?What Does Karbala Teach Us

Husayn had shown by his acts as well as his various discourses during the seven days of Muharram at Karbala, that this conflict was much more universal in nature, and that he knew that he was going to live for ever through his martyrdom.

Yazeed died as uselessly as he lived, only three years after the battle of Karbala took place. While trying to race a baboon, he fell from his horse and broke his neck. As history has recorded, those who were apparent victors at Karbala have disappeared without trace. While the plain of Karbala was transformed from a deserted piece of barren land into a bustling town, of which, the central monument is Husayn's glorious tomb.

Hundreds of thousands of people visit the tomb in reverence, all the year round, day and night. Husayn's martyrdom is observed with solemn deference all over the world, every year during the first ten days of the month of Muharram, by his followers. Public gatherings are held, speeches are made in which the story of Karbala is retold in touching tones and prayers are made to the effect that may the almighty Allah grant the same courage and strength to his followers in their hour of trial as he did to Husayn. At the end of these gatherings, the audience stand up and pay homage to Husayn and his companions in the following formal terms:

I wish I was with you (at Karbala) and would therefore, have attained the same exalted station (as you did).

Although, the observance of commemoration of Husayn in Muharram has only recently started in the Western countries, they are a part of the Muslim culture in India, Pakistan, Iran, Iraq and other eastern countries.

New centers have been established in Canada, the USA, and in many European countries where these practices of Muharram are done with all the elaborate details. The main element of these commemorative practices is the message of Husayn, which is also the message of the Prophet of Islam, that is Islam in its purest form. That is as follows:

1. Islam is a universal religion
2. Islam is the religion of human rights and common sense
3. Islam upholds the basic right of every person to hold his/her own views
4. Islam stands for the poor, the downtrodden and the weak
5. Islam teaches to side with the Mazloom and fight the Zalim
6. Islam appeals to human conscience and consciousness to see the right from wrong

7. Islam appeals to man through his own awareness and power to distinguish between good and evil.

8. Islam does not impose the law by brute force.

Karbala is a gift to humanity. The story of Karbala teaches us the following lessons:

1. It teaches the parents how to love and cherish their children - however, when comes the time of sacrifice, the parent is in the forefront to sacrifice his/her child for the right cause.
2. It teaches men and women how a husband should behave with her wife, and vise-versa. Even when the family is threatened for life, property, and honour, how sensible people keep their heads and act according to Allah's and nature's laws.
3. It teaches the faithful that your beliefs and your convictions are the most important thing in the world.
4. It teaches the faithful to find the right Imam and follow him
5. It teaches the faithful that helplessness and lack of power in this world do not mean a thing as long as one has chosen the right path and he/she is convinced that he/she is on the side of the truth.

One example from our times will suffice to explain this point.

A few days ago, 25 young girls were burnt to death inside a school building in Saudi Arabia. When the fire started in the building, children ran to the gate to save themselves from getting burnt. The religious police of Saudi Arabia would net let them get out of the building because they did not have the proper HIJAB on!!!!!!

When tents were burning in Karbala, Zaynab Husayn's sister approached her 24 year old nephew, Ali Zayn al-Abideen and asked him: "Nephew, you are our Imam now, what is your command about us, shall we all get burnt to death or save our lives and go out of the tents without our HIJAB?" Ali Zayna al-Abideen replied: " Aunt, saving your life is wajib, go out and save yourselves and the children."

The head coverings (chadars) had already been looted from the heads of the ladies by the enemy soldiers. However, Zaynab was the daughter of Ali and Fatima, the grand-daughter of the Prophet of Islam. She did not need anyone else to tell her what was the law. She had grown up with Islam. By this one act, Zaynab showed to the world the importance of the Imam of the time. At the same time, Ali Zayn al-Abideen's reply showed that Islamic law is what it is, but common sense always prevails.