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The Fifth Infallible, Hadhrat Imam al-Husayn, Sayyid al-Shuhada, The Third Imam

Imam al-Husayn (as), second child of ‘Ali (as), whose mother was Fatimah (as) daughter of the Holy Prophet (S), was born on the third of Sha‘ban in the year 4 AH (January 8, 626). After martyrdom of his honorable brother, Imam al-Hasan (as), he attained Imamate by the command of Allah and his brother's last will.

As pointed out in the life account of the fourth Infallible, Imam al-Hasan (as) was forced to accept Mu‘awiya's peace proposal due to hypocrisy of many of his troops; the escape of ‘Ubayd Allah b. ‘Abass, his chief of army to Mu‘awiya's military headquarters; deception of a large number of his troops which, by historical evidences, included two thirds of his whole army; apostasy of the rest of his troops; intrigue of the Khawarij; and the culmination of slanders and false charges against him.

By signing the peace agreement, Mu‘awiya conceded that: companions of ‘Ali (as) and his followers and the Shi‘ites in all cities be secure and protected from aggression, no trickery or deception be made against them, and nobody be appointed as Mu‘awiya's successor after him.

Shortly after peace agreement, however, he showed that he is truly disloyal to his pledge.

Imam al-Hasan (as) had accepted Mu‘awiya's peace treaty proposal for the interests of Islam and the unfavorable circumstances for the household of ‘Ali (as) and prevention of fratricide, and Mu‘awiya had apparently agreed on all items of the peace treaty but he actually did not believe in Islam, and like his father Abu Sufyan, had accepted the outward of Islam out of fear or for the sake of worldly pleasures, gradually revealing his plan which was gaining power and taking over the rule and thus exposing the falsity of his faith.

After making peace with Imam al-Hasan, Mu‘awiya was the absolute ruler of Sham (Syria), ten years of which being during the life of Imam al-Hasan (as), and ten years during the Imamate of Imam al-Husayn (as).

Because of the popularity and influence of Imam al-Hasan (as) and his own peace treaty, Mu'awiya had to restrict his rebellion and aggression – although ostensibly – and at times procure some friends for himself through fraudulence and compromise.

And since he viewed Imam al-Hasan (as) as in a way opposed to many of his anti-Islamic and ambitious goals, he plotted the murder of the Holy Imam (as) with the help of Ja'da, the wife of Imam al-Hasan (as) and martyred the grandson of the Holy Prophet (S) in the final days of Safar, 50 A.H (March, 670 CE). Upon the martyrdom of Imam al-Hasan (as), Mu'awiya found it more convenient to carry out his ominous intentions.

First of all he commenced a series of persecutions, tortures, and murdering of the Shi'ites and followers of Imam 'Ali (as). This horrific era coincided with the Imamate of Imam al-Husayn (as), who was an Imam for ten years. All his Imamate period – except his last six months of life – was spent during the caliphate of Mu'awiya.

The circumstances then were of an extremely adverse nature and toughest strangulation. Among the elements which prompted the great uprising of Imam al-Husayn (as) were: reappearance of the paganism (*jahiliyya*); increasing spread of monarchy and royal luxury; wasting and embezzling of public treasury of the Muslims; unduly liberality; oppressions and cruelties done in the name of Islam; deprivation of the followers of 'Ali (as)'s household of their undeniable rights in the public treasury and granting them to the sycophant of the court; and above all, invalidation of religious rules and the Islamic laws and violation of divine precepts and indifference to commands and prohibitions of Allah and of the Messenger of Allah (S).

Mu'awiya and his cronies made great efforts to force Ahl al-Bayt (a.s.) into seclusion, eradicate the Shi'ites by any means, and obliterate the name of 'Ali (as) and his progeny. When they uttered his name, they did it with curse and abuse. At the same time the propaganda system (of Sham) was to convince people that cursing such a great man as 'Ali (a.s.) was regarded as worship and would be rewarded in the next world!

With his vile and crafty plans, Mu'awiya intended to gradually establish the foundations of the rule and kingship of his lewd, nasty, and drunkard son, Yazid. When gradually Mu'awiya's intention about his son, who was notorious as a despicable and lewd person, was revealed, a group of Muslims were unhappy about it and began to express their dissidence. Mu'awiya, however, proceeded with new crackdown and severities to prevent the widespread dissidence.

Imam al-Husayn (as) was well aware that the Abu Sufyan's clan basically opposed Islam and the name of Muhammad b. 'Abd Allah (S) and had done their best to extinguish the light of Islam. This vile intention was most of all pursued by Mu'awiya. To understand this we quote a *hadith* related in reliable sources:

“... Mutrif b. Mughayra said: “My father and I were guests to Mu'awiya in Sham. My father used to

frequent Mu'awiya's court. One night when he returned from Mu'awiya's palace I found him very disappointed and upset. I asked him about the cause of his sadness. He said: 'this man, i.e., Mu'awiya is an evil-doer and the filthiest man of all times'. 'What has happened'? I asked him.

He replied, 'I suggested Mu'awiya now that his wishes had been fulfilled and he had taken over the Islamic caliphate, he had better treat the people with justice and not to mistreat the Bani Hashim so harshly, as they are also your kindred and nothing much is left with them to scare you of revolting against you.' Mu'awiya replied: 'Alas! Abu Bakr practiced caliphate and spread justice and nothing happened except that he died and his name also faded out as well as 'Umar and 'Uthman who died similarly, even though they were benevolent and well-behaved toward the people.

However, they left but a name and passed away. But the name of this Hashemite man (i.e., the Holy Prophet (S) is called out five times a day from atop the minarets of the world of Islam: '*Ashhadu anna Muhammadan Rasul Allah*' (I profess that Muhammad (S) is the Messenger of God).

Now that the caliphs' names have died and Muhammad's name lives on, nothing is left to be done but the name 'Muhammad' to be buried and obliterated.”¹

Imam al-Husayn (as) and Mu'awiya

As long as his brother was alive, Imam al-Husayn (as) was not to oppose the decisions made by his brother who was a proof (*hujja*) of God and an Imam, to whom obedience was incumbent on every Muslim and obeying him was the same as obeying God. On the other hand, Imam al-Husayn (as) was well aware of the reasons forcing Imam al-Hasan (as) to accept peace treaty.

Imam al-Hasan al-Mujtaba (as) never did anything opposed to wisdom and the expediency of the Muslims to which his brother would have disagreed. If Imam al-Husayn (as) had been in his brother's place, he would have done the same as what Imam al-Hasan (as) had done in his time.

The Imamate and leadership are, in any case, in the same line; but in different times they differ in tactics: a time is for peace, a time for war; a time is for supplication, a time for guidance and teaching. In any era, each one of the noble leaders has somehow struggled against the tyrant rulers and held up the banner of the Truth.

Anyhow, little by little Mu'awiya exposed his filthy plan and paved the way for its implementation. He intended to make monarchy and authority over Muslims hereditary in his dynasty and, through this devastating act, thoroughly uproot Islam.

He wanted to appoint his son Yazid as Amir al-Mu'mimin and the ruler of Muslims. Yazid actually had no art except hedonism and wearing flamboyant clothes. He was so reckless that he would easily and frankly declare lawful the things proclaimed as unlawful by the Prophet (S). Following is what he has been quoted as saying:

“If wine has been made unlawful in the religion of Ahmad, let's then turn the goblet around by the religion of Jesus, son of Mary.”

Yazid was such a person to perpetrate incest in his drunken state². He was constantly indulged in seeking pleasures, drinking, playing with monkeys, and engaged in other amusements. Whenever indulged in drinking, he was apt to whisper what was hidden in his heart as follows:

“My companions! Come over and listen to the intoxicating tune of the singers. Pour yourselves cups after cups of wine and let go of your scholarly rhetoric. The pleasant tune reverberated from a harp and lute distracts me from the call of *Allahu Akbar*. I have exchanged the paradise houris with the dregs of wine. This exciting tune of music, these dancers with their enticing bodies, and the goblets of ruby-colored wine suffice me; I neither wish for houris nor other such things.”

It was for such a mean and nasty son of his that Mu'awiya wanted to secure allegiance from people.

First, Mu'awiya pursued this goal in cities other than Medina, since he knew the latter was more significant than other cities. At first, he ordered Marwan b. Hakam to take allegiance from the people of that city... even from Husayn b. 'Ali (as).

In order to pave the way, Mu'awiya left Sham to go on Hajj but went to Medina and spoke harshly to Husayn b. 'Ali (as), Zubayr's son and 'Umar's son. Then, he gathered the people in the mosque and talked to them about Yazid's competence, asserting that “all Muslims except you have sworn allegiance...”

Interrupting him, Imam al-Husayn (as) stood up and said: “I swear by God, you are putting aside, in favor of Yazid, the one whose father and mother are better and more competent than Yazid's father and mother and he himself is better than Yazid.”

Mu'awiya said: “It sounds you mean yourself?”

Husayn (as) retorted: “Yes.”

Mu'awiya went on: “Verily, your saying that your mother is better than Yazid's mother is true because Fatimah is the daughter of the Messenger of Allah, and her religiosity and bright lifespan is evident to everybody... As for your saying that your father was better than Yazid's father, however, God made his father superior to your father.”

The Imam (as) said: “The ignorance suffices you that you regard the transient world as superior to the Eternal World.”

Mu'awiya said: “As for your opining that you are better than Yazid, I swear by God that Yazid is better and more competent for the *umma* of Muhammad (as) than you.”

The Imam (as) replied furiously: “This is a lie and calumny. Is the drunkard and negligent Yazid better than me?”

When Mu‘awiya noticed this open opposition, he ordered to station two armed agents in each allegiance center so that if anyone uttered any word of dissidence, they would do away with him. This was not acceptable to Imam al–Husayn (as), however, and Mu‘awiya's attempts did not come through.

A study on the states of Imam al–Husayn (as) shows that during the reign of Mu‘awiya, Imam al–Husayn (as) would always consider rebelling against the tyrannical rule of the Abu Sufyan's clan and constantly pointing out Mu‘awiya's innovations (*bid‘a*) and wrong doings.

However, he would regard his noble brother's peace agreement and the presence of Mu‘awiya as a barrier to his uprising and waited for a time when the people would get informed about the corruption in the Umayyad ruling system and would become well–aware of the poisonous propaganda against the household of ‘Ali (as).

It would take years for the people to feel the bitter taste of the despotic rule, so that they could appreciate the uprising of such a pious man as al–Husayn (as) and make it their paradigm for ever.

If Imam al–Husayn (as) had started his movement in time of Mu‘awiya, the latter would have been able to, by his trickery and cunning tricks, murder the Imam and neutralize the efficacy of his spilled blood. However, the collapse of Mu‘awiya's ruling system by way of unlawful acts, tyranny, and impurities, gradually paved the way which reached its peak in the time of Yazid. Perforce the bloody uprising and the immortal epic of the Prophet (S)'s grandson was matured enough to get ready to emerge.

Preparation for the Everlasting Epic of Karbala

Mu‘awiya died on the fifteenth of Rajab, 60 and his son, Yazid, succeeded to the throne. First of all, he decided to secure al–Husayn (as)'s allegiance. To this end, he wrote a letter to Walid b. ‘Ataba, the governor of Medina, and demanded him to elicit allegiance from Husayn b. ‘Ali (as) as soon as possible, not allowing any delay in this respect. The same night, Walid sent an envoy to Imam al–Husayn (as) to invite him to his palace.

The Imam called a group of his kin and told them to get armed and accompany him to the governor's seat of rule, telling them that Walid had sent for him supposedly to ask him do something which he would be unable to do.

He advised them to keep his company to the gate of the palace and as soon as they heard him raising his voice enter the house and get rid of Walid. Then, Imam al–Husayn (as) went to Walid who received him warmly and humbly, then he read the letter and brought the issue of allegiance. Marwan b. Hakam was also present.

Imam al–Husayn (as) addressed Walid: “I do not suppose you would be content with my secret

allegiance. If you want my allegiance, let it be sworn in the presence of people.” “Yes it is better,” responded Walid. To which the Imam (a.s.) added: “So, you'd better wait until tomorrow morning.” Walid asked him to leave then to attend a public meeting the next day. Marwan said sycophantically: “Do not let Husayn b. ‘Ali leave. You will not find another chance like this. Either incarcerate him or have him swear allegiance, or behead him!” The Imam (as) rose to his feet, signs of fury in his countenance, saying: “Oh son of the blue-eyed woman, is that you or Walid who will kill me? I swear by God that you lied and sinned.” Having said this, he left them.

Since Imam al-Husayn (as) did not agree with allegiance, within a day, i.e. Friday night of Rajab 19, 60 AH (Dec. 29, 679), he left Medina for Mecca.

Before Imam al-Husayn (as) together with his family and some of his relatives left Medina, he bade farewell to the tomb of his noble grandfather (S), Fatimah (as), and his brother and wrote a testament to his brother Muhammad Hanafiya who was a noble, brave, and pious man, proclaiming in it both his uprising and the reason for his movement, clarifying that in this movement he had no goal but enjoining the good and forbidding the evil, and reviving the Religion of God and the way of his grandfather, the Apostle of Allah (S) and his father, ‘Ali Murtadha (as).

He also wrote a letter to Bani Hashim and called for help, and another letter to the people of Basra, explicating the philosophy of his movement.

Anyhow, Imam al-Husayn (as) who was the guardian of truthfulness and Islamic justice entered Mecca, which was frequented by Muslims from all over the Islamic lands, to take the required measures and to inform people, by eloquent sermons and letters and talks, of the hazards threatening Islam.

For several months he stayed in Mecca and made many negotiations and wrote many letters to introduce Yazid and to uncover his evil and ill-famed face and the wrongdoings of his functionaries.

Imam al-Husayn (as)'s stay in Mecca lasted until the time of Hajj pilgrimage.

Muslims from all over the Muslim world were entering Mecca in groups and were preparing to perform Hajj rituals. At this time, the Imam (a.s.) took advantage of any moment and position to propagate the religion, to guide the people and to clarify his sacred goals and the chaotic situation of Islam and the Muslims through giving speeches and writing letters. It was then that he found out that a number of Yazid's agents had set out for Mecca, apparently to perform Hajj but actually to assassinate Imam al-Husayn (as).

They had the mission to carry arms hidden under their pilgrimage garments to shed the pure blood of the Prophet (S)'s grandson in the Sanctuary of Ka'ba. Consequently, the Imam performed the ‘Umra (minor Hajj) in lieu of Hajj of *Tamattu'* (major Hajj), after which he gave a short talk to a group of people and told them of his preparedness for martyrdom in order to revive his grandfather's religion, and asked the Muslims for help to this end.

The next day, Dhu'l Hijja 8, he set out for Iraq with a group of his companions and kindred. Some of the dignitaries tried to prevent his journey, however, the Imam (as) said: I will not swear allegiance to Yazid and confirm the rule of tyranny and corruption. Now, I leave Mecca to preserve the sanctity of the House of Allah.

Letters of Invitation from the People of Kufa

In the five-year period of 'Ali (as)'s fair and impartial rule, the people of Kufa had partly become familiar with his virtues and had witnessed his piety, asceticism, and justice. They heard of Imam al-Husayn (as)'s abstention from swearing allegiance to Yazid and his going to Mecca. Thus, they wrote many letters to him and invited him to Kufa.

First, Imam al-Husayn (as) sent his cousin, Muslim b. 'Aqil, who was an efficient, brave, and self-sacrificing man to Kufa to verify the genuineness of their invitation. The Kufans apparently welcomed him warmly and 12 thousand of them swore allegiance to him, eagerly looking forward to the arrival of Imam al-Husayn (as). Muslim b. 'Aqil wrote to the Imam informing him of the favorable situation of Kufa and the people's enthusiasm for his visit.

On the other hand, the administration of the Umayyads which was frightened by this invitation got embarrassed and appointed 'Ubayd Allah b. Ziyad, who was a ruthless and murderous man, as the governor of Kufa. 'Ubayd Allah went to Kufa and dispersed the people from around Muslim b. 'Aqil by threat and deception, so that the latter was eventually left alone.

At last, the blood thirsty troops of 'Ubayd Allah besieged Muslim who stood up to them bravely and with amazing resistance, but finally was arrested and killed as a martyr. Hurr b. Yazid Riyahi, who later on joined the companions and martyrs of Karbala, was assigned to block the road on Husayn b. 'Ali (as) who was on the way to Kufa; however, being decisive in self-sacrifice and fighting against Yazid, although he got informed on the way to Kufa of his cousin's death, he continued his way toward Kufa.

Hurr planned, by the order of 'Ubayd Allah b. Ziyad, to persuade Imam al-Husayn (as) to surrender, but the Prophet (S)'s grandson refused to give up. He turned his way to another direction and arrived in a land called "Karbala" on the second of Muharram.

Before arriving in Karbala, Imam al-Husayn (as) delivered a sermon in a place called "Baydha" addressing Hurr and his troops and those present at the place, and elaborated on his sacred movement and its causes. The following are excerpts of that sermon:

"O people! Whoever sees that a ruler is tyrannizing and violating the Divine laws, committing perjury and opposing the traditions and *sira* of the Apostle of Allah (S), and not to prevent his wrongdoing, verily God will punish him along with the tyrant." Then, pointing out Yazid's despotism, he went on to say: "They have given up the obedience to God and taken to obey Satan.

They regard as lawful what is ordained unlawful by God and as unlawful what is ordained lawful by God. Now, as the son of ‘Ali b. Abi Talib (as) and Fatimah al-Zahra (as) daughter of the Apostle of Allah (S), I am the most competent of all to make a stand against all these... If you are ready, as you have written in your letters, to help me, you will achieve eternal bliss.”

Imam al-Husayn (as), then, said the noon and afternoon prayers in the residence of Sharaf together with his companions and troops of Hurr b. Yazid. After prayers the Imam (as) said:

“O people! If you are pious and regard the truth as belonging to the people of truth, this will please God. We, the household of the Prophet (S), are more competent to be your leaders and Imams than the ones who are now in charge and practicing tyranny and oppression. If your opinion is different from what is implied from your letters, I will return.”

Hurr b Yazid said: “I swear by God that I am not aware of these letters.” The Imam (as) ordered one of his companions to bring two packs of the Kufans’ letters to Hurr. He said he did not know anything about those letters and that he was commissioned to take him to Ibn Ziyad. The Imam (as) told him: “Death is closer to you than this mission.”

Then he ordered his companions to mount the horses and return. Hurr tried to stop the Imam (as) and supposedly began to advise him, saying: “I swear you by God not to wage war; otherwise, you will be killed.” The Imam (as) retorted indignantly: “Are you frightening me of death? Do you think you will be relieved and your problems solved by killing me?”

All those who were present heard the precious words of the Imam (as). But there was only one conscious and living heart that heard him and was influenced, and that was Hurr himself, who joined the camp of al-Husayn (as) in the morning of ‘Ashura and was martyred in the way of Imam al-Husayn (a.s.).

On Thursday of Muharram 2, 61 AH/ October 2, 680, Imam al-Husayn (as) stopped in an area of Naynawa called Karbala, where he set up the tents of his pure household. The next day four thousand troops led by ‘Umar b. Sa’d arrived from Kufa and positioned before the Imam (as).

From that day on, frequent negotiations took place which resulted in proposing that Imam al-Husayn (as) get prepared to surrender and to swear allegiance to Yazid. Husayn b. ‘Ali (as) said: “I will not tolerate baseness, neither will I go hand in hand with Yazid. I regard death in the path of Allah nothing but happiness, and life with the tyrants nothing but destruction and wretchedness.”

As the poem goes:

*The man of God does not submit to degradation,
Man is free to acquire dignity or disgrace.*

Finally, on the day of ‘Ashura (Muharram 10, 61 AH), the most tragic event and at the same time the

most outstanding epic in the history of Islam and the world occurred. Imam al-Husayn (as) and his children and companions stood out firmly to the cost of their lives and embraced all kinds of afflictions and hardships in order to restore Islam and to set up the truth; they sacrificed their loved souls to pull down the tyranny palace of the cruel and corrupt dynasty of the Umayyads and to reveal to people the hideous face of the oppressors.

Throughout the day of 'Ashura, Imam al-Husayn (a.s.) encountered disasters and hardships, the smallest of which would have been enough to render a man helpless. However, this man of truth, with his thorough faith and trust in God, stood up to all those afflictions and sufferings honorably and did not surrender his body and soul to disgrace and degradation. With full bravery he said:

"I swear to God that I will not stretch my hand in begging before you, and will not flee from you like slaves." Anyhow, the battle started quite fiercely on the day of 'Ashura. The retainers, companions, and the Bani Hashim, each in turn, fought with several of the enemy troops, while chanting brief rhetoric epic verses by means of which they would clarify the reality of their uprising and express the reasons for their support of Imam al-Husayn (as).

Hadhrat Zaynab (as), Imam al-Husayn (as)'s sister, was, in this awesome situation, engaged in pacifying the women and children of Imam al-Husayn (as) and helping him and assisting in gathering the sacred bodies of the martyrs, and above all, taking care of Imam's son, Hadhrat Sajjad (as), who was due to Divine expediency sick and feverish in those days. She did all this as steadfastly as a mountain, and at the same time maintained her patience and tolerance as she was aware of the ending and the secret of Imam al-Husayn (as)'s great uprising.

The more the pressures intensified and the close companions of the Imam were martyred and their number decreased, the more would Imam al-Husayn (as) become cheerful and smile at the beauty of martyrdom. The battle continued until the afternoon of 'Ashura. Almost eight hours of incessant hand-to-hand fighting and attacking of thirty thousand troops against seventy two people, was carried out.

What an astonishing event! One person versus a full scale army! Indeed, Husayn (as) drank up the bitter goblet of love and lay down his head on the hot soil of Karbala, while all his body was strewn with painful wounds and blood was flowing down as if from fountains. In this state, however, he was – as always – in remembrance of his Beloved, the Almighty Allah, and praying as follows:

"I am content with your ordinance and decree, and patient with the disasters You send on me; I have no beloved and goal but You, O Helper of those who call for help."

After that, the tents were set on fire, the pure household of Sayyid al-Shuhada were taken captive, and then taken to Kufa, Sham, and finally to Medina. These are events which are heart-rending and bringing blood to the eyes of his Shi'ites and lovers.

Some Sayings of Hadhrat Sayyid al-Shuhada (as):

1. People are slaves of the world, with the religion only at the tip of their tongues; as long as it provides for their material life they stick to it but once they are afflicted (and the religion contradicts their interests), then the number of real religious people will diminish.
2. When there comes a trial, people can be known (it will then be known who is really faithful).
3. Benevolence and good-doing must like the rain of mercy fall upon both the acquainted ones and the strangers.
4. On the journey to Karbala, he said: "Verily, this world has turned upside down and bizarre; its good has vanished and nothing is left but a little moisture like that remaining inside a bowl, and a troublesome life. Truly, I see death but happiness and life with tyrants but misery..."
5. He said to the man in his presence who was speaking ill behind another man: "Keep away from backbiting, since it is the food for the dogs of the Hell."
6. God's gradual leading man to perdition (*istidraj*) is in that He gives him abundant bounties and takes away from him the [chance of] thankfulness.
7. He said: It is not that doing favor to the unworthy is wasteful, benevolence is like a fast rain which falls upon both good and evil.

¹. Barrasi-yi Tarikh-i 'Ashura, p. 17.

². Zaynab (as) Himasa-i Abadi Bar Faraz Tarikh, p. 59.

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