



Islamic Queries

ORIGINAL RESEARCH BY

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Commemorating the Martyrdom of the Infallibles

ANSWER PROVIDED BY:

The Porch of Wisdom Institute

UNDER THE GUIDANCE OF



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The below Question and Answer was extracted from:
www.islamquest.net/fa/archive/question/fa23144

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Published by the Islamic Publishing House - iph@iph.ca

Summary Question

Are we permitted to hold the *arbaʿīn*¹ commemorative ceremony programs for the martyrdom of Imam ʿAlī عليه السلام and the other Infallibles of the Ahl al-Bayt عليهم السلام? During the life time of the Infallibles عليهم السلام, do we see an example of [them] having wide-spread commemorative ceremonies for the martyrdom [of their predecessors] in which they held [such programs] over the course of many days, weeks or held ‘ten day’ [*ashra*] events?

Detailed Question

Is there any problem with marking the *arbaʿīn* commemorative ceremony for the martyrdom of Imam ʿAlī عليه السلام [such as is done with the martyrdom of Imam al-Ḥusayn عليه السلام in which we remember him forty days after his martyrdom]? Is such a commemoration [to mark forty days after the martyrdom date of Imam ʿAlī عليه السلام] considered a religious innovation - *bidʿah*? Do we have *aḥādīth* which mention that it is impermissible to hold an *arbaʿīn* commemoration for any of the Imams other than Imam al-Ḥusayn عليه السلام?

¹ *Arbaʿīn* literally means forty and in the context of the *aḥādīth*, it refers specifically to the commemoration marking forty days after the day of ʿĀshūrāʾ when Imam Ḥusayn ibn ʿAlī عليه السلام was tragically martyred in Karbalāʾ. This annual event, which began after the events of ʿĀshūrāʾ when the family of Imam al-Ḥusayn عليه السلام left Shām and stopped in Karbalāʾ before returning to Medina has since become an annual pilgrimage attracting millions of lovers of freedom who walk from the Iraqi city of Najaf al-Ashraf to the city of Karbalāʾ. (Tr.)

Summary Answer

As for what has been mentioned in the religious texts in regards to holding commemorative ceremonies – *majālis* – for the martyrdom of the [other] Imams عليه السلام: In the sources of the narrations and *aḥādīth* of the Shī‘a, when it comes to establishing commemorative gatherings, such programs have a special status only when it comes to expressing grief over Imam al-Ḥusayn عليه السلام - and that too, only in those specific days of the year [meaning the first ten days of the month of Muḥarram and the *arba‘īn* period].

However, in regards to the other Imams عليه السلام, there are no *aḥādīth* or historical reports in which the martyrdom of any other of the Infallibles عليه السلام, or even the remembrance of other important sorrowful historical events which transpired, as ever being declared by the Imams عليه السلام as being a day to remember or commemorate – let alone that we observe the *arba‘īn* of any of the Imams عليه السلام [other than Imam al-Ḥusayn عليه السلام], or that we mark ten-day commemorative *majālis* ceremonies for any of the Imams عليه السلام other than Imam al-Ḥusayn عليه السلام.

However with that said, if a *majlis* to express grief over the tragic martyrdom of any of the other Imams عليه السلام is held, then perhaps it can be done so under the guise of showing reverence to the signs (*sha‘āir*) of Allah ﷻ, by keeping in mind the following points:

1. These ceremonies (*majālis*) are not to be held in such an elaborate fashion such that the grief sessions (*‘azādārī*) of Imam al-Ḥusayn عليه السلام – which according to numerous traditions, has been emphatically stated need to be held – do not gradually take on an aura of being lesser in greatness, or end up being like other grief ceremonies (*majālis*);

2. In addition, such *majālis* for other than Imam al-Ḥusayn عليه السلام must not be structured in such a way that people begin to hold these new found ten-night gatherings (*‘ashra*) and *arba‘īn* programs. As we previously stated, when we look at the *aḥādīth*, there is no mention or emphasis on holding such *majālis* for other than Imam al-Ḥusayn عليه السلام. If such programs begin to take root in the community, then it is possible that those who are ardent followers of the faith may feel that within the year, they must continuously wear black, be in a state of grief, and limit themselves as to what they can do in life [as normally, during the period of the remembrance of ‘Āshūrā’, the faithful will distance themselves from many of the permissible pleasures of life]. With this, a misguided understanding may fall over the Shī‘a community that being “religious” means that one must leave all forms of happiness and joy in their life [as they must mourn and cry over the tragedies which befell the Ahl al-Bayt عليهم السلام for the entire year].

🌀 Detailed Answer

That which we can say in regards to setting up the commemorative gatherings (*majālis*) to mark the grief (*‘azā*) of the tragedies of the Imams of the Ahl al-Bayt عليهم السلام is that:

Within the sources of *aḥādīth* and traditions of the Shī‘a, there is a special emphasis given to establishing *majālis* to lament the tragedy of Imam al-Ḥusayn عليه السلام - such that the Imams عليهم السلام which came after him would mark the first ten days of the month of Muḥarram in a state of

sadness and grief. They would sit in their homes and remember the tragedy of Imam al-Ḥusayn عليه السلام and his companions.²

In addition, the poets would also recite prose in lamentation over Sayyid al-Shuhadā' عليه السلام and his companions.³

However, in regards to holding *majālis* for the martyrdom of the other Imams عليهم السلام, we do not have any traditions or historical references which show us that during the time of the later Infallibles عليهم السلام, that when the day of the martyrdom of any previous Imam arrived that the Infallibles عليهم السلام would pronounce that day as a general day of grief and lamentation – let alone marking the *arbaʿīn* of that Imam عليه السلام!

In this vein, it has been clearly stated in the traditions that during the era of Imam al-Ṣādiq عليه السلام, the Shiʿa only marked the death anniversary of the martyrdom of Imam al-Ḥusayn عليه السلام and they did not even observe the martyrdom anniversary of the Noble Prophet صلى الله عليه وآله, the Commander of the Faithful عليه السلام, Fāṭima al-Zahrā' عليها السلام, or Imam Ḥasan عليه السلام.⁴

In any case, if the gatherings of 'azā' are organized for the other Imams عليهم السلام, then perhaps they can be done under the guise of being a way to show reverence of the signs of Allah ﷻ (*shaʿairullāh*).

However, the reality is that other than in regards to the 'azā' of Imam al-Ḥusayn عليه السلام, we do not have any specific traditions in which we are told to mark the martyrdom of anyone else, except that which

² Qummī, Abū Jaʿfar Muḥammad ibn ʿAlī ibn Babāwayh al-, *Al-Amālī*, pg. 128, Printed in Beirut by Al-Aʿlamī, Fifth Edition, 1400 AH.

³ Baghdādī, Abū al-Qāsim Jaʿfar ibn Muḥammad ibn Jaʿfar ibn Musʿab, *Kāmil al-Ziyārāt*, Researched and Annotated by ʿAbd al-Ḥusayn al-Aminī, pp. 104-106, Section Three, Printed in Najaf by Dār al-Murtaḍwiyya, First Print, 1397 AH.

⁴ Ṣadūq, Shaykh al-, *Illal al-Sharāʿī*, vol. 1, pg. 225, Printed in Qum by Maktabat al-Dāwarī, n.d.

is seen in regards to the last testament (*waṣiyyah*) of Imam al-Bāqir عليه السلام in relation to establishing a mourning ceremony ('*azā*') for himself in the region of Minā, just outside of the city of Mecca – and that too only for a period of ten years.⁵

In this example, in regards to the commemoration of the martyrdom of Imam al-Bāqir عليه السلام, as the tradition mentions, this gathering to express grief ('*azā*') was mentioned by Imam al-Bāqir عليه السلام himself. He went on to say that it should be held for a limited period of time – ten years – and within a limited geographic location – the land of Minā – in which he wanted this act to be carried out. As such, we cannot take such a tradition and apply it to be a general directive [for all of the other Imams عليهم السلام].

Coming back to the main theme of this article, generally speaking, that which we can state in this regards is: Perhaps the reason why there is an exclusive emphasis about holding *majālis* to specifically remember Imam al-Ḥusayn عليه السلام [and not the other members of the Ahl al-Bayt عليهم السلام] is due to the exceptional circumstances surrounding the movement of 'Āshūrā' and the self-sacrifice and altruism displayed by Imam al-Ḥusayn عليه السلام and his companions.

By the other Imams عليهم السلام not holding *majlis 'azā'* for the other Imams of the Ahl al-Bayt عليهم السلام, even to the extent of not marking the death of the Prophet of Islam صلى الله عليه وسلم and Sayyida al-Zahrā' عليها السلام, this may have been done to protect the greatness of the movement of 'Āshūrā' and to ensure that these programs (*majlis 'azā'*) for the other members of the Ahl al-Bayt عليهم السلام do not become habitual practices alongside the commemorative event of grief ('*azā*') for the martyrs of Karbalā'.

⁵ Kulaynī, Abū Ja'far Muḥammad ibn Ya'qūb ibn Ishāq al-, *Al-Kāfī*, vol. 5, pg. 117, Printed in Tehran by Dār al-Kutub al-Islāmiyyah, 1406 AH.

Indeed, if it was to be that for the martyrdom of each of the Infallibles عليه السلام, with all of the varied dates of their martyrdoms which exist for them in history, and in addition, if it was to be that we were to hold mourning ceremonies for one week and commemoration events to mark the fortieth day (*arbaʿīn*) after each event of martyrdom [of the other Infallibles عليه السلام who were martyred], and even for the martyrdom of [important religious personalities, such as the] non-Imams, and we were to hold *majālis* for every sad event which has transpired in our [Shiʿā] history such as the attack against the house of Imam ʿAlī عليه السلام [which led to the martyrdom of his wife, Fāṭima al-Zahrāʾ عليها السلام and the miscarriage of their son, Muḥsin عليه السلام], and everything else that has transpired in history, then simply by keeping in mind the number of such events which have taken place, we can deduce that the special commemorative sessions of ʿĀshūrāʾ and the first ten days of Muḥarram would have very little meaning in [the Shiʿā] culture and society!?

If we were to hold such programs throughout the year, then would there be any days in the calendar year which would not be regarded as days of grief and mourning?

Of course, there are some people who by citing general *aḥādīth* which mention that the Shiʿā are in a state of grief and sorrow when their leaders are in a state of grief and sorrow⁶ - try to use such

⁶ Ṣadūq, Shaykh al-, *Al-Khiṣāl*, vol. 2, pg. 634, Printed in Qum by Jāmiʿa Mudarrisīn, 1403 AH. One such example of a *ḥadīth* has been narrated in *Ghurar al-Ḥikm*, tradition 5,060, in which it is mentioned:

قال الإمام عليّ (عليه السلام): إِنَّ اللَّهَ سُبْحَانَهُ أَطَّلَعَ إِلَى الْأَرْضِ فَاخْتَارَ لَنَا شَيْعَةً يَنْصُرُونَنَا وَيَفْرَحُونَ لِفَرَحِنَا وَيَحْزَنُونَ لِحَزْنِنَا وَيَبْذُلُونَ أَنْفُسَهُمْ وَ أَمْوَالَهُمْ فِيْنَا أَوْلِيَّتِكَ مِنَّا وَإِلَيْنَا.

Imam ʿAlī عليه السلام has said: “Verily Allah, the Glorified, checked the earth and chose for us followers who would help us, would be gladdened by our joy and saddened by

aḥādīth to justify their commemoration of all of the tragic historical events. However, for those who are the scholars of this faith, it is clear that such *aḥādīth* cannot be used to justify such a stance and the creation of special new times for mourning – again, with the exception of the [first] ten days of Muḥarram.

Of course, the Shī‘a have a special spiritual connection and inner affinity to their Infallible leaders ﷺ, and even in the times of happiness and festivity, they remember the calamities that befell the Ahl al-Bayt ﷺ.

Dāwud ibn Kathīr al-Raqqī has said that once he was in the presence of Imam al-Ṣādiq ﷺ. The Imam requested some water and after drinking it, he began to cry such that his eyes were filled with tears. The Imam ﷺ then said: “O Dāwud! May Allah deprive the killers of al-Ḥusayn ﷺ of His mercy! How much the remembrance of the killing of al-Ḥusayn makes life bitter. I do not drink cold water except that I remember al-Ḥusayn. There is not a single servant of Allāh who drinks water and remembers al-Ḥusayn, and asks Allāh to send His damnation upon his killers except that by doing so, Allāh will record 100,000 good actions for that individual; wipe away 100,000 sins off of his record; and raise his rank 100,000 levels. In addition, this person will be given a reward as if he freed 100,000 individuals from slavery, and on the Day of Judgement, he will be raised up with an illuminated face.”⁷

our sadness, and would spend from their people and their possessions in our way – these are the ones who are from us and shall rejoin us [in the Hereafter].”

⁷ Baghdādī, Abū ‘Abdillāh Muḥammad ibn Muḥammad ibn Nu‘mān al-Ukbarī al-, *Al-Amālī*, pg. 142. The full text of this tradition reads:

Similarly, when the Commander of the Faithful ‘Ali عليه السلام was busy burying his oppressed wife, Fāṭima al-Zahrā’ عليها السلام, he addressed the [grave of the] Prophet صلى الله عليه وآله and said:

أَمَّا حُزْنِي فَسَرَمَدٌ

As for my grief [at losing my wife], it will last forever...⁸

Imam ‘Ali عليه السلام, the humble follower of the Prophet صلى الله عليه وآله, was also in a constant state of grief, however it does not mean that he commemorated the grief ceremony for his wife [what we commonly refer to today as the *Ayyām Fāṭimiyyah*] for the entire year, or that he initiated certain limitations upon himself during his lifetime [due to losing his wife in such a tragic manner], or that he brought about innovations [*bid‘ah*] in his life [by creating such commemorative programs].

In any case, without creating an innovation [*bid‘ah*] in announcing [to the general public] the necessity of mourning at a certain time, it is desirable to remember the calamities which befell the Ahl al-Bayt عليهم السلام at every possible opportunity, and to ensure that their tragedies are never lost into the annals of history, however we must note the following two points:

حَدَّثَنَا أَبِي رَحِمَهُ اللَّهُ قَالَ حَدَّثَنَا سَعْدُ بْنُ عَبْدِ اللَّهِ عَنِ الْحَسَنِ بْنِ مُوسَى الْخَشَّابِ عَنْ عَلِيِّ بْنِ حَسَّانِ الْوَاسِطِيِّ عَنْ عَمِّهِ عَبْدِ الرَّحْمَنِ بْنِ كَثِيرِ الْهَاشِمِيِّ عَنْ دَاوُدَ بْنِ كَثِيرِ الرَّقْفِيِّ قَالَ: كُنْتُ عِنْدَ أَبِي عَبْدِ اللَّهِ عَلَيْهِ السَّلَامُ إِذَا اسْتَسْقَى الْمَاءَ فَلَمَّا شَرِبَهُ رَأَيْتُهُ وَ قَدِ اسْتَعْبَرَ وَ اغْرُورَقَتْ عَيْنَاهُ بِدُمُوعِهِ ثُمَّ قَالَ يَا دَاوُدُ لَعَنَّ اللَّهُ قَاتِلَ الْحُسَيْنِ فَمَا أَنْعَصَ ذَكَرَ الْحُسَيْنِ لِلْعَيْشِ إِيَّيْ مَا شَرِبْتُ مَاءً بَارِدًا إِلَّا وَ دَكَرْتُ الْحُسَيْنَ وَ مَا مِنْ عَبْدِ شَرِبَ الْمَاءَ فَذَكَرَ الْحُسَيْنَ عَلَيْهِ السَّلَامُ وَ لَعَنَّ قَاتِلَهُ إِلَّا كَتَبَ اللَّهُ لَهُ مِائَةَ أَلْفِ حَسَنَةٍ وَ مَحَا عَنْهُ مِائَةَ أَلْفِ سَيِّئَةٍ وَ رَفَعَ لَهُ مِائَةَ أَلْفِ دَرَجَةٍ وَ كَانَ كَأَنَّهَا أَعْتَقَ مِائَةَ أَلْفِ نَسَمَةٍ وَ حَشَرَهُ اللَّهُ يَوْمَ الْقِيَامَةِ أَبْلَجَ الْوَجْهِ.

⁸ *Nahj al-Balāgha*, pg. 320, Printed in Qum by Dār al-Hijrah, n.d.

1. These commemorative sessions [other than those during Muḥarram] of showing grief for the other Infallibles عليه السلام must not be arranged and held like the programs which are held to commemorate the martyrdom of Imam al-Ḥusayn عليه السلام - which in numerous *aḥādīth* have been specifically emphasized to be held - so that they, meaning the Muḥarram commemorations, do not take on a lesser sense of importance, and do not become like the other commemorative sessions held for the other Infallibles عليه السلام.
2. Secondly, we must ensure that we do not organize such commemorative services such that they turn out to be ten-day commemorative sessions, or *arbaʿīn* sessions for the other Infallibles عليه السلام. When we look into the *aḥādīth*, we see absolutely no such indication or emphasis on holding such programs in this fashion such that if they were to be held in this way, then gradually, those who are the adherents to the faith of Shiʿa Islam, during the course of the year would constantly be having to wear black and think of themselves as being in a constant state of grief, and thus having to place limits upon themselves about what they can and cannot do. Even more, this assumption would make its way around the society that to be religious means that you must stop being happy.



O Allāh! Send Your prayers upon Muḥammad and the family of Muḥammad!

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