

Peculiarities of Uzbek mourning Rites

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ABSTRACT: The article reveals Uzbek traditions of remembrance of the deceased. The similarities of memorial ceremonies with the birth and childcare periods are analysed, as well as cases involving figures in family rites.

KEYWORD: Uzbeks, family rites, commemoration of the dead, customs, Islam, funerals, condolences, fatwas, ceremonies of three, seven, twenty, forty.

Introduction

Remembrance ceremonies have a special place in the system of funerals and condolences, and Islam stipulates that these ceremonies must be performed in a certain order, on a certain day or time, and these ceremonies have always been performed by people in this traditional way.

Main body

The rite of commemoration among the Uzbeks consists of several stages. According to the ancient tradition, a candle was lit for forty days in a house where the deceased was "put on the ground" and "followed into the real world", and after three days a sheep was slaughtered and "washed" by the goddess, "the tip of the dead" and then "seven". "Twenty", "forty" and finally "one year" after Eid al-Fitr and Eid al-Adha, mourning women wore "white" and mourned after the "white sun" ceremony. Although these dates are referred to as "twenty", "forty" and "year" memorial services, in fact "twenty" falls on the seventeenth or nineteenth day after the funeral, "forty" falls on the thirty-seventh or thirty-second, and "year" is usually after the ninth or eleventh month. The system of memorial services for the deceased includes natural and seasonal events.

Some ethnographers explain that memorial services are held on certain days because the spirit of the deceased lives in his home for a year and is tormented by the fact that he does not remember it well, as if the spirits also eat the guests' food.

According to journalists, the reason for the multi-stage memorial ceremony is that when a person's soul dies, it is forced into a strange life, and often misses home. Within a year, it is fully accustomed to the afterlife and no longer visits its home.

The fact that the rites of seven, twenty, forty days and one year dedicated to the spirit of the deceased are performed at the proper time may also be related to the process whereby the body of the deceased is buried in the ground for a year. The spirit of the deceased comes to his body until it has rotted

away and only bone remains. Therefore, ceremonies are held throughout the year to commemorate the return of the soul to earth.

X. Esbergenov writes that the thanks of those who come to the memorial service serve as a request to God to ask the deceased to go to heaven.

Informants disagree on this, and their reasons for holding a memorial service vary. They do not even know why these ceremonies are held on these particular days. Uzbek funerals embody various beliefs and customs, rooted in the period of the primitive community and animistic beliefs. This is based on the belief in the existence of the human spirit in the afterlife. Later, these beliefs were adopted by advanced religions.

The original cause of commemoration ceremonies such as the three, seven, twenty, forty days and year period ceremonies, which are held simultaneously in many countries, still needs to be investigated. Nor can their cause be attributed to Islam, because the Koran and other religious books say nothing about five-step remembrance ceremonies. Ethnographer M. Ruzieva writes about mourning ceremonies in the 1970s [1].

At the same time, the Spiritual Administration of Muslims of Central Asia and Kazakhstan also undertook measures to reduce the number of commemoration ceremonies. During the year, a fatwa was issued [2] stating that ceremonies such as 3,7,20,40, which in some cases were lavish, had no Shariah basis, and that memorial services should be held with close relatives [2]. The Muslim Board of Uzbekistan adopted a fatwa in the early years of independence and the fourth article of the fatwa's requirements states that 'the ceremonies, conducted in seven, twenty, forty days and a year of Eid al-Fitr which became customary after the burial of the deceased are not Shariah'.

Some scholars like K. Nasriddinov on Uzbek nation [4], S. P. Tolstov, Turkmen nation [5], H. Esbergenov on Karakalpak nation [6] have shown that holding memorial ceremonies during such periods is not Islamic.

Most sources also refer to the above rituals as "a tradition inherited from our ancestors", without linking them to Islam.

Written sources on the ancient peoples of Central Asia also confirm that these rituals are of the nature of pre-Islamic beliefs. According to Herodotus, the celebration of feasts on the day of burial, the fortieth day and the year passed on from the ancient peoples of the island (the Scythians).

However, some scholars also attribute the multi-stage nature of the campaign to Christianity. But these multi-stage memorial ceremonies also exist in countries that do not believe in Christianity.

According to S.A. Tokarev, Eastern Slavic peoples, even in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, had ceremonies in the family without religious rites. So, the reason why the memorial ceremonies are held in the period of 7-20-40 days and a year is not because of Muslim, Christian and other religions, but because of primitive beliefs and ideas which have survived among people.

H. Esbergenov, who studied Karakalpak funeral rites links them to the idea of the rebirth of the soul of a dead person, which takes place in strictly defined periods of 7, 20, 40 days and a year. In his opinion, these ceremonies not only resemble those associated with childbirth, but also take place precisely during those periods.

Indeed, rituals with purifying and magical properties are present both at the birth of a child and in the memorial ceremonies mentioned above.

The first forty days after childbirth is the **chilla period**. The rituals performed during the chilla period were performed to protect the baby (*murghak*) from evil spirits and evil eyes. This also applies, for example, to the mourning ceremony when the lamp is turned on at night. The most difficult days for a child are the first seven days. During these seven days she/he adapts naturally to the environment, i.e. the biological state of the body adapts to the temperature and light of the surrounding air. In our opinion, this is why there are seven ceremonies, because the soul of the deceased is also adapted to the afterlife.

The child will have a slight chill after twenty days, and the chill period will end after forty days. The child be fully adapted to the environment. She/he can then be bathed in unsalted, uncontaminated water, from which the 'dog shirt' or 'chillah shirt' can be removed.

After one year, the child starts to walk and eat on his own. He will now be much more independent. The Uzbeks, like other peoples of Central Asia, have the same timing of staged ceremonies for a child under one year of age as 7, 20, 40 and one year of commemoration.

So, in essence, we can conclude that the origin of the above-mentioned commemoration ceremonies must be connected with the idea of a new birth and development of the soul in the afterlife. But then why these ceremonies are not performed when young children die. The informants explained the reason as follows: since a boy was considered innocent until the age of twelve and a girl until the age of nine, there was no need to hold a multi-stage commemoration ceremony for them, since they had left the world as an angel.

Kazakh scientist A.T. Toleubaev links the five-stage commemoration with the development of the child in the womb [11]. During the first seven days of development the embryo is in the form of foam. On the fortieth day it turns into blood, in which signs of life appear. From the fortieth day until birth, the child's body and soul develop and take shape. In total this process takes nine months and nine days.

As we can see, the stages of the child's development in the womb are similar to those of the five-stage memorial service. This similarity is not only in that it has a logical connection stemming from animistic imaginaries.

The development of the child in the womb and the timing of the five-stage memorial service can be associated with the moon, one of the lights of the sky.

L.J. Sternberg also writes on this subject: *"The phases of the moon are normal for us, but primitive man was struck by the fact that every month dies and resurrects"*, and they associate the moon with the concept of death and resurrection [12].

Another reason why memorial services such as "three", "seven", "twenty", "forty" and "year" are held simultaneously is because of "magic" numbers, i.e. "three", "seven", beliefs and practices such as the practice of "twenty", the practice of "forty" or the burning of forty elephants on behalf of ghosts, also derives from ancient folk beliefs associated with "magic" numbers.

It is important to know the historical basis, essence and meaning of traditional numbers used in our rituals and customs. In doing so, the concept of number should not be confused with the centuries-old traditions of our people.

If we take number "3" in remembrance of the deceased we will see that it is included in various rituals of our people. The number "3" is found not only in the "tip" of the deceased, but also in other funeral rites. For example, setting a cauldron for three coffins to heat water, the number of participants in the ablutions of the deceased, three layers of male shrouds, cleansing the beds so that

the deceased sees a "star" for three nights. , or three visits to tombs. On the third day, the Uzbeks performed the "*kir yuvdi*" ritual, during which they washed the three ends of the bed.

The number "7" is also reflected in ancestral traditions and reflects their way of life and psyche. For example, there is a popular belief that "7 wonders", "7 heavens" and hell consist of 7 stories.

The 10th century historian Narshahi reports: No matter how many times he builds it, it will be destroyed again. The judges were assembled and asked for their advice. They decided to build this tower on seven stone pillars in the shape of seven pirate stars in the sky. The tower was never demolished as it was (once built). Another notable feature of this palace is that no king who lived in it was ever defeated and no king died in it until it was demolished"[14].

The custom of lifting the coffin up seven steps, throwing seven spades of earth into the grave and circling the Kaaba seven times is also associated with the number "7". Even in the early years of independence the seven dead were actually kept on the fourth day, although it was still called "seven". M. S. Andreev, who observed the rites of the Tajik Yaghnob people in 1927-1928, also reported that seven rites were held on the fourth day, during which sheep were slaughtered.

When we talk about the number "40" in connection with commemoration of the deceased, we pay attention to the word "*qirq chilla*", *chilla* is used to denote a hot day in summer and a cold one in winter, in the system of family rites it is used to denote the post-natal period, childbirth and death. Grieving family members also get cold for forty days after the burial of the deceased. During this period they go nowhere. It was during this cold that a lamp was lit in the house of the deceased. According to informants, it was rumoured that the dead needed the same light as the living [16].

Analysis of the collected data showed that the deceased needed light only for forty days, i.e. before the "chilla" ritual, after which the soul of the deceased did not need light. According to B. Toleubaw, the deceased was not included in the list of the dead for the first forty days, so a lamp was lit in the room for his soul, and the newborn was not included in the list of the living for the first forty days. So, the recitation of the Koran in the mourning house for forty days is an Islamicised form of this custom.

Uzbeks used to light a lamp before sunset before the "forty" of the deceased, when all family members would gather in the room where the deceased had been washed and the eldest of the family would wrap cotton wool in a reed straw or a scented stick, dipped it in oil and poured some flour into a bowl. An elderly man in the family recited the Koran before the lamp was lit. People did not turn off the lamp on the basis that if the lamp was turned off, it was tantamount to turning off the dead person's lamp, it would light up and go out on its own. Not surprisingly, the ancient saying "*Sit by the lamp of the dead*" is related to this rite.

Despite the conservatism of mourning ceremonies, recent years have seen a change in the rituals of this particular period of life. Ceremonies that used to be considered compulsory are now performed on a voluntary basis. New features in the conduct of memorial ceremonies appear not only in the special ceremonies, but also in their essence and content. While the characteristic feature of traditional ceremonies is that they ensure the "life" of the deceased in the afterlife, most Uzbeks today do not associate these ceremonies with the "afterlife". They believe that the essence of these mourning ceremonies has to do with the care and respect shown to the deceased, as well as the care and support of family members of the deceased.

Conclusion

In general, memorial ceremonies have a special place in people's mourning ceremonies and have developed in connection with people's lifestyles and cultural activities. Today, the timing of these

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ceremonies has changed slightly. Although seven, twenty-five or forty years of the deceased are not timed, it has become a special tradition to commemorate his soul, i.e. after his death voluntary charity meetings are held by his relatives on memorial days. According to a sociological survey, 92% of respondents agreed with the question of how you feel about joint commemoration ceremonies and donations.

Thus, sharp turns in the political, socio-economic and cultural development of society and the emergence of change directly and indirectly affect the traditions, customs and rituals of the people.

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