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Introduction

I. Explanation of The Use of Terminology

Within the situation which existed, revolution at any time, or in any place, will have, political, social and economic causes, which impel a group of people to a movement—by force—against the existing situation, whether because that situation represents a deviation from an ideal which has been portrayed and is present in the faith of the *umma*, or because that situation does not respond to the aspirations of that group of people who represent the elite within the *umma*.

By its success or failure, a revolution will produce consequences. In the case of success the consequences will be represented by the change in the conceptions and institutions in the society. This will be accomplished by their transformation from their past form to the form put forward in the slogans of the revolutionaries when they embarked on their revolution. In the case of failure, the consequence will lead to the existing regime intensifying measures of repression in order to strengthen its foundations and make the conceptions which it applies to society more deeply-rooted in terms of policy, the economy, society and other matters of ordinary life.

On rare occasions, failure of the revolution may lead to the existing regime changing some of its conceptions or altering some of its institutions to respond, in some measure, to some of the slogans of the revolutionaries, when it seems that there is something in that which will help its existence and supremacy, which will subdue the growing popular hostility to it, and which deprive its opponents of their propaganda weapons.

The skeleton of the revolution are the material events which occur in time and place. This is what general history is concerned to record. Since, however, these events are stripped of their relationship with the general mentality of the nation and their emotional effect on the *umma* and the way in which it understands them, they have no significance and no meaning.

Then they are something dead with no life and movement in them. Thus the events, in this respect, do not have any meaning to a man of thought. They may be an entertaining story but they are not, in this

respect, anything more than that.

The flesh, sinews and blood of the events are the manifestations of their reflections in the general mentality of the *umma* and the reactions which the occurrence of the revolution produced in the lives of different groups, and then the reactions which the revolution produced after it had occurred.

From this standpoint, the revolution – whether a failure or a success – will be an influential and active element in its human environment. From this standpoint, it will take its place in the living history of the *umma*, the history which has affected it and which is affected by it, the history which will endure in time, in place and in man and whose effect does not end with the end of its time, or with the change of its place, or with the death of its hero.

From this point of view, the revolution affects the *umma* and is affected by it. It affects the *umma* insofar as it offers to it—both leaders and followers—examples on whose pattern the *umma* may work out its positions to face the situations and attitudes which it will be exposed to in its journey to the future.

The revolution is affected by the *umma* insofar as the picture of the events in the general mentality of the *umma* is influenced by its psychological attitudes towards the misfortunes which may befall it, the victories which it may achieve, and the difficulties which it may face and from which it may suffer.

The events may change their composition in order to accord with the existing situation; the composition of the events may remain as they were but explanations for the events may be given which accord with the actual attitude in which men are now living. In these circumstances, they carry out what is termed the operation of 'ommission'.

At this point it seems clear that history, in this respect, is something living which moves in the minds and emotions of the *umma*. It is not an inheritance by which a theoretical relationship connects it. The relationship which unites the *umma* and its history is, in this respect, a living relationship which reflects the interaction between the *umma* and history in a continuous movement of give and take.

In this way, history may be a spur to go forward into the future and a light which guides the *umma* in its advance towards the attainment of its aspirations. It may be a mirror of the spirit of the present time, through which the *umma* is living now, and a justification for the situation to which it is shackled.

This view of an historical event is what we term 'history in popular consciousness' and it is what we mean by 'the revolution of al-Husayn in popular consciousness', insofar as, in this study, we intend to investigate the reflections of the revolution in the behaviour of the *umma*, its attitude toward its events, the nature of its practice in keeping it alive, the quality of its association with it, how the events influence its psychological attitudes so that they transform and change the composition of these events or give them new meanings and explanations which are different from their original meanings and significations.

I hope that the study will present a faithful picture of the revolution of al-Husayn in Muslim

consciousness, in a general way, and of Shi'ite Muslims, in particular.

II. The Attitude Towards The Revolution

1. The Eve of the Revolution

When people learnt of al-Husayn's determination to revolt, they took up three different attitudes towards it.

The first attitude was the attitude of the Shi'a of the Holy Family. It was to urge the revolution, to offer it promises of help and support and to undertake some actual tasks for its sake.

We find evidence for that in the event of al-Husayn's revolution when he refused to give the pledge of allegiance to Yazid ibn Mu'awiya and left Medina for Mecca. Indeed we find evidence for it even before the death of Mu'awiya, in the efforts of the Kufans to get al-Husayn to revolt and to rectify the situation—as they claimed—which had arisen as a result of the ratification of the peace treaty between Mu'awiya and Imam al-Hasan ibn 'Ali.

After the death of Mu'awiya, the assumption of office by Yazid and al-Husayn's departure for Mecca, letters from the leaders of the Shi'a came continually to him. Other leaders also participated in this call and this urging, and their letters came in abundance to him. They dissociated themselves from the Umayyad governor, al-Numan ibn Bashir al-Ansari, and then they gave a positive response to al-Husayn's messenger to them, Muslim ibn Aqil. Eighteen thousand of them pledged allegiance to him.

Many of them remained faithful to their attitude after the Umayyad regime had regained control over affairs in Kufa when the new governor, 'Ubayd Allah ibn Ziyad, arrived there and took over from al-Numan ibn Bashir. He exercised absolute authority over Kufa with ferocity and speed. Some of them were paralysed by fear; some of them were imprisoned after the abortive movement of Muslim ibn 'Aqil in Kufa; some of them were prevented from joining al-Husayn by the blockade which 'Ubayd Allah set up around Kufa; while others, who were able to slip through the cordon which had been positioned around Kufa, joined al-Husayn at Karbala', fought with him and were martyred in his presence.

The second attitude is the attitude of members of the clan of the Hashimites and the attitude of some of the tribal leaders. As for the attitude of members of the clan of the Hashimites, it is portrayed by the words of Muhammad ibn al-Hanafiyya and 'Abd Allah ibn 'Abbas.

On the eve of Imam al-Husayn's departure from Medina, Muhammad ibn al-Hanafiyya gave him the following advice: 'You should go to Mecca. If staying there provides you with security, that is what we want. If it should be otherwise, you should go to the land of Yemen. They are supporters of your grandfather, your father and your brother. They are better-natured and have kinder hearts ...'¹

He received similar advice from 'Abd Allah ibn 'Abbas when 'Abd Allah ibn 'Abbas said in a conversation

which took place between him and the Imam: 'I have learnt that you are setting out for Iraq. They are treacherous people and are only calling you to war. Do not hurry. If you refuse any other course but to fight against this tyrant and yet are unwilling to stay in Mecca, then go to Yemen. Write to the people of Kufa and your supporters in Iraq that they should drive out their governor. If they do not do that, you should remain there until God sends His commandment, for there, there are fortresses and mountain paths.'²

As for the attitude of those who were not members of the clan of Hashim, it is portrayed by the words of 'Abd Allah ibn Muti' al-'Adawi: 'O son of the Apostle of God, I remind you of God and of the sanctity of Islam lest it be defiled. I adjure you before God concerning the sanctity of the Apostle of God and the sanctity of the Arabs. By God, if you seek what the Umayyad clan has in their hands, it will kill you. If they kill you, they will never fear anyone after you. By God, it is the sanctity of Islam which will be defiled, the sanctity of Quraysh and the sanctity of the Arabs. Do not do it. Do not go to Kufa. Do not expose yourself to the Umayyad clan.'³

In principle, these men agree with the revolution but they are concerned about its results. Some of them –like 'Abd Allah ibn Muti'– are absolutely certain of its failure and express their feelings of consternation and alarm at the Umayyad audacity against everything sacred which will follow this failure.

Others are doubtful about its result and advise him to take refuge in places and among groups which will make the possibilities of success greater than the possibilities of failure.

The third attitude is represented by 'Abd Allah ibn ' Umar and other such men of piety (!)⁴ who have withdrawn from politics since the killing of 'Uthman under the slogan of keeping away from discord, even though, by this attitude of theirs, they have rendered a great service to the existing regime when they made themselves into a party which was impeding the progress of revolutionary forces in society under the slogan of piety and keeping away from discord.

'Abd Allah ibn ' Umar said to Imam al-Husayn: 'Abu 'Abd Allah, you know the hostility of this clan towards you and their injustice to you. The people have given authority to this man, Yazid ibn Mu'awiya. I cannot be sure that the people would not favour him because of gold and silver (which he has given them) so that they would fight against you and thus many men would be destroyed through you. I advise you to enter into the agreement which the people entered into and to be patient as you were patient before.'

'Abd Allah ibn ' Umar and other such holders of this view were not from the Shi'a of the Holy Family. Nor were they members of that second group which believed in the justice of the revolution as a principle. In outward appearance at least, they were not supporters of the regime. They were only looking hostility at the revolution by starting out with a basic attitude in their public and private lives, which was the maintenance and acceptance of the status quo, not because it was just, but only because it existed, and because any change would not agree with their temperaments and interests.

2. The Aftermath of the Revolution

The Muslims faced the distressing end of the revolution and the consequences which followed (including the cutting off of heads and captivity) with three attitudes.

The first attitude was the attitude of the Shi'a of the Holy Family. They received the distressing end with sadness, regret and anger: they were sad because of the atrocity which had taken place at Karbala'; they felt regret because they had been remiss in their help and support; and they were angry with the Umayyad regime because it had committed a dreadful crime.

The interaction of grief with sadness generated in them extreme anger and a burning desire to atone, which they expressed against the regime and its supporters in poetry and speeches, and in revolutions which continued through generations. The slogan, 'Vengeance for al-Husayn', became a slogan for all revolutionaries against the Umayyads.

The second attitude was the attitude of the general body of Muslims who were not committed to the political policy of the Shi'a and the Imams of the Holy Family.

These met the disaster with shock and revulsion. The Umayyad techniques of dealing with their political opponents, as revealed in their suppression of the revolution, appalled them. These techniques showed no respect to law or morality, nor did they set any store in social norms.

There is no doubt that this discovery prompted many of the tribal and communal leaders to reconsider their attitude and friendship towards the Umayyad regime. Among such men was 'Ubayd Allah ibn al-Hurr al-Ju'fi who changed from being a supporter of the regime, who had refused to answer the summons of al-Husayn when the latter had asked him to help him, by becoming a revolutionary against the regime, who wrote poems of lament about the martyrs of Karbala' and proclaimed rebellion.⁵

Even the so-called pious who had received the decision to revolt with lassitude and had given advice to stop it, even these men, were not able to maintain their previous negative attitude towards the revolution and were forced to follow popular opinion by showing shock and revulsion. Zayd ibn Arqam had been one of those present at 'Ubayd Allah ibn Ziyad's assembly in Kufa when the prisoners and the heads of the martyrs were brought in.

He wept when he saw Ibn Ziyad poking at the teeth of Imam al-Husayn with a cane in his hand. When Ibn Ziyad rebuked him for weeping and threatened him, he declared: 'O people ... you will be slaves after today. You have killed the son of Fatima, and you have given power to Ibn Murjana (i.e. Ibn Ziyad). By God, the best of your men have been killed, and the worst of them have become masters. May God destroy those who consent to humiliation and shame!'

When al-Hasan al-Basri learnt of al-Husayn's martyrdom, he said: 'How despicable is an *umma* which has killed the son of the daughter of its Prophet!'

The third attitude was the attitude of adherents of the regime. These men received the news of the end of the revolution with joy and delight. They demonstrated their feelings of comfort and elation. Some of them could not desist from showing feelings of revenge and gloating.

Yazid ibn Mu'awiya showed his feeling of happiness and elation. Indeed it seems that he made the coming of the prisoners into an occasion for popular merriment in which music and songs were used.⁶ He could not hide his delight when the prisoners and the head of Imam al-Husayn were brought into him amid a lavish assembly.

The same is the case with regard to the rest of the members of the regime, like 'Ubayd Allah ibn Ziyad, Marwan ibn al-Hakam, 'Amr ibn Sa'id b. al-'As and others. They expressed their delight in expressions which narrators have recorded and historians have reported.⁷

Soon, however, the adherents of the regime discovered that the matter did not give rise to happiness. It was not the simple matter which they had envisaged. This revolution was not just a simple insurrection which could easily be put to an end, and then the regime would rid of its dangers.

The members of the regime discovered that the failure of the revolution generated dangers which were much greater than those which had existed before. The whole situation exploded. The failure of the revolution made the Shi'a of the Holy Family become much firmer in their attitude whereas before, during the reign of Mu'awiya, they had been more inclined to peaceful negotiations and forbearance.

Similarly in a way which got talked about so that Muslims heard it from one another, the purifying effect of the revolution produced a great change in the attitude of large numbers of the Muslims towards the Umayyads and their government. We consider that this change made these groups equipped to adopt effective negative policies against the regime after their psychological attitude against the regime had developed.

When the Umayyads discovered this new situation, they began to take practical measures aimed at destroying the effect of this psychological activity which the revolution had produced in the community. This activity had begun to turn the *umma* away from friendship with the regime to the public declaration of attitudes which resisted it and its institutions and policies.

Yet the adherents of the regime discovered the danger of the spiritual forces, which were unleashed as a result of putting down the revolution by the savage method which had been followed, and they brought into play every means of seduction and intimidation which they possessed in order to prevent these forces from working against the regime.

In contrast to that, the Shi'ite leadership with the Imams at its head had also discovered the awesome powers, which the revolution had mobilized to work against the Umayyads and annihilate their regime, and new circumstances which were appropriate to the success of this work. This leadership prepared to use its energies against Umayyad activities, by aiming at releasing the rays of the revolution and

spreading its psychological influence among the *umma* to the furthest extent and the widest range.

In the rest of this chapter we will present a brief picture of the Umayyad activities which were aimed at thwarting the transforming effect of the revolution within the *umma* in order to move from that to the presentation of a detailed study of the efforts of the Shi'ite leaders, with the Imams of the Holy Family at their head, which resisted Umayyad activities and which aimed at stimulating the activity of the revolution to change the *umma* from friendship with the Umayyads and to rally against them.

We will see that the activities of the Shi'ite leadership were the ones for which success was ordained in the end.

III. The Motives And Aims Which The Revolution Implanted In Popular Consciousness

The efforts of the Umayyads to frustrate the activity of the revolution in the nation are represented by two tendencies:

The First Tendency

Among the realities of the history of the revolution of al-Husayn is that Yazid ibn Mu'awiya had the primary responsibility for what had happened at Karbala'. He received the dreadful result with happiness and joy. He did not show any opposition to the methods which Ibn Ziyad employed to deal with the revolutionaries. Rather he was at one with him through issuing directives about the nature of this method. When, however, the consequences of the crime were revealed, he attempted to shirk the responsibility for them.

'Ubayd Allah ibn Ziyad admitted to Musafir ibn Shurayh al-Bakri in a conversation between them: 'Yazid indicated to me that either al-Husayn was killed or I was. I chose to kill him.'⁸

The historians have reported: When the head of al-Husayn was brought to Yazid, the position of Ibn Ziyad became high in his estimation. He loaded him with blessing, made gifts to him and was pleased with him for what he had done. It was not much later when he learnt of the people's abhorrence for the act, and their cursing and reviling it that he regretted the killing of al-Husayn.'⁹

He said to al-Nu'man ibn Bashir al-Ansari: 'Praise be to God who killed al-Husayn.'¹⁰

This reality prompted those in charge of the Umayyad regime to make efforts aimed at removing the responsibility for the suppression of the revolution by the savage method which had been used at Karbala' from the Umayyad regime and from Yazid, and putting the responsibility for that on specific adherents of the regime and essentially on 'Ubayd Allah ibn Ziyad. In that way the spirit of hostility and indignation was directed against one man, and not against its great symbolic figure and its leader, Yazid

ibn Mu'awiya.

The researchers will find some traces of this tendency in some of the reporters. Among them is Ibn Hajar al-Haythami who went so far as to claim that Yazid was not pleased that al-Husayn was killed and had not ordered that to happen.^{[11](#)}

It appears that the practical efforts made on this course were concentrated on Iraq and the Hijaz, and not the Syrian area, for there the Umayyads had laid down that 10th Muharram should be a day of festival, of happiness and of rejoicing.^{[12](#)}

This attempt failed, and public opinion did not absolve Yazid and his regime of the crime, even though – after the Shi'ite tendency had become stronger and had expressed itself by carrying out the slogans of al-Husayn – some of the later men of religion utilized this Umayyad attempt to absolve Yazid and would not allow anything bad to be said about Yazid.^{[13](#)} Public opinion, however, was against this attempt.

Therefore no success was ordained for it and it did not leave any mark in popular consciousness. Rather in this popular consciousness, Yazid ibn Mu'awiya remained the symbol of a great and hideous crime.^{[14](#)}

The Second Tendency

The second tendency was to distort the revolution. Because of that it was more serious than the first tendency.

This tendency shows itself in two forms within the framework of the texts which have come to us.

First of all, it is the portrayal to public opinion of al-Husayn as some one seeking a worldly kingdom. Thus, his aim in his revolution was not one which was universal, religious and Islamic but only a personal aim. When he despaired of achieving his objective, he showed himself ready to submit and surrender.

The manifestation of this is reflected in the account in which it is reported that al-Husayn said to 'Umar ibn Sa'd: 'Come with me to Yazid so that I may put my hand in his hand.' The evidence for the falseness of this report is the proof which many historians report from 'Uqba ibn Sim'an. The latter was the servant of al-Rabab, the wife of Imam al-Husayn, and one of the few men who survived the slaughter at Karbala'.

Therefore he is an eyewitness. He said: 'I accompanied al-Husayn from Medina to Mecca and then from Mecca to Iraq. I did not separate from him until he was killed. I heard all the conversations he conducted with the people right up to the day of his death. By God, he did not give them any reason for what the people are telling each other about him saying that he would put his hand in the hand of Yazid, nor that they should let him go to one of the frontier-posts of the Muslims. He said, "Leave me and I will return to the land from which I came, or leave me and I will go in this broad land until we see what the decision of the people comes to." However, they would not do so.'

The fact that this attempt had met with some degree of success had made 'Uqba ibn Sim'an say: '... He did not give them any reason for what the people are telling each other...'

It seems, however, that this attempt failed to achieve any success worth mentioning after eyewitnesses applied themselves to disproving and refuting it.

Secondly, the tendency showed itself in the portrayal to public opinion of al-Husayn and his followers as Kharijites, or as sinners who had rebelled against the constitution and constitutionality as represented by Yazid ibn Mu'awiya: they have revolted against their Imam, renounced their allegiance and spread discord on the *umma*.

Ibn Ziyad, from the time he arrived in Kufa and took charge of the suppression of the movement of Muslim ibn 'Aqil, had attempted to leave an impression in the minds of the people that the movement was the handiwork of the Kharijites and the Harurites. [15](#)

There is no doubt that the efforts made to give the revolution of al-Husayn this characteristic became more serious and intense in order to produce reactions in the masses.

This attempt did not succeed in winning credibility with the masses. Instead of putting the revolution of al-Husayn outside constitutionality, the Umayyad regime, in its entirety, was put outside constitutionality, and increasing numbers of people rejected it after the extent of its distance from the truth in its claim to represent Islam became understood through the effect of the revolt of al-Husayn.

The growth of the Shi'ite entity after the Umayyads, the prominence of the Shi'a in political attitudes which were opposed to the political system, and the 'Abbasid recourse to nourishing juristic and theological tendencies which were opposed to any Shi'ite tendency produced a sectarian situation which prompted some jurists, traditionists and theologians to gratify the impulses of fanatical rulers and some fanatical extremists among the general body with despicable sectarian ideas.

These ideas were recorded and clearly and decisively exposed by the important jurists, traditionists and theologians. Among these despicable sectarian ideas was the attempt to give a quality of constitutionality to the conduct of Yazid and the Umayyad regime against the revolution of al-Husayn, and to take away any quality of constitutionality from al-Husayn's revolution. In what follows, we will mention some of these attempts.

Among these ideas is the idea of Abu Bakr ibn al-'Arabi, in his book, *al-'Awasil min al-Qawasil*, where he said of al-Husayn: 'No one went against him (i.e. al-Husayn) except by using their ability to understand. They only fought him because of what they had heard from his grandfather, the master of apostles, who had informed them about the corruption of the situation and warned them against entering into discords. His statements about that are numerous.

Among them is that he said: "There will be lamentations and lamentations. Strike down anyone who

wants to divide the authority of this *umma*, while it is united, whoever they may be." The people only went out against him with this or its like in their minds.'¹⁶

Ibn al-Jawzi has stated in his book, *al-Sirr al-Masun*: 'Among the common beliefs which have prevailed among a group of those who associate themselves with the Sunna is that they maintain that Yazid was in the right, and al-Husayn was in the wrong in revolting against him ... Only a non-Shi'ite who was ignorant of the practice of the Prophet, would be inclined to such a view and would think that he could anger the Rafidites (i.e. the Shi'a) by that.'¹⁷

Al-Shawkani has said: 'Some scholars have gone too far and judged that al-Husayn, the grandson of the Prophet, should have been content with the drunkard who was violating the sanctity of the sacred law, Yazid ibn Mu'awiya. May God curse them! How strange are such statements when they are laid bare. Rocks would split apart at hearing them.'¹⁸

These ideas reflect a hostile attitude towards the revolution of al-Husayn in the popular consciousness of an insignificant group of Muslims. This attitude grew out of the efforts of the Umayyads and their propaganda apparatus. Soon, however, it was an attitude which had lost its supporters in Muslim circles, and there was no longer anyone who held it. The scholars and leaders of thought used to record it merely for the purpose of recording their rejection and revulsion of it.

Among those who have done so in the modern era is Shaykh Muhammad 'Abduh, when he wrote: 'When one finds in the world a just government which maintains the sacred law and an unjust government which paralyses it, it is necessary for every Muslim to support the former ... In this category is the revolt of Imam al-Husayn, the grandson of the Apostle, against the leader of tyranny and injustice, who had gained control of the government of the Muslims by force and deceit, namely, Yazid ibn Mu'awiya, may God desert him and may God desert those Karamiyya and haters of 'Ali who supported him.'

This attitude began to be recorded as past dead history to arouse scorn and amazement at the rigid mentalities of men who were incapable of originality in thought that they took refuge with strange ideas for their attitude. Perhaps that might achieve some of the commotion for them, which they imagined to be the fame which their sinews burned, in vain, to attain. As a result of their blind desire for the spreading of their reputation, they fell into the same sort of quagmires in which the supporters of Yazid wallow.

The true attitude, which still throbs with life, is the attitude which has, from the year 61 and still is even now, put its roots deep in the popular consciousness of all the Muslims in general and of Shi'ite Muslims in particular. It is the necessity, dedication and inspiration of the revolution. It is the attitude which is necessary for every free man and every man who thinks, who has become aware of the real nature of al-Husayn's revolution.

The revolution of al-Husayn has won its war against Umayyad distortion and has entered firmly and deeply into popular consciousness. On the one hand, that is because of its truth and purity. On the other

hand, it is because of the efforts of Shi'ite leadership – and that is what we will explain in what follows.

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Against Umayyad attempts aimed at frustrating the effect of the revolution on the *umma*– attempts which as we have already seen failed desperately– there were the efforts of the Shi'ite leadership aimed at activating the effect of the revolution in the *umma*.

Before entering into a discussion of the details of the Shi'ite leadership's efforts in this field, we must know the motives which impel this leadership to adopt this attitude in the course of Islamic history.

Will we find these motives in the emotions of love and hatred? Will we find them in a personal attitude towards the Umayyads through considering them as a family who were hostile to the Hashimites because of historical interventions?

On this basis, the Hashimites would have been motivated and would have motivated their Shi'a, to gratify the feeling of hatred which they bore against the Umayyads.

Or do we find the motives in the political advantages of the Hashimites in terms of the fact that the Umayyads had competed with the Hashimites for government after Umar ibn al-Khattab and beaten them to it? Then they would have been motivated, and would have motivated their Shi'a, against the Umayyads in order to pursue government as being a political authority which would consolidate the dominion of one family of Quraysh over the fate of the Muslims at the expense of another family of Quraysh.

If we deal with this problem superficially, there is scope for imagining that emotional or political motives, or both, were the things which impelled the Shi'ite leadership to strive to activate the effect of the revolution on the *umma*. The scope for imagining this is vast, for this is the kind of thing which accords with human nature at every age.

Any objective and deliberate study of this problem, however, will confirm to us the superficiality of the explanation, based on emotion and advantage, for the motives of the Shi'ite leadership in their attitude. It would also reveal other motives which were the basic instigation for the Shi'ite leadership to adopt this attitude towards al-Husayn's revolution.

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When we examine the attitude of the Commander of the faithful, 'Ali ibn Abi Talib, towards the Caliphs who preceded him, we find that he relinquished his personal emotions and interests and the interests of his family in order to support the state and mission of Islam. If he had wanted to serve his own interests and emotions, he could have brought about a harmful political struggle within the state, which may have enabled him to gain power. He did not do that, however, not because he was unable to stir up such a struggle, but only because he preferred the interest of Islam in the political unity of the Muslims.

After the incident at the Saqifa, he refused to respond to the call by Abu Sufyan, which was supported by al-'Abbas ibn 'Abd al-Muttalib and in which he urged him to resist the decision taken in the meeting at the Saqifa. He answered: 'The safety of the religion is something which we love more.'

Similarly he announced his acceptance of the result which came from the consultative council, even though he registered his disapproval of it, for he said: 'I submit to what the affairs of the Muslims have submitted, even while there is only injustice against me, in particular, in them.'[19](#)

When he was invested with the caliphate, and his political rivals split the unity of the Muslims through their rebellion in Mecca, and then in Basra, he was compelled to struggle in order to preserve the unity of the Muslims by the peaceful means which his opponents refused to respond to. They forced him to fight against them in order to preserve Islamic unity.

When he brought the rebellion to an end and started to build the model state, the Umayyad party under the leadership of Mu'awiya ibn Abi Sufyan revealed its intentions aimed at destroying the unity of the Muslims and at changing Islam into an institution which served the interests of a class of exploiters at the expense of the interests of the *umma*.

At this point 'Ali b. Abi Talib struggled for a long time by peaceful means to attain a framework, which would preserve the unity of the Muslims and which would enable him to realize his dream of building a just state. He failed, however, because of his opponents' persistence in their separatist attitude. Then the Imam was forced to enter into war to protect the unity of the Muslims and to preserve Islam from the fraudulent interpretation of its principles.

He constantly declared his aims in embarking on this struggle.[20](#)

Imam 'Ali was martyred and the struggle went on.

Imam al-Hasan ibn 'Ali assumed authority after his father. He declared that he would adhere to the aims for which Imam 'Ali had striven, and made strenuous efforts to safeguard the political unity of the Muslims through negotiation but he had no better fortune in this matter than his father. Indeed his opponents became more resolute in their attitudes as a result of their realization of the weakness of his position through the spreading of a defeatist spirit among the leaders of Iraqi society at that time.

After despairing of gaining any benefit from negotiations, he attempted to follow the policy of Imam 'Ali to protect the unity of the Muslims by force of arms. He discovered, however, that he was in a desperate situation and that new considerations in society made it impossible for him to engage in a successful war. Therefore he chose to preserve the unity of the Muslim under the auspices of the authority of his political rival, Mu'awiya, after having made the most prudent provisions possible for all the Muslims.

He chose to do this against his personal and family interests and feeling. Otherwise, he would have been able, by taking certain measures, to have remained in his position and embarked on a long-term

war which would have been in his personal and family interests but would have brought dire consequences to the Muslims.

As a result of his conduct as a principled statesman, and not as an opportunistic politician, he faced severe and painful Shi'ite opposition which the leaders of his followers proclaimed according to their feelings. Yet he endured them patiently and began to explain to these men that he had taken this painful position with regard to himself personally out of his anxiety for them and the general body of the Muslims.

When Imam al-Hasan ibn 'Ali died as a martyr through the deception of his rival, Mu'awiya, Imam al-Husayn remained for a long period during the reign of Mu'awiya, inactive and quiet, not calling for a revolution because of his concern for the unity of the Muslims. Nonetheless he would have been able to raise a large number of people against Mu'awiya, who was hateful to him and contradicted his own interests and his family's. However, he did not, even though he did not refrain from criticizing the policies and excesses of Mu'awiya.

When, finally, he did rise up against Umayyad rule as represented by Yazid b. Mu'awiya and his regime, his rising was not to serve his own interests and emotions. His personal history and the history of his father and brother were testimony that their stand was always taken in the higher interest of Islam and the interests of the Muslims from all aspects.

From the time of Mu'awiya's announcement that his son Yazid was his heir apparent, Imam al-Husayn – along with other leading Muslims – looked ahead in dismay to the time when Yazid would have authority over the *umma* and take control as Caliph over the Muslims.

He – along with other leading Muslims – saw that if, after Yazid b. Mu'awiya attained power, his rule gained legitimacy, even if through silence, then it would be a danger for Islam as a religion and a divine call. It was clear from the beginning that Yazid's regime would not be content with mere silence from al-Husayn and other influential Muslims. Rather it would want a clear and formal acknowledgement of his legitimacy; it would want allegiance to be paid to Yazid.

Thus it became clear to all that safeguarding the political unity of the Muslims would mean abandoning the ideological and legislative content of the Islamic political institution. Sacrificing the political unity of the Muslims had become obligatory in order to safeguard the ideology, Shari'ah and path of Islam, after the Umayyad rule had begun to represent a danger not only to the political unity of the Muslims but to Islam itself.

As we clarified in detail in our book *The Revolution of al-Husayn: Its Social Circumstances and Its Human Effects*,²¹ it was known that his revolution was one of self-sacrifice which would not lead him to any effective political support. It was only drawing the attention of the *umma* to the danger, setting it towards confronting that danger and releasing in it the power of the revolution and the spirit of refusal by compelling the government to maintain some regard for the principles of Islam in its policies, even at a

minimal level.

* * *

The consideration of the problem of the motives of the Shi'ite leadership, and at their head the Imams of the Holy Family, to strive to release the rays of al-Husayn's revolution in the *umma* in the light of this fact, will show us that these motives were not emotional, arising out of the Hashimites' hatred of the Umayyads, nor based on self-interest, arising out of the struggle for government in terms of worldly domination.

The proven history of the Imams of the Holy Family –as we have seen– demonstrates that this was not their idea. It, further, establishes that their lives were a continuous chain of sacrifices for the public good. They were only overcome by their Umayyad rivals in the political battles because, in their dealings with the *umma*, with their rivals and with their supporters, they always followed principles and standards which rose out of their feelings of Islamic responsibility of the first degree.

It is sufficient here to mention, in addition to the proven history, that Imam Zayn al-'Abidin 'Ali ibn al-Husayn who himself witnessed the atrocity of Karbala' and lived it, hour after hour, with all its pain and sorrow, used to pray for the frontier fighters, the soldiers of the Umayyad regime, who had perpetrated the crime of Karbala', captured him with his aunts, sisters and other womenfolk, and imprisoned him.

That prayer of Imam Zayn al-'Abidin was only because of his consciousness of the role of the armies of the frontier in defending Islamic society from its enemies, even though that army also used to protect the regime of the Umayyads.

The motives of the Imams of the Holy Family and the other Shi'ite leadership sprung out of the fact that the revolution of al-Husayn –in terms of representing a defense of the essence and qualities of Islam and in terms of its aim to require the regime to be faithful in applying Islam to the life of the nation– that revolution, for both reasons, had to be spread and made influential in the minds of Muslims, so that, by keeping it alive, it would be a constant incentive to a Muslim to be watchful and critical.

Thus, when revolution becomes a necessity in order to preserve the unity of the Muslims and the integrity of the application of Islam, he will arise. In this way his association with its principles and slogans is assured so that it attaches him to Islam, and he does not deviate from it, nor does he turn away from its guidance.

From this starting point, we shall study the manifestation of the escorts of the Shi'ite leadership and at their head the Imams of the Holy Family, to release the rays of al-Husayn's revolution to the furthest extent and the widest scope in the life of the *umma*.

IV. The Ways the Revolution Flowed Into Popular Consciousness

Before embarking on the study of the manifestations of the expression of popular consciousness through the influence of al-Husayn's revolution upon it—both with the Muslims, in general, and the Shi'ite Muslims, in particular, I feel I ought to indicate the ways in which this revolution entered so deeply and comprehensively into popular consciousness, and developed its expression in celebratory manifestations and artistic works, especially in poetry.

Here the indication of these ways will be brief because the following chapters in the book and the studies which they include, will guarantee that sufficient details will be given to the reader to illuminate the subject in all its aspects.

Among the ways in which al-Husayn's revolution entered into popular consciousness and developed and grew, there are the following:

The Doctrinal Factor

The revolution of al-Husayn was an Islamic movement, which one of the great leaders of Islam undertook. When the Muslims differ about the degree of his sanctity—some of them holding the view that he was an infallible Imam, while others holding the view that he was a little less than that—they never differ that it was his right, even his duty, to correct the theoretical and practical deviations into which the rulers had fallen; and that it was his right, even his duty, to strive to assume power in the service of this objective.

It was, then, a revolution which the principles and laws of Islam demanded to be undertaken for the purpose of warning the *umma* of the evil situation which it was in, and making it improve this by setting its Islamic personality in the face of a deviating ruler. That was by correcting the policy of this ruler.

It was not a tribal or regional or sectarian movement. Here it is not possible to consider it as a sectarian inheritance of the Shi'a, because its sectarian hue came as a result of historical factors which are beyond the scope of this study.

At that time all the Islamic leadership understood and were aware of the comprehensive nature—both political and cultural—of the identity of the revolution and the fact that it belonged to the whole of Islam. This is what made the revolution—the men involved and the events enter widely into popular consciousness as a celebration of sanctity.

It gained respect and love even from the most savage and bitter enemies of the Imams of the Holy Family, namely the Kharijites. Al-Sayyid Muhsin al-Amin reports in his book, *Iqna' al-La'im*: 'We learnt that the Kharijites of the Ibadite group in Zingibar perform ceremonies of grief on the day of 'Ashura', not ceremonies of festivals. In the same measure as they hate 'Ali and his son, al-Hasan, they love al-Husayn because of him rising with the sword and resisting oppression.'²²

The Call of the Holy Family

The Imams of the Holy Family were anxious to keep the revolution and its hideous details alive in the general mind of the nation. That was done by encouraging the composition and recitation of poetry about it, by their holding special gatherings to listen to it, and by their calling for gatherings and meetings to be held dedicated to the study of the events of the revolution, by the institution of the ritual of pilgrimage (*ziyara*), and by other directives than the ones we have mentioned which all served one aim, namely to keep the revolution alive in men's minds and hearts.

The goals of this call will be classified in greater detail in coming studies in the book.

If the doctrinal factor had enabled the revolution to enter into the popular consciousness of the nation generally, the call of the Imams of the Holy Family very much strengthened the effectiveness in the doctrinal factor in the mind of the *umma*, even though the influence of this call on the *umma* had differing force.

The revolution had decisive influence on the Shi'a of the Holy Family and those who shared their affection from the point of view of their love for the Imams of the Holy Family in terms of considering them as the most trustworthy, sincere and understanding representatives of Islam. The nature of this influence was no less important for the rest of the Muslims.

The Nature of the Tragedy

From its beginning to its end, the revolution was so appalling as to raise deep grief and distress. From there, it came to enjoy an extraordinary attraction which raised it to a human level in addition to its religious goal.

Al-Husayn's revolution represented the eternal human dialectic between good and evil, between nobility and baseness, between political expediency and moral idealism, between the tribal ethos and the rational conscience which aspires to the formation of an integrated *umma*, between mercenary man and a man of principle.

The intensity of the struggle impelled each one the contrasting theses of the dialectic to express itself and its vision with absolute clarity, in the course of a continuous exercise in which revolution represented the nobility and the ideal humanity of the revolutionaries, and the Umayyad regime represented man's worst endeavours and lowest methods.

The nature of this tragedy captivated every man who read about it or heard about it. Then, in addition to Muslims, non-Muslims were also affected by it, both at the level of ordinary people and of men of culture. This was the case in the past and it still continues right up to the present.

How numerous are the creative works of poetry, which non-Muslims have composed and in which they

express their emotions about his revolution, its heroes, its events and its aims. How numerous are the manifestations of the rites of remembrance which non-Muslims undertake in some areas (the Indian sub-continent, for example) to express their veneration for the revolution and their respect for its heroes.

The Psychological Situation of the Shi'ite Muslim

From the time of Mu'awiya ibn Abi Sufyan, the Shi'ite Muslim has endured different kinds of persecution, harassment and terrorization. He has been pursued by the authorities and has seldom felt secure. These authorities have waged war against the resources of life when they have failed to annihilate him and impede his freedom. In the best of circumstances he was a second-class citizen.

All of this was because of one of his doctrinal views, namely the Imamate, and because of his legal tendency in terms of his following the Imams of the Holy Family, for they were the guides in the law of Islam.

The tragic situation for the Shi'ite has continued for long periods. Out of this situation, under which generations after generations have lived and died, a man has emerged who carries, in the depths of his being, a feeling of sorrow and a spirit of revolution. This situation has made him keep close to his historical symbols, in the vanguard of which is the revolution of Imam al-Husayn, in particular, and the history of the Imams, in general.

The attitude of most of the authorities, which govern in the Islamic world, has strengthened this psychological situation, across the centuries, to keep the memory of Imam al-Husayn alive or to make a pilgrimage (*ziyara*) to his grave. These authorities have persisted in making public their disapproval of these practices which the Shi'ite has continued to carry out.

They have put obstacles before his freedom to carry these practices out. Their attitude has varied between complete prohibition, under penalty of death, imprisonment or confiscation for anyone who practices any intellectual, cultural, artistic and remembrance activity connected with al-Husayn's revolution, and between laying down legal limits on the freedom of movement and expression in this field.

In the coming chapters we will see how this attitude, which was opposed to any expression of the existence of al-Husayn's revolution in popular consciousness, was an established policy of many of the governments in many of the Islamic countries.

The ruling authorities, who adhered to this or that attitude against keeping the memory of al-Husayn alive in the popular consciousness of the Shi'ite, were transformed into symbols of repression and persecution which were heirs of the Umayyads and became an extension of the Umayyad entity in authority, which used to execute its plans and policies against al-Husayn and the policy of al-Husayn. This feeling in the Shi'ite impelled him even more to keep close to the symbol of al-Husayn, in doctrine, in religious law, in society and in politics.

As we shall see, these basic factors were the essential great influence on the existence of the revolution of al-Husayn. We will become acquainted with the extent of the participation of each one of them, when we study, in the following chapters, the revolution of al-Husayn in popular consciousness in the following manifestations: (i) the pilgrimage (*ziyara*), (ii) the poetry of lament for al-Husayn, (iii) the gatherings of remembrance, and (iv) the phenomenon of weeping.

1. Al-Khwarizmi, al-Muwaffaq Ahmad al-Makki, *Maqtal al-Husayn* (Najaf 1948) I, 187–8.

2. Al-Mas'udi, 'Ali ibn al-Husayn, *Muruj al-Dhahab* (Cairo 1948), III, 64. Cf. al-Tabari, *Ta'rikh al-Rusul wa-al-Muluk* (Cairo, 1960–4) V, 383–4 and al-Khawarizmi. op.cit., I, 216. It appears that this attitude of Ibn 'Abbas was in response to Yazid ibn Mu'awiya who had asked him to stop al-Husayn from departing. Ibn 'Abbas had answered him with a letter in tactful tones in which he said: 'I hope that al-Husayn does not depart for something which you dislike. I will not give up in advising him in everything by which God may unite the affairs of the umma and tumult may be extinguished.' Ibn 'Asakir, *Ta'rikh* IV, 221. This supports our view that the relationship between the 'Abbasids and the 'Alids was formal and opportunistic. Cf. our book *Ansar al-Husayn* (op.cit) 186 ff.

3. Al-Tabari, op.cit. V, 395–6.

4. Among these were Anas ibn Malik, Zayd ibn Arqam, al-Hasan al-Basri and others like them.

5. Al-Tabari, op.cit. V.

6. Al-Shaykh al-Saduq, *Amali*, 100; *Majlis*, 31; al-Khawarizmi, op.cit. II, 60, 'The people came out with tambourines and trumpets. They were happy and joyful.'

7. One of the worst examples of malicious joy is that of 'Amr ibn Sa'id ib al-'As, Yazid ibn Mu'awiya's governor in Medina. When the death of al-Husayn was announced in Medina and people knew about it, the people of Medina were in great commotion. Never was such lamentation heard as the lamentation of the Hashimite women for al-Husayn. The daughter of 'Aqil ibn Abi Talib came out distressed with her womenfolk with her. She was twisting herself in grief in her dress as she recited: 'What would you say if the Prophet asked you: What have you, the last umma, done with my offspring and my family after my departure from them? Some of them are prisoners, some of them are stained with blood.' When 'Amr heard these voices, he laughed and recited: 'Then the women of the tribe of Ziyad raised a great lament like the lament of our women mourning after the battle of al-Arnab.' Then he said: 'This lamentation is in return for the lamentation for 'Uthman.' (Al-Tabari, op.cit., V, 356–7; Ibn al-Athir, *al-Kamil*, III, 300.)

8. Ibn al-Athir, op.cit., IV, 140.

9. Ibn al-Athir, op.cit., III, 300; al-Siyuti, *Ta'rikh al-Khulafa'*, 308.

10. Al-Khawarizmi, op.cit., II, 59.

11. Ibn Hajar al-Haythami, *al-Fatawi al-Hadithiyya*, 193, quoting the account of the death of al-Husayn of 'Abd al-Razaq al-Muqrim.

12. Al-Sayyid al-Muhsin al-Amin in his book *Iqna' al-La'im* quotes the text of al-Maqrizi's *al-Khitat* (II, 385): Afterwards al-Maqrizi says that the 'Alids in Egypt used to keep the Day of 'Ashura' as a day of grief on which all markets were shut. When the government was changed, the Ayyubid rulers kept the Day of 'Ashura' as a day of rejoicing on which they were generous to the poor and spread out great banquets where they took sweet food and used new utensils. They would adorn themselves and take baths, following the practice of the Syrians which al-Hajjaj introduced to them in the reign of 'Abd al-Malik ibn Marwan in order to humiliate the Shi'a of 'Ali ibn Abi Talib, who had made the day of 'Ashura' a day of mourning and grief for al-Husayn ibn 'Ali because he had been killed on it... We can understand the rest of the actions of the Ayyubids in making the Day of 'Ashura' a day of rejoicing and entertainment...

Al-Sayyid al-Amin has reported elsewhere in his book *Iqna' al-La'im*: The truth is that those who introduced feasts of celebration on the Day of 'Ashura' were the Umayyads and their followers from the time of Yazid, and not just specifically al-Hajjaj. When the Companion of the Prophet, Sahl ibn Sa'd, arrived in Syria, he saw that they had hung curtains, screens and silks, while they were rejoicing and happy. With them were women playing tambourines and drums. He said to himself: 'I wonder if the Syrians have a festival which we do not know about!' Then he learnt that that was because the head of al-Husayn had been brought, and he was shocked.

[13.](#) ‘Abd al-Mughith ibn Zuhayr ibn ‘Alawi al-Harbi wrote a book on the virtues of Yazid ibn Mu’awiya, in which he forbade the cursing of Yazid ibn Mu’awiya. Ibn al-Jawzi refuted him in a book called The Refutation of the Obstinate Bigotry of Prohibiting the Cursing of Yazid. Cf. Ibn Rajab, *Tabaqat al-Hanabila*, I, 356.

[14.](#) It is reported that a man referred to Yazid as the Commander of the faithful in the presence of ‘Umar ibn ‘Abd al-‘Aziz. The latter ordained him to be given twenty lashes for giving Yazid such an honour. Cf. Ibn Taghri Burdi, *al-Nujum al-Zahira* (Cairo) I, 163.

Abu Shama reported in *Rijal al-Qarnayn* (p.7) in the events of the year 590 A.H: Ahmad ibn Isma’il ibn Yusuf al-Qazwini can to Baghdad and preached in the Nizamiyya. On the Day of ‘Ashura’, he was asked to curse Yazid. He replied that that man had been an Imam who had used his reason to arrive at appropriate actions. One of the people attacked him, and he was almost killed when he fell from the pulpit. They exiled him to Qazwin and he died there in 590.

Ibn Taghri Burdi has mentioned in *al-Nujum al-Zahira* (op.cit., VI, 134) in the events of the year 590 that ‘Umar b. ‘Abd al-‘Aziz al-Qazwini referred to Yazid as Commander of the faithful. The scholars issued legal judgments against him for honouring Yazid, and he was expelled from Baghdad to Qazwin.

[15.](#) Al-Tabari, op.cit., V, 359. Ibn Ziyad demanded that the officials of the Government administration write down their names for him of those, in their administrative sections (‘asha’ir), who were Harurites and suspicious people. Later Ibn Ziyad accused Hani b. ‘Urwa of being a Harurite. Cf. al-Tabari, op.cit., V, 367.

[16.](#) Abu Bakr ibn al-‘Arabi, *al-‘Awasim min al-Qawasim*, edited by Muhibb al-Din al-Khatib (1371) 232.

[17.](#) Cited by Ibn Muflih al-Hanbali, *al-Furu’*, III, 548.

[18.](#) Al-Shawkani, *Nayl al-Awtar*, V, 147.

[19.](#) *Nahj al-Balagha*, (published by Dar al-Andalus, Beirut), I, 51.

[20.](#) Evidence for that can be found throughout *Nahj al-Balagha*.

[21.](#) *Thawrat al-Husayn: Zurufuha al-Ijtima’iya wa-Atharuha al-Insaniya* (5th ed., Beirut, 1977), 236.

[22.](#) Al-Sayyid Muhsin al-Amin, *Iqna’ al-La’im*, op.cit., 211.

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