

Karbala

Karbala



Muhammad Namazi

Al-Islam.org

Al-Serat Vol. 2, no. 4 (1976)

[1] [1]

SHARES

Authors(s):

[Muhammad Namazi](#) [2]

Publisher(s):

[Muhammadi Trust of Great Britain and Northern Ireland](#) [3]

[Get PDF](#) [4] [Get EPUB](#) [5] [Get MOBI](#) [6]

Topic Tags:

[Karbala](#) [7]

Person Tags:

[Imam Husayn](#) [8]

Karbala

Late Professor M. M. Namazi

Al-Serat, Vol 2, 1976, no.4, pp 2-11

Muharram literally means prohibited or unlawful, and it is the name of the first month of Islamic Calendar because during this month the Arabs used to lay down their arms and ceased to fight. The Islamic Calendar is a lunar one, and four months out of the twelve were considered by the Arabs as prohibited months namely Muharram, Rajab and Dhu 'l-Qa'da and Dhu 'l-Hijja. This old Arab custom continued in Islam¹, but it was broken by Yazid when he waged war with Husayn in Muharram (61 Hijra – 680 A.D.). Thus, the army of Yazid slaughtered Husayn at Karbala during the time-honoured prohibited month, namely Muharram.

Karbala is situated in Iraq 50 miles from Baghdad along the Euphrates. When on 2nd of Muharram 61 A.H. Husayn arrived there, he found it a desert. It was owned by some people of the Bani Asad tribe who lived in their tent-dwellings a few miles away. Husayn purchased from them the whole area which is now known as Karbala.

The word Husayn is a diminutive form of Hasan which means good and nice. Husayn was the second grandson of the Prophet, being a son of Ali ibn Abi Talib and Fatima, the only daughter of the Prophet. Husayn was born at Medina on 3rd Sha'ban 4 A.H. The word Husayn bears the same significance as Shubair in Hebrew. Shubair is the name of the second son of the Prophet Aaron, the brother of Moses.

History tells us that among the prophets of old who suffered and were tortured to death in the cause of truth, John the Baptist stands foremost. At Karbala Husayn remembered him not infrequently. According to the Christian belief Jesus Christ sacrificed his holy life at the Cross for the salvation of the believers. But John the Baptist and Jesus were both celibates and possessed nothing beyond the lives which they laid down. But the sufferings and hardships of these and of the other Prophets and holy person-ages and martyrs taken individually or collectively stand no comparison with the horrible tragedy of Karbala (10th, Muharram 61 A.H. – 9th, October, 680 A.D.).

It should be noted that Husayn was born and brought up in a highly religious family where all kinds of ecclesiastical as well as temporal laws were respected in the highest degree. This is illustrated by a famous saying of Imam Ali, "I swear by God that if I am given all the seven continents with all the things contained in them to induce me to commit a sin, still I will not commit a sin even to the extent of taking away a seed of barley from an ant."

History proves that the love of the Prophet Muhammad for Husayn was unlimited: and it is agreed on all hands that the Prophet used to say "Husaynun minni wa ana min Husayn" i.e. Husayn is of me and I am of Husayn.

The Prophet's love for Husayn finds powerful evidence and illustration in an incident of the 9th year of the Hijra. In that year some Christian priests of Najran in Yemen came to Medina with the object of ascertaining the truth of Muhammad's mission. It was agreed upon, after some discussion, that both parties should bring their women and sons to an appointed place and make "Mubahila" i.e. to pray that God's wrath and curse may fall upon the liar and imposter². Next day, 24th Dhu 'l-Hijja, the Prophet proceeded to the place with Ahl Al-Bayt only, consisting of 'Ali, Fatima, Hasan and Husayn. Thereupon the opposite party gave up the challenge and agreed to pay an annual tribute. This event and many others illustrate the great position of Husayn in Islam and in the eyes of the Prophet.

Now, I would like to deal with a very important matter. It was common amongst the Arabs to boast of their ancestral lineages; but Islam does not support this idea at all. Islam refutes that custom outright³. Noah's son associated himself with wicked men, and thereupon his connections with his father were cut off for ever by God⁴.

The wives of the Prophet Noah and the Prophet Lot, nephew of Abraham, also received rebuke and denunciation when they proved to be unworthy of the honour conferred upon them⁵. The criterion of greatness in Islam is piety, knowledge and virtue⁶. Therefore, the greatness of Husayn was not so much because of his close relation with the Prophet, but because he possessed all those qualities which make

a perfect man great and famous and entitle his name to be written in the first page of the book of eternity in letters of gold.

Considering the important position that Imam Husayn held in the history of the world even a critic would ungrudgingly concede to his ranking as one of the most learned men of Islam. His devotion to God and respect to the laws of religion were second to none. Iqbal says:

در میان است ان کیوان جناب همچو حرف قل هو الله در کتاب

The exalted position of Husayn amongst Muslims, which surpassed the height of Saturn, is similar to that of ***Qul Huwa Allah (112: 1)*** compared with other verses in the Quran.

None could be more eloquent than the Holy Quran. We are informed⁷ that once in fulfilment of a vow 'Ali and Fatima resolved to fast for three consecutive days. Hasan and Husayn also joined them. On the very first day when at breaking the fast at night, a poor hungry man came to the door asking for alms. 'Ali gave away his only loaf and Fatima, his wife, and Hasan and Husayn, his sons, did the same with the result that nothing was left for them to break their fast with. On the next day at the time of breaking the fast an orphan came. And the latter was followed on the third day's fasting by a captive. All were fed successively and, in the manner described above; and Husayn in spite of his tender years fasted at a stretch for three consecutive days.

This and many other noble deeds of like nature distinguished the pious and holy lives of the Prophet's family and provide a proof of their supernatural virtue and determination to serve and guide humanity.

On the 2nd day of Muharram 61 A.H. history tells us Zuhair ibn al Qu'ain, a gallant companion, suggested to him that, as Hurr, who led the first battalions of Yazid's army to intercept Husayn, possessed only a thousand horsemen, it would be easy to fall on them and destroy them before the arrival of reinforcements. But Husayn refused to accept the suggestion and did not approve the idea of taking aggression. Overwhelming contemporary evidence establishes the fact that Husayn was ready to suffer rather than make others suffer.

It is this kind of lofty ideal which all mankind will be interested in preserving at all times, since it will ensure the increasing glory and well-being of mankind through all ages and times.

Ibn 'Abd Rabbih writes in 'Iqd al-farid that Husayn used to pray one thousand rakats (رکعت) every day. Even in the scorching heat of 'Ashura, the tenth of Muharram, in the plain of Karbala, Imam Husayn performed his prayers amidst a heavy rain of darts and arrows from the army of Yazid.

No wonder that such a holy man as Husayn would never submit to a rake and drunkard like Yazid who was neglecting openly the prayers and all principles of Islam.

Husayn expressed one of his great principles in a short sentence saying “al-qatl awla min rukub al-'ari” "It is better to be killed than to accept humiliation."

The Holy Quran enjoins that the spiritual ruler of Muslims must be an ardent pious Muslim⁸. The Muslims should not allow themselves to be dominated and ruled by the non-Muslims. They should not permit the abridgement of personal freedom and the exercise of arbitrary power by irresponsible and conscienceless authority. They must refuse to acknowledge the sovereignty of an atheistic rake. And Husayn acted consistently and most courageously according to this principle.

The tragedy of Karbala was not the only evidence of the barbarity debasement and treachery of Yazid; his massacre and plunder of Medina (the Prophet's city) and demolition of the sacred Ka'ba is another proof of the fact that Yazid was not a true Muslim and had no fear of God.

This sad event is called the battle of Harra. Muslim Ibn 'Ukba al-Murri with an army from Syria was ordered by Yazid to plunder the city of Medina and massacre its people for three consecutive days. The army of Yazid met the defenders of Medina on 27th Dhu 'l-Hijja 63 A.H. at a rocky place called Harra which is one mile away from the Prophet's mosque. The defenders from Quraish were led by Abd Allah Ibn Muti' al-'Adwi, a cousin of 'Umar Ibn al Khattab; and Abd Allah Ibn Hanzala al-Ghasil al-Ansari was leading the Ansar.

The forces of Yazid put thousands of the Muslims to the sword; and they entered with their horses into the shrine of the Prophet where many helpless people had taken shelter; so many were massacred that the whole of the Prophet's mosque and shrine were deluged with blood. As already said, Yazid gave free hand to his army at Medina for three days. It is mentioned by al-Tabari, al-Waqidi, Ibn Qutaiba and Jalal al-Din al-Suyuti and other notable writers, that apart from other gross atrocities perpetrated by them, about one thousand virgin girls and several thousand women were ravished. one thousand and seven hundred men of reputation from among the Quraish, Muhajirin and Ansar and more than ten thousand other people – not counting women and children were mercilessly put to death.

On entering a house, a soldier of the army of Yazid saw a baby sucking at his mother's breast; the brute pulled the baby by the leg, dashed him against the wall and smashed his skull and brains. While plundering the city, the army of Yazid tortured many people and killed others outright; they started for Mecca, surrounded the holy city and rained stones and fire on the sacred Ka'ba and demolished it. However, before they could force their way into the holy city and repeat the wholesale massacre and atrocities which they had committed at Medina, they received the news of Yazid's death and had to shorten their nefarious programme of plunder, pollution and destruction.

It should be noted that rules and regulations of Islam make it incumbent on every Muslim in normal times to refrain from taking risk and jeopardizing his health and life. A sick man, for instance is exempted from the obligation of and spared the trouble of fasting; similarly, a Muslim is spared the trouble of performing a pilgrimage to Mecca if the road to Mecca happens to be unsafe.

But in times of crisis say on two occasions life becomes unworthy to live and everyone is required to lay it down. First when a person is asked under threat of being killed to kill another. Here the menace to one's life affords no justification for destroying the life of another person which is as precious as one's own.

Secondly, when Islam is in danger, at that time it is the solemn duty of every Muslim to give away his life and everything that he owns. That is what actually happened at Karbala. Islam was in danger. And in order to save Islam Husayn sacrificed his life and everything else on the 10th of Muharram. Sir Iqbal says:

پر حق در خاک و خون غلطیده است پس بنائے لا اله گریده است

Husayn weltered in blood and dust for the sake of truth. Verily, he became the rock-bottom (foundation) of the Muslim creed: La ilaha illa'llah. Khaja Moinuddin Cheshti says:

سرداد و نداد دست در دست یزید حقا کہ بنائے لا اله است حسین

He gave away his head, but did not put his hand into the hands of Yazid. Verily Husayn is the foundation of “**la ilaha illa Allah**”.

The heart-rending tortures and sufferings of Imam Husayn at Karbala saved Islam with all its ethics from destruction. Islam as it has been founded by his grand-father Prophet Muhammad, and which Imam Husayn loved and adored and at the altar of which he laid down his life and gave away freely everything that was near and dear to him – the lives of his children, nephews, brothers and those of his best friends and companions along with all their belongings and goods.

It should be noted that even the ornaments and head-wear of the ladies of Imam Husayn's family were ruthlessly plundered after his martyrdom on the 10th of Muharram. And the patience and forbearance of Saiyid Sajjad, the only surviving son of Imam Husayn who lay in a sick bed in the tent and silently witnessed the heart-breaking scene of wholesale destruction of Ahl Al-Bayt and his subsequent orations to this effect are the crowning features of the tragedy of Karbala.

Husayn passed away from this world to take his abode in the presence of the throne of Eternity.

وَلَا تَحْسَبَنَّ الَّذِينَ قُتِلُوا فِي سَبِيلِ اللَّهِ أَمْوَاتًا ۚ بَلْ أَحْيَاءٌ عِنْدَ رَبِّهِمْ يُرْزَقُونَ

“Think not of those, who are slain in the way of Allah, as dead. Nay, they are living. With their Lord they have provision.” (Aali-Imran, 3: 169).

Husayn was besieged and was assaulted by innumerable hordes and armies while over and above this and at the same time he was attacked by hunger, thirst and the burning heat of the Arabian summer and by every conceivable distress; and all this he bore with such a remarkable patience as seemed beyond the scope of human endurance.

Husayn and his sons, brothers, nephews, cousins and supporters were ruthlessly butchered in the most brutal way. They were deprived of water for so many days – water which could be freely used by all others, even by animals.

Husayn was beheaded from behind; his body was disrobed and cut to pieces and trampled under hoofs of horses and he was subjected to all sorts of humiliations and tortures before his holy soul passed away; but his firm and unwavering conviction of a future life remained, spread far and wide and created a bright future for Islam. Iqbal says:

تا قیامت قطع استبداد کرد

موج خون او چمن ایجاد کرد. ملت خوابیده را بیدار کرد

He uprooted despotism for ever till the day of resurrection. He watered the dry garden of freedom with the surging wave of his blood, and indeed he awakened the sleeping Muslim nation.

It is true that Husayn suffered a physical defeat, but he gained a moral victory. Husayn emancipated humanity by cutting at the root of treacherous diplomacy and opened a new chapter in human history of triumph for virtue, learning and freedom of conscience. His efforts were crowned with success.

The Holy Quran says:

مَنْ عَمِلَ صَالِحًا فَلِنَفْسِهِ وَمَنْ أَسَاءَ فَعَلَيْهَا

“Any man doeth good does it for himself and whoever doeth evil does it against himself”
(Fussilat, 41:46).

In other words, there is a reaction for every action which is termed in English Philosophy, the "Causation theory" corresponding with the Karma in the Mimamsa philosophy of Hindus.

Husayn's sacrifices and sufferings in the cause of Truth and Righteousness are unparalleled in human history; and in the same proportion the reactions of these have surpassed the reactions of all sufferings of kindred nature known to history.

I venture to say and the clear contemporary historical evidence supports it that the tragedy of Karbala was not merely a struggle between Husayn and Yazid "originally based on the rivalry between two families, Banu Hashim and Banu Umayya for the leadership of Islam". It would be a travesty of truth and fact if anybody apprehended that Husayn fought for worldly gains. I wish to give the lie to that kind of absolutely wrong suggestion; and I am borne out by Sir Iqbal who says:

رمایش سلطنت بودیے اگر خود نہ کردی با چین مامان سفر

If Imam Husayn had aimed at acquiring worldly empire he would not have travelled the way he did (from Medina to Karbala).

None can dispute the fact that Yazid grossly disregarded the Islamic teachings and principles; and none can deny that when the Prophet's grand-daughters together with Husayn's family and children were presented to him at his assembly like prisoners of war along with the head of Husayn, he plied his stick to Husayn's lips, mocked at him and made highly objectionable remarks showing contempt for Islam, the Prophet of Islam and his House, Ahl Al-Bayt.

Furthermore, Yazid is noted in history for his atrocities and massacre of the Muslims of Medina and his murdering the Muslims of Mecca and desecrating and demolishing the sacred Ka'ba.

It is really very amazing to find that there are still in this 20th century of enlightenment and scientific progress "Muslims" who have remained ignorant of the misdeeds of Yazid and of his contempt for Islam and who are inclined to consider him as a rival of Imam Husayn in the realm of Islam.

From the historical data marshalled above one cannot but infer that the fight between Imam Husayn and Yazid was a struggle between Godliness and Devilry, and between Virtue and Vice. Husayn represented the divine attributes in the highest degree while Yazid embodied almost all the qualities and propensities of Satan.

The golden deeds of Imam Husayn have saved humanity from destruction. They are still, and will always remain, a guiding star and beacon for all those seeking guidance, inspiration and truth.

Husayn has given innumerable lessons to mankind; he has shown the right way and manner of performing sacrifice and of undergoing sufferings in the cause of Truth, Virtue, Freedom of thought and conscience. Throughout his life and right up to his martyrdom at Karbala he strictly observed the laws of God and Humanity with the greatest zeal and vigour and in the face of immeasurable adversities and embarrassments.

That is why the other nations of the world have drawn inspiration from him. They celebrate his martyrdom in the month of Muharram, with as much enthusiasm and sympathy as the Muslims themselves. Instances beyond computation can be given to illustrate how the Jews, the Christians,

Hindus, Chinese and Parsees adore Imam Husayn. I restrain myself from going into details for want of space and time.

To say that Muharram ceremonies are observed only in India and Iran is to betray one's ignorance about the Muslim world. In fact, Muharram is observed almost in every Muslim and non-Muslim country. In Iraq Muharram is celebrated even on a larger scale than in India. In Egypt men of rank and position as well as those of Sufi persuasion celebrate it in the most impressive manner. Even in Istanbul, the old capital of Turkey, the Muharram ceremonies used to be celebrated publicly. And Husayn day was observed at a place called Khan-i-Waldeh; and the then Khalifa, Sultan Abdul Hamid, as a mark of respect to Imam Husayn, used to send escorts out of his own body guards to form part of Muharram's procession.

History tells us that the first public meeting in which Husayn's suffering were cited was held at Medina when 'Ali ibn Husayn who was seriously ill at Karbala, was taken with surviving members of the Husayn's family to Kufa and Damascus and thence to Medina.

They halted on the outskirts of Medina; and 'Ali Ibn Husayn sent Bashir Ibn Jazlam to inform the people of Medina about their arrival. Bashir came to the mosque of the Prophet with tears in his eyes and said at the top of his voice:

قتل الحسين فارمعي مد را را والرئيس منه على القناة ندارا

يا اهل يشرب لا مقام لكم بها الجسم منه بكريللا خرج

"O, people of Medina, Medina is no longer a fit abode for you, because Husayn has been martyred, my tears are streaming. His body lies weltering in (a pool of) blood at Karbala and his head is taken round fixed on the spear. Now 'Ali Ibn Husayn with his aunts and sisters have returned, and they are now outside the city. They have sent me to inform you of their arrival."

On hearing this the inhabitants of Medina came out to receive the party. With their hair scattered and barefooted, the women came out of their respective houses and marched in mourning, smiting their faces in order to meet the Ahl Al-Bayt.

'Ali Ibn Husayn came out of his tent weeping and wiping his tears with a hand-kerchief. Tears streamed forth profusely and ceaselessly from his eyes.

The whole crowd also were weeping and crying. Then he made a sign to the crowd to keep quiet for a while. When silence prevailed, he began his sermon. He praised God and reminded them of the great calamity which had befallen Islam.

He said, "Verily Husayn and his followers were murdered, his women folk and children were taken

prisoners. His holy head fixed on a spear was taken round the cities. This is a calamity which has no parallel elsewhere". He then said "Oh, People, is there any heart which is not mourning and not bleeding for Husayn? Who can stand listening to the heart-rending story of this distress of Islam without bursting into tears? I swear by God that if the Prophet had not recommended us to the fold of Islam; and if he had on the contrary ordered them to ill-treat us in the worst possible manner, the outrages practised on us and tyranny exercised over us could not have been exceeded".

Later, under the Abbasids and during the reign of the 23rd Caliph al-Muti' Ibn Fadl Ibn Ja'far al-Muqtadir bi'llah (who reigned from 334 to 363 𐆱. 𐆱. 945 to 973 A.D.) an order was issued (352 A.H. 963 A.D.) by Ahmad Ibn Buwaih al-Dailami otherwise known as Mu'izz al-Dawla that the 'Ashura should be celebrated as a day of mourning and the whole population of Baghdad should mourn the martyrdom of Imam Husayn.

He further ordered that women should be permitted to come out in mourning procession with their hair dishevelled on the said day of 'Ashura and that all shops should be closed with black hung in front of them. Furthermore, it was notified that all public places serving food should be closed and all public works must be stopped. It was ordered that the whole city should observe mourning.

The above orders were carried out and universal mourning was observed. This is the origin of the commemoration of the martyrdom of Imam Husayn.

I would like to add that Husayn is not of the Shi'a fold only. Could anybody claim that God, the Ka'ba, the Holy Quran and Muhammad belong to a particular section of the Muslims? Nay, they belong to all sections of the Muslims.

I for one, believe, that the differences that existed in the past and those which exist still are born of ignorance. They will be dispelled with the dawn of knowledge and understanding.

I say we believe in the Day of Resurrection and Judgment; and if we do, let us hold up the said differences until then to be resolved before Allah, Muhammad and the parties concerned. Let us be united in the manner ordained by him.

I feel that Muslims should at least concede what even non-Muslims have agreed upon, namely that the sufferings, and privations Husayn underwent at Karbala for the sake of humanity have placed him high in the estimation of all for all time.

Again, in fairness, the Muslims may concede what non-Muslim critics of the Prophet have conceded that Husayn belongs to the Universe because of the unfaltering manner in which he stood for righteousness in the midst of unprecedented and unparalleled ordeals and trials.

I trust the Muslims will also admit the fact that it is because of his unique sacrifices and services to Islam and humanity at large that Imam Husayn is adored and loved by all. And whoever acts upon the golden

principles of Husayn and follows his brilliant example belongs to him.

I repeat that Imam Husayn does not belong to the Shi'a, and has nothing do with Sunnis. He is not exclusively of the Muslims either. Husayn belongs to God and is absorbed in Him.

Husayn is the embodiment of Virtue and Truth and as such holds up the light to humanity and the whole world and he has taken abode in the Eternal Bliss.

I conclude with Salawat on Husayn; but while doing so I fear there might be someone who might object to this. They might contend that Salawat could be invoked on the Prophet only, but the Quran says that the Salawat is not confined to the Prophet only. For instance, the following verses prove the justification for the extension of Salawat to other holy personages:

الَّذِينَ إِذَا أَصَابَتْهُمُ مُصِيبَةٌ قَالُوا ۖ إِنَّا لِلَّهِ وَإِنَّا إِلَيْهِ رَاجِعُونَ

Who say, when a misfortune striketh them: Lo! we are Allah's and lo! unto Him we are returning. (Al-Baqarah, 2: 156).

أُولَٰئِكَ عَلَيْهِمْ صَلَوَاتٌ مِّن رَّبِّهِمْ وَرَحْمَةٌ ۖ وَأُولَٰئِكَ هُمُ الْمُهْتَدُونَ

Such are they on whom are blessings from their Lord, and mercy. Such are the rightly guided. (Al-Baqarah, 2: 157).

History bears powerful testimony to the fact that in the midst of sufferings, Husayn continued to recite the aforesaid Quranic Verse.

Therefore, Imam Husayn is entitled to Salawat; and we are justified in invoking Salawat (blessings) on him. Peace be upon him.

AMIN

(Message – May 1967)

[1.](#) Vide At-Tawba, 9:36 and Al-Baqara, 2:214.

[2.](#) Refer to Aali-'Imran, 3:54.

[3.](#) Refer to Al-Mu'minun, 23: 103.

[4.](#) Refer to Hud, 11:47.

[5.](#) Refer to At-Tahrim, 66: 10.

[6.](#) Refer to Al-Hujurat, 49: 13, etc.

[7.](#) Vide Surat al-Dahr, 76:7.

[8.](#) Refer to al-Ma'ida, 5:60, al-Mujadila, 58:22, etc.

[1] [1]

SHARES

Source URL: <https://al-islam.org/al-serat/vol-2-no-4-1976/karbala-muhammad-namazi>

Links

[1] <https://www.addtoany.com/share>

[2] <https://al-islam.org/person/muhammad-namazi>

[3] <https://al-islam.org/organization/muhammadi-trust-great-britain-and-northern-ireland>

[4] <https://al-islam.org/printpdf/book/export/html/208621>

[5] <https://al-islam.org/printepub/book/export/html/208621>

[6] <https://al-islam.org/printmobi/book/export/html/208621>

[7] <https://al-islam.org/tags/karbala>

[8] <https://al-islam.org/person/imam-husayn>