

Why the Martyrdom of Imam Husayn (a.s) became Immortal?

[This speech was broadcast from the Nairobi (Kenya) Radio on the eve of Ashura, 1383 A.H.]

Since the beginning of creation until date, innumerable tragic incidents have occurred in the world. But in these tales of sorrows and tragedies the events of Karbala' are seen to be as prominent as the moon among the cluster of stars. Human nature demands that happy remembrances should always be retold and tragic reminders be obliterated from the memory as soon as possible. However, this law of nature had no control on the tragedy of Karbala'. Today, even after a passage of thirteen centuries every year this tragedy is remembered with such fervor as if it has just happened yesterday.

Indeed this is an astonishing fact. But if we ponder upon it we would be able to realize how the control of human nature became ineffective in this case. The significance and endurance of a sacrifice depends upon the significance and firmness of its aims. Some sacrifices are presented for worldly aims and such sacrifices take man towards decadence. The Almighty Allah says:

“Who created for you all that is in the earth...[1](#)

Now if instead of considering these worldly things as our servants, we destroy our life in their service, such a sacrifice, instead of carrying any greatness would be eligible for denouncement because we have considered our life inferior to those things that were created for our service. The greatness of man demands that he should consider worldly things as means of life and not that he should make it the aim of his life. In the Islamic parlance it is the stage of, “There is no god except Allah.” And reaching this point man thinks that the whole universe collectively cannot become equal to the value of a single human being. The aim of the life of man should be higher than the universe and such a being is only the Creator of the Universe. After, “There is no god” it is the stage of “except Allah.” To put it in a different way,

“Say: Surely my prayer and my sacrifice and my life and my death are (all) for Allah, the Lord of the worlds...”[2](#)

The purpose is to imply that you must make the principle of your life such that all your worship acts, rituals, life and death etc. should be for Allah, Who is the Lord of the worlds. In other words, the entire universe is for man and man is for the Lord of the worlds.

The world is transient. Everything here is going to be destroyed. If a sacrifice is made for these things that also shall be transient and not eternal. Its remembrance would be finished in a few days. Contrary to this, the Creator of the world is eternal. He is from eternity and He shall be there forever. Therefore whatever sacrifice is presented on His path, that too shall don the raiments of eternity and its remembrance would also endure forever. Its remembrance shall also remain fresh in the minds of all. That is why the Almighty Allah says:

And do not speak of those who are slain in Allah's way as dead; nay, (they are) alive, but you do not perceive.[3](#)

That is why the sacrifice of Imam Husayn (a.s) is always fresh. Husayn (a.s) made Allah as the aim of his life and presented incomparable sacrifices in the path of Allah. In recompense, the Almighty Allah also crowned the remembrance of Husayn with the crown of eternity.

Why had Husayn (a.s) presented this sacrifice? Let us see what Husayn (a.s) himself says about it. At the time when he was departing from Medina, he wrote a bequest to his brother, Muhammad Hanafiyyah. Some of the sentences of this testament were as follows:

“...I am not taking up arms in order to make merry, or be ecstatic over what I possess. I am not making mischief, nor exercising oppression. But I am ready to fight for the sole goal of seeking reform of the Ummah of my grandfather, the Apostle of Allah (s.a.w). I want to enjoin good and forbid evil and guide the affairs of the people as my grandfather and father were doing.”

This event began in the year 60 A.H. when Yazid ascended to the throne. The enthroning of Yazid was a terrible calamity for humanity and Islam. Historians are unanimous that no aspect of Yazid's character conformed to humanity or Islam. He neither believed in Allah nor had faith in the Messenger of Allah (s.a.w). He also denied faith in the Day of Judgment and Hereafter. He used to ridicule Prayer and those who recited Prayer. Wine was served openly in his court. Chess and gambling were obligatory acts in his view. Stepmothers and sisters were sexually legitimate for him. He remained on the throne for three or three and a half years. During this brief rule, in the first year he wreaked havoc on the family of the Holy Prophet (s.a.w) and slaughtered them with utter mercilessness. He wrought a carnage for which we are mourning these days. It was such a terrible carnage that human history had never witnessed. In the second year, he had Medina attacked and allowed his soldiers to plunder and ransack, kill the inhabitants and rape their ladies. Hundreds of companions of the Messenger of Allah (s.a.w) and memorizers of Qur'an were put under the sword. Prayer was not conducted in the Prophet's mosque for three days at a stretch as Yazid's soldiers had converted it into a stable for their horses. Thousands of women lost their honor and the Medinites were compelled to pay oath of allegiance to Yazid in the

words, “We are slaves of Yazid. If he likes he can sell us and if he wants he can release us.” In the third year of his rule, Yazid’s forces attacked Mecca and laid siege to it. Catapults were employed to throw fireballs on the Holy Ka’ba, which was consequently damaged. The siege was in process when Yazid died in Damascus.

This was a brief sketch of Yazid’s biography. How the times had changed and how the circumstances became inverted that such a person should demand allegiance from Husayn (a.s)!

Who was Husayn? The beloved one of ‘Ali and Fatima (a.s) and in the words of Qur’an, the son of the Messenger of Allah (s.a.w). He was absolutely sinless and had scaled the heights of purity of self and the best of deeds. Love and regard towards him is made obligatory for the Muslims. According to the sayings of the Holy Prophet (s.a.w) Husayn was from the Prophet and the Prophet was from Husayn (a.s). In other words, every saying of Husayn was the saying of the Prophet and every action of Husayn was the action of the Prophet. That is why Yazid was so keen to obtain the allegiance of Husayn. Because he felt that if Husayn gave him allegiance, each of his acts, beliefs and policies would get the seal of approval of the Messenger of Allah (s.a.w). Husayn was also aware of this fact and thus he refused to give allegiance, and as a result bore with absolute resignation and tranquility, the mountains of calamities that befell him.

He had to leave Medina. He had to bid farewell to the shrine of his maternal grandfather, the grave of his mother and the tomb of his brother. Then he took refuge in the Holy city of Mecca. Here also no security was found, because Yazid sent 30 militants in the garb of pilgrims to assassinate Imam Husayn (a.s) in Mecca. They were ordered to kill Husayn (a.s) even if he was found circumambulating the Ka’ba. Husayn (a.s) was compelled to leave Mecca along with his family members one day before the Hajj and he headed for Iraq. On the way his path was blocked by the forces of Yazid. This army consisted of a thousand men. When they reached the caravan of Husayn (a.s) they were dying of thirst as their water supply had been exhausted. The riders’ condition was serious due to the thirst. The horses were hanging out their tongues. It was the army of foes but the son of the great Prophet of Mercy could never allow them to perish of thirst. He ordered that not only the men but their beasts also be provided ample water. Husayn (a.s) himself organized the distribution of water.

Followed by these enemy forces, Imam Husayn (a.s) reached the plains of Karbala’ on the 2nd of Muharram. Forces dispatched by Yazid’s governor, Ibn Ziyad began to assemble in this area one after the other. In a few days, their numbers rose to 32000, who had gathered to slay a few oppressed people, among whom were aged men, children and women, totaling not more than 100–150 persons. The tents of Husayn’s group were initially removed to a point far away from the riverbanks. From the 7th Muharram onwards water supply was completely cut off for them. From the 8th of Muharram the cries of “Thirst! Thirst!” from the children of Husayn’s camp began to echo in the deserts of Karbala’. The same Husayn (a.s) who had provided drinking water to even the enemy forces was not unable to procure any water for his children and companions.

The next day was the 9th of Muharram. During the afternoon, Umar Ibn Saad, the commander of Yazidite forces prepared his army to attack the entourage of Husayn (a.s). Imam Husayn (a.s) asked for a night's respite to enable them to engage in the worship of Almighty. The eve of Ashura arrived. The camp of Husayn (a.s) buzzed with the recital of the Holy Qur'an, the chanting of invocations, ritual prayers and worship acts. People who have recorded those incidents say that such murmur arose from the tents of Husayn (a.s) as if bees were humming around the beehives.

In between these adorations and worships, Imam Husayn (a.s) assembled all his companions and relatives and recited a sermon, which, in brief said that Yazid did not have anything to do with them except the Holy Imam (a.s). Thus they must not endanger their lives. Husayn (a.s) released them from his allegiance and told them that all of them could leave him and go away wherever they liked so that their lives could be saved. The Imam explained to them in various ways so that they may leave him and obtain their survival. In the end he even extinguished the lamp so that they could leave in the cover of darkness if they are embarrassed otherwise. In reply to this, a wail arose from the gathering and different people stood up and reiterated their faith and loyalty to the Imam. Their wordings were different, their voices were various. But the aim of all of them was one and the same, that, "O Master! This is dying only once and achieving eternal success. Even if we are killed seventy times and our corpses are burnt and ashes scattered in the wind and after that again we are enlivened, we would not leave you ever."

By according freedom of action to his companions and relatives, Imam Husayn (a.s) performed the same duty that Prophet Ibrahim (a.s) had performed by seeking the opinion of Ismail (a.s). Ibrahim (a.s) could have sacrificed his son without informing him about it. But in that case it would have been only the achievement of Ibrahim (a.s) and it would not have been shared by Ismail (a.s). Ibrahim (a.s), by taking the opinion of his son and the son by expressing his willingness for slaughter, made it a model of partnership between the Friend (of God) and the slaughtered one (Ismail). Exactly in the same manner, Imam Husayn (a.s) also, by according permission to them all to leave Karbala', and the companions by expressing their determination to voluntarily lay down their lives, made this event a model of a shared sacrifice. That is why Iqbal the bard of the orient says:

"The end of it is Husayn and the beginning, Ismail."

The morning of Ashura was the day of terrible turmoil. By shooting the first arrow, Umar Ibn Saad initiated the battle. Initially the companions of Imam Husayn (a.s) laid down their lives one after the other. In the afternoon, it was the turn of Banu Hashim (or more precisely the progeny of Abu Talib). The progeny of Aqil became extinct from the world. The beloved sons of Zainab were smeared in their blood. The last remains of Qasim were trampled under horses. The sons of 'Ali (a.s) praised the bravery. Abbas lost both his arms in his struggle to get drinking water for children and the lion of 'Ali (a.s) after capturing the Euphrates went to sleep on the riverbanks. The image of the Prophet, 'Ali Akbar, arrived in the battlefield. The people witnessed the same valor of 'Ali (a.s). At last a dagger pierced the chest and the shattered facsimile of the Holy Prophet, after being smeared with blood, mixed into the sands of

Karbala’.

Now ‘Ali Asghar heard the call of his father for help and made himself fall off the cradle. Husayn (a.s) could not bear to see the thirst of the six-month old infant. He brought the child to the fields shading him with the tails of his cloak and asked for water for the child. Instead of giving water, Hurmula quenched the baby’s thirst with an arrow. This arrow not only pierced the neck of ‘Ali Asghar and the shoulder of Husayn (a.s), it also pierced the heart of Fatima (s.a.).

Now Husayn (a.s) pounced upon the forces of Yazid like a heavy flood. He launched three such deadly attacks that the enemy forces began to feel helpless. The time of Asr (late afternoon) approached. Husayn (a.s) was covered with wounds from the head to the toe. Incessant bleeding made him feel physically weak. He restrained his sword for a moment and the enemies began to shower him with arrows and stones from all sides. At last the moment arrived that a poet says,

The rider of the Prophet’s shoulders has come down from the saddle.

If I am not wrong, it is as if the sky has fallen to the earth.

Shimr exhibited such heartlessness that the heavens and the earth were in turmoil. A call echoed in the atmosphere:

Know that Husayn is slain in Karbala’!

Know that Husayn is slaughtered in Karbala’!

The world became empty of Husayn (a.s).

After the martyrdom of Imam Husayn (a.s), the enemies began to plunder his camp and his women and children. The tents were burnt down. Head coverings were snatched from the heads of the Prophet’s daughters. The ailing son of Husayn (a.s) was arrested and tied up in chains and iron-collars.

Now the terrible night fell, which is called “Shaam-e-Ghariba” (the night of the homeless). Yesterday, Husayn (a.s) had been present to protect the folks of Harem.⁴ There was Abbas and ‘Ali Akbar. The companions and helpers were also present. Today none remained. After Husayn (a.s), the responsibility of this plundered group and the defense of Islam fell upon Zainab. Zainab fulfilled her role in such a beautiful way that the world gave her the title of “Partner of Husayn.”

This apparent defeat of Husayn (a.s) was actually a magnificent victory. See, Yazid was demanding allegiance from Husayn (a.s) and his companions. Though Imam Husayn (a.s) was martyred, when his successor, the ailing Imam ‘Ali Ibn Husayn (a.s) was brought chained before Yazid, Yazid could not summon the courage to demand allegiance from him. Yazid and his cohorts had to give up their demands. Husayn and his supporters remained firm on their stance. What can be a better proof than this of the victory of Husayn (a.s) and the defeat of Yazid? That is probably why Mir Anees said about the

holy Imam:

“He suppressed Byzantine and Syria with such ferocity

That Jihad was not required from the remaining nine Imams.”

- [1.](#) Surah Baqarah 2:29
- [2.](#) Surah Anam 6: 162
- [3.](#) Surah Baqarah 2: 154
- [4.](#) Ladies and children

Source URL:

<https://www.al-islam.org/understanding-karbala-sayyid-saeed-akhtar-rizvi/why-martyrdom-imam-husayn-became-immortal#comment-0>