

# Third Sermon 'Ashura – Misrepresentations and Distortions

In the Name of Allah, the Beneficent, the Merciful

All Praise belongs to Allah, the Lord of the worlds and the Maker of all creation, and may Peace and benedictions be upon His servant and messenger, His beloved and elect, our master, our prophet, and our sire, Abu al-Qasim Muhammad, may Allah bless him and his pure, immaculate, and infallible Progeny.

I seek the refuge of Allah from the accursed Satan:

***“So for their breaking their compact We cursed them and made their hearts hard; they would pervert the words from their meanings, and they forgot a portion of what they were reminded of.”***

(5: 13)

We stated earlier that the history of an event of such greatness as Karbala<sup>1</sup> has been subject to distortion at our hands both in respect of its external details as well as its meaning. By distortion of outward form we mean the accretions that we have piled up on the corpus of its history which have obscured its bright and luminous visage and disfigured its beautiful countenance. We cited some instances in this regard.

## Distortions of Meaning

Regrettably this historic event has also been distorted in respect of its meaning, and corruption of meaning is much more dangerous than corruption of external detail. That which has made this great event ineffectual for us is the corruption of meaning, not that of external detail. That is, the evil effect of distortions in meaning is greater than those pertaining to external details.

What is meant by distortion of meaning? Without adding a single word or deleting a single word, it is possible to misinterpret a statement in such a manner that it gives a meaning exactly contrary to its real meaning.

I will give just one small example to illustrate this point. At the time that the early Muslims were building the Mosque of Madinah, 'Ammar Yasir was working hard, making an extraordinary amount of sincere effort. Among the reports that are of a definite authenticity is the one that the Noble Messenger (S) said to him at the time:

'Ammar, you will be killed by the rebellious faction.[1](#)

The term 'rebellious faction' (*al-fi'at al-baghiyah*) is Qur'anic, and it occurs in a verse which states that if two faction of Muslims fight one another and one of them is rebellious, one must take a stand against the rebellious faction and join on the side of the other faction so that the matters are set right.

***“If two factions of believers fight, make peace between them, but if one of them rebels against the other, fight the one which is rebellious until it returns to God’s command.”*** (49:9)

The statement, made by the Noble Messenger concerning 'Ammar, gave him great prestige. Accordingly, during the Battle of Siffin, when 'Ammar fought on the side of Imam 'Ali ('a), Ammar's presence in 'Ali's troops was considered a strong point in 'Ali's favour.

There were people with a weak faith who, until 'Ammar had not been killed, were not convinced that it was right for them to fight on Ali's side and lawful to kill Mu'awiyah and his soldiers.

But on the day that 'Ammar was killed at the hands of Mu'awiyah's soldiers, suddenly a cry rose from all sides that the Prophet's prophesy had come true.

The best evidence of the unrighteousness of Mu'awiyah and his companions was that they were the killers of 'Ammar and the Prophet had informed years ago through his statement that 'Ammar will be killed by a rebellious faction.[2](#)

On this day it became quite clear that the Mu'awiyah's troops represented the rebellious faction, that is, one which was unjust and unrighteous, and that justice lay on the side of 'Ali's army. Hence in accordance with the express injunction of the Qur'an one had to join the battle on 'Ali's side and against Mu'awiyah's army.

This incident demoralized Mu'awiyah's troops. Mu'awiyah, who always tried to make a headway by resorting to cunning and subterfuge, resorted to a misinterpretation. It was not possible to deny that the Prophet had made such a statement concerning 'Ammar, because perhaps there were at least five hundred persons who could bear witness that they had heard this statement from the Prophet himself or from someone who had heard it from the Prophet.

Accordingly, it was not possible to deny the fact of the prophesy concerning 'Ammar. The Syrians protested to Mu'awiyah, for it were they who had killed 'Ammar and the Prophet had said that he would be killed by a rebellious faction. Mu'awiyah told them, “You are mistaken. It is true that the Prophet said 'Ammar will be killed by a rebellious faction and army.

But it were not we who killed 'Ammar.” They said, “He was killed by our warriors.” “No,” he said, “'Ammar was killed by 'Ali who brought him here and provided the causes of his death.”

'Amr ibn 'As had two sons. One of them was a worldly person like himself. The other one was a youth who was relatively a man of faith and he did not agree with his father's ways. His name was 'Abd Allah. 'Abd Allah was present in a gathering where this sophistry was put into effect. 'Abd Allah said, “What a false argument that it was 'Ali who has killed 'Ammar, as he was among his troops.

If that is so, then it was the Prophet who killed Hamzah, the Doyen of the Martyrs, as Hamzah was killed due to his presence in the Prophet's troops.” This enraged Mu'awiyah and he said to 'Amr ibn As, “Why don't you check this ill-mannered son of yours!” This is what is called distortion of meaning.

## **How is the meaning of events and facts distorted?**

Historical events and facts have on the one hand certain causes behind them, and, on the other, they are inspired by certain goals and motives. Misrepresentation of a historical event lies in ascribing to it causes and motives other than what they have actually been, or in attributing to it goals and motives other than what they in fact were.

For instance, you visit someone who has recently returned from a pilgrimage to Makkah. The purpose you have in mind is that it is mustahabb to visit a hajji and so you go to see him. Someone makes a remark about your motives for the visit, describing them as an intention to propose your son's marriage with his daughter under the pretext of visiting a hajji returning from Makkah.

This is how he misrepresents your motive and purpose. This is what misrepresentation means.

The historic event of Karbala' had certain causes and motives behind it, as well as certain sublime goals. We Muslims and followers of Husayn ibn 'Ali have misrepresented this event in the same way as Mu'awiyah ibn Abi Sufyan distorted the meaning of the Prophet's statement concerning 'Ammar.

That is, Imam Husayn ('a) had certain goals and motives for staging his uprising and we have ascribed to him some other motives and goals.

## **The Character of a Sacred Movement**

Abu 'Abd Allah ('a) made an uprising that was of unusual greatness and sanctity. The uprising of Abu 'Abd Allah possessed all the characteristics that make an uprising sacred, so much so that it is without a parallel in the entire history of the world. What are those characteristics?

**1.** The first condition of a sacred movement is that it should not have a purpose and end that is personal and pertaining to the individual but one which is universal, covering the entire humanity and human species.

At times persons make uprisings for personal goals, and sometimes they may launch a movement for the sake of society, or for the sake of mankind, for the sake truth, or for the sake of justice, equality and monotheism, and not for some personal goal. In such cases the struggle and movement is no longer for a personal cause.

One who wages such a struggle represents all human beings. That is why men whose actions and movements were not for the sake of personal motives and for the sake of humanity or for the sake of truth, justice and equality, and for the sake of tawhid and knowledge of God and for the sake of faith, are honored and loved by all people.

And that is why the Prophet (S) said: “Husayn is from me and I am from Husayn”<sup>3</sup> We also say, “Husayn is from us and we from Husayn.” Why? Because Imam Husayn, may Peace be upon him, took a stand 1328 years ago<sup>4</sup> for our sake and for the sake of all mankind. His uprising was sacred and holy and it transcended personal goals.

**2.** The second condition for an uprising to be sacred is that it should be inspired by a powerful vision and insight. To explain, suppose there is a society who people are unaware, ignorant, and without understanding.

There appears among them a man of vision and understanding who understands their ailments and their remedies a hundred time better than they do. At a time when others fail to understand and see, the man of vision sees very early and distinctly what other people fail to see at all. He comes forward and takes a stand.

Years pass. Twenty, thirty or fifty years later the people wake up and find out why he had risen up and they understand the sacred goals that he had sought to attain whose value and worth was not visible to their fathers and ancestors twenty, forty or fifty years ago.

To give an example, the marhum Sayyid Jamal al-Din Asadabadi [Afghani] launched an Islamic movement about sixty or seventy years ago in the Muslim countries (his death occurred in 1310 H./1892–93, fourteen years before the Constitution Movement in Iran). When you read today the history of this man, you see that he was truly a lone and solitary figure.

He knew the maladies of Muslims and their remedy while the people themselves did not. He was insulted and ridiculed by the people and they did not support him. Now after sixty or seventy years when the facts of history have become clearer we see that he understood things at that time which the people of Iran, ninety-nine out of a hundred, did not.

Read at least two of the letters written by this great man. One of them was written to the marhum Ayatullah Mirza Shirazi Buzurg, may God elevate his station. The other was an open letter to the 'ulama' of Iran and is like a manifesto. Or read the letters written by him to marhum Hajj Shaykh Muhammad Taqi Bujnardi at Mashhad, or to a certain eminent scholar of Isfahan or Shiraz.

See how well he understood the problems and how clearly he saw things, how well he knew the character of colonialism and what effective measures he took for awakening this ummah (pay no attention to things that are still said about him by some agents of colonialism, for as the proverb goes, 'this henna has lost its colour!').

His movement was sacred because it was launched by a man who appeared during a difficult era and who saw the reality behind the appearances which was invisible to and hardly understood by his contemporaries.

The movement of Imam Husayn is such a movement. Today we understand fully the character of Yazid and the implications of his rule. We know what Mu'awiyah did and what were the schemes of the Umayyads. But the Muslims of that era, ninety-nine out of a hundred, did not understand these things, especially due to the absence of the media of the mass communication media which exist nowadays.

The people of Madinah did not understand the situation that existed. They came to know the character of Yazid and the implications of his caliphate when Husayn ibn 'Ali was killed. They were shocked and they asked themselves why he had been killed. They sent a delegation to Syria consisting of some eminent persons of Madinah and led by a man named 'Abd Allah ibn Hanzalah, known as "Ghasil al-Mala'ikah."

Making the journey from Madinah to Syria when they reached Yazid's court, after staying there for some time they came to know the realities of the situation. On returning to Madinah they were asked as to what they had seen. They said, "All that we can tell you is that so long as we were in Damascus we were afraid lest stones should rain on our heads from the heaven."

They told them they had seen a caliph who drank wine openly, gambled, and played with hounds and monkeys and had incestuous relations with women of his family.

'Abd Allah ibn Hanzalah had eight sons. He said to his townsmen, "Whether you rise up or not, I will make an uprising even if I have to do it alone with my sons." He fulfilled his words. In the uprising of Harrah against Yazid he sent forth his sons to fight.

They were martyred and he himself was martyred after them. 'Abd Allah ibn Hanzalah was not aware of the conditions two or three years earlier when Imam Husayn departed from Madinah. Where was he at the time when Husayn, as he prepared to leave Madinah, was saying:

One should bid farewell to Islam when the *ummah* is afflicted with such a ruler as Yazid?

Husayn ibn 'Ali had to be killed and the Muslim world had to receive a shock so that the likes of 'Abd Allah ibn Hanzalah, the Ghasil al-Mala'ikah, and hundreds of people like him in Madinah, Kufah, and other places may open their eyes and say that Husayn ('a) was right in saying what he said.

**3.** The third characteristic of a sacred movement is its solitary and exclusive character; that is, it is like a

flash of lightening in total darkness, a cry in the wilderness of silence, and a movement in the sea of absolute stillness. In conditions of total repression when the people cannot speak out, when there is total darkness, despair, absence of hope, and absolute silence and stillness, there appears suddenly a man and he breaks the magic silence and stillness.

He makes a movement and it is like a flash of light in the midst of surrounding darkness. It is then that others begin to stir and gradually start moving behind him and following him. Wasn't the uprising of Husayn such a movement? Yes, it was. Such was the movement that Imam Husayn launched. But what were his objectives in launching it?

Why were the Infallible Imams so insistent that the tradition of mourning Husayn ibn 'Ali ('a) should always remain alive? There is no need for us to look far for the reasons. Husayn ibn 'Ali himself has declared the reasons behind his movement:

Indeed, I have not risen up to do mischief, neither as an adventurer, nor to cause corruption and tyranny. I have risen up solely to seek the reform of the Ummah of my grandfather (s).

He says in most explicit terms: "Our society has become corrupt and the ummah of my Grandfather has become degenerate. I have risen up to carry out reform and I am a reformer."

I want to command what is good and stop what is wrong, and (in this) I follow the conduct of my grandfather and my father, 'Ali ibn Abi Talib.

Don't you see that righteousness is not acted upon and vice goes unforbidden. In such a situation, the man of faith yearns for the meeting with his Lord ... I see death as nothing but felicity and life under oppressors as nothing but disgrace.

Imam Husayn ('a) says, "I have risen up to carry out *amr bil ma'ruf*, to revive the faith, and to struggle against corruption. My movement is one which is Islamic and aimed at reform."

But what we say is something else. We have made two skillful manipulations which are very amazing (I don't know whether I should say skillful or ignorant). In one of these cases, we said that Husayn ibn 'Ali rose in order to be killed for the sake of the atonement of the sins of the ummah.

Now if someone were to ask us as to the source of this notion, whether it was Imam Husayn ('a) himself who said such a thing or if it was the Prophet or some Imam, we cannot cite any authority. But still we keep on insisting that Imam Husayn got killed so that our sins are atoned. I don't know whether we have borrowed this notion from Christianity. Muslims have unwittingly adopted many ideas from Christendom which are contrary to Islam.

One of the doctrines of Christianity is the notion of the crucifixion of Christ as a sacrifice made for the sake of the atonement of man's sins. Jesus is called 'the Sacrifice,' and it is an essential part of the Christian doctrine that Jesus went upon the cross for atoning the sins of his people. They have made

Jesus carry the burden of their sins!

However, we did not suspect that this notion belongs to Christianity and that it is consistent neither with the spirit of Islam nor with the statements of Husayn ('a) himself. By God, it is a calumny if we ascribe such a thing to Abu 'Abd Allah ('a)! By God, should one attribute such a notion to Husayn ibn 'Ali while he is keeping a fast in the month of Ramadan and claim that Husayn's martyrdom was for the sake of such a purpose and should he ascribe such a statement to him, his fast would be void for ascribing a falsehood to the Imam. Abu 'Abd Allah rose to struggle against sin, whereas we said that he rose in order to be a refuge for sinners!

We claim that Imam Husayn founded an insurance company to guarantee security to sinners! He has insured us against the consequences of sin in return for our tears. All that we have to do is to shed tears for him and in return he guarantees immunity to the sinners.

Now one could be whatever one liked to be, one could be an Ibn Ziyad or 'Umar ibn Sa'd, as if one 'Umar ibn Sa'd, one Sinan ibn Anas, and one Khuli were not enough! Imam Husayn wanted that the likes of Khuli and 'Umar ibn Sa'd should proliferate in the world and so he came and announced: 'O people, be as evil as you can be, for I am your security!'"

There is a second misrepresentation involved in interpreting the event of Karbala'. According to it, Imam Husayn made an uprising and was killed in order to carry out a special command that was solely addressed to him. He was told to go and get martyred. So his action does not relate to us and it is not something which can be followed and emulated: it does not relate to those precepts of Islam which are general and universal.

See, what a great difference there is between what the Imam declares and what we say! Imam Husayn cried out that the causes and motives of his uprising are matters that coincide with the general principles of Islam. There was no need for a special order. After all special orders are given in situations where the general prescription is not adequate.

Imam Husayn declared in unequivocal terms that Islam is a religion that does not permit any believer (he did not say, an Imam) to remain indifferent in the face of oppression, injustice, perversity and sin. Imam Husayn established a practical ideology which is the same as the ideology of Islam. Islam had set forth its principles and Husayn put them into effect.

We have divested this event of its ideological character. When it is shorn of its ideological character, it is no more capable of being followed, and when it can not be followed, one cannot make any use of Imam Husayn's teaching and draw any lesson from the event of Karbala'. We have rendered this event barren from the viewpoint of being beneficial and useful.

Could there be a worse kind of treachery? This is the reason why I say that the distortion in the meaning of the event of 'Ashura' is a hundred times more dangerous than textual corruption.

Why did the Infallible Imams (and there are even traditions from the Noble Messenger in this regard) want this movement to be kept alive? that it should not be consigned to oblivion?—that the people should mourn Imam Husayn? What was the objective that led them to issue this command?

We have distorted that objective, declaring that their only goal was that the mourning ceremonies are to be held for the sake of offering consolation to Hadrat Zahra', may Peace be upon her. Although she is with her great son in Paradise, we imagine that she is continually restless and full of sorrow, so she should be given consolation by the mourning of such worthless people as us! Can there be a greater insult of Hadrat Zahra' than this notion?

Some others say that Imam Husayn was murdered without any guilt at Karbala' at the hands of a group of aggressors and this was a tragedy. It is true that Imam Husayn was killed without any guilt. But is this all there is to the event that an innocent person was murdered by a group of aggressors!? Every day a thousand innocent persons are killed and wiped out throughout the world by criminals, and this is of course a tragic fact.

But does this kind of death have such a value that one should go on expressing sorrow over it and continue to mourn it year after year, for years, or rather for centuries, for ten and twenty centuries, expressing sorrow and regretting that Husayn ibn 'Ali was killed without guilt and that his innocent blood was shed for no reason by aggressors? But who can dare say that Husayn ibn 'Ali's death was in vain and his blood was shed futilely?

If one can find anyone in the whole world who did not allow one drop of his blood to be wasted, that is Husayn ibn 'Ali. If you can find anyone in the whole world who did not let one particle of his personality to go waste it is Husayn ibn 'Ali. He set such a high value for every single drop of his blood that it is indescribable!

If you take into account the amount of wealth that has been and is spent for his sake and will continue to be spent until the day of Judgment, you will see that humanity has spent billions and trillions for every drop of his blood.

Can anyone say that a man wasted his life whose death, for ever and ever, sends out tremors through the castles of the oppressors?—that his blood went in vain? Is his martyrdom to be saddening for us because Husayn ibn 'Ali was killed in vain?

It is we, wretched and ignorant people that we are, I and you, whose lives go waste. We should grieve for ourselves! You insult Husayn ibn 'Ali when you say that his life was lost in vain! Husayn ibn 'Ali is someone about whom it is said.

Indeed you have a station with God which cannot be attained except through martyrdom.

Did Husayn ibn 'Ali desire to die a vain death when he aspired for martyrdom?

The Imams have exhorted us to keep alive the tradition of mourning over Husayn ibn Ali because his goal was a sacred goal. Husayn ibn 'Ali established a school, and they wanted his school to remain alive and flourish.

You will not find a practical school of thought in the whole world that may be likened to that of Husayn ibn 'Ali ('a). If you can find a single another example of Husayn ibn 'Ali, you may ask why we should revive his memory every year.

If you can find another example of that which was manifested in Husayn ibn 'Ali during the event of 'Ashura', in those ordeals and taxing conditions, of the meaning of twahid, of faith, of the knowledge of God, of perfection, convinced faith in the other world, of resignation and submission, of fortitude and manliness, of self contentment, of steadiness and steadfastness, of honor and dignity, of the love and quest for freedom, of concern for mankind, of the passion to serve humanity—if you can find a single example in the whole world, then you may question the need to refresh his memory every year. But he is unique and without a parallel.

Keeping alive the memory of his name and his movement is for the purpose that our spirits may be illumined by the light of the spirit of Husayn ibn 'Ali ('a).

If a tear that we shed for him should signify a harmony between our souls and his spirit, it represent a brief flight that our spirit makes along with Husayn's spirit. Should it create within us a little glow of his valor, a particle of his free nature, a particle of his faith, a particle of his piety, and a small spark of his tawhid, such a tear has an infinite value.

They have said that it has the worth an entire world even if it is so small as the 'wing of a gnat.' Believe it! But that is nor a tear shed for a pointless death, but a tear for the greatness of Husayn and his great spirit, a tear that signifies harmony with Husayn ibn 'Ali and of movement in his steps. Yes, such a tear has an incalculable worth even if it is so small as a gnat's wing.

They wanted this practical ideology to remain for ever before the people's view, to witness that the Prophet's family are a proof and testimony of the truthfulness of the Prophet himself. If it is said that a certain Muslim warrior displayed great faith and valor in such and such a battle against Iran or Byzantine, for instance, it is not so much of an evidence of the Prophet's truthfulness as when it is said that the Prophet's son did such and such an act.

A leader's family is always subject to more suspicion and doubt than any of his followers. But when we observe the family of the Prophet at the highest summit of faith and sincerity, that is the best evidence of the Prophet's truthfulness. No one was so close to the Prophet (S) like 'Ali ('a). He grew up by the Prophet's side. No one had a faith in the Prophet like him or was more dedicated to the Prophet. This is the first evidence of the Prophet's truthfulness.

Husayn is the Prophet's son. When he manifests his faith in the Prophet's teaching it is a manifestation

of the Prophet himself. Things which are always declared by human beings verbally but are rarely observed in practice are clearly visible in Husayn's being. What makes a human being so undefeatable? Subhan Allah! See the heights to which a human being can rise!

See how undefeatable is the spirit of the human being whose body bears wounds from head to foot, his young sons have been cut to pieces before his very eyes, he is suffering from extreme thirst and when he looks up at the sky it appears dark in his eyes, he sees that the members of his family will be taken captive, he has lost all that he had and all that has remained for him is his own undefeatable spirit.

Show me such a spectacle of human greatness in an event other than Karbala' and I will celebrate its memory instead of Karbala! Accordingly, we should keep alive the memory of such an event, of a group of seventy-two persons who defeated the spirit of a host of thirty thousand. How did they inflict such a defeat? Firstly, though a minority facing certain death, not a single one of them pinned the enemy's side.

Yet some men from the thirty thousand pinned their ranks, including one of their commanders, Hurr ibn Yazid Riyahi and another thirty. This indicates the moral victory of this group and the defeat of the other one. 'Umar ibn Sa'd took certain measures in Karbala' which disclose his moral defeat. In Karbala' 'Umar ibn Sa'd's men refrained from a man-to-man encounter during the battle. At first they complied in accordance with the custom prevalent in those days, before launching an all-out attack and shooting arrows.

The man-to-man fight was a kind of contest in which one man from one side fought a man from the other. After several men were killed in these encounters with the companions of Imam Husayn, strengthening their morale, 'Umar ibn Sa'd ordered his men to refrain from man-to-man fights.

When did Abu 'Abd Allah come to the field for the final battle? Imagine, it is afternoon on the day of 'Ashura'. Until this time there were still several of his companions who offered the prayers with him. He has been very busy from the morning until the afternoon of that day as it was he, most of the time, who has brought the bodies of his companions from the battlefield and placed them in the tent of the martyrs.

He himself has rushed to the side of his companions in their last moments and it is he himself who consoles and reassures his family members. Apart from all this, there is his personal grief for the dear ones that he has lost. He is the last of all to come into the field of battle. They imagine that it would be a simple task to deal with Husayn in such a circumstance.

But he does not give a moment's reprieve to any contestant that dares to come forward to combat him. 'Umar ibn Sa'd then cries out: "Woe to you! Do you know whom you are fighting? This is the son of the most fatal of Arab warriors. He is the son of 'Ali ibn Abi Talib. By God, his father's soul is in his body. Don't fight him singly!"

Wasn't this an indication of defeat? Thirty thousand men combat against a single man, lonely and solitary, who has suffered all those sorrows and ordeals., and who has been through the arduous and

grueling labors of the day, thirsty and hungry, and he defeats them and makes them flee.

They faced a defeat not only against the sword of Abu 'Abd Allah but also his logic and eloquence. Abu 'Abd Allah delivered two or three sermons on the day of 'Ashura' before the commencement of his battle. These sermons are truly amazing.

Those who practice the act of oration know that it is not possible for someone in an ordinary state to say things which are sublime or at the height of sublimity. One's spirit must be in a state of fervour, especially if the oration is of an elegiac character. It is only with a heart burning with feeling that one can deliver a good elegy.

If one wants to compose a ghazal, he must be strongly moved with the passion of love so as to say a good ghazal. If one wishes to compose epic poetry, he must be moved with warlike emotions.

When Abu 'Abd Allah began his address, especially the sermon that he made on the day of 'Ashura', which is one of the most elaborate of his sermons, 'Umar ibn Sa'd was alarmed by the effect it might have on his men's morale. The Imam alighted from his horse and mounted a camel in order to make the sermon, as he wanted to make his voice heard better from a higher point.[5](#)

Words, which are truly reminiscent of the sermons of 'Ali ('a). Aside from the sermons of 'Ali we won't find a more powerful and vibrant sermon in the whole world. He spoke three times. 'Umar ibn Sa'd was frightened lest Husayn's sermon should change the minds of his troops.

The second time when Abu 'Abd Allah started to address them, due to the defeatist morale of the enemy, Umar ibn Sad ordered his men to hoot and beat their mouth with their hands so that no one could hear Husayn. Is that not an evidence of their defeat and the sign of Husayn's victory?

If a man has faith in God, in *tawhid*, if he has a link with God and faith in the other world, single-handedly he can inflict a moral defeat on a host of twenty and thirty thousand. Is this not a lesson for us? Where can you find another example of it?

Who else can you find in the whole world who could utter two sentences of that sermon in conditions in which Husayn ibn 'Ali spoke, or for that matter two sentences like the sermon of Zaynab ('a) at the city gates of Kufah?

If our Imams have told us to revive this mourning every year and to keep it alive for ever it is for the purpose that we may understand these points, that we may realize the greatness of Husayn, so that if we shed tears for him it is out of understanding.

Our knowledge of Husayn elevates us. It makes us human beings, free men, followers of truth and justice, and real Muslims. The school of Husayn is a man-making school, not a school that produces sinners. Husayn is the bastion of righteous conduct, not a citadel for sin and sinfulness.

The historians report that at daybreak on the day of 'Ashura', after offering the prayer with his companions, he turned to them and said, "Companions, get prepared. Death is nothing but a bridge that takes you across this world into another, from a world that is very coarse, hard and base to one that is sublime, noble and gentle."

These were his words. But now observe his conduct. The reports do not come from Husayn ibn 'Ali but from those who have chronicled the events. The episode has been reported even by Hilal ibn Nafi', who was accompanying 'Umar ibn Sa'd as his chronicler.

He says, al Husayn ibn 'Ali was astonishing to me. As the time of his martyrdom drew nearer and his ordeals became severer, his countenance appeared to be more refreshed and ruddier, like someone about to meet his beloved."

Even in the last moments when that accursed wretch approached him to sever his sacred head, he says, "When I approached Husayn ibn 'Ali and my eyes fell on him, the light and burnish of his face so gripped me that I forgot my intention to kill him:

The light of his face and its awe-inspiring beauty so gripped me that I was distracted from the thought of killing him.

They write that Abu Abd Allah had chosen a point for his combat which was nearer the tents of the womenfolk. That was for two reasons. Firstly, he knew the unmanly and inhuman character of the enemies. They lacked even the sense of honor to spare the tents of their attacks as it was he whom they were fighting.

Therefore he wanted to restrain them from attacking his camp so long as he was alive and had the strength to stop them. He would make a frontal attack and they would flee. But he would not pursue them but return to guard the tents of his womenfolk from any assault.

Secondly, so long as he was alive he wanted the members of his family to know that he was alive. Accordingly, he had chosen a point from where his voice could be heard by them. Whenever he returned after making an attack he would stand at that point and cry out:

There is no power or strength save that which derives from God, the Exalted and the Almighty.

His cries would reassure the women who knew that the Imam was still alive. The Imam had told them not to come out of the tents as long as he was alive (Don't believe those who say that the women kept running out every now and then. Never.

The Imam had ordered them to remain in the tents as long as he was alive). He had told them that they must not make any untoward utterance which might reduce their reward with God. He had told them that they would find deliverance and that their ultimate end would be a good one, that God will punish their enemies.

They did not have the Imam's permission to come out of their tents, and they did not. Husayn ibn Ali's sense of manly honor and their own sense of feminine honor did not permit them to come out. Accordingly, when they heard the Imam utter '*La hawl wala quwatta illa billahil aliiyyil azim*', they felt reassured. And as the Imam had come back to them once or twice after bidding them farewell, they still expected the Imam to return.

In those days they used to train Arabic horses for the battlefield, as the horse is an animal that can be trained. Such a horse would show a particular reaction when its master were killed. The members of Abu 'Abd Allah's household were in the tents awaiting the Imam, that he might return to them once again and they might see his angelic visage one again. Suddenly they heard the sound of the neighing of the Imam's horse.

They rushed to the tent's door imagining that the Imam had come. But they saw the horse without its rider with its saddle overturned. It was then that the children and the women raised the cries of *Wa Husaynah!* and *Wa Muhammada!* They surrounded the horse and each of them began to mourn for him. Mourning is part of human nature.

When a person wants to express his grief he mournfully addresses the heaven, or an animal, or some person. The Imam had told them that they must not weep or lament so long as he was alive. But of course they could mourn him when he died. And so in that state they began their lamentations.

They write that Husayn ibn 'Ali had a daughter named Sukaynah, whom he loved greatly. Later she grew up to become a learned lady of letters much revered and respected by all scholars and literary men.

This child was very dear to Abu 'Abd Allah ('a) and she too had an unusual love for her father. They write that this child uttered some sentences in the way of mourning which are very heartrending. In a mournful tone she addressed the horse and said:

O my father's stallion, my father was thirsty when he went out. Did they give him water or was he killed thirsty?'

That was at the time when Abu 'Abd Allah lay fallen on the ground.

[1.](#) al Halabi, Sirah v2, p77

[2.](#) Musnad, Ahmad b. Hanbal, v2, p199

[3.](#) al Mufid, al Irshad, p249, Alam al Wara, p216, Ibn Shahr Ashub, al Manaqib, v4, p71, Hilyat al abrar, v1, p560, Kashf al Ghummah, v2 pp10,61, Mulhaqt lhqaq al haqq, v11, pp 256-279

[4.](#) This sermon was delivered in the year 1389 H, corresponding to Farvardin 1348 (March-April 1969)

[5.](#) al Masudi, Muruj al Dhahab, v3, p69

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