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**THE MISSION  
OF  
IMAM HUSAIN**

Muhammad Yazdi

Translated by  
Ali Quli Qarai

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بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

In the Name of God  
the Compassionate, the Merciful

### PREFACE

The present book has been based on the original book in Persian by Hujjatulislam Muhammad Yazdi entitled *Let Us Get to Know Husain ibn Ali Better*. The translation was originally printed as a series of articles that appeared in the monthly magazine *The Message of Peace* under the title *The Qiyam of Husain ibn Ali* (a.s.). The book has been edited to suit non-Persian readers and some sections of the book that had little or no relevance to them were deleted.

Hujjatulislam Muhammad Yazdi, the author, was born in Isfahan, in the year 1931, where he received his basic education in theology and religious sciences under the guidance of his father Hujjatulislam Ali Yazdi and other well-known teachers of the theological school of Isfahan. When Qum acquired a central position among the theological schools of Iran after the arrival of Ayatullah ul-uzma Haj Agha Husain Burujerdi, he went to that city for completing his higher studies in theological sciences. Besides learning from other teachers of renown, he attended the lectures in *fiqh* and *usul* (Islamic jurisprudence and its principles) by such teachers as the late Ayatullah Burujerdi and Ayatullah ul-uzma Imam Khomeini, the present leader of the Islamic revolu-

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tion and the founder of Iran's Islamic Republic. He studied philosophy and *tafsir* of the Holy Quran under the great *mufassir* of the Quran and philosopher of fame Allamah Muhammad Husain Tabatabai.

Besides devoting attention to the theological studies, he was also involved in the problems of Iranian society and the events that took place. On weekly and seasonal holidays, he gave much of his time to meetings and gatherings where these kinds of problems were discussed.

His observations of the way religious gatherings were held and their irrelevance in the context of the events that took place in the country in those years and the indifference to the prevailing conditions created by the government of the time and the attempts that were being made to efface Islamic values in this country were written down as notes, many of which, on the encouragement of friends, were included in the present book in February 1963.

The book indirectly discussed the prevailing social and political conditions of the time and hinted at the stand taken by the revolutionary leader Imam Khomeini who was exiled to Iraq. This was the reason behind the wide welcome received by this book which was printed several times. It did not take long before the book was banned by the ex-shah's government and his internal security organisation, the SAVAK. But this resulted in greater interest of the public. Some publishers insisted that parts of the book be deleted but since the author refused to do that, the book was printed secretly in different sizes.

The book has a special value for the author among his writings since he wrote it during the course of his

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political struggles and for the sake of forwarding the Islamic government in Iran. After the Islamic Revolution of Iran, he gifted the book to the Trust Organization.

He has struggled and worked for the Islamic revolution of Iran in the leadership of Imam Khomeini since 1961 and was imprisoned and exiled on several occasions. Presently he is a member of the Islamic Consultative Assembly of Iran. His Persian works include: *God and Prophethood*, *Islam in Harmony with Time*, *The Thing You Have Lost*, *Reconstructing the Environment*.

His Arabic works include: *Fiqh-al-Quran* (four volumes), *Asas-al-Eeman fil-Quran*.

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## INTRODUCTION

The tragedy of Karbala which took place on 10th of Muharram, in the year 61 of Hijrah (October 2, 680 A.D.) was an event of unique significance in the history of mankind. This is not to say that all of the historians have recognized its uniqueness. Some have seen in it nothing more than a struggle for political power and and sovereignty while others have considered it to be simply a ruler's suppression of the rebellion of a rival. Such writers have either drastically failed to understand its significance, or, having understood, have sought only to malign its real nature.

The only way to understand the events of Karbala is by viewing them in the context of the teachings of Islam and the ultimate objectives of its Prophet (s.a.w.a.s) The Quran declares: *Verily We sent our Messengers with clear signs, and We sent down with them the Book and the Balance for mankind to stand in justice. (57:25)*

It is obvious that from the point of view of the Quran, God sent His Messengers and Prophets for the establishment of justice. That is why throughout history Prophets have opposed tyrants and oppressors and sought to establish a rule of justice throughout human affairs. The Quran also urges Muslims to rise and fight for the liberation of human beings from the yoke of injustice, oppres-

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sion and exploitation:

*What is (wrong) with you, that you do not fight in the way of God and in the way of the oppressed; men, women and children who say, 'Our Lord, bring us forth from this city whose people are unjust and oppressive, and bestow on us from Thee a guardian (wali), and bestow on us from Thee a helper (4:75)*

The above verse of the Quran explains why Imam Husain (a.s.) could not reject the overwhelming demand of the people of Kufa to come to their city and could not set aside their earnest promises to support him. On the contrary he considered it his duty to give a positive answer to their call. There is no doubt that it is the duty of the Imam, the Divinely appointed 'wali', to struggle for the establishment of a government of justice, i.e. an Islamic government, whenever he sees the chances of success. But in the movement of Imam Husain, the objective was not just the establishment of an Islamic government. Husain's objective was not just to rise in order to put an end to injustice. Husain's objective was not just to struggle for the re-establishment of the Islamic laws and values. Husain's objective was not just to struggle to overthrow a corrupt ruler and end a degenerate regime. Above all, the objective of Husain ibn Ali (a.s.) – and this was his supreme aim – was to save Islam from destruction. His objective was to prevent from taking place in Islam the degeneration which had sooner or later destroyed all the other Divinely revealed religions one after the other. Husain's objective was to deliver Islam from the kind of obliteration and disfiguration which, for example, took place in Christianity soon after Christ. Islam came as a revolutionary religion of truth and justice, as a supporter of the weak and the oppressed. It came as a flood that threatens to destroy the castles and palaces of dictators and tyrants. It declared that

the ruler's policies and actions must be subject to the laws of God and that the ruler should be a follower of the Divine Will. It did not recognize monarchy and hereditary rule. It taught that in front of the Law, the ruler had no preference over the ruled. It rejected systems of government where law is the will of the ruler, the lands he rules are his personal property and the 'subjects' he rules are those who submit to his every whim. All these political principles and ideals of Islam had faced a gradually increasing danger of complete and irreversible obliteration, and this process reached its peak during the reign of Yazid. Though Imam Husain (a.s.) was not successful in establishing an Islamic government, he was completely successful in achieving his primary aim which was deliverance of Islām. His heroic struggle against oppression and arbitrary rule served as a lesson for future generations. He had taught how one should struggle against tyrants during the darkest of times and the severest repression.

For example, by following his teachings, more than thirteen centuries later, the people of Iran were able to overthrow the strongest repressive regime in the Middle East, the regime of Muhammad Reza Pahlavi. It is not possible to understand the dynamics of this revolution without knowing about Husain and his *qiyam*(uprising). It is not possible to understand the philosophy that martyrdom can be a political tool without knowing enough about the leader of martyrs of all time, Husain ibn Ali (a.s.). Imam Husain by his struggle did not only oppose Yazid, but stood up against oppressors of all time to come. His achievement is clearly visible in the slogan of the revolutionary *ummat* of Iran:

“Our Movement is Husaini!  
“Our Leader is Khomeini!!”

And similar other slogans like:

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“Iran has become Karbala!”  
“Blood is always victorious over the sword!”  
“Death to Saddam Yazid” (i.e. Saddam Husain)

Had it not been for Imam Husain and his movement, and had it not been that the Iranian people were his followers, there would have existed no political or spiritual force in Iran to topple the Pahlavi regime or stand against American imperialism. Thus, in reality, it was not the teachings of Ayatullah Khomeini but those of Imam Husain which have guided this movement and given it its original spiritual nourishment. From now on, wherever and whenever internal oppression and imperialism are defeated in Muslim countries, we shall hear that those who fought and struggled were guided by the spirit of Imam Husain (a.s.). It cannot be otherwise.

Like Yazid, the ex-shah of Iran, made a pretence of Islam, for it is characteristic of all despotic systems that they encourage a brand of religion which does not interfere with their evil mode of government. Mu'awiyah, and his son Yazid, stood for an Islam which could serve rather than oppose their despotic ways. They promoted a brand of religion which could serve as the opiate of the masses rather than the means of their awareness. They had nothing against an Islam which did not interfere in the affairs of the State. They were not opposed to a religion which is regarded as a personal affair of every man. They were not against a religion which does not call men to responsibility regarding their social affairs.

However, Husain ibn Ali (a.s.) stood for a religion which does not consider any aspect of human life to be outside its sphere of influence. He stood for a religion which does not limit an individual's responsibility

to his personal house, family, business and job. Husain, and those who accompanied him, felt responsibility towards the oppression that was going on in their country. They felt responsible about what the regime was doing to the minds of the public. They felt responsible about what the regime was doing to the God-sent religion the existence of which guaranteed the future welfare of the human race. They did not feel responsible solely towards the misfortunes of the people of their time, but also those of the future generations. By their unsurpassable resistance to coercion they proved that freedom is an unalienable right of man which none can take away. They declared that the true religion of God is only that which stands adamantly in the way of arbitrary rule of despots; that which upholds the rights of the oppressed; which opposes corruption and perversion in every sphere of human life and which never comes to terms with oppression, cruelty, greed, injustice and exploitation.

Thus, we realize that in spite of his apparent failure in overthrowing the rule of Yazid, Imam Husain's success has not been confined to a single time and place. Karbala was a lesson in heroism and martyrdom; Iran, after more than thirteen centuries, has become the workshop in which his methods are put to work with startling results. From now on, not only every country in the Middle East but every part of the world will become a similar workshop in which the eternal and everlasting value of the methods of Husain ibn Ali (a.s.) will be revealed. The revolutionary Muslim youths of our world shall join the youths in Paradise whose leader is Husain ibn Ali. Did not the Prophet say, "My sons Hasan and Husain are the leaders of youth in Paradise"? He and Hasan are

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the leaders of all youths who fight oppression and injustice throughout the ages to come. Husain is the leader of the martyrs of Iran, Iraq, Syria, Jordan, Palestine, Egypt, Philippines, the Arabian Peninsula, Turkey, Pakistan and Indonesia, and, for that matter, of all lands. Imam Ja'far-us-Sadiq (a.s.) said, "Every day is 'Ashura and every land is Karbala!" Thus the leadership of Husain ibn Ali is universal: he is the leader at all times in all places. For whenever and wherever there is oppression, Husain ibn Ali is there leading and inspiring his followers. Whenever and wherever there is repression and exploitation of the masses, Husain leads the torch of liberty and justice. Wherever there is deviation in religion and perverse rulers accustomed to corrupt ways of life, Husain ibn Ali brings the tempests and torrents of purification that flush away dictators and their perverse cliques. Karbala is not a thing of the past; it belongs to the future and the future belongs to Husain ibn Ali (a.s.)

### **The Uprising of Imam Husain (a.s.)**

In general, for understanding a person, a nation or a society, we must evaluate the intellect, morality and deeds of that person or group, searching for their worth in the acts and character they manifest; as the personality of a man is the sum total of his thought, speech, behavior and beliefs. Accordingly, in order to understand the personality of Husain ibn Ali (a.s.) we must study the mode and manner of his thought, his way of life and his actions, and, through these, try to elicit an understanding of his station.

Here it is not our intention to write the history of his life or compile a biography. Many books have been written which deal with this subject and it might be said that almost no corner has been left obscure or has escaped illumination. Our intention here, is to attain an understanding of Husain's person in the perspective of Karbala and his objectives which led to that tragic event and the outcome of the events that were to follow.

Here we shall pursue the real objective of Husain ibn Ali (a.s.) so as to find out the reasons that lay behind all his sacrifices.

Abu Bakr, the first khalifah, appointed Yazid ibn Abu Sufyan as the governor of Syria. After him, Umar, the second khalifah appointed his brother Mu'awiyah in his place. Thus Mu'awiyah was recognized as the

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governor of Syria from the early days of the khalifah of Umar. In all, Mu'awiyah remained in the governorship of Syria for a period of almost two hundred years — in spite of his manipulation of the weaknesses of Othman, the third khalifah, and his conversion of an Islamic dominion into what appeared to be some kind of formal monarchy — until the khalifah of Ali (a.s.) not withstanding all the battles and wars that have been recorded in history, to the point that after Ali's (a.s.) martyrdom Mu'awiyah changed his governorship into an unrivalled khalifah .

As a result, Mu'awiyah ruled over Syria — first as a governor and later as a khalifah — altogether for a period of nearly fifty years. The near-fifty-year rule had sunk deep roots during the reign over Syria and, after completing the history of its black days, ended in an evil scheme. The court of the khalifah saw the appearance of a novel idea regarding succession that was totally strange and alien to the Islamic world, against the laws and regulations of Islam regarding khalifah and succession, and opposed to the course of action pursued by the preceding khalifahs.

This novel idea rested totally on the personal ambition of Mu'awiyah for the sake of his only beloved son, Yazid. The idea was suggested by one of the governors, who offered it to the khalifah in order to patch up his weakened position at court.

The matter was one which concerned succession and the question of who was to succeed Mu'awiyah after his death. The personal ambition of Mu'awiyah which was based on paternal love was put forth by him as a compulsory matter destined to be put into execution. Hereditary succession is opposed to the Islamic regulations regarding government; but Mu'awiyah's decision to give the high post of khalifah to his son was based on nothing more than a father's preference for his only son.



With the help of his assistants, Mu'awiyah finally decided to make his pleasure-loving, wine-drinking son the sovereign of Muslims and his own crown prince. Thus the khalifah of Syria which itself was wont to spend its good time in the Syrian resorts among singers and artists at the expense of the public treasury, decided to have this youth recognized as his crown prince and introduce him to the Muslim world as the successor of the Prophet!

Seating a perverse young man on the seat of the Prophet and entrusting the leadership of society into his hands did not agree with the Islamic code and political practice. But this had to be done, since Mu'awiyah wanted his son to be his successor on account of his love for his son, and, in the view of Mu'awiyah, this had to assume the garb of reality. Here personal qualifications did not matter, nor did the capacity to administer, nor had the will of the people any significance. Just the wish of Mu'awiyah was enough to put into action a thing so important and significant from the point of view of the interests of Muslims.

In spite of the fact that Mu'awiyah foresaw that Yazid's succession would be hard for Muslims to accept – and even perhaps for the Umayyad family – and would bring dishonour and disgrace to Islam and Muslims, he was determined to put his programme into action. He himself used to tell his son, "I fear that I might have to forego my Hereafter for your sake." He himself knew well that Yazid's succession, in view of his character, could be disastrous for the Umayyad rule and its continuity.

Yazid, who knew no more than wine and poetry, and whose thoughts did not go beyond making love and drinking wine . . . Yazid, who was known to all for his pleasure-seeking, drinking, licentious and profligate

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character throughout Syria . . . was to become the "crown prince".

The matter of Yazid's succession was posed in the Syrian court and was approved on account of Mu'awiyah's will. The matter was formally notified to all the governors and regional heads with orders to take allegiance from the people and compel them to submit to this matter. The governors and regional heads in execution of their orders forced the people to swear allegiance to Yazid.

In certain corners of the Islamic domain, however, there rose certain opposition and difficulties, but with the devilish politics of Mu'awiyah the programme was made completely practical . . . to the extent that in some quarters of the country, where difficulties were much more serious, Mu'awiyah personally travelled to those points under various pretexts and solved the difficulties with 'consummate diplomacy' and attained his objective no matter what the cost.

Of all regions, it was in Madina , a totally religious city where a large number of *sahabah* (Companions of the Prophet) and *tabe'een* (those who had seen and met the Companions of the Prophet) were living near the shrine of the Prophet's (s.a.w.a.) tomb, that the government was faced with its most serious difficulties. The governor of Madina almost admitted his impotence in face of the hindrances that stood in the way of implementing the orders of the court. He explained to the court the basic reason as being the presence of religious personalities of the first order and his incapacity to elicit the people's allegiance to Yazid, a pervert and an alcoholic, as the successor to the khalifah of the Prophet after Mu'awiyah.

It is true that Mu'awiyah cleared most of these troubles through his special cunning and talent for artifice

and even in Madina he succeeded in securing the people's allegiance to Yazid. However, there were some free men of courage who refused, preserving the integrity of their souls and consciences under even the most adverse circumstances. These men had no fear of the Syrian court and were not influenced by its material power. They paid no heed to the regime's propaganda and were not afraid to declare the truth even if it had to be done at the price of their own lives.

### **The Upholders of Justice**

Always, there have existed individuals among men who give little significance to the glory and splendour of palaces and have the least fear of the power of armies and weapons. They are the ones who, for the sake of truth and freedom, cross into bloody fields of battle and who, by their love of freedom and truth, are driven into the arms of death. These men struggle heroically to raze the palaces of tyrants and destroy the power of oppressors. They dread nothing and do not submit to tyranny at any price, for they give greater value to freedom than life and its good things.

The fighters of the path of truth and freedom, the upholders of the rule of justice and the protectors of human honour and sanctity, have always stood against the blood-thirsty tyrants of history and have fought against the oppressive rulers of their times. They never gave up and, to the last drop of their blood, fought alongside their companions for the establishment of justice; sacrificing everything for that objective.

It is true that these upholders of justice and truth had to face great hardships and pains, but, through steadfastness and persistence, they so overturned the thrones of tyrants and set their crowns rolling in the dust that thereafter they had no power to rise again.

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The same freedom loving men and upholders of justice, in those tough conditions of repression and coercion, stayed away from submission to the evil scheme of Mu'awiyah and, refusing to grant their allegiance, rejected the succession of Yazid to the khalifah.

However, the pressures of the times and the forces of repression had reduced the number of such freedom loving men to a handful, who, against the massive current of the time, upheld the standard of justice and waved the flags of freedom in the gloom of the black regime of Syria. At the head of this opposition and movement for freedom was the man who was the very embodiment of the fear of God and merit: Husain ibn Ali (a.s.) – who displaying adamant faith and fearlessness, outspokenly conveyed to the government the erroneous course of action it had decided to pursue and with absolute finality refused to submit to Mu'awiyah's schemes.

Mu'awiyah, better than anybody else, knew the freedom loving nature of Husain (a.s.) and recognized the fact that any attempts at persecution of Husain (a.s.) – that very spirit of courage and self-sacrifice – were not to the benefit of the ruler or his regime. Many a time during his khalifah Mu'awiyah had the chance to behold the serious countenance of Husain (a.s.) in his struggles for truth and freedom. He knew for certain that any attempts at persistence or persecution would not only fail to elicit Husain's (a.s.) submission, but on the contrary would open the way for massive opposition and even bloody encounter.

Mu'awiyah had himself observed in the past battles that Husain (a.s.) was an able general of merit and a warrior of unexemplary courage on the battlefield.

Mu'awiyah also remembered how once Husain (a.s.) heedless of his Syrian guards had dragged him down from the *minbar* in the mosque of Kufa and showered

heavy blows on his ears.

Mu'awiyah knew better than anybody else that Husain (a.s.) had grown up in the very cradles of freedom and was raised in the arms of such a woman as Fatimah (s.a.) and had been reared by the side of a father like Ali (a.s.) – and neither was it possible to ignore his general popularity among the people.

But Mu'awiyah knew very well the way to make things hard for Husain (a.s.) and compel him to maintain his silence; for Mu'awiyah knew the fact that Husain's (a.s.) silence was most precious and valuable for his objectives, even if he should refuse to give allegiance or extend his support and favour.

Yazid's succession was recognized as an absolute official fact, and apparently there were no more than three persons in the whole dominion who had opposed it, of whom the most significant and sensitive was the opposition of Husain ibn Ali (a.s.).

The existence of these opponents, however, was not very important; since being devoid of any support and any open field of action, they were rendered almost ineffective. The whole environment was so loaded with repression and fear that nobody even dared to think of insurgence or revolt. The government's logic was this: 'It is true that Husain (a.s.) is an adversary; but in the present conditions and the general atmosphere created by the Syrian regime, he is forced to maintain his silence, and, in the futile hope of an opportunity, keep himself confined within a personal life engaged in the training of the handful that surrounded him.'

Mu'awiyah told his son, 'Dear son, having tamed the wild camel of khalifah, I hand you over its reins; watch out lest it snatches away its reins out of your hands.' Mu'awiyah explained the conditions of his kingdom to his son; 'Son, ruling over a nation is not a simple matter,

and especially if it is a nation like the Arabs who are headstrong and prejudiced. You have to be well-versed in psychology so that you may be able to tame and make everyone tractable. I conquered this dominion through various schemes and today I have acquired the title of khalifah. It took me fifty years of political life to enable me to reach and attain my present station and position. Today, apparently, there is no sizable adversary within the whole dominion – and these two or three opponents are of no significance. That which is important is the sacred person of Husain. More than anybody else, I know the kind of training that has raised Husain.

He is not the one who could be made to submit by granting of worldly honours and gifts. He has grown up in the home of a father like Ali. The programme of the government of Abu Turab (Ali) has been his school lesson. He will forego everything for the sake of truth and righteousness. He doesn't care for anything in the path of upholding justice and resurrection of the spirit of Islam. If necessary he will sacrifice even his life and march into bloody battlefields. Yazid! Husain is not the kind of man against whom you would dare to try your strength or whom you would call to combat. If you should rise to contend with him, then, gradually gaining field, he will create the greatest danger for your rule. Treat him with restrained and measured respect and never compel him. If he continues his silence, regard it as the most precious thing. Husain's silence has the worth of sovereignty over an entire kingdom. Son, treat him honourably, and control the situation in such a manner that it would not create the requisite conditions of insurgence for him, that he may be forced to consider the alternative of active resistance. In short, son, rivalry with Husain is a matter of danger and his silence has a worth that surpasses everything. Treat him with honour

and maintain peaceful conditions. Never think of persecuting him and if you do so then it will certainly be disastrous for your government. For, if Husain is compelled to come to the field of battle, you will be the loser, whatever the outcome of the battle.”

This was a summary of what Mu’awiyah told his son in the way of advice. It was the last action of Mu’awiyah that had any positive significance. The heirdom of Yazid was recognized as a finalized official matter and the heavens bode the omens of a perilous event of great tragedy in the history of Islam and in the history of mankind as the days rolled one after another towards the year of 61 A.H.

### **Great Men and Great Ideals**

True men – the earthly ones who belong to the heavenly spheres – the prophets and the vicegerents of the inerrant, and, similarly, great thinkers, philosophers and heroic men – they who have been trained in the Divine schools – have always lived among mankind. They are the ones who study the general conditions of human life and pursue objectives in their lives which are related to human destiny in its universality. These heavenly men observe the life of their fellow earthly creatures and constantly ponder and meditate on the actions of men and the final goal towards which they are moving. If they find that the society is pursuing a humane goal, they come forward to guide men and to their utmost – to the extent permitted by the conditions of the age – they assist the fallen and help society reach its goal of felicity and happiness.

In the same way, if they find the society going astray from the path of righteousness and moving in the pursuit of lusts and animal desires, towards blood-shed and

oppression, they are most deeply grieved, and to the extent permitted by the prevailing conditions, they enter upon a course of guiding and delivering the society from the perils that threaten it, giving their most sincere advice to the society's elders and leaders. And sometimes, when they behold that the society has reached a most dangerous point, and has approached the very brink of annihilation, when the very existence of human society is threatened, they enter into the field to deliver mankind from destruction through extreme self-sacrifice, and thus, once again re-establish the foundation of human felicity at the price of their own lives.

The prophets and the messengers of God have always been the guides of men who emerged at sensitive times when mankind had reached the very edge of the abyss of destruction. At such times, they, through their unrelenting struggles, delivered mankind from the yoke of oppression and tyranny and overturned the regimes of blood-thirsty rulers.

Men like Abraham (a.s.) and Moses (a.s.) have toppled the thrones of tyrants like Nimrod and Pharaoh and pulled down their edifices of tyranny and oppression.

The Last Prophet (s.a.w.a.s.) saved the world, which was rapidly descending into the degeneration of materialism and lust, through his heavenly teachings and delivered it from the peril of sure annihilation.

After the prophets, their vicegerents, following in their steps, suffered pains and hardship for the deliverance and progress of mankind and unavoidably had to stand up against the tyrants and oppressors of their time. Next to them are the great philosophers and thinkers who have endeavoured to guide mankind. Socrates addressed his fellow Athenians and called them to a higher, spiritual way of life. The great Greek philosopher drank the cup of hemlock as a price for his invitation to



fellow men to pursue the ideals of honour, law and humility. Men like Aristotle and Plato delivered their advice to the society of their time and through speech and the pen warned it of the dangers of degeneration and deviation. Similarly, great men of Europe fought the tyrants of the Middle Ages even to the extent of making the deviate and dogmatic Church the focus of their criticism, and bravely underwent the penalties of imprisonment, torture and death.

The prophets, the messengers and their vicegerents, the philosophers and thinkers – when they had to face extremely adverse conditions, were forced to regard struggle as fruitless; consequently, they were compelled to sit in a corner and grieve at the condition of their society and at the same time wait for an opportunity to come along: ‘God! Why is it that tyrants and oppressors have become the leaders of the society and gained the power to trample all human ideals under their feet, depriving men of the most rudimentary freedom and dignity which is their right? O Creator of the world! Is it possible that man may ever be liberated from the claws of these tyrants and oppressors?’

This is the way of true men; under favourable and under the most adverse conditions.

The Prophet of Islam (s.a.w.a.s.) choked with grief as he studied the barbaric conditions of life in the world of his days. When alone in the wilderness, he raised his face to the heavens and pleaded with God about the condition of the world: ‘O God! Where are these misguided men going? When is it possible that they may turn away from this course of deviation and degeneration? O God! When would it be possible to deliver man from slavery and worship of these absurd idols, so that in obedience to You they may enter upon a course of guidance and deliverance?’ Muhammad ibn Abdullah

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(s.a.w.a.s.) suffered great pains and choked with intense grief until the conditions became favourable enough to execute his delegated mission for the salvation of mankind.

Ali, Ameerul Momineen (a.s.), after the Prophet (s.a.w.a.s.), when he saw himself faced with the reversal of times, maintained his silence in regard to his right for the sake of the higher objectives of Islam. Whenever he heard of the devious deeds of the regime, he was intensely grieved and at times used to shed tears at the conditions of the Muslims: 'O God! How did it happen that ignorant men, who do not have the knowledge of even the simplest juristic problems, have established themselves in the seat of the Prophet (s.a.w.a.s) and gathered the destiny of Islam and Muslims into their hands? What kind of days are these when those connected with the regime plunder and kill people in revenge for past hostilities in the name of struggle against apostasy? How do they dare transgress the honour of Islam while the heads of the government maintain cold indifference and suspend the laws of Islam? O God! What world is this that inept and incapable men have mounted the necks of the public and entrusted their relatives – who have the least knowledge of Islam and the utmost indifference to the interests of Muslims – to rule over the people, paying not the least attention to their complaints?'

For twenty-five years, Ali (a.s.) with measured caution and restraint, cooperated with the successive governments; always being kind and helpful and never grudging his advice and admonition. He actively worked for the benefit of Islam till the day he received his official position. He, during his rule, showed to the world the true programme of an Islamic government and showed the difference between the service of God's appointed leaders and the rule of tyrants and oppressors

until he was martyred at the hands of one of the most wretched of men.

Imam Hasan (a.s.) attained the office of khalifah after his father Ali (a.s.) and, obtaining the support of the people of Kufa, confronted Mu'awiyah, and, as a result of the events that followed and which are recorded by history, was forced to abdicate and retire to a life of seclusion. At the time of his isolation, he was deeply grieved at the plight of Muslims: 'O God! How is it that the people have chosen the rule of a tyrant like Mu'awiyah with all his deviations and perverse ways that are obvious from his every word and act and recognize him to be the khalifah of Muslims? O God! How shameful that Mu'awiyah is recognized to be the successor of the Prophet, and Ali ibn Abi Talib (a.s.), the best of the Prophet's (s.a.w.a.s.) companions, is made the focus of abuses and slanders from the top of *mimbars*. Is it possible that a day would come when the people shall awaken and the hands of oppressors are shortened so that a government of justice and equity may be established?'

When Imam Hasan (a.s.) was forced to make peace with Mu'awiyah he had put forth the following conditions:

1. That Mu'awiyah's government would be according to the way laid down by the Quran and the *sunnah* of the Prophet.
2. That Mu'awiyah, at the end of his life, would have no right to appoint or nominate a successor to the khalifah.
3. That the life, honour and property of Ali (a.s.) and his companions, wherever they might be, would be safe and secure.
4. That Mu'awiyah would allow Imam Hasan's supporters in Hijaz, Iraq and Yemen to live in peace.

5. That Mu'awiyah would not carry on any overt or covert actions against Imam Hasan and Husain (a.s.) and the members of their family or intimidate them.

But the twenty-year history after this pact, which took place in Jamadi ul-Awwal of the year 41 A.H., bears evidence that Mu'awiyah adhered to none of the above conditions. By his various actions he proved that he had nothing but contempt for the teachings of the Quran and the *sunnah*. He ordered his governors to encourage the people to openly defame, libel and vilify Ali (a.s.) and his household by granting rewards from the public treasury. He also instructed them to imprison, torture and execute those who did not desist from making an open display of respect and loyalty towards the Prophet's household. He ordered his governors to handsomely reward those who forged traditions attributed to the Prophet in favour of Bani Umayyah, Mu'awiyah and others, and in disapproval of Ali (a.s.) and his sons. He and his governors tortured and killed many of Ali's companions and friends. His hands drenched in the blood of men like Muhammad ibn Abi Bakr and Hujr ibn 'Adi. It was he who had Imam Hasan (a.s.) poisoned through Imam Hasan's wife Ja'da the daughter of Ash'ath ibne Qays, because he considered Imam Hasan (a.s.) to be the principal hindrance in the way of Yazid's succession to khilafat. After the death of Imam Hasan (a.s.) when there was a movement among the people of Kufa against Mu'awiyah's dictatorship, they wrote to Imam Husain (a.s.) that they were ready to break their allegiance to Mu'awiyah and assist him. Imam Husain (a.s.) in his reply referred to the pact between Mu'awiyah and Hasan (a.s.) and told them that the conditions would not be suitable for any such action as long as Mu'awiyah

was alive. When Mu'awiyah came to know about the matter he wrote an angry letter to Imam Husain (a.s.) in which he threatened him. Husain (a.s.) wrote to him in reply:

“I received the letter in which you have mentioned receiving reports about my unexpected opposition to you. These reports have been sent to you by flatterers and maligning spies, and are no more than a slander. I have presently no intention of opposing you and have unhappily adopted silence. Indeed I am afraid that God may be displeased with me on account of it. In any case, my silence cannot serve as a confirmation of you or your supporters. Why Mu'awiyah! Are you not the man who murdered Hujr ibne 'Adi? Are you not the man who killed God-fearing men who stood up against injustice and innovation in religion, who heeded no dangers in matters of faith? They were men with whom you had made solemn covenants and who were not guilty of any mischief in the land or ever opposed you. But you were not satisfied until you had killed them. Are you not the man who killed 'Amr ibne Hamiq Khuza'ee; the companion of the Prophet (s.a.w.a.s), who was such a pious man that constant prayer had made his body weak, his face pale and diminished his bodily powers? You promised him amnesty and then you impudently and unashamedly executed that innocent man.

“O Mu'awiyah! Are you not the man who declared Ziyad ibn Sumayyah, who was the son of 'Abeed, a slave of the tribe of Bani Thaqeef, to be your brother and a son of your father Abu-Sufiyan, when the Messenger of God has said that the son belongs to the woman's legal husband and the adulterer's claim is considered void? But in view of your designs you declared him your brother and disobeyed the Prophet's command and made him the ruler of Iraq for him to chop the limbs from Muslims and pierce their eyes with heated iron rods or hang them from trees. Was it not you, when Ziyad ibne Sumayyah wrote to you that the Hazarmis follow the religion of Ali, who instructed him not to leave even one of them alive? So that he killed everyone of them?”

“What you have written (advising me) to be careful about my own life and to be heedful of the *ummah* of Muhammad (s.a.w.a.s.) and not create problems for them or do something that would divide them, . . . I think that I do not consider anything more disastrous for the *ummah* than your khilafat and your government; and I do not consider anything more beneficial for myself, for my religion and the *ummah* of Muhammad (s.a.w.a.s.) than to create hindrances for you in such matters! If I do that, then it would certainly please God and if I remain silent, then I would ask for His forgiveness and beseech Him to increase me in guidance!”

After the death of Inam Hasan (a.s.), Mu’awiyah sent two representatives, one after another, to Madina: Ziyad ibn Abeeh and Marwan, both of whom failed to obtain the people’s allegiance to Yazid’s succession. After that Mu’awiyah himself travelled to Madina. In a gathering of the people of Madina, he praised Yazid and tried to create sympathy and admiration for him in the hearts of the people that would displace their hatred and antipathy towards him. Husain ibn Ali (a.s.) who was present burst into outrage at the misleading speech of Mu’awiyah. He cried:

“It is as if you are talking about some veiled lady or are describing an unknown and hidden object! Or as if you are telling us about something which only you know about!

“Yazid is well-known by the people. His beliefs and thoughts can be judged from his corrupt character and perverse ways. If you want to talk about his prominent qualities and the habits which would describe his nature, then talk of those characteristics of him for which he is criticized, like his playing with dogs and pigeons, his incessant fascination with singing and dancing women. Only then will the people affirm what you have said to be true!”

Husain’s resistance destroyed Mu’awiyah’s chances of success in his plan at Madina. But after moving on to Maccah, through the use of his favourite weapons of reward and threat, he forced allegiance to Yazid from

most of the tribal chieftans and people of Maccah. As he returned to Damascus, however, he was grinding his teeth in disappointment and regret that his trip was, after all, not a complete success. He was apprehensive of the future of his son on account of the furious resistance of Husain ibn Ali (a.s.)

### **Mu'awiyah's Regime**

Husain ibn Ali (a.s.) considered the events and happenings that had occurred from the days of the Messenger of God, his grandfather, upto his own day – the scenes that he had beheld from near – and weighed them over meticulously in his mind. He studied the general spirit of the people who were subject to the propaganda of the regime. The lives of his father Ali (a.s.), his mother and brother were a great lesson for him to understand the people around him.

More than anybody else, he knew how the degenerate politics of the day had clouded the clarity and purity of the people's minds and their capacities to understand. The level of people's understanding and prevailing morale had been brought extremely low. The powers of independent thought and discrimination between true and false, and between the just and unjust, had been taken away from them. He knew better than anybody else the effect of the political cunning and devilry that had been pursued by Mu'awiyah throughout the sixty years of his life, the destruction brought about by his evil schemes and treacherous political rule.

He knew that if he were to make an uprising under such conditions, not only would he not achieve a fruitful result, but that he might instead make matters worse. He knew the supporters of Mu'awiyah – men like 'Amr ibn 'Aas who could deceive people through crafty resort to the Quran itself – even as they had once compelled

Ali (a.s.) to withdraw his armies from the battle of Siffin. The propaganda of the treacherous regime had so much distorted the people's perception and thought, they openly abused the most worthy Companions of the Prophet (s.a.w.a.s.) and considered it to be their duty. How is it possible to fight against a government that is led by such artful deceivers of the public as Mu'awiyah and which has cunning supporters like 'Amr ibn 'Aas and which rules over such a society of ignorant and unaware men?

If Husain (a.s.) had chosen to fight against this regime, not even the most pious would have followed him. If Husain (a.s.) had wanted to rise against that government, even those who made a pretense of piety and godfearing would have said, "Why do you disrupt the law and order of the country? Let the people alone to lead their peaceful lives so that there might not be any killing and blood-shed."

Had Husain (a.s.) wished to make the people understand the ways of Mu'awiyah's court and the great danger to which it had subjected the Islamic society, the same ignorant people would have forced him – as they had brought pressure on Ali (a.s.) and Imam Hasan (a.s.) – to concede to their demands, with an entirely opposite outcome.

Husain ibn Ali (a.s.) knew for sure that if he were to start a struggle against the regime in those prevailing conditions, hardly anyone would support him. The regime, through its political cunning, had maintained a hushed and silenced atmosphere in the country and through every possible means had made everybody tame and tractable, overcoming all hurdles through manoeuvres of money and power, which together are the most effective tools of victory in a world of corruption.

Therefore, his calculations made, Husain ibn Ali (a.s.)



decided that silence and seclusion were the only possible alternatives left for him under the reign of Mu'awiyah.

The treaty of peace between Imam Hasan (a.s.) and Mu'awiyah had long since reached the end of its period of validity after Hasan's death, and there was no more any contract that might have compelled Husain (a.s.) to silence after Imam Hasan (a.s.). Therefore there was no reason for his abstention from struggle except that he did not consider the conditions to be yet suitable for it.

When Mu'awiyah died, Yazid assumed power. This perverse youth, in accordance with the allegiance that had already been elicited from the people, succeeded his father and assumed the title of the khalifah of Muslims. This was the beginning of Husain's qiyam. The first day that Yazid came into power may be taken as the point of commencement of Husain's struggle.

With the arrival of Yazid in office, and the declaration of his khalifah, the whole situation was changed and Husain commenced the first moves of his well planned jihad.

Before we begin to describe the manner of this struggle, we are compelled to summarily investigate this issue:

#### **Why did Husain Rise Against Yazid?**

In general, when one is confronted with a certain event, the question arises, 'Why did it happen?' If the reasons and causes of the event are obvious enough, having satisfied oneself, one proceeds to examine the event itself. But if the causes and conditions which gave rise to that event are not clear, then of necessity one is forced to examine the background that lies behind the surface.

Therefore, when faced with the tragedy of Karbala,

before entering upon the events, one is compelled to ask the question why after all did this tragedy take place and why did Husain (a.s.) rise against Yazid?

Why did Husain ibn Ali (a.s.) break off a quiet and peaceful life to rise in conflict against the government of his time so as to create all those troubles and problems for himself and for the government?

What was the objective of Husain (a.s.) which made him commence his struggle?

What was it that compelled him to invite a sudden commotion and tempest into his thought and life and forced him to struggle against all opposing odds?

In the end, what was the basis and real cause and the true factor which gave rise to Husain's (a.s.) struggle?

Everyone replies to this question in his own way depending upon his beliefs and mode of thinking. However, among all the things which are said there is a certain matter which we are forced to discuss for the sake of illuminating the mind of the young generation.

It is said that Husain ibn Ali (a.s.), like Abdullah ibn Zubair, rose against the regime of his time for his love of power and rule . . . . That depending on the prevailing conditions and as the time permitted, he began a series of moves and gathered a number of supporters as a result of a few month's activity. It is said that as a result of these moves the government of the time became conscious of the increasing danger that he posed and was forced to take precautionary measures by putting him under pressure, and, as a result of Husain's resistance, it was compelled to crush that resistance and kill and imprison his supporters.

It is said: "A government suppression of an internal rival and an insurgent is quite natural and common; in such conflicts generally one side emerges as a victor and the other a loser. Obviously in this particular case, the

government's political hold and power was much greater and so it could easily defeat Husain and regain its control of the situation. It is obvious that in such engagements, both the sides blame each other for aggression and the government in power considers that it has the right to defend any encroachment on its rule and authority. When Yazid became aware of Husain's opposition to his government, he made a series of moves for avoiding the possible headache and the probable danger by selecting an able governor and putting him in charge of the troubled region, giving him the orders to suppress and put down the revolt at any cost. Ibn Ziyad, too, was obliged to quiet the revolt and suppress Husain's opposition. In accordance with the prevailing political tactics of the time, he stopped Husain in his advance towards Kufa, cutting off the supply of water to his company and subsequently killed him. Then, having imprisoned his women and children, he had them sent to the royal court of Syria for it to take some decision about them. Consequently, Husain's death was a matter common in history and the imprisonment of his supporters and the remaining family members was also a natural thing. These kinds of battles and conflicts are innumerable in human history and not without precedent in the history of Islam "

Of course it is added after this interpretation that it was the hand of politics which gave an exaggerated look to this incident and which gave rise to those clamorous traditions in the shape of mourning gatherings and assemblies.

But is it true that Husain (a.s.) rose for the sake of attaining power and rule? Was the only point of disagreement between Husain ibn Ali (a.s.) and Yazid a matter of material gain and power? Or was it something else? This is a question which occurs to the mind of everyone after coming across interpretations of the above kind and

it is essential to give a fundamentally convincing answer to this question.

Is it true that the hand of politics has exaggerated the importance of this event and given it the present colour and glamour and that the hand of politics will again at sometime deprive it of its present significance? Or can the hands of politics never exaggerate the significance of such a tragedy? This is a question which must be answered thoroughly.

Is the immeasurably tragic event of Karbala one of the innumerable similar incidents in the history of mankind and of Islam that has no major point of difference from all the others? Or is it a tragedy of individual significance which is why it has acquired such a great importance? This is a question that must be answered.

The reply to these questions is undoubtedly in the negative. For, if we study Husain ibn Ali's (a.s.) character in the course of his struggles, we see that it bears not the least similarity with the ways of ambitious and power hungry men.

Truly, if it is correct that Husain ibn Ali (a.s.) started his struggles for the sake of power, he certainly made a gross mistake and is responsible for adopting an erroneous course of action! Because for those who hold any amount of social station, if they be disposed towards acquisition of power and authority, there is only one way, and that is to compromise with the established power and to overlook its faults and shortcomings. Unless one strives to flatter the government in power and comes to terms with it, one cannot establish one's position and thus gradually strengthen one's situation. Even those who are successful in attaining power through insurgence against those in authority through a coup; they too are obliged to approach sensitive power centres with friendliness and adopt a cautious line of action.

But history bears witness that the personality of Husain (a.s.) was of such social eminence that had he compromised with the established regime from the very beginning, not only would he not have been killed, but he would also have received some important position and governmental post.

Thus, had it been in Husain's plans to attain power, either through the means of a coup or through gradual improvement of his political standing, he should have come to a compromise with the regime and not maintained, as he did, a stand of continued displeasure and non-cooperation. Not only did Husain (a.s.) never care to show his good-will towards the regime, but even during the deceptive and repressive days of Mu'awiyah's dictatorial rule, he never came to terms with the establishment and rejected every one of Mu'awiyah's proposals even in the most sensitive issues. As we have said, he maintained a long silence during the days of Mu'awiyah — though, if he had supposedly any designs for attainment of power, he should have come forward and made use of the political tactics prevalent at the time, instead of remaining secluded and maintaining an isolated opposition.

Those who seek power and position; if they sense any danger after having entered the field of political struggle and observe that the power of the enemy and the resources at his disposal are much greater, and thus they fear being overpowered, then they suddenly change their ways and retrace their steps, adopting a different attitude after having decided to wait for a better opportunity.

But Husain ibn Ali (a.s.), on the contrary, when he sensed the danger to have mounted, became, because of it, even more determined and decisive in his stand. In face of the warnings of all his friends and relatives who

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endeavoured to stop him, he never faltered and with determination moved forward in the pursuit of his objectives.

Even if it be taken for granted that apparently there was some chance of his success till before the revolt of Kufa, then after the martyrdom of Muslim ibn Aqeel there was no hope of any victory and his continuation of the journey towards Kufa does not agree with any designs for attainment of power. For the same reason, he ignored the persistent advices of friends and pursued his objectives, which we shall explain later.

Had Husain ibn Ali's (a.s.) objective been power and material gain, then after the reversal of the situation in Kufa and the martyrdom of Muslim, there was no point in resisting the power of Yazid until the Eighth and Ninth of Muharram of the year 61 Hijrah.

If Husain's (a.s.) basic aim was gain of power and position, then what was the meaning of stopping in Karbala and putting up a headstrong resistance to all those proposals, and in subjecting his own life and the life of his companions to the danger of death?

Had the companions of Husain (a.s.) also accompanied him in hope of worldly gain and better days, why did they not leave him alone and depart as others departed, but on the contrary remained steadfast even when face to face with death itself, although there was not even the least amount of hindrance in their way and they could have easily escaped safely? Why did they continue to cling to Husain's (a.s.) company and for what purpose?

Apart from what has been said, this interpretation does not agree in the least with Husain's (a.s.) background of training and family environment. Husain (a.s.), who had grown up by the side of Ali (a.s.) and Zahra (a.s.) and had seen the days of his grandfather, the Prophet (s.a.w.a.s.), and whose family, totally humanis-

tic, strongly averse to the passion of power-hunger and ambition for domination and which had actively endeavoured all those years for the development and guidance of mankind – how can it be imagined that all his endeavour was directed at attainment of political power?

In short, neither his family background nor the biographical details of his life, nor his demeanour during the days of the event of Karbala – none of these agree with the above interpretation, and so it cannot be said that Imam Husain (a.s.) began his struggle for the attainment of kingdom or khalifah. Without any doubt the real motive of the *qiyam* of Husain ibn Ali (a.s.) was not love of power and rule, and it is not possible to explain all his great sacrifices in the light of this bluntly simple interpretation.

Then what is the right interpretation? Why did Husain (a.s.) rise against Yazid? Husain (a.s.) who was fully aware of the dangers – why did he enter upon the course of his struggles paying no heed to the advice and sincere warnings of friends and relatives? Why did he ignore their warnings about the danger to the life of his supporters and himself as if he were after some objective which nobody else could perceive? Why did he not himself give a direct answer to this question? Why did he give those greatly varying and unconvincing reasons in reply to the queries of various people?

To one friend who warns of dangers ahead, he replies: “I will think it over and let you know later on.” To another he says, “I saw my grandfather, the Messenger of God, in a dream commanding me: ‘Husain go towards Iraq, for God wishes to see you killed and your women and children imprisoned.’”

Strange! A dream, which in Islam after all has no primary significance and that, too, in an issue so sensitive and important, when the lives of a large group of people

are endangered! How does Husain (a.s.) rely on such a thing? What is more strange, God, who does not like anybody to commit the smallest transgression against another – how is it possible that He would desire that men like Husain (a.s.) and his companions be killed and their women and children be put into captivity of tyrants?

These differing and unconvincing replies are a proof of the fact that the true answer lay beyond their perception and understanding, for they could not realize the significance of the real issues involved; so he gave a reply to each in accordance with his understanding.

Before we go on to see what was Husain's (a.s.) true answer which explained his *qiyam*, we would like to examine another curious stand which takes an opposite viewpoint in regard to it.

It is said that Husain ibn Ali (a.s.) was killed for the sins of the *ummah* (people) of his grandfather, the Prophet (s.a.w.a.s.); that he subjected himself to martyrdom and his family to captivity for the followers of his grandfather to attain salvation near God and that he was killed for the *ummah* of his grandfather to enter paradise! They say that Husain ibn Ali (a.s.) uttered these words during his last moments: "O God! I have fulfilled my covenant and You too now fulfil Yours. I had promised to sacrifice myself, my companions, my brothers, my sons and my family, and You too had promised to forgive the *ummah* of my grandfather its sins!" It is said that Husain ibn Ali (a.s.) was killed so that his followers may shed tears and, having received the ticket to salvation, go straight to paradise. It is said that if somebody wets his eyes to the extent of a fly's wing for Husain (a.s.), then God shall forgive all his sins even if they may be 'as numerous as the grains of sands in all the deserts of the world and as numerous as the leaves of trees throughout the world'!



Fortunately, the answer to these groundless pretensions is obvious and no explanation is required.

If Husain ibn Ali (a.s.) gave his life for sinners to the extent that all sins however numerous were to be forgiven for an eye lash wet to the extent of a fly's wing, then we must say – God be our refuge – that he thus became an effective means for the prevalence of sin throughout the Muslim society and thus contributed to the propagation of sinfulness as a result; for a sin however great is easily committed if it is known to be forgiven for the mere shedding of a single tear drop.

I think this is a matter which has been fabricated by the hands of political cunning for its own devious aims so as to make people lose sight of the real objective of Husain ibn Ali (a.s.), so that they may be estranged from the Husainic way of thought and avoid being a hindrance in the way of oppressors and tyrants.

Who except Shimr (the man who dealt Husain [a.s.] the last blow) might have heard the above mentioned 'last words' of Husain (a.s.) that have been related for us? Was it Shimr who related for us these words or were they fabricated by the hand which seats the likes of Shimr on thrones and appoints them to rule over the people?

The creation of the world is based totally on measure and reckoning . . . calculation so meticulous and sensitive that not even a particle or a moment of life is left without being reckoned. How is it possible to forgive a mountain's weight of sin in return for the tiniest tear, and for people to be allowed to enter Paradise without any reckoning? (The problem of reckoning on the Day of Judgment is by itself a lengthy argument and if there is anything in the Traditions of the above meaning about people entering paradise without any reckoning, what is implied is the crystal clarity of their account so that there is no need of reckoning, and not total absence of reck-

oning of a dubious account.

A life spent in oppressing others, depriving them of their rights, plundering others' property and possessions and later settlement of a lengthy account of a life of crime and sin by shedding of a few tears - that does not agree with any method or mode of just reckoning!

Has Islam become Christianity that a life of crime and corruption be forgiven through a single baptism and a series of baseless and meaningless rituals? Are the sacred laws of Islam something like Christianity that would forgive the greatest of sins and crimes through performance of certain nonsensical rituals? And dispatch criminals to Paradise in return for a small sum of money?

In Islam attainment of Paradise and everlasting felicity depends on firm, calculated and clear principles. It is not possible to reach Paradise through weeping, crying and shedding of tears.

In Islam, repentance is not just uttering the words '*Astaghfirullah*' ('I seek God's forgiveness'). Money matters are not settled by '*astaghfirullah*'; plundering people's property and swallowing the property of *Waqf* (Public Trust) and fabrication of untrue cases against innocent people is not compensated through the words '*Astaghfirullah*'.

Even matters of worship are not set right by '*Astaghfirullah!*' *Salat* (prayer) that has been omitted must be performed; the obligatory fasts that have been left must be kept, the *hajj* pilgrimage must be performed; God's appointed duties must be fulfilled. All of these must be done before shedding tears over the tragedy of Karbala is to be of any use.

The Divine rewards for mourning Husain's (a.s.) death that have been mentioned in the traditions, is neither repentance nor some kind of baptismal purifi-

cation; rather it is for encouraging people to hold mourning gatherings so that this event of great tragedy may not be forgotten and so that through them the people may become aware of the sublime objectives of Husain's (a.s.) *qiyam* so that these assemblies may serve as platforms for propagation and dissemination of the spirit of true Islam.

However, those traditions which do not agree with the principal beliefs of Islam or any rational principles, like other similar traditions regarding other issues – if they have been narrated through a chain of reliable narrators – must be explained and interpreted.

In short, the answer that Husain (a.s.) was killed for people's shedding tears and going to Paradise – is insufficient and unacceptable.

It is true that Husain ibn Ali (a.s.) chose martyrdom for the sake of the *ummah* of the Messenger (s.a.w.a.s.); it is true that Husain ibn Ali's (a.s.) *qiyam* had the objective of preventing Muslims from losing the way to Paradise – but not through them crying and shedding tears.

It is true that Husain ibn Ali (a.s.) will be an intercessor for his friends on the Day of Judgement, but not of those who have done nothing else and have only cried and shed tears.

It is true that Husain ibn Ali (a.s.) is a ship of salvation – not only he but all the Household of the Prophet (s.a.w.a.s.) are the ship of human salvation – but not for those who have spent a whole lifetime in sinfulness like the son of Noah (a.s.) and for the sake of being called a Shiah of Husain (a.s.) or son of Noah (a.s.) await salvation.

Husain ibn Ali (a.s.) and his companions chose martyrdom in order to point out the way of Paradise to the people. They gave their lives to teach the way of attainment of felicity for mankind.

Husain ibn Ali (a.s.) struggled and fought against Yazid and his lot, the inhabitants of Hell. He was against the deeds of Yazid and those like him. He chose martyrdom in order to abolish drunkenness, gambling, sexual deviations, the plundering of people's possessions, oppression, tyranny, endless misappropriations of the public treasury and so on.

### **The Reasons of the Qiyam**

The conditions of the Muslims and Islamic society of that period were extremely hopeless from the point of view of the existence of wholesome and true men. The class which ruled the Islamic domain had adopted the ugliest character and did not refrain from committing the most horrific crimes. At the head of this class was the Khalifah, who was the vilest among men. He was a pervert addicted to drinking, gambling and unbridled licentiousness. At the same time he considered himself to be Khalifah of Muslims. A man had come into power who had an alcoholic brain and had no belief in Islam or respect for the sanctities of the faith. He recognized no difference between Islamic Khalifah and materialistic government and monarchy. This pervert who had said: "It was all a game of Bani Hashim (the tribe to which the Prophet belonged); neither was there any revelation nor any news (of the Unseen)," was recognized to be the leader of the Islamic society.

A man who did not accept the prophethood of the Messenger of Islam had seated himself in the seat of the Prophet to pursue the deceptive tactics of his father.

People's honour and honourable living were endangered. Thought and culture had totally weakened. People were deprived of personal honour and freedom. Everybody in whatever part of the Islamic domain was under terrible repression. Nobody dared to raise any murmur

of disagreement and an environment of fear and a reign of terror was established throughout the whole Islamic dominion. Faithless and materialistic men had established themselves in power all over the country in every post and position of significance. Generally those who were connected with the regime agreed with Yazid in temperament, thought, character and deed.

Was it possible that in such conditions men like Husain (a.s.) would sit indifferent and watch Islam that had been established through so much endeavour, hardship and sacrifice rapidly descend into decline and degeneration, subsequently leading millions of human beings of the future generations onto paths of misguidance and misfortune? That could not be allowed. Husain (a.s.) considered silence under such conditions to be treachery and a crime.

It is true that even before his rule, Yazid's perversions and his moral aberrations were not hidden from the eye of the public, neither was his endless licentiousness anything new. But the most sensitive point lies just here. The basic motive of Husain ibn Ali (a.s.) is connected with this issue and the fundamental reasons behind his *qiyam* lie here. The single most complete cause for the appearance of the tragedy of Karbala lies in this matter, and that is the essential importance of law and the duty to safeguard Islamic regulations.

There is a great difference between a man who sins but accepts the fact of his sinfulness and the deviation of his actions from true morality, and a man who commits a transgression openly and then unabashedly asks, "What is sin?", "I am not a sinner neither are my actions sinful", "rather the antiquated law which finds fault with me is wrong and no longer applicable." "Not only are my deeds not against morality but they are the most effective ways of attaining personal happiness."

If Yazid drank wine, gambled and was given to perverse licentiousness before his coming into power, he was then no more than a common Muslim connected with the regime of Mu'awiyah, making the greatest misuse of his father's power as a pampered and delinquent son. That is, his actions would nevertheless have been considered wrong by the people, and so respect for law would have remained intact.

But in the position of the 'Khalifah' of Muslims, as a successor of the Prophet (s.a.w.a.s.), he wished to persist in his habits to the extent of drinking wine and gambling with friends in the very court in the presence of the courtiers.

If the leader of an Islamic government publicly breaks the Islamic laws, it is obvious what results it would entail for the governors and regional heads and what implications it held for the public. If the heads of government follow such practices, what effect does it have on the people? If such practices had continued in this manner, without any opposition for some period of time, sooner or later they would have destroyed the sacred laws of Islam, profaned its sanctities and after some time, these corrupt practices would have displaced the sacred code of Islam in the name of Islam itself and would have been introduced to posterity as authentic Islamic practice. The result would have been as expressed in the words of Husain (a.s.) himself: "If this is Islam, then bid farewell to Islam!"

Such a dangerous situation, if it had continued, would have brought havoc to the God-revealed religion in the manner of Christianity, where falsifications were introduced in the heavenly scriptures and Divine laws for the objective of setting right the affairs of caesars and consolidating their rule. It was Christianity (of course not true Christianity) whose deviated leaders attributed

drunkenness and licentiousness to the Prophets and messengers of God for achieving a few days of a life of repose, for worldly power and for the purpose of justifying the works of kings and rulers of their time, and to exhibit them to the public as pious men of religion despite all their perverseness and deviations.

The acts of the Khalifah and others attached to his regime were considered by the people at that time to be a model of Islamic practice. What would have happened to Islam if the people, having taken lesson from their leaders, adopted these perversions in their lives and, as a result, subject the Divine sanctities and heavenly laws to a sure danger of annihilation? Would the result been any other than, the degeneration and destruction of Islamic teachings?

In such conditions, was it possible that Husain (a.s.) and his like would sit and observe the Islamic society accelerate towards the very edge of annihilation? There was no alternative and no way except to start a desperate struggle!

This is the secret of the *Qiyam* of Husain (a.s.). Husain ibn Ali (a.s.) rose to deliver Islam and Muslims from destruction. He struggled to safeguard the laws of Islam. He rose that people might not say that drinking wine and gambling are permitted by Islam . . . that sexual perversions do not matter, since the Khalifah is used to them and nobody finds any fault with the Khalifah.

Husain ibn Ali (a.s.) rose so as to eliminate the possibility, for all time, of some leader making Islam a plaything in the hands of his caprice and thus obliterate the religion of God.

Husain ibn Ali (a.s.) rose to declare to the world that: "Those who do not adhere to Islamic laws have no right to govern the Islamic society." Husain ibn

Ali (a.s.) rose to remind the world that any leader, Khalifah or head, who considers himself to be a governor and a ruler of Muslims must adhere completely to the Islamic laws and regulations. Here one question arises: These deviations had come into existence from the time of Mu'awiyah's rule and the danger of degeneration was obvious from the time of martyrdom of Ali ibn Abi Talib (a.s.) and felt generally by the people; especially so when the issue of Yazid's succession was raised and Mu'awiyah's deviate moves were executed with dictatorial coercion and force. The danger of decline of Islam was completely manifest during the last decade of Mu'awiyah's government. Why did Husain (a.s.) keep his silence during those days and never put forth even the smallest opposition after the martyrdom of his brother Hasan ibn Ali (a.s.)?

In short, the conditions of Mu'awiyah's reign also justified and called for his *qiyam* and in those days, too, the general situation was not much better than in the time of Yazid. Both of them had a single programme, and basically the Umayyad tribe and the sons of Abu Sufyan were opposed to Islam and played with the fate of Muslims. Then why didn't Husain ibn Ali (a.s.) fight with Mu'awiyah and continue to live in isolated seclusion during his reign?

With attention to what we have said already, the reply to this question is obvious. We will not repeat our explanation here except mentioning a few points which need elucidation.

The regimes of Mu'awiyah and Yazid basically differed from each other from the point of view of their courtiers and their manner of action.

Mu'awiyah was an adept politician with decades of experience in statesmanship and deception of the public. But Yazid was an unexperienced and immature youth



given to a life of pleasure-seeking, who also coveted authority and power for the sake of fulfilling his lust for wine, women and poetry. Those around Mu'awiyah were men of ripened political experience — like 'Amr ibn 'Aas — who were not lesser men than Mu'awiyah in skillful use of every mode of intrigue, scheme and political devilry for the achievement of their aims.

But there were no such men around Yazid even for the sake of quoting an example. Those who ran the affairs of his dominion were men who were more crude and immature than Yazid himself in their lust for power, and in their flair for flattery and opportunism.

Yazid could no longer afford to spend such large sums of money as Mu'awiyah used to spend for stabilizing and protecting his sovereignty and for soliciting the compliance of individuals in various ways, to make happy those who had cooperated with his father but were reluctant to support him.

More important was the general state of waiting and common discontent of the masses of the people as a result of the dictatorial rule of the last years of Mu'awiyah. The society was fed up and there was a general displeasure among all. The people awaited the overturning of the regime and sought relief from the hands of tyrants and dictatorial rulers. It is true that they had complied with the issue of Yazid's succession in the days of Mu'awiyah but that compliance was elicited through coercion and force.

The fact that a large number of people gave their allegiance to Muslim ibn Aqeel who had gone to Kufa as Husain's (a.s.) ambassador, and paid no heed to the government's power, is a proof of this prevailing general discontent among the people. The leniency shown by the governors of Madina and Kufa...the general welcome given to Husain (a.s.) by the people of Maccan

and Kufa — whom even the governor joined — these are proofs of the general discontent and disillusionment among the masses. The letter of the governor of Madina to Ibn Ziyad, which we shall mention later, is also an indication of that discontent. These and several other, similar indications point out the changed conditions of the time which allowed Husain (a.s.) to put an end to his silence of the days of Mu'awiyah and commence his struggle against Yazid.

Finally, we will summarily describe the point of view of Sayyid Murtada (may God's mercy be upon him).

The great scholar in his book *Tanziyatul Anbiya* says:

If anybody says, 'Why did Husain ibn Ali (a.s.) leave Maccah with women and children for Kufa at a time when the tyrannical regime of Yazid still had full control of the situation and when he already had the experience of the treatment of the people of Kufa with his father and brother and their disloyal behaviour towards them? Why did he think in a way contrary to all his relatives and friends and act against their advice as none of them saw any wisdom in his journey towards Kufa . . . for particularly Ibn Abbas and Abdullah ibn Umar had conveyed to him in clear terms their fear of his martyrdom? Why did Husain ibn Ali (a.s.) continue to pursue his journey towards Kufa even after having heard the news of the martyrdom of Muslim ibn Aqeel and the complete reversal of the situation of Kufa? Why did he accept to fight a sizable, well-equipped and well-supplied army of several thousands, with a small group of seventy-odd followers and companions? Why did he reject the offer to save his life and that of his followers by offering his allegiance to Yazid and thus subject his own life to the danger of death, when his own brother had made peace with Mu'awiyah under much more favourable conditions?

In answer to all these questions it must be said that, in general, whenever an Imam has the assurance that he can attain his right and fulfill his duties through struggle, then he must certainly rise in *qiyam* however difficult the situation may be and however great the odds against him. Neither did Husain ibn Ali (a.s.) decide by himself to journey to Kufa, nor was he the first to write

letters to its people. Instead, the people of Kufa had written to him even during the lifetime of Mu'awiyah — after the peace treaty signed between Imam Hasan (a.s.) and Mu'awiyah — and through these letters they tried to persuade him through various arguments, and Husain (a.s.) had replied to them giving the requisite replies.

After the martyrdom of his brother, the same personalities of Kufa wrote to him with greater resistance and promised him their fullest support for him, giving better hopes of the future as the extremely repressive days of Mu'awiyah were gone. After the death of Mu'awiyah the frequency of letters and the number of writers increased. The letters were much more compelling, in their persistence, solicitation and promise. The sheer earnestness of the solicitation was so much that he considered it his duty to accept their appeals. The aspect of the letters and the general conditions appeared to be such that the possibility of division between the Kufians seemed very remote. Was it not that when Muslim entered Kufa, he received the universal welcome of its people and took their allegiance? Was it not that when Ibn Ziyad came to Kufa and made his preliminary moves, the people gathered during prayer assemblies and drew plans to kill him? If Muslim had been successful in killing Ibn Ziyad, then without doubt things would have taken an altogether different turn for Husain (a.s.) and he would have entered Kufa without the least amount of hindrance. The people of Kufa would have universally supported him and even those who were apparently on the side of the enemy would have joined him. But Muslim had not agreed with their suggestions to kill Ibn Ziyad, saying, "That is only a temptation, and the Prophet (s.a.w.a.s.) has said, 'True faith closes all doors to temptations.'" Did it not happen that when Muslim came to know about Haani's arrest, the people, following his call, were mobilized to put the governor's office under their siege forcing Ibn Ziyad to close all doors in dread and be compelled to disperse the besiegers through mere recourse to devilish cunning? Here we mention all these things to show that apparently the victory seemed to be on Husain's side, and Yazid's defeat in Iraq seemed to be unavoidable. And the possibility of Husain's (a.s.) defeat in the sense that it would lead to the martyrdom of himself and his companions seemed very remote. When, however, the conditions led to that point, Husain (a.s.) offered to return peacefully, but this alternative was rejected forcing him to stop midway in his journey. However, he and his companions remained steadfast

to the point of martyrdom (which from our point of view was the last alternative for defeating Yazid's aims and resurrecting Islam), hoping for the best with determination to face the worst that could come up. On this basis, it can be said that the programme and objective of the two brothers (Hasan and Husain a.s.) were the same. Whenever they saw any chance of making headway, they never gave up the struggle and went ahead to the extent possible and when they observed things taking an opposite course, when they saw the people openly taking part in intrigues, and subversions, they left off; with the difference that in Husain's (a.s.) case the enemy's forces surrounded him and martyred him rejecting his offer to withdraw."

Sayyid Murtada (may God's mercy be upon him) after arguing in this manner goes on to say:

Apart from what has been said, we know that every one of the Imams acted according to the divine programme that had been appointed for them by God. They were inerrant and infallible and one must never judge the acts of the inerrant according to one's conjectures.

Is it not true that the prophets were sometimes commanded to fight single-handed against thousands of enemies and to condemn the tenets, practices, rituals and traditions of idolators and to remain steadfast in face of all innumerable and incalculable hardships and misfortunes? Therefore, there is no reason to find fault with Husain's (a.s.) *qiyam* in the face of heavy odds.

At the same time, if one were to meditate and ponder over the acts and moves of Husain ibne Ali (a.s.), one will find that he sacrificed his life to preserve the message of his grandfather, the Messenger of God (s.a.w.a.s.) and through his martyrdom shook the very foundations of Umayyad rule and proved the faithless and tyrannical character of its rulers for the world of Islam.

Had he cooperated with them or remained silent, their power would have consolidated and this would have resulted in gradual obliteration of the principles and laws of Islam to the extent that the people would have been led into identifying Islam with the acts and practices of such tyrannical regimes.

The late Sayyid Murtada continues his explanation in this manner:

It is certain that Husain ibn Ali (a.s.) went out of Medina to avoid being killed there. He departed from Maccah when he

was informed that 'Amr ibn Sa'eed ibn 'Aas had been commanded to enter Maccah as a leader of a caravan of pilgrims with a company of armed men entrusted to obey and his orders and kill Husain (a.s.) at any cost.

Is it not true that Husain (a.s.) in reply to his brother Muhammad ibn Hanafiyyah, who tried to make him desist from the journey towards Kufa, said: 'Brother, I am in such a situation that wherever I may hide they will pull me out and will not be satisfied until they had shed my blood.'

It is clear that even if Husain (a.s.) had agreed to make peace with the enemy or even offered his allegiance, they would not have allowed him to go free. Observe how Marwan suggested to the governor of Madina to murder Husain (a.s.) at a time when he had not even been asked to give his allegiance. We know how Ibn Ziyad had ordered his officials: "Ask Husain to swear allegiance to Yazid and if he complies, arrest him so that we may decide later what to do with him." We also know how Ibn Ziyad promised amnesty to Muslim Ibn Aqeel and his supporters and later murdered him and Haani. That is why Husain's (a.s.) surrendering himself would have been totally meaningless and without point.

Contrary to Mu'awiyah who, with all his mischief, was a man of prudence and caution, who with all his devilry and genius for deception, knew that open murder of such personalities could have led to public anxiety, giving rise to open revolt, and could have ended in possible damage to the regime itself. That is why in appearance, he acted with moderation. He made peace with Hasan (a.s.) and never tried to persecute Husein ibn Ali (a.s.). He used to caution his son lest he try to create any engagement with Husain (a.s.) which would be perilous for his rule.

Now the reader can himself judge the reason for Husain's (a.s.) *qiyam* and the cause for which he was killed. He gave his life to protect Islam from being ruined by the deviations and destructive practices of Yazid and his like. He saw the religion of God and Divine sanctities in danger of obliteration and rose in *qiyam* to stop that process.

He started his struggles after meticulous planning which should result in a fruitful outcome under every

condition.

Now that we have examined the basic reasons that lie behind Husain's (a.s.) *qiyam*, we will go on to the events themselves and see how Husain (a.s.) put his programmes into action.

### **Yazid Abuses Power**

As we have already said, Mu'awiyah departed from the world and Yazid occupied the seat of his father on the Syrian throne. He was a young man who had attained to power without the least amount of hardship. He saw himself in an elevated position in the midst of the surrounding courtiers lined in front of him to serve his every whim. A well equipped army, an overflowing treasury and a calm and extensive dominion had fallen into the hands of an inexperienced youth.

One of the first acts after his coming into power was a letter that was sent in the month of Rajab, in the 60th year of Hijrah, to the governor of Madina. In that letter, after the announcement of Mu'awiyah's death and the commencement of Yazid's rule, the governor was ordered to take the people's allegiance for a second time and press the opponents, especially Husain ibn Ali (a.s.), to openly declare their support of the regime.

Waleed ibn 'Utba, the governor of Madina, called Husain (a.s.) into his presence and after respectfully declaring the contents of the letter and the orders he had received from the Syrian court, inquired Husain (a.s.) about his opinion. "*Inna lillahe va inna ilaihe raje'oon*" ("truly we are from God and truly we return unto Him"), said Husain (a.s.) upon hearing the news of Mu'awiyah's death and as to the issue of giving his allegiance to Yazid replied, "This kind of allegiance is something which should be discussed in a public gathering and not in special meetings." With these words, he

got up from his seat.

Marwan, who was there, upon hearing Husain's (a.s.) reply, turned to Waleed and said, "Now is the best opportunity to elicit Husain's allegiance otherwise . . ." These words angered Husain (a.s.) and he indignantly replied, "It is beyond you and your superior (Waleed) to take any decision regarding my life, and you have done nothing but divulged the baseness of your inner self with these words." He said this and left the governor's office.

Husain ibn Ali (a.s.) came out of the governor's office with the knowledge that a period of clam and silent living had come to an abrupt end. He realized his new obligations which had suddenly risen as a result of the change in government and the changed conditions that had suddenly thrust themselves forward. He became deeply engrossed in thought as he moved towards his home. His face reflected his inner fūry and deep engrossment in thoughts. From his home he proceeded to visit the tomb of his grandfather, the Prophet (s.a.w.a.s.). There he sat down and read the *ziyarat* (salutation). As he spoke and talked with his grandfather, the people could observe his changed manner and melancholy behaviour. Husain (a.s.) was very different that day from the way he ordinarily used to be when he called on his grandfather's tomb. His behaviour was not usual, neither was it calm and composed as it was in the former days. His countenance suggested inner grief, agony and unrest. It was obvious that some matter had deeply engrossed his mind and soul.

One was deeply affected when watching his sad face and those who conversed with him could not overcome their tears.

"How are you, O son of the Prophet?" They asked him. "All praise is for God" (*Alhamdulillah*), he would kindly reply. But his voice and tone betrayed the intense

sadness and sorrow of his inner self. "Husain, what is it? What has happened?" the friends inquired. "Nothing," came the sad reply which openly told that indeed there was something.

Why shouldn't Husain (a.s.) feel grieved among his friends and relatives when he could not explain to them the significance of the problems which engaged his mind. He had an inner sense of the immense responsibility that he could not share with others and this put his inner agony beyond description and expression.

It was obvious that something immensely important and significant was occupying his mind. Many painful questions which had no certain and reassuring reply were rising in his mind. What were the disasters which Yazid's rule could bring for Islam and Muslims? Would Yazid continue the same kind of black and unashamed political tactics pursued by Mu'awiyah? Would he continue the oppressive dictatorial mode of his father's rule? Would Yazid continue to pursue the ugly licentiousness of his days when his father Mu'awiyah was still in power? Didn't he have any plan to abandon his former gambling, drunkenness and sexual perversions after occupying the seat of Khalifah? Is it possible that he will show better political sense than his father, by abstaining from continuing his dictatorial ways and tactics of public deception, and on the other hand strive to consolidate his kingdom through gaining the public's favour and satisfaction with the regime, abstaining from his own past licentiousness and deviations and, at least for the sake of pretense, show respect and honour for the sanctities of Islam? But not only Husain (a.s.), but most of the people knew that Yazid was no more than an inexperienced youth who had spent most of his past years in the retreats of Syrian resorts among dancers, jesters and beautiful women. It could not be expected that he would



prove to be an adept politician like his father. Everybody knew that Yazid's addiction to wine and women was so deeply rooted that it was not imaginable that he would part with them so simply so soon. He had become used to a life of leisure and pleasure-seeking and during the days of Mu'awiyah paid no attention to his father's advice to attend political meetings and discussions.

As a rule, the attitude of the Umayyad family from the beginning to the present had been a known thing. They were not men who had any soft corner in their hearts for Islam and its progress. Not only were they not in the least interested in its progress; on the contrary their past record and performance proved that they were definitely against its rise and opposed to its progress. They had maintained a concealed enmity towards Islam which they were forced to hide because of the prevailing atmosphere. Even when they cooperated with Muslims in any struggle, their objective was acquisition of power and position and not the progress of Islam.

In short, in such conditions how was it possible to protect Islam and its sanctities? What would happen to Muslims and what future could be expected of the Islamic society? What would happen to the fruits of the hardships and labours of his grandfather, the Prophet (s.a.w.a.s.), and his father, Ali (a.s.) and brother, Hasan (a.s.)? What would be the result of the sacrifices of the martyrs of Islam who had given their lives and blood for the sake of Islam?

In the end, what lay before him was his own responsibility to preserve the foundations of this Divine religion. Was it possible for him to sit and watch silently while Islam and Muslims descended rapidly to decline and decay? In that case, how would he face God on the Day of Judgement? He wondered whether he should rise and take steps to protect Islam. In that case, would

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the majority of Muslims support him? Or would they leave him alone to contend single-handedly with what might befall him? The dangers that lay in his way did not matter, but he was concerned whether his struggles would be fruitful. Would he be successful in protecting Islam from the evil hands of traitors and tyrants? Perhaps these were the thoughts that had engrossed the mind of this sacred person.

In our view, the considerations which made Husain (a.s.) reach his final decision were somewhat like the following: He knew that if he decided to remain in Madina and extend his support to Yazid's regime, that would in itself be a major assistance for obliteration of Islam and in that case he himself would then be the one to assist Yazid in his crime. Even if the common people would fail to find any fault in his action, he himself had complete knowledge of the outcome which would be in wait for the Muslim society and the evil which the tyrannical regime would bring on Islam and Muslims. He was fully aware that not only his support of the regime but even his mere silence and indifference under such conditions were very dangerous. The evil men in power would then make full use of his silence and execute their devilish schemes for destruction of Islam. If the masses were ignorant of the real dangers. . . if they had no idea of the great threat to Islam . . . if they could not properly understand because the oppressive rule of the last twenty years had clouded their minds and kept them in ignorance . . . still he himself had complete awareness and understanding of the perilous situation. . . how could he continue his silence or extend his support to the regime?

He saw that there was no alternative except opposition and that there was no way except struggle.

On the other hand, it was obvious that Yazid's

government would not sit idle and allow him to expand his opposition. He knew that more than any other opponent, the regime watched him with special anxiety and disquiet. Naturally, it would subject him to greater control and put his activity under special watch. He considered that if he continued to stay in Madina, he would soon find himself besieged from every side. After more vigorous attempts at forcing him to allegiance, they could easily have murdered him in his own city.

He gave no significance to his own death. What was important was the result that could be attained thereby. If he were to be killed in Madina, in a restricted environment without any knowledge of Muslims living elsewhere, the regime could have projected his death and introduced him to the rest of the Muslim world in any way it chose, with the extensive and powerful propaganda machinery at its disposal. With its deceptive tactics, it would reduce the effect of his sacrifice and his blood-shed to almost nothing. It would confuse the people about the real issues that were involved and without much headache maintain its authority intact.

Martyrdom for him was not very important. What was important was the results that could be derived from it. Getting killed and giving martyrs was sensible only if it had an effective outcome that would help the religion of God.

Had he remained in Madina and started his struggle there without trying to inform other Muslims about his intentions, then he would have been surely killed there without their knowledge of the reasons that lay behind his struggle. The government could then easily project him to the rest of the Muslim world in any way it chose and could even introduce him to the Muslim world as an enemy and an opponent of Islam. For these reasons, he saw no point in remaining at Madina. Now that he

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had reached his final decision to struggle against the regime, the sooner he left Madina, the better it would be.

Now if it was necessary to leave Madina, where should he have gone? In the first place, he saw himself compelled to inform the Muslim world about his struggle and make them aware of his opposition. If tomorrow on the Day of Judgment all Muslims were to give their pretext before God, "O Lord, we had no idea and no information about Husain's (a.s.) struggle so that we too could have cooperated with him overturning the oppressive regime of Yazid," what would he say? Accordingly, he decided to make the society aware of its responsibilities. After he had informed them and made them aware, it would be much more clear what steps he would then have to take.

As a result, he considered it his primary duty to inform the people. But unfortunately, it seemed as though he had no means at his disposal. There was no radio or television in those days: neither were newspapers, magazines or periodicals in existence; nor were printing techniques yet invented. Whatever means of communication existed, they were outside his reach. Accordingly, he could only utilise the means that were at his disposal. But with the slow means of communication of those days, the regime's attention would be more readily attracted than that of the public. The regime would then finish him off before he had any success in attracting the attention of Muslims in distant points of the country. He was seeking a means that would enable him to communicate with the people before the regime could take any action to stop him.

### **Husain Leaves Madina**

The month was that of Rajab; exactly four months remained for Hajj. During the time of Hajj, people from

every corner of the country would come for pilgrimage to Maccah. He could then easily convey his message to the people. Husain (a.s.) knew that if he were to start his *qiyam* and struggle from Maccah, all the world of Islam would become aware of his objectives and then it would not be so easy for the regime to deceive the people about him and his aims. Speaking in Maccah about political problems, especially if the issues involved opposition to the government, meant speaking to the whole world of Islam. Under these conditions, the most effective and best means of communication with the world of Islam was to deliver speeches and sermons in Maccah before the enormous gathering of pilgrims, which was alone sufficient to gather the attention of the whole world of Islam.

The next thing to be decided was whether he should go alone or take his family with him. For the time being he decided to take his family with him for the first part of the journey, i.e. from Madina to Maccah. It was obvious that his journey would not remain a secret for very long. The people would inquire and soon come to know about the reasons of his sudden departure. They would soon find out about his disagreement with the governor and their meeting. How would the regime react to the publication of this matter? He considered it necessary that some of his near relatives should remain behind him in Madina and keep him informed about what passed in the city during his absence. For this reason, he set forth his decision to his immediate family who assembled in his house and spoke to them in these words, "I have no alternative but to leave Madina. For the time being, I am travelling to Maccah. This journey is such that I cannot leave you behind in Madina and I am setting out towards an uncertain goal. Thank God, we have our own house in Maccah and the days of pilgrimage

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are near also. We shall leave at our earliest and you prepare to move as soon as you can.”

For this reason, he decided to travel to Maccah. No other Islamic city had this characteristic that was special to Maccah. Apart from being the location of God's Holy House, it had unestimable position of honour and dignity in the eyes of Muslims which forbade bloodshed and strife in its holy precincts. No other city had similar characteristics.

Husain (a.s.) determined to leave Madina for Maccah at the earliest opportunity before the governor and related officials had any knowledge of his intentions of departure.

This decision was announced before the members of his family and was a secret matter. However, the other people belonging to the tribe of Bani Hashim soon came to know about the matter and came to visit Husain ibn Ali (a.s.). After coming to know about the reasons of this sudden journey, they expressed their views in favour and in opposition to Husain's (a.s.) decision.

There were two persons among the visitors with whom Husain (a.s.) had a lengthy conversation and upon whose lives his decision had a direct impact. The first of them was Muhammad ibn Hanafiyyah, the eldest of his brothers who, after conferring with Husain (a.s.) wanted to accompany him on this fateful journey. Husain (a.s.), however, told him to stay and send him the reports of everyday events that passed in Madina during his absence. He told him that the only person who was capable of fulfilling this sensitive and dangerous responsibility of reporting about the reaction of the regime in Madina and the opinion of the masses there, as an aware and well informed observer, was Muhammad ibn Hanifiyyah. Therefore he had to stay behind and carry out this duty assigned to him.

The second person was Zainab-e-Kubra (s.a.) his eldest sister, the wife of Abdullah ibn Ja'far. When she saw that Husain's (a.s.) decision was final and that nobody could make him turn away from it, she was deeply moved. With grief choking her voice and tears in her eyes, she spoke to him in these words: "Dear brother! After grandfather (the Prophet (s.a.w.a.s.) ), father, my mother and brother Hasan (s.a.), only you remain to console my heart and of all of them it is only you who are left. I cannot bear your separation. How can I stay here with unbearable worry and anxiety about what may happen? Is it not possible that I might be of some service to you if I come along?"

Husain replied: "No sister. You are a woman with a house, husband and children to take care of. Your husband is an illustrious man. I am not the one to decide about your affairs. It is Abdullah ibn Ja'far who can give you the permission. As to myself, I have no alternative but to leave."

Abdullah ibn Ja'far (who was himself suffering from sickness at that time) agreed to Zainab's accompanying her brother on the journey. Not only this, he sent two of his sons to accompany her.

Less than thirty hours after his meeting with the governor, Husain (a.s.) was prepared to leave. As he was making his preparations, he was brought the news that the governor had summoned all other persons who had opposed Yazid's allegiance and conferred with them. One of the opponents of the regime, Abdullah ibn Zubair had secretly left for Maccah the night before. He was pursued by the government's men who could not trace him since he had not used the usual road to Maccah.

Not more than a few hours were left for his departure when for the last time he visited the tombs of his

grandfather, the Prophet (s.a.w.a.s.), his mother, Fatimah (s.a.) and his brother. As he returned, he met Marwan on the way who told him: "I want to give you some advice. I think it is best for your worldly life as well as your Hereafter that you accept to give allegiance to Yazid. Do not put yourself and your relatives into trouble." "*Inna Illahe wa Inna Ilaihe Raje'oon*" came Husain's (a.s.) reply, "And bid farewell to Islam?"

If Marwan did not understand Husain's (a.s.) words, others understood afterwards. Obviously Husain (a.s.) wanted to say, "If I agree to support Yazid's corrupt government, then Islam will be wiped out without any trace. Opposition to Yazid may prove to be costly, but anyhow we would have saved our Hereafter. Indeed everything comes from God and returns unto Him."

Two days remaining until the end of the month of Rajab, on the night of Sunday, Husain (a.s.) left Madina for Maccah. As he left, this verse of Quran was on his lips, a verse which relates the story of Moses as he fled from Pharaoh's Egypt: *So as he departed therefrom, fearful and vigilant: he said, "My Lord, deliver me from the evildoers."*

The night passed, and, as the travellers drew away from Madina, the sun came up. One of the relatives came to Husain (a.s.) and suggested that the caravan leave the highway for the danger of being stopped by pursuers: "It is possible that they might pursue us like Abdullah ibn Zubair and catch up with us and cause us trouble." Apparently the suggestion was a good one. But Husain (a.s.), in view of the open and sublime nature of his objectives replied, "I will never deviate from the right way. And you too, friend of Husain, always choose the right road and move straight. God will be your protector. There is no danger of losing the way as long as you chose to travel on the right and straight



highway!"

The caravan completed its five day journey from Madina to Maccah and entered the city on the 3rd of Sha'ban of the year 60 Hijrah. As he entered the city, Husain (a.s.) hopefully murmured this verse of the Quran – the words uttered by Moses as he entered Midian fleeing Pharaoh's men: *And when he turned his face towards Midian he said, "It may be that my Lord will guide me on the right way."* (21, XXVIII; Quran)

The news of his coming soon spread through the city and all men who held any significant social position hurried to see him. The governor of Maccah, other city officials and similarly many important personalities of the city came to pay a visit.

Soon, the busy hours of visitors rushing to see Husain (a.s.) came to pass and the days took a normal and relaxed aspect. It was during this time that most of the visitors wanted to find out Husain's (a.s.) views about khalifah and the general political conditions of the time.

It did not take much time for the people to know that Husain's (a.s.) movement from Madina was a gesture of opposition to the regime and a protest against the orders sent from the Syrian court to the governor of Madina. Very soon this news spread to all parts of the country; it reached the capital in Syria and other provinces.

Yazid became aware that Husain (a.s.) had made the determination to oppose his government, even as he had refused before to give allegiance to his nomination as crown prince. He discussed the matter with his courtiers and asked them for advice. They held the opinion that it seemed inadvisable to take any hasty step. They advised that it was better to wait and discover the dimensions that Husain's (a.s.) opposition might take. It seemed possible that he would settle down in Maccah

and maintain his silence as before. They suggested that any attempts at his persecution would only help to aggravate the prevailing situation. They reminded him about Mu'awiyah's advice that if Husain ibn Ali (a.s.) continued his silence, it was sufficient for Yazid and that his persecution was inadvisable under any condition.

#### **Kufa Longs for Freedom:**

The city of Kufa was regarded as one of the most important cities in the Muslim world. This city has played a significant role in the political and cultural history of Islam. The city began its existence in the year 17 A.H. during the days of the conquest of Persia as a base for the military. It was here that Muslims belonging to various tribes of the Arabian peninsula, Iraq and Persia had gathered and made Kufa their home. Thus the city had a cosmopolitan culture and attracted towards it militant men aspiring to become warriors and acquire fighting skills. The army stationed at Kufa was sent to reinforce Muslim armies in their battles and had fought many a victorious battle. There were more than twenty thousand soldiers who received regular pay from the public treasury. Around 50 A.H. during the governorship of Ziyad ibn Abeeh, the father of Ibn Ziyad, the Kufan army was re-organized into four divisions. Each of these divisions consisted of one, two or three tribes. During the years 60 A.H. to 64 A.H. the army at Kufa consisted of 20,000 men fully armed and equipped ready to move at a short notice.

The people of Kufa were known for their unstable and revolutionary temperament. During his khalifah, Othman, had to change the city governor four times on the people's complaints and dissatisfaction about the ways and character of the men appointed. The divi-

sion of the army on tribal grounds had accentuated tribal prejudice among the people and this was heightened by the peculiar manner of Othman's rule, who made most appointments from his own tribe, the Bani Umayyah, and showed special favours to his own kinsmen. This was the origin of the hatred that grew among the Kufans against Bani Umayyah. The Kufans had fought and won many battles for Islam but now they felt disappointed and cheated by Bani Umayyah who had established their hegemony over the country's affairs. Kufa had been the capital during the days of Ali's khalifah and he had struggled hard to drag the Kufans out of their indifference and lethargy to make them ready for battle against the internal enemies of Islam, so called 'Muslims' who opposed his revolutionary rule on account of their political and material interests or who were used by his enemies on account of their perverted misunderstanding of the religion. The Kufans had lived and fought with Ali and his sons for four years. This association had created a special reverence and liking in the hearts of the Kufans for Ali (a.s.) and his household. The people of Kufa knew in their hearts that Ali and his sons were the true spiritual successors of the Prophet (s.a.w.a.s.) and devoted defenders of Islam and Muslims, who stood up courageously against anything that threatened the religion of Muhammad (s.a.w.a.s.) or posed a danger to the interests of the Muslim society. Though all of them were not Shi'ites, the majority had certainly a soft corner for Husain (a.s.) and considered him to be the only person of unquestionable integrity who could lead a movement against the existing system of corruption and uphold the people's rights.

The news of Husain's (a.s.) arrival in Maccah and his opposition to Yazid's rule soon reached Kufa and spread throughout the city. Kufa was a major city of

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Iraq which had been the capital of Ali's (a.s.) government for about five years and the Sluahs of Ali (a.s.) in this city were abundant. The supporters of Ali (a.s.) had been very unhappy with what had happened during the short rule of Hasan ibn Ali (a.s.) and now they considered it a good opportunity to support Husain (a.s.). Through this support perhaps they hoped to seek deliverance from the tyranny of Mu'awiyah's long and oppressive rule and the black and aggressive ways of his son, Yazid.

The first person to think of action was Sulaiman who invited his close friends to a meeting at his house. After the guests had eaten and the feast was over, with the permission of his guests, he delivered a short, serious and well considered speech. In that speech, after praising God and praying for God's blessings and benedictions upon the Prophet (s.a.w.a.s.) and his Household as is customary, he described the news of Husain's (a.s.) opposition to Yazid and his movement to Maccah and his continued stay near God's *Haram*. Then he went on to discuss the prevailing political situation and the past oppression and corruption of the regime of Mu'awiyah. At the end he put forward the suggestion of inviting Husain (a.s.) to Kufa and of supporting him for the establishment of a government of justice.

When Sulaiman finished his address, one of the guests stood up and delivered a heated speech full of passion and fury: "The love of Ali (a.s.) and his sons has entered our blood through our mothers' milk and will remain to our last breath. We will support Husain to our last drop of blood. With our iron fists, we will crush the brains of tyrants and oppressors. Our lives matter the least for fighting in the way of truth and justice. Living under oppression and tyranny is no more than a slow and gradual death . . . ." and he continued to speak in

this fashion.

As the second speaker had finished, a third one started with even more passion and vigour, and similarly others one after another, stood and spoke with greater agitation and heat than the predecessor.

At the end of the meeting, the host spoke again with the permission of his guests. After a prelude, he said, "Dear friends! Here we sit in this house in warm and cozy seats and sitting comfortably here it is easy to talk of heroism with passion and heat. These violent speeches delivered in such a comfortable atmosphere without any threat or danger are easy, but devoid of practical value. What I have suggested is not a simple matter to be taken lightly. I have not suggested inviting a common personality of common esteem and honour. What is involved is a hard struggle against an established regime of great and deeply rooted power and hold and not some kind of a family or tribal conflict. Dear friends! First consider yourselves as if you were out in a bloody battlefield in midst of swords and warriors then open your tongue to speak. If you have any guts for war and are willing to face naked swords, spears, the hardships of war and possible death and exile, then talk of action and taking practical steps. Otherwise, pretend as if you had no knowledge of Husain's opposition and do not needlessly involve that sacred person in a conflict with the tyrannical and cruel regime of Yazid and subject him to the dangers that the faithless, conscienceless and haughty regime, which follows the oppressive tradition of Mu'awiyah, can inflict upon him."

The guests felt hurt at hearing these words from Sulaiman and rose in strong protest: "Sulaiman! You have imagined us to be devoid of honour and considered our words to be without any weight. If we said anything, it was because we have already considered everything.

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Indeed we love Ali (a.s.) and his sons more than you do and perhaps we long for a government of justice in place of the present oppressive government more than you yearn for it. As we have already said, we will stand to the last drop of our blood, and as it is we are ready to write him a letter in any way you consider advisable.”

The meeting was over and several letters were written to Husain (a.s.) from important Shiah personalities of Kufa.

The news of this meeting and the speeches of different persons who took part, gradually spread through the city of Kufa. Most of the people who heard the details were pleased with the suggestion to invite Husain (a.s.) to Kufa. Following this almost everybody, who had any inclination, wrote a letter and had it sent to Husain ibne Ali (a.s.) in Maccah. Then a letter with innumerable signatures of the people was sent to Husain (a.s.). In short, a stream of letters with appeals, supplications, in prose and verse flowed towards Maccah from Kufa.

Obviously, the officials reported the matter to the governor and the central government in Syria. But so far the government showed no reaction.

#### **Husain sends a Representative:**

Back in Maccah, Husain ibn Ali (a.s.) was busy carefully studying the general conditions of Islam and Muslims. He carefully weighed the prevailing situation throughout the Islamic domain. He received letters from Kufa and filed them away. He studied their contents in the light of information he received from Syria and Madina. The letters came but remained unanswered. The bearers who brought the letters waited anxiously to carry back the replies.

Husain (a.s.) considered the matter thoughtfully.

He examined the possible outcome of every step that he might have to take and reflected over what would be the most effective thing to do.

Should he continue his stay in Maccah up to the time of Hajj and, when caravans of pilgrims come from every corner of the Islamic domain, declare his opposition to the regime, inviting people to support his movement to establish a government of justice?

Should we accept the invitation of the Kufans? Perhaps the conditions there were more favourable for struggle. Or possibly the Kufans had changed little since the day of his father and brother; being easily susceptible to seduction and threat, who soon changed their colours and masks?

Or should he accept the suggestion of friends and relatives to go to Adan or Yamen which were smaller places as peaceful as they were distant from the capital?

Would the regime resort to devilish tactics taking actions against him as he himself could not morally opt for, putting him under siege from every side?

Without doubt, the Syrian government would not let him go and would pursue him wherever he went, even to the most distant points of the country. However, he gave no importance to the persecution and pressure that the regime could arrange; rather what had importance was that one underwent all this in such a way that it would bring a fruitful outcome and give the desired effective results.

Certainly his objective was not finding a place for peaceful and secure living for a few days. The aim was not finding a place of pleasant weather and healthy surroundings for settling down. Neither was his aim to attain power and rule. Had he been after these, he would not have been compelled to leave Madina. A simple assent

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and a single 'yes' would have been enough to furnish him with all of these. Most of the things that friends wrote and said, revolved about material ends like the above. They imagined that he was after a life of peace and leisure and their suggestions always revolved around a place of good climate with an abundance of sympathetic friends and supporters.

But as an Imam of Muslims and a spiritual leader he had enormous responsibilities of which they had no realization at all. He deeply grieved at the general condition of Islam. Even if he would have gone away to a distant place where he could live peacefully and in security from the devilish designs of the regime of Yazid, that would not have solved any problem nor reduced his anxieties and sorrows. He could not stand the fact that Yazid after his father continued to deride the sanctities of Islam. He could not sit and watch Muslims turn away from the path of salvation and pursue the course of eternal damnation, entering Hellfire. He had enormous responsibilities on his shoulders and was answerable before God as nobody else was. If he had remained silent during the days of Mu'awiyah, it was because the conditions were such that any struggle would have been ineffective and borne no fruit. The result he wanted was the awakening of Muslims and the bringing of awareness to the society. The objective was to deliver Islam and Muslims from the hands of oppressors and tyrants.

He had left his home to raze the castle of tyranny. He had chosen wandering and homelessness for establishment of freedom and justice. He was determined to wander from city to city for the sake of upholding the laws of Islam. He had come to Maccah to announce to the Islamic world that gambling, drinking and involvement in sexual perversions were opposed to Islamic commands. He had come to declare that usurpation and



misappropriation of public funds and public treasury were damned in the view of Islam. He had come here to declare to the Muslim world that gamblers and drunkards had no right to become rulers over the affairs of Muslims. He had come here to awaken the Muslim world and declare to it that the sexual perverts who look down upon people and attach no value to their honour, have no right to introduce themselves as the leaders and heads of an Islamic society.

The objective of his mission was to make the Muslim world understand that those who squander the public treasury for their personal benefit and comfort and that of their families while the people live in hunger, poverty and deprivation, unhygienic dwellings, have no right to become the rulers of Muslims, and that it was with force and coercion that they had taken power into their hands and occupied posts of enormous social responsibility.

He had left his home to shatter the established regime of oppression and injustice and ruin it forever, and in its place resurrect the house of justice and freedom. His movement was aimed at liberating people from tyranny and oppression and delivering Islam from rapid decline and deterioration.

These were his aims, and they lay beyond the grasp and understanding of most of the people around him. They did not comprehend these sacred and important ideals and the need for urgent and effective action. But he was completely aware of them, however, and realized well his duties and obligations.

He was resolved not to lose sight of these objectives and was meticulously examining the possible results of every alternative of action. Apart from these thoughts, he was determined to ignore what others had to say. Whatever their motives and expectations from his move-

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ment, he was firmly resolved to pursue his sacred ideals.

These letters which kept coming like a torrent from Kufa, supplicating him to rise and establish Divine justice; eagerly soliciting him to hasten; appealing to him in the name of the Prophet (s.a.w.a.s.) to remember his duty before God and his answerability to Him on the Day of Judgement – if what they said was true and they were to prove as steadfast in deed as they seemed to be earnest in their protestations, that would indeed be good. He would then move to Kufa and make it his base for struggle against oppression and cruelty; otherwise he would have to consider some other alternative of fulfilling his duties. There was only one way to be assured of the seriousness of the Kufans: to send a representative to Kufa with a letter from Husain declaring his full authority and that any opposition or support of him would be considered an opposition or support of Husain (a.s.) himself. Only after that would he be assured of the sincerity of their claims and pleas.

This representative had to be a man of great trust, faith, steadfastness and capacity. In addition he had to have a powerful personality capable of executing this sensitive obligation capably. This was not a mission of secondary importance but involved representation from a revolutionary leader. It needed a man of great foresight and experience with complete grasp of the political situation of the time and the principles of the sacred teachings of Islam. It needed a man of firm moral standing and integrity, who would be a true representative from such a sacred person as Husain ibn Ali (a.s.).

Husain ibn Ali (a.s.) picked Muslim ibn Aqeel, his cousin and brother-in-law, the husband of his sister Ruqayya for this important mission. In the eyes of Husain (a.s.), Muslim possessed all those requisite qualities that were desirable for such a job. He was a man of

great courage who would not lose himself in times of victory and was steadfast and patient at times of defeat and opposition: a man for all seasons.

History has recorded in detail the events that accompanied his preparations for departure from Maccah. With him he carried a letter from Husain (a.s.) addressed to the people of Kufa. Husain (a.s.) had written:

“In the Name of God, the Compassionate and the Merciful:

This is a letter from Husain ibn Ali to the Muslim masses of Iraq. Haani and Saeed were the last two representatives of yours who brought me your letters. What I gathered from your writings and narrations is that you do not have a capable leader. You are inviting me in the hope that perhaps God may gather us all under His guidance. I am hereby sending my brother and my cousin Muslim, who is a trustworthy man from my own household. If he reports that your views are as much united in practice as they apparently seem to be from the claims in your letters, I will accept your invitation and God willing set out to meet you. By my life! The leader is only he who governs and rules upholding justice and who follows the religion of God and opposes his own self and selfish motives for the sake of executing the will of God!”

### **Muslim in Kufa**

On the 5th of Shawwal, in the year 60 A.H., after a 19 day journey, Muslim ibn Aqeel entered Kufa with Husain's (a.s.) letter and directly went to see Salim ibn Musayyab, a senior friend of Husain (a.s.). The news of Muslim's arrival soon spread in the city and the supporters of Husain (a.s.) in an unusual welcome swore allegiance to Husain (a.s.). With special honour they took him to the major city mosque. With every day that passed many more people came to give their allegiance.

The governor of Kufa retaliated by delivering a speech in the Mosque of Kufa in which he admonished the people warning them from cooperation and support of Husain (a.s.) and Muslim.

A totally revolutionary situation prevailed at Kufa

and immediately two letters went out in different directions: one towards Husain (a.s.) from Muslim and the second to Yazid from his supporters in Kufa. Muslim wrote to Husain (a.s.) about the warm welcome he was given by the people of Kufa. He informed Husain (a.s.) about the pressing crowds that came to swear their allegiance to him and advised him to move towards Kufa.

The supporters of Yazid too wrote to him informing him about the arrival of Muslim as Husain's (a.s.) representative and the warm welcome he had received from the people of Kufa. They advised Yazid that No'man ibn Basheer, the governor of Kufa, was an ineffective man who was unable to combat the extraordinary situation in the city and whose ineptitude and leniency had largely contributed to Muslim's success. In that letter they demanded Yazid to replace the present governor with a more effective man who could control the hazardous situation and put an end to turmoil.

Each of these two letters gave rise to two conflicting moves. On one hand, Muslim's letter caused Husain (a.s.) to decide to move towards Kufa and on the other, caused Yazid to remove No'man from office appointing another person, Obaidullah ibn Ziyad, to take over the governorship of Kufa. Obaidullah ibn Ziyad, who was at that time the governor of nearby Basra, was given in addition the control over Kufa as an incentive, as will be seen.

### **The Effects of Muslim's Report from Kufa**

When Husain (a.s.) received Muslim's letter, he gave it careful thought. He saw that the contents of letters formerly written by the people of Kufa agreed with what Muslim had reported. He concluded that conditions in Iraq were favourable to him and Kufa would be a

good point to start with. However, even though these letters and reports clearly indicated the present favourable situation, they did not throw any light on the possible future, as assuredly, the regime was not going to sit still. The people of Kufa had been very unstable in the past and their views and stance subject to change in the face of pressure. He predicted that it was entirely possible that the government resorting to devilish tactics and ways might soon reverse the conditions of Kufa. Again, it was also possible for the people of Kufa to prove to be as steadfast indeed as they had been persistent in their claims and promises.

In any case, he considered that in view of the various reports received from different sources, and specially from the capital in Syria, and the decisions that the regime had taken against him, there was no alternative except to leave Maccah. He had received reports that the regime had resorted to terrorist tactics and had appointed a number of unscrupulous mercenaries to assassinate him in the holiest of places, the Ka'ba and its surrounding Holy Mosque, on the occasion of Hajj – something entirely against the injunctions of Islam. His men had brought him the news that the central government, in pursuit of its devious ways, was bent on violating another law of Islam by arranging for his assassination during the ceremonies of Hajj. Even certain officials of the regime had confessed that men dressed as pilgrims carried weapons under their clothing with the intention of his murder and violation of the sanctity of the House of God.

Now we can imagine what kind of regime ruled over the Muslim domain whose leaders had been trained to resort to such ways and whose officials received inspiration from the Devil himself. What kind of Islamic leaders were they who had occupied the seat of leadership

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over Muslims and their affairs, and who held no law of Islam in honour and respect, exhibiting openly their downright contempt of its absolutely clear and defined regulations? Certainly this was the mode of statesmanship which Yazid had learnt from his father Mu'awiyah. Without doubt it showed that the Bani Umayyah had no scruples that would make them abstain from committing any kind of atrocity, murder and crime for the sake of worldly power. This was the kind of politics that most people considered justifiable. Certainly, Husain ibn Ali (a.s.) was not among those who would accept it. He was the person who would not in life deviate even slightly from the laws of Islam. They are another kind of men, who, for the sake of power, have no scruples in committing any kind of deviation, crime and atrocity, resorting to murder of innocent men, assassinating lovers of freedom and liberty for their opposition to tyranny and oppression.

It did not matter to him if he was killed in the Holy House of God; what mattered was the unprecedented violation of an Islamic law and tradition by the regime which was intent on obliterating every Islamic law and tradition, giving not the slightest significance to the sanctity of this holy place.

### **The Unexpected Departure**

Husain (a.s.) knew that if he were to remain in Maccah, he would be assassinated even if he were in the act of circumambulation of the Ka'ba. Death was not important; what was important was the result he would achieve.

If he was assassinated before his formal declaration of opposition to the regime and of his viewpoint, then his objective would remain unfulfilled and the regime with its devilish tactics and misleading propaganda would

nullify the impact of his blood-shed; moreover, it could introduce him to the Muslim world as a trouble-raiser opposed to reforms and progress of Islam. The best alternative was acceptance of the invitation from Kufa. This would give the result of hitting two birds with one stone. His untimely departure from Maccah, just a few days before Hajj, would create commotion and surprise and the people would start asking each other as to the reason that lay behind it. In this way, even if the situation at Kufa were to reverse and the devilish regime were to deprive him of this opportunity, there would still remain the possibility of realizing his objective and deriving the desired results. If his journey to Kufa were to prove a success, that would be the best of things that could be desired for upholding of truth and struggling against oppression and injustice. This would be the shortest way to attainment of his objective. However, if the Kufans were to fail him and turn away from their promise, then he and his companions could still attain their sacred objective through martyrdom. The regime would not be able to hide their massacre. The people would raise questions and, having come to know the truth, their outrage and anger begin the process of dissolution of the atmosphere of repression and dictatorial rule. The public outrage at his murder would shake the foundation of the present regime and, naturally, as the people are awakened a more liberal government would come into power. The laws and traditions of Islam would remain intact by overwhelming public support.

So this was another way of attaining his objective. A longer way no doubt, but all the same, fruitful and effective.

A sudden and unexpected departure from Maccah was the only way of approach towards his objective

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which was ultimately the resurrection of Islam, liberating the Muslims and safeguarding the sanctities of religion from the clutches of tyrants who had hidden their true faces behind the mask of Islam. If the people of Kufa came forward with their assistance, then it would be possible to achieve a rapid result by toppling the oppressive regime in power; however, if they did not, the other alternative would be martyrdom. This would pave the ground for a future popular revolution toppling the tyrannical regime of Yazid, and his atrocious allies and delivering the people from the yoke of oppression.

Thus, in any case, he saw victory to be on his side, with the difference that one of the possible outcomes promised a more rapid success than the other which would be gradual and delayed. Both of these ways, however, led to the same objective. For the time being, he resolved to prepare for the shorter way till the events revealed the future course to be taken. There was every chance that the enemy would block the course of the shorter of these ways and apparently, the chances of his defeat were obviously great. But in spite of his almost certain defeat, he saw final victory to be his.

These thoughts confirmed Husain ibn Ali (a.s.) in his final decision and on the 8th of ZeelHajj of 60 A.H. he left Maccah for Kufa.

This departure seemed extremely unexpected. Pilgrims from every corner of the Islamic domain, coming from far off lands, poured in Maccah hurrying to reach there before the time of Hajj. Husain's (a.s.) departure at this time struck every common Muslim with extreme amazement when the grandson of the Prophet (s.a.w.a.s.) left Maccah instead of joining the pilgrims on this sacred occasion. For this reason, the news of his departure soon reached every ear and became the issue of the day. Wherever two people met, Husain's (a.s.) departure was



the topic of discussion. Without much exception, they came to grasp the reality that Husain ibn Ali (a.s.) did not recognize the government of Yazid and that the major reason for his departure from Maccah was an effort to save his life, and to protect the sanctity of the House of God.

Of course, people differed in their views about this departure and everybody had an explanation commensurate with his religious and political awareness and insight. But one thing which was common between the people was their extreme outrage and disapproval of the plot of the loathsome regime to murder Husain (a.s.) at any cost – even if it had to be during circumambulation of the Ka’ba.

His forecasts, together with the reports he received from the capital in Syria, and most important of all the letter from Muslim ibn Aqeel, contributed to his departure from Maccah.

### **The Revolution in Kufa**

Yazid sat in his court at Syria surrounded by his courtiers. The intoxicated Khalifah conversed with them as a warm and cosy atmosphere prevailed. The news was brought of the arrival of a messenger from Kufa. The messenger was permitted in, and, entering, he offered the letter to the Khalifah. Yazid opened the letter expecting to find some happy news but as he read the first lines, marks of anxiety were obvious on his face and with drawn eyebrows he read the letter with close attention to the end. The surrounding courtiers guessed the contents of the letter from Yazid’s face and knew that some disturbing news had been brought.

Yazid read the letter for another time and for a few moments sank in deep meditation. A chilling silence prevailed for some time as everyone tried hard to guess

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the exact nature of the message. At last, Yazid himself broke the silence as he exclaimed with characteristic harshness, "Who is this inept man that has been sent to Kufa? No'man was not such a weak and ineffective man! Why did he not react firmly towards all this?! Now the situation is spoiled. Our friends from Kufa have reported that the city is virtually under the control of Husain's representative." He was angered by the fact that his officials had not reacted firmly regarding this issue. He decided to remove No'man from governorship immediately. He asked the courtiers to suggest someone who could effectively handle the situation of Kufa and quieten the trouble in the region. He required somebody who had the necessary experience and determination to save Kufa and Iraq from Husain (a.s.), whose advancing influence he resolved to stop at every cost.

"Why is Husain so stubborn?" He said, "Why does he not give up like other Muslims and make a deal with my regime, giving his allegiance to me like the others and formally recognize my government? Doesn't he see that we might be forced to make some dangerous move to stop him? Doesn't he observe that nobody supports him and that he has no power? Why doesn't he learn from what passed with his brother and father? Why doesn't he realize that he cannot challenge our power?" All these questions had a clear answer that we have already mentioned. But there was not a single man among Yazid's courtiers who had the necessary awareness or the courage to reply to the Khalifah's angry exclamations.

After Yazid had aired his anger and expressed his disapproval of Husain's (a.s.) actions passing uncomented by the courtiers, he asked them, "What is to be done? Whom should we send in No'man's place? Whom do you think can silence this turmoil immediately in

your opinion?"

Different names were suggested by everyone present and rejected one by one for some weak point cited in the candidates. Obviously this was a job which conflicted with religious sanctities and beliefs and not every person could be expected to execute this work successfully. Neither sheer courage, experience and capability could be of any effect. Personal popularity, military and financial capacity were not enough. Somebody was to be found who could work without any encumbrance rising from human conscience and scruples posed by religious beliefs. Somebody was required who could withhold his human impulses and blindly follow the orders he received from the court. A reckless, unscrupulous and cunning governor was necessary to control the situation at Kufa.

At last one of the courtiers suggested the name of Obaidallah ibn Ziyad. As soon as the everybody heard his name, they all agreed that he was the man most proper and suitable for this job. They all admitted that he had the capacity to quieten Kufa through whatever means necessary. There was one problem, however! Ibn Ziyad was the governor of Basra at the time; if he was sent to Kufa, Basra would be left without a proper man to control it. Basra too was important because of its particular political and geographical characteristics. One of the courtiers who had some psychological insight in addition to the knowledge of the weak points of Obaidallah ibn Ziyad immediately solved this problem by his suggestion that a very good alternative existed and that was to give him control of Kufa besides his governorship of Basra. That would help as a strong incentive to strive to prove his worthiness for it by endeavouring to bring Kufa immediately under control.

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In general, men whose lives revolve around materialistic interests, and who are firmly attached to the service of materialistic governments, when they receive a promotion, they can hardly contain themselves and are gratefully willing to execute any command without trying to see and understand what is being asked of them. It seemed very probable that if Ibn Ziyad were to be given the governorship of Kufa while at the same time keeping his position at Basra, then he would do everything in his capacity to prove his "worthiness" and display his gratefulness.

This suggestion was approved by all and it was decided to put Obaidullah ibn Ziyad in governorship of Kufa. Soon a letter went out from Yazid towards Ibn Ziyad in Basra.

At Basra, Obaidullah ibn Ziyad received Yazid's letter. It read: "From the moment you receive this letter, you shall be considered the governor of Kufa, maintaining as well your post at Basra. You have all the powers over Kufa and its surrounding region. You are required to act with speed, and stop the advance of Husain's influence so that the situation is soon brought under control. Keep us informed about the situation and send frequent reports of your performance and progress."

Obaidullah ibn Ziyad soon made up his mind about the course he should take in view of Yazid's letter and the reports he had been receiving from Kufa.

The first thing he did was to assemble the people in the mosque of Basra. There he delivered a speech praising Yazid's ancestors and applauding Yazid himself. He told the people of his decision to move to Kufa for a relatively long period. He declared that in his absence his brother would discharge his functions and asked the people to obey him in his absence. Then he threatened the people

of the power of the regime based in Syria, highlighting for them its considerable military power. "Woe to him who dreams of opposing our commands. Unfortunate is the man who tries to go astray from the path we have appointed for him. Woe unto him who harbours thoughts of opposing our powerful regime and allows such idle dreams to enter his head."

There was a reason for these harsh warnings and threats of Ibn Ziyad. He had been informed of the writing of letters and establishment of contracts of the people of Basra with Husain (a.s.). Some days previously he had ordered the execution of a messenger who was caught with Husain's (a.s.) reply to Munzir ibn Jarood, a personality of Basra.

After this harsh speech, Obaidullah ibn Ziyad left the mosque and started preparing to leave for Kufa as early as was possible.

#### **Ibn Ziyad Enters Kufa**

Just as Muslim's letter prompted Husain (a.s.) to proceed towards Kufa, so the letter sent by the supporters of Yazid started Ibn Ziyad from Basra. These two opposite poles started to move near to one another. As these two conflicting personalities moved towards a single point, good and evil were approaching the field of battle. Oppression and tyranny from one side, liberty and freedom from another, approached Kufa. For another time in history, faith and denial hurried towards the scene of a decisive battle to prove, as has been proved again and again thousands of times, that truth and freedom have always defeated falsehood and oppression.

With an established governmental machinery at his disposal, Ibn Ziyad neared Kufa gathering information and receiving reports of the revolutionary situation at Kufa.

Husain ibn Ali (a.s.) had already departed from Maccah and gradually moved towards Kufa. There were two reasons for his slow movement. It was possible that days of hajj being over, the returning pilgrims might join him. He also expected to receive fresh reports from Kufa which would confirm the earlier news contained in Muslim's letter.

Ibn Ziyad covered the distance between Basra and Kufa with great speed and reached the surrounding palm groves of Kufa before sunset. He knew that if he were to enter the city immediately, not only would he not be welcomed by the people, there were chances that something unpleasant might be in wait for him.

He knew that the people were impatiently waiting for Husain's (a.s.) arrival and waited to receive him. He knew that inside the city, the governor's hold had weakened drastically and the governments's power of resistance had collapsed.

As he considered the course of action he must take, a devilish plan emerged in his head. After giving some thought to his plan, he changed his dress putting a veil over his face and adopted the appearance of a noble of Bani Hashim.

The men who accompanied him were amazed at his behaviour wondering as to his possible aim by this sudden act of disguise. Perhaps, they wondered, the governorship of Kufa required him to do so. Perhaps, since the people of Kufa were well acquainted with the sons of Ali (a.s.) and were used to their dress and manners, it was a wise thing for the governor of Kufa to appear like them!

As time for sunset drew near, Ibn Ziyad started to move towards the city. Moving over the landscape in twilight, he ordered his men to gather near the city gates before he even approached them, and to raise a clamour as they see him approach and greet him as if they were

welcoming Husain (a.s.). Now his companions understood their leader's plot!

Soon there was a clamour near the city gates as there was shouting and crying of welcome and greeting, joy and merry. This clamour together with angry slogans against the regime of Umayyads, totally misled the people of the city.

Soon the rumour spread throughout the city that Husain (a.s.) had arrived and was already near the city gates. The city was suddenly mobilized for a welcome and people hurried towards the city gates where a large crowd had already gathered.

As darkness fell, Ibn Ziyad making use of poor visibility entered the city passing through one street after another moving towards the governor's palacial residence: *Darul Imarah* without speaking a word and his face safely concealed under the veil.

The people believed that Husain had come and was first going after the governor to throw him out. The scene was that of a common uprising as people besieged the building of the governor's office. The besieging crowd was angry and impassioned and seemed to threaten to raze the building to ground.

No man who saw himself besieged from all sides, ordered all gates of entry to be closed and guarded.

Ibn Ziyad had anticipated these demonstrations and his scheme was aimed at two objectives: The first objective was to reach the *Darul Imarah* safely unmolested by the crowd; the second objective was to measure from a close distance the people's attachment to Husain (a.s.) and their hatred of Yazid. This would be of much help to him in forming his future plans.

Followed by the greeting crowd and amidst their slogans against the regime of Yazid and Bani Umayyah, he at last reached the building of *Darul Imarah*. No man

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putting his head out of a window, cried out to him, "O son of the Messenger leave us alone and go after your own business." Here Ibn Ziyad first opened his mouth since his entry into the city and in reply to No'man cried out, "Who is the son of the Messenger?! Come on, hurry up and open the door! I am Obaidullah Ibn Ziyad."

No'man was quick to recognize him and soon the gates were opened to let him and his companions in. The door was immediately closed after them.

There was extreme outrage at this impudent trickery which was as much disgusting to the people as it was unusual. As the night came, they dispersed to their homes and the news of Ibn Ziyad's tricky entry into Kufa seemed to have stretched an already strained situation.

### The New Governor

The first night that Ibn Ziyad spent in Kufa was devoted to formal discussions with other officials and supporters of the regime to determine the most effective course of action to "save" Kufa from Husain (a.s.). This was a meeting of historical significance without precedent in the history of Kufa. Men opposed to liberty, freedom and independence conferred together to stop the growing influence of men like Husain (a.s.) and Muslim at any cost.

Needless to say that it was Obaidullah ibn Ziyad who presided over the conference. First was No'man to speak. He explained the current situation and gave a report of the activities of Muslim, Husain's (a.s.) representative. "The situation is crucial and explosive," he emphasized.

Then Obaidullah ibn Ziyad started speaking. "In my opinion, the only alternative left to control the situation is resorting to a policy of threat, suppression and



repression. We should arrest all the leaders of the people, and make use of others who comply and agree to cooperate with us. Otherwise we shall execute them. Naturally, after we treat three or four leaders in this way, the rest will be discouraged and compelled to silence. People will soon be afraid to speak openly against us and gradually the situation will change in our favour." Then Ibn Ziyad introduced his companions as staunch and loyal supporters of Yazid and the regime of Bani Umayyah. "They are men whome I trust and who are willing to sacrifice themselves for this cause," he said.

He also reprimanded No'man for what he called his 'weakness and leniency'. "Had you acted firmly and severely from the first, the current situation would not have come into existence. You should have immediately arrested those who were first to involve themselves in this matter. Had you done it on time, this would not have happened. In any case, now there is no alternative except doing what I have said and shall have to say later on."

"One of the most fundamental things basic to our plan is the organization of a spy network with secret agents cooperating with us. They shall bring us exact reports of what is going on under the surface so that we are never caught unaware. If we start immediately with a handful of effective men, soon the way to our success will be cleared, bringing us final victory."

He again admonished No'man for his ignorance in this matter. "It seems you have no idea of the effectiveness of a good espionage team. Through a good espionage (security) organization, we can get a good picture of the general condition of opponents as well as the minute details of their activities. There is no alternative to such an organization and we should immediately decide for selection of persons who can be trusted

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to discharge this duty."

He introduced his slave Mo'aqqal as being extraordinarily suitable for this work. Two or three other men were chosen for the time being so that more could be employed later as necessary.

With this decision and selection, the work of the meeting came to end several hours after midnight.

The results that were drawn from this meeting was adoption of an unscrupulous policy of atrocious repression and merciless suppression.

In the morning, a *Moazzin* calling from the top of the mosque's minaret called the people to gather. Curiosity about the current conditions and general anxiety drew a large crowd of people to the mosque.

Ibn Ziyad came to the mosque and mounting the *minbar* addressed the people. He told them: "I have been appointed by Yazid as the new governor of Kufa so as to take charge of your welfare and protect and safeguard the frontiers of your land. I will not allow any strangers to interfere in your affairs and Yazid has commanded me to treat you with justice. He has ordered me to relieve the poor in this city and return their rights to the oppressed and deprived. I shall treat those who are obedient with fatherly kindness, but will treat opponents and the disobedient with the sword."

"O people," he threatened them. "be afraid for your lives and do not subject yourselves recklessly to bloody death. Do not think that I am only threatening you. On the contrary, if you ignore my warning, you shall soon prove to have been absolutely wrong!"

He said this, dismounted from the *minbar* and then immediately ordered the leading personalities of the city to be summoned into his presence. Then, when they came, he warned them and asked them to give the names of all persons they knew to be working against the

government. He demanded that a list of supporters be sent to him. Moreover, he asked them for an assurance that men of their family and tribe would not help the opponents. "Everyone who is thinking of rebellion must rest assured," he warned, "that I will hang him from the ceiling of his own house." Soon after, his policement started making arrests. People were arrested on mere suspicion and were sent to prison. It is said that the prisons of Kufa were overflowing with prisoners.

When news of this gathering in the mosque was brought to Muslim ibn Aqeel, as a precaution, at midnight, he changed his place of stay from the house of his host to that of Haani, one of the most outstanding personalities of the Shi'ites of Kufa. There, friends and supporters came to see him with utmost caution and under secrecy. There, they talked about the current situation and discussed future plans and at the same time continued to take further allegiances from those who could be considered trustworthy. Gradually, the number of supporters reached about twenty thousand men determined to fight with him against Ibn Ziyad and his forces. Haani was of the opinion, however, that it was still early and that it was wiser to wait.

On the other side, Obaidullah ibn Ziyad had almost completely controlled the former disturbances. With every day that passed he summoned other tribal chiefs and compelled them to submission with various promises and threats. He was aware that under such outwardly calm conditions, Ibn Aqeel was not sitting idle and was certainly making preparations. Remembering the violent demonstrations of loyalty to Husain (a.s.) on his day of entry into the city, he was convinced that Husain's (a.s.) supporters must be making plans and preparations for future struggle.

Obaidullah felt threatened by the outward unnatural

silence knowing it to be only a facade created by his own suppressive and repressive tactics. He knew that such a silence is more dangerous than noisy demonstrations. It is only under such apparent peace that the revolutionaries actively pursue their plans and preparations, and then, all of a sudden, throw a silent city into sky-high flames of revolution.

With knowledge of these things, Ibn Ziyad came to give his greatest concentration on the espionage team of which he had talked about in the first meeting after having entered Kufa.

He called his slave Mo'aqqal and giving him three thousand dirhams, told him, "Take this money and try to find a friend of Muslim and give it to him saying, 'I have brought this little amount to give to Muslim so that it might help him in his struggle against his enemies. May this small service please God'....In short you must try to present yourself as a staunchly loyal friend and Shiah of Husain (a.s.). Find your way into their organization and discover their plans, activities, the hiding place of Muslim and the leading personalities involved with him in this enterprise." He told Mo'aqqal to be very careful giving no sign of any contact with the regime. "I know that your job is a dangerous one", he told him, "but by contrast, you will see that your reward too shall be as great if you successfully execute this mission."

Mo'aqqal took the money and went straight to the main city mosque. Appearing to be a devout religious man, he became busy with prayer. As he prayed, his ears and eyes were alertly watching that which went on around him. Some time passed as he pretended to engage himself in prayer. Suddenly he heard someone introducing Muslim ibn 'Ausaja as the man who took allegiance on Husain's (a.s.) behalf. His heart was delighted at what

he had heard. He got up and approaching Muslim ibn 'Ausaja sat down beside him. After prayers, he addressed him in a soft tone, "O servant of God! I am a Syrian and God has blessed me with a passionate love for the House of the Prophet (s.a.w.a.s.). I have heard that someone has come to Kufa to take allegiance for Husain and I came to give my allegiance. But the situation is as you see...." Saying this he burst into tears assuming such sincere and genuine appearance that 'Ausaja was touched. Then Mo'aqqal wiping his tears took out his money saying, "I have brought this humble sum. Take it and hand it over to him."

In short, Mo'aqqal was successful in gaining Muslim ibne 'Ausaja's confidence and his tactics enabled him to find his way into Muslim ibn Aqeel's presence at Haani's house the same night and see and hear that which took place there.

Soon Ibn Ziyad had Haani arrested through a plot when he came to see Ibn Ziyad, accepting an invitation to visit the governor. Haani was cross-questioned by Ibn Ziyad and had to confess his role when Mo'aqqal was produced as a witness. Ibn Ziyad demanded of Haani to hand over Muslim ibn Aqeel, who, he was sure, was given asylum by Haani and was living under his protection. He tried every means of compulsion and persuasion to force Haani in this regard but he refused bluntly being an aware and enlightened man who had known thoroughly the deceptive tactics of Mo'awiyah's regime. He spoke resolutely in reply to this demand saying, "If I hand over Muslim, that will destroy my position not only in this world but also in the next. This is opposed to my welfare in this world as well as in the Hereafter. How do you expect me to hand over Muslim to you and save my life. With what face shall I meet my tribe and friends. By God, even if I had no-

body, I would never hand him over to you. I would certainly prefer death to such an action."

The argument went on and soon when persuasion and inducement failed, the time for threats and physical torture came when Ibn Ziyad angrily declared, "Haani, you have no alternative; either you are going to hand over Muslim or I shall cut off your head."

"Under no condition shall I hand over Muslim! As to your taking my life, it will prove to be expensive for you," Haani replied resolutely.

"You are threatening me?!" cried Obaidullah as he pulled his sword and rushed to kill Haani then and there. Here others interfered and took away the sword from Ibn Ziyad. Haani, his head and face bleeding, was taken out and put into a room to be kept under armed guard.

Haani's nephew, through whose efforts and persuasions Haani had accepted the invitation to visit Ibn Ziyad, was angered when he saw things taking an aspect entirely different from what he had expected. He angrily protested against this mistreatment of his uncle whom Ibn Ziyad had wanted so much to see, considering him to be an honourable and respectable personality of Kufa. But Ibn Ziyad replied, "No more nonsense! Don't raise your voice. We punish culprits at the first opportunity we get!"

Not much time passed before Haani's father-in-law, Omar ibn Hajjaj with his tribe, having armed themselves gathered outside the governor's building and besieged it protesting against Haani's arrest and mistreatment. "If Haani is not allowed to leave unharmed," they threatened, "we shall kill everyone of you."

Ibn Ziyad felt endangered at the situation he had created. He again resorted to his deceitful tactics asking a mullah who was there to go outside and pacify the people. The mullah, who knew well the manner in which

Haani had been treated by the governor, went out and addressed the people in this way: "Brothers! Why have you raised this clamour and besieged the building? The *Amir* has been informed about your demand and so he has asked me to speak to Haani and tell you that he is perfectly safe and well. He is held in great esteem and honour by the *Amir*. The *Amir* has enormous liking for great personalities. Do not believe the silly things that you have been told by someone. Now disperse and go after your own business."

Omar ibn Hajjaj was satisfied on hearing these words and asked his men to disperse, seeing no point in persisting in their demand. The people dispersed at this.

Having resolved to act with greater harshness, Ibn Ziyad went to the mosque accompanied by his guards. There, in his speech, he again warned the people severely, threatening the disobedient with certain death. He asked the people to capitulate and submit themselves. "In that case I will accept their excuse; but if they refuse, they will be caught and punished."

Ibn Ziyad, finishing his speech, had not yet descended from the *minbar* when somebody brought the news that Muslim ibn Aqeel was coming towards the mosque with his men. Hearing this, with great speed, Ibn Ziyad fled with his men to the building of *Darul Imarah* and having entered it safely, ordered all doors to be closed.

### The Last Wave of Revolution in Kufa

As soon as Muslim ibn Aqeel was informed about what had happened to Haani he ordered the callers to announce that his supporters assemble in the mosque. With the first call resounding in the streets of Kufa, four thousand people from the neighbourhood collected in the mosque and soon the mosque and its surrounding area was full of crowds of his supporters. Muslim appoin-

ted a leader for each of the tribes which supported him and with well formed lines they moved towards the governor's residency besieging it. Here Ibn Ziyad let out the last arrow in his quiver: utilizing the policy of divide and rule, which was to prove an immediate success. He called some men of influence belonging to different tribes and tribal nobility sending them back to their tribes to do mischievous propaganda, dispersing the people through a common tactic: threatening the people with the army from Damascus which, it was declared, was expected any moment.

These obsequious men, who are ever willing to depart from every vestige of human dignity and willing to abase themselves to any degree of degradation, entered the ranks of the people coming out of the residency, and began to disperse the people through various ways. One would say to people: "Don't you have wife and children? Don't you want to live? Call off these stupid demonstrations. You do not know anything of the powerful troops of Yazid. It is to your welfare that you stop worrying yourselves and endangering your lives for such matters. What difference does it make whether Ibn Ziyad is the governor or somebody else?" Another cried: "Fellows! The night is drawing near and time is over for this kind of senseless game. Go to your home and family. Fear the Syrian troops. The Amir has been given special authority to reward the supporters and punish the opponents severely."

Yet, another raised a flag crying, "Whoever comes under my flag shall be secure from the governor's fury: otherwise, the rest shall be doomed to death and destruction!"

At last, unfortunately, the people dispersed as a result of these devilish designs and Muslim's hold over his supporters was entirely paralysed . . . to the extent that



when he returned to the mosque after sunset hardly thirty men had gathered to pray with him and even they stole away silently after the prayers. When Muslim came out of the Mosque after his prayers, there was nobody who had stayed by his side!!!

Sunk deeply in thoughts which revolved about the future of Islam and the prevailing conditions of the Muslim society, he walked away silently and aimlessly in the dark streets of Kufa.

He stopped near a house, seeing a lady anxiously waiting for her son at the door-steps (a kind of curfew prevailed in the streets of Kufa and people were afraid to step out of their homes). Calling the lady, he asked her for some water to drink. When Muslim had drunk the bowl of water brought to him, the lady carried the bowl back inside the house and as she returned to the door was surprised to find him still standing there resting against the wall deeply involved in his thoughts. "Why don't you go to your home," inquired the lady, "don't you know about the state of affairs in the city? It is not right for you to stay here."

Muslim got up suddenly and replied, "I don't have any home in this city..." Before he could finish his sentence, the lady asked him, "But don't you belong to this city?" "No," came the quiet reply. "I am Muslim ibn Aqeel." The lady was surprised at hearing the name of the stranger and politely invited him to come inside her house. She led the way and Muslim followed her. Muslim was guided to a lonely chamber at a distance away from the rooms used by the host. She prepared the room, and the bed for him to rest and brought the dinner, but saw that the guest had no desire to rest or eat his food being deeply engaged in his prayers.

Soon the son returned and was quick to observe that some guest had come to stay in the house. The

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mother, after taking a promise to keep the matter secret, told him the name of the honoured guest who had unexpectedly come to their house.

Muslim spent the last night of his life in prayers as the morning of 9th Dhul Hajjah of the year 60 of Hijrah rose.

Back at the residency, when the people had completely dispersed from around it, seeing the clamour raised by Muslim's supporters subside to a totally hushed silence, Ibn Ziyad asked his men to investigate whether Muslim, with his supporters, had not taken a position of hiding near the mosque. After assuring himself that there was no danger to be afraid of, he came to the mosque accompanied by guards and ordered the callers to announce that everybody who came to the mosque for the *isha'* prayers shall be secure from prosecution. Soon the mosque was crowded by people, and with Ibn Ziyad leading the prayers, the men of Kufa lined behind him to pray — the same people who not many hours before had prayed behind Muslim ibn Aqeel!

After the prayers, Ibn Ziyad mounted the *minbar* and again repeated the same words he had said before again and again. "O people, didn't you see how Muslim came here and created disturbances and trouble. Anyhow, thank God the trouble is over." After this speech he turned to the chief of police, Husayn ibn Numair, and said to him, "Woe to you if Muslim escapes from Kufa tonight. Put the city doors under severe control. I give you complete authority over the lives and houses of the people to find Muslim as soon as you can, and bring him to me." Then he turned to the people and said, "Woe to him who allows Muslim to enter his house and does not inform us. Secondly, whoever brings information about his whereabouts shall receive a good reward."

That night – the blackest of nights in the history of Kufa – passed, and the son of Muslim's hostess hurried to receive the "award" announced the night before by Ibn Ziyad.

A company of seventy armed men under Obaidullah Salmah was dispatched to arrest Muslim.

Muslim had come out of his chamber hearing the sound of horses' hoofs as the company of seventy men entered the house. Muslim pulled out his sword in defence and in the first attack drove the assailants into the street. A number were killed in the unequal battle and at last, Muslim, cheated by a deceptive promise of protection and asylum by Ibn Ziyad's men, put his sword back into its cover.

Muslim was taken before Ibn Ziyad who reprimanded his men on hearing of their promise of asylum to Muslim, saying, "He must indeed be put to death." He then turned to Muslim and said, "What is it that you are up to? Why are you creating conflict and discord between Muslims, you trouble-maker?"

"We are not trouble makers," replied Muslim, "it was Mu'awiyah and men like your father, Ziyad, who were creators of trouble, discord and disagreement among Muslims.

Muslim, seeing his death near at hand, asked to be allowed to dictate his last will. This Ibn Ziyad permitted. Muslim called for 'Omar ibn Sa'd and after telling him about how he should be buried, told him, "What is more important than everything else, you must write a letter to Husain and inform him about the change of conditions here. Stop him from coming to this place, since I have already written that the people of Kufa have maintained their loyalty to him." In spite of the fact that Muslim's will to 'Omar ibn Sa'd was supposed to be kept secret, after Muslim had finished speaking,

'Omar turned to Ibn Ziyad and disclosed everything that Muslim had said.

After conveying his last will, Muslim was taken to the roof of the governor's residency and beheaded. His body was thrown down from the top of the building. After killing Muslim, when Ibn Ziyad was assured of his control over the people of Kufa, he ordered Haani also to be killed. Haani was beheaded and like Muslim, his body too was thrown down from the roof of *Darul Imarah*.

Soon Ibn Ziyad dispatched a letter to Yazid accompanied by the heads of Muslim and Haani. Yazid was overjoyed when he received this news. Proud of his "skillful" governor, he sent an encouraging letter to Ibn Ziyad, honouring his "valuable services" to the Syrian throne. Also, in that letter, he gave orders about Husain ibn Ali (a.s.): "I have been informed that Husain is moving towards Kufa. I ask you to keep a strict control of the roads and the traffic. Kill everyone found to be a suspect. Send to me daily reports of events."

Ibn Ziyad had already done what Yazid had asked him to do; that is, he had imposed a strict curfew on the region of Iraq, meticulously controlling all traffic on the roads and near frontiers.

### **The Third Martyr**

The situation in Kufa had become "calm" and under the control of Ibn Ziyad. Life became "normal" for the people of Kufa as they had surrendered to the regime. A certain fear could be read from their faces, however, as the people expected the murderous regime to prepare for the most grievous crime of human history.

One of these days, Abdullah ibn Yaqtar, a messenger from Husain (a.s.) was arrested by the officials. He confessed that he had brought a message from Husain

(a.s.) which he had destroyed before being caught. However, he agreed to their demand to address the people from the *minbar* at the mosque, and openly condemn Husain (a.s.) and his supporters. After the noon prayers, he went over to the *mimber* and, after praising Ali and his family, denounced Mu'awiyah and Bani Umayyah and said, "O people of Kufa! Know that Husain is coming towards you so do not fall short in your duty towards him. I had brought a letter from him which I could not, unfortunately, deliver to you. But thank God that I had fulfilled my duty even if it had to be at the cost of my life...."

Abdullah had not finished his words, that he was dragged down from the *minbar* and ordered to be killed.

#### **Towards Karbala**

As stated before, Husain ibn Ali (a.s.) had left Maccah after receiving Muslim's letter. The governor of Maccah sent a small company of horsemen to stop him. But after a brief skirmish they returned to Maccah and told the governor that Husain (a.s.) could not be made to turn away from his resolve. Husain (a.s.) was not simply going from Maccah towards Kufa, rather he was approaching the fulfilment of his real objective with determination and resolve. As we have said before, his ultimate objective was to deliver Islam and Muslims from the oppressive rule of the tribe of Bani Umayyah. His real objective was to awaken the Islamic world so that the people would act to overturn the oppressive regime. His ultimate objective was to resurrect Islamic laws and regulations which faced obliteration at the brutal hands of Mu'awiyah and his son, Yazid. If others could not see, Husain (a.s.) himself saw very clearly that Islam faced a rapid decline and ultimate annihilation under the black

shadow of the regime of Bani Umayyah. The intricate explanations of friends and their apparently sincere advice failed to hide this shining reality from his eyes: that Islam was doomed if an urgent step was not taken for its deliverance. He was firmly resolved to move forward towards his objective, whatever it would cost. Indeed he considered every kind of sacrifice in this way to be only a cheap price for attainment of this lofty objective.

### Unpleasant News

Husain's (a.s.) caravan was pursuing its journey calmly in the desert when he received the news of the death of Muslim ibn Aqeel and Haani in Kufa from two Kufans who had left the city after its people succumbed to Ibn Ziyad's suppression.

Husain (a.s.) received the news in the presence of his companions and, tears appearing in his eyes, repeatedly said, "*Inna lilla he wa inna ilaihe rāje'oon*" (Truly we are from God and truly we return unto Him). Then he turned towards his companions and said, "May God's mercy be on Muslim and Haani. They fulfilled their duty and departed towards lasting felicity and Paradise. The rest remains for us to accomplish."

At this stage, when Husain's (a.s.) representative in Kufa had been killed, and there was no hope in Kufa and the Kufans had it been Husain's (a.s.) objective to grab power and rule, it would have been senseless for him to continue his journey towards Kufa and pursue his opposition to Yazid's regime. But this was not what had made Husain (a.s.) rise in opposition to Yazid. He knew very well what his aim was, and had resolved not to keep silent in face of oppression and dictatorship; he was determined not to sit and watch the rulers destroy Islam and profane its sanctities. He was firmly resolved

to give new life to Islam, even if it had to be at the cost of his own life and misfortunes of his family.

### **The Last Halt**

The caravan continued on its movement and, on the way, people joined Husain's party or deserted him as his objectives became more clear to them and as the destination towards which he was bound became more perceptible.

As the caravan moved quietly through the waterless desert, under the burning heat of the Arabian sun at the peak of summer, someone sighted an army of mounted men on the horizon across the vast expanse of burning sands. A battallion of a thousand men, under the charge of the general Hurr ibn Yazid Riyahi was approaching Husain's (a.s.) caravan. They and their horses were in extremely bad shape due to intense thirst and suffering the unbearable summer heat. Their water supplies had long since exhausted and Husain (a.s.), seeing their condition, ordered that all of them be given water. Men happily quenched their unbearable thirst and even their horses were satiated by Husain's (a.s.) companions, to the last man and beast.

This kindness delayed the exchange of words between the leaders of the two groups, until the time of noon prayers drew near. After the call of prayers, all men made preparations for prayers. Before prayers, Husain (a.s.) delivered a sermon in which, after praising God and praying for blessings upon the Prophet (s.a.w.a.s), he said, "O people of Kufa, you have invited me to help you establish justice and truth. If you still stick to your invitation, extend your hand and swear allegiance. Otherwise, speak out frankly so that I will know what to decide and take some other course." Nobody said anything in reply

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and there was a total silence.

Husain (a.s.) asked Hurr to lead his own men for prayers while he would lead his own. To this Hurr replied, "No, O son of the Prophet of God! You lead the prayers and we shall all together pray behind you."

When the prayers were over, half of Hurr's men did not join him and stood apart here and there in scattered numbers; doubt and hesitation stopping them from gathering together.

Late in the afternoon, at the time of *asr* prayers, Hurr said to Husain (a.s.), "I have no information about these messengers and letters that you speak about." At this, Husain (a.s.) ordered for the letters to be brought in. Two sacks full of letters were brought and dumped before Hurr. When Hurr saw the letters, he was extremely surprised and said, "But, I myself have not written any letter. I have nothing to do with you. My only duty now is to take you under my charge and hand you over to Ibn Ziyad in Kufa." To this Husain (a.s.) replied, "You cannot do any such thing!"

"Why can't I?" asked Hurr getting agitated. The conversation became tense until Husain (a.s.) said, "May thy mother mourn for thee! What do you want of me?" These words made Hurr very angry, but controlling his feelings, he said, "If any man in the whole of Arabia had taken my mother's name, I would have replied to him in the same way. But as to you, I do not know of a way except that of respect and honour, to take the name of your mother, Fatimah, the daughter of the Messenger!"

"Then what do you want", asked Husain (a.s.).

"You must accompany me to Kufa" came the reply.

"Death is nearer and easier for you then obtaining my obedience to this command", said Husain (a.s.). The conversation went on until Hurr suggested, "Husain,



now that you do not agree to accompany me to Kufa, select a path that does not go towards either Kufa or Madina and I shall accompany you. In the meantime, I shall write to Kufa and ask for orders. God willing, I hope not to be involved in any sinful action in your matter.”

Husain (a.s.) agreed to this and they moved together on a third course that went neither towards Kufa nor Madina. After they had travelled some distance, Hurr said to Husain (a.s.), “Husain, for God’s sake reconsider your decision. I can tell that if this affair is drawn towards battle and conflict, you shall be slain.” Husain (a.s.) replied, “Do you threaten us with death and martyrdom?” Then he recited a few verses of poetry which convey the following meaning:

“Indeed we march towards death and certainly death is not a defeat for the brave! Yes, death is not a shame if one dies for truth and for the sake of Islam. How much does the dress of martyrdom suit the courageous, when heavenly men give away their lives in stirrups of truth and rectitude; for certainly, in this struggle against oppressors, they are delivered from every sign of bondage and submission to tyranny!”

This apparently aimless and goal-less caravan moving under the charge of Hurr, passed through the desert and at last neared Nainawa, when a lonely rider approaching fast, caught the attention of all. The messenger drew near and going straight towards Hurr, saluted and presented a letter that he had brought from Kufa. Hurr read the letter and at once started implementing the orders that it contained.

The letter read: “As soon as you receive this letter, force Husain to stop his journey and make him come down on a territory away from water and far from inhabited areas.”

Husain (a.s.) insisted, however, that the caravan be allowed to come down in Ghadiriyyah, a nearby village of Nainawa. Hurr did not agree saying he had no alternative except obeying the orders he had received.

Zuhair ibn Qayn, one of the eminent persons accompanying Husain (a.s.) and who had voluntarily joined Husain (a.s.) on the way, came forward and said to him, "If you give permission, we shall fight with these people. This is much easier than facing what may come up later."

Husain (a.s.) refused saying, "I do not want to be the one to start the battle and bloodshed."

The caravan was forced to come down in the desert and with the minimum of choice left to him, Husain (a.s.) chose the place called Karbala to unload his burden and erect the tents. At a relatively considerable distance from him, the thousand-man battalion of Hurr too came down. Both sides engaged in arranging their camps with an unknown and dark future facing them.

This final halt of the caravan took place before noon on the 2nd of Moharram of the year 61 of Hijrah.

### **A Halt forever?**

This caravan came to halt so that humanity could continue its journey on the road to perfection. This caravan fell into the captivity of the highway robbers of the road of human perfection. It came down in a waterless, uninhabited desert for the caravan of humanity to be delivered from the attacks of power-hungry oppressors, on its journey towards everlasting felicity. Through its coming down in this barren landscape, it watered the lands of human spiritual, political and social life with its own blood, so as to keep it always fertile and fruitful. This caravan landed in the midst of a waterless desert

so that the future generations could live in prosperity and freedom. This caravan accepted deprivation from a normal happy life, so as to deliver humanity from the clutches of tyrants and oppressors.

The leader of this caravan firmly declared, "I shall not be the one who first starts this battle and bloodshed," in order to deliver the throats of an oppressed people from the swords of blood-thirsty tyrants.

This caravan had given up everything so as to deliver humanity from the yoke of oppression and gather it under the standard of the sublime teachings of Islam.

### Friends and Traitors

When the tents were erected, Husain (a.s.) assembled his friends and companions and delivered a sermon. To summarize, after praising God, he spoke thus to his companions: "My friends and companions! The things are as you yourselves behold. The world has degenerated. Ugly actions are regarded as acceptable and taken for granted and fair behavior has been abandoned. In truth, nothing of value adheres anymore to life. Do you not see that truth is not followed and falsehood is not rejected? In such a world and in such conditions, what can a *momin* desire except to hurry to meet God? I do not see deliverance and felicity except in death, and do not find a life with tyrants and oppressors to be anything more than intolerable agony and disgrace."

As Imam Husain (a.s.) finished his speech, Zuhair ibne Qayn asked for permission to speak. He said, "Even if life were eternal and everlasting, we would prefer to be martyred with you and fight with you." After him Hilal stood up and said, "Apart from the desire to meet God, we have no other objective in view, and shall fight by your side until we are martyred." Then after him

Burair spoke, and after him, one after another, each of the companions declared his loyalty to Husain (a.s.) and his willingness to die with him.

### Husain's Last Letter

Though there was little hope left from Kufa and the Kufans, Imam Husain (a.s.) decided to make a last attempt and fulfil his obligation. Perhaps the conditions still permitted them to rise for his assistance and aid him in the attainment of their sacred objective, which was no more than deliverance of Islam. He knew well that all the roads to Kufa were being strictly controlled. The city doors were kept on tight watch and the traffic in and out of the city was under firm control. There remained, however, the possibility that the people of Kufa would move again, were they to know that Husain's (a.s.) caravan had come down at a place not far from their city. Ink and pen were brought in and Husain (a.s.) wrote the letter.

He wrote:

"In the Name of God, the Merciful, the Compassionate:

"This is a letter from Husain to Sulaiman, Musayyab, Rifa'a, Abdullah and all the other believers.

"Friends! You know the words of my grandfather, the Prophet (s.a.w.a.s.), who said: 'When a people see a tyrant breaking the limits of the Almighty, permitting what He has forbidden, acting against the *Sunnah* of the Messenger and ruling over the people with tyranny and sinfulness and oppressing them, and still they continue to keep their silence and do not take any step to stop him, then God too will drive them towards the place which they rightly deserve (Hellfire). My Friends! You know that the Bani Umayyah follow Satan and disobey the commands of God. You know what corruption they have publicized on earth and to what extent they have suspended the law of the Almighty, permitting what He has forbidden and forbidding that which He has

allowed.

“My friends, you know that I, more than anybody else, deserve the right of *khilafat* and only under justice is it possible to be delivered of oppression and exploitation.

“O people of Kufa! It was you who wrote the large number of letters and sent so many messengers. It was you who had sent all those invitations and gave hope-raising promises. Now I have answered your call and come towards you. If you have remained faithful to your promise, then you have taken your own share from life and taken the right road to felicity and deliverance from tyranny and oppression. If, however, you are now ashamed and regretful, having broken your covenant, then it is not something new and not without precedent; since it was you who have similarly treated my father and brother in the past, and lately, my cousin. If that is so, then you have ruined your lives with your own hands and closed all doors to everlasting felicity!

“Know that God has always been my Protector and Helper, and it is not I who is in need of you. Wassalam.”

The letter was written and handed over to one of the companions, Qays. Qays started towards Kufa moving with great care. Unfortunately he fell into the hands of ibn Ziyad’s guards outside Kufa and was killed.

The news of his martyrdom intensely grieved Imam Husain (a.s.). With tears in his eyes, he raised his hands towards heavens and prayed for him, “My God, appoint for us and our Shi’ahs a noble station near Thee and award them with Thy Mercy and Thy bounties. Indeed Thou have power over everything.”

### **The Situation at Kufa**

As we have already described, Kufa had been broken into submission through the devilish tactics of ibn Ziyad and, especially after the deaths of Muslim ibn Aqeel and Haani, all of the tribal chiefs and important personalities of Kufa were forced into a state of silent submission and surrender. A strange silence and a base

peace had overtaken Kufa. This silence spoke of further degradation of the inmates of the city and this tragic peace represented total shattering of their sense of duty towards God and respect for their own humanity. Everyone went after his work as the people of the city had given up the courage to act and fulfil their duty in a situation that they themselves had created. However, there was no sign of happiness and satisfaction on the faces. The military government had extended its powerful hold over the lives of the people and was in complete control of the city doors and walls. The very signs of freedom and liberty had been effaced from the scene of public life. Kufa, once a city of free men, had now become a prison!

Ibn Ziyad had "brought peace" to Kufa and taken "control of the situation." At this point another letter arrived from Yazid in which he had accorded praise and encouragement to ibn Ziyad. This letter also contained orders about Husain (a.s.) and the lines on which ibn Ziyad was to act were laid out.

Now the job that lay before him was to deliver the government of Yazid from a still greater danger that confronted it: Husain ibn Ali (a.s.). Now was the time when he could proceed to the next step in his programme. He ordered Husain ibn Numair, the head of the police, to keep a tight control over the city gates and the surrounding region and to stop any movement in and out of the city. Then he gathered all the mobile troops stationed in the far regions of the desert around Kufa that guarded the borders and roads. These he put under the command of Hurr ibn Yazid Riyahi, whom he ordered to arrest Husain (a.s.) and his companions, or at least to stop him from proceeding towards Kufa.

Now he had to deal with the very basic cause of this revolution against the regime of Bani Umayyah. Was it

possible to deal with Husain (a.s.) with the same severity as he had treated his representative, Muslim ibne Aqeel? Was it possible to crush him with the same brutality as he had suppressed the people of Kufa? Or must he proceed with care and mildness? Ibn Ziyad's mind was involved in these thoughts as he meditated about the possible ways of handling this difficulty when a messenger from Madina brought a letter from its governor.

Waleed, the governor of Madina, had written to ibn Ziyad: "I have been informed that Husain ibn Ali has proceeded towards Iraq. You must be very careful lest you bring on yourself total ruin. Be careful, since a small mistake can ruin your world and your hereafter. If you make the smallest amount of violation against him, then rest assured that you will have earned infamy and disgrace for yourself in both the worlds."

This was a letter from a respectable official of the regime of Yazid; it was written by one who belonged to the ruling class and even belonged to the tribe of Bani Umayyah. However, it had no significance compared to the letter that had just come from Yazid in which ibn Ziyad had been given complete authority to deal with the situation in any way he thought fit, and to crush this opposition at any cost whatsoever.

Ibn Ziyad compared the contents of these two letters and gave thought to issues that surrounded them when a third letter arrived from Hurr. Hurr had reported that Husain (a.s.) had been stopped at Karbala and had been forced to camp there under his surveillance. Hurr had asked for further orders.

Ibn Ziyad knew well that the people of Kufa would not be willing to fight a battle against Husain (a.s.) that simply. He understood that basically it was a dangerous move to fight Husain (a.s.) with an army raised from the people of Kufa. Obviously it was not a simple thing to

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take any action against Husain (a.s.) – a man widely loved and held in great respect and honour.

On the other hand, he was afraid that if action was not taken immediately, and if Husain (a.s.) were to approach Kufa, the people would welcome him and all his endeavours and cunning hitherto could be rendered fruitless. If that were to happen, Kufa would blow up in revolutionary zeal and not only Kufa but the rest of Iraq could go out of his hands and the control of Yazid's regime.

The letter from Hurr made it apparent that Husain (a.s.) was, to some extent, in his hands and completely under his surveillance. Ibn Ziyad was hurriedly making his calculations. What steps was he to take? Both the solutions of this problem posed certain difficulties. Was he to let Husain (a.s.) go away after he had come into his hands without taking any further step? He knew that if the news of Husain's (a.s.) opposition reached the other corners of the Muslim domain, a greater and more certain danger would threaten the regime

He came to this conclusion: it is not possible to keep Husain (a.s.) always under surveillance and maintain his control over his moves. There was no alternative except to send troops and build up pressure upon him so that he could be coerced to offer his allegiance to Yazid. If Husain (a.s.) submitted, that would be the end of the problem; otherwise there was no way except an attack and a bloody massacre of Husain (a.s.) and his companions.

In order to carry out this design, ibn Ziyad needed a commander who possessed the requisite influence and popularity with the people. If an outstanding personality of Kufa could be persuaded to accept this job and lead an army to fight Husain (a.s.), it was possible to make others follow through gifts of money and promises. With



this design in mind, he evaluated the various popular personalities of Kufa one by one for their suitability in this regard. All of a sudden his mind stopped on the right person : Omar ibn Sa'd. When he asked about Omar's whereabouts, he was told that lately he had received the orders to take up the governorship of Ray, in Persia, and was making preparations to leave.

Ibn Ziyad at once ordered for Omar to be summoned in his presence and, in case he had already left, to be stopped in mid-journey and returned to Kufa.

Omar came. Ibn Ziyad told him, "Why don't you co-operate with us? With this great opportunity in your hands why don't you help us? This difficulty that we have encountered can be solved, I think, only at your hands. I am convinced that with your special gifts for tact and expedience, you will be able to quieten this turmoil most speedily."

Omar ibn Sa'd asked ibn Ziyad to be more explicit. Ibn Ziyad explained, "It is nothing. The issue is that of Husain's coming to Iraq as you may already be informed. Right now he is encamped at Karbala and is almost under our surveillance. However well I have thought, I could not think of anyone better than you to take up this mission. Go there and finish off the trouble as soon as possible."

Omar ibn Sa'd was shocked at the abrupt prospect of what seemed to be an unpleasant proposal and replied in a plaintive voice, "Please excuse me and find someone else to do this job."

After conversing with Omar ibn Sa'd for a while, ibn Ziyad soon discovered the right point of Omar's weakness. He knew that Omar was not a man to be enticed by money, to be allured by banquets or to be persuaded by the charm of feminine beauty. Nor was he a man to be forced into submission through threats and

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warnings. He was a man who had grown up in the school of his father, a politician, and was given to the charms of power and political station. He had watched scenes of battle and had enjoyed being present on scenes of heated political struggle for power. This was the only point from which he could be subjected to any pressure.

After all persuasions failed, he said to Omar ibn Sa'd, "Return that order for governorship of Ray. This issue of Husain (a.s.) is not so important; we shall find someone else to do it. All we wanted to do was to give you the due honour and utilize your position in the society of Kufa." These words made Omar shiver at the prospect of such a loss. At last, much softening his voice, he replied, "Why do you get angry so fast? What does this matter have to do with the governorship of Ray? Give me some time to think it over."

Ibn Ziyad was adamant and demanded of Omar a quick decision and a final reply. However, as a special favour he granted him a period of one night, and Omar was to declare his final decision early the next morning.

### **The Blinding Lust for Power**

There is a saying among Arabs: "The love of anything makes man blind and deaf." The governorship of Ray, even if it was to be dearly paid for by the murder of Imam Husain (a.s.), was still worth it in the eyes of Omar ibn Sa'd. The governorship of a province, even if it was to be attained at the price of one's conscience, honour and humanity, was still a valuable thing to be yearned for in the eyes of Omar. For him power and position was something that was the highest of goals with respect to which everything else was only a means. With this working principle engrained in his soul, he spent the whole night thinking about this matter. He saw the ghastly ugliness of the deed that he was commis-

sioned to undertake. He saw the shame and disgrace that would be his lot on the Day of Judgement. But in the end, everything faded in front of the glory and pomp that radiated from the very idea of the governorship of Ray. Its lustre and brilliance did its work on a mind that was most susceptible to it. It drew a thick curtain over his eyes and closed all doors to the rumbles of his conscience. With his eyes blinded by this false glory and ears deafened by the clamour of this pomp, his soul saw nothing before it other than the governorship of Ray. The whole of the universe and the sun and everything else had disappeared behind this thick brilliant cloud:

“Should I forego this governorship of Ray, which I have always yearned for . . . or should I take upon myself this sin of murdering Husain?”

A man whose first reaction was to bluntly refuse having anything to do with this bloody and ghastly enterprise, was soon to give away under the satanic temptations of power . . . and in one night slid down into the dark valley of blindfolded crime and stupefying degeneration. Of course his first step was self-delusion. He said to himself, “I will indeed go to Karbala and try my best to make a breakthrough with peaceful negotiations.” He did not realize that on this steep and slippery road, a moment would soon come when he would not have the power to stop or turn back, but the further he moved ahead, the faster he would have to traverse the way to decline, ruin and indignity . . . the way to Hell, from which God has warned all mankind. With this illusion brought about by his love of power and prestige, he was convinced that the problem could be solved peacefully and without any blood-shed. Therefore he finally decided to accept this commission to go to Karbala.

The next morning, after seeing Omar ibn Sa’d and having been informed of his acceptance, ibn Ziyad

mounted the *minbar* in the central mosque of Kufa and spoke harshly against Husain (a.s.). He called the people to battle against Husain (a.s.) and attracting them with tempting promises of rewards and riches, gathered a large number of men ready to fight under the command of Omar ibn Sa'd.

In his speech, he said, after praising God and blessing the Prophet (s.a.w.a.s.): "O people! Now you are forced to accept the guardianship of Aal Sufyan and live under their benign protection. You have observed that this family has ruled in a way that your hearts desired. Now it is the turn of Yazid. You know about his most cultivated manners and recognize his kindly and virtuous ways. You have seen his kindly and openhanded treatment of the public. During his reign, you have observed the safety and security on highways and the traffic of the caravans moves without any danger posing it. So it was during the days of his father, Mu'awiyah, when the same security, law and order prevailed throughout the country. Now, after him, his son looks after the people with respect and honour, generously helping the needy and increasing your livelihood. Presently, he has ordered me to increase your share from the public treasury and send you to defeat the enemy, Husain. Now comply with his commands and obey his orders!"

Within a short time an army of four thousand armed men from Kufa was marching towards Karbala under the command of Omar ibn Sa'd.

Working upon the same lines, after Omar ibn Sa'd's departure, Ibn Ziyad gathered more soldiers who were dispatched in different numbers under the command of Shabath ibn Rib'i, Shimr ibn Dhil-Jaushan and others towards Karbala.

Historians have given varying figures for the number of men in the army sent to Karbala; but, according to

the oldest sources, the number of soldiers was nearly 30,000. Putting Husain ibn Numair at-Tamimi in charge of the affairs of the city, Ibn Ziyad himself proceeded to Nakheelah, outside Kufa, to make arrangements for the army. Thus, within a few days, an army of 25 thousand men reached Karbala in order to fight Husain (a.s.) and his seventy two companions:

Hurr ibn Yazid Riyahi . . . . .	1000 men.
Omar ibn Sa'd . . . . .	4000 men.
Shimr ibn Zul-Jaushan . . . . .	4000 men.
Husayn bin Numair at-Tamimi . . . . .	2000 men.
Mughayer ibn Rahniyah Al-Mazani . .	3000 men.
Nasr ibn Harshah . . . . .	2000 men.
Ka'ab ibn Talha . . . . .	3000 men.
Shabath ibn Rib'i . . . . .	3000 men.
Hajjar ibn Abjar . . . . .	1000 men.

These were joined by others who could not find weapons nor had any proper means of travelling. They came to Karbala on donkeys and cows when horses could not be found. Blacksmiths and ironsmiths of Kufa worked day and night for ten days sharpening swords and arrow heads. The revolutionaries had become mercenaries subject to the tyrant's will! But the question is why was such a large army sent to fight Husain (a.s.) and his less than hundred companions? Perhaps Ibn Ziyad was anxious and doubtful about the loyalty of Kufans. Perhaps he thought that by assembling a great number in his ranks and reducing Husain's chances of victory in battle to almost nil, he would thereby discourage any impulses on the part of Kufans to join Husain (a.s.). Perhaps he had the idea that, by including as many Kufans in his army as possible, a majority of the population of Kufa would share his guilt having played a role in this great crime. Probably he considered that by making almost the whole population of Kufa share this

crime and guilt, the chances of an uprising in the future against the regime would be negligible. Had Husain (a.s.) and his companions been killed by a smaller army, it would have still been possible for the people to turn against him and those who had taken part in the crime. Ibn Ziyad, through threats and promises of reward mobilized the people of Kufa to share this guilt with him and Yazid in the forlorn hope of ensuring their loyalty in the future.

True that the bravery of Bani Hashim was known among the Arabs and the mercenary troops of Ibn Ziyad were low in spirit and morale; true that Husain (a.s.) and his companions had resolved to fight to the last drop of their blood for their ideals while the majority of those in the army of Ibn Ziyad had come unwillingly to the field of battle – as reflected by the attitude of Omar ibn Sa'd -- but, as we have seen, these were not the real reasons why such a large army was amassed against Husain ibn Ali (a.s.).

As soon as Omar ibn Sa'd reached Karbala, he sent a message for Imam Husain (a.s.) inquiring the reason of his journey towards Iraq: Husain (a.s.) sent the reply: "The people of Kufa have invited me and I have come responding to their call. If they are regretful now, I am willing to take some other course."

Omar ibn Sa'd was overjoyed at receiving this peaceful reply from Husain (a.s.). Considering it to be a sign of his quick success, he wrote a conciliatory letter to Ibn Ziyad in which truth was generously mixed with ample falsehood. Ibn Ziyad opened the letter. Omar had written: "God, the Supreme, has extinguished the fire of conflict. Husain is ready to go back and lead a peaceful life like other Muslims, and in case it is necessary, is willing to extend his allegiance to Yazid."

Shimr who was present said, "What does he mean?"

Are we to allow Husain to go away without giving allegiance to Yazid? Are we to let him go now that he is in our hands? Without doubt, if Husain is allowed to leave Iraq without giving allegiance, that would be like inviting a danger much greater than we had to face hitherto. You have commissioned Omar ibn Sa'd to execute an order and not to give advice. In my opinion, Husain (a.s.) must be asked to meet you or Yazid and extend his hand in allegiance. Only then can he be left free to go wherever he likes."

Ibn Ziyad agreed with what Shimr had said. He told him, "You go as my representative to Karbala and meet Omar ibn Sa'd. If Omar complies with my orders, then it is all right. Otherwise cut off his head and take charge of the command of the army; finish off this trouble immediately. Either allegiance or battle; Husain does not have a third alternative. You are right. Omar was unwilling to go to Karbala from the beginning. Now that he has accepted it, he is being too soft with Husain. I had ordered that he is to cut off water supply to Husain's camp and that not a drop of water is to reach him and his men from the river. Now I have been informed that Husain's men have carried water to their tents and have dug wells. I had written to him to be severe and harsh with Husain, and now I hear that he has nightly meetings with him. In this situation, we have to act with speed and decisiveness. You reach Karbala and put an end to this matter immediately, relieving us the soonest you can from continued anxiety."

With this command from ibn Ziyad, Shimr ibn Zil-Jaushan started from Kufa with 4000 men and arrived at Karbala in the afternoon of the 9th day of Muharram of the year 61 A.H.

### **Karbala**

A few days after Husain ibn Ali (a.s.) was forced

to come down in Karbala, Omar ibn Sa'd arrived with a column of 4000 men. One or two days later, the orders came to cut the supply of water to Husain's (a.s.) camp. This order was immediately enforced. Husain (a.s.) and Omar saw each other a number of times but the talks and meetings were always concluded without any outcome. Omar ibn Sa'd eluded Husain's (a.s.) well-defined arguments by empty expressions of friendship. Once or twice, Husain ibn Ali (a.s.) addressed Omar's army, giving admonition and putting forth his reasons, thus completely fulfilling his obligation. However, the money and promises of ibn Ziyad had already done their work. Husain's (a.s.) heavenly sermons failed to elicit any response from their hearts in which devilish desires and evil ambitions had already taken roots. Husain (a.s.) told them: "Men are the slaves of worldly life. Religion and piety are on their lips as long as they help them to get along smoothly in their material affairs. But few prove themselves at times of trial and tribulation!"

The deserted expanse of Karbala had taken an entirely novel face with the arrival of Husain's caravan (a.s.). The wilderness assumed the aspect of a busy town with its bustling population and people moving to and fro. On one side Husain (a.s.) and his companions had camped and on the other side, as fresh columns of troops sent by Ibn Ziyad arrived, they selected their own locations and pitched their tents. For the time being, their only duty was to stop any water from being taken to Husain's (a.s.) camp. From Husain's side, however, some would volunteer to get water and would return successfully after severe fighting. Aside from these scuffles, the men from each side would meet and try to convince each other by arguments. Some of Husain's (a.s.) companions continually pressed him for permission for battle. Always his answer was, "I shall not be the one to start the



battle.”

On several nights Husain (a.s.) and Omar ibn Sa'd met to discuss the complicated situation. Not only Omar but also many of the commanders, were not disposed to fight with Husain (a.s.) and most of them had been compelled to come into the field of battle. All of them awaited a peaceful solution to the crisis and hoped that the matter would end without any blood-shed. Hurr ibn Yazid Riyahi, who had forced Husain (a.s.) to change his course and stop in Karbala, was most optimistic. He was convinced that Omar ibn Sa'd would never be willing to fight with Husain (a.s.). The meetings and nightly visits between Imam Husain (a.s.) and Omar had made him very happy. But this did not last for long; soon the scene at Karbala was to change drastically.

In Husain's camp, women and children suffered without water. On the other hand, there were no women and children with ibn Ziyad's troops. But the son of the Prophet (s.a.w.a.s.) had come with his family and, particularly after the orders prohibiting the supply of water to Husain's camp had come, the members of the family had become very anxious and alarmed. The children especially suffered with thirst. True, none of them was optimistic that the matter would not lead to battle and perhaps they foresaw that they might be killed . . . but deprivation from water was something that was not understandable. Why had they stopped water? Cutting of water is not allowed in Islam. During the battle, it is not permissible to stop water from reaching the enemy, even if they are unbelievers. But what kind of Muslims are these . . . who act in opposition to the commands of Islam and stop us from getting even water for drinking?

From the 7th of Muharram, no water could reach Husain's camp. The situation had become very critical. and tense . . . until on the 9th, in the afternoon, with

coming of a letter from ibn Ziyad, things took an ominous aspect: Shimr had arrived with his troops and had brought new orders.

He said, "According to the orders I have been given, the matter must be settled immediately: either battle or allegiance!" Husain ibn Ali (a.s.), as is apparent from the letter Omar had written to Ibn Ziyad, had suggested three alternatives to Ibn Ziyad in his meetings with Omar ibn Sa'd:

1. That he be allowed to return to Hijaz.
2. To be taken to Yazid, so that Yazid himself may take a decision regarding him.
3. To be sent to one of the frontier regions, so that he may settle there and live peacefully like others (in the words of Omar ibn Sa'd).

Omar had informed Ibn Ziyad about these three alternatives suggested by Husain (a.s.). But Ibn Ziyad rejected them all insisting on immediate allegiance or battle. Husain ibn Ali (a.s.) knew that even if he were to submit, Ibn Ziyad would not spare his life and he might be killed and insulted, as the son of Ziyad was bent on taking revenge for the ancestors who had been killed in the early wars of Islam against unbelievers. The order to cut off water was explained as a revenge for the incident thirty years previously when Othman, the third Caliph, was besieged and deprived of water before he was killed by his political adversaries. The history tells us that Ali (a.s.) and his family had nothing to do with the siege of Othman's house and stopping of water, both of which were acts of the Muslims from Egypt demanding Othman to resign from his office. In fact, when Ali (a.s.) came to know that Othman's house had been besieged and that water was stopped from being taken into his house, he had ordered his two sons, Husain (a.s.) and Hasan (a.s.) to take water to Othman and thus relieve him and his

household from the agony of thirst!

In any case, when Omar heard the declaration from Shimr, with disappointment, but still surrendering to Ibn Ziyad's orders in view of his desire to attain the governorship of Ray, he said: "There is no problem. I shall myself execute these orders. But I know that you have not allowed the matter to be solved peacefully."

Then, moving towards his troops, he yelled loudly, "O cavalry of God! Mount your beasts and march towards Paradise!"

Yes! The murderers of the son of the Prophet had to call themselves 'the cavalry of God'. Certainly these aggressors had to assume a religious stance and put on the mask of religion before they could execute their evil designs.

The cry of Omar ibn Sa'd reached Husain's camp. Zainab, Husain's (a.s.) sister, was alarmed and hurriedly came to her brother. Husain (a.s.) said to Abbas, his brother, "Take some men, and go! See what is going on. Has something happened?"

Abbas galloped forth accompanied by a few men. On inquiry he was told: "Just now we have received orders from Kufa. The matter must be settled immediately: either battle or allegiance!" Abbas said, "Wait a moment. I will inform the Imam about this." While his companions waited, Abbas galloped back to inform Husain (a.s.). Husain (a.s.), on coming to know the intentions of Omar ibn Sa'd, said to Abbas: "Brother, speak to them and ask for a respite until tomorrow morning and tell them to postpone the battle for one night. We want to spend this night in prayers!"

Abbas ibn Ali, returned to Omar ibn Sa'd and after prolonged argument and discussion, was successful in getting his agreement that Husain (a.s.) and his companions be granted this respite for one more night!

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### The Night of Radiance and the Day of Gloom

The sun set over Karbala. The sunset prayers were performed as usual and the men went into their own tents. A strange silence hung over the place. Gradually as time passed, the thirsty children were put to sleep. Zainab was by the side of her ill nephew, Ali ibnul Husain (a.s.), Husain's (a.s.) eldest son, who for several days had had a bad fever. The men who guarded the boundaries of the camp prepared themselves for their nightly duty. At this time, there came a call from Husain (a.s.), summoning his friends and companions. Husain's (a.s.) voice reached his sick son in his bed. He requested his aunt to be allowed to move his bed nearer to the tent door and raise the curtain so that he could hear the words of his father and Imam.

In his fifty-seventh year of life, Husain ibn Ali (a.s.) had an angelic white face with grey hair and beard. Husain (a.s.) started addressing his companions. After praising God with his inherited eloquence, he said: "I have not known of anyone's companions being more loyal and faithful than you. I have not heard of any women and children more full of love than these. I hope that God will grant you the best of His rewards and the highest of compensations.

"I do not see for myself any more days of life. Life with the tyrants you have seen, is devoid of any value for me. But I want to tell you this: the darkness of night is a good cover. Nobody has anything against you. These people are thirsty for the blood of only one man: myself. Do not put your lives into danger and all of you depart from this deserted place. Take my family, women and children and leave this place. I most heartily give permission . . . I do not have the slightest objection to your departure."

The audience began to cry and more than others,

his own sons. His nephews said: "Dear uncle! May God not show us the light of the day when we are alive without you. We hope we shall never see the light of such a day. We shall never do such a thing! We shall not give up this opportunity to be martyred with you by your side!"

"Oh Imam," said one of them, "Do you ask us to go away and leave you alone? That cannot be. Life has no value without you."

Another from among them said, "If I were killed, my body burnt and my ashes scattered...and if that process were repeated seventy times, I would still choose to stand by your side and be martyred for your sake."

Yet another said: "If I had a thousand lives, I would sacrifice them all for you!"

When they finished, everyone of the Imam's friends and companions spoke in the same vein expressing in similar passionate and warm words their loyalty and inseparable attachment to Husain ibn Ali (a.s.) for the last time. The light that glowed in their words reflected the radiance of their hearts and purity of their impeccable consciences and their deep and well understood sense of duty to Islam and their love for their beloved Imam. In the heart of that gloomy night, springs of true and real love poured into the wilderness of Karbala. Once again, time had gathered in its fist the best of human beings, brave, loving, committed, devoted, resolved, unshakable, understanding, and passionately willing to serve God and their Imam. They were men the like of whom have never gathered in such a number at one place and time, with a determination to sacrifice their lives and their selves for the love of God and His vice-gerent upon the earth, the sacred person, the focus of love and adoration, the very embodiment of purity, love, wisdom, faith, supreme courage, and everything

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else that gives greatness to man, the grandson of Muhammad (s.a.w.a.s.) the son of Ali (a.s.) and Fatima (a.s.), the brother of Hasan (a.s.), the heir of all the prophets of God from Adam to Ahmed, the leader of all Martyrs from the first to the last, the heart of history to the Day of Judgement, the pride of Abraham, the noblest of the noblest, the outstripper among the outstrippers, the human embodiment of *la ilaha illallah*, the 'blood of God' (*tharallah'*), the Sign of Allah, the foremost of self-sacrifiers in the way of God, whose very name . . . remembrance . . . memory . . . rises like a sigh from the human breast and flows as tears from the eyes: Imam Husain ibn Ali ibn Abi Talib (a.s.)!

That night passed . . . a night which was both gloomy and radiant. It was a sacred night passed by Husain's (a.s.) companions in prayers, recitation of Quran and supplication for Divine mercy and forgiveness. That strange and wonderful night, indeed without any example in the history of mankind, came to an end. The sun of the Tenth of Muharram rose . . . the last day of the life of the standard bearers of human liberty and truth. Its rays fell on those innocent and angelic faces of the pure ones: the torch bearers of guidance and awakening. But the same sun . . . when it had covered the tiresome journey of that tragic day . . . and when it had gone to set in the west, had seen the brave fall and slaughtered and their bodies trampled under the hooves of the cavalry of slaves of Satan.

Here we do not wish to describe the details of the unequal battle between a group of more than seventy persons and an army of several thousands. Here is no place to describe the horrible butchery of the oppressive regime of Yazid. Here we shall abstain from telling the most grievous part of the tremendous tragedy which took place on this single day from morning until late after-

noon. We shall not talk about how those brave men, being thirsty for three days, fought courageously and sacrificed their lives and let their blood flow for the sake of Islam, its existence and its honour. The sun of the 10th of Muharram of the year 61 AH about 42 years after the decease of the Prophet of Islam (s.a.w.a.s.) and history, and the stars that were to rise a little later, all bear witness to the crimes and atrocities of the tyrannical regime of Yazid and Ibn Ziyad that were committed against the righteous supporters of truth, justice and freedom. No mercy was shown to the old or the young. No trace of human conscience, feeling for religion, respect for the House of the Prophet or towards any law or moral dictum can be traced in the acts that were committed.

Soon, as the sun of Ashura rose, the announcement of the beginning of the battle came in the shape of the satanic call of Omar ibn Sa'd. Arrows left their bows in deadly showers and the battle started according to the customs and traditions of the day. At dusk, not only was there not a single man left in Husain's camp except his bed-ridden son, Ali ibn ul-Husain (a.s.), who lay in high fever inside his tent but the tents were plundered and burnt, the women and children were scattered amongst the smouldering remains of the tents, and the bodies of the martyrs were trampled on and their heads severed and carried away by the insane tyrants as prizes to be exchanged for rewards from ibn Ziyad.

#### **The Role of Zainab (a.s.)**

The ruin and confusion brought about by the atrocious army was so great that Zainab, the daughter of Ali (a.s.), had great difficulty in gathering the orphaned children, whom she had to appease and console till late midnight.

Ali ibnul Husain (a.s.) says, "My aunt Zainab always performed her prayers standing. But on that night, intense grief and the extra-ordinary effort of gathering, guarding and consoling the children and women had made her so tired that she performed her night prayers sitting, for she could stand only with great effort. Late after midnight, she sat facing the *Qiblah* and raised her trembling hands with a voice that spoke of her grief and fatigue, and yet determination. *Allaho akbar!* One can only guess the feelings of this great daughter of Ali (a.s.) when she spoke to God during those prayers. Was she complaining of the destruction and death the oppressive regime had brought upon the household of the Messenger of God? Was she pleading with her God to accept all those sacrifices made by Husain (a.s.) and his companions for the sake of Islam? Was she asking God to bestow a greater determination and strength to this daughter of Ali (a.s.) and sister of Husain (a.s.) to enable her to fulfil this mission which had been brought upto this point by the martyrs and the most difficult part of which remained for her to complete? Was she beseeching the Almighty to give patience and forbearance to the hearts of the women and children whose sole guardian she had become? Was she praying that God may take His revenge from the oppressors and tyrants who had not heeded the exalted station of the House of the Prophet and had shed the blood of their heir of the Prophet?

When we observe the dishonourable deeds of the evil regime of Yazid against the Household of the Prophet, there is no need to be surprised; for the foundations of disrespect and injustice towards them had been laid a long time before. The regime of Yazid and Ibn Ziyad was only the successor of its predecessors. We need not be surprised at the hideous acts of the agents of Yazid for the sake of his political power and position.



Don't we know about the conspiracies which had started even before the death of the Messenger (s.a.w.a.s.)? Don't we know about the insulting fashion in which the Prophet (sa.w.a.s.) himself, on his death bed, was treated by his so-called 'Companions'? Had not the dictates of political conspiracy demanded that Ali's (a.s.) house be broken into? That his wife and children be threatened with death? And that Ali (a.s.) be pulled out of his house with a rope around his neck? Who was it who cried from outside his door, "By God, I will set fire to his house."? If, after Ashura, almost 50 years after the Prophet's (s.a.w.a.s.) death, the women and children of his household were taken prisoner and paraded through the streets and bazaars of Kufa and Damascus, was not Fatima (a.s.), the Prophet's beloved daughter, mistreated and beaten only days after her father's death? Shall we be surprised when, in the year 61 A.H., the so-called Muslims of Kufa, fighting under the command of Omar ibn Sa'd did not abstain from burning down the tents which housed the women and children of the Prophet's Household, when the 'companions' of the Prophet, soon after his death, threatened to burn down the house of Ali and Fatima (a.s.)? Why must we be surprised at the looting and pillaging of the tents after the martyrdom of Husain (a.s.), when we know that the Prophet's daughter was deprived of her rights of inheritance and her property confiscated by the 'companions' of the Prophet himself? There is no reason to be surprised at the daughter of Ali (a.s.) the grandson of Ali (a.s.) and the women and children of his household being taken as prisoners from Karbala to Kufa and from Kufa to Damascus into the presence of the 'caliph' of Muslims! Was not Ali (a.s.) himself taken into the presence of an earlier caliph with a rope claspng his neck . . . when the swords came out of their scabbards threatening his life and that of

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his household: either allegiance or. . . ? The same condition and the same demand and a similar threat!?

### **After Karbala**

The morning of 11th of Muharram dawned and Zainab took up the mission where Husain ibn Ali (a.s.) had left it. Husain (a.s.) had played his part and from this juncture Zainab assumed her important role in the struggle for Islam, so that the mission that had reached this point, with so much sacrifice of noble lives, could be brought to its fruitful conclusion. It was possible that even now, the smallest amount of oversight and neglect might make the whole venture fruitless and render the martyrs' sacrifices futile.

With supreme courage and determination, she resolved not to be overcome by grief and be crushed by the weight of the tragedies that had befallen her family, and with the iron will she had inherited from her father and grandfather was determined to make the best use of every opportunity to propagate the mission of Imam Husain (a.s.). It had remained for Zainab (a.s.) to utilise every opportunity to counteract the deceptive propaganda of the regime, by which it sought to justify the bloodshed of Husain (a.s.) and his companions, and make the truth shine forth for the people. It was her mission to dispel the doubts and misunderstandings sown into the public mind by the propaganda of the regime and to make known for the people the objectives and ideals which lay behind Husain's martyrdom. Her role was to make people understand that the oppressive and exploitive regime had falsely introduced Husain (a.s.) and his companions to the people as opponents of Islam and enemies of its progress. She had to make it known to the people who were ignorant of the truth that it was the Household of the Prophet (s.a.w.a.s.), the home of

Revelation, that was the true upholder and the source of the values and teachings of Islam, for the protection of which they did not refrain even from sacrificing their lives and everything else they had. The martyrs gave away their lives and departed from the scene of oppression, but it remained for the women and children, in the leadership and guardianship of this great daughter of Ali (a.s.), to pursue the most difficult and the most tormenting part of the mission. Had it not been for Zainab, we would not have known the objectives of the *qiyam* of Husain ibn Ali (a.s.). His aim would have been lost and this event of great tragedy would have been buried under the mountain-load of distortions and misinterpretations – a thing which many have nevertheless tried to do but have failed miserably. Thus it was a great responsibility that lay on Zainab's shoulders – the great woman who, in addition, was also the kind and compassionate guardian and leader of this group of unhappy prisoners in their journey from Karbala to Kufa, from Kufa to Damascus, from Damascus to Karbala and from there to Madina, the home of the Prophet's family.

This job required great strength and forbearance and qualities which cannot be found in an ordinary woman. But Zainab too was no ordinary lady; she was the daughter of Ali (a.s.) and had been reared by a mother like Fatima (s.a.) – the same Ali and Fatima (a.s.) who had spent all their lives in struggle and had fought their way in the midst of political crises and conspiracies. Zainab (a.s.) was a true daughter of her mother, who, through her active and passive struggle, had forced the regime of her time to take a defensive stand and had shown to posterity the ways of struggle in difficult times as well as their immense value, a fact to which history bears testimony! Thus it was Zainab (a.s.), the daughter of Ali and Fatima (a.s.), the wife of such a valuable man of

renown as Abdullah ibn Ja'far, and the mother of such brave youthful martyrs as 'Aun and Muhammad and the beloved sister of such a man as Imam Husain (a.s.), who pursued the mission with immense care and wisdom and who at last brought it to its sublimly fruitful conclusion.

As we have indicated before, our intention here is not by any means story-telling. The only objective is to illuminate the aims and objectives of the *qiyam* of Imam Husain (a.s.). Till now, we have accompanied Husain (a.s.) on his journey which as we have said, had no other than a sacred and heavenly objective and purpose. We have seen how Husain (a.s.) constantly struggled for the sake of upholding the sanctity of the laws of Islam and the survival of its sublime values. We have observed how he stood up to safeguard the rights of Muslims and ideals of social justice and human liberty. From this point, we shall accompany Zainab (a.s.) in her journey from Karbala to Madina and see how Zainab pursued the same ideals as her brother, Imam Husain (a.s.).

#### **From Karbala to Kufa**

Omar ibn Sa'd left Karbala on the 11th of Muharram after having performed the funeral ceremonies and burial of the hell-ward bound dead of his army. The headless bodies of Husain (a.s.) and his companions lay unattended and neglected in the desert for three days. When Ibn Ziyad's men left Karbala and nobody had stayed, some people of the tribe of Bani Asad came and buried the bodies of Husain (a.s.) and his companions. When Ali ibn Husain (a.s.), who was twenty-two at the time, and Zainab were being taken to Kufa as prisoners on the 11th of Muharram, the bodies of the

martyrs lay scattered all over the camp, drenched in their holy blood, uncared for and unattended. But Zainab knew that God would not forget those who had died in His way, and a day would come when Ibn Ziyad, Shimr and Omar ibn Sa'd, and those who had assisted and fought for them, would be recorded by history with ignominy and disgrace surrounding their very names, their dead among the most ignominious of the dead, while the tombs of the holy martyrs would become lasting symbols of human glory and greatness, where every year, even after passage of centuries, millions of Muslims from every corner of the earth would come to pay their homage to the great works and sacrifices of the martyrs of Karbala. The bodies of the martyrs lay for three days unwashed and uncovered, their heads severed from their bodies, naked and broken under the hooves of horses, yet history was to lay bare before the eyes of posterity the most ugly, atrocious and vengeful attitude of the regime of Yazid towards the Household of the Prophet of Islam (s.a.w.a.s.); and to this, the bodies of the martyrs bear testimony. God covered them with the magnificent and glorious apparel of martyrdom and sainthood and laid bare the ugly nature of the atrocious enemies of Islam and its Prophet (s.a.w.a.s.). While the graves of Yazid, Ibn Ziyad, Shimr, Omar ibn Sa'd and the other agents of the regime are unknown and forgotten, history preserves their ignominious names and acts to serve as a lesson to all oppressors and tyrants to come. Yet the tombs of the martyrs of Karbala stand as luminous signs of man's struggle for justice, liberty and human dignity and, even after the passage of centuries, are like radiant and potent minarets of guidance and struggle in a world of oppression, injustice and denial of God. Whatever movements for freedom and struggles for liberty took place in the Muslim world,

their leaders and followers have always looked up to the martyrs of Karbala for guidance, strength and inspiration. More than thirteen hundred years later, when an Islamic revolution in Iran was victorious against oppression and colonialism, its victory was yet another gift from the martyrs of Karbala to mankind. Islam and Muslims have become everlastingly indebted to them . . . and to Zainab.

That is why when Ali ibn Husain (a.s.), as the caravan of the prisoners started for Kufa, was intensely grieved at the sight of the bodies of his father, brothers, relations and friends of his father lying unattended in the sands, Zainab consoled her nephew and said: "Dear nephew, do not sorrow nor grieve! Be confident that this scene too shall pass. Do you not know that those who give away their lives for the sake of God take up residence in the depths of human hearts? The memory of those who die for freedom and liberty takes firm root in the heart of humanity and there it lives on forever. Dear nephew, without doubt, soon a time will come when one will pass through this place and will not see any desert or sand. A beautiful city will grow around the tombs of these martyrs and this battlefield will assume the form of a glorious shrine."

Leaving the bodies of her dear ones – her brothers, nephews and sons behind – Zainab started on the way to Kufa as a prisoner.

The gates of Kufa drew near and a large crowd of spectators had gathered outside it. The regime was indeed celebrating its newly achieved victory! And the people of Kufa . . . who in history have become synonymous with treachery and deceit . . . were again back in the streets. They were the people who had sold their souls for money and promises of rewards . . . who yearned for liberty and freedom from oppression while the

desire for wealth and worldly position and possessions had enslaved them. They had invited the son of the Prophet (s.a.w.a.s.) to this city and had then taken up arms against him! Now, as they saw the women and children of Husain (a.s.) being brought as prisoners into the streets of their city, they wept. When the caravan of prisoners neared the Dar ul-Umarah, Zainab seized this opportunity to address the treacherous crowd of the deceitful Kufans. She cried:

Praise belongs to God and may His blessings be upon my father, Muhammad, and his Household – the chaste and the sacred!”

“O people of Kufa! You deceivers! You traitors and saboteurs! You sinners . . . now you weep? May God never abate the flow of your tears and may your hearts ever smoulder with grief and sorrow. You are like the woman who painstakingly and with great labour twines a strong rope, and then herself unwinds it, thereby wasting her effort and enery. Your false pledges have no bearing on truth and sincerity. Know that you have naught to offer but fictitious harangues, false pride, knavery, deception, lust, malice, lies and faltery. know that you are as vile and devoid of character as low and despicable slave girls. Your hearts are full of antagonism and spite, you are as odious and loathsome as the vegetables that sprout and flourish around cesspools and the rotten plaster on old graves.

“Beware, for you have sponsored a very wrongful act for which God is totally displeased with you. You have foraged but poorly for the Hereafter. Without doubt, His wrath shall soon descend upon you.

“Now you weep for my brother and raise wailing cries for him. Yes, by the Almighty, weep! Because you are only fit to weep. Yes, weep in plenty and laugh less, because you are wholly steeped in the ignominy of the murder of the Imam of your time. The stain of his blood is upon your hands and you cannot wipe it off. Nor can you be exonerated from the crime of slaying the vicegerent of the Last Prophet of God (s.a.w.a.s.), the light of his House and the apostle of the divine saints

“You have martyred a man, who was your succour, your support in adversity the tower of your strength, your guide in precept and practice. Realize that you are guilty of an extremely obnoxious crime and a heinous misdeed in this world. What ridiculously futile assets have you amassed as an offering for the Day of Reckoning! May the Wrath of God descend upon you and may you perish and be ruined! Your efforts have miscarried and you have miserably failed. Your aspirations have fallen through, and you are not only the universally despised and hated of this world but have also reaped the eternal enmity of God!

“Woe to you, O people of Kufa! Do you know where you have hurt Muhammad (s.a.w.a.s.) most? What vows you have broken and whose blood you have shed? Truly, you have committed such a colossally loathsome and hateful act that the heavens may fall upon earth, the earth may tear up and mountains scatter like ashes!

“Remember! Yes, remember that your retribution shall be extremely harsh and sever and there will be no one to come to your rescue. Do not gloat even during so short time at your disposal before the Final Reckoning. The lapse of a period of time between commitment of a crime and the meting out of punishment is but a reprieve. For God knows best when to strike! Understand; surely God is watching you and is waiting for you!”

Zainab's words fell like angry thunderbolts over the minds of the people of Kufa who were shaken out of their base complacency by the daughter of Ali (a.s.) The older people heard Zainab with surprise; to them, it was as if after twenty years they were again hearing Ali (a.s.) himself; for Zainab had a voice, a manner of speech and an eloquence that closely resembled that of her father. Today she stood as a prisoner in the market-place of Kufa, where her father had once ruled as the khalifah of Muslims, and where Zainab herself had lived as the Khalifah's daughter.

This speech of Zainab, delivered with undaunted courage and fiery eloquence of her father, had a very



deep effect on the minds of the people. It sowed the seeds of an uprising that was to manifest itself five years later (remembered in history as 'the Movement of the Tawwabun' or the Penitents). After Zainab, her sister Umm-e-Khulthoom addressed the people of Kufa and under the guise of attacking the people of Kufa for their treacheries delivered deadly blows to the regime of Yazid.

Ali ibnul Husain (a.s.) too, with all the weakness of a man who had only half-recovered from a serious illness, addressed the people: "Are you not ashamed of yourselves? With what face shall you meet the Prophet of God (s.a.w.a.s.) on the Day of Judgement? You invited his son and this is how you have received your guest! You called him and then put him under siege and martyred him together with his companions; and having imprisoned his women and children you have them paraded around the streets of your city! This is how you welcome your guests! . . ."

It was at this stage that the people again started speaking against the regime and some approached Ali ibnul Husain (a.s.) declaring their support and offering to fight with him against the government. To Ali ibnul Husain (a.s.) this was yet another affront; angrily he replied: "Strange! Your treacheries and disloyalties with my father are before my eyes! As it is, we are undergoing the manner of your hospitality! But still you do not abstain from fabricating your devilish designs! If what you say is really true, do not do anything against us and abstain from saying anything that would bring us greater harm. We do not want either your support or your favours!"

Soon the officials came to realize that the speeches of the prisoners before the people, even if it were not dangerous, might heighten anti-government feelings among the people. Ibn Ziyad ordered the heads of the

martyrs to be taken out to be carried at the head of the caravan of the prisoners being paraded around the streets of Kufa. When the spectators saw the heads of the martyrs appear, all their attention was absorbed by these heads, which they pointed out to one another, and their attention shifted away from the prisoners and they no longer paid any heed to what they had to say. In this fashion, the prisoners were finally brought to the residency of the governor of Kufa.

### **Court of Ibn Ziyad**

The court of Ibn Ziyad was being prepared for a special occasion. The government officials and the army commanders who had shortly returned from Karbala were all present. Other classes of the people had also been permitted to attend the celebrations. Ibn Ziyad had set the head of Husain Ibn Ali (a.s.) in front of him.

He ordered the prisoners of Karbala to be brought into the court and the women and children of the household of the Prophet (s.a.w.a.s.) were brought in. Zainab entered without paying any attention to Ibn Ziyad and as she stood in a corner, women and children surrounded her.

“Who is this lady?” asked Ibn Ziyad, “who considers herself to be so important?” “She is the daughter of Ali, Zainab;” he was told.

He turned towards Zainab and said, “Thank God who brought you low and exposed your lies.”

Zainab replied, “The evildoers abase themselves, and the corrupt tell falsehoods; and we are not such.”

Ibn Ziyad ostensibly acted, however, as if these words were not aimed at him. He said, “Daughter of Ali, have you seen how God has acted with your brother and his family?”

Zainab replied: “I have not known aught but bene-

volence and goodness from God. And as for our people, for whom God has ordained blessings of martyrdom, they defended themselves with valour. They were martyred and have reached their Divinely-ordained Abode.

“But, O son of Ziyad, God will bring them and all of you face to face, when you will offer excuses which will be of no avail.

“Son of Ziyad! May your mother weep over you. Remember, one day you have to answer for this before God. Be prepared for that day and realize in whose favour the Almighty’s verdict shall be. I swear, you have no doubt slain our men, violated our sanctity, and have not only hacked our family tree but have pulled it out from its very roots. If you think that all these acts are the cause of glorification for you, then yes, you have acquired glory. For certain, I am surprised at the person who murders his Imam and says he has gained glory, whereas in truth he knows what retribution awaits him for this atrocious deed.” Ibn Ziyad, apparently unmoved by what Zainab had said, retorted, “Anyhow, I am at peace after having killed Husain.”

“O son of Ziyad! You say your heart is at peace by the slaughter of Husain (a.s.). Yet you know too well that the sight of Husain used to soothe and solace the Prophet. The Prophet always petted and fondled Husain (a.s.) and the two, he and his elder brother, Hasan, were often riders on his holy back.” Zainab continued:

“Indeed prepare your excuses for the Day of Reckoning.

“Son of Ziyad! Even if my brother was aspiring for the khalifah, then he was in the right because the khalifah was his inheritance from his grandfather, the Prophet; whilst you, son of Ziyad, prepare your defences for the day when God shall be the judge.

“O Ibn Ziyad, you are guilty of a most ghastly crime, and in spite of this deed of yours, you seek peace in the world! Pity, yes a thousand pities that you are drunk with this short-lived

might and this brief prestige. Worldly power and wealth have enticed you and have made you proud. But be warned that temporal monarchy and power will fade into insignificance and perish. You are not immortal and shall not live forever. Peace and rest you shall never find.

“Do you know and realize what you have done to those divine souls and their relatives? You are revelling and celebrating over your evil deeds and their massacre. Remember your act is so grievously vile and ghastly that its ignominy shall always accompany you till the Doomsday.

“You shall, indeed for sure, never be gratified with the acquisition of your heart’s desire.”

Ibn Ziyad was angered but was made to desist from taking any harsh action by those who were present, who told him, “Leave her alone. She has suffered and her grief makes her say all this.”

Zainab’s speech, however, had transformed the very mood of the assembly. The joys and pride of victory had been obliterated in the hearts, which were now invaded by guilt, shame and indignity.

Ibn Ziyad who was well aware that Zainab’s speech had created an atmosphere which was not at all to his benefit, tried to change the topic with the comment: “Zainab too speaks eloquently like her father!”

To this Zainab replied. “What do women have to do with oratory.” Up to now the exchange had been entirely to the ruin of Ibn Ziyad. He turned to Imam Sajjad (a.s.) the son of Husain (a.s.), who stood among the prisoners and inquired, “Who is this man?”

“He is Ali, son of Husain,” came the reply from one who stood around. Ibn Ziyad said, “We had received the report that Ali ibnul Husain was killed by God in Karbala!”

“Yes, I had a brother named Ali,” replied Imam Sajjad (a.s.), “who was killed by your army in Karbala.”

“No, it was God who killed him,” came the angry

retort from Ibn Ziyad.

In reply, Imam Sajjad (a.s.) recited this verse of the Quran, *"God takes the souls at the time of their death, and that which has not died, in its sleep; He withholds that against which He has decreed death, but looses the other till a stated term"* (43:39)

The calm reply enraged Ibn Ziyad who cried, "What impudence! How dare you argue with me!" Then he ordered his men to behead him. Zainab, when she saw this, came in between Imam Sajjad (a.s.) and Ibn Ziyad's men and cried out to Ibn Ziyad, "Ibn Ziyad, are you not ashamed? Do you intend to kill all of our men. It is impossible! You will have to kill me first before you can put your hands on my nephew."

Ibn Ziyad was surprised at this scene of love and courage. He clearly saw that Zainab (a.s.) intended what she had said. Then desisting from the idea he said, "Indeed, blood-relationship is a strong bond!"

Ali ibnul Husain (a.s.) told his aunt, "Dear aunt, be calm and allow me to speak directly to him." Then taking a few steps forward he said to Ibn Ziyad, "You threaten me with death? Do you not know that martyrdom is our inheritance and our merit . . . ?"

By this time, Ibn Ziyad had understood that this kind of exchange was not to his benefit. Perhaps it was at this moment that Husain's (a.s.) head attracted his attention and with a cane that he had in his hand pointed out to Husain's (a.s.) lips and teeth and at the same time commencing an absurd highhanded harangue.

Zaid ibn Arqam, an aged companion of the Prophet was present. When he saw that Ibn Ziyad's impertinence had come to this extent, he cried out in protest, "Ibn Ziyad! Take away your cane! God is witness that I have seen many times the Prophet of God kissing these lips." And with these words, he got up and weeping loudly

left the assembly. Ibn Ziyad realized that with the honourable station Zaid ibn Arqam possessed in the society the matter could end ruinously for him. He cried after Zaid, "Do not cry. You have become old and have lost your wits. Do you weep at a time of great victory as this? Had you not been old and decrepit as you are, I would have had you beheaded this moment!"

Zaid ibn Arqam, as he walked out of Ibn Ziyad's court cried out to the people: "O Arabs! You will ever remain slaves of Ibn Ziyad after this moment! You kill the son of Fatima (a.s.) and make the son of Marjana (Ibn Ziyad's mother) the ruler over yourselves, so that he may kill the pure and pious among you and give mean brigands supremacy over your affairs. O people! It were you who brought everlasting indignity and ignominy on yourselves and submitted to this absement. May God deprive you of honour and welfare since you have submitted to such abasement and devilry!"

### **Admission of Crime?**

When the assembly at the court dispersed, the prisoners were ordered to be taken temporarily to a house near the city mosque of Kufa till the matter could be reported to the capital and further orders were received.

When the people dispersed and Ibn Ziyad was alone with his close intimate colleagues, it was obvious from his face that he was anxious and displeased with the turn the events had taken. Omar ibn Sa'd who was the commander-in-chief of the army that fought Husain (a.s.) at Karbala was also present. Ibn Ziyad turned to Omar ibne Sa'd and after thanking him for his sincere efforts in Karbala said, "Please return the letter which I wrote when you were in Karbala regarding battle with Husain."

Omar ibn Sa'd replied, "I am sorry. After I came to know about your orders, I did not pay any attention to preserve that letter. It was lost in the hurry and scurry of battle."

"What?" said Ibn Ziyad, pulling his face in anxiety, "You mean you have not preserved the order which is supposed to be an official document? I am sure that you want to keep it with you so as to put the whole blame on my neck . . . so that tomorrow even old women when they sit together to talk may say that you were not to be blamed! By God, you will have to return that document!"

This made Omar ibn Sa'd furious; he replied, "I advised you sincerely and if you had been my own father, then I could not have fulfilled my obligation to any further extent. If you did not pay any attention, it is not my fault. Now I feel that you are not happy with what took place. That is why you talk as you do. But let me tell you this: nobody who returned from Karbala was more misfortunate than I, who obeyed your commands but sinned against God. Yes, I have committed a grievous sin and created those bloody scenes of Karbala. But now whatever happened has passed and nothing can be done about it."

Othman, one of Ibn Ziyad's brothers who was also present there, supported Omar ibne Sa'd, saying, "By God, I would have preferred that Husain were not killed though the sons of Ziyad had to suffer at people's hands till the Doomsday! Brother, he is right. He warned you and admonished you; but you yourself were bent on committing this ugly and ghastly deed."

### **Kufa's Troubled Conscience**

The recent happenings had bewildered the people of Kufa. The people seemed to be amazed by the grossly

ugly and enormously ghastly nature of what had taken place at their hands. The speeches of Zainab (s.a.) and Umm-e-Kulthoom (s.a.) and the scenes at the governor's court were narrated from amongst the people and their reports circulated from one house to the next. The deep feeling of guilt and enormity of the crime of Husain's murder had started to blow through their hearts. A hurricane was on its way. Certainly Zaid ibn Arqam had been right! They had made themselves the slaves of Ibn Ziyad. The speeches of Zainab had revealed to them the enormity of the crime that had been committed. They could hardly believe the ugliness of what had taken place. Were they not those who had invited Husain (a.s.) to their city? Had they not sworn allegiance to him on the hand of Muslim ibn Aqeel? Were it not they who had surrendered to Ibn Ziyad's threats? Had they not submitted to the temptation of rewards the evil governor of Kufa had promised? Were they not those who armed themselves and marched to Karbala to fight Imam Husain (a.s.)? But alas, now they had come to realize to what depths of meanness and abasement their weakness had plunged them. They were, as Zainab said, like the woman who unwinds her strong rope after painstakingly twining it. Such were the thoughts that were passing through the minds of the people which sometimes came out on repentent tongues.

Indeed the murder of Imam Husain (a.s.) at the orders of Yazid, Ibn Ziyad, and Omar ibn Sa'd and at the hands of the Kufans was, and still is, not only a great human tragedy but also a stupendous enigma. It is a strange event because it uncovers the limits of spiritual blindness man is capable of reaching. It is a strange event in human history because it sets forth in all clarity this baffling enigma that the noblest and sublimest of saintly personalities can become the victim of human degenera-



tion and wickedness. It is a strange event because it cannot be explained except as a 'miracle' of human degeneration and abasement. *Or dost thou think the Men of the Cave and Er-Raqeem were among Our signs, a wonder?* (18:8) Certainly the events that followed Karbala were more tragically wonderful than what had taken place with the Men of the Cave. The murder of Imam Husain at the hands of Kufans who claimed to be Muslims and had invited the Imam to their city is certainly as strange as it is tragic. It is the murder of a heavenly guide at the hands of those who claim to follow him, invite him eagerly to their town, then make him stop in the middle of the desert, cut off the water supply even to his women and children, then murder him and his thirsty companions, imprison his women and children, burn and pillage their tents, trample his body and that of his companions under the hooves of horses, sever the heads of their Imam and his noble companions from their bodies and carry them off on spears to the governor as a prize, make his women and children parade bareheaded in the streets of their city . . . is it not deeply and tragically strange? Is it not strange that the noblest of beings become such victims of the most abased? *Or dost thou think the Men of the Cave and Er-Raqeem were among Our signs, a wonder?* The pure and pious Men of the Cave (Er-Raqeem) were destined to a long long sleep in a world where wakefulness is the monopoly of tyrants and atrocious men.

### **A Cry of Protest**

In the aftermath of the events of Karbala the general feeling of sore guilt and wounded public conscience had once again created conditions in Kufa which were no less dangerous than the days of revolutionary ferment when Ibn Ziyad had first come to take charge of Kufa.

Therefore, in order to restore his dwindling prestige and slippery authority, ibn Ziyad decided to call the people to attend a speech he was to deliver in the city mosque.

The next day the people gathered and Ibn Ziyad arrived with his guards, accompanied by the retinue of officials and army commanders who had taken part in the battle of Karbala.

Ibn Ziyad mounted the *minbar* and after praising God and the Prophet (s.a.w.a.s.), spoke at some length in praise of Mu'awiyah and his son Yazid. Then he said, "Thank God that He separated the truth and the truthful from falsehood and its followers and gave manifest victory to 'Ameerul Mo'mineen' Yazid and his supporters . . ."

He had not yet finished his sentence, when a cry of protest which rose from a corner of the mosque interrupted his address: "Oh son of Marjana, be ashamed, you liar! It is you who are the liar and son of your lying father! It is you who lie and the one who has sent you here as governor! O enemy of God! Do not utter things which are bigger than thy mouth! You kill the son of the Prophet and yet have the impudence to utter such nonsense from the *minbar* in a mosque of Muslims! How dare you be so impudent towards the sons of the Prophet."

Ibn Ziyad could hardly believe his ears. Who was this man who had the daring to open his mouth in such conditions? But when he saw that the daring speaker would not leave off his angry protest, he cried out, "Who is this man who dares to utter all this nonsense! Get him!"

Abdullah ibn Afeef Kindi, who was completely blind, had stood up in a corner of the mosque and roared in reply to Ibn Ziyad, "It is me who is speaking! And

you, O enemy of God! Do you consider yourself to be a Muslim? How dare you utter all that apostasy and impertinence regarding the Prophet's family whom God has praised in the Quran! Where are the Emigrants and the Helpers? Where are the true believers who would take revenge against this tyrant who has been cursed by God and His Prophet?"

With the clamour he created, Abdullah ibn Afeef engaged the total attention of all the people in the crowd and tilted the public opinion in a direction entirely opposite to what Ibn Ziyad had intended!

The cry of protest raised by Abdullah ibn Afeef fell like a thunderbolt. Ibn Ziyad could hardly control his anger at this blind man whose words threatened to destroy what he had achieved through days and nights of hard work and consistent devilry.

"Bring him! I will punish him now and here!" He cried to his guards. The guards fell on Abdullah, who was in turn shielded by the men of his tribe. As a result, Abdullah ibn Afeef was carried outside the mosque in order to calm the unexpected clamour.

Abdullah ibn Afeef was a follower and companion of Ali (a.s.). He had lost his eyes taking part in the Islamic *ji*had for Islam. One of his eyes was lost in the Battle of Jamal fighting by the side of Ali (a.s.) and the other in the Battle of Siffeen, again fighting by Ali's side against Mu'awiyah. His blindness had forced him into political seclusion but had not kept him from carrying on a peaceful life of devotion and piety.

Ibn Ziyad had called the mosque assembly to allay people's doubts and misgivings about the bloody events of Karbala. But Abdullah ibn Afeef, had made him fail again in this effort. Not only that, by his speech he had succeeded in turning people's hearts to the Family of the Prophet (s.a.w.a.s.) and the martyrs of Karbala and

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their glorious resistance against the atrocious regime of Yazid. But Ibn Ziyad was determined in pursuing his politics of terror and repression. He ordered the immediate arrest of Abdullah, whose furious protest had delivered a heavy blow to Ibn Ziyad's plans.

A severe battle took place between governmental guards and the fellow tribesmen of Abdullah ibn Afeef. The guards were successful, however, in breaking into his house and, once inside, were met with Abdullah who stood sword in hand, resolved to defend himself in spite of his total blindness. He was arrested and brought before Ibn Ziyad who, seeing him, said: "Thank God that you have been arrested and abased." Abdullah replied: "Had I my eyes today, I would have proved to you for sure which of us has been abased!" Ibn Ziyad knew that after the events at the mosque, the murder of Abdullah ibn Afeef would be yet another set-back, because it would convince the people that the government was intensely scared of the least amount of opposition, even when it came from a blind man. He did not see any wisdom in killing Abdullah; on the other hand, he wanted to efface the effect his words had produced upon the people and again reassure them that the murder of Husain Ibn Ali (a.s.) was a necessary and entirely justified action on behalf of the regime.

Ibn Ziyad again turned towards him and enquired: "O Ibn Afeef, what is your opinion about Othman (the third Khalifah)?" Without any delay, Abdullah replied courageously: "O son of Marjana, what do you have to do with whether Othman was a good man or not. It is God who shall judge His servants with justice. Instead, ask my opinion about yourself and your father! Ask me about Yazid and his father, so that I will say things which have as yet remained unspoken!" Ibn Ziyad was stunned with the ferocious courage of this

blind man. He saw what damaging issues Abdullah had hinted to talk about – a nightmare for Ibn Ziyad. Tactfully, he said: “I shall not speak to you anymore until you taste the flavour of death!”

Ibn Afeef said: “Thank God! Ibn Ziyad, you should know that I have prayed for martyrdom since before you were born. I have prayed that I might be martyred at the hands of the most wicked of men. I took part in the past battles but did not attain martyrdom, even though I lost my eyes. My blindness made me despair of the hopes of martyrdom since I could no longer hope to take part in jihad. Now I am happy that God has shown His kindness and my prayers have been accepted. I am happy that I shall be martyred at the hands of a wicked man like you!”

These words of Abdullah ibn Afeef angered Ibn Ziyad. He could no longer control his rage. He had forgotten that one crime cannot be wiped out by yet another atrocity. Bursting with helpless anger, he cried: “Take him out and behead him!” The guards took him out and Abdullah ibn Afeef attained the martyrdom he had so eagerly prayed for.

### **The Prisoners of Kufa**

Ibn Ziyad reported to Yazid the events of Karbala and asked him for further orders regarding the prisoners. He also wrote a letter to the governor of Madina in which he informed him about the recent events.

The reply came quickly from Damascus. Yazid had praised ibn Ziyad's efforts and had ordered the prisoners to be sent to his court together with the heads of the martyrs.

But the news from Karbala created deep sorrow and mourning throughout Madina. The sound of mourning

rose from the houses of Quraish and the families related to the Prophet (s.a.w.a.s.). By the side of sorrow, deep hatred towards the regime could be felt by the officials of Yazid's government at Madina. In one gathering, one man said to Abdullah ibn Ja'far (Zainab's husband and Husain's cousin): "I am sorry to say that your sons have also been killed. You must try to look at these events from Husain's (a.s.) point of view." Abdullah ibn Ja'far retorted angrily, "I am proud that if I was not by Husain's side, at least my sons had the honour to be martyred with him. By God, if I knew that things would come to this, I would also have accompanied him!"

From Kufa the caravan of prisoners was sent towards Syria according to Yazid's orders. The official who was put in charge of the prisoners was a very brutal and cruel man, as were those who carried the martyr's heads on their spear-points.

The city of Damascus, which was the capital of the 'Muslim' Empire, was making preparations for victory celebrations. The court of the Khalifah eagerly awaited the arrival of the prisoners and the heads of the 'rebels' – as Husain (a.s.) and his companions had been introduced to the people of Syria. For them, the 'enemies' of Islam had been defeated and killed and the rule of the young Khalifah of the Muslim world was re-strengthened and made secure. It was natural that the people should be happy; since all they knew about Husain Ibn Ali (a.s.) and his movement against Yazid's regime was what the misleading propaganda of the regime had made him out to be. Yazid was happy, and so were those who immediately surrounded him.

The court's waiting did not last long and soon it was heard that the prisoners, together with the heads of the martyrs, had approached the city gates and were about

to enter Damascus. For most of the people, the awaited moments of celebration had arrived. They thronged to meet the entering caravan and followed it as it passed through the streets of Damascus and approached the palace of Yazid, where the prisoners, the members of the House of the Prophet (s.a.w.a.s.), would be presented before the Khalifah of Muslims.

### **The Imperial Court**

Yazid sat on his throne and wore a jewelled crown on his head. The important officials and foreign ambassadors sat on their special seats bordering the hall. The court had invited the guests to a kingly dinner, and everybody was in a festive mood. The order was given: let the prisoners be brought in! The women and children were made to stand behind the Khalifah's throne and Ali ibnul Husain (a.s.) was made to stand on the right side between the prisoners and the assembly of guests. The head of Husain ibn Ali (a.s.) was brought on a golden tray and put in front of Yazid. This was the moment when most eyes were turned in wonder on this angelic face, the face of one the people were told was an enemy of Islam. The people wondered to whom did it belong. The nobility of the prisoners and their dignified faces affected the assembly which was in a festive mood.

The man who had brought Husain's head, came forward and said: "I have brought you the head of him who was the best of men and was of the noblest descent. It is only fitting that my tray be filled with jewels and pearls for my service!" The man had no idea that his words had secretly inflamed the Khalifah's deep-seated hatred and ill-will towards Husain (a.s.) and whatever was connected with Ali (a.s.) and the Prophet of Islam (s.a.w.a.s.)

Yazid asked him: "If he was such, why did you kill him?"

"For your reward!" came the reply immediately. Yazid ordered him to be beheaded saying: "Take him out and execute him!"

Zahr ibn Qays, who was in charge of the prisoners' caravan, came forward and in detail disclosed the report of events that had taken place. Yazid listened to him with attention, at moments signs of pleasure appearing on his face and sometimes pulling his face in displeasure and anxiety. When Zahr had finished, he said: "I thank you all for your efforts. But you could have satisfied me without killing Husain (a.s.) . Had I personally met him, I would have certainly forgiven him. Had I been there, I would never have allowed things to come to a bloody battle. I think Ibn Ziyad is responsible for this mistake. May God's curse be upon him who brought things to this point. But anyhow whatever God decreed has come to pass and nothing can be done about it."

Then he turned towards the assembly and pointing to Husain's (a.s.) head said: "This gentleman was arrogant and considered his grandfather, father and mother to be superior to mine. He considered himself to be more deserving for the station of khalifah than me. His arrogance brought him to this day. His claim that his grandfather was better than my grandfather was true, but his claim regarding his father and mother and himself was false. Did he not see that his father fought against my father and God judged between them and gave victory and sovereignty to my father. He considered himself to be superior to me but did he not know the words of the Quran: *Say 'My Lord. All sovereignty is Yours and You give kingdom and power to whoever You wish?'*"

His words came forth with confidence and as he talk-



ed, his pride and arrogance poured forth. With the cane that he had in his hand, he pointed towards Husain's lips and said sarcastically: "Husain, how did you find the life of the world? You have lovely teeth, but how soon have the signs of old age appeared on your face." Then he read a few verses of his own: "Alas, my forefathers were martyred at Badr! Had they been alive and seen how I have avenged them! Had they been, they would certainly have said in joy: 'O Yazid, may your hand not ache nor be slack!' 'who murders you!'"

Well pleased with himself, as he recited these verses, he played with Husain's (a.s.) teeth and lips with his cane. At this moment, most unexpectedly, Samarra ibn Jandab, cried out in protest: "O Yazid! Take away your cane! God is witness that I have seen with my own eyes the Prophet of God (s.a.w.a.s.) used to kiss those lips and say to Husain: "May God's curse be upon him who murders you!"

This cry put the assembly into confusion. Yazid cried: "Don't cry out in here! Take him out!" The man was seized by the royal guards and taken out in a rush. As the man was being dragged away, Yazid said to him, "I would have had you beheaded if you had not been a companion of the Prophet." "Alas", moaned Samarra ibn Jandab, "the Prophet's companionship is taken note of but no heed is paid to his blood-relationship with Husain!"

Silence returned to the court assembly. Zainab was the one to break the baffling silence. She started praising God and as she proceeded the attention of the audience was totally attracted and absorbed by her words. She said:

"In the Name of God, the Omnipotent Creator: May His blessings be upon my grandfather, the Seal of the Prophets.

"Verily God has said: 'Evil unto those who do evil, and so

with those who belittled and belied the Signs of God.”

“O Yazid! Do you believe that you have made our life miserable and our existence impossible? That we are powerless prisoners because we are standing in your presence bound and shackled and that you have gained power over us? Do you think that we have been abased and disgraced, and that you instead have been honoured and elevated by God? Do you imagine that your apparent success is the result of your supreme might and higher station? You are gloating over this with pride and impudence? Do you believe that you have gained the whole world, and achieved supremacy over the universe? That your position is safe and secure now that your crooked affairs are smoothed out, and that you are the master of our country and the ruler of our government?

“Wait! Wait! You misguided ignoramus; have you forgotten the edict of God which says: ‘Do not think that We give respite to the evildoers and unbelievers for any good they have done; but it is for the multiplication of their sins that will lead them to degrading chastisement!’

“O you progeny of freed slaves! Is this your justice that women of your house should be behind veil and we the daughters of the Prophet be imprisoned and marched through market places, from door to door? You have certainly insulted the dignity of the House of the Prophet by unveiling us. At your whim we are taken from one town to another. All kinds of people, whether they are those who live on hills, or those who camp by wayside springs, rich or poor, young or old, men of honour or of disrepute, all gaze at us from far and near, and we have neither an able-bodied male relation nor anyone else to come to our aid.

“Yazid! By what you have done, you have provided ample proof of arrogance against God, denial of His Prophet (s.a.w.a.s.) and rejection of the doctrines of the Holy Book and teachings sent down upon the Prophet by God. Yet, why should this appear strange or cause surprise? For you are one whose ancestors actually chewed the livers of the martyrs of Islam (i.e. Hamza, whose liver was chewed by Yazid’s grandmother) and nurtured on this diet. It was they who amassed armies and drew swords against the Prophet (s.a.w.a.s) himself. It is but natural that the descen-

dants of such persons should be most prominent among the Arabs in cruelty, treason and deceit, in causing rifts and conflicts and being steeped in activities against God and His Prophet (s.a.w.a.s.) Remember, the evil, loathsome and abominable acts of yours are a true reflection of your ingrained disbelief and of the spirit of vengefulness smouldering in your hearts since the Battle of Badr.

"You nurse spite, vengefulness and vendetta for us and do not hesitate in the open declaration of enmity against the Prophet's Household. You deny the Prophet (s.a.w.a.s.) and with pride and joy announce from housetops, 'I, Yazid, have slaughtered and butchered the sons of the Prophet and imprisoned the members of his family.' Do you not consider it an act of stupendous ugliness? You say, if your forefathers could but see your unholy achievement, they would give an encouraging call: 'O Yazid more strength to your arm, for you have avenged us.'

"Yazid, in this assemblage, joyously and playfully you strike the teeth of Abu Abdullah Al Husain (a.s.) with a cane. Do you not know that these very teeth and lips were constantly kissed by the Prophet?

"I swear that by shedding the blood of *the Master of the Heavenly Youth*, the son of the Prophet and Ali, (a.s.) and the shining light of the House of Abdul Muttalib, you have caused us grievous pain.

"Yazid, allow yourself a moment of thought . . . if you could only deliberate over the ghastly and abominable deed you have done, you are certain to wish that your arm were severed from the elbow and that your parents had not brought you forth; because if you think, you shall realize that God is wrathful with you and the Prophet is now your enemy!

"O Almighty God! Revert our rights to us. Take revenge on those who have wronged us and pour Your wrath on those who have shed our blood, broken their pledges, murdered our kinsmen and profaned against our sanctity.

"O Yazid! You have done all that your feeble and deluded brains could think of; yet remember, in committing this act you have slashed your own skin and have shredded your own flesh (indicating the evil end in store for Yazid and Bani Umayyah). Indeed very soon you shall be in the presence of the Prophet

(s.a.w.a.s.) and with this great guilt, the blood of his vicegerent on your hands as well as the crime against their station and dignity. That will be the time when the entire progeny of the Prophet shall be assembled and punishment shall be meted out to their enemies.

“Yazid, do not revel over this brutal orgy of crime and slaughter! Do not for an instant think that those who lay down their lives in treading the path of righteousness for the glorification of God are dead. No, they are alive and receive nourishment from God. They are happy for the sublime blessings of martyrdom showered upon them by their Maker.

“God alone is enough to deal with you; the Prophet is your challenger and the angel Gabriel is our helper and supporter against you. Those who have made you the head of the state and burdened the Muslims with your oppressive rule will soon find out what awaits them. The result of atrocities is only evil, and pain follows all excesses. Who among you discerns the misguided and astray?

“O Yazid! In my speech, I have denounced you and condemned your deeds giving a very clear account of what lies in store for you. It is not in the hope that after deliberating you may repent of having done a grievous injury to the Muslims overwhelming them with tragedies. The thought would be a fantasy, for you are amongst those whose hearts have hardened, whose instincts have been disfigured, whose bodies have become corrupted and whose beings have become despicable to God and His Prophet (s.a.w.a.s.). You are one of those whose hearts are the nests of the Devil in which he lays his evil eggs; indeed your character is one such ugly creation of the Devil.

“Certainly, one wonders that saintly human beings, sons of prophets and vicegerents should be butchered by the sons of despicable slaves, traitors and unbelievers and that their hands should be drenched in their blood.

“How strange to think of their sacred and chaste bodies pierced by arrows, lying on the sands of the burning desert, desolate and abandoned without burial and grave!

“Yazid, if you are blind enough to regard us as your booty, then remember that without doubt you will also have to pay the penalty for your deeds on the Day of Judgement. God does not

oppress His creatures and only in Him do we put our trust and faith. He alone shall deliver us and in Him do we seek refuge and with Him do our hopes rest.

“Cover yourself with as much deceit as you wish, but I swear by God who sent upon us His Book, bestowed upon us prophethood and dressed us in sanctity, that you can never aspire to attain our honour and station. You will never be able to destroy our legacy or extinguish our light, nor will you be able to wipe out the ignominy that you have earned for yourself by your loathsome and abominable acts against us.

“Feeble are your designs and numbered are your days. When the cry for punishment of traitors and evil-doers rises like a tide, your parties will break up and your lackeys shall forsake you.

“All praise belongs to the Supreme God, who appointed a peaceful abdoe for His Messengers and who fulfils the hopes of His saints, and Who by His kindness and blessings calls them back to Himself.

“But you O Yazid, by your atrocities against those sacred personalities have embroiled yourself in villainy and perfidy.

“In the names of these holy souls, I now earnestly pray to the Almighty to avenge us. May He shower His endless blessings upon us and grant us the khilafat and Imamate. Indeed He is Compassionate, Benevolent and Merciful to His creatures.”

Zainab's speech changed the mood of the entire assembly. Yazid was himself absorbed by Zainab's furious eloquence and struck by the power of her logic. All he could do was to listen without making the least attempt to interrupt her. When Zainab became silent, the only thing he could utter was, “The persons who have undergone hardships overlook all dangers and seem to be afraid of nothing; even death!” Then he turned to Ali ibnul Husain (a.s.) and said, “O son of Husain! It was your father who severed the bonds of kindred. He failed to recognize our rights and disputed with us in the matter of rule. It was he who was responsible for bringing matters to this point! Praise be to God who

killed your father.”

Ali ibnul Husain (a.s.) retorted: “May God damn those who killed him!” This enraged Yazid who threatened to have him executed then and there. Undaunted and calm, Ali ibnul Husain (a.s.) told him: “Whenever you decide to kill me, make arrangements for the women and children to return to their homes; although they have no *mahram* man in their company beside me.” Yazid, softening, replied, “No, you shall return with them and accompany them home.”

Ali ibnul Husain (a.s.) stood there in manacles and chains with an iron collar around his neck. It is said that Yazid asked for a file which was brought. Then he himself removed the iron collar from the Imam’s neck, with the comment: “*Whatever affliction may visit you is for what your own hands have earned; and He pardons much*” (42:29).

Ali ibnul Husain replied, “It is not as you imagine. The verse which has been sent regarding us is this: “*No affliction befalls in the earth or in yourselves, but it is in a Book, before we make it happen; that is easy for Allah.*” (57:22)

However, Yazid had become aware that this kind of exchange was entirely damaging for him. So, Yazid, whose tactics of intimidation thus failed to break the resolve of the captives of Karbala in their hour of trial and suffering, had no choice but to order their imprisonment with a view to preventing their contact with the people. For he had seen for himself to what extent Zainab, the leader of the captives could be devastating for the interests of the government. Zainab had made him speechless and her eloquence had struck him dumb. Yazid, as we know, was a man of letters and a poet of elegance; but in spite of it all, he failed to guard himself or his government from the silent disapproval of the visi-

tors at his court nor was he able to preserve even an appearance of the dignity that comes from being right.

The very fact that history has preserved the speeches of Zainab in the market-place of Kufa, the courts of Ibn Ziyad and Yazid, and the account of events surrounding the journey of the captives from Karbala to Kufa and from Kufa to Damascus, is enough to establish the significance of the great task accomplished by this great woman, who is one of the towering sacred personalities in the history of Islam. Very little is known of Zainab's life before Karbala. But history has recorded in enough detail the greatness of this daughter of Ali, as reflected in the events succeeding the tragedy of Karbala.

Zainab and her fellow captives were completing the mission started and brought half-way by Imam Husain (a.s.) and his companions. Their accomplishments were indivisible. Zainab became the very torch that illuminated the reality of the events of Karbala for the people of the time, and the author of its history for posterity. If history does not know of a leader of more sublime greatness who accomplished more by his death than others through life than Imam Husain, similarly it knows no woman who accomplished a greater task in captivity and prison than Zainab, the daughter of Ali. Husain attained eternal life through martyrdom while in captivity Zainab became the very tongue of freedom. Her very speech belies her apparent captivity, for she demonstrated that she was the spirit of courage and freedom itself. Who has ever thought of putting freedom in chains? Who can induce fright in courage?

The things which deter others from struggle became potent tools of struggle in the hands of these Islamic leaders. Death, homelessness, prison, captivity — these were the instruments and tools used by Husain and

Zainab in their struggle against oppression and apostasy.

The regime threatened its opponents with death and imprisonment; but most enigmatically Husain and Zainab turned these into the very weapons they used against it! This was the greatest lesson of Karbala to oppressed mankind which faces tyranny and oppression defenseless without weapons. Husain declares to all oppressed human beings that for as long as they walk on the Path of Truth, Justice and Righteousness – suffering in the form of death or imprisonment is itself the most potent weapon against the enemy. Not because such suffering softens the hearts of the cruel or forces the oppressor to reconsider his actions, and making him repent for his crimes, but because it serves to awaken others and gives them the needed awareness and courage to take up the struggle with a zeal of their own.

Now it is easy for us to understand why Husain in reply to the sincere warnings of his well-meaning friends that his life and that of his companions might be in danger, simply told them, "I saw the Prophet in my dream telling me, 'Husain, God wishes to see you killed and your women and children taken captive'." Little did they understand how Husain planned to use these very dangers and portending misfortunes of his family and companions as instruments to save Islam and as weapons to destroy the regime of Bani Umayyah. The women and children he had brought with him on his journey to Kufa were as necessary in this plan as his own martyrdom. Death and captivity being the only weapons at their disposal Husain and Zainab used them with mastery, in the highest and the profoundest sense of the word, to save Islam, to fight the oppressor and leave a great legacy to guide mankind for ages to come; for above all Karbala was a lesson for humanity! Such are the acts of an Imam, a 'wali', and for that matter of all



the Imams and Walis who came after him. As times changed, they also changed their tools and weapons; but the weapons used by Husain and Zainab were the deadliest that were ever used against oppression and apostasy.

Following Yazid's command, the captives were confined in a dark and desolate prison with damp and crumbling walls. But in prison the women and children of the House of the Prophet lived with such fascinating dignity that invoked the sympathy, nay, respect and esteem of the prison officials and the people who came to visit them. Slowly, as the days passed, the people of Damascus came to be acquainted with the true identity of the prisoners and their close relationship with the Prophet and their position in the world of Islam. The people who had been told terrible lies about Ali and his sons now saw the sacred faces and characters of the daughters and children of the house of Ali and heard their speech. The nobility of the prisoners and in contrast, the ghastly details of crimes committed by Yazid and his forces against the House of the Prophet, set a wave of resentment and hatred permeating through Damascus.

As public opinion changed in favour of the captives, Yazid too was forced to deal with them with apparent softness. Ali ibnul Husain (a.s.) was called and declared free together with his family members. He was asked to shift his family to a house of his choice anywhere in Damascus. No longer were they prevented from meeting other people. They were, for the first time, allowed to hold ceremonies to remember their martyrs. Husain's sisters were mentioned with respect and Ali ibnul Husain, (a.s.) was treated with kindness and esteem. As the members of the House of the Prophet (s.a.w.a.s.) shifted to their new residence, Zainab laid down for the first time the tradition of holding mourning assemblies in the

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memory of the martyrs of Karbala and the ignominious crimes committed by Yazid and his agents. The *'Majlis'*, the gathering to mourn Husain, became the eternal platform for commemorating the events of Karbala, the struggle of Husain and his companions and the events following the tragedy of the day of 'Ashura.

During the short stay at Damascus, Ali ibnul Husain (a.s.) was invited to the Friday prayers. Yazid, who considered himself the Khalifah or the spiritual leader of the Muslims was also attending. Before the prayers, a speaker mounted the *minbar* and according to the custom, started praising Yazid and his forefathers and condemning Ali (a.s.) and his sons. The speaker condemned Husain (a.s.) and his supporters with reference to the events of Karbala and with practiced glibness and habitual flattery praised the tribe of Bani Umayyah and its achievements.

All of a sudden, against all expectations of Yazid and the audience, Ali ibnul Husain, a man lean and weak who had not for long recovered from severe illness, cried out, "Be ashamed you evil speaker! With your words, you have exchanged the anger of God for the people's goodwill. Hold your tongue, you infernal orator!" Then he turned to Yazid and said, "Allow me to mount these planks and say a few words which may please God and be of benefit to the audience." Yazid replied, "No, it is not possible. Please be seated."

Yazid's companions seeing him refuse, said to him, "O Amir, allow him. Let us see what he has to say." Yazid replied, "These people if allowed to talk will certainly speak against us!"

"What can this weak young man do against you in an assembly such as the present one? Permit him to mount the *minbar* and let us hear what he has to say."

Yazid refused saying, "You have no idea about those

who belong to the House of the Prophet. Few are those who have a similar command of speech or possess such knowledge of religion.”

However, Yazid, pressed by his companions and courtiers was forced to give his assent. Imam Ali ibnul Husain (a.s.) mounted the *minbar* and, after praising God and blessing the Prophet, said, “O listeners! God has given us (*Ahle Bait*) six merits over all other people. He has granted us special status in wisdom, patience and forbearance, sublime dignity, eloquence, courage and social respectability. He has awarded to us the merit of belonging to the family of the Prophet of God, to us belong Hamza and Ja'far. To us belonged *Asadullah* (the Lion of God, the title given by the Prophet to Ali (a.s.)). To us belonged the Masters of the Heavenly Youth' (the Prophet said, “My sons Hasan and Husain are the leaders and masters of the youth of Paradise.”)

“Oh people! I introduce myself to those among you who do not know me. I am the son of Maccah and Mina! I am the son of Zamzam and Safa. I am the son of he who carried *zakat* for the poor, hiding it under his robe. I am the son of the best of those who have ever put on the garments of *ihram* and performed the ceremonies of Hajj. I am the son of he who was taken on the nightly journey from the Holy Mosque to the Masjid-e-Aqsa and rose to *Me'raaj*. I am the son of he whom Gabriel escorted to the Lote-Tree of the Boundary (*Sidra-tul-Muntaha*).”

“I am the son of Muhammad Mustafa (s.a.w.a.s.) I am the son of Ali-e-Murtuza (a.s.) who fought the kaferoon in the fields of battle until they submitted to the Will of God and said '*La ilaha illallah*'. I am the son of he who fought in the presence of the Prophet until his sword was broken and to whom *Zul-Fiqaar* was awarded. I am the son of he who had the honour of

migrating (*hijrat*) twice in Islam. I am the son of Fatima, the best of women of the world . . . ”

Imam Ali ibnul Husain (a.s.) declared to the audience his ties with the Prophet of Islam and the illustrious and eminent station of his Household to whom the unfortunate captives of Karbala, including himself, belonged. The people of Syria, who from the time of the second Khalifah, Umar, had lived under Mu'awiyah's rule as a governor and then as the khalifah of Muslims, had been kept in ignorance about the realities of Islam. More than anything else, they were unaware of the high religious station of the House of the Prophet. Mu'awiyah, during his rule, had introduced Ali and his sons to the ignorant and unaware Muslims of Syria as enemies of Islam who were opposed to the religion of God! Here the objective of the Imam was by no means that of boasting over his relationship with the Prophet. He wanted to tell the people about the glorious station of the House of the Prophet and his grandson Husain whom Yazid had killed and whose women and children he had imprisoned. His words had a profound impression on the minds of the listeners. Yazid, sensing danger, asked the *mu'azzin* to make the call for noon prayers so as to force Ali ibnul Husain to discontinue his speech.

“*Allaho akbar! Allaho akbar! Allaho akbar! Allaho akbar!*” “*Ash-hado an la ilaha illallah!*” cried the *mu'azzin*. “Yes, certainly Allah is greater than everything!” said Ali ibnul Husain (a.s.). “And my complete existence bears witness to His unity,” he added.

“*Ash-hado anna Mohammadar-Rasoolullah!*” came the cry of the *mu'azzin*. Now Ali ibn ul-Hasain turned to Yazid and asked him, “Yazid! Tell us! Was Muhammad (s.a.w.a.s.) your grandfather or mine? If you say he was your grandfather, then it will assuredly be a lie; and if he was my grandfather, then why have you killed his

son and imprisoned his family? Why have you killed my father and have brought his women and children as captives to this city?"

Soon the prayer call was over and Ali ibnul Husain (a.s.) descended from the *minbar*. After hurriedly finishing the noon prayers, Yazid rushed back to his palace, the so-called *Darul-Khilafah*.

Now, more than ever, Yazid realized that it was no longer wise to retain Husain's family in Damascus. Their very contact with the people was injurious to the regime. The members of Husain's family from the elders like Zainab and Ali ibnul Husain to the smallest child were doing propaganda against him and his rule. After he realized that the murder of Husain was a political blunder on his part and his brutal governor of Kufa, Ibn Ziyad, he now thought constantly of absolving himself of this crime and tried to shift the blame to Ibn Ziyad.

No'man, son of Bashir, a Companion of the Prophet, was charged with the responsibility of supervising all arrangements for the return journey of the thirty members of the Prophet's Household to Madina.

The unhappy caravan in its journey back to Madina stopped at Karbala. After staying there for some time to mourn over the tombs of the martyrs, they bid them farewell and started towards Madina. Ultimately, the caravan reached the outskirts of Madina and Imam Ali ibnul Husain (a.s.) alighting from his camel pitched tents at a suitable place outside the city. Bashir bin Jazalam, who had attended the caravan was sent into the city to announce the arrival of the unhappy caravan. Bashir entered the city and reciting a moving elegy broke the news of the martyrdom of Husain and his companions and the arrival of the captives of Karbala. In no time the entire population of Madina rushed to meet

Imam Zainul Abedin (a.s.).

We have abstained from describing the painful and heart-rending details of the caravan's brief stay at Karbala and here too we shall abstain from describing the sad scenes of home-coming of the unhappy travellers. Surrounded by his friends and relatives, tears rolling down his cheeks, Imam Ali ibnul Husain (a.s.) delivered the following speech:

"Praise be to the Merciful Lord who is beyond comprehension of human reason and knows all the hidden secrets. I express my gratitude to Him for undergoing with forbearance unsurpassed cruelty at the hands of tyrants. Abu Abdullah Husain has been killed; his family was made prisoner and his head and those of his companions have been carried on spears from town to town. Who among you shall be happy after this tragedy? What ear can listen to the ghastly details of it? Our trial has been unparalleled, bitter and painful. I pray to the Almighty that He may shower His grace upon us and wreck vengeance on our enemies!"

Yes, this caravan after its toilsome and tragic journey had returned with some glorious achievements the value of which, at that time, could only be understood by a few. Those who accompanied Imam Husain (a.s.) and chose martyrdom with him were a handful of individuals having rare insight and awareness but who were few in number. Imam Husain himself was aware of the immense value of these great men. The people were grief stricken to see that the last of the five most sacred personalities of Islam had also departed from the world. The cream of the youth of Madina were lost. Abul Fazl, Ali Akbar, Qasim, and others had not returned with the caravan. Zainab's sons Aun and Muhammad had remained behind with their uncle, Husain, at Karbala. Zainab (a.s.) was exhausted. She did not live long

after the martyrdom of her beloved brother. A year of her life after Karbala was an age of grief. Ali ibnul Husain never stopped shedding tears and never smiled again. Whenever he was brought water to drink, his eyes were filled with tears. He remembered the thirsty faces of his father, friends and relatives on the day of 'Ashura. The cries of thirsty children on that day still echoed in his ears.

### The Aftermath

Yazid, after Karbala, continued to imagine that cruelty and repression would expunge public resentment and rage. He thought that the traces of a crime can be wiped out by yet another series of crimes and atrocities.

When the people of Madina made an uprising against his government ousting Osman ibn Muhammad ibn Abu-Sufiyan, the governor, he reacted by ordering public massacres, looting and destruction of houses and atrocious treatment of women. His forces under the command of Muslim ibne Aqba entered the city on 28th of Zeel Hajj in the year 63 A.H. and pillage the city for three days, looting, destroying, killing its inhabitants and committing atrocities against women. Yazid himself had ordered his men to pillage and kill and do whatever they wished with its citizen for three days and nights.

As if this was not enough, the same forces under the command of Husain ibn Numayr besieged Maccah on the 3rd of Rabi ul-Awwal the following year. They attacked the city and bombarded and set fire to the Holy Ka'ba. This was Yazid's last crime. The siege of Maccah and the battle were discontinued when news of his death reached the city on the 14th Rabi ul-Awwal of 64 A.H.

Maccah and Madina are and were the sacred cities of the Islamic world. Yazid by his acts proved that his apparent regrets regarding the event of Karbala were nothing more than a hollow show to absolve himself and shield his regime from public anger. But by his acts he had so deeply injured the religious sentiments of the people that the wounds were no longer curable.

A year after Yazid's death, there was another uprising in Kufa known as 'The Movement of the Tawwabeen' or repenters. Led by Sulaiman ibn Surad Khuza'ee – the same person in whose house the Kufans had gathered to consider inviting Husain to Kufa in the beginning – these repenters fought the battle of 'Ayn al-Warda against Syrian troops. The people of Kufa had thrown out 'Amr ibn Hurayth, Ibn Ziyad's deputy in Kufa, who was in charge of the city, and temporarily made 'Aamer ibn Mas'ood the city's governor. The new city governor accepted loyalty to the khilafat of Abdullah ibn Zubair whose base was Maccah. Thus Kufa broke away from the khalifati of Marwan ibn Hakam who had succeeded Yazid as the head of the Syrian based regime.

On the 14th of Rabi ul-Awwal 66 A.H., Mukhtar assisted by Ibrahim ibn Malik Ashtar took over the control of Kufa. Ibrahim's forces fought and killed Ibn Ziyad. Mukhtar mercilessly executed Omar ibn Sa'd and everyone who had been involved in the killings of Husain and his companions. Only a few escaped his sword. During his one year rule over Kufa, he accomplished his mission of avenging Husain's martyrdom and destroying his assassins. He was the Almighty's instrument for the punishment of criminals. His work done, Mukhtar himself was martyred on the 14th of Ramazan while defending himself against the forces of Mus'ab ibn Zubair, the brother of Abdullah ibn Zubair and his governor in Basra, who attacked Kufa.



## EPILOGUE

It is an undeniable fact that at no time in history, before and after Karbala, can we find a group of more than hundred men, women and children, who were so much united in purpose, will and determination. There was not the slightest disagreement between them regarding their ultimate goal and the necessity of self-sacrifice. We know that at several times Imam Husain spoke to his enemies and advised them to reconsider their decision to kill him. But never, not even once, did he speak to his companions for the purpose of bolstering their spirit of loyalty and courage. On the contrary, he repeated his advice encouraging them to leave him and save their lives. Despite this, some left the enemy's ranks to join him choosing to be martyred with him, while not a single man left him to join the enemy for the sake of his life. None of his companions betrayed any signs of weakness when faced with trial. No one deviated however minutely from his commands. On the contrary, they were all happy and in good spirits at the aspect of the precious opportunity to be martyred with their Imam. Husain's supplies had dwindled and there was not a drop of water to drink in his camp. True, children cried with thirst; but nobody complained. Their patience, confidence, dignity, calm and fortitude were not tainted at any moment. In their actions they never departed from the demands of most perfect Islamic behaviour and showed no signs of weakness that the enemy could utilise. Husain ibn Ali (a.s.) was an Imam, a Wali; but he was in company of men, women and children who were all 'Husains' as they were in perfect harmony with their great leader and faithfully reflected his lofty spirit. They shared his awareness of the goal and his determination to defend it to the last drop of blood and not to submit to the forces of evil.

The question rises: who was victorious in this conflict? If by 'victory', we mean physical destruction of the opponent, then Yazid was indeed victorious in Karbala. But if we consider the objectives of Husain and that of Yazid which gave rise to the conflict between them, and the extent to which these objectives were realized, then Yazid was by no means a victor and Husain was certainly triumphant. Yazid, besides being a tyrant and a pervert, claimed to be the spiritual successor of the Prophet, his khalifah. For Yazid it was not only necessary that Husain (a.s.) should be forced to give allegiance, even his silence was not considered enough. But after Karbala the Muslim ummah began to understand that Yazid was by no means fit to be called a Muslim and certainly did not deserve to be considered a religious leader. Khilafat for ever lost the aura of fake sanctity that it had been given. After Karbala no ruler in the Islamic countries could ever claim that religious authority and sanction which the earlier rulers enjoyed. This was a great achievement of Husain that he forever saved Islam from being defiled by arbitrary rule.

The government in Damascus had created a reign of terror in which even the most basic freedom of expression and liberty of thought were taken away from the people. The masses were deprived of the awareness of what happened in the country and of the courage to take any action for the restoration of their liberties. It was Husain's objective to awaken the public mind and resurrect public courage. The tragedy of Karbala, and the journey of its captives, opened the eyes of the public conscience and awakened the people's sense of political awareness. The masses stirred from their indifference and began to realize the true nature of the regime that ruled them and the evil nature of the pervert Khalifah

who headed it. Husain set a sublime example of human resistance against oppression and injustice before the Muslim society. The people heard the details of how Husain and his companions stood with unbreakable resolve against the efforts to subjugate them and boldly withstood every hardship for attainment of their sacred goal. Husain had revived the institution of martyrdom in a world of cowardly men who were afraid of death and stuck to life no matter what indignity it entailed. He declared in that famous sentence:

*Death with dignity is far better than life in dishonour!*

The regime of the time had thought that repressive measures would discourage explicit opposition. But the speeches of Zainab and Imam Ali ibnul Husain in Kufa and in Damascus and the cries of outrage raised in the courts showed to what extent the regime was wrong in its expectations. Before Karbala no one dared to take Husain's name with respect in the presence of Yazid. But the captives praised Husain and his companions in front of Yazid himself and furiously condemned him; and he had to listen to it all in silence.

The special characteristic of victory and defeat is that the victor is always proud of his deeds and the loser is full of regret and shame. Husain ibn Ali (a.s.) and his companions, his relatives and his followers, the young children or the adults in the caravan of captives, none of them ever expressed any regret at what took place at Karbala. True, that the events produced grief and overshadowed lives with sadness, but nobody ever regretted at not having submitted to the pressures of the government. On the contrary, there were many who regretted that they were not present in Karbala to be martyred by Husain's side.

The Kufans who had not come to Husain's assistance chastised themselves for not answering the call of Husain.

The Kufans, full of remorse, regret and repentance, were not satisfied until in the course of the Movement of Tawwabeen' nearly four thousand of them gave their lives fighting the Syrian government's troops, which they considered responsible for the tragedy.

On the other hand, the enemies of Husain (a.s.) spent the rest of their lives in biting regret, shame, ignominy and dishonour. For example, Razi ibn Munqidh 'Abdi, who had killed Burair, one of Husain's companions, was heard to say: "O that I had been dead before the day I killed Burair and went to fight Husain!"

'Omar ibn S'ad, when one of his friends inquired about his feelings on returning from Karbala, said, "Don't ask! No traveller returning home was more unfortunate and miserable than me when I returned having killed my kinsmen and committed there those great crimes!"

After Karbala Yazid always sought to shift the blame to Ibn Ziyad, who in turn put its sole responsibility on Yazid himself. When at a time Yazid wanted to send his forces to Maccah, he wrote to Ibn Ziyad asking him to go and fight Abdullah ibn Zubair. Ibn Ziyad flatly refused and said to his associates: "I have killed the grandson of the Prophet at the bidding of this pervert. Now he is asking me to attack Maccah and the Holy Ka'ba. This I will not do!"

Yazid himself, who was over-joyed at receiving the news of Husain's death, and who in reality continued to show his gratitude to Ibn Ziyad for years to follow, never removed Ibn Ziyad from the office of the governorship of Kufa and Basra after the event of Karbala, and continued to compliment Ibn Ziyad by special favours, only ostensibly blamed him in order to absolve himself in the eyes of the people. Yazid, after Karbala, used to say, "What a misfortune! By killing Husain, Ibn

Ziyad has defamed me in the eyes of Muslims who now hate and despise me. He has made them my enemies and all of them, the good and the bad, consider me a criminal and resent me. Consider what he has done! May God damn the son of Marjana!" Marjana was Ibn Ziyad's mother.

It was the most significant sign of acceptance of defeat that Yazid turned away from his objective for which he had killed Husain and his companions: allegiance. When Ali ibnul Husain (a.s.) and Zainab and the other members of the family of Husain were brought as captives in front of him, he never raised the question of allegiance. It was not the ignorance of his crimes and ugliness of his deeds that restrained the tyrant. What made him desist was the infinite resistance of the martyrs and unshakable determination and forbearance of the captives that discouraged him from raising the question of allegiance. What could be a greater evidence of Husain's victory and Yazid's defeat?

### Relevant Chronology:

- 570 A.D. The Holy Prophet Muhammad (s.a.w.a.s.) born in Maccah.
- 600 A.D. Ali ibn Abi-Talib is born in the Holy Ka'ba on the 13th of Rajab, almost 22 years before the Hijrah.
- 610 A.D. The Holy Prophet begins his mission on the 27th of Rajab.
- 612 A.D. Fatima, the Prophet's only daughter, Ali's wife and the mother of Imam Hasan, Imam Husain, Zainab and Umme-Kulthum is born.
- 622 A.D. On 16th of July, 1st of Rabi-ul-Awwal, the Prophet migrates with his followers from Maccah to Madina. This marks the beginning of the Islamic calendar, the Hijrah.
- 2 A.H. The *Qiblah* of Muslims changed from Jerusalem to the Holy Ka'ba at Maccah. The same year Muslims defeat the idolators of Maccah in the battle of Badr on 17th of Ramazan. Ali and Fatima are married.
- 3 A.H. Hasan, the eldest son of Ali and Fatima born on 15th of Ramazan.
- 4 A.H. Husain born on the 3rd of Sha'ban.
- 11 A.H. The Prophet passes away on 28th of Safar. Abu Bakr becomes his 'khalifah'. Fatima dies on the 3rd of Jamadi uth-Thani.
- 13 A.H. Abu Bakr dies appointing Umar to khilafat.

- 25 A.H. Umar dies and Othman becomes the 3rd khalifah.
- 35 A.H. Othman is assassinated. Ali is elected by the overwhelming support of Muslims for the office of the khalifah.
- 36 A.H. Ali moves his capital to Kufa.
- 40 A.H. Ali is martyred on the 21st of Ramazan. 'Night of Power'.
- 41 A.H. Imam Hasan abdicates and hands over the khilafat to Mu'awiyah in the month of Jamadi ul-Awwal.
- 49 A.H. Imam Hasan dies in the month of Safar after being poisoned by Mu'awiyah through Hasan's wife Ju'da, the daughter of Ash'ath ibn Qays (a relative of Mu'awiyah).
- 60 A.H. Mu'awiyah dies in Rajab at the age of 78 years. Yazid assumes khilafat. Imam Husain leaves Madina on the 28th of Rajab and reaches Maccah on the 3rd of Sha'ban. Husain leaves Maccah for Kufa on the 8th of Dhul Hajjah. Muslim ibn Aqeel and Haani are martyred in Kufa on the 9th of Dhul Hajjah.
- 61 A.H. Imam Husain arrives at Karbala on 2nd of Muharram. 7th of Muharram: Umar ibn Sa'd following Ibn Ziyad's instructions orders that water should not be allowed to reach Husain's camp. 10th of Muharram: the fateful day when Husain and his 72 faithful companions are martyred at Karbala. 1st of Safar: The captives of Karbala enter the city of Damascus.
- 62 A.H. Zainab passes away on the 14th of Rajab.
- 63 A.H. The people of Madina oust Othman ibn Muhammad ibn Abu Sufiyan, Yazid's governor in Madina. On the 28th of Dhul Hajjah

- Yazid's forces under the command of Muslim ibn Aqba enter the city killing and pillaging for three days. The city streets ran with blood.
- 64 A.H. On the 3rd of Rabi ul-Awwal Yazid's forces under Husain ibn Numair attack Maccah and bombard and set fire to the Holy Ka'ba. Yazid dies on the 14th of Rabi' ul-Awwal.
- 65 A.H. 1st of Rabi uth-Thani is the beginning of the Movement of Tawwabeen, in Kufa, under the leadership of Sulaiman bin Surad Khuza'ee
- 66 A.H. The rise of Mukhtar on 14th of Rabi ul-Awwal who takes control of Kufa. On the 24th of Dhul Hajjah orders execution of those who had taken part in the battle against Husain.
- 67 A.H. Mukhtar is killed on 14th of Ramazan defending Kufa against Mus'ab ibn Zubair's forces.
- 132 A.H. The fall of Bani Umayyah after the last Umayyah king Marwan ibn Muhammad is killed in the Battle of Zaab. The rise of Bani 'Abbas.