

Imam Husain's Great Revolution

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Yazid's Demand for Allegiance

In 50 A.H. when Imam Hasan (A) was poisoned, the duty of Imamatus became the responsibility of his younger brother Imam Husain (A). At the time, Muawiya bin Abu Sufyan, the governor of Syria and arch-enemy of the family of the Holy Prophet (S), was virtually the ruler of the whole Muslim Empire. Muawiya, who had caused the poisoning of Imam Hasan (A), continued to disregard the human rights of the people and employed gangs of criminals to terrorise them. Imam Husain (A) was not frightened by the power of Muawiya, and openly condemned him and criticised his actions in his letters, warning him against the punishment of Allah.

Muawiya broke the conditions of the treaty he had signed with Imam Hasan (A) and declared his evil son Yazid as Caliph. In 60 A.H., news was conveyed to Walid, Yazid's governor in Madina, about the death of Muawiya. At the same time, Yazid sent orders to Walid to demand the oath of allegiance (Bay'at) from Imam Husain (A). The orders stated that if Imam (A) refused, his head should be cut off and sent to Yazid in Damascus.

On receipt of the letter of Yazid, Walid sent his servant to Imam (A), requesting a meeting. It was night time and Imam (A) was in the mosque when Walid's servant found him. When the servant informed him that Walid was calling him, he at once exclaimed that Muawiya was dead. He then sent word to Walid that it was late and he was in the mosque, and that he would visit him the next morning.

When Imam (A) returned home to his family with the news of his invitation by the governor, they were very worried. His sisters Bibi Zainab (A) and Bibi Umme Kulthum (A) asked him to take along the youth of Bani Hashim, especially Abbas (A), for protection. Imam (A) was reluctant to take any one along, saying that he had been invited alone. He finally agreed to allow some of the Hashimite youth, including his brother Abbas (A) and his son Ali Akbar to accompany him.

When they reached the Government House the next morning, Imam (A) asked the men to remain at the door, and only to come in if they heard his voice become unusually loud. Walid was well aware of the position of Imam (A) and greeted him with respect and offered him a seat beside him. He then read out the letter he had received from Yazid, and when he reached the part about sending the severed head of Imam (A) if he refused to pay allegiance, he was too embarrassed to continue and handed over the letter to Imam (A) to read. Imam (A)

read it and smiled and said: "O Walid, invite the Muslims of Madina tomorrow and ask them if they say I should pay allegiance to Yazid, and then let us decide."

Walid accepted this reply, but Marwan, the old enemy of Islam who the Holy Prophet (S) had expelled from Madina, said, "Do not let Husain out of your grip now. If the fox gets out of the four walls of your court you will not see it again. Cut off his head here and now and do not let this opportunity pass or you will not get it again."

When Imam (A) heard these insulting words of Marwan, he put his hand on his sword and said aloud, "O enemy of Allah, will you or Walid touch my head?" On hearing the raised voice of Imam (A), the young men of Bani Hashim burst into the court room. Abbas (A), who was well known for his skill in combat, had already drawn his sword. Imam (A) managed to calm the boiling blood of his companions and averted a situation which would have certainly resulted in a blood bath. The shaken and cowardly Marwan took advantage of Imam's (A) mercy and quickly ran away from the scene.

Imam (A) flatly refused to pay allegiance to Yazid, well knowing that such an action would leave Islam and the Muslims in ruins. His famous answer to the governor of Yazid was, "A man like me can never give allegiance to a man like him."

After this confrontation the life of Imam (A) was in danger, and with a heavy heart he began to plan to leave Madina, the city of his beloved grandfather

Imam Husain's (A) Departure from Madina

When Imam (A) announced that he was leaving Madina, the people of the city were struck with grief. They could not bear the loss of their dear Imam (A) who reminded them so much of the Holy Prophet (S) in his appearance, manner and speech. Groups of people approached him asking him why he was leaving, and begging him not to go.

Imam (A) explained that Yazid had demanded his allegiance and that because of his refusal, the tyrant would not hesitate to make Madina a battlefield. Imam (A) did not want bloodshed of innocent Muslims in the city of his grandfather. Therefore, he was going to Makka for pilgrimage and then he would decide what to do.

Imam (A) then visited the graves of his grandfather, his mother Bibi Fatimah (A) and his brother Imam Hasan (A). After this, he went home to make preparations for the journey. Imam Husain's (A) sister Bibi Umme Kulthum (A) was a widow and lived with him. His other sister Bibi Zainab (A) was married to Abdullah bin Ja'far, and she begged her husband for permission to accompany her brother, saying that she could not live without him in the city. Abdullah granted her his permission and she returned to Imam (A) and prepared to leave with him. The caravan began moving and Imam Husain (A) bid farewell to the people of Madina.

.The people were weeping openly, wondering whether they would ever see him again

Imam Husain (A) in Makka

Imam (A) arrived in Makka on 3rd Sha'baan 60 A.H. While he waited for the Haj season, he pondered about his future action. He could not have continued to live in Madina after refusing to pay Yazid the allegiance he demanded.

Had he stayed on in Madina, he would have undoubtedly been killed and his murder would cause the clash of the loyal people of Madina, especially the Hashimites, with the forces of Yazid.

This would result in the massacre of innocent people and destruction of the city of his beloved grandfather, the Holy Prophet (S). Besides if he had stayed in Madina, the world would always ask why he had not sought shelter elsewhere.

The whole empire was going through terrible times. Yazid's grip on the people was absolute and anyone who dared to say anything against him was harshly dealt with. Yazid favoured those worthless people who flattered him, and he installed them as governors and leaders in the mosques.

The chastity of women was no longer safe, with their dignity at the mercy of Yazid's brutal soldiers. Marriage lost its sanctity and protection to married women. If a woman was desired by men of the government, deceitful measures were adopted to force the husband to divorce his wife so that she could be made available to these shameless men.

Human rights were deliberately denied and the laws of religion were openly defied by Yazid, who remained in a constant state of intoxication. There was no protection for life or property and looting and persecution was freely practised in the political interests of the state.

At last, people could bear it no longer and messengers began to come to Imam (A), with written requests to come to the rescue of Islam and the Muslims. People wrote to Imam (A) saying that if he did not do something to defend the religion of Allah from getting lost and the people from going astray, they would complain about him to Allah and the Prophet (S) on the Day of Judgement.

Many of these desperate messages came from Kufa, begging Imam (A) to come to their urgent aid. When Imam (A) received these calls for help in Makka, he had to respond. However, he could not blindly accept the call from Kufa, because the people of that city were well known for their fickle and unstable character and conduct.

Therefore, he decided to send a deputy to Kufa who would write to him after having studied the sincerity of the invitation. Imam (A) sent his cousin Muslim bin Aqeel to Kufa and asked him to report from there. Muslim left for Kufa on the 14th of Mahe Ramadhan, along with his two

sons and two guides.

Meanwhile, Yazid received news in Damascus that Imam (A) was in Makka for Haj. He therefore hired 30 men to disguise themselves as pilgrims and murder Imam (A). These men entered Makka with daggers under their Ehram with a view to kill Imam (A) even if he was within the boundaries of the Holy Ka'ba.

At the same time, Imam (A) received a letter from Muslim that it was safe for him to come to Kufa. He decided to leave for Kufa once the Haj was over. However, he was then made aware of the presence of Yazid's assassins in Makka. On the eve of Haj, Imam (A) decided to change his intention to Umrah instead of Haj, and leave Makka immediately. The reason for this was that he did not want bloodshed on the sacred ground of Makka.

In response to the call of the people of Kufa, Imam (A) made his way towards that city. By that time however, Muslim was in dreadful trouble in Kufa, where after being welcomed, he was now having to fight for his very life. Although Muslim desperately tried to send a message to Imam Husain (A) to avoid Kufa at all costs, he was not successful

Muslim bin Aqeel in Kufa

In Kufa, Muslim was given a very warm reception and thousands of people swore the oath of allegiance to Imam Husain (A) at Muslim's hands. He was impressed, and, guided by the enthusiasm and assurances of the people, he immediately wrote a letter to Imam (A) advising him to come to Kufa.

When Yazid learnt of Muslim's arrival in Kufa and the reaction of the people, he despatched Ubaidullah ibne Ziyad as his governor to Kufa with instructions to force the people to withdraw their support of Muslim. Soon after his arrival, the new governor had managed to bribe all the leading figures of Kufa to change their allegiance.

To the rest of the population a strong threat was issued. At the time of evening prayers, the following message was announced: "The Caliph Yazid will consider anyone who is found associating with Muslim bin Aqeel, the Deputy of Husain bin Ali, to be a rebel. By way of punishment, such people will be hanged, their families put to sword and their property confiscated. If anyone has extended any help to him upto now, no harm will come to him as long as the support is withdrawn immediately".

The time for prayers came and Muslim rose to lead the congregation as he had done since his arrival. When he completed his prayers, he turned back to find the whole mosque deserted, except for Hani bin Urwah, at whose house Muslim was a guest. The people of Kufa had all succumbed to the warning of the governor, too cowardly to make a stand against this injustice and knowing that they had effectively passed the death sentence on Muslim. These were the

same people who had deserted Imam Ali (A) and Imam Hasan (A) in their times of need. Both men realised that their first priority was to get a message to Imam Husain (A) and warn him to turn away from Kufa. Hani knew the town better so they decided that he should get away with the message.

With a quick farewell, Hani ran out. He knew that before he left Kufa he had to do something to secure the safety of Muslim's two little boys. He rushed home and told his wife to get the children out of the back door with instructions to leave the city. As Hani prepared to leave, his house was surrounded by armed soldiers. Hani drew out his sword, determined not to give in easily.

However, he was hopelessly outnumbered and was overpowered, chained and taken to the governor. Meanwhile, Muslim left the mosque not knowing where to go. At last he rested against a doorway, tired and thirsty. The door opened and an old lady stood there.

On learning his identity she quickly pushed him in, warning him that soldiers everywhere were hunting for him. This pious lady, who's name was Tau'a, told Muslim to hide in her attic till it was safe to leave. Before retiring into the attic, Muslim told the old lady that he had to get an urgent message to Imam Husain (A). She assured him that her son would soon return and he was a noble young man who would do his best to help.

When Tau'a's son returned she explained the situation to him. The evil man immediately thought of the reward being offered for Muslim's capture. He cunningly assured his mother that he would make arrangements for Muslim's escape the next day. In the morning the traitor went and informed the governor of Muslim's whereabouts.

When Muslim heard the approach of soldiers, he knew that he had been betrayed and had to leave. He snatched a sword from the room and rushed out. The soldiers, who were expecting a meek surrender, were surprised to see Muslim emerge from the house like an enraged lion. The lane outside was too narrow for the soldiers to attack him in a group and Muslim could thus fight in single combat. Muslim was no ordinary soldier. He had extensive experience and skill in combat and the enemies began to fall back under his attack, dying and being trampled by the hooves of the horses of their own men.

The leader of the soldiers sent word to the governor that they needed more men, a request that astounded Ubaidullah. He tauntingly asked how many warriors they needed to capture a single man. When it was suggested that perhaps he would like to go and capture Muslim himself, the coward backed away. Instead, he suggested that it would be better to trap Muslim by foul means. Accordingly, a trench was dug and then disguised with straw and sticks.

As Muslim surged forwards attacking the enemy, they broke away and he unsuspectingly fell

into the trench. Immediately, the cowards who had been running from him, returned to pelt him with stones.

His head pouring with blood, Muslim fell unconscious. He was dragged up, chained and brought to Ubaidullah. When Muslim was presented to Ubaidullah, he stood erect with dignity. He was asked for his last wish before he joined Hani, who had already been killed. Muslim asked for a messenger to be sent to Imam Husain (A). This request surprised the governor, who expected a plea for mercy for Muslim's sons, who had also been found and captured. In any case, he refused the request. Muslim then asked for his armour to be sold and his debts in Kufa be paid with the proceeds. Agreeing to this, Ubaidullah then ordered that Muslim be beheaded. As the sword of the executioner fell on his neck, Muslim spoke his last prayer: "O Holy Imam, pardon me for I was misled. O Allah!, let him know what has happened here and not come to".Kufa

The Arrival in Karbala

When Imam Husain (A) left Makka for Kufa, a large group of people accompanied him. Many of these people thought that if the grandson of the Holy Prophet (S) was making a stand against Yazid, the whole Muslim world would support him and Yazid would surely be toppled. They thought that they would be able to share in the glory and war booty that would follow. Although Imam Husain (A) repeatedly warned them that they were mistaken in their thinking, the crowd persisted in travelling with him.

Imam Husain (A) continued on his journey towards Iraq until he neared Kufa. From there he wrote a letter to the people of Kufa and sent it through Qays bin Mashar Saidaawi. In the letter he informed the people of Kufa that he had received Muslim's letter and that he was on his way to Kufa and would arrive soon. Qays took the letter to Kufa but was arrested outside the city and taken to the governor, Ubaidullah ibne Ziyad.

As he was led to the governor, Qays managed to tell some people where Imam Husain (A) was, and the word spread secretly amongst the loyal Kufans, many of whom managed to reach Imam (A) in Karbala.

The governor told Qays that the only hope he had to save himself was to mount the pulpit and publicly abuse Imam Husain (A). Qays addressed the people by first praising Allah and then said, "O People, Husain (A) is the best of men living at present and is the son of Fatima (A) the daughter of your Prophet (S).

I have been sent by him. All of you should rise and assist him." He then cursed Ubaidullah and his father and praised Imam Ali (A). By this time, the governor had heard enough and ordered

that Qays be thrown down from a high roof. Qays did not survive this brutal treatment and was martyred. His broken body was left on the ground where it fell. Meanwhile, Imam Husain (A) continued his journey towards Kufa until he reached a place called Zurud. There, he learnt about the martyrdom of Muslim and Hani and said: "We are from Allah and to Him we all will return." He prayed to Allah to bless them. At the stopping place of Uzaybul Hajanaat, Imam Husain (A) received news about Qays. When the caravan stopped at Zabala, he informed his companions of the deaths of Muslim, Hani and Qays and the state of affairs in Kufa.

Thereafter, he said, "Our supporters have withdrawn their support from us. Whoever wishes to leave us and go his own way should do so." At this time most of his companions left and very few remained. These few were his sincere followers and had not come with him for material gains.

In response to the news of Imam Husain's (A) approach, several military parties had been sent out to search the desert and stop his advance. One such party, led by a famous commander, Hur ibne Yazid ar-Riyahi, met the caravan of Imam Husain (A) on the 1st of Muharram 61 A.H. When they met, Hur's army was exhausted and desperately thirsty. Imam Husain (A) instructed that water from their stores be provided to Hur's men and horses.

It was time for noon prayers. Imam Husain (A) led the Jamaat prayers and Hur's army also prayed behind him. After the prayers were over, Imam Husain (A) addressed Hur and his companions. He reminded them that he was only there in response to their written invitations. He also explained that he was the rightful Imam and that he was one of the people mentioned in the Holy Qur'an in the verses relating to Mubahila (3:61) and Purification (33:33). He warned them of the consequences of obeying a man like Yazid, and urged them to refrain from staining their hands with the innocent blood of the family of the Holy Prophet (S).

Hur did not accept these words of advice, and although there was no fighting, he diverted the path of Imam Husain (A) away from Kufa and led him into the desert. On Thursday, 2nd of Muharram 61 A.H., they reached a place where the horse of Imam Husain (A) stopped.

Although he changed horses several times, the animals would not carry him further. Gathering the people who lived there, Imam Husain (A) asked the name of the place. Some said that it was called Naynava, others said it was also called Mariya. Imam Husain (A) asked if there was any other name. Someone said it was also known as Shattul Furaat. Then one old man came forward and said that he had heard his ancestors say that one name for this area was Karbala.

When Imam Husain (A) heard this, he smiled and thanked Allah and then said, "Surely this is

the plain where my Holy Grandfather has prophesied that I, with my faithful companions shall lay slain after suffering three days of hunger and thirst. We will not move from here - we have reached our destination."

Imam Husain (A) then ordered for his caravan to stop and tents were pitched next to the banks of the river Euphrates

Events of the First Days in Karbala

The caravan of Imam Husain (A) had arrived in Karbala and their tents were pitched next to the river Euphrates. As his companions settled down, Imam Husain (A) took his brother Abbas (A) around the barren desert and pointed out the various places where each of his comrades would fall and be slain on the Day of Ashura.

The people living in the area were from the tribe of Bani Asad. Imam Husain (A) purchased the land of Karbala from them and then gifted it back to them. He then addressed the men of Bani Asad saying, "On the tenth of this month you will see our dead bodies lying on this plain with our heads severed and taken away. Please bury us, and when our devotees come to visit our graves, treat them with honour and point out to them the places of our burial.

" He then turned to the women of the tribe and said, "O virtuous ladies! If your husbands, fearing Yazid, do not bury us, then please encourage them to do so or do it yourselves." Finally, he turned to the children of Bani Asad and said, "O innocent ones! If your parents, out of fear of the ruler, do not bury us then, by way of playing, bring some earth and throw it on our bodies to hide them." This heartrending appeal of Imam Husain (A) made all the listeners weep.

When Ubaidullah ibne Ziyad, Yazid's governor in Kufa, learnt that Hur had brought Imam Husain (A) and his companions to Karbala, he sent his troops to surround them. The first man to arrive in Karbala on behalf of Yazid was Amr ibne Sa'ad, who was the commander-in-chief of all the forces. He brought with him 6,000 men. After that, regiment after regiment began to pour in onto the plains of Karbala.

Historians all agree that at least 33,000 of Yazid's men gathered to fight Imam Husain (A), while some state that the figure was closer to 80,000 men. This large army was bent on the massacre of Imam Husain (A) and his companions for the sake of the rewards that Yazid had promised them. Many amongst them were the same people of Kufa who had invited Imam Husain (A) to come there in the first place.

The first act of the enemy was to order Imam Husain (A) to remove his tents from near the river. Abbas (A) objected to this demand, claiming priority of occupation and the right of the grandson of the Holy Prophet (S) to stay where he had first camped. When the enemy threatened to march towards their tents, the lion-hearted Abbas (A) stood firm and drew out

his sword shouting, "If anyone dares to advance one more step forward, he shall lay headless on the ground." His bravery was well known and none dared to step closer. However, Imam Husain (A) called to his brother saying, "Brother Abbas, do not let the bloodshed be started by our side. When Allah is with us, it does not matter how far the river is."

Imam Husain (A) then ordered for their camp to be moved further into the interior of the desert. In the days that followed there were several meetings between Imam Husain (A) and Amr ibne Sa'ad. Amr kept on insisting that the only way to stop war was for Imam Husain (A) to give the oath of allegiance to Yazid. He said that once the allegiance was given, all worldly comforts would be at the disposal of Imam (A).

However, Imam (A) remained firm on his stand and replied: "I shall never yield to the one who does not believe in Allah and one who defies Him, both by words and actions. I am willing to meet any calamity but will never surrender Truth to falsehood."

On the 7th of Muharram, Amr ibne Sa'ad received orders to block all sources of supply of water to Imam Husain (A). From that day onwards, not a single drop of water was allowed to reach the camp of Imam (A). The scorching desert sent heat waves everywhere and the little children began to cry with intense thirst. Even little babies could not receive milk, because their poor mothers were themselves suffering from thirst.

The brave group of Imam Husain (A) suffered these tortures with patience as they watched the enormous army that faced them prepare for war

The Night of Ashura

On the 9th of Muharram, Shimr arrived in Karbala with orders from Ubaidullah ibne Ziyad for Amr ibne Sa'ad. The orders stated that if Imam Husain (A) did not surrender and give the oath of allegiance at once, he must be fought and killed immediately. On receipt of these orders, Amr rallied a part of his army and marched towards the camp of Imam Husain (A). Abbas (A) advanced towards the enemy with 20 horsemen and enquired from them the reason for their sudden approach. When he was told of the ultimatum, he said that he would inform Imam Husain (A) of the position and bring back the reply.

When Abbas (A) briefed Imam Husain (A) of the situation, Imam (A) said to his brother, "Go back to them, and if possible, ask for an extension of time till tomorrow morning, so that tonight we may offer prayers to Allah, make Du'as and ask for His forgiveness". Amr granted them respite till the next morning with great reluctance. Now that they knew that death was inevitable the next morning, the whole camp of Imam Husain (A) readied themselves for martyrdom.

Imam Husain (A) gave a speech on the night of Ashura saying in part, "O Lord! I thank You,

because You have honoured us by means of Prophethood and taught us the Qur'an, made us understand the religion and its commandments, granted us eyes, ears and hearts, kept us free from the evils of idol-worship and then enabled us to thank You for Your blessings. I am not aware of any companions more faithful and honest than my companions, and any relatives more righteous and kind than my relatives. May Allah grant you all a good reward. I think the day of our fighting with this army has arrived. I permit you all to go away, because the enemies are after me only. You are free to depart without any restriction and can take advantage of the darkness of night".

The people who had come with the wrong intentions had already left before, and the ones who remained were perfect in their faith and loyalty. The listeners all rejected the option of abandoning Imam (A). One said, "Should we go away to live after you? We pray to Allah that the time may not come when you may be killed while we remain alive".

Thereafter the whole camp busied itself in preparation for the events of the next day. The sound of prayers and supplications filled the air like the buzz of hundreds of bees. Some soldiers checked their weapons, while others discussed tactics of warfare that would allow them to cause the most damage to Yazid's army. Mothers prepared their sons to lay down their lives with Imam Husain (A) in the cause of Islam.

Imam Husain (A) went around the camp talking to his men as well as his family and giving encouragement and last minute instructions. He consoled his sister Bibi Zainab (A) and urged her to remain patient in the face of the hardship that was to follow his martyrdom. The night eventually came to an end and the morning of the day of great sacrifices arrived. After reciting the dawn prayers, Imam Husain (A) arranged his small army in readiness for the battle. Just about one hundred brave men readied themselves to face the onslaught of .thousands

The Day of Ashura

The 10th of Muharram 61 A.H. is known as the day of Ashura. On this day in Karbala, the army of Yazid fought the army of Imam Husain (A). On this day the household of the Holy Prophet (S) was killed, alongside the faithful companions of Imam (A). Imam Husain (A) and his companions had spent the entire night in prayer. In the morning Ali Akbar gave the Adhan. He resembled the Holy Prophet (S) greatly and his recital reminded the people of the early days of Islam.

After the morning prayer, Imam's (A) followers took it in turns to come forward to address Yazid's army. Many had relatives and friends in the enemy camp and they tried to convince them of the terrible crime they were about to commit.

Finally, Imam Husain (A) came forward himself and addressed the enemy. He introduced himself and informed them that he was a peaceful man, living quietly in Madina and not harming anyone. He asked them why they were so bent on killing the grandson of the Holy Prophet (S), in whom they all believed.

Seeing the result of the words of Imam Husain, Amr ibne Sa'ad, the commander of Yazid's army, was concerned that the morale of his troops would be affected. He therefore declared that all should witness that he was casting the first arrow in battle and he shot an arrow towards Imam (A).

This was the beginning of the battle. Imam (A) had only 32 horsemen and about 110 soldiers in all. He had fortified his camp by locating it so that it was enclosed by a chain of hills on three sides. This area is known as "Haa-yeer" and can be seen even today.

He pitched his tents close together and dug a ditch at the exposed rear. The ditch was filled with firewood which was set alight when the enemy attacked the camp.

After a few single combats, there was a general attack in the mid-morning. Although the enemy was repulsed. Most of the army of Imam (A) was killed. By now it was time for the Zuhr prayer. Imam (A) prayed Salatul Khawf (prayers under attack) while the battle continued.

In the afternoon, it was the turn of the family of the Holy Prophet (S), the Banu Hashim, to sacrifice themselves. Ali Akbar was the first to go and within an hour, no adult male remained alive in Imam's (A) camp except his ill son Ali Zainul Abideen (A) and himself.

It was Asr time when Imam Husain (A) bid the ladies and children farewell and entered the battle-field. He gave his last speech, once more urging the enemy to consider their actions. When he did not receive any reply, he attacked them bravely, scattering them wherever he turned. The enemy could not stop him.

Finally, Imam (A) paused. He was dizzy with the loss of blood. He slid off his horse in a little hollow. Here the enemy found him with his head in Sajdah. The accursed Shimr committed the most terrible of crimes when he beheaded Imam (A). Inna Lillahi wa Inna Ilayhi Raji'oon

The Aftermath of Karbala

After the supreme sacrifice had been accepted and our Holy Imam Husain (A) had been martyred, a gloomy silence hung over the battlefield of Karbala.

Every now and then the silence would be broken by the sound of drum-beating to celebrate victory. Not content with spilling the innocent blood of Imam Husain (A) and his companions, Amr ibne Sa'ad, the commander of Yazid's army, ordered the horses to be shod afresh and then run over the bodies of the dead Muslims. Although some people from his army objected to this gross disrespect to the dead, he managed to enforce this horrible action. Having

trampled over the bodies of the martyrs, the enemy next turned their attention to the defenceless camp of Imam Husain (A).

Yazid's soldiers marched into the camp where they subjected the grief-stricken ladies to further torment and indignity. They had expected to find luxurious articles in the tents of the family of the Holy Prophet (S), but all they found were simple items and clothes, some of which had been stitched by Bibi Fatima (A) with her own hands. The ruthless soldiers snatched away these few possessions of sentimental value. They were angry at the lack of booty, and they took the veils off the struggling ladies forcing them to expose their hair and faces. This humiliation was almost too much to bear.

Not satisfied with this, the enemy set fire to the tents. The terrified ladies gathered their children and rushed from tent to tent, trying to escape the burning flames. One young child was seen rushing out of a tent with her clothes on fire. One of the enemy soldiers, seeing her pitiable condition came forward and put out the flames. The child looked at him, surprised at the unexpected kindness.

Tearfully, the little child asked him, "O Shaikh, do me one more kindness and tell me the way to Najaf." The soldier was very surprised at this unusual request, and replied, "Najaf is far away from here. Why do you want to know the way there?"

The child said with heartbreaking innocence, "I want to go to the grave of my grandfather Imam Ali (A) and complain about what your people have done to us - how our men were butchered and how our ladies have been whipped.

I want to tell him how the earrings were snatched from my cousin Sakina's ears, leaving her earlobes torn and bleeding." Bibi Zainab (A), who had been left in charge of the camp by Imam Husain (A), was at a loss as to what to do. She went to the seriously ill Imam Ali Zainul Abideen (A). He lay unconscious on the ground after the enemy had even robbed the mattress on which he lay. She shook him urgently to ask his advice. He was burning with fever but with a great effort he replied that it was compulsory on them to save their lives and he asked her to get everyone out from the burning tents into the open.

Soon the raging fires subsided leaving only one tent standing, although it was also damaged by fire. The ladies and children salvaged whatever they could of their few belongings and huddled together in that little shelter waiting for nightfall.

The night following the day of Ashura is known as Shame Ghariba. It was the night when the exhausted, hungry and tired families of Imam Husain (A) and his companions sat in loneliness, each thinking about the loved ones they had lost in the unjust battle on that day.

Due to the illness of Imam Ali Zainul Abideen (A), Bibi Zainab (A) realised that she would have

to take care of the small group of women and children herself. She called her sister Bibi Umme Kulthum (A) to help her and they decided to count all the children to see that none had gone missing in the confusion of the fire. To her horror and dismay Bibi Zaynab (A) found that Bibi

Sakina (A), the beloved daughter of Imam Husain (A), was not there.

The two ladies searched everywhere for the young girl but in vain. Finally, in desperation, Bibi Zainab (A) went to the place where the body of her brother Husain (A) lay and cried, "O my brother, Sakina, who you left in my care, is nowhere to be found. Where shall I look for her in this wilderness?" Just then, the moon came out from behind a cloud and Bibi Zainab (A) saw that little Sakina (A) lay on her father, sleeping on his chest like she always used to. She shook the child awake and said, "My child, how did you find your father's beheaded body in this darkness?"

The little girl replied innocently, "I wanted to tell my father about what the people had done to me. I wanted to tell him how Shimr had robbed the earrings that my father had so lovingly given me. I wanted to tell him how he had ripped them from my ears leaving my earlobes torn and bleeding. I wanted to tell him how the beast had mercilessly slapped me when I cried in pain. When I was running aimlessly in the desert I thought I heard my father's voice telling me he was here. I followed the voice and I found him lying here. I told him everything and then I felt like sleeping on his chest the way I always did, for the last time. So I kept my head on his chest and slept till you came."

Bibi Zainab (A) took the little child's hand and led her back to the camp where her mother Bibi Rubab waited anxiously. She had just returned the exhausted child to her mother when she noticed that a group of people were advancing towards the camp carrying flame torches. She thought that some soldiers had returned to loot them and she hurried to stop them from disturbing the children who had finally gone to sleep despite their hunger and thirst.

However, it turned out that the arrivals were a group of ladies, the wives of some of the enemy soldiers. They were led by the widow of Hur, who had joined Imam Husain's (A) army from the enemy camp.

Hur's widow said, "Dear lady, we have been asked to bring food and water for the children and bereaved ladies of your camp." She continued sadly, "I am the widow of Hur who died fighting for your brother. When the soldiers of Amr ibne Sa'ad realised that all of you would perish of hunger and thirst, and that they would not be able to take you back to Yazid according to his command, they sent me to bring food and water to you."

Bibi Zainab (A) offered her condolences at the death of Hur and apologised that they had not been able to offer him much hospitality. This remark prompted Hur's widow to say, "My lady, I

do not know how to offer you condolences, because you lost not one, but 18 members of your family."

Bibi Zainab (A) supervised the feeding of all the children and ladies. She then took a broken sword in her hands and began going around the camp ensuring that the small group was safe from any further disturbances during that night

The Journey to Damascus

On the morning of 11th Muharram, the army commander, Amr ibne Sa'ad called his officers to decide what steps they should take next. It was decided that the captives should be led through Kufa to Damascus to the court of Yazid. Amr ibne Sa'ad marched directly on to Damascus to inform Yazid about the events of Karbala, and to obtain his promised reward. He left Shimr and Khooli in charge of the captives.

With these arrangements completed, some soldiers were appointed to bind the ladies and children. They tied ropes and chains round their hands and feet. The ladies were put on camels with no saddles. The hands of some of the ladies were tied behind them and linked to the necks of the young children.

Imam Ali Zainul Abideen (A) was heavily chained and made to walk on foot, despite his weakened condition. The heartless officers made the captives pass by the place where the bodies of their loved ones lay, headless and without even shrouds over them. Many of the ladies and children threw themselves down from the camels to the bodies of their dead relatives, only to be whipped by the soldiers. Even the innocent children were not spared the lashes.

Once the captives were made ready, the heads of all the martyrs were mounted on spears. Every soldier who was given a severed head was made in charge of it and marched at the front of the army. The head of Imam Husain (A) was given to Khooli, who was a hard-hearted tyrant. Finally the caravan got underway for Kufa. The pitiful condition of the little children was such that they could not hold on to the camels due to their inexperience and the rapid pace of the march. Many children fell to the ground as a result. Despite the pleading of the mothers, the heartless soldiers would not halt the march to remount a fallen child. Today, the road from

Karbala to Kufa has many graves of such children who were left to die in the hot desert. Within a few hours, the caravan reached the outskirts of Kufa. Shimr decided to send a messenger to inform the governor, Ubaidullah ibne Ziyad, of their arrival. The messenger returned, saying that all preparations had been made, and the captives should be marched through the main streets of the town.

The people of Kufa lined the streets and looked from the balconies of their houses as the

captives were paraded in front of them. The announcer was saying, "O people of Kufa, we are bringing you the grand-daughters of the Prophet and other women and children of the family of Husain son of Ali. Husain, who had risen in rebellion against our Caliph Yazid, has been defeated and killed with his companions on the battlefield of Karbala. The members of his family are now being taken to the court of Yazid, to face whatever punishment he wishes to inflict upon them. People of Kufa, this is the fate that awaits all those who question the authority of Yazid, and no person who tries to rise against Yazid will be spared."

The people heard all this in astonishment. Not long ago Kufa was the capital of Imam Ali (A), and they all remembered the kindness shown to them by him and his sons and daughters. On seeing the pitiful condition of the captives, many were crying, but none dared to raise their voice against the oppressors, in case a similar fate befell them.

Finally the caravan reached the court of the governor. When he saw the condition of the captives, he mockingly said that it seemed that some slave girls had been brought before him, and not the grand-daughters of the Holy Prophet (S). This remark made Bibi Zainab (A) lose her temper and she addressed Ubaidullah ibne Ziyad with a fiery and eloquent speech.

Bibi Zainab (A) related the status of the Holy Prophet (S) and his Holy Ahlul Bayt (A). She reminded him of the teachings of Islam about the considerations to be given to prisoners, especially women and children. She warned him about the temporary nature of his victory and the doom that he and his evil master Yazid would soon face. She began to tell the assembled people about the inhuman crimes committed against Imam Husain (A) and his companions.

As she spoke, the people were reminded of the eloquence of her father Imam Ali (A). Ubaidullah became worried at the effect the speech of Bibi Zainab (A) was having on the people. He tried to shout her down by threatening the worst possible torture if she did not stop. Undaunted by his threats, the brave lady continued and her words moved many to tears. One of the aged companions of the Holy Prophet (S), Zaid bin Arkan, who was blind, rose up and protested at the cruel treatment of the members of the family of the Holy Prophet (S).

Ubaidullah realised at once that the situation could get out of hand. The speech of Bibi Zainab (A) could cause an uprising against him if he did not act quickly. He ordered his men to get rid of the companion of the Holy Prophet (S) and told Shimr and Khooli to get the captives out of Kufa immediately.

Arrangements were made for departure straight away, and Shimr chose the quietest route to Damascus so that he would not face any surprise attacks from anyone wishing to avenge the martyrs of Karbala. The caravan of the captive families of Imam Husain (A) and his

companions was led by Shimr through the deserts of Iraq and Syria, from Kufa to Damascus (Sham).

Throughout the journey people noted with wonder that the lips of the cut head of Imam Husain (A) kept on moving, reciting verses from the Holy Qur'an. Clearly heard was the following verse: Do you think that the people of the Cave and of the Inscription were of Our wonderful miracles?

Surah Kahf, 18 : 9

By reciting this verse, the Holy Imam (A) was calling the attention of the people to the next verses of this chapter of the Holy Qur'an (18 : 9-14), where Allah relates how He increased the guidance and strengthened the hearts of the Companions of the Cave, when they stood up against the evil-doers. Even in death, our Holy Imam (A) was pointing out the similarity of the message of his stand in Karbala to the other event from ancient history.

The captives finally reached Damascus. On reaching the city gates, the caravan was halted and Yazid was informed of their arrival and his permission was sought to bring the captives into his court.

The Court of Yazid

By the time the captive ladies and children of the caravan of Imam Husain (A) reached Damascus, they were in a terrible state. Their bodies were covered in dust, their clothes were in rags and blood oozed from the wounds and cuts inflicted by the tight ropes and whips.

As the caravan was paraded through the streets, the people of Damascus saw the captives and were moved by their pitiable condition. The children were crying with hunger and thirst, so many onlookers threw them dried dates as alms. Bibi Zainab (A) and Bibi Umme Kulthum (A) asked the hungry children not to eat these dates as it was Haraam for them.

They requested the people not to throw them food as Sadqah, because the Holy Prophet (S) had forbidden his family to eat such sacrificial offerings. The people of Damascus could not believe that these ladies, who were covering their faces with their hair, were actually from the family of the Holy Prophet (S). They wondered how Yazid had dared to humiliate these holy people in such a manner.

Finally, the prisoners arrived at the court of Yazid. After a wait of one full hour under the scorching sun, the orders came from Yazid to admit the captives into the court. As they entered they saw that the Yazid sat on an elevated gold throne while his courtiers and foreign envoys sat on gilded chairs around him. Yazid was already quite drunk. What a terrible spectacle the poor prisoners had to witness.

They saw that the accursed oppressor had the head of Imam Husain (A) on a tray at his feet and he was rattling a cane against the teeth and lips of the Holy Imam (A). He was boasting,

"Ah, aren't these the same lips that received the kisses of Muhammad? How delighted will be my ancestors when they see how I have taken revenge for their defeats in the battles of Badr and Hunayn."

In his drunk state, Yazid could not believe that the people he saw before him were members of the family of the Holy Prophet (S). In a quivering rage he accused Amr ibne Sa'ad of substituting slaves instead of the relatives of Imam Husain (A).

Amr ibne Sa'ad knew that Yazid was more dangerous than normal when he was drunk so he quickly reassured him and began to point out the ladies. He said, "O Commander of the Faithful, your slave has done exactly what you asked. Those are the sisters of Husain, Zainab and Umme Kulthum. The young girls are Sakina and Rukayya, the daughters of Husain. That lady is Rubab, the widow of Husain, while the others are orphans and widows of Husain's friends and relatives. The man before you is Husain's son Ali."

Yazid turned his attention to the people that Amr ibne Sa'ad had identified. He noticed that an old lady was standing in front of one of the lady prisoners, as if shielding her from the gaze of Yazid. He pointed towards the direction of the lady and shouted, "Who is that one sheltering behind the old woman, and why?" Amr ibne Sa'ad replied, "Your Majesty, she is Zainab, daughter of Ali and Fatima and the old woman standing in front of her is Fizza, and Abyssinian princess, who calls herself the slave of Fatima and Zainab."

Yazid ordered Shimr, who was guarding the prisoners, to throw Fizza aside so he could have a full view of Bibi Zainab (A). Seeing Shimr advance towards her, Fizza turned to the Abyssinian slaves who stood armed behind Yazid as his bodyguards, and said, "O brothers from my native country, will you watch silently while an aged lady from your land is molested in this manner?" Hearing the words of Fizza, some of the slaves stepped forward and warned Yazid, saying, "Your Majesty, ask Shimr to step back from our lady Fizza. If he does anything to her, blood will flow like water in your court."

Yazid was stunned at this threat and immediately stopped Shimr and assured his bodyguards that he would not harm Fizza. However, he was furious at the fact that he had been humiliated in this manner in front of everyone and he soon wound up the court session, deciding to .imprison the captives in the dark dungeons of the fort of Damascus