

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 4

Lesson 1

EVERYDAY IS ASHURA AND EVERY LAND IS KARBALA

This famous saying sums up the event of 'Āshurā' and Karbala. In the previous lesson on the life of Imam Ḥusayn (as) we discussed the background to the event of 'Āshurā' and why Imam Ḥusayn (as) took it upon himself to defend Islam by sacrificing his life. 'Āshurā' was the ultimate good vs. evil event and its power has inspired hundreds of revolutions. In this lesson we shall discuss some of the lessons that Imam Ḥusayn (as) taught and that live to this day and will continue to live.

SITUATION AT THE TIME OF OUR IMAM (AS)

In order to understand the history of Karbala, it is imperative we understand the situation under which our Imam was living. As we have discussed previously, our Imam lived in a very difficult time. At the time of Imam Ḥasan (as) his own people deserted him and he was forced to sign a peace treaty with Mu'āwiyah. One of the conditions of the treaty was that when Mu'āwiyah died, Yazīd would not be leader. Mu'āwiyah eventually murdered Imam Ḥasan (as) and violated many of the conditions he had signed with Imam Ḥasan (as). When Mu'āwiyah died, Yazīd knew that Imam Ḥusayn (as) was the rightful leader so he did not inform anyone that Mu'āwiyah had passed away.

He sent a message to the governor of Medina to seek allegiance from three key people whom he thought would revolt against his rule: Imam Ḥusayn (as), 'Abdullāh bin

Zubayr and ‘Abdullah bin ‘Umar, none of whom recognised his right for any position. Walīd, the then governor of Medina called Imam to him and Marwan bin Ḥakam the governor’s ruthless advisor told Walīd:

"I swear by Allah that if Ḥusayn bin ‘Ali leaves this place without taking the oath of allegiance it will no longer be possible for you to lay hands on him without bloodshed. You should, therefore, detain him till he takes the oath and in the event of his refusing to do so, you should chop off his head."ⁱ

Imam very tactfully escaped the situation and did not give his allegiance to anyone.

As we have discussed, earlier, this hatred that these people had to our Imam was rooted in greed, corruption, and the need to take revenge for what the Prophet (saw) and Imam ‘Ali (as) did to their ancestors. This intimidation and threats against the Imam (as) continued and our Imam (as) refused to acknowledge Yazīd as the leader of the Muslims and he knew if he stayed in Medina, he would be assassinated and no one would have ever known. After a few nights he left Medina along with his wives, brothers and nephews and most of the members of his family, and proceeded on his journey to Mecca, remembering the words of Prophet Mūsa:

"So he left the city in the state of fear and cautious saying: Lord! Protect me against the unjust people."
(28:21)

The 'state of fear' in the verse however should not be mistaken for 'fear of death' for our M’asumīn leaders are far from such states. The fear in this verse perhaps was from any event that would hamper his path from fulfilling his mission of awakening the slumbering community and reviving Islam in the hearts and minds of the Muslims. Thus he did not want to be martyred before he fulfilled his mission.

TO MECCA

The Imam arrived in Mecca just before the pilgrimage season. Traders, pilgrims and visitors would come from all over the Muslim world and meet in one place. When we analyse the journey that Imam took to migrate to Medina, he did it for three main reasons

1. THE IMPORTANCE OF A GLOBAL PLATFORM:

In one of his historic statements Imam Ḥusayn (as) clearly says that the main reason behind his uprising (in whatever stage it may be) is to seek reform in the Muslim nation. Then he describes the path he would

أُرِيدُ أَنْ أَمُرَ بِالْمَعْرُوفِ وَ أَنْهَى عَنِ الْمُنْكَرِ

“I plan to invite towards good and to forbid evil.”

In order for him to carry out this reform immediately, the best place to go to was Mecca, where pilgrims from all over the Muslim world would come to perform 'Umrah and Ḥajj. They would listen to his message, wake up, and relate the message to their people on their return. Historical records tell us that while in Mecca, Muslims from different countries would come to Imam Ḥusayn (as) day and night, and listen to what he had to say.ⁱⁱ

2. OPPOSITION AGAINST FALSEHOOD:

The flight of Imam Ḥusayn (as) reveals the Imam's liberated spirit. He never allowed himself to submit to any government that does not obey the laws of God. In fact it is a practical manifestation of Islām (submission to the will of God).

3. SEEKING REFUGE IN ALLAH

His flight to the Divine sanctity of safety perhaps demonstrated that his only refuge was Allah (SWT) in whose house there is always safety:

“In it are clear signs and whosoever enters therein is safe” (3:97)

Seeking refuge in the Divine sanctity, however, should transport us to a greater meaning: one who really seeks refuge in Allāh is safe from all kinds of polytheism and oppression.

MUSLIM IS DEPUTED TO KŪFAH

As people realised that Mu’āwiyah was dead and Imam Ḥusayn (as) had refused to pay allegiance to Yazīd, the people of Kūfah responded and wrote hundreds of to the Imam while he was still in Medina, asking him to come to their city and help them rise against the tyrant rulers. They claimed he would have safety and an army if he wished to fight the oppressors. The Imam (as) could not ignore these letters and therefore sent his special envoy and cousin, Muslim Ibn Aqīl, to Kūfah to determine the situation and report back to him. When Muslim arrived,

over 10,000 people paid allegiance to him! Muslim, seeing that the people were with him, sent a message to Imam to come to Kūfah to set up his base there.

Yazīd heard of this and immediately appointed one of his most ruthless and cunning mercenaries, ‘Ubaydullāh Ibn Ziyād as the governor of Kūfah. ‘Ubaydullāh was very devious and cunning and tested the resolve of the Kūfans: he threatened them, jailed a few, killed some of them and bribed many to abandon Muslim. The Kūfans failed this test and one by one, they abandoned Muslim such that he was left alone. ‘Ubaydullāh also killed Muslim ibn Aqil in the most brutal way.

IMAM HUSAYNS’ JOURNEY TO KŪFAH

Whilst this was happening, Imam Ḥusayn (as) had already left Mecca on his way to Kūfah to join Muslim. He left as people were coming for the Ḥajj (on the 8th of Dhul Ḥijjah 60 AH) and therefore Imam took every opportunity to speak to people. In every stop, he gave sermons and spoke to people telling them to join him and spread the message of true Islam that Yazīd and his clan had so desperately tried to distort and corrupt. We will discuss a significant incident that happened at one of these stations. The companions of Zuhayr Ibn al-Qayn narrate:

We were with Zuhayr bin al-Qayn when we came from Mecca. Although we were travelling alongside Ḥusayn (as), there was nothing more hateful to us than that we should stop with him at a halting place. Yet at one point when al-Ḥusayn (as), travelled and halted, we could not avoid halting with him. Imam Ḥusayn halted at the side (of the road) and we halted at the (other) side (of the road). While we were sitting, eating our food, a messenger of al-Ḥusayn, peace be on him, approached, greeted us and entered (our camp).

"Zuhayr ibn al-Qayn," he said, "Abu ‘Abdullāh al-Ḥusayn, peace be on him, has sent me to you (to ask) you to come to him." Each man of us threw away what was in his hands (i.e. threw up his hands in horror); it was (as surprising) as if birds had alighted on our heads.

"Glory be to God," (Zuhayr's) wife said to him, "did the son of the Messenger of God send for you? Then aren't you going to him? If you went to him, you would hear what he had to say. Then you could leave him (if you wanted to)." Zuhayr ibn al-Qayn went (across) to him. It was not long before he returned to announce that he was

heading east (to join the Imam). He ordered his tent (to be struck) and (called for) his luggage, mounts and equipment. His tent was pulled down and taken to al-Ḥusayn, peace be on him, then he said to his wife: "You are divorced, go back to your family, for I do not want anything to befall you except good."

Then he said to his companions:

“Whoever wants to follow me (may do so), otherwise he is at the end of his covenant with me (i.e. released from obedience to follow Zuhayr as the leader of his tribal group). I will tell you a story (of something which happened to me once): we were raiding a rich land.

God granted us victory and we won (a lot of) booty. Salmān al-Farisi, the mercy of God be on him, said to us: 'Are you happy with the victory which God has granted you and the booty you have won?' We said: 'Yes.' Then he said: 'Therefore when you meet the master of the young men of the family of Muḥammad be happier to fight with him than you are with the booty which you have obtained today.' As for me. I pray that God may be with you."

He remained among the people with Imam Ḥusayn (as) until he was killed. ⁱⁱⁱ

The powerful message Zuhayr ibn al-Qayn left us with is that sometimes we are scared to stand up for the right things, we would rather avoid talking to someone when we know he is going to tell us to do something good that we dislike. The reward Allah granted him for joining and being with our Imam was that he got paradise and he defended Islam and we remember him till today as a hero of Islam. He chose a more difficult yet more rewarding path and never regretted it.

Class Activity

From what we have learnt about the journey of the Imam each person in the class will give one message we learn from this lesson.

- Standing up to oppressors
- Spreading message of Islam in a peaceful strategic manner
- Opposing falsehood
- Standing up to authority when the authority is in the wrong
- Not being hypocritical like the Kūfans, i.e. sticking by your word (your promise) even if it means giving your life for the truth
- Not abandoning the Ahlul Bayt (as)
- Sticking by the truth even if it means losing your life

Review Questions

Q1. Imam Ḥusayn (as) rose up against the tyrants of his time because:

- a. He wanted to establish justice
- b. He wanted to re-establish the real teachings of Islam
- c. Both of the above

Q2. Imam Ḥusayn's (as) revolution:

- a. Had no real effect on the Muslim world
- b. Revived the Muslims and led to many other revolutions
- c. We are unsure of its consequences

Q3. Imam Ḥusayn (as) did not pay allegiance to Yazīd because:

- a. He was an open sinner and an unjust ruler
- b. He didn't like his family
- c. He was the son of Mu'āwiyah

Lesson 2

In this lesson, we will discuss the members of the army of Ḥusayn (as). The companions of the Imam were incredibly loyal to him and to the religion of Islam. They had such strong faith which made them extremely brave. They were told by the Imam that they will be martyred on the day of 'Āshurā' yet none of them left Imam's side. These are the kinds of characteristics our present Imam (as) requires of us! Let us see who Imam's army consisted of and check with ourselves if we can be considered to be as part of the army of the Imam of our time.

THE PROMINENT COMPANIONS

- Muslim ibn 'Awsajah: Muslim was an elderly man who had fought alongside the Ahlul Bayt his whole life. He left Kūfah despite the blockade and managed to join the army of his Imam. He gave his life early on in the battle of Karbalā'.
- Ḥabīb ibn Maḍāhir: Ḥabīb was a lifelong friend of Imam Ḥusayn (as). Even as a child, he was very close to the Imam (as). He too had fought to help the Ahlul Bayt throughout his life. He gave his life soon after his friend Muslim.
- Zuhayr ibn al-Qayn: we have learnt about how Zuhayr joined the Imam's army on their way to Karbala.
- Sa'id ibn Abdullah al-Ḥanafī: Sa'id was the man who stood in front of Imam Ḥusayn (as) while the Imam prayed his Ḍuhr prayer. He was shot by 13 arrows, as well as spears, and died protecting the Imam (as).

HIS FAMILY

The most difficult part of the saga of Karbala was the sacrifice Imam Ḥusayn (as) gave from his family and the family of the Prophet and Imam 'Ali (as).

BROTHERS OF IMAM ḤUSAYN (AS)

1. 'Abbas ibn 'Ali ibn Abu Tālib
2. The three younger brothers of 'Abbas
3. 2-4 other brothers of Imam Ḥusayn (as) according to different narrations

SONS OF IMAM ḤUSAYN (AS)

4. 'Ali al-Akbar ibn Ḥusayn ibn 'Ali
5. 'Ali al-Asghar ('Abullāh) ibn Ḥusayn ibn 'Ali

NEPHEWS OF IMAM ḤUSAYN (AS)

6. Qāsim ibn al-Ḥasan (as)
7. Two brothers of Qāsim both named 'Abdullāh
8. Aun, the son of Zaynab
9. Mohammad, the son of Zaynab (according to some narrations)
10. There were also many sons of 'Aqīl and Muslim ibn 'Aqīl among the martyrs

THE IMAM REACHES KARBALA

When Imam Ḥusayn (as) crossed into Iraq, Ibn Ziyād's troops blocked the path and surrounded the caravan. Ḥurr ibn Yazīd had been sent by Ibn Ziyād with one thousand troops to meet Imam Ḥusayn (as). After

studying the unfortunate situation, Imam Ḥusayn said to the enemy troops:

“I have come because you wrote letters inviting me to come and unite you for the cause of truth and justice. But now if you have changed your mind and you dislike my presence here, I am ready to go back.”^{iv}

However, the treacherous Kūfans, who invited the grandson of the Prophet showing their loyalty in their messages and letters, had now become so hypocritical and delusional with the riches that Ibn Ziyād and Yazīd had promised, that they were not prepared to let him go back, either to Mecca or Medina or forward to Kūfah.

Imam Ḥusayn (as) continued his march in a direction that led neither to Kūfah nor Medina, and reached the fateful plain of Karbala. Here he camped on the 2nd Muḥarram, 61 A.H.

The followers of Imam Ḥusayn (as) showed unparalleled dedication and conviction. They refused to desert him, despite the unfavourable situation.

One of his followers, Muslim ibn ‘Awsajah, famously remarked:

“Could we leave you alone? How should we excuse ourselves before Allah concerning doing our duty to you? By God! Not before I thrust my spear until I break it in their chests...I will not leave you. If I have no weapon to fight them with, I will throw stones at them to defend you until I die with you.”

Other faithful followers voiced the exact sentiments and promised to defend Imam Ḥusayn (as) with their own lives.

THE FATEFUL BATTLE

For the next nine days, more and more soldiers began to arrive in Karbala, in preparation for the battle against Imam Ḥusayn (as). Every day, the Imam took the opportunity to speak to them and warn them not to fight him. He offered every possible solution other than paying allegiance to Yazīd, but the army refused time and again.

Ibn Sa’d, the commander of Yazīd’s army, insisted Ḥusayn (as) to come in the battlefield and decide the matter by sword. After a final discussion, the confrontation between truth and falsehood commenced when Ibn Sa’d led the assault by shooting the first arrow.

Even at such a tense moment, Imam Ḥusayn (as) did not forget his Lord. Rather, he devoutly prayed to Allah, saying:

“O Allah! It is You in Whom I trust amid all grief. You are my hope amid all distress. You are my trust and provision in everything that happens to me...”

Imam Ḥusayn (as) also reminded the cruel and heartless army of the crime that they were about to commit. With great eloquence, Imam Ḥusayn (as) told them:

“...Trace back my lineage and consider who I am. Then, look back at yourselves and remonstrate with yourselves.

Consider whether it is right for you to kill me and desecrate my honour. Am I not the son of the daughter of your Prophet, the son of the executor of his will and his cousin, the first of the believers in God and the man who [first] believed in what His Messenger brought from his Lord? Was not Ḥamzah, the lord of the Martyrs, my uncle? Was not Ja’far, in heaven, my uncle? Have you not heard the words that circulate among you that the Prophet of Allah said concerning myself and my brother: ‘These are the two leaders of the youths of the inhabitants of heaven?’”

The enemies could not answer to these truths. Some got confused but their leaders reminded them of the riches and gold they were promised and therefore in greed and frustration they attacked.

Though the Imam’s companions were few (between 72 and 100), they put up a brave and courageous fight.

By midday, most of Imam’s faithful devotees had been martyred. Soon after, none remained except the close relatives of Imam Ḥusayn (as). One by one, they too were brutally assassinated. Imam Ḥusayn’s (as) own son, ‘Ali al-Akbar, was savaged to pieces by the cruel army.

Qāsim, the son of Imam Ḥasan (as), showed great courage and bravery, but was soon martyred too. Even the infant ‘Ali al-Asghar was not spared. Eventually Imam Ḥusayn (as) himself was brutally killed by the enemies. Imam al-Mahdi (as) describes the scene in vivid detail in his Ziyarāt Nahiyah:

“You were bearing the tribulations of the battle with so much patience that the angels of the sky were astonished.

Then the enemies surrounded you from all the sides and began to give you one injury after another and made you fatigued. No helper remained between you and your women and children. You were still deflecting the crowd of attackers with persistence and patience away from your women and children.

Till they forced you down from the horse-back. And you descended to the earth, wounded. The horses were trampling you with their hooves. The atrocious-army fell upon you with their swords.

The perspiration of death appeared on your forehead and your hands and feet folded and unfolded to the right and the left.

You were beholding your wounds and your children too, when in such a situation you might not have thought of your children and family due to the severe pain. At that time your horse galloped towards your camp, weeping and neighing.

When your ladies saw your rider less horse and the saddle which had slipped downwards, they became restless and came out of the tents. Their hair awry, they slapped their own faces and wailed and lamented. They were calling their elders and ancestors in a dejected condition after having been so much respected. They all headed towards the place of your slaughter. What a pity!

That at that time the accursed Shimr was astride your chest and was moving his sword upon your neck as he held your hair with his hand. And was slaughtering you in this way

will his sword . You had become motionless and your breathing was about to stop. Till the time you were beheaded and your head was raised up on the sword. And your women were arrested like slaves and tied up with heavy iron chains and made to sit on the camels.

Their faces were seared in the heat of the sun during the day. They were taken around in the desert and wilderness like homeless people. Their hands were tied to their necks. In this condition they were made to march in the markets.”^v

THE AFTERMATH OF KARBALA

Although the battle of Karbala on the surface was lost, and the enemies of Islam plundered and looted and humiliated the family of the Prophet (saw), the real victory came after the battle. Sayyedah Zaynab (as) and Imam Sajjād (as) opened the eyes of the Muslim

community to the deception of Yazīd, Ibn Ziyād and others. At every opportunity, even in front of the tyrant rulers the bravery of the daughter of Imam ‘Ali (as) shone through as she courageously spoke to the rulers^{vi}. The Holy family was taken first to Kūfah where they ended up humiliating ibn Ziyād then to Damascus (Shām) and were



imprisoned for up to a year. Were it not for the bravery and courage of Zaynab (as), the blood of Imam Ḥusayn (as) would have been in vain because no one would have known about it and we would have any form of Islam surviving today.

We are the Zaynab (as) of our time; we have to speak for Imam Ḥusayn (as) and tell people about the true Islam and portray Islam in our behaviour and actions. Yet we have to be brave and have the courage to speak against the oppressors of our time- we cannot as followers of Imam Ḥusayn (as) afford to keep silent!

MISCONCEPTIONS ABOUT KARBALA

Every year, the Shi’ah commemorates the message of Imam Ḥusayn (as) in centres all over the world. This revival of the faithful is the seed of revolution we must all ingrain in our hearts. We must try to attend these programs and participate in mourning for Imam Ḥusayn (as) as this is one way in which the message of the Imam (as) remains alive.

Imam Reḍa (as) has said:

“He who sits in a gathering in which our affairs are discussed and revived, his heart shall not die on the day (Day of Judgment) when hearts shall die (of fear).”^{vii}

Often though, different speakers come and occasionally, to make people cry more, exaggerate the story of Imam Ḥusayn's (as) martyrdom.

This form of lying is not permitted in Islam and unfortunately some major misconceptions have entered into our communities such as:

- The age of 'Ali al-Akbar (his real was age around 33 whereas many unjustifiably claim he was much younger)
- The supposed weeding of al-Qāsim ibn Ḥasan: some claim that Qāsim married his cousin in Karbala. However, Qāsim was very young and had not reached the age of puberty yet, and thus the story of his marriage is a myth.
- A more common myth is the exaggeration about the number of people killed by the army of Imam Ḥusayn (as).

We have to also be careful what books we read to learn about the tragedy of Karbala as not all books contain authentic information. A highly recommended books in English is:^{viii}

- *Nafasul Mahmum* by Sheikh Abbas al-Qummi ^{ix}

Homework

Write a 1000 word essay on “What would Imam Ḥusayn's (as) criteria be for accepting someone into his army”

ⁱ A Probe into the History of Ashura <http://www.al-islam.org/ashura/>

ⁱⁱ The Everlasting instruction of Imam Ḥusayn's journey to Mecca <http://www.al-islam.org/gallery/sounds/hajj2004/An%20Everlasting%20Instruction%20-%20internet%20version.pdf>

ⁱⁱⁱ *Kitab-al Irshad* by Shaykh Al-Mufid- <http://www.shia.org/journey.html>

^{iv} *The History of al-Tabari; The Caliphate of Yazid. b. Mu'awiyah*. Volume XIX.

BRIEF SAYINGS OF THE IMAM (AS)

“Emulate and compete each other in achieving the human values, and rush and hasten to get the spiritual treasures.”

(BIHAR UL ANWAR VOL 78, P 121)

Review Questions

Q1. Imam Ḥusayn (as) army consisted of:

- a. A small number of brave and intelligent people
- b. Many cowards and deserters
- c. A mixture of brave and coward people

Q2. Imam Ḥusayn's (as) revolution:

- a. Made the hearts and minds of the people wake up
- b. Was continued to its final aim by Sayyedah Zaynab (as) after Karbala
- c. Both of the above

Q3. To be a companion of our living Imam is to be:

- a. Truthful, brave and courageous like the companions of Imam Husayn(AS)
- b. To be brave and truthful only in the presence of our Imam (as)
- c. To be truthful only when fighting the enemies of Islam

^v Ziarat Naahiya (Dua.org)

^{vi} Speeches of Sayyida Zaynab (AS) can be found at <http://www.al-islam.org/ashura/>

^{vii} http://www.al-islam.org/azadari_40hadith/

^{viii} NOTE TO TEACHERS- Please bring a copy of these books to class and discuss them with your students if possible.

^{ix} <http://www.al-islam.org/nafasul-mahmum/>