

A Turning Point in History – Karbala

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In the history of Islam there are countless number of incidences of such great sadness that can never be forgotten by any Muslim. Despite the elapse of so many years, the pain suffered cannot be diminished. One of the signs of a successful and prosperous nation is that even in its times of prosperity and opulence, it continuously reminds itself of its darker days. Thus, even today those who truly love the Holy Prophet Muhammad^{sa} still feel the great pain of his sad demise and of the martyrdom of his companions and Khulafa. Even today, a Muslim's heart bleeds and eyes become tearful upon reading the horrific accounts of persecution inflicted upon the companions of the Holy Prophet^{sa}, yet it is these very accounts of great sacrifices that open new avenues and set new goals for the future generations. One of such incidences took place in the first century of Islam, in Karbala, Iraq.



The martyrdom of Imam Hussain^{ra} was one of the most tragic incidents in Islamic history

Karbala

Before 61 Hijri, Karbala was no more than a barren land, situated in Iraq along the Euphrates River. Approximately 100 kilometres from Baghdad, today it is a town that is densely populated with people and every year it is particularly made mention of during holy month of Muharram of the Islamic calendar. The prominence of this town is due to the martyrdom of Hazrat Imam Hussain^{ra} and his companions, which occurred in Karbala, where their graves are also located.

Hazrat Imam Hussain^{ra}

Hazrat Imam Hussain^{ra} was born to Hazrat Ali^{ra} and Hazrat Fatimah^{ra}. Hazrat Ali^{ra} was the Fourth Rightly Guided Khalifah after the Holy Prophet^{sa} and Hazrat Fatimah was the daughter of the Holy Prophet^{sa}. On Hussain's^{ra} birth the Holy Prophet^{sa} recited the words of the *Azaan* (call for prayer) in his right ear and the *Iqaamat* (shortened verses of the *Azaan*, indicating that congregational prayer is about to start) in his left (this is an Islamic custom continued by Muslims even today). He also had the honour of having the Holy Prophet^{sa} grant him his blessed saliva as his first nourishment, name him "Hussain," perform his *Aqeeqah* (an Islamic ritual – sacrificing an animal on the birth of a child) on the seventh day, shaved his first hair and gave its equal amount of weight in silver to charity and also sacrificed a few Rams. His title was Abu Abdullah.¹

The Holy Prophet^{sa} had great love for his two grandchildren, Hassan^{ra} and Hussain^{ra}. Hazrat Anas^{ra}, a devoted servant of the Holy Prophet^{sa}, said that among the family members of the

Holy Prophet^{sa}, he loved them the most. He would often go to their house to visit them and would greatly enjoy their childish behaviour, would kiss them and wrap them around his arms. Sometimes the Holy Prophet^{sa} would take them alongside him to *Masjid-e-Nabawi* (the Prophet's Mosque in Madinah) and whilst he would be in the state of prostration they would climb onto his back. Once the Holy Prophet^{sa} was delivering his Friday sermon and Hazrat Imam Hussain^{ra} walked into the mosque. Upon seeing him, the Holy Prophet^{sa} immediately got off the pulpit, picked him up and held him close to his chest. The Holy Prophet^{sa} would often pray for them stating, "Oh Allah I love them dearly, may you also treat them with love and affection."²

Another time he said, "Hussain is from me and I am of Hussain, may Allah love those who love Hussain."³ Hazrat Abdullah^{ra} narrates that the Holy Prophet^{sa} said, "Hassan and Hussain will be the leaders of the youth in Heaven."⁴

Hazrat Imam Hussain^{ra} had great mastery in knowledge, grace and speech and was prolific in charity, worship and offering the *Tahajjud* (pre-dawn prayer). According to Hazrat Anas^{ra}, both Imam Hassan^{ra} and Imam Hussain^{ra} resembled the Holy Prophet^{sa} in appearance more than anyone else.⁵ The Holy Prophet^{sa} often used to say that both Hassan and Hussain are like the world's finest fragrance.⁶ Hazrat Imam Hussain^{ra} had the honour of spending approximately seven years in the love and care of the Holy Prophet^{sa}. After the Holy Prophet^{sa}'s demise, Hazrat Abu Bakr Siddique^{ra} and Hazrat Umar^{ra} (the first and second Right Guided Khalifas respectively after the Holy Prophet's^{sa} demise) would take great care of Hazrat Imam Hussain^{ra} and would be mindful of his close relationship with the Holy Prophet^{sa}. During the time of Hazrat Usman's Khilafat, Hazrat Imam Hussain^{ra} had become a young a man and it was in his reign that he first took part in *Jihad* (striving in the way of Allah) by being part of the Muslim army travelling towards Tibristan in 31 Hijri. During the time of the onset of the rebellion towards Hazrat Usman^{ra} both Imam Hassan^{ra} and Imam Hussain^{ra} were appointed to guard his house by Hazrat Ali^{ra} lest none of the rebels could enter who had surrounded it.⁷

Introduction of Certain Names

Before mentioning the details of the event that led to the martyrdom of Hazrat Imam Hussain^{ra}, it would be appropriate to briefly introduce some key figures in relation to this incident. The majority are from the progeny of Abd Manaf and Abd Shams. Hashim was one of the sons of Abd Manaf and Abdul Muttalib was the son of Hashim. One of the sons of Abdul Muttalib was Abdullah, who was the father of the Holy Prophet Muhammad^{sa}. Abdul Muttalib's other son was Abu Talib. Hazrat Ali^{ra} and his brother Hazrat Aqeel^{ra} were the sons of Abu Talib. Abd Manaf's other son was Abd Shams, whose son was Ummayyah. Abu Sufiyan^{ra} was Ummayyah's son and was the father of Hazrat Muawiyah^{ra}. Also of importance is Yazid, who was Hazrat Muawiyah^{ra}'s son.

Background to the Incident of Karbala

After the martyrdom of Hazrat Ali^{ra} in 40 Hijri, more than 20,000 people took the *Bai'at* (oath of initiation) of Hazrat Hassan^{ra}. However, Hazrat Hassan^{ra} withdrew from this title in favour of Hazrat Muawiyah^{ra}, in order to avoid the potential bloodshed that could have occurred between the Muslims as a result of the dispute between the two. Hazrat Muawiyah^{ra} in his own lifetime took the *Bai'at* from all of his governors and officials for his son Yazid to be appointed as his successor. And so, in 60 Hijri after Hazrat Muawiyah^{ra}'s demise, according to the agreement of appointment, Yazid took charge and instructed the Muslims to take his *Bai'at*, pledging obedience and loyalty towards him. A large section of the Muslims took Yazid's *Bai'at*, however some of the prominent and senior companions of the Holy Prophet^{sa} disliked the method of appointment and declined. Among them were Hazrat Imam Hussain^{ra}, Hazrat Abdullah bin Umar^{ra} and Hazrat Abdullah bin Zubair^{ra}. When the governor of Madinah insisted upon taking the *Bai'at* of Yazid, Hazrat Imam Hussain^{ra} left the city for Makkah with his family and retired to Sha'ib Abi Talib. When the people of Kufa came to know of Hazrat Imam Hussain^{ra}'s decision of not doing *Bai'at* of *Yazid*, they immediately wrote letters to him, requesting him to come to Kufa so that they could appoint him as their Amir and Khalifah. Hazrat Imam Hussain^{ra} sent Hazrat Muslim bin Aqeel^{ra} to enquire about the conditions in Kufa. Upon his arrival in Kufa, Hazrat Muslim bin Aqeel^{ra} was given a rapturous welcome so he wrote to Hazrat Imam Hussain^{ra} and urged him to come to Kufa.

In Kufa the situation became out of hand and ultimately Muslim bin Aqeel^{ra} was also arrested and martyred in a very cruel manner. Thereafter, those who were loyal to Hazrat Imam Hussain^{ra} were searched and killed. Hazrat Imam Hussain^{ra}, unaware of the dramatic change in circumstances, had left for Kufa. When he had reached Tha'ibiya, he found out about Hazrat Muslim bin Aqeel^{ra}'s martyrdom and understood the seriousness of the situation. He was advised by aides to turn back and not go to Kufa as there was no longer any support for him there. During the course of the journey various supporters of Hazrat Imam Hussain^{ra} joined him along the way. After travelling some distance, Hazrat Imam Hussain^{ra} received more news of the martyrdom of his supporters and the changing circumstances of the situation ahead. He stopped at one place and addressed his people stating that if anyone wants to leave they may do so now. Upon hearing this many of those who had joined him along the way dispersed leaving mostly those who had originally started the journey from Makkah. Most of the people in this group were the *Ahl-e-Bait* (Family of the Holy Prophet^{sa}) and the companions^{ra} of the Holy Prophet^{sa}.

When Hazrat Imam Hussain^{ra} and his caravan reached *Ashraaf*, the holy month of Muharram had begun. Hur bin Yazid with army of a thousand, had surrounded Hazrat Imam Hussain^{ra} and his caravan. Hazrat Imam Hussain^{ra} told them that he had only come to Kufa at the request of its people and also showed them the letters that the people had written to him. Hur replied that they have no concern with their letters. Hazrat Imam Hussain^{ra} addressed the army and said that if their opinion had changed then he would turn back. However, Hur responded that that he had been ordered to not let them return. On the 2nd of Muharram a messenger of Ibn Ziad (Amir of Basra) came to Hur and directed to surround Hazrat Imam Hussain^{ra} and take them to

such a barren land whereby there would be neither water nor any fort. Hence, it was decided to take Hazrat Imam Hussain^{ra} and his companions to Karbala. On the third of Muharram Umar bin S'ad also arrived with a 4,000 strong army from Kufa and was given the order to make Hazrat Imam Hussain^{ra} and his companions take the *Bai'at* of Yazid and deal with the other matters later. After a few days had passed, another order was given that Hazrat Imam Hussain^{ra} and his companion's access to water from the Euphrates River should be stopped and with this followed a series of torture by the much larger army, on the companions of Hazrat Imam Hussain^{ra}.

Day of A'shur

On Yaum e A'shur, the 10th of Muharram, and at sunrise the army of Hazrat Imam Hussain^{ra} took its stand in front of Yazid's army. The battle between the truth and falsehood was about to be fought and the seventy two devoted Companions of Hazrat Imam Hussain^{ra} were ready for battle against an army of four thousand standing in front of them. As the battle commenced, the brave and courageous warriors would take blessing from Hazrat Imam Hussain^{ra} and one after the other entered the battlefield. Exhausted from their long journey and full of thirst these lions that fought ever so fearlessly and displayed their skills of great bravery were eventually martyred and now it was the turn of the members of the family of the Holy Prophet^{sa}. As Hazrat Imam Hussain^{ra}'s son Ali Akbar stepped into the battlefield, the enemy put him to pieces and thereafter the members of the *Ahl-e-Bait* began to get martyred. After Ali Akbar it was Abdullah, Abdur Rehman, Qasim the son of Hazrat Imam Hassan^{ra} and his brothers Abu Bakr, Ja'far, Usman and Abbas who were martyred.

Martyrdom of Hazrat Imam Hussain^{ra}

It is narrated that when the enemy overcame the army of Hazrat Imam Hussain^{ra}, he placed his horse in the direction of Euphrates River. The army blocked Hazrat Imam Hussain^{ra} pathway and prevented him from getting to the river. The same person then threw a spear that hit Hazrat Imam Hussain^{ra} in the face and embedded into his chin, thereafter a rain of swords fell upon him from all around until he was hit in the face by Sanaan bin Anas's spear, who then stepped forward and cut off Hazrat Imam Hussain^{ra}'s head which once used to be kissed by the blessed lips of the Holy Prophet^{sa}. Regarding Hazrat Imam Hussain^{ra} state in war, it is said that he would be wearing a turban and would march into the enemy ranks as if he was an equestrian of wrath. Before his martyrdom he stated:

“By God, after me you will not kill anyone whose death would incur the displeasure of God more than my death. By God, I am of the hope that God will humiliate you and will honour me. And will then avenge my death on you in such a manner that you will be left astounded. By God, if you kill me then God shall cause a war to break out amongst you. Your blood will be shed and even then He will not be satisfied and will multiply the punishment.”

After the demise of Hazrat Imam Hussain^{ra} the enemy then moved towards the camp of Hazrat Imam Hussain^{ra} and began to loot it and even removed the veils of the women. Umar bin Sa'd then made an announcement calling for those among them who would trample over the body

Hazrat Imam Hussain^{ra} with their horses. Hearing this, ten horsemen presented themselves and trampled over Hazrat Imam Hussain^{ra} body to the extent that his chest and back were completely crushed. As a result of this battle Hazrat Imam Hussain^{ra} had 45 wounds to his body; according to another narration, 33 wounds were caused by spear and 43 wounds by sword in addition to the wounds caused by the arrows. Not only that but his head was cut off and sent to the governor of Kufa.⁸

God's Revenge

Hazrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmad^{as} (the Promised Messiah) states, "Yazid the impure carried out this injustice on the grandchild of the Holy Prophet^{sa} but God rapidly brought his wrath upon them."⁹

Even though Yazid and his companions were punished by God Almighty, another form of God's punishment is to make the progeny of those who transgressed accept the mistake of their forefathers and this was exactly the case with Yazid. Hazrat Mirza Bashiruddin Mahmood Ahmad^{ra}, Musleh Ma'ud (the Promised Son and the second Khalifah of the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community) in his book, *Khilafat-e-Rashidah*, writes:

"Not to speak of the consent of other people to the Khilafat of Yazid, his own son did not agree to it. Immediately after his accession to throne, he went into seclusion and surrendered the throne. It is a well-known historical event, but I am not sure why Muslim historians have not highlighted it. They should have repeated it frequently because it is another clear proof of the atrocities of Yazid. It is recorded that after the death of Yazid, his son, who was also named Muawiyah after his grandfather, acceded to throne and went home after taking the *Bai'at* of the people. He did not come out for forty days. When he came out, he rose to the pulpit and addressed the people that he had accepted the *Bai'at* from them, not because he was more entitled to it, but because he did not want dissention among them. He had been continuously meditating in his home to find a person more entitled to take the *Bai'at* of the people so that he might get himself relieved of chieftdom by handing it over to him. But in spite of his great efforts he did not find any such person. Therefore, he said, "O people listen to it carefully that I am not fit for this post. I also want to tell you that my father and grandfather were also not entitled to this post. My father was inferior to Husain^{ra}, and his father from the father of Hasan^{ra} and Husain^{ra}. Hazrat Ali^{ra} at his time was more entitled for Khilafat than my grandfather, and after this Hassan^{ra} and Husain^{ra} were more entitled than my father. Therefore, I retire from this chieftdom, and you can take the *Bai'at* of the person of your choice."¹⁰

What Did Hazrat Imam Hussain^{ra} Intend?

Hazrat Imam Hussain^{ra} had no desire of acquiring any power or government for himself but rather wanted to put an end to what was slowly becoming a monarchy rule that was forcing people to do its *Bai'at* in the name of Khilafat. Hazrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmad^{as} (the Promised Messiah) in one place writes, "...Hazrat Imam Hussain^{ra} did not want to do the *Bai't* at the hands of a transgressor otherwise it would have discredited the religion."¹¹

Hazrat Mirza Masroor Ahmad^{aba} (the fifth Khalifah of the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community), in his sermon delivered on the 10th of December 2010 stated:

“Hazrat Imam Hussain^{ra} only had one purpose; he did not want any power but wanted to establish the truth and that is what he did. Hazrat Musleh Ma’ud^{ra} [Mirza Bashir-Ud-Din Mahmud Ahmad, the Second Khalifah of the Promised Messiah] has given a beautiful explanation that Hazrat Imam Hussain^{ra} took his stand in support of the principle; that is, that the right of electing the Khalifah lies with the people of the country, the whole of the community. A son cannot inherit this right from his father and that this principle is of the same significance today as it was before. In fact the martyrdom of Hazrat Imam Hussain^{ra} has further signified this right. Hence it was Hazrat Imam Hussain^{ra} who succeeded, and not Yazid.”

Hazrat Imam Hussain^{ra} had no intention of fighting or causing any kind of bloodshed and his persistent statement that he would refrain from initiating the battle, is a powerful argument of his intentions. Hazrat Mirza Masroor Ahmad^{aba} further states:

“Despite declining to take the *Bai’at*, Hazrat Imam Hussain^{ra} however constantly tried to seek reconciliation and when he realised the danger of the Muslim bloodshed, he told them to go back stating that those who could, should leave. Those that insisted upon staying with him were approximately 30 to 40 and also his family members remained behind with him. Furthermore, he told the representatives of Yazid that he did not want to fight and they should let him go, so that he may go and worship God or go and fight in the *Jihad* and become martyred in the way of Islam. Or they should take him to Yazid so he could tell him the reality of the matter but the representatives did not listen to a single word of his.”

How Should the Holy Month of Muharram Be Remembered?

Hazrat Imam Hussain^{ra} was extremely pious and noble and everyone should try to follow the example of people like him. Hazrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmad^{as} (the Promised Messiah) has stated:

“Hussain was a pious man and surely was from among the noble people whom God Almighty Himself purifies and fills them with His love and is from among the leaders of heaven. And to hold even the slightest of grudges against him can endanger one’s faith. His righteousness, love for God, patience, piety and worship is a perfect model for us and we are the followers of that guidance which was granted to him. Such a heart is completely destroyed that bears enmity towards him but one that displays love for him through his actions and perfectly reflects every trace of his faith, morals, bravery, righteousness, patience and love for God will surely succeed.”¹²

What is the correct manner to remember the martyrdom of Hazrat Imam Hussain^{ra}? Expounding on this subject Hazrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmad^{as} (the Promised Messiah) writes:

“...to love the Prophets and the righteous people is mere wishful thinking until one does not adopt their attributes.”¹³

The best way of remembering Muharram is thus that one should strive to become like in character Hussain^{ra} and adopt all his qualities. And for that a constant striving is required that is spread over the span of one's lifetime. Hazrat Mirza Masroor Ahmad^{aba} (the fifth Khalifah of the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community) in his Friday sermon delivered on the 10th of December 2012 expounded on what activities a Muslim should practice during these days. He stated that one should recite *Durud Shareef* (invoking salutations and blessings upon the Holy Prophet^{sa} and his physical and spiritual progeny) as this is the best way of translating one's emotions felt from the incident of Karbala and to alleviate the oppression. And the *Durud* is also a means of comfort for the physical and spiritual progeny of the Holy Prophet^{sa}. It is the best way to show one's love for the dear ones of the Holy Prophet^{sa}. May God Almighty enable us to invoke as much *Durud* as possible and may this *Durud* prove to be a source of blessings for us also. May God Almighty enable us to always love the progeny of the Holy Prophet^{sa} and enable us to always send *Durud*.'

Endnotes

1. *Seerat Al-Sahaba*, printed by Idaarah Islamiyaat, Lahore, Pakistan. Vol.6, pp.146-147.
 2. *Sahihul Bukhari*, Kitabul Fazail.
 3. *Sunan At-Tirmadhi*, Kitabul Munafiq, Hadith No 3775.
 4. Al-Mustadrik Al-Haakam Kitabul Ma'rifah Ashaab Wa Min Munaaqib Al-Hasan wa Al-Hussain Hadith No. 4840.
 5. *Sahihul Bukhari*, Kitabul Fazail.
 6. *Sahihul Bukhari*, Kitabul Fazail.
 7. Jalal ul Din Sayuti, *Tarikh ul Khulafa*.
 8. *Tarikhut Tabari*, Vol.6, pp.243-250, Darul Fikr Bairut (2002).
 - Al-Bidayah Wal-Nihayah*, Ibn Katheer, Vol.8, pp.171-190, Darul Hadith Qahirah
 - Tarikh-e-Islam*, Akbar Shah Khan Najeeb Abadi, pp.51-78, Nafees Academy Karachi (1998).
 9. *Seerat Tayyiba*, Hazrat Mirza Bashir Ahmad, pp.36-37.
 10. *Khilafat-e-Rashidah in Anwar Ul Uloom*, Hazrat Mirza Bashir-Ud-Din Mahmud Ahmad, Vol.15, pp.557-558.
 11. *Malfoozat*, Vol. 4, p. 580.
 12. *Majmoo'a Ishtiharaat*, Vol.2, pp. 653-654.
 13. *Malfoozat*, Vol.4, p.533.
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