

## **Imam Husayn b. ‘Ali – The Model for Human kind**

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History bears testimony to the fact that thirty years after the death of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) in 632 A.D, the Umayyad dynasty came to power. They ruled the Islamic empire with brutal force and tyranny, bearing little or no concern for the Islamic principles that the Prophet had striven so hard to establish. Mu’awiya b. Abu Sufyan, who founded the Umayyad dynasty and proclaimed himself the sole ruler of the Muslims, appointed his son Yazid to succeed him.

After coming to power in 680 A.D, Yazid sought to legitimize his position as the leader of the Muslims by seeking support and allegiance from the Muslims. By seeking recognition as the undisputed ruler of the Muslims, Yazid not only tried to consolidate his own position but also tried to strengthen his tribe’s vicious stronghold over the Islamic empire.

However, a leader in Islam is required to be a source of emulation for his citizens and an exemplar *par excellence*. His duties include not only that of ensuring that Islamic law (*shari‘a*) is implemented, but he is also required to exercise temporal and spiritual authority. In order to guide the Muslims, the leader must therefore possess the most exemplary moral traits.

Yazid, on the contrary, openly flouted with Islamic laws. He was more concerned with playing with apes and addicted to drinking wine and womanizing. He publicly ridiculed the traditions of the Prophet Muhammad and sought to forcibly impose his tyrannical rule by threatening to kill those who opposed him.

It is within this context that we must examine the actions of Imam Husayn (AS). As the grandson of the Prophet, he felt it his duty to safeguard the divine principles which had been revealed to his grandfather. That Imam Husayn saw himself as an upholder and defender of Islamic principles can be seen in a letter that he wrote to the people of Basra. The Imam states that he chose to stand up for the rights of the Muslims because “the traditions of the Prophet had been killed (by the Umayyads) and innovations revived.”

A careful analysis of the speeches and letters preserved by our primary sources indicate that

Husayn perceived the need to revive the religious conscience of the Muslims. His actions indicate that he was aware of the fact that a victory achieved through military strength and might is always temporal because another power can, in the future, bring it down in ruins. But a victory achieved through suffering and sacrifice is everlasting and leaves a permanent imprint on human consciousness.

It was because of the desire to revolutionize the minds of the feeble-minded Muslims on the one hand and to check the gradual decadence of Islamic principles on the other that Husayn embarked on a fateful journey to Kufa despite the dangers that he foresaw. He was intercepted at al-Qadisiyya by a small detachment of troops under the command of Hurr. It was at this point that Husayn began addressing the enemy. He explained his stance, stating that Yazid was trying to establish an unjust and corrupt society and that he had violated all moral and religious norms. Imam Husayn clearly enunciated that he would never submit to oppression and tyranny. As he stated when he was asked to pay allegiance to Yazid: “Those like me can never give allegiance to those like him.”

Although Husayn was denied water for three days under the scorching sun of Kerbala, he remained resolute and firm in his principles. He preferred honorable death than life under tyranny and oppression. As he said:

**“I do not view death except as a path to everlasting happiness while living under the oppressors is abject humiliation.”**

Imam Husayn’s noble companions shared his determination and were prepared to die for his cause. On the fateful morning of the 10<sup>th</sup> of Muharram, Husayn stood in front of his tent with a very small army. Preparing himself for the forthcoming encounter, he delivered a series of speeches and admonitions to his enemies. He repeatedly explained to them why he refused to submit to Yazid and reminded them of his close proximity to the Prophet Muhammad. He also told them that he would never submit to Yazid rather, he would submit to God only.

One by one, Husayn’s brave companions died in front of his eyes. He witnessed the fall of everyone of them, running to the battlefield to retrieve the dead ones and lining their bodies in a row in

a tent. As the day grew hotter, the fighting became more fierce. Even 'Ali Asghar (also called Abd Allah), a six month baby, was not spared. An arrow struck him killing him in his father's arms.

Alone and weary, exhausted and dejected, Imam Husayn consoled the grief stricken women and children for what would befall them after his demise. After bidding them farewell for the final time, Husayn confronted the Umayyad army. Attacked from all sides with stones, spears and arrows, the Imam finally succumbed while his womenfolk and children witnessed the horrific scene.

Husayn though, remained resolute to the very last. He invoked God saying:

**“O God, You are my only trust in every calamity, You are my only hope in every hardship; You are the only promise in anxiety and distress in which the hearts become weak and human actions become feeble, in which one is deserted and forsaken by his friends.”**

As the enemy encircled Imam Husayn to deal the final blows, Zaynab came out of her tent and cried out to 'Umar b. Sa'd the commander-in-chief, “Will Husayn be killed while you are standing by and watching?” Zaynab's pleas were to no avail. Husayn's head was cut off and raised on a spear as a sign of victory for the Umayyad army. The women and children were enslaved and taken to Yazid in Damascus.

Husayn, it is true, was slain in the plains of Kerbala. But memories of his supreme sacrifices have remained alive. His death stirred the consciousness of the Muslims in general and the people Kufa in particular. Many of them rose against the Umayyads, avenging Husayn's death.

The tragedy of Kerbala will evoke and stir the minds of even the coldest and most stone hearted reader. For Imam Husayn's supreme sacrifice provided a model for all the oppressed nations of the world, showing how, through struggle and sacrifice, truth will finally triumph over falsehood. This is shown by the fact that today Imam Husayn is regarded as a hero and champion of truth whereas Yazid is portrayed as the chieftain of oppression and vices.

To you, O Imam Husayn, we send our salutations and greetings. The message and principles

you fought for will forever remain alive.

Let us end by quoting Imam Husayn's words which best describe the motives for his actions:

**“If the religion of Muhammad cannot be saved except by my being  
killed, then O swords come and get me”**