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Why Did Imam al-Husayn (as) Bring his Family to Karbala?

Another question brought forth for discussion is why Imam al-Husayn (as) brought his family to Karbala while he knew very well that a brutal battle would ensue between him and the army of Kufah and that this battle would end with his martyrdom and his family being taken into captivity. Why would he bring his *Ahl al-Bayt* (as) along on this dangerous journey?

First response

There have been various responses provided for the above-mentioned question. One of the answers is that it was a prevalent custom among the Arabs of that time to bring their families and wives to the battlefield.

Objection

This response does not meet the needs of our question because it brings other questions to mind: Why did the Arabs bring their families to the battlefield? Even if it is true that this custom did exist among the Arabs, what benefit and gain would there be in bringing one's household to a battlefield?

Was it usual for Imam al-Husayn (as) to follow or imitate the customs and social practices of the Arabs? Was Imam al-Husayn (as) not following Allah's decree when he brought his family and newborn children to the battlefield?

Second response

Another answer put forward as a possibly correct response is that Imam al-Husayn (as) knew that he bore a great divine mission on his shoulders. The mission was to bring about social awareness and consciousness in the Muslim *ummah*. For fulfillment, this mission had to traverse different stages.

One of those stages was fulfilled by the martyrdom of certain individuals. Another stage would have to reach fulfilment after the martyrdom of Imam al-Husayn (as) and his companions, and was accomplished by way of speeches and open and public display of the oppression imposed upon Imam al-Husayn (as) and his *Ahl al-Bayt* (as) by Yazid ibn Mu'awiyah's government.

Only with the manifestation of this second stage does the divine mission of Imam al-Husayn (as) become complete.

This second aspect was well fulfilled by the household of Imam al-Husayn (as) and the captives of Karbala. Yazid ibn Mu'awiyah wanted to secure his position and government by killing Imam al-Husayn and then later claiming that he had only been compelled to do so because Imam al-Husayn (as) had strayed from the religion.

It was by means of the speeches given by the captives of Karbala, led by Imam al-Sajjad (as) and Zaynab al-Kubra, that the oppression and crimes committed by Yazid were exposed. It was because these crimes were publicly disclosed by the captives that Yazid could not achieve his sinister and ominous objectives.

Imam al-Husayn (as) knew very well that if he and all his children and companions were killed, and some of his household members were not present to witness his martyrdom, no one would disclose the oppression committed against him to the public.

There had to be some family members who should remain alive and be taken into captivity so that they could disclose the oppression that was committed against him, or all the blood which would be shed would have been futile. This is why Imam al-Husayn (as) brought the womenfolk of his household along with him and why this act was considered necessary.

It can therefore be said that the public speeches which were given by the womenfolk of Imam al-Husayn's (as) household shook the foundations of Yazid's government and eventually brought about its collapse.

Objection

This possibility, although rational, does not completely meet the needs of our question either because still a second question comes to mind: Why did Imam al-Husayn (as) bring even the newborns of his household? The duty of divulging the events of Karbala could be left to certain older members of his household, as was done by Imam al-Sajjad (as) and Zaynab al-Kubra, and the other women who were in Imam al-Husayn's (as) caravan.

There was no need to bring the children and newborns to accomplish this duty. Therefore, this argument does not explain the entire cause for bringing all the members of his household, although it can be cited as one of the philosophies behind bringing his family along.

Third response

Some people, while trying to provide a response to this question, have focused on the human tragedies of this event, and have emphasized that Imam al-Husayn (as) intended to prove and expose Yazid's inner self and the crimes he had committed against Islam and the Prophet's *Ahl al-Bayt* (as).

That is why Imam al-Husayn (as) brought all the members of his household, including the women and children. Even though he knew what Yazid would do to his family members, Imam al-Husayn (as) brought them along in order to prove the true nature and identity of Yazid and his government. In this way, he could substantiate that Yazid was not worthy of being the caliph for the Muslim *ummah*.

This response can also be cited as one of the causes of Imam al-Husayn's (as) bringing his household along, but is still not a complete reason for this act.

Fourth response

Others say: the reason for bringing all his household members to Karbala was that Imam al-Husayn (as) wanted to incite people to come to his help, because when the Imam is seen with all his children and womenfolk, his friends and supporters would be persuaded to join him out of mercy and compassion, and the hearts of his enemies would become sympathetic.

However, this possibility does not seem correct because:

Firstly, Imam al-Husayn (as) could use other means of persuading both his friends and enemies, like making speeches and sending representatives to different cities and countries.

Secondly, Imam al-Husayn did not want to create a state of anxiety and uneasiness in the *ummah*. He did not desire to obtain the people's help at all costs by arousing their emotions and sympathies. On the contrary, he wanted the people to choose their way by their own volition.

Fifth response

Another answer, which is probably a better answer to this question, is that Imam al-Husayn (as) brought his *Ahl al-Bayt* (as), womenfolk and newborns because he was worried about them. If Imam al-Husayn (as) had gone on his own and left his *Ahl al-Bayt* (as) in Medina when he rose up against Yazid, there was the fear that the caliphate apparatus would arrest and imprison them.

The Imam saw it to be in everyone's interests to take his *Ahl al-Bayt* (as) along with him so that, on the one hand, he could keep them under his own protection and, on the other, they could be charged with continuing the mission by sermonizing and divulging the oppression suffered by the pure and chaste *Ahl al-Bayt* (as). This possibility can also be confirmed as follows:

a. When we take Yazid's government's way of conduct into consideration, it is probable that Yazid would have arrested and taken the *Ahl al-Bayt* (as) into custody.

b. On the night before the day of 'Ashura, Imam al-Husayn (as) told all his companions to feel free to leave him alone at Karbala, but he did not give permission for his *Ahl al-Bayt* (as) to do the same.

c. The governor of Medina at that time was 'Amru ibn Sa'id Ashdaq. When the news of Imam al-Husayn's (as) death reached him, he rejoiced. At a time when the whole of Medina was engulfed in sorrow and everyone was crying and feeling miserable, he said, "This cying and weeping should be for 'Uthman." And also in another speech, he severely criticized the people for mourning over Imam al-Husayn (as), and rejoiced at their misfortune.[1]

Now, if the *Ahl al-Bayt* (as) and womenfolk of Imam al-Husayn (as) had remained in Medina, no one can imagine what such a vile man would have done to them? Would he not have arrested, tortured and imprisoned them? Sa'id was the one who gave orders that all the houses of Bani Hashim should be destroyed. And he was very stubborn in his enmity and hatred of Imam 'Ali (as).[2]

1. Muqarram, Maqtal al-Husayn (as), p. 334.
2. Ibid., p. 335.

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