

# MUHARRAM

## Significance of Ashurah

by Naseem Huq

MUHARRAM is the first month of the Islamic Calendar. This year it is 1419 Hijri. According to the Quran, Muharram is one of the four sacred months in Islam. The other three being Rajab, Zil Qadah and Zil Hajj. Muharram has its own unique importance. But unfortunately, as we have distanced ourselves considerably from the religion, we hardly even observe the 1st of Muharram as the Islamic New Year's day. It comes and goes unnoticed. It should be a day of thanks giving to Allah and to seek his forgiveness and mercies to help people live the new year with due decency and prosperity. We however observe the 10th of Muharram as "Ashurah" to commemorate the martyrdom of Hazrat Imam Hussain (RA) at Karbala near the river Euphrates in Iraq. He was murdered on the 10th of Muharram by Yazid, twelve years after the Sahadat by poison of his brother Hazrat Imam Hussain R.A. They were the sons of Fatima (RA), the Prophet's daughter and Ali (RA) the Prophet's cousin. Therefore Imam Hussain and Imam Hasan were the grandsons of our Prophet Muhammad (SM).

Other than this, Ashurah also has the following commemorative significance: 1. The 10th of Muharram is named "Ashurah" because on this day 10 prophets received Allah's mercy and forgiveness and were blessed by Allah. The universe was created by Allah on this day. He also created Hazrat Adam and sent him to Heaven on the 10th of Muharram. 2. Baba Adam and Bibi Hawwa were forgiven by Allah, for having disobeyed Him in the Garden of Paradise. Adam and Hawwa got re-united on the 10th of Muharram at Arafat. This is one of the reasons why our prayers are accepted on Arafat Day during Hajj. 3. On the 10th of Muharram,

Hazrat Noah (AS) after the great flood, had his Ark anchored by the Mount Judi and was saved by the Grace of Allah.

4. On the 10th of Muharram, Hazrat Ibrahim (AS) was saved from the fire of Namrood, the infidel king, and became "the friend of Allah".

5. On the 10th of Muharram, the Pharaoh of Egypt, who claimed to be god, was drowned in the river and Hazrat Musa (AS) and his followers could cross over the water which was separated by the Grace of Allah to make a road for them and their horses to cross.

6. On the 10th of Muharram, Hazrat Yaqub (AS) got back his lost son Hazrat Yusuf (AS).

7. On the 10th of Muharram, Hazrat Ayub (AS) recovered from his long illness of 18 years, and thanked Allah for His mercies and blessings.

8. For certain reasons Hazrat Younus (AS) got into the stomach of a whale and remained there for a very long time. After much repentance he came out of the fish and was saved by the Grace of Allah on the 10th of Muharram. This is one of the reasons why we should read "Dua Younus" at the time of great crisis or danger: "La ilha illa anta sub hanaka inni koomtum minaz zalemin".

9. On the 10th of Muharram, Hazrat Idris (AS) was given a high position.

10. On the 10th of Muharram, Hazrat Sulaiman (AS) got back his kingdom which he had lost on the same day.

11. On the 10th of Muharram, Hazrat Isa (AS) was born and was also taken back to the sky.

The above incidents coinciding Ashurah has made the day important for the Muslims in general, regardless of them being Shia or Sunni. It is said that on this day if people do good things, such acts may invoke Allah's mercy as it did in the cases of the Prophets.

3. On the 10th of Muharram,

I MAM Hussain (AS) was born in Medina in the 4th year of Hijri. The Prophet (SM) gave him the name of Hussain. He resembled the Holy Prophet from breast to foot. His elder brother Hazrat Imam Hassan (AS) was like the Prophet from head to breast. He was born in Medina on the 15th Ramazan 3rd year of Hijri.

Both the brothers were Imams or spiritual leaders of Islam. The Prophet had designated Ali (AS) as his immediate successor or Caliph after him.

He had also nominated Hassan and Hussain as his successors after Ali. Ali too appointed Hassan his successor at the time of his death on the 21st Ramazan 40 A.H. at Kufa. Hassan at his death bed on 28th Safar 50 A.H. at Medina designated Hussain as his successor. Hussain was in this way the real Imam, successor or Caliph of the Holy Prophet (SM).

Despite his appointment as Imam by the Prophet, Ali was deprived of Imamate after the death of the Holy Prophet (SM), and Hazrat Abu Bakr (RA) was elected by Hazrat Umar (RA) and few others as Caliph. After little more than two years Abu Bakr (RA) died and at his death bed he nominated Hazrat Umar ibn al-Khattab as his successor.

Umar (RA) first made Yezid ibn Abu Sufian and then Muawiya ibn Abu Sufian the Governor of Syria (Sham). After ten years of his rule Umar (RA) was assassinated by Abu Lulu Feroz. When he was dying he nominated six persons empowering them to select a Caliph amongst themselves. Umar (RA) also laid down the condition that anyone who was chosen by Abdur Rahman ibn Auf should be the Caliph and anybody who challenged his authority should be beheaded then and there. Ali was also one of the six persons and so was Hazrat Uthman (RA).

Abdur Rahman first offered the Caliphate to Ali on three conditions: 1) He should follow the Kitab (Quran), the Holy Book of Islam; 2) He should follow the sunnah of the Prophet (SM); 3) He should follow the example and

# FOCUS

## Hussain (AS) — the Greatest Martyr of Islam

by M M Faiz Shirazi

*The battle which started from the morning of Ashura (10th Muharram) continued until Asr time. All the men consisting of friends, relatives, nephews, brothers and sons including the six-month old son 'Ali Asghar' embraced Shahadat at the hands of the most brutal army of Yazid.*

the system of the government established by Abu Bakr and Umar. Ali accepted the first two conditions but rejected the third only.

Now Ali, who was on many occasions nominated by Allah and his Prophet as his immediate successor became also the temporal head of Islam and the ruler of the Islamic world. Only three or four persons including Abdullah ibn Umar did not take oath of allegiance to Ali at Medina. The Governor of Syria, a champion of the Umayyad cause also flatly refused to accept Ali as the Caliph and revolted afterwards. The Umayyads also did not recognise Ali, for Muawiya kept them in ignorance of true facts.

Ali asked him to enter the fold in which all the Muhajirs and Ansars had entered and repeatedly told not to create trouble. But he did not care. Ali had not consolidated his position when Bibi Aisha, the daughter of Abu Bakr (RA) and the widow of the Prophet revolted against him on the pretext of revenging for the blood of Uthman (RA). She fought a battle at Basra against her step son-in-law. She was defeated and sent to Medina with full protection and honour by Ali, the commander of the faithful.

The battle is called Jang-e-Jamal (Battle of Camel).

After this battle Ali made Kufa (Iraq now) as his capital and returned there from Basra.

Amir Muawiya did not give breathing time to Ali after the Battle of Camel. He challenged Ali's right to the Caliphate on the battle field of Siffin, a place on the bank of river Euphrates. Ali had about 80,000 and Muawiya over 12,000 army men. The battle lasted for about 40 days. When victory for Ali was in sight, the tricky and treacherous 'Amir-e-As' turned the tables on Ali. He told Muawiya to raise copies of the Quran on spear points and appeal to the soldiers of Ali to stop the fight and come to compromise in accordance with the Quran. Ali knew the trick full well and refused to stop the battle. But Muawiya had already bribed and won over some men of Ali's army. The traitors compelled the Caliph to accept the offer. The battle was stopped. Both sides returned to their respective capitals. Ali to Kufa and Muawiya to Damascus, Syria.

It must be remembered that Ali had in his army people of diverse views and different denominations. The Shias who believed in Ali's spiritual and temporal leadership as an Imam were a minority. A group from among the army men of Ali objected to him as to why he

was not giving breathing time to Ali after the Battle of Camel. He challenged Ali's right to the Caliphate on the battle field of Siffin, a place on the bank of river Euphrates. Ali had about 80,000 and Muawiya over 12,000 army men. The battle lasted for about 40 days. When victory for Ali was in sight, the tricky and treacherous 'Amir-e-As' turned the tables on Ali. He told Muawiya to raise copies of the Quran on spear points and appeal to the soldiers of Ali to stop the fight and come to compromise in accordance with the Quran. Ali knew the trick full well and refused to stop the battle. But Muawiya had already bribed and won over some men of Ali's army. The traitors compelled the Caliph to accept the offer. The battle was stopped. Both sides returned to their respective capitals. Ali to Kufa and Muawiya to Damascus, Syria.

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agreed upon arbitration and rejected against him. He told them that he was not agreeing to stop the battle at the time of victory but they themselves compelled him to do so. All objected to the arbitration too, but they did not listen to him. Now that an agreement had been reached he could not break it, and in case the issue was not decided according to the Quran, they would be at liberty to decide it as they liked. But they did not come to terms and deserted the Caliph only to create chaos and bloodshed. They had to march against them. They met him at a place called Nahrwan.

They battled with Ali and were utterly routed and defeated. They are called Kharjees or Kharjites, dissenters and deserters of the true Caliph. Both Amr ibn As and Abu Musa assembled at Dumatal Jandal to decide the issue. The weak Abu Musa was cheated and duped by the crafty Amar ibn As, and agreed to depose both Ali and Muawiya from the Caliphate. But Amr ibn As then rejoined that he too deposed Ali and appointed his chief Muawiya to the Caliphate. The companions of Ali now understood the wisdom of the stand taken by Ali in refusing to stop the battle on the eve of victory. They now decided to fight out the issue by sword. Ali was making preparations for a battle against Muawiya when he was assassinated, through the intrigue of Muawiya while offering morning prayer in the Grand Mosque of Kufa, by one Kharjite Abdur Rahman ibn Muljim, on the 19th Ramazan, 40 A.H. He willed that Hassan (AS), his eldest son, would be his successor and Imam after his death.

The eldest grandson of the Prophet became Imam and thousands of Muhajirs and Ansars took oath of Fealty. Muawiya, the despot of Damascus who had usurped the Caliphate refused to accept Imam Hassan as head of the Islamic state and began preparation for war. Imam Hassan persuaded his companions to come out for Jihad but he found them weak, vacillating and reluctant. In the meantime Muawiya asked Imam Hassan for a compromise, a sort of truce lasting till the death of Muawiya. Had Imam Hassan refused the offer and come out to meet the aggression the result would have been the same. The treacherous people of Kufa would have left him alone after thousands of his true followers had lost their lives, and thousands would have been ruined for nothing. Imam Hassan made a treaty, handed over the reign of the

temporal administration of the Islamic world to Muawiya and returned to Medina. But the despot of Damascus violated all the terms of treaty. He put to death many true followers of the Prophet. He sent deadly poison to Joda Bint Ashath, a wife of Imam Hassan and the Grand daughter of Abu Bakr (RA) with one hundred thousand Dirhams and a promise to marry her to his son Yazid if she killed Hasan with that said poison. She administered that poison to Hasan and killed him.

Muawiya (1) who was secretly killed by poison by Marwan, Walid broke the news of Muawiya's death and read out the letter of Yazid. Imam Hussain Said, "I think you will not be contented with a secret Bayat at night, but will like to have it at day time so that all concerned will know that I have put my hands in yours as a token of Fealty to Yazid." Walid said it was alright. The Imam said, "Let the morning come and then you will make up your mind." Walid said, "It is alright, please go back and come to me with the men." When Imam Hussain got up Marwan told Walid, "By God, if Hussain was sent away this time he would never do homage to Yazid, you would never be able to take oath of allegiance from him without a terrible blood shed. Take Hussain into custody at once and do not let him go out unless he does homage. If he refuses, chop his head off at once." Imam Hussain stood up and said, "O! son of blue-eyed slavegirl, could you or could Walid kill me. By God you have lied and sinned."

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The first thing that Yazid did after his becoming so called caliph was to write a letter to the Governor of Medina, Walid ibn Ullah ibn Abu Suffian, his cousin to take allegiance from him from Imam Hussain at once. If he agrees so much the better otherwise put him (Hussain) to death and send his head to Damascus. On the 27th Rajab 60 A.H. Walid sent for Imam at night. The Imam anticipated the reason and took some of his relatives with him and went to Governor's house, leaving them outside with instructions to enter in case his voice was raised. Imam Hussain went alone to Walid and saw that Marwan ibn Hakam was also sitting with Walid. This Marwan was turned out of Medina, forever, by the Prophet (SM). He was called back from exile by Hazrat Uthman who made him his minister without portfolio and gave him his daughter in marriage. The same Marwan became caliph after the abdication of Yazid's son

Ali. The Imam spent the night of 27th Rajab 60 A.H. at his house in Medina. Again Walid sent some of his men to Imam to come and perform the Bayat. The Imam said, "Let the morning come and then I will think over it and you will also think over it. There was no further message from the Governor to the Imam. Next morning i.e. on 28th Rajab 60 A.H. Imam Hussain left Medina for Mecca accompanied by his sons, nephews, brothers and all his family members except his step-brother Mohammad Hanafiah.

The Imam with his caravan reached Mecca on 3rd Shaban 60 A.H. He stayed in Mecca until 8th Zilhaj 60 A.H. and received hundreds of letters from Kufa requesting to go there and take their oath and allegiance to him. The Imam turned his Hajj into Umra when he came to

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know that Yazidi men have been sent to Mecca in disguise to kill him in the melee of Hajj, so no one could say who killed him. After a long journey from Mecca from the month of Zilhaj the Imam reached a place called Karbala/Nainawa where the army of Yazid lead by Idris blocked his way. The Imam with his caravan put up their tent near the bank of the river Euphrates on 2nd Muharram 61 A.H.

The army of Yazid started to assemble phase by phase and compelled Imam Hussain and his entourage to remove tents from the bank of the river. The brave companions of Imam wanted to attack the army of Yazid at that stage but Imam Hussain stopped from doing so because Islam does not allow unnecessary offence.

From 7th Muharram 61 A.H carrying of water was stopped by the Yazidi forces. Umar ibn Saad put forward two conditions to Imam Hussain to accept the Bayat of Yazid or fight a battle. The great Imam preferred war for the right cause.

Hazrat Imam Hussain, his family members, relatives, and companions who assembled there in Karbala passed the night of 9th Muharram 61 A.H. called Shahad-e-Ashura in Tasbeeh and Tahleef.

For the Fajr (morning prayer) the Imam came out of the Governor's house and returned to his own house with his relatives. When the Imam had gone away Marwan told Walid, "You did not listen to my advice; now it is not possible for you to take allegiance from Hussain or catch hold of him." The Governor cried, "O Marwan fie on you, you give me advice which spells the ruin of my faith. By God if the whole wealth of East and the West were given to me for killing Hussain I would never like it, whoever is responsible for the blood of Hussain will be empty-handed on the Day of Judgement." Marwan said that if such was his opinion, then whatever he did was right.

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After the Shahadat of Imam Hussain at the time of Asr Prayer the heinous crime in the history of mankind was committed. The tents of the family members of Imam were burnt, every kind of things inside the tents were looted, even the chaddars (veils) of the noble household ladies of Rasul (SM) (Aal-e-Rasool) were not spared. Ear rings from the ear of Bibi Sakina, the 5-year old daughter of Imam Hussain, were snatched from her ear leaving her bleeding through the ears. And the worst crime of running horses over the dead body of Imam Hussain was also indulged in by the brutal army of Yazid.

On the lighter side of things, I had started working at the daily *Kabul Times* as a young journalist in 1972. The beauty of the valley of Kabul is fascinating, especially to the north and west. The Indian filmmakers could not resist the temptation. They would travel thousands of miles from Mumbai (Bombay) — the Indian Hollywood — to Kabul, just to shoot their films and relax. Even though the real Hollywood also shot a couple of movies there including the *Horsemen* with Omar Sharif, not too many western movies were filmed in an Afghan setting. The Pakistani film makers always flocked to Kabul in big numbers.

The Afghan nation, today, in distress. Piecemeal support has not helped and will not help. A few dollars here and a few dollars there by the donor nations is not enough. There is a growing need of a full blown debate in US Congress on Afghanistan. The Senate Foreign Relations Committee has to take the lead to provide comfort and relief to the agony of this nation. The capture of Kabul by the Taliban extremists from the failing and disorganized Rabbani regime was also believably a result of covert American support and the triumph of an ill-conceived plot by the Afghan lobby in Washington DC which had an access to the US Congress.

The writer is a former journalist from Afghanistan. This