

Reflections on the Great Sacrifice of Husain ibn ‘Ali (A.S.)

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The month of Muharram, the first month of the Islamic calendar, is approaching. Great multitudes of people around the world are getting ready to commemorate the tragic martyrdom of Imam Husain and his companions. There will be Majaalis, recitation of Nauha, doing Maatam, recounting the suffering of Imam Husain and his supporters, expressions of grief, and shedding of tears. For some it is a season of grief and rituals to keep the name and mission of Imam Husain alive. For others it is a way to earn Sawaab and enter paradise. These are undoubtedly noble goals. Beyond the obvious, it behooves us to reflect upon the nature of the great sacrifice, to try to understand the significance of the “supreme sacrifice” (*zibh-e-azeem*) mentioned in the Qur’an, and above all, explore what was motivating Imam Husain and what was going through his mind during his ordeal.

Allah (S.W.T.) has bestowed the gift of intellect (*‘aql*) on human beings. This gives us the power to think and to reflect. This faculty sets us apart from the rest of creation. It allows us the opportunity to elevate ourselves to the status of vicegerent (*khalifa*) of Allah (S.W.T.). Allah (S.W.T.) says in the Qur’an: “*Verily, there are signs in this for those who reflect.*” (30:21)

One may ask why Imam Husain sacrificed his family and himself on the plains of Karbala. Obviously, there will be more than one answer, depending upon the perspective of the reader.

Some of the possible answers are:

- A) “To save Islam” – This is true. However, Islam is Allah’s Deen. He nurtured it over the course of human existence on this earth. He made the fire cool for Prophet Ibrahim (A.S.) when he was thrown in it. He saved Prophet Musa (A.S.) from Pharaoh. He protected Prophet Jesus (A.S.) from being crucified. He sent angels (according to the Qur’an) to help Prophet Muhammad (S.A.A.W.) gain victory in the Battle of Badr. Finally, He perfected His Deen on the day that the prophet was returning from the last Hajj, at Ghadeer-e-Khum.
- B) “To establish Truth and expose Falsehood” – Again, this is true. However, one wonders why such a momentous sacrifice by such a great number of uniquely courageous, devoted, and pious individuals was required. We also know from history the courageous, fearless, and superbly scholarly discourses of Hazrat Zainab (A.S.), sister of Imam Husain (A.S.), and Imam Zain-ul-Abideen (A.S.), his son, in the court of the ruler Yezid. In the aftermath of the massacre, they were instrumental in making the mission of Imam Husain (A.S.) successful. Countless followers of Ahl-ul-Bayt gave their lives during the repressive rule of the Umayyads and Abbasids, in order to keep the message of Imam Husain alive.
- C) “To safeguard the Qur’an” – The despotic ruler Yezid had abased himself to the extent that he was casting doubt on the mission of the prophet and the authenticity of the Qur’an. Safeguarding the truth included preserving the true position of the Qur’an

among Muslims. However, Allah says in the Qur'an: "*Verily, We have sent down the Reminder, and We will certainly be its guardians.*" (15:9)

Thus, Allah (S.W.T.) will safeguard His message for all times. This is His promise.

Therefore, we ask ourselves, what were the real motives of Imam Husain that moved him to perform this great sacrifice?

We learn from history, and from the statements made by Imam Husain (A.S.), that from the time he left Madinah, he knew full well that the martyrdom of his children, his companions, and himself was imminent. The older scriptures and the Qur'an have prophesied the event. Prophet Muhammad (S.A.A.W.) had knowledge of this event, and he had shared it with some of his family members and companions.

Thus, in answer to the above question, my humble opinion is that Imam Husain performed his duty as Imam, obeying the command of Allah (S.W.T.). He performed this exemplary act of sacrifice with full trust in Allah's divine plan, being fully satisfied with Allah's Will, with utter calm and full contentment. There was not an iota of bitterness in him throughout his ordeal. In fact, in his final Sajdah before he achieved martyrdom, he thanked Allah with *Sajdah-e-Shukr*. He was sad because of one concern: that Yezid's forces by killing him would earn Allah's wrath and would be subjected to severe punishment. He repeatedly conveyed this warning to the army of Yezid before his death.

Above all, Imam Husain performed the great sacrifice for the love of Allah. He was the embodiment of this verse of the Qur'an: "*Say: verily, my prayer, and my sacrifice, my life and my death (all of the above) are for Allah, the Lord of the Worlds.*" (6:162)

Qur'an teaches us this: "But, the believers are stronger in love of Allah." (2:165)

Finally, one may ask why Allah required such pain and suffering of His beloved Imam. Was there no other way to achieve the goals, short of this tragic sacrifice?

One answer might be that by a miracle, Allah (S.W.T.) may have overturned the rule of Yezid and destroyed his forces. However, this would have only a short-term effect. People would soon fall back to their ignorant and sinful ways. Recall the story of the Children of Israel, as told in the Qur'an. Soon after Allah parted the Red Sea by a great miracle and saved them from the Pharaoh of Egypt, they fell back into sin and even worship of the golden calf. This shows that miracles do not have lasting effects. Allah's plan was to create an enduring legacy that would move the minds and hearts of humankind for all times to come. As we see, the great sacrifice of Imam Husain continues to inspire people all over the world, year after year, and will continue to do so until the end of time. This could only have come about as the result of a momentous struggle and sacrifice, and not as the result of a miracle. Imam Husain stood up to the challenge, and history was forever made.

In summary, in my humble opinion, above all, the dominating motive of Imam Husain (A.S.) in performing the great sacrifice was his unyielding Love of Allah (S.W.T.). This is the legacy that he left behind for all of us.

(The End)