

Chapter 22: Ashura; the Tenth of Muharram

The battle of Karbala was foretold in almost all religions. The *Bhaunik Puran* of the Hindus was translated into Urdu by Maulvi Abdurrahman Chishgti, a prominent Sunni scholar under the title ‘Mir’atul Makhlooqat’. In that book, Mahadev relates to his wife Parbati all the future things that were to happen, including the birth of Prophet Mahamat (Muhammad) who will preach a great religion and that a few years after his death some evil men would unjustly murder his grandson. [1](#)

Among the Zoroastrians *Jamasp Nama* is a famous book of predictions. It was translated into Urdu by Mulla Wahidi, editor of *Nizamul Mashayakh*, Delhi. Jamasp predicts the birth of the Prophet (a.s.), the spread of Islam and the chaos after the Prophet’s death. He writes, “Religion shall become a stepping stone to rulership. People will wage war against his son-in-law. The son-in-law will have two sons. One will be poisoned and the other will be martyred along with his friends in the desert. The leaders opponent to the Prophet’s progeny will be men of low morals.” [2](#)

The battle between Imam Husayn (a.s.) and the forces of Yazid took place on the tenth of Muharram, the year 61 A.H corresponding to October 9, 680 A.D.

Mirza Ghulam Abbas Ali writes, “*Adib, the first month of the Jews, corresponds to Rajab of Moslems; and Nisan, the seventh month of the former, to Muharram of the later. But, during the time of Moses [Exodus Ch. 12 V. 2], the seventh month of the civil year was changed into the first month of the sacred year, and hence Muharram that was originally the seventh month is now considered the first month of the year by Muslims.*” [3](#)

He writes further, “*The Jewish months as well as those of Hindus and Moslems have always been Lunar. The difference in the dates calculated by the Jews and the Hindus from those of Moslems is due to the fact that the Jews give the month of Nisan 40 days and the Hindus give every third year an additional month, so as to make their years keep pace with solar years; otherwise, the Day of Atonement, Dasara and Muharram, all being the tenth day of the seventh month, would fall on the same day.*” [4](#)

The tenth day of the seventh month has great importance in every true religion. The Christian and the Jews consider it as the Day of Atonement or the Day of Sacrifice. They are directed to observe Sabbath and rest, and a day of convocation in which they should afflict their souls and give offerings of fire to the Lord on that day.⁵ There is no explanation with Christian and Jewish theologians as to why they are commanded to afflict their souls on the tenth day of the seventh month.

In the Hindu mythology, Pandavas got the permission to untie their weapons from the Jimmi plants in preparation of regaining their lost empire from the Kauravas. Until date, the Hindus celebrate it as Dasara, the tenth day of their seventh month. On this day, Hanuman found out the place where Ravana had hidden Sita, and informed it to Rama.

According to Muslim traditions, it was on the tenth day of the seventh month, at the place now called Karbala, Noah's Ark was caught in a whirlpool and barely escaped drowning. On that day while passing the plains of Karbala during their times, the Prophets Abraham, Moses and Jesus stumbled, suffered bleeding injuries and cried when their hearts suddenly became heavy with inexplicable deep sorrow. Suffice it to say that the Tenth day of the Seventh month is of great importance in every religion, signifying war or sorrow.

It was the invariable custom among the Arabs in their wars to challenge the opponent into a single combat. Those who were at the bottom of the hierarchy came out first to throw or face the challenge, followed progressively by the best, bravest, and renowned warriors, sparing the commander until the last. If the single combat was indecisive, in rare cases, recourse was to be a general onslaught by the entire army, but, ordering a general onslaught was looked down upon by valiant and noble soldiers as a mean and cowardly act of a vile and weak commander.

In the battle of Karbala, the tradition of single combat was adopted in the initial stages. The hostilities were invariably commenced by Yazid's forces, who, finding confidence in their numbers, challenged Imam Husayn's small number of companions and family members in single combat. Imam Husayn (a.s.) being steeped in his father Imam Ali's tradition, advised his small group of companions to refrain from commencing any hostility, and only to defend themselves whenever the enemy threw a challenge.

The scribes present in the battlefield were not in agreement as regarding who was the first martyr or the sequence in which Imam Husayn's companions went forth to meet the enemy's challenge. The differences in their reports may be due to their situation, exact spot and time of their observation.

There also appears to be some difference, among various narrators, regarding the number of martyrs from Imam Husayn's camp. It is commonly asserted by the Shia sources that the total number of martyrs is seventy-two, comprised of fifty-four companions of Imam Husayn (a.s.) and eighteen members from his family including Ali al-Asghar, the six-month-old son of Imam Husayn (a.s.).

Moulvi Mirza Ghulam Abbas Ali Sahib writes, "... Thus, the whole number of Imam Husayn's companions ranges between seventy-two and one hundred and twenty according to different authors." ⁶

According to him, the total number of companions, identified by name, is ninety-five and the number of Imam Husayn's family members is twenty-seven, thus making a total of one hundred and twenty-two martyrs. This figure takes into account twenty-eight companions of Imam Husayn (a.s.) who were martyred during the frequent shower of the enemy's arrows,⁷ shot blindly towards Imam Husayn's camp. Sheikh Abbas al-Qummi gives a list of twenty-nine companions of Imam Husayn (a.s.) who were martyred in the first raid.⁸ S.V. Mir Ahmed Ali has appended a brief note on 105 martyrs of Karbala in his book 'Husayn, the Saviour of Islam'.⁹

All narrators, however, unanimously record that it was Umar ibn Sa'd who emerged from his tent, called his slave Duraid to whom he handed over the standard and stood under the shade of the banner with bow and arrow in his hand and shouted "*My warriors! Bear witness before God and people that it is me, Umar son of Sa'd, who is the first to attack al-Husayn.*" Umar, then, shot the first arrow towards Imam Husayn's camp, signifying the commencement of war.

According to some narrators, al-Hurr, who crossed over to Imam Husayn's camp early that morning, was the first person to seek permission to face the challenger. Having got the permission from Imam Husayn (a.s.), al-Hurr was preparing to go into the battlefield, when his servant Urwa approached him saying that the slave cannot live to see his master facing the enemy. He begged to be allowed to go first. He first dispatched triumphed over several warriors in single combats and then killed many of the enemy who surrounded him before falling down a martyr. Thus, Urwa, Al-Hurr's slave, according to some historians. was the first to face the enemy and to attain martyrdom, followed by al-Hurr's son, brother Mus'ab and al-Hurr himself in that order.

According to Moulvi Mirza Ghulam Abbas Sahib, the first to face the enemy was Abdullah son of al-Hurr who attained martyrdom after slaying a good number from the enemy. He was followed by al-Hurr's slave, son, brother and al-Hurr himself. ¹⁰

However, there is unanimity among all the writers that the last person to face the enemy was Imam Husayn (a.s.). They also agree that just before his martyrdom, Imam Husayn's six-month-old infant son Ali al-Asghar (a.s.) was brought into the battlefield to get for him some water, but Harmalah martyred him by slitting his parched throat with his powerful arrow.

Umar ibn Sa'd gave his army's standard to his slave Duraid, the command of the left flank to Umar bin al-Hajjaj and the right flank to Urwa bin Qeis. He gave the command of the cavalry to Khouli and the infantry to Shabath bin Rib'iy.

Imam Husayn (a.s.) gave the standard to his brother Abul Fadhl al-Abbas (a.s.), who in turn appointed Zohair ibn al-Qain to command the right flank and Habib ibn Mudhahir to command the left flank.

A detailed account of the battle itself is found in the various '*Maqatil*'.¹¹ Mirza Ghulam Abbas Ali's book "Life of Husayn" and the English translation of Nafasul Mahmoom provide the details for those who read English. Late S.V Mir Ahmed Ali, the well-known translator of the Qur'an into English, has also written a

book under the title of “Husayn; the Saviour of Islam” in 1964. Curiously, Ghulam Abbas Ali, S.V. Mir Ahmed Ali as well as this humble servant all belong to Madras. Another excellent book is Yasin T. al-Jubouri’s “Kerbala and Beyond.” Our object is not to go into lengthy details of the battle but to bring out the words uttered by Imam Husayn (a.s.) and his companions, so that we may understand the object and motive that propelled them to fight Yazid’s forces and attain martyrdom. Detailed accounts of the battle can be found in several books, which establish the ferocity and inhuman nature of the vile Yazid and his forces, and in contrast, the just cause and the spirit of independence from tyranny in which Imam Husayn (a.s.) and his noble companions defended themselves. Historians are also unanimous in recording that it was Yazid’s forces that always initiated the attack and that Imam Husayn’s companions went forth, as a last resort, in response to the enemy’s challenge.

In the following pages we give a general account of the battle with some details about Imam Husayn’s brother Abbas (a.s.), his sons Ali al-Akbar (a.s.) and Ali al-Asghar (a.s.). Whenever anyone from Imam Husayn’s camp emerged to meet the challenging enemy, they reminded their opponent about the Qur’anic verses and sayings of the Prophet (S) which praised and demanded adherence and obedience to the Ahlul Bayt (a.s.). They emphasised that Imam Husayn (a.s.) was the last of those Ahlul Bayt (a.s.). They also demanded to know what crime Imam Husayn (a.s.) had committed and the reason why they were after his blood.

Moulvi Mirza Ghulam Abbas Ali Sahib recounts the various sermons addressed by Imam Husayn (a.s.) and his companions Brurair, Muslim, Zohair, Habib and several others before the enemy commenced the war.

According to some other authors, al-Hurr was the first to address the enemy, perhaps hoping that he would be able to persuade the thousand horsemen he commanded to see reason and leave their services under the aggressor and to shift their support to the righteous cause. Al-Hurr along with his son, brother, and servant were some among those who had crossed over from Yazid’s army. Therefore, his address to the forces that he commanded until recently was very significant.

In his speech, al-Hurr praised the Lord and the Prophet (S) and he recited verses from the Qur’an glorifying the Ahlul Bayt (a.s.) one of whom Imam Husayn (S) was. Al-Hurr recited the verses relating to the Prophet Salih (a.s.), the killing of whose camel had brought down the wrath of God. He reminded them that the killing of Imam Husayn (a.s.) who was from the very the flesh and blood of the Prophet (S), for no fault, would be a major sin inviting greater wrath of God both in this world and the hereafter. He reminded them that the pleasures and promises of this world were merely a transitory mirage and that the life to come would be the everlasting one. He then recounted his own experience saying that until the last night he commanded Yazid’s cavalry and that he realized that never had Imam Husayn (a.s.) done anything unjust, illegal or contrary to Islam, while Yazid was an imposter, debauch and hypocrite undermining Islam from within. It was this reason why he left the command of Yazid’s cavalry though knowing that he would be martyred.

The enemy had no answer to al-Hurr's arguments. Realising that al-Hurr's speech had caused a stir in the rank and file of the enemy, Shimr, the most cruel and stonehearted of all, advised Umar bin Sa'd that they should immediately attack and kill al-Hurr before he could utter another word. Al-Hurr went back to seek Imam Husayn's permission to fight the enemy.

Burair took permission to address the enemy. In his address, Burair told the enemy, *"Would you deny and refuse to recollect the tradition in which the messenger of Allah had said that he was leaving, among the people, two inseparable and essential things, namely the Qur'an and the Ahlul Bayt and that following both is obligatory and that if they forsake anyone of the two, Muslims will be confounded and led astray."* In unison, the enemy forces replied, *"We admit that the messenger of Allah had done so."*

Burair said, *"Would you deny that in the Qur'an God declares that the Ahlul Bayt are Immaculate, free from the possibility of committing error?"* The enemy soldiers replied, *"We can not deny what you say as it is the truth."* Burair said, *"Do you admit that al-Husayn is one of the Ahlul Bayt and the Imam of the time and that he is pious and righteous?"* The soldiers replied, *"We do admit."*

Burair said, *"Has al-Husayn committed any transgression of divine laws, killed anyone, deprived anyone of his property or has he committed any act that demands his execution?"* The enemy forces admitted that Imam Husayn (a.s.) had not committed any such act. Burair continued, *"Do you not remember that Yazid's father Mu'awiya prevented water in (the battle of) Siffin and that when Ali gained possession of the river, he acted magnanimously in giving water and he refused to act like Mu'awiya or to prevent water to be given to the thirsty enemy."* The enemy concurred.

Burair then said, *"You know that there are women, children and infants in al-Husayn's camp who are being denied even a drop of water since the past three days. You allow heathens, atheists, Christians and Jews and even animals to drink water from the river, but you refuse to allow even a drop of it, to your Prophet's grandson and his children."* The enemy replied, *"We are soldiers employed by Yazid to wage war. We obey his orders and there is no room for sympathy in a war."*

Burair cursed their blind following and lack of humanitarian considerations, and came back to Imam Husayn's camp.

Then, Zohair ibn al-Qain took permission to address the enemy ranks. Zohair said, *"O you people who have gathered here, have you forgotten that the messenger of Allah had advised you to adore and follow the Ahlul Bayt of whom al-Husayn is the most prominent of those present here? This is the time of your test regarding that advice. You claim to be Muslims. Your action will show how you treat al-Husayn now in the context of the Prophet's advice."*

Shimr shot an arrow towards Zohair saying, *"O old Man, will you face us in combat or you will waste the breath of your old lungs with unnecessary talk? I am anxious to kill all of you."* Zohair replied, *"Life among people like you is a disgrace and a burden. Death for al-Husayn's cause is indeed a grace, blessing and everlasting pleasure."*

Muslim ibn Awsaja and Habib ibn Mudhahir went and addressed the enemy similarly, but Shimr, Ibn Sa'd, Harmala and Khouli interfered and disturbed their speech to prevent the soldiers from being impressed with the unassailable arguments put forth before them.

Imam Husayn (a.s.) then addressed the soldiers of Kufa saying, *“Have you not written to me and requested me to come to you for providing religious guidance? Did you not assert that you are left without an Imam? Have I not written in reply promising to be among you to provide religious guidance? Have we done anything wrong? Have we committed any crime? Did you ever find me negligent in my religious obligations or in the adherence to the Islamic tenets?”*

The soldiers replied, *“You are not guilty of any of these.”*

Then, Imam Husayn (a.s.) said, *“On the other hand, Yazid himself and his men who have gathered here are guilty of making innovations, discarding religious injunctions, indulging in worldly carnal pleasures, and mocking the messenger of Allah by saying that there is nothing but this life in this world, and that there is no accountability or reward or punishment and no life hereafter. Has not Yazid persecuted and killed several noble scholars who were pious Muslims? Do you then take sides with such men against me? Have you lost your sense of justice? Have you forgotten that Islam teaches austerity and piety? Is not this worldly life transitory and the gain you hope to get is not going to provide eternal comfort to you? Do you not realize the consequences of the evilness of your act in seeking to slay me?”*

The enemy soldiers were spell bound. Imam Husayn (a.s.) continued, *“You have fallen in serious error. You are misled and baffled by your own ignorance and the incitement of Yazid and his men. You have lost your sense of Judgement and the desire to distinguish and accept good instead of evil. You are tempted by vain promises of worldly wealth and comfort. I assure you that you shall not have it. In fact, your guilt will torment you in this world and you will suffer punishment in the next. Take heed and listen. I have not done anything wrong nor harmed any of you, as you never met me before. There is no cause for enmity between you and me. You know that God will punish those who kill an innocent person. Desist from your evil plan, and even this moment let us part ways and avoid bloodshed.”*

Umar bin Sa'd at the head of the enemy soldiers shouted, *“We will not let you go. We have gathered here to fight and kill you and your companions.”*

Imam Husayn (a.s.) replied, *“Disgrace be upon you! You have forsaken your religion and become Satan's disciples. The ill-gotten and prohibited food that you consume has imbibed disloyalty, uttering falsehood, injustice, oppression and shamelessness into your very blood and nature. Yet, you seek my allegiance so that you may later claim that I had assented to your evil deeds? I would rather sacrifice my life than to succumb to the threats of a tyrant. I have placed all facts before you to show who I am, and that we have not done anything wrong to warrant your wrath. I have also warned you sufficiently and if you do not heed my words, you shall be eternally held responsible in this life and in the hereafter.”*

On hearing this, Umar bin Sa'd shot the first arrow towards Imam Husayn (a.s.) saying, *“Bear witness O*

you God and men, that I am the first to shoot this arrow in token of initiating this war against al-Husayn and his companions.”

Thereafter, one after another, Imam Husayn's companions went, as per the custom of the Arabs, to meet the challenge in a single combat. They told the enemy about their noble ancestry and depending on their age, their achievements in various wars fought alongside the Prophet, Imam Ali, or Imam Hasan (a.s.) and explained the relationship of Imam Husayn with the Prophet, his daughter Fatima, and Imam Ali (peace be on them). They explained the justness of Imam Husayn's cause for which they were ready to sacrifice their lives in accordance with the Qur'an and the Holy Prophet's traditions. Each of them prevailed over several opponents in single combats and were martyred when they were slyly attacked from behind or when Yazid's soldiers made a concerted onslaught.

The Martyrdom of al-Qasim ibn al-Hasan

After the companions of Imam Husayn (a.s.) were all martyred, it was the turn of his relatives; the remoter relatives facing the enemy before the nearer ones. Thus, the first to go, one by one, were the six brothers, three nephews and two sons of Muslim bin Aqeel (a.s.), cousin and deputy of Imam Husayn (a.s.) who was martyred in Kufa. Then, followed Own and Muhammad the two sons of Abdullah bin Ja'far and Imam Husayn's sister Zainab (a.s.). Next, came the turn of the sons of Imam Hasan (a.s.). Al-Qasim was in his teens. In the single combat, he prevailed over several renowned warriors including the renowned Syrian, al-Arzaq and his brothers. When the enemy made a general attack with all his might, Qasim fought with great valour and the ferocity of his attack scattered the enemy whom he pursued right into the midst of Yazid's army. Sa'd bin Urwa bin Nufeil, a vile soldier of Yazid, hid himself and when Qasim passed in pursuit of the fleeing soldiers, attacked from behind so ferociously that Qasim fell from his horse. The enemy, seeing Qasim lying on the ground, regrouped and attacked him. Hearing Qasim's cries, Abbas, Ali al-Akbar and Imam Husayn (a.s.) rushed to rescue him, but in the melee, the hoofs of horses of the retreating forces of Yazid trampled him (Qasim) badly.

The Martyrdom of Abbas and other sons of Imam Ali

According to Hafiz Jalaluddin¹², Own son of Imam Ali (a.s.) and Asma' bint Umais, a stepbrother of Imam Husayn (S), was present and fought valiantly for Imam Husayn (a.s.). He prevailed over Salih bin Sayyar and his brother Badr bin Sayyar in a single combat, but while he was thus engaged, Khalid bin Talha came from behind and dealt a mortal blow and Own was martyred.

Abbas (a.s.), one of the four stepbrothers of Imam Husayn (a.s.), was born to Imam Ali (a.s.) and Ummul Banin bint Hizam bin Khalid bin Rabi'a. Three of them, Uthman, Ja'far and Abdullah had earlier in the day fought the enemy and attained martyrdom. Abbas (a.s.) was now very anxious to face the enemy. He was a renowned warrior and had fought alongside Imam Ali (a.s.) even when he was only twelve years old. The enemy ranks were terrified of facing him. Earlier in the preceding night Shimr, who

claimed that Ibn Ziyad, the governor of Kufa, was distant relative of Ummul Banin, produced Ibn Ziyad's letter, offering enormous wealth and property to Abbas in addition to a high post in Yazid's army. Abbas tore and scattered the letter of guarantee and refused to be enticed saying that he was least interested in worldly wealth or power and that he was fighting for the just and noble cause of Imam Husayn (a.s.) against the tyrants and hypocrites.

When Abbas approached, Imam Husayn (a.s.) did not permit to fight against the enemy. Instead, he permitted him only to fetch water from the river Euphrates to quench the thirst of the children in the camp.

Abbas came out of the camp and addressed the enemy soldiers saying:

"O you vile and base men of ignoble birth, would you deny the basic need of water to the children of the Holy Prophet's grandson al-Husayn, while you claim to be Muslims and hope for the Holy Prophet's intercession before God? What sin have these children committed that you seek to kill them? How do you justify denying water to children and women? Your conscience is dulled by the lure of wealth and you have forsaken the Islamic tenets. The curse of God is forever upon you for your evil nature."

Hearing these words, the enemy attacked Abbas (a.s.) from all sides. Abbas repelled the onslaught and the enemy soldiers took to their heels. Murad, a veteran soldier from Yazid's army, became infuriated and called upon his men to stop running, as he, an accomplished soldier, would singly face Abbas (a.s.). When Murad attacked with his lance, Abbas (a.s.) dexterously evaded it at the very last moment, wrenched it from Murad's hands and struck his horse with such force that Murad was thrown down and his horse was disabled. Shimr shouted at Suraqa to take and give Murad another horse called Tawia. Abbas (a.s.) frustrated this plan by killing Suraqa and taking the horse Tawia. Abbas (a.s.) left his own horse at Imam Husayn's camp and riding Tawia, went back to the fight. Murad, in mortal danger, shouted at his men to come to his rescue saying, *"Abbas, riding my horse Tawia, will kill me with my own lance."* Hearing the pitiful cries of the wretch, Shimr accompanied by Sinan bin Anas, Khouli bin Yazid al-Asbahi, Jameel bin Malik and several horsemen went forth to rescue Murad. But, before the rescue party could reach Murad, Abbas (a.s.) overtook them and killed Murad with Murad's own lance.

Scattering the enemy contingent, Abbas (a.s.) reached the banks of the Euphrates and asked the horse to drink water. The faithful animal turned away its head as if refusing to taste water. Abbas (a.s.) then raised a handful of water up to his mouth to show to the world that he had command over the river then. Abbas (a.s.) filled the leather bag with water and started towards Imam Husayn (a.s.) camp, anxious to deliver water to the thirsty children. Fearing that water might, after all, reach Imam Husayn's camp, the enemy soldiers rallied. Unable to face him with sword or lance, the archers were pressed into service. While Abbas (a.s.) was busy avoiding the arrows, one of the soldiers came from behind and severed his right arm. Abbas (a.s.) caught the leather bag by his left hand. Another vile soldier of Yazid slunk behind and cut his left hand. Abbas (a.s.) caught the leather bag by teeth, intent on saving the bag of water. An arrow then pierced the leather bag and water flowed out of it. At that moment, an arrow struck Abbas

(a.s.) in the eye, blinding him completely, while simultaneously he was clubbed from behind with brute force. Finding that his object of procuring water to Imam Husayn's children failed, frustrated Abbas (a.s.) had no desire to live, and he fell down from his horse.

Imam Husayn (a.s.) fought and scattered the enemy and reached Abbas (a.s.), whose face and eyes were completely covered with blood. As a last wish, Abbas (a.s.) wanted his healthy eye to be cleaned of the blood so that he might see his master in his last moments, even as he had opened his eyes at his birth to see Imam Husayn (a.s.) before he saw anyone else. Abbas (a.s.) heaved a deep sigh and expressed his desire that Imam Husayn (a.s.) should not take his body to the camp, as he was, even at death, ashamed to face the children for whom he could not procure water. Abbas (a.s.) breathed his last in Imam Husayn's lap. His wish was fulfilled and he was buried where he breathed his last. His mausoleum is far away from that of Imam Husayn's camp.

Imam Zainul Aabidin (a.s.), the eldest son and next Imam to his father Imam Husayn (a.s.), was laid up with such high fever that he became completely unconscious. Muslims believe that by making him sick, God paved the way for the succession of the Imamate to continue by devolving upon him.

The Martyrdom of Ali al-Akbar

The last person to fight in the cause of Imam Husayn (a.s.) was his second son Ali al-Akbar (a.s.) who was then eighteen years old. He was the darling of the family. He very much resembled the Prophet (S), not only in appearance and bearing but also in the manner of speech. His aunt Zainab (a.s.) and his mother Layla were severely grief stricken on his departure for battle. Imam Husayn (a.s.) asked them to pray for his safe return. When Ali al-Akbar (a.s.) went to fight the challenging enemy, he overcame every mighty opponent who came for single combat.

The efforts in the battle coupled with the lack of water over the past three days brought with it excruciating thirst. Ali al-Akbar returned to the camp and said, "If only I could get a gulp of water, I would show the enemy the mettle of a Hashemite warrior." Hearing this, Imam Husayn (a.s.) called and asked him to suckle his tongue, as there was not even a drop of water available. When he took his father's tongue in his mouth, he immediately withdrew it saying, "Father, your thirst is more severe than mine, for your tongue is parched and hard."

Ali al-Akbar (a.s.) went back to the battlefield. This time, Imam Husayn (a.s.) forbade Zainab and Layla from praying for the safe return of Ali al-Akbar (a.s.). With renewed vigor, Ali al-Akbar (a.s.) fought the enemy, who instead of coming for single combat, now attacked him in a concerted effort of the cavalry, archers, lancers and infantrymen. The lance of the wretch Sinan ibn Anas pierced Ali al-Akbar's chest and passed through his liver.

All the day, Imam Husayn (a.s.) used to call Abbas (a.s.) and Ali al-Akbar (a.s.) to help him bring the bodies of every martyr. Now, when he heard the cry of Ali al-Akbar (a.s.), there was no one remaining to

assist him. Hameed ibn Muslim records, *“In the morning of Ashura when I saw him, al-Husayn appeared much younger than his sixty three years. By the time al-Abbas was martyred, he was stooping from the waist. The colour of his beard had turned salt-and-pepper. When I saw him hurrying to the side of his martyred son Ali al-Akbar, he was stumbling and his vision appeared to have dimmed. His hair had turned completely grey and he appeared to have suddenly aged into a very old man. He was calling out: ‘Where are you Ali? Where is my Ali? Oh Lord, help me to find my son!’ At that moment, Ali al-Akbar’s horse appeared, smeared with blood, and it pulled al-Husayn to where its master was rolling in blood.”*¹³

When Imam Husayn (a.s.) attempted to lift his son’s full-fledged body, he found that all his strength had suddenly drained. He prayed God to give him the strength to lift the body. With great difficulty, he lifted and put his son’s body on the back of the horse and took him to his camp. He called out the children to help him in bringing down the body of Ali al-Akbar from the back of the horse. Some years later in a congregation, a person asked Imam Zainul Aabidin (a.s.), *“I was present at Karbala on the day of Ashura. Though it was a very solemn occasion for the Ahlul Bayt (a.s.), towards the end of the day, I saw a woman of noble stature clad in red clothes. I wonder what the happy occasion was which warranted the wearing of a red colored dress.”* On hearing this, Imam Zainul Aabidin (a.s.) wept and said, *“The woman was my aunt Zainab. She had assisted my father in getting down my brother Ali al-Akbar’s body from on the back of the horse and her clothes were smeared with his blood and appeared red.”*

The enemy, finding that there none was left in Imam Husayn’s camp except women, children and the ailing and unconscious Imam Zainul Aabidin (a.s.) and Imam Husayn (a.s.) himself, started shouting and clamoring for Imam Husayn (a.s.) to come out and fight them.

Imam Husayn (a.s.) bade farewell to his family members and came out to face the challenge. He asked Umar bin Sa’d to order his men to be quite so that they might hear his words. Umar replied, *“I will order my men, but can I prevent the neighing of horses and the clanging of armors?”*

Imam Husayn (a.s.) said, *“If you are not capable of it, I shall do it.”* Then, Imam Husayn (a.s.) cast a glance all around. The men became quite, the neighing of horses and the clanging of armors stopped. A miraculous and absolute silence prevailed over the entire battlefield.

Imam Husayn (a.s.) first glorified God while addressing the enemy:

“God has created this world as a temporary and ever changing abode for his creatures. Its pleasures entrap men and those who run after such pleasures are, in reality, the losers. Let not the pleasures of this world deceive you, for it denies you that which you seek and deprives you of that which you aspire. I find that you have united in that which God deplores and have thus incurred God’s wrath. You had apparently accepted God’s sovereignty and Muhammad’s prophethood. Yet strangely, you have joined hands against the very progeny of the Holy Prophet’s and intend to kill them. Satan has prevailed over

you and you have forsaken God. You and your evil plans are going to be destroyed very soon. We are from God and to Him is our return. You people have rescinded and lost your faith and have become infidels. Tyrants will be soon destroyed.”[14](#)

On hearing this, the vile Shimr said, “What you say is not comprehensible to us, nor do we care for what you say.” Imam Husayn (a.s.) replied,

“I say: fear the True God,[15](#) and do not slay me, for in any sense, it is neither legal nor proper for you to murder me. Nor have you any right to disgrace me,[16](#) for I am the son of the daughter of the messenger of Allah and my grandmother is Khadija. You know that the messenger of Allah had declared that Hasan and Husayn are the masters of the youth of Paradise.”

So saying, Imam Husayn (a.s.) raised his voice so that everyone there might hear him. He said,

“O people of Iraq and all those who have gathered here, pay attention and listen carefully. Do not be hasty until you hear me fully, for you have the right to hear my objections and arguments before you, so that if you decide justly, it will stand to gain. If, perchance, you are unable to decide justly,[17](#) I advise you first to, at least, consult and discuss among yourselves so that you may resolve any confusion, differences, difficulty or complication in the process of arriving at a just conclusion. After this, inform me of your final decision, but remember that God, Who had revealed the Book and *protects the virtuous, is also my Protector.*”

Imam Husayn (a.s.) then returned to his camp, so that the enemy might have the opportunity to discuss among themselves and arrive at their own conclusion.

After some time, Imam Husayn (a.s.) once again returned to advise the enemy forces. He said,

“You, people, are intent on being doomed. Is it not a fact that you yourselves wrote to me complaining of your bewilderment at the oppression and called me to your assistance? Have we not, at your behest, rushed to redeem you? Until yesterday, you had drawn your swords in our support and against oppression. Today, you have turned against us. You fanned the smoldering fire of freedom against the common bigots and oppressors, and today you are fanning the fire of hatred against us. You have now joined hands with the enemy and are now opposing your well-wishers, though your enemy has dealt injustice to you. You can not repose any hope for just reward from the enemy except for the possibility of getting impure and prohibited things of transitory carnal pleasure. Nothing has transpired to shake your faith and confidence in us. Then, what is the cause for deserting us and preparing to wage war against us, even when our swords were in their sheaths and we continued to repose confidence in you. Like swarms of locusts, you have gathered in great numbers and surrounded us. You are doomed because you have become oppressors, transgressors under Satan’s influence and you have forsaken the Divine Commandments. You have joined the group of infidels who introduced innovations in Islam, alterations in the Book and Traditions, killed prophets and the progeny of their vicegerents. You have now joined hands with those who adopted illegitimate children, persecuted true believers, reviled the signs of God

and tore the Holy Qur'an into pieces. Your souls have accepted the most evil matter, which have drawn you, in its vortex towards eternal doom. You are supporting the offspring and associates of Harb (the Umayyads), and have betrayed us. Your betrayal is well-known. Your roots are founded in betrayal and your hearts are steeped in and content with betrayal. Your character is abhorred by the pious and you are the most desired fruit of usurpers. The curse of God is upon those who make solemn covenants only to break them. You are, verily, those who broke their solemn covenants. The illegitimate son of an illegitimate father (ibn Ziyad) is intent upon two things; to either slay me or put me to the disgrace of meek submission. It is impossible that I suffer the disgrace of submission. My upbringing by the messenger of Allah in immaculate laps, noble descent and independent mind does not brook even the very thought abandoning sacrifice in preference to meek submission to the power of the wretched tyrant. Look, I have discharged my duty of presenting my objections and arguments and I have sufficiently warned you against incurring God's wrath for your evil intentions. You hold great numbers of soldiers in your army against me while the numbers of my own companions is very small. Friends have turned away from me and there is none to help me. Despite all this, I have decided to stand up to your evil forces." [18](#)

According to Farwa, Imam Husayn (a.s.) then recited a few verses and continued:

"It is only for as short time as it takes to mount a horse that you will rejoice. Thereafter, you will be drawn and spun in the vortex of the wheel of Time. My father has related this to me from my grandfather."

Imam Husayn (a.s.) continued:

"It is better that all of you and your associates sort out the affair (to its proper and lawful conclusion) and do not hide your intent, but make it known to each and everyone of you. After this, you are free to deal with me forthwith, according to your choice. I only rely on God, Who is also your Lord, for He controls everything, big and small, and His Justice is sublime." [19](#)

Hearing this, Umar ibn Sa'd was enraged, and he asked his men to attack Imam Husayn (a.s.) immediately. In his defense, Imam Husayn (a.s.) fought and prevailed over whoever challenged him for a single combat. The evil Shimr, as always, advised Umar ibn Sa'd to stop sending individuals, and to launch concerted attacks. Imam Husayn (a.s.) repelled the attacks with such ferocity that the enemy soldiers scattered for fear of their lives. Imam Husayn (a.s.) himself was wounded. He then raised his voice and called out, *"Is there any one to defend us? Is there anyone to help us?"* [20](#)

[The Martyrdom of Ali al-Asghar](#)

Imam Husayn's call had its effect on his son Ali al-Asghar (a.s.), who was six months old. The child fell out of his cradle in response to Imam Husayn's call for help. This caused a great commotion among the women, who feared that the infant was about to die out of the three day's thirst. The commotion and wailing attracted Imam Husayn (a.s.) who returned to the camp. He took the child and covered him with

a cloth to protect him from the scorching sun. He brought the child into the battlefield. The enemy soldiers assumed that Imam Husayn (a.s.) was holding the Qur'an in his hand as a prelude to surrender. When Imam Husayn (a.s.) lifted the cloth, the soldiers gasped with surprise to see an infant. The infant smiled as if taunting the enemy in the face of adversity.

Imam Husayn (a.s.) told the surrounding army:

“On account of you, this child has gone without water for the past three days and you can see that the extreme thirst will kill him shortly. Is there anyone who would provide water to this child?”

Several enemy soldiers were moved by the sight and a murmur of sympathy was heard. Umar ibn Sa'd realized the seriousness of the situation and said, *“Beware my soldiers! Do not be beguiled by al-Husayn's word. He is only tricking you into getting some water for himself. Even if al-Husayn gets only a sip, it will reinvigorate him and several of us will lose lives.”*

Imam Husayn (a.s.) replied,

“I only seek water for the infant, whose condition and agony is before you. Since you fear that I may myself drink the water, I am placing this infant on the ground so that you may yourselves take the child and quench his thirst.”

The child, placed on the burning sand of Karbala, protruded its tongue as if to show the severity of the thirst. This act of the infant was so eloquent that it created great pathos and several of the enemy soldiers cried in grief. The eloquent gesture did not go unnoticed by Umar bin Sa'd who considered it to be much more powerful than all the eloquent sermons of Imam Husayn (a.s.) and all the martyrs. He therefore ordered Harmala to interrupt Imam Husayn's words.

The cruel Shimr said, *“Beware soldiers! Al-Husayn is only playing on your sentiments. Do not forget that the emir ibn Ziyad's order is that not a drop of water should reach al-Husayn or his family. Any disobedience of his order will invite immediate punishment.”*

The wretched Umar ibn Sa'd called his archer, Harmala, who was renowned for the velocity and strength of his arrows. He commanded Harmala to kill the child with his arrow and thus to terminate the pathos created by Imam Husayn's infant. Harmala's arrow whizzed towards the child whom Imam Husayn (a.s.) held close to his chest. The arrow slit the throat of the six-month child and pinned him to Imam Husayn's ribs and arms. Imam Husayn (a.s.) collected in his palm the dripping blood from the child's throat, looked towards the sky and then downwards towards the earth, and finally applied it to his own face. He was seen muttering something.

Several years later in a gathering, Imam Zainul Aabidin (a.s.) was asked why Imam Husayn (a.s.) had applied the infant's blood to his face and what was he muttering then. He replied, *“My father was saying: ‘Before God, I swear that these wretched people are cruel even to an infant. If I throw the blood*

of this innocent martyr toward the sky, no rain will ever fall anywhere on the earth, and if I throw it on the earth, it will become parched and unproductive forever. Therefore, I am applying it to my face so that I may complain to my Creator about the cruelty of these people.'

Imam Husayn (a.s.) was perplexed whether he should take the dead child back to the camp or to bury him there. The cruel nature of Yazid's army was brought into full focus when, after the battle, the heads of martyrs were counted, and not finding the infant's head, soldiers were ordered to find it. The wretched Harmala, Shimr and Khouli went about striking their spears to find the soft earth where the child was buried and ultimately unearthed the infant's body, severed his tiny head and carried it on a lance along with the heads of the other martyrs.

The Martyrdom of Imam Husayn (a.s.)

Imam Husayn (a.s.) went back to his camp and bade farewell to his family members who gathered around him in a circle. He advised them to bear the calamity patiently. He then went to his ailing son and heir Zainul Aabidin (a.s.) who was lying unconscious. The sweat from Imam Husayn's brow fell upon Imam Zainul Aabidin who opened his eyes then. Seeing his heavily injured father, Zainul Aabidin (a.s.) asked as to what happened to all the relatives and companions, particularly Abbas and Ali al-Akbar. Imam Husayn (a.s.) told him that they were all martyred and that he alone remained alive. He told Zainul Aabidin (a.s.) that then he would not return from the battlefield. Imam Husayn (a.s.) advised Zainul Aabidin (a.s.) to bear the calamity with patience. He then said, *"My son, when you go back to Medina, convey my greetings to our Shias (followers) and tell them that I remembered them very much when I was carrying the dead body of Ali al-Asghar. Ask my Shias to remember me whenever they drink water and whenever they see any person suffering away from his home."*

Imam Husayn then bade farewell to all members of his family and those who were present in his camp. He bid adieu to each of the women and to Fidhdha, his mother's retainer.

As Imam Husayn (a.s.) came out of his tent, his daughter Sukayna (a.s.) caught hold of him and on being told that he was going to the battlefield, she cried out, *"My uncle Abbas went promising to bring water, but he never returned. My brother Ali al-Akbar went, but he did not come back. My cousins went but they too did not return. If you also do not return, what will happen to me?"* To satisfy the child, he lay down on the ground and Sukayna (a.s.) clambered on and lay on his chest, as she did everyday before going to sleep. She dozed off for a while, but suddenly got up startled and said, *"I will not detain you because I saw that your mother, father, and grandfather were all waiting for you and asked me not to detain you any longer."*

Imam Husayn (a.s.) who appeared old and feeble after the martyrdom of his son Ali al-Akbar (a.s.), now appeared to be invigorated with the desire to meet his Creator. Abdullah ibn Imad, who was present in the battlefield, narrates, *"I have not seen anyone whose companions, kith and kin were slain before his eye, fighting the enemy with so much zeal, vigour and determination."*²¹

Imam Husayn (a.s.) fought valiantly, scattered the soldiers and went to the Euphrates. He spoke to his horse asking him to drink water, but the faithful steed turned his head and refused to even lower his head. Imam Husayn (a.s.) took the water in his hands to show that the river was now in his control. He said, *“When my brother Abbas, my son Ali al-Akbar and the infant Ali al-Asghar and my companions have all died thirsty, of what use is this water to me?”* So saying, Imam Husayn (a.s.) threw down the water back into the river.

Meanwhile, the enemy had reassembled their ranks. Umar ibn Sa’d ordered a general assault. Imam Husayn (a.s.) met the onslaught, defeated, and scattered his opponents. He called out the names of Abbas (S), Ali al-Akbar, Habib ibn Mudhahir, Muslim ibn Owsaja, Zohair, Habib, Sa’eed and other companions, and asked them to witness his valour.

He then stood leaning on his sword and in a final attempt to bring the enemy to reason, and eliminate the possibility of any claim as to a mistake arising out of ignorance, regarding identity, he addressed the enemy saying, *“Tell me, by God, Do you not know who I am?”* The soldiers replied, *“We know that you are the progeny and grandson of the messenger of Allah.”*

Imam Husayn (S) said, *“Do you know that I am the son of Fatima, daughter of the messenger of Allah?”* They replied, *“Yes, it is true.”*

Imam Husayn (S) said, *“By God, you also know that Ali ibn Abu Talib is my father.”* They replied, *“Yes, we know.”*

Imam Husayn (S) said, *“Do you know that my grandmother Khadija was the first to embrace Islam?”* They replied, *“Yes, it is so.”*

He then reminded them that it was his own uncle Ja’far and his father’s uncle Hamza, who was killed and his raw liver was eaten by Hind mother of Mu’awiya, were among the first martyrs who gave their lives for the cause of Islam. He showed them the turban he was wearing and the sword he held and asked, *“Do you know to whom these belonged?”* The enemy replied, *“These are inherited by you from your grandfather, the messenger of Allah.”*

Imam Husayn (a.s.) then reminded the enemy saying,

“Was not my father the first to accept Islam, entrusted as the Holy Prophet’s trustee, given the standard by the Prophet (S) who declared him as his vicegerent, successor and deputy? Did not the Prophet (S) inform you that at the Pond of al-Kawthar in the Paradise, Ali will quench the thirst of the faithful?”

The enemy admitted the truth of every word uttered by Imam Husayn (S). Umar ibn Sa’d replied, *“All this is nothing new. Everybody knows these facts. We are professional soldiers and have come to fight you and not to listen to your rhetoric. We will not rest until we slit your parched throat.”* [22](#)

Imam Husayn (S) then said,

“Tell me if I have made innovations in Islam. Have I altered the Book? Have I transgressed any tenet of Islam? Have I failed to observe my religious obligations even once in my life? Have I killed anyone? Have I deprived anyone of his property? Have you found anything I ever said to be false? Did I ever hurt you? Did I ever aspire for any wealth or power?”

In one voice, the enemy soldiers declared that Imam Husayn (S) had never done any such thing.

Imam Husayn (a.s.) then asked, *“If you know all this, then tell me why you want to slay me?”* Some of the soldiers shouted out, *“It is in revenge for your father Ali. Our only desire is to slay you and avenge our ancestors who were killed by your father Ali in the battles of Badr, Uhud, Hunain and al-Khandaq.”*²³

Umar ibn Sa’d realized that the real truth behind waging war had been inadvertently revealed. Before Imam Husayn (a.s.) could say anything, the cunning Umar ibn Sa’d ordered his soldiers to attack the women and children in Imam Husayn’s camp. This sudden turn of events greatly pained Imam Husayn (a.s.).

He said, *“O supporters of the Umayyads, how mean it is on your part to think of attacking defenseless women. Even an atheist will not think of doing it, if only out of his civic sense. You are worse than heathens and atheists. I am still alive. Engage in combat with me and leave the women and children alone.”*

Imam Husayn (a.s.) quickly intercepted and killed the soldiers marching towards his camp. He fell upon the enemy with renewed vigour and he dispersed them far and wide.

Imam Husayn (a.s.) called out at Umar ibn Sa’d to come before him. The wretch came out and stood under the shade of the umbrella held by his servant. At that time, there was much commotion and a lot of noise. Imam Husayn (a.s.) said, *“I like to have a last word with you and your army.”* Hardly could his words be heard above the din and noise. Imam Husayn (a.s.) asked Umar ibn Sa’d to order silence so that all the attendants might listen carefully. Umar ibn Sa’d replied, *“It is impossible. I may ask my men to keep quite, but how can I prevent the neighing of horses or the clanging of weapons.”* Imam Husayn (S) said, *“You have expressed your inability. Now, I will do it myself to see that silence reigns so that every one present here may clearly hear every word I utter.”*

Imam Husayn (S) cast an intense glance all around him. The whole atmosphere became quiet, neighing of horses and clanging of armor stopped. Even the very wind became still and silence prevailed over the entire battlefield. Thus, when Imam Husayn (a.s.), by his spiritual power, commanded complete silence and got the attention of everyone, he said in a loud and clear voice:

“O son of Sa’d, listen carefully and pay heed to my words so that you may even now redeem yourself. I have been saying this from the first day, and today I repeat it so that none may complain that he does not know. I once again repeat that even now I give you the same three options. I say, the first option is for you to remove the blockade around me and let me go from here and return to Mecca or Medina.”

Umar ibn Sa'd replied, "Do you think that we have surrounded and dragged you here to let you go? We are not such fools. Our leader Yazid has ordered your death and has not permitted us to let you go from here."

Imam Husayn (a.s.) then said, "Your second option is that since you intend to confine me here and *to fight, let me have some water to quench my thirst before fighting. Under your orders, I was deprived of water for the past three days and this desert sun is scorching.* "

Umar ibn Sa'd replied, "We have strict orders from our emir Ibn Ziyad not to allow even a drop of water to pass through your parched throat until we slit it open." This reply of ibn Sa'd created a stir in his army.

Imam Husayn (a.s.) said,

"O son of Sa'd, since you are neither willing to let me go nor to give me even a drop of water, your third option is that, like true warriors, come and face me one after another and fight me in single combat, for I am alone and you are in thousands. "

Umar ibn Sa'd realized that the refusal of all three options, which were just and reasonable, might brook discontent and even lead to mutiny in his own army. Grudgingly and outwardly, as hypocrite that he was, Umar ibn Sa'd conceded the last demand and agreed that his soldiers would challenge Imam Husayn (a.s.) only in a single combat.

Hardly had a few soldiers challenged and were vanquished by Imam Husayn (a.s.), when Shimr bin Thul Joushan, Harmala, and Sinan bin Anas advised Umar ibn Sa'd saying, "*This is the valiant son of the undefeated warrior Ali. He is the best of the Hashimites, and like his father, he can never be overcome in single combat, even if you keep on sending warriors until eternity. The only way to defeat him is to order a general attack, preferably by archers and lancers who can pick al-Husayn from a distance, without risking their own lives.*" Umar bin Sa'd replied, "You are only reflecting what is in my own mind." Umar ordered a general attack by his archers and lancers. Arrows and lances rained on Imam Husayn (a.s.) injuring him from all sides.

Imam Husayn (a.s.) suffered many serious injuries and was bleeding profusely. He was swaying on his steed. Yet, none of the cowards dared to go near him. An arrow struck his forehead with such force that it stuck there. Imam Husayn (a.s.) pulled it out and fresh blood started flowing on his face. He murmured, "*O God, be my witness as to how these people treat your humble servant.*"

At that moment, another dart pierced his chest with such force that Imam Husayn (S) trembled on the saddle. He recited:

"In the name of Allah, for the sake of Allah, with His help and in following the tenets of the messenger of Allah. My Lord, you are a witness that these people has killed me and killed the progeny of Your Prophet."

An evil man, Salih bin Wahab al-Muzany, was waiting for an opportunity and he struck the fainting Imam Husayn (S) on the head with a heavy club, bringing him down from his horse. Seeing this, Abdullah son of Imam Hasan (a.s.) who was about ten years old, rushed out, caught hold of Salih, and said, "*How dare you assault my uncle?*" The notoriously wretched Harmala struck Abdullah with his poisoned arrow. Imam Husayn (a.s.) caught hold of the falling lad who died in his arms.

Imam Husayn (a.s.) looked up at the sky. It was time for evening prayers. Imam Husayn (a.s.) put his sword in the scabbard and performed his prayers while sitting. He was unable to lift his head. He collected a little heap of sand, and placing his right cheek, facing the camp, and watching if any assault is being made on his camp, Imam Husayn (a.s.) recited, "*O Allah, my Preserver, my Master.*" He repeated this with his left cheek placed on the small heap of sand and lastly with his forehead placed on the small heap of sand. This *Sunnah* is practiced by the Shia when they end their prayers, whether obligatory or recommended prayers, by keeping, instead of a mound of soil, a small pellet made from the soil of Karbala.

Seeing Imam Husayn (a.s.) motionless, ibn Sa'd ordered an assault on the women in Imam Husayn's camp, just to find out if Imam Husayn (a.s.) was still alive. On hearing the mean trick, Imam Husayn (a.s.) pulled himself up and said,

"How cowardly and shameless you are! You order women and children, who cannot defend themselves, to be assaulted. Come one by one if you are men and fight with me, for I am still alive."

The coward Shimr ordered his soldiers to surround Imam Husayn (a.s.) and bring him down on the ground. The cowards surrounded Imam Husayn (a.s.) in a great number and each one gave a blow with whatever weapon he carried. Imam Husayn (a.s.) fell down and lay prostrate on the ground. Malik bin Bishr gave a severe blow with his sword followed by Zar'ah bin Shareek. Moving on his knees, Imam Husayn (a.s.) killed Zar'ah with a single blow of his sword.

Imam Husayn (a.s.) said,

"O my Lord, give me patience so that I may bear this cruelty. I declare that there is no God but You..."

Finding that Imam Husayn (a.s.), even in this plight continued to glorify, pray and seek strength from God, the infidel hypocrite Hussayn bin Numair struck an arrow which transfixed Imam Husayn's mouth.

Another wretch, Abu Ayyoob al-Ghanawi pierced Imam Husayn's throat with an arrow. Nasr bin Kharasha dealt a heavy blow with his sword. Salih bin Wahab al-Muzany struck Imam Husayn (a.s.) with his lance. Imam Husayn (a.s.) continued moving about on his knees and praying. Sinan ibn Anas dealt two blows, one with his lance and another with his arrow which paralyzed Imam Husayn (a.s.).

All these names and factual details are recorded by historians who were present in the battlefield at Karbala. The historian Abu Makhnaf, recorded his detailed eye-witness account about the beheading of

Imam Husayn (a.s.).

First, Shabath bin Rib'iy attempted to behead Imam Husayn (a.s.), but when Imam Husayn (a.s.) faced him, he ran back shivering. Sinan ibn Anas asked the reason for his sudden retreat and Shabath replied, *"When I saw al-Husayn's eyes, I found that they resembled the eyes of the Prophet. The sight so frightened me that I had no courage to touch al-Husayn."* Sinan mocked at Shabath and proceeded towards Imam Husayn (a.s.). When Imam Husayn (a.s.) looked at him, Sinan trembled and ran away and his sword slipped and fell from his hand.

When Shimr questioned him, Sinan replied, *"Al-Husayn so much resembled Ali that I was unnerved and I lost my courage."* Shimr said, *"You are all boneless cowards. It is I and I alone who will behead al-Husayn."*

The accursed Shimr sat on the chest of the prostrate Imam Husayn (a.s.). Imam Husayn (a.s.) opened his eyes and asked the name of the one who was so harsh to him. Shimr mentioned his name, and then Imam Husayn (a.s.) asked, *"Do you know who I am?"* Shimr replied, *"Yes, I know that you are Husayn son of Ali and Fatima the daughter of the Prophet. Hasan is your brother."*

Imam Husayn (a.s.) said, *"When you know this, then why do you want to kill me?"* The shameless brute replied, *"For the reward promised by Yazid to anyone who brings your head."* Imam Husayn (a.s.) asked, *"Is salvation and a place in the Paradise dearer to you, or the reward promised by Yazid?"* Shimr replied, *"Salvation and Paradise are vain promises without proof and I am not sure about them, but I am sure of the reward promised by Yazid."*

On hearing this, Imam Husayn (a.s.) asked Shimr to remove the cloth covering his chest. On seeing Shimr's chest, Imam Husayn (a.s.) exclaimed, *"How true my father is and how true my grandfather the messenger of Allah is!"* Shimr asked Imam Husayn (a.s.) what was that, and Imam Husayn (a.s.) replied, *"My grandfather, the messenger of Allah, told my father Ali who related to me that my assassin's chest would bear the marks of leprosy and it would be full of coarse and long hair like those of a wild boar."*

Hearing this, Shimr became angry. He turned Imam Husayn (a.s.) over and beheaded him from behind. When asked later why he did so, Shimr replied that he dared not look into the eyes nor hear the words of Imam Husayn (a.s.) and therefore he turned him upside down. The severed head mounted on a lance was handed over to Khouli ibn Yazid al-Asbahi and Hamid ibn Muslim. The heads of the other martyrs including the infant Ali al-Asghar were severed from their bodies, mounted on lances, and carried by the tribes of Kindah, Hawazinn, Tameem, and Muthhij under the command of the accursed Shimr bin Thil Joushan, Qais ibn al-Ash'ath, and Amr ibn al-Hajjaj. The tribe of al-Hurr refused to sever his head or permit trampling his body. They took his body and buried it in their village about seven kilometers away from Karbala where his mausoleum is found today.

Abu Makhnaf writes, "Having committed the nefarious and sacrilegious act, Shimr cried out 'Allaho

Akbar' while beheading al-Husayn (a.s.). At that moment, darkness enveloped and a violent earthquake shook the earth. Raw blood rained from the sky and a loud voice proclaimed, "By God, an Imam, son of an Imam is unjustly slain. The one who cared for the poor, the sick, the disabled, the widows and children is butchered without cause." This occurred on Friday the tenth of Muharram, in the year 61 A.H." Abu Ishaq al-Esfarayini narrates similar facts with some additions.[24](#)

Among the Twelver Shia, the tragedy of Karbala is recited in the form of Elegies called 'Marthiyya' and have been passed on from a generation to another and regularly recited and detailed by their orators in prose in their congregations known as 'Majlis', throughout the year on different important occasions.

It will be incorrect to assume that the details of the martyrdom of Imam Husayn (a.s.), his companions and family members are exaggerated. These are facts recorded by impartial historians like Abu Makhnaf and Hameed ibn Muslim, a reporter imbedded with Yazid's army. None of their accounts have ever been challenged or disproved or even shown to be incorrect or exaggerated. Major Price, Simon Oakley[25](#) and several western writers have relied on the narration of Hameed and Abu Makhnaf.

- [1.](#) Understanding Kerbala by Sayyid Sa'eed Akhtar Rizvi, Eng. Tr. By Sayyid Ather Husayn S.H Rizvi, Ansariyan Publication [2006], p. 70-73.
- [2.](#) Understanding Kerbala, p. 74.
- [3.](#) Life of Imam Husayn [The Saviour], p. 170.
- [4.](#) Ibid., p. 170-171.
- [5.](#) Leviticus, Ch.16 vol. 29, Ch.23 vol. 23 to 32, Revelations 12:1-11.
- [6.](#) Life of Imam Husayn, p. 203.
- [7.](#) Life of Imam Husayn, p. 194, quoting at-Tabari who gives the names of 28 martyrs, killed by the shower of arrows at Karbala.
- [8.](#) Nafasul Mahmoom, p. 353.
- [9.](#) Husayn the Saviour of Islam, Ansariyan Publications, [2005], p. 198 to 213.
- [10.](#) Life of Imam Husayn [A.S], p. 182.
- [11.](#) The plural form of Maqatal that means the record of the murder of so-and-so, but somehow particularly the martyrdom of Imam Husayn (a.s.) and his family and companions.
- [12.](#) Roudhatul Ahbab.
- [13.](#) Life of Imam Husayn the Saviour, p. 220.
- [14.](#) Balaghatul Hussain, p. 105 - 107.
- [15.](#) The words 'True God' is used here to distinguish between the Creator on the one hand and the worldly wealth, power and pleasure which Yazid and his men worshiped as their god.
- [16.](#) To demand fealty for Yazid and to compel Imam Husayn [s] to swear allegiance to him is itself an act of insult and disgrace to Imam Husayn [s].
- [17.](#) Injustice done out of fear or due to undue influence or avarice
- [18.](#) Balaghatul Hussain, p. 121-125.
- [19.](#) Ibid., p. 127-129.
- [20.](#) Note: Imam Husayn's request of help was not because he expected to survive, but because he wanted to show that those surrounding him were stonehearted and cruel and that there was none, at that time, who was ready to help the lone, innocent person against the hordes who had gathered in support of oppression and tyranny.
- [21.](#) Life of Imam Husayn, p. 229.
- [22.](#) Balaghatul Husayn, P. 113-115.
- [23.](#) Note, all these battles were fought by Imam Ali [s] to defend and preserve Islam, under the Prophet [s]. Though Yazid's

forces, in seeking to kill Imam Husayn [s], claimed that they were taking vengeance against Imam Ali [s], it was in fact vengeance against the Prophet [s] and Islam.

[24.](#) Life of Imam Husayn, p. 239–240.

[25.](#) History of the Saracens.

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