

Imam Husayn, the Luminary of Justice

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No other tragedy, expression of grief, resistance to oppression, or liberation from the forces of evil stands out in history as does the tragedy at Karbala. The tale that is woven in the sands of the desert leading to Kufah, Iraq, amidst the traveling caravans and feuding tribes, is one that invokes tears and sorrow even from the coldest of hearts.

Nevertheless, many have chosen to ignore this story of tragedy, revolution, and justice. It is even more surprising to find that those who choose to ignore it are often Muslims. Shocking, for the story of Karbala is the story of a man with a purpose, higher than many of the worldly causes, whether political, social, or economical, that we adopt. This man, by his personality, bravery, force of polarization, and intellectual prowess alone was unlike any other man. But his lineage only typifies the significance of his life, his works, and his death. He is the grandson of the Messenger of Allah (may Allah bless him and grant he and his family peace), the son of the beloved daughter of the Messenger of Allah (may Allah grant peace upon her luminous countenance), and the son of the Commander of the Faithful, the lion of Allah, and the chosen brother of the Prophet (may Allah grant him peace). He and his brother are the leaders of the youths of Paradise, and his followers are among those of legends. He is al-Husayn ibn Ali, the champion of martyrs.

Most know the story of his life and his tragedy, but many, including his self-proclaimed followers (shi'a), fail to understand the true message of his mission. At any point throughout his journey, this brave Imam (spiritual leader of the Islam-minded believers), could have retreated to his home and lived in relative safety, paying a false homage (for the sake of security) to his oppressor (Yazid ibn Mu'awiyah). Yet, for seemingly unknown reasons, he embarked on a journey, certain for death. Along with him were noble warriors and chieftains among his clan (Banu Hashim). The best among the descendants of the Prophet and dearest relatives and companions stood at the beckoning of their master, al-Husayn (peace be upon him).

Even more surprising, however, were the women and children who also accompanied him. With no intention of fighting, they still stood by their leader's side and held the wing of support out to him and other fallen soldiers, as one by one, they were dragged from the blood

soiled battlefield. Never before or after had such courage and fortitude been witnessed.

The only question is: why? For what reason would he and his followers plunge to their doom in a fight to the finish on the desert plain of Karbala? The answer is a single word: Justice. It is easy to discount the significance of this tragedy if one looks at it only from a socio-political standpoint, but true Justice (adl) is divine in nature. No amount of oppression or belittlement can curtail divine Justice, for the very nature of the Most High, is Just (al-Adl). Those who are His true devoted servants are those who are able to manifest His attributes on earth. Those who can manifest mercy in the form of their deeds, for example, can truly grasp and teach the meaning of Ar-Rahman.

It is with this conceptualization of supreme Reality, that the real Imam Husayn comes to life, not death. When we come to understand that the flesh is only secondary, and that the ruh (spirit) is the essence of Allah's Mercy, it is then possible to imagine divine Justice personified. The sands of Karbala speak to us and remind us of this phenomenon. It is evident in his supplication to Allah:

"O Allah, it is You in Whom I trust amid grief. You are my hope amid all violence. You are my trust and provision in everything that happens to me, (no matter) how much the heart may seem to weaken in it, trickery may seem to diminish (my hope) in it, the friend may seem to desert (me) in it, and the enemy may seem to rejoice in it. It comes upon me through You and when I complain to You of it, it is because of my desire for You, You alone. You have comforted me in (everything) and have revealed its (significance to me). You are the Master of all grace, the Possessor of all goodness and the Ultimate Resort of all desire." [1]

No amount of worldly possessions or promises of grandeur could persuade such a man to desist from his mission. He, after all, was among the family of the Prophet (Ahlul-Bayt). He could have enjoyed luxury and satisfaction, so long as he did not upset the social norms that had been established through the tyranny of the occupying regime (the Umayyads). But they were usurpers of the divine mantle of truth (al-Islam), occupiers of a throne that did not fit them (the caliphate), and perpetrators of unspeakable injustice and oppression. The holy grace, the mist of divine breath, had lifted with their coming to office, and true guidance, gnosis, and righteousness was in danger of being extinguished.

Someone

who has the cosmic connection between himself and Allah, through a chain of golden luminaries (Ahlul-bayt), is unflinching in the face of tyranny and adversity. His own words, illustrate his mission where mine would falter:

Muslim

ibn 'Awsaja wanted to shoot an arrow at him, but al-Husayn, peace be upon him, stopped him from (doing) that.

"Let

me shoot at him," he asked, "for he is a wicked sinner, one of the enemies of Allah, and the great tyrants. (Now) Allah has made it possible to kill him."

"Do

not shoot at him," ordered al-Husayn, peace be upon him, "for I am unwilling to begin (the fighting) against them."

Then

al-Husayn called for his mount and mounted it. He called out at the top of his voice: "O people of Iraq," -and most of them (began to) listen to him- "people, listen to my words and do not hurry (to attack me) so that I may remind you of the duties you have towards me and so that (by telling you the true circumstances) I may free myself from any blame in (your attacking me). If you give me justice, you will become happier through that. If you do not give me justice of your own accord (as individuals), then agree upon your affairs (and your associates); let not your affair be in darkness to you. Then carry (it) out against me and do not reflect (any further) (10:71). Indeed my guardian is Allah, Who created the Book; He takes care of the righteous (7:196)."[2]

Then he

praised and glorified Allah, and mentioned what Allah entitled him to. He called for blessings on the Prophet, may Allah bless him and his family, and on the angels and (other) prophets. No speaker has ever been heard before or after him more eloquent in his speech than he was. He continued: "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 to violate the honour of my womenfolk. Am I not the son of the daughter of your Prophet, of his testamentary trustee (wasi) and his cousin, the first of the believers in Allah and the man who (first) believed in what His Messenger brought from his Lord? Was not Hamza, the lord of the martyrs, my uncle? Was not Ja'far, the one who flies in Heaven, my uncle? Have you not heard the words of the Messenger of Allah concerning myself and my brother: 'These are the two lords of the youths of the inhabitants of heaven.'? Whether you believe what I am saying -and it is the truth, for by Allah I have never told a lie since I learned that Allah hated people (who told) them - or whether you regard me as a liar, there are among you those who, if you asked them would tell you: Ask Jabir ibn 'Abdullah al-Ansari, Abu

Sa'id al-Khudri, Sahl ibn Sa'd al-Sa'idi, Zayd ibn Arqam and Anas ibn Malik to tell you that they heard these words from the Messenger of Allah concerning myself and my brother. Is this not sufficient to prevent you from shedding my blood?"[3]

In life,
he was the Imam of all believing people, the guardian of the suffering and downtrodden, and in death, he is the beacon of hope in Justice. Through his and his followers' sacrifice, righteousness prevailed over tyranny and al-Islam triumphed over kufr. We can only pray that Allah raises us, on the Day of Reckoning, among the likes of al-Husayn ibn 'Ali and the luminescent souls who will accompany him to the gates of eternal bliss.

1. Kitab al-Irshad by Shaykh al-Mufid
2. Ibid.
3. Ibid.

(Duplicate accounts are also found in Tarikh al-Rusul wa-l-Muluk by al-Tabari, under the volume, "The Caliphate of Yazid ibn Mu'awiyah")