

(Questions Relating to Ashura/Karbala (1

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Question:

Why did **Imam Husain (a.s.)** take his family with him to **Karbala**? He knew that their fate was death. Why did he not leave them and allow them to remain behind or stay in a safe place?

Answer:

The holy uprising of Imam Husain (a.s.) has two dimensions: 1. Martyrdom. 2. Accomplishing a Mission.

The primary role of the women can be seen in the second dimension. Of course the women did have a role in upbringing and encouraging the warriors that participated in the battle, but their main role was in delivering a message.

All of the actions of Imam Husain (a.s.) were done for a reason and calculated, and even though he was aware of the dangers of travelling, he still took his family members with him to Kufa, saying: "Verily, Allah wishes to see them as captives." [Bihar al-Anwar, vol. 44, p. 314]

So, by doing this the Imam (a.s.) wanted them to be his propagators in the different cities and in the heart of the enemy's land. The women of Karbala, and in particular Seyidah Zainab (a.s.) were very influential in continuing with the uprising of Imam Husain (a.s.) and were able to change the stance of many people in opposing the Bani Umayyah government. They counter-attacked the anti-Shi'a propaganda, and exposed the corruption and evil doings of the Yazid government.

The following details can assist in further understanding the important role the women of Karbala had in the uprising:

1. Delivering a Message: The history of Islam shows us many examples of primary roles women had in the Mission of spreading Islam. Events where a female was there hand in hand with the male. Seyidah Khadijah (a.s.) was beside the Prophet (s.a.w.), Fatimah al-Zahraa (a.s.) was with Imam Ali (a.s.), and both these women had many responsibilities and duties. In the uprising of Imam Husain (a.s.) it was Seyidah Zainab (a.s.) who continued with this legacy and played a major role in the revolution. The uprising of Imam Husain (a.s.) was fighting and martyrdom all the way till the afternoon of 'Ashura, and it was him that led this battle. After him, the role of Imam al-Sajjad (a.s.) and Seyyidah Zainab (a.s.) commenced. The amount of widespread propaganda against Ahlul Bayt (a.s.) from the time of Mu'awiyah, and in particular in the area of Shaam, had a great influence on how the people felt towards Bani Hashim, and if the uprising had stopped there on that afternoon, the message would not have continued and

made the universal impact it has achieved. The advertising and propagation and publicising that the captives had during their captivation did not allow the enemies to continue on with their atrocities, and they corrected the views and ideology of the masses of people.

2. The Propaganda of the Enemy losing its effect: Shaam at that time was under the power of the likes of Khalid ibn Walid and Mu'awiyah ibn Abi Sufyan. The people of this land had not heard anything from the teachings of the Prophet (s.a.w.) and had very filtered and limited information about Islam. People had thought that Islam was represented through Bani Ummayah, and they were forced to accept Muawiyah as the Caliph. Mu'awiyah ruled Syria for up to 42 years, and this explains what kind of environment its people grew up in. The government was not shy in holding back their outward animosity and hatred towards the Ahlul Bayt (a.s.) and their followers.

Seyidah Zainab (a.s.) stood in front of all of this after Karbala and exposed their corruptions, religious, social and political. Their plots and schemes were not able to survive and their claws of power were losing grip.

3. Exposing the essence of the tyrant rulers: Another reason for the presence of the Imam's (a.s.) family was to show the face of the bloodthirsty, inhumane, and merciless person Yazid and his government. An effective element that made people accept the Message of Imam Husain (a.s.) and let the uprising have its effect was that people saw how oppressed they were. The human being by nature opposes oppression and stands against tyranny, and people came to see the reality when they witnessed the atrocities committed. In the event of Karbala, true oppression occurred, along with the sacrifice that Imam Husain (a.s.) and the other martyrs made. The women and children who were without weapons were attacked, they were hit, their jewellery was snatched from them, their tents were burnt, a six month infant was killed, and all were thirsty for water in the plains of Karbala.

The global message of Imam Husain (a.s.) was successful because of the many dimensions it had, and a very effective aspect of this uprising is the presence of the women of Ahlul Bayt (a.s.) at Karbala.

Answered by: Sheikh Zaid Alsalamy

Question:

Who would hold a higher status: the 72 companions of Imam Husayn (a.s.), or the 313 soldiers of Imam Mahdi (ajfs)?

Answer:

In my view, all the martyrs of Islam hold a very high status, but the martyrs of Karbala, they are with Imam Al-Husayn (a.s.), the Master of Martyrs, so they hold the highest status as martyrs.

As being companions of Imam Al-Husayn (a.s) or Imam Al-Mahdi (a.j.f.s), there won't be any difference because they are all faithful to the Imam of their time. Allah has the best knowledge.

Answered by: Sheikh Jafar Fathullah

Question:

Why did Imam Husayn (a.s.) leave Madina for Karbala?

Answer:

The Imam didn't go directly from Madina to Karbala. He first went to Mecca, and this was before Hajj (pilgrimage) time.

He started to talk to people about the political scene, about Yazid and his conduct. How he's openly violating God's laws, and how oppressive he is. He spoke to the people about their responsibility of standing against injustices. He provoked them to stand against Yazid, and he continued these activities until Hajj season arrived.

During the Hajj season, which starts in Shawwal, more people came from around the Islamic world. The Imam took advantage of this time to try and gather more support against Yazid.

While he was doing this, the people in Kufa got the news of what the Imam was doing. Being fed up with the central government based in Damascus (and some of course because of their Islamic responsibility), the Kufans sent letters to the Imam requesting him to come to Kufa, pledging that they will help him against Yazid.

The Imam sent a representative to test the waters. He was supposed to see how loyal the people were going to be. He was supposed to see if there was any truth to the letters. After some time, Muslim bin Aqil (the Imam's representative to Kufa) wrote a letter telling the Imam that the people were ready for him to come to Kufa.

On the ninth of Zhil Hijja, the Imam realised the government may assassinate him, so he left towards Kufa, since that was the only place he had support. On the way, he got news that things were changing in Kufa, but there was still hope of him being able to change things if he could reach the city.

When he got closer to Kufa, forces loyal to Yazid sent an army of 1000 soldiers to prevent the Imam from going towards Kufa, and from returning to Madina. The Imam chose another direction and started moving in that direction. The order came to stop the Imam in a bare land, and so when the Imam arrived in Karbala, he was stopped and prevented from leaving.

They presented the Imam with two options: one was to surrender and pledge allegiance to Yazid, and the other was to get killed. The Imam decided not to pledge allegiance even if that meant he will have to fight until death.

So the Imam's objective was to stand against Yazid. If he had the support in Kufa, he would

have gone on to fight Yazid as his father and brother fought Muawiya. When the people of Kufa said they were ready to support the Imam, the Imam practically showed his readiness to lead the people against oppression. When the people retracted their support, he continued the mission of standing up against injustice and refusing to pledge allegiance to a tyrant. He was willing to get killed to awaken the people and make them realise the reality of Yazid's illegitimate rule.

Answered by: Sheikh Hamza Sodagar

Question:

Can you please describe Yazid, the killer of Imam Husain, from the most reliable sources? What type of family did he come from, and how did he manage to get into power and rule the new Islamic state after just several decades from the demise of the holy Prophet(s)?

Answer:

Who is Hend, the grandmother of Yazid?

She was known as the wife of Abu-Sofyan. Unfortunately, some historians have quoted that she was known in the pre-Islamic era (the era of Jahiliah) as an unchaste woman, to the extent that her son Moawia was related to four fathers! Abu-Sofyan of course was the legitimate one and the other three were his friends (1).

The Grandfather of Yazid

Bani-umaya which was led by Abu-Sofyan was a leading Jahiliah tribe in the pre-Islamic era, and Abu-Sofyan was considered the Pharaoh of Mecca. With the appearance of Islam his kingdom began to shake, and hence he became the first enemy of Islam. The first battle between Muslims and the infidels of Mecca was the battle of Badr, which was organised basically by Abu-Sofyan, in which the father of Hend (Otbah), her uncle (Shaybah), her son (Handhalah) who were all killed by Imam Ali and the uncle of Prophet, Hamza. Eight people were killed in that battle from the family of Bani-Umaya. From that time, Bani-Umaya held a very strong animosity against Islam in general, and Imam Ali and Hamza in particular. Therefore, after the battle of Badr, Abu-Sofyan made an oath not to wash his head until he took revenge from Prophet Mohammad. As a result, the second major battle was organised, called the battle of Ohod. Hend, the wife of Abu-Sofyan, who had also lost her father, son and uncle, had appointed a black slave just to kill Hamza (the uncle of the Prophet), and to cut open his chest, remove his liver, and hand it over to Hend in order for her to chew it so that she might satisfy her anger, and this she did. Historians have narrated that she mutilated the bodies of the martyred from that battle and made a necklace for herself from the cut noses and ears (2)!

A few years later, Abu-Sofyan initiated a campaign against Islam. He mobilised all allied groups and parties including the Jews who were against Islam, to fight Islam. The battle of Ahzab (meaning parties) was the result of that plot, though Muslims fortunately won the battle and all the allied groups were scattered.

Two years before the passing away of the Prophet, the city of Mecca was captured by the Muslim troops and the kingdom of Abu-Sofyan collapsed forever.

Both he and his wife were in Mecca and had not a single doubt that they would be amongst the first to be executed. However, the merciful Prophet of Islam, forgave them all and made an announcement “ Go, you are all free”. Thus, he had no other choice but to embrace Islam, although he never seriously believed. One day he saw the Prophet passing by, and he whispered to himself saying : ‘I wonder how he defeated me’. ‘By the power of Allah’ replied the Prophet after reading his mind.

In the year 10 after the Hejrat (migration), the Holy Prophet of Islam passed away, and the event of Saqifah took place. Abu-Bakr in a political game became the ruler and Imam Ali was ignored. Abu-Sofyan, who was now seemingly a Muslim, though never believed in Islam, came to Imam Ali to pledge allegiance to him. Imam Ali, knowing that he had the intention to split the Muslim community and take advantage of this opportunity for his devilish plans, refused and said to him: “I do not need your support”.

On his way back home, Omar Ibn Khattab, an intimate friend of Abu-Bakr, who was later appointed by him as Second Caliph, saw Abu-Sofyan coming from the house of Imam Ali. He immediately informed Abu-Bakr and asked him to pay an amount of charity to Abu Sofyan which would silence him. The proposal was accepted and Abu-Sofyan shook the hand of Abu-Bakr as Caliph.

Abu-Bakr, in return, as a reward, appointed his son Yazid, brother of Moawia, as the commander-in-chief of an army which was dispatched for a battle in the then border of Islam, Damascus. The army of Islam won the battle and Yazid was appointed as the governor of Syria.

Moawia, the Father of Yazid

A few years later, during the reign of the second Caliph, Omar Ibn Khattab, a disastrous plague came to Syria and many people died. Yazid, the governor was also affected and hence wrote a letter to the Federal Government asking Omar to appoint Moawia as his successor. Again the proposal was accepted and Moawia became the governor of Syria and the neighboring states.

From that time, the pillars of the Bani-Ummaya dynasty started to become re-established. Before continuing with the story I'd like to mention a Hadith from the Prophet for you: Tabari,

the famous historian has quoted that the Prophet once saw Abu-Sofyan riding a camel and his two sons, Moawia and Yazid were walking, one in front and one behind the camel. The Prophet said: 'May God curse the rider and the one in front and in the back.' (3).

Years passed by and he was still the governor in Damascus until the third Caliph, Uthman came into power. Things were improving, for Uthman was from the same family tree of Bani-Umaya. Abu-Sofyan was still alive and his dreams were becoming reality, i.e. to rule Muslims and destroy Islam under the mask of Islam.

Therefore, during the reign of Uthman, Moawia had more freedom and designed many plots against Islam. It was during this time that his true nature became apparent and he started drinking alcohol. Obadat-ibn-Samet, who was one of the distinguished companions of the Prophet, was one day walking in Damascus. He was surprised to see a caravan of camels carrying a liquid which looked like wine. Given the fact that it was an Islamic state, and drinking of alcohol is forbidden in Islam, he asked the leader of the caravan if the liquid was olive oil?! The man answered: No, it is wine, and I am delivering the order of Amirul-Mo'menin Moawia!

Upon hearing that, Obadat ripped off all the skins of wine.

The years passed in this manner and Moawia freely ruled for about 19 years until Uthman was killed by Muslims and they asked Imam Ali to accept the leadership. One of the first duties of Imam Ali was to write a letter to Moawia asking him to resign, otherwise he would be sacked, since he didn't deserve the position. The answer of course was negative, and the battle of

Seffin was organised by Moawia against Imam Ali.

Unfortunately, the leadership of Imam Ali did not last long, as after almost four years, the Imam was assassinated. Since then, Moawia became the one and only leader of the Islamic Ummah. In order for him to seek revenge from Imam Ali and his followers, he put the followers of the Imam under the utmost oppression. The story of Bosr's raid is one of his crimes. Hamdan was a tribe of Muslims who loved Imam Ali. Moawia appointed his cruel commander, Bosr Ibn Artat to attack the tribe. In a barbaric raid, all the men of Hamdan were killed, their houses were set on fire and their ladies, including their children, were taken as prisoners of war and sold in the market as slaves! (4). This is the first time in Islamic history that Muslims were taken as prisoners of war by so called Muslims (5).

Final goal of Moawia

Mas'oudi, a very reliable historian, has quoted in his book Morooju-dahab from Motaref son of Moghayra that: "Once I made a trip with my father to Damascus where Moawia was ruling. My father was visiting Moawia every night and when coming back home, he was praising Moawia and acknowledging his intelligence. Suddenly, one night he came back home in a bad mood.

He didn't even have his dinner. I asked him what was wrong? He replied: I've come back from the most devilish person, my dear son! Surprised, I asked him who he meant? He turned around and said:

- Moawia!

- Who? Moawia?! You were praising him every night!

- Yes, but I never knew his real intention. Tonight, when all the people around us went away, it was only he and I. I took advantage of the opportunity and told him to reduce his pressure on the followers of Imam Ali, since he had gotten everything he wanted.

However, he replied: "You are talking nonsense. Look at Abu-Bakr, the first Caliph. He died and with his death his name has almost died too. The same with Omar and Uthman. But the name of this man (meaning the Prophet) is still repeated 5 times a day! Nay, I will never stop the pressure until I bury his name!" (6).

Mobilizing the Muslims towards Yazid

In the last 7 years of his ruling, Moawia started paving the way for his son Yazid to be the next caliph. Let me tell you some of his plans:

Assassinating the suspected candidates:

His first plan was to assassinate and get rid of those who could be in the pipeline of leadership. One day, he delivered a lecture in Damascus and asked the crowd their opinion for the next caliph, as he did not want to appoint anyone without their consent. They unanimously replied: "We are happy with Abdul-Rahman Ibn Khalid." Moawia, who was thinking of his son Yazid, got upset but did not say a word and swallowed his anger. However, he decided to assassinate Abul-Rahman.

A few months later, Abdul-Rahman fell sick and needed a doctor. Moawia took advantage of the opportunity and sent his own doctor to him and ordered the doctor to poison Abdul-Rahman. The doctor accepted on the condition that he would be exempt from paying his taxes for a whole year. Moawia agreed and the assassination was committed.

Imam Hasan (a.s.) was also in the position of candidacy. Moawia sent some money secretly to the wife of the Imam, Jo'dah, with the message that should she poison Imam Hasan. All the money would be hers and the son of Moawia, Yazid, would be also her husband. The plot was carried out. She killed Imam Hasan with poison. However, Moawia did not fulfill his second promise, reasoning that a woman who is not loyal to the son of the Prophet would definitely not be loyal to his own son!

Other Plans and Methods:

Moawia used different ways and means to pave the way for the leadership of his son. Buying

the leaders of the tribes was another plan. Arabs at that time had a tribal life. Each clan had a leader, whose word was law. Therefore, in order to have the support of a tribe you just needed to satisfy the leaders of the tribe. Moawia once called upon the leaders of some of the trouble-making tribes. He offered 100,000 Dinaars to each leader on the condition that they should not protest against Yazid. Among the leaders was a person named Hattat. Moawia gave him 70,000 Dn. When they left the castle, they counted their money and Hattat noticed he was given 3000 less than the others. He returned to the castle angrily and asked Moawia why he had paid him less. “Your belief is not worth more than that” said Moawia. He said : “No

Moawia, buy my belief at the same price”, and he was paid the rest.

Levying heavy taxes to humiliate people was another plan of Moawia’s to force their allegiance.

Yazid comes into Power

By the way, in the year 60 A.H., Moawia, after almost 40 years of ruling, died, and his son Yazid, the tippler, the gambler, the one who had no care for Islam, the one who had all the vengeance of his ancestors in his blood against Islam, came into power. If Moawia was secretly assassinating figures like Imam Hasan, Yazid had no shame barbarically killing the Imam. By his order, the master of the youth of Paradise (Imam Husain), along with his noble companions, were ruthlessly killed, and horses were ridden over their bodies after they were mutilated. Their families were taken as prisoners of war.

Finally, when the severed head of the Master of the youth of Paradise was brought to his castle in Damascus he hit the lips of the Imam with his stick saying : “Today is for the day of Badr.” Meaning, I have revenged now the day of Badr in which my ancestors were killed by Muslims, especially Imam Ali. Then he recited some poems in which he explicitly demonstrated his Kofr (disbelief in Islam).

Just imagine the scene, the head of Imam Husain severed from his body, in front of him are all the orphaned boys and girls whose fathers were killed in front of them a few days before. Lady Zaynab is also amongst those watching Yazid hitting the lips of her dear brother Imam Husain.

She courageously stood up and recited the Ayah:

“Let not the unbelievers think that our respite to them is good for themselves, We grant them respite that they may grow in their iniquity; but they will have a shameful punishment.” (3:178).

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Footnotes:

(1): Ibn- Jozi, Tadhkeratul-Khawwas p.116

(2): Compare and relate it to the evening of Ashoora.

(3): Tabari, Tarikh, 11:357

(4): Ibn-Athir, Osdol-Ghabah 1: 180

(5): Compare and relate it to the captives of Ashoora.

(6): Ibn-Abel-Hadid, Sharh Nahjul-Balagha 1: 463

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Answered by: Sheikh Mansour Leghaei

Question:

Can you please explain the event of the massacre that Yazid's troops committed in Madina? I am interested to know more about the background behind it.

Answer:

The event of Harreh (The massacre of Madina):

All reliable historical sources have narrated this tragedy which took place almost 3 years after Ashoora.

Although right after the catastrophe of Karbala, so many protests were mobilized against Yazid, Madina, the centre of revelation and the main base of the Prophet (s) in which hundreds of the companions of the Prophet (s) were still living, rebelled against the tyrannical government of Bani-Ommaya.

Abdullah son of Handhaleh (bathed by the angels) (footnote 1) who later on led the movement, upon receiving the news of Karbala, paid a visit along with a delegation from Madina to Damascus, the capital of Yazid. He reported later on, out of what he had observed in Damascus, that the extent of the corruption had gone so far, he wouldn't be surprised if they were stoned in Damascus from the sky.

As a result, upon his arrival to Madina, he mobilized an army against the government. They captured the House of the Governor in Madina, deported the governor, Othman Ibn Mohammad Ibn Abu-Sofyan, from the city and declared an autonomy. By doing this, the first capital of Islam was released from the influence of Bani-Omayya. However, as soon as the news was reported to Syria, Yazid dispatched one of his most vicious and murderous officers named Muslim Ibn Aqabeh (2) along with his troops which consisted of 5000 soldiers to suppress the revolt.

In spite of a heroic defense from Madinians, the barbaric troops of Yazid ultimately conquered the city. According to Mas'odi, the famous historian, so many people including Bani-Hashim and the companions of the Prophet were killed.

In short, Yazid had permitted his troops to enjoy their total freedom for 3 days in Madina, meaning no chastity, no property and no blood was respected. Tens of pages in the history of

early Islam consist of descriptions of the Massacre of Madina. Al-Fakhri in his History describes this bitter part of Islamic history as: during those 3 days, hundreds of the Prophet's companions were killed. The troops of Yazid entered the Masjidul-Nabi, and polluted the mosque. Around 900 girls were raped. For many years, Madinians would not guarantee the virginity of their daughters when marrying them.

Footnotes:

(1): Handhaleh, the father of Abdullah was among the martyrs of the battle of Ohod who had just married one night before the battle. Since he had directly gone from his wedding night to the battle without having his ritual bath done, the Prophet gave him the title of 'being bathed by the angels'. Abdullah, his son, was the only child he left behind as a result of the one and only communication he had with his wife.

(2): Due to his numerous crimes, some historians have named him instead of Muslim ' Mojrem' (meaning criminal).

Sheikh Mansour Leghaei