



Monday, 7th November 2016

The Commemoration of Arba'een

Dear Sir / Madam,

I am writing to you to inform you of an upcoming religious commemoration for Shia Muslims, Arba'een, which is due to take place on Monday 21st November 2016 and is likely to result in students in your school being unable to attend on that day. Please note, the date may vary according to the sighting of the moon as the Islamic calendar is lunar based.

By way of introduction, I am the principal of the Shia Ithna'asheri Madressa which is a community Sunday school which has circa 900 students (aged 4 – 16) and is based in Stanmore, in the London borough of Harrow. Our students primarily reside in the London boroughs of Harrow, Brent, and Hillingdon however some do live further afield.

You may already be aware that for Shia Muslims, the first 2 months of the Islamic calendar (Muharram and Safar) bring with it the commemoration and mourning of the martyrdom of Husain, the grandson of the Holy Prophet Muhammed (peace and blessings on him and his Holy Progeny). I would like to take this opportunity to inform you about the importance of this event and the reasons why some of the pupils in your school during the period 10th November – 21st November will be attending their local mosque on a daily basis each evening culminating in the commemoration of Arba'een during the day on Monday 21st November.

Who is Husain?

Husain was the grandson of the Holy Prophet Muhammed and the son of Ali, the first Shia Imam [successor to the Prophet] and the fourth ruler [Caliph] of the Muslims.

Husain was revered as a knowledgeable, pious and generous man, who took seriously his responsibility in looking after the poor and needy people in his town. Because of both his lineage and stature, he was and still is regarded as a beacon of guidance for one and all, and is the perfect role model for all those who wish to walk the path of righteousness.

Why do we still remember the day of Ashura and Commemorate the Arba'een?

The actions of Husain represented a conscious choice to courageously resist and sacrifice his life for a higher cause. The rest of the entire Muslim nation at the time had failed to challenge the malpractice of the then Caliph, and had acquiesced to his authority and given their obedience even though he was an oppressive and cruel tyrant.

In such circumstances, passiveness by Husain would have signalled not only the end of the religion of Islam (only some 75 years since its inception), but also the end of all humanitarian values of liberty, freedom, integrity, honesty etc. instilled and promoted by Islam. Thus Husain took the heavy responsibility of challenging the despot and stand firm for the sake of all values promoted and espoused by the religion of Islam. In his own words, he said:

"I have not risen to spread evil or to show off, nor to spread immorality or oppression. But I have done so for the betterment of Muslims, and to propagate goodness and forbid evil."

Despite this event occurring over 1,400 years ago, it was the message that Hussain stood for which resonates today. This was one of peace, tolerance and justice towards all of humanity, and these values are what we hope to reinvigorate in commemorating this tragedy today. Politicians and historians alike have spoken of the event - Gandhi referred to Hussain as a "great saint" and praised his peaceful nature, and English historian Edward Gibbons reported that "in a distant age and climate the tragic scene of the death of Hussain will awaken the sympathy of the coldest reader."

In Islam, families gather after forty days to pay their respects once again on the demise of a loved one and you may have seen, millions of Muslims flock towards Kerbala in Iraq to pay their tributes to Husain. Those who cannot travel, gather in their local centres to remember the aftermath of the tragedy and once again, pay tribute to the grandson of the Holy Prophet Muhammed (peace and blessings on him and his Holy Progeny).

This year Arba'een fall is scheduled to fall on Monday, 21st November 2016 and will be observed through special prayers and events at various religious centers.

Should you have any questions or concerns, please feel free to contact us

Yours faithfully,



Sajjad Govani

Principal - Shia Ithna'asheri Madressa Stanmore, London, United Kingdom