

Ashura', the Tenth of Muharram



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Article

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A historical analysis of what led to the tragedy of Karbala¹.

In the Name of Allah, the most Gracious, the most Merciful

The Religion of Islam was presented to the world and human society Forthrightly; no problem, or issue, which was necessary for of society in order to prosper, was left unsolved by the time the Prophet passed away. All issues were made clear to people whether outspokenly, or contained within the folds of decrees that were enunciated. One of the issues of significance which the Prophet made most clear during his lifetime of prophethood and which the mentioned repeatedly was that of leadership and the question of the person who would assume the role of leader after his death.

Islam was not a religion that merely confined itself to matters concerning morality, or set forth advice on matters related to living. The Prophet was not a man who abstained from the world and relegated himself to delivering a few sermons. If it had been so, his cry and call would have been lost amidst the clamours of history, as have the voices of several other pious sages. If so, then this profound revolution would never have reached fruition, nor could we have learned from this perfect religion of a range of issues such as the regulation of society, the relationship of this world of ours with the next, the duties of individuals in society, the moral and material affairs, legal and cultural matters, penal codes, political issues, all issues of the moment and matters relating to philosophy and logic.

What the Prophet mainly directed his preaching to during chiefly 13-year stay in Mecca focussed on one aspect the oneness of God, the advent of his messengers, the essence and finality of prophethood and lastly the final return to God and the resurrection the prevailing milieu, the very atmosphere and circumstances then prevailing did not make it possible or convenient given the difficulties he had to cope with at the time to elaborate on and explicate on divine decrees to any full extent the prophet actually was unable to give practical cohesive form to a society based on the concept of the Qur'anic unity in God but this he was able to do only after 10 years after his migration to Medina. Here he was able to lay the groundwork for an edifice, which he buttressed with his proclamations. It was there in Medina that he enlarged the number of his followers and warriors many issues relating to politics, military and social affairs were expounded and put into practice.

It was during this Medina period that the prophet was able to organize Islamic society, a thing which was not practicable to do in Mecca and for which there was no groundwork even the very first fundamentals of belief and the initial commands of Islam they, the Meccans, were not inclined to accept, but they were ready to carp against and quarrel with the prophet. Hence to institute a new organization, to create an entirely different and changed atmosphere, to promulgate a new set of laws and establish a new society based on them was simply out of the question.

Therefore, the Prophet, restricted himself when at Mecca to preaching and propagating on the concept of the Oneness of God in order to that this may form a background and take a hold on the hearts of the people until the time was ripe for further advances to be made. If, however the Prophet deemed it sufficient to preach alone Islam would never have taken the revolutionary turn it did take, nor would a nation within Islam have taken shape. Today we see a religion spread from one end of the world to the other by the name of Islam.

This would hardly have been attained through preaching alone. To establish and consummate and complete a religion it is necessary to have a political and legal structure and beyond that a nation. Likewise, the Prophet who had both a divine office –that of prophethood– as well as a worldly one had necessarily to look to political and governmental organization.

The positions and offices he held were bestowed upon him by God as he was the seal of the prophets. He was a paragon of virtue from whom all could learn and a beacon of prosperity.

The Prophet created institution basing them on the high pedestal of Qur'anic standards. Then again he placed a great deal of stress on leadership that he viewed as essential to the existence of Islam and a system based on it. He named Ah as the leader of the nation and a guide to the interpretation of the Qur'an.

The Prophet, in addition to being a spiritual teacher was also a political leader, the standard bearer of a revolution. He had a Divine mission to invite people to God and demolish wrong beliefs, wrong deeds and deviated systems then prevalent in human society he replaced all these obsolete systems with those rooted in the Oneness of God and in divine policy, which in effect was the law of logic and reason. His mission was far reaching and aimed at embracing human beings all over the world and welding them into a single nation with belief in the unity of God, riveted to and directing their vision god ward endeavouring to perfection and eternity and ultimately basing their day-to-day material lives on a grid of moral injunctions founded on a principles derived from the Qur'an.

Indeed it is no simple matter to change an entire society. To speak, or write, is perhaps easier than it is to practice. A prophet has to be careful not to trespass on that which is considered to be universal sanctities, or those having their origins in nature or the very matrix of society. Long established traditions cannot be torn away at once.

Hence the prophet was at first obliged to tread the path of preaching in order to gather the people

around him and draw their hearts towards him.

When attracted to him, he could then set out his proposals before them and acquaint them with his mission.

The next stage would then be easier when he would be able to mould their lives according to law, organize them into a society and regulate society in terms of a system that system being Islam. This is indeed what the Prophet did in Mecca and later in Medina.

What is most remarkable in all this is the fact that right from the very inception the Prophet concentrated on one thing and that was the Oneness of God (*Tawhid*) and this idea of *Tawhid* (Oneness of God) surpassed everything else one that embraced all things.

Here was the foundation of a revolution paving the way for a new religion and one that was so perfect that it had no need to borrow from any other religion and stood in all things.

As such Islam covered every aspect of society and proved to be an ideal system through which social organization and political life were ordered and so Islam turned out to be more than just a religion. Islam in its vastness took within the folds of its soaring outspread wings every social and political form as to be considered a thing of such vast wonder and greatness by scholars.

A French scholar Jean Jacques Rousseau (1712–1778) has this to say of Islam:

“The holy religion (Christianity) has always been separated from the ruling class. There was no compulsory link between it and the government. But Muhammad in this regard had a very prudential and salutary approach since he used his political wing to good effect in ordering his affairs.”¹

George Saiten, historian, has this to say:

“For the first time a religion was to become a real motor for a system of great imperial power. The worldly rulers may be changed but the religion will have to remain a thing everlasting. The Muhammadan religion or Islam is the third and last of the monotheistic religions”.²

The prophet did not neglect paying attention and of the people.

He never failed to appoint a leader capable of guiding society in accordance with Qur’anic standards. Yet, the issue of leadership was distorted and embroiled in controversy after his demise. Those making decisions strayed away from the direction given by the Prophet. Whatever recommendation the Prophet made in this regard were conveniently forgotten, or ignored. The commandments set forth in the Qur’an and the entire body of philosophical and social thought, which were the keys to solution of such problems were never availed of.

And besides all this the person at the helm of affairs was not one appointed by the Prophet although he had himself nurtured the Prophet in his childhood and was well aware of the Qur’anic instructions and Islam is regulations. The absence of a responsible person at the top had a negative impact and

adversely affected later developments. Events kept on moving and moving and the currents kept flowing until the third one (Caliph) Othman, came to power.

In his time the mistakes became so apparent and so glaring that they could not possibly be overlooked, nor did they escape any one's notice.

Muslims in the end gathered. Together and decided to dismiss the Caliph (Othman) and to kill him. Now it came to the turn of Ali bin Abi Talib to assume the seat of the Caliphate.

The Bani Umayyad group whose leader was then Muawiyah was not happy with this development. They disliked the idea of Ali assuming power. There were 3 reasons for their resentment:

- 1) Envy and rivalry. They had hoped to take power after Othman and allow affairs to continue as they were before.
- 2) Enmity. They had not forgotten the blows dealt on them by the sword of Ali and Hamza in the early days of Islam. These dark, angry thoughts still rankled in their breasts since their ancestors were killed by Ali's sword a thing that caused them a great deal of agony and pain of mind. Hamza, they had already killed at the Battle of Badr and his body was torn to pieces. Now Ali was within range of their evil hands and so he became the target of their revenge.
- 3) Betrayal. They did not wish to see Islam making progress. But here was a man in the person of Ali very serious, very strong very straightforward and one very eagerly bent on doing everything he possibly could to invigorate Islam.

What they hoped for and what actually was happening ran counter to all they desired. Hope? To them there could have been no hope as long as Ali adhered to the Qur'an and the traditions of the Prophet. They knew and dreaded Ali's qualities since he was honest humble a servant of the poor and pious, contented brave a warrior and an adept at Qur'anic science. What they had spoiled this man could restore afresh.

Under the rule of such a man none that broke the law would escape, or go unaccounted.

They foresaw that Islam would regain its original effulgence and assert its authority. A return of this sort they hardly desired. The rule of Ali was a source of constant dread to the hypocrites at Damascus – – the pagans who took on the guise of Islam so that they could take shelter under it. They concocted plot after plot and finally contrived a very deep one. If it was not possible to stop the progress of Islam it was possible to stop Ali by creating hindrances in his way, causing setbacks and obstacles for him and such like. They created battles and battles draped Ali on to plain plateaus and deserts. Time which was precious to him, he had to spend in conflict. A conflict is one of the best means for consuming a person 5 times, the time of a man they wanted out of their way.

This is exactly what happened to men like Abuzar, Ammar Yaser, Hujaz bin Addi, Malik Ashtar,

Mohammed bin Abi Bakr, who were all killed.

And finally they plotted and planned a plan that went all too well. They assassinated Ali as he was offering his prayers to God at the mosque. Even as they succeeded in this wicked scheme of theirs, they stored it up as part of their experience which they later used in the identical way to get rid of the Second Imam, Imam Hasan. They went step by step – from betrayal to battle and continuous conflict alongside a propaganda campaign in order to darken the facts and obfuscate the reality and make nebulous the truth. Muawiya used every wicked stratagem available to him.

He was the man who fought Ali and now he could not bear to see Hasan occupying his seat. He resorted to every trick every cunning he used to act out his treachery.

Things became very difficult for Imam Hasan.

Finally, the outcome was a peace. Imam Hasan saw himself deserted by his army generals and the other commanders had no way left to them but to stop Muawiya by coming to terms in a peace accord with him, which terms he was obliged to be bound by.

Imam Hasan took the view that such a peace would be in the interests of his people.

Peace appeared to him as the only way in which to prevent the blood of Muslims from being shed and best to preserve the newly established order from being shattered.

He, therefore, suggested and wrote down the conditions for a peace, which could have ensured the safety of the religion, and of the Muslims and of the future itself. All he foresaw and embodied in this peace treaty. Muawiya accepted its condition.

But after he signed the treaty Muawiya picked and reneged on what he had agreed too earlier.

Muawiya did not honour a single condition of the peace treaty. He transformed Islamic society into almost a farcical and evil one and spread a reign of terror everywhere.

A great need of the time became the need to set things in order again.

But the worst happened.

Yazid became the Caliph; he now sat on the seat of the Prophet. It was Muawiyas intention that his son, Yazid, should come to power. Yazid was a villain of the worst dye and a drunkard. He came to power through the use of force, terror, bribes and every wicked means at his command.

All and any obstacles on his way he cleared with the sword or using poison.

Imam Hasan was poisoned because had he lived he would never have allowed Yazid to come to power.

Y

azid was a mere youth, easygoing and a debauchee, born to a Christian mother and brought up by her.

He was from his young days addicted to drink and the rearing of dogs. It was such a youth who took control of the government in an Islamic domain where the Qur'an and the mosques were predominant and where from the minarets was sounded the call of 'Allaho-akbar' and witness was borne in the recital which said: "I gave evidence that God is One and that Muhammad (S) is His servant and messenger." It

was in this milieu that the youth Yazid reigned supreme as the Caliph of the Muslims.

However little by little he is seen being entangled in the knot of great problem – – that knot which he had to unravel at any cost was none other than Imam Husayn.

When a ruler happens to be a loose character, wanton, villain, cunning, nefarious and unprincipled it obvious that the entire country would be suffused and imbued with the very qualities of such a ruler. Sin became common. Wrong ceased to be wrong because it was so widely prevalent.

Crime was no more wicked since it was the order of the day.

Every conceivable practice that was prohibited in Islam took hold of nearly all the youth.

All sense of values was in confusion and the distinction between what was good and bad became blurred. In short all Islamic lands were engulfed in all forms of sin and crime.

A fetid smell emanating from sin pervaded the air everywhere and the people were so immured to such repellent odours that anything fragrant came to be abhorred.

In such an environment as this Truth was hidden and suppressed, the Qur'an was abandoned as no one appeared to have anything to do with it. Religion was in recession. Christians and Jews gained the upper hand over Muslims.

A great shadow of gloom spread over all things. Society came to be covered over by a thick, murky mist, which was nothing if dreadful. A saviour was the need and sacrifice and flame of faith was the call that rent the air in such an atmosphere.

A leader of a nation was required to revolt against and uproot what was rotten in society and put to right the things that had gone wrong. Real and true Islam was the hidden call.

One was needed who could rescue mankind. One who would be prepared to give of his own blood to wash clean the land of all the murk and foul filth, which encrusted it. Blood, only blood could do that.

And it was none other than Husayn task.

And that one was Husayn the grandson of the Prophet.

It was for him to come to the rescue. Qualities that distinguished the members of the Prophet's house were patience, fortitude, tolerance and endurance.

They refrained from bloodshed and held back from violence directing their efforts to the guidance of the people.

This was very evident during the rule of Ali bin Abi Talib.

Three battles known by the names Jamal, Siffin and Nehrawan took place during his time but he did not initiate any of them. He always tried to solve the problems by talking to his enemies. Like Imam Hasan, he preferred peace to war.

But then, after the martyrdom of Imam Hasan the people of Mecca and Medina, the companions of the Prophet who were still alive and above them all Imam Husayn became seriously concerned and

apprehensive at the unchecked influence of the Bani Ummayds who were becoming a fearful threat to Islam and to the healthy society that the Prophet had laboured so hard to establish.

After giving the most serious thought to this state of affairs they concluded that there was no and no solution to take up the sword.

A bloody uprising was the key to the problem.

Yazid on the other hand was intent on cornering Imam Husayn in order to have him acknowledge his authority.

Imam Husayn was in Medina at the time.

Yazid wrote to the governor of Medina, Walid bin Otaba, asking him to obtain Imam Husayn's acceptance of his authority.

This, if done, was tantamount to Legitimizing Yazid's.

To confer such legitimacy on a person such as Yazid was impossible to the Imam.

When Walid relayed Yazid's request to him, this was his reply:

"When you inform the people of Muawiya's death and ask them to acknowledge Yazid's authority, then call me too.

I will come to the mosque and address the people as to what I should do."

In fact Yazid's agents were busy hounding the Imam and he did not feel at all easy at this in the prevailing circumstances. Often he used to awaken the people from their deep slumber at nights and worshipped God near the grave of his grandfather, the Prophet.

It was the 3rd of Sha'ban in the year 60 of Hijra.

Imam Husayn left for Mecca and stayed there till the month of Dhul-Hijja in the same year. As the pilgrimage season approached he too readied himself to perform the Hajj ceremonies.

He put on the Hajj garb (*Ihram*) and stayed on till the 8th of that month engaged in prayer and worship. From time to time he used to come amidst the people and talk to them.

He headed for Iraq even while his Hajj remained yet incomplete and unfinished. His journey to Iraq shows that there were matters of moment that were drawing him that way. He had received several invitations from Iraq, which he felt impelled to respond to by going over there.

The caravan of the revolution was on its way. Imam Husayn was its captain. The route was long and the journey arduous. Whenever and wherever he stopped he explained to people the reason for his mission at every stopping place, at every point where people thronged to welcome him the Imam enlightened them on the purpose of his journey and on the parlous state of events unfolding under Yazid's dispensation. All along the route as he went by villages, dwellers both high and low, vagabonds and wanderers in the desert and even humble shepherds began to know of Yazid's nefarious character and

deeds.

But since the Imam could not enter the larger cities and towns on the way due to the presence of Yazid's armed men, he chose to skirt them going through villages and plains.

Although there were many open-minded and well informed people in these cities and towns who were very much against Yazid's atrocities and cursed, they were reluctant to come openly out on the Imam's side for several reasons.

For one, they were not fully aware of the far-reaching implications of the Imam's uprising. Secondly, many of them had reconciled themselves to living and adopting their lives within Yazid iniquitous rule.

And lastly it was sheer mental apathy and an unwillingness to take up something new, preferring to be content with what they were familiar with. But in spite of all this, there were still those, although a very few, who were prepared to leave all behind and join Husayn's caravan of revolution.

As the caravan proceeded on its way distressing news kept reaching the Imam.

One of these had to do with the martyrdom of that great personality of Islam – the brave, pious and straight forward one, Muslim bin Aqil of the house of Thalaiba. Muslim who was a cousin of the Imam was earlier sent by him to Kufa as his deputy. He was martyred by the agents of Ibn Ziad, the governor of Kufa. Muslim stood out against the traitors with great courage up to the time of his martyrdom.

At long last the caravan kept moving closer to its destination, when it came to halt on the west plain of Karbala' on the first day of the month of Muharram in the year 61 of Hijra.

Imam Husayn ordered that tents be set up close to the banks of the river Furat (Euphrates). Days passed quickly by until it came to the ninth day (Tasu'a) when as evening set in soldiers sent by Yazid grouped in large numbers attacked the Imam's camp.

The Imam sent Abbas, his brother and a few others to talk to those who commanded the enemy army. It ended with Abbas proclaiming loudly to them the following:

"We want from you the time tonight that Imam Husayn has asked me to request of you so that it may be offered up in prayer and worship of God. Tomorrow we shall meet again under an umbrella of swords."

Night fell, embracing the desert in its spell.

All was silent, calm and eerily wonderful with full moon lighting up the scene like a premonition of what was to follow.

The Imam looked around seeing himself surrounded by his friends and relatives and spoke to them thus:

"The covenant I overlook and now ignore, the oath of allegiance to me you have taken and yokes you to me I lift from you and leave you to yourselves. You are free, there is no obligation to bind you and I shall hold you no longer. You can go and leave me to myself. Leave this land availing yourself of the veil of night, which can act as cover for you taking any direction in which you wish to go.

I leave you to this night and to the tracks of the desert.

These soldiers of Yazid's army have business with me, not with you."

Death lay ahead, waiting. There was no victory. This was the meaning of the Imam's words and they fell heavily indeed on those still captivated by the world and its several attractions. To die in the way of belief was not easy for one without belief. Where there was nothing to gain, there was no temptation. Sadly, there were several among the Imam's entourage who were too weak and did not have the mettle to stay on. So they left betaking themselves and leaving the Imam.

But there were the few, and they stayed behind solid, unflinching and ardent in their faith, to which the greatest temptation was the very person of the Imam, himself. Death in a cause and for the sake of their religion was no cheap commodity – it was far too precious and it was harder indeed to desert the Imam.

The fateful day dawned. The Imam mustered his small force, which was in stark contrast to the thousands arrayed on the enemy side, and readied them to do battle.

And then it began in earnest. It was the force of faith on one side against the forces of tyranny on the other.

The Imam's was a small force but they were fighting a holy war and defending a cause. Hence this gave them an unimagined and extraordinary burst of strength helping them to fight bravely.

Each warrior killed several of the enemies with ease. There were 72 men on the Imam's side as against the thousands of Yazid's men.

It was not here a question of numbers – it was that of belief, faith and a cause.

Faith shone out fully among that small group – it was bright and brilliant. The enemy lacking any kind of belief and lacking in the strength that only faith can give were confused by the astounding courage of that small force confronting them and were overtaken by a nameless dread.

This was why the Imam's men were able to penetrate deep into the heart of Yazid's army.

Wherever they thrust, they caused a rout and consternation among the enemy, many of which the Imam's men killed until they were martyred.

It will be in point to digress hereto see what it was that made such a battle possible unequal though the forces were, what it was in the environment and upbringing of the Imam's followers that made such singular and indomitable courage possible. One knows all too well that Islam has restricted such lax sports as gambling but encouraged others like horse riding and archery. The purpose, of course, was to encourage skill in such sports, but beyond this Islam finds a deeper purpose, which is to develop such noble qualities as fearlessness, strength and courage under all circumstances and in particular to stand opposed to the enemy and to tyranny in every form.

There is a well-known saying of the Imam wherein he says, “you should take care of the health of your bodies as long as you are alive.” The idea was to be able to live pure, clean lives and build up strength against abominations and the evil of what is inimical to such a life, as is tyranny.

Those present on that Ashur’a day with Imam Husayn were trained under his father Ali bin Talib and dyed in these manly virtues.

They had seen and been with the best of soldiers and generals of Islam.

In their hearts there still shone forth the flame of a burning love and affection for the Prophet and his family made them desire death in preference to a life without them.

Sincerity was their currency and faith that which moved in their very veins.

They were in fact the heroes of history and its pride.

That night was a time of waiting which they spent in polishing their swords even as they kept reciting verses from the holy Book and saying their prayers.

They were those who were enchanted by truth, as if the very taste of truth were always upon their tongues.

All was action to them and they waited the moment of great action. They waited awake till dawn for the moment they looked forward keenly to. A blood – red dawn broke forth with the rising of the sun in the East and enfolded the earth with its red-shot colour and Husayn took his small brave force out into the field of battle to confront the forces the dark forces of evil. A’bes bin Abi SHabib Shakery one of the companions asked his friend Shozab, a scholar, what his feelings were at the time and he said he was proud to be in the company of the Prophet grandson and more to be among those who were going into martyrdom.

A’bes then said this was just what he felt too about him. Both then took the Imam’s permission and leave before proceeding into the battle and martyrdom. It was the custom then to first take leave of the Imam before battle and A’bes addressed him thus:

“O Husayn, there is none more dear to me in all the world than you.

Had I the power I would have rescued you from the clutches of these tyrants.

I have nothing now but the breath of this life, which stirs within my body and this I offer in sacrifice to you and your father’s religion.” With these stirring words he bade farewell to the Imam and rode out into the field. Rabee bin Tameem one of Yazid’s men had this to say of him:

“When I saw A’bes I recognized him as I had know him before. I have not known anyone to be more courageous.

So, I shouted, “This is the lion,” in order to alert my colleagues.”

A’bes as he strode in stood out alone as none among Yazid’s men dared confront him. Omar Sa’ad, Yazid’s commander was furious at this and ordered a group of his men to surround and attack him with another group throwing stones at him.

A'bes seeing that there was no one prepared to combat him singly with the sword but that he was being got at in this cowardly way with stones flung at him, removed his coat of armor and walked into the thick of the enemy with nothing else but his sword and fought bravely on.

Of this scene Rabee bin Tamim narrates:

“By God, I saw that in whatever direction A'bes went there were hundreds of men scattering in a mad stampede.

The enemy saw that he could not be overcome and so they surrounded him from every side.

As he had received great many wounds from the stones flung at him and with sword cuts, he fell.

A little later I saw a group with one holding his severed head and each claiming to have killed him.”

To this their commander Omar Sa'ad said:

“None of you singly has killed him. All of you together alone were able to kill him.”

Another of the brave ones was Abu Thamameh Saidari. As noon approached he went to the Imam and said:

“O Husayn, these men will kill you. As long as I am alive I will not allow them to do this.

I should be killed first.

I want to pray my last noon prayers behind you.”

The Imam thanked him and blessed him then saying:

“Go and ask these people to give us time to pray.”

Then there was Jaber bin Orawa Ghaffari.

He was an old man. He had seen the Prophet and had taken part in many a battle including that of Badr and Siffin. This old man who had the courage and determination of a youth tying a cloth around his waist and a scarf over his head so that his eyebrows would at no time cover his eyes went forward to battle killing sixty of the enemy before he was martyred.

Imam Husayn is reported to have said when he saw the old man fighting:

“God thanks you for your efforts old man.”

Next came Muslim bin Aousaj'an Asadi, a brave man whose bravery had won him a great deal of fame.

When Muslim bin Aqil was appointed the Imam's representative in Kufa, Aousaj'a acted as his deputy in charge of procuring arms, collecting funds and making known of the Imam's authority to the people of the area.

On that night before when Imam Husayn urged those who wish to go to leave him Muslim bin Aousaj'a had this to say in reply:

“O, son of the Prophet of God, we leave you here and go to save ourselves? How then do we answer God? By God, I shall not depart from you until I have thrust my lance into the very heart of the enemy.

As long as I have strength to hold up my sword I shall fight the enemy.

If not with a sword, I shall fight them with stones.

I shall never leave you and may God be witness that we have not deserted the Prophet. If I am killed and brought back to life and killed yet again and my body burnt to ashes, and this is repeated again and again seventy times, I shall not desert you. Now there is only this one martyrdom for me and then eternity.

This I shall not give up.”

Muslim went out into the battlefield killing his enemies until he was himself martyred. Imam Husayn came to him as he lay fallen followed by Habib ibn Mazaher who was a friend of his. Habib telling him it was hard for him to see him in such a condition nevertheless congratulated him for gaining Heaven to which Muslim rejoined saying, “May God bless you with good tidings.” Habib then said: “I hoped to be of service to you, but I know this cannot be because I too will soon be killed.” Muslim his voice feeble said once more, “My only will is to see that Imam be not left alone. Stay by his side at any cost.”

Next comes Omar bin Junada Ansari, a youth whose father Junada bin Ka’ab Ansari was killed early in the battle. His mother had this to say to him: “O, my son, get up and go into the battlefield and let the Imam see how you kill the enemy and how you get killed.” The boy approached the Imam to seek his permission but the Imam seeing he was but a youth and considering the fact that his death might fall too heavily on his mother since her husband too was lost to her, hesitated. But the boy assured him that it was his mother herself who had sent him along and so was given leave to fight. He went along with the following poetry from his lips:

“My chief is Husayn

There is none better to gain

Bringing gladness to the Prophet’s Heart’s domain,

His parentage are Ali a chain,

Do you know of any obtain?

His face effulgent like the sun, His forehead like moonlight shone.”

The boy went into the battle, killing the enemy until he was finally killed. His head was cut off and thrown across to the Imam’s camp. His mother took it in her hands, embraced it saying “God bless you my son” and then threw it back into the enemy camp saying:

“What we give in the way of God, we and Fatimah in of his like to do not take back.”

One by one the companions of the Imam went forward and each in turn were martyred until none were left. Now it came to the turn of the Bani Hashim, the Imam’s relatives – the sons of Aqil Imam Hasan, his own son and the sons of Muslim and Abdullah bin Ja’far.

His brother who was popularly known as the moon of Bani Hashim, a handsome youth with a fine personality and wonderful features was yet another.

He was possessed of burning faith and love for his brother and what he stood for.

Dreaded by the enemy he stood out as a hope for the Imam and his children. But alas, he too went out

and was martyred relieving the enemy of their anxiety but plunging the Imam's came in despair. One by one they had all gone into battle and attained martyrdom.

First his companions, then his relatives, his brother and his own sons.

He stood alone with none to come to his aid.

It was now his turn to enter battle. He did shattering the enemy forces the blood running strong in his veins that was his mother Fatima's, his father Ali's, his brother Imam Hasan's and that of redoubtable relatives Hamza and Ja'far. His blood, which was shed that they were the bloods of the Prophets and apostles Abraham Moses, Ismayl, Jesus and many others because they were from the divine and this cause was indeed divine.

As the day went by the sun began gradually to set, the desert of Karbala' was suffuse with the blood of the martyrs and then the unthinkable happened – – Imam Husayn's head was in the hands of the enemies.

God is great;

The air became dark, the earth shook and the sun was eclipsed.

But it was the dawning of the son of truth.

The blood of Imam Husayn and that of his companions, relatives and of the loved of his family was shed to nourish the tree of human liberty and dignity. It was history's greatest sacrifice and one that shaped its future course.

It was the uprising that nourished many other uprisings. It was the fount from which many other springs flowed.

It was the uprising from which the uprisings of Mukthar Thaqafi, that of Zayd and many others took their roots. Even unto this day Ashura' of Husayn blazing forth as the paradigm supreme of the fight against tyranny and its eventual defeat and overthrow.

1. The Social Contract Third print. 195
2. Introduction to historical science, 530

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