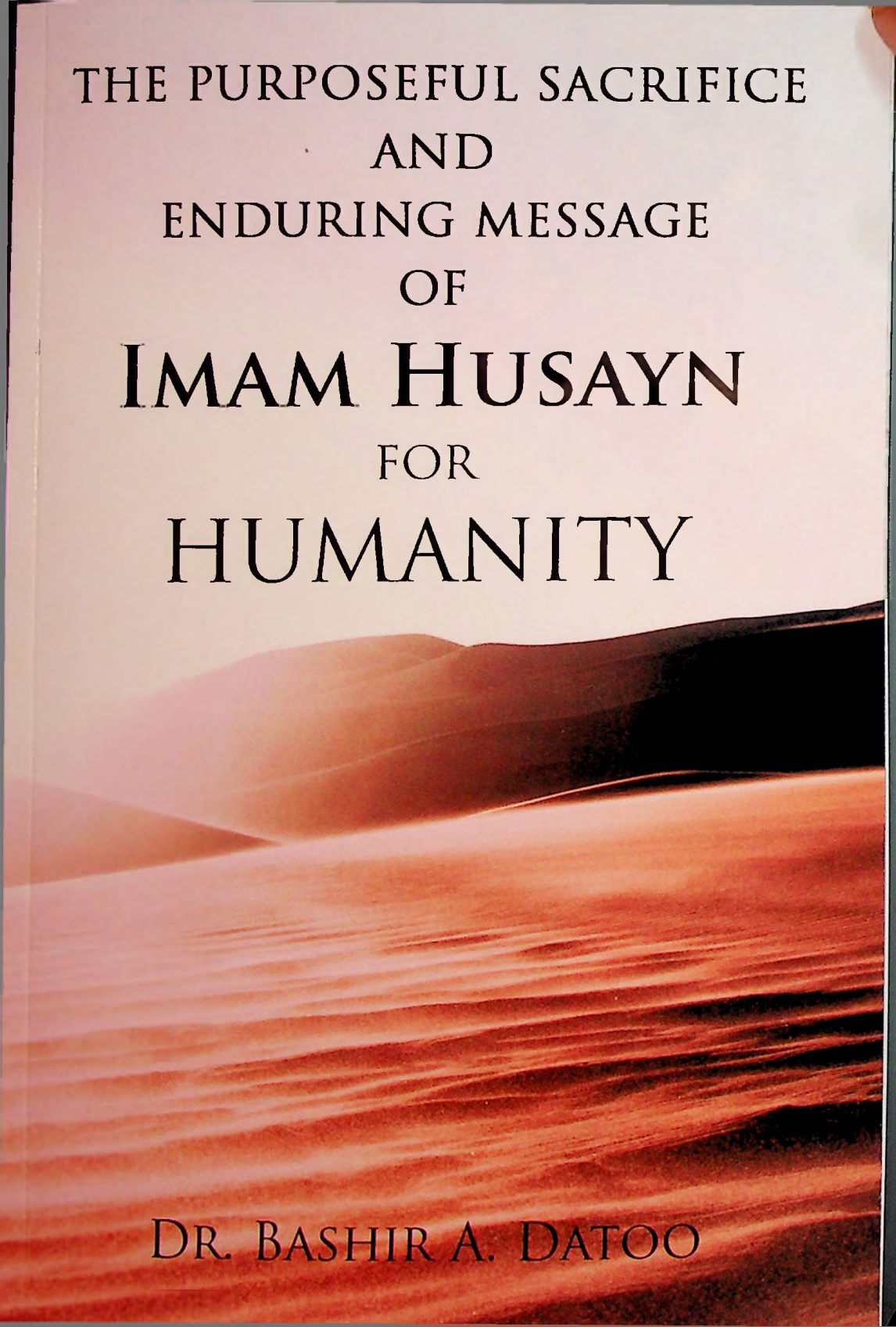
THE PURPOSEFUL SACRIFICE AND ENDURING MESSAGE OF IMAM HUSAYN FOR HUMANITY



DR. BASHIR A. DATOO

"This book clearly speaks to us today. On an individual level, and on the level of our families, our local communities and individual relations, Ashura and Karbala symbolize self-purification, commitment to equity and fairness, and readiness to make small or great sacrifices."

- Dr. Seth Ward

"Even if one sets aside the spiritual and religious dimensions of Imam Husayn's sacrifice, it is an incredibly valuable teacher even on the secular front. The true follower of Imam Husayn is one who has the moral strength to derive these insights from the event, and to act on them in their own personal lives, especially when faced with adversity. These insights are of tremendous value not merely to Muslims, but to all of humanity. Rarely in history does one come across an event that so comprehensively provides us with an entire framework of morality. It is for these reasons that the name of Imam Husayn resonates amongst us even in the 21st century, and will continue to inspire humanity in centuries and generations to come."

- Dr. Raza Mir

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THE PURPOSEFUL SACRIFICE AND ENDURING MESSAGE OF IMAM HUSAYN(a) FOR HUMANITY

[The Grandson of Prophet Muhammad(s)]



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[The Grandson of Prophet Muhammad(s)]

By

DR. BASHIR A. DATOO

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The Purposeful Sacrifice and Enduring Message of Imam Husayn(a) for Humanity

[The Grandson of Prophet Muhammad(s)]

By

DR. BASHIR A. DATOO

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Hasan M. Rizvi

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USA



Mayor Bill de Blasio

To Shia friends observing Muharram, NYC feels your sorrow and shares with you, and so many Muslims, the values of compassion and justice.

865 990



Phil Murphy @PhilMurphyNJ · Aug 9

On the somber occasion of #Muharram, we remember our Muslim friends and neighbors as they begin the Islamic New Year. We stand with them in their commitment to the values of compassion and justice.

12 15 51



Joe Biden

As our Muslim friends and neighbors mark the start of the Islamic New Year and honor the sacrifice made during the holy month of #Muharram, let us all recommit to standing together in the struggle for compassion, equality, and justice.

8:30 PM · 8/20/20 · TweetDeck



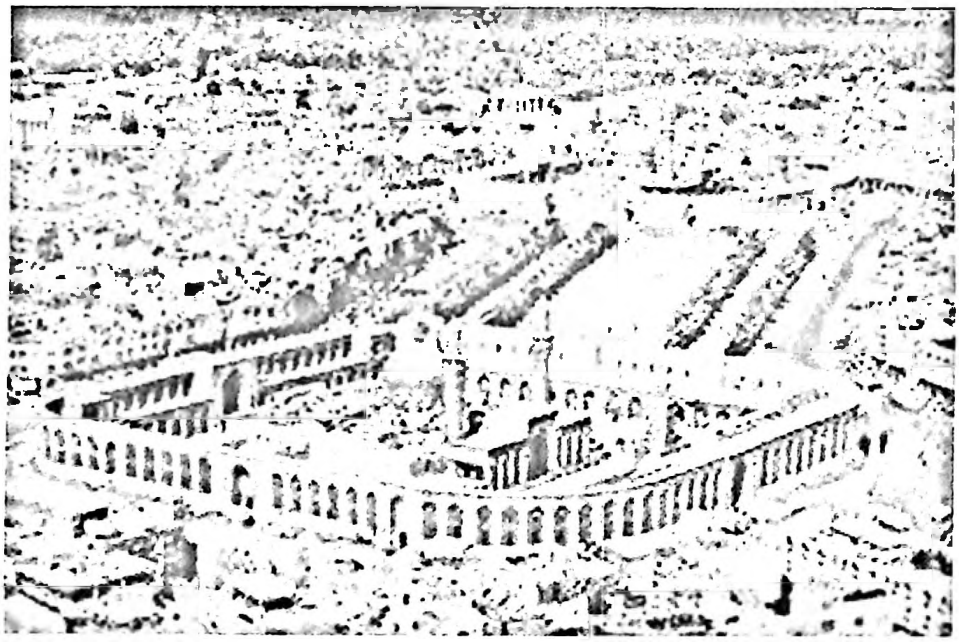
President Biden

United States government official

Jill and I extend our warm wishes to all those observing the Islamic New Year and remembering the historical sacrifices during the holy month of Muharram. We join you in honoring the universal values of justice, equality, and compassion.

10:55 AM · 8/9/21 · The White House

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Explanatory Notes

References to the Qur'an, Muslims' holy scripture, are in the format of (xx: yy) – the number of the chapter is shown before the colon; the number of the verse(s) is indicated after the colon.

Abbreviations are shown after the mention of:

- Allah(swt), Islam's name for the One and only One God, is Muslims' way of glorifying God
- Prophet Muhammad(s) (believed by Muslims to be the last Messenger of Allah and all preceding Prophets(a) as well as Imams(a), the Prophet's anointed successors and prominent members of his family(a), is a way of sending salutations to these personalities.

So as not to clutter the text, the abbreviations have been inserted only the first time these names appear in every section of a chapter.

In the Name of God, the Almighty

REMARKS FROM THE PUBLISHER



This book in your hand is a very small token of our appreciation for what Shias consider as the great sacrifice by a man named Imam Husain(as) with a lofty stature who was the grandson of Prophet Muhammad(saw).

The author Dr. Bashir Datoo, an intellectual, and a charismatic and prolific writer, takes us through the journey of the faith of the Abrahamic beliefs, concluding with the supreme sacrifice of Imam Husain. Dr. Datoo guides the reader in a step-by-step process as to the needs, causes, and results of this ultimate sacrifice.

It is true that many people during their lifetime engage in some sort of sacrifice, big or small. But there are very few and apart who sacrifice it all, and sacrifice it for the sake of others. When thinking of sacrifices, Husain ibne Ali immediately comes to mind. Imam Husain is unique in that he sacrificed all that was near and dear to him and beyond, all in

the name of God, the Almighty, and for His sake alone. He did it for the sake of truth, for righteousness, for freedom, for exposing evil, and for maintaining goodness under the most devastating circumstances.

Imam Husain fought for human and social justice against all odds, against the most powerful regime at the time, and one of the worst tyrants of history. His stand against all odds, the clear concept of his objective, his courage in the most demoralizing situation, and his firm belief in non-violence, gave his sacrifice a unique, special and towering position that people of knowledge, even today, are trying to emulate.

Imam Husain displayed to the world that a human being is born free and should have the right to decide his or her own fate. No one at all should compel anyone or be compelled in doing anything that one does not wish to do so. If one decides not to accept something of his own free will, he has that right regardless. Imam Husain fought for these very principles in the most adverse conditions, a stand that is felt even today.

The story of his sacrifice speaks volumes about today's world. This world has had its weight of evils, injustices, intolerances and corruption of action and thoughts. Imam Husain had shown the human beings, their built-in capabilities, if they care to listen and dare to act. He had shown the world that success demands struggle and to strive towards the cause of humanity which requires sacrifice. The greater the obstacles, the higher the sacrifice which will result in a greater achievement as well as personal satisfaction.

Whether one accepts it or not, either due to a lack of knowledge or awareness, or out of spite, the fact remains that the people who have come to know Imam Husain and understand and appreciate his mission, hold him in high regard, and view his sacrifice as one of the greatest services to

human beings. They consider Imam Husain as the torch bearer of social justice for the benefit of humanity at large.

SYED MANZOOR N. RIZVI, MD
Bloomfield NJ
September 2019



WHY HUSAIN RESONATES



The sacrifice of Imam Husayn on the 10th of Mohurrum 61 AH at Karbala took place in a desert plain far away from civilization.

Imam Husayn and his followers were massacred, his family enslaved, and the only official recorders of the event were those in the pay of Yazid's army. And yet, try as they might, those who seek to minimize the importance of Karbala, the significance of Imam Husayn's sacrifice, the venality of Yazid, and the fact that Imam Husayn's martyrdom rescued Islam from the greatest crisis it had faced since the Prophet's passing, continue to fail. When Muslims and including some non-Muslims take on the might of antagonistic empires, they often invoke Imam Husayn as their role model, and scorn their enemy as a Yazid.

How do we make sense of the fact that even in the 21st century, Imam Husayn's sacrifice resonates with the immediacy of a recent event, hurts the heart like a fresh wound, inspires us to value selflessness in front of a greater cause, and builds community among Muslims and

non-Muslims alike?

The martyrdom of Imam Husayn can be thought of as the fulcrum around which a variety of events and historico-philosophical traditions are balanced. Of numerous aspects, I want to highlight four, as briefly as possible.

1. First, there is a historical trajectory, which the book in front of you highlights admirably. It is important to understand that the Banu Umayya who emerged into tyrannical power a few decades after the passing of Prophet Muhammad were determined to undermine and devalue the teachings of Islam, especially those that emphasized egalitarianism. Their mode of rule was uneasy with the idea that the religion represented a remarkable move to recast identity in the mold of justice, the rights of common people, and a shared humanity that was beyond identities crafted by birth or social station. Yazid sought to present the emergence of Islam as nothing more than a political ploy of the Banu Hashim clan to which Prophet Muhammad belonged. Imam Husayn's sacrifice put an end to that crafty ploy, and recast Islam as a movement that was beneficial to all humanity. Today, the teachings of Islam inspire the secular world as well. To take but one example, when the United Nations Declaration of Universal Human Rights was proclaimed by the United Nations General Assembly in Paris on 10 December 1948 as a common standard of achievements for all peoples and all nations, it noted the teachings of Islam as one of its inspirations. That would not have been possible without the sacrifice of Imam Husayn, which rescued the religion from the false allegation of sectarianism.

2. Yet another dimension of Karbala is its social and cultural ethos.

Many communities all over the world observe the martyrdom of Imam Husayn in their specific way, making it a truly transcultural event. Ashura observances are markers of the reaffirmation of faith, and are deployed as the passing on of traditions from one generation to another. This of course draws inspiration from Imam Husain, whose quest was never a solitary one. He built a community of activists for his cause, as exemplified by his letters to close allies like Habib b. Mazahir, and his constant calls of *Hal min nasirin yansurna* ("Who will assist me?") on the battlefield which is still echoed today. This was eventually rewarded, as exemplified by his own assertion that "neither my grandfather, my father, nor my brother had such allies." Despite being outnumbered, Imam Husain's seventy-two followers, as well as the women and children who endured the deprivations of Kufa and Damascus, formed a true collectivity, one that functioned as the collective saviors of Islam's destiny.

3. A third dimension of Karbala is as an allegory. The sacrifice of Imam Husayn has been invoked as a precedent or as an inspiration to fight a variety of unjust rulers across the world. To take the most recent example, when Indian Muslims, standing shoulder-to-shoulder with their progressive non-Muslim compatriots, fought the forces of fascism in their country in early 2020, they often invoked the sacrifice of Imam Husain and his sister Bibi Zainab as inspiration. The undaunted speeches of Bibi Zainab in the streets and palaces of Kufa and Damascus ensured that the real story of the Imam's sacrifice became part of folklore. One cannot overstate the sheer courage of such an act in the face of extreme hostility. Yet again, the moral principle one derives from here is the need to put one's own life on the line and lead by

example, especially when the going gets tough.

4. Finally, there is a literary dimension to Ashura, where poets and writers all over the world have repeatedly invoked the event as a rich source of inspiration and have made it the muse for their eloquence. Be it Urdu *marsiyas* or Arabic *latmiyas* (lamentation in the form of poetry), academic essays in English or epic poems in Persian, the influence of Karbala is writ large on the face of world literature.

Imam Husayn's sacrifice and martyrdom serve as a beacon not just of historic record, but as a guide to contemporary morality. We live in a world where the foundations of truth and morality are often subject to question. It is my humble contention that despite being almost fourteen centuries distanced from our contemporary lives, the events of Karbala can provide us with a rich template that we can deploy to examine the way we conduct our lives with ethics, dignity and morality. It teaches us to take a stand against evil, emphasizes the primacy of human rights, highlights the importance of 'speaking truth to power,' focuses on the redemptive power of forgiveness, and demonstrates that collectivities are to be formed on the basis of ideals and morals. Such collectives, once formed, can withstand and win against the tyranny of multitudes, just as a band of seventy- two destroyed the might of an army that was a hundred- thousand strong.

In conclusion, even if one sets aside the spiritual and religious dimensions of Imam Husayn's sacrifice, it is an incredibly valuable teacher even on the secular front. The true follower of Imam Husayn is one who has the moral strength to derive these insights from the event, and to act on them in their own personal lives, especially when faced with adversity. These insights are of tremendous value not merely to Muslims, but to all

of humanity. Rarely in history does one come across an event that so comprehensively provides us with an entire framework of morality. It is for these reasons that the name of Imam Husayn resonates amongst us even in the 21st century, and will continue to inspire humanity for centuries and generations to come.

RAZA MIR, PhD
Professor of Strategic Management and International Management,
William Patterson University
Wayne NJ



INTRODUCTION



I am honored to have been asked to write an introduction to this important little book by Dr. Bashir Datoo, honoring the legacy and message of Husain, the grandson of Muhammad, as this message is understood by many within the Shia community. Imam Husain, as he is known in the Shia branch of Islam (and among many other Muslims and non-Muslims alike), lost his life on October 10, 680 CE, opposing the Umayyad caliph Yazid at Karbala, about 67 miles SSW of Baghdad, Iraq. The Islamic date was the 10th day of the month of Muharram in the year 61 of the Hijra (the Muslim Era); known as Ashura, it is memorialized each year annually throughout the Islamic world. The annual period of pilgrimage to Karbala lasts forty days and draws millions yearly, and Shia Muslims around the world commemorate Ashura and the forty days in local communities as well.

Ashura is marked not only by Shia Muslims, but for the 85% of Muslims who are Sunni, Ashura is a recommended and widespread day of fasting. Ashura has a rich tradition as a holy day in Islam: it recalls not only the martyrdom of Husain but the early practice of Muhammad and

the Believers prior to the establishment of the Ramadan fast. Moreover, various Islamic traditions associate Ashura with the Israelites crossing the Red Sea, Noah emerging from the Ark after the Flood, and Yom Kippur. Of especial importance to the Islamic narrative of the Ashura are Islamic retellings of well-known Jewish traditions in which Moses descended Mount Sinai with the second set of the Tablets of the Covenant (the "Ten Commandments") on Yom Kippur, the 10th of Tishrei.

As an academic scholar of Islam and Judaism, I had studied Shia Islam as part of my professional training, and learned about the history of the partisans of Ali and the followers of Imam Husain. Through these studies, I was aware of the martyrdom of Husain, the ramifications of Karbala for Islamic history, and even the power of memorializing Husain and traditional practices on Ashura. The death of Prophet Muhammad's grandson at Karbala transformed both the resistance to the Umayyads and the nascent Shia movement. Umayyad brutality in putting down those who opposed them and "pacifying" Iraq over the next decade became proverbial. Proverbial as well was a period after Karbala, in which Shia ideas became further clarified thanks in part to the reaction to the Umayyad's decapitation of the Prophet's grandson, but especially to the survivors of Karbala and those who continued the Shia movement. Of special importance are Imam Husain's full sister Zaynab (d. c. 682), his half-brother Muhammad ibn al-Hanafiyya, and Ali ibn Husain Zain al-Abidin (Imam Husain's son; d. c. 713), Ali Zain al-Abidin's son Muhammad al-Baqir (d. 733) and especially his grandson Ja'far al-Sadiq (d. 765). Ali, Muhammad and Ja'far are the 4th, 5th and 6th Imam in the main Shi'a tradition.

The enormous emotional power of the story of Husain's life and death was also well-known to academic students of Islam. Presentations

sometimes called "passion plays" suggesting a parallel with Christian Good Friday pageants are reported to have brought even non-Muslims in the audience to tears. There are parades in local centers and a mass pilgrimage to Karbala (today, millions visit during the annual pilgrimage season). Many accounts often focus on a gory but very photogenic practice: men gashing their bodies with swords or sharply-pointed instruments, to draw blood in memory of Husain's self-sacrifice. (In recent years, I am aware of many Shia communities who argue that drawing blood honors Imam Husain's memory far better when done to save lives in a blood donation clinic than in a street parade.)

My own sense of the transformational social and ethical importance of Imam Husain's legacy was dramatically enriched some time ago when a truly amazing group of young people got involved in continuing a tradition of "Husain Day" as a day of introspection and analysis, oriented towards reaffirming commitment to a life totally informed by humanity, love of neighbors, and standing against injustice. I was honored to be invited to speak to this group, and to contribute a short piece to a publication of their proceedings. And I am honored even more by the request of one of the organizers of that event to contribute this essay to the present volume.

This volume offers a reading of the history of "Abrahamic Religions" that reflects a typical Islamic retelling of these traditions, one that differs somewhat from the Hebrew Bible and New Testament versions of these narratives. Readers familiar with Midrashic motifs about Abraham known to most traditional Jews--but not found in the Bible--will recognize the stories of Abraham knocking off the heads of the idols and being thrown into the fiery furnace. The narrative of the Jesus story will seem strange to many Christian readers as it gives the Muslim version of the story. The

Apostle known in Western sources as Judas Iscariot betrays Jesus, as in the New Testament; God takes Jesus up to heaven and it is Judas who is crucified, although those who witness the event believe it to have been Jesus on the cross. Dr. Datoo notes that all the Abrahamic traditions share a belief in a Redemptive event at the end of history—for Shias, this is symbolized by the return of the Hidden Imam.

The book continues with an account of the life of Muhammad and his early successors, known as Caliphs. The narrative clearly follows a Shia version of events, emphasizing the *wilaya,* the appointment of Ali as successor, and positing a unanimous designation of Ali to the Caliphate after the death of Uthman (656 CE), which in this book is considered an interregnum between the period of the early caliphs and the Umayyads. The Umayyads are characterized as opportunists who rejected Islam and the moral demands it makes on leaders and arrogated Kingship to themselves. Dr. Datoo is aware of the attractiveness of the separation of Church and State to many of his potential readers but argues that in this case, the Umayyad kings abused religious doctrines of "hope" and religious determinism to justify their rule while straying far from the ideals worthy of a leader committed to both religion and rule. Indeed, Yazid is said to have rejected Islam totally, assessing it as a charade imposed by the traditional rivals of the Umayyads, the Hashemites—the clan of Muhammad, Ali, and Husain. (By the way, I think Dr. Datoo refers in part to early strands of Mu'tazili opinion, an approach that came to be characterized by a commitment to Unity and Justice, and an emphasis on human free will and agency rather than determinism.)

Much of this book is devoted to developing the idea that Imam Husain was committed to reforming Islam. The Quranic verse behind this idea is from the chapter known to Muslims as *Surat al-Hujurat,*

49:9. It seems to me that the repetition of the verb *fa-aslihu* in the verse is key, although the author does not dwell on this. In context, the verb is usually understood to mean "make peace" (*sulha*) or to agree to settle things without fighting. But the verbal noun, *islah* means "improvement" or, as translated in this book, "reform." Dr. Datoo emphasizes the work of Husain as a reformer. He includes a nice account of "reform" in other Abrahamic religions, Judaism and Christianity, talking about the Reformation and Protestantism, and about the emergence of Reform, Conservative, and varieties of Orthodox Judaism starting in the 19th century. For Islam, he focuses on Imam Husain as a reformer, frequently invoking the Quranic mandate to commend the good and oppose evil (Qur'an 3:104, 110, 9: 71, 112, et al.).

Dr. Datoo argues compellingly that we should view the path to Karbala as a reasoned one: only through "suffering the sacrifice" would the consciousness of the Muslim community be raised. Imam Husain worked to assure those who would face Yazid's forces and certain death were a cross-section of the community, were purified, and pure of heart—and made it easy for those who were not ready for sacrifice to leave. He also made sure to clarify he was not attacked because of his personal, ethical shortcomings: He asks whether anyone has a claim against him for killing their dead or taking their property, and no one had a claim against him. (Dr. Datoo could have drawn a comparison with Moses' nearly identical response to Korah in Numbers 16:15 but did not. Perhaps this is because, as far as I can tell, there is no parallel to this speech in the story of Qarun in the Qur'an, 28:76). The horrific Day of Karbala is described in detail, and the important work of Imam Husain's sister Zaynab and son Ali Zain al-Abidin are described. Dr. Datoo cannot draw parallels with the sacrifice of Jesus, as the Qur'an insists that it merely appeared to be so without having any

reality. But he eloquently speaks of the readiness of Abraham and his son Ishmael for the sacrifice. By the way, the earliest generations of Islam debated whether it was Isaac or Ishmael who is referred to as the one to be sacrificed. The great historian and Qur'an commentator Tabari (d. 921) seems to think it is quite possible that Isaac is the more likely of the two, but within a few generations, the dominant idea in Islam is that it was Ishmael. Dr. Datoo also speaks of the Jewish notion of "Sanctifying the Divine Name (*Kiddush HaShem*) and the role of Christian martyrs in bolstering the faith.

Dr. Datoo argues that Imam Husain's "suffering the sacrifice" should inspire everyone towards eight key moral values on the individual level: Pacifism, Steadfastness, Self- denial, Awareness, Loyalty, Repentance, Patience and Propriety, and on a social and political level, combatting injustice, tyranny and oppression.

This book clearly speaks to us today. On an individual level, and on the level of our families, our local communities and individual relations, Ashura and Karbala symbolize self- purification, commitment to equity and fairness, and readiness to make small or great sacrifices. On the political level, the lessons learned from Husain's suffering and sacrifice should be seen as a critique of governments and social systems that needlessly kill, that impose "biased treatment" in society "without regard to merit" and opposing tyranny, "cruel, unreasonable or arbitrary use of power or control usually by a ruler or person of authority who wields absolute power."

In my training and research, I had encountered the religious and eschatological power of the story of Imam Husain, as well as the important role commemorating Ashura played in many Shia societies for social cohesion and emotional commitment. The young people who

invited me to speak at Husain Day so many years ago showed me back then how powerful the suffering sacrifice of Husain was as a driver of social good on a societal level, one that worked within the community but also clearly transcended it, such an important concern in our global and multicultural era. Dr. Datto's volume will, I hope, inspire Shia readers to self-improvement, ethical actions and social awareness. It will also give readers from outside this tradition an insider's view of the power of Imam Husain's martyrdom for those—Shias, Sufis, Muslims and non-Muslims—who see his death and the death of his supporters at Karbala as an ultimate commitment to individual ethics and social justice.

It is my fervent hope that the life and death of Husain, as recounted in this book, will help all of us to recognize the importance of rejecting the path and lifestyle of those who abuse or pervert political, religious or other power. May this book help us readers orient our own lives and work, rejecting extremism and affirming love, respect and honor to our fellow human beings.

SETH WARD, PhD
Senior Academic Professional
Dept of Philosophy and Religious Studies
University of Wyoming
Laramie WY



INTRODUCTION



It bears repeating in every generation that were we to treat Karbala' as no different from any other battle learned about in the schoolroom – Agincourt or Waterloo or the Battle of Britain – we would be discounting the way it has soaked deeply through the very fabric of Shi'i prayer and piety and daily life, and consequently profoundly underestimate the quality of life which al-Husain's struggle has birthed, both in the Islamic community and outside its borders, over a period fourteen hundred years.

It bears repeating in every generation that Karbala' has rarely ever been understood as some important but nonetheless distant historical encounter, played out on a dry and dusty Iraqi plain; but that on the contrary, the memory of Karbala' is an anamnestic remembrance, a recollection that makes the event of al-Husayn's martyrdom actively and substantially present in the now, becoming for every devout adherent the whetstone against which to sharpen the human thirst for justice and righteousness.

If al-Husain dies on the Karbala' field precisely to endorse the

standards of his grandfather and of Islam, suffering with his companions so that those who came after him could inherit a markedly nobler and freer world, then such an active and extant remembrance is the least one could do for such beloved protagonist, expressing, through the rituals of tears and actions for justice, not a simple recollection but commonality with his cause. Such a remembrance proclaims: had I been in Karbala' with al-Husain, I would have shared his thirst and anguish, fought with him, died with him.

It bears repeating in every generation that Karbala' is an occurrence that people inhabit and constantly renew; not merely as a memorial of al-Husain's exertion, but as a personal field of battle for every believer; for those deeply engaged with issues of justice, for those who find themselves standing before any example of inequality or iniquity, and for those who, every day, have to make small moral choices that paralyze them for fear of the outcome. Karbala' does not invite its devotee to avoid suffering, but rather to use it, even small, daily personal sorrows, for some greater good.

It bears repeating in every generation that Karbala' is a word written by God onto the hearts of the faithful, spoken into their lives, a word which reveals the human capacity for justice and courage and invites the believer to step back and reassess life, not as aimless and hopeless, but as decisive and potentially fruitful. Karbala' is a God-designed space that invites us to live more intensely, to struggle more forcefully with the truth that demands to be told, and fearlessly to make correctly those daily ethical choices no matter the outcome. The martyrdom of al-Husain at Karbala' was, in truth, the outcome of his moral stance, and consequently the paradigm for the struggle, no matter how small, for what is true, what is right, what is moral, what is just.

It bears repeating in every generation that in Islamic life and

piety, in its ethics and its spirituality, God remains the focal point, the overwhelming presence; and that between such a worldview and its polar opposite, the view that God is irrelevant, arise the symbolic personalities like al-Husain, standing in the gap, as it were, embodying the hopes and aspirations of entire societies, sent by God to beckon each distracted generation back to righteousness, so that in the present moment, if justice is wanting among human beings, al- Husain needs to be encountered, remembered, as he summons his supporters to the field of battle to assist him once again against tyranny and oppression.

This book offers a broad-spectrum examination of the Karbala' message; presenting the event as part of the aftermath of the revolution initiated by all of God's prophets, ending with Muhammad, and drawing crucial links between the Abrahamic faith systems. In this way, al-Husain transcends the boundaries of creed or nationality or race and becomes a paradigm of the righteous struggle for all human beings. Quite apparently, al-Husain is following a model of struggle that has existed from the start, in the lives of the prophets to whose message he has submitted himself. In this, the grandson of Islam's prophet felt himself to be acting in accordance with a divine command, as recorded in the 75th verse of Sūrat al- Nisā' "*How should you not fight for the cause of God and of the feeble among men and of the women and the children who are crying: Our Lord! Bring us forth from out of this town of which the people are oppressors. Oh, give us from Your presence some protecting friend! Oh, give us from Your presence some defender!*" The broad overview of religious history sets the tone for the rest of the book; Muhammad's establishment of the Islamic city-state, the founding of the caliphate, and the pressing need for the rise of al-Husain– because an oppressive ruler was violating the sanctions of God, opposing the *sunna* of Muhammad and ill-treating God's servants. His definitive action at such a critical hour of Islamic

history is purported by al-Husain's adherents to be the greatest suffering and redemptive act in all of history. Whatever the motives that may have been involved, and they are numerous, al-Husayn's martyrdom is clearly understood as divinely preordained; by such a death, he became a model of selflessness for the community, and by such vicarious suffering by the innocent, he sets in motion a number of socio-political reactions that to all intents and purposes released the faith of Islam and the message of his grandfather from a corruptive situation.

It bears repeating in every generation that the voice of Karbala' cannot be silenced, nor its thirst for justice quenched, nor its message treated as transient. Instead, it engraves itself upon the memory, urging its adherents to fashion something new, to reshape their lives, to stand with horror before every oppressive word or act; in a word, to inhabit the places that al- Husain inhabits; constructing justice with him, waging peace with him. This book is a welcome addition to the growing body of literature about Karbala' and al-Husayn.

CHRISTOPHER PAUL C LOHESSY, PhD
Ordained Catholic Priest from South Africa
Resident Faculty Member,
Pontifical Institute for Arabic and
Islamic Studies
Visiting Lecturer,
Pontifical Beda College, Rome



INTRODUCTION



"The Imam is the lamp that burns itself but illuminates the world about it."

—Professor Hossein Nasr

In my more than three-decade-long career teaching and writing about religion, I have come to the conclusion that what most effectively defines a religious community and gives it its character are the stories that it values most deeply, the ones it hands down from generation to generation. In this way, the Jewish people are defined by the story of Passover and their liberation from Pharaoh. Christians are defined by the stories of the birth of Jesus and, even more importantly, the narrative of his passion crucifixion and resurrection. Buddhism is rooted in the narrative depicting Siddhartha Gautama's quest for wisdom and liberation that ultimately led him beneath a tree in Bodhgaya where he achieved enlightenment. We might ask, what are Islam's stories? What

narratives define the deepest values of the Muslim community?

For many people, Islam seems a tradition relatively devoid of narrative. Well-meaning introductory textbooks often define Islam in terms of its shared rituals, foregrounding the *ibadat* of "the five pillars" as the essence of Islam, to such a degree that it seems a religion built almost entirely around the practice to the exclusion of narrative. So much attention is given to Islam's emphasis on *tauhid*, its essential monotheism, that the importance of human beings and their stories can sometimes seem diminished or ignored. On one level this is understandable. Scholars writing about Islam, of course, want their readers to realize that there is a reason that Muslims call their faith "Islam" and not "Muhammadanism, "a term often favored by European colonizers. However, I would argue we must be careful to recognize that Islam is also a faith that emphasizes the importance of humanity *(insan)*. After all, Islam is a religion that is rooted in revelation. What is the point of revelation without humanity to receive it?

Furthermore, Muslims believe that God chose to deliver that revelation through the agency of exceptional human beings, *nabis* (prophets) and *rasuls* (messengers). These paradigmatic examples of human virtue play a pivotal within the religious worldview of Islam. After all, it should not be forgotten that in the Qur'anic story of the creation of Adam as God's *khalifah*, God commands the angels to bow down before him. So important is humanity in the narrative of Islam that the first human, who is also the first prophet, is the *qiblah* for the angels.

Thus, Islam is not only about *tauhid* but also *nubuwwat*. It is through the agency of prophets that Muslims believe that God has chosen to remind humanity both of *tauhid* and the coming judgement (*qiyamat*) that demands we strive to perfect our humanity and become the

creatures we were truly intended to be. Thus, the Qur'an is full of stories of the prophets and messengers who came before Muhammad including Ibrahim (Abraham), Yusuf (Joseph), Musa (Moses), and Isa (Jesus). And, of course, Islam is unimaginable without the story of Muhammad himself, the orphaned boy, who grew up to be an exemplar of trust (*amanat*) and patience (*sabr*), who despite having every opportunity to live a life of comfort and ease instead chose instead a life of spiritual poverty; who was forced to flee his home city in the *hijra* (migration) that dates the beginning of his community's calendar, and offered everything he had to the fulfillment of his mission. For generations of Muslims, Muhammad is not only the prophet who reveals the Qur'an he is Habibullah, the Beloved of God, and the perfection of human virtue, a model of behavior to be both loved and emulated.

Beyond stories of Muhammad and the other prophets and messengers who exist both as models of human virtue and foci of love and devotion, the Islamic tradition also speaks of others who have been successful in the process of developing their humanity and thereby becomes "Friends of God, the *auliyah-I Allah,* who serve as models of devotion to both God and the Prophet. For many Muslims, these include the great *pirs* and *shaykhs* of the Sufi tradition. For the Shi'a, the chief among the *auliyah* are their Imams, divinely chosen and protected guides connected to the Prophet Muhammad by ties of blood and love. These include of course those whom the Prophet knew and loved in his own lifetime, his cousin and son-in-law Ali ibn Abu Talib, and his two grandsons Hasan and Husayn, and the later Imams in their lineage. From the Shi'i perspective, if we wish to love God we must, of course, also love his Beloved, the Prophet Muhammad. Similarly, to love him we need also to love those whom he loved and, by extension, those whom they loved. Looked at in this way, Shi'ism is an affective tradition built upon a chain

of love, devotion and allegiance that reaches back through the Imams, to the Prophet and God. The stories of these exceptional human beings are crucial to the identity of Shi'i Muslims, as they provide models of how we as human beings should live.

Among these stories perhaps no other single narrative is more important than that of Imam Husayn's sacrifice at Karbala. The events of Karbala are paradigmatic events that while grounded in history, are simultaneously transcendent. All of us, every day, in ways both big and small are asked to choose between the path of Husayn or that of Yazid, the path of Ali or Mu'awiyah, that of Moses or Pharoah. In a very real sense, "Every Day is Karbala; Every Place is Ashura."

However, we would be mistaken if we saw the narrative of Karbala as a story that speaks only to Shi'i Muslims. In fact, it is a story dear to the hearts of almost all Muslims. In all the years I have been studying Islam, I have yet to meet a Sunni Muslim who considers Yazid to be the hero of Karbala. Even those who do not call Husayn their "Imam," in the Shi'i sense, invariably see him as a hero and master of the spiritual path. Furthermore, because the story of Karbala is about universal human virtues that transcend any religious community--loyalty, courage, sacrifice, compassion, justice— its message resonates well beyond the confines of the Muslim community as well. The author of this book quotes the important 20th Century scholar Allamah Ali Naqi Naqvi who describes Imam Husayn as one who "might with his nobility of character confront power with powerlessness, meet multitudes with want of material support and defy oppression with suffering and martyrdom." Such a human being is heroic not only in Shi'i or Islamic terms but in universal human terms as well. It is thus not surprising that the same Allamah Ali Naqi Naqvi wrote a book in which

he called Imam Husayn, "The Martyr of Humanity." Imam Husayn is an exemplar of shared human virtues that reach across the boundaries of cultural and religious communities.

Every year there comes a point in my introductory class on Islam where I tell the story of Karbala. My students are invariably captivated by the narrative. Not only the suffering and sacrifice of Imam Husayn but the virtues of his companions. The courage of Hur and Abbas. The dignity and bravery of Zaynab bearing witness before Yazid. The story is inherently compelling and speaks to them at an emotional level. It presents examples of human beings behaving at their very best, as exemplified by Husayn and his companions, and at their very worst, in the atrocities committed by the troops sent by Yazid to subdue the Imam. As Prof. Syed Hossein Nasr says in the quote with which I began this essay, which is quoted by Dr. Datoo in the book which you are now holding in your hands, "The Imam is the lamp that burns itself but illuminates the world about it." The sacrifice of Imam Husayn indeed illuminates universal truths about the nature of humanity and the human condition and in so doing it speaks to Muslims and non-Muslims alike. It is my experience that when people hear the story of Karbala for the first time, they come away with a newfound respect and understanding of the tradition of Islam because it speaks in terms they can understand on a most essential human level.

Thus, this book you hold in your hands accomplishes an important service in putting the story of Karbala into the hands of people who may not yet have heard it and in so doing changing minds and attitudes about Islam. As one might expect from an event as profound and meaningful as Karbala there are many ways that it has been interpreted or approached over the centuries. Some have emphasized its

spiritual dimensions. Others have emphasized its role as part of a never-ending struggle for social justice. The author of the text you hold in your hand provides his own particular intellectual framework for interpreting the meaning of the events of Karbala and their role in the history of Islam and the world. He makes many interesting and compelling arguments which I am certain will provoke many fascinating discussions. For me, what I found most compelling is the way that the power of the event of Karbala shines through throughout the entirety of the book. This small volume will provide a wonderful opportunity for readers, especially those unfamiliar with the Shi'i tradition, to access the Karbala narrative, perhaps for the first time. When they do, they will undoubtedly see first-hand that the human virtues cherished by the Shi'a tradition are ones that they value themselves. Inshallah, the sacrifice of Imam Husayn will help them to see the common humanity that unites us all.

VERNON JAMES SCHUBEL, PhD
Professor of Religious Studies
Kenyon College
Gambier OH
March 3rd, 2020



IMAM HUSAYN B. ALI VIEWED IN THE PROPHETIC TRADITION OF REFORM (*IṢLĀḤ*) AND PEACE (*ṢULḤ*)

By the twentieth of the Arabic month of Ṣafar of 1436 (2014CE), Imam Husayn's *arba'een* (the fortieth day of his martyrdom in 680 CE) was traditionally commemorated by a volunteer march of millions of mourners from the Iraqi city of Najaf toward Karbala (the location of the shrine of the martyred Imam). Forty days before this event, on *Ashura* (the anniversary of the day of martyrdom) in the city of Yazd, a central city in Iran, the usual *ta'ziya* procession (collective mourning) also took place again according to centuries-old tradition in this old town. Both occasions were traditional, but there was something novel in them. During the Najaf-Karbala march, frequent chants from millions of mourners echoed anti-violence pronouncements. A Daily Mail article published on 25 December 2014, quotes Aqeel al-Turaihi, one

of the marchers to have said: "This year's march has become exceptional because it is transformed into an anti-violence demonstration against Daesh (ISIS)." Three years before this occasion in 2011, many prominent leaders of the *ta'ziya* procession in Yazd had adopted procession poems that also focused on non-violence. One poem from Shahabeddin Musavi which was recited at a populous procession by hundreds of chanting mourners imagined the suppressive mode of life under al-Yazid in the following metaphoric words:

> *"They were told that the ruler's order must not be challenged*
> *even in the most implicit way,*
> *They were told that to have an open eye, and to lit a light are manifest sins.*
> *The penalty for blossoms was excommunication, the punishment for pansies, to be chained,*
> *The dawn must be exiled, the star belonged to the abyss.*
> *This is a city of all dead souls, where no new song was permitted, only closed lips were allowed, blooming, forbidden.*
> *The caliphate court was well-maintained, ignorance and superstition were allowed,*
> *Injustice after injustice. Protests are outlawed..."*

In Muharram of 2015, Mohammad Ali Karimi, a contemporary poet was given chance to lead the mourning chants in Yazd with partially borrowed words from Sohrab Sepehri (a very popular neo-Sufi Iranian poet):

"We need to see in different ways, eyes must be washed,
Till when, war and hatred, this omnipresent hellfire?
We need to go under the rainfall, we need to wash away rancor,
This loneliness must end!
Wake up to get together, wake up to build another world with love,
That day, we shall experience the spring, that day, the most
chivalrous will appear..."

Main messages of the above poems and many more performed every year since 2011 are the following: Violence, injustice, unfreedom, despotism, animosity and religious superstitions are enough!

These messages are manifestations of how the modern Shi'i communities are looking at the Husayn b. Ali's martyrdom in a new lens. This new lens finds the Karbala tragedy no more, as a conscious choice of martyrdom that could practically be avoided, but a tragedy that was imposed upon Imam Husayn and his companions in breach of all prophetic traditions and moral codes conflict.

Traditionally, the Shi'i literature used in the above occasions reflected deep lamentation and sympathy with all martyrs and sentimental collective mourning. The developing Muharram and *ta'ziya* literature however is shifting towards a new goal: the condemnation of violence. This ritual transformation signifies a new lens through which Shi'a communities are redefining the function of ritual commemorations from a passive expression of historic sorrow to proactive protests against violence.

To fully appreciate the above development, one needs to revisit a whole range of Shi'i martyrdom theories through a critical lens. Presently

and increasingly these theories offer concepts attached to various ethical and political philosophies.

In one of the latest critical works on Imam Husayn studies published in Persian in 2012 by Mohammad Esfandiari under the title of *Imam Husayn, the Emigrate of the Road to Reform,* the author classifies all religio-political theories of the Shi'ite martyrology into seven categories: Defense-based, military activism, mystical approach, duty-based approach, pre- ordained sacred sacrifice, religio-ethical reformism and political incentives. Some more recent authors such as Mehdi Kompani Zaqre' came up with the idea that additional theories can be offered based on a mix of the above-mentioned scenarios or even a whole new theory based on peacemaking.

The truth is that certain historical situations can prompt specific views of martyrdom useful for that specific occasion. Important examples are the three cases below:

1. Ali Shariati interpreted Imam Husayn's martyrology as an active moral choice to use the sacrificed blood as an energy source for a revolution.

2. Neimatullah Salehi Najafabadi, a seminarian scholar contemporary with Shariati opposed him and suggested that Imam Husayn had no intention of being martyred but planned to overthink al-Yazid's corrupt regime and make subsequent religio-political reform in the Islamic caliphate.

3. During the Iran-Iraq war, the Iranian military strategist made vast use of Imam Husayn as a paragon of active martyrdom. This strategy helped the continuous mobilization of youths to join war fronts.

Theories of martyrdom received yet another upheaval when Daesh (alternatively known as ISIS in the western media) and Al-Qaida appeared to uphold 'jihadism' as their ideology with the result of many tragic events perpetrated across various geographies with many indiscriminate massacres of non-military and civilian casualties extended to Shi'i communities.

These monumentally tragic developments prompted an intellectual reconsideration of martyrdom theories in the light of the new intra-Muslim extremism. The result is that a new dimension of Imam Husayn's martyrdom and its tragic nature came under scrutiny with new questions: Did Imam Husayn really choose martyrdom out of many decent options or whether a savage martyrdom was imposed on him, his camp and his family by al-Yazid's troops because he was left only with two options of accepting a humiliating and forced political allegiance with the corrupt and illegitimate caliph or war?

Modern critical scholarship (mostly based on the oldest authentic report on Karbala by Abu Mikhnaf) has shed new light on the nature and conditions of the tragedy and proposes that Imam Husayn did his very best to find a decent third way without success. Does this new theory diminish the value of his martyrdom?

I propose a negative answer to the above question. The fact that Imam Husayn did his utmost effort to find a peaceful and decent third solution in between war and a forced submission to the illegitimate rule of al-Yazid elevates the value of his martyrdom and adds to the depth of the tragedy of his demise because the case demonstrates maximal crime by al-Yazid's camp. In short, the injustice against Imam and his camp becomes just maximal because Imam was giving them a third practical option. In fact, an authentic account of the last negotiation between

Imam and his enemies shows that Imam, in search of a third solution suggested being allowed to go to al-Yazid's court and directly negotiate with him about a decent way out of the impasse. This means al-Yazid's army commanders martyred a peacemaking Imam, rather than a person who is actively seeking tragic martyrdom. This account of Imam Husayn's biography sharply stands against 'jihadism' as understood and practiced by Daesh in current history.

So, what I am proposing here is a whole new prism through which an evaluation of the Karbala tragedy gains its maximal meaning. Basically, I suggest using "Ethics of War" as the best prism to understand the Imam's imposed martyrdom and the utmost inhumanity of this imposition. Of course, he stood very tall in the uneven battle and embraced the imposed martyrdom in full bravery. But the suppression against him looks worst once we agree on the ethics of war as the main evaluative prism.

To understand this argument, let's have a brief view of the three realms of ethics of war as understood and theorized today in the relevant academic disciplines. The current scholarship on the ethics of war divides it into three distinct realms of Ethics at War, Ethics in War, and Post War Ethics (all three realms are currently addressed under the three rubrics of *jus ad bello, jus in bellum* and *post bello*).

In Ethics at War, a number of questions and principles are raised and discussed: The legitimacy of the commander of war; the just cause of war; the force proportion; war as a last resort; the reasonable probability of success in the war, etc.

In Ethics in War, a number of different principles are established: the ban on indiscriminate attacks against non- military population; the humanitarian treatment of prisoners of war; the ban on the destruction

of the environment; prohibition of attacks against women, children and the elderly; etc.

In Post War Ethics, the victor is responsible for observing the human rights of the defeated enemy, a good maintenance of the economy of the occupied lands, environmental care of the occupied lands, the liberation and well-being of the prisoners of war, etc.

Now let's use these lenses to look at the Karbala tragedy and evaluate the results: As for Justice at War, the camp of al- Yazid fails all standards of this realm. His rule is not legitimate, and the war against Imam Husayn also has no just cause. Forces on the battlefield are not proportional (more than three thousand troops against seventy-two); etc.

Regarding justice in war, al-Yazid's forces adhered to every cruel and inhuman act against an army of far smaller size when it was forced to an unproportioned battle. They set all tents of women and children ablaze. Against minimal humanitarian measures, Ibn Ziad (Al-Yazid's army commander) prevented access to water in Imam's camp including infants. They even continued their cruelties against martyred corpses to humiliate them and their causes.

Regarding post bellum, Ibn Ziad's army breached all humanitarian rules about the treatment of women and children as they were all chained, tortured, and forced to march toward al-Yazid's court for a humiliating showdown.

It is very important to pay attention that one of the greatest honors claimed by the early Muslim community was that the Prophet Muhammad(pbuh) had established many moral rules in wars as codified, later on by Muslim jurists such as Abu'l Hassan Shaybani (known as the father of Muslim international law, d. 805 CE) in his book *Siyar*.

These rules, many of which are mentioned in the Qur'an, proved that any legitimate war has to be primarily defensive and also has to observe certain moral codes. So, the notion of victory at any cost is totally alien to the Qur'anic worldview.

One can forcefully argue that the comprehensive and maximal breach of the Quranic and the Prophetic ethics of war by al-Yazid is the most manifest proof of his deep corruption and illegitimacy.

Now let's briefly examine the way Imam Husayn meticulously observed all humanitarian rules of war. First of all, on his way to Kufa when his army had several chances to get rid of some important figures in the camp of his enemy through ambush attack or terror, Imam rejected such attacks. In one case he had the power to deny water to his enemy, but rejected such measures on the basis of humanitarian concerns (I have discussed the full account of such details in my book *Ethics of War and Peace in Iran and Shi'i Islam,* University of Toronto Press, 2016).

When Imam was comered in Karbala by Ibn Ziad troops, he asked if he could go to a different location along a border area without any plan to begin a war. His request was denied without any qualification. He then asked if he can go in person to visit al-Yazid and negotiate a peaceful solution to their differences, and he was again denied. Ultimately when all his peacemaking efforts failed, he invited all his companions to use the darkness of the night before the battle and leave the battlefield. Out of loyalty, his companions rejected the offer. So, Imam truly did his utmost to prevent or minimize the bloodshed and failed.

This is telling us that he was not just martyred by an enemy, but by one of the most inhumane and violent enemies in history. Once, he was forced to fight on the battlefield along with his family and companions,

in accordance with the Islamic ethics of war, Imam did not allow his troops to make the first strike.

It is mind-boggling to see how he acted as a paragon of moral behavior in war as juxtaposed by his cruel enemy who became a paragon of evil in war and peace.

Before his martyrdom, Imam Husayn had said that he accepted invitations of the Kufa people to join them and lead a moral reform. The Kufans backed down and left the Imam alone to face the suppressing forces of the illegitimate calif. Imam, however, stood loyal to his promise, did not agree to become a conformist to the corrupt rule of al-Yazid, but did not also seek bloodshed which is the heart of jihadism. Al- Yazid, however, did not give Imam's peaceful solution a chance and persisted in a military encounter and a savagery that always stands most violent in human history.

Michael Walzer is right in saying that behaviors in war demonstrate the naked moral body of civilizations. Imam Husayn was not an ordinary martyr. He was the most memorable martyr of peace (*ṣulḥ*) and reform (*iṣlāḥ*).

What most important lesson does his martyrdom leave for the current generation? I think the *'arbaeen* marchers are right is saying that the message is primarily anti-violence. The Shi'i society would certainly prefer a living Imam Husayn to a martyred one. This means that although jihad as a personal struggle towards moral advancement is much revered by Husayn's followers, jihadism has no value in the Shi'i worldview where justice, peace and moral reform stand paramount.

MOHAMMAD JAFAR MAHALLATI, PhD
Professor of Islamic Studies
Oberlin College
Oberlin OH



FOREWORD



The idea of defiance against tyranny and oppression owes a great deal to Husain ibne Ali, the hero of the battle of Karbala in 680 AD. With just 72 valiant followers and family members, the grandson of Prophet Muhammad faced the military might of the Muslim empire ruled then by a despot, Yazid bin Mu'awiya. Husain refused to sanctify Yazid's reign through *baya'a* (allegiance) and consequently, he and his small contingent were martyred in the most brutal of fashions. The accompanying women and children were imprisoned for months in the dark alleys of Damascus.

On every Ashura, falling on the 10th day of the Muslim calendar month of Muharram, Muslims, especially Shia Muslims, all across the world commemorate Husain's great sacrifice. Tragically though, the central message of Karbala appears to evade the broader Muslim thinking today. In Western literature and research on Islam, this episode is often viewed through the lens of Shia rituals and processions practiced according to various cultural manifestations. The message of Karbala hardly comes through for an ordinary observer lacking in knowledge of the historical

context of this extraordinary event. It is worth investigating why that is so. Even more importantly, it is critical to understand why terrorists and extremists like Daesh, Al-Qaeda and the Taliban often attack the Ashura related gatherings (as is evident from a consistent pattern of terrorist attacks over the years in various parts of South Asia & Middle East), and what is at the core of their disdain of all the things that Imam Husain stood for.

A brief historical reference is required to fully comprehend the essence and meaning of the great sacrifice rendered by the family of the Prophet under the transformative and visionary leadership of Imam Husain. He was no ordinary being and his mission was far broader than a personal endeavor.

After Prophet Muhammad's death in 632 AD, the expansion of Islam became a global phenomenon, courtesy of a variety of means. Islam was a rising power in the world, but in the process, the fabric of Muslim society was also being transformed, as the Muslim outlook was gradually influenced by people from various cultures. New elites that were more interested in power and wealth alone started emerging as more influential, and consequently, Islam's emphasis on egalitarianism, justice and equity started getting diluted. A deliberate attempt to imitate the dynastic empires of the Byzantines and Sasanians was obvious to many observers at the time and well recorded by historians. The distortion of Islamic ideals became a favorite pastime of Yazid and his coterie. The expansion of influence and control by way of the sword was a hallmark of his times.

This deplorable trend in fact was nourished by Yazid's father Muawiya ibn Abu Sufyan who had militarily challenged the legitimate caliphate of Husain's eminent father Ali ibn Abi Talib. The rivalry was

much bigger than a family or tribal confrontation. It was a battle of ideas. The hindrances and obstacles that Abu Sufyan had created for Prophet Muhammad since the early days of Islam signified his worldview. The Prophet had shown ultimate magnanimity and mercy by accepting Abu Sufyan in the fold of Islam at the time of the peaceful conquest of Mecca in 631 but history testifies that the progeny of Abu Sufyan continued to follow the old ways rather than internalize the spirit of Islam. Husain symbolized the message of Islam built around the unity of God, following Muhammad's model of love for humanity and selflessness.

Imam Husain, the spiritual custodian of Islam at his time, refused to accept allegiance to Yazid who was dedicated to following his forefathers rather than Islamic principles. Husain staunchly stood against this shifting tide, and his unprecedented sacrifice was intended to shake the Muslim conscience and expose the misleading path introduced in the name of Islam. It was a matter of principle for him – one of human dignity and honor.

Challenging the newly introduced monarchical system of government was another important feature of this struggle. In his last sermon before departing from Madina on his journey towards Karbala, Iraq, he made clear his mission: ***"I seek to reform the Ummah of my grandfather."*** An armed struggle for that purpose was never his intended route. He believed in conveying the message through love and compassion. It was a message motivated truly by humanity. The famous Indian leader Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi aptly acknowledged this by saying: *"I learned from Hussein how to achieve victory while being oppressed."*

This was not a mere political battle, though some Muslim historians try to project it that way so as to cover up not only Yazid's atrocities but indirectly to defend his school of thought as well. The mainstream view,

however, both among Sunni and Shi'a Muslims, is highly sympathetic toward Imam Husain. It would be an absolute travesty of Muslim history to call this a Sunni-Shi'a confrontation. Some western writers still do that, either out of a lack of in-depth understanding or in a flawed effort to simplify things for a lay Western reader. On the Muslim side, only a handful of clerics project this fake narrative. A few deranged ones call it a "battle of two princes" which is equally worse and defy most credible historical evidence. Still, most Muslims shy away from digging too deep into the matter, and carefully avoid questioning the historical developments leading to the rise of Yazid. There are no two views that Muawiya appointed him as his successor. Muawiya's own rise within the political corridors of Islam was reflective of manipulation and drift away from Islamic values and ethics.

Insightfully, the whole narrative of the tragedy at Karbala would have remained unheard of without the tireless struggle of Husain's sister Zainab binte Ali, who as an eyewitness of the tragedy propagated details of the event far and wide among Muslims. While in chains, she courageously challenged Yazid's policies on his face in his court in Damascus soon after the battle at Karbala. Many Muslims — some out of ignorance and others out of bigotry — avoid appreciating the crucial role of a woman in this grand struggle. Zainab's contribution to fighting for the essence of the Muslim faith was as critical as that of Husain.

Though Shi'as are often at the forefront of commemorating the tragedy of Karbala, Sunnis, especially those belonging to the Barelvi school of thought in South Asia and almost all Sufi circles in broader Asia and the Middle East also enthusiastically participate in paying homage to Imam Husain and his companions. Extremists and terrorists among Muslims want to destroy this element of unity, as sectarianism suits their

divisive and violent agenda. Distorting religion to make it dogmatic in outlook and regressive in approach is also what helps them achieve their goals exceedingly well. For them, political power is an end in itself. Husain's message stands completely contrary to this perspective.

The tentacles of extremism within Muslim societies today can be pushed back by forging unity in following the principles that galvanized the courageous companions of Husain in Karbala.

It is high time to recognize that the curse of sectarianism (which is fed by extremist and isolationist tendencies across Muslim sects) has inhibited the spiritual growth of Muslims. The remedy to the malady lies in mainstreaming the message of Husain in Karbala both within the worldwide Muslim communities and among those who are interested in deciphering the foundational themes of Islamic discourse. At a higher level, Husain's message of defiance against oppression and personal sacrifice for the cause of humanity is applicable to a broader audience for generations to come.

Efforts, such as those reflected in this important compilation, further the mission of Imam Husain and hence deserve special appreciation.

I conclude with the poetry of the great Sufi saint of South Asia, Moinuddin Chishti, who pays a befitting homage to Imam Husain:

King is Husain
King of Kings is Husain

The faith is Husain
The savior of faith is Husain

He gave his head but
not his hand to Yazid

If truth be told, the foundation
of faith is Husain.

HASSAN ABBAS, PhD
Distinguished Professor of International Relations,
NESA,
National Defense University
Washington DC
October 2019



Some of the passages in this essay are borrowed from the author's article, "History Lessons of Karbala," Foreign Policy, 2011; available at: https://foreignpolicy.com/2011/12/11/history-lessons-from-karbala/

PREFACE



The tragedy of Karbala and the martyrdom of Imam Husayn(as) is one of the most defining moments of human, Islamic and particularly, Shiite history. On the one hand, this is witnessed in and through the passion with which Shiites and the broader Muslim community have remembered and commemorated this tragedy throughout the 1400 years of Islamic history. On the other, it is evidenced by the un-abated outpouring of reflections and poetry written in almost all major Islamic languages. The tribute of Khwaja Moinnudin Chisti (d.1236), the founder of Chisti Sufi order in India sum ups the reverence and devotion that has been a norm for Muslim consciousness throughout Islamic history:

Husayn is King, King of Kings;
Husayn is Religion, Protector of Religion;
Gave his head, gave he not his hand;[1]
The truth is that Husayn is the bedrock of la ilahailallah[2]

[1] Giving of hand means giving forced allegiance to Yazid, the ruler of the Umayyad dynasty.
[2] The first proclamation of the Islamic faith, "no god but God", meaning monotheism.

The momentousness of the tragedy is such that it has not gone unnoticed by non-Muslim observers either. Already in *Unique Sacrifice of Imam Husayn(as) for Humanity* (2014), Dr. Syed Manzoor Rizvi has compiled non-Muslim voices touched by the life and martyrdom of Imam Husayn(as) ranging from Mahatma Gandhi and Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru to Thomas Carlyle, Edward Gibbon and Charles Dickens (see pp.379-383).On the Christian side, when introduced to Imam Husayn's life and sacrifice on the plains of Karbala, Christians have inevitably noticed parallels between this sacrifice and that of Prophet Isa (Jesus)(as):

"Despite these differences, the similarities between Catholicism and Shiism concerning the martyrdoms and deaths of Jesus Christ and Imam Hasan are noteworthy. The redemptive deaths of Imam Husayn and Jesus Christ became the sources and symbols of martyrdom in Shiism and Catholicism, respectively. Husayn's martyrdom was only the most significant of a long series of Shi'i martyrdoms. Both Catholics and Shi'is believe that the martyr courageously chose death when he could have chosen to forego it; both see the deaths as ultimately victorious; these acts of supreme martyrdom as a redemptive in nature; both hold these deaths to beat the very center of their faith systems; and both have constructed an elaborate system of ceremonies around these tragedies that are reenacted on the regular basis. In this way, the sacrifices remain vivid parts of the lives of the believers...Catholics recite numerous prayers and lamentations in remembrance of the suffering and martyr Christ, and Shi'is repeatedly voice supplications of great grief to the martyred Imam Husayn [*Roman Catholics and Shi'i Muslims* (2002),73].

It is this universal attraction toward the life, martyrdom, and sacrifice of Imam Husayn(as), his family, and companions on the plains of Karbala that has prompted Sayyed Ali Naqi Naqvi (d.1988), author of

one of the most comprehensive works titled *Shahīd-i Insāniyat (Martyr of Humanity)* on Imam's life in any major Islamic language, has called Imam Husayn, the *Martyr par excellence of humanity.*

As Syed Akbar Hyder has shown in *Reliving Karbala: Martyrdom in South Asian Memory* (2006), in the South Asian context, various contemporary political, literary, religious (even ecumenical!) initiatives have drawn on the polyphonic powerful motif of Karbala. For those seeking revolutions, Imam Husayn(as) became the ultimate revolutionary; for those seeking total surrender to the Will of God, Imam Husayn(as) the ultimate Muslim. One observes between these two poles various iterations of the symbolism of Karbala. The fact remains: till the Iranian revolution Karbala remained, and continues to be, a powerful symbol for Muslims.

But despite this immense inherent symbolic potential of this tragedy and sacrifice for inspiring human communities and humanity at large, and irrespective of the immense human awe and reflection that the tragedy has invited, Imam Husayn's life and martyrdom still remains, especially in the West, unknown to many. Various initiatives such as "Who is Hussain?" movement have tried to redress this lack of familiarity with the figure and achievements of Imam Husayn(as), yet have had limited success. Put simply, introducing Imam Husayn(as) to western modern and Christian audiences still has a way to go.

There is an old adage of logic: the path of knowing (*'ilm*) is an intellectual movement from what one already knows toward what is unknown. Any attempt to introduce Imam Husayn(as), his family and companions, or any other aspect of the Islamic tradition to the Christian (and western) mindset will have to pay heed to this ancient wisdom, and our ability to speak to them in terms familiar to them. It remains to be

seen whether Muslim scholars, thinkers, and believers will succeed in this onerous task.

It is in view of these observations that I see the significance of the continued efforts of Muslim thinkers and scholars to illuminate the Imam's life, mission, and teachings and continue to reflect and re-present him to the world around them. I congratulate the author and the publisher for their efforts in this respect.

SYED RIZWAN ZAMIR, PhD
Associate Professor of Religious Studies
Davidson College
Davidson NC
13th Rabi al-thānī, 1441AH
December 10, 2019



A SPECIAL NOTE



"Husayn's(a) sacrifice saved Islam."
"Husayn(a) is for everyone."

I heard these two statements repeatedly when I visited the shrine of Imam Husayn(a) during *Arba'een* in October 2018. I had been on my own journey for truth when I first heard of Husayn(a). I was moderating a conference on geopolitics in the Middle East when I discovered that each of the panelists had sacrificed a great deal to bear witness to their understanding of truth that threatened the powers that be. It was in the follow-up to that conference in an email exchange that I first heard of Husayn(a). I was told that Husayn(a) sacrificed all he had for truth and justice, for what was right. These panelists were following in that path.

How do you find the courage to do that?

Our natural inclination is not to ask if something is true, but to be concerned with what others will think. What will happen to me if I take

this path? What will happen if I speak out? What will happen to me if I act on this truth? What will others do?

How do you break that natural inclination for a divine inclination? Even if you want to do so, how do know for sure that you are following what is true and just? What if it is just your own ego playing tricks on you? What about when your decision to journey toward truth has effects on others, your family, and your companions? What responsibility do you bear for them? What good is truth anyway if the powers will kill you? Isn't truth really a hopeless cause? When should truth be suppressed for strategy's sake? When does strategy become an escape from truth and its consequences? How does knowledge of truth turn into wisdom?

If you have ever had these kinds of questions, Husayn(a) may be for you.

His is the story of purity of character and how one holds on to truth amidst opposition so great it requires sacrifice. The sacrifice of comfort. The sacrifice of reputation. The sacrifice of livelihood. The sacrifice of life. Sacrifice even of those we love.

It was a week before the day of *Arba'een*. I was in the shrine of Imam Husayn(a) in Karbala, Iraq. I decided to touch the lattice work above his tomb. I wasn't sure if I should since Husayn(a) wasn't a figure in my religion. But I had been told again and again that Husayn(a) is for everyone, regardless of religion or creed. Just like Jesus(s).

So, I am in the Shrine of Imam Husayn(a). It is beautiful. It is filled with the sound of prayer. People are crying. Some are standing. Some are sitting. Some are in various positions of prayer. Poetry is being recited from many places. I don't understand a word of it, except now and then

I hear a name I was beginning to recognize Ali, Zainab, Abbas, Husayn.

I don't know what it is like on the women's side, but on the men's side, even a week before the day of *Arba'een* the place is packed. It is a push and pull like ocean waves of bodies. Your feet almost leave the ground. There are so many people. You know where you are headed. It is like swimming in the ocean. You don't need to be aggressive, but you need to hold your own. You swim through the bodies, pushed left and right. Finally, I got close enough, almost there.

I should stop here. I was conscious of being different. Different religion. I only speak English. From America. My reddish hair, now reddish-gray, pale skin. Of the thousands of people inside the shrine that day, I was probably the whitest guy in the room. I reach up and put my hand up to touch the lattice work and I can't reach it.

What happened with me is that as I reached up, I couldn't touch it, and a hand took mine and pushed it up against the grate. It was a brown hand, taking my white hand up against the final resting place of Imam Husayn(a). It was a visual imprint in my mind that beyond all color, all race, all religion, all language, the language of justice, love, truth and courage is one. The love of Husayn(a). Our eyes met. We just looked at each other.

I feel that it was a summons. It was a summons from Imam Husayn(a) to take this journey of truth. It was as if he was saying to me, "Do not be afraid." It was a summons to bear witness to human dignity, to discover the truth, speak about it and act. When I walked with the millions of beautiful people toward Karbala, I knew that this journey, this path, was real. It is the path of justice for all who are oppressed everywhere. It was a sign of the reality of Allah(swt).

I am a Christian. I am a follower of Jesus. It was Jesus I followed to Karbala. Jesus showed me Husayn. If I want to follow Jesus, I must follow Husayn. Husayn shows me how to follow Jesus.

Both Jesus and Husayn (peace be upon them both) teach us to hold on to the truth. As I told my congregation recently:

> *"Hold to your truth. Hold fast to your truth. Whatever that truth is, don't let it go for the sake of acceptance by others. No relationship that requires you to deny your truth is worth keeping. Do know that if you do hold fast to what you know is true, and this truth is in order to goodness, it will at some point require sacrifice. But if it is true and good, it will last. It will resurrect beyond death. It will live and save."*

All this is to say that the book in your hand is not a book about history, although it contains history. It is not a book of religious doctrine, although it contains profound religious teaching. It is a book that bears witness to what it means to be a human being. What it means to grow your character. What it means to hold to the truth. What it means to give your life for justice.

Husayn(a) is not primarily a figure of history but a present reality. Husayn(a) is here now. Through sacrifice as Dr. Bashir Datoo writes, Husayn(a) arouses our consciousness. Once aroused, what will you do? *Hal Min Nasirin Yansurna* (Is there anyone who will come to our aid?)

My experience in Iraq walking the 50 miles from Najaf to Karbala and learning about Husayn(a) from the people I met was the most beautiful thing I think I have witnessed. (That and the birth of my children). My heart was expanded. My consciousness aroused. But of course,

that is only the beginning. Dr. Bashir Datoo writes:

> *"Imam Husayn's(a) call was not emotional, but physical. Prophet Muhammad(s) has indicated three different ways in which the call to action could be implemented and, depending upon a person's capabilities, he set up a priority among the ways:*
>
> *'Whoever of you observes an evil [in the society] must object over it physically with his* ***hand****; and if he does not have the power of that, then he must object over it by his* ***tongue****; and if he does not have the strength of that, he must object over it in his* ***heart****. And this [the third alternative] is the lowest status of faith.'"*

The aroused consciousness or expanded heart is a beginning. How one moves from heart to tongue to hand will require prayer, study, discipline, and *sacrifice.*

Now the journey begins.

REV. JOHN SHUCK
Portland OR
January 2020

Rev. John Shuck was a Presbyterian Church pastor who lived in Oregon. Sadly, he passed away in 2021.



A SPECIAL NOTE

I am Imam at an Interfaith Community Sanctuary in Seattle. Since the event of 9/11 in 2001, I have been working with a Rabbi and a Christian Minister. Affectionately known as the Interfaith Amigos, we travel extensively sharing a message of inclusive spirituality. In our presentations and writings, we describe the ideals of oneness, love, compassion, truth, justice and peace that are found in our holy books. It is easy to trot out beautiful verses but how many of us are willing to live them? In the face of so much global abuse of human rights, how many of us are willing to combat the evil of oppression and injustice. Are we willing to make sacrifices?



In this significant book, filled with wise insights, you will read of the story of Imam Husayn, grandson of the Prophet Muhammad(pbuh). Imam

Husayn was an ardent and unwavering torch bearer of truth, justice and mercy. With astonishing courage and grace, he sacrificed his life to fight the evil of tyranny and corruption. Such was the radiance of his being and his commitment to divine ideals, that a hundred of his followers and members of his family readily made the ultimate sacrifice.

Over the centuries the example of Imam Husayn has enthused and ennobled the struggle of many who have fearlessly fought injustice and oppression. In modern times, the likes of Mahatma Gandhi, Nelson Mandela and Martin Luther King have drawn inspiration from the story and ideals of Imam Husayn.

May this book awaken and inspire us, regardless of our affiliation with race, religion, or culture, to take righteous action for the sake of human rights and justice; may we be willing to suffer inconveniences and make sacrifices according to our capacity with courage, grace and compassion. Our collective efforts will bring about core changes that will allow justice and peace to prevail and flourish.

JAMAL RAHMAN, PhD
Lecturer
Pacific Luther University
Tacoma WA
Imam & Co-Minister
Interfaith Community Sanctuary
Seattle WA



A SPECIAL NOTE



Interfaith Dialogue:
The Importance of Discussing Imam Husain

With integrity, people of different faiths, life ideologies, and outlooks towards life can come closer and engage in dialogue despite their differences, and learn about one another's religions, history, traditions, cultures, rituals, and values while cherishing their own. This is what lies at the heart of the concept of interfaith dialogue. Through interfaith dialogues, we can learn things about the beliefs of the people adhering to other faiths and religions as well as learn about the lives of their heroes. Not only that, but we can also get inspired by those who are revered in other religions while maintaining our own faith. This can also help us learn important lessons for life. Sometimes, learning about the heroes in other faiths can also help us reinforce our own beliefs. This can be one of the outcomes of interfaith dialogues, which take place on a regular basis in different parts

of the world, in particular in Europe and North America. Such dialogues, when between the people of Abrahamic faiths, usually involve discussions around Abraham, Jesus, Lady Mary, or Muhammad. However, the family of the last Prophet of Islam, Muhammad are rarely mentioned in interfaith dialogues. The family of the Prophet Muhammad – which includes the twelve Imams and Lady Fatimah – are highly revered by Shia Muslims. Moreover, the belief in their infallibility and that the twelve Imams are the Divinely appointed leaders of Muslims after the Prophet Muhammad is an integral part of the Shia Muslim doctrine. This book is about one of the Imams of Shia Muslims, Imam Husain.

One may ask the question: why would a non-Muslim be interested in reading this book? What benefits does it have to learn about one of the Imams of Shia Muslims who was martyred almost fourteen centuries ago? Out of all the Imams of Shia Muslims, Imam Husain holds a special status and

position because of his heroic martyrdom in Karbala at the hands of the army of the Umayyad tyrant, Yazid. In my point of view, any interfaith dialogue – in particular between the people of Abrahamic faiths – needs to include discussions on Imam Husain, his values, and his movement. There are several aspects of the personality of Imam Husain and his movement: spiritual, religious, political, and social, etc. All of those aspects can have an appeal to people of different religions.

However, I would like to bring the attention of the readers to two key aspects of the personality of Imam Husain: a strong belief in One God to face hardships with ease and achieve peace at heart, and reliance on One God to stand up for social justice. As you can see, the "belief in One God is the central point here. Any interfaith dialogue between the people of Abrahamic faiths should hinge upon this basic belief.

According to the Qur'an, God, the Almighty says the following:

> *"Say, 'O People of the Scripture, come to a word that is equitable between us and you - that we will not worship except God and not associate anything with Him and not take one another as lords instead of God.'"*
>
> — The Qur'an 3:64

When it comes to worshiping One God, Imam Husain was its epitome. A deeper meaning of worshipping One God is to live life in servitude to Him. Imam Husain rose up against the tyrant Yazid and to reform the Muslim society at that time as an act of worshipping One God. Not only that, every act of his on the way from Medina to Mecca and then from Mecca to Karbala and on the plains of Karbala on the Day of Ashura until the final moments of his life was nothing but a manifestation of *La Ilaha Illa Allah*, which means that there is no one worthy to be worshipped except Allah (the word for 'God' in Arabic) –the One God, the Creator, the Master, and the Owner of every being. It was this faith that gave him the courage and the power to stand up to the tyranny of Yazid despite having few companions. The battle of Karbala was one of the most disproportionate battle in the history of mankind. This battle took place in the key period of Islamic history i.e., the early period, merely half a century after the demise of the

last Prophet of Islam, Muhammad. It was a tumultuous period, with widespread *fitnah*, disinformation and chaos, and the oppression from the Umayyad ruler, Muawiyah and later his son, Yazid. In such times, Imam Husain rose up to the task of bettering the society by challenging the tyrannical reign of Yazid, denying to give the oath of allegiance to him, and starting a movement to put the *Ummah* or Religious Community of his grandfather back on track – the track of true belief in One God and submission to Him alone, not to some tyrant. And that essence included encouraging and promoting good and goodness, and denouncing and shunning all that evil. This could only be possible with an unshakable belief in One God and absolute reliance on Him. Hence, those who aspire to better their community or society can derive inspiration from this aspect of the personality of Imam Hussain.

According to some narrations found in the *Hadith* sources (sayings) of Shia Muslims, the following verse of the Qur'an refers to Imam Husain:

"[God will say to the righteous], 'O tranquil soul! Return to your Lord, well-pleased [with Him] and well-pleasing [to Him].'"

— The Qur'an 89:27-28

According to the famous Shia Muslim philosopher, gnostic, teacher of ethics, and exegete, Allamah Tabatabai, a soul that is pleased with

God is definitely one that God is also pleased with. This statement of Tabatabai, points to the fact that it is not possible that God, the Almighty, the Most Generous, does not reciprocate the one who is pleased with Him. Imam Husain lived all his life being pleased with God. Hence, God is also pleased with him. For Imam Husain, whatever came from his Beloved was good, including the harshest of the calamities. Imam Husain is reported to have said after even his 6-month- old infant Abdullah (Ali al-Asghar) was martyred:

"Every calamity is easy upon me if the beholder is God."

This quote of Imam Husain in such a difficult situation that is beyond imagination, is a manifestation of his belief that God is All-seeing. This belief is fundamental in all three Abrahamic faiths. This statement of Imam Husain is a ray of light in all sorts of darknesses that one may find oneself in. Reflecting on this statement can help us all deal with calamities and troubles in life.

A tranquil soul is the one who has a content heart. God, the Almighty says in the Qur'an:

"Verily, in the remembrance of God do hearts find peace."

— The Qur'an 13:28

Imam Husain had peace at heart even when he lay on the plains of Karbala, hungry and thirsty and drenched in blood. This is because his heart was filled with nothing other than the remembrance of God. He left this world with a tranquil heart longing for his Beloved, God.

There are many universal aspects of the movement of Imam Husayn, which have been appealing and will continue to appeal to people of conscience regardless of their faith and culture and the era they live in. In this book, Dr. Bashir Datoo has not only described the historical background of the movement of Imam Husayn but also discussed several of the universal aspects of his movement. Those aspects are as relevant for those of other respective faiths, in particular the people of Abrahamic faiths, as for Muslims. Hopefully, the readers of this book will find those discussions interesting and inspiring. I also hope that the people of all beliefs and life ideologies in general, and the people of Abrahamic faiths in particular, will enjoy reading this book.

SAYYED REHAN NAQVI, PhD
Scientist, Researcher, Theologian
and Public Speaker
Utrecht, the Netherlands
June 11th, 2020



I

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK



A conceptual framework consists of a set of concepts and the relationships among them organized within a logical and sequential structure. The purpose is to provide a focus and a tool for the integration and interpretation, in the present case, of historical phenomena. Stated briefly, a conceptual framework is a network of linked concepts that provides a context for the interpretation of historical events.

There are two key benefits of using a conceptual framework. First, it provides the ability to move beyond descriptions of "what" and "where" to explanations of "how" and "why." Second, it ensures coherence in the narrative which then flows logically from one chapter to the next and from one section of a chapter to another.

Linked Concepts of the Framework Foundational Revolution

The book begins with the revolutions ushered in by the Abrahamic Prophets that are divinely appointed by God who, in the terminology of Islam, is called Allah(swt). He sends prophets to different communities at different times to guide humankind onto a righteous path in this world so as to attain a blissful life in the next world. The first prophet in this lineage was Prophet Ibrahim(a) (Abraham) and the last of the prophets was, according to Muslims, Prophet Muhammad(s). He is thus considered to be "the seal of the prophets" as no other prophet came after him.

The Aftermath of the Revolution

A radical revolution that challenges the vested interests of the elite of the society evokes a reaction on their part with a view to modifying or deviating from the beliefs and practices of the initial revolution. The reaction may take place under two scenarios. Under the first scenario, the reaction may be so intense that it gives rise to a counter-revolution. If the elite underestimate the power of the revolution, the counterrevolution may not be successful during the initial phases; it then leads to a progressive intensification in subsequent phases with the purpose of arresting the progress of the revolution. Under the second scenario, the reaction may initially be muted and opposition to it may be trepid. However, over a period of time, which may be relatively long, it may gain momentum which would then lead directly to the reformative movement.

The Interregnum between Phases of Counter-Revolution

In the event that a counter-revolution occurs, it may take hold for a varying period of time depending upon the strength and persistence of the forces behind it. Occasionally, there may be an interval, an interregnum, whereby the initial revolution is temporarily revived before it is overturned by the emboldened and manipulative counter-revolutionaries. More often, however, this phase does not occur, so it is next followed by the reformative movement.

The Reformative Movement

In the aftermath of the foundational revolution, distortions and deviations (which will hereafter be collectively referred to as innovations) begin to creep into the fundamental principles and values of the original revolution. These changes are affected to advance the political agenda of the new leadership, most importantly to solidify their authority and power. These innovations become so glaring that a single or a group of principled individuals rise to take a stand to reform the society. The reformation may lead to a reformulated leadership structure and religious practices or simply to renunciation of altered principles and values of the foundational revolution designed to strengthen the will of the people to resist the innovations.

Application of the Framework

With a view to providing the background and context to the reformation of Imam Husayn ibn Ali(a), the grandson of Prophet Muhammad(s), and its impact, the conceptual framework will first be applied to all the Abrahamic Prophets – in chronological order, to Prophet Ibrahim(a) (Abraham), Prophet Musa(a) (Moses), Prophet Isa(a) (Jesus) and Prophet Muhammad(s). Each of the prophets launched a foundational revolution that met with varying degrees of opposition from the local elites. At some point in the future, it was followed by the reformative movement. The lapsed period between the revolution and the reformation may have been relatively short or quite long and the forces behind it may have varied.

The first three Abrahamic Prophets are briefly discussed in Chapter II which covers both the revolution, the reaction to it and the reformation that ultimately followed. Separate chapters are devoted to the fourth and the final prophet, Prophet Muhammad – Chapter III on his revolution and the resistance, and Chapter IV on the interregnum between the two phases of the counter-revolution. The reformation brought about by Imam Husayn is analyzed in Chapter V and his enduring message in Chapter VI.

II

UNDERPINNINGS AND LEADERSHIP OF MAJOR RELIGIOUS MOVEMENTS



The Concept of Revolution

Revolution is generally thought of as a major, sudden change – a change that is so radical and profound that it marks the end of one period and the beginning of another. Such a revolution typically involves a change in such areas as government, leadership, ideology and policies (for example, the French revolution of 1789).

However, a revolution can also involve a slow, deliberate change – a change in, say, economic relationships or technological conditions that

marks a fundamental departure from a previous historical pattern. Such a revolution transforms the entire society but takes many years, if not generations to bring about (for instance, the Industrial Revolution of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries).

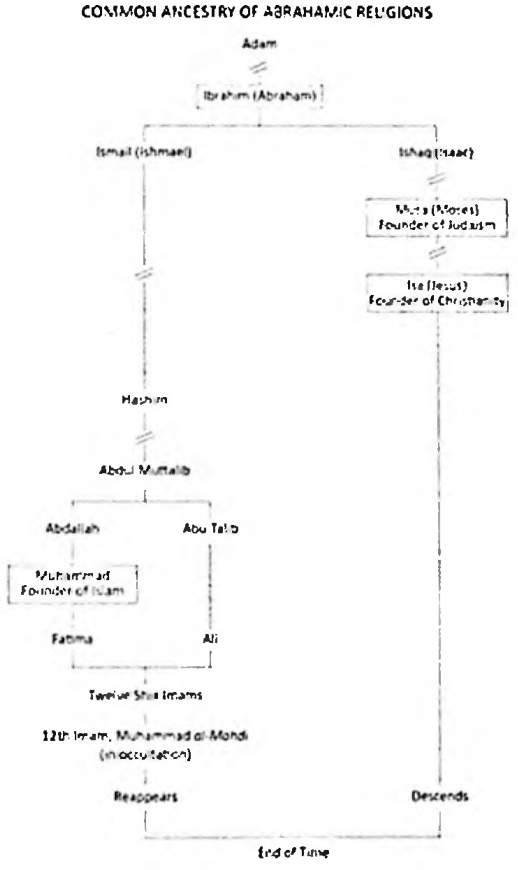
Abrahamic prophet's religious revolution was of the second kind. The chain of prophets was necessitated by the dynamic nature of society and by the subsequent decline in innate human attitudes and behaviors. With the passage of time, the message of Allah(swt) tended to be corrupted or forgotten, leading to the deterioration in the moral and ethical consciousness of the society.

The major monotheistic religions of West Asian origin emphasize and trace their common origin to Prophet Ibrahim(as) (Abraham). He was a *hanif*, a primordial monotheist in complete submission to the Divine Reality before its fragmentation into three major religions. These three are thus referred to as "Abrahamic Religions" and they are, in chronological order, Judaism (1st millennium BCE), Christianity (1st century CE) and Islam (7th century CE). (See the diagram of the Common Ancestry of Abrahamic Religions). The unifying characteristics of all the three are that they conceive God to be a transcendent creator and the source of moral law.

Authority of Leaders of Foundational Revolutions

The founders of Abrahamic religions were all divinely appointed and each one received divine scriptures from the Creator. Prophet Musa(a) (Moses) was the recipient of the *Taurat* (Old Testament), Prophet Isa(a) (Jesus) of the *Injeel* (New Testament) and Prophet Muhammad(s) of the

Qur'an. These texts feature many of the same figures, histories and places, but scholars generally agree that the two earlier scriptures were lost and that the texts that were compiled much later contain distortions.



Thus, Muslims maintain that the only scripture that is the verbatim word of God is the Qur'an. It contains the gist of all the previous scriptures and as Prophet Muhammad was the last of the prophets and none other came after him. Human society had developed over time and now one comprehensive message was all that humankind needed to accomplish its purpose on this earth. His message remains relevant for all the peoples of the world until the end of time. Briefly, the Qur'an represents the true, final and eternal message to humanity.

The State of Society before Prophets' Revolution and their Universal Message of Monotheism

The most important civilizations of the ancient Near East developed in the great river valleys. In the east was Mesopotamia in the river valleys between the Tigris and the Euphrates. In the west was Egypt beside the River Nile. In-between lay the land of Canaan, west of the River Jordan. Canaan was kind of a land bridge that connected Egypt and other Mediterranean kingdoms to successive kingdoms of Mesopotamia.

Prophet Ibrahim's(a) Prophethood

He was born in Ur, on the River Euphrates in Lower Mesopotamia in modern-day Iraq and Iran. The birth and death dates of the early prophets are not known with any degree of certainty. Some scholars think that Prophet Ibrahim may have been born in 2166 BC and may have lived until 1991 BC. He traveled many times from Mesopotamia to what would become the Land of Israel.

Prophet Ibrahim's ancestors were idolaters and polytheists. There were some conscious efforts to counter these influences, but they were all unsuccessful. The primary reason for the failure was the lack of necessary leadership. It was not until Prophet Ibrahim appeared that he aroused the region from the slumber of paganism.

The state of the society at his time is best captured by the incident described in the Qur'an of the Prophet's destruction of the idols and the commotion that ensued among the people (21:57-58, 68-69). He tried to reason with the people by speaking about the power and might of Allah(swt) and inviting them to worship Him, the only Lord, instead of the many idols but to no avail. He next decided to perform a practical joke to make them understand that the helpless and breakable idols were not worthy of being worshipped.

The people used to celebrate a festival every year outside of the town. Prophet Ibrahim stayed back and when the town had emptied, he went to the temple where the idols were installed and, with a pickaxe, knocked all of them down except for the biggest one. When the people returned, they were enraged and suspected it was the work of Prophet Ibrahim.

The Prophet was brought to trial in the court of Namrud, the tyrant ruler of Babylon, a famous city in Mesopotamia, who had called his people to worship him as their lord. Since they had fallen prey to polytheism and idolatry, they readily accepted him as their god.

The Prophet was asked if he was responsible for the demolition of the idols. He retorted that the damage was done by the biggest idol and, if he is in a position to speak, he can confirm it. The people could not but acknowledge the helplessness of their idols when they responded with, "They do not talk, nor do they answer any question." Prophet Ibrahim seized the opportunity to undermine the cult of idolatry. But it had no effect on them and, on the basis of circumstantial evidence, he was found guilty. They shouted in unison, "Burn him alive! Be with your lords."

A bonfire was prepared, and it was so huge and so intense that nobody could dare go near it. Prophet Ibrahim was thrown into the fire by means of a catapult. He prayed to Allah to deliver him safely from the fire and at His command the fire became cool. To their utter bewilderment, Namrud and his people saw him sitting in the middle of the fire totally unharmed. They realized the truthfulness of the Prophet's message but, out of rebelliousness and haughtiness, all but a handful refused to embrace faith in him and belief in Allah. Namrud spared his life but worried about discord among the people, so he ordered Prophet Ibrahim to be exiled from his kingdom.

Prophet Musa's[a] Prophethood

Prophet Yaqub[a] (Jacob), one of the prophets who followed Prophet Ibrahim[a], had settled in Canaan. His son, Yusuf[a] (Joseph), was dearly loved by his father as he was destined to be a prophet. The siblings became jealous of him and so, on an outing, they threw him in a well. He was retrieved by a passing caravan of merchants and was sold as a slave in Egypt. After a series of trials and tribulations, he won the confidence of the king because of his ability to interpret dreams and rose to a prominent position in the court. As per the king's dream which Prophet Yusuf[a] interpreted for him, the region was later ravaged by a severe famine. Prophet Yaqub's children journeyed to Egypt to acquire grain that Prophet Yusuf had stored in a granary in anticipation of the famine. The communication was thus re-established between Prophet Yusuf and his siblings and they all, including their father, subsequently settled in Egypt and came to be known as Bani Israel.

The state of the society during Prophet Musa's(a) time is described in exquisite detail throughout the Qur'an (in chronological order as detailed below in 28:7-9, 28:20-21, 7:142-145, 7:103-108, 7:115-122, 26:29-48,7:133-135, 20:77-

78, 7:148-149). Over the centuries, the Bani Israel grew considerably in numbers and when Firaun (Pharaoh) ascended the throne of Egypt, he feared that they would pose a great threat to his kingdom. An astrologer reinforced his fear with the prediction that a child would be born in that tribe who would destroy his kingdom, so he decided to kill every male child born to the Bani Israel. It was under these circumstances that Prophet Musa was born in 1566 BC, some 600 years after Prophet Ibrahim. His mother was naturally worried about his safety, but she was inspired by Allah(swt) to put the newborn in a wooden box and to float it on the River Nile.

The "little boat" rested near the palace of Firaun. He ordered the child to be put to death but his wife, Lady Asiya, pleaded with him to adopt him as their son. When he reached the threshold of adulthood, Allah bestowed upon him Prophethood. Prophet Musa determined to help the people of his tribe of the Bani Israel who had been enslaved and were being oppressed.

However, Prophet Musa had to go into exile in Madyan (a region in the vicinity of the southern-eastern shore of the Mediterranean Sea) over an incident that resulted in an inadvertent death of a person from Firaun's tribe. After ten years, he decided to return to Egypt, and en route, he saw burning flames emitting from the trunk of a tree on Mt. Sinai in the Egyptian Peninsula. When he went up the mountain, Allah spoke to him directly without any intermediary. He equipped him with extraordinary miracles and ordered him to go to Firaun and his people and to invite

them to his Lord and to free the children of Israel from bondage.

When Prophet Musa came to Firaun's court, the latter looked down upon him with contempt and threatened him that if he did not stop making bizarre claims of his prophethood and accept any lord other than himself, he would have him imprisoned. The Prophet then performed his miracles, but Firaun accused him of being a great magician. However, upon the advice of his ministers, he summoned expert magicians from all over the country to outwit Prophet Musa.

The magicians threw cords on the ground and as they were filled with mercury that expanded under the heat of the sun, it looked as if serpents were crawling on the ground. Thereupon, Prophet Musa threw his staff which instantly turned into a huge serpent and devoured all the fake serpents. The magicians understood the difference between a miracle and magic and immediately prostrated in obeisance to the Lord of Prophet Musa.

Firaun not only continued to be defiant but also intensified his oppressive tactics against the Bani Israel. Allah commanded Prophet Musa to warn him of His Wrath that would befall them. Out of His mercy though, Allah gradually stepped up His torment. Whenever such a calamity befell the people, they requested Prophet Musa to pray for their relief and promised to embrace his faith in Allah. But when they were relieved of their afflictions, they reverted to polytheism.

The grace period that Allah had extended to Firaun and his people expired and His Wrath and Curse (the latter meaning the withdrawal of His mercy) overtook them. Prophet Musa assembled the people of the Bani Israel and departed for the Land of Palestine. He had not yet covered much distance before Firaun learned of his departure and chased

him at the head of a large army. When Prophet Musa and his people reached the Red Sea, at the behest of Allah, he struck the sea with his staff. A dry path was created across the sea, and they crossed over to the opposite shore safely. Meanwhile, when Firaun and his army arrived they too attempted to follow them but when they were in the middle of the sea, the walls of the dry path collapsed on them, and they all drowned under the sea.

Prophet Musa had promised the Bani Israel that once they were liberated from Firaun's domination, he would bring to them a Divine Book for their guidance. When they had crossed the Red Sea, the Prophet was commanded by Allah to come to Mt. Sinai. During his absence which lasted for forty days, an aberrant person collected gold from the Bani Israel and molded it into the shape of a calf. He then invited the people to worship the golden calf. When Prophet Musa returned, he had with him the *Taura* inscribed on some tablets. He was greatly annoyed to see that his people had reverted to idolatry. He reprimanded them for breaking their pledge of remaining steadfast in their faith. They repented for their action and sought Allah's forgiveness. Prophet Musa melted the golden calf in the fire and eliminated the evil that had been planted.

Prophet Isa's(a) Prophethood

Prophet Isa's birth was a miracle of miracles, as is beautifully narrated in the Qur'an (in chronological order as detailed below in 3:35-36, 3 :45-47/19:19-22, 1 9 :27-30, 3:52/61:14, 5:110, 43:63-65, 3:54-55/4:157-158). His mother, Lady Maryam (Virgin Mary), had been dedicated from birth to the service of *Baytul Muqaddas* in Palestine. When she came ofage, a chamber was set aside exclusively for her use.

She busied herself in the worship of Allah(swt) and the glorification of His Name. One day, angel Jibraeel (Gabriel) appeared to give her glad tidings that Allah was going to bless her with a son who would be one of the most worthy divine personages. Lady Maryam was incredulous as she had not been touched by any man whereupon Jibraeel assured her that Allah has only to say, "*Be*" and "*it is*."

Despite her absolute faith in Allah, Lady Maryam was frightened and embarrassed, and wondered how she would establish her innocence. At the onset of labor, she left the sanctuary to give birth to Prophet Isa in a faraway place around6 BC, over 1500 years after Prophet Musa (the year in which the Prophet was born varies around the time of the Gregorian calendar took effect depending upon various calendars used to make the determination). When she returned to *Bayt-ul- Muqaddas* with the child, the Jews cast aspersions upon her. As previously instructed by Allah, she pointed to the cradle of the newborn. The child then spoke: "*Surely, I am a servant of Allah; He has given me the Book* [Injeel, New Testament] *and made me a prophet.*" Her accusers could not but accept the birth of Prophet Isa as one of the greatest signs of Allah and consider Lady Maryam as the most chaste, virtuous woman.

However, the Jewish Emperor feared that some unexpected circumstances might lead to his kingdom's downfall. He, therefore plotted to kill Prophet Isa but Lady Maryam sensed danger to his son's life, so she took him away to Egypt. He stayed there until he reached the age of thirty when Allah revealed the Divine Book, Injeel. He returned to *Baytul Muqaddas* and invited Jews to the religion.

Some of the Jews embraced Prophet Isa's religion after they were convinced of his prophethood because of the great miracles that he could perform (specifically, bringing the dead to life, restoring the eyesight of

the blind and curing the lepers). He selected from among this group, 12 apostles to whom he delegated his authority to preach to the people the laws as laid down in Injeel. The Prophet with the assistance of his apostles traveled from place to place inviting the people towards monotheism and the teachings of Injeel.

The religious leaders of the Bani Israel and Jews who stood to benefit from worldly gains thought that prophet Isa's prophethood would end their influence and domination over the people, so they formed a united front to oppose his teachings. However, Prophet Isa remained undaunted and, as devotees came to *Baytul Muqaddas* on pilgrimage, he had the opportunity to hold congregations to deliver his sermons and bring them to the fold of the divine religion.

The Jews became worried about the increasing popularity of Prophet Isa and so accused him of causing dissensions among the people and disrupting peace and tranquility in the land. They even claimed that he had become dissident of the religion of Prophet Musa. Ultimately, they decided to do away with him and sent out spies and informers to hunt him down. They caught hold of him and took him away to crucify him, but Allah raised him to the heavens. Instead, Yahuda, an apostle who had betrayed the whereabouts of the Prophet and was his look-alike was seized and crucified though the Jews thought that they had crucified Prophet Isa himself. The apostles thereafter continued the mission of propagating the religion of Prophet Isa as they spread out throughout the Roman Empire.

Prophet Muhammad's(s) Prophethood

Muhammad ibn Abdullah was born a Prophet in Mecca in modern-day Saudi Arabia in 570 CE. Allah(swt) did not command him to declare his prophethood until 610 CE when he was forty years old. There was divine wisdom in this prolonged wait. Given the beliefs and customs of the Arabian society at the time, it was clear that he would face an enormous challenge in trying to convey his message. He therefore, had to first establish his credentials as a truthful and trustworthy person before he could begin his mission. Secondly, Muhammad was all alone without the necessary financial and physical support that was critically necessary for his mission to succeed. It was only after Khadija ibn Khuwalid, the most successful businessperson of Mecca, offered him her hand in marriage 25 years into the waiting period, and after Ali ibn Abi Talib(a), his cousin who became the greatest warrior of Islam, was born 30 years into the waiting period, that Allah commanded him to publicly declare his prophethood.

Prophet Muhammad's fundamental message was, in essence, the same as that of the previous prophets. Initially, he enunciated Islam's belief system, consisting of monotheism, the existence of the One and only One Allah, and the resurrection of the dead at the end of time for full accountability before their Lord for their deeds on the earth. Later, when his revolution had taken hold, the focus of his message shifted to religious practices and moral and ethical conduct. The Prophet's revolution and the subversion and insurrection in its aftermath will be covered in detail in the next chapter of the book.

All the three major monotheistic religions believe in the coming of a savior at the end of time, the Messiah (whom Muslims refer to as the

Mahdi), who will enforce justice and equity in the world. Naturally, all three assert that this divinely ordained personage will be from among them. Muslims believe that he will be a direct descendent of Prophet Muhammad and will be joined on his return by Prophet Isa (Jesus). As can be seen from the diagram referred to earlier, the two branches of Prophet Ibrahim will then be united – because Prophet Isa descended through one child, Prophet Ishaq (Isaac) [a], while Prophet Muhammad descended through another child, Prophet Ismail[a] (Ishmael).

The Concept of Reformation

Reformation makes a faith abandon its defective, depraved ways and replace them with an improved, purified form or practices. The objective of this change is not to overthrow some religious order; rather the objective is to restore the faith by bringing it back to its original state when it was considered to be good and pure, or to renew it by purging it of all objectionable deviations that had since crept into it.

Reformation within Judaism and Christianity occurred long after the initial foundational revolution, though there were some tentative attempts before the reformation ultimately took hold. Within both these faiths, reformation resulted in the splintering of the religion into several distinct groups. By contrast, reformation within Islam occurred within half a century after the demise of Prophet Muhammad[s]since his foundational revolution was followed by a counter-revolution that had to be countered at the earliest opportune time. The reformation therefore, came sooner and as the objective was to restore it to the pristine religion as taught by the Prophet, it did not lead to any further sub-divisions of the religion.

Authority of Leaders of Reformative Movements

The leaders of the reformation of Judaism and Christianity were rabbis and clergymen within the hierarchy of the synagogues and churches respectively. They had become disillusioned by the doctrines, practices and/or abuses and sought to disassociate themselves and other like-minded individuals from the religion as it had evolved over the centuries.

By contrast, reformation within Islam was ushered in by the grandson of Prophet Muhammad(s), Imam Husayn ibn Ali(a). He was an Imam which, within Shia Islam, is a divinely appointed position, as is the case for all prophets, including Abrahamic prophets. The Shia sect maintains that the Imams were the rightful successors of the Prophet and all of them were from his progeny. There were twelve Imams with Imam Husayn being the third in that line-up. Their primary role was to safeguard the religion as taught by the Prophet.

The Reformation within Abrahamic Faiths Within Judaism

Unlike Christianity which will be described below, Judaism never suffered from shattering schisms, but it developed distinct divisions in Central Europe in the early nineteenth century. Major sources of differences among the three groups are their approaches to Jewish law and the authority of the Rabbinic tradition. Reform (or Progressive) Judaism is characterized by a lesser stress on ritual and personal observance and greater openness to external influences and progressive values. Early principles were formulated by Rabbi Abraham Geiger and

his associates. Conservative (or *Masorti*, meaning Traditional) Judaism was a reaction to Reform Judaism. Although it agreed that scripture and other essential texts were drafted by humans, it saw them as being divinely inspired, with their principles and laws coming from God. Consequently, it also saw Jews bound by religious law, though it was subject to human interpretation and adaptation to cultural circumstances. Briefly, Conservative Judaism seeks to avoid the excesses of Reform Judaism and the stringency of Orthodox Judaism.

Orthodox Judaism in its modern form is also a nineteenth-century German development. Although it claims no official founders since it considers itself the authentic version of ancient Judaism, Rabbis Samson Raphael Hirsch and Moses Sofer are widely considered to be its ideological forefathers. Orthodox Judaism sought to reconcile a liberal approach to daily life with continued adherence to the Torah, both written and oral laws, which were still seen as divine in origin, eternal and unalterable, and that they should be strictly followed. In Israel, modern orthodoxy is generally the default version of Judaism for those who are not secular. But even among Orthodox, there are variations in observance as well as in the extent of integration into the general society. Ultra-Orthodox (or Haredi) Judaism, though, rejects the possibility of such integration.

Within Christianity

There was a succession of ecclesiastical differences and theological disputes between the Greek East and the Latin West which pre-dated the formal rupture between the two that occurred in 1054. Known as the East-West Schism, or simply as the Great Schism, the church split among doctrinal, theological, linguistic, political, and geographic lines to give

rise to what is now the Roman Catholic Church, led by Pope Leo IX, and the Eastern Orthodox Church, led by the patriarch of Constantinople, Michael Cerularius.

Protestantism originated with the reformation based on the rejection of the Roman Catholic doctrine of papal supremacy and sacraments. It is popularly considered to have begun in Germany in 1517 when Martin Luther published *Ninety-five Theses* as a reaction against abuses in the sale of indulgencies by the Roman Catholic Church which purported to offer remission of sin to their purchasers. Although there were earlier attempts to reform the Roman Catholic Church, only Luther succeeded in sparking a wider, lasting reformative movement. This was because earlier reformers denounced the sins of the churchmen, whereas Luther confronted the whole scheme of redemption. It became the third major force in Christianity. However, without structural unity or a central human authority, Protestantism has since become diverse, being more divided theologically and ecclesiastically than the Roman Catholic Church or the Eastern Orthodox Church.

Within Islam

During the counter-revolution that followed the demise of Prophet Muhammad(s), political authority was vested in the caliphs from among the companions of the Prophet. They were selected by a small coterie of companions or nominated by the preceding caliph. Thereafter, the community made a consensus choice of Imam Ali ibn Abi Talib(a), the cousin and son-in-law of Prophet Muhammad whom he had declared, before his demise, as his rightful successor as commanded by Allah(swt). But after a short interregnum of Imam Ali's rule of less than half a dozen

years, the counterrevolutionaries regained political authority. They transformed the system of caliphate into kingship, namely from asserting to be successors of the Prophet who wielded politico-religious authority to becoming dynastic rulers who were political leaders without any claim to religious authority.

There were serious moral and criminal transgressions during the rule of the caliph and kings. The Prophet's successors laid the groundwork for the reformation during the interregnum and, as conditions deteriorated further, the time was opportune for Imam Husayn ibn Ali(a) to launch his reformation. His goal was to arouse the consciousness of Muslims with regard to the transgressions and to reeducate them of the instruments that Islam advocates to reform a Muslim society. The interregnum will be discussed at length in Chapter IV and the reformation in Chapter V of the book.

III

FOUNDATIONAL REVOLUTION OF PROPHET MUHAMMAD(S)



Arabian Society before Islam

Geographical Location and Historical Background

Arabia is a large peninsula located in the south-west corner of Asia. It is surrounded by sea on three sides – the Persian Gulf in the east, the Arabian Sea in the south and the Red Sea in the west. The northern part is bounded by the extensive Syrian Desert. It would seem therefore that the natural barriers of the peninsula impeded

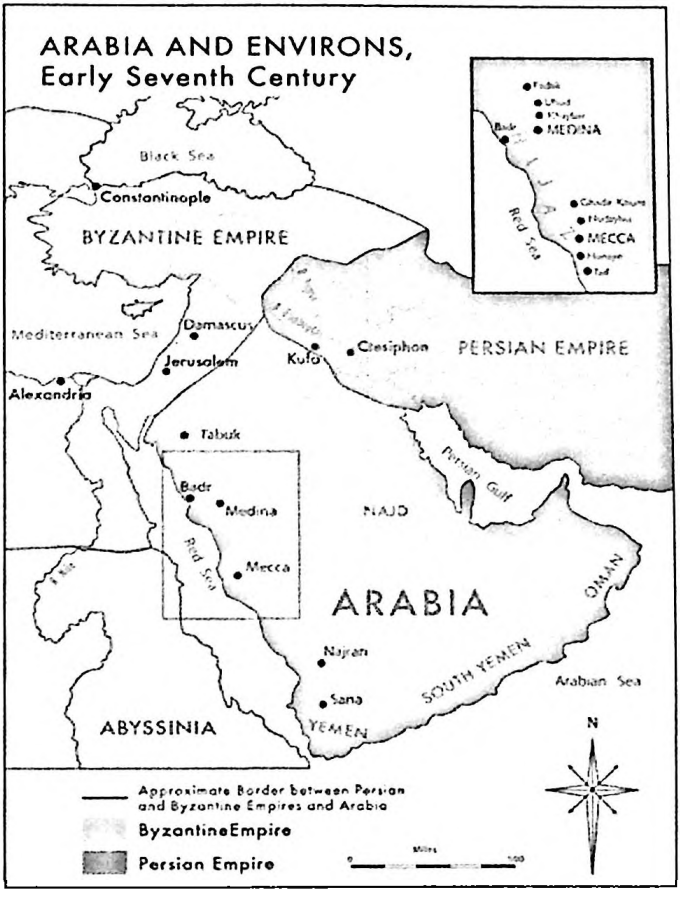
the penetration of foreign influences.

Notwithstanding the relative isolation of the peninsula, two superpowers of the time existed to its north – the Byzantine Empire to the west and the Persian Empire to the east (See the map on Arabia and Environs, Early Seventh Century). Even though the two powers were constantly at war with each other seeking to expand their territorial control, neither ever chose to penetrate Arabia. Perhaps this was partly because of its arid, hostile environment and partly because of its warring, uncultured people. Arabia therefore, was never colonized in history.

Tribal Structure

The most remarkable feature of Arabia was that, except for Yemen in the south-west, there was no political organization of any form at any time in the rest of the peninsula. The only authority that the Arabs recognized was that of the chiefs of their tribes. Members of the tribe subordinated their needs and desires to the well-being of the group that consisted of only blood relatives and confederates. The way of life that the forefathers bequeathed to their descendants was considered sacred and inviolable. They called this tribal glory *hasab* ("ancestral honor").

Since there was no central authority, there was no law and order in Arabia. The only protection a person could find from the enemies was within their own tribe. The tribe considered its obligation to protect its members even if they had committed crimes. Thus, the tribes who roamed the steppes were locked up in ceaseless warfare with their neighbors for water and pastures for their animals in a desolate environment that offered little of either resource.



Religious Beliefs

Given that the pagan Arabs were polytheists, one would have expected them to be vehemently opposed to monotheism. However, the Qur'an says that they acknowledged who was the creator of the universe (31:25). It was on the basis of their innate disposition that the pagan Arabs subscribed to the notion of a god as the creator of the universe. However, they did not acknowledge His Oneness, so they worshipped many idols as intermediaries (10:18).

The *Ka'bah,* the sanctuary in Mecca, that had been rebuilt by Prophet Ibrahim(a) and his son Prophet Ismail(a) on the original foundation and dedicated by them to the service of One God, was turned into a pantheon housing, in and around it, 360 idols of stone and wood. The Quraish of Mecca worshipped *Hubal,* the highest-ranking idol, which stood inside the *Ka'bah.*

Social Customs

Women did not have a status of any kind in Arabia. They were considered simply as sex objects. A man could marry any number of wives he chose. When he died, his son "inherited" all his wives except his own mother. Furthermore, the relations of the sexes were extremely loose.

The Arab society was patriarchic and believed in the nobility of having a son and the disgrace of having a daughter. Sons played an important economic and military role, whereas daughters ran the risk of falling into enemy hands during a conflict or bringing dishonor to the family if they married into a tribe with a lower status. Infanticide was therefore a widespread practice.

Bases of Islamic Ideology: The Qur'an and Traditions (*Sunnah*)

Allah(swt) did not create human beings and leave them to fend for themselves. He intended their lives to be purposeful, so in addition to the general guidance that He has granted to all human beings, He has

blessed humankind with the particular guidance that includes inspiration and revelation.

Thus, Allah bestowed upon His last prophet, Prophet Muhammad(s), the Qur'an that superseded previous scriptures and is meant to prevail until the end of time. The Qur'an is the central, sacred reality of Islam. It has laid down the Islamic ideology and the Prophet lived it, and so he serves as a role model. He had only to convey the message, not to compel or watch over the people since each human being has the intellect and free will and is hence responsible for accepting or rejecting the guidance.

Hadith (Traditions in English) literally means "talk" and these are narrations that describe the utterances, acts, and tacit approval of the actions of another person that occurred in the presence of an infallible representative of Allah. The Sunnis, however, include the narrations not only of the Prophet but also of his companions and disciples of such companions, whereas the Shias, by extension, include the narrations of the rightful successors of the Prophet, the Imams, and of Sayyida Fatima(a), the only daughter of the Prophet.

While the fundamental principles and obligatory commandments of Islam are all laid down in the Qur'an, their exposition and elaboration were done by the Prophet and his progeny in the form of traditions. Put differently, the Qur'an is looked upon as the silent guide while the Prophet and the Imams are considered as the speaking guides. Allah commands Muslims to follow these traditions (59:7). For unless the Muslims know what His representatives said or did, they cannot fully follow the footsteps of their divine leaders. Thus, the traditions complement the Qur'an.

Salient Aspects of the Prophet's Revolution:

I. Belief System

The mission of Prophet Muhammad(s) was fourfold:

- Drawing people's attention to Allah(swt)'s wonderful signs in His Creation and in His ordering of the universe, thereby convincing them of Allah's existence and majesty
- Purifying and sanctifying those who were steeped in superstition and wickedness, thereby preparing their hearts and minds to receive Allah's message
- Teaching them the Qur'an that lays down the moral and ethical codes, thereby exhorting believers to become obedient servants of Allah and to serve humanity at large, and
- Providing them with wisdom, thereby giving believers practical guidance in applying the teachings of the Qur'an in their daily lives.

Monotheism (*Tawhid*)

Prophet Muhammad publicly declared his mission in Mecca in 610 CE. He was addressing infidels so his message there focused on two cardinal principles of Islam, namely, Monotheism (*Tawhid*) and Day of Judgment (*Qayamah*). The Qur'anic chapters that were revealed during that period of his mission thus address all of humankind; the audience is referred to as "O' people!" or "O' Children of Adam!"

The profession of faith {*shahadatayn*) that is pronounced to induct a person into Islam begins with *"La illhailla-Laah"* (There is no God but Allah). There is first negation, rejection of all gods, followed by affirmation, confirmation of the One and only One Allah who is at once Transcendent (above and beyond the universe or material existence) and Immanent (existing only within the mind or consciousness). His Oneness is best exemplified in the Qur'anic chapter on The Unity of God (*Surah at-Tawhid*):

> *"Say: He, Allah, is One. Allah is He on whom all depend. He begets not, nor is He begotten. And none is like Him."*
>
> (112:1-4)

Day of Judgment (*Qayamah*)

The second principle that the Prophet stressed in Mecca was the resurrection of the dead at the end of time and their accountability before their Lord. The Qur'an puts great emphasis on the concept of the individual's full accountability for every deed through the belief in the afterlife. The belief in the individual accountability in the life to come deepens the feeling of personal responsibility in this life. Another chapter of the Qur'an states:

"What! Did you then think that We had created you in vain [aimlessly] and that you shall not be returned to Us?"

(23:115)

Allah's Will is to let human beings have the power of thinking and the freedom of choice, for only then would it be fair to hold them accountable for what they freely do and what they freely refrain from doing. However, Allah's plan is not to make His judgment and His subsequent requital in this life because He wishes to give human beings a sufficient length of time for a fair test with ample opportunity for self-correction and improvement.

Subversion of the Prophet's Movement in Mecca

Subversion is a process by which the principles and values of a system that is already in place or is in the process of being established is undermined through a series of coordinated and often surreptitious acts. It can involve the use of insidious, dishonest, monetary or violent methods to reverse the process of change.

The campaign of subversion by the Quraish, the prominent and powerful tribe in Mecca, began as soon as Prophet Muhammad(s) took his message to the community at large. It took different forms, but as time passed there was a shift in emphasis and an intensification of the campaign.

- The first phase of molestation was directed at the Prophet himself with a view to stopping him from preaching his message and, when it failed, to undermining his integrity both within and outside of Mecca. The Quraish insulted him in public, called him names, threw dirt at him, and heckled him to drown his voice when he was preaching.

- The next phase of persecution moved beyond the person of the Prophet to actions against the early converts to Islam. The goal was to harass the Muslims for their audacity in accepting the Prophet's call and to serve as a deterrent to other potential converts. Since the Prophet could not physically protect them, he advised them to seek sanctuary in Abyssinia (Ethiopia) whose Christian king was known to be a just and God-fearing ruler.

- The third phase of ostracization broadened the target to include the Prophet's entire clan of Bani Hashim with their socio-economic boycott for the purpose of forcing the clan to end their protection of the Prophet. The clan had to relocate to a valley outside of Mecca and during the siege that lasted three years, they suffered from severe deprivation.

- When the Quraish learned that the Prophet and his converts were planning to migrate to Medina (north of his hometown of Mecca) on the command of Allah(swt), they resolved to kill him while they could still get to him and stop his movement once and for all. However, the Prophet managed to leave Mecca without being detected and their pursuit of him ended in failure.

Reasons for Subversion

The Prophet's Origins

Prophet Muhammad(s) came from a humble background as he had arisen from among the masses. The Quraish knew that the Prophet was unschooled as he had not received any formal instruction from any tutor inside or outside of Mecca. However, they instinctively recognized that he must have been divinely blessed as no human could have the breadth and depth of knowledge and wisdom that he exhibited.

Rather, the issue that the Quraish had with the Prophet had to do with his social status. He was from the clan of Bani Hashim which enjoyed a special position in Mecca, but this was due more to the responsibilities that they had for pilgrims who visited the *Ka'bah* than to any material wealth that they had acquired through their mercantile activities. Like all the Abrahamic apostles, the Prophet tended sheep as a boy and, as an adult, he went on trading caravans as an agent of their owners. The Meccan aristocracy could not reconcile themselves to the thought that a prophet would not be from among the elite of the society.

The Prophet's Message

A second basis of the opposition had to do with the fact that Prophet Muhammad had brought a unique message, a set of ideas that Arabs had not heard before and, therefore, found them disconcerting. His most ardent opponents were from the Umayyad clan of the Quraish.

1. He told them not to worship objects of stone or wood which they themselves had made, and which could not give anything to them nor take anything from them. Instead, he told them to

submit to Allah(swt), the One Lord of the universe.

2. But idolatry, worship of inanimate objects, was an old practice of the Arabs and they were not quite ready to give it up.

3. He declared that all members of the society were equal – regardless of whether they are masters or slaves, rich or poor, and Arabs or non-Arabs – and, in the eyes of Allah, the most honorable is one who is most righteous.

   But Arabs had the notion of their own superiority over everybody else and found the idea of equality among all intolerable.

4. He enjoined the rich Arabs to share their wealth with the poor. This would result in a more even distribution of wealth in the society.

   But the rich Arabs of Mecca were moneylenders who charged a high rate of interest on loans; the poor could not pay back the loan, so they were held in economic bondage. The rich did not want to share their wealth with the same people that they were exploiting.

5. He wished to change the way society was structured. He made a common religion, instead of the same blood, the basis of the society – in other words, he wished to replace an "Arab society" with an "Islamic society."

   But Arabs believed in the tribal structure and the Umayyads in particular feared that any change would mean the end of their power and privilege.

6. He spoke of the Day of Judgment when people would be held

accountable and rewarded for their good deeds and punished for their bad deeds.

But Arabs were easy-going, fun-loving people who did not care for such warnings.

As the Prophet's movement got stronger, the Arabs felt that the ideas he was propagating, most especially of economic and social justice, were "dangerous" and threatened their economic interests and political power.

Establishment of an Islamic City-State in Medina

The Qur'an declared that an overarching responsibility of Prophet Muhammad(s) was to establish a community whose guiding principles would be justice and equity: *"... We sent down with them [Our prophets] the Book and the Balance [criterion between right and wrong], so that mankind may maintain justice; and We sent down iron [rule of law]. ..."* (57:25). The establishment of political authority was a necessary condition for the enforcement of justice and equity in the society.

The ideal of an Islamic community, however, could not be achieved immediately because of the hostile environment in Mecca where the Prophet's mission began. Every attempt was made to undermine his mission which culminated in the danger to the safety of his own person. It was only when he migrated to Medina in 622 CE that, by prior treaty arrangements (Pledges of Aqaba) with newly converted residents, he was able to establish a model Islamic city-state.

Hallmarks of an Islamic City-State

Unified Community

One of the greatest challenges that Prophet Muhammad(s) faced in Medina was the diverse composition of its population. First, there were the two Arab tribes of *Aws* and *Khazraj*. They had been warring for several generations and right from the outset, he acted both as an advisor and a mediator in resolving conflicts between them. His ultimate goal however was larger, namely, to assimilate these two groups into a broader community of Muslims.

Next, there were the new emigrants from Mecca who had left their homes and livelihoods behind and had very little money and still fewer possessions. With a view to addressing their immediate needs as well as fulfilling the broader goal of binding them together with the indigenous residents in a sacred bond of brotherhood, the Prophet paired each emigrant, a *Muhajir,* with a resident helper, an *Ansar,* and called upon them to live as "brothers in faith," thereby welding all the Muslims of Medina together into one cohesive unit.

Enlightened Constitution

The third major group in Medina consisted of the Jews. When the Romans captured Jerusalem, some Jews wandered into the Western part of Arabia and settled, among other places, in Medina. While the Arabs were mostly farmers, the Jews were primarily engaged in commerce and industry. They soon became rich and powerful and controlled the economic life of the city.

The Jews initially accepted the Prophet, albeit half-heartedly, as the

civic ruler of the city. Their favorable reaction owed much to the pact that the Prophet drew up, "The Charter" or "The Constitution of Medina." All three groups of people in Medina were signatories to the pact. The first sentence of the first article declared: "The signatories of the agreement form **one nation** [emphasis added]."

Comprehensive Authority

The norm in almost all modern countries is the separation of "church" and "state," that is, the division between two groups of leaders who have secular power or command religious authority. However, Islam is an all-encompassing belief system that involves matters of human beings' relationship with Allah(swt) (*ibadaat*) as well as their relationship with their fellow human beings (*mu'amalaat*). The Prophet thus laid the foundation of what is referred to as comprehensive authority based on the Qur'anic principles. He proclaimed that sovereignty belongs to Allah(swt) alone. He is, therefore, the only lawgiver and His laws cover every aspect of human life. His duty was to administer the divine laws justly without fear or favor.

The Prophet's overall policy on war and peace was never to use force where negotiations would suffice, or ever to initiate aggression except if he had to preempt those who had already demonstrated their hostile intentions. Furthermore, his principle was to be magnanimous in victory and seek to bring the vanquished to the Way of Allah by persuading them rather than taking revenge against them.

Transparency and Accessibility

Even as the Prophet retained full responsibility for the overall policies of the city-state, he remained close to the community of Muslims that he led. He formed a consultative council and consulted its members to

forge a consensus. He made it clear what were Allah's commandments and what were his personal thoughts so as to empower them to present alternative viewpoints. All the decisions were discussed in the mosque and consequently were transparent to the whole community.

Moreover, the Prophet fixed one day of the week when he met in the mosque anyone and everyone who had any questions, be they religious or administrative, or wished to ask for his advice, or sought his involvement in the resolution of disputes. He thus made himself readily accessible to the entire community.

Salient Aspects of the Prophet's Revolution:

II. Self-Improvement and Societal Well-Being

The focus of Prophet Muhammad's(s) message in Medina shifted to religious practices and moral and ethical conduct. The Qur'anic chapters that were revealed during this period of his mission thus address Muslims; the audience is referred to as "O' you who believe!"

Submission (*Tasleem*)

Allah(swt) declares in the Qur'an:

> *"O mankind! Worship your Lord, who created you and those who were before you, so that you may be God wary."*
>
> (2:21)

Human beings are the noblest of creatures endowed with intelligence, the power to think as well as free will, the freedom to act. The notion of *Tasleem,* submission of one's whole being to Allah(swt), follows logically from *Tawhid*, the unity of Allah, which is to serve Him and Him alone. Submission to Him is a natural and essential relation between the creation and its creator.

Submission, though, is not just by the tongue alone, by the utterance of the profession of faith (*shahadatayn*). This declaration makes a person's body "pure" as they become a Muslim, but in and of itself, it does not lead to the soul's "salvation." It has to be accompanied by innermost conviction, by the attainment of the right belief (*imaan)* for that person to graduate to the status of a believer(*mu'min).*

Nor is submission in Islam used in the ordinary restrictive sense of the word to simply mean devotional acts. Rather, it is used in an extraordinary expansive meaning to include all kinds of human interactions. Thus, Islam considers every virtuous action which is sincerely performed to implement the commandments of Allah and to seek His pleasure as an act of worship for which human beings will be rewarded. There is profound wisdom in this extension of the scope of worship. For, by keeping Allah in the forefront of every thought and action that a person engages in, their heart is, in the process, in perpetual communion with Allah. Consequently, this guards the believer against selfishness, arrogance, greed and other immoral or unethical behavior. The Islamic Code is customarily divided into two spheres of relationship, religious practices and social interactions.

Religious Practices (*Ibadaat)*

Ibadaat represents religious practices that are designed to lead to self-

improvement and a progressively higher level of perfection. This aspect of human beings' relationship with Allah may be characterized as the vertical dimension, the relationship with the Creator on account of His giving human beings life and blessing them with all manner of bounties. This relationship is one of *abd,* being a passive servant of Allah. As is required of any servant, they have to serve their master, so too, Muslims have to worship their Lord. *Ibaadah* in Islam encompasses every action that is being performed in accordance with Allah's guidance. First, it includes rituals that are designed to test believers' willingness to serve Him as He commands. All these rituals were instituted during the period of the Prophet's period in Medina.

Next, they extend to include personal character, the development of moral and ethical traits that are meant to reflect the perfection and goodness of Allah. The Qur'an elucidates in different places the positive and negative traits that human beings should respectively seek to cultivate or avoid in themselves. But Allah does not stop merely at the exhortation. His Prophet was an embodiment and personification of the virtues to which the Qur'an calls believers to follow. It describes the Prophet as *"an excellent exemplar"* (33:21).

Social Interactions (*Mu'amalaat)*

Mu'amalaat involves social interactions that arise out of the interdependencies among human beings and is intended to forge a caring and unified society. This dimension of human beings' relationship with Allah may be described as the horizontal one, the relationship with His creatures to foster the spirit of brotherhood/sisterhood among all Muslims and fraternity among all humankind. This relationship is one of a *khalifah*, being active as a vicegerent of Allah on the earth. As is incumbent upon any leader, they have to cater to their followers, so too,

Muslims have to be responsive to the needs of the disadvantaged in the society — the poor, the disabled, the orphans, and the aged; in Islam, *imaan* is inseparable from good deeds.

Most importantly, as Allah emphasizes in the Qur'an,

believers have to work for the establishment of a just and an equitable society: *"Say: My Lord has enjoined justice ..."* (7:29). This is carried out with the two instruments of *amr bil-ma'ruf*, enjoining or promoting good and *nahyi 'anil-munkar*, forbidding or preventing evil. These injunctions are to be applied at the individual level within the circles of family and friends whereby one Muslim exhorts another to the right path. They are also to be implemented at the societal level within the Muslim community or society at large whereby a believer, within the limitations of their capabilities and resources, fights injustice and inequity wherever it prevails.

Insurrection against the Islamic City-State

The Quraish of Mecca used subversion against Prophet Muhammad(s) for thirteen years during his ministry in Mecca. They failed in their attempts to stop him from propagating Islam and attracting converts to his movement even though these attempts had done much economic and psychological harm to his person and to his flock.

When subversion fails, it usually leads to the next more destructive phase of insurrection. This phase involves an armed struggle. There was now a radical shift in focus – it turned from the Prophet and his followers to the Islamic city-state that the Prophet had established in Medina. During this period of ten years, a series of four major battles

(Badr, Uhud, Khandaq and Khaybar) were waged against the Muslims of Medina by the infidels of Mecca and their confederates around Mecca and sometimes in collusion with their Jewish allies within and outside of Medina. The goal was to weaken the Muslims and destabilize their city-state leading to its ultimate collapse.

Ultimate Triumph of the Prophet

As the battles ended in a stalemate or in the defeat of the Meccans, the Quraish realized that they could not dislodge Prophet Muhammad(s). They therefore, signed a peace treaty (Treaty of Hudaybia) with him but when they violated one of its terms soon thereafter, the Prophet marched on Mecca and took over the city without a fight in 630 CE. This was a major milestone for Mecca was after all the cradle of Prophet Muhammad's movement and it contained the *Ka'bah*, the symbol of the core of his message of monotheism.

With the fall of Mecca, the phase of insurrection inevitably came to an end. The Quraishite hold-outs were left with no choice but to accept Islam, however reluctantly. But they turned out to be hypocrites bidding their time, accepting Islam by word of mouth but not by conviction in their hearts. They waited for another day to resume their attempts to undermine the Prophet's revolution.

With the cessation of the Quraishite and confederate hostilities, Prophet Muhammad could now turn his attention to his broader mission of guiding all of humankind to the right path, not just the people in and around Mecca and Medina. Allah(swt) instructed the Prophet in the Qur'an to *"Call [non-believers] to the way of your Lord with wisdom and*

goodly exhortation and have disputations [arguments] with them in the best manner ..." (16:125). He thus tried to win the minds of Arabs through their hearts, to so touch them with his nobility and pureness of his conduct that they would instinctively believe in him and his message.

After the fall of Mecca, envoys from farther afield came to visit the Prophet in Medina to discuss Islam or to pledge their allegiance to him. The Prophet used two peaceful means to propagate Islam. He dispatched teachers who had accepted Islam to instruct other people in the teachings of Islam. Many such teachers accompanied deputations that came to the Prophet. He also wrote 62 letters to kings of neighboring empires/ kingdoms, chiefs of tribes and clans, and heads of Jews and Christians to invite them to monotheism and the Islamic fraternity. At the time of his demise in 632 CE, Islam had spread to most of the populated areas of the Arabian

Peninsula and some converts were to be found as far afield as Syria and Iraq. Islam had become a mainstream religion.

IV

INTERREGNUM BETWEEN CALIPHATE AND KINGSHIP AFTER THE PROPHET



Institutions of Leadership in Islam

There are two key institutions of leadership in Islam, namely, Prophethood (*Nubuwwah*) and Divine Leadership (*Imammah*). The prophet's role is to receive the message from Allah(s) and to communicate it to his community, while the imam's role is to advance that message and protect it from misinterpretation and distortion. As with any newly established institution, it is necessary that it should first be "introduced" to the relevant public. Thus, Prophet Muhammad(s) made a public proclamation of his anointed successor, right at the onset of his

mission in Mecca in 613 CE. He followed it with the grand investiture of the same successor at the end of his apostleship at Ghadir Khum, between Mecca and Medina, in 632 CE.

At the proclamation, the Prophet introduced his cousin, Ali ibn Abi Talib(a), as the first divine leader with the announcement, "Verily, this is my brother (*akhi*), my successor, (*wasiyyi*) and my caliph (*khalifati*) amongst you; therefore, listen to him and obey [him]."At the investiture ceremony, the Prophet first asked his listeners, "Do I not have more authority upon you (*awla bi kum*) than you have yourselves?" The people replied in unison, "Yes, O' Prophet of Allah." He then raised the hands of Imam Ali, who had now also become his son-in-law, and proclaimed, "Ali is the master (*mawla*) for whomsoever I'm the master (*mawla*)." By coupling *awla* with *mawla*, the Prophet made it absolutely clear that he was using the latter word in the meaning of the former term which denotes greater authority; in other words, he was appointing Imam Ali as the leader of the community after him.

The Concept of Counter-Revolution

As the phrase implies, counter-revolution seeks to overturn or reverse the changes brought about by the original revolution, whether in full or in part. The goal of the leaders of the counterrevolution is to restore the state of affairs that prevailed during the earlier period so that they can reinstate the privileges that they previously enjoyed.

The counterrevolution begins with the seizure of political authority. This is typically accompanied by a tendency to revert to traditional, in the present case, pre-Islamic political culture. The revolutionaries then

embark on a series of moves designed to legitimize and consolidate their power. However, due to the excesses of the new leadership for more than two decades following the demise of the Prophet, the process was briefly disrupted and went through an interim phase for less than half a dozen years before the counterrevolution was finally completed.

Selection of the Caliphs

A series of three caliphs among Prophet Muhammad's(s) companions succeeded him, one after another. Contrary to the historically recorded events in regard to successorship, these companions later claimed that neither the Qur'an made a statement on the leadership of the Muslim community nor did the Prophet leave any specific instructions on who was his successor or what should be his qualifications. Therefore, to maintain order in the community, they had to improvise and follow the old tribal procedure for the selection of a chief to fill the vacuum created by the Prophet's demise. However, the method of selection was not based on any universal principles. The choice of the first caliph, Abu Bakr ibn Abi Quhafa, was by a coterie of companions; nomination of the second, Ummar ibn Khattab, was by the previous caliph alone; the selection of the third, Uthman ibn Affan, was by an appointed electoral body which was staked in favor of a pre-conceived candidate.

Imam Ali(a) was not present at the town hall of *Saqifah* where the companions had met to overturn his appointment and select one of their own. He, along with his loyal followers, was busy with funeral arrangements for the burial of the Prophet. When Imam Ali realized that he would not have the unanimous support of the community in his claim to succession through evidence and reason, he decided not to fight

for it by the force of arms. He did not want to risk a civil war when Islam was still in its infancy and needed to sink its roots more deeply within the community and more widely across the region. The period of the three caliphs lasted for 14 years from 632 to 656 CE.

Schism within the Muslim Community

Saqifah not only created a major division within the community but also led in time to the complete separation of religious and political authority that Prophet Muhammad(s) had combined into one person consistent with the Islamic doctrine of non-separation of "church and state."

The majority of Muslims accepted rulers' political authority, and, over time, religious authority devolved to the learned clergy (*'ulamah*). They came to be known as Sunnis and the initial set of rulers are referred to as Caliphs and the later set of rulers as Kings. A minority of Muslims could only accept joint religious and political leadership of the infallible progeny of Prophet Muhammad but, due to adverse political circumstances, the fusion of the two authorities had to await a favorable condition. They came to be known as Shias and their leaders are called Imams.

Circumstances that led to the Consensus Selection of Imam Ali(a) as the Next Caliph

The disenchantment with the rule of the new leaders simmered below the surface, but it did not assume the force of a movement in large part because of the political glory and material gains that the Muslims enjoined in the wake of the conquests of foreign lands. However, discord

began to grow very quickly during the Third Caliph's rule. Among the primary reasons for the discord were, first, his favoritism toward his own clan of the Umayyads who were appointed to governorships of the most important cities of the Muslim Empire and who used their positions to benefit themselves and their kinsmen which aroused the ire of many Muslims. Second, he was also criticized for acting against the teachings and practices of Prophet Muhammad(s). Discontent exploded into a revolt. The object of the rebels was to depose the Caliph, not harm him for failing to address their grievances. They laid siege to his palace for forty days but when they were provoked by an incident, they broke in and, in a fit of anger, murdered the Caliph. The counter-revolution had suddenly been stopped in its tracks.

The Medinites realized that the community needed a leader who would put the public interest ahead of his family or clans' interests. They now turned to Imam Ali(a) who had been appointed to lead them in the first place. Imam was admired by all for his piety, wisdom, courage and eloquence, and kinship to the Prophet. His acceptance of the caliphate was not unconditional: "I have perfect knowledge and understanding of the Book of God [the Qur'an] and of the practices and precedents of His Messenger [Prophet Muhammad]. In ruling the Muslim community, I shall put their commandments and prohibitions before everything else." At the Mosque of the Prophet in Medina, most Muslims turned up to pay allegiance to the Imam who officially took over as the Fourth Caliph of the Muslims in 656 CE. In his inaugural address, he said," My mission today is the same as it was in the times of the Messenger of God, Muhammad ... and it is **to establish or reestablish the Kingdom of God on this earth** [emphasis added]." The Imam later moved the capital of the Muslim Empire from Medina to Kufa in modern-day Iraq.

Period of the Caliphate: I. Suppression of Prophetic Traditions

The fundamental principles and the obligatory commandments of Islam are all laid down in the Qur'an. But their exposition and elaboration were done by Prophet Muhammad(s) and his rightful successors in the form of traditions. With respect to the Qur'an, there was no time gap between the coming of the revelation and the writing down of it. In regard to the traditions, the campaign to suppress them was mounted by the first three caliphs. The First Caliph collected five hundred traditions of the Prophet and burnt them; the Second ordered companions sent out on official business to the provinces not to narrate any traditions; the Third persecuted and exiled some prominent companions of the Prophet in order to silence them.

The reason that the caliphs themselves gave for burning and

banning the traditions is that they feared the emergence of "a second book" alongside the Qur'an, but as stated above, the traditions and the Qur'an complement each other, so one is incomplete without the other. The real reason for the caliphs' actions was to separate the Prophet's rightful successors from the Qur'an. That gave them the freedom to interpret the Qur'an however they chose, and they could thus obviate the risk that their policies and actions would be contradicted by one or both of the primary legislative sources.

Period of the Caliphate: II. Deviations from the Prophet's Laws and Practices

When Imam Ali(a) officially assumed office as the Fourth Caliph, he stated that, "The Caliphs before me did things wherein they consciously acted against [the dictates] of the Prophet of Allah. They broke their covenant with Him and changed the *Sunnah* [Prophetic Traditions]." Deviations ranged from changes in religious laws and the introduction of new ones, through infractions of human rights and unjust distribution of stipends from the state treasury, to abuse of power as manifested in nepotism and oppression.

The flagrant abuse of political power reached its height during the third caliphate. He was a member of the Umayyad clan and he sought to consolidate his position with the support of his kinsmen. One dimension of corruption is nepotism. He summarily dismissed the governors of the provinces of the Empire without due cause and replaced them with his close relatives and kinsmen who then engaged in gross misconduct. Another dimension of corruption is the misappropriation of funds from the state treasury. He enriched himself with large properties in different cities and such other assets as numerous riding animals and slaves and slave-girls. Moreover, there was no safety and security of life and property, so thousands of people were killed including some prominent companions of the Prophet whom he had personally certified as being most pious and virtuous (Abu-Dharr al-Ghifari and Ammar ibn Yasir). Thousands more migrated to places outside the reach of the central administration.

The Turbulent Caliphate of Imam Ali(a)

Imam Ali had pledged to reestablish the Kingdom of God on earth in his inaugural address. However, he was beset by civil wars among the Muslims themselves and opposition from those who had benefited from, or just got accustomed to practices introduced by the previous caliphs. The Umayyads under the leadership of Muawiya ibn Abu Sufyan, the Governor of Greater Syria who had designs on the caliphate, used the pretext of demand for the revenge for the murder of the Third Caliph (even though no witnesses had come forward) for an instant challenge to Imam Ali. The Imam had to fight a series of three civil wars between 657 and 658 CE (Battles of Jamal, Siffin and Nahrawan). The Imam was victorious in the first and third wars but Siffin came to an unsatisfactory end and was submitted for adjudication to an arbitration whose decision was also inconclusive. Muawiya survived to "fight" another day but with a different strategy of duplicity rather than that of confrontation.

The civil wars had disastrous consequences. The Muslim community was divided with one group of the Prophet's companions pitted against another and one city and one province of the Empire opposed to another. A group of rebels (Kharajites) decided to kill all the key leaders of Siffin. They succeeded in assassinating only Imam Ali in the course of the morning prayers in the mosque of the capital of Kufa in 661 CE. The Imam's caliphate thus came to a tragic end within a short period of less than five years.

Reinstitution of the Prophet's Governmental Policies and Leadership Practices

Notwithstanding the "distractions" that Imam Ali(a) had to contend with during his brief caliphate, his highest priority was to reestablish progressive governmental policies and enlightened leadership practices that Prophet Muhammad(s) had implemented in the Islamic city-sate of Medina. However, the Imam had to adapt these policies and practices to fit the situation as it had evolved since the Prophet's time.

Four of his progressive policies were:

- Enforcement of fairness: Imam Ali refused to make any distinction between the Quraish (his clan) and non-Quraish, the Arabs and non-Arabs, the early and later converts to Islam, and the town's established residents and new immigrants in the distribution of stipends from the public treasury.
- Protection of basic human rights: The Imam enforced all manner of rights and freedoms that included religious, personal, social, legal and political freedoms.
- Institution of progressive taxation: There were two streams of revenues for the state – a four-tier land tax based on the size of acreage and nature of crops grown; similarly, a four-category personal tax paid by non-Muslim subjects (in lieu of any other tax and exemption from military service) based on their economic status.
- Establishment of the rudimentary welfare state: Besides revenue streams mentioned above, there were religious dues and voluntary

donations that were used for helping the indigent, aged, orphans, widows, and disabled persons, and giving honorariums to volunteers who fought for the state and emancipating slaves.

The Imam put into effect enlightened practices that his provincial governors were required to follow, and these included:

- Cognizance of the chain of accountability: The chain began with the governor who appointed his functionaries, continued through the Imam who designated the governor, and ended with Allah(swt) who anointed the Imam.
- Exemplification of divine standards of morality and ethics: Unlike secular states where a leader may lead two separate lives, a public and a private one, Islam does not recognize this dichotomy, so the Imam expected of his leaders the same rigorous moral and ethical standards in public as in private.
- Advocacy of accessibility and transparency: Governors were advised to meet regularly with their subjects without the presence of law enforcement officers so people could raise their complaints without fear of reprisal, and they could explain regulations that gave rise to any concern without a hint of rancor.
- Provision for a system of oversight: A system was set up to monitor the performance of governors who, in turn, were to check on the conduct of their functionaries so that all remained true to the trust that had been placed in them; the scope of oversight was comprehensive and covered political abuses and violations of Islamic standards of morality and ethics.

The Succession of Imam Hasan ibn Ali(a) and Subsequent Relinquishment of Power

Following the assassination of his father, Imam Hasan was acclaimed the next caliph with the support of the Muslim Empire's core provinces of Hijaz (which contains Mecca and Medina), Yemen, Iraq and Persia. Muawiya who had been working for the office of the caliphate since the murder of the Third Caliph, refused to accept his appointment. In a show of force, he marched against the Imam with an army of 60,000 men. However, he did not wish to fight, rather he hoped to pressure the Imam to come to terms with him. The Imam had, at best, rallied a third of Muawiya's force which subsequently shrunk in size as Muawiya lured away from his commanders and foot soldiers by rumors and bribes. He could not thus fight and reluctantly entered into peace negotiations.

The two most important terms of the treaty that Imam Hasan agreed to were: Muawiya will rule according to the dictates of the Qur'an, the Traditions of the Prophet, and the conduct of the righteous Caliphs; he will not appoint anyone to the caliphate after him – the rule will be handed back to the Imam or, according to some narrations, the choice will be left to the council of the Muslims. The Imam did not pay allegiance to Muawiya, nor did he absolve his followers from the pledge that they had previously made to him. With the signing of the treaty in 661 CE, Muawiya seized the opportunity to reinvigorate the counterrevolution after a short interregnum.

Establishment of the Umayyad Dynasty and Transformation into Kinship

After Muawiya assumed the caliphate, he began a new political order, the Umayyad Dynasty, and transferred the capital of the Muslim Empire from Kufa in Iraq to Damascus in Syria. He introduced for the first time the principle of hereditary succession when, in a violation of the peace treaty, he appointed his son Yazid as his heir apparent. He thus ensured that political power continued in the Umayyad house See the diagram of the Tribe of Quraish of Mecca).

When the counter-revolution was first launched under the first three caliphs, they undertook some religious functions in addition to all the political ones, so the caliphate could still be conceived along politico-religious lines as had been the modus operandi during Prophet Muhammad's(s) time. The general population thus did not perceive a definitive separation of political power and religious authority – the separation was at best implicit or implied. However, when Muawiya assumed power, he made it absolutely clear that his goal was to rule over the Muslims, not to wield religious authority. There was now a division of spiritual and political leadership into two separate offices – the separation was explicit or obvious. The Umayyads had sealed the counter-revolution once and for all.

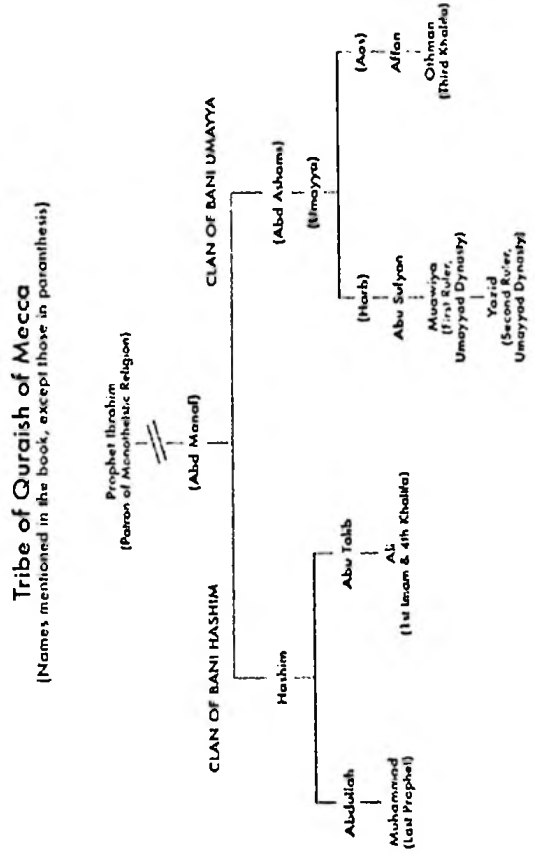
The Period of the Kingship:

I. Fabrication of Prophetic Traditions

Fabrication involved falsely attributing statements to Prophet

Muhammad(s) and inventing the chain of narrators to create the notion of authenticity of the traditions. A whole "cottage industry" grew up with court narrators paid to forge traditions. The volume of fabrication was staggering, running into thousands by a single narrator, even though some of them converted to Islam late in the Prophet's mission.

One major thrust of the fabricated traditions was to degrade the status of Prophet Muhammad and his progeny so as to make them look like ordinary human beings prone to making errors (except that Qur'anic revelation conveyed by the Prophet was acknowledged to be error-free). Another thrust was to prohibit opposition to the Muslim rulers and enjoin obedience to them under any and all circumstances.



The Period of the Kingship:

II. Moral and Criminal Transgressions

As documented earlier in this chapter, these atrocities began during the later period of the caliphate, but the situation further deteriorated under the Umayyad Dynasty, specifically when Muawiya and his son Yazid became rulers. They made a mockery of justice as unjust measures were used against the perceived "enemies" of the regime. The inequity and injustice became so rampart that the historian and geographer, Ali ibn Husayn Masudi of the tenth century CE, opines, "in the Muslim *ummah* [community], Yazid was like Pharaoh among his subjects," but then he hastens to add, "It is not so, because Pharaoh was more just to his subjects."

There was no safety or security of life and property; thousands were killed, and others were robbed of their means of livelihood. Muawiya instructed his commanders to "Kill whoever holds different views from ours; loot their villages and demolish their homes. Indeed, fighting them against their livelihood and taking their wealth is similar to killing them but is more painful to their hearts." Just as happened during Uthman's caliphate, additional prominent companions of Prophet Muhammad were tortured and killed when they refused to denounce Imam Ali[a] (Maitham at-Tammar, Hujr ibn Adi al-Kindi and his six associates). These transgressions were a direct consequence of the deviations that had occurred in the Islamic ideology and in the implementation of its basic tenets following the demise of the Prophet.

Acquiescence or Indifference of the Muslim Community

Given that deviations from the norms and practices of pristine Islam had become so pervasive (as discussed in two separate sections of this chapter). it may seem surprising that there was no grass-root movement to challenge the Umayyad's attempts to turn Islam into a political instrument to justify the actions of their regime. An insightful scholar, Dr. Ali Shariati (pp. 39-44), cogently argues that the regime perceived the "real center of danger" not to be any particular city or a specific group within the Muslim Empire but, rather, "the hearts and minds" of the people that could give rise to revolutionary fervor. Hence, the regime sought "in the name of God and the religion of God" to propagate -- with the active support of the religious clergy that had been won over with bribes or threats -- two misguided philosophies that effectively preempted any effort to organize opposition to the regime.

One was the philosophy of hope. The proponents opined that whatever crime a person commits, be it a sin or treason, they must have faith and hope in Allah's(swt) mercy and forgiveness. They cited as the basis for hope the Qur'anic verse, *"[There are] others waiting for Allah's edict; either He shall punish them, or turn to them clemently, and Allah is All-Knowing, All-Wise"* (9:106). Thus, to condemn such a person before the Day of Judgment would be to judge him before Allah does. Briefly, then, they suggested suspension of judgment against erring believers.

Another philosophy was that of determinism. The advocates maintained that whatever takes place in the universe is because Allah so willed. They advanced this view based on the Qur'anic metaphor that

Allah's *"Throne extends over the heavens and the earth"* (2:255) stands for the absolute sovereignty of Allah. Hence, whatever one does, whatever choices one makes, whether virtuous or despicable, are the manifestation of Allah's Will. In short, any criticism against the rule or power is a criticism of the Divine Will. The scholar aptly characterizes these two philosophies as "cancers" inflicted on the society which had the disastrous effect of sapping its capacity to rise in protest.

V

THE REFORMATION OF IMAM HUSAYN IBN ALI(a)



Imperatives for Islamic Reformation

The bases for reformation initiated by Imam Husayn ibn Ali(a) were discussed at various points in the previous two chapters. It will therefore be helpful if these are succinctly summarized in one place.

Allah(swt) mandated a set of ideological beliefs and ritual practices, but during the period of the caliphate and the kingship, there were many deviations from these injunctions. Herein lay the mortal danger that the

distorted version of Islam, if unchecked, would be passed on to the future generations as the authentic Islam.

During those same two periods, there were incidents of abuse of political power as well as instances of moral and criminal transgressions which were against the fundamental tenets of Islam. The Muslim community did not express any outrage for either fear of the outcome of their actions or bribes and positions awarded to them to buy their silence.

Islam is based on two primary legislative sources, the Qur'an and the Traditions of Prophet Muhammad(s) and his divinely appointed successors. The caliphs and kings who assumed power following the demise of the Prophet suppressed their traditions and fabricated new ones. The goal was to separate these personalities from the Qur'an, the speaking guides from the silent guide, which in reality complement one another so as to allow for a different interpretation of the Qur'an to legitimize the caliphs/rulers' political agenda.

Prophet Muhammad had established an ideal Islamic city-state in Medina over which he exercised comprehensive authority that fused political power with religious authority. The caliphs undertook some religious functions in addition to all the political ones, so the caliphate could still be conceived along politico-religious lines. Stated differently, the general population could not perceive a definitive separation of "church" and "state," that is, the separation was at best implicit. When the Umayyads thereafter established a hereditary dynasty, they made no pretense of exercising religious authority, so there was now the complete separation of "church" and "state", that is, the division into two separate offices was made explicit.

There was, indeed, an interregnum between the caliphate and the kingship when Imam Ali ibn Abi Talib(a), the rightful successor of the

Prophet, was unanimously chosen as the next caliph. However, his rule was marked by a series of three civil wars that divided the community. While he sought to reimplement the broad governmental principles and practices introduced by the Prophet, he did not have adequate time and whole-hearted support to right all the wrongs, most especially deviations and innovations in jurisprudential rules. He was assassinated within less than five years after he assumed the caliphate.

The discontent simmered below the surface during the period of the caliphate/kingship, but it did not assume the force of a movement. It was not until Imam Husayn succeeded as the Third Imam that he had to step up to the lead of the reformer with the occurrence of certain political events as described in the following section.

Precipitating Events that Triggered Islamic Reformation

Muawiya ibn Sufyan, the first king of the Umayyad Dynasty, died in 680 CE. As per prior arrangements that he had made, his son Yazid was next declared as the hereditary ruler. Muawiya had sought and obtained the allegiance of the prominent Medinites for his heir apparent, but Imam Husayn(a) had refused to oblige. The father had warned the son to tread gingerly with the Imam but as soon as Yazid ascended to the throne, he wrote to his governor in Medina to extract the oath of allegiance, *baya'h,* from the Imam, accompanied with the threat of "or else."

The concept of *baya'h* had evolved from the time of Prophet Muhammad(s) through to the establishment of the Umayyad Dynasty.

The Qur'an had declared that, *"Those who exchange pledges with you [Prophet Muhammad] it is with Allah that they exchange them"* (48:10). During the apostleship of the Prophet, *bay'ah* thus constituted a pledge to Allah(swt) through the intermediacy of the Prophet and was sealed with a hand clasp. It was a reciprocal transaction through which believers would be rewarded by Allah in return for their fulfillment of stipulated conditions.

The form of the *baya'h* went through successive changes after the demise of the Prophet. With the establishment of the Umayyad Dynasty, the caliphate was transformed into kingship, that is, the comprehensive authority exercised by the Prophet was now divided into two separate offices of spiritual and political leadership. *Bay'ah* now became an instrument of conferring political legitimacy to the new leader, even if he was unjust and oppressive. The transactional pledge of heretofore had changed into an unconditional allegiance that was buttressed with an oath. Imam Husayn could not allow the distorted version of Islam practiced by officialdom to bury the pristine version as taught by Prophet Muhammad. He realized that this was the most opportune time to take a stand against Yazid, so he refused to swear an oath of allegiance to him. He left Medina for Mecca accompanied by a group of his kith and kin that included women and children of Prophet Muhammad's family.

The Qur'an's Clarion Call for Imam Husayn(a)

Individual versus Collective Accountability

On the Day of Judgment, human beings will be judged based on the deeds or actions that they carried out in this world. The Qur'an makes

it clear that they will be held accountable for two sets of behaviors – one is for their individual, personal conduct, and the other is for their collective, societal performance.

With respect to individual accountability, the Qur'an warns:

"We have attached every person's omen [a book of deeds, actions] to his neck, and We shall bring it out for him on the Day of Resurrection as a wide-open book that he will encounter. [Then We shall say,] Read your book! Today your soul suffices as your own reckoner."

(17:13-14)

"Your book" will be a detailed, accurate record of everything a person did in this lifetime however hard they may have tried to hide or justify them. Each will be forced to admit all that they did and so will be the witness against their own self. The result:

"Every soul will be recompensed fully for what it has done, and He [Allah] is best aware of what they do."

(39:70)

As for collective accountability, the Qur'an declares:

> *"And you will see every* ***nation*** *fallen on its knees [kneeling down]. Every* ***nation*** *will be summoned to its book: Today you will be requited for what you used to do. This is Our book, which speaks truly against you. Indeed, We used to record what you used to do [emphasis added]."*
>
> (45: 28-29)

"Our Book" will consist of infringements of the rights and freedoms of members of the society, the most horrific acts being injustice and oppression against the weak and the disenfranchised. These acts may have been committed by one or a few persons of authority or influence, but because they have serious ramifications throughout the society, its members will be held to account for having acquiesced in them or, at the very least, having been indifferent to them, as is indicated by this verse:

"And be aware of punishment which shall not visit the wrongdoers among you ***exclusively*** *and know that Allah is severe in retribution* [emphasis added]." (8:25)

Imam Husayn's Lone Stand

Among all the possible stakeholders that could conceivably mount opposition to the regime, Imam Husayn was the only one who was willing – nay, duty-bound -- to respond to the Qur'an's call to action on behalf of the Muslim society as a whole.

Prophet Muhammad(s) had indicated three different ways in which the call to action could be implemented and, depending upon a person's capabilities, set up a priority among the ways:

"Whoever of you observes an evil [in the society] must object over it **physically** with his hand; and if he does not have the power of that, then he must object over it **by his tongue**; and if he does not have the strength of that, he must object over it **in his heart**. And this [the third alternative] is the lowest status of faith [emphasis added]."

The Mission Statement of Imam Husayn(a)

Before Imam Husayn left Medina to embark on his mission, he wrote a Will that he left in the custody of his brother, Muhammad al-Hanaffiya. The Will contained a clear, concise statement of his mission. For the Imam did not wish history to misunderstand or misrepresent the purpose of his stand against Yazid ibn Muawiya, the new ruler of the Umayyad Dynasty.

Reform, not Rebellion

The mission statement reads:

"I'm not rising [against Yazid] as an insolent, or an arrogant or a mischief monger or as a tyrant. I have risen [against him] as I seek to reform the ummah [community] of my grandfather [Prophet Muhammad]. I wish to bid the good [amr bil-ma'ruf] *and forbid the evil* [nahy' 'anil-munkar], *and to follow the way of my grandfather and father [Imam Ali ibn Abi Talib]."*

Like the *shahadah* or *kalemah* of the Muslims, *la illahailla- Laah* (There is no God but Allah), Imam's statement is in two parts – the first part is rejection, and the next part is affirmation. The Imam first dispels the accusations that later-day historians might level against him. He denies that he is planning to lead a rebellion against Yazid. Rather, the Imam emphasizes that his purpose is *islah*, to reform the Prophet's community. Barely half a century had passed since the Prophet's demise and the religion of Islam had become so distorted and diluted that there was a grave risk that the pristine religion would be completely replaced by the court religion.

The Instruments of Reform

As the mission statement indicates, the instruments that the Imam planned to use to bring about reformation were those of *amr bil-ma'ruf* which is to enjoin good and *nahy 'anil- munkar* which is to forbid evil. Now, these injunctions are typically applied at the individual level, with one Muslim exhorting another to the right path. However, by 680 CE, deviations from the norms and practices of Islam were

so pervasive that the very foundation of the Muslim society had been seriously undermined. Thus, there was a dire necessity to apply for these injunctions at the societal level, with one institution (divine leadership) that represents Allah's(swt) goodness on this earth challenging another (kingship) that had become an embodiment of evil.

As a logical corollary, while the individual application of the injunction is done in private to protect the dignity of a Muslim whose actions one wishes to rectify, the societal application has to be done in the open to draw the attention of the whole community to the actions that one would like to stop. Hence, in order to reform the Muslim community, Imam Husayn had to take a bold public stand as is dictated by the Qur'an: *"If two groups of the faithful fight one another, make peace between them. But if one party of them aggresses against the other, fight the one which aggresses until it returns to Allah's ordinance."* (49:9)

The Strategy of Reformation: Raising Consciousness ofMuslims through Sacrifice

Imam Husayn(a) had resolved to challenge Yazid. Yet he did not have the power to fight him militarily. He was all alone with no significant base of support. However, as the eldest surviving member of Prophet Muhammad's(s) progeny and the anointed Imam of the Muslim community, he was still responsible. For responsibility is born out of awareness and faith, not power or possibility.

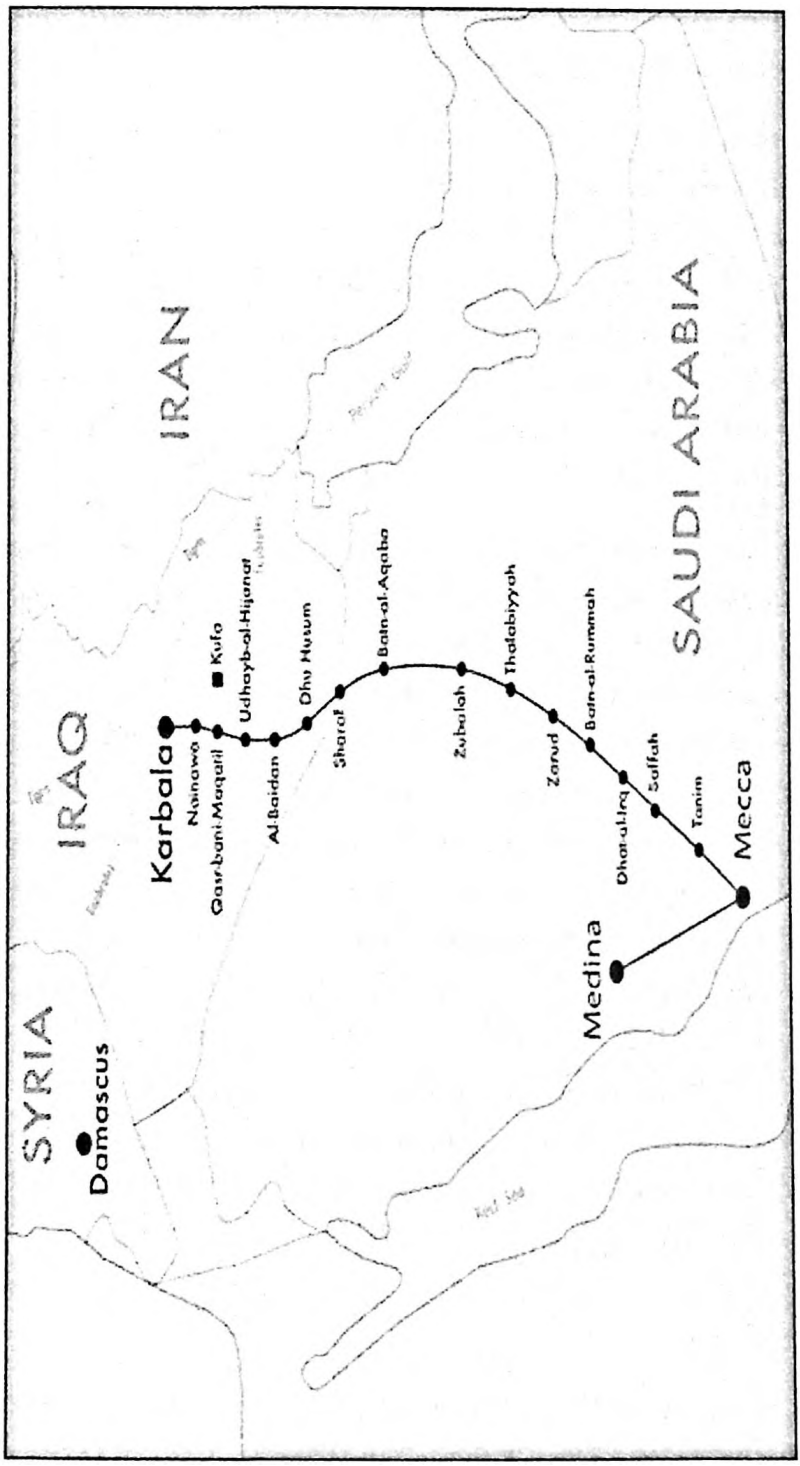
The Imam therefore, had to devise a novel strategy which can be summed up in three words – "arousing the consciousness" of the Muslims - and the most effective weapon for it was sacrifice. As Allama

Ali Naqvi explains, "It would serve to revive in the people the capacity to feel, awaken in them the power for independent thought and restore to them the courage to respond to the dictates of their conscience" (p. 61). Muslims would then be inclined to implement the fundamental Islamic obligations of *amr bil-mar'ruf*, enjoining good, and *nahy' 'anil munkar*, forbidding evil, not just at the individual level but also, more importantly, at the societal level. If these obligations are carried out in a concerted and coordinated manner by protesting against and refusing to abide by alterations in religious ideology and practices, the society can reform itself and once again become followers of true Islam.

Optimum Place for Sacrifice

Imam Husayn(a) wished to choose the place where he would make his sacrifice, and not be forced to do so just anywhere as dictated by Yazid and/or his officials. The Imam avoided three locations before he settled for the fourth. If he was going to sacrifice his life for the cause of Islam, he could not allow the circumstances of his death to be shrouded in mystery (See the Map of the Route of Imam Husayn(a)'s Journey).

Medina: When the Imam was summoned by the governor to his palace and presented with the demand for an oath of allegiance on the order of Yazid, he took with him some Hashimite youths. However, he instructed them to remain at the door while he entered alone, and to come in only if they heard his voice become unusually loud. In response to the demand, the Imam told the governor that he would not be "content" unless the oath is given in public, not in private closeted in his mansion. The governor's counselor advised him not to let the Imam out of his grip as he will not get that opportunity again. The Imam reacted to the threat



Route of Imam Husain's Journey

in a raised voice whereupon the youths burst into the courtroom. This was a calculated move to forestall his murder.

Mecca: Thereafter, the Imam left Medina for Mecca where he stayed for just over four months. He took this opportunity to inform Meccans and other Muslims (who flocked to the city as the season of the annual pilgrimage (*hajj*) approached) of the impending crises. Meanwhile, Yazid sent assassins disguised as pilgrims to kill him. When the Imam learned about the scheme, he left the city, together with his family and a group of supporters, just a day before the rituals of *hajj* began. He thus denied the assassins the chance to assassinate him.

Kufa (in modern-day Iraq): While Imam Husayn was in Mecca, he received many letters from Kufans inviting him to lead them now that Muawiya was dead and promising to use the city as a base for challenging Yazid. He sent his cousin, Muslim ibn 'Aqeel, as his personal emissary to assess the strength of the commitment of the Kufans and to report back to him. Thousands pledged their allegiance to the Imam, so Muslim wrote to advise the Imam to head for Kufa. Alarmed by the support that Muslim had generated, the governor, Ubaydullah Ibn Ziyad, hunted him down and assassinated him. The Imam received the news of his assassination en route to Kufa (at *Zubalah*). He was next intercepted by a commander in Yazid's army (Hurr ibn Yazid al-Riyahi) who had been ordered to arrest the Imam and his group and to bring them to Kufa (at *Dhu Husum*). The Imam refused to submit as a prisoner, so a compromise was reached that he would neither return to Medina nor proceed to Kufa. He would continue north and after a journey of roughly 1300 miles over 25 days, he reached Karbala where he was ordered to stop.

Karbala (in modern-day Iraq): The place was then a wide-open field – in the words of Yazid, "a plain that has no defense and no water

supply"- but ironically it was ideal for the stark juxtaposition, respectively, of Imam and Yazids' values - truth versus falsehood, right versus wrong, justice versus injustice and benevolence versus tyranny and oppression for all to observe and bear testimony to the Imam's just cause, then and now. The massacre that occurred here has come to be known in history as the Tragedy of Karbala.

Selection of Persons for Sacrifice

The goal of Imam Husayn(a) was not to seize political power through the use of force, as is mistakenly alleged by the western scholars of Islam. Rather, his movement was to revive Islam by giving battle to Yazid "on the spiritual plane" and, as Allamah Ali Naqvi elucidates, "to oppose might with his nobility of character, confront power with powerlessness, meet multitudes with want of material support and defy oppression with suffering and martyrdom" (p. 61). To succeed in his mission, it was not enough for him to sacrifice just his own life; he needed a "critical mass" of martyrs to generate maximal impact.

However, Imam was not interested in just any person offering their life regardless of whatever were their motivations. He used two specific criteria to lineup martyrs that he wished to present on the plains of Karbala.

(a) Quality, Not Quantity

When Imam Husayn left Mecca, his way station in 680 C.E., it is estimated that he had with him about 50 persons who could bear arms, 18 relatives and 32 others. The latter number grew during the course of the journey (as well as after his arrival in Karbala when escapees from

Kufa that had been blockaded, came to his help). The vast majority of the people who joined him en route, however, were motivated solely by economic considerations, the expectation of material benefits should the Imam be triumphant over Yazid.

Yet Imam Husayn made it abundantly clear that there were no gains to be had, only sacrifices to be made. His most poignant message to his entourage came when he received the news of the death of his cousin, Muslim ibn 'Aqeel, whom he had sent earlier as his emissary to Kufa. Imam declared:

"Our [Kufan] supporters have withdrawn their support from us. Whoever wishes to leave us and go his way should do so."

At that point, it became obvious to everybody that the Imam would not fight Yazid, so it was futile to stay with him in the hope of any worldly rewards. Many therefore left him.

Having pruned the ranks of his companions, Imam Husayn tested those who remained on the eve of the day of sacrifice. His purpose was to do a final check of their steadfastness. His address is remarkable for its keen insights into human psychology. He first appealed to their reason – Yazid was only interested in his head so they should leave him to his own fate. Next, he relieved them of their social responsibility – he absolved

them from the oath of allegiance that they had sworn to him. When all else failed, he protected them from a sense of shame – he put out the light so they could leave in the darkness of the night. None of the historians who recorded this incident mention that any companion left.

Before the battle commenced, Imam Husayn had purged his forces and tested the purity of the intention of his kinsmen and companions. They passed the test when they, in their own separate ways, assured him that they had made their decision according to the voice of their conscience and took full responsibility for their actions.

(b). A Cross-Section, not a Section

At the same time as Imam Husayn encouraged some of his companions to leave him, he invited others to join him in his cause using whatever means he could to reach out to them. He dispatched a letter to his childhood friend, Habib ibn Muzahir, who was a resident of Kufa. The letter intimated that if there was ever a time that the Imam could use his help, this was it. Habib promptly dashed to Karbala to arrive a day before the battle began.

The Imam sought a postponement of the battle for one night on the grounds that they wished to offer prayers to Allah(swt). This stratagem gave the opportunity to Hurr ibn Yazid al-Riyahi, who had intercepted the Imam and diverted him to Karbala, to ponder over his fate. When Hurr was convinced that the battle was imminent, he galloped across the line that divided the two forces to be with the Imam on the day of sacrifice. He is only the most famous of reportedly twenty to thirty soldiers who defected from Yazid's army.

Imam Husayn's decision to simultaneously trim and extend the ranks of his companions, to subtract and add to the lineup of his martyrs may,

at first sight, appear odd. The explanation perhaps lies in his desire not only to ensure the quality but also to plug the gaps in the spectrum of the martyrs he planned to offer. Only the Imam knew best the gaps he saw in his ranks, but we can point to the diversity that we observe in their demographic characteristics as well as in their personal affiliations and accomplishments:

> With respect to age, the martyrs ranged from the nephews of the Imam who were in their pre-teens to the companion of Prophet Muhammad(s) who was in his eighties
>
> In terms of socio-economic status, the martyrs were arrayed from the chief of his clan to the freed slave of African descent
>
> In regard to political affiliations, on the one hand, there was a partisan of Imam Ali(a), and on the other an officer previously in Yazid's army
>
> As for accomplishments, at one end there were men of literary distinctions, memorizers of the Qur'an and traditions and at the other end men of military exploits, participants in earlier battles.

It may be surmised that Imam Husayn sought a cross-section of martyrs for two reasons. He wanted history to record that it was not just one group or the other with some vested interests that stood beside him, but persons of every stripe recognized his cause as just and acted on their conviction. More importantly, he wanted future generations that would commemorate the Tragedy of Karbala to be able to personally identify, at every stage of their life, with one particular individual in his lineup. His goal was not to promote hero-worship, that is, the imitation of the outward appearance and lifestyle of a person one dotes upon. Rather, his

purpose was to facilitate the adoption of his martyrs as role models, that is, the emulation of the inner character and values of a personality one admires.

Imam Husayn went through a deliberate, purposeful selection process to present the best specimens of humanity on the battlefield of Karbala, persons who had attained a lofty station and encompassed a wide spectrum.

The Day of the Sacrifice (Day of Ashura): I. Early Part of the Battle

Imam's Address to the Enemy

Imam Husayn(a) reportedly addressed the enemy forces, numbering a minimum of 30,000 soldiers, a few times on the Day of Ashura, the 10th of *Muharram* (the first month of the Muslim calendar) in 680 CE. The first, longest speech that he gave was after the morning prayer which was in two parts. In the first part, the Imam made it clear that the reason why he addressed them was that it was his religious duty and their basic right that he should dispel their misconceptions:

> *"People listen to my words and do not hurry [to attack me] so that I may remind you of the duties you have towards me and so that [by telling you the true circumstances] I may free myself from any blame [in your attacking me]."*

The enemy had been brainwashed into believing that he was a "garden variety" rebel who had risen against the legitimate regime of Yazid. The Imam was fulfilling the obligations of *amr bil-ma'ruf*, enjoining good and *nahy 'anil- munkar*, forbidding evil, as he indicated in his mission statement.

Next, Imam Husayn wanted the enemy to examine their motives for being prepared to kill the grandson of Prophet Muhammad(s). He wished to deny them any excuse they might offer later for their action. Therefore, he put it to them bluntly:

"... are you seeking retribution from me for one of your dead whom I have killed, or for the property of yours which I expropriated, or for a wound which I have inflicted?"

The enemy had no reason to seize on any of these excuses. Instead, they simply repeated their demand that all he needed to do to save his life was to swear allegiance to Yazid. The field commanders had been promised key positions in the administration of the principalities of the Muslim Empire, while the rank and file may have been beguiled by threats to their lives and/or offer of monetary incentives. They were all single-mindedly focused on instant gratification to pay any heed to what the Imam had told them.

In the second part of the speech, the Imam's tone was dramatically different from the first part. Now he no longer sought to advise and guide them to the right path; instead, he warned them of the folly and consequences of their intended action:

"You will be grounded by the millstone of the time, while encountering intense anxiety and severe mental disturbance, and this is a promise which has been made to me by my grandfather [Prophet Muhammad]. Therefore, appraise yourself ... one more time, so that the world doesn't rain upon your grief and sorrow. "

The commander-in-chief of Yazid's army, Umar Ibn Saad, decided to preempt any attempt at self-doubt by his forces due to their conscience being aroused by the stirring speech of the Imam (and a couple of his companions who spoke after him). Consequently, he decided to shoot an arrow towards the Imam's side declaring "[All of you] be a witness of who was the first to shoot." That signaled the start of the battle.

The Sacrifice of the Companions

The first to sacrifice their lives were the companions of Imam Husayn. They did not want any member of the Imam's family to face the enemy while they were still alive.

The Arab custom in a battle was for a man from one side to fight another man from the opposite side. Each fighter would first identify himself by his tribal lineage and the engagement would continue until one of the two men is killed at which point, he would be replaced by another fighter. This is how the battle began. A dozen of the Imam's companions were killed in one-on-one combat. However, the enemy lost many more men than did the Imam's side. Ibn Saad therefore, changed the rules of the engagement and ordered a general attack. A unit of about 50 archers shot arrows simultaneously at the Imam's forces. During this general attack, some 50 of the companions were killed.

Encouraged by the heavy casualties suffered by the Imam's side, the enemy launched an attack on his encampment. They planned to surround the Imam's men from behind the tents, but they were repelled with minimal loss of life of the Imam's companions. Next, the commanders even thought of setting the tents on fire and killing all the occupants enmass, but they were chided by their own forces who considered this move to be a cowardly and a despicable act.

It was now noontime and the Imam asked for time off to offer mid-day prayers with his remaining men. The request was denied, and the fighting was not suspended. The remaining companions took to the battlefield, one after another. After a while of one-on-one fighting, Ibn Saad changed the rules of engagement again. A group of enemy soldiers ambushed an Imam's companion, then surrounded and killed him. By early afternoon, many of the92 companions had laid down their lives.

Tactics of Reformation: Suffering the Sacrifice

I. Illustrative Examples from Early Part of the Battle

Imam Husayn(a) decided that the most effective way of bringing about the reform of the community of his grandfather, Prophet Muhammad(s), was to build a second plank into his strategy of reformation: suffering on top of sacrifice. For he realized that sacrifice without suffering would be just as ineffective as suffering without sacrifice. His strategy, therefore, can again be summed up in three words: "suffering the sacrifice."

It was not enough to lay down his life along with those of his kinsmen and companions. For the sacrifice to have maximal impact, he needed to go further. He had to set the enemy up to inflict unwarranted suffering. The setup was designed to lead to violations at two levels – at the level of believers with contempt for elemental Muslim obligations, and at the level of humanity with the transgression of universal human rights.

One example of each violation will be described hereunder from the early part of the battle. The examples will show how the Imam gave the enemy an opportunity to show their respect or, alternatively, their disregard for Muslim obligations and human rights respectively.

Attack on Worshippers during an Obligatory Prayer

At noon, Imam Husayn requested time off from the battle to offer mid-day prayers. The request was denied so the Imam directed two of his companions to stand in front of him to enable him to lead the prayers. A shortened form of prayer has been prescribed when under siege (the prayer is called *salat ul-khawf*). This is the first recorded instance of such a prayer being offered under a shower of arrows. One

companion fell dead from the injuries he sustained as soon as the prayers were over. Another was hurt and, sensing that the enemy was getting dangerously close to the Imam, charged into their ranks and fell fighting.

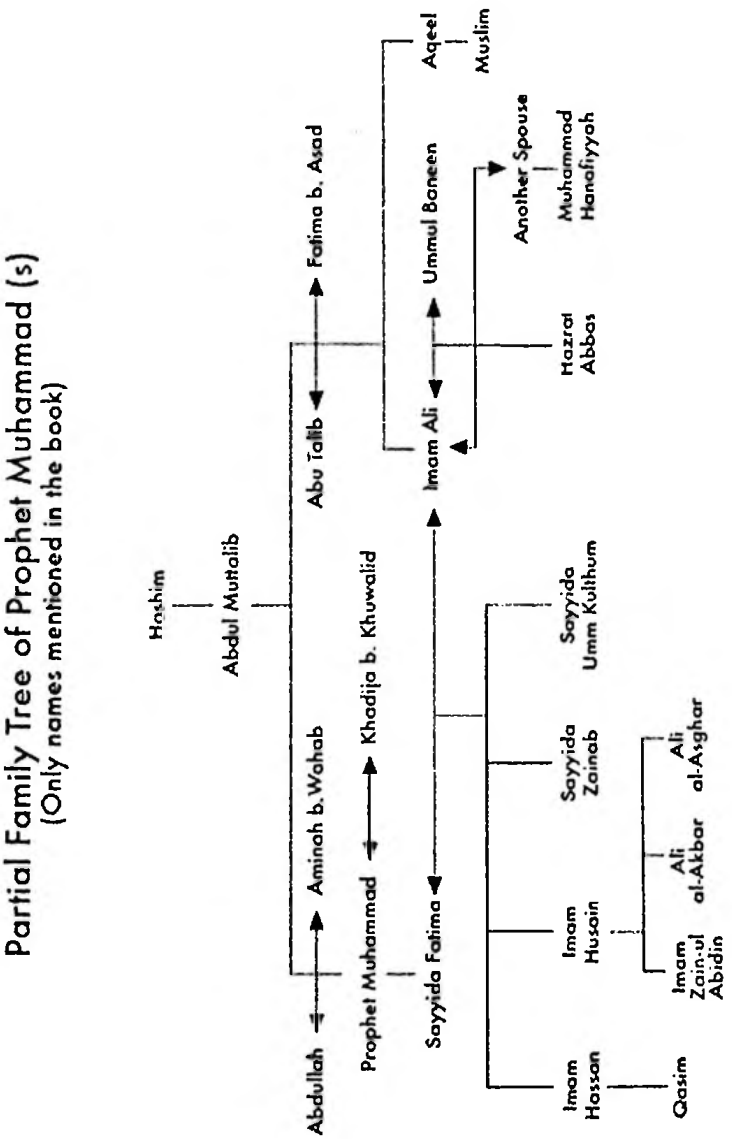
Transgression of Private Property

The first act that Imam Husayn performed when he arrived in Karbala was to purchase a piece of land from the local residents. The land now became his private property, so its sanctity had to be respected. Nevertheless, the Imam feared for the security of his womenfolk and children so, first, he ordered the tents to be pitched in a row, tied one to the other and, second, a ditch to be dug at the back to be filled with wood and brush and then, lit fire on the Day of Ashura to prevent the enemy from attacking the encampment from the rear. The enemy attempted or threatened to attack it a couple of times, but they were either pushed back or dissuaded from their action. However, on the very evening of the sacrifice, in an act of glaring transgression, they invaded the encampment, as will be described in a later section on the Eve of the Dispossessed.

The Day of the Sacrifice (Day of Ashura): II. Later Part of the Battle

The Sacrifice of the Prophet's Family Members

With all the companions of Imam Husayn(a) fallen, it was now the turn of the family members to go to the battlefield. All members were from the descendants of Abdul Muttalib, the grandfather of Prophet Muhammad(s) (see the diagram of the Partial Family Tree of Prophet Muhammad).



The first to sacrifice was Ali al-Akbar, the eighteen-year-old son of Imam Husayn. He was especially dear to the Imam as he bore a marked resemblance to the Prophet in his features and disposition. Whenever the Imam longed to see the Prophet, he would look at his face. When he bade him farewell, it was a moment of great anguish of his soul

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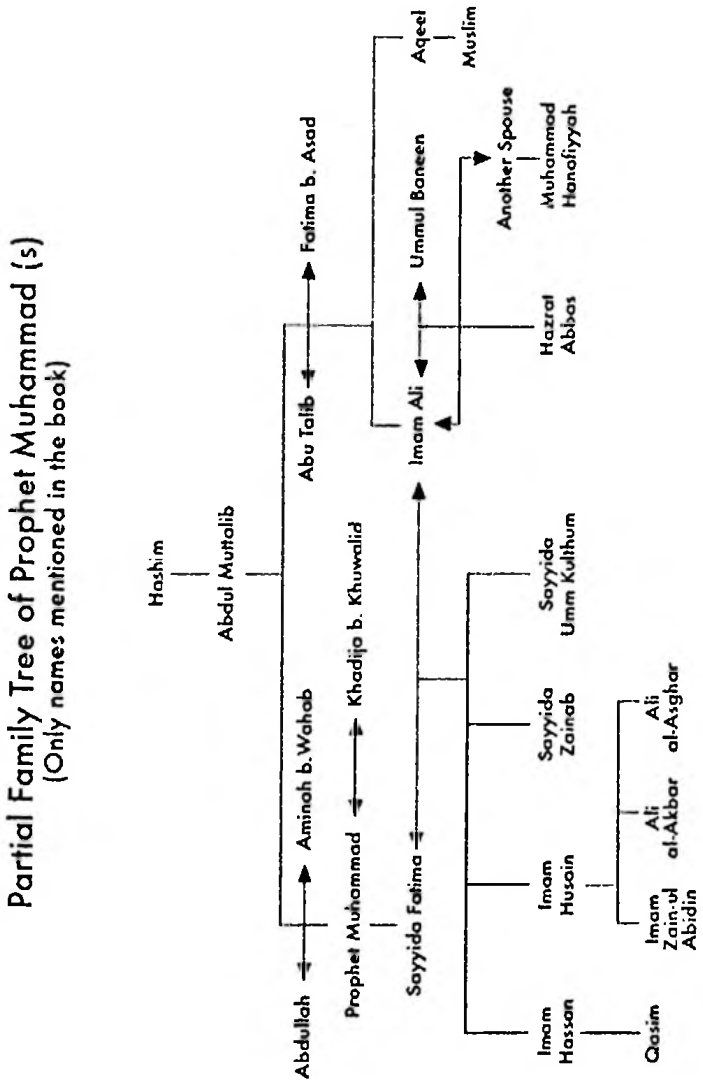
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and restraint. Ali al-Akbar fought valiantly but an enemy eventually struck him with a lance which pierced his chest and he fell down from his horse. When the Imam came beside him, he knelt down and with utmost courage pulled the lance out of his chest. As blood gushed from the wound, the Imam saw his son breathe his last. In chronological order, Ali al-Akbar was followed by the:

- Progeny of Aqeel ibn Abu Talib, the uncle of Imam Husayn
- Children of Jaffer ibn Abu Talib, the uncle and brother-in-law of Imam Husayn
- Children of Imam Hasan ibn Ali(a), the nephews of Imam Husayn
- Progeny of Imam Ali ibn Abu Talib(a), the brother and nephews of Imam Husayn, including the commander and flag-bearer of the Imam's forces, Abbas ibn Ali(a) who was killed on a mission to fetch water for the thirsty children.

The penultimate sacrifice was of a "nursing baby", reported to be the six-month-old son of Imam Husayn, Ali al-Asghar. The Imam had brought him into the battlefield to plead for water on his behalf. He tried to reason with the enemy that the battle was between them and him and that the innocent child should not have to pay for it. Ibn Saad, sensing a revolt, gave instructions to take him out and a three-pronged arrow, typically used to hunt a four-footed animal, killed him in his father's arms.

The number of family members that had sacrificed their lives for the sake of Islam and in support of Imam Husayn's goal was 16.

Whenever a person fell in the battle, Imam Husayn retrieved his body (except in a couple of cases) and laid it down near his encampment

which served as a makeshift morgue. The reason was to ensure that the body does not get trampled by the horse's hooves in the event of any crossfire on the battlefield. The Imam, however, neither had the time nor the manpower to bury those who died on Ashura day. The only exception that he made was to bury the body of Ali al-Asghar behind the tent.

The Supreme Sacrifice of Imam Husayn(a)

The last person to sacrifice his life was Imam Husayn. Broken-hearted and intolerably thirsty as he was, he charged at the enemy with a sword in hand. He instilled such fear in their hearts that none had the courage to come forward and confront him. With the enemy demoralized, their commander rearranged the ranks, putting the infantry before the cavalry and ordered the archers to rain arrows toward the Imam. So many arrows were shot that the Imam's body, as reported by an eyewitness, resembled that of a "porcupine."

The Imam could no longer maintain himself on his horse and came down to the ground. While the field commanders were discussing their next move, he took the opportunity to offer his last prayer on the earth. The enemies were ordered to finish him off. Several approached him but retreated when they heard him entreat Allah(swt) to accept his humble sacrifice. Alas, Shimr ibn Dhil Jaushan stepped forward and while the Imam was in *sajdah*, the most sublime part of the prayer when a worshipper prostrates before Allah, he slew the Imam. The head of Imam Husayn was immediately sent to Kufa as proof to the governor, Ibn Ziyad, that he had been killed.

It was late in the afternoon and the Battle of Karbala had ended but the brutalities did not cease. Ibn Saad next performed the most despicable act unheard of in Arabia. He ordered ten horse riders to ride

over the body of Imam Husayn, back and forth multiple times, so as to trample it with the horses' hooves.

Modern scholars have given varied numbers of the total number of persons killed. This is because of the inherent difficulties in compiling a list from fragmentary primary sources coupled with the confusion in the similarly sounding names of the dead. Allamah Ali Naqvi has painstakingly put together the most comprehensive list enumerating persons in the order in which he believes they were killed; by his count, 109 were killed on the Day of Ashura. An additional person, 110th, was wounded in the battle but his tribesmen retrieved his body and he died after the Day of Ashura.

Tactics of Reformation: Suffering the Sacrifice II. Select Examples from Later Part of the Battle

Two additional examples will be described below that demonstrate how Imam Husayn(a) implemented the tactics of suffering the sacrifice. He afforded the enemy the chance to honor or, alternatively, show contempt for the obligations that are incumbent upon a human being or a person who claims to be a Muslim, as did Yazid's forces.

Denial of Access to Water

When Imam Husayn first arrived in Karbala on the second of *Muharram*, he pitched his tents near the River Euphrates. Five days later, when the forces of Yazid began to pour in, they demanded that he relocate his tents away from the river. Abbas Ibn Ali(a), the Imam's brother, had first-hand experience from a previous battle (Battle of Siffin waged against the Imam's father) of the physiological and psychological

effects of lack of water and was prepared to take a stand. However, the Imam sent word that he should accede to the demand of the enemy.

By the Day of Ashura, the Imam's side had been without water for three long days. The elders bore the suffering with dignity, but reporters of Karbala's events recorded cries of thirst that could be heard from the children in the Imam's camp. The Imam dispatched Hazrat Abbas, the bravest of his warriors, to fetch water rather than to fight the enemy. He managed to fill the water bag with water from the river but, on the way back to the encampment, the enemy surrounded him, severed both his arms and then pierced the water bag with an arrow. As the water spilled on the ground, so did his courage flow out of his body. No water reached the Imam's camp and the children remained thirsty.

Disrespect for the Slain Bodies

After the battle ended, Ibn Saad had all the bodies of the dead kinsmen and companions brought out from the makeshift morgue into the open battlefield and ordered their heads to be severed, as they had done with Imam Husayn's head. Heads of all the martyrs were later paraded through the streets of Kufa and, next, Damascus where they were presented as trophies to the ruler Yazid.

The enemy left all the beheaded bodies under the open sky. Islam requires that the dead should be buried as soon as possible, preferably within twenty-four hours. It is an obligation upon the entire Muslim community to attend to the burial and none is relieved of this solemn duty until some people come forward to perform the burial (the obligation is referred to *aswajib ul-kifaee*). By contrast, the enemy collected the bodies of their own troops and, after the prescribed prayer for the dead, buried them the next day while those of the martyrs remained unburied for

another day when the residents of a nearby village interred them.

Eve of the Dispossessed (*Sham e Ghariban*)

The only adult male member from the family of Prophet Muhammad(s) who was alive at the end of the day was the middle son of Imam Husayn(a). It was through providence that the son, Zain al-Abidin(a), became seriously ill in Karbala and since he was the designated successor of Imam Husayn and the earth cannot be without Allah's(swt) representative, he did not take to the battlefield.

As the night fell, Ibn Saad and his forces, having meted out all manner of atrocities to the kinsmen and companions of Imam Husayn, next turned their attention to the Imam's encampment that contained the women and children of the Prophet's family.

Intoxicated with their perceived "victory," they rampaged through the tents and stole anything that they could lay their hands on. They even aggressively snatched jewelry from little children and stripped off the veils of women with which they covered their heads.

As a final act of indignity, the enemy torched the tents. As these were tied together, women with children in tow ran for safety from one tent to another as the fire spread. When the last tent caught fire, they were left with no other option but to emerge from the tent and spend the night under the open sky.

The horrendous evening following the tragedy is referred to as the eve of the dispossessed because the women and children of the Prophet's family were dispossessed not only of their meager possessions but also of the only shelter that they had.

Publicists of the Tragedy of Karbala

There were two phases to Imam Husayn's(a) campaign, pre- and post-Ashura. The goal of the first phase was to convert the Imam's certain death into a purposeful sacrifice to arouse the consciousness of Muslims. The purpose of the second phase was to counter the disinformation campaign that Yazid would mount with the goal of hiding the circumstances surrounding the Tragedy of Karbala.

The first phase ended with the sacrifice of Imam Husayn and his small band of kinsmen and companions. The second phase called for a shift from a defensive to an offensive posture. Now that the sacrifice had been made, it was critically important that it not be in vain. Yazid would, surely, attempt to portray his actions in such a way as to justify them. The truth, however, would have to be told. It is for this reason that the Imam brought the women and children with him to Karbala. They were taken as captives to be brought to the courts of the governor of Kufa and, next, the ruler in Damascus. They did not have the freedom of action but somehow, they would have to rise to the challenge and use unorthodox means to cut through the propaganda. The two publicists were the son and successor of Imam Husayn, Imam Zainal-Abidin(a), and the sister of Imam Husayn, Sayyida Zaynab bint Ali(a).

Address in Kufa

On the day after the Tragedy of Ashura, chains were put on Imam Zainul al-Abidin's neck, hands and legs, and together with the women and children, they were taken as captives on a fifty-mile journey to Kufa. The caravan reached the town at nighttime, so they were made to wait overnight before they were brought into the presence of the governor,

Ibn Ziyad, who had directed the events in Karbala. Both Sayyida Zaynab and Imam Zain al-Abidin addressed the Kufans who had thronged to the bazaar to see the caravan and chided them for their betrayal of Imam Husayn and complicity in his murder. The next day, Sayyida Zaynab confronted the governor in his court in a powerful exchange of recriminations.

The Imam's grandfather, Imam Ali(a), had made Kufa the capital of the Muslim Empire when he was the caliph not so long ago before he was assassinated. Kufans therefore knew and had some affinity with the Imam's family. The eloquent speeches of the publicists deeply touched their hearts. Fearing a revolt on his hands, the governor hurriedly dispatched the captives away to their next stop in Damascus, almost six hundred miles away. He instructed the soldiers to travel via a "desert route" away from major settlements to avoid a similar arousal of the public's sympathy.

Address in Damascus

Damascus was different than Kufa as it had long been the power base of the Umayyads. The residents' only source of awareness of Islamic principles and values was the clan of Bani Umayyah, specifically, the family of Abu Sufyan. Yazid compounded their ignorance by mounting a massive campaign of disinformation to prime the public to receive the captives as "rebels" against the authority of the Muslim leader.

Upon their arrival in Damascus, the captives were made to wait for a prolonged period before being brought into the court as Yazid had ordered it to be decorated to "celebrate" his apparent "victory." He filled the court with senior officials, dignitaries of Syria, ambassadors of foreign governments stationed in the Muslim Empire's capital and heads of other faiths.

Yazid had put out the word that the "anonymous" persons killed in Karbala were "rebels" against the regime. This was the external justification that he offered for his brutal actions. He also nurtured an inner motive that became evident when he addressed the *Ahl al-Bayt* (the Prophet's infallible progeny) in his court. He wished to avenge the death of his forefathers at the Battle of Badr, the first battle that the Quraish had launched against Medina in an unsuccessful attempt to destabilize the Prophet's city-state. Imam Zain al-Abidin and Sayyida Zaynab had to formulate an effective strategy to counter this propaganda at the same time as they maintained the dignity of the Prophet's family.

With the label of "rebels," Yazid implied that Imam Husayn had questioned his authority as the leader of Muslims. The first order of business, accordingly, was to acquaint the public that the actions of the regime were contrary to the teachings of Islam. When Sayyida Zaynab spoke out in the court of Yazid, she unequivocally told him that he had deviated from the true Islam: "By what you have done, you have provided ample proof of arrogance against God, denial of His Prophet, rejection of the doctrines of the Holy Book [the Qur'an] and teachings sent down upon the Prophet by God." She went on to cite, as incriminating examples of his misdeeds, "[You have] slaughtered and butchered the sons of the Prophet and imprisoned the members of his family. "This constituted the first fatal arrow in the quiver of the publicists of Karbala.

Having been humiliated in his court, Yazid had Imam Zainul al-Abidin brought to the Mosque of Damascus on a Friday and instructed the leader of the prayer to disparage the Imam's family. For Yazid had intimated that the "anonymous" persons killed in Karbala had no standing whatsoever in the community. When the Imam got a rare opportunity to address the congregation, the second order of business, therefore, was

to inform the public of the lineage of Imam Husayn. He introduced himself thus: "O people! I introduce myself to those among you who do not know me. I am the son of . . ." as he traced his descent from Prophets Ibrahim(a) (Abraham) and Muhammad(s), through Imam Ali(a) and [the Prophet's daughter] Sayyida Fatima(a), to Imams Hasan(a) and Husayn(a) [the Prophet's grandsons]." Yazid tried to silence the Imam by signaling the *muezzin* to recite the call for noon prayers, but the Imam turned the tables on him and delivered a killer blow when on the mention of "*Ash-hadu anna Muhammadar- Rasuulallah*" (I bear witness that Muhammad is the Apostle of Allah), he pointedly asked Yazid if "Muhammad was your grandfather or mine. If you say he was your grandfather, then it will assuredly be a lie; and if he was my grandfather, then why have you killed his son and imprisoned his family?" Yazid was dumbfounded. This constituted the second fatal arrow in the quiver of the publicists of Karbala.

After their appearances in public, the family was put in prison in Damascus. The impact of the speeches of the publicists, however, occurred relatively soon thereafter. Under intense pressure from the Syrians who were appalled by what they heard. Yazid was forced to release the captives and accede to a key demand of Sayyida Zaynab. She wanted access to a facility where she could gather the ladies of Damascus and recount for seven days the crimes committed against the Prophet's family in the very capital city of the ruler who had perpetrated them. She would leave Damascus only after she could proudly proclaim to the Muslim community and to posterity, "mission accomplished."

Medina's Reaction to the Tragedy

Yazid provided an escort for the family's return journey to their hometown of Medina. At the request of the family, they first made a detour to Karbala to pay their respects, unmolested, to their beloved. Yazid had given the heads of the persons who sacrificed their lives back to the family. They buried the heads in their respective graves in which they had previously been laid down by a local tribe two days after the Tragedy of Karbala. After their short stay in Karbala, the family left for Medina.

The People of Medina were shocked and saddened when they heard about the Tragedy of Karbala. They decided to set up a commission of inquiry to investigate and report on the event. To ensure that their report was unbiased, the commission did not include any members of the Bani Hashim (the Prophet's family) or the Bani Umayyad (Yazid's family) or anyone connected with the administration of Medina. The commission traveled to Damascus on a fact-finding trip.

When the commission returned to Medina, they gave a very damning report on the character of Yazid and his government. The people of Medina were so disgusted by the report that they chased out of the city all Yazid's officials, including the governor. Seeing the success of Medina in throwing out its governor, an opportunist in Mecca declared the city independent of Syria and installed himself as the new governor.

Yazid's Response to the Rebellion

Yazid was furious over the loss of two of the most important cities of the Empire, Mecca and Medina. He sent an army of about twelve thousand soldiers to bring them back under his control. The army was instructed to take any measures necessary to recapture the two cities.

The army reached Medina in 682 CE and brutally put down the rebellion. It was followed by three days of plunder and rape. Even the sanctity of Prophet Muhammad's(s) mosque was violated as it was used as a stable for horses, and dogs were allowed to sit on the Prophet's pulpit. Yazid's army stayed in Medina for two months to consolidate their power and appoint a new governor.

The army next proceeded to Mecca. They surrounded the sanctuary of the *Ka'bah*. Not only stones but also burning pieces of wood were thrown onto the *Ka'bah*. It burned for almost a month while the fighting continued.

When the news of Yazid's sudden death in 683 CE reached Mecca, the army hurriedly returned to Damascus without consolidating their power. While on a hunting trip in Syria, Yazid had died in mysterious circumstances (three and half years after he came to power). Neither his body was ever found nor was the site where he perished pinpointed.

Sayyida Zaynab in her address in Yazid's court had warned him that he should not consider his apparent "victory" as a sign of Allah's(swt) pleasure by citing a verse from the Qur'an. There may be a delay in reprisal, the Qur'an asserts, but it will eventually come:

"And let not the faithless think that Our granting them respite is good for their souls; We give them respite only that they may add to their sins; and [eventually] they shall have a humiliating punishment."

(3:178)

VI

THE ENDURING MESSAGE OF KARBALA



Imam Husayn's(a) Unique Sacrifice in History

The concept of sacrifice is found in all the Abrahamic religions, as in Eastern religions as well. In Judaism sacrifice is one of the main examples of *Kiddush Hashed* or sanctification of God's name through public dedication to the Jewish practice. In Christianity, a sacrifice is one who brings testimony of the Christian Gospel or, more generally, the word of God. During the early years of the Church, this often occurred through stoning, crucifixion, burning at the stake, or

other forms of torture and capital punishment. Ever since it has been restricted to persons who suffer death rather than deny their faith.

The definition of sacrifice in Islam involves two basic elements: first, it must be *fi sabi-lilah*, that is, the cause must be sacred for a person to sacrifice life for it; second, it must take place knowingly, with full awareness. The greatest of the sacrificers exhibit two additional characteristics: one, they have the zeal for sacrifice, they wish that Allah(swt) would bestow them the glory of sacrifice; another, they have a special logic, the logic of a reformer who wishes to change society, and the logic of gnostic who wishes to meet their Lord.

Imam Husayn(a) meets all the four requirements of a sacrificer. There is, in fact, no parallel to his sacrifice in the annals of history. The Qur'an narrates the incident involving Prophet Ibrahim (Abraham)(a) who is commanded by Allah to sacrifice his son Ismail (Ishmael) who was then his only child born late in his life after he repeatedly supplicated to Allah (37:102-107). Both willingly submitted to the command on the plains of Mina, on the doorstep of Mecca. The Prophet, however, tied a band around his eyes so he does not falter as he executes the command to slay his son. When he removed the band, he was astonished to see that Allah had miraculously substituted a lamb in place of the son. The Qur'an states that the sacrifice of Prophet Ismail had been ransomed for *zibhi azeem*, an even greater sacrifice for another time (37:107). The exegetes of the Qur'an unanimously affirm that

The Qur'anic allusion is to the sacrifice of Imam Husayn.

The Imam's sacrifice is, indeed, supreme for a couple of reasons. As has been described in the previous chapter, he did not just lay down his own life but also of over a hundred companions and members of

his family who, moreover, willingly "suffered their sacrifice" along with him. Furthermore, he put the ladies and children of his family through anguish and grief as they witnessed their loved ones killed and their heads hoisted on spears and paraded in their midst as they were marched to Kufa and then Damascus to be humiliated and mocked by Yazid in front of hundreds of courtiers.

As has been appropriately observed, "all (those who give their lives) sacrifice some, but some (Imam Husayn being an exceptional example) sacrifice all (lives and then some)."

The Immediate Objectives of Imam's Reformative Movement

Given the circumstances that prevailed at the time of Yazid ibn Muawiya's ascension to the caliphate, Imam Husayn(a) had to address four distinct objectives of his movement:

- Delegitimize Yazid's rule which can be extended to any Muslim leader deemed immoral and corrupt
- Respond to the call of Kufans who had invited the Imam to come and lead them which can be extended to the calls of any oppressed Muslims
- Act against the religious corruption of the Umayyad rulers by promoting good and forbidding evil, an obligation incumbent upon all Muslims, which can be extended through time, and
- Propagate and teach the true essence of Islam to the Muslims which can also be extended through time.

The Imam's success in meeting all the above objectives can be assessed against two criteria:

- Yazid had brought on the crisis when he demanded an oath of allegiance from the Imam and coupled it with the threat of "or else." However, he did not ask Imam Zain al-Abidin(a), the next Imam in the line of succession to Prophet Muhammad(s), for a similar oath of allegiance. When Medina rose up in rebellion as described in the previous chapter, Yazid sent his soldiers to brutally put it down, and the surviving residents were forced to pay homage to him, but the Imam was singularly exempted from that demand. Thereafter, no Umayyad or Abbasid ruler ever asked any of the Imams for a pledge of allegiance.

- A standard litmus test of who is triumphant in meeting their objectives in a military or moral confrontation is to determine which of the protagonist's memory stands the test of time. Centuries after the Tragedy of Karbala, Imam Husayn is still remembered and universally extolled for his courageous stand, while Yazid is forgotten and unanimously condemned for his vile actions. A more rigorous test is to ascertain whose principles and values have prevailed ever since as will be discussed in the two sections following.

Professor Hossein Nasr has aptly characterized the sacrifice and the success of Imam Husayn in his mission thus:

The Imam is "the lamp that burns itself but illuminates the world about it" (p.270).

The Message of Karbala: I. Inculcation of Values at the Individual Level

The Tragedy of Karbala provides moral and ethical lessons not just for Muslims but for all of humanity. There are two dimensions to Imam Husayn's(a) message. At the individual level, he taught noble values that should be inculcated in the minds of all, regardless of their ethnicity or creed. At the societal level, the Imam proclaimed fundamental principles of human rights that should guide the actions of all conscientious political and social leaders, however challenging they might be to uphold. These values and principles will be respectively described in this and the next section.

The values were exhibited during the events that took place in the course of the Tragedy of Karbala that show how the Imam reacted to them and/or inspired his companions and relatives to respond to them. Among many manifest values, a few more important ones will be highlighted below.

Pacifism: When Muawiya ibn Abu Sufyan violated the terms of the treaty with Imam Hasan(a) by appointing his son, Yazid, as his heir apparent, Imam Husayn did not act so long as he was not forced to pay allegiance. However, when Yazid succeeded his father and demanded the oath, the Imam could not comply so for his own safety he left Medina. Even after he arrived in Karbala, he engaged in a peace parley with Ibn Saad, the commander of Yazid's forces, but Ibn Ziyad, the governor of Kufa to whom Ibn Saad reported, did not budge.

Steadfastness: When it became clear that nothing short of an oath of allegiance would avoid confrontation with Yazid, the Imam remained

steadfast even though he fully realized the perils of his decision. For, as he had said, "An honorable death is better than life in discredit." When Ibn Saad was ordered, one last time, to extract the oath or else to give battle to the Imam, he responded that, "Al-Husayn will never submit in this manner. His father [Imam Ali's] heart throbs in his breast."

Self-denial: On the way to Kufa, the Imam was intercepted by Hurr ibn Ziyad al-Riyahi, an officer in Yazid's army, who was under orders to block him from proceeding to Kufa. When he caught up with the Imam, his forces were dying of thirst. Without considering his own future needs even though he had young children in his entourage, the Imam placed the water they were carrying with them at the disposal of his enemies who drank themselves and gave it to their horses as well.

Awareness: Everyone participating in a major task should be made aware of the likely consequences of their action. On the eve of Ashura, the Imam gathered his companions and relatives and advised them to leave him to his fate since they would all otherwise be killed in the battle the following day. They all assured him that they had made their decision to stay with him according to the voice of their conscience and took full responsibility for their actions.

Loyalty: On the Day of Ashura, the Imam told Jaun, an Abyssinian slave of Prophet Muhammad's(s) companion, "You have accompanied us all the way but now you may go."

Jaun replied that, "It is not fair that I benefit from your company and hospitality but abandon you in your hardship."

Repentance: Hurr, who had diverted the Imam to Karbala, defected from Yazid's army on the Day of Ashura when he realized that a battle was imminent. He was ashamed and nervous but when he sincerely

pleaded for forgiveness for his action, the Imam, without a word of reproach, assured him that his repentance would be accepted by God.

Patience: The Imam exhibited so much patience that he is called *"Sayyid al-Sabireen"*, the leader of those who remain patient in adversity. Those who saw him on the Day of Ashura reported, "We have never seen a man as composed as Imam Husayn while his relatives and children were being slaughtered before his own eyes."

Propriety: When the companions went to the battlefield, the Imam watched the encounter, and when they fell wounded, he rushed to their side. He retrieved their bodies with the help of others, but he had to recover those of his relatives who followed later mostly by himself. He laid the bodies down near his encampment which served as a makeshift morgue since he wished to ensure that they do not get trampled by the horses' hooves in the event of any crossfire on the battlefield. The Imam, however, neither had the time nor the manpower to bury the dead, except for his infant son, Ali al-Asghar.

A perceptive Lebanese Christian writer, Antoine Bara, portrayed the person of Imam Husayn as "The Conscience of all religions" (Interview about his book on Imam Hussein in Christian Ideology, transcript on various websites). He included "all" religions in his statement because they and, most especially, the Abrahamic religions preach the same moral and ethical values that the Imam exhibited; and he deemed Imam Husayn to be its "conscience" because no other reformative leader had upheld those values so consistently and resolutely as he did despite severe hardships and intense agony.

The Message of Karbala: II. Upholding of Principles at the Societal Level

Islam lays great emphasis on combating the heinous societal ills of injustice and inequity, and of tyranny and oppression:

> Justice in Islam is defined as giving to every holder of rights their due rights under the law, so **injustice** becomes transgressing or withholding the rights of others
>
> Equity in Islam is designated as fair but not necessarily equal treatment of individual members of the society, so **inequity** becomes biased treatment without regard to their merit
>
> **Tyranny** is considered to be the cruel or arbitrary use of power by a single, tyrant ruler or a person of authority who wields absolute power over others; they are unrestrained by law and defend their position by repressive means. It is a matter of control.
>
> **Oppression** is the exercise of that power or authority in a cruel or unjust manner; it usually involves denying target groups of people any meaningful human or civil rights and terrorizing them through the imposition of harsh punishment. It is a matter of affliction.

Indeed, the Arabic word *zulm* encompasses all the above societal ills and is used as the opposite of justice; in its various forms, it is one of the most frequently used terms in the Qur'an. Every problem involving different states or groups within a state is born out of a sense of injustice, real or imaginary.

Imam Ali ibn Abi Talib(a) explains that injustice is of three kinds:

- The injustice that will not be forgiven is *shirk*, associating partners with Allah(swt).
- The injustice that may be forgiven is an injustice a person does to themselves by committing sins, and
- The injustice that will not be left unquestioned is the injustice of persons against other persons.

As described in Chapter IV, the societal ills took root especially under an Umayyad caliph around the middle of the seventh century CE and they accelerated after the establishment of the Umayyad Dynasty a decade or so later. They impacted many people, most especially the progeny of Prophet Muhammad(s) and their followers.

Imam Husayn(a) stood up against *zulm* by using sacrifice as a vehicle for expressing grievances against infringements of fundamental human rights with a view to mobilizing people for political action. The message was not just restricted to people of his era but is also applicable to all humankind in the future. For when the Imam made the final call of *Hal Min Nasirin Yansurna* (Is there anyone who will come to our aid?) just before he set out to sacrifice his life, he was not calling upon his companions and relatives for they all had already been killed, but he was calling upon the conscience of all peoples at all times toward social justice.

Karbala thus resounds even today and will continue to resound until the end of time. The continuing relevance of the Imam's message is best captured in the famous lyrics:

Every Day Is Ashura, Every Land Is Karbala

Any casual observer of the world scene recognizes that the truth of the lyrics is more evident today than ever before. Transgressions of human rights have become so rampant and far-flung that they occur almost every day (so every day is indeed ASHURA) and in virtually all the countries of the world (so every land is indeed KARBALA). People impacted are not just Muslims of different persuasions but also people of all other faiths, monotheistic or polytheistic, and of no faith in all walks of life.

Imam Husayn's call was not emotional, but physical. Prophet Muhammad has indicated three different ways in which the call to action could be implemented and, depending upon a person's capabilities, he set up a priority among the ways:

> *"Whoever of you observes an evil [in the society] must object over it physically with his* **hand**; *and if he does not have the power of that, then he must object over it by his* **tongue**; *and if he does not have the strength of that, he must object over it in his* **heart**. *And this [the third alternative] is the lowest status of faith."*

World's Extolment of Imam Husayn(a)

The followers of *Ahl al-Bayt* (the Prophet's infallible progeny) gather together in all corners of the world to commemorate the Tragedy of Karbala with the same fervor year after year. It keeps the memory of the epic event alive and stiffens their resolve to live the message of Imam Husayn. A wide spectrum of prominent scholars (Muslims and non-Muslims) and leaders (religious and political) have taken note of these observances over the years and sought to understand the dynamic force behind them. They have been so inspired that they have left incisive comments about the Tragedy of Karbala. A sample of their comments will be weaved into a coherent narrative below (collage of quotes on Imam Husayn on various Islamic websites).

Collectively, they make two profound overall observations. The first is the steadfastness of Imam Husayn and his companions: "No one faltered for a moment and bravely faced the greatest odds without flinching" (K. Sheldrake). The second is the enormity of their sacrifice: "In a distant age and clime, the tragic scene of the death of Husayn will awaken the sympathy of the coldest reader" (English historian Edward Gibbon). These observations lead them to two fundamental conclusions. Firstly, Imam Husayn and his companions had absolute faith in Allah(swt): "They were the rigid believers of God" (Scottish historian Thomas Carlyle). Secondly, the Imam could not have taken such a stand had it not been for a lofty cause: "He sacrificed purely for Islam" (English novelist Charles Dickens). Thus, he not only "Awakened the sleeping Muslim nation" (Indian Muslim poet Muhammad Iqbal) but also inspired others to learn from him, "How to achieve victory while being oppressed" (Indian freedom fighter Mahatma Gandhi among the likes of Nelson Mandela and Martin Luther King).

Beyond these general statements, these scholars and leaders maintain, "No battle in the modern and past history of mankind has ... provided more lessons than the martyrdom of Husayn" (Antoine Bara). The specific lessons include: "water[ing] the dry garden of freedom" (Muhammad Iqbal), "keep[ing] alive justice and truth" (Bengali poet Rabindranath Tagore), setting an "example of the path of righteousness" (1st Indian Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru) and, above all, by refusing to pledge allegiance to Yazid, declaring "there is no Deity except Allah" (Sufi saint Khwaja Moinuddin Chisti).

The **universality and immortality** of Imam Husayn's message are best captured separately by two Indian statesmen, both past Presidents of India:

"The sacrifice of Imam Husayn is not limited to one country or nation, but it is the hereditary state of the brotherhood of all mankind." (Rajendra Prasad)

"Though Imam Husayn gave his life [over] 1300 years ago, but his indestructible soul rules the hearts of people even today." (Radha Krisnan)

There is no character quality more important than a sensitive, social conscience. When the wider public comes to know and grasps the narrative of Karbala, they will achieve a heightened sensitivity, a

sharpening of their receptivity to human suffering and pain, and will develop compassion and kindness for all people afflicted with sorrow and anguish. They will all then proudly claim that **"Husayn is ours."**

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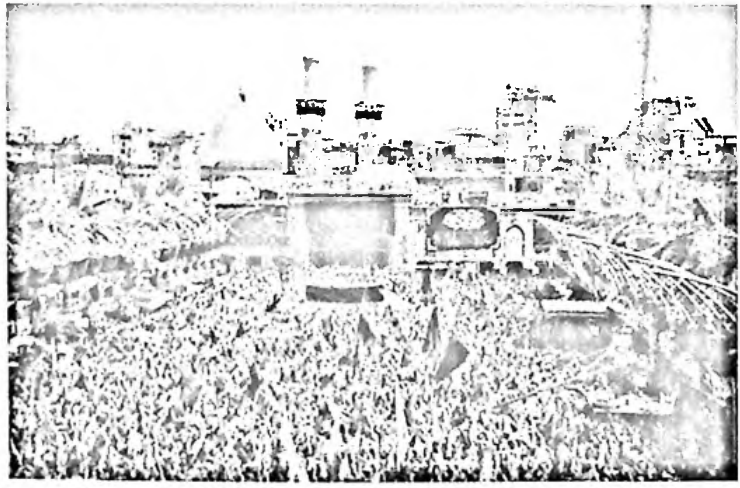
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APPENDIX A

IMAM ALI IBNE ABI TALIB – THE FATHER OF IMAM HUSAYN

Imam 'Ali, the fourth Caliph of Islam and the first Imam in Shia Islam of the Ahlul Bayt, is the father of Imam Husayn. He is well known for his abiding contribution to spiritual thought, and he is just as famous for being a great jurist. We are including a letter that Imam Ali wrote as Caliph to one of his governors in Egypt, Malik Al-Ashtar. Imam Ali being the father of Imam Husayn is also considered as his teacher and spiritual guide, grooming him for both the real work and the world of spirituality. This letter can provide an inside to the thoughts and teachings of Imam Ali, that his son Imam Husayn also acted up and carried through. This letter serves as a basic guide in any type of administration.

The essence of the letter can be summed up in the following paragraph taken from the letter.

"There are two types of people. They are either your brothers in faith or your brothers in humanity. And both deserve your compassion and justice..."

Imam Ali's Letter to Malik al-Ashtar

Be it known to you, O, Malik, that I am sending you as Governor to a country which in the past has experienced both just and unjust rule. Men will scrutinize your actions with a searching eye, even as you used to scrutinize the actions of those before you and speak of you even as you did speak of them.

The fact is that the public speaks well of only those who do good. It is they who furnish the proof of your actions. Hence the richest treasure that you may covet would be the treasure of good deeds. Keep your desires under control and deny yourself that which you have been prohibited from, for, by such abstinence alone, you will be able to distinguish between what is good to them and what is not.

Develop in your heart the feeling of love for your people and let it be the source of kindliness and blessing to them. Do not behave with them like a barbarian, and do not appropriate to yourself that which belongs to them. Remember that the citizens of the state are of two categories. They are either your brethren in religion or your brethren in kind. They are subject to infirmities and liable to commit mistakes.

Some indeed do commit mistakes. But forgive them even as you would like God to forgive you. Bear in mind that you are placed over them, even as I am placed over you. And then there is God even above

him who has given you the position of a Governor in order that you may look after those under you and to be sufficient unto them. And you will be judged by what you do for them.

Do not set yourself against God, for neither do you possess the strength to shield yourself against His displeasure nor can you place yourself outside the pale of His mercy and forgiveness. Do not feel sorry over any act of forgiveness, nor rejoice over any punishment that you may meet out to anyone. Do not rouse yourself to anger, for no good will come out of it.

Do not say: 'I am your overlord and dictator, and that you should, therefore, bow to my commands"' as that will corrupt your heart, weaken your faith in religion and create disorder in the state. Should you be elated by power, ever feel in your mind the slightest symptoms of pride and arrogance, then look at the power and majesty of the Divine governance of the Universe over which you have absolutely no control.

It will restore a sense of balance to your wayward intelligence and give you a sense of calmness and affability.

Beware! Never put yourself against the majesty and grandeur of God and never imitate His omnipotence; for God has brought low every rebel of God and every tyrant of a man.

Let your mind respect through your actions the rights of God and the rights of man, and likewise, persuade your companions and relations to do likewise. For, otherwise, you will be doing injustice to yourself and injustice to humanity. Thus, both man and God will turn unto your enemies. There is no hearing anywhere for one who makes an enemy of God himself. He will be regarded as one at war with God until he feels contrition and seeks forgiveness. Nothing deprives man of

divine blessings or excites divine wrath against him more easily than cruelty. Hence it is, that God listens to the voice of the oppressed and waylays the oppressor.

The Common Man

Maintain justice in administration and impose it on your own self and seek the consent of the people, for, the discontent of the masses sterilizes the contentment of the privileged few and the discontent of the few loses itself in the contentment of the many. Remember the privileged few will not rally around you in moments of difficulty: they will try to side-track justice; they will ask for more than what they deserve and will show no gratitude for favors done to them.

They will feel restive in the face of trials and will offer no regret for their shortcomings. It is the common man who is the strength of the State and Religion. It is he who fights the enemy. So, live in close contact with the masses and be mindful of their welfare.

Keep at a distance one who peers into the weaknesses of others. After all, the masses are not free from weaknesses. It is the duty of the ruler to shield them. Do not bring to light that which is hidden but try to remove those weaknesses which have been brought to light. God is watchful of everything that is hidden from you, and He alone will deal with it. To the best of your ability cover the weaknesses of the public, and God will cover the weaknesses in you that you are anxious to keep away from their eye.

Unloose the tangle of mutual hatred between the public and the administration and remove all those causes which may give rise to strained relations between them. Protect yourself from every such act as may not be quite correct for you. Do not make haste in seeking confirmation of tale-telling, for the taleteller is a deceitful person appearing in the

garb of a friend.

The Counsellors

Never take counsel of a miser, for he will vitiate your magnanimity and frighten you of poverty. Do not take the advice of a coward either, for he will weaken your resolve. Do not take counsel of the greedy: for he will instill greed in you and turn you into a tyrant. Miserliness, cowardice, and greed deprive man of his trust in God.

The worst of counselors is he who has served as a counselor to unjust rulers and shared in their crimes. So, never let men who have been companions of tyrants or shared their crimes be your counselors. You can get better men than these, men gifted with intelligence and foresight, but unpolluted by sin, men who have never aided a tyrant in his tyranny or a criminal in his crime. Such men will never be a burden on you. On the other hand, they will always be a source of help and strength to you. They will be friends to you and strangers to your enemies.

Choose such men alone for companionship both in privacy and in the public. Even among these, show preference to them who have a habitual regard for truth, however trying to you at times their truth may prove to be, and who offer you no encouragement in the display of tendencies which God does not like His friends to develop.

Keep close to you the upright, and the God-fearing, and make clear to them that they are never to flatter you and never to give you credit for any good that you may not have done, for the tolerance of flattery and unhealthy praise stimulates pride in man and makes him arrogant.

Do not treat the good and the bad alike. That will deter the good from doing good and encourage the bad in their bad pursuits.

Recompense everyone according to their deserts. Remember that mutual trust and goodwill between the ruler and the ruled are bred only through benevolence, justice and service. So, cultivate goodwill among the people; for their goodwill alone will save you from troubles. Your benevolence to them will be repaid by their trust in you, and your ill-treatment by their ill-will.

Do not disregard the noble traditions established by our forbears, which have promoted harmony and progress among the people; and do not initiate anything which might minimize their usefulness. The men who had established these noble traditions have had their reward; but the responsibility will be yours if they are disturbed. Try always to learn something from the experience of the learned and wise, and frequently consult them in state matters so that you might maintain the peace and goodwill that your predecessors had established in the land.

The Different Classes of People

Remember that the people are composed of different classes. The progress of one is dependent on the progress of every other, and none can afford to be independent of the other. We have the Army formed of the soldiers of God. We have our civil officers and their establishments, our judiciary, our revenue collectors and our public relations officers.

The general public itself consists of Muslims and other subjects and among them of merchants and craftsmen, the unemployed and the indigent. God has prescribed for them their rights, duties and obligations. They are all defined and preserved in the Holy Quran and in the traditions of his Prophet.

The army, by the grace of God, is like a fortress to the people and lends dignity to the state. It upholds the prestige of the faith and

maintains the peace of the country. Without it the state cannot stand. In its turn, it cannot stand without the support of the state. Our soldiers have proved strong before the enemy because of the privilege God has given them to fight for Him; but they have their material needs to fulfill and have therefore to depend upon the income provided for them from the state revenue.

The military and civil population who pay revenue, both need the cooperation of others – the judiciary, civil officers and their establishment. The judge administers civil and criminal law; the civil officers collect revenue and attend to civil administration with the assistance of their establishment. And then there are the tradesmen and the merchants who add to the revenue of the state. It is they who run the markets and are in a better position than others to discharge social obligations.

Then there is the class of the poor and the needy, whose maintenance is an obligation on the other classes. God has given an appropriate opportunity of service to one and all; then there are the rights of all these classes over the administration which the administrator has to meet with an eye on the good of the entire population – a duty which he cannot fulfill properly unless he takes a personal interest in its execution and seeks help from God. Indeed, it is obligatory for him to impose this duty on himself and to bear with patience the inconveniences and difficulties incidental to his task.

The Army

Be particularly mindful of the welfare of those in the army who in your opinion, are staunchly faithful to their God and the prophet and loyal to their chief, and who in the hour of passion can restrain themselves and listen coolly to sensible remonstrance, and who can succor the weak

and smite the strong, whom violent provocation will not throw into a violent temper and who will not falter at any stage.

Keep yourself in close contact with the families of established reputation and integrity with a glorious past and draw to yourself men brave and upright in character, generous and benevolent in disposition; for such are the salt of society.

Care for them with the tenderness with which you care for your children, and do not talk before them of any good that you might have done to them, nor disregard any expression of affection which they show in return, for such conduct inspires loyalty, devotion and goodwill. Attend to every little of their wants not resting content with what general help that you might have given to them, for sometimes, timely attention to a little want of theirs brings them immense relief. Surely these people will not forget you in your own hour of need.

It behooves you to select for your Commander-in-Chief one who imposes on himself as a duty, the task of rendering help to his men, and who can excel in kindness to every other officer who has to attend to the needs of the men under him and look after their families when they are away from their homes; so much so, that the entire army should feel united in their joys and in their sorrows. The unity of purpose will give them added strength against the enemy.

Continue to maintain a kindly attitude towards them so that they might feel attached to you. The fact is that the real happiness of the administrators and their most pleasant comfort lies in establishing justice in the state and maintaining affectionate relations with the people. Their sincerity of feeling is expressed in the love and regard they show to you, on which alone depends the safety of the administrators.

Your advice to the army will be of no avail, unless and until you show affection to both men and officers, in order that they might not regard the Government as an oppressive burden or contribute to its downfall.

Continue to satisfy their needs and praise them repeatedly for what services they have rendered. Such an attitude, God willing will inspire the brave to braver actions and induce the timid to do deeds of bravery.

Try to enter into the feelings of others and do not foist the mistake of one over another and do not grudge dispensing appropriate rewards. See to it, you do not show favors to one who has done nothing but merely counts on his family position; and do not withhold proper rewards from one who has done great deeds simply because he holds a low position in life.

The Real Guidance

Turn to God and to His prophet for guidance whenever you feel uncertain as to what you must do. There is the commandment of God delivered to those people who He wishes to guide aright:

"O people of the Faith! Obey God and obey His prophet and those from among you who hold authority over you. And refer to God and His prophet whenever there is a difference of opinion among you."

(4:59)

To turn to God is in reality to consult the Book of God; and to turn to the prophet is to follow his universally accepted traditions.

Chief Justice

Select as your Chief Justice from the people, one who is by far the best among them – one who is not obsessed with domestic worries, one who cannot be intimidated, one who does not err too often, one who does not turn back from a right path once he finds it, one who is not self-centered or avaricious, one who will not decide before knowing full facts, one who will weigh with care every attendant doubt and pronounce a clear verdict after taking everything into full consideration, one who will not grow restive over the arguments of advocates and who will examine with patience every new disclosure of fact and who will be strictly impartial in his decision, one who flattery cannot mislead or one who does not exult over his position. But it is not easy to find such men.

Once you have selected the right man for the office, pay him handsomely enough, to let him live in comfort and in keeping with his position, enough to keep him above temptations. Give him a position in your court so high none can even dream of coveting it and so high that neither back-biting nor intrigue can touch him.

Subordinate Judiciary

Beware! The utmost carefulness is to be exercised in its selection: for it is this high office that adventurous self-seekers aspire to secure and exploit in their selfish interests. After the selection of your chief judge, give careful consideration to the selection of other officers.

Confirm them in their appointments after approved apprenticeship and probation. Never select men for responsible posts either out of any regard for personal connections or under any influence, for that might lead to injustice and corruption.

Of these, select for higher posts, men of experience, men firm in faith and belonging to good families. Such men will not fall an easy prey to temptations and will discharge their duties with an eye on the abiding good of others. Increase their salaries to give them a contented life.

A contented living is a help to self-purification. They will not feel the urge to tax the earnings of their subordinates for their own upkeep. They will then have no excuse either to go against your instructions or misappropriate state funds.

Keep a watch over them without their knowledge.

Perchance they may develop true honesty and true concern for the public welfare. But whenever any of them is accused of dishonesty and the guilt is confirmed by the report of your secret service, then regard this as sufficient to convict him. Let the punishment be corporal and let that be dealt with in the public at an appointed place of degradation.

Revenue Administration

Great care is to be exercised in revenue administration, to ensure the prosperity of those who pay the revenue to the state, for their prosperity depends on the prosperity of others, particularly of the masses. Indeed, the state exists on its revenue.

You should regard the proper upkeep of the land in cultivation as of greater importance than the collection of revenue, for revenue cannot be derived except by making the land productive. He who demands revenue without helping the cultivator to improve his land, inflicts unmerited hardship on the cultivator and ruins the state.

The rule of such a person does not last long. If the cultivators ask for a reduction in their land tax for having suffered from epidemics,

drought, excessive rainfall, soil infertility, floods impairing the fertility of the land, or the cause of crop damage, then reduce the tax accordingly, so that their condition may improve.

Do not mind the loss of revenue on that account, for that will return to you one day manifold in the hour of greater prosperity of the land and enable you to improve the condition of your towns and to raise the prestige of your state. You will be the object of universal praise. The people will believe in your sense of justice. The confidence that they will place in you, in consequence, will prove your strength, as they will be found ready to share your burdens.

You may settle down on the land of any number of people, but discontent will overtake them if the land is not improved. The cause of the cultivator's ruin is the rulers who are bent feverishly on accumulating wealth at all costs, out of the fear that their rule might not last long. Such are the people who do not learn from examples or precedents.

Clerical Establishment

Keep an eye on your establishment and on your scribes, select the best among them for your confidential correspondence such among these, as possess high character and deserve your full confidence, men who may not exploit their privileged position to go against you, who may not grow neglectful of their duties, who in the drafting of treaties may not succumb to external temptation and harm your interests, or fail to render you proper assistance and to save you from trouble, who in carrying out their duties can realize their serious responsibilities, for he who does not realize his own responsibilities can hardly appraise the responsibilities of others.

Do not select men for such work merely on the strength of your first

impressions of your affection or good faith, for as a matter of fact, the pretensions of a good many who are really devoid of honesty and good breeding, may cheat even the intelligence of rulers. Selection should be made after due probation, which should be the test of righteousness.

In making direct appointments from people, see to it that those selected possess influence with the people and who enjoy the reputation of being honest, for such selection is agreeable to God and the ruler. For every department of administration, let there be a head, whom no trying task might cause worry and no pressure of work annoy.

Remember, every weakness of anyone among your establishment and scribes, which you may overlook, will be written down against you in your scroll of deeds.

Trade and Industry

Treat businessmen and artisans well and advise others to do likewise. Some of them live in towns, while some move from place to place with their wares and tools earning their living by manual labor. Trade and industry are the real sources of profit to the state and the suppliers of consumer goods.

While the general public is not inclined to bear the strain, those engaged in these professions take the trouble to collect commodities from far and near, from land and across the sea, from mountains and forests and naturally derive benefits.

It is this class of peace-loving people from whom no disturbance need be feared. They love peace and order; indeed, they are incapable of creating disorder. Visit every part of the country and establish personal contact with this class and inquire into their condition.

But bear in mind that a good many of them are intensely greedy and are inured to bad dealings. They hoard grain and try to sell it at a high price, and this is most harmful to the public. It is a blot on the name of the ruler not to fight this evil. Prevent them from hoarding, for the prophet of God had prohibited it.

See to it, that trade is carried on with the utmost ease, that the scales are evenly held, and that prices are so fixed that neither the seller nor the buyer is put to a loss. If despite your warning, anyone should go against your commands and commit the crime of hoarding, then deal him appropriately with punishment.

The Poor

Beware! Fear God when dealing with the problem of the poor who have none to patronize them, who are forlorn, indigent, helpless, and are greatly torn in mind – victims of the vicissitudes of time. Among them are some who do not question their lot in life and who, notwithstanding their misery, do not go about seeing alms.

For God's sake, safeguard their rights, for on you rests the responsibility of protecting their interests.

Assign for their uplift a portion of the state exchequer (Bayt al-Mal), wherever they may be, whether close at hand or far away from you. The rights of the two should be equal in your eye. Do not let any preoccupation slip them from your mind, for no excuse whatsoever for the disregard of their rights will be acceptable to God.

Do not treat their interests as of less importance than your own, and never keep them outside the purview of your important considerations and mark the persons who look down upon them and of whose conditions they keep you in ignorance.

Select from among your officers; such men who are meek and God-fearing and who can keep you properly informed of the condition of the poor. Make such provisions for these poor people as shall not oblige you to offer an excuse before God on the Day of Judgement for, it is this section of the people which, more than any other, deserves benevolent treatment.

Seek your reward from God by giving to each of them what is due to him and enjoin on yourself as a sacred duty the task of meeting the needs of such aged among them as have no independent means of livelihood and are averse to seek alms. The discharge of this duty is what usually proves very trying to rulers but is very welcome to societies that are gifted with foresight. It is only such societies or nations who truly carry out with equanimity their covenant with God to discharge their duty to the poor.

Open Conferences

Meet the oppressed and the lowly periodically in an open conference and conscious of the divine presence there, have a heart-to-heart talk with them, and let none from your armed guard or civil officers or members of the Police or the Intelligence Department be by your side, so that the representatives of the poor might state their grievances fearlessly and without reserve.

For I have heard the prophet of God say that no nation or society, in which the strong do not discharge their duty to the weak, will occupy a high position.

Bear with composure any strong language which they may use, and do not get annoyed if they cannot state their case lucidly. Even so, God will open for you his door of blessings and rewards. Whatever you

can give to them, give it ungrudgingly and whatever you cannot afford to give, make that clear to them in utmost sincerity.

There are certain things that call for prompt action. One of them is correspondence regarding the redress of grievances, which your heedless staff has been unable to tackle. See to it that petitions or applications that are submitted for your consideration, are brought to your notice without any delay, however much your officers might try to intercede them. Dispose of the day's work that very day, for the coming day will bring with it its own tasks.

Communion with God

Do not forget to set apart the best of your time for communion with God, although every moment of yours is for Him only, provided it is spent sincerely in the service of your people. The special time that you give to prayer, is to be devoted to the performances of the prescribed daily prayers. Keep yourself engaged in these prayers both in the day and in the night, and to gain perfect communion, do not as far as possible, let your prayers grow tiresome.

When you lead in congregational prayer, do not let your prayer be so lengthy as to cause discomfort to the congregation or raise in them the feeling of dislike for it or liquidate its effect, for in the congregation there may be invalids and also those who have to attend pressing affairs of their own.

When, on receiving an order to proceed to Yemen, I asked of the prophet of God, how I should lead the people there in prayer, he said "Perform your prayers even as the weakest among you would do and set an example of consideration to the faithful".

Aloofness not Desirable

Alongside the observance of all that I have said, bear one thing in mind. Never, for any length of time, keep yourself aloof from the people, for to do so is to keep oneself ignorant of their affairs. It develops in the ruler a wrong perspective and renders him unable to distinguish between what is important and what is not, between right and wrong, and between truth and falsehood. The ruler is after all human, and he cannot form a correct view of anything which is out of sight.

There is no distinctive sign attached to the truth which may enable one to distinguish between the different varieties of truth and falsehood. The fact is that you must be one of two things. Either you are just or unjust. If you are just, then you will not keep yourself away from the people but will listen to them and meet their requirements. But, if you are unjust, the people themselves will keep away from you.

What virtue is there in your keeping aloof? At all events, aloofness is not desirable, especially when it is your duty to attend to the needs of the people. Complaints of oppression by your officers or petitions for justice should not prove irksome to you.

Make this clear to yourself that those immediately about and around you, will like to exploit their position to covet what belongs to others and commit acts of injustice. Suppress such a tendency in them.

Make a rule of your conduct never to give even a small piece of land to any of your relations. That will prevent them from causing harm to the interests of others and save you from courting the disapprobation of both God and man.

Deal justice squarely, regardless of whether one is a relation or not.

If any of your relations or companions violates the law, mete out the punishment prescribed by law, however painful it might be to you personally, for it will be all to the good of the state. If at any time people suspect, that you have been unjust to them in any respect, disclose your mind to them and remove their suspicions. In this way, your mind will get attuned to the sense of justice and people will begin to love you. It will also fulfill your wish that you should enjoy their confidence.

Peace and Treaties

Bear in mind that you do not throw away the offer of peace that your enemy may himself make. Accept it, for that will please God. Peace is a source of comfort to the army; it reduces your worries and promotes order in the state.

But beware! Be on your guard when the peace is signed for, certain types of enemies propose terms of peace just to lull you into a sense of security only to attack you again when you are off your guard. So, you should exercise the utmost vigilance on your part, and place no undue faith in their protestations.

But, if under the peace treaty you have accepted any obligations, discharge those obligations scrupulously. It is a trust and must be faithfully upheld and whenever you have promised anything, keep it with all the strength that you command, for whatever differences of opinion might exist on other matters, there is nothing so noble as the fulfillment of a promise.

This is recognized even among non-Muslims, for they know the dire consequences which follow from the breaking of covenants. So never make excuses in discharging your responsibilities and never break a promise, nor cheat your enemy. For breach of promise is an act against God, and none except the positively wicked acts against God.

Indeed, Divine promises are a blessing spread over all mankind. The promise of God is a refuge sought after, even by the most powerful on earth, for there is no risk of being cheated. So, do not make any promise from which you may afterward offer excuses to retract, nor go back upon what you have confirmed to abide by, nor break it, however galling it may at first prove to be. For it is far better to wait in patience for wholesome results to follow than to break it out of any apprehensions.

Beware! Abstain from shedding blood without a valid cause. There is nothing more harmful than this which brings about one's ruin. The blood that is willfully shed shortens the life of a state. On the Day of Judgement, it is this crime for which one will have to answer first. So, beware! Do not wish to build the strength of your state on blood for, it is this blood that ultimately weakens the state and passes it into other hands. Before me and my God, no excuse for willful killing can be entertained.

Murder is a crime that is punishable by death. If on any account the corporal punishment dealt by the state for any lesser crime results in the death of the guilty, let not the prestige of the state stand in any way of the deceased relations claiming compensation.

Last Instructions

Do not make haste to do a thing before its time, nor put it off when the right moment arrives. Do not insist on doing a wrong thing, nor show slackness in rectifying a wrong thing. Perform everything in its proper time and let everything occupy its proper place.

When the people as a whole agree upon a thing, do not impose your own will on them and do not neglect to discharge the responsibility that rests on you in consequence. For, the eyes of the people will be on you, and you are answerable for whatever you do to

them. The slightest dereliction of duty will bring its own retribution.

Keep your anger under control and keep your hands and tongue in check. Whenever you fall into anger, try to restrain yourself, or else you will simply increase your worries.

It is imperative on you to carefully study the principles which have inspired just and good rulers who have gone before you. Give close thought to the example of our prophet, his traditions, and the commandments of the Holy Qur'an and whatever you might have assimilated from my own way of dealing with things.

Endeavor to the best of your ability to carry out the instructions which I have given you here and which you have solemnly undertaken to follow. By means of this order, I enjoin on you not to succumb to the prompting of your own heart or to turn away from the discharge of duties entrusted to you.

I seek the refuge of the might of the Almighty and of His limitless sphere of blessings and invite you to pray with me that He may give us together with the grace willingly to surrender our will to His Will, and to enable us to acquit ourselves before Him and His creation, so that mankind might cherish our memory and our work survive.

I seek of God the culmination of his blessings and pray that He may grant you and me His grace and the honor of martyrdom in His cause. Verily, we have to return to Him. I invoke His blessings on the Prophet of God and his pure progeny.

United Nations
UN Secretariat
The Committee of Human Rights
New York



The Caliph Ali Bin Abi Talib is considered the fairest governor who appeared during human history (After the Prophet Muhammad). So we advise Arab countries to take Imam Ali bin Abi Talib (AS) as an example in establishing a regime based on justice and democracy and encouraging knowledge.

إن خليفة المسلمين علي بن ابي طالب يعتبر اعدل حاكم ظهر في تاريخ البشر بعد الرسول محمد لذلك ننصح . البلدان العربية الى الاقتداء به كمثال لتأسيس نظام قائم على العدالة والديمقراطية وتشجيع المعرفة.

KOFI ANNAN
SECRETARY-GENERAL OF THE UN
كوفي أنان
الأمين العام للأمم المتحدة

UNITED NATIONS

APPENDIX B

IMAM ZAYN AL-ABIDEEN – THE SON OF IMAM HUSAYN

Imam Zayn Al-Abideen was one of the sons of Imam Husayn, and happened to be present at Karbala. He is considered as the 4th Imam in the Shia faith. *'Treatise on Rights'* (*Risalat al-Huquq* in Arabic) is attributed to him, aside from other supplications and sayings.

In 'Treatise on Rights', Imam Zayn Al-Abideen explains what is meant by `everyone who possesses a right.' He provides examples while also using the Qur'an, the *sunna* and *Ahadith* (sayings.)

The word *haqq* translates best as `right', but it has several closely related meanings such as justice, truth, reality, correctness, properness, appropriateness, necessity, incumbency, obligation and duty.

Being the son of Imam Husayn, Imam Zayn Al-Abideen was taught by him, and obtained much of his knowledge from him. We included some of the rights here to also provide an insight into the character and personality of Imam Husain.

Treatise on Rights

The Right of One who Trains through Knowledge

The right of the one who trains you through knowledge is magnifying him, respecting his sessions, listening well to him, and attending to him

with devotion. You should not raise your voice toward him. You should never answer anyone who asks him about something, in order that he may be the one who answers. You should not speak to anyone in his session nor speak ill of anyone with him. If anyone ever speaks ill of him in your presence, you should defend him. You should conceal his faults and make manifest his virtues. You should not sit with him in enmity or show hostility toward him in friendship. If you do all of this, God's angels will give witness for you that you went straight to him and learned his knowledge for God's sake, not for the sake of the people.

The Rights of Subjects through Knowledge

The right of your subjects through knowledge is that you should know that God made you a caretaker over them only through the knowledge He has given you and His storehouses which He has opened up to you. If you do well in teaching the people, not treating them roughly or annoying them, then God will increase His bounty toward you. But if you withhold your knowledge from people or treat them roughly when they seek knowledge from you, then it will be God's right to deprive you of knowledge and its splendor and to make you fall from your place in people's hearts.

The Right of the Wife

The right of your wife is that you know that God has made her a repose and a comfort for you; you should know that she is God's favor toward you, so you should honor her and treat her gently. Though her right toward you is more incumbent, you must treat her with. If she is ignorant, you should pardon her.

The Right of the Mother

The right of your mother is that you know that she carried you where

no one carries anyone, she gave to you of the fruit of her heart that which no one gives to anyone, and she protected you with all her organs. She did not care if she went hungry as long as you ate, if she was thirsty as long as you drank, if she was naked as long as you were clothed, if she was in the sun as long as you were in the shade. She gave up sleep for your sake, she protected you from heat and cold, all so that you might belong to her. You will not be able to show her gratitude, unless through God's help and giving success.

The Right of the Father

The right of your father is that you know that he is your root. Without him, you would not be. Whenever you see anything in yourself which pleases you, know that your father is the root of its blessing upon you. So, praise God and thank Him in that measure. And there is no strength save in God.

The Right of the Child

The right of your child is that you should know that he is from you and will be ascribed to you, through both his good and his evil, in the immediate affairs of this world. You are responsible for what has been entrusted to you, such as educating him in good conduct, pointing him in the direction of his Lord, and helping him to obey Him. So, act toward him with the action of one who knows that he will be rewarded for good doing toward him and punished for evildoing.

The Right of One who does a Kindly Act

The right of him who does a kindly act toward you is that you thank him and mention his kindness; you reward him with beautiful words, and you supplicate for him sincerely in that which is between you and God. If you do that, you have thanked him secretly and openly. Then, if

you are able to repay him one day, you repay him.

The Right of the Neighbor

The right of your neighbor is that you guard him when he is absent, honor him when he is present, and aid him when he is wronged. You do not pursue anything of his that is shameful; if you know of any evil from him, you conceal it. If you know that he will accept your counsel, you counsel him in that which is between him and you. You do not forsake him in difficulty, you release him from his stumble, you forgive his sin, and you associate with him generously. And there is no strength save in God.

The Right of the Adversary who has a claim against you

The right of the adversary who has a claim against you is that, if what he claims against you is true, you give witness to it against yourself. You do not wrong him, and you give him his full due. If what he claims against you is false, you act with kindness toward him and you show nothing in his affair other than kindness; you do not displease your Lord in his affair. And there is no strength save in God.

The Right of one who seeks advice

The right of him who asks you for advice is that, if you consider that he has a correct opinion, you advise him to follow it, and if you do not consider it so, you direct him to someone who does consider it so.

The Right of one whose Advice you seek

The right of him whom you ask for advice is that you do not make accusations against him for an opinion that does not conform to your own opinion. If it conforms to it, you praise God.

The Right of one who asks your Counsel

The right of him who asks your counsel is that you give him your counsel, but you conduct yourself toward him with compassion and kindness.

The Right of the Counselor

The right of your counselor is that you act gently toward him and give an ear to him. If he presents you with the right course, you praise God, but if he does not agree with you, you show compassion toward him and make no accusations against him; you consider him to have made a mistake, and you do not take him to task for that unless he should be deserving of accusation. Then attach no more importance to his affair. And there is no strength save in God.

To introduce Imam Husayn and his stand and message along with his character to the general public, *Message of Peace Inc.* from an interfaith platform, has been organizing the annual ***Husain Day Seminars*** in the New York and New Jersey area since 1978. ***Message of Peace*** strives to invite speakers and intellectuals from different walks of life and backgrounds including priests, rabbis and maulanas / imams, professors and scholars, community leaders and government officials and representatives, and others to share their thoughts and viewpoints on different areas from different perspectives when it comes to Imam Husayn and what he stood for and ultimately gave his life for. We are including four transcripts from the different years that ***Husain Day*** was held.

APPENDIX C

TRADITIONS OF ABRAHAM: THOUGHTS ON MARTYRDOM IN JUDAISM AND ISLAM

(This article was later further edited and presented as an afterthought and critique to the particular Husain Day where it was originally delivered.)

"People often hate most those things that they do not know or cannot understand"

—Ali[3]

The "24th Annual Husain Day Convention," held in Queens, New York, on March 30th, 2003, was an unusual gathering organized primarily by Shi'ites of South Asian heritage. The theme was "Peace and Understanding through Religions." Speakers included South Asian Muslims, both Sunni and Shi'i, from both sides of the Indian-Pakistani

[3] This quotation is widely available in lists of quotations of Ali, for example, http://www.nahjulbalagha.org/sayings.php where it is no. 171. The quotation is apparently from Ali's *Nahj al-balagha* but none of the websites examined quotes a printed source, nor is it easily retrievable from a search index available of an English translation of the *Nahj al-balagha*.

divide; and a broad selection of other Muslims and non-Muslims. The conference was particularly heated not only by the situation in Iraq, but also by violence between Muslims and Hindus in South Asia, including the recent flare-ups in Kashmir and slaughter in Gujarat. The issue I was specifically asked to comment upon was Abraham and traditions of martyrdom. My comments, edited here to be somewhat more suitable for the current venue, were offered in the spirit of seeking to further dialogue and mutual understanding, while maintaining a fundamental respect for very real differences together with the commitment to presenting material from within each tradition which could promote openness to fair dialogue.[4]

The organizers of the convention were remarkable for the clarity of their vision. Politicians exchanged barbed comments and armies exchanged bombs and bullets, but they stayed true to their commitment "to engaging each other in an exchange of ideas and thoughts about how we can work towards a productive and peaceful society, and ways we can learn [from] and understand each other."[5]

All too often, the issues which demand our attention are policy or military issues— "who gets what, where, and when"[6]—who controls whom. The same types of issues would be my focus if I were speaking as a historian or in the classroom analyzing the factors which led up to or resulted from the fateful battle between forces loyal to Yazid, the Umayyad Caliph, and Husain, the son of Ali and the grandson of

[4]It is a mark of our troubled times that in early 2003, (when this address was originally delivered) members of our faculty were asked, by the President of the University of Wyoming to inform audiences when lecturing about Middle East-related issues, that, while speaking as a member of the faculty of that University with expertise in this area, my views are my own and not necessarily those of the University.

[5] Hasan M. Rizvi, a student organizer, email to participants, 23 Sept, 2002.

[6]This formulation is usually associated with Harold D. Lasswell, *Politics: who gets what, when, how*, New York: P. Smith, 1936 (Reissued 1950).

Muhammad. But the Husain Day Conference challenged its speakers to concentrate on the values that Imam Husain symbolizes for those who celebrate his life and death annually. The shared search for peace and understanding through religious discourse, teaches us to emphasize ideas, culture, and religion rather than politics and war as our most potent tools in the search for liberty, justice and freedom.

Imam Husain's death on the fields of Karbala is recalled by Shī'īs in the Islamic month of Muharram. For Shi'ites, the lessons of his life story include the necessity to stick behind liberty, justice and freedom at all costs, and ultimately, to support these goals whether or not we can mobilize men, money and material. In traditional Shī'ī societies, Husain's death is recalled with processions, with a retelling of the story of his martyrdom, and with self-mortifications. But Imam Husain's story is more than that. It is about his rejection of tyranny—but it is also about his loyalty to his political commitments before Yazīd came to power. It is about his disregard for personal safety—but it is also about passing along values. These values include loyalty and generosity, faith and honesty—as well as family and continuity, symbolized by the narratives of how the Prophet Muhammad played with a very young Imam Husain on his knee,[7] and how Imam Husain protected his son, 'Ali, destined to become the fourth Imam, 'Alī Zayn al-'Ābidīn.

More than anything else, it is about the commitment to light[8] and truth. For the organizers of the "Husain Day Annual Conference," the legacy of Imam Husain went far beyond merely repeating the rituals, and understanding the legacy of the Third Imam of Shī'ī Islam, to include a call for action to promote fruitful dialogue, a dialogue which eschews

[7] Encyclopedia of Islam, article al-Husayn ⊠ Alī b. Abī Tālib, 3:607, citing a collection of stories by Ibn Kathir.

[8] Ibid., section —The Legend of Husayn.

power politics and dynastic domination to concentrate on the deepest issues of peace and understanding, with deep respect for the diversity and truth.

The story of Abraham is a good place to start. This story is shared by all three monotheistic religions; in late antiquity and in the days of the Prophet Muhammad and Imam Husain, it was shared also by the "Sābi'ans" and by others as well.[9] For Jews and Muslims, the account of his willingness to sacrifice his beloved son, promised by God, is a central theme. The "binding of Isaac" is called '*Aqeda*»עקדה "binding" in Hebrew. Interestingly, this is the same root and nearly the same word as *'aqīda* عقيدة"belief"—indeed the kind of belief and faith which can be held by all men. The story of the 'Aqedah is recounted by the Jews in the synagogues every year on Rosh Ha-Shanah, the "Jewish New Year," the beginning of the Jewish month of Tishrei, in the fall, usually considered to be parallel to the Arab month of Muharram.[10] It also found a place in the daily recitations of Biblical passages found in the traditional prayer book as a prelude to the formal prayer, and thus was recited every day for generations by pious Jews.[3] Perhaps most important in our context,

[9]Nabatean Agriculture was widely known in medieval times in its Arabic translation, Al-Filāha al-Nabatiyya, recently edited and published in Arabic by Toufic Fahd, Damascus, 1993-1998, and various Arabic paraphrases, and considered to be associated with the Sabi'an religion. Assuming that at its core the Arabic versions in fact translated an earlier, Aramaic work, it provides evidence of a group of star-worshippers who told many stories about the Biblical Abraham in late antiquity and early Islamic times. The term Sabi'an is not without its problems. In the Arabic-speaking Middle Ages, there were a number of opinions about who the Sabians were. Some considered this to be the name of the ancient polytheism at the basis of Egyptian, Greek and Mesopotamian idolatry. Others considered it to be a form of monotheism based on a scripture. The relationship between this group and the Hanīf religion— supposedly monotheism—has been subject to much debate.

[10] Muharram is often thought to have begun in the fall in an ancient Meccan calendar which kept pace with the sun, unlike the Islamic calendar, which does not. I explored some of the issues and suggested solutions in S. Ward:Teach us to Number our days: The Elusive Epoch in Muslim, Jewish, and Christian Calendar Millennialism from the Hebrew Bible to the Present. (Studies in Jewish Civilization Vol. 12) L. Greenspoon and R.A. Simkins, ed. Creigh-

ton University Press, University of Nebraska Press, 2002. 63-90.

Rosh Ha-Shanah begins a ten-day period leading up to the tenth of Tishrei—the Day of Atonement, Yom Kippur. Usually associated with the 'Āshūrā', Yom Kippur is, like the Shī'ī observance of 'Āshūrā', closely tied to learning lessons from acts of faith and sanctification of the divine name.

Which son of Abraham was to be offered as a sacrifice? For Jews and Christians, the answer is simple: The Bible text says Isaac. For Muslims, however, the Qur'an does not specify which one; early Muslim historians and commentators, such as al-Tabarī, are convinced that Isaac is the better answer, although today most Muslims believe that it could only have been Ismā'īl.[11] This is an important difference, and we must accept that today's Jews and Muslims may not be able to agree about the identity of the *al-dhabīh* "the one who was to have been slaughtered."

I will not seek to resolve this difference here. Indeed, our challenge is to respect difference. All too often we are in positions in which we are asked to find "unity in the community" or to "celebrate diversity." Yet these celebrations too often focus on similarities—some substantial, some not. What is truly difficult—and our challenge today—is to respect diversity.

Instead, it may be instructive to examine two central questions about the response of *al-dhabīh*—in the Jewish tradition always Isaac—to this ordeal. What did he think about it, and what did he do as a result?

[11] Al-Tabarī noted that both views had been supported by statements reported on the authority of Muhammad but suggests that the Qur'ān itself proves that the better version of the account is the one which Isaac is offered by his father. 1:290ff.; the Qur'ānic proof: 1:300. For discussions of these stories the views of other Islamic scholars, see, e.g., the brief note to 1:290, (Brinner, The History of Al-Tabarī II: Prophets and Patriarchs, Albany: SUNY Press, 1987, p. 82). See also R. Firestone, Journeys in Holy Lands, Albany: SUNY Press, 1990, 135-151, who notes that Tabarī's choice has no following among contemporary Muslims. Khaleel Mohammed, Journal of culture and religion (Concordia University, Montreal), 13 (1999) 125-138.

As for the first question—Was the son as prepared to be a martyr as was the father to offer him? —This is explicit in the Qur'an: Abraham tells the sacrificial son that he is to be sacrificed and the son tells Abraham "do as you are bidden" (37:102). As for the Biblical text, the agreement goes unmentioned, yet the Rabbis understand Isaac's agreement as implicit. In Genesis 22:8-9, Isaac asks his father where the lamb for the sacrifice is; Abraham tells him that God will provide the lamb (Gen. 22:7-8), and it is understood by tradition that Isaac knew from this that he was to be the sacrifice. Then the Bible says, "they went together" (Gen. 22:8, cf. 22:6)—the second time these words occur in the normally sparse Biblical discourse. This is understood by the commentators to indicate that Isaac knew and was at peace with God's decree. The *Aqedah* is thus not only about Abraham's readiness to sacrifice, but about Isaac's acceptance, his readiness to die for the sanctification of God's name.[12]

The second question may be more important: What does one do *after* the Aqedah? This question is irrelevant to the Qur'an, but here Jewish tradition has several answers.

1. ***He studied***. Unlike the Qur'an, the Bible is very much a linear narrative. Abraham's return from Mount Moriah is mentioned, but Isaac's is not, from which the Rabbis deduce that Isaac did not go back. In an interesting parallel with Shī'ī stories, some texts assume that Isaac was indeed sacrificed, and later returned to life. These versions were especially poignant in periods of great tribulation for the Jewish people. The Rabbis also suggest that Isaac went to study with the elder sage of his generation, Noah's son Shem, still alive according to Biblical chronology.[13]

[12] Genesis Rabbah 56:4, 8, and Rashi commentary on Gen. 22:8. Shalom Spiegel's volume, *The Last Trial: On the legends and lore of the command to Abraham to offer Isaac as a sacrifice*, New York: Pantheon Books, 1967, is a study of many of the midrashic and poetic elaborations of this passage.

[13] Gen. Rabbah 56:11; Midrash Ha-Gadol on the verse, and numerous other places.

2. ***He married.*** The death of Abraham's wife is the next subject discussed in the Bible and the Rabbis link it to the *'Aqeda* as well: Sarah died when she learned of the sacrifice of her son, or when she saw that Abraham had returned but Isaac had not. Next is the account of how a wife is found for Isaac, his cousin Rebecca. He marries and is consoled for the loss of his mother. Rebecca's kindness, by the way, is a mark of her suitability to marry Abraham's son. In a story reminiscent of the kindness shown by Imam Husain, Abraham's servant asks Rebecca for water. She offers, unasked, to draw water for his camels as well.[14]

3. ***He prayed.*** The Bible reports that when Rebecca came to Isaac's abode, he had gone out *la-suahba-sadeh* "to converse in the field" (Gen. 24:63). But to converse with whom? The Rabbis understand this as meaning to converse with God: to pray the afternoon prayer. (Abraham, who "arose early" to go to Moriah, Gen. 22:3, but see also 19:27 and 21:14, is understood to have instituted the prayer of *Shaharit* "dawn.") and Jacob the *ma'riv* or evening prayer.[15]

4. ***He remains faithful to the promise of patrimony and works in this world.*** Isaac never left the land of his birth, heeding God's command. He has children, digs wells, and works the land as a farmer (unusual among the patriarchs, who are otherwise depicted as nomadic shepherds) and raiser of livestock.

So here we have it: connection to the past and to the future, with study and marriage, with faith and prayer, with family and work. "God will see the lamb as He sees fit." (Genesis 22:8). We must be ready for martyrdom if that is God's will— but we must be just as ready to seek holiness in our daily lives. The ideals of our ancestors are not merely

[14]Genesis 24:12-19. Husain's kindness with water is associated with drawing water even for his enemies: Syed Husain M Jafri, Origins and early development of Shi'a Islam, London: Longman, 1979, Chapter 7, at note 29. (Viewed at http://www.karbala-najaf.org/shia-ism/174-221.htm, 20 July 2004).

[15]Babylonian Talmud Berakhot 26b, Bereishit Rabba 60:14.

beacons of light in trying times, but shape and model our responses to the challenges which greet us every day in our families and careers.

Other Stories of Abraham

Jewish tradition tells other stories of Abraham. One of the most popular—found not in the Bible but in the Midrash, collections of commentaries and narrative elaborations on the Bible but known to almost all Jews—is how he destroyed the idols of his father. The story is familiar from the Qur'an as well.[16] When I learned this story as a youth, it was always recounted that Abraham's father had an "idol shop." Abraham took his baseball bat to knock off the heads of the idols except for the largest one, in whose hands he then put the bat. When his father came home, Abraham explained that the one idol had gotten mad at all the others and behaved like a big bully, knocking them over with the bat. When Terah protested that the idols had no power and could not do this, Abraham said "Ahah! That's the point!" Recently, I learned that Canadians retell the story in much the same way, except that Abraham used his hockey stick to do the deed. The Midrash also has stories about Abraham and Nimrod, and Abraham's trial in the furnace; these stories are known to Islam and play a role, interestingly, even in the *Kitāb al-Filāha al-Nabatzyya,* supposedly a translation of a pre-Islamic pagan work.[17]

Genesis 14 is a lengthy account of Abraham's fight against the tyrants of Iraq and Iran of those days: the Biblical Amrafel of Shin'ar, Kedorla'omer of Elam—identified with historical Kings of Babylonia—the land from Najaf to Baghdad—and Elam, east of the Tigris, near Basra, today inside Iran, and two other Kings. They had captured Lot. Abraham

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[16]Pesahim 118a; Qur'ān 6:74 and 21:51ff.

[17]See reference above, note 7.

and his two allies took 318 soldiers and, despite the unequal odds, they were able to subdue them and release their prisoners. Here Abraham fights to save his family and neighbors. The point of the story, though, is not his military might, nor his readiness to die fighting. Instead, the story stresses his generosity and commitment to family, which led a prominent local priest to bless God on his account.[18]

Other Stories of Martyrdom

Abraham's readiness to sacrifice his son, and Isaac's readiness to be sacrificed, are a prime model for the Jewish concept of *Kiddush ha-shem* "sanctification of the [Divine] name"–including readiness for martyrdom should the case arise.

In Greco-Roman times, we read of the story of a woman whose seven sons refused to submit to a tyrant who demanded that they worship an idol. One by one, with their mother's blessing, they refused to bow down to the image. The youngest one was offered a ruse in which the king offered him a gold ring, placed in such a way that it would only appear that he was bowing before the idol when he picked it up. He not only refused but chided the King for being more concerned about his image than even about the worship of his God. Their mother, nameless in some versions of the story, and called Hannah or Miriam in others, then compared herself to Abraham, who bound his son but did not lose him—whereas she gave the ultimate sacrifice of all her seven sons. [19]

The binding of Isaac was also invoked in Medieval Europe, when a group of Crusaders complained that they need not wait until they get to Jerusalem to fight those who do not believe in Christianity when

[18] Curiously, this story has what may be an echo in the Nabatean Agriculture, in which — Abraham the Canaanitel invades Mesopotamia(!)

[19] Probably first encountered in 2 Maccabees 7; see G.D. Cohen —Hannah and her seven sons,I Encyclopedia Judaica 7:1270-1272 for all the references in Jewish literature, and the development of this story.

there were unbelievers—Jews—close at hand. In Jewish accounts of the Crusades, the Jews of the Rhineland are depicted as recalling the sacrifice of Isaac. They told the story of the death of their coreligionists as one of martyrdom at their own hands in order to make an atoning and redeeming sacrifice—recalling the sacrifice of Isaac.

Indeed, even the hint of willingness to compromise was seen as requiring expiation.[20]

Yom Kippur

A story is told of Rabbi Amnon of Mainz in the same framework—according to the narrative, he had no intention of acceding to requests by the local bishop to apostatize. Nevertheless, Amnon eventually told him to wait three days for an answer. The story goes on to say that Amnon turned him down, after which the Bishop tortured Amnon by cutting off his arms and legs; Amnon is said to have viewed this as just punishment to himself for giving the impression he might abandon his faith. While being tortured, Amnon composed a prayer of intense emotional strength, depicting God as examining each person individually, as a shepherd counts his flock one by one—and how repentance, prayer, and righteousness avert the severe decree. His prayer, *u- netanehtoqef,* is a centerpiece of the liturgy for Rosh ha-Shana and Yom Kippur. [21]

There are other motifs of martyrdom in the Jewish tradition, also recalled on Yom Kippur. The Ten Martyrs, victims of Roman oppression, included Rabbi Akiva. Akiva's greatness as a scholar was such that the Rabbis tell a story that Moses was amazed that God chose to reveal the Torah to him and not to Akiva. Indeed, in the Talmud's telling of this story, Moses was unable to understand Akiva's lectures, consoled

[20]Hebrew accounts of these stories are available in English translation in S. Eidelberg, The Jews and the Crusaders: The Hebrew Chronicles of the First and Second Crusades, Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1977.

[21]Esp. Jud 2861.

only by Akiva's reference to his conclusions as based on the law of Moses received at Sinai. Akiva's end was inglorious—he was brutally killed by the Romans, probably because of his support for the second Jewish uprising; like Husain's fight, it was directed against the brutal tyranny of oppression, and undertaken in the name of restoration of rightful rulership in the land. And like Husain's mission, the Jews were tragically outnumbered. Moses was, according to the Talmudic story, granted a vision of Akiba's end, and saw the Roman's selling his flesh in the marketplace. Moses laments "Such is his teaching, and such is his reward?" God tells him to be quiet and accept the divine will.[22] But every student of Talmud knows that it is the Romans who have disappeared; their descendants have accepted a form of monotheism, while Akiba's teachings went on to form the nucleus of Talmud, the basis of Jewish learning and practice ever since.

Islamic tradition about the naming of Imam Husain suggests a further link to Yom Kippur by recalling that Hasan and Husain were named after two of the sons of Hārūn (Aaron), identified in Islamic sources as *Shabir* and *Shubair.*[23] To be sure, these names for Aaron's sons are unknown in Jewish tradition,[24] and are Aramaic (not Hebrew) equivalents of the names of Ali's sons: *shapir*[25] "beautiful" translates directly to Arabic *hasan*, *shubayr* is formed from *shapir* on the model of the Arabic *husayn.* The two oldest sons of Aaron died offering "strange fire" in the sanctuary (Lev. 10:1-3).[26] Jewish tradition does not paint this as martyrdom but as a tragedy, yet Moses eulogizes them by telling Aaron that God has

[22]Menahot 29b

[23]This is found in the hadith (collection of Abu Dawud) and elsewhere. Some of the sources add a third son of Aaron and of Ali. See: http://www2.irib.ir/worldservice/Etrat/English/Imam3/Birth.htm

[24]Note, however, that several Sassanian rulers were called Shapur.

[25]Arabic has no —pl; this would normally be represented as Shabīr in Arabic.

[26]See also Num. 3:4, 26:61 and I Chron 24:2.

said "I shall be sanctified by those closest to Me." Perhaps the account of naming the sons of Ali after Aaron's sons is symbolic both of claims of continuity of leadership residing in the line of Aaron, and of the sanctification achieved through their deaths. Yet there is another lesson here that brings us back to Yom Kippur. No chronology for the deaths of Aaron's sons is offered but the Yom Kippur ritual was revealed to Moses "after the death of Aaron's two sons" (Lev. 16:1). In the Jewish ritual, the Torah reading selected for Yom Kippur morning is thus not the account of the death of Aaron's sons, but rather the way to move forward after that event: an annual ritual for atonement, cleansing, and renewal.

Let us return to Abraham

Jewish tradition has Abraham fulfill the entire Torah,[27] notions matched by accounts familiar to Islamic sources that Abraham was a believer, submitting to God, and received the Torah—although he also received ten leaves of his own book, the *Injīl* (Gospels), the *Zābūr* (Psalms) and the *Furqān*, i.e. Qur'an.[28] "Abraham's book" (known to Jews as well as Muslims) was sometimes cited as a rational argument against idolatry and polytheism, a motif well-rehearsed in the stories about his interaction with his father and with Nimrod.[29] Judah Ha-Levi (d.

c. 1141) sees Abraham as the only inheritor of a living tradition of Monotheism among his ancestors, and stresses the role his descendants play. Maimonides (d. 1204), however, sees Abraham as the model of a philosopher, who came to his belief in a single God through reflection,

[27]On Abraham and Isaac fulfilling the entire Torah, see Mishnah Kiddushin4:14, BT Yoma 28b, Nedarim 32a, Pesikta Rabbati 25b (127b).

[28]Tabari I:350.

[29]These stories are not in the Torah of course, but they are encountered in Midrashic elaborations to Gen. 11:28, including in the Midrash Rabbah, and in the Targum Yerushalmi, as well as in the Qur'an.

without being taught.[30] Whereas the Bible's telling of Abraham's story seems to make his *hijra* –his migration away from his homeland—the starting point, Rabbinic tradition adds another level. The Rabbis sought to divide human history into periods. The first was *tohu,* "chaos"—a reference to the situation at the point of Creation when the world was "unformed (*tohu*) and void." (Gen 1:2). They sought to date the end of the period of *tohu* and the beginning of the period of *Torah.* In Islamic discourse, this would be the line between *jāhiliyyah* and revelation. The answer: in the year 2000 "since Creation" according to the Jewish Era, when, at age 52, Abraham began to teach his ideas about monotheism in Harran, before receiving revelations or divine promises. From considering chronology, the Rabbis made a striking conclusion: teaching monotheistic values is a more significant marker of the end of *jāhiliyya* than the rational argument for belief or even God's revelations and promises to Abraham—or Moses.

Islamic sources also connect Abraham with Justice: Abu Dharr al-Ghifari asked the Messenger of God "What were the leaves of Abraham?" (A reference to Abraham's Book.) He answered, they were all proverbs such as 'O dominated, afflicted and deceived king! I did not send you to collect all the world, one part to another, rather I sent you to act justly so that I would not have to hear the cry of the oppressed, for I will not reject that cry even from an unbeliever.' "[31]

Justice too, is a theme of Shi'i appreciation of al-Husain. "Al- Husain comes to teach the people the need to revolt against unjust and impious governments." According to Muslim accounts, a band of angels came to help him on the battlefield, but he insisted that this was his role, and he would fight for himself. He would be the *uswa*" an example." "My

[30] In the Kuzari *(Kitab al-radd wal-dalil fi al-din al-dhalil)* 1:95 and 103; Maimonides, —Laws of Idolatryl in the Mishneh Torah, 1:1-3.
[31] Tabari 1:351.

soul is with your souls my people with your people, and you will find in mean *uswa*." Much has been made of the comparison of Husain with Yahya—John the Baptist—because both resisted evil kings, and both had their heads severed. Yet the comparison with the Binding of Isaac and, for Christians, the self-sacrifice of Jesus, the Lamb of God, is perhaps more instructive.

Many of us today will disagree about which governments or even which religious traditions are tyrannical and suppress freedom. But many of us are—or ought to be—prepared to invest an incredible amount of energy into the role of religion as a source of peace and understanding. Our world is wracked by many disputes in which religious difference plays a role. It is often thought that religion can bring us together— after all, we are all children of the God we all consider to be One. The Tractate Sanhedrin (written down about 200 CE) teaches that only one man was created so that none of us could claim our ancestors were better than anyone else's—and so that we know that one who kills any individual destroys, as it were, an entire world, a sentiment expressed both in the Mishna and in the Qur'an.[32] Religion, however, gives value to difference. The legacy of Husain—and the legacy of Abraham—is that we must teach our children, our students, and our followers through our examples. We must live and teach what is true, strive for justice, and keep our commitments.

Al-Farazdaq (d. ca. 730) is supposed to have met al-Husain while he was traveling from the Pilgrimage to Iraq in 680. He is cited as having said:

[32] Sanhedrin 4:5; Qur'an 5:32. These passages are obviously closely parallel— the language is nearly the same, and both Mishnah and Qur'an discuss this in the context of mentioning the two sons of Adam. There are important differences in the precise wording as well. Scanning the internet for discussion of these parallel texts, one is struck that all too often the debate has been about which text is prior or of greater nobility, rather than exploring the commonality and continuities.

"The hearts of the Iraqis are for him, but their swords are for the Umayyads."[33]

The acts of martyrdom and the readiness for martyrdom remind us that we must strive to have our actions match our thoughts and hearts. In our challenging times, we must examine our deeds and to ensure that they reflect our deepest commitments to liberty, justice and peace.

SETH WARD, PhD
Associate Academic Professional
Lecturer of Religious Studies
University of Wyoming
Laramie WY



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[33]This famous verse was cited, for example, in a letter purportedly from the late leader of al-Qā ida in Iraq, Mūsa al-Zarqāwī, to Usāma b. Lādin, reproduced in http://www.house.gov/ marshall/Zarqawi.html. Ironically, of course, this is a virulently anti-Shi'ite missive.

APPENDIX D

IMAM HUSAIN IBNE ALI IBNE ABI TALIB FROM A CHRISTIAN PERSPECTIVE

At the outset, I would like to tell you how happy and how honored I am to be here at The Al-Khoei Charitable Foundation. When Dr. (Syed M.) Rizvi called me asking me to speak on Imam Husain, I was of course happy to do it. I have always had a great respect for the Shias, and your long and rich mystical and Philosophical traditions. When Dr. Rizvi told me that I was to speak to you at the Islamic Center and told me where it was, I was doubly delighted. For one thing, I went to high school at Archbishop Molloy High School, which is very near here, just up Mansing Street. But even more to the point, I have often driven by the Center and wanted to visit.

As you know, I am a Christian and have spent many years studying Islam and engaging in Christian-Muslim dialogue. I am a Roman Catholic Christian, and my church also has a long tradition of theology - *kalaam*, of philosophy - *falsafa*, of mysticism - *irfaan*, and although we don't have a word for it, we too do something very much like *ijtihad*.

I must say that while there are many important differences between Christianity and Islam, differences, which I believe, must be understood and treasured. The story of Imam Husain ibne Ali ibne Abi Talib has a special residence for us Christians. Both Christians and Muslims believe

that God is powerful and indeed omnipotent. The named *Al-Qadir* and *Al- Muktadir* gives witness to that in the Muslim tradition. Both Christians and Muslims take great consultation in the belief that our God is not only powerful but also good and just. The beautiful names, *Al-Aadil*, the Just One, *Al-Lateef*, the Gentle One, *Al-Karim*, the Generous One, and even *Al-Wali*, the friend, provided tremendous stores of riches for both Christians and Muslims to meditate upon. In fact, the justice, the power, and the goodness of God are qualities upon which believers meditate and from which we draw strength in difficult times.

One of the great mysteries which we as believers encounter is the suffering of the good and righteous persons. Among the Jews, the figure of Job, a Jew. Among the Christians, the person of Jesus, and among the people of the Shia faith, Imam Husain, are pivotal figures in the eternal question not just of human suffering but the suffering of the good person. When the suffering of the good person as in the case of Jesus or Imam Husain suffer at the hands of evil people, the questions become even sharper.

Imam Husain ibne Ali ibne Abi Talib was a beloved grandson of the Prophet. As you all know, better than I, together with his brother, Hasan, Imam Husain was declared *Syed Shabab ahle Janaat* (the Leader of Youth of Heaven). It is clear that he was a man of compassion and patience. Even after the death of his father Ali ibne Abi Talib, Imam Hasan was unwilling to risk the suffering and bloodshed of many people by challenging the Khalifah Muawiyah in Damascus. Imam Husain was not a rash person or one who was unaware of reality. He knew that challenging the ruling power would accomplish nothing and just cause the death and suffering of the people. However, neither was Imam Husain a person of no principles. That became evident when he refused

to do the *Bay'a* to recognize Muawiyah, as the lawful Khalifah. Imam Husain had patience and wisdom, but he was principled and would only accommodate so much.

You are far more familiar with the events that transpired after Imam Husain's refusal to recognize Yazid as the legal Khalifah, and leading up to the tragic events which took place on the 10th of Muharram, 61 year of the *Hijrah*, October 10, 680 AD in the Georgian calendar. You know the weakness and the ultimate treachery of the Kufans. The historians, al-Tabari, recount the events of Karbala in details. How the army under Ubaidullah ibne Ziyad and Omar Ibn Saad made seize to Imam Husain's camp and tortured them with a terrible thirst. Attack after attack reduced the number of the followers of Imam Husain. Although al Tabari states that the Imam had told his followers that they were free to escape, most of them chose to stay, and to stay with him.

In the afternoon of the 10th of Muharram, the battle got brutal. Imam Husain witnessed the death of his son Ali al- Akbar, the death of his nephew, Qasim ibne Hasan ibne Ali, and a young man who had come to the rescue of his uncle. Even al- Abbas, Husain's half-brother was not to survive the battle. In a way, the outcome could hardly have been otherwise, given the fact that the party of the Imam consisted of 72 men against armies of over several thousands. As you know, the end of the Imam was especially cruel. While holding his son Ali Asghar, in his hands, Husain pleaded for water for the child, and the child was killed by an arrow in the arms of the father. Imam Husain was severely wounded. And finally, and there is some difference here, Shimar bin Jawshan or Ali Sinan bin Anas b. Amr, struck the blow which ended the life of the grandson of the Prophet.

The women were taken as captives and although Ubaidullah wanted to kill Ali, the surviving son of Imam Husain, the youth was spared by the brave intervention of his aunt, Zaynab who was mentioned today earlier. The martyrdom of Imam Husain was a crucial moment for the community of the Shias. Although it must have seemed that all was lost, the Community nonetheless was able and continues to be able to draw strength, much to others' eyes seems like a total defeat.

The sufferings of the Imam are looked upon by many as an offering for the benefit of the member of the Community. A eulogy was written - I don't read Urdu, but a eulogy that was written in Urdu by the poet Anis, who lived between 1803 and 1875, illustrates that.

In the poem. the poet speaks for Husain at his dying moment. And the poem goes. The Imam is praying. And he is praying to God. The 'You' in the prayer is God.

"I need not a house.
. The door of Your felicity is enough for me.
I need not a head.
My concern is only for You.
I need not a bed.
Your grace is my pillow.
I need not an arm.
I want Your assistance.
May the agony of death be easy for my Shi'as.
May whatever befalls me be in requital for what my devotees."

In the suffering and death of Imam Husain, Shia Muslims find a

challenge and comfort. It is never easy to understand how the good person suffers and especially die at the hands of evil. The temptations are strong to ask God why?

One of the great Christian mystics was a woman named St. Theresa of Avilah. And one time when she was going through an especially difficult time, she prayed. *"O God if this is how you treat your friends, it is no wonder you have so few of them."*

We recognize however that God is sovereign and infinitely wise. God is *Al-Hakim*. We cannot always understand why things happen Very often things happen which would not be the way we would do them. But of course, we are not God. It is precisely when we are faced with the mystery of how God's goodness and justice can allow the good person to suffer and die at that notion of obedience, submission, Islam with a capital or small 'I' if you want, is the most important.

It is easy to submit to God when things are going well. It is not so easy when every single part of our body cries out that this is not right. It is precisely here that Imam Husain provides to you both an example of patience and suffering and indeed death. But also provides consolation. The same eulogy which I recited earlier goes on to read:

"Did I have the strength to endure having my entire household plundered?
Or bring forth Asghar in my arms when Akbar was murdered?
He was rising in my arms but I would not say a

word. Even if my arms were to be cut off, I would still not abandon my people."

Imam Husain prays to God in the poem. He accepts his suffering and death as a supreme act of submission. The supreme act of Islam to God. But also promises that regardless of what happens, he will not abandon his people. The goodness of Husain is recognized also in the eulogy. The poet as only a poet is allowed to do, answers the prayer of the dying Husain. And God responds in the poem and says:

"Enough, enough oh Shabir for your God is embarrassed. Why are you afraid, oh Shabir to enter my presence? O Shabir, I desire the gift you bring. Oh Shabir, I like humility among my servants. You have considered our court the gift of forgiveness. By understanding your status, one understands the Almighty."

As a Christian, it is very easy for me to understand the feelings with the people of the Shia hold for Imam Husain. We Christians hold very similar feelings about Jesus. As people of the. Book, we both believe that

human life does not end with physical death. While that does not make the death of the good and righteous person, any easier to understand, such a death is nonetheless, a powerful witness to us. It is a witness that a person was willing to make the ultimate act of submission to God's will; and was able to put everything, even life itself, on the line, based on the belief that this life is not all there is. On the belief that victory over evil is to lose. On the belief that power, goodness and the grace of God, are infinitely more powerful than the strength of armies, the power of governments and even more powerful than death itself.

In a very real sense, the defeat of Imam Husain is his crowning achievement. Al-Husain ibne Ali ibne Abi Talib, the grandson of the Prophet, has been a sense of tremendous strength for millions of the Shias over centuries and throughout the world. The dynasty of Yazid and the household of Umayyad, was to survive Imam Husain by only 70 years. In the Gregorian calendar, Imam Husain died in the year 680 AD, and the Umayyad Dynasty was overthrown in the year 750. And replaced by another dynasty whose defeat was ultimately to be.

Both dynasties and their leaders, including if not especially Yazid, are not part of a history long past. Victorious over Imam Husain in the short run, Yazid for the most part is unknown to most people on this planet. However, the martyred Imam Husain, defeated in the short run, is ultimately victorious as the living symbol of a vibrant, spiritual Community that sees in Imam Husain, a perfect example of that which all she wishes to be in Muslims, that is totally submissive to God's will.

FATHER ELIAS MALLON, PhD
Ordained Member of the
Franciscan Friars of the Atonement
Former Director of the Graymoor Ecumenical
and Interreligious Institute
External Affairs Officer for the Catholic
Near East Welfare Association New York City



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APPENDIX E

MARTYRDOM IN THE SERVICE OF JUSTICE

I extend my greetings to you on this auspicious occasion, and I want to thank the organizers of the event for the invitation to address this assembly. Some of you will remember that I was with you in 1989 for the Iman Husain Day, so it is gratifying to receive a second invitation. Although I come today as a private individual, I also represent, morally and spiritually, the Christians of this and, so let me greet you on their behalf as well.

My subject has to do with justice and martyrdom. Justice is one of those great words, the meaning of which everyone feels, almost instinctively, but which we have difficulty in defining exactly. People of faith in God whether Jews, Christians or Muslims, recognize that true and perfect justice is found only in God Almighty. And, as Sayyid Mujtaba Musawi Lari writes "When we say that God is just, it means that His all-knowing and creative essence does nothing that is contrary to wisdom."

Acknowledging this perfect, unapproachable source of justice, we confess that all attempts to behave justly fall short of the divine model. Our human governments, policies, programs, and interpersonal interactions are but imperfect efforts to act in equity and justice. To recognize the imperfection of our human justice is not to despair, however for the

all-Merciful God has inspired in our hearts, a vision of the true goal of human life and a great desire to put that vision of truth into practice. No one has ever said how far we can go in achieving a just, humane society. There is no limit to the ways in which we can help to deliver our brothers and sisters from oppression, poverty, diseased discord, deception and hypocrisy. Justice is so grand a goal that it even goes beyond our particular religions.

We Christians, stand with you Muslims, for strictly honorable conduct. We have the same principles of equity, in spite of religious differences. All around us are men and women who in a variety of ways are striving to realize the goal of a just society, doing ordinary tasks, but in heroic ways, being led on by the vision of truth that they have received from God. But we ordinary people need encouragement. We need inspiration in order to continue putting the truth into practice. The Almighty in His Providence has put martyrs in the world to enlighten our path, to steel our nerves, and to help us purify our motives.

Imam Husain stands as one of these great heroes in the struggle for justice. Not all martyrs give lives for social and political justice, but as you know, you who have told and retold the details of Imam Husain's suffering and death from your childhood until now, no one better exemplifies the supreme sacrifice for justice than he. Feeling that I can scarcely do anything to your knowledge of and insight those dramatic events of long ago, I nevertheless should like to point out three thoughts which Imam Husain s struggle for justice suggests.

1. Ayatullah Taleqani wrote that the *shaheed* (martyr) is the one who has experienced the *shuhad* (vision) of truth. So, in the case of Imam Husain, the vision of justice for the people of Islam completely occupied his mind. All of his energies were directed

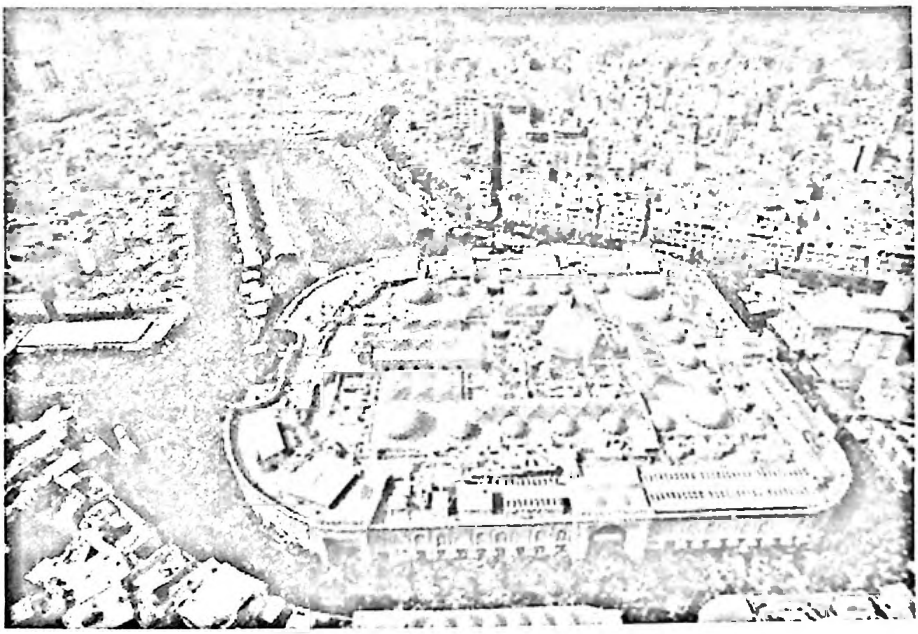
toward the quest for justice. Nothing in the world was more important to him than that. It is in a martyr that we see this single-minded concentration of purpose best. A martyr for justice has heart purified of all else but the one vision of truth. A great Christian philosopher once wrote that the purity of heart is to desire one thing.

2. My second thought is that we cannot measure the achievement of a martyr for justice in terms of the practical outcome of their martyrdom. Social justice did not come about as a result of Imam Husain's death. A sacrifice is not great because of its immediate consequences. It is great because people recognize the nobility of a single-minded fairness to principle and truth. All who hungered and thirsted for justice in our time, take heart when they contemplate the simple dedication of a martyr for the truth. And our struggle for a better life continues.

3. Finally, my third point is similar to the second. A life like that of Imam Husain is commonly called a tragedy. The events of Karbala were infinitely sad, and all who are caught up in the memory are right to weep. But should we not say that Imam Husain's martyrdom was not a tragedy but a victory? Is this not an example of strength being made perfect through weakness? The calamity of Karbala, the awful massacre which seemed to be the disastrous end to everything for all concerned, became a great turning point in history. Out of the shamble of the pitiful battle, there was generated an energy worldwide. A force that inspires men, women and children to this day, an example, a vision that makes people even now, in this world of jaded hopes, look forward to a better time of justice and peace.

REV. R. MARSTON SPEIGHT, PHD.
Past Director – The Offices of Christian-Muslim Relations of the
Nation Council of Churches
Former Teacher – Hartford Seminary
Hartford CT

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Imam Husain Yesterday

"I'm not rising [against Yazid] as an insolent, or out of arrogance or a mischief monger or as a tyrant. I have risen [against him] as I seek to reform the ummah [community] of my grandfather [Prophet Muhammad]. I wish to bid the good [amr bil-ma'ruf] *and forbid the evil* [nahy' 'anil-munkar], *and to follow the way of my grandfather and father [Imam Ali bin Abi Talib]."*

- Medina, Saudi Arabia, 680 AD

Martin Luther King, Jr. Today

"For those who are telling me to keep my mouth shut, I can't do that. I'm against segregation at lunch counters, and I'm not going to segregate my moral concerns. And we must know on some positions, cowardice asks the question, „Is it safe? Expediency asks the question, Is it politic? Vanity asks the question, Is it popular? ***But conscience asks the question, 'Is it right?'*** *And there retimes when you must take a stand that is neither safe nor politic nor popular, but you must do it* ***because it is right.***"

- Atlanta GA, 1967

"Indeed, I find death nothing but an honor. And I call not a coexistence with the oppressors but a disgrace and humiliation."

Husain ibne Ali

"All men and women are born, live suffer and die; what distinguishes us one from another is our dreams, whether they be dreams about worldly or unworldly things, and what we do to make them come about... We do not choose to be born. We do not choose our parents. We do not choose our historical epoch, the country of our birth, or the immediate circumstances of our upbringing. We do not, most of us, choose to die; nor do we choose the time and conditions of our death. But within this realm of choicelessness, we do choose how we live."

Joseph Epstein

"Never bend your head. Always hold it high. Look at the world straight in the eye."

Helen Keller

"Once one assumes an attitude of intolerance, there is no knowing where it will take one. Intolerance, someone has said, is violence to the intellect and hatred is violence to the heart."

Mahatma Gandhi

"Tolerance implies no lack of commitment to one's own beliefs. Rather it condemns the oppression or persecution of others."

John F. Kennedy

"The ultimate measure of a man is not where he stands in moments of comfort and convenience, but where he stands at times of challenge and controversy."

Martin Luther King, Jr.

"Never be bullied into silence. Never allow yourself to be made a victim. Accept no one's definition of your life; define yourself."

Harvey Fierstein

"For freedom is not a mere matter of political decision or new constitutions, not even a matter of what is more important, that is, economic policy. It is of the mind and heart and if the mind narrows itself and is befogged and the heart is full of bitterness and hatred, then freedom is absent."

Jawaharlal Nehru

"A free-born people are not required to submit to tyranny!"

Citizens of Marlborough MA 1774

"Those who desire to give up freedom in order to gain security will not have, nor do they deserve, either one. Any society that would give up a little liberty to gain a little security will deserve neither and lose both."

Benjamin Franklin

"Those who desire to give up freedom in order to gain security will not have, nor do they deserve, either one. Any society that would give up a little liberty to gain a little security will deserve neither and lose both."

Katherine Paterson

"Patience and perseverance have a magical effect before which difficulties disappear and obstacles vanish."

John Quincy Adam

"There are only two ways to live your life. One is as though nothing is a miracle. The other is as though everything is a miracle."

Albert Einstein

"The beauty of the soul shines out when a man bears with composure one heavy mischance after another, not because he does not feel them, but because he is a man of high and heroic temper."

Aristotle

"It must be borne in mind that the tragedy of life doesn't lie in not reaching your goal. The tragedy lies in having no goal to reach. It isn't a calamity to die with dreams unfulfilled, but it is a calamity not to dream. It is not a disaster to be unable to capture your ideal, but it is a disaster to have no ideal to capture. It is not a disgrace not to reach the stars, but it is a disgrace to have no stars to reach for. Not failure, but low aim is sin."

Benjamin Elijah Mays

"The first step in the evolution of ethics is a sense of solidarity with other human beings."

Albert Schweitzer

"Depths of wisdom are probed and discovered by means of reasoning; and the depths of reasoning are probed and discovered by means of wisdom, and excellence of supervision brings back social propriety."

Ali ibne Abi Talib

"Words without actions are the assassins of idealism."

Herbert Hoover

"Without civic morality, communities perish; without personal morality, their survival has no value."

Bertrand Russell

"We seek peace, knowing that peace is the climate of freedom."

Dwight D. Eisenhower

"It isn't enough to talk about peace. One must believe in it. And it isn't enough to believe in it. One must work at it."

Eleanor Roosevelt

"The real differences around the world today are not between Jews and Arabs; Protestants and Catholics; Muslims, Croats, and Serbs. The real differences are between those who embrace peace and those who would destroy it. Between those who look to the future and those who cling to the past. Between those who open their arms and those who are determined to clench their fists."

William J. Clinton

"Never Doubt That a Small Group of Thoughtful, Committed Citizens Can Change the World; Indeed, It's the Only Thing That Ever Has."

Margaret Mead

"The only thing necessary for the triumph of evil is that good men do nothing."

Edmund Burke

"The vision of the eye is limited while the vision of the heart transcends all barrier of time and space."

Ali ibne Abi Talib

"There is a universal appeal in his martyrdom. Hazrat Imam Hussein sacrificed his all, but he refused to submit to a tyrannical government. He never gave any weight to the fact that his material force was far less in comparison with that of an enemy; the power of faith to his greatest force, which regards all material force as nothing. This sacrifice is a beacon light of guidance for every community and every nation"

Jawaharlal Nehru

"Lessons provided by Imam Husain are lessons for today, as the world lives hegemonic and colonial schemes, witnesses thousands and thousands of innocents die over wars of greed while only a few fight for virtue."

Sarojini Naidu

"Of that gallant band, male and female knew that the enemy forces around were implacable, and were not only ready to fight, but to kill. Denied even water for the children, they remained parched under the burning sun and scorching sands, yet not one faltered for a moment. Hussain marched with his little company, not to glory, not to the power of wealth, but to a supreme sacrifice, and every member bravely faced the greatest odds without flinching."

Dr. K. Sheldrake

"Though Imam Hussain gave his life years ago, but his indestructible soul rules the hearts of people even today."

Dr. Radha Krishnan

"I learned from Hussain how to achieve victory while being oppressed."

Mahatma Gandhi

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Dr. Bashir Ahmed Datoo was born in Zanzibar, an island off the coast of Tanzania, and grew up in a family and a broader community that was imbued with Islamic ideology and steeped in its traditions. He attended a religious school in the evenings for several years to learn the fundamentals of Islam.

After he settled in the United States, Dr. Datoo became the principal of a newly established weekend school in New Jersey. During his tenure for nearly a decade, he introduced a curriculum of four core courses of *Quran, Aqaid* and *Fiqh* (Beliefs and Jurisprudence), *Akhlaq* (Ethics) and *Tarikh* (History).

During that time, Dr. Datoo was a key member of the Islamic Education Board of a North American Muslim Communities Organization. The Board launched a number of initiatives for weekend religious schools ranging from the Curriculum Development Process to the Drive for Excellence in Educational Program. He was also one of the principal organizers of its biennial retreats held between 1996 and 2004 and authored all of the proceedings.

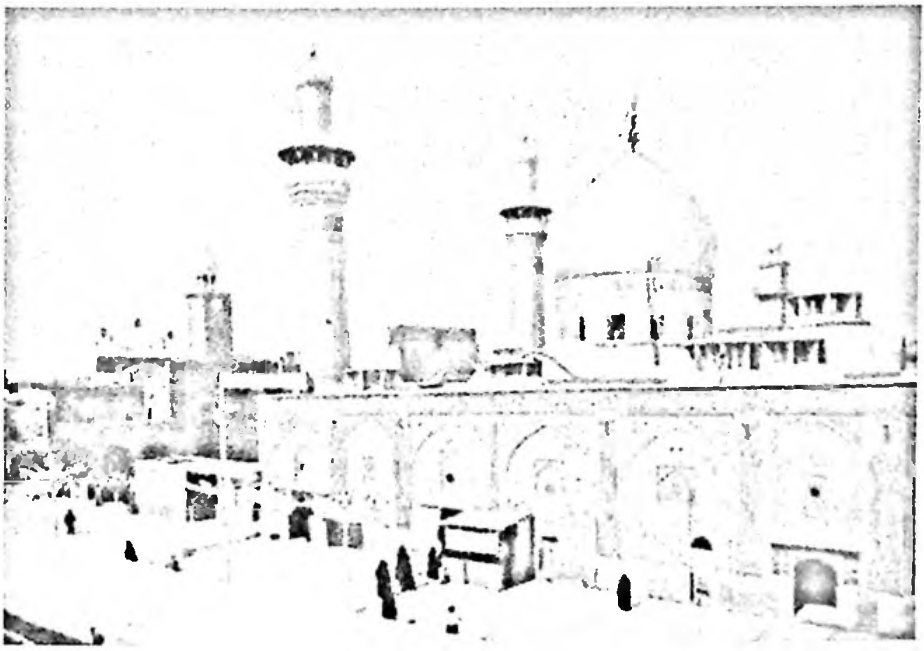
With regards to his academic background, Dr. Datoo completed his post-high school education in Zanzibar before proceeding to Makerere University in Uganda to study for his bachelor's degree. Next, he went to the London School of Economics and Political Science at the University of London for his doctoral studies.

Upon his return to Tanzania, Dr. Datoo taught at the University of

Dares-Salaam in the capital city from 1968 to 1976 where he rose to the rank of Associate Professor. On a sabbatical leave in 1972 and then in 1976, he came to Minnesota University in Minneapolis and Princeton University in New Jersey respectively as a Visiting Research Fellow.

Dr. Datoo left academia in 1977 to enter the field of marketing research and consulting. He worked for a couple of leading firms in New Jersey and Pennsylvania as a Senior Vice President focusing on the application of advanced statistical and modeling techniques to business marketing issues.

Dr. Datoo is the author of a variety of articles and books including *Perspectives on Islamic Faith and History* and *Reconnect with your Religion.*



FINAL THOUGHTS

Pyame Aman Publications has published more than 35 books since 1980, thanks to the ceaseless dedication, vision and passion of Dr. Manzoor Rizvi to make the written word on Islam available for the discerning eye.

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Soon after the Prophet's passing, the Umayyads, his worst enemy, aided and abetted by the foolish and the weak in faith among early Muslims, managed to capture the power that led to an illegal installation of Yazid the son of Muawiya, as Ruler, who had instructions from his dying father to obtain, even if by force, an allegiance from Husain ibn Ali, which would have meant the undoing of Islam. A pharaoh had once again challenged the Moses of the time!

In the struggle that ensued between the forces of good and evil, although Husain lost his life and the lives of his children and a few faithful ones with him, yet when the dust settled down on the blood-stained bodies of the brave and valiant the world had never seen before, a fine and clear distinction between the Right and wrong had made itself manifest!

The winds of change wiped out forever the evil despot and his clan. Husain, the Supreme Martyr, shall be remembered forever, as a savior of Islam and benefactor of humanity; and the one who stood upon the

sands of Karbala against evil defiantly for the sake of justice and human rights.

To Muslims as well as non-Muslims, Husain is known for his indomitable courage and unbreakable resolve. His unshakable stand against oppression continues to inspire the weak and oppressed to stand up for their right!

NASIR SHAMSI
Lumberton NJ
October 2019





Hussein illustrated that the numerical superiority does not count when it comes to the truth and falsehood. The victory of Hussein, despite his minority, marvels me!"
THOMAS CARLYLE



"In the history of Islam, the life of Hussein stands unique, unapproached and unapproachable by anyone. Without the martyrdom, Islam would have been extinguished long ago. He was the savior of Islam and it was due to his martyrdom that Islam took such a deep root, which it is neither possible nor even imaginable to destroy now. In a distant age and climate, the tragic scene of the death of Hussein will waken the sympathy of the coldest reader"
EDWARD GIBBON



I have spent more than 20 years in prison, then on one night I decided to surrender by signing all the terms and conditions of government. But suddenly I thought about Imam Hussain (as) and Karbala movement and Imam Hussain (as) gave me strength to stand for right of freedom and liberation and I did.

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"It was possible for Hosein to save his life by submitting himself to the will of Yazid. But his responsibility as a reformer did not allow him to accept Yazid's Caliphate. He therefore, prepared to embrace all sorts of discomfort and inconvenience in order to deliver Islam from the hands of the Omayyads. Under the blazing sun, on the parched land and against the stifling heat of Arabia, stood the immortal Hosein."

Washington Irving
(American Historian & Essayist)



"The best lesson which we get from the tragedy of Karbala is that Hussein and his companions were rigid believers in God. They illustrated that the numerical superiority does not count when it comes to the truth and the falsehood. The victory of Hussein despite his minority, marvels me."

Thomas Carlyle
(Scottish Historian & Philosopher



In the Name of God

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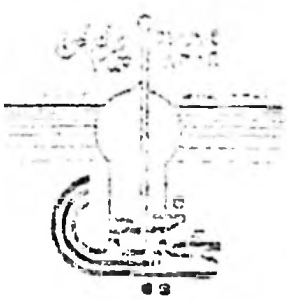


The Purposeful Sacrifice and Enduring Message of Imam Husayn(a) for Humanity

[The Grandson of Prophet Muhammad(s)]

By

Dr. Bashir A. Datoo



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