

# KARBALĀ'

## كربلاء

### Objectives >>>

#### Students should understand:

- The political and social situation of the Imam, Muslims and Islam prior to Karbala
- Understand the motives of Imams Uprising and be able to refute common objections
- Be reminded that Karbala and 'Āshurā' should always be commemorated for it keeps Islam alive.
- Learn further details of the events of the day of 'Āshurā'
- Should review the importance of sticking to the truth and dispelling myths when engaging in remembrance of Karbala
- The important role of Sayyedah Zaynab (as)
- The significance of 'Āshurā' in Islamic history

## FUNDAMENTALS OF ISLAM

## LEVEL 5

### Lesson 1

## SEEDS OF DISCORD IN THE MUSLIM COMMUNITY

The tragedy of Karbala was not an overnight occurrence, it is incredible to think that just a mere 50 years since the demise of the Greatest pure Manifestation of the mercy and creation of Allah (SWT), The Holy Prophet (saw), the Muslims were so deviated that they had the audacity to massacre the beloved family of the Prophet!

It is clear that the seeds of this vile criminal act far preceded the actual events in Karbala. Indeed, as we have studied previously, the roots of this tragedy not only lie in the events in the last years of the Prophets' life but mainly those just after his demise (the tragedy of Thursday and Saqifah). It was during the caliphate of 'Umar and particularly, 'Uthman, that Mu'āwiyah was given unprecedented powers in the area of Damascus. He consolidated this power over two decades and entrenched himself, his henchmen and his corrupt family members in positions of power and authority. He rebelled against Imam 'Ali (as) in the battle of Şiffīn and as we learnt signed a peace treaty with Imam Ḥasan (as).

In his time in power, he was slowly but surely attempting to erode the very fabric of Islam. He and his family hated the Prophet, a hatred rooted in greed, corruption, and the need to take revenge for what the Prophet (saw) and Imam 'Ali (as) did to their ancestors (the Pagans of Mecca). He attempted to focus people's attention away from the spiritual realm to the material worldly realm but the single worst atrocity that he, his ancestors and others like him committed was to begin distorting the words of

the Holy Prophet (saw). In essence, they muddied the clear waters of Islam with doubt and corruption.<sup>1</sup>

## **APPOINTMENT OF YAZID**

Yazīd was brought up in a family whose atmosphere was electrified with emotions of its dead ancestors who fought against Islam and who were killed mostly during Islam's first major battle. Among the Umayyads who were killed in it were: 'Utbah, father-in-law of Yazīd's father Mu'āwiyah, 'Utbah's son al-Walīd ibn al-Mughīrah (father of the famous military leader Khalid ibn al-Walīd), and Shaybah, 'Utbah's brother. Al-Walīd ibn al-Mughīrah is cursed in the Holy Qur'an in (74:11-30) (Surah al-Muddathir). 'Utbah is father of Hind, mother of Yazīd, who tried to chew the liver of Ḥamzah, Prophet Muḥammad (saw)'s dear uncle and valiant defender of Islam.

Yet Yazīd himself had some unique deficiencies in addition to what we recorded above. He was known as a playboy; he is on record as the first person ever to compose pornographic poetry. He described each and every part of his aunt's body for sensual excitement, doing so without being reprimanded by his father or mother or anyone else. Historians record his being seen drunk in public, his committing adultery, and his leading a very corrupt life.

Mu'āwiyah was not ruling as an individual but was representing a way of thinking which differed in nature from everything Islam stands for. However, he was not satisfied to leave the ruling stage without making sure that it remained within his family. His pragmatic and materialistic mind drove him to prepare for the crowning of his son, Yazīd, as his successor.

Mu'āwiyah had made many pledges not to install Yazīd when he saw the conditions at the time not conducive to such a plan because Muslims were still politically conscious and desired to see the restoration of the Islamic laws and values. Mu'āwiyah, hence, had a difficult job at hand before leaving this world.

He, in fact, tried his best to buy the allegiance for his son from his army's commanders, tribal chiefs and chieftains, and entire tribes as well as men of distinction and influence, spending huge sums of money in the process. But his efforts did not succeed with everyone.

One of his failed attempts was when he wrote Imam al-Ḥusayn (as) soliciting his endorsement for his appointment of Yazīd as the heir apparent to the throne. Imam al-Ḥusayn's answer was a scathing criticism of all what Mu'āwiyah and Yazīd had committed. Mu'āwiyah, therefore, forewarned his son Yazīd to beware of Imam al-Ḥusayn (as).

Yazīd eventually succeeded his father Mu'āwiyah as the ruler. Yazīd now spared no means to secure the submission for his unholy practices, oppression and aggression, from everyone. He knew very well that in reality, he had no legitimate right whatsoever to make claims or to issue demands. On the contrary, he was guilty of having committed many illegal and sacrilegious deeds for which he should have been killed, had there anyone powerful enough to implement the Islamic code of justice.

Once in charge, Yazīd took his father's advice regarding Imam al-Ḥusayn (as) seriously. He wrote the then governor of Medina, al-Walīd ibn 'Utbah, ordering him to secure the oath of allegiance to him as the new ruler from everyone in general and from Imam al-Ḥusayn (as), Abdullah ibn 'Umar (son of second caliph 'Umar ibn al-Khattāb), and 'Abdullah ibn al-Zubayr, in particular, being the most prominent personalities. Yazīd, with unmistakable language ordered al-Walīd to secure such an oath for him by force if necessary, and that if Imam al-Ḥusayn (as) refused, he should behead him and send his severed head to him in Damascus.

But al-Walīd's efforts were fruitless. Imam al-Ḥusayn's reply was exact and direct:

"Governor, I belong to the Ahlul Bayt (family) of the Prophet. Allah (SWT) has consigned to and charged us with the Imamāt (spiritual and political leadership of the Muslims). Angels pay us visits. Yazīd is a wicked sinner, a depraved reprobate, a wanton drunkard, a man who sheds blood unjustly, and a man who openly defies Allah's commandments. A man like me will never yield his allegiance to a person like him."

## **MOTIVES OF THE IMAM'S UPRISING**

These motives were numerous. Some of them stemmed from the grievances of the general public, while others were ideological in nature and noble in objective. They may be summed up as follows:

## **STOP THE DISTORTION**

The most urgent need was to stop the attempts to distort the Islamic concepts and code of conduct, particularly the falsification of Ḥadith as discussed above. This was of the utmost significance; it preoccupied the minds of responsible Muslims at the time. Such fabrication was quite rampant, epidemic in nature, festered by the funds available for those who rushed to please the Umayyads with their pens, those who did not hesitate to sell their religion for a trifling.

Such fabrication was poisonous in effect, and it affected the lives of all Muslims, and it still does. It was giving the Umayyads a free hand to do whatever they desired of unfair and unethical policies in dealing with their subjects. The mask of religion which they used to hide their un-Islamic conduct was quite dangerous. In the long run, such danger would eventually change the pristine concepts introduced by Islam and substitute them with anything but Islam. Stripping such a mask and exposing the true picture of the Umayyads was the most urgent task of a revolutionary like Imam al-Ḥusayn (as).

## **SOCIAL JUSTICE**

The State's structure was built on un-Islamic premises, giving preference to people from certain races and families. That was the general social picture of the Islamic world under the Umayyad rule. Anyone who dared to express an opinion which did not agree with that of the Umayyads would be imprisoned or killed.

Furthermore, the poor and down-trodden were ignored and left to vie for themselves. Wealth gained from Zakāt and government taxes was used to build palaces and pay for the extravagant habits of the ruling class.

## **EXPOSE CORRUPTION**

The Umayyads considered the Islamic world as their own real estate property. Large gifts were doled out from the state treasury (called in Islam bayt al-māl) to governors, government officials, tribal chiefs, army commanders, and officers who surpassed others in their cruelty and oppression. Large sums of money were spent on activities which Islam prohibits: racing, gambling, wines, singers and so on...

The majority of Muslims were left on the brink of starvation while the ruling people enjoyed the social and material privileges. It very much is like what one sees happening nowadays in many Muslim countries.

## **WAKE THE PEOPLE**

The Muslims had apparently become accustomed to the un-Islamic rule of the Umayyads as time passed by. Their resistance gradually slackened, and some people began adjusting to the new realities. The revolutionary spirit of Islam began to disappear little by little from the Muslims' lives and thoughts. A new stimulant to their souls was necessary in order to bring life back to their misled souls and to restore the Islamic conduct and way of life to the society.

## **KEEPING KARBALĀ' ALIVE- HEEDING THE IMAM'S CALL**

Imam al-Ḥusayn (as) on the plains of Karbala spoke to the people saying "who is there to help us?" This was not a message for the kuffār and his enemies, it was a message for us. As we have seen above, the motives of Imam are still relevant till today! It is imperative that the message of Imam be kept alive so we can counter the forces of evil trying to distort or destroy Islam. We have to ensure we do not resemble Yazīd in any shape or form! We should not distort the words of Qur'an or Ḥadith to suit our needs, we should be politically and socially aware and fight against corruption and stand for social justice. This will come after we have been woken up by the harsh tragedy that befell our Imam (as).

## **THE IMAM'S PURE MOTIVES**

Unfortunately some groups have questions the Imam's motives.

Some claims that Imam Ḥusayn rose only to gain power. These people argue that the Imam should have remained quiet like 'Abdullah ibn 'Umar and not risen to challenge Yazīd. The reason for this objection is that they do not understand that the Imam challenged Yazīd's power not because he wanted power in itself, but because he wanted to establish God's rule and justice.

Others argue that the Imam (as) should not have taken his family with him when he knew that his journey would likely end in tragedy. This group fails to understand the impact that the presence of the women and children had on the longevity of the legacy of Karbala.

We shall briefly discuss some of these objections and will keep the remainder as reading (with references).

The Imam (as) clearly and eloquently explained his motives, and his words answered the objections raised above as well as other objections:

“And surely the aim of my uprising is not inspired by vain exultation and it is also not for the quest of kingdom, neither it is to cause dissension and corruption nor it is to wrong anybody. The purpose of my uprising is the reformation of my grandfather's nation. I intend to enjoin good and forbid evil. I want to emulate my grandfather, the Holy Prophet (saw) and my father Ali ibn abi Ṭalib (A). Whosoever accepts me by accepting the truth, then Allah is higher than the truth. And whosoever rejects me then I will bear patiently until Allah judges between me and them and He is the best Judge.”

## Class Activity Homework - Research

Using the book- The Uprising of Ashura and Responses to Doubts <http://www.al-islam.org/uprising-ashura-and-responses-doubts-ali-asghar-ridwani> answer the following questions:

- 1- Some say Yazīd did not know what ibn Ziyād was doing in Kufa and Karbala, what proof can you show that he did indeed know?
- 2- Some Wahhabis accuse the Shi'a of blasphemy because we lament over the tragedy of Karbala, how can you disprove this claim?
- 3- One of the accusations often raised against the Shi'a in recent times is that they themselves were the killers of Imam al-Ḥusayn (as). Does this contradict the fact that we mourn the martyrdom of the Imam (as)? What other important points need to be considered here?
- 4- Why did Imam Ḥusayn (as) bring his family to Karbala?
- 5- Did Allah (SWT) leave Imam Ḥusayn un-aided in Karbala? Why did God not give him a miraculous victory?

## Lesson 2- The Day of 'Āshurā'

### Review

We begin this lesson by discussing the research questions from the previous lesson.

### THE DAY OF 'ĀSHURĀ'

In this lesson, we shall further discuss the events that transpired on the fateful day on the 10<sup>th</sup> of Muḥarram 61AH, the day of Ashura.

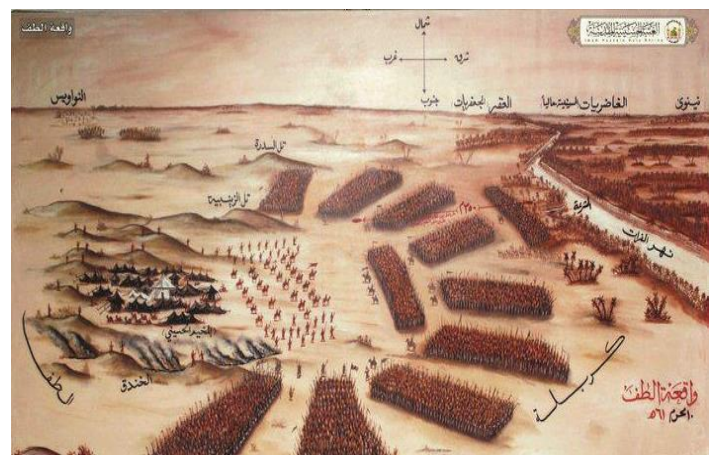
We have discussed previously, the sermons Imam Ḥusayn (as) gave on the day not only to his companions, but especially to the enemies of Islam, reminding them of their duties, reminding them who he was and reminding them of the grave sin they were about to commit. They did not heed his call.

Imam Ḥusayn (as) recited the morning Prayers on the 10th of Muḥarram with his companions. After finishing the prayers he stood up and delivered a short sermon. He praised and glorified Allah and said:

“Verily Allah, the Mighty, the Sublime, has intended that you be martyred, as will I, thus you should forbear.”

Then Imam prepared his companions for battle and set up his army's positions. There were thirty two horsemen and forty foot-soldiers along with him.

Imam Ḥusayn (as) designated Zuhayr bin al-Qayn in charge of the right wing and Ḥabib bin Maḍahir in charge of the left wing, and handed over the standard of the army to his brother 'Abbas (as). They positioned themselves in front of the tents, with their backs towards



them. Then the Imam commanded that the firewood, which was kept behind the tents, be put in the moat dug at night behind the tents and set it on fire, lest the enemies might attack from behind.

It was a little later in the day that Ibn Sa'd put an arrow in his bow and let it fly. He said: “Be witnesses that I was the first [person] to shoot.” This was the extent of his arrogance and hate.

## **MARTYDOM OF 'ALI AL-AKBAR (AS)**

'Ali al-Akbar bin al- Ḥusayn bin 'Ali (as) was the first to be killed on that day from among the family of the Imam. His mother was Layla. He began attacking the people while he recited the following:

"I am 'Ali, son of Ḥusayn bin 'Ali; by the Lord of the House, we are closest to the Prophet. By Allah! A man born illegitimately shall not rule over us"

He attacked them several times and killed a large number of them. Then Murrah bin Munqidh bin al-Nu'man al-'Abdi saw him. He said: "May the felonies of the Arabs come on me, if he gets past me doing the same as he has been doing [and] I do not deprive his mother of him."

'Ali bin al- Ḥusayn (as) continued to attack the people with his sword. Murrah bin Munqidh wounded him with a spear. 'Ali al-Akbar fell on to his horse and got tangled in the straps, and the horse rushed towards the enemy out of fright. The enemy cut the body of 'Ali al-Akbar into pieces as his horse passed through them until he finally fell to the earth and called out to his father.

al-Ḥusayn (as) came to [his body] saying:

"May Allah kill [the] people who killed you, my son! How foolhardy they are against the Merciful and in violating the sacredness of the family of the Prophet! There will [only] be dust on the world after you."

The Imam was finding it difficult to leave the side of his son's body, until Zaynab (as) came to join him there. Out of fear for Zaynab the Imam got up and the body of 'Ali was taken back to the tents to be laid with the rest of the martyrs.

## **MARTYDOM OF QĀSIM (AS)**

Qāsim was the son of Imam al-Ḥasan (as) and so was Imam Ḥusayn's nephew. When Imam Ḥusayn (as) saw that Qāsim prepared to step into the battlefield, he embraced him and they wept until both of them became unconscious. Then Qāsim asked permission to go, but Imam refuse.. He continuously kissed the hands and feet of Imam Ḥusayn (as) until he finally gave in.

Qāsim left for the battlefield while tears were flowing from his eyes and he was saying:

"If you do not know me I am the son of Ḥasan, the grandson of the Prophet, the chosen one, the confidante, this is Ḥusayn similar to the one captivated by the mortgager, in the midst of such a (horrible) people, may Allah deprive them of rainwater".

He fought fiercely despite being so young and killed a significant number of the enemy.

As he was fighting ,the strap of his sandal came off, and he stopped to fix it. 'Umar bin Sa'ad bin Nufayl al-Azdi said, "By Allah! I shall attack him". He attacked him and before he could turn his face towards him, he dealt a blow upon his head with his sword. The child fell down on his face upon the ground and called out:

"O Uncle"

Imam Ḥusayn (as) leapt into the battlefield, attacking the killer of Qāsim and severing his arm, before the man was trampled by the horses of his own army. The Imam then sat by the body of Qāsim, saying:

"It is so difficult for your uncle that you call him, but he does not respond, or that he responds, but he cannot help you."

Qāsim soon passed away, and the Imam (as) carried him back to the tent and lay him down next to his son 'Ali al-Akbar.

## **MARTYDOM OF 'ABBAS (AS)**

'Abbas, the younger brother of Imam Ḥusayn (as), ventured to bring water to the wailing thirsty children. He individually attacked the soldiers guarding the bank of the Euphrates and stopping the Imam's family from accessing it. 'Abbas was al-Ḥusayn's standard-bearer.

'Abbas parted through the army and reached the water. He filled the water-skins and headed back to the camp without even drinking water first, for he did not want to drink while his Imam and brother was still thirsty.

On his way back to the camp, he was again cutting through the army, when a wretched man hit behind a palm tree and severed the right arm of 'Abbas. 'Abbas held the water skins in his left arm, but soon this was also severed. Then the arrows began to rain down upon him, bursting the water skin. The water spilt on the floor and 'Abbas was dejected at this. Finally, he fell from his horse after the many wounds, and called out to his brother, who heard him despite being far away and rushed to him.



When Imam al-Ḥusayn (as) came to the side of his brother and saw his state, he said:

"now I have no more plots, now my back is broken."

The Imam (as) buried his brother there, a little distance away from the battlefield. This is why now we have a separate shrine from 'Abbas a few hundred metres from the shrine of Imam al-Ḥusayn (as).

## **RESULTS OF THE REVOLUTION**

The murder of Imam Ḥusayn (as) the grandson of the Prophet (saw) was a great shock to the whole Muslim world. This is not to mention the way he was murdered or the treatment given to his family who had the highest esteem and respect among all Muslims. Consequently, all Muslims dissociated themselves from the Umayyad's deeds and policies.

Thus, this revolution had done the task of unveiling the Umayyad's un-Islamic character to the general public and left no doubt in any person's heart about the true nature of the Umayyads.

Therefore, the concepts which the Umayyads were propagating in order to distort the ideals of Islam found no listening ear any longer, diverting the Umayyad's mischief of changing Islamic concepts and ideals.

Imam al-Ḥusayn's revolution set a lively example as to the duty of Muslims in such conditions. It had deeply penetrated peoples' hearts and produced great pains within them for not doing their Islamic duty. This feeling among people transformed into repentance and then to an open revolt against the Umayyad regime. Thus, the revolution provided the stimulant to move their spirit and set it in a dynamic movement.

A series of revolutions took place, all motivated by taking revenge for the murder of the Ahlul Bayt, and the removal of the Umayyads from power, at least within certain areas. Among these was the uprising of the

'Repenters' (Tawwabīn), and the more successful revolution and takeover of power in Kufa by Mukhtār al-Thaqafi. Mukhtar was successful in executing all the major criminals of Karbala. There was also the uprising of Zayd ibn 'Ali, as well as others.

Eventually, the Umayyad regime was destroyed by these revolutions. Even the takeover of power by the Abbasids, whose intentions were impure, was under the banner of taking revenge for Imam Ḥusayn (as), even though they only used this as an excuse to mobilise people.

The secret key of this blessed revolution lies in the firm faith in God, and the willingness to sacrifice everything for His sake. These ideals were demonstrated by Imam Ḥusayn (as) when the Muslims were in need of such an example most.

Imam Ḥusayn wanted to change the life of Muslims to be in conformity with Islamic laws and ideals, and to give them justice.

## **MISCONCEPTIONS ABOUT KARBALĀ'**

Every year, the Shi'a commemorate the message of Imam Ḥusayn (as) in mosques and centres all over the world. The real purpose of these gatherings is to remember the values that the Imam (as) demonstrated in Karbala, so that we can apply these values in our lives today.

Imam al-Reḍā (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).”<sup>ii</sup>

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.

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:<sup>iii</sup>

- Nafasul Mahmum by Sheikh Abbas al-Qummi <sup>iv</sup>

## **POST ASHURA- THE ROLE OF SAYYIDA ZAINAB (AS)**

The revolution of Imam Ḥusayn (as) would not have been alive nor would have been as successful as it was had it not been for the bravery of this heroine of Karbala. Sayyeda Zaynab, (as) the sister of Imam Ḥusayn (as) witnessed all the shocking scenes in Karbala, the loss of her family, her children and her brother. She was tasked with being the leader whilst Imam al-Sajjad (as) was ill.

He patiently looked after the traumatised women and children; nursed the Imam (as) back to health, and stood up to 'Ubaydullah and Yazid with her eloquent and powerful speeches in Kufa and Damascus.

These powerful speeches contain many lessons and values from which we can learn. They served to tell people what had actually happened in Karbala, as well as

triggering them to repent, and motivating them to bring about change in their communities.

(<http://www.al-islam.org/probe-history-ashura-dr-ibrahim-ayati/chapter-32-sermon-lady-zaynab-court-yazid> )

### **Homework - Research**

- 1. What divine laws did Sayyeda Zaynab (as) refer to when showing Yazid that he should not be proud of his current state?**
- 2. Write the verse that Sayyeda Zaynab (as) used to tell Yazīd not to be content with the actions he perpetrated?**
- 3. Give 3 arguments Sayyeda Zaynab poses to Yazīd proving that the Ahlul Bayt will be the eventual victors, in this world and the Hereafter?**

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<sup>i</sup> Please refer to this book <http://www.al-islam.org/misbah-uz-zulam-roots-karbala-tragedy-sayyid-imdad-imam> to get a clearer understanding of the roots of the tragedy.

<sup>ii</sup> [http://www.al-islam.org/azadari\\_40hadith/](http://www.al-islam.org/azadari_40hadith/)

<sup>iii</sup> NOTE TO TEACHERS- Please bring a copy of these books to class and discuss them with your students if possible.

<sup>iv</sup> <http://www.al-islam.org/nafasul-mahmum/>