

KARBALA

كربلاء

Objectives >>>

Students should understand:

- The political and social situation of the Imam, Muslims and Islam prior to Karbala
- What happened in Medina that caused Imam Ḥusayn (as) to leave
- Know that Imam moved to Mecca so as to seek a global platform, seek refuge with Allah (SWT) and as opposition to falsehood
- Understand why Imam left Mecca to go to Kūfah with brief details of his journey.
- Be reminded that Karbala and 'Āshurā' should always be upheld for it keeps our Islam alive
- The composition of the Imam's army, including most prominent family members and companions
- The characteristics of the people in the Imam's army, and how this can be generalised to any time or place
- How the Imam ended up at the land of Karbala
- The events prior to 'Āshurā' and brief details of the events of the tenth day, dispelling common myths such as
 - The age of Ali al-Akbar and al-Qāsim ibn Ḥasan
 - Exaggeration about people killed by the army of Imam Ḥusayn (as)
 - Apparent marriage of Qāsim
- Should be wary of sermons where preposterous and fabricated stories of Imam Ḥusayn (as) are mentioned that contradict Islamic principles
- Should be aware of the most reliable literature on the story of Karbala in the English language.
- The role of Zaynab (as) on the night after 'Āshurā' and thereafter
- A brief discussion of the aftermath of 'Āshurā'

FUNDAMENTALS OF ISLAM

LEVEL 3

Imam Ḥusayn (as)

THE ENVIRONMENT OF THE MUSLIMS LEADING TO KARBALA

When Prophet Muḥammad (saw) passed away, the teachings of Islam that he had introduced also died with him. The Muslims were being ruled by tyrants who mocked and made fun of the original teachings of Islam. In addition, narrating the words of the Prophet (saw) was not allowed anymore. During this time, racism was very common and the Zakāt money was being used for personal gain and luxury.

When Mu'āwiyah ibn Sufyan took power, the situation became worse and the environment in which the Muslims were living in became even more threatening. There were very few Muslims who dared to speak out against him & show support towards the Ahlul Bayt (as); those who did were brutally murdered. After Mu'āwiyah's death, his son Yazīd continued to rule the people by instilling fear in them. Just like his father, he was a very corrupt man who drank wine, killed innocent people and openly disobeyed the laws of God.

THE KŪFANS TURN TO IMAM ḤUSAYN

The Muslims in Kūfah were desperate to end the injustice of Yazīd's rule. They wrote to Imam Ḥusayn (as) urging and pleading him to come to Kūfah to be their leader. Imam Ḥusayn (as) was in Medina at the time when he received almost 12000 letters from the Kūfans. Imam (as) sent his cousin Muslim Ibn Aqīl to Kūfah, to find out exactly what was going on before Imam (as) himself took any action.

In the meantime, Imam Ḥusayn (as) learnt that Yazīd had sent secret agents to Mecca to kill him. In order to avoid bloodshed in the holy land of Mecca, Imam Ḥusayn (as) together with his family left for Kūfah. It is important to remind ourselves of the objective and intention of the Imam (as) and why he carried out this movement. Imam Ḥusayn (as) says:

“Certainly I am not departing (Medina) out of pleasure or seeking corruption or oppression. I am only rising to make correction to the nation of my grandfather Muhammad peace be upon him and his family. I want to command good, forbid evil...”

From this we learn that Imam Ḥusayn’s (as) main motive and goal was to re-establish those Islamic values and practises that died with the Prophet (saw).

MUSLIM IBN AQİL, THE IMAM’S MESSENGER

Muslim Ibn Aqīl received a very warm welcome when he initially arrived in Kūfah. He was there to see whether the Kūfans were truthful in their invitation to the Imam (as). On seeing the overwhelming support from the Muslims of Kūfah, Muslim Ibn Aqīl wrote to Imam (as) asking him to come to Kūfah. Having heard about this, the governor of Kūfah, Ubaydullāh Ibn Ziyād, scared of all the support that Muslim Ibn Aqīl was receiving from the Kūfans, threatened to kill anyone who associated themselves with Muslim Ibn Aqīl.

Sadly, it did not take long for the Kūfans to desert Muslim Ibn Aqīl and leave him all alone. He was left wandering the streets of Kūfah with no supporters while Ubaydullāh’s men searched for him. This showed Muslim that the Kūfans were not sincere in their invitation. Yet now he had no means to let Imam Ḥusayn (as) know of the sudden change in circumstances.

Muslim Ibn Aqīl wandered the streets of Kūfah with no place to stay nor food to eat when a kind woman by the name of Ṭaw’ah offered care to Muslim. She knew exactly who Muslim was and she loved Imam Ḥusayn (as). Muslim Ibn Aqīl spent the night worshipping Allah (SWT) as the army of Ibn Ziyād were looking for him everywhere. Unfortunately, Ṭaw’ah’s son, who had heard of the reward that Ibn Ziyād had placed for whoever finds Muslim, revealed the location of Muslim Ibn Aqīl to Ibn Ziyād and his army. In the early hours of the morning, Muslim heard the march of the army and hooves of the

horses and immediately understood that the army were here to take and kill him.

Muslim Ibn Aqīl thanked his kind host before he left her house. It is reported that Muslim Ibn Aqīl fought with the enemies bravely. However, the power and strength of one man fighting hundreds eventually diminished. Muslim Ibn Aqīl was attacked from every side until he was captured and taken to the castle. There, he was taken to the roof, where his head was severed and his body was thrown from the roof then dragged through the streets of Kūfah.

In his final moments, the person who killed Muslim mentions that as he got closer to Muslim, he heard him glorifying God and seeking His forgiveness.

THE IMAM’S JOURNEY

As we mentioned earlier, Imam Ḥusayn (as) left Medina and made his way to the holy city of Mecca. While he was there, he learnt of Yazīd’s plan to kill him. Therefore, to avoid bloodshed in the holy land of Mecca, he left for Kūfah. On his journey, Imam Ḥusayn (as) stopped at 13 different places and as mentioned in history books, our Imam (as) stayed at some of these places, met people and also delivered sermons



THE MEETING WITH ḤURR

Before reaching Kūfah, the Imam’s army were stopped by a small army led by a man by the name of Ḥurr. Ḥurr was a general in the army of Yazīd and he had been ordered to stop the Imam from reaching Kūfah.

Lesson 2: The Imam's Army

When the two armies met, Ḥurr's men were thirsty so Imam Ḥusayn (as) ordered his men to give them water. The Imam himself helped several thirsty soldiers to drink. Even animals were given water to drink. Ḍuhr prayers were led by the Imam (as) and all prayed behind him including Ḥurr's soldiers. Here the Imam Ḥusayn (as) told Ḥurr about many letters from Kūfah. He said:

“O People of Kūfah, you sent me your delegations and wrote me letters that you had no Imam and that I should come to unite you and lead you in the way of Allah. You wrote that we the Ahlul Bayt are more qualified to govern your affairs than those who claim things to which they have no right and act unjustly and wrongly. But if you have changed your mind, have become ignorant of our Rights and have forgotten your promises, I shall turn back.”

However, Imam Ḥusayn (as) was denied from turning back by Ḥurr's army and was led to bypass Kūfah. After a few more days, the Imam (as) and his camp were led through the desert till they reached a place called Karbala. The Imam asked for the name of the place. Someone said Karbala. On hearing this name, the Imam asked the caravan to stop and settle there for they had arrived at their destination. The Imam (as) said:

“This is the place of our Martyrdom. This is Karbala”

Like the people of Kūfah who were hypocritical to the Imam of their time, we need to look into ourselves and question our sincerity and love toward our Imam. Are we amongst those who constantly call and pray for his quick reappearance but at the same time pay little attention to the majority of our actions that displease him? Are we cowards in front of the tyrants of our time? Are we willing to sacrifice all our comforts to be with him? ⁱ

Review Questions

Q1. Who did the Imam send as his representative to Kūfah:

- Muslim Ibn Aqīl
- Hani Ibn 'Urwah
- Ali al-Akbar, his oldest son

Q2. Why didn't the people of Kufa support the Imam?

- They loved this world and did not want to sacrifice it
- They were attracted by the expensive gifts that Ubaydulāh Ibn Ziyād offered to them
- They did not like Imam Ḥusayn

Imam Ḥusayn (as) left Medina with an army of 72 people, including women and young children. Some of his immediate family members in this army included:

- The Imam's three sons:
 - Imam Zainul Abidīn (as)
 - Ali al-Akbar
 - Abdullah (Ali al-Asghar)
- The Imam's brother Abbas Ibn Ali
- The Imam's sister Zaynab Bint Ali along with her two young sons 'Aun and Muḥammad
- The Imam's young nephew Qāsīm ibn al-Ḥasan

As the Imam left Mecca and headed towards Kūfah, thousands of people joined his army. However, when they heard the news of the death of Muslim in Kūfah, they slowly began to leave the Imam also. According to historical reports, the Imam's army consisted of about 72-100 people by the time he reached Karbala ⁱⁱ but with almost 8000 soldiers in the army of Ibn Ziyad, the Imam's army did not appear as a strong one.

THE CHARACTER OF THE IMAM'S ARMY

The fighters and companions of the Imam (as) army were unique in many ways. They were not scared of death and instead would compete with each other for martyrdom. The Prophet (saw) said:

“Ḥusayn (as) will be amongst those who will glitter like shining stars, those who compete against each other for martyrdom”

When someone asked Imam Ṣādiq (as) as to why the companions had such a positive attitude toward death and why they were so eager toward it, he replied:

“The curtain of this world was removed for them and they observed their status in Paradise.”

We need to ask ourselves why we don't share the same enthusiasm as the companions of the Imam (as). We are told of the reality of our actions by our Imam. For example, we know that attending the gathering of remembrance of Allah (SWT) and the Ahlul Bayt (as) is as if we are entering the gardens of paradise.

So why aren't we as passionate in performing those actions just like the companions of Imam Ḥusayn (as)?

BRIEF EVENTS OF THE NIGHT AND DAY OF ASHURA

The companions were extremely loyal toward the Imam and would never allow any harm to reach him. For example, some of his companions would surround the Imam (as) whilst he recited his prayer and their bodies took all the arrows the enemies shot.

The Imam (as) was taking a nap before midday on the day before 'Āshūrā' (9th Muḥarram) when the hooves of the horses and the beat of the drums were heard in the distance. The enemies tried to instil fear in the hearts of the Imam's camp. Umar ibn Sa'd cried out to his men: 'O horseman who are riding their horses for the sake of God, ride towards Ḥusayn so that I give you the good news of paradise'.

On hearing this, Imam Ḥusayn (as) requested his brother Abbas to speak to the enemies and ask them for one more extra night so that they could worship and pray. The enemies obliged thinking that the Imam's men were scared.

Before sunset, Shimr shouted at the Imam's camp: 'Where are the children of our sisters? Where are our nephews (referring to the children of Ummul Banīn i.e. Abbas). Come over (onto our side) and you will be safe.'

Abbas shouted back:

"Shame on you! May your hands be cut off! Which blood relation is more important to safeguard? Yours or that of the Holy Prophet (saw)?"

After Maghreb, the Imam gathered his companions and gave them a talk. He began with the sweet praise of Allah (SWT) even though he knew what was going to happen to him and his family the following day. The Imam (as) said:

"I do not know of any companions more loyal and better than all of you. These enemies are after my blood so take advantage of the darkness of this night and leave if you have any commitments (obligations)."

(Some narrations also say that Imam turned his face so that no one would feel embarrassed to leave his presence)

Not a single person moved.

'Abbas said to his Imam:

"O Imam! Where will we go? How can we leave you? We will all die before they touch you!"

Replies from other companions:

- Muslim Ibn 'Awsajah:

"O Ḥusayn, This is my sword and I have been sharpening it. This is my arrow and I have been sharpening it. Even if I lose this sword, I shall fight with my bare hands but I will never leave you."

- Sa'id bin Abdullah:

"I don't care even if I'm martyred and then miraculously brought back to life, and then burnt to death and then brought to life again 70 times just in order to protect you. What is once giving my life for the sake of God?"

- Zuhair Ibn al-Qayn:

"I wish I was given life a thousand times just so that I can protect you"

These brave and loyal companions spent the rest of the night worshipping Allah (SWT), their prayers sounded like the humming of bees; and many spent most of the night in prostration (sujūd), bowing and crying.

MARTYDOM OF QĀSIM BIN AL ḤASAN

Qāsim was the son of Imam al-Ḥasan (as). He was very young when the event of 'Āshūrā' took place. He asked permission to go to the battlefield but Imam Ḥusayn (as) refused to grant him permission. Qāsim continuously kissed the hands and feet of Imam Ḥusayn (as) until he gave him the permission. Qāsim left for the battlefield while tears were flowing from his eyes as he addressed the enemies giving them an introduction of who he was. He fought bravely and even though he was so young he fought thirty-five men until eventually the weak enemies surrounded Qāsim and killed him. Qāsim called for his uncle to pay his final respects to the Imam. The Imam pressed Qāsim's head against his chest and said:

"Far be the nation who have killed you, while their enemy on the day of Qiyāmah (judgement) shall be your grandfather (the prophet)"

MARTYDOM OF 'ALI AL AKBAR

Ali al-Akbar was the oldest son of Imam Ḥusayn (as). He resembled the Prophet (saw) in every way. Ali al-Akbar asked permission from his father to fight. The Imam (as) reluctantly gave him permission and looked at his son as though he was never going to see him again. It is related that the Imam lifted his beard toward the heaven and said:

“O Allah, be a witness upon these men, that the youth who resembles your Prophet the most in character and speech is proceeding towards them. Whenever we desired beholding the face of your Prophet, we would look at him.....”ⁱⁱⁱ

Ali al-Akbar entered the battlefield like a vicious lion, attacking several enemies. He killed so many soldiers that the enemy started grieving. However, after some while, Ali al-Akbar, who hadn't had water for three days, eventually became tired; he went to his father saying:

“O father! Thirst is killing me while the load of iron has rid me of strength. Is there water available so that I may regain strength and pounce (ambush) the enemies?”

Hearing this Imam Ḥusayn (as) wept and said:

“O dear son! Fight for a while, and very soon you shall see your grandfather. You shall drink from his flowing cup and shall never be thirsty”

Ali al-Akbar returned towards the battlefield and continued killing the enemies until one person faced him and threw a spear at him throwing him to the ground. Seeing that Ali al-Akbar was on the ground, the enemy surrounded him from all sides and continued attacking him with their swords and arrows mercilessly. As he lay on the floor, he called out to his father:

“O dear father! Peace be upon you! Here is my grandfather, the Prophet of Allah (SWT) calling me to hasten toward paradise”

MARTYDOM OF 'ABBAS

'Abbas was the brother of Imam Ḥusayn (as) and the commander of the Imam's army. 'Abbas was known for his physical strength and bravery. He was never permitted to fight until the children's cries for water were heard from the camp so the Imam (as) asked 'Abbas to bring water for the children. 'Abbas proceeded toward the enemies and advised and warned them but to no avail.

He took a water-skin and mounted on his horse and rode toward the river Euphrates. He made his way through the group of the enemy who were guarding the water and made it to the Euphrates. He filled the water-skin and headed back toward the camp. The enemies blocked his way and one of them severed 'Abbas's right hand with his sword. 'Abbas (as) placed the water-skin on his left shoulder. Another enemy severed his left hand. 'Abbas carried the water skin with his teeth until an enemy pierced the water skin and all the water flowed from it. Another arrow pierced his heart and he fell off from his horse and called out to his Imam:

“O Master! Peace be upon you”^{iv}

It is stated that when 'Abbas (as) was martyred, Imam Ḥusayn (as) said:

“Now my back has bent, and my efforts have weakened”

WHY DO WE MOURN FOR IMAM HUSAYN AND HIS FAMILY?

Throughout the year and in particular during the month of Muḥarram, we mourn for Imam Ḥusayn (as) and his family. The reason we do so is not only because of the brutal and merciless treatment that the Imam and his family faced, but also to remember the values that the Imam stood for. This includes intolerance towards any tyrant and oppressor who openly violates the laws of God stand up for the truth and to fight off evil.

BRIEF SAYINGS OF THE IMAM (AS)

“One who wishes to reach a goal and aim through sin and transgression, the way to that aim would get blocked and soon he would fall into danger.”

(TUHFUL AQOOL, P248)

“The one who loves you forbids you (from committing evil) and the one who has enmity with you entices and allures you (to commit evil)”

(BIHAR UL ANWAR VOL 78, P 128)

Review Questions

Q1. Why were the companions of the Imam competing against each other for martyrdom?

- a. They wanted to be the first to protect their Imam
- b. They had seen their great position in paradise
- c. Both a and b

Q2. We cry and weep for Imam Ḥusayn because:

- a. he was killed in a merciless way
- b. we love the Imam very much
- c. we wish to purify our sins by crying
- d. It is a reminder that we should fight for truth against falsehood
- e. All of the above

ⁱ References:

All historical facts and sayings of the Imam in this lesson are from *Nafasul Mahmoom* by Sheikh Abbas Al Qummi .

ⁱⁱ According to the 'Holy Visiting' the companions numbered 89, according to *Mahallati* 228 and according to *Seyyed Mohsin Ami* 139

ⁱⁱⁱ *Tasliyatul Majalis* as quoted in *Nafasul Mahmoom* Pg 269

^{iv} *Bihar al- Anwaar*