



**IMPORTANT GUIDELINES
FROM THE COUNCIL OF SHIA MUSLIM SCHOLARS OF NORTH AMERICA
FOR CONDUCTING MUḤARRAM 1442 PROGRAMS**

In the name of the Almighty
May the blessings of Allāh be upon Prophet Muhammad & his holy family

The Prophet (s) said:
*"Verily there is a warmth in the hearts of the believers
for the martyrdom of al-Ḥusayn that will never cool off."*

- The ceremonies and gatherings commemorating the tragedy of Karbala during the month of Muḥarram and Ṣafar are the hallmarks of Shī'ī Islam. The sacrifice of Imam Ḥusayn (a), his family and companions solidified and safeguarded the foundation of the authentic teachings of Islam as delivered by the Holy Prophet (s).
- The Prophet (s) unequivocally predicted that the warmth in the hearts of the believers [from the tragedy of this event] will never cool off. May Almighty God bless the mourners, increase their numbers, and protect them.
- Indeed the commemorative ceremonies have continued uninterrupted through time, but they have always done so by recognizing the prevailing social and political factors, and prudently proceeding to ensure the preservation of Islamic ideals. We are in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic, and therefore, we cannot ignore the ongoing spread of the coronavirus and its dire implications on our communities in North America.
- The Council of Shia Muslim Scholars recognizes that the prevalence and incidence of new cases in our communities across North America is not uniform. Some parts of this vast continent are experiencing an alarming surge in the transmission of the virus while others are impacted less severely. Therefore, it is clear that there is no single format for the Muḥarram programs that would be suitable for every mosque, center, and organization, and as such, we will see a variety of approaches being taken to commemorate the event of Ashura.
- Given these conditions, the Council of Shia Muslim Scholars of North America would like to strongly recommend the following guidelines:

Online programs:

- Many centers will continue holding Muḥarram programs online as was done during the month of Ramadhān.
 1. It is important to mention that anyone who chooses the online format of 'azā or mourning commemoration should not be criticized for it or judged as having less love for Imam Ḥusayn (a) – the act of 'azā is an 'ibādat or worship, and its acceptance by Almighty God depends on the intention and not its format. Moreover, there is also *thawāb* or reward for conducting the commemoration online.
 2. Those who will be participating in online programs at home should dedicate a room or a space in the house for the 12 nights of Muḥarram where all the family members



can gather to listen to the online poetry and speech from their respective center, and thereafter, participate in the *matam/latmiyyah* after the speech and conclude with the *ziyarah*. Thus, each family will be able to create an atmosphere of 'azā and hold gatherings at their homes while simultaneously remaining connected to the community at large.

Programs at centers:

- Some centers will decide to open for the Muḥarram program, either partially or fully. For such centers, the Council of Shia Muslim Scholars of North America strongly urges to evaluate their local situation and if there is surge in the spread of the virus (such as currently seen in the southern states of the USA), then it would be prudent religiously to adopt the online format for 'aza programs.
- If they take on the responsibility to open the centers, then the Council strongly advises that they strictly adhere to the guidelines of their local health officials, paying particular attention to the followings:
 1. Keep the number of participants within the percentage allowed in the center by your city. If possible, depending on the weather, try to organize the programs in the parking lot or a nearby park where you can accommodate more people while adhering to the limitation on numbers and other restrictions.
 2. Set an age limit to minimize the risk for the vulnerable believers (i.e., the elderly and the children).
 3. Monitor the temperature of the attendees/participants at the entrance.
 4. Record the name and contact number of the attendees/participants at the entrance so that, God forbid, if it is determined later that an attendee/participant was infected with the virus, they would be able to contact others who were present that day and ask them to take precaution or seek coronavirus testing.
 5. Monitor and strictly enforce the compulsory social distance.
 6. The reciter and speaker should be far enough from the first line of audience,
 7. Enforce the use of face masks, gloves and other precautionary measures.
 8. Plan the entry and the exit points for the congregants in a way that they do not violate social distancing requirements inside the center as well as in the parking lot.
 9. Serving tea, juice (*sharbat*) or other food/drinks (i.e., *tabarruk*) should be strictly avoided to prevent any transmission of the virus.

Private Majālis at Homes:

- Many Shi'as organize private majlis at their homes during Muḥarram and Şafar. With the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, there are serious issues in such gatherings that need to be considered, and so the same advice given to the centres applies here also.
- However, if a person decides to organize the private majlis, then he or she is legally and religiously responsible to adhere to the guidelines of the local health authorities as follows:



1. Not exceeding the maximum number of persons allowed in gatherings at a private home.
 2. Maintaining the compulsory social distance. This means that the organizer will not be able to invite a full house; they will have to be selective in who is invited and who is not.
 3. Record the name and contact number of attendees/participants.
 4. Enforce the use of face masks, gloves and other necessary precautionary measures.
 5. Control the entry and exit of individuals so that social distancing requirements are not violated.
 6. Serving tea, juice (*sharbat*) or other food/drinks (i.e., *tabarruk*) should be strictly avoided to prevent any transmission of the virus.
 7. If a reciter or orator refuses to attend in person, then don't judge him or her for the decision. Find someone else or do the majlis through zoom or other media.
- Remember that emergency situations like what we are experiencing currently require extraordinary solutions. There should be no sense of guilt if you are unable to adhere to these guidelines. Instead, consider doing it in a minimized form or delay it till things get back to normal.
 - According to the Grand Ayatullah Sistani, if an infected person knowingly attends a gathering and spreads the virus, then they are not only sinful, but also liable for any loss experienced by those who were infected by them, including indemnity for loss of life.
 - Let us end with a point of reflection: in our teachings, it is disliked (*makrūh*) for a person to go to the mosque after eating onion or garlic because they can cause bad breath. If Islam does not want you to create discomfort for your fellow congregants in the mosque because of your bad breath, then it surely wants to prevent any transmission of a deadly virus by aerosolized droplets. Therefore, wear face masks and gloves, and strictly adhere to social distancing. Consider that to be your religious duty. Our great *marāji'* are clear and united on this issue.

On behalf of the council,
Sayyid Muhammad Rizvi,
The Secretary General