

Advice to Reciters of Azaa by Ayatullah Nasir Makarim Shirazi

(This article is written from a speech given to reciters of Azaa by the above esteemed scholar)

Now that the days of mourning for Imam Husayn (a) have come upon us we must try and become familiar with our responsibilities. The purpose in gathering today is to remind those who recite the tragedy of Karbala of their responsibilities during the days of mourning for Imam Husayn (a).

Each one of us, in whatever way we can, should try to benefit from this great event of history. The famous Hadith *Husayn is from me and I am from Husayn* is a historical truth. If we look at the history of Islam, we see that there were many hypocrites during the time of the Holy Prophet (s). Sura al-Ahzab, Sura at-Tawba, and Sura al-Munafiqun all show that there was a strong group of hypocrites during the time of the Holy Prophet (s). However, the strength of the Prophet was such that they did not dare to reveal themselves. We can compare this to the time of Imam Khumayni. A group of hypocrites were present at that time who co-operated with the assumption that they would later gain control of the revolution. But the control and influence of Imam (r.a) prevented them from reaching their goals and eventually they fled.

The group of hypocrites during the time of the Prophet slowly gained strength after the death of the Prophet. Things reached a stage where the chief of all the hypocrites, and a leading figure among the enemies during the battles against Islam [Abu Sufyan], announced in a gathering of the Banu Umayya, his well known declaration: *Remove this Khilafat away from the field. By the being by whom Abu Sufyan swears [his idols], there is no heaven and there is no hell. They have started a play called Islam and now the field of play is in your hands. Get the Islamic government in your hands.*

People were heedless after the death of the Prophet and left the field open for the Banu Umayya. As a result, the son of Abu Sufyan, with all his beliefs and [wrong] desires, sat in the place of the Prophet and became known as Muawiya, leader of the Muslims. The Banu Umayya did not hide their lack of faith in Islam. It wasn't only Yazid who said: *The Banu Hashim have played with the Kingdom, there was no news that came from God, nor any revelation.* They **all** clearly indicated their lack of faith. As an example, it has been narrated of Umar bin Saad that he said: *They say there is a God, there is a Day of Judgment, and there is punishment. If that is true I will repent after killing Husayn. If it is false, I will have acquired the world and received the governorship of Rayy.* Notice how all this shows their lack of faith.

Thus a group of people without faith in Islam, who considered Islam as a political plaything, did not believe that Jibrael came down or that the Qur'an was the word of God, got hold of the most sensitive part of Islam; the issue of successorship. If they remained, nothing of Islam would remain. At such a juncture it was necessary that the veils be opened and the evil face of the age of ignorance and the Banu Umayya be revealed for the Muslims. Who came into the field to save Islam from the clutches of these faithless hypocrites? It was Imam Husayn (a) and his companions who entered the field and drank

from the cup of martyrdom. They opened the curtains and allowed the Muslims to see the party of the hypocrites. The rising of the Tawwabeen and the rising of Mukhtar and others were all uprisings to defend the Ahlul Bayt (a). So was the rising of Abu Muslim Khurasani and the taking over of the Caliphate by the Abbasides was under the banner of “the pleasure of the family of Muhammad, Allah’s blessings be on him and his family”. Imam Husayn changed the path of history. He saved Islam from the group who wished to return the people to the days of ignorance. Thus [when the Prophet says] I am from Husayn, [its meaning is that] the remaining of Islam was due to Husayn. That is from one aspect. The other aspect is that Imam Husayn taught a lesson to the Muslims, a lesson that will remain throughout history until the end of the world. It will remain until the rise of the Imam of our time. Every year through Imam Husayn’s martyrdom, from the lessons learnt in Ashura and the actions of his companions and himself, it is possible to train individuals who are lovers of martyrdom and are willing to sacrifice themselves for protecting and saving Islam. On one hand he saved Islam at that time, and on the other hand he left a lesson for all to come.

You all know that these are the days of fajr. Those who were present during the revolution know that the one thing which gave strength and momentum to the revolution was the Ashura of Imam Husayn. Through the teachings of Ashura it was possible for the revolution to succeed. Thus the departed Imam [Khumayni], may Allah sanctify his name, after the victory of the revolution when some people thought the rituals of mourning for Imam Husayn should decrease, was firm and said; The ritual of Ashura must continue in the same form, and the people it brought forth should continue to be brought forth. We are indebted to Karbala and to Ashura. Ashura is our pride; it is the school of training humans. Ashura is the protector of Islam, and not just Shiism.

A group of people are not aware of what Imam Husayn did. They do not understand the role of Imam Husayn at that time, or the traces and teachings he left behind. This is due to ignorance. However there are others who are not followers of the school of Husayn but because of their research they acknowledge the role of Imam Husayn in the history of Islam. The issue of Ashura has reached beyond the frontiers of Islam and even non-Muslims learn lessons from this school. You should know that Gandhi, the leader of the revolution in India, told people: For the sake of saving this country from the clutches of the colonialists, I have no better no lesson for you than the one Imam Husayn taught the Muslims. Follow that school, that program, and you will be able to free the great country of India from the English colonialists. Thus the image of Islam also gained from the light of Ashura.

I have reminisced about this before for many of you, but there are many present today who have not heard it before, so I am repeating it for them.

We were sent, in the early days of the revolution, to Kurdistan. We tried slowly to connect with the Ahle Sunnat but Mahabad, Kurdistan was very silent. This was at a time when during the early days of the revolution all places blazed with fervor. I talked to some of the Ahle Sunnat whom I had befriended and asked them why they were so quiet and complacent while the rest of the country was so enthusiastic. He said; you cannot

compare us to yourselves. You have two things that we do not have and those two things create the fervor and momentum that you see.

The first thing is that your scholars are independent of the government; rather the scholars themselves are a government. We are completely dependent. If the awqaf does not give us seven hundred tomans per month, our condition would stall. But your scholars, through the teachings of the Ahlul Bayt and the understanding of the issue of Khums and the verse: *Know that whatever you may come by, a fifth of it is for Allah, and the Messenger, for the relatives, the orphans, the needy and the traveler . . .* (8:41) [Because of this they] were able to have the freedom to stand on their own and fight against the Shah without fear. The other thing is that you have a resource by the name of Imam Husayn. You put up a black flag [of mourning] and groups gather together.

We must guard this great resource very well. However every resource can be affected by afflictions, and tonight I would like to present to you some aspects of such an affliction regarding the role of the reciters. The reciters have had an important role in the history of Islam. You have all heard of the story of De'bal al-Khazai' [the great poet of the Ahlul Bayt]. The poetry of Debal was so effective that once his caravan was attacked in the desert by thieves. When one of the thieves got on his horse, he recited verses from Madaris Ayaat. Debal asked the thief; do you know whose poetry this is? He said, yes, it is by Debal Khazai. De'bal asked him; Have you seen Debal, the poet of the Ahlul Bayt, do you know him? The thief said he did not. De'bal told him who he was. The man cried out; my fellow thieves; Debal is among us. Return all the goods that you took from them. Guard them and see them safely back to their homes.

The poetry of Debal had spread everywhere, even among the thieves of the desert and from this we can deduce that the followers of the Ahlul Bayt gave a lot of importance to this form of poetry. The Masumeen themselves gave it a lot of importance to it and encouraged it. They said; *for every verse [of poetry that is composed], a house in Jannah.* It had an important role, and it should be so. A recitor can express the emotions of Ashura and convey the aims of Imam Husayn through poetry to the hearts of others, especially to the young generation.

But at the same time, it is possible that it may become afflicted with problems and we should be careful of that. I am presenting before you fourteen points that are brief and summarized regarding this matter.

1) The material must be rational; the poetry must be either first hand or second hand. Second hand means it is found in an authentic source, while first hand means that in reality the condition of Imam Husayn and his companions was thus. The greatness of Imam Husayn must be protected in the contents of the poetry. When we hear in one of the verses of poetry; *O Imam Husayn, O Imam Husayn I am certain that you had no greater desire than to see Akbar becoming a bridegroom*; that reduces the greatness of Ashura. Firstly, Ali Akbar had become a bridegroom earlier, according to some reliable reports. Secondly, this person is putting himself in Imam Husayn's place and Imam Husayn in his

place. He is confining Imam Husayn to his own lowly thinking, since all he himself wishes for is to see his son or daughter married.

Or regarding the Imam of our time, a poet says; *I do not know which desert you are wandering in, so that I too can wander in that same desert.* The Imam is not wandering in a desert; he is among us, among the Muslims, among the Shiahs. The phrases and terms should be such as to pay tribute to the greatness of Imam Husayn. Here I must appreciate some of the present day poets of Tehran, Mashhad and Qum, who have composed noble poetry. The reciters must make use of this poetry. Those who cannot memorize new poetry and are ashamed to write it on paper and read from it should know that it is not a shame to read from paper. In fact that is good. I too write down material that I have memorized so that it is more reliable. Write it, and read the new poetry that has been composed. Praise be to God that we have thoughtful reciters who recite beautiful poetry. They nourish the holy aims of Imam Husayn, the school of the Ahlul Bayt, and the love for Imame Zaman. I hope they will keep these points in mind.

2) Matters that seem exaggerated should not be mentioned. You have heard the saying of Ameerul Mu'mineen; *two people will be destroyed regarding me; the one who loves me excessively and raises me higher than my status and praises me the way he [should] praise God, and the enemy who, I seek refuge in God, curses me.* Both of these two groups have been grouped together and both of them are wrong.

We have heard certain whisperings and I am forced to repeat them here. People say; *there is no god but Fatima az Zahraa, and there is no god but Zaynab.* The respected preachers who are present in the gathering must draw their attention to it. I have said often that one who says such a thing and understands what he is saying, if he drinks tea his cup must be washed [to be made pure]. He is guilty of two things; one that it is against the teachings of Islam and the other great wrong is that when this reaches the ears of the enemies - and these days it spreads very easily - the enemies say; In the name of Allah, this is why we say the Shias are disbelievers.

Also, sometimes organizations name themselves with names that are not very appropriate. For example; the organization of *those crazy about Imam Husayn* (a). I am not saying this is haram, but imagine if you want to participate and you are asked as to where you are going, you will say I am going to those crazy about Husayn. This will spread and among the young generation it will become an excuse; what type of group is this that names itself crazy about Husayn? Instead, name yourselves [with names such as] those who love Husayn, those who sacrifice themselves for Husayn, those who give their hearts to Husayn, the servants of Husayn. You should have names that reflect the appropriate status for Imam Husayn.

3) Education is very necessary. In the hawza we have a section for propagating Islam and we have sections for learning. The preachers are taught, and the reciters must also be taught. The preacher must have knowledge and skill, and the recitor must also have knowledge and skill. He should have knowledge of what he is reciting, and know how to present his material. He cannot achieve much if he only pays attention to the skill of

reciting but does not have knowledge. He cannot fulfill his responsibility that way. Just as we have these facilities in our Hawza, how good it would be if Inshallah we would have centers beside the hawzas to train the recitors. They would come to these centers where they would be taught the correct ways and methods of reciting. They would be more successful in their work and would please the Imam of the time and be accepted by Imam Husayn.

4) During the gatherings of the respected preachers and the respected recitors, people should not be given permission to sin. They say; *whatever sins you want to commit during the year, you can. On the day of Ashura all these will be washed off.* Imam Husayn died for the religion and the school of Islam. This must be strengthened [not weakened by allowing people to sin].

You have heard the story of Hajib Hashi Kashani. He recited a poem about Ali (a); *Hajib if you will be raised with Ali, then commit whatever sin you want. If our affairs will be with Imam Ali on the Day of Judgment, then sin as much as you like.* At night he saw Imam Ali in his dream. Imam told him; *Hajib, you recited a very wrong poem today. You are a good recitor but you recited a bad poem.* Hajib asked, what should I say? He said say; *Hajib if you will deal with Ali on the Day of Judgment, be ashamed of meeting Ali and sin less.* Do you see how great the difference is between these two mentalities? We must not give the permission to sin. Imam Husayn was martyred for Salaat. You say Bibi Zaynab sat and recited Namaze Shab on the 11th night of Muharram. Then how can we say sin as much as you want, and change the religion so much?

5) You should not let people take off their shirts and become bare-chested during the Majlis. If women are a witness to this then it is definitely a sin. Even if they are not, we live in a time when this will be filmed and spread out. People will say; see what the Shiahs of Imam Husayn are doing. It was common in the past and still is. The mourner wears a black shirt, the front is open and they want to beat the chest. The back is open so they can beat the back with zanjeer [This is not appropriate]. The shirt must not be removed. In our times it is harmful for us to do so.

6) We should not encourage mourners to hurt their bodies. Our bodies may be hurt during Jihad, during martyrdom for Islam. Our youth were shattered into pieces by the bombs of the enemies. This is not a problem. But we cannot inflict harm on our bodies with our own hands.

7) The time of Salaat must be given serious consideration by the preachers and recitors. They must never have a program going on at the time of salaat. Salaat is the pillar of religion, the source of training of our society. Salaat is everything to us and must not be sacrificed. We ourselves say that on the day of Ashura Imam Husayn recited Salaat in the face of the shower of arrows from the enemies so that you should know that nothing can stop you from salaat, not even being in the midst of the battlefield. In the Qur'an we have instructions for Salatul Khawf. The meaning of Salatul Khawf is that in the battlefield if the enemy does not desist, the Muslim army must be divided into two groups. One group defends the army while the other goes to the back to say their prayers. Then they change

places. Salatul khawf has been mentioned in the Qur'an. Salaat has great importance. How can we allow the majlis of Imam Husayn to become the cause of missing salaah?

8) The rhythm chosen for the recitations must be appropriate. For the majalis of Imam Husayn we have many recommended rhythms which are mournful and very effective and beneficial. But lately in all corners we have seen rhythms of the times of the oppressive rulers. I am afraid that people take the rhythms of the places in America of entertainment and corruption, and they apply these to the program of the recitors. The rhythm of recitation must be appropriate for the Majlis of Imam Husayn (a). We have a Hadith which says during the last times there will be a group who will recite Quran with the rhythm of entertainment and corruption. These people have been promised a painful punishment. The recitations become worse when these rhythms are applied to it.

9) Those who recite the tragedy of Karbala should be careful that they are not used by undercover political organization, for such groups want to infiltrate everywhere; the mosques, the universities, the schools, the religious organizations, the gatherings of recitors, everywhere. Be careful that they are not able to do that.

10) You should refrain from very detailed and heart-rending recitations. Some of the stories narrated are so painful that even the Imam of our time is not pleased that it should be recited to that extent. We can make an exception for the day of Tasua and Ashura for such stories but they should not be recited in everyday majlis. A skilled preacher and recitor can refrain from reciting the tragedy and still create a surge of feeling among the listeners. It is not a skill to recite the most heart-rending narrations and make people weep. Rather it is a skill to create grief by only alluding to the tragedy. This is what should be done and it can be done.

11) The majlis should not be such that people get exhausted. Especially consider the desires of the youth of today so that they come to mosque. Why? Because there are groups that wish to separate our youth from religion and the majalis of Imam Husayn. Satellites, internet, means of corruption, intoxicants, pornographic pictures, wrong teachings [all these are means of destroying our youth]. We must strive to attract the youth, not tire them.

12) We must not neglect the strengthening of the leaders and Marjaiyat. The enemy is striving hard to prevent this. You have heard the words of the President of America. They are trying hard to weaken the leadership and are active in it. I was telling someone that if there was no marjaiyat in Iraq, the Shiahs would not have reached where they are, nor would Iraq be what it is today. They would have completely transformed Iraq. It is the Marjaiyat that has saved Iraq, saved the school of the Ahlul Bayt, saved the sacred shrines of Najaf and Karbala. Thus we must strive to protect this institution. The recitors can mention this as part of their presentation, or as a side mention. Over and above this, the love of the Imam of our time must be an important part of all the majalis. Attention must be drawn to the Imam.

13) The last point is that the recitor should have the akhlaq of Imam Husayn. People should not say that these recitors are actually evil people, they hurt others. They must say that the recitors are pure people, they do not lie, do not cheat, and their wives and children have Islamic etiquette. They do not have inappropriate hijab and their families do not have problematic issues. If we do not have the akhlaq of Imam Husayn our majalis will not have any worth.

I hope that Inshallah all of you, through the teachings of Imam Husayn, will be able to safeguard yourselves and your families, your societies and your country, as well as Islam and Qur'an. May you never give the school of Imam Husayn less than it deserves. Inshallah the training school of Imam Husayn will become stronger each year, against the wishes of the enemies.