

## Understanding the Concept of Azaa' for Imam al-Husayn (a)

### Session 1

1. Recitation from the Holy Qur'an with brief discussion on âyat 12:83 - 87
2. Function of Marthîya in remembering the tragedy of Karbalâ
3. Origin and History of Marthîya
4. Examples of Marthîya recited by the bereaved in Karbalâ and Medina
5. Merits and reward of composing, reciting and participating in Marthîya
6. Discussion on the effectiveness of Marthîya in our time

قَالَ بَلْ سَوَّلَتْ لَكُمْ أَنْفُسُكُمْ أَمْرًا فَصَبْرٌ جَمِيلٌ عَسَى اللَّهُ أَنْ يَأْتِيَنِي  
 بِهِمْ جَمِيعًا إِنَّهُ هُوَ الْعَلِيمُ الْحَكِيمُ 83 وَتَوَلَّى عَنْهُمْ وَقَالَ يَا أَسْفَى  
 عَلَى يُوسُفَ وَأَبْيَضَّتْ عَيْنَاهُ مِنَ الْحُزْنِ فَهُوَ كَظِيمٌ 84 قَالُوا تَاللَّهِ  
 تَفْتَأُ تَذْكُرُ يُوسُفَ حَتَّى تَكُونَ حَرَضًا أَوْ تَكُونَ مِنَ الْهَالِكِينَ 85  
 قَالَ إِنَّمَا أَشْكُو بَثِّي وَحُزْنِي إِلَى اللَّهِ وَأَعْلَمُ مِنَ اللَّهِ مَا لَا تَعْلَمُونَ  
 86 يَا بَنِيَّ اذْهَبُوا فَتَحَسَّسُوا مِنْ يُوسُفَ وَأَخِيهِ وَلَا تَيْأَسُوا مِنْ رَوْحِ  
 اللَّهِ إِنَّهُ لَا يَيْأَسُ مِنْ رَوْحِ اللَّهِ إِلَّا الْقَوْمُ الْكَافِرُونَ 12:87

**12:83** He (Yaqub) said: Nay, your souls have made a matter light for you, so patience is good; maybe Allah will bring them all together to me; surely He is the Knowing, the Wise.

**12:84** And he turned away from them, and said: O my sorrow for Yusuf! and his eyes became white on account of the grief, and he was a repressor (of grief).

**12:85** They said: By Allah! you will not cease to remember Yusuf until you are a prey to constant disease or (until) you are of those who perish.

**12:86** He said: I only complain of my grief and sorrow to Allah, and I know from Allah what you do not know.

**12:87** O my sons! Go and inquire respecting Yusuf and his brother, and despair not of Allah's mercy; surely none despairs of Allah's mercy except the unbelieving people.

2. Functions of Marthîya in remembering the tragedy of Karbalâ

Shaykh Muhammad Mahdi Shamsud deen: (Introduction to Chapter 3 on Lamentation in his book *The Rising of al-Husayn*) One of the richest fields of Arabic poetry is the poetry of lamentation for al-Husayn. It is much greater and more natural than that on any other single subject. In addition to classical Arabic, colloquial of Iraq and the Gulf possess a vast inheritance of this lamentation poetry about al-Husayn and his revolution.

Persian poetry about this event is like Arabic literature but, perhaps, there is even more of it, for it contains very many works of lamentation and praise for al-Husayn and his revolution in a variety of styles.

Indeed Shî'î Muslims have composed poetic works on this subject in any language they speak-Arabic, Persian, Turkish, Urdu and others. These works are vaster than their compositions in other fields.

To invite the audience to dwell on the virtues of the deceased and demerits of the enemy

i) On the steadfastness of the companions of the Imam on the eve of Âshûrâ, Abbas Qummi in his *Nafasal Mahmoom* quotes the following poetry

*How excellent was the youthfulness of men who persevered in patience,  
The like of which I have not seen among men.  
Those were virtuous noble men like pure milk  
Unlike contaminated water turning to urine after drinking*

ii) The poet, Abu Dihbil Wahb ibn Zam'a al-Jumahi was a contemporary of Mu'awiya ibn Abi Sufiyan and his son, Yazid. He used to compose poetry of lamentation for al-Husayn and defamatory poems against the Umayyads so that he had to avoid people. He lived in the first century of the hijra.

In one of his poems, he gave a picture of his passionate concern for the dead heroes at Karbala. The nobility and integrity of those who were killed there is contrasted with the sinful extravagance of the Umayyads, with their drinking and their humiliation of chaste women.

iii) Di'bil ibn 'Ali al-Khuza'i (148-246) composed a poem in which he cursed the Umayyads who were led by the devil. He then turned to the shocking treatment they meted out to the women in al-Husayn's camp.

Sorrows and sadness of the situation is exhibited

Imam al-Husayn ؑ on the eve of Âshûrâ  
*O Time! Shame on you as a friend!  
At the day's dawning and the sun's setting,  
How many a companion or seeker of yours will be a corpse!  
Time will not be satisfied with any substitute.*

*Indeed the matter will rest with the Mighty One,  
And every living creature will journey on my path*

Imam as-Sajjâd عليه السلام reports: *The Imam repeated these verses twice or three times. I heard these verses and realized what he meant. Tears choked me and I pushed them back. I kept silent and knew that tribulation had come upon us. As for my aunt, she heard what I heard. She could not control herself. She jumped up, tearing at her cloths and sighing, as she ran to the Imam crying out, "Then I will lose a brother! If only death would deprive me of life on this day. I only have you, for my mother, my father and my brother have all passed away."*

To try to move the audience to weeping and wailing

An Arab poet recites in the lamentation of Muslim ibn 'Aqil

*They threw your body from the palace after tying you.  
Has any limb remained intact?  
You were tied and dragged through their streets.  
Were you not their commander until yesterday?  
Will you die without the wailing women crying for you?  
Do you not have anyone to weep for you in this city?  
Even if you were mercilessly killed, cries of grief were heard  
As news of your death reached [the people of] Zarud*

Jafar b. 'Affan came to al-Sâdiq's residence and seated himself next to him, upon which the Imam said, Ja'far, I have been told that you recite poetry for Husayn, peace be upon him, and that you do it well.' 'Yes, and may God make me a sacrifice for you!' replied the poet. 'Recite, then', said al-Sâdiq, and Ja'far recited these verses:

*He who weeps for Husayn might well weep for Islam itself,  
For the principles of Islam have been destroyed, and used unlawfully:  
On the day when Husayn became the target of spears,  
When swords drank from him, busy with their work.  
And corpses, scattered, were abandoned in the desert.  
Great birds hovering over by night and by day ...*

And the Imam Sâdiq wept and those around him with him, until his face and beard were covered with tears. Then he said, 'By God, Ja'far, the angels closest to God are witness here and they hear your words; they have wept as we have, and more ...

Use the art of poetry to picture what might have happened during the tragedy

'Abd Allah ibn al-Zabir recited the following verses concerning Muslim ibn 'Aqil and Hani' ibn 'Urwah:

*If you do not know what death is,  
Then look at Hani' and Ibn 'Aqil in the marketplace.  
Look at a hero whose face the sword has covered with wounds*

*And at another who fell dead from a high place.  
The command of the governor struck them down,  
And they became legends for those who travel on every road.  
You see a corpse whose colour death has changed  
And a spattering of blood, which has flown abundantly.  
(Kitab al-Irshad)*

To derive the sympathy and intercession of the Ahlul Bayt عليهم السلام

Al-Kumayt ibn Zayd al-Asadi (d. 126) spoke to Imam al-Bâqir (a) after reciting one of his odes to him and the Imam offered him money which he would not accept, 'By God, I have not said anything about you for which I want to be given a worldly reward. I will not accept anything as compensation for it because it belongs to God and His Apostle.'

Then the Imam replied:

*'You will have what the Apostle of God mentioned: You will continue to be supported by the Holy Spirit as long as you defend us, the members of the Holy Family.'*

Al-Kumayt said in his Hashimiyyat that it was through the love of the Holy Family that he approached God when he was in distress.

To connect to the Imam & other martyrs who sacrificed so much for Islam

Al-Husayn had not striven for personal glory through his revolution. He had undertaken it to serve the people on the basis of the guidance of Islam. This is why the composing and recitation of poetry became a religious act which entered into the glorification of the rites of God.

L. Clarke: "These *marathi*, then, provided the germ for early gatherings of partisans of the House of the Prophet; they may also then be seen as the origin or earliest form of the *ta'ziya* as it is known today among Shi'i peoples. The literary forms known as *ta'ziya* and *marthiya* in Arabic are related, the *ta'ziya* being a kind of extended lamentation which is also intended to comfort the hearer in the face calamity, as the root meaning of the Arabic - 'comforting' - suggests.

To show the love of the Ahlul Bayt of the Prophet

Muhammad ibn Idris al-Shafi'i, the founder of the school of law, (d. 204 in Egypt) composed an ode in lament for al-Husayn. In it, he said that, if he had committed a fault in loving the family of Muhammad, it was a fault from which he would not repent, for they would be his intercessors on the Day of Resurrection when important decisions were made plain to the onlookers.

Di'bil al-Khuzai (d. 246) asked in one of his famous poem show a man could blame the family of the Prophet, for they were always his beloved friends and the family of his trust. He had chosen them to be good to himself because they were the best of the best

men. He called on God to increase his love for them and to increase their love for his good deeds. He sought Paradise from God through love of them.

To ready oneself and prepare the community to defend Islam when required

Shamshud deen: To make the revolution of Imam al-Husayn live on in oneself and to spread its slogans and influence in society through poetry and other things is an act of piety.

22:32 ذَلِكَ وَمَنْ يُعِزُّ شَعَائِرَ اللَّهِ فَإِنَّهَا مِنْ تَقْوَى الْقُلُوبِ

*Whoever exalts the rites of God that will come from the piety of the heart*

Ayatullah Seestani in a message to his muqallideen at the approach of Muharram, about 2 – 3 years, quoted this verse its beginning.

To lament in lieu of those who denied (similar to distributing water & sherbet)

The poet describes al-Jumahi the pitiful picture of the events at Karbala' where a child was killed by arrows and children were left orphaned with no one to console them. He then promised that he would always remember events and weep over them.

- to renew the covenant with the Imam of the time
- to wish for an opportunity to seek the vengeance of the enemies

In Ziyarat Warith (not waritha)

السلام عليك يا ثار الله و ابن ثاره و الوتر الموتور

Peace be on you O fearless warrior of Allah,  
Son of a fearless warrior of Allah,  
And one who was killed,  
But to whom blood revenge is still denied.

The last four functions are common to all aspects of Azaa.

### 3. Origin and History of Marthîya

Lynda Clarke in her article “Elegy (Marthîya) on Husayn: Arabic and Persian” (*Al-Serat*, XII) writes: “The tradition of elegiac poetry known in Arabic as *marthiya* had its roots, as regards themes as well as form, in pre-Islamic times.”

She adds, later on: “What is of relevance here is that it has clearly been the event of Karbalâ which allowed this pre-Islamic Arabic tradition to continue into Islamic times and take its central place in the languages of the Islamic tradition.”

In the next section we would Inshaa Allah look at some of the marthiyya recited by the family members of the martyrs.

i) Sulayman b. Qatta al-'Adawi al-Taymi composed a poem when he passed Karbalâ ' three years after al-Husayn had been killed. He described how he passed by the graves of members of Mohammed's family. The sun had become sick and the land had shaken at the killing of al-Husayn, He describes the treachery of the tribes of Qays and Ghani in killing al-Husayn and promises them vengeance to come for the shedding of such blood. The dead body of al-Husayn on the banks of the Euphrates brings shame and disgrace to Muslims. The sky and the stars wept at his death.

ii) In his poem 'Ubayd Allah ibn al-Hurr al-Ju'fi (d. 68 AH) blamed himself for his failure to support the son of the daughter of the Prophet, This failure filled him with a grief that would not leave him, He remembered standing at the graves of those who had been killed and prayed to God for them. He described them as heroes and the best and bravest of them. Then he promised vengeance on their behalf. Thus, this poem of lament expresses the profound grief and regret in his heart and gives the threat of vengeance.

iii) Among the earliest poetic texts which reflect the religious vision of the poetry of lament for al-Husayn are the words of Abu al-Aswad al-Du 'ah Zalim ibn 'Amr (d. 69 at the age of 85) in his ode in which he laments al-Husayn and those of the Hashimites who were killed with him. There he wishes that he could have been a shield to protect them and thereby he would have gained eternal reward from God.

#### *4. Examples of Marthiyya recited by the bereaved in Karbala and Medina*

i) Marthiyya by Janab Rabab wife of Imam al-Husayn عليه السلام

He who was a light, shining, is murdered;  
 Murdered in Karbala', and unburied.  
 Descendant of the Prophet, may God reward you well;  
 May you be spared judgment on the day when deeds are weighed:  
 For you were to me as a mountain, solid, in which I could take refuge;  
 And you treated us always with kindness, and according to religion.  
 O who shall speak now for the orphans, for the petitioners;  
 By whom shall all these wretched be protected, in whom shall they take  
 refuge?  
 I swear by God, never will I wish to exchange marriage with you for  
 another;  
 No, not until I am covered; covered in the grave.

ii) And on another occasion Rabab said:

O Husayn! Never shall I forget Husayn!  
 Pierced by the spears of his enemies,  
 He whom they abandoned, in Karbala'.  
 May God now never water the plains of Karbala'

Muhammad Jawad Maghniya, *Adab al-Taff'aw Shu'ara' al-Husayn*  
 (Beirut, 1388/1969), I, 61 quoted by Lynda Clarke in *Al-Serat*, Vol XII  
 (1986).

iii) When the sad news of al-Husayn'sn(a) martyrdom reached Madīnah, Asma bint Aqil b. Abu Tâlib came out with a group of her ladies and came to the grave of the Prophet ﷺ and clinging to it, sobbed bitterly. Then, addressing the Muhajireen and the Ansar, she said:

*"What will you say when the Prophet says to you  
 on the Day of Judgment, and the truth will indeed be heard.  
 'You deserted my family members, or were you absent,'  
 and the truth will be brought together before the master.  
 'You had forsaken them at the hands of the oppressors,  
 so you have no one to intercede on your behalf before Allah.'  
 There was no one (of you) at Karbalâ on the day  
 When death crept to them, and none was there to defend them!"*

He said: "We never saw as many wailing men and women on any other day."

(Al-Amaali of Shaykh al-Mufid, Assembly 38, Hadith 5)

##### **5. Merits and reward of composing, reciting and participating in Marthiyya**

i) Imam al-Sâdiq (a): 'God has built a house (bayt) in Heaven for whoever recites a line (bayt) of poetry about us.'

ii) Abu Harun al-Makfuf reported: Abu 'Abd Allah (i.e. Imam Jafar al-Sadiq) said to me: *Abu Harun, recite to me about al-Husayn*. I recited and he wept. Then he said, *'Recite as you were reciting.'* He meant with emotion. (Footnote by the author of *The Rising of al-Husayn*: It appears the rites of remembrance or al-Husayn had already reached an advanced stage at the time of Imam Ja'far al-Sadiq insofar as he named a special style of recitation.)

So I recited: Pass the grave of al-Husayn and speak of his great purity.

'He wept and then asked me to give him more. I recited another ode. He wept and I heard weeping behind the curtain. When I had finished, he said to me: *'Abu Harun, whoever recites poetry about al-Husayn and weeps making ten others weep, Heaven is decreed for him. Whoever recites poetry about al-Husayn and he weeps and he makes one other weep, Heaven is decreed for them both....'*

iii) Abu 'Umara al-Munshid reported that Imam Jafar al-Sadiq asked him: *Recite to me the verses of al-'Abdi about al-Husayn*. He recited to him and he wept. Then he recited to him and he wept. Then he recited to him and he wept. By god, he continued to recite to him with weeping until he heard weeping from the house.

iv) Imam Ja'far al-Sadiq told Sufyan ibn Mus'ab to recite to him about al-Husayn. He told Umm Farwa and his family to come near. When they were present Sufyan recited.

Umm Farwa, weep much with flowing tears . . .

Umm Farwa shrieked with grief and the women shrieked. Imam Ja'far al-Sadiq called for the door to be shut while people of Medina were gathering outside. He sent a message out to explain to them that a boy had fainted and that was the reason for the women screaming.

v) The Imams of the Holy Family honored the poets who composed this kind of poetry in lamentation and praise of the Holy Family and of al-Husayn, in particular.

vi) During the days of tashriq immediately after the great pilgrimage (hajj), al-Kumayt (d. 126 AH) asked for permission to visit Imam al-Sadiq and wanted to recite an ode to him. It troubled the Imam that they should be reminding themselves of poetry during the great days of the pilgrimage. However, when al-Kumayt said that it was about the Holy Family, the Imam was satisfied. He called some of his family and brought them near. Then al-Kumayt began to recite and the tears flowed. When he reached the words about the archers firing on al-Husayn, Imam al-Sadiq raised his hands and said, *'O God, forgive al-Kumayt for his past and future offenses, whether secret or public, and give him what will please him.'*

Question: Why would such a simple action deserves the great rewards?

Answer by Shyakh Muhammad Mahdi Shamsud-deen: “This high rank, which the poet or the reciter of poetry about al-Husayn receives, is not absolute. It arises out of the nature of the conditions which prevailed at that time. Poetry in praise or lamentation of the Imams of the Holy Family and especially of al-Husayn, speaking about the injustice done to them and denouncing their oppressors . . . all this encompassed a political attitude which rejected the existing authority. It also meant a political attitude which supported the Holy Family and their political and legislative program.” For example, Al-Kumayt ibn Zayd al-Asadi was almost killed when Hisham Ibn 'Abd al-Malik heard his poems called the Hashimiyyat. He only escaped death through a trick by which he was able to flee from prison.

Your instructor (HK) disagrees with the qualification of the reward for composing and saying of marthiyya.

## 6. Discussion on the effectiveness of Marthîya in our time