

[Home](#) > [The History and Philosophy of Aza' of Imam Husayn \(a\)](#) > Karbala, The Pleasure of Allah

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# The History and Philosophy of Aza' of Imam Husayn (a)

## [A. The Message](#)

Over one thousand three hundred and fifty years ago, on the 10th of Muharram, just before 'asr, a man stood on a sand-dune at Karbala'. He was bleeding from several wounds on his body. He had lost everything. Since early morning he had carried several dead bodies into his camp. He had even buried his infant child.

He looked at the bodies of his loved ones. Tears flowed out of his eyes. He looked at the sky and seemed to draw some strength from an unseen source. Then, like a muezzin from a minaret, he raised a call:

Is there anyone who will come to assist us?

Is there anyone who will respond to our call for aid?

He turned direction and repeated the call. He did this four times.

Whom was he calling out to? Surely he was not expecting anyone to come to his aid. Those who wanted to help him had already crossed the lines and laid down their lives for the cause. He knew there was no one left. He knew that there was no other Hurr. And yet, meticulously and laboriously, he made sure that his call reverberated in all directions.

Of course that call was a call to Muslims of every generation in every land. It was a call to us where ever we may be. It was a call for help. Help against Yezeedism which in every age rears its ugly head to oppress justice, truth and morality. Our Imam was calling out to every Muslim of every age and time to combat Yezeedism, both within himself and as an external force.

This was his battle cry for jihad-ul-akbar. He had already demonstrated that his objective had always been to create a spiritual awakening through amr bil ma'ruf and nahyi anal munkar. Now he was calling out for the continuation of this jihad at the individual, social and political levels.

## **B. Evolution Of Aza'**

Muslims, and more particularly the Shiahs, have answered this call with the unique institution of *aza' al-Husayn*. With every tear that we shed for him we pledge to resist the oppression of injustice, immorality, inequity and falsehood. Every time we raise our hand and bring it down on our chest in *matam*, we are saying: "Labbaik, Labbaik Ya Mawla!" to our Imam, Husayn Ibne 'Ali, the grandson of the Holy Prophet (S).

For long the word *aza' al-Husayn* has been exclusively used in connection with the remembrance ceremonies for the martyrdom of Imam Husayn. *Aza' al-Husayn* includes mourning congregations, lamentations, *matam* and all such actions which express the emotions of grief, anger and, above all, repulsion against what Yazid stood for. These emotions, however, remain futile and hypocritical unless accompanied by a will to reform both at the individual level and the community level.

The term *majlis* has both a grammatical meaning and a meaning which relates to *aza' al-Husayn*. In its technical sense, a *majlis* is a meeting, a session or a gathering. In reference to *aza' al-Husayn*, it means a gathering to mourn Imam Husayn. In this sense it was first used by our sixth Imam, Ja'far Sadiq A.S. It is reported that his companion al-Fudhayl Ibne Yasaar came to pay his respects to the Holy Imam.

After the exchange of usual courtesies, Imam asked al-Fudhayl: "Do you people ever organise *majaalis* to recall the martyrdom of Imam Husayn?" Al-Fudhayl, with tears pouring down his eyes, replied: "Yabna Rasulillah, indeed we do." The Imam said: "May Allah bless you. I highly approve of such *majaalis*."

On another occasion, the poet Ja'far ibne Iffaan recited to our Imam al-Sadiq a poem on the tragedy of Karbala'. The Imam began to weep uncontrollably. He then addressed the poet in the following terms:

"O Iffaan, do not think that it is only those whom you can see here are listening to your poetry. In fact Allah's closest angels are present here at this *majlis* and they are all listening to your recitation and they too lament and weep. May Allah bless you for what you have recited. He will, inshallah, reward you with paradise for your efforts on our behalf."

*Aza' al-Husayn* was a phenomenon which gripped Muslim conscience immediately after the tragedy of Karbala'.

The first *majlis al-Husayn* was recited in the market-place of Kufa by a lady from whose head her veil had been ripped off, whose hopes and aspirations had been destroyed on the blood-drenched sands of Karbala' but whose indomitable spirit stepped forward to free the Islamic values from the yoke of tyranny and oppression.

She was the first one to answer the call of Imam Husayn. Standing on her unsaddled camel, she looked at the multitude rejoicing the victory of Yazid. As soon as people saw her, they were quiet. They knew that a historic moment for Kufa had arrived. Looking straight at them, the daughter of 'Ali said:

"Woe upon you O people of Kufa. Do you realise which piece of Muhammad's heart you have severed! Which pledge you have broken! Whose blood you have shed! Whose honour you have desecrated!. It is not just Husayn whose headless body lies unburied on the sands of Karbala'. It is the heart of the Holy Prophet. It is the very soul of Islam!"

The first majlis touched and moved the people of Kufa so deeply as to give rise to both the Tawwabun movement and al-Mukhtar's quest for vengeance.

Ten days after Ashura, a messenger from Yazid arrived in Madina. His name was Abd al-Malik ibne Abi al Harith al-Sulamee. He came to tell the Governor, Amr bin Said al-Aas that Husayn ibne 'Ali had been killed in Karbala'.

The Governor, more conscious of the mood of the people, said that he himself could not make the news public but Abd al-Malik, if he so wished, could make the public announcement. Abd al-Malik announced the news after the morning prayers.

There was such intense weeping and wailing from the homes of Banu Hashim that the very walls of masjidun-nabawi began to tremble. Zainab, Umme Luqman, the daughter of Aqeel ibne Abi Talib came out screaming: "What will you say when the Prophet asks you: What have you, the last ummah, done with my offspring and my family after I left them? Some of them are prisoners and some of them lie killed, stained with blood. What sort of ajr al-risaalah is this that you disobey me by oppressing my children ?"

Fatimah Binte Huzaam, also known as Ummul Baneen, carried her young grandson Ubaidullah ibne Abbas and prepared to go out. When asked where she was going, she said that she was taking the orphan of Abbas to offer condolences to the mother of Husayn.

Marwan ibne Hakam reports that every afternoon men and women would gather at Jannatul-Baqee and there would be remembrance of the tragedy of Karbala' and the weeping and wailing could be heard miles away.

When the prisoners were finally freed by Yazid, they asked for an opportunity to have rites of remembrance in Damascus. A house was made available to them and *aza' al-Husayn* went on for over a week.

Just as Hadhrat Musa Kalimullah had been raised in the palace of the enemy of Allah, Firaun, Bibi Zainab laid the foundation of *aza' al-Husayn* in the very capital of his murderer !

On their return to Madina, Bibi Zainab took over the leadership of *aza' al-Husayn* in the city of the Holy Prophet. This aroused such strong emotions in the people and such revulsion against the oppressor that Amr ibne Said ibne al-Aas wrote to Yazid to have Bibi Zainab exiled from Madina. This was done in the beginning of 62 A.H. Bibi Zainab died shortly afterwards.

Both the 4th and 5th Imams greatly encouraged *aza' al-Husayn*. In their times *aza' al-Husayn* had to be performed in utmost secrecy as the regime was opposed to any remembrance of Karbala'. The poets who composed elegies and the devout Shiahs who attended the gatherings at which these elegies were recited did so at the risk of their lives. Nonetheless, the poets continued to pour out their emotions in their poetry.

Some of these poetry are extant today and one can see the intensity of faith and sadness enshrined in the words of the poets.

Gradually, the institution of ziyarah came into being. People would visit the graves of the martyrs and there perform *aza' al-Husayn*. Our Imams wrote for them ziyarahs to be recited. One of these ziyarahs is recited today by us and is known as Ziyarat al-Waritha.

When we examine Ziyarat al-Waritha, we can see not only a testimony of the greatness of

Imam Husayn and the moving sentiments describing his sacrifice for the cause of Allah, but also a solemn pledge and a commitment by the reciter:

"And I make Allah, His angels, His prophets, and His messengers, witnesses to the fact that I believe in Imam Husayn and in my return to Allah. I also believe in the laws of Allah and in the consequences of human actions. I have subordinated the desires of my heart to his (Imam Husayn's) heart and I sincerely submit to him and (promise to follow his commands)."

Clearly, this undertaking was never meant by our Imams to be an empty ritual. Recitation of Ziyarat al-Waritha is a commitment to Imam Husayn's cause made in the presence of Allah and the angels and the prophets and the messengers and in full awareness of the final accountability of human action. One must always reflect upon the seriousness and solemnity of this pledge.

Until the time of ghaibat al-kubra, we find that our Imams always encouraged *aza'* al-Husayn. They S in *aza'* al-Husayn not only a demonstration of grief for Imam Husayn and the martyrs of Karbala' but also a renewal of one's commitment to Allah and His laws as expounded in the Holy Qur'an and the ahadeeth.

We have records of the sayings of the representatives (Naibs) during ghaibat al-Sughra explaining and encouraging *aza'* al-Husayn. From 329 AH onwards the fuqaha and the 'ulemas took it upon themselves to perpetuate the message of Karbala'.

Shaykh Ibne Babawayh-al-Qummi better known as Shaykh as-Suduq who died in 381 AH was the first scholar to have introduced prose as medium of conveying the message of Imam Husayn. He would sit on a pulpit and speak extempore while many of his students sat by the side of the pulpit and recorded the speech. His speeches have been preserved and to this day are known as the Amali (dictations) of Shaykh Suduq.

Public demonstration of grief first occurred in 351 A.H. On the 10th of Muharram, there was a spontaneous procession in the street of Baghdad and thousands of men, women and children came out chanting "Ya Husayn! Ya Husayn!" beating their breast and reciting elegies. In the same year, a similar procession took place in Egypt.

The regime tried its best to stem the tide of *aza'* al-Husayn but failed. Very soon *aza'* al-Husayn became an institution with deep roots in the hearts of Muslims. Majlis evolved into an institution for amr bil ma'ruf and nahya anal munkar as well as reminder of the tragic events.

As Islam spread, different cultures adopted different modes of *aza'* al-Husayn. Taimur Lang introduced the institution of tabut and alam in India. As Islam spread southwards on the sub-Continent, the form underwent changes to take into account local cultural influences so as to portray the message of Karbala' in the medium best understood by the local people, both Muslims and non-Muslims.

By the beginning of the 19th Century, there was not a corner of the world, from Spain to Indo-China, which did not have some form of demonstration on the 10th of Muharram.

The form varied from country to country. In Iran, the most popular form has been passion plays as a medium transmit the message of Karbala' in addition to the majaalis from the minabir.

In India, the Ashura processions became part of the Indian Muslim culture. Even the Hindus participated in these processions. The Maharajah of Gwalior was always seen walking behind the 'alam of Hadhrat Abbas barefooted and without any insignia of his exalted office. Marthiyas and majaalis were such strong influences on the Muslim population that they helped strengthen not only their Islamic beliefs but also their political resolve.

History reports that even Gandhi on his famous salt march to protest against the oppression of the British Raj took 72 people with him in emulation of Imam Husayn protest against Yazid's oppression.

## **C. Importance of Aza'**

The following excerpt from the last will and testament of the Late Ayatullah Ruhullah Khumayni (A.R.) is most touching and relevant:

"The memory of this great epic event (Ashura) must be kept alive. Remember, the cries of damnation and all the curses that are rightfully raised against the cruelty of the Bani Umayyayah caliphs towards the Holy Imams, are reflected in the heroic protests against cruel despots by the nations through the centuries. It is the perpetuation of such protests that shatter oppression and cruelty.

It is necessary that the crimes of the tyrants in each age and era be indicated in the cries of lamentation and in the recitals of elegies held for the Holy Imams." Where ever the Shiahs have gone they have taken with them the cultural forms of *aza'* al-Husayn as practised in their country of origin. Today, *aza'* al-Husayn in one form or another, can be seen throughout the world.

*Aza'* al-Husayn is an important institution and we have to ensure that it is kept alive so as to cultivate and nurture Islamic conscience in each one of us and that our children and their descendants remain committed to the cause of Imam Husayn.

## **D. Aza' At Personal Level**

We must never lose sight of the fact that while the form of *aza'* al-Husayn may reflect the local indigenous culture, the essence of *aza'* al-Husayn must always be remembrance of the martyrdom of Imam Husayn and our re-dedication to his cause.

There is always the danger that if the form appears to be incongruent to the local norms and consequently incomprehensible to the young generation or to the indigenous population upon whom we wish to impress the message of Karbala', the substance might gradually lose its significance. The fabric of the substance invariably depends upon the acceptability of the form.

Throughout history the form of *aza'* al-Husayn has always undergone changes to accommodate local norms. It is for us, therefore, to seriously re-evaluate the form in order to ensure that we can pass on to our children the substance of *aza'* al-Husayn in its pristine state and also make *aza'* al-Husayn an irresistible instrument of tableegh !

We are duty bound to Allah and His Prophet to ensure that our children grow up to accept *aza'* al-Husayn NOT as a ritualistic activity NOR as means for atonement, but as a serious commitment to the basic values of Islam.

Dr. Liyakat Takim in his speech in Toronto on the occasion of the last Husayn Day made this very profound statement: "The message of Imam Husayn can only be properly comprehended when we bear in mind the Qur'anic principle of tawheed which demands our undivided commitment to Allah only."

I accept that not all of us can suddenly make or honour such a commitment. But supposing on the day of 'Ashura, after performing our a'amaals or when the Ziyarah is recited after the *aza'*, each one of us promises, in the name of Husayn ibne 'Ali, to give up one such activity as is contrary to the doctrines of Islam what a strong community we would be and what an excellent legacy we would leave for our children !! This in my opinion would be *aza'* al-Husayn par excellence !

## **D. Aza' As Instrument of Tableegh**

It is our duty to deliver Imam Husayn's message to the indigenous population of the country we live in. We can succeed in this only if we ourselves appear to be true followers of Imam in all our interaction with the community at large. We must reflect the maximum integrity, Islamic values and our sincere commitment to Imam's cause. We can not possibly be making the commitment enshrined in Ziyarat al-Waritha without the least intention of honouring that commitment.

Processions are of course the institution effectively used in the countries of the East and in Africa. We have to convince ourselves that this institution can be equally effective in the West. If not, we must explore other means of taking Imam's message to the people. We have to examine such activities as:

- blood donation through Husayni Blood Banks;
- distribution of food to the needy;
- maximum usage of media to explain the event and the fact the Holy Imam died to save the basic values cherished by all the communities;
- publication and distribution of leaflets;
- distribution of cold drinks in schools and colleges;
- visiting the patients in hospitals with floral gifts. You may find that when you take a small gift to a patient in hospital you will have carried the message of Husayn to the entire family of that patient.

All these suggestions are based on the institution of the public "sabeels" which we still have in the East and in Africa. While mourning is important, perhaps we should limit that within the confines of our Imambargahs, and demonstrate the true spirit of Imam Husayn's generosity when he ordered Hadhrat Abbas to provide water to Hurr and his army. Perhaps we too may see a large number moving towards Islam and Imam Husayn.

## **E. Zakiri And Presentation of History**

I seek, with utmost respect, to offer word of caution to all my zakir colleagues.

Exaggeration can only discredit us and the cause of Imam Husayn. The historical accounts

must be adhered to although at times, in our anxiety to arouse emotion, we resort to exaggeration. We should have the recorded history as our guide and reason and logic as our limitations as do most of our 'ulema and fuqaha.

Abu Mikhnaf was the earliest historian who took testimonies from eye witnesses and compiled his maqatal. There is in existence today an book in Arabic called Maqatal Abi Mikhnaf. It is doubtful whether this is the original text.

However we do have the excerpts quoted by Tabari and other historians. We zakireen have relied on various sources principally Allamah Majlisi's Biharul Anwar and others. Several very good books in English exist on this subject. Maulana Sayyid Muhammad Rizvi is the compiler of a book containing several very interesting articles relating to the history of the tragedy of Karbala'. Then there is Shaykh Mufid (a.r.)'s al Irshad.

Extrapolations of certain inferences from known facts are not, in my opinion or in the opinion of the 'ulema, objectionable. For example description of natural human emotions, though not chronicled in vivid detail may be extrapolated if the description is within the bounds of reason and does not detract from the character of the personalities involved.

Some of the maqaatil can be faulted in respect of certain statements For example Tabari records that the age of Imam Zain-ul-'abideen (A.S.) was questioned at Kufa and he was examined to determine whether he had attained buloogh. (See the History of al Tabari, Vol. 19 page 166). Shaykh Mufid gives the fourth Imam's age at the time as 23 years. It is well known the Imam was married and had a son .

Many such contradictions exist in the maqaatil but this does not mean that we have to reject any account in toto. Detailed events, and often the names of those involved, are very difficult to record accurately even by an honest and meticulous chronicler recording contemporaneously as the events are taking place. Abu Mikhnaf began to compile his history, mostly through eye witness account at least twenty five years after the tragedy. It is necessary for us to be eclectic for so long as we remain within the confines of reason. To be eclectic we must know what historical material is available and where to find it.

It is not within the scope of this article to deal with all the historical sources I would refer the reader to Sayyid Husayn Muhammad Ja'fari's **The Origins and Early Development of Shi'a Islam**, Chapter 7<sup>1</sup>. I would also refer any reader interested in the subject to the following additional works:

- The volume of Tabari referred to above.
- Al-Irshad by Shaykh Mufid.
- The article by Imam Husayn by Veccia Vaghliers in the Encyclopaedia of Islam which is based mostly Balaadhuri's account.

## **F. Objectives**

We have to remember that the 'ashra al-Muharram is a very emotional period and this emotion has to be exploited by the ahle minabir to convey the message of Karbala', to awaken a hatred against all that Yazid stood for and to rekindle a commitment to Islam as preached by the Ahlul Bayt and for which Imam Husayn laid down his life.

We can not perpetuate the illusion that *aza' al-Husayn* means no more than a few tears, *matam* and processions. These are the means and not the end. They are important only if they lead each of us becoming a better shiah than we were in the preceding year.

If we lose sight of the objectives we may find ourselves answerable for forgetting and holding to ridicule the cause for which our Imam sacrificed so much !

Imam Husayn himself advised a muslim who was claiming to be a shiah to fear Allah and not to make a false claim lest on the Day of Judgement he is raised with the liars. "Our shiah," the Imam added, "is the one whose heart is pure of malice, deception and corruption. His words and deeds are only for the pleasure of Allah."

We must during this forthcoming 'ashra-e Muharram pose this question to ourselves in all seriousness. Do we intend to make a commitment to Imam Husayn's objectives or do we wish to continue complacently in our current state, paying what can best be described a lip service to his martyrdom with demonstrative mourning only ??

While I pray that we begin, as we must, to understand the philosophy of *aza' al-Husayn* and make a serious commitment to the objectives of the King of Martyrs, I sincerely hope that there never comes a day when *majaalis* are replaced by clinical lectures devoid of all emotion!

Reason when supported by emotion has a more enduring effect, and it is for this very end that as a recompense of the rationality of the message of the Holy Prophet he is told by Allah to ask for no recompense save the love of Ahlul Bayt. Love, while being an emotional force, becomes hypocrisy if one fails to identify and follow the wishes of the loved one.

May all our Muharrams be true demonstration of our love for, and a confluence of emotion, reason and commitment to, Imam Husayn.

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5. Al-Serat the Imam Husayn Conference Number, published by the Muhammadi Trust, July 1984.
6. The origins and Early Development of Shi'a Islam, by S.H.M. Jafri
7. Al-Tawhid, Vol. 2 No.1, the Editorial.
8. Al Tawhid, Vol.13, No. 3, Pages 41 to 74, reproducing the article by Martyr Murtadha Mutaharri entitled "Ashura : History and Popular Legend"
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10. The last issue of Jafferri News.



## The Cause

Let us reflect upon the cause of the martyrdom of Imam Husayn (A.S.)

From the day he left Madinah on the 28th Rajab in 60 Hijrah, at every stage, our Imam made his mission clear. He left no doubt as to his intentions. It was not to fight Yazid to get the throne of the empire over which the khalifah ruled. Imam mission was to reawaken the spirit of Islam and rekindle the Islamic conscience which was nearing extinction by the conduct of Muawiyah and Yazid.

Justice and morality were gradually being destroyed by the greed for land and power of those who had become rulers. Qur'an insists that distinction can be accorded by piety alone. Since the death of the Holy Prophet a social order had come into existence creating aristocracy based on nepotism and blood relationship.

Let us look at some of the statements by Imam Husayn. Before leaving Madinah Imam Husayn made a will and handed it over to his brother Muhammad Hanafiya. In this will Imam wrote: "My mission is to reform the muslim community which I propose to do by **amr bil ma'ruf and nahya anil munkar**, inviting them to the good and advising them against evil. It is not my intention to set myself as an insolent or arrogant tyrant or a mischief maker".

In Mecca a man came to him and said he was a Shiah of Ahlul Bait. Imam looked at him and said: "My friend, never claim to be one of our Shiahs lest Allah, on the Day of Judgement, raise you with the liars. No one can be our Shiah except a person whose heart is free of deceit, malice or hatred towards others and free of corruption. If you are not such a person you can claim to be our admirer or supporter but never our Shiah."

Being a Shiah means having a pure mind and soul, free of greed, malice, jealousy, deceit. It means keeping away from back biting and other habit of putting down others. It means having a thirst for knowledge. It means living our lives justly, humbly and being true to ourselves and others.

In Mecca Imam addressed a large group of scholars who had come for pilgrimage. He exhorted them to do amr bil ma'ruf and nahya anil munkar and not to pander to the philosophies of the rulers who paid them to keep away from truth. This was a long and powerful speech reminding the scholars of their duty to inculcate Islamic conscience and not to mislead the masses who trusted them.

This famous speech of the Imam, is a document which must be read by all of us every Muharram so that we could ourselves be our own judge as to how seriously we take our duty to do amr bil ma'ruf and nahya anil munkar. These are mandatory obligations.

The Holy Prophet (S) has said :The world is like a ship and mankind its passengers. The welfare of all depends upon the safe conduct of each. If anyone is found making a hole on the side of a ship, he must be stopped.

The Holy 5th Imam (AS) "Amr-bil-ma'roof and nahya 'anil munkar are the most important obligations because upon them depend the performance of all other obligations. If amr-bi-ma'roof and nahya 'anil munkar are done the earth will become a safe place, enemies will be subdued and all other affairs discharged satisfactorily"

The Holy Prophet (S) "He who does amr-bil-ma'roof and nahya 'anil munkar is the vicegerent on the earth of Allah, His Prophet and His Book."

The sole cause for which Imam Husayn set out from Madinah was to perform his duty to do amr bil ma'ruf and nahya anil munkar to the ummah which had not only apathetically accepted the evil that had been flowing from the court in Damascus but, sadly, begun to emulate it. The inevitable consequence of this would have been a total destruction of all Islamic values.

In a letter which he addressed to the people of Kufa Imam wrote: "An Imam is one who judges by the Holy Qur'an, upholds justice, professes the religion of truth and dedicates himself to obeying Allah and His Prophet."

When Hurr and his army stopped Imam caravan from going to Kufa, and Hurr told Imam that his order from ibne Ziyad was to ask Imam for Bai'at to Yazid, Imam refused to declare Bai'at to someone who was only serving his own ends and not of Islam. Hurr said that such an attitude might cost Imam his life.

Imam replied: "Are you threatening me with death? Death is many thousands of times better than the dishonour of Bai'at to an enemy of Islam. Do you not see that truth is not being practised and falsehood is not being prevented? I see death as a blessing and life with tyrants as the most disgusting state one can be in."

At Karbala', facing the army of Yazid, Imam Husayn addressed them as follows: "Remember that when you see a ruler who does what has been forbidden by Allah and His Messenger, who indulges in sins, who oppresses the people he rules, and you do nothing to stop such a ruler, before Allah you are as guilty as he is."

He went on to add: "My parents did not raise me to submit myself to an evil tyrant. I am your Imam and it is my duty to tell you that you have surrendered the freedom of your mind to the evil ways of Yazid. If you do not care for Islam, and do not fear the day of judgement, at least do care for that precious gift from Allah, the freedom of your spirit!!"

When Amr Sa'ad called upon the army to attack and kill Imam Husayn he said: "Death is better than disgrace and disgrace is better than the fire of hell."

## **Karbala, The Islamic Conscience**

*"Wa innama kharajtu li talabi-l islahi fi ummaati jaddi"*. Indeed I am leaving Madinah to reform the ummah of my grandfather.

The above words summarise the mission of Imam Husayn (A.S.). These words are part of his will which he left with his step brother Muhammad al-Hanafiyya. The reform of the ummah through amr bil ma'ruf and nahyi anil munkar, that is what should be the objective of every one of us claiming to be mourning for our Imam during these twelve days.

It is only through amr bil ma'ruf and nahyi anil munkar can the Islamic conscience amongst the Muslims be re-kindled and safeguarded. Mere indulgence in ritualistic practices, however fervently executed, during the 'ashra can only be an insult to our own intelligence if we lock them away for another year and continue during the interim ignoring the call of our conscience to heed to the message of Husayn. Our every action during these twelve days should be towards our rededication to the message of Imam Husayn never to forsake

our Islamic conscience.

Let us reflect upon two case studies.

Zuhair ibne Qain al-Bajali was a Kufan. He was a committed Uthmani and would have nothing to do with the Shiahs. Husayn's caravan was moving slowly towards Kufa. Zuhair had gone for hajj and was returning to Kufa. It so transpired that at a place called Zarud the two caravans met. Zuhair learnt that the Imam's caravan was but a short distance away but it did not occur to him to go and pay his respects.

Then in the early hours of the evening a messenger came to Zuhair and said, "Abu 'Abdillah Husayn ibne 'Ali has sent me to ask you to come to him." A companion of Zuhair reports that they were all astounded. Zuhair remained seated. His wife came to him and said, "O Zuhair the grand son of the Holy Prophet has summoned you and you take no heed!" Zuhair got up and went over to Imam's camp. No one knows what conversation took place between the two. One can only surmise that this must have been Imam Husayn's yet another foray into amr bil ma'ruf and nahyi anil munkar.

All we know that when Zuhair returned to his caravan his face, as Tabari puts it, was radiant and cheerful. He dismissed his companions and told his wife that he had decided to go with his Imam to what may well turn out to be a certain death. She was free to return home.

Zuhair remained with Husayn. On the 'Ashura day, in the morning encounter, he fought bravely reciting his rajas, "God has purified our souls and has guided us." When someone taunted him that he was not a Shiah but an Uthmani, he retorted, "But now seeing me with Husayn you must recognise that I am a Shiah of 'Ali."

At Zuhr prayers when the Holy Imam was leading salat al-Khauf and the arrows continued to be shot at him, Zuhair offered to stand in front of Imam to protect him. He would smile as he intercepted an arrow shot at Husayn by receiving it in his chest. Imam concluded the prayers and Zuhair fell dead. Thirteen arrows had pierced his life out of him. He was a person whose conscience had been aroused by amr bil ma'ruf and nahyi anil munkar and he died protecting that great 'ibadah- the salah.

Hurr bin Yazid al-Tamimi al-Yarububi was a career officer in the Kufa army. When Husayn bin Numayr, the commander at al-Qadisiya, learnt that Imam Husayn and his entourage were getting very close to Kufa he dispatched Hurr with a detachment of 1,000 men to intercept Imam.

Hurr believed that Imam was being prevented from entering Kufa because his presence there might jeopardise the stability of the city. As a professional soldier he did not very much concern himself with what he considered to be political issues. His duty, he felt, was to execute the order of his superiors. However, lurking somewhere in that stout military heart was an Islamic conscience.

Hurr and his soldiers met Imam Husayn and his companions at a place a few miles outside Kufa. It was midday when the two parties met.

Hurr and his people had been travelling since morning and were very thirsty. He requested Imam Husayn for water for his army. Imam Husayn asked Hadhrat Abbas, Hadhrat 'Ali Akbar, Hadhrat Qasim and the others to give Hurr and his men water and also to give water

to their horses. This must have been a poignant scene. Water bottles being brought out of the saddle bags and the youths of Ahlul Bayt pouring water for Yazid's army to quench their thirst.

Zuhr prayers were led by Imam and Hurr and his soldiers joined in. After the prayers Hurr told Imam Husayn that his orders were to stop Imam Husayn from going to Kufa unless he agreed to give "Bai'at" to Yazid. Imam Husayn said that he would never give Bai'at to Yazid. Yazid was an unjust ruler who wanted to destroy Islam. In any case he was going to Kufa because he had been invited by the people there.

Imam produced two sacks of letters and petitions from the people of Kufa begging him to go there. Hurr said that as his orders were not to let Imam go to Kufa there was nothing that he could do save carry out his orders.

Imam Husayn could have fought Hurr and his soldiers and forced his way into Kufa, but he did not wish to start any battle.

He told Hurr that he would take another route and go away from Kufa. Hurr said that his orders were to follow Imam Husayn. And so, followed by Hurr and his 1000 soldiers, Imam Husayn and his companions rode in the direction away from Kufa.

On the 2nd Muharram, they reached Karbala'. Imam Husayn bought land there and put up his tents. Hurr and his men pitched their camps some distance away.

The following day, Umar bin Sa'ad came to Karbala' with 4000 soldiers. Umar Sa'ad was the commander of the Yazid Army. He had several meetings with Imam Husayn and was so impressed by Imam that he began to join Imam for prayers. When Ibne Ziyad heard this, he was furious. He sent Shimr with 10,000 men and wrote a letter to Umar bin Sa'ad, ordering him to get "Bai'at" from Imam Husayn or kill him. Umar bin Sa'ad immediately changed his attitude towards Imam Husayn. Following his instructions he imposed restrictions on Imam Husayn and his followers from getting water from the Euphrates, and from the 7th Muharram, no one from Imam Husayn's camp was allowed near the river.

On the night of Ashura, Hurr was very restless. He could hear the children in Imam Husayn's camp cry because of thirst. His conscience whispered to him: "What have you done Hurr? Why did you put the son of Fatimah in this position? Will Allah ever forgive?"

This was the rising of his dormant Islamic conscience. This career soldier could not sleep the whole night. Within him there was a struggle between his duty as a soldier and his Islamic conscience. He had been a professional soldier most of his life. He S his life in terms of obedience to his superiors and the military discipline. The political considerations were not his concern. But now it was more than just the politics. The issues were moral and touched the very core of Islam. Hurr's Islamic conscience compelled him to consider these issues.

Just before dawn he made up his mind. Hurr, his son and his slave rode over to Imam Husayn's camp. Hurr threw himself at Imam Husayn's feet, pleading for his forgiveness. Imam Husayn took Hurr in his arms and said, "Hurr, I forgive you. I assure you that my grandfather, the Holy Prophet also forgives you".

The defection of a professional soldier of Hurr's calibre is a momentous event in the history of Karbala'. He chose to move from the side that would in a few hours be victorious and

earn great accolade from Ibne Ziyad and Yazid to the side of the few hungry and thirsty men, children and infants who would certainly perish in the burning sands of Karbala'. This marks a great victory for the cause of Imam Husayn. Hurr and his companions gave their lives for Islam.

Both these cases underline the victory of Islamic conscience over the might of evil.

## **Karbala, The Pleasure of Allah**

In *Surat as-Saafaat* 37:101-109, Allah (SWT) says:

***We gave him (Hadhrat Ibraheem A.S.) the tidings of a son possessing forbearance (hilm).***

And when the son (Hadhrat Ismail A.S.) was old enough to walk about with him (some mufasssireen have translated sa'ya as to work) (Ibraheem) said : " O my son I have a seen in a dream that I should sacrifice you (for the pleasure of Allah)". He (the son) responded: O my father! Do what you are commanded. If Allah pleases, you will find me of the patient ones."

So when they had both submitted (to Allah), he (Ibraheem) flung him (his son) down upon his face.

We called out to him saying: "O Ibraheem !

You have indeed fulfilled the vision. Surely thus do We reward those who do good deeds

Most surely that was tremendous (manifest) trial !"

Then We ransomed him (Ismail) with a great sacrifice (bidhibhin 'azeem).

And we shifted (this blessing) on him (who is from) among the generations (to come) in later times.

Peace be upon Ibraheem !

The above ayaah paint the picture of a father and son. The father was commanded by Allah to sacrifice his beloved son. The son willingly accepted to be the sacrifice for the pleasure of Allah. By Allah's Grace the son is saved. Allah says the dhibhin 'azeem will come from the later generations.

This was a test of obedience to Allah's command. Ibraheem dearly loved Ismail, but he loved Allah more. He agrees to sacrifice his son for the pleasure of Allah. Ismail is a youth with a whole life time ahead of him. Yet not only he agrees to be the sacrifice but also assures his father that he will, inshallah, find him amongst the patient one.

The most poignant statement is that of Allah when He says it was indeed a tremendous trial for the father and the son!

To perpetuate the memory of this test we perform pilgrimage where every ritual is connected with the love which a father and a mother have for their child. Sa'ee reminds us of infant Ismail's thirst and a mother's frantic search for water to quench the baby's thirst. The journey to Meena with a halt at Arafah retraces the journey undertaken by the father

and son to fulfill Allah's command.

Where are there any circumstances to call for such a sacrifice ? One can find no reference to it. Was it recorded by any historian ? No, Allah recorded it and reminds the Muslims of the events year after year during the pilgrimage.

Over three thousand years later, on the 10th of Muharram in 61 Hijrah, history witnessed the situation re-enacted on the battle-field of Karbala'. Then a sacrifice was called for to protect and save Islam and all its values from being trampled under the unclean feet of Yazid. Wahdaniyyah was at stake ! Prophethood was at stake ! Justice was at stake ! The belief of accountability on the Day of Judgement was at stake !

Miles away from Mecca we once again we see a father and a son. 'Ali Akbar is standing in front of Imam Husayn. He says, "Father, I request for permission to go and fight the enemies of Islam." Imam looks at his son lovingly. He says, "Akbar, you have my permission. May Allah be with you! But Akbar, you know how much your mother, sisters and aunts love you. Go and say farewell to them." Akbar goes into the tent of his mother. Every time he wants to come out of the tent the mother, aunts and sisters pull his cloak and say, "O Akbar, How can we live without you!"

Finally Imam Husayn goes in and pleads with all to let 'Ali Akbar go.

Imam helps his son mount the horse. As Akbar begins to ride towards the battlefield, he hears foot-steps coming from behind. He looks back and sees his father. He says, "Father, we have said good-bye, why are you walking behind me?" Husayn replies, "My son, had you been a father you would surely have understood how difficult it is for a father to part from his son!!"

After a fierce battle Akbar is over-powered by the enemy who rush from all sides. As he falls from his horse, he cries out. "O Father, my last salaams to you!" As he hits the ground a spear which had wounded him and lodged in his chest breaks. The blade remains embedded in Akbar's chest.

When our Imam heard Akbar's salaam he looked at Furaat where Abbas lay and said, 'Abbas! Now that this brother of yours needs you most, where have you gone?' With all his strength sapped by the anguish in Akbar's voice, Husayn began to walk towards the battlefield.

When Imam Husayn got to where Akbar lay he took him in his arms. Akbar had his right hand on the chest. He placed his left arm over the shoulder of his father. Husayn said, "Akbar, why do you embrace me with one arm only?" Akbar would not reply. Husayn tried to move Akbar's hand. Akbar resisted. Imam gently moved the hand. Then he saw it ! He saw that dreadful blade of spear sticking out of his son's chest. Imam Husayn laid 'Ali Akbar on the ground and sitting on his knees he put both his hands on the blade of the spear. He then looked at Najaf, and cried out, "Father, I too have come to my Khaiber!" He pulled out the blade.

Jibraeel (a) cried out "Marhaba! Marhaba!". Akbar took a deep sigh and then lay still!

*Assalamu 'alaika ya waritha Ibraheema khaleelillah!*

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