



Weatherhead Center
FOR INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS
HARVARD UNIVERSITY



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Launch of Ashura at Harvard Project

Increasing Knowledge on the Life & Legacy of Imam Husayn

On Sunday March 28, The Project on Shi'ism and Global Affairs at Harvard University's Weatherhead Center for International Affairs launched the Ashura research track through the sponsorship of the Jaffer Family Foundation of New York (JFF) in the memory of the iconic philanthropist Late Mustafa G R Jaffer.

The Ashura at Harvard track endeavors to undertake research and produce high-quality scholarly output on the historic event of Ashura and the culturally diverse manifestations of mourning for Imam Husayn in the West as well as in traditionally under-appreciated areas of the Muslim world.

In his keynote address Professor Payam Mohseni, Director of the Project on Shi'ism and Global Affairs - Harvard University, stated the project aims to initiate a comprehensive research track on the various dimensions of Ashura in elucidating the study of Shi'ism and the Shi'a world.'

Thanking the Jaffer Family Foundation of New York, he said that 'the Project on Shi'ism will be able to establish a research track on the academic study of Ashura and the life of Imam Husayn.'

The Ashura research track will conduct further research on early Islamic history as it related to the subject of Ashura and study the various cultural, artistic, and ritual manifestations of Ashura as have been developed across the world into the contemporary era. It will also pursue the academic research on Ashura and the fields of study in which Ashura has been undertaken in Western academia across various disciplines.

Echoing the sentiments by Dr. Mohseni, Professor Nicholas Boylston, Lecturer in the Study of Religion – Harvard University, emphasized that in view of the increasing interest and demand for courses on Shi'a studies, this was indeed a welcome initiative to help meet the needs of students who wish to serious academic study of Shi'a Islam.

Dr Hasnain Walji, Executive Director of the United Global Initiative, outlined the trajectory of Shi'a studies in Western academia and welcomed the Ashura at Harvard initiative as one that would provide the much-needed interaction between academia and the wider community. He emphasized that it was time that Western academia had conversations with the Shi'a rather than just about the Shi'a.

The Chairman of the JFF Mohamed Taki Jaffer appreciated the opportunity to be a part of this noble project to create greater understanding of Ashura and Shi'a Islam - perhaps the first ever academic project specifically dedicated to focus on the life and times of Imam Husain who inspired many social justices causes by his valiant stand against oppression and tyranny.

A board member of the JFF Siddique Jaffer stated that the JFF continues the legacy of their father and prayed for successful implementation of this great initiative to enhance greater understanding amongst all people of faith to make this world a better place for all humanity.

The event concluded with closing remarks by Mohammad Sagha, PhD Candidate and Co-Director of the Shi'i Studies Group - University of Chicago, who underlined the significance of Shi'a studies in academia and the importance of providing an advanced scholarly venue for students and researchers who wish to pursue Shi'a studies.

The video for the launch event will be made available in the near future for your viewing. We will make an announcement at that time so kindly stay tuned for future updates.

For further information, contact Dr. Payam Mohseni at pmohseni@fas.harvard.edu