

## Reflections on the Battle of Karbala

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The epic Battle of Karbala in Iraq took place over 1400 years ago. It was where an army of the despotic ruler Yazid, massacred a small band of people that comprised of Imam Husain, the grandson of Prophet Muhammad(s), his family members and supporters. This event is unparalleled in the recorded human history. The sheer brutality of the army of Yazid and the absolute adherence of Imam Husain to the principles of truth and justice is unprecedented. This confrontation presents many unique features and many stark opposites between the two camps. This article attempts to bring into focus some of these aspects of the momentous sacrifice offered by Imam Husain.

- Yazid was a depraved person who violated many principles of Islam and was installed as ruler of Islamic empire by his father Muawiyah. Imam Husain was the grandson of the prophet of Islam; he was an Imam (spiritual guide) and legitimate successor of the Prophet(s).
- The illegitimacy of Yazid was self-acknowledged by insisting that Imam Husain must pledge allegiance to him to legitimize his rule. Imam Husain clearly declared that a person like him (the Imam) cannot pledge allegiance to a person like him (Yazid).
- Yazid demanded pledge from Imam Husain, and in case he refused it, he ordered him killed. Imam Husain was like a fortress of courage, determination, faith and total submission to the Will of the Creator.
- Yazid deputed a well-equipped army of more than 30,000 soldiers. Imam Husain had mere 72 individuals in his camp, which included children and elderly.
- Yazid's army indulged in inhuman tactics, which included depriving Imam Husain's camp with water and food. They also attacked his men while they were offering Salaat. In contrast Imam Husain did not initiate hostilities and before arriving at Karbala, fed water to the enemy soldiers and their animals when they ran out of water.
- The debauchery and extreme hard-heartedness of Yazid's army was evident by killing the six month old infant son of Imam Husain with an arrow, who was already near death from dehydration.

- Demonstrating the ultimate brutality, after the battle was over, the bodies of the martyrs were trampled by the hooves of the horses at the order of Umar bin Saa'd, the commander of Yazid's army. The camp was looted and tents were torched. Women and children scattered hither tither in confusion, trying to save themselves from being burned.
- The survivors were taken as prisoners of war and presented to Yazid in his court in Damascus.
- The courage, poise and utter fearlessness of Hazrat Zainab, the sister of Imam Husain and Ali bin Husain, the surviving son of Imam Husain demonstrated the illegitimacy and hollowness of Yazid's claims of legitimacy in his court in the presence of domestic and foreign dignitaries.
- People all over the Islamic empire were shocked to learn that the grandson of the prophet of Islam was brutally killed by Yazid. The resulting unrest shook the foundation of Yazid's power.
- The apparent defeat of Imam Husain turned out to be a victory for truth and justice. Yazid's attempt to tarnish and disfigure the religion of Islam was defeated.
- Imam Husain's history making sacrifice at Karbala started a revolution that has continued for 1400 years and continues to inspire people and nations even today to stand up to tyrants, even against great odds.

A question that comes to mind is that Umar bin Saa'd, the commander of Yazid's army was fully aware of the position of and status of Imam Husain. Despite that he chose to fight against him for some worldly gains. But the extreme brutality and utter disregard for the norms of traditional Arab chivalry that he demonstrated is perplexing.

In the ancient history, the Bani Israel had disobeyed God and their Prophet and had spread corruption and injustice in the land. God revealed this verse in the Qur'an to characterize their situation:

*"Then your hearts hardened after that, so that they were like rocks, rather worse in hardness; and surely there are some rocks from which streams bust forth, and surely there ae some of them that split asunder, so water issues out of them, and surely there are some of them that fall down for fear of Allah, and Allah is not at all heedless of what you do." (2: 74)*

It seems that when Umar bin Saa'd decided to fight and kill Imam Husain, Allah hardened his heart to such an extreme degree that he carried out such unprecedented brutality against Imam Husain and his supporters without any guilt feelings or remorse.

The other question that comes to mind is. "Was Imam Husain's objective to gain military victory over Yazid?" From the available information, it appears clearly that it was not so. Imam Husain

did not take a huge army with him. On the contrary, he took women and children. He encouraged his supporters to leave him and find safety for their lives. He did not permit Hazrat Abbas, the bravest and noblest warrior of all Arabia, to launch an offensive against the enemy.

Was it possible for Imam Husain to gain military victory?" It was plausible for him to be militarily victorious, if he had prepared for it. But Imam Husain knew that any military victory will be short-lived and eventually the forces of evil would have prevailed. Imam Husain's plan was to bring about a revolution, an enduring legacy by exposing the evil in its worst form and sacrificing his life by undergoing unimaginable suffering and torture. The result was a clear distinction between good and evil that is etched on the conscience of humanity for all times to come.

May Allah's curse be on all tyrants and oppressors; the past, the present and the future.

The End