

The Day of Ashura: A Microcosm of the Human Condition

Author: Marryam Naqvi¹
Supervising Professor: Dr. Mehdi Islami²

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1. Choice: the cause of felicity or adversity

From the creation of the first human to the present population of seven billion, there is undoubtedly a universal agreement that humans are unique from other creation. God has created humans with a special capacity for intellect. Unlike angels who are governed by command, or animals governed by instinct, humans have the unique ability to use their reason to make individual decisions. When the intellect governs a human's life, the soul strives towards Justice, thus allowing one to manifest one's true nature. It is one's choices that ultimately lay out the path for the future with the bricks of history. The successes and failures of people and of civilizations are conducted through a series of choices. In the moment, many choices feel confined to the present. It is not until years later that one can understand how certain decisions shook the earth and will continue to echo through time.

The Tragedy of Karbala is a microcosm which encompasses what it means to be human by providing a depiction of the choices every human being must make throughout his or her life. It illustrates choices of truth and falsehood; the choice to sacrifice for the next world or surrender one's humanity for the temporary rewards of this world. The Day of Ashura reflects two potentials for human nature: the side of animals and the side of angels. It illustrates what it means to use one's intellect, to make the (often difficult) choice to uphold the key tenets of humanity. In this paper, I intend to explicate the choices that were made on the journey to Karbala, during Karbala, and after Karbala (through the depictions of historians), in order to demonstrate the microcosmic nature of all of humanity, encompassed in a single event.

2. The reasons of Imam Hussain's mission

Imam Hussain's mission does not begin with the instatement of Yazid's caliphate. His mission begins with the creation of his soul, as the son of 'Ali, and the grandson of Prophet Muhammad, peace be upon them. His mission, from the very beginning, is to "seek to enjoin what is good and forbid what is evil and follow the

¹. Ma Islamic Studies, marryamx@gmail.com

². PhD Islamic Mysticism, mehdiislami2010@gmail.com

traditions of [his] grandfather and [his father].”¹ His soul did not allow him to give allegiance to an immoral and unjust leader. His mission was not born out of a need for power, but was to “correct not conquer,”² and to simply refuse to be silent in the face of injustice. Imam Hussain tells the people, “[The Caliphate] ha[s] spread corruption, suspended the application of Islamic laws, and taken to themselves Muslims' wealth. Besides forbidding what is permitted and allowing what is forbidden.”³ For the likeness of his character, the Imam had "no choice but to announce his outright rejection" of Yazid.⁴ He chose to pursue a journey based on principles, while many chose to remain indifferent, so as to not to disrupt their lives with hardship.

History recounts certain people who attempted to derail Imam Hussain from his mission. As mentioned in “The Revolution of Imam Al-Hussain (a),” a man by the name of ‘Abd Allah ibn Muti’ al-’Adawi warns the Imam, “By God, if you see what the Umayyad clan has in their hands, it will kill you [...] By God, it is the sanctity of Islam which will be defiled [...] Do not go to Kufa. Do not expose yourself to the Umayyad clan.”⁵ Al-’Adawi’s advice to the Imam is based on the “[certainty] of [the Imam’s] failure.”⁶ Instead of choosing to support the Imam to pursue the higher ground, he is more “concerned about [the] result.”⁷ Such people have chosen to play passive in making a moral decision. Al-’Adawi views the Imam’s death as an end, not a beginning.

Furthermore, a man named Abdullah bin Abbas tells Imam Hussain "to retire to the mountains of Yemen to escape the troops of Yazid."⁸ Like others

1 Ayatullah Murtadha Mutahhari, "The Truth about Al-Hussain’s Revolt." Speech, Tehran. Accessed November 20, 2016. <https://www.al-islam.org/truth-about-al-Hussain-s-revolt-ayatullah-murtadha-mutahhari>. Translated by: Najim al-Khafaji

2 Ibid.

3 Yusuf Fadhl, "Imam Hussain's Revolution: An Analytical Review." *Ahlul Bayt Digital Islamic Library Project*. Accessed November 20, 2016. <https://www.al-islam.org/imam-Hussains-revolution-analytical-review-yusuf-fadhl>. Published by: W.O.F.I.S. World Organization for Islamic Services

4 Ayatullah Murtadha Mutahhari, "The Truth about Al-Hussain’s Revolt." Speech, Tehran. Accessed November 20, 2016. <https://www.al-islam.org/truth-about-al-Hussain-s-revolt-ayatullah-murtadha-mutahhari>. Translated by: Najim al-Khafaji

5 Shaykh Muhammad Mahdi Shams Ad-Din Al-Amili, *The Revolution of Imam Al-Hussain (a)*. Muhammadi Trust of Great Britain and Northern Ireland. Accessed November 20, 2016. <https://www.al-islam.org/revolution-imam-al-Hussain-shaykh-muhammad-mahdi-shams-ad-din-al-amili>. Translated by: Dr. I. K. A. Howard

6 Ibid.

7 Ibid.

8 Ayatullah Murtadha Mutahhari, "The Truth about Al-Hussain’s Revolt." Speech, Tehran. Accessed November 20, 2016. <https://www.al-islam.org/truth-about-al-Hussain-s-revolt-ayatullah-murtadha-mutahhari>. Translated by: Najim al-Khafaji

before him, it is clear that this individual's concerns lie in the worldly results—death and disruption of worldly peace. The choices of these men lie in the concerns of a finite existence. Another man, ‘Abd Allah ibn ‘Umar advises the Imam, “...you know the hostility of this clan towards you and their injustice to you. The people have given authority to this man, Yazid ibn Mu’awaiya. I cannot be sure that the people would not favor him because of gold and silver (which he has given them) so that they would fight against you, and thus many men would be destroyed through you. I advise you to enter into the agreement which the people entered into and to be patient as you were patient before.”¹ His advice, on the surface, is seen as a concern for the well-being of the *ummah*². He does not want to see the *ummah* separated and be led into fighting against the Imam.

Shaykh Amili eloquently analyzes the choices of such men who tried to lead Imam Hussain away from confronting the army of Yazid. He states, “In outward appearance at least, they were not supporters of the regime. They were only looking [...] at the revolution [...] with a basic attitude [...] which was the maintenance and acceptance of the status quo [...] not because it was just, but only [...] because any change would not agree with their temperaments and interests.”³ Shaykh Amili explains how the political climate during this time was not black and white. It was not simply those who believed in upholding principles versus those who did not. There were those whose choices did not rely on the benefit of society, but rather on their personal interests. Such men covered their ulterior motives with a mask of genuine concern, but their attempts did not dissuade the Imam, whose choice was planted into the solid rock of choosing death over humiliation.

The choices of the men around him reflected the temporary world, while the choice of Imam Hussain reflected preserving Islam. For anyone who is concerned with the material safety of one's life, to silently surrender seems like the smart option. But Imam Hussain knew that this was not the meaning of sacrifice. To give one's life, to fight until the very end, is the true and “best opportunity to present an effective and final sacrifice for Islam.”⁴ Imam Hussain's decision to leave Mecca

1 Shaykh Muhammad Mahdi Shams Ad-Din Al-Amili, *The Revolution of Imam Al-Hussain (a)*. Muhammadi Trust of Great Britain and Northern Ireland. Accessed November 20, 2016. <https://www.al-islam.org/revolution-imam-al-Hussain-shaykh-muhammad-mahdi-shams-ad-din-al-amili>. Translated by: Dr. I. K. A. Howard

2 Community of Muslims, the Muslim world.

3 Shaykh Muhammad Mahdi Shams Ad-Din Al-Amili, *The Revolution of Imam Al-Hussain (a)*. Muhammadi Trust of Great Britain and Northern Ireland. Accessed November 20, 2016. <https://www.al-islam.org/revolution-imam-al-Hussain-shaykh-muhammad-mahdi-shams-ad-din-al-amili>. Translated by: Dr. I. K. A. Howard

4 Allamah Sayyid Sa'eed Akhtar Rizvi, *Understanding Karbala*. Qom: Ansariyan Publications. Accessed November 20, 2016. <https://www.al-islam.org/understanding-karbala-allamah-sayyid-saeed-akhtar-rizvi>. Translated by: Sayyid Athar Hussain S.H. Rizvi

to preserve the sanctity of its land and travel towards Karbala was a journey towards sacrifice, through his desire to preserve the Islam of his grandfather. Many speculate that it was the invitation of the Kufan people that jump-started Imam Hussain's mission, knowing that there were many who backed him. Ayatullah Mutahhari refutes that if this was indeed true, then after learning of the Kufan's insincerity, he "could have resigned to the fact there was no point in carrying on with his plans [and could have] [contemplated] swearing allegiance to Yazid."¹

Evidently, his revolution was not dependent on the people. Imam Hussain had already made the decision to embark on his mission with or without the support of the Kufans. He "[acted] in accordance with the obligation of 'enjoining what is right and forbidding what is wrong' [...] he was under no illusions that that was his prime motive for launching his revolt."² Imam Hussain chooses to refuse allegiance to a man he does not see fit to wear the crown of caliphate, a man who lived in direct difference with the pure teachings of Prophet Muhammad, peace be upon him. It was a choice that was made from the beginning of time, that comes to a beautiful fruition of one man against many. Through his decisions from the beginning of the journey to Karbala, Imam Hussain manifests the choice of love in its truest form – for love does not demand passivity, nor hiding away in the face of hardship. Divine Love, the truest Love of all, demands action, self-sacrifice, and rising up to defend the Beloved.

3. The true nature of Imam Hussain followers and Yazid's army

The next choices to be made were by the companions of the Imam. Two options remained: to leave the Imam and protect themselves and their families, or to stand by Imam Hussain to protect Islam. It is interesting to analyze the relationship of Imam Hussain and his companions, the choices he provides them with, as well as the choices they make. After all, a decision to face Yazid's army "[is] a personal decision...it was not incumbent on him to ask others to team up with him."³ Imam Hussain did not have to force men to fight with him. Those who chose to stand by him were moved by his spirit, and chose to stay with him based on following truth. It is perhaps for this reason that history will not forget the names of such martyrs, as their stance was truly, and purely, for the sake of Islam. Yasin T. Jibouri relays the famous narration of

"the eve of the ninth of Muharram [where] Imam al-Hussain gather[s] all his companions together and [says] to them, 'Whoever remains with me will be

1 Ayatullah Murtadha Mutahhari, "The Truth about Al-Hussain's Revolt." Speech, Tehran. Accessed November 20, 2016. <https://www.al-islam.org/truth-about-al-Hussain-s-revolt-ayatullah-murtadha-mutahhari>. Translated by: Najim al-Khafaji

2 Ibid.

3 Ibid.

killed tomorrow; so consider this opportunity as Allah-sent and take advantage of the darkness and go home to your villages.’ He then extinguished the light so that those who wanted to go away might not be too embarrassed when seen by others. al-Hussain’s loyal companions burst out in inconsolable weeping and distressfully said to him, ‘*Mawla* (master)! Do not thus shame us before the Messenger of Allah, before Ali and Fatima! With what face will we present ourselves to them on the Day of Judgement? Were we to desert you, may the wild beasts of the jungle tear us to pieces.’¹

The grace and freedom Imam Hussain allows for his followers is rarely seen in a relationship between a leader and follower. He knows that his army is outnumbered, yet still shares the definite and inevitable result of the battle. His followers who remain are the ones who recognize their potential to reach the status of angels.

It is important to consider that such followers compare leaving Imam Hussain to the likeness of: “wild beasts” “tear[ing] [them] to pieces.”² Their language foreshadows their deaths, being killed mercilessly by the beasts of Yazid’s army. Though they appear to be men, the members of Yazid’s army have, in actuality, dipped below the level of humans to the level of animals. A wild beast kills out of instinct; thus a man who tortures for the sake of torture must be something worse than a beast. Knowing this, Imam Hussain’s companions prepare themselves for the cruelest of the deaths. But it is not this death his followers are afraid of. To them, this death is a desire: to fight against the human beasts, and to be sacrificed to protect the grandson of the Holy Prophet.

The true nature of Yazid’s army is crystallized in the sermon of Lady Zainab in Syria. She informs the Syrians of the atrocities committed towards the Ahlul-Bayt, even after their death. She announces that “the sacred bodies of the martyrs have been placed at the disposal of the wolves and other carnivorous animals of the jungle.”³ Lady Zainab reveals the true nature of Yazid’s army as animals. It can be understood that Lady Zainab, as the daughter of Imam ‘Ali possessed the knowledge of the hidden world. Thus, it can be understood that comparing Yazid’s army wolves is not simply a figure of speech. Rather, their souls have taken the shape of a beast, rescinding their position as humans.

The juxtaposition of the two armies is a clear embodiment of the potential for every human being. The power to choose: to stand by principles for the sake of

1 Yasin T. Al-Jibouri, *Karbala and Beyond*. Accessed November 20, 2016. <https://www.al-islam.org/karbala-and-beyond-yasin-t-al-jibouri>.

2 Ibid.

3 Dr. Ibrahim Ayati, *A Probe into the History of Ashura'* Accessed November 20, 2016. <https://www.al-islam.org/probe-history-ashura-dr-ibrahim-ayati>.

great principles, or to disregard one's principles for the sake of wealth and status. It is such decisions that lead to the elevation or degradation of one's soul. It was the decisions on the Day of Ashura that reflect the "ongoing struggle between right and wrong, truth and falsehood, piety and impiety, worldliness and spirituality. Such struggles take place in our life each and every day on different scales."¹ It is with the freedom of the human beings that one must decide to choose the side of less, the side of the oppressed, even if the odds are entirely against them.

It was with this same freedom that Imam Hussain provided his companions, with a transparent understanding that there would be no reward, and a definite martyrdom. No other leader would give their followers the freedom, or even the push them to leave, to the extent of Imam Hussain. Ayatullah Mutahhari concludes that this was namely because "he was seeking that his companions would discharge their responsibility of their own accord."² Each person is responsible for their own fate, with the knowledge of their potential outcome. Not only did this allow his followers the freedom to make their own decision, it also purified the intentions for who stayed, to fight for no gain in this world, but purely for the sake of Islam.³

4. Imam Hussain's companions: two examples

There are many great examples of Imam Hussain's companions who faced the struggle of joining Imam Hussain's army. It is easy to look back at history with a quick glance, and paint every man in black or white; the side of the oppressors or oppressed. Unfortunately, history can sometimes overlook the personal and internal struggles, and connect the dots without focusing on the line in between. One man who faced a heavy decision was Zuhair ibn Qayn. It is narrated by a companion of Zuhair ibn Qayn who states that their caravan was proceeding to Iraq. On their journey, they met the caravan of Imam Hussain, but avoiding taking the same resting place as Imam Hussain. "However, on one occasion, it so

1 Yasin T. Al-Jibouri, *Karbala and Beyond*. Accessed November 20, 2016. <https://www.al-islam.org/karbala-and-beyond-yasin-t-al-jibouri>.

2 Ayatullah Murtadha Mutahhari, "The Truth about Al-Hussain's Revolt." Speech, Tehran. Accessed November 20, 2016. <https://www.al-islam.org/truth-about-al-Hussain-s-revolt-ayatullah-murtadha-mutahhari>. Translated by: Najim al-Khafaji

3 In his work, "Understanding Karbala," Allamah Sayyid Saeed Akhtar Rizvi compares Imam Hussain giving his companions freedom to Prophet Ibrahim "seeking the opinion" of his son, Ismail, before his sacrifice. He states that Ismail's "willingness for slaughter, made it a model of partnership between the Friend (of God) and the slaughtered."

Allamah Sayyid Sa'eed Akhtar Rizvi, *Understanding Karbala*. Qom: Ansariyan Publications. Accessed November 20, 2016. <https://www.al-islam.org/understanding-karbala-allamah-sayyid-saeed-akhtar-rizvi>. Translated by: Sayyid Athar Hussain S.H. Rizvi

happened that [they] were obliged to halt at the same place at which Hussain bin Ali halted. [They] pitched [their] tents on one side and he pitched his on the other. While we were taking our meals there suddenly a messenger of the Imam came. He saluted us and said: ‘O Zuhair bin Qayn! Hussain bin Ali has called you.’”¹

Although Zuhair tried to avoid meeting the responsibility of joining Imam Hussain, he was eventually left to make a decision and could no longer turn a blind eye. It is further narrated that the companions of Zuhair “disliked this message so much that [they] put down [their] morsels.”² Zuhair did not immediately oblige to join the Imam. Instead, his true duty and the reality of the situation was shaken into him by his wife, Lady Dulham who reminded him, “‘The son of the Holy Prophet of Allah has sent someone to you and called you; are you not prepared to go to him? Allah be praised! What is the harm if you go and see him, hear what he has to say and then return!’”³ It was when Zuhair remembered that this world is not permanent and that he had to, one day, face Allah (swt) in the next world even if he turned his face from Imam Hussain in this world. And so, Zuhair decided to leave behind his wife and comfortable life and began his journey to be one of the greatest martyrs in history.

Imam Hussain, recognizes the difficulty of this choice, and comforts Zuhair, “Do not be worried on account of what has happened...”⁴ Zuhair “offered to stand in from of Imam to protect him” during Zuhr prayers on the Day of Ashura, and would “smile as he intercepted an arrow shot at Hussain by receiving it in his chest. Imam concluded the prayers and Zuhair fell dead.”⁵ Zuhair died while standing on the side of righteousness. It was his moral conscience that transformed his will from turning away to facing the army. Imam Hussain tells him, “God will not destroy you, Zuhair. May He curse your killers and may He curse those who turned themselves into baboons and pigs.”⁶ It is not only Zuhair’s bravery that makes him a memorable martyr in the eyes of so many, but that he chose to protect Imam Hussain instead of turning away and protecting himself. As stated by Imam Hussain, the killers of Zuhair are the animals who have killed the man who chose

1 Dr. Ibrahim Ayati, *A Probe into the History of Ashura'* Accessed November 20, 2016. <https://www.al-islam.org/probe-history-ashura-dr-ibrahim-ayati>

2 Ibid.

3 Ibid.

4 Ibid.

5 Mulla Bashir Rahim, *The History and Philosophy of Aza' of Imam Hussain (a)*. Accessed November 20, 2016. <https://www.al-islam.org/articles/history-and-philosophy-aza-of-imam-hussain-mulla-bashir-rahim>.

6 Shaykh Muhammad Mahdi Shams Ad-Din Al-Amili, *The Revolution of Imam Al-Hussain (a)*. Muhammadi Trust of Great Britain and Northern Ireland. Accessed November 20, 2016. <https://www.al-islam.org/revolution-imam-al-hussain-shaykh-muhammad-mahdi-shams-ad-din-al-amili>. Translated by: Dr. I. K. A. Howard

the side of angels. Zuhair could have easily joined the side of the oppressors through indifference, but he chose to protect truth, thus embodying the courage to leave one's comfort for the sake of protecting what is right.

Another renowned martyr is a man by the name of Hurr ibn Yazid al-Riyahi. Like Zuhair, he was a man who made the right choice by joining Imam Hussain. Unlike Zuhair, Hurr had already belonged to the opposing army. It is said that Hurr did not join Yazid's army out of hatred towards Imam Husain but that he, like Zuhair, was indifferent to "political issues."¹ Instead, "his duty, he felt, was to execute the order of his superiors."² But Hurr did not turn off his conscience completely. He began to question such orders on the night before Ashura. It is narrated that "Hurr was very restless. He could hear the children in Imam Hussain's camp cry because of thirst. His conscience whispered to him: '*What have you done Hurr? Why did you put the son of Fatimah in this position? Will Allah ever forgive?*' This was the rising of his dormant Islamic conscience. This career soldier could not sleep the whole night. Within him there was a struggle between his duty as a soldier and his Islamic conscience."³ It was through questioning and self-reflection that he was able to join Imam Hussain. Through the contemplation of his intellect, Hurr remembered his eventual return to Allah, the magnitude of fighting against the family of the Prophet, and the responsibility of his deeds. It was through such contemplation that his conscience was brought out of the cloud of worldly duty, and was basked in the sunlight of a far greater duty—a duty of justice towards others and towards one's soul.

Hurr is immediately forgiven by Imam Hussain, who also assures him that "[his] grandfather, the Holy Prophet, also forgives [Hurr]."⁴ Hurr has travelled from the side of the strong, the well-fed, the many, to the "side of a the few hungry and thirsty men, children and infants who would certainly perish in the burning sands of Karbala."⁵ It is evident that such decision is made truly out of the love for Islam. After Hurr had valiantly fought against the army, Imam Hussain "addresse[s] al-Hurr when he had been killed: 'You are a free man (*hurr*), al-Hurr just like your mother named you. You are free in this world and in the Hereafter.'"⁶

1 Mulla Bashir Rahim, *The History and Philosophy of Aza' of Imam Hussain (a)*. Accessed November 20, 2016. <https://www.al-islam.org/articles/history-and-philosophy-aza-of-imam-hussain-mulla-bashir-rahim>.

2 Ibid.

3 Ibid.

4 Ibid.

5 Ibid.

6 Shaykh Muhammad Mahdi Shams Ad-Din Al-Amili, *The Revolution of Imam Al-Hussain (a)*. Muhammadi Trust of Great Britain and Northern Ireland. Accessed November 20, 2016. <https://www.al-islam.org/revolution-imam-al-hussain-shaykh-muhammad-mahdi-shams-ad-din-al-amili>. Translated by: Dr. I. K. A. Howard

Hurr embodies the freedom and potential of the human being. He chose to unshackle himself from worldly rulers and embraced his God-given freedom to choose what is right. His freedom and forgiveness is not taken away from him in account for his past. Rather, Hurr is proof that God is the most forgiving, if we but choose to return to Him.

All human beings can see themselves in men like Zuhair or Hurr. So many humans are walking on a thin bridge between right and wrong, struggling every moment to make the right decision. To see how a single person can make such a drastic change in his or her life provides magnificent hope for change for many. It reinforces that God's mercy is not far for those who seek it. Both Zuhair and Hurr embody the struggle every person will face at least once in their life. It is not always easy to choose the right side, especially when there is no material reward, and when there are so few walking the straight path. But these great martyrs show that if one allows one's intellect to govern their interests rather than self-preservation and reward, one can become a human being in the truest, greatest sense. Through their intellect, they governed their decisions with the upright principles of enjoining good and forbidding evil—a characteristic that only a true human being can possess and protect.

5. A martyr's blood: the cause of immortality

After the Day of Ashura, many believed that the Family of the Prophet had lost everything and would be obliterated from history. In the moment, to those who saw death as an ending, this was true. "Those who were flowing in the current of the events may not have realized the importance of each and every incident, but when we consider those events today we can place each and every incident in a proper perspective."¹ To the dismay of the Umayyads, Imam "Hussain ... emerged with exemplary fortitude, moral fiber and aplomb, Hussain has emerged as the most revered and meritorious martyr the world has produced, who established the highest standards of excellence which humanity prides itself."² For those who thought the true Islam of the Prophet had been destroyed, they attempted to record history on their own terms. While ripping the pages of Imam Hussain's mission from history, they did not realize that every drop of a martyr's blood became the ink with which history would immortalize them.

1 Allamah Sayyid Sa'eed Akhtar Rizvi, *Understanding Karbala*. Qom: Ansariyan Publications. Accessed November 20, 2016. <https://www.al-islam.org/understanding-karbala-allamah-sayyid-saeed-akhtar-rizvi>. Translated by: Sayyid Athar Hussain S.H. Rizvi

2 Ayatullah Murtadha Mutahhari, "The Truth about Al-Hussain's Revolt." Speech, Tehran. Accessed November 20, 2016. <https://www.al-islam.org/truth-about-al-Hussain-s-revolt-ayatullah-murtadha-mutahhari>. Translated by. Najim al-Khafaji

Dr. Ibrahim Ayati reminds us that “at the time of the occurrence of the tragedy of Karbala there were a very limited number of Ahlul Bayt and the Shi'ah who could evaluate the importance of this event, speak about the effect which it was likely to have on future history and remove the misunderstanding of the people.”¹ This being so, the message of Imam Hussain did not begin and end in Karbala. It was the choices of those who survived that spread his message. Some of the most important choices were made by those who did not die, who had the choice of either spreading the truth of what had happened against the grandson of the Holy Prophet, or by twisting the facts to suit one's own agenda.

One famous historian, and depicter of events of the battle of Karbala, was a woman by the name of Bakr bin Wa'il. It is narrated that “she was with her husband in the army of Ibn Sad. However, when she saw that the soldiers of Kufa had made a rush on the tents of the children of Imam Hussain and were looting even the dresses of the ladies she picked up a sword, proceeded towards the tents of Imam Hussain and shouted: “O children of Bakr bin Wa'il! You are alive and in spite of these people are plundering the tents of the daughters of the Holy Prophet. Allah is the only Arbitrator. Come on, and avenge the bloodshed.”² Such a narration shows that decisions were to be made, not just by those fighting, but those who stood witness to, or survived the aftermath of the tragedy.

The role of historians and those that carried forth the message of Karbala are perhaps the most important in keeping the message of Imam Hussain alive. Yazid chooses to hire “court historians and *fuqaha*³ [who] tried to justify even the blackest crimes of Yazid as errors of *ijtihad*.”⁴ But his attempt did not fool the many who were able to see his crime as no mistake. Like the choices of those who were passive and indifferent to fighting against Yazid, there are those who indifferent in sharing the events as it occurred. “If the religious scholars of Islamic society are silent, therefore, in the face of the policies of the oppressors, they too are reproached and condemned by God; and here there is no distinction between scholars of the past, present and future.”⁵ It is the duty of historians and scholars to speak the truth, and to never remain silent or indifferent towards oppression.

1 Dr. Ibrahim Ayati, *A Probe into the History of Ashura'* Accessed November 20, 2016. <https://www.al-islam.org/probe-history-ashura-dr-ibrahim-ayati>.

2 Ibid.

3 Religious lawmakers

4 "The Sermon of Mina, Al- 'Imam Al Hussain's Everlasting Message to Religious Leaders." *Al-Islam*. Accessed November 20, 2016. <https://www.al-islam.org/articles/sermon-mina-al-imam-al-hussains-everlasting-message-religious-leaders>. Exposition by: Imam Khomeini

5 Ibid.

The article mentions Chapter 9, Verse 71 of the Qur'an: “The Believers, men and women, are protectors one of another: they enjoin what is just, and forbid what is evil: they observe regular prayers, practise regular charity, and obey Allah and His Messenger.

There was a clear attempt to “distort [Imam Hussain’s] revolution”¹ especially when leaders such as “Ibn Ziyad learnt of the people’s abhorrence” for the killing and torturing of the head of Imam Hussain.”² Yazid’s men had believed that the masses would agree with their actions and share in their happiness. When they realized that the truth had been spread, by witnesses and the likes of brave women such as Lady Zainab, they began to fear, and intended to change history. Source relays the likes of “Ibn Hajar al-Haythami [...] went to so far as to claim that Yazid was not pleased that al-Hussain was killed and had not ordered that to happen.”³ But regardless of the researchers, the voice of the witnesses and the death of his family was enough to refute such claims.

6. Keeping alive the truth of the Day of Ashura and the message of Imam Hussain

Further attempts were made to shift the blame on to Imam Hussain. There was a push for propaganda of portraying of “al-Hussain and his followers as Kharijites, or as sinners who had rebelled against the constitution...as represented by Yazid ibn Muawiyah...[and] spread discord on the *ummah*.”⁴ Their attempts had backfired on them as “an increasing numbers of people rejected [the false claims] after the extent of its distance from the truth.”⁵ The historians, in turn, lost credibility and ultimately earned themselves the same eventual “quagmires in which the supporters of Yazid wallow.”⁶

The efforts to keep alive the truth of the Day of Ashura and the message of Imam Hussain can be most importantly and foremost, attributed to Lady Zainab, the sister of Imam Hussain. As stated, one does not always realize the making of history in the moment. During her speech in Damascus, many had simply watered down her words to a “mournful and bereaved woman whose sentiments had been

On them will Allah pour His mercy: for Allah is Exalted in power, Wise.” It is incumbent on all Muslims to speak out against oppression.

1 Shaykh Muhammad Mahdi Shams Ad-Din Al-Amili, *The Revolution of Imam Al-Hussain (a)*. Muhammadi Trust of Great Britain and Northern Ireland. Accessed November 20, 2016. <https://www.al-islam.org/revolution-imam-al-Hussain-shaykh-muhammad-mahdi-shams-ad-din-al-amili>. Translated by: Dr. I. K. A. Howard

2 Dr. Ibrahim Ayati, *A Probe into the History of Ashura'* Accessed November 20, 2016. <https://www.al-islam.org/probe-history-ashura-dr-ibrahim-ayati>.

3 Shaykh Muhammad Mahdi Shams Ad-Din Al-Amili, *The Revolution of Imam Al-Hussain (a)*. Muhammadi Trust of Great Britain and Northern Ireland. Accessed November 20, 2016. <https://www.al-islam.org/revolution-imam-al-Hussain-shaykh-muhammad-mahdi-shams-ad-din-al-amili>. Translated by: Dr. I. K. A. Howard

4 Ibid.

5 Ibid.

6 Ibid.

aroused...and would be forgotten by history."¹ The mourning of Imam Hussain, his teachings, his message, have all been kept alive by Lady Zainab. Whereas Imam Hussain planted the seed, Zainab gardened the tree of love for Imam Hussain, which has continued to spread its roots in millions of hearts throughout history.

Dr. Ayati claims that it was “necessary...for the sake of the true religion of Islam and for the Holy Qur’an, [that] women [became] captives and as a consequence... address the people in the bazaars and streets, so as to nullify the unjustified propaganda of the enemy and to make the reality known to the people.”² It was through personal contact, speeches, and sharing the realities of Karbala that hearts turned towards the Ahlul Bayt. Lady Zainab saw it as her “duty to speak more clearly” to the Syrians, who “were more mistaken and unacquainted with the Ahlul Bayt.”³ Her presence was not of silence or omission, but her speak shook those who listened. “Allah preserved her speech and it was not eliminated” from history, or from the hearts and minds of the people.⁴ The truth entered the heart of the people, through her eloquence and virtue. She reminds the people in her speech to Yazid: “You have shed the blood of the sons of the Holy Prophet and have hidden the brilliant stars on the earth from amongst the descendants of Abdul Muttalib under the clouds of oppression and injustice.”⁵ She reminds the people that those Yazid attacked were not rebels seeking power, but that they were the Prophet’s family who yearned to return the *ummah* to the values and principles of his teachings. This created a “tumult in the spirit of the people, shook their hearts, removed their misunderstanding...invited them to realize the value of this sacred rising.”⁶ Lady Zainab, through her words, proved herself as standing on the side of truth, and preserved the message of Imam Hussain today. Remembrance of Imam Hussain was instituted through “encouraging the composition and recitation of poetry...[by] holding special gatherings...by...calling for gatherings and meetings to be...dedicated to the study of the events...[and] by the institution of the ritual of pilgrimage (*ziyara*).”⁷

It is clear that Imam Hussain’s message has been kept alive through truthful words and through action. The lovers of Hussain do not sit idle in their grief, but

1 Dr. Ibrahim Ayati, A Probe into the History of Ashura' Accessed November 20, 2016. <https://www.al-islam.org/probe-history-ashura-dr-ibrahim-ayati>.

2 Ibid.

3 Ibid.

4 Ibid.

5 Ibid.

6 Ibid.

7 Shaykh Muhammad Mahdi Shams Ad-Din Al-Amili, *The Revolution of Imam Al-Hussain (a)*. Muhammadi Trust of Great Britain and Northern Ireland. Accessed November 20, 2016. <https://www.al-islam.org/revolution-imam-al-Hussain-shaykh-muhammad-mahdi-shams-ad-din-al-amili>. Translated by: Dr. I. K. A. Howard

remembers Imam Hussain through seeking to stand up for the oppressed and speaking out against injustices like Lady Zainab. She “spoke very eloquently...laid the facts bare before the people [and in turn] deprived their enemies from altering history.”¹ This is another prime example of how history is not always made in swift blows. It was the individual hearts that were softened by hearing such tragedies that came together and chose to remember and mourn the Day of Ashura. History always forces the truth to come to sight. As Dr. Ibrahim Ayati states, “Contrary to what is imagined by most of the people that with the passage of time history forgets the historical accounts and conceals the facts, it actually reveals the realities as the time passes and removes for the future comers the impediments which are experienced by the contemporaries so that they may become more fully acquainted with the historical realities.”² Many may choose to write history for their own gain through propaganda and falsehood. Though this may fool some in the moment, history makes sure this disguise does not last forever. The truth had been revealed, that the followers of Hussain sacrificed their lives purely for the sake of Islam, and ignited a fire of love in the hearts for generations to come.

It is evident through our analysis that “Al-Hussain’s revolution represent[s] the eternal human dialectic between good and evil, between nobility and baseness, between political expediency and moral idealism, between the tribal ethos and the rational conscience which aspires to the formation of an integrated *ummah*, between mercenary man and a man of principle.”³ The Day of Ashura clearly encompasses the juxtaposition of the potential for the human condition. The freedom to choose and create one’s own destiny and history lies in one’s own hands. From the initiation of his journey, to the spreading of his message, choices have been made through the principles of truth and sacrifice and the false promises of lies and power. It is most important, above all, to understand, that ultimately History, itself, has a choice, as it is written by the participants, those who strive to record the truth and those who attempt to cover it. Similarly, every person has this choice, every day. History is a construct, but it is all happening in the present. It is only confined to the past if we, in the present, let it. But knowing the history, learning from it, and acting with our knowledge is in itself is a responsibility on every human being.

1 Dr. Ibrahim Ayati, *A Probe into the History of Ashura'* Accessed November 20, 2016. <https://www.al-islam.org/probe-history-ashura-dr-ibrahim-ayati>.

2 Ibid.

3 Shaykh Muhammad Mahdi Shams Ad-Din Al-Amili, *The Revolution of Imam Al-Hussain (a)*. Muhammadi Trust of Great Britain and Northern Ireland. Accessed November 20, 2016. <https://www.al-islam.org/revolution-imam-al-Hussain-shaykh-muhammad-mahdi-shams-ad-din-al-amili>. Translated by: Dr. I. K. A. Howard

7. Every human's role in creating history

As much as one can analyze the choices that have been made in the past, it is time to face the choices that must be made in the present. It is foolish to believe that history does not have a place in the now. More often than not, the current situation of the world is not unfamiliar to history. On the Day of Ashura, Imam Hussain exclaims “O people, take heed.”¹ The author of the article forces readers to self-reflect: “[Does Imam Hussain not] address us too? Are we not included in ‘people’? Should we not profit from this address of Imam Hussain?”² Through the message of Imam Hussain, one learns to stand against oppression. Silence, or indifference is equal to supporting the oppressors. One cannot turn a blind eye for the sake of comfort in this world, but must choose the principles that are the pillars for the institution of humanity. There is no soul that will choose to return to Allah that will be rejected from the shelter of his mercy.³

Whether through the sword or the pen, every human being has their individual role in creating history. It is indisputable that every person will be accounted for their choices. Imam Hussain’s message has become “influential and active element in its human environment” which is not confined by space or time.”⁴ The Day of Ashura is a microcosm of the human condition: the freedom of choice which ultimately determines one’s place in history and in the hereafter. “Hussain’s acceptance of persecution in the cause of humanity was most convincing and moving proof of God’s immanence in men. He was a man par excellence who maintained the highest standards set by the martyrs and heroes of all ages.”⁵

1 "The Sermon of Mina, Al- 'Imam Al Hussain's Everlasting Message to Religious Leaders." *Al-Islam*. Accessed November 20, 2016. <https://www.al-islam.org/articles/sermon-mina-al-imam-al-Hussains-everlasting-message-religious-leaders>. Exposition by: Imam Khomeini

2 Ibid.

3 "Merits of the Soul: Repentance (Tawbah)." *Al-Islam*. Accessed November 20, 2016. <https://www.al-islam.org/articles/merits-soul-repentance-tawbah>.

To seek forgiveness or *tawbah*, “means return to the soul's initial spiritu'Ality after the light of its human nature (*fitrah*) and its spirit has been covered by the darkness of sins and disobedience.”

4 Shaykh Muhammad Mahdi Shams Ad-Din Al-Amili, *The Revolution of Imam Al-Hussain (a)*. Muhammadi Trust of Great Britain and Northern Ireland. Accessed November 20, 2016. <https://www.al-islam.org/revolution-imam-al-Hussain-shaykh-muhammad-mahdi-shams-ad-din-al-amili>. Translated by: Dr. I. K. A. Howard

5 Ayatullah Murtadha Mutahhari, "The Truth about Al-Hussain’s Revolt." Speech, Tehran. Accessed November 20, 2016. <https://www.al-islam.org/truth-about-al-Hussain-s-revolt-ayatullah-murtadha-mutahhari>. Translated by. Najim al-Khafaji

The Day of Ashura has countless examples for those in the present who are “alive and fully conscious.”¹ It conveys tales of women and men, young and old, examples of those who faced difficult moments at every stage of life. It is by understanding the Day of Ashura in history that can motivate future generations to make the right choice in the present. Humans have the choice to embrace their own freedom, and sacrifice a life of comfort to preserve a world of principle. The purest of humans sacrificed his life and family for Islam. Imam Hussain and his companions made the choice to soar above the ranks of angels, and by doing so, have preserved their success and honor in history. The Day of Ashura has strengthened the will of every soul, so that when the time comes to choose—above the heights of angels or below the levels of animals—they will choose heights. They will choose to be, human.

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1 "The Sermon of Mina, Al- 'Imam Al Hussain's Everlasting Message to Religious Leaders." *Al-Islam*. Accessed November 20, 2016. <https://www.al-islam.org/articles/sermon-mina-al-imam-al-Hussains-everlasting-message-religious-leaders>. Exposition by: Imam Khomeini

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