the fact that this visit is regarded as the largest mass gathering on a global magnitude, we find that some are attempting in various ways to oppose these great religious rituals and wipe away the message of this visit in all its dimensions. For example, some secularism has criticised the march to Imam Hussein as they believe it disrupts society and imprisons many people's lives. They also have the notion that civilization and growth are built on a foundation of materialistic means, with morality and spirituality views having no place in this society. Also tend to notice that the International media purposefully seeks to ignore these annual visits and this global event, with them seeking to cover and spotlight every news story in various fields and different regions of the world, no matter how minor it may seem.
CONCLUSION: It is necessary for all of us, in our respective capacities, to spread the message: 'Who is Hussain?', to globalise this religious and social event as one of the most important occurrences in the world while also working on the cultural building and reconstruction of modern Islamic civilization as well as to research the various aspects of this great human and peaceful review centred on the Arbaeen Pilgrimage.

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Introduction

This article reflects the deep love and spiritual connection to Imam Hussein and highlights the secret of millions of people renewing and reviving allegiance and loyalty to the Master of Martyrs every year in Karbala. The Pilgrimage of Imam Hussein's Arbaeen with its political, spiritual, moral and social significance provides a platform for the world's free people to raise the word of truth in opposition to injustice and tyrants and to stand up for what is right, no matter the cost.

The Holy Prophet is reported to have said:

"The best Jihad is a word of truth before a tyrannical unjust ruler". (Ref: Robson, 1952)

After seeing that the government's overriding goals were incompatible with Islamic teachings and that the political and social climate was getting worse, Imam Hussain took action. He stood up at that time because he was aware of the excruciating hardships that the Ummah was experiencing and was determined to fulfil his religious duties as the duly chosen leader who might restore Islamic principles.

Imam Hussain served as a leading example of how to sacrifice one's self, possessions, family and social standing in the battle against oppression and injustice. His revolution

turned out to be a clash between truth and falsehood. His timeless lessons have inspired generations of people all over the world and his principles have remained alive for centuries. His insurgency, movement and goals have had a lasting impact on the Muslim empire's conscience and awareness.

Robert Manias, a Hungarian academic and scholar, claims that Imam Hussain's revolution was for all of humanity and not just for a certain group. In his words, the experience of Imam Hussein is a global experience that is not limited to a doctrine, religion or country, but for the entire world and everyone seeking revolution. He urged Muslims everywhere to follow the path of Imam Hussein.

Historical Origins of Arbaeen Pilgrimage

Every year on the twentieth of Safar, the forty-day anniversary of Imam Hussein's martyrdom is commemorated. One of the notable Ahl al-Bayt companions, Jaber ibn Abdullah Ansari, is regarded as being the first to pay homage at the holy graves of Imam Hussein and his companions. Following the Battle of Karbala, Imam Zayn al-Abidin and the other survivors were taken as prisoners to Yazid ibn Muawiah in Damascus until they were eventually allowed to return to Medina. When Yazid appointed Numan ibn

Bashir to transport the widows and children to Medina, the women requested that he also take them to Karbala. When they arrived at the scene of Imam Hussain's slaughtering, they discovered Jaber ibn Abdullah Ansari, a companion of the Prophet along with a group of Banu Hashem. They stayed for three days, weeping and wailing until their voices became croaky hoarse and their hearts broke. *(Majlisi, 1983, Vol. 27: 45&146)*

It should be noted that what distinguishes Shiites from others is their interest in performing cemetery visits on a regular basis, beginning with Pilgrimage the grave of the Prophet and the pure Imams particularly Imam Hussein. The imams encouraged Shiites to engage in spiritual worship because it brings them closer to God Almighty and strengthens their love for the Prophet Muhammad and the Fourteen Infallibles.

However, some other religious people believed that this type of activity were against Muhammad Sharia and Islamic teachings and that visiting cemeteries and such sites was nothing more than a form of ritual that the Islamic faith forbade.

There have been many hadiths from the Ahl al-Bayt school of thought regarding the virtue of Pilgrimage the Arbaeen of Imam Hussein, including one from Imam Hasan Askari, who stated:

"The signs of a believer are five: Fifty prayers, Arbaeen Pilgrimage, wearing the ring in the right hand, prostrating in the ground, Saying loudly the name of Allah, (Bismillah Rahman Rahim)". (Hor Amili, 1990, Vol. 10: 373)

Also, Imam Sadiq stated: *"Whoever wishes to be in the vicinity of the Prophet, as well as next to Ali and Fatima, should not leave Imam Hussain's pilgrimage". (Ref: Ibid: 331-339)*

In general, numerous narrations in Islamic literature discuss the spiritual advantages of performing specific rites and supplications; But the most notable deed is the Pilgrimage to Imam Hussain's actual grave on Arbaeen.

Objectives and dimensions of the Arbaeen Pilgrimage

The Arbaeen Pilgrimage has a variety of meanings and objectives: spiritual, moral, social, educational, political and economic. It also has consequences, which are significant to the cultural and spiritual development of Islamic society.

Pilgrimage Imam Hussein's tomb was emphasized by the Imams in many narrations which later developed into a sacred ritual. They also discussed the benefits and the huge reward Allah would bestow upon anyone who performs Imam Hussain Pilgrimage.

The famous Islamic philosopher Mir-Damad talked about the significance of Pilgrimage and stated that even Fakher al-Din Razi, a Muslim theologian and scholar known as an imam or teacher of the skeptics, condones the concept of Pilgrimage. He mentioned an interesting point showing the degree to which Pilgrimage is accepted in various cultures. He said one of Aristoteles' students used to hold discussions next to his teacher's grave when a difficult issue arose which helped him out a lot. This happened because there is a spiritual connection between those who are physically alive and the dead. *(Shomali, 2022, Part. 2)*

In the following, some spiritual, social and political dimensions of Arbaeen pilgrimage are mentioned:

1. Spiritual Dimensions

The question that always arises is why someone would travel such a long distance to Pilgrimage a shrine, enduring all of the hardships along the way. What is the secret that attracts millions of people from all over the world? Why is there so much interest in Imam Hussein? What is the basic philosophy behind this?

The philosophy of walking in the Arbaeen of Imam Hussein is a great indication of the Pilgrims faith and pure love for God Almighty, the Prophets, the infallible

Imams especially Imam Hussein and Imam Reza.

The Holy Prophet said:

"One to whom Allah grants the love of the imams from my Ahl al-Bayt has attained the goodness of this world and the hereafter". (Majlisi, 1983, Vol. 27: 78)

It is love that motivates the Pilgrim, regardless of their location, to walk long distances, overcome all obstacles and reach the shrine of Imam Hussein. It is love that makes a person serve the Pilgrims of Imam Hussein regardless of their sect or religion. It is love that transcends self-limitation and achieves a spiritual connection with the Martyrs of Karbala.

The most visible manifestations of the people's love for Imam Hussein are feeding Pilgrims, treating them with respect, providing comfort, and encouraging them to Pilgrimage the holy shrine again.

This love and giving spirit drive thousands of people to donate blood on the tenth of Muharram in order to save the lives of those who are in need.

In recent years, the culture of donating blood on Muharram days has become more common in some Western countries, with the number of people increasing each year. This positive act prompted the National Health Service in the United Kingdom to

speak about it, as stated: The Imam Hussain Blood Donation Partnership is still the most successful Muslim blood donation partnership in the United Kingdom. *(NHS Blood and Transplant, 2022)*

Even the Guardian newspaper covered this historic event. According to Who Is Hussain, a social justice organisation, more donations from Black, Asian and minority ethnic (BAME) communities are needed as NHS stocks dwindle. *(The Guardian, 2022)*

The volunteer-driven initiative is being directed by the Imam Hussain Blood Donation Campaign, one of the nation's oldest Muslim blood donation organisations and Who Is Hussain UK working with NHS Blood and Transplant.

The people's love of Hussein that drives a lot of individuals around the world to take part in the Global Blood Heroes, a campaign initiated by "who is Hussein". Donations began in New Zealand and ended in America in about 250 locations collecting approximately 50,000 people's blood over 20 centuries all in honour of Imam Hussein who gave his life to reform Islam and oppose the oppression of the then-tyrant ruler Yazid ibn Muawiah.

Muntazir Rai, Director of "Who is Hussein" said: Thousands of people around the world responded to the call to be a Global Blood Hero and save lives and

beat a world record. He added: "Giving blood donation is a universal act that unites people around the world. *(PR Newswire, 2022)*

Hussein's love is what teaches people the culture of giving. Both the Ashura Project, which is an organisation in Dearborn, Michigan and "Who Is Hussein" USA organise food drives, charity events, and other activities for young people in order to spread the message of compassion and unity. *(AAN, 2017)*

People carry love and peace to Imam Hussein, the place where one can feel the highest level of spiritual satisfaction. As shown below, there is a steady increase of Pilgrims coming to the shrine of Imam Hussain. *(Alkafeel Global Network, 2022)*

Table 1: Official Annual Count of Hosseini Arbaeen Pilgrims

2016	11.2 Million
2017	13.8 Million
2018	15.3 Million
2019	15.2 Million
2020	14.5 Million
2021	16.3 Million
2022	21.1 Million

2. Social Dimensions

The Arbaeen Pilgrimage aid in the strengthening of social relations between people of various colours, beliefs, races, ages, and gender-people that help foreigners coming from abroad develop a strong

connection. This is a blessed service that everyone loves to do with sincerity and respect for each other despite there being no materialistic or worldly reward.

These Arbaeen Pilgrimage greatly contribute to strengthening the spirit of equality that the Islamic religion calls for, as well as eliminating the cultural and racial discrimination that has become prevalent in our modern society.

The intellectual balance that Imam Hussein managed to embody was able to eliminate all racial divisions among the millions of people making their way to Karbala. In these crowds, we can find people of different races, nationalities, religions and classes being treated equally with all of them having access to the same facilities in terms of clothing, food, etc.

The most important things that one can be exposed to during the Arbaeen Pilgrimage are unlimited moral and material generosity. We see volunteers of all ages working with social and cultural organisations, as well as spiritual giving. This is the idealised representation of social unity, which international institutions and other organisations have failed to realise.

3. Political Dimensions

God Almighty said in his Holy Book:

> *"And do not incline toward those who do wrong, or you will be*

touched by the fire, and you would not have other than Allah any protectors; then you would not be helped". (Quran, 11: 113)

In the English language, the incline means to remain silent about something. The incline in this noble verse refers to the tendency to defend wrongdoers, justify their actions and deeds, and remain silent about them.

When asked why the Umayyads had such presence and power, Imam Sadiq said:

"If someone had stood up to the Umayyads and opposed their views, they would not have robbed us of our rights". (Majlisi, 1983, Vol. 93: 238)

The Quranic verses and honourable hadiths show that obedience should be shown towards the rightful leader and not to the oppressor because accepting wrongdoing for a long period of time distorts the human instinct and causes a person to be satisfied and content with the oppression.

In addition to their ideological and religious role in directing the people, the Prophets and Imams had a role in confronting dictators and their beliefs, so they had a giant role in preserving Islamic principles and defending the Prophet's Sharia by standing up to tyrants.

For example; Abraham confronted Nimrud, Moses faced Pharaoh and Imam

Ali and his son Imam Hassan faced Muawiya and fought against his corruption. This leads to Imam Hussein and his blessed revolution to revive the Islamic law and save the people from corruption, humiliation and mortification.

Imam Hussein revolution is a never-ending school from which we learn many lessons and which every oppressed people on the earth emulates. It is a message that inspired all of humanity with divinity.

Mahatma Gandhi, who liberated India from the colonial regime, addressed his people by saying:

> *I have carefully read the life of Imam Hussein, the great martyr of Islam, and paid enough attention to the pages of Karbala, it has become clear to me that if India wants to become a victorious country, they must follow the instructions of Imam Hussein. (Gandhi, 1927)*

The Pervasive Silence of the International Med for Arbaeen Pilgrimage

The benefits of Arbaeen and the significant gathering that takes place in Karbala are generally ignored by the International media. How can a small demonstration in London, a march of a few hundred in Hong Kong, or a small gathering in Russia be covered while a blind eye is turned towards the largest human gathering of men, women and children?

Asks Syed Mahdi Modarresi in a harsh critique of the

International media's politicised handling of the Husseini rites. He asserted that if a few hundred anti-immigration protesters demonstrate in London and garner media attention, a pro-democracy march in Hong Kong or an anti-Putin rally in Russia will also receive equal airtime. But a crowd of 20 million protesting obstinately against injustice and terrorism somehow fails to even appear on the TV news ticker. *(Modarresi, 2014)*

For instance, The Independent, as the most famous newspaper in Britain, described the Arbaeen Pilgrimage as the largest and riskiest religious gathering ever, writing; One of the biggest and riskiest pilgrimages in history is currently underway. *(Dearden, 2014)*

It pointed out that the Pilgrimage of Hussein known as the Arbaeen, is five times more than the Muslim Pilgrims to Mecca in terms of the number of Pilgrims; And it continues: It is also more significant than the Hindu festival (Kom Mela), which only occurs once every three years, as the forty days are repeated each year and last for a number of days.

The BBC newspaper headline read: Huge number of Shia Muslim pilgrims gathered in the Iraqi city of Karbala at the climax of a Key festival, despite threats of violence. *(BBC News, 2014)*

The International Media turns a blind eye toward the

positive effects of the Arbaeen while they brainwash the ignorant audience to draw connections between this occasion and danger by emphasising the danger and violence that endanger the lives of millions of people traveling to Karbala. However, they could not disprove the fact that a massive number of people would travel there every year.

Madrasi said the Arbaeen Pilgrimage Husseini should be entered into the Guinness Book of World Records under a number of categories, including the largest human gathering, the longest dining table, the largest number of volunteers in one event and other fascinating and thrilling things.

According to the British journalist Emily Garthwaite, International media continue to overlook the Arbaeen Pilgrimage, and question how more than 25 million people make their way to Karbala each year. She was at Najaf Airport with a group of Iraqi and Iranian photographers getting ready to make a documentary on the Arbaeen Pilgrimage for someone who passed away 1400 years ago and the International media did not consider it a ground-breaking issue.

There is no political or hidden agenda to Arbaeen she says, it is just a religious but more importantly, a humanistic commitment to social justice and empowerment. *(Garthwaite, 2014)*

She notes that the massive media blackout on the Arbaeen Pilgrimage was a reason that inspired her to film it. Emily admits it was very frustrating and almost painful how surprised people would be if they reacted to the positive narrative she was showing to the world.

British journalist Charlie Metcalfe, who was participating in the Arbaeen walk for the first time, discussed the idea of Imam Hussain Holy Shrine with the International Media Centre as follows: Unfortunately, the International media focuses on a different side of Iraq and turns a blind eye towards all of this. I believe if more people knew about Arbaeen, they would want to participate and experience the journey.

According to Metcalfe, the Arbaeen Pilgrimage is underreported in the West and few people are aware of this important yearly humanitarian event.

When she visited Iraq for the Arbaeen Pilgrimage last year, political analyst and author Catherine Shakda, based in London, stressed how important Arbaeen is for fostering unity among Muslims.

We observe that International media and some Western and Arab regimes continue to use media blackouts or deploy them in ways that distort the purpose behind Arbaeen; Even when the issue is addressed, the International media tries to

destroy the historical philosophy behind Imam Hussein which indicates why the media upset to see the huge number of people from all across the globe that come and gather at Karbala each year. Hence it is our job to spread the message Of Imam Hussein that the International media is so scared of and tries so hard to shut down.

Inspiration from the Revolution of Imam Hussein

The immortal Husseini revolution is evident that the battle of Karbala was and continues to be the light and hope for all the people who are oppressed or living in injustice. Imam Hussein revolted for these ideals and beliefs. It is a revolution against oppression and tyranny in which numerous leaders, intellectuals and people were impressed by and surprised by how much their perspective was changed when they read about the event.

In a documentary, a well-known Hollywood actor Morgan Freeman, who has won numerous awards over the course of his more than five-decade career, including an Oscar and a Golden Globe, discussed the series of events that resulted in Imam Hussein's martyrdom.

He said: For centuries, men and women hear their story, I mean those who want to sacrifice themselves for their faith because they believe God chose them, And the name of one of them is Hussein ibn Ali,

and every year millions of Muslims around the world remember his sacrifice to keep his religion on the right path.

In the 2016 documentary "The Story of GOD", Morgan released these statements and introduces Imam Hussein as follows: Christians believe that God chose Jesus to show a new path for Judaism that fell under the rule of the Romans; Shi'ism in Islam is something similar. Its origin goes back to the death of a person named Hussain ibn Ali.

Finally, He concludes: Christians hold weekly ceremonies for Issa's death at an intimate and holy gathering, and Shiites hold one in a year; the funeral ceremony. This is the person they chose, who stood up for Islamic principles, no matter what the price. *(Freeman, 2022)*

Morgan wonders why the Shia community holds Hussein in such high regard. Why do they continue to commemorate his martyrdom after 1400 years? He travels to London to learn more about the Ashura tragedy. While there, he visits the Khoei Foundation Mosque, where he hears from the speakers and interacts with worshippers. He said that the star seemed quite interested in commemorating. *(Freeman, 2016)*

Edward Browne, a famous orientalist and professor of Arabic who studied in the

University of Cambridge, describes the horrible events that befell Imam Hussain at Karbala in the following way: Is it possible to find someone who learns of the tragedy at Karbala without also being overcome with sorrow and grief? Even non-Muslims are unable to deny the morality and spirituality of this Islamic holy war.

The European pastor and philosopher Thomas Masaryk says: Although our priests likewise use the sufferings of Christ to touch people's hearts, you won't find in Christ's followers the same passion and intensity as you will in Hussein's supporters, who symbolise nothing more than a blade of straw in front of a huge mountain. *(Kerbela, 2022)*

Gandhi, an Indian leader also took lessons from Hussein and his great revolution one being that he should be loving and kind until he achieves victory. The Vatican profited from Imam Hussein and even left a special section for the research of Imam Hussein's revolution.

Upon being questioned, the library director said: We saw in Hussein an attractive and effective way of evangelism that we do not have in our method of evangelisation. These studies have been conducted in an effort to better understand Hussein's personality.

Imam Hussein rebelled against oppression and

submission in favour of freedom and humanity. His movement is widespread and has inspired millions to resist oppression and injustice. It has been successful in inspiring feelings of sacrifice and martyrdom while elevating the message of truth to achieve lofty objectives.

Conclusion

God Almighty said in his Glorious Book:

> *"And from among you there should be a party who invite to good and enjoin what is right and forbid the wrong, and these it is that shall be successful". (Quran, 3: 104)*

Justice, freedom and reformation allines with the true principles of Islam that were the principal goals of Imam Hussein's revolution against the life of deceit and corruption that the civilisations at the time were living. This revolution stands out as a movement that is full of spiritual, moral, and religious values that, if put into practice in our own life and philosophy, will be brought down to our children and offspring.

Therefore, as true believers in this revolution and its message, we must not see the harmful events unfolding upon us and sit by idly. Instead, we should make use of occasions like Arbaeen Pilgrimage and other holy days to reform and spread the message of Imam Hussein. For this reason,

it is necessary to Pilgrimage him with a firm understanding of his sacred position so that we can promote his ideals throughout the entire world especially during this Arbaeen as Imam Hussein has evolved into one of the symbols of Islamic identity.

In this regard, it's also crucial to keep in mind the well-known Imam's declaration:

> *"By God, I did not revolt against the oppressive Bani Umayyad out of self-interest, with the goal of oppression or corruption! I stood up instead to demand reform in the nation of my grandfather; I want to promote right and forbid wrong. Every person who accepts me through accepting the truth rather than accepting me for myself is larger in the eyes of Allah than the truth. And if someone rejects me, I will wait patiently for Allah to make a judgement call on me and them as He is the best judge". (Majlisi, 1983, Vol. 44: 329)*

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