

Publisher's Foreword

We are pleased to present this book, *The Revolution of al-Husayn: Its Impact on the Consciousness of Muslim Society*, by Hujjat al-Islam Shaykh Muhammad Mahdi Shams al-Din, Vice-President of the Supreme Shi'ite Council in the Lebanon, to the reading public.

The Book

Imam al-Husayn, peace be with him, created a momentous Islamic revolution, which has continued to live as history has gone by and still provides writers with vitality and inspiring material. Despite the passing of time, it is a revolutionary torch whose light guides revolutionaries and those who struggle to proclaim and support the truth and to resist and oppose the symbols of falsehood. For more than thirteen centuries, writers of different groups, inclinations and ideas have continued to write books and studies about this revolution.

Yet neither has its spring been exhausted nor have the streams which flow from it run dry. It is the same as it was at the blessed time it took place in terms of its great significance.

This book about the revolution of al-Husayn is considered one of the most original works on the subject, an originality which the author indicates in his own preface. With this in mind, we wanted to have this work translated from its original Arabic into English for two important purposes.

Firstly, we wanted to make those non-Muslims, who only speak English in many parts of the world, aware of the eternal quality of al-Husayn's revolution so that they could understand its social circumstances and its influence on men.

This revolution is unique when considering the history of revolutions aimed at reforming society which abound in Islamic history, in terms of its ideology and its heroism. Similarly it represents the highest degree of self-sacrifice for the sake of religious principles and to free man from slavery and individualistic despotism.

Secondly, the secret of the lasting nature of this pioneering revolution, which, despite the passing of

thirteen centuries still keeps alive the crucial position, which it had on the day it took place, as a vital agent in creating acts of heroism, embodying self-sacrifice and teaching men the way of noble sacrifice for the sake of achieving a noble aim.

The rising of al-Husayn was not merely a tragedy arising spontaneously out of the injustice of man. Nor was it a manifestation of family or personal struggle against the government or authority. It was much more exalted and greater than that. It was for the sake of preserving the Islamic religion and its great benefits for saving humanity from persecution and slavery.

The Author

The author, Hujjat al-Islam Shaykh Muhammad Mahdi Shams al-Din, is one of the scholars and illustrious personalities of the Ithna 'Ashari Shi'ites. He is from a family whose roots in learning are deep, going back to al-Shahid al-Awwal, Jamal al-Din Muhammad ibn Makki al-'Amili (d.786 A.H.) This family has been well-known in Mount 'Amil in the Lebanon since the rise of scholarship in that region.

The author was educated at the Religious College in Najaf where he studied the Arabic language, rhetoric, logic, jurisprudence, the principles of jurisprudence and Tradition under the great figures and teachers of that college. At the same time he acquired great knowledge of literature, history and other aspects of human learning.

However, he did not consolidate his great ability as a scholar and extend the area of his horizons until, after he had passed the first stage of the studies required for students of religious education, he moved on to the stage of being lectured directly by the mujtahids and marji's (the most important Shi'ite scholars who lead the Shi'ite community in all aspects of faith while the twelfth Imam is in occultation).

Then he studied under such great authorities in the sciences of jurisprudence and the principles of jurisprudence as the late Ayatullah Sayyid Muhsin al-Hakim and Ayatullah Sayyid Abu'l Qasim al-Khu'i.

He participated in the foundation of some of the cultural organizations in Najaf and the College of Law, where he gave lessons in Islamic history and jurisprudence. He represented the late Ayatullah Sayyid al-Hakim, for a number of years, in the province of Diwaniyya, which is one of the important tribal provinces in Iraq. He also took part in many of the religious and cultural celebrations in Iraq.

After that he moved to Beirut in the Lebanon. There he worked with great effort to initiate cultural and religious schemes, especially in matters concerned with raising the standards in the south of the country. He was given the office of Vice-President of the Supreme Shi'ite Islamic Council. He has had to work there in a presidential capacity since the disappearance of Musa al-Sadr.

Despite his being occupied with events in the Lebanon and the civil war there, he has continued to support the Islamic Publishing House with his valuable works which give expression to basic Islamic ideals and spiritual direction to those setting out to study Islamic culture.

Among those works produced by Hujjat al-Islam Shaykh Muhammad Mahdi Shams al-Din is this book, The Revolution of al-Husayn, which we present to the English reading public. We have every confidence that we have made a good choice. God, may He be exalted, is the One Who guides in the right direction.

The Muhammadi Trust

Author's Preface

What is the significance of giving the quality of immortality to any one man, to any one historical event, or to any great accomplishment of mind and heart which one man has achieved?

We constantly, or at least sometimes, feel the need for it. We go back to such an immortal man to read, to listen and to see his story, and we recall his life. We go back to such an immortal event so that we can make it live again in our minds and hearts. We enrich our life by it, we ennoble our existence through it, and we illuminate our paths through it and its author. We go back to the glories of the human genius so that we may quench our hearts' thirst for truth and beauty through them.

How and why is immortality ordained for some men, or some events, or some great acts?

It is because they encompass the eternally living reality.

There are men, events and impressions which are concerned with what is false, counterfeit and artificial. However, the latter will not endure in the life of man. Soon the false and the counterfeit in them will be revealed, and then people will dismiss them from their lives which constantly seek to correct themselves.

There are others which encompass only a limited extent of the reality. The life of such a man is limited by his contribution to the life of man.

There are others which encompass the eternal living reality which is associated with the unceasing creative activity of mind and heart. This is always immortal because it answers an increasing need in the mind and heart of man and in his greatest aspirations and hopes.

This is the factor which applies, with a miraculous exactitude, to al-Husayn and his revolution. We go back to him in all the stages of his life and we go back to him in the climax of that life, his revolution. We make it live again and we try to understand it. We live with him in all its stages, from its beginning to its bloody but resplendent ending. We are affected by it because, after we have discovered it, we have discovered ourselves in it: we have discovered part of our heart, part of our aspirations, part of our humanity in it. From it we have heard more than a call which summons the noblest things which human creativity encompasses.

This is the underlying reason for the fact that his revolution has penetrated into the depths of the popular

consciousness of the Islamic community, in general, and of Shi'ite Muslims, in particular, so that it has become part of the general cultural environment of a Shi'ite, which has shared, and continues to share even now, an important role in the formation of his cultural identity and his social and political morality.

We should observe that the revolution of al-Husayn, among all the revolutions in the history of Islam which, itself, abound in revolutions, is the only revolution whose memory is still as alive and fresh to Muslims in the present time as it was to Muslims in the past.

Of all the revolutions it is the only one which has entered into the depths of popular consciousness so that it has enriched it and been enriched by it. It has enriched popular consciousness by its slogans, its ideas, its morality and its noble aims. It has been enriched by popular consciousness by the latter's endeavours and aspirations through the ages.

That is only because it is the matrix of revolutions in the history of Islam. It is, as we said in our book *The Rising of al-Husayn: Its Social Circumstances and Its Human Effects*, '...the spearhead in revolutionary history. It is the first revolution which mobilized people and set them on the long bloody path, the path of struggle, after they had been about to lose their spirit for struggle through the effects of the policy of the Umayyads'.^{[1](#)}

It is the only one among the revolutions in Islamic history which has set in motion a torrent of poetic and intellectual creativity, which began in the year 61 A.H. and has not ceased to the present day.

This book is a pioneering attempt to study the existence of the revolution of Imam al-Husayn and its manifestations in popular consciousness. It follows my previous books about the revolutions of al-Husayn:

- (i) *The Rising of al-Husayn: Its Social Circumstances and Its Human Effects*^{[2](#)} and
- (ii) *The Supporters of al-Husayn: A Study of the Martyrs of the Revolution of al-Husayn – the Men and the Evidence*.^{[3](#)}

If God grants us success, a fourth book about the revolution of al-Husayn will follow these with the title, *The Story of the Rising*. With that our study of all aspects of the revolution of al-Husayn will be complete.

Then God willing, we shall be able to apply ourselves to the revolutions which follow al-Husayn's revolution, thereby fulfilling the promise we made in *The Revolution of al-Husayn* when we said: The study of Islamic history, by means of the revolution, will give a truer and more exact picture than what emerges when this history is studied in the traditional manner which has no difference between whether it is a study of epochs or ruling dynasties.

We pray to God Almighty that He makes this work of ours and our other works a step towards attaining His approval and that He accepts it favorably and makes it of use. Praise be to God, Lord of the

Universe.

The Author

- [1.](#) Thawrat al-Husayn: Zurufuha al-Ijtima'iyya wa-Atharuha al-Insaniyya (5th ed., Beirut, 1977), 236.
- [2.](#) Op.cit.
- [3.](#) Ansar al-Husayn: Dirasa 'an Shuhada' Thawrat al-Husayn – al-Rijal wa al-Dalalat (Beirut, 1975).

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