

Blending Joy and Sorrow¹

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In the name of Allah, the Most Merciful, the Most Compassionate

We have no idea what to say on this Nowruz (the beginning of New Year in Iran). At one moment, we should feel sorry for the events back in Muharram 61 lunar year, 680 AD, and at the other moment, we should feel happy according to our ancestors' tradition thousands of years ago; Nowruz is the remembrance of the Prophet Zoroaster and was also confirmed by our Imams (AS) such as Ja'far al-Sadiq. In other words, we have to mix water with fire. We cannot simply mix water with fire in the same container, but if we know a trick, we can. No doubt if you pour water on fire, both will be wasted, but there is a container like samovar that heats up water by fire and the water does not waste the energy of the fire. As it can be seen in hookah, how water and fire can get along.

We have been told in all our religious teachings to remember and appreciate God, no matter in happiness (Eid or wedding celebration) or in grief, and we actually follow these teachings. Therefore, there is a common ground between joy and sorrow; they are alike somehow. The difference is at the emotional angle; the human emotion of course, not the religious emotion. Anyone who loses a relative feels sad and contrarily feels happy when they receive good news. The Prophet (PBUH), for example, grieved and cried when he lost his two-year-old son, Abraham. It is involuntary and is in humans' nature, it should be so. God has created mankind to be kind to each other; to have affection and devotion. So, there is a spiritual bond between one and their beloved ones. If this bond breaks, they will be sad, as simple as that. But now, the problem is the overlapping of Muharram and events of Ashura with the Nowruz ceremony which is valid in the Iranian society. Besides, Ja'far al-Sadiq (AS) verified this Eid (Nowruz) and also recited certain prayers to be told when the New Year starts to remember God at that moment. It is said that on one occasion (it may or may not be true), he ordered Moalla Bin Khonays to celebrate this Eid along with saying prayers and the like- this way, he validated the Nowruz Eid.

His honorable Ja'far al-Sadiq (AS) was a descendant of Imam Husain (AS), the one for whom his honorable Imam Sadjad grieved some moments whenever he wanted to perform an ablution or to drink water. It is an involuntary reaction. It has been said many times that there is no sorrow in Islam- neither in the official laws nor in the Prophet's attitude. Whereas, there are two eids: Eid ul-Adha and Eid ul-Fitr in which certain rituals like saying prayers are performed. Also there is a weekly eid which is Friday. Therefore, there is no grief. At the Prophet's time, some distasteful events happened to him for which no memorial was held and also the years later no anniversary was commemorated. We are following the Imams' manners as they, too, followed the Prophet's. The remembrance of Imam Husain is named *Rawzeh* after the book *Rawzat al-*

¹ A transcript of a two speeches taken place in Amir Solaymani Husainia made by his honorable Haj Dr. Nour Ali Tabandeh on March 21 and 23, 2002 occasioned by the happiness of new solar year in Persian calendar and the sorrow for the commemoration of Muharram in Islamic lunar calendar simultaneously.

Shohada by Molla Kamal-Al-Din Hosayn Waez Kashefi and since then the preachers gradually started reading out loud on the *minbars* (the pulpit in a mosque) to recite the tragedy. So, there came the *rawzeh-singing* to remember His Holiness. At the Imams' time, this recitation existed regularly but differently. They knew Islam better than we do for sure and they were the depicted Islam themselves. There is a blessing in this recitation for the Shiites, especially for the Iranians from among all Muslim nations to have the delight of following and maintaining the Prophet's attitude. Based on "all beams of light are from the same source", since we love the first Imam, we love the last one, too. Therefore, each Imam's death is a poignant reminder for us. But why are some of these reminders stronger? So strong they are to influence our several-thousand-year-old tradition (Nowruz) in being equally acknowledged by the society and there is some give-and-take and compromise between them.

Of the memorial ceremonies are Ali's and Husain's martyrdom and Fatima's passing. Needless to say that the Shiites also commemorate and acknowledge Imam Hassan's passing as well as other Imams. But these three are outstandingly significant and noticed by the Shiites and the Iranians. What features were there in these events that have become so bold?

Imam Ali's assassination symbolizes the attack of fanatics on the spiritual depth of Islam. The Kharijites were woefully shallow-minded. They were such strict worshippers that their foreheads were callused. The calluses were real (and not by burning their foreheads intentionally) as they really prostrated all night; they said prayers way too much that they missed all about their own business and personal life. Imam Ali said about them: "Their word is correct but their inference is wrongly made"², replying to what the Kharijites said: "**judgment is only Allah's**"³. It seemed fair, but as Ali (AS) said, only their word is right and the consequences of their actions are not.

What impact has Imam Ali's martyrdom had on Iran and the Iranians? (We will discuss the events of Karbala on Ashura morning if we find a chance, but today we will mostly talk about the relation of these events with the Iranians and Nowruz.) The Iranians witnessed discrimination in favor of Arabs and against Iranians by the Caliphs and especially by the Ummayed caliphs, elevating Arabs and humiliating Iranians way too far to call the non-Arabs "Ajams", literally meaning "cow". But according to the Quran, "**surely the most honorable of you with Allah is the one among you most pious**"⁴. There are some differences between black and white, Arabs and non-Arabs; but all have the same rights, all are Muslims. The more pious, the more honorable with God. Therefore, the Iranians were drawn to Ali. For this reason, intentionally or unintentionally, some orientalist mistakenly think that the Iranians raised the Shiism. When Ali (AS) was murdered, Iran and the Iranians suffered. After the Prophet passed away, those two went to Ali's home to extend their condolences to Fatima but she did not allow them to enter. Ali was going back on the way home. He saw them and asked: "Why are you standing here (at the front door)?" They said: "we are not let in". Ali went in and asked Fatima: "Would you please let them come in?" Fatima said: "It is your house. Do as you wish. I do not complain." Then Ali (AS) invited them in. Fatima told them: "Do you remember my father said if I (Fatima) were angry with anybody, he (the Prophet) would be angry with them, too? And if he were angry, God

² كلمة حق يراد بها باطل

³ The Quran, Al-Anaam (Cattle), 57 and Yusuf (Joseph), 40 & 67: إِنَّ الْحُكْمَ إِلَّا لِلَّهِ

⁴ The Quran, Al-Hujraat (The Apartments), 13: إِنَّ أَكْرَمَكُمْ عِنْدَ اللَّهِ أَتْقَاكُمْ

would bring them misery?” “Yes, we do” they replied. Fatima went on: “Then be well aware that I am unhappy and angry with you”. (I do not recall the exact words). She did not talk anymore. They left the house shedding tears, especially Abu Bakr was desperately crying and said: “what I am doing is not right”.

Anyhow, this was an important epoch for the Shiism because the Islam of Iranians was the Shiism Islam. Now, the Islam has been separated into a thousand fragments; Wahhabis, Zaidis, Ismailias, etc., and they are all Muslims. At that time, Islam did not use to be like this. Hence, the Shiism which was the actual Islam was damaged by murdering Ali.

Another event for which we are grieving now is the martyrdom of His Holiness Husain (AS). Not only were the Shiism and the Iranians but also was the Islam damaged by this disaster. It was a turning point for the history of the Shiism and Iran. Ali’s attitude was like “**surely the most honorable of you with Allah is the one among you most pious**”. He put it into practice and treated everybody the same. Ali’s descendants also did the same. Ali did not establish this attitude, God did and said in the Quran: “**surely the most honorable of you with Allah is the one among you most pious**”. As a matter of fact, Ali was the talking Quran; the depicted Quran. If you want to realize what the Quran is, take Ali into consideration. This attitude always existed in the real Shiism by the Imams. For example, during a war of Omar with Iranians, there were two prisoners of war from the Iranian royal family who were sisters, and Husain (AS) married one of them whose name was Bibi Shahr Banu. Arab soldiers wanted to make them maids like other prisoners but Ali (AS) said they could not be bondswomen because kings, queens, princes and princesses could not be slaves. It is pretty much the same as what is said today to respect the political prisoners. It is stipulated in the law system of France which reads the political prisoner cannot be forced to wear the prison uniform or banned from telephone conversations (they are eavesdropped, though). Other examples can be found in recent centuries in European wars when Napoleon was defeated, captured and exiled to Saint Helena and the British let him be the governor there. The British governor also visited and saluted him. When they wanted to put the captives on trial, the judges would have to be of a higher rank, e.g., if the accused had been a colonel, the judge would have been a general and so many other examples of the kind. It seems like they (European legislators) have been following Ali’s order.

Likewise, Ali (AS) said to those two Persian princesses that they were free to choose their husband from among the soldiers, whomever they wished. (It was ordained by God but seemingly) one of them married Husain (AS) and the other married Muhammad ibn Abu Bakr who was like a son to Ali (AS) and Ali raised him like one.

Iranians embraced this magnanimous manner as they had already seen Shapur I capture the Roman emperor in war and whenever Shahpur wanted to mount his horse, the emperor had to kneel down at the Shahpur’s horse and then Shahpur stepped on the emperor’s back to comfortably put his foot on the pedal and mount his horse. Also, they had seen Shahpur II (Zol-Aktaf; The owner of the shoulders) pierce holes in the captives’ shoulders and put ropes through them. Now Iranians compared Ali with these kings and they certainly chose him over them.

During the invasion of Iran, Iranians were all the time fighting against the Umayyad and the Abbasid caliphs and Arabs (the army of Islam) gradually conquered many countries. What they had conquered by the Prophet’s time, the Prophet had been vigilantly supervising. But whatever they conquered later on was done generally by utilizing Arabic prejudice. So they appointed

Arab governors and ruled everywhere. For this reason, these wars have been called Arabs' expansionist wars by orientalists. In other words, the government was called Islamic but it was just a mere puppet of the Arabs. They abused the Islam and wanted to rule in the name of Islam. Every country they conquered such as Tripoli, Syria, Lebanon, Palestine, North Africa, Sudan and Ethiopia surrendered to the Arabs except Iran, as it can be seen in history that Arabs conquered many countries. Iranians did not support the governors appointed by Arabs. They obeyed the Islamic government but not the Arabic government. All the revolutions later on by Iranians were to achieve the independence of Iran, holding on to Islam. Some Iranians fought against Arabs as they thought that Iran was invaded by Arabs and some others thought that Iran was invaded by Islam. In fact, Arabs surf boarded with Islam and conquered Iran. Imam Husain's story was a good example for these revolutionists such as Yaqub Layth Saffar who raised an army to fight with the Abbasid caliph. He tried to provoke the army by telling them about Imam Husain's life and said: "These rulers are the successors and the inheritors of those who killed the Prophet's son (Imam Husain) and in fact we are taking revenge on them."

Iran and Iranians, therefore, cannot forget Imam Husain's tragedy and also they cannot forget Nowruz and all the effects and events of it such as Wednesday Bonfire (*Chaharshanbe Soori*) and Thirteenth-Day Out (*Sizdeh Be Dar*); it is running in their blood. Today's joy and sorrow is like the example of water and fire mentioned earlier about which I say they affect each other greatly as they are like one single entity. The joy is to celebrate the evidence that our origin comes not out of nowhere and that we had a prophet (Zoroaster) who established these things about four or five thousand years ago, and the sorrow is to show that we had such great men (like Husain) who said: "O' swords! Slash through me fast and shed my blood as Islam cannot be irrigated by anything except by my blood." This combination of joy and sorrow symbolically displays the two positive and negative sides of this passive resistance to maintain independency. So they do not conflict. There is no need to try to separate them. Deep in our hearts, they lodge together. Hopefully, it will be a special Eid for us. In fact, any day which is a better day than the earlier day is also an eid, Ensha Allah.

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In the name of Allah, the Most Merciful, the Most Compassionate

May the New Year bring prosperity for all of us, Ensha Allah, enabling us to follow Husain ibn-Ali (AS), as remembering him is the sweetness of our Eid. The sweetness I just mentioned is to commemorate Husain and to bear in mind that to such great men, martyrdom is the joy of being greeted by their love. Anyway, two emotional reminders are meeting together at the same time and neither one can be underestimated. Anyone who believes that either one of them should be lowered is making a mistake. As any human being has conflicting emotions deep inside; affection and grudge, kindness and anger, both sides coexist in th and neither one can be ignored, we also own the two sides, so to speak.

On the first day of Nowruz we got our ears and tongues blessed by articulating Husain ibn-Ali's name and at the same time we have been celebrating the ancient tradition of Persia for the last three days. (The national vacation used to be more than three days but recently it has been shortened!). We cannot ignore the fact that this tradition has been handed down to us from our

ancestors and has been imprinted on our minds. It is absolutely impossible to forget. It is like you have had a ring or a rosary received from your great grandfathers and it is enormously valuable to you, the further it traces back, the more valuable. If it is from your father, it is very valuable, if it is handed down to your father from your grandfather, it is much more valuable. Now, how can we challenge a belief that has been handed down by every Iranian father to his children, has been validated by society, has been imprinted on our minds and moreover, were allegedly initiated by the Prophet Zoroaster?

The very first celebration named Nowruz is said to be going back to the legendary king, Jamshid. The Pishadian kings were believed to have a divine side alongside with their worldly kingdom, just like King Talut who was appointed by the Prophet Samuel to rule the kingdom. King David who was a prophet himself also was appointed by Prophet Samuel. King Solomon; the same fashion. As well as they (Israeli kings) appreciated their successors such as King David and King Solomon, we ought to embrace our heritage, too. It does not mean we are forced to do that. We willingly do.

This presupposition is wrong to believe that after Islam came, all about the past should have been ignored. Time consists of chronologically connected sequences. The day before yesterday, yesterday, today, tomorrow, the day after tomorrow, they are not disconnected but they are connected like a chain. All the events taken place in every nation are connected sequentially like a chain. It is not fragmented. If by any chance, this chain is broken somewhere by some people, they lose their past as if they come from nowhere. Basically, it can be considered a mental disease. Just like those patients who suffer from Alzheimer's disease; they forget their own past and might not even recognize their family members at times. It is related to the physical condition, but if someone forgets their past, it is a mental disease. If any nation does that, it is a social illness. Some wished to do that- seemingly benevolently- but they failed to notice that the relation of a nation and its past cannot be broken off. Islam did not order anything related to the past must be forgotten. You need to step on the first rung while you are continuously climbing up a ladder; first rung, second, third, and so on. When you reach up the ladder, you are not on the first rung anymore but you still owe it all to the first rung, if there had not been any first rung, you would have not been able to step on higher ones. So you should not ruin the rungs when you are climbing up higher and when you are up finally, you should not break or let go of the ladder. Practicing all those rituals which had been passed down since Zoroaster, Iranians who had been Zoroastrians converted to the new faith (Islam) which was more modern than what they had practiced and they realized that Islam let them feel free whether to celebrate the Nowruz, whether to set the Seven-S Table⁵ and so on. So they just blessedly added the holy Quran to the Seven-S Table, meaning the Quran is beyond all the letters and objects beginning with sound patterns like /s/, /ʃ/, /b/, etc. The previously-used objects were kept and the Quran was added. The glory of Islam covered all these things like a shelter. For this reason, it has been said in sciences like history, sociology, law and medicine that Islam respects traditions and customs of all nations aside from those which are against its religious principles. The principles all divine

⁵ A decorating table for Nowruz on which seven symbolic objects are placed, each begins with an /s/ sound pattern. These objects usually include: Sekke (coin), Serke (vinegar), Samanu (a kind of preservable pastry), Sir (garlic), Sabzeh (a certain kind of grain which has been grown shortly before Nowruz), Sib (apple) and Senjed (sesame). Some researchers believe that these objects' initial letters and sound had been used to be sh /ʃ/ prior to Islam. But because one of the objects had been Sharab (wine) and it is forbidden in Islam, since then the table has been furnished by Iranians with the above-mentioned objects.

religions have in common are unity, prophet hood and resurrection. Those traditions and customs against these principles cannot be appreciated by Islam; however, it respects all traditions and rituals. It is like someone wishes to have two meals a day, in the morning, in the evening, and another one wishes to have three meals a day. While Iranians are Muslims, all their customs and traditions have been maintained and they have not been conflicting with Islam. If they have been contradictory, Shiite or Sunnite scholars would have forbidden them during centuries. So, while there is no forbidding, it is obvious that there is no conflict with Islam. And if some believe that the Seven-S Table is nonsense, then we should draw their attention to our thousands of other nonsensical actions. Then let us do this one, too, for the sake of our ancestors.

I have read two narratives about Nowruz; quoted by reliable narrators, one of the narratives describes how the Prophet congratulated some Iranians who were Muslims and travelled from faraway lands, saying: "It is a very good idea". So try to be as happy as you can, Ensha Allah. Another one is narrated by Moalla Bin Khonays which says Imam Ja'far al-Sadiq (AS) verified the Nowruz and prayed: "O' the Reformer of hearts and minds! Clean our hearts and eyes" that we pray every Nowruz.

While Imam Ja'far al-Sadiq (AS) verified it, what can we say? (You can imagine Imams Ja'far al-Sadiq and Sadjad (AS) who were mourning all their lives for Imam Husain (AS) and compare them with us mourning only for one month and how stupidly we think Imams Husain and Sadjad owe us for this!). The Prophet said: "Feel happy but meanwhile remember God in happiness". Happiness is a kind of feeling which comes together with action. However, happiness and action are different, the former originates inside and the latter is displayed outside. On the contrary, grieving, mourning and sadness are the same. They are personal, but if they are purposeful, they can create some movements in the society. Public grieving leads to a set of movements. It is like a ride to a destination, the more purposeful, the faster. It is determined from the very beginning. But when there is no destination, there is no right way.

Therefore, all the rituals lasted and held so far have been in agreement with Islam. They have never contradicted. In spite of all changes and modifications made to Nowruz and its calendar throughout history, it has persevered. Any modifications made to the calendar and the first day of spring changed accordingly, Nowruz synchronized with it as well. Such rituals have stuck with people; not only Iranians and all the people in this geographical boundary, but also those who align with this belief. As it is celebrated in Tajikistan, Afghanistan, Pakistan, India, Iraq, etc. no matter Shiite or Sunnite. Because, once upon a time, these nations used the same Persian Jalali Calendar. Now that the historical events have changed conditions in some countries is a different matter. Otherwise their calendar would still be the same. In every kind of calendar, there is a first day of the year. The first month of the Lunar Year is Muharram. In some Arab countries such as Syria where I have been to and saw it for myself, they celebrate the first day of Muharram but not as excitingly as we celebrate Nowruz. Throughout history, those researchers who wanted to provoke disagreements between Arabs and Iranians- either intentionally or unintentionally- believed that because Iranians mourn at the same time, they celebrate. But it is not like that. Most researchers and also their jurisprudents believe that in the history of Islam, there were some righteous apostles and people who were martyred for Islam such as Sumayyah bint Khayyat, Yasir ibn Amir and Hamza ibn Abdul-Muttalib, others such as Abu Talib ibn Abd al-Muttalib and Khadija bint Khuwaylid passed away and Muslims mourned greatly but no commemorations were held for them later on. These countries also celebrate the beginning of their own year.

In Islam, the first day of the Lunar Year is not celebrated but there are 2 eids during the year; Eid al-Fitr and Eid-al Adha which are the great Islamic Eids. Though we; Shiites, also celebrate the Eid of Velayeh. Of the most important historical legacies for the Shiites is the Eid of Ghadeer. For those who believe in the Velayeh (Guardianship), the Eid of Ghadeer is very important, as important as Nowruz. There is neither another eid nor any kind of mourning in Islam. The Prophet said: “Be happy ever but remember God all the time in happiness and sorrow.” Christians celebrate January as the beginning of their year. Iranians as well have the same right to celebrate their own beginning of the year and therefore they have been doing so for thousands of years. This beginning used to be in a different time. The first time, Ardashir Babakan considered 30 days for a month and 12 months for a year to modify the calendar. The Holy Quran states: **“Surely the number of months with Allah is twelve months in Allah's Book”**⁶. All nations before Islam also had had 12 months a year; their year would have been modified, though. Lunar months have included 29 or 30 days and in the whole year there is a deviation about 11 days less than that of the solar year. Ardashir I divided the year into 360 days, but as we already know a year includes 365 days. So 5 days were missing. These 5 days were left aside unnamed and it was said that God created creatures in 5 days and then rested on the day after. Some say God created human on the 6th day. Anyhow, the 6th day was the beginning of the year and people celebrated it. God worked for 5 days and rested on the 6th day. There are fragments of truth in the stories related to God, to the Creation and/or to whatever handed down by prophets geared to our cognition. We might not have been able to appreciate the whole truth; hence it has been partly revealed. Perhaps this very 6-day-off Nowruz here is the same as the days off entered later on into Judaism, Christianity and Islam. By the time, a year included 365 days and its first day was considered Nowruz. Years later when Ardashir I held the reins, after 360 days, they celebrated for 5 days and the 6th day was considered Nowruz; just like nowadays for the state departments that two holidays with a short interval between are connected as a consecutive one. Later on, people connected the old Nowruz which was their own; the one before Ardashir’s modification, to the Nowruz after Ardashir’s modification, therefore 5 days were celebrated and the 6th day was celebrated more happily; the 1st day was called the minor Nowruz and the 6th; the major. A late friend named Mr. Parsazad, some of you may still remember him, believed that in the ancient times, all the Pishdadian and Kianian kings had the spiritual and divine side as well and were allowed to guide people; similar to many Israeli kings who were both the guardian and the reformer of the principles, as I have said before. There were found some issues in the calendar and Ardashir and/or others modified it several times. The last time it was modified was the Jalali Calendar founded by Omar Khayyám⁷, the calendar we use today.

Highly we respect our inheritance and the more we respect it, the more respectable we will be. The more we show our dedication to Imam Husain’s divine perfection and express our love to him, the more presentable we will be, certainly. Dedication and expressing love do not mean weeping and crying for him; some people are so shallow that they hold a bottle to collect their tears to boast about on the Judgment Day in front of God. Such actions are totally futile. Dedication means when His Holiness calls out “Is there anybody to help me?” he is answered

⁶ The Quran, Al-Tawba (The Repentance), 36: إِنَّ عِدَّةَ الشُّهُورِ عِنْدَ اللَّهِ اثْنَا عَشَرَ شَهْرًا فِي كِتَابِ اللَّهِ

⁷ Omar Khayyám; 1048 – 1131, was a Persian mathematician, astronomer, philosopher, and poet, who is widely considered to be one of the most influential scientists of all time. He wrote numerous treatises on mechanics, geography, mineralogy and astrology. (Wikipedia)

back “Here we are”. Though this calling does not mean that we have to pick up a sword, certainly not, we have to follow his way. By the time, Imam Sadjad was the closest companion and follower of Imam Husain’s but he never drew a sword. If we think deeply about his way, we will find it.

Serving Imam Husain is to follow his way. This viewpoint or interpretation is exactly based on the Quran, as I have talked about it before; Jesus (AS) addressed his apostles: “**Who serves me on account of Allah? The apostles replied: We are servants of Allah**”⁸. Serving Imam Husain on account of Allah is to believe in “**We are servants of Allah**”. It is the same notion.

Again, I pray for this New Year to be full of blessings and free of all problems, Ensha Allah. **You are the cause of all causes; clean our hearts and eyes.** May God clean our eyes and hearts in this year, Ensha Allah.

⁸ The Quran, As-Saff (The Ranks), 14: مَنْ أَنْصَارِي إِلَى اللَّهِ قَالَ الْخَوَارِجُونَ نَحْنُ أَنْصَارُ اللَّهِ